

THE LEGEND OF GORAM & VINCENT

The legend of Goram and Vincent of Bristol belongs to the genus of [myths](#) which explain the origin of local geographical features by supernatural activity, and trade on existing place-names to do so. Such myths are often also the basis for other new names. The most widespread version of the legend relates that two local giants, Goram and Vincent – who, according to one version, were brothers – fancied the same woman, the beautiful Avona (whose name is that of the major local river, the [River Avon](#), in [Latin](#) dress). She was open-minded about her suitors, and offered herself to whichever of them could drain the lake which supposedly once occupied the space between [Bradford-on-Avon](#) ([Wiltshire](#)) and Bristol. They chose different routes through the limestone hills for their drainage channels. Goram opted for a route through [Henbury](#), and Vincent chose one on the south side of [Clifton](#).

Unfortunately for Goram, he overheated while hard at work, drank a giant quantity of ale, and fell asleep in his favourite stone chair, whilst Vincent paced himself better and completed his channel. (One version depicts Goram as lazy and Vincent as keen and industrious.) The story accounts for the narrow gorge of the [Hazel Brook](#) (a tributary of the [river Trym](#)) in Henbury and the [Avon Gorge](#) through which the Avon now flows. ^{[1][2]}



The legend says that the Giant's Footprint formation in the [Blaise Estate](#) was caused by Goram stamping his foot after discovering that he had lost Avona's challenge.

The legend also provides a basis for explaining the existence of other geographical features. When Goram woke up, he was distraught at losing Avona's affections. He first stamped his foot in a pit, creating The Giant's Footprint in the Henbury gorge, and then drowned himself in the Severn. The two islands in the [Severn](#) estuary, [Steep Holm](#) and [Flat Holm](#), are his head and shoulder. Goram also has his Soap-Dish, which is a short pillar capped with earth, ^[3] and a pool also in the Henbury gorge.

The transmission of the legend

The oldest known version of the legend is to be found in [William Camden](#)'s *Britannia* (1586). A variant version is given by [Robert Atkyns](#) in his *History of Gloucestershire* (1712, p. 188). The Camden version was reworked by the boy poet [Thomas Chatterton](#), who attributed his verses to his alter ego, a medieval monk named Rowley. ^{[better source needed][4]}

Names

The name *Vincent* for one of the giants rests on the fact that at Clifton, at the narrowest point of the Avon Gorge, there was formerly an ancient hermitage and chapel dedicated to [St Vincent](#), at or near the present cave in the cliff-face which bears his name. Another (apparently modern) version of the story calls the Clifton giant *Ghyston*, which is in fact the name, of obscure origin, for the whole of the cliff-face of the Avon Gorge at least as early as the mid-fifteenth century, in the detailed description of the Bristol area by [William Worcestre](#).^[5] The place-name was personified to produce the giant's name. Vincent's Cave is called *Ghyston cave* or *The Giant's Hole* in an article in the [July 1837 issue of Felix Farley's Bristol Journal](#).

Goram's name seems to have been borrowed from [Iseult](#)'s father, the king of Ireland in early versions of the romance of [Tristan and Iseult](#), which might suggest that the legend arose sometime after 1200.^[citation needed] *Gorm* is Irish for 'blue' or 'dark-skinned'. The Christian name *Vincent* is first found in England in the 13th century,^[6] suggesting a fashionable cult of the saint ([St Vincent the Deacon](#)) around that time.^[citation needed] These two factors suggest a possible 13th-century origin for the Bristol legend,^[citation needed] but that is completely uncertain. It is not known, for example, whether the Clifton hermit was himself called *Vincent* and later became associated with the saint. St Vincent might also have been known in Bristol relatively early through the city's wine trade with [Portugal](#) and Spain (he was born in [Huesca](#), lived and worked in [Zaragoza](#), and is patron saint of [Lisbon](#) and of [vintners](#)).

Goram in modern times



Sculpture of Goram the Giant in the grounds of [Ashton Court](#)

Goram is commemorated in the features Goram's Chair and Footprint (some versions seem to treat these as the same thing, saying that the Chair was formed by the giant stamping his foot) and Soap-Dish in the gorge of the Hazel Brook. A pub of the early 1960s on the [Lawrence Weston](#) housing estate in west Bristol is called *The Giant Goram*,^[7] and from about 1954 sporadically to 1996, there was a funfair bearing Goram's name on the [Blaise Castle](#) landed estate (by then in the hands of [Bristol City Council](#)) in Henbury.^{[3][8]}

Vincent in other variants

In another version of the myth, Goram dug the Avon Gorge himself and there is no sign of Vincent in the story. Having completed the job, he carelessly fell over a barrow called [Maes Knoll](#), on [Dundry Hill](#) south of Bristol, and plunged into the Severn estuary, as above. In yet another, Vincent and Goram shared a pickaxe as they went about their labours, and Vincent

accidentally killed Goram by throwing it to him inaccurately halfway through their respective jobs. Vincent finished the Avon Gorge out of remorse and did some other major construction work like the [Stanton Drew stone circles](#) and even [Stonehenge](#). One or the other giant is said to have created [Maes Knoll hillfort](#) and the pre-[Anglo-Saxon](#) period linear [earthwork Wansdyke](#), south-east of Bristol, more or less accidentally with his digging tools.^[9] There are other variants.

A derived legend

The story has also been adapted to other local circumstances. The early 19th-century cleric and folklorist [Rev. John Skinner](#) collected a tale from the area that is now called *Druid Stoke* from a local farmer. Two giants had thrown stones at each other, one standing at Henbury, the other at St Vincent's Rocks by the Avon Gorge. The Henbury giant, called *Goram* or *Gorm*, threw a large one at his rival, but it fell short of its target; this accounts for the capstone of a formerly visible megalithic monument at Druid Stoke.^{[better source needed][10]}

Sources of the legend and its literature

The earliest record of this cluster of stories is said to date from the 17th century.^[11] Marc Vyvyan-Jones, with help from Roland Clare and Linda Clare, wrote (on Plough Monday 1993) a [mumming](#)-style play based on the legend. This was first performed by Rag [Morris](#) at [Blaise Castle](#), Bristol on Saturday 20 March 1993.^{[12][13][14]}

A BRIEF HISTORY OF BATH, ENGLAND

By Tim Lambert

ROMAN BATH

There is a legend that Bath was founded in 860 BC when Prince Bladud, father of King Lear, caught leprosy. He was banned from the court and was forced to look after pigs. The pigs also had a skin disease but after they wallowed in hot mud they were cured. Prince Bladud followed their example and was also cured. Later he became king and founded the city of Bath.

In reality it is not known exactly when the health giving qualities of Bath springs were first noticed. They were certainly known to the Romans who built a temple there around 50 AD. The temple was dedicated to Sul, a Celtic god, and Minerva the Roman goddess of healing. (The Romans hoped to please everybody by dedicating it to both gods). They also built public baths which were supplied by the hot springs.

In the 60s and 70s AD a town grew up on the site of Bath. It was called Aquae Sulis, the waters of Sul. In the late 2nd century a ditch was dug around Roman Bath and an earth rampart was erected. It probably had a wooden palisade on top. In the 3rd century, it was replaced by a stone wall.

In the 4th century Roman civilization began to decline. The population of Roman towns decreased and trade shrank. The last Roman soldiers left England in 407 AD. What happened to Bath afterward is not known for certain. Some people probably continued to live within the Roman walls and Bath was probably still a market for the local area. However, the old, grand Roman buildings fell into disrepair and were replaced by simple wooden huts.

[Life in Roman Britain](#)

SAXON BATH

After the Romans left the Saxons invaded Eastern England. In 577 AD they won a battle at Dyrham. They then captured Bath, Cirencester, and Gloucester. The Saxons took over the settlements and life went on.

In the late 9th century Alfred the Great created a network of fortified towns across his kingdoms called burghs (from which we derive our word borough). If the Danes attacked all the local men could gather in the nearest burgh to fight them. Bath was one such burgh. By the 10th century, it had a mint. So by that time, Bath must have been a flourishing, although small, community. In 973 Edgar, the first king of all England was crowned in Bath.

BATH IN THE MIDDLE AGES

In 1088 a rebellion occurred. The rebels sacked Bath and burned the monastery but the town soon recovered. The local Bishop moved his seat to Bath and in the early 12th century a great abbey was created which dominated Medieval Bath. The present building dates from the very end of the Medieval period. Oliver King was Bishop of Bath and Wells from 1495 to 1503. In 1499 he dreamed of angels ascending and descending ladders to Heaven. He heard a voice telling 'a king' to restore the church. The Bishop took the dream to mean he should rebuild the abbey.

During the Middle Ages the church also ran 2 almshouses in Bath, St John the Baptist's and St Catherine's. There was also a leper hostel outside the town walls. During the Middle Ages people still came to Bath to bathe in the hot springs hoping it would cure them of their ailments.

In 1189 Bath was given its first charter (a document granting the townspeople certain rights). The main industry in Medieval Bath was the manufacture of woolen cloth. The wool was spun. It was then fulled, that is it was pounded in a mixture of water and clay to clean and thicken it. Wooden hammers worked by a watermill pounded the wool. The wool was then stretched on tenterhooks to dry. It was then dyed.