

# Dragon

ISSN 0267-1026 12

ace  
-in diebus  
-nostris

A Merry Christmas  
and a Happy New Year



Welcome once again to Dragon,

Here we are at the end of the first volume and at this point it is good to look at the past and the future.

When I first began this society and magazine I had no idea how long it would last. Also, as a few of you already know, it all began by a mistake. I wrote a letter to Military Modelling concerning a series of three articles on Arthur and in it I said something like wouldn't be good to have a club for people interested in Arthur and the Dark Ages. I didn't know there was already two societies dealing with this subject. Soon I received letters from folk wanting to join the club. So I thought seriously about it and went ahead with some ideas. And there we are! Most of those who wrote to me three or so years ago are still members. I'd like to thank them and everybody for their continued support.

Whether Dragon is a success that is up to the members but I must agree that we have had some excellent articles in the magazine over the years. I hope that these can be kept up. The future, I hope, hold a lot of interesting things. I am at the end of this issue suggesting a Dragon Project - so please try and join in and do the best you can. Remember this your magazine so it is up to you to mould it whichever way you wish.

Now to a piece of business: for many members re-subscription time has come. So if you wish to resubscribe and the time has come an indication will be given in the square to be found at the end of this line:-

A few pieces of news and comments: First it is my sad duty to tell you that Sir Idris Ll. Foster died on June 18th 1984. Some will remember him at the Llangollen Arthurian Weekend last year. Sir Idris was born at Bethesda, Gwynedd in 1911, went to the local county school then on to Bangor and University of Wales. Before the Second World War he was Head of the Department of Celtic, Liverpool University, served for three and half years in Naval intelligence and then in 1947 became Professor of Celtic at Jesus College, Oxford. He was knighted in 1977 and retired in 1978. Sir Idris was possibly the world's greatest expert on the Culhwch and Olwen story. He will be sorely missed.

A good piece of news was the meeting with Roswitha and Wolfgang, from Vienna, in London on the 20th October. It was nice to see them and I hope to visit them in Vienna in the near future.

Finally, two pieces of news is the publication of Geoffrey Ashe's latest book. "The discovery of King Arthur", consisting of 240 pages, 38 black and white photographs and maps and costing £12.95 will be published in February 1985. I hope to review it then. Another event for '85 will be Quest Heritage Tours which take in many Arthurian sites with lectures by people like Geoffrey Ashe, John Michell and John Matthews. The price of this ten day long course is £995. If anyone can afford this and would like further information drop me a line.

Finally, I'd hoped to have reproduced the transcripts of two interviews but due to lack of time they both will have to be left until the next issue. So will see you all then. Now please read on.

## the lost kingdom of rheged

A guided tour to the sites of the northern Arthur and earliest surviving Welsh poetry.

Rydal Hall is situated in the heart of the Lake District not far from Ambleside, and it is here that a most interesting course started on the 22nd October 1984. (It would be very difficult to cover the whole course so I am forced to summarise the events. It is hoped that in the future some of the notes made may be transcribed into articles.)

After a long journey on the train from North Wales on a very rainy day I arrived at Windermere around three in the afternoon to be greeted by Tom Clare and to meet Dr Rachel Bromwich. Tom took us to Rydal Hall, where later a sherry reception was laid on followed by dinner. Likewise dinner was followed by Dr Bromwich's talk on "The Earliest Surviving Welsh Poetry". These

consisted mainly of Aneirin and Taliessin.

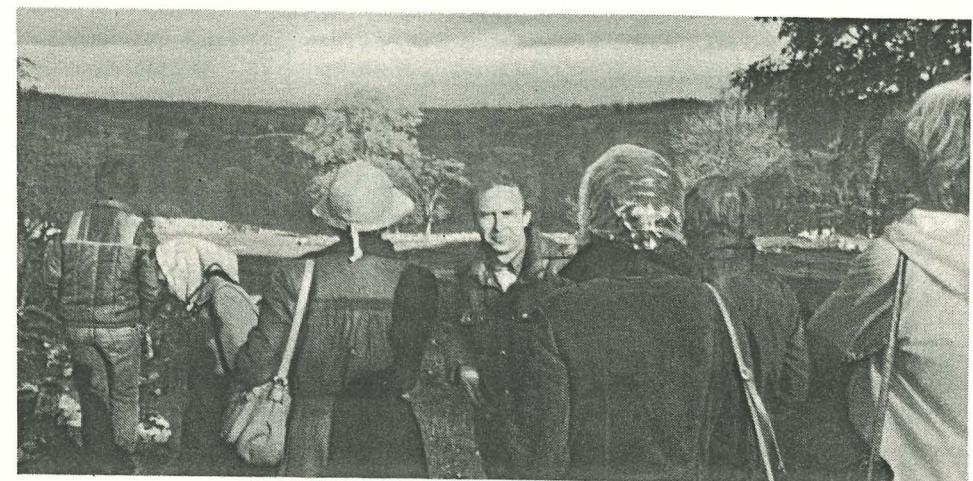
On day two the resident group (about fourteen), under the leadership of Tom Clare, piled into a transit and began the practical part of the course. The first site visited was a "Dark Age" rectangular enclosure called Burwens. From there we went to Morland Church and Powdonnet Well. Then we visited Penrith to see the Giant's Grave, a strange array of hog-back stones between two cross. From there we travelled passed Ninkirk to see Isis Parlis. Both the Giant's Grave and Isis Parlis may have had connections with Owein son of Urien Rheged. We rounded off our excursion by visiting Dacre, a church traced back to the Saxon period and beyond. Back at Rydal, after dinner, Tom Clare gave his lecture on Urien Rheged and Arthur. (Part One of an article on this subject by Tom will appear in the next issue.)

The third day was exceedingly wet but we managed to visit a number of sites including Pendragon Castle. At Richmond, following a quick stop at the Castle and lunch, we picked up Peter Wilson, archaeologist, who guided us to Catterick Bridge and talked about the Roman site. This is believed to be the area where in the epic poem "The Gododdin" a great battle is duly recorded. Following this we were shown Stanwick Hillfort complex by Percy Turnbull. This day culminated in a lecture by David Longley, of the Gwynedd Archaeological Trust, who talked about the Mote of Mark and Castle Hewen.

Day four took us in search of sites connected with the British Civil War of the later sixth century with its climax at Arthuret. First we stopped near Tarn Wadling (once a famous lake with Arthurian connections) and Castle Hewen. From there we visited first Carlisle, a Roman city known to have survived into the "Dark Ages", then to Birdoswald, once believed to have been the site of Arthur's death at Camlan. There is no doubt that there is nearby a most impressive 'crooked glen' but it is now said that Castlestead, with its Cam Beck, is Camboglanna. After this

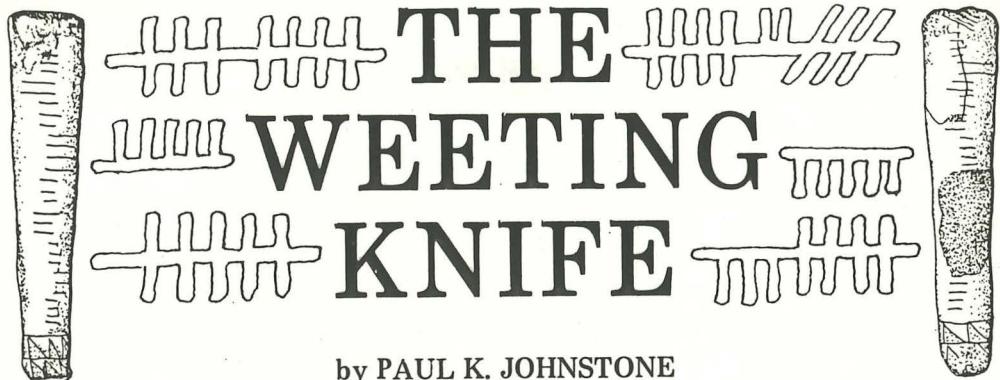
we went on to Bewcastle, passed Carwinley and on to Arthuret. That evening Dr Lloyd Laing lectured "Dark Age Northern England and Southern Scotland".

The final day was devoted to St Kentigern or as he is known in Scotland, St Mungo. Our first visit was to Crosthwaite, near Keswick, where one of Kentigern's churches can be found. From there we travelled a couple of miles to the west and stopped off at Castlerigg stone circle. This was to emphasise the strength of paganism in the area which Kentigern had to deal with. Leaving the circle, situated in a most atmospheric area, we visited a few more churches and then made a swift return to Rydal, by way of Greystoke (didn't see Tarzan!), for lunch.



Members of the "Lost Rheged" course, Tom Clare facing the camera.

So ended a very interesting course brilliantly guided by Tom Clare who brought to life entries in chronicles and stanzas of poems. Despite the rough weather the course not only brought out some fascinating points but gave me the opportunity to see the magnificent countryside of Cumbria. The weather also added an almost mystical feel to the course - with mist rolling over the mountains and the most impressive of skies. I returned home with many questions in my mind about a Northern Arthur and a dynasty of kings who ruled a beautiful and awe-full land.



# THE WEETING KNIFE

by PAUL K. JOHNSTONE

The Weeting Knife is a tiny thing - actually it is only the knife-handle which survives - two and three quarter inches long, cut from the tine of a red-deer antler, with remnant of rusted iron knife-tang still embedded to form the baseline of an inscription in Ogam letters as follows: (ANTIQUARIES JOURNAL 1952, 71f.)



The letters can be identified with little difficulty. It is when we come to interpretation that cautious scholars have taken a long and careful look at the letters - and shaken their heads.

Professor Kenneth Hurlstone Jackson, once remarked (I quote from memory) "To read this inscription as Gaelic, or indeed any Indo-European language, would require superhuman ingenuity." But Toynbee said that "it is the duty of every scholar to put his reputation in risk." And in my case, holding no academic position whatever, and never having wished to do so - I equally detest boring and being bored - why should I not try my hand? I divide it up as (U)LUCU VUTE C(OVUM) I TELEG as others have done before, which I read as a not very expertly spelled dialect of Gaelic.

Now Weeting is in western Norfolk, just west of the Devil's Dyke, between the rivers Wissey and Ouse. But there it certainly is an exotic. A similar knife-handle inscribed INEITTEMON..... MATS was found in Shetland. It is not of prehistoric date, for then it would be Ogam Consainne,

with vowels omitted.

I will first give the Gaelic in normalised spelling. ULUC FADA CU MI TULACH, which I translate as ULUC THE TALL - HOUND AM I (champion) OF THE HILL.

There is a perfectly good historical context for this find. In A.D. 429 there was a then famous but largely forgotten battle fought at Stamford on the river Welland in south Lincolnshire. It must have been the subject of a longish Old English song or saga, which survived to be quoted in the twelfth century by Henry of Huntingdon and in the sixteenth by Hector Boece and George Buchanan. I will conflate these three stories, all well worth reading.

South of the Welland were the post-Roman Britons of King Vortigern, actually commanded by Vortigern's eldest son Vortimer (earlier Vortamorix) "the Blessed" (by St Germanus) stiffened by perhaps about 500 well armed "Saxons" (that is North Sea Teutons) led by Hengest the son of Wihtgils, already famous as the slayer of King Finn of Frisia.

North of them a probably larger composite force, of which the largest contingent were Picts, the famous "Painted Men", but there were also Irishmen and renegade Britons and the Atecotti ("From beyond the North" or Gwyddyl Fichti "Gaelic speaking Picts" from the Isles, including Shetland). Welsh tradition told of their invading Powys in the fifth century. Rhitta (Gaelic Rette "ram") the Giant was one of those and a famous story, no longer extant in Welsh, but retold in French by Norman conteur as part of the enormous Suite de Merlin, told how Arthur fought and eventually slew Rhitta and married Gwenhwyfar of Caersws.

But that happened later, and we are discussing the battle of Stamford-on-Welland in 429.

The Picts and their allies charged and carried the stony ford with a rush on Hengest's men, who closely formed in a triangular "swine-fylking" held the centre of the British line and held it well. Their swords and axes cut down many a Pict. But the Picts kept on coming and worked their way around the Saxon phalanx. They reached the British

infantry and began to force them back. They opened a wide gap between the Saxons and the Britons. But to their credit the Britons, few of them experienced in war, did not break and run. Some of this may have been due to native stubbornness and courage, but surely a few hundred British cavalry were also there to support the infantry with a charge when they were about to break and to cheer them by words and deeds.

Even so, the battle was going in favour of the Picts, when a sudden thunderstorm broke over the battle. The rain poured down so fast that warriors were compelled to hold their shields over their heads. Hail rang on shields and helmets. A milky mist cut off vision beyond a few feet away. The fighting ceased. Human fighting was but a small thing compared to this terrific display of elemental wrath!

Then as suddenly as it began, the storm was over. Men could lower their shields, take a fresh grip on their weapons and get their courage and will to battle. As the rain ended the mist began to lift. And Hengest saw that there were no Picts in front of him. Where were they? Look south, perhaps a mile away, men were fighting. Hengest blew their battle horn, calling his gesiths together. Then he led them, still in their shield-wall, in a charge on the backs of the Picts, who by this time must have been counting their battle as won. Even so, they kept on attacking the Britons. Once again Prince Vortimer threw in his little, and now sadly diminished cavalry. It was late in the day, and both sides must have been deadly tired, though it is doubtful if many noticed it yet. They had all earned a victory

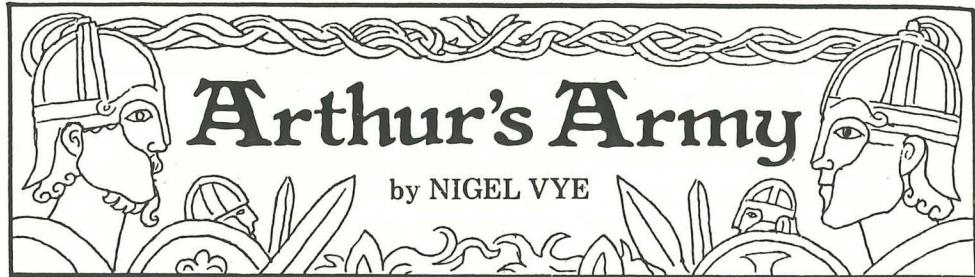
and paid dearly for it, and still the long battle was not decided.

In such a moment the tiniest bit of added force can have enormous effect. One thinks of the gillies at Bannockburn. And now the Picts were hit on their left flank by King Hors and his North Swabians, who had come across the Fens by the Denver Causeway - men who must have been tired themselves from their long forced march - but nothing like the men they were attacking. So the battle was won, and the English had earned their new homes in Britain. But let us remember, if the Britons had fled the English would have been surrounded and in spite of their superior equipment, gradually beaten.

If the Britons had lost at Stamford, what would the Britons have done.Appealed to Aetius, just as they did in 446, when Aetius' hands were tied. But in 429 Aetius was a younger man with less entanglements. He might have been welcomed in a Britain about to become Pictavia. And would have that saved the Roman Empire from collapse? A Uluc the Tall - was he King of the Atecotti? Did he fall under a Saxon sword, and did his conqueror take his knife as a trophy of victory back to Norfolk, to be eventually thrown away - by some other Saxon, for men of all races love to keep such trophies, but not those of other men. Even so, the Weeting Knife survives as proof that in 429 and for many years before the Northern Isles were already Gaelic-speaking, a thing many a professor will stoutly deny. Let them deny. The Weeting Knife is solid evidence.

© Paul K. Johnstone





A lot of people tend to regard Arthur's army as consisting of a horde of heavily armed and armoured cavalry trampling over all opposition. The purpose of this short article is to dispel this notion and to give my personal view of Arthur's army.

The army was divided into four types, namely the armoured cavalry (knights), other cavalry, the infantry and, finally, the mercenaries.

The heavily armoured cavalry was composed of the nobility and the personal warbands these being the only people capable of providing the expensive equipment and the time necessary to be able to use these proficiently. The equipment itself was composed of helmet, mail corslet, shield, spear, sword and warhorse. Various other pieces of equipment could be added to this such as vambraces, greaves, armour for the horse and possibly the substitution of the *kontos* for the spear. The *kontos* was akin to the medieval lance although more slender. It was couched for impact with the enemy and then discarded for the sword. The spear could be retained for melee as well as the charge but would be less effective on impact. All the above equipment was available to the late Roman armies and therefore would presumably be available to the successor states, but not in such large quantities. The nobility would be able to pay their own way, living off their estates and booty. Additional money was provided from levies on church property which was of course unpopular.

The other cavalry would be provided by the less well off nobility and the more wealthy militia. They wore little or no armour perhaps just a leather jerkin and helmet, together with a shield. Weapons consisted of javelins, as their primary

role in battle was to soften up the enemy in preparation for the charge of the heavy cavalry. Other weapons would be swords and spears, all of lesser quality than the "heavies". Their horses would also be of lighter build.

Next we come to the infantry. These would be the local militia from the towns, the remnants of the late Roman garrisons and low quality. They would be poorly equipped, any able to afford anything special being expected to serve mounted. Weapons appear to have been a long spear and either a sword or light axe. It is suggested that some may have worn leather jerkins as armour and these may have been regular troops maintained by Arthur. Some infantry would have acted as skirmishers, being armed with bows and javelins.

Mercenaries were well attested, as the first Saxons came to Britain as such warriors. Irish are also recorded. All would fight on foot and be of better quality and better armoured and equipped than their British counterparts. However their loyalty would always be in doubt.

Little is known on how these various troops were organised. Sources mention the 'teulu' consisting of normally 300 men and in my opinion this is how the cavalry, both light and heavy, would be organised. I believe the infantry would be organised on the late Roman model, with units of 1000 men. Mercenaries would have no fixed organisation.

As to tactics, the infantry would form a series of dense 'clumps' around which the cavalry could charge out from and rally around. The lighter cavalry would harass the enemy with missiles and avoid contact. All the cavalry would also attempt to outflank the enemy as well.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Armies of the Dark Ages by I. Heath (W.R.G.)  
The Age of Arthur Vol 1 by J. Morris (Phillimore)  
Arthur's Britain by L. Alcock (Pelican)

(Editor's note: Normally I wouldn't comment on an article but I think Nigel's calls for it. This is probably one of the best pieces written on the military aspect in a long time. It is intelligent though out and I feel is nearly the truth. What

I would call for now is an expansion of the notes shown above. If someone is really interested in the military side of the Dark Age then why not study it in detail (including a comparison between the late Roman army and other armies of the period) and produce a long article. If illustrations are needed there are a number of members who will be willing to help. So will someone volunteer to take on such a project?)

# STILICHO

by ANTHONY TOMLINSON

I have taken my illustration of the famous Imperial General, half-Roman and half-German by birth, from an ivory diptych of the period in which he is depicted in an ornamental architectural frame of Corinthian-style columns; these I have omitted in favour of a damaged mosaic floor. The spear which in the diptych he bears in his right hand has also been lost for the sake of a natural pose; although shown as six feet in length this may have been influenced by the size of the area in which the artist had to work.

All other details are as in the original; this is obviously the sort of clothing seen as suitable for such an important leader, for he has a large ornamented brooch with which to fasten his cloak, and both tunic and cloak are very richly patterned, (although I have shown the cloak plain for clarity), with a circular motif employed; unfortunately, though, their colours are lost to us. So too are those of his shield, bearing the images of the co-emperors and covered in a pattern of scales or overlapping feathers, which would have looked very effective in just white outlined in red. The metal shield rim is my own addition but the central boss is original and is actually in the shape of a cone. His sword is the usual late-Roman cavalry pattern, but the pommel and

guard would no doubt be rich in gold or silver.

The Diptych may be found reproduced in "The Quest for Arthur's Britain", Granada; and "The Dawn of the Middle Ages" by M. Grant, McGraw-Hill.



# SCROUS

Once again we have only a few letters and the first is from the Count of the Saxon Shore, Richard Norton:

"Graham Sumner in his 'scroll', Dragon No.11, appears to overlook the fact that battles were fought where they were for thousands of reasons.

"It could well be that King Arthur's forces had occupied the high ground prior to the arrival of the Saxons, wishing to halt the latter's advance into their territory. King Arthur merely using the higher ground to attack from or to gain impetus for a hefty cavalry charge once the Saxons had been halted. This not an original idea but is mooted (nice one!) in one or more Arthurian novels.

"I agree with Graham, intelligence/scouting must have been pretty rough. However, the routes available to marching men were limited and there were signal fires, fast horses, short but awkward cuts for runners, etc."

Some interesting points there Richard. May I add a point concerning the location of Badon. Ekwell points out that placenames with the element Bad come from "Badda" or "Baddan" and are often connected with ancient earthworks. These include Badburys in Wiltshire, Berkshire, Northamptonshire and one in Lincolnshire.

The second, and final, letter is from Paul Johnstone, St. Louis, USA and it concerns, guess what? Yes, you've got it stirrups:

"...from two separate sources I know the Dark Age Britons had stirrups. One is MEATES-ROMAN FOLKSTONE, 1926, the other is psychic - and I don't believe all that every psychic says. But this is different. It is a brief article KING OSWALD'S GREY by JAMES SCHOFIELD in FATE MAGAZINE, January 1967, pp.116-117. It shows that (not St. Oswald but) King Cadwallon ap Cadfan of Gwynedd in 634 (or was it 633?)

had stirrups of a sort, attached to corners of the saddle-leather. The Cymraeg (Ed. Welsh) for 'stirrup', GWARTAFL ('sling-over') seems equally old."

Many thanks Paul for adding to this very interesting discussion.

Well, folks, that is all from Scrolls till the next issue.

## Dragon Project

Over the last few years many different articles have been reproduced in the pages of Dragon on many aspects of life in the "Dark Ages". Also in recent years archaeology of the "Dark Ages" has become much more respectable. I would like to suggest that we begin a project that will culminate in a special edition of Dragon at the end of 1985 or early in 1986.

The question I would like to ask is: "What was life really like in the 'Dark Ages'?"

This will be a co-ordinated look at the "Dark Ages" from as many aspects as possible. I would like members to volunteer separately or jointly to submit information on life in the period we are all interested in. This can cover every possible aspect of life from all the different cultures. Each member will concentrate on his or her area making use of material gleaned from books, journals, museums and archaeological reports.

Questions that can be asked could include: living conditions, food and drink, way of life, what age they lived till, how tall were they and so on. I am not asking for quesses but evidence to build up a picture that will help us all to understand the time Arthur is reputed to have lived in.

It is intersting that recent finds suggest that there was little difference between the skeletons of the late Roman period and that of the Saxon period in certain areas. I think this is one aspect that must be discussed. Of course the military side must be looked at, but please let's not have everybody wanting to do the same thing.

So please drop me a line with your suggestions and let's give Dragon a worthwhile project.

DRAGON c/o Charles W. Evans-Gunther  
9 Earls Lea, FLINT, Clwyd, CH6 5BT, N.Wales.

TALES FROM THE TWOELLS  
or NEWLIGHTON THE DARKAGES

by ROGER WILCOX

