Estonians consider themselves to be one of the most enduring European ethnic groups to have lived on the shores of the Baltic Sea. This premise is still of the utmost importance to the national identity and explains the continued survival of the nation despite the foreign conquests since the 13th century. Even though the national identity regards the current frontiers of Estonia as an inviolable unit, the development of the nation has not been smooth. Hidden power struggles have played a major role in its history, turning localities which were formerly central to economic activity into marginalised countryside, even before foreign conquests. In the following chapter this process will be demonstrated in the distinctive former parish of Helme; in southern Estonia; and the repercussions it had on local identity and future developments will be described.

The current landscape in Helme is welcoming and human scale. Rivers cut through an undulating landscape with scattered low hills. There are large areas of forest in the south, whereas the north has an agricultural mosaic. Although most of the local roads are not metalled the traveller discovers fresh views round every bend. Sometimes the explorer is rewarded with splendid vistas to ruined castles or park landscapes, which are a testimony of its former glory. More commonly, secluded traditional farmsteads can be seen, which are more representative of the old way of life.

As such, the landscape is easeful and therefore with its friendly people has potential as a destination for tourists seeking and peace. However this promise has not been realised, because Helme lacks an established identity which could draw visitors. Although the European Landscape Convention concentrates more on everyday landscapes, there are some showpieces which, if linked by association with the whole region, could serve as attractions in its promotion. In order to escape the current marginalised situation it is essential to look into the history of the region and search for a local identity in the glorious past of the parish.