

Polyfaceted Penhallam

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Penhallam

Some places exude demonstrable history, while others are imbued with a more esoteric essence of the past. The ruined former Manor House at Penhallam, just south of Bude in North East Cornwall, has more than a modicum of both. It is therefore an excellent location for both novice dowsers and their more experienced colleagues to integrate with intent.

On a day that threatened us with a downpour but, in the end, only managed a little dampness, a dozen Devon Dowzers and half a dozen compatriots from the Tamar Dowzers set about experiencing and/or analysing the remnants and the remanences of this intriguing site.

The continuing presence of a full foundation floor plan certainly gave those starting out on their journey a good template to work on - and we all had a crack at working out which skeletal 'rooms' were used for which purposes. Some of us resorted to the English Heritage display board more quickly than others.

Locating, and making sense of, the long-lost foul water drainage system was a good practical dowsing exercise, as was finding the staircases to the missing upper floors. Having established both the stone staircase used by the De Cardinham and the

servants' wooden escalier, it was felt that someone had incurred a serious injury on the latter. There were no lost souls on the site, but the memory of the accident still hung in the ether, to be picked up by some of us several centuries later.

I was asked if I could confirm the location of the on-site stables, already dowsed by others. I chose to try to do so by finding a horse and following it. Lesson one: choose the right horse. My first spiritual guide was a feral horse, which didn't use a stable at all. Clang! My second psychic steed was certainly something to do with the house, but was stabled off-site. Eventually I resorted to finding the stables in the conventional manner, and ended up round the back of the buildings with everyone else, in a formerly wooden-roofed lean to - long since consumed by grass and soil.

Examining the domestic well is always a sound example of practical dowsing in action. Some of us had the depth of water left in the well at around 10ft below the surface - and cited the water level in the residual moat as supporting evidence. Several others had the water level at around 25ft. Only later in the afternoon did it occur to me that the surface of the water could be the former, with the bottom of the water column the latter. Dowsing the crossing water flows cut through by the well, did indeed indicate them to be around 10ft and 25ft respectively - or, of course, I could have made that up to fit my thesis. Feel free to check next time - or indeed from home!

In the tiny, but still consecrated, chapel of the house, we found a flurry of water and energy patterns, including a 'new' line of consciousness. This appeared to run from horizon to horizon, from Ashbury 'hill fort' in the east, through the manor and its chapel, to a hilltop to the west. As it dowsed as being a line of sight, did that mean it pre-dated the manor?

This led on to examining the previous residential use of the site, which dated back to the late Bronze Age. A small menhir dowsed as previously having stood on the crossing point of earth energies in what later became the chapel. Apparently, it was felled in the eighth century, not by evangelistic early Christians, but by stonecutters. It may indeed still exist, a couple of miles away, now employed as a gatepost. A good map dowsing exercise for another day!

Another, much larger, standing stone used to stand where the courtyard of the Manor House was later constructed. A rod poked in the ground to mark the spot ended up marking the dead centre of the only ley to cross the site. It's nice to get a bit of corroboratory evidence now and then.

On our previous visit, in the (rather small) Great Hall, we had found one of those beautiful earth energy propeller-shaped features that seem to occur quite often in chambered tombs and passage graves. They are like infinity signs (lemniscates in Greek), which rotate on their axes. In Brittany, we had found (or thought we had found) two lemniscates rotating in opposite directions, one within the other, which seemed a pretty complicated arrangement.

However, at Penhallam the 'propeller' appeared not only to rotate, but to move from place to place, with each focal point joining to form the pattern of a 'higher-level' propeller. An ellipse, drawn around the outside of this pattern would be fully contained within the walls of the old hall. Apparently, the builders of Penhallam Manor House

had been aware of these energies (and hence the location of the Great Hall), but not of the detail of the pattern - so maybe we really are rediscovering ancient lost knowledge, after all.

Given that this feature is probably also a complex three-dimensional image, you would need a pretty advanced Spirograph-type computer programme to see it with any clarity. I wasn't sure if we have moved our own intuition on to a new level or whether, metaphorically, we are trying to understand the shape of the elephant by grabbing its tail! Answers on a postcard, please.

While sites such as this don't change much, we do. Each time you visit a place like Penhallam, with its multiple layers of history, and feature within feature of earth energy, you find something new - because you have renewed yourself; you have become someone subtly different; older, arguably wiser and unavoidably more experienced.

Once again, it was good to see the members of our two groups naturally finding common ground, and choosing to mix and mingle.

Many thanks to Colin Wilson for setting up this event - and, of course, to our friends at English Heritage for maintaining and providing access to the site.