



Pendragon

This is the first issue of "Pendragon" and it is hoped that many more will follow with your, our readers', interest and support. The Bristol branch of Pendragon was founded in July 1964 and now spreads from London to Southampton taking in the greater part of the West Country.

Owing to the wide variety of projects undertaken during the year interests and memberships have increased steadily, so much so in fact that we are now one of the registered organisations recognised by the Youth Committee of Bristol.

The overall project caters for all tastes and hobbies ranging from, for the outdoor enthusiast, ariel photography, resistivity surveys, measuring and mapping of sites and leys, camping and hiking. For those whose interest lies elsewhere there is the job of looking through old records, books, etc., and noting points of interest.

WHY ALL THIS?

We are trying to stimulate interest in the Historical Arthur of the Post-Roman-Pre-Saxon period known as the Dark Age. This involves searching for old battle-grounds, missing graves and monuments, reading manuscripts, studying name-places, ballads, etc., with a view to sorting fact from fiction, history from legend and romance.

The ultimate intention is to write a guide book to Arthurian Britain and so fill in the missing gap in British history books.

Later issues of this magazine will carry a variety of articles. This one gives only the background for the Quest but we hope you will find it useful.

If, after reading this, and the outline of history, you would be interested in finding out more about our activities, please fill in the tear-off slip on the back page of this magazine, your inquiries will be welcome.

If you live in the Hampshire area, please post your slip to:- Donald Bryan, 18 Kelvin Road, Eastleigh, Hants.

In the Bristol area:- David Gorringe,
9 Grove Park,
Redland, Bristol 6.

In the Keynsham area:- Terry Staples,
2 Hollway Close,
Stockwood,
Nr. Bristol.

ARTHUR OF BRITAIN

King Arthur of the Knights of the Round Table belongs not only to the Britons but to all English speaking countries, and even to some continental ones. The names of his knights are familiar to us all -- Tristan, Kai, Bedevere, Gawain, Lancelot, Gareth and Galahad, to name but a few -- and we all know something, if only vaguely, of that romantic, "many-towered" capital that was called Camelot.

What we know of that other Arthur, the real historical Arthur of the 5th and 6th centuries, is another matter. The man who is now almost lost in the mists of time is said to have worn Roman chain-mail,

carried a white-washed shield, probably had a string of amber beads round his neck, and charged into battle with a red dragon flying from the tip of his lance; not the figure of romantic legend we have come to believe in.

Yet this was the Arthur -- a Roman-Briton aristocrat, born about 470 A.D. -- around whom the Legends were woven later. This was the man who organized and led a great Resistance Movement that delayed the Saxon conquest by many long years and who gained a respite for his fellow-Britons so that, in due course, a Christian Kingdom could be founded; a Kingdom from which America and a great Commonwealth could grow.

How comes it that so little is known of this Arthur? This is only one of the many perplexing mysteries that surround that period known as The Dark Age. There is a good chance now, at long last, that this and many other conundrums will be solved within the foreseeable future because, in Britain at least, a Quest for the historical Arthur has begun.

If there are any who still do not believe that the famous Knights really existed, let them go to Cornwall and take a look at the time-battered monument that marks the grave of Tristan and carries a Latin inscription. If anyone can lay his hands on copies of those old medieval manuscripts known as The Welsh Triads, he will find there a story about three swineherds whose activities became involved with those of Arthur. He will read that: "The third was Trystan son of Tallwch, who guarded the swine of March son of Merchion while the swineherd had gone on a message to Essylt to bid her appoint a meeting with Trystan. Now Arthur and Marchell and Cai and Bedwyr undertook to go and make an attempt on him, but they proved unable to get so much as one

porker either as a gift, or as a purchase, whether by fraud, or by theft."

If this sounds very rustic one should remember that pigs bulked very large in the Celtic economy, and when one finds oneself part of a desperate Resistance Movement rations are hard to come by and have to be well guarded.

What was the setting for this life-and death struggle ?

For close on 400 years the island of Britain had been occupied and ruled by the Romans. The British had become used to them. Many Romans had settled in the country and married British women. Romano-British boys joined the local Legionaries. Those who could afford to do so withdrew into the countryside, built themselves villas after the Roman fashion, settled down to agriculture and formed little self-contained communities, speaking Latin (quite probably with deplorable accents). Peace and prosperity reigned.

Then suddenly all this was changed. The Romans withdrew, taking their Legions with them, and quite soon those peace-loving agriculturalists found themselves in trouble. Marauders from Ireland began to ravage the western coasts, Picts from the north came raiding over the border. Worst of all, the terrifying longboats of the Saxons came sailing across the Channel loaded with ferocious warriors who massacred the land-owners, burnt down their farmsteads and carried off their stock.

The Britons sent messengers across the Channel with frantic pleas for help, but the Romans now had troubles of their own elsewhere. The Britons, untrained in self-defence, tried one desperate expedient after another. A Pretender called Maximus was proclaimed Emperor for want of anyone

better. He assembled an Expeditionary Force with which he restored something like law and order (though only temporarily) and then he took his Expeditionary Force across the Channel with the intention of conquering all Gaul and even of marching on Rome. He was killed outside the walls of the Eternal City and his Expeditionary Force melted away. It is thought that most of those who went with Maximus, and who survived the campaign, wandered back to Brittany and were the first to form a British Settlement there.

Thus further depleted of their best fighting men the Britons tried to come to terms with the Saxons but the Saxons were not only pagans (while the British were, for the most part, at least nominally Christian) they were also barbarians driven by want and poor harvests in their own country to find land overseas, and therefore were in no mind to be placated.

It was when the Britons were threatened with total extermination that a young fellow called Arthur summoned some of his compatriots and told them bluntly that they had better give up hoping for help from Rome and do something to help themselves.

It is probable that Arthur was one of those Romano-British boys ~~who~~ had trained with the Legions. Anyhow, he was a master of cavalry tactics. His lieutenants were Bedevere, Kai, Gawain and the others. They became a highly mobile force, followed by infantry for mopping-up exercises, and they put the fear of God into the invading Saxons.

It is true that the Saxons overran the country in the end, but that was many years later and by then circumstances had greatly changed. Twelve major battles had been fought and a desperately-needed respite had been gained. Those Saxons who remained clung only precariously to the coastlines in certain areas. These formed communities

that gradually mixed and inter-married with the inhabitants. Missionaries from Rome had arrived and Christianised these communities. The Saxons became accepted and acceptable. Arthur himself was killed -- according to tradition, by a traitor -- and the Resistance melted away. An additional reason may have been just that the Britons could no longer breed heavy horses capable of carrying men in heavy armour.

The first Saxon to form a kingdom was Cerdic who landed at a spot near Southampton and, with his sons, established the kingdom of Wessex from which the future began to take shape. Modern research now suggests that this Cerdic was, in fact and like Arthur, half-British. While one of Arthur's parents had been Roman, it is thought now that only one of Cerdic's parents was Saxon, and that through his British parent he was probably descended from one of the oldest Celtic families in Britain. This is interesting since every king and queen who has ruled Britain since then has been descended from this same Cerdic.

If we now know so much what need is there for further information? Indeed, there is a great deal more to uncover and this is the reason for the present quest. In his book, "King Arthur's Avalon", Geoffrey Ashe has this to say:-

"We have a beginning and an end, but Arthur's track in between is fragmentary. For most of the time we catch echoes of his footsteps and that is all. The salient point about the mass of Arthurian oddments is the grandiose geography. Nobody else except the Devil is renowned through so much of Britain. From Land's End to the Grampian foothills, Arthur's name 'cleaves to cairn and cromlech'. We hear of the Cornish fortress of Kelliwic: of a Cornish

hill called Bann Arthur and a stream called the River of Arthur's kitchen; of Cadbury and its noble shades; of the lake Llyn Berfog in Merioneth, where Arthur slew a monster, and his horse left a footprint on the rock; of a cave by Marchlyn Mawr in Carnarvon, where his treasure lies hidden (woe to any intruder who touches it); of a cave at Caerleon, and another near Snowdon, where his warriors lie asleep till he needs them; of still another cave in the Eildon Hills, close to Melrose Abbey, where some say he is sleeping himself; of the mount outside Edinburgh called Arthur's Seat; of Arthur's Stone, and Arthur's Fold, as far north as Perth; and many more such places. Arthur seems to be everywhere."

There are still unsolved mysteries such as the grave mentioned by Nennius who was a reputable historian. Nennius writes of a grave that is sometimes ten feet long and sometimes six feet long, and always a different length at whatever time it is visited. This sounds nonsense, of course, but an ingenious theory has been put forward. Supposing that this grave -- a hastily-dug one after the final battle of Camlann -- were just a tiny island at the mouth of a river? The incoming tide would reduce the island to six feet, and the out-going tide might well lower the surrounding water till the grave was ten feet long. Maybe this island can still be located?

Delving into all the long-neglected literature such as The Welsh Triads, the Goddodin (which speaks of men in blue armour) the Mabinogian and the Songs of Taliesin and Aneirin, historians such as Geoffrey Ashe have been sifting out the facts. Now the time has come when the facts must be substantiated by the work of the archaeologists.

If Arthur had a capital and stronghold in the West Country it must have been at Cadbury Castle in Somerset. It had been a particularly fine fort and refuge in times of trouble even long years before the Romans arrived in Britain. It rose high above the bogs and marshes that surrounded it, and this wet and soggy ground helped to make the fort almost impregnable. Traces of the stone facing of the ramparts are still visible in many places, and the levels suggest that part of the revetment may stand to a considerable height. Air photographs disclose the presence of numerous storage pits.

Many are the tales that surround it. The hill is said to be "hollow". There are two widely-separated wells on it. It is said that when the lid on one well is clanged shut the clang can be heard to echo in the other well. There are stories of ghostly hunting-horns sounding in the night, the clatter of horses' hooves down the rough pathway into the village. There is still a long Causeway that can be traced in parts across the adjoining fields that is marked, even on the Ordnance Survey maps, as Arthur's Hunting Causeway.

When the sun shines this is one of the most lush and fertile and beautiful parts of Somerset, the home of the cider-making industry. But when the clouds gather, and the winds howl, and the rain lashes against the trees that now rise above the ancient ramparts, one can easily believe any superstitious tale that is told. One can gaze up at the summit and feel sure that the ancient fortress carries a load of secrets.

A hint at some of those secrets came to light a few years ago when the hill was ploughed for planting potatoes. Many small scraps of pottery were picked up, and amongst them were small sherds of the sort that was imported to Britain from the

Eastern Mediterranean area. Some of these small sherds suggest the presence of Christian missionaries, and Arthur, of course, was reputed to be a Christian.

The whole area covers 18 acres. If the necessary funds can be found to carry out an extensive dig we may well uncover a great deal more than just archaeological remains.

How did the Legends come to be written? The most likely suggestion so far put forward is that after Arthur's death, when the Resistance died down, survivors of the long struggle probably drifted off to Wales and Cornwall, and some probably went as far as Brittany to join the community of ex-soldiers already there. Maybe one of them sat down to write a long saga of the campaign. It could be that parts of this were recovered, long years later, by a wandering minstrel who realised that he had found himself a valuable meal ticket. Others took up the story. Geoffrey Ashe has written:

"Even if most of the stories were borrowed or fabricated, it is still necessary to explain why they should ever have been attached to Arthur. Even if the bards vested him with the attributes of a god, the question still remains: why him in particular? To which there is no adequate answer but the readiest one -- because he deserved it."

Books to read:-

The Lantern Bearers by Rosemary Sutcliffe.

Sword at Sunset by Rosemary Sutcliffe.

King Arthur's Avalon by Geoffrey Ashe.

From Caesar to Arthur by Geoffrey Ashe.

The Long Sunset by R.C. Sherriff.

"Legacy of Arthur's Chieftain" by
Robert Stoecken

"Ancient Secret" by Flavia Anderson.

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Name:

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Please send me further information
about the Pendragon Society.

