

# NORTHERN EARTH

Pan-Demiotic 2

July 2020



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## LEAD-IN

Straight after the spring equinox, at the New Moon on March 24, 2020, the British government decreed its lockdown of citizens and businesses, and NE, with our printers and retail outlets closed, was unable to produce and sell a hard-copy magazine. Contrary claims and stories and rumours and explanations and lies have buzzed like the hummadruz around news and social media over the last few months, and it became clear that we live in a time of variant discourses operating within a central contested thread - what are called *demiotic* discourses.

And for several weeks, the air cleared and noise quietened; Nature was obviously appreciating the lockdown... Wouldn't it be nice, many said, if after it all we could maintain and even improve our relationship with Nature? So the *Pan-Demiotic* discourse arose... though Nature's chances seemed slimmer as soon as popular compliance was soured at the end of May by hypocrisy, and thousands flocked to beauty spots, leaving their mark in mountain of litter.

This is the second, and we hope the last - for now at least - of NE's downloadable issues to quell the pangs of withdrawal among regular readers. Unwilling to break the continuity of articles in the magazine itself for those who prefer to blank the internet, we compiled these open-access issues. Some material herein is exclusive to these issues, while some will reappear in the magazine itself in due course.

Hopefully we will be able to resume our publishing schedule in September, with the delayed NE161, but in the meantime we hope you enjoy our interim efforts. If you do, please tell your friends to go to our website, and download their own copies of the free Pan-Demiotic mini-series ([www.northernearth.co.uk](http://www.northernearth.co.uk)).

If you are not a regular reader of Northern Earth, then we hope these are a kind of trailer tempting you to subscribe and support a small-press magazine that has been 'pushing the envelope' on fringe or alt-antiquarian research and reflection for over 40 years. Subscriptions start at £9, and are available for all over the world - just go to the web shop, sign up, and get a new perspective on the world!

*Cover illustration: Stone at Castle Hill, Birchover, Derbyshire, in 2010*

Northern Earth

*Estd. 1979*

5 Foot Kiln, Old Town, Hebden Bridge, W. Yorkshire HX7 8TW, UK

Editor: John Billingsley

Team: Guy Beech, Mike Haigh, Davina Ware, Paul Williment

[editor@northernearth.co.uk](mailto:editor@northernearth.co.uk)

[www.northernearth.co.uk](http://www.northernearth.co.uk)

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# Season's Gleanings

## Another mega-site at Stonehenge

As we were going to press, news was coming in of a paper describing a major archaeological discovery around Durrington Walls, the settlement site near Stonehenge. Touted as the largest prehistoric monument ever found in the British Isles, the find consists of an irregular ring of twenty or more large shafts which may have formed a boundary of some kind in the Neolithic, 4000 years ago. The 'ring' is over a mile in diameter, and composed of massive pits 30ft across and 15ft deep; it encloses both Durrington Walls and Woodhenge.

As of June 22, the full paper [V. Gaffney *et al.*, 'A Massive Late Neolithic Pit Structure associated with Durrington Walls Henge'; see also *Guardian*, 'Vast neolithic circle of deep shafts found near Stonehenge', 22-6-20, with illus.] was available online at <https://intarch.ac.uk/journal/issue55/4/full-text.html>.

## Pictish landscapes

Excavations at the Tap o'Noth hillfort near Rhynie, in Aberdeenshire, Scotland, have been going on for some time, and some preliminary observations have been announced. The site is impressive - ramparts 6m wide and 3m high enclose an area of 21 hectares (52 acres). Dating had been contentious, but indications now seem to be that what is now visible is largely a Pictish settlement, dating only perhaps to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, and able to host 800 huts and



*The club man  
and beaked  
beast from  
Rhynie*



a population of 4000 - which would rank it amongst Europe's largest settlements of the post-Roman period. It was burned to the ground in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, possibly in the expansion of the Kingdom of Fortriu under King Bridei.

These findings add weight to the significance of Rhynie, known for such sites as the Craw Stane, on which Class One Pictish carvings (i.e. non-Christian) are inscribed, including the beaked creature shown here; a collection of 8 symbol stones; two large burial sites; an unusual carving of a human figure, nicknamed Rhynie Man (illus.); and what has been seen as a fortified palace site in an enclosure 60m across defended by four separate sets of ramparts (see NE129, NE156:9-10 for more on these) [BBC Online 14-5-20]

## Voices from the past

How far back can a story go? Some researchers believe that Australian aboriginal people may hold the deepest well of oral narratives. The Gunditjmarra people of Victoria have long told an ancestral tale of a giant creature transformed from Budj Bim volcano, with teeth made of lava - could this relate to the creation of a second volcanic landform

in an eruption of Budj Bim, as implied in the tale which talks of 'land and trees dancing' and hills being formed from the forehead of the ancestral beast? Certainly aboriginal tribes were in the vicinity at the time – a stone axe was found buried in debris from that eruption. If story and eruption are related, that raises a rather prodigious implication, as the series of eruptions was 37000 years ago, and no major activity has occurred since. Thus the narrative might just be the world's oldest, by some margin. [*Times*, 19-2-20; *Geology*, 10-2-20, [www.geosociety.org/GSA/News/pr/2020/20-04.aspx](http://www.geosociety.org/GSA/News/pr/2020/20-04.aspx), acc'd 4-5-20]

### Some Saudi prehistory

Regular readers will know that NE likes to counter any impression that W Europe was somehow megalithically special by drawing attention to fascinating sites in countries less known for their prehistoric monuments, like Libya and India. Saudi Arabia is one such country, and luckily pre-Islamic monuments seem to fare better there than in other territories where militant Islamism is rife. In the northern oasis of Dûmat al-Jandal, excavations have been going on at a large ritual site dating from the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE and later, constructed of drystone walling. The main feature uncovered has been a triangular platform 35m long. The site is thought likely to have funerary and commemorative associations for nomadic pastoralists of the time. [[https://www.eurekalert.org/pub\\_releases/2020-06/c-dtp060520.php](https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2020-06/c-dtp060520.php), after *Antiquity* 9-6-20]

### Healthy waters

People on the Iveragh Peninsula of Co. Kerry, Ireland, put their faith in a traditional medication during the Covid-19 pandemic. Legends tell of St Fionán (St Finian) coming to the area in the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE, when a deadly

plague was raging. The saint offered a safe sanctuary from disease (remembered today in a local placename Na Tearmainn, 'sanctuary') and a number of holy wells on the peninsula are dedicated to him. These wells had an upsurge of patronage during the recent pandemic – the water was seen as having protective virtues against plague (and at the very least was safer than anything Donald Trump suggested). The well at St Finian's Bay, especially, is revered, as it is said that the saint blessed the well himself, and also the beach and waters beside it – which also saw an increase in visitors and bathers. "It's believed there's a cure for sickness in the water here, not only in the well itself, but also in the sea-water below in the strand. They used pour the sea-water over the cattle long ago to protect them from disease". One local resident recalled that when she was young a bottle of the well water was always kept inside the front door. [[www.rte.ie](http://www.rte.ie), 4-5-2020]

The peninsula looks out on to the island of Skellig Michael, where the ruins of a monastery said to have been founded by St Finian featured as Luke Skywalker's retreat in *Star Wars* films, *The Force Awakens* and *The Last Jedi*.



### Early bird

A small Palaeolithic carving of a bird, just under 2cm long, has been acclaimed as the East Asia's earliest 3-dimensional art. Carved on bone, it appears to represent a passerine – a 'perching bird', a classification that includes over half of bird species; true to its class, it is de-

picted on a pedestal and with an enlarged tail, enabling it to stand upright. It has been dated to around 13000 years ago. [PLOS ONE, <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0233370>, 10-6-20]

### **Dope, frankincense and mirth?**

Analysis of residues on two altars at the inner sanctum of an ancient Jewish shrine in Israel has revealed frankincense on one and cannabis on the other; the separate unmixed residues indicated that each substance had its own sacred character. Tel Arad in the Negev Desert was a Canaanite city in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, but an Israelite fortress from the 10<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE - the shrine with the altars is dated to c760-715 BCE, the same period as the First Temple at Jerusalem. [smithsonianmag.com, 4-6-20]

### **A sacred secret revealed**

Railway workers attending to a landslip beside a tunnel at Guildford, Surrey, found that it had exposed a small cave. Recesses and graffiti had been carved into the soft sandstone, and there were black marks on the roof thought to be soot from lamps. Initial speculation is that it may have been a mediaeval shrine connected with nearby St Catherine's Hill, and may have been larger before the adjacent railway construction. More tantalising speculation revolves around a pre-chapel name St Catherine's Hill, Drakehill - 'Hill of the Dragon' - and it has been suggested that the site was an area of cult activity prior to the 14th century. [Metro.co.uk, 6-4-20; Current Archaeology, <https://www.archaeology.co.uk/articles/medieval-carvings-found-in-cave-near-guildford.htm>]

### **Rumble on the Atlantic seaboard**

Three skeletons unearthed in Co. Antrim, Ireland, in 2006 provided a

shock when genetic analysis indicated that they were ancestors of modern Irish people - but they weren't Celtic. The bones were around 2500 years old, and other research has indicated genetic make-up with connection to what is now Turkey. This underlines the argument that 'Celtic' is a culture thing, not a people; and it also means that Ireland's megalithic architects of 5000 years ago were not Celtic, nor even proto-Celtic. [Fortean Times 393, June 2020, p14; <https://www.irishcentral.com/roots/new-study-claims-that-irishmen-descended-from-turkish-farmers-83217437-237788351>]

### **Tim Robinson, 1935-2020**

One of Covid-19's victims was cartographer and social chronicler, Tim Robinson. Born in Yorkshire, he moved to the Aran Islands in 1972, where he wrote *The Stones of Aran* and an acclaimed trilogy on Connemara, books that incorporated geology, botany, art (the interplay of land and light on the perceiving eye) and narrative (history and folklore) in an approach he called 'geophany', "our aesthetic, corporeal and affective relationships with the Earth".

### **Aubrey Burl, 1926-2020**

A towering figure in archaeology, and a go-to source for megalithomaniacs all over Europe, passed away in April, aged 93. See Robert Farrah's tribute in this issue.



### **Clippers**

Judith Adams, Paul Devereux, Mark Greener, Jim Hales, Layla Legard, Dave Raven, Verda Smedley

# Mike Haigh's Archaeology Review

## Whale ahoy

The Cairns is the site of a ruined broch and related village on the island of S Ronaldsay, Orkney. During a lengthy excavation, over 30 whalebone artefacts were discovered, including a casket containing the jawbone of an old man who died around 120-140 CE. In all, 33 whalebone objects were analysed by Vicki Szabo and Brenna Frasier in collaboration with Martin Carruthers as part of an international project. They used DNA analysis to discover facts about how whales were utilised on Long Iron Age Orkney. The most striking observation was that 20 of the objects came from the fin whale; all but one from the same animal. As the fin whale is the second largest whale on the planet, it is thought that the bones were taken from an individual that beached itself nearby.

One of a number of mysteries about The Cairns is why the settlement was abandoned and the broch dismantled during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE. It has been suggested, unconvincingly, that the whale beaching was seen as a bad omen which led to arduous and time-consuming dismantling of the tower. Quite why this bounty should be seen as bad isn't explained – it could be interpreted quite differently from an anthropological perspective, especially with the by-products of the beaching. Also unaddressed but probably relevant is the fact that a number of other brochs in the area were also abandoned at around the same time.

[DNA analysis sheds light on whalebone use in Iron Age Orkney. *Current Archaeology* 363, June 2020, p8]

## Weaving the past

Many features of everyday life don't survive the passage of time because they are organic, such as the clothes our ancestors wore. Occasionally, however, in exceptional circumstances clothes do survive. Traces of the skins used to keep Otzi the Italian hunter warm survived because his dead body was frozen in a glacier around 3300 BCE, while clothing of Danish Iron Age bog bodies survived because they were submerged away from the destructive influence of oxygen. Recent discoveries on Orkney also represent some indirect evidence for clothing.

A volunteer doing some post-excavation work on sherds of Grooved Ware pottery noticed the impression of a woven cloth across two fragments (for those who collect synchronicities, the worker's name was Lorraire Clay). She showed the fragments to the specialists, Jan Blatchford, Emma Smith and Susanna Harris, who arranged for the pottery to be subject to Reflectance Transformation Imaging. This involves taking lots of pictures under different lighting conditions and using computers to combine all these images. This results in very sharp photographs that can be manipulated in many ways. The results were so good that individual fibres could be seen. The impression of the fabric was found on the inside of the vessel, so was probably made by the potter as it was formed. The imprint indicates that the cloth was finely woven and was probably a plant-based yarn, possibly flax.

The Ness of Brodgar Site Director, Nick Card, notes that there is no trace

on Orkney of textile tools, suggesting that the weaving was done by hand or using implements that have not survived in the archaeological record.

Similar evidence for textiles has turned up on other sites. The nearest to Orkney is Flint Howe in distant Dumfries and Galloway, where the exterior of a Late Neolithic/Early Bronze age pot held a textile impression. However, the earliest evidence for textile use in Europe comes from Dolni Vestonice in the Czech Republic, where a textile impression was left on a clay floor as long ago as 27000 BCE.

[[www.heritagedaily.com/2020/06](http://www.heritagedaily.com/2020/06); See also Jane McIntosh, *Handbook to Life in Prehistoric Europe*, Oxford 2006 p195-201]

### Anomalous equine burial in Wales

Back in NE 158, we reported that a metal detectorist had found some objects thought to be part of an Iron Age horse burial in Pembrokeshire, many miles from their usual locations. Further archaeological work has discovered more bronze objects in the area, along with the iron rims of the wheels and an iron sword. The objects are dated to CE 25-75. A geophysical survey found the remains were buried in a pit encircled by a ditch. They also found the earthworks of a previously unknown hillfort about 100m (330 ft) from the grave. [*British Archaeology* 171, March/April 2020 p7]

### Lockdown fieldwork

During the lockdown, digging may have stopped, but not the search for ancient sites. Volunteer screen fiends in SW England have been poring over aerial Lidar surveys of the Tamar valley area of Devon and Cornwall to improve knowledge of Roman impact on the area. Over 30 previously unknown settlements and 20 miles of roads have been tentatively identified in the terri-

tory; places like Bodmin Moor and Dartmoor seem to have had a higher population than previously thought. About 20 pre-Roman burial mounds have also been located, along with mediaeval sites. For fear of looting by detectorists, the sites were kept highly secret, ahead of field investigations once lockdown ends. [*Guardian*, 13-5-20]

### Cave art uncertainty in Spain



Questions have been raised about the age of cave art following Spanish research into the designs at Nerja, near Malaga. In 2012 there was excitement that images like the seal pictured were between 43500 and 42500 years old,

according to scientific dating, much older than the 30000 years BP of Chauvet Cave images; this seemed to indicate that the art was of Neanderthal origin. The new study analyzed the reliability of Uranium-thorium dating, which is known to provide dates erring on the side of increased age. Investigating the complexity of dating on calcite for the study of the chronology of cave art, the study questions Neanderthal origin for art in Nerja and other caves. The research team suggests an action protocol for dating Paleolithic art, using data from three measuring systems - Uranium-thorium testing, Carbon 14 (C14) testing, and a second mineralogical study of the sample - before coming to dating conclusions. [E Pons-Branchu *et al.*, 'U-series dating at Nerja cave reveal open system', *Journal of Archaeological Science* 117, 2020; [https://www.eurekalert.org/pub\\_releases/2020-06/uoc-dat060220.php](https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2020-06/uoc-dat060220.php)

# Aubrey Burl ...and 'the most sacred of places...'

*Robert W.E. Farrah pays tribute to this seminal figure in modern European prehistory studies*

In the folklore of megalithic landscapes, architecture is often attributed to the labour of giants. It is fitting therefore that these mysterious landscapes have been given clarity and understanding by another giant, Aubrey Burl, who passed away on the 8<sup>th</sup> April 2020.

Harry Aubrey Woodruff Burl FSA, HonFSA Scot., was born in London on September 24, 1926. Burl joined the Royal Navy in 1944 for his National Service and became a sub-lieutenant. In 1947 he went to the University of London to study, taking his BA in 1953. Burl then moved to Leicester to teach history and archaeology and obtained his MA at Leicester University with a thesis on stone circles in 1970. Burl tells an extraordinary story of how he came to study and become the foremost authority on stone circles, by his own admission 'by accident'. His first three choices of subject for his MA were declined, his fourth choice, stone circles – influenced by a recent visit to the Rollright Stones – was finally accepted. The same year he obtained his MA he took up the post of Principal Lecturer in Archaeology in the Department of Evolution and Prehistory at Kingston-upon-Hull College of Education, a position he held for just over a decade. While at Hull he established a research programme with an emphasis on Neolithic and Bronze Age ritual monuments and began to establish a reputation as a knowledgeable writer. It was during this time that he wrote his major works. In the 1980s his department was closed down, but Burl received a generous financial package which gave some financial independence. He moved to Bir-



*Long Meg and her Daughters, Cumbria*

tingham and pursued his megalithic interests as an independent researcher, engaging in exhaustive documentation and extensive travel throughout Britain, Ireland and Brittany.

The April 1998 newsletter of the Prehistoric Society reported on a dinner held in Birmingham in honour of Burl, where he was presented with the festschrift *Essays in Honour of Aubrey Burl: Prehistoric Ritual and Religion* (Gibson & Simpson 1998). The contributors were some of the most prominent scholars of prehistory, amongst them Richard Bradley, John Barnatt, Graham Ritchie, Miranda J. Green and Clive Ruggles. In this, Ruggles reminds us of the part Burl played in the resolution of certain divisions between old-school archaeology and the more marginal disciplines: "We have progressed far since the days when archaeologists argued, sometimes vituperatively, against astronomers and engineers about astronomical computers and megalithic observatories. Aubrey Burl played a prominent role in this reconciliation" (Ruggles 1998:203). Burl also enlisted professional photographers to capture the atmospheres of monuments, like Fay Godwin, Mick Sharp (Burl 1979) and Max Milligan (Milligan & Burl 1999).

His first co-authored publication was 'Stone Circles again' (Burl, MacKie & Selkirk 1970) - aptly titled, considering almost every other publication to follow would concern stone circles or associated prehistoric architecture. It was clear that Burl had already commenced the journeys into the megalithic landscape that would take him all over the British Isles and N Europe from 1964 to 1974 - excavating and observing, cataloguing and classifying, and eventually interpreting these monuments, to culminate in his magisterial *The Stone Circles of the British Isles* (1976). Richard Atkinson rightly hailed him for a "breadth of knowledge and vision rivalled only by Stukeley" - not since the antiquary William Stukeley in the 18<sup>th</sup> century had anyone travelled so extensively with the aim of making sense of these enigmatic monuments, and Burl was almost single-handedly responsible for the foundation of modern research into these monuments.

There was something of the outsider in Burl, and it is entirely appropriate that this edition of *NE* should host an appreciation of Burl, whose work embraced both mainstream and marginal aspects of archaeology. His writing was so accessible to many besides his academic audience; he was a gifted interpreter, his prose rich with a descriptive and lyrical style which betrayed his wider literary interests.

In later publications, he put aside archaeology and wrote books on other literary subjects, like Francois Villon (Burl 2000), the medieval poet beloved of Bob Dylan, and Catullus (Burl 2004). His last publication was *Shakespeare's Lover* (Burl 2014).

One of Burl's achievements is that he could reconcile such diverse disciplines. In his appraisal of Thom, he acknowledged the archaeological debt due to

the outsider: "It is strange how rarely advances in stone circle research have been made by an archaeologist. To the contrary, with little worthwhile artefactual evidence coming from rings that lacked stratigraphy and were deficient in pottery, human bone and charcoal, stone circles became the *personae non gratae* of British prehistory" (Burl 1988, 176). His outsider mentality saw him address such taboo subjects as archaeoastronomy and leys, at a time when both needed academic recognition. This brought Burl to the attention of a wider audience, what was then politely referred to as the 'fringe' - followers of John Michell, Alexander Thom and Alfred Watkins. Burl questioned the existence of leys with John Michell as part of many exchanges between orthodox archaeology and what were deemed 'unscientific' perspectives.<sup>1</sup> The 'Great Debate' was left unresolved, with neither accepting the other's point of view. Burl never did accept the ley hypothesis, but he continued to encourage and support independent research into prehistory, as shown in his patronage of 'The Megalithic Portal', the online forum for all aspects of prehistory, established in 1997; the founder Andy Burnham recently paid tribute - "Dr Burl helped greatly in getting The Megalithic Portal started in allowing us to post his complete set of stone circle and row data online".<sup>2</sup> The Megalithic Portal has since gone on to become an invaluable online resource.

Arguably one of Burl's most important impacts was in the acceptance of archaeoastronomy, which saw the appointment of Clive Ruggles as the first Professor of Archaeoastronomy in 1999 at the University of Leicester.

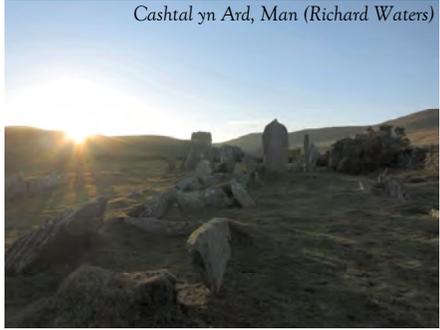
In the end it will be Burl's publications on megalithic monuments which will endure. His breadth of knowledge

was outstanding and for many who working on these monuments, Burl was often the first point of reference, the groundwork already achieved by his research and writing. *The Stone Circles of the British Isles* was considerably revised for a 2000 edition, to include Ireland and Brittany, and is probably the most comprehensive guide ever likely to be written on these sites. It is a work I have referenced in most of my writing and was nearly always my first point of reference. Burl was a reliable scholar, always providing the sources of his research. One of his more concise publications, *Prehistoric Astronomy and Ritual* (1983) was an important introduction to the subject of archaeo-astronomy, even providing an insight into the necessary field work and the equation for calculating celestial declinations.

As I commenced my own research into one of the finest megalithic landscapes in the British Isles, in Cumbria, I benefitted from Burl's extensive studies -Burl's observations would be instrumental in focusing this 'outsider's' attention on the correlation that existed between the megaliths and the landscape, resulting in field work over many years which would demonstrate how the mountains, the most significant feature of the Cumbrian scene, were built into the very foundations of these "great stone circles".

Focusing on the traits of the early stone circles, he argued that "the presence together at the heart of the Lake District of axe factories and great stone circles is not accidental, but an indication that the two were contemporary and functionally connected" (2000:116). Geographically, Burl described these monuments as belonging to an "island culture, sufficient in itself and largely unaffected by outside traditions" (2000:181). At the heart of the

Cashtal yn Ard, Man (Richard Waters)



Lake District is a central massif of mountains culminating in summits like Pike of Stickle, Harrison Stickle, Scafell Pike and others, where evidence of axe factories was to be found. Fertile valleys radiate from this central dome like the rays of some ancient solar symbol. The circles are located in the broad plains of these valleys, sentinel at entrances to this inner mountainous landscape: "The circles are quite neatly separated, eight to ten miles apart, in tracts of about 50 to 80 square miles each conveniently strung together, side by side almost without a break..." (Burl 1988:186). Burl recognized that astronomical trends were present within these circles, not necessarily precise sightlines, but indicating a concern with solar orientation: "perhaps nowhere in the British Isles are [Thom's] features more apparent than in the great stone circles of Cumbria, and it is largely through the plans and studies of Alexander Thom that they have been recognised" (Burl 1988:176).

Thom's data also indicated a strong attention to the cardinal directions - "a great many sites with very definite indications of a north/south line" (Thom 1967:95). These, along with east/west orientations, are traits present in many of the early stone circles, "and this pervasive concentration on the cardinal points must have been purposeful" (Burl 1988:199), though "in contrast to these calendrical lines, the north-south align-

ments seem meaningless" (Burl 1988:201). However, what of circles like Castlerigg and Gunnerkeld, with their portal entrance facing north? I have discussed elsewhere the ritual observation of the meridian (Farrah 2018:154), providing evidence that the N axis of the meridian lying outside the limits of the solar and lunar cycles was perceived by some cultures to correspond to the realm of the Otherworld and the dead. And Burl concludes his study of Thom's research into the Cumbrian circles citing cultural correspondences, emphasising the immutability of the north, 'the still point': "This was the essence of the north. The sun and moon and stars revolved around it, but the North was always still, unmoving, eternal" (1988:201). Finally, he compares the stone circle to a symbolic representation of "the cosmos in stone...an image of time and place...its circle the circle of the skyline, its North point the token of the unchangingness of life, a microcosm of the world in stone, the most sacred of places..." (1988:202).

Let us hope that Aubrey Burl's spirit will forever dwell in that immutable north...at 'the still point'...

#### Notes

1. 'Living Leys or Laying the Lies' (Burl & Michell 1983) is available online, [www.cantab.net/users/michael.behrend/repubs/burl\\_michell/pages/index.html](http://www.cantab.net/users/michael.behrend/repubs/burl_michell/pages/index.html)
2. <https://www.megalithic.co.uk/article.php?sid=2146414485>

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# Hunting the Wild Megalith

## A chronicle of standing stones in South Wales

### *A megalithic narrative arc from Dewi Bowen*

**August 1969**

We're walking around St. David's headland; it's a hot afternoon. I'm with Fred Rellis, an American who arrived in Wales a few years ago to avoid getting sent to Vietnam.

We take a rest by the burial chamber that stands near the path. Fred leaps up on the capstone and mimes a sequence of 'surfer moves', "Y'dig that! Your first farmer dudes were G'dam surfies man". Later he continues this theme of comparing the early Neolithic settlers with his own tribe of beach bums: "See, Dew, just like surfers they had a feel for the tides, winds, phases of the moon and that kinda stuff"

I pondered a while and said, "Sure Fred, but these first farmers were just that, farmers, so unlike you surfers they could do a day's work".

"Mutant gene," he replied, "probably come about by making out with Welsh chicks; by the third generation they'd lost the plot altogether and buried their granddads under these stone surfboards in memory of th' good 'ol days."

It was that frivolous conversation with Fred that got me thinking about the stone monuments that pepper the Welsh landscape. I had noticed them before: the cairns that topped the Rhondda hills where I grew up, the burial chambers Arthur's Stone and Giant's Grave that had fascinated me on Gower holidays, as did the wild and airy Pembrokehire coast with its standing stones and cromlechs that in the summer of '65 greeted a 15 year old school-leaver who preferred the vocation of beatnik spud picker to that of trainee coal miner.

In the years that followed I had the good fortune to meet a group of people who had a common interest in ancient Britain. These were Ley Line hunters, folklorists, dowzers, mathematicians, mystics and, incidentally, some of the finest minds of my generation.

At about the same time in London the painter and writer David Jones was coming to the end of his days. For more than two decades Jones had become a hermit in a room at Harrow on the Hill, having turned his back on the world of art and literature in which he was highly regarded (T.S Eliot had considered Jones to be 'one of the four significant writers of his generation', the others being Pound, Joyce and himself).

When the writer Kathleen Raine visited his 'poky room' she found it had been made 'beautiful by small treasures charged with meaning for him':<sup>1</sup> his mother's silver tea spoon, a glass chalice in which flowers had been arranged, a photograph of the little dog Leica that the Russians had sent up into space. Among the things Jones treasured to the end of his days was an annotated copy of the map 'Distribution of Megaliths in South Wales'.

It was some years later in 1991 I came across this footnote in Jones' *Anathemata*:<sup>2</sup> "If the hunt of the boar Trwyth by the men and dogs of Arthur described in the tale of *Culwch and Olwen* is read with one eye on the Ordnance Survey's map 'Distribution of the Megaliths' (sheet 7), the possibility of some connection between the itinerary of this great mythological hunt and the sites of the megaliths may suggest itself".



What follows are excerpts from my diaries, written as I hunted the Wild Megaliths in search of an older and deeper truth behind this traditional Welsh myth.

### **The Boar's Trail November 1999**

I'd just returned from an autumn on Crete where we had been restoring a traditional Cretan farmhouse. I buy the new Ordnance Survey map and notice that a stone circle is marked on the map at SN 561 099. Having heard a rumour that Dyfed Archaeological Trust were undertaking a new survey of prehistoric sites in West Wales I considered the possibility of a stone circle being rediscovered, so I hurried to Capel Hendre on the Saturday shopping bus.

Enquires in the village drew blank looks from locals who had no knowledge of any stone circle, until a sagacious old gent gave good directions, told me not to expect much and to beware of a particularly grumpy farmer. There, in a boggy field, I found the three smallish stones that remain of Y Naw Garreg (the nine stones) stone circle.

I had read of this circle in E Car-

marthenshire and understood it to be a circle that had been deliberately destroyed during the First World War by the landowner, whose reasoning was productivity and the war effort. Grimes' description of the site in 1933 will do for us today:

"A fairly level open site, on land with a pronounced boggy tendency, with peaty soil overlying clay. The area is much broken up by the tributaries of the River Gwilli; there is an extensive view over rather unimpressive country". Grimes also noted a local tradition that the stones would be visited by young people 'on a Sunday about midsummer' and that they could not be counted.<sup>3</sup>

The 1917 inventory describes a circle of "about 60ft" with five or six stones surviving, forming "little more than a semi-circle" spaced 18ft apart and 18-24 inches high. Shortly after its destruction the circle was visited by Col. Llewellyn Morgan, who planned the site. Morgan's plan shows 14 patches of disturbance where the stones had been buried, plus the three that remain on the surface. These, apart from obvious gaps, were evenly spaced. Perhaps one day Y Carreg Naw may be excavated, which would be



a little recompense for its mindless destruction. On the way back I noticed a skein of wild geese heading south - I think I had been chasing them.

**June 17 2001**  
**Mynydd Llangynderyn**

The foot and mouth epidemic is at its height. I have slyly set up my tent at dusk, though I'm not sure why I should feel any guilt as I've not been near a farm animal for about ten years. I sidle down the mountain for a pint in the Crwbin pub; I don't mention that I'm camping on the mountain.

Morning: I wake up to a contrasting dawn chorus; the ravens' harsh 'craw' and the gentle cooing of the collared dove both rouse and relax me. I am on the ridge of Mynydd Llangynderyn, a spiny outcrop of limestone and millstone grit that runs ENE through this part of Carmarthenshire. The ridge is oriented in the direction of the midsummer sunrise and the Carmarthen Fans.

Midsummer is just a few days away and the sun, red as a beach ball, rises majestically behind the Black Mountains. There is a dense mist lying in the valley bottom; in our looked-for ancient landscape the mist would demarcate those boggy wooded areas, the domain of wolves, bear and boar until they were extinguished by spear, bow and pitfall. On the higher ground the ancient routes can be seen, from Frenni Fawr to Tricrug, all bathed in the magnificent

golden light that is unique to midsummer and the west.

**April 11 2002**  
**Myrddin's Quoit, Llangain**

It's the first weekend without rain for weeks and we head off with some friends to the seaside village of Llanstefan. Our friends had taken over the editorship of the holy wells journal *Source* and wanted to visit the lovely St. Anthony's Well. The fresh air at the seaside was a 'fresh breeze', 5 on the Beaufort scale, enough to blow stinging sand into your face and make walking difficult.

After an hour we head inland, knowing that the wind is only blowing like this on the seashore. On the way we visit Fernhill, the house made famous by Dylan Thomas in the poem of the same name.

*And as I was young and carefree amongst the  
barns*

*About the happy yard and singing as if the  
farm was home,*

*Time let me play and be*

*Golden in the mercy of his means*

The warmth of Thomas's description was not to be found anywhere in the place itself. A 'for sale' sign clacked with menace, the windows were boarded up with mouldy plywood, and an almost sinister atmosphere surrounded the house - so far, not a great day out. We moved on to Llangain to investigate Myrddin's Quoit in a field W of the village.

Myrddin's Quoit are a pair of standing stones oriented N-S near a gatepost at the N-E corner of the field. Turning away from the stones I noticed a man striding purposefully toward us; this would be the first farmer I'd met since the 'all clear' on foot and mouth, and I thought he may well resent us being there. I need not have worried as one of our number had on a Welsh rugby shirt, and following a little banter on the mis-

fortunes of the national game/religion, I asked if we were trespassing. “Not a bit”, he replied, “the path there (which becomes obvious after the stones) would have once taken you all the way to Carmarthen. In fact, I can remember when they would drive the geese to market that way”.

Our conversation led to the other stones of the area and he knew them all, “you got Maen Melyn on the crossroads above Llansteffan, the three down by the golf course, the one on its own above Church Farm Woods, a couple in the hedge by Gilfach Farm, all on the way down to the estuary, and when you get to the river there’s a stone actually on the beach which can only be seen a low tide and I reckon it to be some sort of crossing place”.

### December 15 2010

Two blessings: I have been given copies of some of the maps associated with Nikki Cook’s’ punctilious study, ‘Prehistoric Funerary and Ritual Sites in Carmarthen’ (PFRC).<sup>4</sup> It’s a lovely bit of work and shows all the Neolithic and Bronze Age ceremonial sites that exist as well as those that have disappeared. The braided pattern I believe to be the relict herd movement/Landnam clearance is further emphasised by this survey. I knew Nikki when she was a bright undergraduate at Lampeter and she is typical of the new generation of prehistorians that consider the landscape as whole rather than focusing on the individual sites in a given area.

Second blessing: I am now bus-pass age and able to travel widely throughout Wales wherever buses deem to go. My first trip out is west of Pontyberem - the locations of five stones are noted on the PFRC maps. At the first of these, Tan y Graig (SN 49854 13464), a large prostrate stone is to be found in a small field where pigs and poultry are kept. The



GARREG FAWR NANT JACK

*Garreg Fawr  
Nant Jack  
(DB)*

stones at Bryn Dolau (SN 5045 1240) and Coed Moelan (SN 5080 1235) could not be found.

Both locations enjoy elevated views over the Gwendraeth Valley and the rolling countryside to the E. The remaining two standing stone locations (SN 5048 1190 and SN496 114) have recently seen housing development and could not be accessed. Thence to Bont Fawr Farm a mile or so E of Pontyberem, where no remains of the huge stone that once stood there were found.

I already knew from the 1910 Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments survey for Carmarthenshire that the stone (called by them Sticil Waun Maen) had been removed “and broken up to repair the adjacent hedge”. These remains were in turn probably removed when the road was widened in the late 1960s. Its location, however, is certainly right for purpose, with stunning views toward the Carmarthen Fans and a midsummer sunset aligned on Mynydd Llangynderyn.

### 2nd February 2011

It’s a sunny day and half-term; my six-year-old daughter Hannah wants to know why old stones and mounds are of such interest to her dad. I take her on the bus, to see the stone at Bryn y Rhyd and for lunch at a nice country pub.



*Beddafanc  
passage  
grave,  
Pembrokeshire (JB)*

I don't think Hannah quite 'got' the standing stone thing, but liked the donkey we met, learned to recognise celandine and hazel catkins, and got joyfully muddy. "I think I prefer castles", she said, "It must be to do with being a princess."

### 16 December 2016

I'm now 66 and the winter solstice is fast approaching, there's been a renewed interest in my 1980s work in the Glamorgan uplands; but I'm beginning to despair that I'll ever complete the trail of the boar hunt. The final hurdle, The Carmarthen Van/Black Mountain seems an impossible task for someone who doesn't drive. By looking at Google Earth and reading the descriptions of other writers I considered cribbing the final chapter, but all my insights so far have come about from a personal experience of the landscape. I dread people asking "How's the book coming along?" and wish I'd never spoken of it. In an art-gallery opening I tell a few people of this impasse. Artist Rose Davies and filmmaker Melvyn Williams show a little interest and say they would be in touch in the New Year.

Rosie had a few years before been on a cultural exchange trip to Pakistan, where she had been impressed by a brief visit to some 'petroglyphs' - prehistoric rock carvings thought to have a mythological and topographic correspondence with their locality. Rosie had felt that my description of our prehistoric sites chimed with this combination of art and landscape and wanted to learn more about her own indigenous culture. Con-

sequently, we decided to spend a day visiting some monuments. I would take notes, compass readings and measurements, and Rosie would sketch and paint her on-the-spot impressions; Melvyn, Rosie's partner, would tag along with his filming equipment, but with no real plan in mind except to record the proceedings. In the event Rosie became captivated, first by the monuments themselves and then slowly realised how they would 'fit' into the wider landscape. Melvyn showed himself to be a skilled driver, pathfinder and navigator as well as being on top of his game as a filmmaker.

As for me, the old 'bus pass cowboy was back in the saddle and on the boar's trail once again, with improved health to boot!

### Notes

1. Merlin James, *A Map of the Artist's Mind*, Museums and Galleries of Wales 1995, p62.
2. David Jones, *The Anathemata*, Faber 2010, p80.
3. W F Grimes, 'The Stone Circles & Related Monuments of Wales', in Ll. Foster & L. Alcock (eds.), *Culture & Environment*, RKP 1963, pp93-152, p139, 141.
4. Nikki Cook, 'Prehistoric & Funerary & Ritual Sites in Carmarthenshire', *Carmarthenshire Antiquary* 15, 2006, <http://www.pembrokeshirehistoricalsociety.co.uk/prehistoric-funerary-ritual-sites-pembrokeshire-nikki-cook/>



*Dewi Bowen, Pembrokeshire, July 2018*

# Albion's Ancient Druid Rocky Shore

*David Taylor assesses the relationship of William Blake to alternative visions of history from the 18th century to today*



*“Awake Albion awake!  
And let us awake up together”*

what influence, if any, had the poet and artist William Blake (1757 – 1827) had on readers' perception of 'earth mysteries' and visionary landscapes. The origins of this question lay in a visit my wife and I had made to the Blake exhibition at Tate Britain in November 2019.

Blake, like all true artistic geniuses, was not recognised in his own time. His dense and complex personal mythology, in both his artistic and poetic output, means that even today he has a limited, and at times confused, audience!

Rightly or wrongly, it had seemed to me that Blake had held a special place in the annals of the counter-culture and the 'New Age' movement, of which so-called 'earth mysteries' had had its re-birth. As an interesting aside, in the preface of Blake's 1804 classic epic poem 'Milton', we not only see the now famous "And did those feet..." but also an early – possibly the first – use of the term 'New Age'.

Blake scholar and poet Kathleen Raine hints at Blake's appeal to the newly emerging counter-culture: "Already in Blake's lifetime the old gods of England had departed beyond re-

In a membrane; the saints too, had been recent post-banished. In his attempt to wed the imagination once more to land and NE history, he had all to do from the beginning; he had, as it were, to re-create the Readers, I mythical prehistory" (Raine, 2011).

asked a In his excellent survey of English question visionary music, *Electric Eden*, Rob Young (2010) observes: "A significant portion of Britain's cultural identity is built on a succession of golden ages ... William Blake cast his visionary faculties back to a prelapsarian era in which none of his present woes – industrialism, poverty, urban blight – existed".

How and why Blake appealed to the 'counter-culture' is documented in *William Blake and the Age of Aquarius*, by Stephen F. Eisenman (2017), although unsurprisingly no mention is directly made of the 'earth mysteries' movement. The closest we get is an account of the intriguingly named 'Church of William Blake'. In 1969, Æthelred Eldridge (born James Edward Leonard Eldridge), the avant-garde painter and Associate Professor at the Ohio University School of Art (1957-2014), founded a commune called Golgonooza, where he established 'The Church of William Blake – Primal Church of the Blake Revival' at the foot of Mt Nebo, not far from his home in Athens, Ohio. The church eventually burned down, reportedly due to arson, in 2001.

Eldridge described Mt. Nebo as a "hill of vision" and centre of spiritual power, its magnetic activity attracting

what he described as the "airship of the gods". In the 1973 issue of the commune newsletter, *The Golgonooza Loose Leaf*, attention turned to the skies: "Fiery discs recently known as flying saucers have been sighted frequently in the vicinity of Mt. Nebo and directly above the mount". It is tempting, had Blake been alive, to think that he would have seen these 'discs of fire' not as alien visitors, but as a company of the heavenly host: "What it will be questioned, when the sun rises, do you not see a round disc of fire, somewhat like a guinea? Oh! no! no! I see an innumerable company of the heavenly host, crying, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty!'".

Rumours soon began to circulate locally of the mountain's uncanny 'energy'; it had been sacred to the Shawnee people, had been a centre of spiritualist activity in the nineteenth century and was, according to Eldridge, "the centre of a 'network of tracks and alignments marked by mammoth earthworks, mounds and stones and planned by a divine race ...'".

A quick scan through a few books on the shelf in front of me as I write this reveals an interesting relationship between Blake and earth mysteries.

In his 1969 classic, *The View Over Atlantis*, John Michell sums up the zeitgeist on how the emerging earth mysteries movement was embracing Blake: "William Blake understood the secret of the landscape giants...". This poetic view reached its zenith a few years later in 1977 with Anthony Roberts' *Atlantean Traditions in Ancient Britain*, and the following year with his *Sowers of Thunder*: "It is only to be expected that the Earth Mysteries would take birth in Britain: this country was the first to experience the 'dark Satanic mills' of the Industrial Revolution and it will be the first to register the necessary spiritual counterbalance. It will be a fresh, unfamiliar

spirituality, and so its early manifestations are, for some, difficult to recognize. William Blake saw the shadow of gross materialism being cast in his time, but he also sensed the awakening of Albion, the awakening of the spirit of a people through a renewed understanding of the ancient landscape within which they dwelt". (Roberts, 1978)

Albion is a traditional name for England, and the name of a mythical giant inhabitant of this land. To Blake, the giant Albion represents the country and its inhabitants, and also the fallen personification of all humankind, the Eternal Man. Albion is a giant not only because he contains many lives, but also because he contains the universe. An illustration in his poem 'Jerusalem' shows the giant Albion with sun, moon and stars in his limbs. For this cosmic figure, Blake had a precedent; there is Swedenborg's 'Grand Man' who contains the heavens, the Jewish Adam Kadmon; the Frost Giants of the Eddas, from whose body heaven and Earth were made, and Jakob Böhme has a fine description of man as a microcosm. His flesh is the earth, his blood the ocean, his breath the air.

Blake's unique take on our mythical prehistory was to write: "The stories of Arthur are the acts of the Giant Albion" (Wall, 2019).

In 1979 Nigel Pennick used an engraving from Blake's 'Jerusalem' to illustrate his history of geomancy (Fig. 1). The naked figure of Los stands with compass, dividers and hammer in his hands, behind him snakes and an amalgam of Stonehenge and Avebury, based on William Stukeley's depiction of Avebury as a 'serpent temple'. Pennick (1979) commented: "Inspired by the Neolithic monuments of Avebury, William Blake's allegorical illustration, 'The Serpent Temple', links the masonic tradition of compass-wielding Creator with



Fig. 1:

*Two forms of Los (left and right) with Enitharmon (right). Pl100 of Jerusalem*

(Sinclair, 2012). Both Coverley and Sinclair see Blake as imbuing the landscape of London with mythological life. Blake's name for this mythological London was Golgonooza, a city of imagination built by Los, the spiritual four-fold London, a vision of London, linked to Jerusalem and Blake's great city of art and science.

the solar and lunar attributes of megalithic sites". Twelve years later, Paul Devereux (1991) made a similar observation. Unsurprisingly, considering his 1969 classic, John Michell used the same illustration in his sixth 'Radical Traditionalist Papers' on Stonehenge, placing Blake firmly within setting of the Stonehenge counter-culture (Michell, 1986).

Blake spent most of his life living in London (except for a few brief years in Felpham in West Sussex), and understandably is regarded as a city poet and artist. But how did he view the megaliths in the rural landscape?

On the other side of the Atlantic, the most direct link between Blake and leys was mysteriously suggested by Donald Cyr (1993) in his 'thirty points' of ley-hunting - point 3: 'Ley hunting is said (for its support) to draw on the astronomical work of Alexander Thom (agreed); the recalibration of carbon-14 age determination; the writings of the mystic poet William Blake (why not)...'. What direct justification Cyr has for this intriguing comment is never really made clear.

An important influence on Blake's interest in megalithic monuments was the English antiquarian, physician, and Anglican clergyman William Stukeley (1687-1765). He believed that megalithic monuments such as Stonehenge, Avebury and Boscawen-Un stone circle in Cornwall had been built by the Druids, who were part of "an oriental colony" of Phoenicians who had settled in Britain between the end of Noah's flood and the time of Abraham. John Michell (1982) saw the differences between Blake and Stukeley as being those between poet and priest: "The greatest extension of Stukeley's work has been made by poets, notably by the man who became his prophet, William Blake. The noble, generous vision behind Stukeley's account of Avebury and Stonehenge deeply affected Blake, who captured it and gave it sublime expression in his finale prophecy, 'Jerusalem'".

The author and researcher Merlin Coverley (2010) lays claim to Blake being some form of proto-psycho-geographer, a sentiment shared by the author Iain Sinclair (2000) who describes Blake as "the godfather of psycho-geography". Sinclair lays his cards squarely on the table in a 2012 book directly linking Blake to London topography and mythology, showing how Blake's vast and rich poetry, language and imagination conjoin to delineate a profound engagement with place

Another contemporary of Blake was Francis Wilford (1761-1822), who actually placed the Biblical patriarchs in Britain and was apparently about to reveal that Britain itself was the original seat of Biblical history when in 1805 he

was obliged to reveal the forgeries of his assistants, who had provided for him what they thought he wanted. Blake seized upon Wilford's theory with patriotic zeal and gave it full expression: "All things begin and end in Albion's ancient Druid rocky shore". Adam, Noah, and other biblical patriarchs were Druids, and Britain was "the Primitive Seat of the Patriarchal Religion" of the Druid Temples and Oak Groves. But historical accounts of Druid human sacrifices showed to Blake that Druidism, far from being the pure faith of Abraham, symbolised Deism, the religion of the Natural Man, the bloodthirsty savage (Foster Damon, 1979). They offered sacrifices to their gods, instead of music as the Bards had done. "The Serpent Temples thro' the Earth, from the wide Plain of Salisbury, Resound with the cries of Victims, shouts and songs and dying groans" as Blake wrote. In his study of Stukeley, Neil Mortimer (2003) observed: "For Stukeley the builders of Stonehenge and Avebury were wise holy men carrying out God's original will; to Blake the megalithic monuments symbolised humanity's fall from divine innocence into a state of moralistic religious bondage". Blake encountered 'bloodthirsty Druids', as he imagined them, as a young boy in the first year of his apprenticeship, helping his master, James Basire with engravings of (so-called) Druid stones for Vol. II of *Archaeologia*, the journal of the Society of Antiquaries, which appeared in 1773. The text accompanying those engravings likens 'ancient' pillars in the churchyard at Penrith to the ruins of Druid temples (Sklar, 2020).

Blake's negative views about Druids did not stop later neo-Druids from claiming him as one of their own, saying he had been one of the Chosen Chiefs of the Ancient Druid Order from 1799 until his death in 1827 (Nichols, 1990).

One of Blake's largest paintings was Arthurian-inspired 'The Ancient Britons'. We can only guess as to what it looked like as it is now lost. It was this painting, or a copy, which he completed for William Owen Pughe, a Welshman who was an expert on Welsh folklore and bardic literature. Pughe was an associate of Edward Williams, better known by his bardic name [Iolo Morganwg](#). Through his efforts he virtually single-handedly kickstarted the modern druid revival. Apart from his association with Pughe, Morganwg also worked with the well known Welsh antiquary Owen Jones on *The Myvyrian Archaeology of Wales*, a three-volume collection of medieval Welsh literature published in 1801-1807. In 1792 Morganwg held the first druid ceremony on Primrose Hill, London. However unlikely this may seem, it could be possible that Blake was aware of, and even attended, one of these ceremonies on Primrose Hill (Taylor, 1984), and perhaps through his friendship with Pughe he may even have met Iolo Morganwg.

In the famous depiction of the hybrid Stonehenge/Avebury complex (Fig. 1) from his poem 'Jerusalem', it is intriguing to theorise that the female figure of Enitharmon on the right appears to be lifting a veil. Blake's concept of nature follows from his dialectical and idealist position. On the one hand, he stresses that 'Nature Teaches us nothing of Spiritual Life'. The science which only studies nature is therefore the "Tree of Death". But here Blake is only talking of Newton's nature, the nature of matter in motion. Like modern ecologists, Blake adopted a holistic approach to nature, stressing its interdependence, its unity in diversity, and its organic growth. If we go beyond our five senses, if the doors of perception are cleansed, then we will see that "everything that lives is Holy". Human beings are not separate

from nature, but are an integral part of it. Unfortunately, man has interfered with the beneficial course of nature; 'The Bible says that God formed Nature perfect', Blake wrote, "but that Man perverted the order of Nature, since which time the Elements are fill'd with the Prince of Evil". Man in his fallen state has therefore introduced self-interest and cruelty into the originally pure natural order. Blake referred to the material world in its most fallen state as Ulro. It has been pointed out that Ulro goes by other names – Hebrew *Gehenna* or Islamic *Jahannam*. Ulro is *Samsāra* in Buddhism — the realm of *dukkha*, the land of illusion that creates pain and suffering due to our illusory attachments; it could also be compared to Parsifal's Journey (in the Arthurian legends) through the Waste Land.

If any more proof was needed of what megalithic 'Druidical' sites represented to Blake, we only have to look again at his poem 'Jerusalem', where there is a famous depiction of a trilithon dwarfing three humans and framing a crescent moon,<sup>1</sup> which Blake possibly intended to be identified with Stonehenge. In it he shows Bacon, Newton and Locke, the unholy trinity of the materialist sciences, walking under the giant stone arch. The elongated clouds may suggest the smoke of a sacrificial fire.

In NEReaders, John Billingsley posted: 'Brian Larkman, co-founder of the NE group, observed in the 1970-80s, that art perception has always been a vital fellow traveller in the earth mysteries voyage, from Blake to Palmer to Nash and to any number of modern artists". As Brian rightly pointed out, although inspired by Blake, it was his followers, who called themselves 'The Ancients', who developed techniques to express the visionary landscape. The core members of the Ancients were Sam-

uel Palmer, George Richmond, and Edward Calvert (Lister, 1984).

One respondent to my online question about Blake and earth mysteries was Eileen Roche, who neatly summed up the opinion of many: "Some practical examples of the beauty, drama and terror include Blake's depiction of Serpents, Dragons, Lind-Worms, call them what you will. *Europe, A Prophecy* contains a wonderful coloured picture of a giant coiled and looping snake breathing fire on a hillside ... This sort of art resonates with ley-hunters, folklorists, fortune gatherers and many neo-pagans and earth mysticians".

Blake's rejection of materialism was summed up by his famous saying: "keep from single vision & Newton's sleep". Newton, to Blake, was the arch-materialist. Here Blake refers, I think, to those who live in the realm of low consciousness, who are consumed in a single-minded way with control, power and domination. Blake opposed the Newtonian view of a mechanical, unfeeling, dreary universe, as well as those who would seek to drown out the voices of subtlety, compassion and wisdom. This is a vision cut off from nature and from the soul, and is one we should strive to



transcend. But let's leave the final word to Blake himself:

*May God us keep from single vision  
and Newtons' sleep<sup>2</sup>*

#### Note

1. We were unable to reproduce this image because of copyright held by the image owner, The Morgan Library and Museum, New York; it can be viewed online at <http://www.blakearchive.org/copy/jerusalem.mpi?descId=jerusalem.mpi.illbk.27>

2. *The Book of Thel, c1818*

#### Images

*William Blake*: Phillip Schiavonetti, Phillip - Gilchrist's Life, 1880, a copy of which is available at scan. This page was obtained from online viewer's jpg, converted to greyscale and B&W point adjust to 11/6311 or thereabouts, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=9969126>

*Blake's grave*: Tarquin Binary

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**Hebden Bridge:** The Bookcase

**Halifax:** Friendly Dragon;

The Book Corner

**Morley:** Kyro

**Leeds:** Global Tribe;

Id Aromatics

**Bridlington:** Beachcomber

# Britain's Herbal Heritage: Folklore and a kernel of truth

*A homespun pharmacopeia was once more than simple folklore, as Mark Greener explains*

Folklore often contains kernels of truth. In 1568, for example, gardeners in England began cultivating Goat's Rue (*Galega officinalis*). First recorded in the wild in 1640, Goat's Rue (also called French Lilac or Italian Fitch) is now a common wildflower.<sup>1</sup> Healers soon started using Goat's Rue to treat, for instance, plague, worms, snake bites and St Vitus dance.<sup>1,2</sup>

The herbal compiled by Nicholas Culpeper, first published in 1653, suggested using Goat's Rue for symptoms we now know arise from type-2 diabetes.<sup>2</sup> Some 200 years later scientists realised that Goat's Rue is rich in a chemical called guanidine, which lowers blood sugar levels.<sup>2</sup> In 1929, scientists chemically modified guanidine to create metformin, which remains the most commonly prescribed drug for type-2 diabetes.<sup>1</sup>

Goat's Rue isn't the only wild flower to yield a medicine that remains on pharmacist's shelves. About 1250, Welsh physicians used ointments containing foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*) to alleviate headaches and spasms. In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, England physicians used foxglove as an expectorant and emetic as well as to treat epilepsy, goitre, obstruction of the lung and tuberculosis.<sup>3,4</sup> Foxglove became more than a footnote in medical history when, in 1775, Birmingham physician William Withering learnt of a remedy for dropsy: a build-up of fluid - typically in the feet, legs, or ankles - often caused by some types of heart disease.

"I was told [the remedy] had long been kept a secret by an old woman in

Shropshire, who had sometimes made cures after the more regular practitioners had failed", Withering recounted in *An Account of the Foxglove and Some of its Medical Uses*, published in 1785. The old woman's secret remedy, which contained at least 20 different herbs, caused "violent vomiting and purging". Withering, a keen botanist, realised "that the active herb could be no other than the foxglove".<sup>3</sup> Today, thousands of people take chemicals derived from the foxglove to treat heart disease.

Ancient Egyptian scrolls from about 1500 BCE suggests using *tjeret* (willow) to treat non-specific aches and pains.<sup>5</sup> Millennia later, in the 1740s, Horace Walpole wrote that malaria - Italian for bad air - visited Rome each summer. Walpole introduced 'malaria' into English.<sup>6</sup> But ague, the British term, was a well-known risk each summer and harvest time in the marshes and coasts of Kent, Essex, Norfolk and Somerset. Farmworkers moved north following the harvest and in the 18<sup>th</sup> century malaria reached the Scottish Borders, Aberdeen and Inverness.<sup>6</sup>

In 1763, the Reverend Edward Stone, an Oxfordshire clergyman, reported to the Royal Society that willow bark was a "powerful" astringent that was and "very efficacious" in alleviating fever and shivering, malaria's hallmark symptoms. Stone left the willow bark to dry outside a baker's oven for 3 months. He then pounded and sifted the dry bark into a powder.<sup>5</sup>

In 1828, the German scientist Johann Buchner refined the active ingredient in willow bark into yellow crystals,

which he named Salicin (after *Salix*, the Latin name for willow). Ten years later, Raffaele Piria, an Italian chemist, produced a stronger compound from the crystals, which he named salicylic acid.<sup>5</sup> In 1897, Felix Hoffmann, a German researcher, manipulated the salicylic acid extracted from dry meadowsweet leaves, producing a chemical called acetylsalicylic acid. The brand name of the new drug reflected the ‘acetyl’ chemical group Hoffmann added to salicylic acid and the Latin name for meadowsweet ‘*Spiraea*’. They called the new medicine Aspirin.<sup>5</sup>

But our herbal heritage contains a warning: never take herbs without advice from a doctor, pharmacist or medical herbalist. Several herbs, such as St John’s wort, can cause potentially serious interactions with conventional medicines.<sup>7</sup> Some people almost died from the side effects of traditional medicines. In February 1685, the Dublin Philosophical Society heard that a 40-year-old woman experienced “a violent vomit” lasting for more than two days after drinking a foxglove infusion. She also experienced heart palpitations.<sup>4</sup>

In about 1776, Withering was asked to see a travelling tradesman who was gravely ill. The tradesman’s wife had stewed a large handful of foxglove leaves in half-a-pint of water to treat her husband’s asthma. He swallowed the entire draft – and “narrowly escaped with his life”. As Withering noted “This good woman knew the medicine of her country, but not the dose of it.”<sup>8</sup>

Many of the traditional remedies probably acted as placebos. But some really worked and formed the basis of some drugs we still use today. Our herbal heritage shows that folklore often contains kernels of truth. But folk traditions generally and an appreciation of Britain’s herbal heritage in particular are dying out. I can’t but help wonder what



knowledge and even what treatments we’ve lost.

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# The solar alignments of the ancient henges and the precession of the equinoxes

*Richard Stead recalls a scary conversation - for megalithomaniacs - happily resolved*



This piece arose from a challenge during a dinner-table conversation. It had me quite worried. The challenge was that the solar alignments of the Stonehenge and the other neolithic henges so celebrated today did not obtain when Stonehenge was laid out (from c.3000 BCE with much from c.2500 BCE, some 4,500 years ago: R Hutton, *Pagan Britain*, Yale 2013,p116).

I had been under the impression that the debate over whether Stonehenge - and other neolithic henges - were aligned to the Solstices was over, the doubters having conceded defeat. Hutton in *Pagan Britain* (p117) tells us that "the entrance to the monument was aligned with the midsummer sunrise". At the midsummer sunrise, the shadow of the Heel Stone goes through a trilithon and strikes the altar-stone, doesn't it? It's there for all to see. This, I was informed by a professional archae-

ologist, was all nonsense, because account had not been taken of the Precession of the Equinoxes. What might this be? Was he right?

To seek clarification, I had recourse to my copy of Donald Menzel's *Field Guide to the Stars and Planets* (Collins 1975). I did not find it an easy work to grapple with. Precession (for short) is a feature which adds to, and greatly complicates, the motion(s) of the Earth and thus the apparent motion (s) - to an Earth-bound observer - of the sun and stars.

The familiar setting has three elements: 1) the Earth orbits the Sun (once a year), while 2) spinning on its axis (once a day). The plane of the Earth's orbit is called the Ecliptic and a line going vertically upwards (sorry - I am writing from the northern hemisphere) from this plane points toward something called the Pole of the Ecliptic. If

the Earth's axis were vertical, it would point at this Pole of the Ecliptic. Well-known Fact (3), however, is that the Earth's axis does not point in that direction; rather, the Earth leans, by an angle of 23 and a bit degrees. The Earth's spinning gives us day and night, while the orbiting in combination with the leaning produces the seasons, with their attendant changes in daylight length, weather and of course the apparent location of sunrise at the Solstices. If the degree of leaning were to alter, all these items would alter as well - the solar alignments would be thrown out! While being spot-on today, they would, by implication, have been wrong in 2500 BCE.

My initial reading of Menzel, shockingly, appeared to point to just this conclusion. It explained that the Earth's axis is not constant; rather, it wobbles! That is what the word 'Precession' actually means. I read further that in 3500 BCE when Stonehenge was being laid out, the role of Pole Star (now taken by Polaris in the constellation Ursa Minor, the Little Bear) fell upon the star Thuban, in the constellation Draco (Menzel, p153). Thuban lies some considerable distance from Polaris, so clearly there have been some big change in the sky since Stonehenge was laid out. How might this have affected the leaning of the Earth's axis?

At half-time, therefore, the alignment-deniers were narrowly but clearly in the lead. During the half-time interval, however, I realised that the challenge was to understand how the Earth's axis had moved from pointing at Thuban thousands of years ago to pointing (as now) at Polaris. Otherwise expressed, the question was "by what route has this pointing-and-leaning moved across the night sky?". The presumption has to be that the route is a circle, since nearly all heavenly bodies move in circles, larger

or smaller. Some items move in ellipses, but the spoiler is that precessing goes in a circle. Of itself however, this by no means guarantees the stability of the lean - if the axis were to wobble in a small circle, it would still throw the alignments out.

Resolution lay in a diagram on p330 of Menzel - a diagram which I must describe as cryptic and with which I grappled for some time. To resume the sporting metaphor, the defence was very tight. It was, nevertheless, penetrated and the lead changed hands. The answer goes as follows. First, the circle is actually quite large. Its circumference, besides taking in Polaris and Thuban, reaches nearly all the way over to Deneb in the constellation Cygnus. Despite its large size, we do not register movement round it, as progress is very slow, a circuit taking 26000 years. The cheerful news, furthermore, is this: the centre of that circle is none other than the Pole of the Ecliptic. Although the Earth's axis wobbles, it wobbles round and round the vertical! The degree of lean, accordingly, holds constant through the millennia at 23 (and a bit) degrees. Although precession is a fact - the axis of Planet Earth does indeed wobble, with the result that the role of the Pole Star passes slowly but remorselessly from star to star (and on into the void and back) - precessing emphatically does not affect the Earth's degree of lean. The seasons, the solstices, the sunrises and the henge-alignments do not change. Hurray!

So, readers, if anyone tries to cast doubt on the solar alignments of the ancient henges by talking learnedly about precession, don't take any nonsense from them! Refer them either to Donald Menzel's book or to me. I only wish I had read up on this earlier and indeed had had my Menzel about my person when the situation arose.

# Having Your Say

*A selection of feedback received since our May  
Pan-Demiotic issue*



## ***The Short Ferry Feature***

**David Staveley, Brighton:**

A Lidar image of the Short Ferry farm site (NE Pan-demiotic Issue 1, p26) makes me wonder if the feature could be a tide or soak mark rather than an enclosure? I.e. if the water had been higher, then receded, it would leave a tide mark; if water has soaked up through the loam, it may leave a similar mark.

## ***An observation pre-Watkins***

**John Simpson, Matlock:**

“A path is traceable from the district E of Shuckstone Cross through Lea, Cromford and Bonsall to Youlgreave, and thence to Buxton and beyond, which appears to bear evidence of prehistoric origin. It runs about 14 miles parallel with a Roman road; at the top of Winster it is two miles and a quarter from the Roman road at Minnington; at Youlgreave it is 2 miles 7 furlongs from the Roman road at Arbor Low; at Monyash the distance apart is one mile, at Flagg one mile one furlong, and at Staden half a mile, gradually converging until it crosses the Roman road at Sherbrook. The path is absolutely independent of the Roman roads, and though running parallel with one for several

miles, and crossing it at Buxton, it has no obvious connection with it anywhere. It is noteworthy that there are Roman camps near to each of these crossings. Not only does the path pass through places of prehistoric interest, such as Billberry Knoll, Matlock, Cromford Bridge, Robin Hood's Stride, the Nine Ladies' circle, the Castle Ring at Harthill Moor, Bradford, Youlgreave, the Deep Dale Cave, and Staden Low, but it passes through a country dotted with tumuli for miles, and it has also a direct connection with known prehistoric sites at a distance. There is no great divergence from a straight line anywhere in the path. An examination just made of the route discovered the path to have been diverted in places, but it is there all the same.” [Letter in *The Antiquary* III No.10, October 1915, pp363-364; come upon by Geraldine Beskin of *Atlantis Books*, London]

## ***Any NE-relevant dreams out there?***

**John Billingsley, Hebden Bridge:**

A lot was said in the media about the vivid dreams people were having in their semi-quarantine situation of lockdown, with plenty of experts ready to trot out the anxiety or wish-fulfilment explanations for this. While sometimes it must be true, I'm not sure it answers the whole question of why dreams were making themselves more felt at this time, and I dare say NE readers will also have more nuanced perspectives.

Here's one I had on May 3-4<sup>th</sup>; it has a very folkloric underpinning, but clearly expresses a wider psychological and social unease - about our use of so-

cial technology, but also about the effect of the pandemic on community and folk traditions.

I was with friends among a group of people watching a Pace-Egg play (which were cancelled this Easter because of the lockdown). It was a windy day, and one of my friends complained she couldn't hear the words, so I pulled out my phone, brought up the performance on that so she could hear more clearly, and handed it to her. Others also gathered towards my phone, other groups in the gathering brought it up on their phones too; after a while I noticed nobody was watching the performers, just the phones, and the performers were drifting off one by one. I rushed in and alerted the crowd to this, and snatched my phone back, but too late: the pace-

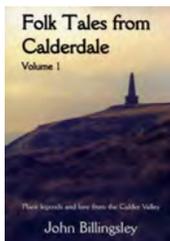
Midgley Pace-Egg in Hebden Bridge, 2019



eggers had gone – but their performance, spookily, continued, now existing only on people's phones...

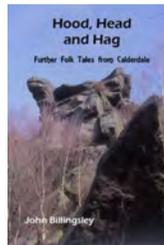
I wonder if anyone else had dreams which touched on NE-relevant topic areas?

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# Red Moss... then, now and some time in between

*Norman Darwen used lockdown to look up and look around...*

Like many readers, I suspect, the injunction to take an hour's exercise early in the COVID-19 lockdown meant an opportunity to (re-)discover my local area – in my case, Horwich, at the foot of the West Pennine Moors. Time at home meant I could also look up things I'd long been meaning to. Only a few hundred yards from my home was what I suspected was an overgrown road, which I could finally confirm by old OS maps online, but my main achievement was to finally visit Red Moss.

When my wife and I first moved to Horwich in 1997, there was a large expanse of wasteland to the W of the town. Now much of it is occupied by the Middlebrook Shopping Centre, offices, Bolton Wanderers football ground, a railway station and a grassed-over rubbish tip. It is the last of these that is the most important for this piece. It is now a tree-covered hill with several walks around it, and behind it – shielded by it – is what remains of Red Moss. I knew of it as a peat bog ('moss' is the Lancashire word for this – I knew of several 'mosses' when I was growing up in W Lancashire) and that a burial had been found there – Bronze Age, if I remembered correctly.

So it was that we spent a few evenings exploring the area, now full of ponds, ditches, linear earth banks, and bird calls, and an occasional deer in the distance. The nearby motorway and railway were both quiet, we met very few people (no-one at all on the Moss itself), and the whole place was eerie, but in a non-threatening manner – the very definition of liminal space, it seemed, brooding but yet calming.

In trying to find out more information about the 'burial', I came across a

very entertaining and informative article by archaeologist Maggy Simms, which links what was in fact a skull with other 'bog-bodies'. It is well worth reading.<sup>1</sup>

I followed up too, not really expecting to get a reply – I wasn't even sure how old her article was. I had to wait a full 17 minutes. She told me that the original discovery was made in the 1940s by "a Mr Krikkens, a Dutch emigré who may have been under internment at the time. He was working for a farmer, and cutting peat. In my estimation, that puts him nearer the Horwich end of the moss, but nobody thought to mark the precise location".

The *Bolton Evening News* gave a date of 1943 for the discovery,<sup>2</sup> but the skull they are talking about here was not the severed head that was dug up – see Maggy's article for further explanation. Also Wikipedia notes: "A severed female head was discovered in Red Moss in the 19th century dating from the Bronze Age or early Iron Age" – this dating is clearly wrong.<sup>3</sup>

Maggy has also been trying to ascertain the present whereabouts of the skull – a mystery in itself – and the South American skull which was at one time passed off as 'the Red Moss Skull'. Both have 'disappeared'.

But as she told me in signing off: visit Red Moss when it's possible. It will still be there". It is noisier now, but still has that feeling of remoteness.

1. <https://archaeocourses.weebly.com/the-red-moss-skull.html>, acc'd 13-6-20

2. <https://www.theboltonnews.co.uk/news/6208973.red-moss-skull-to-go-on-show/>, dated 26-3-1996

3. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red\\_Moss,\\_Greater\\_Manchester](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Moss,_Greater_Manchester) acc'd 13-6-20

# The Eyes of the Goddess: West Kennet Long Barrow

Some years ago, we asked readers to send in their uncanny experiences, like John Hall's story in the previous Pan-Demiotic; we'd love to hear more such memorates, so if there's something you'd like to share, please send it in (let us know if you're happy to be identified in print)

This story harks back to those days when one of my favourite ancient sacred sites, Avebury henge in Wiltshire, was still cared for by the Ministry of Works, long before English Heritage took over and 'promoted' this Neolithic marvel.

Having arrived one afternoon at Avebury, I sojourned around the ancient stones. Later I visited the local pub, where I had a pint of fine cider. It was getting late, and I needed to find a place to crash; I put out my thumb and soon I was on my way to West Kennet Long Barrow. I was dropped nearby; the weather was fair, the farmer was burning the stubble and slowly the fires crept across the field.

The sun had gone beyond the horizon and with darkness descending I unrolled my sleeping bag within one of the cells of the tomb.

After a while, I thought I heard voices, and looking up, I saw the passage immersed in golden light. By then I was wondering whether the farmer's son was playing a joke on me, following which I decided to await the prankster behind the huge blocking stone. I looked out intently at the stile, the customary approach to the monument. The fires had died out. Even so, I distinctly saw a black figure standing at the stile. It was most convincing, though it was not moving at all.

While I was waiting for the figure to move and approach the barrow entrance, suddenly there was a lightning flash, but no thunder. I could see for



miles, but the landscape which then unfolded before my eyes, down to the very horizon, was a different landscape from that I'd seen prior to entering the tomb.

And when I returned to my Neolithic/megalithic 'cell', I saw, emblazoned on the ancient stone wall, two large shallow circles. The illusion was most real indeed - I touched those 'engravings', marvelling how smooth they were, and understood them as the eyes of the Goddess! Gosh, what an amazing discovery, not mentioned anywhere in the archaeological reports! Note that all this happened long before the present widespread Goddess association with megalithic monuments...

The next day, I informed the caretaker at Avebury Museum about the 'overlooked' engravings, a surprising discovery indeed.

Many years later I returned to the site - but I found no trace of the Eyes of the Goddess, though what I'd experienced was not a dream, but in-depth reality, an experience I recall in every detail.

Please do not publish this story without adding a request to 'respect the site, light no fires, leave no litter, please'!

**John Palmer**

# All Things Considered: Reviews

*Three blasts from the past and a new look at an old habit*



## RUSSIAN BLACK MAGIC

**Natasha Helvin**

Inner Traditions, 2019. Pbk, 176pp.  
978 1 62055 887 4

This is a book of magic, rather than one about magic. Although there is a historical introduction that roots Russian black magic in the deities of the Slavic Peoples, it is mostly about how to cast spells and work *maleficium*. Indeed, the introduction often reads like a series of bullet points in a hurried Powerpoint presentation, something to get out of the way before getting onto the preferred stuff. While emphasising the need to learn from a master rather than using a book like this – which seems somewhat self-defeating – this is a practical book, concerned with how to write one's own grimoire, prepare paraphernalia and calculate the correct time and place for rituals.

It's very much a 'does what it says on the tin' kind of book, with plenty of spells to curse people, split up relationships, and even kill them. Helvin is unapologetic about the dubious morality associated with her chosen subject, regarding it as part of human life. This seems a very Trumpian attitude, where

business is business and anything can be justified if it turns a profit.

I can't say if these spells work or not as I can't imagine a single situation in which I would want to use them. This is a book for a niche market that I similarly can't imagine many NE readers belong to. [Mike Haigh]

## RELIGION AND THE DECLINE OF MAGIC

**Keith Thomas**

It may be 50 years since this title first appeared, but it remains a classic and essential reading for anyone wanting to know the social and cultural background to the witch furores of the 16th and 17th centuries; and it may be that in the light of our contemporary 21st-century circumstances it has more lessons for now that it did even back in 1971.

I've used it for research for many many years, but it was only with the Covid-19 lockdown that I decided to tackle its disconcerting 800 pages in full. I needn't have fretted – Thomas' writing style is readable, and the stories of Britain half a millennium ago, the stories behind the court cases, the cultural drift of English society, are utterly absorbing, from witches to ghosts to fairies and prophets.

If you're interested in the subject area, take the plunge – this book, despite its age, is better and more readable than most other books on witchcraft, and than anything you'll read on the internet. Bear in mind, though, that academic perspectives on the subject matter and its treatment change, and it is half a century – I followed it up with

Ronald Hutton's *The Witch*, which barely mentions Thomas' work, so perhaps it's out of fashion. Nonetheless, I got more of the (less theoretical) information I was looking for in the older work. [JB]

## EUROPE: THE FIRST 100 MILLION YEARS

**Tim Flannery**

Penguin, 2019. Pbk, 346pp. £10.99. 978 0 24135 807 8

This interesting little book tells the story of the evolution of the sub-continent of Europe. It begins with an archipelago of islands being moved around by tectonic forces before melding into their present form and goes on to describe their changing fauna and climate. Sometimes animals including freshwater fish migrated into Europe from other regions, and sometimes the traffic was in the other direction – much depended on whether the land-bridge to Asia was open or not. When hominids arrive, the author lays stress on the skills of the Neanderthals and the fact that the first wave of *homo sapiens* interbred with them. After describing the extinction of Europe's megafauna since the retreat of the ice, the book ends by discussing re-introductions and re-wilding. The reader also gets vignettes of the lives of various famous or pioneering archaeologists, such as V Gordon Childe. There is also substantial evidence of second-rate proof-reading. It is nevertheless most informative. [Richard Stead]

## THE INHERITORS

**William Golding**

I find it a bit hard to rate this classic novel, but for reasons that were unavailable to the author, who thought it the finest novel he'd written (and he wrote *Lord of the Flies*, so there's stiff competition). On the face of it, the story is of a

brief but fateful encounter between a small group of Neanderthals and an incoming tribe of *homo sapiens*, the 'new human'. The Neanderthals are inbred, outclassed in intellect and skills, and ill-equipped for change – though oddly they are less scared of it than the incomers, who are also loud, tooled-up, and fond of this tipple they've invented. The effect of this tipple on the Neanderthals is strong and equally violent (Golding was a regretful alcoholic, so the inclusion of this episode is telling).

Outside the plot, the novel is an imagining of what may happen when an 'advanced' culture comes into contact with a more traditional society, and on those lines can be taken as an allegory for western impact on cultures in South and Central America, Australasia, or elsewhere on the globe – how does a people come to terms with things that are wholly outside their conceptual experience (If you've seen the film *Apocalypse*, this same point is made in the first sighting of the Spanish galleon at the end of the film)? Do they learn to live with them, or is the shock all too much?

Where the book falls down for me is not Golding's fault; it's just that now, thanks to more recent archaeological findings, we know much more about the Neanderthals than we did when the novel was written in 1955. We now know that they were far more than simple-minded furry savages – they had tools, rituals, art, boats, etc. and there is plenty of evidence that the new humans mated with these predecessors, something unthinkable in *The Inheritors*. For the archaeologically-minded among us, this dissonance is perhaps as uncomfortable as reading some of 19th-century anthropology's view of tribal cultures as savage and primitive. A fine novel that gets you thinking – but in the end I'm speaking up for the Neanderthals! [JB]

## What *are* they like?

We invited readers to send in photos of simulacra at significant sites around the world - here is a selection of what we received...



Tanya Loi snapped the 'head of Zeus' in the outline of Mt Juktas in Crete, above - the supposed resting place of the god (if a god can really be buried anywhere).

Greece has no shortage of mountains sacred to the ancient gods, and here (right) on the island of Evia an appropriately buxom simulacrum appeared to John Billingsley at the top of Mt Klios. The mountain is sacred to the goddess Hera, described in Wikipedia as "the goddess of women, marriage, family, and childbirth ... a matronly figure".



Moving away from deities, two rock-cut tombs of Sardinia provide an archaeological context for Roccia dell'Elefante (The Rock of the Elephant) - though the editor saw a passing resemblance to that guy down the chip shop who swears he's Elvis... Snapped here by Barry Teague, the tombs date from the pre-Nuragic period (Neolithic/early Bronze Age).

Rather closer to NE's home is Beacon Hill in Leicestershire, where this 'giant' figure looks out westward. Around the hilltop are Bronze Age ditches for a hill-fort, with some Iron Age embellishment. Bob Trubshaw tells us that in 2006 a Druid group started to host public rituals on the hill at solstices and equinoxes.





While we're on about elephants, this stone at Duddo stone circle in Northumberland lurks where surely none roamed before.



It looks like a personage peering out at Paul Degan from a stone at Steincleit, a cairn and stone circle overlooking a cairn and crannog on the Isle of Lewis. Is the inhabitant there by choice, magic, or accident? It's not a carving. Paul praises this hilltop, with its loch and crannog visible behind it.



Jesus appears in many types of medium, from clouds to window glazing, but this is one of the more appropriate revelations, in a piscina in the ruined abbey of Jervaulx, in N Yorkshire.



Suzie got in close and personal for this evocative bit of weathering at Harewood House, an 18th-century mansion in West Yorkshire, built for a Caribbean slave-owner, Edwin Lascelles. The grounds were landscaped by Capability Brown.

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Simulacra take many forms in as many media as there are available to human perception. It's all in the eye, sometimes - as in religious 'messages' - very much the eye of faith. Sometimes they can be obviously ephemeral, amusing asides to the human tendency to see one thing in the form of another. But sometimes, perhaps, they may have been metaphors, even literal manifestations, of inner concepts. Terence Meaden argues that the number of simulacra at Avebury suggest they were a key design element; Peter Knight suggests that forms in the landscape may have embodied ancestral concepts. Were they integral elements in the origin of ancient monuments? All we can say is possibly. But Jesus in a slice of toast? Nah...

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# NE LISTINGS

*Magazines, websites & groups of interest*

**APOTROPAIOS** Folk magic house protection. [www.apotropaios.co.uk](http://www.apotropaios.co.uk)

**BRITISH SOCIETY OF DOWSERS**

[www.britishdowsers.org](http://www.britishdowsers.org)

**CAERDROIA** 53 Thundersley Grove, Thundersley, Benfleet, Essex S57 3EB. Labyrinths, mazes, etc. [annual £8 UK, £12 EU /\$20 US/elsewhere]

**CENTRE FOR FORTEAN ZOOLOGY**

[www.cfz.org.uk](http://www.cfz.org.uk)

**DORSET EARTH MYSTERIES GROUP** Dave Shead. 07977 144147. <http://dorsetmysteries.org/>

**ENVIRONMENTAL & ARCHITECTURAL**

**PHENOMENOLOGY NEWSLETTER** D. Seamon, Architecture Dept, 211 Seaton Hall, Kansas State Univ., Manhattan, KS 66506,

USA [\$12 (3) outside USA (\$ only): \$c=David Seamon/EAP]

**FOLKLORE FRONTIERS:** 5 Egton Drive, Seaton Carew, Hartlepool, Cleveland TS25 2AT. [£7.50(3) or £5(2) etc: £c=P.Screeton]

**FOLKLORE SOCIETY** Warburg Institute, Woburn Sq, London WC1H 0AB. [www.folklore-society.com](http://www.folklore-society.com)

**FORTEAN TIMES:** Subs from Dovetail Services, 800 Guillaat Ave, Kent Science Park, Sittingbourne ME9 8GU. FFD 0844 844 0049. See [www.forteantimes.com](http://www.forteantimes.com) for offers

**GATEKEEPER TRUST** Non-denominational pilgrimage. <http://gatekeeper.org.uk>

**JOHN MICHELL NETWORK** [www.john-michell-network.org](http://www.john-michell-network.org)

**THE MEGALITHIC PORTAL** Website and database for megalithic sites worldwide. [www.megalithic.co.uk](http://www.megalithic.co.uk)

**MEYN MAMVRO** Whitewaves, Boscawell Village, Pendeen, Penzance TR19 7EP. 01736-787186. [editor@meynmamvro.co.uk](mailto:editor@meynmamvro.co.uk). [www.meynmamvro.co.uk](http://www.meynmamvro.co.uk) [£11.00 (3)/£3.70\*].

**THE MODERN ANTIQUARIAN** <http://www.themodernantiquarian.com>

**MUSEUM OF WITCHCRAFT** Boscastle, Cornwall. [www.museumofwitchcraft.com](http://www.museumofwitchcraft.com)

**MYTHO GEOGRAPHY**

[www.triarchypress.net/mythogeography.html](http://www.triarchypress.net/mythogeography.html)

**NETWORK OF LEY HUNTERS (NOLH) L** Main, 9 Mawddwy Cottages, Minilyn, Dinas Mawddwy, Machynlleth SY20 9LW Newsletter. [£15(4); £25 overseas]

**THE NORTHERN ANTIQUARIAN** <https://megalithix.wordpress.com/>  
**RIDINGS DOWSERS**

[www.ridingsdowsers.co.uk](http://www.ridingsdowsers.co.uk).

**RILKO JOURNAL:** Research Into Lost Knowledge Org. [www.rilko.net](http://www.rilko.net). [info@rilko.net](mailto:info@rilko.net) [£19/£24 overseas (2)]

**SACRED SITES INTERNATIONAL** 1442A Walnut St. #330, Berkeley, California 94709, USA. Int'l site protection. [www.sacred-sites.org](http://www.sacred-sites.org). [sacredsite1@gmail.com](mailto:sacredsite1@gmail.com).

**SOCIETY OF LEY HUNTERS (SOL)** Adrian Hyde, 7 Mildmay Rd, Romford, Essex RM7 7DA. + Newsletter, Meetings.

[www.leyhunter.co.uk](http://www.leyhunter.co.uk). [leyhunter@leyhunters.co.uk](mailto:leyhunter@leyhunters.co.uk). [£15(4)/£4 inc p&p]

**TEMENOS ACADEMY** Events (London) related to sacred traditions of East & West. [www.temenosacademy.org](http://www.temenosacademy.org)

**TIME & MIND. Journal of Archaeology, Consciousness & Culture.** <http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rtam20/current>

**TOUCHSTONE:** 1 St Paul's Tce., Easton, Wells, Somerset BA5 1DX. Surrey Earth Mysteries [£2(4)/-]

**TRENCROM DOWSERS (W CORNWALL)**

<http://www.trencromdowsers.org.uk/>  
[www.trencromdowsers.org.uk](http://www.trencromdowsers.org.uk). Monthly programme, speakers and workshop presenters from late autumn to spring; monthly dowsing trips to ancient sites in W Penwith.

## NORTHERN EARTH

*Northern Earth* takes a broad-based 'earth mysteries' or alt-antiquarian approach, looking at historical and contemporary cultural and geographical environments free from agendas or beliefs.

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