

# **Barrows in the cultural imagination of later medieval England**

**by**

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**Thesis submitted  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

2019

## **Abstract**

When history has gone beyond memory, and where there is little or no written record, then objects in the landscape are used and interpreted in order both to understand the past, and to tie the past to the present. This thesis explores the places of barrows in the cultural imagination of later medieval England, following the interdisciplinary approaches of Sarah Semple (*Perceptions of the Prehistoric in Anglo-Saxon England: Religion, Ritual, and Rulership in the Landscape*, 2013) and Anwen Cooper (*Other Types of Meaning: Relationships between Round Barrows and Landscapes from 1500 BC-AC 1086*, 2016). This thesis identifies and examines a range of historical sources to explore an area of research which has not previously been studied in depth.

Whilst it is the case that barrows appear in texts relatively infrequently during the later medieval period, this thesis argues that these references were included specifically because they had significance and meaning both for the writer and the intended audience. Those writers who included barrows in their work anticipated that their intended audience would be able to recognise them, and to be aware of their significance. The intended audience for many of the texts discussed in this thesis was primarily aristocratic elites and the clergy, and therefore the texts speak to their interests and concerns, with barrows often being connected to themes of exemplary kingship. The past is also used to talk about the present; here barrows become symbols of the past, both 'historic', and at times mythical, having links to the supernatural. They act as focal points through which wider, contemporary issues can be explored, thus allowing authors access to the past and to a landscape onto which they can project the concerns of the present, and therefore talk about them more freely.

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## **Acknowledgements**

I must first say a heartfelt thank you to the members of my supervisory team (past and present!) Dr Sheila Sweetinburgh, Dr Lesley Hardy and Dr Mike Bintley, for all of their unwavering enthusiasm, guidance and hard work throughout the past three years! I am also hugely grateful to Dr Diane Heath, Dr Leonie Hicks, Prof. Louise Wilkinson and Dr Ellie Williams from the History and Archaeology departments at CCCU, for all their help, support and kind words. I am also very grateful to have received a Graduate School Scholarship and the Ian Coulson Memorial Prize from the Centre of Kent History and Heritage, to fund my research.

Dr Francis Young has done a brilliant job of proofreading this thesis, for which I am eternally grateful - any remaining errors are my own. Thanks to Dr Jo Edge for recommending Francis, and for all her support since we first met in 2017.

The past three years have been filled with laughter, help and friendship thanks to Jacie-Ann Cole, Tamar Wildwing, Yu Zhu, Aurora Patera, Francesco Violi, Nicole Holt and Chiara Costa, and to my lovely friends (old and new), Charlotte Kennedy, Sophie Bruce and Mary Batemen who have put me up in their houses for conferences, and always offered support. Also, of course, the best pub quiz teammates anyone could wish for (as long as the round is on medieval history...) Dean Irwin and Charlotte Liebelt.

This thesis is dedicated to my Nana Gwen & my mum, Michele Hawker, who has supported me all the way, even when that meant hearing far more about Geoffrey of Monmouth than anyone should really have to!



An additional thank you, post viva, has to go to everyone on twitter who has helped me find photos of barrows during the spring of 2020 – you are all brilliant people and I really couldn't have got this done without you all!

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## Introduction

When Haraldr Hardrada lands in Yorkshire to begin his invasion of England in the thirteenth century Icelandic Saga *Hemings Pattr*, he spies a barrow by the seashore. Haraldr asks his Anglo-Saxon guide Tóstig, the traitorous brother of Harold Godwinson, “what is the mound called over there to the north?” Tóstig replies dismissively, stating “not every hillock here is given a name”. The Scandinavian Haraldr insists that it must have a name and he is correct, the barrow is revealed to be the burial place of the Viking ruler Ívar the Boneless, and it has the power to prevent England from being conquered. “It is sheer superstition now,” Tóstig says, “to believe such things”.<sup>1</sup>

*Hemings Pattr* may be an Icelandic text, but this encounter actually provides a useful insight into the places of barrows in the cultural imagination of later medieval England. Although barrows do not appear particularly frequently in later medieval literature, during the later medieval period they were recognised not only as a feature of the English landscape, but also as monuments constructed by past inhabitants of that landscape. By analysing depictions of barrows, both real and fictional, in literary, historical and documentary primary sources, as well as discussing the importance of the context in which they appear and events which take place around them, we can explore the significance that barrows held for the aristocratic and ecclesiastical members of society, who were producing the texts in which they appeared. Haraldr and Tóstig are members of the aristocracy who move easily across North Western Atlantic Europe, sharing cultural connections and stories. They have a shared culture which allows them both to recognise barrows and understand that they are culturally significant. The story also picks up on the key themes which seem to have been associated with barrows by the higher levels of later medieval English society; barrows are burial places, but they also convey

<sup>1</sup> *Hemings Pattr*, trans by Anthony Faulkes (Dundee: Thorisdal, 2016), p. 30.

traits of good kingship and the importance of the past to the present, as well as the role of imaginative memory in the development of local and national identities. It is also possible to discern a medieval Icelandic view of the English aristocracy; they can recount the history of the landscape but its significance and true importance, is dismissed as superstition and so the barrows are largely ignored. The saga implies, perhaps, that had the English known their history and landscape as well as the saga writers, then the events of 1066 might have concluded very differently.

### **Evolution of the Thesis**

This thesis began life as a very different project, intending to explore the use of folklore in modern day heritage interpretation. However, during the process of refining and developing the topic, it became apparent that in recent years there has been a large quantity of research relating to folklore and heritage interpretation, carried out from a number of interdisciplinary backgrounds. There was the risk, therefore, that this thesis would simply end up replicating those studies rather than adding anything original or innovative. Although it is now apparent that there is still much work to be done in that field, especially relating to the appropriation of folklore and heritage by far-right groups, amongst others. The decision was therefore made to focus on a particular type of archaeological monument; to explore how they had been interpreted in the past, and how these interpretations could be used in heritage interpretation in order to offer a fuller understanding of the lives of these monuments from their construction to the present day. Barrows were chosen because almost every parish in England contains at least one barrow, despite the number which have been destroyed over the centuries,<sup>2</sup> and yet in terms of modern heritage interpretation their history is often limited to the period in which they were built. Whilst reviewing relevant literature, it became apparent that whilst there was plenty of

<sup>2</sup> Field, D. *Historic England Introduction to Heritage Assets, Prehistoric Burial Mounds and Barrows* (2011): 2

useful material from the early medieval and early modern periods, there had been little work done on interpretations of barrows in the later medieval period. Within the past twenty years there has been a huge interest in early medieval perceptions and reuse of prehistoric archaeology, culminating most recently with Sarah Semple's 2013 book *Perceptions of the Prehistoric in Anglo-Saxon England: Religion, Ritual, and Rulership in the Landscape*. Recently, Cooper (2016) in *Other Types of Meaning: Relationships between Round Barrows and Landscapes from 1500 BC- AC 1086* explored the re-use and biographies of Bronze Age barrows over multiple periods. Early modern responses, focusing on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century antiquarian excavations of prehistoric remains, have been explored by Piggott (1989), Marsden (1974), Schnapp (1996), Sweet (2004), Morse (2005) and Parsons (2006). However, a similar approach has not been undertaken in regard to later medieval interpretations. Several examples which are discussed at length in this thesis, such as the discovery of St Amphibalus in a barrow near St Albans, do appear in introductions of books about barrows, however this is usually in the context of a general overview of attitudes towards barrows and other prehistoric monuments throughout history. Even Leslie Grinsell, in *The Ancient Burial-mounds of England* dedicates less than a page to discussing excavations of barrows in the later medieval period, although he does attempt to connect some folklore recorded in the early modern period to medieval ideas.

Whilst it is the case that relatively few barrows appear in later medieval English texts, especially in comparison to neighbouring countries such as Iceland and Ireland, there is more evidence than one might expect from reading some prior research. According to Martin Carver, for example, there were very few interactions with barrows from the end of the early medieval until English Reformation, when 'there was a change in the relationship between God and man'

and people were released from ‘superstition’.<sup>3</sup> Considering that there is at least one example of the bones of a saint being exhumed from a barrow, this may not be the best explanation. Even though there is not as much archaeological evidence of activity at, or around, barrows in later medieval England, as there is in some earlier periods, this also may be because such interaction was not considered particularly notable by antiquarians and early archaeologists, and they were therefore overlooked. A project examining excavation reports and drawing out examples of later medieval pot sherds found in barrows, for example might well prove fruitful. Firstly, however, since the culture of writing was well developed in England during the later medieval period, it is important to study the evidence we have in written sources.

Francis Pryor has identified two approaches to the study of landscape. The first is a historical approach which begins by using evidence from documents. The other approach he suggests is archaeology, which takes the material evidence as its starting point. As more evidence exists in the documentary sources, it therefore makes sense to approach this topic from a historical perspective, although the subject matter is still deeply rooted in archaeology. An analysis of references to barrows in literary sources, combined with some documentary and archaeological offered the most accessible starting point for someone with a background in classical studies and archaeology, rather than medieval history or literature. Some evidence, such as place-names was considered during the early stages of research, however, it was felt that searching charters, inquisitions post-mortem and other medieval documents for place-name evidence could easily form an entire PhD thesis in itself and would be very worthwhile for someone with the appropriate paleography and toponomy skills. It is worth emphasizing that this thesis represents a starting point, hopefully laying the groundwork for future projects.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Carver, *Sutton Hoo: Burial Ground Of Kings?* (London: British Museum Press, 1999), p. 174.

Equally, this thesis is not intended to be a gazetteer of all later medieval interactions with burial mounds. Due to the constraints of time and scope, this thesis focuses on a few case studies in each chapter, choosing texts which are accessible, with good translations into English where possible. The case study format helps to demonstrate key themes, and to begin to draw out the complex and nuanced interpretations of barrows in the cultural imagination of later medieval England.

### **The “Cultural Imagination”**

The term ‘cultural imagination’ was widely used but not properly defined before Juliette Harrison in 2013 described it as ‘ideas shared by a group of people; shared, but not necessarily commonly believed in’.<sup>4</sup> Harrison saw cultural imagination as different from cultural memory, suggesting that cultural memory is specifically about the history and historical stories which bind a group of people together.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, whilst ideas in the cultural imagination are often shared, there will be no detriment or threat to the collective past if they are not believed by all members of the group. Whilst the lines between cultural imagination, cultural memory, imaginative memory and social memory are not always distinct (as discussed below), the concept of cultural imagination relating to ideas which are meaningful only within certain social groups in a society is significant for this thesis. As mentioned above, the concentration on textual evidence in this thesis means that the themes and associations explored here are feasibly only those of the authors and their intended audience; the aristocratic and ecclesiastical elite, by and for whom the texts were created. It is not possible to tell the extent to which, if any, these associations were held by the rest of the population.

<sup>4</sup> Juliette Harrison, *Dreams and Dreaming in the Roman Empire: Cultural Memory and Imagination* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

The term ‘cultural memory’ has been defined for a longer time, having been adapted from the French term *mémoire collective* (collective memory), a concept conceived by Maurice Halbwach in the early to mid-twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> Cultural memory was developed in the mid-1990s by Aleida and Jan Assmann to describe collective traditions about the past, which Halbwach did not include under *mémoire collective*.<sup>7</sup> The lines between cultural memory, social memory and concepts such as Amy Remensnyder’s ‘imaginative memory’ are not entirely fixed, primarily because what is remembered about past events and what is imagined is difficult to determine, especially when looking at past societies.<sup>8</sup> Amy Remensnyder used ‘imaginative memory’ rather than ‘cultural memory’ in her discussion of medieval monastic foundation legends, because she wanted to ‘evoke the creative flair of the legends and their fantastic transformations of reality’.<sup>9</sup> Remensnyder decided to retain ‘memory’ in order to indicate that whilst the legends were fantastical, the communities constructing them did believe in them, to some degree.<sup>10</sup> Imagination fills gaps about what we know about the past, as well as in the present and the future.<sup>11</sup> As Remensnyder wrote, ‘we believe what we remember, even if what we remember is false, even if we have consciously or unconsciously constructed what we remember’.<sup>12</sup> The monastic legends Remensnyder argues, constituted memory, because if the community did not believe them to be true, they would not have put the effort into commemorating them as they did.<sup>13</sup> Holtorf, writing about cultural memory in relation to past landscapes, said ‘cultural memory is not about giving

<sup>6</sup> Astrid Erll, "Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction", in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 389-97, (p. 1).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Amy G. Remensnyder, *Remembering Kings Past: Monastic Foundation Legends In Medieval Southern France*, (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Remensnyder. p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Remensnyder, p. 2.



testimony of past events accurately and truthfully, but making meaningful statements about the past in a given social context'; monuments do not preserve the past, they simply bring it to mind.<sup>14</sup> Whatever term is used to describe the way that the past is used to bring meaning to the present, it is the belief that something is meaningful rather than 'real' which is important. Equally, a society's understanding of chronology necessarily has an impact on the way in which it interprets monuments.<sup>15</sup> The evidence inherited from past societies also affected how people in medieval England interpreted that past, for example they had Anglo-Saxon and Roman writings which contained references to the barrows that the medieval people could see in the landscape, but no testimony from earlier societies.

In summary, the phrase 'cultural imagination' is used in this thesis for a number of reasons; firstly, because it is discussing ideas belonging to a subsection of society, rather than society as a whole, a distinction which Juliette Harrison made clear in her definition of the concept. Secondly, 'cultural imagination' is used rather than 'cultural memory' because the messages and associations the barrows carry are as important as them being symbols of the past. In fact, it is suggested here that the barrows can convey ideas about the present as well as the past, and context is important to understanding the meaning of the barrow. Lastly, as Tina Paphitis has highlighted, 'memory' when discussing cultural ideas of past societies carries unhelpful connotations of 'folk memory' which should be avoided in this context, due to the mutability of oral traditions, especially over hundreds of years.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Holtorf, pp. 7, 130.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Tina Paphitis, 'The Place of Folklore in Archaeological Landscapes: Narratives and Identity' (unpublished PhD Thesis, University College London, 2014), p. 78.

## **The “Usable Past” and the later medieval imagination**

This thesis proposes that barrows feature in later medieval English imagination because they are part of the ‘usable past’; defined by James Fentress and Chris Wickham as a version of the past which can be used to reinforce national identity.<sup>17</sup> Fentress and Wickham suggested that the ‘usable past’ in medieval England was the purview almost solely of the clergy and aristocracy.<sup>18</sup> Therefore it consisted of ideas and landscapes which were relevant to them.<sup>19</sup> This echoed Holtorf’s assertion that the usable past in later medieval England was actually only of use to a small portion of the population - historians and their intended audience, which at this time consisted of other churchmen and aristocrats, ‘the only part of society before 1300 whose voices can normally be heard’.<sup>20</sup> From this it would seem that the ideas about barrows discussed in this thesis were not necessarily forming part of an overarching ‘English’ cultural imagination, but that of a culturally mobile aristocratic and ecclesiastical elite. This thesis offers a starting point from which further research can develop, hopefully research which can attempt to explore some of the interactions ordinary people had with barrows. Chapter 7, in particular, works towards developing a methodology which can explore how those lower down the social strata viewed and exploited barrows, and how these ideas were related to those of the elite.

The later medieval English court, the intended audience for most of the texts discussed within this thesis, comprised not just the Anglo-Norman ruling class, but also aristocrats, writers and many other people from across north western Christendom (England and its surrounding countries including Ireland, Scandinavia and modern-day France). Robert

<sup>17</sup> James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (New York, N.Y.: American Council of Learned Societies (POD), 1992), p. 129.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* p. 146.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Cornelius J. Holtorf, "Towards A Chronology Of Megaliths: Understanding Monumental Time And Cultural Memory", *Journal Of European Archaeology*, 4.1 (1996), 119-152, p. 146.

Edwards has recently described the court of Henry II, for example, as a literary centre with ‘its own official discourse of secular and religious chronicles, vernacular translations from the classics, hagiography, romances, moral and political didacticism’.<sup>21</sup> The significance of barrows to this group was as connected to the mixing of cultures and identity, Celtic and Scandinavian as well as Anglo-Norman, as it was to the place of barrows within the ‘English’ landscape. The barrows discussed in the thesis, whether real or imaginary, are located in England, although the texts in which they feature do not all necessarily originate there or have the English as their intended audience. There are a number of contemporary Norse and Welsh sources used in this thesis, for example *Hemings þattr* and the *Mabinogion*. At this time there were also sustained links to Wales through writers such as Geoffrey of Monmouth, and a continued cultural connection to Scandinavia in some parts of England through the Danelaw.

It was not just the aristocracy who shared cultural links across Europe. Many people moved freely for various reasons, including trade, war and pilgrimage, amongst others.<sup>22</sup> The religious houses where a number of the texts discussed in this thesis were produced also had links with monasteries across Europe, with whom they shared not only religious and secular texts, but also values and social norms.<sup>23</sup> The thirteenth-century author and monk of St Albans, Matthew Paris, exemplifies the cultural connections both between religious houses across Europe, and between English monasteries and the court. Matthew not only had contacts who had spent time in the Danish court, but he himself had actually visited a monastery in Norway in the 1240s.<sup>24</sup> Matthew Paris recorded such interactions between the monastic houses of

<sup>21</sup> Robert R. Edwards, *Invention and Authorship in Medieval England* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2017) pp. 12-13

<sup>22</sup> Björn Weiler, "Historical Writing and the Experience of Europeanisation: The View from St Albans", in *The Making of Europe, Essays In Honour of Robert Bartlett*, ed. by John Hudson and Sally Crumplin, (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2016), pp. 205-243 (p. 215).

<sup>23</sup> Weiler, p. 207

<sup>24</sup> Weiler, *Historical Writing and the Experience of Europeanisation*, p. 207.

Europe in his thirteenth century *Chronica Majora*. One such account is the recovery of the relics of St Alban from Denmark by a monk in the eighth century.<sup>25</sup> While as Björn Weiler points out that this story was at least partially fabricated (the church in Denmark allegedly holding the relics was not in existence in the eighth century), these details must have seemed sufficiently credible both to Matthew and his audience for them to be included in his chronicle.<sup>26</sup> Weiler suggests that this is most likely because they reflected their own experiences and those of their peers, who travelled reasonably freely around the Continent.<sup>27</sup> Whilst mercantile links were not as prominent before the thirteenth century, church networks were; particularly after the establishment of Christian churches and monasteries in Scandinavia.<sup>28</sup>

The mixing of cultures and ideas shared across medieval Europe allowed for the development of a complex understanding of landscape, place and the past, from which authors could select the parts which would be the most useful for their purposes and which would be the most meaningful for their intended audience. Barrows, therefore, must have been present enough in the shared cultural imagination of both monastic writers and their ecclesiastical and aristocratic audiences for the authors to choose to include them.

### **Primary Sources**

Starting this research from a background in archaeology and cultural heritage management rather than medieval studies meant beginning with the basics –discovering what words could mean ‘barrow’ in later medieval texts, starting with examples that had already been identified. A particularly useful text was the late fourteenth century text *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* p. 208.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

which contains multiple Middle English synonyms for barrow, including *lawe* (low, a word which derives from *lawe* is still used to denote a barrow in areas of the country such as Derbyshire and Cheshire) and *berwe* (from *beorg*, Old English, barrow or hill). These words were then entered into the search feature of the Middle English Dictionary Online. As well as confirming the definition, translation and alternative spellings of the words, the Middle English Dictionary Online provides quotations which contain them. These texts were then examined to decide whether the word meant barrow in that context – often it referred to a hill, rather than a barrow. Having collated synonyms for barrow, electronic databases of medieval documents, such as the Close Rolls, were searched, using words identified as meaning barrow in later medieval England. Through reading secondary literature, such as dictionaries of British place-names, as well as some primary sources already identified by scholars such as Grinsell, it was also possible to identify other words which were used to denote a barrow in some medieval sources, such as *hoga* or *howe* (from the Old Norse *haugr*, meaning mound or barrow) and *collis* (Latin, hill). These were again used to search the Middle English Dictionary quotations and online databases as described above.

By identifying and bringing together a range of sources, including histories, chronicles, poems, Middle English romances, documentary sources from the royal courts, monastic annals and a limited amount of archaeological evidence, this thesis follows the interdisciplinary approach exemplified in Sarah Semple's 2013 book *Perceptions of the Prehistoric in Anglo-Saxon England: Religion, Ritual, and Rulership in the Landscape*, using a broadly historical approach.<sup>29</sup> It also uses a range of sources from across the later medieval period as case studies,

<sup>29</sup> For more on the historical and archaeological approaches to landscape study see Francis Pryor, *The Making of the British Landscape: How we have transformed the land, from prehistory to today* (London: Penguin Books, 2010), p.xv.

in order to lay the groundwork for further studies in this field. Whilst many of the case studies discussed in this thesis have been previously identified by scholars and antiquarians, most have never been discussed in depth, or compared at length with each other. These texts were chosen because they offered the most for analysis and came from a wide range of sources across different types of later medieval literary and documentary evidence. They are not obscure texts, but for the most part easily accessible in the original as well as translation. It is also important for the analysis to know something about the author and their intended audience.

The main sources used in this thesis are: passages from Geoffrey of Monmouth's twelfth-century narrative history *Historia regum Britanniae* and its derivatives Lazamon's late twelfth-early thirteenth-century Middle English *Brut* and Wace's thirteenth-century French *Roman de Brut*. The *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*, a poem attributed to Guy of Amiens and possibly written in late 1066 or early 1067, two thirteenth century Icelandic sagas - *Ragnars Saga Loðbrókar* and *Hemings Pattr*, and two twelfth-thirteenth century Welsh texts, the *Mabinogion* and *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*. The thirteenth century Middle English Romance *Havelock the Dane* and the anonymous fourteenth-century poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, as well as in several chronicles including William of Newburgh's twelfth-century *Historia rerum Anglicarum*, Gervase of Tilbury's early thirteenth-century *Otia Imperiali* and his contemporary Roger of Wendover's chronicle *Flores Historiarum*. A number of administrative records from the royal court, namely the Close Rolls, Pipe Rolls, and Fine Rolls are also important sources.

### **Scholarly Context**

Over the past twenty years, historians and archaeologists have become increasingly interested in understanding how people in the past interacted with their inherited landscape and how they perceived, understood and in some cases interfered with the ruins and remains of past societies and cultures. Richard Bradley's 1989 book, *The Significance of Monuments: on the Shaping of*

*Human Experience in Neolithic and Bronze Age Europe*, was one of the earliest pieces of scholarship to explore how the creation of history in the past related to the evidence of the past in the landscape. Drawing on the work of Cornelius Holtorf, who wrote about the permanent nature of monuments, and how they were built to communicate *something* to the future, Bradley suggested that monuments such as barrows acted as mnemonics, ways of recalling an otherwise vanished past.<sup>30</sup> Once the true biographies of the people and their monuments passed out of human memory, the presence of the past in the landscape became something which people interpreted in ways which were meaningful to them.<sup>31</sup> Bradley's 2002 work *The Past in Prehistoric Societies* built upon these ideas, exploring how people in prehistory used monuments in the creation of social history, in order to understand their own past. Acknowledging that people in prehistory constructed monuments in order to be remembered in the social memory of future generations, Bradley looked at the relationship between structures and monuments from the past and those in the present, in terms of settlements constructed next to older monuments, the insertion of later secondary burials into Neolithic barrows, and the ritual deposition of artefacts from different periods in one place. He found that even if people had chosen to ignore monuments from the past in the landscape, this would have been nearly impossible for them to do as they would have come across them in everyday life, even to the extent of discovering concealed deposits whilst farming or building their own monuments.<sup>32</sup>

It has been suggested by numerous scholars, including Holtorf, that prehistoric communities intended barrows to have meaning for future generations.<sup>33</sup> Without writing it

<sup>30</sup> Holtorf, p. 121., Richard Bradley, *The Significance of Monuments: On the Shaping of Human Experience in Neolithic and Bronze Age Europe*, (London: Routledge, 1998), p.162.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Richard Bradley, *The Past in Prehistoric Societies* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 13.

<sup>33</sup> Holtorf, p. 121.

was not possible for past societies to dictate what that meaning was across the millennia, and thus subsequent generations assigned their own meaning to these monuments. Whilst barrows cannot preserve memory in the way that writing can, they still evoke the past and encourage both remembrance and connections across time.<sup>34</sup> They are, as Adrian Chadwick wrote, places ‘where the past and the present collapse into each other’.<sup>35</sup> The importance of barrows as a quasi-container of the past for the future is clear in Felipe Criado’s definition of a monument as ‘a cluster of intentional results, made concrete in the form of an artificial product which is visible through space and which maintains this visibility through time’.<sup>36</sup> Prehistoric monuments such as barrows do not become cultural foci as much as they *remain* cultural.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, Chris Tilley has suggested the role of these monuments was always intended to integrate cultural values into the landscape; we see this in later medieval England where ideas relating to moral and religious symbolism and good kingship are expressed through a relationship to barrows (this is discussed fully in Chapters 2 -4).

Gabriel Cooney in his chapter ‘Icons of Antiquity: Remaking the Megalithic Monuments in Ireland’ (2009) identified three broad approaches to how the ancient past is reworked in the present landscape: it is interpreted, confronted or used for legitimation.<sup>38</sup> Even when barrows are not actively being used, either by their builders or by later societies, they still exist within the landscape, and cannot be completely avoided.<sup>39</sup> Wendy Ashmore and

<sup>34</sup> Adrian M. Chadwick, “‘Memories Can’t Wait’ – Creating Histories, Materialising Memories and Making Myths in Iron Age and Romano-British Landscapes”, in *Memory, Myth And Long-Term Landscape Inhabitation*, ed. by Adrian M. Chadwick and Catriona D. Gibson, (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2013), 291-314, (p. 293).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Felipe Criado, "The Visibility of the Archaeological Record and the Interpretation of Social Reality", in *Interpreting Archaeology*, ed. by Ian Hodder, Michael Shanks, Alexandra Alexandri, Victor Buchli, John Carman, Jonathan Last and Gavin Lucas (London: Routledge, 1995), 194-204 (p. 199).

<sup>37</sup> Criado, p.199.

<sup>38</sup> Gabriel Cooney, “Icons of Antiquity: Remaking the Megalithic Monuments in Ireland” in *The Lives of Prehistoric Monuments in Iron Age, Roman and Medieval Europe*, ed. by Marta Díaz-Guardamino, Leonardo García Sanjuán and David Wheatley, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 55-76, (p. 71).

<sup>39</sup> Alessandra Gilbert, *Syro-Hittite Monumental Art and the Archaeology of Performance* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), p. 2.



Bernard Knapp's three categories of landscape in *Archaeologies of Landscape: Contemporary Perspectives* included not only 'constructed landscapes', which have been altered visibly by humans through the construction of monuments, but also 'ideational landscapes'.<sup>40</sup> Ideational landscapes do not relate to real places, but rather to landscapes of the mind, where the landscape 'provides moral messages, recounts mythic histories and records genealogies'.<sup>41</sup> A typical example of ideational landscapes would be heaven and hell, but many of the barrows discussed in this thesis are also ideational. The Green Chapel in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, discussed in Chapter 5, whilst possibly drawing upon real landscapes is itself an imaginary place, through which themes relating to kingship, morality and society may be processed. The histories of barrows are often multi-layered, involving many generations of interaction and interpretation, but as Richard Bradley highlighted these interactions do not have to be an inclusion of barrows into the cultural landscape or imagination of the time, they can equally be a rejection of the monuments, either by ignoring them or destroying them.<sup>42</sup>

Chris Gosden and Gary Lock in *Prehistoric Histories* (1998) suggested that all prehistoric societies acted with the past in mind. Their awareness of their own past may well have had an impact on the monuments they constructed, knowing they would remain for future generations.<sup>43</sup> Gosden and Lock identified two main versions of the past which they believed prehistoric societies related to: a 'genealogical history' which linked the prehistoric society to an ancestral past or mythical history, and a 'less known' past.<sup>44</sup> They suggested that prehistoric peoples created history through formalised and repeated ritual actions, which had 'time-binding

<sup>40</sup> The third category is 'conceptualised' landscapes, those which have not been physically altered, but which hold deep meanings for a society.

Wendy Ashmore and A. Bernard Knapp, "Archaeological Landscapes: Constructed, Conceptualised and Ideational", in *Archaeologies of Landscape: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. by Wendy Ashmore and A. Bernard Knapp, (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 1999), 1-32, (p.12).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Richard Bradley, *Altering the Earth* (Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 1993), p. 129.

<sup>43</sup> Chris Gosden, and Gary Lock. "Prehistoric Histories", *World Archaeology* 30: 1 (1998), 2-12

<sup>44</sup> Gosden and Lock, p. 4.

properties’ and connected the people performing them with a collective past.<sup>45</sup> The idea of a ‘collective past’ is important for this study of later medieval England, because as Chadwick has argued, communities depend on a shared sense or understanding of the past in order to function as a cohesive group.<sup>46</sup> Without an understanding of barrows common to the intended audience of the medieval texts, as well as a knowledge of a shared past in which they featured, the inclusion of barrows by the authors had little or no effect.

Since the late 1990s, there has been much attention paid to early medieval perceptions of and reuse of prehistoric monuments, starting with Sam Lucy’s 1992 article ‘The Significance of Mortuary Ritual in the Political Manipulation of Landscape’.<sup>47</sup> Howard Williams in *Death and Memory in Early Medieval Britain* (2006) made a particularly pertinent point, which is as applicable to the study of later medieval barrows as the early medieval; that too much emphasis has been placed on accuracy - that is, on defining the exact form of the monument: ‘archaeologists have focused on debating the accuracy of the description and the precise form of the monument, but the literary significance of the monument’s description lies in the role of the burial mound as part of inherited, invented, imaginary and inhabited landscapes’.<sup>48</sup>

Taking in all prehistoric monuments, not just barrows, Sarah Semple’s 2013 book *Perceptions of the Prehistoric in Anglo-Saxon England: Religion, Ritual, and Rulership in the Landscape* represented a particularly important advance in the field, focussing on the significance of barrows in the culture of early medieval England, in literature and hagiography as well as archaeological sources. Semple laid out and then built upon the wealth of scholarship

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Chadwick, p. 293.

<sup>47</sup> For early medieval perceptions and reuse also see Williams (1997, 1998, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2015), Semple (1998, 2003, 2004, 2009, 2009, 2013), Blair (2005), Reynolds (2009) and Semple & Williams (2007, 2015)

<sup>48</sup> Howard Williams, *Death and Memory in Early Medieval Britain*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 206.

which had burgeoned since her 1998 article ‘A Fear of the Past: The Place of the Prehistoric Burial Mound in the Ideology of Middle and Later Anglo-Saxon England’, which looked specifically at early medieval activity around barrows. In *Perceptions of the Prehistoric*, Semple brought together evidence from folklore and place-name studies, as well as early medieval interactions with the past landscape. These had often been mentioned previously by scholars in history, English Literature and archaeology, but usually only as an aside to the main body of their work. Semple saw this an enduring problem and addressed this by bringing much of the disparate information together, analysing it using interdisciplinary methods.

Of course, no discussion of scholarship relating to the study of barrows in the cultural landscape can exclude the contributions of Leslie Grinsell. Even eighty years after it was originally published, his 1936 book (reprinted in 1953 and 2014) *Ancient Burial Mounds of England* has had an undeniable influence on this research, partially because it identified a number of the sources which this thesis used as case studies. However, Grinsell’s belief that later medieval references to barrows were nothing more than ‘chance’ has hindered the development of research in this field before this thesis. That said, Grinsell’s dedication to the pursuit of understanding English barrows, as well as the incorporation of folklore, place names studies and similar sources in all of his publications, means that his work remains an incredibly relevant and useful resource. In many ways, Grinsell’s dedication to his field and his approach, drawing out many references to barrows from a vast variety of sources, and where possible, identifying them in the landscape, has been a real inspiration to this thesis. Indeed, Grinsell highlighted several cases which are discussed at length in this thesis, such as the discovery of St Amphibalus in a barrow near St Albans, and a number of instances where treasure was sought at barrows. The aim of this thesis was to develop these from highlighted cases to full

analysis using interdisciplinary methods as exemplified by Semple, as well as developing new methodologies for reading the medieval texts.

### **Reading Text as Landscape – developing an interdisciplinary methodology**

In 1996 Rebecca Yamin and Karen Bescherer Metheny suggested that archaeologists read the landscape “as if it were a book, finding the plots and subplots that have been written on the land by both conscious and unconscious acts of the people who lived there”.<sup>49</sup> This concept, was developed in the field of human geography in the mid-1980s, and the reading and interpretation of “textual metaphors” in the landscape quickly came to the fore of both human geography and theoretical archaeology.<sup>50</sup> The reading of landscapes as texts developed with the idea of landscape as a “cultural image”, originating as a belief that landscapes could be objectified, reflecting the dominant power or worldview of those who occupied them.<sup>51</sup> If landscape can be read as text, can we therefore read text as landscape? This thesis attempts to do just that, developing a new methodology which reads the medieval texts as landscapes, using methods of interpretations from within the field of landscape archaeology. As this thesis focuses on exploring an archaeological monument through the medium of textual analysis, bringing in elements of analysis from landscape archaeology seemed an interesting starting point.

The *Encyclopedia of Global Archaeology* describes landscape archaeology as the study of how people have related to a “geographic space”, how they have appropriated, transformed

<sup>49</sup> Rebecca Yamin and Karen Bescherer, Metheny, *Landscape Archaeology: Reading and Interpreting the American Historical Landscape*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), p. xiii

<sup>50</sup> Sam Turner, “Landscape Archaeology” in *The Routledge Companion to Landscape Studies*, ed. by, Peter Howard, Ian Thompson and Emma Waterton, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013) 131-142 (pp. 131-2)

<sup>51</sup> Federico Bellentani, “Landscape as Text”, in *Concepts for Semiotics*, ed. by Claudio Julio Rodriguez Higuera and Tyler James Bennett, (Tartu: University of Tartu Press, 2016) 76-87 (pp. 77-78)

and made the space significant.<sup>52</sup> Landscapes, and the monuments they contain, play a very significant role in the cultural imagination and cultural memory because they act as points of connection, focal points to which shared ideas and beliefs can be fixed, where myth can be anchored to the ‘real world’. Whilst barrows as a point of connection, especially to the past, is an important theme which will emerge throughout this thesis, the aim is not just to explore how monuments in texts reflect or connect to the physical landscape, but to read the text as though it is itself a landscape. The barrow in each text is taken as a starting point, before opening out to the wider textual landscape around the barrow. After all, archaeological monuments do not sit alone in their landscape, analysing monuments in their wider contexts is one of the most important aspects of landscape archaeology. Equally, the barrows in these texts are not just throwaway references, this methodology can help identify why the barrow appears in the text and excavate below the surface narrative.

The cultural geographer John Wylie in his 2007 book *Landscape* compiled a list of questions one could use to interrogate the landscape-as-text “Who has written the landscape?” he asks, “what story does it tell? Does the landscape have just one plot or is it composed of many overlapping and even competing storylines?... How will the landscape be read? Is it written in language that we understand? Or we will need to learn new languages and develop new techniques for reading and interpreting the landscape, if we wish to understand it more deeply?”<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> César Parcero-Oubiña, Felipe Criado-Boado, David Barreiro, “Landscape Archaeology” in *Encyclopedia of Global Archaeology*, ed. by Claire Smith and Jo Smith, (New York: Springer, 2014), 4379-4388 (p. 4379)

<sup>53</sup> John Wylie, *Landscape (Key Ideas in Geography)*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), p. 70–71

The questions used by this thesis to interrogate the text-as-landscape are similar: What words are used to describe the barrow – how can this help us understand its appearance? What traditions or ideas does it build on? Is it a reaction or reference to something else within the cultural landscape? How does it use or include elements of the past? How did the author (the architect and builder of the text) want it to be read? Who did they intend for it to have meaning? What comes before and after it, both in terms of directly in the text and its place within the cultural landscape? The role these individual elements play and the consideration of them within a wider context are important parts of the interpretation of the landscape as a whole, exploring how they connect to each other, to the past and even to the future. Only by analysing the barrow within its wider textual and cultural landscape can we gain a true understanding of its significance and meaning to the author and their intended audience. In fact, one of the most important questions we can ask for both landscape-as-text and text-as-landscape is “who is the intended reader?”. James and Nancy Duncan suggested that the readers are often unaware of how the landscape is supposed to be read<sup>54</sup>, and as will become evident in this thesis, especially in the case of Geoffrey of Monmouth, the author’s intended audience may not have been able to read the text or landscape as they intended.

Nicole Branton (2009) states that in order to successfully analyse landscape using frameworks of landscape archaeology, the landscape must have clear boundaries. Whilst these boundaries do not have to be “real” or “physical”, they have to be in some way spatial and temporal (although this can span long periods) and address the “sociocultural context” of the

<sup>54</sup> James Duncan and Nancy Duncan, “(Re)Reading the Landscape”, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, (1988) 117-126, (p. 123)

landscape, that is “the people to whom the landscape is significant”.<sup>55</sup> This thesis has given broad spatial and temporal boundaries (later medieval England) but the texts themselves also provide useful boundaries, clearer perhaps than those of actual historic landscapes, defined as they are by paragraphs, chapters and stanzas which contain the barrow, and further contained within the text as a whole.

There are of course problems and difficulties with reading text-as-landscape: this analysis does not and cannot represent material engagement with the landscape. We also will never fully know or understand why the medieval authors wrote what they did. Just like landscape analysis as described by Denis Cosgrove it is one “way of seeing” which offers “an illusion of order and control”, and only some insight into the past.<sup>56</sup> It is important therefore to combine this new methodology with other elements of textual analysis, both modern and contemporary to the medieval authors. This is most clear in chapter two of this thesis, where it is only by using methods of reading texts employed by the medieval clergy that we can perhaps gain a fuller understanding of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s work and intentions.

### **Medieval History Writing**

It is in historical sources, both narrative histories and chronicles as well as romances set in the past, that we find most of the barrows discussed in this thesis. This is not only because barrows were recognised as relics of the past in the landscape but, as a number of scholars including

<sup>55</sup> Nicole Branton, “Landscape approaches in historical archaeology: the archaeology of places” in *International Handbook of Historical Archaeology*, ed. by Teresita Majewski and David R. M. Gaimster, (New York: Springer-Verlag, 2009), 51-65, (p. 53)

<sup>56</sup> Denis Cosgrove, “Prospect, Perspective and the Evolution of the Landscape Idea”, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, Vol. 10(1), (1985), 45-62, (p. 55)

Chris Given-Wilson have noted, because medieval authors looked to the past for legitimisation, prestige and cultural authority.<sup>57</sup> They often did this through references to older sources, such as Geoffrey of Monmouth's ancient British text, but as this thesis demonstrates, they also did so through references to past monuments.<sup>58</sup> Holtorf stated that 'people do not structure their understandings of the past chronometrically, in neat blocks of years, decades, centuries and millennia ... important events tend to have happened in the distant mythic past or the very recent and therefore recollect-able pasts'.<sup>59</sup> This is true to a certain extent; however, some medieval chroniclers, especially those documenting the history of their abbeys such as Matthew Paris, gave very specific dates, even if they had no way of knowing this information. This was a way of controlling the past, not only in order to use the past to their advantage, but to tackle a problem which all history writers faced - the 'unthinkable'.<sup>60</sup> According to Michel de Certeau, the unthinkable was not just the parts of history society wanted or needed to forget in order to function, it was also everything they had forgotten but wanted or needed to remember. The lost traditions, especially relating to the foundation of religious houses, are exactly what imaginative memory (as outlined by Amy Remensnyder) created or re-created. In order for them to control the present, they also had to be able to control the past and their place in it. It was not only monastic houses or history writers who rewrote the past to suit their own purposes, whether consciously or unconsciously. Patrick Geary in *Phantoms of Remembrance* demonstrated how politically and socially powerful individuals also 'reformed' their own pasts, and those of their families, in order to ameliorate their reputations and status in the present.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Chris Given-Wilson, *Chronicles: The Writing of History in Medieval England* (London: A&C Black, 2004), p. 180; Cynthia Turner Camp, "Inventing the Past in Henry Bradshaw's *Life of St Werburge*", *Exemplaria*, 23:3 (2011), 244-267 (p. 247); Edwards, p. xxiii.

<sup>58</sup> Edwards, p. xxii.

<sup>59</sup> Holtorf, p. 119.

<sup>60</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. by Tom Conley, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 136.

<sup>61</sup> Patrick Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance*, (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 7.



Geary suggested that in order to properly control the past, one also had to control the things which gave access to that past, the ‘relics’. Barrows in England were levelled during the later medieval period, and it has previously been suggested that this had religious motivations, although this thesis suggests this was actually more likely a result of treasure hunting.<sup>62</sup> Equally, a number of the barrows discussed here appear only on the page; they are part of a constructed landscape of the past, which in reality never existed. There are cases where access to the past, through the barrow, is clearly and carefully controlled, such as when the monks of St Albans designated the barrow on Redbourn Heath as the burial place of St Amphibalus.

That said, it cannot be suggested that the writing of history in later medieval England was purely self-serving on behalf of the writers.<sup>63</sup> Matthew Paris believed history was a ‘storehouse for moral truths’, and therefore the writing of history was meant to provide a guide to the audience on how to live a good and moral life, even if that required the writer to prioritise good moral behaviour over ‘factual truth’.<sup>64</sup> Björn Weiler has published widely on how Matthew Paris did this; primarily by demonstrating actions which were either good or evil, which he anticipated his audience would not only emulate, but may compare with the behaviour of leaders of their own time.<sup>65</sup> Chapter 2 of this thesis explores how Geoffrey of Monmouth used similar techniques in his *Historia regum Britanniae*. Amy Remensnyder notes that it has been suggested that the imagined past (and therefore versions of the past which exist in the

<sup>62</sup> Paul Ashbee, “The Medway Megaliths in Perspective”, *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 111 (1993) 57-112, (pp. 64-5), suggests an itinerant group of ‘wreckers’ with ‘substantial support and some power’ from both the king and the church, who may have travelled around England uprooting stone circles and long barrows. Whilst stones at Avebury were certainly disturbed in the fourteenth century, there is no evidence to suggest that the Kentish barrows destroyed during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were related to this, or that they were disturbed because they were pagan monuments in a Christian landscape.

<sup>63</sup> Björn Weiler, “Matthew Paris on the Writing of History”, *Journal of Medieval History*, 35 (2009) 254-278 (pp. 259-60).

<sup>64</sup> Weiler, pp. 262-75.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* p. 266.

cultural imagination) is too distant from the present to make it a source of moral guidance in the present, but this is not the case. Remensnyder makes it clear that imaginative memory draws inspiration from the past, but the imagined past is not a ‘real’ past as we would envisage it; rather it is filled with present mores and concerns, reflecting onto the past and not actually originating in it.<sup>66</sup>

### **Key Interpretive Themes from previous scholarship**

A number of key interpretive themes relating to activity around barrows, from the prehistoric to the early medieval period, have been identified by Semple, Williams and others. These were recently summarised by Anwen Cooper in her 2016 article *Other Types of Meaning: Relationships between Round Barrows and Landscapes from 1500 BC-AC 1086*, as: ‘ancestral’, ‘supernatural’ and ‘historical’ associations of barrows, the role of barrows in the creation of local identity and sense of place, the use of barrows in legitimising land claims, justifying the emergence of new social or political configurations, and the role played by social memory and past historical understandings.<sup>67</sup> For the prehistoric and Roman periods, this activity was identified through the archaeological record. For the early medieval period, whilst much of the activity was still related to and identified through the archaeological record, for example secondary burials inserted into barrows, it could also be identified through literary sources, historical documents such as charters, and place-name evidence. Having reviewed the previous scholarship, Cooper then criticised the previously identified themes for being a narrow set of interpretations which are in danger of losing meaning by being used too generally,

<sup>66</sup> Remensnyder, p. 4; Valerio Valeri “Constitutive History: Genealogy and Narrative in the Legitimation of Hawaiian Kingship”, in *Culture through Time: Anthropological Approaches*, ed. by Emiko Ohnuki-Tierne, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 154-92, (p. 164).

<sup>67</sup> Anwen Cooper, “Other Types of Meaning: Relationships between Round Barrows and Landscapes from 1500 BC- AC 1086”, *Cambridge Archaeological Journal*, 26 (2016), 665-696, (p. 667).

and therefore lacking in meaning.<sup>68</sup> She cited the instance of Roy Van Beek and Guy De Mulder's 2014 article *Circles, Cycles and Ancestral Connotations: The Long-Term History and Perception of Late Prehistoric Barrows and Urnfields in Flanders (Belgium)*, which concluded with the statement that 'it is impossible to decide whether these practices served to, for instance, "familiarise" ancient monuments, legitimise political authority, or strengthen territorial claims',<sup>69</sup> as evidence of an 'interpretive impasse', where researchers are unable to decide exactly what certain activities signified because the interpretive themes have lost specificity.<sup>70</sup> Cooper therefore called for research which explored other interpretations of barrows besides those themes most commonly discussed, to seek out 'other types of meaning'.<sup>71</sup> Cooper's solution to this was to focus on barrows in a specific area of England (Norfolk) over a long period (c. 1500 BCE - 1086 CE), to explore their deep histories, using an interdisciplinary method similar to Semple's. Of course, it may have been 'impossible to decide' exactly what activity around barrows was meant to achieve, precisely because they were intended to serve multiple purposes. As Norman Yoffee wrote in *Negotiating the Past in the Past*, the physical remnants of the past, such as barrows, are points where various and diverse levels of identity can be negotiated.<sup>72</sup> Equally, there will always be a certain amount of ambiguity, as the study of the past cannot tell us everything about it, especially relating to personal ideas and actions. This thesis takes aspects of the approaches of both Semple and Cooper, following an interdisciplinary method and focusing on one particular type of monument. It explores them over a wider geographical area, but within a shorter timeframe,

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* p. 666

<sup>69</sup> Roy Van Beek and Guy De Mulder, "Circles, Cycles and Ancestral Connotations: The Long-Term History and Perception of Late Prehistoric Barrows and Urnfields in Flanders (Belgium)", *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*, 80 (2014), 299-326 (p. 326).

<sup>70</sup> Cooper, p. 666.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Norman Yoffee, *Negotiating the Past in the Past* (Tucson AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2007), p. 3.

looking specifically at barrows in the cultural imagination of the clergy and aristocracy in later medieval England.

### **The Archaeological Perspective**

Slightly earlier than Cooper, John Thomas (in *Mounds, Memories and Myths: Ancient Monuments and Place in the Leicestershire Landscape* (2013)) explored barrow reuse across a similarly extensive time period (c. 2500 years), from a purely archaeological perspective. This type of approach is difficult to attempt on anything other than a site-by-site basis, due to the sheer amount of data and information which would have to be collected and discussed. The focus of Thomas' analysis was on 'processes of change' in the use of the site, which was a Neolithic and Iron Age settlement, as well as a Bronze Age and Anglo-Saxon barrow cemetery.<sup>73</sup> Exploring uses of the monuments over an extended time period made it possible for Thomas to identify the full extent of these concentric patterns in usage, which would not have been possible if he had simply looked at a single period in the site's history.<sup>74</sup> The amount of data, however, meant Thomas' work was limited to the one site; it would require similar levels of detailed research on other sites to explore whether the same or similar patterns of use and re-use exist across the country for this much earlier period.

Most recent archaeological studies of barrows have generally aimed to understand the complex place of barrows in prehistory and to develop new perspectives on the role they played in ritual and prehistoric daily life. There are some exceptions, for example Ann Woodward's 2000 book *British Barrows: A Matter of Life and Death*. As well as offering a comprehensive discussion on all aspects of barrows, from their construction to their role in the wider landscape,

<sup>73</sup> John Thomas, "Mounds, Memories and Myths: Ancient Monuments and Place in the Leicestershire Landscape", in *Memory, Myth and Long-Term Landscape Inhabitation*, ed. by Adrian M. Chadwick, Catriona D. Gibson, (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2013), 76-98

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

Woodward highlighted the importance of the context of the barrows, how they related both to the landscape around them, and the events of the intervening millennia between the barrow's construction and it being recorded or excavated. That said, Woodward summed up later medieval interactions with barrows by stating that whilst it is evident that barrows were opened during the medieval period, there is little record of this in later excavation reports.<sup>75</sup> This does not necessarily mean that these sites were ignored or meaningless during this period; many barrows were opened by antiquarians in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the remains of medieval digging, such as potsherds, were of little interest to them.<sup>76</sup> There are several instances of twelfth- and thirteenth-century pottery being discovered in barrows and it must be acknowledged that the strategies used to dig barrows during the later medieval period may have almost or completely destroyed some barrows. Equally, the medieval excavations may be almost indistinguishable from the antiquarian damage.

Very recently there has been more interest in exploring medieval interactions with prehistoric monuments within the field of archaeology. Building on archaeological investigations in 2000 at Silbury Hill and 2012, Hatfield Barrow and Marlborough Mound, Leary et al. 'Normal for the Normans? Exploring the Large Round Mounds of England' discussed some of the early findings of the Round Mounds Project, which ran from 2015-2017. The main aim of the Round Mounds Project was to investigate the ages of a selection of England's large motte mounds. Leary et al. stated that the supposed dates for 'Norman' motte mounds had only been suggested speculatively by historians in the early twentieth century, and that it had not been previously possible for work to have taken place to scientifically date

<sup>75</sup> Anne Woodward, *British Barrows: A Matter of Life and Death*, (Stroud: Tempus Publishing Ltd, 2000), p. 2.

<sup>76</sup> Paphitis, p. 79.

them.<sup>77</sup> Due to advances in archaeological coring techniques, it has now been possible to core a number of mottes, selected for the project through a number of criteria, including the likelihood of them being possible prehistoric mounds, due to positioning or shape. Radiocarbon dating of these cores has shown that whilst around seventy percent of the mounds investigated were constructed in the decades after the Norman Conquest (late eleventh-early twelfth centuries) and a couple dated from the end of the medieval period, there were several mounds which had been assumed to be medieval in date, but were actually prehistoric monuments, often barrows, reused as motte mounds by the Normans.<sup>78</sup>

### **Folklore Studies**

The majority of scholarship relating to barrows and other prehistoric monuments in the cultural imagination of later medieval England has developed out of folklore studies, rather than history or archaeology. In 2009 Jeremy Harte drew out a number of references to barrows in literature and folklore from medieval and early modern Britain, presenting them as a meta-narrative, ‘a story of how we came to know what we know’.<sup>79</sup> Looking through a folkloric lens, Harte made some important points, especially relating to the use of folklore in scholarly research. He emphasised that stories were not ‘fossils of belief, passed down from some ancestral pagan to his peasant lineage’, a point which was often forgotten, especially by scholars in the earlier twentieth century.<sup>80</sup> Whilst Harte has previously dismissed the idea that barrows were

<sup>77</sup> Jim Leary, Elaine Jamieson, and Phil Stastney, “Normal for the Normans? Exploring the Large Round Mounds of England”, *Current Archaeology* 337 (March 2018) <<https://www.archaeology.co.uk/articles/normal-normans-ex-ploring-large-round-mounds-england.htm>> [accessed 12 March 2018]

<sup>78</sup> Leary et al. 2018.

<sup>79</sup> Jeremy Harte, “The Devil’s Chapels: Fiends, Fear and Folklore at Prehistoric Sites”, in *Written on Stone: The Cultural Reception of British Prehistoric Monuments*, ed. by Joanne Parker, (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 23-35, (p. 23).

<sup>80</sup> Jeremy Harte, “Dragons, Elves and Giants: Some Pre-archaeological Occupants of British Barrows” in *Antiquaries and Archaists: The Past in the Past, the Past in the Present*, ed. by Megan Aldrich & Robert J. Wallis, (Salisbury: Spire Books, 2009), 14-28, (p. 28).

recognised as a landscape feature separate from hills during the later medieval period,<sup>81</sup> Ronald Hutton has suggested that during the medieval period barrows were recognised as burial mounds because when people dug into them they found human bones – leading to a tradition of barrows as the burial places of heroes, saints and giants, and sometimes grave goods – therefore leading to a tradition of treasure in burial mounds.<sup>82</sup> It is evident from a number of the texts discussed in this thesis that at least some people recognised them as burial mounds, and that they were written about as such during the later medieval period by writers such as Geoffrey of Monmouth. Ultimately, however, Hutton concluded that retrieving medieval viewpoints in relation to prehistoric monuments such as barrows was ‘extremely difficult’, as the contemporary references were few and far between.<sup>83</sup> This thesis aims to prove that it is actually well worth attempting to explore these references, and that it is the context as much, or sometimes more, than the barrow which is important.

In 2006 Lucy Franklin noted that later medieval studies of the landscape tended towards discussions of practical landscape use such as settlement and agriculture, rather than looking at what the landscapes *meant* to people and how the landscape was constructed within their imaginations.<sup>84</sup> Franklin’s exploration of barrows in the imaginative past in both early and later medieval England was somewhat speculative, as it consisted of a discussion of folklore which was not recorded until the late seventeenth century. Most of the examples discussed by Franklin are relevant only to the early medieval period (i.e. until the Norman Conquest). She states, for example, that dragons were particularly associated with barrows during the medieval period; however, there is no particular relationship between barrows and dragons in later medieval

Jeremy Harte, “Hollow Hills”, *At the Edge*, 5 (1997), 22-29 (p. 22).

<sup>82</sup> Hutton, R. “Megaliths and Memory” in *Written on Stone: The Cultural Reception of British Prehistoric Monuments*, ed. by Joanne Parker, (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 10-22, (p. 11).

<sup>83</sup> Hutton, p. 10.

<sup>84</sup> Lucy Franklin, “Imagined Landscapes: Archaeology, Perception and Folklore in the Study of Medieval Devon”, in *Medieval Devon and Cornwall: Shaping an Ancient Countryside*, ed. by Sam Turner, (Bollington: Windgather Press, 2006), 144-61 (p. 144).

texts.<sup>85</sup> Franklin also suggested using a combination of folklore and archaeological excavation to explore medieval interpretations of the landscape, by looking at field- and place-names in tithe appointments. Like the folklore, these field-names were not recorded until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which Franklin has to acknowledge, and she relies on Stephen Rippon's claim that it is possible to "regress" the landscape backwards from the nineteenth century to the medieval period.<sup>86</sup> Whether this is possible or not is of course highly debatable, and thus such evidence will not be used in this thesis. In 2009 Ronald Hutton, in *Megaliths and Memory*, similarly used place-name studies and later folklore to identify themes associated with prehistoric megaliths, when he examined how megalithic monuments (including barrows) were interpreted from the Middle Ages onwards. Unlike earlier scholars such as Franklin, however, Hutton recognised that it was not possible to simply examine folklore recorded during the early modern period and assume it represented a historical tradition.<sup>87</sup> Instead, Hutton, who was attempting to create a broad framework for the history of perceptions and interpretations of these monuments, used similar interdisciplinary methods to Semple (2013), and those which will be used in this thesis, bringing together archaeological, literary and historical evidence.

### **Thesis Structure**

The first chapter of this thesis offers a brief introduction to barrows in England, including typology, location and re-use, from the Neolithic to early medieval period. This is essential as this thesis offers an interdisciplinary approach, and the approach used is a historical rather than archaeological one. Therefore, it provides an introduction to the archaeology of these monuments, which aids in envisioning the different barrows discussed in the later chapters.

<sup>85</sup> Franklin, p. 144.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* p. 150. and Stephen Rippon, *The Severn Estuary Landscape Evolution and Wetland Reclamation*, (London: Leicester University Press, 1997), p. 24.

<sup>87</sup> Ronald Hutton, "Megaliths and Memory", in *Written on Stone: the cultural reception of British prehistoric monuments*. (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009)



Chapters 2 to 5 examine the place of barrows in the cultural imagination through literary sources, poems, romances and narrative histories, and the chapters are linked together through shared themes and associations (see Fig. 1). Barrows were used as signifiers of the past which allow writers to access that past, whether real or imagined, as well as transmitters of lessons on good kingship and moral behaviour. They were also associated with burials of kings and leaders, the supernatural, justice, hidden treasure and Christianity. The final two chapters use slightly different sources to explore two different interpretations of barrows in later medieval England. Chapter 6 discusses the *inventio* of St Amphibalus, using histories written at the Abbey of St Albans to examine the discovery of Amphibalus' relics in a barrow near the town of St Albans, and the Christianisation of the pagan monument. Chapter 7 explores an interpretation of barrows which appears to have captured the imagination of ordinary people as well as kings: barrows as places where hidden treasure could be found. This chapter uses archaeological and documentary evidence to try and understand the extent of this activity, which does not really appear in the more literary sources.

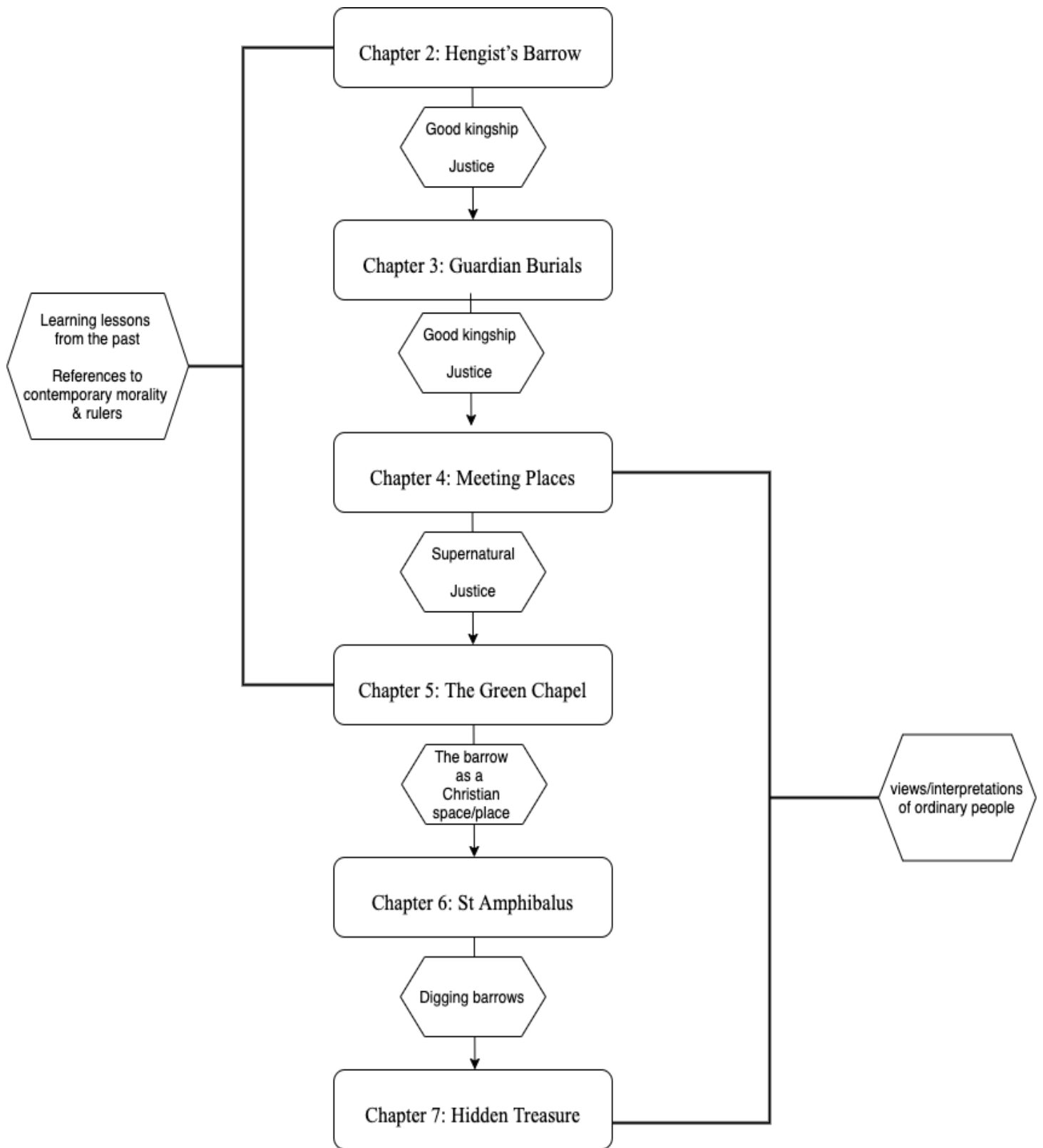


Figure 1. Diagram showing progression of shared themes through thesis chapters

## Chapter 1: Burial Mounds in England

### Introduction

There are several types of prehistoric burial mounds, which still exist, in varying conditions, throughout England. The most common by far are long and round barrows, which were constructed between c.3800BCE – c.1400BCE.<sup>88</sup> Cairns, passage graves and dolmen are also included in the monument type.

It must be recognised that due to farming, treasure seeking, antiquarian excavations and changes in land use, the number of barrows which remain in England today is not representative of those which existed in medieval and, to some extent, in early modern England. Indeed, it has been suggested that medieval and earlier farming destroyed more barrows than more modern methods of cultivation.<sup>89</sup> It is clear, however, from the level of medieval treasure hunting discussed later in this thesis that farming methods were not the only contributing factors to the destruction of barrows in this period.

Christopher Tilley suggested in 1996 that prehistoric monuments represented attempts by a society to reflect the monumentality they saw in the natural landscape; through which they sought not only to emulate the landscape, but to enhance and even control it.<sup>90</sup> What is certain is that the motives that lay behind the constructions of barrows in prehistoric Britain would have been complex, varying from place to place and between different communities.<sup>91</sup> It has been widely acknowledged that barrows in prehistory, especially during the Neolithic, often

<sup>88</sup> Dave Field, *Historic England Introduction to Heritage Assets, Prehistoric Burial Mounds and Barrows* (London: Historic England, 2011), p. 3.

<sup>89</sup> Frances Peters, "Bronze Age Barrows: Factors Influencing their Survival and Destruction", *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, 18:4 (1999) 255–264 (p. 262).

<sup>90</sup> Christopher Tilley, "The powers of rocks: topography and monument construction on Bodmin Moor", *World Archaeology*, 28(2),1996, 161-176, (p.172).

<sup>91</sup> Francis Pryor, *The Making of the British Landscape: How We Have Transformed the Land, from Prehistory to Today* (London: Penguin Books, 2010), p. 64.

appear to have been used as a way of staking a claim on the landscape.<sup>92</sup> The barrows were certainly sited in prominent positions, often along the skyline, and in open landscapes. As will be discussed further in this introduction, barrows were often placed near to other artificial monuments, such as the Bronze Age barrows around Stonehenge, or in some cases on top of earlier barrows, and intrusive burials were made into barrows throughout the period from the Bronze Age to the early medieval, although all these cultures, to some extent, also constructed their own barrows.

Burials in barrows are described as either primary interments (the first burial), secondary and satellite interments (burials around the primary interment, which are often contemporary to the primary interment, or of the same period, showing a continued tradition within a community) and intrusive interments (burials into or around the barrow of a later period, and often in a different style from the primary and satellite interments).

### **Long Barrows**

All long barrows in England were built during the Neolithic period (c. 4000-c.2500 BCE). Most long barrows were built between 3500-2700 BCE.<sup>93</sup> They consist of a long earthen mound, often with stone-built chambers and with a maximum length of around 50m and width of 25m.<sup>94</sup> The exception to these measurements are early long barrows, such as West Kennett in Wiltshire, built c. 3800 BCE, which are larger and measure between 80 and 100m long.<sup>95</sup> Long barrows are now found most commonly in the South West; around Cranbourne Chase, Salisbury Plain and Gloucestershire. However, there are also clusters in the Peak District, Lincolnshire and the South Downs. Where long barrows are described as ‘chambered’, they

<sup>92</sup> Pryor, p. 60.

<sup>93</sup> This is, of course, with the exception of two modern ‘long barrows’ built by former Stonehenge steward & farmer Tim Daw and a company called ‘Sacred Stones’ in 2014 and 2016 respectively.

<sup>94</sup> Timothy Darvill, *Prehistoric Britain*, (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 64.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, p.64.

have an entrance and are subdivided into chambers off a main passageway. Neolithic long barrows generally contained multiple burials where the remains, once disarticulated, appear to have played a part in an intensely complex ritual culture. Evidence from these tombs shows that they were not left alone after burial: indeed, at sites such as Wayland's Smithy (Oxfordshire) the bones of the different skeletons were mixed together. Francis Pryor suggests that 'this, and other evidence suggests that the bones were regularly removed from the tomb and perhaps paraded through nearby settlements during certain ceremonies associated with the ancestors. These rituals suggest that the dead - and the ancestors - played an active part in the world of the living.'<sup>96</sup> Such removals are assumed to account for the frequent discoveries of incomplete skeletons, for example at West Kennett where there are too few skulls, femurs or tibias for the number of bodies represented by the other bones.<sup>97</sup> These communal tombs are also thought to represent the importance of community and communal values in the Neolithic.

<sup>96</sup> Pryor, p.56.

<sup>97</sup> Julian Thomas, "Death, Identity and the Body in Neolithic Britain", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 6 (2003) 653-668 (p. 659).



*Figure 2. West Kennett long barrow, photograph: Martyn Barber*

### **Dolmen, Cairns and Portal Tombs**

As well as Neolithic long barrows, there are several other categories of prehistoric burial mound, which exist in far smaller numbers in England, such as cairns and dolmen, two other types of Neolithic burial monument.

In this context ‘cairn’ refers specifically to mortuary sites consisting of a mound of piled stone, usually built over an internment or cist. They are not to be confused with cairns piled up on the summits of hills by modern walkers. Cairns are the most frequently occurring Neolithic funerary monuments outside of long barrows, and are almost all located in the Peak District, across Northern England and Devon, with over 100 cairns in Dartmoor National Park alone. Cairns are distinct from barrows because they were created from piled stone, rather than from earth. This has led to certain folkloric tropes being associated with them,

often suggesting they were dropped by the devil or giants; these stories have been recorded from the early modern period. In England cairns consist of two main types, round cairns and ring cairns. Round cairns are a mound of stone over an internment or cist, whereas ring cairns are a circular shape, without a mound over the central internment.



*Figure 3. Shaw Cairn, Cheshire. Photograph: author's own*

Dolmen usually survive as a large stone sitting atop a number of upright menhirs, they exist in great numbers in Wales but are also found in South West England, particularly in Cornwall and on the Scilly Isles, where they are often called 'quoits', although they are also present as far north as Cumbria and Tyne and Wear. Kit's Coty House and Little Kit's Coty in Kent are both examples of dolmen. Dolmen are generally thought to date from the Neolithic, although

they are difficult to date as they are open structures and it is easy for later material to intrude.<sup>98</sup> It is debated whether dolmen may originally have been covered with a cairn or earthen mound, which have all now weathered away, to leave only the inner stone chambers, or whether none of them would ever have been covered.<sup>99</sup>



*Figure 4. Kit's Coty, Kent. Photograph: Beth Whalley*

Portal tombs are very similar to dolmen; indeed, they are often considered a type of dolmen.<sup>100</sup> Commonly found in Ireland, there is one known portal tomb in modern day England: The Whispering Knights in Oxfordshire. Due to their distinctive appearance, dolmen and portal

<sup>98</sup> Darvill, p.102.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*



tombs are easily distinguishable as manmade features in the landscape and have often attracted folklore similar to that of stone circles.



*Figure 5. The Whispering Knights, Oxfordshire. Photograph: author's own*

## **Round Barrows**

Round barrows differ widely in type compared to long barrows, cairns and dolmen, and the majority were constructed in the Bronze Age, between c.2000 and c.1500BCE.<sup>101</sup> Round barrows are the most common type of burial mound found in Britain. The five main types of round barrow are: bowl barrow, bell barrow, saucer barrow, pond barrow and disc barrow. It is generally difficult to identify the different round barrow types, especially as they also range dramatically in size. As with long barrows, many have been lost to ploughing and other

<sup>101</sup> Field, p.3.

agricultural development. Round barrows remain, however, the most frequent type of prehistoric burial mound still visible in England, from Broom Ridge Barrow at Etal, close to the Scottish Borders in Northumberland, to Porthloo Barrow in the Scilly Isles. They also generally contain a central cist, pit or beaker burial, depending on where they are located, in contrast to the communal burials of the Neolithic. The types of grave goods also vary, with long barrows (perhaps related to the communal burial aspect) tending to contain a few pots or personal items such as axe heads and other stone tools, whereas barrows constructed in the later Bronze Age have yielded treasures such as the gold Ringlemere cup. As with Neolithic long barrows, Bronze Age round barrows also responded to earlier features in the landscape. For example, Gib Hill, a round barrow constructed next to the stone circle of Arbor Low in Derbyshire, was built on top of a Neolithic long barrow. Neolithic long barrows and Bronze Age round barrows are often found in groups, referred to as barrow cemeteries, further suggesting that the Bronze Age barrow builders were responding to the Neolithic burial monuments, and purposefully located their own burial monuments, built in a different style, in close proximity to the older monuments.



*Figure 6. Gib Hill long barrow and round barrow, Derbyshire. Photograph: author's own*

It was previously thought that Bronze Age round barrows were mainly concentrated on higher ground; however, it is now thought that those on higher ground, where there is little cultivation, were more likely to survive than those in lowland areas.<sup>102</sup> Similarly, it is recognised that Bronze Age barrows were often constructed at ritual centres such as Stonehenge. Here it was thought the barrows were contemporary to the main construction period; however, Parker-Pearson's excavation work there has led him to suggest the barrows

<sup>102</sup> Richard Bradley, *The Prehistory of Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) p.154.

are later in date, close to what was certainly an important place, but one which was already becoming an ancient monument.<sup>103</sup>

### **The End of Prehistoric Barrow Building**

There appears to be been a shift in the importance of monumentality across Europe in the second century BCE (late Bronze Age, Early Iron Age). Around 1500 BCE not only did the construction of barrows cease, but archaeologists have discovered almost a complete dearth of burials of any kind.<sup>104</sup> During this time, thousands of Bronze Age hoards were buried, often not accompanying a body. Pryor suggests these hoards were possibly sometimes deposited as a substitute for a body.<sup>105</sup> Metalwork recovered from Lilla Howe, a Bronze Age round barrow in North Yorkshire, was thought to represent a burial, although it is now generally thought to be a hoard.<sup>106</sup> The extent to which these practices may have taken place at barrows is unclear. However, if barrows did occasionally contain grave goods or a hoard but no interment, this could explain the disconnection between barrows as burial sites and barrows as places where treasure was hidden, which this thesis identifies in later medieval England. This could also be explained by the medieval treasure hunters not recognising that the urns and other pots buried in barrows contained cremated human remains.

Although generally barrow building appears to have ceased in the centuries around 1500 BCE,<sup>107</sup> there is some evidence of a small resurgence in barrow building during the Iron Age. The evidence for this is focused in Yorkshire and Humberside, where the flourishing

<sup>103</sup> Mike Parker Pearson, Josh Pollard, Colin Richards, Julian Thomas, Christopher Tilley and Kate Welham, "Stonehenge, its River and its Landscape: Unravelling the Mysteries of a Prehistoric Sacred Place", *Archaologischer Anzeiger*, 1, (2006), 237-258.

<sup>104</sup> Pryor, p.108.

<sup>105</sup> Pryor, p.109.

<sup>106</sup> Guy Halsall, "The Viking Presence in England? The Burial Evidence Reconsidered" in *Cultures in Contact: Scandinavian Settlement in England in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries*, ed. by Dawn Hadley and Julian Richards (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2000), pp. 259-76 (p.267).

<sup>107</sup> Pryor, p.108.

‘Arras’ culture appears to have been influenced by the La Tène culture of mainland Europe, rather than Iron Age British burial traditions.<sup>108</sup> Excavations of the Arras Barrow Cemetery (which gave the culture its name) undertaken in the 1970s revealed hundreds of square barrows.<sup>109</sup> There is also a square ditch barrow at Henley, Dorset which may be Iron Age, likewise Lexden Barrow, near Colchester, is generally considered to date from the Iron Age or Roman period.<sup>110</sup> Square barrows were much less monumental features than any other type of barrow, and therefore are now only visible as crop marks, having been ploughed out in the intervening millennia. Communities in the Iron Age also developed a practice of encompassing earlier barrow sites with earthworks, but not altering them.

### **Romano-British Barrows**

Romano-British barrows are generally rare in England, in comparison to Neolithic or Bronze Age barrows; fewer than 150 are still in existence in England. Roman barrows tend to be round barrows on a much more monumental scale, as they are far taller and more conical than Bronze Age or Anglo-Saxon round barrows.<sup>111</sup> This can be seen at the Dane John Mound in Canterbury (although this mound has been altered by both the Norman castle builders and eighteenth-century civic landscaping) and the Bartlow Hills in Cambridgeshire; indeed the Bartlow Hills are the largest surviving Roman burial mounds in Western Europe. The Bartlow Hill barrows were recognised as Roman during excavations in 1815 and 1832, due to the presence of Romano-British grave goods including glass vessels, Samian ware pottery, bronze strigils and pateras.

<sup>108</sup> Bradley, pp. 263–4.

<sup>109</sup> Ian Stead, *Iron Age Cemeteries in East Yorkshire: Excavations at Burton Fleming, Rudston, Carton-on-the-Wolds, and Kirkburn* (London: English Heritage, 1991), p. 1.

<sup>110</sup> Leslie Grinsell, *Barrows in England and Wales* (London: Shire Publications, 1979), p. 49.

<sup>111</sup> Leslie Grinsell, *The Ancient Burial Mounds of Britain* (London: Methuen, 1953), p. 26.



*Figure 7. One of the Bartlow Hill barrows. Photograph: Rachel Arnold*

As with other types of Roman burial, most Roman barrows are located outside of the towns, and can often be found along the route of a Roman road, such as the ‘Little Donjon Hills’ outside the city wall at Canterbury.<sup>112</sup> The majority of burials in Romano-British barrows were cremations burials, although there have been instances of inhumations recorded. Eckardt et al. (2009) used GIS, as well as archaeological finds evidence, to investigate the Roman barrows at Bartlow, which are the largest remaining in Europe. They suggested that due to the placement of the barrows in relation to Roman roads and trackways, the barrows possibly represented the emergence, or re-emergence of a local elite in the late first and early second

<sup>112</sup> Grinsell, *Burial Mounds of Britain*, p.26.

centuries CE, and that the monumental size of the barrows was intended primarily to impress the local inhabitants.<sup>113</sup>

Barrows were not only built during the Roman period in England; there is also a great deal of evidence of Romano-British offerings being made at barrows, for example large amounts of Romano-British pottery and coins have been recovered from Neolithic and Bronze Age barrows.<sup>114</sup> Some interments have also been discovered, however these are rare and generally the activity appears to have been focused on ritual offerings rather than secondary burials.<sup>115</sup> Ronald Hutton has noted that this activity also appears to have been reserved for mounds rather than megaliths, as there is no evidence of similar offerings around dolmen.<sup>116</sup> It has also been suggested that the Dane John mound in Canterbury, which has been identified as a Romano-British barrow converted into a motte for an eleventh-century motte and bailey castle, may have originally been a Neolithic or Bronze Age barrow, which was extended during the Roman period.<sup>117</sup>

<sup>113</sup> Hella Eckardt, Peter Brewer, Sophie Hay and Sarah Poppy, "Roman Barrows and their Landscape Context: A GIS Case Study at Bartlow, Cambridgeshire", *Britannia*, 40 (2009), 65-98.

<sup>114</sup> Ronald Hutton, "Romano-British Reuse of Prehistoric Ritual Sites", *Britannia*, 42 (2011), 1-22 (p. 12).

<sup>115</sup> Hutton, *Romano-British Reuse*, p. 9.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *Canterbury's Archaeology 2015-16: An Annual Review of the Canterbury Archaeological Trust*, (Canterbury: Canterbury Archaeological Trust Limited, 2017), p. 15.



Figure 8. Dane John Mound from Canterbury City Wall. Photograph: author's own

### **Early Medieval Barrows**

The tradition of barrow burials in England was revived during the fifth century CE, reaching its height during the late sixth and early seventh centuries. Hutton has suggested that barrows built in the fifth and sixth centuries may have been copied from the ‘native British’ and that ‘the newcomers saved themselves labour’ by reusing the prehistoric and Roman burial mounds for satellite and intrusive burials.<sup>118</sup> Prehistoric burial mounds may well have been a source of inspiration for the Anglo-Saxons or at least helped build a sense of legitimacy and ancestry in

<sup>118</sup> Ronald Hutton, *The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles: Their Nature and Legacy*, (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1997), p.277.



the landscape.<sup>119</sup> Similarly Elizabeth O'Brien wrote that the resurgence of barrow burials was due to native Britons taking on some aspects of Anglo-Saxon culture whilst retaining their own burial traditions.<sup>120</sup> The re-emergence of barrow building in the fifth and sixth centuries seems to have affected the way the Anglo-Saxons engaged with prehistoric burial mounds. During this period Anglo-Saxon cemeteries have been found clustered against and around early Bronze Age mounds, without disturbing the contents of the mound. Howard Williams sees this as an attempt to connect the dead with an imagined past, whatever they envisaged the history of the barrows to be, 'or whatever supernatural associations the monument evoked'.<sup>121</sup> Williams also noted that the reuse of prehistoric barrows for burial occurred most frequently in areas of England in which a large number of barrows survived, typically Wiltshire, Derbyshire and East Yorkshire.<sup>122</sup> This may seem obvious, but it is sometimes easily forgotten. Williams sees this as the community making a deliberate choice to attach themselves to specific remnants of prehistory in their landscape, in order to construct 'idealised visions of the past... their mythical origins and their social identities'.<sup>123</sup> These Anglo-Saxon cemeteries near early Bronze Age mounds have most frequently been discovered in areas of England in which a large number of prehistoric barrows survived, typically Wiltshire, Derbyshire and East Yorkshire.

Martin Carver has suggested that the construction of the burial mounds at Sutton Hoo in the late sixth century CE may well have been a response to the monumentality of Christianity: 'as surely as the churches of Canterbury, Augustine's Gospels or Bede's Ecclesiastical History constitute the political manifestos of Christian Kent and Northumbria,

<sup>119</sup> Richard Bradley, "Piecing Together a Past" in *The Lives of Prehistoric Monuments in Iron Age, Roman and Medieval Europe*, ed. by Marta Díaz-Guardamino, Leonardo García Sanjuán, & David Wheatley, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 325-42, (p. 335).

<sup>120</sup> Elizabeth O'Brien, 'Post-Roman Britain to Anglo-Saxon England: The Burial Evidence Reviewed' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Oxford, 1996), p. 126.

<sup>121</sup> Williams, p. 62.

<sup>122</sup> Howard Williams, "Ancient Landscapes and the Dead: The Reuse of Prehistoric and Roman Monuments as Early Anglo-Saxon Burial Sites", *Medieval Archaeology*, 41 (1997), 1-32 (p. 14).

<sup>123</sup> Williams, "Ancient Landscapes and the Dead", p. 25.

the burial mounds of Sutton Hoo represent a document recording the defiant bid of the pagan East Angles for independence and international recognition'.<sup>124</sup> Carver also saw the sudden construction of these distinct burials as being a reaction 'to perceived menace of a predatory Christian mission'.<sup>125</sup> This is an interesting interpretation, although there is no evidence to support it.

Whatever the reason, it is evident that the seventh and eighth centuries marked a change in interactions with prehistoric barrows in Anglo Saxon England. Where previously cemeteries had been clustered around barrows, now the burials of high ranking and wealthy individuals were placed into a prehistoric tumulus as a secondary interment. At some sites, such as the Anglo-Saxon bed burial at Swallowcliffe, Wiltshire, the removal of the original interment preceded the secondary burial.<sup>126</sup> The removal of the primary burial, and the disposal of the bones elsewhere, clearly shows that the culture of these wealthy Anglo-Saxons did not include the fear that the grave's original occupant was still present in some form, and capable of haunting or causing harm to the people who disturbed the burial. It is interesting to note this change in the way burials were placed into prehistoric barrows, and the social status of those buried there. In the later Anglo-Saxon period, mostly from the eighth to eleventh centuries, both prehistoric and earlier Anglo-Saxon barrows were also used as execution sites, and for deviant burials, including at one of the most famous Anglo-Saxon barrows, Mound 1 at Sutton Hoo. Gerald Dyson believes the recognition of prehistoric barrows as burial sites by Christian Anglo-Saxons led them to associate contemporary deviant burials with prehistoric pagan burials.<sup>127</sup> This suggests an emphasis on unchristian burial as a further punishment.

<sup>124</sup> Martin Carver, *Sutton Hoo: Burial Ground of Kings?* (London: British Museum Press, 1998), p.106.

<sup>125</sup> Carver, p.136.

<sup>126</sup> Williams, *Death and Memory*, pp.32-36.

<sup>127</sup> Gerald Dyson, "Kings, Peasants, and the Restless Dead: Decapitation in Anglo-Saxon Saints' Lives", *Retrospectives*, 3 (2014), 32-43 (p. 39).

Throughout the Anglo-Saxon period, prehistoric barrows were identified in charters as marking the boundaries of the Anglo-Saxon hundreds, their visibility in the landscape being used as jurisdictional boundaries, as they had separated the lands of the living and the dead during their original use. It could also be suggested that another reason for using barrows for criminal or deviant burials because they marked the edge of a hundred, as well as representing pagan burial. It is also during the later Anglo-Saxon period that barrows entered English literature: in fact, some of the earliest surviving English literature features barrows. The interpretation of barrows as deviant, unchristian and filled with demons was present throughout the later Anglo-Saxon period. Connections between barrows and hell can be found in the eighth century *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*, and the Old English poem Guthlac A, where Guthlac must rid the barrows of demons. The ninth century poem Andreas contains a section in which criminals, murderers and heathens are dragged into hell through an ‘eorðscræfe’.<sup>128</sup> Barrows were also depicted as hell or entrances to hell. Illustrations from the British Library manuscript Harley 603 (The Utrecht Psalter) shows hell as a space inside a hill or a mound.<sup>129</sup>

### **Later Medieval England**

In recent archaeological literature, including that which focuses specifically on barrows, it is often suggested that during the later medieval period barrows were places which might be dug for saint’s bones or treasure, but were not particularly of general interest. Barrows in literature are noted but often not analysed. Of course, it cannot be denied that barrows were seen as places where treasure had been hidden. This was not a tradition unique to later medieval England, as it also appears in other places, such as sources in early medieval England and medieval Scandinavia. It may be that the shape of barrows inspired the idea that there might

<sup>128</sup> Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric*, p.157.

<sup>129</sup> Sarah Semple, “Illustrations of Damnation in Late Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts”, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 32 (2003), 231- 46, (p. 236).

be something inside them. Hutton has suggested it was physical interactions with barrows that led to most of the later medieval traditions around them; they were recognised as burial mounds because when people dug into them they found human bones, which led to a tradition of barrows as the burial places of heroes, saints and giants.<sup>130</sup> As grave goods must sometimes have been found, this then led to a tradition of treasure in burial mounds.<sup>131</sup> It is likely that the tradition that there was treasure to be found in barrows originated earlier than the period covered in this thesis, as the eighth-century Latin *Vita Sancti Guthlaci* records; when Guthlac arrived to begin his hermitage at a barrow in the Lincolnshire fens, it had already been broken open by treasure hunters.

The idea of hidden treasure in barrows was not the only early medieval interpretation which also appeared during the later medieval period. As will be seen in the next chapter, which discusses Hengist's burial in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*, barrows were associated still with pagan burials, and more generally as burial places and grave markers. As depictions of barrows in literature and histories are not overly common during the period, it would suggest that where they did occur, they were included for a particular purpose. Being burial places, for example, may have given barrows a sense of antiquity and history, which this thesis suggests would have allowed writers such as Geoffrey of Monmouth to use the barrows as a conduit through which they could access the past and make use of it in the present.

<sup>130</sup> Hutton, *Megaliths and Memory*, p. 11.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

## Chapter 2: Hengist's barrow in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*

### Introduction

Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* is well studied, but Hengist's barrow, which appears in Book 7 has rarely been mentioned or commented upon. This chapter uses the methodology developed for this thesis, that of reading text-as-landscape, in order to uncover the place of the barrow in the text and the importance of landscape in history writing, as well as highlighting the importance of the intended audience when talking about the cultural imagination. Further to this, it suggests that by understanding the use of symbolism and medieval methods of interpreting biblical writing we can gain a much wider understanding of Geoffrey's *Historia*.

Geoffrey's great narrative history was composed in the mid to late 1130s. Whilst Geoffrey himself referred to his work as *De gestis Britonum* ('On the Deeds of the Britons') it is more commonly known as *Historia regum Britanniae* (History of the Kings of Britain).<sup>132</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth is generally thought to have been Welsh, as his name suggests, and perhaps of Breton origin, but he wrote the *Historia regum Britanniae* in Oxford, having moved there in around 1129. Charter evidence suggests that during this time Geoffrey was a canon of St George's College in Oxford; a chapel and college of secular canons, patronised by the king before being absorbed into the abbey of Oseney around 1149.<sup>133</sup> St George's College being under royal patronage may explain the initial wide circulation of *Historia regum Britanniae*, whose popularity after the absorption of the college may have been linked to the originality of

<sup>132</sup> All translations of the *Historia regum Britanniae* come from Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain: An Edition and Translation of De gestis Britonum* (*Historia regum Britanniae*), ed. by D.M. Reeve and trans. by N. Wright (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2007), unless otherwise stated. All translations of the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* come from *The Carmen de Hastingae Proelio of Guy Bishop of Amiens*, trans. by Frank Barlow (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).

<sup>133</sup> "Colleges: St George, Oxford", in *A History of the County of Oxford*, ed. by William Page (London, 1907), ii, pp. 160-161 (British History Online: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/oxon/vol2/pp160-161> [accessed 11 February 2019]).

its content as well as the admiration of Henry II who used the *Historia* to justify his political claims.<sup>134</sup> Of course, the legitimacy of his history was of great concern to both Geoffrey and his audience. Kellie Robertson states that Geoffrey's claim to be translating an ancient British text, given to him by Walter, archdeacon of Oxford, was part of his attempt to legitimise his work as historical truth, claiming authority over the past by being a translation.<sup>135</sup> Actually, it seems to be the case that rather than translating an ancient text, Geoffrey was in fact reusing sections of the works of Nennius, Gildas, Bede and the Welsh Annals, supplemented to no small extent by the products of his own vivid imagination. Geoffrey was writing his *Historia* at a time when there was a growing interest in national history, although Judith Weiss comments that 'authentic history' appears to have 'played very little part' in Geoffrey's approach.<sup>136</sup> Hence Geoffrey appears to have been playing on ideas of what was real or unreal, for example presenting a united Britain (albeit consisting only of England and Wales) with one enemy, well before that was actually historical fact.

### **Legitimising History**

Translation of an ancient text was not the only way in which Geoffrey sought to legitimise his history. Geoffrey seems to have cast an imaginative net over the landscape, attaching his pseudo-historical events to recognisable points in the countryside, both natural and artificial in order to legitimise the version of the past he had created. He responded to features in the landscape, using these in his construction of the past, such as the labelling of the barrow at Conisbrough Castle as the tomb of Hengist, leader of the Anglo-Saxons and enemy of the Britons. It has previously been recognised that Geoffrey constantly connected his history to

<sup>134</sup> Kellie Robertson, "Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Translation of Insular Historiography", *Arthuriana*, 8.4 (1998), 42-57 (p. 50).

<sup>135</sup> Robertson, p.43.

<sup>136</sup> Wace, *Roman de Brut: A History of the British Text and Translation*, trans. by Judith Weiss (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), p.xiii.

events from the Bible, as well as classical history, for example Brutus and the Trojan War, which feature at the beginning of *Historia regum Britanniae*. Here it is argued that Geoffrey also did the same with recognisable features in the landscape, such as barrows. On one level this was in order to connect his version of the past to the landscape, however, barrows also played a part in Geoffrey's use of analogy, acting as points through which he could use events in the past to talk about the present. Although the focus of this chapter is on burial mounds, they were just one aspect of Britain's monumental past which Geoffrey seemingly used to tie his version of history into the landscape, and therefore into a past which is perceived as real. Geoffrey also incorporated Stonehenge into the *Historia regum Britanniae*, making it the grave marker of Britons massacred by Hengist, as well as the burial place of two kings, Aurelius and Uther (the father of King Arthur). Of course, Geoffrey is not alone in this use of the landscape. The same notion has manifested across the world, a thousand times over, from the prehistoric era to the present. After all, landscapes are, to quote Simon Schama, 'culture before they are nature; constructs of the imagination, projected onto god and water and rock'.<sup>137</sup>

Up to a point, Geoffrey's legitimisation of his history was a marked success. The *Historia regum Britanniae* was well regarded as an historical authority until the seventeenth century and appears to have gained popularity almost immediately.<sup>138</sup> This is evidenced by a copy of it already being in the possession of Bec Abbey, Normandy, when Geoffrey's contemporary Henry of Huntingdon visited there in 1139.<sup>139</sup> Although mainly read for historical information, there is also evidence that it was used to substantiate legal and historical documents.<sup>140</sup> The widespread readership of the *Historia regum Britanniae* is evidenced today

<sup>137</sup> Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 1995), p.61.

<sup>138</sup> Pablo García Loaeza, "Deeds to be Praised for all Time: Alva Ixtlilxochitl's *Historia de la Nación Chichimeca* and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*", *Colonial Latin American Review*, 23 (2014), 53-69 (p. 54).

<sup>139</sup> Valerie Flint, "The *Historia regum Britanniae* of Geoffrey of Monmouth: Parody and its Purpose: A Suggestion", *Speculum*, 54 (1979) .447-468 (p.447).

<sup>140</sup> García Loaeza, p.54.

with at least 215 extant manuscripts throughout Europe.<sup>141</sup> Geoffrey had two main critics in the Middle Ages, William of Newburgh and Gerald of Wales. William of Newburgh was an Augustinian canon from Yorkshire and the author of the late twelfth-century text *Historia rerum Anglicarum*, which covered the history of England from 1066-1198. In the *Historia rerum Anglicarum*, William suggested that Geoffrey had invented everything in his history that could not be found in Bede, and that he had done so ‘either because of his unbridled love of lying, or in order to please the Britons’, by which he almost certainly meant the Welsh.<sup>142</sup> Julia Crick suggested that Gerald of Wales’ dislike of Geoffrey’s work, on the other hand, may have come from his access to Welsh sources, which would have made it evident to him that Geoffrey was fabricating large portions of his history.<sup>143</sup> It has been suggested that both William and Gerald sought to discredit the *Historia regum Britanniae* because it was written in Latin, the language of historical truth, and they did not approve of Latin being used for things which they believed were not historical truths.<sup>144</sup> This would have played into a fear of Latin sources (the oldest sources) also being false.<sup>145</sup> However, William and Gerald appear to have had ulterior motives. They both disliked Henry II, and it may be that they criticised Geoffrey’s work because Henry approved of it and used it to further his own political aims.<sup>146</sup> Also, they were themselves both authors of histories of England and Wales, which they would have sought to promote. Geoffrey’s history did not overlap with William of Newburgh’s history chronologically, but it may be that William recognised that Geoffrey was using the past to talk about more recent history, as well as the present, and it was this to which he actually objected.

<sup>141</sup> García Loaeza, p.61.

<sup>142</sup> Stephen F. Lappert, “Malory’s Treatment of the Legend of Arthur’s Survival”, *Modern Language Quarterly*, (1975), 36(4), 354–368, (pp. 357-8)

<sup>143</sup> Julia Crick, “The British Past and the Welsh Future: Gerald of Wales, Geoffrey of Monmouth and Arthur of Britain”, *Celtica*, 23 (1999), 23-75 (p. 61).

<sup>144</sup> Robertson, p.52.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.* p.53.



As Pablo García Loaeza recently wrote, Geoffrey was not just writing or creating events, he was reshaping history, purposely selecting elements of the past in a process which ‘resulted in new structures of meaning, exemplary myths and legends that could serve as repeatable models of the past, present and future.’<sup>147</sup> After all, ‘the past was what made the present meaningful’.<sup>148</sup>

### **Geoffrey of Monmouth’s Intentions**

Although the legitimacy of his history was important, Karen Jankulak states that Geoffrey’s intention was not to write an account of real events, but rather a thematic story of the pre-Anglo-Saxon British past.<sup>149</sup> His desire was to fill a gap in the historical record, to give Britain a *prehistory*. Geoffrey’s history also had a number of aims beyond giving Britain an extended history. As Tatlock writes, the *Historia regum Britanniae* was not composed for churchmen or the populace, but for ‘favourable specimens of the upper-class laity’.<sup>150</sup> Ultimately it was a warning to the Anglo-Norman rulers of Britain so that they might learn from the mistakes of their predecessors. Moreover, it also offered an explanation about why the British dominion over England ended with the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons, as discussed by Bede, and to provide a new history for England’s Norman conquerors.<sup>151</sup> Michelle Warren writes that ‘one of the consequences of the Norman settlement of Britain was a reassessment of history, through which both colonisers and colonised sought to defend their collective identities’.<sup>152</sup> The *Historia regum Britanniae* developed out of this reassessment of history, and the emphasis on

<sup>147</sup> García Loaeza, p.56.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> Karen Jankulak, *Writers of Wales: Geoffrey of Monmouth*, (Lampeter: University of Wales Press, 2010), pp.2-3.

<sup>150</sup> John S.P. Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain: Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia Regum Britanniae and its Early Vernacular Versions* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1950), p. 395.

<sup>151</sup> Weiss, p.xvii.

<sup>152</sup> Michelle Warren, *History on the Edge: Excalibur and the Borders of Britain 1100-1300* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. xiii.

landscape features close to Anglo-Norman centres of power, such as Conisbrough, could help the new elite feel a connection to the landscape, by understanding it as well as inhabiting it. More than this, Geoffrey used analogies in order to talk about the present through the past. In this case the landscape is less important than the characters and events which occur there – the barrow is important because it is Hengist’s barrow, and Geoffrey expected his audience to use his comparison of Agag and Hengist to make their own links between Hengist and figures both in the present and more recent past. It must be acknowledged that Geoffrey was writing, at least partially, at the time of the succession crisis, and therefore this had a huge influence on the *Historia regum Britanniae*. This can be seen both in the demonstrations of good kingship and the theme of domestic treachery as a cause of national disaster, which run throughout Geoffrey’s text.<sup>153</sup> Geoffrey has often been assumed to be pro-Welsh or pro-British, including by his contemporaries such as William of Newburgh, however Michael Faletra suggested that this is not the case and that many of the British kings in the *Historia regum Britanniae* ‘appeared either as victims, sinners or fools, especially in the face of foreign invasion.’<sup>154</sup> Vortigern, the king who welcomed Hengist to Britain can easily be seen as all three of these. Rather than taking an obviously pro-Norman, Anglo-Saxon or British stance, Warren suggests that Geoffrey ‘equivocated between the admiration and condemnation of conquering history’.<sup>155</sup> He presented a history which allowed both sides to demonstrate positive and negative qualities, although it was also a history which was meant to demonstrate the mistakes of the past to try to prevent them reoccurring in the future. With the best aspects of kingship being exemplified in King Arthur, it is clear with the invader Hengist, Geoffrey was presenting much of the worst.

<sup>153</sup> Tatlock, p.xix.

<sup>154</sup> Michael Faletra, “The Conquest of the Past in the History of the Kings of Britain”, *Literature Compass*, 4 (2007), 121-133 (p.125).

<sup>155</sup> Warren, p.25.

## **Hengist & Horsa**

Hengist and his brother Horsa are legendary figures who, originally invited to settle in Britain by King Vortigern, led the Angles, Saxons and Jutes in the fifth century, eventually turning against the British. They are considered the traditional founders of the royal house of Kent in c.450CE.<sup>156</sup> Hengist and Horsa first appear in an English source in Bede's eighth-century *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Bede identified them as the leaders of the Saxon forces which Gildas, in his sixth century *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* ('On the Ruin and Conquest of Britain') stated were invited to Britain by King Vortigern to help fight against the Picts. Where Gildas did not name the leaders of the Saxons, Bede gave them not only names but a genealogy, making Hengist and Horsa the sons of Victgilsus, son of Vecta, son of Woden. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (compiled at Worcester and Peterborough in the eleventh and twelfth centuries respectively) gave the same details as Bede, but extended Hengist and Horsa's genealogy to: sons of Wihtgils, son of Witta, son of Wecta, son of Woden. Nennius' ninth-century text *Historia Brittonum* extended Hengist and Horsa's genealogy back a further five generations to Geta, the son of a pagan god. This provides a possible link to the kingdom of Lindsey, which Hengist was granted by Vortigern in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*. The first king of Lindsey in the eighth-century Anglican Collection of Genealogies was named Geot, of whom Woden was listed as an ancestor.

<sup>156</sup> Barbara Yorke, "Kings of Kent", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/52343>> [Accessed 12 February 2019]



Figure 9. Hengest of Kent, from John Speed, 1611, 'The Theatre of the Empire of Great Britaine'. Image: Cambridge University Library

### **Hengist in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae***

When Hengist first arrived in Britain in book six of the *Historia regum Britanniae* he informed Vortigern that he and his followers worshipped (amongst other unnamed deities) a number of gods, who the modern reader would recognise as belonging variously to the Roman Pantheon or Norse mythology: Saturn, Jupiter, Mercury (who Hengist explains is called Woden in the Germanic language) and Freya. This conflagration of different polytheistic religions may seem strange today, but not to the medieval theologian.<sup>157</sup> Once this combining of different pagan

<sup>157</sup> Carl Watkins, *History and the Supernatural in Medieval England*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.91.

religions and mythologies is acknowledged, it is possible to see that the notion of barrows as pagan burial mounds in this context could come from classical texts, as neither Geoffrey, nor any other twelfth-century writer of history, made a distinction between different pagan religions as the modern reader would. Of classical texts which were well known in medieval England, Virgil's *Aeneid* contains a clear description of a burial mound. In book six of the *Aeneid*, Palinurus, who had been sacrificed by the gods in the previous book, in order to provide safe passage for Aeneas and the rest of his followers, was told in the underworld that a mound would be built for him by the people who found his corpse and that the site would be named after him (*Aeneid* 6.78-81).

During the early medieval period, the Church played a part in the recognition and designation of barrows as pagan monuments.<sup>158</sup> As Geoffrey was a member of the clergy, his knowledge of pagan burial methods may well have come from the Church. For example, in the ninth century, a law of Charlemagne ordered '*jubemus et corpora Christianorum saxonum ad camiteria ecclesiae deferantur et non am tumulos paganorum*' ('and we command that all the bodies of Christian Saxons to be taken to the cemeteries, and not to the barrows of the pagans').<sup>159</sup> According to Lesley Abrams, around the same time in the 890s Bishop Formosus wrote to English bishops, saying "the abominable rites of the pagans have sprouted again in your parts".<sup>160</sup> Although both of these examples are early medieval, the same sentiment is echoed in Laȝamon's *Brut*, a Middle English version of the *Historia regum Britanniae*, where Vortimer intends to *aniðeri Hengestes laȝen & hine & his hæðene-scipe* ('put down Hengist's laws, him, and all his heathenship' (*Brut*, lines 7416-17)) which he brought with him to Britain.

<sup>158</sup> Sarah Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric in Anglo-Saxon England*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.108.

<sup>159</sup> Richard Colt-Hoare, *The Ancient History of Wiltshire, Vol. 1* (London: William Miller, 1812), p.29.

<sup>160</sup> Lesley Abrams, "Eleventh-Century Missions and the Early Stages of the Ecclesiastical Organisation in Scandinavia" in *Anglo-Norman Studies XVII: Proceedings of the Battle Conference 1994*, ed. by Christopher Harper-Bill, (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1995) pp. 20-40 (p. 21).

This passage was presumably written as part of *Lazamon's* aim to confirm Britain's status as a historically Christian country, and the validity of the English Church, and to emphasise that Britain's Christianity predated not only the Norman Conquest, but also the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons. Recently, Hannah Bailey wrote that this shows that Vortimer was concerned about the cultural threat of the pagans, which would linger as long as the Saxons were in Britain.<sup>161</sup> This desire to promote England's status as a Christian country prior to the Anglo-Saxons is also evident in Geoffrey and means that his one clear description of a barrow identified them as a type of burial which was not associated with the original British inhabitants of the landscape. It is interesting that barrows, some of the oldest artificial features in the English landscape were correctly being identified as pagan burial places but that this meant they were un-English, even un-British.

Much of the information we have about Hengist's character and his life comes from Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Nennius' *Historia Brittonum*, and of course Geoffrey's *Historia regum Britanniae*. We know that he and his brother were the leaders of a number of men who had been exiled from Germany. They arrived in Britain and met King Vortigern, who gave them the Isle of Thanet to live on, in exchange for fighting against his enemies, including the Picts and the Scots. According to *Historia Brittonum*, Vortigern later gave Hengist the whole of Kent in exchange for his marriage to Hengist's daughter Rowenna. Vortimer, the son of Vortigern, seeing how Hengist was taking over Britain, fought the Saxons four times. In the third battle Horsa was killed, and in the fourth battle Hengist and his men were driven out of Britain (*Historia Brittonum* 44). After Vortimer's death, Hengist returned to Britain. Meeting with Vortigern under the pretence of peace, he ordered his men to conceal their knives and on his order they massacred the Britons. In exchange for his own life Vortigern gave Hengist the

<sup>161</sup> Hannah McKendrick Bailey, "Conquest by Word" in *Reading Lazamon's Brut, Approaches and Explorations*, ed. by Rosamund Allen, Jane Roberts, & Carole Weinberg, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), pp. 269-286 (p. 278).

‘provinces’ of Essex, Sussex and Middlesex (*Historia Brittonum* 46). In Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia regum Britanniae*, this massacre took place close to Stonehenge. Geoffrey of Monmouth expanded the legend further, providing an additional two stories about Hengist. One of these is the description of his death, which will be discussed below. The other, from book six of *Historia regum Britanniae*, again showed Hengist’s cunning nature. Geoffrey tells us that Hengist asked Vortigern for permission to build a fortress on a piece of land small enough to be encircled by a leather thong. Vortigern agreed and Hengist made a thong out of the whole hide of a bull in order to encircle a piece of land he had already carefully chosen.

It is likely that Hengist and Horsa were mythical, legendary founders rather than historical figures. Hengist and Horsa’s alliterative names, meaning stallion and horse, also equate them with other legendary founders of nations, such as Romulus and Remus, the twin brothers who founded Rome. Nonetheless, that Hengist was a mythical figure has no bearing on his character in the *Historia regum Britanniae*, where he exists in the company of many fictional kings. Therefore, this chapter will present him as Geoffrey did; as a historical leader of the Anglo-Saxons during their arrival in England.

### ***Historia regum Britanniae*, Book Seven: Hengist’s Death and Burial**

In book seven of *Historia regum Britanniae*, having treacherously betrayed his ally, the British king Vortigern, Hengist was pursued by the army of Eldol, Duke of Gloucester and the new British king, Aurelius. After a battle at a place called *Maisbeli*, Hengist retreated to a town called *Cunungeburg* (called *Kaerconan* by the Britons, *Historia regum Britanniae* Book 8.4) generally identified as Conisbrough in South Yorkshire. Here Eldad, Bishop of Gloucester, ordered the execution of Hengist in the same manner as the execution of King Agag in the book of Samuel, saying:

‘Though all would be unanimous for setting him free, I would cut him into pieces. I would be following the example of the prophet Samuel, who, when he had Agag, king of the Amalekites in his power, cut him into pieces, saying: “As your sword has made mothers childless, so shall your mother be childless amongst women.” Therefore, do the same to Hengist, who is a second Agag.’

(*Historia regum Britanniae* Book 8.4)<sup>162</sup>

After Hengist’s sentence was passed Eldol, Duke of Gloucester, following the orders of his brother Eldad, took Hengist outside the town and beheaded him. Hengist was then buried by King Aurelius, *cumulum terrae super corpus pagano more apponi* (‘under a heap of earth, after the pagan custom’, *Historia regum Britanniae* Book 8.4)). This comparison between the Anglo-Saxons and the Amalekites is very telling. The Amalekites were the archetypal enemy of the Jews in the Old Testament, which suggests that here the Anglo-Saxons were being presented as the eternal enemy of the British. By using this analogy, Geoffrey was not only commenting on the actions of Hengist, a second Agag; he was also remarking on how the Anglo-Saxons later came to rule England. As with the story of Agag, the British failed to remove the threat of Hengist at the correct time, which led to them suffering further, even after his death, thereby requiring not only a second Aurelius, but a second Arthur to fully rid Britain of the latent Anglo-Saxon threat.

<sup>162</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, “*The History of the Kings of Britain*”: an edition and translation of “*De gestis Britonum*” (*Historia regum Britanniae*), ed. by D.M. Reeve, trans. by Neil Wright, (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2007), p. 168. All further translations of the *Historia regum Britanniae* in this thesis are taken from this edition, apart from individual words, or where a literal translation is needed.



Geoffrey's description of Hengist's death was also connected with his continual desire to emphasise the Christianity of the British kings and therefore the legitimacy and long history of the British Church, which extended much earlier than the English Church, and according to Geoffrey's history, possibly even the Church in Rome. It has been previously noted that Geoffrey often connected his version of history to biblical events; indeed, Jacob Hammer suggested this was done in order to validate it.<sup>163</sup> In this passage, however, it seems that Geoffrey used this verse from the Bible as both an analogy and an allegory. Through making a comparison between the executions of Agag and Hengist, he may have been inviting his readers to make further comparisons and to see the Hengist's burial and the events around it as analogies for the present and more recent past. This is not the only part of the *Historia* in which Geoffrey invited comparison with present events. Monika Otter notes that prior to this, in Merlin's prophecies, he challenged readers 'to equate the events described in his prophecy to events in their known history; thereby inviting them to perform a similar operation for the *Historia* as a whole'.<sup>164</sup>

It is equally important that this version of Hengist's death and his burial was created by Geoffrey. Neither Nennius, Gildas nor Bede, whom Geoffrey of Monmouth credits as the historians and chroniclers best known to him, describe the burial of Hengist. Nennius writes that Hengist dies but does not describe his death or burial in any detail. Bede also writes that Hengist died in 488CE but does not describe the circumstances of his demise. Bede does describe the burial of Hengist's brother Horsa, saying: *in orientalibus Cantice partibus monumentum habet suo nomini insigne*. ('In the east of Kent there is a monument which bears

<sup>163</sup> Jacob Hammer, "Geoffrey of Monmouth's Use of the Bible in the *Historia regum Britanniae*", *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 30 (1947), 293-310 (p. 293).

<sup>164</sup> Monika Otter, *Inventiones: Fiction and Referentiality in Twelfth-Century English History Writing* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), p. 75.

his name', *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1:15).<sup>165</sup> Of course, this assessment is ignoring the possibility that Geoffrey was translating an earlier British source, which is now considered very unlikely. In fact, in pre-Conquest sources, such as Bede, it is Horsa's death and burial which is described in some detail, whereas the post-Conquest sources, such as Geoffrey of Monmouth, merely state that Horsa died in a battle with Vortimer and describe Hengist's death and burial in greater detail. This perhaps demonstrates a difference in the representation of Anglo-Saxons after the Norman Conquest. Here focus switches to Hengist, who is reprehensible in his actions: he betrays his ally King Vortigern and is eventually executed as a criminal. Anglo-Norman historians such as William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon laid blame on previous actions of the English for the Norman Conquest,<sup>166</sup> just as earlier historians such as Gildas had blamed the Anglo-Saxon invasion and conquest on the sins of the British.

Conversely, Kenneth Tiller states that Geoffrey of Monmouth was more interested in British history, and in bridging the gap between the British and the Normans, than he was in blaming the English for their own downfall.<sup>167</sup> As none of Geoffrey's predecessors or assumed sources describe Hengist's burial, it is possible to suggest that all aspects of Hengist's death and burial were chosen specifically by Geoffrey, who used an imagined past to talk about the present.

Geoffrey connected his characters to particular places, mediating the process through which his audience encountered the past in the landscape. Monika Otter puts it eloquently when she says that Geoffrey's characters 'merge with the land ... a lasting contribution to the English landscape.'<sup>168</sup> More than that, however, they are a lasting contribution to English history, a

<sup>165</sup> Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, Bk 1, Chap. XV, quoted in John H. Evans, 'The Tomb of Horsa', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 65 (1952), 101-113 (p. 103).

<sup>166</sup> Elisabeth Van Houts, "History Writing" in *A Companion to the Anglo-Norman World*, ed. by Christopher Harper-Bill and Elisabeth van Houts, (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2002), 103-122 (p. 114).

<sup>167</sup> Kenneth J. Tiller, *Lazamon's Brut and the Anglo-Norman Vision of History* (Lampeter: University of Wales Press, 2007), p.64.

<sup>168</sup> Otter, p.70.

rewriting of the past which supplants the true antiquity of the site. The rewriting of history in this manner often causes the landscape to be caught up in current political uses of the past, although it is equally a change in political situation which inspires or requires it, with the rewriting of the past representing a renegotiation of space.<sup>169</sup> This appears to have been the case with Geoffrey of Monmouth, who was addressing themes of conquest in the recent past of the country (the Norman Conquest), as well as civil war in the present, and the Anglo-Norman conquest of Wales. A. Joseph McMullen has written about sites which were established during the Roman occupation of Wales as being ‘regenealogised’ during the Anglo-Norman occupation, to present them as places built by the Welsh.<sup>170</sup> Likewise, Yorkshire went through several stages of colonisation and occupation. The execution of Hengist at Conisbrough in the *Historia regum Britanniae* might be seen not only a metaphorical retaking of Yorkshire by the British, as McMullen sees the building of the castles in the twelfth-century Welsh text *Breuddwyd Macsen Wledig* (‘The Dream of Macsen Wledig’), but also representative of both the Danelaw and William the Conqueror’s actions against the north of England after 1066.

### **The Danelaw**

The Danelaw refers to the large swathe of England which was under Danish control in the latter half of the early medieval period. Originally conquered by the Great Heathen Army under Ívar the Boneless from 865CE onwards, and later ruled by Guthrum, the Danelaw stretched from London to Northumbria, although the Danes had managed to conquer the whole of England apart from Wessex before Alfred the Great forced Guthrum’s surrender and conversion to Christianity in 886 after the Battle of Edington. As its name suggests, the Danelaw along with

<sup>169</sup> A. Joseph McMullen, “Three Major Forts to be Built for Her: Rewriting History through the Landscape in *Breuddwyd Macsen Wledig*”, *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 31 (2011), 225-241 (p.239).

<sup>170</sup> McMullen, pp. 234-5.

West Saxon law and Mercian law referred to the ruling legal system of the area, rather than being a specifically geographical term. Equally, although any Danish control or ownership over England ended with the ‘Harrying of the North’ by William the Conqueror in the years after the Norman Conquest, the Danelaw continued to appear in the law codes of England, such as the laws of Henry I in the twelfth century. In the *Historia regum Britanniae*, the North East of England (the traditional home of the Danelaw) is referred to as a place where the Saxons were always welcomed. By equating the Saxons to the Danes in this way Geoffrey of Monmouth was creating a proto-Danelaw, where more recent history could be re-enacted in the distant past. In Geoffrey’s ‘Saxonlaw’, the native British do not allow the Saxon occupiers to remain in their stolen lands but force them out through a show of arms. This contrasts with Alfred the Great, Edward the Elder and Æthelflæd, Lady of the Mercians, who fought hard against the Danes to maintain control of their kingdoms of Wessex and Mercia but allowed the Danes to retain some of their lands in England such as Northumbria and Lindsay as the Danelaw.

### **Places of Power: Reading the Landscape**

As well as drawing on places which were important or had links to ruling power in the past, such as the Danelaw, Geoffrey also often mentioned places which were representative of Norman power.<sup>171</sup> If Conisbrough was not well known to the Anglo-Norman rulers of England, it would not make sense for Geoffrey to have located Hengist’s burial there, at as it would not have had the desired effect of allowing him to use the past as an analogy for the present.

That landscape was integral to Geoffrey’s work has, of course, been identified by other scholars. Indeed, as Gareth Griffith noted, there is little that takes place in the *Historia* without the reader being told where it is happening.<sup>172</sup> Although apart from place name studies, much

<sup>171</sup> Gareth W. Griffith, ‘Rhetorical Functions of Landscape in Early Middle English Literature’ (unpublished PhD thesis: University of Bristol, 2008), pp. 93-4.

<sup>172</sup> Griffith, p.88.

of the recent scholarship about landscapes in the *Historia regum Britanniae* has focused on natural places, rather than artificial, Hengist's barrow has never previously been discussed. Despite this, the general findings of that research are still useful for exploring how and why Geoffrey of Monmouth used landscape; it shows that Geoffrey and his contemporaries used methods from biblical exegesis, which looked for symbolic meaning in the Bible and applied it to their descriptions of place, as well as using ideas of natural landscape drawn from the Bible and classical epic.<sup>173</sup> As mentioned, the later medieval understanding of barrows may well have been enhanced by descriptions of barrows in important classical texts, such as Virgil's *Aeneid*, which was read in varying forms in the twelfth century, including a French vernacular version *Roman d'Eneas*.<sup>174</sup> Christine Chism characterises the landscape in *Historia regum Britanniae* as 'a living palimpsest, on which kings inscribe their petty deeds'.<sup>175</sup> But it is more than that; it speaks to deeper ideologies, of who has the right to occupy and control land, and the extent to which the dominant culture chooses to exercise that control. When Aurelius had Hengist buried according to the pagan customs he was allowing the Anglo-Saxon pagan culture to become part of the culturally Christian British landscape. It must be remembered that the English, including the rulers of England before the Conquest were, according to Geoffrey, still descended from the same line of Anglo-Saxons as Hengist, but the only places they have in the landscape of the *Historia* are those of death and destruction. Also, in the *Historia*, Britain (consisting of England and Wales) is presented as a united country long before that was the case. Indeed, during the period covered by Book 8 of the *Historia*, even England itself was nowhere close to being a united country. Jessica Farrell says that this 'united kingdom' is actually one of the main themes of early Welsh literature, an ideological aspiration

<sup>173</sup> Griffith, pp.6-7.

<sup>174</sup> Christopher Baswell, *Virgil in Medieval England: Figuring the Aeneid from the Twelfth Century to Chaucer*, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1995), p.15.

<sup>175</sup> Christine Chism, "Ain't Gonna Study War no More: Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* and *Vita Merlini*", *The Chaucer Review*, 48 (2014), 457-479 (p. 465).

reflected in the landscape.<sup>176</sup> It is similarly noteworthy that Anglo-Norman motte and bailey castles were often built on earlier centres of power, such as barrows.<sup>177</sup> Of course, Geoffrey using the landscape to speak about these deeper ideologies relied on his audience understanding what he was doing. Griffith states that the way landscapes were used in the ‘authoritative texts’ read by medieval literate classes shaped the ways in which they interpreted and interacted with landscapes, both in the real world and in sources such as Geoffrey’s *Historia*.<sup>178</sup> However, the audience to whom Geoffrey was trying to speak through the *Historia regum Britanniae* was not necessarily one trained in biblical exegesis.<sup>179</sup> Whilst Geoffrey expected an understanding of landscape from his audience, and used this expected knowledge to signpost certain points, his lay audience were not always able to read the text as deeply as Geoffrey intended.<sup>180</sup>

### **The Life of the Monument**

Despite Geoffrey’s lay audience’s inability to necessarily read the text in the manner he intended, the influence of *Historia regum Britanniae* allowed the history and sense of place given to the barrow by Geoffrey to become ingrained as a tradition for the lifespan of the monument. For example, a number of centuries later, in William Camden’s sixteenth-century chorographical *Britannia*, it is stated that before the gates of Conisbrough Castle was ‘an *agger*, said by tradition to be the burying-place of Hengist’.<sup>181</sup> *Agger* is a Middle English word

<sup>176</sup> Jennifer Farrell, “History, Prophecy and the Arthur of the Normans: The Question of Audience and Motivation behind Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia regum Britanniae*” in *Anglo-Norman Studies 37: Proceedings of the Battle Conference 2014* (2014), 99-114 (p.102).

<sup>177</sup> Paul Barnwell, “The Power of Peak Castle: Cultural Contexts and Changing Perceptions”, *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 160 (2007), 20-38 (p. 33).

<sup>178</sup> Gareth Griffith, “Reading the Landscapes of Layamon’s *Arthur*: Place, Meaning and Intertextuality” in *Reading Layamon’s Brut: Approaches and Explorations*, ed. by Rosamund Allen, Jane Roberts and Carole Weinberg, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), 643-660 (p. 645).

<sup>179</sup> Griffith, *Rhetorical functions of landscape*, p.242.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>181</sup> William Camden, *Britannia or a Chorographical Description of Great Britain and Ireland, together with the Adjacent Islands*, ed. by Dana F. Sutton (2014) <<http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/cambrit/>> [Accessed 4 December 2018]

meaning heap or pile, coming from Latin ‘rubble, mound or rampart’. In classical Rome it usually referred to artificial earthwork embankments but was used generally to mean a mound.<sup>182</sup> It is not clear whether Camden was referring to the *Historia* here, or whether there was a distinct local tradition which had developed independently of Geoffrey. Even though it may be the case that the tradition of the mound at Conisbrough Castle being the burial place of Hengist already existed during Geoffrey’s time, Geoffrey is the earliest extant written source to connect Hengist to Conisbrough, or indeed to describe Hengist’s death. The idea of Geoffrey working from an older British text, which may have contained this information has also been dismissed by many scholars. There is the possibility that the legend was already in existence, but not previously recorded. If so, Geoffrey may have heard it from someone who had visited Conisbrough, because he does not appear to have visited there. Monika Otter has noted that Geoffrey often played with people’s knowledge of local legends in the *Historia*, and that these local legends may or may not have been real, such as the prophetic ‘eagle of Shaftsbury’ which is dismissed by Geoffrey as fanciful, despite not appearing in any sources before the *Historia*.<sup>183</sup>

Geoffrey was also not the only later medieval author to connect a pre-existing barrow to historical events. The same occurs in the later fourteenth-century anonymous poem the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*. Here after a battle Arthur had his men heap earth over the graves of the fallen so that they would be recognised by passersby. The events described in this passage took place at Canterbury, which would have had several large barrows such as Pin Hill, Oaten Hill, Salt Helle and Little Dungeon, located just outside the city walls.<sup>184</sup> Someone

<sup>182</sup> "agger, n." in The Oxford English Dictionary Online, <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/3884?redirectedFrom=agger>> [accessed 4 January 2019]

<sup>183</sup> Otter, p.81.

<sup>184</sup> William Urry, *Canterbury under the Angevin kings*, (London: Athlone Press, 1967), includes folio of maps of Canterbury c. 1200 which reference several of these as tumuli.

who had visited or knew Canterbury may well have made the connection between the heaps of earth in the poem and the barrows, although the author of the poem does not appear to have had any particular link to Canterbury.

### **A Continuing Tradition**

The most famous reference to the tradition of Hengist's barrow at Conisbrough, outside of the *Historia regum Britanniae*, dates to 1820 in Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*. In his description of Conisbrough Scott wrote: 'a barrow, in the vicinity of the castle, is pointed out as the tomb of the memorable Hengist'.<sup>185</sup> By the early nineteenth century, it appears that the mound had worn away. When the Rev. Joseph Hunter wrote about the history of Conisbrough in 1828 he found that the mound 'said to be Hengist's tomb' was 'now scarcely to be discerned'.<sup>186</sup> After this there are few references made to Hengist's tomb or mound, and there is no tumulus marked on the early series OS maps. Whilst Geoffrey was clearly very successful at promoting or creating this tradition of Hengist's mound, it only lasted as long as the monument itself. This demonstrates the importance of landscape features not only in the creation of traditions and legends but also in the retention of them. Whilst there is no evidence of a tradition which connects Hengist to Yorkshire more generally until the *Historia regum Britanniae*, Hengist's mound at Conisbrough Castle is not the only barrow associated with Hengist in the local area. King Hengist Rein is a Neolithic long cairn located within five miles of Conisbrough. There is very little information about this barrow, or where the name came from, but the word 'rein' in Old Norse can signify a long bank of earth or gravel.<sup>187</sup> Considering that this barrow is not

<sup>185</sup> Sir Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe; A Romance* (London: Hurst, Robinson & Co, 1820), p.505.

<sup>186</sup> Rev. Joseph Hunter, *South Yorkshire: The History and Topography of the Deanery of Doncaster in the Diocese and County of York, Vol. 1*, (London: J.B. Nichols & Son, 1828), pp.97–107.

<sup>187</sup> Harald Lindkvist, *Middle-English Place-names of Scandinavian Origin* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Uppsala, 1912) p.74.



mentioned in any written sources before the mid-nineteenth century, it may be that once the mound at Conisbrough had disappeared, the legend somehow transferred onto this long cairn.

### **Conisbrough Castle**



*Figure 10. Conisbrough Castle, photo author's own*

Conisbrough (or *Cunungeburg*, as Geoffrey calls it), appears as *Cuningesburg* in the Domesday Book. Its name derives from the Old English *Cyningesburh*, meaning ‘king’s fort or stronghold’. Although also referred to in the *Historia regum Britanniae* as *Kaerconan*, this appears to be a faux-British name invented by Geoffrey which had the effect of extending the town’s history back even further than the Anglo-Saxon origins the name *Cunungeburg* would suggest. With a lengthy entry in the Domesday Book it is clear that Conisbrough was an important place around the time of the Conquest. Prior to 1066 it belonged to King Harold and was a large estate covering twenty-eight townships. Paul Dalton has suggested that Conisbrough may have been a liberty before the Conquest; that is, a place to which the king

had granted the privilege for the owner of the estate to minister their own justice.<sup>188</sup> Conisbrough was probably fortified before the Conquest, and was afterwards given by William the Conqueror to his cousin William de Warenne who then constructed a motte and bailey castle on the site.<sup>189</sup> According to Dalton, it was one of the most important places in Yorkshire after the Conquest and there was a ‘powerful’ castle at Conisbrough by the twelfth century.<sup>190</sup> The estate of Conisbrough covered much of South Yorkshire and by 1086 William de Warenne commanded 300 peasants and 108 plough-teams, around three times the national average of plough-teams per hide of land.<sup>191</sup>

### **Making Connections, Writing Parallels**

By connecting Conisbrough to an important national event – the execution of the first Anglo-Saxon invader of Britain - as well as making it his burial place, Geoffrey was helping explain how Conisbrough had become an important place and giving it a history, which matched its status. However, this link between landscape and history also helped create a sense of place which emphasised the connection between past events at Conisbrough and its recent owners. It is one of the ways in which Geoffrey seemingly encouraged his audience to make connections between events in his *Historia* and contemporary political situations. Similarly, both Stephen Knight and J. S. P. Tatlock have recognised several individuals from Geoffrey’s time who appear in the *Historia* in the guise of figures from the past.<sup>192</sup> Knight, for example, identified the British King Mempricus as an analog for William Rufus. Robert of Gloucester, the first Earl of Gloucester and illegitimate son of Henry I, who led his half-sister Matilda’s

<sup>188</sup> Paul Dalton, *Conquest, Anarchy, and Lordship: Yorkshire, 1066-1154* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 33.

<sup>189</sup> Dalton, p.33.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>191</sup> Dawn Hadley, *The Northern Danelaw and its Social Structure c. 800-1100* (London: Continuum, 2000), p. 142; Dalton, p. 33.

<sup>192</sup> Stephen Knight, *Arthurian Literature and Society*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1983), pp.46-7.

armies against Stephen and to whom Geoffrey dedicated the *Historia regum Britanniae*, is recognisable in the characters of the duke and bishop of Gloucester, both of whom played important roles in Book 8. Indeed, it was the duke and bishop of Gloucester who made the decisive moves which rid England of Hengist. Comparisons can also be made between characters in the *Historia* and historical figures through their actions. For instance, there is a notable similarity between Geoffrey's description of Aurelius' construction of Stonehenge (*Historia regum Britanniae* Book 8.9) and William the Conqueror's building of Battle Abbey.<sup>193</sup>

It is not just people, but also places which find their analogues in the *Historia regum Britanniae*. Knight suggests that William the Conqueror's 'Harrying of the North' may be mirrored in Arthur's defeat of the Picts and Scots before rebuilding all the churches in the north, in Book 9 of the *Historia regum Britanniae*.<sup>194</sup> It seems feasible too that both the 'Harrying of the North' and the Norman Conquest itself are reflected in Aurelius' defeat of Hengist. In Book 8 of the *Historia* Geoffrey wrote that after burying Hengist, Aurelius 'settled the whole kingdom, revived the laws, and restored the heirs to the possessions of their ancestors and those estates where heirs had been lost in the grievous calamity he redistributed amongst his fellow soldiers' (*Historia regum Britanniae* 8.9). Aurelius also rebuilt all the churches in York and the surrounding area, as well as restoring London, Winchester and Salisbury. By comparison, after the Conquest William built the White Tower at London, and doubled the size of the royal enclosure at Winchester.<sup>195</sup> After the 'Harrying of the North' he founded St Mary's Abbey at York and possibly a monastery at nearby Selby, before eventually disbanding his troops in Salisbury.<sup>196</sup> William also redistributed estates amongst his own followers. He did

<sup>193</sup> John, S.P. Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain: Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia Regum Britanniae and its Early Vernacular Versions*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1950) p.41.

<sup>194</sup> Knight, p.50.

<sup>195</sup> David Bates, *William the Conqueror*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016) p.324.

<sup>196</sup> Bates, pp. 319-21.

treat some English favourably; however, mostly he gave lands to those he trusted or to whom he needed to reward for their service during the Conquest.<sup>197</sup> It is possible William's removal of the Anglo-Scandinavian elite from the north of England could be represented in a positive light in the *Historia*, as it seems to be echoed in Aurelius' settling of the kingdom and restoration of the laws. With the end of the Danelaw and the Anglo-Norman attempts to conquer Wales, the vision of a united 'Britain' as espoused in the *Historia* was on the way to being achieved, albeit not under circumstances which would benefit the native inhabitants.

### **The Harrying of the North**

Much of the scholarship around conquest and colonisation in the *Historia regum Britanniae* focuses on the Anglo-Norman conquest of Wales. Nevertheless, it must not be forgotten that William's 'Harrying of the North' was still very much present in the national consciousness when Geoffrey was writing in the 1130s. Around the same time Orderic Vitalis wrote about it in the most dramatic terms, saying:

'The King stopped at nothing to hunt his enemies. He cut down many people and destroyed homes and land. Nowhere else had he shown such cruelty... He ordered that crops and herds, tools and food be burned to ashes. More than 100,000 people perished of starvation. I have often praised William in this book, but I can say nothing good about this brutal slaughter. God will punish him.'

(*Historia Ecclesiastica of Orderic Vitalis*. Book 4, Chapter 5)<sup>198</sup>

<sup>197</sup> Bates, p. 323.

<sup>198</sup> Ordericus Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of England and Normandy*, trans. by Thomas Forester, (London:H.G. Bohn, 1853), p. 28

Some scholars have suggested that the scale of devastation caused by the Harrying was hugely exaggerated in literary sources.<sup>199</sup> Regardless of the true scale, it is important to acknowledge that it was remembered and written about as a devastating event in Geoffrey's time. Geoffrey was not making a direct comparison between the actions of William and either Hengist or Aurelius but appears instead to have used subtler methods. He gave his readers the setting (Yorkshire), an allegory (the Old Testament story of Samuel and Agag), an event (the execution of the leader of the Anglo-Saxon occupiers), and a result (Aurelius rebuilding churches and repairing towns – towns which had connections both to William's movements after the Conquest and to the 'Harrying of the North') and relied on his audience's ability to understand that he was asking them to make connections between the past and the present, and to actually make those connections.

The 'Harrying of the North' may not have been the only event to which Geoffrey wanted his audience to make a comparison. After all, the damage repaired by Aurelius was caused not by his army but by the Anglo-Saxons, and William would have considered his actions in the North a justifiable part of kingly rule, part of the process of gaining control over the country.<sup>200</sup> Just before the death of Hengist in Book 8 of the *Historia regum Britanniae*, it says that the Saxons fled in fear of Aurelius and 'retired beyond the Humber and in those parts fortified the cities and towns, for that part of the country was always a place of safety for them' (*Historia regum Britanniae* 8.3) This constructed the north of England as a place associated with supporting the Anglo-Saxon cause against the British and therefore deserving of William's later actions. It may also have been images of the events leading up to the 'Harrying of the North' which Geoffrey wanted to evoke in his audience. In 1068, just two years after the Norman Conquest, both the Earl of Northumbria, appointed by William, and his successor had

<sup>199</sup> Bates, p. 314.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.* p.317.

been murdered and the new Earl Gospatrick had joined with Edgar Ætheling against William. Edgar Ætheling was, of course, the surviving Anglo-Saxon candidate for king of England alongside William and Harold, as he was the great-nephew of Edward the Confessor. He was elected king after Harold's death at Hastings but never crowned. With support from Scotland and the Danish king he joined two rebellions against William in 1069. The first was defeated at York, but the second, buoyed by a force sent by Swein, king of Denmark, defeated the Norman forces at York, taking control over Northumbria. William's reaction to this was the 'Harrying of the North'.

Knight says that Geoffrey reworked 'disturbing events from the past' and presented them 'in an acceptable, value-ridden way.'<sup>201</sup> It can be seen here that Geoffrey also took events from the present, as well as the much more recent past such as the Norman Conquest and its aftermath, and presented them in the guise of the distant past. In doing so, some of William's more controversial actions became more acceptable when undertaken by his equivalent Aurelius, whom Geoffrey said showed moderation in all his conduct (*Historia regum Britanniae* 8.4). Nonetheless, it is possible to see elements of William's actions reflected in Hengist's destruction of the churches on his retreat to Conisbrough. A prime example of this would be William's sacking of York and desecration of the cathedral.<sup>202</sup> It should also be noted that Conisbrough is much further south than York and appears not to have been affected by the 'Harrying of the North', but in fact prospered under its new Norman lord.

William's 'Harrying of the North' was not the end of violence in Yorkshire. There were a number of other incursions into the region between 1069 and 1086, including a further three carried out by William's forces, two from Scotland, as well as Danish occupation around the

<sup>201</sup> Knight, p. 53.

<sup>202</sup> Bates, p. 305.

Humber estuary and York.<sup>203</sup> Equally, the devastation caused by the routing of the Saxons from the North in book eight falls into a cyclical pattern through the remainder of the *Historia regum Britanniae*. After defeating Hengist and rebuilding the country, Aurelius, on advice from Eldad, the bishop of Gloucester, gave Hengist's sons Octa and Eosa, and their followers 'the country bordering Scotland' (*Historia regum Britanniae* 8.8). Immediately after Aurelius' death, however, the Saxons rose up and once again 'destroyed all the fortified places from Scotland to York' (*Historia regum Britanniae* 8.18). The Britons defeated the Saxons under Aurelius' brother Uther, and again the cities were repaired and peace was restored (*Historia regum Britanniae* 8.18). This cycle was repeated a further two times until after the death of Arthur when the Britons became consumed by civil war. The Saxons controlled the north and eventually took over the whole of Britain, as the British were too busy fighting each other. This takes on especial significance considering that Geoffrey is thought to have written Books 8-11 of the *Historia* after Stephen's accession to the throne, and with England under the threat of civil war.<sup>204</sup> As well as a commentary on the Norman Conquest, and the ensuing violence in Yorkshire, the cyclical nature of violence in these books was surely meant as a warning to the Anglo-Norman rulers of England, to show them the danger they were in and how little the Norman Conquest had meant if they engaged in a civil war. This idea was recognised by Monika Otter when she wrote that 'Geoffrey's *Historia* does not draw up simple didactic parallels between a contemporary conquest of Britain and an earlier paradigmatic one ... instead making a pattern of conquest, and all that leads up to it, available for a more inclusive and less univocal reflection'.<sup>205</sup> Conversely, where Otter states that Geoffrey was political, but not in the service of one particular faction, it could be said that in this case he was acting

<sup>203</sup> Bates, p. 316.

<sup>204</sup> Farrell, p. 107.

<sup>205</sup> Otter, p. 75.

specifically in the interests of the Anglo-Norman rulers, in an attempt to stop them making what he saw as the mistakes of the past. It is feasible to see the *Historia* as being critical of William the Conqueror but to still have this aim at its heart.

Geoffrey of Monmouth has often been viewed as having an allegiance to the Welsh, primarily based on the equation of the ancient Britons in *Historia regum Britanniae* with the Welsh, and the fact that Monmouth is in Wales. This is one reason that the majority of previous scholarship about conquest and landownership in the *Historia* focuses on Norman incursions into Wales. On one hand, Geoffrey's contemporary William of Newburgh accused him of having Welsh sympathies and the *Historia regum Britanniae* was very well received in medieval Wales, where it was translated into Welsh in the thirteenth century as the *Brut y Brenhinedd* (the Chronicle of Kings). However, as Jessica Farrell reminds us, it is important to distinguish between the reception or impact of a text and the author's intentions.<sup>206</sup> Geoffrey may have been writing about Wales to a certain extent; however it is important to make a number of points which aid the argument that Geoffrey was writing to advise or warn the Anglo-Norman elite, rather than to chastise them for their actions in Wales. Firstly, it must be noted that according to the Domesday Book, in 1086 Monmouth was in the hands of Breton supporters of the Normans who had relocated there after the Conquest.<sup>207</sup> Geoffrey being of Breton rather than Welsh origin is highlighted at several points in the *Historia*. For example his 'ancient British text' is specifically noted to be from Brittany, not Wales.<sup>208</sup> Equally, Geoffrey said both the Welsh and the Bretons are descendants of the British, but that the Welsh are 'unworthy successors of the British' and he is dismissive of recent Welsh history.<sup>209</sup> Being descended from Breton supporters of the Normans would certainly give Geoffrey a motive for

<sup>206</sup> Farrell, p.101.

<sup>207</sup> Farrell, p. 101.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.* p. 103.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.* p.102.



writing a history of Britain which praised the Bretons, dismissed the Welsh and sought to offer warning to the Anglo-Norman rulers.

### **Comparing Kings**

William the Conqueror is not the only figure to whom Geoffrey was encouraging his audience to make a comparison in this section of the *Historia*. Returning to the passage from the Old Testament quoted by the bishop of Gloucester, we can explore other associations made between the biblical characters and the characters in Geoffrey's *Historia*, and by extension the analogies Geoffrey was making between these characters and important figures from the present and more recent past. According to the passage from the Old Testament (1 Samuel 15:8-33) Saul, the king of Israel had been told by God to kill all of the Amalekites, including Agag. However, he decided to merely capture Agag as well as the best of the Amalekites' livestock. Saul was then rejected by God for not obeying his commandments and replaced as king by David. There is a distinct similarity between the story of Saul and Agag, and that of Vortigern, king of the Britons in *Historia regum Britanniae*. Vortigern had several opportunities to eliminate Hengist; however, he did not take them and accepted a peace-meeting with him instead. Here Hengist had his men hide their knives and then on his order they massacred the Britons. Saul and Vortigern can be compared; both are kings who are rejected by God and who fail to execute their enemy at the correct time, thus bringing further suffering upon their people. Agag and Hengist are captured and executed, although only after they have committed further offences against their enemies. It is interesting that the piety of Eldad, the bishop of Gloucester, who stands before the king and calls for the dismemberment of Hengist, is especially emphasised, as he takes on the role of the prophet Samuel. Aurelius, the new king of the Britons would then be the equivalent of King David.

As Geoffrey of Monmouth made a comparison between Agag and Hengist, and by extension between the biblical King David and Aurelius, it seems likely that he intended his

readers would make further comparisons, between Geoffrey's characters and figures from the more recent past. Similarities have already been discussed in the actions of Aurelius and William, the new kings. In eleventh-century commentaries on the battle of Hastings, such as Guy of Amien's *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* and William of Poitier's *Gesta Guillelmi*, William was often compared to the Ancient Greek hero Achilles. By comparing William to Aurelius, Geoffrey was moving away from discussions of William solely as a warrior or general. Whilst they are not direct analogues of each other, Geoffrey was using the character of Aurelius to comment both on good kingship and on the actions and character of William, without addressing incidents like the 'Harrying of the North' directly and potentially offending his Anglo-Norman patrons. Similarly, the character of Hengist in the *Historia regum Britanniae* can be compared to Harold Godwinson; there are distinct similarities between Hengist's burial in the *Historia* and Harold's burial in the eleventh-century poem *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*. Conisbrough Castle itself provided a connection between Harold and Hengist, as the town of Conisbrough and the surrounding estate belonged to Harold before the battle of Hastings. The *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* is a poem about the battle of Hastings which is thought to have been written in early 1067 by a Norman, Guy, bishop of Amiens. Harold's burial in the *Carmen* is discussed further in the next chapter, nevertheless, the similarities between the descriptions of the deaths and burials of Hengist and Harold are similar. It seems probable that Geoffrey intended his description of Hengist's burial to act as the starting point for comparisons between the personalities and actions of the two men. Ultimately this comparison to the evil Hengist means the passage from the *Historia regum Britanniae* passes a rather harsh judgement on Harold.

Although soon supplanted with Harold's arrow through the eye, details of Harold's death from the *Carmen* appear in twelfth-century sources such as William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, so it was clearly a well-known version of the narrative when Geoffrey was

writing, although Geoffrey most probably knew it from William of Poitiers *Gesta Guillemi*. In the *Carmen* Harold is decapitated, as Hengist is in the *Historia*, but then his body is dismembered: ‘the second with his sword cut off his head below the protection of his helm, the third liquefied his entrails with his spear, and the fourth cut off his thigh and carried it some distance away’. (*Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* lines 545-8).<sup>210</sup> In the *Historia regum Britanniae* the bishop of Gloucester would have had Hengist killed in a similarly violent fashion, saying: ‘even if everyone were eager for his release, I would still cut him into pieces’. (*Historia regum Britanniae* 8.4). Whilst in the *Historia*, King Aurelius stepped in and had Hengist buried before this could happen, William did not. Aurelius is cast as a moderate man for these actions, but that does not mean William would necessarily be judged badly for his part, as he was not present when Harold was killed – and it must not be forgotten that the prophet Samuel, who hacked Agag into pieces himself, was a righteous man. According to the *Carmen*, amongst other sources, after the battle William would not give Harold’s body over to his mother, instead ordering him to be buried *aggere sub lapidum* (‘under a mound of stones’. (*Carmen* line 584)) on the shore of the sea. The description of Harold’s burial under a cairn is also echoed in Hengist’s barrow burial, providing another point of comparison. It is important to note that whilst Hengist was a pagan, Harold was not, and Hengist’s burial according to the pagan customs could easily be seen as an uncharitable reference to William’s unchristian burial of Harold. Indeed, this criticism of William is echoed in the lines above the description of Harold’s burial which state that William left the bodies of the English ‘to be eaten by the worms and wolves, by birds and dogs’ (*Carmen*, line 571). Where Aurelius is moderate, William is *iratus* (‘enraged,’ (*Carmen*, line 582)).

<sup>210</sup> trans. in Frank Barlow, *The Carmen de Hastingae Proelio of Guy Bishop of Amiens* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), p. 33.

Like the *Histora regum Britanniae*, the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* also uses historical and literary references to make comments about the character of the kings. When Harold's mother offered William gold in exchange for her son's body, this was echoing Priam's offer to Achilles in the *Iliad*; however, unlike Achilles William did not take the gold. Bates suggests that by using classical references both the *Carmen* and William of Poitiers's *Gesta Guillelmi*, which contains the same story, were making coded criticisms of William, or at least expressing an ambivalence towards him, despite the fact that both Guy of Amiens and William of Poitiers were Norman.<sup>211</sup> It is also possible to see an ambivalence towards William in Geoffrey's comparison of him to Aurelius. By inference, William is no Arthur. Aurelius was a good, moderate king, whose nephew Arthur was the hero of Geoffrey's history (suggesting that William's descendants also have the opportunity to be second Arthurs) but the *Historia* does not grant William that glory; indeed, when the description of William's actions in the *Carmen* are compared to Aurelius, William is not presented favourably. Equally, by comparing Harold to Hengist, the *Historia* was unequivocal in its condemnation. In this vein, it is not only through death that the *Historia* demonstrates parallels between Harold and Hengist. Harold's broken oath of submission to William is represented in the *Historia* in Hengist's broken oath to Vortigern. These broken oaths led to a great loss of life and terrible consequences for the country. Harold allegedly swore his oath on relics, meaning he not only broke his oath to William, but also to God, condemning himself to eternal suffering long before his barrow burial. Similarly, both Harold and Hengist are Anglo-Saxon usurpers, and William is preventing Harold from destroying the country, just as Aurelius stopped Hengist.

<sup>211</sup> Bates, p.246.

## **Lessons from History**

The cyclical violence in the *Historia regum Britanniae*, which is continued by the Anglo-Saxons well after Hengist's death is a reminder that not only are all Anglo-Saxons as bad as Hengist, but that they only have a claim to Britain because the British themselves failed to rule the country correctly, not because they are worthy kings. This feeds into the suggestion from Steven Knight that the *Historia regum Britanniae* was an attempt to justify the Norman Conquest.<sup>212</sup> Bates asks why the 'slaughter of an obviously defeated army' was necessary after Harold's death at Hastings.<sup>213</sup> The *Historia* easily answers this through example – Aurelius does not go on to have all of Hengist's army killed, or even Hengist's sons, and the Anglo-Saxons eventually return to conquer Britain. Beyond that, however, this section of the *Historia regum Britanniae* was also a commentary on kingship, and on who had the right to rule. William might have been a conqueror, like Hengist, but William was justified in his conquering because he was the rightful king of England, whereas Harold, despite the legitimacy of his claim to the throne was an oath-breaking usurper. Ultimately, through these comparisons the *Historia* was explaining who had the power to control and construct the English landscape, and that what they choose to construct or destroy was a representation of both their character and their kingship.

## **Reading the *Historia*: Geoffrey's Allegories**

In his use of biblical references and allegory, Geoffrey was utilising a well-established tradition of symbolism within the Church. William Durandus' thirteenth-century treatise *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum*, a commentary on symbolism in the medieval church, provides a guide to interpreting biblical writing through the four 'senses':

<sup>212</sup> Knight, p. 44.

<sup>213</sup> Bates, p. 246.

One must be aware of the fact that in the Holy Scriptures there exists an historical, an allegorical, a tropologic and an anagogic sense... we should examine the divine scriptures in three ways: Firstly according to the literal sense, secondly according to the allegorical meaning and thirdly according to future blessings.<sup>214</sup>

(The Proeme from the *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum* of William Durand, Bishop of Mende,")

It is possible to apply the same principles to a reading of the *Historia regum Britanniae*, acknowledging its literal meaning as a history of Britain and its use of allegory and analogy through which events and characters can be compared. The tropological sense, according to William Durandus, provided 'a way of speaking about morality so as to either form or correct behaviour'.<sup>215</sup> This can be seen in the advice and warnings Geoffrey's *Historia* provides for the current Anglo-Norman rulers of Britain. Whilst we cannot say for certain that Geoffrey expected his audience to read the *Historia* in this manner, this is how Geoffrey himself would have been trained to read biblical symbolism. Certainly, Geoffrey was not the only medieval history writer to use symbolism in this manner; Björn Weiler has written at some length about how Matthew Paris did exactly this in his thirteenth-century chronicles. Matthew Paris, like Geoffrey, was writing history which not only provided information about the past, but acted 'as a storehouse of communal memory' - aiding in the transmission of morality from the past

<sup>214</sup> "The Proeme from the *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum* of William Durand, Bishop of Mende," trans. by Fr. Rama Coomaraswamy, in *The Rationale Divinorum Officiorum* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2007), p. xxi.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.* p. xxii.

to the present, which could help the community confront problems it may experience in both the present and the future.<sup>216</sup> This salvic function, was just one function of medieval history writing, it also had a hermeneutic function; it offered guidance on how to read history and thereby unlock the moral guidance contained in it.<sup>217</sup> Medieval histories and chronicles did this, Weiler suggests, not only through offering examples which showed how ‘morally appropriate actions’ occurred in the past, but through the use of parallels.<sup>218</sup> Like Geoffrey, Matthew Paris made frequent use of parallels, often describing two events in exactly the same manner so that his audience could clearly see the differences between them.<sup>219</sup> According to Weiler, Matthew did this in order to demonstrate to his audience not only how to read history, but to use events in the past to make comparisons to the present.<sup>220</sup> This is exactly what this thesis argues Geoffrey of Monmouth intended his audience to do, and it may not be a coincidence that both Geoffrey and Matthew used parallels in such a similar manner. Weiler has argued that history writing in St Albans in the early thirteenth century, when Matthew Paris wrote his chronicle, was heavily influenced by a number of chronicles and histories copied there, including the *Historia regum Britanniae*.<sup>221</sup>

If Geoffrey anticipated that his audience would interpret his history in this manner, he could use allegory and parallels not only just to legitimise his version of the past, but to draw out deeper symbolic meaning. He would have expected his audience would be able to make comparisons between the past and the present without him writing about present political concerns openly. But to what extent was Geoffrey successful in this approach? By exploring

<sup>216</sup> Björn Weiler, “Matthew Paris on the Writing of History”, *Journal of Medieval History*, 35, (2009), pp. 254-278, (p. 271).

<sup>217</sup> Björn Weiler, "Historical writing in Medieval Britain: the case of Matthew Paris" in *The Oxford Handbook of Historical Writing in Britain, 1100-1300*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>218</sup> Weiler, *Matthew Paris on the Writing of History*, p. 276.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.* p. 272.

<sup>220</sup> Weiler, *The Case of Matthew Paris*, pp. 330-1.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 325-6.

how this passage from the *Historia regum Britanniae* was adapted in three twelfth-century derivatives of Geoffrey, Alfred of Beverly's *Historia Aluredi Beverlacensis*, Wace's *Roman de Brut* and Lazamon's *Brut*, it is possible to see how successful Geoffrey's presentation of the past as an analogy for the present was.

### **Adapting the Story: Alfred of Beverly**

Alfred of Beverly's *Historia Aluredi Beverlacensis* is unusual amongst all other later medieval texts which repeat this passage from the *Historia regum Britanniae*, in that it repeats the description of Hengist's burial word for word. Beverley, where Alfred lived, is in Yorkshire around fifty miles north east of Conisbrough. There was no particular connection between the two towns in the twelfth century, although both were clearly important places after the Norman Conquest. Beverley itself is said to have been spared in the 'Harrying of the North' in part because of its saintly founder John (Bishop of Hexham and York in the late seventh and early eighth centuries). Indeed, a *vita* of John of Beverley was written sometime shortly after 1066.

Thought to have been composed in around 1148-51, Alfred's *Historia Aluredi Beverlacensis* seems originally to have had had limited circulation, but became widely cited from the early fourteenth to the seventeenth century.<sup>222</sup> The *Historia Aluredi Beverlacensis* was the first Latin chronicle to incorporate the *Historia regum Britanniae* by reworking it into the body of the text, rather than just by inserting it as a separate section as in Henry of Huntingdon, and more recently it has been been condemned as holding little originality or value.<sup>223</sup> Alfred's history was always intended to be an abridgement of Geoffrey of Monmouth's work, according to its prologue.<sup>224</sup> Interestingly, when Alfred adapted the passage he omitted Geoffrey's biblical analogy. Alfred claimed to only be keeping sections

<sup>222</sup> John P. Slevin, 'The Historical Writing of Alfred of Beverly' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Exeter, 2013) p.14.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.* p. 14.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.* p. 112.



from Geoffrey's work which he either believed were credible, or he could compare against other sources.<sup>225</sup> As there was a barrow at Conisbrough, this is a section of the *Historia regum Britanniae* whose credibility Alfred would have been able to confirm by referring back to the landscape in which the passage was set, rather than relying on other texts (perhaps the benefit of Alfred being a Yorkshireman). Although the passage is not framed in a way which would suggest Hengist's barrow was an older or even concurrent local tradition, this may well have more to do with Alfred's narrative style. Indeed, the fact that Alfred decided this information was credible might perhaps suggest the existence of such a tradition in the late 1140s. Despite this, Alfred's omission of the biblical allegory means that Geoffrey's apparent intention in including it to highlight to the audience that the story of Hengist's death is also an allegory (and to encourage the audience to make further comparisons with present or more recent events), is also lost. It may be that Alfred excluded this on purpose, as he is thought to have been well versed in biblical exegesis, and would therefore have been able to interpret the symbolism in Geoffrey's work.<sup>226</sup> Alfred was after all reworking Geoffrey's narrative, as well as other texts such as Symeon of Durham's twelfth-century *Historia Regum* into a secular, more 'conventional' historical framework, including removing some controversial elements and criticisms against various rulers.<sup>227</sup> John Slevin has noted that Alfred's work often takes a pedagogic tone, which along with the relatively concise nature of the history suggests it may have been read aloud at the collegiate church of Beverley.<sup>228</sup> The levels of analogy and symbolism in Geoffrey's work may not have been in keeping either with Alfred's aim for his work, or indeed with the expectations of some of his intended audience, if as Slevin suggests

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>226</sup> Slevin, p. 28.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 23,30.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.* p. 30.

this included members of the local aristocracy as well as fellow members of the collegiate church.

### **Adapting the story: Wace and Lazamon**

The two most popular adaptations of the *Historia regum Britanniae* were Wace's *Roman de Brut* and Lazamon's Middle English *Brut*. Wace's *Roman de Brut* was composed between c.1150-1155. Wace was a Norman poet, born in Jersey and educated in Caen, Normandy. Wace was living in Caen whilst writing the *Roman de Brut*, but he almost certainly visited England during this time. Wace worked as a *clerc lisant*, a role which appears to have involved translating Latin texts into French for non-clerical listeners, and perhaps 'improving' texts to entertain listeners on feasts and holidays.<sup>229</sup> This is exactly the approach Wace took with the *Roman de Brut*, a 'translation' of the *Historia regum Britanniae* from Latin into French. Judith Weiss suggests it was therefore aimed at a Norman audience who preferred to read French rather than Latin.<sup>230</sup> Wace was not merely 'translating' the *Historia*, in the modern sense of the word, and he augmented, altered and 'reimagined' various sections of the text.<sup>231</sup> Generally considered to have been written forty to fifty years after Wace's *Roman de Brut* (around 1190) Lazamon's *Brut* was written to provide a translation of Wace in Middle English.

Both Wace and Lazamon expanded on Geoffrey's comparison of Hengist and Agag, giving further detail about the crimes of Agag, and even explaining Samuel's role as a prophet. This may suggest that their intended secular audiences might not know the biblical verse particularly well. Their texts were obviously meant to be accessible to a wider lay audience, as they were written in French and Middle English, respectively, as opposed to the Latin Bible or *Historia regum Britanniae*. The further details would also make the comparison between

<sup>229</sup> Françoise Le Saux, *A Companion to Wace* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D.S.Brewer, 2005), p.4.

<sup>230</sup> Weiss, p. xvii.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.* p. xvii.

Hengist and Agag more explicit. Lazamon expands further on the description of Hengist's death and burial, giving Eldad, Bishop of Gloucester a number of new lines in which he outlines Hengist's crimes, calling him *a hæðene hund; helle he scal isechenline* ('a heathen hound; hell shall he seek' (Lazamon's *Brut*, line 8297)). This shows that Wace and Lazamon were concentrating on the literal meaning of the account. Rather than interpreting it using the four senses as described by William Durandus, they saw it as emphasising Christian triumph over pagan rather than providing a commentary on more recent history. In doing so, they lost the comparisons Geoffrey was encouraging his readers to make between the past and the present. Both authors removed the description of Hengist's barrow, perhaps because barrows were readily recognised as pagan burial sites at that time and it was therefore considered an extraneous detail, which once removed from the context of a comparison with Harold's burial it almost was. It is important to note that both Wace and Lazamon's texts were performing different functions from Geoffrey's; Wace was writing about the history of a people to which he is not related, and Lazamon was writing a history of the English in their own language. Indeed, as Francis Le Saux wrote, to Wace the *Historia regum Britanniae* was 'the history of an alien people, taking place in a distant, quasi-mythical past'.<sup>232</sup> Ultimately, they were transforming Geoffrey's text into a secular history of England which could be read aloud for a lay audience.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter has argued that Geoffrey's description of Hengist's burial was a response to monuments such as barrows in the landscape, which Geoffrey incorporated into his history in order to give authority and authenticity to his version of the past, connecting it to sites which actually existed as proof that the events too occurred as he wrote about them. It is

<sup>232</sup> Le Saux, p.84.

evident from the long association between Hengist and the mound at Conisbrough Castle, credited to Geoffrey by several later authors, that Geoffrey succeeded in linking his history to the landscape, and by so doing created a tradition that outlasted the monument itself. Conversely, his apparent intention that his history would say as much about the present as it did about the past was seemingly lost on later writers who adapted his work, although it is possible that they no longer viewed it as pertinent. Geoffrey's commentary *On the Deeds of the Britons* and consequently on the deeds of the present rulers of England, became simply a history of the kings.

This chapter also proposed that Geoffrey did not just connect his history to pre-existing points in the landscape for legitimization, as other scholars have suggested. By reading the text as landscape, understanding why it was written, and how Geoffrey may have wanted his audience to interpret it, we can gain a wider appreciation for Geoffrey's history writing techniques and a fuller understanding of his work. By locating Hengist's barrow at Conisbrough Castle in Yorkshire, Geoffrey was able to relate his history to other events and historical figures associated with both the castle and the county. Similarly, Geoffrey used analogies, parallels and methods of reading history and symbolism in the Church in order to talk about both the past and the present, without having to refer to present political concerns directly. Conisbrough belonged to Harold Godwinson before the battle of Hastings and became an important seat of Anglo-Norman power in the years after the Conquest, whilst much of Yorkshire suffered under the Harrying of the North. Thus, it seems feasible that Geoffrey was encouraging his audience to think about events in the more recent past, without referring to them directly. Equally, by paralleling the historical event of Hengist's burial with the biblical story of Saul and Agag, this thesis argues that Geoffrey was encouraging his audience to compare that historical event to contemporary events as well as the more recent past. Björn Weiler has published at length how Matthew Paris used similar techniques in his history writing, particularly in his use of parallels,

through which he encouraged his readers to compare similar events and make judgements based on the differences.<sup>233</sup> This chapter demonstrates that Geoffrey of Monmouth was writing his history for very similar reasons to Matthew Paris; both wanted to share moral lessons which could be found in history. By comparing biblical and ‘historical’ kings, Geoffrey was offering exemplars of both good and bad kingship, at a time when England was experiencing a succession crisis and civil war. The barrow was a key point through which Geoffrey could connect the past and the present, as well as access associations about that area more generally. This chapter offers a new methodology for reading a passage of the *Historia regum Britanniae*. This should be taken further to see if the methodology can be applied to the rest of the text.

The next chapter of this thesis expands on these themes of kingship, control of the landscape and explores further what being buried in a barrow said about the character of a king. Here the burial of Harold is discussed in more depth and is compared to the burial of another king from the *Historia regum Britanniae*: Vortimer, the son of Vortigern, who usurped his father, albeit with honourable intentions and was murdered for his efforts.

<sup>233</sup> Björn Weiler, “Monastic Historical Culture and the Utility of a Remote Past: The Case of Matthew Paris”, in *How the Past was Used: Historical Cultures c. 750-2000: Proceedings of the British Academy*, ed. by Peter Lambert and Bjorn Weiler, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 91-120, p. 114.

## Chapter 3: Guardian Burials

### Introduction

J. S. P. Tatlock, in his 1950 book *The Legendary History of Britain: Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia regum Britanniae and its early vernacular versions* linked the burial of Harold Godwinson in Guy of Amiens' *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* to that of Vortimer in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*, as well as to Beowulf's cliff-top burial at the end of the eponymous hero's poem. Despite making this connection, Tatlock then wrote that he would not enquire 'what superstitious background there may be for such guardian or defiant tombs' and it remains one of hundreds of footnotes in the book.<sup>234</sup> This 'superstitious background' which focused on the role and place of the king after death, both in the landscape and in the national history of England, referred to here as 'guardian burials', is identifiable in a further four texts from the later medieval period. Although occurring in a very small number of texts, separated from each other temporarily as well as geographically, the burials share a number of similarities; primarily that all the burials are located in England and all consist of burials of kings in barrows or other similarly elevated tombs, for the express purpose of defending the country from invasion. All the 'guardian burials' are fictional or legendary burials; there is very little to suggest that any of these burial monuments ever existed, or were identified with specific sites in the later medieval period. This chapter continues to explore the themes of good kingship and justice established in chapter two, as well as using the knowledge gained about Geoffrey of Monmouth's use of parallels in his history writing.

<sup>234</sup> John S.P. Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain: Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia regum Britanniae and its Early Vernacular Versions* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1950), p. 373.

## **Primary Sources**

It should be made clear now that whilst ‘guardian burials’ appear in later medieval texts from England, France, Wales and Scandinavia, they appear so infrequently that it cannot be the case that it was a well-known tradition. There are only four later medieval ‘guardian burials’ associated with England (all four are in England, although the texts are not necessarily themselves *English*), which appear in eight texts; Harold Godwinson in the eleventh-century *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*, Vortimer in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia regum Britanniae* and its derivatives including Wace’s *Roman de Brut* and Layamon’s *Brut*, Ívar the Boneless in two thirteenth-century Icelandic sagas - *Ragnars Saga Loðbrókar* and *Hemings Pattr*, and Bran the Blessed in the twelfth- or thirteenth-century Welsh texts, the *Mabinogion* and *Trioedd Ynys Prydein* (also known as the *Welsh Triads*). Equally, the ‘guardian burials’ do not survive in a distinct form over a particularly long period of time, with the exception of Vortimer’s ‘guardian burial’ in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia regum Britanniae*, although the continuation of this particular narrative may well have been due to the wide circulation of Geoffrey’s text, especially in Wales, where narratives of Vortimer’s ‘guardian burial’ appear in a couple of fourteenth and fifteenth-century poems. The *Historia regum Britanniae* itself was translated into Welsh in the thirteenth century as the *Brut y Brenhinedd* (‘History of the Kings’), which itself is extant in over sixty manuscripts. That said, the fact that some of the burials are explicitly barrow burials alone makes them worth discussing in this thesis, and the similarities between the texts, whilst not evidence of a tradition, are worth exploring.

The eight texts discussed in this chapter, between them covering four burials, date to between the eleventh to thirteenth centuries. As noted previously, although originating in Welsh and Norse sources, as well as Anglo-Norman, all four of the ‘guardian burials’ are located in England. Equally, all four of the burials are imbued with ideas of kingship, moral

judgement and the importance of the connection between king and place, and between king and barrow.

For the modern reader, who can view all of the texts together and make connections between them, it is possible to view the ‘guardian burials’ as fitting into a pattern. The pattern begins with Vortimer, who according to different sources was either not buried according to his instructions or whose burial was removed by Vortigern, thus eliminating its guardian properties. This allowed the Saxons to invade. Bran’s ‘guardian burial’ also aimed to prevent further Anglo-Saxon settlements of Britain; however, his burial was removed by King Arthur. As Bran’s ‘guardian burial’ was no longer effective, this led not only to the Anglo-Saxon settlement of Britain, but also the invasion by Ívar the Boneless and the Great Heathen Army. On his death Ívar continued the tradition of the ‘guardian burial’, only for his remains to be disinterred and burnt by William the Conqueror. After the battle of Hastings, William had Harold buried in the same manner. Of course, this pattern is evident only in retrospect, and indeed, the texts were not written in the order laid out. Equally, it is almost impossible to determine the extent to which any of the authors were aware of the other texts, never mind making connections between them, but the ‘guardian burials’ do have similar themes, which may indicate shared customs of the authors and the movement of culture and ideas in north west Atlantic Europe. Some of the texts, such as the Norse Sagas, may have encountered the ‘sentinel burial’ custom in Ireland, with whom they had long-standing connections. Equally, connections between ecclesiastical houses allowed for a transmission of knowledge between Ireland, England, France and Scandinavia; the English Church, which had been instrumental in the establishment of Christianity in Scandinavia in the early Middle Ages, maintained that connection throughout the later medieval period.<sup>235</sup>

<sup>235</sup> Eleanor Parker, *Dragon Lords: The History and Legends of Viking England* (I.B.Tauris: London, 2018), p. 11.



## “Sentinel Burials”

Elizabeth O’Brien has identified what she has designated as ‘sentinel burials’, in a number of Anglo-Saxon English archaeological and medieval Irish literary contexts.<sup>236</sup> O’Brien suggested that the idea of pagan Anglo-Saxon warriors, buried in full armour in order to protect their land in death, may well have been transmitted to Ireland by Anglo-Saxon clerics, and that the Irish, taking it to be an ‘appropriate’ form of pagan burial for a king or prince, absorbed it into narratives of their own pagan past.<sup>237</sup> If burial with a sword or armour made one a ‘sentinal’ or guardian of the land after death, then this connection between literature of one country and archaeology of another feels tenuous, especially when one considers the frequency of grave goods such as swords in Anglo-Saxon contexts.

Although focusing on medieval Irish literary sources, O’Brien identified Vortimer’s burial in Nennius’ ninth-century *Historia Brittonum* (‘History of the Britons’) as one of these ‘sentinel burials’. However, comparing the narrative of Vortimer’s burial in the *Historia Brittonum* to O’Brien’s Irish sources (as the archaeological sources, as mentioned above, are too vague to make a comparison), two of the main features of the burial do not appear in O’Brien’s Irish sources. These are principally; the ordering of the burial by the king shortly before his death and the idea that the enemy will not be able to enter or stay in the country as a direct result of the burial. Of the eight ‘guardian burial’ narratives discussed in this chapter there is only one which does not contain these elements; Harold’s burial in the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*. Instead it was ordered by William after Harold’s death and the poem presents the burial as primarily an insult towards the dead king.

<sup>236</sup> Elizabeth O’Brien, “Early Medieval Sentinel Warrior Burials.” *Peritia*, 20, (2008) pp. 326-8.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.* p. 329.

### **Harold's burial in the Carmen de Hastingsae Proelio**

Guy of Amiens' *Carmen de Hastingsae Proelio*, a poem about the battle of Hastings and the events which led up to it, is one of the earliest sources for the Norman Conquest. It was probably written in 1067 and Frank Barlow, in the introduction to his translation of the poem, suggests it was probably finished by May 1068.<sup>238</sup> Indeed, it has even been suggested that the *Carmen* was written to be performed around Easter 1067, which would further imbue the text with themes of death and resurrection.<sup>239</sup> Although, as Barlow notes, there is no evidence that Guy actually visited England until 1070.<sup>240</sup> The poem was attributed to Guy, the French bishop of Amiens, by the twelfth-century chronicler Orderic Vitalis who wrote 'Guy, bishop of Amiens, also wrote a poem describing the battle of Senlac in imitation of the epics of Virgil and Statius, abusing and condemning Harold but praising and exalting William'.<sup>241</sup> Orderic also wrote that Guy travelled to England with Queen Matilda for her coronation in 1068, although Barlow notes that there was no charter evidence of him being in England at that time, instead he was frequently at the French court.<sup>242</sup> Barlow, who most recently edited and translated the *Carmen*, suggests that William of Poitiers encountered the poem in the 1070s, and used it as a source for his *Gesta Guillelmi* ('The Deeds of William') although it seems that all manuscripts of the poem were lost by the end of the twelfth century, or perhaps earlier, as Orderic Vitalis does not give much information about the poem.<sup>243</sup> Furthermore, the *Carmen* survives in a single manuscript, which was rediscovered in Hanover in 1826.<sup>244</sup> Exactly why

<sup>238</sup> Frank Barlow, *The Carmen de Hastingsae Proelio of Guy Bishop of Amiens*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), p. xl.

<sup>239</sup> C. Morton and H. Muntz, *The Carmen de Hastingsae Proelio of Guy Bishop of Amiens* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972)

<sup>240</sup> Barlow, p. xviii.

<sup>241</sup> Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of England and Normandy*, 1st ed, (London: H.G. Bohn, 1853), p. 158

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xx.

<sup>244</sup> Barlow, p. xiii

Guy wrote the *Carmen* is unknown, although he had been out of favour with the pope (Alexander II) for a number of years before 1066 and it is possible he wrote the poem as a show of support for William whose conquest of England had been blessed by the pope, in order to gain William's favour and thereby return to the pope's good graces.<sup>245</sup> Guy also dedicated a copy of the poem to Lanfranc, who was at that time abbot of Saint-Étienne at Caen and close to both William and Alexander II.<sup>246</sup> Despite this, there are several passages in the *Carmen* where William is not portrayed in a positive light – the most prominent of these are the lines which describe his actions immediately after the end of the battle, including leaving the bodies of the English on the battlefield to be picked over by scavenging birds and animals, rather than given a Christian burial. Guy's description of William's actions regarding Harold's burial are a continuation of this.

In the *Carmen*, after Harold's death, William refused to give Harold's body over to his mother, swearing that 'he would sooner put him in charge of the shore of that very port – under a heap of stones' (*Carmen*, lines 580-84).<sup>247</sup> The grave was then marked with a stone which read 'You rest here, King Harold, by order of the duke, so that you may be guardian over sea and shore' (*Carmen*, lines 591-2).<sup>248</sup> Not only was Harold denied a Christian burial but, worse still, his burial trapped him, setting him up to be William the Conqueror's eternal servant, the guardian of his new kingdom, performing the role at which he failed in life: successfully protecting England against invasion.

Howard Williams has written about barrows in Anglo-Saxon England as 'evoking the mnemonic presence of the dead within their graves', thereby allowing the dead to inhabit the

<sup>245</sup> E. M. C. Van Houts, "Latin Poetry and the Anglo-Norman Court 1066-1135: 'The Carmen de Hastingae Proelio'", *Journal of Medieval History*, vol. 13 (1989), p. 56.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>247</sup> trans. in Barlow, p. 35.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*

landscape.<sup>249</sup> Equally, ‘guardian burials’ carry with them a sense that the dead are still present and able to extend power over the landscape. The dead king in the barrow as the ultimate guardian of the country also gives a great sense of the power contained in the landscape, both metaphorical and literal. Williams’ comments on both the power of barrow cemeteries in early medieval England, and the use of cemeteries ‘as places of social and political display in which identities and memories are negotiated and reproduced’<sup>250</sup> both resonate with the concept of ‘guardian burials’, especially as the ‘guardian burials’ were not simply about protecting the country; they were also representative of the king’s actions in life. As with Hengist’s barrow in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia regum Britanniae*, as discussed in the previous chapter, the ‘guardian burials’ allowed the authors to comment on the moral character of the king and those around him, on what it meant to be a good king and what form the afterlife might take for a tyrant or usurper. Of course, with just four examples it is only possible to label the individual kings and their burials as good or bad, rather than explore them as a collective group. That said, a number of the kings who would have been considered tyrants. In later medieval England a tyrant was not just a cruel and unjust ruler, but one who took the throne without a legal right, a usurper. For example, Vortimer became king whilst his father Vortigern was still alive and had not abdicated, although Vortigern himself had allied himself with the Anglo-Saxon enemy. Ívar the Boneless was both an invader and a tyrant, and Harold ascended to the English throne despite having sworn an oath to William that he would uphold William’s claim to the throne. Indeed, in the twelfth century Orderic Vitalis referred to Harold as ‘the crafty tyrant’.<sup>251</sup> Thomas Aquinas, in the thirteenth century, wrote that a tyrant king was ‘heedless of

<sup>249</sup> Howard Williams, *Death and Memory in Early Medieval Britain*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 204.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.* p. 197

<sup>251</sup> Ordericus Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of England and Normandy*, 1st ed, (London: H.G. Bohn, 1853), p. 460.

the common welfare, seek[ing] his own personal satisfaction'. A burial which required the king to protect the country as a whole would be a fitting punishment for such a man, although it is not possible to recognise kings such as Vortimer in this description, as according to Geoffrey's description he acted only for the good of the country and his 'guardian burial' would have acted as a continuation of that service. Equally, regardless of whether they were good or bad kings, it is a shared feature of the four 'guardian burials' for the kings to have been murdered or have died in defence of their country.

To a certain extent, Harold's pagan burial reflected badly on Harold, rather than William, despite the fact that it was William who ordered it. There was a moral message incorporated in the description of Harold's death and burial; those who sinned, broke oaths and sought something above their lot, died a bad death and suffered a bad burial.<sup>252</sup> A bad death, in later medieval England, was one where death came too suddenly for last rites to be received or for sins to be forgiven, which was the case both for Bran and Harold, although as Bran's head survived his death and was able to communicate with his companions, the idea of the bad death does not necessarily apply to him. Harold's death, however, could be seen not only as a bad death, but according to Paul Binski, it was an 'exemplary' bad death.<sup>253</sup> 'Exemplary', Binski adds, 'in the negative sense: it was an example of what not to do and therefore could establish principles for action'.<sup>254</sup> Harold's death also restored the natural, God-given order, which had been disrupted when he broke his oath to William.<sup>255</sup>

Exactly how the recipients of 'guardian burials' protected their country is unclear, but it seems likely that their souls remained in the graves and were able to exert influence in a

<sup>252</sup> Michael Evans, *Royal Death in Medieval England*, (New York: Hambledon Continuum, 2003), p. 63.

<sup>253</sup> Paul Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (New York, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 47.

<sup>254</sup> Binski, p. 49.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*

similar way to a saint. The attitude towards the recipients of these ‘guardian burials’ after death was that they may have been buried, but they were not expected to simply rest in peace, although on the whole this was not particularly different to the way the dead were treated more generally in later medieval England. As Jane Gilbert writes, ‘the medieval dead and living had reciprocal obligations and complementary spheres of activity as members of a greater community’ and the dead ‘retained a social role safeguarding the communities and places in which they found themselves’.<sup>256</sup> Nonetheless, there was a dissimilarity in the way the ‘guardian burials’ were treated, as opposed to what Gilbert refers to as ‘the ordinary dead’.<sup>257</sup> Whilst the ‘ordinary dead’ were rewarded with prayers for their souls, the ‘guardian burials’ were expected to perform their task without thanks or reward. In the cases of Bran, Vortimer and Ívar, who ordered their own burials, this may have been seen as an obvious extension of kingly duty, and indeed Bran and Vortimer were both referred to as ‘the blessed’ in medieval texts. In the case of Harold, however, his ‘guardian burial’ was clearly further punishment for his actions.

There is some veiled criticism of William also contained within the description of Harold’s burial, especially where William left the English dead *vermibus atque lupis, auibus canibusque uoranda*, (‘to be eaten by worms and wolves, by birds and dogs’ (*Carmen*, line 571\_)). Marjorie Chibnall suggests that this must have been viewed as criticism of William’s character because William of Poitiers, in his *Gesta Guillelmi*, which was written in the 1070s, changed it; stating instead that William gave the English free licence to bury their dead.<sup>258</sup> In the *Carmen*, William is shown to have had Harold buried on the seashore out of anger and

<sup>256</sup> J. Gilbert, *Living Death in Medieval French and English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 2.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2.

<sup>258</sup> Marjorie Chibnall, *The Gesta Guillelmi of William of Poitiers*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 143.

immediately afterwards distributed alms to the poor as an act of penance. This is completely omitted from William of Poitiers's version; clearly it reflected badly on William and shows that Harold's burial would not have been viewed universally as either positive or appropriate. William of Poitiers was Norman so it is natural that his version took William's side and railed against Harold, but it must be remembered that whilst Guy himself was French rather than Norman, he did have relatives who fought at the battle of Hastings on the Norman side. Equally, as Barlow has pointed out, William the Conqueror himself would have seen Harold as having broken his sacred oath, which he swore over holy relics, and usurped the throne that was rightfully William's.<sup>259</sup> Whilst Harold's burial was unchristian, it may well have been what William believed Harold deserved as punishment for his oath-breaking, thereby highlighting how heinous an offence Harold had committed.<sup>260</sup>

Marjorie Chibnall has linked William of Poitiers' use of the word 'tumulus' to describe Harold's burial to Pompey's seashore burial in Lucan's *Pharsalia* (written c. 65CE).<sup>261</sup> Presumably William of Poitiers was well versed in classical texts, but beyond the seashore location and use of the word *tumulus* there is little to connect the two events, especially as Pompey's tumulus is nothing more than a few handfuls of sand, which the poem then comments was not a fitting memorial for Pompey.<sup>262</sup> Indeed, Pompey is presented as tragic hero in the *Pharsalia*, and his death is the result of treachery. There is little about Pompey's character in the poem which could be compared to William of Poitiers' version of Harold, unless it is a very carefully concealed criticism of William, which seems unlikely. Equally, in the *Gesta Guillelmi* Harold's 'guardian burial' is presented as a joke: *dictum est illudendo, oportere situm esse custodem littoris et pelagi, quae cum armis ante uesanus insedit* ('it was said in jest that he

<sup>259</sup> Frank Barlow, *The Godwins: The Rise and Fall of a Noble Dynasty* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 114.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>261</sup> Chibnall, p. 159.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*

should be placed as guardian of sea and shore, which in his madness he had once occupied with his armies' (*Gesta Guillelmi* 2.25))<sup>263</sup> whereas Pompey's burial in Lucan's *Pharsalia* is tragic. It could be argued that here William of Poitiers was inviting those of his readers who would have been aware of the *Pharsalia* to contrast the characters of the tyrant Harold and the tragic hero Pompey, although as the passage from the *Gesta Guillelmi* highlights all of Harold's failings, there was not necessarily a need for such a level of subtlety.

### **Burial Locations**

With the exception of Bran, who it is said was buried under what is now Tower Hill in London, the 'guardian burials' were placed on clifftops or at the seashore, facing the continent. Whilst this represents a border, as with the 'sentinel burials', it is also one which indicates a foreign enemy who threatens the entirety of Britain, as well as demonstrating the need for protection against outside forces, rather than from within the country. Through this the authors were perhaps indicating the idea of a more cohesive national identity for England.

Although the 'guardian burials' do not seem to emulate the reality of the landscape - that is, they are all fictional or legendary monuments, rather than actual burial sites - they do also reflect landscape features which would have been well known, especially around the Kent coast. Before the silting up of the Wantsum Channel towards the end of the later medieval period, clifftop barrows would have been easily recognisable features from the sea, along both the east Kent and Thanet coast. Indeed, viewshed analysis undertaken by Stuart Brookes in 2008 has shown that up to 90% of burials built between 450-750CE, within a six kilometre corridor from the coast, would have been visible from medieval maritime routes such as the

<sup>263</sup> trans. in R.C.H. Davis and Marjorie Chibnall, *The Gesta Guillelmi of William of Poitiers*, (London: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 141.



Wantsum Channel.<sup>264</sup> Brookes adds that many of these barrows would have made an impression on those entering the Wantsum Channel at Deal, who would have been ‘confronted’ with the Bronze Age barrow at Ringlemere ‘dominating the skyline’.<sup>265</sup> Equally, past the Ebbsfleet peninsula at Thanet, which is considered by some to be the traditional landing place of Hengist and Horsa, the sixth- and seventh-century Anglo-Saxon barrow cemeteries at Minster and Monkton, as well as the fifth-century cemetery at Sarre would have been impressive landmarks.<sup>266</sup> There are a number of barrows further south along the Kent coast, towards one of the candidates for the site of Vortimer’s final battle with Hengist: Folkestone. The Bronze Age round barrow which sits on the cliff edge overlooking the English Channel at Capel-Le-Ferne, for example, appears in the antiquarian William Stukeley’s early eighteenth-century *Itinerary*. Stukeley wrote that ‘beyond Dover southward the cliff is exceedingly high to Folkestone. In the road two great Roman barrows, which will be eaten away in a few years by the sea’ (*Itinerary*, 5.130). Slightly further along the coast at St Margaret’s at Cliffe there was another prominent clifftop barrow overlooking the sea, this time Anglo-Saxon – although it was levelled in the 1920s to make way for a tennis court. Whilst the origins of these barrows may not have been known by the medieval writers, they would have been familiar landmarks to anyone regularly navigating the Kent coast. Equally, it is probably the case that this pattern of clifftop barrows was not unique to Kent; perhaps there was a prominent barrow close to Hastings, which could have inspired Harold’s fictional barrow burial there, in the *Carmen de Hastingsae Proelio*.

According to Christopher Daniell it was common for people in later medieval England to request burial across a boundary or near an edge, suggesting that this may have been equated

<sup>264</sup> Stuart Brookes, “Settled Landscapes – A Regional Perspective from Early Anglo-Saxon Kent” in *The Very Beginnings of Europe?* ed. by Rica Annaert, Koen De Groote, Yann Hollevoet, Frans Theuws, Dries Tys, & Laurent Verslype, (Relicta Monografieën: Brussels, 2008), 69-80, (p. 73).

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.* p. 74.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*

with margins between the world of the living and the afterlife.<sup>267</sup> Of course, these requested burial places were not at the borders or edges of land; rather they related to areas of the church and churchyard,<sup>268</sup> but it may suggest that some of the writers and their audience, such as Geoffrey of Monmouth, could have been aware of the connotations of being buried right on the edge of the country. Indeed, burial of Christians on or around the seashore was very rare.<sup>269</sup> Beyond the fact that by this point the churchyard was the expected place for Christian burials, Daniell notes that ‘the sea-shore was a temporary place of burial, neither at sea nor in a graveyard. So long as the body was on the shore there was hope of recovery’, giving an example from the thirteenth-century hagiographical collection, *The Golden Legend*, of a woman who could not be drowned because she was a Christian, but appeared as though dead and thus was laid to rest on the seashore, and was eventually resurrected.<sup>270</sup> ‘The sea-shore’, Daniell writes, ‘was a temporary place of burial, neither at sea nor in a graveyard. So long as the body was on the shore there was hope of recovery.’<sup>271</sup> Perhaps this could suggest that there might be hope of reprieve for Harold, or that on some level the recipients of the seashore ‘guardian burials’ were not completely dead as long as they remained buried there.

It is never made clear in any of the texts exactly why the proximity of the body to the seashore was necessary. It may well be that the visual presence of the tomb was an important part of the ‘guardian burial’. However, it is equally clear that the buried king was taking an active role in protecting the country, as opposed to invaders being discouraged merely by the sight of his tomb. In the *Roman de Brut*, which was a translation of the *Historia regum Britanniae* it was again the height and visibility of the tomb which was important and gave it

<sup>267</sup> Christopher Daniell, *Death and Burial Medieval England 1066-1550* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 91.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 91-2.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.* p. 92.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.* p. 91.

<sup>271</sup> Daniell, p. 91.

power, with Vortimer saying ‘raise above me such a tomb, so large and lasting, that it may be seen from far by all who voyage upon the sea’ (*Roman de Brut*, lines 7175-8).<sup>272</sup> Françoise Le Saux also notes that this passage in Wace loses the sense of the tomb being built in the port where the Saxons landed, which was important in both Nennius and Geoffrey.<sup>273</sup>

### **Vortimer’s Burial in *Historia regum Britanniae***

There are a number of similarities and differences between Harold and Vortimer’s burials. The similarities mark them both as ‘guardian burials’. They are both usurpers, buried in tombs by the sea, with the express aim of protecting the country from future invaders. There are also two key differences. Firstly, Harold did not ask for a ‘guardian burial’, whereas Vortimer did, but his order was disregarded by his friends. Secondly, whilst Harold’s burial is clearly described as a stone cairn-type barrow, Vortimer’s burial is never described specifically as a barrow, although it is usually a type of raised tomb; for example, it is a *sepulture* (raised tomb) in Wace’s *Roman de Brut*, although it is simply a buried *chæsten* (coffin) in Lazamon’s *Brut*.

Tatlock recognised Vortimer’s burial in *Historia regum Britanniae* as a parallel to Harold’s burial in the *Carmen*, but despite this he did not explore either burial in detail. Vortimer’s burial first appears in Nennius’ *Historia Brittonum*, written in the ninth century, although it is not possible to tell whether Harold’s burial was intended in some way as a reference to Nennius. Within the world of the ‘guardian burials’, had Vortimer been buried how he ordered, there would never have been an Anglo-Saxon king of England, and by extension no Norman Conquest, or even an England to conquer. This relies, however, on how widely the *Historia Brittonum* was read, and whether it would have been possible for Guy of Amiens to have read it. The *Historia Brittonum* was in circulation in the eleventh century and

<sup>272</sup> Judith Weiss, *Wace’s Roman De Brut: A History Of The British (Text and Translation)* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003), p. 181.

<sup>273</sup> Francis Le Saux, *A Companion to Wace* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2002), p. 123-4.

is extant in three manuscripts dating to the late eleventh century: Douai, Bibliothèque Municipale MS 795, Paris, Bibliothèque National Latin MS 9768 and Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Regiensis Latini MS 1964. Of these, Paris, Bibliothèque National Latin MS 9768 was possibly created as early as the late tenth and originated either from the Abbey of Saint-Médard in Soissons or Saint-Riquier. Guy of Amiens was educated at Saint-Riquier, so if the manuscript was held there it is possible, although perhaps not probable that Guy encountered the *Historia Brittonum* there.<sup>274</sup> There was an earlier version, Chartres Bibliothèque Municipale MS 98, which was thought most likely to date from the tenth century, however it was lost during the Second World War.<sup>275</sup>

Given that the narrative of William declaring Harold his *guardian over sea and shore* does not appear outside of the *Carmen* and the *Gesta Guillemi*, it could be that this phrase is making reference either to Vortimer's burial in the *Historia Brittonum*, or a similar narrative which is no longer known. By comparison, regarding Vortimer's burial in the *Historia regum Britanniae*, it seems feasible that Geoffrey was making reference to Vortimer's burial in Nennius' *Historia Brittonum*. As discussed in the previous chapter, it seems that Geoffrey expected his readers to make a comparison between characters based on shared details, such as the parallels between the deaths of the Anglo-Saxon leader Hengist and the biblical enemy of Israel, Agag. Whilst it is fairly unlikely that Geoffrey was making a direct reference to Harold's burial in the *Carmen*, a comparison between Harold and Vortimer is further enhanced by Neil Wright's suggestion that in the *Historia regum Britanniae* Vortimer could, through his actions (including removing the Anglo-Saxon threat to Britain), be seen as the precursor to Arthur.<sup>276</sup> This is particularly interesting in the context of later conceptions of Arthur as the once and

<sup>274</sup> Frank Barlow, *The Norman Conquest and Beyond* (London: Hambledon Press, 1983), p. 194.

<sup>275</sup> David Dumville, *The Historia Brittonum, vol. 2: The 'Chartres' Recension* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1988)

<sup>276</sup> Neil Wright, "Françoise le Saux 'Layamon's Brut: the poem and its sources' (book review)", *The Yearbook of English Studies*, vol. 22 (1996), p. 260.

future king, who will return from death to protect the country at its hour of need. On the other hand, Harold, as established in the previous chapter, was heir to Hengist, who represented the worst of the Anglo-Saxons. Tatlock also suggests there is a link between both Harold and Vortimer's burials and Beowulf's, as they were all kings buried in tombs overlooking the sea.<sup>277</sup> Whilst there may well be a connection between Vortimer and Harold's burials, Beowulf's burial may be evidence of a parallel tradition, where the burial mound was a grave marker through which the dead king could be remembered and commemorated, rather than forming part of the country's defence system. At the end of *Beowulf* it is clear the Geats were worried about how the country would be defended after his death. Equally, the description of Beowulf, a loved and respected king, who asked to be buried in a barrow on the cliff-top, as a memorial for his people, and as a marker for seafarers, does clearly resonate with the description of Vortimer as a 'great man' of 'admirable bravery' who asked to be buried in a tomb by the seashore.

Vortimer's burial in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* is an extended version of the same story described in Nennius' *Historia Brittonum*. In Book 6 of the *Historia regum Britanniae*, Vortimer had successfully driven the Saxons out of Britain, when he was poisoned by his stepmother, Rowena, the daughter of Hengist. On his death-bed, he called his men to him and commanded that he be buried 'in the port where the Saxons landed... he said none of them would dare approach the country, that should but get a sight of his tomb' (*Historia regum Britanniae*, 6.14) As in the *Historia Brittonum*, Vortimer's wishes were not fulfilled and his body was taken to London, thus his burial had no guardian effect. In the *Historia regum Britanniae* Vortimer's tomb is described as a bronze *pyramidus* (pyramid) at the top of which his remains would be buried. Of course, Geoffrey's *pyramidus* does not necessarily represent

<sup>277</sup> Tatlock, p. 373.

a pyramid as the modern reader may imagine it. Tatlock states that the word *pyramidus* was used by various medieval writers, contemporary to Geoffrey of Monmouth, to mean a monument with some kind of stepped pedestal.<sup>278</sup> Another example of this is the two pyramids which stood at Glastonbury Abbey in the twelfth century, described by William of Malmesbury in his twelfth-century chronicle *Gesta Regum Anglorum* as

... those pyramids which stand at a few feet from the Old Church in the cemetery of the monks. The nearest to the church is twenty-eight feet high, and has four stories [steps]... The other pyramid is twenty-six feet high, with four stories, on which can be read 'Ketwin', 'Hedda the Bishop', 'Bregored' and 'Beoruard' ... within, in stone coffins, are contained the bones of those persons.

(*Gesta Regum Anglorum* 1 pp. 34-35)<sup>279</sup>

Tatlock has suggested that these pyramids might be some form of stepped obelisk.<sup>280</sup> William of Malmesbury also described St Patrick as being buried in a *pyramide saxea* ('stone pyramid') by the altar of the Old Church at Glastonbury.<sup>281</sup> This conjures up images of monuments similar, although on a slightly smaller scale, to Trajan's column in Rome, where

<sup>278</sup> Tatlock, p. 373.

<sup>279</sup> trans. by J. A. Giles in *William of Malmesbury's Gesta Regum Anglorum*, (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1847), p. 23

<sup>280</sup> Tatlock, p. 373.

<sup>281</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Gestae Regum*, trans. J. A. Giles (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1847), p. 37.

the Emperor Trajan's ashes were set into the base of a thirty-five foot high column, which was topped with a statue of the emperor. This monument was known and altered during the medieval period, although there is no way of knowing whether Geoffrey himself would have been aware of it. There was of course an actual pyramid, as a modern audience would conceive it, standing in Rome during the Middle Ages. The Pyramid of Cestius was built in the very late first century BCE, probably sometime between 18 and 12 BCE, and during the medieval period it was thought to be the burial place of Remus, who was murdered by his brother Romulus, the founder of Rome, as there could not be two kings.<sup>282</sup> During this period, however, the Pyramid of Cestius was referred to as a *meta*, an alternate Latin word for pyramid, which may perhaps suggest Geoffrey was actually describing something similar to the Glastonbury pyramids when he used the word *pyramidus*. Therefore Vortimer's *pyramidus* may not merely have been intended as a reference to the Classical past, but to the burial places of saints and religious men at Glastonbury which may have been recognisable to some readers of William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, which itself was copied into a manuscript alongside the *Historia regum Britanniae*, in British Library MS Royal 13 D V, dating to the early thirteenth century. Like Geoffrey, William dedicated his *Gesta* to Robert, the first Earl of Gloucester, and he also wrote further about the antiquities of Glastonbury Abbey (including the pyramids) for Henry de Blois, Bishop of Winchester, suggesting he was writing for an audience that consisted both of the aristocracy and senior churchmen.

As Paul Binski wrote, the 'socially prestigious tomb was conditioned by metaphors of elevation', with both their height and the material allowing tombs to shed 'their old subterranean association with the underworld'.<sup>283</sup> The height of a tomb in the later medieval period was also connected with being closer to heaven, so Vortimer's request for his remains

<sup>282</sup> Eileen Gardiner and Francis Nichols, *The Marvels of Rome* (New York, NY: Italica Press, 1986), p. 86.

<sup>283</sup> Binski, p. 77.

to be buried at the top of the pyramid allowed the reader to understand Vortimer's positive assessment of his own character and actions. Not only would he be fulfilling his kingly duty and protecting his country even after his death, but he would also be elevated closer to heaven. Of course, this also carries with it imagery of the elevation of relics.<sup>284</sup> In one sense, 'guardian burials' could share certain similarities with the tombs of saints, as they both contained a body which was in some way still considered living, and whose role was, at least partially, one of protection.<sup>285</sup> It was common for the bodies of saints to have been uncorrupted in the grave; interestingly, according to the Icelandic sagas *Ragnars Saga Loðbrókar* and *Hemings Pattr*, Ívar the Boneless' body was not at all decomposed when disinterred by William the Conqueror. Both sagas recount that William had Ívar's body burned before battling to victory where Haraldr Hardrada failed, perhaps suggesting the writer's notion that William's victory was not possible whilst Ívar's body remained whole in the barrow. Equally, in the Mabinogion, Bran's head was still alive despite being cut from his body and may well have remained alive in the grave. Whilst Bran's incorruption may well be an indication of his sainthood, (he is known as Bran the Blessed), or a relic from the time when he was considered the son of a pre-Christian deity. In other Icelandic sagas it was not unusual for the inhabitant of the barrow to still be alive in some way inside the mound, therefore the description of Ívar's undecayed body in *Hemings Pattr* is connected to this, rather than to Christian saints. This vital difference in how the bodies remained un-decayed may well point to them belonging to two separate but parallel, traditions.

That Vortimer's tomb was to be constructed out of bronze is also important. According to Bartholomaeus Anglicus' early thirteenth-century compendium *De proprietatibus rerum*, brass and gold shared a common quality – glowing virtue, and according to Binski, in the medieval

<sup>284</sup> Binski, p. 78.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.* p. 94.



period 'brass was thus a sign of durable, untarnishable memory.'<sup>286</sup> This adds further weight to the suggestion that unlike Harold's, Vortimer's 'guardian burial' would have been conceived of as entirely positive. Vortimer's burial also allows for a clear contrast to be made between his and Harold's tombs, the pagan barrow and the bronze pyramid. The barrow was representative of failure, defeat and ignominy, whereas the pyramid was aspirational. Vortimer is portrayed as seeing himself as an idealised 'guardian burial', a successful king who could continue to protect the country after his death, whereas Harold was forced into it by his enemy after a humiliating death. To the twenty-first-century reader this immediately calls to mind the description of the barrow in *Guthlac*, which was described as a monument to the 'wretched deaths and shameful ends of the ancient kings of his race in the course of the past ages'.<sup>287</sup> Unlike Harold, Vortimer strove to play an active role in his burial, attempting to control his afterlife even after being killed untimely, although like Harold he ultimately had no control over his burial.

Vortimer was not the only king to be buried in bronze in Geoffrey's *Historia regum Britanniae*. Cadwalla, a British king also received an unusual bronze burial. According to Geoffrey, when Cadwalla died of old age, his body was embalmed and placed in a bronze statue, which was then set above the western gate of London as a monument of the Britons' victory and a terror to the Saxons (*Historia regum Britanniae* 12.13). Indeed, both of these burials, Vortimer's 'brazen pyramid' and the bronze statue of Cadwalla above the city gate of London, would have been very visually striking, and indeed it was the sight of these tombs which inspired terror in the invaders causing them to turn back. Cadwalla's burial will not be

<sup>286</sup> Binski, p. 91.

<sup>287</sup> Williams, *Death and Memory in Early Medieval Britain*, p. 206.

discussed at length here because unlike the other four it cannot conceivably be thought of as a barrow burial.

Vortimer's wishes not being obeyed led to the Anglo-Saxon settlement of England and therefore eventually to the Norman Conquest. This, whilst unfortunate, was not particularly unusual. Burial requests were disobeyed in later medieval England with family and heirs, especially of wealthy families, overriding the dead person's wishes, as happened with Edward I.<sup>288</sup> Equally, there was no guarantee for any level of society that their bodies would remain in the same graveyard, or indeed even in the grave for a lengthy amount of time, especially once the body had decomposed to the skeleton.<sup>289</sup> Indeed, as Paul Binski states, those who were of particular importance, either because they were a saint, or the member of the royal family, were particularly likely to have their bones moved and interfered with.<sup>290</sup> Of course, there does not appear to be a connection between the 'guardian burials' and any real later medieval burial traditions, although as O'Brien highlighted, there is some evidence of it in early medieval burials.

### **Vortimer's Burial in Trioedd Ynys Prydein**

Vortimer's burial also appears in one of the *Trioedd Ynys Prydein* ('The Triads of the Island of Britain') often referred to as The Welsh Triads. The triads are medieval Welsh verses, comprising references to significant events and people, arranged into groups of three as a mnemonic device.<sup>291</sup> Bromwich states that none of the Welsh Triads, in their current form, are much older than ninth century, although they may be recording earlier traditions, and the earliest extant manuscripts; National Library of Wales MS Peniarth 16, the *White Book of*

<sup>288</sup> Binski, p. 79.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.* p. 85

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>291</sup> Karen Jankulak, *Geoffrey of Monmouth*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2010), p. 33.

*Rhydderch* and the *Red Book of Hergest*, date to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.<sup>292</sup> Vortimer (in Welsh *Gwythefyr*), appears in Triad 37 and its variant 37R as one of the *Tri Chud a Thri Datcud Enys Prydein* ('The Three Concealments and Disclosures of the Island of Britain'). In Triad 37 Vortimer's body is divided into pieces and buried *a gladwyt ym pryf byrth yr Enys hon* ('in the chief ports of this Island [Britain]' (*Welsh Triads* 37)). In Triad 37R this is extended to add *a hyt tra udynt yn y kud hunnu, ny doei Ormes o Ssaesson byth y'r Ynys honn* ('and as long as they remained in that concealment, no Saxon oppression would ever come to this Island' (*Welsh Triads* 37R)). However, the triad continues, Vortimer's bones were disclosed by his father Vortigern to Hengist's daughter Rowena.

### **Bran the Blessed's Burial in Trioedd Ynys Prydein**

The other two concealments were those of Bran the Blessed's head in the White Hill in London, and the native British and the foreign dragons fighting under Dinas Emrys. Of Bran, triad 37R says *penn Bendigeituran uab Llyr, a guduwyt yn y Gvynuryn yn Llundain, a'e wyneb ar Ffreinc. A hyt tra uu yn yr ansavd y dodet yno, ny doei Ormes Ssaesson byth y'r Ynys honn* ('The head of Bran the Blessed, son of Llyr, which was concealed in the White Hill in London, with its face towards France. And as long as it was in the position in which it was put there, no Saxon Oppression would ever come to this Island' (*Welsh Triads* 37R)).<sup>293</sup> Bran's 'guardian burial' was removed by King Arthur, *kan nyt oed dec gantav kadv yr Ynys honn o gedernit neb, namyn o'r eidav ehun* ('because it did not seem right to him that this Island should be defended by the strength of anyone but him' (*Welsh Triads* 37R)). The burial of Bran's head also features in the late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century Welsh text the *Mabinogion*. Here Bran commanded his men to take his severed head to the White Hill (now Tower Hill in London), and to bury it

<sup>292</sup> Rachel Bromwich, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein, The Welsh Triads*, 2nd ed, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1978), pp. xi–xxxii.

<sup>293</sup> Trans. Bromwich, p.88-9

there. In the *Mabinogion*, Bran's head was carried around by his companions for over eighty years without corrupting and continued to speak, before eventually being buried as he asked. Although admittedly, the majority of those eighty years were spent in a fairy otherworld where none of the humans aged. In the *Mabinogion*, Bran is presented as a good king, who is killed attempting to rescue his sister from her violent husband. Unlike the other kings who were given 'guardian burials' he cannot be conceived of as a usurper, invader or tyrant; although he took a large British army to Ireland, this was not done with the intention of invasion.

### **Ivar the Boneless' Burial in Ragnars Saga Loðbrókar and Hemings Pattr**<sup>294</sup>

On the other hand, Ívar the Boneless, son of Ragnar Lothbrok and a leader of the Great Heathen Army in 865CE certainly was a violent invader who sought to occupy England, as well as raid it. In a thirteenth-century Icelandic saga, *Ragnars Saga Loðbrókar* ('Ragnar Lothbrok's Saga') the earliest extant manuscript of which dates from around 1400, Ívar asked to be buried in a barrow on the seashore in England. The saga states that whilst Ívar 'lay in his final sickness, he ordered his body to be taken to the place where a raiding army would land, and said he expected that they would not win victory when they came ashore' (*Ragnars Saga Loðbrókar* – Ch.18).<sup>295</sup> When Ívar died, his men did as he asked and buried him in a mound, the exact location of which is not stated, beyond it being by the shore of the sea. The saga then provides two pieces of proof of the effectiveness of Ívar's 'guardian burial'. Firstly, 'when King Haraldr Hardrada came to England, he landed where Ívar was buried, and he was killed in that

<sup>294</sup> Whilst these sagas were written in 13th century Iceland, as discussed in the introduction to this thesis the burials take place in England and can give us an insight into the views of the Icelandic writers on their shared cultural history with England.

<sup>295</sup> *Ragnars Saga Loðbrókar* – Chapter 18, trans. by Jackson Crawford *The Saga of the Volsungs with the Saga of Ragnar Lothbrok*, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2017), pp. 128-9.

expedition' (*Ragnars Saga Loðbrókar*– Ch.18). Secondly, when 'William the Conqueror came to England, he went to Ívar's mound and broke it open and there he saw Ívar's body undecomposed. William had a bonfire built and then burned Ívar's body on that pyre, and after that he fought for the rule of the kingdom and he won it' (*Ragnars Saga Loðbrókar* 18). There is also a version of Ívar's 'guardian burial' in *Hemings Pattr* ('The Story of Heming'), an Icelandic Saga which also dates to the thirteenth century.<sup>296</sup> Fellows Jensen suggested that either the author of *Hemings Pattr* took the story from the writer of *Ragnars Saga Loðbrókar* or else that they were working from the same original source, as the story does not appear in any other text.<sup>297</sup> Recently, Eleanor Parker proposed that both versions of the story may have their origins in Anglo-Scandinavian narratives about the Norman Conquest.<sup>298</sup> Ívar's burial mound appears in *Hemings Pattr* when Haraldr Hardrada landed at Cleveland, Yorkshire, to begin his invasion of England. In the saga Haraldr Hardrada asked Tóstig, the brother of Harold Godwinson, "what is the little hill called over there to the north?"

The exchange continued:

Tóstig says: "Not every hillock here is given a name."

The king says: "But this one is sure to have a name, and you must tell me it."

Tóstig says: "It is the grave-mound of Ívar the Boneless."

The king replies: "There are few who have conquered England who have come across his grave-mound first."

<sup>296</sup> *Hemings Pattr*, trans by Anthony Faulkes, (Dundee: Thorisdal, 2016), p. 6.

<sup>297</sup> *Hemings þáttur Áslákssonar*. ed. by Gillian Fellows Jensen (Copenhagen: E, Munksgaard, 1962), p. cxxxix.

<sup>298</sup> Eleanor Parker, "Havelok and the Danes in England: History, Legend, and Romance", *Review of English Studies*, 67, (2016), 428-447 (p. 438).

Tóstig says: “It is sheer superstition now to believe such things.”<sup>299</sup>

A little later, the saga states that when William the Conqueror left France and came to England, before the battle of Hastings he had Ívar’s body disinterred and cremated.<sup>300</sup> Gillian Fellows Jensen points out that this claim in both the sagas seems unlikely, as Haraldr Hardrada found Ívar’s mound in Cleveland, Yorkshire, whereas Hastings is in Sussex. Fellows Jensen saw this claim instead as a parallel between Haraldr Hardrada and William, which the author of *Hemings Pattr* would have delighted in ‘with his love of parallelisms’.<sup>301</sup> This would also explain to a Scandinavian audience why William was victorious while the Norse King Haraldr was defeated. Such an explanation removed any sense of Haraldr being defeated due to a personal deficit, for had he removed Ívar’s burial the saga suggests, then he would have defeated Harold to become king of England, rather than William.

It is evident from other texts, such as the *Carmen de Hastingsae Proelio*, that William had been ‘plundering’ (as the author of *Hemings Pattr* writes) in England before the battle of Hastings. In the *Carmen*, a messenger tells Harold that William has set fire to Pevensey, where the Norman fleet had landed, and ‘taken captive boys, and girls, even widows and also all the cattle’ (*Carmen de Hastingsae Proelio*, lines 165-66). There is no evidence, however, either in texts such as the *Carmen*, William of Poitiers’ *Gesta Guillemi* or elsewhere, that William and the Norman troops were anywhere except on the Sussex coast. Certainly, they were not in Cleveland burning the uncorrupted corpse of Ívar the Boneless, as described in the sagas. Within the world of the Icelandic sagas though, which as with Geoffrey of Monmouth’s

<sup>299</sup> Faulkes, p. 30.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>301</sup> Fellows Jensen, p. cxxxix.

*Historia regum Britanniae* contained more *imaginative memory* than historical fact, Ívar's 'guardian burial' gave an important role to a powerful Scandinavian king, one which helped determine the next king of Britain. Beyond that, it could be suggested the burning of Ívar's body in Yorkshire possibly be linked to memories of William's 'Harrying of the North' and the overthrowing of the Danelaw in Northern England after the Norman Conquest. After all, a number of English aristocrats sought shelter in Scandinavia after the Conquest.<sup>302</sup>

Exactly how William would have heard about the legend of Ivar's barrow, within the world of the saga, is unclear, although there were characters in the saga who knew about it, such as Earl Tóstig. Equally, from the exchange between Haraldr and Tóstig in *Hemings Pattr*, we get the sense that Tóstig viewed the 'guardian burial' as nothing more than superstition. Beyond being a part of the story which its Norse audience could, with their knowledge of other sagas, find humour in, perhaps it also reveals something about later medieval English attitudes towards barrows from a contemporary Scandinavian perspective. When Tóstig tells Haraldr 'that not every hillock here is given a name' (*Hemings Pattr*), this is clearly the view of the writer of the saga, because unlike in Iceland where mounds were seen as important palimpsests which contain information about the past, in England the writer believed they were mostly ignored. Nonetheless, their significance is clearly not completely forgotten according to the writer, as Tóstig can easily recount the meaning of Ívar's mound to Haraldr. Here Tóstig's reply could be seen as representative of the thirteenth-century saga writers' interpretation of what they believed to be contemporary English attitudes to remnants of the past in the landscape. In contrast to the Icelandic Sagas, texts from England translated in Iceland at the time the sagas were being written do not often contain descriptions of barrows, even though the English landscape contains many more barrows than Iceland. The Icelandic landscape itself

<sup>302</sup> Parker, *Dragon Lords*, p. 11.

actually contains ‘few “true” burial mounds’, most of the 322 recorded graves from the early Norse period, when the sagas are set, were heaped with earth but this was rarely more than one metre high and five metres wide.<sup>303</sup> The *Historia regum Britanniae* was translated into Icelandic as *Breta sögur* (‘Stories of the Britons’) in the early thirteenth century at Þingeyraklaustur, a monastery where many Icelandic Sagas were produced, although Anthony Faulkes suggests that the thirteenth-century author of *Hemings Pattr* does not seem to have known any English sources ‘at first hand’.<sup>304</sup>

The description of Ívar’s burial mound in *Ragnars Saga Loðbrókar* is remarkably similar to the burial requested by Vortimer in the *Historia regum Britanniae*, discussed above. Like Vortimer, Ívar was near his end (‘in his final sickness’) when he ordered his men to bury his body at the shore where invading parties would land (although Ívar did not specify a particular group, unlike Vortimer who specifically mentioned the Saxons). Here a grave monument was built, and Ívar informed his men that no-one would invade successfully whilst he was buried there. Once Ívar’s corpse was exhumed and burnt by William the Conqueror, his ‘guardian burial’ ceased to function. Equally in the *Welsh Triads*, as soon as Vortimer’s remains were exhumed by his father Vortigern, the Saxons were able to re-enter Britain.

It is evident from Ívar’s ‘guardian burial’ in both *Ragnars Saga Loðbrókar* and *Hemings Pattr* that the writer conceived that the burial kept the country from being invaded, but also that it would police the status quo. Any potential invader was repelled, even if they had a rightful claim to the throne, which is why, according to the writer, William believed he had to remove Ívar’s burial before he could win the battle of Hastings. Equally, the Scandinavian connection between Ívar and Haraldr Hardrada, the king of Norway had no

<sup>303</sup> Þóra Pétursdóttir, ‘DEYR FÉ, DEYJA FRÆNDR: Re-animating Mortuary Remains from Viking Age Iceland’ (unpublished MA Thesis, University of Tromsø, 2007), p. 28.

<sup>304</sup> Faulkes, p. 6.



impact, Haraldr was an invader therefore Ívar's burial protected the country against him. This also highlights the failure of guardian burials for the writers and their audience; as the texts show, they could not protect the country from internal threats, although it was the often internal threats which the country actually needed protecting against. For example, in the *Historia regum Britanniae* the real threat for Vortimer was his own father's actions, although to some extent these were engineered or controlled by Hengist. The threat of internal conflict was very real for England at the time Geoffrey of Monmouth was writing, with the civil war between Stephen and Matilda, however it is clear from the other 'guardian burials' that the threats posed by internal conflict were also very present for the authors of the other texts. For Bran the threat also came internally, from kings such as Arthur, who thought too much of themselves, which led to their downfall. Linked to this was the ultimate downfall of the British, which came from their own internal conflict, allowing the Anglo-Saxons to seize control. This could not have been prevented by a 'guardian burial' even if they were anything more than imaginary. It could be said that Ívar's burial was successful to a certain extent, as in the saga the real threat for Ívar actually only came after William was king and his burial had been removed, with William's elimination of the Anglo-Scandinavian power base in the north of England. In the world of the saga, whilst Ívar's burial remained, it maintained the Anglo-Scandinavian and Norse stake in England; once William had burnt Ívar's bones that connection was lost. The threat against which Harold's burial was ineffective was twofold, firstly William's actions against the English after the Conquest, and later threats of internal conflict throughout the later medieval period. Whilst the latter of these cannot be reflected in the *Carmen*, it is possible to see that these internal conflicts made the 'guardian burials' seem useless and thus the tradition never became widely known. As Vortimer was never ever granted his 'guardian burial' it would not have been possible to say how effective his burial would have been against his father's destructive actions, within the fictional or imaginative history of the *Historia regum*

*Britanniae*. That said, if Harold's had ever really taken place, then it would quickly have become apparent that whilst it might protect William's new kingdom from invasion, it was entirely ineffective against internal conflict. Equally, although the four 'guardian burials' discussed here may have been conceived by the writers as protecting the whole of Britain, they emerged out of an earlier tradition where they provided protection on a much more localised scale, for example, in the *Historia Brittonum* Vortimer states that although the Saxons 'may inhabit other parts of Britain,' as long as he was buried at the port where the Saxons first landed, 'they would never remain in this island'. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, in the entry for 449CE, states that this landing point was Ebbsfleet (*Wippedsfleot* or *Eopwinesfleot*<sup>305</sup>) on the Isle of Thanet, which would have still been an island when the *Historia Brittonum* was written. To attribute the repelling of invaders from a relatively small area such as the Isle of Thanet to the burial of a warrior king is one thing, it is quite another to imagine that king protecting the entirety of England, especially at a time when the threat of internal conflict was of more pressing concern than invasion. Equally, the popularity of King Arthur, especially among the Anglo-Norman aristocracy meant there was never a particular interest in the deeds of British kings such as Vortimer, although as mentioned earlier he was perhaps slightly better remembered in Wales, with his 'guardian burial' cited in some later fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Welsh poems.

## **Conclusion**

The 'guardian burials' discussed in this chapter were part of the English landscape of their respective histories, poems and sagas, on multiple levels; connected both to the creation of new landscapes and the creation of the past in the landscape. Barrows in early medieval literature

<sup>305</sup> James B Johnston, *The Place-names of England and Wales* (London: John Murray, 1915), p. 244.

are often analysed as showing awareness of the inherited nature of the English landscape.<sup>306</sup> To an extent this can be recognised in the later medieval sources; Geoffrey of Monmouth, for example, was describing a landscape from the past, albeit an imaginary past of a united Britain, inhabited by Christians who never truly existed. The authors of the texts were not only interested in the fact that their landscape had been inherited from past societies and that elements of that past were therefore visible in the landscape, which required explanation, but they were troubled by this and by the ease through which the landscape could pass from one owner or inhabitant to another. The aim of the individual ‘guardian burials’ was to halt further occupations of the landscape through the construction of a supposedly permanent feature. Amy Remensnyder writes that the power of ‘imaginative memory’ is that it inscribes meaning capable of transforming an object into a monument, or altering the meaning of a monument to incorporate it into an important cultural point, such as a founding legend or focus of commemoration.<sup>307</sup> This was one aim of those few authors writing about ‘guardian burials’, although not necessarily as part of a collective tradition. Despite this desire to transform the meaning of the landscape, none of the burials were permanent features which readers would be able to identify in the English landscape; indeed, even if they believed Geoffrey’s account, the *Historia* related that Vortimer’s monument was never built. According to the *Carmen* Harold’s barrow was built not only within living memory, but no more than a year or two before the poem itself was written, yet it did not constitute a lasting tradition. Barlow suggests that this may be because there was uncertainty over the whereabouts of Harold’s body and that this caused a number of different narratives.<sup>308</sup> It appears that for some reason, Harold’s death by dismemberment and ‘guardian burial’ in a pagan barrow did not gain acceptance within the

<sup>306</sup> Williams, *Death and Memory in Early Medieval Britain*, p. 199.

<sup>307</sup> Amy G Remensnyder, “Legendary Treasure at Conques”, *Speculum* 71 (1999), 884-906, (p. 886).

<sup>308</sup> Barlow, p. 114.

imagination of the Anglo-Norman elite and it was soon superseded by the story of his death by an arrow to the eye, burial at Waltham Abbey and suggestions that he may have even survived the battle.<sup>309</sup> Meanwhile the site of Bran's burial, had it ever existed outside of the author's imagination, would have been obscured by the construction of the Tower of London, and both sagas relate that Ívar's barrow was destroyed by William the Conqueror. *Imaginative memory*, as described by Amy Remensnyder, needs an object to confirm it or to be projected onto. As the 'guardian burials' did not have particular monuments they were associated with (unlike Hengist's barrow at Conisborough Castle, as discussed in Chapter 2) they did not persist in the cultural imagination.

Although the 'guardian burials' did not form a particularly long-lasting tradition, some elements of them are evident in other folkloric beliefs which have survived from the later medieval period into the present day. Elements of the 'guardian burial' tradition can be seen echoed in what Elissa Henken calls the 'redeemer heroes' or 'national redeemers'.<sup>310</sup> These are mythic heroes and kings, usually sleeping in caves, who are expected to arise to save the country in its most desperate hour of need.<sup>311</sup> These 'redeemer heroes' are often associated with folklore motifs, such as the king in the mountain (D.1960.2) and the sleeping hero (AT 766) and Henken notes that 'Arthur is rooted in the tradition from an early period'.<sup>312</sup> One of the earliest references to Arthur in this role came from Sir Thomas Malory's fifteenth-century *Morte D'Arthur*, where on Arthur's tomb the line *hic iacet Arthurus, rex quondam, rexque futurus* ('here lies Arthur, king once, and king to be' (*Morte D'Arthur* 19.7)) was supposedly written. Unlike the 'guardian burials', most of the 'redeemer heroes' did not die, but were

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>310</sup> Elissa R. Henken, *National Redeemer: Owain Glyndŵr in Welsh Tradition*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 19-23.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.* p. 23.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*

thought to be simply sleeping until they were needed. An early example comes from Gervase of Tilbury's *Otia Imperialia* in the early thirteenth century, where a boy was chasing the Sicilian Bishop of Catania's escaped horse, which ran into a cave on the side of Mount Etna. Inside the boy found King Arthur living in a palace. In fact Harold Godwinson even featured as a 'redeemer hero' in one later legend, which stated that he did not die at Hastings and would one day return lead his people against the Normans.<sup>313</sup> Unlike the 'guardian burials' which were protecting the country at all times, the 'redeemer heroes' were sleeping, awaiting a set time, usually when the country was in grave peril, then they would awaken. It may well be that the 'guardian burials' did not develop into a widespread tradition because they were not capable of protecting the country from very present problems such as internal conflict, civil wars and plagues. 'Redeemer heroes', on the other hand, reassured people both that whatever they were going through, it was not the worst time for the country. If it was, then King Arthur or another famous hero would soon arrive to save them.

It cannot be conclusively proven whether the four 'guardian burials' represented a product of shared cultural imagination; an idea which although not a popular tradition gradually transmitted across Northwest Atlantic Europe, or if they appeared independently in cultures which shared similar values and beliefs. Nevertheless, they were significant within the texts because they represented morality, justice, the role of the king and the right to rule, all of which were pressing matters for the intended audience; the aristocracy and clergy. It was not only in death that discussions of kingship were linked to a barrow in later medieval literature, as can be seen from Havelok's vision on the mound in the late thirteenth century Middle English poem *Havelok the Dane*, as discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>313</sup> Edwin S. Hartland *The Science of Fairy Tales: An Inquiry into Fairy Mythology* (London: Walter Scott, 1891), p. 205.

## Chapter 4: Meeting Places

### Introduction

The thematic relationship between barrows, kingship and justice continues to be explored in this chapter, with the late thirteenth-century Middle English poem *Havelok the Dane* (also called *The Lay of Havelok the Dane*), a poem which has been suggested to have a more middle-class than upper-class audience. This chapter, along with Chapter 7, explores the extent to which this text, as well as place-names can possibly give us an insight into how barrows appeared within the cultural imagination of more ordinary people in later medieval England.

*Havelok the Dane* tells the story of Havelok, son of a Danish king called Birkabein. As a child, after his father's death, Havelok himself was supposed to be killed, but instead was rescued by a fisherman who took him over to England and raised him in secret. Once grown, with no idea of his true identity, Havelok worked as a kitchen servant in a noble household before being forced to marry Goldeborw, the daughter of the late king of England, by the evil Earl of Cornwall. On their wedding night, both Havelok and Goldeborw had visions which revealed Havelok's true identity as the rightful king of Denmark. For Goldeborw this consisted of a bright light, seeing fire come out of Havelok's mouth and an angel stating that her husband was the true king of Denmark and England. For Havelok, the vision took place on a high mound:

*Me þouthe Y was in Denemark set,*

*But on þe moste hil*

*Als I sat up-on þat low*

*I bigan Denemark for to awe,*

*þe borwes and þe castles stronge;  
And mine armes weren so longe  
þat I fadmede al at ones  
Denemark with mine longe bones.  
And þanne Y wolde mine armes drawe  
Til me and hom for to haue,  
Al þat euere in Denemark liueden  
On mine armes faste clyueden  
And þe stronge castles alle  
On knes bigunnen for to falle*

*(Havelok the Dane, lines 1287-1303)*<sup>314</sup>

Havelok's story appeared in various forms in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Whilst the focus of this chapter is on the thirteenth-century Middle English romance the *Lay of Havelok the Dane* (the Middle English *Havelok*), there were at least six versions of the story which preceded it, not all of which were romances.<sup>315</sup> The number of references to Havelok in histories and chronicles, not just written in Middle English, but also French and Latin, suggest it was a well-known legend.<sup>316</sup> The preceding texts which are thought to have had the most

<sup>314</sup> 'It seemed to me that I was in Denmark, but on one of the tallest hills which I ever yet came to. As I sat upon that mound, I began to possess Denmark, the towns and the strong castles, and my arms were so long that I embraced Denmark all at once with my long limbs. And then I wanted to draw my arms towards me and have them in my keeping, all who ever lived in Denmark, clasped fast in my arms, and all the strong castles began to fall to their knees' (*Havelok the Dane*, lines 1287-1303). trans. in Parker, *Dragon Lords*, p. 137

<sup>315</sup> G.V. Smithers, *Havelok* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. xvi–xxxii.

<sup>316</sup> Parker, p.159.

influence on the author of the Middle English *Havelok* were Gaimar's twelfth-century *L'Estoire des Engleis*, a French language chronicle of English history written for Constance FitzGilbert, the wife of a Lincolnshire landholder, and the anonymous Anglo-Norman *Lai of Havelok*. There is only one extant copy of the Middle English *Havelok*, Bodleian MS Laud Misc. 108, which was produced between 1300 and 1325. Whilst the identity of the Middle English poem's author is unknown, it was written in a Northeast Midlands dialect. This suggests that the author was local to, or at least familiar with Lincolnshire, which was also the setting for the poem.

The poet's familiarity with the Lincolnshire landscape can also be seen through the detailed descriptions he gave of both Grimsby (where Havelok was raised in secret) and Lincoln. Likewise, as Thorlac Turville-Petre has remarked, the author knew the area well enough to draw on evidence of the past in the landscape, which he used in order to add authenticity to his account.<sup>317</sup> This drawing on the landscape was amplified by the use of Anglo-Saxon personal names for characters including the late king of England, which served to further imbed the story within the history of England. Turville-Petre also sees the poet's address to his audience at the start of the poem, as though they were listening to him recite it, as 'the authority for the truth-claims of the narrative'.<sup>318</sup> The writer of the Middle English *Havelok* was evidently successful in embedding the legend into history, as even into the fourteenth century, the story of Havelok being accepted by some as a historical event. The fourteenth-century English chronicler Robert Mannyng, himself probably from Lincolnshire, was particularly distressed at not being able to find evidence for the kings mentioned in

<sup>317</sup> Thorlac Turville-Petre, 'Representations of the Danelaw in Middle English Literature' in *Vikings and the Danelaw: Selected Papers from the Thirteenth Viking Congress, Nottingham and York, 21-30 August 1997*, ed. by James Graham-Campbell, Richard Hall, Judith Jesch and David N. Parsons (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2001), pp. 345-356 (p.350).

<sup>318</sup> Turville-Petre p. 349.



Havelok in other histories.<sup>319</sup> The Middle English *Havelok* may have a historical setting, but it is an imagined version of the Anglo-Saxon past, complete with a fictional king of England, rather than being set within a specific period of history, but as with the ‘guardian burials’ discussed in the previous chapter, and indeed many of the histories and chronicles written in later medieval England, it purports to be historical fact. This presumably allowed the author to make political commentary in the poem without it being immediately identifiable as commentary on a particular political figure. The fact that Grimsby’s town seal, itself dating to the early thirteenth century, features Havelok is testament to the power of ‘imaginative memory’ in the creation of local identity and legends.

### **Intended Audience**

The intended audience of the *Havelok* poem has been a matter of some debate amongst scholars. The poem’s interest in the lower orders and their interests, including labour, everyday life, poverty and aspirations of being raised to a higher social standing, as well as its detailed descriptions of violence, has led some scholars to conclude that it was written for a non-noble audience, rather than an aristocratic one.<sup>320</sup> In more recent years, however, the idea that the intended audience of medieval romances was inherently of lower standing than the nobility, as suggested by Derek Pearsall, has been reassessed. Robert Levine, for example, has highlighted examples of similarly violent executions in literature written for an aristocratic audience.<sup>321</sup> Levine does not mention the death of Harold in the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*, but the violence in it is similar to the Middle English *Havelok*. Equally, Levine suggests that the

<sup>319</sup> Ibid. p. 348.

<sup>320</sup> Roy Michael Liuzza, “Representation and Readership in the Middle English *Havelok*”, *Journal of English and German Philology*, 93 (4), (1994), 504-6.

<sup>321</sup> Robert Levine, “Who Composed *Havelok* for Whom?”, *Yearbook for English Studies*, 22 (1992), 95-104, (p. 99).

positive depictions of the lower orders in Havelok could have been meant to reflect badly upon higher levels of society, particularly courtiers.<sup>322</sup>

The Anglo-Norman poems about Havelok have been interpreted as containing various different political motives and messages; the Middle English *Havelok* presents its Danish hero as popular and sympathetic character, so much so that early critics believed the text must have originated in Scandinavia, as it was generally considered unusual for an English text of that period to portray the Danes and Denmark in a positive light.<sup>323</sup> Kenneth Eckert has suggested this positive depiction of the Danes was brought about by the Norman court, who wanted to portray a Norse king in a positive light, in order to ‘bolster their own legitimacy following Cnut as rulers of England’.<sup>324</sup> Judith Weiss, in the introduction to her translation of anonymous *Lai of Haveloc* agreed with this, stating that that the *L’Estoire des Engleis* was likely written in order to legitimise Cnut’s claim to the English throne.<sup>325</sup> The poem aimed to explain both how the Danes had come to England and how a Danish leader could rule England and Denmark<sup>326</sup>, albeit in a way which was perhaps a great deal more peaceful than the reality.<sup>327</sup> The story of Havelok ends with his and Goldeborw’s fifteen children becoming kings and queens, a legacy which would mean the future kings of England were also the kings of Denmark, and vice versa. Cnut, of course, had married King Æthelred’s widow; Emma, sister of the duke of Normandy and great-aunt of William the Conqueror.

On the other hand, Dominique Battles believes that the Middle English *Havelok* was

<sup>322</sup> Levine, p. 101.

<sup>323</sup> Parker, *Dragon Lords*, p.161.

<sup>324</sup> Kenneth Eckert, “Don’t Mention the War!: Geography, Saracens and King Horn’s ‘Diplomatic Poet’”, *Journal of Language, Literature and Culture*, 65 (2013), PAGE RANGE NEEDED (p. 129).

<sup>325</sup> Judith Weiss, *The Birth of Romance in England, the “Romance of the Horn”, the “Folie Tristan”, the “Lai of Haveloc” and “Amis and Amilun”*: Four Twelfth-Century Romances in the French of England (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2009), p. 21.

<sup>326</sup> Eleanor Parker, “Havelok and the Danes in England: History, Legend and Romance”, *The Review of English Studies*, 67 (2016), 428–447 (p. 433).

<sup>327</sup> Eckert, p.129.

not looking quite so far back into the past but was instead a commentary both on the Norman Conquest, and the rebellion against Norman rule which followed it.<sup>328</sup> Specifically, Battles argues that the Middle English *Havelok* was making reference to the Anglo-Danish alliance of 1069-71, which was centred in Lincolnshire in the years after the Conquest, with the main aim of restoring an Anglo-Saxon king to the English throne.<sup>329</sup> Equally, there are other possible interpretations of the Middle English *Havelok* which see the author as using the past to speak about kingship in the present. Christopher Stuart, for example has connected the Middle English *Havelok* to events in the reign of Edward I, suggesting that the author was using the poem to portray Edward, who shared a number of features with Havelok including his height, as a positive figure and one who ruled with divine authority, at a time when England was on the cusp of rebellion.<sup>330</sup>

Overall, it seems likely that the Middle English *Havelok* was making a commentary on political events both past and present, and it may be that the author was using the poem to talk about multiple incidents throughout English history, rather than one event specifically. Eckart, amongst others, has written that the Anglo-Norman versions of *Havelok* were all about building a ‘unifying national history’<sup>331</sup>, one which aimed to connect the disparate identities of the nation and allowed them to all become ‘English’, through the marriage of the English princess and Danish king (Goldeborw and Havelok).<sup>332</sup> Beyond that the Middle English *Havelok* was also focused on promoting the importance of Lincolnshire in the national history of England. The *Havelok* poet did this by writing about events of national importance using a local

<sup>328</sup> Dominique Battles, “Reconquering England for the English in *Havelok the Dane*”, *The Chaucer Review*, 47 (2012), 187-205 (p.188).

<sup>329</sup> Battles, p.188.

<sup>330</sup> Christopher Stuart, “*Havelok the Dane* and Edward I in the 1290s”, *Studies in Philology*, 93:4, (1996), 349-364 (p. 358).

<sup>331</sup> Eckert, p. 33.

<sup>332</sup> Turville-Petre, *Representations of the Danelaw*, p. 354.

Lincolnshire setting. This had the added effect of integrating the Anglo-Scandinavian heritage of Lincolnshire into national identity.<sup>333</sup>



Figure 11. Howe Hill Round Barrow, Lincolnshire. Photograph: David Wright  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/dhwright/15936653297/>

### **Danish Elements of the Havelok Legend**

Eleanor Parker has recently linked Havelok's barrow to those in Norse sagas, both because of Danish elements in the *Havelok* story and similarities between the depictions of barrows in Norse sagas and in the Middle English *Havelok*. However, as Parker herself writes 'a romance

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.* p. 351.

does not become a saga just because it has a Scandinavian hero'.<sup>334</sup> Havelok himself may have been Danish, but the story has its origins in Anglo-Norman romance; it is a story of the history of England far more than it is one of Denmark, and as Eleanor Parker notes, the poet does not actually show a great knowledge of Denmark or even Danish place-names.<sup>335</sup> There are several elements of the passage which seem to align with descriptions of barrows in the Norse sagas, and here the poet may well have been drawing on shared traditions between Scandinavia and the North East of Britain.

Lincolnshire was heavily settled by the Danes, following the invasion of the Great Heathen Army in the late ninth century, and Lincoln became an important trading centre. There is evidence that Scandinavian languages and dialects were still in use, to some extent, into the twelfth century, and some of this evidence still remains today, shown by the elements in Lincolnshire placenames, such as *haugr* (mound).<sup>336</sup> Equally, typically Scandinavian first names were still common in Lincolnshire in the thirteenth century, when the Middle English *Havelok* was written, which Turville-Petre suggests showed that local people in Lincolnshire continued to preserve a memory of their Danish heritage.<sup>337</sup>

Whilst the focus here is on the barrow in the Middle English *Havelok*, it is worth acknowledging that barrows were not the only monuments to be associated with legend. According to the mid-fourteenth-century text *Eulogium historiarum sive temporis*, a chronicle of Malmesbury Abbey, Havelok was buried at Stonehenge.<sup>338</sup> Stonehenge was, of course, the burial place of the father and uncle of King Arthur in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*, and therefore was recognised as an important monument in the history of England.

<sup>334</sup> Parker, *Havelok and the Danes*, p. 429.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.* p. 435.

<sup>336</sup> Turville-Petre, p. 352.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.* p. 348.

<sup>338</sup> Parker, *Dragon Lords*, p. 191.

In a similar vein, it is interesting to consider to what extent the barrow in the Middle English *Havelok* can be seen as an ‘English’ monument, especially as it only exists within Havelok’s dream. If the barrow was located anywhere, it would be in Denmark, and interestingly, although the vision tells Havelok he is the rightful king of Denmark, it really says nothing about his accession to the English throne. It may be that the poet is referencing a cultural knowledge of the appointment of Scandinavian kings, although equally it may be the case that Havelok would automatically have a claim to the English throne through his marriage to Goldeborw, once he resumed his place as king of Denmark, and therefore this did not need to be articulated in the vision.

### **The King on the Mound: Norse Sagas**

In the Norse sagas, barrows were often linked to both kings and kingship, as well as conquest and landownership, themes which are also very prominent in the Middle English *Havelok*. In contrast to the place of the barrow in Harold’s guardian burial, as discussed in the previous chapter, in *Havelok* the barrow could be seen as aspirational, because it is connected with kingship in a positive sense. As well as demonstrating Havelok’s royal status, the barrow also allowed for a physical connection between Havelok and Denmark, even when he was separated from it by fate and the North Sea.<sup>339</sup> The trope of kings sitting on barrows occurred fairly frequently in the Norse sagas. Whilst this was more common in the later sagas, it did also appear in some of the earlier sagas where it was worded as though it was perhaps a traditional or ritual act. For example, the early thirteenth-century *Haralds Saga Hins Hárfagra* (‘the Saga of Harald Fairhair’) says ‘that King Hrollaug... went to the summit of the mound on which kings were wont to sit’.<sup>340</sup> Similarly, the mid-thirteenth-century *Hákonar Saga Góða* (‘the saga

<sup>339</sup> Parker, *Havelok and the Danes*, p. 436.

<sup>340</sup> Gleb Kazakov, *Sitting on the Burial Mound – a Literary Invention or Real Ceremony?* (Aarhus: the Fifteenth International Saga Conference, 2012), p. 2.

of Hakon the Good’) contains the line ‘he sat upon a high place, as kings are used to sit’.<sup>341</sup> This phrasing connects the king with judicial power, as things in Scandinavia, and moots in England were sometimes held on and around prominent barrows. Whether it was more important that the site was a high place rather than specifically a barrow is not clear, though barrows feature in this role on multiple occasions in the Norse Sagas, which perhaps suggests this was thought to be a historical practice. This idea is echoed in the Middle English *Havelok*, when Havelok dreamt he was sitting on a *low* (‘barrow’ or ‘hill’, Middle English *Havelok*, line 1289) which is also described as *þe moste hil* (‘the tallest hill’, Middle English *Havelok*, line 1288). Interestingly, especially considering the role played by the barrow in *Havelok*, Hilda Ellis suggested this trope may well have implied a ritual of sitting on a mound to become king.<sup>342</sup> Ellis’ suggestion came from another passage in *Haralds Saga Hins Hárfagra*, where ‘the Norse king who gave up his realm to Harald Hárfagr sat on top of a mound and rolled himself down from it’.<sup>343</sup> If one had to roll down from the mound to give up a kingdom, Ellis proposed, then perhaps the natural way to assume the crown would be by ascending to sit on the top of the barrow.<sup>344</sup> Whether the *Havelok* poet would have aware of these ideas is not certain, although Thorlac Turville-Petre has suggested that he was using local knowledge of Lincolnshire’s Scandinavian past and shared cultural ideas.<sup>345</sup>

### **The King on the Mound: Welsh Evidence**

The relationship between kings and barrows as discussed above, does not just appear in Norse Sagas and the Middle English *Havelok*, in fact there are a number of medieval Welsh sources

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1.

<sup>342</sup> Hilda Ellis, *Road to Hel: A Study of the Conception of the Dead in Old Norse Literature* (New York, NY: Greenwood, 1968), p. 108.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>344</sup> Ellis, p.108.

<sup>345</sup> Thorlac Turville-Petre, *England the Nation: Language, Literature and National Identity, 1290-1340* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 1.

which record instances of kings sitting on mounds. For example, in the first branch of the *Mabinogion*, Pwyll, prince of the Dyfed, was told by a member of his court that whoever sat upon the mound of Gorsedd Arberth would not leave it without one of two things: ‘either wounds or blows, or his witnessing a marvel’.<sup>346</sup> Pwyll replied that he was not concerned about receiving wounds or blows and went to sit on the mound. There he witnessed a woman on a white horse riding towards him, this was Rhiannon who would become his wife. In the Third branch of the *Mabinogion*, Manawyddan, brother of the king of Britain and now the second husband of Rhiannon, Pryderi, the son of Pwyll, and his wife sat upon Gorsedd Arbeth.

‘All of a sudden there was a clap of thunder and ... a fall of mist so that no-one could see anyone else. After the mist, everywhere [was filled] with bright light. And when they looked where before they would have once seen flocks and herds and dwellings, they could see nothing at all: neither house, nor animal, nor smoke, nor fire, nor man, nor dwellings; [nothing] except the empty buildings of the court, deserted, uninhabited, without man or beast within them, their own companions lost, without them knowing anything about them; [no-one left] except the four of them’.<sup>347</sup>

When they left the mound, they discovered that this vision had become true and all the court had vanished, a marvel which was eventually revealed to be the work of a man who had cast a spell over the land. The spell was eventually reversed on the top of Gorsedd Arbeth,

<sup>346</sup> Gwyn Jones and Owen Jones, *The Mabinogion*, 2nd edn (London: Everyman's Library) p. 9. All further quotations/translations of the Mabinogion are from this edition.

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid* p. 43



when Manawyddan went there to hang a mouse he had caught stealing his grain. The hanging of the mouse on the barrow, which strange to a modern reader, does connect the story to judicial uses of the barrow in medieval England; primarily barrows as the meeting sites of hundred courts. Incidentally, a barrow is also the site of Gawain's meeting with the Green Knight in the fourteenth-century poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, which takes place around the Welsh-English border. This is covered further in Chapter 5, but like the encounters of Gorsedd Arbeth, Gawain faces both blows and marvels at the barrow.

Patrick Sims-Williams suggests a date range of the mid-eleventh to the early thirteenth century for the writing of the *Mabinogion*, although the tales contained within it are generally assumed to originate from earlier oral sources.<sup>348</sup> Ellis identified that the theme of receiving a vision as a result of sitting on a barrow, appeared in Norse, Welsh and Irish traditions<sup>349</sup>, so it is possible it was an earlier shared tradition which was passed down orally for many years before being committed to the page. Indeed, Rachel Bromwich suggests that it is likely that the prevalence and importance of barrows in medieval Welsh literature, which far exceeds those in medieval English literature, is due to the survival of earlier 'Celtic' and British oral sources which as far as we know did not survive to the same extent in England due to the Anglo-Saxons and the Norman Conquest.<sup>350</sup> That said, whilst *Mabinogion* continued to be a staple of Welsh oral tradition, but the text itself does not appear to have been widely read during the Middle Ages.<sup>351</sup>

There is a very small amount of evidence for Welsh kings sitting on mounds in documentary sources, all dating to the early medieval period. Contained in the Book of

<sup>348</sup> Patrick Sims-Williams, *Irish Influence in Medieval Welsh Literature*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 61.

<sup>349</sup> Ellis, p. 109.

<sup>350</sup> Bromwich, p. 322.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*

Llandaff, a twelfth-century Welsh text which recorded details of land granted to the Church by various Welsh kings from late sixth to late eleventh century, it is recorded that two kings gave up land from atop a tomb.<sup>352</sup> Gurcant, a king in the early seventh century, is recorded as *sedens super sepulchrum patris sui et pro amina illius* ('sitting on his father's tomb and for the health of his father's soul' (*Liber Landavenis* pg.156)).<sup>353</sup> King Morcant, also in the early seventh century, is recorded as granting the land to the Church *super sepulchrum Mourici regis iacentis coram idoneis testibus* ('lying on the tomb of [his grandfather] King Mouric, in the presence of suitable witnesses' (*Liber Landavenis* pg. 41)).<sup>354</sup> The author of the Middle English *Havelok* may not have been aware directly of these Welsh visions on barrows, he may well have been aware of similar traditions through the link between Lincolnshire and Scandinavia.

### **Interpreting the Vision: Connecting King and Country**

Eleanor Parker suggests that the power of the barrow to provide prophecy comes from the 'intimate physical connection it represents between the king and his land'.<sup>355</sup> It is interesting then that Havelok, cut off physically from Denmark, but still raised by a Danish family, cannot interpret the meaning of this dream for himself, and it falls to his English wife to translate the meaning. Goldeborw's ability to interpret the dream suggests English knowledge and understanding of the tradition, whilst emphasis on Goldeborw as the rightful heir of England provides the link between the meaning of Havelok's vision and the conclusion of the story; that Havelok was the rightful king of both Denmark and of England.<sup>356</sup> Although the demonstration

<sup>352</sup> Ellis, pp.107-8.

<sup>353</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>355</sup> Parker, *Dragon Lords*, p.175.

<sup>356</sup> Turville-Petre, *Representations of the Danelaw*, p.353.

of kingship was evidently an important reason for kings sitting on barrows in the Norse sagas, there were also a number of kings who sat on the mounds of their dead wives.<sup>357</sup>

Equally, Havelok's vision was not the only occasion in literature where barrows were linked to a Scandinavian invasion of England.<sup>358</sup> In the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for 1006 it was recorded that an invading Danish army marched across Hampshire and Berkshire until they got to the mound of Cwihelmeshlæwe (now known as Scutchamer Knob) *forðon oft man cwæð, gif hi Cwicelmeshlæw gesohton, þæt hi næfre to sæ gan ne scolden* ('for it had often been said that if they reached Cwihelmeshlæwe, they would never again reach the sea' (*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (C)* 1006, lines 22-3)).<sup>359</sup> On this occasion the prophecy did not prove to be true and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records that the Danes returned safely to their boats with the goods they had plundered.<sup>360</sup> Despite this, Parker links both the Cwihelmeshlæwe legend and Havelok's vision to the burial mound of Ivar the Boneless, one of the 'guardian burials' discussed in the previous chapter, which appears in two thirteenth-century Norse Sagas: *Ragnars Saga Loðbrókar* and *Hemings Pattr*.<sup>361</sup> It is worth noting however, that where Cwihelmeshlæwe and Ivar's burial have legends which warn against invasion; and in the case of Ivar's 'guardian burial' in the sagas actively prevents it, the barrow in Havelok's vision actually encourages invasion, albeit by the rightful king. Whilst it cannot be denied that Havelok's vision would appear to fit into the tropes of the prophetic barrows, it is unclear whether this was an idea known in late thirteenth-century England, even in Lincolnshire, which had maintained some links to Scandinavia even after the end of the Danelaw. Whilst it is also

<sup>357</sup> Kazakov, p. 1.

<sup>358</sup> Parker, *Dragon Lords*, p.174.

<sup>359</sup> Trans in Margaret Ashdown, *English and Norse Documents relating to the Reign of Ethelred the Unready*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930), pp. 50-51. See also Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric*, pp. 1-2, (p. 217).

<sup>360</sup> Ashdown, p.51

<sup>361</sup> Parker, *Dragon Lords*, p.175.

a theme which, as demonstrated, also appeared in Welsh literature from the same period, it was in a text which does not appear to have been widely distributed at the time. It is more likely that the Welsh tradition at least is a distinct tradition which does not have a cultural connect to Havelok. Instead these ideas developed in parallel, with the Middle English *Havelok* drawing on the use of barrows as hundred meeting places. This use would have been understood by a medieval audience. In Kent, for example, the early Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Saltwood, near Hythe, itself incorporating a Bronze Age round barrow, was used as the hundred meeting place until at least 1274.<sup>362</sup> Equally, hundred moot sites may well have remained places for communal gatherings well after the judicial aspect moved elsewhere.<sup>363</sup> Hundred meeting places often became the sites of fairs and at some sites this appears to have carried on throughout the later medieval period, and there is one site where it definitely continued into the early modern period. When the village of East Ilsley was granted a charter for a fair in 1620, the villagers asked that the ‘customary fair’ which was being held at Scutchamer Knob, a barrow and the assumed old hundred meeting place, be stopped so that their fair might have a monopoly.<sup>364</sup>

<sup>362</sup> Baker and Brookes, p. 9.

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>364</sup> Harte, *Lonely Places*



*Figure 12. Scutchamer Knob. Photograph: Cyrus C. Taylor*

### **Place-name evidence**

Like Cwichelmeshlæwe (Cwichelm's Mound<sup>365</sup>), many of the barrow names recorded in medieval English documents contain personal names, predominantly Anglo-Saxon male, reflecting the identity, or at least assumed identity, of the inhabitant of the barrow.<sup>366</sup> The personal name element is referred to within place-names studies as a “qualifier”, a description such as personal name, number, association or external characteristic, which along with the

<sup>365</sup> Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric*, p. 1

<sup>366</sup> Margaret Gelling & Ann Cole, *The Landscape of Place-names*, (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2000), p. 179

“generic” element (such as barrow, howe and low) make up the place or barrow name.<sup>367</sup> Whilst many minor English place-names, such as field names and “other minor landscape features” only appear in documentary evidence dating to the thirteenth century and later<sup>368</sup>, many of the barrow names which contain personal names appear to date to before the mid eleventh century, to early medieval England. Even though the place-names do not appear in written form before the later medieval period, does not imply they date from that period, as David Mills points out in his dictionary of British place-names: “all names are older than their earliest recorded spelling, therefore... even a twelfth century source usually [has] their origins in Old English”.<sup>369</sup> What the recording of these names some centuries after they were first coined does show is that they were still in use, and therefore still meaningful both to the writers of the documents and the people living within those landscapes.

Of course, place-names, like the landscape, were not something static. Margaret Gelling in *Place-Names in the Landscape* (1984) and *The Landscape of Placenames* (2000) has demonstrated that the meanings of similar “generic” place-name elements were shortened in Middle English and originally had more distinct meanings in Old English.<sup>370</sup> It should be noted, however, that according to the research of Peter Kitson, the uniformity Margaret Gelling and others see in the “generic” elements of place-names is not always reflected in general Old English usage of these words.<sup>371</sup> Indeed, in the case of some barrow “generic” elements such

<sup>367</sup> Richard Jones and Sarah Semple, *Sense of Place in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Richard Jones and Sarah Semple, (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2012), p. 4

<sup>368</sup> Jayne Carroll and Susan Kilby, “Preparing the ground: finding minor landscape names in medieval documents”, *The Local Historian*, 49(4), (2019) 276-300, (p. 278)

<sup>369</sup> David Mills, *A Dictionary of British Place Names 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. xv

<sup>370</sup> Margaret Gelling, *Place-Names in the Landscape*, (London: Dent, 1984) pp. 75–76, and Tamara V. Khvesko, “Interdisciplinary Approach to British Place Names Studies”, *Procedia - Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 154, (2014), 402 – 406, (p. 405)

<sup>371</sup> Peter Kitson, “Fog on the Barrow-Downs?”, in *A Commodity of Good Names: Essays in Honour of Margaret Gelling*, ed. by, O.J. Padel and David N. Parsons, (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2008), pp. 382–94, (p. 393)

as *beorg*, we may actually see the opposite; that is, a condensing to more specific meanings in Middle English. *Beorg* in Old English could refer to a mountain, mountain range, cliff, headland, promontory, hill, barrow, heap, pile or mound, but in Middle English (as *bergh*, *berw*, *beruz*, *beruh*, *berz*) seems to have been used to mean hill, mound or barrow.<sup>372</sup> That said, not every scholar gives such a wide usage to *beorg*. Gelling, for example, writes that *beorg* referred to a hill with continuously rounded profile, although size was irrelevant and therefore it could refer to a large hill as well as a barrow or even a knoll on the end of a ridge.<sup>373</sup> Peter Kitson has suggested that this can make it difficult for researchers to determine whether the use of a word such as *berw* in a Middle English text indicates a barrow, rather than a hill, and this is certainly true. Kitson suggests that at this point in history a sense of scale was set by personal experience,<sup>374</sup> which explains why unlike in the modern day, it was the shape of the feature, not the size, that was relevant to the naming. Likewise, Gelling has pointed out that the sighting of barrows on hills can add to uncertainty, as it can be unclear whether the name is referring to the hill or the barrow specifically.<sup>375</sup>

The work of scholars such as Gelling and Kitson shows the importance of interdisciplinary research to place-names studies. Comparing the place-name evidence to maps of the area, as well as archaeological evidence also highlights the value of understanding how the landscape looked when the name originated, and as Gelling highlighted, there would have been pre-existing settlements and the name applied to both.<sup>376</sup>

Place-names demonstrate that a place had meaning, and also often what that meaning was. They are adopted because there is a need to identify a place as separate, and therefore important

<sup>372</sup> Phillip Durkin, *Oxford Guide to Etymology*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 280

<sup>373</sup> Gelling & Cole, *The Landscape of Placenames*, p. 145

<sup>374</sup> Kitson, pp. 382–94

<sup>375</sup> Margaret Gelling, *Signposts to the Past, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*, (Felpham: Phillimore & Company, 2010), p. 131

<sup>376</sup> Paul Cullen, "English place-names and landscape terminology", in *Perceptions of Place: Twenty-First-Century Interpretations of English Place-Name Studies*, ed. by J. Carroll, & D. Parsons, (2013), 161-179, p. 161

for whatever reason.<sup>377</sup> As Paul Cullen wrote, place-names “offer insights into how people understood, ordered and interacted with their surroundings”, they show us what was important or meaningful for the people who inhabited that landscape at a particular time, and of course names could alter over time.<sup>378</sup> It is possible to see place-names carrying messages from the past,<sup>379</sup> but equally, where names change we can also see a possible change reflected in the use, or frequency of use, of the landscape.

Place-names could add an interesting element to studies developing from this thesis, which focuses mainly on the cultural imagination of the upper echelons of later medieval society in England, because as Cullen writes “place-names offer an insight into a word-stock, even a register, which is underrepresented in literary and other sources – that is the vocabulary, viewpoint and concerns of medieval people who got their hands dirty, the land-working peasantry”.<sup>380</sup> This is especially the case for field names, but where do barrow names fall in this? How can we tell who is naming them?<sup>381</sup> The interests or interpretations offered by some barrow names which will be discussed shortly, especially those relating to the supernatural, do not occur with equal frequency in the literary sources, perhaps suggesting that these really do represent the interpretations of the ordinary people inhabiting and working the landscape every day. However, as discussed in the introduction to this thesis, place-name evidence could form an entirely new substantive piece of research more appropriate for someone with advanced palaeography and toponomy skills.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165

<sup>378</sup> Jones and Semple, *Sense of Place in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 2

<sup>379</sup> *Ibid.* p. 13-14

<sup>380</sup> Cullen, p. 171

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*



The most commonly used words for barrows in English place-names come from Old English (*beorg* and *hlæw*), and Old Norse (*haugr*).<sup>382</sup> There is also an Old Welsh word *crŭg*, although it is not used on its own to denote a barrow in English place names.<sup>383</sup> *Beorg*, as noted above, often refers to a natural hill as well as a barrow, and although Gelling defines *hlæw* as an artificial mound (although not always sepulchral)<sup>384</sup> it is clear from the use of its Middle English derivatives such as *law/lawe* to mean hill, as well as hill names containing *low* in the modern day, that the definition is not quite that simple. A.H. Smith suggests that in Scandinavia the meaning of *haugr* as burial mound was older than the meaning of hill, although it is not clear if that is also the case in England.<sup>385</sup>

Margaret Gelling's books including *Place-names in the Landscape* highlight the difficulties caused by the focus on settlement names in place-name studies, over minor place-names and landscape feature names. For example, in this seminal text in the study of landscape and place-names, Gelling did not include *haugr/howe* at all, and this was not revised or remedied until *The Landscape of Place-names* was published in 2000, almost twenty years later.<sup>386</sup> It is important, therefore, as Gelling herself has pointed out, to undertake systematic studies in order to identify barrows from hills, and to explore the frequency with which the words refer to barrows or hills.<sup>387</sup> Since Gelling recommended this in 1998 only one such survey has been undertaken: Terthi Nurminen's 2012 PhD thesis, *Hill Terms in the place names of Northumberland and Co. Durham*. It would be useful carry out a similar study for medieval

<sup>382</sup> Gelling, *Signposts to the Past*, p. 131

<sup>383</sup> Grinsell, p. 63

<sup>384</sup> Gelling & Cole, *The Landscape of Placenames*, p. 178

<sup>385</sup> Albert H. Smith, *English Place Name Elements Part 1*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956)

<sup>386</sup> Gelling & Cole, *The Landscape of Placenames*, p. 174

<sup>387</sup> Gelling, *Signposts to the Past*, p. 133

England, collecting together barrow names from all different possible sources, although as Nurminen's research shows, this could be a number of PhD projects in itself.

Where would be a useful place to begin identifying barrow names in later medieval England? Barrows frequently appear in Anglo-Saxon boundary clauses, and it would be interesting to see if they continue to be cited in this manner in the later medieval period. Jayne Carroll and Susan Kilby have provided an excellent guide to finding minor place-names in later medieval charters,<sup>388</sup> whilst Stephen Miles on's recent article *Beyond the Dots: mapping meaning in the later medieval landscape* recommends using Inquisitions Post-Mortem (generally dating to between 1200-1500). Miles on writes that Inquisitions Post-Mortem "not only help us to reconstruct the character of the environment at a local level, they also include many peasant by-names as well as field names and other minor place-names which shed light on contemporary practices and attitudes in relation to specific terminology. Because they were coined by ordinary inhabitants, bynames offer a rare glimpse on the outlook and experiences of peasants rather than the lords or clergy".<sup>389</sup> Whilst interpretation of barrows as burial places has already been identified in a number of literary sources, many barrows names especially those relating to treasure and the supernatural may very well represent the interpretations of ordinary people, and even interpretations which were transferred up through society to the elite.

Miles on makes a number of further points which are very relevant when thinking about the naming of barrows; namely that the recorded is the one most commonly used, or which best reflects the collective meaning.<sup>390</sup> The meaning would not have been the same for everyone

<sup>388</sup> Carroll and Kilby, pp. 276-300

<sup>389</sup> Stephen Miles on (2016) "Beyond the Dots: mapping meaning in the later medieval landscape", in *The Later Medieval Inquisitions Post Mortem: Mapping the Medieval Countryside and Rural Society*, ed. by Michael Hicks (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2016), 84-99, (p. 84)

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid.* p. 92

who interacted with the space, it would have been a focus point for varied memories and associations and not all of these can be recorded through place-names.<sup>391</sup>

Systematically recording later medieval barrow names would not only require palaeographic and language skills in order to search documents such as Inquisitions Post-Mortem, but also a good understanding of place-name studies. As Gelling points out, it can be difficult for those without philological training to tell the difference between derivatives of *burh* (fort/city), *beorg* (barrow/hill) and *bearu* (grove/small wood).<sup>392</sup> Gelling gives other examples of barrow names which are difficult even for the seasoned toponymist to interpret: for example the *litch* in Litchbarrow (Northamptonshire – now Litchborough) could refer to a corpse, an enclosure or a stream.<sup>393</sup> Here researching how the landscape looked when the name originated could help determine the correct meaning.

As well as personal names, the “qualifier” element of barrow names often refers to the shape of the barrow or number of barrows as location markers, and to related landscape features as is possible the case with Litchbarrow.<sup>394</sup> However, they can also give some tantalising clues of possible interpretations made by those who named them, or uses the barrows had when they were named. Some barrows contain references to moot or hundred mounds in their names, such as Mutlow (Essex & Cambridgeshire), Modbury and Hundredsbarrow (Dorset), and Brightwellsbarrow Hundred (Gloucestershire).<sup>395</sup>

There are also a number of barrow names which perhaps reference them containing or being searched for treasure, which as discussed in Chapter 7 of this thesis is something which took place during the later medieval period. The searches and their relative successes may be

<sup>391</sup> Ibid, p. 89

<sup>392</sup> Gelling, *Signposts to the Past*, p. 133 & Gelling and Cole, *The Landscape of Place-names*, p. 221

<sup>393</sup> Gelling and Cole, *The Landscape of Place-names*, p. 151

<sup>394</sup> Gelling, *Signposts to the Past*, p. 134

<sup>395</sup> Ibid, p. 133

recorded in names such as Idel Barrow (Gloucestershire) and Brokenborough (Wiltshire), with *idel* coming from Old English meaning empty.<sup>396</sup> Hordlow and Hurdlow were two recorded names, both meaning treasure mound, whilst the sixteenth century Itinerary of John Leland records a barrow called Money Pot Hill in Essex, also recorded in 1277 as “Moneye”.<sup>397</sup> Meanwhile, there are some barrow names which could be deceiving - gold or hoard could be a reference to treasure often just referred to the colour of flowers, crops or soil in the field.<sup>398</sup>

Some barrow names recorded in medieval documents also contain references to the supernatural. In Anglo-Saxon England, barrows were thought of as a place where one might meet the other worldly or supernatural creatures, so some of the ‘supernatural’ barrow names may date to the early medieval period – the Derbyshire Pipe Rolls for 1175 record the town of Drakelow as *Drakelawe* (dragon mound), but a version of that name, *Draken Hlæwen*, was first recorded for the same place in 942.<sup>399</sup> Indeed, Sarah Semple has stated that during the later medieval period ‘associations between the supernatural and prehistoric monuments are few and far between’.<sup>400</sup> This is generally the case, with barrows not being regularly associated with the supernatural in literature until the early modern period. However, in part this may relate to the likely audience of the texts involving barrows during the later Middle Ages. Folklore recorded in the early modern period may have medieval precedents or origins, which come from more vernacular sources. If place-names offer us an insight into the beliefs of the lower classes in medieval society, of the ordinary people, then this may give us some clues as to the supernatural creatures they expected to find lurking in or around barrows. Most frequently

<sup>396</sup> Ibid, p. 132

<sup>397</sup> Gelling and Cole, *The Landscape of Place-names*, p. 178

<sup>398</sup> Gelling and Cole, *The Landscape of Place-names*, p. 178

<sup>399</sup> Eilert Ewell, *Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names* 4<sup>th</sup> edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 143

<sup>400</sup> Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric*, p. 237.

named are dragons and goblins; for example, *Drakenhorde* (dragon hoard, Oxfordshire) which appears in a thirteenth century source.<sup>401</sup> *Elfhow* (elf mound, now Elfa Hills, Cumbria) appears in a 1488 document,<sup>402</sup> whilst Ailey Hill (North Yorkshire), recorded by Leland in the sixteenth century as *Ilshow Hill* is also possibly a medieval reference to elves. Semple has gathered together a number of place-names referencing goblins and barrows from the later medieval period, including *Scrathou* (goblin mound), recorded in the thirteenth century, now Scratters, East Yorkshire, *Shokenhulle* (Herefordshire), recorded in 1377, *Socheberge* (Warwickshire) in 1086, and *Scrathowe* (North Yorkshire) in 1388.<sup>403</sup>

### **Defining “Supernatural”**

It is worth taking a moment now to explore what is meant by the term ‘supernatural’ and to what extent that concept would have been understood by the later medieval writers. The Oxford English Dictionary defines *supernatural* as ‘belonging to a realm or system that transcends nature, as that of divine, magical, or ghostly beings; attributed to or thought to reveal some force beyond scientific understanding or the laws of nature; occult, paranormal’.<sup>404</sup> Whilst the phrase *supra naturam* (above nature) was in use in England by the end of the fifth century, mainly due to the writings of St Augustine, the term *supernaturalis* (from which the modern English *supernatural* derives) only came into common parlance in the thirteenth century.<sup>405</sup> Robert Bartlett describes the ‘difficult and disputable frontiers between what is natural and what is not’ in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as some things such as dragons, which would immediately be seen as supernatural in the modern day were understood to be part of

<sup>401</sup> Gelling and Cole, *The Landscape of Place-names*, p. 178

<sup>402</sup> John Field, *English Field Names: A Dictionary*, (Exeter: David & Charles, 1972), p. 71

<sup>403</sup> Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric*, p. 181

<sup>404</sup> ‘Supernatural, adj. and n.’ *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (2019), <[www.oed.com/view/Entry/194422](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/194422)> [accessed 24 March 2019]

<sup>405</sup> Robert Bartlett, *The Natural and the Supernatural in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p.12.

divinely created nature in medieval England.<sup>406</sup> The twelfth-century theologian and Bishop of Paris, Peter Lombard, derived his beliefs on nature from St Augustine. Augustine's view was that when God created the world he not only created things which existed immediately, but also planted 'seminal seeds', which would over time lead to the existence of new things.<sup>407</sup> This meant that when, for example, animals reproduced, it was a natural process it was not an autonomous act but due instead to the 'seminal seeds' planted by God.<sup>408</sup> According to Lombard there were other things which men considered *praeter naturam* (beyond nature) which were the result of God acting alone, rather than in conjunction with nature as with the 'seminal seeds'.<sup>409</sup> The *praeter naturam* were often things which would be classed as supernatural in the modern day, however to the medieval theologian they were accepted to have been created by God, and therefore existed within the natural order of the world. This does not mean that they were not thought of as interesting or remarkable and were of great interest to late-twelfth-early-thirteenth century writers such as Gervase of Tilbury.

### **The Marvelous Horn, Gervase of Tilbury**

Gervase of Tilbury's main work was the *Otia Imperialia* ('Recreation for an Emperor'), which he wrote in the early thirteenth century for the Holy Roman Emperor Otto IV. Gervase was born in Essex and it is thought that the *Otia Imperialia* had its origins in an educational book for Prince Henry, the son of Henry II of England, before his untimely death in 1183. As a book which was meant primarily for entertainment purposes, the *Otia* contains numerous examples of what Gervase referred to as *inauditia* (things unknown). 'From these' Gervase wrote, 'arise

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.* p. 71.

<sup>407</sup> *Ibid.* pp.6-7.

<sup>408</sup> Bradley Green, *Augustine, Genesis and the Goodness of Creation* (2019)

<<https://henrycenter.tiu.edu/2017/05/augustine-genesis-the-goodness-of-creation/>> [accessed 24 March 2019]

<sup>409</sup> Bartlett, pp.6-7.

two things, miracles and marvels (*miracula et mirabilia*) although the end result of both is amazement'.<sup>410</sup> Miracles, according to Gervase, were things which seemed to be *praeter naturam*, but which men could easily attribute to divine power or intervention. On the other hand, Gervase considered 'marvels' to be things or events which were entirely natural, but which men could not easily attribute to divine intervention.<sup>411</sup> One such marvel from Gervase's *Otia Imperialia* was the story about a *monticulus* (hillock or mound) which stood in some woods in Gloucestershire, probably in the Forest of Dean. The mound was about the height of a man and if knights (*milites*) or hunters (*venatores*) approached it and said '*sitio*' ('I thirst'), a servant would emerge with a gold and bejewelled drinking horn from which the man could drink his fill. It was not wine or water in the horn, but some kind of nectar, and once the man handed the horn back the servant would vanish.<sup>412</sup> One day a knight took the drink, but instead of returning the horn to the servant after drinking, he rode away with it. The horn came into the hands of Robert of Gloucester, the illegitimate son of Henry I, who gave it to his father so that there would not be accusations of him hiding stolen treasure. It is clear that the theft of the horn would have been considered wrong both morally and legally and it is unlikely that giving the cup away would do anything to alter that fact.

In later medieval England, horns were not just used for drinking, indeed, to drink from a horn would have been considered an old English custom. They were methods of communication, blown, for example, to call assemblies.<sup>413</sup> Horns also played a role in the exchange of land, and were sometimes given as proof of ownership of land or to demonstrate

<sup>410</sup> Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, trans. in Bartlett, p.18.

<sup>411</sup> Bartlett, p.18.

<sup>412</sup> Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, Tertis Decisio, LX.

<sup>413</sup> Sheila Sweetinburgh, "Mayor-Making and Other Ceremonies: Shared Uses of Sacred Space among the Kentish Cinque Ports", in *The Use and Abuse of Sacred Places in Late Medieval Towns*, ed. by Paul Trio and Marjan De Smet, (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2005), 165-89, pp. 173, 175.

an office held, especially relating to forests or hunting grounds.<sup>414</sup> The *Historia Monasterii Croylandensis* ('The History of the Monastery of Crowland') was written by Ingulf, the abbot of Crowland in the late eleventh, early twelfth century. Mainly written to support claims to property around Crowland, it contains a passage which describes how estates were transferred from one owner to another, both before and after the Norman Conquest:

At first many estates were conveyed by bare word, without any writing or charter, but merely by the sword, helmet, horn or the cup of the possessor. Many tenements were transferred by a spur, a horse comb, a bow or even an arrow. This was at the beginning of the Norman reign. In later years the custom has been changed. <sup>415</sup>

Of course, as Ingulf was using this to back up land claims made by Crowland Abbey, it cannot necessarily be taken at face value, nevertheless there are other examples of a horn being given to represent the transfer of land. For example, Ulphus' Horn, held by York Minster was given to the Church by a Viking thane called Ulf, as a representation of the transfer of Ulf's estates into the possession of the Minster. This exchange allegedly occurred in the early-mid eleventh century, though it first appeared in the written record in a fourteenth-century chronicle.<sup>416</sup> Gervase may have expected his audience to equate the knight's theft of the bejewelled horn with a similar meaning; it was not just a horn which was stolen but something more symbolic. In Chrétien de Troyes' early twelfth-century romance *Perceval*, a Red Knight steals a cup from

<sup>414</sup> Samuel Pegge, "Of the Horn, as a Charter or Instrument of Conveyance. Some Observations on Mr. Samuel Foxlowe's Horn; as Likewise on the Nature and Kinds of these Horns in General", *Archaeologia*, 3 (1775), 1-12 (p. 3). < <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261340900015885> > [accessed 12 March 2019]

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2.

<sup>416</sup> T. D. Kendrick, "The Horn of Ulph", *Antiquity* 11, (1937), 278-282, p. 279.



King Arthur, spilling the wine onto Guinevere as he goes. In *Perceval* the stolen cup is emblematic of the taking of land<sup>417</sup>:

*Et tant diras al mauvais roi,  
Que s'il ne velt tenir de moi  
Sa terre, que il le me rende,  
Ou il envoit qui la desfende  
Vers moi qui di que ele est moie.  
Et a ces ensaignes t'en croie,  
Que devant lui pris orendroit,  
Atot le vin que il bevoit,  
Ceste colpe que je chi port.*<sup>418</sup>

### **Willey-Hou, William of Newburgh**

Gervase of Tilbury's contemporary, the twelfth-century historian William of Newburgh also recorded a number of what he described as 'wonderful and astonishing occurrences' which 'would appear beyond belief, were they not proved to have taken place by credible witnesses' (*Historia rerum Anglicarum*, 28.3).<sup>419</sup> Although William described a number of events from

<sup>417</sup> Lisi Oliver, "Spilled Wine and Lost Sovereignty in Chretien's' *Perceval*" , *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 97:1 (1996), 91-102 (pp. 92-4).

<sup>418</sup> 'And you can tell that evil King, if he won't submit to me his land, he had better give it back to me, or else send someone to defend it for I claim it as my own. If he doesn't believe you, here's proof: his golden cup I took from him before, with the wine he was drinking. I'm taking this cup with me'. (*Perceval*, lines 889-897)

Chrétien de Troyes, *Perceval, or the Story of the Grail*, trans. by Kirk McElhearn, (2001), <<https://www.kirkville.com/dl/perceval4.pdf>> [accessed 12 June 2019]

<sup>419</sup> William of Newburgh, *Historia rerum Anglicarum*, trans. by Joseph Stevenson (2016) <<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/williamofnewburgh-one.asp#28>> (accessed 12 February 2017). All further quotations and translations for the *Historia rerum Anglicarum* are from this edition.

across Europe in his *Historia*, there is no evidence that he ever left Yorkshire, which demonstrates how effectively information was shared through links between ecclesiastical houses. The story, which is of interest here, however, is actually one William claimed to know from his childhood in Yorkshire and involved the theft of a cup from a gathering held at a barrow. These two stories have often been seen as having a great deal in common, with Leslie Grinsell even suggesting that Gervase of Tilbury borrowed the story from William of Newburgh.<sup>420</sup> Whilst the stories definitely share several similar features, they also have a number of differences. William's story is that of a 'local rustic' who returning late one night from a visit to a friend in a neighbouring village, 'a little intoxicated', had to pass by a 'hillock' known locally as Willey-Hou (*Historia rerum Anglicarum*, 28.3). Willy Howe is the name of a reasonably sized round barrow, standing around fifteen metres tall, forty metres wide and fifty metres long, in the East Riding of Yorkshire<sup>421</sup> and there is no reason to suspect this is not the same mound as described by William of Newburgh.

The 'rustic' could hear the sound of music and revelry emanating from the barrow, and when he approached it, he discovered there was an open door in the side of mound. Looking inside he could see that the barrow was hollow within and 'filled with men and women, who were seated, as it were, at a solemn banquet' (*Historia rerum Anglicarum* 28.3). One of the servants brought him a drink, which he accepted, but instead of drinking he poured the contents of the cup out and quickly rode away from the barrow with it. William noted that the man was wise not to drink the contents, though he did not expand on why this was the case. The party guests chased after him but could not catch him thanks to his swift horse. William then related that the cup was 'of an unknown material, unusual colour, and strange form' (*Historia rerum*

<sup>420</sup> Leslie Grinsell, *Folklore of Prehistoric Sites in Britain*, (Exeter: David & Charles Publishers, 1976), p.35.

<sup>421</sup> Historic England, 'Willy Howe round barrow', *The National Heritage List for England* (2019) <<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1008040>> [accessed online 10 March 2019].

*Anglicarum* 28.3). It was not retained by the man who stole it, but instead was given to Henry I, who in turn gave it to his brother-in-law David I of Scotland. William of Newburgh added that in more recent years it had been presented to Henry II by William I of Scotland, meaning that not only could William claim to be telling the truth, but he had four kings as his witnesses. Similarly, the horn in Gervase of Tilbury's *Otia Imperialia* was presented to Henry I, although there is no further historical record of this. That the cup and horn were given to Henry I served both to legitimise the stories by their associations with the king and to set them at a particular point in the recent past, which was slightly too long ago to be contested but close enough to the present that the authors could reasonably claim to have heard the stories from people present at the time.

### **Stealing from the Barrow**

That the man in William's story was described as *rusticus* (a peasant) itself has implications. The peasant in later medieval England may have been praised in order to highlight the inadequacies of courtiers and the 'virtues of the rural world'<sup>422</sup>, but they were also often synonymous with ignorance.<sup>423</sup> William's patron was Ernald, abbot of the Cistercian abbey of Rievaulx, also in Yorkshire and his intended audience of aristocrats and clergy would not have been surprised that the peasant stole the cup. In contrast, the knight stealing the horn in Gervase of Tilbury may have been more surprising and contained an element of moral instruction which is absent from William of Newburgh's story. Both William and Gervase were making moral judgements in their reporting of the stories; in Gervase's case he was also demonstrating that it was not just peasants who would act in this manner, but also the nobility. Indeed, although both knight and a rustic did the 'wrong' thing by stealing, the knight's actions were worse as it

<sup>422</sup> Daniel F. Pigg, "The Rural World and Peasants" in *The Handbook of Medieval Culture Vol. 3*, ed. by Albrecht Classen, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), p. 1540.

<sup>423</sup> Pigg. p. 1535.

meant the servant could no longer provide refreshment for other knights. This also went completely against one of the seven ‘corporal’ works of mercy: giving drink to the thirsty. The corporal works were a way of emulating Christ’s work and are thought to have been central teachings of the medieval church.<sup>424</sup>

Even though both accounts record drinking vessels which were stolen from a servant at a barrow and presented to Henry I, there are a number of differences in the details of the accounts which suggest they were always separate stories, rather than one appropriating from the other. In William of Newburgh’s account, it was dangerous to drink from the cup, whilst the opposite was the case in Gervase’s story; the knights and huntsmen may not have known exactly what substance they were drinking, but it was evidently safe to consume. Equally, Gervase of Tilbury emphasises the act as being an ancient English custom, which according to Gervase was a well-known tradition amongst knights and hunters, whereas William of Newburgh, as discussed below, saw the party in the barrow as the work of illusion and magic. Not only did the stories take place in very different areas of England, but also different parts of the barrow; the knight met the servant on the top of the barrow in Gervase of Tilbury, whereas the party in William of Newburgh was taking place inside the barrow.

William of Newburgh’s major work, where the story of Willey-Hou can be found, was the *Historia rerum Anglicarum*, a history of English affairs from 1066-1197, written in the late twelfth century. William of Newburgh’s aim was to produce an accurate history, drawing his inspiration from historians such as Bede, and casting writers such as Geoffrey of Monmouth as shameless liars, yet Antonia Graden writes that William of Newburgh also ‘loved good stories’.<sup>425</sup> The *Historia rerum Anglicarum* contains several examples of these; including

<sup>424</sup> Mary Beth L. Davis, “‘Spekyn for Goddys Cawse’: Margery Kemp and the Seven Spiritual Works of Mercy”, in *The Man of Many Devices, who Wandered Full Many Ways--: Festschrift in Honour of Janos M. Bak*, ed. by Balázs Nagy and Marcell Sebők, (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999), 250-68 (p. 252).

<sup>425</sup> Antonia Graden, *Historical Writing in England: 550 – 1307*, (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 292.

elements of folklore and local history, such as Willey-Hou. William's chronicle is also well known for incorporating several stories about revenants; people who came back from the grave to wreak havoc across medieval England, although none of these were associated with barrows. Interestingly, just because he included these events in his chronicle, does not mean that William of Newburgh was entirely convinced they actually took place. He often remarks that he is compelled to include them because of the number of reliable witnesses who attested to them, but that everyone reading them should 'reason on such matters according to his abilities' (*Historia rerum Anglicarum* 1.27).

### **Fairy Mounds?**

Gervase of Tilbury did not associate the horn-bearing servant with fairies, neither did William of Newburgh state it was specifically a fairy gathering in the barrow, nevertheless the encounters at the barrows in both these stories hint at the supernatural or otherworldly, and therefore this is how they have been interpreted by both modern and antiquarian scholars. Although there are several tropes in the two stories which would become associated with fairies in the later fourteenth century and beyond, these traditions do not seem to have been specifically associated with fairies in the twelfth or thirteenth centuries.<sup>426</sup> Jeremy Harte has illustrated that whilst encounters such as these certainly contain elements of later fairy stories, there was actually no set mythology of fairies in medieval English literature before 1380 and therefore it cannot be said for certain exactly what the writers intended for their audience to imagine.<sup>427</sup> As Harte writes, in the case of the barrow revellers in William of Newburgh, their 'non-human status is indicated by allusion and not by direct statement'.<sup>428</sup> Indeed, there is no indication given that they did not have an ordinary human form, unlike the pygmy king in *De*

<sup>426</sup> Harte, p. 2.

<sup>427</sup> Jeremy Harte, "Medieval Fairies: Now you see them, now you don't", *At The Edge*, 10 (1998), pp. 2-3.

<sup>428</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2.

*Nugis Curialium*. It is only through their peculiar actions, such as attending a midnight party inside a barrow, and the reaction of the rustic to being offered a drink, that the reader can imagine their strange and perhaps sinister nature. William of Newburgh himself offered an explanation for unusual stories he related, such as the revellers at Willey-Hou. Newburgh followed the common belief that all things were created by God, but suggested that ‘evil angels’ and ‘also evil men’ (such as magicians) had the power to mould God’s creations into visions through ‘illusion and magic (as in the case of the nocturnal revel on the hill)... by which men may be held in blind amazement’ (*Historia rerum Anglicarum*, 28.4). These things were not done purely out of amusement, but, according to William of Newburgh, they were merely a test, so that ‘evil angels, when permitted, [could] readily do those things, whereby men may be more dangerously deceived’ (*Historia rerum Anglicarum* 28.4).

Both passages have become known as fairy stories because many of those writing about barrows in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries retrospectively applied the concept to earlier literature, where they could identify similar patterns. Realistically, it is not possible to identify a cohesive tradition from so few examples, although there may well have been similar stories circulating at the time which were not recorded by chroniclers or historians and have not survived. That said, it cannot be denied that there are elements of the stories which align with ideas of fairies from the fourteenth century, as well as stories of mysterious encounters and otherworlds in twelfth-century literature which bear certain similarities to those in the *Otia Imperialia* and *Historia rerum Anglicarum*. Although not strictly fairy stories themselves, they represented the foundation onto which later narratives would be built, once the concept of the fairy otherworld had been fully realised. Whilst neither text had the impact of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia regum Britanniae*, the two texts were of enough interest to be copied a number of times; William of Newburgh’s *Historia rerum Anglicarum* survives in eight

manuscripts, whilst the *Otia Imperialia* is extant in thirty manuscripts and was translated into French.

That said, by the fourteenth century, fairies were associated with the British or English past. The example of this most often quoted is from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, where in the *Wife of Bath's* tale it is said: 'in th' olde dayes of the Kyng Arthour... al was this land fulfild of fayerye ... I speke of manye hundred yeres ago. But now kan no man se none elves mo' (*Wife of Bath's Tale*, lines 857-864). The explanation given for the disappearance of fairies is that they have been driven out by all the wandering priests (*Wife of Bath's Tale*, line 880). Gervase of Tilbury's emphasis that the servant offering the horn was an ancient English custom could link to this, especially as King Herla's encounter with the otherworld takes place in the distant past.

### **Barrows as Gateways**

The idea of barrows as gateways to fairy kingdoms was prevalent in medieval Irish literature; this suggests an audience more interested in these ideas, although it is unclear whether these were linked together in a homogenous 'fairy otherworld' at this point.<sup>429</sup> Similar ideas appear in England slightly later than the period covered by this thesis; in the early modern period, the idea of fairies living inside hills or barrows was more prevalent amongst the English aristocracy. King James I in his 1597 book *Daemonologie* discussed 'such hilles & houses within them' as being places where witches might consort with fairies.<sup>430</sup> In the Welsh text *Buchedd Collen* ('The Life of St Collen'), Gwyn ap Nudd, the king of the fairies, inhabits the inside of Glastonbury Tor. The *Buchedd Collen* is assumed to be a medieval text, although the

<sup>429</sup> Sims-Williams, p. 59.

<sup>430</sup> James I, King of England, *Daemonologie, In Forme of a Dialogue, Divided into three Books* (Edinburgh: Robert Waldegrave, 1597) p. 58, <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/25929/25929-h/25929-h.html>> [accessed 3 March 2017]

only extant copy dates from the seventeenth century. Peredur, the hero of one of the three romances in the medieval Welsh *Mabinogion*, had a number of supernatural or otherworldly meetings on and inside mounds. First Peredur met a youth on a mound who directed him to the cave of the Afanc, a monstrous creature which inhabited a *carn* on the ‘mound of mourning’. Whilst on his quest to slay the Afanc, Peredur met a woman on the mound, who gave him a stone of invisibility. When Peredur entered the otherworld, he again encountered ‘the woman on the mound’ who was revealed to be the Empress of Constantinople, a sort of fairy-queen; Peredur then spent fourteen years living in the otherworld with her.

Entering an otherworld through a mound or barrow was also a theme in Marie de France’s twelfth-century *Lai of Yonëc* (lines 345-355). Written in an Anglo-Norman dialect, it tells a story set ‘long ago in Britain’; indeed it is thought that Marie de France lived in England for much of her life, and some have suggested she may even have been the half-sister of Henry II.<sup>431</sup> Towards the end of the poem Yonëc’s mother followed a road through a *hoga* (mound/barrow) to find Yonëc’s father, a man who could transform himself into a hawk. She emerged from the mound into another land where all the buildings were made of silver and beyond her lover, she found no other living man or woman. It is not clear where this idea originated from, as it does not appear in contemporary literature from England, suggesting it was drawing on ideas about barrows perhaps being shared by visitors to the royal courts. The word *hoga* itself appears in the Close Rolls of Henry III, as will be discussed in Chapter 7, where it seems to be used in the context of a barrow.

In medieval English literature, there also appears to be a connection between narratives of caves being entrances to other worlds, such as the Green Children who appear out of a cave in Chapter 27 of William of Newburgh’s *Historia rerum Anglicarum*. An English text which

<sup>431</sup> James Simpson and David Alfred, “Marie de France”, in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature Volume 1*, (New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 2012), pp. 142-143.



contains the description of a journey to an otherworld is the story of King Herla, in Walter Map's late twelfth-century *De Nugis Curialium* ('The Trifling's of Courtiers'). Walter Map was born in the later 1130s-early 1140s, he claimed Welsh origins, although it has been suggested he may have actually been born in Hereford and had Norman origins.<sup>432</sup> He was a royal clerk in the court of Henry II, who became chancellor of Lincoln Cathedral by 1186 and eventually archdeacon of Oxford.<sup>433</sup> *De Nugis Curialium* was written in the 1180s, although it does not appear to have been widely read or circulated at all in the later medieval period, only one copy survives from the fourteenth century.<sup>434</sup> Walter Map was writing for a courtly audience, even comparing the peripatetic life of the English court to King Herla's centuries of enforced riding around England. Interestingly, sections of the *De Nugis Curialium* have been noted as sharing similarities with passages from Gervase of Tilbury's *Otia Imperialia*; Gervase was at court during the same period as Walter Map, so it is possible that they met.<sup>435</sup> Of particular interest here are the similarities in the description of King Herla as *regem antiquissimorum Britonum* ('king of the most ancient Britons') and the custom of receiving a drink at the barrow as *apud antiquissimos Anglos usus habet* ('a most ancient English custom'). The stolen horn in Gervase of Tilbury is also reminiscent, in its description, of the gold jewelled platters on which the pygmies served King Herla's wedding feast. In this case though, the otherworld was not reached through a mound, but through a cave in a high cliff (*altissime rupis*). Herla made a reciprocal deal with a pygmy king that they would each attend the other's wedding and serve food at the feasts. Herla kept the bargain, but when he and his men returned from the pygmy king's wedding, they discovered they had spent hundreds of

<sup>432</sup> Katherine Briggs, *The Fairies in Tradition and Literature*, (London: Routledge, 2006), p.6.

<sup>433</sup> Walter Map, *De Nugis Curialium*, ed. and trans. by M.R. James, C.N.L. Brooke, and R.A.B. Mynors, (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1983), p. xvi.

<sup>434</sup> *De Nugis Curialium*. p. xx.

<sup>435</sup> Partick Joseph Schweitemann, *Fairies Kingship and the British Past in Walter Map's De Nugis Curialium and Sir Orfeo*, (unpublished PhD thesis, University of California Berkeley, 2010), p. 2.

years there. It is not clear exactly why this happened, as Herla kept up his side of the deal with the pygmy king; it has been suggested it was either a punishment for being foolish enough to make the deal with the pygmy king in the first place, or representative of the danger inherent in a pact made with the 'otherworld'.<sup>436</sup> This perhaps gives an idea of what the fate of William of Newburgh's rustic might have been, if he had drunk from the cup.

### **Ritual Drinking in Later Medieval England**

It could be suggested that the horn-bearer is a relic from Anglo-Saxon England, linking the barrow and the story to the Anglo-Saxon cup-bearing ritual exemplified by Rowena, the daughter of Hengist, in Book 6 of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britannia*:

“She called you ‘lord king’” said the interpreter, “and honoured you with her word of greeting. You should reply ‘drincheil.’” ... from that day forward it has been the custom in Britain, that at feasts a drinker says to his neighbour ‘wasseil’ and the one that receives the drink after him replies ‘drincheil’.”

(*Historia regum Britanniae* 6.12)<sup>437</sup>

This ritual was used to establish good relationships and encourage peace through enforcement of the status quo.<sup>438</sup>

In Gervase of Tilbury and William of Newburgh's accounts, drinking vessels are offered as a gift or welcoming gesture, and both the cups are stolen, thus disrupting the status

<sup>436</sup> *Ibid.* p. 26.

<sup>437</sup> trans. Wright, p. 128

<sup>438</sup> Hannah McKendrick Bailey, “Conquest by Word : The Meeting of Languages in *Lazamon's Brut*”, in *Reading Lazamon's "Brut": Approaches and Explorations*, (Amsterdam: Rodopi BV, 2013), 269-286, (p. 279).

quo. The anticipated end of William of Newburgh's story, if the man had played his part in the ritual correctly, may well have been that he drank from the cup and was trapped, either in the barrow or in a fairy otherworld, possibly forever. We cannot be certain about the fate of the man as he pours the drink away and rides off with the cup, but as William comments that this was a wise act, the reader can assume the outcome would not have been pleasant. For Gervase of Tilbury, on the other hand, the benefit of the cup-bearing ritual is apparent; there is no implication that drinking from the horn will cause the drinker any ill, indeed, the fact that the horn was then stolen by the knight actually represents a disruption and disregard for the Old English ritual. The ritual of communal drinking, as described in Geoffrey of Monmouth was still important at this time; indeed provision of food and drink by the king or lord was symbolic of order and civilisation in later medieval England.<sup>439</sup> As mentioned previously, provision of food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty were two of the seven 'corporal' works of mercy, integral acts in the emulation of Christ, according to the teaching of the later medieval Church.<sup>440</sup> Sheila Sweetinburgh has also suggested that communal drinking in later medieval England could also act as a way through which the living and the dead could be connected; with the drinking vessels of the deceased being used by the living and acting as tools for commemoration and remembrance.<sup>441</sup> This ritual should have been understood by the knight, yet he still stole the cup. The theme of stolen cups also appeared in Grail legends; the *Elucidation*, a thirteenth-century French grail poem, contains a passage where King Agamons and his men forcibly stole the golden cups from the Maidens of the Wells, which they used to serve food and drink to every visitor, and after which the land became barren.<sup>442</sup> It is also

<sup>439</sup> Oliver, pp. 92-4.

<sup>440</sup> Davis, p. 252.

<sup>441</sup> Sheila Sweetinburgh, "Remembering the Dead at Dinner-Time", in *Everyday Objects: Medieval and Early Modern Culture and its Meanings*, ed. by Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 257-66, (264)

<sup>442</sup> John Matthews, *Sources of the Grail* (Berwick-upon-Tweed: Lindisfarne Books, 1997), p. 64.

possible that they represent remnants of the ‘Celtic’ cup and bowl traditions which became absorbed. Versions of this tradition still appeared later in Welsh texts, for example the cauldron of Ceridwen, from the fourteenth-century *Book of Taliesin*. When Ceridwen’s servant boy Gwion drank from the cauldron he became all-knowing and gained the ability to transform his body into that of a bird or a fish. The enduring idea that someone who consumed food or drink in the otherworld or underworld would become trapped there is a tradition which dates back far earlier than its most famous appearance in Greek mythology, where Persephone ate six pomegranate seeds and was condemned to live six months on earth and six months in the underworld. Indeed, it is thought that the idea of eating food in the other or underworld and becoming trapped there comes from the very earliest Indo-European myths

There may also be a link between the theft of the cups from otherworldly inhabitants of barrows and the discovery of ‘treasure’ in barrows, for which there is evidence for in the later medieval period. Stories like those in the *Otia Imperialia* and *Historia rerum Anglicarum* may have emerged as a way of explaining where this treasure might have come from, although the discomfort around the fact that they *were* stolen is evident in Gervase of Tilbury’s narrative, and both vessels are quickly passed on to the king. As will be seen in Chapter 7, whilst the treasure trove laws of later medieval England certainly applied to any ‘treasure’ found in barrows, this did not prevent people from digging the treasure up and attempting to retain it for themselves, rather than handing it over to the king.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter continued to explore the theme of barrows as sites relating to justice and kingly rule, discussing Havelok’s vision of a barrow in the Middle English poem *Havelok the Dane*. This barrow was not a burial place for the king, but rather a place where Havelok could receive knowledge, power and kingly authority. Unlike the ‘guardian burials’ discussed in the previous

chapter, the barrow in Havelok did not prevent the invasion of England, but actually encouraged the rightful king to take control of the country through invasion. Barrows as the seats of kingly authority was a theme in texts not just from England, but also from Scandinavia, Wales and Ireland, perhaps indicating common interests across north west Atlantic Europe through the later medieval period. In England the use of barrows for hundred courts; a seat of law and a place for the administration of justice, as well as a meeting place continued well into the later medieval period at some sites, thereby retaining such ideas in contemporary perceptions across society. Chapter 4 also explored barrows as places where one might meet the supernatural, place-name evidence, which needs to be expanded upon by further study indicates that barrows may have been associated with the supernatural by ordinary people and that this idea was not as prevalent in the cultural imagination of the upper classes, however there is a small amount of evidence that these ideas were transmitted up, possibly through folktales. Thirteenth-century writers Gervase of Tilbury and William of Newburgh both recorded stories of people stealing drinking vessels from mysterious figures at barrows. In the case of William of Newburgh, who claims the story is one he heard in his childhood, these mysterious figures are often interpreted as fairies or proto-fairies.

With all of the texts discussed in this chapter, the barrow as a meeting place both in literature and in the real world of later medieval England seems to have played an important role in the barrow's appearance in the text; this is also the case for the text discussed in the next chapter - the Green Chapel in the late fourteenth-century poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, described as a *lowe* and *berwe* (both Middle English words for barrow), is the appointed meeting place for Gawain's second encounter with the supernatural figure of the Green Knight.

## Chapter 5: The Green Chapel in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* returns us to the theme of the first text discussed in this thesis; a beheading at a barrow, justice metered out. Unlike Hengist, however, Gawain survives; he is not beheaded, and the barrow becomes a place of forgiveness and the upholding of good Christian behaviour. There were developments in terms of literacy and literature in the centuries between the writing of the *Historia regum Britanniae* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Like Geoffrey, the Gawain Poet would have expected his audience to be associated with the royal court, perhaps even the king himself, as that was where patronage was most likely to be found. It was also this audience that both writers wished to take on the moral messages of their work; this would be most effective for the good of the country as a whole. But the aristocracy and the clergy were no longer the only possible audiences for these texts. There was a burgeoning literate middle class, merchants and local gentry who were interested enough in literature to cause a demand for the production of texts in vernacular languages, especially romances, such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the Middle English *Havelok*.<sup>443</sup> The Green Chapel, like barrows used as Hundred moot sites, is a meeting place specifically associated with the administering of justice. It also has links to the supernatural; not only is it a place where Gawain expects to meet the ‘fantoum or fayryze’ figure of the Green Knight, but according to one character in the poem, the Green Knight has dwelt there for a very long time. This links to associations between fairies, barrows and ideas about the past discussed in Chapter 4, a time when fairies and marvels such as the Green Knight roamed Britain, as well as when barrows were used as pagan burial places.

<sup>443</sup> Charles F. Briggs, “Literacy, Reading, and Writing in the Medieval West”, *Journal of Medieval History*, 26:4 (2000), 397-420 (pp. 400-401).

## **The Gawain Poet**

The late fourteenth-century Middle English poem, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* represents many aristocratic interests and ideals, including chivalry, courtly love and Arthurian romance. Although the identity of the Gawain Poet is still a matter of some debate, we can be relatively sure about some aspects. As Ad Putter has stated, the Gawain Poet's in-depth knowledge of the Bible, and therefore Latin, would actually mark him out as some form of cleric.<sup>444</sup> The Gawain Poet wrote in a dialect of Middle English local to the Northwest Midlands, close to the meeting point of the Staffordshire, Cheshire and Derbyshire borders. A number of scholars in the later twentieth century claimed to have identified him as John Massey of Cotton in Cheshire, a life retainer in service of John of Gaunt in 1387.<sup>445</sup> This evidence seems flimsy, based as it was on the decoding of a supposed anagram in *Pearl*.<sup>446</sup> Equally, some have suggested that this may merely be the dialect of the scribe who copied the poems into the Cotton Manuscript, but there is little reason to doubt it was also the dialect of the Gawain Poet, especially as the landscapes described are those of the Northwest Midlands.<sup>447</sup> This does not mean, however, that the Gawain Poet was living in the Midlands when he wrote the poem; as Putter notes, there was a large contingency of Cheshire knights at the court of Richard II (ruled 1377-1399).<sup>448</sup> These knights, such as Sir Robert Grosvenor and Sir John Stanley, often employed other Cheshire men in their households, including clerics.<sup>449</sup> This, combined with the many references to courtly life contained in the poem, means that it is feasible to suggest that the Gawain Poet was a London-based cleric from Cheshire, whose patron was one of these

<sup>444</sup> Ad Putter, *An Introduction to the Gawain Poet* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 6.

<sup>445</sup> Clifford J. Peterson, "The Pearl-Poet and John Massey of Cotton, Cheshire", *The Review of English Studies New Series*, 25 (1974), 257-266 (p. 261).

<sup>446</sup> *Ibid*, p. 257.

<sup>447</sup> H.N. Duggan, "Meter, Stanza, Vocabulary, Dialect", in *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, ed. by Jonathan Gibson & Derek Brewer, (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2007), pp. 240-242.

<sup>448</sup> Putter, pp. 29-31.

<sup>449</sup> John Bowers, *An Introduction to the Gawain Poet*, (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2012), p. 3.

Cheshire knights.<sup>450</sup> It is possible that among the intended audience of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* may even have been the king himself; it has been noted that Richard II not only had a large number of Cheshire men in his household and at court, but that he conversed with them in their dialect.<sup>451</sup> The Gawain Poet's main sources were French Arthurian romances, which were 'the favourite reading matter of the well-to-do in fourteenth-century England'.<sup>452</sup> *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is extant only in a single manuscript, British Library Cotton Nero A.x., bound with a further three poems: *Pearl*, *Cleanness* and *Patience*, all of which appear to have been composed by the same author (usually referred to as the Gawain Poet) and copied by a scribe around 1400. The copy can be dated fairly accurately based on the scribe's handwriting style, and Ad Putter has remarked that scribal errors contained in the manuscript suggest it is 'several stages removed from the author's original'.<sup>453</sup> This means that the poem, which may have originally been intended to be read aloud to its audience, was most likely composed some time before 1400, in the latter decades of the fourteenth century.

### **Summary of the Poem**

*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* begins with Gawain celebrating New Year with Arthur, Guinevere, and the other knights at Camelot. Suddenly a terrifying Green Knight appears and challenges them to a game; in which one of King Arthur's knights must behead the Green Knight with his own axe. Gawain agrees to participate, thinking no one could survive such a blow. Afterwards, however, the Green Knight calmly collects his severed head and tells Gawain that he should meet him at the *Grene Chapel* in a year's time, so Gawain can take his turn at being beheaded. The remainder of the poem follows Gawain on a journey through

<sup>450</sup> Putter, p. 23.

<sup>451</sup> Bowers, p. xiii.

<sup>452</sup> Putter, p. 4.

<sup>453</sup> *Ibid.* p. 3.



dangerous wilderness as he searches for the chapel and its knight; who no one has heard of, despite his bright green visage. Shortly before Christmas the following year, Gawain arrives at the castle of Hautdesert. Here the lord of the castle tells Gawain not to worry about the location of the Green Chapel; ‘for I schal teche yow to that terme bi the tymes ende; the grene chapayle upon grounde greve yow no more’ (‘for I shall direct you to your meeting at the time’s end, let the whereabouts of the Green Chapel worry you no more’, (line 1069-1070)).

Whilst at Hautdesert, Gawain becomes embroiled in a new game, where his moral and chivalrous values are tested by both the lord and lady of the castle. Everything he receives from the lady in the day, he must give to the lord (Bertilak) in the evening. Gawain plays along, until the lady offers him a green girdle, which she tells him will protect him when he meets the Green Knight; *for quat gome is so gorde with this grene lace, while he hit hade hemely halched aboute, there is no hathel under heven tohewe hym that might, for he myght not be slayn for slyght upon erthe* (‘For whoever goes girdled with this green riband, while he keeps it well clasped closely about him, there is none so hardy under heaven that to hew him were able; for he could not be killed by any cunning of hand’ (lines 1851-4)).<sup>454</sup> After the Christmas celebrations are over Bertilak has one of his servants guide Gawain the short distance further to the Green Chapel. Gawain’s guide leaves him before they get in sight of the chapel, telling him that *ther wonez a wyghe in that waste, the worst upon erthe* (‘there lives a man in that wilderness, the worst in the world’ (line 2098)), and that *he hatz wonyd here ful yore, on bent much baret bende* (‘he [the Green Knight] has dwelt there long, and brought about much strife’ (lines 2114-5)) and that he would not dare go closer. Terrified, Gawain eventually arrives at the Green Chapel alone and he discovers that nothing is as it seems.

<sup>454</sup> *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, trans. by JRR Tolkien, 2nd edn. ed. by Norman Davis, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968). All further translations of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in this chapter come from this edition, apart from individual words, or where a literal translation is needed.

## **The Green Chapel**

For much of the poem Gawain has struggled to find the Green Chapel. Until Gawain reaches the castle of Hautdesert no one has heard of either the Green Chapel or the Green Knight. Additionally, Gawain is searching for a Christian chapel, which the Green Chapel, in form at least, does not necessarily resemble. Gawain's guide from Hautdesert tells him *he schal se in that slade the self chapel* ('thou wilt see on the slope the selfsame chapel', line 2147), but when Gawain reaches the bottom of the valley he cannot see any buildings, only *a lawe as hit were; a balgh berwe bi a bonke the brymme bysyde* ('save a mound as it might be near the marge of a green, a worn barrow on a brae by the brink of a water', line 2171-2). Then, as Gawain approaches the Green Chapel, the poet says it was *nobot an olde cave, or a crevisse of an olde cragge, he couthe hit noght deme with spelle* ('nought but an old cavern, or a cleft in an old crag, he could not it name aright', lines 2183-4). It is the use of *lawe* (lines 2171, 2175) and *berwe* (lines 2172, 2178) to describe the Green Chapel which is of particular interest to this thesis. *Lawe* (also often spelt *loue* and *lowe*) was used in Middle English to mean a mound or barrow. It derives from the Old English *hlaew*, which was also used to denote a barrow, as in the Old English *Guthlac* and *Beowulf*. Whilst Ralph Elliot has suggested that *lawe* and *berwe* 'must be regarded as largely bereft of whatever funerary associations they carried in Old English', the words *hlaew* and *lawe*, specifically in the context of a barrow, appear in both early medieval and early modern contexts. In 1607 the antiquarian William Camden wrote that people referred to great heaps of stone, which they believed were raised as memorials to the slain as *lawes*. A derivative of *lawe*, *low* is still used to denote a barrow in Derbyshire and Cheshire. The word *berwe* (also commonly spelt *berh3* and *berw*) again comes from Old English, either *beorh* meaning barrow, or *beorg*, Old English meaning hill. *Beorg* is accepted to mean barrow in readings of poems such as the Old English *Guthlac*. Indeed, it is from the Old English *berwe* that the Modern English word *barrow* derives. Whilst both words appear to

have been used to refer to hills more generally in Middle English literature, the context is important; there are several aspects of the Green Chapel, such as the Green Knight emerging from a hole, which do not fit with *lawe* referring simply to an ordinary hill. Equally, Gawain approaches the Green Chapel fully expecting to meet his death there; this is important because Ad Putter has pointed out, descriptions of the landscape in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* are not as much about the landscape itself as they are about the way Gawain experiences it.<sup>455</sup>

### **The Nature of the Green Chapel**

It is important to note that the Green Chapel cannot be interpreted solely as a barrow. The descriptions of the Green Chapel which are given both to Gawain and the audience vary, which makes it difficult to create an image of the Green Chapel in the mind's eye because the audience's image of it constantly alters with each new description; it is a chapel, a barrow, and an old cave, all at the same time. In line 2178 it is described as a *berwe* (a barrow or mound (line 2178)), four lines later it is described as *nobot an olde cave* (nothing but an old cave, (line 2183)). The Gawain Poet's descriptions of the Green Chapel are multifaceted; it is both a natural place: *olde cave* (2182), *crevisse of an olde cragge* (2183) and artificial: *chappelle* or *chapel* (2186, 2195), *oritore* (oratory, line 2190), *kyrk* (kirk/church, line 2196). It is also described using words which carry both the meaning of being either natural or artificial as both *lawe* (lines 2171, 2175), *berwe* (lines 2172, 2178) can mean 'hill, 'hillock' and 'mound' as well as specifically 'barrow'.<sup>456</sup> Interestingly, where the chapel is described using words which could denote something either natural *or* something artificial, it is the un-natural interpretation which is more sinister, alluding to death and the grave. The description of the barrow as both

<sup>455</sup> Ad Putter, *'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight' and French Arthurian Romance*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 20-21.

<sup>456</sup> Benedek Péter Tóta, "Sir Gawain and Ted Hughes: Neither Heroes nor Saints yet Canonised: Contextualising Hughes's Rendering of a Passage from Gawain" in *Heroes and Saints: Studies in Honour of Katalin Halácsy*, ed. by Zsuzsanna Simonkay, (Budapest: mondAt, 2015), 249-68, (p. 253).

a chapel and hillock plays with the audience's understanding of place, and division of the world between natural and manmade. Even if the Green Chapel in its form and structure is meant to represent a barrow rather than a Christian chapel, it still functions as a chapel, or at least a place in which activities associated with Christian chapels take place. This Christian nature does not mean that the chapel is necessarily a pleasant place for Gawain; it acts as a place of punishment for him, although it later transforms into a place of confession and forgiveness. The juxtaposition of green and chapel highlight the chapel's place between nature and civilisation, as well as the contrast between the not entirely human world of the Green Knight and the Christian court of Camelot.<sup>457</sup> It has been suggested that throughout *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* the colour green is used to indicate a moment of choice or change; a point where things are not fixed, but liable to alteration.<sup>458</sup> Equally, in later medieval England the colour green was seen as a positive sign of rebirth; a fourteenth-century sermon interpreting a vision of St John, in which the throne of heaven was built from jasper and sardonyx, said that the colour green 'makes men glad and brings comfort to their eyes'.<sup>459</sup> The colour of the chapel does not bring much comfort to Gawain, although it is the place in which he is reborn, forgiven for the sin committed when he took the lady's green girdle.

The Green Chapel lies between civilised and uncivilised society. Although it is sheltered in the woods and it is a difficult journey for Gawain to reach it, it may well lie on or at least be close to a track or pathway, as Gawain's guide, the servant from Hautdesert, tells him that the Green Knight kills any man, churl or chaplain, monk or priest, who passes by.

There are other theories about the nature of the Green Chapel; for example, Richard North has recently suggested that Castle Hautdesert, where Gawain arrives on Christmas Eve,

<sup>457</sup> Gillian Rudd, "Being Green in Late Medieval English Literature", in *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, ed. by Greg Garrard, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 27-39, (p. 37).

<sup>458</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>459</sup> C.M. Woolgar, *The Senses in Later Medieval England*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 170.

and the Green Chapel may be same place; Gawain has been at the Green Chapel the whole time. Both the castle and the chapel are described using the words *launde* and *lawe*; Hautdesert is *abof a launde* ('on a hill' (line 765)) and 'on a lawe' ('on a mound' (line 765)), whilst the Green Chapel is *on a launde, a lawe as hit were* ('on a hill, a mound as it were' (line 2171)).<sup>460</sup> Equally, the castle's *chalk-whyt chymnees* ('chalk white chimneys', line 798) and *towres* (towers, line 795) with *trochet ful pik* ('many pinnacles' (line 795)) do not easily fit into the landscape of medieval Cheshire or Staffordshire.<sup>461</sup> Even the castle's name, Hautdesert, which can be translated as 'high wasteland or high hermitage', might have felt out of place in the wilds of the north east midlands. To the fourteenth-century audience of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the description of the castle might have suggested Gawain had entered some kind of *otherworld*. There are similarly fantastical castles in other Middle English romances; for example, when Sir Orfeo follows a group of ladies through a cliff into the Otherworld, in the eponymous early fourteenth-century poem, he discovers a crystal castle, with a hundred high towers and buttresses of solid gold.<sup>462</sup>

North's suggestion of a barrow-disguised-as-a-castle-disguised-as-a-chapel is interesting, considering that many motte and bailey castles, and some churches, were built on barrows. This also fits with the suggestion of the hunting lodge built on a mound called Knight's Low in Swythamley, Derbyshire, as an inspiration for Hautdesert, although the age of the hunting lodge is not known, and even if it did date to the fourteenth century, it certainly would look nothing like the description of Hautdesert. Despite this, if the castle in the romance was indeed the Green Chapel, disguised by the magic of Morgana Le Fay, Gawain's journey

<sup>460</sup> Richard North, "Morgan le Fay and the Fairy Mound in 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'", in *Airy Nothings: Imagining the Otherworld of Faerie from the Middle Ages to the Age of Reason: Essays in Honour of Alasdair A. MacDonald*, ed. by Jan R. Veenstra, Karin E. Olsen, (Leiden: Brill Press, 2013), 75-98, (p. 76).

<sup>461</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>462</sup> Muriel A. Whitaker, "Otherworld Castles in Middle English Arthurian Romance", in *Late Medieval Castles*, ed. by Robert Liddiard, (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2016), 393-408, (p. 393).

on from castle to chapel seems extraneous. As there is clearly something supernatural about the Green Knight, it might not be so surprising for Gawain to go to sleep in the castle and wake up somewhere else entirely. The argument that the castle of Hautdesert is certainly enchanted, or in some way an illusion is convincing, certainly it does not quite fit into the medieval Cheshire landscape; this creates an air of mystery and otherworldliness around both the Green Chapel and Castle Hautdesert.

The mutability of the Green Chapel, where it appears both as something man-made and something natural; which has long been part of the landscape and yet is so unfamiliar to Gawain, may well be intended by the Gawain Poet to generate a particular response, from both his audience and Gawain himself.<sup>463</sup> Helen Cooper suggests that the landscape is made unfamiliar so that it can be seen as if for the first time and Gawain, as a surrogate for the reader, has to be trained to read the world he inhabits.<sup>464</sup> When Gawain reaches the Green Chapel he circles around the mound, but, the poet says, *he couþe hit noȝt deme with spelle* ('he could not understand it at all' (line 2184)). This raises the question of how often people in later medieval England encountered barrows, and the environment in which they encountered them. Sometimes it appears that the Gawain Poet expects his audience to recognise the barrow, in order to add interesting layers to the poem, but Gawain's confused reaction could suggest that they might not. One might wonder whether Gawain's inability to understand the landscape feature is the poet making reference to the Cheshire knights spending too much time at court and not enough out on their own lands. John Bowers has suggested that beyond land, there was little to keep Cheshire knights in the north, and many were to be found gathered around Richard II's court in London by the 1380s.<sup>465</sup>

<sup>463</sup> Helen Cooper, "The Supernatural", in *A Companion to the Gawain-poet*, ed. by Jonathan Gibson and Derek Brewer, (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 1997), 277-92 (p. 278).

<sup>464</sup> Cooper, p. 278.

<sup>465</sup> Bower, p. 3.

### **The Poem's Intended Audience**

It is worth briefly considering again the intended audience of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The first known owner of the Cotton Manuscript, which of course was not the original source of the poem, was Sir Henry Saville of Bank, 'a lesser Yorkshire gentleman' in the late sixteenth century.<sup>466</sup> The illustrations in the Cotton MS make it the earliest extant illustrated manuscript in Middle English; only the 'higher aristocracy' had the wealth to commission these illustrated manuscripts.<sup>467</sup> This suggests that if the original copy of the poem was illustrated it would have been written for a wealthy patron, and if not then it must have circulated amongst that level of society enough for it to have been copied and illustrated. That is not to say that there is evidence it was widely distributed, but it has been suggested that, along with the other works of the Gawain Poet, it influenced the authors of *The Wars of Alexander and the Awntyrs of Arthur*.<sup>468</sup> Although it is suggested here that the intended audience for the poem was members of the Cheshire nobility and knights resident in London, the fact that it was written in a regional dialect of Middle English does not preclude it having been read by the highest levels of society, as was mentioned earlier, Richard II was well known to converse with his Cheshire knights in their regional dialect.<sup>469</sup> Michael J. Bennett has pointed out that the Gawain Poet should be seen as no less of a courtier than Chaucer, the difference between the two being mainly in their dialect, metre and material, rather than their intended audience or positions in society.<sup>470</sup> Ad Putter adds to this that the Gawain Poet's descriptive vocabulary often 'falls back on cognates of "court"' because to his audience (and the poet himself) 'these words evoked a familiar locus

<sup>466</sup> Putter, *Companion to the Gawain Poet*, p. 1.

<sup>467</sup> *Ibid.* p. 23.

<sup>468</sup> Putter, *Companion to the Gawain Poet*, p. 28.

<sup>469</sup> Michael, J. Bennet, "The Court of Richard II and the Promotion of Literature", in *Chaucer's England: Literature in Historical Context*, ed. by Barbara Hanawalt, (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1992), 3-20, (p. 11).

<sup>470</sup> *Ibid.* p. 7.

of shared experience and values, a place from which they could orientate themselves when forced out into unfamiliar territory’ – the court is used as a point of contrast and comparison throughout the poem, which would suggest it would be a familiar environment for the poet’s intended audience.<sup>471</sup>

### **The Devil’s Chapel?**

Indeed, when faced with the reality of the Green Chapel, Gawain still uses words which indicate a church (*oratory* and *kirk*) and continues to refer to it as a chapel, albeit a chapel in which one might worship the devil rather than God. Upon reaching the Green Chapel, Gawain immediately recognises it as a supernatural, hellish place, saying *here might aboute mydnyght, the dele his matynnes telle!* (‘‘Here the Devil might say [I ween] his matins about midnight! (lines 2187-8)). This aspect of the Green Chapel’s nature has previously been hinted at in the poem, where it says that in that part of the country *wonde ther bot lyte that auther God other gome wyth goud hert lovied* (‘there wandered but few who with goodwill regarded either God or mortal.’ (lines 701-2)).

It is well acknowledged that barrows were connected to demons in early medieval England. For example, in the eighth-century hagiographical poem *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*, before Guthlac takes up his hermitage in the barrow, he must first rid it of the demons which are inhabiting it. The ninth-century poem *Andreas* also contains a description of criminals, murderers and heathens being dragged into Hell through an *eorðscræfe* (earth-cave or grave).<sup>472</sup> Again, in illustrations from the ninth-century *Utrecht Psalter* (British Library MS Harley 603, fos. 67r & 72r), hell is shown as a space inside a hill or a mound.<sup>473</sup> There is also

<sup>471</sup> Putter, *Companion to the Gawain Poet*, p. 19.

<sup>472</sup> Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric*, p. 157.

<sup>473</sup> Sarah Semple, ‘‘Illustrations of damnation in late Anglo-Saxon manuscripts.’’, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 32, (2003), 231- 46, (p. 236-7).



evidence of the devil being associated with barrows in early medieval England, with a number of barrows being referred to as *Scuccan hlaew* (the Devil's barrow) in Anglo-Saxon land charters.<sup>474</sup> Despite this, there is no evidence of a connection between demons and barrows in later medieval literature, prior to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. There are a number of barrows with 'devil' names in England, including the Devil's Humps and the Devil's Jumps in West Sussex and The Devil's Bed and Bolster in Somerset. There are also traditions of barrows being built by the devil, such a group of Roman barrows called Six Hills in Hertfordshire.<sup>475</sup> Many of these names probably date to the early modern period, rather than the later medieval, although as associations between barrows and the devil or demons existed both before and after the later medieval period may suggest it did exist to some extent when *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* was written.

### **The Green Knight**

As with the Green Chapel, the Green Knight's true nature is not clear. The Green Knight is presented by the guide as 'an ancient and well-known local hazard'<sup>476</sup>, when he says of the Green Knight, *ther wonez a wyghe in that waste, the worst upon erthe* ('there lives a man in that wilderness, the worst in the world', line 2098) and that he *hatz wonyd here ful zore, on bent much baret bende* ('has dwelt here long, and caused much strife in the land' (lines 2114-5)). Yet, this does not fit with the explanation that Bertilak has been enchanted by Morgana Le Fay for this one purpose. Indeed, if Bertilak travelled from the Green Chapel to Camelot in the form of the Green Knight, it is surprising that no one Gawain speaks to before he arrives at Hautdesert has even heard of him. Despite Bertilak's explanation, there remains the lingering

<sup>474</sup> Grinsell, *Ancient Burial Mounds of England*, p. 79.

<sup>475</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>476</sup> J.A. Burrow, *A Reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), p. 119.

knowledge that the Green Knight appears from the wilderness at the beginning of the poem and disappears back into it at the end, wandering *whiderwarde-so-ever he wolde* ('wheresoever he would' (line 2478)).<sup>477</sup>

Despite the long description of the Green Knight, his arraignments and unusual colouring, given when he first appears at Camelot at the beginning of the poem, his exact nature is unclear throughout the poem. He appears as a huge green-skinned man with red eyes, who is beheaded but survives. However, whether he is a mortal man, fairy, phantom or even the devil himself is not revealed until the end of the poem, and the Gawain poet gives a number of clues which might lead his reader to suspect that the Green Knight is the devil or some kind of fairy creature. At the beginning of the poem, the Gawain Poet gives the history of England as being founded by Brutus, but there is nothing to suggest that the Green Knight fits into that tradition; if he has lived there as long as Gawain's guide suggests, perhaps he was a remnant of the old days as described by Chaucer in the Wife of Bath's tale, 'a land fulfild of fayerye'. As discussed in Chapter 4, William of Newburgh's twelfth-century chronicle *Historia rerum Anglicarum* talks about a fairy gathering at a barrow, although as with the Green Knight it is not entirely clear whether they inhabit the mound or are simply meeting there.

The colour of the Green Knight has often been seen as a link between him and the devil by modern scholars.<sup>478</sup> The Devil is connected to the colour green in other Middle English literature, specifically wearing green, such as in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. This is most likely because green was the colour worn by huntsmen to camouflage themselves and deceive their prey, just as the Devil deceived humans.<sup>479</sup> The description of the devil in the *Canterbury*

<sup>477</sup> Edward Bryne, "From Where Do You Come?: Complexity, Theology, and Paradox in the Green Knight", *Scholars' Day Review*, (2013), 5-9, (p.8)  
<<http://web.monroecc.edu/scholarsday/SDRhome>> [accessed 16 May 2018]

<sup>478</sup> Walter Curry, *The Middle English Ideal of Personal Beauty: as found in the Metric Romances, Chronicles and Legends of the 13th, 14th and 15th Centuries* (Baltimore, MD: J.H. Furst, 1916), p. 50.

<sup>479</sup> Elisabeth Brewer, "Literary Sources: Romances and Other Secular Sources" in *A Companion to the Gawain Poet*, ed. by Jonathan Gibson & Derek Brewer, (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 1997), 243-56, (p. 184).

*Tales* and the Green Knight have a few minor similarities which have been identified by previous scholars, as well as a fondness for green; both make sinister contracts and appointments with men.<sup>480</sup> Throughout the poem, the Gawain Poet encourages his audience to associate the Green Knight with the Devil, and therefore to imagine a particular ending for Gawain's encounter with him at the Green Chapel. This continues when Gawain reaches the Green Chapel, *þe corsesdest kyrk þat euer [he] com inne* ('the most cursed church [he] ever was in' (line 2196)) until the Green Knight greets Gawain with the words *God þe mot loke* ('may god preserve you' (line 2239)).

Unlike the Devil though, it is not just the Green Knight's clothing which is green, but his very skin. William of Newburgh's *Historia rerum Anglicarum* and Ralph of Coggeshall's early thirteenth-century *Chronicum Anglicanum* both contain a story of two children who also had green skin (the Green Children of Woolpit). These children were supposed to be from an other-world which according to Ralph of Coggeshall was accessed through a cave. Derek Brewer makes a convincing argument that the children may have been suffering from chlorosis, a form of anaemia which can lend a greenish tint to skin, and that Newburgh and Coggeshall may have been describing a real event, albeit embellished.<sup>481</sup> In relation to the Green Knight's skin Heinrich Zimmer in *The King and the Corpse* went further, suggesting that it was tinted with a deathly shade because he was in fact the dead inhabitant of a barrow.<sup>482</sup> This is an interesting theory, certainly; as mentioned above, the Green Knight is described as dwelling in the Green Chapel (line 2114) but there is no aspect of his physical appearance or character in the poem which would suggest he was in any way sickly; rather the colour is a marker of his supernatural nature. In fact, the colour green was also often seen as a positive colour in

<sup>480</sup> Burrow, p. 123.

<sup>481</sup> Brewer, p. 183.

<sup>482</sup> Heimrich Zimmer, *The King and the Corpse: Tales of the Soul's Conquest of Evil*, 2nd edn. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), p.67.

medieval Europe, due to its associations with spring and renewal of life. Although for much of the poem it is implied that he will kill Gawain, at the end he gives Gawain a second chance at life, and he himself survives a beheading, albeit due to his supernatural or enchanted nature.

J.A. Burrows has suggested that the Green Knight could also be interpreted as representing Death.<sup>483</sup> His reasoning for this is twofold; firstly the Green Knight's victims, as relayed to Gawain by his guide 'include members of all three estates of society', *be hit chorle oþer chaplayn þat bi þe chapel rydes, monk oþer masseprest, oþer any mon elles* ('be it churl or chaplain that rides by the chapel, monk or mass-priest or any man else' (lines 2197-8)).<sup>484</sup> Technically the nobility are not mentioned in this, but may be included in 'oþer any mon elles'. Secondly, the guide's warning to Gawain could also be seen to parallel the boy's warning in Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale*, where Death is described as a man who in this *contree al the peple sleeth* ('who hereabouts makes all the people die', *Pardoner's Tale*, lines 389-390).<sup>485</sup> Whilst there is no evidence that Chaucer or the Gawain Poet were directly aware of each other's works, if we accept that the Gawain Poet was writing for an audience associated with the royal court of Richard II, then both were writing for very similar or even overlapping audiences, with shared cultural influences and understanding. Both may have been drawing on an anthropomorphic description of Death which was common at the time.

That said, rather than directly representing Death, it may be that it is simply another layer in the Green Knight's identity. Both Gawain and the reader are given clues about the Green Knight which may point towards him being the devil, death or a supernatural being, and this has implications for the nature of the Green Chapel too. The Green Chapel itself also has associations with death; it is there that Gawain expects to be beheaded, and unlike the Green

<sup>483</sup> Burrows, p. 120.

<sup>484</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>485</sup> *Ibid.*

Knight that is not something he would survive. As discussed in several of the previous chapters, barrows were recognised as burial places in later medieval England, both in literature and actuality. By implying that the site of Gawain's beheading is a burial mound, the Gawain poet is re-enforcing the reader's sense that this encounter may not end well for Gawain. It is also fitting that Gawain's fear of death is what forces him to cheat in the exchange game with Bertilak, and he must finally confront that fear at a barrow.

### **Into the Woods**

The forest location of the Green Chapel may also have concerned both Gawain and the reader. John of Trevisa translated Bartholomaeus Anglicus' thirteenth-century *De Proprietatibus rerum* ('On the Properties of Things') into English in the late fourteenth century, when *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* was also composed. *De Proprietatibus rerum* describes the forest as 'a place of deceit, where passing men are often despoiled, robbed and slain'.<sup>486</sup> At the same time, Christianity was supposed to tame the wilderness. Gerald of Wales in his twelfth-century *Itinerarium Cambriae* wrote: 'give to the Cistercians some barren place in thick forest and in a few years you will discover not only distinguished churches ... but also a good deal of property and great riches too'.<sup>487</sup> The Gawain Poet subverts this idea, with the wilderness having consumed the Green Chapel. This might perhaps suggest that barrows in woods carried connotations of strange, supernatural or dangerous activity, whereas those on open ground close to civilisation, which were more likely to be destroyed by agriculture, or else dug into by treasure hunters, may have been viewed as more mundane. However, connections between the Green Knight, fairies or woodland spirits and the pagan 'Green Man' were fuelled by Victorian

<sup>486</sup> Marilyn Sandidge, "The Forest, the River, the Mountain, the Field, the Meadow" in *Handbook of Medieval Culture, Vol 1*, ed. by Albrecht Classen, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 537-64 (p. 593).

<sup>487</sup> CS. Watkins, "Landscape and Belief in Anglo-Norman England" in *Anglo-Norman Studies XXXV: Proceedings of the Battle Conference 2012* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2013), p. 309.

and early twentieth-century ideas and would not have been considered by medieval audiences.<sup>488</sup> Whilst there are medieval foliate head carvings in churches all over England and continental Europe, again these are not connected to the Green Man tradition until the Victorian era, indeed the term ‘green man’ was only connected to these in the early twentieth century.

### **Locating the Green Chapel**

Scholars have suggested a number of possible present-day locations for the Green Chapel since the rediscovery of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in the mid-nineteenth century. Based on the Gawain Poet’s dialect of Middle English, and the description of Gawain’s journey through Wales and the Wirral, as well as the descriptions of the landscape which surrounds the Green Chapel, the poem is assumed to be set in the Northwest Midlands where the borders of Staffordshire, Cheshire and Derbyshire meet, on the edge of the Macclesfield Forest.<sup>489</sup> Derek Brewer suggested that the Gawain Poet was basing his description of the Green Chapel on a location which he knew, and which he anticipated the reader would also know, writing that ‘whatever it is, the poet is not making something up out of his head, there is just the mixture of vagueness and detailed description which is to be expected when a man describes something he expects his audience will recognise.’<sup>490</sup> If the Gawain Poet were writing for a North-West audience, or one familiar with the landscape of that area, this may well be the case. Equally, it could be the case that the Gawain Poet was weaving together several places together, with which he was familiar, but the audience may not necessarily have been, in order to create an otherworldly atmosphere.

<sup>488</sup> Brewer, p. 183.

<sup>489</sup> Ralph Elliott, “Staffordshire and Cheshire Landscapes in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*”, *North Staffordshire Journal of Field Studies*, 17, (1977), 20-49.

Also see M.J. Bennet, “*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the Literary Achievement of the North-West Midlands: the Historical Background”, *Journal of Medieval History*, 5 (1979), 63-88.

<sup>490</sup> Derek S. Brewer, “*Gawayn and the Green Chapel*”, *Notes and Queries*, 193 (1948), p. 13.

One of the most commonly suggested sites which may have been the inspiration for the Green Chapel is a natural chasm in the Staffordshire Peak District called Lud's Church, with nearby Swythamley Park 'where the earls of Chester once owned a hunting lodge on an eminence recorded as Knight's Low' often suggested as a location for Bertilak's castle of Hautdesert, where Gawain shelters over Christmas.<sup>491</sup> Local folklore though ascribes another legend to Lud's Church. A nineteenth-century book *Swythamley and its neighbourhood, past and present*, contains the legend that Lud's Church was used as a place of worship by the Lollards in the fifteenth century. This may be where the name Lud's Church originates, although equally the story may have originated as an explanation of the name. Lud was also the name of a king in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia rerum Britanniae* and in the medieval Welsh *Mabinogion*. Ludchurch was already known by that name when Robert Plot wrote his *Natural History of Staffordshire* in 1680s, although Plot did not record any legends attached to the site.<sup>492</sup>

<sup>491</sup> Ralph Elliot, *The Gawain Country: Essays on the Topography of Middle English Alliterative Poetry*, (Leeds: School of English, 1984). & "Landscape and Geography" in *A Companion to the Gawain-poet*, (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 1998), p. 116-117.

<sup>492</sup> Robert Plot, *The Natural History of Staffordshire* (Oxford: Printed at the theatre, 1686), p.173.



*Figure 12. Lud's Church. Photograph: Nathan Jones*  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/nathanjones1979/20201004802>

A visit to Lud's Church in winter, the time of year Gawain reaches the Green Chapel, allows for an easy understanding of the endurance of this chasm as inspiration for the Green Chapel. Even when the landscape around Lud's Church comes in varying shades of mud brown and grey, the damp green moss of the interior maintains a vivid green colour. It is also located



less than three miles from Three Shires Head, where the modern counties of Derbyshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire meet, and the heart of the Gawain Poet's landscape – at least in terms of dialect.

Alternatively, a cavern near Wetton Mill, over the border into Derbyshire and today known as 'Thor's Cave' has also been suggested as a location for the Green Chapel.<sup>493</sup> It is interesting to note that despite the Green Chapel usually being described as a burial mound, none of the sites suggested as possible locations for the Green Chapel are barrows of any type, despite the relatively large number which exist within the Peak District (although few of these are chambered tombs). One such barrow is a chambered tomb called Five Wells, in Derbyshire, which stands on the top of a limestone plateau, looking out over the Wye Valley. It may be that Five Wells, and another large chambered tomb over the border in Cheshire called The Bridestones, have not been considered as inspiration for the Green Chapel because their mounds and some of the stones have been destroyed deliberately over the past two hundred years – in the case of Five Wells, by the nineteenth-century Derbyshire antiquarian and self-styled 'barrow knight' Thomas Bateman.

### **Meeting at the Mere**

When Gawain explains his pact with the Green Knight to Bertilak, he says that he has arranged *to mete þat mon at þat mere* ('to meet that man at that mark' (line 1061)). In *Cleanness*, *Patience* and *Pearl*, poems which are usually attributed to the Gawain poet, it is used to mean water.<sup>494</sup> This has been used by Dominique Battles to link the use of *mere* in Gawain to the mere in Beowulf; a place where the hero of the poem must confront the monster. As part of the

<sup>493</sup> Robert Kaske, "Gawain's Green Chapel and the Cave at Wetton Mill", in *Medieval Literature and Folklore Studies: Essays in Honor of Francis Lee Utley*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1972), 111-21, p.111

<sup>494</sup> Dominique Battles, *Cultural Difference and Material Culture in Middle English Romance: Normans and Saxons*, (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 96.

alliterative revival, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* uses some Old English vocabulary which is thought to have fallen out of general use in England by the time the poem was written. Battles suggests that the Gawain Poet's use of *mere* is an indication of his understanding of Old English and therefore assumes that the Gawain Poet was also well versed in the literature and traditions of Anglo-Saxon England. However, whilst the alliterative revival of which the Gawain poet is a part is looking back to traditions of Anglo-Saxon poetry, it may well be that some of the Old English words which appear in *Gawain* are and ideas preserved in the landscape, rather than people looking back at a tradition- possibly these words were preserved in the vernacular of North-West England. However, *mere* was also used in Middle English to mean a border, an object indicating a boundary or a landmark and it seems feasible that this meaning was intended by the Gawain Poet.<sup>495</sup> It should also be noted that Grendel, the monster *Beowulf* confronts at the mere is not connected with a barrow, although a barrow does feature prominently at the end of the poem.

The Middle English Dictionary also defines *mere* as; a boundary between kingdoms, estates, fields, etc.; the outer limits of a country, a military encampment. Also the bounds set for creatures and the land along the boundary, borderland, with the 'meres of erthe', meaning the ends of the earth.<sup>496</sup> Interestingly, the word *mere* is used in the fifteenth-century text *The Wars of Alexander* to mean to end of one's life.<sup>497</sup> As mentioned early, Putter has suggested that the writing of *The Wars of Alexander* was influenced by the Gawain Poet.<sup>498</sup> All of these alternate definitions carry interesting meanings for the intended audience of the poem. In the

<sup>495</sup> "Mere, n.2". *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/116724?rsk=IMs4Sw&result=2&isAdvanced=false>> (accessed 21 June, 2018).

<sup>496</sup> 'mēre n.(3)', *Middle English Dictionary* (2019) <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED27422>> (accessed 10 April 2018).

<sup>497</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>498</sup> Putter, *Companion to the Gawain Poet*, p. 28.

context of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, mere is most often translated as 'rendezvous', after all, the Green Chapel is the landmark by which Gawain will know he has reached his appointed destination.

Despite all the interest there has been in identifying locations mentioned in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, such as the Green Chapel (reflecting generally an interest in identifying places from Arthurian legend, such as Camelot), it may well actually be the case that the Gawain poet was not intending his audience would identify specific places. Unlike writers such as Geoffrey of Monmouth (as discussed in Chapter 2) and William of Newburgh (Chapter 4) who connected the events they were writing about to real places in the medieval English landscape in order to legitimise the events and ground them in the landscape, the Gawain poet does not need to prove the events of the poem took place by attaching them to one particular place. The events of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* take place in a world which is the England of Arthurian Romance; aspects of Gawain's journey may be familiar to his audience, but like Gawain they may struggle to identify the exact nature of the Green Chapel. Equally, although the Gawain Poet follows the traditions of Arthurian Romance, with which he must have anticipated his audience would be familiar, it is also the case that the line which divides real world events from those of the romance falls in a different place in *Gawain*, in comparison to other medieval romances.<sup>499</sup> Arthur and his knights are shocked by the appearance of the Green Knight, but have to pretend they are not, almost aware for a moment that they should be existing within the rules of a Romance, where such events are everyday occurrences.<sup>500</sup>

<sup>499</sup> Putter, p. 62.

<sup>500</sup> *Ibid.* p. 61.

## **Supernatural Elements**

Ad Putter described it perfectly when he wrote that ‘the Green Knight’s magic represents the sudden interruption of the supernatural and irrational into the realm of the ordinary.’ As discussed in the previous chapter, the word ‘supernatural’ was not particularly used in medieval England until the fifteenth century, however the concept of the supernatural was articulated by both theologians and writers, such as Thomas Aquinas in the fourteenth century, who described supernatural creatures, such as monsters, as occurring in nature, but beyond the intention of ‘active nature’. Writers such as Gervase of Tilbury in the twelfth century categorised supernatural occurrences as either divine miracles or marvels. According to Gervase, marvels, which would include many of the supernatural events in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, were actually a part of nature but beyond human understanding. Indeed the Green Knight picking up his own severed head at Camelot, is described by the poet using the word *meruayl* (marvel, line 466).

Some of the supernatural elements in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, such as the *wodwos* (wildmen of the woods) and *etaynez* (giants) which Gawain encounters on his journey through Wales and the Wirral are not described in great detail, in comparison to the Green Knight and the Green Chapel. It is possible this is because such encounters were quite common in Middle English Romance, especially in the tales of Arthur and his knights.<sup>501</sup> These *wodwos* and giants, therefore, are not *inaudita* (things unheard of) as Gervase of Tilbury labels the unusual things he describes. In contrast to this, the Gawain poet gives a great deal of detail in his descriptions of the Green Knight, the Green Chapel and Hautdesert –these are the *inaudita*, the supernatural, marvelous parts of the poem, and are not going to be familiar to the audience in the way that giants would be.

<sup>501</sup> Burrow, p. 173.

Even before he survives his beheading, the courtiers at Camelot recognise the Green Knight as something supernatural, as ‘fantoum or fayryze’ (‘phantom or fairy’ (line 240)). The world of medieval romance may have contained many strange things, but even there it was not usual for a mortal human to have green skin, green hair, and rolling red eyes. But it is the moment that the Green Knight gathers up his own severed head and speaks to Gawain which fully confirms his supernatural nature.

### **The Beheading Game**

The theme of severed heads possessing supernatural abilities or qualities does appear elsewhere, for example in medieval hagiographical texts. It is not just the heads of pagan or supernatural beings which can survive a beheading. Cephalophores, saints depicted as carrying their own severed heads, appear in both art and hagiographical literature. In Abbo’s tenth-century *Passio Sancti Eadmundi*, St Edmund’s severed head calls out to his followers who are searching for him. Even within Christianity, this trope predated the medieval. The early Church father John Chrysostom believed that the severed head of a martyr was more terrifying to the devil when it was able to speak.<sup>502</sup> It is not clear how long a Christian saint could expect to survive after being beheaded. Often descriptions of the severed heads of saints speaking after decapitation had the saint clearly declare a place of burial, often this was to aid a particular religious house to claim a right to relics or deny the claims of others.<sup>503</sup> It is clear from the wealth of beheading narratives which bear similarities to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* that by the fourteenth century beheading motifs were also popular in English and French romances.

<sup>502</sup> Christopher Walter, *Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition*, 2nd edn, (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 143.

<sup>503</sup> *Ibid.* See also Barbara Baert, Anita Traninger and Catrien Santing, *Disembodied Heads in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (London: Brill Press, 2013).

The Green Knight's beheading game itself mainly has its roots in Irish and French literary traditions, elements of which would probably have been well known in medieval England, by the late thirteenth/early fourteenth century, when *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* was written, there were a number of beheading narratives in circulation.<sup>504</sup> The earliest recorded version of the beheading game is in the Middle Irish prose narrative *Fled Bricrend* ('Bricriu's Feast'). *Fled Bricrend* dates to c. 1100 and contains a similar beheading game.<sup>505</sup> *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is the only version of a beheading game narrative that is associated with a barrow, although the beheading games which also feature Gawain; in *La Damoiselle a la Mule* (also known as *La Mule sans Frein*) a late twelfth- or early-thirteenth-century French text, and the *Romance of Hunbaut*, a thirteenth-century French poem, both take place at a castle. It has been suggested that the Gawain Poet based his description of Hautdesert on the castle in *La Damoiselle a la Mule*.<sup>506</sup> As none of the other beheadings take place at barrows, this means that the description of the Green Chapel as a burial mound is something the Gawain poet has purposefully included, perhaps because the Gawain Poet expected his audience to associate barrows with death and the supernatural. As barrows were written about as burial sites and grave markers in later medieval England, the poem's audience may have been able to see the site of Gawain's meeting with the Green Knight as a foreshadowing of his fate.

Whilst it is thought the Gawain Poet had read a version of the *Brut*, whether Wace, Lazamon or one of the many fourteenth-century adaptations, there is no evidence he had firsthand knowledge of the contents of the *Historia regum Britanniae*.<sup>507</sup> If this is the case, it

<sup>504</sup> Elisabeth Brewer, *From Cuchulainn to Gawain: Sources and Analogues of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 1973), p. 1.

<sup>505</sup> Brewer, *From Cuchulainn to Gawain*, p. 9.

<sup>506</sup> North, p. 77.

<sup>507</sup> Putter, *Introduction to the Gawain Poet*, pp. 4-5.

is most likely coincidence that in the *Historia regum Britanniae*, Gawain beheads Gaius Quintillianus, the nephew of a Roman emperor, after Gaius insults the courage of the Britons. Similarly, the Green Knight insults the courage of Arthur and his knights at the start of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. There is another beheading which some local historians have suggested may have a close link to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. In the late fourteenth century a group of monks from Dieulacres Abbey in Staffordshire were indicted for having beheaded a man named John de Warton, at Leek, at the command of Abbot William.<sup>508</sup> However, as this incident occurred in 1380, it may well have happened after *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* was written. Equally, as there is currently no proven link between Dieulacres Abbey and the Gawain Poet, this is most likely to be another coincidence.

Despite the build-up to Gawain's beheading throughout the poem and the threat of it taking place somewhere already associated with death, it is not the most significant event to occur at the barrow. Meeting at a burial mound may highlight the anticipated conclusion to Gawain's second encounter with the Green Knight, but nothing is as it seems, and Gawain gets off with just a scratch. Indeed, Putter goes so far as to say that the entire beheading plot 'has no significance other than as a reflection of Gawain's performance in a parlour game he has earlier played at Hautdesert'.<sup>509</sup> This does not mean that the Green Chapel is not the pivotal point of the poem though, and the events that take place there still have great importance, they are simply not what Gawain or the reader were expecting. In fact, the events at the Green Chapel have more in common with later medieval uses of barrows than the beheading would have. The Green Chapel functions not only as a meeting place between the Christian knight

<sup>508</sup> G.C. Baugh, W.L. Cowie, J.C. Dickinson, A.P. Duggan, A.K.B. Evans, R.H. Evans, Una C. Hannam, P. Heath, D.A. Johnston, Hilda Johnstone, Ann J. Kettle, J.L. Kirby, R. Mansfield and A. Saltman (eds), *A History of the County of Stafford: Volume 3* (London: Victoria County History, 1970) pp. 232-3 <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/staffs/vol3> (accessed 7 May, 2019).,

<sup>509</sup> Putter, *Companion to the Gawain Poet*, p. 43.

Gawain and the ambiguous, possibly supernatural figure of the Green Knight, but as a place of justice and the upholding of Christian morals.

Ultimately the games in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* are revealed not merely to be games but have been designed by Morgana Le Fay to punish Camelot. Although Morgana's plan is unsuccessful, this does not mean that Camelot escapes unscathed. Although Gawain learns a lesson from his experience with the Green Knight, Arthur and the rest of his knights do not. The conclusion of the poem tells the reader that the knights of Camelot take the symbol of the green girdle but not the accompanying lessons in chivalry. Everything that the Green Knight represents, and the lesson in honesty he gives to Gawain is exactly what Camelot needs to keep at bay in order to maintain its sense of self. It is this inability to put honesty and loyalty between a king or lord and his knights above courtesy to women which ultimately leads to Camelot's downfall. Had Gawain's beheading taken place at Camelot, rather than at the Green Chapel, perhaps then the lesson would have been learnt.

### **Conclusion**

It is this lesson in correct courtly behaviour, as well as what Paul Strohm refers to as the literature's 'textual environment', such as the frequent references to the court structure and pursuits like hunting, which suggest that the intended audience was not primarily a local Cheshire audience, but one connected to the royal court of Richard II. Richard II, for example, was very young when he ascended to the throne, and it has been suggested by numerous scholars that his analogue in the poem can be identified in the beardless King Arthur.<sup>510</sup> Strohm's concept of a 'textual environment' includes references to texts, practices and social structures, such as those of class and power, which together create 'a field of shared knowledge

<sup>510</sup> See John M Bowers, *The Politics of Pearl: Court Poetry in the Age of Richard II*, (Cambridge: DS Brewer, 2001), p. 17



that allows an author to write in the confidence of being understood'.<sup>511</sup> By analysing the medieval texts, we can try to piece together what these references were, and therefore who the intended audience may have been. We can also draw out associations in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, such as from the description of the Green Chapel, and explore what these might have meant to the intended audience by comparing them to similar associations in other texts and in everyday life, where such evidence exists. Therefore, based on the suggested audience for the poem, if we interpret the Green Chapel as a barrow, we can explore a number of associations barrows may have held for the upper levels of later medieval English society.

Interestingly, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is not the only text in which a barrow is presented as or becomes a Christian monument. The next chapter of this thesis explores the miraculous discovery of the relics of St Amphibalus in a barrow outside the town of St Albans. The saint's resting place not only becomes a focus point for Christian pilgrimage and miracles, but a chapel is constructed over the barrow.

<sup>511</sup> Paul Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow: The Social Imagination of Fourteenth-Century Texts*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 6.

## **Chapter 6: The Discovery of the Relics of St Amphibalus**

### **Introduction**

If Gawain was surprised to discover a barrow when searching for a Christian chapel, one might expect the monks of St Alban's Abbey to have reacted likewise when the relics of St Amphibalus, the man who, at least according to Geoffrey of Monmouth, converted St Alban himself to Christianity, were revealed to have been buried in a pagan barrow. What they actually did was construct a cult around the site which was still relevant two centuries later.

In the late twelfth century, very shortly after the martyrdom of Thomas Becket at Canterbury, the bones of St Amphibalus were revealed to be buried in a barrow near St Albans. This has been seen as just one example of how barrows became embroiled in the collecting of relics by abbeys and churches across England, through which they could draw in pilgrims. This was not the case; rather, the discovery of the relics of St Amphibalus was the exception not the rule, nevertheless this and the similarly oft cited discovery of the family of St Brendan at Ludlow in Shropshire have often been seen as examples of a trend, rather than individual cases. This supposed trend was originally developed by the nineteenth-century antiquarian Thomas Wright, who stated that he could identify fifty to a hundred examples of barrows being opened to find the bones of saints in similar circumstances.<sup>512</sup> Nevertheless, Wright only provided details of two discoveries: St Amphibalus and the family of St Brendan. Investigation of further examples of such discoveries in later medieval England have proved fruitless and without

<sup>512</sup> Grinsell, *Ancient Burial Mounds*, p. 80

further primary sources than the two discussed here, it is difficult to prove any trends existed across the period. Even the most up to date archaeological techniques cannot explain exactly why someone in the Middle Ages was digging into a barrow. Also, whilst Wright is an interesting source for information, as he was prolific and produced many books during his lifetime, his work was often commissioned and as he relied on it for his income he often was neither careful nor necessarily accurate.<sup>513</sup> In the absence of evidence, Wright's claims of a hundred examples of similar discoveries must therefore be discounted.

### **Saints in Barrows**

The idea that that Christian saints might be found in barrows was not unique to later medieval England, and it was also present in some early medieval texts. In the eighth-century Latin hagiographical text, the *Vita Sancti Guthlaci* and in the Old English poems *Guthlac A* and *B* from the Exeter Book, the Anglo-Saxon saint Guthlac, who inhabited a barrow at Crowland in the East Anglian fens.<sup>514</sup> According to the *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*, when Guthlac encountered the barrow it was empty and had previously been broken into by men looking for treasure. Once in the barrow Guthlac was stricken with grief, sorrow and illness, then troubled by the devil, demons and monsters. In the Old English *Guthlac A*, Guthlac had to cast out the demons before he could inhabit the barrow. Semple sees this as another portrayal of the barrow, presumably of prehistoric or at least pre-Christian Saxon date, as a place of exile, trial and tribulations, the supernatural and torment.<sup>515</sup> Guthlac's casting out of the demons, for example, could be interpreted as the Christianisation of the pagan landscape. The barrow is also still firmly a place of death, as Guthlac died and was buried there after fifteen years as a hermit. In the early

<sup>513</sup> David Matthews, *The Invention of Middle English: An Anthology of Primary Sources* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), p. 219.

<sup>514</sup> Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric*, pp. 149-50.

<sup>515</sup> *Ibid.* p. 151.

medieval period, barrows were often incorporated into churchyards and graveyards, as part of an attempt to Christianise the landscape.<sup>516</sup> This was undertaken from the sixth century, when Pope Gregory I advised the Church to transform pagan sites to Christian ones, in order to help convert the population.<sup>517</sup> The abbey founded over Guthlac's barrow, Crowland Abbey, also had a close link to St Albans Abbey in the twelfth century; in c. 1138 a monk of St Albans Abbey was elected abbot of Crowland.<sup>518</sup> Equally, Guthlac was not the only saint to make a burial mound into his hermitage. In Gerald of Wales' late twelfth-century *Itinerary*, which chronicles a journey he made through Wales with Archbishop Baldwin in 1188, he wrote about a parish called Llanhamlach where he and the Archbishop were informed about several topographical and archaeological features which related to the life of Iltud, an early medieval saint. This included a chambered tomb called Ty Iltyd (Iltyd's House). This tomb is still standing and on the inside walls are more than sixty pieces of graffiti, mostly incised crosses. It has been suggested that these are medieval in date, remnants of the time when it was a centre of the saint's cult.<sup>519</sup>

Amy Remesnyder, writing about the creation of monastic foundation legends, has suggested that monastic imaginative memory should be treated as something separate to that of the aristocracy.<sup>520</sup> Whilst this has not been the case for the other chapters of this thesis, which discussed a number of texts created by clerics for both the aristocracy and the Church, with the case of St Amphibalus we can see that a barrow has different connotations to those

<sup>516</sup> Alfred K. Siewers, "Landscapes of Conversion: Guthlac's Mound and Grendel's Mere as Expressions of Anglo-Saxon Nation Building", in *The Postmodern Beowulf: A Critical Casebook*, ed. by Joy, E.A. (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2006), 199-257, (p. 218).

<sup>517</sup> *Ibid.* p. 221.

<sup>518</sup> "Houses of Benedictine Monks: The Abbey of Crowland", in *A History of the County of Lincoln: Volume 2*, ed. by William Page (PUBLISHER? London, 1906), pp. 105-118, British History Online <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/lincs/vol2/pp105-118>> (accessed 4 June 2019).

<sup>519</sup> Glyn E. Daniel, *The Prehistoric Chamber Tombs of England and Wales* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), p. 118.

<sup>520</sup> Remensnyder, p. 5.

previously explored, prioritising identity creation over moral message, even by writers such as Matthew Paris who wrote history with a main aim of conveying moral messages.<sup>521</sup> That said, it should be noted that the audience for Matthew Paris' *Chronica Majora*, one of the texts which describes the discovery of the relics of St Amphibalus, written at St Albans Abbey in the thirteenth century, is generally thought to have been written for the royal court of either Henry III or Edward I, as well as for the edification of the monks of St Albans Abbey.<sup>522</sup>

A limited amount of academic scholarship on this topic has previously discussed the later medieval discoveries. Primarily this consists of Florence McCulloch's 1981 article *Saints Alban and Amphibalus in the Works of Matthew Paris: Dublin, Trinity College MS 177* and Benjamin Gordon-Taylor's unpublished 1991 PhD thesis *The Hagiography of St Alban and St Amphibalus in the Twelfth Century*. This scholarship tended to focus on the religious aspects such as the miracles of Amphibalus and the development of the texts containing the story of his martyrdom and discovery of his relics, such as Matthew Paris' *Chronica Majora*, mentioning, rather than discussing, the barrow.<sup>523</sup> Whilst the religious aspects of these discoveries are important and will be discussed below, it is also essential to consider aspects such as the use of landscape in the creation of the past, and control of the landscape, especially when discussing the discovery of St Amphibalus. As there is more information available from primary sources for the discovery of Amphibalus, that will be the focus of this chapter, concluding with a short comparison of the discoveries at Ludlow.

<sup>521</sup> Björn Weiler, "Matthew Paris on the Writing of History", *Journal of Medieval History*, 35 (2009) 254-278 (pp. 259-60).

<sup>522</sup> Dorothy Kim, "Matthew Paris, Visual Exegesis, and Apocalyptic Birds in Royal MS. 14 C. VII", *The Electronic British Library Journal*, (2014), 1-33, p. 2. <<https://www.bl.uk/eblj/2014articles/pdf/ebljarticle52014.pdf>>, [Accessed 20th May 2019]

<sup>523</sup> Florence McCulloch, "Saints Alban and Amphibalus in the Works of Matthew Paris: Dublin, Trinity College MS 177", *Speculum*, 56 (1981), 761-785.

Benjamin Gordon-Taylor, 'The Hagiography of St Alban and St Amphibalus in the Twelfth Century' (unpublished PhD thesis, Durham University, 1991).

## **St Amphibalus**

According to the *Life of St Alban and St Amphibalus*, St Amphibalus was a Christian priest who, whilst fleeing persecution from the Roman Emperor Diocletian in the third century CE, was sheltered by St Alban, whom he converted to Christianity. When Roman soldiers came to arrest Amphibalus, St Alban put on Amphibalus' cloak and went to be executed in his stead. In early medieval accounts of St Alban's martyrdom, such as Gildas' sixth century *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*, Bede's eighth-century *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* and the three texts of *St Alban's Passio*, Amphibalus was not named, nor was he martyred after the death of St Alban. Indeed, it was only in Geoffrey of Monmouth's twelfth-century *Historia regum Britanniae* that Amphibalus gained both his name and fictitious sainthood. It is generally agreed that the name Amphibalus comes from a misunderstanding or miscopying of the Latin loanword from Greek: *amphibalus*, a synonym (albeit a rare one in medieval England) for the Latin *caracallus*, meaning cloak. John Tatlock has suggested that there may have been a miscopy in the manuscript of Gildas used by Geoffrey of Monmouth, where the correct version of the line *sub sancti abbatis amphibalo* ('under the cloak of the holy abbot') had been written as *sub santi abbates amphibalo* ('under the holy abbot Amphibalus').<sup>524</sup> It is perhaps fortunate that the rarer Greek loanword *amphibalus* was used, Caracalla being the nickname of a particularly nasty Roman emperor in the early third century CE. Intentional or not, Geoffrey's ascension of Amphibalus to sainthood, in the early–mid twelfth century, solved a number of problems for the abbey of St Albans. St Amphibalus' shrine still exists in St Alban's Cathedral today, and although Redbourn is no longer renowned for its association with Amphibalus it is clear that the association did continue beyond the end of the later medieval period, as Sir Henry

<sup>524</sup> John Tatlock, "St Amphibalus", *University of California Publications in English*, 4 (1934), 249-270.

Chauny remarked in 1700, ‘this place [Redbourn] has been very famous and many people have resorted hither in respect of the bones and relics of a certain clerk, called by some Amphibalus’.<sup>525</sup>



Figure 13 .The Martyrdom of St Amphibalus, British Library MS Cotton Nero D II, 39v. Image: British Library

### **The Discovery of St Amphibalus: *Flores Historiarum***

Many of the texts containing information about Amphibalus were produced at St Albans Abbey in the late twelfth century and early-mid thirteenth century, for example the Latin *Life of St Alban and St Amphibalus*. It is thought that the *vita*, which contains a description of St Amphibalus’ martyrdom but not the discovery of his relics, was written at St Alban’s Abbey between 1166-1183, as the earliest copy of the manuscript contains a dedication letter to Abbot

<sup>525</sup> Sir Henry Chauncy, *Historical Antiquities of Hertfordshire, Vol ii*, (Dorking: Kohler and Coombes, 1700), p. 397.

Simon, who held the abbacy during this time.<sup>526</sup> William of St Albans Abbey, who wrote the *Life of St Alban and St Amphibalus*, claimed that he was translating it from a sixth-century English source.<sup>527</sup> This story was embellished in the thirteenth century by Matthew Paris, also a monk at St Albans Abbey, who wrote that the original manuscript containing the *Life of St Alban and St Amphibalus* was found in a hole in a wall in the abbey and that no sooner had it been copied into a Latin translation than it turned to dust.<sup>528</sup>

The first full description of St Amphibalus' discovery and translation is contained in Roger of Wendover's thirteenth-century chronicle *Flores Historiarum*. Roger of Wendover was a monk at St Albans Abbey who died in 1236. Covering events from creation to the year before Roger's death, *Flores Historiarum* drew on the work of writers such as Bede, Geoffrey of Monmouth, William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon, as well as relaying important aspects of the history of the abbey of St Albans. *Flores Historiarum* survives in two copies, Bodleian Library MS. Douce 207 (late thirteenth-to early fourteenth-century) and British Library Cotton MS. Otho B.v. (mid fourteenth-century). Shortly after Roger's death, *Flores Historiarum* was adapted by Matthew Paris and incorporated into his thirteenth-century *Chronica Majora*, Matthew Paris' version of *Flores Historiarum* survives in at least twenty manuscripts, ten of which date to the thirteenth century, the oldest extant manuscript being Manchester Chetham MS 6712. Matthew Paris also wrote the *Vie de seint Auban* ('The Life of St Alban') which was illustrated with scenes including the martyrdom of St Amphibalus. The intended audience for Roger of Wendover's *Flores Historiarum* is not entirely clear, but its descriptions of the history of England, combined

<sup>526</sup> Gordon-Taylor, p. 18.

<sup>527</sup> John Frankis, "From Saint's Life to Saga: The Fatal Walk of Alfred Ætheling, Saint Amphibalus and the Viking Bróðir", *Saga Book*, 25 (2), (1999), 121-137, (p. 129).

<sup>528</sup> *Ibid.*



with the later popularity of Matthew Paris' adaptation, mean that Roger, like Matthew, may well have been writing for a lay, aristocratic audience as well as monastic.<sup>529</sup>

A passage in *Flores Historiarum* for the year 1178, tells how a man called Robert, a native of the town of St Albans, was visited in his sleep by a vision of the martyr St Alban, who wished to reveal to Robert the location of the relics of his friend Amphibalus, which had until that point been lost. Here Roger of Wendover emphasised that Robert was considered a man of good character and whilst a devoted attendant of church, was not connected to the abbey. The miraculous revelation of the resting place of relics by God or a saint, often in a vision or dream, was a common motif in European medieval hagiographies.<sup>530</sup> According to contemporary chronicles, for example, in the late tenth century, the Holy Roman Emperor Otto III had a divine vision which led him to the grave of Charlemagne.<sup>531</sup> Robert's good character was stressed here in order to indicate the veracity of the story; a man of good character such as Robert was a credible witness and this was a common indication of 'truth-telling' by medieval writers. Equally, both Robert's lack of connections to the abbey, and his hesitancy to reveal the vision to anyone, as discussed below, can be seen as further attempts to legitimise the discovery. Having St Alban make the revelation to a man of the town, not the Church, distanced the abbey from the start of the narrative in order to prevent claims that the event was in fact invented by the church.

The passage from *Flores Historiarum* continues with St Alban leading the man out of the town and along Watling Street, the old Roman road which ran from Wroxeter, through St Albans and London to the Kentish ports. In Matthew Paris' adaptation of *Flores Historiarum*,

<sup>529</sup> Judith Collard, "Flores Historiarum Manuscripts: the Illumination of a Late Thirteenth-Century Chronicle Series", *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 71, (2008), 441-466, (p. 464)

<sup>530</sup> David Matthews, *The Invention of Middle English: An Anthology of Primary Sources* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), p. 47-8.

<sup>531</sup> Johannes Dillinger, *Magical Treasure Hunting in Europe and North America: A History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, Macmillan 2012), p. 46.

St Alban and Robert turned off the main street for some time, in order not to meet traders who were coming into St Albans to set up the market; here Matthew's addition explains why there were no other witnesses to the revelation. Eventually Robert and St Alban arrived at a plain by the village of Redbourn, which Roger of Wendover described as having lain uncultivated for a long time but providing both good pasture for cattle *and* a convenient resting place for travellers on their way to St Albans. On this plain lay two barrows, which according to *Flores Historiarum* were known as the 'Hill of the Banners' because 'there used to be assemblies of the faithful people held round them, when, according to an ancient custom, they yearly made a solemn procession to the church of St Alban's and offered prayers'. St Alban then explained to Robert that these barrows were the resting places of the martyr St Amphibalus and his companions. St Alban then opened the barrow by making the sign of the cross and a brilliant light shone out, a true indication that the relics of St Amphibalus were inside. Robert asked St Alban what he should do with this knowledge, St Alban told him not to inform the abbot, or indeed anyone else, but to simply remember the spot and what he had seen, thus distancing the abbey from the discovery. St Alban and Robert then made their way back to the town, where St Alban entered the abbey church and Robert returned to his home.

### **The "Invention" of St Amphibalus**

The discovery of St Amphibalus came, miraculously, at a time when St Albans Abbey most needed it. Relics had become increasingly important to the Church over the past two centuries because, as Amy Remensnyder has written, they were a way in which 'ecclesiastical communities might express and regulate their relations with the outside world'.<sup>532</sup> Legends and stories such as the discovery of the relics of St Amphibalus were equally important as they allowed the monastery to identify the relics they held and explain their power and importance,

<sup>532</sup> Remensnyder, p. 291.

as well as explaining why they belonged there, rather than at another abbey or church. According to Remensnyder the writing down of these stories was part of ‘a general restructuring of monastic institutional identity’ during this period, not solely a reaction to ‘stressors’, although on this occasion it does appear that St Albans Abbey experienced a number of ‘stressors’ in the years before the discovery.

The main problem faced by St Albans Abbey was that it was not the only place which claimed to hold the relics of St Alban. That the bones were at the abbey to begin with was not in doubt; however, in the eleventh century the relics of St Alban were taken to Ely.<sup>533</sup> It is not clear exactly why this took place; St Albans Abbey claimed that the relics were sent there for safe-keeping, perhaps due to a fear of Viking raids, whilst Ely claimed that Ecgfrith, an abbot of St Albans Abbey who fled to Ely in 1070 brought them with him as a gift.<sup>534</sup> It was not only Ely who claimed to have the bones of St Alban; the church of St Pantaleon in Köln also believed that the relics had been brought there in the tenth century from Rome by the Empress Theophano.<sup>535</sup> Meanwhile the king of Denmark asserted that the relics had been stolen from Ely by King Svein Estridsson in 1070 and taken to a church in Odense, Denmark, which was then dedicated to St Alban. By the mid-twelfth century all four sites were claiming they had the relics. St Albans Abbey on the other hand did not have any other relics with which to attract pilgrims. This meant that the idea they did not actually have the bones of St Alban was especially damaging to the abbey’s reputation and coffers. This was not the case for Ely who also had the relics of St Etheldreda and the tomb of King Alfred, whilst the church at Odense also had St Cnut.<sup>536</sup>

<sup>533</sup> Frankis, pp. 127-128.

<sup>534</sup> *Ibid.* p. 127.

<sup>535</sup> E.P. Baker, "The Cult of St Alban at Cologne", *The Archaeological Journal*, 94 (1938), 207-56, (p. 211).

<sup>536</sup> Frankis, p. 128.

It is stated in the *Gesta Abbatum* that the event of St Alban revealing the resting place of St Amphibalus was proof that St Alban's remains did indeed rest in the abbey church. It is for that very purpose that Roger of Wendover so clearly stated in *Flores Historiarum* that St Alban was witnessed entering into the church.<sup>537</sup> It seems that this proof did not fully solve the dispute though, as the argument over who really held the relics continued well into the thirteenth century, with Matthew Paris claiming that Ely had received the bones of a monk, and that the relics of St Alban had never left the St Albans Abbey. By this point, however, William de Trumpington, the abbot of St Albans Abbey between 1214-1235 had acquired a number of other relics, including the cross of St Amphibalus, speckled with the blood of St Alban, and a rib of St Wulfstan.<sup>538</sup>

Missing relics were not the only problems faced by St Albans Abbey in the mid-twelfth century. The last recorded miracle of St Alban, before he revealed the burial site of the bones of St Amphibalus in 1178, took place in 1172. In addition, Robert, abbot from 1151 to 1166, left the abbey heavily in debt (*debitis gravitas* (*Gesta Abbatum* vol. 1, p. 183)) by around six hundred marks. Although some of this debt was due to improvements because Robert had embellished the shrine of St Alban and the abbey generally, the *Gesta Abbatum* also records that he lost several pieces of land belonging to the abbey and was even blamed for the location of the burial places of the early abbots having been forgotten. His successor, Simon, also made improvements to the shrine of St Alban, meaning the abbey would not have fully recovered

<sup>537</sup> Thomas Walsingham, *Gesta Abbatum Monasterii Sancti Albani, Vol. 1* (London: Longmans & Green, 1877), p. 193.

<sup>538</sup> Björn Weiler, "Matthew Paris on the Writing of History", *Journal of Medieval History*, 35 (2009), 254-278, (p. 267), S.J. Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England: A Study of West Saxon and East Anglian Cults* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 133.

from its debts by the time Canterbury began to acquire great wealth from the martyrdom of Thomas Becket.<sup>539</sup>

It seems therefore that in order to attract more pilgrims and re-establish St Albans Abbey as an important spiritual centre, the monks decided to tap into the past, leading to the discovery of St Amphibalus and his companions in the barrow. Even if the monks did actually have the relics of St Alban, the addition of St Amphibalus would attract a new flow of pilgrims to the abbey, and his relics were unlikely to be immediately claimed by another abbey. Like the bones of St Alban, this discovery also helped strengthen the abbey's claim as a major centre of English Christianity, its Christian traditions extending to well before the Norman, or even Saxon invasions.

Monika Otter sees the monastic communities 'discovering or retroactively inventing their origins, asserting their continuity in one location and explaining or defending their rights and privileges' as a common theme in *inventiones* (the genre of texts describing the discovery of saints' relics).<sup>540</sup> Otter's description of the monastic explorations into the earth as a self-referential metaphor<sup>541</sup> for accessing the past are also very relevant to this thesis, as it is evident in many of the texts discussed that barrows act as points through which the past may be accessed and made useful for the present.

As has been acknowledged by a number of other scholars, there was definitely a connection between the martyrdom of Thomas Becket in 1170 and the discovery of St Amphibalus in 1178. Benjamin Gordon-Taylor has suggested that the *Vita* of St Alban and St Amphibalus was most probably written shortly after either Thomas' martyrdom, or his

<sup>539</sup> "Houses of Benedictine Monks: St Albans Abbey - After the Conquest", in *A History of the County of Hertford: Volume 4*, ed. by William Page (London: Victoria County History, 1971), pp. 372-416, British History Online <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/herts/vol4/pp372-416>> [accessed 1 March 2019].

<sup>540</sup> Monika Otter, *Inventiones, Fiction and Referentiality in Twelfth-Century English Historical Writing* (Chapel Hill NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), p. 5.

<sup>541</sup> Otter, p. 5.

canonisation in 1173;<sup>542</sup> however it may well have been the case that the writing of the *Vita* was inspired by the naming of Amphibalus in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*.

This does not mean that the discovery of Amphibalus and the martyrdom of Thomas were completely unconnected. *Flores Historiarum* records two miracles which were carried out jointly between St Amphibalus and St Thomas Becket. One of these was a man who travelled from Hertford to Canterbury to ask St Thomas to cure his feet. Thomas healed one foot and sent him to St Albans to have Amphibalus cure the other. The second miracle occurred when a soldier slept by the relics of St Amphibalus and had a vision of St Alban, St Amphibalus and St Thomas standing together before him. Both of these miracles can be viewed as demonstrating that the sanctity of St Amphibalus was accepted by these two important English saints, and that he stood level with them in both sanctity and power.<sup>543</sup>

The monks of St Albans Abbey were by no means unusual or unique in their construction of a saint's cult and the sudden discovery of bones, although the dispute about St Alban's relics is one of the most convoluted.<sup>544</sup> Other chronicles detail similar examples of relics being translated or suddenly discovered. For example, Eadmer of Canterbury's early twelfth-century *Epistola ad Glastonburienses* describes how Glastonbury Abbey sent four monks to rescue the bones of St Dunstan from Canterbury after it was sacked by the Danes. Dunstan had been Abbot of Glastonbury before he was Archbishop of Canterbury in the mid-tenth century and therefore both Canterbury and Glastonbury believed they had a claim to his bones. After a convoluted story which involved the bones being hidden at Glastonbury, with two elderly monks the only ones who knew their location, the relics were promptly lost and

<sup>542</sup> Gordon-Taylor, p. 70.

<sup>543</sup> *Ibid.* p. 104.

<sup>544</sup> Richard Vaughan, *Matthew Paris* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), pp. 198–204.

later rediscovered. It seems that as with St Albans Abbey, after the martyrdom of St Thomas Becket, the bones of St Dunstan were no longer sufficient for the monks at Glastonbury Abbey, and they then staged the discovery of the bones of King Arthur and Guinevere in 1191.<sup>545</sup> Of course, the discovery of the bones of a king who had not previously been venerated as a saint was different from the invention of Amphibalus' relics, for whom a *Vita* had already been written, however the intention of both discoveries was to bring pilgrims to the abbeys. As argued by Patrick Geary, the relics reflected what was important to society at the time; both Amphibalus and Arthur had been elevated by their appearances in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*. Indeed, Geoffrey's work, with its extensive cast of mythical kings and saints would have been very helpful for any monastery wishing to expand their collection of relics without another abbey being easily able to claim or prove they had the relics first.

### **The Cult of St Amphibalus**

The commencement of the saint's cult at Redbourn was not instantaneous, however. *Flores Historiarum* relates that the morning of St Alban's revelation Robert could not decide whether to tell anyone what he had seen, because St Alban had told him to keep it secret for the time being. Ultimately, though, Robert decided to tell his servants and some of his friends, who then spread the word not just around the town of St Albans, but through the local area, until eventually word of it reached the abbot of St Albans Abbey. Immediately a group set out from the abbey to retrieve the bones of St Amphibalus. When they reached the barrows at Redbourn, they discovered a huge crowd of people had already gathered there. Roger of Wendover claims that these people had come from all over the country, and that they had not come after hearing Robert's story, but rather had been led there by the Holy Spirit. Rather than dig for the bones

<sup>545</sup> Antonia Grasdén, "Glastonbury Traditions and Legends", in *Glastonbury Abbey and the Arthurian Tradition*, ed. by James Carley, (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2001), 29-54, (pp. 40-43).

of Amphibalus immediately, the monks waited three days, until after the feast of St Alban on the 25 June. When the bones were eventually dug up by the monks, the abbot ordered them to be wrapped up and taken off to St Albans Abbey, rather than be displayed for the people at the barrows. This was allegedly because the abbot was worried the crowd would become uncontrollable. It was not only the bones of St Amphibalus which were discovered in the barrow, the chronicle also states there were nine other skeletons which are said to be the remains of St Amphibalus' companions. St Amphibalus' bones were identified from the others because they were all broken, whereas all the other remains were intact skeletons. This has led some scholars to suggest that this represents later Anglo-Saxon burials inserted into an original prehistoric barrow, with the broken bones belonging to the original Bronze Age burial. Watling Street was not only an important Roman road, but is thought to have also been an important Prehistoric pathway, with a number of Prehistoric, Roman and Anglo-Saxon barrows constructed nearby. The barrows on Redbourn Plain would have provided useful markers in the landscape and would almost certainly have been known by both local people and those who regularly travelled along that part of Watling Street.





Figure 14. Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 026: Matthew Paris OSB, *Chronica maiora I*; 13th century; f.135v. Image: Corpus Christi College Cambridge

During the time between the abbot arriving at Redbourn and the bones being translated to St Albans Abbey, the *Flores Historiarum* records a number of healing and cursing miracles which took place at the barrow, both before and after the bones were translated to the abbey. Those named may well have been notable or people of status in the local area, which would have helped bolster interest in and acceptance of the cult amongst local people.<sup>546</sup> The first miracle recorded was performed for woman called Matilda from Gaddesden in Hertfordshire, who was cured from various ailments after lying down ‘iuxta sanctorum martyrum loco’ (next

<sup>546</sup> Gordon-Taylor, p. 101.

to the place of the holy martyrs).<sup>547</sup> From the recorded miracles it can be seen that the recipients were mainly from towns around St Albans, and those further along Watling Street, such as Dunstable, with most mentioned coming from Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire.<sup>548</sup> The fact that the site was located on Watling Street clearly played an important role in the development of the cult; as Gordon-Taylor wrote, this demonstrates the vital role ease of access played in the successful development of saints' cults.<sup>549</sup> The visibility of these barrows, and their place on such a major roadway, may well have been why the monks of St Albans Abbey decided to use them in the first place. The use of the Redbourn barrows as a meeting place for assemblies of local people, as described by Roger of Wendover, demonstrates that they were already an important focal point in the landscape for local people. The abbey may well have been capitalising on its local importance by connecting it to St Amphibalus, but equally it may also have been why they were aware of the barrows in the first place.

Although from the evidence we can see that the cult was relatively local, according to the *Flores Historiarum*, news of the discovery spread quickly and a cult built up at both Redbourn and St Albans Abbey, just as the monks had hoped. According to the chronicle, Henry II intended to visit the shrine of St Amphibalus in 1179 (within a year of the discovery of his relics) but was prevented from doing so by his council; this shows the importance of the developing cult and connects it to royal authority, whilst also putting forward an explanation as to why the king had not actually been to visit the shrine.

Regardless of who was or was not engaging with the cult, the divine revelation had the effect of cementing the relationship between Redbourn and the abbey of St Albans, as well as

<sup>547</sup> For a fuller description and discussion of the miracles of St Amphibalus as recorded in *Flores Historiarum* see Gordon-Taylor "The hagiography of St Alban" pp. 91-109.

<sup>548</sup> *Ibid.* p. 95.

<sup>549</sup> *Ibid.* p. 100.

situating Redbourn as a place intimately connected with the martyr Amphibalus. Shortly after, this was extended to include land along Watling Street between St Albans and Redbourn. A few years after the translation of his relics, the *Gesta Abbatum records that St Amphibalus appeared in a vision* requesting that the ground where his relics met with St Alban's on the way to the abbey be honoured with fitting reverence.<sup>550</sup> In order to honour this request, the abbot decided to build a church there, which he dedicated to St Mary and established a community of leprous nuns.<sup>551</sup> From an 1194 charter, it can be seen that the monastery buildings covered land to either side of the important Roman road Watling Street, partway between Redbourn and St Albans. <sup>552</sup> This was important both to the abbey generally as well as to the development of the cult of Amphibalus because it gave them the ability to direct pilgrims travelling down Watling Street to St Albans and eventually Canterbury, to also visit the site of the relic's discovery.

### **Redbourn Village**

The village of Redbourn itself is located around four miles northwest of the town of St Albans, and at the time was reached via Watling Street. The name Redbourn derives from the Old English *hrēod burna* (reedy stream).<sup>553</sup> The archaeology of Redbourn is not limited to the barrows in which the remains of St Amphibalus and his companions were discovered, and of which there is no longer any trace; indeed, there were a number of earlier settlements. There is an Iron Age site called the Aubreys Camp to the southwest of the village, and 400m east of Watling Street, to the northeast of the village a Roman temple complex, now known as Friars

<sup>550</sup> Walsingham, *Gesta Abbatum*, p. 199.

<sup>551</sup> *Ibid.* p. 201.

<sup>552</sup> William Page, "The History of the Monastery of St Mary de Pre", *Transactions of the St. Albans and Herts Architectural and Archaeological Society*, (1896), 8-18, (p.9).

<sup>553</sup> Anthony Mills, *Dictionary of British Place Names*, 4th edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 386.

Wash, which was in use from the first to the fourth centuries CE.<sup>554</sup> Much of the information we have about Redbourn and its connections to the abbey of St Albans in the twelfth century come from the *Gesta Abbatum Monasterii Sancti Albani* ('Deeds of the Abbots of the Monastery of St Alban'). The *Gesta Abbatum* states Leofstan, the abbot of St Albans Abbey in the mid-eleventh century, acquired most of Redbourn manor for the abbey, from a man named Æthelwine Niger, along with other villages called Stodham, Langley, Greneburg and Thwantun (or Thuaneton).<sup>555</sup> The entry for Redbourn in the Domesday Book shows that in 1086 the village was worth over £30 to the abbey, which held Redbourn manor until the dissolution of the monasteries in 1538.<sup>556</sup>

### **Primary Sources**

First produced in the thirteenth century by Matthew Paris, the *Gesta Abbatum* covered the history of the abbey, from its foundation by King Offa in 793 to c. 1255. Matthew Paris made use of an older roll from St Albans Abbey, which was kept by a man called Bartholomew the clerk, a servant to Adam the Cellarer who appears several times in the *Gesta Abbatum* between c.1140-1180. The sections of the *Gesta Abbatum* which cover this time period are very interested in the litigious disputes the abbey was involved in, one of which will be discussed later in this chapter, indeed, this is seen as a further link between earlier sections of the *Gesta Abbatum* and Adam the Cellarer, who was involved in much of the litigation of the 1160s and 1170s. Mark Hagger has suggested that whilst the earlier version of the *Gesta Abbatum* was likely to have been meant for a very limited audience, specifically those

<sup>554</sup> Wessex Archaeology, *Friars Wash, Redbourn Hertfordshire: Archaeological Evaluation and Assessment of Results* (2009), ONLINE at <<https://www.wessexarch.co.uk/our-work/friars-wash-redbourn>> [accessed 8 May 2019].

<sup>555</sup> Walsingham, *Gesta Abbatum* p. 39.

<sup>556</sup> 'Parishes: Redbourn', in *A History of the County of Hertford: Volume 2*, ed. William Page (London: Victoria County History, 1908), pp. 364-371, *British History Online* <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/herts/vol2/pp364-371>> [accessed 7 February 2019].

involved in the administration of the abbey's land and property, Matthew Paris' rewriting was intended to be read by all the monks of the house.<sup>557</sup>

The *Gesta Abbatum* was revised and expanded by Thomas Walsingham in the fourteenth century; the history from c.1308-c.1390 is generally accepted to be Walsingham's work. Walsingham is thought to have studied at Oxford possibly before he entered the abbey of St Albans, and was not just focused on the history of St Albans Abbey; he wrote a number of other texts, including the *Ypodigma Neustriæ*, a history of the dukes of Normandy which he dedicated to Henry V.<sup>558</sup> Walsingham may also have been the author of the *Tractatus de nobilitate, vita et martirio sanctorum Albani et Amphibali* ('Treatise on the Nobility, Life and Martyrdom of Saints Alban and Amphibalus'), itself a version of Matthew Paris' *Vie de Seint Auban* ('Life of St Alban').<sup>559</sup> As Walsingham did not just focus on this history of St Albans Abbey, and intended other texts he wrote for an royal audience, he may well have expected that it would have an audience in the royal court and other monastic houses, as well as for the education of monks at St Albans Abbey. If so, this would have influenced what Walsingham included in the *Gesta*, giving it an aim not only of providing an instructional history of the abbey, but also cementing the abbey's identity and importance, as well as place both in history and in the landscape.

### **The Priory of St Amphibalus: Christianisation of the Landscape**

It may be assumed that the priory or cell of St Amphibalus was built over the site of the barrows soon after the translation of Amphibalus and his companions to St Albans Abbey,

<sup>557</sup> Mark Hagger, "The Gesta Abbatum Monasterii Sancti Albani: Litigation and History at St. Albans", *Historical Research*, 81 (2008), 396-7.

<sup>558</sup> James Clark, "Thomas Walsingham Reconsidered: Books and Learning at Late-Medieval St. Albans", *Speculum*, 77 (2002), 832-860.

<sup>559</sup> Walsingham's *Gesta Abbatum* can be found in British Library MS Cotton Claudius E. iv, and is the version used for this thesis.

however the first record of the Priory of St Amphibalus at Redbourn in the *Gesta Abbatum* comes from the time of Abbot Warin (1183-95) and is recorded after the translation of St Amphibalus to a new shrine, which according to the *Gesta Abbatum* occurred on the 24<sup>th</sup> of June 1186. The *Gesta* records that Abbot Warin sent sick monks to recover at Redbourn, suggesting that the priory there was already well established.<sup>560</sup> This is significant because it suggests the barrows, the pagan element of the site, were quickly concealed under the Christian structure. It was not enough to Christianise the barrow by making it the burial place of a saint; now the bones had been recovered, it was to be assimilated into an overtly Christian landscape. The next record of the priory comes from 1217, when it was raided by the soldiers of Louis of France; the soldiers stole a silver cross but were forced to return it after one of their number was struck down with fits, presumably cursed by St Amphibalus.<sup>561</sup> Shortly after this episode, William, the abbot of St Albans Abbey from 1214-35 gave two gilded shrines containing relics of St Amphibalus and his companions to the priory at Redbourn and appointed two monks to watch them.

When the relics of St Amphibalus were returned to the site of the barrows, the *Gesta Abbatum* records that a number of miracles occurred there, thus emphasising the importance of the site.<sup>562</sup> The translation of relics from the abbey church to the priory, back to the original site of the discovery, is interesting. It would still be a sacred space without the presence of the relics, being the place where St Amphibalus' bones had lain for hundreds of years. The decision to send some of the relics to the priory may suggest this was to encourage pilgrims to visit both the shrines at St Albans Abbey and the cell at Redbourn.

<sup>560</sup> Walsingham, *Gesta Abbatum*, p. 211.

<sup>561</sup> 'Parishes: Redbourn', in *A History of the County of Hertford: Volume 2*, ed. William Page (London: Victoria County History 1908), pp. 364-371. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/herts/vol2/pp364-371> [accessed 7 February 2019].

<sup>562</sup> Walsingham, *Gesta Abbatum*, pp. 282-3.

Sarah Semple identified a number of examples of similar relationships between pagan monuments and Christian churches around England, especially where churches were occasionally built on or close to barrows, during both the early and later medieval periods.<sup>563</sup> Whilst this was of course connected to Christianisation of the landscape, especially in the early medieval period, however as Semple argues the barrows may also have been used because they were already important foci of local interest, to the extent that the Church felt ‘compelled’ to make reference to them.<sup>564</sup> To a certain extent this is confirmed by the fact that it was only particular barrows that were encompassed by the Church, there were far more barrow sites which had no Christian associations than did. It is not clear exactly why some barrows were connected to churches whilst many others were not. Semple has suggested in some cases that these connections may have been established much earlier in the Anglo-Saxon period, where living relatives and descendants of those buried in barrows such as the pre-Christian ‘princely burial’ at Taplow, were exerting their local influence to ensure their ancestor ‘was not being written out of history’.<sup>565</sup>

Where churches were built on barrows or close to barrows, as with the priory of St Amphibalus, much of the evidence for this comes from after the Norman Conquest, rather than before, such as the thirteenth-century chapel at Wervin, Yorkshire, which sits on an artificial mound, possibly a barrow.<sup>566</sup> Equally, by the twelfth century Christianity was so well established in England that the Church may not have felt threatened by these monuments. Indeed, as in the case of St Albans Abbey, by declaring the barrow to be the burial place of St Amphibalus, they had deployed the barrow to validate the church. The later medieval interactions would have naturally been less about the Christianisation of the landscape and

<sup>563</sup> Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric*, p. 114.

<sup>564</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 114-5.

<sup>565</sup> Semple, p. 123.

<sup>566</sup> *Ibid.* p. 119.

more about tying churches into the past landscape in a way which either ignored that these barrows were not Christian monuments, or in the case of St Albans Abbey and Ludlow imagined them to have always been Christian monuments. Doing this encompassed any importance the barrows may previously held within the local imagination whilst also making them sites important to English Christian identity, rather than delineating them as pagan and therefore places to be avoided. By imagining these elements of the landscape as always being Christian meant the Church could connect to the past through these landscape features. This allowed them to be used to legitimise the place of the Church in the landscape and to provide an extended history of the abbey's daughter church. This in turn connected to the English Church's desire to prove its long history and the different abbeys' connections to various illustrious saints after the Norman Conquest. We can view this as an exertion of control over the landscape, made easier by incorporating it into their belief system; Amy Remensyder describes medieval monastic foundation legends as 'symbolic remakings, imaginative recreations of the world as it should be'. This is exactly what the abbey was doing through the active Christianisation of the landscape, it was creating a landscape of England as it should have been, as they imagined it always was.

Semple suggests that the post-Conquest examples of churches built on barrows, such as Wervin, may point to Anglo-Norman or later medieval practices, which would be carried out for different purposes, or with different ideas behind them than conversion-period practices.<sup>567</sup> One such reason for this later practice may be the idea that the barrows were the graves of saintly founders, such as Amphibalus.<sup>568</sup> This makes sense, although it is of course possible that this was born out of stories of early medieval saints who inhabited and were subsequently buried in barrows; most prominently St Guthlac. The monks of St Albans Abbey may have

<sup>567</sup> Semple, p.119.

<sup>568</sup> *Ibid.* p.127.



been Christianising the pagan barrow by having a saint buried in it, but equally they seem to have been connecting their history to local communal memories of ‘Hill of the Banners’ as an early Christian site. As Remensnyder notes, monastic legends often connected to the local landscape more generally, in a way which allowed a communal connection to the past which incorporated lay people as well as the monastic community.<sup>569</sup> We can see this in the use of the idea of processions around and from the barrows, as described in the *Flores Historiarum*. When Thomas Wright wrote about the discovery of St Amphibalus in the mid-nineteenth century, he suggested that the name of the barrows as the ‘Hill of the Banners’ and the description of the ‘assemblies of the faithful people... who yearly made a solemn procession to the church of St Albans’ referred to an Anglo-Saxon custom.<sup>570</sup> Processions were a common and important custom in the early medieval English church, and in the later Anglo-Saxon period they were not just confined to the clergy, but also involved lay participation.<sup>571</sup> As described in the *Flores Historiarum*, these could often be open-air processions, however the evidence suggest they usually went from one church to another, rather than from a lay meeting point.<sup>572</sup> Roger of Wendover may have been referring to Rogationtide or Beating the Bounds, a procession taking place shortly before the feast of the Ascension, which continued as a tradition throughout the medieval period, from its introduction in the seventh century and often involved walking around the parish or other boundaries in the countryside.<sup>573</sup> The Hills of the Banners may well have marked out a boundary of some kind involving the abbey’s landholdings. The use of barrows as meeting places, especially during the Anglo-Saxon period,

<sup>569</sup> Remensnyder, p. 6 .

<sup>570</sup> Thomas Wright, *Essays on Archaeological Subjects, Vol. 1* (London: John Russell Smith, 1861), p. 286.

<sup>571</sup> Helen Gittos, *Liturgy, Architecture, and Sacred Places in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.105.

<sup>572</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>573</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 134-5.

but continuing into the later medieval period, is a theme which has already been identified in this thesis as being very relevant to the appearance of barrows in later medieval texts. In this context the meetings are connected to the sanctity of the site, because the aim is to present the barrow almost as a Christian monument.

Equally, the description of the procession as an ‘ancient custom’ could suggest that it was an idealised pre-Saxon Christian ritual around the barrows, constructed by Roger of Wendover to demonstrate the long history of the Christian church at St Albans. The use of the past to justify a long standing connection between an area and the church was common in monastic foundation legends, the past (both real and imagined) lending authority to the church’s claims of land ownership and local identity.<sup>574</sup> Equally, Roger may have thought it related to the church or shrine which was described by both Bede and Gildas as being present at St Albans in the 400s, and which Matthew Paris said was destroyed in 586. Similarly, he may have been suggesting that the faithful could somehow sense the saint’s presence at the site, even if they were not consciously aware of it; or that it was a site previously associated with Amphibalus, which had been forgotten and had to be revealed again by St Alban.

### **What Happened to the Barrow?**

As the building of the priory of St Amphibalus was not recorded in the *Flores Historiarum* or *Gesta Abbatum* until a number of years later, it is not clear exactly how much of the barrows remained, or whether in fact the barrows were completely destroyed after the bones had been removed, to make way for the building of the church. Semple concluded that for most churches which were thought to have been built over barrows, there was little factual evidence.<sup>575</sup> That said, there were a number of churches which were constructed atop a low

<sup>574</sup> Remensnyder, p .6

<sup>575</sup> Semple, p.118.

mound, which at the time may have been thought to be a barrow, even if it was in fact a different type of earthwork or indeed a natural feature.<sup>576</sup> In the case of St Amphibalus, it may be that the barrow was indeed levelled, and was no longer visible in the landscape, as later accounts do not refer to it. Although the barrows might not have been visible in the landscape anymore, they were written about, for example by Matthew Paris, so they still retained an importance. The construction of the church over the barrow may have led to the saint no longer being associated specifically with burial mounds, but the association remained such that it gave the abbey a strong claim to Redbourn Heath when they needed it two hundred years later.

### **Proving Ownership of the Land**

There is one further record of the priory of St Amphibalus which is of particular interest: the *Gesta Abbatum* contains a copy of an indenture made between the Earl of Warwick and the abbot of St Albans Abbey in 1383, in which it is confirmed that the Earl of Warwick renounced his claim to Redbourn Heath. Thomas de Beauchamp, the twelfth Earl of Warwick was the lord of Flamstead Manor, which bordered Redbourn Manor, and according to the *Gesta Abbatum* the dispute between the earl and the abbey, as to who had the right of common on Redbourn Heath, had begun with his father some years previously.<sup>577</sup> The situation ended after the Earl of Warwick's men refused to let carts carrying food from St Alban's pass through to the priory of St Amphibalus, forcing the Prior of Redbourn to purchase a road across Redbourn Heath from the commoners, before they sued the Earl for their historic right to the land.<sup>578</sup> The main proof offered by the abbey of St Albans, as to their right of common

<sup>576</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>577</sup> Walsingham, *Gesta Abbatum*, iii, p. 257.

<sup>578</sup> *Ibid.* p. 258.

on the heath, was that it was the place St Amphibalus' remains had been discovered and the priory of St Amphibalus had been built on that very spot.

*Considerato insuper, quod Sanctus Amphibalus, Martyr, inventus fuit in dicta  
bruera. Post eius Translationem tunc Abbas Monasterii... prædictum in  
honorem Martyris prædicti quandam Cellam, quæ usque nunc 'Prioratus de  
Redburne' nuncupatur, fieri et construi ordinavit. (Gesta Abbat. 3.260)<sup>579</sup>*

Thus, two hundred years after the monks had dug into the barrows at Redbourn, the idea of the remains found in the barrows was used to legitimise the abbey's claims to the land. It follows that had the barrows not been there, the monks of St Albans Abbey may not have been successful in their claim to Redbourn Heath, even though they owned the manor of Redbourn itself.

### **Ludlow, 1192**

Another discovery of saints' bones occurred at Ludlow in Shropshire, where a barrow was disturbed in 1192 by townspeople who were clearing the tumulus in order to extend the church. It does not appear that the local people expected to find anything concealed in the barrow, and perhaps they simply thought it was a natural hillock. This account comes from a document discovered by the sixteenth-century antiquarian John Leland in the early 1530s, at the nearby abbey of Clebury Mortimer. This record is extant only in Leland's *Collectanea* (vol. 3, p. 407). Leland states that it was copied out for him at the abbey; indeed, he probably came across it during the several years he spent travelling around religious houses, making notes of books

<sup>579</sup> 'Moreover, if we consider that St Amphibalus, Martyr, was found in that place. After his translation to the Abbey of St Albans... there was a cell built and ordained in that place, in honour of the Martyr, which is now called "The Priory of Redbourn"', Walsingham, *Gesta Abbatum*, iii, p. 260.

in their libraries, shortly before the dissolution of the monasteries. The church at Ludlow may well have been purposely built close to the barrow; the 'low' element in the name 'Ludlow' may well have referred to this barrow, or others prominent in the local area.

According to Leland's account, inside the barrow were found *tria mausoles lapides* ('three stone coffins') each containing human remains, most likely Bronze Age cists. He also noted that alongside the bones was a scroll preserved in lead and wax; upon which was written that the remains were those of the mother, father and uncle of St Brendan of Ireland, themselves saints, being named St Fercher, St Corona and St Cochel. St Brendan was an early medieval saint, one of the 'twelve apostles of Ireland'. What the family of such an important Irish saint were thought to be doing buried in a barrow in a Shropshire town is not explained explicitly in the [monastic] account, although according to the scroll, the saints had lived on the site of the barrow for fifteen years. There is a link to Ireland through the de Lacy family who owned the land around Ludlow. Hugh de Lacy was made lord of Meath in 1172 and spent a great deal of time in Ireland, as did his son Walter de Lacy. Robert William Eyton, a nineteenth-century antiquarian who wrote at length about this discovery in volume 5 of his *Antiquities of Shropshire* suggested the scroll was a forgery planted there a few days before, and that the discovery was engineered in order to bring in wealth to the church through pilgrimage.<sup>580</sup> At that time, Eyton suggested, Ludlow was a small church within a small parish, the clergy were not able to raise much money in tithes, and they had no relics of their founding saint.<sup>581</sup> Irish saints were chosen for what Eyton clearly saw as an intricately planned ruse, so as not to interfere with English tradition and bring attention or controversy to themselves. Here we see the bias of Eyton and by extension many English antiquarians of this period, many of whom were members of the Anglican clergy, who dismissed 'relics as an embarrassing manifestation

<sup>580</sup> Robert Eyton, *Antiquities of Shropshire vol 5*, (London: J.R. Smith, 1856), v, p. 293.

<sup>581</sup> *Ibid.*

of irrationality and superstition’, something which appealed to the ‘illiterate masses’ but was not really believed in by the intelligent clergymen.<sup>582</sup> This bias causes Eyton not to acknowledge something important; that bones were discovered during an extension of the church. This would suggest that there was sufficient need for a larger church, perhaps with a growing congregation, and that the church could afford the extension. It seems most likely that the conversion of the bones to Christian saints was opportunistic rather than planned. Whilst there may have been some exaggeration or forgery involved with the scroll found; it was not at all unusual for relic authenticity tags to be forged during this period, but this in no way precludes members of the medieval English clergy believing they had found the remains of saints.<sup>583</sup> Unlike the account of the discovery of St Amphibalus, where the saint’s discovery was immediately verified by a number of miracles, no miracles were performed by the Ludlow saints. Instead, the account says that the remains were buried inside the church *quoad Dominus aliquas virtutes eorum moritis et intercessionibus patrare digentur* (‘till such a time as God should be pleased to perform certain virtues by the merits and intercessions’).<sup>584</sup> Translation itself was never actually considered enough evidence to prove a saint and miracles were needed. In this case, however the tags found with the relics proclaiming the identity of the bones would have shown that they were already saints, and therefore no immediate miracles were needed as proof.<sup>585</sup>

Eugene Thacker suggests that ‘when the non-human world manifests itself to us in ambivalent ways, more often than not our response to it is to recuperate that non-human world

<sup>582</sup> Alexandra Walsham, “Relics and Remains”, *Past and Present Supplement 5*, ed. by Alexandra Walsham, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 9-36, (p. 15).

<sup>583</sup> Paul Brazinski and Allegra Fryxell, “The Smell of Relics: Authenticating Sainly Bones and the Role of Scent in the Sensory Experience of Medieval Christian Veneration”, *Papers from the Institute of Archaeology*, 23 (2013), 1-15, (p. 6).

<sup>584</sup> Trans. in Eyton, p. 292.

<sup>585</sup> Patrick Geary, *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Middle Ages*, 2nd edn, (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 6.

into whatever the dominant human-centric world view is at that time.<sup>586</sup> Equally, when pieces of an unknown past were revealed to the clergy at Ludlow, they attempted to make sense of them by incorporating them into the dominant ‘world-view’ for their area and time. That is, they automatically assumed the bones to belong to the founding saints of the church, which God in his glory had revealed to them.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, it seems that the barrow’s place in these discoveries, as has been the case for many of the other examples discussed in this thesis, as a place through which the past can be accessed and brought into the present. The explanations of the bones as the relics of saints made the barrows significant in the present in a way which they previously were not and allowed them to be incorporated into the mythical Christian past. However, both barrows were destroyed, and churches were built over them, suggesting that the Christianisation of the sites may well have relied on the concealment of the obviously pagan aspect of the monuments. It is also interesting that whilst St Amphibalus’ barrow appears in texts in which the writing of history is meant to act as a moral guide, the description of the barrow itself does not contain any moral lessons, but focuses on the connecting the past to the landscape in order to prove the long standing connection between St Albans Abbey and the land they owned. It is also important to note that whilst an intrinsic part of the barrows significance in the texts discussed in Chapters 1 to 4 was their role in the transmission of moral lessons from the past, and St Albans Abbey was involved in the writing of texts which used history as a moral guide, this was not the case with the discovery of St Amphibalus. Here the barrow was significant for two main reasons; firstly, it could connect the past to the landscape and thus prove a long-standing relationship between St Albans Abbey and the land they owned, but also it could create *meaning*. The

<sup>586</sup> Eugene Thacker, *In the Dust of This Planet: Horror of Philosophy* (London: Zero Books, 2011), p. 4.

barrow allowed for a deeper connection to the past through the landscape, which was beneficial for local people and visitors, as well as for the abbey.

Johannes Dillinger wrote in his 2011 book on magical treasure hunting that if the whereabouts of a saint's body was unknown then the discovery of the relics would be equal to that of treasure.<sup>587</sup> Certainly, the monks of St Albans were well rewarded for their barrow digging, when they unearthed the remains of St Amphibalus, and they were not the only people who dug into barrows in search of treasure in later medieval England. The next and final chapter of this thesis discusses a number of cases of barrows being searched for hoards of treasure hidden there in the distant past.

## **Chapter 7: Hidden Treasure**

### **Introduction**

Whilst the previous chapter contained evidence of ordinary people interacting with a barrow through the form of Christian pilgrimage, and Chapter 4 explored some evidence for their

<sup>587</sup> Dillinger, pp. 45-6.



interpretations of barrows in the form of minor place-names, especially those relating to the supernatural, the aim of the final chapter of this thesis is to examine a theme which highlights an intersection between the interpretations of ordinary people and the upper classes. Does the idea of treasure hidden in barrows in fact represent an upward movement of ideas through society, from ordinary people to the king and court? An interdisciplinary methodology is key to this chapter, which analyses the primary sources, comparing them with archaeological evidence.

### **Isle of Wight & Cornwall, 1237**

On the 22 April 1237 King Henry III ordered his brother Richard, Earl of Cornwall, to investigate rumours that treasure had been found in barrows in Cornwall and the Isle of Wight. Richard was to seize the diggers, and bring them before the king, but also to dig any remaining barrows to see if they contained any treasure. No further record of this investigation survives, but the letters from Henry III to his brother, recorded in the Close Rolls, represent the earliest surviving documentary examples of barrow digging in England during the later medieval period.<sup>588</sup>

It is given to us to understand that certain persons on the Isle of Wight have dug certain *hogas*, seeking treasure therein, we earnestly request you to make as much haste as you can to go to those parts and enquire diligently about the aforesaid

<sup>588</sup> The phrase “barrow digging” usually refers to the destructive actions of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century antiquarians, such as Thomas Bateman, Richard Colt-Hoare and William Greenwell, who “thought nothing of digging half a dozen burial mounds before breakfast” (P.G. Bahn, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Archaeology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 56) but who were generally digging into barrows to explore their origins as well as their contents. In this chapter it is applied to a later medieval context, as a shorthand for the opening of barrows in search of treasure.

diggers, who they were, and if they found anything in those *hogas*, and cause them to be seized to answer before us for their deed when we shall command. Those *hogas* also which are not yet dug there, you shall cause to be dug to see if there is any treasure hidden in them.

*(Close Rolls of Henry III, 22 April 1237, no 433)*

The King commands the Earl of Cornwall and Poitou to cause barrows in the county of Cornwall to be dug in search of treasure, as he commanded to be done to the barrows in the Isle of Wight.

*(Close Rolls of Henry III, 22 April 1237, no. 434)*<sup>589</sup>

These two letters originate in the Close Rolls of Henry the III. Close Rolls are copies of executive letters and writs containing private orders and instructions. These writs concerned matters ranging vastly in importance, from major constitutional decisions to the daily economy of the royal household. Although a number of the texts discussed in this chapter may appear to give insight into interactions between ordinary people and barrows during the later medieval period, it is important to note three things: firstly that these documents are produced by the clerks, the royal court and others employed by the king, and therefore it is their interests and views which are represented in them. Secondly, there are so few cases and they are spread across a relatively long time period, therefore it is difficult to draw concrete conclusions from any comparison of the events described. Lastly, a number of the examples come from

<sup>589</sup> *Close Rolls of Henry III, 1234-7, 433-434*, trans.in Leslie Grinsell and G.A. Sherwin, "Isle of Wight Barrows", *Proceedings of the Isle of Wight Natural History and Archaeology Society*, 3 (1940), 179-222.

documents directly relating to the royal court, such as the Close Rolls and the Fine Rolls; these have generally been published in calendar form and translated into English (although the first two letters discussed nos. 433 and 434 were published in full in Latin). This could mean that there are other examples contained in the original documents which have not been identified because the editor of the calendar did not include the complete Latin text. It would be a lengthy endeavour to scour all of the rolls for reference to barrows, therefore this chapter will discuss those which have already been identified by previous scholars.<sup>590</sup>

The two letters from the Close Rolls of Henry III (1237, nos. 433 and 434), often described as the first evidence of people being permitted to dig barrows, were first brought to the attention of scholars in the mid-1930s by George Hill, the then director and chief librarian for the British Museum (1931-36). Hill collated and published a translation of these documents, along with others related to treasure trove more generally, in his 1936 book *Treasure Trove in Law and Practice, from the Earliest Time to the Present Day*.<sup>591</sup> Hill focused his discussion on treasure trove in law, rather than analysing the individual cases. Lesley Grinsell described the letter as a 'general authorisation' in his 1967 article 'Barrow Treasure, in Fact, Tradition, and Legislation', which has led to the description of Richard being 'authorised' to dig barrows, in books such as Barry Marsden's *The Early Barrow Diggers*. Nevertheless, when the full texts are consulted, it is clear that this was less of a case of the Earl of Cornwall being permitted to dig the barrows, than being *ordered* to explore the truth of rumours that people had been digging up treasure *absconditus* (hidden) in barrows. Whilst it may technically be a general authorisation from the king (allowing Richard to act on his behalf in carrying out his orders),

<sup>590</sup> In 1933 George Hill, then the director of the British Museum, identified several other sites which could be instances of barrows being dug for treasure, all of which came from counties that have a large number of barrows, such as Kent - as both Hill and Grinsell have discussed these cases at length, the focus of this chapter will be solely on cases where the site of the concealed treasure is definitely a barrow.

<sup>591</sup> George Hill, *Treasure Trove in Law and Practice, from the Earliest Time to the Present Day* (Oxford: the Clarendon Press, 1936)

this wording can seem ambiguous, but it is important that the legal terms differentiate being permitted, which indicates a prior interest, and being ordered.

The identity of the person who brought this barrow digging to the king's attention is unknown. The king was at Kempton Palace on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April meeting with the barons of the Cinque Ports, this suggests that he most probably received the information from the Sheriff of Southampton, Gerard de Lisle (1236-8), rather than from a visitor to court. The Sheriff of Southampton's remit also covered the Isle of Wight; it was part of the role of the sheriff to uphold the law and pass on such information to the king.<sup>592</sup> It would be interesting to discover whether these orders were ever carried out. Fieldwork undertaken on the Isle of Wight in the 1960s, discovered a thirteenth-century jug in a 'robber's trench' made into a round barrow on Arreton Down.<sup>593</sup> There are other instances of later pits being dug into barrows on the Isle of Wight which have contained medieval pot sherds, however there is nothing to suggest that these were made by Richard's men, especially as we know from the Close Rolls that people were already digging into the barrows in search of treasure for an undetermined period before the king was informed. Grinsell also claimed to have identified a number of barrows as those mentioned in the Close Rolls passage. This may well have been the case, although there are still a large number of barrows in the two counties, for example on the Isle of Wight currently there are two Neolithic long barrows and 324 Bronze Age Barrows still evident (although 85 of these only exist as ring ditches). Realistically, there are far too many locations and little physical evidence which could conclusively prove that any were the site of Richard's excavations. There is also no mention of this barrow treasure being received by Henry in the Fine Rolls for 1237 or 1238. Equally, Richard rebelled against his brother in the late January

<sup>592</sup> Louise Wilkinson, pers. comm., 16 January 2019.

<sup>593</sup> J.P.C. Alexander and A. Ozanne, "Report on the Investigation of a Round Barrow on Arreton Down, Isle of Wight", *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* 26 (1960), 263-302 (p. 273).

or early February of 1238, certainly before February 3rd when the king wrote a letter to the barons of the Cinque Ports warning them of Richard's treachery. This may suggest that Richard never carried out his brother's orders before this and after it may well have been forgotten. Indeed, Johannes Dillinger has suggested that the order to dig the barrows for treasure and then to hand all that wealth over to the crown may well have been a convenient excuse, if not another reason, for Richard to rebel against his brother.<sup>594</sup>

The word *hoga* seems to have been used in this context to refer to a specific landscape feature (presumably small hillocks, mounds and barrows). It also seems that the meaning of the word was understood by the Earl of Cornwall as there is no clarifying description of the *hogas*. *Hoga* would appear to originate from the Old Norse *haugr*, and appears in Old French as *hoge*, and was also used in Medieval Latin, meaning a mound or a hill. How specific the meaning of the word was; whether it could mean any hill shaped like a barrow regardless of size, or if it recalled a very specific type of barrow is unknown. Also, *hoga* could be used specifically in the context of a salt-mound. The word *hoga* also appears in medieval literature, albeit French rather than English. As mentioned in the previous chapter, in Marie de France's twelfth-century *Lai Yonëc* (lines 345-355) a lady follows the trail of her love's blood into a *hoga* which, although pitch black inside, has a path running all the way through it. Marie de France is thought to have been writing for an Anglo-Norman audience, her *Lais* were possibly dedicated to Henry II.<sup>595</sup> This could add another layer of meaning to the word *hoga* in medieval English documents, connecting it both to the shape of round barrows and the chambered passage inside some long barrows.

<sup>594</sup> Dillinger, *Magical Treasure Hunting*, p. 117.

<sup>595</sup> G.S. Burgess, *The Lais of Marie de France: Text and Context* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), p. 34.

The information provided to the king may have been rather vague, and discovery of the identities of people who had dug the barrows and found treasure in them may have been made more difficult by rumour. The order for Richard to then dig all other *hogas* in the Isle of Wight and the whole of Cornwall, only to hand any treasure over to his brother, would have been an unenviable task. Richard was also ordered to have the alleged barrow diggers seized and brought before the king. Although the punishment which might have awaited them is not specified in the letters, this is evidence of the treasure trove laws in action. The letters also make it clear that the king was not interested in understanding anything about the history or biography of the barrows, beyond confirming the rumours that there was treasure concealed in them, which in accordance with the law would automatically have belonged to him. Had any treasure been discovered, it would have been a boost to Henry's finances; Stephen Church's 2010 review of Henry III's fine rolls revealed his annual income was less than half of the annual income of his father King John.<sup>596</sup> Consequently, had it been an effective method of acquiring bullion, then we would probably expect to see more examples of Henry ordering barrows dug from the court rolls. That said, there is a scale to the barrow digging that should be noted – Cornwall alone has well over a hundred barrows and barrow cemeteries. The order from the king to 'cause [any barrows not yet dug] to be dug to see if there is any treasure hidden in them' shows the scale at which he must have expected his brother to have the barrows excavated, although of course there is no way of knowing whether Henry was at all aware of the number of barrows there would be to dig. As will be seen later in the chapter, this was not the only occasion in which treasure was found in a barrow during the reign of Henry III, although the

<sup>596</sup> Stephen Church, "Review of Calendar of the Fine Rolls of the Reign of Henry III Preserved in The National Archives, Vol. II: 1224–1254", *English Historical Review*, 125 (517), (2010), 1498–1499

other treasure was not reported until almost twenty years later and its discovery was not 'authorised' by the king.

### **Treasure Hunting and Treasure Trove Law in Later Medieval England**

The idea of treasure lying hidden in barrows was present before the thirteenth century. Barrows were associated with buried treasure troves in a number of early medieval texts. One of the most well-known examples of this is in *Beowulf*, where the treasure of an ancient peoples was guarded by a dragon. It also appears in the eighth-century Latin hagiographical text, *Vita sancti Guthlaci*, where Guthlac's barrow had already been dug into by treasure hunters by the time he arrived there. To what extent the case studies discussed in this chapter represent a direct continuation from this Anglo-Saxon tradition of barrow treasure is debatable though. The only surviving copy of *Beowulf* dates to the late tenth or early eleventh century. From the documentary sources available it would appear that the elite members of society who may have been aware of such texts did not instigate the barrow digging until over two centuries later. That said, the association between barrows and treasure may well have endured in everyday society, simply because it was an association that proved to be true. Certainly, there was 'treasure' to be found in barrows, although in reality this was prehistoric and Anglo-Saxon grave goods, as will be discussed later in this chapter. This thesis suggests that not only did the belief that barrows were places where treasure could be found permeate throughout the later medieval period, but that discoveries made early in the thirteenth century, and the interest taken in finding treasure, by all levels of society, irrevocably shaped the way in which many people interacted with barrows throughout the medieval and early modern period.

It is not clear whether barrows were dug for treasure consistently between the early and later medieval periods. Martin Carver has suggested that 'the main inhibition to robbing burials was superstition and people were released from it when there was a change in the relationship

between god and man', that is, after the English Reformation.<sup>597</sup> This is an interesting theory; however, superstition does not appear to have been of concern to the medieval barrow diggers discussed here. Indeed, superstition, or a fear of God, did not even prevent churches, such as St Martins in the Fields, from being searched for *thesauro abscondito* ('hidden treasure') in the early fourteenth century.<sup>598</sup> Equally, these letters from the Close Rolls of Henry III demonstrate that some people were digging barrows at that time. In the early modern period barrow digging would become a hobby of the clergy and upper echelons of society, but in the later medieval period the evidence we have suggests that people were searching for treasure rather than digging barrows out of curiosity (although that is not precluded). It may be the case that people were interested in what was inside the barrows before they began searching them specifically for treasure, but certainly we have no record of that. Regardless, it was the suggestion of treasure hoards inside the barrows that attracted the king's attention. These orders and later permits were issued for the recovery of treasure trove, not specifically related to barrow digging. The interest in searching barrows for treasure may well have come from members of the peasantry who through such activities as ploughing would have come into contact with the contents of barrows more frequently than the nobility. Yet, equally, treasure hidden in barrows featured strongly in Norse culture during the same period. The runes carved inside the chambered burial mound of Maeshowe in Orkney in the mid-twelfth century boast about the discovery of treasure inside, and it is a feature of a number of Icelandic Sagas.

Jeremy Harte attests that barrows were considered a type of hill during the later medieval period, until the advent of 'barrow digging'.<sup>599</sup> Although there are of course a number of examples of barrow digging from the later medieval period presented here, it must be noted

<sup>597</sup> Carver, *Sutton Hoo*, p. 174.

<sup>598</sup> Hill, p. 251.

<sup>599</sup> Harte, "Hollow Hills", pp. 22-29



that Harte is referring specifically to the phenomenon of barrow-digging in the late seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which objectively had the aim of trying to understand the barrows as monuments by excavating them, rather than just looking for treasure. Harte's reasoning for his argument that barrows were considered hills in medieval England supposes that there was a long period in which it was completely forgotten that barrows were indeed burial mounds.<sup>600</sup> As has already been demonstrated in this thesis, however, barrows were recognised both as distinct features in the landscape, and specifically as burial monuments, such as Hengist's mound in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*. Large barrows were also easily recognisable fixed points in the landscape, hence the use of them in boundary charters.

If there was a break in barrow digging between the Anglo-Saxon period and the thirteenth century, it would be interesting to discover what inspired people to start digging for treasure in barrows again. It may have been because agriculture caused barrows to be ploughed out and some treasure was found. After all, barrows were ploughed out during the later medieval period in England, perhaps as many or more than after the introduction of industrial agriculture. Equally folklore and stories like the fairies in Willey-Hou may have inspired people to search for similar treasures in other barrows, although William of Newburgh was writing in the twelfth century and it is not until the mid-fifteenth century that there is evidence for magic and the supernatural being associated with the recovery of treasure from barrows.

Whether treasure was actually unearthed from the barrows in some of the cases discussed here is not always clear, as mentioned above. Nevertheless, in cases where the attention of the king himself was caught by these rumours, there is a chance that something was found. Certainly, there was treasure to be found in burial mounds. Usually this would be

<sup>600</sup> Harte, p. 23.

Anglo-Saxon in nature; yet the discovery of the gold, Bronze Age cup in the Ringlemere barrow near Sandwich, Kent, shows that there was much older treasure waiting to be discovered. In addition, as shall be discussed, it is clear that there were plenty of other instances of treasure being discovered or sought for in barrows all around the country, for which documentary evidence no longer exists, but which can be seen in the archaeological record. It is also not entirely clear from any of the texts who people in later medieval England believed had concealed the treasure in the barrows. There is a mention of treasure being concealed in an *eorð-hus* (earth house) in Lazamon's Brut. The British King Loctrinus sends his mistress to live in a secret *eorð-hus* which he has filled with treasure. The description of the *eorð-hus* with its 'walles of stone' (line 2360) certainly sounds barrow-like. In other versions of the story, such as Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*, Loctrinus is described as digging a cave for his mistress under the city of London. This might remind the modern reader more of discoveries such as the temple of Mithras in Walbrook, London, where numerous Roman 'treasures' were discovered. Equally, the fairy inhabitants of the barrow described by William of Newburgh, from whom a man steals a cup which eventually ends up in the hands of the king, as discussed in chapter four, could also be a reference to treasure to be found in barrows.

The earliest English treasure trove laws, which date to 1114-18 (the laws of Henry I), state that all treasure from the earth belongs to the king.<sup>601</sup> The laws of Edward the Confessor (argued to date either from 1130-35 or 1140-59) state that treasure in the earth belongs to the king, unless it is found in a church or a cemetery, in which case half of any silver found would go to the church. The passage ends 'where it should be found, whoever he be, rich or poor'. It has been suggested that this awkward ending points to a translation from an earlier Anglo-Saxon law.<sup>602</sup> Equally, some early commentaries on the English law, such as Bracton's mid thirteenth-century

<sup>601</sup> Dillinger, p. 12.

<sup>602</sup> Felix Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen, Vol. 1* (Halle: S.M. Niemeyer, 1903), p. 556.

treatise *De Legibus et Consuetudinibus Angliae* make it clear that concealment of any treasure unearthed was considered theft from the crown and punishable in the same manner as very serious crimes. Edward Coke's early seventeenth-century *Institutes of the Laws of England*, suggests that up to the thirteenth century it was punishable by death or at the least dismemberment.<sup>603</sup> Indeed, as Bracton interpreted the law, it was not legal to hunt for treasure, instead treasure was 'believed to be the gift of fortune', and, he continued, 'no-one ought to seek for treasure with the help of serfs or dig the earth for treasure.'<sup>604</sup> This provides an interesting parallel with what was actually taking place, according to the sources examined below. At least in these sources, the treasure is being actively sought.

Although slightly later than the period covered in this thesis, Edward Coke's early seventeenth-century *Institutes of the Laws of England* states that treasure trove consisted of gold or silver, in either coin, plate or bullion, which had been hidden in ancient times. Coke continues that the treasure trove, unless someone could prove ownership, belonged to the king in the first instance and to other people by the king's grant. Coke used details from two medieval law treatises; Ranulf de Glanville's *Tractatus de legibus et consuetudinibus regni Anglie* (Treatise on the Laws and Customs of the Kingdom of England, c. 1187-89) and Henry Bracton's *De legibus et consuetudinibus Angliae* (On the Laws and Customs of England, c.1210-1268) to conclude the concealing of treasure trove carried a death sentence during the medieval period.<sup>605</sup> By the time Coke was writing in the early modern period it appears it was on the whole punishable by a fine and imprisonment.<sup>606</sup> As will be seen below, there was at least one example of it being punished with just a fine in the later medieval period as well.

<sup>603</sup> Edward Coke, *Institutes of the Lawes of England* (London: Miles Flesher, 1644), p. 133.

<sup>604</sup> H. Bracton (attrib.), *Bracton on the Laws and Customs of England*, trans. in Hill,, pp. 192-3.

<sup>605</sup> Coke, p. 133.

<sup>606</sup> *Ibid.*

### **Golden Lowe, Dunstable 1290**

The Seneschal of the Lord King and the Marshall came into the liberty of Dunstable to make inquisition of a certain treasure found at Golden Lowe in the time of King Henry (III). And twelve sworn Burgesses said, that Matthew Tyler of Dunstable found Treasure there... therefore he and his chattels are at the will of the Lord King...

*(Chronici sive Annalium Prioratus de Dunstaplia, 1290)*<sup>607</sup>

Pardon to Adam le Rus of Dunstable and Emma his wife, for a fine of 10*l*. Paid by them in the wardrobe to the king's clerk, Walter de Langeton, keeper of the wardrobe, for the trespass of Matthew le Tyllere of Dunstable, deceased and the said Emma late his wife, in concealing treasure found by them in a place called 'Gyldenlowe' by the said town, whereof they were indicted before Walter de Bello Campo, steward of the king's household.

*(Calendar of Fine Rolls, Edward I, 20 January 1292)*<sup>608</sup>

<sup>607</sup> *Chronici sive Annalium Prioratus de Dunstable*, trans. in Leslie Grinsell, "Barrow Treasure, in Fact, Tradition, and Legislation." *Folklore*, Vol. 78, (1967), p. 36.

<sup>608</sup> *Calendar of Fine Rolls, Edward I*, ed. by Henry R. Luard (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1911), p. 302.

This case, relating to the trial of a widow whose former husband found treasure in a barrow during the reign of Henry III appears in two separate sources; the Fine Rolls of Edward I and the Chronicle of the Priory of Dunstable. The Fine Rolls were records of the crown's finances and money paid to the king, recorded annually. They included payments for rents, taxes, debts, and in the case of Gyldenlowe, fines. The Dunstable Priory chronicle recorded events which took place in the monastery and the local area, including many disputes over landownership, but also discuss matters of national and international importance.<sup>609</sup> They were partially compiled by Richard de Morins, prior of the monastery, from 1210 until his death in 1242, however before this and indeed after, the authorship is unknown.<sup>610</sup> It has not been possible to find a record of the trial itself, nor any of the depositions given.

On the same page of the chronicle as the description of the trial, it is stated that the king (Edward I) spent Christmas at Ashridge, a monastery founded by his cousin, Edmund of Cornwall, in 1283.<sup>611</sup> The king and his court spent five weeks at Ashridge, and according to the *Chronici sive Annalium Prioratus de Dunstaplia*, the king made many visits to Dunstable. It may well have been on one such visit that the king heard about the treasure which had been found at Goldenlowe, almost twenty years earlier. It is interesting that there is such a lengthy gap between the treasure being discovered and the trial taking place. It may be that after the death of Matthew Tyler, other locals were jealous of his widow and her new husband who inherited his wealth, and this is when the rumours came to light. The evidence for this comes from the chronicle, which states that that Adam le Rus and his wife had two trials. At the end of the first trial they were fined £30, however the king then granted them a second trial, or retrial, *eo quod prima inquisitio facta fuerat per atyam* ('as the first trial was made out of

<sup>609</sup> Henry R. Luard, *Annales monastici Vol. 3*, (London: Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1866), p. xv.

<sup>610</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xi.

<sup>611</sup> "House of Bonhommes: The college of Ashridge", in *A History of the County of Buckingham*, ed. by William Page (London: Victoria County History, 1905), I, pp. 386-390.

spite'). After the second trial the fine was reduced to the still considerable sum of £10. From the Fine Rolls for 1292 we can see that this fine was paid, and the pair were pardoned by the king. The fact that they had the £10 to pay this fine could perhaps suggest that they had benefited from the discovery of treasure. It is interesting this was punished with a fine, rather than the much more severe punishments alluded to in Edward Coke's interpretation of the law codes.<sup>612</sup> Perhaps because the offender had already died, the punishment levelled against his widow and her new husband were not as severe.

The name of the barrow as Gylden or Golden lowe (lit. golden barrow, *lowe* coming from the Old English word *hlaew*, meaning hill or barrow) suggests that there may have been a local legend that gold was hidden in the barrow even before Matthew Tyler uncovered treasure there. That said, according to the text the treasure was found in the barrow during the reign of Henry III, who died some eighteen years previously, therefore it is equally possible that the name was given to the barrow after the treasure was found. Neither source relates to the original discovery of the treasure, which means it is not possible either to locate the barrow, or to find anything further out about the treasure. Equally, the first extant source for the name appears to be the Fine Roll for 1292. In the 1950s the archaeologist James Dyer believed he had identified the barrow as an Anglo-Saxon burial mound at Golden Parsonage, Great Gaddeston.<sup>613</sup> When the mound was excavated in 1982, however, it was found to have the remains of a number of clay pipes underneath it and construction was dated to the nineteenth century; it was probably an ornamental mound, or belvedere.<sup>614</sup>

<sup>612</sup> Coke, p. 133.

<sup>613</sup> James Dyer, "Barrows of the Chilterns", *The Archaeological Journal*, 116 (1959), 1-24, (p. 19).

<sup>614</sup> Nicholas Doggett and Jonathan Hunn, "Excavations at Golden Parsonage 'Tumulus', Gaddesden Row", *Hertfordshire's Past*, 13 (1982), 30-31.

### **What “Treasure” might be found in barrows?**

Digging for gold, silver and other precious items discarded, hoarded or ritually disposed of by past societies can be a fruitful hobby in England even in the present day. It is entirely possible that some medieval barrow diggers made some spectacular finds, or certainly enough to encourage others to try their hand searching for treasure. The Portable Antiquities Scheme database, which records finds post-1996, contains eighty-three gold finds which date from the late Neolithic to late Bronze Age, not including gold foil objects. The scheme also records over 3500 Iron Age coins, over 140,000 Roman coins and over 2000 early medieval coins.<sup>615</sup> Not all these items were discovered in barrows, but significant finds from barrows such as the Ringlemere Cup, as well as extravagant grave goods such as those discovered in Mound 1 at Sutton Hoo, give an indication of the types of treasure which people in later medieval England might have found in barrows. Anglo-Saxon grave goods often comprised objects which, if made out of gold and silver may well have been considered treasure trove, such as brooches, ring, pendants, buckles and even decorated sword hilts. The Sutton Hoo boat burial (Mound One), for example, contained amongst other objects; thirty-seven gold coins, gold belts, a silver bowl and ladle and gold buckle, as well as the famous helmet. A number of the barrows at Sutton Hoo were dug into towards the end of the sixteenth century, by digging pits into the mounds. An excavation into Mound One in c.1600 has been dated by the remains of a glass bottle found at the bottom of it, but the shape of the mound had been distorted by rabbit warrens and medieval ploughing, giving it a false summit and the diggers missed the burial.<sup>616</sup> It seems

<sup>615</sup> Portable Antiquities Scheme <<https://finds.org.uk>> (accessed 10 July 2017).

<sup>616</sup> Martin Carver, “Sutton Hoo - An Archaeography”, in *Great Excavations: Shaping the Archaeological Profession*, ed. by John Schofield, (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2011), 25-43, (p. 26).

likely from the lack of similar grave goods and the presence of similar pits that they did find treasure in the other mounds, specifically Mounds 2, 3 and 14.<sup>617</sup>



Figure 15. Sutton Hoo. Photograph: Seb Falk

This misjudging of the shape of the mound may have occurred at other barrows, and in these cases the barrows diggers may well have found nothing, not even human remains. Later medieval sources do not equate the barrows being dug for treasure with other barrows they saw as grave-mounds, perhaps because it would not have been seen as particularly auspicious to be digging up a grave for treasure. Equally, it has been suggested that during the Later Bronze Age there were instances of treasure being buried in substitute for the human remains.<sup>618</sup> This did not really take place during the same period as barrow building however, and in cases where

<sup>617</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>618</sup> Pryor, *Making of the British Landscape*, p. 108.



grave goods are recovered but no human remains, it is often the case that the bones have simply decayed completely due to varying factors including the acidity of the soil. Of course, it may well be the case that that these were ritual depositions made outside of a funerary context, or that they really were buried hoards as medieval people believed.

Richard II's treasure roll, dating to 1389/90 can also give a clue as to exactly what would have been considered treasure by those searching in barrows. Objects listed in the treasure roll were made of gold, silver-gilt and silver, with a preference for gold, and contained precious stones such as amber and beryl. Some of the gold objects listed in the treasure roll are; crowns, gold vessels, chaplets, circlets, brooches and cups.<sup>619</sup> As noted above, it would be entirely possible to discover gold vessels, cups and brooches in a barrow. It would not matter if these objects were in less than mint condition, as such treasure was not necessarily kept by the king, but was often used for payment instead of coinage, or was melted down and remade in a more fashionable style.<sup>620</sup> Equally, some Roman hoards have been discovered buried in barrows. For example, the antiquarian John Aubrey writing in the seventeenth century related the story of an urn of Greek and Roman coins found in a barrow on Exmoor. The famous eighteenth-century Derbyshire barrow digger Thomas Bateman found around eighty Roman coins buried throughout a barrow. Of course, the gold and silver objects recovered from barrows in later medieval England were not, as suggested in the 1237 Close Rolls, *thesauro abscondito* ('hidden treasure'). Rather they were grave goods, deposited with the dead as gifts, displays of wealth or for ritual purposes such as necessities for the afterlife.

<sup>619</sup> Institute of Historical Research, *Richard II's Treasure, The Treasure Roll* (2007), <<https://archives.history.ac.uk/richardII/roll.html>> [accessed 8 June 2018].

<sup>620</sup> *Ibid.*

### **Six Hills, Devon 1324**

In 1324 money needed raising for the treasury. Edward II was at war with France and had just finished fighting both Scotland and the Despencers. The patent rolls of Edward II dated 1st June 1324, contain a writ of aid ordering Robert Beupel the younger to dig up six specific barrows, as well as any others in the county of Devon which were said to contain treasure. This Letter Patent was an open letter, as opposed to the sealed letters of the Close Rolls. Letters Patent covered a number of wide-ranging topics, most commonly including grants of official positions, lands, commissions, privileges and pardons and were accompanied by the Great Seal of England.<sup>621</sup> This particular writ was issued by bill of the treasurer:

Writ of aid directed to the sheriff and others of the County of Devon for Robert Beaupel, the younger, appointed to seek in six hills (in sex collibus) and other places in that County for a treasure which the King is informed is concealed there, on condition that he dig the soil and overthrow stones and timber at his own cost in open day in the presence of the Sheriff, the Tithing-man, and other good men of the said parts, who can testify to the truth there of.

*(Calendar of Patent Rolls, Edward II, I June 1324)*<sup>622</sup>

<sup>621</sup> "Letters Patent", The National Archives, Kew <<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/royal-grants-letters-patent-charters-from-1199/>> [accessed 10 May 2018].

<sup>622</sup> *Calendar of Patent Rolls Edward II, Vol. IV. 1321-24* (London: Public Records Office, 1904), p. 420.

Not much is known about Robert Beupel, apart from that he appears to have been one of the Bishop of Exeter's retainers.<sup>623</sup> The Bishop of Exeter in 1324 was Walter Stapledon, the king's High Lord Treasurer who issued the writ. It may be that Beupel was appointed specifically because he was one of the Bishop of Exeter's men, and trusted by Stapledon, although these reasons can only be speculated on without further evidence. The six barrows were specified (although their exact location in the county was not) because the king had heard, in much the same way as Henry III almost 100 years previously, that treasure was hidden there. Treasure trove law had not changed remarkably during this time, therefore any treasure found by Beupel would automatically be classed as property of the king. The instructions are more specific than those from Henry III to his brother. It is stated in the writ that Beupel must dig the barrows in the presence of the sheriff, the tithing-man and other good people of the county. The requirement of the sheriff to be present is in keeping with *Britton*, a summary of English Law extant in a manuscript dating to the early fourteenth century, which states that it was part of the office of sheriff or bailiff to enquire after *ancient* treasure found in the earth.<sup>624</sup> The public digging of the barrow was important for a number of reasons, although primarily it ensured that Beupel did not try to retain any treasure discovered for himself.

Grinsell suggested that the barrows mentioned as the objects of this writ were most likely to be the Chapman Barrows, located on the on the west edge of Exmoor, or a group near Wrangworthy Cross in East Putford.<sup>625</sup> The writ may have lacked detailed information about the location of the barrows, suggesting that the location of the barrows was already known by those the writ addressed.

<sup>623</sup> Mark Buck, *Politics, Finance and the Church in the Reign of Edward II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 76.

<sup>624</sup> *Britton*, 3rd edn, ed. F.M.Nichol, (Oxford: Oxford University Press:, 1865)

<sup>625</sup> Grinsell, "Barrow Treasure", p. 37.



*Figure 16. Chapman Barrows mound 7. Photograph: Exmoor National Park Authority*

The inclusion of the description of Beupel's work as the digging of soil and the overthrowing of stones and timber is particularly interesting. This shows that chambered long barrows, possibly as well as dolmens and cairns, were targeted as potential locations of treasure: at least often enough for it to be common knowledge that they might contain stone. Cairns and dolmens are found more often in Devon and Cornwall than in other parts of England. As both sets of barrows suggested by Grinsell are round barrows, the inclusion of stone in the writ may suggest that it is a different set of barrows. Equally this shows an awareness that some barrows consisted of stone as well as earth, and it makes evident the fact

that at least in this case we are dealing specifically with the digging of barrows, rather than natural hillocks. The raiding and ‘overthrowing’ of chambered long barrows is also present in the archaeological record. Excavations at the ruined Chestnuts long barrow, Kent in the 1960s showed a number of pits dug into the barrow. A number of pot sherds dating to the eleventh to thirteenth century, were recovered from these and throughout the demolished barrow.<sup>626</sup> The excavation also recorded a number of half-complete pots from under fallen stones inside the chamber, which all dated to the later half of the thirteenth century. As none of the pottery dated from later than this period, it appears most likely that this was the point the barrow was completely overturned. Some of the pottery recovered came from as far away as Oxford and Southampton, which has led some archaeologists to suggest some of the diggers were sent there to investigate the barrow just as Beupel was in Devon.<sup>627</sup> John Alexander in his 1961 excavation report says ‘the Chestnuts may have similarly been opened by some special commissioner. The expertise and thoroughness of the robbing imply considerable resources well used and make it unlikely that the villagers organised it on their own’.<sup>628</sup> Alexander ties this into the idea of a treasure hunt in barrows across southern Britain, organised by the king who desperately needed funds (he suggests Henry III).<sup>629</sup> This is an interesting suggestion: we do, after all have evidence that Henry ordered all the barrows in Cornwall and the Isle of Wight dug, however we have no other evidence from the court rolls of either orders being sent out or treasure being received.

<sup>626</sup> John Alexander, “The Excavation of the Chestnuts Megalithic Tomb at Addington, Kent”, *Archaeologia Cantania*, 76 (1961), 1-57, (p. 25).

<sup>627</sup> Alexander, p.25.

<sup>628</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>629</sup> *Ibid.*

## **Magical Treasure Hunting**

During the later Middle Ages treasure hoards therefore became associated with visible remnants of the past where they could occasionally be found, primarily barrows and Roman ruins. As N.B. Aitchson suggested, it seems that barrows became thought of as places where treasure hoards were hidden because they were landmarks which would make retrieval easier.<sup>630</sup> Digging indiscriminately around ancient ruins and landmarks would have meant that treasure was not discovered every time, hence, towards the end of the later medieval period, magic was increasingly being used to discover hidden treasure. It is possible that the treasure hunters had resorted to using magic because so many barrows had already been dug in the preceding two or three hundred years that they were less likely to find treasure simply by digging into a barrow, and thus turned to magic to divine where the treasure was. It may have followed that as magical methods would have proved as useless as choosing a barrow at random, and for a majority of the time no treasure would be found, people begin to believe that treasure concealed in barrows was a legend rather than a real occurrence.

Apart from the references made in Gervase of Tilbury and William of Newburgh's chronicles, as discussed in the previous chapter, it seems from the cases discussed here that superstition and magic became associated with barrow treasure towards the end of the later medieval period. If the rustic's encounter at Willey-Hou in William of Newburgh's chronicle is a record of a local story William heard as a child, as he suggests, then there may well have been other similar stories about barrows in local folklore, which were simply not recorded or for which no records survive. Folklore recorded in the early modern period does contain a number of supernatural encounters. For example, in 1630, less than a hundred years after the

<sup>630</sup> N.B. Aitchson "Roman Wealth, Native Ritual, Coin hoards within and beyond Roman Britain", *World Archaeology*, 20 (1988), 270-289, (p. 276).

end of the period covered by this thesis, the historian Thomas Westcote recorded a local legend of a man who broke into a barrow in search of treasure. The man was successful in his search, but as he leant down into the hole he had dug to retrieve the treasure, he heard the sound of phantom horses and was so terrified he went deaf, blind and died. As folklore and local stories only began to be recorded by early antiquarians in the latter half of the sixteenth century, similar beliefs and legends may also have existed in the later medieval period.

Although most examples of magical treasure hunting in England come from the fifteenth century and later, there is an earlier record of magical treasure hunting in the *Annales Ecclesiae Wigormensis* ('Annals of Worcester Cathedral') from 1288. This treasure is not discovered in a barrow though, but on the site of the former Roman city of Viriconium (modern day Wroxeter, Shropshire). Here an *incantatorem* (a magician, charmer) caused a boy to have a vision of a house with urns and a vast amount of gold.<sup>631</sup> There is no record of whether this vision led to digging, or indeed if any treasure was found.<sup>632</sup> Indeed, the discovery of treasure, or claims of discovery, could have been viewed as less credible when magic was used. Although slightly later than this period, it is thought that when John Dee petitioned Lord Burghley for a license from the queen to dig treasure in 1574, it may well have been nothing more than a publicity stunt.<sup>633</sup> Even those recording these stories, such as the historian Thomas Westcote, were sceptical and left it up to the audience to decide the truth of the matter when discussing treasure allegedly found through magical means.

<sup>631</sup> Charles Beard, *The Romance of the Treasure Trove* (Marston: S. Low, 1933), pp. 22-3.

<sup>632</sup> *Ibid.* p. 23

<sup>633</sup> Dillinger, p. 115.

### **Nonmete Hill, Forncett St Mary 1465**

In 1465 Edward Clere, the king's Escheater for Norfolk and Suffolk, held an inquiry into a group of men who had allegedly performed various magical acts in order to find treasure hidden in a barrow called Nonmete Hill, in the parish of Forncett, Norfolk. The group made a blood sacrifice in payment to a *spiritum aeriale* (a spirit of the air/disembodied spirit), which with the help of crystal would identify the site of the buried treasure for them. The use of crystals in the hunt for treasure at barrows is a theme which appears in several of the early modern sources. Although crystals were not widely used in magic across Europe during the later medieval period, they were quite commonplace in England.<sup>634</sup>

A report of the Escheater's inquiry continues:

The said John Cans and Robert Hikkes and the other unknown persons assembled at Bunwell aforesaid did proceed to Forncett along with the said accursed spirit and did dig in the hill called Nonmete Hill and made an entry into the said hill, insomuch that there and then they found to the value of more than a hundred shillings in coined money in the said hill. For all which they shall make answer to our lord the King, inasmuch as the said treasure they did appropriate to their own use and do still retain.<sup>635</sup>

It would be fascinating to think that perhaps the spirit summoned was in some way connected specifically to the Nonmete Hill; perhaps as the ghost of the barrow's dead occupant.

<sup>634</sup> Alec Ryrie, *The Sorcerer's Tale: Faith and Fraud in Tudor England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 142.

<sup>635</sup> Augustus Jessopp, *Random Roaming* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1893), pp. 109-13.



This does not appear to be the case, however, at least it is never explicitly stated to be so. Dillinger in his 2012 book *Magical Treasure Hunting in Europe and North America* gives numerous examples of spirits being summoned to find treasure across Europe at the end of the later medieval period and into the early modern. These spirits do not appear to be connected to the place where the treasure is buried. Instead, Dillinger suggests they are related to an idea at the time that the devil knew where all treasure was hidden.<sup>636</sup> It also appears on some occasions that these spirits were summoned not only because they could locate the treasure, but also to protect the diggers against any spirits who might be guarding the treasure.<sup>637</sup> It seems that spirits were considered to have a special knowledge of treasure generally, perhaps it was thought they had been observing life on earth for a long time and had therefore seen the treasure being buried originally. The story has a humorous bent to it, which seems slightly out of place with the serious nature of the enquiry. For example, the spirit originally asks for a Christian man to be sacrificed in payment. The group of men work around this by christening and sacrificing a rooster. As the case is not in its original context, it is impossible to tell whether the story is deliberately humorous, or whether this was done by the nineteenth-century writer Augustus Jessopp, who records the story in his book *A Random Roaming*, who often took a humorous tone in his writing. It would perhaps be more useful to examine this source within the full context of its original document, however, *A Random Roaming* does not give any details as to the origins of the source. Jessopp simply states that it is ‘a story, more complete than any other’, which has ‘never yet appeared before the eye of those who only read what is displayed upon a printed page’.<sup>638</sup>

<sup>636</sup> Dillinger, p. 156.

<sup>637</sup> Francis Young, pers. comm., 19 September 2019.

<sup>638</sup> Jessopp, p. 109.

We do know from Jessop, however, that the inquiry was held before Edward Clere, the king's Escheator for Norfolk and Suffolk. The role of the Escheator was to hold inquests postmortem as well as upholding the king's rights and 'all manner of things belonging to the crown'.<sup>639</sup> As treasure trove by law belonged to the crown, this may be why the Escheator was in charge of the inquest.<sup>640</sup> Equally, it may be the case that information on the barrow digging came to light as the Escheator was conducting an inquiry post mortem of local landowner. These required a gathering of information about the landowner's estate and this may be the 'common report' mentioned. Rumours of the discovery of barrow treasure emerging post-mortem have of course already been discussed earlier in this chapter, relating to Gyldenlowe, but Forncett and indeed much of the surrounding county was held by the Duke of Norfolk, John de Mowbray, who coincidentally died in 1461. Mowbray's estate was so large that it is not inconceivable that the inquiry may have still been ongoing in 1465, and it may be the case that Jessopp discovered this story in the documents from Mowbray's Inquiry postmortem. That said, there is a record of Edward Clere conducting an inquisition in Norfolk earlier in 1465, after lands were seized from William de Beaumont who was convicted of treason.<sup>641</sup> This shows that Clere was actively conducting various inquiries in the area and it could be completely unconnected to John de Mowbray.

Regardless of its origin, this case is especially interesting as it is the earliest extant instance in England of magic being used in the hunt for treasure specifically hidden in barrows. Although, as discussed above, there were earlier reports of treasure being sought through magical means at other sites. Using magic to find treasure was not forbidden at this point, and

<sup>639</sup> "The Escheator: A Short Introduction", *Mapping the Medieval Countryside*, <<http://www.inquisitionpostmortem.ac.uk/contexts/the-escheator-a-short-introduction>> [accessed 10 Feb 2019]

<sup>640</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>641</sup> Thomas Stapleton, *The London Chronicle*, Vol. 34, (London: The Camden Society, 1846), p. ccxi.

any charges would have been brought under treasure trove law. Indeed, according to Dillinger, the use of magic in the hunt for treasure was generally not even associated with witchcraft, until the 1542 Conjurat[i]on Act.<sup>642</sup> The men are told they will answer before the king not because they used magic to discover the treasure but because, like Matthew Tyler and his widow, they have concealed the discovery of the treasure from the king. Other attempts to use magic to find treasure hidden in barrows was markedly less successful than the case at Forncett, and the treasure hunters sometimes took to bribery and extortion instead.

### **Butterhills, Norwich 1521**

That I Lord Curzon half gaffe leve on to William Smyth of Clopton and Amylion, mane aune servant, by atoryte to make cherche ware thei can have knowledge of any tresour hidde in the ground or in the water w'in the sherryes of Sowfolk or Norfolk ... and shwch tresour as shall come into their hannes trwly to kepe it our to the kyngs behove and myne owne, to suche tyme as it shall be delvyed over to my handes, and so the kynges part had, the residew to be distributed to me and them that goose aboute the laboure of it.

(Memorandum from Lord Curzon to his men, 10 March 1521)<sup>643</sup>

<sup>642</sup> Dillinger, p. 17. Dillinger calls this the 1542 Witchcraft Act, however, Francis Young has recently argued very convincingly that it should actually be referred to as the 'Conjurat[i]on Act'. See Francis Young, *Magic as a Political Crime: A History of Sorcery and Treason* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2019), p. 108.

<sup>643</sup> Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society, *Norfolk Archaeology, Or, Miscellaneous Tracts Relating to the Antiquities of the County of Norfolk* (Norwich: Charles Musket, 1847), I, p. 50.

The said William Smyth saieth yt he with the said Amylyon... wern at grounde lyeng besides Butter hilles within the walles of the Citie, about ij or iij of the klok in the mornynge, within a fforthnight after easter last past and ther digged for tresour trovy, he saieth thei ffound nothing.

(Inquiry carried out by the aldermen of Norwich, June 1522) <sup>644</sup>

The first of these two sources is a copy of a memorandum from Lord Curzon, indicating his appointment of a man named William Smyth, along with Curzon's servant Amylion, to search for treasure in the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk. This memorandum was first published in volume 1 of *Norfolk Archaeology* (1847), but there appears little reason to doubt its provenance; both the memorandum and details of the inquisition were provided to the author of the article by Sir Francis Palgrave, who at the time was the Deputy Keeper of the Public Record Office. There is reason to question the exact details of the memorandum, however, as there is no mention of any grant or patent being issued to Lord Curzon in the letters and papers (foreign or domestic) of Henry VIII, for any of the years surrounding the events detailed in the second source. Perhaps Curzon believed this memorandum would not be questioned, as within it he states that he has the authority 'by the Kyngs gracious plakard'. Equally, it is possible he considered it part of his duties as a commissioner of the peace for Suffolk (a grant for which does appear in Curzon's name, in the letters and papers of Henry VIII, dated November 1520).<sup>645</sup>

<sup>644</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51-2.

<sup>645</sup> "Henry VIII: November 1520", in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 3, 1519-1523*. ed. by J.S. Brewer (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1867), pp. 382-398.

Although there are reasons to suspect Curzon was not given a grant from the king to dig for treasure, this source is interesting because it shows a development in Treasure Trove law during the later medieval period. In his memorandum Curzon referred to the treasure being split, with any left over after the king had taken his share to be divided between Curzon and those who found the treasure; according to Edward Coke's *Institutes of the Laws of England*, by the sixteenth century, the law specifically indicated the king might grant shares of the treasure as he pleased.<sup>646</sup> It is clear Curzon expected a share of the treasure for having discovered it. Coke also states that any metal found which was not either gold or silver, was not considered treasure and therefore did not belong to the king, so this might have been divided between the men who found the treasure.<sup>647</sup>

It would appear from the inquiry by the aldermen of Norwich that this treasure hunting was neither as successful nor profitable as Curzon and his men perhaps envisaged, indeed the would-be treasure hunters appear to have made more money from blackmail than they ever found in treasure.<sup>648</sup> The two men, Smythe and Amylion, travelled around the county extorting money from a number of men and women, often by threatening they would report them for treasure hunting without a licence, and implying that they would face punishment when Lord Curzon returned. The men made a number of references to 'hill-diggers' and hill digging, 'saying amongs other convercasions ... that he was a hill digger ... if he wolde not confesse to them that he was a hille digger, he wolde thrust his dagar throwe his chekes'.<sup>649</sup>

That this was both threatened by the men and recorded at the inquiry would seem to suggest two things: that 'hill-digging' was a specific activity, one that the people they were

<sup>646</sup> Edward Coke, *The Third Part of the Institutes of the Laws of England: Concerning High Treason, and Other Pleas of the Crown, and Criminall Causes* (London: W. Clarke and Sons, 1644), p. 132.

<sup>647</sup> Coke, p. 132.

<sup>648</sup> Dillinger, p. 117.

<sup>649</sup> Norfolk Archaeology p. 54.

threatening would be aware of, and that it was in some way punishable by the law. Certainly, the digging of barrows must have taken place in Norfolk on a fairly large scale at some point before the nineteenth century, most likely at more than one time, because when Goddard-Johnson, a Norfolk antiquarian excavated barrows in the early nineteenth century he found many of them had already been dug.<sup>650</sup>



Figure 17. Boudicca's Grave, Norfolk. Photograph: Ruskus

As with the case at Forncett St Mary almost a century before, the men used magical means in their attempts to find treasure, going round Norwich recruiting parish priests to raise spirits; first William of St Gregory's raised one for them, then another priest, Sir Robert Cromer of Melton 'constreyed a vision of a spirit to appear in a ston'.<sup>651</sup> William Stapleton, a priest during the reign of Henry VIII also attempted to use magical means to discover hidden treasure. In a letter from Stapleton to Thomas Cromwell he explains that his hunt for treasure began when he received a book titled *Thesaurus Spiritum* and shortly after 'a little ring, a plate, a

<sup>650</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 49-50.

<sup>651</sup> *Norfolk Archaeology*, p. 57.

circle and a sword for digging'. Stapleton also travelled around Norfolk searching for treasure, at one point meeting the parson of Lessingham who called up several spirits called Oberyon, Inchubus and Andrew Malchus, but none of the spirits were able to provide Stapleton with information which actually helped him discover treasure.<sup>652</sup> Stapleton appears to have been unsuccessful in his search for treasure, however, as were Lord Curzon's men, who were eventually arrested and put on trial. Surprisingly, this not for blackmail or concealing treasure trove, but for political libel; a conversation they had about the Lord of Buckingham being in the Tower of London, and them swearing 'vengeance on the bones of them that caused it: that is my lorde cardynall and the Duke of Suffolk'.<sup>653</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The interpretation of barrows as places where treasure might be found did not cease with the last case discussed in this chapter. Slightly later than the period covered by this chapter, and already discussed in great detail by Stuart Piggott, is a pamphlet dating to 1685 entitled *A strange and wonderful discovery newly made of Houses Under Ground, at Colton's-Field in Gloucestershire*. According to the source, two men found *several Urns, some of which had only Ashes in them, others were filled with Coyns and Medals of Gold, Silver and Brass, with Latin Inscriptions, and the Heads of several of the Roman emperours*, although everything turns to dust as they touch them. The idea that the treasure which could be discovered in barrows originally buried there by the Romans may well have also existed in the later medieval period, as demonstrated by the story of the vision of Roman treasure at Wroxeter, as mentioned in the discussion on magical treasure hunting. Barrows were not the only monuments in the landscape under which treasure was believed to be hidden. During the later medieval period

<sup>652</sup> Grinsell, *Barrow Treasure*, p. 38.

<sup>653</sup> Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society, p. 57.

and into the early modern, stone crosses were also widely believed to conceal treasure – indeed Leland wrote that in parts of Northamptonshire a third of all stone crosses had been pulled down by treasure hunters.<sup>654</sup>

In conclusion, whilst there is little evidence for treasure being associated with barrows in literary sources, from the cases discussed in this chapter we can see that the belief that barrows contained hidden treasure was held by both the aristocracy and ordinary people. Where exactly this belief originated from is not clear, although a number of barrows did contain fabulous grave goods, especially those constructed during the early medieval period such as Sutton Hoo. Equally, there were references to barrows being dug over for treasure in early medieval texts such as the *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*. Evidently, this idea was not new, or unique to later medieval England, but there is a lengthy gap between the early medieval literature and the first case discussed in this chapter which dated to 1237, broken only by the stories recorded by Gervase of Tilbury and William of Newburgh in the mid-twelfth century. It could be suggested that this was a belief which was retained by ordinary people, and which began to attract the attention of the aristocracy after ‘treasure’ was successfully recovered, although this is only a supposition as there is so little evidence. By the end of the later medieval period, however, it could be suggested that the idea of digging for treasure in barrows was becoming well established, at least in Norfolk where the term ‘hill-digging’ appeared to be well-known and understood. Of course, in the early modern period this would develop into ‘barrow-digging’, where antiquarians and early ‘archaeologists’ would tear through hundreds of barrows searching for treasure and evidence of the past.

Although this chapter uses court documents for a majority of its primary sources, the cases discussed in this chapter actually demonstrate how this interpretation of barrows did not

<sup>654</sup> Dillinger, p. 55.



originate in literature but was conveyed upwards through society to the king. In the first case discussed in the chapter, Henry III ordered the barrows to be dug for treasure only after hearing treasure had already been found there, perhaps by ordinary people working the land.

## Conclusion

The central aim of this thesis was to develop our understanding of interpretations of barrows in later medieval England, specifically in the cultural imagination of the clergy and aristocracy. As the writers and intended audiences of most of the texts written during the later medieval period, they not only travelled widely, but shared sustained cultural connections with their contemporaries in Wales, Scandinavia, France and beyond.

Comments made by prominent barrow scholars of the twentieth century, such as Leslie Grinsell, that barrows in later medieval texts were “chance references”, coupled with the relative lack of recorded archaeological evidence for interactions with barrows in the later medieval period in England, has created a narrative that between the Norman Conquest and the Reformation there was little interest in, and less understanding of, barrows. Whilst examples may appear in related scholarship, generally later medieval interpretations of barrows have been absent from recent scholarship. Within the field of Archaeology this may well be because of the relative lack of evidence for physical interactions. Where they do appear it is usually referencing the discovery of Amphibalus and the saints at Ludlow. Within the field of Medieval Studies there is possibly even less attention paid. Johannes Dillinger references the final two case studies of Chapter Seven in the context of magical treasure hunting, whilst interdisciplinary studies and Folklore Studies often combine the early and later medieval examples, but with far more focus on the more plentiful early medieval examples. Until this thesis, however, there has not been a study which focuses solely on the later medieval.

Whilst later medieval literary references to barrows do not appear in abundance, as this thesis has demonstrated, they still provide plenty of opportunity for analysis. Equally, there are many references which it has not been possible to include. This thesis, which represents a first

step in the study of barrows in the later medieval cultural imagination, highlights some of the best examples from literature and documentary evidence, and provides possible methodologies for analysis and further study of the topic. These sources were chosen because they contained enough detail to provide opportunity for discussion and analysis, as well as representing a range of historiographical sources, from narrative histories such as Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* to Middle English romances and even Icelandic sagas.

In short, this thesis demonstrates that people in later medieval England not only knew or had ideas about what barrows were, but that there were contexts in which they were useful for transferring messages and narrative themes from author to audience. Close reading of the texts in this thesis revealed a number of themes associated with barrows in the later medieval cultural imagination; they were the burial mounds of saints, pagans, sinners and kings, repositories of hidden treasure, and places where one might meet the supernatural. But perhaps most importantly, in all cases the barrows acted as points through which the past, both real and imagined, could be accessed, and useful aspects be brought into the present. It was this access to the past which made them significant for the medieval writers and their audiences. As a shorthand for the past, they allowed for the sharing of moral messages and lessons - the past, as Matthew Paris wrote, being a storehouse for moral truths.<sup>655</sup> The past could be used to provide authenticity to the version of events presented in the texts, this authenticity could be compounded further by a connection to an actual historical site such as Hengist's barrow at Conisborough Castle, or Amphibalus' barrow on Redbourn Heath.

Previous discussions of the discovery of St Amphibalus have focused on the religious aspects and benefits of the foundation of his cult to the abbey – the fact the relics were discovered in a barrow has rarely been remarked on, and never specifically analysed. This

<sup>655</sup> Weiler, *Matthew Paris on the Writing of History*, p. 262.

thesis has discussed how the choice of a barrow as his resting place cannot have been completely random. It shows not only that the monks knew barrows were burial places, but also may well indicate the period they thought barrows belonged to: pagan Roman. The analysis in this thesis also highlights how important the barrow is not only within the context of the story, but beyond; to the monks of St Albans, the barrow was a place through which the past could be accessed and brought into the present, in a very practical and physical sense. The designation of the human remains found in the barrow as the relics of a saint made the barrow as significant in the present as it had been in the past. It allowed the barrow to be incorporated into an invented past which gave the English Church an extended history and increased the importance of St Albans in that past. The barrow was significant for two main reasons; firstly, it could connect the past to the landscape and thus prove a long-standing relationship between St Albans Abbey and the land they owned, but also it could create *meaning*. The barrow allowed for a deeper connection to the past through the landscape, which was beneficial for local people and visitors, as well as for the abbey. It was only by reading the text as landscape, taking the barrow as the starting point before moving out to the wider textual landscape, that its importance became clear. When reading the text as landscape, one cannot view the barrow as a lone monument but a point within a wider landscape which can only be fully interpreted when the influences of the author on the monument and the monument on the intended audience, are considered.

This new methodology was best exemplified in Chapter Two. By interrogating a small section of the text the thesis was not only able to provide a new and original analysis of Hengist's barrow, but was able to reveal something very interesting about Geoffrey of Monmouth's history writing, which has the potential to add huge value to how the *Historia regum Britanniae* is read today. By locating Hengist's barrow at Conisbrough Castle in Yorkshire, Geoffrey was able to relate his history to other events and historical figures

associated with both the castle and the county. Similarly, Geoffrey used analogies, parallels and methods of reading history and symbolism in the Church, encouraging his audience to compare that historical event to contemporary events as well as the more recent past. Björn Weiler has published at length how Matthew Paris used similar techniques in his history writing, particularly in his use of parallels, through which he encouraged his readers to compare similar events and make judgements based on the differences.<sup>656</sup> This thesis has demonstrated that Geoffrey of Monmouth was writing his history for very similar reasons to Matthew Paris; both wanted to share moral lessons which could be found in history. By comparing biblical and ‘historical’ kings, Geoffrey was offering exemplars of both good and bad kingship, at a time when England was experiencing a succession crisis and civil war. The barrow was a key point through which Geoffrey could connect the past and the present, as well as access associations about that area more generally. This thesis offers a new methodology of reading Chapter Seven of the *Historia regum Britanniae*, and this could be taken further to see if the methodology can be applied to the rest of the text.

Additionally, this thesis has shown the importance of the shared ‘textual environment’. When later medieval authors included barrows in their writing, they were relying on their intended audience sharing their cultural associations and knowledge, without these shared associations, the mentioning of barrows would be pointless and may not have been understood the way the author may have intended. Equally, for two of the themes identified by this thesis; the supernatural and treasure, it shows a limitation of focusing on the later medieval cultural imagination, as it generally only represents the views and interests of one subsection of society, those at the top of the social strata.

<sup>656</sup> Björn Weiler, “Monastic Historical Culture and the Utility of a Remote Past: The Case of Matthew Paris”, in *How the Past was Used: Historical Cultures c. 750-2000: Proceedings of the British Academy*, ed. by Peter Lambert and Bjorn Weiler, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 91-120, p. 114.

Supernatural elements and hidden treasure are often focused on in scholarship as examples of interpretations of barrows. Interestingly though, for later medieval England there is not a huge amount of literary evidence for supernatural interpretations, but this perhaps is due to the source material. The place-name evidence in Chapter Four shows more evidence for supernatural than any of the texts, but this is evidence coming from more humbler origins, from the ideas and associations of ordinary people. Again, hidden treasure is not a theme which particularly appears in later medieval literature. The cases discussed in this thesis actually demonstrated how this idea was carried up through society to the king; in the very first case discussed in Chapter Four, Henry III ordered the barrows to be dug for treasure because he had heard ordinary people had found treasure there. Whilst the digging of barrows for treasure has been discussed by other scholars it is often presented as an interpretation which passes through society from the top down, with nobles asking the king for permission to dig the barrows. This thesis demonstrates that this is not the case until well into the fifteenth century, and that it was not people asking permission to dig for treasure, but the king ordering barrows dug after ordinary people had already successfully found treasure whilst working the land.

The infrequency with which barrows appear in later medieval texts can be also be seen as a limitation for this thesis. Whilst it meant that associations could be identified without trying to fit them into predetermined themes or patterns, it also made it very difficult to make many general conclusions or observations for the period. The themes and associations identified in these texts are fascinating, and certainly a number of them have not been discussed previously, but further research is needed in order to determine the extent to which they can be applied to other texts or are relevant to descriptions of other prehistoric monuments.

Although interdisciplinary, this thesis has focused more on literary sources rather than archaeological sources because most of the evidence we have for the period is in literature and other written sources. As discussed in the introduction, however, there are a number of other possible avenues for further study, which could include more archaeological evidence. Excavation reports could be searched for references to later medieval pot sherds discovered in barrows. Spatial analysis using GIS systems could also prove very interesting; phased distribution maps could be used to analyse the relationship between barrows and the later medieval built environment, combined with viewshed analysis to explore the visibility of barrows around medieval roadways and towns. Studies involving computer generated viewsheds and sightlines are becoming increasingly important when investigating how landscapes would have looked in the past, especially where the medieval landscape is unrecognisable due to modern developments. Following on from the work of Hella Eckardt, Peter Brewer, Sophie Hay and Sarah Poppy, who created viewsheds of the Roman barrows at Bartlow, Cambridgeshire in order to understand their visibility and presence in the landscape,<sup>657</sup> an interesting area for further research based on this thesis would be to use viewshed analysis, as well as charters, early maps and other sources to try and identify the extent to which they were visible to the medieval inhabitants of the area in everyday life.

This research will be useful for those developing heritage interpretation, as it is important for heritage sites to be able to provide visitors with information about the activity and reuse of the barrow after the 'original' stages of construction. Where this gap is left between the end of the original use and the antiquarian investigations many centuries later, these sites are at risk of

<sup>657</sup> Hella Eckardt, Peter Brewer, Sophie Hay and Sarah Poppy. "Roman barrows and their landscape context: a GIS case study at Bartlow, Cambridgeshire." *Britannia*, 40 (1), (2009), pp. 65-98.

being seen as unchanging points in the landscape, untouched by later conquests or immigration - this is especially concerning as there have been recent reports of far right groups meeting at these sites, such as Wayland's Smithy, a Neolithic long barrow in Oxfordshire.<sup>658</sup> By expanding our understanding of how monuments such as barrows were interpreted in later medieval England, we are able demonstrate that these monuments have been used and re-used by many diverse groups all for their own purposes, and therefore provide a more holistic view of the past.

Ultimately, the research undertaken for this thesis has highlighted the significance of barrows in the landscape for at least certain groups within late medieval society and developed a new methodology for reading text-as-landscape. In particular, through a close reading of texts it has demonstrated that the authors and history writers of later medieval England had certain associations about barrows which were held in the cultural imagination, and they expected that their intended audience would share these associations. Writers could use barrows both to connect the present to the past and to highlight themes in their texts; often relating to moral messages from the past which could aid in the governance of the country in the present day. To Tóstig, as the Icelandic writer in *Hemings Pattr* wished to stress, these stories and associations may have been no more than superstition, but in the hands of a certain medieval writers they had power and importance that had the potential to unlock the past for the benefit of their contemporaries in the present, and potentially future generations.

<sup>658</sup> Hayley Dixon, "Neo-Nazis At The National Trust: How Far-Right Groups Are Trying To 'Take Back' Ancient Sites", *The Daily Telegraph*, 9 August 2019 <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/08/09/neo-nazis-national-trust-far-right-groups-trying-takeback-ancient/>> [accessed 20 August 2019].



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