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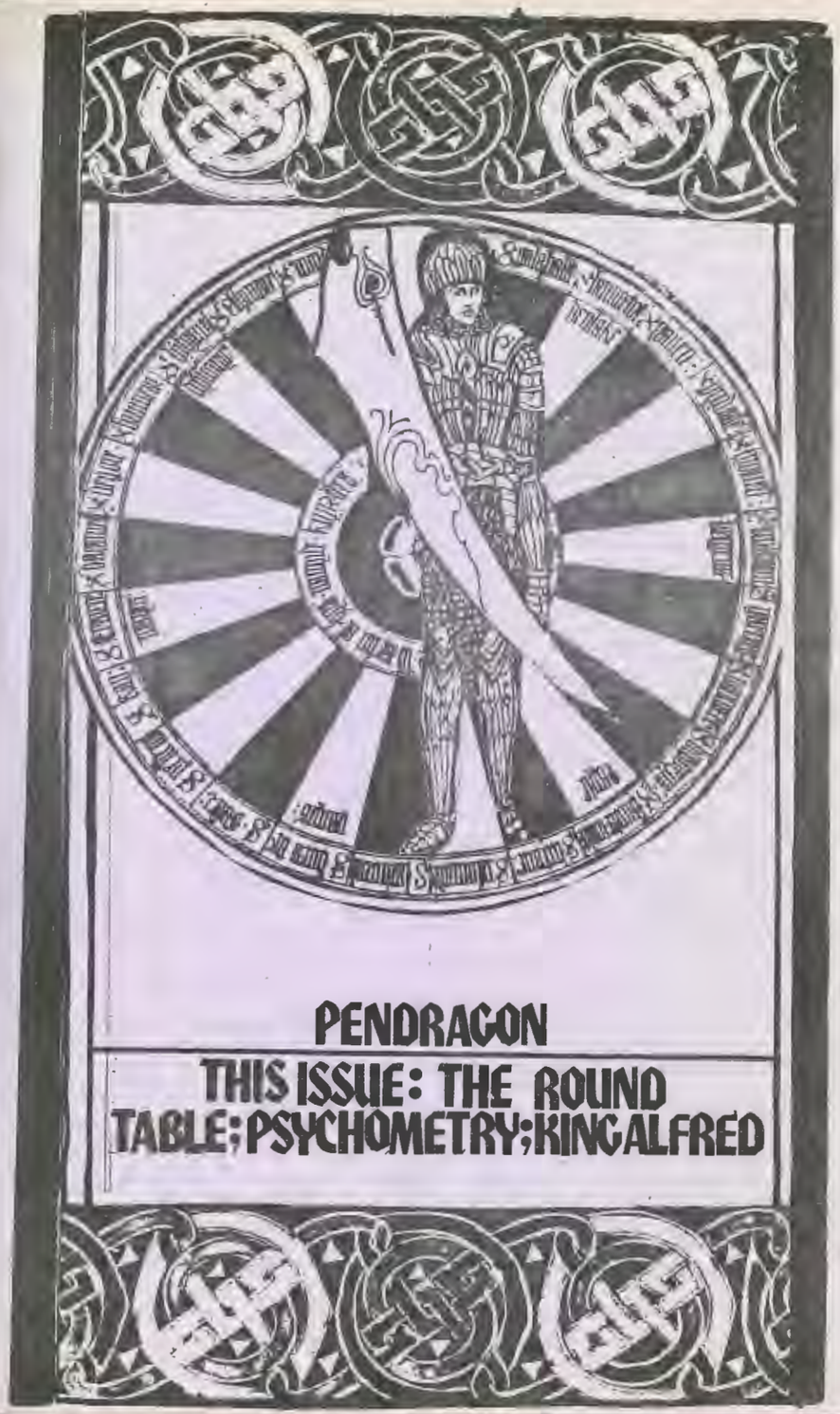
PENDRAGON
THIS ISSUE: THE ROUND TABLE; PSYCHOMETRY; KING ALFRED

PENDRAGON

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Correspondence should be addressed to the Hon. Sec., Garden Flat,
22 Alma Road, Clifton, BRISTOL BS8 2BY.

THE EDITORIAL

It's been a good year for Pendragoning (or so I am told, I have enjoyed a Welsh exile for the last three years and so am slightly out of touch). The'Festival of Mind and Body' was a great success and further to this there is another one coming up at Cheltenham in September at which we hope to be well represented. Bristol has it's Medaeival Fair on the twenty second of July and we shall be there with a stand on College Green. [redacted].

There are lots of good new books around at the moment so the next issue of 'Pendragon' will be concerned chiefly with reviews of these. So anyone who has read anything exciting recently please dash off a review and send it to us by the beginning of October.

There is a new magazine on the bookstalls called 'SANGREAL, A journal of Mysteries, Crafts and Folk Traditions of Britain' Edited by G.Stuart Dearn and S.E.L.Drab. Available from 5I Batchelors, Pembury, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN2 4ED.

It seems a long time since all us'mystical magazines' told our readers about each other. Perhaps we might do a little free reciprocal advertising, write and let us know if you are interested.

R. D. W.

'I'll let you be in my dream if I can be in yours.' (Bob Dylan)

Editor for this issue - Roger Davie Webster.
Design and layout,Catherine Pollard and Roger Davie Webster.
Cover design includes an inset from Beardsley's illustrations for the 'Morte D'Arthur'. Our thanks to Dover Publications Inc, New York.

BEGINNERS START HERE, PLEASE.

During the last year we have enrolled nearly fifty new members. It is obvious from our correspondence that many of these are well-read Arthurian enthusiasts. On the other hand, some newcomers write to say that they have always been interested in King Arthur and would now like to know something about him.

The librarian at Mold, in Flintshire, has a catalogue of more than 1,000 titles concerning Arthur, historical, legendary, and fictional, in English, French, Dutch and Spanish. We have a copy of that list in Bristol, but we doubt whether our members would have the time or the ambition to study it if we printed it here.

However, for the benefit of newcomers we think we should offer the names of a few books from which they can start their researches. From the Bibliographies at the back of such books, members can make their own choices and follow their own inclinations.

HISTORICAL

Alcock, L.	King Arthur's Britain	Allen Lane.
Alcock, L.	Cadbury/Camelot	Thames & Hudson.
Ashe, G.	King Arthur's Avalon	Collins.
Ashe, G.	Quest for Arthur's Britain	Pall Mall.
Chambers, E.K.	Arthur of Britain	Sidgwick & Jackson.
Morris, J.	The Age of Arthur	Wiedenfeld and Nicholson.

FICTIONAL

Mary Stewart.	The Crystal Cave	Coronet Paperback
Mary Stewart.	The Hollow Hills	Coronet Paperback.
Sutcliffe, R.	Sword at Sunset	Hodder & Stoughton.
White, T.H.	The Once & Future King	Collins.

Allied Subjects.

Anderson, P.	The Ancient Secret	Gollancz.
Merry, J.	The Flaming Door	New Knowledge Books.
Murdock, A.	The Sovereign Adventure	Clarke.

Of general interest.

Bayley, H.	The Lost Language of Symbolism	Benn.
Lord, C & J.	Mysterious Britain	Garnstone Press & Paperback.
Guest, C.	The Mabinogian	Dent.
Walton, E.	Beland of the Mighty	Ballantyne/Pan.

Gerard de Sede. Les Templiers sont Parmi Nous — J'ai Lu.

There is also available the history of the Society which costs only 30.p. plus 9½ postage.

THE 'BOARD'

BY ROGER DAVIE WEBSTER.

Of all the objects of the Arthurian mythos the Round Table must bid fair to being the least charismatic. A table, after all is an object of convenience. We sit at them to eat, we sit around them to talk and they undoubtedly serve as a convenient surface between one and the floor for putting things on. Do we take them for granted? For tables undeniably do more than merely support our dinner plates. They establish orders of precedence; the 'Head of the Table', the chief guest on his right and so on. They 'put people in their place' (probably the origin of the saying). The guest who is not quite sure of his relationship with the host over the pre-prandial sherry ceremony is left in no doubt at the dinner table.

But these hierarchical tables are not round. They are square, oblong, oval, anything but round.The round table, beloved of contentious negotiators, be they diplomats, trades unionists or Pendragon committee members, suggests equality. There is no head, no foot, no right and no left. Why, then should a society so manifestly hegemonic as twelfth century France have conjured for their borrowed hero, Arthur, a round table? Perhaps they were guilty, as we all are at times, of gazing yearningly back over the years in search of the Golden Age of Chivalry and Equality.

What evidence is there to suppose that Arthur ever sat at a round table. We may dismiss the beautiful fake at Winchester for there is no doubt that it was hewn long after his demise.

In fact the first appearance of a round table in Arthurian literature is accredited to Maistre Wace who completed his 'Geste des Bretons'in 1155. Wace was born in Jersey, later became Cler Lisant at Caen and finally rose to become Canon of Bayeux. His 'Geste des Bretons' is a poem of 15,000 lines fairly firmly based upon Geoffrey of Monmouth's 'History of the Kings of Britain'. He attributes the Round Table tradition to stories of the Fableor and Conteor telling their tales in the twelfth century. The Round Table appears thus:

La peri la bele jovante
Que rois Artus avoit norie
Et de plusieurs teres coillie
Et cil de la Table Roonde
Dont tex los fu par tot le monde

Robert de Boron in about 1220 suggests that Uther Pendragon, not Arthur, founded the Round Table. His version appears to be based upon the Grail Table of Gautier's 'Joseph' (a history of the Grail before Perceval of which only a fragment remains). De Boron's Table has the famous

Siege Perilous, which may only be filled by a knight who has achieved the Grail. His Brut was also the source for the legendary 'Sword in the Stone'.

Any reference to a Round Table in British literature prior to Wace is lamentably absent, The only faint hope is the altar of St. Carranog (this is 'The Altar that is of a colour that no man may discern' of Arthur Machen's 'Great Return'). A welsh tradition has it that St, Carranog floated the altar upon the Severn as a divine guide to show him where to land. Arthur found the altar and attempted to make of it a table. Unfortunately the altar would not permit any object to remain upon it and immediately flung it off. Indeed it seems unlikely that it was even round and obviously would not serve as a table. Arthur later met with Carranog and returned his altar.

It seems to me that the Round Table might not be a table at all and, indeed, that the whole tradition might be a semantic mishap!

A table is not only the piece of furniture around which we sit, it also includes the company seated around it. The older english word for table was 'board' and this has given rise to 'the Board Room' and 'The Board of Directors'. The Board of Directors is not a table but a body of men who take the decisions that administer a company. Perhaps most significant is the fact that in Welsh the word for table is still 'Bwrdd'.

Thus I would suggest that the Round Table was not a table at all but the 'Board' of knights of equal status who acted as Artur's Parliament in the governing of Britain.

THE CITY OF BRISTOL AS A PLANETARY MICROCOSM.

By Leszek Kobiernioki.

During the course of a number of seemingly disconnected rambles in the city precincts on bright weekend afternoons it became clear to my friend Angela and myself that the inner 'fire structure' underlying the arterial system of physical communications within the city could be definitively established and even placed upon a map for comparative exhamination by fellow researchers into the etheric geometry of the planet.

Angela drew my attention to the lovely, magnetically peaceful area known as 'Temple', enclosed, or rather, marked out, by the St Mary, Redcliffe/Temple Church (or Holy Cross)/St. Jacob's Church sitings.

This drew us again and again with the persistence of a dumb source seeking rhythmic, vocal articulation in our deliberations.

We desultorily psychometrised here and there - several churches in turn*.

In the course of discussion it was born in on us that we were 'tuning' in to the now partly-ruinous construct of a spiritual complex built up by spiritual masons to collect, transform and to irradiate the surrounding area with cosmic energies picked up via World-Soul-currents from solar space

Once 'humanised' and earthed in the elements these energies were then free to course at an harmonious rate into the life of the land and inhabitants adjoining.

The truly sited churches are never built just 'anywhere'.

The locations for service of this nature- which involves worship and praise of the Celstial Astrology of the colonies of beings in the planets and suns, and upon the stars of space - are ALWAYS according to Divine Psychometry (whether practised consciously in full awareness and openly; or whether in secret, and occultly, as during the last or Piscean Age).

The 'diviner' pictured in glyphs eith his two sticks or staffs was initiate into the Divine Mysteries of planetary and Celestial life; and while his two staffs represent the left and the right hand pillars of the Kabbala, he or she him (her) self represents the central pillar of Equilibrium between mind and heart through intuition.

No man can create a holy place. Any construct placed there to bring out and enhance the inherent properties of a site and to share the possibilities of it's multi-dimensional life will necessarily stand half way into other worlds; and so perichoresis (interpenetration of worlds) occurs.

These are no mystic rhapsodies but plainly observable facts to those who fit themselves by the necessary training for involvement in these realms of endeavour.

The Ancient Spiritual Priesthood located in the existence of these sites in the body of the Earth, and they conducted their ceremonies of planetary purification and redemption of the effects of the planet's erratic orbit**

Attention is sparingly drawn to these things today to prepare Humanity for it's long awaited spiritual renaissance as each conscious entity comes into full responsible possession of the Divine and inner faculties birthed through independent inquiry, meditation and prayer.

Astrology is to receive new exposition in the coming schools and an entire corpus of information which has been occluded for a world period is emerging.

The Astro- acupuncture of Planet Earth by the Solar Orb and her sister suns of the galaxy can only be understood through psychometric investigation; which locates, and sketches the true and cosmic verities of geophysiography as reflection of Macro-cosmography.

We began with small things and are led to the great and the sublime; things almost beyond conception these days; yet there may be those among us who will half remember - as echoing within them perhaps in some far chamber or recess of their being - knowledges and faculties for those knowledges apposite to cosmic apprehension and planetary functions once exercised.

It is to these that such researches will prove of interest most of all, in awakening that part of memory which illumines all things in a never - to-be-forgotten-again consciousness-life.

References and Definitions;

* Psychometry; 'The Solar College of Psychometry' defines it as 'soul definition' or 'soulic measurement' - the delineation through polarities of mind and heart of soul contents - whether of personal soul or of the World Soul. See the publications of the College, available from the writer of this article.

** See 'Giants, Myths and Megaliths' - a collection of psychometric researches by John Foster Forbes and Iris Campbell; privately printed, 1973; available through the writer of this article; price £1.00 (+ p&p).

Consult also 'The Trail: lectures on the technique of revelation' by Olive C.B.Pixley, 1934; reprint. Helios Books, 8, The Square , Toddington Nr Cheltenham, Glos. price 60p.

MORDRED; Or Something Rotten in the State!

BY CHRIS LOVEGROVE.

If the Morte D'Arthur was ever played on the Victorian stage we all know at whom we would have hissed. If Judas is the villain of the New Testament, who betrays his lord and causes the break-up of the fellowship of the Last Supper, then Mordred is clearly the villain in Malory, who betrays his lord and causes the break-up of the fellowship of the Round Table. If Judas dies on a tree like his lord, Mordred dies by the sword like his lord too.

Let's take a closer look at this well-known rotter! He is the nephew of King Arthur, some say his illegitimate son; he covets the throne and the power. The picture drawn by Malory seems to be borne out by the earlier Welsh Triads in which Medrawd came to Arthur's court at Celliwig in Cornwall: there he left neither food nor drink but, worst of all, dragged Gwenhwyfar from from the royal chair and struck her a blow. This was one of the Three Unrestrained Ravagings of Britain; the second was when Arthur did tit for tat at Medrawd's court.

If Mordred is black through and through, he strangely reminds us of another Dark Age figure who is traditionally associated with black. This too has claims on the throne, plots against the king through what he regards as the queen's infidelity and would strike the queen (though someone tries to restrain him). He too is a prince, a nephew of a king, but also a king's son, and he kills, and is killed by, the king. If this too sounds like melodrama, it is; it is part of the plot of Shakespeare's Hamlet. But the difference is this: Hamlet is the hero, but Mordred the villain.

One might raise objections. The blood relationships, though ambiguously described above, are different. Hamlet was possibly an historical Danish prince called Amleth, Mordred (if he existed at all) a character in British legend. Moreover, history is full of royal intrigues, and to say that Mordred is like Hamlet in this respect is not a very profound conclusion. In other words, the differences are greater than the superficial similarities.

But let's play devil's advocate for a moment. Hamlet is founded on paradoxes, as Hamlet tells Gertrude:

"You are the Queen, your husband's
brother's wife,
And would it were not so, you are my
mother".

He calls his uncle Claudius his "dear Mother":

"Father and mother is man and wife,
man and wife is one flesh, and so,
my mother".

Celtic thinking, too, is full of such paradoxes. The usual tradition is that Mordred's mother is Arthur's half-sister, Morgan le Fay, and by Malory's time Mordred is the bastard son of Arthur, who has committed both adultery and incest with his own maternal aunt, Queen Margause. Thus Mordred is Arthur's son and nephew, as Hamlet is Claudius' stepson and nephew.

Amleth and Mordred may well have been historical, but the stories they are involved in are patently archetypal, and not in the generalised sense of the rise and fall of dynasties. It seems certain that this tale of revenge, familiar in European tradition (as in the Greek story of Orestes), was carried to Scandinavia from Celtic Ireland and finally written down in the 12th century by the Dane Saxo Grammaticus. It may indeed be that ultimately Mordred and Hamlet are the same character.

Of Mordred's origins we know little. In the earlier Welsh traditions he is not even obviously a villain, but Arthur, strangely, might be. When we come to Malory we learn of Arthur commanding that all babes of noble birth born on May Day (conceived therefore at Lammastide) were to be set adrift in an unmanned vessel to founder. But Mordred survives, as does the older Hamlet sent by sea to England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to be executed by England's king, but turning the tables on his former friends and escaping in a pirate ship.

Mordred's black name is relatively recent, perhaps partly by the similarity of his name with "murder". There is in Welsh tradition a certain Medr, whose name means marksman, who might put us in mind of Amleth (who killed his enemies with sharpened staves). In Irish tradition we are reminded of Mider, who like the British hero Tristan, abducts the reign-

ing king's wife. None of these are villains, and in Scottish medieval tradition Mordred is even a legitimate claimant to the throne, and it is Arthur who is the bastard usurper.

If there is no clearcut answer to the questions of Hamlet-Mordred's moral position, then the question must be of a different order. A clue may be found in Tennyson, at present an unfashionable poet, but for all that one whose comments may still be valid. In The Passing of Arthur we read

"And slowly answered Arthur from the barge:
'The old order changeth, yielding place to new...' "

That the order is not just a mundane knightly order is confirmed by Sir Bedivere:

'But now the whole Round Table is dissolved
Which was an image of the mighty world.'

The authors of Hamlet's Mill assert that "Myth is essentially cosmological". We may, if we like, agree in interpreting myths like the overthrow of the Round Table Order by Mordred's machinations as symbolic of new world orders initiated by precession of the equinoxes.

Or we may, instead, look to lesser, but no less vital cycles. Henry Treece's The Green Man brings the Dark Age figures of Amleth and Arthur together in a kind of mythic history, which he explains in a more down-to-earth manner in his preface: "All myth, most legend, and much of history follow the archetypal pattern of the seeding, burgeoning, dying year. Sometimes this pattern seems to be a coarse one; but it is one which we know to be real."

So, the something rotten in the state, which Hamlet's friends took to be the prevailing power, and which from mischief-maker Mordred's point of view was Arthur's regime, might be regarded as the necessary decay which precedes death and resurrection.

Which, perhaps, is what the Once and Future King is all about.

THE ROUND TABLE

BY SID BIRCHBY

We talk of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, but were they his knights, and was it his table? Opinions differ. Early Norman writers say Yes. Their French counterparts say No.

The first mention of the table is in the Brut (1155), a poem by the Norman author Wace paraphrasing Geoffrey of Monmouth's history of Arthur. It is that table "of which the Bretons tell many tales", and is circular to avoid quarrels over procedence. Loomis notes a contemporary belief that the table of the Last Supper was round, and also a Celtic tradition of chiefs or kings seated at banquets within a circle of 12 warriors.

Layamon, a Worcestershire priest, wrote the first Arthurian poem in English, ca 1205. It is also called the Brut. After a fracas over the seating, Merlin advises Arthur to make a Round Table, and a Cornish carpenter is engaged. It seats 1600 or more, yet is light enough to be carried wherever Arthur rides, and is "That board of which the Bretons boast".

So far, so good. Two Norman sources quote a Breton origin, and there is no reason to doubt them. The Bretons claimed descent from British Celts, their national hero was Arthur, and they were under Norman rule. But 12th century politics soon complicated the legend. Technically, the Normans both in Britain and Brittany were subject to the King of France, but in fact they became increasingly disloyal as the century went on. Hence they promoted Arthur as a symbol of struggle against foreigners, with the Norman monarch as his descendant. French writers, however, tended to play down Arthur, bring the story into line with feudal and chivalric law, and tie it into Christianity. In short, Arthur's kingdom was only to be tolerated as part of the Holy Roman Empire.

Thus a poem about about Merlin by the Burgundian Robert de Boron, ca 1199, says that the Round Table was made not for Arthur but for His father Uther Pendragon. Nor does it stand for unity but for the Holy Trinity, being a copy of Joseph of Arimathea's Grail Table which in turn was a replica of the Last Supper table. The three tables link the fellowships of Apostles, Joseph's followers, and Arthur's.

The idea of a Grail Table was possibly drawn from Chretien de Troyes' mention of a banquet table in the Grail Castle, where the Grail first appears in literature (ca 1180). The early Christian tradition that Joseph and 11 followers founded a church at Glastonbury is well known.

After de Boron, various Arthurian romances appeared in France, mostly by authors now unknown. In the prose Lancelot of the Vulgate Cycle, ca 1210-30, Loomis comments that "the Round Table, the glory of Arthur's kingdom, hardly belongs to him at all. Guenevere brings it with her as part of her dowry and apparently can claim it as her own."

In another work, the Vulgate Merlin, the Knights assert their rights. Arthur marries Guenevere at Carmelide (Camelot?) and they go to Logres with the Table and the Knights. The Table is put in the court without ceremony, and there is a good deal of friction between knights and courtiers, which ends only when Sir Gauvain, one of Arthur's men, is made "sire and master and companion of the Table Round"; a sort of Chairman. So much for Equality, the author implies. What these unruly knights need is a firm hand, and that goes for the Normans, too.

Yet the knights still regard themselves as subject to King Leodogan of Carmelide until his death, when they choose to remain in Logres. The Post-Vulgate Suite de Merlin, ca 1230-40, says that both Knights and Table were created by Uther Pendragon, and that the knights left Logres when he died, because of "disloyalty" there. They enlisted under Leodogan, and Arthur acquired them and the Table by marriage. It is tempting to see a reference to the "disloyalty" of the Normans to their feudal lord, the King of France.

All this hoity-toity is indeed part of the system. A knight swears fealty to the lord who dubs him, for as long as they both shall live, and cannot be swapped about like furniture just because his lord's daughter gets married. Like a modern army officer commissioned once for all into a certain regiment, he may be seconded elsewhere for duty, but his allegiance does not change. The Knights had a valid complaint. They were neither Arthur's men nor Leodogan's, but Uther's, and so was the Table.

A variant of the story appears in the Post-Vulgate Roman du Graal. Merlin goes to Carmelide to arrange the marriage. Leodogan, overjoyed, offers his greatest treasure, the Round Table, complete with knights. Fifty have died since Uther's time. He has not replaced them because a hermit told him that a worthier king would soon do so. He tells the remaining hundred that he is sending them to Arthur who will fill their ranks and keep them "in greater honour than he ever could". They rejoice and thank God for their good fortune. No grumbling there!

In three days, they leave for Logres and are welcomed at the wedding. Arthur asks Merlin to fill all the empty seats save two, his own and the Siege Perilous, reserved for "the knight who shall end the adventures of Logres". Merlin explains this to the assembly and introduces the old knights to their new comrades. The Archbishop of Canterbury gives a blessing and the lesser clergy pray for Peace and Concord. Merlin bids the knights to rise and pay homage to Arthur "who is your compains at this table". Having done so, they find their names have appeared on the seats as a sign that God approves the return of the table to Logres, and doubtless to finalise the seating-plan.

By this means, Merlin unites the company. Arthur is to be both leader and comrade: homage signifies "I am your man", and compains is the modern French copain, a comrade with whom one shares bread. The author's idea of unity under the rule of Church and Chivalry is, however, different from that of the Normans, which entails the rule of a despotic king.

In terms of group dynamics, the Round Table is a Committee, wherein Arthur is a figure-head President with limited power, and Sir Gauvain as Chairman preserves order. Merlin is the Secretary who does the routine work that no-one else can be bothered with. He virtually runs the show and can ensure that any decisions taken are his. Layamon's portable and expanding table, though not meant to be taken literally, is a ring drawn round a group to declare that the meeting is private, and to seal-in the power for the group's own use. Whether in the form of a Magical Sealing Ritual or of excluding the public from company meetings, its purpose is to permit decisions without interruptions, and it is analogous to an electrical condenser in which a charge of energy is built-up.

How round is a round table?

BY MICHAEL WARRIS.

How many seats at the Round Table ? In other words, how many men in Arthur's war band ? Reports vary between 12, 150 and 300.

300 is the traditional size of an elite corps -- e.g. Leonidas, Spartans, the Theban legion and the cavalry section of a pre-Adrianople Roman legion.

But 300 horses need some 700 acres of grazing. On Alcock's figures 300 swords alone would represent 300 X 3 weeks wages. In the economic state of Arthurian Britain a standing army of 300 horsemen is just not on. A 1-off hosting of that size for s short, sharp battle is possible.

A tight-knit group of a dozen that could all sit round a table is also possible. So often society evolves the hunting pack -- a group of between 6 and 16 men, blood-brothers living and eating together devoted to a cause, and each others' survival.

Examples are: The cavalry 'lance' of 6 plus in the early fifteenth century; the board of directors of a public company, (7+); the section of 10 men who, under Caesar and Genghis Khan shared rations, a tent and a place in the battle-line; the minyan (10 male Jews); the jury (12 men);the coven and the common law riot (13 either sex),the fighter squadron in the last war (12 to 16), and the file in the Greek phalanx (16). Most team games involve between 9 and 15 men.

But could such a small group have achieved anything against the wolf-packs ? I think so. Geronimo ran rings round the U.S. cavalry for years with 25 braves. He was mobile and he knew the country.

In those days warriors were lightly armed; just a spear and shield. Even swords and helmets were rare, the badges of a chief. A small, disciplined body with swords and body-armour would have made mincemeat of twice their number of half-trained, half-armed spearmen. (A swordsman has the edge on a spearman, especially in rough country. He advances to close quarters, the spearman retreats and, sooner or later, runs out of room).

A Saxon war-boat held a maximum of 30, many less. Although they might try to land in convoy, storm and fog would often make this impossible. A dozen Romano-British soldiers could handle 30 pirates.

Talking of boats, Professor Alcock has commented on the large number of Dark Age battles fought on river banks, the boundaries and highways of the period. A river, and the broken ground on its banks, gave cover to ambushers and also destroyed the horseman's main advantage, the shock effect of a charge. Was Arthur then a foot-soldier ? Armour and weapons are heavy to carry a long distance in a hurry.

Hadrian and Antonio's walls were built back to front -- not to keep the Picts out: it is almost impossible to patrol all a border all the time --but to stop them getting back with the loot when they were tired and wounded and the Romans were alert and organised. (This was Douglas Bader's strategy in the Battle of Britain).

Suppose Arthur commanded a squadron of dragoons, not heavy cavalry but mounted infantry that rode to battle, picketed their horses and fought on foot. (The original spelling of dragoon was dragon, c 1630. As a drago(o)n was half cavalry, half infantry, so the dragon in Spenser's 'Faerie Queen' is described as half-walking, half-flying, but this may all be just coincidence). Arthur could use his horsemen's speed and knowledge of the country to cut off the Saxons' retreat.

Arthur's band of a dozen mercenaries or crusaders could offer an area the size of a county their protection. Some kind of local Home Guard is organised to work an alarm system and delay the raiders until the cavalry comes to the rescue, dramatically, just like in the Westerns -- the stuff of which legends are made.The **Saxons are not prevented**, but they find life unprofitable and try next door. Next door is forced to acoept Arthur's protection, and Arthur forms other patrols modelled on the successful original.

His power and glory grows until it becomes a kingdom.

Note. Burn in Scots (stream) and boundary come from the same root -- the bourne that is so common in place-names, especially in South Wessex. Streams are the boundaries between two worlds, life and death, as well as two counties. A lot of heroes seem to have been killed at streams. As late as 1700 a boundary stream was believed to have healing powers.

Sources: S.A. Ellacott, "Spearmen to Minutemen".
L.Alcock, "Arthur's Britain".

Letter From America.

I've just finished reading Vol.10, No.4 of your journal. I had acquired a copy from "Stonehenge Viewpoint" after noting that it was an issue on the theme of dragons.

The question of the widespread appearance of snakes with wings in mythology has interested me for some time. In Central America, for example, Quetzalcoatl, the 'winged serpent' was a benevolent god who taught useful arts. Yet elsewhere winged serpents are often reviled. (The Christians hated them.)

Are we involved here with a miscellany of unconnected legends and fancies, or are there at least some connecting links ?

I seem to recall reading some years ago that King Arthur was treated for a sickness (or battle wounds ?) in a land to the West (from Britain) where there were 'golden apples' (Florida oranges?) I would appreciate any information you could furnish me with on such data, as I don't recall where I saw it. Florida and the South-Eastern United States have the appearance of a winged serpent when viewed in the West-East direction from above. More fancies, or clues to profound mysteries of the past ?

Editor: Would anyone who is interested in this subject care to reply to the writer of this letter ? He grew up in Bristol and hopes to visit this country in November to visit his mother. We hope to see him then. He is:
Stuart W. Greenwood,
4505 Calvert Road,
College Park, MD.20740,
U.S.A.

King Arthur: King of Kings

REVIEW BY ALEX SCHLESINGER.

By J. Markale. Translated by Christine Hauch. Published by Gordon & Cremonesi. £10.00.

A famous nineteenth century philosopher, whose name now eludes me, once defined historians as the wise men of a tribe or society to whom are entrusted useful myths and legends. Now this, of course, is good news for the employment prospects for historians just so long as they are willing to grind either the axe of authority, or the equally deadly weapon for current fashionable thinking. Unfortunately, the same definition is bad news for history itself; moulded as it is, and as it always has been, to the necessary interpretations and ideologies.

But Jean Markale knows all of this as you and I: in fact, as a professor of history at the Sorbonne, no less, he probably knows it as well as any man. Indeed, much of his book is devoted to illustrating how the Arthurian story, the very hub of British mythology, has been used by both the indigenous peoples of these islands as well as the Angevin kings, all of whom found solace, inspiration and self-justification in a set of stories inherited through the bardic traditions which had survived three and a half centuries of Roman rule, and then revived in the face of the Saxon onslaught during the fifth and sixth centuries.

Part One of the book deals with Arthur's place in the medieval world, it's literature and it's politics, the latter under the inspiration of John of Salisbury, whose work, 'Policraticus' was completed in 1159. Markale interprets John of Salisbury as an early anarchist; and although Salisbury did apparently have scant respect for crowned authority, especially when it was illiterate, Markale's comparisons with the nineteenth century anarchist Prince Kropotkin may be more than a little farfetched, but for Markale's thesis the comparison is essential. John of Salisbury, the Aristotelian philosopher, the churchman and secretary to

Archbishops, is set firmly on the road trodden by the Romantic and Revolutionary philosophers six centuries later.

Chapter Three deals with Arthur and the Celtic world. Needless to say, reference is made to all the standard works, ancient and odern. As one would expect from a professor of Celtic history, the account of Celtic Britain is detailed and authoritative on matters of historical background. Yet it is in matters of fundamental interpretation that contention once again raises its ugly head, as indeed it must. At the end of the author's introductory chapter, 'Epic and History', we are told that "the aim of this study of King Arthur and Celtic society is then, to examine a charachter without deciding a priori whether he is real or imaginary, and with him the main current of thought behind his creation. As the great epic fresco around Arthur unfolds before us, we shall find the society our forebears yearned for, whose only chance of freedom lay in the great Celtic dream of freedom regained." Page 20. Thus Markale is trying to establish the Celtic world under Arthur as a real (or imaginary) age of genuine freedom and cultural emancipation; a period when men hoped to revive their pre-Roman way of life. Markale must show that Celtic society was the antithesis of the centralised Roman concept of the state. He draws upon both early resources and later, medieval interpretations to show that Arthur was not a king in a medieval or imperial sense, but rather a leader of kings, so was dependant upon the acceptance by vassal kings and people alike for the continuation of his rule. To this end, we are told that "the British way of life in the Arthurian era had nothing in common with life under the Empire. It was barbarian in the sense of being totally alien to Roman customs and practices." Page 89.

Most students of Dark Age history would accept many of the implications of Markale's comment on the disappearance of the Roman system immediately before and during the Arthurian period. After all, archaeological evidence has shown how quickly the Roman world vanished in these islands. What a pity then that Markale should contradict himself between page 89 and this assertion which occurs on page 86. "Recent archaeological finds on the sites occupied by the Britons during the Dark Ages have given us a clearer picture of Arthur's contemporaries. Generally speaking, little had changed since the Empire."

Of course I will admit that in 242 pages of Arthur, King of Kings, we must not be too harsh about some slight discrepancies; after all, much of the book is very closely argued, but this contradiction is so basic that one is left wondering how it could have happened. I suspect the explanation lies in Markale's purpose in writing the book. On one hand he must show them to be independent of the Roman way of government and social structure, and on the other he must show them to be capable of maintaining a highly organised society with all of the technical skills of urban-based life. The Celts must not appear as the poor cousins of the fine Romans on the continent of Europe, Markale, like all true academics, has a deep regard for the subject of his life-long study; as a result the object of research must have their actions explained and justified, not merely in the terms of their own social values, but in terms of our world as well. In studying past ages or different cultures we come to admire and value the systems which we are examining, and it is all too easy to make the men we study in our own image.

One does not need to read more than Markale's opening and closing chapters to realise that he is a syndicalist in outlook, and within itself this detail should not trouble us. Indeed, I should not need to mention it. However, the closing chapter of the book does attempt to draw many comparisons between the Dark Ages (or, more correctly, Markale's vision of them) and our own age of the highly centralised state and the idealised state as described by the eighteenth century philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau. Markale suggests that western man has always yearned for his lost freedoms which were still possible in the small, tribal communities of the Celtic world. He believes that the Celts achieved the impossible, basing their societies on

small, independent units which were integrated into a larger whole. (Page 218.) Markale is probably right, but was this a virtue or a necessity ? Did the Celts choose not to have a central authority, except for a short period under Arthur ? Or were they incapable of maintaining such a system ? Markale skirts round this problem in the same way that he avoids the essentially religious element in the Arthurian Legends. The Celtic chuch is discussed, and Arthur's probable troubles with it are dealt with. Yet does Arthur's religious significance stop there ? What was his place with the medieval church in England and Europe ? His legend is Christianised, and he becomes one of the three Christian heroes of history. Markale does not dwell on this aspect. For him, the social and political elements are the cardinal features. The Celtic world becomes a model for Rousseau's projected system of small autonomous states working a close relationship.

Markale believes, with Rousseau, that man is best when he lives close to what Rousseau called 'the State of Nature'. Perhaps they are both right, and perhaps the Celts had a social and political structure which was akin to this. It is also possible that Thomas Hobbes, the English philosopher of the seventeenth century, came nearer the truth when he stated that only a system of government with a strong central authority can benefit all of its members, and that the so-called state of nature is, in fact, a chaos in which life is 'nasty, brutish and short'.

This is neither time nor place to suggest which social system is the best, and I also suggest that "Arthur: King of Kings" is not the obvious or best place for Markale to ride his political hobby-horse. The Arthurian Legends are part of the history of Europe, and I suppose that they will, inevitably, be re-interpreted every so often to suit this or that philosophy, and M.Markale should remember that neither his nor the syndicalist view of Arthur need be the only view, or even the most accurate one.

It would be an unkindness and an ingratitude to suggest that "Arthur: King of Kings" is, like the curate's egg, good in parts. Despite Markale's holistics in his opening chapter, and his contentious opinions in the closing ones, the book must be regarded as an important contribution to the Arthurian library. It provides much information that is useful, the resumes of the romances and the folklore are of great value, and the chapter on Arthur's influence on medieval political thinking is probably the best and most lucid account that I have read.

Not surprisingly, it will be on the matter of Markale's conclusions that the debate will smoulder. Historical interpretations do influence our current thinking, but there is always more than one interpretation .

The Round Table System

BY JESS FOSTER.

The Tudors always maintained that they were descended from King Arthur, and it was said that "they always maintained the Round Table System." The earlier members of the family were obviously remarkable characters.

Gruffydd ab Llewelyn, who died in 1063, was described as "King of the Britons", and "King over all the Welsh race." In the "Brut of Tywysogion" it was written that he was "the head and shield and defender of the Britons." A Gwentian chronicler reports, "He and his father were the noblest princes that had been, until their time in Wales, and the best for bravery and war, and for peace and for government, and for generosity and judgement."

Gruffydd ab Rhys, Prince of S. Wales, was brought up in Ireland. His father lost his kingdom to Norman adventurers and took refuge with the Danish community in Dublin. Rhys had a daughter called Nest, or Nesta, who was said to be as beautiful as Helen of Troy. This is not difficult to believe when one learns something of her adventurous history.

She was married to the Steward of Pembroke Castle, one called Gerald of Windsor. The Earl of Carnarvon took a fancy to her when he visited Pembroke for some party occasion, so he kidnapped the lady and carried her off to his own castle, taking also her two children and their nurse.

Nesta, apparently, agreed to remain at Carnarvon on condition that the children were returned to their father. This was done quite promptly. Unhampered by her family, Nesta soon found a way of returning to her husband at Pembroke, leaving young Carnarvon to tear his hair with rage.

On another occasion the king himself, Henry, carried the lady off to Normandy for a time; indeed, she was said to have borne him a son. Nevertheless, once again Nesta escaped and made her way back to Gerald at Pembroke.

Nesta had several warrior brothers who were always stirring up trouble for the King. Young Carnarvon, no doubt still smarting from his earlier experience, contrived to round up two of these brothers. He sent a message to the King asking what Henry would like him to do with these ruffianly Gruffydds. Nesta allowed no time for any reply to arrive: she chartered a boat with a few sturdy seamen who sprung the princes from prison and fetched them back to Pembroke.

This decisive and remarkable lady was the grandmother of Geraldus Cambrensis, the historian. It had always been foretold that a Gruffydd prince would become King of England and so it came to pass. It is not really surprising that these Tewdwrs or Tudors should have commissioned the making of the Round Table at Winchester.

Readers of 'Pendragon' in 1977 will remember that this table was subjected to various scientific tests and was found to have been built at the time of Edward III, about the year 1336. When it was taken down off the wall in the Great Hall at Winchester the first person to inspect it was Cecil Hewitt, a master joiner. He took one look at the table's underpinnings and said it must have been made between 1250 and 1350 on account of the way the jointings had been done.

Professor Barefoot, from N. Carolina, took wood core samples from ancient trees near Winchester, and even core samples from H.M.S. Victory at Portsmouth, and after running them through his computer back home, announced that the wood from which the table was made must have been felled in 1336. Edward Tudor, we have been told, was besotted with King Arthur. At any rate, when he returned from France in January 1344 a joust was held at Windsor and he decided to recreate "The Order of the Round Table". To this end he commissioned the large round tower that is still the main feature of Windsor Castle.

In all this, however, Edward was only carrying on an old tradition. His grandfather, Edward I used to hold Round Tables in Wales.

A few years ago, towards the end of the Vietnam war, a peace conference was held in Paris. Those who were reading the newspapers at the time will remember that proceedings were held up for several long, wrangling weeks because one of the delegates -- wasn't it the lady from North Vietnam, or am I mistaken ? --insisted that the conference should be held at a round table. For quite a time it was pretended that no such table could be found, yet ultimately the delegates did indeed get their knees under a Round Table and Talks were able to begin.

At that time a shop steward assured me, in heartfelt tones, that if only our industrial disputes could always be discussed at a Round Table they would be resolved in half the time they normally take to reach a settlement.

"Disputes," he told me, "go on and on from opposite sides of the table, always emphasising the gulf that exists between Them and Us. A Round Table effectually breaks up this image of Them and Us and makes effectual discussion much easier to attain."

Perhaps it was the Round Table that made the Gruffydds kings of the Britons and ....."the best for bravery and war, and for peace and for government, and for generosity and judgement."

Jess Foster.

ARTHUR AND ALFRED

BY TIM PORTER.

Everyone knows Glastonbury Tor, that steep, solitary hill with its tower to which the eye is irrestibly led. Fewer people know Burrow Mump. It too is a solitary hill; it too has a ruined tower, and dominates the surrounding flat lands, drawing the eye in just the same manner. But the intervening Polden Hills preclude any direct line of sight between it and Glastonbury. If there is a hill which the Tor faces, that hill is Cadbury; Avalon and Camelot are the poles of the Arthurian landscape, clearly associated one with another. This is the much-examined, much-discussed landscape of Avalon, the Abbey, the Holy Thorn, the Zodiac. But beyond the Polden Hills is Alfred's landscape, lesser known and quite separate, and presided over by Burrow Mump, one-time beacon hill to the Isle of Athelney.

It was to this place that King Alfred withdrew at Easter in the year 878, to emerge seven weeks later and fight an astonishing battle which decisively turned the tide of history. If we English were a less self-effacing race we should this year be celebrating somewhat more vigorously the eleveneth-hundredth anniversary of this event, which almost more than any other marks the foundation of the kingdom of England.

The preceding decades had brought mounting terror. The light of Christian civilisation had been all but extinguished by "the Great Army" or "the Host", a vast and locust-like swarm of heathen fighting men which was ravaging western Europe virtually unchecked. England had watched its approach with trepidation. In 865 the Host landed on the east coast. One by one, the Saxon kingdoms of Northumbria, East Anglia and Mercia succumbed and were destroyed. Wessex alone put up any sort of fight.

The best army any Saxon kingdom could put into the field was an amateur one, composed mainly of farmers and peasants taking time off from their work; the Host was a body of hardened men who did nothing but fight -- totally ruthless, totally professional, living entirely off plunder, so totally destructive as well. However, when this fearsome and hitherto undefeated horde descended on Wessex for the first time, the Saxon amateurs handled it roughly. During this hard-fought and inconclusive campaign of 871, King Alfred came to the

throne. He had not been trained for the kingship. He had four elder brothers, but all had died in turn, three of them as kings. Alfred was not much more than twenty. He was the only adult male left of the direct line of Cerdic. It was a very precarious moment for the kingdom of Wessex.

The Host had received a bloody nose, and there were richer pickings elsewhere. So Wessex was left alone for some years, though the Host was always hovering, awaiting its chance. At the end of 877 the moment arrived, at Christmas, when the Saxon levies were dispersed. The surprise attack took Alfred completely unawares. It was at this juncture that he was forced to take refuge in the Somerset lowlands.

This part of England was at that time covered by marsh and dense alder forest. Athelney could be approached only by secret paths. At Easter, Alfred established himself there, and sent word to all parts of Wessex that the levies were to assemble at Egbert's Stone (a little to the East of Mere in Wiltshire) on a certain day in May. In a supreme act of faith he made his way there on the appointed day with his own small contingent. Fortunately the other contingents showed up as well. Two days later, at the Battle of Ethardur (thought to have been fought on the downs between Westbury and Warminster) the heathen Host was utterly defeated.

It is strange how actual history seems to shape itself into a mythic pattern. It is no surprise to find that Alfred's defeat and disappearance occur at Midwinter; he is in the wilderness during Lent, suffering the temptation to give in, and the shame of humiliation (this latter illustrated by the hackneyed but by no means irrelevant fable of the cakes); his reappearance on Athelney is at Easter, and his full return in glory before all the people at Whitsuntide (by a happy coincidence, the most likely date for the anniversary of Ethandur actually fell on Whit Sunday this year). So, though all was apparently lost, the anointed king who had seemed to die in the winter returned to life with the summer -- it is a story as old as human thought.

Alfred put himself forward as the champion of Britain, not just of Wessex. The princes of Wales voluntarily submitted to him, and when he and his descendants reconquered the rest of England from the Danes there was no question of re-establishing the old separate kingdoms; the House of Wessex had won the right to provide the kings of all England. His court welcomed men from all over the island, (two of his chief advisers were a Mercian and a Welshman).

One is tempted to wonder whether Alfred was, up to a point, acting out a part. He must have known of Arthur, that earlier champion of Britain, who had organised the Celtic resistance when the Saxons had been the heathen invaders. The climactic battle of those times, Badon Hill, was as distant to Alfred as the Gunpowder Plot is to us, but the very survival of the tradition shows that the Saxons must have honoured the memory of their valiant opponent (a recognisably English characteristic).

The parallels between Arthur and Alfred are remarkable, even if most of them seem at first glance to be co-incidental. Even the sites of two famous victories, Arthur's at Badon and Alfred's at Ashdown, seem to be within a few miles of one another on the Ridgeway. As far as one can tell, there seem to be striking tactical similarities between Badon and Ethardur also. The parallels persist even if we examine the more apocryphal Arthurian traditions. Both kings came to the throne unexpectedly, both fought beneath the dragon standards, both had rebellious nephews who tried to seize the throne (though the revolt of Alfred's nephew Ethelwold was crushed before it could do much damage).

But the most crucial parallel of all concerns the disappearance of the king. After the catastrophe, Arthur was taken to Avalon, there to be healed of his wounds, with the promise that one day he would return and save his people. Alfred also vanished to his own similar, though separate, place. But he became the king in the greenwood. Not surprisingly, this is the part of his career which has inspired folklore. The fable of the cakes, and the tale of how he went into

the Host's encampment disguised as a minstrel, both have a definite flavour of Robin Hood. It is also significant that Alfred's disappearance was into that part of Britain which seems to have been a great centre not only of Christianity but also of the old religion. The one known historical event from these months seems to have a bearing on this. A Saxon skirmishing party captured the Host's raven standard and carried it back to the alder-woods -- surely the symbol of the Old Faith may be read into this !

Whatever happened to Alfred in these months, he returned like a man reborn.

Was he perhaps saying in his own way, "when this happened before, Celt stood alone and lost; this time Celt and Saxon stand together and win. Christianity and the Old Faith also stand together and win. Arthur went away but never returned. I have put another ending on that unhappy event 400 years ago, and so brought it out right."

I'm not, of course, suggesting that Alfred set the situation up; it set itself up, as situations do. But I am suggesting that he may have seen what was happening, and perceived what his own role had to be, and that this may have given him strength and shown him what to do. At all events, Ethardur marked the end of the Dark Age as decisively as Camlann marked its beginning.

The tales of Arthur appeal particularly to the Celt in us; the down-to-earth Saxon responds more to Robin Hood. King Alfred suffers by comparison for the simple reason that we know too much about him. From the Chronicles and from Bishop Asser's "Life" we know that he suffered constant ill-health, that he instituted legal and educational reforms, that he invented a candle clock, that he did not win all his battles. His actual voice speaks to us through the books he translated. Arthur and Robin Hood, though doubtless originally just as real, are shrouded in the romance of Celtic mist and greenwood leaves. Yet Alfred, when seen as a mythic figure, combines their attributes; he is the Divine King, the man in the woods, the Champion of Britain, the friend of the poor, all in one -- a very complete British hero.

BOOK REVIEW.

In Strangest Europe, by Peter Ratazzi. Published by The Mitre Press.

This is not a companion volume to "Mysterious Britain", nor is it a compendium of travellers' tales though it has some aspects of both.

The author has travelled extensively round Europe, notebook in hand, peering curiously down alleyways and into caverns and taverns that normally escape the attention of the average tourist. The book is a sorted-out version of those notes and includes snatches of history, glimpses of enclosed communities, and shows us that most of us do not know our Europe as well as we thought we did, nor as good Europeans should !

Pendragons who have been questing along for many years will find here references to Templars, pilgrims to Santiago and others who have captured our attention in the past.

Having been published in 1968 this book is easily obtainable from the library and we are grateful to the author for drawing our attention to it. It is copiously illustrated, and is sub-titled "A Cabinet of Curiosities, Rarities and Monsters" which seems as good a description as any.

ACROSS

I/ Hebrew primer and four followers (IO)
6/ The historian's Gee Gaw (4)
9/ Plug ugly bosses? (IO)
IO/ Rail about the Celtic saint (4)
I2/ Heretical Bishop's seat within (4)
I3/ Reason behind Macchu Picchu!(4&5)
I5/ A shade over 50 years old, this Cornish castle.(8)
I6/ I river in7 flows through marches (6)
I8/ Briefly, a grave lot of seers!
20/ French town sin confused peasantry. (7)
23/ Cerebral topiary in east saxon territory (9)
24/ Were knights of this .... (4)
26/ .... in days of this? (4)
27/ Early northern border days before the wall (IO)
28/ Gower's holy lady, or east end ship launcher? (4)
29/ All Arthur's fine blacks rushing to Calgary (IO)

DOWN

I/ Noble's lad, decorative in Kells (4)
2/ Gross neglect of stones by castle defence committee - no wonder the lamp gutters! (2,3,2,)
3/ State in knots concerning Brendan's embarkation (7,5)
4/ How the Dominican seeks the working Cathar .... (8)
5/ I50 in french honour for the tight grasp (6)
7/ Latin country turn, clue 'Ego' (7)
8/ Characteristic of Mr Watkins's constitutional? (IO)
II/ Knightly Chesire dormitory uncovered by Gerald de Leye (8,4)
I4/ Spell failure. Arthur's future lies in detritus. Destitute! (5,5)
I7/ (See 4 down).... and finding, deals with him. (5,3)
I9/ Early astrologer held ace position (7)
2I/ Minehead gives the Queen of I5 a splitting headache (7)
22/ O.T. Landing place for a cowardly gunner? (6)
25/ Why north? Why south? The Welsh island's right here (4)

"BROCELIANDE" I7. 6. 78.

prize crossword

Where possible the clues remain in the Pendragon sphere of interest. The more esoteric have cryptic alternatives however, so anyone can join in. A sense of humour is essential. One years subscription to the first two correct or nearly correct solutions opened 31.8.78. Intelligent guesses accepted!