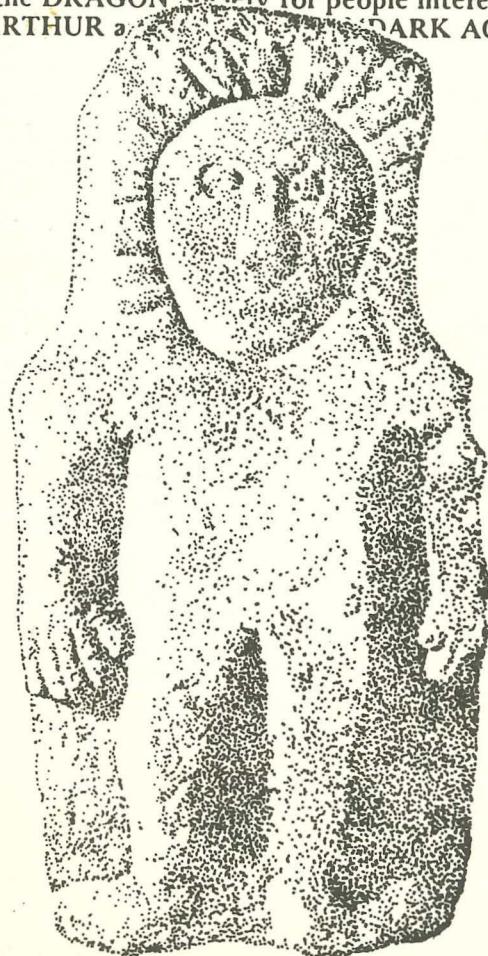


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# Dragon

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



Season's Greetings

Dear friends,

Welcome to the final issue of DRAGON for 1989 - I hope that you have had a good year and that 1990 will be even more interesting. This issue consists of two main articles: "The Last of the Romans" by Kurt Hunter-Mann and "Folk Memory and Geoffrey of Monmouth" by Reg Dand. Also included is a small piece on "Marwnad Cynddylan" with the poem reproduced in English and Welsh (I hope to have a new translation of this elegy in the near future), and the usual regular features - Reviews, Scrolls and Arthrophiles. Unfortunately, this issue is rather sparse on visual material - so please remember if you are doing an article for DRAGON either include illustrations or give suggestions. To add to this I, once again, must ask for more articles because I am running very low with enough material for probably 1½ more issues.

Over the last few years we have not had a DRAGONMOOT - so I suggest we try to get together this coming Spring (1990) in London. I hope to organise this meeting with the help of London area members. However, if you have any other suggestions for places to meet please let me know. It would really be nice to see as many members as possible. I also would like to suggest that members in the United States organise their own DRAGONMOOT.

Meanwhile, I hope you have a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year - Nadolig Llawen a Blwyddyn Newydd Da. Now please read on:

#### COVER ILLUSTRATION:

It must be remembered that not all the people during the Dark Ages were Christians or celebrated Christmas. However, the non-Christians also believed that this period, around the end of the year, was connected with a festival to bring back the sun.

The cover, therefore, depicts a "radiant" deity from Armagh, Northern Ireland, found at the Protestant Cathedral in 1840.

## Marwnad Cynddylan - The Elegy to Cynddylan

by

Charles W. Evans-Günther

*Due to a response to the last issue article by Nick Grant I am including this short piece on the above titled piece of poetry.*

The Elegy to Cynddylan has been discussed by a number of scholars but, unfortunately for many, only in Welsh. These include "Marwnad Cynddylan" in the Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies, 6 (1931-3) pp. 134-141 and "Canu Llywarch Hen", 1935, by Sir Ifor Williams (1881 - 1965) and an article in, "Bardos", 1982, by R. Geraint Gruffydd (Director of the Institute of Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies and one time Librarian of the National Library of Wales). The latter gives a modern Welsh version of the poem but only Joseph P. Clancy in "The Early Welsh Poetry", 1970, has attempted an English version. Personally I don't agree completely with his version but since I am unable to do justice to translating the Elegy, this is the version I have reproduced. Certainly it gives a basic idea of what the poem is about. However, like all translations it loses the rhythm of the piece - therefore I have also reproduced the Welsh version based on the National Library of Wales MS 4973B, copied from an earlier original by Dr. John Davies of Mallwyd. John Davies (c1567 - 1644) was one of the most prominent scholars of the late Renaissance, a collector and copyist of manuscripts.

You will see, in this Welsh version, that there is a strong rhyme to the poem, each stanza having its lines ending with the same letter or sound. This system seems to work well until the eighth stanza. Also the poem is not complete having part of the first stanza missing and the first line of the remaining incomplete. Sir Ifor Williams, from his studies, was convinced that this copy was derived from a genuine poem of the seventh century, comparing it to the Gododdin in style. If this is correct then this poem is without doubt of some interest. Nevertheless, the Elegy is full of problems with references to battles, names and places which cannot be substantiated by other documents. Having said that, this poem cannot be ignored and neither can the reference to Arthur. Was he an ancestor of Cynddylan? (whose dynasty seems to have ended with him) or was he related to the poet rather than the subject of the poem? Further studies need to be done on the Elegy and I hope to bring you further information in the future.

*(Comment on this poem would be gratefully welcomed.)*

## The Elegy to Cynddylan

Invincible lord's distress...

Rhiau and Rhirid and Rhiosedd,  
And kind Rhyygysfarch, fervent leader.  
I shall mourn till I enter my oaken grave  
Cynddylan slain at his power's height.

Height of sword-strife I considered it,  
Going to Menai, though no ford was mine.  
I love him who greets me from Cemais' land,  
King of Dogfeiling, Cadell's forceful heir.  
I shall mourn till I enter my quiet oak  
Cynddylan slain, loss that pierces deep.

Height of sword-strife, to consider  
Going to Menai, though no swim was mine.  
I love him who greets me from Aberffraw,  
King of Dogfeiling, Cadell's renowned heir.  
I shall mourn till I enter my silent oak  
Cynddylan slain, and his warriors.

Height of sword-strife, pouring forth of wine,  
I am left with smile lost, aged by longing.  
I lost when he fought for Pennawg's land  
A valiant man, savage, sparing none.  
He launched the assault past Tren, proud land.  
I shall mourn till I enter the steadfast earth  
Cynddylan slain, famed as Caradawg.

Height of sword-strife, how it has been undone,  
What Cynddylan won, lord of warfare!  
Seven hundred heroes behind him,  
When the lad sought peril, how keen he was!  
No bridal took place, he died unwed.  
Why the changed parish, the dark burial?  
I shall mourn till I enter the circling staves  
Cynddylan slain, famed for majesty.

Height of sword-strife, how I keep high custom,  
Each fish and beast will be the fairest!  
In violence I lost, men most valiant,  
Rhiau and Rhirid and Rhiadaf  
And kind Rhyygysfarch, lord of all borders.  
They would drive their spoils from Taff's meadows;  
Captives would wail; cattle lowed, bellowed.  
I shall mourn till I enter the field's surface  
Cynddylan slain, each border's renown.

Height of sword-strife, do you see this?  
My heart is burning like a firebrand.  
I praised their men's and their women's riches:  
They could not deny me;  
Brothers fed me, better it was when they lived,  
Sturdy Arthur's cubs, steadfast stronghold.  
At Caer Lwytcoed they were sated:  
There was blood-stained crows, fresh plundering.

They pierced shield with spike, Cynddrwynyn's sons.  
I shall mourn till I enter earth's bed  
Cynddylan slain, lord of high renown.

Height of sword-strife, great the plunder  
At Caer Lwytcoed, Morfael captured it,  
Fifteen hundred cattle, and five bondsmen,  
Fourscore stallions, and noble trappings.  
Not a single bishop in four regions  
Has he spared, nor book-holding monks.  
One felled in their fight by a bright prince  
Came not from the strife, brother to sister.  
They came back with their wounds from battle.  
I shall mourn till I enter travail's acre  
Cynddylan slain, praised by all patrons.

Height of sword-strife, how delightful it was  
For me, when I came to Pwll and Alun!  
Fresh rushes beneath my feet till bed-time,  
Fresh pillows beneath my buttocks.  
And though I went there, to my own land,  
Not one friend remained; birds forbid them.  
And though God bring me not to doomsday's mount,  
He committed no sin equal to mine.

## Marwnad Cynddylan

Dyhedd deon diechir by.....(eledd)  
Rhiau a Rhirid a Rhiosedd  
a Rhyygysfarch lary lyw eirassed  
ef cvn iw mi wylf im derwin fedd  
o leas Cynddylan yn ei fanred

Manred gymined a feddylias  
myned i Fenai cyn nim bai fais  
carasi am eneirch o dir Kemais  
gwlering dogfeiling Cadelling traiss  
Ef cynnif mi wylf im derw llednais  
o leas Cynddylan coled a nofais

Manred gymined ei feddyliaw  
myned i Fenai cyn nim bai naw  
carasi ameneirch o Aberffraw  
gwlering dogfeiling Cadelling fraw.  
Ef cynnif mi wylf im dewin taw  
o leas Cynddylan a'i luyddaw.

Manred gymined gwin waretawg  
wylf coddedig wen hen hiraethawg  
Collais pan amnith alaf penawg  
gwr dewr diachor diarbedawg.  
cyrchau drais tra thren tir trahawg  
ef cynnif mi wylf yn naear foddawg  
o leas Cynddylan clod Ceiriadawg.

Manred gymined mor fu dafawd  
a gafas Cynddylan cynrhan cyffrawd  
Saith gant rhiallu ni yspeidiawd  
pan fynwys mab pyd mor fu parawd  
hy darfu yn neithawr ni bu priaws  
gan dduw py amgen plwyf py du daearawd  
ef cynnif mi wylf in erwith wawd  
o leas Cynddylan clod addwyndawd.

Manred gymined mor wylf gnodaw  
pob pysg a millyn yd fydd teccaw  
i drais a gollais gwir echassaw  
Rhiau a Rhirid a Rhiadaw  
a rhyygysfarch lary lu pob eithaw  
Dyrrynt eu preiddau a dolau taw  
caith cwynnynt briwynt grydynt alaw  
ef cynnif mi wylf in erv penylaw  
o leas Cynddylan clod pob eithaw.

Manred gymined a weli di hyn  
yd lysg fy nghalon fal ettewyn  
hoffais mewredd eu gwyr ai gwragedd  
ni ellynt fy nwyn brodir am buiad gwell ban vythin  
canawon artir wras dinas degyn  
rhag Caer Luydd coedd neus digonsyn  
crau y dan frain a chrai gychwyn  
briwynt calch at gwyn feibion Cyndrwyyn  
ef cynnif mi wylf yn nhir gwelyddyn

o leas Cynddylan clodlawn vnbyn.

Manred gymined mawr ysgafael  
y rhag Caerluydd coed neus dug moriael  
pymtheccaant muhyn a phum gwreal  
pedwar vgainmeirch a seirch cyhawael  
pen esgob hunop ym mhedeiraol  
nis noddies myneich llyfr afael  
a gwyddws yn eu creulan o gynhan claeir  
ni ddiengis o ffossawf brawd ar y chwaer  
diengynt ai herchyll trewyllyn tae  
ef cynnif mi wylf in erv trawael  
o leas Cynddylan clodrydd pob hael

Manred gyminedd moroedd ercun  
gan fy myrd pan athreiddwn pwall ac Alun  
irwrnn y dan fy nhraed hyd bryd cyntun  
plwde y danaf hyd ymhen fynghlun  
a chyn ethniwe yno im bro fy hun  
nid oes yn car neud adar iw warafun  
a chyn i m dygger i dduw ir digfryn  
ni ddigones neb o bechawd cyhawal imi hun.

# THE LAST OF THE ROMANS

by  
Kurt Hunter Mann

If the period of British history spanning the years from AD 400 to 700 deserves its depiction as a Dark Age, it is because of the lack of historical narratives or even individual references to events. In this period, which sees Roman Britain become Saxon England, precise dates for events are rare, and even the most prominent personalities only appear as insubstantial, shadowy figures. Of all the characters that graced the political stage in the fifth and sixth centuries, two have enjoyed a measure of reknown. One, Vortigern, was allegedly responsible for allowing the Saxons to enter Britain; the other, Arthur, has assumed legendary proportions over the centuries, due less to his contribution to history and more to how he has been percieved by successive ages since his lifetime. Yet there is a third person worthy of mention. He has been largely ignored by history - a strange omission, for his life is one of the best-documented of the period. His name is Ambrosius Aurelianus.

The most illuminating reference to Ambrosius is by the sixth-century monk Gildas, in his 'Ruin of Britain' (25):

'(Ambrosius was) a gentleman who, perhaps alone of the Romans, had survived the shock of this notable storm: certainly his parents, who had the purple, were slain in it. His descendants in our day have become greatly inferior to their grandfather's excellance.'

Gildas' 'Ruin of Britain' was essentially a diatribe against a number of rulers and members of the clergy of his time. His history of Britain was included mainly to preface and support his criticisms, and consequently accuracy and clarity suffered at the hands of his rhetoric. However, Gildas is more re-

liable as a source for the decades immediately preceding his own lifetime, when the oral history he was using was still relatively fresh.

According to Gildas, Ambrosius Aurelianus' family appear to have been important members of Romano-British society, perhaps even controlling part or all of the country. This is supported by a note in the 'British History and Welsh Annals' of Nennius, which was an early ninth-century compilation of various sources (31):

'Vortigern ruled in Britain, and during his rule in Britain, he was under pressure, from fear of the Picts and Irish, and of a Roman invasion, and not least, from dread of Ambrosius.'

Also in Nennius (66) is the following chronological computation:

'From the reign of Vortigern to the quarrel between Vitalinus and Ambrosius are twelve years, that is Guollopum, the battle of Guoloph.'

Vortigern probably ruled in Britain from 425 to c.465. The 'Ambrosius' in this case the father of Ambrosius Aurelianus. He was a contemporary of Vortigern, and therefore prominent on the British political scene around the second quarter of the fifth century. The 'notable storm' that Gildas said Ambrosius Aurelianus (but not his parents) managed to survive, was the Saxon revolt in the middle of the fifth century. The trouble began in the 440s, and culminated in defeat severe enough to send many Britons fleeing to Brittany c.460. Gildas records excerpts from a letter allegedly sent to the commanding general in Gaul asking for help - the 'Groans of the Britons'. This was addressed to either Aetius, commander in Gaul and 'thrice consul' as the letter states, in 446-454, or to Aegidius, commander during the years 457-462. As Ambrosius' father died during the revolt, his death must have occurred sometime between c.440 and c.460, and probably towards the end of this period. The life of Ambrosius 'Senior' can therefore be dated to the years c.410-c.455. Meanwhile, Gildas specifically states that Ambrosius was grandfather of some of Gildas' contemporaries; as the 'Ruin of Britain' was written sometime dur-

ing the second quarter of the sixth century, the rule of Ambrosius Aurelianus' grandchildren can be placed in this period. This suggests a genealogical sequence consisting of Ambrosius 'Senior' (c.410-c.455), Ambrosius Aurelianus (c.445-c.500), unnamed children (c.475-c.530) and so the grandchildren (c.505-c.560). Consequently, the floruit of Ambrosius Aurelianus can be dated to the last quarter of the fifth century.

There are further insights into the life and times of Ambrosius Aurelianus to hand. In Nennius (40-42) is the 'Tale of Emrys', wherein Vortigern tries to build a fortress in Wales and eventually gives it to Ambrosius. It is no doubt intended as an explanation of the name of the fort, Dinas Emrys (Emrys being a Welsh derivation of Ambrosius). Much of the story can be regarded as fiction or propaganda (particularly Ambrosius' alleged immaculate conception!); but one wonders on what basis Vortigern, approaching the end of his life, was thrown together with a youthful Ambrosius. Like any story of fiction intended to be taken as fact, perhaps the 'Tale of Emrys' had its plausibility cultivated with a bedding of facts - the relative ages of Vortigern and Ambrosius being one of them. The 'Tale of Emrys' ends in the following manner:

'Then the king asked the lad, "What is your name?" He replied "I am called Ambrosius", that is, he was shown to be Emrys the overlord. The king asked "What family do you come from?" and he answered "My father is one of the consuls of the Roman people". So the king gave him the fortress, with all the kingdoms of the western part of Britain. This text supports Gildas' assertion that Ambrosius had a father of very high rank. In addition, it assigns Ambrosius a title, Guletic, which can be variously translated as overlord or prince, perhaps implying a role different to that of a king. Gildas refers to Ambrosius as duce, which was the title of the battle commander in later Roman times; and Nennius (48) even describes him as 'the great king among all the kings of the British nation'. Finally, the 'Tale of Emrys' ends with Vortigern giving

Ambrosius all the kingdom of the western part of Britain, an action which perhaps would have been plausible to an audience only if Ambrosius really had ruled western Britain. In fact, also in Nennius (48) is the statement that one of Vortigern's sons, Pascent 'ruled in the two countries called Builth and Gwrtheyrnion after his father's death, by the permission of Ambrosius.' The implication is that Ambrosius Aurelianus succeeded Vortigern as ruler of Britain, or at least that part of it not under Germanic domination; and therefore Ambrosius reigned sometime after c.465, a date not incompatible with the suggested date of c.445 for Ambrosius' birth.

According to Gildas, following the catastrophic defeat of the British, but even then only 'after a time' (25.2), Ambrosius Aurelianus emerges as a focus of a Romano-British revival (25.2-26.1):

'Under him our people regained their strength, and challenged the victors to battle. The Lord assented, and the battle went their way. From then on victory went now to our countrymen, now to their enemies; so that in this people the Lord could make trial (as he tends to) of the latter-day Israel to see whether it loves him or not. This lasted right up to the year of the seige of Badon hill, pretty well the last defeat of the villains, and certainly not the least.'

If the British defeat occurred in the 450s, perhaps as late as c.460, 'after a time' suggests a date of c.470 for the beginning of the recovery under Ambrosius. Moreover, Gildas appears to regard the campaign of Ambrosius as continuing until the 'seige of Badon hill.' Badon was a significant success for the British; it halted Germanic (better known as Saxon) expansion into western Britain - which at that time primarily came from the south-east and the Thames valley - for over half a century. When expansion did resume, the main thrust came from the south, so setting in motion the rise of the kingdom of Wessex, and subsequently the birth of England.

The battle of Badon has been the subject of much debate, but the victory is usually credited to Arthur. The date of the battle is also a con-

tentious issue; it is dated to 516 in Nennius' 'Welsh Annals', but this may well be inaccurate, since the annals were simply lists of events. There is no inherent chronological framework or historical narrative to show that these events are even in the right order. Moreover, Gildas provides a relative date for Badon (26.2):

'External wars may have stopped, but not civil ones. For the remembrance of so desperate a blow to the island and of such unlooked for recovery stuck in the minds of those who witnessed both wonders. That was why kings, public and private persons, priests and churchmen, kept to their own stations. But they died; and an age succeeded them that is ignorant of that storm and has experience only of the calm of the present.'

At least a generation has passed from Badon to the time of Gildas' writing. As Gildas was writing around the second quarter of the sixth century, this gives a date range of about twenty five years either side of the year 500 for Badon. But Gildas goes further:

'That was the years of my birth; as I know, one month of the forty fourth year since then as already passed.'

This suggests a narrower date range of c.485-c.505 for the battle of Badon; earlier than the date in the 'Welsh Annals', and within the proposed lifespan of Ambrosius Aurelianus. Certainly, Gildas' reference to Ambrosius (above) suggests that Badon was the culmination of Ambrosius' campaign.

Putting Ambrosius Aurelianus into his historical context may have wider repercussions. The Roman period in Britain is traditionally considered to have ended in 410, but this is only because in that year the western emperor, Honorius may have allowed the British cities to look after their own defence. Although this would imply that Roman Imperial rule effectively ended, it does not necessarily mean that the society and economy of Roman Britain was significantly altered; indeed, there is little reason to believe that Roman Britain was seriously disrupted before the Saxon troubles. Admittedly, the coinage system did collapse in Britain in the

early fifth century; but this occurred throughout much of the Western Empire, where there is generally some degree of socio-economic continuity evident. It is not yet known when the Romano-British pottery industries ceased manufacturing recognisably Roman pottery in quantity; but the major Oxford industry, for instance, was still in production in the early fifth century, and it is possible that pottery production continued until the Saxon revolt. The importation of pottery from the Mediterranean and Gaul into Western Britain well into the sixth century indicates that the economy could still maintain such trading patterns, and that there was still a demand for Roman style pottery at that time.

Assessment of the survival of the towns is difficult, for the later Romans towns differed greatly from their original forms. Romano-British towns did not become the foci of society and economy that they did elsewhere in the empire. Even as central government support for urban development was decreasing in the second century A.D., the role of towns as trade centres was being weakened by the increasing vigour of the rural economy. In Later Roman Britain, towns probably acted primarily as administrative centres. The presence of layers of 'dark earth' in many Roman towns was once regarded as evidence of dereliction at the end of the Roman period; but it is now often interpreted as the product of agricultural activity occurring as early as the second century A.D. Presumably, open spaces resulting from urban 'contraction' were used to generate a local food supply for the town dwellers. Urban defensive circuits, generally built some time after the establishment of the town, tend to enclose areas smaller than those of the original settlements. Yet, in spite of this urban decline, private and public building continued throughout the Roman period. The best example of this phenomenon at a very late stage comes from Wroxeter in Shropshire, where a substantial building - constructed on classic lines, but in timber - remained in use well into the fifth century; indeed, if its construction in timber is the product of it being

built after the ability to built in masonry had been lost (and that could not have occurred very quickly), this may well prove to be a fifth century building that remained in use perhaps into the sixth century. Wroxeter is not such an unusual case, either; in general, town life in Later Roman Britain continued at its reduced, functional level well into the fifth century, and in those areas in the west which were not directly affected by the Saxon revolts, perhaps even longer.

There is a certain amount of evidence for continuity of Romano-British society, too. During the Saxon troubles 'kings, public and private persons, priests and churchmen kept to their own stations' according to Gildas (26.2-3), suggesting the survival of at least some political, administrative and ecclesiastical frameworks and processes. Gildas also speaks of 'the calm of the present' (26.3). As with the archaeological evidence, social and cultural change in Later Roman Britain may well be identified (and ought to be expected in the circumstances); but there is no discernible break prior to the Saxon troubles - and in the western half of the country perhaps, no break until the renewed Saxon expansion in the later sixth century. The Ambrosian dynasty reflects this continuity. Ambrosius 'Senior' may have seen a Britain still regarded as part of the Roman Empire; Ambrosius Aurelian is described by Gildas as a 'Roman', and his successors still held power until at least the middle of the sixth century. The fabric of Romano-British society and economy had to change under the pressure of political upheaval and the influx of Germanic immigrants, but it may prove very difficult to identify specific major changes, especially a particular point that can be recognised as the end of Roman Britain.

If Ambrosius Aurelian was the victor of Badon, and the focus of a Romano-British revival that arguably lasted a century or more, his obscurity today in favour of Arthur demands explanation. Gildas, writing relatively soon after the events that he describes, makes no reference to Arthur in his account of the Saxon troubles. Yet in Nennius (56)

it is Arthur who appears as the leader of the kings of the British in twelve battles, the last of which is Badon Hill. Also, Arthur is noted in the Welsh Annals under the year 516 at:

'The battle of Badon, in which Arthur carried the cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ for three days and three nights on his shoulders and the Britons were victors.'

Arthur is also mentioned under the year 537 at:

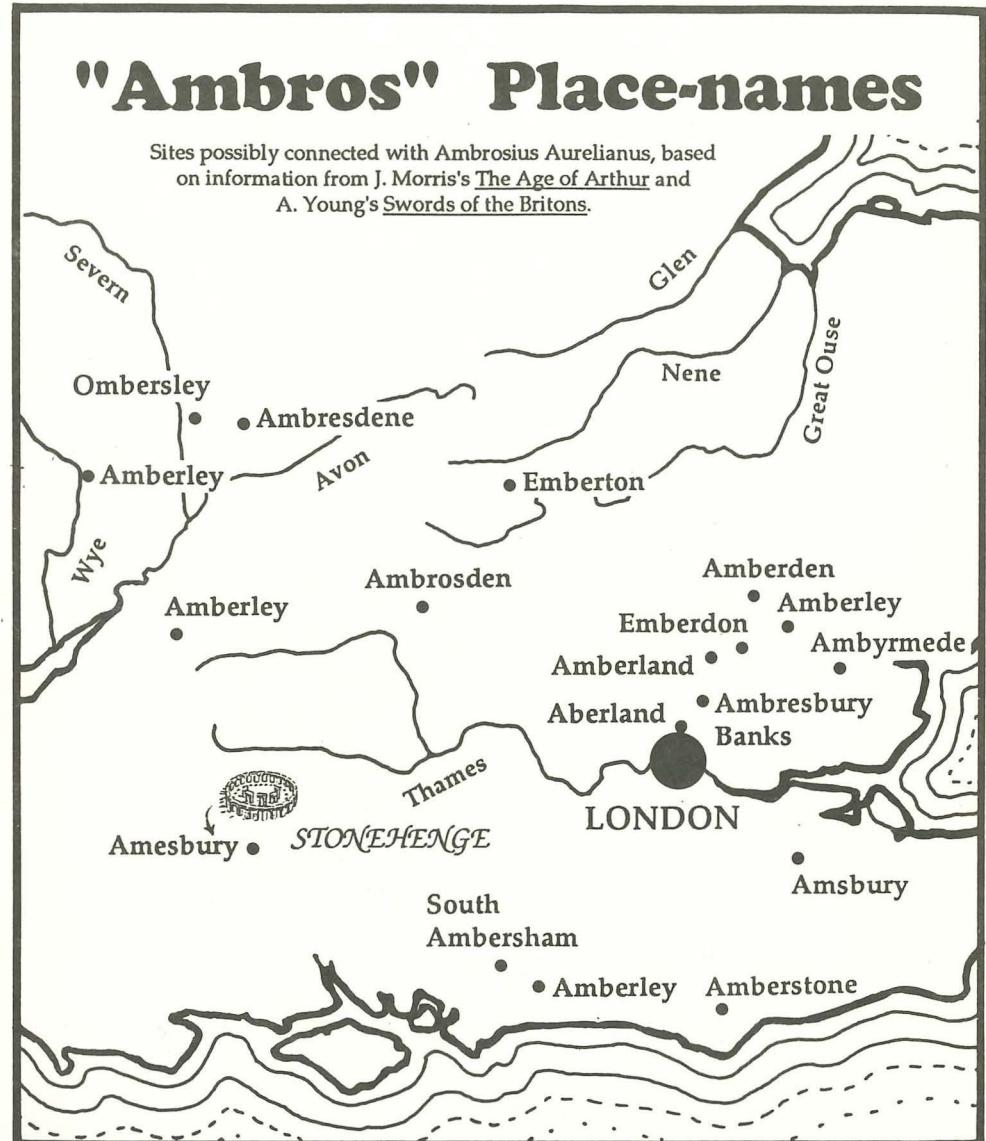
'The battle of Camlann, in which Arthur and Medraut fell.'

Arthur is mentioned in Nennius' 'Wonders of Britain', where he is twice referred to as 'the warrior' in examples of wonders - the stone that returns if removed, and the grave with fluctuating dimensions - that show how Arthur was attracting the stuff of legend even at that early stage. It should be remembered that Nennius' compilation had a strong northern British bias. Of the battles fought by Arthur listed in Nennius, only Badon can be confidently located in southern Britain; yet all of the other battles that can be located are in northern Britain, and would be in keeping with campaigns of a leader of early Rheged (basically, present-day Cumbria). It is quite possible that Badon was inserted into an originally parochial, northern battle list to enhance the status of a local native British hero. The reliability of Gildas has been questioned because of his terrible difficulty in making sense of events that occurred more than a century before he was writing; this is a justifiable caution, but one that should be applied even more stringently to Nennius, compiled over three hundred years after the fact. Barely another three hundred years after Nennius, Arthur's increasing entanglement in myth, folk-lore and historical romance was apitomised by Geoffrey of Monmouth's 'History of the Kings of Britain'. Chronologically, Nennius stands midway between history and legend.

Geoffrey of Monmouth's uncertain control of his sources in 'The Histroy of the Kings of Britain' is evident when Aurelius Ambrosius meets Ambrosius Merlin - two versions of the same person. Aurelius Ambrosius is probably a combination of Ambrosius

Aurelian and his father; Ambrosius Merlin is a fascinating character, a prophet who also performs many amazing feats, not the least being the construction of Stonehenge! Ambrosius is identified with Merlin by Geoffrey of Monmouth in his version of the Nennius 'Tale of Emrys' (vi.19):

'Merlin, who was also called Ambrosius.'



In Geoffrey of Monmouth's account of the construction of Stonehenge (viii.10-12), Ambrosius Merlin the prophet undertakes the work for Aurelius Ambrosius the king. The account attempts to explain Stonehenge as the burial site of a group of British elders massacred at a parley by the Saxons. However, the name given to the stone circles is 'Mount Ambrius', which is also the location of 'a monastery of three hundred brethren' (viii.9). Less than two miles from Stonehenge is Amesbury, a town whose name is probably derived from the Old English equivalent of 'the fort of Ambrosius' and the site of an abbey at least as early as 979. Geoffrey of Monmouth may have been aware of a tradition linking Ambrosius Aurelian with Stonehenge and Amesbury Abbey. Such a tradition would not be surprising if Ambrosius was commemorated in the place name Amesbury. Merlin, on the other hand, is essentially northern British. He is mentioned in the Welsh Annals in Nennius under the year 573:

'The battle of Arfderydd between the sons of Eliffer and Gwendolau son of Ceidio; in which battle Gwendolau fell; Merlin went mad.'

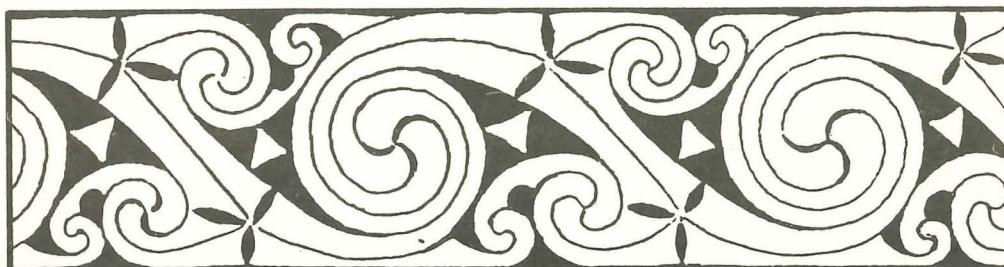
Arfderydd is commonly identified as Arthuret, in Cumbria. Moreover, Merlin is probably a derivation of Myrddin, a late sixth century British poet. This all points to the progressive debasement of Ambrosius' memory as the northern British oral traditions developed. As Arthur assumed the central, heroic role during the seventh and eighth centuries at the expense of Ambrosius, the latter was transformed into a peripheral magus/prophet. Perhaps this implies that although Ambrosius' role as leader was forgotten, his reputation as some kind of miracle worker lived on. Later, Ambrosius became so closely associated with Merlin that Geoffrey of Monmouth was able to present the Ambrosius-Merlin conflation alongside the original Ambrosius.

During the Middle Ages, the Arthurian cycles of chivalry, romance and tragedy served to consolidate Arthur's prominent position in the Matter of Britain, a position he holds to this day. Yet, originally Ambrosius arguably had the better

claim to fame. Indeed, Ambrosius Aurelianus' exploits parallel those of Alfred the Great; basically, both led revivals against an all-conquering enemy, the former the British against the Saxons, the latter the English against the Vikings. The crucial difference between the two is that posterity did not treat Ambrosius as kindly as it did Alfred. Ambrosius' successors did not rule long enough for an Ambrosian tradition to develop. The Romanised south, Ambrosius' domain, was lost to Saxon expansion in the sixth century. What British traditions did survive were those of the less Romanised west and north; local, native British traditions. Culturally and geographically, Ambrosius had no place in them. It was an omission that was never to be rectified.

Further reading:

For history and general setting, see John Morris *The Age of Arthur* (Phillimore, 1977); Leslie Alcock *Arthur's Britain* (Pelican, 1973 and reprints). For the sources, see John Morris (trans.) *Nennius. British History and Welsh Annals* (Phillimore, 1980); Michael Winterbottom (trans.) *Gildas. The Ruin of Britain and other works* (Phillimore, 1978). Lewis Thorpe (trans.) *Geoffrey of Monmouth. The History of the Kings of Britain* (Penguin, 1966 and reprints). For the archaeological perspective, see Chris Arnold *Roman Britain to Saxon England* (Croom Helm, 1984); Richard Reece *Town and Country: The End of Roman Britain* *World Archaeology* 12 (1980), pp.77-92; Ken Rutherford-Davis *The Chiltern Region 400-700* (Phillimore, 1982).



# Folk Memory and Geoffrey of Monmouth

by  
Reg Dand

Geoffrey of Monmouth who lived in the first part of the 12th century comes between Nennius and Mallory as a source of the Arthurian "evidence". He was therefore some six centuries after such events he sought to describe in his Latin "History of the Kings of Britain". He was Welsh or perhaps partly Breton and therefore can be expected to have had some knowledge of his national history, written or oral, especially as one of rather more than ordinary education. He was a cleric and therefore might have been expected to pay more than the average regard for the truth as he saw it, but this cannot be relied upon in the Middle Ages. Finally as an author he may well have decorated whatever he found from his sources. It has been described as "one of the great books of the Middle Ages", but as an aid to the study of Arthur has been the subject of much criticism.

To the modern eye much of it seems somewhat nonsensical. Beginning after the fall of Troy, about 1200 BC, a prince by the name of Aeneas so it was claimed, had fled to Italy with a party of refugees, and the great grandson of Aeneas later led a group to the island of Albion. The leader known as Brutus settled in the island after overcoming the inhabitants, the islanders being henceforth called Britons and the island Britain after their leader. A capital city was founded on the Thames, and named New Troy which we now know as London. Geoffrey seems to have had in his mind the kind of regalian list so beloved of early dynasties, but his seventy five kings it is claimed were largely the product of his own imagination. When therefore one part of evidence is found to be unsafe, how much of the rest can be relied on? That has weakened Geoffrey as a witness so that much

of his History is regarded as worthless. Perhaps however he can be rehabilitated a little as time goes on, as has happened to that rather bad tempered monk Gildas!

It is intended to concentrate upon that first event in the History - the link with Italy.

Two years ago a holiday in the Algarve drew attention to many old, often Celtic names, there and in parts of Spain, so a kind of reconnaissance seemed indicated, at the heart of which was a long article in the *Enciclopedia Linguistica Hispanica* by a German scholar Johannes Hubschmid; both German and Italian scholars have paid a great deal of attention to the Place Names of Spain. Old Spain, which until much later also included the Portugal we know today, was known as the Iberian peninsular and its people as Celtiberians. As the name suggests Celts formed a large part of its peoples, the remainder being many settlements from both shores, north and south of the Mediterranean, and across the Pyrenees. Until the Romans came about 250 BC there were many trading posts of Greeks, Phoenicians and others frequently near the coasts. Some of these places can still be recognised (Cadiz, Ampurias) and those intrepid sailors who, greatly daring, sailed into the Atlantic reached these islands, Ireland, Cornwall and the South; they were trading for metals such as tin, silver and gold. There is no doubt that there was communication from Iberia to these islands and legends in Ireland and at Glastonbury, remember it, however distorted.

Surprisingly Hubschmid wrote of a number of names beginning with Brit- in NE Spain, qualifying this however with the risk that such names were perhaps connected to another verbal base in local languages. Britannia (from an earlier Pritannoi of the Greeks) was a Roman name for these islands, a geographical name rather than a political one at first, because the people were tribal rather than unified, being Brigantes, Silures and so on. Hubschmid's Brit-names however were dated from the 8th century onwards so that it is not impossible they were named from refugees who had left Britain as a result of the Germanic invasions and subsequent troubles. That after all was how Britanny came to be in the place of Armorica. A short Latin reference to the

"site of a church among the Brittones" might suggest that the refugees were from the British Church under pressure after the arrival of Augustine in Canterbury AD 597, but how much after cannot be guessed.

Even assuming that the names in Brit- were later rather than earlier does not reduce the interest in Hubschmid's comment that Britta was the old name for Gallia Cis-Alpina, that is to say the "Gauls on this side of the Alps"...i.e. south of the Alps. The Celts had their name from the Greek Keltoi, but to the Romans they were Gallia, from which we can trace the Galatians to whom St. Paul wrote, Galatia/Galacia and Gauls across Europe in various spellings. So the Brit- prefix leads back to the Celts who dwelt in northern Italy in what we know as Lombardy, near Milan and Mantua, the birthplace of Virgil whose Aeneid brings once again the name Aeneas into the picture, though Rome was in legend founded by the Greeks returning from the Trojan Wars. There was too another influence, the Etruscans, a remarkable people skilled in building and engineering as well as the arts. They were however cruel, superstitious and very much concerned with death. It is far from certain whence they had come but their original home may have been Asia Minor, and they were a sea-faring race. The finds at La Tene show that the Celts were no strangers to these people, and Etruscan influences are clear, including fine metalwork and chariots.

There is no doubt much more to be gleaned from a more careful and extensive look at this relationship, but the point for this purpose is that Geoffrey of Monmouth's apparent farrago of nonsense may have been no more than a deeply buried Folk Memory from Welsh records, mixed into the kind of poetic amalgam of legend and myth of the Aeneid and of Homer. The latter is these days being recognised as having some kind of historical base.

Folk Memory can be extremely ancient, and should not be completely ignored, for at the heart there may well be a truth or historical fact. In a parish in N. Oxfordshire in the 18th century there was a Field Name "Castle Ground" which the village had confused with the unfortunate brush with the Danes in the 10th century. The castle however was a bi-vallate "hill fort" with fragments of flint which

showed its age to have been well before the arrival of the Romans. It is now little more than a sandy image on a deeply ploughed field, but the memory of its older existence remained ingrained in village history.

If therefore we can accept that what Geoffrey wrote of the Italian origin was true, can he be rehabilitated to some of the other? It is suggested that this is doubtless possible if only it were also possible to separate the fact/legend/myth mixture which he may have encountered in the first place and which he may have either altered or improved himself. It is not suggested of course that all the settlement in Britain was through Iberia, though Tacitus early in the first century thought that the swarthy skins and curly hair of the Silures (who were in South Wales, on the north shore of the Bristol Channel) suggested descent from Iberians. The most likely, and probably the most used route for the "Celtic waves" was across the Channel at its narrowest point ... into Kent, where there is evidence to suggest that this was so. Nevertheless this is a fascinating trail, which can be subjected to further examination because it is not at all clear whether some at least of the "British" were in fact named from the old Pritannia/Brittannia name, Old Welsh Priten = Old Irish Cruithne = "Picts" those mysterious people so named from their habit of tattooing themselves about whom so little is known. Even today the modern Welsh names appear to be: Brithwyr = Picts; and for the other islanders the Scots Ysgotaaid (which looks merely a variation on English "Scot") or Albanwyr (which again looks like a variation upon the old name for the island Albion). Geoffrey however recorded that Britain was harassed by the fierce barbarians from Scotland, that is to say the Picts, so in this case the Picts/British were separate peoples. Another mystery, but too complicated to try and solve in this space!



## Arthrophiles

This issue's "Arthrophiles" features Keith Pugh from the West Midlands and Arthur Miller from Peapack, New Jersey, U.S.A.

### ARTHUR W. MILLER

My earliest memories of the stories of King Arthur began when I was nine or ten years old. I recall thinking that while my brothers bore the names of George and Louis, those Kings were not as great as the one whose name I had been given. Good thing they were not Alexander nor William (my middle name) or had I spoken aloud a fight would have started for sure. Now, thirty-two years later, my interest in the Matter of Britain and modern retellings is keener than ever.

My current fascination began in 1987 when I found some issues of *Avalon to Camelot*, followed a while later by a visit to the Rivendell Bookshop two months before it closed in January, 1988. There I bought several books, including *The Arthurian Encyclopedia* edited by Norris J. Lacy. My copy is underlined in red pen for further reading or exploration. And what a marvellous quest it has been this past year and will be to come. One last observation. Perhaps we respond to what is good and noble in King Arthur and his knights (and ladies) because they reflect our own desire to be so.

### KEITH D. PUGH

I am a thirty-eight year old civil servant living in Wednesfield (=Woden's Field) in the West Midlands. My interest in Arthur was kindled in junior school when the headmaster used to read extracts from Tennyson(:). It continued to smoulder through-

out school days but really caught fire when I purchased and read "The Quest for Arthur's Britain" by Geoffrey Ashe in 1969. Visits to Tintagel and South Cadbury soon followed with days out at Glastonbury as well. My Arthurian library soon grew and now numbers 130 tomes.

I would love to spend more time and money on the study of Arthur and his times but I am married (to Ravena) with two young children (Gareth 4 and Helen 1), so there's little to spare of either! I also have numerous other interests to try and fit in, including:- fantasy and science fiction, astronomy, astronautics (I'm a fellow of the British Interplanetary Society), geology (which I studied at University), strange phenomena, ley lines, 'The Avengers' TV programme, collecting old Rupert Annuals, local history, tracing my ancestors, formula 1 motor racing (watching only) and attempting to learn Welsh!

## REVIEW

Unfortunately only a few reviews for this issue! The first narrowly missed the last issue when it arrived a couple of days after I had finished putting together DRAGON 3.4/5.

LEGENDARY BRITAIN An Illustrated Journey  
Bob Stewart and John Matthews, Blandford Press, 1989  
£14.95.

Here is another book from the prolific Bob and John. This volume is very similar to their previous work "The Warriors of Arthur" (which has just come out in paperback). It consists of 192 pages, 37 colour photographs, 12 colour plates, 49 line illustrations and maps, and is divided into 10 chapters separated by 12 stories specially written by the authors. The subjects covered include not only aspects of the Matter of Britain but also Robin Hood (another of my own personal interests), Wayland's

Smithy, Thomas the Rhymer, Iona and the Orkneys. Of the chapters four are connected with Arthurian subjects: Tristan and Isolt, Caerleon, Merlin and Avalon. Much of what this book contains is quite well known but the parts on Wayland's Smith and Aquae Sulis are of interest. This book brings together fact and fantasy.

One of the things I particularly don't like are the coloured illustrations by Miranda Gray - I find them rather wooden and not too well composed. This is in great contrast to the photographs by Tim Cann, which are of a very good standard, and the illustrations in "The Warriors of Arthur". Another criticism may be that some of the information is a little dated. Having said that the book itself is well designed overall and is pleasing to read. The Robin Hood section leaves a lot to be desired but how much can you put in a chapter.

For those with a wider interest in the Matter of Britain and the legendary history of the country, this is worth getting.

(By the way, the paperback of "The Warriors of Arthur" is now on sale in all good book shops at £8.95.)

PENDRAGON Vol. XIX / 4 Autumn 1989

Once again Eddie Tooke and team have worked hard to produce another interesting issue - so PENDRAGON is still going strong.

This issue includes articles on Camlan and Mordred. Of particular interest is "Mordred the Terrible" by Sid Birchby and "Camlan - Where Was It Fought?" by Ivor Snook. (Both Modred and Camlan are fascinating subjects - take for instance the early Welsh poetry that seems to show that Mordred was a paragon of the heroic warrior. And certainly the location of Camlan is well worth discussing. These subjects have been on my mind for some time - so I wish Eddie lots of luck with this two part theme.) There is also a poem on Camlan, which attempts to be like that of the Cynfeirdd (Early Welsh poets). Unfortunately, it doesn't quite come off, using a style not earlier than the 9th century and references, such as Cymru, unknown to the early period.

Together with the above is an article on Stonehenge, book reviews, readers' letters, plus the aims, projects and information about PENDRAGON.

With the main theme being the Jester or Fool at King Arthur's Court, Sarah Gordon has produced the third newsletter for the somewhat younger Arthrophiles. It consists of ten pages (A4) with articles including: The Court Jester by Sarah, King Arthur - Fact or Fantasy by David Covington, plus Dear Merlin, a review of Mark Twain's A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court and a word search.

David Covington also makes a suggestion about the possible purchasing of Cadbury Hill...!?!?



Our first letter in this issue is from Andrew Smith, of Oxford, and concerns Steve Pollington's enquiry about the Compendium of Memorialia Angliae by George Meriton.

"As regards George Meriton, I may be of some assistance, although I cannot instantly identify the book. It is unlikely that the book was written during the reign of Charles I, since Meriton was only fifteen when Charles was beheaded. However, Meriton's Anglorum Gesta, first published in 1675, commenced with Brutus, but was carried down only as far as the end of Charles' reign. Can Merlin Hickman's book be a copy of this lacking its outer leaves? (The second ed., 1678, was brought right up to that date by another hand, and so seems a less likely candidate.) I haven't seen a copy of the Anglorum Gesta, so I don't know whether it has a running head or half-title that would account for the title he gives it. That he doesn't give a precise date of publication seems to suggest the loss of the title page.

"The variant spellings seem to me no more than sloppiness on the part of the author or printer (two variants for both Ceolric and Ceawline), and not to

indicate a hitherto unsuspected source. 'Colgrene' is no more than Geoffrey of Monmouth's Colgrinus (HRB IX.1 &c), slightly garbled, and with the additional embroidery about 70 ships that serves to fill the gap in Geoffrey's account of his movements between the siege of York and Mount Badon. I don't know enough about later tradition, but, even if this is the first occurrence, it should be noted that Meriton put Geoffrey's account on a par with 'sir Bevise himselfe, Fryer Bacon, or Tom Thumb' and presumably allowed himself a fairly free hand with his material in consequence. (Quotation from R.F. Brinkley, Arthurian Legend in the Seventh Century, John Hopkins Press, 1932; repr. Frank Cass, 1967, p. 210, citing Anglorum Gesta.)

"I myself doubt that much historical value would have survived unsuspected until the mid-seventeenth century after the extensive trawls of Leland, Polydore Virgil, Parker, Bale & others. The test is surely not whether anomalous spelling or additional pieces of information are present, but whether the new text can be used to account for otherwise unexplained features of a text of known antiquity. This consideration is very much in my mind at present, as I am intermittently plugging away at a book about Romano-Celtic paganism and the Matter of Britain, which will include an account of the what is apparently a source of much of the earlier material in HRB, and perhaps of some of the Arthurian stuff as well. I've tried to compress the evidence and argumentation for this to a reasonable length for a DRAGON article, but without success. Reg Dand's forthcoming contribution on Geoffrey may prompt an answering article from me, however."

Andrew then goes on to comment on my contributions:

"Your articles on Wade Evans are gradually persuading me that I ought to read his works, although there doesn't seem to be much in them that I am likely to agree with. Where I think both Wade Evans and Ashe go wrong in their use of Geoffrey of Monmouth is in the their selecting the two names that suit their case (and even then one of them, Sulpicius, has to be 'emended') out of a welter of names provided by Geoffrey. If one accepts Leo, Emperor (or King\*) of the Romans, why should one reject (say) Aliphatima, King of Spain, or

Boccus, King of the Medes, who both occur in the same text on an equal footing with Leo, and who are both plainly unhistorical? Geoffrey's Roman Empire is a fictional construct, populated by Kings, Dukes, Senators, &c, who bear names that would have seemed convincing to his twelfth-century audience. 'Leo' is a fair stab at what a Roman Emperor (or King) might be called at the time of Arthur's supposed expeditions to the continent; however, Geoffrey clearly dates him to the year 542 or immediately before (XI.i-ii), when the historical Leos I & II had both been pushing up the daisies of Byzantium for some 68 years. It is surely a suspect procedure to take, out of thirty 'Roman' names that Geoffrey gives us, the two that suit your purpose, and then alter his spelling of the one and the dating of the other and claim that you have supported your argument from Geoffrey's text. (I know that Ashe also supposes the name *Lucius Hiber(i)us* to conceal that of *Glycerius*, but, even so, he is still using only one name in every ten, and 'adjusting' all three to fit his own - to my mind, utterly wrongheaded - theories.)

\*Your quotation on p.42 refers to "Leo, the Emperor of the Romans", and seems to derive from Thorpe's version of XI.i. The MSS. actually read *Leoni regi Romanorum*. Thorpe's translation is full of little inaccuracies and downright mistranslations; C.W. Dunn's 1963 revision of Sebastian Evans's translation for *Everyman* is usually a great deal closer to the original, if one can put up with the Wardour diction. Geoffrey's inconsistency about Leo's title is another indication of the unreliability as a historical source.)"

Our next letter also contains some criticisms of articles or letters in previous issues, and comes from Helen Hollick (who, with some time to spare, looked back at past issues of DRAGON and has made various comments - I have selected only a part of her letter and hope to return to it in the next issue):

"DRAGON 3.1 Chris Halewood, 'Scrolls': I was going to write at the time of this publication because it made me rather angry, but never got around to it. Sorry, but a second reading brought the same reaction. I found

Chris's comments to be most rude and pompous. Mr Young took the time and effort to write to DRAGON, - and his book - I think Chris's comments were unfair. I have read Mr Young's book with interest. No, I do not entirely agree with it, mainly because I follow Mr Ashe's theories. I believe Arthur was about 50 years earlier than most people and Mr Young place him, which I feel alters the perspective somewhat. I doubt many agree with my theories - it is rare in the Arthurian field to find those who DO agree! But isn't that what DRAGON - what the pursual of Arthur - is all about? We, as individuals, ordinary people who are not scholars or historians or archaeologists, put forward our theories for CONSTRUCTIVE comment and discussion? I respect other people's ideas, and so should those of us who put pen to paper for DRAGON. While I am not suggesting that there should not be criticism, to state Mr Young has 'wasted his time' is very much out of order. So what if he has? When it comes down to it, are we not all 'wasting our time' in the matter of Arthur? A man who may never have existed, a subject that no one will ever agree on or will ever be proved one way or the other. So long as we enjoy our research and reading and we set a personal sense of satisfaction from what we do, does it matter that men like Mr Young spend their time writing about their theory? I respect Mr Young. It is refreshing to have a work published from a different angle. Something new to read, to discuss. By reading other people's theories I can get out my own, examine them, decide WHY I do not agree with others.

"Apart from that, can Chris PROVE Mr Young wrong? No. Until such time as there is clear cut proof I don't think anyone of us should pooh-pooh out of hand another's thoughts and hard work. Even Wilson and Blackett are entitled to spout their theories! It is up to the individual to decide what he/she wishes to believe and follow that path.

"Regarding Chris's comment about Nennius's battle list, many of us believe it IS authentic - and I would assume Mr Young considers it so - if he hadn't then he wouldn't have pursued his theory in the first place?

"No Mr Halewood, we, or I at least, have not been

led up a 'cul-de-sac' by Mr Young. I sort the various theories and explanations, I listen, I read and decide what I feel is right for me. If Chris can not bear to sit by and respect other people's ideas then I suggest he drop the matter of Arthur. For that is all Arthur is, and probably ever will be. An amalgamation of widely varying personal theories.

"I think it is a great loss to DRAGON and members, if Mr Young declines to write further articles for us. Any theory is a good theory if it sets us thinking!

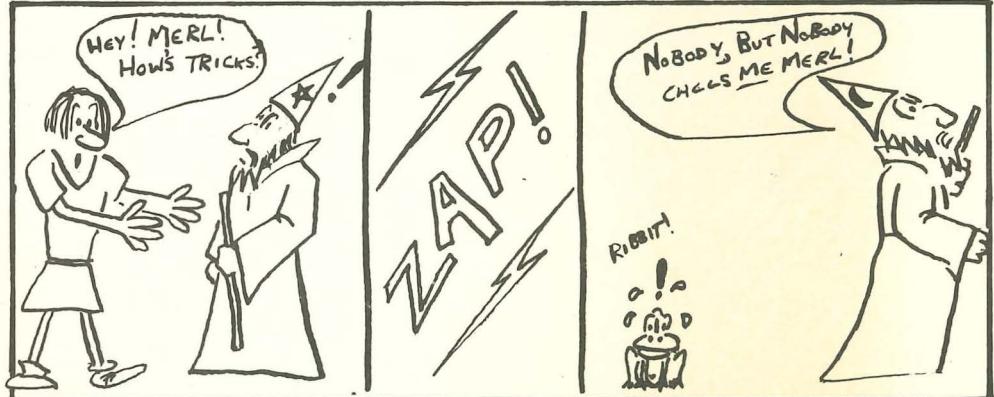
"Although having said that, one of the first rules of putting word in print is to accept criticism gracefully! Particularly when in the case of Arthur, passions are so easily roused!"

Many thanks to Helen for the above comments - there is plenty of material here for reactions from members. I certainly hope YOU will respond to these observations and that we, as members of DRAGON, can keep up a dialogue - discussing all the different ideas without turning it into a slanging match. No theory should be ignored and no evidence pushed aside.

So, once again, best wishes for Christmas and the New Year - I hope you have a good time.

### TALES FROM THE TWO ELLS or NEWLIGHTON THE DARKAGES

by ROGER WILLCOX



## STOP PRESS

Evidence for Anglo-Saxon habitation has recently been found in London. Excavations are at present underway in the Covent Garden area. However, this is well outside of the original area of the Roman city of Londinium. Up until recently only pottery sherds of an Anglo-Saxon type have been found. More news on this in the future.

Over the last year I have had a number of enquiries concerning Avalon to Camelot - at last I have some news. A recent letter from Daniel Nastali, who is on the staff of the magazine, indicates that the magazine has been having financial problems and, as Daniel put it, "the magazine has consequently gone dormant." I certainly hope A to C will awaken soon - it is without doubt an excellent piece of work.

### CORRECTION:

In my bit on the West Country tour, organised by Citisights, I spelt one of the tour guide's name wrong: Kevin Flood should be Kevin Flude. My apologies to Kevin.