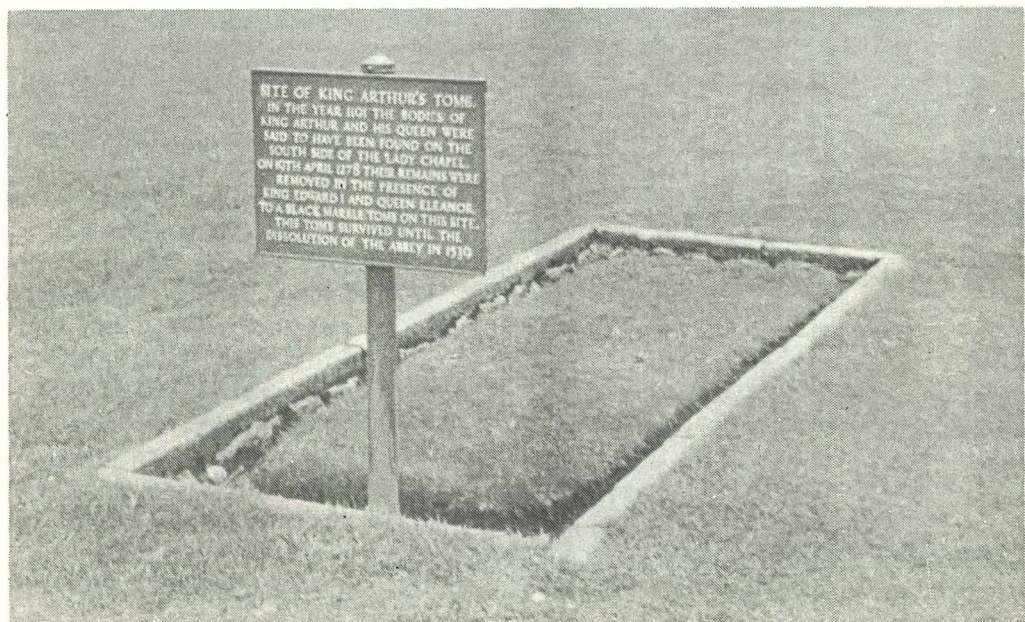


Dragon

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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.



Welcome once again to Dragon, our fourth issue.

Let's begin with a report on the Dragon-moot situation:

The first mini-moot took place in London on the 7th August. Anthony Tomlinson made a fleeting appearance having just returned from York and on his way home but Steve Pollington stayed for the rest of the day and suggested we visit the London Museum near the Barbican. A most enjoyable day was had.

The second meeting was at Glastonbury and this time Steve Hacker and Anthony Tomlinson with his mother came. A number of others said they could possibly make it but had to pull out at the last minute.

Glastonbury is quite a pleasant place but there is not a lot to see or visit and equally not a lot to do in the evenings. I met Anthony and mother on the top of Glastonbury Tor on the 27th August, the day before the moot, and joined them for an evening meal. The weather looked threatening.

On the Saturday the weather had cleared up and we gathered at the entrance to Glastonbury Abbey. After a cup of tea or coffee we met Geoffrey Ashe, who had kindly agreed to meet the group members. We all visited the Abbey where Mr Ashe chatted about the ideas he had for the future, Arthur and the society. While at the Abbey Mr Ashe showed us the site where it was believed that Arthur was buried. (see photo below)



Steve Hacker Geoffrey Ashe Anthony and Mrs Tomlinson

We would certainly like to thank Mr Ashe for the time he gave us and wish him all success with the ventures he told us about.

Following our meeting at the Abbey Steve Hacker suggested that we go to Cadbury Castle and offered to take his in his car.

The journey there took a little longer than was expected due mainly to my navigation and an

out of date map. Nevertheless we made it and it was well worth the trouble. Until you've actually seen Cadbury it is very hard to imagine why it is so unique. The defences alone are incredible. We discussed the communication problems that the occupants of the hillfort must have had but came up with no definite solutions. As Mr Ashe pointed out earlier it is no wonder that a gatekeeper at such a fort was reluctant to report visitors to the main hall, he would have had to walk hundreds of yards to get there.



Steve Hacker Anthony
and Mrs Tomlinson

We went all around the walls of the fort and had a quick look at the site of the great hall. Finally, after an encounter with some cows we returned to the car and back to Glastonbury.

We ended the day with tea and scones and some more discussions of warfare in the Dark Ages. Steve left and later Mrs Tomlinson, Anthony and I had a final evening meal and the moot was over.

The following day I visited Mr Geoffrey Ashe and he was kind enough to give me the interview that appears later in this issue.

Some weeks later, after a few phone calls and letters, another moot gathered in the city of Chester. So on the 11th September John Ivor Jones, and his girlfriend, Brian Kearney, Graham Sumner and of course yours truly met in that ancient city. Immediately, due to the heat, we went to the nearest cafe for a drink and a chat. From there we went on to the Chester Museum and discussed the objects found there including a full size replica of a Roman legionary in armour. Following this we returned to the above mentioned cafe and had a very nice meal followed by a rather heated deep discussion on the good and bad points of cavalry attack and infantry defence during the 'Dark Ages'. Much speculation was given to

the possibility of stirrups being in use during this period. Also there was the probability of Arthur having archer similar to that the late Roman period. John suggested that archers would be needed to soften-up the Saxon infantry before a cavalry attack. Another thought was if the munition factories of the Romans would still be in existence in the 'Dark Ages'.



Brian Kearney Graham Sumner John Ivor Jones Lynn Halsam

Meal and discussion over we trooped down to the Roman amphitheatre where the above photograph was taken. At this point Brian left us and the remaining group visited the British Heritage Centre followed by a quest to find the cob web painting in Chester Cathedral. Mission completed we said our farewells and the Chester moot was over.

I would personally like to thank all those who attended the moots and suggest that a future moot would be held next summer, organised well in advance.

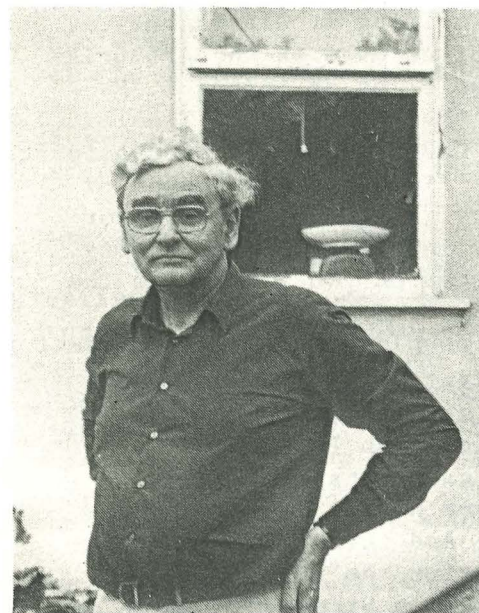
Finally, stemming from the last of the moots is the question of the logo.

To the left is a design that I have produced using a number of ideas sent in by different members. It is therefore a sort of composite creation. If you like it and wish it to be the official logo for the society, please write in and let me know.



An interview with **GEOFFREY ASHE**

by Charles W. Evans-Günther



On 29th August, the day after the Dragon-moot, I had the opportunity to interview Geoffrey Ashe at his house at the foot of Glastonbury Tor.

Over the years Mr Ashe has been at the forefront of an Arthurian revival and has written seven books on this theme, including: King Arthur's Avalon, From Caesar to Arthur, The Quest for Arthur's Britain, All about King Arthur, Camelot and the Vision of Albion, A Guidebook to Arthurian Britain and Kings and Queens of Early Britain.

CEG: Would you tell us something about your early life.

GA: I was born in Acton, London W.3, and was at St Paul's School which was in Hammersmith. My parents emigrated to Vancouver shortly before the War and I was at the University of British Columbia there. Then I was doing confidential war work and afterwards came back and was at Trinity College, Cambridge. Then there have been various toing and froing because my wife is Canadian and I was over there again to have a family. I was then involved actually with industry for quite a long time. My degree is in English but I became involved with the Ford Motor Company who, curiously enough, wanted someone to write instructional material and were willing to take a graduate in English for the job. And so I was doing this and was involved in industrial administration for some time but gradually building up my writing until eventually one phased out and the other phased in.

CEG: When did you become interested in Arthur?

GA: Oh, not Arthur himself at all... I remember having one of those large ornate books of legends that they gave children, and I remember a Victorian painting of Galahad kneeling in front of the Holy Grail, which looked like an athletic trophy, and thinking what a crashing bore it all was. No, that didn't come then at all. It came much later basically because I became interested in Glastonbury and its mythology. But in the course of writing my Glastonbury... King Arthur's Avalon... this involved me with the Arthurian question and I found this aroused a lot of interest. My publishers said I should extend that part of it. Then, of course, I became involved in the Cadbury/Camelot excavations. So I've done a great deal in the field for one reason or another but it wasn't the primary thing... it was an enormously expanded spin-off from my interest in Glastonbury.

CEG: Have there been any influences on you concerning the Arthurian question?

GA: I think I would name three people. One was a professor at the University of B.C. who planted the seeds, although they didn't sprout then. When I was in Vancouver Prof. Priestly, who gave a course on Victorian literature in which he discussed Tennyson and gave something of the background of Arthur. Secondly was Robert Graves - the historical novels not the poems. And thirdly, again an influence I didn't realise at the time, the third book of the C.S. Lewis trilogy - "That Hideous Strength" - which at the time I had read the other two and I thought that it was just rather a muddle. But I came back to it years and years later and realised how much it had influenced me. "That Hideous Strength" is certainly important!

CEG: Have you any other interests apart from Arthur and Glastonbury?

GA: My books range quite widely. Most of what I have written could be said to have branched out from the Glastonbury mythology in various ways, but sometimes it's a pretty big branching out. In fact some, you might say, fits in to a certain extent but is really a separate interest.

I have written one biography and that was of Gandhi, who was a man who fascinated me - the only political figure who fascinated me ever I think.... And related to this there is a long standing interest in some of the social and political things Gandhi stood for - what you might call "small is beautiful".

And when you were speaking of influences actually I forgot to mention another important one - G.K. Chesterton. I think I first got an interest from his "Short History of England". He was a writer who influenced me immensely in many ways quite apart from this. But I happened to read the "Short History of England" where he mentions the Glastonbury legends, and again that didn't effect me much at the time - it developed later....

CEG: I think yesterday we talked about what ideas you had for the future. What was the book you are getting published?

GA: Now this is a second Glastonbury book - the first was 25 years ago and that has sold consistently ever since. And of course there have been so many developments since. The discovery of Glastonbury by what used to be called the 'alternative society' - the pop-mystical festival and so forth - and this has had a lasting influence. The festivals were revived again two or three years ago - I didn't think anybody did not sort of thing now, but apparently they do. Quite a lot of what you might call the 'Aquarian' element have become interested, the two major pilgrimages have built up greatly... so this place is very much more on the map than when I first wrote about it.

At the same time there has been so much more discovered that relates one way or another - the Cadbury excavations for instance. And recently the work I have done on Glastonbury Tor, the prehistoric labyrinth which seems to be a very credible theory but nobody ever worked it out fully before. I've written a booklet on this. I reckon that there is room for a new book which wouldn't supercede the previous one. I mean I wasn't going to go over all the history of the abbey again or anything like that. But simply the things that have gradually emerged in the past few years. So it is a different kind of book from the first.

CEG: Have got any comments about the 'Dark Ages' in general?

GA: Well, I agree with you that it shouldn't be called 'dark' but the trouble is I don't know what else to call it. I remember discussing this with Philip Routs, who thinks exactly the same, and he had ideas like the British Heroic Age and things like that. But nobody has really hit on it.... To call it Sub-Roman is to imply it is nothing in itself - that is just a sort of decline and of course it is something in itself. To call it Pre-Saxon is relating it to something else and not giving it its own value. But beyond saying I think 'dark' is wrong I'm not sure what

is right..

CEG: What then do you image the period to be? For instance some say it is from 410 to 1066.

GA: Well, my objection to 'dark' - the 'Dark Age' in the British context - is that you have this picture: Romans - Darkness - Saxons, and in fact the 'Darkness' is interesting in itself. It is a period for quite a bit of which the Romanised Celtic Britons were in the ascendancy, when you have the roots of the Arthurian legend.... The Red Dragon as a period as it were. And that may be said to have come to an end in 633 when the last Welsh counterattack failed, or at least the last major one. I would be inclined to put this period, in Britain, - 410 to 633. After that was the development of the Christian missions to the Saxons, the continental connections and so forth. You are getting something more like a new civilization and of course you soon get such figures as Bede, who are quite clearly a renaissance in themselves. It is quite clearly not a dark age by then.

CEG: Have you any comments you would like to make about our magazine Dragon?

GA: I am very glad to see any development of this kind and I'm rather interested to see that several people seem to have been doing the same thing separately from each other. I think it is a sign of interest and I think it is a very good thing that this interest develops. My own feeling is that there is always the danger of compartmentalising in the field.... The problem here is that for many years it was absolutely fragmented. There were the Medieval specialists, there were a few Dark Age archaeologists, a few Dark Age historians and so on and they never really talked to each other. While doing the Cadbury excavations they were pretty well forced to talk to each other for a while and they seemed to be converging a bit. But I think there is a danger we are trying to find out the historical roots of the Arthurian legends and forgetting all that Medieval nonsense or alternatively, we are interested in the Medieval literature and forgetting all those miserable broken pots in the fifth century. I don't think that's right. I think it is a study that illuminates back and forth very strongly.

Leslie Alcock and certain other scholars have tried to reconstruct Arthur almost entirely from Welsh tradition and have completely ignored Geoffrey of Monmouth. Al-

though we know he was a creative writer and not a historian, he undoubtedly used Welsh tradition and he undoubtedly used others. He should not be neglected. The work I've been doing myself recently, and Prof. Fleuriot in France without knowing about each other for quite a long time, certainly seems to be tending to the view that Geoffrey of Monmouth used not only Welsh tradition but some sort of continental tradition of British activities which has some validity. And there is virtually no trace of this in the Welsh material - if you ignore Geoffrey completely you lose this.

CEG: Finally, have you anything you like to say to people interested in Arthur and the 'Dark Age'? Advise maybe.


GA: I think I have already said it. It would be to keep a broad view of it and not get wrapped up in a little archaeological package, a little Annales package, so to speak, or a little Medieval Romantic package and don't neglect of course the modern literature. Since what we call "The Quest for Arthur's Britain" began it has inspired an whole lot of creative writing, which is very interesting. A major poem by John Heath Stubbs, a play by John Harden and at least a dozen novels, all produced by this. It is almost a new Matter of Britain and that is a very impressive thing indeed.

CEG: Perhaps, one could also say a "Quest for Arthur's France"?

GA: Well, possibly, yes! When the book "The Quest for Arthur's Britain" was first broached during the Cadbury excavations I suggested at the time that there might be room for a book that would be a conspectus of the whole thing. The publishers first wanted to call it the "Quest for Camelot" and I said absolutely no! Then they said the "Quest for Arthur" and I said no - you can't really talk about a "Quest for Arthur", not at this stage, but you can call it a "Quest for Arthur's Britain". Well, I think we have got a bit further than that now, because we do seem to have got a line on at least one man at the root of the story who is a documented figure. Now maybe there are more than one. Merlin, for instance, Mark, Trystan are all component figures - Merlin is undoubtedly two figures combined, and so are several of these Arthurian characters and it is possible than Arthur is. We have a fifth century Arthur and a sixth century Arthur who eventually combined perhaps in Breton tradition. I would rather end up with one - but who knows! The point

is, however, for the first time now, and this isn't a querk of my own because it is getting quite widely accepted, behind at least a substantial part of the story of Arthur we have a man, a British High King in the 460s who is really and truly documented. And that is something new. Incidentally, the other day a friend of mine in America - who is interested in this research - sent me three unnoticed references she had found in Medieval French chronicles which all put him around the 460s, which is very interesting. How far we can go from here remains to be seen but I think it is becoming possible to talk of a "Quest for Arthur", which is an interesting step.

We must thank Mr Ashe for allowing us so much of his time and wish him every success with his new Glastonbury book and the other prospects he talked about for the future.



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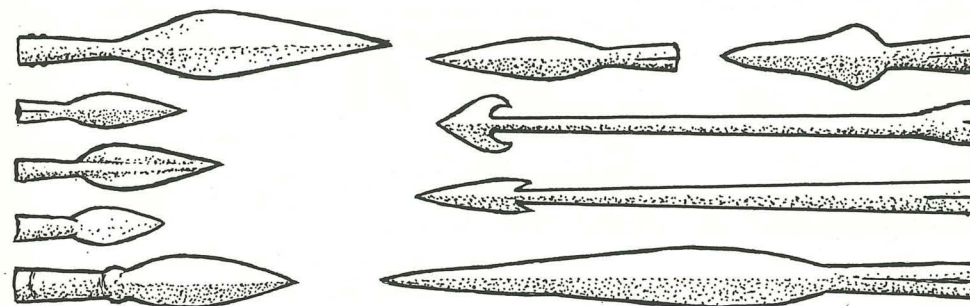
A few thoughts on Dark Age Military Equipment

by John Ivor Jones

The soldier of the Dark Ages in Britain could come from the Saxon invaders, the Celtic Inhabitants or those Barbarians from the north of Hadrian's Wall (Scots and Picts). The Saxons were infantry soldiers (true up to 1066), whilst the native Celts had 350 years of Roman tradition behind them, most will be familiar with the balanced composition of all arms that made up the late Roman army.

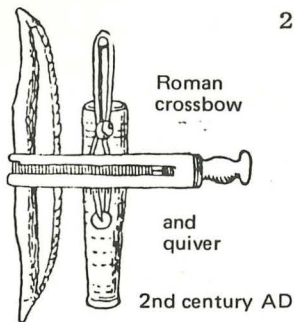
It is generally believed that Arthur led heavy cavalry, and infantry are largely ignored by writers of the time. I believe that Arthur's cavalry would have been the elite striking force and that they would have been supported by good quality infantry.

Let us now look at the weaponry in use during the time of Arthur.



1. SPEARS

To the soldier of the Dark Ages the spear was a main weapon to the peasant soldier, be he Celt or Saxon. It was sometimes his only weapon, early Saxon armies being composed mainly of spearmen. The spear would be of ash or similar wood and could be of any length between 6 and 10 feet. Javelins were the main missile weapon of the Roman cavalry and one presumes Arthur's cavalry would continue to use javelins as their main offensive weapon. The Welsh of the Middle Ages (descendants of the Arthurian Britons) were renowned for their ability with throwing spears and javelins and one presumes their ancestors did not lack this dexterity.



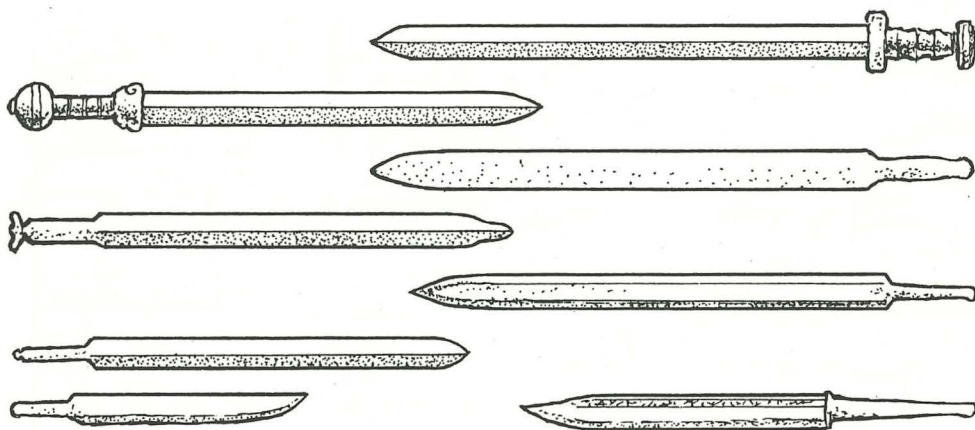
2. BOW AND CROSSBOW

The Saxons make frequent mention of the bow as a hunting weapon, but don't appear to have made large scale use of the bow in war-time. The Celts with their Roman military heritage would have been familiar with the self-bow and the composite-bow and also the crossbow, and it would be military stupidity of the highest order to hurl

cavalry against steady infantry without some sort of preliminary "softening-up". I believe Arthur would have had at least a portion of his army equipped with some sort of rapid fire support weapon to shoot in his cavalry.

3. SLING AND STAFF SLING

The sling and staff sling were also common weapons at this time, and being simple weapons to use one would expect to have found slings in widespread use especially by untrained conscripts.

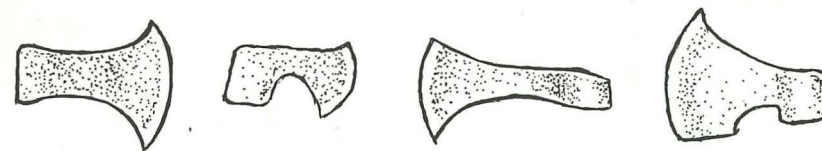


4. SIDEARMS

Arthur's heavy cavalry and the Saxon warrior elite would have been equipped to best of their culture's weaponry.

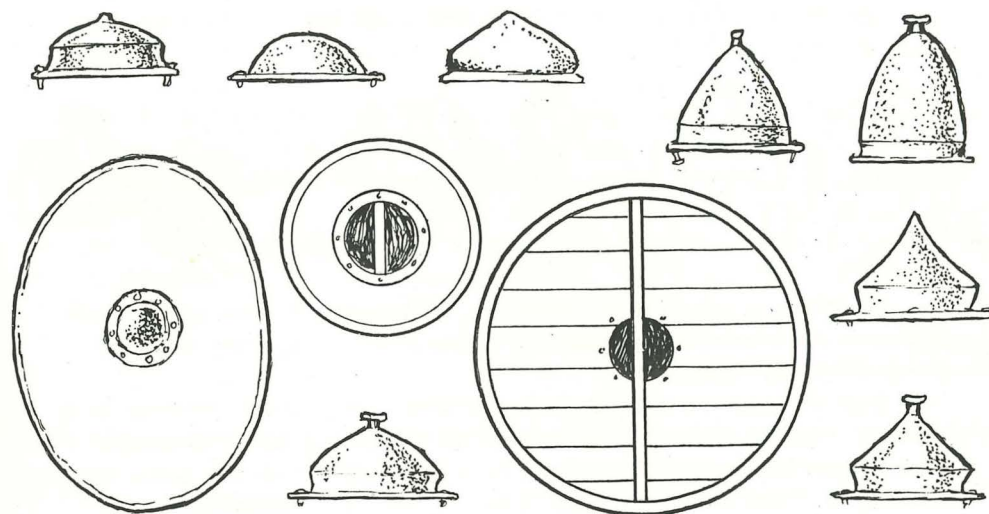
The sword would have been the main sidearm of the above, Arthur's men being armed with the late Roman *spatha* of about 36 inches in length, the Saxons would have carried swords of Saxons origin of similar length. "Lower ranks" would have been less likely to have carried swords but in the Saxon case may have carried a long broad one-edged knife of between 18 inches and 2½ feet in length.

Long knives are also thought to have been standard equipment with Arthur's infantry, (again I refer the reader to the Welsh of the Middle Ages and the murder of the prisoners at Crecy or Poitiers by excited Welsh soldiers).



The *securis* was a one handed axe carried by some late Roman soldiers and may well have continued in use into Arthur's time.

The Saxons may have made widespread use of the Frankish *francisca* or throwing axe.



5. SHIELDS

The most common shape of a shield would be circular, although with the Celts the Roman oval shield may have been popular.

Shields would have been made of wood or leather, linden wood being a popular wood.

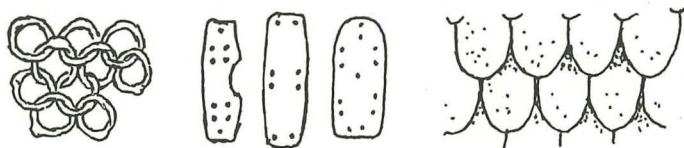
Shields averaged 30 inches in diameter and would have been carried by all types of soldier regardless of social standing.

6. ARMOUR

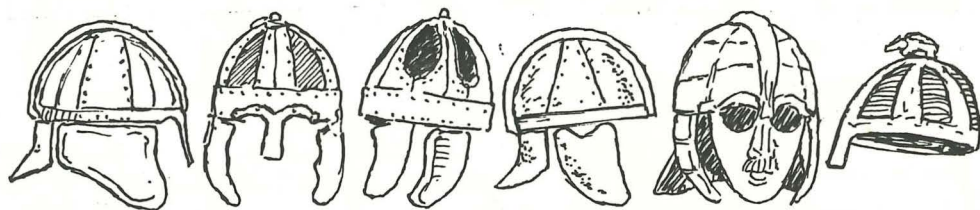
Arthur's heavy cavalry would probably have been equipped with metallic armour of one of these 3 types:-

SCROLLS

- (A) Mail, commonly known as chain-mail, expensive and difficult to make but probably around in adequate quantities if the Roman munition factories had survived under the protection of the Celtic war-lords.



- (B) Scale armour, made of metal pieces laced to a backing material. Easier to make than mail but not as good as body defence.
- (C) Lamellar armour, similar to scale, differing mainly only in details of construction, could be made of non-metallic materials (same applies to scale) such as bone and felt.



Leather would have been in widespread use as a body defence and would certainly have been the most common form of body armour.

The Saxons would have made even less use of the body armour than Arthur's soldiers, not having the resources at the disposal of their enemies and even to a certain extent having a Teutonic dislike for armour as unmanly.

Metal helmets would have been of late Roman pattern for Arthur's Celts and one supposes were issued to each of Arthur's heavy cavalry. Helmets like body armour would have been rarer amongst the Saxons.

It may have occurred to the reader that I favour the opinion that the Arthurian Celts were better equipped, trained and led than the Saxons. Their eventual defeat and retreat to the Highlands of Wales can, I believe, be laid at the door of the Celts themselves, they refused to unify, they bickered with their allies and so made their defeat only a matter of time. Even a Warleader such as Arthur could only stave off defeat for a generation after Badon. If, of course Arthur actually existed....

This issue's first letter is about 'Prince Valiant' and how he inspired our friends from Austria:

"Contrary to Britain, which was taken in long wars between Celtic and German tribes, the occupation of Austria south of the Danube was a peaceful one. The native Celtic population was invaded by the Romans around the time of the birth of Christ. The result was a Roman-Celtic mixed culture. Combat was quite rare and only some Celtic forts offered resistance. These were besieged and after their defeat the surviving people were deported to nearby Roman towns. There are no epics that tell the story of the Celtic people, however, there are tales of the popular heroes of the Germanic tribes that came to Austria, like the 'Nibelungen'.

"Wolfram of Eschenbach, an East-Frankish nobleman, wrote a poem about Percival in 1207. He was not the first to write about Percival but he was the first to write in the German language. Because of this poem King Arthur and his knights came to the German countries. Richard Wagner composed a number of Arthurian operas, including 'Tristan and Isolde' (1859) and 'Percival' (1882). Nevertheless, King Arthur continued to be insignificant and stories and books of legends about him were very few. It was the character of Prince Valiant, produced by Hal Foster, that brought King Arthur to life in Austria. Of course Prince Valiant (or as he is called in Austria 'Prinz Eisenherz') was written for children and it is as children we read these stories and were influenced by them. It would seem that these were the only stories that had any background of Arthur because it is nearly impossible to get literature concerning the Arthurian period in Austria.

"So it was only Prince Valiant that could have made King Arthur popular in Austria."

Many thanks to Wolfgang, Roswitha, Gerhard and Rudolf for their interesting explanation to how a group of Austrians came to know and be interested in Arthur.

Now we return to an article that appeared in the first issue of Dragon with Nigel Vye adding to the list of Arthurian novels:

"I have been doing a lot of reading now...and recommend the following books:

1.) 'Hawk of May' by Gillian Bradshaw

Although a good book of the Arthurian period, it takes some believing that the hero visits the Land of the Immortals and receives the sword of light. But a book I thoroughly enjoyed with its sword and sorcery aspect.

2) 'Kingdom of Summer'

A sequel to the above which I enjoyed a little less, but it nonetheless has some good scenes in which the hero of the Light confronts the Darkness. It is told from the point of view of the servant of the hero (Gwalchmai), and seems to be a less exciting book. Apparently, there is a trilogy in this series though the third is yet to be published.

3) 'A Storm upon Ulster' by K.C. Flint.

An excellent book concerning the exploits of the hero of Ulster, Cuculain. Things never change do they! There is plenty of magic with Calatin the arch-druid and the Sidhe of Ulster and though it is before the age of Arthur it gives a good impression of the heroic ideals of the Celtic aristocracy that persisted into the age of Arthur.

Finally, Richard Norton writes more concerning the idea of an Arthurian model. He asks if any of the club's members would like to suggest ideas of what to produce. Illustrations of what could be produced would help Richard a lot. So if you have any ideas, etc., please let me know and we'll try and get something going.

Once again, I would like to end this fourth issue with a call for more articles and ideas. I would especially like more on the social side and let's not forget the legends completely. In the future maybe it would be nice to have a section devoted solely to military modelling and wargaming with ideas being suggested and discussed.

STOP PRESS!!!

I have just received a letter from Robert Taylor, Chairman of the Arthurian Society. . . He is trying to set up a confederation of groups interested in the Dark Ages and Arthur. Comments please.

Also I would like to hear from anyone who has information and illustrations of the 'Saxon' helmet recently found in York.