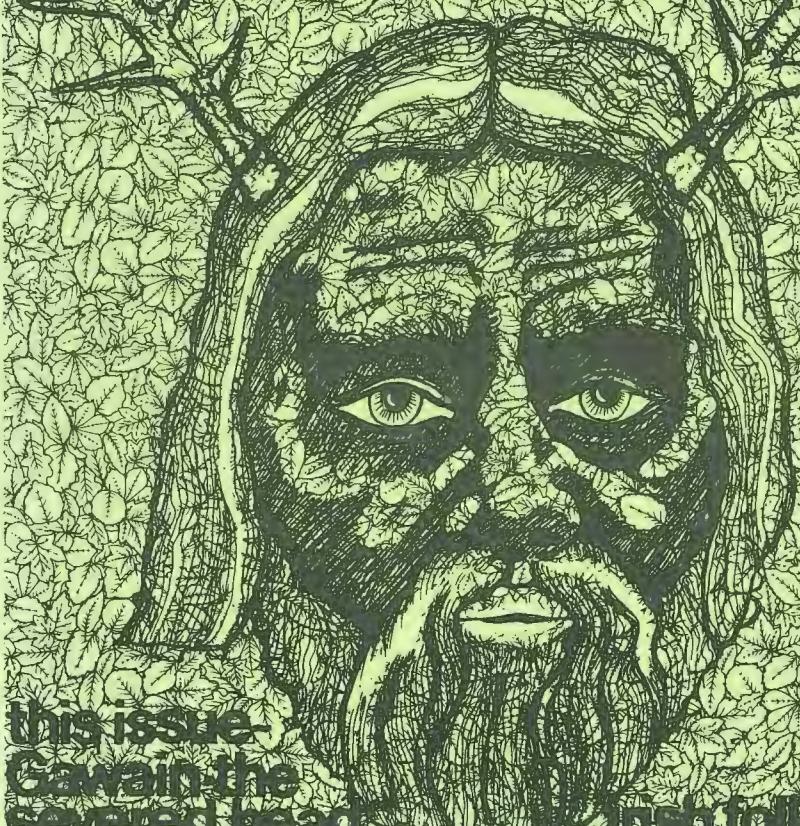


THE

PENDRAGON

MAGAZINE

30p



this issue—
Gawain the
severed head

Irish folk music
An Arthurian opera

THE PENDRAGON

DEC 1978

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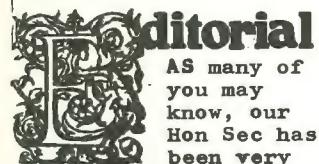
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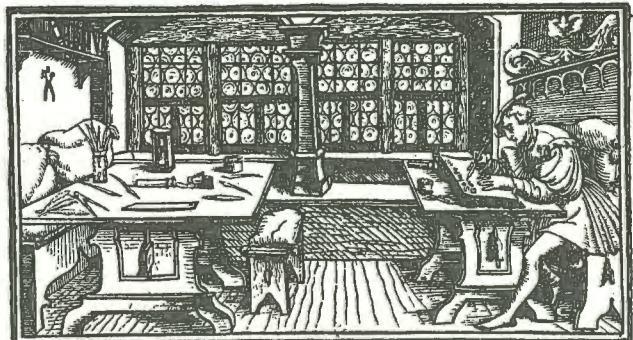
The Society was founded in 1959 to stimulate interest in King Arthur and his contemporaries; to investigate the history and archaeology of the Matter of Britain; and to study the significance of the Arthurian legends.

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AS many of you may know, our Hon Sec has been very unwell recently, and your correspondence may not have been answered with her accustomed alacrity. I'm sure I speak for all of you when wishing her a speedy and healthy recovery from her painful illness.



THEMES

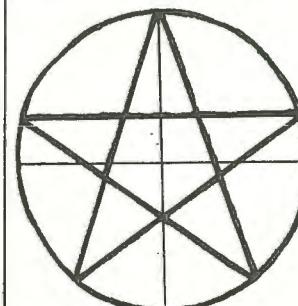
1979

This issue's theme is Gawain and his mid-winter association with the mysterious Green Knight. This marvellous story is found in a unique MS contemporary with Chaucer, and is easily available in "translation" as well as in prose summaries. The theme for the March issue will be Guinevere, suggested by Sid Birchby. Other articles in the pipeline or promised are by Vincent Ryan, Jess Foster, David Stringer and Michael Benkert.

The Society was founded nearly twenty years ago in Winchester, and it would be a pity to let this particular anniversary go unmarked. A new Pendragon Anthology or a Pendragon "Kit" have been suggested, and no doubt a Society get-together will materialise. Please send us your thoughts and suggestions (nothing rude!) so that we can organise something that will reflect your expectations.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

When did you last pay your subscription? If you've forgotten, then it's probably due now! Thanks to various kind and generous donations we are in the black, but postage for letters and exhibitions and printing etc ought really to be covered by members' subs. But now, on with the show!



COVER DESIGN BY TREVOR McGRATH.

The suggestion was made, some time ago, that our next issue of Pendragon should centre on the legend of Gawain and the Green Knight.

Locally there has been considerable discussion on these lines but also a good many members listened with attention to the recent B.B.C. series on Ely Cathedral with its Green Men and its severed heads.

Inadvertently the themes have flowed together and our cover has turned this issue into the issue of the severed head. We hope this subject will invite as much correspondence as the Magic Square of our last edition.

IRISH FOLK MUSIC

Chieftains, Planxty, Bothy... the names of three of the best known Irish traditional groups are known from the United States to Japan. Indeed, in the U.S. and in West Germany in particular their music has become a cult. The enormous sales of record albums and music justify the claim; never indeed has Irish music had such wide acceptance. Leading Irish traditional groups frequently give sell-out performances at Carnegie Hall. At a recent open-air concert in West Germany over 100,000 turned up to hear the Wolfe Tones music group. The folk music festival at Listowel in Co. Kerry is now the biggest of its kind in Europe; it attracts crowds well over 50,000. At a small Fleadh Ceoil (traditional music festival) near my home town in Mayo, a hardly publicised event in Ballisodare, Co. Sligo, one in three of the crowds were German or French. And they are raving in Belmullet about the marvellous traditional Irish playing of a young bag-pipes enthusiast from Switzerland.

The astounding revival of interest in a flagging tradition is naturally welcome; and of course the Irish people are becoming more aware of the marvellous treasure of their folk heritage ... not before time. The old sean nós style of singing which, as will be shown, is the most precious part of that heritage has almost died. "Of all the countries of the world" wrote the late Sir Arnold Bax, "Ireland possesses the most varied and beautiful folk music". Bax was eloquent about its "strange and startling richness". He is not alone in his opinion of the haunting beauty of so many Irish melodies. For an island of its size and small population, its corpus of folk-music is unique with regard to the diversity of its airs and dance-tunes and the sheer volume (there are well over 10,000 melodies). Dickens was undoubtedly expressing his own personal reaction when David

VINCENT RYAN



Reacaire: from Derricke's Image of Irelande (16th c)

Copperfield describes Rosa Dorrtle singing to her own accompaniment on the harp: "I don't know what it was, in her touch or her voice, that made the song the most unearthly I have ever heard in my life or can imagine. There was something fearful in the reality of it. It was as if it had never been written or set to music, but sprang out of the passion within her; which found imperfect utterance in the sounds of her voice, and crouched again when all was still." What Rosa sang is unknown. But Charles Dickens was expressing the pulsating sincerity of the best of our love songs.

To many people Irish music means Moores Melodies, or John McCormack singing Mother Machree or the ballads of Percy French (Johnston's Motor Car, Phil the Fluther's Ball, the Mountains of Mourne). None of these are true folk-song. The composers are known. Defining folk-song is a complicated matter. The original impulse that inspired a folk-song is lost in the mists of time. The song then passes from generation to generation and is constantly changing.

Irish folk music is monodic. It is the development of single strands of melody. These at

times can be extremely florid, crammed with ornaments and embellishments - not surprising, perhaps, from the race that produced the Book of Kells. Polyphony and part-singing never took root in Ireland. There are sound historical reasons for this - if the reader cares to acquaint him- or herself with the country's turbulent history from, say, 1400 to the great famine of 1847-8.

The German poet and historian Herder was an early collector of German folk-songs in the 18th century and believed nothing could be understood without going back to its origins. And for origins in any culture a good place to start is with its vocal folk-music. People representing a particularly pristine phase of Man's evolution, like the Veddu in inner Ceylon, the East African Wanege, the Sirions of Eastern Bolivia, and most Patagonians, have no instruments.

And the more we go back the more it seems music, far from being an end in itself (as it eventually became in Western Art Music), was always subordinated to ends outside itself - religious, social, and practical. Nor has music today ceased to lend its aid to a variety of endeavours. Children are being sung to sleep, soldiers still sing to give themselves courage and labourers lighten their work with song. Western religious rites do not dispense with it and civil rites are seldom without it. And although no one pays much attention to it a certain amount of music is an indispensable ingredient in every film.

Not surprisingly every country's folk music has its labouring songs, spinning songs, lullabies, marches and love songs. And so it is with Irish music.

Most of the folk-songs are the music of Irish-speaking Ireland. One must remember that at the time of the great famine of 1847 over 80% of the population spoke Irish and most of it understood little English. The rhythms, then, of the Irish language are naturally reflected in the melodies.

While most of the melodies are either in a major or minor mode, quite a few are in the Dorian (re) mode and the Mixolydian (so) mode. The Greeks recognised these modes as having certain moods or ethos. And so they saw the

Dorian (re mode) as virile and bellicose;

Mixolydian (so mode) as pathetic and plaintive.

How old is Irish music, one might well ask. Unfortunately it must be a matter of conjecture. Most Irish melodies were collected from 1792 onwards. The national store of Irish melodies is still thriving, so it must be a case of major and minor melodies slowly ousting the older re and so modes.

We can surmise about ancient Irish music when we consider the Ancient Manuscripts and the great "Ossian" type lays about the warrior-hero, Finn McCool, the Fianna (his exclusive band of warriors) and his son Ossian. These are extremely long epic poems (from MSS of the 11th c) in ornate rhyming quatrains about the exploits of the Fianna. These poems were sung - to what strains we will never know. But we know from their descriptions that they had quite a variety of musical instruments.

Above all was the harp, the cruit. Literary convention divided music into threes:

SUANTRAÍ: harp-playing which
threw all who heard it into a deep sleep;
GOLTRAÍ: harp-playing which
caused everyone to weep;
GEANTRAÍ: harp-playing which
caused everyone to burst into laughter.

Many legends attest the spell cast by the playing of the harp. An instrument played with a bow called a tiompan is mentioned in the Book of Leinster, a MS written about 1160. There are references to many wind instruments: buinne (horn-shaped trumpet), corn (long metal curved one), feadán (type of whistle) and pípearahha (pipers).

Down to the middle of the 17th century the poetry was composed in syllabic verse: seven syllables usually to a line. The poetry was the poetry of the poets and bards, and was extremely rigid in rhyming and assonance. These metres were in use long before the introduction of Christian hymnology into Ireland. The old bardic schools however were destroyed and with them went the old tradition of "lofty" rhyming. All the songs we now have are in metres that emerged with the disappearance of file or professional poets. The file had long ignored these metres, usually used in lovesongs. And these lovesongs became tremendously popular in the 18th century. Patriotic songs took the form of *Aisling* or "vision" poetry. These poems were written for traditional airs. In these poems the poet spies a spéir-bhean or "skywoman" coming towards him. He addresses her and asks if she is any of all the women he can recall from Irish or Greek mythology. She eventually tells him she is Ireland, grieving under the oppression of foreigners who would shortly be driven from the land. Many of these songs are still sung in Ireland.

In the next part I will discuss the modern Irish folksong, with examples; the collectors of the nineteenth century; Irish dance music and dancing; traditional techniques and styles and finish with some observations about evidence of the antiquity of the melodies.

BOOK REVIEWS

A couple of recent books that there wasn't space for last issue are reviewed here. The first is John Steinbeck's *The Acts of King Arthur & his Noble Knights* published in 1977. Like Catherine Christian's *The Sword & the Flame* this too could be called variations on a theme of Thomas Malory for its aim is to put Malory's Winchester MS (the source of Cax-

ton's printed book) "into a language which is understandable and acceptable to a modern-day reader". It's a strange work, unfinished (stopping at the point where Lancelot and Guinevere realise their mutual passion) and uneven (starting as a re-rendering of Malory's prose and ending as pure Steinbeck). But one senses throughout the creative artist struggling to reshape his material for a different age. Steinbeck would never have published his work in its current state because, as fiction, it falls short. As a study of a particular creative process however it is fascinating, not least for the revealing correspondence which forms the bulk of the second half of the book. The struggle was unfortunately at this stage beyond him and it was virtually untouched from after his sojourn in Somerset in 1959 to his death in New York in 1968. But if one looks carefully there are jewels glinting in the incomplete crown, which hint tantalisingly at what might have been.

The second book is by the editor of the encyclopaedia "Man, Myth and Magic", Richard Cavendish's *King Arthur & the Grail* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson 1978). This is, as the subtitle The Arthurian legends and their meaning proclaims, a comprehensive analysis of the stories which have attached themselves to the character of Arthur. For newcomers to the legends, and even for veterans, this is a useful companion to read straight through or merely to dip into. Cavendish concentrates on the legends as tales of heroism, honour, the search for integrity and the conquest of death. "It is here, I believe" he says, "that the lasting value and attraction of the Arthurian cycle is to be found" This is a study, I feel, that can be firmly recommended both for its standpoint and the approach to it.



SIR GAWAIN'S HORSE

WHEN Sir Gawain set out in search of the Green Knight, he needed all the help he could muster. The previous New Year's Day, at Camelot, he had chopped off the Green Knight's head, only to be told, as the strange visitor picked up his head and rode away:

"I charge you to come to the Green Chapel next year, and receive such a blow as you have dealt."

Now this is the whole point of the story, because Gawain does not have his head chopped off. His ordeal is really a test of his resistance to temptation by the Knight's lady, who is secretly Morgan la Fay. She has set up the whole enchantment of the apparently headless knight in order to spite Guinevere and the court of Arthur. Gawain's virtue defeats her, for after her greatest efforts, his only lapse is to take from her a girdle of green silk which she says will protect the wearer from injury. He wears it at the duel, and receives a minor neck wound. But for the slight failure of virtue, he would have been unharmed, and this is what the original charge upon him fore-shadows:

"Receive such a blow as you have dealt, as you have deserved."

But, of course, when Gawain sets out on All Saints' Day to seek the Green Chapel, he does not know this, so he takes his red shield with a golden pentangle on it, not so much to repel spirits as to symbolise moral perfection. He also takes his horse, named Gryngole, and in my opinion this name is given by the anonymous poet for a particular reason, because it is another moral weapon for Sir Gawain to take.

The poem of the Green Knight was written quite late to be an Arthurian source, probably by Hugh Massey, in the 14th century. The Masseys are an old Cheshire family, and the poem is written in the local dialect. Also we read

SID BIRCHBY

how Gawain rode north from Camelot, through Wales and over the Dee. The Green Chapel seems to have been somewhere in the hilly part of Cheshire near Wild Boar Clough. Not far away is the rocky cleft called Lud's Church, which ends in a cavern by the statue of a woman, probably now vandalised, alas. It may well have been Morgan la Fay.

In such a remote landscape, it seems, a late-medieval poet restated the legends believed by his countryfolk in the fashionable Arthurian mode, and so Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, although not an original Arthurian source, becomes an unique treasure of Arthur for those who enquire into the Matter of Britain.

The name of Gawain's horse has a curious history. It first appears in 12th century French as a kind of horse. But Chaucer, in The Merchant's Tale (circa 1386 and contemporary with Hugh Massey), makes a passing reference to something being "as tricky as the Boat of Wade", and an edition of Chaucer dated 1598 says that this boat has a name: Gryngole. This is the same as Gawain's horse.

Wade was the hero of tales that flourished in England for about a thousand years. He was the father of Wayland the Smith, both giants of the Northern myths. He is also mentioned in Caxton's edition of Malory, where someone is said to be "as wyghte (active) as ever Wade or Launcelot". He bestrides all myths that ever came to Albion, and may well be the Giant Albion himself.

Gryngole as a word probably comes from the Celtic, via Normans and Bretons. In the modern Breton dialect, gwen=white, or pure, and gallout=power or capability. Sir Gawain rides a white horse, a symbol of the power of purity akin to that of the unicorn, because moral purity will help him best against the wiles of Morgan la Fay.

This is not surmise, but one of

the traditional meeting-points with folk-lore that Hugh Massey must have encountered, because there is a very definite association in Celtic myth between the white horse and virginity. The region of Cheshire in which he lived remains to this day a march-land between Celtic Wales and Anglian Mercia: a land where two traditions meet.

The Celtic goddess Rhiannon is named from the Welsh word for a virgin, rhiannedd. She rides a white horse and comes to show mortals the way to another world. In the other tradition, she is Hela, queen of the Norse underworld. The two met on the Welsh Marches, in the legend, recorded by Walter Map, the 13th century courtier of King Henry 2nd, of King Herla, who visited the world of Faery and now rides the land, not daring to dismount from his horse, because he would crumble to dust. In Welsh, hela means "to hunt or collect". Walter Map says that King Herla was seen in his day (1154) "plunging into the River Wye, near Hereford" by many Welshmen. He was leading many persons "who were known to be dead..."

There is little doubt that Gryngole was a white horse, although an entire book has been written suggesting that Arthur's knights rode black horses: S.G. Wildman ("The Black Horsemen", London, 1971) writes: "The thesis of this book is that the name 'Black Horse', given to an inn, is originally connected with the stories of King Arthur and his knights."

Well, perhaps they were. If the historical Arthur had mounted followers, as some think, and if his Twelve Battles were more like commando raids, as may well be, then white horses would be far too visible to the enemy. However, the persistent white horse/purity tales arise on the level of allegory, and are too widespread to be dismissed: Gawain, Rhiannon, Lady Godiva, the White Lady of Banbury, and others.

The explanation is simple. White horses would be too visible on a

Horse-goddess EPONA, Germany.



raid, but Lady Godiva and the others ride them because they are meant to be seen by onlookers. There is something more than the colour about them, almost a spectral quality, that seems to come across at the right time and place.

I can show this best by an example. On the evening of Oak Apple Day, 1976, I watched the procession in Castleton, Derbyshire: dancing, a maypole, and a great garland of flowers shaped like a dome. This is carried round the village and then hauled onto the church tower by a rope. Crowds of visitors fill the streets, whether from curiously, or to commemorate the restoration of Good King Charles, or from a lingering folk-memory of the earlier Maytime festival, one cannot say. Perhaps the last. In a field near the car park there was a white horse cropping the grass. As dusk fell, it seemed almost to glow, and many of the departing visitors looked at it with a curious expression, as if it meant more to them than just a horse.

The other-world feeling about a white horse is very strong at dusk, of course, but it also exists in the daytime. There is nothing very pure about a horse, white or otherwise, but there is a sense of rarity and magic, as

if it were the next best thing to a unicorn. This, I suggest, goes a long way to explaining its importance in legend. It is a swift and unearthly steed that carries its rider to a place where passions and emotions no longer exist. Perhaps it is the other-world of Rhiannon, at the end of life's journey, or the world that the White Lady brings down to earth every Maytime.

At all events, Gawain's horse was no ordinary one. It had a magical name, and it was meant to remind him of his knightly vows, and to help him keep them. On the whole, he didn't do too badly with it. We are not told if the pentangle on his shield was of any use, but Gryngole took him safely to the Green Chapel and home again.

© S.L. Birchby. This article first appeared in Pendragon Vol 9, No 4 (August 1976).

THE EARLY HISTORY OF AN ARTHURIAN FOLK-OPERA

During my time at Dartington College, one of the lecturers conceived the idea of getting four of us composition students to write a children's opera. It was to be based on the mediaeval poem Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, and each of us was to take one of the poem's four sections. My section was to be the third, that which deals with Sir Bertilak's Christmas Games. I had been anxious to secure this part of the story as it was the most self-contained; otherwise, I doubt whether I'd have been able to write a note - having no control over the total conception was a frustration to all of us. Unfortunately, the clash between our separate styles was too bizarre, lethargy set in, and the final straw was our ignominious flight before the unruly children who the fond but foolish college imagined were going to perform the work! I subsequently lost the score of my part, and don't in fact even

Tim Porter is founder of the Green Branch Opera Group which regularly performs his works, such as Deirdre, Robin Hood & the Turkish Knight, and The Entertaining of the Noble Head.

"Sir Gawain & the Green Knight" may be seen at the Folk House, Bristol on Dec 29 and 30 at 8pm; at the Grange, Newham-on-Severn, on Dec 31 at 4-30pm; at the Assembly Rooms, Glastonbury on Jan 1st at 7-30pm; and the Laverton Hall, Westbury, Wilts on Jan 2 at 7-30pm.

TIM PORTER

remember whether it was completed or not.

A year or two later, when I was in St Austell in Cornwall, I re-met an old student friend, Sue Pettifer, who was now in charge of music at Bude Grammar School. She wanted an opera for her school. This revived the "Gawain" idea. The exciting notion of having a free hand with the whole work, and a captive cast and orchestra, provided plenty of stimulus. There was also the challenge of writing for the limitations of school performance, and the knowledge that children will not tolerate ineffective workmanship!

Two other elements came together to create the catalyst which I needed. One was my recent intensive study of Celtic mythology, which had suddenly set the mediaeval poem as it were in a hall of mirrors, opening vistas into many dim corners of ancient knowledge. The idea of seasonal death

and rebirth is one which I now find it necessary to write into absolutely every work, and there is hardly anything since *Gawain* which doesn't contain it in some guise.

The other element was old English dance music. I had recently started to play the violin in folk dance bands, and also for morris dancing, and fancied I saw many of the same ancient symbols in the patterns of the dance. I was also intoxicated by the sound of this "rough music" of accordions and fiddles, and the idea of writing a piece which at first contrasted it, then combined it, with the sound of a conventional orchestra, incessantly haunted my mind.

Later that same year (1970) I went to live near Okehampton in Devon. This was within easy reach of Bude, so the project could start in earnest. Perhaps because of my earlier work on it, the "Christmas Games" section, with its repetitive cycles of hunting and seduction, came easiest. This part of the story has the natural rhythm of a good joke; something happens, happens again, and the third time comes the punch-line. Besides, sex and animals are both strong theatre. More difficult was the final part of the story, which to a modern audience can seem rather an anti-climax.

Sue wanted to start rehearsing at the beginning of the spring term, so all over Christmas and the New year I was furiously at work. In the end it wasn't finished in time, and the score had to be fed to her bit by bit. When the time came to deliver the fourth and final part I still wasn't satisfied with it and at the last moment implored Sue to hang on, even if it meant postponing the performances.

At this point I was rescued by one of those sudden lightning-flashes which very, very occasionally make composing like its popular image. I happened to notice that the morris tune "Leapfrog", which is used near the start of the opera, combines in counterpoint with a carol I'd written that Christmas. I hastily rehashed the carol as a chor-

us, inserted it at a point where one was still needed, then wrote a jubilant final section which combined carol and morris tune, united the sounds of band and orchestra, got rid of the anti-climax, and led the whole cycle inevitably back to its point of departure. It was a wonderful feeling to suddenly know what was absolutely right; whatever faults and crudities the actual music might contain, it was now held within a sound and watertight vessel. The piece still retains this basic shape unaltered, despite a drastic revision, two years ago, of the music and scoring (the present orchestra numbers only nine, as against the original large forces).

Bude Grammar School was small, so a very large percentage of the pupils had to take part. Singers learnt their music by rote, purely because they could not read music in most cases. This resulted in a high standard of accuracy! The large and motley orchestra, tailored to the band-playing tradition of Cornwall, was heavy with percussion and brass. It was decided in the end that I should conduct, so that Sue could place herself in the front rank of this mighty herd and so check any tendency to stampede. Having collected everybody, we discovered we couldn't fit ourselves lengthways into the small Parish Hall at Bude, so did it sideways. With the audience as well, it was a terrible crush, and as I brought my baton down for the opening chord I struck an elderly lady on the head! It was hot, too, for by now the season was mid-May, and while we performed our story of mediaeval winter, immediately outside the hall seaside holiday-makers were strolling about under a cloudless sky. Going from one to the other was a bizarre contrast.

Things went so well at Bude that I decided to put *Gawain* on again, entirely off my own bat, later that same year (1971). This was made possible by the fact that the Celtic Opera Group (forerunner of the present Green Branch) was by then in existence; also

because an orchestra had been started as an evening class in Okehampton, and a ready-made country dance band was likewise to hand. We planned our production to come at the New Year which of course is the appropriate time for any rendering of the "Gawain" story, and I booked the Okehampton Market Hall, then a spacious, draughty place used for markets, auctions, plays and concerts alike (it has since partially undergone a pretentious "conversion", at the cost of both atmosphere and practicality). The show was "pre-fabricated" in several different places, and put together in a day and a half. People hadn't learnt their parts properly and at the dress rehearsal I was in despair, it seemed such a total shambles.

At this juncture a friend called Maureen had the inspired idea of spending an hour improvising a parody of the whole thing. This produced outrageous, not to say indecent, results, and created a mood of reckless optimism among the cast, so that when they turned again to the actual opera, the production was exactly balanced on that single point, impossible to find except by accident, where unpreparedness becomes for an instant a distinct virtue! We did the piece twice that day, and despite countless imperfections it had a certain life and spontaneity which none of the many subsequent performances have yet equalled. When we came out it was snowing. We repaired to the crumbling remote farmhouse where I lived at the time, and there caroused till a very late hour. This is remembered by those who were present as "the night Liz Holbrook got trifle in her hair".

The opera continues to emerge for inspection every New Year, and I hope somebody who reads this may feel interested enough to sample my West Country version of this immortal story on its next appearance.

Illustrations above: Quintessential Man (after Robert Fludd); Mary etched inside G's shield.



PENTANGLE

GAWAIN'S SHIELD is usually emblazoned with a lion as emblem of the sun, but not on the second meeting with the Green Knight:

"They then brought him his shield that was bright gules [heraldic red] with the pentangle charged with it in pure gold... And why the pentangle was *Gawain's* special emblem must be explained, even though the story waits.

It is a sign that Solomon devised of old, as a token of Fidelity of which it is a fit emblem. For it is a figure that has five points, and each line in it overlaps and locks with another, and wherever you start on it it is endless, and everywhere the English call it the endless knot... *Gawain* was known for a good knight, faithful in five ways and five times in each way [5x5]. He was like refined gold, pure from any vileness, and radiant with all virtues..."

Notice the emphasis on gold and radiance, symbols of the sun, combined with the colour red and the number five, martial or if you like martian symbols. *Gawain* was faultless in twenty-five ways:

- (1) in his five wits (senses);
- (2) in the skill of his fingers;
- (3) in his trust in Christ's five wounds;
- (4) in his trust in the five Joys of Mary;
- (5) in observing the five virtues.

Sir *Gawain*... In Modern English, M.R. Ridley (Ward 1943, Kaye & Ward 1968)

JANUS, OR THE SEVERED HEAD

CHRIS LOVEGROVE

I was searching in my local library for books specifically on the symbolism of the head in order to follow up some thoughts on *Sir Gawain & the Green Knight*.

The search was unsuccessful, so I settled instead for a work ostensibly in a different subject-area - Arthur Koestler's *The Roots of Coincidence*. However, even the title itself was significant as I found on later reading the book, for one of the chapters was entitled "Janus".

JANUS

Janus is the Latin god who gave his name to January, the beginning of the modern year. He seems to have been a rural equivalent of Juppiter, the chief Roman god: Janus = Dianus ("the god")

Jup-piter = Junus Pater
("god the father")

He is often depicted on coins as two-faced ("janiform") and was the god of the doorpost or threshold. As god of the doorpost he was not only the all-important pivot but also a guardian, like the famous leonine door-knocker of Durham Cathedral which one grasped to gain sanctuary (in lieu of actually crossing the threshold).



Durham Cathedral Roman
esque Sanctuary knocker

The idea of a head protecting the home was an ancient one. The Scythians by the Caspian Sea between 1800 and 700 BC used to decapitate their enemies and skewer the heads on long wooden

Roman coin showing



Janus' head

staves so that they protruded far above their houses. These trophies would not only graphically demonstrate their undoubted physical prowess, but also assume magical power by frightening further enemies both in flesh and spirit.

In later times the Celts received this tradition and practiced similar customs, nailing heads to their houses or displaying them in the lintels and upright posts of their religious sanctuaries.



Severed-head, France
Noyes, France

There they acted rather like voiceless porters, and here I am reminded of a suggestive passage in *Culhwch and Olwen* in the medieval Welsh *Mabinogion*. Glewlwyd "Mighty-grasp" is King Arthur's porter each first day of January. His deputies for the rest of the year are Huandaw and Gogigwr and Llaesgymyn, and a certain "Pengwynion who goes upon his head to spare his feet, neither heavenwards nor earthwards, but like a rolling stone on a court floor". These "deputies" sound to me to be unfortunate individuals minus their bodies (let alone their

feet).

Guardian heads persisted through to late medieval times - church gargoyles are an obvious example, a practice stopped only by puritan disapproval - and we find the heads of nobles, traitors and rebels executed for political (and perhaps even ritual) reasons adorning the city walls of London right up to the Age of Reason.

The main problem with guardian heads however (unless yours was destined to be one) was that, not only did they warn enemies away, they in effect kept you prisoner by denying you protection beyond the threshold they guarded. In other words they were, both literally and metaphorically, "two-faced".

HOLONS

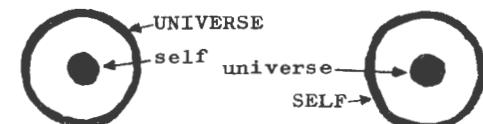
In *The Roots of Coincidence* Koestler discusses his Janus concept at length in the chapter of that name. For him, Janus is a personification for the holon, a term he coined to mean a "sub-whole". The term holon brings together two opposing tendencies within any apparent unity. One tendency is self-centred, and independence-seeking. The other is symbiotic, integration-seeking. This applies to anything, from sub-atomic particles through organic bodies to entities on a truly macrocosmic level. Thus, on a human level, we are all individuals, but cannot be entirely independent of environment or other individuals.

Psychologically we are all Janus-type holons, being both outward and inward-looking. I find the so-called cup-and-ring markings made by various prehistoric or preliterate societies an interesting model for Koestler's holons:



To explain: on one extreme is the individual who regards the self as the centre of the uni-

verse:



The other extreme has the individual trying to find the universe within himself. The extremes can coalesce when there is no differentiation between self and universe, as for example in the infant or the mystic. Here Janus the god, the paradox, is perhaps most fully realised in the flesh as it were.

For the rest of us mortals who merely observe, we can become aware of an intermediate state where the rings of self and universe overlap:



This overlap presents to us that familiar almond-shaped figure known as the vesica piscis (fish-bladder) or mandorla which is found surrounding medieval images of God Incarnate. Here the rings represent the worlds of matter and spirit.

Now, there is a strange sandstone head from Heidelberg (c 200 BC) which displays the mandorla in the position usually taken by the mystic's "third eye" (often identified as the pineal gland). It seems, in a way, to summarise Koestler's essay, which is on the relationship between the worlds of ordinary sense perception and extra-sensory perception (ESP):



For most of us the mandorla can provide a useful holon- or Janus-symbol for viewing the self and the world. The alternative symbol of cup-and-ring could however be more dangerous: either

- (1) the self, imprisoned in its sanctuary, defies the inimical universe; or else
- (2) the universe seeks to annihilate the precious principle of self within it.

In other words, it shows us our own attitudes when at our most childish or our most suicidal. The plans of many Iron Age hill-forts demonstrate the precariousness of such an either/or attitude where the guardian of the gate could so easily become the lurker at the threshold, trapping the defenders (cf Chun Castle and Castle Dore, both in Cornwall).



GODHEAD

The human head as part of a larger whole, and yet, paradoxically, as a symbol of the whole, is a theme found from earliest times. About 8000 BC the earliest settlers of Jericho deposited the heads of their dead apart from the body with the faces modelled in clay and the eyes inset with shell. Near-contemporary burials of heads coated in red ochre in "nests" in Mesolithic S. Germany seem to show similar psychic processes from south-west Asia right across Europe - the dead living on through the separated heads, treated to look alive.

Earlier, Peking Man also showed interest in skulls by extracting the brains for ritual eating, as did Neanderthal men from south of Rome, and, more recently, Melanesian cannibals. This desire to partake of the essence of someone else, whether enemy or dead relative, has a psychological basis too complex to discuss here, but the evidence suggests that the victims were dedicated to the Divine and therefore also received

back some of the divine essence. (The idea of ingesting the divine is of course known to Christianity but the unpleasant connotations are generally eschewed.)



Celtic and Arthurian legend have two particularly striking examples which show an indirect connection between severed heads and feasting:

(1) Bran the Blessed (from one of the Mabinogion tales) has his head struck off but it continues supernaturally to be "pleasant company" at feasting in Harlech and at the Assembly of the Wondrous Head in Gwales off Pembrokeshire. The association of the head with feasting was evident with both the Celts and the Scythians: they sawed off all below the eyebrows of the cleaned-out heads of their worst enemies, and these were then often lined with gold for use as drinking-cups.

Similarly, in Sir Gawain & the Green Knight, King Arthur announces that

(2) he will not eat on New Year's Day until he hears of or witnesses a marvel, which turns out to be the Beheading Game demanded by the Green Knight.

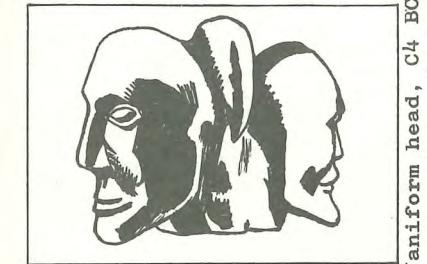
THE GREEN KNIGHT

In the event, Sir Gawain plays the Beheading Game on the threshold of the New Year, at the beginning of the month dedicated to Janus. The Game was to behead the challenger, and then to suffer the return blow

by the beheaded challenger on a future specified day. Who is this brave Sir Gawain who agrees to these weird regulations?

Traditionally he is the son of King LOTH of Lothian, but he performs his feat so much like the Irish hero Cuchulain, son of the Celtic god LUGH (in the tale of Bricriu's Feast), that there seems little doubt that King Loth is analogous to Lugh.

What of the Green Knight? Some strange relationships seem about to crop up, and it is the generally unreliable Geoffrey of Monmouth who provides the link. He mentions that King LEIR (Shakespeare's Lear) was buried in an underground chamber dug beneath the river Soar near Leicester, and that this chamber was dedicated to... two-faced Janus, the patron of craftsmen. This is a strange piece of information for Geoffrey to provide, especially as he does not follow it up in any way.



Janiform head, C4 BC
Roquepertuse, France

Now, what are these relationships? We have JANUS, god of the turning of the year, a sort of pre-Christian St Peter who guards the gates of heaven as well as earthly doors. He is associated with LEIR, perhaps a janiform native British god before he became a mad king, who is patron of craftsmen. We have LUGH (Welsh LLEU), the Celtic god of craftsmen because he is master-of-all-trades, whose name means "Shining One". There is LOTH (or LOT or LUD), the father of Sir Gawain in Arthurian romances, who has given his name to Lud's Church in Staffordshire, the natural rock fissure which is almost certainly the Green Chapel of the Green Knight.⁵ And finally there is the GREEN

KNIGHT himself, identified as a SIR BERCILAK (from the Irish bachlach "a churl"), who on the first day of January strides unheralded into King Arthur's court (what on earth was the porter doing?) and becomes a once-and-future being despite having his head struck off.

The question is: can we identify all these personages as one and the same? Even as circumstantial evidence none of the foregoing would stand up in a court of law, but, poetically, I think the following summing-up would be accepted in Arthur's court at least:

At the turning-point of the year Gawain is made to recognise his paternity in the guise of Loth or Bercilak or Janus or whatever. Not his physical father but, if you like, his universal father, the "Whole" of which he is the sub-whole or holon. Now this was a very important lesson to learn in pre-literate societies - the source of one's being - which is why ancestral lists baulk so largely in tradition (the Bible has several obvious examples), and why the lack of a sense of continuity with the past can not only lead to the generation "gap" but also to a lack of a sense of direction and purpose.

That the power of such fairy-tale concepts continues to survive, against all odds, in a 20th-century industrialised country like Britain is evidenced by a seasonal dance performed in Grenoside by ordinary no-nonsense Yorkshiremen.



Here is the Captain (lit. "Headman") wearing a rabbit-skin cap, his neck encircled by six "swords" wielded by his "sons", about to be

"decapitated" on Boxing Day near the turning of the year. And even if we didn't know that it was all play-acting, we can be certain that the "dead" man would be back to life quicker than you could nod your head.

1. Arthur Koestler The Roots of Coincidence (Hutchinson 1972)

2. Remember how Ebenezer Scrooge's door-knocker appeared as the head of his deceased partner Jacob Marley in Dickens' Christmas Carol?

3. Cf Margaret Murray The Divine King in England (London 1952) for an argument in favour of "ritual" executions.

4. For Cuchulainn's many beheading exploits see The Tain (translated by Thomas Kinsella from the epic Tain Bo Cuailnge) or "The Cattle-Raid" (OUP) 1970.

5. See Twentieth Century Interpretations of Sir Gawain... (edited by Denton Fox, Prentice-Hall Inc., NJ, 1968) 106-109.

PENDRAGONRY

Back numbers of this magazine in this A5 format are available, but only in limited numbers, at 30p each plus postage, as follows:

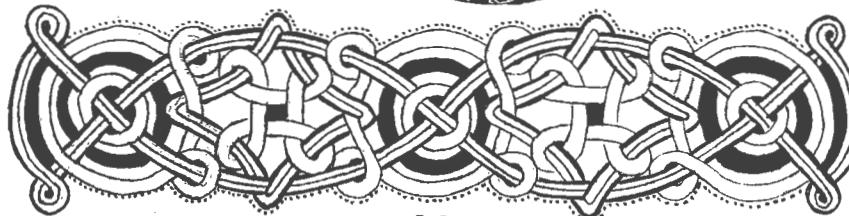
VOL 10
No 4 Dragons

VOL 11
No 1 Merlin
2 Lancelot
3 Round Table
4 St Brendan; Magic Squares

"A for Arthur", an informal history of the Pendragon Society, is also available in limited numbers, also at 30p + postage.

"The Stories of King Arthur and his Knights" are told for children on cassette (details on request).

A sturdy badge for members showing a gold wyvern-dragon on a blue field can be had at £1.00.



LETTERS

MAGIC SQUARES & THE MAGI

From MICHAEL BENKERT, Acton, London W3

Herewith the gist of my findings in the matter of trying to find a meaning to the magic square cryptogram, which I had not previously come across.

Mr Peter Ratazzi's reference to Coptic sources together with Mr Sid Birchby's examination of possible Sumerian origins, led me to experiment with a method of reducing the words to their component syllables, and to see if these had a reasonable meaning in the Akkadian-Hittite language which derived from the Sumerian civilisation, in which two-letter syllables and even single letters have a meaning when referred to their signs in which this language was first expressed.

Our modern alphabet is used to convey the phonetic sounds, as far as we know how, of the original words, with the result that our vowels O, U, and A can be interchangeable in certain usage, and TOR, TAR, TUR, and DAR can have the same meaning as, I suppose, these words were subject to their pronunciation in local dialects. After all, we ourselves say OND, UND, and AND for the word AND, according to the county in which we live.

So, to proceed:-

Akkadian-Hittite word	Sign	Suggested meaning
SA		Proclaim, say. (The sign, a sickle, is thought to be from the Cypriote, and suggests the clearing of an old, ripe crop to clear the land.)
TOR (TUR, TAR, DAR)		A son, a Chief, a Judge, a God. (The sign, a deer's head, was the Akkadian word DARA, meaning a deer and also God. DARA was one of the titles of EA.)
A		Water, and also the letter A was an accepted abbreviation for EA, the God of Creation and of the Deep Waters. AADARA or for short ADARA meant :- the son of EA.
RE		Bright, High, a servant. (The sign represents rays descending from above.)
PO		A bud, a young growth.



Akkadian-Hittite word	Sign	Suggested meaning
TE		To grow, to become, to worship, to establish. (The Akkadian sign, of a sprouting grass shoot, changes to: which resembles the six-point star of the cryptogram.)
		Linear Babylonian
NE		Male
T (TAU)		In Hittite: to beat; with the sign showing an arm holding a rod in its fist. In Hebrew: a sign; the sign for this meaning is:
O (AIN)		An eye. (Suggests Osiris.)
PE		An Akkadian word of obscure meaning. The sign, a Crook, seems to suggest a shepherd.
RA		A luck symbol of the Common Man.
RO		A spear head. Seems to suggest death. (The Spear of Longinus?)
TAS		A lion's head sign as used on seals. Also bears a meaning: heroic. (A prophetic reference to the Lion of Judah?)

In view of the age of the Cryptogram, is it possible that the Chaldean Magi hid a high level prophetic revelation about the birth of Jesus Christ in a cryptogram of which only they knew the facts? In this way they would be free from persecution from the Assyrians and the Greeks under Alexander to whom the Cryptogram would be unclear. The Magi were present at Bethlehem right on time...

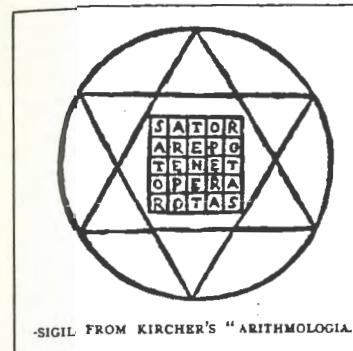
(The books of reference I found useful were - in chronological order!:-)
The Hittites & their Language, Lt Col C.R. Conder (W. Blackwood & Sons, 1898)
Le Déchiffrement des Écritures, Ernst Döblehofer (Arthaud, 1960)
The Hittites, O.R. Gurney (Book Club Associates, London, 1975)

THE WORD SQUARE & A SUGGESTED SOLUTION

From Patricia Villiers-Stuart, London SW6

I was delighted to read in Pendragon the detailed account of this mysterious word square. May I suggest a solution very much in keeping with that of Peter Ratazzi.

The first two words SATOR and AREPO if read backwards are ROTAS and OPERA like the last two words. I consider it useless to look for their other meanings when their meaning is that they must be read backwards.



Athanasius Kircher
German scholar
1601 - 1680

ity and at 1 or 0 breaking into fractions. By investigating the spatial patterns of the two way approach to numbers another world of thought is encountered. An old world perhaps, the world of Jacob's ladder, of angels ascending and descending out of heaven, as William Blake appreciated. In my own case I cannot resist saying "not angels but angles" because it is in the functioning of angles upon squares that I investigate.

The further back in time I go the more links I find with this way of thought. The ancient Mayas had a saying "the first race capable of all knowledge examined the four corners of the horizon, the four points of the firmament and the round circles of the earth". Whereas the ancient Sumerians left behind a record of angles known as the Plimpton tablet, the complexity of which is taking years to untangle. They are called "Pythagorean" triangles but as Professor Thom has pointed out stone circle builders used them long before the Greeks.

The word square in question may be expressed in Latin but the principles behind it may be hiding not only in Sumeria, but even in the mists of Atlantis. Where perhaps not only the binary aspect of numbers was used but also the binary workings of space.

DATING THE SQUARE

From PETER RATAZZI, Hove, Sussex

About the Square: it may predate Revelation's A & O, but the expression A & O may have been written down earlier (the absence of a record is no complete proof) or it may have been used by word of mouth before it was penned into the scriptures.

Incidentally, some magic squares (by combining lines dependent on sequences within them) show up jewel-like forms. A number square of Nine can also be employed to plot "diagonals of destiny" in the case of some historical personalities...

Peter Ratazzi mentioned in his article an Ethiopian ritual in which the five nails of the Cross were named Sador, Alador, Danet, Adera, and Rodas, and this reminds me of the middle five of the 5x5 ways Gawain was known to be a faithful knight (see p 9). Would any reader like to comment on a relationship between the Mars number-square, the Sator word-square, the pentacle/pentangle and Sir Gawain? Ed.

LETTER FROM IRAN

JOHN FOREST

John Forest set off in the summer for Iran to teach English. Despite the troubles we received this letter from him recently, but the situation has worsened and we can only hope that he will remain safe until he decides to return, or at least leave Iran during this politically unsettled period. In the meantime, an open letter...

ALL due seasonal greetings from the tinderbox... You may have gathered that I eventually arrived in Tehran after a quick trip through several Euro-cultures in about as many days, a trip of which most memories appal with the notable exceptions of Rome and Istanbul. (And a fine afternoon on the dome at Florence, sitting in the massive lantern, vertiginous views of acres of red terracotta pantiles stretching out to the distant hills...) Rome a wondrous town, redolent of falling masonry and general decay - around each corner another relic, as out of place in this century as a mastodon or dinosaur - Trajan's Column, Pantheon, St John's, and the amphitheatres etc: many of which I confess I hadn't realised even lived in Rome! A moonlit ramble through St Peter's piazza - deserted save for three cabinieri, surprised by my ghosting through the vast colonnades - Vatican City and squat Fort St Angelo, connected by the umbilical old wall-top papal "chicken run" - meanwhile the fetid Tiber drifts by. And once a fortnight they have the Changing of the Pope - akin to Buckingham Palace but wildly camp. A good town! Istanbul on the other hand a place of rest and recuperation - sitting in the jaded Topkapi watching steam ferries trying to sink each other on the Golden Horn - and the awesome nostalgia of Hagia Sophia, Justinian's shade at the shoulder - the people psychopaths to a man, but pleasant. Until the fateful hour arrives to board the battered bus to Tehran, 60 hours and an hundred aching bones away...

Tehran! Although rumour of this Venice of the East had oft reached my ears, how could I have been prepared for such delights? Disembark at daybreak as the curfew lifts - magnificent backdrop of snow-capped mountains, every nook crystal clear. Stagger across town as the traffic builds up - within the hour the air thickens to a grey gravy, walking becomes wading and the mountains, even the end of the street is lost in the murky haze. Crossing streets becomes, like some oriental martial art, a matter of total synchronization of mind, body and soul. The newcomer eyes the taxis with something akin to terror. Fortunately Turkey has already warmed him to the vision of jumpy young soldiers gripping incredibly lethal weapnry at every street corner (a feature that is to become more prominent as days go by!). The ubiquitous air-borne dirt infiltrates everywhere, and tickles the lungs with visions of illnesses as yet undreamt-of - occasionally relieved by the autumn shower which momentarily clears the smog and reveals the mountains - wham! - once more towering over.

Since which nothing-if-not-poetic arrival I've been passing the time between the Imperial Pahlavi Air Force (mornings) and a private teaching institute (evenings) (trying to raise the money to get out!!) which is an interesting pair of extremes from the political viewpoint - and quite invigorating if initially a nerve-racking occupation. All IIAF would-be pilots and officers have to have fairly fluent English before going Stateside to train. The contract there takes me through till next October at least, unless an "evacuation situation" (!) arises beforehand, which is by no means inconceivable! Indeed at present something akin to a full-blooded revolution is underway; the (rather moving for a British exile!) Nov 5th burning of much of the town was followed by a comparative lull; however last night's arrival Dec 2nd of the local flagellation fortnight was accompanied by running night-long

battles of unnerving dimensions.

Furthermore and much more seriously the few bars unscathed by Nov 5th have closed for the duration! an unprecedented situation in my experience, and I had finally adapted to the local keg lager-style brew! Which may yet lead me to join the flagellants. Meanwhile we sit out on the balcony evenings, in central Tehran, hearing little but the sounds of the night and the occasional distant rattle of gunfire - which goes to show that there is something to be said for a curfew! - But life is essentially on a day-to-day basis and I may yet be seeing you for Christmas!

Ever eager to serve the 'dragons cause, I recall one small thing worth a mention. 7th c Byzantine church at Kalambaka, central Greece - an edifice straight out of Heath Robinson below the (equally Robinsonian) rock-pile monasteries of Meteora. Good lord - are these really low relief panels of knotwork in a style of pure Celt? - visions of Joseph of A. raced through my mind and I grabbed for the felt-tip, but before I was able to scribble down a poor facsimile, an Amazonian harridan wearing rugby socks and boots bore down upon me, flexing a ring of huge iron keys and making low rumbling noises which combined to suggest closing time - awe-stricken I obliged. But it seemed odd -(not much of a roving reporter am I)- but maybe someone could make something of it?... A joyous Yule to you all and all the best with the New Year...



PENDRAGAZINE REVIEW SECTION

ANCIENT SKILLS & WISDOM REVIEW Ed. Paul Screeton; A4; sub £2 pa for 4 issues from the Editor, 5 Egton Drive, Seaton Carew, Hartlepool, Cleveland TS 25 2AT. Don't be put off by the unwieldy title which is precisely what it says it is, with all the relevant books and magazines awarded bouquets or brickbats as appropriate by the former LEY HUNTER editor.

THE LEY HUNTER The Magazine of Earth Mysteries (ancient alignments, geomancy, folklore, prehistoric and ancient sites, possible earth energies, strange phenomena &c), ed. Paul Devereux; A5; sub £3 pa (£360 Europe, \$9 elsewhere airmail) for 6 issues from PO Box 152, London N10 1EP. Aiming to be more than just a big fish in a small pond, No 83 of the new series deals with Derbyshire tumuli, the imaginative Dragon Project, stone circles, Margate grotto, experiencing Reality, temporal cycles as well as leys and regular features. With its excellent and exemplary lay-out (!) TLH has something to offer everyone.

PICWINNARD The magazine of Wessex leys and folklore, ed. Vince Russell; A5; sub £2 pa for 6 issues from the Editor, Hythe Bow, Cheddar, Somerset BS27 3EH. Issue 7 celebrates over a year of publication with articles on giants, Glastonbury patterns, Somerset coldharbours and tree lore, crossroad and Christmas lore plus reviews, letters &c. Brings a human, almost affectionate, touch to a field usually beset by either cold statistics or heated outbursts. Worth supporting.

SANGREAL Journal of the Mysteries, Crafts and Traditions of Britain, ed. Sally & Gef Dearn; A5; sub £2.50 pa (US \$7 surface mail) for 4 issues from BM SANGREAL, London WC1V 6XX. The editors aim to produce

it "to a high standard to meet the demand for a serious magazine of interest to all who wish to deepen their knowledge of the mythology & history of Britain, sacred sites & folklore and the old crafts of this country". This new magazine already promises interesting developments, and is producing a useful occasional newsletter GLATISANT (after the Arthurian Questing Beast) to provide a forum for publications dealing with "Mysteries of Britain".

STONEHENGE VIEWPOINT Archaeology, astronomy, geology and related arts and sciences, ed. Donald L Cyr; A4ish newspaper, sub \$6/£3 for 12 issues from PO Box 30887, Santa Barbara, Calif 93105 or Kay Thompson c/o TLH. Issue 26 deals mainly with Isaac Vail's theory that the earth was covered with a cloud layer or canopy of ice crystals in prehistoric times which resulted in halo effects round the sun and moon; did ancient man record this in his art? SV also runs a comprehensive book & magazine order service.

We welcome reciprocal advertising and/or reviews from magazines and/or groups not represented here. Please send us your details or a sample copy and we'll include a mention in future issues.

NEWSLETTER Informal postal exchange for studies in Paraphysics and the Esoteric Arts, founded 1944. Non-sectarian and non-demanding. Membership by mutual consent and free. For introductory leaflet send a stamp to: NL, 40 Parrs Wood Ave, Didsbury, Manchester M20 0ND.

GOLDEN SECTION ORDER SOCIETY NEWSLETTER Celtic-bardic-druidic newsletter, folds out into illustrated poster; £2 for 4 issues, free to members.

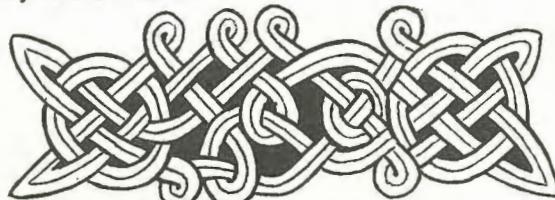
RAGNAROK New independent magazine for occultists of all paths, ed. Magdalene Graham; £1 for 4 issues from 17 Culvert St, Blackburn, Lancs BB1 1BY.

RILKO NEWSLETTER Research into lost knowledge, ed. Janette Jackson; 40p per issue from 36 College Court, Hammersmith, London W6.

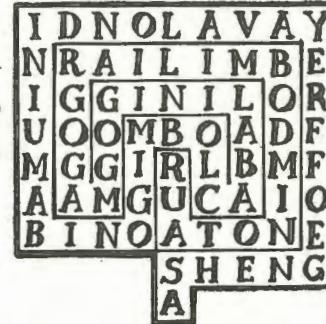
TAILpiece

We have received notice of a book by Douglas Carmichael: Pendragon - an historical novel (Blackwater Press-Exposition Press Inc) which we hope to review next issue. We are told "his battles are so vividly described that we can almost feel the shock of Artorius' sword as it cleaves a Saxon skull like a yolk-spurting eggshell".

Finally, a motto for your Christmas cracker: "After an energetic weekend joust at Camelot, could you say that Lancelot had Saturday Knight Fever after Close Encounters of the Spurred Kind?" Sorry about that!



MAZEWORD



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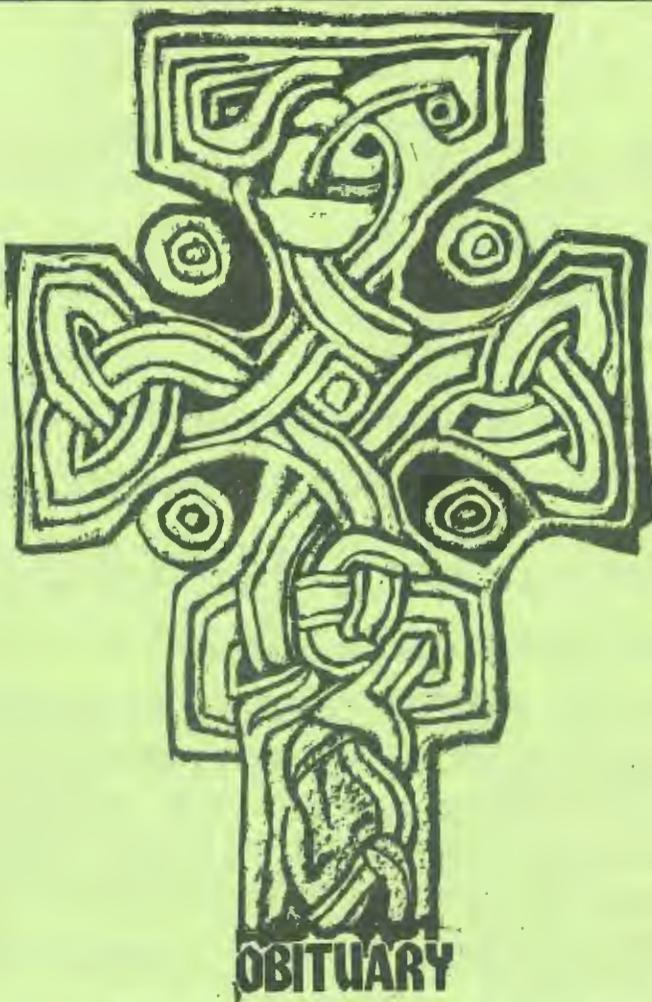
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DATES : 23-25 March 1979

FURTHER INFORMATION/ BOOKINGS :

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OBITUARY

IT IS WITH VERY GREAT REGRET THAT WE HAVE TO ANNOUNCE THE DEATH OF MRS JESS FOSTER ON JANUARY 28th 1979.

JESS FOUNDED THE PENDRAGON SOCIETY IN WINCHESTER IN 1959 AND HAS BEEN THE CREATIVE FORCE BEHIND IT EVER SINCE.

SHE WAS TRULY LOVED BY MANY PEOPLE ALL OVER THE WORLD IN SUCH A WAY THAT IS GRANTED TO FEW HUMAN BEINGS.

THE PENDRAGON SOCIETY WILL NATURALLY CARRY ON THE WORK SHE STARTED.