PENDRAGON

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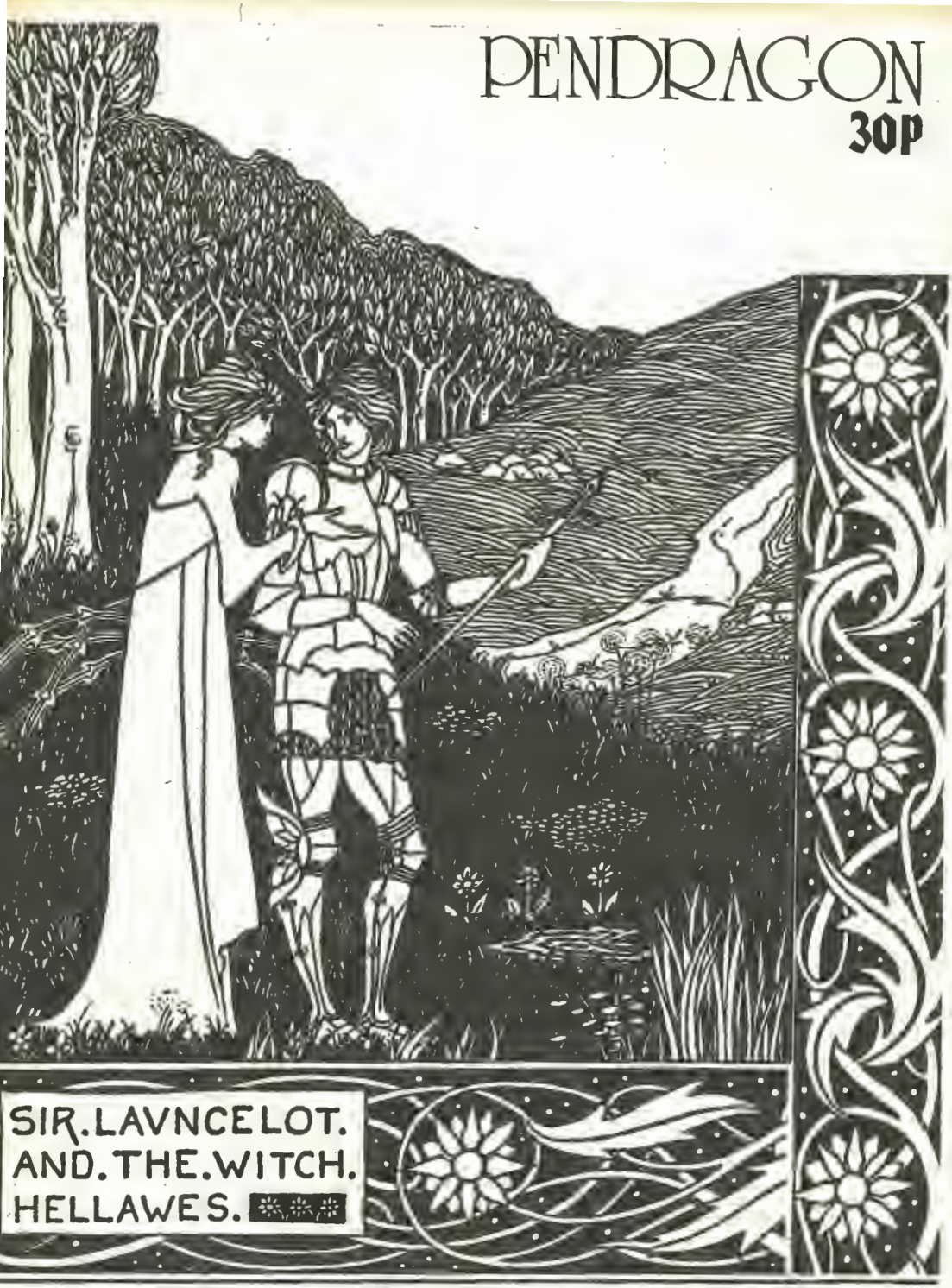

IN THIS ISSUE: LANCELOT; THE HOLY SHROUD; MUSIC

PENDRAGON

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There are several themes in this issue, but France seems to be a link in most of them. The 12th century Chretien de Troyes was the first to bring Lancelot to the public eye; it was at Livey, near Troyes, that apparently Geoffrey de Charny (probably related to his unfortunate Templar namesake) founded a chucrh to house the Holy Shroud, shortly before his death in 1356; and it was the French troubadours, and the trouveres they inspired, who provided the impetus to much of Western European culture then by welding together Celtic hero tales, the new "chivalric" ideals of knighthood, and elements of Moslem music brought back from the Crusades or through contacts with Spain. Incidentally, that strange character Gurdjieff (who died in France) believed that the intricate and traditional art of Persian carpet weaving was a method of incorporating rhythms and tunes for the musicians who sat on them, and this might make us look at Celtic art in a new light.

The suggested theme for the next issue is The Round Table, which can be as broadly based as you care to make it - jousts, zodiacs, mandalas or mazes, fellowships, cosmology and numbers, fact or fiction, or whatever you can think up. We are still looking for articles and themes for future issues so if you are engaged on a project, be it practical or researched, or if you disagree with what's being said, or if you think your pet topic is being ignored, write and tell us.

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THE ENTERTAINING OF THE NOBLE HEAD

Tim Porter is the founder of the Green Branch, a touring opera group which presents works based on British mythology. Recent productions of Tim Porter's operas include Deirdre, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and Robin Hood. The Entertaining of the Noble Head is to receive a new production this August, which will be taken on a tour of 11 places in the West Country, including Bristol, Bath, Glastonbury and Salisbury. On its first production in 1973, one critic wrote "In the musical drama of Tim Porter can be found the kind of stimulation experienced through reading The Golden Bough... Haunting music, in which voices and instruments combine uncannily to produce notes which seem to come from some remote region unknown to this world".

THE BIRTH OF AN ARTHURIAN OPERA

tim porter

For as long as I've been a composer, I've seen it as my particular duty to interpret the "Matter of Britain". This is not exactly a formula for success. But then it's no use anyway trying to make a successful career, in the worldly sense, out of being a composer, if you are "all heart and no head". Those mysterious springs of creation on which one depends may gush forth suddenly, or, equally unpredictably, may dry up for weeks, months, years. All one can do is to provide the right conditions and hope that unseen powers will do the rest. Yet even the "right conditions" may change without warning. I long ago learnt that living in the depths of the country close to nature is not necessarily the answer; nor is living in the frenzy of a city. "Inspiration" (a corny word maybe, but an unavoidable one) may spark in the most curious circumstances. What it does need (so I find, anyway) is a "catalyst", or "flint and steel" situation. Keep reading, keep travelling, keep meeting new people, seeking fresh experiences, and sooner or later two or more unexpected things will strike together and make a spark.

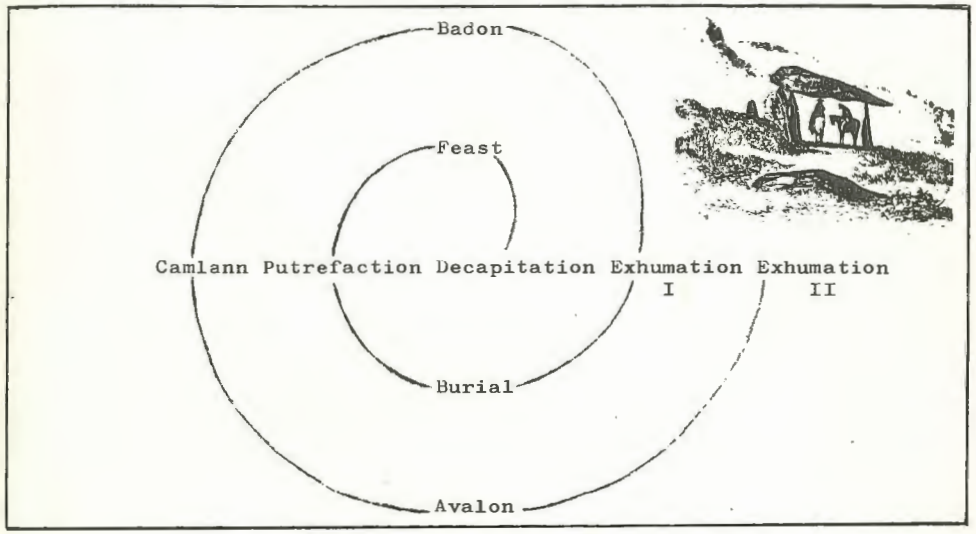
A case in point involved me five years ago. I had for a long time been unaccountably haunted by an incident known as "The Entertaining of the Noble Head" in the Mabinogi of Branwen. It seemed to me that here was the material for a new opera; but what could be done with it? The incident relates how the dying Bran commanded that his head should be cut off, and buried under the White Mount in London, with the face towards France - the idea being that no invasion could come across the sea while the head was thus positioned. For the journey to London, Bran gave very specific instructions; his henchmen were to feast at Harlech for seven years, then on the Island of Grassholm for fourscore years, but when the "door towards Cornwall" was opened, then they should proceed to London without delay. Bran's companions did as they were bid, and during all the feasting the severed head discoursed with them as pleasantly as through Bran had been there entire; but when the "door towards CCrnwall" was opened, they felt all their sorrows afresh, and hurried quickly on to London and buried the head.

This story looms as weirdly as the visible fraction of an iceberg, and proves just as slippery to the grasp. Yet perhaps interpretation is a vain aim; illumination may be of more use. For me, an unexpected light

was shed by the Welsh Triads, in which "the third ill-fated disclosure" is listed as Arthur's exhumation of the head "as he thought it beneath his dignity to hold the island otherwise than by valour". Now, the tone of reproach implicit in this, coupled with the known early date of the Triads, suggested to me a historical origin. Not only could this be one of the few treasured and tenuous links with the real, historical Arthur, but also a thread joining myth to history.

I was also struck by the parallels in the stories of the mythical Bran and the semi-historical Arthur. Both were regarded as guardians of Britain who even after "death" would somehow defend the island. Slightly more arguably, I came to equate the Badon period with the joyful feast when time seemed suspended, and Camlann with the opening of the "door towards Cornwall", followed by the swift decay of glory and the disappearance of the hero to his remote but unforgotten vigil.

A further sequel is of course the alleged exhumation of Arthur in his turn, at Glastonbury in 1190. This gave me three related cycles of myth, semi-history, and actual history. Moreover, each was joined to the end of the former, making a characteristically Celtic spiral pattern...



It further occurred to me that each set of matching events could be seen as initiating a new season. It is the ritual midwinter decapitation that brings about spring, the victory of Badon that enables summer to flourish, the corpses of Camlann and the opening of the door towards Cornwall that cause putrefaction to set in, and the disappearance of life into subterranean hibernation that marks the onset of winter. So the spiral represents two "years", and the beginning of a third.

Still the problem remained of how to present this notion in dramatic form. The most sensible thing seemed to be to use a time-scale of two actual years in a modern life, and to have a character who is able to travel between the "parallel worlds". This device, which has by now become a convention through the works of Alan Garner and others, seemed to be a most suitable vehicle in which to convey an audience around this unfamiliar territory.

For me there could be only one possible guide in this labyrinth - Cole Hawlings, the old showman in John Masefield's novel The Box of Delights, who in that magical story slips with felicitous ease from century to

century, and somehow seems to be a perpetual presence haunting the roads of Britain. This reminded me of a theory I had formed several years previously, that Cole Hawlings might well be a reference to, or even a portrait of, Alfred Warkins, the celebrated re-discoverer of "leys". Watkins certainly admired Masefield, and Masefield's use of personal and place names suggests an acquaintance with Watkins' work. So I rolled the two characters into one, so that Watkins/Hawlings could be a shape-shifter as well as a time-traveller.

Still it seemed that my audience needed a representative of themselves, an "Everyman" figure, a real person to experience all this and so make a human drama of it. I was damned if I was going in there myself (writing myself into a psychic drama the year before had produced unpleasant results). So I took the name (but not the character, for he is a rather priggish little boy!) of Masefield's "everyman" Kay, added my own initial to make Katy, and in so doing changed the character's sex, thus distancing her just far enough; then for good measure I let her be a painter rather than a composer, and felt all set to proceed.

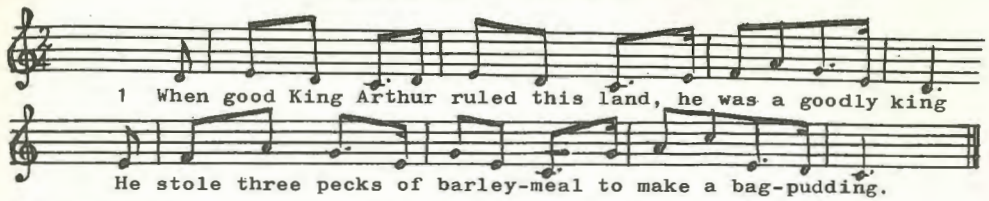
These seemingly disparate elements - the Mabinogion, Arthur, John Masefield, Alfred Watkins, Katy - had together produced the "catalyst" I needed!

I gave Katy's story a classic opening, which is the theme of many of the greatest myths, including the tales of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, and of Pwyll Prince of Dyfed - that of a mortal having to take on the role of an immortal for a set time. Katy is blasted from the twentieth century into the corresponding point in the mythic cycle, which she experiences for a year in the role of Bran. Meanwhile Bran, in Katy's shape, foists upon the twentieth century certain vivid paintings of incidents in the Arthurian cycle, which later prove to be "doors" into the past. On her return to the present, Katy is confronted by these pictures which she is supposed to have done, and, discovering their curious properties, forms a taste for wandering in and out of the past, but finds that it is easier to get there than to get back. The situation is only saved from falling into the depths of horror by an equivocal ending, in which Katy is seen to be with Cole Hawlings in her lost backwater of the past - thus not lost altogether.

The piece is full of loose ends and hints of further unconsidered issues, but I do not claim to understand the material myself - again, I can't resist the metaphor of a slippery iceberg, showing only a fraction of itself above the surface of a murky sea. If I was presenting it merely as a theory, it would have taken the form of a book or an article. Its musical clothing wraps it even deeper in an element which I myself understand as little as anybody. I make my humble coil-pot, but then submit it to the kiln. The drama is the organic matter which makes a person out of a skeleton; the music is the unknown element which makes a living soul out of a person. Unless all these elements quicken to life, the piece fails. It succeeds if the lines of Wordsworth with which it ends prove true -

"The music in my heart I bore
Long after it was heard no more."

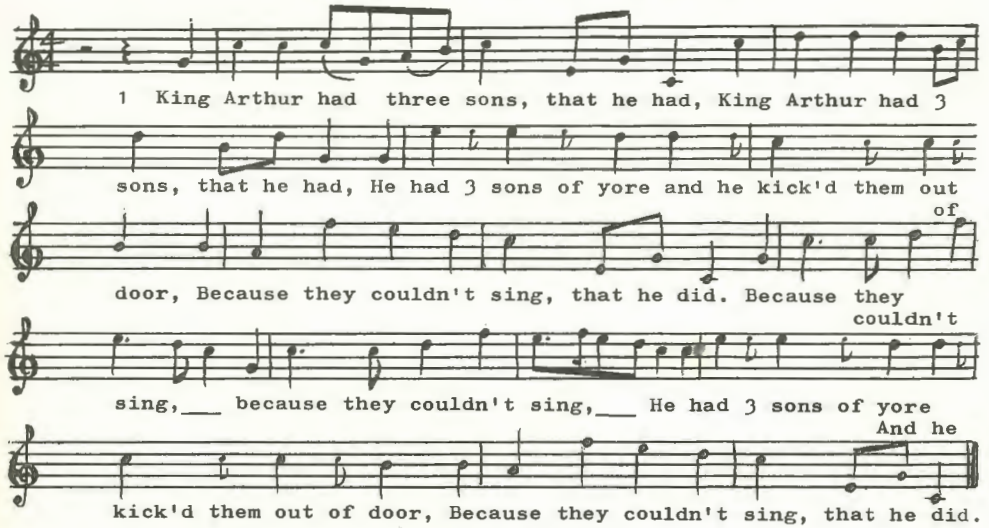
WHEN GOOD KING ARTHUR



2 A bag-pudding the Queen did make, And stuffed it well with plums,
And in it put great lumps of fat As big as my two thumbs.
3 The king and queen did eat thereof And noblemen beside,
And what they could not that night The Queen next morning fried.

- The Baby's Opera, Walter Crane 1877 (Piccolo 1974), slighty adapted.

KING ARTHUR HAD THREE SONS



2 The first he was a miller, that he was,
The second he was a weaver, that he was,
And the third he was a little tailor boy,
And he was mighty clever, that he was. -- CHORUS.
3 Now the miller stole grist for his mill, that he did,
And the weaver stole wool for his loom, that he did,
And the little tailor boy he stole corduroy,
For to keep those three rogues warm, that he did. -- CHORUS.
4 O the miller he was drown'd in his dam, that he was,
And the weaver he was kill'd at his loom, that he was,
But the devil ran away with the little tailor boy,
With the broad-cloth under his arm, that he did. -- CHORUS.

- Dorsetshire folksong collected by Lucy Broadwood.

These unflattering portraits of the thievish family of Arthur, in direct contrast with those of Robin Hood, are slightly mitigated by the fact that similar verses are	told of King Stephen, King Henry and Queen Bess. The miller, weaver and tailor were, as the typical middlemen of a past economy, the favourite butts of jokes about dishonesty.

DRAGONS IN ESSEX

jim kimmis

IN TAKING UP THE theme of issue 10.4 of Pendragon, two qualifications should be made concerning the information set out below. First, using only library material it is difficult to find all the information relating to any legend and it is likely that some references have been missed altogether. Second, Essex is an undraconian county (compared with Northumberland or Somerset for instance) and it may be that apparently local legends have been imported at an early date and given local colouring.
Here, then, are Three well-chronicled dragon stories and a miscellany of related material, all that has come to light so far.

WORMINGFORD

There are two accounts of the dragon of Wormingford, both set in the 12th century. The better-known states that a "cockadrille" was brought back from the Crusades by King Richard I as the first specimen for the royal menagerie in the Tower of London. The creature was small to begin with but grew to enormous size and escaped into the Essex countryside. It reached a village being then named Withermundsford on the river Stour (Suffolk border), and fed on local maidens until the supply ran out. The cockadrille was described as being huge in body and long in tail, yet short and stubby in limb with "grete Nayles or Talouns".
The villagers called on Sir George de la Haye for deliverance. He has been called a son of Count Eustace of Boulogne, but the Count lived a century earlier and probably has no real place in this story. Sir George fought his dragon near the Stour and killed it in a field now called Bloody Meadow. There is a modern stained-glass window of St. George and the Dragon in the church put up to commemorate the encounter.

The second account is in the chronicle of John de Hokelowe, a monk who was writing in St. Albans around the year 1405. The rumour reached him of the sudden appearance of a great dragon with a crested head, saw-like teeth and an enormous tail, which devoured sheep on lands owned by Sir Richard Waldegrave of Smallbridge Hall, Bures St. Mary. The meadows in question are on the Suffolk side of the river, immediately opposite Wormingford. In this account, the villagers themselves attacked the dragon, which disappeared forever into a mere.

Despite the differences in detail, both stories site the encounter on the same stretch of the Stour and seem to describe the same creature. It has been suggested that the "cockadrille" was in fact a crocodile, a prosaic beast compared to a dragon but unfamiliar enough in 12th century England to be identified with something out of legend. It has also been suggested that the name Wormingford is only a corruption of the Saxon Withermundsford, but the equation of "dragon" and "worm" is a clear enough indication that the name records a memory of the creature.
A last detail, which may have no connection with the story, is the former existence of a large tumulus which stood in Wormingford parish. It was completely removed in the 19th century and was found to cover parallel rows of funerary urns, presumed Roman or Romano-British. The connection between dragons and artificial hills is well attested elsewhere, but there is no reference to the tumulus in either of the above accounts.

HENHAM

The Henham dragon was notorious in the 17th century due to the wide distribution of a pamphlet entitled "The Flying Serpent, or Strange News Out of Essex", published in 1669. Although the "serpent" apparently never flew (according to observers its wings were too small), there is a list of signatories in the pamphlet which suggests the unanimous conviction of the local people that they had indeed seen something outside the normal fauna of the area.

The account states that the serpent was 8 or 9 feet long, had large eyes, sharp teeth and slight wings, and habitually basked on a sunny bank in Birches Wood in the parish of Henham-on-the-Mount. It retreated into the wood whenever men approached with weapons, and the assumption of the pamphlet was that the creature was still alive in 1669 - a comparatively late date for dragons.

The author of the pamphlet was probably Robert Winstanley of Saffron Walden, a relative of Henry Winstanley, inventor, practical joker and builder of the first Eddystone lighthouse. The family connection has suggested to some commentators that the "flying serpent" was merely a mechanical device dreamed up by the Winstanleys to frighten the villagers and attract a little fame and capital. Robert Winstanley did capitalise on the story in his "Poor Robin's Almanac", and miniature Flying Serpent souvenirs were sold for years afterwards at the local fair.

Another attempt at rationalisation was the assertion that the dragon was really a serpent, although it is difficult to imagine why a snake of tropical dimensions should choose to settle in Essex. Finally, the existence of a stone dragon carved on a 14th century arcade in the church has led to the suggestion that the Flying Serpent was invented to satisfy the village's curiosity and imagination. It seems more likely that there was an earlier dragon tradition, now represented by the carving and eclipsed by the 17th century tale.

The name Henham-on-the-Mount is difficult to explain in terms of topography The village lies on gently rising ground above the headwaters of the Cam, but it is hardly a hilltop position, even by the standards of "flat" Essex. Perhaps there was a man-made "hill" in the vicinity, or perhaps the dragon-mount association is sufficient to explain the name.

SAFFRON WALDEN

The 1669 pamphlet also included an earlier story from Saffron Walden, a few miles from Henham. This concerned a "cockatrice" or "basilesk" which, true to type, lurked in the riverside meadows and killed people merely by looking at them. It was attacked and killed by a knight wearing a coat of crystal glass, a stratagem used successfully elsewhere. The knight's sword, a brazen effigy of the cockatrice, and a tablet relating the story were all placed in Walden church but were destroyed by iconoclastic soldiers during the Civil War. No later commentator has been bold enough to find a rational explanation for this story; it seems to be a genuine dragon legend which parallels better-known examples from "true" dragon country.

OTHER REFERENCES

I have found brief references to two other Essex dragons, about which there seems to be little published information. One was seen just before the death of King Henry II at St. Osyth, a village near the coast (where, it is said, a holy well sprang when St.Osyth's head was cut off by Danes). The apparition was described as "a Dragon of marvellous bigness".
The other reference is to a battle between a Suffolk dragon and another from Ballingdon, then in Essex but now counted as part of Sudbury. This is the second dragon to be found dwelling on the river Stour, and it is notable that all the stories so far collected are from the north of the county. This may be because the distant influence of London, which now chokes much of southern Essex, has not been able to eradicate the local traditions.

The last word, as usual, must go to St. George. Of over 400 old parish churches in the county, only one is dedicated to this saint (although SS. Margaret and Michael, dragon fighters before the patron of England achieved his present fame, have 30 dedications between them). St. George's church is at Great Bromley, a few miles north of St. Osyth, and contains carvings of monsters devouring people, so it is possible that there is another dragon to be discovered there.

GUARDIANS OF THE SANGREAL?

jess foster

A number of articles have appeared in our national newspapers recently giving details of all the exhaustive tests that have been applied to The Holy Shroud of Turin in an effort to prove its authenticity. There is not room here to explain these in detail, but we can offer an outline of what is involved, and some readers will be able to see the film being presented in London at this time; hopefully, the film will travel the country and elsewhere.

Normally the Shroud is locked away in a silvered reliquary in a grille-covered niche high above the Royal Chapel in the Cathedral of Turin. It is produced for public gaze once in every generation. Eighty years ago an Italian lawyer took the first ever photograph as it hung on display. He expected only to record the vague and shadowy figure as it appeared on the cloth. Instead, the figure showed up in natural relief showing a hauntingly majestic countenance.

The Shroud measures 14 feet and it is obvious that the body was laid on one half of the cloth while the other half was pulled over the feet and laid on top to cover the front and face. Briefly, from head to feet the evidence of flagellation, crucifixion and lance wound in the side is clear for all to see. The only question left is whether or not the Shroud is a forgery.

Tests have shown that grains of pollen in the material belong only to plants found in Palestine and Turkey. Research has revealed that the Shroud was, indeed, in Turkey for some time. It was, it seems, folded four times so that only the head was exposed. For some reason it was never thought of as a Shroud, only as a holy relic, and was then known as the Mandylion.

For that portion of the Shroud's history that is relevant to Pendrag--on research let us quote from the long article which appeared in the illustrated portion of The Sunday Times of Sunday, March 26th, 1978.

"There is then, a substantial possibility that the Mandylion could have been the Shroud, but some explanation is needed for the 'missing' century and a half between the cloth's disappearance as the Mandylion from Constantinople in 1204, and its re-emergence as the Shroud in the hands of the French de Charny family during the 1350s.

"The most likely suspects as possessors of the cloth would seem to be the Crusader Order of Knights Templars, who had wide dealings in religious relics during the 13th century. Significantly by the early 14th century they were widely rumoured around Europe to be worshipping at secret chapter meetings a mysterious bearded male head, described in some accounts as on a plaque, and among the more malicious as an 'idol'.

"In 1307 the rumour was used as an excuse by King Philippe the Fair of France to arrest every French Templar for heresy, enabling him to lay his hands on the Order's substantial wealth. Whatever was the original of the 'idol' was never found. It is clear however that some distant Templar preceptories kept copies of the 'idol', and what may be one of these came to light here in England in 1951 during the demolition of an outhouse at Templecombe, Somerset, the site of a long vanished Templar preceptory.

"It was a curious panel painting, covered with coal dust, but clearly depicting a bearded male head of the type referred to in Templar confessions. Today this hangs in the church of St. Mary, Templecombe, somewhat pale after having been scrubbed in the vicar's bath before its antiquity was realised. Its resemblance to the face on the Shroud is unmistakeable.

"If the Shroud was indeed the 'idol' possessed by the Templars, one further clue survives as to its fate. In Paris during March 1314 two of the last Templar dignitaries were brought out to be burnt at the stake, proclaiming to the last their innocence of heresy. One was the Order's Grand Master, Jacques de Molay. The other was the Templar Master of Normandy. And his name ? Geoffrey de Charny."

Apart from the blood stains, and slight fire damage at the edges, there are certain scorch marks on the cloth which cannot be easily explained, but which may eventually give proof of the Resurrection. However, we must wait a little longer for this.

On October 7th scientists and other experts will be gathering for a special Shroud Congress. They will be hoping to be allowed to test the Shroud image and linen, using the most advanced micro-analytical and radio-carbon techniques available. If the Archbishop of Turin gives permission, we may soon have the answer to one of the greatest mysteries of all time: certainly the most important.

WHERE IS ST GEORGE? - PAGAN IMAGERY IN ENGLISH FOLKSONG
Bob Stewart (Moonraker Press 1977)

One of the ideas central to this book is that a handful of folk-songs have survived to represent pre-Christian ritual practice, though not necessarily in the form, words or music as we now know them. One group of songs refer to the Divine King, the victim who was killed to ensure that life continued for the rest of the community (a concept not unknown in Christianity). Songs like The Two Brothers are about the ritual murder itself, The Cutty Wren is about the surrogate (in this case a bird) who takes the place of the royal victim, and the ballad Edward concerns the slayer who, like Cain, remains behind, marked out among men.

Another group of songs, called collectively The Dilly Song, are sacred counting songs of which Green grow the Rushes is the best known. The symbols are not merely perverted Christian images, but pre-Christian, having links with other Indo-European cultures and especially with the ten spheres of the Jewish cabalistic Tree of Life.

Yet another group includes songs known as Corpus Christi carols, one version of which is supposed to be connected with the Glastonbury thorn which flowers on Old Christmas Eve.

There is a lot more material in this book, too varied to mention. (The title, incidentally, comes from the Padstow May Day song and refers to the now Christianised vegetation god of an agricultural religion who is set adrift in a boat on the sea.) The author, an accomplished Scots musician living in Bath, speaks passionately and in depth about his subject, though I think few would now dispute the broad arguments he sets out.

C.L.

X Pisces

LANCELOT'S ROMANCE

adapted from the spanish romance de lanzarote

yann lovelock

His own three sons are cursed by the king
out of the rage he has against them;

One is a dog and one is a deer
and one has turned Moor beyond the sea.

May an evil fire consume her,
the Lady Quintañones!

So many knights are dead
on her behalf.

High-hearted Lancelot went gladly riding,
hounds on a leash were bounding by him.

"O Lancelot, lay down your crossbow,
courteous jester with ladies;

What gift could you find more fit for your bride
than the deer with white feet?"

Subtle Sir Lancelot sought it gladly,
He has ridden through the land.

And now he comes to the hermitage,
his call is echoed down the wood:

"What heaths are the haunts of the white-footed deer,
for the hounds are bounding by my side?"

"Stay here, my son, till the dawn has brightened
and you shall learn all I can tell.

Two hours before day I saw the deer
and seven lions went by its side;

Seven lions and a suckling lioness,
seven counts lay dying where they passed.

May God preserve you, Lancelot,
from the one who sent you Hunting;

Little delight I think she took
to have you in her service."

The Festival for Mind and Body

At the time of writing we are preparing for another appearance at the Festival of Mind and Body. The Festival will again be at Olympia, from April 29th - May 7th. We hope that everyone who can get time off will be able to come to the Exhibition. We shall be in the area designated for "Ancient British Mysteries".

The entire Festival will travel across the ocean to re-appear at the Coliseum in New York in March, 1979. We shall need volunteers to sell our magazines there and to look after our display. Can any of our American members come to our aid in this way? We shall be very grateful. If you can, please write to the Hon. Sec.

We all know by now that there is a certain amount of evidence in favour of an historical Arthur. Kai, Bedevere and Trystan are mentioned in the Welsh Triads, so they have some historical substance also. Lancelot belongs entirely to fiction, and in the Legends he plays a key role. If we decide to study the drama on the level of human relationships we should consider what manner of man this Lancelot was; obviously his character shapes his destiny.

Lancelot was taken, when young, to visit the British Court. Immediately he developed such a passionate hero-worshipping admiration for King Arthur that, when he returned to France, he dedicated himself entirely to martial exercises and severe self-disciplines. (See T.H. White's book, "The Ill-Made Knight")

In due course this earnest young man returned to Camelot and was admitted to the fellowship of The Round Table. He was determined to become the most valorous and worthy of all the Knights: the acme of his ambition was to perform one totally perfect deed. In every fight he was the victor. After every fight he spared his victim's life on condition that the vanquished one reported to the Court of King Arthur and took service under him. ("Join the Party, man, and in due course we shall shape the world so that all problems are solved.")

Yet, before very long, dallying with the Queen, and with the truth, Lancelot became involved with the Lily Maid of Astolat. (See Tennyson's "Elaine".) He was not to blame that she fell in love with him, but even though he knew this, he up and left her without so much as a backward glance, being totally obsessed with his own obsessions. He was only briefly grieved when she died for love of him. Those who saw the film musical will remember Lancelot as the intense, up-tight, driving man who never went frivolling in the woods when they went a-Maying.

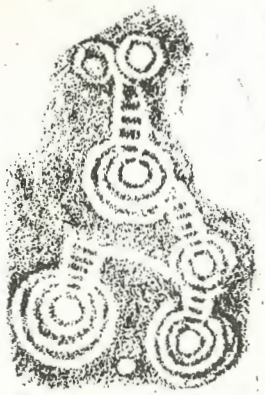
We have here, in fact, the picture of a typical adolescent. Brave, noble, aspiring, totally self-centred and desperately busy about the important business of being busy.

jess foster

Does anyone now read the novels of Thornton Wilder? Wilder wrote a book about a red-hot Gospeler called Elmer Gantry, a man raging with inward zeal and good intentions. On the fly-page of the book Wilder wrote: "Of all forms of Genius, Goodness has the longest awkward age."

T.H. White called Lancelot The Ill-Made Knight. Perhaps the Awkward Knight would be fairer. Unhappily for all concerned Lancelot's awkward age persisted too long. Even at the end, when warned that trouble was afoot, he could not make himself scarce immediately; he had to return once more to say farewell to the Queen and explain to her the reason for his departure. Thus he fell into the trap devised by the mischief-makers and brought ruin to all those he loved best.

Two thousand years ago, in Jerusalem, there was another Zealot whose frustrations got the better of him, and who also brought disaster upon those that he loved best. Quite recently, in our daily newspapers, we read about another zealous young man who took a tape-recorder to a dinner party, gave the tape to a born mischief-maker (there are always plenty around) and did enough damage to last himself a lifetime of ignominy. If we are "To study the significance, past, present and future, of the Arthurian Legends", can we discover what these characters had in common that kept them permanently in a state of adolescence and prevented them from maturing as they might have done?



Rudyard Kipling, who is once again receiving attention, may possibly have an answer. He wrote a poem which begins:

The Four Archangels, so the legends tell,
Raphael, Gabriel, Michael, Azrael,
Being first of those to whom the Power was shown,
Stood first of all the Host before the Throne,
And, when the charges were allotted, burst
Tumultuous-winged from out the assembly first.
Zeal was their spur that bade them strictly heed
Their own high judgement on their lightest deed.
Zeal was their spur that, when relief was given,
Urged them unwearied to new toils in Heaven;
For Honour's sake perfecting every task
Beyond what e'en Perfection's self could ask.
And Allah, Who created Zeal and Pride,
Knows how the twain are perilous-near allied.

The Four Archangels, however, were fortunate inasmuch as they had a Seraph who could tell them stories:

These he rehearsed with artful pause and halt,
And such pretence of memory at fault,
That soon the Four -- so well the bait was thrown
Came to his aid with memories of their own --
Matters dismissed long since as small or vain,
Whereof the high significance had lain
Hid, till the ungirt glosses made it plain.
Then, as enlightenment came broad and fast,
Each marvelled at his own oblivious past
Until -- the Gates of Laughter opened wide --
The Four, with that bland Seraph at their side,
While they recalled, compared and amplified,
In utter mirth forgot both Zeal and Pride!

.....

O sweeter than their zealous fellowship,
The wise half-smile that passed from lip to lip!
O well and roundly, when Command was given,
They told their tale against themselves to Heaven,
And in the silence, waiting on The Word,
Received the Peace and Pardon of The Lord!

UNICORN -MYTH AND REALITY,
Rüdiger Robert Beer (James J.Kerry, New York and Ash & Grant Ltd)

Priced at £7.95 it's something to be ordered from the library rather than bought. It's beautifully illustrated - Beer seems to have sought out every carving, painting, drawing and tapestry ever made with the unicorn as subject, and the text is clear and thorough. It begins with the early zoographical accounts from Greece and the East, covers the use of the unicorn as symbol by the Christian church, details the medicinal properties of the horn and the charlantanism that went with it, looks at unicorns in alchemy, art and folktale, and ends with the survival of the animal in the present day. The only criticism of an otherwise excellent book is that the author concentrates on German art and architecture where he might have brought in examples from other parts of Europe - but that's a minor point. I'd recommend it not only for the subject-matter, which is fascinating, but also because it's a model of how the study of a particular symbol can be treated with both erudition and clarity.

jim kimmis

THE SPIRIT OF THE STONES

eric austwick

THE ISLE OF MAN is something of a world on its own - a spot of green earth poking its head from the very middle of the irish Sea. Mountains, mist, sunshine, people - all with an identity of their own, and a little apart from the rest of the world. And so the Island, and the things which are of the Island, never die. There is a sea-change here that soaks into your bones...

Even so, why should the STONES be so much a key to the old and the impalpable wonder here?

They are familiar enough on the Island, these old time-worn slaty Manx runic stones with their rather incomprehensible carvings. If you are given that way the mystery of them will soon capture your fancy, and - a long time ago now - they haunted mine. I brooded over them; particularly in the night time. Curlews could be heard calling in the darkness over headland a mile away, and I knew they drifted (like ghosts) over the little low church at Kirk Maughold. And near the church were these strange carved Celtic stones, which themselves were ghosts from a world long time dead.

Often there was moonlight over the sea; and then instead of the art of the stones being just scratchings on tough grey granite, the moonlight silvered them, and all sorts of shining colours seemed to be woven into the dark patterns - the colours of the clouds and the sea and the sunrise.

A queer conglomeration, these stones. Gathered together from scattered spots in the parish and housed under a protective roof near the old church - ranged like petrified soldiers; relics; mysterious survivals from another age.

They led me eventually into a strange artistic country woven with complicated patterns of triquetras and spirals and elaborate knotted designs devised by long dead sculptors.

It involved searching in rather off-putting journals of this or that archaeological society. Not the best diet for an eager imagination. But the vision persisted and gave meaning to the effort. Steadily the feeling grew that here was a runic art sadly neglected, but still very much alive in spite of a thousand-year sleep.

The notable Mael Bridge stone of Gaut is signed in runes with Michelangelo-like arrogance: "Gaut made this - and all in Mann". His conception is both bold and subtle. Gaut's ring chain has become not only a pattern but a main principle of Manx Celtic art, and is significant in its fusion of Norse and Celtic inspirations.

But after this heavy meal of antiquarian analysis the job of making new designs seemed woefully difficult. Actually, facts and figures about the crosses never proved very useful but some important guide lines gradually emerged. The "spiral" motive especially was bewilderingly adaptable. Purely Celtic, it undoubtedly had some deep significance...a Symbol...maybe...then the simple criss-crossing of a plait becomes charged with meaning if, instead, it is devised as a single continuos band, returning always on itself. A peculiarly Celtic devise. A Symbol of Eternity? Perhaps. But an art which is creative and a stimulus to the imagination cannot be limited to a single symbolic meaning.

These motifs were surely a "jumping-off point" for designs which were intended to delight the eye, and are a triumph of ancient art.

It was an art that filled my head in the long nights. Half awake I lay in bed, while the triple flash of the lighthouse on the headland regularly swept the bedroom wall hour after hour. Then, no design seemed too wild or fantastic.

In the loneliness of the winter nights, by the light of an aladdin oil lamp, it seemed quite natural to work at something harkly of the modern world, to study without help

contd.p15.

THE LANCELOT WARS

sid birchby

"Welsh tradition knows nothing whatever of the loves of Lancelot and Guinevere." (Prof. Lewis Jones)

When we begin to look for the origin of Lancelot, whether in myth or history, it is curious how little can be found. Arthur and Merlin can with some assurance be traced back to the Dark Ages, at least in legend, but Lancelot appears suddenly in the 12th Century, as if deliberately written into the script.

The answer may lie in the politics of the time, and especially in the power-struggle between England, France and Brittany. Nominally, England was subject to France by feudal law, but the two countries were as cat and dog. Even when the French king appealed to their common superior, the Pope, the Normans pleased themselves.

Consequently, when Henry 2nd became King of England in 1154 and began to promote Arthur in order to unify his realm, France was not enthusiastic. From Henry's point of view, the move had many advantages. Through his grandmother, a Scottish princess, he could claim a Celtic lineage going back, if necessary, to King Arthur, much as the present House of Windsor can, on paper, be traced back to Woden. This was a potential asset in dealing not only with Wales but also Brittany, which was at that time in Norman hands. The Bretons resented the fact. They were of British Celtic origin and their national hero was King Arthur, as in Wales.

If Henry expected to win Breton allegiance, France was against it. The Normans, in French eyes, were the unruly descendants of Norse invaders, and the French aim was to bring them to heel, which entailed supporting anti-Norman feelings in Brittany.

So the French line was anti-Arthur, which may explain the sudden emergence of Lancelot, who first appears in a poem by Chretien of Troyes, ca. 1170. Whereas he is not mentioned in Geoffrey of Monmouth's "History of the Kings of Britain", ca.1136, Chretien relates various episodes in his affair with Arthur's wife. Geoffrey glorifies Arthur as the hero-king of an earlier time of troubles; an attitude well-suited to Henry's purpose. Chretien reduces him to the role of a cuckold.

Little is said of Lancelot's background. This came much later in the French "Prose Lancelot", part of the Vulgate Cycle of Arthurian romances written ca.1210-30. In this, he is the son of King Ban of Benoic, an imaginary kingdom in the West of France which it is tempting to see as Brittany. When the king dies, a water-fay takes the infant prince to her abode beneath a lake, where she educates him. At the age of 18, he leaves to join Arthur's court. There follows the affaire Guinevere, and in a way the downfall of Arthur. The story-line is confused and quite different from the earlier tales of Arthur. Henceforth neither Arthur nor Lancelot are wholly good or bad. Both have their virtues and weaknesses. They become more complex, more human. Perhaps this is because the rival French and Norman propagandas succeeded too well, and myth began to change reality.

Every age has visions of a perpetual Dreamtime world, and the dreamers write them down differently. What is Dream? what is Reality? As Napoleon said, History is a Fable agreed upon.

Reality is a charade endlessly played in an empty theatre outside Time. We enter, we watch, and come away. When we guess at the complete word, we are lucky to get the first syllable right.

As we have seen, King Arthur was the Breton's hero. But they did not accept King Henry as his descendant. When the Breton Countess Constance, wife of Henry's son, had a child in 1187, Henry ordered him to be named after himself, but the Bretons, overjoyed that a boy had come to deliver them from the Norman yoke, christened him Arthur by

solemn proclamation. Thereafter, there was a living Prince Arthur in the Free Brittany movement, and France modified her disparagement of the legendary king. By supporting the Prince, who became the legitimate heir to the English throne, King Philip of France was within an ace of subduing the Normans. For a generation after Chretien's poem, Lancelot dominated the literature; at least in France. Then came the change of emphasis seen in the Vulgate Cycle.

Myth continued to become Reality. In 1199, King Richard Lionheart, son of Henry 2nd, died from a crossbow bolt. His brother John took the throne, ignoring the rights of Prince Arthur. The boy, then aged 12, claimed the French duchies, backed by Philip of France. John contested even this; in 1203, he swept into Normandy, captured Arthur and threw him into Rouen prison. He was never seen again.

To be candid, Prince Arthur seems to have been a little horror. At the time, he was besieging his own grandmother. Nevertheless, he was murdered by his uncle John, just as King Arthur was slain by his nephew Modred.

The Wicked Uncle did not prosper. Philip called him to trial by feudal law. He refused to attend, was found guilty of murder, and forfeited all his French lands. If Arthur's death dismayed Brittany, who now exchanged one overlord for another, Philip had reason to be pleased. Brittany and Normandy were in his hands, and England continued to slide towards him. King John went from bad to worse, losing quarrels with the Pope and with his barons. By 1216, the country was in such a state that Philip's son Louis landed with an army and occupied London. John fled across the Wash, losing his crown and treasure. This put him into such a Hitlerian rage that (a loser to the end) he lost his life after taking too much peaches and rough cider. If he had lived, he would have lost his throne, too.

This was the peak of French achievement, and suggests a date for those parts of the Vulgate Cycle which extol Arthur. With London occupied and England in chaos, King Philip may have been confident of a suitably-modified Return of the King. But abruptly, the dream faded, never to return.

When John died, his 9-year-old son was crowned, and strong regents took charge. Within a year, Louis had signed the Peace of Lambeth and was glad to go home alive. The French defeat was total. In the 56 years of the following reign, they never again tried to invade England.

A last glimpse of Myth in action: the chief Regent in 1216 was the aged William the Marshall, Earl of Pembroke, known as the Great Protector. A man of great fame, he had played a noble part in the Stephen-Matilda war in 1153, and had been the friend and adviser of Kings Henry, Richard and John. To the French, he must have seemed like Merlin himself, the grey eminence protecting Arthur's Realm, and the true cause of their defeat.

the spirit of the stones. from p13

a druid art that today could never be more than half understood.

There was an old story about the church where the ruined stones were gathered together. It had been founded by a sea-raider turned saint. The basket-woven coracle of this Celtic outlaw saint, MacCoole or Maughold, fitted easily into the strapwork weaving of Celtic design. So a design was started showing Saint Mqughold coming to the Isle of Mann.

The legendary King Orry, the holy Patrick and the marvellous Mananan were in turn woven into a rainbow coloured net of Celtic design.

The curve and rhythm of animal movement and men's and women's figures gave life and meaning to the restless patterns which to the Celts were never quite abstract or formal. So the dream-like web of pattern and colour spread, like a dim reflection of Mananan's own cloak, and the legends of a world of wonder, of Manx art and design.

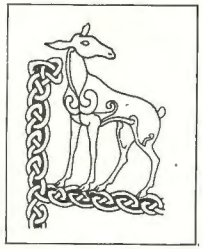
(From the MANXMAN magazine June 1976)

LETTERS

From Yann Lovelock, Moseley, Birmingham, whose Lancelot poem is included elsewhere in this issue.

I've been aware of your society for some time since a friend of mine who was studying the Graal legends at Sheffield University belonged to it and we often discussed things Arthurian and Mediaeval. My main interest is in the Middle Ages, what they made of the old Celtic themes, how they reinterpreted them, although I must admit that what I have seen of the very earliest Welsh poetry with mentions of Arthur has considerably impressed me.

Actually what I wanted to write about was the Romance de Lanzarote, a Spanish ballad which has always intrigued me, mostly because of its great obscurity. It is interesting, however, that the Spanish should take up the legends - and even more so when one finds what are probably remains of the Celtic beliefs of the original inhabitants in other ballads not of the Arthurian cycle (I presume) such as the Romance del Conde Arnaldos. I imagine .. someone in the society .. must know far more about these ballads than I do, including the story behind the Lancelot ballad. I thought you might be interested in using for your journal the enclosed very loose version of that ballad. It might be of interest to your readers and, if it is not well known, spark off some interesting discussion.



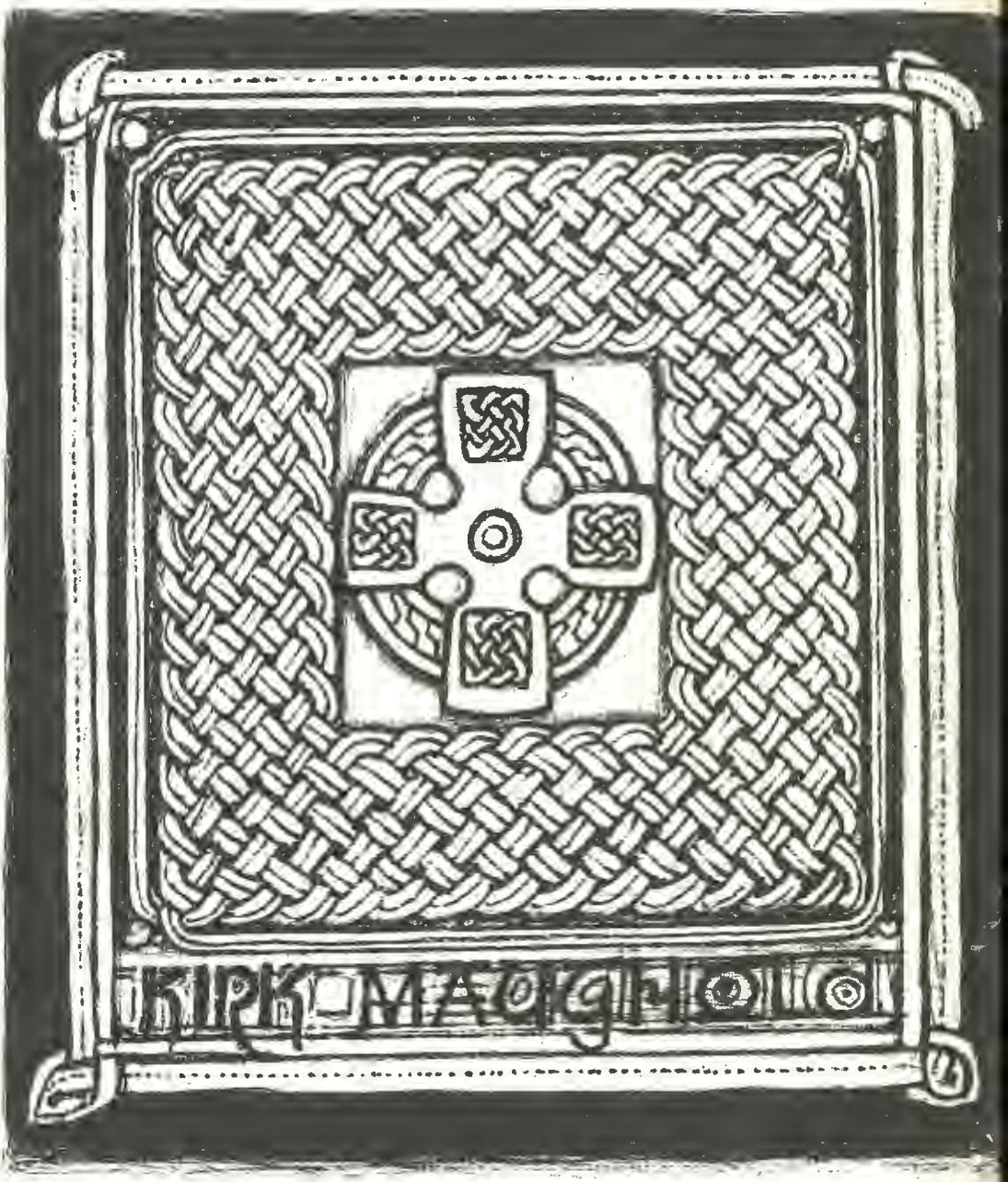
(Apologies are due for not being able to use this ballad sooner.Ed.)

From Joan M. Halcomb, Crowborough, Sussex:

In your magazine there is an article, Dragon Persecution in Devonshire, which (says that megalithic wisdom involved) "a knowledge of the precession of the equinoxes by which the rotation of the earth's axis shifts the celestial North Pole in a vast circle that takes 26,000 years to complete. In the Megalithic Age, the polestar had been Thuban in the head of the constellation Draco or the Dragon - hence the name given to those who accepted this fact."

I must admit that I had wondered how the name "Pendragon" came into being: it would be explained, if it referred to those ancient astronomers living at the time when Thuban was the polestar (i.e. Adam and his immediate descendants), and those who gained their astronomical knowledge from these earliest men. I quote from "The Gospel in the Stars" by Joseph A. Seiss - from chapter 13, where there is some information about the polestar:-

"At the time these constellations were formed, and for a long time afterward, the Pole-Star was the Dragon Star, Alpha Draconis. Thus this central gate, or hinge, or governing-point of the earth's motion, was then in the enemy's possession. But that Dragon Star is now far away from the Pole, and cannot get back to it for ages on ages, whilst the Lesser and higher Sheepfold (mistakenly referred to as the Little and Great Bear) has come into its place; so that the main star of Arcas (in the tail of the Little Bear, or Lesser Sheepfold) is now the Pole-Star ... And understanding Ursa Minor to be the Church of the first-born in heaven, instated in the government of the earth, we have in it a striking picture of the old prophecy fulfilled, when once Satan is cast down and the saints reign with their Lord in glory everlasting."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