



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

Dear friend,

Welcome once more to a rather late issue DRAGON - this was basically to get both the Dark Age Dayschool and the DRAGONMOOT into this issue. Because of this I have been unable to fit literally everything in this magazine. I had hoped to have reviewed the TV series "Outside Time", which dealt with the Mabinogi and Arthur and a new book that has been published called "Kitezh: The Russian Grail Legends". Also worth a mention in the Channel 4 series "Down to Earth", which has so far aired some interesting archaeological material, including a way of genetically identifying skeletons of the Dark Ages, a revision of our ideas about the Gundestrup Cauldron - once thought to Celtic and just as I go to print a piece on Tintagel and its importance in the 6th century. Last Sunday (17th November 1991) BBC TV began broadcasting a new six part children serial entitled "Merlin of the Crystal Cave" based on Mary Stewart's books. The visual images are not too bad, despite stirrups! I hope in the next issue to review the above together with anything else of interest that comes my way. The next issue will also have something of a European flavour to it - due to some material sent from Wolfgang and Roswitha Heindl in Vienna and a piece from himself on a visit to Switzerland in search of ancestors but finding the Dark Ages and Arthur! If you have any ideas for articles, etc. with European connections it would be nice to get them into one magazine.

This issue is something of a military issue with articles on warfare in the Dark Ages by Chris Gidlow, the siting of one of Arthur's battles by John Marsden and a look at Arthur and his battles from a number of points of view. I think you will find this an interest issue. There is also a reasonable size review section together with reports on the DRAGONMOOT held in London and a Dark Age Dayschool at Bodelwyddan Castle, near Rhyl in Clwyd. This is a slightly larger than usual issue and I hope that the next issue will be something special. We have come to the last in volume three and volume four, number one will appear in the New Year - almost ten years to the month that DRAGON first started. Feelers were sent out in 1981 and the first issue was published in February 1982. Since then there have been many ups and downs, and, as they say, a lot of water has flowed under the bridge. Membership has peaked and troughed, and the old creature has changed as the technology became available. In the next issue I hope to re-tell something of DRAGON history - reviewing it and restating some of the fact that appeared in volume 3, number 1.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue, now please read on:

The cover consists of the Ptolemy map of the British Isles superimposed over a reproduction of Arthurian section of The History of the Britons (Harley 3859, folio 187a)

## DRAGONMOOT '91

This year's get-together was to begin at the British Museum on Saturday, 16th November, to coincide with the Anglo-Saxon exhibition that had opened the previous week. The weather forecast for Saturday was bleak - rain coming in from the west, however, London turned out to be very mild and the waterproofs had carried to no avail, thankfully. I arrived at the steps of the British Museum just before 12.00 to be greeted by Kathleen Herbert - much to my surprise as I didn't know she was coming. Unfortunately, her news was that Helen Hollick, who was supposed to be coming, had been in an accident and would not be able to attend. While out horse-riding she had been thrown from her mount due to an inconsiderate taxi driver. (I am sure that we all wish her a speedy recovery.) Soon Steve Pollington arrived (he had reminded Kathleen about the 'Moot') followed a short while after by Jason Garfield, a relatively new member, and Jim Gunter (no relation!) - one of our latest recruits. After greetings and introduction, followed by a group photograph (which I hope will appear in the next issue) we went into the Museum. Eighteen pounds or so lighter (in money that is) - with catalogue (£14.95 at the moment - but will be going up to £16.95) and the entrance fee we entered the exhibition.

Laid out in chronological order from the Pagan period, going through the growth of the state, new learning, the Church in Northumbrian, England and the Continent, Mercian supremacy to the Age of Alfred, the exhibition was a feast for the eyes as well as the soul. Being a hybrid myself (Welsh-Swiss-English-Irish) I can appreciate the excitement at seeing a page of Beowulf as much as the Tassilo Chalice or the Book of Lichfield and the Lindisfarne Gospels (I think that more or less covers the four nationalities). Each section is then subdivided into manuscripts, metalwork, sculpture and coinage, though in one section Church architecture is touched on and here there was a marvellous reconstruction of an Anglo-Saxon monastery. Apart from two helmets (the Benty Grange and the Coppergate) and two swords there was little of a military nature but a lot of religious or decorative material. From Sutton Hoo came the famous shoulder clasps and belt buckle, together with the sceptre which may have been a mixture of Anglo-Saxon and Celtic art. There is obviously too many exhibits to tell you about everything but some of the highlights include the beautiful manuscripts, the Franks Casket, various pieces of jewellery, including the Fuller Brooch and the Alfred Jewel, and coins from the early the Canterbury coin struck by one Eusebius in the 7th century to the coins of Alfred and Cnut in the 10th century. There was also a gravestone from Monkwearmouth which read *HIC IN SEPULCRO REQVIESCIT CORPORE HER(E)BERICHT PR(ES)BYTER* - could it have been one of Kathleen Herbert's ancestors? "There" she said, "you see I'm not Norman!" We spent nearly two hours in the exhibition and even then I missed a few things (looking back through the catalogue later). If you get a chance this exhibition is well worth visiting.

Following the exhibition we went for a meal and a chat, via the Museum bookshop. I cannot remember the name of the café we had our meal in but it was at the end of Museum street next to the famous (or should one say infamous) Atlantis Bookshop. The proprietors of the café were very good and allowed us to stay there for over two hours. Apart from the occasional short periods of silence while we ate our meals, the conversations ranged from comments on the exhibition, personal reasons for being interested in Arthur and the Dark Ages, theories about Arthur, DNA tracing to my own hair-brained theory about the American Indians not coming across the Bering Straits but coming from a different direction. Now, though there were so few of us, I certainly enjoyed myself, I felt it was worthwhile having a DRAGONMOOT and I think those who came went away happy. It is always nice to meet folk of a like

mind and chat about our mutual interests. As we left the cafe, which was closing around five o'clock, Jim asked "Next year?" Well, it would be nice to have a 'moot every year or even more often and especially when you meet for the first time new members or those members who haven't been to a previous 'moot. To answer Jim Gunter's question - I will hopefully be visiting the United States in September/October 1992 but will be free for have a 'moot before April or between the end of May and September. If anyone has any ideas - in any part of the country - please drop me a line. For my part I have news that there will be a lecture at the Library Headquarters or Theatr Clwyd, Mold, next year to help publicise the Arthurian Collection now back in the Library HQ, Civic Centre, Mold - details in the New Year. And looking to 1993 it is possible that there will be an Arthurian/Dark Age dayschool held with the help of the Clwyd Archaeology Service. I will keep you posted about these and other future events and especially the proposed 1995 Badon Conference in forthcoming issues of DRAGON.

## DARK AGE DAYSCHOOL

On Saturday 9th November 1991, Clwyd Archaeology Service held another successful dayschool with an attendance of around 280 people. The subjects approached were Anglo-Saxon and Viking York, the Sutton Hoo excavations, the Crannog excavations at Llangorse and Vikings in Ireland. The venue for the dayschool was Bodelwyddan Castle, an old stately home acquired by Clwyd County Council and now being used for exhibitions and live events with facilities for adults and children (some very good play areas).

What started out as a dreary, very wet morning, turned into a fascinating day. The morning began with open remarks by John Manley, of the Clwyd Archaeology Service, who also introduced the lectures. In the afternoon Kenneth Brassil, of the National Museum of Wales (late of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust) took over as master of ceremonies.

The first lecture was given by Dr. Richard Hall, of the York Archaeological Trust, and concerned the archaeology of Anglo-Saxon and Viking (Anglo-Scandinavian) York. Of particular interest to DRAGON readers was the earlier period which had originally only been known to existed from chronicles and the odd stray find. But now part of the old Anglo-Saxon town has been found near the confluence of the rivers Ouse and Foss on the site of the old Redfearn Glass Factory. Eorforwic grew up outside of the Roman area which seems to have fallen into ruin and thrived from the 7th to the 9th century when it was superseded by the Viking settlement. The Vikings re-settled the deserted Roman areas and some of the best archaeological finds have been discovered at Coppergate. While the industry of the Anglo-Saxons seems to have been primarily of the "cottage" type, Viking York saw a sort of industrial revolution. The results of the Viking digs are now incorporated into the Jorvik Viking Centre, together with "hands-on" facilities at the new Archaeological Resource Centre, which jointly, recently won the 1991 Gulbenkian Award for Museums and Galleries in the category of 'Best imaginative education work'. Though both the Anglo-Saxon and Viking excavations have brought considerable light to the Dark Ages the period between the 5th and 7th still remains something of a mystery.

After the coffee break, Professor Martin Carver, University of York, spoke about the history and recent excavations at Sutton Hoo. Possibly the most famous archaeological site in Britain, the excavations at Sutton Hoo came to an end the day before the dayschool. Prof. Carver, hot-foot from Suffolk, began by reviewing the past excavations of Sutton Hoo started by Basil Brown, who was later relegated to

assistant when he discovered the undisturbed boat burial and a group of professors (sorry, I don't know the collective noun for a collection of archaeologists) with £280 to spend on the dig. In ten days they excavated Mound 1 discovering 260 finds and dating it to the 7th century AD. Prof. Carver went on to discuss the finds, including the person who was likely to have been buried in the boat burial - Rædwald, king of East Anglia, who died c. 625. He also mentioned that the East Anglia was the first area of England to be colonised by Germanic tribes in the early 5th century and not Kent.

The new project began in 1983 with the object of trying to find out more about early Anglo-Saxon society. It found that there was more than Dark Age evidence, showing the site dated back to Neolithic times. However, it is the Anglo-Saxon period that is of interest to readers and this important site can, as Prof. Carver put it, be considered "page one of English history". The excavators discovered on the eastern periphery a series of 20 graves, not covered with mounds, set in a rough circle around what was likely to have been a tree. The bodies had not been cremated but all that was left of them was discoloured earth - they were "sand people". All were strangely positioned in the graves, hands tied or mutilated in some - one was decapitated. One curious one was buried as if ploughing a field! A similar burial pattern was found around Mound 5. Were they some part of a ritual - human sacrifices? Prof. Carver and his team also surveyed all the existing mounds and discovered some more. Unfortunately, most of the mounds have been robbed at various time, though mainly in the mid 19th century. However, recently, when Mound 17 was opened to everyone's surprise it had not been robbed and even more so an oak coffin with the intact skeleton of a young male was found. From this excavation a sequence can be seen showing how the grave was set out with objects found: - a broken spear was placed first in the grave 'then a shield, boss upwards 'provisions' possibly a saddle 'the coffin, contain the body with a sword 'a comb which was thrown in but slide down by the side of the coffin 'then the grave was filled in. Near to this grave was also a small horse had been buried. This shows one possible ritual of inhumation used by the early Anglo-Saxons.

Sutton Hoo seemed to show a sequence of burial styles - the mound type with individual burial (e.g. Mound 17), the cremation with human sacrifices (Mound 5) and ship burial (Mound 1). Prof. Carver also pointed out the similarities between these graves and those found in Scandinavia and that many of the finds had their origins in places as far away as Constantinople. However, he ended this fascinating lecture with the sad news that there are no plans to do any more excavations (only a quarter of the site has been properly dug) and that it is now being left unprotected. It is a great pity that such an important and exciting piece of archaeological landscape should be left to the elements and possibly worse.

Following lunch Dr. Mark Redknapp, of the National Museum of Wales and author of *The Christian Celts* (reviewed in the last issue of DRAGON), began a lecture on the excavations at the Llangorse Crannog in Powys. Dr. Redknapp began by saying that he was trying to lift the curtain on the Dark Ages but pointed out the extreme difficulty of actually finding such sites. He went on to look at some recent finds in Wales and then began to discuss the crannog excavations. What could have been a fascinating lecture turned out to be rather disjointed. Fortunately, the slides managed to convey some interesting images. The information coming from this excavation, nevertheless, proved fascinating. A crannog is basically an artificial island and this one was built, according to dendrological investigations, in the last decade of the 9th century AD. This is quite unusual since most known crannogs are often prehistoric.

The three year study (which ended in September) at Llangorse revealed the way the crannog was constructed showing that in some places timbers bearing joints had been used, or to be more precise - reused. These beams must have come from other halls, evidence of which is sorely lacking in archaeology if not in

documentary evidence. Finds in the area include a flat bottomed boat (date unknown), some ceramics, grains of various types, bones, parts of brooches (consisting of high quality metalwork) and most interesting of all some material (one piece of which consists of 5 or 6 folded layers decorated with embroidery). The actual crannog itself was quite a complex affair made up of woven bundles of wood, planks and stones. A lot of research had been done on the structure of the crannog but unfortunately noting of what was on the artificial island has come light. It was obviously of some importance because of the reference to it in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for the 916.

The final lecture was on Vikings in Ireland and was given by Dr. Patrick Wallace of the National Museum of Ireland. He began by commenting on the sorry state of the position of Sutton Hoo's future - a point which the audience readily agreed. Dr. Wallace then discussed briefly the epithet Dark Age, saying that it didn't really suit the period he was talking and certainly not Ireland. He also pointed out that Early Christian also didn't fit since that could represent any period after the 1st century AD. So he suggested that it was better to use the title Early Mediaeval Period or Early Middle Ages. From there he went on to the topic of his talk and produce a very interesting lecture with some fascinating slides of excavations and finds from Viking Dublin. The amount of material coming from these excavations are extensive and would be of considerable interest to folk interested in the Viking. (If any members are interested in what Dr. Wallace had to say, please let me now.)

Overall this was a very good dayschool with some interesting results. To finish this report I would like to let members know that after a conversation with John Manley it could be possible that an Arthurian dayschool, with the backing of the Clwyd Archaeology Service, may be held sometime in 1993.

## ARTHURIAN WARFARE

by  
**Chris V. Gidlow**

Warfare in Britain during the sub-Roman period is of great importance to those interested in Arthurian studies. Unfortunately, much that has been written on it has been clouded by anachronistic assumptions. Inferences are drawn either from the late Roman army or from the mediaeval Romances. Occasionally, as with the Sarmatian heavy cavalry hypothesis, these are linked together to produce suggestions that have very little basis in fact. The first available sources are the contemporary works of Gildas. After that we have nothing to go on till the ninth century *Historia Brittonum* attributed to Nennius. The first vernacular works specifically concerned with the 6th century only appear in thirteenth century manuscripts but some are generally accepted to derive from at least as early as Nennius. The Gododdin and the poems of the Book of Taliesin and the Black Book of Carmarthen are particularly useful as they are frequently concerned with military matters. Gildas was not specifically concerned or familiar with warfare. His vocabulary is drawn extensively from a Latin translation of the Bible and from Vergil, and may not always be appropriate to his own period. He says the Romans

who conquered Britain used fire, the sword and machines. Their swords are "gladii" [short stabbing blades] and they have the large rectangular shields called "scuta". When Maximus left Britain, he stripped the island of all its armed soldiers and military supplies. The remaining Britons were ignorant of all ways of warfare. They had to be helped out by two Roman forces, the first a Legion, the second horsemen. This last force, before it left, advised the Britons to arm themselves with the "ensis" [a general word for sword], the "hasta" [a spear that could also be thrown] and the "pelta" [a light skirmisher's shield]. To help them they also left "Exemplaria instituendum", which could be training manuals or less specific instructions. The ensis and the hasta evidently took on. The tyrant Constantine is twice described as using them and they were the weapons Maglocunus employed against his uncle's forces.

Horsemen are referred to briefly when Cuneglassus is called a rider, or horseman, of many. He is also described, enigmatically as "auriga currus receptaculi ursi". The most probable meaning is "Charioteer of the bear's hiding place", although it could be translated in a variety of ways. Gildas may have meant that he rode a chariot into battle, as he goes on to say that Cuneglassus fought with weapons peculiar to himself. On the other hand there is no reason to suppose a military context, as we learn from Gildas that some Britons travel on horseback or in vehicles and so consider themselves superior to other men. The phrase may have had an other meaning, as the prophet Elijah, who was carried up to heaven in a fiery chariot, is called "auriga et currus" of Israel.

The military organisation of the Britons is only touched on. The tyrants are always described with civil titles, except on one occasion, when Maglocunus is compared with other "duces" [leaders], a term which could have either civil or military connotations. More tellingly, the companions of the kings are called "soldiers in the same company" as them. The only formation mentioned is the "battle-line" adopted by Maglocunus's uncle. Fighting men are called soldiers, and they fought for booty or reward. Gildas uses many other military words, from standards and banners to decorated shields, armour and helmets, but these are only used figuratively of religious and moral qualities.

"Nennius", though of a more historical character, has very little to offer on warfare. The Roman army includes soldiers and horses, and is controlled by "duces". "Miles" [soldier] is a word used for warriors in all armies, including the Saxons and Arthur responsible for two Wonders. However "Exercitus" [army] is only used for anti-Saxon forces, while Saxons are described with pejorative terms imputing a lack of discipline. The only weapons mentioned are the "little knives" called "saxas" used by the Saxons. As in Gildas, there is no suggestion that armour is worn. The Severn Bore, for instance, is said to be able to overwhelm armies, with their "clothes" and

horses.

The description of Arthur at the Battle of Castellum Guinnion, over which too much ink has been spilt, does not, in any version that we have, mention a shield, decorated or otherwise. The only tactic mentioned is a charge of Arthur (alone) against 960 men.

In contrast, the Welsh poems are fertile sources for military details, although much background is assumed and no distinction made the Britons and the English. The complicated rhyme and metre make even small alterations by later copyists difficult.

"Y Gododdin" is a linked series of elegies for the warriors slain in a military expedition of the late sixth century. The weapons used are those in Gildas, the sword and the spear. Swords are described as bright blue, shining, are sharpened and used for swift, slashing blows. Spears are more common. They are long and yellow, usually of ash-wood. Spear-heads are "square-pointed", presumably in section. Their sockets are dark blue metal, though their tips are only ever red (with blood). They can be used for cutting and tearing or thrusting and pushing. They are also thrown.

Shields are as common as spears and are used in conjunction with them. The most frequent word for them "sgwyd/ysgwyd" is derived from the Latin "scutum" but these are clearly rectangular. Other words used are "cylchwy" and "rhodawg/rhodawr" [circular and round shield]. They are light and broad and generally white, though some are decorated with gold. Although they make a noise like thunder when struck, they are not very strong. If described, they are always "shattered", "splintered" or "not solid". Even spears can shatter rather than pierce them. A reasonable explanation is that lacked a strengthening metal rim. In this they would correspond to the "pelta" mentioned by Gildas, which in the late Roman army were edged with leather.

In striking contrast to the impression given by Gildas and Nennius, the warriors of the Gododdin, and their opponents, are armoured. Their armour is dark blue or iron. It takes the form of the "Llurig", derived from the Latin "Lorica", in this period a shirt of bronze or iron scales or mail. Probably the latter is intended as one warrior is specifically "mail clad". Limb armour and helmets are not mentioned.

The warriors fight both on foot and on horseback. Their horses are fleet, slender and longlegged. The horsemen fight "in dark blue armour, with shields, spear shafts held aloft with sharp points, shining loricae and swords." All of these are used while mounted. Spears are couched or thrown from moving horses. One warrior uses sword strokes then spears from his slender bay horse. A saddle is mentioned which must have helped keep them steady.

The horsemen make close order charges against formed bodies, an attribute of heavy cavalry. They charge swiftly against enemy spears,

trampling on arms and weapons. They tear through armies with surging fury. Blood flows up to the thighs of the riders.

The infantry fight in close ranks, with "The best men in the forefront", "the chosen warriors in the front rank." The mass of men called a "stronghold of shields", a "wall of battle", a "stockade" or "battle-pen". It stands steadfast. Spear point out from it, as, when two forces meet there is a pressure of spears and a clash of spears. Spears shattered at the start of battle.

The poet refers frequently to the noise of battle. Aside from the thunder of struck shields, there is the uproar and fury. Warriors laugh and sing a song of war. They shout a battle cry and "after the cry of jubilation there was silence."

After the battle, they give no quarter in pursuit of the Saxons, whom they cut down like rushes. They collect booty.

The engagement in which the Gododdin fell is conventionally described as 300 men against 100,000. However, this figure of 100,000 is by far the highest given. The scale of battle is usually much smaller. 2,000 are said to be slain at one point, but otherwise 3, 50, 100, 250, 300, 363 and 800 are the sizes given to groups and armies. The command structure of the Gododdin is not made clear. They seem to be divided into three sections, but we cannot tell who led the whole force.

The Book of Taliesin poems deal with much the same area and period, consolidating the information given. The victorious armies of Urien and Owain are celebrated. They pierce and smite with sharpened spears, look over the edges of shields and wear bright loricae. Some, especially the leaders, ride stallions. The infantry sing as they march, which might explain the "war song" in "Y Gododdin". The cavalry charge amid the enemy. The army is divided into four warbands, has banners and is led by a chieftain. The Black Book of Carmarthen contains poems with comparably archaic features. Here we find a correlation which the previous sources. Spears are made of ash-wood, with sharpened blue points. They may be thrown. Swords are used and in "Gereint fil. Erbin" edges of blades are in contact. At Ardderydd, Myrddin saw them being used for thrusting, an exception to consensus that they used to hew. Shields are employed. In "Pa gur", as in "Y Gododdin", they are shattered and fragmentary. However, the only mentions of armour are in the Stanzas on the Graves, where some of the dead were formerly armoured horsemen. One of Gereint's warriors has blood on his head and is presumably not wearing a helmet. The absence of armour is puzzling, considering its prominence in "Y Gododdin" and the Taliesin poems. It is more in accordance with Gildas and Nennius. Could this be a geographical distinction? The Tyrants of Gildas who can be located in Cornwall and Wales, while Nennius' military descriptions are largely drawn from his accounts of the wars in Kent and at the Severn estuary.

"Gereint fil. Erbin" takes place somewhere in Devon or Cornwall. "Y Gododdin" and the Taliesin poems, along with many of the grave stanzas, are set in the North. Unfortunately, though this explanation is attractive, Myrddin's poems are also about the North, and "Pa gur", though it is difficult to locate, mentions Anglesey and Edinburgh.

Horsemen wield spears in battle. Although they lack armour they are used in a heavy cavalry role. Horses gory in battle charge against resisting forces. A poet sees the spurs of men who would not flinch from dread of the spears. The horses are magnificent swift racers, usually white in colour, though sometimes this is caused by sweat. In the Grave Stanzas there is a reference to war-horses being specially bred.

Gereint's battle begins with a shout after which there is a terrible resistance, a terrible impulsion and a fearful return. Many armies, from the Macedonians to the Confederates, begin their battles with a distinctive shout, and it may be that some thing of the kind is implied by the poets. The fifth century Life of St. Germanus tells how the saint organised a British army to oppose the Picts and Saxons. Following Germanus' lead, the army gives a great shout of "Alleluia" which frightens the attackers away before battle is joined. This may be the first example of the British "battle-shout".

The British forces at Ardderydd are described as "Seven spears in seven divisions". Elsewhere, forces are led by a "regulator of hosts", "one who marshalled the armies", "the conductor of the toil". In "Gereint" this figure is Arthur, which parallels Nennius' description of him as "Dux Belli/ Bellorum" [War-leader, or Leader of the Campaign]. "Pa gur" gives the figures of 600 and 900 men for the size of the forces. Again the men fight for booty.

It is interesting to compare these descriptions with those given by Gerald of Wales of the 12th century Welsh armies, which are often used to give retrospective insight into the Dark Ages. There are some similarities, but the differences are much more apparent. The few Welsh who wear armour have Norman-style helmets and greaves of plated iron, as well as mail shirts. The mounted men usually dismounted to fight. They do not use swords but frequently employ bows, which are unknown in the sources we have examined. Light tactics are characteristic, even for those in armour. They run up to the enemy, fire arrows and throw javelins, then run away. "This light-armed people...cannot struggle for the field of battle, enter into close combat or endure long and severe action."

The Poems, in fact, give a consistent picture of Arthurian warfare. It is difficult to say how accurate they are. Close order cavalry charges make good poetic images, even if they do not play much part in a battle. Taken in conjunction with Gildas and Nennius, they provide an informative account which does not rely on extrapolation from the Roman or Mediaeval Periods.

## HISTORIA BRITTONUM: Chapter 56.

Evidence concerning Arthur is rather scarce but one piece that is so often used is the "History of the Britons" credited to a monk named Nennius. Since a number of articles in this issue make use of an extract from this "History", I am reproducing in full the famous chapter 56 which deals with the 12 battles of Arthur. Though much can be said about this chapter, at the present moment I will let it speak for itself. Therefore here is chapter 56 in Latin and English:

*In illo tempore Saxones invalescebant in multitudine et crescebant in Brittannia. Mortuo autem Hengisto, Octha, filius ejus, transiit de sinistrali parte Brittannae ad regnum Cantorum, et de ipso orti sunt reges Cantorum. Tunc Arthur pugnabat contra illos in illis diebus cum regibus Brittonum, sed ipse dux erat bellorum. Primum bellum fuit in ostium fluminis quod dicitur Glein. Secundum, et tertium, et quartum, at quintum super aliud flumen, quod dicitur Dubglas, et est in regione Linnius. Sextum bellum super flumen quod vocatur Bassas. Septimum fuit bellum in silva Celidonis, id est Cat Coit Celidon. Octavum fuit bellum castello Guinnion, in quo Arthur portavit imaginem sanctae Mariae perpetuae virginis super humeros suos, et pagani versi sunt in fugam in illo die, et caedes magna fuit super illos per virtutem Domini nostri Jesu Christi et per virtutem sanctae Marie virginis genitricis ejus. Nonum bellum gestum est in urbe Legionis. Decimum gessit bellum in litore fluminis quod vocatur Tribruit. Undecimum factum est bellum in monte qui dicitur Agned. Duodecimum fuit bellum in monte Badonis, in quo corruerunt in uno die nongenti sexaginta viri de uno impetu Arthur; et nemo prostravit eos nisi ipse solus, et omnibus bellis victor extitit. Et ipsi, dum in omnibus bellis prosternebantur, auxilium a Germania petebant, et augebantur multipliciter sine intermissione, et reges a Germania deducebant, ut regnarent super illos in Brittannia usque ad tempus quo Ida regnavit, qui fuit Eobba filius. Ipse fuit primus rex in Beornicai, id est in Berneich.*

At that time the Saxons increased in numbers and grew in Britain. On Hengist's death, Octha, his son, came down from the north of Britain to the kingdom of the Canti, and from him sprung the kings of the Canti. The Arthur fought against them in those days, together with the kings of the Britons, but he was their leader in battle. The first battle was at the mouth of the river called Glein. The second, third, fourth and fifth were on another river, called the Dubglas, which was in the region of Linnuis. The sixth battle was on the river called Bassas. The seventh battle was in the forest of Celidon, that is the Battle of Celidon Forest. The eighth battle was at the Guinnion castle, at which Arthur carried the image of the holy Mary.

everlasting virgin, on his shoulders, and the heathen were put to flight on that day, and there was great slaughter upon them, through the power of Our Lord Jesus Christ and the power of the holy Virgin Mary, his mother. The ninth battle was fought in the city of the Legion. The tenth was fought on the beach of a river called Tribruit. The eleventh battle was on the hill called Agned. The twelfth battle was on hill of Badon and in it nine hundred and sixty men fell in one day, from a single charge of Arthur's, and no one lay them low save he alone; and he was victorious in all his battles. When they were defeated in all their battles, they sought help from Germany, and continually and considerably increased their numbers, and they brought over their kings from Germany to rule over them in Britain, until the time when Ida reigned, who was the son of Eobba. He was the first king of Beornicia, that is in Berneich.

This is the basic text of the famous "twelve" battles of Arthur, though there are slightly differing versions of these and glosses to the text by later copyists. For example, in one manuscript, translated by J. A. Giles, some differences can be found: - the ninth battle has added to it "which is Cair Lion", the 11th is called "Mount Breguoin, which we call Cat Bregion" (another version of the name of this battle is "Agned Cat Bregomion") and at the end of the chapter Ida is called the first king in "Bernech and in Cair Affrauc". In the Irish version of the "History of the Britons", one battle, number 11, is left out completely and the twelfth is not named, though the rest of the entry is still in.

I hope this will help the reader when reading the articles included in this issue, as well as past and future articles on the battles of Arthur.

## **'THE RIVER CALLED GLEIN'**

### **An Arthurian battlefield in the Cheviots**

by

**John Mardsen**

Chapter 56 of Nennius' *Historia Brittonum* has spawned a vast corpus of speculation as to the locations of the twelve Arthurian battle victories. It is widely agreed that Nennius was working from some original Latin exemplar of real historical substance rather than any lesser 'myth & legend' source, but his battles-sites are at best no more than ambiguously identified. While the Mons Badonicus debate rumbles on to the south, a solid case has been made for the northern location of Arthur's first battle, fought and won according

to Nennius - 'in ostium fluminis quod dicitur Glein'. Glein translates as 'bright', which might describe almost any watercourse of the preindustrial ages, but two rivers 'called Glein' are customarily offered up by the scholarly surveys. The Lincolnshire Glen flows into the Wash might be reasonably proposed as a flashpoint with Germanic sea-raiders, but it is the river Glen in Northumberland which strikes me as the outstandingly probable location of Arthur's first great victory.

In recent months I've been able to more closely investigate the possibilities of Glendale, near the town of Wooler in Northumberland, as a 'Dark Age' battlefield.

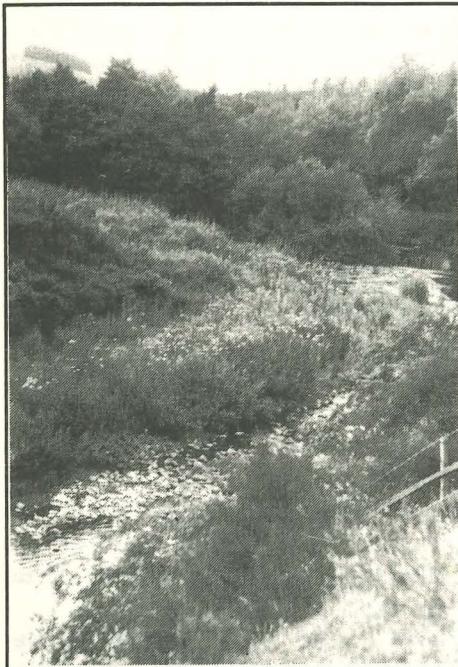
The Glen is formed by the confluence of Bowmont Water and the College Burn at Westnewton, from where it runs through the narrow western end of Glendale at Kirknewton. It follows the northern edge of the valley past Yeavering and continues eastward through the Milfield plain to turn north and fall into the Till which itself enters the Tweed some three miles south-west of Norham. In Bede's time, Glendale had long been a place of importance in the kingdom of Northumbria. There stood the vill - or royal township - of Ad Gefrin where, in AD 627, the newly-converted king Edwin brought his 'bishop' Paulinus to conduct mass Christian baptisms of the northern English in the waters of the Glen. William Camden did not hesitate to locate Bede's Ad Gefrin at Yeavering - 'Ad Gebrin at this day Yeaverin' - and while nothing remains visible of Edwin's township, the great hillfort of the Britons on Yeavering Bell rises up from the banks of the river as a prominent feature of the Cheviot landscape.

The importance of the Glen in the Anglo-Saxon kingdom is confirmed by Edwin's choice of Ad Gefrin for Paulinus' mission and has been underwritten, even expanded, by modern archaeology. Brian Hope-Taylor's detailed excavation and exploration of the Anglo-Saxon site on the fields beside the Glen at Yeavering has revealed a sequence of English settlement from at least the late sixth century through to its abandonment in favour of the vill of Maelmin at nearby Milfield around 685. Hope-Taylor describes a Northumbrian royal township built and rebuilt through the pagan and on into the Christian period. The phases of its building clearly correspond to Bede's accounts of the destruction of Ad Gefrin by fire and sword by Cadwallon's Welsh-Britons in 632 and again by Penda's Mercians in the early 650s, but of greater interest here are Hope-Taylor's clear indications that the Anglo-Saxon township was the last in a long sequence of settlement in Glendale. Bede's place-name of Ad Gefrin is itself a key clue, an English royal estate with a Britonic-Celtic name which translates as 'by the hill of the goats'. The Anglo-Saxon vill had been established in the reign of Aethelfrith (593-616) - if not before - beside the oppidum or hillfort of the Britons of Brynaich on 'the hill of goats'.

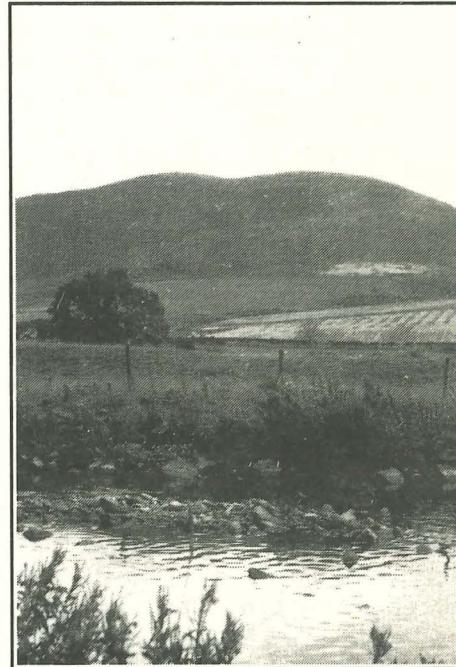
There are still wild goats on Yeavering Bell, and there is also the single stone rampart of a hillfort enclosing the traces of 130 dwellings, which has prompted the Northumberland National Park's Field Guide to describe it as

'easily the largest hillfort in Northumberland and the only one whose size is compatible with the status of a minor tribal centre'. Its populating in the immediate pre-Roman Iron Age must have been larger than that of any other settlement in Northumberland - apart from such Roman depots as Corstopitum at Corbridge - earlier than the small towns of late mediaeval times. Although there is no certain evidence of continued British occupation of the Gefrin hillfort after the mid-second century, such an ancient and imposing defensive refuge located in the often-embattled territory between the Antonine and Hadrianic wall would not have been ignored in times of danger. Brian Hope-Taylor describes Yeavering oppidum as 'the Maiden Castle of the Tyne-Tweed region...so sited as to be strongly defensible and potentially strategic'. In the 'Arthurian' period when formerly-abandoned hillforts were often re-occupied and re-fortified, such must surely have been the case at Yeavering on the dangerous frontier between the sub-Roman British dominions and the expanding English settlement of the fifth century.

It would seem that the religious importance of Glendale began long before the time of Paulinus' baptism mission in 627. The sequence of burial and cremation in the Anglo-Saxon vill dates from pre-Christian times and the 'temple' identified by Hope-Taylor would appear to predate even the Germanic pagans. Edwardian antiquaries sought a 'druidic' significance in the due



The confluence of the Bowmont Water and the College Burn into the Glen ... the site of Arthur's first victory?



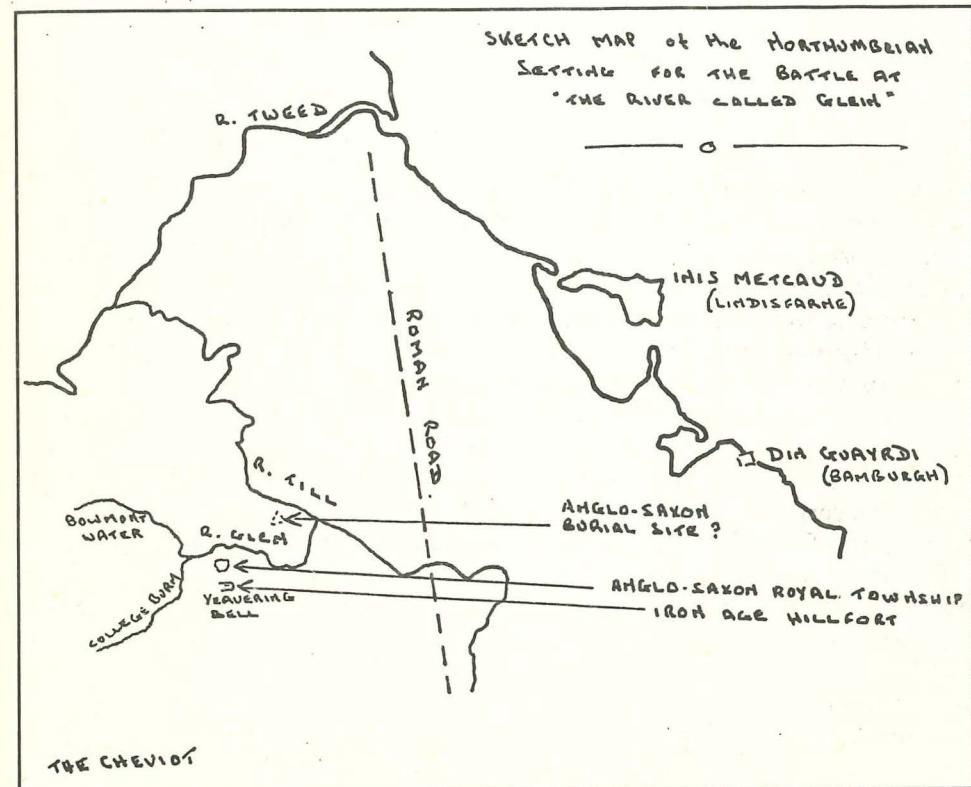
'Ad Gefrin' - the hillfort looks on the the 'river which is called Glein'. (Photographs by Jenni Marsden)

eastern alignment of the causeway leading up to the hillfort ramparts, but the profusion of 'cup and ring' rock carvings throughout the Cheviot region attests the early Celtic, and even pre-Celtic, spiritual significance of the ancient landscape.

The antiquity of the settlement of Glendale is extensively supported by archaeological records of microliths and flint-working debris, a Bronze Age standing stone and three henge monuments, Iron Age palisaded enclosures and pottery finds of the 2nd century AD. Glendale has been a focus of settlement and civilisation since the earliest times by reason of the rich agricultural quality of the land according to Hope-Taylor: 'We find the Yeavering oppidum lording over the region's best soil for the light plough.' By the mid fifth century the fertile farmland beside the Glen must have offered a prospect every bit as tempting to the Germanic warrior-farmers of the earliest English settlement as it had to the agriculturalists of millennia BC.

Having sketched an outline of the historical backdrop, it might now be possible to attempt a speculative scenario for Arthur's battle at the 'river called Glein'.

I have no desire here to contribute to the chronological controversies



surrounding Arthur's wars and so familiar to Dragon readers. Let me only offer a cursory proposal of the historical Arthur as a sub-Roman period warlord with a floruit in the last decade of the fifth century. Such sources as Gildas and Germanus which survive for that period indicate that the administration of fifth-century Britain followed as far as possible along the lines of that of the last century of Roman Britannia. If Ambrosius Aurelianus filled a role akin to the Roman supreme commander or dux *Britanniarum*, then Arthur might be similarly proposed as a post-Roman comes *Britanniarum*, inheriting in some measure the field command first instituted by Theodosius as warlord at the head of an elite cavalry 'rapid reaction force'. Such a military command would have involved Arthur and his comitatus on battlefields as widespread as the southwestern location preferred for Mount Badon to the dangerous no-man's land between the walls in the north, which northern frontier would have been under great pressure in the late fifth century. The mutinous eruption of the laeti and feoderati around the 450s can only have been followed by a century of land-seeking campaigns by the Germanic settlers of the Yorkshire Wolds and their compatriot warbands around the Wall and along the coastal strip between Tyne and Tweed where Ida would later carve his first dynastic foothold on the kingdom of Bernicia.

The rich farmland of Glendale would have offered a prime target for Germanic land-seeking which must have resulted in attacks on the British territory of Brynaich directed against the ancient fastness on the 'hill of the goats'. Whatever battle ensued on the 'river called Glein' might bear comparison with that other battle fought more than a century later at Catraeth, the southernmost stronghold of Urien's Rheged seized by the northern English. The great warband of the Gododdin rode south from the Forth to challenge the Northumbrian claim and were slaughter almost to a man. Perhaps a similar course of events lay behind the battle on the Glen. I would propose an attempt by Germanic warbands to seize Glendale from the native Britons, and perhaps a siege of the most strategically important hillfort of the Cheviots possibly raised or deflected by a decisive cavalry attack.

A Germanic attack on British territory of such historical, religious and economic importance must have been counted no less serious a challenge than the seizure of Catraeth in the sixth century and would have called forth no less dramatic a response. The very different outcome of the battle on the Glen to the defeat of the Gododdin might be reasonably attributed to the renewed success of British resistance in the later fifth century, specifically the extraordinary military phenomenon of Arthur. In the last historical analysis, the final result was the same. Ad Gefrin was eventually absorbed into the Northumbrian kingdom, just as Urien's Catraeth became the Northumbrian vill of Cetreh, and there is a final irony in Bede's note of the two mass baptisms of the Northumbrians by Paulinus - in the Glen at Yeavering and in the Swale at Catraeth.

I'm tempted to rest my case there, but might perhaps add a modest

revision to the translation of the original Nennius evidence. The Nennian text:  
Primum bellum fuit in ostium fluminis quod dicitur Glein  
is traditionally rendered as:

The first battle was at the mouth of the river called Glein.

The 'mouth' of the Glen is some distance from Yeavering at the point where it falls into the Till, and the Latin *ostium* might just as accurately be translated as 'door' or 'confluence', which location would much better correspond to the topography. The *ostium* lies below Westnewton, where the Bowmont and College burns run together to become the Glen and flow through the constricted pass under the slopes of Yeavering Bell. Glendale, akin to the Liddesdale location for the battle of Degastan, would have similarly provided a pass through the Cheviot range for a warband heading south, and is not a very typical 'Dark Age' battlefield but one perfectly sited for ambush.

It is certainly the place where I would want to put the 'crossed swords' on my battlefield map of Arthur's wars to mark the blood-fray at 'the river which is called Glein'.

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## ARTHUR THE GREAT

by  
Charles. W. Evans-Günther

[This short article was written as a response to a suggestion made by Steve Pollington which reminded me of an article passed on to me some years ago by Patricia Litton-Havill. I have extend beyond the ideas of the author to look briefly at the battles of Arthur. This piece was revised following the PENDRAGON AGM when I found an article on this subject in a back-issue of their magazine.]

The history of Arthur is based on sparse records but certain chronicles have become the foundations of our information. Primarily we know so little of the 'real' Arthur. However, much as been written based on Nennius' "History of the Britons", "The Welsh Annals" and "The History of the Kings of Britain" by Geoffrey of Monmouth. The latter has been used by a number of authors to give different accounts of the possible 'real' Arthur. In most

cases Arthur is portrayed as a Romano-British leader fighting the Anglo-Saxons, Picts and Irish. Could it be possible that Arthur was not British? There have been a number of such suggestions ranging from Frank to Saxon, but only one author has made a specific identification with a Saxon leader. F. T. Howard (details of whom I have not been able to ascertain) wrote in the journal "Transactions of the Cardiff Naturalist Society", Vol. 5, 1918, that he believed he could connect Arthur with one of England's most famous heroes - Alfred the Great. Though his theory, at first, is quite compelling and does create some food for thought, it does have a number of pitfalls.

Howard begins his article by discussing the various references to Arthur and that there doesn't seem to be any genuine documentation concerning Arthur before the 12th century. He then talks about the latest research by Professor Lewis Jones and that Arthur is said to have fought 12 battles. He continues to point out the worthwhileness of comparing the battles of Arthur with those of Alfred the Great. It is interesting that the similarities between Alfred and Arthur are quite strong. The country is being invaded by pagans, in one case the Anglo-Saxon and the other Vikings, and that a great Christian warrior defends the country. The area of action is also very interesting in that Mallory has King Arthur in Winchester which was also important to King Alfred, it was his capital, he was buried there and his statue still stands proud in the town. At Castle Hall, to this very day, is kept the "Round Table of King Arthur", hanging on the wall. Could the tales of Arthur really be based on those of Alfred?

Having introduced the possibility of the Arthur/Alfred connection, Howard goes on to compare the twelve battles listed in Nennius with the campaigns of Alfred against the Vikings. Here I will repeat what Howard has written without comment and then later look at how close these battles were to those of Alfred. The battle at the mouth of the Glein (Gleni) must have been "æc Glea", Iley or the river Wilton - now called the Wiley, which runs into the Avon. The second to fifth battles were on the River Dubglas in the region of Linnius which Howard places near the River Dover in the region of Lemanarcha, the Viking fleet having anchored off Leminemouth or Lympne. The battle of Coet Celidon he places at the Weald Forest, quoting from Richard of Cirencester: "The vast forest, called by some the Anderidian and by others the Caledonian." The sixth battle, that of Bassas, is the battle of Farnham (Farnham), close to Basing. When it comes to the battle of Castle Gunnion, Howard places it at Buttingadun or Buttington Tump near Chepstow, which was once called Castle Gwent or Castle Guinn. The City of Legions he shows to be Chester on Dee because the Vikings occupied the deserted Roman city and later fled into North Wales. Tribruit he considers to be the defeat of the Vikings at the River Lea. The battle of Mountain Agned, sometimes called Breguion, is said to be Cwat Bregne, which is probably Quatford near Bridgenorth in Shropshire. The twelfth and final battle in the

list is Mount Badon and Howard put it at Baddabrig - Badbury Rings in Dorset, but compares it to Camlann, the battle in which Arthur is said to have died. From here Howard discusses Castle Guinnion pointing out the Welsh Annals talk of the Vikings attacking Brecknock, Gwent and Wentloog, thus indicating that the campaign took place in the area of Chepstow and re-emphasising the position of this battle. With the battle of Traeth Tribruit Howard shows that the meaning could be "three courses" and this would fit in well with the River Lea, where the Saxons blockaded the Vikings creating a third course of the river, according to Henry of Huntingdon.

From here Howard goes on to talk about various other similarities between Arthur and Alfred. He shows that the titles given to Arthur suit Alfred far better since he gained the support of many tribes including the Welsh. Geoffrey of Monmouth places a prophecy of a dragon at Winchester and Arthur's father has dragon standards, which compares favourably with the silver dragon standard of Wessex.

Arthur's palace in the early tales was "Gelliwic", which according to Howard is the old Roman station Vindo-gladia being practically the modern Wimborne, one of Alfred's royal residences. Howard claims that Medrodd seized Gelliwic and some say abducted Guinevere making her his wife. This he compares to Ethelwald rising in rebellion in 901, after Alfred's death, seizing a nun from the abbey and then fighting Alfred's son at Badbury Rings. Amongst other obscure points made by Howard one of interest is the hunting of the boar Twrch Trwyth being an analogy of a war with the Vikings who are sometimes depicted as having boars on their helmets. Could there be anything to this theory of Mr. Howard's? Is it possible that the exploits of Arthur are in fact based on the career of Alfred the Great? It is not the first time that the story of the legendary Arthur has been questioned, and it could be possible that Geoffrey of Monmouth actually based some of the events on characters of history such as William the Conqueror and Henry I. However, what relevance does it have to a possible real Arthur? There is, as it is as already been mentioned, precious little to go on. The Welsh Annals gives two references but it is Nennius' list that is most often used and books have been based on this list. Does Mr. Howard's comparison between the battles of Arthur and Alfred have any basis in fact? For this it is necessary to look, briefly, at the life of Alfred.

Born into a time of Viking invasions of the British Isles in around 848, Alfred son of Ethelwulf, Lord of Wessex, Kent, Surrey, Sussex and Essex, led a peaceful childhood encouraged in the arts by his mother. When he was five he went with his father to the court of Pope Leo IV, returning three years later. In 858 Ethelwulf died and divided his kingdom between Ethelbald - Wessex, and Ethelbert - Kent, Surrey, Sussex and Essex, while Alfred was the youngest of four brothers. Ethelbald reigned only two years and was succeeded by his brother Ethelbert. Then between 860 and 864 a powerful

Viking army invaded Wessex and even sacked Winchester. Ethelbert died in 865 and the kingship was taken up by his younger brother Ethelred. Together with Alfred, the new king proceeded to move against the Vikings. By 871 the two brothers had fought nine major battles, killed nine Danish earls and one king, and yet they had not pushed the Vikings out of Wessex. But now Ethelred died and Alfred was forced to meet a new threat when more Vikings had reached Reading. With a small force he confronted them at Wilton on the banks of the R. Wylie and there he lost the battle to the Vikings. Wessex was not strong enough and therefore had to make peace with the Vikings, paying them to go away.

For the next four years the new king of Wessex lived in relative peace until 875 a new threat came from the east - a large Viking army had landed dividing into two and the southern army under Guthrum was marching on Wessex. A war of moving lines continued for two years until Guthrum attacked Chippenham, one of Alfred's royal residences. Alfred, his wife Elswitha and their children escaped and took refuge on the Isle of Athelney, in the marshes beyond the Forest of Selwood. In 878 following a Viking defeat by the men of Devon, Alfred moved out of his refuge and attacked Guthrum at Edington. The Vikings were defeated and Guthrum was converted to Christianity, staying faithfully to Alfred until his death in 890. Peace reigned over Wessex and Alfred ruled wisely until in 892 a new Viking threat arrived landing in Britain at the mouth of the River Lympne and near Milton on the Thames. Alfred received support from many quarters, including the Welsh, and fought a series of battles, mainly against Haesten. Edward, Alfred's son, pushed into the Weald and met Haesten at Farnham, defeating them and then following the retreat to Benfleet. The Saxons under Edward and Ethelred of Mercia descended on the Viking, winning a great victory and capturing Haesten's wife and two sons. The Vikings now moved north and encamped on Buttington (either at the mouth of the Severn or not far from Welshpool in Powys). The Saxon levies surrounded them and tried to starve them into submission but the Vikings escaped and marched back to Essex. At harvest time the Vikings moved north again to the deserted Roman city of Chester where they were once again surrounded. Eventually they broke out and moved into North Wales and the Wirral, re-grouping later and returning to Essex. In the winter of 894 the Vikings moved their boats up the Thames and then up the River Lea, where they built a fortress. But Alfred followed them and cut them off by constructing forts on two sides and cutting a channel between the two forts, thus the Vikings couldn't sail their boats out of the trap. They were forced to abandon their defences and moved north-west building a fort near Quatford, not far from Bridgnorth in Shropshire. Once again the Saxons besieged the fort and eventually the Vikings left. This time they had had enough and packing up everything they had they moved back to the Continent.

Alfred reigned for another three or four years, dying peaceful around the turn of the century. His body was taken to Winchester where he was buried at Old Minister. He soon became a legend and many tales both fact and fiction are told about Alfred the Great - what child doesn't know about the burnt cakes? Could the story of Alfred have given rise to the legend of Arthur? What about the 12 battles - do they compare to the campaigns of Alfred? Alfred as Arthur is an interesting idea and at times there seems to be connections that sound reasonable but on further study the whole idea begins to fall apart. Howard was writing at a time when place-names were guessed at rather than studied in detail. Let us look at the sites Howard listed as being the battles of Alfred which gave rise to the list in Nennius. Here there are plenty of references but it is particularly the works of Eilbert Ekwall and Kenneth H. Jackson that has proved most useful. The comparison of names will not only tell whether Howard's theory has any basis in fact but also may enlighten the reader to a study of the Nennian list and whether it suits even Arthur.

**GLEIN:** Howard links the first battle with Ac Glea or Wylie - and though it is true that Alfred fought a battle at Wilton on the Wylie that was in 871 and later in 878 spent the night at Iley Oak, though in fact fought the battle at Edington. The origin of the names seem to be Celtic for "tricky" - it probably meant the river was unpredictable. What connection it has with Glein I cannot see and this name is shown to mean "pure" or "clear". Every indication is that Glein could be one of a number of sites, the most popular being the Glen in Northumberland, one in Lincolnshire and the memory of a third in Leicestershire (aet Glenne, 849).

**DUBGLAS in the region of LINNUIS:** It was years after Edington that the rest of the places listed saw action. There is no evidence of a series of battles in the area of Lympne and the River Dover, the latter is connected with the Celtic word for water, while Lympne doesn't connect with Linnuis. Lympne was known as Portus Lemanis in Roman times and this indicates that the Celtic origin of the name may mean something to do with the word "elm" - found also in the River Leven from the Welsh "llwyf". Jackson has shown that Linnuis relates to the inhabitants of an area - the "-uis" indicating this. He also points out that Linnuis could be derived from Lindensis, which is the old name for Lindsey, Lincolnshire. The Dubglas site can be translated as "dark water" and could have evolved into numerous names - Douglas, Duglas, Dawlish, Dowlish, Dulas, Dalch, and so on. To actually pin-point this site is extremely difficult but it must have been in the area of Lindsey.

**BASSAS:** Howard then changes the order of the Arthurian battles having seven before six it still doesn't quite work. However, it is true that Farnham is near Basing, but the battle was fought between Haesten and Edward not Alfred. So far no meaning has been found for Bassas, unless

it is a mistake and could be derived from "bas" - shallow. However, most places with the Bas- element today seem to be derived from the Anglo-Saxon Bassa - Basing being 'the people of Bassa'. In 871 Basing was known as Basengum. If Nennius had used a place which had an Anglo-Saxon derived name it could indicate he was using later material and not Celtic.

**CELIDON WOOD:** When it comes to Celidon, Howard uses a quote from Richard of Cirencester to indicate that Celidon was Andreadweald - the Weald Forest. As for a battle there is no mention of one in studies on Alfred. In its context in the Nennian list it seems to be the same forest that was mentioned in Roman times - silva Caledonia - a vast forest that stretched from one side of Scotland to the other. No positive meaning can be found though "celli" in Welsh means wood and many writers have tried to use this to have Celidon anywhere in Britain - Geoffrey of Monmouth, for example, had it in the Midlands.

**CASTLE GUINNION** could have been fought at a place that later was called Castle Gwent or Castell Guinn, says Howard, but the Chronicle says Buttington near the Severn, and it could one of two places - some authors place it near Welspool. This one sound plausible but Chepstow was called the castle in Gwent and Gwent seems to be from the Roman 'venta' - which mean a market town or tribal centre (Irish: fine). Meanwhile, Guinnion seems to be derived from the Celtic 'vindo-' but there is nothing positive about this. It has been suggested that could be Binchester, though Jackson disagreed.

**CITY OF LEGION:** It is difficult to disagree with Chester being the City of Legion, since there is too much evidence in support of this connection. That Chester should be a strategic site used on a number of occasions is not unusual and there are plenty of examples of battles fought at or near the same place. It is definite that there was a battle fought at Chester in the first decades of the 7th century and this could have given rise to connecting it with Arthur. However, equally, it could have been a genuine battle fought in the 4th or 6th century but against who - had the Saxons penetrated that far west?

**TRIBRUIT:** As for Tribruit being "three course" and suiting the trap at the River Lea, at first it sounds correct but a study of the name shows this not to be so. The name evolved into the Mediaeval Welsh "Tryfrwyd", cutting out the sense of three and stream. It is more likely to be a river that when through ("try") and area of broken ("brwyd") ground. Its location would be very difficult to position but it is included in early poetry and mentioned together with a number of sites in Scotland.

**AGNED/CATH BREGION:** When it comes to Cwat Bregne - Quatford - it is a case of it sounds like so therefore it is. Its name comes from Cwat brycg and could mean 'the bridge by the hill'. While Agned is untranslatable, Bregion later became Brewyn in Welsh, which means 'white hill'. Some

writers have tried to connect this site with High Rochester, but a positive location is uncertain.

**BADON:** The final listed battle is very strange since Mount Badon is considered the crowning glory of Arthur and the fight at Badbury Rings was a feud between Ethelwald, Alfred's nephew, and Alfred's son Edward following Ethelwald's attempt to take back the throne of Wessex. Howard seems to connect it more with Camlann rather than Badon. As for the battle in the early Dark Age sense, it is recorded a number of times and on two occasions credited to Arthur. However, there are doubts. Its location is difficult and many attempts have been made to locate it in the south-west of the country - possible Liddington Hill, Lansdowne Hill or Badbury Rings. Some have tried to connect Mount Badon with Caer Faddon, the Welsh for Bath, but it is not so easy. Others have pointed out that most sites with Bad- in its name are actual hill forts or are very near to one. Ekwall invented an Anglo-Saxon hero or god connected with hill forts, since most have the English element -bury. For my part I believe that the battle of Mons Badonicus was fought by the British against the Anglo-Saxons and may be credited more to Ambrosius Aurelianus rather than Arthur. The Welsh Annals entry seems out of place and one writer, Thomas Jones, has suggested it should read "The Battle of Badon in which the Britons were the victors". Whatever the truth Howard's suggest doesn't live up to the generally accepted importance of Badon.

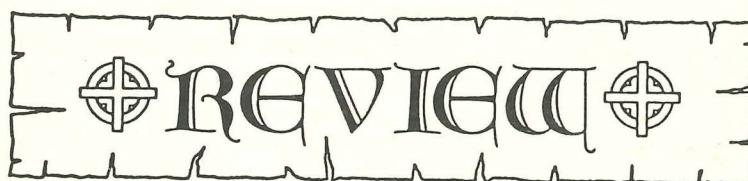
Tim Porter in PENDRAGON Volume 11, No. 3, July 1978, makes some interesting points that I feel can be added to F. T. Howard's theories. He compares the legendary site of the Isle of Avalon to Glastonbury Tor and points out that Burrow Mump, at Athelney, would compare favourably. Alfred seemingly defeated retreats to an island surrounded by swampland - he has gone, as if dead - but then at Easter re-appears to lead his people against the pagan invaders. Alfred is champion of Britain, supported by many tribes and like the legend of Arthur returns when his people are in need. Mr. Porter suggests that Alfred may have used to myths of Arthur's return from the Isle of Avalon to unite the people against a very dangerous foe. There are other similarities between Alfred and Arthur (using Geoffrey of Monmouth) - Arthur came to the throne unexpectedly, he fought under the dragon standard and he had a rebellious nephew. All these equally fit Alfred. Could it be that Alfred was the model for Arthur - at least in English Mediaeval eyes. In his article, Mr. Porter likens Alfred both to Arthur and Robin Hood and makes the interesting statement: "The tales of Arthur appeal to the Celt in us; the down-to-earth Saxon responds more to Robin Hood."

In conclusion, the list of battles given by Howard does not stand up favourably with the list in Nennius's work. There are just too many holes. Nevertheless, an interesting idea and one that may help teach researchers

a lesson. As for the fact of the Nennian list, we are not yet on safe ground. It was suggested many years ago that the list is based on a piece of poetry dedicated to Arthur and some of the battles are so obscure has to be really connected with the man. Others seem to be borrowed from various sources and may have been credited to Arthur rather than actually fought by him. Some of the battles indicate a siting towards the north and the east, and this seems to be a logical position for a campaign against the Anglo-Saxon invaders. Many writers now believe Arthur to have northern origins and that the southern connections are later additions. I am sure that the search for Arthur is not over and that the existing attempts to pin-point the man and locate his battles are far from satisfactory. Each author or authoress has their own ideas - whether it be Arthur of Scotland, Arthur of Wales or Arthur of France - the truth may still yet to be found. What can be said is that is it most unlikely that Alfred the Great inspired the creation of Arthur the Great! Or did he - what do you think?

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THE ARTHUR OF THE WELSH The Arthurian Legend in Mediaeval Welsh Literature  
 Edited by Rachel Bromwich, A.O.H. Jarman and Brynley F. Roberts  
 University of Wales Press, 1991 ISBN 0-7083-1107-5, £27.50

In 1985 at a meeting of the British branch of the International Arthurian Society it was decided to supplement and revise Arthurian Literature in the

Middle Ages (ALMA), edited by R.S. Loomis in 1959 and now the classic reference book on this subject. This would be done in a series of volumes - the first being The Arthur of the Welsh referring to chapters 1-8, 12 and 16 of ALMA. Here is a book of over 300 pages, a very interesting Introduction, 13 chapters, numerous notes and 10 page index. The contents include a general look at the Arthurian scene, touching on various theories, the historical Arthur, in the light of recent research, early Welsh Arthurian poems, Culhwch ac Olwen, the Triads, Saint's Lives, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Merlin, Geraint ab Erbin, Owain, Peredur, the Dream of Rhonabwy, Tristan, Arthurian associations with the South-west, Brittany and the transmission of Arthurian stories to England and France. The authors of the various chapters are Rachel Bromwich, Thomas Charles-Edwards, Daniel Huws, A.O.H. Jarman, Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, Ian C. Lovecy, Roger Middleton, O.J. Padel, Brynley F. Roberts, Patrick Sims-Williams, Robert L. Thomson, and J.E. Caerwyn Williams. This prodigious collection of academics cover not only the main institutions of Wales but also universities of Cambridge, Leeds, Nottingham and Oxford. The result of their endeavours is The Arthur of the Welsh.

Visually, like many academic books, this is not the most attractive of volumes and at time the layout gives anaemic look to the pages. However, once you start reading the book you will find that there is a lot of interesting material within. I personally found the Introduction very useful and quite revealing - doing exactly what an introduction should do and lead the reader into the following chapters. Without going through the whole book chapter by chapter, I would like to comment generally then specifically on The Arthur of History.

There is something for everyone in this book from the history to the mysteries of Merlin (though without going into any Aquarian mysticism) and I found of particular interest the chapters on Geoffrey of Monmouth, the South-west, Brittany and the transmission of the Arthurian stories to England and France. The chapter on Arthurian connections in the South-west includes pieces on Tintagel, Kelli wic, South Cadbury and Castle Dore (which is finally dismissed from having any Dark Age occupation). In the later chapters we are shown the interplay of ancient stories which seemed to have travelled out of the west into Europe and then returned to help create such adventures as Geraint, Owain and Peredur. The latter is a Welsh version of the Holy Grail but in a more archaic style and with symbols that, though similar to those of the Conte du graal and Parzival, are certainly different.

Thomas Charles-Edwards approaches the Arthur of History in a rather different way in the first chapter of this book. The Introduction has already basically introduced Arthur, discussing possible origins and theories, so chapter doesn't need to repeat all that. The main sources for Arthur are the Historia Brittonum and the Annals - so Thomas Charles-Edwards, using the latest research, explores these documents. His primary influence comes from David Dumville, who has made extensive studies of the Historia Brittonum. The part

of the Historia that deals with Arthur - Chapter 56 - is seen as a link between the exploits of Germanus, Gwrtheyrn (Vortigern) and Hengest and the English genealogies and regnal lists of the later part of the book. It also shows that, far from being a 'heap', the Historia Brittonum is primarily an ecclesiastical history giving more importance to Patrick than Arthur. The conversation of the Irish and the works of holy men would be more important than the short term victories of Arthur. And an interesting point that is brought up is the comparison between the campaigns of Gwrthefyr, son of Gwrtheyrn, and those of Arthur. Also of interest is the statement that the victories of Arthur caused the Saxons to bring over from Germany not only fresh warriors but kings, thus indicating that it was only Kent that had a kingship before Arthur and the rest of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms are post Arthurian.

The first chapter of *The Arthur of the Welsh* ends with a statement that seems less hopeful than that of Kenneth Jackson's in the conclusion of first chapter of ALMA: "At this stage of the enquiry, one can only say that there may well have been an historical Arthur; that the historian can as yet say nothing of value about him, but that later conceptions of Arthur are likely to interest historian almost as much as they do students of medieval literature."

I am impressed by the scholarship of this book - but this is only what one should expect from such names. It is certainly not a popular style of book - with only one photograph illustrating a page of the poem 'Pa gur yw y porthaur' from the Black Book of Carmarthen. It is also an expensive book and probably only worth purchasing if you are a dedicated student of Arthurian studies - especially the Welsh aspect. However, it is worth reading to make up your own mind about the contents and so if you don't wish to spend £27.50 you could ask your library to buy a copy or for them to borrow it from within the system.

#### **THE ILLUSTRATED COLUMCILLE - Life of St Columba**

by John Marsden, translation by John Gregory and photography by Geoff Green  
Macmillan London Ltd., 1991, ISBN 0-333-52985-5, £25.00

This fascinating book on the Irish "saint" Columba consists of 192 pages, a calendar of abbots of Iona, a glossary of place names, a select bibliography, a very nicely produced map and numerous coloured photographs. The author is John Marsden who is member of DRAGON, author of *The Illustrated Bede* and, in fact, has written an article on the battle at Glein in this issue. The book consists of five parts - the first and last being by John while the middle three are translations of the parts of Adamnan's *The Life of Columba*. The first part consists of a prologue and introduction discussing the lives of Adamnan and Columba - correctly Columcille. The final part looks at the legacy of the two holy men. Sandwiched between these two is Adamnan's Life which is divided into three parts: The Prophecies of Columcille, The Miracles of Columcille and the Visions of Columcille. Adamnan's work is not strictly a biography but includes

biographical details and material of historical interest, which John has extrapolated and discussed in the Introduction and the preambles to each of the part of the *Life of Columcille*. There is quite a bit to learn from Adamnan's work and John's introductions - not only about the "saint" but also about other people and events of sixth century Ireland and Scotland.

The overall image of this book is that of a fascinating, well researched, easy to read and beautifully illustrated publication (and I'm not just saying this because it was written by a member of the DRAGON Society!). It is copiously illustrated by the attractive photography of Geoff Green and a number of reproduced pages of various manuscripts including the Book of Durrow, Books of Kells and the Lindisfarne Gospels. However, this is far from being a coffee-table publication, being full of information about the life and times of a Dark Age historical character. The combination of the two aspects of information and visual images makes this book well worth the £25 it costs, and will not only make a welcome addition to anyone library but may spark an interest in the religious aspects of the Dark Ages, which have hardly been explored in the pages of DRAGON.

The story of Columcille tells of the growth of man in those strange religious communities of sixth century Celtic lands from Cornwall to Scotland. It tells of transgression which may have been "the first recorded breach of copyright", his exile from Ireland, the establishment of a religious community on Iona and Columcille's adventures in Scottish and Pictish Albion. It is full of weird and wonderful stories, including Columcille's encounter with the prototype Loch Ness Monster. The stories are full of Celtic imagery - warrior monks, saintly navigators, magic and mystery, miracles, visions and angelic visitations. Apart from the myths there are also snippets of actual history - for example Columcille's relationships with the lords of Dalriada and Brude Mac-Maelchon, who may have been the son of Maelgwn, lord of Gwynedd in North Wales. Whatever you preference in religion (and I remember my mother being a member, or something, of the St. Columba Society - though I can't remember what it was) you will find this is a very interesting story.

I would highly recommend this book and hope that you would enjoy reading it as much as I did. Nice one John!

#### **A BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY OF DARK AGE BRITAIN** England, Scotland and Wales, c.500 - c.1050

Ann Williams, Alfred P. Smyth and D.P. Kirby  
B.A. Seaby Ltd., 1991 ISBN 1-85264-047-2, £22.50

Two hundred and ninety five pages packed with information on personalities living during a 600 year period. Though it uses the dates 500 to 1050 it actually goes back earlier to Germanus and Vortigern, both mid-fifth century. This is a very useful reference book which includes not only a 243 page

biographical dictionary, but also a two page glossary, chronological tables of England, Scotland and Wales, genealogical and regnal tables, references and abbreviations and a bibliography. It would be very difficult to go through all the interesting people mentioned in this book but the obvious one is Arthur, and he gets roughly half a page. The entry describes Arthur as a British leader of the early sixth century, who fought a series of 10 (!) battles, of which the tenth (!) was Badon, and probably died at Camlann. To quote: "At present historians are tending to take a minimal view of the historical value of even the earliest evidence for Arthur, but most probably still see him as an historical figure who successfully established himself as a powerful warlord in early sixth century Britain."

Other entries of early interest include (to mention a few): Aelle, Alban, Ambrosius Aurelianus, Beowulf, Cerdic, Ceretic, Cunedda, David, Gabhran, Germanus, Gildas, Hengist, Maelgwn, Merlin, Nennius, Ninnian, Palladius, Patrick, Taliesin and Vortigern. Of course, the later characters have longer entries due to the greater amount of information, but this is a book full of interest, whether it be of the Arthurian period or those less Dark Ages. I found the entries in most cases informative and apart from the odd hiccup, very good. It is obviously a difficult subject to approach but the authors have done an excellent job. At £22.50 it is a bit excessive but it is a subject that is not in the most popular stream of publications. If you can't afford it, at least try and talk your local library into getting it - you never know when this book may be of use to you. The finish off, in the same series are dictionaries of the Byzantine Empire (published) and Ancient Egypt, Dark Age Europe and Mediaeval England (in preparation). I am certainly looking forward to the Dark Age Europe one, which may answer a lot of questions about this interesting period.

## ANGLO SAXON RUNES

J.M. Kemble (with additional material by Bill Griffiths) Anglo-Saxon Books, Pinner, 1991, ISBN 09516209-1-6, card covers, 77 pages, £6.95

For DRAGON readers who are interested in the history of Dark Age scholarship as well as the Runes themselves, I would recommend this A5 format booklet. The author - "Jack" Kemble - was born into a theatrical family early last century; his strong religious, philosophical and political beliefs brought him into no small amount of trouble, and he was never one to shirk his perceived duties. For example, he was involved in an abortive attempt to stage a coup in Spain, to replace the then monarchical system with a democratic one. His personal life was quite unfortunate in many ways, and he lived in reduced circumstances in an unhappy marriage.

His studies in the field of Germanic linguistics, archaeology and culture influenced generations of English scholars. Having spent some time in Germany associating with the Grimm brothers, Jacob and Wilhelm (yes, the Brothers

Grimm of folktale fame!), he used their comparative methods to illuminate some of the murkier corners of Old English poetry and managed to reveal possible traces of Germanic heathen culture in some puzzling, late verses. Only the current generation of scholars has broken away from the view that pagan gods lurk behind references in the enigmatic gnomic verse forms, and have studied the subject with an open mind as possible.

The work reprinted here was first published in 1840 in *Archaeologia* and remains perhaps the single most significant contribution to English runology. Kemble's success in the piece was twofold: firstly, he was able correctly to identify and read the runic signature "Cynewulf" in three Old English poems (Elene, Christ, Juliana); secondly, correctly (well, almost) to read the runic inscription on the Scottish Ruthwell Cross. Only later did he and others come to realise that the text was actually an excerpt from a known Anglo-Saxon poem (preserved in the Vercelli manuscript) called "The Dream of the Rood". Obviously, much work has been done since his day on the details of the text, but his methods and conclusions are sound.

The tone of some of his writing is sardonic and he uses his considerable ironic wit to deflate the Danish rune experts who had previously offered readings - misleading ones, at that - of the English material. Beautiful, handwritten runes of both English and Continental types, as well as comparative drawings of the Ruthwell Cross, are presented in the volume. As a matter of course, notes are included for the modern reader, since the editions of works which Kemble used back in the 1830s are not the standard ones used today. The Old English "Rune Poem" is presented in its entirety, as well as its translation. An expert from "Solomon & Saturn" dealing with the magical efficacy of the letters of the Pater Noster is also included, in both original and modern English.

"Anglo-Saxon Books" is a special-interest publisher with a growing list of A5, card-cover titles many of which may be of interest to DRAGON readers: "The Homecoming of Beorhnoth" - a reprint of Tolkien's classic poetic play on the aftermath of the battle of Maldon (a limited edition of 300 copies).

"Beowulf - Text and translation" by John Porter, Old and Modern English versions side-by-side, the Old in an attractive Dark Age-style script which makes this version visually appealing.

"Monasteriales Indicia" by Debby Banham, the Anglo-Saxon monastic sign language for use when speech was prohibited under the "regole", the monastic rule; Old English text with translation, notes and illustrations - absolutely fascinating.

Steve Pollington

(If you would like further information write Anglo-Saxon Books 25 Malpas Drive, Pinner, Middlesex.)

## THE EVERYDAY LIFE OF AN IRISH PILGRIM

ed. Giovanni Caselli, story consultants: Jon and Rebecca Harley, illustrations by N.J. Heweston, Macdonald & Co, 1986 ISBN 0-356-11373-6.

Not exactly the latest publication but of some interest and I hadn't seen it before. (I got the book in a cheap bookstore in Cardiff, so I don't know the original price.) This is part of a series of children's books ranging from An Ice Age Warrior to A German Printer, with A Celtic Farmer, Viking Settler and Roman Soldier also possibly being of interest. However, in this case it is an Irish monk - Finbar to be exact. He is a young monk who joins a group of older men to go in search of Columbanus, one of their brothers who had set off for Italy some years previously. It shows how they prepare for their journey and the adventures they have on the way.

This is a 32 page hardback, full of coloured illustrations which seem to be very accurate - note the Celtic tonsure. The last four pages include a pictorial glossary, a bibliography and a list of places to visit. It is simply written, well illustrated and full of information about early seventh century Ireland and Europe.

## IN THE BEGINNING: Discovering Welsh History - Book 1

Robert M. Morris & Catrin Stevens Oxford University Press, 1991 ISBN 0-19-917138-6, £4.50.

This is a very colourful and useful book which covers the early history of Wales (and is designed to be used for key stages 2 and 3 of the National Curriculum). It is very well illustrated and consists of 96 pages, divided into six units. These units include: Finding Wales, The Celts, The Romans in Wales, The Romans leave Wales, Saints and Warriors and The Rulers of Wales. It covers from prehistoric times until c. 1063 and has some particularly good material on the Celts, Romans and the Dark Ages. It falls down badly on Arthur - spending more space on the Mediaeval legend than the search for a possible real character. In general this is a very good book, however, there are the odd mistakes like giving the Dark Age monks the Roman tonsure that wasn't accepted until the 8th or 9th century AD. Many of the illustrations are excellent, especially when you recognise the works of Angus McBride and Richard Hook. Though actually concentrating on Wales there is much in this book, and the others in the series, that could be used to learn about British history.

## A GUIDE TO EARLY CELTIC REMAINS IN BRITAIN

Peter Berresford Ellis A Constable Guide, 1991 ISBN 0-09-471110-0 (Paperback with PVC), £9.95 [There is also a hardback version.]

Here is another in the Constable Guides, so loved by ramblers, and this

one travels the country looking, as the title suggests, Celtic sites. Consisting of 272 pages, it also has a site index, bibliography, glossary and numerous photographs and diagrams. It is divided into 9 sections - ranging from London and South-East of England to Scotland, which is sub-divided into six areas. It covers all sorts of sites including hill forts, settlements and finds. This is a very useful and comprehensive book for those who want to have a look at the actual sites with Ordnance Survey references given to aid their finding. Though like the last review it is not specifically Arthurian or Dark Age, I am sure that there are many people who interests go beyond the period of our specific interest.

## PENDRAGON Journal of the Pendragon Society Vol. XXI / 4 Autumn 1991

The speed of production of this magazine always surprises me, and once again from Eddie Tooke and crew another excellent issue. It continues the fascinating "The Fisher King and Odin" article by Alby Stone, has some interesting points of view and two articles specifically on Cadbury - the first being a very good piece of historical/archaeological writing by Nick Grant on "Early Defensive Sites" and the second a rather stranger piece called "Victorian Cadbury" gleaned from an American magazine. The PENDRAGON magazine has improved over the time Eddie saved it from folding and now with the increased use of Simon Rouse's brilliant Celtic style artwork and lettering, it looks better than ever.

(By the way: I had the good fortune to be at the last AGM of the PENDRAGON Society at Kate Pollard's house in Bristol, on the 29th of September, and was very impressed by their professional-ness, organisation and camaraderie. It was also excellent to be able to put faces to the names that so often appear in their magazine. There are also plans for increased collaboration between magazines - for example the reprinting of articles in the form of off-prints. And there may also be co-operation in future events - mainly the 1995 Badon Conference - which would be open to members of both societies and the general public.)

## THE JUNIOR ARTHURIAN CLUB Newsletter - Vol. 111, No 3, FALL 1991

Sporting an illustration of the defeat of a dragon and the consequences of eating its flesh for dinner on the cover, with a poem about the same inside, the JAC Newsletter contains its usual reviews and Dear Merlin Q & A. It also has a truly international flavour with a rendering of the first scene of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight by Joshua Blackman of Australia. The review section looks at six books - five being on the legendary side and one called Quest for a King: Searching for the Real King Arthur by Catherine Andronik - I must admit I have never come across this book. On the final page is another wordsearch - this time on the Knights of the Round Table.

# SCROLLS

Unfortunately we only have one letter for this issue, though before that here is an offer from Helen Hollick: **FOR SALE:** Arthur and the Britons...in Wales and Scotland by W.F. Skene (ed. Derek Bryce) 1988 - original price £5.95, will sell for £4.50 inc. P&P. Contact Mrs. Helen M. Hollick 183 Brettenham Road, Walthamstow, LONDON, E17 5AX.

Steve Pollington writes concerning the so called discovery of the gravestone of Guinevere by Norma Goodrich:

"I'm a bit suspicious about Guinevere's tomb...that motif of the human surrounded by animals is very common in early mediaeval contexts - look at the Sutton Hoo purse lid, for another instance of it. I have always believed (probably wrongly) that it is derived from a Cretan motif known to art historians as the "Master of Animals", a lordly figure who is flanked by wolves/lions/what-have-you; it is he who inspired some of the figures on the Gundestrup Cauldron, where a god-like character sits amid his animals subjects (is this the one called Cernunnos, the Horned God?). Anyway, "Daniel in the Lions' Den" is an optimistic attempt to blend very old European traditions with biblical orthodoxy by using a scriptural allusion to name the motif."

Many thanks to Steve for this point and he is certainly right to be suspicious about the tombstone of Guinevere. My letter to Norma Goodrich has so far remained unanswered, and so I am no wiser on the subject. Nevertheless, like Steve I do not have too much confidence in what Prof. Goodrich has suggested.

If you have any comments to make I would very much like to hear from you.

## TALES FROM THE TWO ELLS or NEWLIGHTON THE DARKAGES

by ROGER WILCOX

ROGER  
WILCOX



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DRAGON SOCIETY NEWSLETTER   AUTUMN 1991   VOL. 3 NO. 12.

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# DECEMBER SUPPLEMENT

The material reproduced herein I thought was worthwhile adding to this issue of DRAGON. This supplement consists of some news from Nick Grant and my report on "Rome, Britain and the Anglo-Saxons", a day school.

## NEWS

Some interesting excavations are reported in the latest edition of 'Current Archaeology' (No. 126). At Droitwich in Hereford and Worcester evidence has been discovered of industrial scale manufacture of salt in the 5th and 6th centuries, namely a series of ten brine boiling hearths. There were around 2m long and 0.4m wide. The hearths contained ash and charcoal residues, and appear to have supported lead pans which contained the brine. Early and Middle Anglo-Saxon pottery and grass-tempered ware was discovered, and radiocarbon dates from the hearth residues range from the mid-5th to mid-7th centuries. After this the site was flooded. Salt production was significant at Droitwich in both the Roman and Later Saxon and Medieval periods. Although the article does not explicitly say so, it would therefore seem that the site must originally have been run by native Britons in the 5th century, to be taken over as a going concern by the Anglo-Saxons when they later arrived in the area.

Continuing the continuity theme, there is also a report of an excavation of a cemetery at Wasperston, Warwicks, which spans the Late Roman and Early Saxon periods (4th-7th centuries). Of the 182 inhumations, 137 are seen as of Anglo-Saxon type, 36 of Roman type, but 9 as possessing a mixture of Saxon and Roman characteristics (grave orientation, grave-goods, coffin type, decapitation of corpse). As the cemetery appears to have been in continuous use, it is argued that we have evidence of 'acculturation', that is, peaceful acceptance by the indigenous Britons of the possessions and burial practices of the immigrant Saxons.

Of course the archaeological invisibility of 5th and 6th century Britons has for a long time been puzzling scholars. The Channel 4 archaeology programme 'Down to Earth' (5/11/91) reported on the discovery that DNA, the molecule containing unique genetic information, can now be recovered from ancient bones for analysis. This has far-reaching conclusions. Dr. Heinrich Harke of Reading University has analysed skeletal evidence from 5th-7th century cemeteries. These included adult males both with and without weapons. However, the occurrence of weapons is too frequent to indicate a simple difference between aristocrats and lower classes. His theory is that different ethnic groups are represented, i.e. Anglo-Saxons (with weapons) and native Celts (without weapons). Analysis of the bone groups showed that there were indeed differences in the DNA pattern indicating different genetic, and thus different ethnic groups.

The 'Down to Earth' programme of 19/11/91 included a report from the latest excavations at Tintagel on the island and in the churchyard. The legendary Arthurian connections were mentioned, together with the fact that these may have their origins in the site having a high status (royal?) settlement in the 6th century. Although on the whole the programme did not really add much factually to the previous reports of the 6th century phase in 'Dragon' (3/8, 3/10), some interesting views were expressed by

those archaeologists working on the site. Prof. Christopher Morris (University of Glasgow) emphasised the significance of the headland site by c.550AD, as demonstrated by the fact that more imported Mediterranean pottery has been found here than any other British site. Prof. Charles Thomas (Institute of Cornish Studies) suggested that the castle built on the headland between 1233-40 by Richard, Earl of Cornwall, was a 'folly'; only built because of the legendary significance of Tintagel, and a device by which Richard hoped to gain some of the reflected glory of Arthur. He also pointed out that, in addition to be the legendary birthplace of Arthur, Tintagel also appears in legend as the castle of King Mark, and burial place of Tristan and Isolde. The names Tristan (Drustanus) and Isolde (Esselt) occur earlier in Cornwall than anywhere else, and their story was circulating probably as early as the 10th century, certainly by the 11th. Jacqueline Nowakowski (Cornwall Archaeological Unit) drew attention to the continuity of Christianity that had occurred at Tintagel churchyard, from the 6th century to the present.

Nick Grant

## ROME, BRITAIN AND THE ANGLO-SAXONS

On Saturday, 30 November 1991, I attended a day school in the lecture room of the Architecture Building, Manchester University. Giving the lecture was Dr. Nick Higham of the History Department. It began at 10.00 and (apart from 15-20 minutes for coffee and an hour for dinner) went on till about 4.15. The subject was Gildas and the historical section of *The Ruin of Britain*, comparing it to other sources and archaeological evidence. What is a very difficult subject was handled very competently by Dr. Higham with a touch wry humour. Out of this came, for me, some very interesting possibilities though I didn't agree with everything he said.

He began by saying that Gildas' "De Excidio Britonum" - *The Ruin of Britain*, though sounding like an 18th century sermon was the only piece of historical material of any length we have from this period (the oldest version of Gildas' work is a copy from the 10th century but it was known of as early as the 8th century). The Breton Life of St. Gildas, which had the saint coming from Strathclyde, could be at best about another Gildas or a story with no reality. This Gildas, Dr. Higham proclaimed is no more historical than Arthur - "I don't believe in Arthur! The Round Table and Merlin - yes, I've seen them on television!" He also considered that the Welsh Annals were unsafe before the 7th century - from then on many of the entries can be cross-referenced, but before that things are dubious. The dates given for Gildas' visit to Ireland and his death in 570 are therefore unsafe. Nevertheless, *The Ruin of Britain* is the oldest insular information we have for Britain in the 5th century AD, though there are sources from the Continent.

The rest of this part of the lecture consisted of investigating the material on Britain coming from outside sources. One of the most important is the Byzantine writer Zosimus who writing in the first decade of the 6th century talked about the troubles of Britain in the beginning of the 5th century. He told of three men who were proclaimed Emperor on British soil - Marcus, Gratian and Constantine - all in 406. Only the latter proved to be reasonably successful when he went into France against the Germans who had crossed the Rhine early in 407. Is it a coincidence that 406 was the centenary of Constantine I being crowned Emperor at York in 306 and that the fifth century Constantine should have his sons renamed Constans and Julian? He held sway over all of modern France and had his eyes on Spain when his army rebelled against him under the leadership of a Briton called Gerontius. By 411 Constans was

dead and Constantine taken prisoner (he was later murdered whilst being taken to trial at Ravenna). Zosimus then tells us that the cities of Britain were told to fend for themselves. From here Dr. Higham went on to look at St. Germanus who according to the Gallic chronicler Prosper Tiro, writing from Southern Gaul in the mid 430s, visited Britain in 429 AD. He had been sent by the Pope to combat Pelagianism which was being preached by one Agricola. Here we see that at this time, and possibly a little later because it is said that Germanus made a second visit in the second half of the 430s (according to E.A. Thomas), there was still some kind of government in Britain.

Dr. Higham rounded off this part of the day school with a look at what the archaeological evidence showed. Though there was evidence for some continuity in a few sites like St. Albans and Wroxeter, the overall picture was one of decay. The burials within the walls of towns, such as Canterbury, shows that the system was falling apart. Decay had set in during the 3rd century AD but by the 5th was almost total. Despite reasonably large scale buildings at Wroxeter no artifacts have been left in the soil - no artifacts, no foundations and no grave goods (with Christianity the customs of leaving things with the corpse had ceased to be done). Surely, here we are moving into a Dark Age.

After a break and before lunch Dr. Higham looked at Gildas' work and explained the reasons for it being written. Basically, it was a letter to the Christian community warning them if they didn't change their ways they would reap the punishment of God. Gildas' idea of history was unlike ours because he saw everything as part of a divine intervention against the people of Britain. God used first the Romans, then the Picts and Scots and finally the Anglo-Saxons as his agents of punishment against the sinning Britons. Gildas made constant use of biblical quotations taking the part of a kind Old Testament prophet warning the people of their transgressions. He uses the various invasions, appeals and assistance from the Romans to build up tension. The invasions got worse and the calls for help became more desperate, until the final appeal to Aetius (Aegidius or Aetius?) which not having been answered was followed by the "supreme tyrant" inviting the Saxons to help and their subsequent rebellion.

Looking at the information in more detail Dr. Higham showed that Gildas' knowledge was somewhat limited and at best was based on oral tradition while at worst was his own creation. However, the employing of the Saxons is described in the correct terms used for such foederati, such as the supplies, monthly allowance and billets in private houses. Gildas makes use of classic material and when it comes to the rebellion of the Saxons he uses Virgil's description of the Fall of Troy to show the horror of defeat or quotes from the Bible to emphasise the punishment from God. Finally, Dr. Higham rounds the morning off with a mention of the defence of Britain by Ambrosius Aurelianus ("...who gave his name to a brand of creamed rice!") and the Battle of Badon, which the readers of Gildas' letter would be able to recognise being 43 years and one month ago and the year of the author's birth. They would have known the dates - unfortunately, we do not!

Following lunch Dr. Higham returned to look at the Continental sources particularly the Gallic Chronicles of 452 and 551. Both indicated that by 441 provinces in Britain had come under Anglo-Saxon control. The settlement of the Anglo-Saxons in East Anglia, Kent and the Upper Thames seems to show, and is born out by the archaeological evidence, Germanic dominance in two of Britain's 4 or 5 provinces - probably Britannia Prima and Maxima Caesariensis. However, Gildas' chronology indicates that the British appealed to Aetius who was "thrice consul" from 446 to 454. In fact the only events datable in Gildas, of interest to a study of this period, are the dates of Magnus Maximus - 383-388, the appeal to Aetius when

he was third time consul - 446-454 and the Battle of Badon which was 43 years + 1 month ago (from the time of writing). This poses problems - the Saxons were, according to the Gallic Chronicle, established before the Britons appealed to Aetius. Could it be when Gildas was writing he knew that the Britons appealed to Aetius and that Aetius had been three times consul. It doesn't have to mean that Aetius was actual "thrice consul" at the time, since it was unlikely that Gildas was actually copying from the original letter for help. This then could put the appeal anytime between 425 and 454 and could push back all the dates suggested by David Dumville (which at this time Dr. Higham was using as an example on overhead projection). If the Britons called for help in the 420s or 430s this would fit in with the employment of Saxons and the Gallic Chronicle's statement of the provinces coming under Saxon control in 441 AD. This could then, suggests Dr. Higham, put Gildas writing around the end of the 5th century and consequently, to my mind, Badon forty odd years previous to that - possibly 460s/70s - making it far more reasonable for Ambrosius Aurelianus playing a part in this campaign. (I spoke briefly to Dr. Higham after the lecture and he felt that Badon did not have the great significance normally given to it.)

Dr. Higham's penultimate question was from where was Gildas writing? - where was his homeground? He seemed to be lacking in knowledge when it came to his descriptions of the two walls (normally taken to be the Roman defences in the North), one built of turf and the other "using the normal method of construction" (whatever that was!). Could these be those enigmatic dykes believed to have been built in the Dark Ages rather than the Antonine and Hadrian's Walls? This and the way he depicted the Picts coming by sea rather than land may indicate that he wasn't writing in the North. He also mentions that the shrines of St. Alban and SS. Aaron and Julius are out of reach to the faithful - meaning they must be in Saxon territory or barred by Saxons. Then there is his list of 'tyrants' which are limited to the West as far north as Gwynedd - in fact indications are that Gildas' strong reaction to Constantine's crimes (Constantine was lord of Dumnonia - which is roughly equivalent to Devon and Cornwall) suggests he was talking about someone local. Does this mean that Gildas was living in the South-West of England? Here I feel I cannot agree fully with Dr. Higham's suggestions. If the shrine of SS. Aaron and Julius was at Caerleon, this being how Michael Winterbottom translates "Legionum urbis", it would seem far from impossible, or even difficult, for pilgrims to get from Cornwall, Devon or Somerset to Gwent, unless the shrine was not in Caerleon and "Legionum urbis" represented a different "City of Legions". (Bede actually links Chester with this name rather than Caerleon - though both seem have been unaffected by the Anglo-Saxons until the later part of the 6th century and would not have been beyond the means of pilgrims.)

Finally, Dr. Higham asks who was Gildas? His name was neither Roman or British - could the name Gildas be a pen-name to hide his real identity from the retribution of the five tyrants he so vehemently criticises? He ended with saying that it was Bede who gave legitimacy to Gildas' writings and that it would not be right to serve up Gildas' Ruin of Britain as history.

This was a fascinating lecture which I feel has given me a lot of food for thought, and maybe even a revision of some of my ideas about the Dark Ages. I would appreciate your opinions.

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