

# WISHT MÆN

DEVON EARTH MYSTERIES  
MAGAZINE. SPRING 1994 No.2



BOW HENGE AND NYMETLAND  
BRIDE IN DEVON  
DEVON GODS AND GODDESSES  
NEWS. LETTERS

£2.30



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FRONT COVER: Bow Henge by ANDY NORFOLK. Titles by ANNA CLARKE Artwork & titles on p1,2,7,11,12,15,16,23 by ANNA CLARKE Artwork on p3 & p24 by NICOLA SELLARS Spinsters Rock knotwork design on p24 by ANNA CLARKE Artwork on p26 by STEVEN SHIPP

THE WHEEL

Three gifts, three kings a baby smiled. Sol woke sleeping daffodils, child to man, to blood to death. The wheel turned to life, to hope, to summer fruits. Old wood on the fire, the beacon blazed. The thorn was cut; the baby cried again.

LYME BAY

Bluebell woods open, surrendering to wind, rain, and the golden line. Cap, to hill, three tree barrow, aligns the place of fire. Soft cliffs, incised spiral preserving memory in bone.

EBB-TIDE

The tide turns, beating on rocks, angry now hissing in rebellion, sighing with reluctance, weeping at her loss, ravenously clawing at the sand. An old iron bedstead partially buried, bleeds adding blood to the flow marrying land to sea. In a dark cave, sculptured by wind and tide a heart beats.

POEMS BY MARY COOMBS

WISHT MAEN

DEVON EARTH MYSTERIES

DEVON AND DARTMOOR MYTHS, LEGENDS AND FOLKLORE. PREHISTORY AND CULTURE- ANCIENT AND SACRED SITES. EARTH ENERGIES AND RELATED PHENOMENA. ALTERNATIVE SPIRITUALITY.

Spring issue? Stretching it a bit....apologies for the lateness of this issue. Other EM magazine Editors inform me it all gets easier after you've done four...I sincerely hope so. Burial cist 9a in Bellever Forest has become the latest victim of the barbecue vandals. Someone used the cist as a barbecue pit; splitting the stone on all sides - the same happened to one at Soussons Common last year, and the DNPA has turfed over it to prevent possible desecration in the future. Debbie Griffiths, the DNPA archaeologist, says there have been three instances of vandalism of ancient sites on Dartmoor last year, but this is three too many. The Forestry Commission, who own Bellever Forest, have cleared their ancient sites of trees and undergrowth and have installed wooden posts with the site number painted on in luminous orange letters. They do this to ensure forestry workers/contractors know what sites are protected monuments and to keep tractor tyres etc well away from them. Unfortunately the numbered post does make the Bellever cist look like "Barbecue Bay 9a"! - it obviously appeared so to the ignoramus who savaged it - or it could have been a deliberate desecration. English Heritage-type signs are not a solution; they detract from people's wilderness experience. The numbered posts also do; but the sites will be victim to the crane and tractor wheels if they are not clearly marked. Crockern Tor was host to a rave just after Christmas, all well and good, but the ravers parked irresponsibly and left gates open, letting livestock wander out into the road. The police and farmers were not amused. Interesting that Crockern Tor, once host to the Stannary Parliaments, should be the venue for a rave. As its Stannary Celebration year, a properly organised summer rave would be a good idea; there aren't many residents to get irate about the decibels - Crockern Tor is ideal as it is very isolated, and the energy raised at such events is more useful directed at our natural environment than enclosed and trapped in warehouses on industrial wastelands; but they must be properly licensed and organised. If this were so, there would be no need for aggression from any side. There's no way to stop illegal raves - the answer is to run them responsibly and with respect to all life. WISHT MAEN needs correspondents from the more ignored parts of Devon -especially North, West, South and North East - Devon is a huge county and quality coverage of ancient sites and indigenous folklore/legends by one person in North Tawton is, er, difficult to say the least. If you live in any of these areas and would be interested in writing articles on your patch please contact us. I am aware that Dartmoor gets written about to death, and I want to cover the whole of Devon's earth mysteries, but there needs to be a network. To this end, we are holding an informal meeting on SATURDAY JUNE 4th at 3.30pm at THE PLUME OF FEATHERS INN, Princetown, Dartmoor; to see what interest there is in establishing an Earth Mysteries Group, for field trips, talks, lectures etc. If you would like to see this happen, or would like to come along and have a natter, we would love to see you and put faces to names! There will be a walk at Merrivale complex after the meeting for those who are into it. Children and babies welcome, the Plume has a safe playground, a loo suitable for changing nappies, and we're holding the meeting in the childrens/function room anyway. We'll be in there or in the bar, the landlord will direct you to us! Cornwall has a very active EM group, I think it's high time Devon had one too, even if it has to be split up into areas - Devon is a big county and a convenient central meeting point is hard to find. See you on 4th June!



# SIGNPOSTS IN NYMETLAND

HUGH H FRANKLIN

"...geographical names testify to the cult of various gods...it is probable that every British town had its own eponymous hero, the deities however, from whom towns derived their names, were doubtless often worshipped near the site long before the first foundations were laid."

Rice Holmes

Driving along the A3072 (a medieval road which represents the line of the old prehistoric routeway from the Exe Valley to the North Cornwall area) from North Tawton to Bow you will notice nothing spectacular. It might be observed that the land here is redland, that the fields are reasonably large, and that there are few trees and woods. A closer look at the map produces some slightly more interesting information with regard to names on the land - Broadnymet, Nicholls Nymet, Nymet Tracey, Crooke Burnell, Stone Farm, a Roman fort and a stretch of Roman road. Still nothing about which to get madly excited. A minor delve into the Domesday Book shows that other farms in this locality - Natson, Hampson, Walson, Burston - were at that time called 'Nymet' or 'Limet', and further out also, Wolfin, Zeal Monachorum and Nymet Rowland had the same appellation. More delving into maps and books produces another batch of 'Nymets' miles to the north at Kings Nympton, Bishops Nympton and George Nympton (Queens is a much later sub-division). East and West Nymph and Nymphayes (now Nymet Hayes) should also be noted....

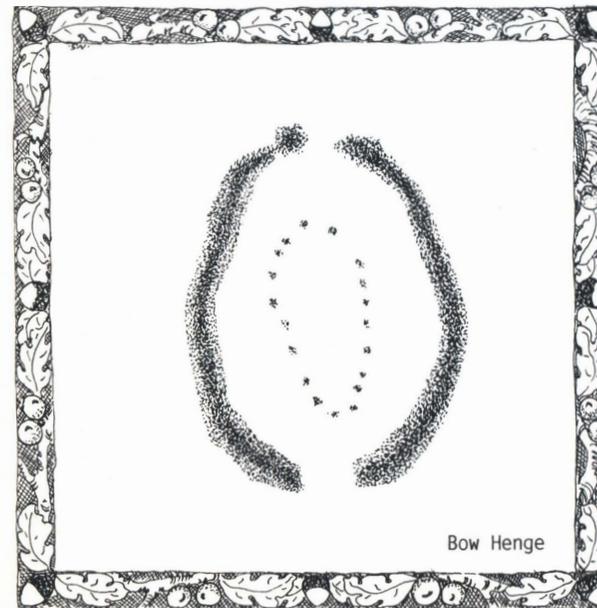
These names have excited interest for many years, for the root of 'Nymet' is NEMETO, a British word for 'a pagan sacred place, sacred grove or shrine', which also gave rise to Old Cornish NEVED (Lanivet) and Welsh NYFED, leading to speculation that this area might harbour some persisting traces of pagan or Celtic christian worship as has been found in other parts of the country (Aqua Arnetmetiae at Buxton, Medionemeton at Cairnpapple, Vernemetum at Willoughby), and on the continent (1). An Domesday book spelling of Okehampton was Ochenemitona - could this conceal a dedication to the ancient Oc/Og, the once supreme ruler of the universe in Irish mythology, meaning 'the high one'? (compare the 'Og' names close to Stonehenge - Ogbury Camp, the Ogbourne villages, the Og and Ock rivers). Another 'bow at a venture' might be to equate the Okehampton area with the 'Uxella' of Ptolemy, a Celtic word meaning 'high place', marked on his map as seeming to be in the heart of Devon but so far unlocated (Ux/Ox/Og/Oc). The high moors here dominate the landscape for miles and tower over Bridestowe, whose St Brigid was the sister of Oc and his half-brother Ogma.

"It is", said Sir Lawrence Gomme, "a gain to science that it has at last been recognised that we cannot penetrate far back into man's history without appealing to more than one element in that history; someday it will be recognised that we must appeal to all elements in that history".

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It is rather amazing that the Roman fort at North Tawton was not recognised as such until an aerial survey in 1954, and tentatively allied to the itinerary name of 'Nemetostatio', although the smaller fort at Bury Barton by Nymet Rowland also vies for this possibility (2). This was recognised in the 1980's by Professor Todd of Exeter University, having been completely missed by Hoskins when surveying Bury Barton. The walls of the fort at North Tawton were 7ft high until 1940, when they were bulldozed by the army for the incumbent farmer (pers.comm.). In the mid C18th the Vicar of North Tawton, in answer to one Jeremiah Milles (presumably the director of an early type of Ancient Sites and Monuments Commission) questionnaire on ancient sites within his parish, replied "There are no ancient Roads, Roman Camps or Walls within this parish, nor any Antiquities" (3). If these prominent remains were overlooked it is not surprising that 'Nemetons' were not detected in this well cultivated strip of land until flown over by F M Griffith, the county archaeologist, in 1984; whilst researching for the book DEVON'S PAST -AN AERIAL VIEW.

So, it is now starting to look very interesting, for she discovered quite by accident from the air, a Neolithic Henge on the outskirts of Bow (alias Nymet Tracey). The henge showed as the cropmarks of an asymmetric ditched structure with two entrances aligned just WSW/ENE of due east-west, and within it an eccentric ovoid of nineteen pits. It is the first example of a Class II henge west of Dorset. (although a possible earthwork example has been reported on northern Dartmoor close to the Grey Wethers stone circles). The village of Nymet Tracey moved up the trade route in medieval times to join a Bernard and Alfred ATTE BOGHE. This is the old English word for 'an arched, vaulted structure', which could have been the bridge over the river here - or imply the memory of some other edifice - for the bank of the henge is still faintly visible as a hillock in the field by the river. This low mound is claimed to be a relic of the Civil War...time will tell.



Bow Henge

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## Celtic Connections

The Journal of Celtic Culture  
and Related Subjects

Celtic Connections is a regular quarterly journal dedicated to all aspects of Celtic culture, especially the arts and crafts. It covers Wales, Scotland, Brittany, Ireland, The Isle of Man and Catalonia.

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Tamarisk Farm, West Bexington  
Dorchester, Dorset DT2 9DF

Other ritual circles and ditches of about the same period were recognised only two miles away under the football pitch at North Tawton. Stone Age, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Saxon, Norman - all Ages are represented in this little patch. And here the mystery and interest deepen again. History taught me as a lad, that people lived and worked on the uplands of Dartmoor and Exmoor building their stone rows and circles, because the rest of 'lowland' Devon was covered with dark impenetrable forest, inhospitable to humans and beasts. This belief I gave up years ago, for every field I have walked in in mid-Devon has produced flint chippings, chert scrapers and arrow heads (not yet an axe!), leading me to the conclusion that most of these woods were cleared in the Stone Age. It is impossible to walk through undergrowth 'whittling' flint, it must be done from a sedentary situation. And flint has to be imported; it is not indigenous to this part of Devon. I would hazard a guess that though there are hedgerows in the fields on the drive to Bow, the general openness of the landscape is much the same as it was in Neolithic and Saxon times, with the exception of course that the Henge and allied structures would have been visible.

Let's consider this 'continuity' further. A Henge in 2000BCE implies land clearance some few generations before its commencement, and thus a fair sized, organised population. One of the proposed uses of a Henge was as a tribal/community meeting place for trading goods. In this case it is exactly halfway on the overland route from the Greenstone axe 'factory' in Mounts Bay, Cornwall; and Stonehenge in Wiltshire. It was thus a very important stop-over centre on this trade route. How long it continued in use for this purpose will not be known without excavation. Neither do we know much about the football field complex, but there are hints, for adjacent to it I have found a flanged arrow-head of the 'Beaker' type, and the landowner informs me that though the field on its southern border is now into permanent grass and unlikely to be ploughed in the near future, he and his father had noticed that it had contained "...many flints and those large brown ones." I take this to be Chert, though this was the preferred material for scrapers by the earlier Mesolithic peoples.

The 'Beaker' folk thus recognised the area as being special and may have set up their monuments not far from the Henge. The 'Crook' of Crooke Burnell (cruc = hill, mound or tumulus), can be vaguely made out on the hillside to the south across the valley and the road, and I am told there was another one nearby which has since been flattened. Whether these belong to this period or a later Bronze Age I do not know. The Celts coming in around 500BCE may have called it that in their language or it may have been built by them. Certainly, when they came into this part of the country, they also recognised its ancient sanctity and utilised it for their own purposes, and the whole numinous area became their NEMETON.

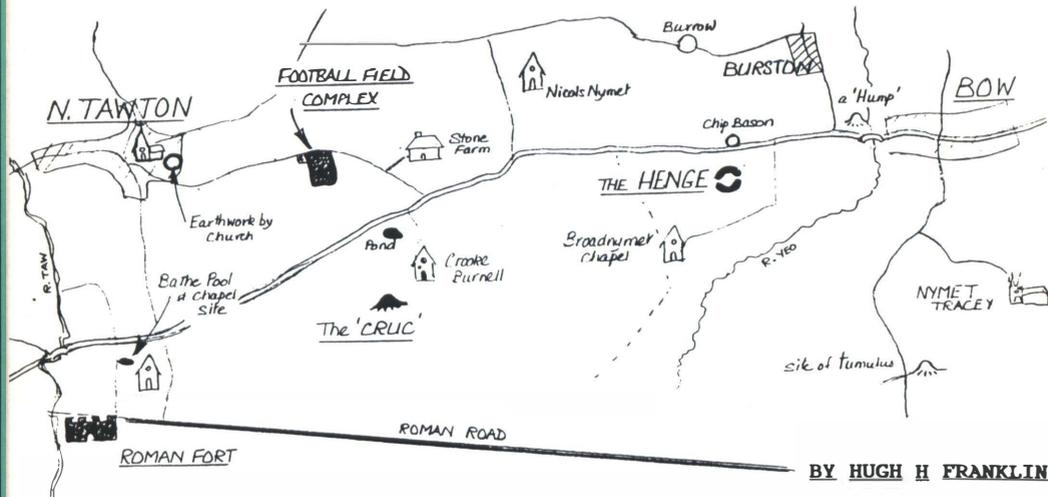
It was to 'Nymetland' that the Romans directed their long straight road from legion HQ at Exeter, via a possible small fort at Crediton -not to destroy or annihilate the Celtic enclave but to build a dominating fort on the River Taw, for its siting, although on the banks of the river, is neither offensive nor defensive. The 2nd Augusta Legion of Vespasian operating in the South West was well used to the religions of the Gallic Celts on the continent, and with the religious freedoms within their ranks, could well have used and adapted the facilities of the North Tawton complex, including the now drained de Bathe Pool, for votive offerings. (Oh for an excavation here!) It must have been a well renowned spot for the Saxons to have named it 'Bath' (= pond), even without the curative properties of the more famous site miles away at Aquae Sulis (although there appears to be the remains of a bathhouse near to the fort) (4).

The Saxon development of the area introduces a mystery, for if the chronology of their immigration is to be considered, they arrived in this still predominantly Romano-British (Celtic) region, in dribs and drabs from about 700CE, and the full flood from Exeter about 930CE (5). Yet the Nymet names of the Celtic farms they took over were to be used for another 200 years, right up to (and presumably beyond) the compilation of the Domesday Book in 1086; although the names of the Saxon and Norman landholders are known well before this date. Indeed the manors of North and South Tawton appear to have been Royal estates long before Domesday, and could possibly have had a prehistoric origin.

It is here that I would like to introduce the supposition that it may have been St Wynfryth; alias Boniface of Crediton (a few miles down the road), who was partly responsible for trying to exterminate and annihilate the still pagan Celts and christian Celts of mid-Devon persisting in their 'Nymet' stronghold. He seems to have had a passionate hatred of them, and had a determination to bring them into the Roman Church. He was known as the "...hammer of the Celtic Church" (6) and when at Geismar in Hesse (he was known here as the 'apostle of Germany'), he felled with his own hand the 'Oak of Thor', which like the Oak of Zeus at Dordona, was believed to be the home of the god of storms (7). It seems likely that he already had some practice on his own home ground opening up and clearing the landscape in the vicinity of the Henge. Despite his Celticide behaviour, and though he may have succeeded in destroying any wooden structures or enclosures, his later fellow Saxons have left us a clue to a material and to a place name, which was not so easy to destroy.

This clue, which I discovered whilst investigating the one-time complex and observatory (unpublished) at Spinsters Rock, Drewsteignton, lies in the farm name "Stone". As a place name this has always been presented to me as meaning a farm 'built of stone', yet as well as 'Shilstone' Farm next to the dolmen, there is a nearby farm called 'Stone' (and a hill called 'Church Down' - church = cruc). By the football pitch at North Tawton is another 'Stone' Farm. A very old stone cross stood near Stone Cross near this Farm until quite recently. At East Worlington to the north by a still-standing 'long stone' is another Stone Farm, and in George Nympton (close to Kings Nympton where the author of The Omphalos of Devon in Wisht Maen No 1 searched for a 'sacred centre') not marked on current maps, but on the original 1" sheet 82 Bideford; is the site of a Stone Farm at approx SS705232, within spitting distance of an earthwork, Great and Little Frenchstone Farms are close by, and here my imagination casts aside the postulated medieval family of le Fraunceis, and converts these names to the Celtic frons = hillside, for there is a corresponding 'France' (frons) Farm alongside Spinsters Rock. Adjacent also is Cheyney -French for "Oak Grove". If it had not been for an ATTE STONE surname in the Subsidy Rolls this farm would have been missed.

This is not the place for a detailed discussion on this aspect of 'Stone' names and its implications, suffice to say that as these first four sites I looked at had connections with ancient landmarks, I have conducted further research, and the plottings have produced extremely interesting results when combined with the ATTE STONE surnames in the Lay Subsidy Rolls of the 14th Century. It is in the vicinity of these Stone and Shilstone names that aerial photography and field work should be concentrated in the search for 'sacred centres'. Devon has many examples of such names. Our perception of the Neolithic Age in mid-Devon may be completely altered if this were to be done.



From the beginning, succeeding races of people have recognised these sites and perpetuated them with perplexing clues which are only now being realised. Was it purely accidental that four chapels were built along this strip of hallowed ground between North Tawton and the Henge at Bow in medieval times? There was one at de Bathe (old 1" map); Mortimer, in "History of North Tawton", mentions one at Nicholls Nymet, one - now gone - at Crooke Burnell, and one at Broadnymet (extant), which brings continuity of use almost up to the present day. There is one more interesting fact to note. Donne's Map of Devon 1765, shows on the road alongside the site of the Henge, a curious name -CHIP BASON. The name 'Chip' is well known as the Old English for 'market'. I believe Bason is a corruption of Burston (a field here is still called 'Two Basin'(pers.comm.)). The Place Names of Devon gives a positive pointer to this, for at SS414075 near Bradford is a place called Bason, derived from 'Badeston'(Bad(d)a's Stone). If 'Burston Market'. 100 yards from Bow Henge was around until 230 years ago, what a continuity of use! A meeting and trading place - and a sacred centre - for 4000 years.

- (1) GRIFFITH, F.M. A Nemetos in Devon? ANTIQUITY pl21, 1985
  - (2) GRIFFITH, F.M. Roman Military Sites in Devon: some recent discoveries. Proc. Devon Archaeological Society No 42, 1984
  - (3) *ibid.*
  - (4) *ibid.*
  - (5) BERRESFORD ELLIS, Peter. Celt and Saxon. p 160 Constable & Co 1993
  - (6) *ibid.*
  - (7) BRANSTON, Brian, Ed. The Lost Gods of England, pl14. Constable & Co 1993
- GOVER J E B Mawer & Stenton. The Placenames of Devon, EPNS Vols viii-ix (Cambridge) 1932  
 HOSKINS W G. Old Devon. p36. David & Charles 1966  
 MORTIMER W, Ed. The History of North Tawton. Local publisher 1978.  
 TODD, M. The Roman Fort at Bury Barton, Devonshire. Britannia No 16, pl-7 1985.

#### ANDY NORFOLK on NYMETS

The Nymet placename is an interesting survival of an old British/Celtic place name in an area where most of the names are Saxon. Devon is from "Defnas", the name of the tribe that used to live there and hence their territory. This name for a Saxon area is derived from the British tribal name latinised as "Dumnonii". P H Heaney suggests that the name Denbury may record a Celtic stronghold within an otherwise Saxon area. Devon was invaded by the Saxons from about 658 and they broke into north and west Devon after a battle in 710 between the Saxon king Ine and the British king, Geraint. Nymet is derived from a British word "nemetos" meaning pagan sacred place or sacred grove. It is related to the Gaulish word "nemeton", a holy place, and the Welsh "nyfed", a shrine. In old Irish, the phrase "br tha nemed" means the fate or wyrd of the nobles. In present day Cornish the word "nef", plural "nevow" was recorded as meaning heaven, sky or climate by Morton Nance in his dictionary of Unified Cornish. In the newer dictionary of the revised Cornish, Kernewek Kemmyn, the word "nev" is shown as meaning heaven and "neves" is given as meaning sacred grove. I think there is more than a hint here that the sacred grove or shrine would have been used for worship of a sky god/dess.

The names Nymet Tracey and Nymet Rowland may not imply that there were two sacred sites at these places. The River Yeo was known in Saxon times as the "Nimed" or "Nymed" in the Cartularium Saxonicum dating from 739 edited by Birch in 1885-93. The river name may be so because the river itself was regarded as holy or because it was near a holy shrine. The names George Nympton and Kings Nympton are supposed to be derived from the river Mole which was previously known as the Nymet. But what about Bishops Nympton? Looking at the distribution of the Nymet/Nympton names I believe they may mark the boundaries of a sacred land lying mostly east of the Taw. The south east corner of this area may be marked by the village of Way, if - and it's a big if -the name is derived from the Saxon word WEOH or WIG meaning "a holy place or heathen temple". (This word crops up in Huish Episcopi and also Wye in Kent).

Andy Norfolk is co-ordinator of the Cornish Earth Mysteries Group  
 For details of CEMG talks & field trips write to The Cottage, Launderers Hill, Crowan, Camborne, Cornwall, TR14 9NB



detail from poster for Wisht Maen  
 by Anna Clarke



NEWS .....

#### JANNERS and MATELOTS AGOG!

Plymouth may be getting their Gog and Magog figures re-cut somewhere within the city boundaries. Originally they were on Lam Goemagot, now Lamhay Hill; the scene of the legendary fight between Corineus and the giant Gogmagog but the construction of Charles II's Royal Citadel caused their erasure. More detail on these giants in Issue 3.

#### NEARLY THE RIGHT PLACE, BUT NOT QUITE....

According to the DAS Newsletter No 57, an archaeological dig is happening at Nymet Tracey, excavating the site of an ancient enclosure. With great excitement I phoned the DAS, hoping they meant Bow Henge. They didn't - I was told they are excavating a "rectangular enclosure that showed up in aerial photography as a cropmark, for signs of Iron Age occupation." Frances Griffith, who took the aerial photos of Bow Henge and the enclosure now being studied, is working at the site along with University of Exeter geography and archaeology departments.

#### RIDDLE OF THE ROWS...PART 163

Roger Hutchins, a Guide for the DNPA, was in the Okehampton Times in January, explaining his theory on the Dartmoor stone rows. He believes they are "coded direction signs placed to help the Bronze Age travellers find their way up through Britain from the coast". It was a study of three rows - Langstone, Conies Down and Higher White Tor - that first led him to this theory. "They are on a converging alignment that meets at the Yealm estuary. Out of 70 rows studied, a total of 13 converged on the same location. There are alignments to most of the ports around the south west, including the Tavy and the Exe. The shape of some of the rows fits the route from Dartmoor to Scotland. If you sub-divide it into the sections of each turn and plot that length on the map you can see it will represent the journey throughout the country." He believes the early travellers from the Mediterranean who came here in search of tin erected the rows in code, which is why they are difficult to interpret. I would disagree with this theory, as the rows are always integral to burial cists and circles. Why bother putting a row of stones purely for directions, near sacred burial ground? Paul Devereux of THE LEY HUNTER says "Certainly an intriguing and original idea, though I don't believe it. So the row would put you in the right direction for a few hundred yards - a mile at most. Then what? But that's what the old stones are for - testing our brains." Were they interstellar space travel landing strips, shamanic-trance flight paths, spirit paths, serpent lines/spines, phallic linear symbolism incorporating female spiral/circular burial mounds, astronomical alignments marking sun/moon rises/sets at solstices/equinoxes - and more? All these theories make more sense than "coded direction rows for tinnners"; readers opinions would be most welcome...



#### PRESERVING OUR PRECIOUS HERITAGE by the MoD (Part 267)

The Lych Way, a track which has survived relatively unscathed for probably one thousand years, has received cavalier treatment from the Ministry of Defence, who completed the army road leading onto the moor from the A386 above Beardon Farm in January 1994. Soon after the Lych Way leaves the moor, concrete curbstones have been laid on either side of the track so that it looks like a road on a modern housing estate. The DPA are petitioning for the curbstones to be removed. This unacceptable aspect of the MoD contractor's plans had not been noticed by staff at the DNPA. As Margaret Davey, Secretary of the DPA, states in Newsletter No 123 "The MoD boasts of possessing archaeological expertise when it comes to teaching soldiers to respect the archaeological heritage and to avoid damage to ancient monuments (see the leaflet entitled "Army: Protecting Britain's Future"). Why could not the same expertise have been used to inform the contractors what was acceptable and what was not when they drew up their plans for a barracks which is within a National Park - a barracks which uses an ancient trackway as access?" Emma Nicholson, Conservative MP for West Devon, commented on Westcountry TV last year that "The Army are the best preservers of the moor - I think they're wonderful." No doubt I was not the only one with mouth agape.

#### BRIDESWELLS REVISITED!

The DNPA has recently cleared a small area at Cator revealing again the two "Ladywells". These are two rectangular troughs, no more than a few feet across, and only 6/7" deep. They are not a well in the true sense of the word but are fed from a nearby groundwater spring, and never dry up. They are in the middle of a small walled field, parts of which were cobbled. The DPA Newsletter states that "the exact use is not known but the field could easily have housed a herd of pigs/cattle, perhaps driven in for a drink at these troughs. Just when they were built or how they got their name is unknown." I have written to the DPA offering my opinion, that they are holy wells. Ladywells were dedicated to the Goddess - the Lady (often Bride, the maiden aspect and healer of eyes - there are also several eye-healing wells in Devon) - who became christianised as Our Lady, the BVM. At least eight Ladywells exist in Devon and the fact that the Cator wells never dry up would vouch for their especial sanctity in times past. I doubt if any farmer would have bothered cobbling a field just to keep his pigs in; and if they are simple animal troughs, how did they get their name?

#### BRIDESTONE REVISITED!

Bride could also be the answer to the WIFE/WIFF stone mystery. This is a very crude and faint inscription on a rounded boulder at 56666880 at Narrator Farm, and Paul Rendell's DARTMOOR NEWSLETTER has put out an appeal for an answer. Some say it reads WIFE, some see it as WIFF. Northern Earth magazine (issues 53 and 54) pointed out that "Old Wife" place-names frequently occur near Bride sites, and associated the Old Wife with the Gaelic hag, the Cailleach. Although the kinds of places linked with these two place-name elements overlap, there may have been a tendency for Bride to be associated with sacred stones and the Old Wife with ancient trackways. The WIFE stone is "up the rough track through the gate". No obvious Bride placenames are nearby, although Brisworthy stone circle appears to be on a southern alignment with this stone. According to Robert Graves, Bride is connected to the Aegean goddess Brizo, brizein meaning "to enchant". Could our 'Bris' placenames be derived from this?

#### PRESERVING OUR PRECIOUS HERITAGE by Big Quarry Business (Part 243)

In September 1993 a 16 month traffic survey began to see if the A38 between Plymouth and Exeter should become a motorway. Southern Dartmoor will have an even bigger scar if this goes ahead. In The Dartmoor Newsletter is the alarming news that the china clay companies are threatening to extend digging and dumping over the next five years. Most sickening is the fact that some of these quarrying permissions were granted back in 1951 and have lain dormant till now - the china clay barons are most gleeful that (a) they discovered them, and (b) the permissions apparently cannot be refused - 43 years later. Among sites and tors that would be swallowed up are Saddlesborough Tor and its hut circles, cairn circle, four cairns, three settlements, a stone row, a medieval homestead with fields; and Hawks Tor and its public footpath and bridleway (linking Shaugh Moor, Emmetts Post (tumulus) and Trowlesworthy Tors). The view towards Plymouth from the southern moor is already severely marred by mountains of clay and craters in the earth. Blackaton Cross would be either moved or surrounded by china clay. Public access to most of Shaugh Moor would be stopped. Roe deer used to roam where the quarry road has been built behind Whitehill Tor; this, Blackalder Tor and Collard Tor are right on the edge of active workings. Wisht Maen urges readers to join the Dartmoor Preservation Association (ad in Exchange Listings) which is only £5 a year and fights to keep Dartmoor from the clutches of developers, quarries and greedy landowners.

#### SCORHILL BREAST CARVINGS UPDATE

In response to 'The Goddess in Dartmoor?' in Wisht Maen Issue 1, Paul Rendell of 'The Dartmoor Newsletter' and county-employed Dartmoor guide checked out the possibility of the 'breast' carvings on some of the Scorhill stones. In his opinion 3 carvings are in high-relief and are not natural formations, and he counted 24 single carvings. Paul told me that since looking at the Scorhill carvings, he seems to see them everywhere! We checked out Fernworthy circle at 656842 and three stones there appear to have paired carvings. Wisht Maen is to contact Exeter University's Archaeology department and the DNPA's archaeologist in due course to get a "professional" opinion.

**SHAUGH MOOR ADDED TO NATIONAL PARK** Shaugh Moor near Plymouth is to be added to the Dartmoor National Park as a result of pressure from the Open Spaces Society and other groups at a public inquiry last April. Many ancient monuments are on this land. Depressing though is the fact that one china clay company has planning permission to dump millions of tons of mining waste on Shaugh Moor. It intends to do so after the year Moor. It intends to do so after the year 2008. The Open Spaces Society also pushed for the addition of Crownhill Down (near Plymouth), West Down (near Yelverton) and Ball Hill (near Okehampton) to be included within the DNP boundary, none of which was approved.



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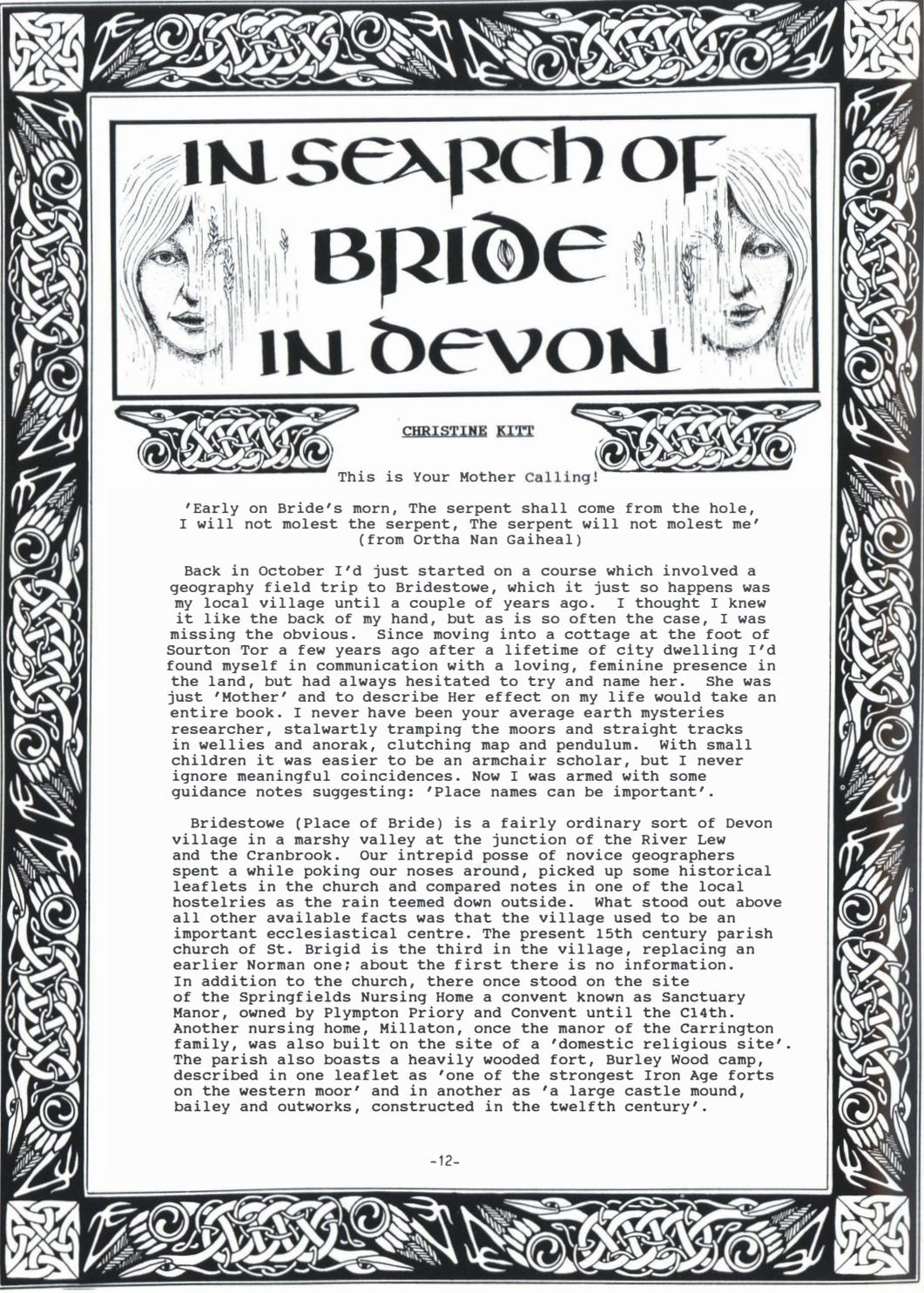
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# IN SEARCH OF BRIDE IN DEVON

CHRISTINE KITT

This is Your Mother Calling!

'Early on Bride's morn, The serpent shall come from the hole,  
I will not molest the serpent, The serpent will not molest me'  
(from Ortha Nan Gaiheal)

Back in October I'd just started on a course which involved a geography field trip to Bridestowe, which it just so happens was my local village until a couple of years ago. I thought I knew it like the back of my hand, but as is so often the case, I was missing the obvious. Since moving into a cottage at the foot of Sourton Tor a few years ago after a lifetime of city dwelling I'd found myself in communication with a loving, feminine presence in the land, but had always hesitated to try and name her. She was just 'Mother' and to describe Her effect on my life would take an entire book. I never have been your average earth mysteries researcher, stalwartly tramping the moors and straight tracks in wellies and anorak, clutching map and pendulum. With small children it was easier to be an armchair scholar, but I never ignore meaningful coincidences. Now I was armed with some guidance notes suggesting: 'Place names can be important'.

Bridestowe (Place of Bride) is a fairly ordinary sort of Devon village in a marshy valley at the junction of the River Lew and the Cranbrook. Our intrepid posse of novice geographers spent a while poking our noses around, picked up some historical leaflets in the church and compared notes in one of the local hostleries as the rain teemed down outside. What stood out above all other available facts was that the village used to be an important ecclesiastical centre. The present 15th century parish church of St. Brigid is the third in the village, replacing an earlier Norman one; about the first there is no information. In addition to the church, there once stood on the site of the Springfields Nursing Home a convent known as Sanctuary Manor, owned by Plympton Priory and Convent until the C14th. Another nursing home, Millaton, once the manor of the Carrington family, was also built on the site of a 'domestic religious site'. The parish also boasts a heavily wooded fort, Burley Wood camp, described in one leaflet as 'one of the strongest Iron Age forts on the western moor' and in another as 'a large castle mound, bailey and outworks, constructed in the twelfth century'.

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I returned home that day with a couple of pages of scribbled notes and a burning question: 'Was this a Celtic shrine?' I had read about the Celtic origins of St. Brigit in the past, but had never got round to making the connection. Now I grabbed my encyclopaedia of mythology (1) and learned that in the Irish sagas dealing with the Tuatha de Danaan or People of Danu, three sisters named Brigit (meaning High One) were described as the daughters of In Dagda, 'The Good God', also known as Eochaidh Oll-athair, 'All Father'. They were the patron goddesses of learning (including poetry, prophecy and divination), healing and smithcraft. One form of the deity was Brigantia, tutelary goddess of the Brigantian federation of tribes.

This was not strictly relevant to the geography project in hand, but by this time I was hooked. I'd only been home 10 minutes when the Irishman from upstairs knocked at my door. 'Aha! Just the person I need. What do you know about St. Bride?' He furnished me with a drawing of St. Bride's cross, a swastica-like corn-dolly traditionally made in Ireland on 1st February: St. Bride's day and, of course, Imbolc. 'You may be interested in something in today's Western Morning News' he said, and showed me an article about a new Devon Earth Mysteries magazine, with a photo of Tracey by a standing stone and an address in North Tawton, where - it just so happened - I was about to move in a week's time. I made contact with Tracey, she fed me all the information she has on Bride, and suggested I write an article for Wisht Maen.

It would seem that we have hit the Bride trail at a very timely moment. John Billingsley of Northern Earth, the northern (could one perhaps call it Brigantian?) earth mysteries magazine, has initiated The Bride Project and is asking for volunteers to map the occurrence of Bride in their own area, or areas they know well, and to send them to Northern Earth, 10 Jubilee Street, Mytholmroyd, Hebden Bridge, W.Yorks HX7 5NP. He needs a site description for each occurrence, any folklore/historical data known and a 6 or preferably 8 figure OS grid reference. He hopes to collate as much material as possible by the end of 1994, in order to start up a database.

Additionally, 'Meyn Mamvro', the Cornish EM magazine, published an article in the summer '93 issue (No. 21) entitled 'The Search for Bride'. While researching possible trade routes across north Cornwall they happened upon a St. Bridget's Well on the OS map near Lezant ('holy place') and on investigation discovered it on the private estate of Landue, where there are records of a chapel also dedicated to St. Bridget.

Of course, none of this proves that any of the many wells, chapels etc. dedicated to St. Bridget were actually named before the Christian era and it must be borne in mind that bands of Irish tanners, quite possibly accompanied by wandering Christian missionaries, would have been likely to name the places along their trade routes after their own patron saint.

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My research began with a book by Janet McCrickard (2), who suggests that the name Brigit means 'fiery arrow' in Gaelic, but derives from the Sanskrit Brihati, meaning 'high one'. I went on to read Kathy Jones' book (3) and assume that this was Janet McCrickard's source about meaning, since she says Brigit comes from 'breo-saigit' ('fiery arrow'). Here at least I was on dry ground, having studied philology many years ago. If the word means the same in Sanskrit and Gaelic, it can only have derived from some earlier common Indo-European word and we could expect to find it in other Indo-European languages, as indeed we do, in the Scandinavian Frigga, Freya and the Germanic Earth Mother Frija, who gave her name to Friday, while in Gaulish we find Bricta, demoted to consort of Luxovius at Luxeuil. There are the towns Breda and Brugga in Belgium, the region in the Nether lands known as Friesland and the German North and East Friesian islands.

As for Kathy Jones' 'breo-saigit', this seems to be more a product of a fertile imagination, which she uses to great advantage throughout her lovely book, linking the world's many symbols and legends of the Goddess in her many guises, but does little to provide hard evidence for the project in hand. I would suggest that it is the very commonality of this sacred name throughout the European languages that makes it so hard to pin down a site to a particular time and culture. If an invading people came upon a shrine to a deity they also revered, they might be expected to readily adopt it as their own and treat its incumbents with some respect. I looked to Miranda Green's 'The Gods of the Celts'(4) and was most surprised to draw a blank, but this may be the key point: Brigit was probably the Great Mother of the peaceful matristic culture that covered most of Europe before the advent of warlike tribes from further east and which retained its integrity and customs into more recent times only on the fringes of the continent.

For the specific site of Bridestowe the Anglo-Saxon conquest and many centuries of aggressive Romanisation (catholicism, that is) followed by the reformation have eroded any evidence of even a Celtic Christian presence in the area, but local placenames show that Celtic people lived nearby, for they named the river Lew and a nearby hill Great Noddens, both common names of Celtic gods. It is not impossible, however, that these had already been named by the people of the great Bronze Age culture which occupied much of Dartmoor during the the first half of the second millenium BCE, after which they presumably descended to the lowlands, where evidence of their occupancy is obscured by the farming practices of later residents. But that is another story.

The Rev. S. Baring-Gould (5) informs us that the locality was of great strategic importance when the Britons made their last stand against the Anglo-Saxon invaders. It would seem that they defended their position from an earthbanked camp at Burley Wood on the side accessible from Galford Down, which was probably the Gavulford mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, where in 823 Egbert and the Saxons made their final conquest of Devon. They then set up their own fortifications at Burley Wood alongside those of the Britons. Baring-Gould tells us that another camp, in the valley below Burley Wood and mostly obliterated by limestone quarrying, commanded the ancient road from Okehampton to Launceston. Could he have been referring to the heavily wooded knoll with a lake to the south (the only lake in this unbelievably

wet area) which Tracey and I spotted on the map at a farm called 'Stone', overlooking a bridge crossing the River Lew and which upon investigation turned out to have a large kiln at its base? Interestingly, Burley Wood used to be part of an estate belonging to the Bidlake family, of which the manor house still remains - 'Bid' or 'Biddy' being a corruption of Bride, it's just possible that this ancient and now extinct family once held the name 'Bridelake'. The only other bit of information the Reverend has to offer about Bridestowe is that St. Bridget used to have a sanctuary of refuge there, latterly called the Sentry.

That, for what it's worth, is all the evidence we have so far. Intuition tells me that if we had a team of archaeologists to hand, the place to start looking would be around that little knoll and lake, but only clairvoyance or imagination could conjure a shrine like the one maintained until the Reformation at St. Brigit's convent in Kildare, Eire, with an eternal flame guarded by nineteen virgins, where legend records that no man was allowed to enter lest he go mad or burst into flames.

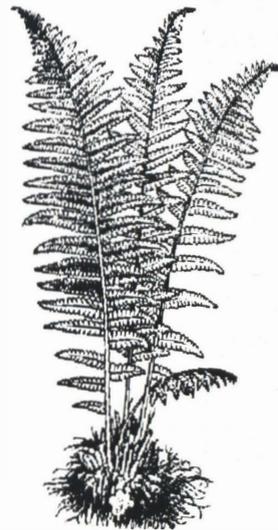
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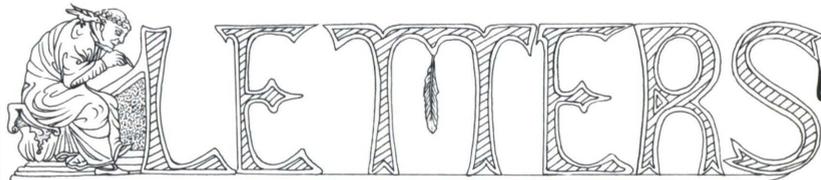
1. 'Mythology, An Illustrated Encyclopedia' Ed. Richard Cavendish Macdonald & Co. 1987
2. 'Brighde, Her Folklore and Mythology', Janet McCrickard, Fieldfare Arts & Design
3. 'The Ancient British Goddess, Her Myths, Legends and Sacred Sites' Kathy Jones, Ariadne Publications
4. 'A Book of Dartmoor', S. Baring-Gould, 1900. Reissued Wildwood House 1982

The Search for Bride continues throughout Devon. Wisht Maen will feature results of investigations at Brentor in the Summer issue. (Ed.)

WITH THE SUN LENGTHENING OF THE DAYS,  
 MAY INSPIRATION GROW BY PROPORTION,  
 IN THE GENEROUS BELLY OF THE CORN MOTHER,  
 NOURISHED BY BELIEF AND THUS IN OUR HEARTS  
 LET MAGIC TINT THE CANVAS OF OUR LAND  
 IN THIS FESTIVAL OF LIGHT AND RENEWAL,  
 THE WISDOM OF TRIBAL CENTURIES  
 GUIDE OUR HANDS AND MINDS,  
 TURNING WITHIN THE WHEEL  
 OF NATURE'S DISTANCED SEASONS,  
 THROUGH A MODERN WORLD,  
 IN SPITE OF IT - NOT FORGOTTEN,  
 SENSING THE EMBRYONIC  
 DORMANT BUD,  
 UNBORN LAMB,  
 DEPART GREEN SWARD,  
 OPTIMISTIC SONGBIRD,  
 HAIL MAIDEN!  
 OUT WITH THE SEED,  
 ON WITH SPRING,

IMBOLG





Since Issue 1 was printed, Wisht Maen has received many letters of support, encouragement and congratulations for which we are very grateful; no-one (so far..) has said that they thought Issue 1 was terrible, and only one letter asking if the ancient sites could be put in more context. I believe this context is a personal thing - one person's holy site is another's poison etc. We are always interested to hear about people's experiences and impressions, physical and psychical, of ancient sites in Devon. Please write if you would like to tell us about a dream you had after visiting a site, or a dream in which a Devon site played a part, or any psychic experiences you have had while at or near an ancient site. We will not print the letter if you do not wish it. Often when collecting these impressions certain details correspond. Something akin to Paul Devereux's DRAGON PROJECT, where volunteers spend the night in an ancient site and record their dreams; then recurring/common images/themes are documented thereby shedding light on the original use of the site i.e. ten people on different nights, unknown to each other, having the same dream within the same barrow/dolmen. (Ed.)

The article "The Omphalos of Devon" elicited many more suggestions. A TSW programme once stated that the centre of Devon was Cheriton Bishop, but we can assume that they were probably not looking for a sacred centre! The centre of Dartmoor was Crockern Tor where the Stannary Parliaments met until the mid-C18th because it was a fairly equal distance away from each of the Stannary towns; this has been thrown into the melting-pot, along with Kings Nympton (Celtic cross -shaft of which is now on the threshold steps of the church) and Copplestone (Celtic cross, once the headstone of the land known as Nymed). Article on Copplestone Cross in Issue 3! (Ed.)

William Saxton writes on Omphalos:

Dear Editor,

Was it yourself wrote the excellently documented article in Issue 1 page 10? (Yes. Thank You! Ed.)

You may be interested to know that I will preach on it on Sunday, at Huccaby Church at Hexworthy (Hucc and Hex probably being the same word as Oisc, Usk and Exe). I shall quote Joseph Campbell (The Masks of God in four volumes) to say that "the high function of Occidental myth and ritual is to establish a means of relationship - of God to man and man to God. Supernaturally revealed, these have come from God himself." He, JC, goes on to say there is a conflict here; Zoroastrianism (Mithra!), Judaism, Christianity and Islam renounce human judgement and give priority to Divinity. Greek, Roman, Celtic and Germanic myth does the reverse, and history is a violent see-saw - interplay between these two contrary pieties. (I say 'Divinity' because god or goddess is irrelevant here. The same one can have a different sex between two

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adjacent villages or two adjacent centuries, eg. the serpent starts off as serpent, becomes serpent-god, becomes goddess-consort, changes to shadow-god, reverts to goddess and ends up dragging feminine to the shadow, black or evil slot, when the "hordes" invade who see no good in toil or cultivation, but honour only in warrior-status).

These conflicting claims, JC says, are what gave our religious heritage its vitality. "Nothing of the kind ever troubled the Orient east of Iran, where the old Bronze Age cosmology of the ever circling aeons - from everlasting to everlasting - endures to this day." All, according to it, is harmony at root, a manifestation of the all-supporting, all-suffusing, mystery of being, which transcends thought imaging and definition. This is where the omphalos comes in. The world tree of life and death, knowledge of good and evil. (The Old Testament always says things twice).

An omphalos - the word means navel - can be a tree, a mountain, a cave, a spring. I know one in Cyprus where a full-blown river comes out of the hillside; they now say it comes from Turkey, but once they would have said it came from the Otherworld. It is a place where you pass from one world to the other, eg. Orpheus rescuing his beloved. It can be a ladder to heaven in a dream as Jacob's vision of "angels of God ascending and descending upon it" (Genesis 28:12). So, it can happen anywhere, because it happens in your mind - it is a sacred centre, not a geometric centre. Your mind will be helped to run that vision by any convenient physical thing - the river to Turkey, the pixies cave at Hexworthy, or a Ladywell at Brixham that ebbs and flows by the minute, regularly. A spring that bubbles all the time will seem to have living water, such as Jesus spoke of at St Jacobs Well, to the woman of Samaria with seven husbands. And then you become aware, as she did, of the existence of a Divinity that can lift us from sightlessly enduring life, to living it in constant awareness of Divinity always present and helping. You (like blood's burdens) move to and fro through the navel that gives life to the baby from the Mother. Doesn't she take the "refuse" like carbon dioxide? Anyway, this "Practice of the Presence of God" (title of a famous book) is what we need to bring this world round to the successful Paradise which God planned for it. (Angels being God-thoughts).

Where is the serpent in all this? Why was I talking about it if I didn't need to? He is another 'angel', a function or functionary of Divinity. His task was not to get an 'apple' picked, but to guard or heal. (He, on a pole (tree), in the Exodus, was raised and the Hebrews who looked on him were healed, remember?). He also wrapped his coils round the roots of the omphalos-tree, to give it strength in its task of upholding the heavens. He also has such a helpful task in the final stages of the Buddha's development.

An omphalos-tree by the way can be made of stone, as a menhir. Or several stones, as in a Cromlech which is also a type of cave. Jacob's head on a stone made him dream. **Everything ties together.** But one must not look for a physical centre of Cornwall or Devon. Everybody could in theory have a different one, which works for them. It only exists in so far as it works. Like Heaven is not "here, nor there" (Matthew 24:23), nor is Divinity this shape or that shape nor having this or that boundary. I do not like to say Heaven, God or Goddess, as being within one, because that seems to say its a thought of mine. It would be more true to say that I am a thought of Its.

Wm A Saxton  
Widecombe-in-the-Moor

(PS I would not dispute that places can have memories, or be habituated to spiritual things, so a place that has worked for lots of people will, because of that, be more able to work for others.)

The article on Wistmans Wood in Issue 1 brought two letters (articles?!) on Mithras (Mithraic rites were "seen" being practiced in the Wood by Shirley Wallis using psychoexpansion, and her account was "thrown" in by the Editor because Druidic rites were also "seen", and I was trying to make a case for the Wood being a place of pre-Christian worship (the catch-all title of Druidical!), as believed by early antiquaries but totally vilified and scorned by later authors - who were usually male, middle-class clerics or archaeologists -or both! (Ed.)

Dear Editor,

May I politely pick a hole or two in the Wistmans Wood article? (No. Ed). Firstly, page 20 "Mithraic/Druidic people". Those two would each have been highly disturbed to be associated together. The Mithras religion was originally highly male, and involved the sacrifice of a bull. In the beginning was Mitra in India (the word means 'friend'), who became Mithra in Iran. He represented, as things developed, contracts, then justice, then the source of all good, then the demi-urge (ie. the Number Two god, who created this world as opposed to the universe). He moved with the sun, looking down on all, but in some fractional way he was not the normal sun-god. He next became Mithras, in Rome. He was now seen as somewhat human, a Saviour. His faith would be a confusion to Christianity because it was so similar, and John's Gospel was written in Mithraic terms to show converts they could have the best of both. It was not wholly Christian because retained from from Mithra, Mithras still killed a bull (if not the Cosmic bull), and was thought thereby to be the religion for Roman soldiers. (They killed the bull from below, and the spilled blood covered and sanctified them - you see the likeness to Christianity?)

Although the Celts had a horned god, I think most people today put more interest in their goddesses, and in their matrilinear descent of the right to rule. We know nothing about the Druidic faith - if there was anything to go by such a term. We used to think that we knew a little, but now we know such sources as we had were biased. Their deities were associated very much with place, the land of the clan, the river, the tree etc. Mithra had nothing of this (hang on - please see the next letter! Ed). Mithraism developed into a gnostic, mystic, philosophical faith, paralleling gnostic judaism, gnostic christianity, gnostic Islam. Gnosis only means knowledge, and never existed on its own. Mithraism has finally found a home in Buddhism; with Mitra being an expected reincarnation of the Buddha. Mitra is here to be spelt Maitreya, and is a stronger form of 'friend' - "The Loving One". You see how much Interfaith can have going for it?

Next, page 22, "Gabriel in Jewish fable...is Lord of the Underworld". Not so! He is the angel of Death, which is not the same thing. (I got this item from Ruth St Leger Gordon's "Witchcraft and Folklore of Dartmoor" Ed.) He does not differ much between the fables of Christianity, Judaism and Islam. In one he stands on the left of God's throne and in another he stands on the right...but so what? Either way he is prince-archangel. His name means "The strength of God" and if you move out of fable, that is probably precisely what he is. As well as the angel of Death, he is also the angel of Life. It is he who brought the good news of the life that was to come to Mary. In short, he is a psychopomp: a carrier of souls between this world and the other. Every Jew believed a baby had three parents. Our current interest in eggs from foetuses provides a good argumental development. It was thought that all people ever to live were present in Adam, and

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that the man parent provided the body, the female parent cooked it until the 'bun' was done, then the heavenly parent sent a soul down by the hand, or satchel, of Gabriel. Which was what Gabriel was doing when he came to Mary, and which was why God was "Our Father which art in heaven". The Jews in Jesus' time were not at one over everlasting life; nor in Paul's time. Both Jesus and Paul exploited the division. The majority seemed to believe you died at death, except that in some way you lived on through your sons.

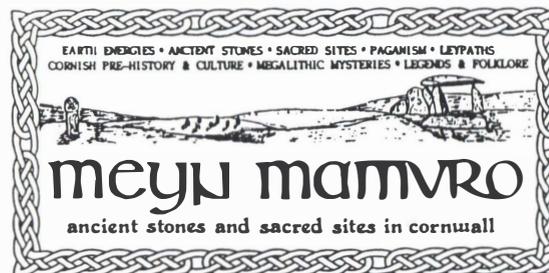
"Or ever the silver cord be loosed,  
Or the golden bowl be broken,  
Or the pitcher be broken at the fountain,  
Or the wheel broken at the cistern.  
Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was;  
And the spirit shall return unto God who gave it".

Ecclesiastes 12

There was no Underworld (place of punishment) - or rather fables were just beginning eg. of Jesus going down and fighting Satan for the already dead. There was an Otherworld, but that is a very different thing. Hel is not hell; Gehenna is not hell - Gehenna is the burning ghat or refuse tip! It was just on the edge of a time warp when ideas would become more what was commonly thought 300 years ago! There were many psychopomps - Cheiron the ferryman, St Christopher, and so on. These Hounds of the Wild Hunt were such; they collected everyone, not just those destined for punishment in the underworld. Except in that they did the same job (in fable, not reality) they were not identical, not other names for the same thing. There is room for Herne the Hunter, and Dewey, and Gabriel, and Arthur; all, if you like hunting on the same night! Here is an extract from a book of my own:-

**Summer - Winter:** Gwyn ap Nydd (= white son of night) or Manawydan ab Llyr, (= night son of light), turn and turn about - ruled Annawn, the underworld, and the Dartmoor Wisht Hounds came up from it to roam, as Herne the Hunter came up from the roots of his oak on Windsor Forest. The Wild Hunt is a Dartmoor legend, sky riders on the wings of the storms, and in some versions Arthur leads it. He played quoits against the regular (black) Leader; their bases were Hel Tor (Arthur) and Blackingstone Rock (the other feller). Archangel Gabriel is considered as a hunter - Himeljeger, the heavenly hunter; his four hounds are Truth, Justice, Peace and Mercy. They are yellow, ie. heraldic gold. (The Dartmoor Wisht Hounds are white, and the Hounds of Annawn are black, and another leader is the horned Celtic god, Cernunnos - an avatar of his was Merlin, who occasionally was horned and rode the sky. Especially, we presume, in his wild phase, solitary in the Celydon Forest.)

Wm A Saxton  
Widecombe-in-the-Moor



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Dear Editor

Having read your article on Wistmans Wood in Issue 1 and the reference therein to Mithraic rites, I have discovered some interesting information. The legend tells how the god Mithras was born beside a sacred stream, beneath a sacred tree; springing fully formed from a sacred rock. These elements are widely recognised as parts of the Earth Mother. If Wistmans Wood was originally called Visg/Wysg Maen Coed (water-rock-wood) as suggested in your article, an interesting conclusion can be drawn - Wistmans Wood would have been the perfect setting for the birthplace of Mithras. Could the name then have been changed to Wisht Maen with the coming of Christianity, the corruption of the older myths with later dialect changes finally becoming Wistmans Wood? If Mithraic/Druidic rites were performed, or something very similar, then it would have caused some consternation among the early Christian rulers. If the rites were for something much older, but adapted to the times, with sacred grove/rock/water, it could explain the ferocity with which they were persecuted.

Mithras is the Latin name for an older Persian/Iranian god, Mithra; who appears to be a later version of the Vedic god Mitra. Mitra was first mentioned as one of five gods in a treaty signed between the Mitanni and Hittite tribes in 1400BCE (1) but little seems to be known about Mitra so far.

The legend tells how Mithras sprang forth as a naked child, wearing only a Phrygian cap, on Winter Solstice. He bore a torch and was armed with a knife. His amazing birth from living rock was witnessed by a group of shepherds watching their flock nearby (sound familiar?..) By using his knife he harvested fruit from the sacred tree and made clothes from its leaves. Needing water, he shot arrows at a rock from which a cool stream emerged. At a certain age he fought with and conquered the Primal Bull. He then carried the live bull on his shoulders, holding it by its hind feet and with the head down, back to his cave through many obstacles. On his return to the cave, a messenger raven from the sun told him that the time for the sacrifice had arrived. Taking the bull by the nostrils he plunged his knife into the flank. From the spinal cord came wheat and its blood became the vine. The semen, purified by moonlight, became 282 species of useful animal, bird, fish and reptile.

There were seven degrees of Mithraic initiation, derived from the seven visible planets; Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. After each stage the neophyte was given a new title: Raven, Hidden Master, Soldier, Lion, Persian Runner of the Sun and finally Father. These in turn led to a deeper mystery symbolized in the second major degree of the cult, known as Zervan Akarana or Boundless Time.

The festivals of the sun were also celebrated in masked rites. There would be a bull sacrifice known as the taurobdium. This was performed above a pit in which the fully fledged initiate lay, so he was literally initiated in blood. At either end of the sacrifice was an attendant; one in front holding a torch pointing upwards, the other behind holding a torch pointing downwards. These represented the rise of light to the upperworld and the descent into the underworld. At other times these would be replaced with the head of a bull to represent Taurus, the vernal equinox, and a scorpion as Scorpio, the autumnal equinox (2).

There are many similarities between this myth and numerous others. Mithras' birth, as well as Christ's, was witnessed by shepherds (3). The positioning of the live bull across Mithras' shoulders and the struggle back to his cave are reminiscent of Christ's struggle with the cross on his shoulders at Calvary. Mithra was born from living rock, Adam born from dust. Both figures ate from a sacred tree. Moses struck a rock twice to gain water for his people, and was denied the Promised Land, as he was told to strike only once (4). Mithras fired arrows at a rock and drank with happiness in his heart. In the 4th degree of his initiation the neophyte partook of a meal of bread, water and wine - an earlier version of the Christian Holy Communion. There is also a correlation between the sun festival rites and Christ's crucifixion. The two torch or head bearers could be taken as the two thieves - one ascends into heaven, the other descends into hell.

With many of their own myths and rites wrapped up in one pagan symbol, the early Christians considered the Mithraic cult to be one of the largest and most dangerous of their rivals in the battle for world religious domination. To combat this problem they told their people that this earlier saviour cult was the 'work of the Devil, who sought to seduce the souls of men from the true faith by a false and insidious imitation' (5) of their own rites and myths. With the expansion of the Roman Empire and a certain amount of tolerance, Mithraism subsequently spread throughout Asia, Europe and as far north as southern Scotland. Many slaves, as well as soldiers, celebrated the Mithraic rites, but only the males. The Roman Emperors from Commodus (189-192CE) to Julian (361-363CE) (7) were also Mithraic initiates. One of the relics of the battle between the two cults is that Christ's birth is now celebrated on December 25th, reckoned by the Julian calendar to be Winter Solstice (8), although before 353-4CE, Christ's birth was celebrated on January 6th.

The raven and the bull also link Mithra to the lunar Goddesses, the bull being the lunar bull, its seed only activating once it had been blessed by the moon. The raven was an incarnation of the Goddess, she being all powerful and worshipped first. Greek myth also plays a part here. Mithras, Dionysus and Apollo were all born on the Winter solstice. The obstacles overcome on the return to his cave are reminiscent of the labours of Herakles (Hercules). Both initiates of Mithraic and Orphic cults worshipped and sacrificed bulls in men-only rites. The Phrygian cap is an ancient conical cap now identified with the Cap of Liberty worn in the French Revolution. There could be a link to a mushroom cult with our own Psilocybe Semilanceata or 'Liberty Cap' mushroom. The Mithraic neophyte put on the Phrygian cap during the 5th degree of initiation, probably signifying the physical ingestion of the Liberty Cap in the 5th degree.

SARAH MCCABERY,  
North Tawton

- (1) Campbell, Joseph. The Masks of God Vol II Occidental Mythology Arkana Pubs., 1991, p121
- (2) Ibid., p259-60
- (3) Gospel According To St Luke Chap 2 8-20
- (4) Exodus Chap 17
- (5) Frazer, Sir James George. The Golden Bough. Macmillan & Co 1950 p358
- (6) Ibid.



Dear Editor

Having read every feature in Wisht Maen 1 and thought over the points raised, I feel I must pass on a little relevant information. During the 1970's I regularly visited Iris Campbell, a lady who passed on channelled messages of spirituality, and who was also a talented psychometrist. I have her book which she wrote as a result of her work with John Foster Forbes, which is entitled GIANTS, MYTHS AND MEGALITHS. It was privately printed in 1973. It contains her psychometric impressions of - among other places - Glastonbury Tor and Haytor. She also has chapters on Human Sacrifice and The Planetary Magnetic Stream. I list below a note of a few comments she made during talks to the group I was in, which I think will interest you. I hope these snippets will be useful. Wish I could remember in more exact detail!

"Dartmoor stones rang different notes, perhaps in tune with others. Druids sent to use circles, to bring planet back to right relationship with other planets. Magnetism."

BRENT TOR - "Holy, powerful. Earth forces up, air power descends and they meet, which is unusual. Michael, Angel of Will, available to all."  
SPINSTERS ROCK - "Small, strong men, power from earth for moving stones. Rites, singing, dancing for 3-4 days and then enough energy raised. 3 tree trunks fastened, and ropes. Funeral rites, brought to holy place."

SCORHILL CIRCLE - "Very powerful. Feminine rites, full moon, wonderful. Stones moved lose magnetism."

CORNISH SITES - "Powerful, but misused."

Christina Green  
Chudleigh

**PAUL RENDELL & DNPA DARTMOOR GUIDED WALKS & TALKS COMING UP**

Tues 12 April 10.30am 2hrs FOLKLORE & LEGENDS. Meet Ivybridge Information Centre. £2.

Sun 17 April 9am 15 miles LYCH WAY DAY WALK. Meet Lydford car park.

£5.30. Limited to 12 people.

Fri 6 May 10.30am 2hrs DARTMOOR MYSTERIES & FOLKLORE. Meet SX739791 -car park near road junction west of Hound Tor. £1.50

Tues 10 May 6pm 3hrs ECLIPSE OF THE SUN AT SUNSET. Meet SX531751 - Pork Hill, car park south side of B3357 between Tavistock & Merrivale. £2.00

Sun 15 May 2pm 2hrs DARTMOOR MYSTERIES & FOLKLORE. Meet Hound Tor as above. £1.50

Wed 25 May 8pm 2hrs MEGALITHS BY MOONLIGHT. Meet SX702874 - Jubilee car park information board, Chagford. £1.50

Mon 30 May 2pm 3hrs PREHISTORIC CEREMONIAL MONUMENTS. Meet SX669838 -Fernworthy car park toilets. (By, not in!) £2.00

Fri 3 June 10.30am 2hrs DARTMOOR MYSTERIES & FOLKLORE. Meet Hound Tor as above. £1.50

Sun 5 June 2pm 3hrs ARCHAEOLOGY OF CHALLACOMBE DOWN. Meet Kings Oven -SX676811 - 100m NE Warren House Inn on B3212 Moretonhampstead -Postbridge road. £2.00

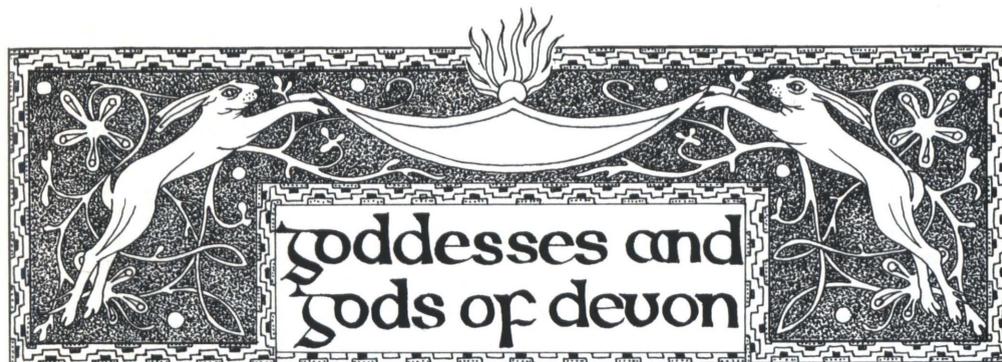
Tues 21 June 8-9.30pm SUMMER SOLSTICE STROLL. Meet Fourwinds - SX561749 - large walled car park in trees on south side of B3357 Two Bridges -Tavistock road. £1.50

Wed 22 June 2pm 3hrs DARTMOOR LEGENDS & FOLKLORE. Meet Fourwinds as above. £2.00

Thurs 23 June 8pm 2hrs MEGALITHS BY MOONLIGHT. Meet Norsworthy -SX569692 - small car park NE end of Burrator Reservoir. £2.00

Fri 24 June 10.30 4hrs PREHISTORIC LANDSCAPE. Meet Cornwood village cross (SX606597), short bus drive to start of walk. £2.50

Sat 25 June 2pm 3hrs ARCHAEOLOGY OF CHALLACOMBE DOWN. Meet Kings Oven as above. £2.00



**CHERYL STRAFFON**

Some ancient sites of Devon and Dartmoor still have legends and folklore associated with them that hint of their original use. Devon was originally part of the Celtic kingdom of Dumnonia, and some English-sounding names do in fact contain a disguised Celtic origin. For example, Bowerman's Nose tor on Dartmoor comes from "vawr-maen" = the great stone. Bridestowe in Devon is "the place of Bride", the Celtic goddess of healing, smithcraft and poetry. She may have been brought by Irish traders travelling through Cornwall.

Another disguised Goddess may have been Tamara, the river Goddess whose story became enshrined in a legend. Tamara was a nymph, the lovely daughter of an earth-gnome, and she wandered freely about the land exploring where she would. One day two giants, Torridge and Tavy, fell in love with her but she would have none of either. However when her father the earth-gnome found out he turned his daughter into a river that to this day marks the boundary of Devon and Cornwall. Torridge and Tavy were also put under a spell: when Tavy awoke he hurried away to his father, a giant living on Dartmoor. Bereft with grief for Tamara, his father took pity on him and turned him into the river that flows from the moor to join the Tamar. Torridge on the other hand went to a local wizard or witch to ask for the same fate, but in the confusion he was sent in the wrong direction, and the River Torridge to this day never links up with the Tamar. Behind this legend lies a folk memory of the old gods and goddesses of the rivers of Devon.

Rivers and streams, waterfalls and lakes were places where the numinosity of the ancient deities could be most strongly experienced. A waterfall in Lydford Gorge is known as "The White Lady", and white lady motifs occur in other places, perhaps originally a goddess of the moon. The rivers and streams were also known to be places of healing, and the holed stone, the Tolmen in the River Teign near Scorhill had a reputation for curing arthritis and rheumatism. This holed stone features in a legend in





Grey Wethers

which "faithless wives and fickle maidens" had to wash in Cranmere Pool, run around Scorhill stone circle three times and pass through the Tolmen before climbing up to the Grey Wethers stone circles to ask for forgiveness. If it were not granted, a stone would fall on her. A similar "woman-judging-punishing" legend occurs at Scorhill. According to tradition, a female skeleton lies underneath each of the seven fallen stones. Behind this legend lie several interesting components: a heavy Christian overlay of 'sin' on an original use of the circles and stones by women (perhaps priestesses) for ritual; hence the three times circumambulation around Scorhill, the immersion in the water of the pool and stream, and the crawling through the holed stone.

Other legends of the stones also contain significances. The Nine Maidens stone circle at Belstone has the same legend that appertains to other stone circles in Cornwall and elsewhere, that of maidens turned to stone for dancing on the sabbath. Ruth St Leger Gordon has suggested that this notion is a corruption of the old word 'sabbat' - the witches gathering-time at the old festivals taking place at the stone circles. However it could also be a later Christianisation of the original meaning of the sites. If they were known to be places where women (perhaps priestesses) danced in ancient times then Christianity would wish to show this as being "ungodly". What is especially interesting about the Nine Maidens circle is the name of the place where it is located - Belstone, which contains traces of the Celtic pagan god who gave his name to Beltane (= the fires of Bel.) The nearby town



The Nine Maidens Belstone

of Okehampton probably derived its name from another Celtic solar giant/god, Og/Ock, later Christianised into St George. Nine is also a significant number: the tripling of the Celtic triple goddesses of maiden, mother and crone. All this seems to indicate that the Bronze Age stones continued to be used into Celtic times, or at least the memory of their meaning and significance was still current 2000 years later.



Many of the stone circles have legends of movement. The Belstone maidens are supposed to shift their position every day at noon. The Grey Wethers take a short walk each morning at sunrise. The Longstone on Shovel Down revolves slowly around at sunrise. Eight Stones (probably once Nine Stones), the now extant stone circle at Cheriton Combe near The Graveyard triple stone row, used to dance when they heard the bells of South Tawton church. All this may be a distant folk memory of the use of the sites for ritual dancing. The memory may still be found in the legends of pixies dancing in some of the stone circles, including Huccaby Moor. There is a story of one Tom White from Postbridge who saw a crowd of pixies dancing near Bellever Tor (Bel again..). He watched for a time and then tried to steal away, but the pixies saw him. They formed a ring and danced around him, making him spin like a top. He was finally released at dawn, exhausted and frightened. The pixies may be a folk-memory of the ancient people who built the circles and danced there to their gods and goddesses.

Something of the same meaning may remain in the custom of "Turning the Boulder" still practised at Shebbear. Every year on November 5th (which may be the nearest to the old Celtic festival of Samhain) men with crowbars turn over a huge stone, which may be an ancient megalith. Legend has it that the stone was dropped by the Devil, and other ancient stones in Devon are also associated with the Devil (such as the standing stone at East Worlington). The Devil is only the old horned Nature god of Paganism in a Christianised guise. Devon has a number of stories about the Devil and the Wild Hunt or Wish Hounds. Shaugh Bridge over the River Plym was thought to be a favourite haunt. The Wild Hunt goes right back to the paleolithic identification of the hunter with the spirits of the hunted animals, a kind of totem magic.

According to Christianity, the handmaidens of the Devil were the witches, but much of the folklore betrays the original meaning of the witches. Some stories are about witches who turned themselves into hares. As late as 1885 a man at Rose Ash near South Molton shot at a hare with a bullet made from a sixpence, and the same day a local woman suspected of being a witch was found with wounds in her leg. There are other stories of witches such as Hannah Henley and Moll Stancombe of Chagford who could turn themselves into hares. Hares were originally sacred to the Goddess and were a special epiphany of Her, so these legends represent a long continuity of goddess-worship, the priestesses of the Goddess having been turned into witches under Christianity.

Finally, to move from the realm of legend to a very recent archaeological discovery. A team of divers searching wrecked ships in the mouth of the River Erme have come across the remains of a Bronze Age vessel, one of the oldest shipwrecked sites in Britain. This wreck contained tin ingots, possibly from Dartmoor, and a small bronze figurine of a Goddess, an image of a deity worshipped all these thousands of years ago, whose memory remained enshrined in the folklore and legends of the old sites.

The Witchcraft and Folklore of Dartmoor - Ruth E St Leger Gordon (Hale 1965); The Folklore of Devon - Ralph Whitlock (Batsford 1977); Devon's Bronze Age Tin - Kendall McDonald (DIVER magazine, October 1993) (Cheryl Straffon is Editor of our Cornish Earth Mysteries sister-mag MEYN MAMVRO, and is author of PAGAN CORNWALL - LAND OF THE GODDESS).

## EAST DEVON WAYS

Steven Shipp

East Devon is often overlooked when it comes to ancient sites, legends and folklore. It takes second or even third place to Dartmoor and North Devon, and very few books on mysteries mention it at all. But it has its ancient places and, if one starts to explore and research, there is a rich vein of legend running through this area. In this series of articles, I intend to show some of what East Devon has to offer. The great dowsing Tom Lethbridge retired here, only to start a new life researching the power of the pendulum. It was from his home in Branscombe that he wrote his many books on dowsing, ghosts, legends, witches etc. There are more hillforts in this area than anywhere else in the county - and they too have their folklore.

### WAYSIDE STONES

In our exploration of this area, we have found a number of large isolated stones - usually on the side of the road. Whether these are ancient monoliths, or were once part of a stone circle, or are of a more recent origin, we do not know. But research has revealed a few interesting tales about them. The **Hangman's Stone** is to be found on a small grass patch on the roadside at the junction of the busy A3052 and the B3174 (SY204909). There is plenty of room to park here on the grass verge on the B-road. This large boundary stone has a tragic story associated with it, which may have its origins in animal or human sacrifice. About 200 years ago a sheep-thief, named Norman, having stolen a sheep from a farm near Branscombe, paused at the spot now called Hangman's Stone. He was carrying the sheep on his back, with the animal's legs secured by a strong cord which crossed his chest. Seeing



Hangman's Stone



Witches Stone



Salcombe Hill stone

the stone by the side of the way, and feeling exhausted with his heavy burden, he decided to rest. As he sat down, the sheep on his back started to struggle, and the cord across his chest slipped up and caught him round the throat. He fell backwards, and the frantic struggles of the frightened animal caused the cord to tighten and strangle him to death.

Ever since the tragedy the spot where Norman died has been called Hangman's Stone. His body is reputed to have been buried in a field close to the scene of the fatal event, the place being known as Norman's Grave to this day. No-one knows what happened to the sheep! When we visited the site recently, the stone had unfortunately been surrounded by crazy paving, and consequently any atmosphere of the place removed.

For our next wayside stone we travel to the Hare & Hounds Inn which stands at a crossroads of the A375 - the Sidmouth to Honiton road - and the B3174, which travelling west goes to Ottery St. Mary. At the front of the Inn and near the centre of the crossroads, there is partly

buried in the ground a very large unfashioned sarsen stone. It is called either the **Witches' Stone**, the **Rolling Stone** or the **Hunters Lodge Stone** (SY146963). This stone has various legends attached to it. One story states that the stone rolls down the hill towards Sidmouth every night to cleanse itself in the River Sid below. This is in order to be purified after being used by local witches for a meeting place where "dark deeds" were carried out on certain nights.

A more sinister version claims that the stone was once part of a dolmen (table stone quoit) which has collapsed and may have originally been used by the ancient people in the area as a sacrificial stone; the stone would then go down to the river to wash off the blood! Another legend tells of the stone dancing or going to the River Sid for a drink when it hears the clock strike twelve midnight (or the bells ring) from the church of Sidbury in the valley below. (See Cheryl Straffon's article in this issue for Dartmoor legends of dancing stones). The road approaching the stone is reputed to be haunted. On Christmas Eve the ghost of a gypsy is seen wandering along it towards the inn. On our visit, the only spirits we saw were served in glasses!

Continuing along the A375 we come to Honiton - famous for its lacemaking. Standing high on a hill just outside the town is the ancient church of St Michael's. On the side of the road approaching the church, and hidden beneath an iron bench is the **Devil's Stone** (SY165003). It is said the people of Honiton wanted to have the church built in the town, but the Devil thought otherwise. Each night he transported the building stone up a hill some distance away. The inhabitants got tired of bringing the stones down again each day, and decided to build the church on the hill where the Devil wanted it. The Devil's Stone was used by Satan to rest upon as he was making his journeys up the hill with the building material. There are several similar tales of the "Devil" interfering in the building of churches all over Devon and most of the country (The ancient belief that true sacred centres could only be located by divination - by the interpretation of signs and portents, and the inspiration which led to the selection of these sites is explored by John Michell in THE NEW VIEW OVER ATLANTIS p47-58). When we went to the site, this recumbent stone was well hidden by the undergrowth of grass and ivy. Only the bench gave us the location.

There are several other unexplained stones in the area. To the left of the lych gate of Salcombe Regis church on the roadside is a large unworked stone (SY148888). We have enquired with locals and undertaken research only to find that there is nothing known about this stone. The only explanation offered was that it was once used as a mounting stone for a vicar earlier this century who toured his parish on a horse. There are some curious 'head' carvings on the lych gates here.

Above Sidmouth on Salcombe Hill stand the three domed buildings of the Norman Lockyer Observatory. In a field close by we found marked on a 1928 Ordnance Survey map a 'Standing Stone' (SY143885). On visiting the site we came only to a ploughed field. However, searching the hedge that bordered the field and directly opposite the map position we discovered a stone measuring 24" x 19". It was the only stone we found along the hedge and believe this to be the original standing stone. It was well hidden by foliage, and had probably been moved there by a farmer who found it in his way when ploughing. It is no doubt of great antiquity.

Finally a stone which we have yet to find is **The Scirland Stone** -believed to be standing some 100yds south of the Iron Age hillfort of Sidbury. This stone, recorded in the time of Edward the Confessor, is claimed to be a boundary marker but its position so close to the hillfort indicates that it is much older.



