

NO PARISH BUT ALBION

The Testimony Of Henry St. John Tarbridge  
or  
My Involvement With The Vagabond Trust  
And What I Know Of Its Lore

Gamekeeper's Cottage, Upper Arlebury, Test Valley Parish

1987

Gamekeeper's Cottage, Upper Arlebury

November 17th, 1987

Tomorrow I leave my name behind and enter the wayfaring life with my brothers and sisters. In order that some record of my past be preserved, I am writing this document, as well as to fulfil my prior role of 'Settler Safe', albeit not to my children but to whomever will find these pages. I have the night ahead of me, for come the dawn I will no longer call this cottage home. In the same box as these papers you will find a cassette containing impressions of the Vagabond Trust, not in a literal sense, but it will help you to understand. It has been recorded at pertinent sites around the Test Valley parish, with the help of various members of the Trust.

In order to give some manner of frame to the story of my involvement with the Vagabond Trust, it is necessary to give a brief sketch of my journey to becoming a Settler Safe and more. It must be admitted that, whilst a colourful life, it has not been what one might call 'marred with greatness', although many anecdotes have proven to be somewhat amusing. I have tried to avoid falling into the [all too easy, yet all too vain] trap of self-mythologising, of giving past events a fresh spin to justify contemporary circumstances, however to some extent this is inevitable, and each person seeks to reinvent their past every day in order to fit with a more current, and usually more flattering narrative, so in that regard [as in so many] I am unremarkable.

It is my hope that someone may find these pages and understand the wayfarers better, for I will be among them, and take up the mantle of Settler Safe for the Test Valley. Much of what is hidden in simple gestures and signs will give you greater liberty than any landowner could dream of.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'Herry' with a stylized flourish at the end.

Herry Bridge

[formally Henry St. John Tarbridge, Settler Safe of Upper Arlebury]



## From Cradle to Cottage

I remember little of my infant days, save for a large white washed house that backed on to a forest, in which there lay a large and, as I thought initially, terrible swing. A great serpentine affair of crude rope and a tyre. The children from the village seemed to gain no end of enjoyment from hurtling through the air on this rudimentary construction, and I too joined in on occasion, if only to show willing. However, even at that age, my head was usually elsewhere, in some manner of daydream, or poking about in the garden around the house. I had some friends, well, school friends, with whom I failed to maintain contact after moving away from the area. Well, that is not entirely true. A stone's throw away, across the common with its river oozing with trout and moorhens, lay a large house [whose name I will not disclose], owned by a rather eccentric couple. Their son and daughter I am still in contact with, and indeed they remain the people I have known the longest in my life. The daughter has grown to work in publishing, the son in the car industry, and their parents are still as delightfully quaint and anachronistic as ever, a throwback to a gentler, certainly wealthier time that would not be out of place in a Wodehouse novel, and I say this with great affection. My memories of this time are slim, suffice to say my cognitive abilities to jot down and store near-perfect recollections were then rather poor; either that or I was so deeply involved with my own imagination that I lived in what could be described as 'a near perfect daze', however as my adult years began to accumulate some vestiges of this era swum back to my shore, from what felt like a place beyond time, that near perfect state of ultimate innocence in the world of light. Brief glimpses of thatch, the winter sun skidding low across the river Test, the angler cursing as his catch evaded him, the glittering skin of the trout thrashing off into the weeds, and the hot mist of breath billowing up on a cold December morning, dawn catching on it as I walked with my mother to the car. Certainly, a rather happy time it must be assumed, but one that appears to me now impersonally, as if it were read in a book, or recounted by someone related yet distant. And yet, somewhere buried deep in that storybook collection lay something that I would later come to recognise as an encounter with the numinous, snapshots of light, nature, in



essence I suppose one would call it something timeless and without verbal expression, hidden in the briars and brambles.

One character of that time whom I do remember, perhaps because she was so archetypal of that realm, was an old lady known as Phyllis, a spinster [possibly a maiden] who lived with her mother until she died, and Phyllis then lived alone with a large black Labrador. She dwelt in a thatched cottage with a large fireplace, for some reason that hearth stuck solidly in my memory. Horse brasses were hung around it, with photographs and clocks on the mantelpiece, and the whole cottage had an air of resolute impermeability to time, and modernity. It would not have been remarkable to me if the clocks themselves ran to a different rhythm to the world outside, as indeed would the archaic mechanism in the church bell tower to the rest of England, beyond the parish boundary. The beams of her house were carved with triangles, crosses, circles and other symbols, quite primitively done. Phyllis used to tell me that these were made by old spirits who lived there and for some reason this did not disturb me as much as it should have done. Many times when we visited she would be ushering some dishevelled wayfarer out of her door, clutching food or some papers, something which at the time I put down to charity. She is long since deceased, another archetype of village life lost to time, yet my memories of here would prove infinitely valuable. Indeed, the figure of Phyllis would become very important after her death, but we often exchanged letters and later I would visit her whenever I was working in the area.

Years later, when visiting the old friends mentioned above at their ancestral home, I was delighted to have my expectations met when approaching the village by driving through a forest covered in golden leaves and low hanging mist, cloaking what already through the fog of memory had become a land apart and transforming it into something that emerged from the yellowing pages of old folkloric texts, to which I had become gradually an addict and collector. The emerging thatched roofs, archaic signposts and slanting sun lending an unearthly aspect to an already curious trip down memory lane. As I entered the village night was beginning to fall, and having checked in with my hosts, I snuck



off to the local pub with the son and daughter for a quick sharpener before the dinner party commenced. The evening passed in rather a haze, filled with champagne flutes and decanters, reminiscence and laughter, surrounded by oak beams, a roaring fire and the gentle patter of dog's feet. This was nearing the end of my time in England, and was a fitting nostalgic glance backwards, but this is many years from the current narrative.

Come my fourth birthday, this bucolic slice of Wessex had become slightly impractical in my father's line of work, and thus a relocation to the ancient capital of England was required, home of the Alfred legend and steeped in Medieval atmosphere. I do not recall my feelings towards this move, still being too young to appreciate such things beyond a change in school and the daily routine. Another house of somewhat outsized proportions, and a new school, whose memories are hazy however, like so many people, the recollection of my first teacher, a remarkably gentle and patient woman, still sticks in my memory. Many years later the school relocated to the outskirts of the town, inserted into a rather grand country house, but at the time of my attendance it lay within the town proper, coincidentally near the house of my friend's nanny. The people were friendly, the teachers likeable, yet nothing of that chapter particularly remains, save for the memory of a garden in which there used to be an abundance of frogs, my awakening passion for reading, and a rather dismal [forced] attempt to learn the recorder, which resulted less in bardic recitals than the strained squeaks of a rheumatic mouse. There was also the early beginning of a pattern that would repeat itself throughout my English scholastic career; a sign of not unreasonable intelligence, but sadly coupled with a lack of application, other than in subjects such as English, Music and [enthusiastically yet not with enormous success] Art.

Four or five years were passed, the clarity of which has faded drastically, however the next establishment sticks firmly in my memory, the character of which one might call the quintessence of Englishness. A boarding school, whose grounds boasted the ruins of a Bishop's palace, a Medieval Priory and an old hall for housing pilgrims, the cathedral just a stone's throw away, gardens, and



a sense of the old order among the renovated buildings and sports fields. In short, this was something which had the charm of a Billy Bunter tale, and in fact was not so far off in terms of its traditions of tuck, choir, and midnight dorm raids between warring factions [albeit in silence so as not to get a tongue lashing by the master on duty].

For four out of the six years I spent there, I returned home each day, walking back along the Cathedral close and up through the High Street, eventually reaching our gates. A thought which usually struck me was how different the other school's children were: screaming, smoking, the boys intent on trying to kiss girls [my school was strictly 'boys only']. One memory I have from this time was in meeting with an old friend whom had attended my previous school but now attended a different publically-funded institution. I remember this encounter particularly, because he seemed to have suddenly become more adult, harder, no longer belonging to the closeted world of Light, even going so far as to demonstrate his prowess in horseplay with a girl he was intent on walking out with. To me, this friend seemed to have become a man, walking between both worlds of Light and Shadow, whereas I still lay limply in the cloisters, fearing to delve into the darkness. In short, I was still a child, which of course had a great innocence about it, however it is different to know that Shadow exists and can be enjoyed, indeed, should be enjoyed, and try to hide from it rather than to truly only know Light. The latter is true innocence, the former, cowardice, and I fear it is the former I still struggle to break free from.

Many moments occurred in this place which, unwittingly at the time, seem to have had a lasting effect on me, not least in terms of my desire for order, quaintness and calm enjoyment [although not shorn of shadow], against the chaotic and pressured world outside me. Sheltered as the school was both by wealth and beautiful old flint walls, life ran along its own lines within the grounds, punctuated and measured out by ceremonies in the local cathedral, the routine of lessons, games and the return to home at the end of each day, the only exposure to what could be called the 'profane' world. In what could now be called a pattern, I continued to excel in a minimum of areas, performing in a



vastly mediocre way in most others, continuing to read voraciously and dream my way through many lessons. Games, as always, were rather excruciating, not that I was unable to play [although 'talented' is hardly a term I would apply here], but rather being unable to enjoy the 'team' aspect that makes someone a real sport. This was rather disappointing, as my father was a keen sportsman in his youth, and I fear had always harboured a secret desire that I would be too. Like in many cases, I would let him down here, preferring solitude, books and music to the pitch.

These years drifted by like autumn leaves, my scholastic achievements continuing to underwhelm, home life being comfortable, if not a trifle lonely at times, but that is not unusual in itself. I enjoyed opportunities to travel the world, from Thailand to India [a revelation in colours, smells and exotic religions, which would live with me ever since], France to the Caribbean, and certainly my relationship with my parents was close, in a strange, reserved way. Then, came a rather interesting decision; my parents decided to become emigrate to sunnier climes. This of course would necessitate either changing schools and entering a foreign education system, or following the grand British tradition of making the move from 'day boy' to 'boarder'.

This great immersion filled e with mixed emotions. Obviously, I was sad to leave the secluded life of the 'day boy', despite [justified] parental remonstrations about my lack of academic achievement. Yet it was also a secret thrill to enter that 'other' world, that which previously was a great secret, the machinations of the boys after dark, or rather, after the final lesson bell rang on the weekdays, where lads larked about on the lawns, and the school offered up its darkest and sweetest secrets. Of course, one had heard tales of what had happened in dorm the night before, or indeed, what events had taken place in the boarding houses in the midnight hours, simple things and innocent things of course, but japes that were both mysterious and filled with coded language, indecipherable to the ear of the lad who went home each afternoon before the sun did set. Obviously these were the lightest of misdemeanours, but to a young boy whose life was sheltered, all these things had the taste of the forbidden, not to mention the



hitherto unencountered aspect of real *camaraderie*, where one would mentally cast a slight pox on the 'day boys', they not really being the genuine inhabitants of the school - after all, how could they be? They went home when the real *life* of this ancient school was just beginning to awaken, not to mention the weekends, where one had the [unofficial] run of the grounds!

My life was certainly rather dazed before this point, I'm sure a fact ascribed by others to a taste for procrastination, shyness and a general unwillingness to *get on* with things. However, there is one element to this brief [although not too brief] sketch that is important to mention. During the transition to the palm laden, coral beached island that they had named their home, my parents rented a gorgeous cottage in an old village outside the town. If the old Medieval high street had been classic England, then this was bona fide pre-war England at its finest, with a classic Home Counties gloss. The cottage was on the edge of a lake known as 'the pond' with an outside wood store, herringbone brick walls, and enough plaster inside on its low ceilings that my father managed to bring half of it down with an over enthusiastic application of the aforementioned wood reserves to the fireplace. The village truly was a marvel, with a formidable, rambling second hand bookshop in which a love affair with old volumes began to bloom.

These few months were certainly a time of dark and shade. Being a 'week boarder' [and therefore not belonging to the hard core of 'full time' boarders, whose weekends were their own, whose parents live far abroad, and who were certainly the most respected in the 'after hours' hierarchy], I would leave the grips of the school on a Friday afternoon, and return Sunday evening. Certainly, this was the twilight between both worlds, where one would anxiously look forward to the freedom beyond the gates at the end of the week, enjoy that Friday eve, the Saturday morning and afternoon, and then come Saturday eve begin dreading the fact that it was the last night 'at home' for another six nights. Sundays were always a slow torture, the morning being a slow awakening to the fact that in ten hours one would have to return to the halls, and the evening drive was a morbid affair. Not because the boarding experience was



particularly grim, but one was caught inextricably between the realm of Light [parental] and Darkness [ill-governed adolescence], and one yearned to belong concretely to one or the other.

It was with somewhat of a relief, albeit it tinged with [habitual] failure, that the move happened formally, and I entered the boarding system fully. No more weekends spent anxiously clock watching and attempting to smother myself in the parental glow. No, now I was hardened boarder, full of supervised weekend trips, Saturday tuck, and unsupervised jollies about the school grounds [and sometimes beyond]. Now I could stand in the playground, wielding my conker on its threadbare string, with the gleam in my eye that told the soft lads who left school each day that I, I knew what it meant to fend for oneself. Obviously, this was hokum, as any Master could see, but at that time I was *one of the lads*.

Well, it was all a bit 'gravy' during those times, coasting along with no real worries apart from maintaining the usual mid-range performance. The seasons came and went, and life was upon reflection, caught in some sort of magical clock-stop, where the dusty rhythms of a public school which revolved entirely around its own archaic rituals lulled one into a sort of neo-Victorian existence. This was, however, until the dire days of the dreaded Common Entrance loomed. I was scheduled to enter a fine old institution [coincidentally the same choice as the sister of my eldest friend, which she hated it must be said], but it was not to be. Frankly, I made such a cock-up that I was only lad in the school's history to actually fail said exam - something of a first, although not the premiere record for the school that I had envisaged. It was eventually decided that the best course of action was to repeat the year, and take the exam again, trying to enter a new institution. The shame! And this new institution would have a formative affect, lying as it did deep within Somerset, a stone's throw from Glastonbury Tor.

This next step was in many ways unremarkable. I continued my scholastic mediocrity, dabbled in horses and archery and developed a taste for tobacco. However, I did find great pleasure in 'breaking bounds', exploring the local



woods and villages and honing my skills in remaining undetected by masters whilst doing so. This was my first introduction to a sort of temporal vagrancy, unknown and attempting to be unnoticed while exploring my surroundings, as well as in talking with some of the vagabonds who haunted the lanes and disused cottages of the parish.

Settling up with school, I read archaeology at a London university and became married. For the next few years I was working in excavations around Britain, especially in Hampshire, which allowed me to reconnect with Phyllis. An elopement made my marriage dissolve, and thus I was presented with a crossroads, where to make my life again? It was at this point that Phyllis died, and after attending her funeral I was called by the managers of her estate to visit their offices in Winchester. There I was presented with a small box that contained a sealed binder of papers, which I was instructed to open by myself at home; the solicitor was clear that he had not been given permission to read them, merely to pass them on to me.

On the train home I broke the seal and began to read the papers. It was then that I discovered that Phyllis had been what she termed the 'Settler Safe' of a loose association known as the 'Vagabond Trust' which, at first glance, seemed to be simply some manner of charitable endeavour to provide the homeless with food and shelter when they needed it. The further I read however the deeper the significance of the group began to become. The final page was an offer, for me to assume the role in the Test Valley parish, and to take possession of her home for the purpose, the same home which I had visited from childhood. She wrote that, should I accept, her solicitor was under instruction to arrange all matters which would allow me to take freehold of the house, with all necessary inheritance taxes being taken care of by an outside fund.

I remember clearly this moment, woodlands scudding by the train window as I sped back to the dingy rented room I held above a newsagent, the choice was stark. On the one hand, there lay a shell of a life, a broken heart [I blush to add], a grim abode and the nagging feeling that I would always be dipping my toe into



life. On the other hand, lay the chance to live in a beautiful village in an ancient home, to enter a world which was hitherto unknown to me and closed from so many, and to lead a life rich in meaning and possibilities. The choice was not a hard one to make. Upon returning to my quarters I packed up my belongings and slept. In the morning, I telephoned my workplace and gave immediate notice then took the bus to Upper Arlebury. I had been told that should I accept the role of Settler Safe, then in the coming days a vagabond would call who would explain things further and also provide some guidance [in exchange for a week's bed and board]. This proved to be the case, and I had the good fortune to be contacted by an old school friend who wanted to know if I was interested in some semi-regular freelance writing work for his newspaper. I gladly accepted and I am pleased to say that it has provided steady income ever since. This will now of course change, and my savings have been placed within this cottage for the next Settler Safe to make use of.

The past five years have proven challenging but rewarding, I have learnt more than I thought existed and it is with no regret that I move into the arms of the Trust and the Parish. I shall not wander alone, however, for over the past twelve months I have reached understanding with a lady traveller and we will enter into the hand fasting within a few days.

Every stile is our gateway, each path our passage, we trespass to transcend man's laws and bring liberty back to the land. I have no regrets.

I now turn to the details of the Trust as left to me by Phyllis and expanded with knowledge I have gained from its members, in the hope that he or she who discovers this manuscript will feel called to become the 'Settler Safe' of the Test Valley, or be able to pass this to a suitable candidate. The knowledge and secrets passed to the 'Settler Safes' is far from the complete lore of the Trust, yet it serves the needs of the position. God be with you, and Pale Mary too.

## History of The Vagabond Trust

Wayfarers and wanderers have existed across this island since the Roman period, often as marginal figures who begged, stole or performed small tasks from place to place in return for food and shelter. Many also practiced aspects of folk magic [i.e. healing livestock, placing blessings or curses etc.], learned from similar figures that dwelt on the boundaries of villages, such cunning folk, healers, woodsmen and others. Such as it is, here is what I have learned of the Trust's heritage.

The Trust traces its roots back to the Ordinance of Labourers in 1349, which decreed any person who was capable of working but refused to do so as guilty of punishable offence, usually with branding or whipping. The two further 'Vagabond Acts' in the 16th century ascribed further, harsher penalties for those who were deemed 'idlers', including the branding of an 'S' on one's forehead. During these two hundred years, many vagabonds banded together for protection, both from the eyes of the law and those villagers and townsfolk who would denounce them, and from these bands various networks of 'idlers' and 'sympathisers' emerged across Britain. The Dissolution of the Monasteries also drove several monks to vagrancy, determined to continue practicing their Catholicism in secret and having become despised by local communities. From this melting pot of backgrounds, the Trust became established in order to pass knowledge of safe locations and learned secrets. There also grew a vaguely consolidated series of codes and superstitions which sustained the gentlemen of the road, these are detailed [as much as possible] below.

The rise and fall of various radical groups in British history such as the Jacobites have also influenced the culture of the Trust. Many preferred to simply disappear along the road rather than face the noose or prison cell, and one such example can be found in the mid-17th century Diggers. Their persecution resulted in many full gaols, yet a significant portion decided to abandon their sedentary agrarian life in favour of wayfaring, yet their



convictions remained. This resulted in the reinforcement of 'the common lot' and stronger codes of comradeship being established among the Trust.

It is also recorded that the successive waves of land enclosures and privatisation had a great impact upon the areas available for vagabonds to establish temporary camps. Due to this, a firm 'right to roam' ethos grew within the Trust, resulting in its motto 'No Parish But Albion', indicating that to the common man all of Britain was his to walk along and sleep within, as was his birth right.

By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as more villages were emptied into urban factories and mechanical solutions to honest labour found favour with landowners, work in rural Britain was becoming scarcer resulting in many losing their generational jobs and finding solace in the road. However, by this point the Trust had become so discreetly established, along with its network of 'Settler Safes' in each parish [see below], that their lot was much improved.

#### Liberty: No Parish But Albion

The Trust believes that a man or woman of the road may forage and sleep where they like, for Britain is their garden and bedchamber, no matter their former station. The fields and orchards of estates are favoured, as are private forests where game is reared, and the remaining wild places are also greatly revered for their gifts. In the case of the latter, however, it is recommended that one should do so sparingly, favouring private land over free common land, as the gifts of wild nature should be enjoyed by all. Another distinction is made between earth owned by the working classes and the middle / upper classes, whereby the land of the former should only be foraged from as a last resort.

Where necessity once drove people to vagrancy, over the centuries there has been an increasingly voluntary turn, especially within the past hundred years.

The Victorian period saw a great upturn in voluntary vagrancy, with many choosing social exile rather than the poor house or domestic servitude within a crumbling estate. During the 1920s, many soldiers returning from the trenches were so disillusioned with their homecoming, not to mention the economic situation, that they turned to the road and found greater freedom among their wayfaring brethren than in the [still] rigid class structure that ran daily life. More recently, we find many examples in the so-called 'hippie movement', which has also injected an artistic culture into the Trust.

All who take the oath of the Trust change their name, typically to one with a Middle English root, in honour of those persecuted by the first Vagrancy Laws. For example, I leave behind Henry St. John Tarbridge and will become Herry Bridge.



## Role of a Settler Safe

Within each parish or, if very sparsely populated, a collection of parishes, dwells a man or woman who is known as its 'Settler Safe'. This person is a reliable source of food and shelter for vagabonds of the Trust, who provide him or her with knowledge, skills and stories in exchange.

A Settler Safe typically lives alone and can be old or young. Once a family is in the household, the role must pass onto another who dwells by themselves. Similarly, when a Settler Safe dies, they must pass on the role to another with whom they have trust and have known to be sympathetic to the vagabond life. This is done either orally or, in some cases, via the presentation of a written record of the role and a level of the Trust knowledge needed to assume the task. In some cases the son or daughter of Trust member can choose to stay with a Settler Safe for six months once they come of age, should they wish to become one and the extant Settler Safe wishes to leave the role.

They are obliged to provide food and a bed for three nights to any member of the Trust, who in return will aid the Settler Safe in any tasks about the home and personal requests that they might have in the way of healing, teaching or magic. In addition, each member who stays with the Settler Safe will leave a coin to contribute towards other members in need of medical treatment or who are with child / have a new born. It is also the case that in some instances, the Settler Safe must ensure the swift passage of dying vagabonds with the best method available.

The Settler Safe will learn many skills from the Trust members, varying from healing spells to craft skills, acquired on the road. They are also taught the history of the Trust, as well as a certain degree about the spirits of the road, and of the house. Both of these aspects will be detailed below in as far as a Settler Safe may know about them.

## Cosmology

Gentlemen and Ladies of the road are highly superstitious, with many small luck rituals which prepare them for travelling, known only to them. Being as intimate with the land as they are, the presence of little folk and other so-called 'supernatural' creatures is a reality to them. Traditionally the majority of them do place trust in the Lord God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, a legacy of the Church's importance in rural life and also influenced by a monastic presence on the road following the Dissolution of the Monasteries. However there are three figures which dominate their world, those of Pale Mary, Black Jim and Old Green.

### Pale Mary

Known also as 'She of the Road', 'The Good Woman' and 'Tectress', Pale Mary is a protectorate spirit who guides lost travellers and has the power to both heal the sick and also show the way to hidden foraging spots. She seems to combine elements of the Virgin Mary and other, older deities that were once invoked in Albion. Aside from appearing when needed, she is known to appear at dawn and dusk, often in some manner of white garment, travelling footpaths and fields.

### Black Jim

Frequently described as a tall, broad-shouldered gentleman dressed in a greatcoat and stovepipe hat, Black Jim is a feared figure of road life. He appears at crossroads and along lanes at night, lantern in hand, looking for people to offer bargains to. One must always be respectful but refuse his help, for in return for comfort and riches he will demand possession of your soul. If a vagabond becomes insane he is said to have been 'given o'er to Black Jim'. He is not an entirely unreasonable creature, as he delights in punishing landowners, justices and other figures if they do wrong to common people, and will not press his bargains if rebuffed. Black Jim is therefore not a simplistic 'demonic', and is



spoken of with respect and fear but not complete disdain. He is a somewhat Luciferian figure, with aspects that recall trickster deities.

### Old Green

Reported only in the oldest woodlands of this Isle, Old Green is rarely seen or talked of yet he is highly respected. From what encounters have been mentioned, he appears to be wreathed in leaves, 'like foliage', tall and silent, some manner of sentient woodland embodiment from a far past. He is not invoked in any spell, being seen as distinct from the spirits which take an interest in human activity / fate. The few reports of him that are spoken of always emphasise that when near, deep in the woods, there is a feeling of incredible age about him, something feral and ancient. Many avoid the older woodlands, and those who do travel through them say they are watched. Vagabonds who know of him will treat wild animals respectfully, for fear of attracting his attention.

### House Whisperers

The other major feature in vagabond beliefs is the concept of a house holding the spirits of all those who died within it, who gather information about the area and pass this on to the spirits of other households. Houses are therefore all in communion with each other, and can provide protection but also bad luck if they are mistreated. If a vagabond does ill by a household beyond spinning a tall tale for supper, or sneaking food, the household spirits will place a curse on him, and he will not be able to beg from any other house in the area. This can only be lifted by the local Safe Settler in their role as 'House Whisperer', an act performed in secret by entering the property under a pretext and burying a small vial of salt and a coin in the hearth. Houses are viewed almost like living beings with their own histories and personalities by vagabonds.

Slang

Badgerman - Night watchman

Bellows - Town mayor

Bidge - The house or dwelling of a Settler Safe

Boss - A stranger who is sympathetic

Branchwait - An ill guarded orchard

Chokey - Gaol

Clem - Starving

Crocky - Strange, eerie

Fad'un - Highwayman or robber

Faretuch - A household that will give alms

Grimmage - Bad weather

Hale Tricks - Curses

Hardup - Tobacco

Jumper - Policeman

Katersticks - Crossroads

Knocking Beams - Reminiscing about one's past life



Leafeyes - A gamekeeper

Lieluck - A safe spot for sleeping

Mietrust - Term for the Vagabond Trust

Milestone Inspector - A veteran of the road

No Parished - Those who leave the Vagabond Trust

On Flight - Avoiding the law

Pins - Feet

Quod - In gaol

Road Love - A person who has undertaken hand fasting with another

Silverskin - A river which can be safely fished

Soft Lay - A comfortable place for sleeping in the wild

Squeaks - A household which will refuse alms

Tellall - Someone who can't be trusted

Tinefoot - Poacher

Tuck - Game which can be poached

White Tricks - Beneficial folk magic

## Signs

When meeting another vagabond, one must trace a quick 'S' over the breast to test recognition. This is the greeting between Trust company, in remembrance of the brandings applied in punishment for 'idleness' in the Middle Ages.

The Settler Safe will have a sign upon their house known to the Trust, typically in the form of an 'S' shaped bracket or carving upon a lintel towards the rear of the house. To announce his or her arrival at the house ['bidge'] of a Settler Safe, the vagabond must only approach the back door and knock once, followed by a pause of three breaths, and then three more rapid knocks. This harks back to the times when it was necessary to know who was demanding entry, and that it was a genuine member of the Trust rather than an officer of the law looking to gain entry.

## House Marks

What follows are the most common marks chalked on gates or posts next to households which give the vagabond a quick summary of the household i.e. their likelihood to give or refuse alms, offer work or inform the authorities. These are not exclusive to the Vagabond Trust but are uniformly used by its members.

Beneath the descriptions are illustrated examples of these signs [numbered I through to XIII].



I - Christian household, charity likely [faretuch].

II - Money may be offered here.

III - Sit down meals offered.

IV - Food offered but not to sit.

V - Emotional persuasion needed.

VI - Witty persuasion needed.

VII - Food for a tale.

VIII - Nothing offered here [squeaks].

IX - Police may be called here.

X - Violent refusal likely.

XI - Dog in house.

XII - Work may be offered.

XIII - Too many have called here recently.



I



II



III



IV



V



VI



VII



VIII



IX



X



XI



XII



XIII

## Spell Fragments

### Skin Healing

This must take place beside a river. The recipient [r] will present their afflicted area to the Trust member [Tm] who will then place salt upon it. [r] then places the area upon the earth, without clothing impeding contact between skin and soil. [Tm] will then silently call upon Pale Mary from the road to draw the sickness into the earth where it may dissolve, and the pain into the salt, which is then flung into the river. Both [Tm] and [r] then turn to face the West and offer thanks.

### A Love charm

[Tm] meets [r] in a woodland, after [r] has explained the desire and [Tm] has judged it to be true. [r] is to provide some hair, nail clippings or a fragment of cloth from their desired. [Tm] wraps them in cloth which has lain for seven nights at a crossroads, and for two consecutive Sundays behind a church altar. [Tm] then passes a rabbit's foot over them, and bids [r] to lay them under his or her pillow for three nights. During these three nights, they will dream of their beloved, and vice versa, and the charm will take hold. Typically, within a fortnight they shall be stepping out together.

### A Curse

This 'Hale Trick' is only used according to the judgement of [Tm], i.e. if it is used to justly punish someone for wrongdoing. [Tm] will usually check with the local Settler Safe for confirmation of the facts;

[Tm] meets [r] at a crossroads when the church clock strikes midnight. Two options are available: the use of a bone fragment from an ancestor of he or she who will be cursed, or some of their dried blood, usually acquired with a small 'accident'. [Tm] takes the bone fragment or blood and presents it to each



cardinal point, reading out the accusations. [Tm] then calls upon Black Jim to come forth that night and place his eyes upon the offender, and give them great pains. The bone or blood is then buried at the crossroads. Typically, within three days the offender is struck by a malady or driven temporarily insane.

### Divination

Many members are familiar with the workings of Tarot cards, thorns and tea leaves, however the use of knucklebones [due to their availability in alms meals] are the preferred method. A variety of techniques are used, depending upon where the [Tm] learnt their craft, however in all cases Pale Mary must be invoked and thanked during the reading.

## Rites of Passage

### Birth

When a child is born to one of the Trust, they are first washed in the nearest stream or river, to symbolise their being welcomed into a life of constant movement, where everything is in motion. The child is then taken to the nearest Settler Safe so that its health may be checked and, if necessary, advice on nursing and feeding may be given, along with a single payment of funds. These funds are typically collected from other vagabonds who leave a small portion of their coin with the Settler Safe for such an occasion.

### Hand Fasting

When on the road it is sometimes the case that members become lovers and wish to signify their devotion to each other. This is done outside of the civil register and the Church and is known as 'hand fasting'. Both parties will make their way to a woodland where they prick their thumbs and join hands, so that a little blood will mingle. This is then smeared on the largest tree in the immediate vicinity, to placate Old Green. They will then seek out the nearest wild rose plant and stand before it, declaring their love for one another, to give the news to Pale Mary in return for her blessing.

### Coming of Age

When a child turns eighteen they are deemed to have come of age and can choose to continue the vagabond life [either with or without their family], enter society to lead a sedentary work life or, in some cases, study under a Settler Safe who wishes to leave [or is close to death] to assume the role at the end of the apprenticeship.



## The Oath of the Vagabond Trust

Upon reaching the decision to join the Vagabond Trust as a knight of the road, they must gather three existing members to a field at dawn, and say the following formula:

'I renounce my name [+++] and from this day will be known on the road by [+++]. I place my faith in my fellow travellers and the Safe Settlers, swearing to them words of kinship. I embrace the ancient liberty of travel and poverty, for this land provides all that I could ever need upon its branches, streams and good folk. I have no parish but Albion and I shall treat it justly, placing my heart in its hands. The road is my home, my horizon ever changes, and the open air is my chamber.'

Then all three make the sign of welcome [an 'S' over the breast'] and break bread in the morning sun.

## Death and Burial

When one of the Trust dies on the road [or is found dead], they are taken to the nearest woodland or moorland and buried in their clothes. Should they arrive to the door of a Settler Safe close to death, the Settler Safe has the duty to put them out of their misery, with either a pillow, herbal mixture or a club. This is understood to be the way, otherwise the vagabond would not call in such a condition.

During burial, the following words are spoken over the wild open grave:

'A long road behind and an unknown one ahead. This is our lot and we accept it, for it has brought us freedom and unusual joy. Rest briefly now in the cold earth, for your path in this land has ceased. Should you return do so with good words and wise intent. Should you pass, do so in peace, for your soul is restless for new roads.'

## Leaving the Trust

Should any member treat another member badly, by violence, theft or informing the lawmakers upon another's deeds, their reputation is dissolved and their association with the Trust must come to an end. Similarly, should a member willingly leave for any good reason, they must seek out the nearest Settler Safe and speak thus before them:

'The road has been my friend and I have known freedom as it was originally intended. Now my path leads to gardens and towns, away from my fellow wayfarers. I renounce myself from the Vagabond Trust and swear an oath to keep my peace upon its matters. Should I find a traveller or one come to me in need, I pledge to give them all aid as I can provide, in lieu of the debt given to me by this Isle for enjoying her wide ways so well.'

The departed can no longer call upon any Settled Seeker known to them from this point onwards.