

Naming the Draiocht

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Image: *The Draiocht.*

We've had the *Olivia K.* for nearly two months, and it's now time to give her a new name, something that will be meaningful to us.

Many people believe that renaming a boat can bring bad luck. However, some boats just seem to end up with names that only the previous owner could love. For example, our sailboat, now called the *Awen* (Welsh for "inspiration") was once called the *Nautigal* (a play on words with Nauticat, the company that built the boat, but what self respecting woman wants to sail on a boat called the *Naughty Gal?*). Although the *Olivia K.* is a benign enough name, it has no particular meaning to us (apparently she was named after a relative of the previous owner).

Given the fickleness of luck at the best of times, renaming a boat is clearly not something to be done lightly. Sailors have long believed that some ships are unlucky, and that the unluckiest ships of all are those who have defied the gods and changed their names. According to legend, every vessel is recorded by name in the "Ledger of the Deep", and is known personally to Poseidon, or Neptune, the god of the sea. To change the name of a vessel without consulting Poseidon is to invoke his wrath, so in order to change a boat's name, a traditional ceremony is used to appease the gods of the seas. The first thing to be done when renaming a boat is to purge its old name from the "Ledger of the Deep", and from Poseidon's memory. Then the renaming ceremony can then begin, and should take place as soon after the purging ceremony as possible.

We removed the *Olivia K.*'s name plates, sanded off the old name, and applied the new name to them. Before we reattached the plates, we performed a denaming ceremony which went like this:

In the name of all who have sailed aboard this ship in the past, and in the name of all who may sail aboard her in the future, we invoke the ancient gods of the wind and the sea to favor us with their blessing today.

Mighty Neptune, king of all that moves in or on the waves; and mighty Aeolus, guardian of the winds and all that blows before them... We offer you our thanks for the protection you have afforded this vessel in the past. We voice our gratitude that she has always found shelter from tempest and storm and enjoyed safe passage to port.

Now, wherefore, we submit this supplication, that the name whereby this vessel has hitherto been known, Olivia K., be struck and removed from your records. Further, we ask that when she is presented for blessing with another name, she shall be recognized and shall be accorded, once again, the same privileges she previously enjoyed. In return for which, we rededicate this vessel to

your domain in full knowledge that she shall be subject as always to the immutable laws of the gods of the wind and the sea. In consequence whereof, and in good faith, we seal this pact with a libation offered according to the hallowed ritual of the sea.

After the denaming ceremony, we screwed the plates with the new name back on, and carried out the christening ceremony:

For thousands of years, we have gone to sea. We have crafted vessels to carry us and we have called them by name. These ships will nurture and care for us through perilous seas, and so we affectionately call them "she." To them we toast, and ask to celebrate Draiocht.

Toast: *To the Sailors of old.*

The moods of the sea are many, from tranquil to violent. We ask that this ship be given the strength to carry on. The keel is strong and she keeps out the pressures of the sea.

Toast: *To the Sailors of old...and to the Sea.*

Today we come to name this lady Draiocht and send her to sea to be cared for, and to care for those aboard her. We ask the sailors of old and the mood of the god that is the sea to accept Draiocht as her name, to help her through her passages, and allow her to return with her crew safely.

We christened her bow with a bottle of apple cider (seemed like a good choice for a couple of Celts).

I name this ship Draiocht and may she bring fair winds and good fortune to all who sail on her.

Toast: *To the Sailors before us... To the Sea... To Draiocht!*

So, you might be wondering, what does Draiocht mean? As with the *Awen*, we have chosen a name that reflects a quality of mind or spirit. Draiocht is Old Irish (Gaelic) for "druidism", "magic", "charm", or "enchantment". In modern Irish, it is usually taken to mean "magic".