

WHO DO YOU THINK WE WERE? A PRELIMINARY STUDY OF ENGLAND'S LOST MYTHOLOGY

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[PPT#1: Cover slide]

i) Background

Who are we? Where do we come from? What makes us quintessentially English beyond our ability to stand in queues and talk about the weather? What happened to our mythology? Did we ever have a mythology? Was it ever ours? These are all questions I'd like to leave to the anthropologists. I hope it's obvious that I won't be able to cover the whole of our mythology – in fact, not even a tiny fraction. Your favourites – King Arthur, Robin Hood – pretty much no show. St George barely gets a mention. Cnut, still paddling. Despite my original plan, the only legends that we will have time to look at this evening are the earliest settlement legend: the first people to come to England, and placing it in a historical context.

[PPT#2] I'd like to start by discussing some of the ideas of the last twenty years that have set this project into motion, after all, this paper represents the first 'stage' of a monograph, whereby I commit myself to actually writing *something* about mythology. I want to begin with a couple of contentious statements. The first is that I feel, as a nation, the English have lost their mythology. As to why that is, I leave the definitive answer to the sociologists. However, to add my twopenneth, I feel that sociologically we live more in the present – a kind of 'I'm all right, Jack', approach, rather than looking to the future: 'What's in it for me?' Equally, in a time of political correctness gone mad, there seems to be a policy of embracing all other cultures at the expense of our own; we can see local and national 'prohibitions' in order to avoid offending other cultures. It's happening around us: think, for example, about the movement to stop us referring to a celebration as 'Christmas' and start calling it 'winter'. One of my students reported that 'Father Christmas is important to English legend because he's a 'modern day reason for all atheists to celebrate Christmas'.

How many people remember Empire Day? An early victim of political correctness: introduced on the death of Victoria in 1901 on her birthday **[PPT#3]**. It was repackaged in 1958 as British Commonwealth Day, and re-imagined in 1966 simply as Commonwealth Day, with the date changed to 10 June, the Queen's Official Birthday. The date was changed again in 1977 to the second Monday in March.

Something has happened over recent generations. Traditional stories are no longer being passed down from father to son – not just stories, but also traditional techniques; the consequences of this is that some stories were never written down because everyone knew them, and they are subsequently lost. This is one of the great ironies of the Information Age, when we are producing millions of terabytes of information a second, and yet losing other material. I shall discuss later that this was a concern that was raised some two thousand years ago, when 'new technology' threatened traditional cultures.

However, there is a reason why I shamelessly ripped off the – now iconic – tree from a famous television programme. Despite what I said earlier, I believe there's a movement against the egocentric culture that's been fostered and that we *are* becoming more interested in our past – the halcyon 'good old days'. Our Information Age means we can access information in seconds via the Internet, whereas some of us had to travel hundreds of miles and spend hours trawling through dusty archives to eventually find a document that we couldn't read.

It's my suggestion that, with the common family structure as we know it fragmenting, there is a need to find a cohesive link to the past, whether it is our own family history, or our lost heritage, as Francois Villion poetically asked in the fifteenth century "*Où sont les neiges d'antan?*" ("Where are the snows of yesteryear?"). This motif, lamenting a lost culture - taken from the Latin *Ubi Sunt* - harks back to ancient times, and is common in medieval literature **[ppt#4: Ubi Sunt]**

Were beth they biforen us weren,
 Houndes ladden and hauekes beren,
 And hadden feld and wode?
 The riche levedies in hoere boure,
 That wereden gold in hoere tressour,
 With hoere brightte rode;

(where are those who were before us)
 (Hounds led and hawks bore)
 (and had fields and woods)
 (The rich ladies in their bowers)
 (that wear gold in their tresses/headdresses)
 (with their bright red)

And the poet carries on lamenting for another ten stanzas...

We might consider this motif in the context of something more familiar: “Alas, poor Yorrick, I knew him Horatio”. Or, as I have argued elsewhere, Victorian society seeing an unprecedented fragmentation through the Industrial Revolution and their need to hark back through literature to the Golden Age of Arthurian Mythology. Equally, it is seen in the work of a medieval chronicler called Geoffrey of Monmouth who wrote a cohesive, if rather fictitious, history that explained our nation’s noble heritage.

I said that the paper has developed from ideas over the last twenty years: a principal idea was from when I was about seventeen years old, writing poetry filled with usual teenage angst; I wanted to write something that might reflect something of English mythology. I’d been brought up with stories of King Arthur and Robin Hood and ... that was where my knowledge of mythology stopped. I knew a few half-baked pseudo-histories, such as Cooking with King Alfred, Cnut going paddling and maybe sparing a thought to Joseph of Arimathea and the Glastonbury Thorn with a final burst from Blake’s *Jerusalem*. In the end, I did what any teenager would do ... gave up on the original idea and wrote a significantly shorter poem that was a veiled in symbolism of my own that no one could decipher.

The second instance is slightly more embarrassing. A couple of years ago, it was announced that Britain’s 50p coin was losing the image of Britannia from the ‘tails’ side. It was suggested that Britannia was created by the Romans around 2000 years ago as the personification of the British Isles – *Britanniae* – and the image was first used on a British coin on the copper farthing in 1672. **[PPT#5: Britain’s coins]**. The new images were (indirectly) a movement away from British Imperialism and theoretically designed to reflect the unified Britain, although I’m sure I am not alone in wondering how showing a fragmented image can demonstrate unity for a county. I’m embarrassed because, in general principle, I find myself troubled to find myself agreeing with the Daily Mail, who started a campaign to save Britannia.

Discussing the changes to the coins, Labour MP Lindsay Hoyle said of the decision, “We should not abandon a tradition which has spanned three centuries. The Government should

appreciate the modern importance of historic symbols and ensure that Britannia is not removed from British coins". Mr Hoyle raises an interesting point: I am not advocating a blanket acceptance of something simply because it's traditional: that's how houses get cluttered because we're too sentimental to throw that useless and frankly rather ugly vase away – but it seems to me that Britannia has been dropped and buried because we no longer know who she is. I'm not going to discuss Britannia tonight – she's going to be the subject of a chapter in her own right.

There is a third thought concerning this loss of mythology, and that was wondering *when* it was lost. Sometime around the time that Kipling was writing *Puck of Pook's Hill*. Kipling was writing about the mythology that *he* knew, and I feel that he was trying to retrieve it as he thought was starting to become lost. Shakespeare had a good understanding of some of our mythology, or pseudo-history, taking stories from Early England, such as *King Lear* and *Cymbeline*, although his sources for these were Ralph Holinshed's *Chronicle* and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*.

ii) Student responses to the questionnaires

Once I'd realised that there was a potential project here, [and the relationship is a bit like falling in love. You don't know when it happens, but suddenly you're happy with this other entity that comes into your life. Then three years down the line, once the initial passion has gone, it becomes a lot more like hard work!] I circulated a questionnaire amongst my students at Northampton College. These students ranged from GCSE level, through to Access and HND students. The results were astonishing. I'd hoped the majority could answer the first question "What is the name of the Queen of England?" but, in fact, only 60% aged between 16-18 were able to answer, and a third of those simply said "Queen Elizabeth".

There were also questions about government: many people who bothered (were capable) of an answer thought that the Labour Party was led by George Brown, but, to the students' credit, 84% of them gave a name recognisable as Gordon Brown and a few even ventured an opinion about him. Rather worrying was the observation about the Leader of the

Opposition. **[PPT#6: Leader of the Opposition]** Over 60% left the question unanswered. One candidate suggested that the leader of the opposition was... Osama Bin Laden.

The data was a primary indication of what people knew about general knowledge: I even had a look at the government British citizenship test – Life in the UK – to see what was expected. I was astonished by the kinds of questions, such as ‘what are the minimum ages for buying alcohol and tobacco’? And ‘how is the country governed?’ (Open ended question if ever I heard one!) There was *one* question about the Patron Saints’ days. In my own survey, I’d hoped that, with St George’s Day looming, I might get some positives, but only 36% of students aged 16-18 were able to say who he was, and only one questionnaire gave the correct date of 23 April, and then, the student admitted, it was because it was their birthday. [Aside: I was concerned with just how badly spelled and punctuated some of these citizenship sites were!

So much for general knowledge. The second point was a quite general question about what characters they knew from mythology. **[PPT#7 Names of mythological candidates]** There were no surprises in the top candidates.

Except they had a different name for our earliest epic poem **[PPT#8 Name of Beer- Wolf]**.

There were a few surprises in some of the other names that the questionnaires suggested were important to English mythology. **[PPT#9 Other Names of mythological candidates]** Which just goes to show that references to ‘the legendary’ have become overused.

The final sections on the questionnaire were divided into Pre-Conquest English History and mythology. I was pleased to see that approximately a quarter of the questionnaires recognised that the Romans had invaded England in 43AD.

I asked ‘who burned the cakes?’ and a couple of people owned up to it. No one answered Alfred. A few suggested that this was the event that started the Great Fire of London and one questionnaire was mixing mythology and literature... **[PPT#10 Queen of Hearts]**

Likewise, when I asked who would come again when England most needed him, 50% of those who answered suggested Jesus Christ, 30% suggested this might be King Arthur, and a few people even suggested... **[PPT#11 Beckham]**

The final part was the mythology: some students remembered the legend – which itself is only a half-truth – of Cnut trying to hold back the sea. In fact, he was clearly aware that the tides were not subject to the king, and people should not invest him with supernatural powers. (And just as an aside, **[PPT#12 section from Anglo-Saxon Chronicle]** Cnut was married to a local girl, **Ælfgifu [AELF-YIFU] of Northampton** (c. 990 – after 1040).

Equally, when questioned about the ‘Green Man’ **[PPT#13 Green Man]**, a third suggested that he was the Sweetcorn mascot; and the same amount thought that he might help you cross the road. One person even suggested it was the Hulk! There were also suggestions of the Cerne Abbas Giant; however, 5% of the surveys suggested he was the nature god – top marks for them – one student said he was Robin Hood (technically correct). Someone wrote that the green man challenged Sir Robin, and Sir Robin cut his head off. Someone else said that it might be something to do with Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, but apologised that they couldn’t remember anything more. **[PPT#14: Gorgon’s Head]** Which shows at least one and a half people were listening when I gave a paper six months ago.

[Aside: these two images, one is the Green Man from Ely Cathedral, the other... a Gorgon from the Temple of Minerva in what we now call Bath; there is a remarkable symmetry between the snakes on the Gorgon and the foliate head of the Green man.]

iii) The History of England from an Archaeological and geological perspective

So, I now want to turn to the archaeological and mythological history of England. Archaeologically, there is evidence that suggests that Britain has been inhabited for hundreds of thousands of years by members of the *homo* genus, and for tens of thousands of years by the *homo sapiens* race. People were living here before the Ice Age, although they fled to southern Europe when the ice came. These days they call it a second home in France. This was a time that sea levels were lower and therefore, not only were Britain and Ireland connected, but so too was Britain and the continent. This image **[PPT#15]** is a simplified geological map to show the similarities between the stone in Kent and in the North of France:

[PPT#16] About 450,000 years ago the Channel was a basin known as an embayment, which was periodically flooded when sea levels were high but was otherwise dry land. The southern part of the modern North Sea was a lake fed by meltwater from the British and Scandinavian ice sheets, and by the Thames and Rhine river systems. Britain was cut off from the rest of Europe.

Over 18,000 years ago was the height of the Ice Age. Ice sheets 1,500 metres thick covered northern Britain and much of the Continent. Sea levels fell considerably because so much water was trapped in the growing ice sheets.

[PPT#17] 18,000 years ago, a “land bridge” emerged as sea levels fell. Ice sheets blocked the North Sea, creating a giant pond which overflowed, gouging deeper valleys through the “land bridge”. Human settlements were generally in the South of France, avoiding the icy weather.

[PPT#18] 10,000 years ago, the climate warms up. Rivers again flow to the North Sea – sea levels slowly rise towards today’s level. Early man and animals return to northern France, and cross to England over the “land bridge”. New forests and grasslands cover the low land, and plentiful game attracts Neolithic hunting groups.

[PPT#19] 8500 years ago, the sea level rises. Water floods through gaps in the hills, joining the North Sea to the Atlantic. It breaks through where deeper valleys had been gouged out during the Ice Age. Swift currents flowing between the Atlantic and the North Sea soon erode the islands, leaving the stumps as sandbanks in the channel.

The result of this is that the tribes on the new island were left to develop separately without fear of attack from the mainland. However, it also meant that there was an abrupt halt in the human occupation of Britain for 120,000 years. **[PPT#20: Early Human settlements]** There is archaeological evidence of ancient humans 700,000 years ago at Pakefield, 500,000 years ago at Boxgrove, 400,000 years ago at Swanscombe and 220,000 years ago at Pontnewydd, but there is no evidence beyond 180,000 years ago until around 60,000 years ago. Archaeology shows that Britain was reoccupied around 12,000 BC. Around 6000 years ago, after the last ice sheets that covered the British Isles and Scandinavia melted, the entire basin was flooded to create the Channel as it is today.

By around 4000 BC, Britain had a Neolithic culture, which gave us some of the earliest sites that still exist: **[PPT#21: Skara Brae]** Skara Brae in the Orkneys to the burial chambers on the Isles of Scilly, **[PPT#22: Scilly Isle]** and the major concentration in Wiltshire.

iv) Early commentators on Britain and the etymology of the name

There are, of course, some early descriptions of Britain, the earliest being that of Pytheas of Massala (modern Marseilles) from around 325 BC – Pytheas’s work has not survived intact and comes to us through commentators, notably Strabo’s *Geographia*, Pliny’s *Natural History* and Diodorus of Sicily’s *History*. In Strabo’s commentary of Pytheas, the name *Britannic* is used adjectively: “those Britannic people”, while Pliny uses *Britannia*, with *Britanniae* meaning all the islands, “the Britains.” Diodorus has *Brettanikē nēsos*, “the British Island”, and *Brettanoi*, “the British.”

Theoretically, Pytheas is the earliest surviving account of using the name *Britannia*; however, manuscript variants offer a P- alternating with B-. There is good reason for thinking that the name learned by Pytheas had P-, as in *Pretania. The etymology of "Britain" is so convincing that many authors use the P-form. They attribute the B- to replacement by the Romans in the time of Julius Caesar. We might consider this in connection with the Welsh name, **[PPT#23: Prydein]** *Ynys Prythein* – the Island of Britain; *Pryth* here means “form”, Britain was the ‘Island of forms’ referring to the tattoos of the inhabitants, the ‘painted race’ or the ‘Picts’ – the priths.

Pytheas and the later commentators also include the term “Albion”; this is a Gallo-Latin word: the Proto-Indo European root word is ‘Albh’ meaning white (proto-Indo European is the common ancestor of all Indo-European languages). **[PPT#24: Albion]** The ‘ien’ of Albion comes from the Welsh *elfydd*, which means ‘earth’ or ‘world’. It is generally believed that the name Albion was coined by the Romans with reference to the White Cliffs of Dover. A sixth century BC Greek periplus (the *Massaliote Periplus*) – a description of sailing around – was translated by the Roman poet Avienus as part of his *Ora Maritima* (the maritime Shores). It speaks of *nesos 'Iernon kai 'Albionon*: the islands of the *Ierni* and the *Albiones*. However, when Pytheas uses the name ‘Albion’ it seems that it refers to any island to the west. Equally, Albion may have been

used to describe any ‘Celts of the extreme west.’ [Aside] Just as a footnote to that, the non-Indo-European root for Alb means ‘mountain’, which may have produced the Latin “Alps”. “It may have been bestowed on the land lying behind the white cliffs visible from the coast of Gaul. Albany, the old name of Scotland, probably means the “hilly land.”

However, by the first century AD, the names are always used in relation to what we now call the British Isles. The Pseudo-Aristotelian text *De mundo* follows the *periploi* describing the Britannic Islands: Albion and Ierne – the root of Hibernia, the latter being the root word for the name of a Celtic goddess *Éire* and the Germanic word for ‘land’.

However, the name of ‘Great’ Britain is not, as one of my students suggested “because that’s when we started taking over the world” nor ‘because we did something “Great”, although that it has been used for that reason: The twelfth century chronicler, Geoffrey of Monmouth refers to the island of Great Britain as *Britannia major* (Greater Britain) to distinguish it from *Britannia minor* (Lesser Britain) - modern Brittany. Similarly, La3amon’s *Brut* describes ‘Brutland þat lasse’ to mean Brittany. The name ‘Great Britain’ was used politically in 1474 when drawing up a marriage proposal between Cecily, daughter of Edward IV of England and James, son of James III of Scotland, referring to it as ‘this Nobill Isle, callit Gret Britanee’. It was also used again in 1604 when James I and VI of England and Scotland united the crowns and proclaimed his assumption of the throne as ‘King of Great Britain, France and Ireland’.

Other things that Pytheas described about the Britains include – in traditional fashion – complaining about the weather “Cold, and frosts being too much to bear”. “The numerous population of natives, he says, live in thatched cottages, store their grain in subterranean caches and bake bread from it. They are “of simple manners” (*ēthesin haplous*) and are content with plain fare. They are ruled by many kings and princes who live in peace with each other. Their troops fight from chariots, as did the Greeks in the Trojan War.” The commentary seems to speak of the British with some respect and it is only Strabo’s glossary on Pytheas’s writings that points out “Until Caesar they were never beaten and never invaded.”

Now that we’ve mentioned Julius Caesar, it’s worth mentioning that he came to Britain around 55BC. Although he claimed ‘I came, I saw, I conquered’, only two parts of that statement are

correct. In 55BC he came, he saw and he took a beach head in what is now called Kent, then realised that he'd bitten off more than he could chew and went away again. His second "invasion" set up a king who was friendly to Rome, and forcing the submission of his rival. So no territory was conquered and held for Rome, it did secure the land of the Trinovantes tribe. However, the actual conquering of England wasn't done for another century. Around this time, however, the name of the island was standardised to "Britain".

Julius Caesar's exposure to England was limited. Many of his descriptions rely on Pytheas; he starts off talking about the weather, and then talks about some of the ethnography of the inhabitants. It is in *Caesar's Commentarii de Bello Gallico* that he famously describes the druids, briefly mentioning their human sacrifice – generally of criminals, but also of 'the innocent... when a supply of that class [of criminal] is found wanting.'

[PPT#25: Julius Caesar's commentary on the Druids] Caesar's observations of the druidic culture brings us one step closer to learning about our how we lost our mythology. He describes how "They are said there to learn by heart a great number of verses; accordingly some remain in the course of training twenty years. Nor do they regard it lawful to commit these to writing. They have adopted this practice because they do not wish their doctrines to be divulged among the mass of the people, nor those who learn, to devote themselves the less to the efforts of memory, relying on writing; since it generally occurs to most men, that, in their dependence on writing, they relax their diligence in learning thoroughly, and their employment of the memory." In summary, if you write things down, you don't necessarily remember them. Likewise, in the present day, our reliance on calculators means that we are less adept at mental arithmetic, and our reliance on computers means that we don't necessarily need to remember as much.

We enjoyed nearly 400 years of watching what the Romans did for us. However, the Romans suddenly withdrew from Britain between 407-410AD. Archaeologically, urban and village life showed signs of decay: pottery shards are not present in levels dating past 400, and coins minted past 402 are rare.

This point of sociological and economic decline, is often referred to – although not by historians – as the Dark Ages, as it is a point where there are few surviving written records. However, as I want to point out in the overall study, we are not necessarily reliant on written literature to discover things about the past. Again, this is something that I'll cover in much more detail when talking about Saxon influences on our mythology on another occasion.

So much for history. What I have presented here is rather a dry account of what actually happened: *homo sapiens* came, Britain became an island, we got invaded, again and again. I want to now turn to the mythological heritage of England, or Albion.

v) English Settlement legends

As far as I am aware, there is no actual legend as to how Britain became an island; however there are some legends as to who the first inhabitants were. [Aside] I need to add a disclaimer here, I am discussing the legends in the chronology that they are alleged to have happened, not the order in which they were written.

In the three main origin legends, giants feature prominently. Chroniclers suggest that these giants were descendants from Noah's son Ham and arrived in England around 4000 years ago. The king of the giants was called Albion. His father was Poseidon. It appears that Albion the Giant enjoyed a long reign of the land before going to the South of France to help his brother in a fight against Hercules, trying to steal the cattle that Hercules had himself stolen from Geryon in the tenth of his twelve labours. When Hercules ran out of arrows to shoot at the giants, he prayed to Zeus, who showered the land with stones which Hercules then used as missiles, killing the giants. Rule of thumb: you might be bigger and stronger than the kid you're fighting, but he can still tell his Dad...

Another of the myths about the origins of the settlement in England comes from the story of Albina in an anonymous Middle English rhymed Chronicle. Albina was a Princess; however, the details depend upon the source that is used. It is said that she comes from either Greece or Syria – both a shorthand way of saying “a long way away”. Her father is sometimes called Diocletian, and he has between twenty and fifty daughters, all of whom he marries off to

virtuous men, although not of the ranks of kings or emperors [PPT#26/1]. Albina is outraged by the strict regime of married life; she accuses her husband of betrayal and discusses a solution with her equally incensed sisters. Depending on the version, one of the sisters, in a fit of guilt, reveals Albina's plan to her husband, or alternatively all the sisters actually carry out their plan, which is to hide knives under their pillows and murder their husbands as they sleep. They plan to hide the bodies in a 'foule diche' and enjoy the status of 'maisters and comandour' without masculine interference. The problem with this plan, however, is that, at the next family gathering, someone is likely to notice that the men folk are missing and questions will be asked.

Either way, the daughters are banished, set adrift in a boat without sails, oars or rudder: I've discussed elsewhere the concept of being set adrift in this fashion: it can be as a punishment, a penance, out of desperation, or pious voluntary exile. The philosophy is that the chances of survival are severely reduced and that God or the Fates take over and protect you if that is their intention. The powers that be are on Albina's side and she and her sisters are set down on an island where Albina establishes herself by giving her name to the land [PPT#26/2]. "Wis lond ichil sese to me, After mi name Albion, ve schullen it clepe euerichon (ll. 308-12) I take this land as my own. After my own name Albion, you shall all call it."

Now, the usual practice when someone makes land under these circumstances is to make a shelter. However, these women immediately start to hunt for venison, and, after feasting to excess, the women crave the company of men [PPT#27/1]: "*Wei tokyn flesh of diuers beestys and bycomen wonder fatte, and so þei desired mannes cumpanye and mannes kynde þat hem faylled.*" The irony, then, is that the women slaughtered, or planned to slaughter their husbands, then realised that they needed men for ... something. The other point about this short passage is that gluttony and lechery – two of the seven deadly sins – are linked.

That could have been the end of the story, as the women were left to contemplate the folly of their actions; however, they are then visited by the Devil or by incubi – sexual demons. The women are impregnated and later give birth to giants who dwell in Cornwall for 800 years until the next settlers of England arrive and impose their new order on this chaos [PPT#27/2]. "*Pai*

broughten forth Geauntes, of þe which on me called Gogmagog,,, & þey dwelled in Cauys & in hulles at here will, & had þe lond of Albyon as hem liked, Vn-to þe tyme pat Brut Arryved

This part of the legend directly links with the next part of the origin mythology; however, before we move onto the next stage, I want to stop and look at the sources of the legend. The story of Albina finds its roots in various mythologies. The name *Albina* is that of an Etruscan goddess of the dawn and protector of ill-fated lovers. The Etruscans lived in Northern Italy and were gradually incorporated into the Roman Republic. Likewise, the theme of husband-killing on such a scale is in the Greek legend of the Danaids, daughters of Danus, King of Argos. Finally, the idea of women giving birth to giants is a part of a legend that was not quite excised from the Bible, about Watcher Angels who, desiring the human women, came down and impregnated them. Their off-spring were giants – the Nephilim. Between them, the Watcher Angels and the Nephilim taught mankind the forbidden sciences – weapon-making, astrology and witchcraft, as well as practicing sexual perversions. It was because of this secret knowledge – occult wisdom – that God sent the Great Deluge to wipe out the Nephilim and their teachings. Which brings us back to Noah, and his sons, particularly Ham.

[PPT#28]Ham is sometimes described as Noah's 'cursed' son. After the deluge, in the Book of Genesis, Noah gets drunk and Ham sees his father naked. Consequently Ham is cursed. This is not the time of the place to start discussing whether the punishment inflicted on Ham was particularly severe, after all, it was Noah who became drunk. Or whether there are certain euphemisms used in the Bible: Ham might have sodomised or castrated his father. The impact of this is that the curse of Ham and his descendants who initially moved into Africa and parts of the near Middle East are cursed with slavery.

As we have seen, the two settlement legends have common factors: one is the giant who is the descendent of the cursed son of Noah, who is killed by a Greek hero; the other legend is based on the Greek Princess whose off-spring are reminiscent of Biblical and Apocryphal legend. Therefore, both incorporate Biblical and Classical themes. Also, in both cases, the giants are presented as being clumsy and stupid, gluttonous and lecherous, which is how Albina is presented in one of the legends. However, the giants are generally restrained to Cornwall –

one such legend with which we will all be familiar, although in a very different form, is that of Jack the Giant-Killer, long before the beanstalk grew into the story: Jack slays Cormoran, the Lord of St Michael's Mount. This legend is based on the legend of Corineus and Gogmagog, part of the earliest of the foundation myths.

The earliest story of the foundation myth was included in the *Historia Britonum* a ninth century compilation attributed to the Welsh historian monk Nennius. The *Historia Britonum* gives a semi-factual account of early English history beginning with the Celtic and Roman founders and culminating around the time of the Saxon Invaders, and is largely the source for the central lynchpin to English mythology, compiled by Geoffrey of Monmouth.

The legend is that fleeing from the destruction of Troy, Aeneas of Troy settles in Italy. Because of a hunting accident, Aeneas's great grandson, Brutus killed his father and was banished. On his journey, he discovered others who were descended from those who had fled Troy. He also finds an abandoned temple to Diana, who directs him in a dream towards Albion. Discovering a group of Trojans led by Corineus; together they travel to the western ocean. They land at Totnes in Devon, and the place that he alighted has a marker called the Brutus stone. **[PPT#29: Brutus Stone]**. It's actually most likely a Roman boundary marker, but it gets the tourists in! [Devon accent: eere come some grockles; let's see what we can get away with this time!]

I want to put this into perspective, chronologically: according to Geoffrey of Monmouth, Brutus arrived in Britain in approximately 1115 BC, some 125 years after the battle of Troy. Albina – who is not mentioned in Geoffrey – arrived 800 years before Brutus. I want to try to place this in context with how Britain was developing at the time. The most recent dating, according to archaeologist Professor Tim Darvill from Bournemouth University (September 2008), is that the first bluestones of Stonehenge were placed *in situ* around 2300 BC, and that the henge flourished until 1900 BC when it started to decline. This is the point when chroniclers would have us believe that Albina and the giants arrived in England, and the country slipped into the moral decline. Whether the two facts are connected – perhaps the chronicler had access to material or knew an oral legend - may take a lot more research.

Going back to Brutus: just as Albion named the Island after herself, so does Brutus. And as the inhabitants didn't like the concept of sharing their island with the invaders. Brutus and Corineus led a slaughter of the giants; Caxton describes how the Brutus 'discomfited' the giants – always a master of understatement, considering some of the descriptions which have an epic battle – to the point of hyperbole, with the invaders pursuing the giants from Southampton down to Cornwall. The leader of the giants, called Gogmagog, however, is spared for a wrestling match against Corineus, who wins and carries the giant on his shoulders from Tones to Plymouth where he is thrown into the water. The composers of these legends seem to forget that they have described the giants as around 18 feet tall and that it would have been some feat to carry him to the coast and hurl him into the water. The place was immortalised with a carving into the hillside at Plymouth Hoe; well, immortalised until they built Plymouth Citadel on top of it. However, the story remains popular for centuries afterwards: here's John Milton in his *History of Britain* [ppt#30]

The names of Gogmagog, and indeed Gog and Magog are found in the Bible; for example in the Book of Ezekiel, it is prophesied that "Gog from the land of Magog will attack Israel"; in the Book of Revelation, Gog and Magog are supporters of Antichrist. Medieval interpreters sometimes ran two names together to create a supreme evil entity. Corineus was fighting a battle on a Biblical scale. His reward is to be made Overlord of Cornwall, the area to which, according to Geoffrey of Monmouth, Corineus gave his name. Nice and plausible. Except it's not true. It's actually from the name of a Celtic Tribe called the *Cornovii*, which has given the name that you see as you cross the Tamar, *Kernow*. [PPT#31] The name, *cern* (from the Celtic) or *Cornu* (from the Latin) both mean 'horn' or peninsular, and the addition of the suffix of the Anglo-Saxon word *wealas* gave the name that we have now. Cornu-Wealas: *Wealas*, meaning 'foreigners'. This follows through a lot of the counties which are not named after a county town) for example, Northamptonshire, Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire); The original tribe in Devon was called the Dumnonii, thought to mean 'deep Valley Dwellers'; and the Kents, from the word *Cantus*, meaning border. We might also think of the East Angles, The South Saxons, East Saxons and West Saxons, or the area of land that was prone to Scandinavian invasion and

was divided between the North Folk and the South Folk. In this way, we can see that there is archaeological and etymological evidence for some of the earliest settlements in England, despite the fact that Geoffrey wants us to believe that the places are named after great heroes.

Brutus went east and decided to build a capital, leaving Corineus as overlord of Cornwall. He established his capital at the place where the River Thames¹ meets the river Fleet, giving it the name Troia Nova, the New Troy. In fact, the *Trinovantum* was an Essex tribe that we mentioned earlier favoured by Julius Caesar on his second invasion of England; Geoffrey has heard this name and has fabricated his mythology to make the facts fit. The legend continues that Brutus built a palace where the Guildhall now stands. He also established a Temple to Diana on what is now St Paul's, with the London Stone, which is currently in the wall of St Swithen's Church, being a part of this. **[PPT#32: London Stone]** Like the Ravens at the Tower of London, there's a legend that states the Stone's safety is linked to that of the city itself. [Aside: Geoffrey also tries to make some other facts fit by having King Lud strengthen and expand the walls and giving the city his name, from the Welsh *Caer Lud*, Lud's fortress. The name became Kaerludein and eventually London. Tacitus is the first author to call it Londinium in 62AD. There has been no single explanation as to why London should have been called thus, however, in view of Brutus establishing a temple to Diana, it has been suggested that the name is **[PPT#33: Etymology of London]** *Luandun* – the city of the Moon, or even Lan Dian – the Temple of Diana.

There is yet another variant legend, promoted by Caxton, amongst others: instead of hurling Gogmagog from Plymouth Hoe, Corineus instead captured the giant and took him to the new capital where they became porters of the palace and later the Guildhall. Effigies have been at the Guildhall almost continually since the Middle Ages as the protectors of London. Male and female giants were included in a London pageant in 1415; in 1522 the pageant included Hercules and Samson, which may be Gog and Magog under different names. By 1558, when Elizabeth went from the Tower of Westminster on her Ascension,

¹ There is a city in Flanders, Belgium, located upon the river Schelde, that has the name **Temse**. There the river suddenly widened in ancient times, that is, before the river was captured (later) between dykes. There is a **Temse** in Germany, a short natural channel between the river Warnow and the Butzower lake (village of Butzow, Mecklenburg, north-east Germany). Here also it refers to a 'wide water body' (lake).

the giants at Temple Bar were known as Gogmagog the Albion and Corineus the Briton. The images here **[PPT#34: Gog and Magog]** were carved in 1708 and replaced those that were destroyed in the Great Fire of London. However, unfortunately these images were destroyed in the blitz in 1940; new versions were made in 1953 for the festival of Britain.

A final thought about Brutus; when he died, his kingdom was divided between his three sons: Loquinius, Kamber and Albanactus. Each of them named the kingdoms after themselves: Loquinius ruled an area named Loegria, or Logres, which is sometimes mentioned in Arthurian literature to mean England. Kamber received Wales (Cymru), and Albanactus received Scotland (Albany).

In conclusion then, we've established that this is only the first stage of a huge project. I had planned to encompass so much more when I originally collated ideas for this paper. I wanted to cover the Romans, the Saxons and the coming of Christianity, which simply wasn't plausible.

I feel, following my questionnaires that there is very little familiarity with the early foundation legends. Equally, there is little correlation between the legends and the history, although there are some instances, particularly chronologically, where there are some interesting overlaps.

Now, I don't know if this has been apparent: the majority of the legends discussed this evening have come from the medieval interpretation and reimagining of a handful of earlier chronicles that were themselves only pseudo-historical. They're obviously not contemporary eye-witness accounts. However, I think that what has been important is that it is the *English* and *Briton* chronicles who are looking to establish their ancestry and link it with Troy. The Angles and the Saxons – relatively new Settlers – didn't need to do this. They had their own ancestry that took them back to their gods. **[PPT#35: Aeneas and descendants]**. What this achieves is twofold: on the one hand, the links with Aeneas established Britain as having a strong claim to some authority on the world stage: the Franks had already claimed to be descended from the Trojan Francus, and this genealogy

was taken seriously. Aeneas was held in mythical status and yet still close enough to be a plausible ancestor. Equally, looking at the descendant tree on the Lavinia line, Aeneas – as is well documented – ‘de Romani il gentil seme’ – give the seed of the noble Romans – to quote Dante (*Inferno* 26, 60). You’ll notice from this tree that the heritage of England was started and established well before Romulus and Remus founded Rome.

Geoffrey claims that his work is a straightforward translation into Latin of a very old book in the British language, although such a book is yet to be identified. He came under some criticism for his *Historia*. He has been described as a writer of fiction, his title is misleading, and he’s been called a maniac. However, he was a patriot. Geoffrey wanted to give us a reason to believe in what he was doing – finding a cohesive force so that the nation would understand who we were and where we came from, and that we had a heritage that we could be proud of, that would rival the equally fictitious lineages of other nations in the theatre of Europe.