

“ CONTEMPORARY OTHERWORLDLY GAZETTEERS ”



FOCUS: YGGDRASIL



PSYCHOGEOGRAPHIC SURVEY OF ELMET

FOCUS:

YGGDRASIL

In the year AD 865, the Great Heathen Army landed on English shores. By the November of the next year, the city of *Eoforwic*, once the Roman legionary fortress of *Eboracum*, was captured by Ivar the Boneless and the kingdom of *Jórvík* was established.

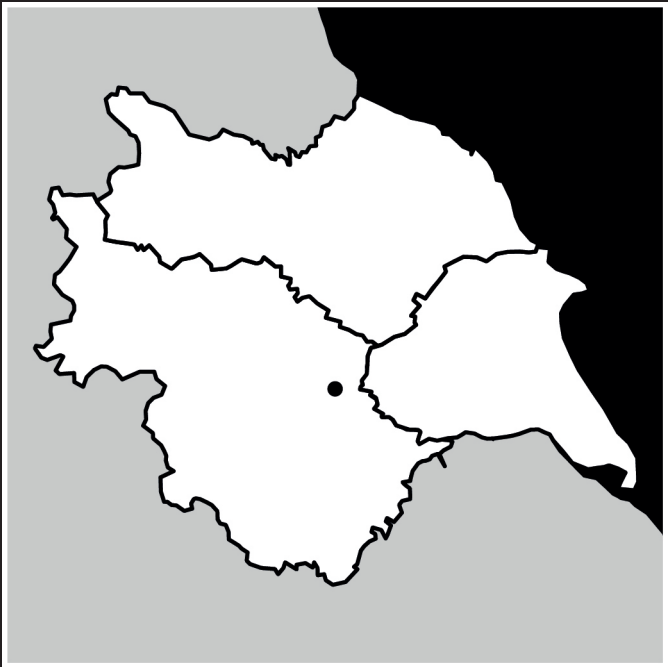
Although it was returned to English hands less than a hundred years later in AD 954 upon the death of its last king, Eric Bloodaxe, the Norse influence upon what is now Yorkshire has persisted to this day.

Central to the pagan Norse mythology of the time is *Yggdrasil*, the world tree. *Yggdrasil* is a colossal ash tree, central to the cosmos, which spans the nine worlds, expands to the heavens and is rooted in the underworld. It is central to all things.

Contemporary Yorkshire is essentially a Norse construct, albeit chopped, changed and adepted by those in power who have come since the Norsemen. There should be no surprise then if we are to find some of their beliefs and mythology bound within its borders.

Within Elmet is the small village of Barkston Ash. Its name is unique in that it specifically mentions an ash tree at its heart where meetings would be held. It became the focus of the local *wapentake*, literally meaning ‘weapon-take’, a Norse administrative subdivision, a smaller area within a larger *riding*.

However it seems as though the ash tree did not remain simply a place to meet as local



Map of the traditional county of Yorkshire with the three Ridings shown; Barkston Ash is the black dot which is almost at the central point

folklore places Barkston Ash as being at the very centre of Yorkshire itself. It seems as though this tree is a direct link to the mythic Yggdrasil, a central and binding force across the whole county.

The tree remained the meeting place of the wapentake for hundreds of years before the old system was replaced by the democracy we live under today. The village gave its name to a parliamentary seat which lasted nearly a hundred years from 1885 to 1983, when it was abolished and broken into a smaller constituencies, one of which was named Elmet.

While the tree that stands today is only a decade or so old, replacing an older tree that had to be felled, it remains at the heart of the village and one can hope it was grown from a seed from the former, preserving its legacy.

Now, a row of new ash trees lines the road opposite, shielding the village from the impending construction of the new HS2 rail line. It seems as though here history, folklore, geography and mythology mix. Perhaps it is not the Yggdrasil of legend, and too much wishful thinking to think it the tree that holds the county together, but it is certainly the cosmic centre and soul of this small place.



The ash tree in Barkston Ash



The leaves of Yggdrasil?

