

# Spiritual inspiration from landscapes: Cambridgeshire chalk streams and more



Lu spirit shrine  
Nepal



Working in a Cambridgeshire chalk  
stream



Votive  
offerings to  
the British  
Goddess  
Senuna

# Water and Mindfulness

“If you let cloudy water settle, it will become clear. If you let your upset mind settle, your course will become clear.

Attributed to the buddha

# Beyuls (sbas-yul)



- Places of peace, refuge and pilgrimage;
- Revered by Tibetan Buddhists (especially the Nyingmapa sect);
- In valleys along the South of the Himalayan range

# Life Water (Tshe Chu) in Beyul Khenpalung, Tibet





# Threat to a Beyul in Eastern Tibet



Concern that possible construction of a **Hydro power dam and mining** would destroy the sacredness of the Beyul

However it would provide **economic opportunities** for the village:

- jobs;
- road;
- increased prosperity;
- cheap electricity

# Invoking the local gods



However a monk considered that the threat to the **sacred nature of the Beyul** and the environment, especially holy medicinal springs and medicinal plants, posed a greater danger.

So he planned a programme of rituals involving the building and consecrating of Labtsets.

# Ritual Activity for the Health of the Beyul

Quote from a local participant:

“During the ceremony, these lamas and monks, together with the local people, will **request the mountain deity** to protect the local people and the mountain, and the local people will also promise to worship the deity devotedly. People believe the mountain will then be protected by the mountain deity in the future, and because they are in awe of the mountain deity, they dare not destroy the local environment at will. **Thus the local environment is protected**”

# Labtse (Lab rtse)

- Traditional, possibly pre – buddhist, **ritual structures**;
- Dedicated to **local territorial gods**;
- Traditionally used to request assistance with health, wealth etc.

“men will live long, women will be glorious, the merits of men and woman will be abundant, their power and prosperity will expand, they will have fewer enemies and thieves”

(translation of an ancient text: Tsering,R 2016).



# Labtse Structure and Rituals



Abbot throwing lungta



Photos by Monk



Family arrows and sacred threads



Horse displays



# Building the Labtse



Pictures by  
Monk



# Consecrating the Labtse



Pictures by Monk

# Gods in the Landscape in SIKKIM, INDIA

KANGCHENDZONGA MOUNTAIN PEAK : SIKKIM



YUMTHANG



KACHOPALRI LAKE

Above:

Gods of the sky

Gods of the mountains

In the middle:

Human beings

Spirits of the rocks

Below:

Spirits of the Underground

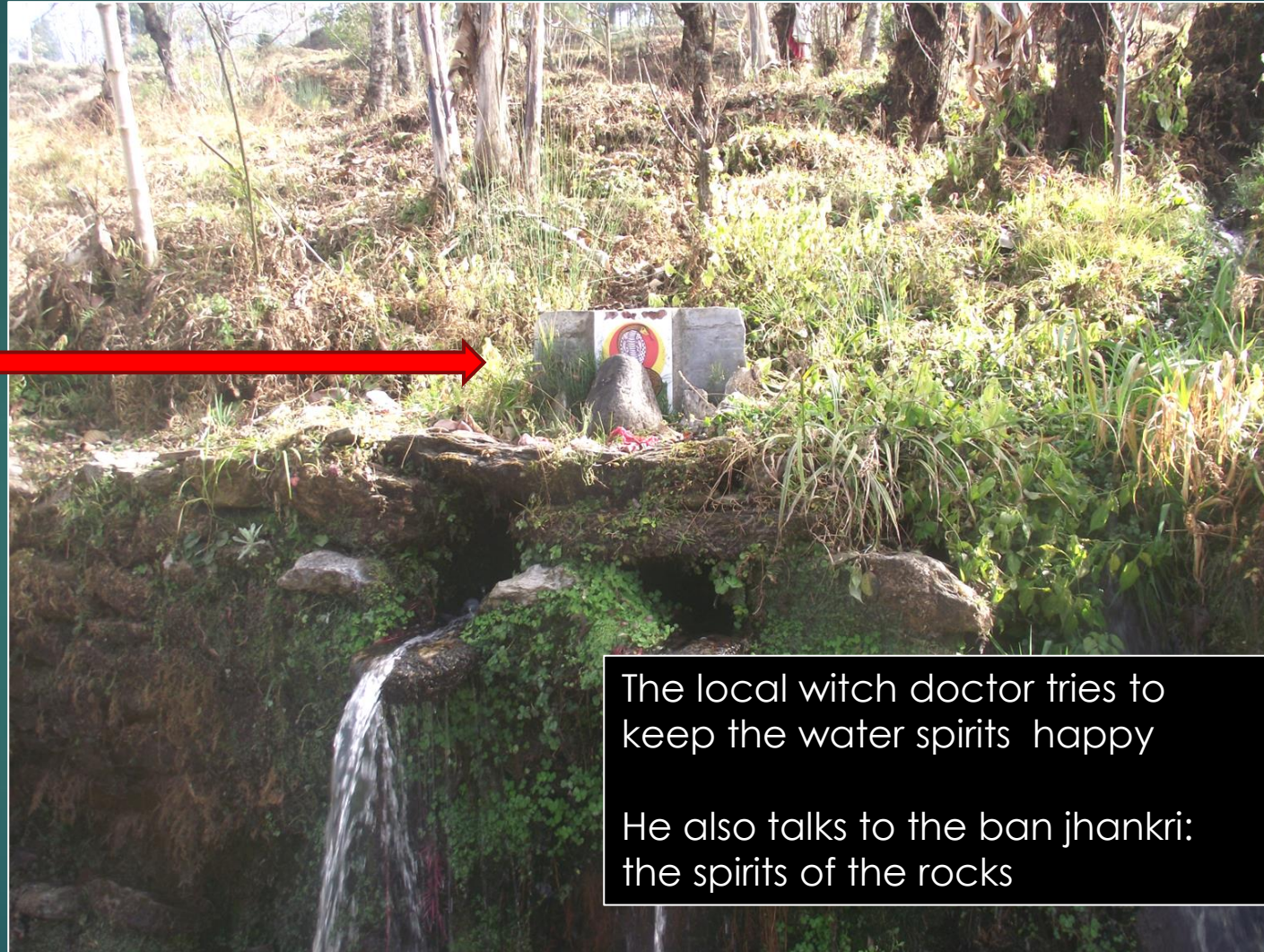
WATER SPIRITS



# Water Spirit Ritual Site in Nepal

Snake  
picture of  
the  
Lu  
(Naga)  
Spirit

It is thought  
that  
earthquakes  
are caused by  
the giant  
underground  
snake spirit  
shaking its  
crest



The local witch doctor tries to  
keep the water spirits happy

He also talks to the ban jhankri:  
the spirits of the rocks

Local Spring



# The River Mel: A Chalk stream in Cambridgeshire



Photograph: Kathryn Betts

# Was there a God or Goddess of the Mel



Some scholars think the name *Melbourn* comes from *Meldeburn*, the "stream of a man named Melde" which may have been the name of a local **god**

# The Melbourn Green Man



Melbourn Church Roof

Photo: Peter Simmonett

The Green Man maybe related to prechristian  
“spirits of the land”



# Father Cam

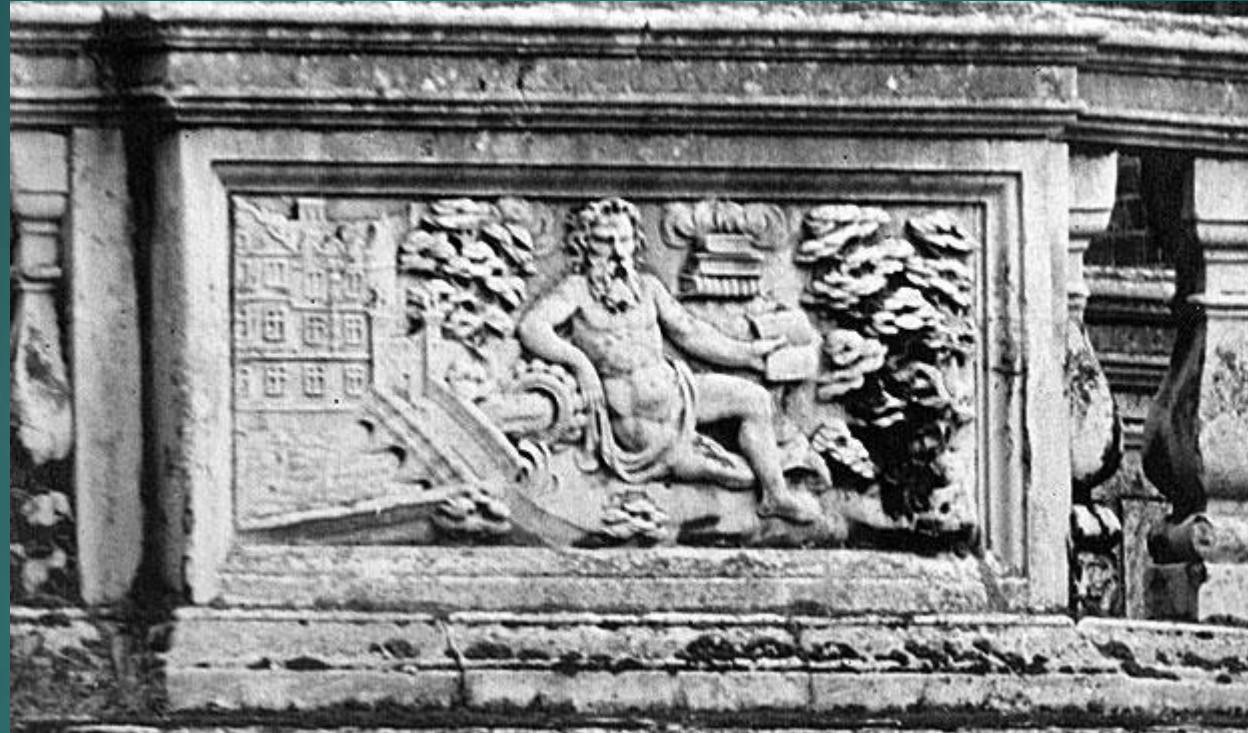


Photo: St Johns College

# The Romano British Goddess SENUNA was worshipped at a Source of the Cam



Romano  
British  
("Celtic")  
figurine of  
the Ashwell  
Goddess



Ashwell Springs



Offerings to the  
goddess



# American Followers of Senuna



Fountain on north altar

We **meditated** as a group, and came up with a **shared visualization of a town and a spring** where Senua's temple might have stood. Finally, we performed a private religion in which we made offerings of food and wine to Senua, with prayers that our community might share in her worship and the blessings of her rebirth.



March 6, 2004,

Altar to Senua in

The Temple of  
Brigantia, Wells,  
Maine, USA

[HTTP://WWW.JANERAEBURN.COM/SENUA/INDEX.HTML](http://www.janeraeburn.com/senua/index.html)

[SENUA.INFO](http://senua.info)

Possibly another group of worshippers in **Arizona**

# Another Cambridgeshire Water Spirit Tiddy Mun



A water spirit of the Fens who got very angry when they were drained

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiddy\\_Mun](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiddy_Mun)

# Holy Wells and Sacred Water sites around Cambridge

## Sacred Wells

- Barnwell
- King Street, under the Rad (previously St Radegund pub)
- St Benet's

## Possible ritual sites

- Cherry Hinton: Giant's Grave/Robin Hood's dip
- Nine Wells
- Trinity conduit head: Eddington

# English Water Serpent

Lampton Worm

Old story from  
Durham in North  
England

Picture: Wikipedia



In the story the Worm is released from the bottom of the river by a boy who misbehaved when he went **fishing rather than going to church.**

The worm does terrible things to the people living in the village.

Later, after fighting in the crusades, he returns and kills the worm

# Biodiverse Chalk Streams



Water vole

Endangered  
Species



Kingfisher



Water crowfoot  
indicates  
healthy river



Yellow flag

Fish: Trout, Bullheads, Sticklebacks, Minnows

Otters, Mink

Other Birds: Heron, Egret



# Chalk Streams: Characteristics

- ▶ **Consistent Temperature**; the spring rarely deviates from 10°C  
On cold winter mornings, it can look as though steam is rising above the relatively warm river; ;
- ▶ **Clear Water with constant flow**;
- ▶ **Lack of sandy debris**;
- ▶ River bed is covered by angular **flinty gravel**, derived from flints found within the chalk itself or the **hard chalk** base;
- ▶ Mineral and nutrient **rich**;

The majority of the world's chalk streams (about 200) are in the UK



River Itchen

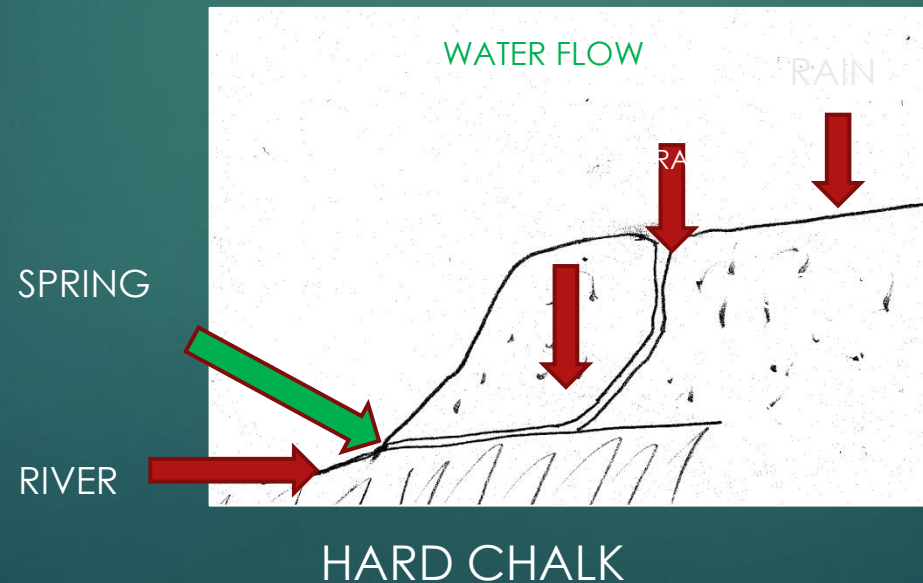
Photo: Hunt and Gather

# Formation

- ▶ irreplaceable relic of our past;
- ▶ created as the ice sheets melted many years ago;
- ▶ The rushing water brought huge quantities of the gravels that determine their ecology;
- ▶ Since then they have hardly changed their course, except for human intervention.

# Process

- ▶ Chalk is **porous**
- ▶ The rain soaks directly into the ground
- ▶ The chalk acts like a **sponge**: an aquifer
- ▶ The water is **filtered** through the chalk
- ▶ **Emerges** lower down where it hits the harder chalk: Melbourn Rock.
- ▶ This is where the **springs** appear.
- ▶ The soft chalk is a reservoir, regulating the water to the springs, so that the amount which flow varies little from day-to-day.



# Important Peatland in Cambridgeshire



Peatlands – only 3% of the world has peatlands! Locking 3.2 billion tonnes of carbon in the UK alone 1% Fenland remaining in the UK supports over 13,000 species.

# Chalk stream Conservation: Cam Valley Forum



## Cam Valley Forum

Protecting and enhancing the environment of the river Cam and its tributaries

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[The Cam Valley](#)



The **Cam Valley Forum** is a voluntary group, established in 2001. We work with our extensive network of partners to protect and improve the environment of the River Cam and its tributaries.

Offers support to 14 other chalk stream groups in Cambridgeshire



# Growing Awareness of the Significance of Water

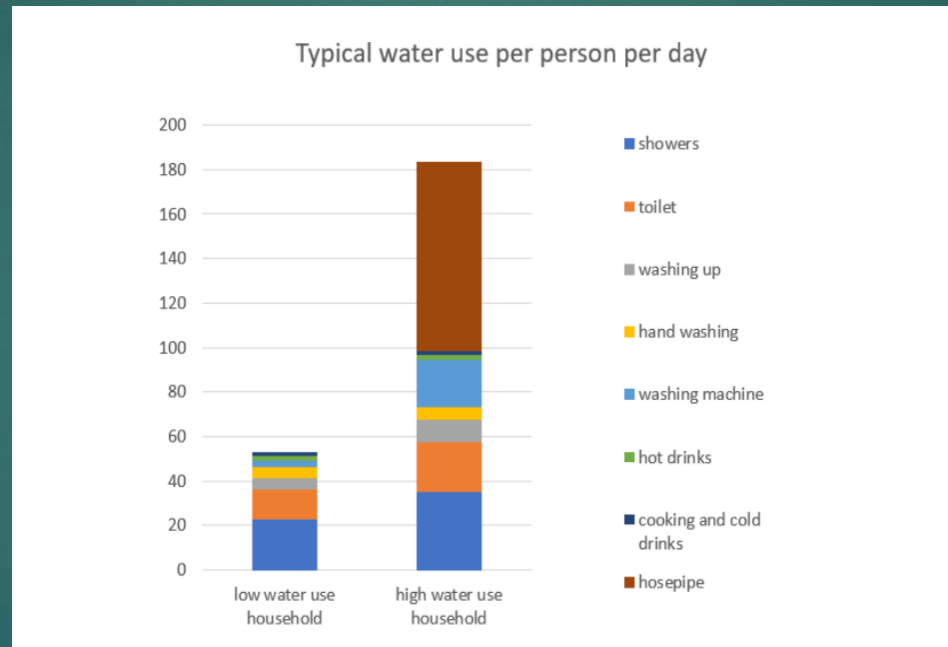
The **Environment Agency** produced **The Blue Space Report** in 2023.

This gathered the lived experiences of people interacting with “blue space”:

- natural – such as rivers, lakes, streams and the sea
- man made.

This found that there were significant **positive health and well being benefits** from interacting with water related environments.

# Water Use Comparison



# Cam Valley Forum: Water Sampling





# Chalk Stream Conservation: River Mel Restoration Group



# Rights of the Cam

"We therefore declare that the River Cam, its tributaries, and aquifers have the following rights arising from their very existence in nature:

- 1. The right to flow and be free from over-abstraction*
- 2. The right to be free from pollution*
- 3. The right to perform essential functions of flooding, moving sediment, recharging groundwater and sustaining biodiversity*
- 4. The right to feed and be fed by sustainable aquifers*
- 5. The right to native biodiversity*
- 6. The right to restoration*
- 7. The right to maintain its connection with other streams and rivers.*

22 Jun 2021

Accompanied by a group of “water spirits”

Friends of the Cam

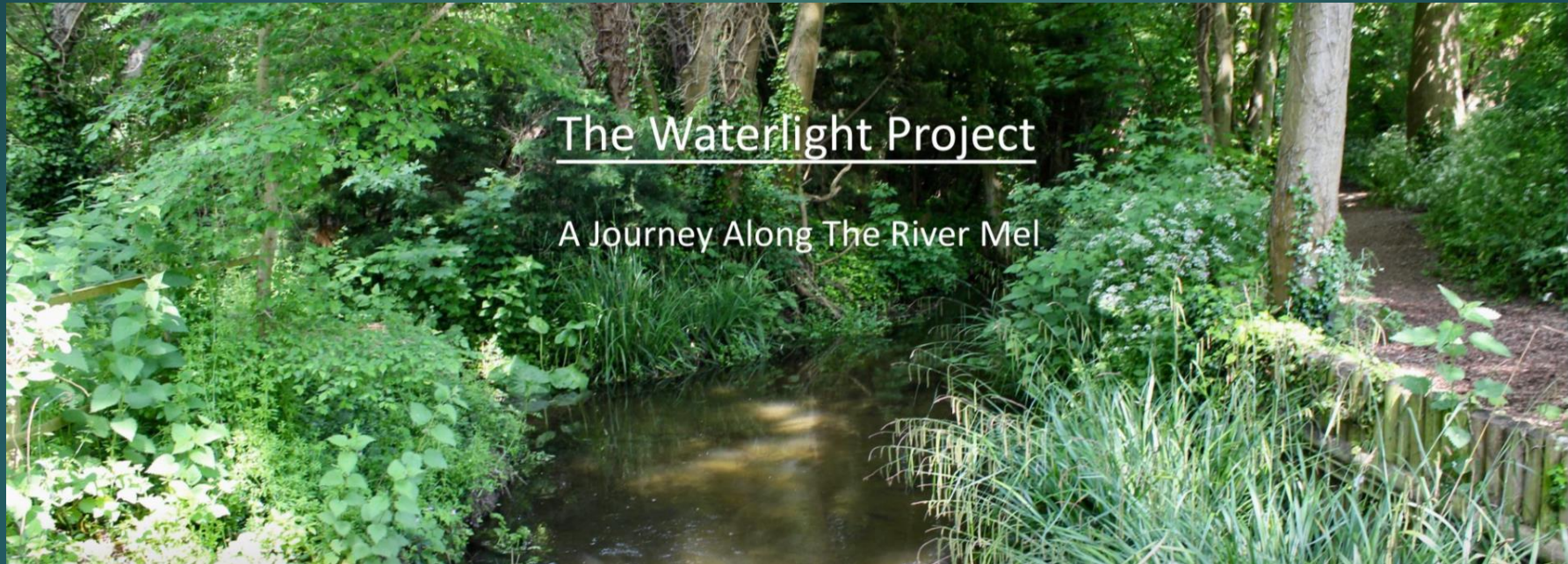
# Spirits of the Cam



Photo: Cambridge Doughnut



# Waterlight Film



## The Waterlight Project

A Journey Along The River Mel

<https://waterlightproject.org.uk/>

# Melbourn Bury

## a Clare Crossman Poem

At the rising place, a bare lake  
come from aquifer, deep spring,  
an accident of geology.  
Clear as an eye,  
straight from the source,  
chalk water spilling through my hands.  
The Anglo Saxons left their cups,  
the sharp edges of their brooches here.  
Votive, for protecting  
a washing, drinking place.  
If this river has a god it's Hestia,  
Goddess of settlement and hearth.  
After the silver jewels fall,  
here is a house, path, bridge  
and a name: Bury: meaning  
secret, hidden, enfolded  
underground.

Clare Crossman © 2018