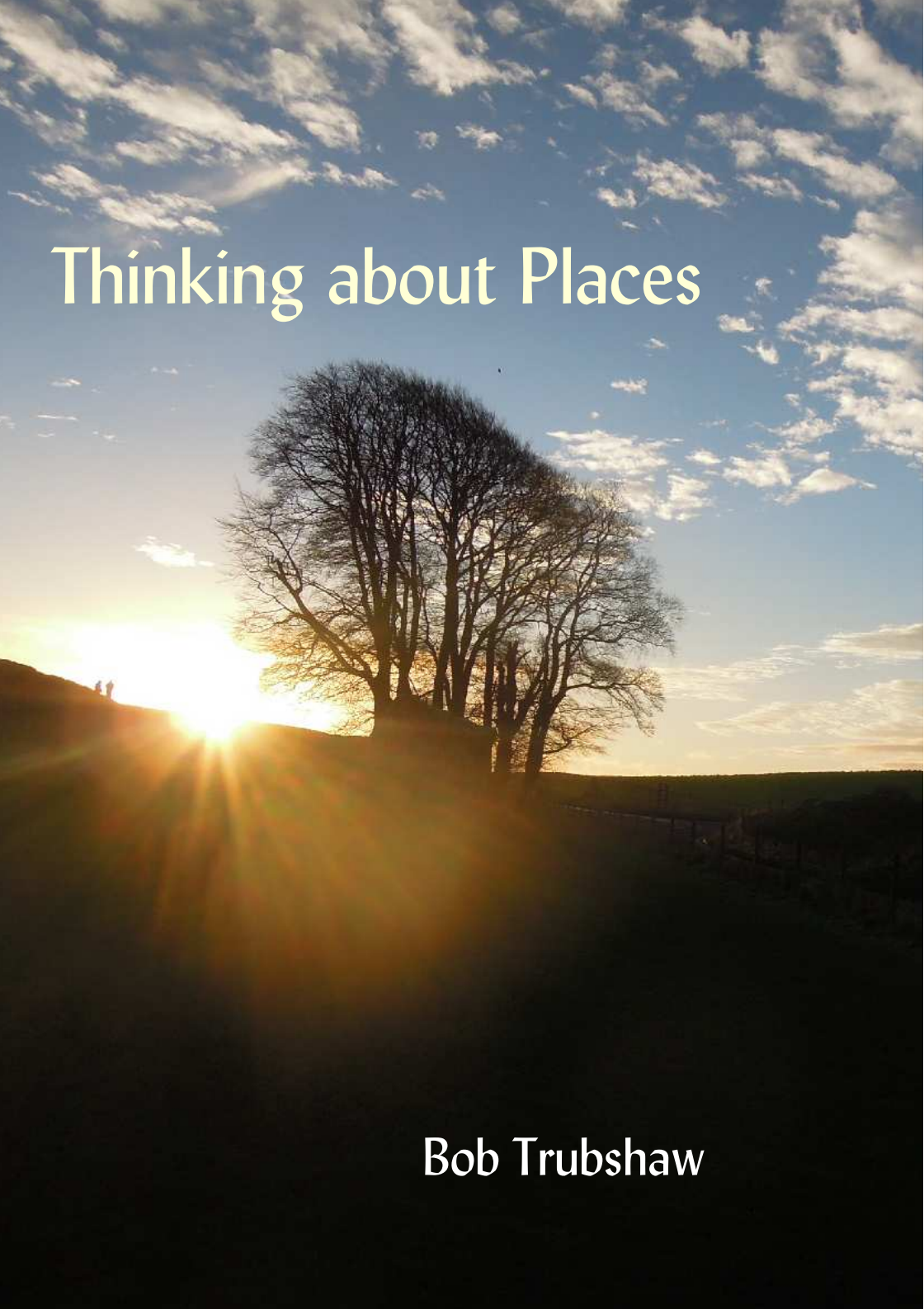
Thinking about Places
Bob Trubshaw

Thinking About Places pivots around Bob Trubshaw's observation that "… because we spend our lives in a variety of different types of places means we are about as oblivious to the nuances of 'theory of place' as a fish is to the water it swims in. Which also means 'theory of place' is as important to archaeologists as water is to fishes."

What is a 'theory of place'? Outside the realms of geography most academics see no need to consider such a question. Sadly, this is especially true of the linguists who study the names of places. Those that do venture, such as Tim Ingold, reveal just what a wonderful 'garden of delights' awaits.

This collection of essays contains reworked versions of previous articles and chapters from books, along with newly-written material. The opening chapter starts from the observation that a place is the sum total of all the functions and activities in a given locality. This makes places more like verbs than nouns. If that sounds odd then think about the core reason for place-names: to distinguish one place from other places. Places – and their names – are not so much inanimate 'things' as ongoing 'differentiations'. Subsequent chapters look at the invention of prehistoric sacred places, the English rural idyll, prehistoric wayfaring and modern-day notions of psychogeography.

Thinking About Places

Bob Trubshaw

Heart of Albion

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Preface

This work is based on several previously-published articles and chapters from books published in 2005 and 2011, together with new material (chapters one, three and seven) which attempts to bring together the different perspectives. Although all the chapters attempt to shed light on how we can think about places, the manner of approaching these core ideas varies greatly. Feel free to 'dip in' and read the chapters which interest you most – after all, most were originally written as stand-alone pieces.

1: Putting places in their place

Have you been anywhere recently? What sort of place was it? A town, a hill, a field, a beach, a river, or someplace else? What do we mean by 'place' anyway? It's one of those frequently-used words which has a slippery meaning. Etymologically, the core meaning is 'spot' or 'courtyard' – think Italian *piazza* or Spanish *plaza* – but even older is a sense of somewhere 'broad' (Greek *plateia*). The Anglo-Saxons had two words, *stede* and *stow*, with the same sense. So in Old English a churchyard was *kirk stede*. Stow on the Wolds, Padstow (originally [St] Petroc's *stow*), Stowmarket and numerous other English place-names reveal the large number of notable *stows*.

One would expect that the academics who study the names of places would have establish a 'theory of place' on which their discipline is based. But this is not the case. Only in the late 1970s did place-names scholars start to think that visiting the places the names referred to was necessary. And only a minority make such visits now. The reality of place-name studies is an emphasis on names rather than the places the names refer to. Formidable linguistic skills are needed for this but there is no corresponding emphasis on geographical and geomorphological skills.

So let's step back a little. Place-names mostly relate to 'places', however conceived, which have some sort of topographical setting – such as beside a river or on the slope of a hill. They usually have a sense of centre and some concept of boundaries, although these are often vague or mutable. What we think of as a place is essentially a mix of topography (especially geomorphology and soil types) with the multiple 'functions' of the place. These can be more or less functional, while multiple functions can overlap at any one time, and there is plenty of scope for any of these functions to change over time, including eponymous functions becoming obsolete while new functions take root.

One example is Waltons. These were once occupied by British-speaking slaves (so they 'functioned' in a manner possibly akin to Apartheid-era South African townships). They are topographically distinct, in that Waltons are typically on less well-drained soils, or heavier clays, or had less reliable water sources – very much 'second-best' locations. The name persisted long after the eponymous British-speaking *walhs* seem to have adopted Old English – and for the much longer period since everyone stopped using Old English.

Eton: from 'watery place' to school.

Another example is Eatons and Etons. These originally denoted a 'water *tun*' in an analogous manner to Strettons which are *tuns* on a Roman road (OE *straet*). Both E(a)ton and Stretton denote some specific function relating to being on routeways, although exactly what that function might have been is now lost. The best guess is the inhabitants were responsible for maintenance of the routeway, but it is only a guess. Yet mention 'Eton' and most people would think of the function of the best-known instance of that toponym: a premier public school and all the 'services' which appertain. Similarly Harrow, Uppingham, Oakham, Marlborough and other minor market towns took on 'Eton-esque' functions when more minor public schools were established there in the nineteenth century.

Topography and functions come together in a different manner at the various places called Bradford, self-evidently located where a river was once crossed without using a bridge or ferry. The designation 'broad', originally meaning 'great' rather than 'wide', affirms these were important. Indeed, such crossing places bring together land and water transport so market towns developed around them. But of course not all market towns are located at fords called 'Bradford' – even if a ford was once key to the location. Strictly the place-name 'Bradford' is descriptive, not functional. Yet without the well-established function there would be no place for which a place-name would be needed. So, for the purposes of this study, I make no distinction between descriptive and functional place-names as, without exception, all places have evolving functions.

Place-names often refer to settlements or other human 'constructs' which either have a fairly exact location – as with fords and hill tops – or to more specific locations, such as shrines (*weohs, stapols*), churches and wells. Larger places, such as settlements and bigger shrines (*heargs*), have an implicit or explicit central place. In reality this distinction often blurs, as when the centre is a church or other 'specific', with the 'specific' giving its name to the settlement and, in many cases, to the surrounding parish. Most commonly this is where the village takes its name from the church – Peterchurch, Padstow or Westminster, and such like – although there are parallel examples based on river crossings, such as the various Bradfords or Bristol, originally the 'bridge stow'.

But there's a problem. Many settlement names refer to nucleated villages. But these were formed anything up to several centuries after the coining of the name. What did the name initially refer to? Presumably an 'estate centre' – think of a large farm – near the most reliable water source, on well-drained sand or gravel, probably with a separate water course for effluent. Just such a location would be ideal – nay, essential – for the later nucleated village. So, presumably, the name remained the same even though the settlement changed dramatically. Some of those small villages later became planned 'new towns' and expanded into neat toft-and-croft plots for the families recruited to occupy such planted market towns. Not all of these new towns took off, so some remained 'mere villages' while others expanded greatly over the following centuries, becoming the county towns and, later, industrialised factory towns.

Despite all these changes of function the name of the place has remained more or less the same. Places typically evolve to a much greater extent than their names. If you go to a Bradford you are unlikely to take much interest in the crossing of the river, still less wonder when the broad ford was replaced by a bridge. If you visit places with equally common names – such as Drayton, Eaton, Grafton, Kingston, Moreton or Stretton – I suspect you will have little idea why they were so called (read Cole 2010 and Bourne 2017a if you want to know). So while we use place-names on a daily basis, we rarely stop to consider either their original meaning or the ways in which the places have evolved (in morphology and function) since the name was given to the locality.

Centres have circumferences

Places aren't simply centred on somewhere, they also have boundaries with other places. In recent centuries such boundaries tend to be tightly defined, as with parishes and counties. But that was not always the case – the Anglo-Saxons carefully managed areas of 'no man's land' grazed by several adjoining parishes. These were the sorts of places also used for seasonal gatherings. Before that major Roman roads, such as Watling Street and the Fosse Way, mostly follow watersheds seemingly crossing though long-standing 'no man's land' as these roads rarely pass by Iron Age hill forts – commonly found on just such high ground overlooking valleys.

What was the sense of boundary before the granting of charters and later tithes and precursors to 'Council Tax' made exact bounds more essential? Boundaries are needed – but they also need to be crossed by administrators, merchants, pilgrims and others. They may also be crossed for more nefarious reasons – toll-dodging, cattle raiding and related 'protection rackets', or by armies passing through on their way to or from a major battle elsewhere (Weber 2005: 14–15). We now think of rivers as good boundaries, but this seems to have been an innovation during the middle Anglo-

Saxon era, as the oldest land units seem to be associated with valleys, with the boundaries along the watersheds (Whittock and Whittock 2014). Longer rivers seemingly were once regarded as a series of distinct valley territories (Trubshaw 2015 (2016)).

Places as processes

Attempting to shed light on all the questions which arise when thinking about places leads to the inevitable conclusion that the concept of place is the sum total of all the functions and activities in the locality. In other words, places are social constructs, albeit almost always with various topographical constraints. This makes places more like verbs than nouns. If that sounds odd then think about the core reason for place-names: to distinguish one place from other places. Places – and their names – are not so much inanimate 'things' as ongoing 'differentiations'. And here I am using the word 'differentiation' in the technical sense of referring to the process of becoming different by growth or development, as when biological cells and organs acquire specialised features during embryonic development. If you are looking for a snappy sound bite then perhaps 'places are processes' comes close.

Back in 2005 I published a whole book looking at the invention of the idea of prehistoric sacred places. The first chapter looked at the roots of such numinous locations: the invention of the English rural idyll in the period from the 1890s to the 1930s which is reprinted as Chapter Four of this work. But secular and downright functional places have been 'invented' too. 'Alternative archaeology' – sometimes also known as 'Earth mysteries' – in the 1970s was strong on one aspect of places which had hitherto been neglected: the legends associated with prehistoric monuments, standing stones, crossroads, and such like, especially those on boundaries and dramatic rock outcrops. While this work was essentially antiquarian, there was a sophisticated, albeit 'intuitive', sense of place.

A similarly sophisticated understanding of topography is a necessary adjunct to the linguistic skills which dominate place-name scholarship. But even more crucial to understanding the name of places is an awareness of what a place is, and the various phases and functions which underlie the modern place, whether unremittingly urban or remotely rural.

Based on an article first published in Northern Earth *No.151 (2017).*

2: The invention of sacred places

Rituals take place at a specific time in a specific place. Indeed the marking of the beginning and ends of rites – as when pagans 'open' and 'close' a circle, or when worshippers gather in churches, mosques, synagogues and temples – is an integral, albeit liminal, aspect. And whether the rites take place in a manmade structure or somewhere more natural, the place is just as significant, at least for the duration of the ritual. A sacred ritual, by definition, takes place at a sacred place (or at least one which becomes more numinous for the duration of the rite).

Archaeologists are finally beginning to understand that the location of prehistoric ceremonies was not just 'accidental' but reflected deeply-rooted 'myths' about the landscape. Springs and hilltops feature most commonly, although closer examination of the topography suggests that more subtle aspects were also of importance. They make specific places in some way distinctive.

Sacred places do not exist *a priori*. Intentions, actions and – above all – recollections deem a place to be more numinous. And because what happens at these places usually involves both dead ancestors and deities they become regarded as the place to go to be nearer the gods, with the dead ancestors acting in exactly the same way as intercessionary saints in early medieval Christianity (see Trubshaw 2016).

Historians rely on rather randomly-recorded written 'snapshots' while anthropologists are accustomed to having living 'informants' to observe and question. In contrast archaeologists are able to look at surviving material evidence. In practice the evidence for ritual activities survives poorly and is inevitably ambiguous. Only when the evidence stacks up over several generations or more do archaeologists feel comfortable about making even the most tentative of interpretations. Until recently archaeologists have rarely looked in any meaningful way at the evidence which survives best – the topography.

Among the exceptions are Vicki Score and Gordon Noble who took a detailed look at the surviving prehistoric sites on the coasts of Ireland, Wales, south-west Scotland and Dorset. The overwhelming conclusion is that these tombs were not sited simply to have a nice view of the waves (although this too is true) but to act as reliable navigation aids for sea-borne travellers. Just to prove they weren't in the least bit daft, given a sensible alternative Neolithic sailors made for the source of rivers that linked together via a short overland trek rather than risk the more extreme coastal tidal races

The Neolithic chamber tomb. acting as a seamark overlooking the estuary at Manorbier, Pembrokeshire.

to get to the estuaries of these routeways. So the Kilmartin valley was preferred to going around the Mull of Kintyre. The Upper Clyde also connects conveniently with the sources of the Tweed (and thence the east coast) and the Nith (flowing south to the Solway coast). Dunragit provides another alternative to the extreme waters of the Mull of Galloway. All these prehistoric Scottish overland routes 'filled up' with monuments, such as henges, and then remained important until the present day; indeed, some of these 'corridors' are now dominated by motorways (Noble 2007).

The same argument links the headwaters of the three watercourses of Wessex (Kennet, Solent Avon and Bristol Avon) into a 'routeway' – the Marlborough Downs – which avoids going the long way round the undisputedly tricky waters off Land's End. Likewise, Wessex filled up with prehistoric monuments on a scale that is on a par with the routes in Scotland.

Sadly, the handful of archaeologists who have looked at topography as more than merely 'viewsheds' seem never to have read up basic undergraduate textbooks on the anthropology of rituals and geographers' concepts of place. And that's not me being uncharitable. Ian Straughin, a scholar specialising in Moslem landscapes, put it in a more scholarly manner when he wrote that archaeologists need to start talking to scholars of religion and 'pay closer attention to those activities by which individuals and communities lay claim to the authority of god-speech, whether in the form of scripture, mystical experience, sacrificial divination, or whatever other shapes it might take.' He also states that sacred place and ritual have 'long suffered' from being analysed only in ways with which archaeologists are most comfortable. (Straughin 2014: 167, 177)

One of the Neolithic monuments in the Kilmartin valley, Argyll.

Places as proactive and determinative

In the previous chapter I introduced the idea of 'places as processes'. A more academic version is that places are 'proactive and determinative'. However, because we spend our lives in a variety of different types of places means we are about as oblivious to the nuances of 'theory of place' as a fish is to the water it swims in. Which also means 'theory of place' is as important to archaeologists as water is to fishes…

Chinese culture provides an ideal opportunity for Western scholarship to explore notions of place and sanctity. Chinese worldviews are sufficiently 'exotic' – at least to Westerners – to be identified despite ethnocentric myopia. And the Chinese culture is sufficiently varied to offer a variety of intersecting ways of thinking about sacred places (see Dematè 2014 if you want more). Think also how Australian Dreamtime tracks consist of a series of landmarks, each of which is associated with an often-complex narrative about ancestral beings. These so-called 'song lines' illustrate that, just as 'sacred places' do not exist until someone makes them 'sacred', so too 'places' do not exist until someone identifies something distinctive about a location – which usually also means giving the place a name and at least the semblance of 'mythic significance'. We did the same with the place-specific folklore collected mostly by late nineteenth British folklorists – but we don't deem it to be as 'exotic' as, say, Aboriginal culture.

Archaeologists and, indeed, many other Western scholars, are intent on establishing what rituals 'do' and what they may have 'meant'. But, as anthropologists have long been aware, the real question is how performing rituals *constructs* meaning (Sperber

The lost-in-the cloud midwinter sunrise seen from the summit of Waden Hill, overlooking Avebury.

1975: 51). And, as already noted, rituals take place at locations which thereby acquire meaning. We need to be more alert to the ways activities at places construct the 'meaning' of those locations.

This means, firstly, being aware how 'sacred places' construct both sacredness and a sense of place rather than thinking of some passive manner in which places merely 'have' a meaning. Secondly, this awareness must extend to the much more pervasive ways *secular* activities construct the 'distinctiveness' that, for convenience, we think of as a specific place.

Places must be experienced to be fully understood. Verbal descriptions, maps, photos, statistical analyses, computer simulations and the like are not places – despite vast armies of academics seemingly being unable to make the distinction. We experience places by being there – walking through the landscape while seeing, hearing, feeling, and sometimes even by smelling or by kinaesthetic responses (as when the ground is difficult to walk over, as with gravel, loose sand, mud, etc). Think of it as 'listening with all the senses' if you like. Awareness of historic or even prehistoric 'functions' of places are generally masked by modern day preconceptions. For example, most visitors to, say, a prehistoric henge bring with them with any number of preconceived ideas about the possible 'meanings' of such places (both in

About fifteen minutes later the sun appears far more dramatically over the henge bank. Is this theatrical effect one of the reasons henges were constructed?

prehistory and the present day). What is actually needed is an open mind, but nevertheless fully 'in the moment' to allow the landscape to tell its own story and meanings.

Even after living in Avebury for over five years I never ceased to be surprised by new 'awarenesses' which the landscape provided, especially when walking around at sunrise or sunset at different seasons of the year (Trubshaw 2018b). When I talked to the small number of people with a similar approach we would swap notes – but rarely did the experiences overlap, instead we each added to the others' awareness. The most complex of these experiences were to do with apparently intentional acoustic effects involving the megaliths, the henge bank, and such like. Such 'soundscapes' would however only have been fully experienced when there were large numbers of people involved in an established ritual – not something which could readily be recreated today (Trubshaw 2015c).

Even plainchant in a medieval cathedral is a poor imitation of the original sound, as modern choirs sing in concert pitch and make no attempt to adjust the dominant to the resonant frequencies of the building. If they did then their voices would set up the same standing waves which male voices can establish in surviving Neolithic chamber

Some of the columns inside Lincoln cathedral are 'tuned' a third or a fifth apart (either by changing the size or by changing the type of stone).

tombs. And such standing waves allow for some dramatic 'ventriloquism' effects as all sounds – including speech and chant – appear to be coming from everywhere and nowhere. Given a little bit of 'stage management' to create a full-on immersive experience (dim lighting, vivid smells, sensory deprivation from fasting or sleep-loss, and such like) such disembodied voices could easily be 'passed off' as the voices of ancestors or deities.

While sunrises and acoustic 'anomalies' can be experienced as individuals, the whole concept of a sacred space is for such 'theatrical effects' to be incorporated in the collective rituals once enacted there. Without knowing the rites we can make only poor attempts at understanding the meaning, significance and 'symbolism'.

As Steven Feld observed back in 1996, 'places make sense and senses make place'. Chris Tilley has made a brave attempt to expand on that premise in his book *Interpreting Landscapes* (discussed in the next chapter). John Billingsley's review of the book concluded that Tilley raised 'issues of sensory perception and transmutation in the consciousness which are, to my mind, key in our own understandings of prehistoric landscapes'. 'But', Billingsley emphasised, 'for those with the ability to realise it to appreciate the full complexity of dialogue with place, past and present, one must be there, present, in that place.' (Billingsley 2015)

Tilley has been publishing relevant remarks since the mid-1990s. But archaeological approached to landscapes are still only beginning to look at the often well-preserved topographical evidence rather than the 'objects' deemed to be material culture. And archaeologists' attempts to put landscapes and material culture into the context of 'non-material culture', such as worldviews and religion, reveal little or no awareness of their colleagues in departments of ethnography or comparative religion.

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3: Thinking about places

Predictably enough the first academics who first began to think about places in a more theoretical manner were geographers. Equally predictably, the roots of this approach are in the 1960s. Those who wish to delve into the origins will need to track down papers published in a wide variety of journals, extending well beyond geographical concerns (see Tuan 1977: 207 fn.3 for a list). One these pioneers has come to be regarded as the founding father of 'human geography': Yi-Fu Tuan. Tuan was born in China, did a BA and MA at Oxford, then enrolled at the University of California to get a PhD. Afterwards he went to Toronto and Minnesota, where he became a professor. He quickly gained a reputation for work on 'topophilia' ('love of places') and making a distinction between human geography and 'humanistic geography'. In more recent years he considered his work to be 'geosophy' – the study of geographical knowledge from any or all points of view – a term invented in 1947 by J.K. Wright.

Tuan wrote two books in the 1970s which subsequent scholarship regards as canonical: *Topophilia: A study of environmental perception, attitudes and values* 1974) and *Space and Place: The perspective of experience* (1977). These two works are commonly cited as the starting point for all subsequent 'serious' thinking about places. Indeed, when an academic author seems to be losing their way when thinking about places I have been known to check the bibliography to see if Tuan is listed; no surprises to say that those that seem most lost are least likely to include a citation.

However there is a great risk of reifying Tuan at the expense of more recent scholarship. The author who, at least for me, who most deserves regarding as a minor deity is the former Professor of Social Anthropology at Manchester and, since 1999, at Aberdeen. Tim Ingold's *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on livelihood, dwelling and skill* was published in 2000 and is the culmination of his work at Manchester. This is a book where almost every page offers challenges and inspiration about how humans relate to where they live.

Ingold's scope is wider than merely places, revealing how our concepts of places evolve from *interacting* with the environment. This sense of place as, in essence, a 'lived experience' and far from the desiccated onamastics which prevails in the study of place-names. With Ingold one feels only a step away from an actual journey from,

say, a Grendon, over the Bradford, and on to the Compton, whereas linguists remain behind their desks, content to identify the specifics and etymologies of green hills, broad fords and coombe *tuns*.

In fairness to Ingold he has much broader aims: *viz*. to understand the 'dwelled world' requires integrating anthropology, archaeology and psychology. Quite an ambition, given the profound theoretical and epistemological differences between these disciplines. Touch, smell, 'materiality', emotions and memories, plants and animals – all these are part of Ingold's 'dwelled world', every much as the predominately visual anthropocentric way we normally 'look at' or 'regard' our world (both terms containing fossilised *visual* metaphors).

The making of landscape archaeology

However there was an academic who, forty years before Ingold became a professor, very literally put on walking boots and experienced the landscape. It would have been about the most unlikely thing anyone would expect an historian to do in the 1940s and 50s. History at the time was all about 'great men' and, at least so much as it helped understand their actions, using old maps as adjuncts to written sources. But why on earth would anyone want to walk around muddy fields? To be honest, I have no idea why W.G. Hoskins decided to take an interest in the history of fields. The best guess is that as relaxation from the rigours of his study he chose to go rambling – it was, after all, fashionable in the 1930s, when he was appointed Assistant Lecturer in Commerce at University College, Leicester (later the University of Leicester). Having an indubitably enquiring mind, presumably Hoskins began to wonder about the humps and bumps in fields in the middle of nowhere. In 1938 he became Reader in English Local History at Leicester, and his interest in fields became part of his work.

Hoskins was the first to recognise that the inexplicably 'humpy bumpy' fields to the east of Leicester – and indeed elsewhere England – were either evidence for medieval ploughing or the vestiges of houses from long-since shrunken or deserted villages. His inquisitive approach came to fruition with one of the more momentous books of the 1950s: *The Making of the English Landscape*, published in 1955. Few other books of that decade instigated a whole new discipline.

Without Hoskins arguably there may have been no *Time Team* as Mick Aston, the kingpin of the long-running series, was Hoskins' successor as Britain's best-known landscape archaeologist. To be fair there were several people of Mick's generation who did not have so much TV presence who also contributed significantly to landscape archaeology, including Maurice Beresford, David Hill and Christopher Taylor. In hindsight we can see that these landscape archaeologists were part of the mythic process described in the next chapter – the invention of the English rural idyll

– in that they ignored industrialised landscapes. Just like the folklorists of the 1870s to 1970s, the 'past' was a Romanticised view of the countryside, while towns were a 'degenerate' modern aberration. The disciplines of 'landscape archaeology' and 'industrial archaeology' developed contemporaneously but with little overlap.

Hoskins and the generation inspired by him showed that the landscape could be 'read' by anyone taking the trouble to go out and walk over it. Maps and historic documents are important too, as may be geophysical surveys and (at least on *Time Team*) surveys by helicopter, and their latter-day reincarnations: camera-equipped drones and Lidar surveys.

The more you look, the more you find…

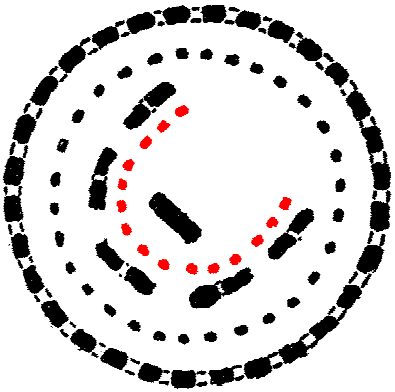
The importance of landscape surveys was not lost on the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (later to merge with English Heritage, before it became Historic England). Several large areas of England were surveyed in exhaustive details by skilled teams, revealing vast numbers of hitherto-unknown remains – from prehistoric earthworks to substantial fragments of industrial archaeology. This was an entirely pragmatic exercise, as far from theoretical debates as it is possible to get. Yet the RCHME surveys revealed something quite profound: the more you look, the more you find, and the more questions the evidence raises.

As with any legal enquiry, the more evidence there is, the more questions need to be asked – and, rather too often, the more ambiguous the 'actual past' begins to appear. In the light of RCHME activities, prior regional distribution maps began to look much more like evidence of where previous research had focused rather than any reliable indication of how specific types of earthwork or structure had originally been set out.

Situating myself in the phenomenology of landscapes

At the end of the day, after all their fieldwork and supporting documentary research, landscape archaeologists and RCHME surveyors draw maps. But, as has been known since the early 1930s, 'A map is not the territory it represents' (Korzybski 1933: 58). At the same time Ingold was using his background in social anthropology to think about the experiences of the environment another anthropologist – with a joint PhD in archaeology – was out there experiencing archaeological landscapes. Christopher Tilley, now the Professor of Anthropology and Archaeology at UCL, referred to his approach as 'phenomenology'. His first substantial publication, *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, paths and monuments*, appeared in 1994, while a work collating key parts of his subsequent career appeared in 2012 as *Interpreting Landscapes: Geologies, topographies, identities*.

Much of Tilley's work has been in the south-west of England – Dartmoor, Bodmin Moor, Exmoor, Dorset and West Penwith – but his early work included



Reconstruction of the final phase of Stonehenge, with the bluestone 'horseshoe' shown in red. North is at the top so the open side faces towards the midsummer sunrise.

Pembrokeshire and Avebury, Wiltshire. Without Tilley's chapters on Avebury and Pembrokeshire this present work – and a great deal of my writing about prehistoric landscapes since the late 1990s – would probably have never happened, or would have been very different. Tilley's 1994 book describes walking along the reconstructed double-stone row, known as the Avenue, towards the henge at Avebury. He notes that this processional route is tucked down in a dry valley between the Ridgeway to the north-east and slopes of Waden Hill to the south-west. Because of a slight rise in the ground the henge – the largest known example – remains hidden until a mere few hundred yards away. And a kink in the stone row just before this rise means anyone walking along is looking toward the causewayed enclosure around the summit of Windmill Hill, which predates the henge and the later stone rows.

Following the route of the Avenue towards the henge means that the substantial earth banks prevent anyone seeing – or clearly hearing – what might be going on within. Even after passing through the south entrance vision and hearing are impeded by the two largest stones of the outer circle. Proceeding between these and the largest stone of the south circle come inhibit sight and sound from the centre, where the Obelisk once stood (and the small but curiously-coloured 'D'-shaped setting of stones has been re-erected).

Sadly Chris Tilley died in 2024 at the age of sixty-nine.

Similarly, the 'Cove Stones' in the centre of the northern circle at Avebury (there were originally three, forming an open-ended 'box') also face to the midsummer sunrise. Photograph taken looking north-east.

Strictly Tilley was not the first to recognise this 'nested' series of barriers to perception: the credit goes to Julian Thomas (Thomas 1993). Intriguingly, there is a similar scenario when approaching Stonehenge from the mid-point of the so-called Cursus. This involves walking due south, through a dip which makes the megalithic monument itself invisible, before the stone re-appear on the horizon a few hundred yards away. This is the only place so close to the stones where the monument is 'skylined' in this manner. The outer trilithons block sight and sound even better than the megaliths at Avebury, while the open side of the 'horseshoe' configuration points north-east, the same as the Cove stone at the centre of the north circle at Avebury (the two surviving stones of the Cove originally had a third companion, leaving the open side to the north-east).

These insights were all new to me in 1994. For once academics were experiencing the prehistoric landscape in ways which hitherto had only been associated with what had been regarded as 'fringe' antiquarianism. One of Tilley's other chapters was a detailed discussion about the intervisibilities of chambered tombs in Pembrokeshire, suggesting that one might have been the 'central' (and presumably oldest) of a cluster. This needed checking out – and so, in September 1995, I drove over for a week's

Gwal y Filiast chamber tomb, Pembrokeshire in September 1995. The name translates as 'the tomb of the dog' and, indeed, the cap stone has a remarkable resemblance to a canine skull.

camping and fairly intensive tour around the surviving Neolithic monuments of the south-west tip of Wales.

The more theoretical aspects of Tilley's work were, at the time, a little opaque to me. I was aware that in the late 1980s he and Michael Shanks had published a couple of books – *Re-Constructing Archaeology* and *Social Theory and Archaeology* (Shanks and Tilley 1987a; 1987b) – which had created some intense debates within the whole realm of British academic archaeology about the relevance of 'post-modernism'. But, because of the demands of both a time-consuming day job and producing *Mercian Mysteries* (a quarterly magazine which straddled alternative and academic archaeology, along with folklore and mythology, later known as *At the Edge* before merging with *3rd Stone*) it was only in the late 1990s that I really engaged with the 'whole po-mo thing'.

Although my understanding of post-modernism in the mid-90s was fairly minimalist, one of Michael Shanks' solo books came to my attention. Called *Experiencing the Past* (Shanks 1992) it was clearly some sort of precursor to Tilley's phenomenological approach (although I read Tilley's book prior to this work by Shanks). According to the blurb 'As Michael Shanks moves through the debates surrounding heritage and cultural identity, archaeology becomes a cultural kaleidoscope.' Quite. Whatever that really means, 'kaleidoscopic' does capture the flavour of this book – complex, difficult to pin down but wonderfully maverick. Unlike the joint works with Tilley and Tilley's solo work, this particular book by Shanks is rarely cited by more recent authors. And yet it was both a revelation and inspiration to me. In part because Shanks includes a wide range of quite 'arty' illustrations which meant that I felt an affinity with my own art college background and met his hermeneutical deconstructions halfway (and, indeed my very first exposure to hermeneutics in the late 1970s was within an 'arty' literary context, not an archaeological one).

While my route into prehistoric landscapes was entirely different to those of either Shanks or Tilley, I had the sense that we had met up in some middle ground near the 'headwaters' of our respective intellectual travels. In hindsight I would deem what we had in common as 'experiential', although it might be more accurate to say it was 'topographical'. I will come back to this in later chapters. For the moment allow me to continue with these personal reminiscences. Because, about the same time as I read Tilley's *A Phenomenology of Landscape* another book had come to my attention. It had a curious title – *Altering the Earth* – although the subtitle was perhaps what might be expected of a Professor of Archaeology: *The origins of monuments in Britain and continental Europe* (Bradley 1993).

I freely admit that prior to this book I had little awareness of Professor Richard Bradley. But *Altering the Earth* hit me with even more impact than Tilley's book. Here was someone who picked up on just how remarkable it must have been for early Neolithic people to 'alter the earth' in such a way as to create massive earthworks such as had never been done before. And these were intentionally monumental, in the sense that chamber tombs and henges were expected to *endure*. Whether they were expected to endure, in some cases, for five thousand years is a moot point. As Bradley observed

> … we can say that the building and operation of monuments bring with them a distinctive type of consciousness. This involves a subtle change in perceptions of place, and the creation and use of these structures necessarily inculcated a new sense of time as well. This is a process that can never be reversed.

At a profound level, the construction of these monuments altered peoples' understanding of their land and promoted more sedentary ways of life.

I was moved to review this book for *At the Edge* – the first review of an academic book I authored or published, and – so far as I recall – not preceded in any of the other 'fringe archaeology' 'zines appearing at the time. I combined my thoughts about *Altering the Earth* with a review of *Landscapes, Monuments and Society* (Barrett, Bradley and Green 1991; Trubshaw 1994). While much of the review now reads as 'adequate' rather than well-informed, my final two paragraphs are pertinent to the rest of this chapter:

> Bradley […] continues with a critical criticism directed at his colleagues: It is their inability to come to terms with experience itself that leaves prehistorians so vulnerable to the inroads of alternative archaeologies. Quite what it is about alternative archaeologies which is unwelcome is unstated but is indicated in the final paragraph of *Altering the Earth* where he notes that when visiting ancient monuments both archaeologists and the public use

> their imagination to recreate a past that is perhaps really beyond recall and make it play an unrehearsed part in the present. While the perceptions of professionals and public are bound to be different '… we should be able to talk to one another. More than anything else, the archaeology of monuments is where those conversations begin.'
>
> Bradley has provided considerably more than enough to start such a conversation. I feel it is up to the alternative archaeologists to read what he has to say and keep the conversation going – for the benefit of both sides.

Here we are, nearly twenty-five years after Bradley proposed such conversations. They have taken place – not only between myself and Richard personally, but also in much more extended ways with his postgrad students at the time (several of whom have long since been professors of archaeology in their own right) and with a wide spectrum of academics at other British universities. In more recent years Mark Gillings, at the University of Leicester, has shared his 'chorographical' approach to prehistoric landscapes (Frieman and Gillings 2007; Gillings 2011). I personally owe much to these conversations. However there is no need to continue with this overly-personal perspective as nearly fifteen years ago I wrote a book which plotted the convergence of academic and 'alternative' approaches to archaeology: *Sacred Place: Prehistory and popular imagination* (Trubshaw 2005) which is available as a free PDF for those who wish to explore that 'history of ideas'.

Spotlighting the Dark Ages

What has happened in the years since I compiled *Sacred Places*? Richard Bradley continued to publish a succession of books in which aspects of prehistoric archaeology, such as rock art and natural 'shrines', are approached from a sophisticated awareness of landscape. Another publication specifically attempted to address the complex nature of place and ontology. The title is *Place as Material Culture: Objects, geographies and the construction of time* (Gheorghiu and Nash 2013). Key to the various papers which make up this book is the recognition that places are at the intersection of material and non-material culture. While this is equally true for pots, tools, burials and so forth, clearly the innovation here is to extend that list to include places. And Anglo-Saxonists came on leaps and bounds. In part it was because of one of Bradley's PhD students, Howard Williams, but that would be to ignore the important contributions of a great many others, most notably Sarah Semple, Aliki Pantos (sadly her innovative DPhil thesis was never published) and David Petts.

> Yes I know academics no longer talk about the 'Anglo-Saxon era' and use the term 'early medieval'. But this PDF is not written for academics.

As a result of our understanding of the Anglo-Saxon era has changed over the last twenty-or-so years quite astoundingly. David Petts was the first Anglo-Saxonist to look at both archaeological and historical sources, thereby identifying the 'mismatches'. A group based at Durham under the leadership of Martin Carver also attempted to look at the material culture of the Anglo-Saxon era for evidence of 'beliefs' (Carver, Sanmark and Semple 2010). While in detail this work is informative, the overall approach seemingly lacks awareness of how anthropologists and those involved in comparative religion would bring considerably more sophistication to the study of 'worldviews', cosmologies and ontologies. For example, the title of the book – *Signals of Belief* – reveals that there is no awareness that before the Reformation religion is about behaviour, not beliefs. And nothing which suggests any awareness that the Western concept of religion does not necessarily have counterparts in older cultures. For example, early in the twentieth century Chinese religious scholars had to invent the word *zongjiao* to translate the English word 'religion'; *zongjiao* literally means 'doctrinal teaching' (Paper 1995: 2–3). In China and India what the West thinks of as religion is known by words which mean 'customary practice' and has none of the connotations of organised Western denominations obsessed with canonical texts and ossified liturgical practices. Personally I think English language users should adopt the phrase 'doctrinal teaching' when referring to what is commonly deemed to be religion.

Just as those studying the Anglo-Saxon era rarely have the basic background in anthropology necessary to understand ontologies or comparative religious studies, so too they rarely approach from an informed geographical or topographical perspective. This means that geographical approaches to 'the past' have flawed methodologies. And this is especially true when the evidence for 'the past' is that of places and their names.

So, while there has been a useful study of place-names associated with Roman roads, so far there has been no comparable study of place-names associated with watercourses used for trade. Indeed Anglo-Saxonists seem reluctant to recognise that waterborne transport around the coast and along rivers must, for fundamental pragmatic and economic reasons, have been far more important than overland routes. The reason is of course simple: waterborne transport usually leaves no historical documents and little recoverable archaeological evidence.

Another example of methodological myopia is that while the association between *wics* ('trading places') and coastal or estuarine locations has been noted, the similar association (especially along the South Coast) with early churches (*mynsters*) has been missed, as has the location of *mynsters* in land-locked counties near the limits of navigation and fording places for significant land routes (see Trubshaw 2015 (2016)).

Likewise an academic study of place-names on boundaries started with names cited in charter boundaries (Jepson 2011) – thereby missing places such as *hoh* and *worth* which are located on or near boundaries but are not typically used as boundary markers.

All the 'good stuff' coming from Anglo-Saxonists has greatly inspired me – but the methodological weaknesses which verge on 'castles built on clouds' have greatly frustrated me! The near-absence of ontological or topographical awareness, combined with the rarely-spanned gulfs between historians, archaeologists and place-name researchers, indicates to me that so much more could be established by effective inter-disciplinary approaches. By 'effective' I mean ones where one discipline's paradigms are not regarded as hegemonic – archaeologists are especially prone to inviting others to the table, so to speak, but remaining oblivious to the need to challenge their prior assumptions. British archaeologists have a bad reputation for only reading about other disciplines when the 'other' has been summarised (rather too often based on out of date sources) by fellow archaeologists.

Since originally drafting this chapter John Blair's tome *Building Anglo-Saxon England* (Blair 2018) has appeared. Blair's indubitable skills as an historian make this a stunningly successful work of scholarship as he takes an historian's approach to the vast 'grey literature' of developer-funded archaeology, trawling through the documents and pulling out the metaphorical 'cherries'. There is an attempt to include place-name evidence and the locations of places. While accepting that these convincingly add to some of the specific arguments Blair is making, they are unconvincing in that Blair is seemingly unaware of similar examples and seemingly feels no need to visit the places he attempts to interpret.

Despite the example of Margaret Gelling in the 1970s onwards (and continued by a few place-name scholars, such as Ann Cole and Jill Bourne), places and their names are still approached as if documentary sources are sufficient. As Blair is an historian it is perhaps inevitable that any methodology which requires *experiencing* places (including as many as possible of a specific place-name element) is alien. That said, how many historians would adopt a methodology which meant looking only at edited editions of source documents and never accessing the originals?

This combination of exciting new insights and flawed methodologies has been a major influence on much of my writing over the last decade. I have wilfully stepped into realms where the angelic understandably fear to tread. Evidence from archaeology, history and place-names were initially used to reveal how the ontology ('worldviews') of Anglo-Saxons evolved slowly over the transition from paganism to Christianity. But that evidence for continuity was then combined with a topographical

approach to *mynsters* and, subsequently, the evidence for Anglo-Saxon pagan shrines. Much of this work – including the work you are reading – is provisional and tentative. From the perspective of most academics, much is probably unduly tendentious. (Trubshaw 2013 (2016); 2012a (2016); 2012b (2016); 2012c (2016); 2016; 2015 (2016); 2016 (2018)).

This present study comes directly out of the more topographic approaches, which have revealed (at least to me) that even those Anglo-Saxonists most interested in places – such as place-name scholars – have largely ignored the 'ontology' of places. Allow me to draw a parallel with another pioneer. Back in 1981, when the first light of dawn was beginning to shine on the Dark Ages, Audrey Meaney's study of Anglo-Saxon amulets and curing stones was not simply aimed at a better understanding of these objects. A better understanding of the amulets would also aid the understanding of wider Anglo-Saxon society. But, as Meaney herself recognised, to understand the amulets it was necessary to have a good comprehension of wider society. My attempt to look at places from topographical and ontological perspectives also tries to understand wider aspects of Anglo-Saxon society better by looking afresh at the specific topic. Dr Meaney also made the comment 'It is in the nature of a pioneer investigation of this kind that conjectures are many, conclusions few.' (1981: 239) In my studies also conclusions are largely absent, although conjectures abound.

Just as with Meaney's research about amulets, the links between topography and ontology flow both ways – how a society thinks about places reveals more about the underlying 'assumptions' (ontologies and cosmologies) of that society, while shedding light on ontological 'assumptions' means that we may be able to understand more about how a society conceptualised places. Ontologies and worldviews are, almost by definition, the 'givens' of any society so we are rarely, if ever, consciously aware of them. Similarly places are 'merely' where we live out our lives, so we rarely need to think about what a place 'is', still less how it came to be the sort of place it is.

Curiously there is one aspect of later medieval history which is very much about places, and travelling between them: the major religious shrines and the pilgrimage routes to them. Elka Weber drew upon late medieval pilgrimage accounts to provide a detailed understanding of the spirituality and practicalities. But there is a whole other dimension to medieval pilgrims as they 'strain against the boundary that separates heaven from earth' (Weber 2005: 26). Evidence, as if it were needed, that complex ontological 'worldviews' are never far away when thinking about places (see Trubshaw 2015a for an overview of pilgrimage in England).

Names not places

'The study of English place-names is a philological discipline which is based mainly on written evidence.' So wrote Margaret Gelling back in 1978 (Gelling 1978: 11). Considering that this book, *Signposts to the Past: Place-names and the history of England,* was the first to introduce some awareness of landscape – mostly geomorphology – into the study of place-names then we might expect geographical concerns might have crept in to that definition over the intervening half century. But no. Not only did Gelling herself stand by the definition but it remains valid, as Carole Hough (one of the leading place-name scholars) affirmed in an article published early in 2018 (Hough 2016: 5).

Frankly, I am in awe of the prodigious linguistic skills possessed by place-name scholars. A fluent understanding of Old English and the speech-changes in English over the last millennium are *de rigeur*; while a deep understanding of Brythonic ('Celtic') languages is increasingly needed, especially when trying unravel names of the Welsh Marches and down to Somerset and north to Cumbria.

One of the place-name scholars to have thought most deeply about the relationship of place-names to places, Jill Bourne, has stated that 'the key to understanding place-name evidence is *context*, and that the robustness of the context needs constantly to be assessed and reassessed. Never trust the "obvious" interpretation.' (Bourne 2017b) Context, for Bourne, most certainly includes topographical considerations.

Place-name scholarship has reached a level of maturity where most of the major names are fairly securely understood. Of course there's a few googly ones and any number of minor names which require one-off studies. And, sadly, not all English counties have been researched to the same extent. Living on the Leicestershire: Nottinghamshire border I am well aware of the importance of Barrie Cox's life-time research into Leicestershire and Rutland names – and equally aware that across the border in Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire the comparable studies were pioneering and lack equivalent depth.

Crucially, place-names research is a study of *names* not of places *per se*. So oiks like me who want to look through the wrong end of the telescope and use place-names to understand places (rather than the names) are doing more than going against the grain. But using place-names as a primary historical source is not only tempting, it's a necessity because the early forms of place-names – even if no older than the Domesday Book of 1086 – may be the oldest evidence we have about, say, a village or town. Apart from confirming the existence of a settlement in the later Anglo-Saxon era, the name may provide some evidence of its 'function' and relationship to other places. It may not be much to go on but – with some exceptions – neither historical documents nor archaeological artefacts are likely to reveal much more. That said,

systematic fieldwalking in parts of Leicestershire over the last forty years radically improved understanding of settlement in the centuries before villages, and that evidence readily reveals correlations with such topographical considerations as natural drainage, soil types and south-facing slopes.

Places not names

An interesting exchange of ideas about 'What is a "place"?' on the English Place-Name Society's email list in April 2017 included a contribution from Carole Hough which began 'It's a very tricky issue!' and concluding that it's 'fuzzy'. Full marks for honesty. Nil points for intellectual insight… In defence of Hough, prior to this exchange she had written a paper which starts off with one of the more theoretical discussions of place-names which I have come across (Hough 2016; published 2018). Entirely understandably she notes that English place-name studies is dominated by semantics – all the variants of 'What does this name *mean*?' – and then goes on to emphasise the importance of structuralist approaches.

Curiously, a few months prior to Hough's paper being published I had made some sketchy notes for this section. One of the notes reads 'place-name scholarship is essentially structural, and largely binary in its taxonomies' and then gives assorted examples such as

- habitative *versus* non-habitative place-names
- hill *versus* dale; land *versus* water; etc
- place-names derived from personal names *versus* descriptive elements
- Old English *versus* Brythonic elements
- 'functional' *versus* descriptive

I feel I should expand on these terse notes to provide examples. But I will refrain simply because I am setting up an Aunt Sally. Ever the one to make cross-disciplinary comparisons, my initial notes state what, to me, is the blindingly obvious: structuralism in anthropology was largely undermined by assorted post-structuralisms in the late 1980s and 1990s. Hough considers that structuralist approaches have not been given enough importance in English place-name studies and the examples she discusses in some respects support that assertion. Though to be fair, her approach is essentially *post*-structuralist in that much of her paper is concerned with showing the 'fuzziness' between different types of place-name. Her (post)-structuralist methodology sheds light on some broad issues of naming, but the scope of her paper is not about places (indeed some of her discussion is about the naming of comets and racehorses).

Part of the Staffordshire Hoard. Buried near Hammerwich, Staffordshire. Plausibly made at Faversham, Kent …

Conspicuous only by its absence is anything resembling a debate about the underlying assumptions of place-name scholarship (rather than the 'scholarship of name studies' more broadly), and how much might be learnt by looking at disciplines in the humanities which are not philological. Margaret Gelling 'broke the mould' in the 1970s by putting place-names into the context of at least some geomorphological aspects. Her co-worker, Ann Cole, added another strand of geography by looking at place-names on Roman roads (Cole 2010). Jill Bourne's study of Kingstons while, on the face of things, seemingly focused on a specific toponym, raised a number of much broader questions about the 'social functions' of place-names and, *inter alia*, the 'context' of Kingstons in the landscape (Bourne 2017).

There is one big problem with place-names. Although 'functional' place-names such as Kingston, Stretton, Moreton, Eaton, Drayton, Burton, Smeeton (smith's *tun*), Hammerwich (literally 'the trading place with hammers' but inferring large-scale ironworking), Faversham (the makers' *ham*) and many more reveal a key function of a specific place at the time the name was coined – and, we can infer, for long enough for the name to become 'fossilised' – they tell us nothing about concurrent secondary functions, nor about how functions mutated and otherwise evolved.

The examples are many and various but the evolution of *burh* into *borough* is one of the simpler to explain. Place-names ending in *–bury* – such as Avebury, Westbury and many more – were named because of distinctive defensive earthworks, known as *burh* or *burgh* in Old English. Indeed some Neolithic burial mounds shared the same place-name element because of their distinctive earthworks. We assume that these *burh* settlements were founded around the eighth century, as they include an early church (*mynster*) as part of the settlement. But early *bury* settlements often – though not always – involved into regionally-important trading places. Indeed the king gave

The footpath follows the line of Avebury's burh.

'tax breaks' to *mynsters* (presumably to encourage literate clerics/clerks throughout the kingdom) and, as always with such financial incentives, we must assume they were abused and such *mynsters* became estate centres, even if they weren't originally. Intriguingly, the evolution of the Welsh *llan* also mimics the change of *burh* from defensive earthwork to early Christian settlement.

By the late eleventh century the ending *–bury* had ceased to denote *mynsters* – there were now plenty more, and not all at places called *–bury*. Instead the ending *–bury* now usually denoted a 'trading place' which had evolved into a market town. Local landowners in the eleventh and twelfth century were very keen on developing markets as they could extract tolls on everything sold there. They went as far as 'planting' new market towns – typically by extending an existing village which was on a suitable routeway. And those 'new towns' were often given names ending in *–borough* – such as the various Harboroughs, Marlborough and Narborough. The spelling may have evolved but there was a continuity from the original earthwork, through trading place to 'planted' market.

While this of itself does not provide any evidence for my initial suggestion of thinking of places as processes – it is, in all honesty, just one more example of the semantic shifts which are ongoing in all living languages – it does provide a clear example of the way the *function* of places evolves. And continue to evolve, as, by the late nineteenth century, many of these market towns – especially those connected to the railway network – grew into 'factory towns' or even cities.

About fifteen to twenty years ago I caught up with the 1980s sociologists who had termed such phrases as 'the social construction of reality' and, a little more accurately, 'the construction of social reality'. I even wrote a book about how myth

and folklore are key to how that construction process works in the modern day, although it appeared under a pseudonym (Danser 2005). And I have to admit that, even though the 'social construction turn' in the humanities is now regarded as decidedly 'old school', it is fairly deeply ingrained into my approaches.

Putting that remark into the context of thinking about places then I have no problems thinking about places as 'social (or cultural) constructs'. This is just a broader way of thinking about 'places as processes'. Places are not *only* cultural constructs – they almost always have various topographical constraints. But where we think of as the 'centre' of a place and how we construct boundaries – whether literally as lines on a map or in more diffuse 'psychogeographical' ways – is most certainly part of the 'construct'. As already stated in the opening chapter, places are not 'things' so much as 'differentiations'.

Place-names function more like verbs or gerunds than nouns; indeed in Chinese all names are as much verbs as nouns – the word for 'cup' principally means 'cupping'. A Kingston was, at one time, 'kingston-ing'. By which I mean that the things people did at king's *tuns* was what people did only (or mostly) at king's *tuns*. The best guess is that Kingstons were where some sort of 'constable' or *reeve* lived who looked after such matters as collecting taxes, tolls and tributes and checking the 'credentials' of people passing through (the parallel is with the Welsh *rhyngell*). At some point such administration moved elsewhere but the name 'Kingston' fossilised and the places shrunk to hamlets or farmsteads (Kingston on Thames and Kingston on Hull are 'borrowed' place-names and therefore do not fit this pattern of atrophy).

Rather than look at ways in which specific places evolve, I want to look at a bigger picture – how European culture invented such terms as 'natural places' and even the word 'landscape'. This illustrates social construction in considerable detail – and gloriously so! I have not prepared this specially, but simply lightly revised the opening chapter of my study of how we invented the notion of 'sacred places', especially prehistoric ones. So a major change of idiom from the broad-brush remarks of this chapter, illustrated with a few overly-specific examples, to a nitty-gritty overview of how thinking about places evolved in recent centuries.

4: The invention of the English rural idyll

We are never conscious of things in their true nature, only of the excerpts we make of them.

(Jaynes 1976)

The landscape is not seen for itself, but as a commentary upon the human condition, as a speculation upon the tension between order and disorder.'

J.M.W. Turner

A richness of meanings

Words such as 'nature', 'landscape', 'country', 'countryside', 'rural', 'urban', 'place', 'space', 'vista', 'route' and 'map' are used in everyday speech without much thought as to their exact meanings, the distinctions between them, and still less to their origins. Yet each of these words relates to complex interwoven ideas rarely recognised in their everyday usage. Academics might be tempted to say that these words are 'problematical', but that has an undesirable negativity. Instead let us put a positive spin on them and think about their 'richness of meanings'.

What is the difference between a 'space' and a 'place', for instance? Whereas space is an abstract analytical concept, place is somewhere specific and tangible. We relate to physical places in a way that we cannot to abstract notions of space. Whereas 'space' is more about what is conceived and thought about, 'place' is what is perceived and lived in. The modern mind might think of space as being a broader concept into which places are situated. However a little thought reveals that humans have had a sense of place long before the more abstract concept of space. An understanding of place must precede the idea of space. Whereas we can conceptualise an empty space, the idea of an empty place suggests only where no people are present, but is otherwise physically present.

Places are not simply physical. They have meaning and significance, which are conveyed in myths and legends, and possibly in ritual activities. Certain places gain

importance from promises made during rituals there, so that in future they are increasingly appropriate for ritual activities – whether celebrating New Year at Trafalgar Square, or for 'rites of passage' at a church or prehistoric stone circle.

Places mean different things to different people, and perhaps even different things at different times. Places are the venues where we live out our lives, and as such places range from entirely secular to entirely sacred, with plenty of variation in between. We live out our lives in such places as houses, shops, pubs, parks, fields, woods, prehistoric sites and churches. Specific examples of each of these types of places may have more significance than others, and each type of place – and each specific place – can change in significance over time.

Modern sense of place has been greatly diluted by people spending so much time in dehumanised places – what might be termed 'architectural spaces' – such as supermarkets, shopping malls, office blocks, hotels, railway and tube stations, airports, and motorways. While they are places they do not have the depth of meanings that are typically associated with traditional notions of place and have only rather negatively-valued meanings (Douglas Adams wittily noted 'It is no coincidence that in no known language does the phrase "As pretty as an airport" appear.'). Even our own homes are becoming less like specific places as we spend more time watching TV or in front of a computer – physically 'at home' but mentally elsewhere.

Meaning and memory

Places have significance to us because they have 'meaning'. That meaning needs to be, in some way, retained and remembered. Simon Schama's study of place and memory (Schama 1995) looked in breadth and depth at the complexities of how cultures create and remember meanings for significant places.

However such 'remembering' also takes place at quite mundane and everyday levels too. For example, the 'meaning' of a place is often summarised in the name we give to the place. The study of place names is far more than unravelling the complex changes to spelling and derivation of the original terminology. It is also more than relating places to the topography, even though a great number of British place names incorporate subtle descriptions of the terrain.

No place-name is arbitrary. No matter how little of the original meaning has been remembered, all names link into a society's associations, people and stories. Within a few miles of where I sit writing this the place-names encapsulate the otherwise lost ideas of Anglo-Saxon people living about 1,200 years ago. There is Walton (which translates as 'native British settlement'), Dalby ('the settlement in the dale'), Willougby ('the settlement in the willow trees'), Hoton ('the settlement on the heel-shaped hill'), Wymeswold ('Wygmund's wold' i.e. woodland with fields), Prestwold

('the priest's wold) and Burton ('the fortified garrison' – created later to defend against Viking attacks). Eighteenth century antiquarians identified the site of a Roman town known as Vernemetum, which means 'Especially Sacred Grove' and presumably refers to a late Iron Age ritual site which has left no visible evidence and has never been excavated by archaeologists. Although long since invisible, this pre-Roman sacred place is nevertheless an aspect of the modern landscape.

Sometimes places are given additional significance by being linked with legends or myths. In northern Europe stories giving significance to sacred places rarely emphasise a transcendental presence, a 'spirit of place' or *genius loci*, although these are common in Classical Mediterranean cultures. Even if these legends are *post hoc* explanations (as, for example, when prehistoric or Anglo-Saxon ditches become called the 'Devil's Dyke') they add to the associations of a specific place. By adding a vivid narrative, place-related memories materialise as myths.

Our sense of places exists in the interplay between physical topography and 'mind scapes' conveyed in legends and myths. The meaning of a place needs to be passed on in the form of story or narrative, even if this has become 'fossilised' or shrunken to merely the name of the place whose original significance is lost or largely unknown. Places, like all other aspects of culture, only have significance by providing them with 'narratives of meaning'. Much of the rest of this book explores different aspects of such narratives, whether they be traditional folklore, academics' belief systems about the past, or modern pagan beliefs.

The meanings we give to a place may help to create the sense of belonging for a society and, intentionally or otherwise, exclude others from 'belonging' there. The meaning we attribute to places readily becomes political. Conversely, people who do not 'belong' – such as Gypsies and other travellers – have for centuries being despised by people who feel they belong somewhere. In many non-Western societies women leave the place of their birth and upbringing to live with their husbands. As some feminist writers have recognised, such women are far more 'placeless' than men.

In summary then, the significance of a place has less to do with the physical landscape than with the meanings we give to the location. More specifically, these meanings are remembered and sustained in the narratives we create about these places.

Places and routes

If we have 'places', what about all that lies between them? Do the places meet up? Are there intentional 'spaces' in between? Are places linked together, either conceptually or by routes? And if so, are 'routes' just another type of rather long and

thin place, or are they something rather different from 'places', or indeed the 'space' they traverse?

And who travels these routes? Are they humdrum routes we use for commuting to work or popping to the shops? Are they deeply rooted in our history, whether made by eighteenth century Enclosure Awards, or by the Romans, or even by prehistoric feet? Were they once – or perhaps still are – traversed by pilgrims? Or have medieval pilgrims given way to modern day tourists? Or are the routes invisible in the material world but known through myths, such as Irish 'fairy paths', Australian 'Dreamtime tracks', or various shamanistic 'spirit lines'?

The answers to such questions about places and routes reveal much more about how we *think* about the landscape than its physical manifestation. Even the word 'landscape' reveals a richness of meanings. As Raymond Williams noted, 'A working country is hardly ever a landscape. The very idea of landscape implies separation and observation' (Williams 1973 (1985: 120)). We separate 'practical' and 'aesthetic' ways of thinking about the land. This is a highly culturally-specific distinction. Immigrants to Britain such as Asians and Afro-Caribbean's, even second and third generation descendants, are rarely interested in visiting the countryside for the pleasures of, say, rambling, picnicking or visiting historic buildings. While there are undoubtedly a number of reasons for this, a key one must be that Asian, African and Caribbean attitudes to the land see it as a practical place where people work in the fields cultivating crops, not as somewhere to be 'enjoyed'. The idea of an aesthetic appreciation of landscape is not inherent in non-western mindscapes.

Nature, landscapes and mindscapes

What could be more 'natural' than a 'nature'? Yet 'nature' is a concept of human thought, an idealistic concept – a vague collective of hills, streams, plants and animals but excluding humans. The exclusion of people from the 'natural world' is a profound contradiction, but this is not the only paradox in the way we think about nature. For, on the one hand, nature represents an idealised paradigm of interdependence and co-operation while, on the other, nature is regarded as red in tooth and claw.

Likewise landscapes are more mental than physical. Western mentality thinks of landscape primarily in terms of who owns what. As a result boundaries become one of the most significant aspects of landscapes. Not everything in a landscape is necessarily created by people, but the idea – or, rather, ideas – of landscape are most certainly entirely invented by people. Clearly we construct landscapes by planting trees and hedges, clearing and managing woodland, digging ditches, ploughing and planting crops, erecting buildings, and – increasingly with the advent of mechanisation – have transformed landscapes with canals, railways, roads, cities,

suburbs, motorways, airports, industrial estates, derelict areas, and all the rest. But the way we *think about* landscapes is more important still. While we may only be constructing ideas and concepts, these are fundamental to our notions of 'reality'. We need not make any physical changes to the land as a result of these transformations in our thinking, although more usually some changes to the 'real world' result from changes to our concepts about reality. Above all, changes are *thought* about before they are put into effect. Once they are put into existence, the changes to the real world affect the way we think and act – so, a boundary fence or a new bridge blocks or enables physical access, while planting or clearing trees creates concealment or enables visual 'access'.

Some of the most artificial ways of thinking about the landscape hide behind the ubiquitous phrase 'countryside'. In Britain, and especially England, over the last hundred-or-so years some deeply-ingrained 'invented traditions' have come to dominate thinking about rural areas. Beyond rural England extends an even more archetypal landscape, the 'wildernesses' of Wales, Scotland and Ireland. So significant are they in defining the character of their country, large areas are deemed 'national' parks. Into this wilderness venture intrepid 'ramblers' who distinguish themselves by an Otherworldly dress code that signifies their separation from urban life.

Sacred places might be thought of as existing within both 'real' and 'perceived' landscapes. However, such a distinction is unreal as the term 'landscape' essentially refers to the way we perceive physical reality. The *topography* may be real but the way we think about it as *landscape* results from the ways we consciously and otherwise construct our perceptions of 'reality'. This book seeks to step outside this 'consensus reality', at least temporarily.

As will become clearer as this chapter progresses, words such as 'landscape', 'countryside' and 'nature' are much more to do with 'mindscapes' than physical reality. But this is not a modern phenomenon. People in all times and all places have engaged with the world in ways that depend on their specific social and historical circumstances. Such involvement is never static. Ideas are continually created, contested and adapted. For this reason 'nature', 'landscape', 'countryside' and similar words are less nouns than verbs in that they describe something that is an ongoing process of both physical change and, more especially, changing significance.

Thinking outside the monoculture

Western culture traps us inside a web of implicit assumptions and values. To step outside these implicit ideas is always difficult, increasingly so as Western cultural values relentlessly promote themselves as 'common sense'. Our 'common sense' derives from a secularised Protestant outlook combined with a dumbed-down,

'Disneyfied' attitude that reduces the most subtle or complex of concepts to simplistic dualistic distinctions.

Where the Western cultural system differs from previous ones is the extent to which it presents itself as the 'natural' option. Western culture succeeds not because it is forced on anyone but because subtle interactions between education, media, commerce and government all beguile the people into thinking there is no alternative. The technical term is 'hegemony'.

The main characteristic of Western hegemony is the assumption that there is only one way to see the world. More exactly, it assumes that, even if there are any other approaches to reality then they are 'superstitious' and otherwise inferior. Its trump card is to swiftly absorb subversive attitudes into nostalgia. This could be seen as one aspect of the invented tradition of the British countryside, explored later in this chapter. A more readily recognised example is the way in which the Sex Pistol's anarchical hits of the mid-1970s were rapidly absorbed into the entirely unthreatening and generally nostalgic *Best of the 70s* compilation CDs. (The pop music industry has proven to be expert at emasculating subversive subcultures, for instance by elevating white boy Elvis Presley as the king of the black R'n'B genre; promoting Jamaican reggae in the trite toned-down versions of UB40 and Eric Clapton's *I Shot the Sheriff;* making rap safe by promptly putting it into the mouths of pretty white boys such as Duran Duran or Vanilla Ice; using drum and bass as the expected soundtrack of TV adverts for executive cars; and with Ali G's trite and unthreatening parodies of black street culture. The New Age ethos is also a prime example of radical ideas that have been commodified and trivialised.)

Because of the ease of travel and communication, together with the Western-orientated aspirations of many Third World inhabitants, the Western hegemony is causing all 'traditional cultures' to adapt and mutate at a pace never seen before. At the same time Western tastes for 'exoticism' mean that selected aspects of traditional cultures are absorbed into the 'mainstream'. We are fast approaching a worldwide monoculture.

We need to start thinking outside ‘the monoculture'. This in no way means a romantically-inspired return to the past, or even turning one's back on modernity and 'heading for the hills'. The aim is to restore some subtleties to our experiences of places, especially those we chose to perceive as in some way sacred.

Western monoculture makes it difficult to step outside the matrix and conceive of places in other ways. Too often 'other ways' are just deemed 'alternative' ways to the ones we are accustomed to, 'other' to the monoculture's 'normality'. Only people brought up as children in what the mainstream might call 'alternative communities'

are spared the inevitable perspective of seeing everything non-mainstream dismissed as 'alternative'. However every 'alternative' comes with its own cultural baggage, its own ideologies and myths, its own fallacies and flaws. No one has any claim on the 'One True Way' of thinking about our surroundings and, as will be explored in much of the rest of this book, no one has the One True Way of understanding past cultures, especially those made more mysterious by the mists that enshroud all prehistoric societies.

Rather than slip and slide on these superficial distinctions, let's delve down to where some of the most pervasive concepts about our surroundings have their origins. Four words act as shorthand for some very complex 'invented traditions' that are pervasive in modern day Britain. They are 'landscape', 'nature', 'countryside' and 'heritage'.

The invention of landscape

'Landscape' derives from an Old German word, *landschaft*, used by the Anglo-Saxons to mean a small piece of cultivated land. The word died out in English during the eleventh century but reappears in Dutch during the late sixteenth century as *landschap,* a technical term used by painters to describe the new fashion for 'landscape' painting. Previously depictions of rural scenes provided only a background to human subjects in the foreground. For reasons unknown, the specialists in such 'background painting' created a fashion for works without any foreground figures.

The interest in 'backgrounds' is probably part-and-parcel of the Renaissance's rediscovery of Ptolemy, a Greek polymath of the second century CE, who invented the concept of 'geography' (as an objective view of the world) and what he termed 'chorography', a more subjective sense of place.

However knowledge of Ptolemy, geography and chorography all died out. Not until 1336 do we have a record of someone climbing a mountain simply to admire the view. This person was the Italian poet Franceso Petrarch (1304–74) who helped to rediscover the Classical tradition. He describes how in 1336 he felt 'intoxicated' by the view from the summit of Mount Ventoux and came down thinking he had transgressed a fundamental law by seeing the land spread out around him, as if he were God, or at the very least Moses when he received the word of the law from Jehovah on Mount Sinai (Lachman 2003: 217–20).

Ptolemy's abstract way of thinking about geography and map-making were rediscovered in the fifteenth century. Two centuries later his sense of chorography manifested in such works as Johannes Vermeer's *View of Delft* (c.1661) and the landscapes of Claude Poussin (1593–1665) and Claude Lorrain (1600–82).

An approximate contemporary of Ptolemy, a doctor called Pausanias, represents a different aspect of chorography. He travelled around Greece in the second century CE describing the sites of Classical antiquity at a time when their remains survived. His aim was to provide a guide to travellers so they might see for themselves the achievements of Classical Greece, at a time when Greece was subject to Roman rule. The sacred sites he describes encompass man-made temples and natural sites such as springs, caves, mountains and groves. Pausanias was especially interested in surviving statues. Indeed his descriptions fail to distinguish between man-made temples and entirely natural sites, although it is probable that in many cases natural sites had been augmented in antiquity with statues and perhaps also temples. (See Alcock and Osborne 1994; Bradley 2000: 20–8)

Pausanias was more than an antiquarian or art historian, as he combined the history of religion with what we would now think of as the attributes of both a field archaeologist and a guide book author. As a 'chorographer' he recovered an all-but-lost sacred landscape to serve nationalistic idealism, thereby anticipating the invention of notions of idealised landscapes that have predominated in Britain during the last hundred-or-so years, to be discussed in the next section.

Art historians conventionally attribute the origins of landscape painting to the Bavarian painter and printmaker Albrecht Altdorfer (c.1480–1538). However these are less studies of nature than settings for human subjects where the background takes greater precedence than in the work of his older contemporaries, such as Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519).

In contrast to these 'background' painters, the aesthetic appreciation of landscape from a vantage point arises from novel Renaissance theories of visual representation, especially those put forward by Alberti in his *Ten Books on Architecture* (published posthumously about 1498). Key to this was the use of linear perspective, almost certainly augmented by tracing from images created using a *camera obscura*. Claude Poussin (1593–1665) became the most famous exponent of such landscape art, although Vermeer's *View of Delft* (c.1661) and a large number of topographical prints also fit into this new mode of seeing. Gone was the 'collage of close-ups' that characterised the landscapes of, say, Hieronymus Bosch (1460–1516) or Peter Breughel the Elder (c.1525/30–1569). Perspective is an essentially humanistic development – it aims to represent how the human eye – or, rather, how the human 'I' – views the world. It is not, for example, the omnipresent 'God's eye view' as used in some previous representational schemas. The illusion of perspective is also an ideological illusion.

Popular notions of art history attribute the depiction of more realistic landscapes to Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519); indeed his earliest surviving work is a sketch of the

Prospect mound at Kirby Bellars near Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire.

Tuscan countryside. However his lesser-known contemporaries Giovanni Bellini (c.1430–1516) and Piero di Cosimo (1462–c.1521) seem to have been the true pioneers.

Landscape as a way of viewing

There is more to landscape painting than the adoption of perspective and a more fully-formed notion of landscape emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a way of viewing. The first recorded use of the word 'landscape' in English is in 1632 and the term came to denote a broad view of a natural or imaginary scene. By the nineteenth century the term landscape shifted from denoting a genre of painting and became adopted as a way of referring to those parts of the real world considered equivalent to the subject matter of such paintings.

The conflation of subject and object continued. Just as landscape paintings depicted their subject from a specific viewpoint, so nature and the estates of the nobility began to be seen from specific 'vantage points', perhaps even imposed by creating prospect mounds or gazebos for the purpose. Estates were 'landscaped' by the likes of William Kent (1685–1748), Humphrey Repton (1752–1818) or Capability Brown (1771–1810) to comply with such idealised ways of seeing. The world was seen as a sequence of *vistas*, whether in the original sense of 'a long narrow view' (as between rows of trees) or in the more panoramic sense that the word is now often used.

With the advent of photography in the second half of the nineteenth century 'nature' was further promoted from the fixed 'ideal viewpoint' of the camera and became the dominant Western way of seeing.

The word 'landscape' owes much more to art history than to geography. Above all it is a way of looking at the world that is specific to Renaissance and modern Western thinking. It is not an *a priori* way of apprehending the world. Writers who refer to

Capability Brown's 1760s landscaping at Chatsworth House, Derbyshire.

'Not everybody approved of 'Capability' Brown's transformations. One critic is supposed to have said to him: "Mr Brown, I very sincerely desire that I may die before you." "Why so?" enquired Brown. "Because I should like to see Heaven before you had improved it." (MacDermott 2003: 42)

'prehistoric landscapes' or the ways in which non-Western societies see 'their landscape' are either using the word 'landscape' as a convenient shorthand for the different ways people of other times or places conceptualised their surroundings, or have failed to recognise that 'landscape' is a concept specific to our own culture.

There are two deeply-rooted aspects which make the modern Western concept of landscape distinct from non-Western ones. The first is that it is entirely visual, whereas non-Western cultures often give equal or greater prominence to auditory interaction with the surroundings. Secondly, the deeply-embedded notion of seeing landscapes from specific viewpoints removes our sense of travelling through space. Indeed when the scene is frozen in a painting or photograph the image becomes literally timeless. Because this static notion of landscape is so ingrained in Western thinking, we see tend to see rural topography as implicitly timeless. Yet almost all our

interaction with our surroundings is as much about time as space. In the next chapter we will explore further these two specific problems with our concept of landscape.

The invention of nature

If our ideas about landscape are derived from Renaissance paintings, 'nature' comes from a more literary vein, albeit deeply rooted in a sequence of social and political strata.

There have been broadly four ways of thinking about nature in Europe during the last few hundred years:

1. In medieval times 'nature' equated to the whole of God's creation, with the human world being rather fluidly differentiated from the rest of the natural world. People were not usually conscious of the distinction between the concepts of the 'human world' and the 'natural world'.
2. By the end of the Renaissance a more secular and rational abstraction had been conceived – the idea of 'humanity', which was defined by distinction from 'nature'. The adoption of perspective by Renaissance artists undoubtedly helped foster this 'alienation' from nature, in that a landscape painting is viewed as an object, by a viewer who is entirely 'outside' the topography depicted.
3. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries humans increasingly intervened in 'nature', whether by agricultural improvement, science, and the various technical and social changes of the industrial revolution, so that all aspects of nature became regarded as something akin to objects. This was the Age of the Englightenment, where 'Reason' was diametrically opposed to 'Nature'.
4. Within the last three decades this way of thinking about nature as quite distinct from humanity has been moderated in various ways by the concerns of ecologists, James Lovelock's 'Gaia hypothesis', and pagans who regard the Earth as a goddess.

These changes underlie more specific shifts in perceptions of nature. Most people are aware that such 'beauty spots' as the Lake District were regarded as threatening wildernesses until the nineteenth century, notably until the poet William Wordsworth (1770–1850) turned to the natural world of his native Cumbria for inspiration. As late as 1874 Gustave Flaubert wrote that 'The Alps are out of all proportion to human existence. They are too big to be useful. This is the third time that they have provoked a disagreeable reaction in me and I hope it is the last.' (Cited in Beaumont 1985: 87)

In the eighteenth century landscape painting developed as part of the activities on the 'Grand Tour'. The pioneer English watercolour painter Paul Sandby (1731–1809) came back from Italy and, for the first time, depicted the landscapes of Scotland and Wales in a similar manner. The Wye Valley, South Wales, the Scottish Highlands, North Wales, and the New Forest followed in the 1780s under the direct influence of William Gilpin (1724–1804). The influence of other watercolourists in the 1760s made the Lake District fashionable.

About a hundred years later a further change in the visual awareness of nature arose in the 1880s when a group of artists, among them Guy Dawber (1861–1938), began to spend their summers at Broadway. This visual awareness was paralleled in literature with the creation of 'Wessex' by Thomas Hardy (1840–1928). Together a fashionable cult of the Cotswolds (hitherto a little-regarded area) was triggered in 1895 with the arrival of a famous actress and various members of the nobility, who were visited by a great many guests, included the leading writers and artists of the day. The publication of four guide books in 1904 completed 'the transformation of Broadway from a sleepy straggling village into one of the showpieces of rural England'. (Marsh 1982: 30)

The founding of the National Trust in 1895 quickly led to the preservation of both historic buildings and 'picturesque' open spaces (see Marsh 1982: 55–9). The priorities of the National Trust fitted in closely with the widespread influence of John Ruskin (1819–1900) and William Morris (1834–96). Starting in 1901 the National Trust became responsible for the preservation of large parts of Ruskin's beloved Lake District.

Long before Wordsworth painters and writers in the sixteenth century had played a major part in creating the modern concepts of nature. In 1546 Arentino writes of 'discovering' the beauty of Venetian sunsets after seeing them depicted in Titian's vibrant paintings. Similarly, the 'discovery' of Alpine scenery *follows* the spread of prints and paintings with mountain panoramas in the sixteenth century. One of the first literary appreciations of an Alpine region bears a striking resemblance to Peter Breughel the Elder's *Landscape with St Mary Magdalene* (*c*.1555). The similarity can hardly be accidental.

As Flaubert's instincts still confirm, 'nature' was once to be feared. Until we felt securely in control we could not begin to look positively at mountains, wild animals, and other previously unsubdued aspects of nature. Only with the Romantic movement's response to urbanisation does nature become regarded as beautiful. The mystical love of nature is a by-product of the change from a largely rural Britain to a largely urban one during the nineteenth century. The active protection of animals, birds and plants in the wild is an even more recent change in attitudes.

Modern Western benign attitudes to nature should not be projected onto earlier times and other societies. Indeed, one of the fundamental concepts of many different cultures is the contrast between 'ordered' society and 'chaotic' nature. Creating such distinctions may be one of the defining features of Neolithic peoples in Europe.

The English rural landscape is far from natural. Since at least the ninth century landowners have invested heavily in farming and estate management to maximise both profit and opportunities for recreations such as hunting. Enclosure Acts in the mid-eighteen to early nineteenth century not only created the pattern of small fields regarded as typical of lowland Britain but also to all intents and purposes eliminated 'subsistence farming' in their quest for maximising profits. The wealthiest aristocrats created landscaped parks around their houses at vast expense as extravagant examples of conspicuous consumption. The English landscape is not merely a product of human enterprise, it is a profoundly political statement of ownership and hegemonic domination. The main players are the tenant farmers who made the aristocracy wealthy, and yeomen farmers transformed the landscape during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to fulfil their own economic motives. Upon this political stage our notions of nature evolved (see Thomas 1983).

The invention of the rural idyll

A widespread human myth is of the 'good old days', a never-quite-specified time approximately contemporary with one's grandparents when everything was better than it is today. Rural England has long been the venue for such myths.

William Keith, in a pioneering study of the rural idyll in English literature, put this sharply in focus when he noted 'Rural values, like all others, are continually in a state of flux; every generation encounters new changes and challenges.' (Keith 1975: 14)

Keith places Isaak Walton's *The Compleat Angler*, written in 1653, at the root of the English rural idyll:

> *The Compleat Angler* begins – and therefore, to all intents and purposes, the English rural tradition begins – with three men, Piscator, Venator and Auceps, meeting on a road leading out of London this 'fine, fresh May morning'. The setting is at one and the same time familiar and original. Inevitably we recall the congregation of pilgrims at the Tabard Inn at the opening of *The Canterbury Tales*, but, whereas Chaucer presents us with a journey from the secular city to the sacred cathedral of God, Walton shows us three men leaving London for the enjoyment of the countryside. True, the river Lea may at first sight appear a trivial goal compared with the shrine at Canterbury, yet the overall tone of Walton's book is more sober and, despite the Parson's concluding and comprehensive sermon (interestingly paralleled

> by Piscator's speech in the final chapter), more pious than that of Chaucer's poem. While at Canterbury pilgrims turn a holy duty into a diverting recreation, Piscator converts a secular hobby into a contemplation and celebration of God's gifts to man on earth. Implicit here, I suggest, is the idea later to be expressed with memorable conciseness by William Cowper that "God made the country, and man made the town".
>
> (Keith 1975: 26, quoting from Isaak Walton's *Compleat Angler* p19 and William Cowper's *The Task* 1, p749)

Man not only made the town but it was these townspeople who predominately made the myth of the rural idyll. As Keith states, 'It is worth noting that Piscator, Walton's mouthpiece, is also a townsman.' (Keith 1975: 27).

Walton was followed by Gilbert White and numerous other literary rural idealisers. Alongside these the work of the political Radical William Cobbett (1763–1835) also created a widespread belief that rural life had been ideal when each man had a cottage, a pig and use of the common – a scenario that was largely being superseded by the effects of Enclosure. Cobbett's idealism was disseminated in popular broadsheet ballads, which gave the underlying ideals such widespread currency that by the 1830s they have become truisms. This rural idyll was prevalent in nineteenth century literature and not directly opposed at the time. (Hutton 1999: 433 fn19, contra Mandler 1997b).

Rural writers such as Isaak Walton and Gilbert White only became popular in the Victorian era with the advent of an urban readership. Reading about the countryside was, and still is, not merely a substitute for visiting the countryside but often preferable to the reality. The rural idyll may be a widespread and deeply-rooted myth, but there is a complex conflict between the myth and both the reality of rural life and the practicalities of travel, weather, refreshments, accommodation and such like.

As already noted, the transformation of nature into something desirable takes place at the same time as Victorian England was becoming increasingly urban. Early urban development soon developed into squalid living conditions where basic sanitation was lacking and epidemics of diseases such as cholera could not be controlled. One of the Victorian obsessions was attributing illnesses to 'bad air'. Quaint as these notions are now that we understand bacteria and viruses, they are fundamental to the positive perceptions of the rural environment, where the air was considered to be generally 'good'. Indeed modern tourism, with its fetish for the seaside, has its origins in Georgian England and the supposed ozone of the coast air (although we now know that 'stimulating sea breezes' smell not of ozone but of rotting seaweed).

The notion of 'bad air' is now regarded as totally fallacious. Nevertheless, it was a primary cause in the creation of an imagined tradition that has become increasingly important in Britain – what we think of as 'the countryside'.

The invention of the countryside

Before we explore the invention of 'the countryside' we need to understand another quirk of nineteenth century values. At a time when Britain dominated the world and was setting the pace for industrialised nations, the preferred architectural style for public buildings was an accurate recreation of the 'Gothic' of about 1300. Why, while every other aspect of British life reflected the overwhelming forces of modernism, were churches and town halls, indeed even the rebuilding of the Houses of Parliament, done in a manner that suggested a loss of confidence in modernity?

This apparent chink in the self-confidence of the dominant nation can be traced to changes in ecclesiastical fashions in the 1830s. These turned against the eighteenth century Church of England liturgy that was dominated by sermons. Instead the reformers substituted the celebration of 'communion' (the Protestant successor to the Catholic Mass) along with hymn singing – more-or-less what was a typical CofE service for much of the twentieth century. This new ecclesiastical fashion required changes to the interiors of the churches. As many of the rural churches were dilapidated and long overdue restoration this led to a major programme of church renewals during the middle decades of the nineteenth century. The leading architects, such as Charles Barry, A.W.N. Pugin and Gilbert Scott all favoured the 'Gothic' style with its emphasis on 'heavenward-pointing' columns and arches as, by the early part of the nineteenth century, the Gothic had become associated with profound religious thinking.

If the Gothic was good enough for the country's cathedrals and churches then, by gosh, it was good enough for town halls and railway terminals too. The fashion for Neo-Gothic brought with it respect and admiration for original medieval architecture. Alarmed at the destructive 'restorations' of medieval buildings typical of Victorian architects, William Morris founded The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) in 1877. Morris achieved some of his objectives with the passing of the Ancient Monuments Protection Act 1882.

Morris's SPAB emulated the first of the 'heritage pressure groups', the Commons Preservation Society which had been born in 1865. The same spirit of concern for what we now think of as 'heritage' widened from the preservation of Gothic architecture to the 'countryside' with the creation of the National Trust in 1895. The formation of the National Trust was part of a wider group of radical and Liberal protests which sought to provide land access benefits for the working classes but, by

the 1920s, these organisations had moved to the political right and were more concerned with protecting property than enabling access.

For example, a leading figure in the Commons Preservation Society at the time, Sir Lawrence Chubb, thought the Kinder Scout mass trespass on 24 April 1932 was funded by 'Russian money'. In the 1930s the National Trust turned its attention away from preserving and providing access to places of natural beauty instead became preoccupied with country houses, hitherto an incidental aspect of their interests. At this time the Conservative party under Stanley Baldwin began to associate itself explicitly with an idealized myth of the countryside.

> Baldwin assiduously cultivated an image of himself as a kind of rural Everyman (despite the fact that his money came from the iron industry) and the illusion he created was so successful that it not only remains more or less intact to this day (think John Major and his evocation of 'village cricket and warm beer' as what was best about Britain) but it also began to undermine the efficacy of the claims on the countryside that were made by the radicals and the Romantics.
>
> (Worthington 2004: 101–2)

The National Trust is a quintessentially British compromise which holds land and properties in private ownership for the benefit of the nation and the public. The radicalism that led to its founding has long been replaced by a populist rhetoric which thinly disguises deeply unequal class interests and the need to be a major player in the 'big business' of the country's tourism and heritage industry.

Little could the founders of the National Trust realise how profound the changes to rural Britain would be in the next fifty years, and to what extent the Trust would both serve to create and maintain an illusion of a 'lost' (but ultimately illusory) countryside. In all fairness the National Trust did not create this illusion, although it has most effectively nurtured it.

So where does the invented tradition of the British countryside arise, and how does it shift so quickly along the political spectrum? Intriguingly, these ideas and changes are largely attributable to the success and longevity of what might be thought of as one of the 'institutions' of British publishing – *Country Life*.

Country Life was founded 1897, the year of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, and two years after the creation of the National Trust. Unlike almost all other periodicals of its time the emphasis was visual rather than literary. It was well-designed and used newly invented high-quality photographic printing technology. These images presented a romantic vision of 'unspoilt' villages, rolling landscapes, country houses, and the nation's heritage of cathedrals, castles and historic cities.

By this time most of the population lived in suburban surroundings. These were the people who predominately bought this romantic rural idyll. The influential thinker John Ruskin (1819–1900) had added his weight to the belief that the countryside provided an antidote of order and tranquillity that was lacking in industrial society (although there is no record of him enquiring whether the rural population thought they were living in 'order and tranquillity').

By the Edwardian era the readership of *Country Life* was predominantly female. For many decades the cover featured a débutante from the minor aristocracy, photographed in a conventional flattering style. Every issue featured a country house, photographed with all evidence of its inhabitants eradicated. Not even a copy of *The Times* on a study desk or a handy pair of bedroom slippers cluttered the images, in contrast to far-from-minimalist furnishings typical of late Victorian interiors.

The emphasis was on rural leisure rather than toil. *Country Life* promoted sports suitable for gentlemen, such as the then new fashion for golf (indeed the idea for the magazine was first discussed on a golf course). Hunting and shooting were also promoted as part of this romanticised tradition, an early emphasis that, controversially, remains a mainstay of current editorial attitudes.

Above all *Country Life* made the countryside glamorous, and nurtured the aspirations of successful businessmen to sell up their urban houses and acquire the appearances of a gentleman by taking up rural residence.

> More than any other magazine, *Country Life* was to become the manual of gentrification for the late Victorian and Edwardian middle classes. It was created at a crucial period in the formation of the attitudes and ideas which were to dominate British society well into the twentieth century.
>
> (Strong 1996: 30)

The reality of rural Britain was totally at odds with *Country Life*'s romantic image. Changes in the rural economy during the eighteenth and nineteenth had been every bit as dramatic as the industrialisation and massive growth of urban areas. Georgian England had been marked by the social consequences of enclosure and the loss of common lands. While improving the efficiency of farming by concentrating land and power into the hands of the gentry, the result was the creation of a large number of landless poor. When these were not required for military service the problems of vagrants and beggars became difficult for the authorities to contain. In parts of England many families eked out their survival in such poverty-stricken trades as framework knitting. Only as the nineteenth century unfolded, and industrialised

urban areas grew, did this poverty steadily migrate from rural settlements to the slums of the new cities.

But all was not well at the top end of the social scale either. The power of the landed classes was steadily undermined by politicians. In 1883–4 the Third Reform Act finally separated voting rights from property. More damaging to the financial basis of the gentry were the imports which depressed agricultural prices from the 1880s until 1945 (for instance, in 1930 land was worth what it had been in 1850). The assets of the land-owning dynasties were further diminished by death duties. These were first introduced in 1894 and increased from 8 percent to 15 percent in 1909. Income tax also rose in 1909 and those with an income over £3,000 per year were subject to a 'super tax'. The Parliament Act of 1910 rendered the House of Lords virtually impotent. The landed classes had all-but lost out to socialism and the First World War completed what the politicians had started. The new county and district councils (with all the associated legislation) took over the power vacuum.

One of the consequences was that the country houses, fetishised in picturesque photography in the editorial pages of *Country Life* and sold or let in its advertisement pages, were increasingly sold off, the contents and fittings auctioned, and – in many cases – allowed to go to ruin. Remarkably, this large-scale 'dissolution' of the country houses during the middle decades of the twentieth century did not render *Country Life* defunct. The reasons provide a remarkable insight into the invention of 'the countryside' in Britain during the last hundred years, as Roy Strong has analysed in his history of the first hundred years of *Country Life* (Strong 1996).

There was a long tradition, going back to Tudor times, of fortunes made in trade and commerce being invested in a country estate. But by the Edwardian era it did not make sense to own a substantial estate. Nevertheless, the new ideal of rural life was modelled on the economically and politically redundant aristocracy.

> At the time when the landowning classes lost their political and social power, they were to retain their cultural hegemony over society through the projection of their culture as the model way of living for the middle classes. By the 1880s, over eighty percent of the population was urban-based, and one might have thought that towns and cities were where future aspirations should logically have been focussed… Instead, they centred around a totally new vision of rural life, part of a phenomenon which we now recognise as an invented tradition.
>
> (Strong 1996: 29)

> Conservatism and a suspicion of change began to pervade society, which found a creative expression for these values in a largely fictional view of the countryside, where ancient stoic virtues were seen to flourish… After decades of massive economic and social change, these alternative attributes quickly assumed an aura of spiritual authority and consequently underpinned a new sense of collective identity from which the attributes of industrialised society were excluded.
>
> (Strong 1996: 33)

The aspirations of the professional and urban-based readers of *Country Life* saw the life of a country gentleman as particularly desirable. Each week's issue provided a 'pantheon of images that gradually formed a powerfully enticing illustration of national identity…. The overwhelming impression … was (and still is) of continuity and tradition.' (Strong 1996: 36)

The illusion crossed ideological boundaries. To the socialist the 'lost idyll' was one where an honest craftsman could practice his skills within the security of an unchanging village community. Simultaneously '… Tories could envisage an age when the social hierarchy lay undisturbed, guided by the landed classes who dominated local affairs as their natural right.' (Strong 1996: 36–7)

Country Life came to embody the quintessence of English ideals. These ideals continue to perpetrate the cultural influence of the aristocracy who, in almost all other respects, had no significant influence after the 1920s. The major social changes of the 1920s included the advent of the five-day working week and thus the 'invention' of the weekend. Developments in private motoring increased the interest in the countryside that had already been aroused by the railways and bicycles, leading to vastly more 'day trips' at weekends. Country houses, ruined castles, parish churches and picturesque villages were the prime destinations, although prehistoric sites were of interest too.

Country Life was written for the upper classes, even though the majority readership was middle class. Towards the opposite end of the social scale *The Clarion* was aimed at the upper working classes, especially those with middle class aspirations. It had started off with a socialist agenda but by the 1920s was promoting cycling, walking and the enjoyment of rural pleasures. The editor of *The Clarion* was Robert Blatchford who wrote a book called *Merrie England*. As the title suggests, it promotes a romanticised rural idyll. The popularity of this idyll is indicated by the sales of sales of *Merrie England* exceeding a million copies.

Even greater commercial success was attained in the 1930s by the King's England series of guidebooks written by Arthur Mee and the Shell guides. These too promoted

the romance of the rural idyll and, to a large extent, shaped the concepts of 'countryside' which we still hold today.

Country Life had an effective monopoly on the advertising of 'superior' country properties and this income kept the magazine alive during the middle decades of the twentieth century, even though the conservatism of the editorial content became increasingly anachronistic. During the 1970s this conservatism led to *Country Life* being the focus for the new 'heritage lobby'. Awareness of 'heritage', and the threats to it, have subsequently gone from strength to strength but, as will be discussed in the next section, exactly what is meant by the term usually remains slippery.

In the mid-1980s rivals to *Country Life* such as *Countryman, The Field, The Lady* and *This England* begun to promoting this fantasy traditional lifestyle. And the emerging concept of poorly-defined 'heritage' combined with increased interest in rural living prompted the launch of other periodicals, notably *Country Living*, which appealed to the new middle class interest in the countryside. Indeed, so pervasive was the notion of rural 'escapism' that it could be gently satirised by the television sit-com *The Good Life*.

Although England is essentially urban, for the majority of people their ideals are rural, even though these ideals are based almost entirely on illusions rather than reality.

The invention of heritage

During the last twenty-five years the word 'heritage' has become increasingly used, initially by pressure groups but now as part of 'bureaucrat-speak' where familiar words are linked together by national and local government officials in sentences that defy all attempts to unravel their meaning.

The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* provides four meanings for 'heritage', of which 'a nation's historic buildings, monuments, countryside, etc. especially when regarded as worthy of preservation' is the only relevant one. But, as we have just explored, this begs the question as to how we think of 'countryside'. Because of the imperceptible changes to the editorial approach between the 1930s and the 1970s, the invention of 'the countryside' by *Country Life* in the early decades of the twentieth century merges seamlessly with the magazine's central role in the invention of 'heritage' in the 1970s. Justifiable concerns for ecology and the depredations of motorway building were put into the same pot as support for hunting and attacks on EEC/EU 'interventionist' farming policies and broader political issues, creating what I think of as 'heritage soup'.

Numerous pressure groups seek to preserve the 'traditional countryside' invented in the twentieth century. Indeed, one of the most active takes its role in the conservation of this myth further and styles itself the Society for the *Protection* of Rural England.

Partly in response to these new pressure groups the British government passed the National Heritage Act in 1983. One of the actions was to create a body known as English Heritage to care for and promote the nation's heritage. English Heritage has responded to this difficult challenge in ways that have rather too often generated controversy and created the impression that it is inward-looking, authoritarian and inflexible (one of the most public of these contretemps arose in the late 1990s over 'Sea Henge'). Suffice to say that the cynicism with which English Heritage (since 2015 called Historic England) was too often regarded tainted the word 'heritage' further.

The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* fails to take account of how the word 'heritage' is now used for much wider cultural legacies, so that phrases such as 'musical heritage', 'literary heritage' and the like are not regarded as spurious. The word 'heritage' is now used so abundantly that it is possible to think in terms of the early twenty-first century being enacted within a 'heritage cult'. The heritage industry too readily reduces the complexities of changes over many centuries to a poorly-differentiated sense of 'oldness'. What they offered is the preservation and promotion of a consoling but largely spurious past, epitomised by neatly mown areas of grass and a nice tea shop. How the past is 'consumed' is far more important to the heritage industry than how ideas about the past are 'produced' (see also Shanks 1992: 71–3; 106–8). This mishmash approach to the past further blurs the ingredients of 'heritage soup'.

Since the start of the heritage industry in the 1980s, its capitalist and materialistic ideologies have been critiqued by a number of writers (notably Samuel 1984; Wright 1985; Lowenthal 1985; 1996 and Hewison 1987, Brewer 1995; Hunter 1996; Mandler 1997a; Arnold, Davies and Ditchfield 1998). The promotion of 'heritage' has become a ubiquitous aspect of modern culture. Like much else it is neither all bad nor all good and continually evolves.

'Heritage' can be thought as a way of reconstructing the past as artefacts and commodities which appeal to present-day fads and fancies. 'Heritage' has little (and often nothing) to do with promoting the sort of ideas and meanings about the past that are developed by specialists or academics. 'Heritage centres' too frequently offer a dumbed-down rendition of the past, with specific myths and ideologies being promoted at the expense of the greater diversity (and complexity) of interpretations which informed research offers.

For most people the past is consumed through different aspects of the heritage industry. Inevitably this consumption of the past is how the meaning of the past is produced, as consumption and production of meanings are two sides of the same process. The ever-evolving mythic past promoted by the heritage industry are reconstructions of the past according to present day considerations.

The romance of ruins

However we should not entirely blame the modern heritage industry for creating romantic myths about the past. There is something inherent in the English personality which has been seduced by the romance of ruined buildings and old documents. This goes all the way back to the author of the first history of England, the *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*), written by Bede (*c*.673–735) – who seems to have a fondness for earthworks and ruins. Two centuries later King Alfred (*c*.848–*c*.900) was also an enthusiastic historian. Indeed, what we might now think of as antiquarianism was crucial to both religious and social status for the Anglo-Saxons.

In later centuries John Milton (1608–74), William Blake (1757–1827) and William Wordsworth (1770–1850) helped to create and sustain a romantic vision of Britain's past. Even William Shakespeare (1564–1616) puts the following words into the mouth a soldier:

> … from our troops I strayed
> To gaze upon a ruinous monastery,
>
> And as I earnestly did fix mine eye,
> Upon the wasted building…
>
> (*Titus Andronicus* Act 5)

And Shakespeare's younger contemporary, John Webster (c.1580–1634), betrays similar concerns in his dark tragedy *The Duchess of Malfi*, which is obsessed with death and decay:

> I do love these ancient ruins;
> We do never tread upon them, but we set
> Our foot upon some reverend history

Webster would have read William Camden's *Britannia* (first published in 1586) which has been described as 'an earnest attempt to convey the political wisdom of the recent past.' (Richardson 2004: 113). Camden, who lived from 1551 to 1623, is the *de facto* father of English antiquarianism as, although John Leland was an generation earlier (1506–62), his *Itinerary* was only published posthumously in 1710. However Camden makes few observations about prehistoric sites and is predominately interested in the Roman period; even the much-expanded posthumous editions of *Britannia* did little to redress the balance.

By the time of Lord Byron (1788–1824) the love affair with ruins went so far as to live in a house adjoining the ruins of Newstead Abbey, whose 'yawning arch betokens slow decay', and drink wine there out of a monk's skull. Even such disparate characters as Percy Shelley (1792–1822) and Edward Gibbon (1737–1794) were

Top: *The yawning arch betokening slow decay at Newstead, Nottinghamshire. Modern day visitors need to provide their own wine and monk's skull to have the complete Bryon experience.*

Centre: *Old John, the well-known folly in Bradgate Park, Leicestershire, built in 1784. Old John was probably designed by John Hope, who had designed a similar folly for Mow Cop (on the Cheshire/Staffordshire border; shown in bottom photograph) in 1754.*

Old John provides shelter to view the surrounding landscape in comfort, especially the hunting and horse trials which took place in close proximity to the tower. The archway was originally part of a longer wall which, although constructed as a mock ruin, was originally part of now-demolished stables.

Local folklore tells that this tankard-shaped monument was erected to the memory of either a faithful retainer or a miller killed on the hill top shortly before the erection of the tower. However the putative 'Old John' commemorated in this way seems to be a post hoc invention, as the hill was known as 'John Hill' at least forty years earlier than these supposed deaths. (Ramsey 2002)

inspired to write by visits to ruins – *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* was conceived during a visit to the remains of the Capitol in Rome.

By the late eighteenth century no garden makeover was complete with the creation of a picturesque ruin. So well-known was the English predilection for ruins that Goethe (1749–1882) was able to include the following mocking remark:

> Are Britons here? They go abroad, feel calls
> To trace old battle-fields and crumbling walls…
>
> (Mephistopheles in *Faust*)

Napoleon may have famously accused Britain of being a nation of shopkeepers but a more accurate observation would have been to regard us as a nation of nostalgics, sustaining myths of romantic rural idylls.

Nothing but nostalgia

Such tendencies to nostalgia have multiplied many-fold in recent decades. The pace of technological and social change means that artefacts and attitudes of our grandparents' era rarely have any utilitarian value today. We can only value them nostalgically, as part of our 'heritage' and such like.

Laurie Lee's evocative although somewhat imaginative biography *Cider with Rosie*, published in 1959, became widely known (not least because for many years it was a set text for some GCE and GCSE English examinations). He describes life in a poor but self-sufficient Cotswold village in the 1920s and records the tough conditions of this now-vanished rural way of life, although the overall tone is very much one of nostalgia. The same is true of Flora Thompson's study of life in late nineteenth century Oxfordshire, *Lark Rise to Candleford*, published in 1945. Lee and Thompson write in a manner which is easy to read and both delight in recounting the traditional practices of their villages. This generates a sense of 'lost idyll' which more than counterbalances the poverty, hard work, disease and sheer stoicism which these writers also recount.

When Edith Holden's natural history diary for 1906 was rediscovered after 70 years and published in 1977 as *The Country Diary of Edwardian Lady* this fuelled a huge wave of nostalgia and led to numerous me-too books and a whole industry of kitsch artefacts decorated with motifs from the book. Sixty to thirty years on from their publication, these three books remain as the key inspirations for the currently pervasive English nostalgia.

In Britain anyone under the age of about forty has been brought up within a culture largely fabricated from notions of nostalgia, mostly woven by commercial concerns

and the whims of mass media, into which tourism and heritage are thoroughly intertwined. Such nostalgia is pervasive but far from homogenous. Indeed, the same place or object can evoke a wide variety of reconstructions of the past, mostly dependent on prior knowledge and belief systems.

Complex constructions of nostalgia are deeply embedded into present day culture. Places and artefacts of historic interest which no longer have any practical importance are utilised to create mythic references to aspects of the past – usually carefully selected aspects that sanitise away the poverty, social inequality and poor health of the people who sustained stately homes and generated the wealth which enabled such conspicuous consumption.

A place or object – restored or conserved to its present day existence – is used to signify specific cultural reconstructions of the past (perhaps better thought of as 'simulations'). The heritage industry has long been creating such nostalgic simulations of the past. This is as true of prehistoric sites as it is for stately homes or decommissioned Cold War nuclear bunkers. The urge to simulate the past takes many forms, from military re-enactment groups at medieval castles to Druids at Stonehenge on midsummer morning.

In recent years the 'visitor centre' syndrome has increasingly infected prehistoric sites too, with Newgrange in Ireland and Carnac in Brittany providing some of the more dramatic examples, while quite subtly-nuanced presentations (such as the Keiller Museum at Avebury in Wiltshire) make their own statements about how the past can be reconstructed, or 'simulated', including in these 'statements' the possibility of multipleinterpretations.

Summary

While only some of these elaborate notions of the past are closely related to how we think about landscape or the countryside, how we think about sacred places is derived from four interwoven strands. Starting with the most recent, these are:

- pervasive and complex nostalgia;
- muddled ideas of heritage;
- the invented tradition of the countryside;
- the earlier invention of nature and landscape.

Needless to say this interweaving readily results in some rather complex (and at times rather confused) thinking about sacred places.

At the time this chapter was written I had not read Peter Ackroyd's book *Albion: The Origins of the English imagination* (Ackroyd 2002). Ackroyd offers some interesting examples of antiquarianism and landscape painting, while remaining unselfconsciously within the myth-making process he is describing. But then he has never made any claims to be approaching his topics in anything resembling a theoretically-aware manner (which is probably why he is a popular writer and I am not…).

5: Prehistoric wayfaring

Places are not abstract entities – names on maps or gazetteers or such like. They are entities which are known only by being 'experienced'. These days this might mean 'virtual strolling' using Google StreetView or such like. But until very recently it meant physically moving around. And until the last century, that mostly – though not always – meant walking around. And just as we walk from one street, though a district, as far as the park or the countryside so too we are linking together places. Sometimes we are linking together different 'small' places, such as a specific street of houses with a particular row of shops, and sometimes we are moving between more substantial places, such as villages or towns.

Modern Westerners almost always travel to get from A to B. The bit in-between is usually a necessary evil or, at best, secondary to the destination or return home. But this book is predominately about pre-modern and prehistoric travel. Modern notions of travel as a means to an end, dominated by the destination and the 'task' of getting there, fit poorly. In traditional societies leaving and arriving may be important; but the experiences along the way are usually more significant. Indeed some journeys may not have an anticipated destination – or the expected end may not be reached. To avoid contaminating our thinking with modern perceptions, perhaps we should think less about 'journeying' than 'wayfaring'.

Before the Iron Age, when horses and animal-drawn vehicles became an option – at least for the posher sort of folk – such wayfaring would typically be by 'shanks pony'. Other options for land-based travel would have to wait for the invention of mechanised transport. So, if horses were not an option, then everywhere was 'only' walking distance away. But everywhere is in walking distance if – as the American humourist Steven Wright observed – you have the time. One suspects pre-modern people simply wouldn't get the joke. Life was just places in walking distance put end-to-end, as it were, so 'walking distance' was as long as your life. And 'life as a journey' is a metaphor that has become ubiquitous, so much so that it is difficult to think about life except as a subsidiary of that metaphor. Answers to the question 'What is life if not a journey?' are usually more than a little off-beat. We find it easier to comprehend the visionary insight of the seventeenth century Japanese poet Matsuo Basho, who wrote in his travel diary 'each day is a journey, the journey itself is home…'

Such metaphorical journeys readily encroach into more spiritual domains. As long ago as the fourth to sixth centuries CE the famous Indian writer Vatsyayana observed 'It's not the road you walk, it's the walking.' Yes, he is famous. We may not know exactly when he lived, but most people have at least heard of his best-seller: the *Kama Sutra*. The metaphorical and spiritual – not to mention sometimes erotic aspects – aspects of journeys feature in later chapters of my book *Singing Up the Country* (Trubshaw 2011).

My own experiences of walking through the countryside set exactly the right pace for more meditative 'ruminations' – or 'walking Zen' as Alan Watts once called it. Just such ruminations while I explored the landscape around Avebury in early 2011 gave rise to *Singing Up the Country*. But they go back to when I was much younger. Travel diaries I kept on walking holidays in 1977 (around the Golden Valley in Herefordshire and into Radnorshire) and 1980 (my first trip to Avebury) reveal all sorts of ideas that 'came to mind' along the way. Such mental detours are not matched by later diaries for holidays made by bicycle and, latterly, car. My experience of the spirits of place 'inspiring' quite profound insights also includes the day after midwinter solstice in 2000, when (for no more spiritual reason than the office party having taken place the night before in a hotel down the road) I found myself walking near Alderley Edge. And I wasn't even seeking any sort of insights…

Life as a road trip

Prehistoric people did not simply go from place to place for the sake of getting from one location to another locality. For hunter-gathering people life was one long road trip. Although hunter-gathering people have now been squeezed to the margins of the inhabited world – such as the Arctic or the deserts of Africa – we can see parallels to this in the way traditional Saami lifestyles involve following reindeer herds over hundreds of miles, or Inuit skilfully using overland and waterborne transport to hunt seals. We have at least some evidence of the travel needed for native Americans to successfully exploit the vast bison herds. While the parallels with Europe in the Mesolithic and early Neolithic may only be approximate, we can infer much about how life might have been before agriculture 'took off' in the later Neolithic and onwards.

Although for most of us walking is the only sensible-paced transport option, it was not the same in prehistory. But as far back as 9,000 years ago we have direct evidence for waterborne transport being at least as important as walking. Mesolithic hunter-gatherers on the inner islands of western Scotland left evidence of hunting seal and red deer and also collecting 'industrial' quantities of shell fish and hazel nuts. Clearly this was part of a seasonal travel routine which enabled different foods to be collected – and, presumably, some of it stored. But crucially these remains are from different

An idyllic beach on Coll.

islands (Coll, Colonsay, Oronsay and Jura) which, then as now, were separate. And, at the time of writing, archaeologists have been excavating a Mesolithic log boat in the waters of the Solent which is only slightly more recent than the evidence from the Scottish islands.

Despite modern mental baggage to the contrary, mobility and travel could not have been exceptional in prehistoric societies – they were integral aspects of those societies. Without travelling between the islands our Mesolithic antecedents would have starved. And every now and again they must also have travelled further away to meet other 'tribes' – genetic diversity is not an optional extra for long-term human survival. To live in the British Isles before – and during – the Neolithic was to be part of a society which relied on boats as much as legs.

Early watercraft – whether log boats or skin-covered 'kayaks' or 'coracles' – clearly follow rivers and sea-coasts. The routes are largely determined by the geography. But three thousand or more years ago walking was constrained less by the terrain – we can, if we really want to, ascend the steepest hills – than by trees. Or, more accurately, a combination of trees and the animals that lived among them. Nowadays when we are out in the woods we there is little prospect of encountering wild boar or wolves. This was not the case a thousand or more years ago. In the Neolithic there were also bears and aurochs, the formidably large wild cattle. While woodland can make overland travel exceptionally difficult, it is rarely completely impassable as wild

Ridgeway near Wayland's Smithy.

animals – pigs, cattle and deer – made tracks through while foraging or escaping predators. These tracks become used and adapted by humans as they too forage or travel through the woodland.

In the modern age where a footpath is defined clearly on a map, and may even be fenced in, we think of paths as something that have always been there. And, to all intents and purposes, some indeed have. But in pre-modern societies, particularly those living before widespread enclosure of fields, a path existed only because it had been created by those who went before you. 'Paths are made by walking' as the Spanish poet Antonio Machado observed. In open countryside – heathland and the like – they may also be more akin to a 'skein' of almost-parallel tracks, rather than one narrower way.

Four of the various types of Neolithic polished axes discovered in Leicestershire.

Following in the steps of those who have established an accepted or 'best' way to go is a profound statement of human culture. The generations of people who went before went to tend animals, plant and harvest crops, travel to market, meet up with relatives and friends, find spouses and – ultimately – were being carried to their final resting places. Little wonder then that following a path became such a widely-used metaphor for the passage of one's life.

Ethnographic studies of nomadic and semi-nomadic cultures confirms that the whole of life 'happens' while travelling. All manner of subsistence activities are accomplished. Goods are traded. Relatives and other people are met. Children are born. Illnesses are overcome – or not. And travel fulfils a love of change and exploration – which are not merely modern aspirations but seem to be an enduring aspect of human nature since earlier times.

Once farming makes us more sedentary then journeys are necessary to enable the more material aspects of culture to be traded or given as gifts – and, as always, gift-giving is either immediately reciprocated or imposes some longer-term 'onus' on the recipient. People trade food, whether to overcome shortages in hard times or simply to add diversity to their diet. People trade specialist raw materials, such as flint, salt and the ingredients to make pots – especially the 'grogs' mixed in with the clay, which in earlier Neolithic pottery seemingly are always white and, where sources can be ascertained, apparently from somewhere which must have had 'cultural

significance' as well as simply being suitable for the task. They also traded or gifted high-status objects, such as polished stone axes.

Probably the highest-status of these non-functional axes were those made from pale green jadeite quarried at high altitude on Monte Viso and Monte Beigua in the Alps. Examples have been found in Brittany, including the chamber tombs at Gavrinis and Carnac. Thirty known examples have been discovered in Ireland, Scotland and especially near the Hampshire and Dorset coasts – confirming that these were important locations for cross-Channel trade even five thousand years ago.

Just over a quarter of British-made examples of similar axes came from a difficult-to-access quarry on the upper slopes of Great Langdale in the Lake District where a band of green volcanic tuff is exposed. Almost certainly the quarry was chosen as much for the mythic significance of its dramatic location rather than simply because of the quality of the stone. About two dozen other quarry sites spread widely through Britain have also been approximately located. Yet hand axes from all these different places have been found widely distributed, often many hundreds of miles from where they came from. Given that something in the order of a month's hard work was needed to make just one of these, then something equally 'valuable' must have been expected in exchange.

A great many less-conspicuous exchanges must also have taken place, but these have left little or no trace among the material culture that archaeologists discover. And for all the material clutter that does or does not survive, there was something even more valuable that would be shared – ideas. The deeper meanings and significance of journeys and the places along the routes would be retold in legends and myths.

Bothies and nightclubs; Apaches and Scots

In a web page explaining the title of his CD *Bothy Culture*, the musician Martyn Bennett (1971–2005) makes the observation that:

> … in some ways bothies have the same, familiar atmosphere to urban nightclubs – arriving for the sound-check when they are merely cold, empty shells is always a spooky experience. Perhaps the same spirits of so many fire/spot-lit, whisky/drug charged nights have somehow imparted a memory of the ghosts of those people you have never met and can only imagine.
>
> (Bennett c.1997)

The words of Apache storyteller Dudley Patterson illustrates the deeper aspects of this:

Stanley Robertson.

> How will you walk along this trail of wisdom? Well, you will go to many places. You must look at them closely. You must remember all of them. Your relatives will talk to you about them. You must remember everything they tell you. You must think about it, and keep on thinking about it, and keep on thinking about it. You must do this because no one can help you but yourself… Wisdom sits in places. It's like water… you also need to drink from places. You must remember everything about them. You must learn their names. You must remember what happened at them long ago. You must think about it and keep on thinking about it. And your mind will become smoother and smoother.
>
> (Basso 1996: 70)

Within the British Isles the only surviving evidence for this is the Scottish Traveller's tradition, especially as maintained by Stanley Robertson (1940–2009). For Robertson 'places "become" through memory, and memory teaches through place.' (Reith 2008: 81)

Within Traveller culture, the pervasive themes of cyclical renewal or life as a journey reflect a worldview instilled by the practical, descriptive, and symbolic richness of Traveller education in which the guidance of family, tradition and nature is always accessible when sought. (Reith 2008: 95)

'In the concealed Traveller topography of North-East Scotland', as Sara Reith calls it, '[…] Stanley's expansive worldview encompasses the material, ancestral, ethereal and eternal as ever present resources.' (Reith 2008: 81–2) The remaining chapters of this book are devoted to such expansive worldviews, those 'mindscapes' through which our ancestors and antecedents made their way.

Wayfaring needs waymarking

Having established in this broad manner the way that travel – wayfaring as I prefer – was integral to pre-modern and prehistoric people this in turn raises a related issue. When we pop to the shops we rarely turn on the sat nav. Yet to get to there we need to know that we turn left at the end of the road, cross over at the zebra crossing, then take the second right. To go somewhere less familiar we normally rely on sat navs, maps or just verbal descriptions – "Go straight over three roundabouts, go past where the petrol station used to be, turn left at the Red Lion – no, it's the Slug and Lettuce now… '

So too pre-sat nav societies made cognitive distinctions between familiar and unfamiliar landscapes, and between local and distant destinations. Natural, man-made and man-modified landmarks would have to be committed to memory for less familiar journeys. Place-names linked by a mythical narrative – a 'song line' of some kind – would be an effective mnemonic (See Trubshaw 2011: Ch.6). For some journeys, what might be thought of as more 'ritual' ones in some respect or another, the mythic narrative might re-enact the time of primordial creation, or the progressive settlement of the region by ancient ancestors, or be part of a rite of passage – and such journeys are most likely deeply immersed in the mythic narratives of the society. Indeed, the re-enactment of the myth, or a fragment of it, might be the *reason* for the journey. The memory of such myths would be passed on with these 'ritual' retellings. The tales would become integral with the places where they were retold.

Perhaps such mythic meaning and significance was once so prevalent there was no such thing as a purely 'mundane' journey in prehistory. Nevertheless there would have been a distinction between longer 'walkabouts' and shorter 'shopping trips'. But even if all journeys were richly embedded in a dominant world view, presumably some journeys resonated more deeply with spiritual and ritual matters than others.

Navigational landmarks in relatively familiar landscapes need not have been monumental – they could have been as minimalist as placing a small distinctive stone on top of a large boulder – although clearly only some of the more monumental markers – chamber tombs and standing stones – have survived since prehistory in most places. And, although the term 'landmark' covers all these, were such guides always intended for the land-based traveller? How did users of coastal waters navigate? How prevalent were such 'sea marks' on the coasts of Britain, and what do they tell us about the prevalence of prehistoric waterborne travel?

Each of these questions has been addressed by at least one – and in some cases several – academics who took part in an academic conference session at the end of 2004. Their papers appeared in a book called *Prehistoric Journeys* (Cummings and

Cairn Holy, Dumfries and Galloway. Note the Irish Sea visible to the left of the photograph.

Johnston 2007). Those who have prior experience of such collections of academic papers should note that this book greatly surpasses the usual expectations of insufficiently-overlapping viewpoints which typify books of conference papers.

Being 'dropped' by helicopter for week-long surveys of areas of Western Greenland abandoned by modern hunters as being unduly inaccessible may seem as remote from British archaeological practice as it is reasonable to imagine. Yet the researchers were able to reliably reconstruct hunting routes not used since about 1200 CE simply by looking for landmarks such as a small (typically head-sized) distinctively-coloured rock placed on top of a boulder near the skyline, and larger cairns in the lower-lying areas. These routes led to evidence of four different types of shelters, corresponding to ethnographic evidence for four types of hunting camps. However not all the landmarks were mundane – some 'arrangements' were clearly part of the old hunting magic condemned by the Christian missionaries to Greenland.

So when, in the two following chapters, the discussion turns to the survival of prehistoric artefacts at British Neolithic sites there is a sense that the 'sites' should be interpreted as part of a spectrum of different types 'camps' which were once linked by landmarks perhaps little more distinctive than cairns or even head-sized stones on bigger boulders. Only the bigger monuments – such as tombs – would have been sites of social interaction.

Back in 1976 Aubrey Burl augured that British prehistoric henges were associated with places easily accessed by water, or on other routeways. So what should we make of chamber tombs (a little older than these henges) which are situated a short, often steep, climb above the sea? Was it so Grandad got a good view of the waves in the afterlife? Maybe that as well. But three of the contributors to *Prehistoric Journeys* take a detailed look at the surviving prehistoric sites on the coasts of Ireland, Wales (especially Pembrokeshire), south-west Scotland (the area of Dumfries and Galloway which includes Cairnholy), Dorset (especially Poole harbour) and the Isles of Scilly. The overwhelming conclusion is that these tombs were not sited simply to overlook the sea but also to act as reliable navigation aids for sea-borne travellers. Interestingly the tombs are sited to act as sea-marks just where underwater features make the water most hazardous, for example where submerged sand banks create locally-faster tidal races. Not only could our Neolithic ancestors knock up a nifty henge, here is evidence that they also nipped around the treacherous waters of the British Isles.

Just to prove they weren't in the least bit daft, given a sensible alternative to the most treacherous inland seas of the British isles they made for the source of rivers that linked together via a short overland trek rather than risk the more extreme coastal tidal races. The Kilmartin valley was preferred to going around the Mull of Kintyre. The Upper Clyde connects the sources of the Tweed and the Nith. Dunragit provides an alternative to the Mull of Galloway. These overland routes acquired numerous prestigious prehistoric monuments, such as henges.

The same argument links the two Avons of Wessex (the Bristol Avon flowing west and the Christchurch Avon flowing south, which passes near Stonehenge and has its headwaters near the Marden mega-henge). This river and land 'short cut' avoids going the long way round the undisputedly tricky waters off Land's End. Furthermore the headwaters of the River Kennet, a tributary of the Thames, are at Avebury, adding a third major routeway to the east. No surprise then that, Wessex 'filled up' with prehistoric monuments on a scale that is on a par with the contemporary routes in Scotland. (See Noble 2007 for a more detailed account of the correlations between Neolithic monuments and routeways.)

Recently-published research reveals that such early seafarers could also construct navigation aids to ensure they made it back to their boats after venturing overland. Roger Hutchins has suggested that the prehistoric stone rows (associated with the tin-producing areas of the British Isles, which would presumably attract sea-borne traders) act as both direction finders and 'mnemonics' for the journey back to the nearest natural harbours (Hutchins 2011). More work needs to be done to confirm his ideas but this suggestion is consistent with the settings of contemporary megalithic tombs as sea marks – and the reality that all monuments act as landmarks.

The experience of journeying

Walking, as with other ways of moving our bodies such as crawling, climbing, jumping, stumbling, and so on, is an 'embodied experience'. We use our whole bodies, not just our legs, when we move about. Our perceptions – the 'response' of the ground to our weight, our use of visual cues to maintain balance – are also integral to even the most basic acts of movement. And, at the risk of being overly-profound, what we do with our bodies – and what we perceive – is in every respect key to what makes up our culture – material or mental. Movement is not in some sense separate to the rest of human activity, it is by and large what makes human activity possible, in all its cultural diversity (See Noë 2004).

And when we are journeying or wayfaring what we experience, and the values we give to those experiences, depends on the season of the year, time of day, quality of the light, the weather and much else. Misty or clear, windy or still, sunny or rainy – they all effect not only what we can see (and hear and smell) but also affect our own visceral responses to the act of walking. Walking uphill into strong wind-driven rain is a far more challenging experience than skipping along a firm sandy beach in the full sun with just a gentle cooling breeze. While we may walk further along the idyllic beach, we have a greater sense of achievement from having 'beaten' the tougher terrain in inclement weather.

What we see while walking depends on the terrain – difficult stony outcrops or dense tree roots require all one's attention to be directed downwards. Slippery or boggy ground requires one to test each step, using leg muscles in different ways to when walking on either gravel or smooth tarmac. In contrast, a smooth sward of pasture grass means that – give or take dodging the odd cow pat or sheep poo – one can devote most of one's attention to the distant panorama and the clouds in the sky, often associated with a greater sense of oneness with the world. Walking on a well-maintained riverside path may require as little attention to one's feet – but the views will usually be much more constrained by the valley sides and denser vegetation associated with valleys.

Entering the Otherworld

Since the age of eighteen I have been fortunate to live in close proximity to countryside eminently suited for rambling – successively West Yorkshire, Sussex, Surrey, Leicestershire and Wiltshire. Back in the 1970s one wore 'sensible shoes' – although, as a cash-conscious student, I have to admit mine were not always sensible enough for the hazards of Brontë country in the winter. But for most people a day's walking is topped and tailed by a drive from and back to a more urban or suburban life. Walking in the countryside is 'other' to their day-to-day world. Certainly, to judge by the activities in a typical pub car park in, say, the Peak District or the Dales,

Top: *Watch your step! Exposed beech tree roots, eastern entrance of Avebury henge.*

Bottom: *Looking back at Avebury henge (lost in the trees) from the smooth turf of Windmill Hill.*

one would have to assume that such ramblers are about to undertake an Otherworld journey. They don a shamanic costume of special trousers and special jackets. Most essential are the 'mercurial' boots and socks deemed essential for this Otherworld expedition. Other parts of the ritual attire may include special thermos flasks, maps or mobile GPS systems. And this magical attire is adorned with words of power – such as Berghaus, Rab, Regatta, North Face, Cragghopper or (for those who desire the most empowering sigils) Rohan.

Just why the English in particular have such powerful myths about the countryside is a story in its own right – and one I summarised in the opening chapter of *Sacred Places: Prehistory and popular imagination* (reprinted as Chapter Four of this work). Suffice for the moment to note that the old adage about 'Other people have myths, we have religion' can also be reworded to reflect our relationship with 'wayfaring' in the landscape. You don't have to live in Papua New Guinea or wear a bone through your septum to see the world through the lenses of myths. You're simply so used to looking

through the lenses to notice that they're there (and if that idea is novel to you then read *The Myths of Reality* [Danser 2005] for an accessible overview of the way myths shape our modern world).

Nevertheless, ethnocentricity notwithstanding, our antecedents probably had a richer and more varied sense of mythic journeys. A quickly-assembled list of ethnographic parallels includes:

- ❖ journeys re-enacting primordial creation
- ❖ journeys re-enacting primordial migrations
- ❖ initiatory quests (either sent or led)
- ❖ quests to seek visions
- ❖ quests to 'meet' – or follow – deceased ancestors
- ❖ quests for healing or psychoactive plants
- ❖ quests or hunts for totemic animals
- ❖ Otherworldly quests
- ❖ open-ended 'walkabouts'

Any experienced ethnographers reading this list will probably think of as many more examples. But that would be to miss my point. Which is that most, if not all, of these examples are somewhat alien to dominant Western culture. Indeed to have personally explored even the *idea* of any of these would be deemed somewhat 'alternative'. We're a long way from popping to the shops or taking the M25 to visit Grandma. We would share Dorothy's thoughts when she said to Toto, 'I've got a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore.'

Originally published as the opening chapter of Singing Up the Country: The songlines of Avebury and beyond *(Trubshaw 2011).*

6: The psychogeographical 'turn'

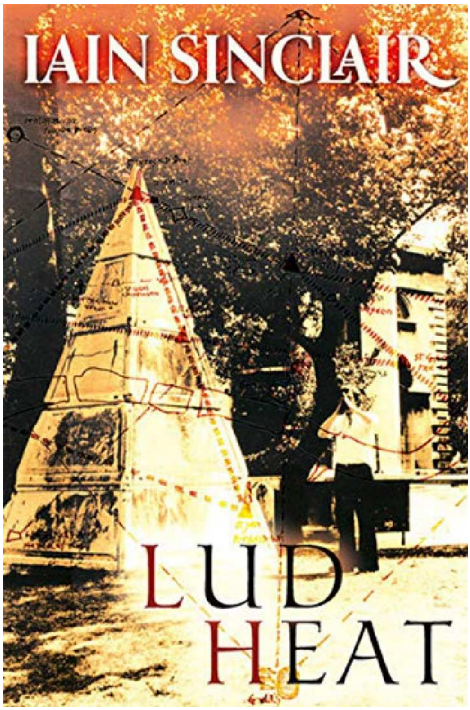
Any mention of 'thinking about places' seems to require some discussion of what has been termed 'psychogeography'. Well, in all honesty, several quite different approaches have gone under this moniker, with the latest manifestation by far the most trivial, not least because of the focus on urbanised places with the rural environment considered, if at all, in the shallow 'cardboard cut-out' manner perhaps inevitable when the authors have no real awareness of anything other than metropolitan lifestyles.

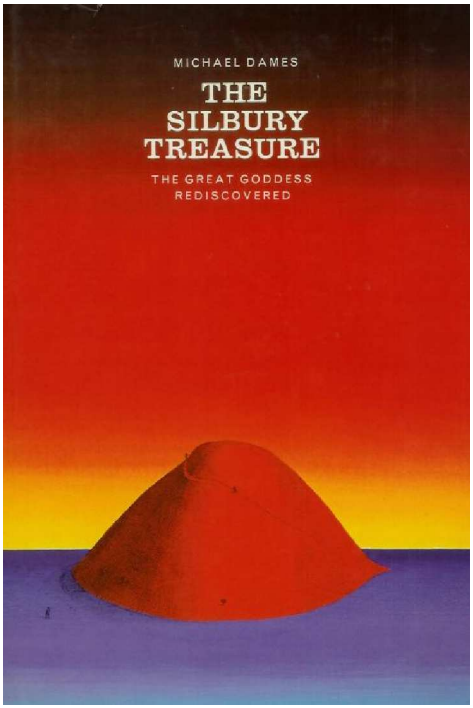
What follows is a previously-published article, itself an expanded version of a review of Merlin Coverley's book about psychogeography. The whole chapter fits badly with the approaches of the rest of this work, but the reasons for the bad fit should become clear by the time you get to the end. Part of me wanted to revamp this chapter quite radically – if only to include some discussion of Robert Macfarlane's recent works – but, because none of this really sheds any light on the core aspects of what I am trying to explore, I have opted to let it stand as published.

Psychogeography isn't what you think it is. At least not if your idea of psychogeography is influenced by Will Self's ramblings in *The Independent*. Before Self hijacked the term for his own agenda, if anyone at all knew what it meant they would either think of obscure 1950s Parisian avant garde intellectual movements or the works a group of London-based writers such as Iain Sinclair and Peter Ackroyd. All of these are essentially urban, so they stand in contrast to those aspects of 1970s to 1990s neo-antiquarianism known (at least to the aficionados) as 'earth mysteries' that seemingly might also be thought of as 'psychological geography'.

The origins of psychogeography

Merlin Coverley has provided a useful introduction to the Parisian and London manifestations of pychogeography (Coverley 2006). He traces its origins with the Lettrist International and, subsequently, Situationist International movements in 1950s Paris. The exotic terminology – such as *flâneur* and *dérive* – of Guy Debord has entered the discourse of English postmodernism untranslated to denote aimless (or sometimes erotically-charged) wandering of urban streets – a common trope of psychogeography. However Coverley convincingly argues that London rather than Paris should be considered as the cerebrum of psychogeography, and details how





notions later adopted by French writers were first explored by seventeenth and nineteenth London authors, who in turn influenced some of the capital's leading authors of the late twentieth century.

So, rather than Debord, it is Daniel Defoe who Coverley regards as the parent of psychogeography. Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year* documents a rapidly changing mental topography of a 1660s city, in the same way that Louis Aragon's *Paris Peasant* was to do in the 1920s. *Robinson Crusoe* – although not urban – was to have a continuing influence on writers who came under the psychogeography umbrella. Coverley then traces a mental map through the works of Thomas de Quincy (*Confessions of an English Opium Eater,* with its dream-like London anticipating Debordian *dérives*); Robert Louis Stevenson (*The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde,* which starts the endless flood of imaginary gothic underworlds sharing the metropolis's material manifestations); Arthur Machen (whose *The London Adventure* is the exact contemporary of Aragon's proto-*flâneur*); Iain Sinclair (whose affiliation with psychogeography starts with *Lud Heat* but includes much of his subsequent output); and Peter Ackroyd (*Hawksmoor* and his more recent non-fiction works).

Coverley notes that these London manifestations of psychogeography have a much more antiquarian aspect than their Parisian counterparts – 'an antiquarianism that views the present through the prism of the past' as he so evocatively states – and that this antiquarianism is, at least in the works of Machen, Sinclair and Ackroyd, linked to an obsession with the occult. Although Coverley omits any discussion of T.S. Eliot's 'Unreal City' of *The Waste Land*, his remarks clearly can be extended to include Eliot's mixing of Classical legends and then-contemporary culture to get under the skin of inter-war London.

The omission of Eliot is all the more surprising considering his psychogeographic-esque musings in 'Little Gidding', one of the *Four Quartets*:

> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive at where we started
> And know the place for the first time.

But I guess Coverley had to stop somewhere, though it's a shame that he did not find a place to mention Virginia Woolf's essay 'Street haunting: a London adventure' which creates a dualism between rural and urban by imagining one of the city's street 'with its islands of lights, and its long groves of darkness, and one side of it perhaps some tree-sprinkled, grass-grown space where night is folding herself to sleep naturally and, as one passes the iron railing, one hears those little cracklings and stirrings of leaf and twig which seem to suppose the silence of the fields all around them, an owl hooting, and far away the rattle of a train in the valley.'

Although for most of us we experience our environment visually (see McGregor 2009 for an example of psychogeographic street walking combined with what is, quite literally, street photography) our environments are also aural, with urban environments often unremittingly so. David Toop's, *Sinister Resonance* (Toop 2010) – from which I lifted the Virginia Woolf quotation – is a most welcome exposition about how sound contributes to our environment, an extended lesson about both listening and the listened. While Toop's approach is not specifically psychogeographical, reading his book adds a whole dimension of experience for any *flâneur*.

The exclusion of the rural

Coverley's emphasis on selected London authors challenging established mental maps of London conforms well with his definition of psychogeography as urban and politicised. But the real weakness of this treatment is the intense circularity. By defining psychogeography as urban (specifically London and, to a lesser extent, Paris) and politicised (at least in intent if not actualisation) Coverley then uses this definition

to exclude a wider orbit of essentially like-minded people 'thinking about places' that did not place themselves under the rubric of psychogeography. After all Coverley quotes the earliest definition of psychogeography, by Debord in the first issue of *Internationale Situationniste,* which reads:

> The study of specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals.

Such a definition of psychogeography would, for example, readily encompass Common Ground, the organisation set up in 1982 by Susan Clifford and Angela King to promote 'local distinctiveness'. The only aspect of Common Ground's agenda that separates them from Coverley's urban re-definition of psychogeography is that their work is mostly in non-urban communities. It might also be said that they distinguish themselves by having achieved far more of their 'political' objectives than urban psychogeography practitioners... But Coverley makes no mention of Common Ground, not even to justify their exclusion.

Conspicuous in Coverley's book only by their absence are the thinkers about 'specific effects of the geographical environment' of the 70s to 90s who came to self-identify under the designation 'earth mysteries'. They too saw the present through the 'prism of the past' in a similar way – although less darkly – as Ackroyd *et al*. Here Coverley seems to reveal the limits of his own awareness. As he repeatedly states, one of the key sources for Sinclair's novel *Lud Heat* (which in turn deeply influenced Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor*) was Alfred Watkins' antiquarianism, specifically the 'ley' or alignment of six London churches, including St Paul's cathedral. Apart from the inevitable repeat of the myth started in 1970 by John Michell that Watkins was riding a horse when he had conceived of the idea of 'leys' (he wasn't, he was much less romantically driving a car – see Michell 1970: xv–xvi; Adams 1978; Trubshaw 2005: 84) Coverley summarises Watkins' ideas accurately, and even goes on to state that they were resurrected as part of the earth mysteries movement. But this only makes the lack of any further discussion about earth mysteries even more remarkable; doubly so as the London Earth Mysteries Group is now only of only three such survivors of the heyday of the movement. As will be discussed below, the anonymously-produced newsletters of the London Psychogeographical Association (LPA) were circulated to editors of all the earth mysteries magazines of the 1990s, so the LPA knew of EM!

If we drop Coverley's psychogeography-is-urban definition and revert to Debord's more encompassing definition – and one more in accord with Will Self's appropriation of the term, which has been responsible for its wider awareness – then the omission of earth mysteries writers such as Janet and Colin Bord and, more especially, Michael Dames, seems wayward. The distinction between Coverley's list

and these authors is less their subject matter than their genre – Coverley favours literary novel writers to the exclusion of non-fiction authors. To what extent Sinclair, Ackroyd and their London-based associates self-identify with the term 'psychogeography' is not explored by Coverley but, as they were writing before the 'resurrection' of this term by the London Psychogeographical Association in the 1990s then the fact that the Bords, Dames and other 1970s/80s earth mysteries writers did not (and probably would not) self-identify with the 'psychogeography' moniker is not, in my opinion, any reason for not exploring the great overlap in approaches.

Ackroyd may have created for London a gothic, occult underworld associated with Hawksmoor churches. This may have generated increased interest in the buildings by tourists. But this is little compared to the vast modern pagan interest aroused in the Avebury cycle of monuments by Michael Dames' inspirational books (Dames 1976; 1977; 2007) – even if most of the present-day pagan pilgrims are probably unaware of his key role in the inception of the modern-day myths about this megalithic complex. Unlike Ackroyd, Dames did not restrict himself to one geographical location but went on to re-mythologise large parts of Ireland (Dames 1992) and much of Wales (Dames 2002; 2006). Dames has no overt political agenda, expresses no interest in urban environments, and has had little or no contact with London literary circles. So well outside Coverley's remit for psychogeography. But certainly well within Debord's scope. And Dames' career as an art college lecturer fostered familiarity with Situationist sentiments, in a way that neither Sinclair nor Ackroyd appear to share.

Just as Dames is conspicuous only by his absence in Coverley's approach to the psychogeography ground, so too is any mention of Janet and Colin Bord's influential *Mysterious Britain* and its many sequels which re-bond physical places with their traditional lore and legends. Which at least makes Coverley's omission of more arcane aspects of earth mysteries – such as Philip Heselton's perceptive ruminations about terrestrial zodiacs (Heselton 1991) – self-consistent. Back in 1991 Heselton was the first to moot that these zodiacs existed neither in the landscape nor merely in the minds of their 'creators' but in a combination of both – psychogeography in all-but-name.

And, somewhere on the fringes of earth mysteries, an eight-year pre-millennial 'Gnostic odyssey' came to a close in 1998 when the maverick rock musician Julian Cope had visited over 300 prehistoric sites in the British Isles. His book, *The Modern Antiquarian* and subsequent web site have been one of the major popular sources for inspiration (and more-or-less reliable information) about these sites, stimulating untold numbers of people to leave their urban homes and visit Britain's prehistoric sacred sites. Whether you admire him or mock him (and there seems to be little middle ground), Cope has contributed more to the meaning and significance of places

in this country than Ackroyd and all the other London-based writers put together. His left-field predilections place Cope somewhere on the spectrum with the Situationists and the London Psychogeographical Association. But not within the spectrum of Coverley's prism. (An informed appraisal of Cope appears in Rob Young's *Electric Eden* (Young 2010: 588–93).)

In general, earth mysteries seems decidedly removed from Situationist International activism. But both, in differing ways, were politicised. Earth Mysteries may have been much more Romantic and retrospective in its world view but the attempt to re-establish meaning and significance for the landscape (threatened by 1970s and 1980s obsessions with motorways, industrial estates, retail parks and all-consuming surburbanisation) is close kin to Louis Aragon's feelings for the Parisian glass-shrouded arcades being swept away by Baron Haussmann's 1920s boulevards. Why is one man's view of 1920s Paris privileged to be part of psychogeography while widely-felt matching sentiments about most of England – indeed large parts of the British Isles – are excluded?

Indeed is the London–Paris emphasis simply a distortion of Coverley's own contrivance? As he repeatedly notes, Robinson Crusoe is key to the psychogeography movement. In addition to his key role as part of the pioneering Defoe oeuvre, principal manifestations of Robinson in psychogeography include an alternative French appellation for *flâneur* – *robinsonner* – and as the explicit inspiration for the work of London-based psychogeographer and filmmaker, Patrick Keiller, whose output includes *Robinson in Space*. While we can deconstruct Crusoe as the excluded other of an urban writer rather than an authentic non-urban entity, his importance to the psychogeography movement is clearly entirely consistent with Debord's definition. So are imaginary islands as much an aspect of psychogeography as urban enclaves?

Part of the answer to both these rhetorical interjections can be found in the scope of the London Psychogeographical Association (LPA). The group was founded in 1992 and its activities reflected the somewhat anarchic, and at times rather paranoid, inclinations of its founders. The even more anarchic and radical writer Stewart Home also contributed to the LPA's activities until the group dissolved in 1997. Although the LPA founders were aware of earth mysteries – which in the early 1990s could be considered to be in their heyday – their agenda was decidedly different. The Neoplatonism, Romanticism and 'lost golden age' trope underlying much of earth mysteries were presumably anathema to LPA sensibilities. However the LPA's inward-looking approach to psychogeography has – wittingly or otherwise – unnecessarily influenced Coverley's own narrow definition of the term.

Something of the ethos of the LPA (seemingly seasoned with the occultism of Kenneth Grant) lives on among the anonymous English Heretics group, whose now-defunct Web site (www.english-heretic.org.uk) stated 'It is our task at English Heretic, ostensibly, to maintain, nurture and care for the psychohistorical environment of England.' Their intermittent activities manifest mostly as a Black Plaque scheme 'to commemorate and draw public attention to historical figures in such diverse fields as sorcery, the Royal Art, left hand path esotericism and witchcraft, as well as the mentally infirm: tortured poets, anti-heroes and village idiots.'

Psychogeography as psychocircularity and psychobabble

Coverley's self-fulfilling London-centric definition of psychogeography may reflect what proponents of psychogeography consider to be the scope of this approach. But this narrow definition raises too many questions which demand consideration. If Robinson Crusoe – the denizen of an imaginary island – is key to psychogeography then why not also Dames' re-imagination of Avebury? Or even Bruce Chatwin's flawed attempt at cross-cultural psychogeography in *Songlines*? And if political impact is a key aim of psychogeography then why the emphasis on Ackroyd rather than on Common Ground? And why the emphasis on writers to the exclusion of composers when Britain leads the way with musicians inspired by the rural landscape, from Frederick Delius, Ralph Vaughan Williams, John Ireland, Peter Warlock through to the 1970s and 80s sonic sculptures of Max Eastley? (Indeed, one of the active members of earth mysteries community in the 1990s, Bob Dickinson, has been increasingly successful as a composer in more recent years.)

There is another significant omission from Coverley's overview of psychogeography, but one that is inevitable given that his book was published in 2006. The previous year a volume of academic papers called *Emotional Geographies* (Davidson *et al* 2005) had been published. However even if Coverley had encountered this volume he would find in it little that resonates with psychogeography, still less earth mysteries. Emotional geographers look at such topics where people chose to be for their dying days, women's emotional responses to hysterectomy (I'll leave you to read the chapter and try to discover what is place-related about this), visiting McDonald's restaurants while travelling abroad, and the geographies of going out in the evening. While there are some attempts at broader topics – such as being 'moved' by the natural world – clearly this is academic activity at its most fragmentary. In this volume and a successor (Smith *et al* 2009) none of the contributors use the term 'psychogeography'; some of the ivory towers of academe seemingly exist without any reference to large parts of the outside world. Frankly the absence of the minutae of emotional geographers from wider discussions of places is of no consequence – the 'emotional turn' in geography needs to stand on a few hilltops and look around at the

wider intellectual mindscapes rather than be constrained by the horizons visible from windowless university seminar rooms. The contrast with the writings of the influential academic social anthropologist, Tim Ingold, about perceptions of the environment (Ingold 2000) could not be greater.

I hope this article has shown that regarding psychogeography as an urban phenomenon is achieved only by repeated substantial omissions. Whether earth mysteries enthusiasts were ever the country cousins of the city-slickers and *flâneur*s of psychogeography is a moot point – there are obvious overlaps but equally conspicuous contrasts. Whether the overlaps are greater than the differences I'm happy to leave open – but earth mysteries has long been far more than a rural counterpart to the limited horizons of urban psychogeography.

Based on an article first published in *Northern Earth* No.127 (2011), itself an expanded version of a review of Merlin Coverley's book in *Time and Mind,* Vol.2 No.1 (2009).

7: Where next?

Since originally drafting this overview Robert Macfarlane's star has been in the ascendant. In a series of works written in an accessible idiom he paraphrases and deifies other writers about the natural world – flora and fauna as much as the hills and rivers. Some of his subjects, such as Roger Deakin, Richard Jeffries and Richard Mabey were already quite well-known. Others, such as Clarence Ellis and Nan Shepherd had been unjustly overlooked and all credit to Macfarlane for bringing them to wider attention.

In his book called *Landmarks* (2015) Macfarlane attempts to draw attention to place-names as something of wonder in their own right. The resulting lists seem trite and, frankly, a rushed attempt to meet a deadline for yet another book. But then I am probably not the publisher's 'target demographic'. In a more inspired section of this book Macfarlane successfully summarises some of the key ideas in Keith Basso's seminal work, *Wisdom Sits in Places* (Basso 1996).

Basso (1940–2013) lived for a decade in the town of Cibecue where he became especially interested in the the 'situatedness' of Apache people of western Arizona. This manifested as 'interconnections of story, place-name, historical sense and the ethical relationships of person-to-person and person-to-place.' (Macfarlane 2015: 20)

The Apache understand how powerfully language constructs the human relation to place. In consequence imagination, geography and history all co-exist. Not only are 'placeless events' inconceivable, as everything must happen somewhere, but so too places 'carry' memories of the events there. It is almost as if 'eventless places' are an oxymoron – at least to the extent that such places lack names or other cultural referents.

Basso dismisses the 'widely accepted fallacy' that place-names operate only as referents. Instead, the Apache, names are used and valued for other reasons: aesthetically, ethically, musically.

There are a number of ways in which Apache place-names are culturally concordant with Anglo-Saxon naming practices. Both have 'precision' – indeed this is something valued for Apache place-names. We have only to think of the long lists of Old English

words for hill, valley, or watery places (few, if any, of which are synonymous) for similar precision. Macfarlane's lack-lustre lists of British place-names do helpfully confirm that Gaelic place-names share some of the same precision of Germanic ones.

Recalling some of the 1950s blues and rock and roll songs, the recitation of lists of place-names can be art form almost in itself. The origins of this can be discerned by the remarks of an Apache working on a fence who recited a list of place-names while working because 'I like to. I ride that way in my mind.'

'Incantations' and evocations of places may not be how modern day place-name scholars think about the use of toponyms. But Macfarlane draws comparisons between the Apache-speakers of Arizona and the Gaelic-speaking community on the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides. In both societies 'language is used both to navigate the land and also to charm and 'en-chant' the land.' And in Old English-speaking England too, if we take the cognate sense of the OE word *spell*, as in 'Spellow', which has the sense of 'speech mound' (or moot site) but which retains the sense of 'ritual(ised) speech' in the Modern English word 'spell'.

Macfarlane's successful attempts at summarising and promoting over-looked writers may, I hope, lead to a wider awareness of at least some aspects of places and their names. His cross-cultural parallels may well be out of fashion in academe, but remain inspirational.

Despite the disparities between the approaches of each of the chapters in this work, I am well aware that much is missing. Perhaps most crucially, my remarks on Anglo-Saxon place-names ignores any consideration of the way 'place' is something émigrés need to construct. There are ethnographical parallels galore in the New World and other European colonies. Underneath all the more compelling needs of the many 'migrants' displaced in our own time is the recognised need to establish a new sense of place – and of 'belonging' to that place.

I have mostly focused on places in the physical world, thereby omitting wide-ranging discussions on 'mythic places'. Accounts of how societies have constructed notions of upperworlds and underworlds – the Heaven and Hell of Christianity, and all the variants from other cultures – might seem to have little relevance to how we construct notions of real places. But not so. In Britain there is an equally mythic process which mixes facts and fantasies – including place-specific lore and legend – to create the idea of a 'North' and 'South', with the latter containing an ever-expanding 'Home Counties' (increasingly referred to as 'the South East'). In America the same mix of fact and fantasy underpins the distinction between the West and East Coast, with a 'Mid West' (significantly not just 'the Middle') in between. More tangible and legislative distinctions separate the forty-eight states of America from Canada to the north and Mexico and 'Central America' to the south.

If large regions and major countries seem a little too big to be thought of as merely 'places' then bear in mind the same fact-and-fantasy constructions have a fractal-like quality – they scale down to counties and to towns and, historically at least, villages. Until the end of the nineteenth century the men of any English village would have regarded males from neighbouring villages as unwelcome rivals – 'ritualised' violence was rife. Only when those men began to work and live alongside each other in the factory towns was the xenophobia tempered (intriguingly, by the establishment of town football clubs, which deflected local rivalry towards supporters from more distant towns). And, as is all too evident in the modern day, xenophobia is never far away, usually accompanied by excess mythmaking about a 'homeland'. Ironically some of the most aggressive antagonism to those of African and Hispanic origin in the USA comes from families are known to have emigrated from Europe and Britain within the last two hundred years. As well as the economic downturn, is it the shallow-rootedness of the myths of the Mid West which makes them feel so insecure?

Perhaps not. Perhaps it's more like the Ojibwe people who only think something is 'really real' if they have dreamt about it – contrary to Western mentalities merely seeing, say, an unfamiliar type of bird is not enough to make it 'real'. We must all have had times when our fears do, at times, seem more real than the rational response 'It may never happen' or whatever. Myths and legends, even when related to particular places rather than anxious situations, have the ability to come in 'under the radar' of conscious thinking, making us liable to emotive apperceptions which are unrelated to rational responses.

Somewhere into this mix is the way maps create places. As my own interests are understanding ideas of place at a time when maps were not commonly used for navigation or administration so forgive me for not properly addressing this more modern ontological process. Suffice to say maps are, from the perspective of this section, almost mythic – not least in their ability to create an omnipotent 'God's eye' viewpoint. With aerial photographs of almost anywhere on the planet now just a few mouse-clicks away for any computer user – and satellite imagery and camera-equipped drones becoming almost as ubiquitous – then our ways of thinking about places are being increasingly 'God-like' and, as such, less and less real.

For anyone under about forty even walking down a street means either checking directions on a smartphone or, if in a familiar location, checking for messages or making voice calls. Even when we do have our feet on the ground and are 'going places' we are, mentally, not 'here' but elsewhere. Leisure pursuits which take people out into the countryside now require some sort of GPS navigation aid and, in all probability, a GoPro camera to record the whole 'experience'. No doubt the trip will be timed, heart rates will be monitored, thinking will be obsessed with how many

Primark by day. Space Rollr by night... Loughborough Fair, November 2007.

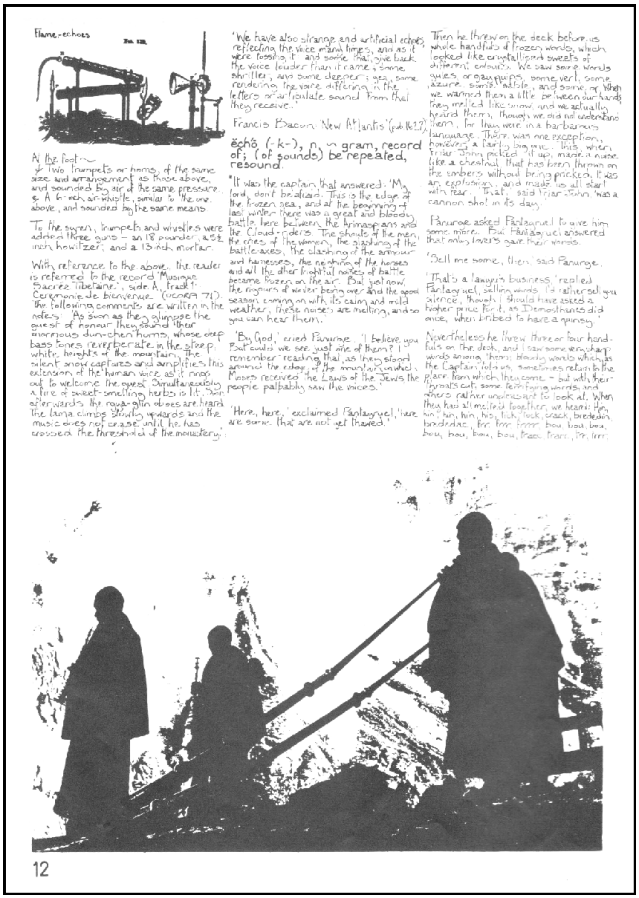
calories to take onboard, and all such other distractions. Little or no chance for such people to ever experience where they are, to be 'in the moment'. No chance of Alan Watts' 'walking Zen'...

Ridiculously there are now expensive courses which attempt to teach 'awareness' and 'mindfulness', which seemingly omit the most obvious: put some sensible footwear on and walk the footpaths in the countryside nearest to you. Being aware of where you are while walking (and not using mobile phones or other gadgets) is remarkably good at instigating awareness of where one is walking, even when the path or field is somewhat unremarkable. (Apologies to readers who live where the countryside is less freely accessible than in Britain or contains threatening flora or fauna.)

Indeed, missing from these discussions is any real consideration of how walking through places triggers the different senses in subtle ways. Modern people are so dominated by vision that we forget to listen or smell in a 'meaningful' way. The smell of wet autumn leaves brings back nostalgic memories to those who live in more suburban or rural areas, but the phrase is probably meaningless to those brought up in urban areas where the 'man from the council' quickly clears up 'the mess' (as it is

Left: *Paul Burwell playing on Newhaven beach in the 1970s. Photograph by Anabel Nicholson, published in* Musics *magazine.*

Below: *A full page from a different issue of* Musics *magazine. The article's theme was places with remarkable echoes.*



Flame-echoes

No. 118.

At the foot—
of two trumpets or horns, of the same size and arrangement as those above, and sounded by air at the same pressure & at the same air-whistle, similar to the one above, and sounded by the same means

To the rogan, trumpets and whistles were added three guns – an 18 pounder, a 24 inch howitzer, and a 13 inch mortar.

With reference to the above, the reader is referred to the record 'Musique Sacree Tibetaine,' side A, track 1. Ceremonie de bienvenue. (Ocora 71). The following comments are written in the notes. "As soon as they glimpse the guest of honour they sound their enormous drum-then drums, whose deep bass tones reverberate in the steep white, heights of the mountains, the silent snow captures and amplifies this extension of the human voice, as it rises out to welcome the guest. Mindful anxiety & fire & sweet-smelling herbs in it. Soon afterwards the rouge-gorge oboes are heard. The Lama climbs slowly upwards and the music does not cease until he has crossed the threshold of the monastery."

'We have also strange and artificial echoes reflecting the voice & all tunes, and as it were double it & and some that give back the voice louder than it came, some shriller, and some deeper; yea, some reflecting the voice differing in the letters or articulate sound from that they receive."

Francis Bacon. New Atlantis (pub. 1627)

ēchō, (-k-), ēs, n. = gram, record of; (of sounds) be repeated, resound

"It was the captain that answered. 'My lord, don't be afraid. This is the edge of the frozen sea, and at the beginning of last winter there was a great and bloody battle here between the Pyrmagarans and the Cloud-riders. The shouts of the men, the cries of the women, the gnashing of the battle-axes, the clashing of the armour and harnesses, the neighing of the horses and all the other frightful noises of battle became frozen in the air. But now that the rigours of winter being over and the second season coming on with its rains and mild weather, these noises are melting, and so you can hear them."

'By God,' cried Panurge, "I believe you! But could we see what is in them?" I remember reading that as they stood around the edge of the mountain-valley, Pilgrims received the cries of the years the people paltered in the voices.

'Here, here,' exclaimed Panurge, 'here are some that are not yet thawed.'

Then he threw on the deck before us whole handfuls of frozen words, which resembled like crystal-ized sweets of different colours. We saw some words green, or grey-green, some red, some azure, some violet, and some, of which we warmed them a little between our hands, they melted like snow, and we actually heard them; though we did not understand them, for they were in a barbarous language. There was one exception, however, a fairly long one. This, when Friar John picked it up, melted in our hands like a chestnut. That has been thrown on the embers without being pricked, it has an explosion, and a noise as all start with fear. That, said Friar John, was a cannon shot in its day.

Panurge asked Pantagruel to give him some more. But Pantagruel answered that only lovers hear their words.

'Sell me some, then,' said Panurge.

'That's a lawyer's business,' replied Pantagruel, selling words. It rather suits you, Panurge, though. I should have asked a higher price for it, as Demosthenes did once, when bribed to have a quinsy.'

Nevertheless he threw three or four handfuls on the deck, and I saw some very sharp words among them; bloody words which as the Captain told us, sometimes return to the place from which they come. – but still their 'annals cut, some farm-fighting worries, and others rather unpleasant to look at. When they had thawed together, we heard the sounds, hin, hin, his, tick, tock, smack, brekekekex, koax, koax, brou, brou, brou, Brou, Brou, Brou, Brou, Brou

12

pejoratively regarded). Between 1975 and 1979 the London Musicians Co-operative produced a 'zine called simply *Musics*. Many of the musicians associated with the LMC were known as pioneers of free jazz – but they included ethnomusicologists, inventors of instruments, dancers and a whole tribe of people who performed *in the landscape*. From memory I can recall articles about a free jazz session on the beach at Newhaven (Sussex), one or more installations of Max Eastley's sound sculptures on open moorland, and a dancer performing to the sound of the 'singing sands' on the Isle of Eigg. I am neither a musician nor a dancer, but nevertheless can fully appreciate that sound and movement transform a place.

At the other extreme of sound and movement, each year in early November the centre of Loughborough is transformed with the massive rides, blaring sound systems, flashing lights and sheer density of people when 'the fair' is set up. In Nottingham and most other places these rides and stalls have been moved out to dedicated 'fair grounds'. But not so at Loughborough. And the result is a truly magical transformation whereby familiar streets become something else, reliable landmarks (such as shops and pubs) become hidden, and there is a real sense of disorientation (and, in case you are wondering, I always drive there and back so no alcohol is involved).

There may well be some other significant omissions from the scope of these chapters. This is, after all, intended to be a provisional work, one which prompts further thought. My previous work on *mynsters* and Anglo-Saxon 'shrines' (Trubshaw 2015 (2018); 2016 (2018)) suggests that there is considerable potential for new insights if the topographical 'context' of Anglo-Saxon place-names is looked at more effectively, especially when combined with some awareness of contemporaneous ontologies and 'worldviews'. But this work is suggesting something more than 'merely' enhanced awareness of topography and ontology when pondering the history of places. At the broadest level there are two intimately-linked questions:

Firstly, what sort of insights might be gained by thinking of places as 'social constructs' or as ongoing 'processes of differentiation'? What sort of new insights might this methodology reveal?

Secondly, what are the weaknesses and problems resulting from thinking of places as 'social constructs' or as ongoing 'processes of differentiation'? Are there better epistemological or ontological methodologies?

Over to you…

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In a remarkable chance encounter in their farmyard in the Vale of Glamorgan, Alan and Norman Jenkins spotted the parallels between Kingston and *rhyngell*.

My grateful thanks to all who have assisted – but you take none of the blame for any waywardness or omissions.

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