

# Lost Treasures

No.2 - Sacred Saints and Cave Chambers - 18<sup>th</sup> August 2005

***Welcome** to this exciting new six part 'adventure archaeology' series presented by antiquarian Mark Olly.*



***The North West has one of the richest histories in Britain but archaeologists have only just scratched the surface.***

***Mark went out and about in search of some of the North West's most intriguing lost treasures, legendary heroes and hidden history. Discovering how ordinary people frequently unearth lost treasures right on their own doorstep and demonstrating how anyone can help in solving some of the most puzzling mysteries in history by applying basic detective skills and commonsense.***



*"I call it adventure archaeology because you never know what you're going to turn up!"*

*Mark Olly*

### Sacred Saints & Cave Chambers

In programme two Mark finds out how the tiny village of [Llanarmon yn Ial](#) in North Wales holds some of the most exciting archaeological discoveries in Britain including a prehistoric flint factory, a mysterious cave chamber and new evidence about the legendary hero figure of St. Garmon.

Nearly 2,000 years ago North Wales became one of the last strongholds for fierce British tribes who, together with the mountainous terrain, tested even the might of the Roman military machine. There is also evidence of early humans which goes much further back into prehistoric times giving this part of Wales one of the richest concentrations of ancient sites in Britain.

Most archaeologists wait a lifetime to find a location that offers such a range of lost treasures and Mark found just such a place three years ago.

[Llanarmon yn Ial](#) is hidden away in the Clwyddian hills, 20 miles from the Roman fortress town of Chester and five miles from the castle town of Ruthin; a beautiful and relatively undiscovered part of Britain full of stunning vistas and hidden history, yet this seemingly sleepy village hides a history from the Ice Age to a 1953 bomber crash site.

Like most ancient villages, life originally centred on the church and the time honoured traditions of birth, marriage and death. The village church itself dates from medieval times but there are indications that the site is much older. The 15<sup>th</sup> century church was built on a mound and it was common practice in England to build churches on the old sacred sites of burial mounds. The Welsh were more respectful of their ancestor's burial places but after the crushing of Owen Glyndwr's leadership the English Lords may well have decided to site the church on the mound.

Llanarmon actually means the '[Church of St Garmon](#)', a Welsh saint who founded a settlement and preached in the village sometime in the 5th century.



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Eighty-year old retired church warden, **Rupert Lloyd** has lived in Llanarmon for more than 40 years and agreed to show Mark around and revealed a magnificent medieval candelabra, which had originally hung in the nearby **Valle Crucis Abbey**, narrowly having escaped destruction after King Henry VIII had dissolved the monasteries in 1536. Rupert reckons that the solid bronze candelabra is one of three, the other two are located at St. Michael's Mount, right down in the South West of England and Mont Saint Michel in France.

The stone effigies of a knight and a bishop had also been rescued from Valle Crucis and now lay at rest in the church, the knight appears to have been a crusader who had been part of the fighting in the Holy Land. *If the knight has his hand upon his sword hilt that means that the knight has seen action.* They may have been related to Sir Evan Lloyd, Treasurer to Charles I, whose family was associated with Llanarmon and who built an elaborate tomb to remember their dead.

The church of Llanarmon held one last surprise. A silver communion dish, which had offered the sacrament to generations of churchgoers.

This was a beautiful gift from the daughter of Sir Evan Lloyd and is dated from around 1600.

Another vital resource for uncovering history and archaeology in places like Llanarmon is... yes... you've guessed it - the local pub!

Built in 1722 the **Raven Inn** has been plying its trade and still functions as the heart of the village. Landlady Jan helped Mark to unravel the history of the Raven, originally one of 11 inns built alongside a busy drover's route. The local postman shot a Raven, had it stuffed and presented it to the inn, which then changed its name. During recent renovations they found old clay pipes, pigs jaw bones and old bottles under the slate floor, there is also a ghostly face carved into the stone of the building. Drovers were herdsman who drove cattle, sheep and pigs hundreds of miles to market towns as far a field as Hereford and London.

Drovers probably followed ancient prehistoric tracks used for thousands of years by early settlers and with so many ancient burial mounds in the area there was strong possibility of finding evidence of Neolithic and Bronze Age settlements...

A few enquiries led Mark to Marilyn, a lady in the village who made an incredible discovery in her back garden.



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Marilyn showed Mark the exact spot in her vegetable patch where she found a flint, since dated from around 2,500 BC; as sharp as the day it was first worked and typical of those found in burial mounds.

Marilyn has gone on to find boxes of flints, Medieval beads and more recent artefacts showing just how much activity has been on the site over thousands of years. She had probably stumbled across, not only an ancient flint factory, but also a [midden](#) or spoil heap, where the accumulated rubbish from people stretching back thousands of years had been deposited – a real treasure trove!

The uses of maps are very important for spotting features in the landscape. On Mark's map of the area there is a mound marked '[Tomen](#)', which is Welsh for castle. The very early castles were not the giant fortifications we perhaps initially think of; more great piles of stones with a stone or wooden shelter on top – a decent look out and room for enough Knights to keep the peace. Sadly Victorian treasure hunters have damaged parts of the mound and this too can be identified from the trail they leave behind.

At the rear of the mound you can see it was built on a natural outcrop of rock and it gives the impression of a longer history than that of the early castle.

Mark then was on the trail of more burial mounds; these would be connected to other sacred sites by an avenue or series of standing stones. At first it appeared that the standing stones in Llanarmon no longer existed but a bit of detective work revealed yet another lost treasure. Many standing stones were swept away by Puritans during the civil war but Mark discovered a line of stones hidden in a thick hawthorn sited just where he'd expect to find them - adjacent to one of the mounds.



Burial mounds were created for important people in prehistoric communities and involved a lot of effort to build. One of the largest mounds and the furthest west from the village is on a hilltop.



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Mark knows that there is a mound there as the hill is formed from clay whilst the mound is formed from soil, which was carried up and deposited there. From the top Mark gets a wonderful 306 view and can see the line of the other burial mounds.

Llanarmon was clearly a sacred landscape in prehistoric times, the evidence still exists to this day and can be seen if you look hard enough.

Originally, what took Mark to Llanarmon was an invitation to investigate a promising farmstead site in the village. Over the course of three years he has been rewarded with many lost treasures including a discovery, which may shed some light on the legend of [St. Garmon](#).

With an archaeological team Mark uncovered an old well. It is known that St. Garmon founded a settlement at Llanarmon in the Dark Ages and is associated with wells; others attributed to him are dotted around the surrounding area.

It is thought that the Llanarmon Well was built within a church founded by St. Garmon as the surrounding stone structure matches religious buildings of that period... *could this be a new sacred well for Wales in the Saint's original settlement? It would certainly seem like it.*

Only a few yards away from the well Mark and his unit then came across another remarkable discovery...a wall with a built in hole, which turned out to be a [bee box](#).

A bee box is a snug place to put your bees in winter, and a practice that was carried out during the late medieval period, dating the wall at around the 1450s or 1500s. With those dates in mind, just a little further along the old wall appeared another wonderful find – [a hermit's cell](#). Very few of these exist as many were destroyed or fell into disrepair after the dissolution of the monasteries in the 1530s. Mark can tell that it isn't a farm store because of the presence of it's own chimney!

Another recent local discovery of an ivory statuette, reputedly from the shrine of St. Garmon, seemed to support the saint's close association with this tiny village...



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### Cave Chambers

For hundreds of years locals had known about an impressive cave entrance gaping out from a limestone cliff in the village. Caves like this were cut out by the action of water over thousands and thousands of years as the ice sheets retreated. The caves would have proved of great interest to prehistoric man as a burial and ritualistic site. Again with his team Mark found prehistoric finds in a previously unknown chamber.

Who knows what other secrets the cave may hold? One thing's for sure this could prove to be one of the most significant discoveries made in Llanarmon but as with all the lost treasures they are pieces in a jigsaw giving us an insight into the places and people who lived here hundreds and even thousands of years ago.

As we were preparing to leave Llanarmon we were contacted by a local farmer who had something rather interesting for Mark to take a look at... the walls of the old hall that has lain undiscovered for years – the Brown Hall – something Mark had missed on his last trip to the area!

Take a good look around where you live; are you standing on a lost treasure?



If you'd like to find out more about the history of the area and do some of your own exploration and research check out the following links:

*To learn more about the history of **Wales** and its sacred places visit:*

[www.britannia.com/celtic/wales](http://www.britannia.com/celtic/wales)

*To find out more about St. Garmon and the church at Llanarmon yn Ial check out the following links:*

[www.civictrustwales.org](http://www.civictrustwales.org)

### **Welsh Archeological Trust**

*"The four Welsh Archaeological Trusts, were established in the mid 1970s to respond to the rapidly increasing demands of rescue archaeology and to provide a uniform local archaeology service across the whole of Wales."*

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



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## **Llanarmon Yn Ial**

*“For the best overall sense of how the area containing Llanarmon Yn Ial has changed, for the modern district of Denbighshire.”*

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

*A site with a wealth of information on **stone circles, dolmens, ancient standing stones, cairns, barrows, hill forts** and the archaeology of megalithic Europe including Wales.*

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

**The Welsh Drover’s, their life and times:**

[www.genuki.org.uk/big/wal/Occupations](http://www.genuki.org.uk/big/wal/Occupations)

## **Valle Crucis Abbey**

*“The evocative ruins of Valle Crucis lie in green fields beneath Llangollen's steep sided mountains. In medieval times, this was a remote spot (ideal for austere Cistercian monks, who deliberately sought out wild and lonely places).”*

[www.llangollen.com/valle](http://www.llangollen.com/valle)

[www.castlewales.com/valle](http://www.castlewales.com/valle)

**Got a term you don’t understand? Check it out here:**

<http://archaeology.d.dictionarypage.co.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)

## **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-detector, go out walking, gardening or just going about their daily work.*

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



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*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 - is published on the Scheme's website: [www.finds.org.uk](http://www.finds.org.uk)*

*The site gives you public access to over 134,000 records and over 52,000 images of finds, as diverse as prehistoric flints to post-medieval buckles – and new finds are going online every day! Emails to [info@finds.org.uk](mailto:info@finds.org.uk)*

## Presenter, 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.



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Find out more at

[www.virtual-knutsford.co.uk](http://www.virtual-knutsford.co.uk)

## Title Music from the series...

The title music from the series comes from Finnish band, '*Nightwish*'. If you'd like to find out more information about them check out: [www.nightwish.com](http://www.nightwish.com)

**'Lost Treasures'**  
**is a Planet X Production for**  
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