

Did Julius Caesar cross my Lawn?

## **A talk at North Hill Village Hall by Gwynn Paulett**

*Nigel Twinn – Tamar Dowsers (February 2018)*

There are many ways of getting your message across. Most of us choose our topic, and then build some sort of presentation around it. But this is just one modern, business-like approach – functional, logical and straightforward – safe, if a bit predictable. Long before we administrators took centre stage, the oral tradition of our ancestors was another, more vibrant, method of telling a story. In this case it was a clutch of connected stories – with threads of the dowser's personal experience running through them.

One thread is that we all learn from stories, either through mistakes that have been made by others, or by trying something that is new to us. Another is in collecting the crumbs of validation, especially when dowsing the intangible.

Gwynn Paulett has dowsed for many years, but has only recently returned to his west-country roots. Much of his previous practical work was undertaken in Kent, where he lived and worked, and also on the farm of a friend in North Dakota, USA. Dowsers come in all shapes and guises – and this Harley-riding retired teacher is yet another memorable member of the great divining menagerie.

The title of the talk arose through the desire of one of his Kentish friends to find out if Roman Legionaries really had crossed his lawn, deep in the south-eastern farmlands of our island, and just around the corner from the famous white cliffs. Caesar himself, a fellow writer, recorded that they had landed on the vast shingle beaches around what is now the seaside town of Deal, and marched from there, intending to confront the Britons, who were massed around modern-day Dover.

Gwynn's dowsing indicated that they had in fact landed in two places – once opposite the Stag Inn at Walmer in 55BC, and then again near the Sea View fish and chip shop in 54BC. Proto-Italians with trademark good taste, clearly.

Following the first landing, they had trekked westwards and inland, with the aim of taking up positions on the High Weald and the South Downs. However, gales destroyed many of the Roman vessels, and they were forced to return to 'Deal' to sort that out. In the process, half a cohort (precisely 240 men) did indeed march through the land of Gwynn's friend – but no, the soon-to-be-Emperor didn't actually cross the dowsing site himself. But hey, it was a much better talk title than 'Julius Caesar didn't cross my lawn'!

Another of Gwynn's south-eastern tales concerned the discovery of two 'lost' tunnels. One, between a castle and its nearby dower-house, was probably built as a potential escape route in the late 1600s, and was still complete with an extant staircase at one end. The other, Gwynn initially failed to find at the castle end, because he was looking for a tunnel, which had been partially back-filled for quite a few metres, and was therefore technically no longer a tunnel at all at that point. Lesson – be specific with your questioning!

He also showed a remarkable image of the well at Lidwell, again in Kent. Here, although he successfully dowsed the location of the well, he was unable to see into it due to a total lack of light. As something of an afterthought, he took a flash photo that, quite unexpectedly, revealed image of an elegantly constructed shaft of considerable depth. Intriguingly, deep down on the sides of the well walling are several tiny protrusions, which look at first to be some kind of fern. In the relentless blackness, this would be somewhat surprising – and when the image is magnified, they appear to resemble little figures. After the talk, there was much discussion about whether they might actually be nature spirits of some kind – but would such ethereal entities really allow themselves to be caught on camera?

Gwynn's work on his friend's farm in North Dakota is also worth a mention. It started conventionally enough with a search for a water source for fields of beans and maize. In time-honoured fashion, he duly found a suitable spot and marked it up. Some time later, a local driller was brought in, who scoffed at the ideas of an English dowser – only to be proved quite wrong, after several failed attempts at sinking a borehole based on logic rather than intuition. The source that Gwynn had originally indicated turned out to be suitable and reliable.

The dowsing activity there culminated in his friend finding three associated crop circles on his land. These were quite modest compared to the increasingly extravagant manifestations found in the UK and elsewhere, but definitive circles in long grass nonetheless. After the usual chain of questioning, Gwynn was given to believe that these had been the marks left by an alien craft, which had come to visit us to 'gain information'. Even by the standards of North American stories of the extra-terrestrial, this was quite a remarkable piece of revelation by dowsing.

His final tale concerned the loss of one of his dowsing rods during an archaeological research session at Berry Castle near Torrington, which involved both Gwynn and myself. It wasn't the first time that he had mislaid one of his tools but, as I was working with Christopher Strong at that time – and CS feels that lost objects are often indicators of hidden messages – I suggested that maybe there might well be a message for Gwynn to recover before the rod could be located. As it turned out, the message was not to leave the county that coming weekend, even though he had already booked and paid to be elsewhere. Being true to his dowsing, he duly stayed in Devon, and instead visited a close relative – for what turned out to be the final occasion. A lost rod was a small price to pay for such a precious payback. Lesson – always trust your dowsing answers, even if there is no logical reason to do so.

It was quite apparent that these were just a selected few cameos out of a considerable catalogue of interesting anecdotes and insights – and I am sure we will be hearing more from him in due course.

Many thanks to Gwynn for coming over from Dawlish to be with us – and we look forward to working with him, and with his colleagues, later in the year.