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A personal selection of

Salisbury, Wessex,

British and world, history

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THE WEALD⁶

The weald occupies the area between the chalk escarpments of the North and South Downs. The centre or High Weald is sandstone, the surrounding Low Weald is of clay whilst there is a greensand ridge that stretches around the north and west sides. The Weald was once heavily wooded and was known to the Saxons as *Andredesweald*. As you might imagine Weald comes from the German *Wald* for forest. In East Anglia this has morphed into *Wold*. The Weald measured some 120 miles by 30 miles and stretched from west Kent to Hampshire's forest of Bere, and up into Surrey (close enough for Londoners to hunt wild boar).

Surprisingly perhaps it was one of England's first industrial areas; Wealden sandstones contain ironstone, and with the additional presence of large amounts of timber for making charcoal for fuel, the area was the centre of the Wealden iron industry from then, through the Roman times, until the last forge was closed in 1813. Below, the local artist, Samuel



Palmer's *Timberwain* of 1833 (below) gives a real flavour of the Weald. The forest was a notorious hiding place for criminals and in 1216, *Wilikin of the Weald* and his archers successfully ambushed the French army brought over by the Barons.

My apprenticeship being in Canterbury, we made regular visits to my parents in Hampshire, traversing the Weald from where we could not help but notice, at least at the eastern end, the number of towns and villages ending in *den*. Such villages as Benenden and Horsmonden are where pigs were brought to roam in the forest and eat the acorns and beech mast (*pannage*).

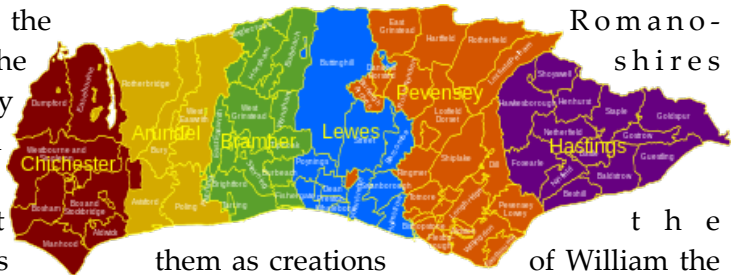
Tenterden is the same but specifically for the men of Thanet.



PARTS RAPES RIDINGS AND LATHES⁶

The **Lathes** of Kent are the main division of that county, and of ancient origin, comprising groups of hundreds. There are five lathes: Saint Augustine, Shepway, Scray, Aylesford and Sutton at Hone. The name may derive from a Germanic root meaning land or landed possession.

The **Rapes** of Sussex are the major divisions of that county also comprising groups of hundreds. Sussex is unique in using this designation of its divisions. The origin of the rapes is unknown, but they appear to predate the Norman Conquest. Sussex was once a separate Saxon kingdom with its own institutions, but whether the rapes go back that far cannot be known. There are various theories about the origin of the rapes of Sussex. The most ambitious suggestion has them as survivals from the Romano-British era, or they might represent the shires of the Kingdom of Sussex. The rapes may be later though, deriving from the system of fortifications devised by Alfred the Great in the late ninth century to defeat the Vikings. The latest date suggested has them as creations of William the Conqueror, which is certainly possible. The Sussex rapes each had a headquarters in the developed south where the lord's hall, court, demesne lands, principal church and peasant holdings were located, whereas to the north there were smaller dependent settlements in the marsh, woodland and heath. Each rape is split into several hundreds.



The Three **Ridings** of Yorkshire are the ancient division of the county, and the creation of the Norse period from which Yorkshire itself arose. Yorkshire, as the largest county in the United Kingdom, is most conveniently divided and the three ridings are the fundamental geographical and cultural divisions of the shire. The three ridings surround the City of York, their boundaries meeting at the walls of the city: York within the walls is the only part of Yorkshire outside any of the ridings.



The three are: The *East Riding*, the smallest and least hilly of the three, much of it in the plains extending from the north bank of the Humber and containing the seaport city of Kingston upon Hull; The *North Riding*, extending from the Pennines to the North Sea, the

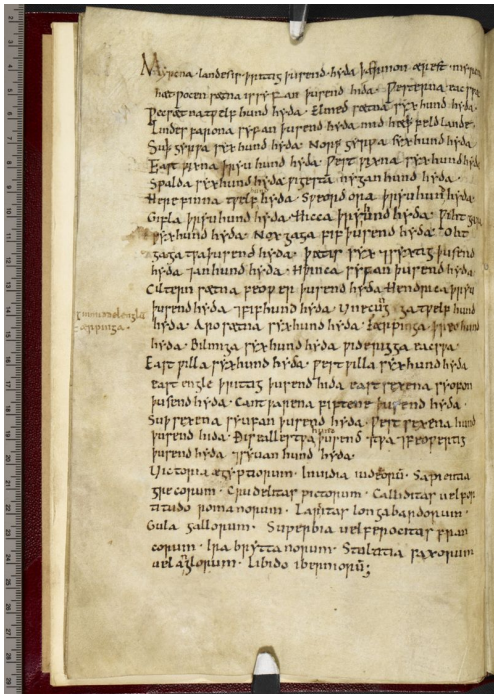
most rural but still containing Middlesbrough on industrial Teeside;

The *West Riding* the largest and most urbanised as its southern parts contain the great industrial cities of Yorkshire, the largest being Leeds and Sheffield though in its north it encompasses some of the finest of the Yorkshire Dales.

Each riding is divided into Wapentakes. The name *Riding* is from the Old Norse meaning a *thirthing*. The term *Thriding* survived into the Middle Ages.



The three **parts** of the English county of Lincolnshire are or were divisions of the second-largest county in England. Similar in



nature to the three ridings of Yorkshire, they existed as local government

units until commencement of the Local Government Act 1972. The three parts were: Lindsey in the north, itself divided into three ridings (North, South and West); Kesteven in the south-west; and Holland in the south-east.

The counties themselves were organised by the Normans but their origin was of course much older. One of the reasons that the Normans took over the country so quickly and thoroughly was that an excellent administration had already been set up by the Anglo-Saxons. There was an idea that a county comprised 100 *hides* of land, the *hide* being the amount of land needed to support one family. As the definition varied geographically and over time it is not of much help.

The document on the left is the British Library's copy of the *Tribal Hidage*. Compiled between the 7th and 9th centuries and written in Old English, it shows the 35 tribes south of the River Humber together with the amount of hides assigned to each. It is a very valuable source for Anglo-Saxon historians. Being English, there are all sorts of exceptions such as Durham which was a *County Palatine* - but more of these anon.

THE MAYPOLE & THE GOSPEL¹

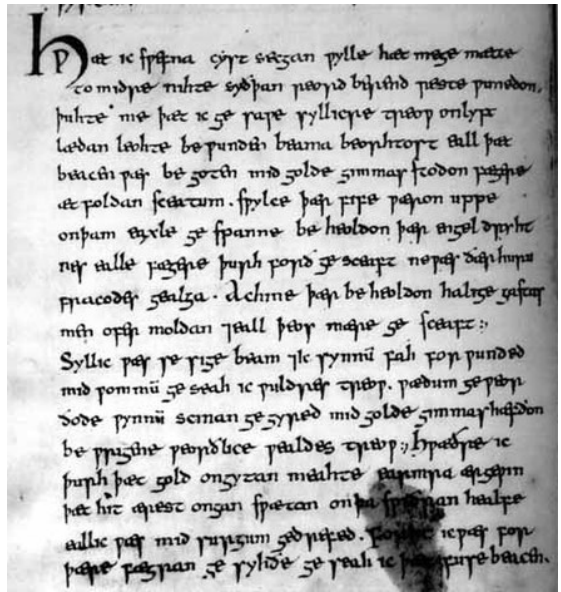
Between the church and Polstead Hall in Suffolk stands the diminished remnants of the now-dead Polstead gospel oak. Gospel oaks were not uncommon features of Anglo-Saxon village life. They were often located at boundaries, cross-roads or other liminal spaces and, in some cases, likely possessed an earlier heathen significance. During the *beating of the bounds* – a ritualised walking of the parish boundaries by the community – gospel oaks were used as focal points for prayer.



Polstead's example (right²) is particularly notable for its great age. At its peak it was 32 feet round at shoulder height. According to legend, the Northumbrian missionary St Cedd preached under the oak in roughly 653AD. When the tree finally collapsed in 1953, a cut through its trunk revealed over 1,400 annual growth rings, indicating that it would have already been 100 years old during the reign of the East Anglian king Anna, nephew of Rædwald, and a descendent of the Wuffinga royal line. Given the great age of the Polstead gospel oak, it was likely venerated as a pre-Christian sacred tree prior to its use by St Cedd. There is no denying its dramatic location, overlooking the Box Valley.

Certain trees were likely regarded as sacred, even sentient, by heathen Anglo-Saxons. Like the world-tree *Yggdrasil* of Scandinavian myth, trees were symbolic *world pillars* that connected the celestial realms with the underworld and *Middangeard* – the human domain. *Irmingsul*, *stapol* and *becun* are Old English words relating to wooden pillars erected in a cult context as mini world-trees. Similarly, *hearg*, *leah* and *hyrst* describe what were probably heathen sacred groves. So trees were not just venerated for their great age (and wisdom), but because they were a means for tapping into otherworldly powers.

Trees' mythological status were maintained into the Christian era and absorbed into the Christian message. The anonymous Anglo-Saxon poem *The Dream of the Rood*, for example (right) cleverly links the wooden cross of Christ with its original status as a living tree. In doing, it draws comparison between Christ's crucifixion on the tree / cross and Odin / Woden's hanging upon the world tree.



BENEDICTINE REFORM³



The *Regularis Concordia* was the most important document of the English Benedictine Reform, sanctioned by the Council of Winchester in about 973. The document was compiled by Æthelwold, who was aided by monks from Fleury and Ghent. A synodal council was summoned to construct a common rule of life to be observed by all monasteries. The document served as a rule for how monastic life should be performed and included monastic rituals like the procedure for the election of bishops that differed from Continental practice, and which led to a predominantly monastic episcopacy.

One of the larger topics found within the manuscript is the Forward to the *Harmony of the Rule*, which is meant to apply to the monks and nuns of the entire nation that was ruled under King Edgar. This section of the document proclaimed that every religious house in the kingdom was to follow the rules prescribed in the rest of the manuscript. This included how the monastic *office* was to be performed; this includes vigils, lauds, and prayers and is a practice that was established in the fifth century. The prescriptions for

monastic *office* are specific; for example, it includes the specific liturgical song to be performed during the mandated labour hours that were required of the monks.⁵

The portion of the manuscript dedicated to the rites of Holy Week and Easter are the most detailed. This is where the introduction of the *quem quaeritis* is introduced, and is now credited to be the introduction of theatrical ritual. The Regularis also creates the specific pattern and order that bells should be rung in for Masses and holidays. The Latin question *Quem quaeritis?* (Latin for *Whom do you seek?*) refers to four lines of the medieval Easter liturgy that later formed the kernel of the large body of medieval liturgical drama, which is also known as *Visitatio sepulchri* (Latin for *Visit to the tomb*). It was introduced into the liturgy in the tenth century, as a new genre of liturgical ceremony.



DID YOU KNOW?⁴

By the end of the 12th century there were two-tone abacuses with black beads for positive and red for negative - still seen today on our bank statements.

The Vatican City's Swiss Guard uniform was designed by Michelangelo.

The Swedish warship *Vasa* that sank on her maiden voyage with great loss of life was examined when raised in 1961. It turned out that the Swedish team constructing the port side used their country's pre-1863 feet and inches whereas the Dutch working on the starboard side used the Amsterdam foot of less than 11 Swedish inches.

In the early days of (bare knuckle) boxing, the spectators were kept back by four coachmen standing with their whips extended. This resulted in a square of 23 feet (7 metres) which is pretty similar to today's *ring*.

The Romans introduced the *cubit* which is why the standard bolt of cloth is still 45". As the measure varied between vendors, brass tacks were hammered into their benches at the correct distance. This is why people say *getting down to brass tacks* rather than relying on guesswork.

The once wealthy inmates of the Debtors' Prison could only exercise in their yard which resulted in a version of *real tennis* (Royal Tennis) called *prison rackets*. In the 1830s this evolved into *squash*. The scoring of modern tennis reflects the *real tennis* use of a clock to keep score.

Eratosthenes of Cyrene (276 - 194 BC) used the Greek distance of the *stadia* and a sun-dial to measure the bearing of the sun at noon at Aswan in Egypt and thereby calculate the circumference of the earth. His answer was 24,662 miles (39,690 km) which compares with our GPS measurement of 24,901 miles (40,75 km) - not bad eh! Incidentally, Greek sports were measured in *stadia* from which we get *stadium*.

1. From *The Meavy Oak* in *Britain's Tree Story* by Julian Hight (National Trust Books 2011).

2. From *Secret Suffolk* secretsuffolk.com/polstead-gospel-oak/

3. King Edgar seated between St Æthelwold and St Dunstan. From an eleventh-century manuscript of the *Regularis Concordia* in British Library.

4. I delved into *Mr Hartston's Most Excellent Encyclopedia of Useless Information* by William Hartston (Metro Publishing 2006) and *The Long and the Short of It* by Graeme Donald (Michael O'Mara Books 2016).

5. St Benedict delivering his Rule to three monks. Courtesy of durhamworldheritagesite.com/learn/history/benedictine-order.

6. Thanks to *A Thousand Years of the English Parish* by Anthea Jones (Windrush Press 2000) and Wikipedia.

SARUM CHRONICLE ADVERTISEMENT

Background

The Sarum Chronicle is an annual high-quality publication that publishes historical research on Salisbury and the surrounding district. The content is scholarly but accessible, significant but concise. Coverage demonstrates the huge variety of topics of interest to local historians, and the wealth of sources they use.

It was first produced in 2001 and has built an enthusiastic following of readers and contributors, which we would like to extend. We are currently working on SC24, which will be published in November 2024. The Chronicle is typically a publication of about 200 pages of text and accompanying images in black and white, and full colour. The Chronicle is produced by an editorial board which comprises about 8 members who are all volunteers. The publication has increased in size and presentation since its early days.

Opportunity

The Editorial Board is now seeking additional members to build on the knowledge and skills of the existing team. We are particularly looking to develop our appeal to a wider audience. We are looking for additional volunteers with one or more of the following skills:

marketing
copy editing
internet skills including help with web site and social media
breadth of knowledge of history of Salisbury
distribution

The Editorial Board meets about 6 times a year but much of the work is undertaken outside formal meetings. If you are interested in being a member of the team producing Salisbury's premier annual history publication, then contact:

Emily Naish
Roy Bexon

We would love to hear from you!

www.sarumchronicle.wordpress.com
e-mail: sarumchronicle@gmail.com

