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## **Treescaping and Landscapes: The Myth of the *Wildwood* and its place in the British Past**

*“The assumption...that Western culture has evolved by sloughing off its nature myths, they have, in fact, never gone away”* Schama (1995:14).

An 18<sup>th</sup> century Glamorgan poet, antiquary and literary forger pored through the histories of the Welsh who were the inheritors of ancient Druidic practice. Iolo Morgannwg found precious little to fit his narrative so he invented the missing elements passing it them off as scholarly discovery (Hutton, 2008:253-4). He shaped and manipulated history, tradition and the notion of place and landscape in order to create a series of Druidic festivals to fit his narrative of antiquity. Eco's (2013: 431) consideration of 'place' also tells us that *legendary lands* depend on “*ancient legends whose origins are lost in the mists of time*”. Odd then, that many pagan, environmental and neo-eco groups typically adopt an *ahistorical* view of the human relationship with nature (Letcher 2001:156). Where the past is acknowledged, it is in reference to a “*‘golden age,’ of a time when humanity lived in a Rousseau-like state of innocence, in a harmonious relationship with a benevolent nature*” (ibid.). This paper is about the rich and complex past of the British landscape and its woodlands. It seeks to act as a signpost for those that engage with treescaping, the wildwood and myth and place and space.

Perhaps a starting point lies in contemporary attitudes to British landscapes which are a complex *mélange* of memories drawn from the cultural themes surrounding the Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries, and played out against a background of fundamental social, political and economic change. The rural landscape of Britain became a landscape of exclusion – based around landed classes at the peak of a hierarchical social structure founded upon ownership and control of land. Massingham's classic study of “The English Countryman” put the ‘peasant cultivator’ at “*the base of the pyramid which we call civilisation*” (Harvey 1988:157). Nature-culture, there is no divide – if the landscape is all about human/environment interaction then clues to this relationship may lie in the very fabric of anthropogenic structures. These attitudes and rhetorics are manifest today in a variety of ways, from the presentation of valued ‘heritage’ sites to our experience of them as an informed

audience. So much of our perception of landscape and heritage is contained within these Enlightenment notions and our greenbelt landscapes are characterised by a predominantly rural rhetoric. Even though today only 1% of the population owns more than half of the land in Britain, over one third of the population is still classified as ‘predominantly’ or ‘significantly’ rural (Harvey 1998:156).

Maitland (2012) encounters the rural in the forest, exploring its magic, its stories, its folklore. For her, forests are a place of danger and safety at the same time, informing “*the psyche - as far as the eye can see, which isn’t far*” (2012:7). Her visceral response to an ancient Scottish pine forest at Glen Affric — where she expected to feel fear - instead felt “*a strange brew of excitement, recognition and peril, with more anticipation or even childlike glee than simple ‘terror of the wild’*” (2012:11). Welsh folklore such as the four tales of the *Mabinogi* were translated during a period which saw *Gothic* emerge as a literary genre. This allowed scholars to stimulate feelings of “*rousing strong effect, be it sentimental, sublime or terror-ridden*” (Aaron 2013: 2). Annwn appears as a British otherworld in the First Branch. A place of eternal youth and boundless food. Set in the steeply wooded and winding Cych Valley at the intersection of three counties: Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire, this place is ‘other’, liminal, and was politically liminal and contested in the middle ages when the *Mabinogi* texts were codified. It is not until the Cwn Annwn are adopted into later folk culture that they become the hell hounds; shepherding the souls of the dead to the underworld. It is the association with the Christian mind later that Annwn then becomes hell (Aaron 2013: 164-5). This kind of Welsh culture is that of an invaded country and can be described as ‘postcolonial’ or ‘imperial’ Gothic (Aaron 2013: 3).

Other national identities are important and also link themselves to forest and liminal place. The Grimm brothers debated whether *Sleeping Beauty* was ‘German enough’ for them as it had been (*re*)told by French Charles Perrault in 1697 (Maitland 2012: 14). There are traps for the unwary though. Maitland (2012:146) suggests that students of folklore spend their time looking for similarities between stories from different cultures and have missed the specific details of “*difference and particularity*”. Rackham (2001:547) recognises a similar attitude in students of the ancient woodland and experiences the oak woodlands of Staverton Park as a place of

‘mystery and wonder’ which Peterken considers it to be as close to primal woodland as anything else in the country (ibid. 147). Wildwood and folklore then combine to tell story, to shape identity, the very words: daddock, chisom, griggles. Battlings, brosnay, rammel, derived from the ancient languages of Britain: Celtic, Gaelic, English (McFarlane, 2015). The past is clearly the key to modern relationships with landscape.

By the time Evelyn had published *Sylva or a Discourse of Forest Trees and the Propagation of Timber in His Majesty's Dominions* in 1664 (Bowler 1981:113), the notion of the ancient and mysterious British forest with its secretive woodland lore already held a romanticised position in the national psyche. Holding high social prominence in the king's Court and as a founder member of the Royal Society, Evelyn was ideally placed to harness this innate patriotism, and, after discussions with Naval Commissioners, Evelyn used his extensive botanical interests to propose new models for the planting and preservation of the country's woodlands. Hoskins estimates that by the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century approximately half of England and Wales was under cultivation as arable or pasture: in 1553 William Cholmeley had spoken of ‘*insatiable desire of pasture for sheep and cattle*’ (Hoskins 1955:109). Indeed, the whole period between 1500 and the late 1600s was a period of immense exploitation of the English ‘wildwood’ in order to supply timber for building and industry particularly in the iron-working districts - the Weald, Forest of Dean, the areas surrounding Birmingham and Sheffield and in the Clee Hills (Hoskins 1985:138). Evelyn’s British wildwood had been a political construct all along.

This economic narrative of woodland landscape history is somewhat complemented by geographical and morphological narratives concerning medieval British landscape use. Williamson's (1988) 'Village England' runs through the centre of the country from Northumberland and Durham to Dorset and Wiltshire, and represents a nucleated settlement pattern set amidst a predominantly arable agricultural landscape. In contrast, the landscape of dispersed farmland lies mainly outside this central region, especially to the west, and for Rackham is indicative of an 'ancient' and wooded countryside (1996:4-5). Williamson (1998) suggests that the dispersed settlement patterns of what he calls the 'woodland' zone is indicative of organic development at the local and territorial level rather than systemic organisation

imposed from above. The implication is that the woodland or dispersed regions correspond more closely with the old polities represented by Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. This region of long lived, kin-based societies was less subject perhaps to intense reorganisations of other areas during the medieval period.

The simple, regular ordered space of the English village is in contrast to areas of winding lanes and irregularly spaced tofts interspersed with many, often small, woodlands. Dyer describes the dispersed settlement pattern encountered in Pendock, Worcestershire as one of these woodland parishes (1990:97). During the 10th and 11th centuries Pendock and its neighbours served as woodland appendages to the more intensively managed estates with their manors in the nearby fertile Avon Valley. The exploitation of woodland in the Pendock parish was for the benefit of Overbury manor with coppicing yielding poles for building plus fuel and wood pasture. The road system included a main route for the carriage of timber, fuel and stock droving, but also a network of smaller access tracks for the use of woodsmen and herdsman. This type of dispersed landscape was often explained in terms of medieval assart and expansion but archaeology has demonstrated a enormous time-depth, with much continuity from the Romano-British and prehistoric landscapes (Dyer 1990:99). Woodland regeneration in the 'Dark Ages' following the Roman period was not reversed suddenly during the boom of the 10th and 11th centuries - at Pendock for example, the clearance and extension of arable cultivation did not occur until a century after village formation elsewhere (Dyer 1990:117).

The notion of the great and ancient wildwood covering Britain during the medieval period is unfounded then but woodland, or place names suggesting woodlands feature 471 times in Anglo Saxon charters, predominantly as boundary features (Hoskins 1955:79). In the relatively treeless Fen region woodlands are surprisingly often mentioned, perhaps because treescapes were prized above all else in an otherwise featureless landscape. Etymologically the Anglo-Saxon language is rich in such terms, *wudu* 'wood', *grāf* 'grove', *scaga* 'shaw' and *hangr* 'hanger'. An early perambulation of Shottery, Stratford-on-Avon of c. 704 AD mentions the *Westgraf* and Westgrove Wood still stands today. Earlier, preconquest names are sometimes evident. Wayland Wood, Norfolk is anciently named *Wanelund* from the Norse *lundr* meaning sacred grove. The Old English *lēah* can mean clearing or a wood. An entry from the Ely

Coucher Book of 1251 describes, "*one wood which is called Heyle which contains fourscore acres. Item, there is one wood which is called Litlelund, which contains thirty-two acres...*" (Rackham 1994:39). Out of the 12,580 settlements described in Domesday Book in 1086 only around half possessed woodland, but these correspond well to areas mentioned in the earlier Anglo-Saxon charters indicating a continuity (Rackham 1997:75). The size of a woodland was primarily described in terms of the number of swine it could support in pannage. For Lestune (Leighton, Montgomeryshire) the "*wood there 2 leagues long, and it is sufficient for fattening 200 swine*" (Linnard 2000:25). The beechmast or acorn crop was however notoriously unpredictable and Rackham suggests that these swine numbers were fed in other ways by the time of Domesday and the practice perhaps owes more to custom or tradition than reality (Rackham 1997:75). A grant by Burgred of Mercia in 866 for example, mentions "*pasture for 70 pigs*" and a charter from Hertfordshire in 989, "*I give the lands at Brycandune to St Peter of Westmenstre, except that I will that they fatten two hundred swine for my wife, if there be mast*" (Rackham 1994:38). It seems reasonable to assume though that the acreage represented in Domesday must be taken as a minimum. Small, coppiced or hornbeam woods that clearly could never have supported pannaging may have been omitted. Forest law and woodland traditions were long-lived and slow to change.

Medieval woodland clearly comprised a valuable resource and management was systematic and detailed with boundaries well defined and often enclosed within an earthen bank and ditch. Afforestation in a legal sense meant the creation of elite permanent hunting reserves, protected under forest law and administered by forest courts. As Hoskin's indicates, 'forest' does not necessarily equate to woodland and he discusses moor, heath and fenland forests (1955:130). This misnomer is partly responsible for the notion that Britain was heavily wooded during the Middle Ages. The introduction of forest arrived with the Normans in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and the early '*Laws of Pseudo-Canute*' were forged in order to provide forestry with a respectable ancestry (Hoskins 1955:130). Forests were always privately owned. At Epping for example, the King owned only the deer, which were often hunted by professionals licensed to do so (ibid: 133). The king owned timber on approximately half his forestry that supplied major building works, the rest was often bestowed as gifts to great abbeys and churches.

The value of hounds and hawks and the status of huntsman and falconer are given in medieval Welsh law as an indication of the early importance attached to woodland management as well as the social and cultural rituals associated with hunting. With the conquest of territories in east and south Wales however, Norman Marcher lords created forests in their lordships in royal imitation. Officers were appointed to administer laws to protect 'vert and venison', that is protection from poaching and encroachment (*purprestre*) on often open hunting areas. The Justice in Eyre (forest magistrate) presided over verderers, regards, foresters and agisters who collected the grazing rents (*agistments*) (Linnard 2000:36). The complex forest court consisted of the Eyre of the Forest, the Swainmote and the Woodmote, collecting fines and tolls and taking jurisdiction over the ordinary courts. Penalties against forest law were severe including mutilation and death for offences against game but Hoskins urges caution stating although playing an active part in the areas they covered, forest courts were not actually any more oppressive than ordinary courts, often finding favour with a defendant or dealing with a plethora of minor disputes between commoners (1955: 136).

The Forest of Snowdon was administered by Englishman, John de Clanbow from 1384. Forest law was not repealed here until 1640 (Linnard 2000:38), but although the initial foresters were Anglo-Norman, they were quickly succeeded by Welshmen (*ibid*: 39). It is often suggested that forest law meant tyranny and oppression, removing common rights from locals but the first foresters and beadles of the forest of Glyncothi in the upper Cothi valley in north Carmarthenshire were Welshmen and local custom and privilege may have escaped the official account books. This forest established by Edward I after the failure of Rhys ap Maredudd's rebellion in 1291 names Einion ap Trahaiarn and Cadwgan ap Ieuan in 1301-2, the Welsh trend continuing until 1533-34 with Hywel ap Guto (Linnard 2000:38-39). The picture of tyrannical English rule is further questioned when we see the celebrated poet, Lewis Glyn Cothi praising the ancient and valuable woodlands of a local landowner Rhys ap Dafydd of Blaen Tren during the mid 14<sup>th</sup> century;

*Derw ieuainc hyd yr awyr*

*O'u bon oll heb un yn wyr*

*Glastwer yn ganerw I gyd*

(Young oaks all reaching up  
Straight from their base, not one crooked  
Green oaks, hundreds of acres)  
(Linnard 2000:39).

Woodland and laws associated with trees and timber are discussed in detailed medieval law texts. The laws allow anyone to cut a ridge pole and two cruck frames without the owner's permission to build a dwelling for example. Eleven species are named and each is given a detailed value depending on its use; alder, apple, ash, beech, crabapple, elm, hazel, oak, thorn, willow and yew (Linnard 2000:22). Amounts vary in different areas. Beech was not native to north Wales at this time and is not mentioned in this version of the law texts. Oak was highly prized and valued at 120 pence, twice that of beech. Pine is not mentioned and may have become extinct in Wales by the Middle Ages, similarly sycamore is not mentioned indicating its later introduction (ibid:23). The value of trees was directly linked to their economic contribution and worked, construction timber (usually oak) was the most valuable; each cruck twenty pence, the roof tree or ridge pole forty pence and four pence each for each of the pillars, benches, stanchions, door-posts, sills, lintels, side-posts and doors. The selection of timber for crucks in particular was vitally important. Selecting a branch of the correct angle, the timber was then split to produce a matching pair, the branch of the tree usually producing the base of the cruck in the building.

Sacred groves in the Celtic world were referred to as *nemeton* which survives primarily as place names and inscriptions. The depiction of Mars Lucretius and Nemetona, the Celtic Goddess of trees, joy, fairies, magic, luck and nature, is recorded in a Roman-era inscription from Bath. Place names include Nymet or Nympton in Devon as well as Vernemton in Nottinghamshire and the Nevet Forest in Brittany. Woods were depicted as dark places frequented by brigands. During the Edwardian conquest of Wales in the late 13th century, landowners were required to clear and maintain woodland near major routeways to reduce the likelihood of attack by Welsh rebels. A royal writ issued in 1284 to “*Geoffrey Clement and brother Madoc, a lay-brother of Strata Florida (Abbey). Appointment to fell the groves*



*(nemora) about the frequented roads in the woods (boscis) and to enlarge the passes through those woods in county Cardigan, as they shall see fit for the security of travellers by the counsel of lawful men of those parts, as the king considers that damages and perils may threaten men passing through divers places within that county unless the groves about the roads be felled as above”* (Lyte et al. 1912: 293). Although disguised as an instruction to protect travellers from ambush, this was clearly an ideological act regarding the destruction of significant Celtic spiritual groves.

The symbolic nature of trees and use of their timber is evident over a longer dureen in this region. The Strata Florida manikin was first recorded in 1903 and was initially dismissed as an imported North American figure. Subsequent analysis (van der Sanden & Turner, 2004) has shown that the 12cm high wooden figure is in fact made from the wood of a mature British box tree and was made around 2000 years ago. In parallel with known Irish examples, these were routinely deposited in significant wetland places as part of a late Prehistoric ritual practice of a kind practised across northern Europe. The Strata Florida manikin has a hole drilled through the pubic region, presumably for a phallus and virility is reflected in the use of an evergreen species. Similar properties are ascribed to large individual yew trees growing in sacred places. Absurd claims of great antiquity must be challenged however. The majority of ancient trees are hollow and don't have more than several hundred surviving annual growth rings. Yew trees are an intrinsic part of the Strata Florida story. A large yew adjacent to the parish church on the site of the former Cistercian abbey is celebrated as the burial site of the famous 14<sup>th</sup> century poet Dafydd ap Gwilym, and it is interesting to note that in the latter 16<sup>th</sup> century there were a remarkable thirty nine yew trees in the abbey's churchyard (Toulmin-Smith 1906). The relationship of this major monastic site with its adjacent Cors Caron raised bog – one of the largest in the country - is significant and the spiritual relevance of the wooded and wetland landscape continued well into modern times where a number of holy wells were, and are, still in use. It evidently suited the 19<sup>th</sup> century gentry to engage with this narrative and the Powell family first exhibited the Nanteos Cup in 1878. Claimed as the Holy Grail, apparently smuggled to Strata Florida by seven monks fleeing Glastonbury in order to hide the prized cup in deepest west Wales (Wood 2005). Carved from Wych Elm, the remnants of the medieval mazer bowl

retains miraculous healing powers and remains in the hands of descendants of the family today.

The remnants of three major Anglo Saxon woodlands situated between the rivers Welland, Nene and Ouse in Northamptonshire came to be known collectively as Rockingham forest during the medieval period. Extensive agricultural clearance resulted in 500 acres of assarts (woodland clearance) in Rushton during the late 13<sup>th</sup> century (Foard 2001:50). This coincided with increasingly intricate management patterns, specifically extensive charcoal production driven by an important local iron industry (ibid. 2001:41). In 1066 the largest Anglo-Saxon tracts were attached to royal manors and each manor or townships' association with woodland was assured. Holdings extended from agricultural into the woodland zone, where this was not achieved, detached sections of forest were allocated (ibid: 44). Woodland in this, as in many regions, lay on the least productive agricultural lands but should not be regarded as a marginal resource: it was effectively managed in competition with arable agriculture (ibid: 50). The Abbot's woods in Oundle permitted the rector to cut the timber though areas which were to be enclosed to encourage subsequent regrowth. Coppicing is again mentioned in 1547 when coppices were to be fenced with hedge and ditch with fences to be constructed of timber cut from the forest. Keepers were employed to maintain the fences and protect against deer in a seven year cycle (ibid: 55). Soilmarks in the area surrounding nearby Geddington Chase suggest a long and complex history of coppicing in this region. Common rights in many areas persisted and underwood was often grazed as wood pasture. But afforestation and emparkment saw the extinguishment of these rights and the process of enclosure and removal of common rights continued into the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

These types of clearance and management systems had a clear impact on settlement. Nucleated settlement was initially concentrated on areas of already open fields. The irregular pattern of such holdings throughout Rockingham Forest shows that clearance continued to focus on these settlements resulting in growth not the generation of new settlements. Clearance was either piecemeal encroachment by free or villein tenants creating hedged enclosures held in severalty or the assarting of larger areas by a tenant under licence from a lord (ibid:61) and some of these were managed from a new isolated settlement within the newly cleared area - away from the existing

village. This pattern of isolated farmsteads is unusual and usually attributed to the woodland zone of north Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire. This dispersed pattern seems to suggest a fragmented manorial structure and demonstrates a different development of settlement and land-use compared to champion lands offering a contrast to the relatively well known intensive arable agriculture of champion with its very visible open fields and nucleated villages. These complex landscapes of wood and village underpin our notion of the British landscape.

Accelerating material and scientific discovery in the post-medieval period began to develop concepts of morality and self-improvement – ‘man’ was in charge and nature was to be tamed and not feared. Change was inevitable and this was a good thing. Under a stable, but arguably corrupt Whig government, and as part of an intensified industrialisation, a new and wealthy upper-middle class began to develop from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Robert Walpole as prime minister seems to have heralded new concepts of capitalism and though ‘improvement’ heralded a new welfare system – the abolition of slavery and a general social reform, a kind of patronising benevolence was turned towards the landless, the working class peasant – the ‘poor’. It was a moral and ethical responsibility to improve the lot of the peasant farmer and estate farms were often staged, prettified and ornamented. The movers and shakers of the day were important Whig sympathisers, who saw themselves as liberal and tolerant. Though traditional in one sense, novel aspects of agricultural innovation and intensification were widespread. They were the epitome of the landed gentry and opened marginal new lands for cultivation and experimented with new breeding stock. They also pictured themselves as the heirs to democracy, and classical influences from Greek and Roman architecture emerged heralding the new Palladian style of architecture and landscape improvement. Ancient woodland was prized as much as an Arcadian classical ruin. Individual veteran trees provided a suitable framework for naturalised, polite Brownian parkland and acted as markers on the landscape, perhaps referring to an imagined memory.

As part of a growing trend, commentators of the day began to critique the restrictive geometries of the past. In 1709, the third Earl of Shrewsbury noted “...*the growing passion in me for things of a natural kind: where neither art nor the conceit or caprice of man has spoil’d their genuine order*” (Chambers 1993:50), and in 1731,

Alexander Pope urged us not to forget nature but to “*consult the genius of the place in all*” (Williamson 19\_95:48). This was part of a new way of thinking – characterised earlier perhaps best by the work of Thomas Aquinas. He was interested in motion and movement and embodied the view that everything had *potential* and *purpose*. It became *de rigueur* to measure, observe, weigh and experiment. Great voyages and discoveries begun in the sixteenth centuries, continued and encouraged innovations in cartography and collection. New medicinal plants and fruits were welcomed and the walled kitchen garden at East Turnbull in 1696 in Berkshire contained over 450 fruit trees with 90 varieties of apples, pears, peaches, nectarines, apricots and quince. Although a walled garden was hidden from view and was not a pleasure garden the food was served to a lord’s guests and the new varieties signalled his status. The medieval deer park was an economic resource but late in this period we see it moving closer to the country house. As it always had been, land was power and although the economic and aesthetic portions of an estate were still essentially separate, the elite were being drawn closer to the house, while a variety of environments and landscapes were increasingly being made available for consumption. The aristocracy remained obsessed with killing and planting.

Herefordshire had particular significance in the history of landscape design. Both Richard Payne Knight (1750-1825) and Uvedale Price (1747-1829) were born here. For Gilpin the scenery from Kyrle’s Prospect was amusing but not of the ‘proper’ picturesque. For him the purely natural was not enough and he preferred his landscape to be accompanied by the wilder aspects of nature (that is, those usually supplied by ‘man’). He may then have approved of nature’s invasion of the domain of ‘man’ when due to suckering, sizeable elm trees were seen growing inside the adjacent church of St Mary’s during the 19th century (Mabey 1998:101).

Kilpeck Church stands on the probable site of an earlier Saxon church – the name referring to the *Kil*, or cell of St Pedic. Formerly within the Welsh kingdom of Ergyng, a classic planned castle, church and village was constructed by William Fitz Norman whose son Hugh built the remarkable Romanesque church around 1140. Hugh was Keeper of the King’s Forests, a title of great prestige, and the Forest of Kilpeck was one of four alongside the forests of Acornbury and

Haywood that collectively once formed a larger single unit (James 1990:72). The architectural rhetoric is distinct to this region of Herefordshire, enough to be named a 'school' but attention may be drawn to the Green Man – often described as a truly pagan figure associated with the fusion of man and the green world of nature. Gilpin's *Remarks on Forest Scenery* illustrated the English Greenwood as the seat of English Liberty (Schama 1995:137); "*the essential England-not just the abode of ancient oaks and wild ponies but the seat of English liberty and its long resistance to despotism*" (ibid). The private hunting reserves of the Marcher lords were condemned by Orderic Vitalis who wrote that "*the Conqueror took away much land from God and men and converted it for the use of wild beasts and the sport of his dogs for which he demolished thirty-six churches and exterminated the inhabitants*" (ibid:140). By the 19th century the English Greenwood had entered the consciousness as a place of Arcadian sylvia where a pre-Norman tyranny of lord and peasant coexisting in a pre-feudal reciprocity survived.

Schama's assertion that a quintessentially 'English' notion of landscape based on medieval notions of free access to woodland is echoed by Mabey who states that "*our ideal wood is green and snug, light and roomy, with a few secret glades and dark corners to add a hint of romance, but not so big that we cannot find our way out*" (Mabey 1998:179). The Green Man, or 'foliate head' can be traced back as far as the 5<sup>th</sup> century but flourished mainly as church decoration in the 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries where leaves may be representative of the sins of the flesh in a Christian context (Hall 2001:179). The principal context for the Green Man is mainly ecclesiastical but this should not necessarily support the notion of a Green Man as a pagan 'convert'. The Green Man became popular in secular contexts from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards but perhaps drawing on rhetorics supplied, for example by the 14<sup>th</sup> century English poem, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* where the Green Man had a complex meaning (ibid:181). Associated perhaps with the medieval festival *Bringing in the May*, the Green Man as a mock king or queen figure was sometimes replaced with Robin Hood as a mysterious woodland figure. In Edinburgh in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries the Guild of Hammermen paid a minstrel and a standard bearer to bring back branches from the woods so as to bring

summer into the town, whilst in St. Andrews, the appointed summer 'king' was sent to hide in the woods before being sought out and brought home (ibid.).

The famous Royal Oak that concealed Charles II at Boscobel, Shropshire was part of the forest region that comprised nearby Cannock Chase (Stamper 2002:25) and contemporary sources indicate that during the 17<sup>th</sup> century it was still part of an active pollarding regime. One of the most common pub names in England, the 'Royal Oak' "*celebrates perceived concepts and definitions of nationhood and national character: steadfastness, loyalty and integrity*" (Stamper 2002:19). The unique dressing of the Abroure tree (a Black Poplar at Aston-on-Clun in Shropshire) with flags on 29<sup>th</sup> May is oft associated with Restoration Day or Royal Oak Day or Oak-Apple Day which commemorated the restoration of Charles II to the throne in 1660 and celebrations were marked by bell ringing and bonfires with the wearing of sprigs of oak (Box 2003: 18). Oak Apple day is also celebrated at Great Wishford and can be traced back as far as 1603. Traditional wood gathering rights at Grovely Forest are maintained annually on 29<sup>th</sup> March in Great Wishford and the rights to gather wood still remains and is exercised on 29 May by cutting oak boughs, wearing oak leaves or oak-apples, and shouting "Grovely, Grovely, and all Grovely" at the high altar in Salisbury Cathedral to retain the claim to the custom (ibid. 23).

By the middle 18<sup>th</sup> century a polite society had formed amongst the upper-middle classes, aided by improving networks of transport and increased mobility. Class and wealth distinctions became more blurred and new levels of social interaction formed. Instead of a wealthy landowner having limited 'up and down' (the class scale) relationships, a plateau of horizontal interactions between increasing numbers of people formed. These people built their estates around principle towns such as Bath, York and London (Ludlow), with easy access to society's resources. Ludlow's 'heritage' is based today on its medieval and post medieval timber-framed houses – an expression of wealth and power by a new middling-sort supported by a growing wool trade. The elaborate and closely framed façade of the Feathers Hotel expresses a particularly high degree of domination over the landscape – the almost excessive use of timber denoting wealth. The expression of this wealth and control was transferred

into the landscaped parklands of the surrounding countryside by the 17th and 18th centuries and this move from a feudal to capitalist society is discussed in terms of a ‘Georgianisation’ of space (Johnson 1996). New assembly rooms and societies formed alongside reputable trades such as surveyors, cartographers and horticulturalists – all literally redesigning the British landscape. Visiting the estates of one’s own contemporaries was a form of early tourism and established the cultural practice of the Grand Tour. A move against the simplicity of the Brownian landscape culminated in the picturesque controversy – Humphrey Repton being one of the main proponents of this debate. Although he saw himself as a successor to Brown his move to more aesthetically complex forms of landscape reflected society’s new mobility and their appreciation of the ‘wilder’ areas of the British countryside. Innovations in the industrial world seemed to parallel the arrival of a new nostalgia and Repton for example, advocated the use of ivy-clad ruins and decaying cottages creating a sense of melancholy. The different rhetorics and motifs used by medieval, Georgian and modern societies are apparent and intricately involved with façade and representation. The presentation of a landscape and its highlighted heritage ‘sites’ are all to do with ‘re’- presentation and use various themes to their own ends. Ancient woods are frequently compared with ancient monuments (Marren 1990:179) - the history of attitudes to, and use of Britain’s woodland ‘heritage’ is only a single strand that nevertheless gives us clues to the development of landscape as a concept into the modern period. There are deeper pasts that play into the narratives and psyche of the treescape.

As early as 1913, Reid identified former drowned landscapes in the form of submerged treescapes off the British coastline. Revealed now as forlorn stumps, visible only at low tide. The North Sea Doggerland was not mere a prehistoric land bridge but represented a rich and diverse range of habitats and resources that would have proved attractive to hunter-gatherer-fisher groups before the last Ice Age. Reid deduced that once-dry land had been inundated by past sea level rise and the preserved footprints of prehistoric humans and animals are often revealed - preserved in the once soft sediments. Flood myths are universal to almost all cultures and the relationship to submerged treescapes is noteworthy. Catastrophic volcanic eruptions have been linked to the drowning of Atlantis. One of the key

settings is Santorini in the Aegean eastern Mediterranean, where the destructive eruption of the Thera volcano occurred in the Late Bronze Age. The subsequent decline of the Minoan culture centred on the Island of Crete 120 km to the south is well documented but this event is also thought to have had significant global effects on climate. Volcanic ash is dated through tephrochronology and layers can be seen in ice cores found in Greenland. The effect of dust clouds in the atmosphere across the northern hemisphere is recorded in tree growth and individual tree rings in ancient Bristlecone pine trees in the White Mountains of California (see Baillie for eg 1995) and have allowed more precise dating of the Thera eruption. That this event must have influenced Greek myth is of no doubt and many place the origin of the Atlantis myth to this precise episode although the dating gives pause to some who challenge this interpretation. Vitaliano suggests that the Atlantis story may be no more than “*a fiction made up by Plato to prove a philosophical point*” (2007: 4). Baillie (1999) has identified other narrow tree ring episodes and linked them to other climatic and cosmological catastrophes such as comets and meteor strikes. His close dating of these events using tree ring science has allowed him to link to specific famine and plagues documented in the Old Testament. He also sees a great influence on myth and folklore. The catastrophic cold climatic event of c. 540 AD saw population decrease – a time of great hardship across northern Europe. He makes a compelling argument for these types of events as explanation for the creation of mythical figures such as Beowulf, Grendel, Merlin and Arthur. The late 12th-century chronicler, Gerald of Wales, noted a great storm that stripped the sand from Newgale beach in Pembrokeshire, exposing prehistoric submerged forests which he interpreted as evidence perhaps of the Biblical flood (Colt-Hoare 1976). It is said that if you listen carefully on the shores of Cardigan Bay you can hear the bells of the drowned church of Cantre'r Gwaelod ringing a sad lament beneath the waves. First told in the 13<sup>th</sup> century Black Book of Carmarthen as the drowned land of Maes Gwyddno – the ‘Welsh Atlantis’: Protected from inundation by floodgates, this coastal kingdom was forever lost to the sea – flooded when the hapless gate-keeper, Seithenyn, in a drunken stupor forgot to close the flood gates (NLW Peniarth MS 1). Other versions of the myth implicate the fairy priestess, Mererid. Similar tales recount loss of lands at Helig ap Glanawg in the Conwy estuary; the drowning of the Breton city of Ys again associated with drunkenness, catastrophic breaching of sea



defences and mournful under-sea church bells; and the drowned site of the final battle between Arthur and Mordred at Lyonesse, the lost land bridge between Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

Some of these tales may be linked to actual past events of cataclysmic coastal flooding such as the great tidal flood recorded by contemporary chronicles in AD 1099, an event that also swamped the banks of the Thames and brought great sand banks into coastal low-lying Kent. Others may have been inspired by observation of submerged forests, exposed by contemporary coastal storms, but dating to more ancient prehistoric times. Remarkably, there is ample archaeological evidence for significant treescapes that once grew on dry land – now submerged, not least the astonishing submerged forest visible at Borth on the west Wales coast, radiocarbon-dated to the Neolithic period. The recent discovery of prehistoric animal and human footprints along with heat-cracked stones from a cooking hearth complements the discovery of a wattled trackway by the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments Wales. The work of Professor Martin Bell and others (eg Bell 2007 and 2013) in the Severn Estuary has also emphasised the seasonal exploitation of a rich mosaic of coastal wetland resources since the Middle Stone Age period.

Flood has long been part of human heritage and myth, used as symbolic narrative – often of a vengeful god's retribution upon an undeserving civilization. The metaphor is one of an act of cleansing or purification. But in the Welsh versions of the flood tradition we can see something more. The catastrophe is caused by delinquency, by those who have failed in their duty to keep the sea out, to prevent the loss of life and property. The motif is one of blame, guilt, and loss. This is reinforced and given legitimacy by linking mythical characters to historic individuals, so the historic 6th-century poet Taliesin was reputedly adopted by the mythical Elffin, son of Gwyddno Garanhir, of the sunken land. Flooding is the fault of humans, we have brought it upon ourselves.

In medieval times, floods of the day and those revealed by prehistoric submerged forests were used as metaphors, moral tales linked to ungodliness and catastrophe. Today, science provides us with new insights. Catastrophic coastal change may be an intrinsic part of the earth system, potentially aggravated by our contamination of it. Are the floods of today a parable of our moral delinquency, the result of our profligate, unsustainable misuse of the earth's resources? Trees and woodland too then, as part of a British landscape are at once, familiar and 'other': both safe and dangerous. If trees are active agents that shape humans as much as humans shape them (Jones and Cloke 2002:7) surely the agency of woodland, grove, forest and all treescapes have the power to shape human agency and behaviours.

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