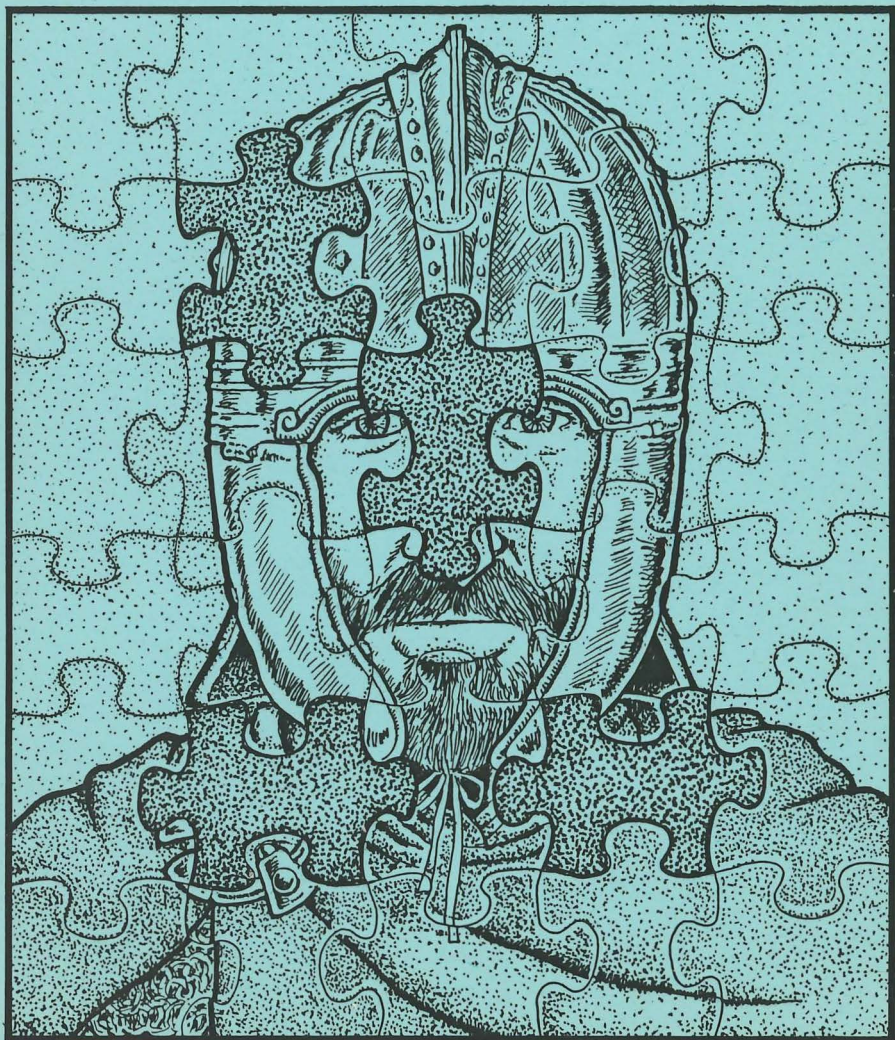


Dragon

ISSN 0267-1026

2.1

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



Welcome to the second volume of Dragon,

Many thanks for all your support, articles and letters - I hope this volume will be as fruitful as the first.

My first announcement of this new year is the 1985 Dragon-moot. It will be held in YORK on the 25th May to coincide with a display of the Ermine Street Guard in the grounds of the Yorkshire Museum. This will also give members the chance to visit the Jorvik Exhibition. Those who would like to attend please write to me and I will forward further information nearer to the time of 'moot. Following on the failure of last year's 'moot I hope to see more members at York but if you can't come please suggest sites for another meeting later on in the year. I would be very grateful to hear from you.

A good percentage of present members come from the U.S.A. and it would be nice for them also to have a Dragonmoot. Maybe one of our U.S. members would like to try their hand at setting up a get-together. I hope in the next couple of years to visit the States - so if no one feels up to a 1985 'moot maybe you can wait till then. Waiting is on this point.

So here we are at Volume two and the thirteenth issue - a lot of water has gone under the bridge since the very first issue in January 1982. The first Dragon was only eight pages but with the excellent response of members over the last three years has helped Dragon to evolve into what it is today. What does the future hold?

To those folk who wish to resubscribe to Dragon (who I reminded in the last issue) the fee is still £4 in the U.K., £5 in Europe and £7 in the U.S.A. Nothing has changed for the moment but the position of sterling may force me to up the subscription fee next time. Sorry folks.

Now please read on:-

ARTHUR

A RE-INTRODUCTION

by Charles W. Evans-Gunther

In issue one of Dragon I introduced Arthur as the pivot of our interest. This is still true but many things have happened since 1982.

"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?"

Three years ago many of us would have given what we thought were definite answers, but today it is in some ways more clearer yet still unsettled. May I quote from two eminent scholars. First Gwyn Williams: "We in the present make sense of the past by manufacturing a history from it. We do this by putting questions to it. And the kind of question you put depends on who you are, what you are and when you are." And secondly Bedwyr Lewis Jones: "Who is Arthur? Did he live? When? Where? These are questions which are very often asked. They seek a finite identity...they seek one answer.... However, I'm afraid that it is a search that will never reach journey's end. I don't think they will ever be able to answer the question who is Arthur as a historical person.... Who is Arthur? Whose Arthur? Whose image?...."

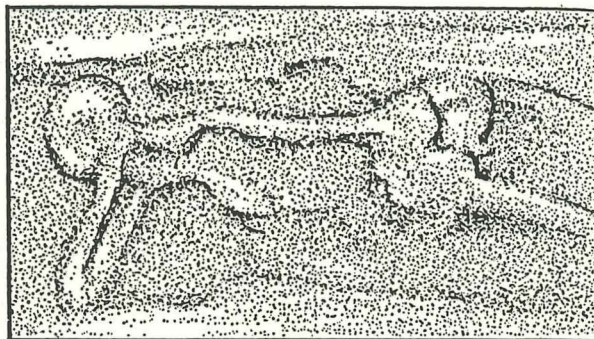
Today we have more suggestions for Arthur's identity than ever. Geoffrey Ashe has pointed out that the British chieftain Riothamus bears a remarkable resemblance to Geoffrey of Monmouth's Arthur. Others like Tom Clare suggest a northern origin for Arthur. Still others point towards South Wales (Messrs Blackett and Wilson) or England (Dr J.P. Brown). To quote Kenneth H. Jackson: "Nothing is certain about the historical Arthur, not even his existence; however, there are certain possibilities, even probabilities."

Arthur today is like a jigsaw, but the picture

is incomplete - some of the pieces are missing. All the above theories are legitimate pieces of this jigsaw and though pieces may never be placed it can be rewarding trying to find them.

I hope that in future issues more pieces will be found. In this issue we have part one of Tom Clare's article on a northern Arthur, a review of Geoffrey Ashe's new book, an interview with the novelist Rosemary Sutcliff and Tim Strickland of the Grosvenor Museum, Chester, talks about the survival of Roman Chester. As for the search for Arthur I hope to add by two pennies worth in the next issue.

Sutton Hoo Sandman



When Sutton Hoo was originally excavated in 1939 no bodies were found, but now new evidence has come to light. Martin Carver, director of the Sutton Hoo research project, decided to find that elusive Englishman (sorry Englishperson). "The clear message we had before we started was that we must not dig any barrow without the technology to define the remains of a body." Research suggested that decomposing bones and flesh leave stains in the soil. Once these stains appeared the bodies were solidified by using a polymer called Vinamul. This creates 3D features from almost indefinable traces. The result was the Sandman of Sutton Hoo. To be more correct three sandpeople were found. Here then is the image of someone who died some 1,200 years ago in what the Sunday Times calls that 'murky era of history'.

ROSEMARY SUTCLIFF

PART ONE OF AN INTERVIEW

by SANDRA GARSIDE-NEVILLE and KURT HUNTER-MANN



INTRODUCTION

Last year Rosemary Sutcliff - author of some of the best Roman/Dark Age period historical novels, such as the Eagle of the Ninth, the Lantern Bearers, and particularly Sword at Sunset - kindly agreed to give Dragon an interview, which she (and her two boisterous chihuahuas!) gave at her home near Arundel. We would like to thank Rosemary Sutcliff for her patience with two apprentice interviewers.

KHM - Can you tell us something about your early life, and in particular the contribution it may have had to your writing? We have read your autobiography and I was wondering how you often had this eye for detail, that you mention in one or two places in the book. I wondered if that

affected the way you do seem to write a very plausible story, that could've happened, that does not involve magic, etc.

RS - Yes, I suppose it did. Certainly my eye for detail was born as a small child because I'd been ill, and I spent a good deal of time sitting, looking around. My eye for visual things was brought out by being an art student. I was taught how to look at things, and I found that a great deal of use.

KHM - Why did you think there was a need to change from producing such detail in paintings to writing books?

RS - Because in painting (I only learned to paint miniatures) I did find it cramping.

KHM - Would you prefer to maybe have painted on a larger canvas?

RS - I think I possibly would have, but I'm afraid I would not have been a terribly successful painter. To this day, I would've liked to work on a big canvas - I loved the squidginess, texture and brushwork which you lose working on miniatures. I opted out, and took to writing enormous battle-scenes instead.

KHM - I'm glad you did. When did you start to write your novels?

RS - The very first one of all was a retelling of Robin Hood, which I did a couple of years after the War. I wrote that for Oxford University Press. It was lost by the typist, then found and sent on. While it was lost, I wrote another one, and sent that off. It was liked and the two books were published the same year.

KHM - What sort of novels do you like to write best of all?

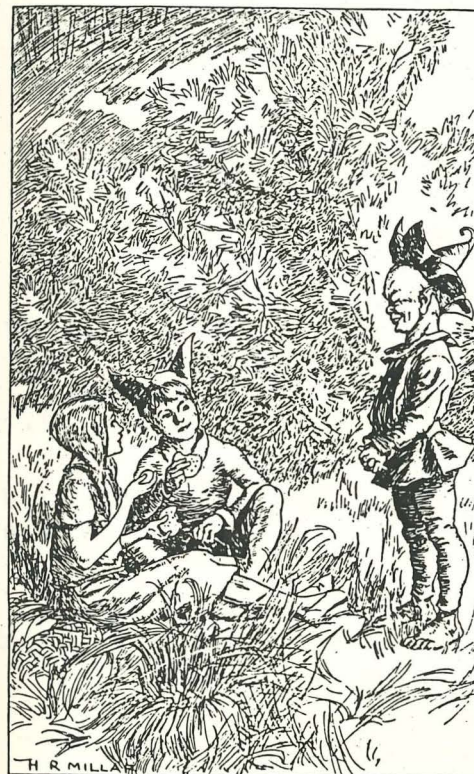
RS - Do you mean the children's ones, or the adult ones?

KHM - In general, your first novels were very much about the Middle Ages.

RS - The first ones were always Tudor (with the exception of Robin Hood), and all the earlier ones were for very much smaller children, and mostly for little girls. Then I began to get my own voice, and I started on 'Eagle of the Ninth', which was the first Romano-British book. I began to get this thing about the legions, and went on from there, on to the rough stuff - lots of battles, lots of soldiers - which they've nearly all been ever since.

KHM - Why are you interested in the Romans and the Dark Ages?

RS - In the case of the Romans, my mother read 'Puck of Pook's Hill' to me when I was a child. That was the start of it all - those truly marvellous stories of the Roman Wall. I didn't understand a thing about it, of course. My mother read me various other historical books, Victorian



ones about Roman times. They rang bells with me, they were marvellous. From then on I got interested, and started to read up on the Romans myself, and on Roman Britain in particular.

KHM - And from there, you were lead on to the Dark Ages?

RS - Yes. You keep on going backwards and you come to the Dark Ages. I always had this thing about King Arthur, and that means getting into the Dark Ages. I have this fascination about the Dark Ages because they are still very shrouded in the mists, and the clash of arms you can't quite see.

SGN - And there is plenty of scope for the imagination.

RS - Plenty of scope for the imagination, which is always best because you can get bogged down in the extent of detail if too much is known about the subject. You're afraid to move in case you're contradicting known fact.

SGN - What do you think of King Arthur? What are your ideas about him?

RS - I still feel very strongly that he must have been a real man, somewhere in the middle of it. Personally, I think we're all curious about a great hero somewhere in the middle of it who got overlayed, got lost. There was somebody, in some sense of the word, and I believe that very strongly of Arthur. It's possible that it was two men, or three men, but I would like to think it was one man to which all of these things were drawn, like a sort of magnetism.

SGN - Many novels written about the Dark Ages and Arthur are written by women - Mary Stewart, Marion Bradley, yourself. Have you any idea what draws them to this period in particular?

RS - I've never really thought about this. I think possibly women are more in touch with the sort of intuitive side of things; the side that isn't so black and white, because we're to do with hav-

ing babies, phases of the moon and that kind of thing. We're very much in touch with this side, which is really unknown, and which you feel with your innermost being, and not with your head.

SGN - What do you think draws women to write about the Dark Ages?

RS - I think it's this. It's something which is not known, and you can't sort of get it down in black and white. Incidentally, of course, women are mostly the best historical writers. It's some kind of quirk in the female imagination which makes us able to empathize with the feeling of a time and place.

SGN - Since writing 'Sword at Sunset' in 1963, have any of your ideas changed about the period at all?

RS - No, I don't think so.

SGN - You think Arthur ruled all of Britain?

RS - Yes, I still believe that. To me, that is the picture that makes most sense. There are lots of others who have completely different ideas. They are all fascinating to read, but they don't shake my own theory - I think mine is right.

SGN - Mr Evans-Gunther would like to ask about the characters in 'Sword at Sunset' who are like the fairies - the little dark people. Where did you get your ideas about them?

RS - I got my ideas from them. Basically, from the people who came up from Spain and the Mediterranean, who arrived here in the Stone Age. I think it was Tom Lethbridge who put me on to it. He was a gorgeous crackpot. He wrote about witchcraft and matriarchy - lovely, lovely stuff, which I've always found fascinating to read. I think it was he who produced this idea, that the basis of the fairies was quite probably from the Stone Age races who got pushed away into the wilds. They were ejected from the best land and pushed up to the moors. They were very poor, and very downtrodden and had strange skills which

the big Bronze Age people didn't understand and were frightened of. Quite possibly the idea of changlings come from the same thing. The idea of dumping your child to be brought up in another's place, to give it the chance of a better life, might appeal to them. Taking the other one in exchange might introduce stronger blood amongst your own people. It's an idea that always fascinated me, that.

SGN - I wonder why they died out?

RS - Well, I don't know. We had a farm labourer living quite close to us near my old home in North Devon, who was absolutely typical of the little dark people. He had a narrow dark head, and he knew everything about the wild - he knew all kinds of things.

SGN - Where did he come from?

RS - He was born in Devon, he was a West-Country man. The little dark people were obviously pushed out to the west, and into the moors and hills. The oldest race always got pushed out of the way to make room for the race which comes afterwards.

SGN - Are you likely to write another novel set in the Dark Ages?

RS - I should think it very likely. Probably a children's novel, this time. But I would like to write another Dark Age novel.

SGN - What sort of area?

RS - I think I'd like to do one coming up to the fight at Catraeth; the Lothian, the Gododdin. I'd like to do something based on that. Though really what, I don't know - it's an idea floating around in my head.

SGN - Are currently working on a new novel?

RS - Not yet. I've just finished a little one. I've only just got that off to the publishers. So, I'm just starting research for another. I shan't tell you what that is, just in case it doesn't come off.

SGN - What are your interests besides writing?

RS - Travelling, dogs, horses - I love all horses. I always have dogs. I don't have hobbies, I have crazes. I get sudden crazes for things like crocheting; which I do like mad, until it wears off, and I get another craze.

SGN - Does Mr Evans-Gunther still send you 'Dragon'?

RS - Yes, he does.

SGN - Have you any comments to make on it?

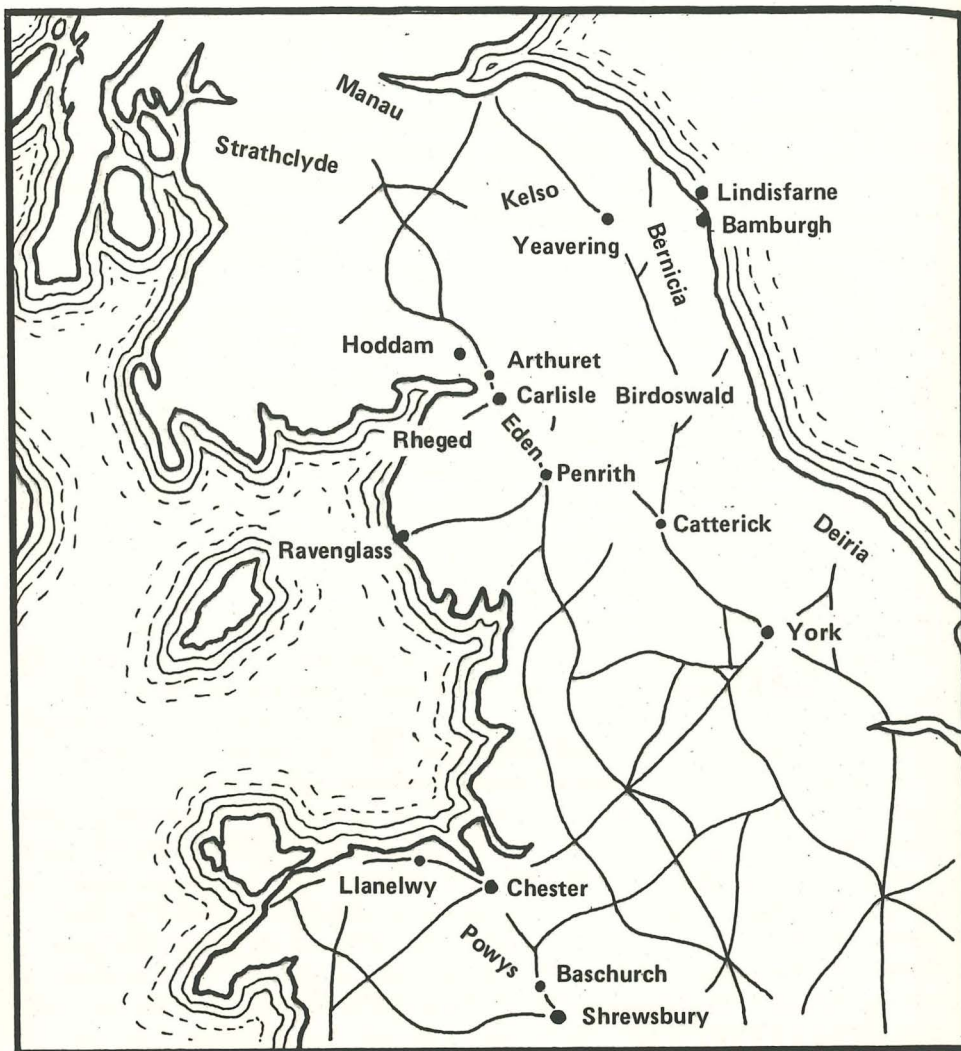
RS - No. I think it's a very good little magazine. I always enjoy it very much. It's very useful - you never know what's going to turn up.

the rheged connection

by TOM CLARE

Cumbria County Archaeologist

In 1765 Thomas Percy published his "Reliques of Ancient English Poetry": a collection of fragmentary ballads some of which locate Arthur in Carlisle. The date of the material cannot be determined with certainty although Percy claimed some were as old as Chaucer. In their present form, however, they are unlikely to be anything other than a variant of mainstream Medieval romance; but two aspects are worth pursuing here. Firstly, they are part of that group of material which localises Arthur in the North and, secondly, they seem to bring him into contact with a local sixth century ruler - Owen Rheged.(2) The general evidence for a 'Northern Arthur' has been discussed by Bromwich (3) although Alcock has dismissed it, concluding "it forms a major obstacle to any rational consideration of the historical Arthur" (4). Dumville has, however, argued (5) none of the material used by Alcock



and others to demonstrate the existence of a historical Arthur can be trusted, nor in his view can "tradition" be used as "the sweetener of this Celtic pill". In Dumville's opinion Arthur is a fictional character drawn in part from historical personages such as Magnus Maximus.

The arguments of Dumville are powerful and to them can be added two further challenges to the existence of a historical Arthur. Why, with the possible exception of the Gododdin, is there no

mention of Arthur in the earliest heroic Welsh poetry and why is the battle of Arduydd (573 AD), not the death of Arthur, the cataclysmic historical horizon in British and Welsh history (6)? The silence of the poetry is all the more remarkable if one accepts many of the allusions are boastful fabrications (7): no major dynasty linked itself to Arthur - Cunedda, Maelgwn, Brocfael, Urien Rheged, but not Arthur. If any interpretation can be put upon such silence it is either that Arthur did not exist or he was unimportant in Wales and the North until a later date: a man of the South East; a man no greater than Maelgwn or Urien Rheged. The purpose of this paper is to re-examine what we know of Urien (in whose kingdom was Arduydd) and the possibility he was one of the historical or semi-historical personages from whom (the fictional) Arthur emerged.

The inclusion of some material relating to Urien in the earliest body of Arthurian material - the battle list - is generally accepted: at least one of Arthur's battles carries the same name as one of Urien's. "We know that the development of Arthurian romance came about in part by the attractions of other men's deeds to the heroic name of Arthur.... If twelve battles were poetically appropriate, and only nine names are known, it would not have been difficult to borrow another three from other warrior heroes like Urien of Rheged" (8). The question is, how many other battles of Urien are incorporated into the Arthurian list - always assuming it is right to equate Agned with Breguoin with the implication a battle place might he had more than one name?

Before, however, examining the possibility that not one but the majority of the battle attributed to Arthur relate to the expansion of Rheged it is worth considering some of the 'Arthurian' material recorded in what was Rheged.

It is now accepted Urien's kingdom centred upon Carlisle and the Eden lowland with the modern probably the same as the Llwyfennydd of Taliesin (9). As such, the kingdom or area of Rheged in-

cluded modern Cumbria and parts of South West Scotland, Lancashire and Yorkshire. It is an area which included Birdoswald - Camboglana, the Roman fort which may have been Camlann - and Ravenglass. Of Ravenglass we have two seventeenth century stories, probably variants of the same tradition: Denton (10) recorded: "Waldeve also gave other ancient buildings called Lyons Yards ... the ruins whereof are yet to be seen, as it is thought, at Ravenglass"; and Camden noted: "They talke much of King Eveling that the heere had his court and roiall palace". The identity of King Eveling was discussed by W.G. Collingwood (11) who demonstrated he was Avallach, Lord of the Underworld; the deity who was transformed into Avallan, the blessed isle, beside which Malory placed Castle Perilous or Lyons Garde. Now in the Triads the daughter of Avallach was Modron, mother of Mabon/Maponus who, in Taliesin's Kychwedul am dodyw seems to be equated with Owen, son of Urien. The same equation must have been available to Malory for in "The Knight with the Two Swords" he states Urien's wife was Morgan le Fey - to be identified with Modron or the Modron type of goddess - sister of King Arthur (12). How Malory, supposedly from Central England, was familiar with such Welsh material is as difficult to determine as the origins of the Ravenglass story: did the latter derive from the publication of Malory? However, if one accepts the view of Matthews (13) that Malory had connections with Cumbria, the question of who was influencing who becomes more cloudy. Certainly there are other traditions and legends within Cumbria which echo Arthurian material. For example, the Owen Ceasarius supposedly buried in Penrith churchyard is linked to a nearby cave where, a variant story preserved in Percy's "Reliques", the giant was called Tarquin and there was a copper basin hung upon a tree at the edge of the river:

"...she brought him to the riverside,
and also to a tree,
Whereupon a copper bason hung,

And many shields to see.
He struck soe hard, the bason broke,
And Tarquin soon he spyed...."

The basin may relate to a note in Bede that where King Edwin "had noticed clear springs adjacent to the highway he ordered posts to be erected with brass bowls hanging from them" (14) but the reference to trophies also hanging there makes a Celtic origin for the story more likely, especially as there was, until relatively recently, an annual ritual at a nearby spring (15). Such detail suggest that story recorded in Percy's ballad, and identified by Willmott in 1857 as part of Malory's Morte d'Arthur (16), is but a variant of part of the "Lady of the Fountain" contained in the Mabinogion. There a (silver) bowl fastened by a chain next to a fountain by a tree in the middle of a vale is used, by Owen Rheged amongst others, to summon a dark knight. Equally, in discussing the extent of Rheged one might draw attention to the geographical links of the three Celtic deities named in the fragmentary dialogue between Arthur and a gate-warden (17): the three being Mabon, Manawydan and Lugh. Mabon has already been mentioned as being equated with Owen Rheged and identified, territorially, with the area north of Carlisle. Manawydan is the Welsh for Manannan who is linked with the sea and more specifically the Isle of Man, and the name of Lugh was an element in the Roman name of Carlisle. Of all the areas within Rheged none was more strategically important than Catraeth. Whilst the name is preserved in the modern Catterick it seems reasonable to infer Catraeth was originally a larger area embracing Scotch Corner and Richmond. As a territorial unit or land holding it probably survived intact after the British collapse for Bede's account of the life of Oswin refers to the house of a nobleman at In-Getlingum (Gilling), near Richmond (18). The strategic importance of Catraeth was that it controlled the land between Bernicia and Deira: in British hands it would prevent the Anglian states uniting. That

importance is emphasised by Bede's account of how Oswin of Deira had marshalled his army there against Bernicia; the action described in the Gododdin; and the tradition that Arthur sleeps beneath Richmond Castle. Thus as Lord of Catraeth Urien was in a position to divide the two Anglian states and make war upon them.

It is in the context of advances between the heartland of Rheged and the Bernician stronghold of Bamburgh that battles such as Breguoin make sense. It is also probable the area around Kelso was allied to Urien (19) and a British advance from there into the Bernician heartland would involve passing "the mouth of the Glen" (first battle in the Arthurian list) where, significantly there was a later Anglian Royal palace (Yeaver-ing).

The poems of Taliesin however, also refer to wars with other British kingdoms such as that on the Clyde - "...A battle in the ford of the Alclud The battle of Cludvein...." - and beyond the Clyde lay Manau with whom Urien also had contact, for a ruler there, Morcant, is named as one of the allies at Lindisfarne. But the contact with Manau may not have been friendly and Morcant an ally under duress for it was he who is named as the plotter of Urien's murder. The details need not concern us, it is the location of Urien's operations which are of interest for they would allow him to have fought on the Dubglas in Linnis and the Tribut if Skene was right in attributing the latter to the vicinity of Stirling in Manau (20). Moreover operations against Manau would bring Urien to the edge of Caledonia if the latter is to be equated with the seventh battle in Arthur's list (Cat Coit Celidon). The location of the latter is, however, more likely to have been in the area of Moffatt (21), on the boundary between Rheged and Clyde. Thus Cat Coit Celidon was a natural battleground in the expansion of Rheged. Moreover, the first valley an army advancing from there northwards would encounter is the Douglas or Dubglas.

If the northern activities of Urien, as far as

they can be deduced, provide a context for the first, second, third, fourth, fifth, tenth and eleventh entries in the Arthurian battle list the evidence from the southern borders of Rheged is no less telling. For example, armies from Gwynedd and Rheged would be likely to clash in the area of Chester - the City of Legions (the ninth entry in the Arthurian list) - and an army advancing from there, down the Roman road toward Wroxeter before striking towards Powys in the Upper Severn, would pass through Baschurch (possibly to be equated with Bassas, the sixth entry in the Arthurian list) (22).

This article will be concluded in the next issue together with Notes which are relevant to the above first part.

THE BAKESTONE

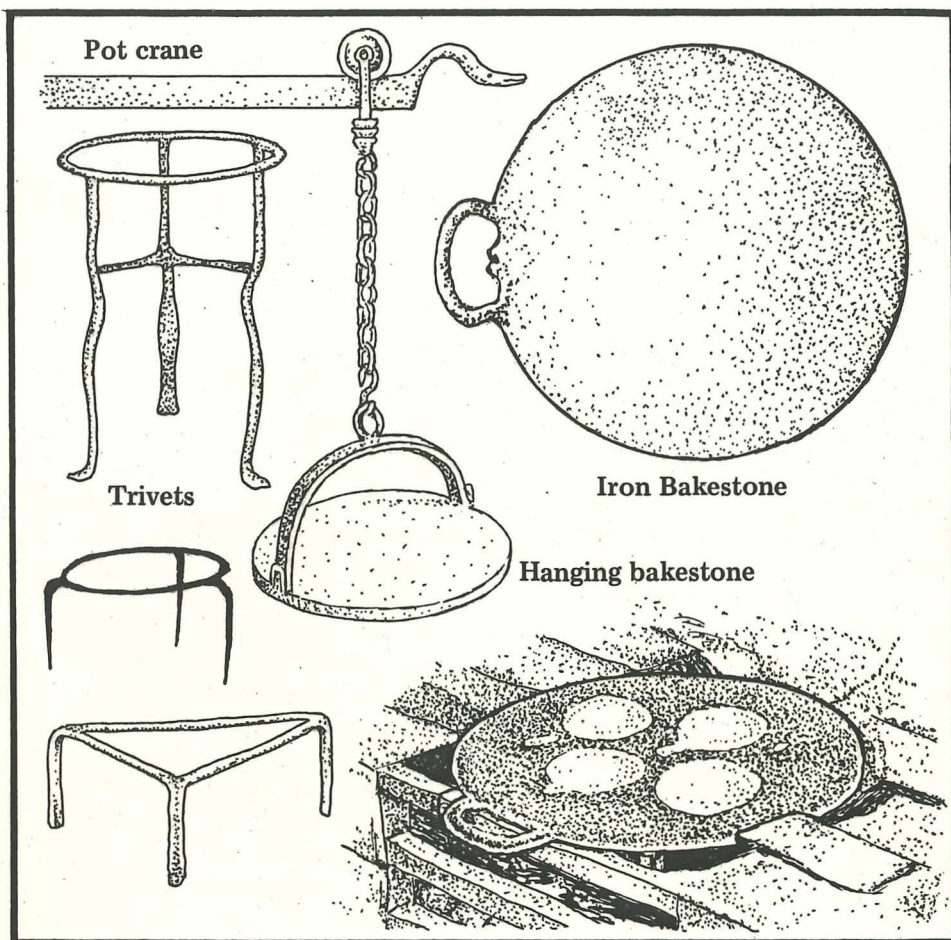
by PAT LITTON-HAVILL

Probably the two most important domestic utensils of both Celtic and Dark Age life were the cauldron and the bakestone or griddle. The cauldron is, of course, well attested in history and legend, and appears to have been of vital importance in both the domestic and ritual life of the Celts. The humbler bakestone is less well-known outside the purely domestic scene, but whereas the cauldron gradually disappeared as open-hearth cooking was superseded by wall-ovens and stoves, the bakestone remains in use in many Welsh homes today in conjunction with gas and electric stoves.

Perhaps an indication of the importance is that the Laws of Hywel Dda expressly state that in the case of separation of a married couple the husband is to have '...the fire-dog and the baking griddle...' the wife is to have '...the trivet and the pan...'

The bakestone of the late nineteenth and twentieth century was (and still is) generally a round, flat iron disc with an integral handle, on which various types of bread and cakes are baked,

but as the name implies, it was originally a thin stone. At the Dark Age site of Dinas Powys in Glamorgan thin discs of Old Red Sandstone, usually with one side fire-blackened, are described as bakestones, which the alternative name 'llech faen' (slate stone) found in parts of Glamorgan and the old county of Breckonshire indicate that this material was also used.



Baking on a heated stone can be traced back to the primitive method of baking on a hot hearth or flagstone. The portable, circular baking stone is a development of this tradition and continued well into the nineteenth century when it was superseded by a circular iron plate. When employed

on a flat hearth the bakestone was either supported by an iron tripod over the fire, or was held in position on a circular iron frame with a half-hoop handle suspended from a hook and chain.

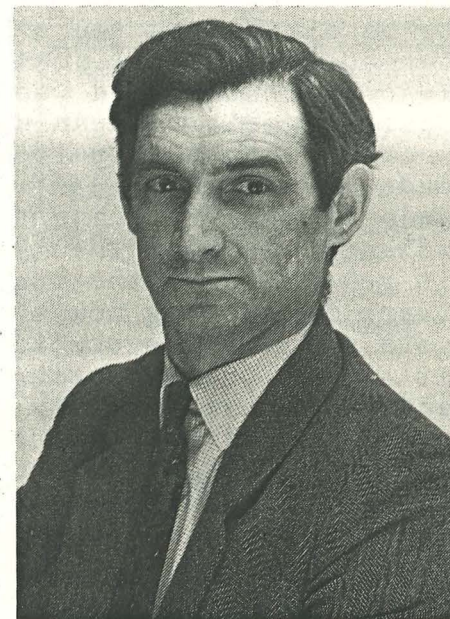
Peat was recognised as one of the most suitable fuels for heating the bakestone, but wood, furze, gorse, straw and dried cow dung were also used according to local resources.

THE SURVIVAL OF CHESTER

AN INTERVIEW WITH TIM STRICKLAND

by Charles W. Evans-Gunther

Tim Strickland, Field Officer of the Chester Museum, was kind enough to give me an interview last year. The topic mainly under discussion was Chester and its position in the Dark Ages. (However, other points were touched upon.) The interview was the result of comment made by Mr Strickland in Current Archaeology and a booklet by him called Roman Chester. Mr Strickland has been Field Officer at the Grosvenor Museum, Chester, since 1973.



CEG: In your Roman Chester your biography mentions that your mother claims descent from Magnus Maximus.

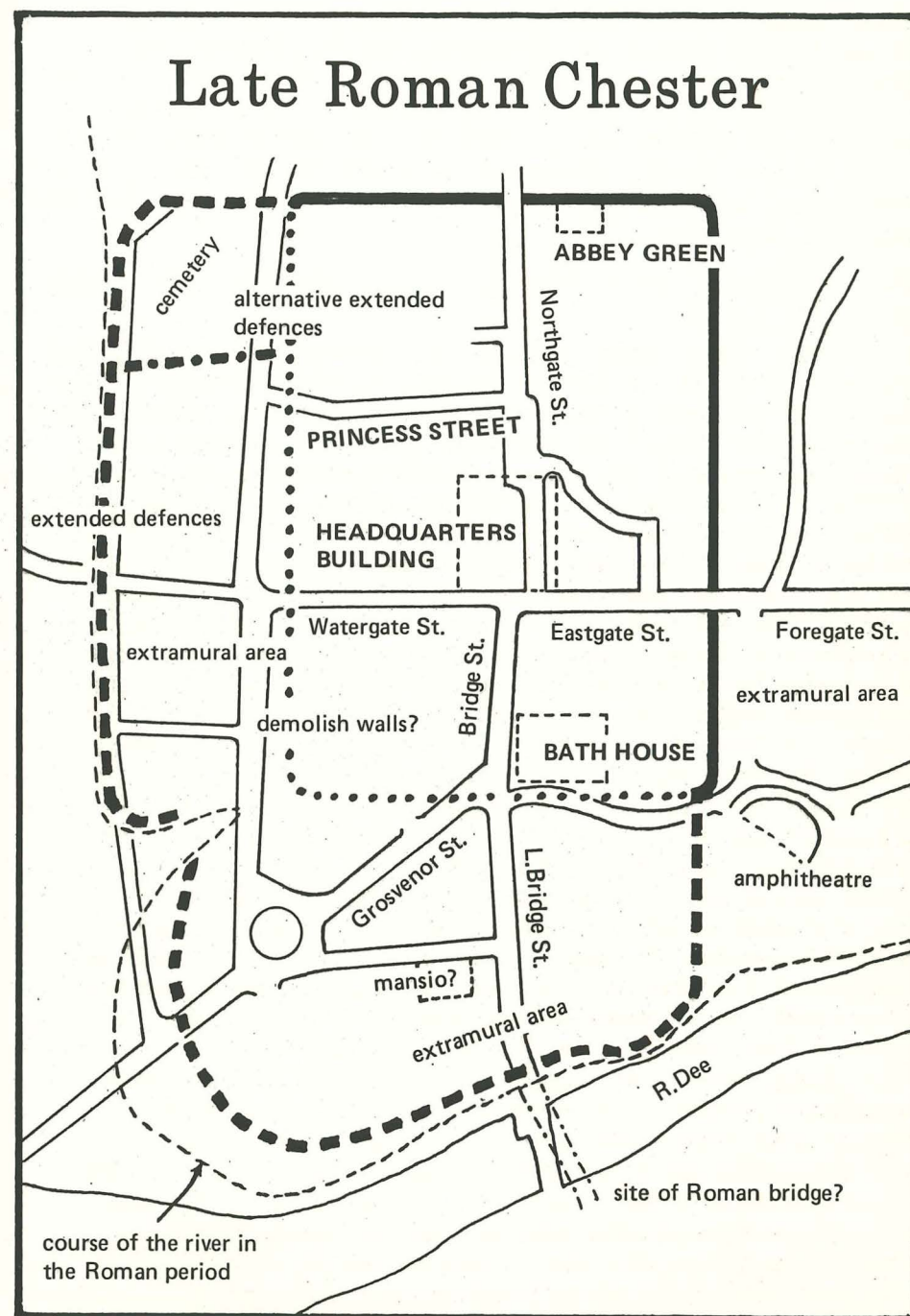
TS: Well, I wish I could produce the family tree for you today. It is on my mother side that des-

cent comes. She was descended from a family called the Owens of Bodowen, on Anglesey. My great-grandmother times four was Charlotte Owen of that family. And it is through them that I have this great long, very Welsh, genealogy which goes miles back. Some of the names in the genealogy can be found on the Eliseg Pillar. Yes, I'm mostly Celtic.

CEG: Also in your booklet you indicate an extended life for Chester.

TS: This is a very difficult question to answer quickly. Let's take this map of the fortress as we know it and point out to you two different things. (A Simplified maps is reproduced with this article.) Up here at Abbey Green, in about 1976-77, a colleague of mine was excavating the site of two centurion's houses. He found on that site a few fragments of pottery which appeared to be similar to the sort of pottery which as turned up in small quantities, particularly in Western Britain, and was imported from the Eastern Mediterranean and North Africa. The problem with that pottery is that it first gets made in the third century and is still being made in the fifth and sixth centuries. How do we know you know when your bit gets made. If it gets made at the beginning of that period there is nothing new about it at all but if it gets made in the second half of the period then it's really interesting. That is the problem and it is particularly problematical in Chester where you have, unlike say South Cadbury where the previous occupation was so much older, continuous occupation prior to that.

That was the first site to produce examples of this pottery but since we have conducted major excavations on other sites in the centre of the city and they have not produced it. However, we now found that at an excavation done some twenty or thirty years ago, outside the fortress down on the western side, actually contained this material which had not been recognised. The point I would like to stress is that, leaving aside the old one, if it was turning up on every



site we would know; consequently, the fact that it has only turned up and this site suggests to me that it is late. So I'm trying to believe that it is genuine evidence for Sub-Roman occupation. Having said that, I ought to say that what I believe, personally, to be the case, is that this occupation should not surprise us at all. Continuous occupation of places, like Chester, is so reasonable an assumption that it may be almost a certainty. And I am by no means alone in archaeological profession in thinking that.

What was this occupation? Why? What sort of people. We know that from the late fourth century Chester does not feature as a military establishment. But many arguments have been sighted many times over many years why this might or might not be significant. But, we can say archaeologically speaking that there is no doubt that Chester was occupied down to the end of the Roman period. What I believe is the situation, based not only on analysis of Chester but other similar places, is that by the early fourth century it was no longer a legionary fortress. We have all the major buildings of the place being rebuilt in the fourth century.- certainly occupied thereafter.

Our problem as archaeologists is to recognise occupation and to date occupation when the people who are doing the occupying do not leave things behind. It is very, very difficult and this is where speculation comes in. However, we have from another site Princess St. in 1981, in the compound in what had been a Roman building, we found a thick deposit of very, very black soil - what's known as 'dark earth' on numerous sights - which contained nothing but late Roman material, such as fourth century coins churned up in this thing much as if they had been old when they got into it. Our problem is to establish what that 'dark earth' is doing there.

Another point about the archaeology, before we talk about speculation, is that we are able to demonstrate that many buildings of Roman Chester survived for a long time after the Roman period. I don't necessarily mean that they were occupied.

But by far the majority of Roman buildings were not robbed of re-useable materials until the Early Middle Ages. We have for example a major building not far from the headquarters building in 1982 where we could demonstrate that it had been standing beyond the tenth century and that somebody was living in the open compound before it came down. A Viking brooch was found alongside a little late Saxon house, and it is only after that the ruin of the building covers those things.

I have just been doing some research on this giving evidence for the survival of numerous buildings in Chester - some into the thirteenth century. And of course the big bath house that was still there in the 1960s - only covered over - the roof had fallen in but the walls were seventeen foot high. Quite apart from the question what was Medieval Chester like, if you back from the tenth century back into the ninth, eighth, seventh, sixth, you must have picture of something even more complete. The difficulties are how they were actually occupied because if they were occupied, as I have no doubt they were, they were occupied by people who were not using object produced by large scale manufacturing industry. And these are the kind of objects we can date. That is the difficulty.

I don't have any difficulty imagining that there was some kind of population centre at Chester. It may have only been a few hundred people, of course. One of the difficulties we have is to ask ourselves what, if any, strategic function Chester might have had in that sub-Roman period. However, there are other places like Segontium and Wroxeter which show continuity in to the fifth century. Chester is a little bit odd in this respect. So many other places are showing evidence of later material which is definite, perhaps it is not accidentally that we aren't. Perhaps it means that Chester was pretty well finished as a place of any significance or importance by then, even if people were living in it.

We have the traditional reference to the

battle of Chester in the early seventh century. The question is was it Chester. It could be anywhere, but it is a possibility. There is, however, the mention of the meeting with St Augustine in 603. (From here Mr Strickland quoted from material supplied to him by J.P. Brown of Llangollen. Dr Brown was at the Arthurian weekend held in Llangollen a couple of years ago.)

"The most important Dark Age reference to Chester never seems to be cited. In the Welsh Annals of 601 is the Synod of the City of Legions. Now this means that Chester or Caerleon could play host to a synod and implies some degree of urban continuity. This synod, in my mind, can easily be identified. Augustine's second meeting with the British bishops took place at an unnamed site but most of the many very learned men present came from Bangor on Dee. It was these men of Bangor who received the hermit's advice to let Augustine arrive first at the appointed meeting place. This would have hardly have been possible unless the meeting place was within easy reach of Bangor, for example Chester." That is what he is saying. He goes on to say: "Augustine's second meeting is usually dated 603, and since the Welsh entry at 601 is entirely unelaborated, I take it Augustine came to Chester. And I hold that as with his first meeting with the West Saxons, it was near but not in British territory." So implication is that Chester is no longer. I would slightly refine that and say that by the seventh century Chester was in a territory that was disputed and had been for some time. That may well be why the occupation evidence does not support the idea of a place of some importance but strategically it is neither one thing or the other.

(In a letter to me, a little later, he discussed the battle of Chester in 613 re-emphasizing the possibility of Chester being in a sort of 'no-man's-land'. However, with relation to Arthur's ninth battle he pointed out that it was very likely that at that time Chester would "be well within secure British territory rather than on the edges of it. If this was so the case of Arthur's

action at Chester would seem to have been rather unnecessary.....")

Returning to the possible continuity of Chester Mr Strickland said:

I must add one point we do know that in 894 a Danish force spent the winter here and that is chronicled in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. The implication of this reference is that English levies who were chasing them got here too late and these chaps got into the fortress and defended themselves. The levies couldn't get in and so after besieging the place for a few days left. This for me means that the defences were all there. And the way it is described in the Chronicle is was a Roman place - even if it is ruined. If you take that back for instance.

CEG: Last question: what are your thoughts about Arthur?

(At this point however a problem arose. The recording equipment I had borrowed to make this interview had no cut-off switch and the tape finished before Mr Strickland could answer the question, though I didn't know this and he continued speaking. What follows, therefore, is made up mainly from a later letter. I must also point out that he has read a number of previous Dragon magazines and the beginning of his comments relate to something in the mag.)

TS: To come to Arthur himself. I am very pleased to see a mention of Rosemary Sutcliff. Her book "The Sword at Sunset" has long been a favorite of mine and I remain convinced that she has helped the study of Arthur enormously. I think she has described very well the kind of man he probably was in reality although I expect that much of the legend has been added to his actions long after his death. After all the available archaeological evidence suggests that the evolution of Roman Britain into England was a very gradual and largely a peaceful affair. But I believe in the idea of a late Roman Cavalry Commander, possibly with a military title such as Duke or Count of the Britains, who would have been acting on the orders of the defacto late Roman

provincial local authorities. I have no difficulty with this whatsoever as a concept and I think evidence from such places as Wroxeter strongly supports it. The context, as I see it, is a Romano British province evolved into smaller units and devolved mainly in the orders and arrangements of Roman political power (namely people like Theodosius and Magnus Maximus) who in the late fourth century would have been settling up sub-units and smaller kingdoms on the orders and precedent of Rome. This was the hal-
lowed tradition and it explains people like Hengest and Horsa just as much as the kingdoms of the Celtic fringe who owe so much to Roman government in the first place. Arthur is part of that scene.

My grateful thanks to Mr Strickland and I would like to add that the Grosvenor Museum in Chester is well worth a visit if you are ever in the area. Also Mr Strickland's book on Roman Chester is an excellent and easy to read little publication and can be obtained from the above mentioned museum. I'm sure if you wrote to the museum, or gave them a phone call, they would be happy to give you further detail of the above and any other publications. The address is: Grosvenor Museum 27 Grosvenor Street, CHESTER, CH1 2DD, and the phone no.: 0244 21616.

Review

THE DISCOVERY OF KING ARTHUR

by Geoffrey Ashe in Association with Debrett's Peerage. Debrett's Peerage Ltd. 1985

Consisting of 226 pages this book also has 24 pages of black and white photographs, four maps, notes, a long index and a bibliography.

In the last issue of Dragon I mentioned Mr Ashe's new book and said I would review it in February

when it was published. However, due to unexpected delays its 'official' publication will not be till the 21st March. (More of this later.)

Here is a truly all rounder of a book. It is excellent as an introduction to Arthur and for those who are already questing for Arthur, Mr Ashe pulls a few more rabbits out of the hat. As an introduction it is fine but for the already initiated the maps (especially) and photographic sections leave a lot to be desired. I would advise those members who are just beginning to quest for Arthur to read this book because it contains almost all references to Arthur that are the basis for starting the search. While for those well on their way this book adds to what Mr Ashe began in Kings and Queens of Early Britain, Methuen, 1982.

I found The Discovery of King Arthur very easy to read and in parts very fascinating. For questors of Arthur the historical character chapters three, four and five are a must. In chapter five, entitled New Discoveries, you will find Mr Ashe adding to his Arthur-Riothamus theory and to be honest it is very persuasive. In it he pinpoints more about Arthur and Riothamus using historical chronicles. The so far unlocated Lucius of Geoffrey of Monmouth is very possibly located. Having previously pointed out Emperor Leo, who ruled from 457 to 474 and Simplicius-Sulpicius, Pope from 468 to 483, Mr Ashe adds a Western Roman Emperor whose name is remarkably similar to Lucius.

Now that Arthur may possibly be connected with the British chieftain Riothamus whose career is best known on the continent, Geoffrey Ashe looks at chronicles from France which may cast some light on Arthur. And surely enough finds it in the persons of Alberic, Jean des Preis, Jacques de Guise and Philippe de Vigneulles. All of these historians despite Geoffrey of Monmouth's date of 542 for Arthur's 'death' seem to favour the fifth rather than the sixth century when writing about Arthur's career.

Having covered the historical character Mr Ashe goes on to look at the romance and mythological side together with more modern treatments of

Arthur like the novels of Rosemary Sutcliff and Mary Stewart. He rounds off the book with an interesting suggestion about Arthur's pedigree and its relation to more recent historical characters like Prince William, whose second name is Arthur.

On a critical point of view I find Mr Ashe is spreading Riothamus a little too far and thin. There are a number of historical events which I would argue with and feel that he dismisses early Welsh material too easily. However, I must concede that Riothamus does seem to be the model for Geoffrey of Monmouth's Arthur. The Arthur of the Welsh may be someone else, another part of the jigsaw that is Arthur. But, please don't rely on my comments - read this very interesting book and make up your own mind.

Finally, and returning to the publication of this interesting book, Debrett's Peerage have made an offer to members of Dragon. They are willing to supply copies postage free to any member wishing to purchase the above book. The cost of the book is £12.95 and if you would like to obtain a copy, immediately and postage free, send a check to: Miss Caroline Franks, Private Order Department, Debrett's Peerage Ltd, 73/77 Britannia Road, LONDON, SW6., and please remember to state that you are a member of Dragon.

The next book is somewhat different from the above in more ways than one:

THE SWORDS OF THE BRITONS: A MILITARY REVIEW
by A.J. Young. Regency Press, 1984. £8.50

It consists of 200 pages, eight maps, four tables, four appendices and a lengthy index.

For the battle orientated members this is the book for you. Squadron Leader Young takes a plunge into the merky depths of battles fought by Ambrosius Aurelianus, Uther Pendragon and, of course, Arthur and comes up with some amazing conclusions. Having read this book you will sit back and either agree with him or oppose his ideas - it is that sort of book.

The author makes a lot of use of Geoffrey of Monmouth in locating sites of battles and areas of campaigns. He also uses the science of etymology, a science which has fascinated me for years and I intend to spend some hours cross-referencing Squadron Leader Young's interpretations. Unlike the previous book reviewed this tome locates Arthur in Britain and his campaigns in the first half of the sixth century. He follows Geoffrey of Monmouth in dating Arthur's death as 542.

There is far too much in this book to analyse in such a short space but he does some excellent detective work in locating those twelve Arthurian battles from Nennius' History of the Britons. At the beginning of the book A. Critic says about the author that he has "...chosen a very difficult period, something of a minefield, in which there are many dangers..." and the Squadron Leader replies: "Those who have not the courage to cross a minefield of uncertainty with military knowledge, will never achieve their objective of further understanding".

Read it and see if you think the author has successfully traversed the metaphorical minefield.

ROMAN BRITAIN TO SAXON ENGLAND

by C.J. Arnold
179pp, 54 figures. Croom Helm, ISBN 0-7099-0513-0, £14.95 (£9.95 to Ancient and Medieval History Book Club members)

Usually, studies of the transition from Roman Britain to Saxon England look at the historical information first and then turn to archaeology to fill in the gaps in the historical framework (which are many). This book is welcomed for giving the archaeological evidence the attention it deserves. It examines the general cultural aspects of the peoples then present in England and avoids dwelling on the political events (such as battles) so patchily recorded in the written sources.

If anyone merely wishes to learn more about

Arthur, or any other such individual figure or event, they will not learn much from this book; but those interested in understanding how Roman Britain became Saxon England, this book is a must.

Kurt Hunter-Mann
December 1984.

ROME'S ENEMIES (2): GALLIC AND BRITISH CELTS

Text by Peter Wilcox and Colour plates by Angus McBride. Osprey: Men-at-Arms Series. (To be published on March 28th.)

Once again the partnership of Wilcox and McBride produce another excellent Men-at-Arms edition. Though strictly not Dark Age many elements of the pre-Roman Celtic society passed over the four hundred year occupation of Britain to reappear in the Dark Ages. As with past Osprey publications this one is of the highest standard and little can be adversely commented upon. The artwork is superb and believable - all of the colour plates, by McBride, are excellent and I like the double page spread and the atmospheric plate E in particular. The text is also of the highest standard with some new information and a few photographs I've never seen before.

The Celtic people left a long lasting impression on the history of Europe which can still be seen today. I personally believe that the fiery character of the Celts survived the years of the Romans and reasserted itself as the Empire crumbled. Much of the feel of the Dark Ages is owed to this spirit - a spirit non wholly the property of the Celts but to all so-called barbarian peoples.

For those folk interested in the Celts or who like the artwork of Angus McBride this book is a good buy. Also watch out for Elite Series (3) The Vikings by Ian Heath and illustrated by Angus McBride to be published in May.

THE WAY OF WYRD

by Brian Bates, Century Publishing Co., 1983, Paperback 1984, £2.95.

Originally mentioned in Sandra Garside-Neville's article, Vol I No.8, this is a very pleasing book in more ways than one. Set in the late seventh century it is about a Saxon Christian missionary who becomes apprenticed to Wulf, a Saxon shaman. Though a novel this book has much historical value - but history of a different kind.

We tend to forget that the people of the Dark Ages were a very superstitious folk and gods, goddesses and spirits played a strong part in everyday life. Wulf shows Brand the Monk another world - a world hidden from him by the restrictions of his religion. 'Magic' plays a big part in this drama - it isn't Sword and Sorcery - it is more pure 'magic' - that experienced by our ancestors but almost wholly ignored by modern man.

Magic wasn't completely the possession of the 'heathen' Giraldus Cambrensis shows that Medieval Welsh folk held their priests in great reverence, especially those who performed miracles, and for objects which had occult powers. The Welsh never lost their belief in hidden powers and 'wise men and women' lingered on into the twentieth century still used rather than doctors or vets.

When it comes to the use of magic in Dark Ages novels I am not completely against it. Not only did it play a part in everyday custom (including those supposedly Christian) but folk were steeped in stories of magic swords, fighting giants or monsters and adventures into the Otherworld.

The Way of Wyrð is not only a good novel but you will learn about the 'other' side of life in the Dark Ages.

THE LAST HARPER

by Julian Atterton
Julia MacRae, £5.95, 1983.

Set in the sixth century this is the tale of Gwion, who is driven from his home by the marauding Saxons. He flees to the court of Urien of Rheged, where he meets Myrddin who continues his education as a bard. Also he follows Urien - his efforts to unite the North British, his betrayal and his death.

Mr Atterton keeps his feet firmly on the ground throughout, and comes out with a very believable tale, which is extremely well told. His book is a welcome edition to my library!

S.Garside Neville
December 1984.

Two very small reviews concern the Channel 4 series "The Dragon has Two Tongues" and one of its spin-offs.

The series of course deals with far more than the Dark Ages - covering the whole history of Wales - but the episode that did look at this period was very interesting. It added little to the knowledge about these times but it was presented in a lively and provoking way. One of its spin-offs is Gwyn A. Williams' When was Wales?, published by Pelican in paperback at £3.95. Those of you with a distinctly Cymric point of view will find this book not only one of the best books on Welsh history but also a stimulating read.

SCROLLS

We have a few more letters for Scrolls than recent issues and we begin with one from Mike Rusling:

"I'm sorry that the moot at Winchester was such a failure on behalf of attendance by Dragon members.

"I have a suggestion to make on this point, would it be possible for all members to have a list of members. This may enable those who live closer to get together more often, which could result in better arrangements for future moots.

"All the places visited by Dragon and Pen-dragon to date I have visited myself....

"Another suggestion I have is I would be willing to arrange a weekend in the summer to several such as Cadbury Castle, Glastonbury,

Stonehenge, Maiden Castle, Avebury, Silbury Hill, Winchester, etc. Using a mini-bus, and possibly collecting people from stations, hotels, etc., we could tour three or four of them and have a combined moot. If we circulated the members we could find out what interest there is and where people would like to visit...."

Your suggestions are very much appreciated Mike. If there is anyone against having their names and addresses listed and sent out to all members of Dragon please let me know as soon as possible because I would like to have a list out before the next proposed moot. Mike's idea of weekend visits in the summer is also a good one and so I would be grateful of co-operation from members to try and organise such a venture. Please send in your suggestions for tours to me or to Mike Rusling, 6 Rixon Close, Weston Favell, Northampton. We would also be interested in hearing from members abroad who may want to visit the UK in the near future. May I point out that Mike suggested this idea before the Quest Heritage advertisement. And concerning this advert, many members have commented on the rather high cost of their tour.

From Northampton we move to Penarth, in South Wales, and Pat Litton-Havell who writes asking for help from members with some queries she has:

"I have been reading some sixteenth century documents from the Glamorgan and Gwent Record Offices, and the female Christian name FRISWITH came up in one of them. It isn't a name I have come across before, particularly in this area, although it has been suggested as a corruption of the Saxon name Winifred. I wonder whether anyone could come up with any ideas as to whether it is of English or Welsh origin.

"The other item is that I have noticed that many cromlechs and/or standing stones throughout Wales which are linked with Arthur also either have to alternative name of 'lair of the greyhound bitch' or 'abode of the greyhound bitch' (i.e. Gwal y filast), or else are near stones so

named. There is a suggestion that there is a link with the Celtic moon-goddess Ceridwen, who had for one of her symbols a greyhound bitch. I have been unable to establish why this should have also become connected to 'Arthurian' sites, and wondered whether it is confined to Wales, or if anyone has come across instances 'over the border'. Or, indeed, if anyone can come up with an explanation!"

If anyone is able to help Pat please either drop me a line or contact her at 35, Uplands Crescent, Llandough, Penarth, South Glamorgan.

From one sort of a request to another:- Sandra and Kurt have a number of books for sale and say:

"The price of the books do not include postage. If you are interested in purchasing any book, and would like to save postage we will be attending the Dragon-moot in York this May and will be happy to bring the book of your choice along with us and meet you there. Our address is: 94 Benjamin Wilson Court, Sussex Street, SALFORD, Greater Manchester, M7 9PT."

These are the books for sale:

ARTHUR'S BRITAIN - L. Alcock. Worn copy. Pelican Paperback (1977) £1.25.

THE HISTORY OF THE KINGS OF BRITAIN - Geoffrey of Monmouth. Good copy. Penguin Paperback. (1979) 80p

IN SEARCH OF THE DARK AGES - M. Wood. Good copy. BCA Hardback (1982) £5.00

KING ARTHUR'S AVALON - G. Ashe. Good copy. BCA Hardback (1974) £2.50

BRITAIN IN THE DARK AGES - Ordnance Survey Map. Good copy. "nd Edition (1974) £2.25

THE QUEST FOR ARTHUR'S BRITAIN - G. Ashe. Good copy. Paladin Paperback (1979) £1.50

HAWK OF MAY - G. Bradshaw. Worn copy (ex-Library) Magnum paperback (1981) 15p

ROMAN BRITAIN - I. A. Richmond. Worn copy. Pelican Paperback (1977) 75p.

Some real bargains here so write to Sandra and Kurt straight away.

The final letter is from Nigel Vye. Having talked about his idea for the Dragon Project, to extend his article which appeared in the last issue of Dragon, he goes to say:-

"I have recently read G. Ashe's book 'Kings and Queens of Early Britain', and now begin to incline to the view of an early Arthur; the same man as Riothamus. This seems to fit the bill as far as I am concerned. I am also open to the suggestion that there were several 'Arthurs', therefore explaining his popularity in the sixth century. Mr Ashe's book is certainly interesting but I do find it rather biased in favour of the 'Welsh' kings and against the Old English. I do wonder whether Arthur saw himself as a Roman/Welshman or a particularly effective and successful general. Much seems to be made of his tactics and armies and yet if they were so successful why were they never adopted by the Irish, Scots or Old English? I have heard it said that if the Old English wanted Wales they could have taken it, but as it did not offer conditions favourable to their agriculture they were content to leave it to the Welsh. (Me? Biased? NEVER!)"

Well.... It is interesting to see one member already agrees with my comments in the introductory article. As for Mr Ashe's bias towards the Welsh kings, maybe he would like to explain this. As for the "Old English" stopping at the border and considering it unfit for Saxon ploughs - I don't know. Whether true or not Wales seems to have a fatal attraction for rulers on the other side of the border. If one moves six hundred or so years into the future one find Giraldus Cambrensis saying: "The southern part of Wales, Cardiganshire and more especially Dyfed, is particularly attractive because of its flat fields and long sea-coast. Gwynedd in the north is better defended by nature. The people who live there are more robust and the soil is richer and more fertile. If all the herds in Wales were driven together, the mountains of Snowdonia could supply them with pasture. In the same way Anglesey is so productive that

it could supply the whole of Wales with corn for a long period...." He also suggested an interesting solution to the problem of Wales: "Indeed, it may well be thought preferable to eject the entire population which lives there now, so that Wales can be colonized anew. The present inhabitants are virtually ungovernable, and there are some who think it would be far safer and more sensible to turn this rough and impenetrable country into an unpopulated forest area and game preserve." (Me? Biased? NEVER!)

Well, that is it for Scrolls. Please keep the letters coming and don't forget the Dragon Project. There has been some response but there are still many members who haven't contributed. I'm quite sure that everyone can help even if it collecting articles from local newspapers or magazines. So please help if you can. Thanks.

Hope you all enjoyed reading this issue. The next will appear just before the Dragon-moot, or at the latest just after. Please get your contributions in as soon as possible and I hope to see as many members as can make it at York.

TALES FROM THE TWO ELLS

or NEWLIGHTON THE DARK AGES

by ROGER WILLCOX



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