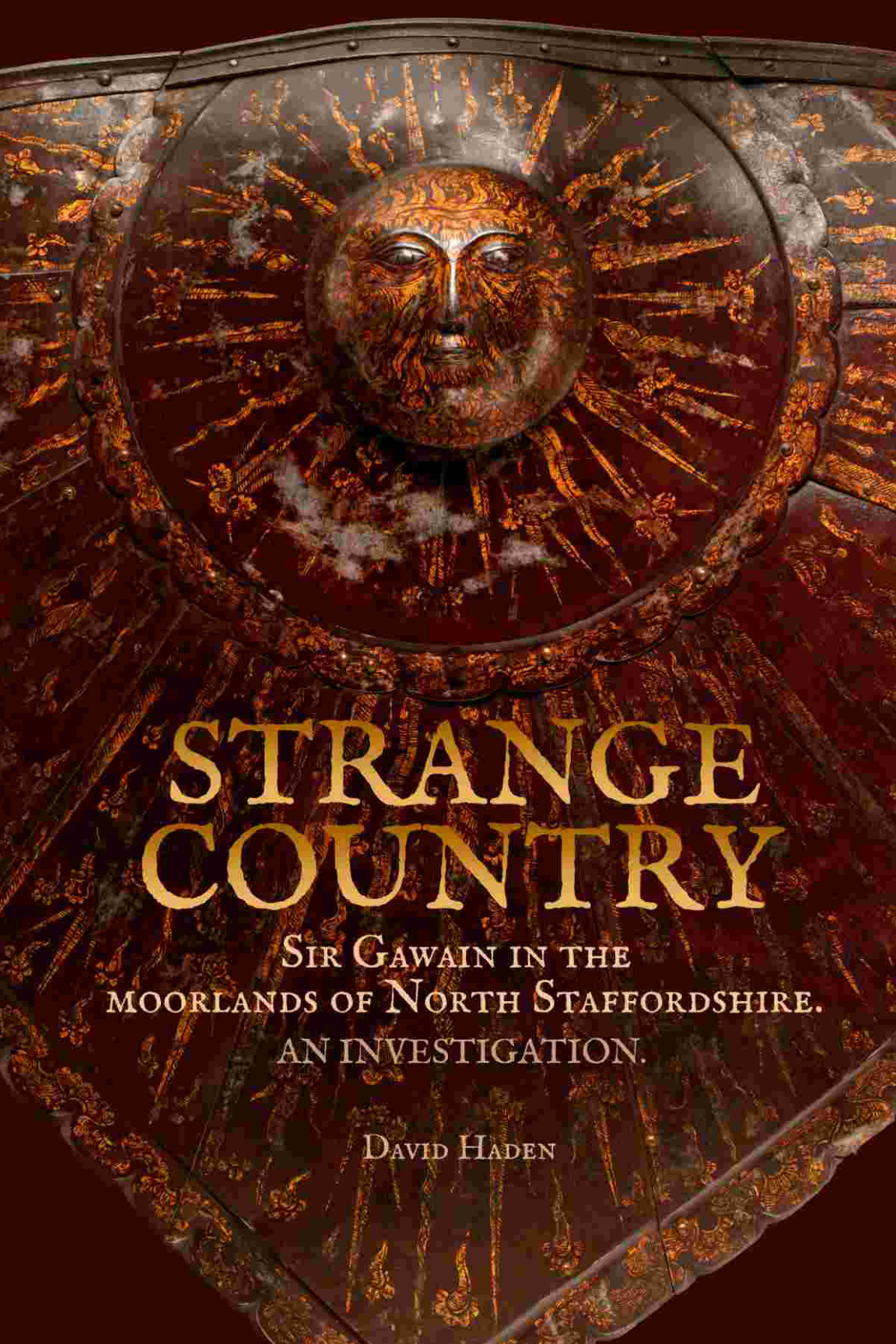

STRANGE COUNTRY

Sir Gawain in the moorlands of North Staffordshire. An investigation.

David Haden

STRANGE COUNTRY:

Sir Gawain in the moorlands of North Staffordshire, an investigation.

by David Haden

2022

Revised and expanded edition

"Þe knyȝt tok gates straunge ... in contrayez straunge"

— *Sir Gawain*, from the J.R.R. Tolkien edition.

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Timeline:

	The 'Arthurian' past, in the minds of the poets.
pre-1066	Alton Castle then a wooden castle in active use.
Domesday	Alton recorded as 'Elvetone' in *Domesday*.
c. 1175	Alton Castle rebuilt in stone by Bertram de Verdun. Bertram also founds the nearby Croxden Abbey.
c. 1200s	The de Verdun family at Alton Castle requires fast travel connections to their large estates in Ireland. They are not absentee landlords in either Alton or Ireland.
late 1260s	Alton Castle partly rebuilt after war damage.
1283	Alton recorded as 'Alveton', a named used to the mid 1800s.
c. 1300	Palatial rebuilding of nearby Tutbury Castle. Lavish cultured court of Thomas, the second Earl of Lancaster, at Tutbury.
c. 1300-1322	Extensive local cultural patronage emanating from Tutbury, 12 miles SE from Alton Castle.
c. 1313	A private? road heading toward Alton. Recorded as '*le hyerlisweye*', the high Earlsway. Established in the 1200s?
early 1300s	The owners of Alton Castle move the main gatehouse site, and a wholly new gatehouse is built.
1313	Annual expenditure list at Tutbury Castle records "100 pieces of green silk, for the knights".
1319	The de Verdun family line dies out. Alton Castle given to the somewhat more illustrious de Furnival family.
1326	Birth at Alton Castle of William de Furnival, a second-son.
1329	Croxden Abbey known to have a significant Book Room.
c. 1340s on	The Peak district to the north and north-west of Alton is recorded as being very popular hunting country. Local

	monks at the small Dieulacres Abbey complain that they are over-run with nobles and retainers, visiting for the superb hunting. The visitors demand free victuals and services.
1347	William de Furnival comes of age.
1349	The first Black Death plague.
c. 1350	The alliterative revival in West Midlands poetry begins.
1351	The Black Prince secures the area's fine hunting for all, by having the justiciar of Chester reimburse the now-larger Dieulacres Abbey for the demands made on its small numbers by frequent visits of hunters.
1361	Second Black Death plague, especially severe around Croxden Abbey and Alton. Death of all the local children born since the last plague. Abbey starts to gradually decline.
1366	On the death of his elder brother, William of Alton unexpectedly becomes William de Furnival, 4th Baron Furnivall. He is summoned to Parliament.
1367-68	William de Furnival crusades in Prussia with the Knights of the Teutonic Order, most likely for a year's tour of duty and against full-blooded outright pagans.
1372	Probable Minstrel Court meeting annually at Tutbury, 13 miles SE of Alton Castle. Richly supported with patronage.
1377	The Coronation of Richard II, a boy-king. First record of 'the King's Champion' at a Coronation in England.
1377	William de Furnival closely assists at the new King's Coronation, and is knighted for his service.
1377	Summer or autumn as the suggested time of writing of *Gawain*, for completion before Christmas 1377.
1379	Possible date of composition of *Pearl*, in which the narrator apparently pleads poverty. William's only child, Joan, is married off at age 10.

1379	The Third Plague. After which, William retires to Windsor? Windsor estate a gift of the King, used for his final years.
1383	William de Furnival dies near Windsor, aged 56.
1400s	Record of annual parades of the region's wood-masters and foresters at Tutbury, and "every keper must have a grene boghe [green bough] in his hand".
1509	Record of the 'the King's Champion' riding armoured into the Coronation Banquet and issuing a challenge (Coronation of Henry VIII). The Knight enters after the first course of the meal, just as he did in *Sir Gawain*.
	Sir Gawain lost to knowledge.
1839	*Sir Gawain* recovered and printed. Assumed to be Scottish.
c. 1840-1843	Pugin's Alton Castle on site of the medieval Alton Castle.
c. 1790s-1850s	'Alveton' starts to be known by the current name of 'Alton'.
1864	Early English Text Society edition of *Sir Gawain*.
1869	First scholarly mention of Staffordshire as probable location for *Gawain*, but in the context of a discounted theory.
1871	Geology paper on "Explosions of Gas in Mountain Limestone" published in *The Reliquary* for 1870-71. Relates to natural noises at Redhurst Gorge very near Wetton Mill.
1899	Sir Thomas Wardle collects and publishes accounts of natural noises and lights at a cave in Redhurst Gorge very near Wetton Mill, these being apparently caused by the action of the underground river.
1916	Sambrooke A.H. Burne first identifies the high Earlsway route from the Cheshire plain into North Staffordshire.
1925	J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon publish the first good modern edition of *Sir Gawain*.
1927	M.S. Serjeantson suggests "the western part of Derbyshire" as the home of the *Gawain*-poet.

1938 Bertram Colgrave makes first modern suggestion of North Staffordshire as a location for the Green Chapel in *Gawain*.

1940 Mabel Day suggests Wetton Mill in North Staffordshire as the site of the Green Chapel in *Gawain*. She mistakenly conflates it with Thor's Cave.

1958 Ralph W.V. Elliott's article in *The Times* newspaper makes his opening claim for Lud's Church in North Staffordshire, as the site of the Green Chapel in *Gawain*.

1963 Angus McIntosh states that the *Gawain* text… "can only fit with reasonable propriety in a very small area either in SE Cheshire or just over the border in NE Staffordshire."

1972 Charles Jones revisits McIntosh's 1963 dialect work and concludes *Gawain*… "is likely to have been composed in the very small area in north Staffordshire". The dialect of the copyist and poet being from the same area.

2018 First notice taken of the medieval Alton Castle as the likely model for the *Gawain* castle. First linking of the natural noises at Redhurst Gorge, Wetton, with those at the 'Green Chapel'. First investigation of the significance of the King's Champion at Coronations, in relation to *Sir Gawain*.

Introduction.

Before I begin, might I suggest the reader refresh their memory of *Gawain*, by re-reading a good brisk translation? This will make my book far easier to follow, since I do not attempt to give a potted synopsis of the plot. Ideally the *Gawain* translation selected should be without impeding archaisms, such as *wherefore*, *thee* and *thou* etc. But please note that the Simon Armitage translation is to be avoided, because it strays too far into the modern vernacular and its Introduction is also under-researched in places. The Penguin Classics translation by Brian Stone, expertly done in the mid 20th century, is perhaps the best for swift and enjoyable reading without archaisms or modern inflections. I nearly always use the 1974 Second Edition of Stone's translation throughout my book, when quoting from the *Gawain* text in translation. Where it was necessary to consult the original text, I have drawn on recent facsimiles which took advantage of modern palaeographic and other advanced discriminatory techniques.

The reader will see I have a liking for footnotes. I take little on trust and like to see and check people's references. I thus find the modern academic's preference for hidden-away endnotes, and all the page-flipping involved, very tiresome. I also give references in full, in easily-consulted footnotes.

This book arose as an offshoot of my in-depth investigation of the origin of the legendarium of J.R.R. Tolkien, circa 1913-1915. As part of this I discovered exactly where Tolkien had undertaken his live-rounds rifle training in late summer 1915, at a camp at a range called the Butts near Newcastle-under-Lyme, quite near to my home in Stoke-on-Trent. I then realized that, from the camp's steep back hillside, Tolkein would have had a good view of Mow Cop and the foothills of the Peak. Thus he might then have been looking at the *Gawain* country for the very first time. He would go on to spend much of his career working on *Gawain*. But did he *know* the view was that of the *Gawain* country, in the late summer of 1915? From that question arose this book.

1. An overview of the previous work on Sir Gawain and North Staffordshire.

This chapter offers a short survey of the works which have, over the decades, associated *Gawain* with North Staffordshire. I discuss them in order of appearance.

The first mention of Staffordshire I can find is in Richard Morris, *Early English Alliterative Poems in the West-Midland Dialect of the Fourteenth Century*, Early English Text Society, 1869.[1] I quote from his revised Second Edition, his first edition having appeared in 1864…

> "Formerly, being influenced by these broad forms [he means "strong provincialism" in dialect], I was led to select Cheshire or Staffordshire as the probable locality where the poems [*The Pearl*, *Cleanness*, *Patience*, all written by the *Gawain*-poet] were written; but I do not, now, think that either of these counties ever employed a vocabulary containing so many Norse terms as are to be found in the Lancashire dialect. But although we may not be able to fix, with certainty, upon any one county in particular, the fact of the present poems being composed in the West-Midland dialect cannot be denied."

Morris's 'Lancashire Norse' argument was later discounted in a short analysis by Hartley Bateson's Manchester University Press edition of *Patience* (1912), and much later by a very detailed AHRC-funded analysis by Dance (2012).[2]

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[1] There was an unchanged reprint in 1896. I also note that there are no references to Staffordshire in either of the EETS edition of the *Gawayne* text.

[2] Hartley Bateson, *Patience*, Manchester University Press, 1912, page 38. The reference is page xxxvi in the "Introduction" of the revised second edition of 1918.

The matter of 'the Norse influence' was later thoroughly investigated in the 2000s in: Richard Dance, "'*Tor for to telle*': Words Derived from Old Norse in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight", IN: *Multilingualism in Medieval Britain (c. 1066-1520): Sources and Analysis*, Brepols, 2012. Dance concludes: "One could hardly, therefore, describe the Norse-derived words at this 'fundamental' end of the lexical spectrum as unusually deeply embedded within the author's language; and, for all their interest in terms of the *Gawain*-poet's stylistic strategies, their evidence does not justify searching for his home in parts of England reckoned to be especially densely settled by Scandinavian speakers".

Interestingly, had J.R.R. Tolkien known Morris's comment and Bateson's 1912 rebuttal, then that must open the possibility that Tolkien was aware of North Staffordshire as a possibility for *Gawain*'s location as early as 1912. Which means that he may have been spurred to see something of the district on his motorbike, while he was stationed at military training camps in mid and north Staffordshire during 1915. There is also the possibility that his basic training at Whittington Heath (near Lichfield) involved some night-marches from the Peak district back to the camp. This is a small point in Tolkien studies, but one which may have wider ramifications for source studies. I explore this possibility further in a forthcoming essay.

Tolkien undoubtedly read the *Review of English Studies* for 1927, as he was 'the coming man' in his field and this title was a leading professional journal. There he would have found the third of a multi-part essay[3] by M.S. Serjeantson which concluded, of the surviving manuscript rather than the *Gawain*-poet…

> "On the whole, Derbyshire seems the least improbable area to which the Nero MS. [containing *Gawain*] may be assigned, whatever the original dialects of the poems may have been. [and within that county] the western part of Derbyshire; and since a northern area is required, it might be suggested that the uplands of the Peak district is a not impossible region."

In September 1938, in the journal *Antiquity*, Bertram Colgrave made the first modern suggestion of Staffordshire. He was suggesting that the ancient Bridestones in North Staffordshire could have formed the 'type' for the Gawain-poet's conception of the Green Chapel…

> There is one and only one chambered tomb with a holed entrance found in this region and that is the chambered tomb called the Bridestones, a few miles west of Congleton. [...] The district in which the Bridestones stand corresponds closely with the vigorous description which the poet gives of the countryside through which Sir Gawayne passed to reach his chapel.

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[3] M.S. Serjeantson, "The dialects of the West Midlands in middle English"; "The dialects of the West Midlands in Middle English II. Distribution of dialect features"; and "The dialects of the West Midlands in Middle English III. Tentative assignment of texts to the West Midland dialect area", all in *The Review of English Studies*, 1927. See the third essay for the workings and evidence.

> The stones are situated close by the side of some high hills on the Cheshire-Staffordshire border. [...] It would be too wild a surmise to claim the Bridestones definitely as the original of Sir Gawayne's Green Chapel. But it looks pretty certain that the chapel was a burial chamber of this peculiar type. If it is not Bridestones then it must be a similar one which has disappeared since the Middle Ages or which has not yet been noted. There is in fact, 25 miles southwest of the Bridestones, near Mucklestone in Staffordshire, a site called the Devil's Ring and Finger which is possibly the remains of a burial chamber with holed entrance, although it is in too ruinous a condition to allow of certainty on this point.
>
> *The editors of the journal responded, directly below his suggestions:*
>
> While agreeing in general with Mr Colgrave's interpretation, we think it unnecessary to postulate that the monument was necessarily of the specialized 'port-hole' type. Note that the 'holes' are said to have been in the end and in either side of the mound. Such a description could quite naturally be applied to a partially ruined chambered mound, the 'holes' being burial-chambers that had been exposed. There are several such megalithic barrows in Derbyshire which might suit the context equally well; see Mr. C. W. Phillips' survey of the Megalithic Monuments of the Trent Basin, *Ordnance Survey Professional Paper* No. 11."[4]

Even if Tolkien — by then one of the preeminent authorities on *Gawain* — had somehow missed these two items in 1927 and 1938, by 1942 at the latest he must have been aware of the North Staffordshire possibility for the location of *Gawain*. Because, although he was very busy with war-work at that time, Tolkien surely made time to read the newly published work of his great arch-rival for the *Gawain* text, Sir Israel Gollancz. Gollancz's book had been edited and produced by Mabel Day, his star pupil and *protégé*. Specifically, Day had corrected and updated an edition of the master's work on Gawain for the Early English Text Society.[5] Her Introduction to this 1940 book suggested that the famous 'Green Chapel' was the cave located…

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[4] Presumably C. W. Phillips' "Map of the Trent Basin showing the Distribution of Long Barrows, Megaliths, Habitation Sites. 4 Miles to 1 Inch", Ordnance Survey, 1933, or possibly an accompanying paper.

[5] Mabel Day, "Introduction to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*" IN: Israel Gollancz, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Early English Text Society, 1940, page xx.

> "just at the bottom of the valley where the Hoo Brook runs into the Manifold at Wetton Mill, Staffs., there stands, above a weir, a striking cave projecting from the hillside".[6]

Day's cave in a pale stone outcrop of rock, greatly eroded since the 1370s, and in Day's time situated above the site of the Wetton Mill railway station (closed 1941). I explore this site in detail, aided by photographs and old engravings, in a later chapter.

If Tolkien knew of Day's suggestion of a cave in North Staffordshire, as he undoubtedly did by about 1942 at the latest, then so far as I know he never made his thoughts on the matter of a Staffordshire location public until toward the end of his life, and then only tangentially. In his famous 1925 edition of *Gawain* with E.V. Gordon, his text had suggested a broad resemblance of the dialect to old manuscripts known to have been…

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[6] A fuller quote from Day (1940): "If Wales, which lay behind Sir Gawain, is excluded, the nearest mountain country to Wirral is the Staffordshire Moorland [where] there stands, above a weir, a striking cave projecting from the hillside after the manner of a flat-topped dormer window. According to Plot [*The Natural History of Staffordshire* (Oxford, 1686)] its name was *Thursehouse* or *Thursehole*, *i.e.* fiend's house. It has a large entrance at the end and a smaller hole at each side of it. If Sir Gawain, approaching as he would from the West, came down from Butterton Moor by the Hoo Brook, he would see [the cave] on the left side beside the weir when he reached the bottom of the valley. The bank on which the Green Knight stood would be the cliff just below the Hoo Brook on the opposite side of the [River] Manifold to the Green Chapel. From the top of this cliff a passage, mentioned by Plot and still traversable communicates with a cave at the foot, the 'hole' of 1.22221. Issuing from thence, the Green Knight crossed the Manifold to the level ground in front of the mill, where the Beheading Game took place."

There are several very obvious flaws here, accurate though Day's broad suggestions of the Staffordshire moorlands and Wetton Mill have proved to be. The objections are: i) Gawain does not pass by the Green Chapel on his way to encounter the castle, as Day suggests — the Chapel is his ultimate destination. If the site is encountered (by her route) later, then surely no guide in their right mind would risk laming the beloved guest's horse by asking him to descend to the site *via the Hoo Brook* in snowy midwinter, and anyway the poem plainly states that a track is used to make the final *fast* approach to the Green Chapel; ii) Day appears to have been confused by the "Thurshole" mentioned by Dr. Plot, which is clearly another cave entirely — the modern Thor's Cave, which is another and much grander cave and which due to its extreme elevation no-one has suggested as the Green Chapel. This identification is made perfectly clear in: "The Excavations and Discoveries in Thor's Cave", *The Reliquary*, April 1886, esp. pages 201-202; iii) the Green Knight was large in stature, but he was not of a size to leap *right along* (rather than across) the course of the River Manifold in midwinter spate, nor leap the *three-quarters of a mile* distance from Thor's Cave.

> "written at Hales in south-west Lancashire, not many years earlier than 1413. This resemblance, however, only goes to show that the dialect of the copyist was of Hales in south-west Lancashire."[7]

Of the poet he later wrote…

> "his home was in the West Midlands of England; so much his language shows, and his metre, and his scenery"

Here it is important to note it appears 'West Midland' could — in the eyes of the scholars of the time — then include Lancashire and Cheshire. I have also found it used, in a couple of instances, of Flintshire and Northumbria. Evidently the old scholarly idea of "West Midland" speech was not to be mapped onto the boundaries of our contemporary West Midlands counties, and seems more fitted to ancient Mercia plus its Northumbrian alliance.

In relation to the early claim for 'Lancashire', one can call on the attentive ear of the noted playwright and dialect scholar Thomas Heywood, who identified an overlap between the dialect of South Lancashire and that of the Staffordshire moorlands. In his "On the south Lancashire dialect" (1861), he comments on the famous novel *Adam Bede*...

> Our [South Lancashire] dialect in a milder form is admirably set forth in this work so far as words and phrases are concerned, but the authoress has a less nice perception of the vocalic sounds, which are far from being lost between Uttoxeter and Leek, and flourish in the Potteries [i.e.: in Stoke-on-Trent and parts of Newcastle-under-Lyme].[8]

It is interesting to be told by a perceptive native expert that the spoken dialect of the *Adam Bede* country — just two miles from Alton Castle — was not purely of 'North Staffordshire' alone.[9] Evidently then there was once

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[7] Recently there has also been the suggestion that the manuscript, in the form of Cotton Nero A.x, was compiled… "at least partially and possibly *in toto*, in York in the early fifteenth century" — from: Joel Fredell, "The *Pearl*-Poet Manuscript in York", *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, Vol. 36, 2014, pages 1-39.

[8] Thomas Heywood, "On the south Lancashire dialect", *Remains Historical and Literary*, Vol. LVII, Chetham Society, 1861.

[9] George Eliot's *Adam Bede* was published 1859. She later spoke of "my inclination to be as close as I could in the rendering of dialect", though spellings were unfixed and she had to tone some of it down so that general readers would not be completely baffled. 'Hayslope' in the novel is Ellastone and its surroundings, two miles NEE of Alton.

a certain detectable overlap with the South Lancashire "vocalic sounds", which those who rely only on written documents may not be able to fit into their triangulations of the relevant historical dialects.

Now, it might be thought that Heywood's observation should be balanced against the fact that J.R.R. Tolkien also had an acute and expert ear for such things, and that when young he had lived for some time in mid Staffordshire around Cannock Chase. That is something to be taken into account, yet I would point out that the mid-Staffordshire heathland is not the same as the wilder North Staffordshire moorlands "between Uttoxeter and Leek".

Despite such personal knowledge of mid Staffordshire Tolkien remained very reticent on his opinion about the exact locations of *Gawain*. Perhaps he was himself undecided and simply wished to avoid public controversy without having firm ground to fight on? But he surely cannot have avoided seeing an article in *The Times* newspaper during the summer of 1958. He took *The Times* each day. The paper had printed Ralph W. V. Elliott's opening claim for Lud's Church near Leek as the site of the Green Chapel.[10] But, again, there is silence — if Tolkien then discussed the article privately with friends, or mentioned it in a letter, no word of the discussion has yet reached print.

Elliott had however made a plausible general claim for the area, albeit in a journalistic manner and with similar 'problematic leaps' to those that had marred Day's 1940 claim. But Elliott's claim was later admirably developed and widened through his intensive fieldwork and map-work. His walks in the district led to a whole series of precise essays on the topography and place-names, these essays being collected in book form in 1984. I think Elliott was likely correct about the Lud's Church site, but not in the way he imagined. After looking at the routes, I think that Lud's Church could have been Gawain's initial mind-bestirring *entrance-way* into the uncanny landscapes of the Green Knight, rather than the location of his final

[10] Ralph W. V. Elliott, "Sir Gawain in Staffordshire: A Detective Essay in Literary Geography", London *Times*, 21st May 1958. The ideas appear to have been picked up and restated in a profile of Elliott in *Country Life* in 1961, and the *Times* article was also reprinted a decade later in the book *Twentieth Century interpretations of Sir Gawain* (1968).

encounter at the Green Chapel. See my later chapter on the Earlsway and Gawain's route, for my reasoning on this.

In 1963, five years after Elliott's *Times* article, came a now-classic linguistics paper by Angus McIntosh. This contained the oft-quoted remark on *Gawain*'s dialect…

> "Let us suppose that one takes the trouble to plot on maps as much as possible of the dialectal information available in localised documents which come from various parts of S Lancashire, Cheshire, SW Yorkshire, W Derbyshire, N Staffordshire and N Shropshire. If one then examines the language of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, it eventually becomes clear that this text, as it stands in MS Cotton Nero A.X., can only fit with reasonable propriety in a very small area either in SE Cheshire or just over the border in NE Staffordshire."[11]

In 1967 J.R.R. Tolkien, in the second edition of his *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, was characteristically rather cautious about McIntosh's statement. Finally giving some public statement on the Staffordshire claim for Gawain, his new edition responded to McIntosh's recent finding of "a very small area either in SE Cheshire or just over the border in NE Staffordshire" with a rather tepid comment that…

> "it would be widely admitted to be in the right general area."[12]

Thus leaving open the question of how far "the right general area" stretched in Tolkien's own mind, and if he even agreed with the "widely admitted" consensus. Admittedly, though McIntosh was eminent in the field he had not published his data and workings. Only his conclusions from those workings. As a consequence Tolkien was justified in not 'taking it on trust'.

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[11] Angus McIntosh, "A New Approach to Middle English Dialectology", *English Studies*, 44, 1963. I think he means *two* small areas, one possibility being in SE Cheshire, and another in NE Staffordshire? Otherwise his "small area" would be huge, stretching from Cheshire across into Staffordshire.

[12] J.R.R. Tolkien, E.V. Gordon, and Norman Davis, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Oxford University Press, 1967. Much of the work on this edition was done by one of Tolkien's students, Norman Davis, so it is not entirely clear the comment quoted comes from Tolkien. Nevertheless, it sounds like him and he must have at least proof-read and approved the edition.

A decade later in 1972 Charles Jones attempted a similar linguistic 'fit' to the one that McIntosh had undertaken and published in 1963. Using the same accepted methods, Jones placed the *Gawain* dialect in North Staffordshire. *Gawain*, he wrote…

> "is likely to have been composed in the very small area in north Staffordshire shown on [McIntosh's] Map II."[13]

1972 was a good year for *Gawain* and North Staffordshire. In that same year Robert E. Kaske's essay "Gawain's Green Chapel and the Cave at Wetton Mill"[14] also appeared. His essay developed and explored Mabel Day's 1940 suggestion of the cave above Wetton Mill train station as the site of the Green Chapel. Kaske undertook fieldwork for this, during which he also noted the somewhat nearby Ossum's Crag Cave, which is about a third of a mile south of Day's suggested cave. Rather ambitiously, Kaske suggested in his essay that Ossum's Crag Cave was the cave from which the Green Knight first emerges, and that the Green Knight was somehow seen by Gawain all the way from Mabel Day's suggested cave…

> "Having visited the site, I must admit that the case […] seems rather intriguing. A short distance from the stream a rugged knoll, overgrown with grass and weeds and with a crevice-like, rock-strewn cave about thirty feet long extending most of the way through it, tops a rather steep slope, separated from the stream only by a narrow gravel road. The knoll is faced at a distance of about three hundred yards across the stream by a forbidding-looking fissure-like hole leading into a deep, narrow cavern in the towering rock known as Ossom's Crag topping a steep hillside. Here, then, the 'Green Chapel' would be facing the hole in the rock whence the Green Knight so dramatically emerges…"

This is not wholly impossible, because Gawain is described as standing on top of the mound at that point in the story, but it was rather an ambitious suggestion given the distance involved and the mistiness of the poem's early-

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13 Charles Jones, *An Introduction to Middle English*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972, pages 212-16. Regrettably, "Map II" appears to be an irrecoverable reference when using the current online version.

14 Robert E. Kaske, "Gawain's Green Chapel and the Cave at Wetton Mill", IN: *Medieval Literature and Folklore Studies: Essays in Honor of Francis Lee Utley*, 1972.

morning setting and the lack of direct dawn sunlight. Yet, allowing for poetic license on the part of the *Gawain*-poet, Kaske was broadly convinced by Day's placing of the Green Chapel at Wetton Mill, and he developed the matter in his ten-page essay.

I likewise think that Day was broadly correct about Wetton Mill, but not *wholly* correct. I think that the Green Chapel is most likely to have been a poetic amalgam of Day's choice of cave and the very nearby Old Hannah's Cave (which is the only one that had the required 'uncanny noises' mentioned in *Gawain*). On his route Gawain would also have had to investigate the chambered Bridestones, the great barrow of Cauldon Low, and perhaps other barrows and stones now lost to us. The poet surely knew the route and its adjacent country, and thus characteristics from such as these may also have been folded into his composite Green Chapel. In a later chapter I will explain my reasoning and the abundant compelling evidence for including Old Hannah's Cave in the amalgam.

After 1958, R.W.V. Elliott published various detailed essays on *Gawain*'s topography and the placename evidence. I will not tire the reader by reeling off the dates and places of publication, but only note that the texts are collected in his *The Gawain Country: Essays on the Topography of Middle English Alliterative Poetry* (1984)[15] along with his 1958 *Times* article. The book served to firmly place the *Gawain* country in the North Staffordshire moorlands and on the western edge of the Peak. The contents are:

1. His 1958 London *Times* article.
2. The Rhetoric of Landscape.
3. Landscape of Spiritual Pilgrimage.
4. Romantic Quest in the West Midlands. Staffordshire and Cheshire Landscapes in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.
5. The Scandinavian Influence: Some Northern Landscape Features in *Gawain*.

[15] R.W.V. Elliott, *The Gawain Country: Essays on the Topography of Middle English Alliterative Poetry*, Leeds Texts and Monographs, The University of Leeds, 1984. Currently out of print, and not yet scanned and online in open access.

6. Woods and Forests in the *Gawain* Country.
7. Streams and Swamps in the *Gawain* Country.
8. Hills and Valleys in the *Gawain* Country.

Reading into the *Gawain* literature, one can sometimes encounter 1980s and 90s scholars bristling at Elliott's insistence on Lud's Church as the Green Chapel, and at least one scholar openly derided his apparent associated suggestions of a nearby fortified manor house as Bertilak's castle.[16] I have the impression that many scholars — interested in trying the poem to medieval court politics — went on doggedly arguing for Cheshire as the more likely location of the *Gawain*-poet dialect, but I can find no-one faulting Elliott's intensive and painstaking research and fieldwork in North Staffordshire, nor his general assertion that much of the poem's *events* must occur somewhere in this tightly defined linguistic and geographic area…

> "Whether or not the actual site of the Green Chapel can be identified, the critics' search through Derbyshire, Staffordshire, and Cheshire owes its impetus to the entirely accurate perception that the poet is describing with great precision a real landscape"[17]

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[16] To be fair to Elliott, his suggestion was actually more specifically of Knight's Low at Swythamley, the *low* or mound perhaps once used a hunting lodge (a lodge there is very plausible, given the monastic holdings and the letter to the King recording of the monks being inundated by huntsmen). Elliott stated there is "no name on the Ordnance Survey map, but the Staffordshire historian T. Pape records it as 'Knight's Low'". Elliot's reference was to: T. Pape**,** "The round-shafted pre-Norman crosses of the North Staffordshire area", *Transactions of the North Staffordshire Field Club*, 1945. Pape was the leading local historian of the period. However, on reading Pape's account the name becomes less convincing in terms of age: "on the high ground in front of the Hall is an Anglian type of cross with a cylindrical shaft. On the highest part of the ground, known as Knight's Low, there is a flagstaff. A little lower down in the centre of a circular depression where there are many stones, the cross was set up last century when the squire of Swithamley removed it from the yard north-east of Wincle Grange". It then seems that the name could date only from the mid 19th century antiquarian re-erection of the cross, perhaps as a antiquarian confabulation — albeit one based on the known record of visits of hunting parties to the area circa the 1350s (on that latter point, see: John Sleigh, *A History of the Ancient Parish of Leek*, 1883) and the presence of a mound.

[17] Gerald Morgan, "The perfection of the pentangle and of Sir Gawain in *'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', IN: *Essays on Ricardian literature in honour of J.A. Burrow*, Clarendon Press, 1997.

Four years later, in 1988, Elliott published the uncollected additional essay "Holes and Caves in the Gawain Country".[18] This was published in an obscure academic anthology, and many will not have seen it or even know that it exists. It explores the poetic potential of words such as *hole* and *caue* for a 14th century evoking of an uncanny landscape.

In 1999 Elliott contributed a summary chapter "Landscape and Geography" to Brewer's introductory book *A Companion to the Gawain-poet*.[19] This offered a strong and succinct summary of his 40 years of work on the locations, and today it is the most easily accessed summary of his findings.

Elliott's final word on the matter came in 2002 with another summary, this time done in an engaging manner and titled "*Sir Gawain* and the wallabies: a mystery in seven scenes".[20] Here "wallabies" was an amusing allusion to the Australian wallabies (a large creature akin to kangaroos) which had escaped into the Staffordshire Moorlands during the Second World War and briefly established themselves as wild exotics among the heather and gorse.[21]

I turn now to other researchers. After a long and highly detailed study, of poetic metre as well as the poet's dialect, H.N. Duggan concluded in 1999...

> "the poet's natal [i.e. birth] dialect is less likely to have been formed in Cheshire, Lancashire, or Derbyshire than further south in Staffordshire. Though we may note that Derbyshire extends on the east almost as far south as Staffordshire"[22]

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18 R.W.V. Elliott, "Holes and Caves in the Gawain Country", in: *Lexicographical and Linguistic Studies: Essays in Honour of G . W. Turner*, D.S. Brewer, 1988.

19 Derek Brewer (Ed.), *A Companion to the Gawain-poet,* Boydell & Brewer, 1999. By the early 2010s most of Elliott's work had become out-of-print and difficult to obtain, though it is now possible to pick up most of his 1984 book's core essays in their original form via online databases. Leeds University appears to be missing out on some potential income, by not issuing a new expanded ebook edition, bundled with his uncollected 1988 and 2002 essays, Kaske's 1972 essay, and an alluring new cover.

20 R.W.V. Elliott, "*Sir Gawain* and the wallabies: a mystery in seven scenes", IN: *Our Medieval Heritage: Essays in honour of John Tillotson for his 60th birthday*, Merton Priory, 2002.

21 The last video sighting was 2009, and the last reliable record of sighting was 2014.

22 H.N. Duggan, "Meter, Stanza, Vocabulary, Dialect", IN: Derek Brewer (Ed.), *A Companion to the Gawain-poet*, Boydell & Brewer, 1999.

Finally, mention of Duggan's work brings me to a key source that he worked with, namely a multi-volume book titled *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English*. Today this is online in a v1.0 version, which offers the 1986 multi-volume original in a digital form that is rather clunky for laymen to use. The *Atlas* publishes Angus McIntosh's record "LP 26" which evaluates the location of the *Gawain*-poet. His record starkly states "Cheshire." as the location, this arising from his working through all the firmly attributed works and selecting the most suitable words for linguistic fitting. However, the "LP 26" online reference of O.S. "Grid 397 364" appears not to have been updated with an errata note which shipped with the printed volumes, which stated the new reference as: 393 364.[23] Either way, the reference regrettably lacks the O.S. sheet number. On checking, the online O.S. map[24] can only put a "393 364" at either Derby city centre (SK 393 364) or Ellesmere in Shropshire (SJ 393 364), neither of which has ever been in Cheshire. The reference in the *Linguistic Atlas* is obviously astray, and as such I have to suspect multiple compounding errors on the O.S. reference that go beyond the revision on the errata slip. The other possibility is that McIntosh was using Coordinates rather than a Grid Reference, and that the reference was originally 'Coords 397 364', which then places the spot on the River Dane a mile below Danebridge, and thus directly on the Cheshire/Staffordshire border and near Gawain's likely route of travel in the poem. Yet the *Linguistic Atlas* record clearly states a "Grid" reference is being used. The matter obviously needs clarification on the record, to prevent further confusion.

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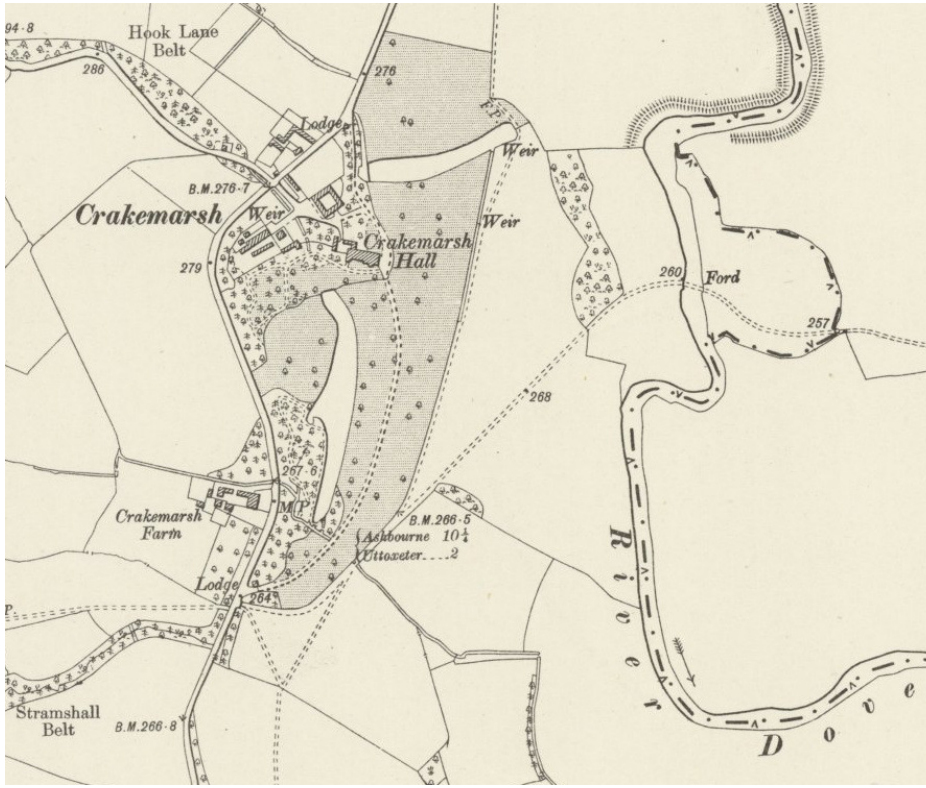
[23] The errata is noted in: Putter and Stokes, "The "Linguistic Atlas" and the Dialect of the "Gawain" Poems, *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol. 106, No. 4 (October 2007), pages 468-491. They give the O.S. reference(s) correctly, but were only concerned with the linguistics. Commenting on the *Linguistic Atlas* profile-record, at the end of their re-assessment they have to admit that…

"On balance, however, most of the additions and corrections that we would make to the profile indicate the northerliness of its West Midland dialect, and speak in favour of the old-fashioned wisdom which inferred a region "bordering on the Northern dialect area": that is, plausibly Cheshire, but less plausibly Staffordshire."

[24] I used https://wtp2.appspot.com/wheresthepath.htm which usefully offers dynamically recalculated grid references in response to the movement of a mouse-pointer over O.S. maps. This was double-checked with the magic.gov.uk website.

However, if we assume the starting "3" may have been a fumbling mis-transcription from an original "0" in McIntosh's decades-old notes (possibly mid 1950s?), then a O.S. reference of **SK 093 364** becomes more intelligible and highly likely – the spot being two miles above Uttoxeter in north-east Staffordshire, on the River Dove, and very near to Croxden Abbey. This fits with where McIntosh's earlier statement of 1963 (see above) would put it: if not Cheshire, then: "just over the border [from Cheshire] in NE Staffordshire". If I am correct on this then his full paper-map reference for the Staffordshire Moorlands would thus today be: O.S. 1:25,000 map 'Explorer 259', titled "Derby: Uttoxeter, Ashbourne and Cheadle", SK 093 364. Of course, I may be astray here and the 'Coords' reference may be the accurate one. But still, one finds a place called Crakemarsh Hall, and discovers that it had very close ties with the man who built Alton Castle. It was, according to a local historian of 1886, his 'green chapel'.



Crakemarsh alongside the Dove, 1920s O.S. map.

Redfern's *History and antiquities of the town and neighbourhood of Uttoxeter*, Second Edition, gives a short entry for Crakemarsh.[25] But it is immensely interesting in relation to the possible inspiration for *Gawain*'s Bertilak. Redfern states that the place was a wedding-gift to the builder of the medieval Alton Castle, Bertram de Verdon (d. 1192),[26] when he married his first wife Maud. Moveover, Redfern states that...

> "**Bertram de Verdun called Crakemarsh his "Grove," meaning a place of devotion"** and "some ground there is called, along with the Rectory Glebe, "The Chapel Yard"" [and this had old gravestones within living memory]. (my emphasis)

This was the same Bertram who built Alton Castle in stone about 1175, replacing the wooden Anglo-Saxon castle on the site.[27] Thus his green "Grove" at Crakemarsh probably existed and thrived as such circa 1160-1192. The likely track he took from Alton Castle to Crakemarsh can still be easily traced on maps, but a viewing of these lanes shows that the track is certainly not the rugged type of route to the Green Chapel which is so vividly described in *Gawain*. Thus Crakemarsh is very obviously not *the* Green Chapel. Now, despite the apparent presence of a 'Chapel Yard' at Crakemarsh one must a little careful here about jumping to conclusions based on a late Victorian antiquarian. One must first step back, to consider that a medieval reference to a 'grove' might simply have implied woodland grown only for the timber, 'grove' then being the correct medieval term.[28]

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[25] Francis Redfern, *History and antiquities of the town and neighbourhood of Uttoxeter*, Second Edition, Allbut and Daniel, 1886, pages 463-464. Redburn is a reliable local historian from that period, and his book the standard work on the town and its district. I have checked and he was not confusing the mention of a 'grove' in the Croxden Abbey charter. He also notes that there was then still an oral memory of the Crakemarsh "chapel yard" having gravestones, but that these were known to have been taken away before the 1880s. Redfern was writing in 1886, and we can be fairly sure that he was not attempting any sort of antiquarian confabulation that would link his home town with *Gawain*.

[26] Bertrand de Verdun, with the anglicised name: 'Bertram de Verdon'.

[27] He founded the nearby Croxden Abbey in 1179, with monks from Normandy. He died 1192 in the ancient seaport of Joppa (on the coast 35 miles NW of Jerusalem).

[28] *Forests and Chases in England and Wales, c.1000 to c.1850 : A Glossary of Terms and Definitions*, St John's College Research Centre, University of Oxford, accessed 2018.

Thus in this context 'grove' might have had no devotional connotation at all. Let me bring together the topology and the Abbey records, and see if I can crack this problem by discovering the nature of Crakemarsh — a name which initially suggests only dank wetlands and waterfowl. It is on a stream that flows down from Alton toward the Dove, but the stream has a weir and large catch-water pool, probably a fish-pool in medieval times. The site of the hall is some 16 feet above the level of the distant river. The intervening land probably had orchards,[29] which were often planted along rivers at that time, but the likelihood of occasional flooding suggests it may not have been good land for a straight timber wood. Yet Crakemarsh was very likely to have been partly wooded, because we know that Croxden Abbey owned "half a wood at Crakemarsh" at that time. However this was not their 'grove' wood from which they periodically took timber, as we also know that was at Great Gate near Croxden.[30] Thus Crakemarsh was lesser woodland of some sort, probably shading into orchard, then water meadows as the land dipped toward the reed-beds of the River Dove. Which means that the idea of a contemplative 'grove' there sounds plausible in terms of the terrain, although it was probably a lot less peaceful during the midge season.

Redfern's discovery of the presence of a 'Chapel Yard' field must remain a slim bit of evidence, in the absence of his source or new archeology, but evidence for the terrain doesn't discount it. On the balance of probabilities it seems there was a medieval 'green chapel' of a sort, at some time, in a wooded clearing above the River Dove. But possibly England had many such, at that time. Further work will be needed locally, to discover more about the Chapel Yard, its dating, and its relation to Bertram de Verdon.

Even if I am astray on 'fixing' the map reference from Angus McIntosh's 'LP 26' record, the accident has been a happy one and has led me to Crakemarsh.

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[29] The *Annals* of Stowe records that in 1331 the monks at Croxden being served with green peas at a time of a dismal harvest season, instead of their normal 'peares and apples'. Therefore, they obviously had good access to local orchards in normal years.

[30] "Houses of Cistercian monks: The abbey of Croxden", *A History of the County of Stafford*, Volume 3, Victoria County History, 1970. They were oaks, since the Abbey *Chronicle* noted they fell in the great storm of 1372.

Let us then assume that there was the local folk-memory of a then-lost[31] 'green chapel' in the area around the castle. Could this have led to 'poetic inspiration' at the Castle, circa the 1370s? If so then that would raise the possibility that at Crakemarsh we find not the *Gawain*-poet,[32] but rather the poet's model for the character of Bertilak de Hautdesert, kneeling at prayer in the Easter dawn in his mistily sun-struck grove.[33] Bertram de Verdon has the same basic name element of Bert-, he has the same high castle, the exact dialect location, and now it seems he even had a 'green chapel' located four miles from his castle.

In a later chapter I will discuss why the later occupant of Alton Castle, then one William de Furnival, might have wished circa 1377 to have his castle's original builder serve as his namesake for the character of Bertilak.

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31 We should remember that plague would have regularly reduced the store of local oral knowledge passed on to future generations. It is true that it mainly took the very young, but the mortality figures also show significant mortality among the old.

32 The current hall is 1820, built around a fine mid to late 17th century staircase. Who was the resident of Crakemarsh Hall circa the 1370s? Francis Redfern (1886) also mentions that at the time of Edward I (1239 – 1307) the hall at Crakemarsh – also called in peerage books "Delves Hall near Uttoxeter" – was in the possession of the Delves family. Burke records this Hall as being the possession of the knight and local justice Sir John de Delves, but he died 1369 leaving no heir. He was succeeded by his brother, Sir Henry Delves (d. 1394/95), who appears to have been holding half of Sir John's estates for Sir John's young nephew until the boy came of age. The boy entered his prime from about 1388 and rapidly became a notable personage – being Sheriff of Staffordshire 1390-1391, and Escheator for Staffordshire, Shropshire and the Welsh Marches 1391-1392, but he died relatively young in 1394. Thus, of the three candidates at Crakemarsh, Sir Henry Delves would best fit the best dating of the *Gawain*-poet. Regrettably he is also the least-known.

33 With a mention of such a grove, this seems a good a place as any to remark on the surviving veneration of springs and wells in the area, in the form of the famous annual well-dressings with flower-petal and pressed-moss mural-arches. Dr. Plot recorded them as extensive in 1686: "...and all the holy wells in the country, which the people still adorn at some stated times of the year with green boughs and flowers, in grateful memory of the good they have formerly done." — Plot, *The Natural History of Staffordshire*, 1686. In the moorlands local people have a tradition that the well-dressing first occurred at Tissington c. 1349 (four miles SW of Wetton Mill), in response to the first great plague, though this may have been a Christianization of some previous votive tradition. The well-dressing tradition likely spread to surrounding villages from Tissington, and was largely taken up in the Victorian period as people became interested in local lore and history.

Stained-glass church window arms of Robert de Vere, 14th century, with foliate background. Top left and bottom right are ruby red leaves against black, while the other quarters are amber yellow-gold. Partly repaired on right. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

I do **not** evaluate or credit such a possible link, but it may interest some readers to know that there were early suggestions among Gawain scholars that the arms of Robert de Vere (1362-1392), Earl of Chester, could have been the reference for the pentangle. He had a single five-pointed blank white star on one quarter of his arms (see above) and — possibly later — a boar rampant on the helmet. He was aged 15 at 1377. He was a friend of the king, but possibly he was not yet the boy-King's favourite nor yet a political power in his own right. Richard II's biographer Nigel Saul names Ralph Stafford as the King's 'best friend' at that point in time.

There were also three such stars on the arms of Sir William Chetwynd, Knight, of Ingestre Hall (near the county-town of Stafford, Staffordshire). By the mid 1350s his line was carried to his second son William de Chetwynd of Shaynton. My perusal of the comprehensive book *The Chetwynds of Ingestre* (1892) suggests no family connections with poetry, or links that might lead to *Gawain*.

2. Sir Gawain's possible routes into and through North Staffordshire.

This chapter re-examines the evidence for 'the Earlsway' road which winds into North Staffordshire from the Cheshire Plain. The existence for 'the Earlsway' was a key element in the claims of R.W.V. Elliott for the country around Leek as the *Gawain*-country. Then I attempt to trace Gawain's own route in detail, as he periodically leaves the road to seek the Green Knight in the wild places.

In 1916 the venerable journal *Folk-lore* published Sambrooke A.H. Burne's article "Examples of Folk Memory from Staffordshire."[34] Burne was concerned to show how folk-memory can often be shown to be true, many centuries later, when old documentation, sufficient scholarship and archaeology becomes available to us. As such, his article gives various examples to support his case. One such example was a now-lost road through Cheshire – to near Congleton – to Leek? – to Waterhouses. Here is the core of his 1916 article, without his speculation that the road served as a mercantile link between the east and west midland estates of the earls of Chester and Dieulacres Abbey...

> "Mr. John Clark, for five years resident at Waterhouses, a village on the turnpike road from Macclesfield to Ashbourne, pointed out to the writer some few months ago a road with what struck him as a peculiar name. It is the length of road running almost due south from the Crown Inn at Waterhouses until it is turned abruptly right and left by the sheer side of the Weaver Hills. This road — it is scarcely more than a lane — is known as "Earlsway." When Mr. Clark first came into the district the pronunciation was "Yarlsway," and on the six-inch O.S. it appears as "Yelsway Lane." The insertion of the consonant Y before vowels and in place of aspirates is a common feature of midland and north country dialects.

[34] Sambrooke A.H. Burne, "Examples of Folk Memory from Staffordshire", *Folk-lore*, September 1916.

> The value and interest of this survival seem to be that it can be tested while so many can not. Taking it at its face value, the advocates of the historical faithfulness of folk memory will claim that this place-name will indicate the ownership or the user (at any rate the close personal association) of some historical person with the rank of Earl. Their opponents will, no doubt, urge that the name is a corruption proving nothing at all. In the majority of survivals of this class proof one way or the other is never obtainable. Here, however, a solitary documentary record which I came across entirely by chance decides this issue at least triumphantly in favour of the traditionalists.
>
> It occurs in the *Chartulary* of Burton Abbey.[35] A deed which may be dated circa 1200 relates to a grant to the Abbey of land situated at Cauldon (p. 52). The boundaries are given, several can be identified, and one of them is "*Viam Comitis*," — the Earl's Way. It is evident, therefore, that this place-name had crystallised into permanent use as early as the twelfth century.
>
> […] The scarce pamphlet history of Rushton Spencer, published in 1856 by the Rev. T. W. Norwood,[36] mentions that a road between that village and Congleton in Cheshire was known as the "Earlsway," and at Congleton itself the same name occurs in a perambulation of 1593.[37]
>
> These two names clearly mark the route between Beeston Castle in Cheshire and Leek and the moorland manors of the Earl. The road now under notice [meaning, Yelsway Lane at Waterhouses] may be a continuation of that, but it looks much more like a route from north to south. […]"

And, I would add, as such it is heading directly for Alton Castle. Which was long the home of the lords of Ireland. Men who would need good roads to get themselves swiftly between Chester (then the passenger port for Ireland)[38] and their family seat and castle in North Staffordshire.

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35 BURNE's footnote: "The original is at Beaudesert. I have used the only transcription, that published by the Salt Archaeological Society in *Staffs Collections*, v. pt. I.]" I have checked this, and he is correct.

36 Later collected in: John Sleigh, *A history of the ancient parish of Leek*, 1862.

37 BURNE's footnote: "Richard Head's *History of Congleton*, page 123."

38 The port was the main port for passengers and small groups and was "busy with Irish traffic down to the end of the 14th century" — Herbert James Hewitt, *Mediaeval*

O.S. map showing the Yarlsway Lane running south from Waterhouses.

This family had extensive Irish estates and, unlike many English lords, they often seem to have divided their time equally between English and Irish estates.[39] In the early years of the 1310s the occupant of Alton was the Chief Justice or 'Constable' of Ireland, meaning he was effectively had the power of 'King' of Ireland (since the English king never went there). The traffic along the Earlsway must have been brisk and frequent.

In the 1200s and early 1300s the family at Alton…

> "were greatly concerned with the administration and exploitation of their Irish lands. They crossed the Irish Sea frequently and spoke of intended conquests, of castles built and agreements made with the Irish or fellow Anglo-Norman lords."[40]

Cheshire: An Economic and Social History of Cheshire in the reigns of the three Edwards, Manchester University Press, 1929, page 136. By 1393 Milford-haven in Wales appears to have become the preferred military port, and in that year was able to carry an army of 50,000 across to Ireland.

39 Mark Haggar, *The de Verdun family in England, Ireland and Wales, 1066-1316: a study*, PhD thesis, University of St. Andrews, 1998, page 275.

40 *Ibid.*

Thus, the need for a good fast road from Alton across to Chester.[41]

A closer look at the phrase "*viam Comitis*", via my fuller translation of the lines, confirms Burne's article and suggests that it arose in the context of someone giving to the monastery…

> "a part of the wood, which was called the *Holgesage* by Bertramus de Caldona [Bertram of Cauldon], is sold, etc." and that this "rod" of land in the wood was partly bounded by "the way of the Earl".

Thus we can assume this Way lay close to or in the Holgesage wood. To some this name might suggests a holly wood, since *holegn* was Old English for 'holly', and thus give a link with the Green Knight's holly bough. But far more likely is that here we have the Old English *holge*, simply 'a hollow place, vacant'. Possibly the name is today Hollington, a mile from Croxden Abbey.

What else can be found about this Earl's way? Much of it was 'high', if we are the judge by one version of the name. In 1313 the Way was recorded as *le hyerlisweye*, the word being composed of the *hëah – eorl – weg* and thus meaning "high Earl's Way".[42] Looking at maps and pictures of the terrain, 'high' presumably meant it headed up from the Cheshire Plain and along the high ridges through the country of the Staffordshire Moorlands and south-west Peak.

The earls of Chester or others may well have paid to maintain parts of the way, as Sambrooke A.H. Burne implies in his article. It would have been in their financial and military interests to do so. Also their hunting interests, as a way to reach the good Peak hunting. But the name may simply have arisen to indicate the general passage of sundry Earls to and fro along it. This is because at the time the name might been forming the term *earl* was a generalist catch-all one, at least among the English…

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[41] I am aware of the famous Gough map, but also of its latest dating to 'post 1420', and its basis in an ancient Roman map of the British Isles. Due to these two factors it has not been used here.

[42] *The place-names of Cheshire*, Volume 1, Cambridge University Press, 1984, page 83.

> "in England the Anglo-Saxon Chronicler, writing in Old English during the Conqueror's reign, used *eorl* for the same groups and in many case for the same persons … Post-conquest writs in Old English addressed both earls and counts as *eorls*."[43]

How did the Earlsway negotiate the settlements of Congleton and Leek? Most probably by avoiding them, for reasons of speed. W.B. Stephens in his *The History of Congleton: Published to celebrate the 700th anniversary* (1970) is precise about how the Way passed Congleton…

> "On the eastern side of Congleton is Earlsway, the extension of Leek Road running from Daneinshaw to the Bridestones and Rushton."

We can be a little more precise about the "eastern side of Congleton". The Rev. W. Beresford of Leek, who had long studied the area and its tracks, suggested Cloudside in an essay on Dieulacres Abbey …

> "the earl's way lay on Cloudside, towards Chester. The Earls came there because it was through Leek or through the neighbourhood of the town that the most direct way from Chester to Lincoln lay."[44]

Cloudside makes a lot of sense in relation to the terrain. At the other end of the Cloudside ridge is Mow Cop, an obvious point by which one would leave the Cheshire Plain if riding from Chester — Beeston Castle — near Nantwich and then going east seeking a way off the plain and up into the Peak. Red Street suggests itself as the obvious ancient point at which to strike up from the Plain, in a road-gap that goes back to Roman times.

Ralph W. V. Elliott appears to concur, without actually stating Mow Cop, when discussing the likely route Gawain took after the Wirral. He offers "below" Congleton on the Earlsway…

> "first recorded about the year 1200 (Palliser 1976, page 80). It led almost due east from Chester and passed into north Staffordshire below Congleton"

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43 "The Earls of Norman England", IN: *Anglo-Norman Studies XIII, Proceedings of the Battle Conference*, 1991, page 211.

44 Rev. W. Beresford, "Dieu-la-Cresse", the *North Staffordshire Naturalists' Field Club, Annual Report and Transactions*, 1889. Citing "the Acts of King Stephen, written by Henry of Huntington".

"Below" would thus have the Earlsway running from Mow Cop along the Congleton Edge, then toward and along Cloudside. This terrain would certainly give the 'high' in *le hyerlisweye*. Of course, today one might think that Mow Cop would be an unlikely place to start a dry but winding way along the various edges. But consider that there was a millstone quarry on Mow Cop, famous since the Iron Age for the best quality millstones in Europe.[45] The idea of there being a good sturdy trackway — capable of carrying carts laden with several millstones — down toward Red Street and hence to Chester, then suddenly becomes very much more probable. Mow Cop would also later have a religious history that was curiously entangled with folk magic.[46] What of the dating of the Earlsway around Congleton? Given the 1200 date stated by Elliott, then the Way was surely of long-standing by the 1370s. The *Victoria County History* Vol 2 ('Industries, Communications, Forests, Sport') has a few more specifics and offers a line that takes it on to Waterhouses…

> "Earlsway. Under this name it can be traced from Congleton, where it is recorded in a [Royal] perambulation of 1595, to Earlsway House at Rushton James, 5 miles [north-]west of Leek." From this point the course appears to have taken a south-easterly direction and has probably been incorporated in the later road plan. The name is found again at Caldon [aka Cauldon/Waterhouses] 7 miles south-east of Leek where, popularly called "Yarlsway"[47]

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45 "In the neighborhood of Mow Cop, the millstone grit is probably better adapted for the manufacturing of millstones than in any other part of the county." — *Transactions of the Manchester Geological Society*, 1862. There "the formation was ideal for producing grindstones and mill-stones." due to the direction of the strata — *The Victoria History of the County of Stafford*, Vol. 2, page 187. The Mow Cop quarries contain "a large number of querns dating from the Iron Age and Roman period" — Charles D. Hockensmith, *The millstone industry: a summary of research on quarries and producers in the United States, Europe and elsewhere*, McFarland, 2009.

46 See: R. Nettel, "Folk Elements in Nineteenth-Century Puritanism", *Folk-lore* journal, Vol. 80, No. 4, 1969, pages 272-285. This is one example of scholarship on the curiously entangled transition of traditional folk beliefs to primitive Methodism around Mow Cop and Biddulph Moor. Other scholarship on the topic includes: "Methodism, the Clergy, and the Popular Belief in Witchcraft and Magic"; and "Hugh Bourne and the Magic Methodists".

47 *The Victoria History of the County of Stafford*, Vol. 2, page 279.

Putting all the above together gives, in sequence:

Chester and the Dee.

Beeston Castle? On a conical hill in the vast and flat Cheshire Plain.

A little south, around the guarded Cheshire salt-pits at Nantwich.

Red Street, as the likely point of leaving the Cheshire Plain?

Up onto Mow Cop, possibly via a cart-track for the millstone quarries.

Along the Congleton Edge, south of Congleton.

East of Congleton, along the Cloudside edge.

Joins a more public road, coming in at Daneinshaw [now Dane-in-Shaw].

From the Bridestones to Rushton Spencer on a good public road.

Rushton Spencer to Morridge (several possible options re: weather).[48]

The Morridge edge Earlsway, all the way down to Waterhouses.

At Waterhouses the Way turns sharply 90-degrees, leaving the Ashbourne road, and turning into a lane running in the direction of Alton Castle.

Around Cauldon Lowe and the Weaver Hills.

Then either:

i) a short direct approach to Alton Castle past Bunbury hill-fort (called *Yornburi*, 1275). The most likely route used by the occupant of Alton Castle and his guests.

ii) around through Wootton and Ellastone to reach the ford over the Churnet. From the ford there was a ridgeway salt-track running for two miles up to Alton.[49] More likely to have been used by merchants and traders. Or if 'the bridge was out' on the shorter route i).

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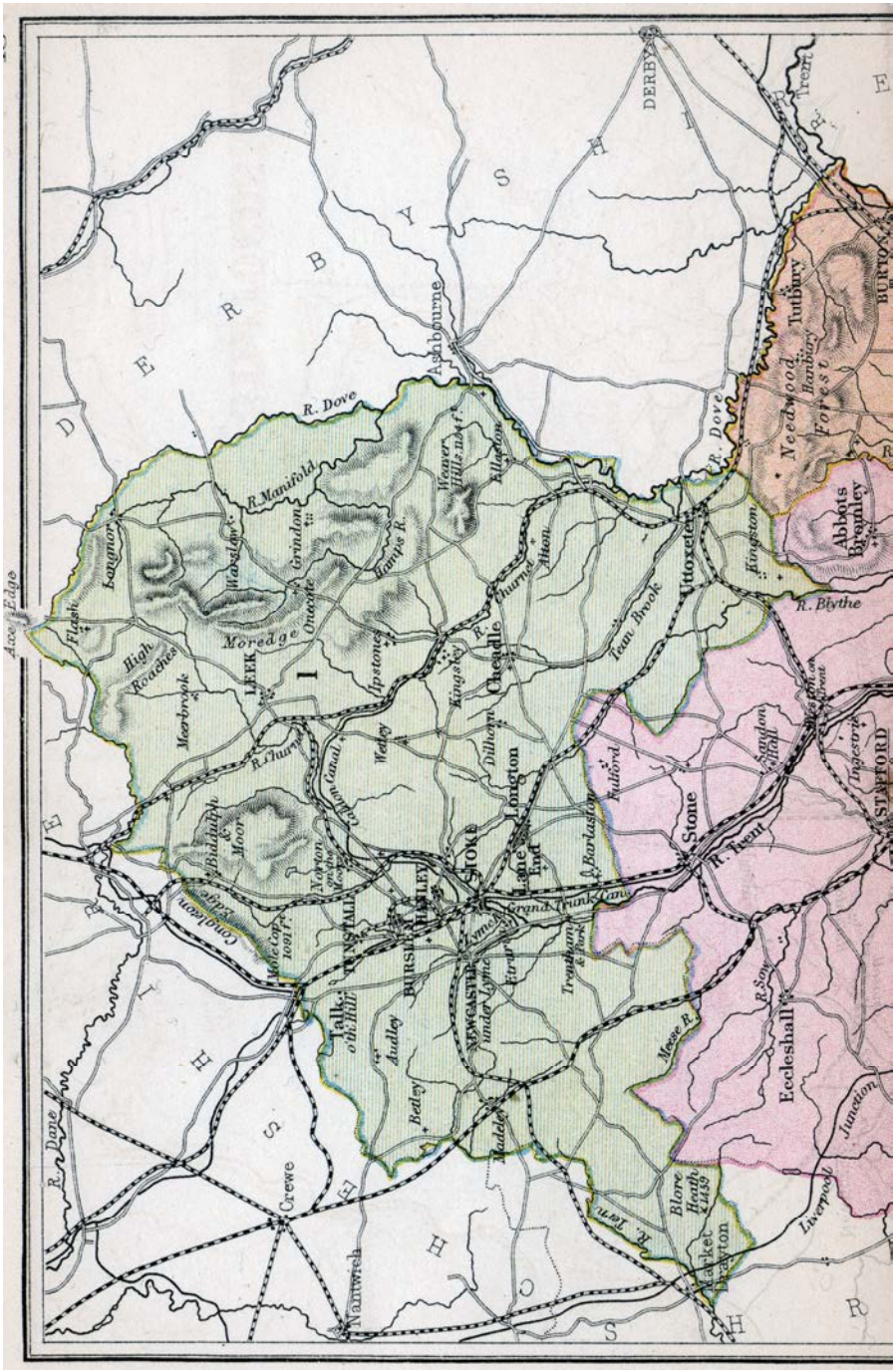
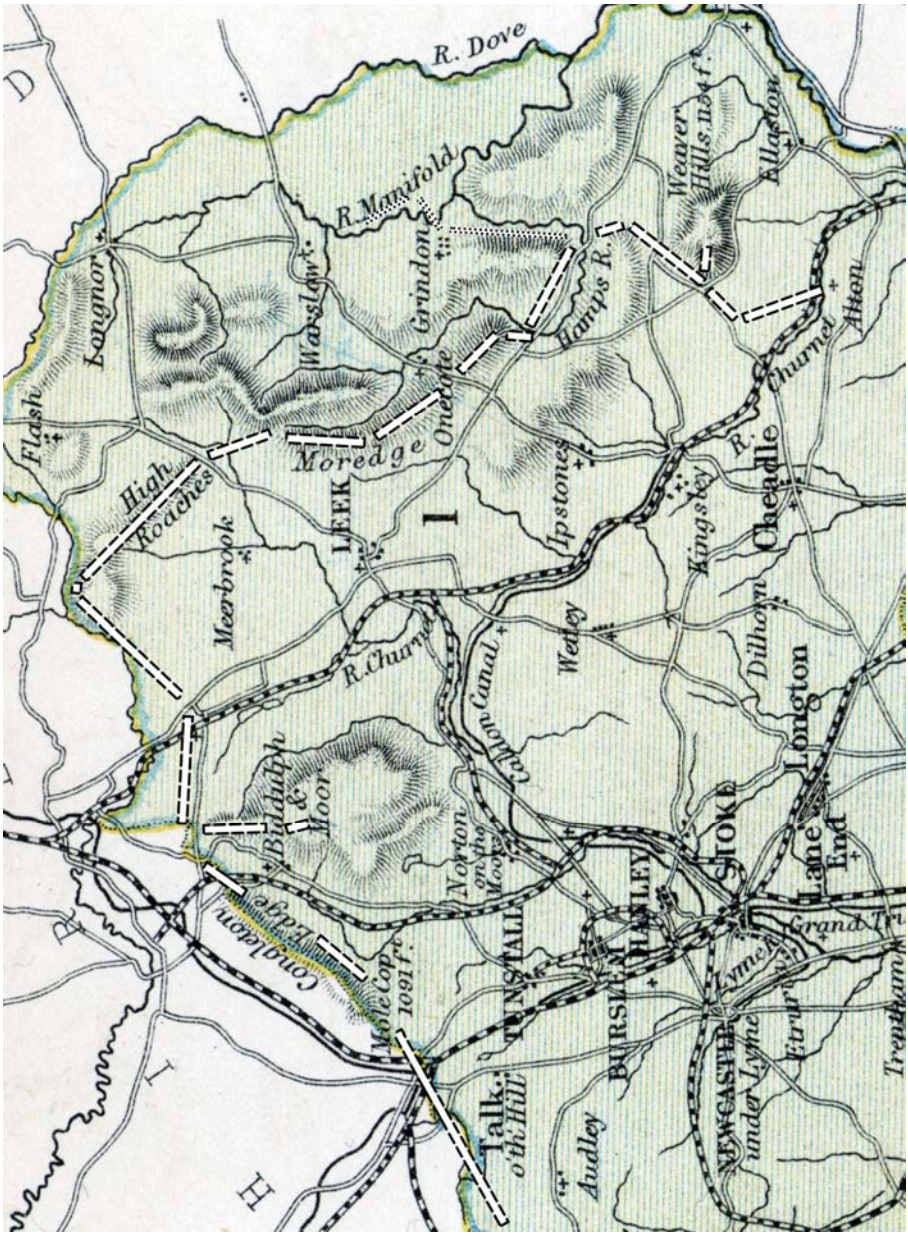
[48] In wet weather the Earlsway likely took a detour to avoid the valley where the Tittesworth Reservoir is today, which is rather boggy (suggestive placenames include Meerbrook, Alder Ley, Frith Bottom) and wet (many small streams converge on the 'bottom'). It was probably especially wet in midwinter, when Gawain is travelling. The obvious winter detour would be Lud's Church – Back Forest – The Roaches.

[49] This salt-way track is recorded as… "*Salterfortherigg*, i.e. Salter's-ford-ridge", in 1339. David Horovitz, *A survey and analysis of the place-names of Staffordshire*, PhD thesis, University of Nottingham, Vol. 2, page 529.

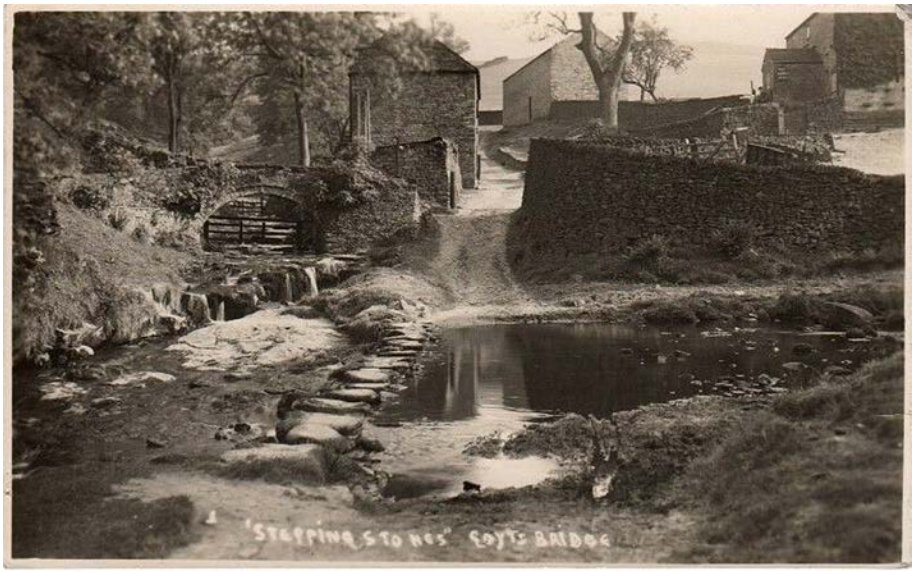


A good vintage outline map of North Staffordshire, showing upland terrain and main locations, circa 1900. The thick dotted lines are Victorian railway lines.



Detail from previous map, showing the suggested route of Gawain. Heading up off the Cheshire Plain (left), he heads for the highest point, Mow Cop (a hill of numerous variant names). He goes along Congleton Edge, and investigates Biddulph Moor. He goes through Rushton Spencer, then up to Swythamley Grange, from where he passes through Lud's Church into the strange landscape of the Roaches and Back Forest. He then comes down the Earlsway along Morridge, to reach Waterhouses. The is a surviving Earlsway stretch there and continuing on in its direction soon leads him to Alton Castle. The more tightly-dotted line indicates my suggestion for his later route from Alton Castle to the Green Chapel.

Not on Gawain's route, but this scene from further north in the Peak is indicative of a typical medieval upland track and ford/bridge amid steep stonewalled moorland grazing and hunting land. Although one should remember that the *Gawain* scene would have been icy midwinter.



Goyt's Bridge, near Buxton in the Peak, somewhat north of the likely Gawain route. But indicative of the complex intersections of track, watercourse, small bridges, stepping stones and farm-yards through which the packhorse tracks would have woven.

The Dane at Three Shire Heads, where the three shires meet. Adjacent is Wildboarclough around which the Boar hunt in Gawain later takes place. The picture is also indicative of the sorts of small tracks and packhorse bridges Gawain might have encountered on his journey, including in the early part set in inland Wales.

Gawain's journey:

Thus, the likely route of the Earlsway and its link-routes. What of Gawain's own route, which is likely to include many detours in search of the Green Knight? Firstly we know from the poem's place names that Gawain comes in the west, most probably after travelling north "on the track" up through Wales and then along part of the North Wales coast, then continues into England from the general direction of Chester.[50] In what follows, it will be most convenient for me to write as if following Gawain in the present tense, and to assume the poet draws on his own knowledge of the route of c. 1377.

After the Wirral and a possible visual encounter with Beeston Castle on the Cheshire Plain, he then surely avoids a direct engagement with the well-guarded salt-works to the north, such as Middlewich and Northwich.[51] His most likely route from Beeston thus takes him south-east and must pass either a little above or below Nantwich, another well-guarded salt-works. He takes several loops off the trackways as he goes across the Cheshire Plain, in order to check likely locations for the Green Chapel. He does not yet know it is in an upland location. As the terrain ahead looks more grim and the 'cliff' of the Plain's edge looms, there are many unfriendly encounters down in the thickly settled Plain…

> At every bank or beach where the brave man crossed water,
>
> He found a foe in front of him, except by a freak of chance

He comes up off the Cheshire Plain, possibly at Bignall Hill or the nearby old Roman road at Red Street, and rides through the increasingly hilly country around Kidsgrove and up onto the high point of Mow Cop and then along the Congleton Edge ridge. From there he also investigates the

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[50] He begins, of course, at Arthur's court. At the time of the *Gawain*-poet Caerleon in South Wales seems to have been well-known (e.g. Gerald of Wales, Geoffrey of Monmouth) as the seat of Arthur. One then assumes that the much later assumption by ballad singers that Arthur's court was in Carlisle, Cumbria (in the 'Delamore' forest there?), must have been due to their befuddlement at the name of 'Caerleon'?

[51] "From as early as 1132 the abbot of Combermere had possessed salt-houses in Nantwich" — from J.T. Driver, *Cheshire in the later Middle Ages 1399-1540*, 1971, page 114. These were connected by various 'salt-ways' to the other salt-making '—wiches' of the area, Northwich and Middlewich.

adjacent Biddulph Moor, which lies on the high ground behind the ridge. This ridge and moor is his first genuine 'high country' since his encounter with mid-Wales in November, and as such the Congleton Edge seems apt for the lines…

> He had death-struggles with dragons, battle with wolves,[52]
>
> Warred with wild men who dwelt among the crags,
>
> Battled with bulls and bears and boars at other times,[53]
>
> And ogres that panted after him on the high fells

Here the population is sparser than down on the Cheshire Plain, but far wilder. Albeit only documented later, there really were "wild men who dwelt among the crags" on Biddulph Moor…

> The "people of Biddulph moor, have been described as 'rough, unbroken, and but half-civilized'" — William White, *History, Gazetteer, and Directory of Staffordshire*, 1834.
>
> "Biddulph Moor, a wild district inhabited by wild people, who lived a kind of gipsy life a large part of the year, going about the country selling earthenware from the neighbouring Potteries [meaning, Stoke-on-Trent]." — William Sproston Caine, *Hugh Stowell Brown: A Memorial Volume*, 1888.
>
> "The inhabitants of this place [Kidsgrove, which Gawain would have passed through to reach Mow Cop] were said to be in a state little removed from barbarism, notoriously ignorant, vicious, and depraved, and as much a terror to the surrounding country as the now equally notorious Biddle Moor." — *Report on Mining Districts*, Children's Employment Commissioners, 1841.

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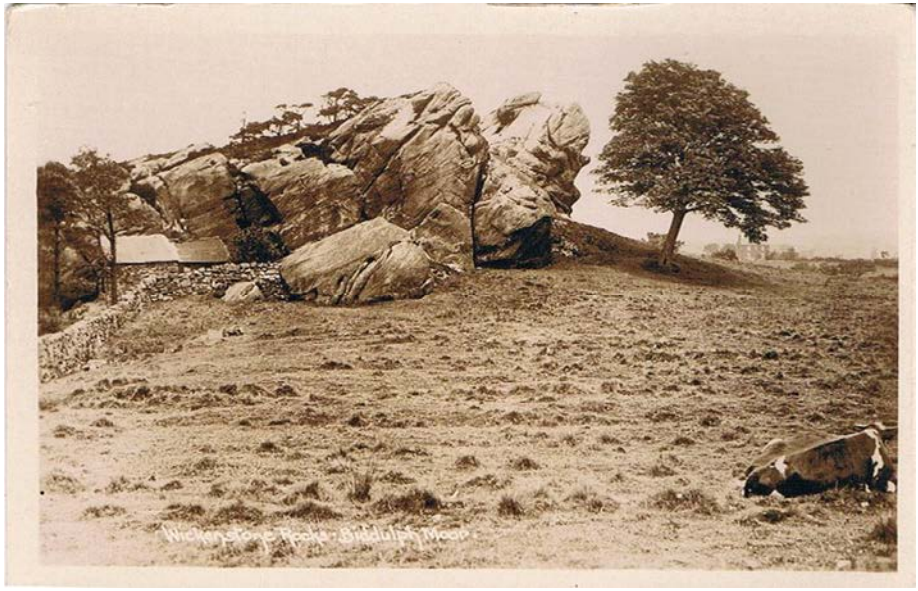
[52] *A history of the North Staffordshire hounds and country : 1825-1902* has it (page 235) that Staffordshire was rid of wolves by a family of professional wolf-hunters, and they were finally destroyed in the reign of King Edgar, i.e.: by the year 975.

Dragons and wolves suggest the poem is set in a time prior to c. 1377. As for dragons being extinct, the more credulous local people may not have been quite so sure — for instance, the settlement of Leek was totally destroyed by fire in 1297.

[53] Congleton was once well-known for bear-baiting and dancing-bears, and the town worthies famously sold the town bible in order to buy a new dancing-bear. Nearby Tutbury and then Uttoxeter was well known for its bull-running, right down to the 1810s. In the later 14th century minstrels gathered at Tutbury and held a court at the bull-running there. For more on this, see my later chapter in this book.

'Old Man of Mow', a rock formation on Mow Cop in winter, with a frozen path crossing an icy stream, Note the tiny people at the base of the rock, for scale. Postcard possibly 1910s?



Wickenstone Rocks, on Biddulph Moor. Postcard circa 1910s?

> "I need not say to those who are in the least acquainted with what this corner of the earth was at this early period, that Biddle Moor was a place of terror" — Henry Allen Wedgwood, *People of the Potteries*, 1970.

A local saying had it that: "there are Englishmen and Frenchmen and Biddlemoor men", and there is still local debate among historians about the genetic origin of this distinctive small-faced darker-skinned group.

Also, when traversing places such as Mow Cop, someone seeing huge stone shapes — looming out of the winter mist and over the path — might well imagine them to be ogres (see adjacent pictures). One can further note a curious and frightening weather phenomenon. This was ably observed by the poet John Edwards, *The tour of the Dove, a poem*, circa 1821. He knew the district in winter, and adds an explanatory note to a line of his poetry…

Stanza 78, line 6: "And those of spectral shape that walk like clouds."

> This phenomenon is of rare occurrence; but the writer was once favored with an appearance of the kind upon Calton moor [8 miles NE of Alton], when, in the midst of a drizzling storm of sleet, he was startled by the appearance of an equestrian figure upon the cloud that skirted the hill, keeping pace with the horse that carried him.
>
> The water-spout is an electrical phenomenon, that occurs with more frequency. They are called *pipes* in the Peak of Derbyshire, and do not always discharge their contents, but are sometimes drawn back into the cloud from which they were suspended.

After the Mow Cop — Congleton Edge — Cloudside ridgeway, Gawain comes briefly back onto the happier Rushton Spencer road, which formed part of the Earlsway. Here a less wild road comes in at Daneinshaw, and connected Rushton Spencer with the more northerly of the Cheshire salt-farms. One can imagine that he fruitlessly investigates the nearby ancient Bridestones, seeking the Green Knight there (see pictures, overleaf). A questing knight might need to seek out many such curious places along the trackways. Although, despite Gawain's youth, we can assume that he had the basic field skills,[54] gained from training in hunting. Such a knight, even

[54] See, for instance, the current work of Tristan Gooley, who shows how to navigate without maps.

when young, would not become irrecoverably lost. For the audience of the time, he also has his Marian shield and his faith to guide him.

Once he reaches a more populated area of uplands on the road around Rushton Spencer (where another road rises up off the Plain), his local informants would likely have become more available and friendlier, but also hazier. As Dr. Johnson later observed in 1777, what the people of the Leek moorlands tell you cannot be taken at face value…

> "in the first place, the common people do not accurately adapt their thoughts to the objects; nor, secondly, do they accurately adapt their words to their thoughts: they do not mean to lie; but taking no pains to be exact, they give you very false accounts. A great part of their language is proverbial. If anything rocks at all, they say it *rocks like a cradle*; and in this way they go on."[55]

But such misdirection of Gawain might be corrected, if he stopped overnight nearby with monks, such as those at the Grange at Swythamley near Rushton Spencer.[56] People then tended not to know much beyond a two miles radius of their dwelling, and the road to a local market-place or mill, but monks and the curacy might know more. Though it is unlikely that Gawain stops any place long by mid December, friendly or not, as he has an ever-tightening deadline.[57]

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[55] Crocker's *Boswell's Johnson*, Vol. 6, page 271. The tendency was later confirmed by the local authoress George Eliot, see for instance her *Adam Bede*. The folk-lore collector Miss Alice Annie Keary of Oakhill, Stoke-on-Trent, found it in Stoke in the 1890s, among the workers who had come in from the Moorlands and Peak… "…proverbs I have for myself found very difficult to collect, owing to the Poyser-like habit of our people of expressing themselves in an epigrammatic and metaphorical fashion which may be proverbial, but is quite as often extemporised."

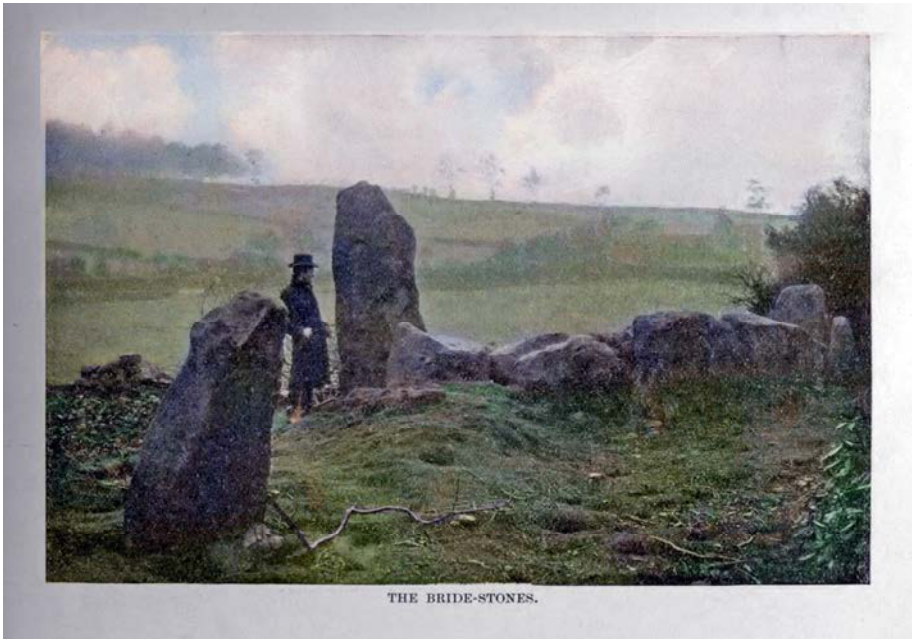
Johnson's father had not, contrary to Johnsonian tradition, been apprenticed to a Leek maker of books. But his father did regularly sell books on market days in Uttoxeter from c. 1681 and would have had Leek customers. He trained his son intensively in the book trade, and would have passed on his observations of the different approaches that a bookseller might expect to encounter, when in different parts of the county and among the various classes of people. Thus, Johnson was not speaking only as a tourist. See: P. Rogers (Ed.), *The Samuel Johnson Encyclopedia*, Greenwood, 1996, page 209.

[56] The site has been able and amply investigated by R.V.W. Elliott. See earlier chapter.

[57] The poet has Gawain leave Camelot on All Hallow's Day (1st November), probably on the internal assumption that the Green Knight was spawned on All Hallow's Eve

The prehistoric Bridestones. Pre-1800 drawing.

Plate from: *Scientific Rambles Around Macclesfield*, 1800.



The Bridestones, postcard probably circa the 1890s.

(Halloween) and then took two months to reach Camelot. Thus, logically, Gawain inverts the Knight's journey, such that he knows that as the end of the year approaches he is more and more likely to be somewhere near the Green Chapel.

Rushton Spencer looking west toward Cloud End on the horizon. If the local topographer Rev. W. Beresford of Leek was correct that "the earl's way lay on Cloudside", then this high way comes in from the left of the picture along the far Cloudside ridge, descends the side of the Cloud itself and drops down and comes toward the picture's viewer and into Rushton.

The centre of Rushton Spencer, looking NW, the Cloud is out of the picture and to the left. The road seen directly ahead is that one which a traveler from Cloudside might come into Rushton on and thus is likely the Earlsway at Rushton.

The road that goes off to the right of the picture is signposted into the pack-horse route along the Dane Valley — and thus in the general direction of the Swythamley and Lud's Church.

There is now a point of uncertainly on the route. On reaching the crossroads just beyond Rushton Spencer (see postcard and map), Gawain has a fateful choice. There are several options for the traveler heading toward Ashbourne.

i) One could go south into Leek, an unlikely place to find a Green Knight.

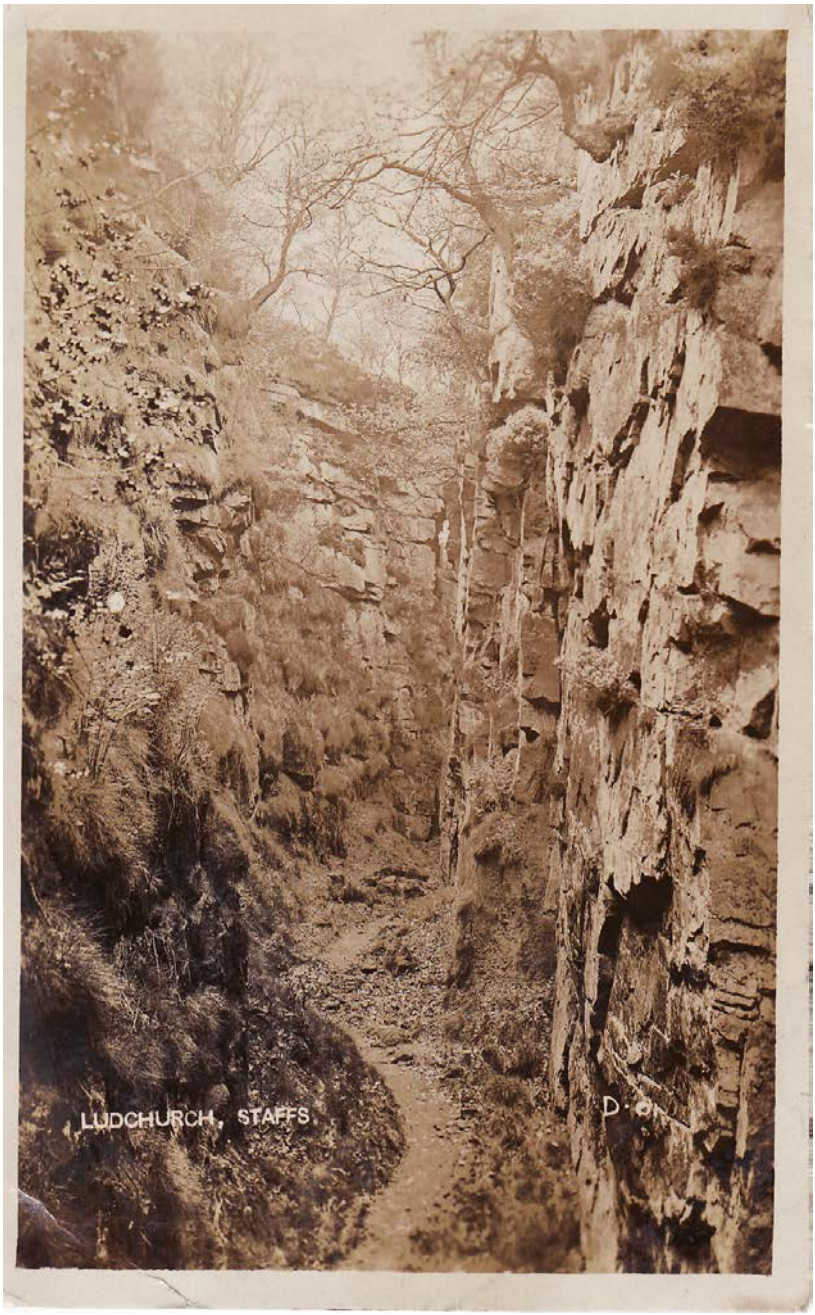
ii) One might swing a little north toward the Grange at Swythamley. Anyone enquiring about a 'Green Chapel' at or near Rushton Spencer would have been told about the eerie Lud's Church, and the Roaches beyond it.

iii) Or alternatively one could bypass Swythamley and from Rushton Spencer take the lower winding pack horse route along the Dane Valley, and thus reach Lud's Church by crossing the Dane (perhaps at Gradbach).

iv) Of course, Gawain might have taken a northerly route from Chester, and even come in from the north: north of Congleton — south of Wildboarclough — Three Shire Heads. Thence to the crossing of the River Dane at Danebridge.[58] But, even so, Lud's Church is then still nearby — just a mile or so along a path via Swythamley.

The path to Ludchurch. Possibly c. 1910.

[58] A medieval track ran south from Macclesfield to the Danebridge, where there "was a bridge by 1357" from whence the track went on over Gun moor and straight into the town of Leek. "Leek: Heaton", IN: *A History of the County of Stafford: Volume 7, Leek and the Moorlands*, Victoria County History, 1996.



Lud's Church or Ludchurch, near Rushton Spencer and Wincle.

Either way, a traveler would then logically come down from investigating the famous Lud's Church cleft (above) and out into the hoary Back Forest.

Merrily in the morning by a mountain he rode

Into a wondrously wild wooded cleft, [Lud's Church?]

With high hills on each side overpeering a forest [Back Forest?]

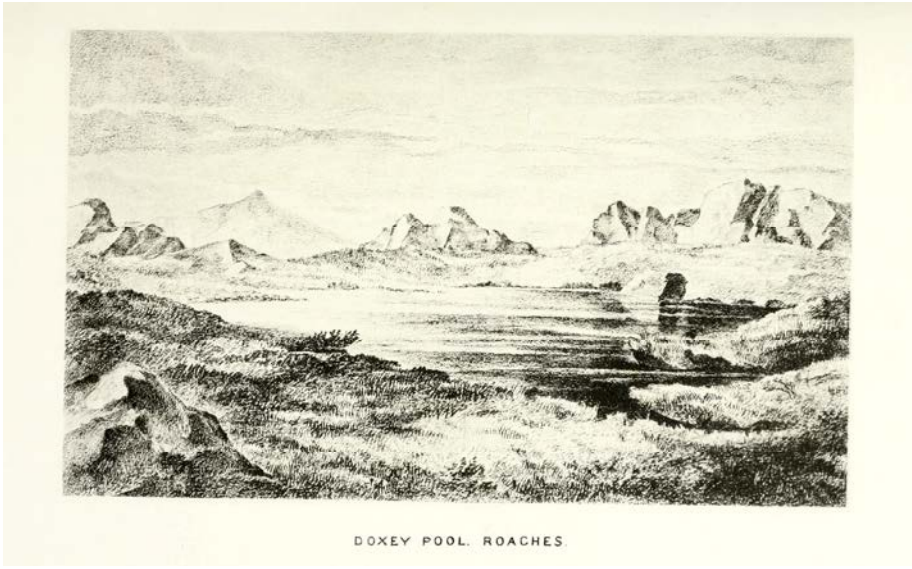
Of huge hoary oaks, a hundred together.

The hazel and the hawthorn were intertwined

With rough ragged moss trailing everywhere.

In my later chapter on the Cistercians, I establish that this was very popular hunting terrain at that time, and would have had good tracks and bridges.

From Back Forest, Gawain would then want to investigate the high line of the Roaches and Hen Cloud, and once there he would encounter curious places such as Rock Hall rock-house,[59] the mysterious Doxey Pool and the Ramshaw Rocks.



Doxey pool, on the lip of the Roaches.

In the mists of an icy midwinter such a man might well think he had ridden into a very uncanny land indeed, and that he was 'on the right track' at last.

[59] In gentrified form it was Rockhall Cottage, circa 1862 and used as a gamekeeper's lodge. Before then it was reputedly a rock-house lived in for nearly a century by one Bess Bowyer. It probably has an even earlier history as a rock-house, offering obvious shelter for a forester and huntsmen.

The line of the Roaches: "by a mountain he rode"

Prehistoric dolmen called 'the Bawd Stone' near The Roaches and Rock Hall. Pool beneath, and Hen Cloud in the background. Pre-1800. From: *Scientific Rambles Around Macclesfield*, 1800, which also has… "Up until the last century the Bawd Stone was whitewashed every May Day by local villagers who made an annual pilgrimage to crawl under the stone in the hope of curing various illnesses."

The only available postcard that gives a feel of winter on the Roaches.

A medieval traveler might then slip down the back of the Roaches to reach the remains of the old Roman Road from Buxton to Leek.[60] That was presumably still an easy and relatively good road in the 1370s. The traveler who wished to avoid the settlement of Leek might then slip a little east, over a boggy Blackshaw Moor at the eastern end of the Roaches, in order to reach the high dry edge of Morridge. At this point Gawain goes…

> Through many a swamp and marsh, a man all alone,

Once on the high edge he is free again of the mires (though there may have been a mounded causeway track, if part of the 'high' Earlsway known from a 1313 document). He then has a fairly easy, if rather cold and windswept journey, down the known Earl's Way along the Morridge edge ("it is always winter on Morridge" — local saying).

At the small settlement of Waterhouses he then turns sharply south, using the documented 'Earlsway' lane there. This has already been discussed in my earlier chapter, and shown on a map.

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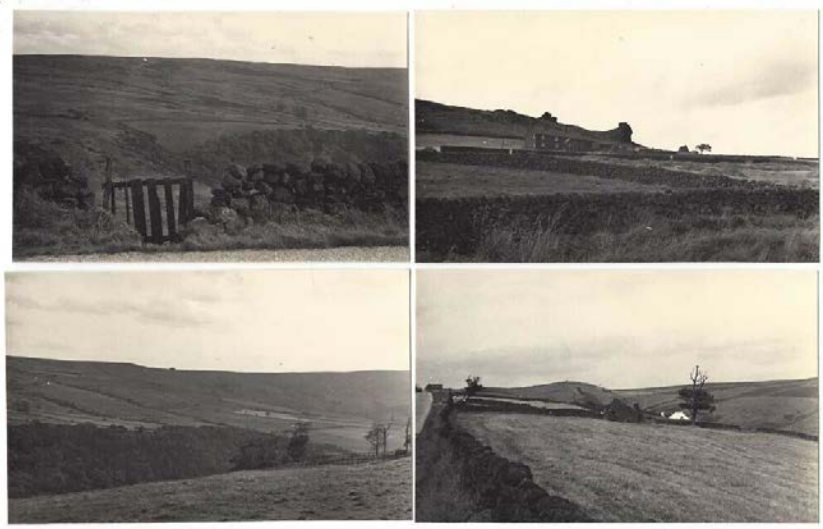
60 Road No. 713, IN: Ivan D Margary, *Roman Roads in Britain*, Phoenix House, 1955.



Vintage views giving a composite feel for the bleak isolation experienced on Morridge Edge at 1200 ft above sea-level.

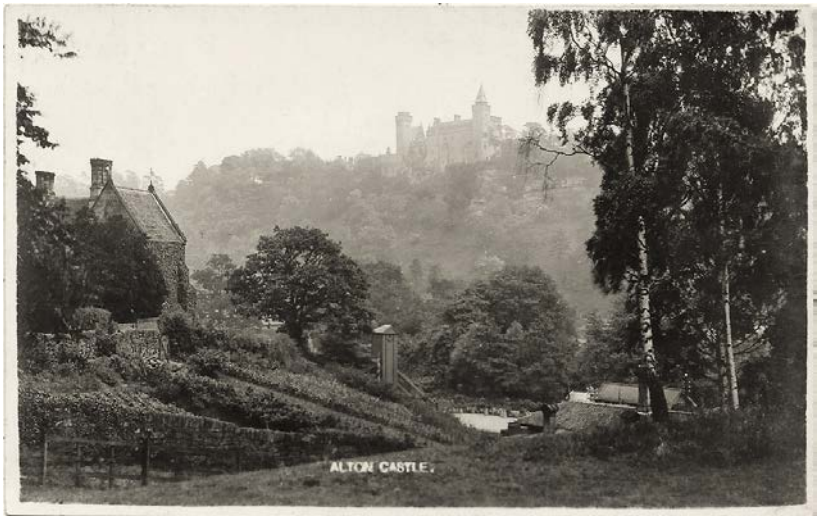
Once beyond Waterhouses the lane swiftly skirts him past the *faery* barrows atop Cauldon Low, on the Weaver Hills two miles north of Alton. These are perhaps investigated for the Green Knight, but again with no luck.

In the night he goes through the tiny settlements of Cotton and Farley and on toward Alton. Coming out of the Abbey Woods just short of the crossing of the River Churnet he is then amazed to encounter in these wild uplands the impressive medieval hilltop Alton Castle. It is perched above the river…

> When in the wood he was aware of a dwelling with a moat
>
> On a promontory above a plateau, penned in by the boughs
>
> And tremendous trunks of trees, and trenched about;
>
> The comeliest castle that ever a knight owned,

The poet's scene is midwinter, so the leaves are off the trees. This means that in the pre-dawn light he can see Alton Castle (as it was circa the 1370s) and its rock with enough light to describe them. He finds the road that leads up and hooks around to the recently-added early 14th century gatehouse.

That, as best as I can 'map and track' it, it his most likely route to Alton Castle on the real-world map.



Site of the medieval Alton Castle, now the new castle built exactly atop it.

A dabble in the Dee

Some will have wondered, in the above chapter, about a detail of Gawain's initial crossing from North Wales into England. I did not front the chapter with this matter because I did not wish to become entangled in the academic arguments about exactly where and when he crossed, and how, and if, and if there was a religious settlement there or nearby. He crossed, he went on. The notion that the *Gawain* castle is located in the Wirral[61] is ridiculous on a great many counts, not least the journey-text as given in *Gawain*.

I will just say that there may be further confirmation of my suggested *Gawain* date of 1377, in the district encountered immediately after the Dee crossing. The then-notorius "*wyldrenesse of Wyrale*" that Sir Gawain encountered was officially 'disafforested' in July 1376, meaning its forest-law and courts were removed. Through this settled but dismal place — the low-forested "strip of land between the estuaries of the Dee and the Mersey" — Gawain briefly travels, meeting only puzzled stares, little goodwill and not a single god-fearing man. The miscreants who once harboured in the glades of this low-forested "*Wyrale*" had long menaced the citizens of Chester and

61 Stated by Torlac Turville-Petre, IN: Greg Walker and Elaine Treharne (Eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Medieval English Literature*, Oxford University Press, 2010.

travelers who had recently crossed the Dee. Hence the reputable locals had long pleaded to the King for the removal of the 'forest law' rights which protected the miscreants.[62] This plea was finally granted in the summer of 1376, though may not have had much immediate effect — as later records show that the dangers persisted.

I assume that the *Gawain*-poet might have named the area as 'forest' if it had still officially been so in law. But he knew it was no longer so, and thus he calls it only the "*wyldrenesse of Wyrale*" in his poem, indicating the drear castle-less and now-untended place where "but few men lived, loving neither God nor man". If I am correct on this, it means the poem must be from after 1376.

This local history also tells us something of the terrain. The Wirral forest had been established as a managed hunting forest in 1120. After 250 years of management it was likely a typical — if relatively small — deer hunting forest with low forest, glades, rides, pools, lodges and good access tracks for large bodies of men and horses.

What of castles? At that time the Wirral had but one small 11th century Norman motte-and-bailey castle, Shotwick, built to control the river crossing and we know it occasionally housed travelling nobles headed into military action in North Wales. But the histories have the castle as defunct and un-garrisoned by 1353, when it is said to have been "barely a manor". It had some repairs as a local residence, but was gone from the records by 1371.

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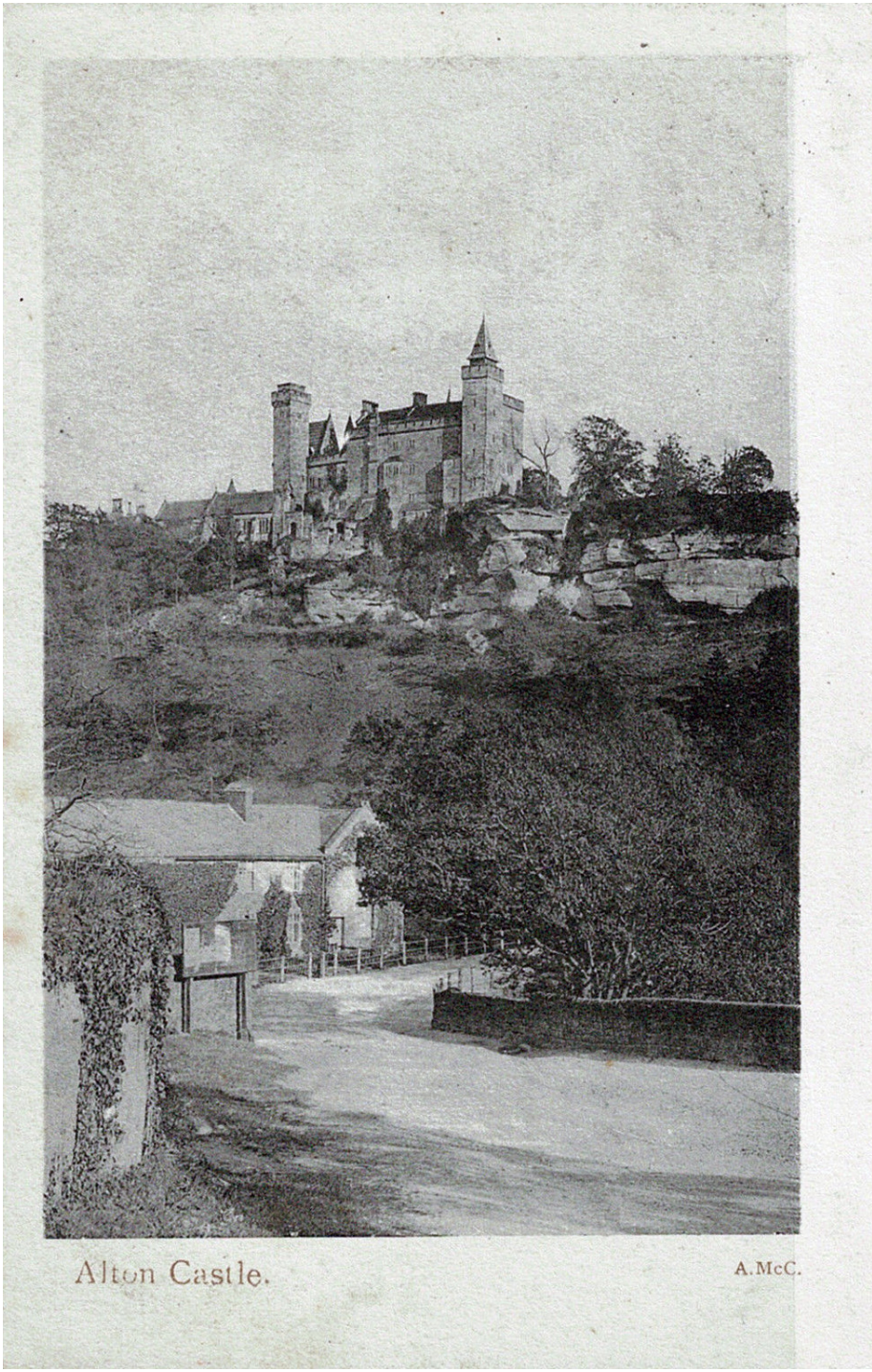
[62] Henry L. Savage, "A Note on Sir Gawain and the Green Knight", *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. 46, No. 7, November 1931, pages 455-457. See also: P. L. Heyworth, Sir Gawain's Crossing of the Dee, *Medium AEvum*, Vol. 41, No. 2, 1972.

From an account of a visit to the ruins, printed in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, October 1792, page 881: "The castle occupies a large extent of ground; the outer wall, though much shattered, still remains, as also two or three of the towers. The space within the walls was lately converted to a bowling-green, but is now laid down as a meadow, and bears a very good crop of grass. On three sides the walls are situate on the edge of the precipice; on the remaining side, by which alone it was accessible, it appears to have been defended by vast piles of masonry. [...] I was able to procure very little information [locally]. Tradition says, that it was demolished by the Parliamentary forces during the civil wars."



Pugin's Alton Castle, directly on the site of the medieval castle, the castle's rock formation clearly seen from the river-bridge and road below. Postcard probably 1900s?

Alton castle in winter, showing the Castle in relation to the river below.

Photography of part of the ruins of the medieval Alton Castle, set within the grounds of the current Alton Castle.

3. Alton Castle as the castle of Bertilak of Hautdesert.

Gawain arrives at 'Alveton Castle'. Called 'Elvetone' in *Domesday* and 'Alveton' in 1283 and thereafter,[63] and then from the mid 1800s onward known as Alton Castle. This is the nearest likely castle to the exact *Gawain* dialect area.

This medieval castle is not to be confused with the modern Alton Towers and its earlier ancient hill-fort, [64] both of which are located north of the medieval castle on the opposite hill across the valley. Nor is the medieval castle to be confused with the Pugin castle (c. 1840-1843) that replaced it — quite closely so, with the medieval chapel and crypt now being directly underneath the modern castle's chapel,[65] and with the old castle walls still visible in ruins in a sweep around the south side of the modern castle.

Even before the Norman Conquest, Alton Castle was a strategic site in the Staffordshire Moorlands, near salt-routes and communication routes from Chester to Lincoln, and well placed to prevent a Scottish army slipping down through the pack-horse tracks and old drove roads of the moorland country.[66]

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63 David Horovitz, *A survey and analysis of the place-names of Staffordshire*. PhD thesis, University of Nottingham, 2003. 2 vols. with comprehensive Gazetteer across both volumes.

64 For our purposes the Alton Towers site does have some interest. The Bunbury hill-fort (named *Yornburi*, 1275) of 100 acres near Alton (now mostly under the Rock Gardens and woods at Alton Towers) had a "double, sometimes treble trench" and would have been present in the landscape in the 1370s. Even if wooded and overgrown by then, it might be seen in a snowy midwinter from the Earlsway, which would have passed below it on the way to Alton Castle when approaching from the north. Despite a confabulated tale of an Anglo-Saxon battle on the site (a tale put about after circa 1437), recent modern archeological tests and mapping now suggest the fort goes back much further in time. The best modern description of the hill-fort is to be found in the listing by Historic England: "Bunbury hillfort: a univallate hillfort south west of Alton Towers".

65 *Alton and Farley Conservation Area Appraisal*, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council, 2007-8.

66 The Jacobite Army would later come down from Scotland via Macclesfield to Leek, then – thwarted – slip away at night through the Peak around Ashbourne.

At circa 1360 Alton likely formed a military nexus[67] with adjacent castles such as: Stafford (wooden, restored in stone and expanded 1347);[68] Tutbury to the south-east (probably not of great military value as a strong-point, but still used residentially and set to be impressively but partially rebuilt in stone by John of Gaunt);[69] Beeston to the west on the Cheshire Plain (of stone, still quite strategically important by the 1350s, but declining somewhat as the threat from Ireland declined); and Peveril Castle in the High Peak (small, seemingly used only as a remote prison and local courthouse by 1400). There was also a commercial nexus which required protection and direction, which was deftly summarized by Christopher Dyer in a lecture in 2001…

> "by the late thirteenth century almost everyone in the [Staffordshire] countryside lived within six miles of a town, particularly if the towns in adjacent counties, such as [...] Congleton in Cheshire and Ashbourne in Derbyshire are taken into account. The only rural areas that were not covered were thinly populated parts of the northern uplands [but even] these remote places could have been served by markets and fairs which were not located in boroughs or towns, for which charters were granted at more than twenty places between 1220 and 1355. Many towns stood on the frontiers of *pays*, that is districts with distinctive landscapes and agrarian systems. So a number of Staffordshire towns [...] were sited near the edge of extensive woodlands. The inhabitants would export their timber, charcoal, ropes and other products through the towns' markets, and buy grain,

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67 There were also small castles in north-west Staffordshire, that appear to have protected market towns and the salt-ways that ran south through them, such as Newcastle-under-Lyme castle and the nearby unsuccessful Heighley Castle of the Audley family. Other castles in the county appear to have been either residential houses or protected places for overnight stops, and not of military importance.

68 Probably due to the threat, which had been growing since the 1340s, of 10,000 revolting Welshmen suddenly breaking out of the Marches and into England. If they had linked in mid Staffordshire with an army slipping down through the Peak from Scotland, the resulting force could have been unstoppable until they reached London. The threat changed shape over the following decades, but revolt was likely in Wales until around 1400.

69 The *Topographical History of Staffordshire* has: "it came into the possession of John of Gaunt, who re-built it of hewn freestone, upon the ancient site in 1350". The "in 1350" seems to be dubious, as the rebuilding was probably later. After 1372 it was home to Gaunt's wife Constance, Duchess of Lancaster.

> especially wheat. Northern towns, notably Leek, presumably performed a similar function for the moorlands."[70]

First known in the records as an Anglo-Saxon wooden castle, Alton Castle had been built again in stone c. 1170, when the Saxon family which had once held it married into the important post-Conquest Norman family of de Verdun. It was then partially rebuilt circa the late 1260s, after some unspecified war-damage in the Second Barons' War.[71] The Ancient Monument Listing (1967) adds that there was a new main gatehouse added in "the early 14th century". As I will show, the castle as it existed at 1377 is a near-perfect fit for the one described in *Gawain*.[72]

I will now briefly go through each feature of the medieval Alton Castle and its location:

The castle name: We perhaps see a neat little nod to the name of the castle, when Gawain sets off from Camelot. He muses that his fate is to be '*Hadet with an alvisch man'* (Beheaded by an elvish man). The *alv—* is the same as 'Alveton', and plays into the original 'Elvetone' placename for the castle (if Elve- was understood as meaning 'elf').[73]

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[70] Christopher Dyer, The Urbanizing of Staffordshire [to 1550], 21st Earl Lecture delivered at Keele University, 9th November 2001.

[71] Mark Haggar, *The de Verdun family in England, Ireland and Wales, 1066-1316: a study*, page 270. Was this a significant rebuild or more of a refurbishment after war damage? The Chester *Chronicle* suggests significant damage in 1264. But the eye-witness statement on the matter from the adjacent Croxden Abbey *Chronicle* is unclear, and offers no suggestion of demolition or disuse.

[72] Until now Alton appears to have been totally overlooked by scholars of medieval literature in search of *Gawain*. Admittedly much of the *Gawain* literature is in paper, and often difficult or expensive to obtain, but I can find no mention of Alton in the literature available to me, even with the aid of online search tools. I can only assume that the usual confusion, commonly caused among the district's tourists by the similar naming of Alton Towers and Pugin's later Alton Castle, meant that the older medieval castle was simply overlooked by earlier scholars. If one knows the *Domesday* name of 'Elvetone', then additional confusion can then arise with Elvaston Castle in Derbyshire.

[73] For more on the likely elvish resonances see: Lisa L. Spangenberg, *The Games Fairies Play: Otherworld intruders in Medieval Literary Narratives*, Ph.D. at UCLA, 2008. "I argue that otherworld intruders intrude upon mortals and the mortal world in search of game (using every conceivable meaning of game) where they enter into agreements and bargains with mortals in their pursuit of 'game'. These bargains are exceedingly carefully, and legally constructed contracts."

The name, Bert-: Was the founder of the castle named Bert—? Yes. Bertram de Verdun. In *Gawain* the occupant of the castle is a Bertilac or Bertilak,[74] in name not unlike that of the Bertram who founded and built the medieval Alton Castle. Admittedly if one looks hard enough one can find a 'Bertolias' or 'Bertolai' in 13th century Arthurian literature, and there is the question of the later development of the descriptor 'bachlach'[75] found in Irish sources, so we may just have a common name here.

Elevated moat: Did this Norman castle have a deep moat, even though it was very high up, as it does in *Gawain*? Yes. Nikolaus Pevsner opens his "Alton" entry in *The Buildings of England: Staffordshire*, with…

> "Alton Castle and the Hospital of St John are in one composition, separated only by the deep ravine-like moat of the medieval castle."

The Ancient Monument Listing (1967) description for the medieval site offers a clear reason why water could be held in the moat. The very wide and deep moat was "rock-cut". Thus, even in if it were 'a dry moat', by midwinter the snow and rain-water would have accumulated in it.

Double-ditch: Did Alton have a *double ditch* moat as described in *Gawain*? Yes, although not in the modern sense of two parallel ditches…

> "Other vernacular poems refer to a *double dich* which seems to mean not two moats but one that required a double throw or cast when digging to clear the spoil."[76]

A *double dich* would then be something of a modest understatement by the poet, for Alton's massive ditch moat. The deep ditch also "drives around" Alton Castle in a curved manner, as can be seen on aerial photography.

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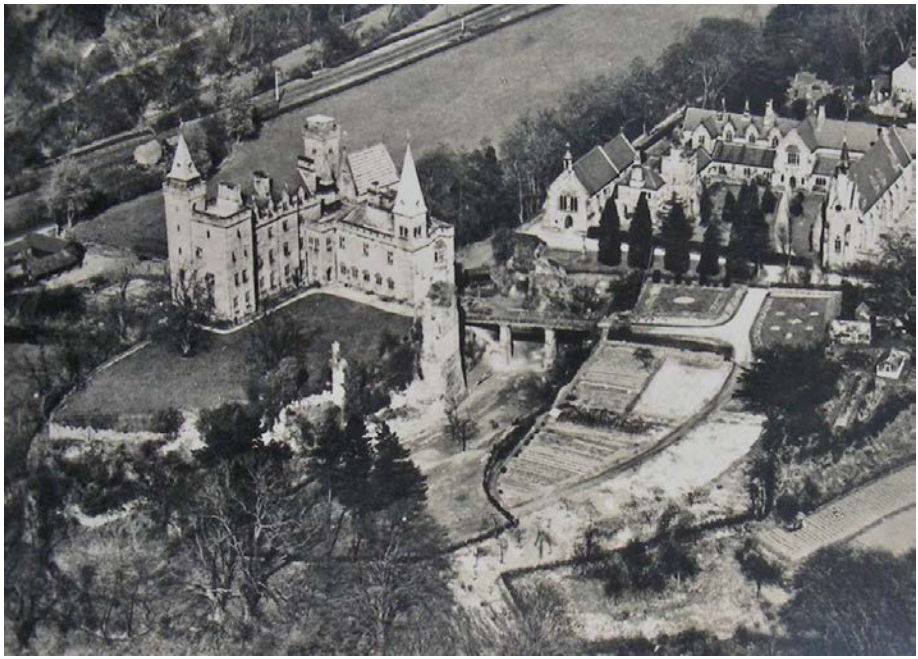
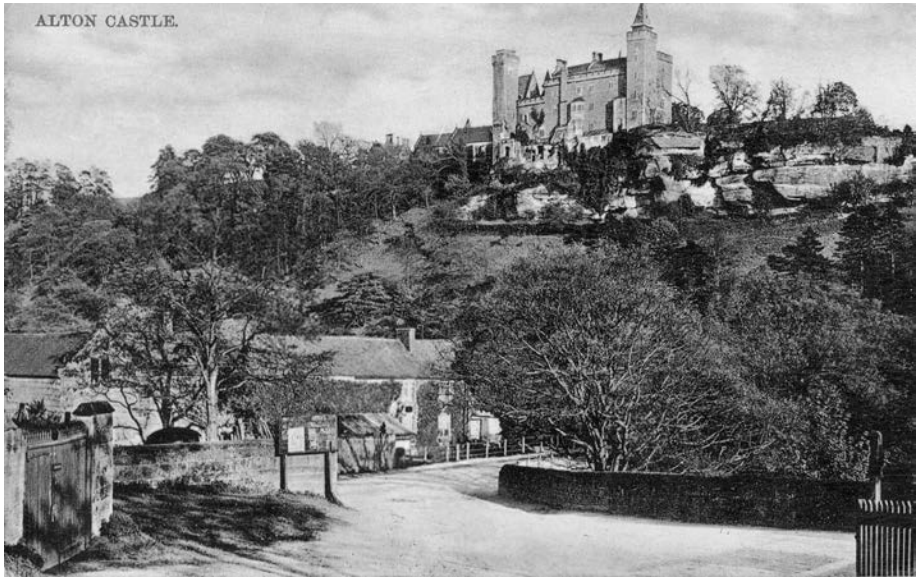
74 "Gollancz thought the doubtful letter was *t* rather than *c* and he appears to be right." — J.R.R. Tolkien, et al, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, 1967, page 128. The Old French name was translated as Bertelak in the 'prose *Merlin'* of c.1450-60.

75 A hideous giant and churlish herdsman, in a *glas* cloak. In Irish and Welsh *glas* can mean both grey and green. Here *-lach* probably indicated his wild tangled thatch of unruly hair. See: *mothlach*, a word in old Irish, meaning "rough, bushy, tangled, scraggy". Also *murlach* from the Isle of Islay; and the Welsh *mwthlach*, with the same meanings.

76 "Castles" by Michael Thompson, IN: Derek Brewer (Ed.) *A Companion to the Gawain-poet*, Boydell & Brewer, 1999, page 125.



Detail from a 1930s postcard view of Alton Castle. Showing on the left of the picture the sweep of the former medieval castle walls, ruined towers, and wide rock-cut moat, in the context of the later Pugin castle.



Pugin's modern Alton Castle, seen c. 1908 from the river-valley below, coming in on the northerly approach road from the settlement of Cotton and the Abbey Wood.

Walls: Pale Ashlar stone walls for the medieval castle? Yes. "Ashlar with diagonal tooling". (Ancient Monument Listing).[77] Possibly from a local quarry near Croxden, which produced pale stone. The local area has a number of good quarries.

Flush walls: "The wall went into the water wonderfully deep". Did Alton's walls fall flush into the moat-water and also into the sides of the castle's rock-base? Yes, as seen on the opposite aerial photograph.

Gatehouse: Was the Alton Castle gatehouse the same? Yes. Two towers, drawbridge, with curtain wall either side, and a porter's lodge. Added early in the 14th century (Ancient Monument Listing).

Saint Peter: When Gawain first reaches the castle gate and asks to enter: "'Yes, by Saint Peter,' replied the porter". The religious symbolism is obvious — St. Peter keeps the gates of heaven, and as such he would appeal to a gatekeeper as a patron saint. Yet consider that... "Alveton Church is dedicated to St. Peter, and was erected in the 12th century, by Bertram de Verdon, who gave it to the monks of Croxden." (*History, Gazetteer, and Directory of Staffordshire*). The modern *Alton and Farley Conservation Area Appraisal* is less certain of the dating of the predecessor… "The Dedication to St. Peter suggests an early parish, and the possibility of a predecessor."[78]

Arrow-loops: Did the castle walls have *mony luflych loupe*? Meaning arrow-firing "loopholes in plenty with locking shutters". Probably, though not many are now visible. The official Ancient Monument Listing of 1967 describes two loops in the surviving walls.

Barbican: A well-made Barbican? Yes. "A short length of wall extends from the front of the western tower and probably terminated the rock-cut ditch to the west and flanked one side of the former approach road."

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[77] "The Castle", Ancient Monument Listing, 1967. List entry Number: 1374687. I would add that Croxden Abbey had a particularly fine sandstone quarry nearby at Hollington, a possible source of the stone. The pale stone there is especially easy to work but hardens on prolonged contact with air.

[78] *Alton and Farley Conservation Area Appraisal*, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council, 2007-8, page 12.

(Ancient Monument Listing). Admittedly, this could have been a later addition, but there is no indication of a later date in the Listing.

Pitched? Was the castle *pyched on a prayere*?[79] Which I take to mean pitched high up on a flat elevated plateau? Thus, was it also built up from relatively flat turfed and rocky ground at the summit of a steep height? Yes.

Wooded park? Was Alton Castle surrounded by trees and meadow and was this generally located within a larger and wilder forest? Almost certainly, but so were most castle and large houses of the time.[80]

Oaks: Were these trees "shining oaks", presumably shining with sunrise? Possibly. There were large oaks in the area, evidenced by later poetry and observations. It was not all bare sheep-destroyed upland moorland, though there may have been significant sheep farming. If Gawain saw the castle at dawn from the road below (a dramatic and 'cinematic' approach) on Christmas Eve, just as the rising sun gets significantly above the horizon around 9.20am, then he is looking SE directly into the rising sun.[81] However, the sun is rising *on the other side* of the castle and its hill. He is still down in wooded gloom by the river, while a nimbus of bare trees around the high castle are suffused from behind by brilliant dawn sunlight. He then rides across the bridge and hooks up and around to reach the castle, and therefore would have approached the gatehouse as if 'out of the rising sun'.

Palisade: A two-mile wooden palisade and ditch around the castle and park, located at the base? Probably. Measuring the likely surround on an O.S. contour-lines map using the Bing Maps measuring tool puts it at 1.85 modern miles. Converting to old Roman miles, then used, gives 2.01 miles.[82]

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[79] The *Gawain*-poet plays with the similarity between *prayer* and *prarye*. The implication of the poem's line is then also that the castle is 'pitched on a prayer' in the modern sense of something precarious being held aloft (in modern terms) only on 'a wing and a prayer'. This fits the precipitous location of Alton Castle rather well.

[80] Deer "... parks are marked by Saxton both at Croxden and at Alton." from Evelyn Philip Shirley, *Some account of English deer parks*, Murray, 1867, page 177. He refers to Christopher Saxton's county atlas published in 1579.

[81] Details from a viewing in the *Stellarium* software, using time and date shift function.

[82] It presumably kept wild animals out, and domestic or stock animals in. It would be unrelated to the later hunting scenes in *Gawain*, which happen elsewhere.

There is also some evidence of its existence in an account of a 1790s antiquarian dig which found evidence from the time before the building of the current modern castle...

> "Alton Castle in Staffordshire [on] a hill of steep ascent, nearly flat on the top, of the extent of fifty of sixty acres, which appears to have been a military station. This last hill has partly been surrounded by a double foss, of which there are evident marks still left, on that part where the ascent is least difficult; and the sword was found in cutting a trench about a hundred yards from the outer ditch"[83] (my emphasis)

Good hunting: Was it within easy reach of excellent upland hunting, by cantering horses? Yes, as evidenced by local names around Leek such as Wildboarclough, and very clearly by various monastic and legal records.[84]

'Paper' turrets: What of the apparently paper turrets Gawain sees…

> So many painted pinnacles sprinkled everywhere,
>
> Congregated in clusters among the crenellations,
>
> That it appeared like a prospect of paper patterning.

Could this have been recognized by the audience for *Gawain* as an allusion to the great coronation procession of Richard II to his investiture, in which William de Furnival of Alton had been present in 1377 and had played a key role? Because this procession had famously featured a magnificent *paper-mache* castle made by the Goldsmiths Company of London…

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83 *Archaeologia, Or, Miscellaneous Tracts, Relating to Antiquity*, 1794, page 431.

84 It is likely that the best local hunting grounds were a 'warm-up' ride from the castle in *Gawain*. The hunts do not have to take place a stone's throw from the castle drawbridge, or within the paling, as some scholars seem to assume. A lord does not want a hunt rampaging around on his own doorstep, and a valuable horse also needs to be 'limbered up' with a ride before a chilly midwinter hunt. There are also the distances to be considered. The North Staffordshire Hunt fox-hunt map of a 17th December 1857 'run' from Barlaston shows that they might then encompass anywhere within a 15 miles radius from the gathering point, having first ridden there. But on that day they had a winding '25-mile total' run that stayed within a drawn radius of 10 miles.

The local summer fishing would also have been excellent, and a little later in time this was the country of Izaak Walton and *The Compleat Angler*.

> "This was the first ever coronation procession. Even a mock castle was erected to the west. In the castle turrets were young girls dressed in white. They showered Richard with gilt scrolls on his approach."[85]

Possibly. But it was apparently the fashion to have wooden or *papier-mâché* embellishments on the walls of castles at that time, and so an alternative explanation is these are put out at Christmas for the hunting parties to see.

Multiple exit routes? The start of Fit III offers the information that the castle has multiple tracks leading away from it: "Guests who had to go gave orders to their grooms, | … | And each rider rode out on his own chosen way". Yes, a guest might easily depart north across the Churnet, and then to Waterhouses and the high Earlsway; or along the saltway track east to Ashbourne and Lincoln; or go directly south through Alton itself.

In the *hautdesert?* Bertilak is called *de hautdesert* (of the 'high desert') and …

> "*Desert* in English is often used for 'wild, mountain or forest land'".[86]

The meaning here seems simple enough. A sparsely-populated upland, with the faint implication that might find monks and hermits. The Cistercians were commanded to settle in such places, for instance, and Alton's neighboring Croxden Abbey was Cistercian. As such I cannot see a pertinent link or parallel with the similarly named Beaudesert Park, a lowland Bishop's residence located further south near Rugeley on Cannock Chase in mid Staffordshire.

As for the castle, it is referred to by scholars as if named 'Hautdesert', and such vagueness at first seems the poet's intention. "Bertilak de Hautdesert" is the name the local people use for the castle owner, as the Green Knight reveals to Gawain at the end of the tale. But any national military name for the castle is of course left poetically unstated. The place and setting is spun from the winter-mists of faery, and needs no mundane name. It is enough for the poet that the use of "Bertilak" along with "Alvish man" will evoke his Alton Castle ('Elvetone' in *Domesday*, then 'Alveton' soon after), and obliquely nod to Bertram de Verdun as his castle's builder and former owner.

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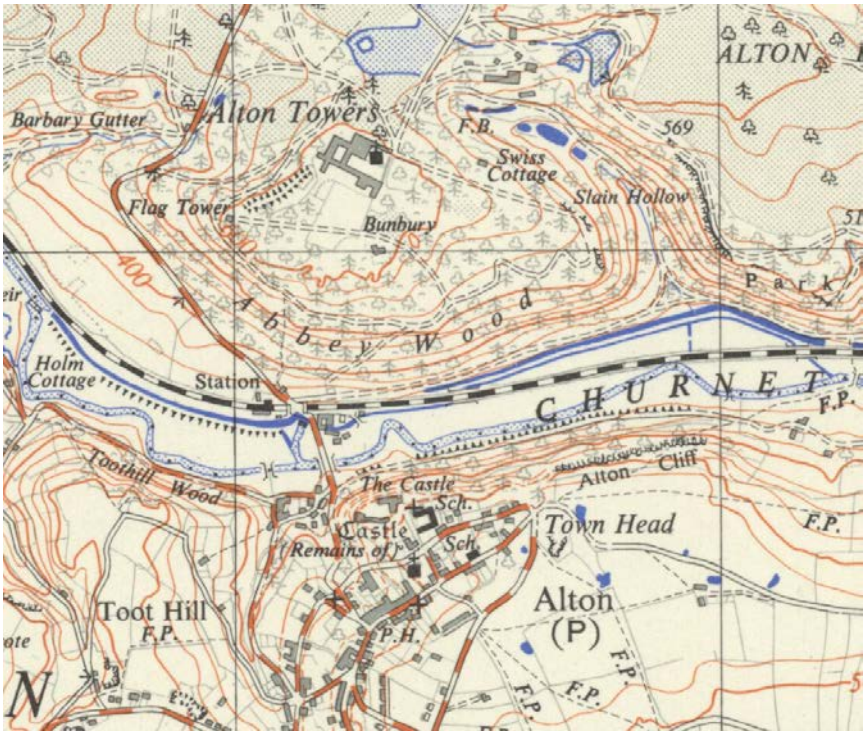
85 "Coronation of Richard II" at kingscoronation.com/coronation-richard-ii/

86 David Horovitz, *A Survey and Analysis of the Place-Names of Staffordshire*, Vol. 2, 2003.



The site of the medieval Alton Castle in relation to the later Alton Towers and Park. The "Flag Tower" seen marked is a later folly, and marks the most well-preserved corner of the very ancient hill-fort earthwork which is located on the opposite side of the valley from Alton Castle.

Of course, it is also possible that Gawain was imagined as approaching Alton Castle from the east. Although that would place the early sunrise behind him and rather awkwardly to his right. But if he did approach from the east that would mean he had first approached the castle across the Weaver Hills but had then gone to their east through Wootton and Ellastone to reach the ford over the Churnet. From the ford there is an ancient ridgeway running for two miles back toward Alton, but going through the south tip of the Alton settlement at a place named on O.S. maps as Gallows Green. This salt-way track is recorded as…

"*Salterfortherigg*, i.e. Salter's-ford-ridge, in 1339."[87]

[87] David Horovitz, *A survey and analysis of the place-names of Staffordshire*, Vol. 2, 2003. Alton owned a salt-works at Middlewich in Cheshire, so possibly this was the route by which the salt packhorses trotted through toward Derby and Lincoln?

I can see no direct connection between the real Gallows Green as site of execution of criminals, and the Green Chapel as the place at which Gawain is set to be beheaded. On the other hand, if the holder of Alton Castle had the right to try and sentence criminals apprehended locally, and if Gallows Green were the site of their execution, then he might have been quite familiar with dealing with visitors whom he must judge and then see taken away by one of his men to a nearby place of execution. The O.S. map also marks a 'Whipping Post' in gothic lettering, near to Great Gate at Croxden Abbey. Presumably less serious criminal cases where whipped there and then the wounds were treated afterwards by the monks.

So much for the castle and its approaches. Why might William de Furnival wish to have his castle be enshrined in such a poem?

i) to evoke the long history of the place, going back in post-Conquest documentation to the Saxon holder, and thus potentially into what was then understood as a real 'Arthurian' past after the withdrawal of Rome.

ii) because it allowed him to poetically play on the 'elvish' name of the place, and the castle's dramatic rocky perch;

iii) because the original builder of one's own castle might be thought a suitable 'character' to evoke by using a similar name in a Christmas tale.

iv) because he wished to entertain guests who might stay at his castle at Christmas, or while visiting at nearby Tutbury;

v) simply because he knew the place and the surrounding lands well, and wished to distill in fine poetry the places and situations of his own youth, via a kind of fairy story. By some point in the 1370s the man I document in the next chapter knew he would have no son, and that he was the last of his line. His castle would pass to others, and soon. If he did not record certain matters and his own way-of-life in a memorable form, then no-one else would.

Boar hunting encounter on a wooded rise, tower glimpsed in distance.

Engraved by Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472–1553). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Public Domain.

4. Who was William de Furnival, of Alton castle?

The holder and resident of Alton in the period of *Gawain*'s likely writing was Sir William de Furnival, 4th Baron Furnivall (born Alton Castle, 23rd August 1326, d. 1383).

In 1319, Alton Castle and the patronage of the adjacent Croxden Abbey passed from the defunct de Verdun family to the somewhat more illustrious de Furnival family. However William's father, Thomas de Furnival, appears to have been far from illustrious. A tactless gauche man, he had married without the King's license and was heavily fined. On arrival in the wilds at Alton he quickly alienated the members of neighboring Croxden Abbey by demands for free services (when he should have been making offers of support) and even suggestions that the convent there should be disbanded. The monks and clerics barricaded themselves into the Abbey, and the resultant bitter breach with the new family at the Castle was only repaired on the birth of Thomas's sons from 1321 onward.[88]

These sons were a first-born Thomas, then William and his younger brother Nicholas, all born at Alton. Neither of the latter were expected to inherit the title, and were likely tutored when quite young at nearby Croxden Abbey and/or Swythamley Grange rather than sent far away. Some scholars note Cistercian links in *Gawain*, and Croxden was Cistercian…

> "the number and density of resonances and the consistent light they shed on the *sentence* of *Sir Gawain* make the Cistercian writings if not a source at least a striking context for thinking about *Sir Gawain*"[89]

William's father Thomas died in 1332, so it is likely the boy had few memories of his father in later life. William's mother died in 1334, when he

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88 Muller and Stober, *Self-representation of Medieval Religious Communities: The British Isles in Context*, Lit Verlag, 2010, page 382.

89 For the connections of the Cistercians with *Gawain*, see: J.S. Russell, "*Sir Gawain* and the White Monks", *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures*, 2013.

was eight years old. William had also had an elder sister, Margaret (b. 1320), eldest child of the family. She died in October 1339, aged 19.

Thus William entered his teens in 1340 with paternal and maternal grandparents dead, his parents dead, and his elder sister dead. William would not become the Baron, as that title had gone to his elder brother Thomas (b. 1321, nicknamed 'The Hasty')[90] in 1332. For William, there is then a 26 year gap from 1340 to 1366. What he did then is unknown. Nevertheless, the terrain suggests he learned much of hunting, had he stayed in or near to Alton from age 13 into his early 20s. Any hunting life would then have been rudely interrupted by the first wave of the Black Death plague which hit England in 1349, when he was aged about 23. In the shadow of the plague came the alliterative revival in Midlands poetry (c. 1350—).

The second great plague, especially severe around Croxden and Alton, was in 1361 when he was around 35 year old. The Croxden Abbey *Chronicle* recorded that all young children in the district had died. William was probably thankfully then that he had never married and sired a family. In the shadow of this plague came the first version of *Piers Plowman* in 1362.

In 1366 his older 'Hasty' brother unexpectedly died, and William inherited the title. He was thus summoned to Parliament 20th January 1366, where he was likely soon told by his elders that he would command more respect if he was married with sons and had some military experience. At age 39 in 1366, William married the 22 year old Thomasine Dagworth. Early the next year he sought his military expertise. Cracroft's *Peerage* states he…

> "had licence to go to Prussia 1367 [taking 5 men, and £200 in funds]"

Presumably the £200 was his own.[91] He was to undertake a tour of duty with the Knights of the Teutonic Order (1230-1528), in their long-running Northern Crusade against the pagan child-sacrificing Slavs in Lithuania.[92]

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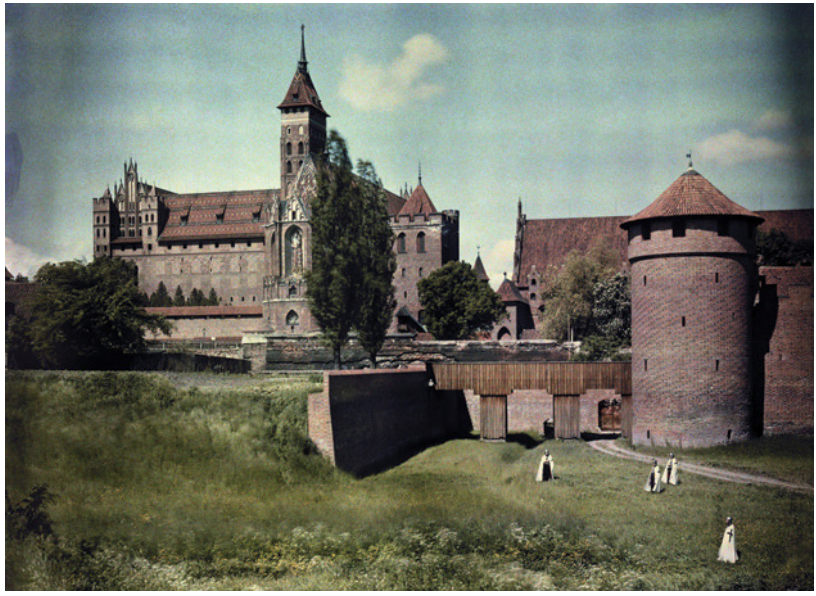
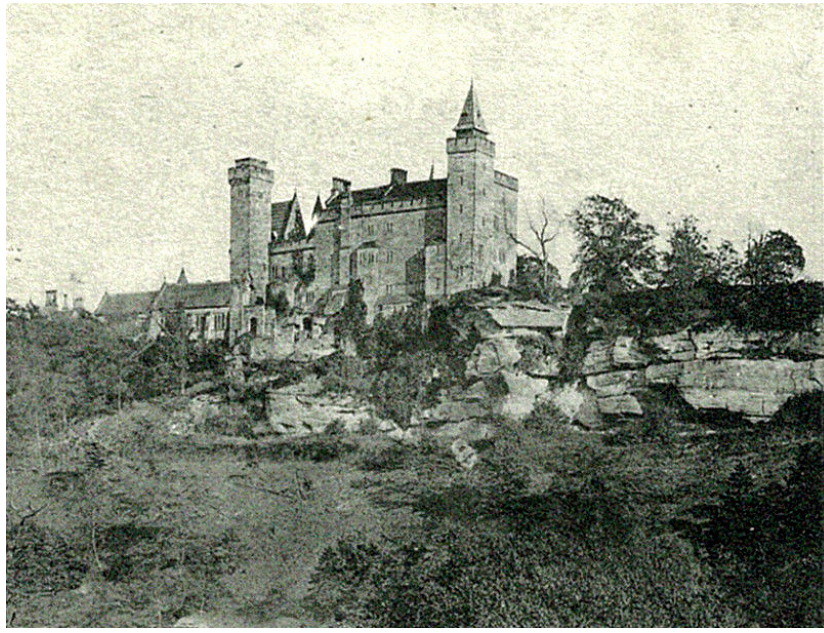
[90] The *Gawain*-poet later writes a poem on the virtues of *Patience*.

[91] The cost of such an overseas venture was probably not a problem. The family was no longer spending much, if anything, on Croxden Abbey. Note also that in 1350 his older brother, from whom he inherited, had had £166 from the King for wood needed to repair Windsor Castle.





Top: Teutonic Order castle, of the sort that William would have seen in Prussia circa 1376. Bottom: Alton Castle, Pugin's recreation (1847-) incorporating parts of the medieval castle. Quite why the current Alton Castle was in done this style is apparently unknown, but one must suspect the influence of the researches of Dr. Rock, then the priest of St. Peter's, Alton. Dr. Rock was the world's foremost scholar of religious buildings, and Pugin's assistant.

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[92] On the pagan practices see: Heiki Valk, "Pühast Võhandust", *Ajalooline Ajakirim,* No. 1/2, 2015. More generally see BBC Radio 4 *In Our Time*: 'Baltic Crusades' episode.

Guard (2016) clearly shows that that fighting in the wild jungle-like border country could be fierce, sometimes holding stockades at remote places, and that as a consequence crusaders bonded tightly. In addition to William…

> "The northern contingent included, from Yorkshire: John Dautre, John Goddard, Thomas Fitzhenry, William Dalleson; from Lancashire: Robert Urswyck, Sir William Scrope of Bolton." [From the Midlands, William Beauchamp, son of Thomas, Earl of Warwick, also applied for license to fight in the crusade in Prussia in 1367. Another footnote adds further names, the first three being adventurers who were put on a tight leash:] From Yorkshire: Richard Mauleverer, Thomas Southeworth, Thomas Boynton. From Lincolnshire: John Multon, Richard Welby, Antony Lucy. From Staffordshire/Derbyshire: William Furnival." [93]

The Order did not have its own Navy, and the King was concerned about sword-slinging young crusaders sparking bad relations with the French as they passed through, so William might have journeyed through Holland or Copenhagen. On arrival in Prussia he would undoubtedly have seen the many impressive castles of the Teutonic Order (see previous page), which controlled Prussia with extreme efficiency and a strong eye for the lucrative fur trade. In order to understand his enemy on the wild Lithuanian frontier, William possibly came into contact with some of the most potent pagan 'river-man' and 'lake-deity' beliefs then available in Europe. This was no half-forgotten folk-dance and gentle waving of mistletoe, but regular ritual execution of child sacrifices to placate the 'spirits of lakes'. There were also animistic traditions around 'hunting in sacred woods' and belief in a sun deity, both possibly relevant to *Gawain*. There may have been pentagrams in the 14th century, since some are found on relics from the Crusade period in the region before 1383... "Pentagram-signs are quite rarely found on round silver pendants, which should probably be interpreted as Christian symbolism".[94] Ancestor worship was another major factor, along with

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[93] Timothy Guard, *Chivalry, Kingship and Crusade: The English Experience in the Fourteenth Century*, Boydell, 2016, page 80, page 134.

[94] Tonno Jonuks, Tuuli Kurisoo, "To be or not to be... a Christian: some new perspectives on understanding the Christianisation of Estonia", *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, 55.

buried-alive horses as a means to convey one's spirit to the ancestors. The structures of belief about rivers and lakes survived strongly in the border areas of Lithuania/ Estonia to be recorded as late as the 1700s.[95] In central Europe William might also have seen living examples of the 'Green Man'-like folk costumes (see Appendix 2). Especially if he travelled back across central Europe around May, in order to reach England before midsummer. I assume that William had returned to England from Prussia by midsummer 1368, since that was when others in his party were royally commanded to return. His only known child was a daughter, Joan (b. 1368 - d. 1413) and given the timing and delays of his journey to Prussia, he may have missed her birth. Joan would be his only child.

The Prussia journey and duty took place about a year after William was summoned to Parliament, in which he later went on to serve about 15 years. A Parliament was then a temporary gathering. For instance in 1366 it took eight days in early May, not counting travel-time to reach it, but the times of year were not fixed. As such, we cannot imagine that William had access there to the sort of library that we might today associate with a modern fixed Parliament. In his subsequent time serving in the Parliaments it seems reasonable to assume that William associated with his directly neighboring members of Parliament in Cheshire, Staffordshire, Derbyshire, and probably also Lincolnshire and Nottingham, for their mutual regional benefit.

At Alton, William was also close to Tutbury Castle which was then annually an open hive of all the region's best minstrels and musicians. I will explore this aspect of his situation in depth in the next chapter.

Sometime in the mid 1370s William recalled that there was a family right to assist the future King Richard II at his Coronation ceremony. This was a great honour. Cracroft's *Peerage* states that he…

> "proved his right to present the glove [to the new King] at the Coronation of King Richard II 1377; knighted 1377".

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[95] I am well aware of the deep confabulation and wholesale national re-invention undertaken by later folklorists and nationalist antiquarians in Eastern Europe. I refer to good evidence which dates from a time before their activities began.

The *Encyclopedia Britannica* offers the detail on the glove…

> "the grand *serjeanty* of finding for the king a [red][96] glove for his right hand on coronation day, and supporting his right arm as long as he holds the sceptre. The right to perform this "honourable service" [was had by the earlier de Verdun family of Alton, and thus] William Lord Furnival performed the ceremony at the coronation of Richard II." With "the bestowal of a glove [symbolising] the concession of the right to found a town or to establish markets, mints and the like."[97]

For this special Coronation service to the new King, William was made a knight.[98] There has been some scholarly speculation that *Sir Gawain* could have been written as part of the process of a man proving himself fit to be a knight. If that was the case, then Sir William becomes a knight at exactly the right time to be 'a good fit' with this theory.

One then also wonders if the *Gawain* poem could have been written in the summer of 1377 [99] in anticipation of the need for the new Knight to provide

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[96] According to Walsingham's eye-witness account from memory, the glove was red. Note that Gawain's pentangle shield is red with a gold pentangle.

[97] Entry for "Glove", *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1911. Richard II also lost a shoe when being carried shoulder high immediately after the Coronation, seemingly by accident - but it would have been seen to connect him mythically with Jason, leader of the Argonauts. "Jason was the son of the lawful king, but his uncle Pelias had usurped the throne. An oracle had warned Pelias that he should 'Beware of a stranger who wears a single sandal.' This would be the person who would surpass him as king. Jason had never met his Uncle Pelias and was travelling to meet him for the first time. As Jason crossed a raging stream, he lost one of his sandals in the current. Thus, one day, Pelias met this one-shoed stranger." — simple story summary from *Roadmap to 8th Grade Reading*, Princeton Review, 2002. Other more mythic versions add that the shoe or sandal was lost when Jason was taking the goddess Hera across a river on his back, disguised as an old lady. Hera was the beautiful goddess most closely associated with marriage. Though possibly propaganda, it appears that the Commoners under Richard II were not learned enough to see the Jason connection — as it was said that many used the loss of the shoe as a petty excuse to revile him.

[98] Either a few days later, or at "Kennington on Tuesday before the coronation", or actually during the Coronation itself. Sources differ.

[99] For a current discussion of the dating, and a useful outline account of previous attempts at dating, see: Cooke and Boulton, "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A poem for Henry of Grosmont?", *Medium Aevum*, Vol. 68, No. 1, 1999.

I also note that in line 1377 of *Gawain*, the master "Told over the tally" (*tails/tales*) — this occurring at a line number which bears an interesting similarity to the date at which

a suitably refined but locally-flavoured entertainment for the King and his young friends if they were to visit his castle. Perhaps as part of a provincial Christmas 1377-78 royal visit to Staffordshire and Cheshire — a visitation which it seems never materialized.[100] This seems very likely to me, and elsewhere I present some items of corroborating evidence for a 1377 date.

It is also assumed by scholars that the *Gawain*-poet was the author of *The Pearl* about an infant girl, and that he likely had a young daughter who died as an infant. Admittedly William's daughter Joan did not die young. Indeed, at age eight or nine, she was likely in London to see the Coronation of 1377 with her father. But in 1379 Joan was married at Alton, about age 10, to a youth of perhaps 14 or 15. Her young husband was from a powerful and well connected family, and by 1406 he had become the Lord High Treasurer of England. Could this early marriage have been a sort of 'death' of Joan to her father, with his Joan being taken away to live with others? A traumatic event which might provoke the patronage of a poem such as *The Pearl?*

I should explain to readers that the Latin form of 'pearl' is *margarita*, the Biblical "pearl of great price", and this leads some *Pearl* scholars to assume that the poem was written in memory of a Margaret. One might also note that St. Margaret had been the patron saint of childbirth since the 12th century, with an especially strong cult in northern France where she clearly retained earlier pagan attributes of such a deity. But those in search of a 'Margaret' as the model for *The Pearl* could also consider that this was the name of his William's older sister, who died when he was about 11 years old. Could *The Pearl* have then been a composite poem of circa 1379, spurred by

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I think the poem was likely composed. Is this a deliberate, if subtle and perhaps even punning, encoding of the date of composition of the *tale*?

100 So far as I can tell, Richard II never made a tour of Staffordshire when young. For an excellent explication of the lessons that such youths might learn from Sir *Gawain*, in the context of the birth of Christ in the less than perfect form of a man, see: Jean Louise Carriere, "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight as a Christmas Poem", *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, Vol. 1 No. 1, 1970. He also usefully establishes that green and red and gold were then the traditional colours of Christmas celebration and that these are known from the time of "the feast at Charlemagne's court with its red roof painter with green gules." This may also give the origin of the Green Knight's holly bough, a point I discuss in Chapter 5.

the immediate loss of his only child Joan to a distant marriage — but also (with Christian charity) a poem framed for a local audience of all those who had lost children in the plague of 1361? Then also tinged with the memory of the Margaret who had been his long-lost elder sister?

From his marriage William had no other children than Joan, and the male line ended with his death in 1383. He died at age 56 at Farnham Royal Manor, Buckinghamshire, an estate near Windsor which he had been gifted for his service at the King's Coronation.

The 4th Baron Furnival would thus fulfill key criteria for the *Gawain*-poet:

1) William was born and located in the right part of the northern West Midlands for the dialect, and he would have become a knight at the exactly the right point in time.

2) His castle at Alton fits that of *Gawain* very neatly in location and style, as does the approach to it.

3) As a young man he was well placed to take advantage of local opportunities in hunting and then the emerging regional local poetic culture, had he wished to. A major annual minstrel court lay just 12 miles away.

4) He had seen military service, brief but possibly bloody. He had presumably seen full-blooded paganism first-hand on the Prussia/Lithuania border, as well as the state-of-the-art peak-perched Crusader castles.

5) He had been present at the Coronation of Richard II, had played a key role in the ceremony, and knew about kingly feasting and (as I reveal in a coming chapter) the tradition of 'hall invasion' by the Champion Knight.

6) He was a member of Parliament.

7) He had travelled and knew ships (to the Baltic, and likely Ireland).

8) The family had connections by marriage and estate into ancient indigenous Irish nobility, albeit several generations back. Presumably they still had extensive estates there. Some may see in the latter both the connection with Celtic precursor tales (which some scholars find in *Gawain*), and a close personal knowledge of the well-worn route from Ireland / North Wales / Chester to his home at Alton.

The only lacks that I can see are: i) actual proof of his level of education and poetic interest; and ii) the infant daughter who is presumed to have inspired *The Pearl*, though there are two other possible similar candidates in the family — one of whom was a Margaret.

Finally I should note that William's family of de Furnival was traditionally associated with Sheffield and that he also held the lodge at Worksop ('Wyrksoppe Park' or 'Parke of Worksoppe'). This was in Nottinghamshire, 40 miles east of Alton. The family appear to have periodically migrated between Alton and Worksop, probably on a seasonal basis, as seems to have been the wont of the great families. Stinky air-pollution from winter fires in towns may have been a factor — for instance, in 1257 Queen Eleanor had protested that Nottingham was too smoky and sulfurous due to sea-coal burning and therefore uninhabitable for her and her court. Eleanor decamped for the cleaner air at Tutbury Castle, just south of Alton Castle.

By 1636 this 'Wyrksoppe Park' was Worksop Manor, with a hunting park of 2,300 acres tended by foresters[101] and was later rebuilt several times.

But a feature remained there from the times of William de Furnival. About a mile away from this Park is the liminal point at which the three counties of Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Yorkshire meet. This was then marked by an immense "Shireoak" tree — which by 1776 was of such enormous size it shaded 235 horses in summer.[102] Even in the 1370s the tree must have been

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101 Royal Visit, 1603: "At Worksop Park appeared a number of huntsmen, clad in Lincoln green, whose chief, "with a woodman's speech, did welcome him, offering His Majesty to show him some game, which he gladly consented to see, and, with a traine set, he hunted a good space, very much delighted."

102 Evelyn, *Sylva.* John Holland leaves us his poignant evocation of the lodge, in his *The History, Antiquities, and Description of the Town and Parish of Worksop* (1826), although by then the adjacent giant oak had failed:

"Worksop Lodge […] stands, not in the park, but near Shireoak [...] On the 10th January, 1825, by the morning star-light of a clear, still, and beautiful day, as ever appeared […] I entered the fields, and after rambling for about a quarter of an hour, by paths apparently but little frequented, I came to the Lodge, which, although said to be curtailed of two stories of its original elevation, is a tall, elderly-looking building, in the form of a truncated or couped cross. Many of the large windows, which might still be traced by their stone transoms in the walls, were built up, and the whole had an air of solitude ... I left it as the last star was disappearing in the progress of the dawn, and began to retrace my way homeward. The picture appeared most delightful ... in the

quite impressive, perhaps 400 years old and thus pre-Conquest. If William was the patron of the *Gawain*-poet,[103] then the poetic mention of a forest of *hundreds* of such enormous ancient oaks might have resonated with members of the poem's audience who had visited him at Wyrksoppe.

I must leave it to the experts in medieval dialect to determine if the Sheffield district might then be present in the language of *Gawain*, and if this could explain some of the Norse elements which still niggle at the dialect specialists even after the recent major ERDF project on the topic. One might also consider the influence of the Yorkshiremen with whom William served on Crusade in Prussia, and likely bonded closely with. At that time there were even a great many Nordic crusader knights engaged in the Baltic Crusades.

There is scant further evidence on William, and certainly no evidence of his writing poetry, and so it is also quite plausible that he was only the *Gawain*-poet's guiding patron — rather than the poet himself.

I should note that there is nothing at all to be found on William's slightly younger brother Nicholas (b. 6th Jan 1328 at Alton,[104] the third son), who presumably lived a peaceful — if unmarried — life at Alton. Or, more probably, among the cloisters and gardens at the nearby Croxden Abbey. I should stress, however, that there is no internal evidence that *Gawain* was written by a Cistercian monk, or for some special occasional at an abbey such as a visitation or festival. There are also many good internal reasons — sex, hunting, the supernatural, etc — why a monk or cleric is an unlikely author.

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foreground lay the fields, diversified in shape, and covered with 'the hoar-frost like ashes'; a little beyond, Mr. Durham's mill, with its extensive dam, and the snow-white swans proudly sailing thereon; on the right, the finely wooded high ground about the Manor, enclosed the scene; while in the mid-distance, the town of Worksop appeared to slumber in the semi-obscurity of the exhaling mist, and the blue smoke-wreaths that were floating lightly and fancifully above the buildings."

[103] Or perhaps even collaborator or reviser, as it seems the *Gawain*-poet was not a professional poet or a Marches bard of some sort? Modern university medievalists may splutter at my use of the word "bard". But consider that Bardic Welsh poetry compares the sun moving across a king's ancient **green** armour before battle, to the beauty of river-grass floating in the river's current in sunlight. Also that Alton was relatively near to the Welsh Marches, and that "by the late fourteenth century a group calling themselves minstrels held a court" at the Tutbury bull-running.

[104] Croxden Abbey, *Chronicle*.

RINGING THE CHAINS.
From a Drawing by MISS EMILY CAMPBELL HILL.

Typical religious garb.

In Congleton (near the Dane, on the Cheshire/Staffordshire border) at midnight on each 12th August, the young "acolytes" of the church would be sent around the town wearing heavy leather sashes or 'chains', each loaded with large bells, as seen above. The loud ringing — probably not very tuneful — of these would announce to the town the arrival of the 'wake', an August holiday fair period called St. Peter's Wake. The tradition was abolished circa the 1860s.

One of a series of paintings made of Tutbury by James Lawson Stewart (1829-1911). "The main gateway, Tutbury Castle".

Ruined walls and towers of Tutbury castle, seen encircling the hill. Postcard possibly 1930s.

5. The annual regional Minstrel Court at Tutbury.

There was once a large annual minstrel court at Tutbury in Staffordshire, which is today between Uttoxeter and Burton-on-Trent. At Tutbury Castle to be specific, located just 12 miles SE of Alton Castle. Held in the dry weather of August, the Court would have been easily accessible to William de Furnival, who was just a short ride away at Alton Castle. As such, the dates and scope of the event require investigation. This is especially so because the poet himself declares that the *Gawain* poem is told "as I heard in town", [105] and the poet thus evokes his access to a range of oral stock themes and stories that only occasionally surfaced in the more formal and rarified literary tradition.

Said to have been founded in 866,[106] The *Topographical History of Staffordshire* has it that Tutbury Castle: "came into the possession of John of Gaunt, who re-built it of hewn freestone, upon the ancient site" some time before 1370[107] and then used it to house his Spanish wife Constance from 1372. Under Constance (b. 1354, arrived in England in grand style in 1372, d. 1394), the Minstrel's Court at Tutbury was either revived or established or enlarged. The translated wording of the Court charter of August 1381 is given by Oswald Mosley in his *History of the Castle, Priory and Town of Tutbury* (1832) and appears to suggest that Constance took over the patronage of a much older annual gathering…

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105 The location of the "town" is not stated, and the phrase may even be formulaic. He also reassures his audience that this is a tale that has stood the test of time, and is thus likely to be found entertaining.

106 It was "overlooking the strategic Dove routeway, [and] was selected by the Mercian King, Ethelred (866-71), as one of his principal seats" from: P.H. Nicholls, "On the evolution of a forest landscape", *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 1972.

107 *A History of the County of Stafford* (Victoria County History) is uncertain on the matter and can only suggest 'before 1370'. A lot depends on if John of Gaunt held court here before he later made it the home for his Spanish wife, but the scholarly ground has been so heavily ploughed and re-ploughed (and confused by antiquarians) that I do not have the time needed to go into determining the original facts of ownership and residency.

> "the King of the Minstrels, [elected by his peers] in our Honor of Tutbury, [is obliged] to apprehend and arrest all the minstrels in our said Honor and Franchises, that refuse to do the service and attendance which appertains to them to do from ancient times at Tutbury aforesaid, yearly on the days of the Assumption of our Lady, giving and granting to the said King of the Minstrels, for the time being, full power and commandment to make them reasonably to justify, and to constrain them to perform, their services and attendance, in manner as belongeth to them, and has been here used, and of ancient times accustomed."

The statement "from ancient times" may be formulaic, but it may also suggest that the gathering still existed. Or had once existed as evidenced by some ancient documentation, at Tutbury. The previous relevant holders of the castle appear to have been: Thomas, the second Earl of Lancaster (d. 1322) who was resident and certainly a patron of the arts and local crafts; then Henry, third Earl of Lancaster; then from 1345 his son Henry of Grosmont.

There may have been a number of reasons for the establishment of such a Minstrel's Court under informal patronage after 1372:

i) Constance was from Castile in Spain, daughter of a King, and used to a higher level of courtly culture than that available in provincial England. She appears to have wanted to make her own court, away from the bustle and intrigues of the large power centres. We know she had singers from her own country at Tutbury, and it seems that in formally chartering the Court she also aspired to raise the 'tone' of the surrounding countryside;

ii) the need to relieve the local gloom and despair after the third Black Death plague of 1379-80, and perhaps a perceived need (within a 'god was punishing us with the plague' mindset) to make minstrelsy more Christian in tone and less bawdy than before;

iii) perhaps for a political reason, namely to prevent certain surly local minstrels from needing to travel into Wales to Welsh bardic gatherings.[108]

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[108] There is a Green Knight variant story from Welsh gypsies in: Francis Groome, *Gypsy Folk Tales*, Hurst & Blackett, 1899, pages 254-255. A miller is challenged to find the castle of the Green Man of Noman's Land in a year and a day, or he must be beheaded.

From c. 1345 the Welsh had been more revolting and sullen than usual, and their resident overlords suspected a Welsh spy under every bed and that the Welsh might rise and march an army of rebels into England at any moment. The Welsh threat, and the threat of their linking up with an army coming down the drove roads from Scotland, was probably why Stafford Castle was rebuilt from 1347. The imminence of the threat may have abated by the 1370s, but was still there — "before 1400 conditions in Wales were ripe for rebellion" (*The Oxford Companion to British History*);

iv) the three waves of the Black Death plague must have caused a sharp decline in available audiences, it having especially affected the young. Smaller paying audiences meant there was an increase in disputes and rivalries among minstrels. Plague may also have sent survivors out to earn their living as minstrels, leading to increased animosity and fines as 'vagabonds'. In an ordered society these would require arbitration to prevent disputes and unfair fines from getting out of hand;

v) what is now called "the alliterative revival" in the Midlands, and the renewed interest in the making of local dialect poetry that had emerged from c. 1350 onwards.

So far as I can tell from my reading for this book, general 'castle use' appears to have been seasonal in the 14th century, with full occupation especially likely during the Christmas season. But judging by a brief look at relevant biographies, after the year 1387 Tutbury Castle became the full-time home to Gaunt's wife Constance, Duchess of Lancaster, winter and summer alike. I am told that this was a political marriage and that Constance eventually disassociated herself from Gaunt and from the Lancastrians. But even after she had outlived her political usefulness to Gaunt she was allowed to live on in comfort and with a court at Tutbury. By all accounts she was someone who not only patronised musicians, but also made some study of the science of music. As political tensions eased she might have drawn musicians not only from the Midlands but also reputable bards from Wales (the early *Gawain* scholar Gollancz once suggested performances of it in North Wales, interestingly). The later *Gawain* scholar R.W.V. Elliot has suggested that…

"Perhaps the [*Gawain*] poem was to receive its first performance by the minstrels retained at Tutbury Castle"[109]

Tutbury Castle, ruins of the main residential apartment.

109 R.W.V. Elliott, "Sir Gawain and the wallabies: a mystery in seven scenes", IN: *Our Medieval Heritage: Essays in honour of John Tillotson for his 60th birthday*, Merton Priory Press, 2002, page 158.

There is an eye-witness account of the Minstrel's Court, from the 1680s. Mosley's *History of the Castle, Priory and Town of Tutbury* (1832) is unreliable, but not so when quoting older documents. He usefully gives an extract from Dr. Plot's *The Natural History of Stafford-shire* (1686) and without the long-s typography. Plot was an eye-witness to the Court at Tutbury…

> "All the minstrels within the honor, came early on that day [noted elsewhere: the court was on 'the morrow after the Assumption', meaning the 16th August] to the house of the bailiff of the manor of Tutbury, and

from thence to the parish church in procession ; the king of the minstrels for the year past, walking between the steward and bailiff of the manor, attended by the four stewards of the king of the minstrels, each with a white wand in their hands, and the rest of the company following in ranks of two and two together, with the music playing before them.

After [the church] service was ended, they proceeded in the same order from the church to the castle hall, where the said steward and bailiff took their seats, placing the king of the minstrels between them, whose duty it is to cause every minstrel dwelling within the honour, who makes default, to be presented and amerced [i.e. a fine would be ordered if the minstrel was found to be absent]. The court of the minstrels is then opened in the usual way, and proclamation made, that every minstrel dwelling within the honour of Tutbury, in any of the counties of Stafford, Derby, Nottingham, Leicester, or Warwick, should draw near, and give his attendance; and that if any man would be assigned of suit or plea [i.e. have a grievance], he should come in and be heard.

Then all the musicians being called over by a court roll, two juries are impanelled, one for Staffordshire, and one for the other counties, whose names being delivered in to the steward, and called over, and appearing to be full juries, the foremen of each is sworn, and then the rest of them in the manner usual in other courts. The steward then proceeds to charge them, first commending to their consideration the antiquity and excellence of all music, both on wind and stringed instruments; and the effect it has upon the passions, proving the same by various examples; how the use of it has always been allowed in praising and glorifying God; and skill in it esteemed so highly, that it has always been ranked amongst the liberal arts, and admired in all civilized states ; exhorting them, upon this account, to be very careful to make choice of such men to be officers amongst them as fear God, are of good life and conversation, and have knowledge and skill in the practice of their art.

When the charge is ended, the jurors proceed to the election of the officers for the next year, the king being chosen out of the four stewards, two of them out of Staffordshire, and two out of Derbyshire, three being chosen by the jurors, and the fourth by him who keeps the court, and the deputy steward, or clerk.

> The jurors then depart out of the court; and the steward with his assistants, and the king of the minstrels, in the meantime partake of a banquet, during which the other musicians play upon their several instruments; but as soon as the jurors return, they present, in the first place, the new king whom they have chosen, upon which the old king, rising from his seat, delivers to him his wand of office, and then drinks a cup of wine to his health and prosperity; in like manner the old stewards salute the new, and resign their offices to their successors.
>
> The election being thus concluded, the court rises, and all repair to another large room within the castle, where a plentiful dinner is prepared for them; after which the minstrels went anciently to the priory gate, but after the dissolution [of the monasteries], to a barn near the town, in expectation of the bull being turned loose for them. […]
>
> If the bull escapes, he remains the property of the person who gave it; but if any of the minstrels can take and lay hold of him [without use of any weapons or hooks], so as to cut off a small portion of hair, and bring the same to the market-cross, in proof of their having taken him, the bull is [theirs to be cooked and eaten, or given away].

Mosley's *History of the Castle, Priory and Town of Tutbury*, also notes that…

> "A separate chair was placed for him [the annual elected King of the Minstrels?] at the upper end of the hall [at Tutbury?], which he never failed to occupy upon all public occasions; from hence he excited the feelings of his guests by the rehearsal of some mysterious legend, the warlike exploits of their ancestors, or some pathetic ['tragic, sad'] ballad of general interest."

The threat of arrest by the King of the Minstrels, together with the opportunity to air one's pent-up grievance in public, surely brought every reputable minstrel to the annual court.[110] Possibly, in the heyday of the

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[110] The later history of the Court is not relevant to *Gawain*-poet, but may interest some readers. Mosley's *History of the Castle, Priory and Town of Tutbury* (1832) also gives another document, from a little before Dr. Plot's time. By the time of King Charles the First it was obviously felt that there was need for better governance of the Court and an order (c. 1630) was issued "for the better ordering and governing" of the Court. A system of seven year apprenticeship was also then in force locally…

> "that no person shall use or exercise the art and science of music within the said counties as a common musician or minstrel for benefit and gains, except he have served and been brought up in the same art and science by the space of seven years, and be allowed and admitted so to do at the said court by the

Court, local lords sent men to discover those they might commission as poets, or compose new-minted ballads written in their local Staffordshire and Derbyshire dialect.

There are two further factors relating to the Court and Tutbury, both of which touch directly on *Gawain* and provide important new fragments of local evidence for the *Gawain* story:

i. The Tutbury tradition of a Christmas kiss:

Firstly, James Somerville transcribes an ancient record of the service at Tutbury of Sir Philip de Somerville. It parallels several key aspects of *Gawain,* both the Christmas date and the form of 'the kiss'.

> jury thereof and by the consent of the steward of the said court for the time being, on pain of forfeiting for every month that he shall so offend, three shillings and fourpence. And that no such musician or minstrel, shall take into his service, to teach and instruct any one in the said art and science, for any shorter time than for the space of seven years, under the pain of forfeiting for every such offence forty shillings. And that all the musicians and minstrels above mentioned shall appear yearly at the court called The Minstrels Court, on pain of forfeiting for every default according to old custom three shillings and fourpence."

The Court appears to have been formally abolished by the Duke of Devonshire in 1778, who deemed it too unruly. At least, he issued an order to stop it at Tutbury. But the bull-running seems to have continued in the district into the early 1800s, as was vividly recalled at Uttoxeter in Mary Howitt's *My own Story, or the Autobiography of a Child* (1845). If there were no minstrels, there would likely have been no bull-running (since a bull was a costly animal). Thus it seems likely that the summer minstrel gathering and bull-running had simply been transferred (c. 1779) by the locals from Tutbury to Uttoxeter, and the Duke's patronage was dispensed with and the cost of 'a feast and bull' found from some other source. One would then expect such an event to attract at least some singers and entertainers, but if they were still present in large numbers as late as the early 1800s at Uttoxeter must be debatable.

Yet, having divested the unruly bull-running to Uttoxeter, it may be that the later lords of Tutbury quietly re-established the tradition of the Court alone, and with a better class of bard and piper. Because Dugdale remarked in 1819 (*The New British Traveller*, Vol 4) that… "An annual court, called the Minstrel's, continues to be held at the steward's house" at Tutbury.

One can note that the Tutbury Court tradition continues today with the annual Acoustic Festival of Britain, which takes place on Uttoxeter Racecourse each summer.

> "… the said Sir Philip [de Somerville, inherited the title 1337, d. 1355] holds of his lord the Earle, the manour of Brideshall, by these services, that such tyme his said lord holdeth his Christmasse at Tutbury, upon Christmasse even [Christmas Eve], the said Sir Philip shall come to Tutbury, by the marshall of the earles house, and upon Christmasse day he himself, or some other knight his deputy, shall goe to the dresser, and shall shew to his lords messinger, and then shall he serve the same meat to his said lord, and this service shall he doe as weill at supper as at dinner; and when his lord hes eaten, the said Sir Philip shall sit doune in the same place where his lord sat, and shall be served at his table by the same steward of the earles house upon Saint Stephans day [26th December]; when he hath dyned he shall take leave of the lord and shall kisse him, and for his service he shall nothing take nor nothing shall give, and all these services aftir rehearsed the said Sir Philip to doe by the space of eightein years and his antecessors before him to his Lords Earles of Longcaster [Lancaster].[111]

Who had Tutbury at that time of this strange ritual feasting? Since Sir Philip de Somerville of Brideshall died 1355 and left only daughters, there were no later men of that title. We might then, at first, assume that the "Lord Earl" he was serving at Tutbury was Henry of Grosmont (c. 1310-1361). But Henry did not acquire Tutbury until 1345, on the death of his father Henry, 3rd Earl of Lancaster. Thus we must surmise that Sir Philip's "eightein years" of such service at Tutbury occupied the years 1336-1354 and encompassed the Christmas residences at Tutbury of first Henry, 3rd Earl and then his son Henry of Grosmont.[112]

Incidentally, the above document makes questionable the commonly heard modern parroting of Wikipedia that Tutbury had been "destroyed" in 1264 and "abandoned" since 1322. *An historical description of Tutbury Castle and Priory* (1851) merely says the residential parts had become "dilapidated"[113]

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111 *Memorie of the Somervilles; being a history of the baronial house of Somerville*, Vol. 1, 1815. page 101-102.

112 It then follows that later authors have mistakenly assumed that this curious Christmastime service agreement was one of the legalistic whims of John of Gaunt, who some years later had and rebuilt Tutbury.

113 *An historical description of Tutbury Castle and Priory*, 1851, page 14.

before John of Gaunt later restored it, and similar old books concur on its state. Indeed, further investigation reveals a palatial rebuilding circa 1300…

> "Thomas, the second Earl of Lancaster [c. 1278-1322], not only repaired the ravages it had sustained while in the hands of the Earl of Derby, but gave to it a grandeur and magnificence which it had not previously possessed. He made it his principal residence, and, from the more than princely style in which he lived, became a benefactor to the surrounding country, giving a stimulus to the industry of his tenantry, and finding a market for all their productions; his housekeeping in one year (1313) amounting to the amazing sum of 22,000[£?] of our present money, and this too at a time when provisions of all kinds were remarkably cheap."[114]

Given this Earl's activities, then, it is clear that we have not one but two waves of abundant local patronage emanating from Tutbury into the surrounding countryside and thus to Alton: the 2nd Earl of Lancaster's from perhaps c. 1300–1322, and then Constance's from 1372–1394.

In the annual Christmas ritual feasting of Sir Philip de Somerville at Tutbury we obviously have several *Gawain* elements in play: the arrival of the guest on Christmas eve; the guest remaining at the castle while the lord is out (presumably hunting); the guest shall kiss the lord, and 'nothing else take or give'. If this was a courtly 'playing out' of the *Gawain*-story in real-life (perhaps originating with Thomas, the second Earl of Lancaster, c. 1300-1322?) or if it actually inspired the *Gawain*-poet's story, we cannot now know. Nor, it seems, can we now tell if this was once a more widespread Christmas tradition at lordly halls in the 14th century.

The tedious ins-and-outs of the dating and ownership and rebuilding at Tutbury have some further importance, in terms of establishing that an annual Minstrel's Court *could* have been happening at Tutbury at the time of Sir William de Furnival's youth and young manhood at the nearby Alton Castle c. 1335-1350. The Tutbury Court happened mostly at a large

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114 "Tutbury Castle", *Penny Magazine of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge*, 5th March 1836, page 90. My guess is that this was probably a rebuilding as a residence rather than a serious military fortification. He died without a son, and so the castle passed to his brother. He led the baronial opposition to the tyrannical Edward II, and something of a cult swiftly grew up around Thomas and saw him as a saintly figure.

meadow and at the church, and there would then only have been the need to find a feasting hall had the Castle not been available. Dr. Plot states that the Priory supplied the bull, before the dissolution of the monasteries.

Sadly we have no proof of the Court before its Charter of 1381, though it seems relatively safe to surmise a growing number of minstrels in the region before that date,[115] their likely patronage at Tutbury c. 1300-1322 by the enlightened Thomas the second Earl of Lancaster, and a probable annual gathering of such men. Also we might wonder if the curious tale of the strange Christmastide service of Sir Philip de Somerville at Tutbury might have been 'put about' the county in the gossip of such men, after his death in 1355, and may even have become the basic framework for one of their ballads?

ii. The Tutbury tradition of men dressed in forest-green, on horseback, each holding "a grene boghe in his hand":

The second factor from Tutbury which touches directly on the story of *Gawain* is from the fifteenth century. There was an account of the part played by the district's forest keepers, the day **before** the Minstrel's Court...

> "on the saide feaste of Assumption the wood-master or his lyvetenant, and the kepers and their deputies, shall be at Tutburye, and every man one horsebake, and soo ryde in order two and two together" [they carry and display a buck's head, precisely shaped and tied, much as it is in *Gawain*] **"every keper must have a grene boghe in his hand"** [...] "and all the minstrells shall goe afore them on foote two and two together" [...] and the wood-master, or in his absence his lyvetenant, shall ride hindermast after all the kepers; and at the said crosse in the town the foremast keper shall blow a seeke [a deer hunter's horn-call], and all the other kepers shall answere him in blowinge the same, and when they come to the Cornell [house frontage] against the Yue-hall, the foremost keper shall blowe a recheate [to recall hounds following a false scent], and all the other kepers shall answere hyme in blowinge of the same; and so they shall ride still tyll they come into

115 See: M. A. Price, *The status and function of minstrels in England between 1350 and 1400*, masters dissertation, University of Birmingham, 1964.

> the church-yarde, and then light [dismount] and goo into the churche in like arrey, and all the minstrels shall pley one their instruments duringe the offeringe tyme [offering of the money-plate], and the wood-master, or in his absence his liuetenant, shall affer up the bukk's head mayd in silver [perhaps a sort of hunting-cup or horse's breast-plate?], and every keper shall offer a peny, and as soone as the bukk's head is offered uppe, all the kepers shall blowe a morte [horn-call for the deer-death], three tymes; and then all the kepers goo into a chappell, and shall there have one of the monks redye to sey them masse; …" (my emphasis)[116]

Of course, the dating of the text is a little after the time of *Sir Gawain*, but we might reasonable suppose the tradition to be older and not to have been inspired by a fireside tavern reading by the local foresters of a c. 1377 text of *Sir Gawain*. If that supposition is granted, then the relevance here to the initial appearance of the Green Knight with his holly bough, and to the later hunting scenes in *Gawain*, should be obvious.

It may be useful to note here that a 1916 compiler, of all of the then-known *Gawain* sources, remarked that…

> "He [The Green Knight] **appears as green in no extant version** of the *Challenge* until we reach the English romance. Whoever gave him that color first, whether the English poet or some French predecessor, was influenced, of course, by current folk-lore, and that folk-lore may have descended to the innovator in question from primeval ideas about the forces of nature. So much we must grant, but that is all. Neither the Irish author of *The Champion's Bargain* nor any of his successors in the line had any notion of associating the challenger with Celtic "probably arboreal" deities, Arician groves, spirits of vegetation, or the annual death and rebirth of the embodied vital principle."[117] (my emphasis)

The local well-dressings aside, one possible source for 'the verdant' and 'the green' is then the Foresters at Tutbury. And, as we shall see in the next chapter, also the knights at Tutbury.

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116 Thomas Blount, *Fragmenta Antiquitatis: Or, Ancient Tenures of Land, and Jocular Customs of some Manors*, 1679, pages 529-32. Blount was drawing on "the Coucher-book of the honour of Tutbury".

117 George Lyman Kittredge, *A study of Gawain and the Green Knight*, Harvard University Press, 1916. He is discussing old Irish precursor stories to *Gawain*.

Nor do we find such things in the Scandinavian tradition, which offers another possibility of a root for Gawain, and one that has only very recently arisen in the English scholarship. I draw here an extended quote from a 2013 open access paper by Magnus Fjalldal, "A Scandinavian Link to Sir Gawain and the Green Knight?"[118]

> In the Old Norse-Icelandic literary tradition and in that of the other Nordic countries in addition to the Faroe Islands and the Orkneys a motif which might be called "evil at Christmas" (or "evil at yuletide," if it occurs in pre-Christian times) emerges very clearly and has long been familiar to Scandinavian folklorists [... yet] It is only recently that articles began to appear in English that explore this motif and its dimensions, and it is therefore hardly a surprise that the English-speaking world has known nothing of the existence of this folklore motif and its possible influence on English literature. [And such a recognition is not easily accepted by English scholars because] the presence of nasty supernatural beings or evil events that take place during the Christmas season is almost completely alien to the English tradition where Christmas time is primarily a festive season."[119]
>
> "... it is Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss (Gests þáttr) that provides the most interesting comparison with the Green Knight's appearance at Camelot at Christmas. Gestr Bárðarson is staying at the court of King Óláfr Tryggvason. [Gestr's father had "become a guardian spirit of the region (landvættr)" in the earlier part of the story]
>
> On Christmas Eve (ch. 18), all of a sudden, an evil-looking and fully armed man marches into the hall and walks straight towards the king's throne without introducing himself or greeting anyone. He is wearing a splendid golden necklace and has a golden ring on his arm. After a while he addresses King Óláfr. No one, he says, has offered him anything in this place, but he will show his generosity by giving his war gear and jewelry to anyone who dares to visit him at home and claim it. But, he adds, no one at the king's court will have the courage to do that. He then leaves, and as he

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[118] Magnus Fjalldal, "A Scandinavian Link to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*?", *ARV : Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, 2013. See also a following paper by Dustin Geeraert, "Etaynez þat Hym Anelede of þe Heȝe Felle": Ghosts of Giants in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*", *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, Vol. 49, 2018.

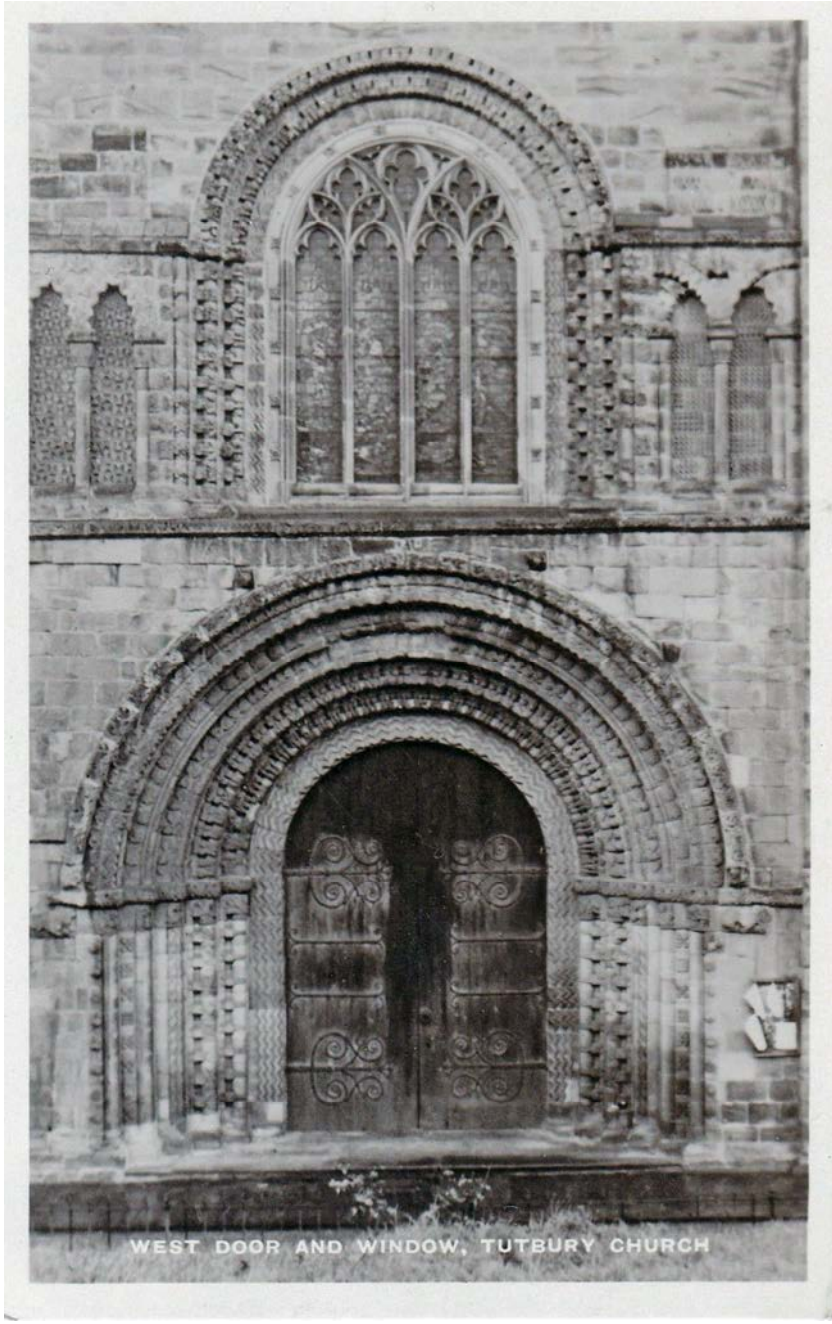
[119] Presumably this refers to older works, and discounts the relatively modern 'Christmas ghost story' tradition.

> goes a foul stench permeates the hall. The king's retainers are terrified, and the bad smell kills dogs and makes several people ill. The king now turns to Gestr and asks him who he thinks the visitor might have been. Gestr replies that he believes it to have been one King Raknarr of Helluland who was notorious for having murdered his parents and a host of other people. In the end he had had a huge barrow built which he entered while still alive taking with him his longboat and 500 of his men. They had then as barrow dwellers become animated corpses (haugbúar). The king asks Gestr to fetch the pieces which the visitor had offered. He agrees and sets out on a long journey to find Raknarr's barrow whose location is unknown. During his journey all kinds of magic beings attempt to spoil Gestr's quest, and it is clear that Raknarr with his magic powers does not want him and his men to reach their destination. Eventually Gestr finds Raknarr's barrow and breaks into it only to meet with a very hostile reception."
>
> [...] it is therefore tempting to wonder whether the author of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight might have borrowed the motif of "evil at Christmas," as it affects Sir Gawain's adventures, from a Scandinavian source with which he happened to be familiar and decided to incorporate it into his poem."

This is remarkable, and a footnote in Fjalldal's paper reveals the tale in question as being "composed around the middle of the 14th century by an unknown author" which would perhaps place it some decades before Gawain. If it is a partial source for Gawain then the "golden necklace" and "golden ring", contrasting with decaying putrid fresh, was reworked into a less ghoulish and more verdant faery theme by the Gawain-poet. I have shown in this chapter how he could have drawn on annual parades of the region's wood-masters and foresters at Tutbury, to make the change to 'the green' and a holly bough, inspired by the fact that "every keper must have a grene boghe in his hand" on local parades.

In a later chapter I will also suggest a locale and situation where the possible *Gawain*-patron might have heard such Norse tales, and also the context of the Coronation of a young boy-king which would have demanded a change from such dark and gory originals.

Old oaks in the Needwood, the hunting forest of Tutbury. Despite a late enclosure (by c. 1810), 500 acres of the forest remain today. At one edge of the remaining forest is Abbots Bromley, where the archaic Horn Dancers still perform annually.



The Church frontage and door at Tutbury, the door being that used by the Foresters and Minstrels. Postcard possibly 1920s.

6. "100 pieces of green silk, for the knights" at Tutbury.

In the previous chapter I noted the first wave of cultured patronage emanating from Tutbury Castle, being that of the 2nd Earl of Lancaster's residence from perhaps c. 1300 until his death in 1322. In respect of *Gawain*, one of the most interesting items we have from this Earl is a list of his domestic expenses. He managed to spend a massive £6,777 for 1313 alone. One tantalising item on the list is: "100 pieces of green silk, for the knights". One must then imagine that a great many knights in mid and North Staffordshire still had a fine piece of green silk in their wardrobes during the *Gawain*-poet's youth and early manhood c. 1330-1350, probably similar to the stitched piece which is central to *Gawain* and which is likewise gifted…

> A girdle of green silk with a golden hem,
>
> Embroidered only at the edges, with hand-stitched ornament.
>
> And she pleaded with the prince in a pleasant manner
>
> To take it notwithstanding its trifling worth

It is remarkable to find what appears like an annual tradition related to this, just 12 miles south-east from Alton Castle. Were the silks given at Christmas, and perhaps to do with the use of the silk as a green sling for the hunting-horn while riding in the Christmas hunts? Sadly we cannot know.[120] A cult did grow up around the 2nd Earl of Lancaster after his death in 1322, but it seems his cultists have not left us an account of the man's interests and beliefs, nor of his court at Tutbury. Also, had there been anything specifically on green silk to find in the lore of knightly arms, the *Gawain* scholars would surely have found it by now. I can find no such commentary.

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[120] We can note, however, that King Arthur's Round Table was said to seat 150, but there were only 100, so Arthur told Merlin to seek out 50 more knights.

There are however certain pointers in the literature on the knightly wearing of such items for superstitious reasons. Several *Gawain* scholars have pointed out that a precious stone was pinned to either the silk or a silk-holding belt and that this was deemed to give the silk girdle its 'charge' of protective power. One can see this in lines from Chaucer circa the 1360s, as Roger Sherman Loomis[121] pointed out in 1943…

> Rychesse a girdell hadde upon,
>
> The bokel of it was of a stoon
>
> Of vertu gret and mochel of myght;
>
> For whoso bar the stoon so bright,
>
> Of venym durst hym nothing doute,
>
> While he the stoon hadde hym aboute.[122]

My thought here is that this 'magical' association of silk and a precious stone probably developed after the sixth-century with the rise of large-scale Baltic amber production and distribution into France and Britain. This would have combined with high-quality imported silks to produce 'magical' results. This is because sun-coloured amber has electrical properties, producing an actual electrical 'spark' within it when rubbed with materials such as silk, thus enabling its surface to become charged and capable of lifting and directing light objects such as feathers or hair or silk. Amber would then offer many possibilities for performing natural magic and uncanny-seeming divination. We know that amber was worn by women, and the electric properties must thus have been swiftly discovered as the quality and variety of cloth increased. For instance, Gitte Hansen shows that the pagan belief in the power of

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121 Roger Sherman Loomis, "More Celtic Elements in 'Gawain and the Green Knight'", *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol. 42, No. 2, April 1943, pages 149-184.

122 Chaucer, "The Romaunt of the Rose", IN: Robinson edition of Chaucer, 1948, page 674. "… a girdle had upon | the buckle of it a stone | of virtue great and very mighty | and whoever had that stone so bright | no venom will hurt him | so long as he has the stone about him." Chaucer's text appears to have been a translation from a French original c. 1230.

amulets of amber persisted relatively long, especially among women, and appears to have been especially hard for Christians to eradicate in France…

> "The sixth-century archbishop of Arles [France], Caesarius, reviled the wearing of amulets of amber and herbs. The same strictures recur in the seventh-century life of Eligius [Paris]: 'no woman should presume to hang pieces of amber at the neck', the bishop of Noyon [France] purportedly proclaimed. Frankish compilers continued to echo such condemnations in penitentials of the eighth century."[123]

England was far more lenient about such amulet stones, and there were substantial numbers of monastic enterprises which were officially sanctioned to carve black-jet and other semi-precious stones.[124] H. Fraquet's book *Amber* (1987) notes that amber was linked with fertility by women, but that regrettably: "There is a gap in the writings about amber in the early Medieval period but from the sixteenth century onwards [there are more examples]".[125]

This association of stone (or whatever type it was) and silk, and its link with love and fertility, may have a relic folk-memory in North Staffordshire in the form of "witch brooches" and their lore. A notable member of the North Staffordshire Field Club reported on these curious items in an article in the journal *Folk-lore* in 1896…

> "My first experience of witchcraft began at a very early age, before I was an hour old, in fact. My maternal grandmother, a pure-bred [Scottish] Highlander, held me close to the fire, and, taking care that she was

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123 Gitte Hansen, *Everyday Products in the Middle Ages*, Casemate, 2015, page 117.

124 I would add that perhaps this was a Christian transfer from the former historic British black amber trade that was remembered in the *De Proprietatibus Rerum* (1240). The majority of grave-goods amber was Baltic, but there was some native 'British amber'. *Chamber's Journal*, "About Amber" (1873) noted some known ocurrances of amber finds in the south of England, showing that it was not only a shoreline find: "Amber has been found in the gravelpits near London, derived probably from some of the Tertiary strata of our island; and pieces of resin occur in the clays of the Wealden in the Isle of Wight, and in the London Clay at Highgate. Bartholemus the Englishman (1203-1272), in his *De Proprietatibus Rerum* (1240): "describes it as of best quality in Britain; of two kinds, yellow and black; it drives away adders." — from Albert Way, "Folk-lore", *Notes and Queries*, 8th February 1851, page 100. The power against adders was probably a late transfer from jet's power as described in *Bald's Leechbook*.

125 It appears to have died out from c. 1800. Jamieson's *Dictionary of the Scottish Language*, 1808: "wearing a necklace of amber, which was formerly so common…".

> unobserved, quietly fastened this witch-brooch beneath the ample skirts of my baby-garments. This form of brooch, fastened in the manner above described, was firmly believed to possess the power of driving the witches, which lay in wait for all newly born children, up the chimney. It protected the wearer from their malevolence, and brought good luck. The rite was practised universally in rural districts throughout the north in my grandmothers time. [His brother Robert had a small collection of witch-brooches] The two witch-brooches set in brilliants [i.e: set around with brilliant cut stones] [my brother] found in Staffordshire. One was the subject of a paper read before the North Staffordshire Field Naturalists' Club in 1890 [in *Transactions*, 1891]. It is interesting to note that the second specimen, which he obtained after the paper was read, is identical in every respect with "Shakespeare's brooch," found at Stratford-upon-Avon about seventy years ago."[126]

The 1891 paper mentioned,[127] written by his brother Robert McAldowie, gives further details and elaborates it connections with love and protection…

> The small brooch which is the subject of this notice is heart-shaped, not of the conventional shape seen on a pack of cards, but is unequal sided, one side being full or rounded, the other indented. In size it is one inch wide and a little more than one inch in height. It is made of silver and set with eighteen crystals in what is called a fancy setting, that is, each crystal is set separately in a piece of silver, and then the pieces are soldered together in the required shape. This is the first example of this kind of setting I have met with, all the other heart-shaped brooches I have seen, set with stones, had a plain setting, just a band of silver with the stones set in it. The most peculiar thing about this brooch is its method of fastening. The pin is hinged on the back, comes through the open loop in the centre, and then the point rests on the front, so that no catch is necessary. This is a particularly safe fastening, for once the brooch is fastened on a piece of cloth it will not become undone unless the fingers are used, and this was a very

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126 Alexander Morison McAldowie, "Personal Experiences in Witchcraft", *Folk-lore* journal, 1896. McAldowie was the respected editor of *Staffordshire Knots* (1895), and Vice-President of the North Staffordshire Literary and Philosophical Society (c. 1897) and Justice of the Peace for Stoke-on-Trent. Robert later found another witch brooch from Staffordshire some years after the 1891 paper was published.

127 Robert McAldowie, "Notes on a Staffordshire Witch Brooch", *North Staffordshire Field Club Transactions*, 1891.

necessary requirement for this kind of brooch. It was not an ordinary piece of ornamental jewellery, nor was it always used in what we, now a-days, would consider a useful manner; yet in the age in which it was worn it was a very essential article to the peace of mind of a certain class of people—namely the superstitious, who believed in witches and in luck. From the peculiarities I have described I have no doubt this is an example of what is known as a "Witch Brooch." They were usually bought along with the wedding ring, and were supposed to keep away witches and bring good luck to the wearers. The lady wore it first but not exposed to view; then it was transferred to her children by a trustworthy nurse, who put it on their little garments while sitting by the side of the fire-place, so that if a witch had got a hold of the child, that evil being would find a ready mode of exit up the chimney, unable to withstand the influence of this miraculous charm.

The wearing of this brooch was thought to be an infallible safeguard against all kinds of evil, and it was considered a very foolhardy thing if parents neglected to put one of some kind on their children's garments. [I omit a section on the fading away on the living tradition in Scotland, within living memory at 1891, followed by a section on the "Shakespeare brooch".]

One of the brooches I have here to-night has this word ["love"] engraved on the back of it, and I have seen them with a scripture text, usually there are the initials of some persons. This Staffordshire one has no inscription of any kind. I got it in Lichfield, in a jewellers, who had bought two of them from an old servant of a family once living near the town; the other brooch he could not find, he thought it had been melted down for old silver, sharing the same fate as many others of the kind. I have inquired at many jewellers in North Staffordshire for these brooches, several remember seeing them but long ago, others have had them and consigned them to the melting pot as useless, of no interest, and not worth keeping.

It is asking the reader for a leap of faith to assume that a knightly tradition of the 14th century — perhaps involving amber and silk — can be traced into a women's tradition of shawls and clasp-pins in the 18th and 19th centuries. But the emotional 'structure of feeling' appears to be much the same. The later connection with love and marriage in Scotland and Staffordshire then perhaps enables us to glimpse something of how a 14th century knightly sash

might have been imbued not only with the power of its 'hidden stone', but also the love of the giver.

One final interesting point to make on sashes is that we have a mural illustration of Arthurian knights wearing their sashes. This is at Siedlecin, Silesia — which is in the territory though which William de Furnival of Alton Castle could have passed on the journey to his Crusade in Prussia.[128] The murals depict the oldest known visualization of the story of Sir Lancelot, from c. 1338-1346.[129] The knights appear to be sleeping partly-clad before they fully arm before dawn and set off. Presumably these girdles would have been hidden under armour once the men were fully armed.

Sleeping Arthurian knights wearing sashes, early 14th century mural at Siedlecin. The leggings are red and on the central figure green, the sash white.

[128] Let us assume that William had avoided French ports for political reasons (some of his group were instructed to avoid French ports) and thus travelled via Rotterdam, then overland from Hamburg to Dresden. In that case the castle housing these murals is 85 miles east of Dresden, and is perfectly positioned as a stop for someone heading on into central Prussia. Had he gone by sea it might have been Copenhagen to Rixhoft to Danzig, before reaching the wild jungle-like '*Wyldrenesse'* frontier.

[129] Lech Marek and Przemyslaw Nocun, "Knights of the Round table of the Tower in Siedlecin, Silesia", *Acta Militaria Mediaevalia* IX, 2013.

7. The King's Champion, William's friend in Parliament and a model for the Green Knight?

At the Coronation of 1377 one also finds the Green Knight, or at least his ceremonial equivalent. For the Royal Coronation one Sir John Dymoke (1322-1381) was chosen as the King's Champion. By right this very richly and awesomely arrayed Champion rode at the head of the Coronation procession, then "appeared at the door" after the Coronation. Nor did Dymoke stint in this...

> "At the Coronation of Richard II Sir John Dymoke rode all accoutered for battle".[130]

In subsequent Coronations, and again by right, the Champion rode his horse into the Coronation banquet and ceremonially challenged any there who doubted the King's right, by manfully throwing down a gauntlet. He then went around the various other lordly Coronation feasts and did the same, being "very terrible and discomforting for 'traytours' to look upon".[131] This certainly sounds like the Green Knight and his entrance into Arthur's court in *Gawain*.

However, the formal *Processus* document of Richard II does not state the banquet appearance as being a service required for the King from Sir Dymoke in 1377. The King only required the leading of the pre-Coronation procession through the streets and being willing to fight in mortal combat any who contested the new King's right to the throne.[132] The day was very

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130 "Her Majesty's Champion", *Once A Week*, *an illustrated miscellany*, 20th May 1865, page 596.

131 *Crowns and Sceptres: The Romance and Pageantry of Coronations*, John Long, 1937, also notes: "this is the first authentic record of this ceremony [but] The office of 'royal champion' is very old; there was a Champion in attendance on Charlemagne."

132 A full account of the Coronation preliminary claims is "Processus factus ad Coronacionem", to be found in *English Coronation Records,* 1901, pages 131-68. We have no record of Sir John holding a holly bough, being in green, or if he had any symbolic greenery about him in some way.

hot, and he might have had a warm time of it, in full armour. It seems from one full account of the pre-Coronation procession that Sir Dymoke was tactfully retired before he could do harm to the public, and that a way was forced through the vast crowds by others placed at the head of the procession. Three hours after the crowning at the Coronation, the *Processus* states that Sir Dymoke was to "dismount and be disarmed" and that seemingly ended his required duties. What actually happened, according to the trustworthy but slightly too tactful Walsingham, seems to have been a change of plans. Sir Dymoke appeared at the Abbey Door to make the challenge as the new crowned king left the building. But the new King had by then fainted with hunger, and thus plans had to be changed…

> "Having furnished himself," says Walsingham, "with the best suit of armour save one, and the best steed save one, from the king's armoury and stable, he proceeded on horseback, with two attendants, the one bearing his spear, and the other his shield, to the abbey gates, there to await the ending of the mass. But the lord marshal, the lord seneschal, and the lord constable being all mounted on their great horses, went to the knight and told him that he should not have come so soon; wherefore, he had better retire, and, laying aside his weighty armour, rest himself until the proper time."[133]

The book *Coronation of a king* (1902) gives a franker account…

> [The boy-king Richard II, being made to fast as per tradition, fainted while praying after the end of the Coronation ceremony. He was carried to the door by three lords…] "Thinking his opportunity had now come, he [the Champion] placed himself directly in their way. But the Earl Marshal unceremoniously bade him begone, and told him to wait for his perquisite until the king had sat down to dinner, and in the meantime that he had better unarm himself, take his rest and ease awhile. Much discomfited, Sir John Dymoke was compelled to beat an ignominious retreat. He appeared again with much state during the royal banquet in Westminster Hall, and throwing down his gauntlet three times proposed to engage in mortal combat with any one who dared to dispute the king's title."[134]

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[133] John Heneage Jesse, *Historical and Literary Memorials of the City of London*, L.C. Page & Co., 1901.

[134] M. F. Johnston, *Coronation of a king; or, The ceremonies, pageants and chronicles of coronations of all ages*, Chapman & Hall, 1902, page 83.

Sir John Dymoke represented Lincoln in Parliament. William de Furnival of Alton was also in Parliament at that time. Which means that he would have known and probably conferred with Sir William, because he was an geographically adjacent member of Parliament who had a strategic interest in much the same part of England (William also had interests in Worksop and York). Both men were about the same age, and each had only one child. In 1377 Sir John Dymoke was nearing the end of a fearsomely involved legal battle to prove his right to be the Champion, and much detailed evidence was unearthed and presented on both sides. That the case was so hotly contested might suggest that the tradition of the Champion was already established,[135] though perhaps not yet in the form of the Coronation Banquet challenge on horseback. Had William de Furnival been present at the legal hearings, or had he sifted Sir John's case papers afterwards, then he would have learned much of the role of the Champion and its antecedents going back to the time of Charlemagne.[136]

Later in time, there is a curious account of the form taken by the Champion's feast-challenge at the Coronation of George IV in 1821, its last[137] such occurrence...

> "The first course was brought in by high officers of state on horseback, and before the second was served the king's Champion used to appear. Escorted by esquires and heralds, he would challenge to mortal combat any one who dared to question the king's title [...] After he had received the king's thanks and retired, the second course was brought in and the feast proceeded without further interruption."[138]

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135 For a careful and scholarly discussion on the matter, see: John Horace Round, *The king's serjeants & officers of state, with their coronation services*, J. Nisbet & Co., 1911, pages 382-388.

136 He would also have frequently encountered the family crest. The Dymoke crest was a pair of asses' ears (see frontispiece of *Scrivelsby, the home of the champions*, 1893). But I will leave it to scholars of Shakespeare to determine if there might be a connection between Queen Titania's beloved Bottom and the Royal Champion.

137 Our own Queen Elizabeth II did revive it, but in another form. The rights holder John Dymoke carried the Union Standard as part of her Coronation ceremony.

138 *Coronation of a king; or, The ceremonies, pageants and chronicles of coronations of all ages*, 1902.

A livelier account of 1821 is given by the painter Benjamin Robert Haydon, who had a clear view from an elevated box…

> "the most imposing scene of all, the championship & first dishes. [brought in on horseback, then …] The Hall doors opened again, & outside in the twilight a man in dark shadowed armour against the shining night appeared. He then moved, passed into darkness under the arch, & Wellington, Howard [Champion's two Esquires, in half armour] & the Champion stood in full view, with the doors closed behind them. This was certainly the finest sight of the day. The herald read the challenge; the glove was thrown down; they all then proceeded to the throne."[139]

I say this is 'curious' because the Knight enters after the first course, just as he does in *Sir Gawain*. I then discovered that the *first course + on horseback* rule was also observed at: the Coronation of Charles II in April 1661, for which one Samuel Pepys furnished an eyewitness account; at the Coronation of Queen Anne in 1702; and at the Coronation of George II in 1727, and there is even a poem by Philip Young that gives the Champion of 1727 a somewhat green cast since he wears a fresh laurel as he enters Westminster hall…

> He rides triumphant thro' the guarded hall.
> Thrice happy conqu'ror, that the laurel [wreath] wears[140]

There is even a slight arboreal hint that Richard II, when a boy, may have worn a laurel wreath at the banquet in place of the too-large metal crown…

> "The Court Dining Room of the Goldsmiths Company in London [who had provided the centerpiece for the Coronation parade] has in the marble chimney-piece two boys holding a wreath, encircling the head of Richard II, by whom the Goldsmiths' incorporation was confirmed."[141]

What then was the next occurrence of this *first course + on horseback* rule being observed for the Champion? The earliest I can find it, after 1377, is in Westminster hall after the Coronation of Henry VIII on 24th June 1509…

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139 "21st July 1821", *Diary of Benjamin Robert Haydon,* Vol. 2, page 351.

140 "Thrice-happy" may refer to the way that the challenge was made three times, first just inside the doors, then in the middle, and finally before the throne.

141 John Timbs, *Curiosities of London*, Bogue, 1855, pages 352-353.

> "The King and Queen led the great procession back to Westminster Hall for the coronation banquet, which was to be "greater than any Caesar had known." […] When the second course was finished, the King's Champion, Sir Robert Dymmocke, paraded up and down the hall on his courser [horse] before throwing down his gauntlet with the customary challenge to anyone who dared contest the King's title."[142]

This 1509 Coronation occurred well before the recovery of *Gawain*, which has the Green Knight appear directly *the first course* has been served, thus...

> And the first course in the court been courteously served,
>
> When there heaved in at the hall door an awesome fellow
>
> Who in height outstripped all earthly men.

We must then assume either that:

i) the *Gawain*-poet somehow directly inspired an extension of a royal ceremony with his poem in the early 1500s or earlier. A later date assumes the dialect text could be read and understood c. 1509, which may be doubtful even in the Midlands.

ii) that the royal court of 1509 had restored or continued the tradition first established at the Coronation Banquet of 1377.

iii) there was some other but now-unknown 'horseman at the feast' motif[143] that had long ago served as the same exact royal

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142 Alison Weir, *Henry VIII: The King and His Court*, Ballantine, 2002. Weir cites 'Edward Hall' which takes one to: *Hall's Chronicle*, "The First Yere of Kyng Henry the VIII", 1809 edition, page 509. There, Sir Robert Dymmocke is recorded as entering just as the second course was starting to be served.

Most likely there was a similar enactment at the Banquet for the Coronation of Elizabeth I in 1588. Several modern popular books assume it was so, but I can find nothing from the 19th century and no reliable early account of her 1588 Banquet.

143 Thomas Warton, in his *The History of English Poetry* has: "See a fine romantic story of a Comte de Macon who, while revelling in his hall with many knights, is suddenly alarmed by the entrance of a gigantic figure of a black man, mounted on a black steed. This terrible stranger, without receiving any obstruction from guards or gates, rides directly forward to the high table, and, with an imperious tone, orders the count to follow him — Nic. Gillos, chron. ann. 1120." But sadly the reference appears to be irrecoverable today.

There is also a Bible parallel in Revelations 7-13, though it concerns a fierce and bloody horseman (implied to be Christ) at a marriage feast. The King James version has:

inspiration for *first course + on horseback*. Possibly even (as royal tradition had it) some now-lost account of the role of the Champion at the coronation of Charlemagne on Christmas Day, 800 A.D. The Christmas Day dating does suggest an obvious link with *Gawain*, and that the Gawain-poet was pointedly making the connection between the Green Knight and the Champion at Charlemagne's Coronation.[144]

> Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.
>
> And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.
>
> And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.
>
> [...] And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.
>
> His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.
>
> And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.

Note that the Gawain-poet's "The Pearl" recalls many aspects of Revelations.

In terms of Bible links one can also note the Tiptoft missal, (England, perhaps the Cambridgeshire fens, c. 1320) in which Fol. 141 (page 141) has a bold pentangle in the margin. The context of the decoration is similar to Gawain, being an illustration of an execution restrained. The Biblical Abraham is seen about to sacrifice the young boy Isaac, but an Angel restrains the raised sword held by Abraham. This apparent correlation known to Christians might have given the symbol added resonance — if *Gawain* were to have been written in the summer of 1377, shortly after the boy-king Richard II had been crowned with the help of William de Furnival.

144 Probably Thierry d'Anjou. In the *Song of Roland* (c. 1115) one sees resonances that would appeal to one who in the summer of 1377 had just 'presented the glove' to the Richard II at the Coronation. Pinabel challenges the King through a challenge to trial by combat, taken up by Charlemagne's champion Thierry d'Anjou… "And he [Pinabel] gives him his right glove made of skin of the deer. ... When Thierry saw that the battle was toward, he gave Charles [the Emperor] his right glove". Again, there seems a link with *Gawain* via the glove as the traditional ritually binding pledge (*gage*) to fight when the moment arises.

Was the *Song* known in England? Yes: "*the Song of Roland*, an unquestioned masterpiece, which contains numerous echoes of continental Normandy at the beginning of the twelfth century. It was certainly known in England later, when the famous Oxford manuscript was copied." — Paul R. Hyams, "Henry II and Ganelon", *Syracuse Scholar*,

iv) that the *Gawain* poem was just a local textual manifestation of a more widely circulating version of a popular Arthurian story, which included the *first course* + *on horseback* element, taken up by the Court at some unspecified point between 1377 and 1509;

v) that the *Gawain*-poet was actually reflecting on the fact that in 1377 he (or his patron) had been at the Coronation Banquet — as William de Furnival would surely have been — and had seen the Champion Sir John Dymoke inaugurate a new tradition by entering at the end of the first course of the Banquet. Entering at that point would give the fasting Richard II a chance to finally eat something, before the Champion entered and at last had the opportunity to present his Challenge. Given the rough day Sir Dymoke appears to have had, one can imagine his manner was indeed very 'terrible and discomforting to traytours'.

I have been unable to find any other record of the 1377 Banquet, other than that there were also other horsemen in the hall, seemingly as event marshals during the feasting and drinking…

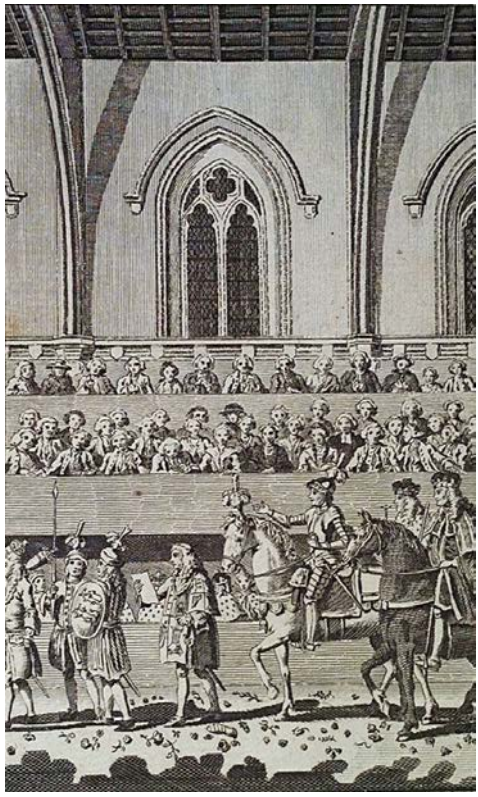
"The coronation banquet of Richard II. (A.D. 1377), who rebuilt the [Westminster] hall, was remarkably magnificent. [...] certain knights, rode about the hall on horseback, to keep the people in order"[145]

Either way, all but one of these various possibilities can tell us something interesting about *Gawain*.[146]

Vol. 4, No. 1, 1983. Citing: D. C. Douglas, "The Song of Roland and the Norman Conquest", *French Studies* 14, 1960, pages 99-116. "It was almost certainly copied in England around the second quarter of the 12th century, and bequeathed to Oxford's Oseney Abbey in the 13th century." — Bodleian Libraries, 2016 online edition. There was also a warrior tradition that it had been sung just before the Battle of Hastings.

One then wonders if this English *Song of Roland* was dug up as potential support for Sir Dymokes's long and highly-evidenced legal dispute against his challenger, who also wished to claim the right to be Champion at the Coronation in 1377? The bitter legal case would have scoured the records for all references to royal champions, and especially those on Charlemagne since the tradition was thought to begin with him.

145 Rev. John Stoughton, "Royal Feastings", in *Shades and Echoes of Old London*, Religious Tract Society, 1889, page 212. Collected the series of articles 'Shades of the Departed' from the RTS's journal.



"Sir John Dimmock [Dymock] performing the ceremony of the Champion's Challenge at the Coronation of Richard II in Westminster Hall", as imagined for an engraving in *Harrison's History of London*, 1775.

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146 The abridged and seemingly 'written up from memory' version of *Gawain* titled "The Grene Knyght" is in the Bishop Percy Folio MS. (c. 1650, a compilation probably gathered 1640s, possibly at Shiffnal in Shropshire which is 12 miles SW of Stafford). For a text of the later version, see: Thomas Hahn (Ed.) *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, 1995. It cannot have inspired the *first course* extension because, while the entrance of the Knight is on horseback, the poet makes no mention of any *first course* rule. Indeed, the Green Knight sits down to feast along with Arthur and his knights, which rather punctures his aura and mystery. Given this version's lack of power, and obvious assumption of a low audience, it would have little play in the court. The introduction to the poem found in Hahn suggests the original was "composed about 1500 in the South Midlands" and that "The surviving text [in the Percy Folio] might well be a written record of the sort of recital mentioned by Robert Laneham in a letter describing festivities put on for Queen Elizabeth at Kenilworth in 1575." This seems quite plausible — an enacted oral tale produced (recovered?) for the royal court 'leaks out', is heard by the poet outside the court in an evening's conversation and in a simplified form, and then some while later the poet attempts a popular form with further simplifications and abridgements as a sort of *aide-memoire* for his ongoing local Midlands performances. Given the c. 1500 dating of composition, the obvious Coronation event is that of Henry VIII on 24th June 1509.

Engraving of the ruins of Croxden Abbey, near Alton Castle.

The Month: An Illustrated Magazine of Literature, Science and Art, 1895: "The Civil War in Staffordshire was a conflict of garrisons and raiding, not of large field armies and set battles […] During the Civil War, Alton Castle and Wooton Lodge were garrisoned for the King [and the nearby] Croxden Abbey by the Cromwellians, and the eastern gable as well as portions of the chancel was left a mass of ruins."

8. The nearby Cistercians at Croxden Abbey.

Croxden Abbey is located just south of Alton Castle and had been founded by the family which held Alton. Like a great many aspects of North Staffordshire it has been relatively little studied, though there are a variety of useful introductory overviews and some heritage documentation is easily available online.

At the time of the likely birth of the *Gawain*-poet this Abbey was relatively affluent, mainly due to the wool trade. It was enriched by a combination of moorland uplands and the excellent and hardy local breeds of sheep.[147] Had either the *Gawain*-poet or his patron been born c. 1326 at Alton Castle, then it seems logical to assume that he and his two brothers might have had some of his basic early education and religious training via the Abbey. If we assume the William de Furnival had his basic education from ages 7 through 12, then he might have been taught by the monks from 1333 to 1338, possibly by the Abbot himself. At that time there was a fairly high level of learning available nearby at Croxden and the Abbey was not yet in decline.

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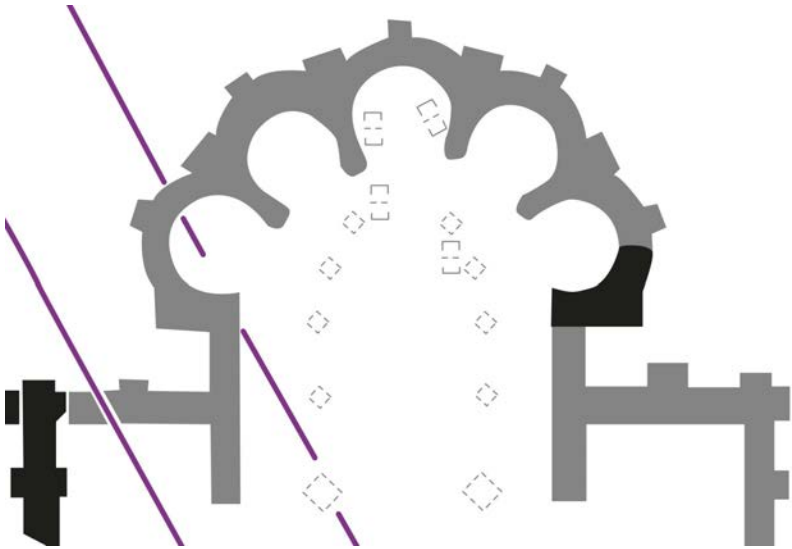
[147] The Shropshire-type has since populated the entire world with a very hardy breed of sheep, but in the early 20th century their origins were somewhat contested between Shropshire and mid-Staffordshire farmers. There appears to be a good case for its originating in mid Staffordshire, on Cannock Chase, which is about 15 miles south from Croxden: "Beside those who contend that the modern Shropshire [sheep] is a child of the Morfe Common [near Bridgenorth], the Cannock Chase, Cannock Heath, or the Longmynd [Shropshire Hills] sheep, there are others who consider that its foundation was laid from a sheep very similar in type to the Cannock Chase breed and known as the "Whittington Heath Sheep," which was considered to be one of the hardiest sheep existing in that day. The result of cross breeding pure Cannock Chase Shropshires and flocks of pure Whittington Heath Shropshires exist to this day and Mr. J. K. Adderly, of Mansley Farm, situated close to Cannock, holds an annual sale of these sheep." — from "Modern sheep, breeds and management" (1907). Croxden Abbey can also claim a role in later siring a famous breed of English horses, the Shire. The famous 'Packington Blind Horse', descended from an ancient breed stabled at Croxden Abbey, gave rise to the modern-day Shire Horse breed. His siring services were sought throughout the Midlands. All the other stallions feeding into the Shire Horse breed were also of Midlands origin.

It had a bookroom in which the Abbot — who from 1329-37 was one Richard of Shepshed[148] — had access to a range of books…

> "Several of these early abbots gave some attention to learning. Thomas of Woodstock [d. 1229] wrote two large volumes containing most of the Bible, and William de Houton [d. 1274] bought a Bible of nine volumes from Master Solomon, Archdeacon of Leicester, for the sum of 50 marks [and gave it to the Abbey]. William of Over [deposed 1308] made additions to the abbey's collection of books."[149]

There might also have been, prior to the first severe Black Death plague of 1349, a relatively wide choice of monks to tutor the three young brothers of Alton Castle in their basic subjects and skills.



Section of a floorplan of Croxden Abbey by English Heritage. Seen in plan outline are the five radiating chapels in the Abbey. I am told that this is a rare church arrangement in England, and thus one wonders at the symbolism. Might it have been some later influence on the poet's conception of the five-pointed pentangle emblem on Gawain's shield?

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148 It appears that we know nothing about him, save that "he retiled all four roofs" of the cloister alleys with 25,550 tiles. John McNeill, *The Medieval Cloister in England and Wales*, Routledge, 2017, unpaginated ebook. The roof was torn off two days before Christmas in 1330, thus presumably requiring the re-tiling.

149 "Houses of Cistercian monks: The abbey of Croxden", *A History of the County of Stafford*, Volume 3, Victoria County History, 1970.

The two younger brothers at Alton were not expected to become the family head, and thus it is reasonable to assume they had a more religious upbringing than otherwise. An early house education was also possible — as was the custom — mostly had while 'boarding out' at a nearby worthy house. Swythamley Grange might suggest itself, and would give the linguists their favoured dialect location for the *Gawain*-poet. Croxden Abbey might have supplemented. On the later matter of more advanced tutors, Philip F. O'Mara (1992) has proposed that one Robert Holcot could have been a possible tutor for the young *Gawain*-poet. This is compatible with my 1377 dating and fits nicely. Although it may be simpler to assume that the *Gawain*-poet merely read Holcot. Presumably an advanced master would only have been employed at age 16-18, for help with 'finishing' the lads.

By the 1370s, Croxden Abbey still had rich incomes but was suffering from overly lavish expenditure. Such over-spending proved a great drain, and to cut a long story short the debts became compounded with what were effectively heavy taxes and local demands. By 1368 the Abbey was seriously in debt and had only six monks. The plague of 1368 and poor weather hampered any recovery. Part of the Abbey collapsed in high winds in 1369, and a similar event occurred in 1372. These events might remind one of the line in *Gawain* when Bertilak's castle is noted (almost with an owner's pride) as being strong enough to withstand any blast of the moorland winds…

> The well-provided wall - | It blenched at never a blast.

Is this a little touch of pride here from the castle's owner, one meant to be subtly noted by any audience that the *Gawain*-poet might have had at Croxden? This may perhaps then be a small point by which to date *Gawain*, if one accepts my theory of Alton Castle as the model for Bertilak's castle.

The English weather then generally improved into the 1370s. There has been recent revisionism of long-term climate data-sets. But in history books the weather record remains reliable and based on actual observations. We thus know that, due to natural climate variability, temperatures fell sharply from Iceland across to Norway and the 1370s were "particularly harsh" across

the icy north of Europe.[150] Further south one can also note that many Alpine glaciers had surged over roads by the 1370s, their expansion there "equalling the later phases of the Little Ice Age".[151] However, it appears that in the Midlands of England we had 'passed the worst of it' in the 1360s, and by comparison our 1370s were cool but drier and somewhat more stable: "The 1370s also appear to have been cold on the whole",[152] yet "The 1370s brought better harvests",[153] and "After the turbulent 1360s, most of the 1370s appear as a period of drier and more stable conditions".[154] Thus if we centre the likely composition of *Gawain* on1377, the weather was still not ideal but would no longer be understood as freakish 'wrath of god' type of weather.

From the perspective of a poet active in the later 1370s, the severe plague of 1349[155] was likewise slipping from living memory, being then a full generation in the past. More important to the poet would have been the second great plague of 1361. This was especially severe around Croxden — the Abbey's *Chronicle* noted in that year "A second pestilence took place, and all the children that were born since the first pestilence died". The plague did not thereafter return until 1379, when its mortality rate was far lower, at perhaps 20% of those who caught it. Modern research suggests that it is possible that this third plague did not even reach North Staffordshire.[156]

If *Gawain* was commissioned on William's returning to Alton from the Coronation of Richard II, in the summer or autumn of 1377, then the 'third stroke' of the plague had not yet fallen. Might we then see here some poetic

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150 *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, page 95.

151 *Northern Europe: An Environmental History*, page 61.

152 *Climates of the British Isles: Present, Past and Future*, page 120.

153 *England in the Later Middle Ages*, page 151.

154 *Farming, Famine and Plague: The Impact of Climate in Late Medieval England*, page 178.

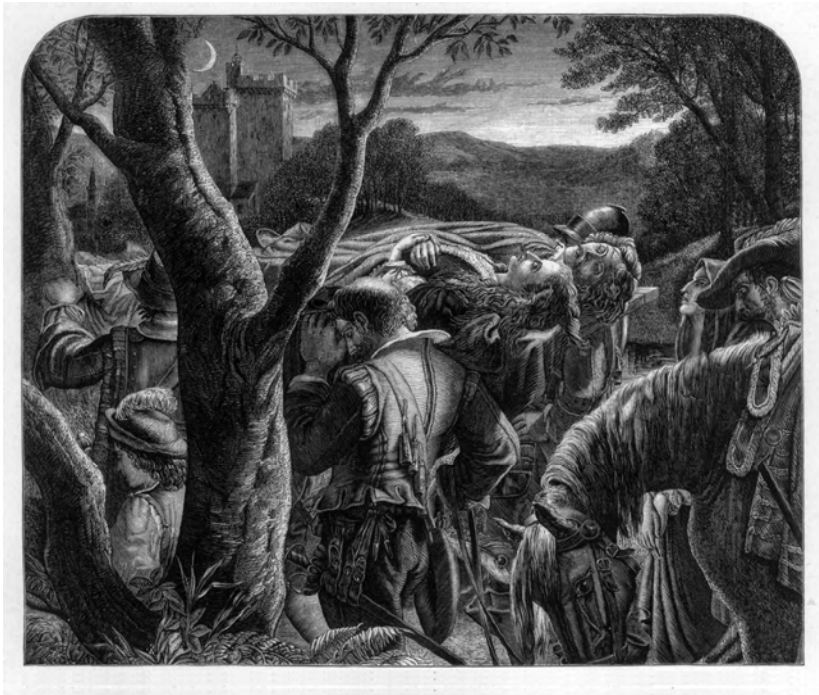
155 Croxden Abbey's *Chronicle* simply records: "There was a great pestilence throughout the whole world."

156 "In 1379-80 there was a plague [the fourth] apparently confined largely to the counties of northern England [meaning the parts adjacent to Scotland]." "The fifth plague hit in 1389-1391" [and appears to have been especially virulent in the eastern fenlands] — from: *Biology of Plagues: Evidence from Historical Populations*, Cambridge University Press, 2005.

parallel with the 'three strokes' of the axe offered by the Green Knight, the last one giving Gawain only a livid little 'nick on the neck'? A third wave of plague was probably expected by Bible readers[157], and consider…

> "the livid spots or 'tokens' which came to be considered the peculiar mark of the plague" — and that the neck was the key visible point of their appearance (the other two being hidden, the armpits and groins).[158]
> "Swellings were normally on the neck or throat, rather than the groin or armpit"[159]

Thus in 1377 a livid mark on the neck of a young man was a sight to be dreaded, as it might indicate the onset of another plague. This is not to say that the Green Knight straightforwardly 'symbolizes plague' and Death, but the general subliminal comparison could have been made by readers.



Engraving of a painting by Sir Joseph Noel Paton (1821-1901), evoking here the deadly visitation of the plague in the vicinity of Alton.

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157 Revelations 9:18: "By these three plagues was the third part of men killed, by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone, which issued out of their mouths."

158 Charles Creighton, *History of Epidemics in Britain*, Volume 1, 1891, page 121.

159 Michael Prestwich, *Plantagenet England 1225-1360*, 2007, page 539.

This sequence of major plague-dates means that a boy born in the summer of 1362 would have been especially precious, and would have been aged about 15 in 1377 when Sir William de Furnival became a knight and played a crucial part in the Coronation of the ten[160] year-old King Richard II. Compare the lines in *Gawain* in which the Green Knight, entering Arthur's hall, distains combat because…

> "No, it is not combat I crave, for come to that | On this bench only beardless boys are sitting. | … | So I crave in this court a Christmas game".

Even Arthur himself is noted as being "child-like" of "young blood". Although he is not described, Gawain thus appears to the attentive reader to be one of the "beardless boys" that the Green Knight observes. Gawain even describes himself to Arthur as being *the least* of these boys…

> "be the least I am the weakest, the most wanting in wisdom."

There are obvious parallels here with the new boy-king of England, who was crowned 16th July 1377. But my small point about the dating of the plagues, and especially its terrible local effect in 1361 as recorded by the Croxden Abbey *Chronicle*, may add something further and also help to date the composition of *Gawain*. The reasoning is that in the summer of 1377 there was a new generation of "young blood" boys in England. Boys who required 'initiation quests' and 'tests', such as the fearsome and manly Green Knight provides for Gawain. This new generation then in England might have had few suitable older exemplars and mentors — for instance, a working lad of 20 who had survived the plague of 1349 would, by 1377, have been an old man of 50 years. This man who would most likely have seen all his own children die in the plague of 1361. In the strange red eyes of the Green Knight, do we then see some symbolic reference to the grief and tears of that generation of men?

This generation of disappointed and worn-out men might have provided poor mentorship and control for the new "young bloods" then coming of age in 1377. Such men might also have offered the poet his template for the grumpy old fordsmen and waylayers, whom Gawain repeatedly meets while

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160 Some sources say he was 11 at the time of the Coronation procession.

crossing the Wirral and the Cheshire plain. Of course, by that point in the story he is riding into places beyond the reach of Arthur's rule, without any companions and with an unknown livery and a strange symbol on his shield. These factors must automatically make him an object of suspicion when...

> At every bank or beach where the brave man crossed water,
>
> He found a foe in front of him, except by a freak of chance,
>
> And so foul and fierce a one that he was forced to fight.

Yet Gawain's likely age also suggests he would have been perceived by the *Gawain* audience in 1377 as a representative of the new generation then coming of age in England, with few and weary older men to control them. A generation then perhaps being stereotyped by the older generation as 'spoiled young whipper-snappers'. Flashy and noisy but callow and untested. His very youth might then also help to explain why Gawain is challenged at the crossings, in a way that an older and battle-hardened knight might not be.

Such older men would have been perhaps somewhat frayed and faded in their garb. S.M. Newton's *Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince* (1980) nicely confirms my dating of *Gawain* in 1377, because the garb of the Green Knight befits the wardrobe of a distant and rustic lord, more than a few years behind the times and not up with the very latest court fashion…

> "…the mysterious Green Knight appears at the end of a New Year's day banquet in King Arthur's hall, both his physique and his dress described. Immensely tall and broad, his loins and back were sturdy and strong, but his belly flat and his waist small; entirely clothed in green, he wore a straight cote so tight that it "stek on his sides", and this is followed by a vivid description of his hood, the length of his hair and his mantle lined with the whitest ermine. The emphasis on the tightness of the clothing — a tunic so tight that it clung to his sides and revealed the flatness of his belly and his slim waist — is a very fair comment on the fashion of the middle of the 1360s […] an appearance which would hardly have been remarked on as late as 1370, for by that time it was a composition which would not only have become commonplace but was, indeed, going out of fashion; by 1380, such tight tunics had disappeared altogether from the masculine fashion".

Gawain is later given a "mantle with ermine" to wear, at the castle.

I return now to my consideration of Croxden Abbey. The Cistercians were commanded to settle only in 'out of the way' or 'desert' places such as the North Staffordshire uplands. This of course meant that labour was short in such places, and especially so after the plagues. Thus strong fresh working lads of Gawain's apparent age would have been much valued in the 1370s. Nearby Cistercian sites of that time included: the impoverished Hulton Abbey[161] in what is now Stoke-on-Trent (with a grange just to the south of Burslem); Combermere Abbey near the valuable salt-pits of Nantwich in Cheshire (with a large forest grange in the hills at Wincle, a short walk from Lud's Church near Leek); and Dieulacres Abbey near Leek. The latter was plaintively self-described by the monks as "situated in a lonely waste" yet it held a very large area of desirable hunting rights north of Leek and even maintained a forester and his men to manage it. The Dieulacres hunting grounds were obviously rather good, despite their chilly remoteness. In the early 1350s the King was asked to stop "the frequent visits of people of the country with grooms, horses, and greyhounds" to the small Abbey, then of perhaps only five monks, for the purposes of sports hunting. These visitors were claiming free hospitality and draining the Abbey's time and funds.[162]

Twenty years later, in the 1370s, we might reasonably suppose that the boar-hunting grounds depicted in *Gawain* are those of this Abbey — most likely around the Roaches ('Roche Grange') and Wildboarclough[163] — and also that they had recovered from the over-use they suffered during the 1340s and 1350s. I have been unable to discover if Sir William de Furnival of Alton Castle would have enjoyed hunting rights on certain days in such lands, in the 1370s. But these grounds were certainly within easy reach. His ride to reach them from Alton Castle would have been about 16 miles along the Earlsway, which would have been about an hour's journey for cantering

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161 William D. Klemperer and Neil Boothroyd, *Excavations at Hulton Abbey, Staffordshire 1987*-1994, Society for Medieval Archaeology Monographs, 2004.

162 1351, in "Houses of Cistercian monks: The abbey of Dieulacres", *A History of the County of Stafford*, Volume 3, Victoria County History, 1970. For a fuller account see the excellent book by Michael J. Fisher, *Dieulacres Abbey*, Dieulacres Abbey, 1984.

163 I am of course not the first to suggest these places for the hunts, and they have been well explored and discussed by R.V.W. Elliott in his *The Gawain Country*, 1984.

horses in midwinter. On 31st December there is about seven hours of midwinter daylight, so a journey of an hour either side would have been feasible for a day's hunting. In the West Midlands as elsewhere, the long-standing tradition of 'the Boxing Day hunt' is still upheld today, and on a bright day the daylight is quite sufficient for a full day of hunting.

Incidentally there is another *Ber-* name associated with Croxden, and a local rustic rhyme on the founding of Croxden reveals it to the layman…

> He dedicated it unto Sainte Mary,
>
> Of the order of Bernardine monks to be.

'Bernardine' was "another name for the Cistercians (the White monks), who were a reformed order of Benedictine or Black monks".[164] [165] The reference then arises from St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1135) who became a leading intellectual force for the Marian cult in northern France. One of his mystical texts, Saint Bernard's popular "Prayer to the Shoulder Wound of Jesus", has obvious resonances with Gawain's neck wound. According to pious legend, St. Bernard had 'asked Jesus' which was his greatest unrecorded suffering and the wound that inflicted the most pain on him in Calvary and Jesus was said to have answered: "I had on My Shoulder, while I bore My Cross on the Way of Sorrows, a grievous Wound which was more painful than the others and which is not recorded by men."

There is a less direct link with *Gawain*. Saint Bernard was closely involved with the development of the idea of the Virgin Mary as the sailor's "Star of the Sea" (*Stella Maris,* 9th century onwards), which Christianised the role formerly played by the wayward planet-star Venus. The Cistercians held to the cult of the Virgin Mary in its northern French form, which had incorporated many earlier pagan forms of women's devotion.

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164 Robert K. Dent and Joseph Hill, *Historic Staffordshire*, 1896, page 106.

165 The Cistercians wore white. At nearby Rocester, an Abbey of Black Monks had existed from 1146. This places its foundation before that of Croxden, the dates of foundation of which vary according to different sources, from 1176, to 1179, or 1189. Croxden was the daughter-house of the Abbey of Aunay-sur-Odon in France.

There is then a link here with the opening lines of *Gawain*, when the poet evokes the voyage from Troy to found Rome and thus (to those who knew the tale well), the guiding role of the star Venus…

> "Venus [was] sent to show Aeneas the way from Troy towards the promised land of Italy...
>
> > 'I seek my country Italy […] I embarked on the Phrygian sea with twenty ships, | following my given fate, my mother, a goddess, showing the way.' (*Aen*. 1.380-1.382)"
>
> [The source for Virgil's lines can be found in] book II of the work *Antiquitates rerum humanarum et divinarum*, [47 B.C., in which M. Terentius] Varro says:
>
> "From the very same moment Aeneas left Troy, he constantly saw Venus's star during the day until he arrived at the *Ager Laurens*, where he was no longer able to see it: this was the reason why he knew he had arrived at the land that had been destined for him".[166]

This imagery was later taken up by Imperial Rome at the highest level…

> The star of Venus (the goddess Venus herself) was believed to have guided Aeneas, the son of Venus, from Troy to Italy. Caesar claimed that his family descended from Venus and he always honored the goddess. Caesar issued coins that depict Venus' head, and several of Caesar's types also display both Venus and her star on the reverse. [...] these coins indicate that Caesar deliberately used Venus and her star as his symbols. [...] After Caesar's death [in 44 B.C.], the *sidus Iulium* and the star of Venus became virtually identical and indistinguishable in the iconography. [...] the iconography of the deified Julius Caesar was important during the reign of Augustus [a 'golden age of peace', 27 B.C. - 14 A.D.], and it spread throughout the Empire."[167]

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166 Miriam Libran Moreno, "The father's star: star imagery in Virgil's *Aeneid* and J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of The Rings*", *Littera Aperta* (Universidad de Cordoba, Spain), Vol. 3, 2015.

167 Mary Frances Williams, "The *Sidus Iulium*, the divinity of men, and the Golden Age in Virgil's *Aeneid*", *Leeds International Classical Studies*, 2.1, 2003. "the *sidus Iulium*, the father's star that adorned Augustus's helm and brow in that battle (*Aen*. 8.678-8.681) [battle = Actium, 31 B.C.]".

Venus also does similar, if more discreet, service for Odysseus in *The Odyssey*...

But here we strike a very curious problem in the poem. The star on Gawain's shield appears to be *the only star in the poem*, a poem otherwise rich in nature description, with scenes of dark nights outdoors, and written in a milieu in which a poem was not deemed to be a poem without astronomical references…

> "nor again if he be ignorant of astronomy can he understand the poets", (Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*)
>
> "Perfection in a versifier does not write about winter, about summer, about night, about day without astronomy." (13th century English rhetorician Gervase of Melkley).[168]

Yet not one star is mentioned in *Gawain*, not one constellation, and there are just two passing and inconsequential mentions of the moon. Only once does the poet go higher than "clouds", to mention "sky". It cannot be, if he was also the *Pearl* poet, that he was ignorant of the poetic power of descriptions of the stars. Since the *Pearl* poet uses them so beautifully in the *strothe-men* transition section etc. We are then left with the conclusion that in *Gawain* he has *deliberately* shut out all stars other than the star on his hero's shield. Why? I can think of no firm solution for this small mystery. Was the patron or audience of *Gawain* different to that of *Pearl*? Did the *Gawain*-patron have a religious dislike of astrology-astronomy? Did the poet make a conscious and innovative decision that his poem was to be 'earthy' in tone and subject matter, and thus required no celestial embroidery?

> "When that bright star appear'd, which chief of all,
>
> Proclaims Aurora's rising, child of morn,
>
> The ship sea traversing approach'd the isle." (G.W. Edginton, translator)

There is a further link with Venus, in the *Gawain*-poet's allusion to the 'Halycon Days' of fine becalmed weather — traditionally assumed to occur at Christmas, and arising in the classical literature in association with Venus. George Sanderlin has also compared the 'glamour' which Venus casts on Aeneas in the Temple of Juno, to Gawain's becoming a 'spring spirit' of 'marvelous hues' in lines 864-868. See: George Sanderlin , "Two Transfigurations: Gawain and Aeneas", *The Chaucer Review*, Vol. 12, No. 4, Spring, 1978, pages 255-258.

168 Both quotations drawn from Scott D. Troyan (Ed.), *Medieval Rhetoric: A Casebook*, Routledge, 2004, page 95.

There is also a more earthy tradition of the "endeles knot", in the context of garters and folk 'love magic', as seen in three instances I have found. All date from before the publication of *Gawain* in 1839. The first is in a bawdy poem published in *The Satirist or Monthly Meteor* (1st February 1812):

Beck of Blackheath

Beck of Blackheath beside her bed,
First heav'd a sigh then softly said
Alack-a-daisy me!
This is the eve of Valentine:
O that the man that shall be mine,
I in a dream might see!
With that, her petticoat she rais'd,
And had a saint been there and gaz'd,
He'd heaven itself forgot;
She rais'd her petticoat around.
Her garter's from her knees unbound,
And tied them in a knot.
Them in an endless knot she tied.—
"Such be the knot when I'm a bride,
So endless be his love!
The first whom in the morn I view,
O may he be that spouse as true
And constant as a dove!"
This as she said, the trembling maid
The charm beneath the pillow laid,
And then, beneath the quilt
She laid her far more potent charms,
A breast that throbbed with soft alarms,
And — guess what else thou wilt.

Evidently the audience here was expected to be familiar with an "endless knot" and its entanglement with love. It turns out that the amorous girl has mis-tied her "endless knot", and so she ends up with a monstrous chimney-sweep. But possibly we merely see here a co-incidence, a natural recurring of the conjunction between an "endless knot" / ladies' garter / love / magic / and and unwelcome and uncouth visitor, and as such it is quite separate from any feminine tradition which informed *Gawain* some 500 years earlier.

The second, rather more elevated, instance of the term occurs in passing in the *Gentleman's magazine* for May 1833. The context is a general comparative discussion on church sculpture in England, and relates to Tutbury near Alton Castle…

> "The intricate mixture of leaves, tendrils […] They are sometimes emblematical, as at Tutbury church, one of the capitals of whose south doorway is composed of an endless knot, in allusion to eternity" […] "the frieze of the south doorway of Tutbury Church. [on which] The boar, driven to the combat by a man, is opposed by four dogs." (page 399).

This knot seems to be different in form and shape than the pentangle, but if it existed under such a name in England — perhaps both in low comedy and high church art — in 1377 then it may explain why the *Gawain*-poet could mistakenly remark of the Solomonic pentangle that…

> and the English call it,
>
> In all the land, I hear, the Endless Knot.

… when no reference can be found to a pentangle known by that name.[169]

This link between "endless knot" and love was not a late development, as it is also found in the *Poetical works* of Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503?-1542)…

> "So shall I knit an endless knot; Such fruit in love, alas! I find."

Chaucer in *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* also mentions a love-knot, albeit not specifically "endless"…

> He had of gold wrought a curious pin,
>
> A love-knot in the greten [great-end of the pin] there was.

[169] James Winny (Ed.), *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Broadview Press, 2006.

9. Wetton Mill and the Green Chapel: new evidence and a new location.

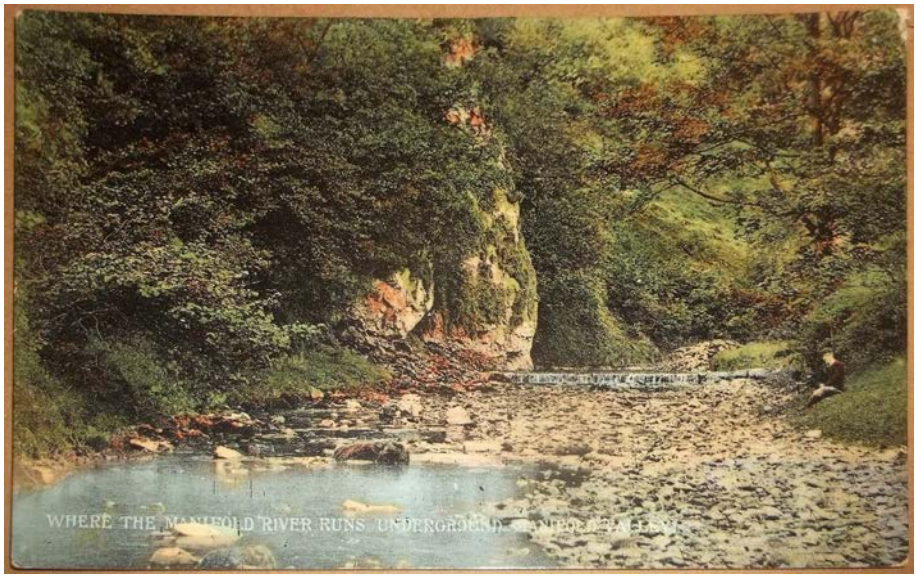
The poem *Sir Gawain* describes a place known as the Green Chapel, in the following words…

> "a mound as it might be near the marge of a green, a worn barrow on a brae [slope] by the brink of a water, beside falls in a flood that was flowing down; the burn [fast stream] bubbled therein, as if boiling it were. He urged on his horse then, and came up to the mound, there lightly alit, and lashed to a tree his reins, with a rough branch rightly secured them. Then he went to the barrow and about it he walked, debating in his mind what might the thing be. It had a hole at the end and at either side, and with grass in green patches was grown all over, and was all hollow within: nought but an old cavern, or a cleft in an old crag; he could not it name aright. (Tolkien translation, run as if prose)

Following R.V.W. Elliott, the Green Chapel has been commonly assumed by some to be the atmospheric and accessible and large Lud's Church, located near Rushton Spencer (about a mile from the Ship Inn at Wincle, and near the later Swythamley Hall). Yet the relatively nearby Old Hannah's Cave near Wetton was known for the remarkable noises that are described in the poem…

> Then from that height he heard, from a hard rock
>
> On the bank beyond the brook, a barbarous noise.
>
> What! It clattered amid the cliffs fit to cleave them apart,
>
> As if a great scythe were being ground on a grindstone there.
>
> What! It whirred and it whetted like water in a mill.
>
> What! It made a rushing, ringing din, rueful to hear. (Stone translation)

These noises were once commonly remarked in the area, apparently the result of blowhole and possible gaseous action in the rocks, due to the river dropping underground.



"Where the Manifold River goes underground, Manifold Valley". Circa 1900 postcard. Note the boy for scale.

Dry bed of the River Manifold, when the river runs underground. One half of a magic lantern stereo slide card, possibly 1880s. Note the grazing cow to the left, for scale.

The River Manifold rises at Axe Edge then comes down to run underground (except when in spate, and spates can also happen in summer after storms) from below Wetton Mill until it resurfaces at Ilam risings near Ilam Hall. The nearby River Hamps also dives underground dry weather around Waterhouses, also surfacing some four miles away at Ilam Hall.

These "explosions which take place in the limestone", at Red Hurst Gorge near Wetton Mill, were amply and reliably documented by Sir Thomas Wardle in the *North Staffordshire Field Club, Annual Report and Transactions* of 1899, with eyewitness accounts from both locals and geologists.

> "On Saturday, December 10th, I was passing this interesting Valley, accompanied by Mr. George Barrow, of Her Majesty's Geological Survey, who is re-surveying the grits and shales of the Millstone grit and Yoredale series of the neighbourhood of Leek. I had invited him to Swainsley for the week-end, to see something of the Limestone geology of the neighbourhood. We were suddenly startled by a loud crackling noise like several rifles being almost simultaneously discharged, and thinking someone was shooting, we looked up the cliff in the direction from whence the sound proceeded, but saw nothing; but very shortly an explosion occurred which was visible as well as audible, a flash, so to speak, was ejected horizontally from a hole or fissure in the upper part of the cliff, across the valley, with immense force and rapidity, accompanied by a bluish column not of steam, or fire, or smoke, but apparently of aqueous vapour. We soon saw it was a case of a mountain in labour, and determined to wait to see more of this singular disturbance. In a few minutes there was another discharge, apparently a little higher up the cliff than the last one, and of less volume and noise, then several smaller ones with crackling sounds, and although there was no smoky appearance, the disturbance of the air could be faintly seen in long streaks of semi-transparent waviness. After a longer time the largest explosion occurred, and we had the good fortune to see it plainly. It was like the discharge of a gun loaded with Schultze powder, the noise being more crackling than with black powder. It was in fact not one, but a series of reports, quite continuous and exactly like thunder when the electric discharge is very near. No doubt these sounds would reverberate and would roll and be in effect like thunder. The reason of the continuity of the sound was clear to see, the force of the explosion was so great that it cleft the air with such rapidity as to take the almost zig-zag or river-like course we are

> accustomed to see in electric discharges. There was a slight misty rain at the time which made its course more visible, and it resembled a narrow band, say six to eight inches, of bluish vapour; whether the colour was only due to external watery vapour, or whether it was accompanied by any vapour from inside the cliff, we could not tell. It is possible that the air may be pent up inside the cliff, and has to accumulate to such an extent, by syphon water pressure, that at last it escapes, carrying spray with it."

Sir Wardle supported his own observation with a wealth of eyewitness reports and some press clippings. See Appendix 4 and Appendix 5 for the full text of the long article and a supporting article by Samuel Carrington of 1870. Carrington even noted a higher opening that provided venting…

> "Towards the base of the hill, opposite to the road, where it and the river make a sharp turn, is a small but conspicuous cave, which is called "Old Hannah's Hole"; and **higher up, in the face of a steep crag, is a rent or hole**, which serves as a vent to the explosions within."[170] (my emphasis)

Compare this with *Gawain*, when standing on the Green Chapel, Gawain hears the voice of the Green Knight above him…

> He roamed up to the roof of that rough dwelling. […]
>
> "Bide there!" said one on the bank above his head.
>
> "And you shall swiftly receive what I once swore to give you."

The *National Speleological Society Bulletin* of January 1982 reported of the Old Hannah's Cave entrance, and confirmed that…

> "The adjacent wall of the Redhurst Gorge contains several smaller solutional openings"

This also matches the *Gawain*-poet's description of the Green Chapel that it "had a hole at the end [entrance] and at either side" and other features stated in the poem.

An interesting additional modern observation of the acoustic properties of this cave was made by local all-weather fieldworker Byron Machin…

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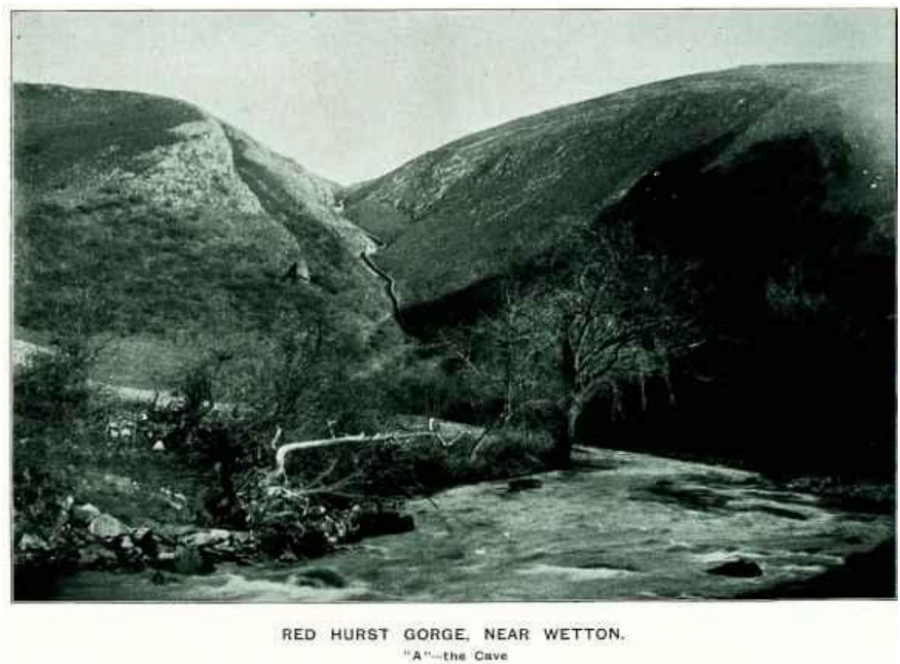
[170] Samuel Carrington (of Wetton), "Explosions of Gas in Mountain Limestone", *The Reliquary and illustrated archaeologist*, Vol. 11, 1870-1871, issued c. 1870 with erroneous forward dates on the volume's cover-page.

> "Old Hannah's Hole: […] The cave itself does make a howling noise, and on very windy days its horn-like shape channels the gusts to produce a booming sound."[171]

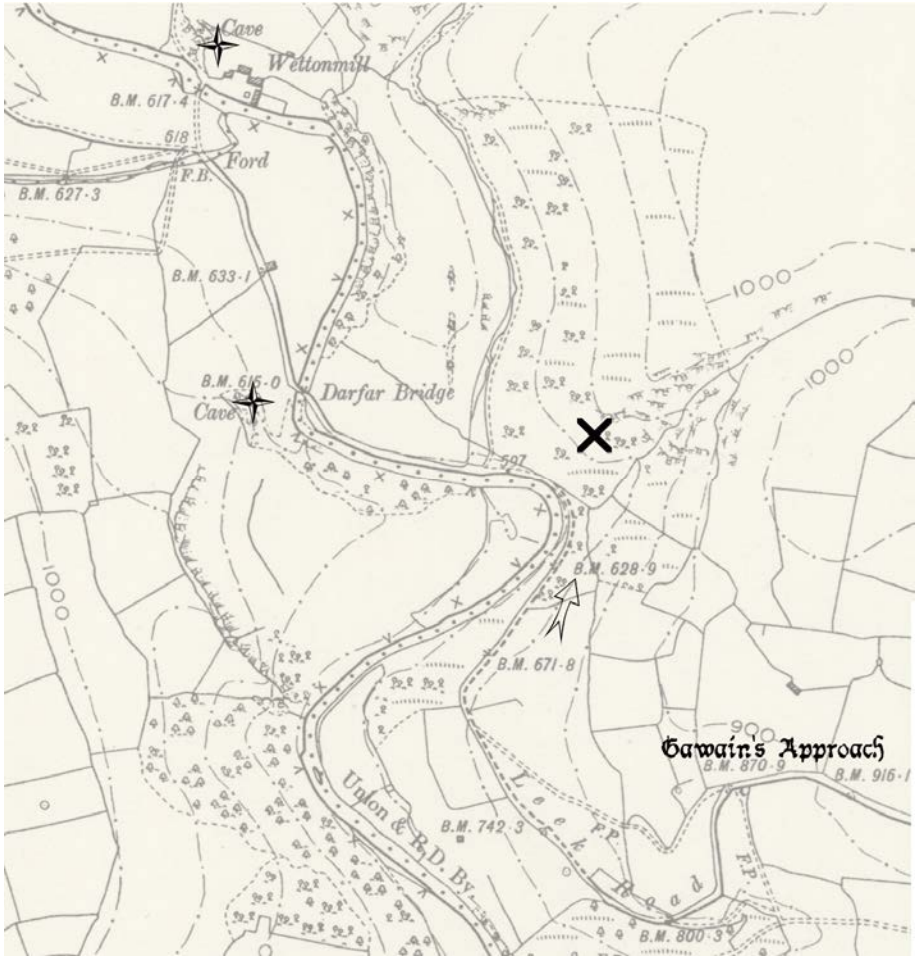
In his 1899 article Sir Wardle confirms the location and is precise about Old Hannah's Cave, even going to the trouble of providing a marked photograph…

> "Now the exact locality of this valley with its sides of semi-mountainous cliffs is about half-a-mile from Wetton Mill, and a little way beyond Darfar Bridge, on the way to the village of Wetton. It is on the left side of the River Manyfold, at a part of the river which for many years has been dry in summer, the water having disappeared beneath the surface at Darfar Crags."



Photograph of the cave and its 'Red Hurst' (aka Redhurst) gorge, *North Staffordshire Field Club, Annual Report and Transactions* of 1899. 'A' marks the cave, at the end of a cleft on the left third of the picture. One can see how in winter, after rain and snow-storms, there could have been a fast clattering streamlet running in the gorge's cleft.

171 Byron Machin, *The Folklore of the Staffordshire Moorlands*, Seven Stones, 2018, page 99.



Old O.S. map with overlay. X marks Old Hannah's cave. Gawain approaches from Wetton on what is marked as "the Leek Road".

Thus Old Hannah's Cave is clearly not to be confused with the more popular cave at Wetton identified by Mabel Day in 1940. Nor with the additional cave across the valley on Ossom's Hill (possibly partly a water outflow for much later metal mining in the hill), suggested by Kaske in 1972, following and expanding on Day.

On the map above one can also see Darfar Bridge, where the river goes underground. In very dry weather it is reported by cave specialists that one can see the cave openings, 'swallets', on the river-bed…

> "bouldery depressions in the bed as at Wetton Mill itself; others are inflow cave entrances, e.g. Redhurst Swallet"[172]

But since the weather in *Gawain* is wet and cold, the river was likely flowing, and thus able to provide the explosions and noises suggested both by the *Gawain*-poet and by the later Victorian geologists. The river being in spate, Gawain and his guide would thus approach on the track from Wetton,[173] on the track that went toward Leek and later toward the mill at Wetton Mill[174] as seen in this photograph…

Old Hannah's Cave, Wetton Mill, c. 1910. One can see a bit of the lane below. Note the similarity of the crack in the land to the female pubic mound and cleft. See Edgeworth (1985).

There is a slight problem here, arising from the Stone translation of…

> look about on the flat, on your left hand

This does not quite fit the terrain when approaching on the track, if we assume the meaning is either 'on the level' (the level of your eye or hand), or

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172 Joseph Newell Jennings, *Karst,* 1971, page 71. Some attempt has been made to plug the swallet holes, either unofficially by farmers illegally disposing of rubbish in them during the dry season, or officially with municipal concrete plugs. As one might expect, the river has defeated most such attempts.

173 Early 14th century church tower. English Heritage listing for the church: "Early C14 … gargoyles at belfry stage … parapet band with gargoyles". Anglo-Saxon settlement, with evidence of Roman occupation, on which see the excavation reports: Thomas Bateman, *Ten years' diggings in Celtic and Saxon grave hills, in the counties of Derby, Stafford, and York, from 1848 to 1858*, George Allen & Sons, 1861, pages 193-203.

174 The later mill was not there in the 14th century. A watermill was first established in 1577 by William Cavendish. The mill house dates to the 16th century. The mill closed as such in 1857, possibly after being replaced c. 1711.

(less likely) 'on the flat ground'. This was somewhat solved by R.W.V. Elliot's translation, given in his *Times* article of 1958…

> Then look up a little among the trees on your left hand,
>
> And there, along the valley, you will see the Green Chapel.

This fits better. J.R.R. Tolkien, ever cautious, has "look o'er the green" without specifying what "the green" might be…

> A little to thy left hand then look o'er the green
>
> and thou wilt see on the slope the selfsame chapel

But this point is perhaps solved by the poet's observation that Gawain, once in the tight gorge with the bubbling fast-flowing stream, simply cannot see the chapel as he expects to see it. Then the poet enters into a description of what is an obvious poetic conflation of Old Hannah's Cave in Redhurst Gorge, and the cave above Wetton Mill.

Interestingly we also know Old Hannah's Cave was once inhabited by 'giants', by medieval standards. The same 1899 article by Wardle explains…

> "All the adult bones [excavated in Old Hannah's Cave] are large, and some especially so, considerably larger than those of an average man of the present day, the vertebrae and hip-bones being those of an individual above the average height."

That was the professional opinion from a…

> "Mr. Newton, of the Museum of Practical Geology, Jermyn Street, London, the best authority on recent and extinct bones", to whom the cave's excavated bones were sent by Sir Wardle.

Now, of course, this remarkable congruity with the size of the Green Knight immediately leads one to suspect that Sir Wardle[175] was attempting to confabulate a local link with *Gawain*.

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175 Sir Thomas Wardle was a highly reputable local silk manufacturer and churchman. He had collaborated on textiles with William Morris, an expert on Indian textiles and related dyes, botany and insects, and president of the Silk Association of Great Britain and Ireland. Through his interest in the local limestone geology, he was also a member of the Geological Society of London. See: A.G. Jacques, *The Wardle Story: Sir Thomas and Lady Wardle: A Victorian Enterprise*, Churnet Valley Books, 1996.

Yet in his article Wardle nowhere mentions *Gawain* in the context of the cave, and he seems utterly oblivious of the poem. He was interested in the cave's geology, the archaeology of its floor surfaces, and only incidentally gives some bits of local folklore relating to the noises. I can detect no evidence that he was trying to massage the facts to 'claim' *Gawain* for North Staffordshire. He would have been 'called out' on any such attempt by his combative fellows in the North Staffordshire Field Club (then one of the largest such groups in the nation), and also by outspoken locals, had he been trying to confabulate. Much the same is true of Carrington in 1870. Both were local men, Carrington being the worthy village schoolmaster of Wetton, a geology sample supplier to museums, and friend and right-hand man of the leading local antiquarian Thomas Bateman.[176]

> "Samuel Carrington was Bateman's lieutenant in Staffordshire. A village schoolmaster at Wetton, he was described by Roache Smith [in *Retrospections*, Vol. 1, 1883] as 'a very intelligent man; a good geologist; and an enthusiastic excavator of tumuli'. Smith noted penetratingly: 'Seldom are such men appreciated and I fear he was not an exception to the fate of the worthy unselfish poor." […] "Carrington appears to have begun working with Bateman in the spring of 1845." […] "Carrington appears to have been a most conscientious and worthy servant. He had a deep interest in archaeology and proved a scrupulous and enthusiastic antiquary." [...] "Judging from later articles in *The Reliquary*, and notes in Jewitt's diary, Carrington continued to interest himself in archaeology for some years after Bateman's death."[177]

Evidently this was not a man who might try to 'pull a stunt' in print, and fool the public. Also, at that point in time there was little attention paid to *Gawain*, and the general suggestion among the few scholars who noticed it was that the text might have originated in Lancashire. There was, admittedly, one suggestion of "Staffordshire or Cheshire" (in the context of a retraction) in the Early English Text Society's second edition of *Early*

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176 *Notes and Queries*, 10th February 1900, page 103. Carrington and Bateman were the models for Flaxdale and Hornblower in Eliza Meteyard's novel *Dora and her Papa*. The novel is still quite readable today and paints a vivid picture of the lives and places of the Peak barrow-diggers, as well as evoking landscapes similar to those of *Gawain*.

177 Barry M. Marsden, *The Early Barrow-Diggers*, Noyes, 1974, pages 43-45.

English Alliterative Poems in the West-Midland Dialect of the Fourteenth Century (1869) and then the third edition (1896). That might have been enough for the most linguistically inclined of the local antiquarians to hazard a reading of the poem in the original, circa 1870, and then surmise some congruence with the landscape around Leek, Alton and Wetton. Nor should we underestimate the circles of oral transmission of knowledge, especially among the antiquarians with local knowledge and strong regional pride.

But I have very carefully read all the *North Staffordshire Field Club Reports and Transactions* to 1896 (in the course of making an annotated database of the contents over several years),[178] and also looked though *The Reliquary* and especially its 'Book Notes' for relevant years, and I have found not a whit of evidence that local antiquarians had any knowledge of the poem *Gawain*.

Sir Wardle's own account of the curious sounds and explosions were confirmed by a letter to the *Staffordshire Advertiser* of c. 1870, which I reprint in full in Appendix 4. The author gave a full paper on the topic soon after, in *The Reliquary* for 1870-71, "Explosions of Gas in Mountain Limestone". There Wardle also briefly recounted the local folk story about the old firewood collector, who knew the inhabitant of the cave by the name of "Hob! Hob! the King of the Woods". How credible this snippet is must remain debatable, and one suspects his local informants may have been embroidering their memory of their long-ago 'verbalized' interpretations of the noises and rumblings, or were even telling Sir Wardle of half-remembered lore which actually related to the nearby Thor's Cave. Nevertheless, this is what he was told, as he recorded it in his paper…

> Occasionally, in the stillness of the night, would those intrepid villagers steal down into the dark shades of the valley [to try to solve its mystery], and hear the low sullen voice of this creature asserting himself in the following words: 'Hob! Hob! The King of the Woods am I,' and the younger woods from their retreat would in a childlike voice respond, 'Hark! Hark! Our daddy calls!'

[178] North Staffordshire Field Studies, an ongoing project which can be found online at: https://northstaffsfield.omeka.net/

Even without this debatable and late folklore, there are clear points that suggest Old Hannah's Cave as a partial model for the Green Chapel:

> i) the general description fits very well, other than the steepness of the terrain for a horse to reach it if riding up from below;
>
> ii) the explosive and unusual noises heard there, which bounce and leap around the gorge as *Gawain* describes;[179]
>
> iii) the finding of 'giant' human bones in the cave in scientific excavations.

Much of the older *Gawain* literature is now slipping out-of-print, but so far as I can tell from online sources I am the first to suggest Old Hannah's Cave as the spot for the Green Chapel, and to make the connections with the uncanny noises mentioned in *Gawain*.

Can modern cave research also provide any information? I have discovered that a 1934 caving survey made an enthusiastic survey of the valley and found the whole of this…

> "curious limestone hummock literally riddled with holes, but as they are quite small affairs there is no necessity for lighting. It is highly amusing exploring this petrified sponge as one is apt to emerge at most unexpected places." [180]

But where does this leave the Wetton Mill cave suggested by Mabel Day in 1940? I am fairly convinced her cave is *part* of the depiction of the Green

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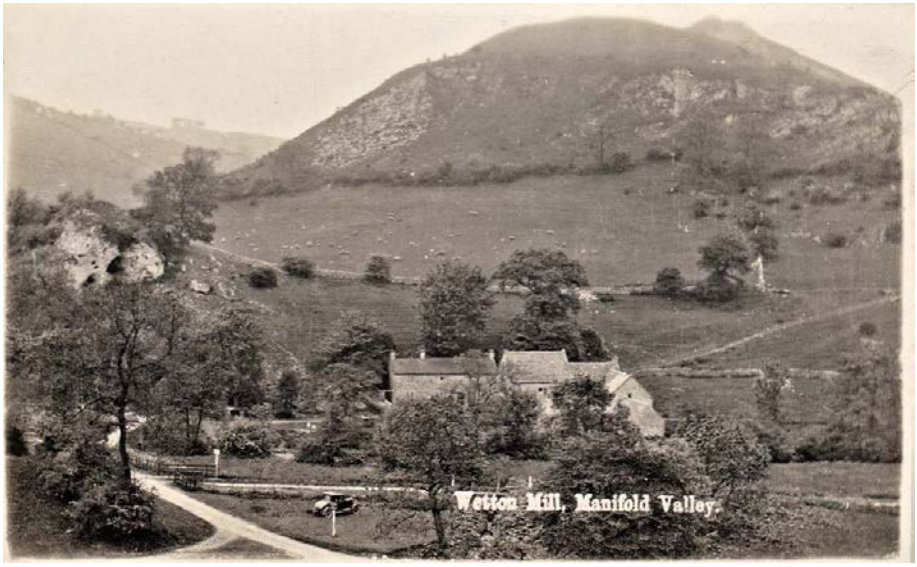
[179] Landslips and erosion, and modern changes to farm and river drainage, appears to have quieted the noises in recent decades. In 1978 *Country Life* magazine reported that the Labour government's Water Board wanted to flood the Manifold Valley to make a giant reservoir, as they had already done with the nearby Goyt Valley, but thankfully that was avoided. Much of this area is now National Trust land.

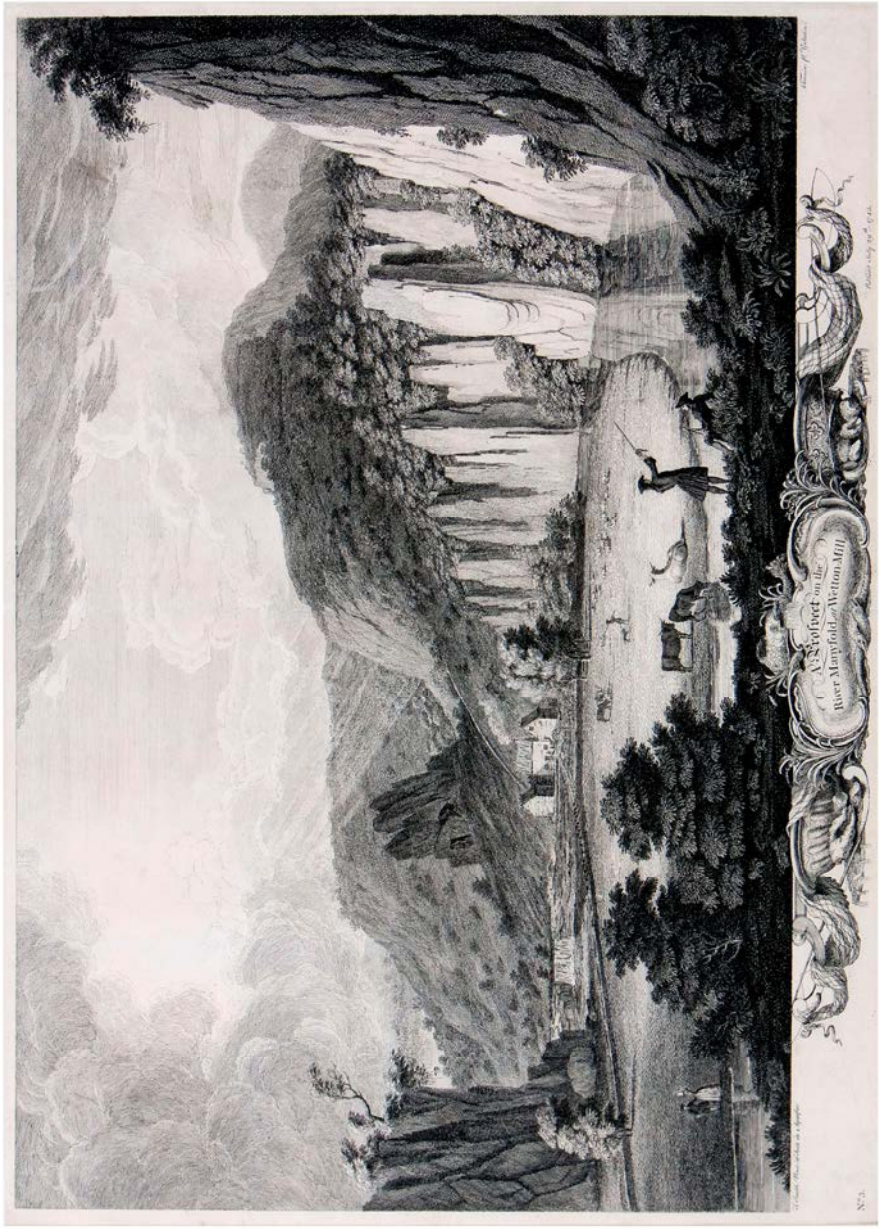
[180] Yates, *Yorkshire Ramblers' Club Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 21. There was a later official and comprehensive Manifold Valley Caves Project in the late 1980s and early 1990s, but its final reports and maps are not online — presumably in a bid to protect the caves from vandalism. The online sources such as *The Modern Antiquarian* are unreliable as to which cave is which, and many contributing pagans and walkers are obviously thoroughly confused on basic matters of cave names and 'which name or bit of folklore belonged to which cave'. The best easily-obtained starting point for working out 'which cave is which' is the comprehensive gazetteer with photos and OS references in the off-puttingly titled *Derbyshire Cavemen* (2010), by local journalist Stephen Cliffe. This useful book also has coverage of the North Staffordshire caves of the Manifold Valley.

Chapel, but only a part. The main point in its favour is that Gawain is able to stand *on top* of the Chapel, and doing so would not be possible at Old Hannah's Cave unless the entrance had once been mounded up with turf in some way. My theory is that the *Gawain*-poet made a poetic amalgam of Day's Wetton Mill cave (see pictures following) with the narrow gorge and uncanny noises of the Old Hannah's Cave around the corner of the hill.



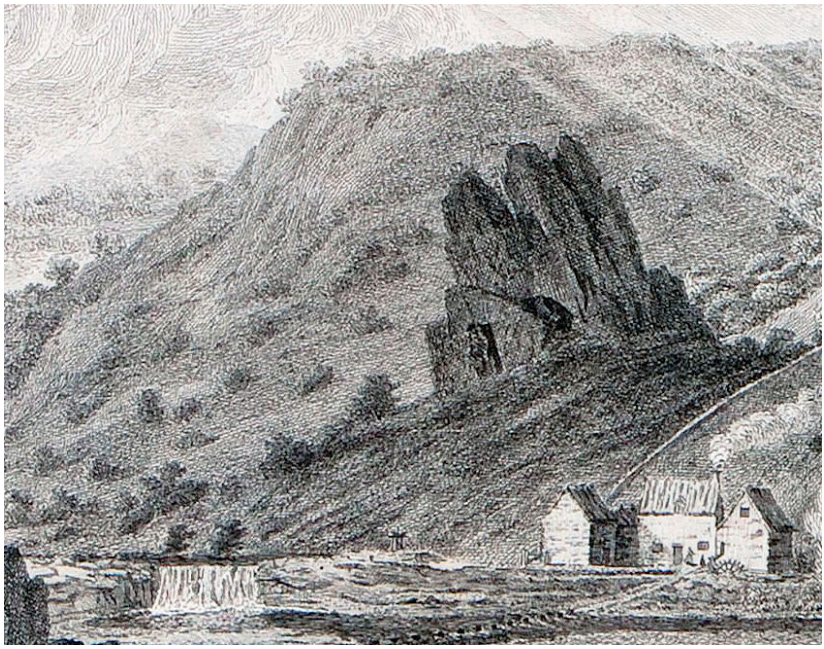
Wetton Mill showing the stone outcrop and cave (left) amid the wider terrain, in a postcard probably c. early 1920s.

Detail of the Wetton Mill cave, from previous postcard.



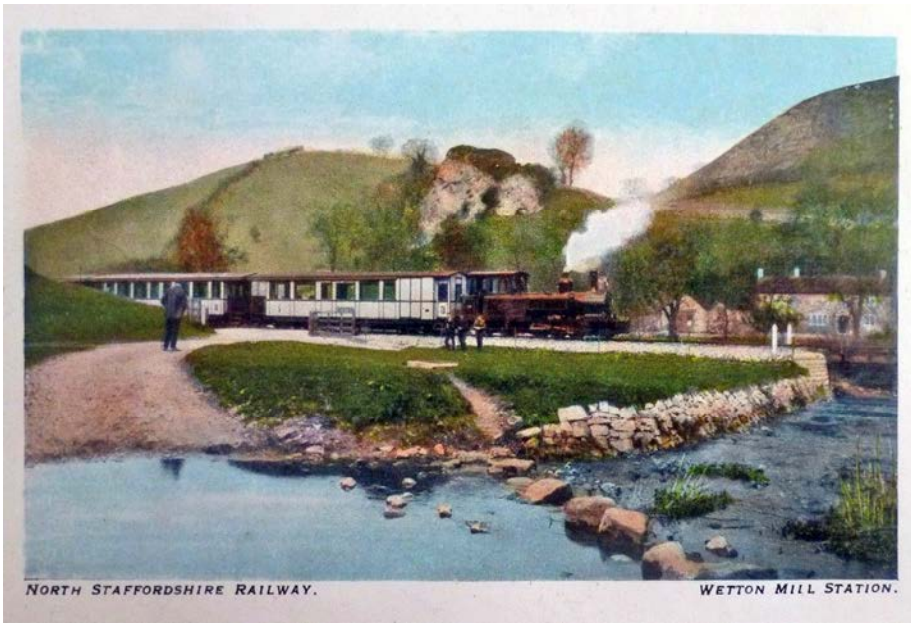
"A prospect on the River Manyfold at Wetton-mill", full engraving. Issued as part of a set, July 1743. Wetton Mill is in the centre, with the cave in the rocky outcrop behind. Ossom's Hill is behind the cave. The rocky fingers above the cave have since been heavily eroded and probably also quarried for local stone. They were likely even more impressive circa 1377, because less eroded.

The cave is often confused with 'Thurshole' (a name which Dr. Plot applied to Thor's Cave) and the Wetton Mill Rock Shelter (National Trust record MNA164360).



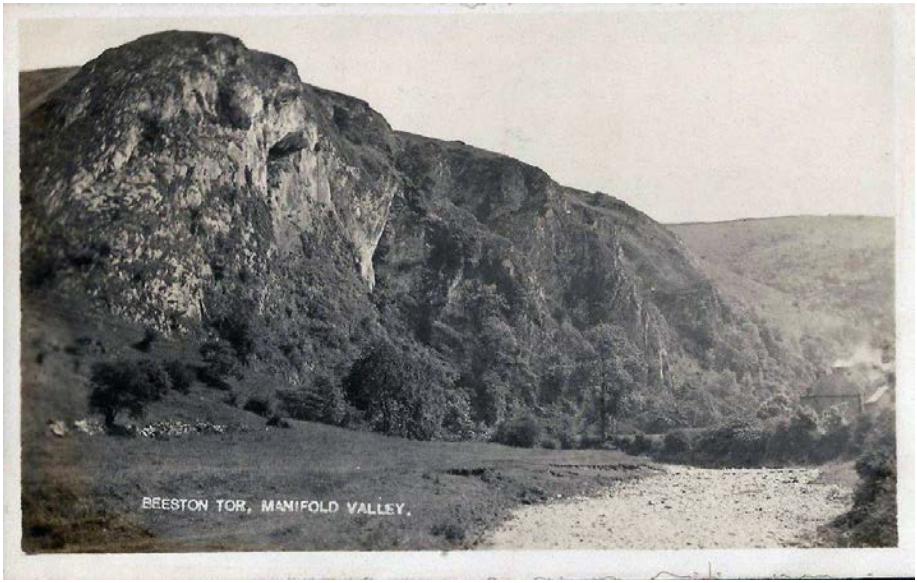
Detail from "A prospect on the River Manyfold at Wetton-mill", July 1743. The watermill and weir were established 1577. The cave-entrance entrance seen above the mill buildings.

"great crooked crags, cruelly jagged; | The bristling barbs of rock seemed to brush the sky"



The same outcrop, heavily eroded and overgrown, circa the 1910s. One suspects that much of the stone from the cave's former 'stone fingers' is now to be found in local walls — such as those seen in the foreground forming the stream-wall.

"Nannys Tor near Wetton Mill", anonymous watercolour, circa 1835-45. One presumes that the on-the-spot artist had the name (lettered at the foot of the picture, but not seen here) direct from local people. Nanny is a common West Midlands word for 'grandma', and is thus akin to the 'Old Hannah' name. The picture evokes the work of Samuel Palmer (1805-1881), and there is one of the nearby Thor's Cave which has a similar quality. The packhorse bridge (also seen below) was circa 1810, a replacement from an older one washed away in floods.

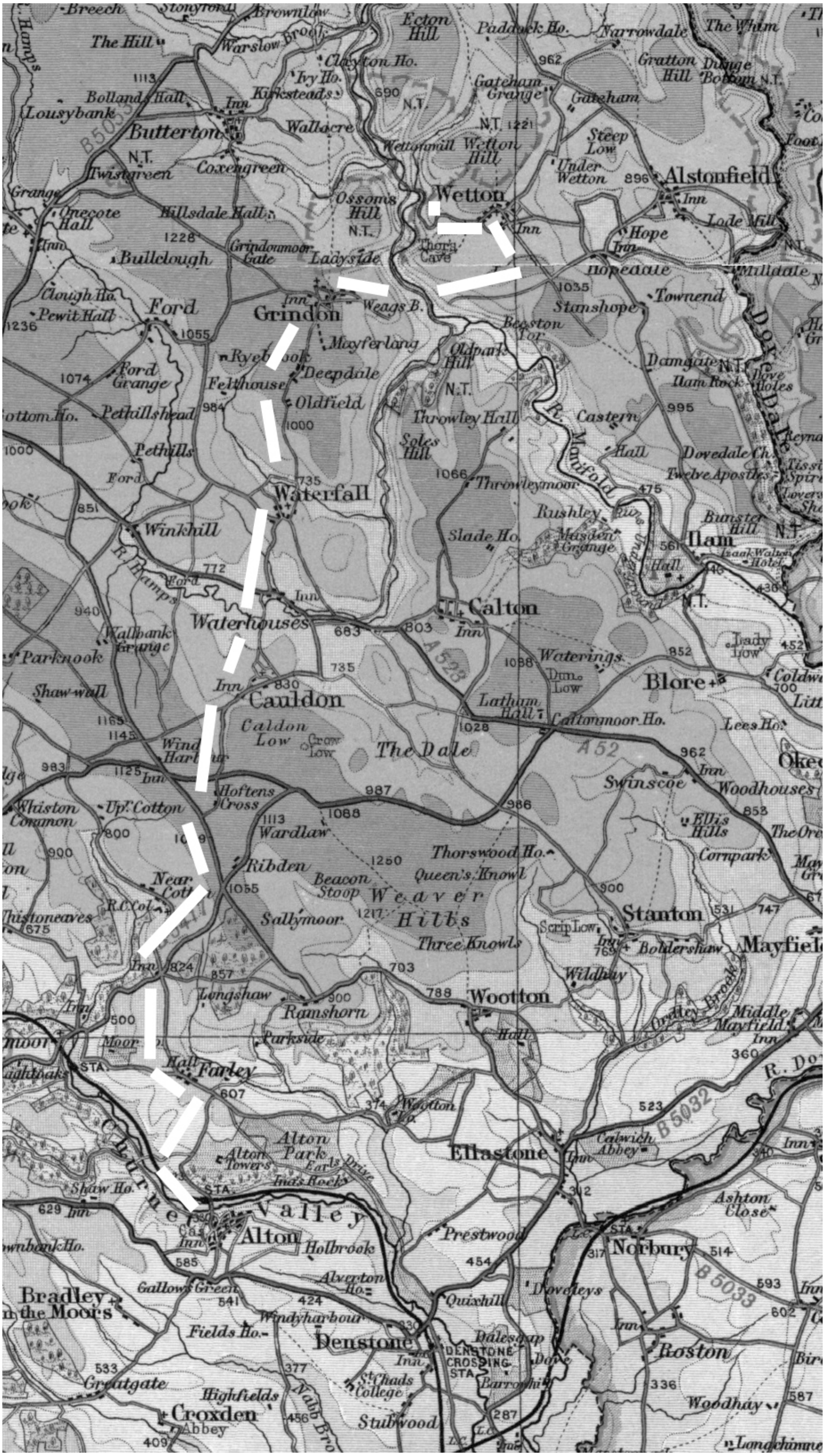


Beeston Tor, just south of Weag's Bridge, where the River Hamps meets the Manifold.

Beeston Tor, with the River Manifold below and flowing strongly.

Map, overleaf: Likely route from Alton Castle to the Green Chapel. Across the Churnet below the Castle – around Abbey Woods – through Cotton - down the western side of the Weaver Hills to Cauldon - down the known 'Earlsway' lane to Waterhouses - up to Waterfall - then on to Grindon ('Gryn') - across the River Manifold at Weag's Bridge by Beeston Tor - to reach Wetton.

Croxden Abbey is seen at the bottom right edge of the map.


Ecton Hill
Paddock Ho.
Narrowdale
The Whim
Brownlow
Warslow Brook
The Hill
Clayton Ho.
Ivy Ho.
Kirksteads
Gratton Hill
Dunge Bottom
Gateham Grange
Gateham
Bolland Hall
Lousybank
Butterton
Wallacre
Wettonmill
Wetton Hill
Steep Low
Twistgreen
Coxengreen
Under Wetton
Alstonfield
Onecote Hall
Hillsdale Hall
Ossoms Hill
Wetton
Hope
Lode Mill
Grindonmoor Gate
Ladyside
Thor's Cave
Hopedale
Milldale
Bullclough
Clough Ho.
Pewit Hall
Ford
Grindon
Weags B.
Stanshope
Townend
Beeston Tor
Mayferlang
Oldpark Hill
Ford Grange
Ryebrook
Felthouse
Deepdale
Damgate
Ilam Rock
Dove Holes
Oldfield
Castern
Pethillshead
Throwley Hall
Soles Hill
Pethills
Hall
Dovedale Ch.
Twelve Apostles
R. Manifold
Waterfall
Throwleymoor
Rushley
Bunster Hill
Winkhill
Slade Ho.
Masden Grange
Ilam
Isaak Walton Hotel
R. Hamps
Waterhouses
Calton
Wallbank Grange
Parknook
Waterings
Dun Low
Lady Low
Blore
Shaw-wall
Cauldon
Caldon Low
Crow Low
Latham Hall
Calton moor Ho.
Lees Ho.
Wind Harbour
The Dale
A 52
A 523
Swinscoe
Woodhouses
Hoftens Cross
Whiston Common
Up. Cotton
Wardlaw
Ellis Hills
Thorswood Ho.
Queen's Knowl
Cornpark
Ribden
Near Cotton
Beacon Stoop
Weaver Hills
Stanton
Sallymoor
Scrip Low
Boldershaw
Mayfield
Three Knowls
Wildhay
Longshaw
Ramshorn
Wootton
Orchley Brook
Middle Mayfield
Parkside
Farley
Wootton Lo.
Alton Park
Alton Towers
Ina's Rock
Ellastone
Calwich Abbey
B 5032
Churnet Valley
Shaw Ho.
Alton
Holbrook
Ashton Close
Prestwood
Norbury
B 5033
Bradley in the Moors
Gallows Green
Alverton Ho.
Quixhill
Doveleys
Fields Ho.
Windyharbour
Denstone
Dalesgap
Roston
Denstone Crossing Sta.
St. Chads College
Barrowhill
Greatgate
Highfields
Croxden Abbey
Stubwood
Woodhay
Longchimney

10. Two miles, by *mydmorn*?

Given that there has been a relatively accepted scholarly surmise that the Green Chapel should be located in the vicinity, one must then consider that Wetton Mill is some nine miles north of Alton Castle. A question that then naturally arises is: is the Green Chapel really two miles from Bertilak's castle, as it is in the poem?

Originally, Bertilak reassures Gawain:

> Mon shal you sette in way,
>
> Hit is not two myle henne.

Straightforward translation:

> [My] man shall set you on the right path,
>
> It is not two miles away.

This could mean that the Green Chapel is two miles away. But it could equally mean that the start of the path, the path that will take Gawain to the Green Chapel, is two miles away. This would depend on if a Baron like Bertilak judged travel distances from the edge of his immediate domain, from the edge of the castle park palings, or from the castle's drawbridge itself.

But the "not two miles" appears to be confirmed by Bertilak telling Gawain that he will reach the Green Chapel at mid-morning...

> cum to that merk at mydmorn

Straightforward translation:

> come to that place at mid-morning.

However, we need to be wary about assuming that *mydmorn* meant midmorning, given the early hours in which working people and monks rose in an agricultural sun-oriented culture circa the 1370s.

The British Library's *The Pearl Poems* (1984) has "MYDMORN GA: n. midmorning". The OED has 'mid-morning'. Tolkien leaves it untranslated as *midmorn*.

Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology states "the 'third hour of the day' is midmorning", but only for 'natural' time. The book points out that there was also monastic time. Monastic scribes also reckoned by the time of the chanter-singing and bells of monastic life. In which case "morning" actually meant the middle of the night, when they got up to sing, while in *terce* (third hour) which to them meant mid-morning. But *terce* was seasonal and in winter *terce* meant 9.20am.[181]

But the meaning of mid-morning is still not quite clear. It may not have been our mid-morning. Consider market law...

> "that hukstaris, that byis and sellis again to wynnyng, sal nocht by ony thing befor that undyrn be rungyn in winter, and mydmorn in summer "

Straightforward translation, with the help of *The Juridical Review*…[182]

> Market hucksters who buy and sell for profit, may not buy anything before the nine o'clock bell rings in the winter, and seven o'clock in summer.

In midwinter in north Staffordshire, the Stellarium software shows that on 31st December / 1st January 1376/77 the sunrise on an open horizon (or from an elevated castle) would be exactly 8.45am. If Bertilak assumes that Gawain will have light enough to follow a horse-track by 8.30am, and that he will take just 15 minutes on good tracks to cover two miles with a horse, then Bertilak is telling him that he'll reach the Green Chapel by 9am. A dawn timing is of course congruent with the ancient idea that people set to be executed, by having their head chopped off, would mount the steps at dawn.

But was Bertilak hinting at his transformed identity to Gawain (and to the intended audience), by using the 'summer' word *mydmorn* rather than the winter word *undyrn*? The Gawain-poet knew a local dialect variant of *undyrn*, since he uses it in *The Pearl* in the context of recounting a market

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181 Emilia Jamroziak, "Schedule of the Cistercian Day", *The Cistercian Order in Medieval Europe: 1090-1500*, unpaginated ebook.

182 *The Juridical Review*, Volume 11, 1899, page 317.

parable (a lord sets off for market '*aboute under*'). But perhaps the term *undyrn* was a lower-class one that might be used when talking of the times of markets, but was not suitable for referring to the time of a man's death.

There is also a slight difference to be accounted for in the distance of the mile. It was then the traditional Roman mile of 5,000 feet (a thousand paces), and was later changed in the year 1593 under Elizabeth I to 5,280 feet or 1,760 yards.

Whatever the slight difference compared to modern miles, that the journey to the Green Chapel appears to have taken longer than just 15 minutes. That might imply that there is something magically askew with time and perhaps the seasons.

Let's look at the timings involved. Gawain rises...

> "Before the day had dawned, he had dressed himself,
>
> For the light from a lamp illuminated his chamber."

Outside, a snowstorm has raged overnight, but has now abated and gone over, leaving...

> "Driving great drifts deep in the dales"

But this snow doesn't seem to then impede travel, suggesting the journey is made on good tracks, despite the weather. In fact, by giving reflected light the light covering of firm snow and side-drifts might aid early morning travel. He and the guide set off...

> By bluffs where boughs were bare they passed,
>
> Climbed by cliffs where the cold clung:
>
> Under the high clouds, ugly mists
>
> Merged damply with the moors and melted on the mountains;
>
> Each hill had a hat, a huge mantle of mist.
>
> Brooks burst forth above them, boiling over their banks
>
> And showering down sharply in shimmering cascades.
>
> Wonderfully wild was their way through the woods;
>
> Till soon the sun in the sway of that season

Brought day.

They were on a lofty hill

Where snow beside them lay,

He's obviously not riding in the dark, even though the sun has not yet risen. The snow will give an uncanny reflected light as he passes the several wooded bluffs, several cliffs with waterfalls, then rides into woods and up onto a wooded hill. It's an eerie liminal light, evoking Gawain's moods as he goes to meet his fate.

John Edwards, in his *The Tour of the Dove* (1821), had visited "most of the places in the Peak" and his long later poem noted the way that looming rocks seemed to be giants, on the Churnet near Alton…

'Twould seem those iron times had reached this glen

When giants played at hewing mountain blocks,

So bold and strange the profile of the rocks

Whose huge fantastic figures frown above.

The Gawain-poet notes the sun then rises enough so that day comes even inside the woods. If he and the guide are where I think they are, just slightly west of Wetton, then the sun is rising directly behind them in the SE and they're looking NW away from it and down into a shadowed and misty land. The mention of sunrise indicates perhaps 9.15am, given how high up they are. If Gawain set off across the castle drawbridge when the sky was paling at 8.30am, then the journey has likely taken about 45 minutes, give or take ten minutes. A canter on a snowy track that is "Wonderfully wild" in the half-light might be at an average speed of 12 mph. In that case 45 minutes has then carried him 9 miles, which is the approximate distance from Alton Castle to Wetton Mill by the likely tracks.[183]

Once at that spot he still has some time to go, but it's only a little way further. On the hill he and his Guide are still in leaf-bare woods. Gawain

[183] Those who wish to walk around Wetton Mill, Grindon, Waterhouses and the Manifold Valley should obtain a copy of: Mark Richards, *White Peak Walks: the Southern Dales*, Cicernone Press, 1988. Ideally in the 1999 pocket-size semi-waterproof edition.

has five minutes or so of conversation with the Guide, who tries to warn him off but eventually tells him...

> Ride down this rough track round yonder cliff
>
> Till you arrive in a rugged ravine at the bottom,
>
> Then look about on the flat, on your left hand,
>
> And you will view there in the vale that very chapel,

Despite the track being "rough" and icy, Gawain and his horse boldly "galloped" down it. This may just be poetic convention, but it might also suggest that he is still on relatively well-made tracks. Then near the bottom of the ravine, Gawain leaves the track...

> Thrust through a thicket there by a bank,
>
> And rode down the rough slope right into the ravine.

So he then reaches the Green Chapel around 9.30am. It's still gloomy and dour in the tight valley ravine, as the midwinter sun may not strike down into it for some time yet (if at all). This then is the '*mydmorn*' time that Bertilak spoke of, in telling Gawain that he would reach the Green Chapel then. If my calculations are correct then Bertilak appears to judge '*mydmorn*' in monastic time, as *Terce*. That being the midmorn for Cistercian monks such as those of the nearby Croxden Abbey, and this time point would have been formally set at 9.20am in a 14th century midwinter.

Limestone vs. Gritstone?

As a rider to this analysis of time, I should perhaps also say something of the terrain in question and its rocky substrata in relation to the action of water. It has been said by Catterall (1988)[184] of the setting described on the ride to the Green Chapel, that certain descriptive lines relating to water show it cannot have been set in the limestone country in midwinter. Catterall's claim is then that these descriptions can only apply to hard gritstone county, and therefore the Chapel must be located further north into the Peak .

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184 Ron Catterall, *The Identity of the Gawain-Poet*, thesis online at catterall.net.

These are the two sets of lines cited in support of this sentiment. The translations have been newly added here, for the benefit of the reader…

Brokez byled and breke bi bonkkez aboute,

Schyre Schaterande on schorez, þer þay doun schowued.

a) Brooks boiled and broke their banks above,

Sharply shattered on shores [shelves of ice], as down they showered.

b) Streams bubbled and foamed within their banks,

Breaking white on the shores where they showered down.

c) Brooks burst forth above them, boiling over their banks

And showering down sharply in shimmering cascades.

A balȝ berȝ bi a bonke þe brymme bysyde,

Bi a forȝ of a flede þat ferked þare;

Þe borne blubred þerinne as hit boyled hade.

a) A bare bulge with a bank below that brimmed,

with the force of a flood that forked there;

born blubbering and frothing as it boiled away.

b) A smooth-surfaced barrow on a slope beside a stream

Which flowed forth fast there in its course,

Foaming and frothing as if feverishly boiling.

I have been on tracks and in valleys in the Peak and the Moorlands in icy weather and I do not see how these lines "must" indicate a hard gritstone landscape. Academics in warm tropic climates probably have little idea of how much water and saturated moist ground there is in North Staffordshire in midwinter, or of the likely ground conditions after a heavy fall of snow on icy ground already saturated with months of rain.

The exact limestone ground in question is anyway somewhat shale-bearing and pebbly…

> "a dark lithofacies [i.e. a subdivision of strata large enough to be mapped] has been mapped out consisting of thinly bedded cherty limestone [i.e. containing chert nodules] with shaly intercalations. The latter facies is more widely developed in the Manifold Valley and good exposures are found in the river section between Wetton Mill and Thor's Cave, and in cuttings along the old Manifold railway track."
>
> — from Mineral Assessment Report No. 129, *The limestone and dolomite resources of the country north and west of Ashbourne, Derbyshire*, Institute of Geological Science, London, 1983.

11. Some other local Gawain-poet candidates discounted.

I here ignore attempts by academics to find and unravel cryptograms, hidden signatures and the like, which have gone nowhere. The tedious pre-Elliott pursuit of these from 1956-1982 is summarised for the reader by Malcolm Andrew in Brewer's *A Companion to the Gawain-poet* (1999), pages 29-31. Equally strained Cheshire suggestions are also overlooked. We must instead look for those who were local and who knew the terrain intimately.

i) Sir Nicholas de Stafford

Throwley Old Hall was located a mile south of Wetton Mill (see full-page map, some pages ago). The Hall overlooked the (often dry) River Manifold, and as such needs investigation.

Throwley Old Hall, *The Baronial Halls And Picturesque Edifices Of England*, 1845-87. Engraved from a drawing by local artist Henry Lark Pratt. The above building was "remodeled" in 1603 (English Heritage listing), and recent detailed studies suggest it incorporated the old manor house.

At the time of *Gawain*, the house was the seat of Sir Nicholas de Stafford.[185] He was High Sheriff of Staffordshire in 1372 and again in 1375. He served in Parliament nine times from 1377-1390, under the name '*Sir Richard de Stafford le Piere*'. Like his near neighbor Sir William at Alton Castle, Sir Nicholas would die without an heir. He appears to have been an efficient county peace-keeper and justice, but nothing more remarkable. On his death the house and park reverted back to the Meverell family who went on to live at Throwley Hall through the centuries.

Throwley Hall and its Park (bottom right) seen in relation to Wetton.

Later, around 1618, that same Meverel or Meverell family helped preserve the memory of another local Bert-, a saint who had reputedly lived near Alton in a *desert* and who might then plausibly be considered as one of several candidates for the poetic inspiration for the name Bertilak in *Gawain*.

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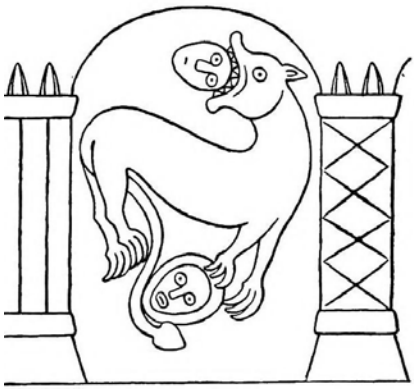
185 This "estate passed from father to son until Elizabeth Meverell inherited the land from her father Thomas on his death in 1347. Between 1349 and 1353 Elizabeth married Sir Nicholas de Stafford (an illegitimate son of Sir Richard), who thereby secured Throwley as his chief seat. Nine times a Staffordshire member of parliament, and knighted by the Black Prince, Sir Nicholas died without issue, so when Elizabeth died in 1405 the estate returned to the Meverells." – R.A. Meeson, "An architectural analysis of Throwley Old Hall, Ilam", *Staffordshire Archaeological Historical Society Transactions*, Vol. 39, page 29. He is easily confused with a host of similar and more illustrious de Staffords, see: *Collections for a history of Staffordshire*, 1917-1918, for a survey of Staffordshire Members of Parliament which distinguishes him from all the others.

The saint's name has various spellings, and to Dr. Plot he was St. Bertelline, but this tomb a short distance away at Ilam bears the name 'Bartram's Tomb'.[186] The font at Ilam (possibly 1070 A.D.) appears to show a carving of Bertellin and his wife escaping Ireland, but his name was first recorded in a text in the mid-twelfth century and thus he could have been known to the *Gawain*-poet. The saint's life-story — as we know it today — can however only be dated to 1516, though the font pictures clearly prefigure this date.[187]

Ancient font at Ilam, possibly 1070 A.D. Likely to be Bertellin and his wife escaping Ireland.



Line drawing reconstruction of the Ilam font's beast, in the act of swallowing a small head and holding another head below. From *Early Christian symbolism in Great Britain and Ireland before the thirteenth century*, 1887, page 373.

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186 *The Baronial Halls, and Ancient Picturesque Edifices of England*, Volume 1, 1845, unpaginated.

187 Hugh Candidus: "Et in Stefford sanctus Berthelmus martyr".

Following on from the devouring dragon-like wolf (seen on the left of the figure), we appear to see Bertellin distraught at the death of his wife and child, in a hermit-like seated pose. Postcard possibly 1910s.

Here is the factual core of a discursive recounting of the life story, as given by the reputable Cardinal Newman in 1844, "A Legend of St. Bettelin or Bertelin. Hermit, and [later] Patron of Stafford, towards A.D. 800".[188]

> Various writers speak of Bettelin, Beccelin, Barthelm, Bertelin; whether he owned all these at once, or whether but some of them, whether a portion of his history belongs to another person, or whether it is altogether fabulous, is not known. A life of him has come down to us which is attributed to Alexander, a Prior of Canons Regular of St. Augustine, in the beginning of the thirteenth century. […]
>
> We are told how that he [Bertelin] was a [Mercian] king's son, and noble in person, and a good Catholic; and how he shrunk from the license [licentiousness] of his father's court; and how, to preserve his purity, he went over to Ireland, where he was received by a certain king or chieftain, who had a fair daughter; and how in a strange land he found the temptation, and fell beneath the sin, which had frightened him from his own. He carried off his beautiful mistress to England, and sought for shelter and concealment in the woods.

[188] "A Legend of St. Bettelin, Hermit and Patron of Stafford, towards. A.D. 800.", IN: 'Hermit Saints. Pt. 3', *Lives of the English Saints*, Toovey, 1844, pages 57–72.

> A wretched childbirth followed, and a tragical issue. While the father was seeking assistance, wolves devoured mother and infant.
>
> Bettelin remained a penitent in the wild, till St. Guthlake [former Mercian noble, 673-714], who was leaving Repton in Derbyshire, where he had entered into both clerical and monastic orders, took him with him to Croyland [Abbey, in the wild and watery fenland of Lincolnshire. This part of the story may arise from a scribe's spurious conflation of Bettelin with a namesake who was found in the life-story of St. Guthlake].
>
> [... Then in 714] On St. Guthlake's death Bettelin took the news, by the Saint's previous directions, to St. Bega [and obscure Irish princess living in England], Guthlake's sister. [...] What happened to Bettelin after that event does not clearly appear. Ingulphus says that he remained and died in Croyland; and he speaks of the marble tomb which contained his relics, as well as Cissa's, near St. Cuthbert, in the Abbey of Croyland. And this is not incompatible altogether with the legend which connects him with the town of Stafford, and which is as follows:–
>
> 'Where the town now stands, the river Sow formed in those times an island which was called Bethney. Here St. Bettelin stationed himself for some years, and led a life so holy, [but then] the Saint, in Plot's words, "disturbed by some that envied his happiness, removed into some desert mountainous places, where he ended his life, leaving Bethnei to others, who afterwards built it, and called it Stafford. Ethelfleda built Stafford [...] in 918." "Now whereabout," Plot continues, "this *desert* place should be that St. Bertelline went to, though histories are silent, yet I have some grounds to think that it might be about Throwley, Ilam, and Dovedale; and that this was the St. Bertram who has a well, an ash, and a tomb at Ilam." [in Staffordshire, just to the east of the formerly mentioned places].

One can see here some obvious parallels with Gawain himself. The pure young noble who leaves a licentious court (in *Gawain* Arthur's Camelot is portrayed as remarkably un-religious and amorous), then journeys to strange lands, trembles on the edge of preserving his chastity, amid the temptation of his youthful desires in a strange castle.

I should note that it appears I am not quite the first to point to this Saint in relation to the Bertilak of *Gawain*. The late Basil Cottle briefly noted it in a

book review of 1986, but it seems that no-one followed his slight hint and investigated the full story and its obvious parallels.[189]

A later version of the life offers some further parallels with the *Gawain* story: that a nature-associated man appears in disguise before a royal court; followed by a journey into the deep wilds. Newman also gives this version of the story, which has Bertelin inadvertently become the rightful King of Mercia during his long absence. At which time he wanted to live on the river-island hermitage of Bethney at Stafford (then not yet a town). He then appeared before the Mercian court — unrecognized by them as their rightful King — to ask for the island by right. The request was granted, but many years later the holy hermit's claim to the Kingship was discovered at court, and (after a duel that partly evokes the entrance of the *Green Knight*, on which see Appendix 5) that was why he fled from his island and went north into the wild *hautdesert* of the Peak. As Dr. Plot suggests, possibly to a site near Wetton Mill, site of the Green Chapel. Although the location may well be an accretion to the story, perhaps one put about fairly late by the Meverell family of nearby Throwley Hall.

ii) Richard de Rudyerd, from Rudyard near Leek.

One 'Ralph Ruderyth' or 'Richard de Rudyerd', apparently from Rudyard near Leek, was twice chancellor of All-souls, Oxford, 1391-2.[190]

Nothing more is known of him, but the dates are good, if he was appointed chancellor at a venerable age then he would have been in his prime in the 1370s. But one has to wonder if someone educated in say, Paris and Oxford, might be rather too sophisticated to value the wild and local things and to write in the dialect of his home district for a relatively limited audience?

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189 The book review is: Basil Cottle, *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol. 85, No. 2, April 1986, pages 253-256. Cottle stated in passing: "I would add that there was a cult of a St. Bertelin, and there are the traces of his church, at Stafford town itself." But this was not developed with mention of the *Gawain* parallels that I have suggested here.

190 Noted by *A history of the ancient parish of Leek*, page 159. Also by *The Reliquary and Illustrated Archaeologist*, Volumes 7-8, page 212.

12. "Here the Druids performed their rites": some other poets of the district.

Even before *Gawain* became known to modern times, the terrain of the Manifold Valley and Wetton Mill was attracting the attention of serious antiquarians and poetic re-enchanters of the landscape. Several of these productions are especially useful, not only because the authors are perceptive geologists, military surveyors or hunters, but also because they footnoted their poetry with some sound topographic and historical explication. Several points they make directly illuminate the nature of the *Gawain* landscape.

John Gisborne.

For instance, *The vales of Wever, a loco-descriptive poem* (1797) by John Gisborne, poetically describes and footnotes walks around Wootton, Norbury, and the Weaver Hills, up onto the local moors, and through the many dips and lanes. Gisborne seems to have spent a year there and he wrote his long poem in the 'long-s' style as a thank-you for his indulgent host. Gisborne shows himself to be a perceptive plant naturalist, alert to the deforestation then ongoing or soon planned, and he mostly writes about the country in winter. For instance, he tells the reader that in 1795 and 1796 in the dales of the district…

> "Some of the walls in the dales resemble the walls of an old castle; others are rudely disjointed, or hang over in the form of a canopy. [...] many of the cliffs in the dales appear rifted by the oaks which have forcibly inserted their roots and trunks between them: and some of the trees seem to support the disjointed strata with their elbowy roots and excrescences".

Compare Gawain, preparing for his fate…

> "Gawain waited unswerving, with not a wavering limb,
>
> But stood still as a stone or the stump of a tree
>
> Gripping the rocky ground with a hundred grappling roots."

Much local deforestation was then going on, but Gisborne notes many "stools of trees, still discernible" indicating that "naked moor was formerly overshadowed with wood" in places. He notes a number of large oaks still standing, and admires the *Twenty Oaks* on a prospect at Northwood, just over two miles by track from Alton Castle, standing in a circle. Regrettably he does not indicate the circle's age.

His observations may have some relevance to the emphasis that the *Gawain*-poet places on oaks of great size, and overhanging rocks They also serve to shift any notion that, by the later 1300s, the entire district was given over to sheep and moorland and that there was then no old oak forest left such as *Gawain* describes…

> "With rough ragged moss trailing everywhere."

Another observation by Gisborne comes even closer to one made in *Gawain*…

> "... in the vicinity of Wootton ... In the month of January, 1795, [there were great icicles on the cliffs and caves.] The surfaces of the adjacent crags beautifully glazed and decorated with a bright coating of ice, through which the *marchantia polymorpha* and several species of moss and fern displayed the luxuriancy of spring."

This indicates that in the dales and deep clefts, relatively sheltered from the wind and snow, Gawain could well have been 'mazed to see green springlike foliage amid the ice and frozen rock of midwinter.

Gisborne notes key elements of the landscape, such as the lofty Thor's cave…

> "Gigantic Grindon's bleak domain,
>
> Where yawning Thor the vale alarms,
>
> And Beauty sleeps in Horror's arms."
>
> — Gisborne, *Vales of Wever*

Gisborne's mention of Grindon is interesting, as the old name was *Gryn*, a name with an obvious fit with 'Green Chapel'. It is just one mile SSW from Wetton Mill, and sits on the hill above Weag's Bridge (which is one of the key entrances into the valley).

Weag's Bridge and a little beyond it the Grindon halt on the Leek & Manifold Light Railway (1901-1934). Magic lantern slide made by Mr. J. Rooke Corbett, possibly 1901.

In 1921, a *Country Life* magazine survey (Vol. 49, page 828) of old agricultural names in the district offered a green meaning for Grindon…

> "Another kind of place name he has neglected is that of names associated with old systems of agriculture. It is well to explain that Grindon, for example, means the green hills".

This seems to be somewhat supported by a list of old spellings for Grindon and its immediate area, which offers *Grend-* …

> Kaldon [Caldon], Wuturful [Waterfall], Grendon [Grindon], Wetton Schene [Sheen], Ylum [Ilam], Astonfelde [Alstonefield].[191]

Also in support of 'green' is Horovitz's "A survey and analysis of the place-names of Staffordshire" (2003) which suggests: OE *grene dun* 'green hill'.

191 *Collections for a History of Staffordshire: A Medieval Miscellany*, Vol. 20, 2004, page 123.

But a quick look at the linguistics suggests another possible meaning, that of 'grind' which would connect it with the curious earth-noises caused by the underground river…

> Olr *meilid* 'grinds', Welsh *malu* 'grind', Latin *mold* 'grind', ON *mala* 'grind', OHG *ma/an* 'grind', Goth *ma/an* 'grind', OPrussian *malunis* 'mill'.[192]

Thus the *mani-* in Manifold Valley might have a Germanic 'grind' meaning via the Saxons, and have arisen from the startling grinding noises made by the actions of the underground river. This seems more likely than a simple meaning in which the river has 'many folds' as it winds through the hills, or even that the valley had 'many sheep-folds'. The possibility must then reflect on *Gryn*, and warn against simply assuming that it has a meaning of 'green'. Why name a place 'green hill', when surrounded by *hundreds* of other green hills? But the matter is one that can no longer be decided one way or the other. It may be that the valley's later medieval metalworking and lead mining and milling also had some part to play in the naming, or arose from some name unconsidered.[193] So it must simply be noted that a 'Gryn Chapel' could theoretically have been a name with meaning for the local people.

Another thought arises in relation to 'Gyrn'. Could this have led to another poetic play on a local placename, akin to the poet's earlier "*alvisch mon*" for Alvestone? Because the name of Gawain's horse is *Gryngolet*, and if this can be understood as 'green guttering-brook',[194] then the horse's name actually encodes the map location of the Green Chapel — below Gryn in a narrow gorge with a guttering brook.

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192 J.P. Mallory, Douglas Q. Adams, *The Encyclopedia of Indo-European Culture*, 1997, page 247.

193 For instance, in 1984 the English Place-Name Society journal (Vol. 55, No. 1, page 7) noted the unusual name of Chitta…

> "Chitta River, a small stream flowing from Grindon to join the River Manifold, Roberts 1900. Like the previous entry perhaps onomatopoeic of a bubbling stream."

194 Old French: *goulet*, 'a deep gutter or narrow brook'. Perhaps implying 'fast-clattering flow of water', and thus a suitable metaphor for a fast-clopping horse?

John Edwards:

The book *The tour of the Dove, a poem; with occasional pieces*, circa 1821, offers a vivid personal account of the Alton winter hunt which is relevant to *Gawain*. The poet gives the distance they could cover (50 miles), and even the role of rumbustious ballads in the hunt. Edwards participated in a fox-hunt that appears to have ridden out from Alton and gathered at Shirley Park, 7 miles due west of Alton near Hollington. A run of 50 miles then commenced before ending at Wootton Park, three miles north-east of Alton. Judging by the later records of the North Staffordshire Hunt, a run of that distance was not unusual. This poem and account may help indicate the kind of country in which the Gawain fox-hunt takes place.

XVI.

Here noble Vernon oft led forth his hounds, [de Vernon – founder of Alton Castle]
A pack that ever proved their good descent :
His sire had train'd them on these forest grounds ;
And braving oft the wintry element.
Beyond the precincts of the chase he went—
As once to Shirley Park, what time he vied. [7 miles west of Alton Castle]
With hounds on cry, and horn deep-winded, bent
Foremost of all the gallant train to ride.
Yet curbing gracefully his fiery courser's pride. [courser – horse]

XVII

The hills rebounded as the hunters past ;
Echoed the champaign, every bank and bush
Remurmuring back the music and the blast.
And shouts of horse and foot-men, as they rush
Through Dove whose stream recoils with troubled gush. [Valley of the River Dove]
Morn had dispell'd the fogs, when from his cell

Reynard was rous'd ; and ere they seiz'd his brush, [Reynard – the fox. Brush = tail]

(That trophy of the chase) the evening bell

Of distant Ashbourn sounded into Wooton Dell.

XVIII.

The ballad of this fox-chase has been sung

With strength of lungs that roar'd it out with glee ;

And when the chorus round gave mouthy it rung

As though the hounds had join'd in company.

[…]

The poet's note on the oral ballad mentioned in XVIII:

This celebrated fox-chase has been made the subject of a ballad, written with considerable spirit, and which it once happened to me to hear sung with an animation worthy of a loftier excitement. The following extract may serve as a specimen, though it is not the most amusing portion.

"The sportsmen they rid at a desperate rate.

As if they had run for a thousand pound plate ;

No hedges could turn them, nor walls could them set.

For the choicest of sportsmen in England were met.

The hounds they did rally and briskly pursue ;

Do you hear little Careless, she runs him in view.

Fifty miles in four hours, which is a great ride ;

'Till in Wootton old park brave Reynard he died.

…

Lets ring Reynard's farewell with a horn that sounds clear;

You've not heard such a hollow this hundred year."

Erasmus Darwin.

There are other poems of the district, equally informative in their own way. In *A Survey of Staffordshire* Harwood footnoted Erdeswicke's mention of 'Wetton on the Manifold' with an enigmatic footnote about this place, stating: "Here it is supposed the Druids performed their rites".[195] Harwood leaves this assertion unreferenced, but all his readers would then have known their "The Loves of the Plants", and thus recognised his allusion as being to the famous and wildly popular poem by the learned and perceptive Staffordshire genius Erasmus Darwin. Darwin had travelled in the district, he knew it well, and he enshrined it in the best-selling poetry book of his day.

His Canto III in "The Loves of the Plants" gives the place a macabre cast. He opens with a pagan sorceress pacing three times around what at first appears to be a barrow, and magically opening it. On closer inspection the mound is revealed as a mouldering chapel with the remains of stained-glass windows and aisles. This seems to be a remarkable fit with Sir Gawain's pacing around a Green Chapel at Wetton Mill, but it seems very unlikely that Darwin could have known of the *Gawain* poem in 1791. Imps, released from the evidently demonic chapel, fly off to torment a sleeping local girl with nightmares. The underground river is then described, and Thor's Cave imagined as a scene of pagan child sacrifice, before the river emerges from its dark underground caves into more sylvan realms at Ilam.

from THE LOVES OF THE PLANTS.

CANTO III.

And now the Goddess sounds her silver shell,

And shakes with deeper tones the inchanted dell;

Pale, round her grassy throne, bedew'd with tears,

---

195 Sampson Erdeswicke , Thomas Harwood, *A Survey of Staffordshire: Containing the Antiquities of that County*, page 355.

Flit the thin forms of Sorrows, and of Fears;
Soft Sighs responsive whisper to the chords,
And Indignations half-unsheath their swords.
Thrice round the grave CIRCÆA prints her tread,
And chaunts the numbers, which disturb the dead;
Shakes o'er the holy earth her sable plume,
Waves her dread wand, and strikes the echoing tomb!

Pale shoot the stars across the troubled night,
The timorous moon withholds her conscious light;
Shrill scream the famish'd bats, and shivering owls,
And loud and long the dog of midnight howls!
— Then yawns the bursting ground! — two imps obscene
Rise on broad wings, and hail the baleful queen;
Each with dire grin salutes the potent wand,
And leads the sorceress with his sooty hand;
Onward they glide, where sheds the sickly yew
O'er many a mouldering bone its nightly dew;
The ponderous portals of the church unbar, —
Hoarse on their hinge the ponderous portals jar;
As through the colour'd glass the moon-beam falls,
Huge shapeless spectres quiver on the walls;
Low murmurs creep along the hollow ground,
And to each step the pealing ailes resound;

By glimmering lamps, protecting saints among,
The shrines all tremble as they pass along,
O'er the still choir with hideous laugh they move,

(Fiends yell below, and angels weep above!)
Their impious march to God's high altar bend,
With feet impure the sacred steps ascend;
With wine unbless'd the holy chalice stain,
Assume the mitre, and the cope profane;
To heaven their eyes in mock devotion throw,
And to the cross with horrid mummery bow;
Adjure by mimic rites the powers above,
And plite alternate their Satanic love.
Avaunt, ye Vulgar! from her sacred groves
With maniac step the Pythian LAURA moves;
Full of the God her labouring bosom sighs,
Foam on her lips, and fury in her eyes,
Strong writhe her limbs, her wild dishevell'd hair
Starts from her laurel-wreath, and swims in air. —
While twenty Priests the gorgeous shrine surround
Cinctur'd with ephods,[196] and with garlands crown'd,
Contending hosts and trembling nations wait
The firm immutable behests of Fate;
-She speaks in thunder from her golden throne
With words unwill'd, and wisdom not her own.
So on his NIGHTMARE through the evening fog
Flits the squab Fiend o'er fen, and lake, and bog;
Seeks some love-wilder'd Maid with sleep oppress'd,
Alights, and grinning fits upon her breast.

[196] Appears to have been a sort of sacred embroidered waistcoat, to which a breastplace could be strapped. Closely connected with oracular practices and priestly ritual.

— Such as of late amid the murky sky
Was mark'd by FUSELI'S poetic eye;
Whose daring tints, with SHAKESPEAR'S happiest grace,
Gave to the airy phantom form and place.-
Back o'er her pillow sinks her blushing head,
Her snow-white limbs hang helpless from the bed;
While with quick sighs, and suffocative breath,
Her interrupted heart-pulse swims in death.
— Then shrieks of captured towns, and widows' tears,
Pale lovers stretch'd upon their blood-stain'd biers,
The headlong precipice that thwarts her flight,
The trackless desert, the cold starless night,
And stern-eye'd Murder with his knife behind,
In dread succession agonize her mind.
O'er her fair limbs convulsive tremors fleet,
Start in her hands, and struggle in her feet;
In vain to scream with quivering lips she tries,
And strains in palsy'd lids her tremulous eyes;
In vain she wills to run, fly, swim, walk, creep;
The WILL presides not in the bower of SLEEP.
— On her fair bosom sits the Demon-Ape
Erect, and balances his bloated shape;
Rolls in their marble orbs his Gorgon-eyes,
And drinks with leathern ears her tender cries.
Arm'd with her ivory beak, and talon-hands,

Descending FICA dives into the sands;
Chamber'd in earth with cold oblivion lies;

Nor heeds, ye Suitor-train, your amorous sighs;
Erewhile with renovated beauty blooms,
Mounts into air, and moves her leafy plumes.
— Where HAMPS and MANIFOLD, their cliffs among,[197]
Each in his flinty channel winds along;
With lucid lines the dusky Moor divides,
Hurrying to intermix their sister tides.
Where still their silver-bosom'd Nymphs abhor,
The blood-smear'd mansion of gigantic THOR, —[198]
-Erst, fires volcanic in the marble womb
Of cloud-wrapp'd WETTON raised the massy dome;[199]
Rocks rear'd on rocks in huge disjointed piles
Form the tall turrets, and the lengthen'd ailes;
Broad ponderous piers sustain the roof, and wide
Branch the vast rain-bow ribs from side to side.
While from above descends in milky streams
One scanty pencil of illusive beams,
Suspended crags and gaping gulphs illumes,
And gilds the horrors of the deepen'd glooms.
— Here oft the Naiads, as they chanced to play
Near the dread Fane on THOR'S returning day,
Saw from red altars streams of guiltless blood
Stain their green reed-beds, and pollute their flood;
Heard dying babes in wicker prisons wail,
And shrieks of matrons thrill the affrighted Gale;

197 The adjacent River Hamps likewise goes underground and emerges at Ilam.

198 Thor's Cave, Wetton.

199 Wetton Mill.

While from dark caves infernal Echoes mock,
And Fiends triumphant shout from every rock!
— So still the Nymphs emerging lift in air
Their snow-white shoulders and their azure hair;
Sail with sweet grace the dimpling streams along,
Listening the Shepherd's or the Miner's song;
But, when afar they view the giant-cave,
On timorous fins they circle on the wave,
With streaming eyes and throbbing hearts recoil,
Plunge their fair forms, and dive beneath the soil. —
Closed round their heads reluctant eddies sink,
And wider rings successive dash the brink. —
Three thousand steps in sparry clefts they stray,
Or seek through sullen mines their gloomy way;
On beds of Lava sleep in coral cells,
Or sigh o'er jasper fish, and agate shells.
Till, where famed ILAM leads his boiling floods
Through flowery meadows and impending woods,
Pleased with light spring they leave the dreary night,
And 'mid circumfluent surges rise to light;
Shake their bright locks, the widening vale pursue,
Their sea-green mantles fringed with pearly dew;
In playful groups by towering THORP they move,
Bound o'er the foaming wears, and rush into the Dove.

Ebenezer Rhodes.

Ebenezer Rhodes, in his early travel book *Peak Scenery* (1824 reprint) gives an account of the terrain, and a particular local 'topographic phrase', before any possible influence from the 1835 publication of *Gawain*...

> "the hills swell boldly from both sides of the river, and their majestic summits are often hid amongst the clouds ... It was a fine morning when we first beheld the enchanting scenery of the river Dove, yet still the summit of Thorpe Cloud was sometimes obscured with vapour, or, in the phraseology of the place, the "mountain had its cap on."" (page 321).

Note the very similar description to *Gawain*'s "Each hill had a hat".

Captain Daniel Astle.

Other curious, though vastly more obscure, text from this time period is by Captain Daniel Astle. His *A Prospect from Barrow Hill*, dated Uttoxeter, 25th June 1777, and was printed as a neat pamphlet by Pearson and Robinson, Birmingham. With a soldier's precision of observation, the Captain simply describes the view from the hill, now Barrowhill, in detail and section by section. It is, in its own strange way, a literary folly to match the hilltop follies in stone that are now to be found on Mow Cop (a small mock castle-ruin on the summit) or Solomon's Temple near Buxton (a Victorian fortified watch-tower built atop a likely Bronze Age barrow).

Mary Howitt.

Lastly, the more modern author Mary Howitt (1799-1888) who grew up in Uttoxeter and the surrounding district, to the south of Alton. Unlike the others she does not have a scientific eye, but she is very perceptive on the interweaving of history, landscape and the macabre. Author of the classic macabre poem "The Spider and the Fly" (1828), in some of her poetry and novels she wrote of her own district. Her long poem *The Desolation of Eyam* (1827) describes a deadly 17th century outbreak of the plague in the Peak

District. Later Mary wrote at least one fairy poem set on the Weaver Hills near Alton, "The Fairies of the Cauldon Low" (1847)...

> And where have you been, my Mary ?
>
> And where have you been from me ?
>
> I've been to the top of Cauldon Lowe,
>
> The midsummer night to see.

There is also her very interesting series in *Eclectic Review*, 1859, called "Sun Pictures". I have now made it available online. When collected, this forms an alternatively delightful and strange account of a journey of three nights, of two women going on foot into the high Moorlands around Alton, Ipstones, and the district. Mary had an obvious taste for the macabre — depicting things like encountering a creepy changeling boy on a railway platform, lovingly describing many grotesque and curious personalities, encountering gypsies carrying a strange mis-shapen woman in their sideshow caravan, and recounting a gruesome *olde time* murder in the wind-swept Moorlands. "Sun Pictures" has its share of dark among the light. Most of the real placenames in "Sun Pictures" are omitted or obfuscated under fictional names.

Fletcher Moss

An intriguing suggestion relevant to *Gawain* is added by local Cheshire/Staffordshire antiquarian Fletcher Moss, in his book *Folk-lore, old customs and tales of my neighbours* (1898). Moss expands on the old word *witan,* to suggest it must also have implied speech...

> "Anglo-Saxon word '*witton*' [*witan* in the latest *Bosworth-Toller*], to have wit or knowledge, alluding to the miraculous gift or knowledge of tongues and speech"

Given the evidence I have presented, is not impossible there was once an ancient understanding that this tiny Wetton Mill area was supernaturally 'speaking' through its natural earth-rumblings, explosions, hissing gas-releases in caves, cave echoes, and chattering streams.

James Buckland.

Finally, here is folklore from James Buckland, found in "By The Manifold River", *The Leisure hour: an illustrated magazine*, 1896, pages 116-120.

> Cast as they are in the sluggish backwater of the current of modern progress and enlightenment, it is not surprising to find that the people of this wild part of the North-east of Staffordshire retain some thing of the false beliefs of their forefathers. Indeed, I was astonished to discover that superstitions have a much stronger hold upon them than they themselves care to admit. They do not speak openly of these things, and only grudgingly when questioned; but some strange old traditions and stories are still whispered about among many of the least educated of the moorland folk. [Spectral horseman belief, cut]. The notion, also, that any strange or untoward incident is the work of lightning, or the devil, is still rife among those of these moorlanders who rank lowest in the scale of general intelligence.
>
> [The River Manifold goes underground during parts of the year, sinking near Wetton Mill and emerging at Ilam.] Four years ago a great hissing sound, proceeding from one of the sinks at Wetton Mill, was heard by a chance passer-by. In speaking to this man upon the subject, I endeavored to extract from, him some explanation for so unusual an occurrence.
>
> *Lectricity, Oi reckon*, he said ; but, when I asked him how long the noise lasted, he cried, *Oi didna wait to see!* In such tones and gestures as left no shadow of a doubt but that he really attributed the cause of the sound to a very different agency than that of electricity.
>
> Some ten years ago a duck was accidentally taken down in the swirl of a sink. After traversing the gloomy [underground] course of the Manifold, it reappeared at Ilam in an almost unrecognisable condition. This incident so worked upon the mind of a soft-headed fellow, who lives hard by, that he at length persuaded himself that where a duck went he could go; and he actually fitted out a tub-like boat, laden with candles and provisions, with the object of setting forth upon a voyage of discovery into the cavernous depths of the earth. Fortunately, before going very far down stream, the crazy boat capsized, and the poor man was nearly drowned — a circumstance which considerably damped his zeal as an explorer. He is still of the opinion, however, that, with a properly constructed craft, the underground passage might be safely made.

13. J.R.R. Tolkien and *Gawain* country: the 1960s in Stoke-on-Trent.

Early in the First World War J. R. R. Tolkien had learned to fire a rifle at a camp on the outskirts of Newcastle-under-Lyme, near Stoke-on-Trent. Less well known is that he had a connection with Stoke toward the end of his life, in the period after the first publication and tepid reception of *The Lord of The Rings*, and before his great work was re-discovered by a critical mass of young readers in the 1970s.

From 1960 through to the early 1970s he spent many holidays with his son — who lived at 104 Hartshill Road, at the top end of Stoke town in Stoke-on-Trent. His son had lived there from 1957, just a few years before his father retired as a university lecturer in 1959. We know, from Tolkien's surviving published letters, that the senior Tolkien spent the summer of 1960 in Stoke with his son and many summer holidays thereafter. We also know from his letters that he spent winter holidays here, in the early 1970s. Specifically a long late visit at Christmas 1971, after his wife's death, and a long summer visit in August 1972. His surviving letters don't provide comprehensive day-to-day coverage of his life, and so there may have been earlier visits to his son in Stoke which went unrecorded. One imagines that Tolkien probably continued to live his life according to the divisions of the academic calendar, as he had since the 1900s, so perhaps some of the holidays were relatively long ones.

We can thus imagine Tolkien, aged in his late sixties and seventies, being quite familiar with alighting from the Oxford train at Stoke with his trusty bicycle. He disliked cars ("Mordor-gadgets"), and the car-culture that was everywhere ruining England. Oxford-Stoke is a long-established direct train service, and there's still a direct two-hour service today. Despite his increasing twinges of arthritis it seems Tolkien was still an avid train user and bicyclist, and until about 1968 and IRA terrorism it was still fairly easy to get a bicycle onto an inter-city train. Thus we can easily imagine him bicycling

from the station through Stoke town (the barrier of the A500 did not then exist) and up onto the lower slopes of Hartshill.

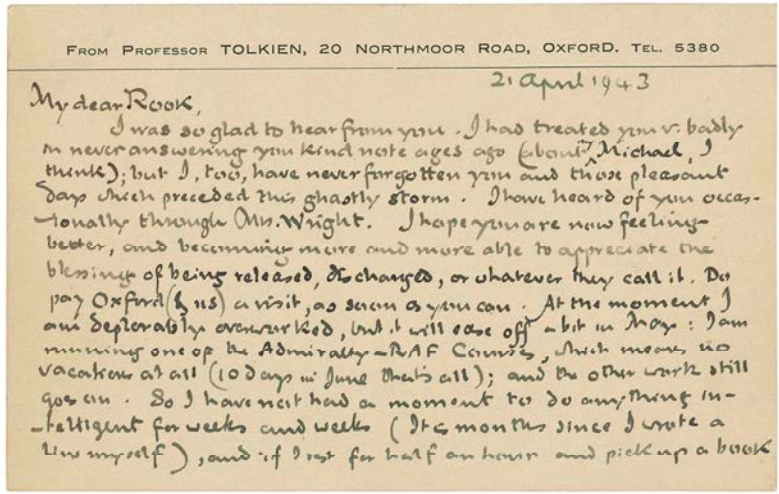
Picture: Northcote House, 104 Hartshill Road, seen today. Now a children's nursery.

He was not the cultural colossus he would later become. There would be no throng of adoring fans waiting for him at Stoke station, of the sort that might gather today for someone like Neil Gaiman. In Stoke he was just an obscure and rather isolated old man and a retired 'professor of medieval language and literature' (as most non-specialists would understand his job). His unwelcome retirement and his caring for his ill wife had tended to cut him off from social life. Yes, he had once published a popular children's book in 1937, as well as a follow-up fantasy trilogy from 1954-56. But the establishment critics rarely thought of his work, and if they did they usually derided it after a hasty skim-reading, or even no reading at all. Philip Toynbee in the left-wing Observer newspaper (6th August 1961) was pleased to note of Tolkien's works that… "today these books have passed into a merciful oblivion". Tolkien's deep national patriotism and his concern with the heroic past were increasingly out of fashion among the chattering classes of the 1960s and early 70s. What fans his work did have, mostly from about 1966/67 onward in America and from 1968/70 in the UK, tended to see only the surface layer of his stories and he often found such people rather annoying. The cultural seeds that Tolkien had planted in *The Lord of the Rings* were thus still largely dormant, and they would only grow up into a vast murmuring forest long after his death.

Once unpacked and 'settled in' at his son's house in Stoke, he might have regularly strolled or free-wheeled his bicycle down to a newsagents in the town for some pipe-tobacco and newspapers. He was in those years an avid newspaper reader, and took both *The Times* and *Telegraph*. On these he sometimes liked to doodle fine decorative patterns with the newly-invented 'biro' pens of red, blue and green. His memory for everyday matters was by then noticeably declining, but he was still fascinated by the intricacies of language and the names for things. Thus he would have had an eager ear for our strong and distinctive local dialect and words. Possibly he visited local pubs for a pint and a smoke of his pipe, the most likely pub being the nearby Jolly Potters rather than the more work-a-day pubs down in the town.

One imagines that he visited the usual local places on day-trips: the new (1956) city museum, where he might have been more interested in the archaeology and the very fine natural-history rooms, rather than our world-famous ceramics; Trentham Gardens and the richly-wooded parkland estate; Biddulph Grange with its fantastical compartment-gardens and trees; the vast grounds full of trees on the campus at nearby Keele. Apparently the son Tolkien was staying with was, or had recently been (depending on the date) the Catholic Chaplain there. The Keele grounds has fine trees and it later became a formal Arboretum. He would have felt at home in a district that cherished, as he did so ardently, its trees and gardens. Perhaps he also once or twice waded through the bracken to see King Wulfhere's hill-fort near Stone, since he had an abiding interest in all things that were early Mercian. Though admittedly such an adventurous and uphill visit might have been too arduous and risky for an older man. Possibly he and his son liked to use the various bits of the local railway network to get about, since the local lines were fairly extensive until the cuts made by the despised Dr. Beeching in the mid 1960s. However, any such local visits would have been far too late in time to have influenced the landscapes of *The Hobbit* or *The Lord of the Rings*.

There is one possibility for influence on his creative work. In 1965 Tolkien wrote the fine long fairy-story "Smith of Wootton Major", a late masterpiece. One then wonders if the name might come from the elegant house at Wootton near Ellastone, in the moorlands of North Staffordshire.



FROM PROFESSOR TOLKIEN, 20 NORTHMOOR ROAD, OXFORD. TEL. 5380

21 April 1943

My dear Rook,

I was so glad to hear from you. I had treated you v. badly in never answering your kind note ages ago (about Michael, I think); but I, too, have never forgotten you and those pleasant days which preceded this ghastly storm. I have heard of you occasionally through Mrs. Wright. I hope you are now feeling better, and becoming more and more able to appreciate the blessings of being released, discharged, or whatever they call it. Do pay Oxford (& us) a visit, as soon as you can. At the moment I am deplorably overworked, but it will ease off a bit in May: I am running one of the Admiralty–RAF Courses, which means, no vacation at all (10 days in June that's all); and the other work still goes on. So I have not had a moment to do anything intelligent for weeks and weeks (It's months since I wrote a line myself), and if I rest for half an hour and pick up a book

Picture: Wartime postcard from Tolkien to Rook, April 1943. Tolkien assures Rook that he has "never forgotten you and those pleasant days which preceded this ghastly storm".

WOOTTON LODGE, STAFFORDSHIRE

Pen and ink drawing of the front elevation of Wootton Lodge.

Rook had the house from 1950. In 1959 *Country Life* reported that…

> "In 1950 the house was bought by the present owner, Major Alan Rook, the poet and playwright, who has solved with great ability and discrimination the problem of living in a house that is both somewhat large and exceedingly remote."

Tolkien's great friend C.S. Lewis may also have been a visitor at Wootton, as Rook also knew Lewis well.[200] Could then the 'Major' and 'Wootton' have then lent their names to the late Tolkien story "Smith of Wootton Major" (published 1967)?[201] This tentative theory also gains a little weight if we consider that Tolkien may have mused on the placename 'Ellastone' perhaps arising from 'elf stone', since this would connect with the matter of the tale. The 'great house' setting is also very similar.

Wootton Lodge seen through the trees in summer.

[200] Stephen Schofield (Ed.), *In search of C.S. Lewis*, Bridge, 1983.

[201] Those who know the story will be able to see that the theory gains a little weight, if we consider that Tolkien may have mused on the placename 'Ellastone' perhaps arising from 'elf stone'. See also the play that the *Gawain* poet seems to make on the name of the nearby Alton with: '*an alvisch man*', the *alv-* is the same as 'Alveton', the former name of Alton. This also plays into the original *Domesday* 'Elvetone' placename for the castle (if *Elve-* was understood as meaning 'elf').

Given his continuing scholarly interests it is also conceivable that Tolkien made at least one excursion to the eerie cleft of Lud's Church in the nearby Moorlands, stated nationally in 1958 (R.V.W. Elliot, article in *The Times*) to be one of the settings for the ancient tale *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight* — of which Tolkien had published a fine scholarly edition in 1925.

Tolkien would broadcast his modern English translation of *Gawain* on BBC radio in 1953, and would publish his *Gawain* again in a revised edition in 1967. Most of the work on that new edition appears to have been done by a student of his, but one wonders if — as part of the field research for the new edition — Tolkien and his student made any trips by car from Stoke into the wild 'barrow downs' districts of the *Gawain* story. As my book has shown, these are to be found very nearby, in the Staffordshire Moorlands and on the western edge of the Peak. Even if Tolkien was sceptical of the Staffordshire claims, as he may have been, he could still have visited at that time in order to 'see for himself'. We have no evidence of such visits at that time however, and it would not have influenced his work, other than perhaps "Smith of Wootton Major".

A key question then is: could he have visited earlier? It has generally been assumed that it cannot be suggested that visits to the *Gawain* landscape in North Staffordshire inspired certain elements of Tolkien's famous works (such as the road to the Door of the Dead, which resembles the eerie cleft of Lud's Church). This is because there is no actual hard evidence that a pre-*Lord of the Rings* Tolkien associated somewhere like Lud's Church with a *Gawain* location. It would, however, be interesting for Tolkien scholars to more precisely date the exact point at which Tolkien privately switched from a reticent 'perhaps south-west Lancashire' stance (due to the apparent similarity to certain old manuscripts known to "written at Hales in south-west Lancashire") to a 'north of the modern West Midlands' stance based more on the later dialect work done on *Gawain*. If switch he ever did. Could he at least have become *curious* about the North Staffordshire landscape by the early/mid 1940s, before he wrote the 'Door of the Dead' sections of *The Lord of the Rings*? Curious enough to visit, and be inspired enough by the

settings to weave one of them into *The Lord of the Rings*? We shall probably never know, but the thought is tantalising.

We do know, however, that in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* Tolkien found and philologically 'recovered' the words *wodwos* (taken back to Old English *wudu-wasa*, 'wood-trolls' or 'wild-men 'o the woods')[202] and *etaynez* (taken back to *eten*, *ettin*, meaning 'ogre-giant')[203] and made live use of them in 20th century imaginative literature. Specifically, he later slipped these names into *The Lord of the Rings*, as the troll-haunted Ettenmoors and the tribes of moss-tangled primitive Woses or Wild Men of the Woods. His small linguistic recoveries and re-inscribings of once-living North Staffordshire tradition are now forever embedded in *The Lord of the Rings* and will live on forever. The *Gawain*-poet, whoever he was, would surely have nodded sagely in approval.

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[202] Also used in *Wars of Alexander* (1540): *full of wodwose, and oper wild bestis*, 'full of wood-wose and other wild beasts'. But, by that time, the writer may not have been quite sure of what the word had actually meant in its original use. He knew they were wild and lived in woods, so he assumed they were animals?

[203] There are deeper links. George Stephens translated a 10th century runic text from Cotton Ms. Domitian A9, thus: "OR-ENT IOR apparently means the *ur-ettin* ([the first or *ur*-] primitive giant) called IOR, from whose corpse the earth and the visible heavens were made." George Stephens, *The old-northern runic monuments of Scandinavia and England*, Vol. 1, 1866-67, page 102. Possible link with the constellation Orion, who was understood as a giant since ancient times? Note that the English antiquary Leland (c. 1503-1552) also mentions: "one Yotten [late corruption of *ettin*], whom they fable to have been a giant", *Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne, Proceedings*, 1885, page 293.

APPENDICES

Medieval Strap End, Staffordshire, 1390-1420 A.D. "The front of the box chape has been decorated with a five-pointed star or stylised person." Finds.org Unique ID: WMID-A73171, found near Tamworth, mid Staffordshire, 2013.

Appendix 1: A thrice 'lifting and heaving' folk practice in the Peak.

A blog post on *Heritage Daily*, by Dr Simon Dixon from the University of Leicester's Special Collections, brought to my attention a thrice 'lifting and heaving' folk practice which survived in the Peak. This seems to me to evoke the 'three strokes' that that Green Knight offers Gawain. Dr. Dixon wrote…

> "The custom of 'lifting' and 'heaving' is referenced in several sources in the University of Leicester's Special Collections as being an Easter tradition in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Common in Lancashire, Staffordshire and Warwickshire and other parts of England, the practice involved groups of people gathering together in the street and physically lifting those they came across into the air […] in all cases **the ceremony is considered incomplete without three distinct elevations made**." (my emphasis)

In a further post Dixon remarks that this folk ceremony was also found in Bakewell in the eastern Peak…

> "It persisted in some areas for a little longer, for example at Bakewell in Derbyshire where young men lifted and kissed the girls on Easter Monday as late as the 1890s."[204]

It seems that the rumbustious and boisterous 'street heaving' had a parallel in a more restrained and respectable 'chair lifting'. I found that it was also done in Buxton on the western side of the Peak, as stated in *British calendar customs* (1936)…

> "On Easter Monday and Tuesday an ancient custom prevails at Buxton consisting in lifting a person, in a chair, three times from the ground. […] Until about the middle of the nineteenth century the heaving custom at Easter was regularly observed in South Staffordshire."[205]

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[204] Simon Dixon, Library Special Collections blog, University of Leicester, 21st March 2016.

[205] *British calendar customs: England*, Vol. 97, 1936, page 109.

Dixon was also able to offer a first-hand account of the late custom as enacted in Shrewsbury, relatively nearby in Shropshire…

> A more detailed account of heaving was first printed in Henry Ellis's edition of John Brand's *Observations on Popular Antiquities* Vol. 1 (London, 1813). The description was from Thomas Loggan, a 'correspondent of great respectability', who encountered the practice while minding his own business eating breakfast at the Talbot Inn, Shrewsbury. A group of female servants entered, carrying a chair lined in white decorated with multi-coloured ribbons. When asked what they wanted, they replied that they came to "heave" him, according to custom:
>
> > "It was impossible not to comply with a request very modestly made, and to a set of nymphs in their best apparel, and several of them under twenty. I wished to see all the ceremony, and seated myself accordingly. The groupe then lifted me from the ground, turned the chair about, and I had the felicity of a salute from each. I told them, I supposed there was a fee due upon the occasion, and was answered in the affirmative; and having satisfied the damsels in this respect, they withdrew to heave others. (SCM 09950, pages 155-56)"

The May Queen aloft at Rushton Spencer, probably 1910s. Presumably related to the springtime well-dressing ceremonies at Rushton, which were in modern times moved to August to co-incide with village's harvest festival.

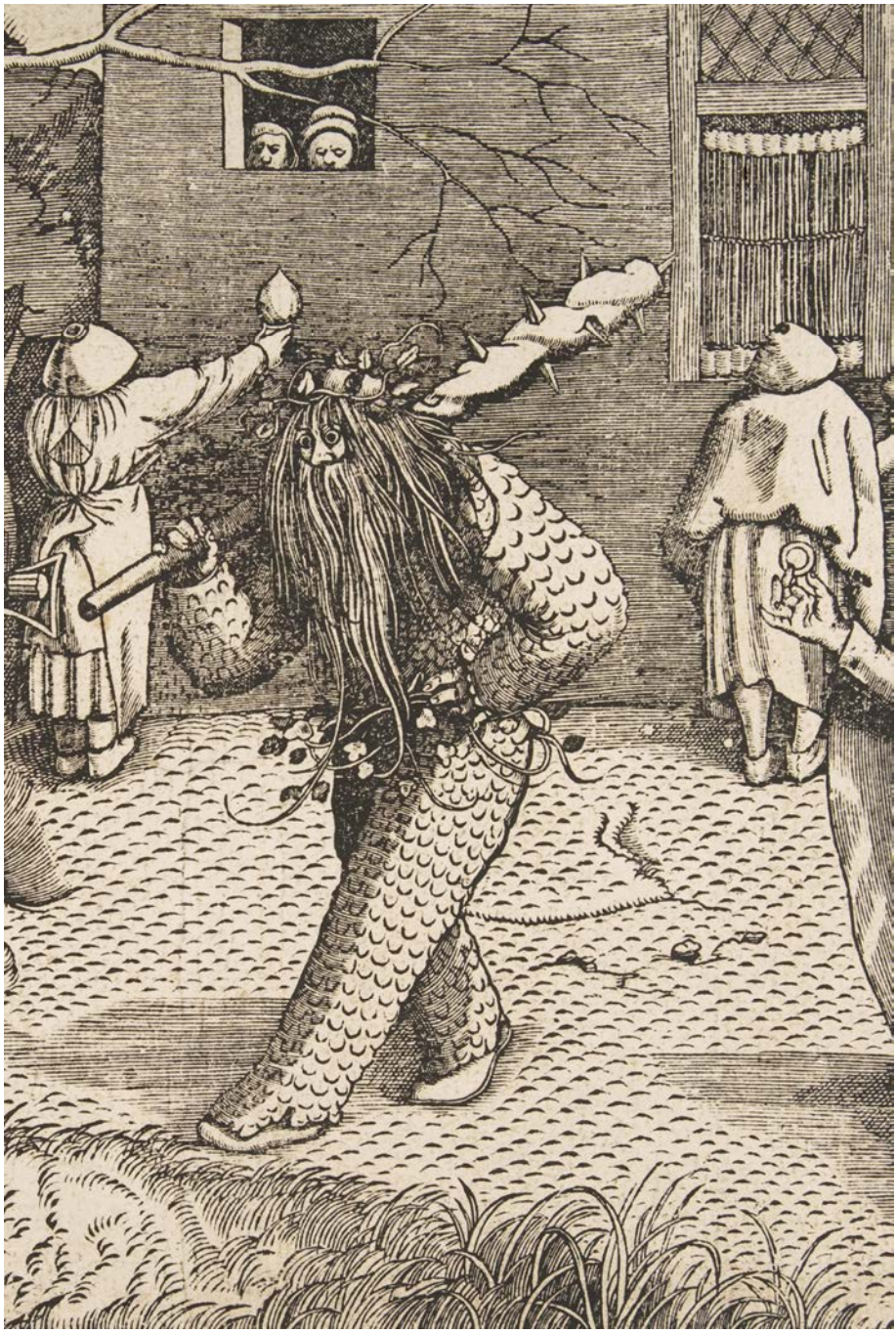
I can add that in North Staffordshire it appears to have a late parallel, in a May Queen chair-carrying celebration at Rushton Spencer, a key place on the route I have suggested for Sir Gawain as he ventures into the Staffordshire uplands. I was able to source an accompanying old postcard photograph of the event, possibly from the 1910s.

These are of course late survivals of local tradition, if they are indeed authentic survivals. But they seem to me to offer some parallel with the three risings and fallings of the Green Knight's axe, on the third stroke of which, only 'a nick on the neck' and the symbolism of red on white…

> "Sir Gawain saw his gore glinting on the snow"

Appendix 2: Some pictures of continental wild-men.

Wild-man with wreath and shields, Martin Schongauer. Germany, c. 1435–1491.



Carnivalesque wild-man costume (detail), Dutch, Anon., c. 1566.

Roundel with Wild Man Supporting a Heraldic Shield with star, South Netherlandish (Dutch), c. 1510–30.

Flemish wild-man in bronze, 16th century, originally holding throwing staff and shield (both items missing – see next picture).

Forest-green wild-man encastled, and topping a golden Ewer. Dragon handle. Franconia, Germany. c. 1500.

With thanks to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Appendix 3: 'A Bag of Giant Bones': Erasmus Darwin and the district.

I have previously mentioned and quoted Erasmus Darwin, whose famous poem, *The Loves of the Plants*, imagines Druid rites and sacrifice at Wetton. That was before *Gawain* was known. There are further local connections. A 2018 essay notes reminds those in North Staffordshire that the earliest theory of evolution first emerged from our own Harecastle Tunnel in 1767, at the northern-most end of the Stoke-on-Trent valley…

> "Erasmus Darwin started to think about evolutionary ideas when his curiosity was aroused by the discovery of mammoth bones at Harecastle near Kidsgrove"[206]

I'm not quite sure where the author of this essay had his "mammoth" from, as that species is not specified in any source I can find. But certainly large fossil bones, including a giant fish, were indeed found on the south side of the tunnel. According to Wedgwood…

> "at the depth of five yards from the surface … in a stratum of Gravel under a bed of Clay of a very considerable thickness,"

Given that the surface has been quite cut back and down at Harecastle, by standing on the iron canal bridge there I guess one might be at the same level as a strata "five yards from the [original] surface"? The British Museum lists a giant shark-tooth from Harecastle, perhaps indicating the nature of the fish bones.

Apparently the obvious choice of the River Weaver for transport of the fossils to Darwin but not possible because, in Wedgwood's words, on the Weaver… "the boatmen are sure to pilfer them". Would that method have

[206] Stephen Foster, "Erasmus Darwin's Evolutionary Ideas", *The Victorian Web*, 31st March 2018.

involved a packhorse to the Weaver at Crewe and then by sea from Liverpool to London and road to Lichfield? Anyway, by whatever means of transport they were sent, the "big bag" of bones arrived in Darwin's stable-yard in Lichfield.

Darwin was a leading medical doctor of the time, but even he was rather baffled by the bag's contents. He tentatively suggested, in a letter to Wedgwood, the likeness of a huge vertebrae bone to that of a camel. He also noted that what appeared to be a horn was more gigantic than any other horn he had heard of.

His curiosity piqued, and his pride in diagnosis perhaps just a little deflated, Darwin immediately decided he needed to gain an *in situ* understanding of just how rock strata were formed and how they lay. He was unable to get to Harecastle from Lichfield. Wedgwood's letter stated the journey would involve considerable cost, at that time, though perhaps that indicated loss-of-income as a doctor. So instead he took a swift two-day trip around the caves and rock strata of the Peak District, more easily accessed from Lichfield. He was in the company of Mathew Boulton of Birmingham, the geologist John Whitehurst of Derby, and Darwin's eldest son Charles went along as assistant to his father. The men also went deep underground at Treak Cliff Cavern, a central Peak mine since Ancient Roman times as a source for 'Blue John'. Boulton took up this rare, but quite cheap, stone for his affordable Blue-John vases made in Birmingham. One popular TV historian has suggested that crushed 'Blue John' also contributed to the mix for the attractive 'Wedgwood blue' look in pottery, but I can find no supporting evidence at all for this. Yet it seems that Wedgwood did supply Boulton with jasperware plaques for Blue-John columns meant to elegantly 'set off' his new Blue-John vases.

Darwin somewhat jokingly proposed erecting, over the site of the gigantic fossil bones, a gigantic statue to the canal builder…

> "I am determined to have the Mountain of Hare-castle cut into a Colossal Statue, bestriding the Navigation [the canal], and an inscription in honour of The Wedgewood."

Sadly the 'Giganticus Wedgwoodia' statue wasn't to be, and instead we only got an incredibly dull municipal monument at Bignall Hill, overlooking the bare Cheshire plain once crossed by Gawain. But Darwin began a far more monumental work. From the Harecastle bones, and the Peak District visit, Darwin formed a theory of 'common descent' — that all life must have at one time originated with a common ancestor. Most probably a shell-dwelling creature. Implied in this idea is the assumption that life diversifies in its forms, branching off into wholly new species, and that there must be some underlying driver for this process. Most pleased with his new idea, he was sure enough of its value to promptly have…

> "fossil shells on his newly minted family crest, along with the motto *E conchis oninia* ('everything from shells')".

He displayed this crest on his coach, until obliged to remove it from public display by an offended local Canon at Lichfield Cathedral. The Canon attacked him in a rhyme…

> O Doctor, change thy foolish motto,
>
> Or keep it for some lady's grotto.

Thereafter, not wishing to lose his Church-going medical patients (the threatening implication of the poem), Darwin had to be content with using the crest privately and as a book-plate. But he cunningly took the Canon's unwitting advice and method, and slipped his evolutionary theories into a book of poetry aimed at ladies titled *The Botanic Garden*. When that book became a runaway best-seller, a copy in every intelligent "lady's grotto", he felt confident enough to elaborate his 25 years of pent up ideas in the science book *Zoonomia* (1794-96), which had a substantial chapter on biological evolution.

Unfortunately for Darwin the book ran smack into an unexpected cloud of national and international politics, a cloud not cleared up until after the Battle of Waterloo. It would take his grandson Charles to fully develop and prove beyond doubt the radical idea of evolution, and then pilot it through the hostile establishment scientific consensus. The rest, as they say, is history.

Appendix 4: A letter to the *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 1870.

This letter is relevant to the strange noises that Gawain hears at the Green Chapel, and is followed by the author's full paper on the topic.

To the Editor of the *Staffordshire Advertiser*.

"Sir, — The extraordinary explosions that issue from a cleft in a rock near Wetton (an account of which lately appeared in the 'Reliquary') are a circumstance extremely puzzling ; so much so that a satisfactory solution appears almost hopeless. The attempt by your correspondent that appeared lately in your valuable paper is certainly very ingenious, and to many may appear a satisfactory one. But residing, as I do, in the immediate vicinity, I am well acquainted with the district and with circumstances that set aside the mere possibility of the reports being caused by pent-up atmospheric air upon the accession of a flood filling the subterranean course.

During the present hot and dry summer a river (except to Darfur bridge, a little below Wetton mill) has had no existence, yet loud explosions were heard by several persons on the 25th of June, and as well attested as any of the previous ones. Besides, no flood, however great and sudden, could produce an explosion or expulsion of air from the fissure in the rock, which is sixty or seventy yards or more above the bed of the river. The subterranean course throughout is directly beneath the upper or surface one, and, owing to the dislocations of the strati, numerous communications exist betwixt them. Not many of these holes or clefts can be seen on walking along the dry bed, owing to their being covered by blocks of limestone, bouldered grit, stones, and pebbles.

Whilst we were clearing out Thor's Cave, which overlooks the bed of the river, a heavy thunderstorm, in the distance, suddenly filled the subterranean passage with water, which also flowed down the previously dry bed at the surface, when I witnessed a novel and pretty sight—numerous small jets of water forced up by pent-up air, which indicated the progress of infilling in the underground channel. Noiselessly the puny fountains continued to advance, and the water from below to rise and mingle with the stream above. It is evident, when the communications are so free and frequent, that other causes than pent-up air originate the loud reports that issue from the fissure in the rock. With respect to the flames said to be seen after the reports, we have the united testimony of three men, two of whom were certainly highly terrified at the time, but they still positively adhere to their first relation.

The third person was a cool spectator, who went purposely to a neighbouring eminence, and as near as he durst venture, to witness the occurrence.

It has been suggested that large cavities, connected by strait and intricate passages, may exist, where falls of rock take place occasionally, and that cherty fragments, by producing sparks, would ignite hydrogen gas. However scientific individuals may differ in their attempt to explain the cause, the fact that explosions do occur is too notorious to be ignored, although nothing similar in nature has been recorded.—

Yours, &c,

SAMUEL CARRINGTON.
Wetton, Aug. 10th, 1870.

The 'Reliquary' to which Carrington referred was the annual *The Reliquary and illustrated archaeologist*, Vol. 11, 1870-1871, which focused on Derbyshire matters. The article mentioned was his own, and is as follows:

EXPLOSIONS OF GAS IN MOUNTAIN LIMESTONE.

BY SAMUEL CARRINGTON.

A PHENOMENON of an extraordinary kind occurring at intervals in the parish of Wetton, Staffordshire, has of late years been familiar to the inhabitants of the village, either from personal knowledge or from current report. The circumstance is so strange that I had well nigh decided to pass it over in silence, not so much from any misgivings in my own mind as to its actual occurrence, but from its being a circumstance of which nothing similar in nature has hitherto been recorded; and, consequently, its publication would be more liable to be received with suspicion, than as a reality. The cavernous nature of the mountain limestone is well known, but after all that can be advanced in support of the occurrence, some may be slow in believing that in the deep recesses of a limestone mountain inflammable gas is elaborated and fired by natural means; and that tremendous reports, accompanied by a lurid flame, issue from a crevice in the face of a rock. The circumstance may be without a parallel in the wide world, but that it is not contrary to the laws of nature can be made evident, and efficient witnesses can be brought forward to substantiate the occurrence; but before we introduce them a brief description of the locality is

necesary to make intelligible the information gathered from them, when it will be seen that their independent relations have a very strong corroborative aspect.

The south end of what is usually called Wetton far-hill, terminates in an high rugged pile chequered with stunted bushes and bare weather-beaten limestone rock. The base of the mountain makes a near approach to the river Manifold, and between which runs the public road from Wetton to Wetton mill, &c. Towards the base of the hill, opposite to the road, where it and the river make a sharp turn, is a small but conspicuous cave, which is called "Old Hannah's Hole"; and higher up, in the face of a steep crag, is a rent or hole, which serves as a vent to the explosions within.

> **"Towards the base of the hill, opposite to the road, where it and the river make a sharp turn, is a small but conspicuous cave, which is called "Old Hannah's Hole"; and higher up, in the face of a steep crag, is a rent or hole, which serves as a vent to the explosions within."** (my emphasis, as pull-quote)

To what extent the strata is dislocated and caverns formed in the locality, by violent convulsions, or the slower effects of running water, is beyond conjecture. It is here that the waters of the river Manifold disappear and find a subterranean channel as far as Ilam, which, following the circuitous course of the valley, may be about five miles.

Tradition fails to inform us of any remote circumstance connected with the locality; the origin of the name given to the small cave is involved in mystery. In our youthful days, when it was the custom, on long winter's evenings to listen, "certainly with more awe than delight" to ghost seers, the apprehension of meeting with the shade of an old woman kept us at a respectable distance from the cave. It is now many years ago when collecting the folk lore and superstitions of the neighbourhood, that I was told by a female, a native of Wetton, that she, with two companions, had some time previously been on a pleasure excursion upon the hill above the rock, when they were terrified by a sudden loud crash, which she said sounded as if the Rock had been rent asunder and the sides violently knocked together again, that they all ran home as if for their lives. She still believes that some Superhuman being was the author of the concussion. Be it what it may, it made a deep and lasting impression upon her. I find that even now, when she is in her ninety-second year, her memory retains every particular, even the names of her companions, who since that awful day, have often congratulated each other on their fortunate escape.

The following occurrence happened when I was from home, but I am enabled to fix the date, namely, January 1st, 1855. It was much talked of in Wetton at the time, and I received the particulars from the witnesses. My first informant is George Fallows, who in company with Mr. Joseph Wint, both inhabitants of Wetton, were driving two cows along the road at the foot of the hill. When opposite to the rock their progress was arrested by a sudden loud report, which he says was as if large blocks of stone were tumbling down the shaft of a deep mine; that the roaring noise was repeated with but short inter missions, and loud enough, but for the high wind that then prevailed, to be heard a mile from the place; and that a blue flame, edged with reddish yellow, issued from the cleft in the rock. The cows took fright and ran wildly up the road towards Wetton with their tails erect. Before they were out of sight they made a stand for breath, but a repetition of the roaring noise sent them off again. When he was sufficiently recovered from the shock, he ventured to get upon the wall by the road side to have a better view of the rock, and to see what was going on, but Wint, anticipating some disastrous catastrophe, urged him by all means to retrace his steps. Similar reports continued while they were on their way home, where they safely arrived, but with horror-stricken countenances, as Wint's brother William described them to be "white as death." A few persons were induced by them to go to an elevated situation opposite to the rock, and separated from it by a deep precipitous defile, but the tale appeared so I'm probable, together with the tempestuous wind then raging, that for the most part they either failed to excite sufficient curiosity, or otherwise got laughed at for their pains. Thomas Redfern, one of the few who went, said the reports he then heard were like blasts of gunpowder, and that a narrow stream of pale fire, like flashes of gunpowder, issued from the face of the rock. Mr. Joseph Wint, who is now occupying a farm near to Uttoxeter, has, on application, favoured me with a note on the occurrence, the following is a copy :—

> "DEAR SIR, "Beamhurst, May 7th,1868. "The following particulars I give in reply to your enquiries for information concerning what I saw and heard on Wetton far-hill. In the first place, I cannot exactly state how long it is since, but it was on the first of January, and a very windy day. I heard the explosions several times, the last time I heard it I was out of sight of the hill, and about a qmarter-of a-mile from Wetton, the report then was nearly as loud as it was when I was opposite to the rock. The nearest comparison that I can make to the reports is the fall of a building, or the shooting up of stones from a cart, but they were much louder, and at the same time a noise like the crackling of a forest on fire ; and while I was in sight there came

from the cleft a kind of blue blaze like the burning of sulphur, which appeared to be about twelve inches broad as it issued from the face of the rock."

The next authenticated occurrence happened about three years ago. A man was at work upon the road opposite to the rock, when he heard a report which he said was like a clap of thunder, which was followed by several other cracks, but none so loud as the first; he saw nothing unusual, but was so paralysed by the suddenness of the report, that in describing his sensations at the time, he says that he felt as if all his clothes had fallen from his back.

The last known instance occurred sometime in April, 1868. Mr. Laurence Fallows, who occupies the now partially cultivated tract called the Redder-hurst, was repairing the wall by the road side near the small cave, when his attention was drawn to the rock by a hissing sound like the firing of a miner's *fusee*, which sound was repeated at intervals whilst he remained there; the noise was not sufficiently loud to cause alarm, but the peculiarity of it attracted his attention to the rock from whence it emanated. There was but a gentle motion of the air at the time. Other persons have heard the reports and been startled on passing by the hill, but sufficient has already been given to establish the reality of an extraordinary phenomenon, the cause of * only remains to be sought out.

By references to what is known to take place in mines, &c., some light may be obtained to assist in the investigation. Explosions of gas, so frequent and fatal in coal mines, have in some rare instances happened in metalliferous deposits. In the *Mining Almanack* for the year 1849, several are recorded to have happened in the iron mines on the upper and lower Rhine, several inflammations of the gas were without serious consequences, but one occurred which severely burned several of the miners. It appears, says the writer (M.A. Dubree), that the inflammable gas of these iron mines is the proto-carburet of hydrogen, which rose through the fissures in the works, and emanated from certain bituminous beds of the lias and oolite upon which the deposits of ore rest. Astonishing accounts of concussions in a mine near Eyam, in Derbyshire, have been recorded; a metallic ore, which is called *slickensides* by the miners, is said, when struck with a hammer, or the point of a pick, to be followed by repeated explosions. Gaseous emanations have arisen in a mine partly sunk in shale, near Warslow, the explosions were called *squibs* by the young miners, but some of the older ones warned them against impending danger, as a more extensive explosion than a squib might sometime or other take place, and be attended with serious consequences. One cautious old miner was wont to lie down upon his flask of

gunpowder to prevent its ignition by the gas. That mine has long been closed — it may now be sixty years since it was wrought. Most of the surrounding hills in our neighbourhood have afforded ores of lead or copper, but no metallic ores except iron have been discovered in the hill under notice. The probable causes of this phenomenon I leave for future solution, contenting myself with now simply recording the facts as they occurred.

Wetton.

Appendix 5: "Notes on the Explosions and Reports in Redhurst Gorge, and the Recent Exploration of Redhurst Cave — Sir Thomas Wardle, P.G.S., &c.", as published in the *North Staffordshire Field Club, Annual Report and Transactions*, 1899.

By SIR THOMAS WARDLE, F.G.S., F.C.S. Read February 26th.

The phenomenon I am about to describe is one which has been previously noticed by several persons now living, and was first recorded in the Reliquary in 1870 by Mr. Samuel Carrington, the Schoolmaster and Parish Clerk of Wetton, near Ashbourne, who for many years was well known as a palaeontologist, and to whom geological science is much indebted for his assiduity as a collector of Carboniferous Limestone fossils, among which are several species of Brachiopoda which bear his name. *The Leek Post* collected some evidences of this phenomenon, some of them accurate, others rather imaginative, and in 1896, published the following account which formed one of a series of "Moorland Jottings—Original and Selected," entitled a "Moor-land Mystery," prefacing its remarks by the following appropriate paragraph:— We have no volcanoes in the Moorlands, but we have rivers that run and meet underground, and mysterious caverns which no one has ever fathomed, with noises in them that startle and terrify." This account of the Moorland Mystery was collected, I believe, by the Rev. W. Beresford, Vicar of St. Luke's, Leek, and it is so interesting that I propose to read it as introductory to what I hope may be considered a more scientific and satisfactory explanation of occurrences, so far as I know, unique in geological science, and so remarkable and interesting that it is no stretch of language to describe them as truly phenomenal.

Mr. Carrington's account, as given in the *Leek Post* of August 13th, 1896, is as follows:— "A phenomenon of an extraordinary kind occurs at Wetton. It has of late years been familiar to the inhabitants of the village, either from personal knowledge or current report. The circumstance is so strange that I had well nigh decided to pass it over in silence—not so much from any misgiving in my own mind as to its actual occurrence, but from its being a circumstance of which nothing similar in nature has hitherto been recorded; and consequently its publication would be more liable to be

received with suspicion than as a reality. The cavernous nature of the Mountain Limestone is well known, but after all that can be advanced in support of the occurrence, some may be slow in believing that in the deep recesses of a Limestone Mountain inflammable gas is elaborated and fired by natural means, and that tremendous reports, accompanied by a lurid flame, issue from a crevice in the face of a rock. The circumstance may be without a parallel in the wide world; but that it is not contrary to the laws of nature can be made evident; and efficient witnesses can be brought forward to prove the occurrence ; but before we introduce them, a brief description of the locality is necessary to make intelligible the information gathered from them, when it will be seen that their independent relations have a very strong corroborative aspect.

A CAVE AND A GHOST.

"The south end of what is usually called Wetton-far-hill terminates in a high rugged pile chequered with stunted bushes and bare weather-beaten limestone rock. The base of the mountain makes a near approach to the river Manyfold, between which runs the public road from Wetton to Wetton Mill, &c. Towards the base of the hill, opposite to the road, where it and the river make a sharp turn, is a small, but conspicuous cave, which is called "Old Hannah's Hole;" and higher up, in the face of a steep crag, is a rent or hole which serves as a vent to the explosions within. To what extent the strata are dislocated and caverns formed in the locality, by violent convulsions, or the Slower effects of running water, is beyond conjecture. It is here that the waters of the river Manyfold disappear and find a subterranean channel as far as Ham, which, following the circuitous course of the valley, may be about five miles. Tradition fails to inform us of any remote circumstance connected with the locality; the origin of the name given to the small cave is involved in mystery. In our youthful days when it was the custom on long winter evenings to listen, "certainly with more awe than delight," to ghost seers, the apprehension of meeting the shade of an old woman kept us at a respectable distance from the cave.

NOISE AND BLUE FLAME.

"Many years ago, when collecting the folklore and superstitions of the neighbourhood, I was told by a female, a native of Wetton, that she, with two companions, had some time previously been on a pleasure excursion on the hill above the rock, when they were so terrified by a sudden loud crash, which, she said, sounded as if the rock had been rent asunder, and the sides violently knocked together again, that all ran home again as if for their lives. Still she believes that some superhuman being was the author of the concussion. Be it what it may, it

made a deep and lasting impression upon her. I find that even now, when she is in her 92nd year, her memory retains every particular, even the names of her companions, who since that awful day have often congratulated each other on their fortunate escape.

COWS SCARED.

"The following occurrence happened when I was from home, but I am enabled to fix the date, namely, January lst, 1855. It was much talked of in Wetton at the time, and I received the particulars from the witnesses. My first informant is George Fallows, who, in company with Mr. Joseph Wint, both inhabitants of Wetton, was driving two cows along the road at the foot of the hill. When opposite to the rock their progress was arrested by a sudden loud report, which, he says, was as if large blocks of stone were tumbling down the shaft of a deep mine; the roaring noise was repeated with but short intermissions, and loud enough, but for the high wind which then prevailed, to be heard A mile from the place; and a blue flame, edged with reddish yellow, issued from the cleft in the rock. The cows took fright, and ran wildly .up the road towards Wetton with their tails erect. Before they were out of sight they made a stand for breath, but a repetition of the roaring noise sent them off again. When Mr. Fallows was sufficiently recovered from the shock, he ventured to get upon the wall by the road side to have a better view of the rock and to see what was going on, but Wint, anticipating some disastrous catastrophe, urged him by all means to retrace his steps. Similar reports occurred while they were on their way home, where they safely arrived, but with horror-stricken countenances, as Wint's brother Will described them as 'white as death.' A few persons were induced by them to go to an elevated position opposite the rock, and separated from it by a deep precipitous defile, but the tale appeared so improbable, together with the tempestuous wind then raging, that for the most part they either failed to excite sufficient curiosity, or otherwise got laughed at for their pains. Thomas Redfern, one of the few who went, said the reports he then heard were like blasts of gunpowder, and that a narrow stream of pale fire, like flashes of gunpowder, issued from the face of the rock.

MR. WINT'S TALE.

"Mr. Joseph Wint, who is now occupying a farm near Uttoxeter, has, on application, favoured me with a note on the occurrence. The following is a copy:— ' Beamhurst, May 7th, 1896. ' Dear Sir, 'The following particulars I give in reply to your enquiries for information concerning what I saw and heard on Wetton-far-hill. In the first place I cannot exactly state how long it is since, but it was on the 1st of January, and

a very windy day. I heard the explosion several times; the last time I heard it I was out of sight of the hill and about a quarter of a mile from Wetton. The report then was nearly as loud as it was when I was opposite the rock. The nearest comparison that I can make to the reports is the fall of a building, or the shooting up of stones from a cart, but they were much louder; and at the same time came a noise like the crackling of a forest on fire; and while I was in sight there rose from the cleft a kind of blue blaze, like the burning of sulphur, which appeared to be about twelve inches broad as it issued from the face of the rock.'

EXPLOSIONS , ETC., IN RED HURST GORGE. THE ROAD MENDER FRIGHTENED.

"The next authenticated occurrence happened about three years ago. A man was at work upon the road opposite to the rock, when he heard a report which he said was like a clap of thunder, which was followed by several other cracks, but none so loud as the first. He saw nothing unusual, but was so paralysed by the suddenness of the report, that in describing his sensations at the time, he says that he felt as if all his clothes had fallen from his back.

MORE EXPLOSIONS.

"The last known instance occurred some time in April, 1868. Mr. Laurence Fallows, who occupies the now partly-cultivated tract called the Redder Hurst, was repairing the wall by the road side near the small cave, when his attention was drawn to the rock by a hissing sound like the firing of a miner's fuse; which sound was repeated at intervals whilst he remained there; the noise was not sufficiently loud to cause alarm, but the peculiarity of it attracted his attention to the rock from whence it emanated. There was but a gentle motion of the air at the time. Other persons have heard the reports and been startled on passing by the hill, but sufficient has already been given to establish the reality of an extraordinary phenomenon, the cause of which only remains to be sought out."

The Editor of the *Leek Post* adds to this account the following paragraph :— "The extraordinary phenomenon in Wetton-far-hill, which is described in this week's 'Moorland Jottings,' ought to have an interest of a practical character. The explosions which take place in the limestone seem to tell of rich mineral deposits; and as the hill is not far from Ecton Mine it may be said to be crying out in the deep voice, which from time to time so terrifies the Moorlanders, for explanation. If the suggested railway be made it is probable that something may be done, not only to explore the cavern, but to bring its rich deposits into the market. As will be seen

from another column, the scheme for making the Railway is progressing admirably, and two of the routes are soon to be explored by the directors of the North Staffordshire Railway and their engineer, in company with Mr. C. Bill, M.P., and the committee appointed at a public meeting in Leek in May last."

Now the exact locality of this valley with its sides of semi-mountainous cliffs is about half-a-mile from Wetton Mill, and a little way beyond Darfar Bridge, on the way to the village of Wetton. It is on the left side of the River Manyfold, at a part of the river which for many years has been dry in summer, the water having disappeared beneath the surface at Darfar Crags, very close to Wetton Mill. It will be interesting if I mention in passing that I have succeeded in concreting at this point and some distance below, the fissures and water-disappearance places. In the coming summer I have no doubt I shall succeed in causing the river to flow over, instead of under, its bed, to the point of its emergence in the grounds of the Rt. Hon. R. W. Hanbury, M.P., of Ham Hall. The accomplishment of this long-needed reversal will be a great boon to the farmers of a large tract of dry limestone country, and the landowners have generously promised to pay their quota to so desirable a benefit. Two deeply-cut valleys debouch upon the Manyfold near the places I am going to describe; just where the road begins a steep ascent to Thor's Cave and Wetton. A high ridge with its prominent escarpments, in many places unclimbable, separates the two valleys, and it is on the south side only that the explosions occur, and where Old Hannah's Cavern or Hole is to be seen. The name of the locality at one time supposed to be Red Deer Hurst, became shortened to Redderhurst, and now to Redhurst. It forms part of what is known as Wetton Hill, a prominent landmark from all parts of the surrounding country. The height of Wetton Hill above the sea is exactly 1,000 feet, and it rises above the Manyfold 400 feet, and is a very fossiliferous Mountain Limestone locality, particularly remarkable for an abundance of many species of Brachiopoda. On Saturday, December 10th, I was passing this interesting Valley, accompanied by Mr. George Barrow, of Her Majesty's Geological Survey, who is re-surveying the grits and shales of the Millstone grit and Yoredale series of the neighbourhood of Leek. I had invited him to Swainsley for the week-end, to see something of the Limestone geology of the neighbourhood. We were suddenly startled by a loud crackling noise like several rifles being almost simultaneously discharged, and thinking someone was shooting, we looked up the cliff in the direction from whence the sound proceeded, but saw nothing; but very shortly an explosion occurred which was visible as well as audible, a flash, so to speak, was ejected horizontally from a hole or fissure in the upper part of the cliff, across the valley, with immense force and rapidity, accompanied by a bluish column

not of steam, or fire, or smoke, but apparently of aqueous vapour. We soon saw it was a case of a mountain in labour, and determined to wait to see more of this singular disturbance. In a few minutes there was another discharge, apparently a little higher up the cliff than the last one, and of less volume and noise, then several smaller ones with crackling sounds, and although there was no smoky appearance, the disturbance of the air could be faintly seen in long streaks of semi-transparent waviness. After a longer time the largest explosion occurred, and we had the good fortune to see it plainly. It was like the discharge of a gun loaded with Schultze powder, the noise being more crackling than with black powder. It was in fact not one, but a series of reports, quite continuous and exactly like thunder when the electric discharge is very near. No doubt these sounds would reverberate and would roll and be in effect like thunder. The reason of the continuity of the sound was clear to see, the force of the explosion was so great that it cleft the air with such rapidity as to take the almost zig-zag or river-like course we are accustomed to see in electric discharges. There was a slight misty rain at the time which made its course more visible, and it resembled a narrow band, say six to eight inches, of bluish vapour; whether the colour was only due to external watery vapour, or whether it was accompanied by any vapour from inside the cliff, we could not tell. It is possible that the air may be pent up inside the cliff, and has to accumulate to such an extent, by syphon water pressure, that at last it escapes, carrying spray with it. After waiting an hour, we ascended the cliff side, and found one hole which Appeared an exit passage, but the higher face of the cliff being vertical, it was impossible to reach the points of the discharges we witnessed. I will now briefly consider the question as to what causes these explosions may be attributed. The allegations of the witnesses I have quoted as to are "tremendous reports accompanied by lurid flames," and of "inflammable gas," cannot be corroborated, and we may dismiss the idea that there has been at any time recently volcanic energy. Of course the presence of the lava known as toad- stone in the limestone of the district, occupying as it does extensive areas, especially in Derbyshire, is evidence in plenty of great volcanic action and sub-oceanic disturbances in Carboniferous times. Neither can the explosions be attributed to pent-up gases in the caverns and crevices of the limestone, for there are no hot springs or decomposing minerals in the vicinity, nor does any stream or spring escape from the cavern or the cliffs in which these explosions occur. The evidence given by those persons whose experiences I have read to you, remarkably agrees, however, in one material point, namely, that at the time of the explosions there was always a tempestuous high wind, and this helps us to a solution. On the day Mr. Barrow and I were there, the wind was a perfect hurricane, blowing from

the south-west exactly against the cave and the whole face of the cliff. The force of the wind was such that several times we were obliged to lie down to prevent being blown over the cliff. I think we may take it, that the wind in forcing its way into the openings of the cave and the many fissures in the cliff compressed the air inside to such a degree that escapes occurred in the way I have described, and with such force as would have reached anyone across the Valley who happened to be in line with the larger of them. The analogy to atmospheric electric discharges in a thunder storm was peculiarly interesting, the crackling sound when near, and deeper thunder-like reverberations at a distance, would naturally lend the inhabitants to ascribe volcanic action as the cause. Mr. Barrow quite agrees with me that it is to the atmosphere in a highly compressed state suddenly escaping, that we must look for a solution of this interesting and unique Moorland mystery. The scenery is very beautiful, the valley of the river Manyfold is here at its best, and the places of interest near are Thor's Cave, Beeston Tor, Wetton Mill, the beautiful but sadly neglected Old Hall of Throwley, and the Darfar Crags ; besides being near the dales of the Dove, from Beresford Dale to Dovedale and Ham, this neighbourhood offers superb attractions for the tourist as soon as the proposed railway is completed. I have a few interesting lantern slides of the locality, kindly photographed for me by Mr. T. Beardmore, jun., of Wetton, which I now propose to show you. They will illustrate the first part relating to the explosions, and also the second part, which is an account of Old Hannah's Cave, and the remains and deposits which by recent diggings I have discovered.

THE DIGGINGS IN OLD HANNAH'S CAVE.

I will now briefly describe the Redhurst Cave or Old Hannah's Cave. The first part of the cave is about eight yards in length, and one and a-half yards wide. Then there occurs a very narrow opening, and after crawling about two yards, the cave opens out a little, giving just room enough to walk sideways for about four yards; it then terminates in an almost round space, perhaps 15 feet high, with room for three or four people to stand upright in it. This was before the excavation began. The cave appears to be a large crack or Assure in the rock, with possibly a subsidence on one side. A section from the top of the floor of the cave gives the following deposits:—

1. Two inches of a rubbly floor.

2. Top layer, at entrance, of blackish earthy soil.

3. Stiff red soil, at entrance, containing a few large bones.

4. 12 to 18 inches of red clay, with small limestone fragments.

5. Limy concrete or Stalagmitic accretions, but commencing well inside the cave and thickening inwards from one to seven or eight feet.

6. Red clay.

7. Whitish sandy loam, at entrance, and clay.

8. Red sand, probably derived from glacial beds.

9. Sand and clay.

10. Rough red sand, with small limestone fragments two feet thick.

11. Red sand, two feet thick.

The thickness of the whole series may be estimated at about from 10 to 12 feet. A few large bones were found in stiff red soil at the entrance, and about four yards up the cave, before the limy concrete commenced, we found broken portions of a funeral urn. Some breakage occurred in getting the urn out, but it appeared to have been broken before. This was found at a depth of 18 inches in a small angular limestone gravel. No bones were found in this gravel, which is of irregular thickness, varying from one foot to between two and three feet, thinning out as one proceeded up the cave. Then occurred a mass of white limy concrete, in which were found several more bones at a distance of four to seven yards from the entrance of the cave, and at a depth of 12 to 18 inches. Three human teeth and about 40 small bones were found at the far end of the cave, amongst wet dirt about a foot deep. The limy bed appeared to be a deposit of lime almost in the form of concrete, in which were embedded many bones. This was the upper bed inside the cave, just below some rubbly stone and a little soil as a surface. This bed of limy concrete, or stalagmitic matter, with bones, was at first only 12 inches thick, but further in the cave the thickness gradually increased to seven or eight feet, but the bones were all nearer the surface of the concrete, not being deeper anywhere than about 18 inches. In six inches of soil in the lime occurred a skull, and also part of a lower jaw, but of another individual, with the teeth in an excellent state of preservation. This skull and the teeth were found eight yards up the cave, where the lime is thickest, close to the side and in the concrete, but loose and not cemented in the concrete like many of the bones which were very firmly bedded and have the appearance of having been placed in lime and then water added to them, as you will see by the specimens on the table.

At a depth of about a foot in the part which had to be crawled along and also in the open space in the interior, a number of small bones were found, with charcoal, some of them being charred. There appeared to have been a fire, with sticks partly burnt.

The prevalence of the charcoal throughout the cave is no doubt due to persons inhabiting the cave, perhaps, before the burials took place. There was also charcoal amongst the concrete. There was brick clay at the entrance, just inside. The clay was irregularly bedded and alternated with sand. None of the bones are of extinct forms, and the smaller ones are much more modern: some may, however, be older than the burial. The bones do not point to the Pleistocene period, or the time of extinct mammals, yet they are very interesting as proving the cave to have been a place of burial. Now with reference to the cave deposits, you will have observed that I referred to that which contained by far the largest portion of the bones as lime, limy-deposit, and concrete. There is one interesting question for investigation on this, on which I should like to have the opinion of the members of the Club— "Is the deposit one of lime, or is it stalagmitic ? "There is abundant evidence of stalactitic as well as of stalagmitic deposition in this case. The water percolating through the limestone is charged with carbonate of lime, and this becomes deposited in favourable places, sometimes to a great thickness. The sides of the cave are in some places covered with it high above where the bones were found, as the large specimens on the table will show, some of them in vertical stratification, showing successive layers corresponding with the varying quantities of carbonate of lime dissolved by percolating and highly-charged water in its passage down the cave sides and re-deposited as the water evaporated. But it is difficult to admit that the lime was not used in sepulture, especially as many fragments of charcoal are found imbedded in the floor masses. Mr. Newton, to whom I am about to refer, however, thinks that these are of stalagmitic origin and that there is no reason for thinking that lime has been put with the bones; but I say if so, how were the people buried ? There is no trace of soil or sand where they were found, except a Very little partially round one of the skulls, only a limy bed of concrete. I am inclined to think both causes operated, but it is an interesting question on which I will not speak dogmatically. I have tested both the stalactitic and stalagmitic matter from the cave sides and floor and the concrete containing the bones, and find they are perfectly neutral, at any rate not alkaline, which rather points to Mr. Newton's theory being correct, because if so much lime had been brought in to cover the bones, some of it would I think be alkaline. I sent all the bones and deposits now exhibited to Mr. Newton, of the Museum of Practical Geology, Jermyn Street, London, the best authority on recent and extinct bones.

He has sent the following report:— "The human skull from the cemented concrete is that of an old man, probably Celtic, of Romano-British age or possibly somewhat older, the front teeth and bicuspids having been lost and the alveoli obliterated, while

the molar teeth are nearly worn away. This skull is well developed, evidently has a full capacity, the forehead and occiput are bold, the low ridges are somewhat prominent, and the nasal bones have been broken during life; it comes within the dolichocephalic group, its cephalic index being 72. A lower jaw and piece of skull of another individual has the teeth beautifully preserved. The last molar, or wisdom tooth, has been fully developed as shown by the alveolus which is now empty, and the enamel of the two molars, which are present, is worn through in places. It is evident therefore that these remains belonged to a person well advanced in years."

Numerous other human bones from the cemented layer indicate at least four adults and one child. All the adult bones are large, and some especially so, considerably larger than those of an average man of the present day, the vertebrae and hip-bones being those of an individual above the average height. The femora have large heads, strongly developed muscular attachments, very prominent line aspera, and the condyles oblique. Tibiae are somewhat flattened, or platyenemic. With these human bones were some belonging to an ox, sheep, and fox. The bones from the inner part of the cave beyond the narrow passage, were mixed with charcoal, and are chiefly of sheep of several sizes, perhaps indicating different breeds. With the sheep bones were a few belonging to badger, fox, hare, rabbit, and one of a bird. There were also a few human bones evidently from the lower strata.

The urn was submitted to Mr. F. W. Rudler, the curator of Jermyn Street Museum, and President of the Anthropological Society, who states:— "Its coarse make and mixture of quartz grains with the clay, indicate considerable antiquity; but it has evidently been 'thrown' on a wheel, which would point to a comparatively late origin. On the whole he is inclined to think it is the work of some ancient Briton, influenced to some extent by Roman ideas; that is, it would seem to be what is usually known as Romano-British. The skeletons would agree with this age, but they might be somewhat more ancient."

Some dark coloured bones were found in stiff red soil below the limy concrete, about six yards up the cave, and some of them in the same mixture, but before the limy deposit commenced. They have lost their gelatine, and would, from this circumstance, lead one to think they were those of extinct animals of the pleistocene period, but Mr. Newton says, the absence of gelatine is not a sure proof of age, because bones, being in a wet place, would in time have the gelatine dissolved out. These bones are probably older than the bones of the limy concrete, and consist of one piece of a red deer's bone, metatarsal; the foot bone of a horse, and two

fragments undeterminable, broken longitudinally, it may be inferred, for extraction of the marrow.

THE DEPOSITS.

Mr. Clement Reid, of the Geological Survey, has kindly examined the specimens of cave earth, etc., some of them by washing through a sieve, but with only negative results. He says:— No. 2.—Top layer at entrance, blackish earthy soil full of roots, etc. No implements, flakes, or bones found in washing. No. 4.—From below No. 1 (12 to 18 inches thick). Red clay, with small limestone fragments. No. 6.—Next below No. 2, below the lime bed, further inside. Red clay. No. 7.—Clay below No. 3 at entrance; bedded whitish sandy loam, full of root fibres. Yielded one small fossil when washed. No. 8.—Sand below No. 4 at entrance. Red sand (? Derived from glacial beds). The washed residue contains a few small fragments of shells, quite undeterminable, a reed of grass, fragment of leaf and of moss are evidently recent, not fossil. A portion of jaw of shrew and part of a small limb bone have also a very modern look. No. 9.—From below the sand (No. 5) is like the last (No. 8), but more clayey, contains no fossils. No. 10.—Rough sand with small fragments of limestone. No. 11.—Red sand two feet thick.

Mr. Clement Reid thinks it is in the earth below the deposit which contains the human bones that we should expect to find remains of extinct forms, and it may be, extinct mice and moles. For the purposes of comparison and analogy, it will now be interesting to say a few words about other pre-historic and visible records of this neighbourhood. No doubt you will remember that the late Mr. Bateman, of Youlgrave, and Mr. Carrington, of Wetton, were occupied for a good many years in examining the barrows and other burial places of North Staffordshire. Their results are recorded in Mr. Bateman's book published in 1861, entitled "Ten years' diggings in Celtic and Saxon grave-hills." As far back as 1845 Mr. Carrington opened a small barrow in a field in his occupation at Wetton called Borough Hole. In this barrow he found a skeleton extended at full length, accompanied by a spear-head and knife of iron. He also found a small brass coin of the Emperor Gallienus (A.D. 253 to 268) with an antelope on the reverse; and a curious article made of two semi-circular bars of lead, perforated at both ends as if intended for a collar, meant to be tied together when round the neck. Later on he found a very beautiful bronze fibula heart-shaped. In 1852 he examined this field to a greater extent, and found it was evidently the site of an ancient British village or settlement. The name of Borough Hole remains to this day, and Mr. Carrington states that the term comes from the word *burh*, being a Saxon word for town or village. The sites of many dwellings were

discovered, and the precise site of each house was indicated by pavement. Ashes, charcoal, broken pottery (Celtic and Romano-British), teeth, bones, and horns of ox, hare, deer, hog, cow (animals which had been used for food), and burnt stones were found, but there was no evidence of this station having been occupied prior to the Roman conquest, neither were there any traces of the Saxon periods further than that of the name of the fields. The people were pagans, and disposed of their dead by burning, either to introduce their shades, with becoming honours, into the presence of their deity, or to propitiate his wrath. A Romano-British knife of iron, and prongs of a fork were found at a depth of about one foot from the surface. There were some broken querns, and a mortar hollowed out at the top for the reception of grain, also part of a vessel of green glass of Roman manufacture. The skull of a stag was found, and a coin of Constantine with the words "GLORIA EXERCITVS" and two soldiers holding standards ; also pieces of Roman tile, a drinking cup made from the leg-bone of a large animal. It seems clear from this, that there is sufficient evidence to assume that there was a joint Romano-British occupation, or, at any rate, trading. These Wetton Borough Fields are distant from Redhurst Gorge not more than one and a-quarter miles. Barrows were also opened at Throwley, Warslow, Ecton Hill, Longbow, and Three Lows near Wetton, and Elkstone, in which similar remains were discovered; in one, were found vessels of stone and bronze. Thor's Cave in its turn came in for examination. In it some bones of extinct animals were found, with other remains. I have here a lump of Breccia, which formed part of the floor of Thor's Cave, in which may be observed a small Roman tessera. From all this, it will appear, that this beautiful limestone country was a dwelling-place of our ancient forefathers from very early times. There does not seem to be any trace of these ancient people being employed in mining operations for lead, copper, or other metallic ores, but everything points to their leading a quite pastoral life.

LIST OF BONES, &C FOUND IN REDHURST CAVE, JANUARY, 1899.

[List omitted for length]

LEGEND

Mr. T. Beardmore, jun., of Wetton, has sent me the following LEGEND OF RED HURST GORGE. "Probably down to less than 100 years ago the whole of Redhurst Valley was thickly wooded, and being in close proximity to the village of Wetton, was much visited by the poorer in- habitants in search of fuel. In addition to their load of sticks, many weird tales did these poor people bring, from this mysterious valley, of the strange sights they had seen and the unaccountable voices they had heard. Neither could they account for the un- usual incidents that were

often occuring in their village—of which more hereafter. "It seems, however, that they were not long in connecting the owner of these supernatural voices with the unusual events that were so often occurring. Resolved to further unravel the mystery, they kept a closer look out for these sylvan residents, and their vigilance was rewarded by discovering that the cause of all their alarm and anxiety was the mysterious '*Hob i' th' Hurst*.' Occasionally, in the stillness of the night, would those intrepid villagers steal down into the dark shades of the valley, and hear the low sullen voice of this creature asserting himself in the following words: 'Hob! Hob! The King of the Woods am I,' and the younger woods from their retreat would in a childlike voice respond, ' Hark! Hark! Our daddy calls!'

"Excitement gradually grew on these people. They eventually decided that at all risks Hob must be captured and brought to Wetton. So, three brave hearted villagers, by name Bowden, Baker, and Redfern, risked the expedition. Equipped with spades, picks, and a bag in which to carry their captive, they started on their venture, and soon discovered by their previous knowledge the haunt of their quest. Laboriously did these poor fellows dig, perspiring profusely, and not the least cause of it being the dread fear of undertaking such a bold intrusion on the abode of this mysterious monster. After hours of unremitting toil, they at length came upon the habitation of the Hob, but alas! Hob himself was not at home, but perhaps better in a sense, there remained behind one of the juniors, whom they managed to bag and to load on Bowden's back. "Elated by their success, they started to trudge back to Wetton, and had proceeded contentedly some distance, when they heard coming from the bag a voice that sent consternation through their frames. It was Hob junior who had spoken, addressing himself as follows: 'Bowden! Bowden! I thought I heard my daddy call!' The perspiration now came more freely than ever, and a halt was made to consider whether it was wise to proceed with their charge. They eventually determined, with sundry misgivings, to do so, but when Hob again in a more uneasy tone than before called out, "Bowden! Bowden! I thought I heard my daddy call", the bag was tossed aside, and the three, needless to say, made rapid tracks for home. The Hob family after this was never seen again, probably from their whereabouts having been discovered and fearing further disturbance. "Prior to their taking up their abode in Redhurst, tradition says that they inhabited the Derbyshire caves in the neighbourhood of Earl Sterndale, and that every Monday morning before daybreak Hob himself would proceed to Dowall Hall, and there undertake the task of churning, preparations for which had been previously made. Watch was kept, and he was seen at work in a nude state. One night a shirt was left to see if he would accept the same, but he, on taking it in hand and finding it to be made of hemp,

thereupon exclaimed — If this shirt had been flaxen fine, This churn I'd have churned times ninety and nine. He immediately took his departure, and in all probability proceeded to the woods at Wetton. Churning and other house- hold work he often undertook at night at Wetton, but woe betide the servant maids if a clean towel had not been left on which to wipe himself after the work. On one occasion he was heard to say— Up those stairs I'll nimbly creep And find those dirty sluts asleep, I'll pinch their arms, their legs, and thighs, None shall escape : I'll none despise. Needless to say he never came a second time to that house."

[*Compare to the poem on Wetton from Erasmus Darwin in Chapter 12, re: tormenting imps – my note.*]

The paper was listened to with great interest, was illustrated by lime-light and lantern photographs, which added greatly to its interest. Mr. Barke said they were much indebted to Sir Thomas Wardle for bringing this interesting subject before them. His explanation seemed to be a feasible one, and he quite agreed that the explosions were not at all likely to be due to volcanic causes. He proposed a hearty vote of thanks to Sir Thomas Wardle.

Dr. McAldowie seconded the motion, and observed that the only phenomena resembling the explosions from the cliff he had heard of were the blow-holes on the West Coast of Ireland. Here the waves dashed into the mouth of a cave and so compressed the air inside, that explosions occurred from the fissures in the cliff above the cave with noises similar to those described by Sir Thomas Wardle. With regard to the discoveries in the cave, he said he was astonished that no implements were found. He doubted very much whether it was a burial place, and suggested that people might have [simply] gone there to die. He had never heard of lime being used for purposes of sepulture. He thought the remains pointed to a greater antiquity than the Romano-British period. The skull was that of an early type of human being.

Mr. Brothers remarked that with regard to the explosions, he ventured to suggest a cause of them in electricity. Air pressure alone could hardly accumulate beyond that of air travelling, say, at hurricane velocity — 90 miles an hour. Let us suppose such pressure to accumulate; then expansion must necessarily be accompanied by a fall in temperature, thereby reducing the force of explosion and making it impossible for the air to rise in temperature, as it appears to do, the observed blue flame being evidence of a high temperature. The required explanation must, in fact, account for an explosion, accompanied by a high temperature. Now a strong current of air meeting with resistance against the sides of the narrow passages of rock will generate

electricity, and if the current be long continued the accumulating charge will ultimately pierce the dielectric air, and produce a spark — a discharge. This will cause a great rise in temperature in the air in the confined crevices of the rock, and a sudden rise in temperature means an "explosion;" we get the blue flame tinged at times with the pinky-red, characteristic of a discharge in nitrogen, and we get the short, sharp cracks, characteristic of the discharge of statical electricity. The rock crevices act as Leyden jars, with air as dielectric, for frictional electricity generated by the long continued blast.

The Chairman wished Sir Thomas Wardle success in his project of getting water into the Manyfold [river] during dry seasons. Mr. J. R. B. Masefield supported the motion, which was carried with applause, and Sir Thomas Wardle briefly responded.

In July 1899 there was a major excursion by the Club to Wetton, conducted by Sir Thomas Wardle. This was very briefly reported in the *North Staffordshire Field Club, Annual Report and Transactions*, 1900.

"About fifty members arrived by train at Leek, and were driven over Morridge to Warslow. Leaving the carriages, the party walked down to Swainsley, where they were met by Sir Thomas Wardle and some local friends. A walk was then taken down the valley to Wetton Mill and Darfar Crags, turning off to view Old Hannah's Cave, Redhurst Gorge, which has been fully described in the Transactions of the Club (1899). [A note on the Club's business, transacted at the Greyhound inn.] The day was fine, an east wind tempering what would have been great heat, and making the walk in the valley delightful; on the return drive to Leek, however, it was bitterly cold, for as the Leader said, — 'it is always winter on Morridge!'".

A more substantial expedition of 140 members to the area was reported, again hosted by Sir Thomas Wardle, in August 1903, as was reported in the *Annual Report and Transactions*, 1904, page 179-182. However, Wetton and the Redhurst Hill Gorge were only passed by in train or carriage…

"From Swainsley [the residence of Sir Wardle] the major portion of the party was conveyed along the light railway to Waterhouses, others preferring to drive. This portion of the line is certainly the most picturesque part of the route, and those who undertook the railway journey found the scenery of the Manyfold Valley remarkably beautiful. The picturesque Wetton Mill; the imposing and lofty rock in the face of

which is seen the famous Thor's Cave; the wooded rocks known as Darfar Crags; the beautiful Ladyside Woods,[207] and Redhurst Hill Gorge, where in a cave Sir Thomas Wardle found a quantity of human and other animal remains, are all seen as one passes along the valley. A point of interest is the disappearance underground of the rivers Manyfold and Hamps, near Wetton and Waterhouses respectively, the streams re-appearing united at Ham. Upon arriving at Waterhouses a portion of the party inspected a limestone quarry, where some years ago the remains of a mammoth were found, and another small quarry, where a kind of fossiliferous marble is obtained."

[207] The name of the "Ladyside Woods" will perhaps be interesting to some, in respect of a possible Marian influence on such a naming, though is likely from later than the 1370s.

Appendix 5. The Dwarf and the Saint: a late *Gawain* variant at Stafford?

From Cardinal Newman, "A Legend of St. Bettelin", *The Lives of the English Saints*. Cardinal Newman gives, from an unknown source (possibly one of his followers) this curious tale of St. Bettelin of Stafford, a dwarf-knight and giant black knight, which shows obvious trace of the *Sir Gawain* story. St. Bettelin is on his island at Stafford, but his claim to the Kingship is discovered and he is due to be beset with persecutors in the morning.

St. Bettelin's wonted prayers are o'er
And his matins all are said,
Why kneeleth he still on his clay-cold floor
By the side of his iron bed?
Ah! well may he kneel to Christ in prayer,
For nought is around him but woe and fear;
By tomorrow's sun the Saint must roam
Far from his cell and his long-lov'd home.
But who would drive this hermit good
From his islet home and his rough old wood?
He is no man who hath sought the wild
In a wayward mood like a frolicsome child,
Who hath wander'd away from his mother's side
Deep in the merry greenwood to hide.
A golden crown he had cast away
To watch all night and to fast all day;
He was of those whom the Lord doth drive
To the weary wild with devils to strive,
For the banner'd Cross must be everywhere,
Wherever the fiend doth make his lair,
And devils trembled and angels smil'd
When the hermit knelt in the weary wild;
While the peasant arose his beads to tell
When the hermit rang his vesper bell.

But what hath the world to do with him,
That it grudgeth his home by the river's brim?
Hath it not woods and streams at will?
But so it hath been and it must be still,
Earth may be broad and its bosom wide,
But the world cannot rest with the cross by its side;
And the king hath said with a scornful smile,
"The hermit hath chosen a fair green isle,
By the river clasp'd around;
And the turf is soft round his sweet chapelle,
I warrant too he sleepeth well
To that gushing river's sound;
A Saint should not dwell in so fair a scene;
And that river sweet with its islet green,
I swear by high heaven it shall be mine
In spite of this hermit St. Betteline."
And he bade the hermit prove his right
To his islet home in a deadly fight,
And if no champion can be found
He must quit by tomorrow this holy ground.
And who is there for Christ the Lord
To don his armour and draw his sword?
And will not a knight put lance in rest
To do this hermit's poor behest?
If for Christ they will not fight,
Foul shame on England's chivalry,
Their dancing plume and armour bright
Are but summer pageantry.
But let the worldlings pass along,
A Saint in prayer is wondrous strong.
"Lord," he saith, "I do not grieve
This sweet place for aye to leave,
For if Thy love abide with me,
Barren cliff or flowery lea,
All is well that pleaseth Thee;
But for Thy glory's sake arise,
Cast down the strong, confound the wise."

He rose from his knee, and then there stole
A low sweet voice to his inmost soul,—
"Man to Saints and Angels dear,
Christ in heaven hath heard thy prayer."
Oh how that whisper deep and calm,
Dropp'd on his weary heart like balm.
Then St. Betteline rose, for the morning red
Through his lattic'd window was sweetly shed.
On the red tipp'd willow the dew-drop gloweth,
At his feet the happy river floweth,
And sweetly the lightly-passing breeze
Bendeth the wood anemones,
And all things seem'd to his heart to tell,
Thou shalt ring again thy chapel bell.
Then a man rode up to his lowly door,
One he had never seen before,
A low mean man, and his armour bright
Look'd all too large for his frame so slight;
But his eye was clear and his voice was sweet,
And it made St. Betteline's bosom beat
As he spoke, and thus his greeting ran,—
"In the name of the Holy Trinity,
Hermit, I come to fight for thee."
"Now Christ bless thee, thou little man,"
'Twas thus St. Betteline said,
And he murmur'd, as meekly he bow'd his head,
"The brightest sword may be stain'd with rust,
The horse and his rider be flung to the dust,
But in Christ alone I put my trust."
And then to the lists together they hied,
Where the king was seated in pomp and in pride,
And the courtiers cried with a merry shout,
"The hermit hath brought us a champion stout."
But, hark! through the forest a trumpet rang,
All harshly it rose with a dissonant clang;
It had a wild and unearthly tone,
It seem'd by no Christian warrior blown,

And into the lists came a giant form
On a courser as black as a gathering storm;
His vizor was clos'd, and no mortal sight
E'er saw the face of this wondrous wight,
But his red eye glow'd through that iron shroud,
As the lightning doth rend a midnight cloud;
So sable a knight and courser, I ween,
In merry England never were seen;
A paynim knight he seem'd to be,
From a Moorish country beyond the sea.
Then loud laugh'd the giant as on he came
With his armour bright and his eye of flame,
And he look'd on his rival full scornfully,
For he hardly came up to the giant's knee;
His vizor was up and it show'd to view
His fair long hair and his eye of blue
Instead of a war-horse he did bestride
A palfrey white which a girl might ride;
But on his features there gleam'd the while
That nameless grace and unearthly smile,
Stern, yet as holy virgin's faint,
Which good old monks have lov'd to paint
On the wan visage of a soldier Saint.
And his trumpet tone rung loud and clear
With a thrilling sound on the 'wilder'd ear,
And each bad man in his inmost heart,
He knew not why, gave a sudden start.
The paynim had laugh'd with a scornful sound
As he look'd for an easy prey,
And he wheel'd his gallant courser round
And address'd him to the fray.
But what hath the dwarfish warrior done?
He hath sat like a warrior carv'd in stone,
He mov'd not his head or his armed heel,
He mov'd not his hand to grasp the steel.
His long lance was pointing upwards still,
And the wind as it mov'd his banner at will

Show'd work'd on the folds an image good,
The spotless lamb and the holy rood.
But men say that his stature so dwarfish and small,
None could tell how, seem'd stately and tall,
And all at once on his foe he turn'd
A face that with hidden lustre burn'd;
Ah! what aileth thee now, thou sable knight?
Hath that trumpet tone unnerv'd thee quite
That the spear doth shake in thy hand for fear?
The courser is stopp'd in his wild career,
And the rider is rolling afar on the ground
His armour doth ring with a hollow sound,
From the bars of his vizor a voice is heard,
But no man could tell that fearful word,
'Twas the cry of a fiend in agony,
Then vanish'd from earth his steed and he;
The black knight had fallen before the glance
Of that angelic countenance.
But how hath the angel vanish'd away?
Oh! how he went no mortal could say,
But a wild shriek rung through the misty air,
And each man said to his neighbour in fear,
St. Michael hath smitten the fiend with his spear."

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Promotional text:

This book offers a concise overview of the existing *Gawain* research relating to North Staffordshire, and then adds a wealth of new detail and facts drawn largely from previously overlooked sources. The case is clearly made that one of the most famous works of English literature belongs to North Staffordshire. Obvious new candidates for both the *Gawain*-poet's patron and the *Gawain* castle are suggested, and these are found to fit naturally and almost exactly when compared with the expected dates, castle features, dialect location, social status and life-story. A wealth of surrounding detail is also explored, such as: the history and role of the King's Champion; English contacts with full-blooded paganism during the Prussian crusades; the two lavish courts at Tutbury; and the history of the Manifold Valley. This 214-page book is lavishly illustrated and copiously referenced with footnotes.