

Damh the Bard:

All right. So you've just released a new book, Magical Britain.

Rob Wildwood:

That's right, Magical Britain.

Damh the Bard:

It's an incredible piece of work, I think. And what I'd like to know is, what kind of gave you the inspiration to really put together this... What is a gazetteer, I guess, of the most magical sites of the whole of Britain, because there's Wales and Scotland and Cornwall and everything.

Rob Wildwood:

Yeah, the whole of Britain and the islands too.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, yeah.

Rob Wildwood:

Yeah, well you'll see, it was just a huge project really. I mean, it's actually a development from my first book which is called Magical Places of Britain, which had only 80 sites in it. And I always intended to do a book two, and even on the cover of one edition it says, book one. Everyone was going, "Oh, where's book two?" But I never got around to producing a book two until I met Daniel Start, who owns the Wild Things Publishing. And I was really keen on his Wild Swimming books and his Wild Guides, and I just thought, "Wow, this would make a great format for my book." And then so-

Damh the Bard:

So you got into contact with him?

Rob Wildwood:

I got into contact with him, and he looked at my first book and he was like, "Yeah, let's do it." But I didn't really know what I was letting myself in for, I don't think because...

Damh the Bard:

So, I mean, basically, within your book the format is that it has photographs, Ordnance Survey locations so people can find it of... How many sites is it?

Rob Wildwood:

There's over 650.

Damh the Bard:

650 sites.

Rob Wildwood:

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There's a lot. I tried to make it as comprehensive as possible. It became an obsession to find every single place, but obviously I've missed a few minor ones. But I've been to every one I could find from every reference book I could find.

Damh the Bard:

And you've personally been to all of these places?

Rob Wildwood:

Yeah. And I've personally-

Damh the Bard:

That's just incredible.

Rob Wildwood:

I've personally photographed every single place. Yeah, but it's all my own photography. There's not a single photograph in the book that's not mine.

Damh the Bard:

I would've loved this book 30 years ago.

Rob Wildwood:

Me too. That's why I wrote it.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Rob Wildwood:

Because nobody else had written it.

Damh the Bard:

I mean the closest I've got is probably The Modern Antiquarian, by Julian Cope.

Rob Wildwood:

Yeah, which surprisingly, I've never seen.

Damh the Bard:

Oh really? Oh, okay.

Rob Wildwood:

I tried to get a copy online, but it's so expensive now you can't get hold of it. But I mean, the most similar book out there is Atlas of Magical Britain by Janet and Colin Bord, but that book's about 30 or 40 years old.

Damh the Bard:

That's getting on, along-

Rob Wildwood:

There's very few photos in it, and some of the locations are a bit iffy. So I mean, that's all part of the journey is going there and seeing if the place is still magical, if there's still anything to see.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Yeah.

Rob Wildwood:

That's part of the excitement for me because some places you go there and there's nothing. It's just a muddy field, or it's been concreted over, but in other places you go, "Wow, how come I didn't know this place existed before?" It's totally mind blowing.

Damh the Bard:

Some people, when they think of a sacred site, the first one will be Stonehenge, Avebury, the big ones like that.

Rob Wildwood:

For me, that's a bit kind of yawn. I prefer the little hidden places in nature.

Damh the Bard:

The tiny little kind of sacred wells and things like that.

Rob Wildwood:

Yeah, especially when you see they're being venerated and they've got offerings hanging there, and to me, that's really, really magical.

Damh the Bard:

Still living. Still living.

Rob Wildwood:

Living tradition.

Damh the Bard:

I used to be a sales rep years ago on the road, and I had the west part of the country in Scotland which, for me, is the best bit.

Rob Wildwood:

Definitely.

Damh the Bard:

Sorry, people in the east of England.

Rob Wildwood:

Well, actually, if you look at my book, there's far more magical places in the west of the country, and I really did my best to find everything I could in the southeast and the east, but there really isn't much, unfortunately.

Damh the Bard:

Yes. And I always used to, at the end of my day, I'd look at... I had an OS Atlas of Ancient Britain. And I'd look at that and I'd find a stone circle or something or some sort of sacred site. And I would make my call close by and then book a B&B close by, and then as soon as my call was ended, I'd just head off into the countryside and find these things, and gradually cross them off. But you've been to 600 of them. So when did you start this journey?

Rob Wildwood:

Well, it was around 2010, really. It was when I first started coming to Glastonbury, and I just... I don't know. One thing just kept leading to another. It was honestly just like a spiritual quest to begin with. I never planned to write a book. I never planned to do any of that.

Damh the Bard:

It was all for you, basically, and your connection to-

Rob Wildwood:

To begin with. To begin with, but I mean, I've always been into photography. It just so happened that I was photographing all the places I went to which, in hindsight, was very useful. But then eventually, it turned into a spiritual quest and then I was guided that I had to get the information out there. And then I was guided some more that I had to publish a book which is what I did with in my first book, *Magical Places of Britain*. But of course that led directly onto this obsession with visiting every single site.

Damh the Bard:

Amazing. Absolutely amazing. So the entries are comprehensive. You've got the OS location of them as well, and, to a certain degree, how easy they are to get to. But I have to say, Rob, that the photographs are amazing too. Have you had photography training or anything like that? Because they are beautiful.

Rob Wildwood:

Well, I've never had any photography training at all, no. I'm completely self-taught I mean, I taught myself mainly from photography magazines that you get in WHSmith, that kind of thing. There's loads and loads of handy hints and tips and all that in there. But I've been doing it since my teens, photography, you know what I mean? So it's like I'm not a professional photographer, but I think it's good enough.

Damh the Bard:

But I think if somebody out of Britain was just really into the magical sites of Britain, this is a journey that people can take through the book.

Rob Wildwood:

Oh, absolutely. It'd take them years, though.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, it will. And I love the opening chapters are kind of dedicated to aspects of magical Britain. So there a section on fairy lore, there's a section on visiting the sacred sites and that kind of thing. So it's not just a guidebook. There's actually more to it.

Rob Wildwood:

But every site has one of these 22 categories. That's how I define what is a magical place because it has to have some kind of magical history or folklore or magical properties to it to qualify. So the categories are things like the mythic history such as King Arthur and Merlin and the Celtic Saints, and there's also the magical properties of a place such as wishes and healing and divination. And then there's also the magical beings such as the fairies and hobs and pixies. So any place with folklore, I'm going to go and investigate it and see how magic it still is.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Yeah. On this journey of 600 sites, are there any particular ones that stand out in your memory of any kind of magical encounters or impressions or anything like that?

Rob Wildwood:

Yeah. Well, that's a tricky one because I really love discovering new places, and it seems to be some kind of energy about when going to a new place, I can really tune into it. So I mean, yeah, I've had some amazing experiences at places like Pistyll Rhaeadr in Wales, which I'm going to pronounce the English way. Sorry to all the Welsh listeners out there. I won't even attempt pronounce it in Welsh.

Damh the Bard:

And that's a great photograph of Pistyll Rhaeadr.

Rob Wildwood:

Yeah. That's a fantastic place. It's so magical, and there's so much folklore, and there's so many different levels to it. I mean-

Damh the Bard:

And that's a waterfall just so people don't know.

Rob Wildwood:

Yeah, it's a huge three level waterfall and the middle one goes through a hole in the rock that they call the Fairy Bridge which is a bit like St. Nectan's Glen, but bigger and more so. But like I said, my first few years of doing this was like a spiritual quest. So I was getting visions in most of the places I went to using shamanic techniques, just tuning in and there's a whole story attached to it which I've published in my book called The Land of the Fae. But, I mean, there's so much to talk about. I wouldn't know where to start, but-

Damh the Bard:

Just somewhere in the... Aim for the middle.

Rob Wildwood:

The middle. Aim for the middle. Well, I'll just tell one simple story. I read some folklore about a cave called Hobthrush Hole which is on the North Yorkshire Moors, and it's not marked on any map! There was nothing on the internet at that point about how to find it. All I had some was some 19th century folklore to go on, so I followed the directions from this old folklore, and I eventually found these holes in the cliff face, and climbed up there, went in. I had a poke around, and it was quite fascinating. There was old graffiti in there from the 18th century and stuff. But for some reason, I was really tired that day and I had a headache and I thought, "Oh, okay, I've done that now. I photographed it. I'm on my way." And just as I was leaving, as I was about a hundred yards away, I ducked under this branch. For some reason, I took my cap off, and there's this big moth, this amazing, shiny brown moth with these big antenna on my hat, and I'm trying to shoo it away, going, "Oh, go on. Get off."

Rob Wildwood:

And then suddenly I realized, "Oh, okay. Maybe I need to talk to this creature" because I'd been doing these animal communication courses before that, and I tuned in, and the moth just said, "Go back to the cave." And I'm like, "Oh, do I have to?" I'm tired.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, come on, moth.

Rob Wildwood:

I'll come through another time. Yeah. Come on. Exactly. And he goes, "Go back now." And I'm like, "Oh no." And then I see his little antenna twitching in the direction of the cave. Seriously. I'm thinking, "Oh, God. So, okay." So I go back to the cave, and I put my hat down on the floor, and then the moth immediately flies off into this crevice. And I think, "Okay, I need to investigate this place a bit more closely." And I noticed there's one crevice in the corner which was blocked by rocks. And so there were quite big rocks, almost the size of footballs. And I thought, "okay". I lifted them out the way, and this crevice got narrower and narrower, and at the end was a little door, literally, like a perfect little rectangular door, and it was so far down, I couldn't actually even reach it with my arm. And I thought, "Wow, this must be where the hob lives. This is like Hobthrush Hole. This is like his home."

Rob Wildwood:

And what happened was I tried to tune into it, and this wave of energy just came out, and it honestly knocked me backwards. I had to shake my head because I thought I was going to pass out.

Damh the Bard:

Wow.

Rob Wildwood:

And then I had this conversation with this being who's-

Damh the Bard:

Like a spirit of place or something like that?

Rob Wildwood:

Yeah, I mean, the hobs are normally household spirits, but when they're not working in the household, they tend to live in places nearby like caves and whatever. And I left an offering there of honey as well which it seemed to really please him.

Damh the Bard:

So when you say you saw the door, was it a physical door?

Rob Wildwood:

That was a physical door. I have a photograph of it. The photograph is in my first book actually, but I didn't put it in this book.

Damh the Bard:

And that was on a moor with... . Wow.

Rob Wildwood:

So that's just one experience. I mean, there's lots of strange things like that happened. And like I said, my first book *Magical Places of Britain* is really just a photographic documentation of this quest I went on. And then after-

Damh the Bard:

That's still available, is it?

Rob Wildwood:

Yeah, that's still available. And then after I met Daniel and his publishing company, then it kind of morphed from being a spiritual quest into an obsession, like I've got to visit every single place. And then it wasn't quite the same because I didn't quite have the same time to tune in. Sometimes I'd visit four or five places in the day. So I had the whole country divided into regions. I had a road atlas with every single place marked on it so that I could plot all these different trips and just drive out there.

Damh the Bard:

Incredible. Wow. I'm quite jealous. I would have loved to have that journey. I thoroughly enjoyed it when I was on the road doing it as a sales rep.

Rob Wildwood:

Well, yeah, it's great fun. It's great fun to do that.

Damh the Bard:

So there are some that created a kind of a spiritual connection. Do you have any sites that just... When I go to Wayland Smithy, the spirit and feel I get from that site is way bigger than that site. Do you know what I mean?

Rob Wildwood:

Way bigger than that site?

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. It just feels-

Rob Wildwood:

Like part of a sacred landscape.

Damh the Bard:

Yes, part of a sacred landscape that that is part of. But it's like, that is the expression of that sacred landscape. Do you have any kind of... Favorite's a dull, silly word, isn't it? But do you kind of have a favorite from the book or some favorites, ones that stand out?

Rob Wildwood:

I've got a close connection with Janet's Foss in Yorkshire which is from my native Yorkshire in the-

Damh the Bard:

Now, I'm not familiar with Janet's Foss. What is Janet's Foss?

Rob Wildwood:

It's just a really magical waterfall, and Janet is like the fairy queen who lives behind the waterfall.

Damh the Bard:

Oh nice.

Rob Wildwood:

And it's one of these twofer waterfalls, so it's like moss that's turned to stone. You can't actually get behind it, but there's all these hollow kind of resonating chambers behind it.

Damh the Bard:

Oh right.

Rob Wildwood:

And behind the actual curtain of the waterfall itself, there's a little tiny cave you can climb into which most people-

Damh the Bard:

And you've climbed in there?

Rob Wildwood:

Of course, yeah. And just don't ask me how, but somehow by chance, I discovered that if you stick your head right into the very end and do a kind of "Rrrrr" it resonates throughout all these caves which are

behind the waterfall, which you can't even get to. And I've been visiting that place since I was in my teens, so that's a really magical place, and it's on the front cover of my first book.

Damh the Bard:

So how did you get into this stuff in the first place? Because obviously it must be a personal spiritual quest. You keep saying it was a spiritual quest in the first place. What's the calling to do something like that?

Rob Wildwood:

I don't know. It was more about just finding who I was. I mean-

Damh the Bard:

As in the past and ancestry, or-

Rob Wildwood:

Yeah, past and ancestry, definitely. I've definitely felt a deep connection with that, always. I was brought up in a small town in East Yorkshire, and I felt a deep affinity with the North York Moors because there's so many myths and legends associated with that, and I used to go out on car journeys with my dad and whatever, but it wasn't really until I moved to London and I discovered all the weird esoteric shops in places like Camden and suddenly it was like, "Ph wow, this is me." And it was almost like I found myself. I mean, I didn't really know before that what being a pagan really was, but as soon as I saw all this stuff, I realized that I was one. You know what I mean? And I got into the music of RJ Stewart and all that stuff. And then ended joining a Viking society, like a Viking reenactment society, and there was one guy there who was already like a ship-

Damh the Bard:

Was that The Vikings? Was it, or-

Rob Wildwood:

They're called that now, yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Oh, okay. I know that-

Rob Wildwood:

The Vikings. Yeah, yeah. And there was a guy in the group who was like a Viking shaman, like a gothi. And he taught me about the runes and shamanism and things like that. And so I immediately felt a really close affinity with that because it seemed so connected with nature. I just love that nature connection. And so I joined the Rune-Gild, and I learned all about the kind of Norse path, but over time that kind of lapsed. I was more into the reenactment and the fighting and the drinking and all that stuff rather than... And then it was only really in about 2008, '09, '10 when I just regained that connection with my spirituality, really. Originally through shamanism and doing courses and things like that and had another whole massive journey visiting tribal cultures all around the world, but that's a whole other subject.

Damh the Bard:

Cool. Drop that one in.

Rob Wildwood:

Yeah, yeah, exactly. But after, after doing all that, I just suddenly thought, "Well, we must have this same connection to the land in Britain. We've just forgotten it." So I wanted to come back to Britain and find our connection to the land. Where are our sacred sites? Where are our stories?

Damh the Bard:

And there's loads of them.

Rob Wildwood:

Well, yeah, when you dig there is. I mean, to begin with, I didn't know any of them. I mean, I'd never been to a holy well at that point. And when I went to my first holy well, it almost brought tears to my eyes to see these places still being venerated because you thought that all that was in the past and it was all gone.

Damh the Bard:

And it's not.

Rob Wildwood:

And it's not. It's still here, and it's always been here. Indeed.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, that's beautiful. There's something... Even though they're things like Wayland Smithy and stone circles and some of these older neolithic barrows, they are... In a way they're buildings, but they don't seem to separate you off from the natural world. I think that's what it is.

Rob Wildwood:

Uh-huh (affirmative). That's odd.

Damh the Bard:

There's something that our ancestors knew and felt, obviously. Pre-industrial revolution, I think even people in villages felt that connection to the natural world with the folklore of the fairy and stuff like that. So when I go to these sacred sites myself, and like I say, tune in, it feels like two arrows that are pointing in different directions suddenly meet together, the past and the future, the present heading back to them and boom, and then there's that kind of reaching out and touching of the two forces and things like.

Rob Wildwood:

I've had that sense of timelessness, especially visiting stone circles. There's one that's... I can't remember the name of it now, but it's just by a main road, and I'm thinking-

Damh the Bard:

Is that the Nine Ladies?

Rob Wildwood:

Yeah, yeah. That's right. And I had that sense of timelessness there, like this place has been here thousands of years before that road was made, and it's going to be here a thousand years after the road's gone. You can just feel it.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. That's another amazing sacred site. And again, you go there and there's little pile of daffodils every now and again.

Rob Wildwood:

Yeah. Course there's always a little offering which is great. It keeps the places alive. I mean the offerings and the veneration and also the stories is what keeps the place alive, really.

Damh the Bard:

Stops them from just becoming trapped in amber and monuments.

Rob Wildwood:

But you were talking about the past. I mean, how people view these places in the past. Well, one huge thing that we've forgot is that the stones are alive. They are the stone people. They're living, animate beings. People in the past would've communicated with them, and we've totally lost that animus sense of everything being alive and full of spirit, and so we're looking at them as blocks of stone, and they're so much more than that.

Damh the Bard:

Yes. Yes. They just exist on a very different speed to us.

Rob Wildwood:

Well, exactly. Yeah, exactly. That's a totally different sense of time. I mean, it's like the trees are there for hundreds and hundreds of years, and we just come then we go, and we come and we go, and they're still standing there, but with the stones even more so.

Damh the Bard:

It does feel like animism is making a comeback.

Rob Wildwood:

I hope so.

Damh the Bard:

Yes, because I think it's our hope.

Rob Wildwood:

Yeah. I believe so as well. I mean, this is one of the reasons I published this book, and it's one of the reasons that Daniel, the publisher, was so excited about it because it's reigniting that sense of

sacredness of the land. And if you believe that the land is sacred, you're not going to destroy it and desecrate it, are you? Like we do today.

Damh the Bard:

And stories as well. It's like if that mountain has no stories, and your people have forgotten the story attached to the mountain, then that mountain that is full of Ore and the like, is a resource to be exploited to a lot of people, whereas if you knew the stories attached to that mountain, that for thousands of years it protected the village from the storms and it has a spirit and a name attached to it, then it becomes far more difficult to get up there and blast it apart, I think, because you have a personal connection with a story that has gone back thousands of years.

Rob Wildwood:

Of course there are people around who don't give a damn about that kind of thing, but there is enough people who do care to give it a chance of being protected. And I mean, the same is true for stone circles. I mean the amount of stone circles you see in farmers' fields and things, I mean, they wouldn't exist today unless the local people for hundreds and hundreds of years or however many generations had seen something magical there. If it was just a pile of stones, they'd have just dragged it away and plowed the field, but there's all kind of beliefs, superstitions, whatever.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, that's kept them standing.

Rob Wildwood:

Yeah, that's kept them standing. And I mean, you really have to think there's something at work here that's kind of protecting them.

Damh the Bard:

Yes. Having visited these sites, do you have any theories about stone circles, about what they could have been? Any thoughts?

Rob Wildwood:

Well, any theory is just a theory because we don't really know, do we?

Damh the Bard:

I know, and it really is a theory, but if you kind of-

Rob Wildwood:

I mean, I do see them as a kind of ancient technology. I mean they're a step on from pure animism where people just live completely at one with nature. So they are a kind of ancient technology, but technology to do with channeling energies, fertility, that kind of thing, increasing the fertility of the land. Who knows? Who knows?

Damh the Bard:

Who knows? I mean, like you with Yorkshire, I wonder if it sometimes is a kind of accident of birth, but I was born in Cornwall, and I think that when my family moved to Sussex and everyone else said that they were born in Brighton and I went, "Redruth", and that kind of even then made me go, "Oh, there's something different here." And when we used to go back to Cornwall for holidays, and we used to go to places like the Merry Maidens and the Boscawen-Un and all those fantastic sites, Boscastle, obviously as well, and the Arthurian connection. And the thing about Cornwall-

Rob Wildwood:

There's so much.

Damh the Bard:

Oh, Cornwall is just full of folklore.

Rob Wildwood:

Layer upon layer upon layer. It was the hardest chapters to write because the folklore is so complicated.

Damh the Bard:

And it's so amazing as well with the Spriggans and all that stuff. And I think probably that's why that accident of birth probably led me right onto the path that I've been on all my life. The strange kid at the back of the room with the occult books while everyone else is swapping football cards.

Rob Wildwood:

I can relate to that.

Damh the Bard:

I remember looking out at a gig I was playing once, and I said to the audience, "Ah, so this is where all the people who didn't quite fit in in school ended up."

Rob Wildwood:

Yes, you're probably right there.

Damh the Bard:

We all knew it somewhere in our hearts, didn't we? Okay, so where can people find your book, and...

Rob Wildwood:

Well, it's available on my website which is called themagicalplaces.com.

Damh the Bard:

Themagicalplaces.com. Great.

Rob Wildwood:

It's also available on Amazon or apparently it's in WHSmith's and Waterstones and old places like that.

Damh the Bard:

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Okay, well if you do buy it, and I think we've also got it on the OBOD store now.

Rob Wildwood:

Really? Oh, great.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, we're stocking it on the OBOD store, so lots of places where people can find out more. Is the hub of all things Rob-

Rob Wildwood:

Huh?

Damh the Bard:

... your website? Is that where people can find out more about all of what you do and your other books?

Rob Wildwood:

Yeah, I guess so. Themagicalplaces.com has got links to my other things.

Damh the Bard:

Anything planned for the future? You got anything in the pipeline that you can talk about?

Rob Wildwood:

Oh, it's just such a relief to have that got done with.

Damh the Bard:

Fantastic.

Rob Wildwood:

Finally done and dusted. Yeah. Well, I mean, it's the first book I've ever published through a proper publisher, so we need to wait and see how well it sells, but it's selling incredibly well so far. It keeps selling out.

Damh the Bard:

I'm not surprised.

Rob Wildwood:

It's already sold out on Amazon.

Damh the Bard:

Really?

Rob Wildwood:

But I think it's back in stock now.

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Damh the Bard:

Like I say, it's a fantastic book. You've done an amazing job. Like I say, I wished I'd had it 30 years ago. The closest I had was, I think, Aubrey Burl's Stone Circles of Britain. I had that.

Rob Wildwood:

Oh right. I didn't have anything that exciting. I had some Reader's Digest Gazetteer or something.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, and I also had got Janet and Colin Bord's book as well, but anyone now, if you want to know the stuff and go on an amazing journey, get Rob's book. Thank you for taking time out of your day to come back to Glastonbury.

Rob Wildwood:

Oh yeah. Thank you for giving this chance.

Damh the Bard:

All right. Thank you very much, Rob.

Rob Wildwood:

Thank you.

Damh the Bard:

Thank you.