

Mars Cocidius and the Redcaps in Lancashire .

I come from one of the old Lancashire families who for many centuries served as retainers of the Stanley Earls of Derby, Kings of Mann & the Isles. My mother's family came from Westmorland and as Hall's were members of the notorious reiving family that for centuries cut a bloody swathe through the borders. The Halls passed on a tradition of folk worship and witchcraft to myself and my cousins , and during the early 1980's I learned a form of "Spae" from my Aunt (my mothers elder sister). Who had learned it from her grandfather Tom Hall of Winton a Westmorland horsebreaker (on Stainmoor where Eric Bloodaxe Last Pagan King of York died in battle in 954).



Tom halls ancestor Anthony Hall of Ellershaw was hung with 100 of his men at Berwick Assizes in 1598 by Lord Henry Scope Warden of the West March after the Redesdale hunting incident. The families survivors were driven out of Redesdale but were granted land and sanctuary in Westmorland by Sir Richard Lowther Sheriff of Cumberland who had no love for Scrope. Lancashire and Westmorland were colonised by Norse settlers during the 9th Century, they established The Kingdom of Mann and the Isles and the West Derby Hundred where my father's family have lived for more than 20 generations.

In 901 the Gallgael Earl Ingimund landed on the Wirral with eighteen Longships and took possession of the Land having been granted it by Ethelflaeda Queen of the Mercians. The Gallgael were the half Norse and half Irish occupants of Dublin who had been driven out by Harold Finehair, King of the newly unified Norway. The Gallgael went on to establish the Kingdom of Mann and the Isles and the Hundred of West Derby. My own family name is Norse in origin as indeed are many of the South Lancashire family names and almost all the place names. Lancashire also has a strong Celtic and Roman heritage. Lancashire with Cumberland, Westmorland and West Yorkshire formed the Kingdom of Brigantia. The Brigantes a Spanish Celtic tribe arrived during the Iron-Age via Ireland; where Brigantes remained in the province of Ulster (the Sedantes to which Chuhullain belonged were a sept of the Brigantes). Later during the Roman period Lancashire was part of the Military Province of Britannia Inferior governed from York by the commander of the VIth Victrix Legion based at the city of York. Diocletian later broke Britannia Inferior into two parts and created the Province Later named Valentia (Modern Lancashire, Cumberland, Westmorland and Galloway). It was a military Province with its main garrisons at Lugovalium (Carlisle) and, Bremetenacum Veteranorum (Ribchester) in Lancashire. Marcus Aurelius (around the year 175) had settled a permanent garrison of eleven cohorts (11 x 500 men) of **Sarmatian** cataphracts (i.e. Persian style heavy cavalry) at Ribchester, these were the Numerus Equitum Sarmatorum under the command of a Consularis Singularis or officer of the Consul (the Provincial Governor). These according to the Notitia Dignitatum had remained in place even after 450. Ribchester was also one of the towns where veteran legionaries were regularly settled on demobilisation, and became a centre for the breeding of cavalry horses. Contrary to

popular myth not all Roman troops were withdrawn in 410. Only the Comitenses or mobile field army was withdrawn, the standing garrisons or Limitanei (at Ribchester & Carlisle) remained in place as did the Foederati or military allies placed at strategic places in the Empire in the case of Valentia the troops of Manau Goddodin in Lothian (from whence Cunedda was sent to retake North Wales in the 5th Century), German Tungrian troops on the “Wall” near Carlisle, and a Cohort of Aelian Sailors at Ravenglass (Cumberland). The Notitia Dignitatum specifically lists a large array of Comitenses forces available to both the count of Britain and the Count of the Saxon Shore in about 450, so either not all the forces were withdrawn in 410, or they had been replaced by 450. It is worth noting that Bishop Germanus who visited Britain twice in the mid 5th Century was a military Count before being elected as a Bishop and may well have brought an army with him. The Province of Valentia was later the Romano-British Kingdom of Rheged which persisted until it was overthrown by the Norse Kings of York. Modern research of inscriptions (of which more than 8,000 remain) and surviving texts has shown that the extent and quality of Latin literacy in Western and Northern Britain was higher than anywhere else in the Empire even Rome at this time. This coupled with evidence of extensive re-building in the cities during the 5th and 6th centuries implies that far from declining Romano-British culture was undergoing a renaissance during this period.

The main deities of Brigantia/Rheged were naturally enough Brigantia (Brigit) and Cocidius (Goch in modern Welsh i.e. the red one). Cocidius was a god of hunting and the forest who had a cult centre at Bewcastle in Cumberland. At Bewcastle or “Fanum Cocidi” *the Temple of Cocidius* there was both a fort and a temple. The strong Roman military presence soon became a part of the local mix and Cocidius quickly became associated with Mars (& also Silvanus – the son of Mars) as “Mars Cocidius” who was widely worshiped by the civil and military population alike. The Roman military had a tradition (for the most part, Jews and Druids aside) of respecting the “Genius Loci” (local gods), since like all soldiers they needed as much luck as they could get.



So they took on the local cult but gave it a Roman gloss.

My private worship has for some years been reserved for the Roman/Etruscan trinity of Laran (Mars), Turan (Venus) and Lupercus (Faunus sometimes called Silvanus). This came about as the result of a strange chain of events. I had already made a study of Roman Domestic Pagan worship (the cult of the Lars Familiaris – or *familiar spirits*) and the survival in Northern Britain of the folk veneration of the spirits of the hearth and the ancestors. Particularly “house familiars” brownies, boggarts and redcaps. This convinced me that Romano-British forms of domestic worship had persisted into modern times in a modified form. Where the beneficial **Lars Familiaris** (which represent the families honoured ancestors) are replaced by

the ‘*Brownies*’; these are left offerings to promote luck. While the restless and unhappy dead the **Lemures** are replaced by the ‘*Redcaps*’ and require an equally earnest propitiation to ward off evil.

Boggart

The Boggart is most commonly found in the counties of Yorkshire and Lancashire, its name appears in places such as Boggart's Clough and Boggart's Hole in Lancashire.

Boggarts were mischievous spirits responsible for mishaps and poltergeist activity within the home and in the countryside. They would rearrange furniture, break pots and generally be blamed for ‘things that go bump in the night’.

They were often found attached to families and could be helpful within the household until they were insulted in some way. Boggarts had the ability to shape-shift, and sometimes appeared in the form of animals. If offerings were left out for them they would not cause trouble.

The supposed ghosts of people were also called Boggarts, and the word may have been used to explain any strange phenomena in the past. An outbreak of poltergeist activity on a farm above Oldham in Lancashire was attributed to a Boggart and there are several such stories, some of which we will outline in the future.

Red Caps, Dunters & Powries



The Red Cap is one of the most dangerous supernatural creatures said to haunt the castles and watchtowers of the border regions.

In appearance they are short and wiry, with ragged pointed teeth and sharp claws like steel. They wear a red bonnet on their heads, and are generally bearded with wrinkled aged faces.

Brownies

A widespread name for a fairy or supernatural creature, they were small in appearance and wore brown coloured clothing.

Like many mischievous spirits they were thought to be attached to houses or families and could be helpful in menial household tasks. If offended they became malignant and mischievous, creating poltergeist activity and generally making a nuisance of themselves.

To get rid of brownies all you had to do is leave them a new cloak and hood, they would take it and never be seen again.

The brownies were found in both England and Scotland as far as the Shetland Isles.

The Red Caps are murderous, and kill by rolling boulders or tearing at people with their sharp claws. They then proceed to drink the blood of their victims and dip their hats in the blood, giving rise to the name of Red Caps.

In particular they haunt castles with a reputation for evil events in the past. In the folklore and legend of [Hermitage Castle](#) in Roxburghshire Bad Lord Soulis, a man with an evil reputation is said to have had a Red Cap as a familiar.

Powries are virtually indistinguishable from the red caps, as are the Dunters, who haunt castles with the constant sound of beating flax. It has been suggested that these spirits are the memories of foundation sacrifices, a custom that was practised within written history. See [Church Grim](#)

The above are from “Folklore of the British Isles”
<http://www.mysteriousbritain.co.uk/folklore/boggarts.html>



Typical story book elf – note the green & red livery and the red *Phrygian* style cap.

About five years ago an antique dealer I know told me of another dealer, who was looking to sell a mixed bag of “antiquities” a metal detectorist had unearthed from a ploughed field in the vicinity of York. I went and had a look most of the items were poor quality medieval detritus eg broken buckles poor quality coins etc. However there were a few good 2nd Century Roman coins and one very nice 3 inch bronze of Mars (Laran) in the Etruscan style. The dealer was a notorious operator often selling overpriced rubbish to the unwary. However he clearly didn’t recognise the bronze so I was able to buy it for £18 (about \$32) believing it likely to be an 18th Century copy of an Italian original. Later I had the bronze checked at the British Museum to find out it was a 2,400 year old original. Therefore it was a genuine Etruscan votive image of



Laran (Mars). This image would have been the family Lar of a Tuscan family in Iron Age Italy before coming to Britain in the rucksack of a Roman Legionary perhaps a member of the VIth Victrix Legion based at York. How the bronze came to be lost I will never know but the loss would have been appalling to its owner. The Lar represented the spirit of the ancestors of an entire family and the families luck and prosperity resided in it. Such an ancient Lar could only have belonged to an old family and it would have been passed from one head of household (Paterfamilias) to the next for centuries. The loss of this would have been a disaster to both the individual and his whole family.

That the only Etruscan votive of Laran to be found in Britain that I have heard of came into my hands is in itself surprising; but this coincidence was just the first of many. The Etruscan deity Laran (also called Maris – later Mars) was one of a pair of deities, twins. Laran’s twin was Tages. According to legend Laran had the head & neck of a swan in childhood before assuming human shape at maturity, and Tages the wings of a swan. Laran was a deity of protection, the protector of the flocks and the community, a god of divination and of agriculture and fertility. He was above all a god of the countryside in this form he was often named and represented as Picus the red capped green woodpecker (*Picus viridis*). With his sister Turan he was the father of Faunus the god of the wild forest. Faunus also called Silvanus is of course the patron of the hunt and as Lupercus takes the form of a wolf. Tages was sent to earth

where he arose from the soil being ploughed by the Etruscan Swineherd Tarchon, in the form of a small boy. The divine child taught Tarchon the arts of haruspicy and augury (divination) before dying and ascending to the heavens. Tarchon went on to found the city and Royal line of Tarquinia (and therefore of Rome too), and the College of Augurs who thereafter carried the crooked staff (Lituus) of a swineherd as a symbol of office. The Lituus also mimics the shape of a swans head and neck (this is



not coincidental!). The staff was used to mark out the area of sky used in the process of augury and to mark out the “Templum” on the ground where the augur carried out his rites. The Lituus was later adopted by Christian Bishops. It is therefore most appropriate that the votive of Laran was unearthed in a ploughed field. When it came into my hands it was still covered in brown clay. As noted earlier Mars as god of the countryside is represented as the green woodpecker (*Picus* – Puck? c.f. pook, bwca, boggart, buggane and all the other variants) and therefore wears the livery



common to most of the little people in folklore. At the risk of being accused of wild speculation it is worth noting that Cocidius (Goch in modern Welsh) means red and would have been rendered **pock** or **poock** in many of the British “P Celtic” dialects (in which g’s & c’s at the beginning of words are commonly exchanged for by p’s or b’s). Such a similarity in the name, appearance and function of the two deities would not have gone unnoticed by the Romans for whom portents were very significant. This may go some way to explain the enthusiasm with which the Roman soldiers appear to adopted Mars Cocidius’s cult.

I come from a traditional pagan family, from a district whose tutelary deity was Mars Cocidius (*Mars the Red*) and where the familiar spirits and the redcaps are still left offerings. As a Warden & Ranger I was for many years responsible for the breeding and conservation of swans and geese many thousands of which winter in the district. For this reason I have a number of crooks including a good swanhook I commissioned more than ten years ago from a local stick-maker and a small fowlhook (or chickenhook) which is in fact my favourite. This was used daily for many years in my work, for catching ducks and as a means of protection on dark nights. I am also a practitioner of Spae (a form of augury) and have always used these crooks in place of the more familiar stang, as do many pagans locally. So like the Romans before me I took cognizance of the portents and have adopted Laran as my personal Lar and pay appropriate reverences not only to my own ancestors, but also to those of my benefactor the bronze’s former owner, on his behalf.



My traditional craft tools.



Branwen my pet carrion crow

What follows below is un-edited material from other sources I fear it does not paint My mother's family in a very favourable light, but they were violent times.

Hall. English and Scottish. At one time the most powerful in Redesdale they were hated and feared on both sides. In 1598 in an incident the Scottish Halls and the Rutherfords were allegedly singled out by English officers as two surnames to whom no quarter should be given.

The Hall's were one of the sixty (60) major riding families of the Anglo-Scottish border and were involved in reiving as other border clans were. During one of the 'Day of Truce' occasions, a Robert Spragon 'fyled' a complaint against two Halls that had rustled 120 sheep. The traditional homes of the Hall's were at Redesdale in England; East Teviotdale, and Liddesdale, in Scotland. Some notables in the Scottish East March were: John Hall of Newbigging; George Hall (called Pats Geordie there; Andrew Hall of the Sykes, and Thom Hall in Fowlscheils. Other Hall's lived in Aynstrother; Glenryg, in the barony of Lesmahagow; Garvald; Irvide; Glasgow; Sancharmvr, in Preswick; and Perth.

The village of Otterburn, known for the famous battle and border ballad of the same name, contains an old Pele tower that was owned at one time by the Umfravilles. The property passed into the possession of the Hall family. A Hall by the name of 'Mad Jack Hall' lived here and was also hung at Tyburn for his participation in the Rebellion .

The border ballad 'The Death of Parcy Reed' describes an incident that involved the 'fause hearted Hall's of Girsonfield'.

The Murder of Parcy Reed

Parcy Reed was the Warden of the Middle March for the English and was a popular figure. He had offended the Hall family in some manner. They pretended friendship for Parcy Reed and awaited their revenge. Reed had taken as prisoner a man named Crozier who also was determined to get revenge. The two families conspired to catch him in a trap. The Halls invited Reed to go hunting. At the end of the hunt, as prearranged, they stopped at a hut in a lonely glen. The Halls poured water into Reed's gunpowder. The Croziers were advancing toward the men and the Halls pretended alarm and fled leaving Reed without any defense. Reed was killed by the Croziers. Because of this treachery the Croziers were driven out of Redesdale. Likewise, the Halls were forced to leave and their name became a byword for treachery. The Borderers valued loyalty above all else and scorned treachery.

"The Death of Parcy Reed"

Border Ballad

God send the land deliverance
Frae every reaving, riding Scot;
We'll sune hae neither cow nor ewe,
We'll sune hae neither staig nor stot.

The outlaws come frae Liddesdale,
They herry Redesdale far and near;
The rich man's gelding it maun gang,
They canna pass the puir man's mear.

Sure it were weel, had ilka thief
Around his neck a halter strang;
And curses heavy may they light
On traitors vile ousrels amang!

No w Parcy Reed has Crosier ta'en,
He has deliverd him to the law;
But Crosier says he'll do waur than that,
He'll make the tower o' Troughend fa'.

And Crosier says he will do waur,
He will do waur if waur can be;
He'll make the bairns a' fatherless,
And then, the land it may lie lee.

'To the hunting, ho!' cried Parcy Reed,
'The morning sun is on the dew;

The cauler breeze frae off the fells
Will lead the dogs to the quarry true.

'To the hunting, ho!' cried Parcy Reed,
And to the hunting he has gane;
And the three fause Ha's o' Girsonfield
Alang wi' him he has them ta'en.

They hunted high, they hunted low,
By heathery hill and birken shaw;
They rashed a buck on Roken Edge,
And blew the mort at fair Ealylawe.

They hunted high, they hunted low,
They made the echoes ring amain;
With music sweet o' horn and hound,
They merry made fair Redesdale glen.

They hunted high, they hunted low,
The hunted up, they hunted down,
Until the day was past the prime,
And it grew late in the afternoon.

They hunted high in Batinghope,
When as the sun was sinking low;
Says Parcy then, 'Ca' off the dogs,
We'll bait our steeds and homeward go.'

They lighted high in Batinghope,
Atween the brown and benty ground;
They had but rested a little while
Till Parcy Reed was sleeping sound.

There's nane may lean on a rotten staff,
But him that risks to get a fa';
There's nane may in a traitor trust,
And traitors black were every Ha'.

They've stown the bridle off his steed,
And they've put water in his lang gun;
They've fixed his sword within the sheath
That out again it winna come.

'Awaken ye, waken ye, Parcy Reed,
Or by your enemies be ta'en;
For yonder are the five Crosiers
A-coming owre the Hingin-stane!'

'If they be five, and we be four,
Sae that ye stand alang wi' me,
Then every man ye will take one,
And only leave but two to me:
We will them meet as brave men ought,
And make them either fight or flee.'

'We mayna stand, we canna stand,
We daurna stand alang wi' thee;
The Crosiers haud thee at a feud,
And they wad kill baith thee and we.'

'O turn thee, turn thee, Johnie Ha',
O turn thee, man, and fight wi' me;
When ye come to Troughend again,
My gude black naig I will gie thee;
He cost full twenty pound o' gowd,

Atween my brother John and me.'

'I mayna turn, I canna turn,
I daurna turn and fight wi' thee;
The Crosiers haud thee at a feud,
And they wad kill baith thee and me.'

'O turn thee, turn thee, Willie Ha',
O turn thee, man, and fight wi' me;
When ye come to Troughend again,
A yoke o' owsen I'll gie thee.'

'I mayna turn, I canna turn,
I daurna turn and fight wi' thee;
The Crosiers haud thee at a feud,
And they wad kill baith thee and me.'

'O turn thee, turn thee, Tommy Ha',
O turn now, man, and fight wi' me;
If ever we come to Troughend again,
My daughter Jean I'll gie to thee.'

'I mayna turn, I canna turn,
I daurna turn and fight wi' thee;
The Crosiers haud thee at a feud,
And they wad kill baith thee and me.'

'O shame upon ye, traitors a'
I wish your hames ye may never see;
Ye've stown the bridle off my naig,
And I can neither fight nor flee.

'Ye've stown the bridle off my naig,
And ye've put water i' my lang gun;
Ye've fixed my sword within the sheath
That out again it winna come.'

He had but time to cross himsel',
A prayer he hadnna time to say,
Till round him came the Crosiers keen,
All riding graith'd and in array.

'Weel met, weel met, now Parcy Reed,
Thou art the very man we sought;
Owre lang hae we been in your debt,
No w will we pay you as we ought.

'We'll pay thee at the nearest tree,
Where we shall hang thee like a hound;'
Brave Parcy rais'd his fankit sword,
And fell'd the foremost to the ground.

Alake, and wae for Parcy Reed!
Alake, he was an unarmed man!
Four weapons pierced him all at once,
As they assail'd him there and than.

They fell upon him all at once,
They mangled him most cruellie,
The slightest wound might caused is deid,
And they hae gi'en him thirty-three;
They hackit off his hands and feet,
And left him lying on the lee.

'Now, Parcy Reed, we've paid our debt,

Ye canna weel dispute the tale,'
The Crosiers said, and off they rade
They rade the airt o' Liddesdale.

It was the hour o' gloaming gray,
When herds come in frae fauld and pen.
A herd he saw a huntsman lie,
Says he, 'Can this be Laird Troughen?'

'There's some will ca' me Parcy Reed,
And some will ca' me Laird Troughen;
It's little matter what they ca' me,
My faes hae made me ill to ken.

'There's some will ca' me Parcy Reed,
And speak my praise in tower and town;
It's little matter what they do now,
My life-blood rudds the heather brown.

'There's some will ca' me Parcy Reed,
And a' my virtues say and sing;
I would much rather have just now
A draught o' water frae the spring'

The herd flung off his clouted shoon
And to the nearest fountain ran;
He made his bonnet serve a cup,
And wan the blessing o' the dying man.

'Now, honest herd, ye maun do mair,
Ye maun do mair, as I you tell;
Ye maun bear tidings to Troughend,
And bear likewise my last farewell.

'A farewell to my wedded wife,
A farewell to my brother John,
Wha sits into the Troughend tower
Wi' heart as black as any stone.

'A farewell to my daughter Jean,
A farewell to my young sons five;
Had they been at their father's hand,
I had this night been man alive.

'A farewell to my followers a',
And a' my neighbors gude at need;
Bid them think how the treacherous Ha's
Betrayed the life o' Parcy Reed.

'The laird o' Clennel bears my bow,
The laird o' Brandon bears my brand;
When'er they ride i' the Border-side,
They'll mind the fate o' the laird Troughend.'