

BELTANE

FIRE FESTIVAL

2025



EVENT PROGRAMME

IGNITE THE SPIRIT, REWILD THE FLAME!

BELTANE FIRE FESTIVAL

2025

A BELTANE FIRE SOCIETY PRODUCTION

THE BELTANE FIRE SOCIETY MARKS THE CHANGING OF THE SEASONS BY BRINGING ANCIENT CELTIC HARVEST TRADITIONS AND STORIES ALIVE WITH A MODERN TWIST.

Are you ready to turn the wheel and bring in the summer of 2025? It's time for Beltane! Join us in celebration of the warmer seasons with our festival inspired by traditional Celtic stories, an immersive experience of revelry as we light the fires on Calton Hill on Wednesday 30th April!

Beltane is a living, breathing re-interpretation and modernisation of an ancient Iron Age Celtic ritual which is over three thousand years old. Established in Edinburgh, the Beltane Fire Society is a community which has brought people together for the largest Celtic festival of its kind since 1988!

This year, Beltane is taking rewilding to new heights. It's not just about restoring ecosystems; it's about reviving our cultural and spiritual connection to the earth. What does it mean to truly "rewild" our community? From costumes crafted with foraged materials to the planting of seeds that represent growth and renewal, every part of this year's festival is a call to action—to reimagine our place in the world and our role in the land's story.

Throughout the festival, you'll experience the spirit of rewilding through a seed exchange series—a chance to connect with the earth and with one another in a way that goes beyond the physical. And on the night itself, a symbolic seed exchange led by the May Queen will invite everyone to come together, share, and cultivate something magical.

As we retell the stories of The May Queen, and The Death and Rebirth of The Green Man, you'll also come across a whole assortment of larger-than-life characters, fire-play, acrobatics, drummers, dancers, musicians, and much more.

Join us as we celebrate life's renewal with fire, story, and rewilding. Let's ignite the wild within and reawaken our connection to the land, the fire, and each other.

ALL ARE WELCOME!

HOW TO EXPERIENCE BELTANE

**THERE IS NO SINGLE PATH THROUGH BELTANE,
ONLY THE ONE THAT CALLS TO YOU.**

This is a night to immerse yourself in the magic, mystery, and revelry of the turning of the wheel. Wander freely, follow your instincts, and let the energy of the fire guide your steps. The only boundary we ask you to honour is around our fire performers - please leave the flames to those trained in their dance, and resist the urge to light your own.

You are warmly invited to witness the procession of the May Queen, as she journeys through the hill and encounters a vibrant array of characters, creatures, and communities. We recommend beginning your evening at the Acropolis, and from there, let the fire take you where you want to go!

At times, you may feel lost, and that's all part of the magic. Trust in the night. Let the rhythm, the music, the wild joy of it all carry you. Dance, cheer, and celebrate - this is your Beltane too.

Throughout the night, the hill will come alive with dazzling performances, rituals, and celebrations—many unfolding at once, all weaving into the same living story. You may not catch every chapter, and that's okay. Let curiosity lead the way, and use our Fire Festival map below to find the moments you don't want to miss.

**IF YOU PREFER TO ENJOY THE MAGIC FROM A
LITTLE DISTANCE, PLEASE PICK UP A WRISTBAND
FROM THE TENT WITH THE Y SYMBOL &
UNDER 16'S WRISTBANDING.**

**POINT AT IT IF YOU WOULD LIKE A PERFORMER
TO GIVE YOU SOME MORE SPACE.**



OUR BELTANE CHARACTERS

THE MAY QUEEN

This Beltane, The May Queen carries with her the essence of rewilding, a call to restore not only the land but our very relationship with it. She embodies the urgent need to reconnect with nature, to reclaim the wild spaces within us and around us, and to honor the earth that sustains us.

Her presence marks the renewal of life, the Green Man's cycle of death and rebirth, mirrored in the changing seasons and shifting ecosystems. As the world faces the challenges of climate change, the May Queen's costume reflects the delicate balance we must protect: fragile, yet vital. She invites us to reimagine our roles as caretakers of the earth, to plant seeds of hope, and to nurture what has been forgotten. This year, she calls us all to act, to rewild ourselves and the world we share.

THE GREEN MAN

The Green Man emerges not as a symbol of unchecked growth, but as an ancient oak, weathered and wise, standing amidst a landscape altered by time and human hands. Inspired by a vision of rewilding in Scotland, he embodies the resilience of nature, even when faced with ecological challenges.

His journey through the night mirrors the struggle against climate doomerism—the belief that it's too late to mend our ways. Instead, he chooses renewal, drawing strength from the vibrant energy of the community, culminating in a death and rebirth that signifies hope and commitment to growth. As he dances, he calls us to remember that the best time to act was 100 years ago, but the second best time is now. Together, we can rewild our hearts, our communities, and our planet.

THE BLUES

In keeping with Celtic tradition the history of the Festival is maintained mainly through storytelling. Beltane lore is held by the Blues, a respected group of the society's 'old hands' who build the stories through their considerable experience of the festivals, involvement in Beltane Fire Society and a deep connection to our rituals and traditions.

They help to define and guide the Court and other characters through the night, acting as a liminal boundary between the worlds. You can see them at the front of the procession holding the gaze of the May Queen and guiding things from one moment to the next. Sometimes they pop up in other places to prepare a space - including ritually blessing & opening the stage space before the court steps onto it.

OUR BELTANE CHARACTERS

AEROSPHERE

We are AerOsphere, the embodiment of the element of Air and Spirit expressed through music. We yearn to capture the awe-inspiring beauty of the night sky, where the shimmering Aurora Borealis dances across the horizon. Each electric performance serves as an invitation for you to experience the power and energy of the cosmos.

We are a dynamic drum and music ensemble featuring Celtic harp, viola, violin, hurdy gurdy, jaw harp, flute and more. With wild breath and soaring vocals, our music pays homage to the union of the Green Man (Earth) and May Queen (Sun), in a celebration of life and creation in our small corner of the galaxy. Let our cosmic rhythms guide you through a night of wonder and joy, raw power and emotion as we journey to the Earth's upper atmospheric boundary with the cosmos.

AQUARIUM

Aquarium is a safe haven where beautiful aquatic animals reside together in a flowing harmony of movement and dance. But an aquarium is not free, and it's not wild. And kids keep tapping on the glass.

Thanks to wily rebel cephalopods, word will spread of a life beyond glass walls, a free and wild world with food and wonder and danger everywhere. Some are afraid to leave the safety and regular mealtimes of the aquarium - but ultimately all will rise up and escape, to roam and rewild Calton Hill on their way to the sea.

BEASTIE DRUMMERS

The Beasties are the embodiments of joy, rhythm and the pulsating energy of the upcoming summer. Painted in red, we will wake up, full of excitement, innocent wonder and delight for the world around us. We will explore the hill and bring the party! With our drums, we will ignite (figuratively) the space with wild, fun and high energy tunes to celebrate the returning of the sun.

Combining character work alongside drumming, we explore themes of harmony with nature, to understand how we are part of the world and not separated from it.

OUR BELTANE CHARACTERS

BOWER

The bowerlings are mostly elusive creatures, bustling around the bower making sure everything is cosy and comfortable for when the revellers arrive at the end of the celebrations. But here and there around bower you may meet with one and they will show you some Knot magic!

They want to rewild fabrics, find a connection with fibres and nature. So they use wool and nettle yarn from this land and into the yarn you can tie the magic of the night and take it with you around the hill gathering a little bit of Beltane magic to keep, or maybe even take part in some knitting!

CALL HORN

The blast of deep, resonating Call Horns cuts through the night; raising all eyes to the acropolis and heralding the first movements our May Queen. Their sound can be heard all throughout the hill and those first three calls send a breath of anticipation throughout the characters awaiting her presence and the story to unfold. They are the first note played atop the Acropolis, signalling the powerful drums to begin.

COVEN

Coven reclaims the witch as a symbol of diversity, otherness, and a deep connection to nature and community, using dance and movement to express magic. This year's theme is "rewilding"—restoring both witches and the natural world to their authentic, untamed selves, while honouring the wisdom gained on their journey. Our performance, inspired by witches dancing around a fire under the moonlight, will be accompanied by the live, ethereal music of our AerOsphere. We hope to transport our witnesses into a mystical realm, celebrating freedom, transformation, and wild spirit. In our rituals, we honour the five elements through the pentacle. Our performance will begin at the easternmost point of Calton Hill, under the beacon, before flowing into a ritual dance in front of the Acropolis, and culminating at the stage area. Through movement and ritual, we invite our witnesses to join us on a journey of empowerment and magic.

OUR BELTANE CHARACTERS

GOBLIN WORKERS UNION OF ENERGY

Since time immemorial (2022), Goblins have been an essential part of our festivals, squeezing into every gap in the running order. We've set the arch on fire, thrown a giant house party, and been "extremely helpful" to the Tech team.

Each year, we've claimed the Green Man's horns / antlers / carnyx (yes, it's a horn!), so it's tradition now – and by stick and by rock, we're doing it again! Maybe it'll fix all this weird sky stuff? But there's no sign of Greenie or Queenie! We've been calling out on the radio, but only other goblins are answering. Are we on the wrong channel?

Wrong date? Probably.

This year, our goblin crew is all about costumes, character chaos, tech, and lots of running around playing silly games – all tied together by one of the most powerful tools in our kit: the humble handheld radio.

MYOINN

Released onto Calton Hill as part of a rewilding project, a group of small wild cats awaken and begin to explore their new territory. Drawn by the scents of Beltane fires, warm earth, and the sounds of celebration, they roam where they please, weaving through crowds and slipping into hidden corners. Witnesses might glimpse them stalking unseen prey, playfully pouncing on one another, or standing atop each other in moments of bold curiosity. Agile and instinctive, they hunt, climb, and claim their space without hesitation. From the undergrowth to the gathering firesides, no part of the hill is out of bounds. As Beltane night stirs larger, stranger creatures from the shadows, the cats remain unapologetic – moving through the hill as if it were theirs alone, a reminder that wildness endures in the land, in the night, and in those who dare to follow it.

NIGHTWATCH

The Nightwatch is a group of Stewards and Torchbearers. Together we hold the space between the audience witnesses and the performers. We guard the May Queen as she journeys around Calton Hill.

Stewards, clad in high-vis, help answer questions from the audience, guide them and hold the performance space. They are also part of the fire safety for the festival. Torchbearers in their black cloaks provide light for the performance in the form of open fire carried in long metal torches.

OUR BELTANE CHARACTERS

PHOTO POINT

Photopoint is the volunteer documentary team capturing the fleeting magic of Beltane, preserving it in images that echo long after the fire fades. We witness the festival as it unfolds – from quiet preparation to wild celebration – sharing glimpses with the wider world and offering our community a way to remember the wonder they've created. We work closely with performance groups and courts, exploring their creativity and our own through collaborative photoshoots. With a lens tuned to firelight and movement, we aim to tell the story of Beltane in all its vibrant, glowing detail.

PILLYWIGGINS

In the Dale, under the veil, we invite you into the realm of Fae. We are Pillywiggins. We are the fairies who dance upon the top of flowers. We will give gifts to share the journey we will take, use the magic of the Self to transform and re-wild the Self, taking us back to a more natural state. In a supportive group we will set a quest, complete it and turn our experience into honouring the May Queen, whilst letting go of that which does not serve us anymore, and playing with the audience.

PROCESSIONAL DRUMMERS

The Processional Drummers provide the rhythmic heart of the festival in the May Queen's procession. We will begin on the Acropolis, playing the iconic first beats of the festival as fire lights up the night, a muirburn to cleanse away the old. As we accompany the May Queen around the Hill, visiting the elemental points, we will gather energy and rewild our sounds and selves. Our purpose is to awaken the wild – we will use our rhythms to wake the soil from Winter sleep and ecological depletion, building energy and culminating in energetic tunes to celebrate the full expression of nature's intensity.

PYROSHERE

Though often viewed as a destructive force, fire is an important part of many ecosystems, human cultures, and traditional folklore. Pyrosphere presents the perceived disconnect between these areas in order to show how stewardship of pyrodiversity is essential to rewilding practices. Through fire spinning and performance we aim to showcase the strength of elemental fire and its importance to all, whether folk, flora, fauna, or fae.

OUR BELTANE CHARACTERS

REDS

Reds are wild and feral creatures born on Beltane night, filled with joy and curiosity. We celebrate the coming of summer with a fierce love for the season and the world around us. You can see us performing acrobatics, dancing to the drums of our Beastie siblings and revelling in the joy of summer free from cares or inhibitions. Aligned with the Green Man, we draw on His strength and celebrate His rebirth with the turning of the season. Throughout the night we'll also try to win the hearts of the Sith nam Banrigh, acting as a force of chaotic energy and daring them to embrace their own wildness.

SITH NAM BANRIGH

Though wild and playful, with tricks in their heart,
The pixies were, after all helpers, each with their own part.
So on Beltane, they decided, with hope in the air,
The pixies would gather, show that they care.
With laughter and mischief, they'd play their role,
To welcome the summer, and make it whole.

We are Sìth Nam Banrigh. Or to non-Gaelic speaking humans, the Queen's Pixies! If this is your first Beltane here, then you're in for a treat. We can say this with absolute certainty because having fled an industrialised Victorian Edinburgh we made Calton Hill our home. A last patch of wild in a sprawling city. And since then, we have seen each and every Beltane!! We have a funny feeling we might be more involved this year...we haven't seen anyone rehearsing wearing white clothes. We hope this will turn out to be ABSOLUTELY FINE...but if our beloved May Queen arrives on the Hill needing some Pixie help? Then we'll be sure to follow Her wherever She goes...

TECH

We help facilitate the tech needs of each Beltane group and the wider production. We create and provide light by fire cans, to help tell the Beltane story with fire sculptures. On the night we are there to light fires and contribute to the safety and smooth running of the festival. From stage building to fire safety, we do a bit of everything: Tech is the glue that pastes the festival together by fire and sometimes nuts and bolts.

OUR BELTANE CHARACTERS

TELL IT TO THE BEES

To "Tell the Bees" - a duty of the beekeeper, to let the hive know of important news, such as births, deaths, and marriages. Sometimes it was said that you should sing it, sometimes that you should talk in rhyme, perhaps that you should bring them wedding cake, or decorate the hive, but always that the bees were to be kept informed of important community events. The bees are messengers as well as pollinators, connecting us to the flowering world.

This Beltane, we invite you to step inside the hive, & Tell the Bees. They'd like to know.

THERE IS NO BIN

There is no bin... think about that. We often treat nature as a place to "vanish" our waste, unconsciously burdening it for the sake of convenience. But what if we shifted our awareness from "waste" to "resources"?

In harmony with this year's theme of conscious Rewilding, this project explores how we can fuse ancient traditions with modern environmental awareness. Through thoughtful, collaborative art made from repurposed materials, we invite the community to reflect on climate, consumption, and change.

TOWN FOXES

Scamper. Bark bark ack ack.

We have heard that there is some sort of festival on that there Hill at the end of April and we thought we'd go for a wee daunder and see what the fuss is about. We are town foxes, but city life is getting tiresome. So we're very up for being rewilded. Also we hear that there is a Goddess and we've never seen a Goddess before but She sounds like our kind of people, we'd like to see Her (also we heard that there will be humans and that therefore brings about the possibility of the presence of snacks and we like snacks). 100% of us live or work on the west coast. We're not human tho. We are definitely foxes (We may look a bit like big lit up lantern puppets but we're definitely foxes). Definitely not human. Bark bark ack ack yup yup.

Scamper

OUR BELTANE CHARACTERS

WISHING TREE

It has long been a tradition in the community to add something onto the Beltane Fire. Perhaps something to release and set free or a wish to commit to the cleansing energy of fire.

As the wheel turns and we step forward into the summer, we extend this tradition to those visiting and witnessing our festival. We will have two Wishing Trees which you can visit and tie a clouty (scrap of fabric) to, a symbol of your wish. There will also be a basket at the feet of our Willow Goddess into which can be placed small tokens that you wish to be added to the fire. These must be made of natural fibres.



F.A.Qs

WHERE SHOULD I ARRIVE? Please have your QR code ready for scanning, either in print or on mobile. Where possible, approach Calton Hill from Regent Road.

WHAT TIME DOES THE PROCESSION START AND END?

Festival gates open at 7.30pm (last entry 11pm) with the main procession beginning at dusk (approx. 9.22). Please try to arrive before 8.30pm to ensure you can witness the start of the celebrations. The procession will end around 12/12.30am.

WHAT SHOULD I WEAR? Dress for the weather. This is a fire festival, and as such we 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 ON THE HILL? 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.

CAN I BRING DOGS? Dogs are not allowed – nor 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 THE 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.

WWW.BELTANE.ORG @BELTANEFIRESOCIETY

Taken some great photos? Join the conversation and tag us using #Beltane2024

Artwork: Becky Salter @wilder.ways.art.illustration

HAPPY BELTANE



FESTIVAL MAP



- First Aid / Welfare Tent
- Catering vans
- Accessible toilets
- Toilets
- Entrance/Gate points
- Fences/No Access

The processional route

Performance spaces



Ticket Holders Entrance:
Waverly Steps

Box Office, Ticket-Holders
& Under-16s Entrance:
Carriage Drive

Need help with tickets?
Box Office can help!

For under 16s and wristbands- look for the tent!

