PENDRAGON

in this issue:
MERLIN; ideas
& interpretations

(30.P.)

:PENDRAGON

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The whole Arthurian scene is punctuated by the saying, "Well really, your idea is as good as mine", and every quester has different notions about Merlin, either historical or mythical. In this issue of "Pendragon" we are offering a selection of views for discussion and hoping that our readers will write to us with more.

Probably the most popular modern book about Merlin is Mary Stewart's novel, "The Crystal Cave". At the end of the sequel, "The Hollow Hills," the author tells us that she drew most of her material for "The Crystal Cave" from Geoffrey of Monmouth's "History of the Kings of Britain." She goes on to say, "Merlin, the narrator of "The Hollow Hills", the enchanter and healer gifted with the Sight, is able to move in and out of the different worlds at will. And as Merlin's legend is linked with the caves of glass, the invisible towers, the hollow hills where he now sleeps for all time, so I have seen him as the link between the worlds; the instrument by which, as he says, all the kings become one King, and all the gods one God. ...The hollow hills are the physical point of entry between this world and the Otherworld..."

Our Pendragon badge, a golden dragon on a blue background, reminds us that Merlin foretold the birth of Arthur, and that the Dragon appeared in the sky while Ambrosius was on his deathbed and before Uther had been proclaimed Leader of the Dragons. It seemed right, therefore that the first issue of our magazine in its new format should be a Dragon issue, and that this one should be devoted chiefly to Merlin. The revised version of our booklet, "A for Arthur", will be available shortly. Will readers please write and tell us which theme they would like to develop next?

Better still, will you send us articles -- please? J.F.

Lead-in by Jess Foster. Editor for this issue, Chris Lovegrove.

(Certain it is that there are two Celtic - we may perhaps say two Cymric - localities in which the legend of Arthur and Merlin have been deeply implanted and to this day remain living traditions cherished by the peasantry of these two countries, and that neither of these is Wales or Britain west of the Severn. It is in Brittany and in the old Cambrian kingdom south of the Firth of Forth, that the legends of Arthur have taken root and flourished. Geoffrey of Monmouth represents Merlin as living in the country of the Gewisseans "at the fountain of Galabes, which he frequently resorted to", In Brittany his resort was the forest of Brocéliande, in which was also a fountain of mysterious virtue...)

Brocéliande

ANTHONY SMITH-MASTERS

The Wood of Brocéliande, where Merlin entered his last sleep, is in Normandy, part of one of the great state forests of France. To reach it you must start from the village of Beauvais, which could perhaps be translated as 'Good Will'. Then you drive for mile after mile along a straight track through the forest; the track is called Le Val Sans Retour, the Valley of No Return. At the end of the track is the little hamlet called Mauvaises Pensées, Evil Thoughts. Who chose these strange names, and when, and why?

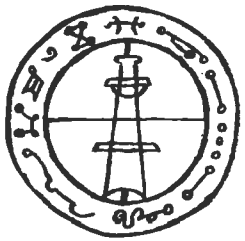
Leaving your car behind at Evil Thoughts, you follow a path rising steeply among the trees. It is solemn and quiet. There are hardly any birds. Conversation flags, perhaps because of the hill.

At the top the path turns and goes down a little way. You hear the sound of trickling water and come out into a small clearing in the wood. There is a stone basin a few feet square. The water wells up from below the weeds, very clear, very cold, splashes over a stone lip and is soon lost in the undergrowth. You look down into the pool and your eyes meet treetops and blue sky. You feel drawn down, or is it up?

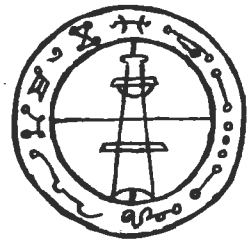
You sit on the stone coping or on a tree stump and let the surroundings speak to you in their fashion. There are meaningful Druidic trees planted round the clearing; hazel, willow, rowan, birch. Silence, peacefulness, meditativeness, healing. Each visitor takes in impressions according to his receptiveness. Some have a strong feeling of a presence, forceful but kindly. My own memory is of paradox, of looking through a hole in the ground at the sky.

We cannot stay long at this level of existence. We have to go down the hill again, back to Evil Thoughts and motor cars. But the people who drive back along the Valley of No Return are not the same as started out that morning.

(Quotation from Henry B. Wheatly, "Merlin, or The Early History of King Arthur", Early English Text Society, 1870)



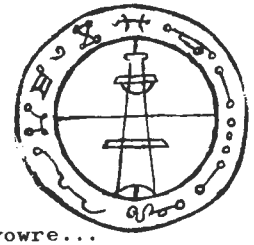
Secret Seal of Solomon



Maridunum, or Cayr-Merdin

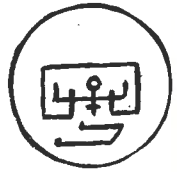
SPENSER'S FAIRIE QUEENE

There is a cave outside Carmarthen which is still known as Merlin's Cave:



And if thou ever happen that same way
To travell, goe to see that dreadfull place:
It is an hideous hollow cave (they say)
Under a rocke that lyes a little space
From the swift Barry, tombling downe apace,
Emongst the woodie hilles of Dynevowre:
But dare thou not, I charge, in any cace,
To enter into that same balefull Bowre,
For fear the cruell Feends should thee unwares devowre...

"Shortly before his death Merlin intended to surround Carmarthen with a brazen wall, and the task was confided to the sprites beforementioned. Whilst the work was in progress, Merlin was summoned away by the Lady of the Lake, for whom he cherished a deep affection, but he bound the workmen not to relax their labour during his absence. Through the false lady's wile Merlin was buried and compelled to abandon his enterprise, but the fiends are so afraid of him that they go on working day and night to erect the brazen wall."
- From F.J. Snell, King Arthur's Country, Dent 1926.



Love talismans

Merlin at Carmarthen

ENID GRIFFITHS

Near the hospital in the ancient town of Carmarthen there stood, until two years ago, an ancient stump of oak tree concreted into place and bearing a brass plate stating that Merlin had been imprisoned in this tree.

Road widening made it necessary for the stump to be removed which caused a great deal of controversy and a hurried archaeological dig.

This controversy arose because of an old prophecy which states that when a calf ran up a steeple and Merlin's tree fell, then Carmarthen would sink.

Many years ago a calf did climb up the tower of St Peter's Church, and following a slight earthquake part of the town did subside near the estuary.

Naturally the people objected to their well-preserved tree being moved.

Merlin had married Vivienne, a friend of Morganwy le Fey, who, having been trained by Merlin actually excelled him in occult knowledge. The local story is that Vivienne imprisoned Merlin in the old tree and went off to visit her friend Morganwy.

- Adapted from an article first published in Pendragon magazine, Vol 7, No 2 (July 1973).

Merlin at Alderley Edge

SID BIRCHBY

The story of the Cheshire Enchanter has often been told. A farmer from Mobberley was taking a horse to sell at Macclesfield Fair on a misty autumn morning. As he passed by the heath near Alderley Edge, he met a stranger who predicted that no one would buy the horse, and that they would meet again that night. So it happened. He led the farmer and his horse to a pair of iron gates in a rock. Inside was a cave piled with treasure, in which warriors and horses slept. One horse was missing. The Enchanter took coins from a chest, bought the farmer's horse, and led him out. Nevermore was the cavern found.

Sleeping-warrior legends are not uncommon. Often, their leader is named as King Arthur, though not invariably. In Germany, it is Barbarossa and his knights who sleep under the mountain until the day when ravens cease to fly about it. At Alderley, the feature of a guardian is unusual. He is not named, nor is a sleeping King mentioned, but we shall see that Merlin and Arthur are implicit in the tale. By unpeeling several layers we may learn how myths arise.

The scene is a wooded ridge 1½ miles East of the decayed hamlet of Nether Alderley where there is now little but a church, a watermill and a closed inn. At about the same distance NW of the ridge is the modern village of Alderley Edge, which was developed as a wealthy commuter satellite of Manchester in Victorian times.

All the district was owned by the Lords Stanley for centuries until the 1930's, and they were able to preserve or change whatever they wished. The Legend of the Wizard was thought to be worth recording in a book by the Hon. Miss Stanley in 1843. An earlier anonymous account appeared in 1820, allegedly drawn from a tale "long told by the firesides" and often told by Parson Shrigley in the previous century.

There is no reason to doubt that folklore made much of the Edge. Copper-bearing sandstone was mined from it, perhaps as early as the Bronze Age. The remains of blocked adits and tunnels crumble away in the woods, lending an air of mystery reminiscent of the Roman gold mines of Pumpsaint. Round barrows, standing stones and holy wells are marked on the maps of the district.

Analysis of the earliest written account of 1820 shows its basis of fact. The Fair that the farmer journeyed to was probably Macclesfield Wakes Fair, held at Michaelmas. Fairs differed from the weekly markets, being usually annual events for such purposes as hiring labour or selling horses, rather than for selling produce. So a farmer with a horse to sell would go to the Michaelmas Fair.

The route described is also correct, when one follows it along the old lanes and bridle-paths. For instance we read that when the farmer returned at moonrise he saw the Enchanter "reclining on a rock beneath the seven firs" at a certain point. The rock, although not the trees, can still be seen by the roadside. It is an L-shaped glacial boulder, very much like a seat with a back, on which one can recline. Old maps show it as a parish boundary, and other boundary markers lie on the route to the Fair or to the Cave.

Here are two layers of the myth: the old route from Mobberley to the Fair, before modern roads were built, and a memory of Beating the Bounds. As to the first, the earliest accounts clearly show that the village of Mobberley, about 5 miles West, is being glorified, rather than Nether Alderley. The farmer comes from there, and later he returns with some neighbours to look for the cavern.

Mobberley men rule OK.

Beating the Bounds was once an important annual occasion, when territory was patrolled to assert ownership, much as birds and other animals do. In March 1822, the Mayor of Macclesfield led the procession. On private estates the bailiff went round periodically and made a report called a Terrier. This happened on the Stanley estate in 1841 in order to assess Tithe Awards due the the Church.

The Merlin/Arthur layer takes us back to Mobberley. In 1621 the living of its church, ie, the right to appoint its clergy, was bought by Thomas Mallory, a Yorkshireman who became Dean of Chester and founded the Cheshire branch of his family. Whether or not he claimed Sir Thomas Malory (with one 'l') as his ancestor, we cannot say, but it is highly probable. The family origins of the author of "Morte D'Arthur" are debatable, but Yorkshire has one claim.

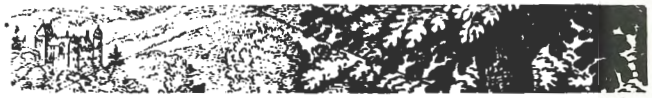
Dean Thomas certainly had literary interests. He borrowed more than 50 books from the Holcroft library, and 14 were still booked out to him when the collection was sold in 1616. This library was assembled by Sir Thomas Holcroft, who bought the Abbey of Vale Royal in Cheshire, at the Dissolution, and perhaps its monastic books also. At all events he began to collect books and lend them to scholars. In 1601 he visited the aged Dr John Dee in Manchester, possibly book-hunting. The 1616 inventory records such esoteric works as "Brute of England" and a Life of Merlin. There is no proof that Dean Thomas borrowed these, but if we are looking for someone who may have re-written a folk-tale "told round the firesides" in Arthurian style, he had Motive, Means and Opportunity.

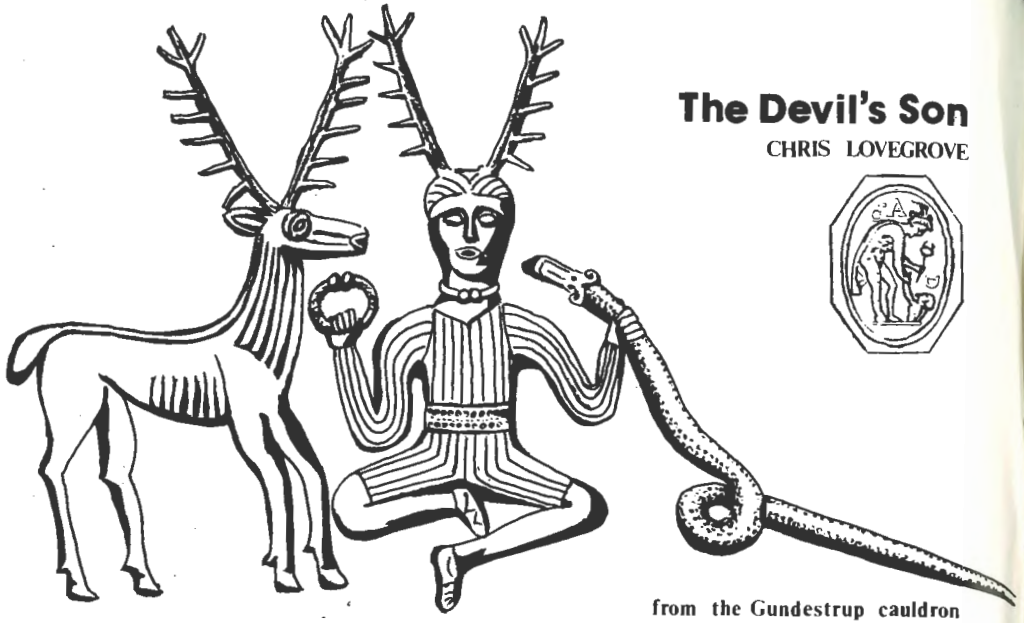
Whether or not his ancestor did write "Morte D'Arthur" is immaterial. He may have thought so. Therefore we see how rural traditions may be influenced by sophisticated literary notions. If we find folk-tales resembling legends told in wider contexts, we need not assume independent origins. Ideas passed about quickly even in those days.

Merlin stands for something that keeps nagging at us. The analysis of legends, by peeling away their layers, is a way to enlightenment. Possibly he stands for a counterpart of the Old Wise Woman. The earliest form of the place-name Alderley means the Wood of the Wise Man, and a wizard was more of a counsellor than a magician. Merlin gave advice more than he worked magic. So did the Anglo-Saxon magician Woden, who was also usually encountered in the form of an old man sitting on a mound by the roadside, like the Enchanter.

The special Alderley contribution to our understanding is that Merlin guards the sleeping warriors against the day when England shall be in peril. What will happen then is described in another Cheshire folk-tradition, the prophecies of Robert Nixon, the Cheshire Seer. They are a set of gnomic utterances, ascribed to a 17th century village idiot, but very much more than that, describing a Ragnarok of confused grandeur and epic proportions that intimates what Arthur will have to face when he and his knights awaken.

Alderley shows us a Merlin with a responsibility to the Future, and a conscience. It may, of course, be a "Dean Thomas" layer to the myth. Do allegories grow as our consciences sharpen?





from the Gundestrup cauldron

The Devil's Son

CHRIS LOVEGROVE

IN COMES I BEELZEBUB, OVER MY SHOULDER I CARRIES MY CLUB,
IN MY HAND MY DRIPPING-PAN; DON'T YOU THINK I'M A JOLLY OLD MAN?

Geoffrey of Monmouth presented his figure of Merlin in the 12th century in two works, The History of the Kings of Britain and The Life of Merlin, and it largely determines our view of Merlin today. But "Merlin" was not a historical figure but a character knocked together from various sources; and early critics distinguished at least two Merlins - one called Ambrosius, the other Merlin Sylvester or Merlinus Celidonius.

AMBROSIUS

The story of the conception and childhood of Merlin was apparently taken from the 8th century Nennius compilation. Here the youth is named as Ambrosius (Emrys) - perhaps related to the historical Ambrosius Aurelianus. The tale of the princess of Demetia (Dyfed) visited in the confines of a nunnery by an incubus disguised as a young man has echoes throughout mythology and folklore, not only in Celtic tradition (especially the conception of Arthur) but also in other contexts (eg Hercules and Perseus, Alexander the Great, even Jesus). The precocity of the child, either in heroic deeds or through special gifts like wisdom or divination, and the attempt on his life by the presiding power, whether court magicians or usurping kings, Pharaoh or Herod - both are also very common themes designed to mark out the child as someone apart, predestined for events of some cosmic significance.

MYRDDIN WYLT

After the prophesying for Vortigern and the magical services for Uther Pendragon - the well-known feats of rebuilding Stonehenge and arranging for Arthur's conception through shape-shifting - we come to an aspect of Merlin that is slightly less well-known, namely his "madness".

This madness took a particular form and followed the reported pattern of other contemporary madmen:

1. In 637 at the Battle of Moyra (Mag Rath) the Irish prince Sweeny (Suibne), having previously been cursed by St Ronan, became geilt or crazy and went off to seek solitude. He lived in tree-tops like a bird, became vegetarian, and was befriended by St Moling (see Chadwick 275).
2. A certain Melinus mentioned in Jocelyn's Life of St Patrick was an Irish worker of evil who, like Simon Magus, claimed to be God and flew in the sky like a bird. He was brought down to earth by St Patrick's prayers (Chambers 97).
3. A certain Lailoken (Llallogan) is mentioned in the Life of St Kentigern (Mungo) as living in the woods of Scotland. He may be the same as the bard Myrddin who, in 573 after the battle of Arthuret or Arderydd near Carlisle, hid in Celidon forest when his lord Gwendoleu was killed (Morris 219). It may have been a combination of the names Melinus and Myrddin which gave Geoffrey the name of his fictional prophet.

Now according to Geoffrey, Merlin was driven mad by the death in battle of the three brothers of his chief. He retired to a forest where he lived the life of a wild animal. Only music could soothe him, but after being persuaded to visit his sister Ganieda he returned to his beloved forest.
He visited civilised life only once more, riding on a stag, but with the purpose of killing his wife's suitor (a common mythic theme) by hurling the stag's antlers at the suitor's head.
Despite capture after falling into a stream, he escapes back to the forest, this time to observe the stars in a "house" with 70 windows and doors. His only companions are Thelgessin (Taliesen), his sister and another madman.

CERNUNNOS

I believe the clue to the later image of Merlin is not primarily the bearded druidic figure of romantic antiquarians but through his associations with animals. Ambrosius, remember, is regarded as the son of a devil; he prophesies two fighting dragons for Vortigern; and he interprets Uther's comet as a dragon.
Meanwhile mad Merlin lives in the forest as an animal and rides a stag, while other contemporaries live as birds in trees.
Now, Celtic mythology recognises a god who frequently wears antlers and is not only worshipped by wild animals but also associated with ram-headed serpents. He looks like the Christian devil and is described as CERNUNNOS, the Horned One.

Cernunnos may be linked semantically with Herne the Hunter (who wears antlers), the Cerne Abbas giant (who wields an antler-shaped club), Corineus the Cornish giant-killer, and Kronos the Greek Saturn. The strange incident of the stag's antlers is suggestive of rituals once found all over Europe: a seventh-century Archbishop of Canterbury proclaimed that
"if anyone at the kalends of January goes about as a stag or a bull (that is, making himself into a wild animal, and putting on the heads of beasts), those who in such wise transform themselves into the appearance of a wild animal penance for three years because it is devilish" (Hughes 54).

The antlered Cernunnos is also linked to the ram-headed serpent, a type of dragon, and surrounded by the beasts of the forest. These link him not only with Merlin but especially with Ambrosius. The serpents are also related to Mercury's caduceus of interlaced snakes and to the yogic serpent kundalini.

SHAMAN

Finally Merlin, at a great age, "withdraws". This might be a kind of bird's nest, this esplumeor that he retires to in de Boron's Percival, symbolic of a dwelling in the Cosmic Tree, and is reminiscent of the exploits of both Sweeny and Melinus, and also of Siberian shamans or medicine men.

The bird, whose environment is between heaven and earth, would clearly be a fitting creature to emulate for a human departing from a mundane life to a Celtic vision of paradise. Merlin's predilection for star-gazing in his observatory (an echo of stone circles or foreshadowing of the Round Table perhaps?) might indicate the direction of his interest. (Mogh Ruith, a Munster druid, wore a bird-dress made from the skin of a hornless, dun-coloured bull-hide and a white-speckled bird-headpiece with fluttering wings, with which he "rose up, in company with the fire

into the air and the heavens" (Ross 187-8, Piggott 163-4).

The point to be made is this: even if Geoffrey's character of Merlin did not historically exist, the pattern was there nevertheless, and I believe that this pattern was followed by individuals who were mindful of some of the traditions that had existed in a not-so-remote Celtic pagan past.

Whether Geoffrey was aware of this is, of course, another matter.

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Merlin: Fool of Time

MARILYN PORTER

One of the most magical, and certainly one of the most enigmatic figures in the whole Arthurian legend is Merlin. Although the "original" literary sources contain scant account of him,[1] many fictional writers such as Mary Stewart, T.H. White, Charles Williams and John Heath Stubbs[2] have filled out the little evidence we have with their various imaginings. Even so, at one level, there remains much painstaking work to be done searching out further scraps of evidence about Merlin - who he was, either in historical "reality", or in legend.

One thing at least is clear: Merlin predates Arthur, and Uther himself, and all the main elements of the legend. He existed, and he directed the setting of the Arthurian scenario. Nothing is known of his own origins, save for a few tantalizing hints that they were not human.[3] During his brief sojourn in the legend, strange and mysterious characteristics are attributed to him. He was held in high respect, if not awe. Yet he disappears under circumstances that seem bizarre - almost trivial - long before the real drama is played out. He does not appear at all in the search for the Grail.

One other salient detail: like Arthur, Merlin is not dead, but sleeping, and they will both return at the time of need.

So much for the outlines. In this brief piece I simply want to draw attention to - what seem to me - to be two of the most evocative and enduring aspects of this mysterious figure - and to put them into conjunction. These aspects are:-

Firstly, Merlin's peculiar relationship with the dimension of time; and secondly, his position outside conventional requirements of behaviour or ability. Although this esoteric exemption is common to the tradition of Sage or Magician I prefer to refer it instead to the tradition of Fool or Jester.

TIME

To take the dimension of "time" first. Specifically, I want to pick up the hint explored (fairly superficially) by T.H.White that Merlin lived backwards in time. Many people have been fascinated with the idea of escape from chronological time,[4] from tales like Rip van Winkle to Dunne's "An Experiment with Time" - but these have in common an escape from the dimension. You may move backwards or forwards in time, but you yourself remain yourself. You have your "own" time, and with luck you return to it - or choose not to. Merlin, however, does not escape the dimension of time - he simply reverses it. Coming from unimaginable origins in the future he gets older as others get younger. The whole process is clearly way outside the normal lifespan - but the principles are there. Merlin's gifts of prophecy, therefore, rest on the fact that for him they are not prophecies, but memories.[5] He had been in the future. Where he had not been was in the past, and in youth, and this was his downfall. It is hard to imagine a man of great age, wisdom, and - more important - integrity, falling for the ruses of a mere nymph. Even Nimue's (or Vivienne's) most ardent defenders could scarcely call her subtle. Yet it is quite plausible if we imagine the effects of the sudden onset of adolescence after centuries of wise maturity. Such a linear explanation is too crude. The all important cyclic element is reintroduced when we remember that in some accounts, at least, Merlin's mother was also called Nimue or Vivien. Death and rebirth - not incest. The eternal circle released Merlin in that shape, at that time, to do what he had to do. He was then reabsorbed, so that he could reappear when it is necessary for him to do so. This kind of speculation perhaps gains more validity when we see the way in which it enables legend and reality, normally so carefully separated, to be read in conjuncture.

FOOL

This idea is contained more strongly in the second aspect that I want to touch upon. This is the concept of Merlin as the Eternal Fool. To describe Merlin's prophecies as "memory" is not in any way to belittle his stature as a great Sage in line with all the traditional sages, magicians, wise men and wizards of the ages. It is rather, to point to the uniqueness of Merlin's contribution - not least in his willingness to literally "make" history.[6] To describe him (and all others like him) as Fools, is not denigratory either - for Fools may be defined as those who stand outside society, and although therefore in some ways rejected by it, gain in compensation the right to see and to comment from a position that no-one inside that society can have. They gain immunity from the conventions and blinkers that prevent the rest of us from seeing ourselves. It also means that they can say things that ordinary men cannot; and sometimes they are listened to when "sensible" men would be laughed to scorn. Merlin was certainly one of these - and strange as his ideas seemed (eg the sword in the stone) he got his way.

This eccentric element is, of course, well known, and has marked out magicians and the like in all cultures. Perhaps the point can be made more powerfully by two contemporary "fools":

Firstly, anyone who has seen Bob Fosse's Cabaret (United Artists 1972) will remember the stunning force with which Joel Grey as the Master of Ceremonies was able to comment on the emergence of Nazism in the 1930s at a time when no-one else could - at least not openly.

The second example comes from our own culture, and indeed the author claims for it an especial talent for "jesting". It is E.P.Thompson.[7] "Never mind, we proceed, if circuitously, and there is perhaps more logic in the progress than I mean as yet to show. I have been jesting with you - you indomitable and seasoned jester, because I am the product, perhaps the prisoner of a jesting culture. If you come before us to ask questions, I will ask questions of your questions... And in the end, one may only act and write as one is; hoping, like all sad jesters, that some day someone may turn - as Kent turns to King Lear - and say, "This is not

contd page 13

Merlin's Dance

"Two curious ballads... depict Merlin as he has always existed in the mind of the Breton peasantry, and as he is certainly intended to be in the original legend, a magician possessed of supernatural powers, if not given to the diabolic arts. The Welsh legends, on the other hand, ignore the magic and represent the enchanter as a pious Christian... We find accordingly that Merlin Ambrosius or, as the Welsh call him, Merddin Emrys is represented in the Triads as one of the Three Chief Christian Bards of the Isle of Britain, the other two being the celebrated Taliesin, and the other Merlin... Merddin ab Madawg Morvran. According to other Welsh authorities he was not only the bard, but the chaplain of Ambrosius Aurelianus; a skilful mathematician, and the architect who constructed the "Gwaith Emrys", or work of Ambrosius, 'called the English Stonehenge', on Salisbury Plain." - H.B. Wheatly.

THE IRISH CONNECTION

Geoffrey of Monmouth describes how Merlin arranged for the Giant's Dance, an Irish magic healing circle on Mt Killaraus, to be transported to its present site on Salisbury Plain. Giraldus Cambrensis, in his Topography of Ireland (c 1186), gives a precis of Geoffrey, but says the stones were from Kildare near the castle of Naas, and that some stones still stood there.

T.C. Lethbridge (in The Legend of the Sons of God, 1972) suggests that Killara-us is a latinisation of Killaradh or Killary. Now kill is Erse for a cell or church, and Ary is a river name as in Tiobaid arann or Tipperary (where tobar is a well). So is Killaraus near Tipperary?

Modern archaeologists seem to accept that the bluestones, the spotted diorites* of Stonehenge, were shipped from the Prescelly quarries in Dyfed. Lethbridge sought answers by the technique of using a pendulum, and his questioning covered three areas:

1. The date of the setting up of the Stonehenge bluestone circle (Stonehenge II) was found to be 1870 BC;
2. The origin of the stones were given as, not Prescelly Top (favoured by archaeologists) or Dublin (where the nearest deposits of spotted diorites* in Ireland are found, 15 miles north of that city) byt near Tipperary;
3. The date of the setting up of the original Irish bluestone circle was given as c 2650 BC.

LORD OF THE DANCE

As far back as 1966 Geoffrey Russell told us he was convinced that Stonehenge was intended to be a labyrinth similar to the labyrinths and mazes found all over the world and made famous and familiar by the designs on coins from Crete.

If we use the sevenfold plan of Cretan labyrinths and superimpose it on a plan of Stonehenge, the boundaries of the path of this unicursal maze are formed by

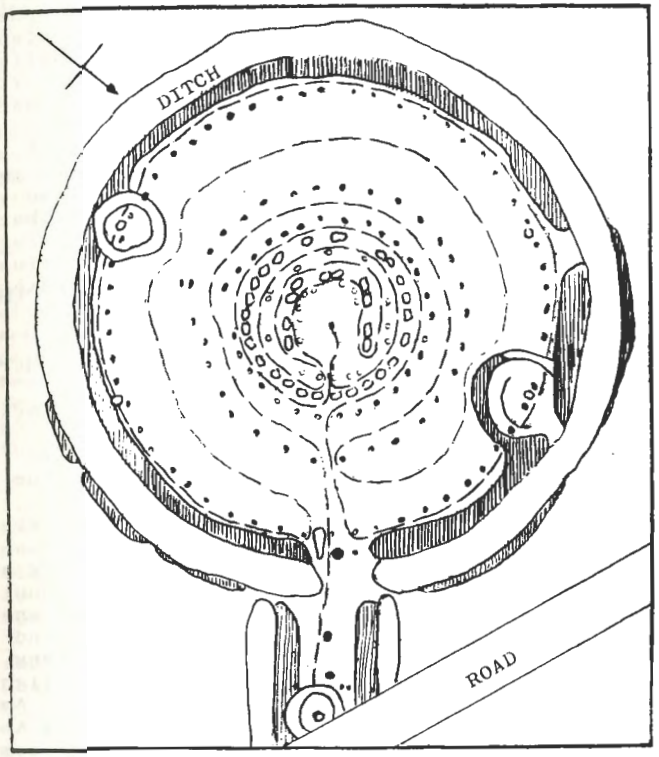
bank - Aubrey holes - Y holes - Z holes - sarsen circle - bluestone circle - sarsen horseshoe - bluestone horseshoe (see figure).

A processional dance down the Avenue would, if it followed a path similar to that suggested in the figure, snake in a complex spiral to the central area enclosed by the horseshoes, and thus integrate two areas of related symbols which have been found together in many other contexts, namely the snake, and the horns. Some examples:

1. On the bottom tier of the seven-tiered cone of Silbury Hill was found two-stranded string on the original surface of the hill, like umbilical cords (c 2660 BC), together with stag's antlers.
2. Cretan goddess figurines carry serpents and wear skirts with seven flounces. (c 1600 BC)

3. Ariadne's clew of thread guides Theseus in his Cretan labyrinth, at the heart of which dwells the bull-horned Minotaur. Theseus also dances the geranos or crane-dance with a snake-like garland around a Horned Altar, one of seven youths and seven maidens. (5th cent. BC)
4. The antlered deity on the Gundestrup cauldron grasps a ram-horned serpent in his left hand, and elsewhere on the cauldron the serpent appears again.

An imaginative "Grand Conventional Festival of the Britons" shown in Meyrick and Smith's The Customs of the Original Inhabitants of the British Islands (1815) even illustrates these two themes - serpents and crescent moon on hangings placed over the central trilithons, and bulls much in evidence either as draught-animals or as sacrifices.

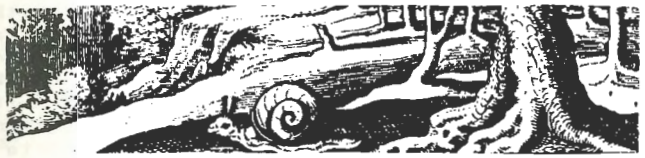


Archaeologically Stonehenge has links with horns as an antler was found associated with the original ditch and dated about 2750 BC. The aptly named "horseshoe" stone placements may also be linked symbolically with horns, crescent moons and the later Celtic torc which the Gundestrup deity is grasping in his right hand.

There are no simple answers to the questions Stonehenge poses. But even if no conclusions are reached then these clues might be grasped for new directions in which to enquire. Since the central area of Stonehenge has not yet been excavated we might yet find Merlin sitting there in his antlers like a Minotaur in his maze!

*"Diorite" seems to be a mistake for Dolerite.

Michael Dames, The Silbury Treasure: the Great Goddess Rediscovered, Thames & Hudson, 1976
Jack Lindsay, Helen of Troy: Woman and Goddess, Constable 1974



Prophetic talisman of Abra-Melin the Wise

Merlin: Man or Myth?

ROGER DAVIE WEBSTER

Of all the figures of the Arthurian Mythos Merlin is the one who lends himself least to a firm definition. His outline, like his origin, is obscure and blurred. He is perhaps, more than any other, all things to all men.

My own first impression of him was, in common with most other children, that of a benign but faintly eccentric wizard, dressed in flowing robes with a conical hat on his head and a habit of forgetting the proper way to phrase his spells. He inhabited that indeterminate childhood middle age, peopled with chivalrous and unlikely heroes to which properly brought-up infants like myself would flee in times of stress.

Unhappily the amiable wizard made no lasting impression on me and it was not until many years later when I read C.S. Lewis's "That Hideous Strength" that Merlin again caught my imagination. But here was a very different Merlin, a huge strong man dwarfing his fellows both physically and spiritually who, scorning to await the invocation of his promised return, tears apart his own tomb with his bare hands and emerges ready to fight any man who will try to put him back. Here is the earth spirit embodied, and one could sniff the tangled soil and forest smell of him between the pages of the text.

So, what evidence is there for the existence of such a man during the period of the historical Arthur? There is very little. Geoffrey of Monmouth is the main source. His "Historia Regum Britanniae" and "Vita Merlini" were the means whereby Merlin was introduced into the mainstream of British historical literature.

In the "Historia" Merlin makes his entry as the divine child who prophesies defeat for the Saxons. He is brought to Vortigern in order that he may be sacrificed as he is born of a virgin, and the King's advisers assure him that only the sacrifice of such a one will secure his victory. But Merlin confounds Vortigern's wise men and reveals the famous vision of the red and white dragons.

Thus begins Merlin's life of prophecy. Indeed Geoffrey credits Merlin with such a torrent of prophetic allegory that it is difficult to believe that the prophet is anything more than a convenient vehicle for Geoffrey's nationalistic fervour. Particularly when it becomes apparent that the prophecies viewed in retrospect (from Geoffrey back to the historical period in which Merlin is said to have lived) are clearly related to historical events whereas the prophecies concerned with the period following Geoffrey are diffuse and indefinable in terms of later events.

However, while Geoffrey is undoubtedly the main source for Merlin he is not the only source. There are poems in both the Black Book of Carmarthen and the Red Book of Hergest which deal with the prophecies of "Myrddin" (the Welsh spelling of Merlin) and which are held to predate Geoffrey although many scholars would dispute this. There is the meeting of Vortigern and Ambrosius in Nennius' "Historia Britonum" which unequivically predates Geoffrey and relates the same famous prophecy, but there is a considerable weight of opinion to suggest that the Ambrosius refered to is Aurelius Ambrosius, Vortigern's dreaded enemy and not the Merlinus Ambrosius of Geoffrey.

However it occurs to me that if Merlin did not exist then it would be necessary to invent him. Without Merlin Arthur would be little more than another Dark Age warrior and without Arthur Merlin would be just another wizard mumbling half-remembered spells on the mountainside. But together the composite figure of Arthur and Merlin represents a fusion of Celticism and Christianity, of past and future,

MAN OR MYTH? contd

of savagery and justice. They represent the key period in our history and they symbolise all that is curiously British within us.

So it may be that Merlin has no existence in history outside the pages of Geoffrey of Monmouth, but to anyone who has lived as I have among the dark mountains of his Kingdom of Dyfed it is plain that behind the insufficient politics of Plaid Cymru and the mindless absurdities of defaced road signs, Merlin, both Man and Myth hovers above the ever present lowering clouds, and manipulates with spectral threads his insubstantial puppets.

For however scholars elsewhere may snap and snarl over his metaphysical bones have no doubt of it Merlin is alive and well and living in West Wales.

FOOL OF TIME contd

altogether fool, my lord".
And in such ways Merlin lives today, both in special individuals, and in that part of all of us that learns to stand back, to question, to raise the quizzical eyebrow at the latest of our follies.

1. He does not appear at all in the High History of the Holy Grail, and only fleetingly in Malory, Geoffrey of Monmouth etc.
2. Let us not forget Tennyson, Spenser, Hallan etc.
3. See Mary Stewart (from G of Monmouth) that he was the son of a Celtic princess and the Prince of Darkness.
4. Definitively, of course, Einstein's great work proving the reality of the relativity of the fourth dimension.
5. Anouilh in his latest play asserts "We cannot experience experience, only memories".
6. Notably when he arranged the conception of Arthur between Uther and Ygraine.
7. E.P.Thompson, "An Open Letter to Leskek Kolokowski", Socialist Register 1973.

Stag, symbol of the soul

Nimue imprisons Merlin

Merlin rebuilds Stonehenge

IMAGES OF MERLIN

The Taming of the Worm

a quest for dragons in fiction

R. A. GILBERT

The dragon in literature has proved to be too elusive a beast to capture and systematise, so that I have been driven to exclude the bulk of what is normally considered as "literature" and to concentrate on one small branch, that of modern imaginative fiction, in order to produce a coherent picture of the development of the fictional dragon in our own time and in our own tongue.

In this context "Dragon" means exactly what it says; there is no room for the shape-shifting serpent of Bram Stoker's "Lair of the White Worm", nor for the latter-day pterodactyls of Conan Doyle's "The Lost World": but to set the scene there is a place for a Chinese fairytale of the 16th century, not only because in the form in which we have it, it is a classic translation into elegant English prose, but because, above all, it swarms with dragons. Arthur Waley's version of "Monkey" presents faerie beasts in abundance and the dragons are true exemplars of all that an oriental dragon should be; very correct and anything but ferocious: "When the dragon heard this, his scales stood on end with fright (and) he went away, weeping bitterly... 'Your majesty' said the dragon king, 'is a True Dragon, I am but a dragon by karma'" (Monkey, by Wu Ch'eng-en, translated by Arthur Waley. 1942 pp 100-101).

Lesser dragons fare no better when confronted by Monkey:
"The dragon soon became very uncomfortable as he lay at the bottom of the stream. 'Misfortunes never come singly', he thought to himself... 'Now I have fallen foul of this cursed monster, who seems determined to do me injury'" (ibid, p 143).

But in the end he regains both composure and glory:
"After a short while, it began to stretch itself and its coat began to change in appearance. It grew horns upon its head and its body became covered with golden scales, while on its cheeks silver whiskers grew" (ibid, p 313).

A fine, self-effacing, comfortable dragon, loving water and seeking only to mind its own business; eminently suited to our own civilised times. A very different creature appears when the dragon tale is set in the proper time and place for the venomous, fire-breathing monster of Western legend. Such a being is Smaug, the jewel-hoarding dragon of "The Hobbit": "There he lay, a vast red-golden dragon, fast asleep; a thrumming came from his jaws and nostrils, and wisps of smoke, but his fires were low in slumber. Beneath him, under all his limbs and his huge coiled tail, and about him on all sides ... lay countless piles of precious things" (The Hobbit, by J.R.R.Tolkien, 1951 ed. p 226).

And, true to his nature, he does not flee man but pursues with poisonous rage those who would thwart him:
"Smaug came hurtling from the North, licking the mountain-sides with flame, beating his great wings with a noise like a roaring wind. His hot breath shrivelled the grass before the door, and drove in through the crack they had left and scorched them as they lay hid" (ibid, p 230).

A dragon indeed, a very symbol of evil itself, and yet, as with all of his kind, he is doomed to perish in the end. The destruction of the dragon, increasingly through surrender rather than combat, and the triumph of Good is common to all fictional dragons whether "real" within the tale or merely, like the Jabberwock, legends within a dream:
"And as in uffish thought he stood,
the Jabberwock with eyes of flame,
came whiffling through the tulgey wood,
And burbled as it came!
One, two! One, two! And through and through,
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!
He left it dead, and with its head
He went galumphing back"

(Through the Looking Glass, and what Alice found there, by Lewis Carroll, 1872 p 22)

Although dangerous - "the jaws that bite, the claws that catch" - the Jabberwock shows clearly the changing nature of the dragon; for while he is yet untamed and submits only to death, he has become partially civilised and dresses for dinner, at least to the extent of a waistcoat.

Even his home is a woodland of dream, for the shrinking of dark forests and trackless wastes as civilisation spreads has left the dragon with no home, and he must come to terms with man or must live elsewhere, perhaps kidnapping maidens as a sop to his vanishing venom. But this, too, has hidden perils, as with Dunsany's dragon in "Miss Cubbidge and the Dragon of Romance":
"She did not notice the roar of the dragon's golden scales, nor distinguish above the manifold lights of London, the small, red glare of his eyes. He suddenly lifted his head, a blaze of gold, over the balcony; ... the dragon lifted Miss Cubbidge and spread his rattling wings, and London fell away like an old fashion" (The Book of Wonder, by Lord Dunsany 1912, p 42).

Carried away to a timeless fairyland, she is yet hardly a victim in need of rescue:
"You had not pictured Miss Cubbidge stroking the golden head of one of the dragons of song with one hand idly, while with the other she sometimes played with pearls brought up from lonely places of the sea" (ibid, p 43).

Fortunate indeed that she had not dwelt in Middle Earth, for no ancient dragon would have submitted to destruction by taming. But others that roam the pages of little-known tales are more domesticated even than Miss Cubbidge's dragon. Most curious of them is the grovelling title beast of A.E.Waite's "Belle and the Dragon", who despite her true dragon form, is in reality (both inside the tale and in the world outside) the transformed step-daughter of the heroine. She is thus that oddity among dragons, a

female; even more:
"The chief eccentric of the comedy was possibly the Green Dragon... The Dragon was an artist on a scale of creative genius which required to be taken largely, and without reference to first principles" (Belle and the Dragon, an Elfin Comedy, by A.E.Waite, 1894 p 15).

Not only is this a female dragon, but artistic and self-employed. Worse still, she is tractable, for when dismissed by the heroine: "The Dragon ... dropped with a thud to the floor, turned a rapid series of somersaults, uttered a dismal howl, and transformed into the ravening monster whose name she bore. It was a more dire and complete transformation than any she had yet suffered. Her tail covered the entire floor: her short, bat-like wings brooded over the whole bedstead; her breath filled the apartment; she moved uneasily to and fro, her scaly body heaving and undulating like the sea... The Dragon grovelled and

A GREAT AWAKENING.

groaned submissively, and made frantic efforts to resume her previous shape" (ibid, p 146).

A long descent from the splendour of Smaug, but for all her modernity this feeble beast still reflects one part of the true dragon nature: "The Dragon would be unworthy of her title were she otherwise than infinitely wicked" (ibid, p 25).

Even so, she gathered enough goodness in suburbia to illustrate herself.

Thus far have dragons calmed down from the violence of their primaeval nature; they are tame, tractable and talented, but their fall is not yet complete. The last dragon in this headlong descent into domestication excites not fear, but pity: "Meanwhile I heard a noise in the fireplace, and Pompey came out. He was a small dragon about a foot long, not counting his tail, which measured another foot. He had been lying on the burning coals and was red-hot. So I was glad to see that as soon as he got out of the fire he put a pair of asbestos boots which were lying in the fender on to his hind feet. 'Now Pompey', said Mr. Leakey, 'hold your tail up properly. If you burn the carpet again, I'll pour a bucket of cold water over you. (Of course I wouldn't really do that, it's very cruel to pour cold water on to a dragon especially a little one with a thin skin') he added in a low voice, which only I could hear" (My Friend Mr. Leakey, by J.B.S.Haldane, 1937 p 46).

Pompey is a dish-warmer and general domestic servant, which sad state of affairs Mr. Leakey justifies bluntly: "Anyway, I think dragons were meant for use, not ornament. Don't you?" (ibid, p 48)

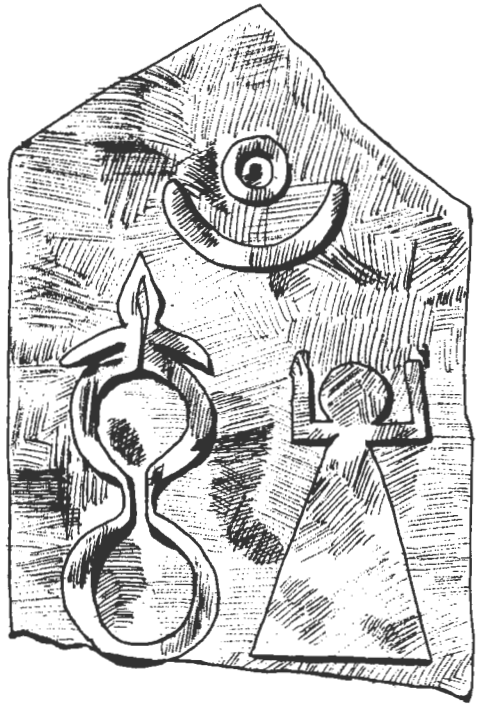
No, I don't. Modern man is a quiet creature, at least in England, and I suppose that his imagined dragons reflect his mood, but even symbols should keep their rightful place. At least Pompey was spared the final indignity, for Mr. Leakey was not like you and I - he was, like Merlin, a Magician.

Trinities

STEPHEN BANKS

LEFT: from the Last Judgement, Saint Thomas', Salisbury

RIGHT: Tanit (Ashtar) represented symbolically from near Carthage



To Christians "the Trinity" is that of Father, Son and Divine Spirit. God the Father set his Son at his own right hand (Ephesians 1-20) so we are given the relative positions of the Persons in this trinity. Let us here consider other trinities and the placing within them of the three members.

Just as the Son was called to God's right hand, so the placing within all trinities refers to the central character, not to the viewer. Thus "right" is stage right, known in heraldry as dexter, and "left" is stage left, or heraldic sinister. At its simplest the right side is male and the left female, as is seen on a coat-of-arms showing on one shield the arms of a man and his wife "impaled", as the expression is. If it was required to represent a married couple by their initials, the convention was to place them in an equilateral triangle. So the initials of John and Mary Smith may appear on a Georgian silver spoon as:

S

J M

In the fifteenth century a godly merchant of Salisbury caused a picture of the Judgement to be painted over the chancel arch of St Thomas' church in that city. There God sits in majesty above the point of the arch. To His right the dead arise from their graves and are shepherded by angels up to heaven, or whipped by devils down to hell on His left. So the right side may be "right" in the sense of being good, and the left may be sinister in the sense of evil. In this Salisbury "doom" painting the sun appears above the right shoulder of God, and above his left shoulder the moon.

Now the sun is the "Sun of Righteousness", associated with the deity whose concern is the law, for the sun is strong, and constant in his movement. The first known code of laws in the western world is that of Hamurabbi, a king of ancient Assyria, which may be seen engraved on a stone in the museum at Tehran in Persia. Above the lines of close-set cuneiform writing the king stands, his open hands palm upwards in worship of a seated deity, who by the rays of light

springing from his shoulders is seen to be Shamash the sun-god. In other representations of Shamash he is seen rising from a valley between two hills, which Professor Thom would be pleased to note.

The Jews came to worship one God early in their history, but it is significant that when Moses brought down the Ten Commandments he was transfigured and his countenance shone like the sun. Furthermore when Christ in his turn was transfigured it was Moses the law-giver who appeared with Him on the right, and Elias the prophet on the left.

Apollo is a god with several antecedents, but he came to be concerned with justice, and with the sun. A modern slant on him was given by the psychologist William James, who classed humanity into "apollonians" who are conservative, and "dionysians" who are rebels.

Let us turn to the left. On the chancel arch in Salisbury the moon appears over the left shoulder of God. Now the sun stands for constancy, but the moon changes to mark the passing months, and it has been recently established that female creatures on earth are indeed influenced by the phases of the moon, as had long been believed without scientific proof. Moreover the moon's dominion is wide-ranging: mercy and peace are in her province, but so are inconstancy, waywardness, and the madness called "lunacy". In her finest manifestation the moon is Queen of Heaven, from Ashtaroth to Mary, robed in the blue of the night sky studded with stars, on her forehead a crescent of silver. It is She the Mother of all creatures, whose intercession we seek when we have broken the laws of God. On a lower plane are the female deities of earthly love, whose symbol is the curving green willow leaf, and below them lurk and rage Kali the destroyer, Cerridwen the sow who eats her farrow, and the dreaded Furies. All these are comprehended in the trinity of Virgin, Mother, and Hag. It is not male chauvinism that delays the introduction of women into the ministry of the orthodox and catholic churches, but an inward fear that the less acceptable faces of female godhead would somehow rise up. The word "priestess" has overtones recalling Cybele rather than Christ.

SHAMASH, the Assyrian sun-god

What we may call a "regular" trinity has a chief central element bringing together a being on the right with straightforward, often male characteristics, and one on the left which is subtle, usually female. A departure from this lay-out calls for explanation.

One "irregular" trinity is formed by the lights of a steamship, as seen approaching at night. The two complementing colours of red and green on the bows have between them a white light at the masthead.

So far, so good, but the light of lady-green-sleeves is on the right and the fiery red lamp of the sun on the left. This may simply be because the steering oar used to be on the starboard(steer-board) side, so ships normally passed starboard side to starboard side, the steersmen face to face and the confronting green lights signifying safety. Now consider a moment the trinity of the deisis, often depicted in Eastern churches. Here Christ on the Cross has the Virgin Mary on His right, and St John on His left. In this dark moment the central figure of God is humbled and the normal order of nature is reversed. Our Lady stands where Eve once stood, on the right of another tree. This is no place to speak further of such deep mysteries.

So, as Pendragons should, let us return to consider Arthur, himself a trinity of man, king and legend. The historic Arthur can be seen through the mists of literary and archaeological research: the legendary Arthur has inspired past generations, pictured as a medieval knight or a Victorian pastiche of one: in the centre Arthur the King brings together fact and myth as leader of the powers of good against those of evil;
Arturus, rex quondam, rex futurus.

REVIEW

Picwinnard

The magazine of Wessex leys & folklore.

This is a new bi-monthly illustrated publication of which two numbers have appeared at the time of going to press. The format is similar to The Ley Hunter and Pendragon and the contents highly readable, informative and refreshingly free of cant, which can be the bane of such enterprises.

The magazine is symbolically named after a cairn in Weston-super-Mare woods which was demolished but then rebuilt after a public outcry. Its subject-matter unashamedly aims to "link ourselves to our ancestors, and to our history". A worthy aim, and well may it flourish.
(Obtainable from The Editor, Hythe Bow, Cheddar, Somerset for 25p + postage, or local shops.)

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