Living in a Magical World
Volume Three

Learning from the Ancestors

Beatrice Walditch

In almost every traditional culture throughout the world, including Europe until comparatively recent times, there have been ways of 'honouring' at least some of the dead, those who were regarded as key founders and ancestors. *Learning from the Ancestors* shows how such traditional ways of thinking – and doing – are of benefit in the modern Western world.

Beatrice Walditch mostly explores the ancestors of England, although also shows how similar ideas and concepts are found elsewhere in Britain and beyond. She explains how 'listening' and learning from the ancestors should be done in a ritual manner, not necessarily in ways which would be appropriate in other situations.

Learning from the Ancestors is the third book in the Living in a Magical World series. These books will challenge you to recognise the traditional magic still alive in modern society, and empower you with a variety of skills and insights.

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You Don't Just Drink It!
What you need to know – and do – before drinking mead

Listening to the Stones
(Volume One of the Living in a Magical World series)

Knowing Your Guardians
(Volume Two of the Living in a Magical World series)

Living in a Magical World:

Volume Three

Learning from the Ancestors

Beatrice Walditch

Heart of Albion

Learning from the Ancestors

Beatrice Walditch

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In this world, no one can pin me down.
For I reside just as much among the dead, as
among those not yet born. A little closer
to creation than is usual, and yet still,
much too far away.

Paul Klee

The path to the ancestors. This clump of trees is growing over a Bronze Age burial mound near Avebury, Wiltshire.

Introduction

In *Listening to the Stones*, the first volume of *Living in a Magical World* series, I introduced a number of ideas about using all our senses – not just hearing – to 'listen' to megaliths and indeed a wide spectrum of 'other-than-human persons'. In the second volume, *Knowing Your Guardians* I summarised the need for protective guardians, how to 'meet' them in your own locality, and how to make and 'charge' a variety of protective amulets to wear or otherwise carry with you.

This book assumes you have not merely read both but also put into practice the key ideas. Don't go blundering off without learning to listen or without having some suitable guardians!

My ideas about ancestors have not been influenced by Spiritualism and have nothing to do with the séances and 'mediums' of that movement. My idea of ancestors is an essentially anonymous one – the ancestors who lived so long ago that you never knew them, perhaps not even their names. So this book has little or nothing to offer those grieving for recently-deceased relatives.

I have also shied away from the tricky topic of ancestral remains displayed or stored in museums. Whether or not you consider that human remains should be held in museums, by the time you get to the end of this book you will have the ability to honour and perhaps even learn from them in ways which fit in with your overall attitude. Instead I deal with the much greater number of ancestors who still remain where they were interred, in places which are more convivial than any museum.

The opening sections of this book start with the present day and steadily work back to older ancestors of Britain generally and, more often, England specifically. If these are not your ancestral lands then feel free to adapt my examples accordingly. This is a book which is intended to inspire you, not to be read as a list of instructions. There are vastly more ideas between the lines than on them.

Learning from the elders

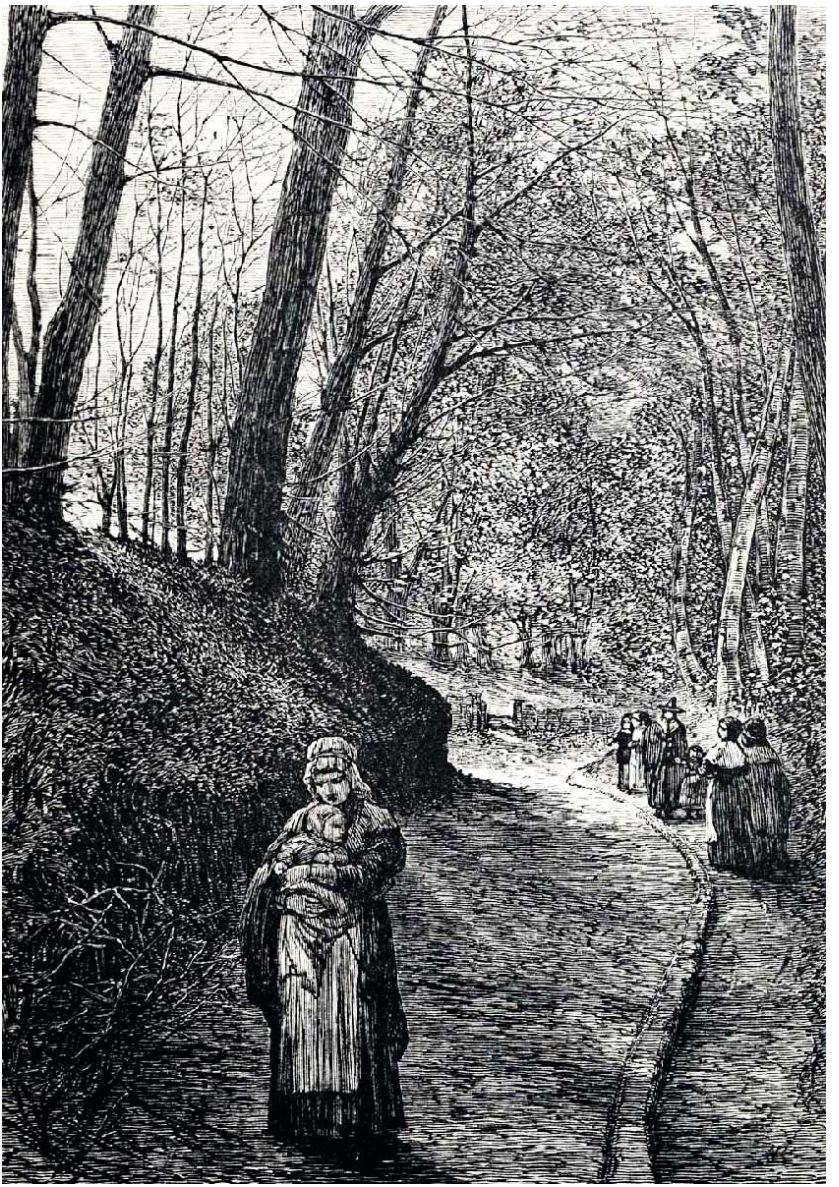
Traditional people quite naturally turn to their ancestors for advice because these are the people who, when alive, they had asked for guidance. Only during recent decades have people in the Western world lost touch with the idea of older people knowing more – and, more importantly, understanding better – than their children or grandchildren. We now live in an age where few appreciate that knowledge is not understanding and understanding is not wisdom. Instead opinions are passed off as facts – especially by politicians, 'media consultants' and the whole shebang of professional shucksters.

Increasingly Western society regards the past as old fashioned or defunct. So much as the past is thought to have any value it is little more than nostalgia – something which has a place only in museums, re-enactment groups and such like, or to be bought as faux replicas. For most people the past has become little more than 'twee', and the people who lived in the past all-but invisible apart from a few celebrity individuals who stand in for the many dozens or hundreds of people like them. The past is something to be consumed by buying entrance tickets or souvenirs, while the people of the past and their ways of thinking are generally considered irrelevant to the present.

Western people often want to move on, to put problems behind them. Traditional societies have no such concepts – all of life is immersed in tradition, where parents and grandparents are revered because they carry that tradition through to the present day. Revered in life, they continue to be revered after death too.

This book sees the present day through this same traditional perspective, so life in present day England is the successor to innumerable changes which make up an unbroken tradition back to Anglo-Saxon times and before. The people who carried that tradition are the ancestors whom I have in mind, although I realise they may not necessarily be your ancestors.

There is the more literal sense of ancestry which we all know but generally ignore. Each of us is the outcome of an unbroken chain of mothers and fathers. Many of us are part of a chain which continues forward into at least the next generation and maybe beyond. Our



The lives of people in the past have long been regarded nostalgically. This illustration was drawn in 1878 for an edition of Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter *(first published 1850 but set in mid-seventeenth century Boston).*

appearance and some of our mannerisms are shared with our biological parents and our offspring. More especially our conscious ideas and, above all, our unconscious assumptions, are carried between the generations too.

Remember too that we actually began life in our maternal grandmother's bodies. Think about it – a baby girl at birth has tiny ovaries, inside which are all the cells which will emerge as eggs after she reaches adolescence. All those cells grew while in the womb. One of those cells your grandmother 'grew' became you…

Becoming your own grandparents

Back in the mid-1980s, when modern paganism had yet to evolve into the more diverse practices we now associate with the term, most people thought that any 'indigenous traditions' in the British Isles – especially in England – had been either lost or corrupted. So, whereas in traditional societies traditions were maintained and passed on by the older generation, in Britain we had, in a sense, to become our own 'grandfathers' and 'grandmothers'.

Ironically, those of us who were active in the mid-80s are now old enough to be grandparents! But that is to miss the point. Sometime between then and now an ever-widening range of 'traditions' have been invented. Most of the people following these traditions think of themselves as pagan, although several would deem themselves to be more 'occult' than pagan, while some distance themselves from either term or come up with such neologisms as 'alternative pagan'. Be that as it may, my remarks span all such practitioners.

The claimed lack of an indigenous tradition has been partially undermined. Firstly, by extensive research into what we do know about British traditions. Secondly, by an increased willingness for at least some of those who indeed are indigenous traditional bearers to engage with and teach people in modern paganism – although they rarely, if ever, put themselves in any sort of spotlight. Just because you don't know such people doesn't mean they don't exist…

Part of the problem for people who really do have a family tradition is that one of the myths created by modern pagan 'experts' is that there is no 'hereditary witchcraft' left in Britain. Well, as I've just written it, that is true. These people would not think of themselves as witches or practising witchcraft. But that is a long way from saying that there is not an hereditary tradition which 'does its stuff'. Simply that such people don't dress up in robes every six weeks and call the quarters and so forth. Indeed, by and large, they are quite happy that other people don't believe they exist, as it stops the foolhardy from seeking them out.

In case you are wondering, I am not one of those indigenous tradition bearers. I am much more one of the 80s folk who 'became their own grandparents'. The *Living in a Magical World* series is my way of 'telling the grandchildren' about the tradition I have partly discovered from historical researchers, by talking to those who really are part of a tradition, and 'listening' to special places. In small part, I have used my intuition and imagination to fill the gaps. This 'tradition' of mine is informed by modern paganism, but differs greatly from the beliefs and practices of most pagans. I have learnt from ceremonial magicians, although I have never been a member of any such group. Neither am I attempting to 're-enact' pre-conversion paganism – although I have made every attempt to understand what people were doing and thinking before missionaries in Anglo-Saxon England began the slow process of changing what folk thought religion should be. If your life isn't complete without a neat label on things, then pin 'alternative pagan' on me. But you'll be far better off if you get over the need to obsessively 'pin down' people and their ideas.

All my known ancestors have Anglo-Saxon surnames and my male lineage is rooted in Staffordshire. However in all likelihood some of my more distant female ancestors may not have been born in England – not least because Staffordshire is close to the Welsh borders. Nevertheless I think of my ancestral tradition as English. So I make no apologies for this book being mostly about English history and places – just as I would not expect anyone with, say, Irish, Scottish or Welsh ancestry to feel a need to apologise for being proud of their ancestry. If your identity is not as English as mine, my hope is to inspire you to look in a fresh way at what you can learn from your ancestors.

The ancestors of early Christianity

The history of Christianity in Britain can be reduced to two key events. First, there was the conversion from paganism. Conventionally, historians claim this happened during the seventh century but in reality the process seems to straddle several centuries either side, depending on which part of the British Isles. Indeed, much of what we think of a 'typical' medieval Christianity only arises from the twelfth century onwards. Secondly, there was the Reformation. In England this took place in the sixteenth century, and Wales and Scotland largely went 'non-conformist' soon after, although in Ireland religious differences combined with disastrous political policies created complex social scenarios which still overshadow the doctrinal distinctions between Catholics and Protestants.

The slow initial conversion, the 're-invention' of doctrine from the twelfth century, and the Reformation introduced three profound changes in doctrine. Well, *eventually*, these process led to changes in doctrine. Initially it was essentially 'business as usual', with just a few changes to what was said and why it was said. The underlying 'worldview', at least for the laity, took several generations to adapt.

As described in *Knowing Your Guardians,* before the conversion there were any number of local protective deities. Academics call them *'genii loci'* or 'tutelary spirits' and so forth. Their names would be legion as each local deity would have its own name. In Wales and England they seem to have been collectively referred to as *Y Mamau* or *Modor* ('The Mothers') – although male deities, such as Ing, are sometimes mentioned too. In Old Irish they were called *érlam*.

In this pre-conversion worldview only priests could address the major deities directly. It was risky business, and that's why people were prepared to pay, in some way, for the priests' services. The head of the clan would happily allow a 'ritual specialist' to take the lead in organising the bigger annual rites. But people did not always go to the priest to ask for the help of the gods. They asked their local or household deity to intercede on their behalf. By bribing the local protective spirit with an offering she – or he – would ask the help of the 'big' deities, the ones with real powers.

Statues of saints (most probably the Apostles) carved about 1000 CE inside the church of Breedon on the Hill, Leicestershire.

After the conversion, at least until the Reformation, only the clergy could address the Holy Trinity. After conversion the early Anglo-Saxon kings appointed a bishop to head up the rites and feasts of the church – which is why bishops' dioceses seemingly mimic the extent of an early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms (although much has changed since, and these days only the Diocese of Worcester still matches, more or less, the kingdom of the Hwicca). But the priest was not expected to intercede on behalf of each and every person in his flock. The laity could ask the local saints to intercede on their behalf. Local saints had almost always been priests when alive. They were not thought of as dead, but rather as still living. Except they now lived in Heaven, keeping close company with Christ, the apostles and a host of other saints and angelic beings. In other words, in exactly the right place to 'put in a good word' on behalf of the person seeking their assistance. In exchange, that person would offer a candle or make a small offering to the church.

Spot the difference between pre-conversion local spirit-deities and post-conversion saints? No, I can't either. More to the point, after the conversion in Ireland, the word *érlam* changed from meaning a pagan local deity to referring to a local saint. A case of 'Meet the new boss, same as the old boss… '

What the ancestors did

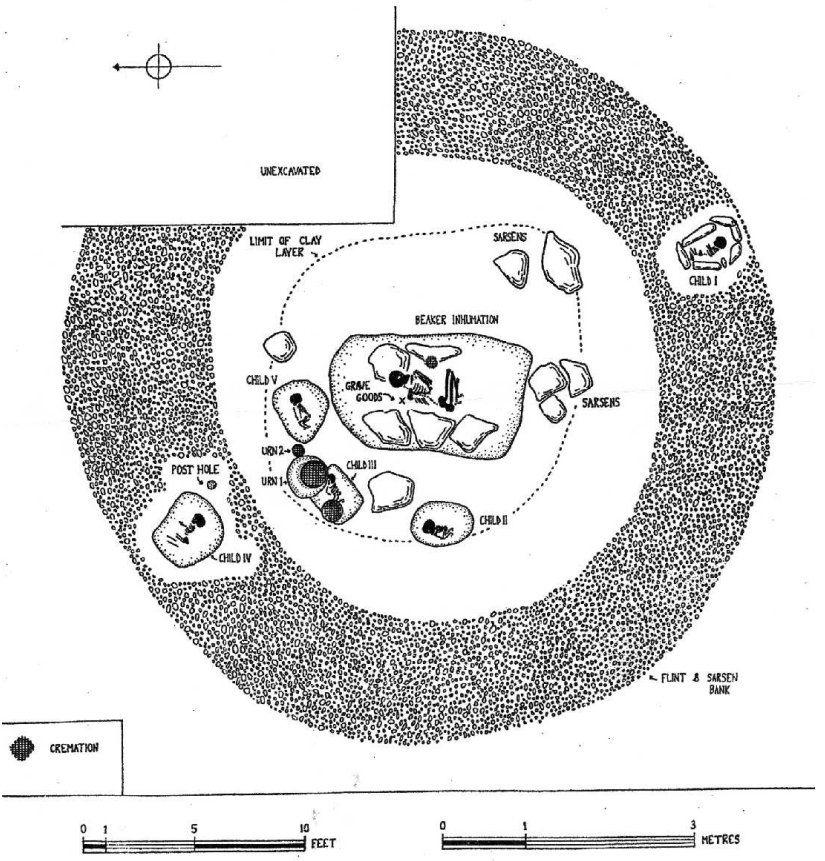
There are many other examples of such continuity in early Christianity. Historians have puzzled over the apparent lack of evidence for what the early missionaries in northern Europe and the British Isles were converting people *from*. The answer seems to be along the lines that there was nothing fundamentally different between what on before the conversion and during several centuries of early Christianity. Yes, the clergy had some different beliefs. But little of that was communicated to the laity until the tenth century onwards. By and large the evidence for 'paganism' in northern Europe is to be found in what early Christians *did*. In other words they kept on doing what they'd done before, even if the words and 'reasons' – the ideologies and doctrines – steadily shifted.

Something did change at the Reformation. Christians began to believe that everyone had 'direct access' to God or Jesus, and personal prayers began to be addressed to them. This is still the unchallenged assumption of most modern day pagans – they can talk direct to any of the major deities. Such a notion is alien to Catholic and Orthodox Christians, as it is to all pre-Christian religions.

Such bare bones overviews of the past can seem rather dry and dusty. Instead I want to put some flesh back on the past by looking at some specific aspects. My aim is not simply to outline the history but, more importantly, try to understand how my ancestors – and maybe yours too – thought about their ancestors.

Where did the ancestors live?

Where were these ancestors? Clearly not in churchyards as these were still in the future. But there were cemeteries in Anglo-Saxon times. Some of these contained inhumations, others contained created remains (usually in specially decorated pottery vessels) while just a few cemeteries contain both inhumations and cremations. Furthermore, other human remains from this era are found in small groups of one to about half a dozen inhumations. And a small proportion of the



The plan of the burials and cremations in one of the Bronze Age burial mounds on Overton Hill near Avebury, Wiltshire. These barrows are shown in a photograph on the next page.

population were buried under, on the sides of or near to burial mounds. Sometimes such mounds were created specially but, at least as often, Bronze Age mounds – already about 1,500 years old – were 'adopted'.

If nothing else this variety of burial practices tells us that Anglo-Saxon people had a considerable range of ideas about the most appropriate way to be buried. Indeed, only in the last 150 years have British people had anything like as many options.

Often these burials, whether in cemeteries or smaller groups, were on or near places that we can still recognises as boundaries. Presumably at

Part if a group of Bronze Age burial mounds on Overton Hill near Avebury, Wiltshire.

least some of the other burials were at places where a boundary can no longer be recognised. As I discussed in some detail in the second book in this series, boundaries are exactly the places where guardians are needed.

In *Knowing Your Guardians* I discuss such boundary-protecting deities as Hecate, Hermes, Artemis and Toutatis. In the early Christian era St James seems to have taken on such responsibilities, before becoming better-known as the patron saint of pilgrims (who pass through many boundaries on their pilgrmiages).

In the pagan Anglo-Saxon period there seems little evidence for major deities being associated with boundaries. Seemingly they were protected by local spirit-deity guardians. Indeed all the evidence suggests that dead ancestors protected the living. In the Avebury area of Wiltshire the evidence is convincing but there is no reason to suppose this is a local anomaly – the evidence elsewhere in England, while less clear, suggests that the founders of settlements (whose names often survive in place-names with endings such as –ham and –ton, and sometimes as –ingham or –ington) were regarded as fierce and warlike even in death. If they hadn't been fierce and warlike while alive then they simply wouldn't have been the leaders of such a kin group, as a more aggressive rival would have taken them out. After death, they were still regarded as exemplary guardians.

The special ancestors

Most Anglo-Saxon burials and cemeteries are now invisible because the ground has since been levelled. Most of what we know about such graves was discovered accidentally during gravel extraction or at the start of building activities. The exceptions were always exceptional – the small minority of Anglo-Saxons who were buried under mounds.

Why were only some Anglo-Saxons buried under mounds? The answer is probably the same as why only some English people are buried in Westminster Abbey today. In other words, status. The quality and quantity of the items buried with these people is almost always way

This high-status female Anglo-Saxon burial from the late fifth century CE was discovered near Glen Parva, Leicestershire, in 1866. Grave goods included a glass cup, a necklace of twenty-eight glass beads, a piece of faceted quartz (probably used as a spindle whorl, shown bottom right of this photograph, several bronze rings and brooches, and a chatelaine *or belt-hanger of keys (perhaps symbolic rather than practical) shown in this photograph, and two pieces of bone, probably from a knife handle.*

The 'dragon' climbing up the face of this Anglo-Saxon cross-shaft at Sproxton, Leicestershire, may be the successor to wyrms *which decorated the* becuns *on burial mounds a few generations earlier.*

above the normal. Even young children buried alongside adults in mounds may be accompanied by something unusual – such as a boar's tooth or piece of quartz – probably worn as a pendant.

The problem with so-called 'grave goods' is we cannot always be sure that these items were habitually worn or carried before death. They may just have been already-old 'heirlooms' deemed suitable for adorning the corpse to give it the status the family thought appropriate. However, when we come across swords and shields, we can be fairly sure these were carried in life, as they clearly denote a warrior of the highest status. Similarly the *chatelaines* in a minority of female burials suggest they had a similarly exceptional status as these were symbolic or actual keys to the chests in which the family's wealth was stored. In all probability they were the daughters and wives of such sword-wielding warriors.

My early remark about only high-status Anglo-Saxons being buried in mounds should not be a taken to mean that such 'big wigs' were *only* buried under mounds. Burials with equally affluent grave goods have been found where there is no evidence of a mound. However, even in cemeteries where most people seem to have been buried in graves without a mound, those with highest standing have some sort of mound. In just a few cases of exceptionally good preservation, there is a post hole in the middle of the top of mound.

So it seems that most, maybe all, burial mounds had a carved wooden post as a grave marker. What the decoration looked like is an open question. Seemingly there may have been a *wyrm*, the precursor to later dragons and wyverns. All we know is that these posts were called *becuns*, a word which then meant 'sign' or 'signal' but became the modern word 'beacon'.

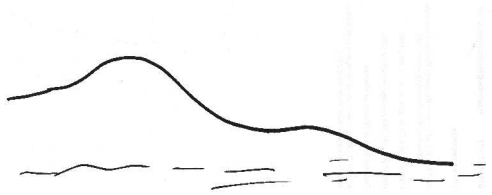
The protective *hohs*

If there is a village near you called Houghton or Hoton then this takes its name from the Anglo-Saxon word *hoh*. There is even a village in north Leicestershire called Hose, which is the plural of *hoh*. A *hoh* is a hill that looks like the heel of giant lying face down, although modern buildings almost always disguise this characteristic shape. But look carefully enough – the contours lines on an Ordnance Survey map will help – and you may well find the church is often situated on the eponymous 'heel'.

But *hohs* were not just distinctive-looking places. They were seemingly also on boundaries. Hoton and Hose in Leicestershire are on topographical boundaries and close to the border with Nottinghamshire. Other *hohs* are most definitely on boundaries – the boundary between land and sea. Think of Plymouth Hoe and Sutton Hoo (don't be confused by modern spellings).

These are exactly the same sorts of places where ancient Greeks would have erected shrines to Artemis. And the Leicestershire villages are associated with the area where examples of finger rings dedicated to Toutatis have been found (see *Knowing Your Guardians*). This does not prove that *hohs* were shrines to Toutatis or indeed any sort of shrine. Any evidence for such shrines would almost certainly have disappeared as the sites developed into churches, churchyards and houses.

The distinctive shape of *hoh* – at least before it was built over – is not simply a giant's heel. It is also a giant-sized 'burial mound'. More accurately then, a larger-than-life ancestral shrine, whether to a man whom legend has increased in stature, or to a spirit of place who was a *thyrs* or *eoten*, both Old English words for giants.



A hoh *is a hill which looks like the foot of a giant lying face-down.*

The church at Hoton, Leicesteershire, sits on the hoh *which gives the village its name. Not the traffic on the left dropping down the slope. This* hoh *overlooks the boundary between Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire.*

Perhaps coincidentally, the word *hoh* originally sounded like one of the Old English words for burial mounds, *hlaw* (discussed in the next section). The poems and riddles of the time reveal that Anglo-Saxons revelled in word play, so perhaps they too were aware of these similarities in sound and sense.

The protecting ancestors

Exceptionally we can guess the names of one of these ancestors. The richest of all the mound burials discovered in England is that at Sutton Hoo. Historical sources suggest this may have been the resting place of king Rædwald. Interestingly, it is at a place called 'Hoo' which derives from the Old English word *hoh* and which refers to a rounded promontory. If *hohs* were shrines to boundary-protecting deities then Sutton Hoo fits well. The various mounds there, including that of Rædwald or whoever, overlook the Deben estuary, making the ancestors buried there the protectors of the boundary between land and sea. And that boundary in eastern England was the one most threatened by raiders from northern Europe and Scandinavia, so most in need of all the protection going.

One of the Anglo-Saxon burial mounds at Sutton Hoo, Suffolk. This hoh *overlooks the Deben estuary and marks the boundary between land and sea.*

We might think it ironic that Rædwald, himself a Scandinavian 'raider', was guarding against similar attacks. But that irony would be entirely lost on his kin group, who now regarded this part of Suffolk as their own.

Further inland, burial mounds and their occupants still give their name to numerous latter villages. These are place-

Paul Mortimer dressed as Rædwald, presumed to be the king buried under on of the mounds at Sutton Hoo and accompanied by exceptionally high-status grave goods.

Tæppa's hlaw *in the churchyard at Taplow, Buckinghamshire.*

names ending in '-low' which comes from the Old English word *hlaw*, meaning 'burial mound'. In Derbyshire alone *hlaw* appears in over seventy place-names. Over thirty of these are known to have been places with burial mounds. At least eleven of the thirty are comprised of a personal name followed by *hlaw*, for example, Bassa at Baslow, Eatta at Atlow, Hucca at Hucklow and Tidi at Tidelow. Shropshire gives us Beslow, Longslow, Munslow, Onslow, Peplow, Purslow and Whittingslow while in Herefordshire is Wolferlow. All these appear to be men's names, presumably the earliest Anglo-Saxon settlers.

One of these mounds, at Taplow in Buckinghamshire, is now in the churchyard. When the mound was excavated exceptionally high-quality artefacts such as drinking horns were recovered. These would have been used by Tæppa in his hall.

Sadly most such mounds were ploughed away before antiquarians or archaeologists could properly investigate. But enough did survive to shed light on the role of the ancestors, at least in death if not in life.

The *weohs* of the *weoh don*

Sometime before the earliest church was built at Avebury (probably in the eighth century, but perhaps a little earlier or later) there were Anglo-Saxons living nearby. We know exactly where because the remains of their houses and workshops were discovered underneath what is now the main visitors car park. Immediately to the south of this settlement is Waden Hill. This was quite probably the central place – a 'cult centre' if you must – for the Canningas, whose territory stretched west past Calne, east past Marlborough, south to Devizes and north to the dramatic ridge over the Thames valley which runs between Wroughton and Chisledon.

Waden Hill does not, as has been said in print rather often, mean 'Woden's Hill'. It actually takes its name from *weoh don* – the hill (*don*) of the shrines or idols (*weohs*). Think of a roadside shrine in any Catholic country and there will be a statue. Without the statue there would not be a proper shrine. The apparent 'double sense' of *weoh* is clearly referring to something similar in concept if not in appearance.

In *Knowing Your Guardians* there is a section devoted to *weohs* and their big siblings, *stapols*. Both *weohs* and *stapols* seem to have been

The gently rounded shape of Waden Hill overlooks the Neolithic henge and stone circles at Avebury, Wiltshire.

Waden Hill seen from the present day visitors' car park at Avebury, Wiltshire – but once the site of an early Anglo-Saxon settlement.

intended to offer 'protection' – although perhaps only in part from the human realm.

Where were the *weohs* of Waden Hill? There are two clear options. One is that the word was used to refer to the double row of stones erected in the Neolithic which we call the West Kennett Avenue.

The late Neolithic double stone row known as the West Kennett Avenue runs parallel to the length of Waden Hill, seen here in the background.

Seen from the henge on a misty morning, the double row of stones can appear more like hooded mourners either side of the processional way.

Looking along the Avenue from the henge they can appear quite anthropomorphic. While we cannot be sure, presumably a good number were still upright in the Anglo-Saxon period.

The second option is that the Anglo-Saxons reused a Bronze Age barrow cemetery which once ran along the skyline of Waden Hill as seen from the early settlement. Sadly all these mounds were ploughed

Aerial photography has revealed the location of numerous prehistoric burial mounds on the summit of Waden Hill, although they have all been ploughed away. This reconstruction shows how these mounds would have 'sat' on the skyline of Waden Hill when seen from the Neolithic 'Avenue'.

away before antiquarians or archaeologists could investigate. But in dry summers crop marks reveal their presence. On the basis of digs at several nearby barrows (including those on the Ridgeway near the Sanctuary, clearly visible from the top of Waden Hill) then the Anglo-Saxons would have reused most of these already-existing mounds. And one of the funerary practices throughout England at that time was to place a wooden post in the summit of the mound, or *mund* in Old English. The posts were called *becuns*, meaning 'marker' although this became the modern word 'beacon'.

We have no idea what those *becuns* looked like, although in all probability they were carved. Nor do we know if they were thought of as *weohs*. But as these burials and their carved posts would dominate the southern skyline, while the stone row is merely at the foot of the eastern slope, then my guess is that Waden Hill takes its name from such *weoh munds*. But I am only guessing.

Altars not burial mounds

The words 'burial mound', 'barrow' and 'tumulus' have all been used at different times to describe these Bronze Age and Anglo-Saxon monuments, reflecting changes in nomenclature by antiquarians and archaeologists. Yet parish churches have vastly more burials in and around them than have ever been discovered under or near any burial mound. Yet we do not refer to churches as 'funerary chapels' or 'sepulchres'. Churches, despite all the burials, are not *primarily* about interring the dead. Churches are the 'house of God', numinous places, places to go to feel nearer to the Holy Trinity and (at least for Catholics) any number of intercessionary saints.

Perhaps we should refer to burial mounds as 'sacrificial altars' where offerings to the ancestors were made. The deal was a simple one. If the living looked after the ancestors with the traditional rites and offerings, then the dead would intercede with the gods on behalf of the living to make sure everything went as well as possible.

This seems a fairly sensible arrangement – and, as noted, not that far removed from the local saints of pre-Reformation Christianity interceding with Christ on behalf of anyone making an offering at their shrine. What is different is that such offerings to saints were not thought of as 'sacrifices'. But did the people performing rites at Scandinavian

'burial mounds' think of themselves as making 'sacrifices'? After all they were simply doing what had always been done, as this is what the ancestors would have expected. The offerings were gifts, not sacrifices. Perhaps we should be even more neutral in terminology and simply refer to these mounds as 'ancestral shrines', places to go to feel nearer to one's forebears.

Meeting the guardians

Cult centres such as Waden Hill would have been only one among many places with *weohs*. Everything about Germanic and Scandinavian religion suggests that each farmstead or home had their own protective deities. Some of these would have been male. But more commonly they would have been female, probably in threes. The people living at the side of the south-flowing seasonal watercourse which we know as the Winterbourne but changes name and direction just a few hundred yards to the south and becomes the east-flowing Kennet would have thought of themselves as living at the head of the Kennet valley. The local spirits of place, the tutelary deities, the *genii loci* – whatever modern day academic term you prefer – would to them have been the local manifestation of the Mothers.

Anachronistically, we might call them 'Our Ladies of Kennet'. Beyond that speculation lies only deeper and less reliable speculation. But we can draw upon Scandinavian sagas for a few clues as to how these Mothers might have incorporated into rituals. I want to look specifically at one rite – *útiseta*. This translates literally as 'out sitting' but has the sense of 'sitting out'. But not just any old sitting about outside. This is the Scandinavian counterpart to a New World 'vision quest', although the objective was not to meet some kind of shamanic power animal. The reason for Scandinavians sitting out seems to have been to 'meet the ancestors' so they could reveal the future. However there may have been other reasons which have not come down to us.

In various sagas two things are associated with the word *útiseta*. Firstly, it was something someone did on their own. Secondly, it was thought that anyone sitting out in this way was doing sorcery. However a closer reading of the texts reveals that *útiseta* was concerned with gaining knowledge or with prophecy – not with 'casting spells'. That knowledge had to be cajoled from the old gods. Bear in mind too,

This reliquary gives an indication of what early Christian shrines looked like.

by the time the sagas are being written down then Christian ideologies would deem divination to be sorcery.

The saga *Voluspa* describes an unnamed seeress who 'Alone she sat out when the Old One came, dreaded of the *aesir*'. The Old One is clearly Odin. The sagas also tell how Hallbjorn acquired the gift of poetry while sleeping out on the burial mound of a dead poet called Thorleifr.

Strictly there is no direct link between *útiseta* and protective deities. But I suspect this is simply because it would have been obvious and second-nature to actively seek the protection of the Mothers and any other local spirits of place before undertaking such a challenging and risky ritual. Sagas and the like rarely describe what would be obvious to the audience, instead they draw attention to the unusual or the contravention of custom.

A parallel is how every medieval pilgrim sought the blessing of his or her local priest before setting off, and then paid their respects at the numerous shrines to local saints as they passed – and especially at any shrines to St James and St Andrew, the patron saints of pilgrims and travellers. There are barely any written accounts of this, but we can infer that this was 'the done thing' for everyone, despite the lack of such accounts.

Another clue to the significance of mounds in early medieval thinking is the frequency with which they were thought to be haunted by the 'unquiet dead'. Similarly, early written references infer that the dead in mounds were associated with wisdom.

Indeed, when the leaders of local communities got together at so-called 'moots' – the origin of our word 'meeting' – they often chose sites with mounds. And, if there wasn't a burial mound in the right place, they'd create a mound anyway. Archaeologists have excavated a number of such mounds and discovered there never were any burials. It's as if the people at moots originally hoped to share in the wisdom of the dead buried under the 'moot mound' but the thinking shifted so that is was the mound rather than the burials which had the significance.

This practice of 'consulting' the dead did not die out with the introduction of Christianity. On the contrary, it evolved into a key aspect of piety – the veneration of saints' tombs. Most modern people find it hard to think of these shrines as 'heaven on earth'. But they were decorated with gold and gemstones and all the splendour that was expected of the after-life. Because shrines were betwixt-and-between heaven and earth, they were liminal places, places where the normal 'rules' did not always apply. So they were exactly where the saints could hear the prayers of the supplicants, where in turn the saints might speak back or even miracles might happen. I have already suggested that we should think of burial mounds more as ancestral shrines. Equally we should think of Christian shrines as an especially elaborate continuation of burial mounds.

Just as Hallbjorn acquired the gift of poetry while sleeping out on the burial mound of Thorleifr, so too Bede describes how Cædmon acquired the gift of poetry after fleeing from a party and spending time alone in a byre where he had a profound vision. Bede provides an explicitly Christian interpretation, *assuming* that Cædmon had a vision of Christ or the Virgin Mary. But in Bede's account Cædmon make no such recognition. Instead, Cædmon seems to be 'sitting out' in a way which, presumably, was well-established before the conversion era. There is no reason to suppose that Cædmon's byre was situated on a burial, but it provides clear evidence of indigenous 'vision questing'.

The 'exiled' goddess's lament

The Old English poem known to scholars as *The Wife's Lament* is conventionally thought to be the 'autobiography' of an exiled noblewoman. But the identity and even the status of that person are ambiguous.

Part of the seventh century Franks Casket with Hos on her mound to the left. The runes start herh os sitæþ, *'Here sits Os'. Most of the casket is in the British Museum but this panel is in the Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.*

The general mood of the poem is gloomy, evoking a strong sense of emptiness and loneliness. There is a reference to a ruined defensive site – both physically decayed and also evocative of a now-lost era. The woman is described as living in an 'earth cave' or an 'earth structure' – terms also used in *Beowulf* to describe the abode of the dragon – and, elsewhere in Old English literature, dragons are specifically stated to be the guardians of burial mounds.

'Here sits Os'.

Rather than an account of exile, the poem reads more convincingly as the first-person viewpoint of a dead woman in a burial mound. She describes 'my friends, loved while they lived, are in earth, possessed by the grave.' Or maybe not a woman but the goddess Hos. On the Franks Casket is the curious depiction of a human-like figure with a horse's head and hooves sitting on a small mound – perhaps intended to be seen as a burial mound. The runes around that panel of the casket start *herh os sitæþ*, 'Here sits Os'.

If this interpretation is correct, then the apparently human posthumous viewpoint of *The Wife's Lament* is not what it seems. It is a metaphor for a pagan deity 'exiled' by the christianisation of late Anglo-Saxon culture.

This would mean the poet is expressing the first-person viewpoint of a deity. And, bearing in mind how little Old English poetry has come down to us, we must assume that the so-called *Wife's Lament* is the sole survivor of a much more established literary tradition, one which has its roots deeply in the oral bardic traditions which preceded the literacy of the Church.

Hos also seems to below in the realm which Paul Klee described:

> In this world, no one can pin me down. For I reside just
> as much among the dead, as among those not yet born.
> A little closer to creation than is usual, and yet still,
> much too far away.

The Old Woman of Beare

There are parallels in Irish literature. The *Lament of the Old Woman of Beare* is one of saddest and most evocative of the medieval Irish tales. The oldest surviving versions may go back to the ninth century. The *Old Woman of Beare* is also known as 'the Hag of Beare, a more literal translation of the Irish *An Cailleach Bhéara*. She seemingly mourns for life and youth, now in her past. The evocative language of *An Cailleach Bhéara* has much in common with *The Wife's Lament*. Whether or not we should consider the later versions of *An Cailleach Bhéara* to be successors of a ninth century euhemerisation of a pre-Christian goddess must remain an open question. The whole poem is a remarkably moving image of old age. This translation into English is by Anthony Weir.

My life is ebbing: let it drain -
unlike the sea which flows again,
The boiling, unbegotten sea.
I whose gown was always new
am now so pitifully thin
that this old shift will outlive me.
They want only money now.
When I was young, love was what
I wanted – and so richly got.
People then were generous,
and in return they asked a lot.
They ask and give so little now.
I had chariots and horses then,
given by admiring kings.
I drank mead and wine with them.
Now among old onion-skins
of withered women I drink whey,
myself a withered onion-skin.
My hands are bony now, and thin;
once they plied their loving trade
upon the bodies of great kings.
My hands are bony, wasted things,
unfit to stroke an old man's head,
much less a young man's glowing skin
Young girls are happy in the Spring,
but I am sad and worse than sad,
for I'm an old and useless thing.
Nobody round me is glad;
My hair is grey and going thin.
My veil conceals what is well hid.
I once had bright cloth on my head
and went with kings – now I dread
the going to the king of kings.

The winter winds ravish the sea.
No nobleman will visit me -
no, not even a slave will come.
It's long ago I sailed the sea
of youth and beauty wantonly.
Now my Passion too has gone.
Even in Summer I wear a shawl

It's many a day since I was warm.
The Spring of youth has turned to Fall.
Wintry age's smothering pall
is wrapping slowly round my limbs.
My hair's like lichen, my paps like galls.
I don't regret my lust and rage,
for even had I been demure
I still would wear the cloak of age.
The cloak that wooded hillsides wear
is beautiful; their foliage
is woven with eternal care.
I am old: the eyes that once
burned bright for men are now decayed:
the torch has burned out its sconce.
My life is ebbing; let it drain
unlike the sea which flows again,
the man-torn and tormented sea.
Flow and ebb: what the flow brings
the ebb soon takes away again
- the flow and the ebb following.
The flow and the ebb following:
the flow's joy and the ebb's pain,
the flow's honey, the ebb's sting.
The flow has not quite flooded me.
There is a recess still quite dry
though many were my company.
Well might Jesus come to me
in my recess - could I deny
a man my only hospitality?
A hand is laid upon them all
whose ebb always succeeds their flow,
whose rising sinks into their fall.
If my veiled and sunken eyes
could see more than their own ebb
there's nothing they would recognise.
Happy the island of the sea
where flow always comes after ebb:
What flow will follow ebb in me?
I am wretched. What was flow
is now all ebb. Ebbing I go.
After the Tide, the Undertow.

For reasons that will become clearer in the next volume in this series, *Everything is Change,* the recurrent sense of ebbing and flowing is a crucial insight into pre-conversion ways of thinking. Unlike modern ways of thinking about old age, the words of the Cailleach Bhéara offer much more understanding and wisdom.

Where to honour the ancestors

All this talk about burial mounds – or 'ancestral shrines' – does not mean that these are the only places where we might encounter ancestors. Only a small proportion of places have prehistoric burial mounds. But almost all have churchyards and cemeteries. Add to them war memorials, roadside 'shrines' to traffic accident victims, and so forth. Once you start to take note of places where the dead are buried or commemorated then the landscape of every village, town and city starts to take on a new level of significance.

Simply being aware that the dead are, in many places, never far away is an excellent start. This is a step or two short of 'honouring' them, but at least you are not totally ignoring them! As you go about your everyday business learn to be aware of the 'presence' of the dead in graveyards and on memorials. A long-distance journey not made by motorways and dual carriageways will take you through many towns and villages, with the cemeteries on the edge of the settlement (more accurately, on the edge when the cemetery was created) and the parish church near the historic centre. Just 'be aware', no more.

When walking I suggest you briefly pause to acknowledge the 'inhabitants' of burial grounds and those commemorated on memorials. When the need arises to walk into a churchyard or such like then pause at the gate. If, as is often the case, I am carrying a walking stick or staff, then I tap it three times on the ground. Otherwise just tapping my right foot is sufficient. Whatever you chose to do, make sure it's not unduly conspicuous and simply get into the habit of always doing it. No need for formal prayers or anything elaborate – just 'spare a thought' for those who have gone before you.

I live next to the parish churchyard so have reason to pass through on my way to or from a variety of prosaic places on the far side. But most people only enter a cemetery for funerals or to place floral tributes on the graves of relatives or close friends. I will not presume to suggest

The 'King's Barrows' to the north-east of Stonehenge, Wiltshire. Each mound was built over the remains of several people, presumably related to each other. The different mounds probably span a greater number of generations than the burials in each one, but in all probability everyone buried here was either born in or married into a specific 'blood line'.

what you should – or should not – do regarding honouring the graves of people you know, as I am sure just doing 'what comes naturally' is exactly right for you. But as you walk about, mentally acknowledged the other people sharing that place. You may not know who they were, but nevertheless they were just as much people as the ones you know in life.

Until five years ago I had never lived within about fifty miles of the churchyard near to my current home. So the names on the gravestones are not of friends, but of strangers. In a few cases I know surviving relatives – if only because we chat as they tend the grave – but I can neither put faces to any of the deceased nor tell you anything significant about their lives. While many readers may share this same deep sense of 'not being a native', it is largely a modern phenomenon. Only a couple of generations or so ago most people would have been acquainted with everyone buried in a village churchyard within their lifetime, and would have a fairly good idea about how the previous

generation was related to them. Such a detailed 'social history' is now exceptionally rare even within rural communities.

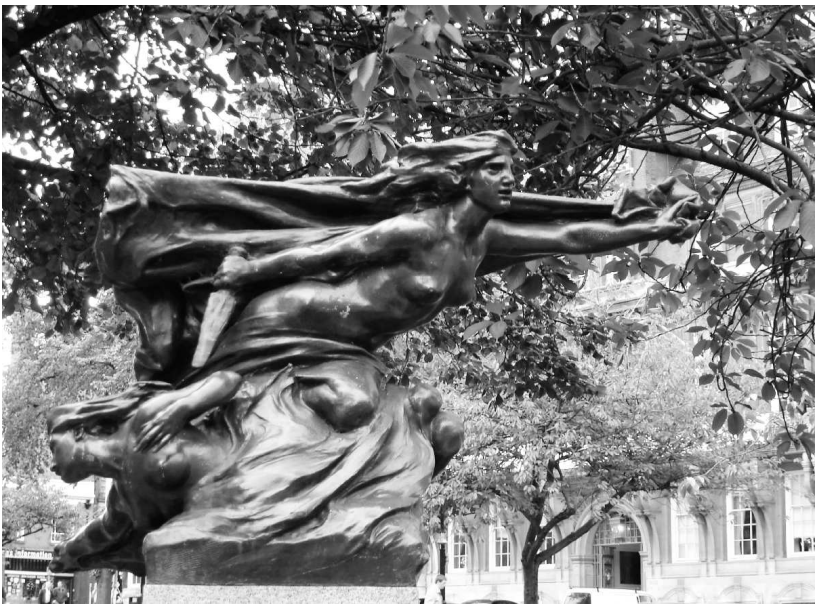
One other change is that churchyards contain not only graves but also memorial stones marking where ashes have been deposited after cremation. However many people's ashes do not have any markers, but have been placed – sometimes surreptitiously, sometimes not – at places which the person thought of fondly when alive. Only surviving family members know of these places, so it is important that they are honoured.

Because there is no collective term that covers both inhumations and cremations, in the next few sections I will simply refer to 'graves' and 'burials' to avoid cumbersome sentences. But please read these as all-encompassing words rather than merely literal.

From All the Faithful Departed to Remembrance Sunday

In Britain today any collective acts of honouring the dead tend to be associated with war memorials – although these parades are rarely secular and usually terminate at the parish church. The main exceptions are events commemorating the victims of major accidents or terrorist atrocities. The feast commemorating 'The Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed' – commonly known as 'All Souls' – goes back before the Reformation and is still part of the Catholic calendar of feasts, always falling on the second of November. In essence All Souls is a day of prayer for the dead, especially relatives. Some Church of England clergy give prominence to All Souls, but rarely to the same extent as Remembrance Day services which fall a week or so later on the nearest Sunday to the eleventh of November. These services honour the dead of two World Wars and service personnel killed in subsequent conflicts. They too originated in commemoration of close relatives, although that has changed because few, if any, people alive today knew the fallen.

War memorials rather too readily bring to my mind thoughts about the sheer futility of major military conflicts. But that is a personal response and needs to be set aside. The point is that these memorials commemorate once-living people who had parents, siblings, partners and – sometimes – offspring, all of whom would have grieved for them,



Part of the South African War Memorial at the corner of Town Hall Square, Leicester, erected in 1906 commemorating the loss of three hundred men from the town (as it was then) and county between 1899 and 1902 although they are not named on the memorial. A simple inscription reads: 'Glory to God / Honour the dead / Peace after victory'. The three allegorical female figures by sculptor Crosland McClure depict War, Grief and Peace. The photograph shows War.

along with any number of friends. Pause anyway, tap your staff or foot, and acknowledge them as people. Ignore the whys and wherefores of their untimely deaths which, after all, are only one aspect of their truncated lives.

Finding the prehistoric ancestors

The bodies of prehistoric people mostly 'disappeared'. Indeed the remains of very few Iron Age people have been discovered – archaeologists assumed that bodies were placed in rivers rather than buried or burnt. We associate prehistoric graves with burial mounds, simply because these monuments remained prominent landmarks (at least until the era of early antiquarians if not always until today).

On the skyline to the east of Avebury is a series of clumps of beech trees, planted early in the nineteenth century. Each of these clumps marks one or more Bronze Age burial mounds. Many more of these barrows have been ploughed away.

But they are the exception – relatively few people at any time were buried in this way, and none at all during some eras.

Unless you are a professional archaeologist you are unlikely to encounter prehistoric graves 'by accident' and, unless you are an avid reader of archaeological excavation reports, probably will not know about burials which are not under mounds. But, as a rule of thumb for every burial mound you know about there will be a great many more mounds which have now been ploughed out, and also ancient burials which never had mounds over them in the first place. However these were probably only discovered during gravel extraction or building work, so the locations have been transformed into a lake or industrial estate.

As discussed earlier, the burial mounds on Waden Hill have all been ploughed flat. But there are many places in the landscape around Avebury where Bronze Age burial mounds reused by Anglo-Saxons have survived – often because a clump of beech trees was planted on them early in the nineteenth century. In Derbyshire and some other parts of Britain such mounds have also survived. Not all Bronze Age mounds were reused by for Anglo-Saxon burials – but clearly they would have been prominent landmarks.

Your locality might have prehistoric burial mounds too. Or you may know from archaeological discoveries where they had been before being ploughed out. Even if you don't live within easy walking distance

Although little more than a mile from the Bronze Age mounds shown on the previous page, the early Neolithic chamber tomb at West Kennett was over two thousand years old by the time Bronze Age barrows were being built.

of such places you may sometimes go to places where they can still be visited. These places evoke a different sensibility to churchyards and cemeteries. After all, the dead are very much older – whether Anglo-Saxons from about 1,500 years ago or Bronze Age people from twice as long before. The people buried in Neolithic long barrows were alive about 5,000 years ago.

Perhaps too, these places feel different because antiquarians and archaeologists have disturbed the graves and, in all probability, taken away at least some of the human remains and grave goods. But nevertheless these places retain a certain 'sanctity', albeit one that seems to be ignored by just about everyone else! You may well need to focus your thinking harder to establish a mental 'engagement' with the people these mounds commemorate. In some cases this is a good thing. These places – or maybe their 'inhabitants' – can also have a dark, unpleasant demeanour which you will not usually encounter elsewhere. Think of them as places where the dead were protected in all ways possible – physically by both the grave and the mound but also by *wyrms* and who knows what other powerful 'magic'. And that's not to mention the 'alpha male' at the centre of the mound, who in life would have been more than a match for modern days thugs and villains. Honour them, but never neglect to establish your own magical protection – more of which later.

The ancestors are everywhere

The more you become aware of the many places where our ancestors are buried or commemorated – where appropriate pausing briefly – then the more you become aware than they are never far away. Indeed, there is another sense in which we live 'among' the ancestors. And that is that every building, every road, every hedge – and nearly every tree – has either been created by someone (or a group of 'someones') or, as with trees, has been intentionally planted or left to grow. Even major rivers have had their courses deepened, their banks raised and straightened, bridges built over, landing stages set up alongside and so forth.

Areas of wilderness too need some sort of management, as any ecologically-aware person knows all too well. In almost every part of the Western world, and a very high proportion of the rest of the world, there is no such thing as 'nature' which is not part of intensive farming or active conservation management. Standing in some part of the English countryside one can expect to see mobile communication masts erected in the last few decades, modern agricultural barns, elegant eighteenth century farm houses, more functional nineteenth century brick-built successors, farm tracks repaired in recent times with rubble from demolished walls that were perhaps built by the fathers of the men who knocked them down, mature trees planted by people who lived a hundred or more years ago, ditches maintained almost every year but – in some parts of England – originally dug by Napoleonic prisoners of war two hundred years ago. The subtle contours of flood meadows reveal the skills of seventeenth or eighteenth century experts, carefully maintained until recent generations.

I am sure you could add to this list almost endlessly. The list is even more complex in urban environments. The point is that the whole landscape of England, urban and rural, didn't just happen. It was made that way. And while we may not be able to put names to the people who designed, made and maintained everything, we can be certain that they had names, relations – and, no doubt, reputations. Some would have been 'colourful characters' and, had we met them when alive, there may have been any number of reasons to dislike them. But they are the people whose expertise and hard work made the landscape

what it is – the bits we like, the bits we hate, and all the rest which we usually just take for granted.

In a more diffuse sense, become aware of these 'ancestors of place' too. Recognise that wherever you stand, sit or lie you are doing so because of their collective effort. There is much more to ancestors than their mortal remains in graveyards and such like. There is also the sense that ancestors are not simply the 'spirits of place' but also the 'guardians of place', as I have discussed in both the previous books in this series. Unlike in earlier times, we look for protection in quite different ways, relying on alarms and police officers. But it is not impossibly hard for modern mentalities to understand that in times past 'Dads Armies' were not merely figures of fun but, rather, the only means of home defence.

In the previous book in this series I quoted the words of Andrew D. Chumbley, as reported by Michael Howard. Bear the previous pages in mind and re-acquaint yourself with what he said:

> The tradition you draw upon is native to the land upon which you stand, solely because the power must be drawn direct from the earth where you might happen to be. The circle is the gate which opens into the earth and allows [spirit] in/egress through the power of the land.

The power of the land is in large part indistinguishable from the effort of the people who made the land what it is and who farmed it for millennia. There is a 'spirit' – which in *Knowing Your Guardians* I termed *leac* or 'luck' – but this manifests through the other-than-human spirits of place. These include the ancestors every bit as much as fairies, elves, giants, and the whole constellation of beings which Anglo-Saxons termed *land wights*. What is a *land wight*? Let Rudyard Kipling enlighten you.

Remember what Puck said

> The People of the Hills have all left. I saw them come into Old England and I saw them go. Giants, trolls, kelpies, brownies, goblins, imps; wood, tree, mound, and water spirits; heath-people, hill-watchers, treasure-guards, good people, little people, pishogues, leprechauns, night-riders, pixies, nixies, gnomes, and

> the rest — gone, all gone! I came into England with Oak, Ash and Thorn, and when Oak, Ash and Thorn are gone I shall go too.

This paragraph from near the beginning of Rudyard Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill* is even more accurate now than when it was published in 1906.

Kipling's long list of the People of the Hills is taken from the wealth of Old English words which refer to other-than-human beings, such as *aelf, thyrs, eoten, puca, scucca, dwearg* and *maere*. Collectively they can be thought of as the *land wights*. Puck's own name is taken from one of those words – *puca*.

Oak, ash and thorn are indeed where the *land wights* might still be found. More accurately, the places near hedgerows and in woodland where such species dominate. Which is not to say that beeches, birches, elders, rowans and other native species might not also be a convenient home. But remember that elders and rowans are renowned as 'witches' trees', so be careful! Where you will be least likely to encounter a *land wight* is in the middle of a big field, far from the hedges.

Later in the story, the children refer to Puck as a 'fairy', which he takes umbrage to.

> [Fairies]... are made-up things the People of the Hills have never heard of – little buzzflies with butterfly wings and gauze petticoats, and shiny stars in their hair, and a wand like a schoolteacher's cane for punishing bad boys and rewarding good ones. I know 'em!

The fairies which Puck is describing had been invented in the previous decades. Prior to that fairies were as big as humans and had something of the same 'tricky' reputation as witches. A hundred years on and we've made angels into twee fairies too. Indeed, a whole cult of squeaky-clean Holy Guardian Angels has arisen. Not a fallen one among them...

Irish legends reveal something of what English fairies were originally – mostly keeping themselves to themselves, living in the 'hollow hills' or *raths,* and only making contact with the human realm for those occasions when humans could do what they could not. These other-than-human beings are known in Irish as the *sí* (pronounced 'shee').

Just as the *sí* are essentially of this world – although rarely seen. Similarly, we need to be careful about deeming Anglo-Saxon *land wights* as 'supernatural' or 'otherworldly'. These words are distortions introduced by Christianity as there is no suggestion of either in the Old English literature – these beings are 'of this world' but just rarely seen or heard. Indeed, as with the *sí*, they are more often heard than seen. Sound passes more readily from one realm to other, especially at certain times of day or of the year. Once again, all this is discussed in more detail in the two previous books in this series.

Honouring before learning

This book is called 'learning from the ancestors' yet here we are about half way through and all I've done is help you learn *about* them, not *from* them. And I'm not just about to change that, although I will get there. Before you can think of asking their advice or help you need to 'make their acquaintance' and show them appropriate respect. After all what would your response be if you're sitting somewhere comfortable and someone you've never met before shouts out, 'Oi, you! Tell me how to set up a bank account online. And right now!'

You might have a different response if they started a conversation, introduced themselves, asked whether you would be willing to help, and offered you a cup of tea or pint of beer by way of a token of their appreciation.

After all, as Cecil Williamson once wrote regarding similar circumstances, 'A kind thought costs nothing and everything has feelings.'

My grandmothers passed away several decades ago. They were born over a hundred years ago. When they were alive and visited me then just about the first thing I did was put the kettle on and made tea. If I knew they were coming I'd try to make the time to bake a cake – or offer suitable apologies if my only option was shop-bought biscuits. My grandfathers might have preferred a bottle of beer but, as they knew I never kept any in the house, they were more than happy to conform to the ritual of tea and cake – or whatever.

And a ritual it most certainly was. The Japanese tea ceremony may be more exotic. But our own 'tea ceremony' once pervaded English culture

from the highest echelons to the lowest. The only material difference was whether the guests were honoured with cups which had 'Wedgewood' or 'Doulton' on their undersides or whether they got the mug with the fewest chips or cracks around the rim.

Anyone born more than about forty years ago was brought up with this ritual way of 'honouring' older people. Now those people have passed in to the realm of the ancestors why should you honour them in any other way? On at least the mental planes offer female ancestors tea and biscuits or cake – you can make it more literal if you feel it is really necessary. And, if the 'occasion was right', most would have been tempted by a glass of sweet sherry. Male ancestors will tag along, although let's be honest, they would probably prefer some beer…

Children of my generation were encouraged to leave a glass of sherry and mince pie out on Christmas Eve for Santa. While it would be pushing things too far to suggest that this is some sort of pagan rite for 'honouring Santa Claus', it is the nearest we have to a 'native ritual' for honouring 'otherworldly' beings.

When honouring people who you knew in life, then recall their preferences. Did they take sugar in their tea? Was there a brand of biscuits which they couldn't resist? Or was beer alright but better if followed by a whisky 'chaser'? But, unless your ancestors are not as English as mine, or you know them to have had 'exotic' preferences, then there is no need to make offerings based on some practice you read about in a book about cultures in places remote from Europe.

If you have read such literature, you will know that the local home-made 'beer' is almost inevitably the right offering to make to the ancestors. Me? I happen to carry a hip flask of mead on my 'travels' – enough to honour the spirits of place and the ancestors and still have a swig myself…

However modern English people still maintain a custom which pervades almost all other societies – we take flowers to graves and memorials. Sometimes it is appropriate to take real flowers, or collect a posy of wild flowers from the wayside. But if not then visualise the flowers you would have brought. Try to make them appropriate to the season – daffodils or tulips only in the spring, chrysanthemums in the autumn, and so forth.

In several later sections I will discuss other reasons to 'honour' the ancestors, but for the moment I simply want you to think how you

I will suggest the use of visualisation several times in the course of this book. This is a skill in its own right which takes considerable practice to develop. However it's OK just to do your best! Until you are proficient then aim to visualise something simple in precise detail rather than several things in a 'fuzzy' way. So a single, simple-shape flower rather than a whole bouquet. Or a posy of the same simple flowers rather than a mixture. You will need to have looked at the 'real thing' in detail. Indeed the same sort of close attention as if you were about to do a realistic drawing.

Practice visualising things when you have a few 'dead moments' – waiting for the bus, perhaps. It is in itself a form of meditation. Aim for visualising as much detail as your can recall. And if you can't recall enough detail then make a mental note to look again at the real thing, or at least a photo. But, unlike photos, with visualisations you need to have the ability to turn the object around to see the 'back' or the 'base' and still visualise all the detail that would be there. Practice being able to 'hold' the visualised object a foot or two in front of your face – or resting on a table or the ground if that makes more sense. Aim to be able to hold that visualisation *without losing attention* for one to two minutes. That is seriously difficult and, for me at least, remains an unfulfilled aim. But practice anyway as this will make you better at a skill which will come into its own in the later books of the series.

would show respect to either your direct ancestors – whether known to you personally or not – and to more anonymous the 'ancestors of place' or 'ancestors of tribe'.

We are one with them

We are so used to thinking of the dead being something different to the living that we find it hard to do otherwise. Even when, as in the previous section, we chose to engage with them, we think in terms of crossing a boundary. So phrases like 'walking between worlds' are bandied around. But those boundaries are ones made by our minds. We think of the dead differently to the way we think of the living. Few traditional societies are aware of such dualistic conceptualisations, which come from Christian thinking and have been 'exported' unquestioned into the quasi-secular realms of Western rationalism.

Take away that distinction. The realm of the dead is our realm also. There is no reason to suppose that they occupy an otherworld or have been transported into the heavens. Simply because they are in graves in the ground does not mean we should think of them living in an Underworld, least of all one demonised by Christian notions of Hell. Think over what I have said briefly in this book (and more extensively in the previous books) about the *sí*. They are not 'otherworldly' beings, but resident in a realm that is 'beside' ours. The same is equally true of the dead.

Indeed, you may find it difficult to distinguish between ancestors and 'spirits of place'. That is entirely understandable, and it is entirely up to you how you make such distinctions, if any. Just as we have a different way of thinking about ancestors whose names we know from those who must have existed but are now anonymous, so too we can acknowledge many nameless spirits of place, but have a closer relationship with those refer to by name. And, as previous examples reveal, there is no reason whatsoever why an ancestor cannot also be a 'spirit of place'.

Avoid creating unnecessary distinctions and boundaries. There may be some sort of spectrum or continuum between the fully 'quick' and the fully dead, as there most certainly is regarding all manner of other-than-human-persons. The only boundary that needs to be established is the one that separates you from all of 'them'. It is a boundary which can, and needs, to be crossed – but only as part of appropriate rituals and

with suitable guardians in place. Above all, you need to know how to 'reset' the boundary at the end of the rite. The next sections of this book set out how this can be done.

Honouring 'Peter'

If all this sounds rather dramatic, then bear in mind how the residents of Nun Monkton in Yorkshire used to celebrate the feast day of the patronal saint of the parish church, St Peter, whose feast is the 29th June. Until the middle of the nineteenth century a series of events lasting over a week took place. According to an article published in the local paper in 1868, when the customs was already almost obsolete:

> On the Saturday evening preceding the 29th a company of parishioners headed by fiddlers and players of other instruments went in procession across the Great Common to Maypole Hill where there was an old sycamore tree, for the purpose of 'Rising Peter', who had been buried under the tree after the last St Peter's Day. This effigy of St Peter, rudely carved in wood and clothed in a fantastic fashion was placed in a box and conveyed to the neighbouring house (possibly the inn) where it was exposed to view and kept there until the following Saturday, when another procession formed and St Peter was reinterred. This was called 'Burying Peter'.

In northern Europe there are accounts of pre-Christian rites which are similar. However we should not simple-mindedly assume that this is a 'pagan survival' – almost certainly this ritual came about in the sixteenth or early seventeenth century when the worship of saints was being suppressed as part of the Reformation. Presumably an effigy of St Peter – originally less rudely carved – was hidden in the ground at the time of the Reformation, and only brought out somewhat surreptitiously for his feast day. There may once have been many other villages which maintained such Catholic traditions covertly. In Ballyvourney, Ireland a thirteenth century statue of Saint Gobnait is still honoured in a slightly more elaborate annual custom on the eleventh of February, although the effigy of her is not buried between times.

Local saints, such as Gobnait, were once flesh and blood. In a manner of speaking they are the 'ancestors of tribe' for Christian communities. Catholic saints are venerated not because they are dead but because they are now living in Heaven alongside Christ, the angels and so forth, so can intercede on behalf of the faithful. Pre-Reformation Christianity introduced a dualism between heaven and earth which seemingly did not exist hitherto, but the distinction between life and death arose in much more recent centuries.

When to honour the ancestors

Christian saints traditionally have an annual feast day. The most important ones have two or even more. The lesser 'also rans', so to speak, were commemorated on the first of November at the feast of All Saints or All Hallows. Even though this feast was dropped by the Protestants, the previous day is still known as Hallowe'en.

The following day, as noted, is All Souls, when relatives and friends are commemorated. In Chinese culture the full moon in August is the main time to honour the ancestors. However the day *after* every full moon is also a time when Chinese people traditionally honour immediate ancestors. This may involve visiting graves or simply placing flowers on the household shrine and burning incense.

Mexico is famous for the *Día de Muertos* or 'Day of the Dead'. Now celebrated as an ostensibly Catholic feast at the time of All Hallows, before Spanish colonisation in the sixteenth century, the celebration took place at the beginning of summer, and then only in what is now southern Mexico. Ancestors are honoured at specially-constructed altars called *ofrendas* with sugar skulls, marigolds and the favourite foods and beverages of the departed. Similar gifts are taken to their graves.

A similar festival, *Dia de Finados*, is held in Portugal. In La Paz, Bolivia, the *Dia de los ñatitas* ('Day of the Skulls') is celebrated on the fifth of May and retains more of its pre-conquest traditions. Indigenous Andeans had a tradition of marking the third year after burial by sharing the day with the bones of the ancestors. Families still keep the skulls – but no longer the other bones – for these rituals. On the ninth of November each family's skulls are decorated with fresh flowers, Offerings of cigarettes, coca leaves, alcohol and such like are made by

La Calavera Catrina *('The Lady of the Dead'), a key personage in the Mexican* Día de Muertos *or Day of the Dead.*

way of thanks for protection during the previous twelve months. They are now the 'grateful dead', having been rewarded for their assistance.

Indeed, at some time of year, but usually around the end of harvest, most traditional societies in Africa and Asia honour the dead. In Britain and Europe the flowers taken to graves at All Souls were traditionally chrysanthemums.

Feeding the hungry ghosts

Understandably the Day of Dead in Latin America tends to focus on the bones of the deceased. But what about their souls? After all, in Catholic ideology humans will only get to heaven if the soul is reunited with its body. As medieval graveyards became increasingly overcrowded, the preservation of bones was pragmatically reduced to the skull and two long bones. These were kept in ossuaries while the other bones were disposed off – probably being burnt on bonfires (from 'bone fires') and used as valuable fertiliser. From this practice came the *momento mori* now mostly associated with pirates: the 'skull and crossbones'.

In India, China and Japan deeply-rooted local practices are focused not on Western notions of religion, but instead on honouring local deities or spirits. And in China, Tibet and Nepal there are especially unwelcome 'spirits' known as 'hungry ghosts' or 'orphan souls'.

To understand hungry ghosts we must first make the leap outside the Christian one-soul worldview. The Chinese worldview normally thinks of two souls. Traditionally, the bone soul (*p'o*) remains with the bones and is treasured by living descendants while the *shen* soul leaves the body soon after death and is usually reincarnated. However there are

more *shen* souls than opportunities to be reborn so some of these are 'orphaned' without a body and as such become 'hungry ghosts' or *ku-hun*. Contemporary Chinese concepts of the soul are more overtly based on the yin-yang dualism and think in terms of *hun* (heavenly; yang) and *po* (earthly; yin) souls.

Similar ideas are part of Buddhist and, to a lesser extent, Hindu popular religious practice – the Sanskrit word *preta* is usually translated as 'hungry ghost'. It is also part of Tibetan Yungdrung Bön (where they are called *yidag, yi-dvag* or *yi-dak*) and Shinto beliefs (although there are two distinct types of such ghosts). Hungry ghosts were also known in the Middle East as described in the apocryphal *Book of Enoch*.

All these traditions share the same fear – that a hungry ghost may enter into a person's body, with the terrifying consequence that they then have two conflicting souls. We might rationalise this away as someone suffering from a personality disorder – maybe nothing more clinical than having bouts of bad temper. But perhaps traditional cultures could teach Western reductionism some much needed lessons – rituals to avert one-too-many-souls might be more effective than psychotherapy after the event.

How old these notions are can only be speculated. Buddhist sculptures from around 300 BCE depict hungry ghosts, and these carvings are contemporary with the oldest parts of the *Book of Enoch*, so the idea must have widely known by this time.

The rituals for 'feeding the hungry ghosts' in Yungdrung Bön can, so far as I am aware, be performed any time considered appropriate. Small bell-like cymbals are allowed to rub together – but not 'clashed' – to

The type of small cymbals traditionally used by Tibetan priests when 'feeding the hungry dead'.

call the hungry ghosts to feed on the smoke of incense and partake of the ritual food offerings placed on the specially-prepared shrine, decorated with flowers. It is in some ways more elaborate than, say, Native American 'smudging' with burning sage before a ritual, but shares many of the same actions and functions. In *Knowing Your Guardians* I have described how to prepare native British plants, such as common mugwort and groundsel, can be used as incense.

'Feeding the hungry ghosts' rituals are, of course, not that far removed from rites to ensure the 'grateful dead'. Not least because both seem alien to Protestant Christianity. But there are not so alien to medieval Catholicism. In the absence of any biblical precedents we must assume that they are yet another 'carry-over' from pre-conversion practices .

Literally listening?

If you are to learn from the ancestors then you need to learn to listen. But how literally should you think of yourself as listening to the ancestors? As literally as you are comfortable with. Some people have little or no problem with the idea of talking to – and with – deceased relatives so the sense of 'ancestors' is just a sense of much older 'relatives' whom one never knew in real life, probably not even their names. Other people find the whole concept uncomfortable or unfathomable. But I doubt that such people are reading this book, unless to scoff and proclaim their own bigotry. In reality, most people are somewhere on a wide spectrum in between. We shift position along that spectrum depending on circumstances. This book is, in large part, about understanding the 'circumstances' which are most appropriate – and providing an 'off switch' for other occasions.

Human brains are most different from other higher primate brains in exactly the regions used for making 'informed' guesses about how other people are thinking. We do it all the time when in company. Higher primates and a great many other species seem to have some such abilities, but they do not have such large cerebral cortices.

The extent to which we are right about how other people are *actually* thinking is often unknown – the very nature of such social activities means we probably assume we're right far more often than is actually the case. Similarly we assume other people have understood what we are saying or doing in exactly the same way we understand or intend.

Here the reality check is often more accurate – for all of us there will be times when other people misunderstand or find a meaning we did not intend.

There is a borderline area when adults talk to or try to understand children, especially when they are too young to have sophisticated language skills. Not only do we make wide assumptions about what they 'mean' by what they are doing – often in ways which are unverifiable – but we also assume that young babies understand quite complex sentences , even before they've reached an age to say 'Dada' or 'Mama' clearly. While it is undoubtedly true that from an exceptionally early age children are masters at what is termed 'non-verbal communication', I am specifically referring here to what is going on in adult minds when they talk to babies.

The next step along the spectrum is taking to pets. Dogs and, to a lesser extent, cats are also experts at reading human body language. They can be training to respond to specific words, although the distinctive sound of these words is the dog's cue, not any 'semantic sense' as it is for human communication. Many people, myself included, will happily talk to pets as if they understand the English language almost as well as me. Clearly this is not the case, and is quite different to teaching a dog the desired response to a command word.

We quite happily give 'personalities' and behaviour traits to other adults, children and animals based on little real evidence – and what 'evidence' there is may well be illusory and giving a false sense of one's own abilities to 'mind read'. But it happens all the time – it is part-and-parcel of being human. When in company a large proportion of our brain activity seems to be associated with such 'guessing'.

Little surprise that we can readily invest the same sense of 'reality' and personality to inanimate objects – such as cuddly toys – and to fictional characters, whether in novels, feature films, soap operas or fantasy video games. Indeed for rather too many people in the modern world, fictional characters and the 'celebrities' who depict them are more real than their own neighbours or families. Little wonder that adults as well as children find it easy to talk to cuddly toys – and, more often than most of them care to admit – for them to have a real sense of meaningful conversations with what, in reality, are seemingly insentient 'persons'.

Such conversations with cuddly toys are just one very small step away from the conversations people of all cultures have with deities, saints,

angels, spirits-of-place, fairies, household guardians, *orishas,* ancestors and whatever. These 'other-than-human-persons', as anthropologists often deem them, share the same realms of reality as pets which understand every word, cuddly toys who chat back, and so forth. You may well believe differently – that too is part-and-parcel of this mental 'territory'. In other words, the extent to which you regard some of these as literal and others as 'what other people with weird ideas do' is down to you. All are believed literally by some and all dismissed as weird by a greater number!

My suggestion is simply to be as literal as you feel necessary about talking *with* the ancestors – or, indeed, any 'other-than-human-person. During a ritual it is safe to be more literal than outside (spatially or temporally) a ritual. That is why rituals are so useful! Putting it another way: know where the 'off' switch is as well as the 'on' switch.

Let me give you a personal example. In that mental limbo state of the first few minutes after getting up in the morning it is very easy for me to have a conversation with the row of mugs on the kitchen shelf along the lines of 'Whose turn is it today?' If I began to explain that each of the mugs has a different personality – some are more jealous and 'demanding' than others, while some are more laid back about 'My turn will come again soon… ' then you're probably beginning to wonder if this book has been written by a person with a clinical personality disorder. If I continue by saying that some days I end up having a comparatively long chat with one or more of the mugs then you're probably quite seriously doubting my sanity.

While I cannot be the ultimate judge of such matters, rest assured I have never felt a need to seek counselling for such matters, nor has it been suggested I should! Bear in mind this is a 'liminal time', betwixt and between being asleep and awake – the latter awaits the 'lucky' mug to be filled with strong coffee and then consumed – and that there is, for me, a real sense that this is part of my morning ritual for getting up. At the risk of more alarm bells then, yes, this is indeed normal when I am at home!)

Other folk chat to their teddy bear at the corresponding liminal time at the end of the day. Still others go off to special ritual places once a week and 'chat' to God. I wish to offend no one, but I feel safer with someone who thinks their teddy talks to them than with someone who thinks God listens to them. As for God talking to a mere mortal, well that seems like maxed-out megalomania compared to merely chatting to coffee mugs…

There is no one right approach. Rituals – and the all-important 'on' and 'off' boundaries – allow for a 'suspending of disbelief'. Or, more accurately perhaps, an interlude in the need to establish what is literal and what is illusory.

Carrying protection

Oriental beliefs in the risks from 'hungry ghosts' may seem exotic from the perspective of modern day Western thinking. However, as I established throughout *Knowing Your Guardians*, we should not neglect to create and establish contact with our own 'otherworldly' guardians. Above all, there is a need to empower amulets – a terms which covers a multitude of wearable items – with these powers of protection. By all means read the rest of the this book without having make contact with guardians and empowered suitable amulets. But do not start to put these ideas into practice without having done so.

Guardians of place have their own ways and means and have little trouble in 'shooing off' the merely curious. Honour them and ask their permission and, by and large, all will go well. But there are places which 'don't want to play'. There are still places where the protective spirits have not gone away.

As an example, there is a woodland close to where I used to live which has a powerful history – even the place-names reveal how especially important it once was. The spirits of place are most certainly still able to protect. They will allow me access for a limited amount of reasons. But when they didn't like 'profane' intentions they have sent me, 'pixie led', into brambles and barbed wire – even though I thought I was following a path I knew! Another time they conjured up a powerful thunderstorm from an almost clear sky. I took that as a very forthright 'f*** off' and did so! Yes, it really did happen.

Other people I have spoken to call such places *loci horriblis* – a Latinism inspired by *annus horriblis*. Actually I would question where they are simply 'horrible places'. Personally I think of them as well-protected places: *loci tutela*, if you must Latinise.

Ancestors – who may also be guardians of place – are rarely malign. But, just as people in real life are sometimes grumpy or mean-spirited, so too can 'real dead' ones too. Honouring and making mental or

physical offerings might win them round. Others might be seductively sweet. But most are either somewhat dull or have a sense of mischief. Spend a long time dead and the chance to play some 'harmless' tricks on a mere mortal must seem like a pleasant pastime. Even asking their name might lead to a little subterfuge. Play along, stay within your comfort zone, keep plenty of energy in your personal protection, and call upon your guardian if needs be.

Creating a ritual time and space

There are in essence three ways of protecting yourself, all of which are necessary and have a different role to play.

Firstly, prepare and empower a protective amulet which you can wear or carry with you, as described in the previous book. Simply wearing this conveys protection, but more especially you can touch or hold it for extra reassurance. Establish a relationship with this amulet – yes, chat to it if that seems right. Thank it for its help as you take it off or put it back in its special place. (And by definition it is a special place, because it is where you keep a powerful amulet – don't just drop it down any old how.) Say 'Hello' and suitable words of encouragement and re-empowering as you put it on again. If, perchance, you wear it all the time then establish a routine – perhaps, but not necessarily, daily – when you do such things.

Examples of protective amulets – see Knowing Your Guardians *for more details.*

Secondly, practice setting up a protective 'bubble' or 'cloak' and feeding it with *leac* ('potency'). This is something you need to become adept at doing. Before setting off with the intention of meeting the ancestors (or indeed a great many other ritual activities) then 'recharge' this visualisation. Something quite minimal and unobtrusive is best – drawing energy up from the earth or down from the moon are classic examples, although my sense of this is less of an energy and more of a creative process (more about that in the next book). 'Recharge' again at suitable occasions, such as before and after the next step, and maintain the visualisation of this protection without getting distracted from everything else. This last suggestion is hard to do at first but becomes easier the more visualisation you do.

The third protection is in many ways the most important. You need to create a boundary in space and, more importantly, in time. It is the classic 'magic circle' although to be honest the shape is not that important – circles are simple and easy. The crucial point is that they are set out for the purpose of the ritual and 'wiped' at the end. Yes they set out a 'safe space' but, far more crucially, they only exist for a finite time, so they set limits on the 'danger time'. I simply think of such ritual spaces as counterparts to the on/off switch on an electrical appliance. And, believe me, there are times when you will feel a real need for the 'off switch', no matter how much care and attention you have devoted to the first two forms of protection.

You must, must, must be able to walk away from the ancestors, leaving them in their place. All being well you will determine when to end and can say 'Cheerio' and offer to come back another time. Even if you get less than helpful responses, try to avoid just 'stomping off'. Even if you have cut things short, depart on the friendliest-possible terms and wish them well before closing down your ritual space.

Whether or not you feel a need to mark out a ritual space with something physical will depend, in large part, on your prior experience. Not least your prior experience of holding visualisations in your mind. Pragmatism comes into this too. Do you really want to carry a rucksack full of ritual 'gear' all the way to where you want to do the rite? If so, then prepare guardians for the four quarters, containers for offerings, the all-important flask of tea, home-made cake, containers and plates for the above, a bottle of beer or mead, incense, matches, and goodness knows what else.

Mostly I work with a stripped down version. A long length of red cord lives in my 'ditty bag' (a ditty bag is a bag for keeping ditties in. If you

don't know what ditties are, then they are the things you keep in a ditty bag…). This is long enough to lay out as a circle and still leave enough over to knot four loops to mark out the cardinal directions. My carved walking staff – also my main protective amulet – is stood up in the centre or at the north. Rummaging around in the ditty bag reveals the hip flask of mead and a motley assortment of dried fruit, nuts and cereal bars. And there is usually fresh fruit. This is mostly for my benefit but can be shared with the ancestors.

If I think there is any chance I will be disturbed by other people then even this is too much. I have no problems about visualising myself setting out the 'ideal' protective circle and all the necessary 'ditties' – although I will use actual food and drink (even if only bottled water) as appropriate.

If, like me, you feel strong connections with the Anglo-Saxon era then envisage an encircling *wyrm* and invoke the beings of the four directions – having previously invested them with distinct detailed personalities. However, as most of what we know about such matters comes from Scandinavian sagas then there is a risk that this is much less Anglo-Saxon than you might at first suppose.

The 'on' and 'off' switches

Most people would call this 'opening the circle'. But that is confusing because in my way of thinking the circle is 'closing in' a ritual space. To me it's more like getting ready to plug an electrical appliance in, doing all the necessary preparation before turning it on.

At the risk of seeming facile, the whole point of a ritual is that it is a ritual. What I mean is that the key parts of the rite remain almost the same each time. They are, so to speak, routine. The so-called opening and closing of a protective space especially need to become routine. By all means chop and change a little as you find what works for you. But when you've got to the stage of something which you feel is right, and doesn't seem to have too many 'frilly bits' which take undue amounts of time then simply stick with it.

You are, to all intents and purposes, creating a 'comfort zone'. Just as most people don't change the layout of their lounge from week to week, and only swap around the chairs if they're not comfortable

enough, so too you should normally 'stick with it' when it comes to the opening and closing stages of a ritual. I've given some clues as to what I do and there's plenty of advice in books and on the Internet if you need some more suggestions.

Most modern pagans 'call the quarters'. But don't forget the fifth direction – 'here and now' at the centre. This is traditional way of thinking from Ireland to China. Personally I consider that calling the four quarters in this way is only effective if you have a real sense of what those four quarters signify and can visualise their denizens strongly. If so, draw their energy into the circle for protection. However if all that is new to you – or you've only so far 'dabbled' with the directions – then far better to merely 'acknowledge' the directions and focus instead on the spirits of place and the ancestors of the place. Either way, drawing in the power and protection of your own guardians is even more important.

There is a great risk it all gets very complicated but 'keeping things simple' is crucial – the real effort needs to be saved for what you intend to do in between the opening and closing. If you're not spent a lot of time previously visualising each of the quarters then simply going round from east to north saying acknowledging the directions and saying 'Know you are honoured here' or 'Hail and welcome' is quite sufficient. Come 'closing time' the corresponding phrase is a brief expression of thanks, followed by 'Hale and farewell'.

Why am I suggesting you go to so much trouble to start a ritual? Partly because you need a 'safe zone' – more accurately a 'comfort zone'. But in much bigger part because you need to create a clear sense of when the ritual has ended. There needs to be a real sense that the ancestors and spirits of place have been thanked, magical space has been 'wiped', and – most important of all – that it has come to an end with a real sense of a 'boundary' in time. Take away only your memories and thoughts – but not any other-than-human-persons you made contact with.

Think about a more commonplace counterpart when relatives visit the grave of a close relative in a churchyard or cemetery. There are social norms for being 'soberly' dressed, not cavorting about, and so forth on the way there. But these come into full effect at the gateway to the burial ground. And all burial grounds have gates, walls and hedges. Stepping back out through the gates a little while later 'releases' some of the feelings and social obligations. As we get back to the car we may smile at any companions and perhaps offer a humorous remark that

The lych gate at Avebury.

would be less appropriate at the graveside. All this is 'perfectly normal'. And it is some of that sense of being 'perfectly normal' that the opening and closing of rituals needs to create. More specifically, boundaries between what is normal inside and outside (both spatially and temporally).

How to talk to the ancestors

We quite unconsciously use slightly different language when talking to someone 'important' than when chatting to mates. 'Hey up' is a very different greeting to 'Good afternoon, ma'am'. English is overstocked with words which mean almost the same thing – think how a lawyer will refer to a suspect being 'interrogated', whereas the police officers will refer to someone being 'questioned', while the suspect himself might say to friends afterwards that the cops wanted to 'ask' him about whatever. These three tiers are typical - the professions use a word which entered English direct from Latin or Greek, the middle classes use words which were first used in England by the French-speaking Normans, while to lower sort stick with words used before then by Anglo-Saxons.

Rituals often use an even less everyday 'register' of language. When the Bible was officially translated into English at the behest of King James the language used was deliberately archaic to people of the early seventeenth century. 'Thee' and 'thou' and many other Biblical words and phrases have become increasingly obsolete since then. But we expect rituals to sound archaic! Indeed in many cultures an entirely different language is used for religion. Even when the Catholic church used Latin for the Mass the most sacred part, the *kyrie eleison,* was still

sung in Greek. Poets too more or less consciously adopt a specific register of language – traditionally a decidedly 'literary' one, although nowadays the 'register' maybe a faux lowbrow one mimicking street culture.

So phrases like 'Hale and farewell' and slightly archaic words such as 'shall', 'whilst' and 'amongst' may seem appropriate. I am not suggesting that you need to talk to ancestors in an archaic manner simply because they are old. More because ritual language is transformative. So too is the walking around and various gestures needed to make offerings and such like. Do not become stiff and pompous, but slow things down – both words and deeds – to give a sense of gravitas. Sometimes alliteration – when words 'rhyme' at the beginning rather than the end – feels appropriate. However, avoid allowing an alluring affectation for alliteration to augment alarmingly… Above all, aim for phrases where the cadence provides a sense of rhythm and 'rise then fall' to the voice but isn't as 'ti-tum-ti-tum-ti-tum' as poetry.

Three-fold repetition – or slight variations – are almost *de rigeur* for ritual wording. The main exceptions are for the four – or rather, five – directions. Never worry about 'getting the words exactly right'. Prepare and have some idea about what you think needs to be said. But once you are 'in' the ritual you will have raised your own 'potency' (or *leac*) and focused your intent then the flow of inspiration will take over in the moment and say what needs to be said.

What needs to be said is usually quite short. Three words said by someone who has the gift to make those words really do what they say is far better than a three minute 'sermon' by someone who hasn't got the *leac*.

Some basic words

If you really need help with putting together the words for a simple ritual then there are plenty of examples on the Internet. Rather too often they verge on the pompous or the overly 'olde worlde'. But look for the thoughts 'behind' the words and use them for inspiration. After many years the following phrases tend to trip off my tongue without prompting. They may not feel right for you, but I'll share them anyway:

> Spirits of place, spirits of the rocks, spirits of the plants, spirits of the animals: know that you are honoured here.
>
> Ancestors of place, ancestors of tribe, ancestors of blood, ancestors of bone: know that you are honoured here.

I have a way of thinking about 'ancestors of blood' as shorthand for honouring my mother, her mother, and my female ancestors back into the mists of time, while 'ancestors of bone' honours my father, his father and all my male antecedents as far back as whenever. These terms are purely metaphorically of course. So far as I'm aware the idea just came to me a few years ago, so don't be surprised if other people don't give the same meaning and significance to these phrases!

'Ancestors of tribe' is a useful term as it includes anyone who you aren't related to but nevertheless has been a real influence on your thinking and 'doing'. You may not even have known them in life but only through their books, or their influence on people who you do know.

As an aside, I tend not to use 'tribe' for people I simply live among – they are, to use the Anglo-Saxon word, my 'kith'. In recent centuries the expression 'kith and kin' has been used rather loosely. But originally it embraced the people you were related to by blood ('kin') and people you lived among ('kith'). Anglo-Saxon men would have had less use for this expression than women as the men tended to stay put, living on inherited land. But their wives came from a different kin group. This meant that, although they grew up among kin, their adult lives were among kith. In practice sisters may have married into the same kin group – in other words two or more brothers were married to women who were sisters. But, if not, then no doubt there was a real sense that a wife was an 'outsider' to her kin group.

Singing up the dead

Why so much emphasis on how to talk to the ancestors and other-than-human-persons? Because sound passes through the realms. Indeed without earplugs or such like we cannot turn off our sense of hearing in the same way we can close our eyes. Even when asleep our hearing is still functioning.

There is a form of language which is even more 'ritualistic' than the most archaic ways of speaking. I am thinking of chanting, although I will use the wider term 'singing' to avoid too many thoughts of football terraces and such like. My notion of chanting has more to do with Gregorian plainsong and Tibetan monks!

In societies where writing is not the main way of conveying information then formal songs and sagas almost always are. They are how the culture is transmitted down the generations. From long, tedious genealogies to the most ribald of trickster tales, all human – and superhuman – life worthy of consideration is there somewhere. The Scottish travellers thought of their traditional stories and songs as the 'carrying stream of memory'. Sub-Saharan African *griots* memorise prodigious amounts of lore and information so when one of them dies it is commonly said that it is as if a library has burnt down. Strictly the same is also true of traditional customs, whether dances, plays or rituals. Indeed, in most non-Western societies there is a complete overlap between these three activities.

In an oral culture songs are, as Brendan Kennelly once observed, living ghosts that long for a living voice. Once those societies make contact with literate cultures – as happened in Africa during colonialisation and happened in England when the Roman church began missionary activities – then something happens which we find hard to imagine. Instead of this fragile oral transmission, traditions are all-but 'carved in stone'. The written words become more powerful than the spoken ones, no matter if it is the king himself speaking. A common metaphor in such transitional societies is that writing is like the dead bearing witness in the world of the living. Unsurprisingly writing and numerical notation is often seen as a gift from one of the gods. In European cultures he seems to have been called Ogmios, which comes down to us as *ogham*, a specific form of runic script.

Traditional cultures often have a wealth of songs for rituals. These are often performed using an archaic way of singing. Among the Saami of northern Scandinavia the oldest recordings of *yoiks* suggest the performers were using tense vocal chords, a narrowed throat and compressed voice. These *yoiks* are often inspired by natural sounds or imitate bird songs and animal cries with remarkable accuracy. The Scandinavian sagas tell that the divinatory rituals of the women known as *seiðr* ('pronounced 'seether') could only take place if other women were present who knew the necessary songs.

I am not known for my singing abilities and prefer not to inflict them on anyone – alive, dead, human or otherwise. But if you have such skills then honour the ancestors with your gift. Before the recent deluge of recorded music the ability to sing was, understandably, greatly welcomed. Above all, singing is the most powerful of all the ways of communicating. Next best, and an option even for the likes of me, is to chant.

There are other ways of making sound apart from with the human throat. Ubiquitous as 'shamanic drumming' has become in recent years, there is no reason to suppose that it was ever part of western European traditions. In any event, drumming is a no-no if you want to do rituals without anyone within half a mile wandering over to find out what's going on! Clap sticks (see *Listening to the Guardians*) are more subtle and probably more authentic for British traditions. But the sound still carries. 'Tibetan' cymbals and tinkling bells work much better – and are considerably easier to carry than a frame drum!

The preliminary visit

If you are thinking of 'sitting out' at burial mounds at liminal times of day then there are a number of practical considerations, not least being alone somewhere remote in the dark! Don't simply turn up with a map, torch, bottle of mead, groundsheet and sleeping bag – important as all those are. Get to know the place beforehand. Use the Internet to find out as much as possible about the archaeology, history and folklore of the place and its surrounds.

I suspect you may well chose a place that you have visited at least once before. But, unless you have done rituals there previously and made contact with the spirits of place then the next step is to go there to perform a simple ritual to introduce yourself to the 'inhabitants'. Several such visits may be needed before it 'feels right' to spend longer. Don't be too surprised if it never feels right, or assorted 'gremlins' thwart your intentions.

Don't forget to wear or carry your protective amulets. Bring some simple yet sincere offerings – but make sure they are ones which will not be visible to anyone else visiting afterwards. Mead and grain, or tea and cake (which should be reduced to crumbs as part of the offering) are most likely the best options, although 'improvised' offerings with

A Bronze Age burial mound near Avebury. Wherever you intend to do your rituals, remember to introduce yourself to the 'inhabitants' over a series of visits.

whatever is to hand – water and biscuits, perhaps – might be necessary if advance plans didn't pan out.

Over a series of visits get to know and 're-activate' the local protective spirits. If necessary re-introduce 'the Mothers' of the place. Acknowledge them as 'Our Ladies of Kennet' or whatever local place-name makes most sense. If in doubt, use the name of the nearest watercourse, as the valleys would, long before the Anglo-Saxons, have been regarded as the territory of a female sovereign.

Don't get worked up about long, elaborate rituals. Just say what's got to be said and start a conversation. Yes, a conversation. Remember to listen. Give them time to respond, don't just gabble away *to* them. Only when you feel really comfortable about spending a night in their presence should you start planning for the 'sitting out'.

Ask permission of the ancestors and the guardians to return for a longer 'sitting out' ritual. If you don't feel comfortable with the idea or the ancestors of the place then it's probably their subtle way of saying 'No'. Ask if there is anything you need to do differently which would make

them more agreeable to you coming back. You may pick up a hint there and then or it may come to you in the next few days.

In my experience I simply don't want to hang around in places when I'm not welcome. Offer thanks and an apology for disturbing them, then close the circle and leave.

Bear in mind that all prehistoric burial mounds will be Scheduled Ancient Monuments. So digging into them, leaving non-biodegradable offerings, and lighting fires are all against the law. So, you say, no one's watching, so I'll just do it anyway... But why go somewhere to desecrate it? Digging, leaving modern 'litter' such as crystals, and contaminating the soil with charcoal (which may be on the surface when you leave it but with in few decades the worms in the ground will have done a good job of 'shaking it down' to the archaeological layers) are cumulative processes. One person does this little bit, another person does another bit, and after a few dozen times the effects are no longer negligible. Honour the dead and their 'shrines', never be disrespectful.

Getting to know

Before you set off, visualise in detail a few different variations of how the opening and closing should go. Also 'try out' a few different ways of honouring the ancestors, using the sound of your voice, small bells, or maybe deeper-sounding gongs.

Make a decision about what sorts of incense you think would be appropriate and then devise a suitable container which offers protection from wind and won't fall over or risk setting dry grass or leaves alight. Thuribles are a good bet. Me? I carry a small tin of dry sand. Take the lid off and add incense. Then at the end put the lid back on – not only will any 'mess' be safely contained but any remaining embers will be extinguished.

Frankly I do not want to be over-prescriptive about this. This is your rite, not mine. If you feel that you need more experience of doing rituals before being able to plan one for meeting the ancestors then you're almost certainly right!

The first few times you do the ritual 'for real' in the intended place – or perhaps places – don't be overly concerned about getting everything right. Initial protection and the final 'closing' are not optional. But adapt or even drop anything that just seems too cumbersome. After a few such rites you will start to feel that what you do is coming naturally without too much thought.

Until then keep the contact with the ancestors at the level of 'getting to know'. Allow them to become accustomed to your presence and attention. If you think it's a little odd going off and talking to the ancestors, at least it's a choice you made. Put yourself in their place – they are almost certainly unused to such attention, and didn't even ask for it either!

Specifically ask if they're OK about you coming back again. Don't expect a resounding 'Yes' – indifference is the most likely response. You might get a clear 'No' but more likely you will simply find that 'life gets in the way' of a unwelcome return visit, or the 'gremlins' interfere with transport arrangements and such like. Contrary to popular fiction, other-than-human-persons are rarely malign. But there's a surprising number who like playing tricks. It's not that they are simply 'naughty', just that they stand outside of human concerns about what is thought to be right and wrong – 'amoral' rather than 'immoral'. By their very nature, tricks require seeing the world from a different perspective to normal. As such they are excellent way to get people to 'reframe' their assumptions, doubly so as it's more often about what tricksters *do* than what they *say*. Tricks are not the same as 'Go away'. They are testing your mettle and opening up your thinking, both at the same time.

'What do I need to know?'

I am, finally, getting to the core of learning from the ancestors. There are seemingly limitless possible topics. But in the same way a grandparent – whether dead or alive – is unlikely to be the best person to fix a wonky smartphone, so too you may not be that interested in being told when to press button 'B' in a GPO telephone kiosk. (I kid you not – back in the 1950s and 1960s this was essential knowledge for all children that might need to use a phone when away from home!)

I am not simply being flippant. Only ask questions which are sufficiently 'timeless' that almost anyone could understand their importance. And they do need to have some importance – there's Tarot cards, runes and a whole host of much easier divination methods for the trivial stuff about your love life (especially a lack of) or even changing your job. Yes, love, lust and dosh are trivial to the beings you are seeking advice from.

Above all, feel sure you have a really want inspiration or knowledge of the future. This is not a trivial 'parlour game' like Oiuja. The answer you get may well be an 'honest' one – and it may hurt your pride, or provide knowledge about the future of yourself or others that you find hard to accept. Memory has no 'rewind and delete' option. So, for example, don't ask about the prognosis of a serious illness – whether yours or someone else's – unless you have already considered the implications of all the possible answers.

Don't be impatient

Very often you may feel that you are just having a one-way conversation with the ancestors and, seemingly, not getting any responses. As I discussed at some length in the first book in this series, *Listening to the Stones*, modern people are usually very bad at listening! We're much happier to talk *at* rather than listen *to*. The absence of a clear reply is, quite often, the inability to listen appropriately.

Furthermore you may be asking for something which cannot be immediately answered or resolved. Or there may be good reasons why knowing the answer would not help, at least at the present moment. Do not get frustrated with yourself for not getting clear responses – although do stay sensitive to a sense that the ancestors are getting frustrated with you! I fully accept it can be difficult to spot the difference – but feel free to ask if you think this is the case.

My own approach is to honour and then 'chat'. At a certain stage, when it feels right, I will ask something along the lines of 'I don't know whether you can help me, or even if you're willing to, but can you offer me any advice about… '. I may well finish by saying that 'I don't need to know right now, but sometime in the next few weeks would be good. Big thanks if you can.' Only ask for a shorter timescale is there is a real urgency.

Not all prehistoric burial sites survive as mounds. This 'dolmen' or 'cromlech' is known as the Devil's Den. It can be found a few miles to the east of Avebury in the parish of Clatford.

This allows for all sorts of 'stuff' and apparent 'coincidences' to happen. You may stumble across the 'answer' in a book brought to your attention in a random way (for example, browsing through the stock in a charity shop you don't normally visit). A passing acquaintance may start a conversation about the relevant topic and reveal insights or other pertinent 'know how'. Or you may wake suddenly from a dream, 'knowing' the answer. In some instances what seemed to be the need to choose between two or more options changes unexpectedly so that only one option is left open. In other words, while you are in charge of asking the question, you are not in control of how and when the answer 'appears'. Just don't make assumptions – least of all that something is merely coincidence!

Frankly, it's quite alright to forget you asked the question! Some well-versed magicians would say it's even better if you do. Be that as it may, there is absolutely no point in going on and on about the same thing, either in the presence of the ancestors or in your head afterwards. Remember what I said about rituals needing a clear 'off switch' at the end. That applies just as much to the questions as it does to all the rest. You've done the opening ritual, you've asked the ancestors for their advice, you've closed the rite. Now get on with the rest of your life.

The so-called 'Whispering Knights' near the Rollright Stones on the Oxfordshire-Warwickshire border are the damaged remains of another 'dolmen' type burial chamber.

Don't forget to say thanks

As and when you think the ancestors have interceded on your behalf then don't forget to return and do another ritual, however brief, offering them your thanks – and, if at all possible, flowers, incense, tea, cake, beer or mead. Nothing upsets the older generations more than 'the young ones of today who don't know when to say 'thank you'.

So, always give something back. I am often happier visualising a gift rather than leaving anything physical. Either way, make sure it is something the ancestors would have appreciated in life. Flowers, biscuits and chocolate are the most obvious. Visualising the gift of a mobile phone so they can text you probably is probably rather wide of the mark...

Re-establish in your own mind the original meaning of the phrase 'grateful dead' and its sense of the dead who reward those who help them. Be sure in your dealings with the ancestors – even the difficult

and crotchety ones – you aim to make them into grateful dead. Token gestures or visualisations are just as valid as anything more elaborate. 'What would have been an appropriate gift when alive?' is the guiding principle.

Sitting out with the *land wights*

Unless you have considerable prior experience of rituals which involve entering Otherwordly realms – and, if so, you may have already surmised that this book is not written with you in mind – then don't attempt to travel into the realm of the dead. Remain standing or seated during rituals – avoid lying down. Above all, avoid lying face down to 'see' into the mound. A long-standing acquaintance of mine did just that many years ago, and saw all-too-clearly the burials underneath. Fortunately he had the common sense to turn over and 'come out' to this realm. Nevertheless he still regards it as one of his scarier moments, despite many powerful 'magical encounters' subsequently.

However the boundary between ancestors and the 'spirits of place' is, as I have attempted to show in this and the previous books, much less well defined than most people assume. So, if you find the idea of 'sitting out' with the ancestors doesn't seem right for you – most likely because where you are living is not your place of ancestry – then adapt everything I have been saying so it refers to learning from the spirits of place. Try to find out as much about them as you reasonably can, including what name they would have been referred to in the local languages.

First-person prophecies

This book is essentially about getting to know the ancestors and beginning to feel comfortable learning from them. How things go from there is, in large part, down to your inclinations. However I will offer just some thoughts about how things might develop.

Once you start asking the ancestors for advice about future options or events you are doing a form of divination. Strictly, you are asking the ancestors to prophesise on your behalf. Much of the time the responses

will simply 'happen' in the forthcoming days or weeks, such as the most improbably opportunities presenting themselves to you (and I say that from repeated personal experience). But you may find that the answers come into your mind in a quite prescriptive manner. These statements will be quite positive. Above all they are likely to be sentences which start 'I am… ', 'I saw… ' and variations on phrases such as 'I have heard tell…'

Indeed, the phrase *ic gefraegn* ('I have heard… ') is a common opening line to Old English poems. Clearly it is a good way for a storyteller to start and, like other clichéd phrases such as 'Once upon a time… ', serves to get the attention of the audience. However 'I have heard… ' is also the opening phrase of prophesies in the Scandinavian sagas. The women making these prophecies were known collectively as the *volva* and seem to have travelled about in small groups.

Based on what is written in the sagas there is no evidence that the *volva* asked the ancestors for help in foretelling the future. But there is no fundamental reason to suppose that, at least sometimes, this happened. Learning from the dead is one of the traditional north European 'mantic' or divinatory arts. Like the others it has a Latin name. *Senso stricto*, asking the dead to 'divine' the future is 'necromancy' – although this word was hijacked by Gothick novel authors and horror film screenwriters to refer to something different.

Seeing the past, divining the present and foretelling the future

Having raised the spectre – so to speak – of necromancy, note that the *volva* were human counterparts to the Norns, the triple female deities who could see the past, divine the present and foretell the future. There was then a distinction between seeing, divining and foretelling, unlike modern day presumptions that these are more or less the same.

Create similar distinctions in your own mind but be aware that you, like the *volva*, are somewhere on the borderlines of the original sense of necromancy. If you haven't realised already, do you now understand why I've given so much attention to protective guardians, amulets and ritual spaces?

In this short book I cannot possibly venture into practical guidance about divination and foretelling the future. All I will say is don't expect the answer to come flash, bang, right now. Give the ancestors time to 'act'. Don't get over-excited if 'stuff happens' over the next few days or weeks that you would not have ever expected. Be alert to potents and ostenta – stuff that 'happens' which you realise has special significance or meaning. My own experiences include unexpected close encounters with a hare and a deer (almost the same place but on different occasions) – and the 'timely' appearance of a kestrel or buzzard when asking for permission to proceed into places known to have been sacred groves in the past.

Sometimes, as already noted, opportunities present themselves which you simply could not have anticipated. There is no firm boundary between divination and enchantment, as I will explore in a later book. Asking to 'see' the future is a significant step towards bending the future to suit you.

Just accept such 'stuff' as portents and 'inexplicable coincidences'. Don't get excited about how 'clever' you are. You're not – it's the ancestors and the *land wights* who are pulling the strings, so to speak. You simply asked for their help.

'Foretelling the future' may or may not fit in with your sense of 'learning from the ancestors'. If not then simply keep your 'boundaries' and intents within the realms of learning which you are comfortable with. Those who already have some experience of 'knowing' or otherwise influencing the future will probably regard these last two sections as overly simplistic. This book is not the place to go into the necessary detail, I simply wish to make it clear that any boundary is of your choosing – there isn't one already 'out there'.

Envoi

This book has been about understanding that there is no 'them and us' about the ancestors. Their realm and our realm are separated by a permeable boundary, although one which should be crossed with care and scrupulously 'closed' again afterwards.

In almost every traditional culture throughout the world – including Europe until comparatively recent times – there have been ways of

'honouring' at least some of the dead, those who were regarded as key founders and 'ancestors'. Without being overly-prescriptive this book has attempted to show how such traditional ways of thinking – and doing – may be of benefit in the modern Western world.

Previously in the Living in a Magical World series I have described how to 'listen' – with all your senses – to other-than-human-persons, and how to recognise guardians among them. I have also shown how to create guardians which can be carried with you to ritual places. This book has been about 'listening' and learning from the ancestors in a 'ritual' manner, not necessarily in ways which would be appropriate in other situations.

I'm quite happy if you think learning from the ancestors is 'all in the mind' – at least you will be exploring those parts of the mind many people are unfamiliar with or uncomfortable about. I'd be less happy if you thought everything was literally 'true'. I'd be most happy if you have a different way of thinking during rituals than during the rest of your life – a temporary shift in the 'boundary' of your worldview.

In the next book in the Living in a Magical World series I will discuss how everything is in a state of flux or emergence – a 'state of emergency' in the literal sense. Recall the words of Paul Klee used as this book's epigraph:

> In this world, no one can pin me down. For I reside just
> as much among the dead, as among those not yet born.
> A little closer to creation than is usual, and yet still,
> much too far away.

Think again of the *The Lament of the Old Woman of Beare*, already quoted in full:

> Happy the island of the sea
> where flow always comes after ebb:
> What flow will follow ebb in me?
> I am wretched. What was flow
> is now all ebb. Ebbing I go.
> After the Tide, the Undertow.

Suffice to say that the ancestors are part of the emergent processes I will explore further.

Acknowledgements

My ideas have been inspired by a great many authors – who may be dismayed to see their ideas paraphrased without any reference to their own names. However in such a brief book then such 'niceties' must, regrettably, be omitted. Nevertheless, the relevant works are cited in the list of sources.

Special thanks to Lama Khemsar Rinpoche for *loong* ('transmission') of Yungdrung Bön teachings which, while not succeeding in making me a *bön po*, effectively put me in touch with my own ancestry.

Private conversations with Emma Restall Orr together with her leadership of the Honouring the Ancient Dead group gave me insights into her life-long relationship with the 'hidden company'. This book is in many respects the outcome of one specific conversation, long before I had this series in my mind.

Conversations with Jamie Blackwater have influenced the contents of this book at the deepest levels. Indeed, had he not shared his experiences and insights with me I doubt very much if I would have ventured into this territory myself.

Nigel Pennick's numerous books, YouTube videos and personal emails have been both a source of specific information and provided general reassurance that I am resonating with a real English tradition. The observation that we begin our existence in our grandmother's wombs came from one of his earlier but most informative works, *Secrets of East Anglian Magic*.

John Male described – at dusk, within a few miles of the centre of England – a powerful, accurate and traumatic experience while 'sitting out' at a burial mound. I have incorporated one of the lessons he learnt into the relevant section of this book.

Various ideas have crept in which I am aware were picked up from Graham Harvey's inspirational talks and conversations – I suspect that others have also crept in too, but without my conscious recollection.

Linda Sever posted details of 'Raising Peter' to the *Northern Earth* email list and Simon Crook responded with the Ballyvourney link.

Björk Guðmundsdóttir, on her 1997 album *Homogenic* (which I take to mean 'self-creating') was, to my awareness, the first person to use the phrase 'state of emergency' to refer to 'emergence'.

At the risk of stating the excessively obvious, none of these people necessarily share my opinions or approach.

These acknowledgements would not, of course, be complete without acknowledging the inspiration and guidance of 'Our Ladies of Kennet' and the *land wights* and ancestors of Avebury and north Leicestershire.

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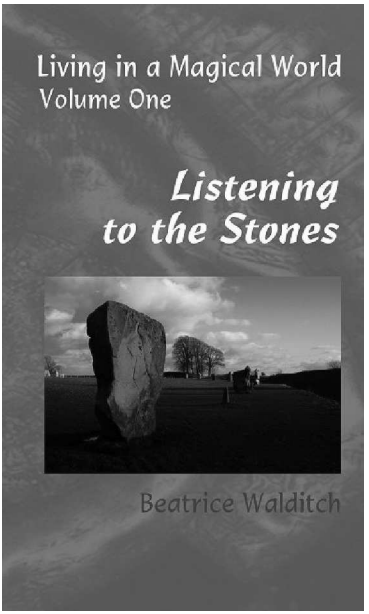
Listening to the Stones

Beatrice Walditch



Listening to the Stones teaches you to 'listen' – with all your senses – to revered places. Beatrice Walditch uses the prehistoric henge and stone circles at Avebury as her main examples, but wants you to explore and 'listen' to sacred sites near to where you live.

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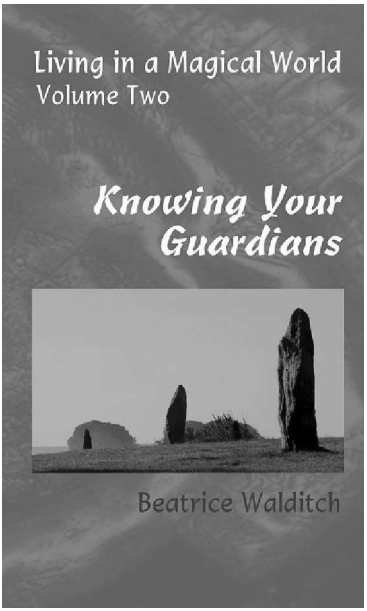

Beatrice Walditch

Knowing Your Guardians provides advice and inspiration to help understand the various ways of thinking about protective guardians. Beatrice Walditch mostly explores the traditional 'spirits of place' in Britain, although also shows how similar ideas and concepts are found elsewhere in Europe and beyond. She shows how these guardians have long been thought to have a 'potency' or 'luck'. The final sections of the book explain how to make amulets and 'charge' them so that they act as personal guardians.

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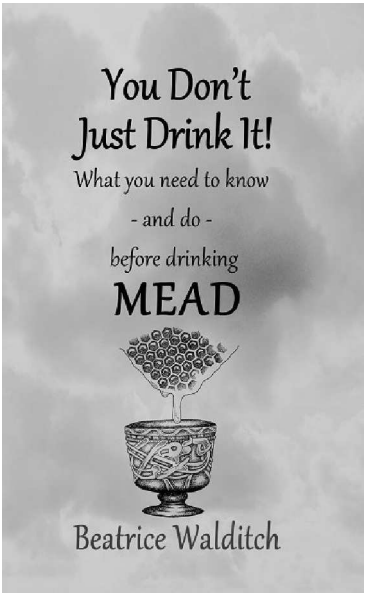
Illustrated by David Taylor



Mead is the oldest-known alcoholic drink and familiar to a great many traditional societies throughout the world. For Druids it is the appropriate ritual offering to the ancestors. In medieval legends it is the source of poetic inspiration. In the British Isles mead-making may go back as far as five thousand years ago, to the time of the prehistoric henges.

Every bottle of mead is part of this unbroken tradition. So, as Beatrice Walditch explains, *You Don't Just Drink It!* In this informative yet light-hearted book she tells you what you need to know – and do – before drinking mead. She also includes recipes and practical advice for brewing mead, based on her own experience.

Above all, *You Don't Just Drink It!* reveals why sharing a bottle of mead with friends needs to be done at the full moon…

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