

There's something about Down St. Mary ...

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Hunting the dragon

I first visited the church at Down St. Mary during my dragon-hunting phase. I had read Hamish Miller and Paul Broadhurst's seminal work, *The Sun and the Serpent*, but I hadn't yet attended my first dowsing course. So, this was a period when I used Paul and Hamish's book as a travel guide; going to the places mentioned in the book and looking out for the features – often images of serpents or dragons in churches. (Many dowsers consider dragons and serpents to be interchangeable symbols for earth energy lines). After a while, and once I'd learnt a little more about what to look for, I began to branch out – and to go to places that just sounded intriguing but weren't on either the Michael or the Mary lines.

Well, Down St. Mary didn't disappoint. As expected, the church is dedicated to St. Mary the Virgin. There are crosses pattée (as used by the Knights Templar) on some of the gravestones – as well as three deteriorating coloured mosaic gravestones, yew trees, and a wonderful ancient cross in the churchyard. However, before I could marvel at the fifteenth-century carvings on the pew ends inside (a mermaid, a hare, a green man and lots and lots of fish-like dragons), I was stopped in my tracks by the tympanum in the porch (Figure 1). For someone who was hunting dragons, this certainly attracted my attention.



Figure 1. The tympanum in the porch

What did this feature represent? The church booklet said that it was almost certainly Daniel in the Lion's Den. Whoever wrote that clearly hadn't read the information sheet inside the

church (or vice versa), which suggested that it could be St. George slaying the dragon – or maybe it was about the local legend of a ghostly ‘Black Dog’ that ran through the village at night?

No more than a couple of miles away, at Zeal Monachorum, the information folder in the church is definite about it showing the Ascension, Christ’s arrival in Paradise. I tested this theory on Peter Knight and Sue Wallace of Stoneseekers. On seeing a photo, they immediately identified the Flowers of Life and toroids, the spiral shapes of rising energy. You can decide for yourselves which, if any, of these theories explains why the fans are attached around the dragons’ bodies, and why the Saxon-styled person looks so content (Saxon: the tear-shaped face is the giveaway clue).

St George and the Lion

On another visit to Down St. Mary, I saw a house called *St. George’s*. It had been built to the east of the church so that energy lines running up the church aisles and onwards across the countryside would pass through it.

What mystified me most was the astonishing plasterwork frieze on its whitewashed walls and why, in a remote agricultural village, I was looking at a coat of arms showing three lions with human faces. A fourth lion can be seen above the crest. Much later I learned that the row of cottages that includes *St. George’s* was built in 1870 by Rev. WTA Radford who also transformed the neglected church into ‘One of the richest Victorian ensembles in rural Devon’ (Nicholas Pevsner 1952, quoted in Browne) during the 1870s. The name *St. George’s* wasn’t acquired until after the Second World War. Before that, it was simply No. 2 Wisteria Cottages. I can’t help but notice that wisteria has vigorous and serpentine-like growth and that its bloom time is mid-summer.

Underwood in the Underworld

Several months later I had learnt to dowse, joined the Devon Dowzers and the Tamar Dowzers, and read several books. I had also practised dowsing a lot, mostly on my own, and on self-imposed projects loosely based around the theme of Dr Angela Blaen and C.E. Stevens’ independently reached conclusions that mid-Devon was once a large sacred wood. I wondered if I could use my newfound skills to make sense some of what I had seen at Down St. Mary. The following is what I pieced together after a number of visits.

One of the books I had read (and re-read) was Guy Underwood’s *Pattern of the Past*. Underwood is an important, but controversial, figure in Earth Energy Dowsing. He developed a unique and original way of understanding the etheric features in the landscape. More importantly, he was also one of the first to appreciate that different types of energy line have varying and identifiable internal structures and signatures.

It’s funny that it was only after reading Underwood’s book that I noticed that the churchyard was terraced. The east, and higher, end of the churchyard is almost a metre above the pavement, on the other side of the retaining wall. Underwood devoted a whole chapter to such topographical evidence of the geodetic system. This describes various features (which can still be discerned today) that our ancestors dug or built in the landscape

to, let's say, channel, or highlight, or somehow accommodate energy lines. The terrace was one of these features.



Figure 2. Down St. Mary churchyard showing just-discernible terracing, a cross pattée with the octagonal shaft referred to later.

Underwood also identified (in possibly too much technical detail, but I found it interesting anyway) different kinds of energy lines. One type, running together with a water line, he termed 'holy lines'. I wondered what I'd find running along the terraces.

But first I must talk about aquastats. It's the first entry in Billy Gawn's *BSD Glossary of Dowsing Terms*, and it attributes the term to Underwood. Aquastats and water lines are each comprised of different configurations of triads (and each strand of a triad is itself composed of three hairlines of energy flow). On first reading this, I was confused, as all I had come across to that date (Michael, Mary, Apollo, Athena, my own findings and those of other dowsers) were energy lines comprised of bands. Now, it was clear that in Underwood's terminology, we also have different types of energy lines, some comprised of bands – and aquastats and water lines comprised of triads of hairlines. When aquastats and water lines run together, Underwood called them 'holy lines'.

Meanwhile, back on the terraces ...

For what it's worth, my dowsing in 2018 tells me that the terraces at Down St. Mary were dug 3592 years ago, in the Bronze Age. I'm going to deal only with the terraces in the southern churchyard, where the grass is shorter! They don't seem to be aligned with the

terraces in the northern churchyard, where they are almost indiscernible. It could well be that later the Saxons and/or Normans and/or Medieval builders heaped up the earth dug out for the church foundations in the northern churchyard.

On the top, the easternmost terrace, I counted eight aquastats, before blundering into under-and over-growth. One of these had a row of five gravestones aligned on it, under an old and large yew tree marking a blind spring. Those buried there were all members of the Bushell family, who seem to have been the central essence of Down St. Mary during the twentieth century and for some time before that. The church has been cut into this terrace by a little under 1.5 metres. The aquastat that runs up the north aisle emerges from the church here and runs across the top terrace at right angles to the eight aquastats that join it. At one of these junctions, there are two of the coloured mosaic gravestones. Unfortunately, they are too weathered to make out who it was that would have known about this special place.

The second terrace had an aquastat and a water line paired together (holy lines) running across it, and into the church via blind springs (domes of water welling up from deep underground and fanning out before reaching the surface). These holy lines flow roughly where the single altar probably used to be, prior to the construction of extensions to the north and the east in the 1400s. Where the paired holy lines enter the church, there is an airbrick patterned with a 4-petalled flower.

The third terrace is bisected by the church path, which again has been cut into the terrace. East of the path, two pairs of holy lines run across the terrace and into the church via blind springs, each of which is marked by a 4-petalled flower airbrick. There's a water line running up the church path and three aquastats to the west of it.

On the fourth and, as far as I know, final terrace I counted two energy lines before grass cutting stopped play. All the energy lines traversing each the terraces run at right angles to the two energy lines that enter the church at the western end and run up the aisles. To the east of the church, the terrace energy lines join the north aisle aquastat. To the west of the church they cross it. The churchyard wall marks the point where the aquastats and water lines join into pairs of holy lines to traverse the terraces.

An octagonal cross

By now I had noticed that the shaft to the ancient cross in the southern churchyard is octagonal. I've noticed several of them in mid Devon. The shafts are an octagonal geometrical prism, and sometimes the arms of the cross are octagonal geometrical prisms too.

I dowsed four pairs of water lines and aquastats approaching the cross, which marks a blind spring, (one water line and one aquastat in each pair), and four pairs leaving. Actually, each aquastat approaches one of the eight faces of the octagonal geometrical prism in a direct line and the water line via the blind spring spiral, just as Guy Underwood described. I've dowsed four octagonal crosses so far, and all have had this feature. These 'holy lines' do their best to travel from west to east, even performing a 90° turn in Down St Mary's churchyard after leaving the octagonal cross. I've even come across a hairpin bend!

Lynchets

Down St Mary has a couple of lynchets. Lynchets are another of Underwood's ancient (and allegedly) man-made landscape features. They are slopes that highlight the presence of an aquastat traversing the top of the slope, and a water line traversing the bottom. Sometimes they have 'feathers' in them (Figure 3). Both of Down St. Mary's lynchets have a single feather. One lynchet is on your right as you enter the churchyard through the main gate, and one is on the south side of the Green, near the tree. It's reasonable to suppose that the churchyard wall, which was built in early medieval times years later, used the raised mound of the lynchet.

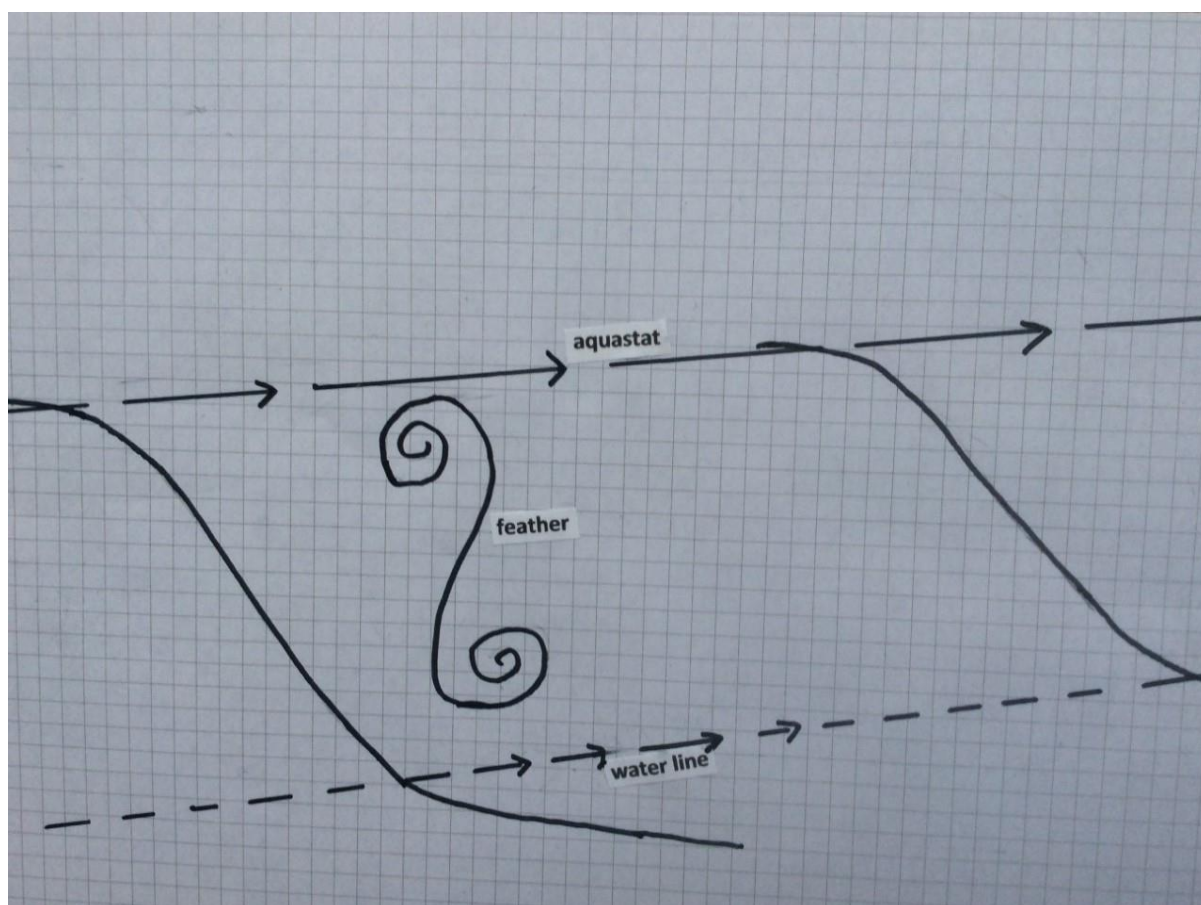


Figure 3. A lynchet with a single feather

Mary and Gaia

One thing was still bothering me. Why was the church dedicated to Mary the Virgin, widely accepted as the Christianised Earth Goddess? Admittedly, I hadn't questioned the gender of all the energy lines in the churchyard, but I knew what ran up the north and south aisles and on through *St. George's*.

By dowsing, I asked to be shown the most significant feature that had led to the church being dedicated to Mary the Virgin. My rods took me through knee-high wet grass along three sides of a rectangle around the church. I later learnt that I was following a water line against the flow. I was led to a gate where a wooden signpost pointed to '*Howard's*

Spinney'. Following the footpath for a short distance, I arrived at a lovely twentieth-century village feature. There was a pond amongst the trees, with a plaque indicating it to be a spring, rather than a 'well' as marked as on the OS 1 : 25000 map. The information board there reminds us how precious water is, to such an extent that our ancestors regarded it as sacred; a gift, issuing from the body of Mother Earth herself.

In 1921 there was such a severe drought in the South West that tree branches were cut down to feed to the cattle; grass fields were scorched, and many village wells ran dry. The information board states that Sid Howard 'discovered' a spring to the west of the church that provided for the village for the rest of the summer. Later, in 1981, his son Alf cleaned up the land that he then owned and planted the spinney for the village.

I feel it's reasonable to assume that our Bronze Age ancestors knew all about this spring. Close by is a blind spring, from where two water lines emerge that encircle the church. The village name, Down St. Mary, means 'hill + church's dedication'. The Virgin Mary has taken on the attributes of the pagan Earth Goddess, the Queen of Heaven – and the landscape historian, Cheryl Straffon, suggests that it is unlikely that early Christianity would have survived without this accommodation of the Earth Goddess. Mary certainly isn't a deity in the Bible.

In 1921 there wasn't much more than a church, a school, a couple of large farms, several cottages and a rectory in the village. What would Christian missionaries have found when they arrived? Pope Gregory's edict of 601 is quoted by most authors wanting to show that the Christianisation of pagan sites is a matter of the historical record. It advises that the pagan temples are to be retained, so that the locals keep attending them, but to erect an altar in each of them to Christianise the sacred sites. The Christian missionaries would surely have found a sacred hill, where the Earth Goddess was honoured for her provision of reliable water. There's also something here about the meeting of Heaven and Earth. I reckon that Yin and Yang, The Virgin Mary and St. George are depicted by the female and the male dragons on the tympanum in the church porch.

What's my line?

Going back to *The Pattern of the Past*, as well as aquastats and waterlines, Underwood describes a feature that he calls 'track lines' – and he says that all old roads are aligned upon them. All three of types of energy lines, he contends, are comprised of triads and hairlines. However, on my dowsing courses, and amongst the dowsing community in Devon and Cornwall, most people were talking about energy **bands**. Underwood settled in Stratford-on-Avon and seems to have dowsed in Wiltshire and the area around Bath, amongst other places. I was very confused when I first read his book (first published in 1969), because the energy lines he examined didn't match what I thought I knew.

I've done a lot of walking the lanes in mid Devon and, on one occasion, I wondered if I had company. Lo and behold, I discovered that an energy line runs along every Devon lane that I've since dowsed, just as Underwood stated. Except that, for me, in Devon these lines are comprised of bands, and Underwood seems to have encountered track lines comprised of triads and hairlines. On one occasion, I dowsed that the sort of energy lines I was following

along the old Devon lanes only occurred in the UK in Devon and Cornwall, although they also crop up in Europe, Asia and the Americas.

There is always an even number of bands, because they are always half Yin and half Yang. Once I got over my state of blank confusion, I found myself calling these lines 'dual gender'. Yin is always on Yang's right-hand side, just like country dancing!

I can't claim to have undertaken a systematic nationwide survey of energy lines, nor to have dowsed overseas, but the working theory described above has, so far, stood up to scrutiny. I find that Underwood's track lines do occur in Devon, and I have found all four types together on one occasion.

So, running up the South aisle in Down St. Mary church is a dual-gender line. One band of Yin, one band of Yang. Just in front of the current rood screen each band splits. One strand continues to the altar and the other is drawn a little northward to contribute to a toroid (a kind of spiral within a spiral tube shape, beloved of modern physicists and sacred geomancers), before re-joining again. The centre of the toroid is currently marked by an enigmatically carved chair, but it would be reasonable to suppose that it used to be in front of the altar of both the Saxon and the Norman church. The *BSD Glossary* says that toroids are often found at ancient sites, particularly henges. My view is that this is the feature referred to on the Saxon tympanum in the porch. Male and female dragons are depicted with rising energy tethered to their waists to transport them heavenwards.

I would be delighted to receive feedback on any of the issues raised by this article and especially any findings, corroboratory or otherwise, by other dowsers.

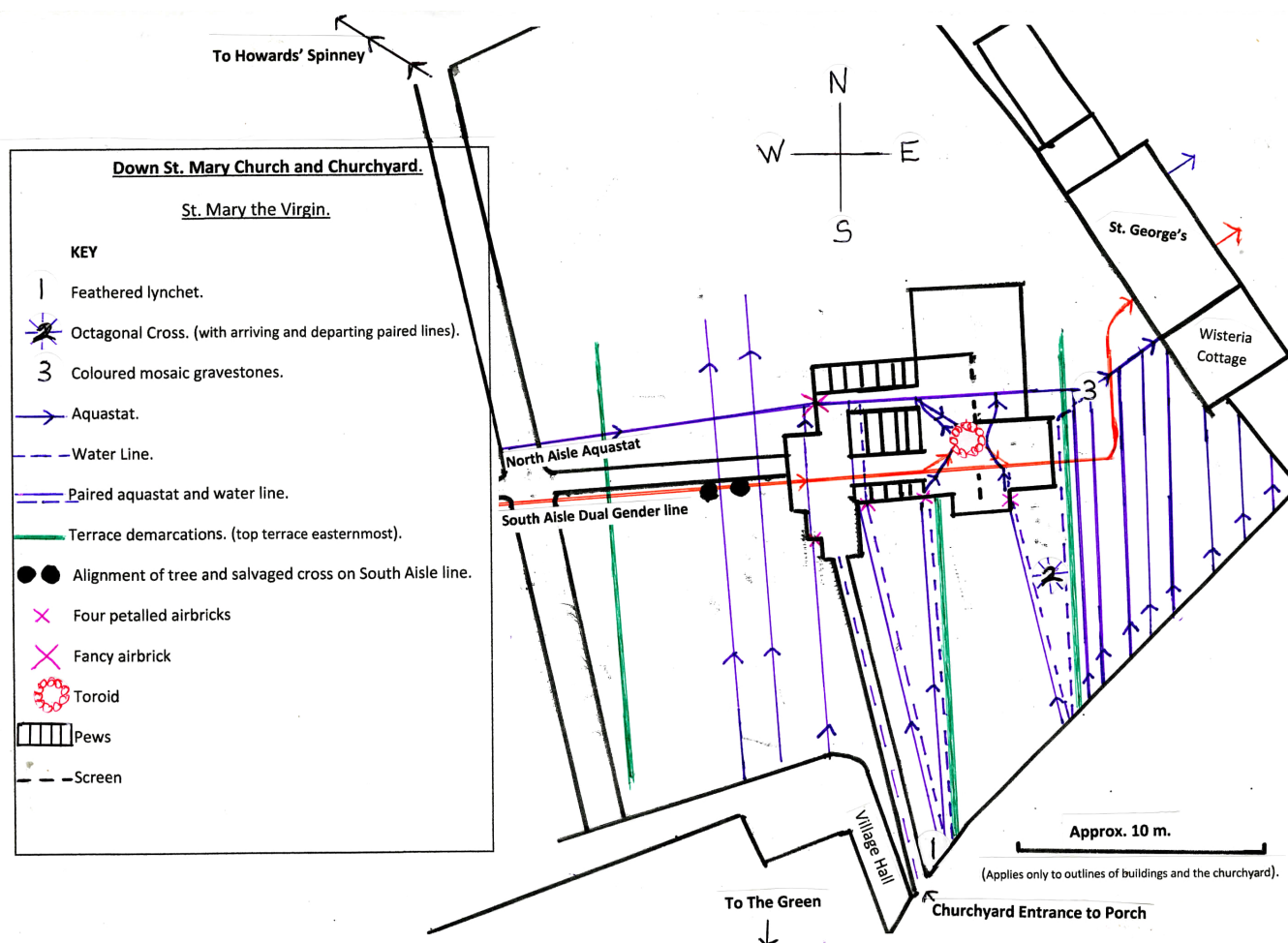


Figure 4. The plan of DSM churchyard I dowsed.

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