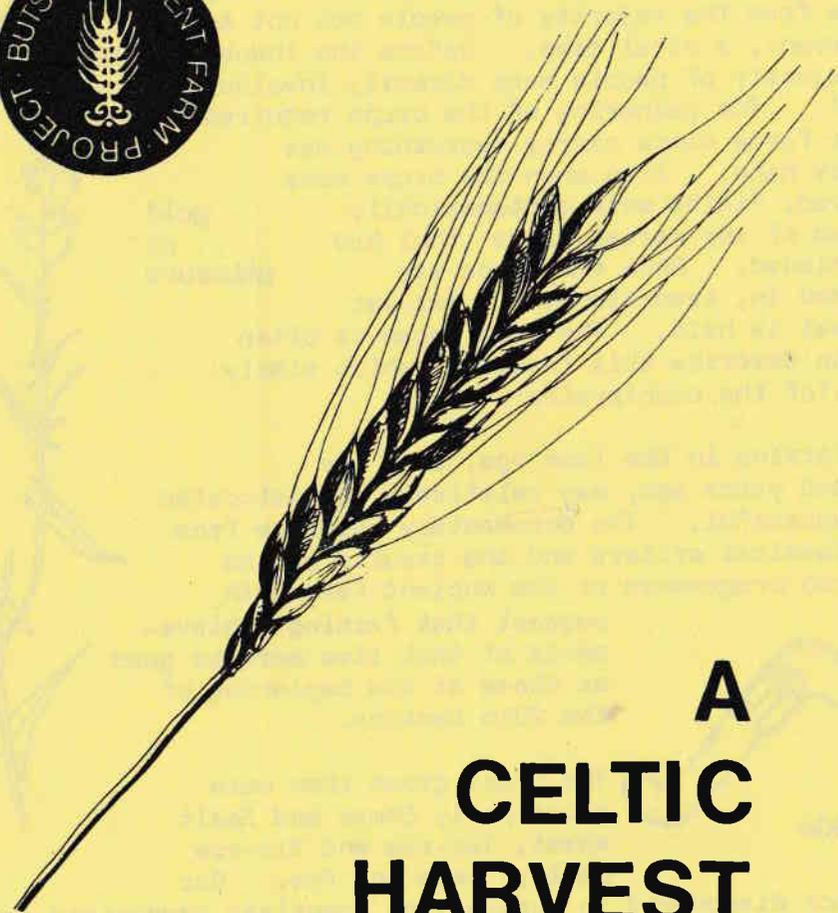


The harvest festival of recent times is rooted in the remote past. From the classical writers we learn of the Celtic festival 'LUGHNASA' dedicated to the birth of the pan-celtic god LUGOS. Held on the 1st August it was a festival to invoke a good harvest. Another celebration for the same god was held after the last sheaf had been gathered. If the harvest had been good this last sheaf was made in A'MHAIGHDEAN, The Maiden. It was a life size corn dolly dressed as a virgin and gifts were given to it by the thankful farmers. If the harvest had been bad an image of an old hag, A'CHAILLEACH, was sacrificed to propitiate the anger of the gods and to purify the land. In all probability this was once a human sacrifice.

Soon after the second part of 'LUGHNASA' was celebrated, the most sinister Celtic Festival of all took place. Called 'SAMHUIN' it was held on 31st October, 1st November. Sacrifices were made to the gods, most were probably human sacrifices, to propitiate their anger during the coming season of darkness and blight when all things ceased to grow. Today we keep this festival as HALLOWE'EN.

The Celtic Harvest, as harvest at any time in history, was a period of intense activity, hard work and, with the gods' blessing, rich reward.



A CELTIC HARVEST

Farming is about survival. This is as true today as it has been from the time when man first tilled the land and depended upon the plants he had grown for his winter food supply. The harvest is the measure of the farmer's success and determines the level of survival. Today the harvest is remote from the majority of people but not long ago it was a real event, a vital time. Before the Industrial Revolution the majority of people were directly involved in the harvest itself. The gathering of the crops required an enormous labour force since nearly everything was done by hand. Even when the crops were gathered, fields were systematically gleaned of any cereal heads that had been missed. Once the crops are gathered in, traditionally a harvest festival is held. The word pagan is often used to describe this festival, which simply means 'of the countryside'.

Farming in the Iron Age, some two thousand years ago, was relatively sophisticated and successful. The documentary evidence from the Classical writers and the results of the research programmes at the Ancient Farm both suggest that farming achievements at that time were as good as those at the beginning of the 20th Century.

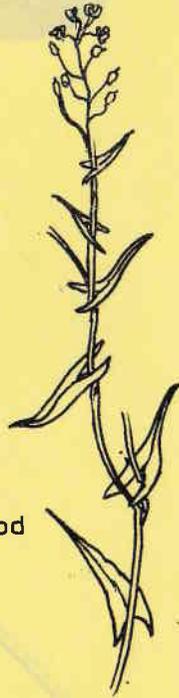


sickle

The crops grown then were principally Emmer and Spelt wheat, Two-row and Six-row Barley, Oats and Rye. Our evidence discovered in excavations comprises carbonised seeds, seeds which have been accidentally turned into charcoal, seed impressions in pottery, waterlogged plant remains and pollen grains.

Research at the farm indicates that yields from these prehistoric type cereals can exceed over two tons to the acre despite massive weed competition. These results show that it was indeed possible for Iron Age farmers to export grain to the Continent.

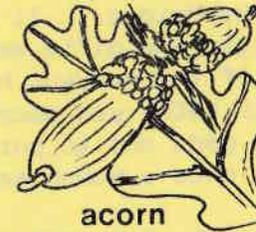
gold
of
pleasure



It is more difficult to isolate vegetable crops simply because leaves hardly ever survive. The small celtic bean was certainly a major crop. Fat Hen or Melde, regarded today as a pernicious weed, may well have been deliberately cultivated. The seeds of both celtic bean and melde can be ground up into flour and made into a bread substitute. Flax and Gold of Pleasure provided oil from their seeds for both cooking and lighting. Flax also provides linen fibres from its stems.

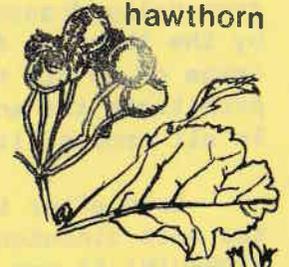


flax

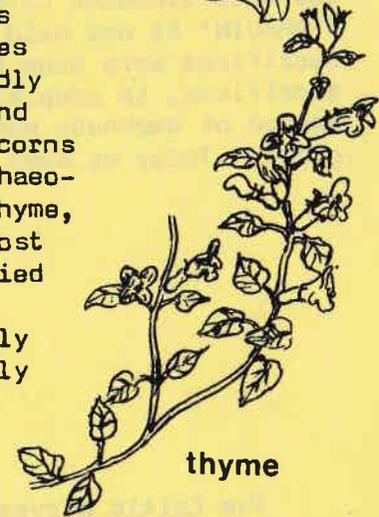


acorn

In addition to the cultivated plants there was the natural harvest. There is no doubt that the fruits, seeds and leaves of wild plants were deliberately and avidly collected. Blackberries, cranberries and hawthorn haws, hazel nuts, beech nuts, acorns and crab apples are all found in the archaeological record. Leaves of herbs like thyme, basil, marjoram, ladies bedstraw and a host of others were probably collected and dried for subsequent culinary, aromatic and medicinal purposes. Honey, too, probably belongs to the natural harvest. The only form of sweetening they had it was also used in a mixture with barley or wheat, cranberries and bogmyrtle, to make an 'alcoholic beverage'.



hawthorn



thyme

Two important parts of the 'natural harvest' are often overlooked. Hay collected in May and June was a vital element of the economy to maintain the livestock through the winter. Leaves of ash and oak were also gathered as additional cattle fodder. Salt too either imported from the continent or traded from coastal areas was necessary for the preservation of meat.