Explore the Folklore of Winter with Midwinter's Magical Quest at Butser Ancient Farm

Thursday 7 November, 2024

Waterlooville, Hampshire - Butser Ancient Farm invites you to experience the rich tapestry of ancient winter traditions at this year's Midwinter's Magical Quest: Yules of Yesteryear. Set against the backdrop of Butser's historic buildings, this immersive, family-friendly event will take you on a journey through time to experience the winter customs of the Saxons, Romans, Celts, and Neolithic peoples. Discover the magic of winter festivals, meet characters from folklore, and engage in hands-on activities and crafts inspired by the past. This year, Butser has developed exciting new characters to bring more Yules of Yesteryear to life for visitors.

A Journey Through Ancient Winter Celebrations in the heart of Hampshire

This December, step into a world where folklore comes alive, and the spirits of midwinter are honoured as visitors embark on a quest to bring a message to the Deer Queen. The Holly King, guardian of Winter, has gone missing, and your journey to find him will take you through an immersive blend of time-honoured traditions—from fireside tales in an Iron Age roundhouse to the mischievous revelry of Saturnalia in the Roman Villa.

Join Rowena in the Saxon Hall for Glæd Geol!

Midwinter, or Yule, was a major celebration for early Medieval people, marking the return of the sun after the Winter Solstice. In the cosy Evergreen Saxon Hall, you'll meet Rowena, the Lady of Yule, who carries the magic of the ancient Forest of Bere. She whispers to the deer, and they listen, a gift likely bestowed by her connection to the fae folk. Visitors will hear about the Scandinavian folklore of the Tomten or Nisse—helpful household spirits who guard the farm and home in winter. But be warned: these spirits demand respect! If they are not rewarded, they can be very mischievous...

During Yule, Saxons celebrated the return of the sun with great feasts and the burning of the Yule log, a symbol of warmth and hope for longer days ahead. Join Rowena in natural crafting and learn more about these ancient traditions.

Io Saturnalia! Revel with Felix, the Lord of Misrule

Next, step into Butser's Roman Villa and immerse yourself in the festive chaos of Saturnalia! Saturnalia was a time of role-reversal, where masters served slaves, and everyone joined in joyous feasting, games, and gift-giving. Meet Felix, a slave who has been elevated to the role of Lord of Misrule for the day and join in the spirit of Saturnalia by making your own sigillaria—small wax figures that were the traditional Roman gifts of the season.

The festival's roots in generosity and mischief remain strong in today's celebrations, with Felix guiding you in the traditions of Roman feasts and merrymaking. And if you're successful in waking Saturn—the god of time and agriculture—you may even receive a message from the god himself about the importance of giving and generosity.

Iron Age Winter Wishes and Festive Storytelling

Venture back to the Iron Age where the Winter Solstice could have been a time of great feasts and gatherings. Archaeological evidence suggests that feasting may have been a significant part of past winter festivities. Join us in the Great Roundhouse, where the storytellers will share ancient tales around the fire, as guests sip warm drinks and indulge in sweet treats. The Winter Wishing Trees await your hopes for the season, and a special message will be delivered to guide you onward in your quest. Allow the fire, food, and friendship of ancient gatherings to echo through the ages and bring warmth to the darkest night.

Will You Find the Holly King and Meet the Deer Queen?

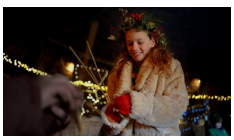
In British mythology, The Holly King rules the darker half of the year until the Winter Solstice when his power peaks. His brother The Oak King eventually battles and defeats him, ushering in the return of longer days and light. But in this year's quest, the Holly King has disappeared! Visitors will need to

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journey through the different time periods to gather the wisdom of the ages, find the Holly King and make sure his reign lasts long enough for us to enjoy all that Winter has to offer.

At the end of your quest, you will meet the radiant Deer Queen in our Neolithic Horton Longhouse. Her character draws on British and Celtic mythology, inspired by goddesses like Epona, the protector of horses, and Danu, a mother figure tied to nature. The Deer Queen embodies the bond between humans and the natural world, reminding us of the turning of the seasons and the new hope that Spring brings.

A Festive Family Experience Like No Other

This December, Butser Ancient Farm invites families to experience Midwinter's Magical Quest, a celebration of winter's gifts, generosity, and the enduring power of light in the darkness. With hands-on nature-based crafting, immersive storytelling, and encounters with legendary characters from the past, this event offers an unforgettable journey through time and tradition.

Kristin Devey, who developed the winter experience at Butser Ancient Farm, shared her excitement about this year's Midwinter Quest: "We are delighted to welcome visitors to Butser this winter for a truly magical experience. This year's quest brings to life even more folklore, characters and ancient traditions, offering a chance to reconnect with the heart of the season—away from the rush and commercialism of modern festivities. We invite you to gather your friends and families, reflect on the simple blessings of winter, and take home the warmth, wisdom, and timeless customs of Yules long past."

Event Details:

- **Dates: All weekends in December**
- **Location: Butser Ancient Farm, Chalton Lane, Chalton, Hampshire, PO8 0BG**

Midwinter's Magical Quest runs three times a day on all weekends in December, from Saturday 7th until Sunday 22nd December, 2024. Butser Ancient Farm also features a full schedule of festive events and workshops, including Tales of Winter Magic, Yuletide Storytelling, and a Winter Solstice Celtic Celebration complete with drumming, poetry, and prose.

Tickets for Midwinter's Magical Quest and are available on the Butser Ancient Farm website at https://www.butserancientfarm.co.uk/whats-on/christmas/midwinters-magical-quest-family

Notes to editors

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About: Butser Ancient Farm is an open air, experimental archaeology museum nestled in the picturesque Hampshire countryside. The farm offers visitors a unique opportunity to step back in time and experience the lives of our ancient ancestors through reconstructed buildings, authentic crafts, and immersive events.

Beginning as a research site 50 years ago, Butser Ancient Farm has become one of the South East's top visitor attractions welcoming visitors throughout the year including some 35,000 schoolchildren who learn about the lives of our ancient ancestors from the Stone Age through to the Anglo-Saxon periods. As a not-for-profit, independently run community interest company (CIC) they rely on the support of many organisations and individuals, as well as their own fundraising events, to make their research and education work possible. More about the farm can be found at www.butserancientfarm.co.uk

Keywords:

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