STAVERTON

Pt1: WONDERLAND OF KINGS

Its place in the sacral landscape of the Suffolk Sandlings

Jeremy Taylor

"The oak woods at Staverton are the forests of childhood, the forests of dreams. Here perhaps more than anywhere else I have ever been, the forest of the imagination materialises, becomes actual; here perhaps more than anywhere else I have ever been, a smallish piece of ancient deciduous woodland opens into the world of magic, the place of fairy story that we inhabited as children and lost, I had thought, for ever."

Gossip from the Forest:
The Tangled Roots of
our Forests and Fairytales

MAITLAND [1]

STAVERTON: WONDERLAND OF KINGS
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INTRODUCTION

Staverton Park is a bold, otherworldly punctuated verse in the East Anglian sacred landscape. There is no obvious reason why an extensive woodland *"should have survived **here** when the adjacent heathlands were stripped bare of trees*" [2] and Staverton Park, Williamson continues, is *"one of the most important surviving areas of wood pasture in England."*

In his seminal book *'The History of the Countryside'*, Oliver Rackham, OBE for services to Nature Conservation, described Staverton Park as *"an awesome place of Tolkienesque wonder and beauty. The mighty and bizarre shapes of oaks of unknown age rise out of a sea of tall bracken, or else are mysteriously surrounded by rings of yet mightier hollies."* [3]

Few places on earth touch the soul as deeply as the landscape around Staverton in Suffolk, be this the oaks in the park itself or the myriad of trees in the area known as The Thicks. Not only does it boast some significant statistics, as I will explore, making it ecologically hugely important in Europe, but few places can lay claim to being held sacred and potentially unspoilt for possibly thousands of years, for the woodlands of The Thicks comes the closest out of all the woodlands in lowland Britain to one that looks wholly natural and unspoilt.[4]

Some of the trees date to at least the 1200's A.D.* and we know that a woodland did exist in Staverton Manor even earlier according to the Domesday book (1086)[5] while the rest of the surrounding landscape was poorly wooded.[6] The earliest reference to Staverton as a park occurred in 1275, though medieval records dating to 1178 record an increase in stable rent and *may* indicate imparking, the enclosing of a confined area into a park.[7]

The Bigod family were Earls of Norfolk and early imparkers, having parks recorded at Saxtead by 1140, and Kelsale by 1200, both however in Suffolk. It is entirely possible therefore that an existing well established wooded area was specifically selected and destined to be a deer park in the 12th Century, overlaid on top of the royal activities of Raedwald's kingdom, for this area being so close to Raedwald's royal palace who reigned 617 - 625 is considered to be a hunting ground in the early 7th Century.[8] The current parish boundary of the village of Rendlesham is just under 250 metres away which was itself by the early 7th Century virtually the capital of Southern England.[9] Staverton Park is five miles East of Woodbridge and just over four miles from Sutton Hoo, site of the famous Royal Ship burial of Raedwald. Bede**, only 100 years after Raedwald's death, wrote in his '*History of the English Church and People*' of a royal residence, a *vicus regius* called Rendlesham,[10] and where recent findings from archaeological excavations and surveys have been described as some of the most important *"in the UK during the early 21st Century."* [11]

Fig 1: Staverton Park

Fig 2: Staverton Park

The area known as the *'Suffolk Sandlings'* stretches from the outskirts of Ipswich, north to Southwold, sweeping through the lowland heaths of Sutton and Dunwich, the Forests of Rendlesham and Tunstall before snaking the inland river ways from Butley to Walberswick. Place names ending in Old English *ley* or *leah* like Hollesley and Butley indicate substantial amounts of local woodlands and relate to '*wood*' or '*clearing*.' [12] This *"division between wooded and less wooded parts of England was established in or before the Roman period"*. The Suffolk Sandlings play host to some of Britain's rarest wildlife habitat, and home to a deep history and heritage. The Sandlings are both our natural and cultural heritage which is currently managed as a protected landscape being an area of outstanding natural beauty (AONB). Today, the Sandlings represent just 0.8% of the Suffolk landscape at approximately 3,000 hectares, compared with as much as 16,000 hectares less than 250 years ago.[13,14] The proximity to water and the light soils of the Sandlings coastal region favoured early Anglo-Saxon*** activity in these restricted areas, which produced a series of internationally significant high-status cemeteries with boat burials and barrows, including Sutton Hoo and Snape.[16]

It is telling that one interpretation for the origin of the place name Staverton might relate to a post or stake,[16] for in pre-Christian Britain, *Stapols* were a sacred post, pillar or platform.

In Part 2 of this publication (*forthcoming*) I will focus on this in greater detail, as well as the wider ritual landscape around Staverton, exploring the cosmological and mythical functions associated with these numinous locations and how they relate to the solstitial surveyed alignment explored in *'A Ritual Landscape Considered'*.[17]

Footnotes:

** Unless stated otherwise or unless quoting from source material, all other dates used from here will be A.D.*

*** An English monk (673-735) Saint Bede or the Venerable Bede was also an author and scholar often referred to as the father of English history.*

**** In the section below, 'The people of the Suffolk Sandlings: royal rule, kingdom and beliefs', I will explore why this term currently is often challenged.*

THE TREES AT STAVERTON

"Staverton is a place of mystery and wonder; it has a peculiar effect on first-time visitors who have no foreknowledge that the world contains such places."

RACKHAM [1]

Staverton is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), designated by the government as a Special Area of Conservation. It certainly scores a few bullseyes as outlined in the English Nature ancient tree survey of 1999.[2]

- The Thicks has a canopy of the densest and tallest hollies in Britain, containing what is purportedly the tallest holly in the country at a towering 22.5 metres in height, as well as some of the biggest birches and largest rowan trees.[3]
- It contains one of the largest collections of ancient trees in Europe [4] containing over 3,020 ancient oaks in Staverton Park alone, with over 1,900 silver birch and 347 hollies; this figure excludes an estimated further 1,000 trees in The Thicks, (not included in the English Nature survey).
- Whilst many of the oaks in the park have a mean girth of 324 cm the largest was measured at over 740 cm twenty years ago, with the oldest trees recently redated to 1034, making the park the oldest primeval woodland in East Anglia.[5]*
- Staverton is unusually rich in lichen flora, presently found on the old trees, even though the remainder of East Anglia is considered poor in lichens compared to other parts of the UK.
- Fungi are in abundance, with one species found in just *three* other locations in the UK. [6]

The ancient trees of Staverton are located within three adjoining areas, Staverton Park, The Thicks and Little Staverton, the latter being an outlying wood within the original medieval park boundary. Maps record a boundary between The Thicks and the Park from 1820 onwards, however the exact date of this boundary is unknown.[7,8] Whilst today the Park totals some 200 acres, the original medieval boundary shows the Park to be some 370 acres. In the post-Conquest period i.e. after 1066, parks larger than 200-300 acres were commonly in Royal hands.[9] The Thicks is the part of the park that was fenced from the remainder in the early 19th Century and was left fairly unmanaged and its name first appears on the 1881 O.S. map and refers to groves or woodlands with close undergrowth.[10] Staverton Park is located in the parishes of Wantisden and Eyke, *'eik'*, coming from Old Norse meaning place at the oak-tree [11] and is near the village of Butley in the Suffolk Sandlings.

I had not heard of the term *'phoenix tree'* until researching Staverton, a term given to a collapsed tree that has since regenerated. The National Trust describe these as being like the *'mythical bird'*, the phoenix, rising *"up after death, but in this case not from fire but from falling over or snapping off near to the ground. Both of these occurrences would normally kill a tree, but sometimes the tree lives on... Over time roots are created beneath each branch where the trunk is in contact with the soil and eventually the original trunk can decay and disappear leaving a row of trees arising from the one fallen tree."* [12] There are over 170 standing dead trees in Staverton Park with a further 96 trees that have subsequently fallen over, but which are still living.

As well as the mighty oaks and holly trees present, there are hawthorn, elm, ash, elder and when measured in 1969 a chestnut with a girth of 333 cm, a birch at 247 cm and a rowan tree at 227 cm. Created as a deer park sometime between the late 11th and mid-13th Centuries, the earliest reference to Staverton as a park is in the Hundred Rolls circa 1275, the equivalent of today's census but for taxation and judicial purposes. After 1178 the Pipe Rolls, financial records maintained by the English Exchequer, record an increase in stable rent and may indicate the first 'official' function of Staverton as a park,[13] held by the Bigod family. The land had not been recorded as being imparked in the Domesday by 1086, unlike the five other parks in Suffolk, at Eye, Leiston, Ixworth, Bentley and Dennington.[14] That said, Hoppitt offers caution in looking for literary validation alone citing that there *"was no requirement to list parks in the Domesday returns, and thus it is impossible to be categorical about the accuracy of the data."* Parks that were recorded in Suffolk, like the one at Eye for instance could also be pre-Conquest in origin.[15] The settlement at Staverton however was recorded, in the Hundred** of Loose and with a recorded population of 40 households puts it in the largest 20% of settlements recorded in Domesday.[16] The area of Staverton Park at the time the Domesday settlement was recorded was pasture, with oak and other tree species, which no doubt descended from a remnant of natural woodland which remained at Staverton in the 11th Century.[17]

Peterken forensically explores and underpins this argument for Staverton's archaic past by asking the provocative question ***"Has Staverton Park ever been completely cleared of trees for a significant period?"*** He then pursues the evidence, based on four main lines of enquiry:

- When woodland vegetation is cleared on well drained, acid sandy soil and replaced by dwarf shrub or grass heath it is likely that a podsol*** will develop as can be seen beneath Calluna Heath, just a few yards from the Staverton Park boundary.[18] As the soil in both The Park and The Thicks is not podsolized, this is further evidence for the suggestion that tree ***"clearance has not occurred"***.
- The lichen flora which is both extremely rare and rich, particularly the presence of such 'Atlantic' species in Eastern sites, usually correlating ***"with continuity of woodland cover"***.

- Prior to the land being imparked, the people of the manor had the right of topping and lopping for fuel, with the land probably part of common waste.[19] If Staverton Park was wooded when it was formed with a mature woodland still present in 1528 ***"it is highly unlikely that clearance occurred in historical times."***

- Woodland did exist at Staverton Manor, as recorded in 1086 [20] and at that time the Sandlings were poorly wooded. [21] In selecting a site for imparking it seems likely ***"that extant woodland would have been chosen***".

This is not to say that the *'whole'* of the woodland is totally *'natural'*, for many of the trees' features are as a result of pollarding (a pruning system designed to remove the upper branches of the tree in order to promote a dense head of foliage and sustainable timber supplies) with their location and extent of coverage partially *'man-made'*.

Whilst the oldest trees might date from some time in the twelve and early thirteen hundreds this should not mean that we abandon the idea, as others have, that Staverton is *not* a relic of an old East Anglian primeval forest.[22] For Domesday records in the Manor of *Stauertuna* woodland sufficient for 30 swine, which whilst it does not necessarily imply the site of the present park, it does indicate woodland just over 900 years ago and as a mentioned above, it was not a requirement to record every park, which would contain areas of tree cover in an area that is also considered to be a Royal hunting ground in the early 7th Century.[23] In East Anglia we know that ancient wood pasture is descended from Royal hunting forests [24] adding further to Staverton's historical links with Raedwald. Quite simply, the science is clear, *"the environmental evidence for the site (micro-faunal and lichen communities plus characteristic soil profiles), suggests that the area has been more or less* ***permanently under woodland cover***" (my emphasis).[25] The woodland at Staverton retains an unbroken chain of tree cover possibly stretching back thousands of years, as mentioned in the introduction.

There has been very little elimination of tree species with only native tree species present, meaning that there is a close genetic link between the existing oak trees and those of the original woodland. **It is The Thicks in particular, with its array of dead and fallen trees that cling to life and regenerate, between the fallen timber, that most closely resembles a wood in lowland Britain that *could* be considered 'natural'**.[26] It is here, more than anywhere, that it really does feel like you have stepped back in time, thousands of years.

According to Suffolk Woodland Officer Gary Battell, it is highly likely that a tree (see Fig. 5) near to Cumberland's Mount, an unusual semi-sub-circular earthwork 92 metres East-West that I will explore later, is a strong contender for the 'Nine-yard oak' (8.23 metres) as recorded in 1832.[27]

Fig 3: One of Staverton's 174 standing dead trees [28]

Fig 4: Staverton Park

Fig 5: The most likely contender for the Nine-yard oak, Staverton Park

The record of the perambulation, associated with the beating of the bounds (a customary tradition concerned with maintaining and reaffirming for parishioners the parish boundaries which were then recorded) described passing this colossal old tree nearly two hundred years ago. Perambulations were attached to Charters which in later centuries existed to define the legal boundaries of forests. These *'witness trees'* as they were called in the United States were *"an important source for the landscape just before the settlement."* [29] When Charters do mention trees, the most often cited are thorn, oak, apple, willow, ash and elder. At least 840 perambulations are attached to Charters that date from between 600 - 1080.[30] It is telling that the largest tree recorded in the whole of the park is close to Cumberland's Mount.

Staverton Park straddles both the parish boundaries of Wantisden and Eyke, and this peripheral location for parks, where they can be adjacent to parish boundaries occurs at other parks in Suffolk, at Holbrook, Fakenham and Framlingham.

"In other words, the feature, whether early wood or later park, was already a part of the landscape when the boundary was being defined… In Suffolk, many parish boundaries date from the late Anglo-Saxon period and some may follow even more ancient divisions." [31]

Footnotes:

** It is a myth that the trees in the park were planted in the early 1500s by the monks of Butley Abbey, according to Farmer in 1949.*[32]

*** The hundred was the division of a shire under common law for administrative and judicial purposes introduced by the Saxons between 613 – 1017.*

**** Characterised by a grey, whiteish subsurface layer, a podsol typically occurs under temperate coniferous woodland in infertile acidic soil where the minerals have been leached.*

Fig 6: The Thicks

Fig 7: Staverton Park

Fig 8: The Thicks

Fig 9: Staverton Park

Fig 10: Staverton Park

Fig 11: Staverton Park

Fig 12: Staverton Park

Fig 13: The Thicks

Fig 14: The Thicks

Fig 15: Staverton Park

THE SURROUNDING LANDSCAPE

Territorial organisation in the 7th Century produced a spatial dislocation, reflecting a significant shift in conceptions of sacred geography between human and supernatural residents of the landscape. Specialist settlements became both territorial centres and cult sites, *"places of emergent power where connections were being made with the supernatural or ancestral and where access to this powerful resource was managed."* [1]

Rendlesham

At Rendlesham, the connection *"between temple, the royal halls and the first Christian church"* [2] mirrored the royal capital of the Swedish royal house of the Wuffingas (*see below*) and the great religious centre at Uppsala, just North of Stockholm. According to Blair,[3] Rendlesham's ecological landscape resonates with a sense of liminality, with riverside grasslands down to the Deben and hunting grounds surrounded by forests giving it an abiding well equipped environment. Magnetometry as part archaeological investigations undertaken between 2009-2014 revealed crop marks and the site of a (supposed royal) timber hall, 23 metres by 9.5 metres.[4] The royal *'cult'* centre at Rendlesham would have been a place where the East Anglian Kings would have stayed, feasted and administered justice and whilst there were other sites in the region that would have provided temporary residences to the royal households across the kingdom *"Rendlesham appears to have been the largest and the longest-lived of these places"* [5] for at least three centuries.[6]

As many as 3,946 items were found at Rendlesham in the above survey, all of varying significance, however it is clear that the discoveries uncovered at the royal settlement of Rendlesham, capital of Southern England [7] are *"likely to be some of the most important archaeological discoveries in the UK during the early 21st Century"* according to Professor David Gill, Director of Heritage Futures at the University of Suffolk.[8]

Eyke

The small village of Eyke, whose name comes from Old Scandinavian *'eik'*, meaning *'oak-tree'*, underlies the scarcity of woodland in the area as mentioned above. For *"the fact that a single oak tree could serve as a marker for a settlement"* [9] underscores this point. Eyke is also believed to have once been of prime importance within the royal estate of Rendlesham.[10]

Fig 16: Staverton and the landscape of the Suffolk Sandlings

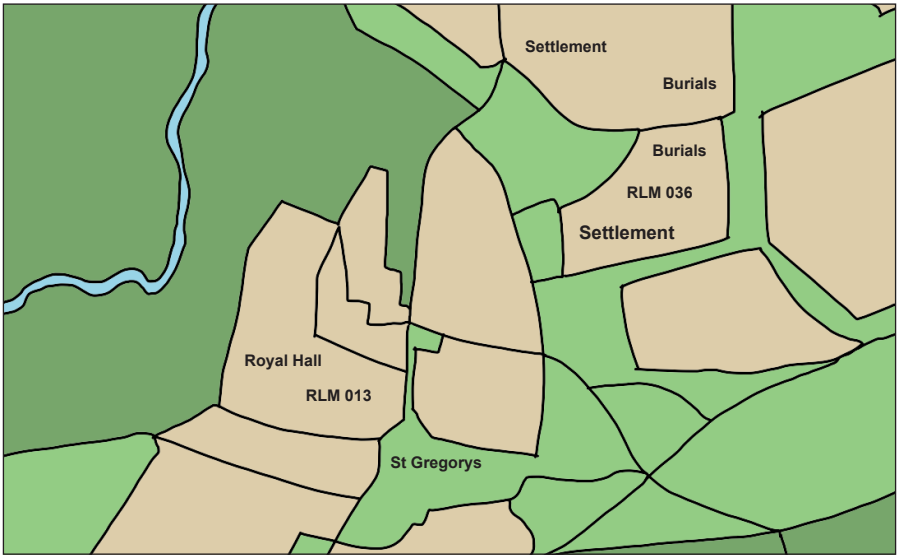

Fig 17: Rendlesham, the Royal Hall and two primary areas.
6–8th Century. RLM 036 settlement & RLM 013 residence, high levels of material finds.

Fig 18: All Saints Church, Eyke

Fig 19: Eyke human figurine, dating from 400–750
© TimeLine Auctions.

Fig 20: Mound 1, Sutton Hoo, with metal peaks indicating the bow and stern of the boat

The cruciform plan of the current church is a remnant of a much larger Saxo-Norman minster, and may be the site of a church that dates back to the early to the mid-600s and was possibly *"central to Raedwald's Kingdom"*.[11] The term *'minster'* is a corruption of the Latin monasterium and the axial design of the church of All Saints at Eyke is similar, Warner proposes, to other buildings which would have once stood on late pre-Conquest minster sites. The level stone rows and current walls are evidence of Saxon features.[12]

Two wonderful and incredibly rare items have been discovered in Eyke. One is an escutcheon from a hanging bowl discovered in 1984 in long grass following a construction project ten years previously and dating from the mid-second half of the 7th Century. Its design contains three trumpet spirals in what is more commonly called a triskele and may derive from Celtic triadic magic.[13]

The other object is the copper-alloy Eyke figurine and is one of only eight examples known in the whole of Suffolk. Spanning the conversion period dating from 400-750 these talismanic, human representations from this period are indeed unique and have been interpreted as being amuletic or apotropaic [14] signifying the 'special nature' of these objects.[15] Late antique human representational art is usually attributed to the Norse gods, representing an equivalent of the Norse god of fertility Freyr and his sister Freyja [16] or the cult of Odin or Woden.[17]

Sutton Hoo

Raedwald's death occurred around 625 and the discovery of his ship burial in 1939 at Sutton Hoo revealed the extent to which the rites associated with death were so regarded. The boat burial alone required the removal of between 17,000-20,000 cubic feet of material [18] for the 27 metre long vessel, large enough for 40 oarsmen, 20 on each side. Raedwald was king of the East Angles from 599 and high king of the Southern English from 616 and claimed to be the eighth descendent in line from Odin. He was acknowledged as Bretwalda, the only East Anglian king to attain this pre-eminent unifying status, being overlord of the other kingdoms of the Saxon heptarchy.[19]

Boat burials represent a rite associated with transition and a belief in the liminality of death and have a strong connection with shamanistic beliefs, centred on the idea of a journey to the otherworld.[20] Symbolically, the ship is associated with the Vanir deities,[21] Norse gods associated with fertility and wisdom, such as Freya, Freyr and Njord. Whilst there might be more than 420 boat-graves known across North-Western and Northern Europe alone, in England it is only at Sutton Hoo and Snape, approximately 10 miles to the North-East, that anything like an actual intact ocean-going vessel have been discovered.

Fig 21: The Sutton Hoo purse lid. The metal worked lid measuring 19cm long and 18.3cm wide with the plaques themselves only 4mm thick contain 1,526 hand cut garnets.

The Sutton Hoo helmet is undoubtedly the most iconic of all the Sutton Hoo finds and recent investigations have concluded that it was constructed deliberately so as to portray and reinforce the wearer as being descended from Odin.[22] The 23 garnets of the left eyebrow were backed with gold or silver foil, to reflect light back through the stone, producing a red glow, unlike the right eyebrow where there was no foil present. *"When seen indoors by the flickering light of the fire, the wearer of the Sutton Hoo helmet was one-eyed,"* a practice pursued by creators of prestigious artefacts across a wide range of European locations between 500-950.

For a more detailed exploration of the burial grounds and lavish grave goods discovered at Sutton Hoo readers should refer to *'A Ritual Landscape Considered: Cosmography & Anglo-Saxon Ship Burials'*.[23]

Butley and Burrow Hill

The remains of the Augustinian Priory that was home to the 36 Black Canons founded in 1171 by Ranulf de Glanville, Chief Justiciar to King Henry II before falling into decay shortly after 1538 is found in Butley, around one kilometre South East from Burrow Hill.[24]

Burrow Hill overlooks the mouth of the Butley River and due to its close proximity to Rendlesham it is considered a Wuffing site.[25] An extensive cemetery of over 200 inhumations

Fig 22: Butley Priory Gatehouse

(predominantly adult males) dating from 780, it is likely to be one of seven early medieval minsters in King Aelfwald's kingdom, described in a letter from him to Boniface 742-749. Burrow Hill was an island site and occupied during the Iron Age and Roman times long before the Augustinian priory was founded on the hilltop in the late 12th Century.[26] As well as the site at Burrow Hill yielding many runic coins bearing Beonna's name, (another Wuffing king of East Anglia from 749), there was also the remains of what are called *'pseudo-boat burials'*, a type of log boat in the form of a bath tub or coffin boat, surrounding the deceased.[27] The practice of placing clinker boat timbers, or substitute planks of boats to either line the grave or cover a grave, mirrors the maritime symbol of a boat, echoing the East Anglian boat-burial tradition found at Snape and Sutton Hoo with a much wider pan-Germanic concept.[28] An earthwork causeway 450 metres long known as The Thrift *(BUT 018)*, approaches the hill from the north-west.

The term *genius loci*, meaning spirit of place, refers to the idea of the presiding spirit or deity of a particular place, which according to Prendergast gives the landscape its distinctive characteristic, one that is more *"experiential, rather than quantifiable."*[29] Elements contributing to such liminal characteristics (as at Burrow Hill) Prendergast continues, would include proximity to the river, pronounced elevation above a river, discreteness of setting and the act of ascension needed to gain access to the site and visibility of the sky.*

Fig 23: Burrow Hill

Fig 24: Stone Cross Shaft, Iken Church

Iken

The church at Iken, meaning *'the heel or spur of land'* [30] rests on an ancient and sacred place in the wider landscape on a promontory, overlooking the River Alde.

It is one of East Anglia's earliest Christian sites and is believed to be that of Botolph's *monasterium* of *Icanho*, founded in 654 and appearing in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in the same year. Alongside the reference to the death of King Onna there is the mention of Iken, the likely site of the Saint's original foundation, that of St. Botolph, *"Her Onna cyning wearþ ofslægen; ond Botulf ongon minster timbran æt Icanho - Here [in this year] Onna King was slain; and Botulf began [his] minster to build at Iken Hoo."* [31]

It is at this minster church of Iken that St. Botolph, the early pioneer of Benedictine monasticism in England is buried, having died on 17th June 680. Under the reign of King Cnut 1016-35, St. Botolph's relics were divided between several minsters, including Bury St. Edmunds, and housed in his own shrine at the west end of the great abbey, known today as the ruined crypt.[32] The current church is mainly 15th Century, with parts of the nave dating possibly to the 12th Century. The foundations of what has been described as a Middle Saxon (660-889) timber framed building, thought to have been St. Botolph's original church, lie just to the South of where the monastery would have stood.[33]

In 1977, an archaeologist found embedded in the tower of Iken's medieval church a stone cross shaft 1.5 metres in length, a section from what would have been a 3 metre tall cross. Beautifully carved with interlace patterns and mythical beasts from the Mercian school of sculpture it dates to 850-900 and is itself only one of three examples of carved stone dating from the early medieval / pre-Conquest period.[34] In East Anglia the first Viking raids in the winter of 869-870 destroyed many monasteries across Suffolk, including Iken,[35] which is thought to have been abandoned soon afterwards.[36]

Snape

The East-West cemetery at Snape is approximately 200 metres by 70 metres and estimates, based on grave density, conclude that the cemetery may have held up to 1,200 cremations, [37] significantly more than the two largest cemeteries in Suffolk at Lackford and Eye, with 530 and 130 cremations respectively. The cemetery at Snape is home to England's only second intact Anglo-Saxon boat burial and was originally excavated in 1862 and has been dated to 550-575+/-.

Fig 25: The late antique – early medieval cremation cemetery, Snape. Home to the first ever intact boat burial excavated in Europe in 1862.

The boat discovered in Grave 1 was 54 feet long, 9 feet 7 inches wide within a barrow of 85 feet wide, and it has been estimated this would have been visible from the sea, from over 7 km away at this point.[38] It is possible that across the cemetery there were also, 2 or possibly 3 other graves that also contained logboats or parts of a boat within them.

The use of charred wooden coffins in later Anglo-Saxon burials has symbolic associations with the concept of eternity [39] and eight small pieces were carefully laid out over the body in Grave 9. Whilst Filmer-Sankey and Pestell acknowledge that there may be some difficulty in transposing ideas around Yggdrasil, the World Tree central to Norse cosmology into the interpretations here, though they conclude that the *"possibility of a totemic inclusion must"* be considered. In fact, the inclusion of small deliberately selected pieces of wood, perhaps related to specific ritual intentions alluded to above, have been used across the Snape cemetery. In total, charcoal from a variety of woods has been found in over thirty graves, including branches of charred oak carefully arranged in Grave 9 and a charred container made of oak heartwood that was part of a boat, deliberately selected in Grave 3. Oak also appears to have been ritually placed under and around the log boat in Grave 4. One theory as to why we find such an elite cemetery at Snape is that the newly emerging Royal dynasty of the Wuffingas broke free from a local tribal base in order to establish themselves in the region.[40]

Friday Street

Friday Street is a small minor road or trackway at approximately 390 metres in length and plainly visible on the apportionment of rent-charges on the tithe map for the parish of Rendlesham in 1839. Although no longer visible today on the O.S. map of 1881 at the end of the Street, there is a well clearly indicated. The Celts and late antique populations *"used wells for connecting with the Otherworld"* and also for consulting the oracles or supernatural powers by the art of divination to foresee the future.[41] The Norse gods and goddesses such as Freyja and Freyr are associated with fertility and wisdom, with wells themselves also representative of fertility, for water flowed from the very source of life. Because of this outpouring from the earth, this liquid was *"blessed, magical and powerful, and therefore emanated from and was protected by the spirit."* [42]

To the South of Friday Street is the Rendlesham and Eyke parish boundary. The same parish boundary makes its way along Fenn Row East before doing an abrupt South-East right turn straight towards and right beside the earthwork that is Cumberland's Mount, in the centre of Staverton Park. It has been suggested that ancestral and mythic associations, perhaps enshrined in the beliefs around associations with the dead at burial sites and

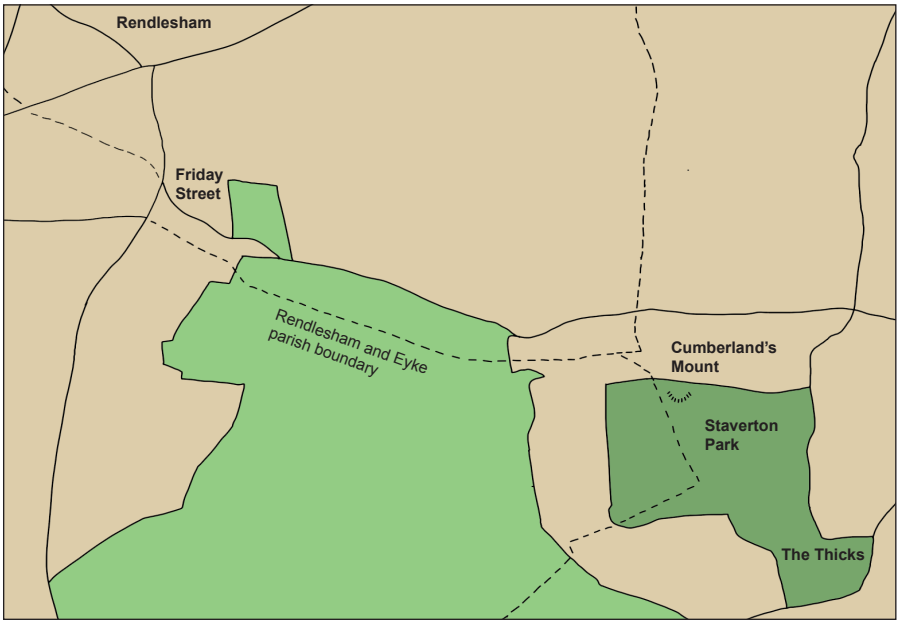

Fig 26: Friday Street in relation to Rendlesham, Staverton and Cumberland's Mount

Fig 27: Sunrise over Friday Street

ancient monuments, lay at the heart of Charter boundaries from the 7th Century onwards.[43] One burial mound for instance acted as a cult centre of the Angles in Schleswig and an important assembly site of their *'thing'* for four hundred years.** [44] Charter boundaries from the pre-Conquest period include 28 occurrences of beam, with at least 21 of these related to individual trees, some associated with personal names.[45] Two boundary clauses dating from 854 in a 12th Century manuscript called the Codex Wintoniensis list one of the landmarks as *'the holy ash'* and another as the *'ash tree which the ignorant call holy.'* [46]

According to Filmer-Sankey,[47] the place name Friday Street in Rendlesham is evidence of the worship of Frey, whilst Morley [48] and Metzner [49] favour the same derivation for the word Friday, suggesting that the name is a form of Frigg, that is Friga and preserves the name of Woden's wife, coming from the old Germanic Friatac and Old English Frigedeag.***

Footnotes:

** In Part 2 of this publication (forthcoming), I will explore the wider landscape context of Burrow Hill in more depth.*

*** 'Thing' was a site of assembly, a meeting place. The Angles, or Engelisc, came from the Angeln, just South of the current German/Danish border and invaded the East coast, probably coming to ascendancy between 475-495.*[50] *Their first established settlement was modern day Ipswich, called Gypes Wic, just 12 miles South West of Staverton.* [51] *Shortly after the Angles conquered the Eastern Britains it "became known as the kingdom of the East Angles, present day Norfolk, Suffolk and part of Cambridgeshire". The Wuffingas, who had links with the Swedish royal dynasty, also occupied the same part of Jutland as the Angles.*

**** In Part 2 of this publication (forthcoming), I will consider the wider landscape context of Friday Street whilst exploring the possible origins behind its name.*

THE PEOPLE OF THE SUFFOLK SANDLINGS: ROYAL RULE, KINGDOM & BELIEFS

"Legends, stories, the solitude in the deep forest, first-hand knowledge of the environment, and a vivid imagination and preventive actions to take care of fear resulted in an ordering of the landscape into safe or dangerous places. This led to the use of learned or invented 'rituals' to cope with fear or ward off potential hazards – real or imagined – such as bears, wolves, or supernatural beings. Myths were created to explain incomprehensible phenomena; rituals were performed to disarm dangers. All this was a means of responding to the environment and maintaining a continuous dialogue with the surrounding landscape".

BRINK [1]

That Staverton is only three kilometres South East of Rendlesham, home of the East Anglian kings, the Wuffingas, the *'people of the wolf'* [2] is unlikely to be coincidental.[3] Coming from Sweden, an offshoot of the Scylfings, they established their vicus regius, *'royal estate'* described by Bede in his *An Ecclesiastical History of the English People 731* as the *'king's village'* at *'Rendlaesham'*.[4] In 1898 Redstone, in the proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and history, records how the Saxon settlement or *'ton'* in all likelihood established itself amongst the protection of impassable fens around Staverton and dense woodland before being moved when the Normans felt more secure from marauding Danes, moving to a more fertile and *'salubrious'* district. It was at this time [5] continues that *"the Saxon church of Staverton fell into decay"* before a new one was erected in the village of Eyke, circa 1150. Unfortunately, nothing else is recorded about the origins of this church.

Before we try to understand exactly what the landscape around Staverton might have meant to the people who inhabited Eastern Britain over 1,000 years ago, we need to take a sideways step in order to attempt an exploration of what a tree might have represented or how it was seen, what animals such as deer or stags might have been symbolised and what beliefs prevailed at the time. However, exactly who were these people, and where did they come from? Modern day discoveries, drawing on the latest findings from genetic analysis, physiognomy of skeletons and archaeology are forcing us to revise our understandings about who, when and from where the people came that inhabited this land and came to Britain between 400 – 1,100.

In September 2019 issue 355 of Current Archaeology published a feature titled *'Axe the Anglo-Saxons?'* [6] This illuminating article showcased the works of Oosthuizen [7] and Blair [8] and similarly, I too will move away from the much-favoured tripartite divisions of early, middle, and late Anglo-Saxon. I will instead be adopting the following terms, *'late antique'* – 400-600, *'early medieval'* – 600-850, and *'pre-Conquest'* – 850-1100 (rounded up from 1066) for as Oosthuizen concludes, whilst the phrase Anglo-Saxon may describe the people who occupied much of England between 400 – 1100, the term is however "*beset with difficulties.* The first is that it lumps together individuals whose origins lay across a wide geographic region and across at least two centuries-people who arrived between about 400 and 600 from Francia, the Low Countries, Scandinavia, and what is now Germany, North and West Africa, Southern Europe, and the Eastern Mediterranean. They came from within and beyond the Roman empire, spoke a range of different languages, and had diverse cultural backgrounds*." The Germanic Saxons for instance spoke a language similar to that of the Jutes and Angles all of which belong to West Germanic, and are not *"considered to be part of the Old Scandinavian or Old Norse sub-sections of Germanic languages."* [9]

A precis of the present consensus on how Britain became populated from the 5th Century onwards is presented by Carver in his *'Formative Britain'*. People *"arrived from Frisia, Denmark and Northern Germany in the 5th Century in significant numbers, and immigration probably continued during part of the 6th Century from other parts of the continent. By the third or fourth generation a German identity was being celebrated under the catch-all banners of 'Angle' and 'Saxon'; terms used to label the nascent kingdoms, which were forming in emulation of Celtic practice. By the 7th and 8th Centuries, shared identities were being constructed with native Britons…"* [10] There are no obvious differences in the archaeology between supposed *"British"* or *"Germanic"* communities in the 5th-6th Centuries or even later, indeed across England the kings continued to position themselves as the heirs to Rome from the 5th Century until the 8th Century and beyond.[11]

Christianity had successfully removed all traces of English paganism by the 730s, in terms of any obvious formal belief system, something that was achieved not solely through any simple *'stamping out'*, but by assimilating *"a diverse penumbra of festivals, calendar customs, folk beliefs"* and, crucially, holy sites.[12] The earliest written histories were also generally the work of Christian monks who were taking their instruction direct from the bible to *"utterly destroy all the places"* where the heathen gods were worshipped.[13] *"Christianity, a religion of the book, documented itself thoroughly, while in failing to do so Paganism laid itself open to centuries of abuse*" and conjecture.[14] Furthermore the advent of the Christian conversion already started to take root across Roman Britain by the 4th Century, long before the arrival of St. Augustine's mission to the English from the Pope in Rome in 597 [15] and long before the antique populations *"were able to put down their ancient beliefs and myths."* [16]

Given the widespread cultural influences and populations entering late antique Britain, it is easy to see why sources for the likely beliefs held by the people of this time look outward, away from Old English literature, where there was no room for instance for Ingeld, a legendary warrior who appears in early English and Norse legends in the 8th Century. *"By contrast, Norse poetry was written down at a later date, and Norse religion and culture had a much greater period of time in which to respond to (and assimilate) elements of Christianity before its formal end in Iceland c.1,000. Literature preserving these beliefs flourished in Norse culture because approaches to paganism were different when it was written down. As a consequence, Norse poetry has that much more to contribute to our understanding of the role of trees in pre-Christian Germanic belief."* [17] Thus it is, according to Dunn,[18] in her *'Christianization of the Anglo-Saxons c.597-c.700'* highly possible that the cosmological ideas that appear in developed form in later Norse mythology may have been shared by the same people inhabiting this Isle at this time. *"Gallic bishops since the 4th Century had been resacralizing the landscape, consecrating healing springs and associating trees with the graves of saints"* where, increasingly, ritual markers were being understood in a Christian context, *"saints wells, ash-trees grown from their staffs, posts and pillars in the guise of crosses."* [19]

Unofficial Christian ritual foci was widespread across the landscape up until the 10th Century, when legislators and bishops were largely tolerant and inclusive. This patchwork of beliefs has recently been highlighted by Chris Skull, who is leading the team that are writing up the lavish and rich burial discovered at Prittlewell, between 580-600, which is considered too early, preceding St. Augustine's arrival of 597.[20] Skull favours a two-stage approach to the conversion, with late antique populations upon first hearing of Christianity adopting Christ alongside all their other gods and goddesses. Polytheism is not uncommon and may explain the *"crosses placed over the body's eyes when he was buried,"* whilst not losing sight of the need to still worship all the gods – Woden, Freyr, Mercury and Thunor etc. We know Saeberht, king of Essex however adopted a more purist type of Christianity and after his death in 619. *"Essex reverted to paganism,"* clinging to the old ways and all their gods and goddesses, something which his grandson would later relinquish by becoming fully Christian with no room for *'false gods'*. Not only did people pick and mix between religious systems, they also developed *"their own idiomatic and personal manifestations of each"*.[21] As late as 959 in the ecclesiastical canons of King Edgar a long address attempted to steer all towards the light once again: *"We enjoin, that every priest zealously promote Christianity, and totally extinguish every heathenism; and forbid well worshippings, and necromancies, and divinations, and enchantments, and man worshipping's, and the vain practices which are carried on with various spells, and with sanctuaries, and with elders, and also with various other trees, and with stones, and with many various delusions, with which men do much of what they should not."* [22] Carver makes an interesting observation however, stating that *"Christianity was a no less enthusiastic champion of the irrational delusion than paganism. With it sins and relics, its devotions and penances, angels and*

saints, cherubim and seraphim, heaven, hell and purgatory, its transubstantiation of bread and wine into flesh and its fondness for ritual killing, especially of religious deviants, Christianity was simply much the same, only more so." [23]

Pagan animism also influenced the development of early medieval Christianity and material culture of the 7th Century, which briefly had a resurgence in the 9th and 10th Centuries. *"Incoming Scandinavians would introduce, albeit briefly, animal funerals and new monumental expressions of their beliefs where the major cosmic player was the pagan wolf, rather than the Christian lion or dragon."* [24] It was the wolf, the hound of Hel during the great final battle at the end of the world, Ragnarok, that would eat the moon and swallow the Sun, according to Gylfaginning.[25] The late antique kings claimed in their genealogies to be direct descendants of Odin, Old English Woden, the original founding father of many of the Old English royal families, as stated by Bede.[26]

In the same lineage, Caesar was placed as Woden's son, and such a pedigree almost became a prerequisite to any claim of kingship.[27] Wuffa who ruled from 571 to 578 [28] is believed to be the first to be buried at Sutton Hoo, on the highest part of the promontory at Burial Mound 5. The current church at Rendlesham dates from the 14th Century and is dedicated to St. Gregory, a dedication that is described as rare.[29] It is one of only six churches in East Anglia dedicated to the instigator of Augustine's mission to the inhabitants of this region,

Fig 28: The Church of St. Gregory, Rendlesham. © Creative Commons

being the chief architect of the East Anglian conversion.[30] Presumably, at the time the Doomsday survey was completed in 1086 there was an earlier church on the same site. Indeed, Bede records that the East Anglian King Aethelwold sponsored the baptism of Swithelm of Essex, which occurred in Rendlesham around 661. He refers to persistent pagan worship alongside Christianity in East Anglia, where Raedwald, despite being baptised in Kent, maintained a temple with one altar for *"the Christian sacrifice and another small altar on which to offer victims to devils"*. The location for and sighting of these early churches was the start of a ritual supplanting across the landscape, and it is deemed highly possible that these *"founders entertained something akin to the geomantic notions of sacred sites as* ***axes mundi****, or centres of a symbolic cosmos"*.[31] The cremation cemetery at nearby Hoo Hill, on similar glebe land that came down in ownership of the church may suggest continuity of a pagan burial ground or even a temple.[32]

How populations in the past interacted with the landscape to *'charge'* it is explored by Brink, and how the land was used by people to *'address'* the gods and communicate with them and appease *"them so that they would fertilize land and make life more prosperous, hence actually to 'manipulate' the landscape with the help of the gods. This is, of course, a theme well known in most cultures, and also found in the Christian religion… two very common means of charging land were (1) by using fire and (2) by walking the land carrying idols, and the element which was used as the main interface with the godly world, and therefore the best element for religious interaction, was, of course, water"*.[33] Landscape features such as a tree or a well, that a saint may have created are of course immoveable, though both of these can provide relics in the form of shavings of wood and holy water. *"Such legends had the potential both to Christianize existing sites of numinous power and to create new ones"* [34] whilst suggesting that a holy site needed supernatural sanction by the church, not simply the approval and blessing. Seminal locations were nodal, *"interlocking ordinary and elite experience, providing theatres where memory and activity linked populations with their perceived"* identity and the myths of the nation *"and where people could encounter kings… Kings traversed their territories on Roman roads, used symbolic meetings and rituals at seminal monuments and natural places, and meted out their power in the landscapes of justice and authority that used the memories of heathenism to delimit and reinforce the new Christian order."* [35]

Evidence suggests that to the peoples of modern Germany and Scandinavia in the pre-Christian tradition, symbolic relationships between dendroid bodies of trees (tall, arborescent and branching) and humans was much more closely aligned than it is today.[36] Just as today, from at least 400 – 1,100 and beyond, trees and humans were and are both seen to possess limbs.[37] Bintley is clear, that the evidence presented in Old Norse literature preserved in multiple accounts circa 1,000-1,300 is evidence of a Germanic anthropogony (the study of the birth and origins of humans) and that the effect of the natural world, the importance of wood combined with myth, all contributed to this world view, whilst bolstering metaphysical

beliefs. In the Gylfaginning (the first part of an Old Norse work of Icelandic literature written in the early 13th Century by Snorri Sturluson in the Prose Edda) we see how Odin, Vili and Ve found on the seashore *"two trees, and they took up the trees and shaped men from them. The first gave breath and life, the other consciousness and movement, and the third aspect, speech and hearing and sight. They gave them clothes and names. They called the man Askr, and the woman Embla,"* [38] *'ash tree'* and *'elm'*.

As previously mentioned, in Staverton there is reported to be the tallest holly in the country, with holly present since at least the 13th Century [39] which began to grow up and out compete the oaks from about 1820.[40] Its use is thought to be unlucky if it is brought into the house before Christmas Eve and if left in the home after the twelfth night, for every day each leaf and sprig of berries would turn into a mischievous spirit.[41] *"However, holly that had been used for church decorations brought good health to the beasts if it were hung in the cowsheds; and cattle and sheep would thrive if they saw holly on Christmas Eve."*

Today, we largely view the animal and plant kingdoms simply as a resource, unlike late antique populations who not only depended on trees for shelter, weapons, fuel, built in them and hunted amongst them, but also where the forest was a place of power and magic and was like a great spirit that had to be befriended [42] and an inherent component of their early spiritual repertoire.[43] However in the transition from the agrarian Goddess cultures of Old Europe to the establishment of the warrior tribes that came to dominate central Europe, there was a gradual shift over a two thousand year period where subtle but profound transformations occurred in the beliefs and conceptions of death and the afterlife.[44] For our most ancient ancestors the endless cycles of death and regeneration, exemplified in the seasonal vegetative cycle all occurred under their great Earth Goddess who *"gave death as well as birth to all living forms. The Indo-Aryan patriarchal warrior societies seemed to be much more preoccupied with assuring the individuals, especially the chieftains, comfort and honour in the afterlife…"* Studies have revealed that sacral kingship in the Irish tradition, going back thousands of years, share an Indo-European ideology with kingship in Vedic India, underpinned by a sacralised landscape associated with the inauguration of the sacred king.[45] These world kings *"were a cosmic link between heaven and earth."*

The great timber pillar dated to 93 B.C. at Navan Fort as well as the sacred tree at Tara were both an expression of the bond between the supernatural and the natural world.[46] *"It is extremely difficult today to understand the underlying concepts that constituted the imbued metaphysical or supernatural quality that was assumed to exist in a sacred grove, well, forest, mountain, or river. Their existence as what the ancient Romans would term 'numen' — that is, objects and phenomena imbued with godly or spiritual power — is obviously one aspect.*

A sacred grove, well, lake, river, or mountain could therefore be a place or an area (1) where one might sacrifice to the gods, that is, a cult site, (2) where one could have a closer contact with gods or ancestors, and where one might perform rituals, hence interfaces in the landscape (3) where one might receive godly power or be spiritually charged, for example, with holy water or under a sacred tree, (4) which was dedicated to some god, because you were one of his or her 'people' or so that he or she might protect you, or (5) where you might be given asylum or protection that was sacrally sanctioned".[47]

That Staverton later became a deer park is fitting, given the importance of the symbol of the stag and hart as a cult-animal in late antique sacral kingship.[48] The stag as a guide appears in Frankish and Germanic legends [49] and in Norse mythology four harts gnaw at the leaves of the sacred tree Yggdrasil, the World Tree. The symbol of the stag is preserved in late antique royalty in the Sutton Hoo sceptre, with the sun.

The Huns recorded a legend of the stag with a sun on its forehead while there are later Christian legends of St. Eustace and St. Hubert encountering a stag that bore a cross on its horns. Davidson alludes to a continuation of *"mythological imagery associated with wild creatures of the forest world"* [50] with the shedding of antlers, associated with seasonal decay and regeneration, representative of the cycle of life itself, growth, with death and regeneration [51] aligning symbolically with Christ's resurrection.

In the Hungarian origin myth, two hunters were lured to start a great nation in a bountiful land, spurred on by the Miraculous Hind that appeared before them with golden antlers, with the sun on its breast. [52] *"Later, the creature (now a stag) appeared in New Year's songs, described as arriving from heaven with the sun between its horns, the moon on its chest and a star on its forehead.*[53] *A traditional shaman's chant describes the same "miracle stag" as straddling the earth, holding up sun and moon with its antlers"*.[54] It has also been suggested that the stag *'horn god'* Cernunnos was known to the Germans *"under the guise of Frey, who used a stag-horn to slay the giant Beli."* [55] Cernunnos was one of a panoply of deities of a priestly caste according to Greek and Roman accounts, in Gaul, Britain and Ireland, known as the druids, of which very little is known about them. [56] This followed the Roman Empire's conquest of Gaul (58–51 B.C.) and southern Britannia (43 A.D.) where Celtic religious practices began displaying elements of Romanisation. [57]

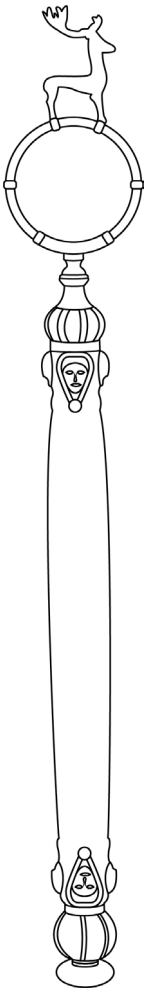

Fig 29: The Stutton Hoo Sceptre. After: Lindsay Kerr

The Vaudois, a Christian sect founded at Lyon in 1179, regarded Christ as a stag, *"the day starre arises in men's hearts; yea, the day breaks and the shadows flee away; and Christ comes as a swift Roe and young Hart upon the mountains of Bether."* [58] In Christian symbolism, the stag was associated with the values of love, honour, kindness, mercy, grace and forgiveness, with each of the various *Virtues* and *Graces* carrying its own distinctive symbol in turn. The Way of Solitude and Purity was symbolised by the Stag, which was also regarded as a type of religious aspiration, probably from the passage in the Psalms, *"like as the hart panteth for the water brooks"*. [59] The stag was not only a symbol of solitary and purity, Bailey continues, *"but its branching antlers were likened to the rays of the rising Sun, and the Stag thus becomes a Solar emblem."* Writing in the 500s St. Gregory of Tours (538 – 594) wrote his chronicles *'Historia Francorum'*, the History of the Franks, about the Merovingian rulers that contained the legend of King Clovis. In one of the King's campaigns against the Goth Alaric II, his army needed to secure a place to cross the river Vienne. Upon praying to Christ, a large deer became startled by his soldiers which then sprinted across the river, using a ford that only it knew. [60] From this point forward, this allegory was believed to be a divine sign.

In Beowulf, an Old English poem produced between 975-1025, we read in line 1319 of the Great Hall of King Hrothgar, known as Heorot (Hart / Stag - Hall) and how Hrothgar is called *"frean Ingwina"* which may be translated as *'Lord of the Friends of Ing'*. Hrothgar at this time was still a pagan and if his hall was called *"Stag"*, it has been noted that it is not too much of a stretch of the imagination to conclude that within this building a Stag-god may have been worshipped.[61] In Germanic religion Simek has theorized that a stag cult may have possibly existed, related to *"Odin's endowment of the dignity of kings."* [62] This symbolic totem of the stag continued in Viking age Britain into the 10th Century as illustrated at Gosforth, Cumbria at the high point of Viking monumentality in formative Britain.[63] There six artefacts, including the Gosforth Cross, a tall and elegant sandstone menhir dated to 920-950 at a staggering 4.4 metres tall, have been attributed to an artist known as the *'Gosforth master'*. One of the stone slabs produced by this master depicts Hyrmir and Thor *"fishing for the world serpent with a bull's head for bait and a serpent wrestling with a deer as the surrogate of Christ."* [64] This tradition carried on from an earlier late antique and pre-Christian animistic worldview – where nature was perceived as being supernaturally charged and animals were messengers from the otherworld.

Totemism is defined as *"the use of animals or plants as emblems or guardians of social* ***groups*** *celebrated in* ***ritual***" [65] and usually exists as a religious phenomenon and often within the context of others e.g. ancestor or earth cults. [66] The crude pillars, ermula crude, described in St. Aldhelm's letter dated around 680 of his recollections to Heathfrith, were no doubt the subject of veneration and have been given numerous interpretations, such as Roman altars,

re-used Neolithic menhirs or some kind of totem-pole.[67] In pre- Christian times, Sanmark concludes that such pillars were carved with images of animal heads and that natural features, such as a rock that might resemble the head of an animal, might then be used as a sacrificial site, because of this visual association. One suggestion is that Ermula may have referred to a specific heathen deity, Eormen or that it may have related to a small statue of Hermes erected at a boundary.[68] Filatos however believes this may have referred to an image of a stag or even a hybrid stag deity. [69] Ermula, it has been noted is very similar to *'Irminsul'* (see below) and may hint at the possibility of the worship of the stag in early medieval England.[70] Evidence for the use of *'Stag Poles'* may have lingered in England long into the Middle Ages, for in 1255, a company of thirteen poachers hunting in Rockingham Forest were accused in court of setting up the head of a buck on a stake, facing South making its jaws gape widely open towards the Sun *"in great contempt of the King and his foresters."* [71] In the Saga of Egil, spanning the years 850–1000, we read how Egil erected a scorn-pole, (or Nithing pole) a pole used for cursing an enemy in Germanic pagan tradition, which was made of wood and surmounted by a severed horse's head upon which a curse was laid.

The root meaning of religion is to *'bind together'* and a deeper connection and understanding is made possible and greatly enhanced through belief and participation in a religion that connects the gods in some way with *'us'*.[72] *"Thus the creation of ritual space, and place, is a human act intended to '**embody symbolic content**' and to demarcate it for transformation and special use."* [73] The landscape can of course be structured in very different ways and are all part of what Hutton describes as that *"lost interiority of religious experience"*. [74]

In Suffolk, many Parish boundaries date from the late early medieval period with some following even older ancient divisions that were properly established by the 12th Century. Landscape evidence for the chronology of imparking may also be present in the relationship between parish boundaries and parks.[75] Like their Celtic predecessors, *'heathen'* worshippers seem to have favoured open-air sanctuaries connected with distinct features in the landscape supporting the pre-Christian belief in an *'ensouled'* landscape.[76]

The kings of Sweden were said to be descendants of Freyr, known collectively as the Ynglingar and can each be called Yngvi after him, with Yngvi corresponding to Ing. One of the challenges in trying to understand the cult of the Vanir deities Freyr and his sister Freyja *"is the variety of names under which both seem to have been remembered."* [77] In Tacitus' *Germania* written in 98, he describes the cult of Alcis, meaning *'elk'* or *'stag'* as being worshipped by the Germanic tribe of the Naharvalii, stating that they have *'no image'*. As outlined earlier, whilst Royal Families claimed divine lineage from Woden, there is evidence that the Ynglinga's family tradition claimed their divine origin from Freyr, who is in fact the only god that is referred to explicitly as the ancestor of kings in Ynglingatal, a Skaldic poem from the late 800s.[78]

The Angles of East Anglia were also part of the Ingaevones, *'son of Yngvi'*, a West Germanic tribal group and one of three descended from the three sons of Mannus. Although the Angli/ Angles during the 4th Century carried out succession though the male line, as was custom in the royal house, their principal deity in the 1st Century was a goddess. *"Furthermore, Chadwick has suggested that the worship of Frey in Sweden was a later development, replacing an original female cult of Freyja"*. [79, 80] Whilst there might be some uncertainty regarding the etymology of his name, there is no doubt that Freyr was a sovereign *'king God'* who held both warrior and fertility traits, was principally a deity of the sun and of the fertile earth with his name relating to both *'Lord'* and *'the fertile one.'* [81] Ingui was central to the agricultural world of the Angles in the early 7th Century where his worship was related to the sky, sea and the earth [82] and was regarded as a progenitor of the Anglian Kings. Chaney mentions the Fall procession of Frey, a harvest feast and Germanic celebration occurring around the time of the September Equinox, associated with the plenty of the earth.[83]

It is possible that the *'ermula'*, - the stag pillars described above may also have been dedicated to the ancestor-god of the Ingaevones,[84] *'Lord Ing'*, the older name of the God Freyr. According to Grigsby [85], it is possible the 7th Century pagan shrines mentioned by Aldhelm were dedicated to Freyr, since *"Freyr's weapon was the stag's antler"* which he wielded in the final battle with Surt the giant of fire at Ragnarok.

As mentioned above, in Norse mythology four harts were said to feed on the boughs of the world tree, Yggdrasil according to the poem *Grimnismal*, with one special hart, called Eikpyrnir, Oak Thorn was said to gnaw at the tree whilst standing upon the great hall of Odin. [86] There is also mention of the Sun Hart in the 12th Century Icelandic poem *Solarljod, Song of the Sun,* in which a dead Christian man recounts to his son a powerful dream vision of this world and the next, in which one of these a hart appears in the sky *"rather incongruously in a Christian context. Although Christ is sometimes represented as a hart, no satisfactory explanation has been given of this figure as a Christian symbol, nor of the two said to be driving it."*

I saw the Sun Hart come from the South,
Driven by two together.
His feet stood upon the earth,
His horns reached up to heaven.[87]

Gelling and Davidson confirm that whilst there is no direct link between Odin the one-eyed god and the stag, Odin has among his names Elgr, Elk.

For our ancestors the natural world was charged with mystery and numinous power. As well as sacred trees being an expression of a supernatural bond with the natural world, particular

areas in the landscape, associated with certain directions such as the rising and setting sun, heightened this temporality. These ancient sites held qualities *"now lost to us: associations with mythical ancestors, importance as ancestral places, connections to legends about origins, landownership, and identity."* [88] Rackham tries to define aspects that helps make certain woods *'special'* to us today, citing certain features that contribute to characterisation of the genius loci, providing a list of various markers.

Like today, these would have all interacted and combined with each other and *'self'* in the wider landscape:

- Topography, whether the wood was on a plateau or contains ravines
- Archaeological features
- Lichens on trees, proving the existence of past knowledge; is this a place where we know trees were 400 years ago?
- Cultural and spiritual features; battlefield, site of a folkloric or mythic tale or a famous bluebell wood
- Tree communities
- Shade-bearing communities of vegetation

After, *Rackham 2006*.[89]

Footnote:

**The term Anglo-Saxon however will still appear in this article if the works that I am quoting have used this term.*

Fig 30: Staverton Park

THE WORLD TREE

"Lying at the heart of all these traditions, in one way or another, is a clear sense that the arboreal or horticultural setting – whether natural or constructed – presented a sacred space in which individuals, through meditation, prayer and reflection, might open their minds to commune with supernatural powers."

BINTLEY [1]

The symbol of the *World Tree* with its roots descending into the underworld occurs often in myth, as mentioned in the above example. In Ireland as late as 982 as recorded in the *Annals of the Four Masters*, the king of Tara, Mael Sechnaill provocatively felled the sacred tree at Magh Adhair.[2] In so doing, it is telling Waddell continues that the tree was deliberately dug up with its roots, it was not simply cut down for they too *"carried a symbolic charge"*. Similar trees at three other inauguration sites were uprooted and recorded in various annals in 1111 over 3,000 years after one of the most famous examples discovered in Norfolk in 1998. At Holme-next-the-Sea, an oval setting up to 6.78 metres wide comprised of 55 large oak timbers surrounded a pit, 1.5 metres deep which contained the lower section of an inverted oak tree. Dendrochronological analysis dated the timbers in this sea henge to 2049 B.C. and it is possible that a number of the posts came from the same central inverted oak.[3] The roots of the tree were deliberately upturned and exposed meaning again, it was not simply cut down at the time this enigmatic symbol was buried on the salt marsh on the coast.

Fig 31: Seahenge, Holme-next-to-the-Sea

This inversion in this liminal landscape has been interpreted as marking the trees transformation *"from the world of the living to the world of the dead... The Holme tree may be an early material expression of a cosmological concept that had currency in the Indo-European world and beyond*".[4]

Throughout late antique England, trees marked significant meeting places where important political decisions were made, maintaining ideological ties with human and supernatural authority.[5] There is evidence of *"a synergic relationship with the natural world"* [6] and that religious practice was organised around a pattern of regular feasting and rites that were *"closely connected with the cycle of fertility and the agricultural year"*.[7]

There are early medieval parallels that mirror the symbolic axis mundi in the form of timber uprights, that point to the symbol of a *'world-pillar, a cosmic axis'*. Referred to as *Irminsul*, the most famous historical recording is sadly of one being felled by Charlemagne in 772 around the same time that heathens in Hesse, near Germany, were worshipping the robor Iobis, Oak of Jupiter.[8] Earlier in the late 4th Century St. Martin, Bishop of Tours, had to destroy a heathen temple associated with a sacred tree [9] and Boniface, as late as the 8th Century felt compelled to destroy a large sacred oak that served as an assembly point for heathen diviners and enchanters at Geismar.[10]

The wild woodlands of the British Isles were the equivalents of the desert wildernesses in the Bible, unmastered, untamed and dangerous, *"places sought out by saints in order to wrestle with demons and to test their faith"*.[11] Trees acts as bookends in the Bible and appear frequently as portents of symbolic otherworldly realms, featuring in both the opening in Genesis and at the close during the Apocalypse. In the story of the Garden of Eden, planted by God in Genesis it states here stood *'the tree of life… and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.' "Whether interpreted as one, two or three individual trees, this may incorporate a universal concept of World Tree symbolism… tree symbolism reappears at the end of the last book of the Bible when the tree of life in the midst of God's paradise offers the last chance of conversion at the Apocalypse."* After Exodus, in the Daniel Poem in Junius 11, we read how a sacred tree appeared in the second dream of the King Nebuchadnezzar, and as he slept:

"It seemed to him that there stood, fair upon the earth, a peerless tree that was steadfast in its roots and bright in its fruits. It was not like ay forest tree, but it towered up to the stars of heaven, just as it enveloped the surfaces of the earth with its twigs and branches, the whole of middle earth, until it met the waters. There as he looked upon it, he thought to himself that the tree sheltered wild beasts, providing nourishment enough for from itself alone, just as the birds also took their life's sustenance from that tree's fruits." [12]

In the record of the Saxon conversion described by Rudolf of Fulda, a medieval writer, he records in his Translatio Sancti Alexandri of 863-5: [13]

"They [the Saxons] worship green trees and wells. They also worship a large tree trunk, erected under the naked sky; in native language they call it Irminsul, which in Latin means world-pillar, since it supports everything [in the world]." [14]

The name Irminsul itself may be a by-name of the god *himinsjoli,* a compound of 'heaven', *himinn* with the term *sjoli* possibly being cognate with the *-sul* 'post' of *Irminsul*, German Säule, 'post, pillar.' [15]

Whilst the boundary between the world pillar and world tree is fluid, for they *"can both be perceived as 'functional alternatives', in early cosmologies"* [16] there have been certain structural differences noted between these two forms.[17] The World Tree usually alludes to the binding link between heaven, earth and the underworld, whilst the tree itself is often seen as the embodiment of a god. On the other hand, the world pillar can be seen as supporting the heavens and sometimes is attached by a nail to the immobile symbol of the Pole Star at its crown. This interpretation is most commonly found in circumpolar cultures, indigenous peoples of the Arctic region, with the belief of the World Tree *generally* more prominent outside of Arctic societies.[18]

"The symbolic importance of trees is one of the best attested elements of Germanic religion both in mythology and in Christian literature." [19]

A cosmic tree was central to the cosmological beliefs of pre-Christian Icelanders who represented a tree (a horizontal interpretation) in the centre of a round disc, surrounded by water. This World Tree or Yggdrasil is analogous to that of the role of the Irminsul which Rudolf records as being the centre of the nine worlds in Icelandic cosmology.[20,21] "*Yggdrasil is by far the most illustrious example of the World Tree we have in Europe, with this axis mundi symbolising the "central metaphysical link between heaven and earth."* [22] Yggdrasil is a means of communication between the three levels of being: earth, heaven and hell [23] (a vertical interpretation). The concept of a tree, rising like a ladder through these worlds to ascend to the heavens has shamanistic connotations and occurs in Northern Eurasia and in another Scandinavian source there is also reference to *"the ritual slathering of the World Tree with white mud."* [24] Aelfric, an English abbot 955-1010 recounts the story of St. Martin in Gaul in the 4th Century in which he recounts the great outcry at the cutting down of the tree that was associated with the heathen temple which was also due to be destroyed, over which there was however little protest:

Fig 32: The destruction of Irminsul by Charlemagne. Heinrich Leutemann, 1882

"The holy Martinus threw down a certain idol at a certain time in a certain place. A pine tree was by the temple, considered a very holy shrine in the heathen manner. Then he wanted also to cut down the tree but the heathens gainsaid the saint, (they) said they could not find it in their hearts that he should cut down that tree even though he might throw down their temple." [25]

In Norwegian legislation the *'staf'* was outlawed under the Law of the Eidsivating circa 13th Century, which prohibited the keeping of any objects connected to *'paganism'*. *"It must however be pointed out that although such pillars may well have played a part in the pre-Christian cult, pillars symbolising other beings were probably more common"*.[26] And in England in the 11th Century laws were passed prohibiting the veneration of the sun and the moon, fire or rivers, wells, stones or trees under the Laws of the Scandinavian immigrant King Knut, issued 1020-23 outlawing the *'veneration of pagan gods.'* [27] In Old Norse, the load bearing ore-pine posts from lintel type timber framed buildings were called stafr, stav in modern Norwegian, thus the stavkirker *'stave churches'*. [28]

The bounds of social groups and the specified locations for meeting places and ritual sites were also shaped by raw topographic form. The monumentality of ancient structures could lead to an investment, with the ancestral and supernatural qualities of the landscape, enhancing their use as sacred places by constructing their idealised visions of the *"past and present, their mythical origins and their social identities."* [29]

Early medieval ecclesiastical history reveals the continued importance of periodic assembly using specific monuments and landscape features in the *"creation of the place"*.[30] Ritual procession in Christian practice used the very same valleys, hills and open-air landscape features and not just of churches, that had been long revered prior to the conversion.[31] The narratives of the community *"drew upon natural geography and the antecedent landscape to construct concepts of ancestry, place, and identity… the power of the past, the ancient, the mythical, and the remembered was being both curated and manipulated."* [32] Semple believes that a loss of roots, identity and stability i.e. because certain populations had travelled away from their homeland and were not, by definition, local, all contributed to the creation of a mythology that centred around ancestry and connection to *'place'*, and that this may have helped in furnishing the lavish funerary boat burials in the landscape of the Sandlings in Suffolk. The notion of a ship as a method for crossing the boundary between worlds occurs often in funerary rites, with the boat or ship symbolising a vessel, associated with birth and renewal, crossing into the otherworld. [33] The boat as an image and bearer of the soul reached its height in late antique and early medieval Suffolk at Snape,

Sutton Hoo and Burrow Hill where this is thought to symbolise strong evidence for a cult of Freyr. Freyr's ship Skidbladnir was described as being the finest of all ships, great enough for all of the gods to travel in.[34] For our forebears, ritual landscapes were far richer than how we in our modernity might define them. Beliefs and world views that centred around sacred topography resided *"in the memory and tradition rather than in physical monumentalization"* which introduced ideas of different land-zones between frontiers.[35]

One interpretation for the origins of the place name Staverton is *stæfer*, Old English for a post or stake with *'tun'* meaning an enclosure, a farmstead.[36] Other suggestions propose the name comes from post, beam or cross; [37] or *Stoford* (= stave ford) farm/settlement [38] or *'pole and tun with park.'* [39] Archaeological evidence suggests some late antique and early medieval burial mounds may have had a central post hole in the top which due to the poor state of material remains and preservation means it is unclear exactly how common this practice was. In Old English literature such posts are referred to as *becuns,* the origin behind our modern-day word beacon, but which originally implied more of an actual *'marker.'* [40] Such markers or becuns may or may not relate to stapols, large wooden posts akin to maypoles which may have been carved, with this large wooden *'god-post'* or stapol being used to support the roof of a great hall or standing outside *'on a barrow or prominent landscape feature'*.[41] At the high status settlement at Yeavering, Northumberland outside the big hall of the most important royal site of old Bernicia that was built for King Æthelfrith c. 594 – c. 616 huge free standing posts 12 ½ inches (311 mm) in diameter were aligned in order to allow an observer to date sunrise to different times of the year.* [42]

It may be appropriate to imagine stapols as a carved or painted pole, in the form of a totem pole, which is surely the implication of the message in St. Aldhelm's letter.[43] According to Blair [44], many place names retain an association with commemorating a *'beam'* or *'stapol'*, a post, tree or pillar. A stapol may also have meant a platform, and whilst a tree might have been used as a marker, these were not just *'ordinary'* trees with these important markers in the landscape marking the site of ritual and social activity, and most graphically demonstrated at Bladbean (Kent) and Thurnstable (Essex); *'blood-beam'* and *'Thunor's stapol'*.

Sometimes, according to Meaney, a beam may have marked out something special, a particular focal point or landmark pillar, post or platform.[45] Is this further proof that Staverton was a key location in a sacralised ritual landscape, and one that contained a stapol, sacred tree, post or pillar? If stapols were a post, it was common for them to be sited on a prominent landscape feature or barrow, *"used as an object of veneration, then its position in heathen religious observance at the site should have been very important."* [46]

Helmold of Bosau (1120 – 1177 +?) was a German historian and priest who to Wagria (now Northern Germany) recorded in 1134, oak trees surrounded by a fence of stakes that were enclosed within a courtyard: *"Among very old trees we saw there the sacred oaks devoted to the god of that country, called Prove. They were encircled by a yard and a dense wooden fence with two gates."* [47] Today it is hard to imagine how so much sacrality and ritual practice was associated with something as humble as a tree or post, that all too often we might simply either walk past or give a cursory glance.

Cultic trees and cosmic pillars also feature in Nordic contexts, with archaeological support for cultic trees in evidence beneath the church altar of Frosön, in Sweden *"the island of the deity of Freyr."* [48] Bone materials, consisting of 60 percent from wild animals, including bears, along with a birch tree stump dating to the 10th Century were found beneath the altar of the church, suggesting a cosmological continuity of the site.[49] Early Christian timber crosses are recorded as being placed outside of aristocratic houses, such as when the hand of God announced Guthlac's birth and pointed to the cross outside his parents' house in the East Midlands around 634.[50] These early timber crosses Blair continues, *"sound very like the 'guardian trees' of farms and houses in Scandinavian folk tradition, and it is tempting to think that they were direct successors of cultic trees planted outside houses in the pagan period."*

The World Tree is both a physical motif and a symbol belonging to the realm of the imagination, and can be signified by real, earthly trees, whose physical form is both representative or microcosmic of their *"mythic ideal"*.[51,52] The house-pillars inside Germanic houses were regarded as a microcosm of the World Tree.[53]

Fig 33: 9th Century stapol-like wooden pillar from the River Zbrucz, Poland. © Creative Commons

The principal categories of *'cosmically significant trees'* have been summarised by Tolley, based on Eliade [54] as follows:

1. There is a pattern of stone-tree-altar which constitutes a microcosm of the world in most ancient religions.
2. The tree is an image of the cosmos.
3. The tree is a site of cosmic theophany i.e. a visible manifestation to humankind of God or a god.
4. The tree is a symbol of life, inexhaustible fertility, connected with the symbolism of water identified as the fount of immortality.
5. The tree is the centre of the world and a supporting prop of the universe.
6. Mystical bonds exist between the tree and man, it gives birth to men and is a repository of the souls of ancestors and used in initiation rites and rituals.
7. The tree is a symbol of the resurrection of vegetation and of Spring.

After, *Bintley 2015* [55]

Yggdrasil, and by definition Irminsul, equate to a stable measure of things, a fixed central marker of authority that determines and governs the organisation of the cosmos. The old English words for *'cross'* are *rōd*, *treōw* and *bēam* and may suggest that the first crosses in use were perceived as something akin to a sacred landmark, which they often supplanted, such as at Rudstone (rōd-stān, 'cross-stone') in East Yorkshire, a vast prehistoric menhir still standing at 25 feet tall beside the church.[56]

Despite the successes of the conversion in England, the Germanic form of the Latin for cross, crux, was never in common use.[57] In the *Dream of the Rood*, an Old English lyric poem that contains lines of an earlier form of the *Dream* poem (that may have originated in the late 7th Century) the poet beholds a beautiful tree. One of the most salient *"features of the Dream is that both the dreamer and the 'humanised cross' only ever refer to the rood in terms which denote a tree, post or gallows in Old English – **never a crux.**"* [58] Despite the Christian conversion, trees and posts that would have been supplanted by wooden or stone crosses, continued to retain a firm symbolic place in the early medieval landscape.[59]

"It is noticeable that Anglo-Saxon Christian tradition emphasizes the motif of the tree to an unusual degree, making the sigebeam 'tree of victory' an object of cult in itself." [60] Parts of the poem are written in runes on the stone cross at Ruthwell at Dumfriesshire, Scotland which is believed to have originally been erected as a pillar, an image of the World Tree and subsequently reworked.[61]

Fig 34: Byzantine Bowl with equal armed cross and rosette motif, Sutton Hoo

One set of items buried with Raedwald at Sutton Hoo were the ten silver Byzantine bowls. Marked with a decorative cross motif in the centre, there is a rosette adorning each bowl that could serve as a conventional bridge, according to Bintley, between Christian and pre-Christian religious traditions.[62] *"It may thus have been understood in 7th Century Anglia as a flower from a sacred tree."* The symbol of the cross in surviving Old English poetry is referred to as a rod, beam or treow, all terms that were explored above and that were common parlance for describing pillars and trees. The word treow meant both tree and trust, or truth. *"The tree seemed to represent the very essence of spiritual reality in cosmology, and material trees manifested this deepest level of integrity. For this reason, trees were even thought to provide witness for the most serious of contracts between people. Sacred vows, such as marriages or pledges, were carried out in the presence of these spirits of nature"*.[63] Bintley in his *'Trees in the Religions of Early Medieval England'* states that *"evidence from England alone implies a distinct insular tradition... which had emerged from the blending of Germanic and British cultures between the fifth and early seventh centuries"* regarding the tradition of sacred trees as part of a religious culture.

The association of a central tree, with a powerful god, was a strongly pervasive one in the Old English tradition according to Glosecki, who associates OE plant lore with Woden and it is telling that the cross is specifically imagined as a tree.[64]

Stapols then may symbolise the first emergence of English ritual architecture *"in a sequence from the natural to the man-made: first a living tree, then the carved embellishment of its trunk or stump, and finally – around or after 600 – the setting up of sacred pillars within ritual enclosures."* [65] Saxo Grammaticus, a Danish historian, theologian and author 1160 – 1220 records that the Northern Othin (Odin) possessed magic pillars. There is the possibility that association with this Northern pillar-cult remains still today, as evidenced by the phrase the *'pillars'* of the church.[66]

The Germans, according to Tacitus, refused to imprison their gods in manmade temples, or represent them in human form and instead chose to worship them as abstractions, in sacred woods and groves.[67] *"Trees were the link between men and gods. Jean-Louis Brunaux noted that, unlike the Celts for whom a post or column could satisfactorily symbolise a sacred tree, the Germans venerated the tree in its natural form only*".[68] The veneration of trees or worship in woodland continued into the 11th Century, as evidenced by law codes of the time as their veneration was still common enough to require prohibitive legislation, long after the conversion.[69] The wood oak has many mystical and religious connotations and is known to have had ritual associations with the Germanic predecessor to Thor, Donar who was affiliated with Groves and oak woods.[70] According to Tacitus, the Germanic tribes at the time in his Germania 98 consecrated sacred woodlands and sacred spaces, as opposed to the construction of temples or creation of deities for their cultic practices, which also included the pasture of sacred animals.[71] *"The grove is the centre of their whole religion. It is regarded as the cradle of the race and the dwelling-place of the supreme god to whom all things are subject and obedient."* [72] The Vandals had two early kings called Raptos and Raos, the twin brothers mentioned by Cassius Dio, a Roman statesman and historian 155-235 and have been connected to *"Old Norse raptr, English rafter, wooden pillar and could provide further evidence for a worship of wooden beams by a Germanic tribe."* [73] Lucan the poet (39 – 65) records Julius Caesar's account of the destruction of a sacred grove near Marseille in 49 B.C. in his epic Civil War (Pharsalia) presenting a *strange and foreboding place:*

> A grove there was, never profaned since time remote,
> enclosing with its intertwining branches the dingy air
> and chilly shadows, banishing sunlight far above.
> In this grove there are no rustic Pans or Silvani, [402-03]
> masters of the forests, or Nymphs, but ceremonies of the gods
> barbarous in ritual, altars furnished with hideous offerings,
> and every tree is sanctified with human blood.
> If antiquity at all deserves credence for its awe of the gods,
> the birds fear to sit upon those branches,
> the beasts fear to lie in those thickets; on those woods
> no wind has borne down or thunderbolts shot from black
> clouds; though the trees present their leaves to no breeze,
> they have a trembling of their own. Water pours
> from black springs and the grim and artless
> images of gods stand as shapeless fallen tree-trunks.
> The decay itself and pallor of the timber now rotting
> is astonishing; not so do people fear deities worshipped
> in ordinary forms: so much does ignorance of the gods
> they dread increase their terror.[74]

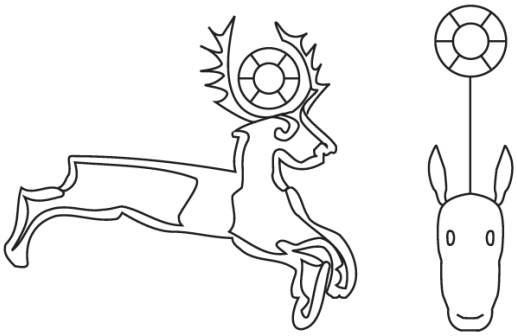

Fig 35: The wheel was the emblem of divine reunion. The innumerable rays united in a single centre, so to, like the mind mounted upwards seeking "to lose their bitterness and merge into the axle-tree of Christ". After: Bailey 1912

The Roman goddess Diana was the goddess of the hunt and nature associated with wild animals and woodland. She is equated with the Greek goddess Artemis with her twin brother being Apollo, God of music, art, prophecy and the sun, he was born at midwinter and his symbols include the stag and the wolf. Atermis or Diana was worshipped at cross-ways by one of her other names as Trivia and in art is represented as being drawn along by two white harts or sometimes four stags with golden antler.[75] Coincidentally, the pollarded trees of Staverton Park are often described as 'stag headed' due to their appearance following years of pollarding.

Our modern-day Mayday evolved from the Beltane festival where one chosen felled tree was placed upright phallus like to usher in the fecundity of the natural year and is the closest equivalent to any sacred pole or pillar modern Britons might encounter today. Known as Beltane in British mythology, the old Celtic quarter festival of Bealtaine and Walpurgis in Germanic European countries it linked with specific tree mythologies. The English Maypole is a symbolic representation of the Ashera, a phallic upright stem or pole mentioned in the Old Testament.[76] In Japan, the sanctity of the central pillar, the daikoku-bashira or king-post of the house still retains a degree of sanctity with old Japanese rituals connecting bashira with Father Ashira, a House-God.[77]

Footnotes:

** Blot is an offering to the gods which in some late antique groups referred to a blood sacrifice*

*** Bintley (2015) also points out a modern day comparison. There is just one supplier today in Britain capable of producing wooden telegraph poles that are smaller in diameter, 285 mm to the posts found at Yeavering.*

THE EARTHWORK

Cumberland's Mount is a half-moon shaped earthwork consisting of a single bank near the foot of a gentle North-facing slope. On the South side of the earthwork is an entrance, marked by a gap in the centre of the inner bank, possibly an original causewayed entrance, centrally positioned, across the ditch and cutting the bank.[1] The character of Cumberland's Mount and its topographical position have been interpreted as being possibly defensive in nature, though the earthwork itself is *"difficult to date."* [2]

Over the years it has been recorded by a variety of names, Cromwell's Mount, Caesar's Camp or Cumberland's Mount of Wantisden. Situated in the valley meadowlands, its key characteristics are flat valley floor grasslands on silty and peat soils and it is situated on the edge of Staverton Park, where the Butley River runs from Chillesford. The overall dimensions of the earthwork are approximately 92 metres East - West by 85 metres North - South.[3] A semi-sub-circular earthwork, comprised of a shallow ditch and two banks, it is 236 metres South - East of the Rendlesham parish boundary and 7 metres East of Eyke parish boundary.[4] Before Ordnance Survey maps it was also often trees that played the important function of defining the parish boundaries and were often marked out.[5] The area of the earth work slopes gradually towards the North and though it is difficult to measure accurately on the highest parts on the S.E. and the S.W., the crest of the vallum is approximately 8 feet above the middle of the fosse, as described by Gray in his 1910 excavation and visible in my colour plate, Fig: 28.

Suggestions regarding Cumberland's Mount's origins vary. It was once considered a defensive earthwork built by the insurgents in the Peasant Revolt in 1381.[6] The earthwork's location within the park, together with the dating evidence from numerous sherds of pottery found in the enclosed area however, led the Ipswich museum to classify these as Norman, early – middle 12th Century.[7] This contradicts the above date of construction by over two hundred years, whilst it was also suggested that the earthwork was an enclosure and had a specialised use connected with deer management.[8] That said these rather prosaic descriptions have been brought into question, with some rather more exotic explanations proposed, these include that Cumberland's Mount may be part of the remains of a timber Castle, likened to a Ringwork [9] or a red hill, a by-product of salt production [10] from either the Bronze Age, Iron Age or into the Roman period.

Ringworks originated in Germany in the 10th Century as an early form of *medieval* castle and at first were little more than a fortified manor house. The earliest medieval castles in Britain mostly built in the 11th and 12th Centuries were mainly constructed of earth and timber, and

Fig 36: Cumberland's Mount. The vallum and foss from western outer bank looking in an E.S.E direction. Showing entrance way on the southern side dividing the ditch. Excavated Easter 1910. Gamekeeper and son. Photograph by Mr. H. St. George Gray. JA3/12/2. Source: Suffolk Archives

Fig 37: Cumberland's Mount

Fig 38: Cumberland's Mount

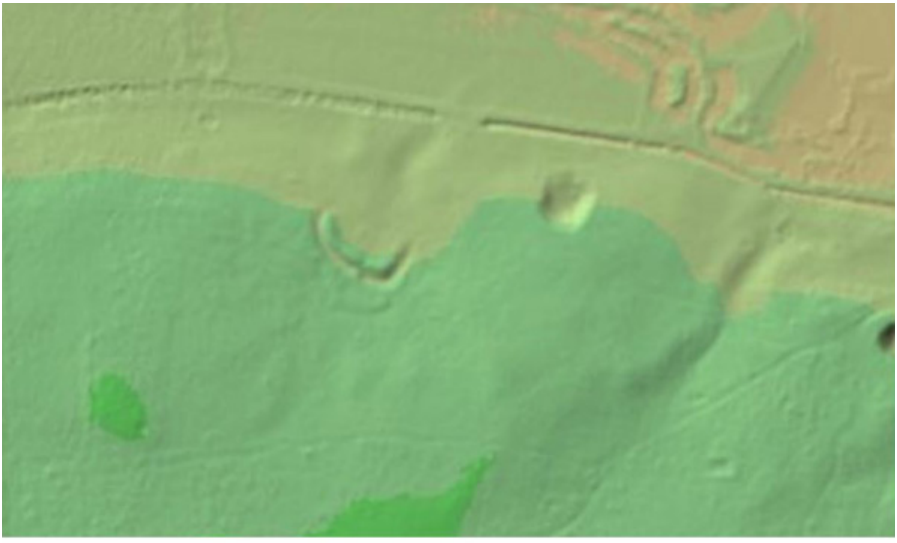

Fig 39: Cumberland's Mount is the flattened 'U' shape, with the circle being a disused gravel pit. LIDAR image. © Environment Agency

were either a ringwork or motte and bailey type. This ringwork attribution has however been rejected by some since 2009.[11] Furthermore, archaeological finds excavated at the site *may* also hint at the earthwork's origins, predating its Norman attribution. A perforated limestone spindle-whorl, in the form of a truncated cone 22.5 mm in height and 29 mm wide at the base, excavated in 1910, had ***only one*** comparable example in the British museum. It had been found among the early Iron Age burials of the Arras culture 100 B.C. – 70 A.D. in East Yorkshire as the use of spindle-whorls as grave-goods are generally considered *rare* in southern England.[12]

'Red Hills' are the waste produced by late Bronze Age and Iron Age marine salt production, though the industry and much of the related technology largely developed during the early Roman period with the advent of increased production scales.[13] Found almost exclusively in or on the edge of areas that in the Roman period were inter-tidal, Suffolk's Redhills are far fewer in number than in the neighbouring county of Essex which has approximately 400. The National Mapping Programme report of 2005 and results from fieldwork identified 18 Red Hills in Suffolk.[14] Ten miles to the South-West of Cumberland's Mount is a Red Hill just south of Painter's Wood at Trimley St. Mary dated to 800 B.C. – 409 A.D. that measures roughly 50 by 15 metres.[15] Was it the case, as has been speculated with other Red Hills, that late antique settlers may have stumbled upon this large red mound, as I believe its origins predate the deer park and that its *"high mineral content or unusual colouration"* were features that would *"have provoked interest, and in some instances, veneration"* in the midst of this wild and primeval forest? [16] Or was it known to be the site of an Iron-Age grave or simply, though evocatively, that this was the perceived location of the *'World Tree'* or the site of a stapol? Stapols do seem to have been erected either in the centre of settlements, at fords, crossroads or as a territorial boundary marker,[17] as in the case of the *'nine-yard oak'*. Stapols acted as foci for settlements *"and may have signalled kin-based or group identities, marking territory, places of assembly and sacred sites… established purely to structure movement and interaction with sites."* [18]

In Part 2 of this publication *(forthcoming)* I will take a much closer look at Cumberland's Mount in a bid to understand its origins, by considering its location in the wider ritual landscape.

STAVERTON - A MODERN DAY RESOURCE

"Favoured locations were often in some sense liminal, perhaps providing an analogy for the process of travelling across a barrier into the spiritual realm... A field bounded by woods or a large clearing also is a meeting of two natural ecosystems"

SEMPLE [1]

Many studies in recent years have reinforced the importance and over-riding benefits of the power of having a closer relationship with trees in our lives. In a longitudinal study lead by Professor Thomas Astell-Burt from the University of Wollongong, Sydney they tracked the changes in health of around 46,000 people aged 45 and older living in Sydney. Researchers found that people with a tree canopy of 30 percent or more had a lower risk of developing psychological distress, had better overall health if they had more trees within a walkable distance from their homes and 31 percent lower odds of developing psychological distress. Interestingly, urban green spaces with open grass, as opposed to a tree canopy, did not deliver the same benefits. "Walks through green space have been shown to reduce blood pressure, improve mental acuity, boost memory recall and reduce feelings of anxiety." [2] Closer to home, the NHS has even found that patient recovery rates improve, even if people can only view trees from their hospital window.[3] The Forestry Commission, working in partnership with the mental health charity Mind developed a programme called 'feel good autumn' following Mind's survey that found that 94% of respondents reported that spending time in green spaces, whether for relaxation or general exercise had a positive impact on their mental health.[4] The programmes simple objectives were about giving everyone the opportunity to feel the health benefits of simply spending time in a forest.

"The psychological benefits of walking through forests are very significant, and forest environments are expected to have very important roles in promoting mental health in the future."

The authors of the above quote advocate what they call 'forest bathing', the practice of deliberately spending time in the woods.[5] Participants in Japan, where it is a nationally recognised pastime, namely 585 young adults, reported that while walking in a forest they experienced less anxiety, hostility, confusion, fatigue and depressive symptoms compared to walking in an urban setting. What's more, and even more difficult to understand immediately, is that when researchers looked at crime data for the city of Chicago they found that for every 10 percent increase in tree canopy cover, crime rates went down in several categories, including a reduction of 11.3 percent in assaults, narcotics crimes and robbery.[6]

"In historical times, we in the western world have transformed nature and landscape (i.e. the cultural landscape) from an essentially existential 'partner' — charged with mythical, cultic, numinous, and socializing places of memory, places with which people had a 'religious' connection — into economic entities, containers of resources and raw material, that we can use or rather misuse in a unilateral way".[7]

Today, we are gradually re-awakening to the importance of seeing the natural world as much more than a pragmatic resource. The vagaries of the modern world for many of us unfortunately mean that if we are not careful, we can all to readily detach ourselves from the *real world* outside. Compounded by our need or desire we are often forced to view the world through the filter of a screen - be this a laptop, car (windscreen), mobile phone, tablet or television.

I am not suggesting that en masse we undertake a wholesale 180 degree turn and become an all-embracing tree-based cult, remembering our ancestors' divine practices like the Uduk-speaking people of Sudan. Practicing a form of 'ebony divination' according to these Eastern Sudanese people, the twigs of the tree if plunged into water or burned reveal their information to the diviner in either the pattern of the ashes or the shape they form on the surface of the water. The tree they believe possesses the powers to listen in on current conversations, archive and retain past conversations as well as understanding the movements of the 'arum', the animating life force that exists within all of nature and humans and which can outlive and survive outside the body.[8]

It is just that today, such is the sense of disconnect from the outside world, that for many of us the wilderness remains the stuff of dreams. Consequently, if we visit our doctor we are as likely to be given a prescription for an allotment course or walking for health in the great outdoors than we are to be given a course of antidepressants for the treatment of depression. We all ignore our woodland fix at our peril.

We could do worse than to try to emulate the playful behaviours of the great Royals of 1528 when the Dowager Queen Maria of France joked and played games with Charles, Duke of Suffolk whilst hunting in Staverton Park.[9]

> *"The geophysical properties of certain locations were known by our ancestors and would have enhanced and facilitated altered states on consciousnesses and shamanic practices."*
>
> COLLINS [10]

Part 2 *forthcoming*

STAVERTON

LANDSCAPES & SKYSCAPES

Forgotten realms of the Suffolk Sandlings

This publication will explore how the above ritually planned landscape used systematic sites that were chosen for their mythological and cosmological functions, forming part of wider ensouled landscape incorporating a cosmological world view that was painted across the canvas of the landscape; *as above, so below.*

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