Randle Wilbraham's Time Machine

Build a tower, Squire says.

A tower?

Aye.

What does he mean, like?

My father looked around and sniffed the wind, and then looked down and crunched some gravel with his boot.

I reckon he means a tower.

I went everywhere with him at that period. I best remember our visits to the Hill, for which I formed a special fondness. I've often thought what a nuisance I must have been to him; but on reflection I suspect my presence helped him be reasonably well tolerated among those independent, unworldly hillfolk.

I didn't hear the finish of their talk of a tower because Old Twemlow came from his cottage and my father's grip on my little hand relaxed, knowing I would run straight to my friend.

The Hermit by the Well

Come and taste Sugar Well, my little starveling, said the old man, and tell me if it aren't the nicest thing you'n tasted. Did I ever tell thee why the water's so sweet?

Eleven times, I said.

Eleven is it? he laughed. I'm two short of my dozen then.

I don't know why I said eleven, I don't think it was true. Perhaps I thought it meant lots and lots. It can't have sunk in, for I confess I don't remember why he said the water was sweet. I'm not even sure it was. It was cool and clean, and extremely refreshing. Sweet probably meant something different in those days, before sugar was common, before everything was liable to be made either very sugary or very salty. I think our tastes then were different.

Anyway I loved to visit Sugar Well. I suppose I was a pilgrim, in my small way, like the others who came, for that's what he called them. I don't know if it was meant to cure things. Rejuvienating, was the old

man's word for it; I didn't know what it meant at the time. I could do with some now, seventy years on.

The peculiar thing about it to me though, perhaps to the others, was its situation: that it was there at all, in the midst of the quarries, under the final cliff, under the very summit of the Hill. Such a peculiar place for a spring.

You'n wondering where it's coming from, our little well, the old man said, knowing my thoughts. If I've told thee why it's so sweet so oft, you'n fair matriculating to the real mystery ont. Where on earth's it come from, and never stop its bubbling there? That's why they'n mystified.

We'd gone along the sunken path that protected the spring in its little rocky hollow. I drank from my hands. It was beautiful.

The sacred water – I assume it was sacred, if pilgrims came, if the old man was its guardian, if it was rejuvenating – the water was a welcome treat on a summer's day, after climbing the long steep slopes.

Proper pilgrims got a tankard full. On this day he filled a tankard and carried it back to his seat, by the end wall of his cottage, looking towards the well and the great cliff beside it, that was the summit of the Hill. And we sat in the shade and shared the beautiful water, as friends do.

Godgiven, like mother's milk, our rejuvienating water, he always used to say. To outsiders he would add: But the tankard, I mun supply, from my great fortune earned at the smuggling. They always looked at him for a moment, before surmising that he was a wag of a peculiarly inscrutable sort, and tipping him a silver coin for the use of his tankard.

The Fountain of Life

This whole mountain is holler, he eventually declared, and then leaned his head towards me more secretively. It is like to a woman. Dost remember mother's milk?

My mother was dead, which was why I traipsed about after my poor father; but I knew what he meant, I did remember. Not perhaps how it tasted, but I remembered how safe and comfortable it was, at my mother's bosom, and I knew that it had nourished me, that it had kept me alive and made me grow.

She started you off and there's no holding you, my father used to say; God rest her good soul she left me a bundle, right.

For when she died I was still nursing, as children did in those days, even to several years of age. I must have been a burden to him. But I

tried to be as little trouble as possible, and it helped that I inherited her independence and her enquiring mind (for she had been a governess at the Hall). He always said I was the very image of her. In his last days he seemed to think I *was* her. And in a way I am, for that is how we defy time and make ourselves live for ever, as human beings, is it not?

This whole mountain is holler, and the holler full of lifegiving liquid. Like a mother's bosom. And like to a bosom's shape tis comely and round, and the top is pointed. And that is where it oozes out and we drink. That is where God suckles us of the pure earth.

I didn't think much of his picture of the Hill. I'd just smile if an old-timer said such things now, but children are very honest and direct. I told him it wasn't like that at all, it was all rocky and rugged.

It is true nonetheless, he said indignantly. I grant thee, tis the way of mountains to be made out of stone, and to get themselves quarried, and to have springs spouting out all over them. This Hill is the very fountain of life, the whole Plain yonder – he gestured, although nothing was visible but sky, as Sugar Well cottage is on the other side of the hilltop from the great Plain – that whole Plain there is *fertilised* by this Hill.

He said fertilised as if it were a slightly rude word, which I thought it was as a child. But he was right of course.

And another thing. If this great cavern of pure water weren't held by our Hill, where think thee it'd go, eh? The Plain being low and flat. I'll tell thee. If this Hill weren't here there'd be sea from this beach to the Mountains of Mourne.

The Mountains of Mourne?

They be far far away, in Ireland.

The most distant mountains we could see, my father had pointed out as the Welsh Mountains, so I said: Are they the *Welsh* Mountains?

Nay, much farther off than them. Though I dare say you'n right, the Welsh'ns would have to form an archie-pelago in the midst of this here sea I speak of, that they would. And this'd be a seaside place, and I should like as not be an old fisherman or – he pulled a sinister face – a pirate.

I chuckled at that idea, it suited him somehow.

And should this day dawn when our Hill be abased, and the chains of the sea will have burst, it will come to pass as the Prophet said. The Prophet Nixon.

He paused, and adopted a prophetic sort of voice: The only place of safety will be twixt here and Morridge.

I knew that saying. And although I didn't know what it meant, I don't think Old Twemlow's explanation enlightened me any. I suspect he was mixing his prophecies rather, Morridge being up in the Moorlands, in quite the opposite direction to the Mountains of Mourne.

Aye, this intire mountain is a reservoy of lifegiving liquid. And Sugar Well the pap from which it do ooze. There is a very ocean of it beneath our feet.

I remember I stamped my foot on the ground to see if it sounded hollow, and as I climbed back on to his bench – for my little legs didn't reach the ground like his – he stamped his booted foot and laughed.

That's too massive Millstone for to ring holler. But believe you me, it be a reservoy. Yon stonehewers know they mun go careful. You will see how they work around it. For our well be the entry, the true portal to the liquid within. I know it is the way of hills to have springs all about them. But Sugar Well is the teat.

Like a cow, I said.

You'n doing grand at the comprehending, my little suckling. I might have said the mountain is an udder, an udder turned upside down. And that is why it flows and flows, yon little rill, be it everso near the very hilltop, it will not give over bubbling there. It is endless, pure and nourishing to man and beast and field, Godgiven in the similitude of a miracle. We are on the very bosom of the earth.

It sounded thrillingly romantic. Remembering it all these years later, his quirky explanation, the earnestness with which he spoke, a tone of reverence almost, as it struck me on that sunny day on the hilltop, comes vividly back – nonsense though I suppose it is as a real explanation. Though perhaps if it's nonsense Sugar Well was the more of a miracle. I still don't know how water could bubble up so ceaselessly in a little hollow near the foot of a cliff, not a hundred feet below the highest rock of the summit. I have no idea where the sweet water came from.

In spite of the unvividness of his metaphor, I came away with an image that stayed in my mind ever after. Of the rugged hilltop as the rough pimply flesh around the point of a bosom, and rising at its centre, instead of a nipple, on the sheer crag above the well, the tower my father was speaking of.

The Lost Peak

It was a strangely formless landscape, just here, at the top of the Hill. You expect a true summit, an apex, a place you can stand that is unambiguously the highest. The wind bracing, the view breathtaking. Wind and view did not disappoint; but the quarrymen had ruined the ground. Over many centuries, like a natural erosion, the summit had been quarried away.

As far as I could gather from my father's talk as I followed him about, a huge outcrop or Knoll had all but disappeared, the features of the summit, as they appeared now, being but its remnants: towering and grand as they seemed, they were mere vestiges of the original rocky hilltop, a natural peak that had characterised the Hill hundreds of years before. Or thousands. That's what I understood him to be saying anyway.

One reason my father spoke of it was that he was concerned about the boundary. Or rather, the quarrying having eaten it away, the lack of an obvious natural boundary between the two manors or estates that were divided by the Hill.

We want a boundary mark that is fixed for all time, is what my father said the Squire said, that cannot be swept away and that cannot be gainsayed. You'd think immutable rock would serve; yet on the Hill it is not so.

So that's how he came to be sounding out various hillmen, about marking the boundary for all time, and building a tower. None of them seemed much taken with either proposition.

This is all that's left of the Knoll, my father was saying, as used stretch from this edge, over to where tother crag and Old Man are left.

He pointed to this other prominence, a few hundred yards across the bumpy landscape, with its queer-looking pillar of rock, a leftover of the quarrying. Then he raised his outstretched arm.

How higher it went we don't know anymore, the memory of it's lost.

And did it have a tower on it, then? the other man said.

My father smiled slightly, and shook his head, not negatively so much as to imply, no one knows. He was a man of few words.

I could see, even as a child, that there were two summits in rivalry. All the way up the Hill this crag, where we were standing, the one above the sacred spring, looked like the summit. But when you got to it and stood on it, this other hillock to the north, with its great detached pillar or needle that the quarrymen called an Old Man, looked higher. Yet

when you went and stood there, on top of some old weathered boulders that lay about, and looked back, the dark crag above Sugar Well made a distinctly more imposing hilltop.

Between them was an uneven wasteland, all hills and hollows and trackways, a mixture of long worked-out quarries and overgrown quarry refuse heaps.

Daddy, do you mean the Hill carried on up and the top was in mid-air over there? I didn't usually join in when my father was talking to other men; but it was the strangest thing to imagine, a hilltop entirely quarried away. People once stood like us, but beyond the precipice, and higher, in what was now just air.

So Squire believes.

And you say beacons were lit on it? the other man said.

My father nodded thoughtfully, and gazed with me, into mid-air.

The Beacon

It is a castle in the air, this tower of thy father's, my more talkative old friend said later. Aye, that it be. Nobbut a castle in the air.

I pictured it, sitting on a cloud, and thought it would be very difficult to build. He meant, of course, that it was a daft idea.

I have not yet inveigled why the Squire should want such a thing.

I knew the answer, I had heard my father say.

It is to rectify time, I blurted out proudly, and make the hilltop look as it did in olden days.

By damn, said Old Twemlow.

I don't think I quoted my father correctly, he will have said something like rectify the summit that has been ruined over time. But the old man knew what I meant, and flattered me by seeming much taken with the notion.

My father would often leave me in his care – though it never felt like that – while he went calling on people, I think he was probably collecting rents. Or trying to; the hillfolk, as I've said, were a rather independent lot.

Either my innocence or Old Twemlow's tolerance always made me feel we chatted as equals. So I proceeded to tell my friend with great earnestness all about this strange lost summit.

It be the best Millstone, that will be why, he said. They been getting the millstones out of this mountain time out of mind, beyond the days of Julius Caesar I shouldn't wonder. Even then it was probably not remembered who began it.

I pictured Julius Caesar with wedges and a mallet tapping away like they do under Sugar Well cliff.

Goodly massive Millstone for millstones, all along about the top here, he went on, so I aren't surprised to hear it. But there's only the faintest remembrance come down. No one speaks of it now, this place in mid-air as you say; it is well lost in time.

And beacons were lit on it, I said affirmatively, as if knowledgeable about these things lost in time.

Aye, that they would be. If it were higher ground, that's where the beacon would be all right, to be seen from all round. To stand ready, and pass along its message. Northern Nancy we signalled to, from this Hill. She is beyond Macclèsfield.

I asked what the messages said, that had to be sent north by beacons. The question seemed to give him pause.

Invasion, if not the death of a King, it'd be. It'd have to be summat grave like to that'n. It'd be the Armada, like as not, at that time of day, when last it were kindled, I can't think what else it would have been. You'n heard of the Spanish Armada?

I had. It seemed a long time ago for the idea of signalling to Nancy – whoever she was – to be so fresh in his mind, or in the memory of the hillfolk, if it wasn't the same thing.

Defeated it was and this land ne'er since invaded, ever again, he said, as though a beacon on his Hill had helped do it. No one never more dared. Kin of mine, one side or tother, I imagine it were, laid turves and kindling, and watched day and night, and put fire to it in the end.

He was lost in thought for some moments, I assumed about these ancestors of his, saving the land from invasion.

I am in a manner of being a beacon keeper myself, though I'd not seen it thus till you put me in mind ont. Come Lammastide, I too am in a manner a perpetuator of fire on the hilltop. Or what answers for the hilltop, if thy father be right. And I reckon he be.

He was referring to a bonfire they have at the Wake, an annual custom on the Hill, the arrangements for which he seemed to be in charge of. I

had never seen the bonfire. We didn't stay so late, and as a child of course it was the stalls and sideshows I took notice of.

I always rode on a swing-boat. It must have been a modest and probably very rickety affair, pushed by a strong youth; but for me it was an impossible, unearthly journey, flying through the air like a bird. That's what sticks in my memory of my early visits to the Wake. That and the dancing bear.

And the days even of that are grinding to their close, he added after a contemplative silence, and some attention to his pipe. If thy father be right, and they are to build this here tower. The Squire will not countenance the burning of it, that he won't.

The Squire

The other place I often went with my father was the Hall, the home of his employer, whose name was Randle Wilbraham. How noble and mighty I thought that name sounded, as befits a Lord. For he *was* a Lord: he was the Lord of the Manor, a kind of royalty really, ruling a little kingdom of Plain and Hill. Everywhere my father went upon the Squire's business, his rustic subjects touched their forelocks or hats at the very mention of him, and then cursed him, with equal loyalty.

His Hall was down on the Plain, in a park of flat grassland and gardens and lake. The Hill, several miles distant, on the boundary of Squire Wilbraham's manor, was clearly visible, an enormous rearing-up of the land, gloomy looking, as if the world ended there.

The top looked broad and jagged, but in a way unfinished, as if a natural point or peak had been broken off it. It's easy to think so, in retrospect, in light of their talk of this Knoll or of building a tower. Yet I seem to remember thinking it, that it looked broken off.

So it made perfect sense to me that the Squire thought so too. But how to rectify it was the problem. That was my father's job. When the Squire wanted something doing, it was my father who had to turn what he called his whim into action, and look to the practicalities.

The Squire would say: I want rid of that Podmore, he's a dashed encumbrance, I need someone I can trust looking to my interests up there. And my father would say: I'll see to your interests up there Squire, never you fear. Then he'd have to go and see this encumbrance and I suspect quietly cover for his encumbrancy, explaining to me (though he knew I had little grasp of what he was talking about) that you just can't ride roughshod over a man's dignity like that.

The Squire would say: I want the boundary fixing and marking for all time, I'll wager half the stone they're paying Sneyd for is from my land. And my father would say: Tis a thorny issue as ever Squire, but

I'll address it again. Then he'd have to go and wander over the quarries and wasteland with his stick and his chain, and come home grumbling that the markers he'd put down but last year were now grinding corn in Alderley.

The Squire would say: I want a tower building at the terminus of my vista, to rectify the summit that time has ruined. And my father would say: I don't know that you can rectify what time has done Squire, it may not be practical. Then he'd have to go and arrange anyway, who should build this tower, and what it might cost and how tall it must be, and how on earth they could stop it being blown down by the wind the very next winter, he said. As well as suffering being told by the hillfolk that the very idea was folly.

As I think I've implied, he missed my mother very much, even after years. She was such a *friend* to me, he used to say, as if it meant something more than a wife. I understand what he meant now.

The habit he particularly maintained, which made me so knowledgeable about the estate's affairs – in an innocent way, for I understood but little of what I was hearing – was to sit back in his chair of an evening and, taciturn though he normally was, take stock of the business and conversations of the day. The Squire said this, so-and-so said that, we arranged for this to be done, we complained to old whatsit, we fixed the tank, we got that door back on its hinges.

He didn't much care whether the housekeeper, who'd be getting his dinner, thought he was telling her, or whether I, playing on the hearth-rug by his feet, thought he was telling me. In his mind he was still telling my mother. Except that she was so intelligent, she could be depended on to say things that helped him. That's why I felt obliged to try and do the same when she was gone – though I can't have said anything helpful, at such a tender age.

Still, that's how I knew what the Squire thought and what the Squire wanted and what the Squire said. I seldom saw the man himself. He was usually away in London – helping the King, I assumed. But now he was retiring they said he would be more often at home, which was probably why people were busy everywhere, building and repairing things, and beautifying the grounds.

The Folly

Just once I came close to the great man and witnessed one of these conversations first-hand. The Squire happened to ride by as we walked in his grounds. The horse was huge – and beautiful – so to a child the grand personage upon him was scarcely more than a booming voice with a horse's head nodding in front of it.

He wanted to know why there hadn't been progress with his tower.

They will come to it once they are done in your grotto, Squire.

I suspect it was a diplomatic answer; and the Squire suspected it was a diplomatic answer too.

You have not shown me drawings.

I have wished to consider it more carefully Squire, and consult on the Hill—

Consult be damned, he said, and the horse shook his great head in support of the damnation of consulting. But my father was unflapped, resuming after only the slightest twisting of his boot.

... regarding the form that will best endure in that location, and the apt dimensions for it, and the exact whereabouts that will serve best your honour's purpose. It is an undertaking that will not be hurried.

Perhaps you're right. But if it is Podmore or that other chap obstructing me I shall take a dim view of your humouring them.

He is too sick to mind Squire. But we may act in such a way as to be favoured by each, and that will render you purpose—

My purpose is to rectify the profile of the Hill as it terminates my vista here. He nodded – the horse that is – in the direction of the broken-off hilltop, which we couldn't see, for it was a misty day. The Squire was a great interrupter, obviously; but I was proud to find my father equal to him, in his quiet persistence.

... it will render your honour's purpose more manifold, for as well as serving as the lodge or summerhouse you require, I have in mind to make it your fixed eternal boundary-mark as well. But it will serve that only if there is common assent to its location. It will not impede us, but it is of some delicacy reaching it.

That's a dashed good idea.

Then there's the matter of preserving it from further quarrying Squire, which I think may be addressed in like manner. The hillmen believe as ourselves that the top of their Hill has been spoiled, but time out of mind. Their memories of what there was for a peak are but legends: a cairn of stones, a beacon, or stranger things they sometimes will speak of, for their forebears thought the very sky pivoted on this mountain, and life welled out of it like mother's milk. If we are careful about it they will accept that a tower rectifies what time and the quarrying have done, and restores their lost peak. And they'll honour your name for doing it.

I'll be damned, said Randle Wilbraham. It sounds as if this tower may rectify the very fabric of the universe. I will leave it in your hands and go to my more worldly business.

The horse reared and wheeled, and galloped away.

The Grotto

I couldn't tell you what the Squire looked like, but I remember his horse very well, for I'd seen him often. When I accompanied my father to the Hall I'd more usually, at least for the time he was attending the Squire, be left with the stableman's wife, and we'd sit watching the horses being groomed or trotted about the yard.

Or sometimes I'd be entrusted to one of the kindly gardeners where they were working, about the garden or park.

It was one of the latter occasions that found me in the grotto, or what was to be a grotto, for they were in the process of making it. It looked like a bit of rocky terrain from the Hill transported down to the Plain. And that is what it was. Parts of the grotto were being formed from rugged stones and boulders brought from the hilltop, and a couple of hillmen were there, unloading some from a wagon. Another man, a stone mason, seemed to be in charge of this odd creation.

Steward's little girl, the gardener said, by way of excusing my presence.

We see her oft up the Hill, one of the hillmen said; I think by the time she is ten she'll be our master. The others laughed.

You'll be safe to sit or play over here young Miss, the stone mason said, and ushered me gently to one side, for he was chipping away and bits of stone were flying about. He seemed to be carving a face. I asked who he was making a statue of.

No statue, he said, nor no person living neither. But it is to watch over Squire's grotty. Mind you, it will notice more than notice it.

Is it a spirit then? I said.

It may hold the spirit of the place in some measure. But in truth it is a trademark of mine, to leave a head to watch over my work.

I discerned something of a mystic in him, even so. I suppose simple childhood logic excuses my next question, though it obtained what I took to be a flatteringly serious response.

Is the spirit brought from the Hill with the stones?

Now that is a very likely proposition Miss, and an interesting point of view to take. I will mull it over whilst I chisel.

I let him mull and chisel a while before next distracting him. Are you going to build a tower on the Hill?

I am not sure Miss. When we finish this here grotty we will wait upon the Squire's commission, through the good offices of your father. I hope he may have more for us to do. A summerhouse is what's been spoke of, though I have also heard mention of this tower. I'm vague as to the full sense ont – nor neither the practicality, at such a place, to be frank.

It be a fashion they're taking to, squires 'n'all, of the building of ruins. The youth who assisted the stone mason – I assumed his apprentice, but his son too I later learned – was the contributor of this knowledge.

I build things firm and to last, I do not want them calling ruins.

But he said this grotty must look as though it has been here from old time, and tumbled somewhat into its shape. So Squire said.

Aye, so he did. That is why we brought some ancient stones that have lain on the hilltop a-weathering for centuries.

I had noticed that the boulders were of dark colour, not freshly quarried like the smaller yellowish stones. They were very like those that always lay around on the other summit, near the rock called the Old Man.

Speaking of spirit, didst hear what the men who carted the boulders were saying? He was speaking to the youth.

I thought he said his missus'd curse him for helping us.

He said he was feart o' telling her he'd helped, for it'd bring a curse upon him, moving yon boulders, she'd say.

I was not comfortable taking them neither. They were left from olden time, and have been passed over for good reason.

And the other bloke said if the old man saw us taking em he'd play hamlet.

I'm sorry we brought em. I think they belong on the hilltop.

The Old Man ne'er turned his head, he saw nowt. Young lady wonders if the Hill's *spirit* may have come down with em.

He chipped a while, and doubtless did some more mulling.

We'll keep some aside. Happen we build this here tower we can use em for that, and restore to the Hill what's the Hill's, if it troubles thee.

The Old Man

Wilt mind if I takes the wench to see the Old Man? the old man had said to my father.

He waved his hand, then turned round to me and said: Go careful now young lady, and take Master Twemlow's hand when you comes by cliff or quarry.

I wandered all over the Hill with my father, and he spoke, in his economical way, to all manner of people – not that there were many then, it was much more sparsely inhabited than it has lately become – but although he took care of me he didn't usually involve me, I might as well have been a dog he was walking. Old Twemlow in contrast treated me as an equal, included me in conversation, and introduced me to people as his associate – he had a repertoire of educated-sounding words which he loved to use, perhaps not always correctly, looking back.

Not that we went about the Hill. As befits a hermit, he hardly ventured beyond the vicinity of his cottage and the nearby well of which he was guardian, and the crag above it, which I suppose he was also a kind of guardian of, and where he sometimes sat for hours, gazing at the view. Or perhaps he was daydreaming.

But people came to *him*, both outsiders, pilgrims as he called them, and local people, for he seemed – though there was I think diffidence in putting a name to it – a kind of elder or head man of the village.

Or of the Hill, really, for as I said it was too sparsely inhabited in that day to be called a village. It was mostly open common land. Just here and there, by an old quarry or in a sheltered hollow, a little cottage or shack would nestle, occupied either by people called Oakes or by a migrant quarryman from Derbyshire, or Wales.

So we set out on our adventure. Who is the old man we're going to see? I said, forgetting the quarrymen's name for the pillar of rock near the other hilltop.

He laughed. It is a secret, mind, but on our way to the Old Man we will happen per-chance to call unwarranted upon the old man who dwells by the Old Man. It will occur to us. Or you may happen to say by the way, whose abode be that tumbledown edifice there, and we will go and see. But just between thee and me ...

He looked around, and hushed his voice to impart the secret.

Between thee and me, it is my *enemy*, Old Podmore, the man I am going to see. We have been enemies these forty-six year. I have spoken not a word to him for several past. We are in a manner of being in counter-pose. It is our place to be enemies.

It didn't give me much relish for the visit. I expected I would be witness to a fight, or at least some of that juicy oath-taking that workmen do when they drop something on their foot.

Is he an ogre? I asked, as you would.

He is my enemy as I am his. You shall decide which of us be the ogre.

The Ruck of Stones

The edifice he'd spoken of occupied a mound immediately beside the quarry in which the giant pinnacle they call an Old Man stands, just below the Hill's other summit. Like Old Twemlow's cottage its masonry was rough and higgledy-piggledy – and it did look rather as if it had begun to tumble back into the heap of stones and boulders it was built from.

As we turned from the common path, a very frail little man, much too small to be an ogre (I remember thinking), hobbled with a walking stick from the doorway.

We were passing on our way to see the Old Man, said my companion, and my small associate here wondered if this venerable pile were where the Old Man sleeps, when he is not on watch.

The two old men clasped hands, all four, and shook them and shook them as if they were the fondest of old friends.

And I said to her I said: You'n almost correct in such surmise. For yon be the residence of the chiefest man on the Hill, one Thomas Podmore of Old Man, yeoman, who looks after the Cheshire side. You are of an age when it may be meet to get presented to him, and pay thy respects.

They finally released each others' hands, and turned towards me.

May I present my little fosterling, Miss Amy, who is a particular friend of our Hill.

I am greatly honoured to meet you sir, I said, and hastily contrived what I hoped looked like a curtsey. In case he really was as important a person as he sounded.

He in turn paid me the rare compliment of removing his battered old hat – for all hillmen wear hats almost all the time, even indoors, and

removing them is the highest courtesy they ever pay. Usually, greeting my father for instance, they merely touch them.

And he said in a gritty, breathlessly slow voice: It be grand to meet thee. I have seen thee about with our Steward, but I am not able to go out and greet people as I used.

He and Old Twemlow sat together on a bench under a kind of arbour near the cottage door.

It be a name from the old days, he went on, still addressing me, I have not heard the name Amy in donkey's years. Thou mun forgive two very old friends if they natter a while of things thou'rt not interested in.

She be interested in everything, anent our Hill, said Old Twemlow, and I squeezed into the corner of the seat beside him.

I think I should tell thee I am not rightly the chiefest man on the Hill, by the by. Thou already hast acquaintance of the chiefest man on the Hill, one John Twemlow of Sugar Well, gent, who looks to the Staffordshire side.

Old Twemlow took his hat off to me, very briefly.

In fact, he then said to his enemy, so interested she be, that she has been telling me of a great bank or Knoll as lay in olden days twixt thy hilltop and mine. So that if it be so, neither thine nor mine be the true top, the which it is our place to be at strife and variance o'er, but a peak as would disparage em both, both betwixt and between, that has all but been quarried away over time. I believe it may be so. It suits what were always said of the great pointed Hill of old time, that pivotted the very sky.

And were there a tower on it? was the frail man's surprising reply.

Ah, you have not missed this talk of a tower then. Our happening by may be in a manner providential, for we mun discuss such things. How seems it to thee, this olden peak they will speak of, and the rectifying ont wi a tower?

Thou'st heard tell of a ruck of stones as was on the hilltop in ages gone by. Up yonder it were, above Old Man. The last bits of it yet be nigh, the oldest stones of all, in a fashion sanctifying the spot. I were ever given to believe as that be why the old stonegetters honoured the summit and let that land *be* as be now the Old Man. I believe it be the true summit peak and there were never land higher, but for the ruck of stones as crowned it.

The Old Man was ever the highest you say then?

Aye. It be a wonder he remains, for they hew at him yet, now and again. If any will defend him when I be gone, I have no man's word on it. No one remembers his beginning now, as I think some seemed to when I were a lad; the next as come will not know why he be there.

And this great Knoll the Steward speaks of, that is quarried away. You don't hold with it then?

I am not saying there were no Knoll. The great quarries went all along between, so a Knoll of sorts there were, the Steward be right; and it be gone but for the great cliff of Sugar Well, and thou no more able nor I in the fullness of time to keep that from the same fate, as they get stone there yet. But I picture it not higher but a slope, as was, from thy hilltop to mine, and that be uphill.

You were a stonehewer was the day, and have eyed the problem forty-six year. What is the yardage of it, by thy estimation, the difference twixt thy hilltop and mine?

It be ten yards. The Old Man's cap has ten yards on the brow of Sugar Well cliff.

I have always been a great believer in the old saying, from the highest to the highest, and would lief yeild to this invisible Knoll, gone time out of mind, our two highest being its remnants both, both one side and tother. I would eradicate the difference. But the Old Man's cap is set against it, you will not yeild.

I see it thus. But we be the last of our kind Jack. What they will say who come after us be beyond our power. I am not in strife with thee over it, for we be both of us out of our time. Thou'lt bury me soon, and ere long after that, they will bury thee.

Old Twemlow placed his hand on the coatsleeve of his enemy. I am not in strife over it either Tom. It is out of our hands. Whoever follows us, Squires and Stewards will rule em. I am the last of the Twemlows, and you have but scattered daughters.

I have lived too long, said Old Podmore. The son-in-law I thought to follow me has died these seven year. I told him everything I knew or remembered. I am forgetting it myself now.

Yonder, where we're bound, there'll be no reproach, we have done our shift; God who put us on this Hill will take us into his mountain, and like as not forgive us ten yards. I am glad his providence brought us together this day. Tis a good while since we nattered.

It be that. I am glad Miss Amy brought thee, I am beholden to her.

I was listening to their curious conversation intently and with utter fascination. I was honoured to be mentioned in it.

So where should they put it then, if Squire mun have his tower? Old Twemlow said briskly, rising from his seat.

Not at Old Man, not while I draw breath. But that be my fear. For they have not long to wait, they have time's advantage over me. It be summat else I am bereft of a successor's word on.

Then that is a parting gift I can give thee, old friend, said my companion, helping his enemy to his precarious feet. That is word I can give thee on my own oath. I will not let them build by the Old Man. I'll have the tower on my hilltop, I shall insist on it. Here's my hand.

The blue eyes of the chiefest man on the Hill were moist as he clasped the hand of the chiefest man on the Hill. I don't think he said anything, there was nothing more to say.

But then he said again, to me: I am beholden to thee for bringing my old friend to see me. We have resolved important matters, as it be our place to. And I have enjoyed the company. I wish thee God bless.

I shook his hand too, and said: Thankyou sir, I am pleased to have met you and hope you will feel better soon.

I trust old men forgive little children their infelicities.

One day, a few weeks after, Old Twemlow was rather quiet, and carried his hat in his hand all day, as if he didn't know where to put it.

Our old friend has gone to his reward, he said, eventually. He dwells o'er yonder now. The yoke of time has unburdened him.

And later he said: It cannot be made to keep no how, nor life nor mountain, but will fall to dust ere time has its end.

The Elixir

I have a notion how it may be made never to fall down.

Old Twemlow talked of the tower more and more, to me and on occasion to my father. He seemed to keep coming up with his own ideas for it. I knew why, of course, but I kept the reason secret: it was his parting gift to his enemy.

In the end I'm not sure my father made drawings at all. It was taking shape by itself.

I have a notion how it may be kept from falling down, this tower of yon Squire's.

My father raised his face expectantly.

Wherewith it may withstand the windy hilltop and the burden of time. The lime they are digging along the ridge there, brid lime they calls it, it is like glue.

He turned to me. Hast seen how they catch brids with it?

I had. It wasn't very nice.

The Romans used it in their aquiducts – I don't know how he knew this, but I *have* since read it in books – and that is why they'n stood these thousand year. Roman cement they calls it. It is the very elixir.

I shall tell the mason, my father said.

You tell him.

He leaned forward as he sat, and did that head movement that men do when they are imparting their expertise.

Tell him use Astbury lime for his mortar and tower will endure wind and weather a thousand year.

My father nodded.

It will defy time.

The Spindle of the World

Thirty foot it mun be, tell thy father. Neither more nor less.

Why? I said, as children do. We were standing on the very spot, on top of his windy crag, just the two of us.

Thirty foot. That is the gap twixt earth and sky at this point.

He said it with an air of serious authority. But even I was not that credulous; I laughed as if it were a joke.

It is so nonetheless. I grant thee it is the way of sky to have mists that sag down and cloak us; as it is also its way to have clouds that are so high up, you may scarce reach em from the tallest hill. But thirty foot is what crag wants to nestle into the bellybutton of the sky.

I giggled at that too, I liked that image.

They do say, he went on as we sat in a sheltered spot under the lee of the crag, from where the whole of the great Plain was spread below us, they say the sky have some tilt or wobble int, that skews it off centre somewise. I'm not saying it's the Hill's fault mind. Yet the old belief, one time of day, was that it turned upon the peak of this mountain.

Like as not that notion came down from when there were such a peak, as none now remember; for now there's just Sugar Well and Old Man, in rivalry fort. Happen that's what sent sky out of kilter.

We sat and contemplated it a while.

Aye ... They had used say it were spindle of the world, about which time itself, never mind sky, rolls and rotates as it do. You don't hear it said no more; but mams and grandads used tell us so upon their knees. As I'm telling thee.

I wasn't on his knee; but I was flattered to be told – briefly.

For then he said: Yet I'm inclined to doubt it be true. I'm loath to contradict what the old men believed, nor the old women. But my opinion after a long life, most of it watching o'er this hilltop, is that it is in the manner of being a fable. It is not literately true, as they say, but conveys a notion where truth is hard to grasp, answering our inquisity and calling upon our respect, for God's mystery ont, like a church sacrament do. It had used be an article of faith with hillfolk, that time turned about their Hill. But folks grow ever wiser.

Perhaps he meant they grow less wise.

Notwithstanding, I am minded to allow that a tower be suited to the part in greater measure than I hitherto perceived. Be it fable or folly. For in its hollowness it is like the eye of the mill.

I knew what the eye of a millstone was. I had looked through one in the quarry.

It is thus a fitting thing with which to repair the peak, were it ruck of stones or what you will, that our forebears looked to as the world's axle. To put back time aright. And then ... surry, the sky will turn happily about it with a bit of a breeze, and now and then a soft rumble of the gearing.

So it will be a machine? I said.

Nay, I elaborate the thunder into it. It is in a manner metaphysical.

I thought you meant it would be a windmill that turns back time. (I am almost certain that is what I said.)

He laughed heartily. There'd be wind enough to turn it an' all, up here, if not make it fly through the air like a brid.

And what a journey we'd make in it, eh, my little fledgling. Back to the Hill of old time and the happy summer days.

The Unearthly Child

My birthday fell shortly before the traditional time of the Wake, the summer festivity that took place on the Hill in those days. I had been with Old Twemlow when he was making arrangements. He didn't actually do much; but people came to him from all around, as if to receive instructions. Or rather, it was almost as if they came to receive his blessing. It seemed complicated. But it took place every year, so they each had a part to play that either they'd done before or their parents had done before them, or an elder brother or sister.

One day he said to my father: I have now envisioned what in future may crown our mountain. It is the very similitude of a tower. I have a pre-monition ont, taking place of the top of my crag.

My father listened with his head tilted slightly to one side.

Its shadow at sunset will fall upon Sugar Well, receiving its baptism.

The old man lit himself a clay pipe, which seemed to bring him down from his oracular mood. Well, almost.

I am of a mind it may be our last Lammas fire, this summer's end.

Your bonfires aren't at issue, my father said.

Squire never approved on em, neither Squire, nor clergy neither. I think it is behind it.

A silence, looking at his boot in my father's way. He has said nought of it to me.

I am thinking of the wench ...

My father looked quizzical, and waited. Old Twemlow lit his pipe again – for pipes must always be lit three or four times.

She is of an age when she may be witness to it, and pay her respects. I believe she had a birthday lately. There is summat ...

He drew on his pipe several times, surrounding himself with smoke.

Summat about her ... Truth is Steward, truth is, I am greatly fond of her. I deem her a particular friend of our Hill. I have no childer, I am the last of the Twemlows ... I have no granchild but her.

My father looked at him, but did not speak. His looking said something I could not see, in the dark smokey cottage or through the innocence of childhood, I'm not sure which was the reason. I trust it said you have been kindness itself to her; I hope it said, she has no grandfather but you.

I should like her to come to our Lammas fire, if so happen it be my last.

My father rocked his boot again, nodding, and as we left he sort of patted the old man on the arm. So much that is most meaningful in life is unspoken.

The Castle of Fire

It was utterly spectacular. I have never seen nor even heard tell of anything like it, anywhere in the world. Why it is not described in books, why indeed it was barely spoken of on the Hill, even then, and seems nowadays – for I think it probably *was* the last one – totally forgotten, I am at a loss to explain. It was the most grand and sublime spectacle I have witnessed in all my long life.

As the late July sun reddened towards the far side of the Plain, the focus of the Wake shifted from the traditional spot on the shoulder of the Hill, up to the crag above Sugar Well. The small crowd as if intuitively began making its way up. They were not the usual kind of pilgrim, but a mixture of hillfolk and countryfolk from the Plain and Moorlands around.

An activity was afoot on the crag – the very spot where, by that day of the following year, they were building a tower. Strong men and youths were laying foundations as if for a structure, they seemed to be placing stones, and upon the stones turves, which had evidently been dug ready and dried – poorer folk still burnt turf as a fuel at that time.

Other men were ascending the crag bearing poles, and others carrying what looked like lattices, woven panels, wickerwork arches. It all looked chaotic; yet as they came and went, a structure arose on the foundations that had been laid, and as some of them busied themselves about this structure or clambered upon the surrounding rocks, a distinct shape emerged to it.

In very little time a round tower, several times the height of a man, and attached to it a high archway, and then a span of wall, had materialised from these disparate elements and flimsy materials.

One of the figures up there in the thick of it, orchestrating the miracle, was Old Twemlow, picked out by his shock of white hair and his regularly raised or pointed arm, as if conducting a band, except his hat was the baton.

The men who had built it backed away, and a hush seemed to fall.

And now a more orderly and reverent procession, mostly of women, began to file up to the building, and through the archway, and back, each person bearing some bundle or basket in her arms which she seemed to deposit within the tower. Bundles of straw or wheat, or of barley, oatmeal cakes or loaves of bread, baskets of apples or bilberries or other fruits and vegetables, even large pies. It was like the harvest thanksgiving in church.

The procession ceased. The sun was red and spreading across the western horizon, behind us, giving an odd, coppery coloured silhouette to this strange building on the hilltop.

Now another procession began, predominantly of old people and children. They all seemed to be carrying flowers, from little posies to lavish bouquets, or arrangements of leaves and other greenery. These were not placed inside the tower. Several of the agile youths positioning themselves on the precarious edges of the crag, took them from the faithful as they filed through the archway and hung them about the building's exterior, until it was transformed into a castle of flowers.

I had been told to bring flowers to the Wake, and our housekeeper had helped me bind them into a nicely arranged posy, though they were nothing but humble wayside flowers that I'd picked myself, plus a little heather mixed in – for Old Twemlow loved the heather. The flower of the mountain he called it.

And there he suddenly was, out of the shadows beside me, offering me his hand.

Come pay thy respects to our Lammas tower, my little sapling, and help us thank God for our bounty of food and pretty flowers.

I took his hand and we joined the back of the procession and climbed the gravelly paths and hollowed rocks to the top of the crag.

In the archway Old Twemlow handed up a large, cascading bouquet of heather and bilberry and wild mountain flowers. And I passed my modest little posy to the stone mason's boy, who hung it immediately below my old friend's, at what seemed to be the very centre of the sunset side of the tower.

We came back along the other side of the archway and wall, and my father met us at the edge of the crag and went down with me. Leaving the old man on his own, just below the miraculous building.

The crowd as we rejoined it was gazing in quiet expectation at this incredible creation. In the falling darkness it looked not like a mock structure at all but absolutely real, as if it were built of solid stone, and then entirely decorated with beautiful flowers and foliage.

Old Twemlow stepped forward on the skyline with a blazing firebrand, and walked all around the tower, applying it to the foundations. And as he returned and disappeared into the blackness the flames slowly rose, and a fierce crackling with them.

The whole structure lit up with the colours of fire and the sunset. For a long time (it seemed) it was a castle of fire, as if fire had that shape, as if fire were the very structure of it. The last streaks of sunset were out-reddened by the burning tower.

In fact the entire sky, which had but lately turned black, now glowed deep red above it. My memory must be at fault, for I picture the redness rising in a great column above the tower and overspreading the world. I thought it tinctured the farthest parts of the universe.

A smokey smell filled the air. The building of fire could not hold its timeless moment. The arch of flame collapsed, and flaming pieces of the structure began falling down the sides of the crag. I was in a peculiar way horrified by it, and at this point I think cried and clung to my father's arm.

The whole structure then quickly lost shape and collapsed. Flames played about the low remains for a while. Eventually, from our vantage point below, nothing but an orange glow thrown up by the embers remained. The rest of the crag and the world and the universe was in blackness, blacker indeed than it had ever been, so it seemed.

We stood in silent awe, the whole crowd. The whole world was hushed. Then we all shuffled slowly and quietly off the Hill, back to our homes. Everyone I suspect feeling something of what I was feeling.

I don't know to this day how to describe it. Sanctified sounds blasphemous. Yet it was as if we had carried out a sacrament, and some transformation had been wrought: an essential ritual that had put the physical world to rights, or had reaffirmed our place in it.

We had made a sacrifice.

It sounds silly I know, but from that day, if it had not been already, the Hill was a holy place to me. And some of the things Old Twemlow had

said about it – the bosom of the earth, whereby God suckles his creation; the pivot of the sky, around which time turns; his so-called premonition of a tower – seemed less exaggerated or fantastic.

I never looked upon the world quite the same after seeing the burning of the Lammas tower.

The Tower

Build a tower, Squire says.

A tower.

Aye.

Where does he want it?

My father looked up into mid-air, where he thought the summit of the Hill used to be, as if it was truly to be a castle in the air. Then he gestured with his head towards the sheer rock face behind his shoulder, the great cliff that rises above Sugar Well.

Put it on top o't crag.

The stone mason stared at him blankly, like workmen do when they're thinking you're mad. He pointedly didn't look towards the crag at all. I don't know which of them was the greater expert at gazing in silence: my father was a man of few words, but the stone mason's silence was positively eloquent.

I think he lost the game though, for it was he who eventually interrupted the wind by saying: Old Twemlow will never countenance it.

You leave Old Twemlow to me. My father's answer came so quickly, it proves he knew exactly what the mason was going to say.

Aye?

The disbelieving tone and a wry smile made an entire paragraph of so simple a word.

Aye ... before you'n hardly laid the footings he'll be up there egging you on, and telling you how to build it.

An if he do?

My father did his usual looking at his boot as it crunched some fragments of stone. He caught my eye in doing so, and gave me a mischievous wink.

You build it exactly like he tells you.

The mason was defeated, and looked up towards the brow of the cliff. I think he even scratched his head, under his hat.

We began to walk away, towards Sugar Well cottage.

Exactly like he tells you mind, thirty foot and archway and Astbury lime and all.

What of Squire's notion of it? came through the wind.

You leave the Squire to me. He chuckled at being handed such a coup-de-grace by so seasoned a haggler as a stone mason.

Old Twemlow was there in his doorway.

Squire will get his tower then, he said. They'n already speaking of Wilbrum's Folly.

I daren't say whose tower it will be, was my father's canny reply, nor yet whose folly.

Once we were alone I told the old man, with all the eager anticipation of a child, how he might help the mason build it.

I reckon tis already there, was his odd response, shaking his head as he gazed at the empty crag. But out of its time. Mason will bring it to present view.

We had fetched water from the well, and he took a deep, manly draught or two.

Clear as day it be now, though only lately has I come to the right vision ont ... Helped thither by my small familiar, eh, my little foundling?

He handed me the tankard. Cool clean water from Sugar Well.

We are the both of us, he said, in a manner perpetuators of the tower on the hilltop. Me and thee. And he stroked my head.

The Pointed Hill

It is famous for its tower now, the Hill – the pointed Hill, the Hill with the unambiguous summit. Clear as day: there is no mistaking the Hill with the tower. It is in the guide books. And visitors (or are they pilgrims still?) climb the steep slopes to taste the rejuvenating water, to survey the vast horizon, and to see what this strange building is on top.

They do not discover what it is; yet I think they come away feeling it is somehow right, knowing it had to be there, half believing it always was. No one can now imagine the Hill without it. Even I – and I suppose I'm the only person who remembers it not being there, who stood on the spot when it was just the bare top of a crag – even I cannot really picture the Hill without it. So right has it always seemed; so mysteriously did Old Twemlow convince me it was pre-ordained; so effectively did it rectify time, if not the very fabric of the universe.

You will be told that Julius Caesar built it. That it's an ancient beacon from the Wars of the Roses. That it's something Cromwell once bombarded. Wilbraham's Folly, wags still call it; while in the country-house parlance of the Wilbraham family it has always been referred to as a Summerhouse. Surprisingly, hillfolk took fondly to that name. I suspect it resonated of the summer's end festival in which a spectacular, beautiful presentiment of their tower played so profound, so ephemeral a part.

Though none now speak of it.

And but for one thing, I'd leave it unspoken too. Nothing I say can dispell the mystery of it anyway. But it's the memory of my childhood friend that's made me want to tell the story. I hear often of the special bond of affection little girls have felt towards their grandfather. The nearest I came to it was Old Twemlow. I have a notion, in that conversation with my father in his smokey cottage, that he was adopting me as his granddaughter. I'm proud if it was so.

Not everyone liked him. He was certainly eccentric, though that goes with the job – the hermit under the hilltop. But my father was a good judge of men, and allowed him the tower of his imagining; and trusted me to his care and company often, a little girl of about eight.

Just as he had quietly refused the Squire's command to replace the ailing and dignified Old Podmore; just as he saw the good character of the pair of stone masons, father and son, whose name I later learned was Harding. The youth in fact married and settled on the Hill, and my father engaged him to look after the tower.

For many years I saw little of the place. By the time I resumed my pilgrimages, no one there knew me. It was little changed, except in one respect: I was surprised how populous it had become; and when you speak to them you find they are mostly called Harding. They are children and grandchildren, and great grandchildren too, of the young stone mason.

The Hill under its tower is dotted with their little stone cottages, and really quite a village now.

But lifegiving liquid continues to bubble up out of it. And the sky turns about it, in the eternal dispensation of time.

And the tower stands at the centre of it all, timeless – and reddens at every Lammas sunset.

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Notes

The story is set in the year 1753. Its purpose is to explore and animate various probable layers of background and inspiration to the building of the Tower, or to the concept of a Tower, for which historical writing and a discussion of folklore are not adequate. The circumstances and the topography are thus entirely true, the features of the topography (Sugar Well, Old Man, quarries, etc) are as described. The elements brought into the story as background or inspiration to the idea of a Tower are either historically true if they appear to be tangible or topographical things (a beacon, a cairn, an earlier lost peak) or conceptually valid if they appear to be folkloric or mythological notions (a castle of fire, a hollow mountain, the world's spindle). The Tower really exists, and indeed has become iconic; a spectacular photograph of it, also showing the great cliff of Sugar Well quarry and the Cheshire Plain beyond, forms the frontispiece (and dustjacket) of W. G. Hoskins's seminal book *The Making of the English Landscape* (1955). Now generally called a Castle, it was formerly named the Summerhouse and nicknamed Wilbraham's Folly; it is one of the earliest pseudo-medieval or Gothic follies, its date as well as its location reinforcing our basic premise that its origin (the formulation of the concept) may have been less simple than is normally the case with country-estate follies. The Squire who had it built in 1754 was Randle Wilbraham (1694-1770), the stone masons who built it were John Harding and his son Ralph Harding (1731-1812). Ralph settled on the Hill (marrying a native girl named Oakes), as did his younger brother Samuel, their descendants contributing significantly to turning a wild and largely uninhabited common into a hilltop village. The traditional roles of the two men living by and looking after the two summits are also historically true, more or less, though the actual two old men have been invented, as have the narrator and her father. Twemlow and Podmore were nonetheless two of the chief surnames on the Hill during the 17th century, disappearing after the mid 18th. The name Twemlow, by the way, originally meant two hills.

Literary note

The story contains, quite intentionally, allusions (homages you might call them) in the form of phrases adapted from several literary or similar sources. For example, 'An Unearthly Child' is the title of the first episode of *Doctor Who*, referring to the Doctor's granddaughter

(writer, Anthony Coburn); 'By damn' is what Huw Halfbacon says in *The Owl Service* when he realises one of the youngsters has understood the implications of the legend (Alan Garner); 'the chains of the sea will have busted in the night' is a phrase from the apocalyptic song *When the Ship Comes In* (Bob Dylan); 'remembering her own child-life, and the happy summer days' are the final words of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Lewis Carroll). Less anachronistically some traditional local sayings are included, all of them genuine, as well as words and expressions that reflect local parlance. Sometimes these too (like the literary homages) have a particular association or resonance. The rare archaism 'anent', for example, always seemed part of the language of the Hill after Joseph Lovatt used it in his 1942 book to introduce his thoughts about the Old Man; 'strife and variance' is from a pamphlet of 1642 referring to a boundary dispute that has halted quarrying; 'that's why they'n mystified' stuck in my mind from an interview with an old hillman in 1969; while 'o'er yonder' as a colloquial euphemism for death is poignantly deployed in the 1892 epitaph of a hillchild, which children on the Hill once knew by heart: 'And now I dwell just over yonder / In heaven with God so good and kind'. My great grandmother's dying words, in the bedroom where four years later I was born, were 'Dunner it look peaceful o'er yonder' – she was gazing through the window towards her native Biddulph Moor.

Other notes and glosses

Alderley or Nether Alderley mill uses millstones from the Hill (as of course do most mills in the region), and examples can be seen there.

Amy, a fairly common name in earlier centuries (and later), has largely fallen out of use in the 18th century.

Anent (concerning) is an archaic word that suits Old Twemlow, though it is included in the story more on account of Joseph Lovatt's use of it.

Armada see Beacons

Astbury lime or 'Newport lime', made from limestone quarried on the northern slopes of the Hill, is a naturally hydraulic lime renowned for its adhesive and water-proof qualities when used as mortar (see Roman cement); the tradition that it is used in building the Tower, and that in consequence the Tower can never fall down, is a true local tradition.

Beacons (signal fires) are a stubborn presence in the folklore of the Hill, albeit seldom specific, which may be due to their long history; even before the famous chain of *Armada* beacons in 1588 there are systems as far back as Anglo-Saxon times; a reference to such a beacon on the Hill occurs in 1329; in addition to which (as in the story) the recollection of signal beacons is mixed up with that of ceremonial or festive bonfires (see Castle of fire).

Brid lime (bird lime) is what Astbury lime is sometimes called by locals, who put it on tree branches to catch birds (for putting into pies).

Cap see Old Man

A *Castle in the air* is more than an apt cliché, it is a phrase used a few years later in mockery of a hare-brained plan to tunnel through a nearby hill and utilise its natural water-table as a summit reservoir for a

canal system; the Harecastle Tunnel gets built nonetheless, using Astbury lime!

The *Castle of fire* is a real folkloric phenomenon, whether as merely a term for a festive bonfire or (as in the story) as an actual figurative structure (akin to the famous wicker man) that is laboriously made and lovingly decorated then burnt as a ceremonial or sacrificial act (see Lammas); the techniques of making and decorating are similar to those used in well-dressing, which of course is another custom on the Hill.

Dancing bear see Swing-boat

Eye of a millstone see Spindle of the world

A *Face* or *head* is a folk artefact occasionally found lurking in the area, related to the stone heads that have totem significance in the Celtic world; a spooky stone face in the doorway of the Tower is seldom noticed by visitors.

Fertilised reminds me to mention that Old Twemlow's emphasis on the Plain is correct: it is a peculiarity of the drainage topography that with only one exception (an important exception, for it is one of the headwaters of the Trent) all the springs and streams emanating from the Hill, even those on the Staffordshire side, flow into Cheshire; the River Wheelock is traditionally regarded as rising on the Hill.

Folly is not actually a word that hillfolk take kindly to in reference to their Tower, though Wilbraham's or *Wilbrum's Folly* is well evidenced as a nickname for it.

From the highest to the highest is a genuine saying or phrase on the Hill, used in boundary descriptions in reference to the dual summits.

Gent see Yeoman

Great cavern see Reservoy

Great cliff see Sugar Well

The *Grotto* and rocky hollow at the Hall are usually said to be of early 19th-century date, so I may be taking a liberty in projecting their origin back to the mid 18th; they are certainly made of stones from the Hill, possibly including stones from the summit cairn (just as stones from the Bridestones long-barrow are utilised in Biddulph Grange gardens); near the Grotto is the 'Stone Chair', an ancient stone brought for safe keeping to the Hall, not relevant to our story but proving that ancient stones have been removed to the Hall gardens.

The Hall see Randle Wilbraham

The *Harding* family comes to the Hill in 1753; Ralph Harding (1731-1812) helps his father John build the Tower and then looks after it for the Wilbrahams; he and his younger brother Samuel settle on the Hill, their progeny contributing significantly to the growth of a *village* on the hitherto largely uninhabited hilltop common; Harding is the most common surname in the village in the 1841 census.

Hats (as our narrator states) are traditionally worn by all hillmen 'almost all the time, even indoors, and removing them is the highest courtesy they ever pay'.

Head see Face

Hermit is a relative term of course, but it is hard not to see the secular custodians of the hilltop as successors to (say) medieval hermit-ascetics, and they in turn to prehistoric priest-votaries.

The Hill (used throughout the story as the name of the Hill) is neither a disguise nor an affectation: it is the correct local familiar or colloquial name for the Hill, used by all true hillfolk and historically validated (millstone makers' wills as early as the 16th century, for example, refer to their works or tools 'in the hill' or 'upon the hill', sometimes using no other name); the earliest known name for the Hill is Moel, which is Celtic for The Hill.
Hills and hollows and overgrown *refuse heaps* form the landscape typical of ancient quarrying or shallow mining, just as characteristic of the hilltop as the more obvious rock faces and outcrops; Sugar Well cottage (see below) and the equivalent cottage near the Old Man are both built on top of large ancient refuse heaps.
Holler see Reservoy
Julius Caesar is one of Randle Wilbraham's rivals as builder of the Tower in local tradition or waggery.
The *Knoll* is a name found in old manorial documents and quarry leases, presumably referring either to the summit where the Tower is built or to a nearby lost summit.
Lammas is the name of a harvest festival, one of the four quarter days of the religious and agricultural calendar (August 1st); presumbly in prehistoric pagan times there is a great festive and religious gathering on the Hill, ancestor of the Wake (see below); the *Lammas fire* is a ceremonial or festive bonfire, and a version of it, the *Lammas tower*, is a real folkloric phenomenon akin to the castle of fire (see above).
Little rill (a word usually meaning a streamlet) is from a local folk rhyme about one of the Hill's springs.
Macclèsfield is pronounced locally makləs or maklers (vowel+soft s), not makəlz.
A *Machine* is best represented by millwork at the time (see Windmill), though other forms of machinery are becoming more common; the word 'machine' however (curiously to modern ears) is also used of certain horse-drawn coaches and wagons, long before mechanical road vehicles or flying machines (or time machines).
Millstone (Millstone Grit) is the rock that forms the Hill, and has been quarried from ancient times for the making of querns and *millstones*.
The *Moorlands* or Staffordshire Moorlands are what lies to the east of the Hill, as the Cheshire *Plain* lies to the west.
Morridge is the great moorland summit at the heart of the Moorlands, between Leek and Buxton, visible from the Hill; the saying or prophecy linking it to the Hill is genuine.
Mountain (used of the Hill) is technically correct, the height at the northern summit near the Old Man is 1,100 feet.
The *Mountains of Mourne* are referred to in the folklore of the Hill, whether by mistake for the *Welsh Mountains* (Snowdonia) or for some more inscrutable reason I know not.
Northern Nancy (as she is known on the Hill) is White Nancy, another strange hilltop building or folly at the summit of Kerridge, near Macclesfield; she marks the next beacon site to the north.
The *Oakes* family is found on the Hill from at least the 17th century.

Old Man is the name of the giant rock pillar, about 70 feet high, left after quarrying beside the northern summit; the top of his head or *cap* is the highest point of land on the Hill; he is first mentioned in 1533, a formal agreement to preserve him dates from 1628, but his face has presumably gazed over the Plain as an exposed summit outcrop from a period of much greater antiquity; a cottage near the Old Man is the traditional residence of the head man for the Cheshire side of the Hill.
Old Podmore (a fictitious character) is slightly based on a later inhabitant of the cottage near the Old Man, John Stanyer (1787-1853), a quarryman, who succeeds Ralph Harding in looking after the Tower for the Wilbrahams (in rivalry with Old Thorley – see next); Podmore is the name of the chief family on the Hill until the mid 18th century.
Old Twemlow (a fictitious character) is partly based on a later inhabitant of the cottage near Sugar Well, James Thorley (1783-1851), known as 'Old Thorley', a sort of custodian of the hilltop, whose eccentricities and mystical bent are mocked by his fellow hillfolk even while he is also held in respect; Twemlow is the name of a leading family on the Hill until the mid 18th century.
Pilgrims seems an apt word for visitors to the Hill, true pilgrimage being part of the ancient veneration of hills and springs, and thus of the original festive gatherings on the Hill (see Lammas, and Wake); more recently Methodists reviving the tradition of open-air worship on the Hill explicitly call themselves 'pilgrims'.
Plain see Moorlands
Play hamlet is a commonly-used local expression meaning to rage with histrionic anger or be very cross, cognate with 'go mad' in that sense.
The *Prophet Nixon*, also known as the Cheshire Prophet, is a real historical and folkloric character; his inscrutable prophecies (real or spurious), first printed in 1714, are widely known in the 18th century.
Randle Wilbraham (1694-1770) is a distinguished lawyer and politician as well as a country *Squire*; he rebuilds *the Hall* in 1752 and then has various other works done about his grounds and manor; the Tower and Old Man belong to his family until 1923; the name is pronounced Wilbrəm.
The *Redness rising* into the dark sky and seeming to 'tincture the ... universe' is a real phenomenon observable at bonfires on the hilltop.
Refuse heaps see Hills and hollows
Rejuvienating (rejuventing) is the main virtue traditionally claimed for the Hill's spring water, more modest than magical but much more than merely refreshing (see Sugar Well).
Reservoy (reservoir) embodies the traditional belief that the Hill is *holler* (hollow) or contains a *great cavern* filled with water, a handy explanation for the many springs that occur, even near the hilltop; the related notion that the Plain might flood and the Hill become a *seaside place* is also a true bit of local tradition or waggery; hollow hills are of course a common notion in folklore and mythology.
Roman cement is a mortar made with hydraulic lime (see Astbury lime), used by the Romans in building aquaducts; modern experiments have proved scientifically that it is the ingredient in ancient cement and

concrete that accounts for their phenomenal durability, and hence that the tradition to that effect on the Hill is true.
The *Ruck of stones* (representing the phrase 'roke of stones' in a document of 1533) is a cairn on the northern summit of the Hill, above the head of the Old Man, that has disappeared by the 18th century.
Seaside place see Reservoy
Shoulder of the Hill see Wake
Sneyd is the squire of the Staffordshire side of the Hill; disputes arise from time to time as quarrying breaches the invisible boundary and intrudes into the neighbouring estate (see Strife and variance).
Son-in-law is a common line of descent in a matrilocal community such as the Hill (where couples live with or near to the wife's family).
The *Spindle of the world* is the axis not of the planet but of the cosmos, the visible universe, and however variously pictured (from an ash tree to the axle that goes through the *eye of a millstone*) is a well-attested concept in mythology; for ordinary folk, as Old Twemlow says, it 'conveys a notion where truth is hard to grasp' of how the sky seems to turn about a centre, and time follow it in ever-recurring cycles.
Squire see Randle Wilbraham
A *Steward* or agent is the manager of a landlord or squire's estate; Wilbraham's agents are known but for the purposes of the story a fictitious character – and his daughter – have been substituted.
Stonehewers and *stonegetters* are the old local words for quarrymen.
Strife and variance over a manorial boundary is reported in a pamphlet of 1642 as causing the temporary cessation of millstone quarrying.
Sugar Well is the name of a spring beside the summit crag on which the Tower is built, and by extension also of the quarry and of the 70-foot *great cliff* or quarry-face immediately beneath the Tower; sacred springs are often designated by terms that imply the water is *sweet* (see Rejuvienating).
Sugar Well cottage (known as 'The Cottage') is the traditional residence of the head man for the Staffordshire side of the Hill; its Victorian replacement is called Beacon House; his counterpart on the Cheshire side lives in a cottage near the Old Man.
Surry represents the local pronunciation of the archaic word sirrah, meaning sir but in practice used as an emphatic or a mild expletive.
Sweet see Sugar Well
A *Swing-boat* is remembered as a feature of the latterday Wake by the oldest lady I have spoken to on the Hill (born in 1875); that and the *dancing bear*.
Ten yards or *thirty foot* (or 32 feet 9 inches to be exact) is the height of the Tower, as well as the approximate difference between the surface of the crag on which it stands and the true summit at the Old Man.
Village see Harding
The *Wake* is an annual rustic festivity or fair on the Hill, anciently a pagan festive and religious gathering at Lammas, syncretised as a parish saint's feast and latterly taking place near the end of July (St James – patron saint of pilgrims!); it survives with some of its traditional rustic character until 1807, and in debased form a century beyond, while its religious element is taken over by Methodist 'camp

meetings'; the 'traditional spot on the *shoulder of the Hill*' where the festivity centres is the area around Parsons Well and Coronation Mill.

Welsh Mountains see Mountains of Mourne

Wench is the normal word on the Hill for a girl, and is neutral or affectionate (neither jocular nor disparaging as modern dictionaries might imply).

Wilbrum's Folly see Folly

A *Windmill* does not figure directly in the traditions relating to our Tower (see Machine), though the similar hilltop building or folly called Old John at Bradgate Park, near Leicester, is built on the site of a windmill which – according to the legend – burned down!

Yeoman (a status term usually associated with a prosperous farmer) is applied to the chief men of the Hill in spite of their being of much lowlier status; Old Podmore referring to Old Twemlow as *gent* is presumably flattery one-upmanship.

Yonder or 'o'er yonder' is used on the Hill to mean heaven, or rather, as a euphemism for death; a gravestone on the Hill bears an epitaph with the words 'And now I dwell just over yonder / In heaven ...'.

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 2007/12