

THE DYNAMIC PORTRAYAL OF SOUL

SEXUALITY SOUL SPIRIT

BY DAVID ENGLAND

*We will have open heart to heart communication when we are intimate with one another.
Harley SwiftDeer Reagan*

PURPOSE, AIMS, AND SCOPE

Harley SwiftDeer Reagan's book (1980) *Shamanic Wheels and Keys* made the wisdom of the Medicine Wheel, held in secret within Native American culture for hundreds if not thousands¹ of years, available to the wider world.

Aims and Scope

This paper describes a portrayal of a human being based on the Medicine Wheel. SwiftDeer called the portrayal simply *The Four Elements*. I now refer to the portrayal as *The Dynamic Portrayal of Soul*, a real-time representation of a whole person, their constituent elements, how these interrelate, how energy is deployed, how the person changes in time.

My aim in writing this paper is both to remain faithful to SwiftDeer's beautifully compassionate account of *The Four Elements* and the needs of therapists for a dynamic, robust, comprehensive, and realistic portrayal of a human being, a human soul.

My Purpose

I have sought to fulfil my purpose of incorporating Shamanic thought and practice into a contemporary mainstream psychotherapy practice by writing my book *Soulfulness : The Marriage of Shamanic and Contemporary Psychology* (2017), in which I show how Shamanic and Contemporary Psychology can be integrated, including, from Native American psychology, some powerful psychological models based on the Shamanic Medicine Wheel.

Practising as a psychosynthesis psychotherapist, my *Soulfulness* book and my previous papers about the Medicine Wheel have been from the perspective of psychosynthesis. My purpose with the present paper recognises that a contemporary presentation of *The Four Elements* and the needs of therapists for a dynamic portrayal of a human soul have relevance for the wider psychotherapeutic community.

¹ Hyemeyohsts Storm claims that the wisdom of the Medicine Wheel goes back 2500 years to the Mayan civilisation. Storm, H. (1994), *Lightningbolt*. Ballantine Books. While I have not been able to substantiate this claim, it is given some credence by the existence of an ancient city in Illinois, with Mayan-type pyramids, going back to 700AD, <https://www.enjoyillinois.com/travel-illinois/cahokia-mounds-state-historic-site/>.

Soul

In this paper, I use the term 'Soul'. The definition of 'Soul' in the Shorter Oxford is 'animate existence,' though I would rephrase this as 'being alive'. And, 'being alive' is a lived experience. So, for me, Soul is the experience of being alive.

In other words, I speak not about *having* a Soul but *being* a Soul. Soul is our present, whole, lived experience of ourselves. Anticipating later discussion, as we grow in Spirit we deepen Soul, and this is Soulmaking.

SWIFTDEER: THE FOUR ELEMENTS

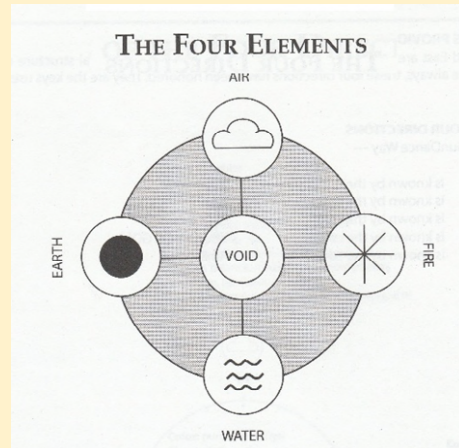
In *Shamanic Wheels and Keys*, SwiftDeer describes *The Four Elements* (Pages 22 and 32): Water, the Emotional aspect; Earth, the Physical aspect; Air, the Mental aspect; and Fire, the Spiritual aspect.

It is important to note that, while *The Four Elements* acknowledges our oneness with nature, earth, and universe, it includes nothing supernatural.

In SwiftDeer's diagram of *The Four Elements*, the elements are depicted around the Medicine Wheel.

At the centre is the Womb or Void, the Sexual aspect.

Here is SwiftDeer's delightfully lyrical description.



WATER : Emotional Aspect

Element	The South sings of the fluidity of WATER.
Aspect of Being Human	The South is the EMOTIONAL aspect. The heart reflects the song of the Water and the Moon. In this way, we give with beauty.
The Gift of Being Human	We will GIVE WITH TENDERNESS by gathering together in our heart space.

EARTH : Physical Aspect

Element	The West sings of the stability and endurance of the EARTH.
Aspect of Being Human	The West is the PHYSICAL aspect. The body reflects the song of the Earth, both element and planet. In this way, we hold and transform with strength.
The Gift of Being Human	We will HOLD WITH INTIMACY by caring for one another's physical spaces.

AIR : Mental Aspect

Element	The North sings of the flexibility of the wind or of AIR.
Aspect of Being Human	The North is the MENTAL aspect. The mind reflects the song of the Wind or Air and the Stars. In this way, we receive with clarity.

The Gift of Being Human We will RECEIVE WITH CARING by teaching one another respect, honour and dignity.

FIRE : Spiritual Aspect

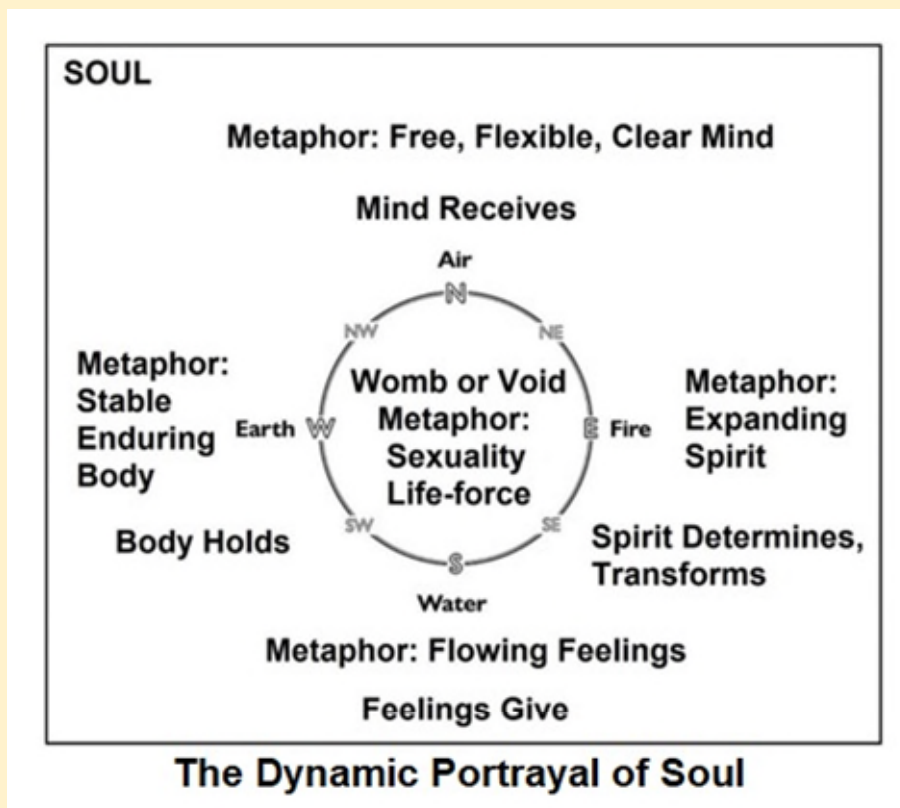
Element The East sings of the expansion of FIRE.
Aspect of Being Human The East is the SPIRITUAL aspect. The spirit reflects the song of the Fire and the Sun. In this way, we determine with responsibility.
The Gift of Being Human We will DETERMINE WITH PASSION AND LUST by sharing with one another our spiritual visions.

WOMB or VOID : Sexual Aspect

Element The Centre sings of the Womb or the VOID.
Aspect of Being Human The Centre is the SEXUAL aspect. The soul reflects the song of the Void. In this way, we catalyse with individuality.
The Gift of Being Human We will have OPEN HEART TO HEART COMMUNICATION when we are intimate with one another.

My heart is touched by the kind-heartedness of this portrayal, a soul in harmony with their community, the natural world, and the universe.

THE DYNAMIC PORTRAYAL OF SOUL



Feelings, Body, Mind, and Spirit in Metaphor

The elements of being—Feelings, Body, Mind, and Spirit—are represented metaphorically by the elements of water, earth, air, and fire, respectively.

Feelings flow like water. When we feel, we give something of ourselves. Intuition is similar to feelings, a sense of knowing something without knowing how.

Body has the strength and endurance to contain us and is the medium of expression for our feelings; we may weep when we are grieving, go red with rage, smile when we are happy. Body includes our five senses and visceral senses. Intuition is experienced as a visceral sense, sometimes referred to as a 'gut feeling'.

Mind is as free as air to receive intelligence from our feelings, intuition, body, and environment, with the clarity to analyse this knowledge, to reflect upon it, and to formulate options.

Spirit is a transforming fire, using the knowledge our mind has received and formulated to make life choices, great and small, which determine our way in the world and our relationship with the world, the personality we present. Spirit has an expanding capacity to be self-reflective, make choices, exercise will, create change, be self-determined.

The Spiritual Aspect

Writing in humane terms, SwiftDeer calls us to *give* with tenderness, to *hold* with intimacy, to *receive* with caring. Of the Spiritual Aspect, he calls us to *determine* with responsibility, with passion. Also, to share with one another our spiritual visions, which to my mind means sharing our experience of spiritual growth.

Growing in Spirit influences how we experience being alive, our Feelings and Intuitions, what we learn about ourselves, and so the Wheel goes around as we grow. *The Dynamic Portrayal of Soul* is a real-time portrayal, changing as we change.

THE FOUR ELEMENTS IN THERAPY

This paper aims to address the needs of therapists for a dynamic, robust, comprehensive, and realistic portrayal of a human being. *The Dynamic Portrayal of Soul* does more than represent a soul in harmony with their community, the natural world, and the universe; the Portrayal serves as a real-time representation of a living human Soul, how their constituent elements interrelate, how their energy is deployed in the presence of disharmony and fragmentation, the way a living human Soul changes over time.

This section discusses the portrayal of the four elements, Feelings, Body, Mind and Spirit. The portrayal of Sexuality and Soul is the subject of a later section.

Following the Portrayal

The aim in this section is to illustrate the process of following the Portrayal, the kind of questions to continue asking ourselves as the therapy unfolds, and a very brief example of a client relationship².

Georgia, a woman in her late twenties, suffers, and has always suffered, an overbearing, emotionally distant mother. She has a controlling male partner who doesn't value her. She is talented, making and selling jewellery.

Feelings. We begin with feelings. Feelings are always there, but to what extent is the client connected with their feelings? To what extent do their feelings flow? What feelings do they express?

Georgia is so close to her feelings that she is often overwhelmed by feelings of sadness, loneliness, and despair. She has low self-confidence and self-esteem. Occasionally, she will feel a sudden rage with her partner over a chance remark.

Body. How are the client's feelings expressed in the body? To what extent are their feelings contained by the body? How grounded are they? What does their body and bearing show of their self-care and self-respect?

Georgia's body cannot contain her feelings, so she is prone to suffer panic attacks. At the same time, she carries herself well and she is neatly dressed.

Mind. To what extent can the client think clearly and logically? Are they able to think reflectively, freely, flexibly? To what degree do they have a capacity to be self-reflective?

Georgia's mind lacks the ability to think clearly, especially when feeling overwhelmed. She speaks of mind-fog and distorted thoughts. She is not reflective.

Spirit. To what extent is the client spirited or dispirited, high spirited or low in spirit? When it comes to making decisions, where are they on a decisive/indecisive scale? What is their personality?

Georgia is low in spirit. She relies on her partner to make decisions affecting her. She occasionally shows diffuse indications of spirit when she verbally lashes out at her partner. The predominant aspect of Georgia's personality is a tendency to experience challenging emotional states, a lack of assertiveness, and a failure to acknowledge her talents.

The portrayal of Sexuality and Soul is discussed in the section The Soul in Therapy below.

² This is a typical client, no personal details are given.

SEXUALITY

Life-force : Energy for Life

At the centre of the Medicine Wheel is Sexuality. Sexuality originated with the evolution of the first self-reproducing organism 3.5 billion years ago, the common ancestor from which all life on Earth has descended. Sexuality is the life-force that has created and sustains every species of life on the planet, each with its own system of sexual reproduction.



Sexuality is the life-force that supplies energy for life, that vitality differentiating a living being from a lifeless corpse. We experience life-force simply by knowing we are alive.

The metaphor for Sexuality is a creative void, a fertile womb; Sexuality is the vital energy that seemingly can form something wonderful out of nothing: a fertilised egg, a pollinated seed, an inspired thought.

Sexuality is, “The force that through the green fuse drives the flower” (Dylan Thomas, 1937). By photosynthesis, the flower converts electro-magnetic light energy into chemical energy which, when combined with carbon dioxide and water, creates the carbohydrate molecules used to form the vegetative parts of the flower, petals and sepals, enclosing the sexual organs, carpels and stamens, that effect reproduction. Sexuality is the force and directionality driving the flower’s reproduction. Indeed, *Sexuality is the force and directionality driving the reproduction of all plants and animals and the thread running throughout their evolution.*

To energise our body’s cells we eat plants and inhale oxygen, the products and by-product of photosynthesis. Thus, the sun is our ultimate source of energy, energy that moves into a myriad configurations to synthesise and sustain our living being. Thus, *Sexuality is the life-force, energy for life, real energy, infusing our whole being:* the complex functioning of our body; the physiological processes that give us the experiences of feeling; the brain functions that give us the experience of thinking.

Interpreting SwiftDeer’s Sexual Aspect

Womb : The Gift of Being Human. I interpret the phrase, “We will have open heart to heart communication when we are intimate with one another”, to be about intercourse, relationship, and attachment, the receptive, nurturing, feminine dimension of the Sexual aspect.

The Song of the Void. I interpret the ambiguous phrase “catalyse with individuality” to be about the force and directionality serving to bring new life into being, the thrusting, masculine dimension of the Sexual aspect.

Soulmaking

The force and directionality of Sexuality, the masculine dimension, remains active throughout life, and is most evident at a time of Soul Crisis; James Hillman offers a graphic description of Soul Crisis:

Pathology keeps the person in the soul, that torment, that twist that you can't simply go along in a natural way, something broken, twisted, hurting, forcing reflection. There's a work going on all the time, a fire burning, something elemental happening, the soul's way of working on itself, the pathology necessary to that working of imagination. (1983)

For me, the force and directionality of Sexuality is the root of the pathology, keeping the person in the Soul serving to bring about transformation, an expanding of Spirit, a deepening of Soul.

The Soul Crisis is an agonising dialogue between Sexuality and Spirit. Sexuality is the force and directionality driving change, forcing reflection. Yet, change needs an act of determination and will by Spirit, the transforming fire, and this doesn't always happen. We can distract ourselves, maybe through a recurring cycle of sexual relationships or by resorting to a pharmaceutical way out from those disturbing feelings.

James Hillman's quotation serves to illustrate the dynamics of Soul Crisis, how disturbing Feelings (South on the Portrayal) are invoked, to be expressed and contained in the Body (West), forcing reflection (North) and necessitating the working of imagination and will by Spirit (East). Pathology here is dis-ease, not disease, a normal functioning of *The Dynamic Portrayal of Soul* in a time of Soul Crisis. The Wheel goes around as we grow in Spirit, and as we grow in Spirit we deepen Soul. There's a work going on all the time, though not always so dramatic as a Soul Crisis. The dialogue between Sexuality and Spirit goes on throughout life. We may receive promptings, experienced as a call or a sense of vocation or a sudden insight. Here is my personal testimony to the interplay between Sexuality and Spirit:

Some years ago, I was feeling increasingly discontented with my work in IT, when a friend whom I had not seen for some time asked me, "What do you really want to do?" I replied without hesitation, and completely out of the blue, out of nowhere, "I want to be a psychologist," which surprised us both. "Well, that's interesting," she said, "Because I'm doing this course in Psychosynthesis." It was the first time I had heard the word. This brief exchange changed the direction of my life.

Change needs an act of determination and will by Spirit. This influences how we Feel about ourselves. Which influences how our Feelings are expressed in our Body and maybe our attitude to our Body. Changes in Feelings and Body influence the understanding our Mind has of ourselves. And so back to Spirit, the Wheel goes around, an expanding of Spirit, a deepening of Soul.

This is Soulmaking.

SOUL

Which brings us back to Soul. The feminine dimension of Sexuality, intercourse and relationship, persists throughout life, and is present in our experience of Soul.

Soul Experience

Whilst Feelings, Body, Mind, and Spirit are elements of being, Soul is the total package, our present, whole, lived experience of being a Soul.

Soul is contained within a flexible membrane, our skin, and Soul is our lived experience of being held within this membrane. Soul comprises everything experienced within the membrane, Feelings, Body, Mind, Spirit, Sexuality: our feelings, intuitions, imagination, the five senses, visceral senses, spatial awareness and balance, physical pain or discomfort or vitality, promptings or call or sense of vocation, a sudden insight, thoughts, determinations....

Soul's Inner Being

Soul, the total package, our lived experience of being a Soul. Yet there is more, our inner being, hidden from our experience, whilst revealing itself to us through intuition, insight, imagination, inspiration, and dreams, and thus coming within our Soul Experience.

Soul Connection

SwiftDeer doesn't include Soul in *The Four Elements* explicitly, yet Soul Connection is there implicitly in the Sexual Aspect, Gifts of Being Human, "We will have open heart to heart communication when we are intimate with one another." As relational beings, when we connect with another we share something of each other's energy, if only a trace of memory. I sometimes enjoy brief 'cameo conversations', like this one:

It is the middle of the night at Gatwick airport. I am waiting hours for my flight to be called, along with a million others, a living nightmare. I squeeze into a seat in a balcony café, with a cup of coffee. The woman sitting next to me turns towards me, locks eyes with me, and says, "This is the seventh circle of hell." Eye to eye, a brief Soul Connection, being in hell together. It lives in my memory.

We can have a Soul Connection not only with people, we can also connect with the natural world. Psychotherapist and author Susan Holliday writes about moments of intimate Soul Connection with the natural world in her collection of prose poems 'Inklings'. In *How to Fall*³, for example, she captures a moment of inter-connection with the life energy of a waterfall.

I feel a Soul Connection with mature trees, particularly when they occupy sacred sites: the 1700 year old yew tree in Compton Dundon churchyard, with messages strung from its branches; an age-old yew tree in, unusually, a circular churchyard at Aldworth, surrounded by a circle of holly bushes, an ancient sacred site long before the church was built.

Connecting deeply with another person is a Soul Connection, an exchange of energy. Something of their Soul becomes part of my Soul, and mine of theirs. For each of us this is a Soul Experience. Sometimes a Soul Connection can be spontaneous, like when there is sustained eye contact, such as these two memories of Soul Connection:

At Oxford Dance Camp, I have a long conversation with a trans-man, a mature soul, a pagan prison chaplain. Later, he and I are in a workshop, including an exercise involving sustained eye

³ <https://www.susanholliday.co.uk/inklings/how-to-fall>.

contact. He and I work together, the effect of prolonged eye contact being for us to feel deep connection and affection, like gazing into the other's soul.

At another dance camp, in the grounds of Braziers Park Community Residential College, our 5Rhythms dance session is joined by residents. 5Rhythms includes short periods of dancing in couples, with dancers often reluctant to make eye contact. I dance with a woman from the college. It's like we spontaneously trust each other and are willing to maintain eye contact as we dance. The rhythm of the music, our movement in the dance, our touch, our sustained eye contact, form a gestalt, a five minute love affair. Then we part, as 5Rhythms moves on, never to meet again, yet in my case at least, always to remember our five minute love affair.

In a longer relationship, be it a friendship or a sexual union, the exchange of energy can include feelings of commitment, loyalty, trust, a sense of alignment, a feeling of love:

I spend a chaste weekend with a friend, unspokenly discovering we love each other. She and I enjoy simple pleasures, buying fish straight from the sea, cooking and eating the fish, drinking beer in a cosy bar, walking the promenade, attending a reading of poetry. An air of enchantment blows through all we take pleasure in. The rapture, such energy, is alive in my memory.

Two people can experience a profound level of Soul Connection when there is mutual trust, alignment, openness, and perhaps most of all authenticity: a deeply shared spiritual encounter; ineffable yet natural; rapturous yet grounded; expansive yet contained. This feminine dimension of Sexuality present in their lives is a call to Spirit, inviting them to determine the meaning of the Soul Connection, a creative call to give birth to some looked-for progeny.

A SOUL IN THERAPY

This paper aims to address the needs of therapists for a dynamic, robust, comprehensive, and realistic portrayal of a human soul. *The Dynamic Portrayal of Soul* serves as a real-time portrayal of a living human Soul, how their constituent elements interrelate, how their energy is deployed, the way a living human Soul changes over time. Portraying the four elements is the subject of an earlier discussion. This section completes the discussion, by illustrating the portrayal of Sexuality and Soul, continuing and completing the brief example of client Gloria.

The Therapeutic Relationship : Four Phases

Crucial factors in portraying Soul are the quality of relationship the client has with their therapist and the way this relationship evolves over time. For me, there are four main phases in a therapeutic relationship, in terms of the therapist's developing role as the therapy unfolds:

Authentic Mirror. The therapist's role is to build safety and trust and to move towards establishing a psychotherapeutic alliance.

Care of Soul. Whilst still providing an authentic mirror, the therapist's role is to hold the space for the client, supporting them in broadening and deepening their present, whole, lived experience of themselves, in expanding their Soul as they grow in self-worth and self-esteem, self-awareness and self-will, as they pursue their Soul-journey towards the realisation of whom they truly are.

Gatekeeper. Whilst remaining an authentic mirror and carer of soul, the therapist can open gates for the client, even if only one step ahead, by being willing to share whatever is relevant of their own psychospiritual journey.

Fellow Traveller. Whilst the therapist remains an authentic mirror, a carer of soul, and a gatekeeper, therapist and client can work as a team on the client's project of expanding Spirit and deepening Soul.

The Process of Following the Portrayal

The aim in this section is to complete illustrating the process of following the Portrayal, the kind of questions to continue asking ourselves as the therapy unfolds.

Sexuality/Life-force. To what extent does the client experience open heart to heart communication with those close to her and with others? How does the client relate to the natural world? How vigorous are they at pursuing their goals? To what extent are the directional masculine dimension and the receptive, nurturing, feminine dimension of Sexuality present in their life?

Georgia is doubtful of her love for her partner and of his love and commitment to her. She has an edgy relationship with her family of origin. She seems not to be fulfilling her creative potential. Neither dimension of Sexuality has a strong presence in her life.

Soul. What is the quality of relationship the client has with their partner, if they have one, their family, and their friends? What is the quality and depth of relationship with their therapist? Where is the therapy in relation to the above four phases?

***The Wheel**—Georgia's life—is stuck. She lacks close relationships and has strained relations with her partner and her mother. She seems ready for therapy, though, and makes an immediate connection with me, and is open and articulate about her life, feelings, relationships. Within a few weeks, the therapy moves on from Authentic Mirror to Care of Soul, and a therapeutic alliance is formed.*

***Soul Connection:** During two years of therapy, Georgia is able to make a heart to heart bond with me as her therapist, a Soul Connection.*

***Feelings:** Georgia continues to have strong feelings, though these are becoming less overwhelming.*

***Body:** Georgia's body is gradually able to contain her feelings, and panic attacks recede.*

***Mind:** Georgia becomes increasingly capable of applying her mind to the quality of relationship with her partner and with her family.*

***Spirit:** Finally, Georgia has the Spirit to make the decision to leave her partner and to live and work far distant from her mother. She becomes an independent, spirited, single woman who values herself and is able to manage her life. With renewed Spirit, she determines to use her talent to develop her jewellery business. Whilst she will*

always be an emotional person, she knows when she needs to seek therapeutic help; for a while, she occasionally phones me when she begins to feel overwhelmed.

Soul Connection: *She makes a Soul Connection with a man who helps her when her car breaks down, and is now married with a family.*

*And so the **Wheel** goes around.*

At our final therapy session, Georgia presented me with a painting she had made, intricate and stylised, an eagle in flight, its wings outspread, a painting of herself.

ENDNOTES

Acknowledgement

I am pleased and grateful in acknowledging, in the unfolding of this paper, the encouragement, wisdom, and gentle challenge of my fellow psychotherapist and author Susan Holliday.

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He trained as a Shamanic Practitioner at Eagle's Wing College of Contemporary Shamanism. Impressed by the synergy between Psychosynthesis and Shamanism, he wrote 'Soulfulness, The Marriage of Shamanic and Contemporary Psychology' (Karnak Books, 2017). He has successfully integrated Shamanic thought and practice into his psychotherapy practice. He is also a professional storyteller and a member of the actors' union Equity. He is the co-author of 'Berkshire Folk Tales' (The History Press, 2013) and 'Lancashire Folk Tales' (The History Press, 2014).