

It is a conundrum that Glastonbury has been such a recognised place of sanctity in the Christian era, yet so little evidence of pre-Christian activity has been found on the island. This is despite the discovery of the Iron Age lake village near Meare and the numerous Neolithic trackways crossing the levels to the west of Glastonbury.

The last two Winter Solstices have seen a small group of people gathering on the mound on Windmill Hill to watch the rising sun roll up the side of the Tor and envelop St Michael's tower. It is a quite extraordinary and moving phenomenon to witness and we have Nicholas to thank for uncovering this amazing event.

The Star Temple of Avalon builds on this occurrence, developing the theory that the Windmill Hill mound is of Neolithic construction, built for the specific purpose of observing celestial movements. It is also suggested that our ancestors remodelled the steep northern slope of the Tor, creating three or more notches in the side, so that the sun, rising lower in the sky 6,000 years ago, could flash its light to observers on the mound on its rolling route to the summit.

Nicholas and Philippa have gone on to make an extensive range of observations of the rising and setting of the sun and other celestial bodies in significant positions in the landscape; taking advantage of last year's lunar major standstill to incorporate the movements of the moon into the function of the mound as Neolithic observatory. They also provide a wonderfully coherent explanation of the wandering rising and setting of the moon, an opaque subject at the best of times.

Their stellar observations focus especially on the rising of Orion behind the Tor through the winter and the rising of Scorpius behind the Tor in summer, suggesting that these mirror the seasonal myth of the conflict between Gwyn ap Nudd and Gwythyr. The cause of their conflict, the beautiful Creiddylad, is identified with the vesica piscis shape of the Southern Cross appearing between the two starry warriors above Chalice Hill up to 2,800bce.

And in our modern era, a further phenomenon has been occurring as the mound and the Tor align to the rising Winter Solstice sun passing over the crossing point of the ecliptic and the galactic equator, our galaxy's distant centre. This alignment occurs for a relatively short period of time once every 26,000 years or so and will continue up to 2012 and beyond.

This book is an extraordinary achievement, firmly placing Glastonbury as a major site in the Neolithic sacred landscape of Britain. The Star Temple

of Avalon will come to be seen as a seminal work in the ever-growing body of literature about Glastonbury and Avalon.

Mike Jones for The Oracle www.glastonburyoracle.co.uk