



Series II – Programme VII

## Lost Treasures

Avoid disappointment – check with your chosen destination before leaving.

**Mysteries - every town, village and city has a secret history. Forgotten facts, amazing people and dramatic events - lost treasures inches below the surface.**



He's back, and on the trail of more lost treasures

**Britain is literally a treasure chest just waiting to be opened, and in the North West especially we've only just scratched the surface of what lies beneath. Welcome to Programme seven.**

**In this new series Mark Olly and his team go in search of some of these lost treasures and show how you can get involved to solve some of the biggest mysteries in history. This is "adventure archaeology" and you don't have to be an expert to get stuck in.**

Wherever you live there are legends and myths lurking in the background; fantastic stories of giants and monsters, fairy tales, tall stories, sometimes with an amazing grain of truth – but how do you tell fact from fiction?



**This week Mark and the Lost Treasures team go in search of the Green Knight.**

Since ancient times, legends of great heroes and extraordinary characters have echoed down the centuries. In our modern world, amazing stories still entertain millions everyday in Hollywood blockbusters often inspired by real events from long ago, but the legend of **Holywell** in North Wales is among the most intriguing of ancient stories; the **Lost Treasures** team decided to investigate.

For over 13 centuries, millions of pilgrims from all over the world have visited **St. Winefride's Holy Well** – the “*Lourdes of Britain*” – many searching for a miraculous cure, or renewed religious conviction in the cool waters of this beautiful shrine.

The Legend dates form around 600AD, when it is said that the well sprang from the ground at the place where St Winefride was beheaded by a local chieftain, Caradog, after she spurned his advances. Luckily, her Uncle **St Beuno** came along and replaced her head and she was healed, living for another 22 years. The Well then became known as St Winifrede's Healing Well.



*St Winifrede's Holy Well*

**Visit St Winifrede's Well**

**Holywell**

**Flintshire**

**North Wales**

**CH8 7PN**

**01352 713 054**

**Open everyday except Christmas day.**

**For more information visit:**

[www.saintwinefrideswell.com](http://www.saintwinefrideswell.com)

For more than 1,400 years, water has gushed from this well and ever since pilgrims have gratefully paid homage to St. Winesfride. Intriguingly, the story of her miraculous resurrection has echoes in another great legend, one of the most popular tales of King Arthur and Knights of the Round Table.

*The Story of **Gawain and the Green Knight** begins at Christmas time in the court of King Arthur. A Green Knight appears and challenges anyone who dares to a duel. Up steps the brave Sir Gawain who wins the duel and chops off the Green Knight's head. Much to everyone's amazement and horror, the Green Knight picks up his head, sticks it back on and challenges Sir Gawain to a similar duel in a year and a day in the "Green Chapel". So, Gawain leaves King Arthur's court at Holywell, crosses to the Wirrel and travels across Cheshire and down through Staffordshire to the Green Chapel in Leek.*

Or so some believe! However, there is some evidence of Leek playing an important role in the tale. Experts believe the story dates back to a medieval manuscript written by an anonymous monk in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The manuscript was written in a dialect spoken around the area of Leek. Mark decided to go in search of this Green Chapel in Leek, Derbyshire.

Like Sir Gawain, Mark's journey would take him to interesting places and hopefully there would be some lost treasures and certainly some beautiful landscape along the way. His first stop was **Arbor Low Stone Circle**. Situated about 14 miles outside Leek it is one of Britain's most important prehistoric monuments, although most people don't even know it is there.

Dating back to the Neolithic period (about 3000BC), it is as old as the Egyptian Pyramids and as big as Stonehenge in Wiltshire. Here, however, the stones are recumbant - lying flat on the ground – although there is still much debate as to whether they were originally upright or not. Like Stonehenge, the circle here may have been used as a solar clock to measure the position of the rising or setting sun or to synchronize a calendar to the solar cycle for purposes of timing religious rituals.



*The recumbant stone circle at Arbor Low*

Mark discovered that the circular bank surrounding this stone circle is made up of white flint imported to the site from elsewhere. In prehistoric times it must have been an incredible spectacle – a gigantic white circular mound standing out on top of a ridge. Whatever the circle was used for, an intangible sense of mystery pervades the area around the stones.

**Arbor Low** is down a farm track about 5m Southwest of Bakewell. There is a small entry fee. It is open most days from: 10 –6 pm summer  
10 –4pm winter.

For more visit:

[www.english-heritage.org.uk/server/show/conProperty.52/](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/server/show/conProperty.52/)

Continuing on his travels, Mark speculated as to where Sir Gawain might have visited on his journey; perhaps he would have stumbled upon one of the many sacred wells dotted around the Leek area that originated in Celtic times.

In a country park to the West of Leek, Mark found one of these Celtic Groves (which give their name - *lek*- to the town). The well itself is surrounded by Yew trees, which are up to a thousand years old (dating from the late Saxon period) and there are two shallow tanks cut into the sandstone as well as the remains of a Roman semi-circular basin. Could this be the remains of a 2000 year old Celtic druid site?

In the peace of this magical place, Mark felt the presence of history all around him; perhaps Sir Gawain might have also have rested here before continuing his journey.

Nearby, another well has been rediscovered and maintained by some local enthusiasts following an Archaeological dig in 2000. Mark met **Linda Skellam** who has helped restore **Ladydale Well**. An old lady had told Linda of the whereabouts of the well and claimed the water has healing qualities – especially for eye complaints.



*Local volunteers maintaining Ladydale Well*

During the archaeological dig, an ancient roadway was discovered running adjacent to the spring and it is thought to be an Anglo Saxon/Norman road called the **Earlsway**. Some of the stones at the well certainly seem to date back to this time.

The Earlsway was the main road in the area. It was built by local Saxon lords and led north to **Deulacress Abbey**, and this is the place where that mystery monk is supposed to have lived who wrote the story of Sir Gawain.

The Lost Treasures team continued following this trail only to reach a house called Abbey Farm. Evidently, this was site of the once great Abbey that had prospered from this rich land, but of course it had vanished after Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries in 1536. All that remained was a few intriguing fragments which survived in the surrounding farm buildings.

A hermitage, however, which was once attached to the abbey, and found only a hundred metres from the farmhouse provided Mark with more food for thought: could this be where the manuscript for Gawain and the Green Knight was originally written?



*Mark emerges from the Hermitage at Deulacress*

The medieval manuscript of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight was first translated by a quiet, unassuming professor from Oxford University, an expert in early medieval languages; a man who wrote an amazing story that entertained generations and has since passed into legend and modern mythology. That man was J.R.R.Tolkien and the book was **The Lord of the Rings**.



*Original manuscript of Sir Gawain & the Green Knight*

Continuing on his search for Sir Gawain's haunts, Mark visited Leek. Capital of the peaks and a beautiful country market town, Leek is one of the oldest marketplaces in Britain and a home to a wealth of lost treasures, beautiful buildings and landmarks that conceal many tales of local folklore. It is a wonderful place to explore.

The busy marketplace is open every Wednesday. An unremarkable fact except that the first market was held here in 1207; people have been trading on this site for 800 years! Also in the market place is the famous **Butter Cross** dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and still in amazing condition.

Whilst in Leek Mark also visited the **Hyde Out**, a shop selling curiosities and trinkets from all over the world. What interested Mark was that this shop was previously the Cock Inn and current owner, Mrs Hyde, has kept the signboard from the door. Keeping hold of history like this is very important; even though this is relatively recent history, things like this are disappearing fast.

For more about historic Leek, places to visit and things to do, visit:

[www.visitderbyshire.co.uk/towns-18.html/](http://www.visitderbyshire.co.uk/towns-18.html/)

Some traditions from the past have still survived in Leek and Mark visited a throwback to Victorian fashionable society that is still as popular today as it was then. The picturesque **Greystone Tearooms** was built in the 17<sup>th</sup> century right in the middle of Leek. In 1821, it was decided that an Institute was to be built behind the tearooms and that the tearooms would have to be demolished.

Fortunately, a famous local resident by the name of **William Morris** stepped in and stopped the demolition. He was very fond of old buildings and it is thanks to him that the Greystone Tearooms is still standing today.

Whilst enjoying a refreshing break from his research, some diners at the tearooms told Mark of a story of treachery at one of Leek's other drinking holes.

**The Quiet Woman** is a pub that dates back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, with a rather gruesome sign featuring a woman holding her head under her arm. Inside is a courtyard where a secret society called the Round Table used to meet.



*The gruesome pub sign*

Apparently a popular barmaid at the time would overhear their conversations and then sell their secrets to whoever would pay. Unfortunately she also paid for this treachery: she was beheaded in that very courtyard and now is forever remembered as the eponymous “quiet woman.”

That story of the Quiet Woman gave Mark food for thought: a treacherous woman also played a part in the story of Sir Gawain. On his journey, Gawain stayed at a lord’s castle and the wife of the lord attempted to seduce him. Gallant Knight of the Round Table that he was, Sir Gawain rejected her advances and continued in his quest.

Other interesting tales that Mark heard in Leek included story of the famous “double sunset”.

Leek is set on a large hill with the church at the top and it is said that in prehistoric times at the summer solstice the sun would set behind the hill and then appear to rise and set again, giving the appearance of a double sunset.

In the churchyards around Leek, other lost treasures can be found. In one is the gravestone of a man who died in 1788 at the ripe old age - according to the gravestone - of 438! In another, Mark found an Anglo Saxon cross which still had Anglo Saxon runic inscriptions on it, in surprisingly good condition.

The cross shaft is surrounded by pieces of rubble and it is said that in 1536, during the dissolution of the monasteries, the Abbey at Deulacress was dismantled and entire parts of it were brought to this churchyard and the stonework recycled.



*A lost treasure in a Leek churchyard*

Leek had proved to be a bit of a lost treasure itself, but the surrounding area is also absolutely breathtaking. An old friend of Marks, **Doug Pickford**, believes the landscape could have inspired one of Britain’s greatest storytellers, translator of Gawain and author of Lord of the Rings - J.R.R. Tolkien. Doug is a local historian, and told Mark that although Tolkien was from the Birmingham area, he came on holiday to Leek and apparently stayed at the Swan Inn, which at that time was named the **Green Dragon**.

Could the Green Dragon have been the inspiration for the dragons in Tolkien's books? Doug believes that so many people are inspired by the Derbyshire countryside that The Lord of the Rings may well have been conceived among its magical contours.

Keen to experience this for himself, Mark continued on his journey out into the countryside. Just a few miles north he entered what seemed like a different world. This was **The Roaches**, a spectacular gritstone escarpment that stands like a line of silent warriors, guarding the entrance to the Derbyshire peaks, worn into fantastic shapes by the elements.



*The Roaches – entrance to the Derbyshire peaks*

To find out more about the Roaches go to:

[www.derbyshireuk.net/roaches.html/](http://www.derbyshireuk.net/roaches.html/)

or, for walking in Derbyshire:

[www.derbyshireuk.net/walking.html/](http://www.derbyshireuk.net/walking.html/)

If anything conjures up Tolkien's middle earth, this has to be it, and one can almost imagine the hills and ancient landscape swarming with "Orcs" in an epic battle between good and evil.

A mysterious pool awaited Mark at the top of the Roaches. This is the **Doxy pool**, which is a strange body of water that never dries up. There are many legends surrounding this sacred pool including stories of mermaids and druidic rituals. In Victorian times it was apparently surrounded by prehistoric carvings but, unfortunately, a rather fervent local minister used to bring his congregations up to the pool and smash the carvings because they were pagan icons. Like so many of Mark's lost treasures and sacred sites, most people just do not know it is there.

Sitting by Doxy Pool, Mark was close to the end of his search for the Green Chapel that had haunted Sir Gawain for so long.

Before he had left, Doug had suggested he should visit **Ludschurch**, saying it was “a spectacular place, you have to visit it before you die” – a tempting proposition. Ludschurch is indeed dramatic. A huge chasm hewn from rocks and concealed by thick forest, it might be exactly the place that Mark was seeking. He could certainly now imagine the end of the story of the Green Knight:

*As Sir Gawain descended into the dramatic green chasm of Ludschurch — the eerie atmosphere was heavy with foreboding, perfect for the final battle; at last, a chance to prove his honour against the supernatural spectre of the Green knight.*



*The dramatic chasm at Ludschurch*

*The Green knight spared Sir Gawain's life with a final glancing blow to the neck - a constant reminder that he lived a virtuous life for the rest of his days as a knight of the round table.*

To Visit Ludschurch go to **Gradbach**, which is between the A54 and A53 coming from Buxton. Park in Gradbach and walk down past the Youth Hostel, across a footbridge and on towards Swythamley. Go to the site below for map references and pictures.

Ludschurch is on open access land.

[www.themodernantiquarian.com/site/333/luds\\_church.html](http://www.themodernantiquarian.com/site/333/luds_church.html)

One thousand, five hundred years after the events in the story of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, this place is still inspiring storywriters today, right into the 21st century!

The Story of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight by **JRR Tolkien** and **EV Gordon** is published by Oxford University Press. ISBN 0-19-811486-9

It is also available in many different editions and translations, including versions by:

**Brian Stone** (Penguin Classics)

**Keith Harrison** (Oxford World Classics)

and, most recently, **Simon Armitage** (Faber and Faber).

The objects found - if properly recorded - offer an important and irreplaceable source for understanding our past.

At its heart are the Scheme's **Finds Liaison Officers**, offer everyone a way to log all the finds for public benefit. The data recorded - itself an important educational resource – published on:

[www.finds.org.uk](http://www.finds.org.uk)

**Get stuck in! How you can get involved with archaeology.**

## **Portable Antiquities Scheme**

Established in 1997 the **Portable Antiquities Scheme** is a countrywide community archaeology project to encourage the voluntary recording of archaeological objects found by the public in England and Wales; people who use metal-detectors, go out walking, gardening or just going about their daily work.

## **The Council for British Archaeology**

<http://www.britarch.ac.uk/>

## ***Get Involved!***



**Send us details of your local lost treasure:**

Click the **your treasure** tab on the main

[www.lost-treasures.co.uk](http://www.lost-treasures.co.uk) website or email the team at [info@lost-treasures.co.uk](mailto:info@lost-treasures.co.uk)



Mark Olly

Born and raised in Warrington, Mark Olly established and runs the **Celtic Warrington Project** archaeological unit (CWP), whose aim is to document all prehistoric and Dark Age remains in the Mid Mersey Valley, North Cheshire and South Lancashire. This unique historical project for the North West is revealing an unsuspected picture of the region in Dark Age times.

Mark writes on archaeology and other subjects for local and national press.

His books include the '*Celtic Warrington & Other Mysteries*' volumes, which have been based on six years of research.

His other interests are wide ranging and include, musician, artist, photographer, and archaeologist, having trained at Liverpool University. Mark also holds a Certificate of Ministry and a Diploma of Biblical Studies and is part of '*Dalraida The Norsemen*', a dark age, living history, re-enactment aspect of Celtic Warrington.

Mark joined forces with **Virtual-Knutsford** in June 2000 and his work features regularly on the site. The second of Mark's '*Celtic Warrington & Other Mysteries*' volumes, which covers Knutsford and surrounding areas, appears in regular instalments. Find out more at [www.virtual-knutsford.co.uk](http://www.virtual-knutsford.co.uk)

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[www.take27.co.uk/t27cgilt](http://www.take27.co.uk/t27cgilt)

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