

**‘And Raise Me Up a Golden Barrow’¹: Narratives of Ancestry and
Continuity in Contemporary British Druidry and Beyond.**

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ABSTRACT

The stories we tell ourselves about our beginnings are a vital part of our sense of identity and belonging. For Druids living in the UK those stories tend to be deeply rooted in a sense of connectedness with the landscape and with the ‘Ancestors’, usually situated in an imagined and often idealized pre-Christian past. Since the time of William Stukeley, himself associated with the Druid Revival of the Eighteenth Century; the Druids have been associated in the popular romantic imagination with the ancient burial mounds that proliferate in the landscape. The fact that this association is not historically correct has done little to weaken its power.

This paper will focus on the construction, in recent years, of a number of barrows, mimicking the Neolithic monuments, and designed to take human cremated remains in niches built into the construction. The fact that this initiative has proved hugely popular with Druids, but also with many others testifies to the power that the barrows hold over the imagination. Why is this? What stories are being told about the barrows, and do those stories have to say about connections to ‘deep time’, to the land, to each other, to community and to the future.

KEYWORDS

Barrow, Druid, death, ancestors, landscape, narrative, reception theory, deep past

¹ From *Barrow Song*. Lyrics by Andy Letcher. From the Album *Untie the Wind* by Telling the Bees. 2008. Used with permission.

Introduction

The title of this paper is taken from 'Barrow Song' a piece of contemporary music written by Andy Letcher, a musician and academic who has written on Druidry and Bardism (Letcher 2001). The song, which knowingly references death rituals from a variety of different time periods from the ancient past, romantically reimagines a death that is simple, authentic (in the sense that it addresses emotion and death in an honest and straightforward way that is meaningful to the bereaved) and 'natural': free from modern constraints of empty and outdated ritual and expense. It also refers, with a sense of nostalgia, to the ancient Neolithic and Bronze Age burial mounds that form a prominent feature of both the British landscape and the British popular imagination.

The song entreats the listener: 'And raise me up a golden barrow, lay me down 'neath sods of earth; and when the year is good and hallowed, let me hear your songs and mirth.' The dead person, then, is envisaged as a continuing participant in the community, hearing, and presumably taking pleasure in, the sounds of life continuing to unfold around him. This participation in community is ongoing through the generations. The song concludes: 'And down the ages, still some remember to sing the song and raise the glass.' The person has, in effect, become an ancestor, beyond the realms of living memory, yet he continues to be engaged in the wider life of the community as well as becoming present in an embodied sense as a part of the landscape.

Barrows, then, were, and are, not only prevalent features of the landscape, but also important identity markers with stories to tell. In recent years, and for the first time in countless generations, new barrows are beginning to spring up around the British countryside, and these too have powerful and important tales to tell.

Barrows in Antiquity

We know surprisingly little about the cultures that produced the earliest barrows or the rituals that took place within and around them (Smith and Brickley 2009). We do, however, know that they have had an impression on the religious, spiritual and political life of those who lived near to them from earliest times. Neolithic stone circles and barrows have been re-used and re-interpreted by people of the Bronze and the Roman Iron Age (Bradley 2017) and the Anglo Saxon period (Semple 2013). In fact, Bradley has demonstrated that some Scottish sites previously thought to be Neolithic are in fact much later, belonging to the Middle Bronze Age, and are self-conscious reconstructions of forms and alignments that have their origins in what was, even then, the ancient past. There is no direct line of continuity from the Neolithic monuments to their re-purposing, re-use or reconstruction in the Bronze Age and therefore, as Bradley points out, the Bronze Age monuments are not based on memory, in the sense of an accurate account of past events, rather their histories have become fluid, imbued with successive layers of association, memory, myth and meaning.

Rather than such reconstructed barrows being based on memory, he suggests, 'A more appropriate term is commemoration, which can be characterised as human activity undertaken in response to a past' (Bradley 2017, p.5). This may be for political reasons, where incoming people seek to assert their right to an area of land by burying their elite dead in places of ancient and 'ancestral' importance. Bradley suggests that the local Iron Age elite, who were in receipt of luxury goods from the Romans and lived in Roman style residences, nonetheless sought to re-assert their 'native' identity through burial in places associated with their ancestral past.

During the Saxon period, burial mounds were perceived as frightening liminal places associated with ghosts and the dangerous dead. They were used by the Saxons as places of execution and for burial of the 'outcast dead' (Smith and Brickley 2009). Possibly, although this can never be certain, they were associated in the Saxon mind with the Pagan underworld and with access to the ancestral dead, and as this connection came to be viewed increasingly as evil or forbidden during the conversion period, the barrows came to be viewed as dangerous and marginal places.

Barrows in Deep Time

We can see, then, that by the time that they first became objects of interest for the antiquarians of the 17-19th Centuries, the barrows were already clothed with many layers of myth and story, having been imagined and reimagined by countless generations. As Bradley says, 'If the histories of such places were represented as memories, that was sometimes a fabrication or an illusion. When people looked back across an enormous expanse of time it is likely that they were remembering things that had never happened' (Bradley 2017, p.10). The barrows, in other words, were inhabiting a sort of 'deep time'.

'Deep time' is a concept that was developed by Scottish geologist James Hutton in 1788 to describe the timescales in which geological processes of earth-shaping take place. The phrase itself was first used by American author John McPhee nearly two centuries later (McPhee 1982). The comparison is drawn between the almost unimaginable timescales in which mountains and rivers are formed and landscapes shaped, and the brief, almost un-noticeable flicker of each human life against this backdrop. Human beings, viewed at this scale, appear as almost insignificant; and yet they are not insignificant. Building upon McPhee's concept, David Farrier writing in an article for *The Atlantic* in 2016 comments that human activity, certainly over that last 10,000 years, has been intimately involved in this process of landscape formation. Human presence is increasingly visible written onto the landscape and will, increasingly, be writ large over the 'deep future'. 'Deep time is not an abstract, distant process, but a spectral presence in the everyday. We also, in the everyday, increasingly see our human role in shaping deep time' (Aeon 2016).

When we look at the barrows, we see the role of geological timescales in shaping the landscapes that gave rise to them and in which they are deliberately and purposefully placed; we see the processes that have created

the different rocks and stones used for their building in different locations, and in the formation of the valleys and hills that are incorporated as part of the 'sacred landscape'. We also see the role of our distant ancestors as co-creators of the landscape that we have inherited. Viewed from the perspective of deep time, a human life span may seem insignificant, no more than a mayfly, and yet at the same time it is possible to see it as a part of something unimaginably larger than itself, a vital part of the coalescence of processes and intentions that have created the landscape and will continue to shape it into the deep future. The deep time of the barrow formations exists beyond history or memory. We may find glimpses of the barrow builders through archaeological investigation but we can know almost nothing of their intentions or hopes, and because of this, the barrows are freed from their place in the 'mundane time' of day to day living in which the past and the future are easily discernible and easily separated. Any interpretation of them that fulfils the evidence available at a given time, be that the Bronze Age, the Eighteenth Century or the present day is as valid as any other and so meaning can be 'read into' them and the people of each time and age are as instrumental in their creation as the men and woman who first created them as part as a relational and reactive world made up of living beings, animals, ancestors, gods and primal forces.

Barrows and Druids

The tendency to 'remember' a past that never was, in the historical sense, was manifested publicly when the prominent archaeologist Stuart Piggott took exception to the claims of various groups of people calling themselves 'Druids' to be the natural inheritors not only of the Neolithic mounds, but also of monuments such as Stonehenge (Piggott 1985). The association between the Neolithic monumental landscape and the Druids was first made by the antiquarian, William Stukeley in the 18th Century, and this association has continued with surprising tenacity to the present day. Archeologists such as Piggott in the mid 20th century criticized Stukeley for attributing the building of the monuments and barrows to the Druids when in fact they were much earlier. While this is true, and the barrows predate the earliest accounts mentioning Druids by around two thousand years, it must be remembered that Stukeley lived in an age when the creation of the earth in six days approximately six thousand years ago was widely accepted by the scientific community. Stukeley correctly identified the mounds as pre-Roman, showing considerable insight. According to his worldview, if they were pre-Roman then the only possibility was to ascribe them to the Druidic period. In any case, the association between the mounds, the stone circles and the Druids stuck and it is an association that many still hold today, as is testified to by the number of cartoons and memes that appear on social media clearly showing ancient Druids building or otherwise associated with Stonehenge. In the Fifteenth Mount Haemus lecture, Julia Farley observes that 'By Piggott's time, the association between the Iron Age Druids and the monument at Stonehenge had been thoroughly unraveled in academic circles, but it was still popular with the general public (and it remains to this day)' (Farley 2014).

Who, then, are the Druids that Piggott accused of imagining a non-existent past and of inadvertently deceiving the wider public about the true nature of their ancient heritage? The Druid orders as they exist today in the British Isles have their origins in the Romantic Movement and the 'Celtic Revival' of the late 18th and early 19th Centuries. The Romantic poets were, to a large degree, attempting a project of the re-enchantment of the natural world and a movement away from the religious establishment. The 'Celtic Revival' and the emergence, as its result, of a number of 'Ancient Druid Orders', celebrated all aspects of a re-imagined 'Celtic' identity. For the Druid Orders it was this sense of performed identity and a mythologised 'Celtic' history clearly separated from Englishness, with all of its negative associations for the Celtic countries that was most important.

The sense of continuity with an imagined past and a celebration, in particular, of Bardic skills, led to the establishment of the National Eisteddfod celebration in Wales in 1792 by Iolo Morganwg, a key figure in the history of modern Druidry. There was, in short, a concern with not only re-imagining but also with performing 'Celticness' or Celticity as it existed in a mythic past and in reinterpreting this idea as a form of activism in relation to the politics and concerns of the day.

Contemporary Druidry in the UK is organised into a variety of orders, many of which base their ideas on the writings of Iolo Morganwg, the *nomme de plume* of Edward Williams (1747-1826), a Welsh stonemason, poet and antiquarian. His major work, *The Bardas*, published in 1862, and claiming to be a translation of lost Druidic writings, sets out a philosophical system and mystical cosmology that is foundational to many forms of modern Druidry. In 1964, Ross Nichols split away from the Ancient Druid Order to form the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids (OBOD). This was, arguably, the beginning of the specifically Pagan interpretation of Druidry.

Between 1976 and 1988 a number of new Druid orders with a distinctively Pagan flavour were established. Notable among these were the British Druid Order, established in 1979 by Philip Shallcrass (also known as Greywolf), and the re-establishment of OBOD by Philip Carr-Gomm in 1988. As Ross Nichols's successor as Chosen Chief, Philip Carr-Gomm, has continued this trend and moved OBOD away from what was, essentially, a 'Celtic' para-masonic (Anczyk 2014) monotheist mystery tradition, to a much wider, eclectic philosophy, encompassing a wide range of beliefs and practices, and engaged in active dialogue with the Indic religions.

OBOD, under the leadership of Philip Carr-Gomm, is the largest order with members throughout the world. It operates a distance learning course divided into the three grades of Bard, Ovate and Druid and also sponsors the four-yearly Mt Haemus Conference where each year a scholar is granted a bursary to write an academic paper on a subject of interest to Druidry. These are published every eight years. The British Druid Order (BDO) is the next largest order. In nature, this is more polytheistic than OBOD, with an emphasis on building relationships with the ancient gods of Britain, and more inclined towards shamanic practices. This is not a hard distinction, however, and

'sectarian differences' are not really a feature of modern Druidry with many individuals belonging to two or more different orders and co-operation between the orders commonplace. The Druid Network, established by Emma Restall-Orr, is a loose association of Druids who may or may not belong to other orders and exists, mostly online, as a place for discussion and dialogue. It was recently granted membership of the Interfaith Forum and has been granted Registered Charity status as a religion. The Anglesey Druid Order, under the leadership of Kristoffer Hughes, is much smaller but extremely influential. There are also various smaller orders as well as many solitary practitioners

'Druidry', in the modern sense, is notoriously difficult to define; not least because it is so diverse and because there is no unifying set of beliefs. 'Druids' may, or may not, identify as 'Pagan'. They may be monists, monotheists, polytheists, animists or even atheists. Various attempts to define Druidry as a religion, a spirituality, a philosophy or as a way of living each have their strengths, but also significant weaknesses.

Perhaps one of the best definitions of modern Druidry comes from Ronald Hutton in a recent interview for *Pagan Dawn* magazine (although it should be noted that he was speaking of Paganism in general rather than of Druidry in particular):

A complex of religions calling on ancient images and ideas, but addressing some of the greatest needs of modernity, and in doing so drawing on major streams of British culture going back over two hundred years and a continuous tradition of ceremonial magic going back millennia. (Large 2016)

Useful as this is, there are still Druids who would take issue with the use of the word 'religion'. It might appear obvious to the outside observer that the category that contemporary Druidry falls into is 'religion'. The problem however, is that 'religious' is an identity marker that many Druids would explicitly reject. The major reason for this aversion to the term within Druidry and the wider Pagan world is that it has become associated in the minds of many Pagans with the perceived narrowness and oppressiveness of the Christian Church (Ezzy 2014, p.24). There is also the fact that Druids, as mentioned above, hold a diverse and diffuse set of beliefs about deity, life after death, and other matters that are generally considered central to religion. This problem only exists, however, if we define religion in terms of belief in God or gods and a growing number of scholars of religion are challenging this model, claiming that belief is not a universally defining characteristic of religion and that its centrality is due to a mistaken belief that all religions to some extent resemble Christianity. Harvey (2013) suggests that we need to move away from a Post-Enlightenment concern with internalisation of religion and to engage with it as a social activity. Likewise Ezzy (2014) offers a definition of religion based on what people do, rather than what they believe. 'Religion is a set of ritual practices that engage symbolic resources to provide etiquette for relationships and an emotional and cognitive sense of self-worth and purpose' (Ezzy 2014, p.22). Mallory Nye (2000) suggests that since the boundaries

between religions are fluid and ever-changing so that it is perfectly possible for a single individual to hold more than one religious identity at a particular time, it is more appropriate to talk about 'religioning' as an activity that people engage in, rather than 'religions' as monolithic bounded entities. Harvey (2013, p.208) expands on this: 'Religion is a performance, an activity, something people do.'

Druids may also refer to themselves as a tribe. While this terminology is self-consciously drawn from a sense of continuity with Iron Age peoples who were tribal in the usual anthropological sense of the word, this is clearly not true of modern Druids who are often geographically diffuse and whose main community formation may be carried out online; although, as Letcher points out, much community building also takes place in temporary heterotopic spaces such as seasonal camps and festivals (Letcher 2001). Druid groups do, however, conform very closely to Maffesoli's idea of modern or neo-tribes, which function in modern, fluid and industrialised societies (Maffesoli 1996). These are characterized by their fluidity: geographical disbursement, members united by a single common interest but otherwise diverse and their temporary nature, with members drifting in and out of membership over time. From this perspective, Druid Orders could usefully be described as polythetic 'neo-tribes' engaged in the activity of 'religioning', predominantly through ritual performance and creative engagement. Furthermore, the type of religioning in which they are engaged is concerned with negotiating and performing relationships in the 'more than human world' (Abram 1997). As Harvey notes, religion can be described as 'efforts to live well in a world which is a community of persons, most of whom are "other than human"' (2013, p.126). For Druids, the 'other than human' persons comprising a landscape or local community might include plants, trees, animals, spirits of place (wights) gods and/or ancestors (Blain 2016). All of these may be active and relational participants in ritual and their needs and concerns would be taken into account.

As well as the concern with ritual performance engaging human and 'other than human' persons, Druidry is deeply concerned with artistic or 'bardic' performance in the form of music, poetry and story-telling. It should not be surprising, then, that layers of story are central to Druidic accounts of self-understanding. This attempt to encapsulate the essence of Druidry comes from a member of The Druid Network:

The evolving traditions of Druidry, from ancient and largely unknowable practice through romantic reinvention have grown through peaceful protest and animist awareness to the partly religious, partly philosophical partly activist modern Druidry of today...we are the result of a thousand, thousand stories and here we are, now, being us.
(Roshier 2017)

This, perhaps, gets us closer to the reality. Druidry, not unlike the barrows themselves, *is* the stories that it tells, about itself and about its relationship to the past, the larger than human world, and to the future. Creative response to inspiration ('Arwen' in Druidic parlance) is a bardic virtue that is central to

virtually all forms of modern Druidry. Druidry is as much a creative artistic response to the world as it is anything else. A Druid may well agree with Morrison's description of language from an indigenous (rather than a Cartesian Western perspective) as 'generative — in other words they assume that the world emerges from human and other-than-human intentionality and interaction' (Morrison 2013, p.49). Words do not merely describe a world that is fixed, other and 'out there', rather they actively engage in the act of creating the world. The stories that the Druids tell about themselves, about the land, their ancestors and the monuments they left behind are not 'just' stories. They participate in the generation of the relational cosmos.

Another, albeit related approach to defining Druid identity can be found in the eighteenth Mount Haemus lecture. According to Jonathan Woolley, 'Druidry is a form of re-enchantment, an attempt to restore some of the magic and meaning stripped from the land through the alienating forces of capitalism and consumerism...the basic work of the Druid is to spin this process into reverse—to challenge the relentless commodification and alienation from our world. It does so through constructing a very specific aesthetic—an aesthetic of enchantment' (Woolley 2017).

It is interesting that both Rosher and Woolley understand Druidry, at least in part, as being fundamentally concerned with activism in the sense of a conscious rejection of systems, political and otherwise, that are seen as oppressive or unjust. Here, perhaps, we begin to engage with some of the stories that contemporary Druids are telling about the distant past and about the original barrow builders. According to Farley (2014), Druidry to its followers 'is not a relic from the past, but a timeless response to nature, to the landscape and the sacred sites, and was capable of re-interpretation, re-imagination and re-creation without losing its spiritual essence' (Farley 2014).

Max Weber suggested that the modern capitalist world is 'disenchanted' as it is stripped of mystery and magic (Weber 2013). When many Druids look at the barrows of the deep past, they imagine them situated in a society free of the angst, alienation and displacement that they perceive as endemic in our own and caused by this disenchantment. They imagine a society where everybody had a place and was valued and accepted. A society that was fundamentally living in harmony with a world populated with animals, ancestors and deities. Whether this story has any basis in historical fact is largely irrelevant, as is the question of any direct continuity between the Druids of the Iron-Age and those of today. 'Authenticity,' says Woolley, 'arises not from adherence to a series of ancient modes and forms set down by our ancestors, but from engagement with nature itself...— Indeed I would suggest that the reason why ancient monuments possess such a power is that they are preserved through, and integrated with the landscape upon which they are built' (Woolley 2017).

Stories have power. A story about a past in which society was harmonious and just can become a story about a future society. Living in community is reciprocal, negotiated and relational. It often relies on an economy of obligation and gift-giving (Mauss 1925), in the larger than human world, it

would be natural to expect this economy to operate between species and well as between humans. Humans might be expected to have obligations towards not only the gods, but also to the ancestors, the animal and plant ecology on which they depended, and to the land itself. It is possible to read the activism of which Woolley speaks in this context, as part of a reciprocal series of obligations in which Druids understand that they 'owe it' to the larger than human community to act as protector and guardian. It is also in this context of an 'inalienable gift' that many Druids interpret the idea of returning their body to the earth when they die, through natural burial or, as we shall see, through interment of their cremated remains in a barrow, into the keeping of the land itself. This brings us back to the song with which we began. A song that imagined a more authentic way of dying in a re-imagined past. A way of dying that was in harmony with the earth and with the more than human community and in which the dead, in a very physical way, become one with the landscape, in fact become the landscape itself, the foundation upon which future generations are built.

Modern Barrows, Modern Druids

In 2014 Tim Daw, a farmer and former steward at Stonehenge, opened All Cannings, a Neolithic-style mound modelled on chamber tombs (particularly West Kennet) and designed to receive cremated remains caskets in niches in the walls that would then be sealed. It is aligned with the Mid-Winter sunrise and there is an annual open day to correspond with this event where families of those whose remains are interred in the barrow, those who have niches reserved and members of the local community meet to socialise and to mark the occasion. The site is clearly designed to engender feelings of connectedness and continuity with an ancient past but is not faith-specific and is open to people of all religions and none. It is of particular interest that while the barrow, which has only been open for a few years, has only a 5% occupancy rate, all of the niches have been reserved. So popular was the project, in fact, that the team responsible for its construction later set up a company (Sacred Stones Ltd.) in order to construct similar barrows at other places in the country, where possible, in keeping with the archaeology local to that area. The second barrow, at Willow Row near St Neots in Cambridgeshire, was completed in summer 2016. This is a round barrow, rather than a long barrow, as at All Cannings, and it does not have any alignments to the sun or stars. However, it is nestled in a wooded clearing and approached by a pedestrian gravel path approximately half a mile long, which conceals the barrow from view until you round the final corner and come face to face with the heel stone. This path has the feel of a processional way associated with a number of ancient monuments and adds to the numinous atmosphere of the site as well as its connection with the deep past.

Work on a third barrow in Soultton Manor in Shropshire began early in 2017 with the barrow due to be completed in summer 2018. The Soultton barrow is the first to include a short processional way of standing sarsen stones, marking an even closer connection to the Neolithic past. Various innovative rituals are also beginning to emerge, linking the communities and landscapes of the different barrows. A stone from All Cannings was brought by Tim Daw

to the Soulton site and is built into the foundation of the wall alongside stones from the farm at Soulton Manor. An oak tree from Soulton has been planted at All Cannings in an act of reciprocity. Also, the principal stone, forming the central point of the barrow, was laid by the family of the first person whose remains are to be interred there, with coins placed beneath. As building on the site continues, a number of families intending to use the barrow have participated in the building of their own niches. For Toby Angel, one of the directors of Sacred Stones Ltd, the central idea of the barrows is of a community hub where layers of meaning are added over time; a place where ritual, whether consciously religious or not, can be conducted in an unhurried manner by family members. The barrows are placed in natural settings surrounded by wildlife and far from the urban noise and pollution that often surrounds civic cemeteries and crematoria. He sees this, to some degree, as an antidote to the modern 'conveyer belt' of commoditised and impersonal cremation ritual. He describes the site as 'non-denominational, but full of faith' (Angel 2016).

It is clear, therefore, that the idea at the heart of the barrow is one of community. The barrows function as the hubs of networks of living people; both from the local communities, where they become the centre of social and cultural activity, and also between the different 'barrow communities'. They also become hubs for building and sustaining relationships, perhaps, ultimately, across generations, between communities of the living and communities of the dead in a way that is, perhaps, unique in modern Britain. Finally, they are designed to fit harmoniously into the wider than human ecology that already exists in the location chosen. The Soulton site boasts a healthy population of barn owls which have become almost totemic to the barrow, with the owl imagery being repeated in various ways throughout the construction, including in stained glass panels to seal the niches. Toby Angel speaks of the owners of Soulton Manor and of the barn owls equally as 'guardians' of the site.

The barrows are almost unique in the United Kingdom in their attempt to establish a place where communities of the living, across generations, can gather, socialise, enjoy music, theatre and food, and interact with a community of 'other than living persons'. In using this term, I am suggesting that the people whose remains are interred at the barrows operate within a reciprocal and relational world as 'persons' with agency to affect the wider world around them. Clearly, they are not 'living' in a biological sense, however they are continuing to interact with and influence those that are. They form a part of the larger than human world envisaged by Abrams and Harvey and yet they are clearly not 'other than human', since human is precisely what they are. They are more than a homogenised concept of ancestral dead, as many of them continue to be acknowledged in kinship relationships and activities and so they operate as 'persons'. I therefore suggest that the 'more than human' ecology of relationships be expanded to include those who continue to be a part of the day to day lives, activities and affairs of their kinship and wider relational groups and yet who are not themselves alive in a biological sense. This is not to comment on the question of life after death, or on the beliefs concerning the afterlife of those who use the barrows or of their

families. Rather I am suggesting that the dead remain, as present and visible in the community in a way that allows the relationships that the living have with them to be renegotiated in a dynamic and relational way that perhaps goes beyond the 'continuing bonds' that have been theorised in bereavement studies (Valentine 2008). The dead remain as important members of their families, with regular interaction. Many of the niches can be opened so that artefacts can be placed within them or taken out, and candles can be burnt. One family elected to hold a wedding within the barrow so that the recently deceased grandfather would not be excluded from the occasion. This active and dynamic way of relating to the dead allows each generation to continue to be present as an 'ancestral' dynamic which, while radically different to the ways in which the Neolithic barrow builders interacted with their ancestors, is, non-the-less a part of the same continuum.

It is significant that while All Cannings is open to, and used by people of all faiths (including Christians), it was dedicated at its opening by the 'Arch-Druid of Avebury'. Early interview data suggests that these barrows are indeed linked in the minds of Druids with a sense of continuity with an ancient and pre-Christian past. The barrows provide the opportunity to become in effect 'tomorrow's ancestors', continuing to be present and to be a part of the human and more than human community, as well as of the landscape itself, into the deep future. Many contemporary Druids understand ancestry in three related but distinct ways (Brown 2012). They speak of ancestors of blood, place and tradition. Ancestors of blood are the hereditary forerunners from whom we inherit our DNA. The initial response to the new barrows suggests that they may well take on the role of 'family tomb' to a number of families, with possibly, successive generations laid there. Each barrow has a number of family niches designed to take up to six urns of cremated remains, with the intention that as the niche becomes full the oldest residents are scattered over and around the barrow, continuing to be a part of the landscape, while new are interred. The possibility remains that for some at least they could fulfil the role of a family or ancestral shrine.

Ancestors of place are those, human and other than human, who have inhabited the same locality across time and even deep time. Since the barrows are built in the same way as their ancient forebears there is no reason why they could not, given favourable conditions, last as long and so become markers of ancient inhabitants of their localities. Interestingly, Tim Daw has a slightly different vision for All Cannings to the one that Toby Angel has for Willow Row. All the niches at All Cannings are now reserved and the intention, at some point in the future when all of the interments have taken place is to permanently seal the barrow, as many of the Neolithic barrows were sealed in antiquity. All Cannings, like its ancient predecessors will, for a generation or two, operate as a place where the living can encounter and interact with the dead, but it will, in the fullness of time, become a place of the ancestral dead who will slowly pass from living memory. Placed, as it is, within the ancient sacred landscape of the Avebury area, it will, in time, settle into that landscape as an unremarkable part of it. In this way, its inhabitants will become 'ancestors of place' no less truly than those in the ancient barrows just out of view from it.

'Ancestors of tradition' is perhaps the most nebulous concept, referring to those people who are instrumental to an individual in making them what they are. In the case of modern Druids, these may include, but are by no means limited to, the Druids of the Iron Age, or seminal figures in the rise of modern Druidry such as Iolo Morganwg or Ross Nichols. One cannot help but wonder if future generations might look at the barrows that are springing up today and wonder about the 'ancient' barrow builders and the role that their vision had in shaping future communities. Since many Druids also believe in reincarnation, there is also the intriguing idea that they are to some extent their own ancestors, the barrows may therefore represent an opportunity to mimic the way in which that individual may, in a previous life, have been laid to rest, providing some degree of continuity from life to life.

The long tradition of ecological and social activism also makes the barrows attractive to some Druids. They are seen not only as a direct link to distant ancestors but also as a community enterprise that circumnavigates the institution of modern funerals and the impersonal feel of the modern crematorium. There is time and space to conduct a ritual fitting to each person when the cremated remains are deposited in the niche without the need to conform to convention. For this reason, for some, it is the deposition in the barrow that has real ritual meaning and not any cremation service that might precede it. The barrows also provide a suitable setting that allows the dead to retain their 'personhood' beyond the moment of death, and to continue to act as part of a reciprocal and relational community based on ideas of kinship and ancestry that is entirely in sympathy with Druidic ideas about death and dying.

Barrows in the Modern World

While the appeal of the barrows to modern Druids is perhaps not surprising, their popularity goes far beyond this. According to Ezzy (2014, p.19), rituals are among the resources that enable a person to live a 'life with soul'; that is a life that is experienced as worthwhile and emotionally satisfying. Such a life is characterised by relationships; facilitated through ritual performance and draws on 'symbolic resources such as myths and shared cultural understandings' (2014, p.19). The rituals that are evolving organically among and between the families choosing to use the new barrows seem to be engaging with just such a 'soulful' approach to death and to the forging of new relationships between living and 'other than living' persons. For society as a whole, as well as for Druids, the link to an imagined and idealised past is important. Howard Williams, in his work on the National Arboretum, notes that in memorial gardens there is 'a veritable scramble to harness antiquity' and makes the observation that 'ancient and historical material cultures are refashioned, replicated and re-used' on a regular basis (Williams 2014, p.11). The imagined, idealised past has power for many in today's world (see, for example, Bauman 2017).

In an article for 'Once I'm Gone', Toby Angel writes thus: 'Now I have to admit I'm no expert on Neolithic burial mounds or culture, but I do feel somewhat empowered to communicate the modern-day barrow's impact has created a

tangible sense of ‘community’. I believe that the ancients were also celebrating community. I believe they were making a clear statement about who they were and where they belonged. That they were “‘of’ the locale and thus keen to remain part of the commune’ (Angel 2017). So, despite the non-denominational nature of the barrows, the owners are also involved in re-telling the past in order to re-shape the future, creating new possibilities and new ways of being in community.

In literary studies, ‘reception theory’ is used to unpack the idea that each person who comes to a text brings with them their own past, knowledge, emotions, associations and ideas and that these are at least as important as the intentions of the author in establishing the ‘true’ meaning of the work (Goldstein 2001). There can therefore never be a single, fixed, bounded and unchanging way to understand a text. It may be used in new political, religious or cultural contexts in ways that would have been totally alien to its creator. It has been suggested (Hunt 2004) that a similar methodology can be applied to gardens as deliberately shaped landscape with meanings that can be both intended and ‘read’ by visitors. It is clear that such an approach can, and indeed should be taken to the sacred and ritual landscapes of the deep past, overlaid with countless layers of ‘commemoration’ (Bradley 2017), re-telling, identity making and mythologising. Much can be learnt about the power and importance of such landscapes, both in the past and in the present day, by paying attention to the various ways in which they have been read and interpreted by successive generations. The original intentions of the barrow builders lie hidden in the deep past, and yet such sites remain full of meaning, embodying the reimagining of national, religious, cultural and local identity.

Barrows into the Future

One more thing remains to be said and that is that for many Druids the land is a living and sentient thing that forms a vital part of their network of relationships and obligations. Thus, the land remembers all of the people who have come and gone upon it and is itself a part of the ‘larger than human’ world. From this viewpoint, the land is a participant in its own evolution. The land is not only re-told, and re-read, it is a story is constantly telling and re-telling itself. It holds the ancestors within itself, physically as well as incorporating within itself their stories and their memories, read and re-read in the landscape by countless generations. Seen from this perspective, the ‘new barrows’ are a continuation of the story of the land and those whose ashes are laid to rest within them will themselves become a part of that story.

At the time of writing, there are plans for at least four new barrows to be constructed around the country. We cannot know at this stage how widespread the barrows will become; whether they, like their predecessors, will become a familiar part of the landscape. Likewise, we cannot know how long they will last, or for how long they will be in active use. Perhaps our descendants will tell their own stories about them and about the ancestors that lie within them and perhaps those stories will be about a better future.

To conclude, in *The Last Hero*, Terry Pratchett has one of his characters, Cohen the Barbarian, found by his friends sitting pensively on an ancient burial mound. They ask him what he is doing and he replies, 'Someone's got to remember the poor bugger!' His friends are confused by this response since the person for whom the mound was built died many centuries ago, beyond the reach of historical time or living memory. 'You don't know anything about him!' they protest. After thinking about this for a while, he replies, defiantly, 'I can still REMEMBER him!' (Pratchett 2001, pp.34–35). I suggest that the barrows are among a number of resources employed in the modern world for attempting to 'remember' something that lies just out of reach.

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