Vikki Bramshaw:

So it's interesting, isn't it? Whenever John and I do talks, we do our talks completely separate. We don't talk about what the content's going to be, and we end up sort of covering the same sort of thing in a roundabout way. John was talking about land spirits, about working with spirits of place, about really getting back to your roots, and I suppose this talk and also the book, which I've just finished writing... Well, actually I've finished it last year, but it's taken a bloody long time to get it actually published, for one reason or the other, mainly COVID. This is a case of me getting back to my roots. So some of you probably know that I wrote the Dionysus book, which is a complete shocker for a lot of British pagans, because I think what are you doing over in Greece and God knows where else, because you are a British pagan and here you are in England and what are you doing?

Vikki Bramshaw:

So for me, it was actually to do with witchcraft and the origins of the masculine deity and witchcraft in particular, the Horned God and where that God leads back to. And interestingly that's Dionysus and other related deities. So that was the reason why we ended up going down there, but also the ecstatic aspect of magic and witchcraft, which was in a lot of the traditional initiatory magic, but hasn't really made it into modern Wicca. And that's a real shame because it's the ecstatic side of magic that actually gets us doing something that works, not just sitting around saying pretty words and lighting candles and things like that, which is all lovely, but it's the actual energy and putting the passion and power into the magic, which actually gets it actually doing something. It's a battery. It's a battery, which we need to charge. So that's the ecstatic side of what Dionysus brings to magic.

Vikki Bramshaw:

Whether you call him Dionysus or whoever else, that was the point of me writing that book. But just before lockdown, just before COVID, I started becoming a lot more interested in the native landscape, sort of popped out of Dionysus mode and into exploring what's around me. I live in the New Forest. I have done for about 10 years, which isn't as long as some of the people that are here today, but in that time I've lived in a few different places in the forest, moved around and for my whole life really I've lived in the vicinity of the forest and I've used the forest for horse riding, dog walking and all of that sort of thing. To be honest, it's been my inspiration for my whole life. The fact that I'm actually not a very sociable person, I don't like people generally.

Vikki Bramshaw:

Obviously I like all of you, but find me in West Quay, no I hate West Quay. But the idea of being in the forest, there's more to it than just being somewhere that's pretty and that's somewhere that you feel quiet and calm. There is a distinctive liminality to the forest and anyone who's seen any of my talks before will know that liminality is one of my favourite words. The limit nor place, the place between the worlds, the above, the below, stepping over into other worlds is a place to lose yourself in the forest, both physically and also mentally and spiritually. There are a lot of places in the forest where we can find liminality. If you are not familiar with that word, it's a place essentially where one thing meets the other. And I was reminded of this when I was driving to work day before yesterday, thinking about this conference and oh, shit, I haven't written it yet.

Vikki Bramshaw:

And I was driving along and just as the mist... Was about 7.30 in the morning, because I start work at eight o'clock and the mist was just rolling in over the Avon. And there were sort of swans sort of floating

surreally around on the Avon, but more than just being something pretty to look at, I realized how that one scene is liminal in nature. The fact of the water and the earth meeting at the bank of the Avon and also the fog meeting the water and the land. And I started to think about how that would've been seen by our ancestors. Mists of Avalon, well, let's not go there, but the fact that the mist is seen as a liminal thing, the fact that water meeting earth is seen as a liminal place, and these places were the places of magic for our ancestors and the forest itself is a wet place.

Vikki Bramshaw:

It's essentially very boggy and damp in a lot of places. And many of you that have walked there will know sometimes to go to A to B, you have to go all the way around, through all the other letters of the alphabet before you get back, because there is no direct way. You have to know the roots around the bogs and the wet places and the forest. But those places to our ancestors were also seen as sacred. And there are places in the forest where there are valleys with bogs below, and there are round barrows or locally known butts, which are on the top of the ridges. And it was quite common. We see that all over the UK of having a wet place below with bogs and barrows and various other sacred places and landscapes above, because it was seen as a place where you could survey your lands.

Vikki Bramshaw:

And those people that were buried in those Barrows were normally quite important. People who would've had some power over the lands that they were surveying before they died. So I found this piece that Sybil Leek wrote. And I guess when you're talking about the new forest, you have to mention Sybil Leek in some respects, even though she ended off going to America, which is very odd, but there we are. Not sure how you could leave the forest and go to America, but she must have had her reasons.

Vikki Bramshaw:

So she wrote this about the forest. "In the heath lands, completely detached from other people, here I can lose myself physically in a trackless waste, renewing an unknown source of strength within myself. In the forest, I feel suspended between earth and sky heaven and hell." So she's just summarized in that paragraph, that feeling of transition and liminality, which the forest offers. If we can just look past the car parks and the traffic and the high street and all those places that the tourists like to go. Again, any of you have seen my talks before, I love a PowerPoint.

Vikki Bramshaw:

So the landscape of the forest is carved and created by the sea and by water and transitions of water, which guess again, has to do with liminality and change and transition and all those lovely, magical things. I'm not going to go into the history of the forest very much, because a lot of you being local, probably know that. I'm going to try not to touch on all of those stories, that again, you are probably already aware of, but there might be a few little bits and bobs, which you haven't heard of before, which should be quite interesting to you. So I'll probably scoot over a few subjects, but if there's anything that you want to know, you can come and ask me or just stick your hand up and I might know the answer, maybe not. Right, So the forest, why have I... Right. The place is frozen in time.

Vikki Bramshaw:

Why is that? So this goes all the way back to the structure of the soil, the beginnings of time, and the forest has sort of gone from, again, transitions from one state to another. It started off as being a very hot and damp place. And we've got fossil evidence of crocodiles and all sorts of things from the forest

long, long, long, long time ago. And then it started having bursts of permafrost. We are talking with sort of like 20,000 year processes here, lots of change. But as things were flooring, we start seeing fossils coming down, we start seeing gravel coming down and we get this very strange soil in the forest. The structure of the soil is sand and clay, which it comes from the warmer boggier times in our past. And then gravel on top, which has been washed down by the defrosting with permafrost.

Vikki Bramshaw:

So we get this very strange soil in the forest and that soil means that for the most of it, the forest cannot be built on and it cannot be put into agriculture. There are some pockets of it that can, which is more fertile soil, which is generally rarely outside of the forest, and the foresters become smaller because people have started to use that land, which is more fertile soil to build on and to grow. But because of the way the forest soil is, it's kept the forest as it should be, or always has been. It's retained, its original landscape, people can't farm it, people can't build on it. So it's been largely unchanged. And the commoning, obviously that a lot of you will be aware of in the forest, again, is largely unchanged and has been since the 11th century Norman forest law, but probably was also happening before this time.

Vikki Bramshaw:

So you've got hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years of continuity in the forest and also relative isolation because there's not very many people that live there. We are getting more now obviously because with transport, people can live there and go out to work elsewhere. But relatively there's not very many people. And with relative isolation comes a continuity of folklore and folk traditions, especially because we are bound by the sea below, almost like a half circle. So it's quite a contained space as any of you will know that try and drive into the forest in the summer. It's a bloody nightmare trying to get back out again. So I just wanted to quickly talk about boundaries in the forest as well. Just talking about roads and things like that. Anciently it was demarked by rivers. Again, anciently, it was much bigger than we know the forest to be now, but it was very fluid.

Vikki Bramshaw:

The boundaries were fluid from one ruler to the next. And it's only relatively recently that it has become what it is today as we know the national park in terms of the boundaries itself. But the roads themselves are not really much different to what they were. They tended to be the old roads that would go from one place to the next. And it's very difficult to put new road down in the forest. So again, a lot of the roads that we are traveling on are actually ancient trackways, which have been paved over.

Vikki Bramshaw:

Right, so this chap, a lot of you're probably quite familiar with, this is William Rufus the Red, Rufus the Red, third son of William the Conqueror, shot dead in the forest. You probably all know that story, so I'm not going to go over it, but essentially he was out hunting in the forest, got shot with an arrow, boop, dead. Always been blamed on the chap that was out with him that day. Sir Walter Tirel, there's a lot more to that story. But what I wanted to talk about in particular was the color red. Now the color red and blood is quite a common theme in the forest, which I came across when I was researching this book. And in particular, this again goes back to the soil, which is a really strange thing.

Vikki Bramshaw:

There is a particular stone in the forest called heath stone or heath stone, as it's more kind of commonly said, which is in the bottom left hand corner. I've turned it into a nice candle stand though, as you can

see, and this is a combination of the clay and the sand coming together, it's like an iron stone sort of thing. It's like a sedimentation of the soil from the iron rich springs. And obviously iron rich springs are also seem to be very sacred. That's something that I'll quickly talk about in a bit.

Vikki Bramshaw:

It comes in different sort of forms this stuff. So that piece there is a hard piece of rock, which myself and my good friend Kate came across when we were walking across the forest, that's a piece that we took home, but it also comes in glutenous sort of clay sort of stuff, which I can only compare it to sort of like a glutenous blocks, menstrual blood sort of consistency about it. And that is actually really good for magic and I have collected that.

Vikki Bramshaw:

It also comes in the sand and there's a place called Red Sands, which is up near where I live, which is a completely red trackway that goes around one of the enclosures. But it's also within the ground everywhere in that area. And Heywood Sumner who's, he was a local author, used to write about how some of the farmers there would use that red soil in their chicken coops and all the bottom of the chickens would all be all red all the time because it was stained red and is a staining substance.

Vikki Bramshaw:

So me being me and loving to collect all these natural materials, I've got the glutenous stuff and I've got the powdery stuff and it can stain your skin for hours, which is brilliant for anointing yourself and actually any kind of magical use really. And the iron stone in history was also used for creating crude iron tools and things like that. It was worked into tools and it was also used for foundations of houses, but particularly in the north of the forest, there is something particularly quite innate, magical about this red substance. And it kind of goes through all of the stories, this red blood, obviously going back to Rufus here again, I'm not going to go through the whole story, but the night before the hunt, he dreams of blood gushing from his eyeballs and what have you.

Vikki Bramshaw:

He dreams of being dragged to hell with blood coming out from behind him. He also dreams of the black dog, which I'll talk about shortly. So Walter Tirel, he stopped off at a pond to wash the blood off of his hands. This pond runs red, it's called vermilion red each year, or supposedly, on the anniversary of his death. And it's quite possible actually that red is seen at certain times of the year because of the soil.

Vikki Bramshaw:

So again, this is something that could have been a physical thing, which was interpreted into folk lore. Blood dripping from the cart that took him to Winchester. So he was found dead. He was put into a cart, he was taken to Winchester. Some people opt to say it's up the route of the M3 which is a bit odd, but there you go. And the black dog who is supposed to be seen dragging him to hell is also supposed to have followed the cart up to Winchester, to follow his body up to Winchester, to follow the root of the blood and the blood is supposed to be seen on that route. I don't know if it's on the M3. I can't really imagine. I'm sure there would be a better route to Winchester, I would think. But, anyway.

Vikki Bramshaw:

Oh yes. Sir Walter Tirel, poor guy probably didn't shoot him. It was probably more sibling rivalry with his brother probably shot him, but poor old Sir Walter Tirel. Anyway, he's always meant to be the person that did it, but I don't think he did. So symbology is also in the landscape, isn't it? In the leys, the places we walk. I wanted to talk about some of the ancient highways in the forest.

Vikki Bramshaw:

Obviously I've spoken about how many of inconvenient roads that we have in the forest that you can't get from A to B without going through all these other places, but they did connect major settlements and they would've been used to take goods and livestock, and many of them date back to the bronze age, which is really interesting, such as Roger Penny Way. And there's a road which runs parallel to that, which is still just a trackway. And you should be able to see there is Hampton Ridge, which runs from Abbots Well, all the way up to Fritham. And again, at Fritham, there is an ancient well that has this iron rich quality, which I'll just discuss in a minute.

Vikki Bramshaw:

Certainly it had an auspicious outlook. It looks over Latchmore Brook, which is old English for a stream through a bog or a leach pool or dead body and corpse locally known as marsh of corpses. But this trackway, which is Hampton Ridge, locally it was known as several terms, actually, snake road, horse road, great road, the old way, but most locally known as Old Shut, Old shut. I'm going to travel the Old Shut to Fritham. So Old Shut is possibly from the word shoot, which is for a steep, inclined plane or track.

Vikki Bramshaw:

We've got another place called Red Shoot, which again is near me and that's Pine's Hill, which has got this red substance within it. But one of the locals there told me that it's more likely that they used to use part of that road to take the horses up with the horse and trap. And the weight of the person would have to be put on the front of the shafts to stop the horse's windpipe from being shut because they were going up such a steep incline. So the person would have to get out of the cart to put the whole weight on the front of the shafts so that the horse didn't have its windpipe closed or shut.

Vikki Bramshaw:

So that was an interesting little thing that she told me. She was very interesting, actually, to talk to, but they connect lots of ancient well. So as I say, says Abbots Well at the start of the route, and then when you get to the other end, you get to the other well, which is the well at Fritham. The ancient wells in the forest were used both for practical reasons, so they were used for washing, for gathering water for even getting your honey from your bees and people were using this well in particular, Abbots Well, both for travelers who would come across the well, and as a source of water, right up into the 1950s. They didn't have any mains water. So people were still washing and collecting water and all sorts from that well, right up to the '50s, which is really interesting.

Vikki Bramshaw:

Of course, they also used it for sacred use, cleansing and healing properties. There's accounts of gypsy children being blessed in the wells, also in the mist ponds, which you find in the forest, which are ponds which don't have any source of water other than the mist and the rain and sometimes they will disappear in the summer and then reappear later in the year. I said, how auspicious the position of the well is because again, it's on this ancient trackway, which is looking over this valley, which is associated

with death. And there are lots of barrows, some of them which are flattened out now, which again is just the situation of the forest, because it just doesn't hold a structure like it doesn't say Wiltshire that the soil just falls in on itself, but there's lots of barrows that can be found along that particular route.

Vikki Bramshaw:

The strange thing about the place is it seems to have an association with the dead across the years. So there's a local author called Juliet Levy and she writes that in some distant past a great battle was fought at Latchmore Bottom, which is that area underneath Hampton Ridge and that the bodies were piled up in Latchmore Brook. Also, well, I won't get into it, but basically there was some pollution that came out into that Brook and lots of fish were dying and being washed up that brook, which was horrific at the time. And also in World War II, there was a couple of planes that came down in that area. And allegedly there is a plane that went down into the bog. I suppose the strangest thing for me is I live behind there. And I quite often hear the sound of bombs. I know that sounds bizarre.

Vikki Bramshaw:

Who knows? Anyway, so talking about bogs is probably a good time to talk about the pixie colt. Has anyone heard of the pixie colt? You're not allowed to answer. So the pixie cult is basically a malign bog spirit, similar to some of the other bog spirits that we are aware of in folklore. So the colt pixie is a local trickster spirit that takes the shape of a new forest pony and entices walkers, horses and their riders into the treacherous box of the forest. According to local lore, only the eldest born sibling is protected from the spell. The spirit is usually described as a small, wild looking pony with a long and rough pale coat, or sometimes a sleek and handsome young colt, I.e. young male pony, and sometimes a beautiful Phily ,girl, lightly stepping with a waving mane and tail, which lures the unwitting traveler to their untimely demise. The pixie name is used interchangeably in the forest with the mischievous spirit puck. Al puca, hob.

Vikki Bramshaw:

Now, hob, Jonathan was talking about the hob that he's got a home as a little protection spirit, but obviously there's also the hob, which is the horse hob, which we saw as part of mumming in times past. And actually if you go into the Salisbury Museum, there's the Salisbury giant there and is little friend, which is Hob the horse and they would go out and they would do ceremonial festivals and things like that for the certain times of year. And he was seen as a Saint, but it kind of, to me, seems a little bit older than that.

Vikki Bramshaw:

Where did I get to? I'm going off on one again. Also similar to the Cornish bucca, the horse hag or faerie hob devil names used interchangeably for the ancient chthonic God and land spirits who according to some were diminished demigods or piskies. The author Thomas Crocker for an Irish boy in 1825. The puca's were very numerous in times, long ago, they were wicked minded, black looking things. They would come in the form of wild colts, I.e. horses with chains hanging about them. The puca's did great hurt to benign travelers.

Vikki Bramshaw:

Sounds like a friendly fella. So anyway, back to sacred wells. The well at Fritham, which is the end of this route was known as leper's well. So there's quite a lot of leprosy in Hants in those sorts of times, but this particular well was quite rich in iron sorts and those deposits, the glutenous sort of deposits and was

said to cure sore eyes and arthritis, and also controlled mange in dogs. And there's a little extract. Robert Charles Hope described this in 1893 as a little wooden structure over and with a board on the top, by which you may drop your dog into the water and a convenient arrangement exists after which he has finished his ablations. He may scramble out on the other side. Cured of mange.

Vikki Bramshaw:

So we have these big tracks. They go all over the forest connecting places. We also have the smaller tracks, including animal tracks, otherwise known in the forest as faerie paths or spirit tracks, which have been worn over hundreds and hundreds of years by animals and people. And obviously in that way, intimately connected with the landscape. I think it would be fair to say that these are also lays. Peter Knight talks a lot about lays and how they can be created by repetitive use of a root. And I think there can be no better example really than some of those pony paths, which they just intuitively are following over hundreds and hundreds of years. We also have boundary stones in the forest and a really interesting one if I'm to capture some of the outer parts of the area, which may or may not be looked at as correct or not, but Verwood stone, has anyone seen that one?

Vikki Bramshaw:

So it's called Stephen's Stone. First recorded in 1280 a the Hoar stone near the road leading to the great bridge of Ringwood and refers it to it as a boundary. So Fairwood stone is 13 foot long, 11 and half foot wide and two foot thick. So now it's flat on the ground now, almost like a table, but it would've been stood up originally. And legend has it that an iron age tribal leader flung the stone half a mile. No mean feat. It's about three ton into the forest.

Vikki Bramshaw:

Now it's interesting that they're saying that this tribal leader just picked this stone up and tossed it over into the forest. And the fact that they're saying it's a tribal leader because in the forest, tribal leaders were considered as giants. So they were often referred to as giants interchangeably, possibly because of their stature, because the Jutes were well known for their size, but also for the position that they held in society, because they were important peoples, they were giants in their society. And obviously the name for the forest that people like to use is Etain and Etain means land of the Jutes, not verdant waste as some people have thought in the past, it's a mistranslation or something and it's definitely not a waste. There's lots to the forest.

Vikki Bramshaw:

So the Jutes are obviously an interest to lots of people because of the Etain connection. The Jutes originated from Denmark with the Angles and the Saxons that came from Northern Germany and those three people together are loosely referred to as the Anglo Saxons. So they sailed along the coast together, and some of them stopped off here. Some of them stopped off there and with the Jutes stopping off in the forest. Jutes also brought the cult of Woden to us.

Vikki Bramshaw:

Now, Christianity was already here at that time, but the cult of Woden was so strong that it took force. And especially in the forest where the Jutes were obviously living and also brought the runes. So that's an interesting piece, but this idea of giants throwing things is a really big theme in the forest and also Dorset and Hampshire in general, and also devils flinging things. Devils love to fling things around here. The Longstone or Moot stone on the Isle of Wight, where that was flung there by the devil and other

examples of the devil making is mark on the land, such as Devil's Den, which is near Blackwater, which is on the Eastern side of the forest.

Vikki Bramshaw:

There's also Rollestone at Holbury, known as Rollestone road now, but it's no longer called Rollestone but it's Rollestone, which is near Holbury. Again, suggestions that the devil or some land... Let's remember devil equals chthonic land spirit, land spirit of the earth, suggesting that those stones have been shifted by these demons and devils and also Christchurch priory. So all the people were put in the priory up and then every night someone would take the stones down and chuck them at the bottom of the hill again, and that was down to the devil or so it was said. Oh, there's the well, which I forgot to press the button on.

Vikki Bramshaw:

So that's Abbots Well, so it's actually two pieces. So the piece on the left hand side is for the animals to drink out of, and the piece on the right hand side would've been for collecting water and various other things, your collective washing water. It's not in a great kind of condition anymore. I wouldn't collect the water from there. Where's she going? Oh, it doesn't matter. Friend of mine collected water from there. I wouldn't have done... Anyway, yeah, there we go. Rollestone. So this is from one of the old maps, like a driver's map, which actually showed Rollestone lane, which I think is now called Rollestone road, Rolleston farm, and interestingly, you've got here looks like Priest Croft Corner, so it shows that the whole area there would've been of some significance because now obviously the Christianity has come in and has decided that it's Priest Corner. There's obviously something going on there, which was quite interesting.

Vikki Bramshaw:

Have I missed a piece? Oh, maybe I didn't put that slide in. Oh well. Nevermind. Okay. So lots of other things that you can see on these really interesting old maps, such as remarkable, large yew tree, barrows, obviously buttes otherwise known as shades, the witches, wells, lost wells as well, like Caroline's well, which is just up the road, on an old map, just up the road from Abbots Well. Can I find it now? It's gone.

Vikki Bramshaw:

Also the gally-bagger near Hale. Gally-Bagger. So that's on the map. Very old oak tree, but also the old Hampshire word for scarecrow, the gally-bagger. So obviously on these roots from place to place, there would be crossroads and we all know how important those are to our ancestors. And there would normally be boundary stones or boundary trees. Trees were quite an important one. You see, although on the map, old oak tree or old Yew tree. And then we've got some that are actually interwoven into folklore, like the Cadnam the Cadnam oak, which blooms in the mid-winter. And one of my favorite trees, which is in Rockford near Moyles Court, which is this huge oak tree.

Vikki Bramshaw:

One of several actually, was a couple, but this one is particularly old and particularly large. So at Moyles Court there stands several fabulous ancient oak trees, wayside oaks. When you consider the geography and history of the area, the importance of these trees becomes clear. The crossroads of Moyles Court offers four directions, Linwood to the east, the old road to Linford Bottom to the south, Ringwood to the

west and Ibsley to the north where it crosses the stream Dockens Water, and Dockens means dark or secluded.

Vikki Bramshaw:

The meeting plays between old trackways and Dockens Water was important to our ancestors and there's some evidence of 4,000 years worth of habitation there at the nearby Rockford Common. One of the oaks is particularly old and marked on the map, simply as Oak, but it was an important boundary tree. And it's marked on every single map that I've looked at, Oak. It's estimated to be about 600 years old, that tree.

Vikki Bramshaw:

And when you look between those two trees, it creates this avenue of vision between the ancient settlements and various other earthworks and iron age banks and pillow mounds as well. So the spectral black dog. The black dog, which I've mentioned before in relation to Rufus, black shuck, or the devil pacing stretches of roads, byways and crossroads accompanying travelers sometimes called Padfoot. Going to go Harry Potter on you now, referring to the footfall, but also Gaelic for faerie dog.

Vikki Bramshaw:

And it's believed to haunt liminal places such as bridges and marshes. And again, accompanying the dead. It's also seen with ghostly carriages. So at Rockford where I've just mentioned where the tree is, a stage coach is seen there, has been seen there for hundreds of years, with a black dog running alongside, and given the history of the place, many people suggest that's carrying the ghost of Alice Lisle, who's put to death there. A lot of you'll probably know that story of Alice Lisle. Another account of the black dog in the New Forest was a ghostly black dog that rushed into a cottage in the New Forest, through the walls that may also be linked to foundation sacrifices of the place with a dog concealed to offer protection to the house.

Vikki Bramshaw:

Interesting, actually, when I was researching the black dog in Hampshire, so dog skeletons are really rare, like the cat skeletons, there's lots of them, there's lots of examples, but dog skeletons as protection are rare. Now there are five examples in the UK of dog skeletons. And two of those five were found in Hampshire and Dorset. So there's quite obviously a high proportion found in this area. There's another account of doglike scratchings haunting the Crown Pub, which is Alton, which is obviously a little bit further from our study today, but Walnut Farm in Corfe Castle Castle where a puppy was found buried under the floorboards together with a child's shoe and coins. And they were classic foundation sacrifices. Let's go onto pubs. Pubs of the New Forest.

Vikki Bramshaw:

So this is a photo from the Royal Oak, which is in Fritham, which is the end of that trackway, which we've been discussing. So I went in there just before lockdown, as I was doing some research with my son and we had a hot chocolate and that sort of thing. And we started to look at all the symbols that were around the fireplace. Now there's a lot of Marian charms here, all combinations of Marian charms. And I talk about how perhaps these are New Forest interpretations of Marian charms in my book. I won't go into that because obviously I want you to buy the book, but in general, Marian charms were used as lucky symbols. They weren't necessarily understood in the context of Marian charm in the

Christian sense, we're talking post reformation here where people had a folk understanding of something and they didn't necessarily understand why they were using it.

Vikki Bramshaw:

And at that point, it became more about the magic or the intent than it did what it was being used for in the church. It was used for evil averting, good luck charms, and was placed around doorways, fireplaces, and around the windows. So basically anywhere that a spirit might enter. So a spirit might enter through your fireplace because obviously you've got a chimney. Your spirit might enter through a window because obviously the windows open, the doors, et cetera.

Vikki Bramshaw:

Also, we were protected against witches, ha-ha, but witches, remember in those times were generally considered to be a spiritual being. They weren't necessarily considered to be your eye. We were magic workers. We were not witches. So the word has obviously been translated over time and has changed. The concept of the witch in a medieval mind was, was very different, perhaps how we see it today, but we just have to shake that off. It's not an issue, but you just have to see it as a negative spirit that would come through your chimney. And so these things would be put round at those entry points.

Vikki Bramshaw:

So yeah, Marian charm, incomplete Marian charm, other marks. An interesting one I did find was the possible need which, need-fire symbol, which would make sense, putting it over the fireplace. There's also quite lot of symbology, not so much here, but various other places in the forest in buildings linking to commoning, which again I go into in the book. So this is a collection of symbols that I found in St Mary's church, which is in Fordingbridge. So, many of us being pagan, like to shy away from the Christian sites, but the manner of the fact is we are losing a great big chunk of magical history if we do that and we have to understand that those people that we're going to church, and were not necessarily seeing it in the same way as we would understand today. There was a lot of magical war going on in those churches in terms of what they were carving on the walls, and it was enduring symbolism, there were things which were enduring because of the power of symbol, not necessarily what that symbol originally meant.

Vikki Bramshaw:

So some of the things I've found, and again, I haven't just made this up, I've gone to other sources who know more about magic symbolism than I do. Oh God, I could have spent hours in the place. Lightning strike, the idea that if your house is struck once, it would strike again. So if you draw the lightning strike on your house, lightning isn't going to hit it, is it because you've already hit it with your symbol. Consecutive lines, spirit ladders, which were a way of containing a spirit by getting it to go up and down the ladder, rather than doing whatever it's come to do. The fish, questionable, just a Christian symbol that someone's put in there, pentagram at the doorway in the south. I'll talk about positioning in a minute of some of these eight spoke star, we all know what that one is.

Vikki Bramshaw:

Consecutive lines, again spirit ladders, boats, and ships. Interesting, I heard the other day about the symbolism, that's not in the book, something that I heard about boats and ships and the church actually being a container of taking people from A to B, a transition. So there's a bit more in the boat than perhaps just drawing a boat. The demon facing the north wall. Look at him, isn't he cute? Sort of looks

like a pig or a dog, or I don't know something. My son loves that anyway, and draws it again and again, Marian charms, shield, possibly the symbol for yew and death, which was an interesting one, crossed swords and mesh spirit traps. So basically like a hash mark, lots of things like that, hash marks, which contain spirits.

Vikki Bramshaw:

So many of the symbols, like the pentagrams in the Foldingbridge church and the demon are facing north. And this takes us to the positioning of symbols in terms of their purpose for controlling spirits. There's also the northern door, which is a lot of people argue about the northern door. The devil door, it's basically a door that the devil would be shunned out of at the beginning of the ceremony. But interestingly, when you look back at that, it was also the door the common people were given to come in and out of because they felt it was more comfortable because they were used to entering at north because that was the sacred place for them. So I'll just read this because it's easier. So as history would have it, post reformation, the larger doors were bricked up. And that was to prevent the superstition from lingering.

Vikki Bramshaw:

The theory of the devil door is now generally discounted in many cases due to church orientations or other practical considerations, but mostly because the accounts are not sourced. It's an interesting possibility though, because as the witch mark suggests, just because something isn't officially documented doesn't mean that didn't exist in the lives of the ordinary layperson. They weren't writing down what they were doing.

Vikki Bramshaw:

Symbols and customs used by the common person just don't appear within mainstream records, Nicholas Groves writes and his paper Devil's Doors Revisited, which I should mention mainly is trying to discount the devil door. This is not to say that north doors were not left open at baptisms, but if they were, it was a piece of folk religion and definitely not part of the official liturgy. Who cares? It was happening. The devil door was used, the northern door was used. And in the same way, we see these symbols facing north. Another thing that we've got at Fordingbridge is the Knight's Templar sharpening stone. And obviously on the last slide, we can see the shield and we've got the crossed swords, which are also linked to the Knight's Templar.

Vikki Bramshaw:

Now this was a sharping stone or an anointing stone, which meant that you would go there with your sword to sort of basically bless the sword before you went off to do anything. It's probably iron stone as well. So yet again, going back to that idea of the sacred stone of the land, and also the color red, and it's cut with blade marks, but locally it's known as the miracle stone and has continued to be cut for other purposes, such as healing.

Vikki Bramshaw:

You can't really see it in this picture, but there's also loads of charms around the stone. Other people have added, graffiti you might call it, but is it that people are going there to do things like healing and to be blessed and they're leaving something on the stone as a marker. So it's almost like setting your magic in stone as such. What else have I got? There's some more charms I found. Verger's Court, Queen's

House in Lyndhurst, Water Ditch Cottage, which is Powler. That's got the classic marks from the window ledge. They're like cat scratch marks, which were meant to confuse spirits that were coming in.

Vikki Bramshaw:

Again, lots of different Marian marks, mesh marks. So other types of charms we find in the forest, witch bottles, knotted hair for both cures and fertility, hag stones. There are accounts of hag stones, which are classic charms used all over the place, blacksmith charms, forges, and the magic connected to them here. I just wanted to talk about the forge very quickly, because I'm aware of running out of time. Just going back to Rufus the red and the escape of poor old Sir Walter Tirel, who was going to be lynched for the murder of Rufus. I'm reading for my book now. I would've stood here with the book, but I'm not, one of the most fabled of the New Forest forges was the forge opposite The New Queen pub in Avon, just outside Ringwood, where it said Sir Walter Tirel had his horses shoes reversed after fleeing the scene of the murder.

Vikki Bramshaw:

As late as the 19th century, the blacksmith forge at Avon had to pay an annual fine of three pounds and 10 shillings as penalty for this treachery. Another forge in Lynns Lane was demolished and turned in to housing, however it is said that the blacksmith anvil, which was too heavy to move from the site is buried under the back doorstep. Indeed, the blacksmiths anvil is a powerful charm in itself, and it was known at the blacksmith or the descendants of a blacksmith could curse on an anvil by turning it upside down or turning it anticlockwise while chanting malicious words.