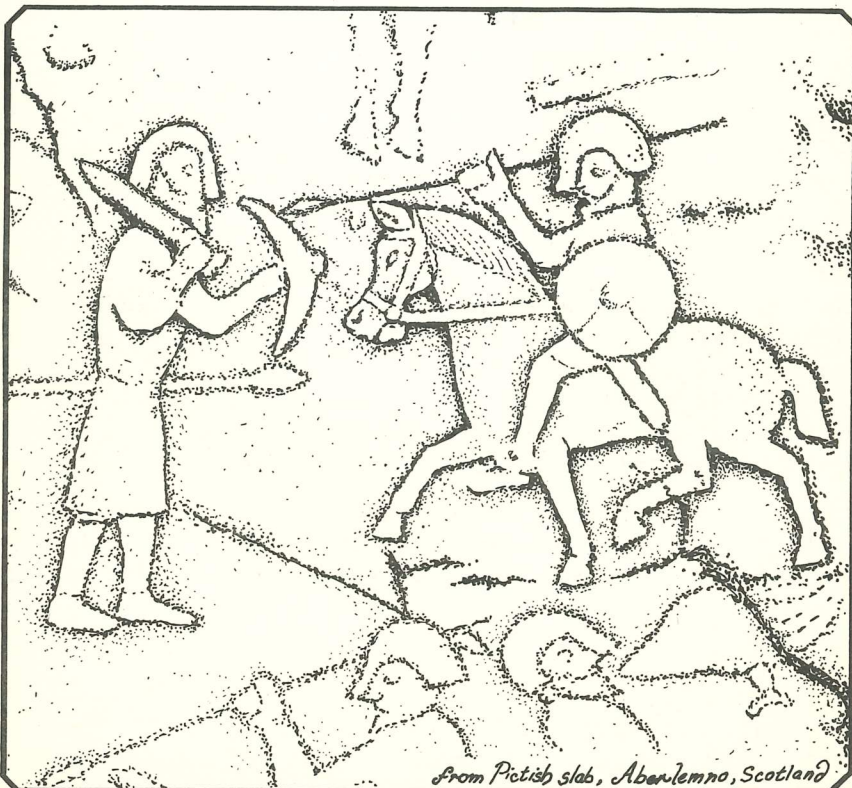


Dragon

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Newsletter of the DRAGON Society for people interested in the life and times of ARTHUR and the cultures of 'DARK AGE' Britain.



From Pictish slab, Aberlemno, Scotland

Welcome to DRAGON...

Many thanks to those who have written making suggestions and giving advice. I am most grateful. And thanks to those who sent stamped addressed envelopes or stamps...much appreciated. Over the last few months I have received a good few letters from all parts of the country and even one from Austria. It seems we're off to a good start

Well, here is the first of the Dragon Newsletters, of which I hope there will be at least three more this year. This Newsletter will not be very sophisticated but with your help we can at least keep it lively and interesting, and maybe even innovative. I would like to see your ideas down on paper for all to see. From the publication, in a small way, your theories may strike the chord that may bring about successful conclusions. Was Arthur really a cavalryman or is Collingwood just barking up the wrong tree? Where did Arthur fight the famous Nennian battles? Did he fight and win the Battle of Badon Hill? These are just some of the questions that could be asked and maybe someone's research will spark off a theory in someone else's research. Let us compare notes. I know of a person who has been studying Arthur for a decade and every time he meets me or someone of a similar interest he drops hints about how he has discovered who Arthur really was. However, he just will not let his secret go, much to the detriment of Arthurian research.

So folks let us get down to business and begin this little Newsletter. In the future we can talk about getting together and having face-to-face discussions and maybe a jar or two.

STOP PRESS - Just as this issue was to go to press I received two letters... one from San Francisco and another from Japan. DRAGON is already becoming an international society.

More about members in the next issue.

ARTHUR

An Introduction by Charles W. Evans Günther

Who is ARTHUR? Is he the 'Dark Age' warrior or the King of legend? When and where did he live? Was he born at Tintagel and live at Cadbury Castle?

The first mention of Arthur, by name, is in the Gododdin written around 600 AD. Gwarddur was a great warrior "but he wasn't an Arthur..." Whether the author did recognize Arthur as an example of bravery or used his name to rhyme with Gwarddur cannot be proved one way or the other.

The first historical writing to indicate the possibility of Arthur is Gildas. Writing in the mid-sixth century Gildas wrote of someone called 'the Bear'. If Arthur had been the victor of Badon, Gildas may not have needed to mention him by name since people of his time knew who defeated the Saxons. Today we can talk about the battles of Hastings and Waterloo without having to mention William the Conqueror or the Duke of Wellington - we just know.

Nennius describes Arthur as a warrior - a leader of battles who fought beside the kings of Britain and victor of twelve battles. Maybe he based the battles on a poem about Arthur and there were more than one stanza about Dubglas, thus giving rise to a number of battles being fought at the same place.

Following this chronicle Arthur falls into the mist of myths and folk-lore. It is not until the late-nineteenth century that historians start to consider Arthur as a person who may have lived in the those 'Dark Ages'.

In future issues of DRAGON I hope readers will air their theories about Arthur. For my part I intend to write some articles on Arthur in relation to genealogy, onomatology and mythology.

The Gododdin Poem

-its Military Details

by Steve Hacker

INTRODUCTION

The Gododdin poem was written in the 7th Century and was concerned with a band of 300 warriors from the British state of Manaw Gododdin. It was written as memorial to these warriors, almost all of whom were killed in an unsuccessful attack on the Saxons around Catterick.

The poem does not make it clear if the 300 were the total force present, but if there were others they were not considered important enough to mention. What the author intends to do is to show what the poem tells us about some of the warriors of 'Dark Age' Britain.

EQUIPMENT

The first point to note here is that the Gododdin warriors were cavalry, or at least mounted troops. They ride "bounding wide-coursing horse(s)" and ride out as "a force with steeds". The warriors themselves have "white shields" which are "light and broad". No form of helmet is mentioned but they do wear armour - "blue armour" and "bright mail coats". Many learned authors have stated that this armour was in fact leather. This idea is based on the original word which is translated as 'mail' (llurheu). This can be traced back to the Latin original and in its 'pure' form probably does refer to leather. However if the whole passage is looked at it seems to me that the armour must be metallic. The descriptions "bright" and "blue" (used elsewhere to describe the colour of a sword) can surely only refer to mail. It ought to be remembered that Aneirin's knowledge of Latin would probably be somewhat vague and therefore the word he used cannot be expected to have a precise meaning.

WEAPONS

The three weapons mentioned in the poem are the sword, javelin and lance. The following extracts will give the flavour of the references to the weapons:

"His sword was blue and gleaming", "Javelins...and keen

lances" and "Red were their swords...and square pointed spear heads".

There is a clear difference in the poem between javelins/spears and lances. It would seem that the javelins/spears were throwing weapons while the lances were for hand-to-hand fighting.

TACTICS

These are very hard to reconstruct. There are several references however to what seems to be skirmishing manoeuvres. For example "He showered spears in fight from his bounding wide-coursing horse". There is also a reference to hand-to-hand fighting: "In his first onset his lance penetrated the target".

Presumably the idea was to 'soften up' the enemy with javelins, then to charge in with spear and sword.

TRAINING

One of the most interesting aspects of the poem is the emphasis it gives to the training received by the Gododdin warriors. They spent one year in full time training before going off to fight. The warriors seem to have spent the nights drinking and feasting, but the days were spent in drill. This training is reflected in the way the warriors marched and attacked. "The warriors rose together, together they met, together they attacked, with a single purpose."

CONCLUSION

The Gododdin warriors may or may not have been typical of their age. However they did exist and it would be surprising if they were a unique group, considering that Manaw Gododdin was no more than an 'average' British state. The warriors themselves were well trained and armed at a time when both training and armament were meant to be in decline after the 'demise' of the Roman army.



Arthurian Novels

Compiled by C.W. Evans-Günther

In the last eighty or so years a number of memorable novels have been written concerning Arthur and the Dark Ages. Below are those written with history in mind rather than the Romances of France and of later periods. Most of these novels concern Arthur as Dux Bellorum or at least are placed in a Dark Age situation. Of course there are numerous other books on the subject of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, many of which we were brought up reading, but this list concentrates, as much as possible, only on the Dark Age Arthur.

Berger, Thomas. Arthur Rex: a Legendary Novel. New York: Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence, 1978.

Bishop, Farnam, and Brodeur, Arthur Gilchrist. The Altar of the Legion. Illustrated by Henry Pitz. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1926.

Bradshaw, Gillian. The Hawk in May. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980.

Canning, Victor. The Crimson Chalice. London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1976.

----- The Circle of the Gods. London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1977.

----- The Immortal Wound. London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1978.

Carmichael, Douglas. Pendragon: An Historical Novel. Hicksville, New York: Blackwater Press, 1977.

Chase, Mary Ellen. The Dawn of Lyonesse. New York: Macmillan Co., 1938.

Christian, Catherine. The Sword and the Flame: Variations on a Theme of Sir Thomas Malory. London: Macmillan London Ltd., 1978.

Church, Rev. Alfred J. The Count of the Saxon Shore, or the Vill in Vectis: A Tale of the Departure of the Romans from Britain. New York: G.P. Putman's Sons, 1887.

Closs, Hannah. Tristan. London: Andrew Dakers, 1940.

Costain, Thomas B. The Silver Chalice. New York: Doubleday & Co., 1953.

Deeping, Warwick. The Man Who Went Back. London: Cassell & Co., 1940.

Ditmas, E.M.R. Gareth of Orkney. London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1956.

Duggan, Alfred Leo. Conscience of the King. London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1951.

Faraday, W. Barnard. Pendragon. London: Methuen & Co., 1930.

Finkel, George. Twilight Province. Sydney: Angus and Robertson Ltd., 1967.

Frankland, Edward. The Bear of Britain. London: Macdonald, 1944.

Gloag, John. Artorius Rex. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977.

Marshall, Edison. The Pagan King. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co. Inc., 1959.

Masefield, John. Badon Parchment. London: William Heinemann, 1947.

Nye, Robert. Merlin. London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd., 1978.

O'Meara, Walter. The Duke of War. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World Inc., 1966.

Powys, John Cowper. Porius: A Romance of the Dark Ages. London: Macdonald and Co. (Publishers) Ltd., 1951.

Stewart, Mary. The Crystal Cave. London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1970.

----- The Hollow Hills. London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1973.

----- The Last Enchantment. London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1979.

Sutcliffe, Rosemary. Sword at Sunset. London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1963.

----- The Light Beyond the Forest: Quest for the Holy Grail. London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1979.

----- The Sword and the Circle. London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1981.

----- The Road to Camlann: The Death of King Arthur. London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1981.

Treece, Henry. The Eagles have Flown. London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1954.

----- The Great Captains. London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1956.

Turton, Geoffrey Edmund. The Emperor Arthur. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co. Inc., 1967.

The editor would be glad to hear of any other books about Arthur or the Dark Ages that have not been included in this collection.



The Dragon Society Newsletter, DRAGON, will be at present a quarterly magazine but it is hoped that this will become bi-monthly. Subscription to DRAGON and the Society is £4 per year (or four issues). The subscription covers only the cost of printing the magazine and postage.

DRAGON needs your help with illustrations, articles and the like, but please keep articles short.

YOUR EDITOR

Charles W. Evans-Gunther: born 1948 of Welsh-Swiss descent in the town of Flint, N.Wales. Educated in Flint, attended Art College in North and South Wales and did Teachers' Training in Chester. Taught Art at a Secondary Modern School, worked in the HQ of the Clwyd Library Service as an indexer and is now a graphic designer at the Clwyd Centre for Educational Technology, Mold, N.Wales.

Interest in Arthur and the Dark Ages began over ten years ago but increased while working at the Clwyd Library HQ which has a large collection of books on Arthur. Other interests include: Eastern Philosophy, Japan and China, Welsh History, Art, Folk-lore, Spaceflight and American Indians.

DRAGON is produced by the DRAGON Society.

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Letters, articles and illustrations should be sent to the above address. For personal replies please enclose a stamped addressed envelope if possible. Thank you, *B.W.E.*