

pendragon

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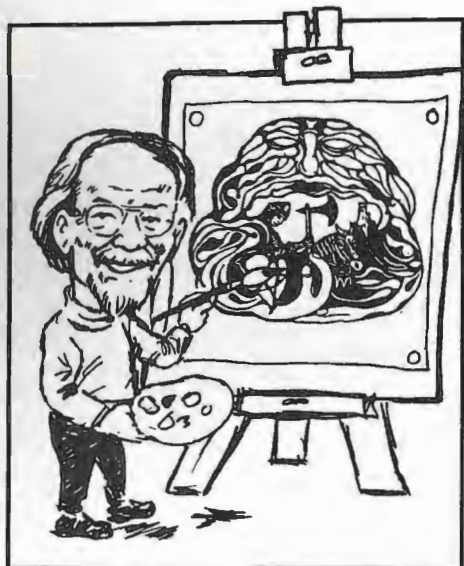
Spring 1997



The Journal of the Pendragon Society

Welcome to the Spring edition,

This issue is centred around articles on the subjects **Grails** and **Stars**. We offer you a variety of Holy Grails together with an introduction about the first known Grail story written by Chrétien de Troyes. But what was it all about? There are innumerable theories and it is difficult to be sure whether any are near the truth. Surely, every reader will have their own opinion about the belief in the Holy Grail. We follow the Grails by Stars – two articles about stars on land and in the sky together with another kind of star – author Bernard Cornwell – interviewed by John Matthews. So if you have any theories or comments about Grails and Stars (or any other Arthurian subject at all) please let us know.



After the last issue we received a few comments, including one from Fred Stedman-Jones, our Membership Secretary. The cover of the Winter edition was actually drawn by Fred rather than Simon Rouse. Sorry about that Fred! There are a few more apologies to make concerning missing advertisements and we hope that we can make up for any exclusions. There was also one complaint about errors – spelling, grammar, etc. Well, there is no excuse for these – the editor takes full responsibility for any fall in standards. On this point the editor would appreciate a **volunteer proofreader**. Address and phone number can be found on the opposite page and in What the Papers Say.

As with the Winter edition there has been a lack of correspondence. Your comments are always welcome – for, against, supportive or critical – we would appreciate your letters. Also, we want to know what is going on in your area. Are there any local lectures, shows, exhibitions that have some connection with the Matter of

Britain or the history and archaeology of the Post Roman period? I am sure members would like to know. However, if you don't tell us we will not be able to pass the news on.

Finally, we hope that you will be sending articles soon, because we really need them to keep the journal running along smoothly. The next edition will concentrate on **Arthurian Topography**, particularly **Cornwall**. So, get out your pens out or boot-up your computers and let's have your contributions as soon as possible.

Pendragon is published three times per year - Spring (April/May), Summer (August/September) and Winter (December/January). Your subscription, therefore, covers three issues and you will be kept informed of how many issues you have left by a number in the box at the top right-hand corner of this page. For example, when the number one [1] is marked in the square it means you have one journal left, however, if there is a red cross [X] it indicates your subscription is overdue.

PENDRAGON

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GRAILS AND STARS EDITION

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"Ce est li contes del graal"

An introduction to the grail story

by Charles W. Evans-Günther

The Holy Grail has become almost a household name, can be found in English dictionaries and is often used to indicate something almost unobtainable. The search for the meaning of the Holy Grail continues to be an important part of the Matter of Britain and encompasses everything from folk tales like Peronnik to New Age philosophies. But what was the first story of the Holy Grail? A mention is made by the troubadour Rigaut de Barbezieux: *"Just as Perceval, when he was alive, was lost in the wonderment at the sight, so that he could never ask what purpose the lance and the Grail served, so I likewise, Mielhs de Domna, for I forget all when I gaze on you."* The actual date of this composition is problematic since the poet is given two possible period when he flourished - 1140-1163 or 1170-1210. If it was the latter, Rigaut could have used a recently written piece as his source of information, but if it was the former then he had access to something interesting.

In the last decades of the 12th century a writer of romances, Chrétien de Troyes, composed a long poem for Philip of Alsace, Count of Flanders. Chrétien was already famous and well known throughout the French speaking world from England to the Holy Land. He had translated material from the Roman poet Ovid and written a number of Arthurian romances. It would seem that he worked from Troyes, east of Paris, in the Duchy of Champagne, under the patronage of Henri the Liberal and Marie, daughter of Louis VII and Eleanor of Aquitaine. Certainly his **The Knight of the Cart** is dedicated to *"my lady of Champagne"*. Sometime after the death of Henri (1181), Chrétien moved his allegiance to the Count of Flanders at Brugge (Bruges). The poem he wrote for Philip was **The Story of the Grail**.

This tells the tale of a youth who leaves his home and mother in search of adventure at the court of King Arthur. After a series of events the young man decides to return to his mother but instead embarks on the most fascinating of quests. Lost he meets a rich man fishing on a river and is directed to a castle. On entering he is greeted by a squire who, after giving him a sword, invites him for a meal with the lord of the castle - the invalid rich fisherman.

"As they were speaking of one thing and another, a squire came forth from a chamber carrying a white lance by the middle of the shaft; he passed between the fire and those seated upon the bed. Everyone in the hall saw the white lance with its white point from whose tip there issued a drop of blood, and this red drop flowed down to the squire's hand"

Though the youth marvelled at the event he asked no questions, for his tutor, the knight Gornemant of Gohort, had advised him that a good knight should not be too talkative.

"Then two other squires entered holding in their hands candelabra of pure gold, crafted with enamel inlays. The young men carrying the candelabra were extremely handsome. In each of the candelabra were at least ten candles burning. A maiden accompanying the two young men was carrying a grail with her two hands; she was beautiful, noble, and richly attired. After she entered the hall carrying the grail the room was so brightly illumined that the candles lost their brilliance like stars and the moon when the sun rises. After her came another maiden, carrying a silver carving platter."

The grail was described as being of *"fine gold"* and set with *"precious stones of many kinds, the best and costliest to be found in earth and sea"* and *"finer than any others in the world,"*

Like the lance the grail passed in front of those gathered and into another chamber. The young knight watched with amazement but still made no attempt to ask any questions of his host. After the feast was over the youth was shown to a fine bedroom. In the morning he awoke to a

completely empty castle. Riding away from one strange experience it was not long before another unusual event took place. He meets a maiden crying over the corpse of her headless lover. But when the young knight questions her about what had happened she seems more interested in his experiences. When she is told that he had spent a night at the castle of the Rich Fisher King, she asks him what he saw and what was his name. To the reader's surprise the young man has to guess that he was called Perceval the Welshman. The maiden explains that if Perceval had asked about the marvels he had seen, the lord of the castle would have been cured. She goes on to say that he is her cousin and informs him that his mother is dead.

Perceval takes revenge on the knight who killed the maiden's lover and then returns to King Arthur's court. On the third day after arriving a strange, ugly damsel comes to Caerleon. When she realises that Perceval has been to the castle of the Fisher King she admonishes him for not asking why a drop of blood flowed from the tip of the lance or whom the grail served. She calls him a *"wretched man"* for not asking these questions. The ugly damsel also instructs the rest of the knights on how they should run their lives. Many take heart and go out on quests.

Despite, or because, of the ugly damsel's words Perceval seems to lose all interest in life and though he continues to defeat other knights he wonders the world for five long years. He is so confused that he does not go to mass and even forgets about God. Then he comes across an old hermit. When Perceval tells him who he is, the hermit shocks him by saying *that* his mother died of sorrow because he deserted her and it was on account of this sin against his mother that he asked no questions at the Fisher King's castle.

"Sin stopped your tongue when you saw pass in front of you the lance that bleeds unceasingly and failed to ask its purpose; when you did not inquire who is served from the grail, you committed folly. The man served from it is my brother. Your mother was his sister and mine; and the rich Fisher King, I believe, is the son of the king who is served from the grail. And do not imagine he is served pike or lamprey or salmon. A single host that is brought to him in that grail sustains and brings comfort to that holy man - such is the holiness of the grail!"

Perceval receives a penance from his uncle and attends mass, renewing his belief in God.

At this point Chrétien informs the reader that he will tell stories about Gawain before returning to Perceval but the tale is never finished. It is not sure why this happened and it is presumed that Chrétien died before he could complete the work. We know that Chrétien had previously left **The Knight of the Cart** unfinished and had passed it on to Godefroy de Lagny. It has been suggested that he did not like the story that he had been asked to write and couldn't bring himself to complete it. This may also be true of **The Story of the Grail** but since no further works are credited to Chrétien it should be considered that he was unable to finish the story because he passed away. We know his patron was Philip, Count of Flanders, and that the Count went on crusade to the Holy Land in 1191, where he died of plague during the siege of Acre. Also we know from Chrétien's own words that he obtained the story from Philip. In the introduction of **The Story of the Grail** Chrétien praise Philip and tells the reader that

" . . . he aims and strives by command of the count to put into rhyme the greatest story that has ever been told in royal court: it is the Story of the Grail, the book of which was given to him by the count"

What the mysterious book was and how the story ended we may never know! Later versions seem to stray from Chrétien's original and become more and more Christianized. Certainly there are elements of Christianity in **The Story of the Grail** but the part women play in the story borders on heresy!

I hope to produce an article on Chrétien de Troyes and Philip of Alsace in the near future, but meanwhile I am sure you will find the following articles on aspects of the Holy Grail of considerable interest.

The Emergence of the Symbol of the Holy Grail

by Ian Forrester Roberts

The full flowering of Arthurian legend in its medieval form occurred between 1150 and 1250; a period which also saw the Christian Church establish itself as the undisputed cornerstone of western society. These were intensely formative years, when the religious cooking pot seethed and boiled over with conflicting ideas. The Church itself was torn, inside and out, by a struggle between the supporters of two totally different philosophies that were fundamentally in conflict with each other. Those who endeavoured to follow Christ's teaching faithfully in their personal lives as opposed to those who devoted themselves, above all else, to the glory and expansion of the Church. For the latter, the Church was the living manifestation of God's glory on earth. The fact that the essence

of Christ's teaching lay in meekness, poverty and humility was, for them, hardly relevant. Their satisfaction lay in increasing the magnificence and influence of the Church here on earth. After all, meekness and humility are useless tools when it comes to crusading, and amassing of earthly power. To them, the Church had to be God's sole embassy on earth and they, its self-appointed officers. A Merlinesque mirage was conjured up of an imaginary chasm between Man and God. The Church was its only bridge and they were its guardians. They alone held the keys to the Kingdom and to maintain the illusion, it was essential that they eliminate every rival. This they proceeded to do, with fanatical zeal and inhuman cruelty.

The Church made itself the sole arbiter of religious doctrine. Any interpretation of religious symbols outside of their decree were emphatically banned. Every aspect of Jesus' life was to be literal and historical fact, questioned only on the pain of death. Any suggestion that miracles might be symbolic rather than factual was instantly condemned as heresy. In the Holy land, territorial aggression and wholesale slaughter went hand in



The Pope, dramatically portrayed as a fiend from Hell, 16th Cent. woodcut from by Eduard Fuchs

hand, cloaked in the splendid trappings of holy war. Throughout Europe divergence from Church decrees resulted in the most dreadful atrocities which were blithely attributed to the divine vengeance of the Lord. Everywhere within its domain, the orthodox Church unleashed the devil to run amok in God's name. Sincere and God-fearing people were burnt alive, 'with great joy', sometimes in batches of two hundred at a time, in an attempt to expunge dissension from society. It is an appalling and shameful record which has never been fully acknowledged by the Church. In studying its excesses, one is reminded of Yeats' piercing observation that, when . . .

*... twenty centuries of sleep were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born? (1)*

Nevertheless, despite the increasing encroachment of the Church, these were wonderful years. Religion infused every facet of society, provoking feverish dispute. Traders and crusaders were returning from the east filled with new ideas about alternative approaches to Christianity and life in general; ideas that were uniquely at variance with the teachings of the Church. New sects sprang up, often promoting notions far ahead of their time, such as reverence for life,



The Mass burning of heretics, from 'Weltchronik' by Hartmann Schedel, Nuremberg

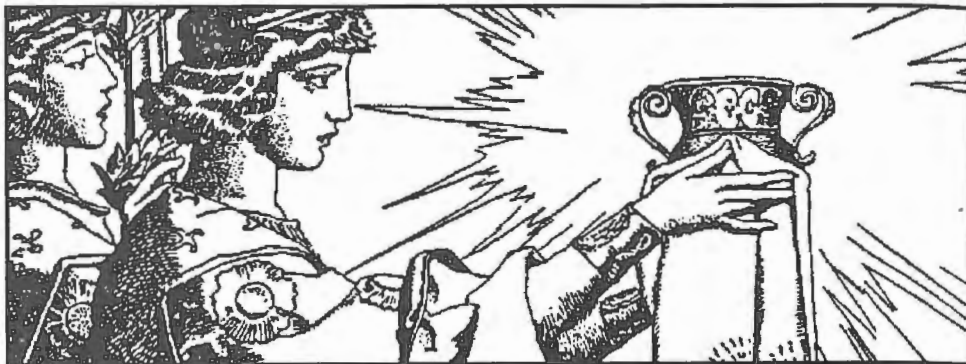
vegetarianism and women priests. Although each sect interpreted the Christian message differently, they all had one thing in common; an aversion to the opulence of the orthodox Church and licentiousness of so many of its priests. However, it was all to little avail. A successful religious holocaust was launched across Europe.

*The blood-dimmed tide was loosed and everywhere,
The ceremony of innocence was drowned; . . . (1)*

Conformity was triumphant. Every sect that dared to differ was wiped out. Independent religious thinkers dissembled or fled, mercilessly pursued by the Inquisition. Some sought refuge in alchemy, other sublimated their frustrated yearnings into romantic tales of King Arthur and knightly derring do, infusing their stories with the religious themes now denied them, but heavily disguising them in abstract symbolism.

It was into this atmosphere of fear, suppression and frustrated belief, that the Holy Grail descended. Human bodies can be torn apart and burnt, but good visions and ideas are immortal. They continued to flourish like wild flowers between great slabs of stone, springing up with a life

force of their own. Those who dared to tell stories of the Grail were treading on very dangerous ground, but tales which simply featured a heavenly chalice could hardly be accused of transgressing papal decree. Orthodoxy was never comfortable with the idea of this unpredictable manifestation from above and monkish scribes frequently railed against it, but it was hard to pin down as heretical. So, despite the dark murmurings of the Church, the Holy Grail grew in brilliance as the symbol of independent spiritual transcendence; a vivid image, unfettered by the territorial machinations of any creed. In this independence lay its power and its beauty. The imaginary world of Camelot was a natural setting for such a wondrous symbol and Arthurian legend was fast becoming the central myth of western civilisation. In some of the stories it appears as a stone, reminiscent of the Black Stone of Mecca. In others it is a dish, calling to mind the dish that carried the head of John the Baptist, or indeed the head of Bran the Blessed of Celtic legend. Then, under the influence of stories penned by two daring Cistercian monks, it is metamorphosed into the cup that carried the blood of Christ.



Although its form is of no great consequence, a chalice-like shape containing Christ's life-blood - the embodiment of the life principal being passed from God to man - befits its symbolic context very well, and its absorption into Christian mystique added reverence to wonder. Whatever its form, the Holy Grail has come to symbolise the living source of an inexhaustible spiritual vitality;

... that fountain at the centre of the universe from which
the energies of eternity are poured into the world of time. (2)

References:

1. *The Second Coming* W.B. Yeats
2. *Transformations of Myth through Time* Joseph Campbell

Roy Franks

It is our sad duty to announce that member Roy Franks has passed away. He died in April 1995 but we only got to hear about his death in February 1997. Roy and his wife Dorothy were both born in the Wrexham-Llangollen area of North Wales and though they emigrated to California in 1964 they remained British at heart.

Dorothy informed us that Roy was enamoured with the Arthurian period of history and read everything he could get his hands on, amassing quite a collection of books. Two weeks before he died, Roy gave a lecture on King Arthur to the local Welsh group.

A Head on a Platter

by Alby Stone

Chrétien de Troyes' unfinished romance *Perceval* (written c. 1190) spawned an entire genre. It was plagiarised, imitated and 'completed' by numerous authors, and over the next century or so the Grail story became one of the great cornerstones of Arthurian literature. Indeed, *Perceval* was undoubtedly one of the most influential literary works of its time.

One of its most curious offspring is the Welsh romance *Peredur*, written some time in the thirteenth century. Like its German counterpart, Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* (written c. 1210), the Welsh tale is a nearly faithful rendering of Chrétien's story, although both are tailored to suit the requirements of different audiences. It too has been 'completed' by its author. Inevitably, from the point in the narrative where *Perceval* ends, *Peredur* is as different from *Parzival* as that romance is from the French continuations of Chrétien's incomplete masterpiece.

However, both *Peredur* and *Parzival* offer different versions of something that Chrétien described in explicit detail. In *Perceval*, the eponymous hero's visit to the Grail Castle includes a ritualistic procession in which the Grail is the central figure. It is described as a *graal* - a fairly common Old French word denoting a wide serving-dish, initially designated by the indefinite article suggesting that such objects were indeed commonplace - made of 'fine, pure gold' set with 'precious stones of many kinds, the richest and most precious in the earth or the sea'. Wolfram's version of the same episode barely describes the Grail at all, other than in terms of its virtues and properties. It is later described as a 'stone [*stein*] most pure'. *Peredur* does not mention the Grail by name. The equivalent object in a radically shortened procession is 'a larger platter [*dysgl*] with a man's head covered with blood on it'.

Of course, no version of the Grail exactly matches Chrétien's original description. Most of the subsequent Grail stories - notably Robert de Boron's *Joseph d'Arimathie* of the 1190s - turn the object into a chalice or similar vessel, and link it firmly with the Eucharist. Chrétien's Grail is most definitely not a chalice, nor does it have any clear association with Christian ritual - all that came with those who took it upon themselves to finish the story, and with those who produced entirely different Grail stories. Wolfram's version has its own mystical agenda, without any shadow of a doubt, but that is of no concern here. There is also the possibility that Wolfram misunderstood the word *graal*, leading him to invent his own. But his Grail has clearly taken its cue from the precious stones adorning Chrétien's *graal*, with a possible pun on the word *stein*, which can denote either a stone or an earthenware drinking vessel.

The 'Grail' of *Peredur* does not seem to have resulted from any linguistic misapprehension (*dysgl* is a perfectly adequate translation of *graal*), nor is there any trace of a mystical Christian subtext that could explain it. One possible source of misunderstanding is the episode that follows immediately after the adventure in the Grail Castle. In *Perceval* the hero encounters a young woman with the headless corpse of her lover - but the equivalent incident in *Peredur* does not mention decapitation. It is possible that the decapitation has been misread or misheard by the author of *Peredur* and inserted in an inappropriate place, but that would leave the subsequent scene with one head too many. *Peredur* explains the head on the platter, when toward the end of the story, the hero is told that the head belonged to his cousin, killed by the witches of Gloucester, but the explanation does not solve this inconsistency.

Arthurian literature abounds with severed heads used as talismans or taken as trophies - a motif evidently derived from the treatment of heads among the pagan Celts, for which no compelling explanation has yet been given - including some on platters, in the first continuation

of *Perceval* for instance. The severed head of *Peredur* is of a very different order. It is seen when *Peredur* is on a quest in a royal household, in the context of a ritual procession. True, the *Peredur* episode is much less elaborate than its equivalent in other Grail romances; but it is still clearly of a ritualistic nature.

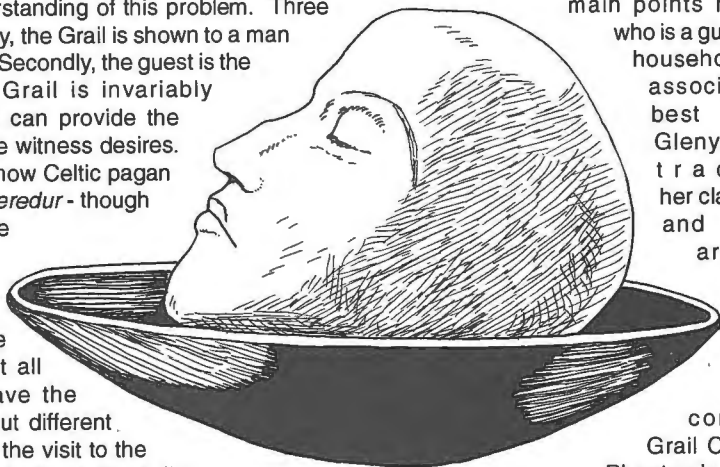
There have been many attempts to account for the major departure from Chrétien's original vision and from other, orthodox depictions of the Grail. Emma Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz associate the head with the vengeance theme that runs through the story, asserting that the head cries out to be avenged. It does not. Others wail and lament when the head is paraded through the hall, but the head remains quite silent. The idea of revenge is invoked much later in the romance, and it does indeed account for the severed head. At least, it tells whose shoulders the head formally rested upon. It does not tell us why the head should turn up on the platter in the mysterious castle when Chrétien's template episode makes no mention of it all.

Other explanations include an ingenious but rather weak suggestion that the author of *Peredur* confused *la teste* 'head' with *le teste* 'text', so that the head represents the Grail's association with the Gospels. R.S. Loomis speculates that the image arose from the misapprehension of an episode in *Perlesvaus*, where a young woman arrives at Arthur's court carrying a king's head in a stole - *estole* being misread as *escuele*, which means more or less the same as *grail*. Again, this is clever but not persuasive. The head has also been identified as that of John the Baptist, whose sword features elsewhere in the Grail romances, but the context fails to support the idea.

It is clear that most explanations hinge on fortuitous misreadings for which there is not a shred of hard evidence; or on hypothetical Biblical references. Jung and von Franz, meanwhile, conjure an explanation out of thin air. What is more, none of these explanations fit the context of the Grail procession.

The ritualistic parading of the mysterious vessel through the hall of the Grail Castle is crucial to our understanding of this problem. Three main points need to be made. Firstly, the Grail is shown to a man who is a guest in a royal household. Secondly, the guest is the householder's heir. Third, the Grail is invariably associated with drinking - it can provide the best wines, or whatever the witness desires. Glenys Goetinck has shown how Celtic pagan traditions permeate *Peredur* - though her claim that both that romance and Chrétien's *Perceval* are derived from an earlier founder's simple traditions is a bit of a stretch. The fact that all variants have the same beginning but different conclusions. She relates the visit to the Irish story *Baile in Scail* ('The Phantom's Frenzy'), in which a future king visits the otherworld dwelling of Lugh, where he is served red ale in a goblet and the god looks on as a woman representing Sovereignty recites a list of kings who will become descended from the visitor.

According to Goetinck's interpretation, the blood in the platter of *Peredur* is derived from the red ale of the Irish tale. The head is effectively a pun based on Welsh *pen*, which can denote either a head (physical) or a head (political), so is itself a representation of kingship. So far, so good. However, the question must be asked: why should the Welsh romance place a head on the platter, while a drinking-vessel is sufficient for the Irish tale? The dish is good enough for Chrétien de Troyes, as was the chalice for the likes of Robert de Boron and numerous anonymous authors.



Even Wolfram's adaptation of the Grail is explicable in terms of derivation from Chrétien's original and in the context of his own story.

It is generally accepted that the adventure at the Grail Castle is based on a composite of several otherworld houses mentioned in Irish and Welsh tradition. As the Bleeding Lance and the Grail are so similar to the fiery or toxic spears that occur in conjunction with cauldrons in certain Irish tales that there is clearly a generic link, it must be significant that several spear/cauldron pairings are located in otherworld hostels - in *Mesca Ulaid* ('The Intoxication of the Ulstermen') and *Togail Bruide Da Derga* ('The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel'), for example. In view of the emphasis given to hospitality in the Grail Castle episode, it would seem appropriate to look at Celtic customs pertaining to hospitality for clues to the nature of the head on the platter. In particular, those customs relevant to guests of high rank need to be examined.

Michael J. Enright has shown how from the earliest historical times guests in Germanic and Celtic royal households were served alcoholic drinks (usually mead or ale) in descending order of rank, by a high-ranking woman, often the king's wife, whose task is to identify the rank of guests and serve them accordingly. Significantly, Enright shows that the role also involved prophecy. This is evidently the historical source for the events in *Baile in Scail*, and perhaps the forerunner of the prophetic powers of Wolfram's Grail. The Grail, of course, is usually borne by a woman who is related to both the Grail-keeper and the hero, and the hall in which the vessel appears is usually set out for a feast. The entire episode conforms structurally to the typical pattern of the ritualised feasts of the old European war-band, in which drinking and the circulation of drinking-vessels played a central part.

The derivation of blood from red ale in Goetinck's analysis is suggested by their being the same colour. But the transformation goes much deeper than that. In Indo-European cosmological tradition blood and alcoholic liquids are seen as homologues - they are different forms of the same thing. This is evident from Norse myth, in the story of how the gods made mead from the blood of Kvasir; and in Herodotus' report of the mixture of blood and wine by the Scythians to sanctify oaths. The best known example is the Christian doctrine of Transubstantiation, in which wine 'becomes' the blood of Christ - an example of Indo-European cosmological beliefs shaping a religion rooted in Semitic tradition. Both blood and alcoholic liquids exemplify a mythological theme of great importance to Indo-European cosmology, the idea of 'fire in water', which is relevant to the twin phenomena of poetry and prophecy. Both are effected by the consumption of fiery, inspirational substances: mead and poetry are roundly equated in Norse myth, and mead is associated with prophecy in the Germano-Celtic ritual feast.

The bloody platter of *Peredur* must be seen in context with the blood-dripping spear that precedes it in the procession. The spear is a descendant of the fiery spears of Irish myth, which must be quenched in cauldrons of liquid to render them harmless. These spears, magical weapons associated with lightning, are essentially made of fire. In Indo-European tradition lightning is especially identified with the 'fire in water' theme - the Indo-European figure Apam Napat, the 'Child of the Waters' is the fire-god Agni incarnated as lightning. In Iranian myth, Apam Napat hides the *xvarenah*, a fiery threefold nimbus that is an attribute of royalty, in a lake. Related themes occur in Irish myth, and are evident in the throwing of Excalibur into a lake - assuming the sword's name is properly derived from Irish *caladbolg* 'lightning sword'. The point is that the liquid contained in the platter - or whatever else the Grail may be - is water infused with fire. In simple terms, both blood and alcoholic liquids (mead, ale, red wine) are water that contains the essence of fire. They are 'red' and 'hot'.

But why is there a severed head on the platter? One plausible explanation is that the image derives from the *Mabinogion* story *Branwen ferch Llŷr*, in which the severed head of the Bran the Blessed entertains its companions in an otherworld hall for a number of years. There is little doubt that the story of Bran's head has some bearing on the Grail romances - the story does, after all, feature a rejuvenating cauldron and a wounded leg, both of which can be related to the Fisher King. It would be simple enough to conclude that the adventure of the Grail Castle and its equivalent

in *Peredur* conflate the hostelry episodes of *Branwen* and *Baile in Scafl*. Or is there a historical tradition preserved in *Peredur*, as well as a mythological one?

The Roman historian Livy tells how in 216 BCE Lucius Postumius was defeated by the Boii in the forest of Litana in Cisalpine Gaul. The Gauls removed his head and took it to a temple. 'Then, after they removed the flesh from the head, they adorned the skull with gold according to their custom. They used it as a sacred vessel to give libations on holy days, and their priests and the custodians of their temple used it as a goblet.'

This is a striking analogue to the imagery of *Peredur*. There are no comparable reports of this practice among the Celts, but there is evidence that it may have been widespread among so-called barbarian peoples of the ancient world. In the fifth century BCE, Herodotus reports that the Scythians took the skulls of their enemies and turned them into drinking-vessels, finished with gold or leather according to the wealth of the victor. Chinese annals of the Han Dynasty refer to a victory by the Xiongnu (identified as the Huns, a Turkic people) over the Yueji (probably Tocharian - or Iranian-speaking Indo-Europeans) in about 209 BCE, which involved the skull of the Yueji king being made into a drinking-vessel by his conquerors. Nearly eight hundred years later, according to Paul the Deacon's eighth century *Historia Langobardum*, the Lombard king Alboin made the skull of his enemy Cunimund (king of Gepids) into a cup - the vessel was part of the royal treasure of the later Lombard king, Ratchis, in the eighth century.

This evidence, fragmentary though it is, argues for a wide distribution of the practice, from Gaul to the north-western frontiers of China, and a particular significance for Indo-European-speakers. It may even shed some light on the Celtic custom of headhunting - though perhaps not enough to suggest that the Celts went to war hoping to top up their crockery supply. A memory of the skull cup may underlie the drinking-horn with a human head attached to it that features in a otherworld hall in the fourteenth century Icelandic tale *Þorsteins þáttur bæjarmagns* ('The Story of Thorstein Mansin-Might'). The horn is called Grímr the Good - which is interesting, as Grímr is a name of Odin, god of mead and poetry - and the head has the power of prophecy. One is reminded of the oracular head of Mímr, preserved and consulted by Odin in a manner much like the preserved heads once kept by the shamans of certain Siberian communities. Mention must also be made of the ancient Greek myth of Orpheus, whose head continued to sing long after it was detached from his body. The head of Brân demonstrates that the same idea was known in medieval Wales, and parallels can be found in Irish tales - the singing head of Donn Bo in the *Yellow Book of Lecan*, for instance. The tradition of oracular heads is both ancient and long, and is particularly resonant in the story of Brân.

The head is the seat of the intelligence, perception and speech, of course, so it is easy to see how it came to be imbued with magical properties. Turning a skull into a drinking-vessel would have had an added significance: it would give extra inspirational potency to the alcoholic brew supped from it. Little wonder that the priests of the Boii used the skull of Lucius Postumius as both a libation cup and a goblet. It is also appropriate to replace the brain-matter of the deceased with alcohol, effectively substituted one form of inspirational substance with another. As Byron so eloquently put it, in his poem *Lines inscribed upon a cup formed from a skull* (1808),

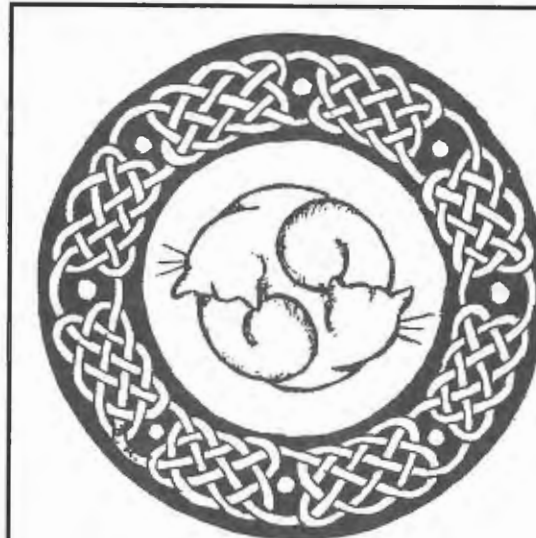
Where once my wit, perchance, hath shone,
In aid of others' let me shine;
And when, alas! our brains are gone,
What nobler substitute than wine?

The image of the head on a platter in *Peredur* does seem to owe much to these three interconnected Indo-European traditions: the serving of mead or other alcoholic drinks to guests in Celtic and Germanic noble households, which survived well into the Middle Ages; the theme of 'fire in water', which pervades Indo-European myth and cosmology; and the skull cup. The greater age of reports of the skull cup among the Scythians should not be seen as evidence for C. Scott Littleton's theory that Arthurian tradition derives from Scythian myth and religion - though Littleton

and Linda A. Malcor do not pursue the matter, despite mentioning the Lombard skull cup in their recent study. It seems more likely that the practice of making skulls into cups was common to Celts, Germans and Indo-European steppe tribes in early historical times, and may have been a continuation of older Indo-European customs. The head on a *dysgl* may be a memory of such skull cups, with a separation into two functional parts, head and vessel. Perhaps some tradition of skull cups lingered on among the medieval Welsh long after their original form and manufacture were forgotten.

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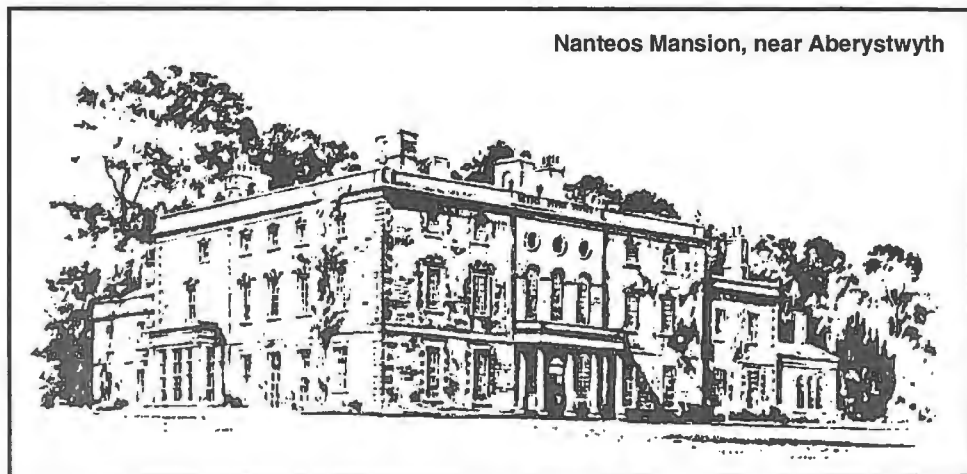
The Grail in Wales? The Nanteos Cup

by Fred Stedman-Jones

The following article appeared originally in Pendragon Vol. XVIII No. 3, Easter 1987. We are repeating this revised version here because of the current surge of interest in the cup after several articles about it were printed last year, in national newspapers and, most recently, it made its first appearance ever on national television - on the Channel 4 "Fortean TV" programme - on 19th February 1997. New members may be interested to know that Fred is acknowledged to be an expert on the cup's history, his interest in it was kindled over twenty years ago when he was researching his Stedman ancestry. He is at present writing a book about this fascinating relic.

For many years a small wooden bowl, famed for its miraculous healing powers, was kept by the Powell family of Nanteos in Mid-Wales. It was originally known in Wales as the "Phiol Sanctaidd Ystrad Fflur" (The Holy Cup of Strata Florida) after the Cistercian Abbey of the Vale of Flowers. Later it became the Tregaron Healing Cup - the Tregaron Estate was originally part of the Abbey lands. Now it is known to all as the Nanteos Cup. It is a small bowl in form but it has always been known as a 'cup' or 'cupan'.

Nanteos, the Brook of the Nightingale, is a Georgian mansion set in a large and lonely park in the valley of the Paith, two and half miles from Aberystwyth. The Powells, an ancient Welsh family, were from Llechwedd Ddyrys, a house on the other side of the valley, now vanished without trace (1). In 1690 William Powell married Averina le Brun, heiress of the Nanteos Estate and since nine generations have lived there. The last of the Powells was Margaret, she died in 1951 aged 89. Her will was contested and the Cup was lodged in a bank for several years before Mrs. Myrlees, a grand-niece, inherited. She moved away from Nanteos in 1967, taking the Cup with her; a replica was on show there subsequently and this may have misled visitors into thinking it was still there. Since then the house has had several owners but is now a hotel, restaurant and conference centre, following extensive restoration. Inquiries are still received by the staff at Nanteos but the television programme revealed that their knowledge of the Cup's history is as confused as the many articles that have been written about it over the past century. The object of this article is



Nanteos Mansion, near Aberystwyth

to present a brief but accurate account which I hope to expand into a full length illustrated book.

There are several 'traditions' concerning the Cup. The best known is that it is the Holy Grail, the Cup of the Last Supper, and that it was taken to the Cistercian Abbey of Strata Florida by 7 monks from Glastonbury at the time of the Dissolution, 1539. On the approach of Thomas Cromwell's commissioners the monks fled 15 miles over the 'impassable mountains' and found sanctuary at Nanteos, as servants of the Powells. On his deathbed the last monk entrusted the Grail to the family "until such time as the Church shall claim her own".

The story is obviously set into conventionalised folklore patterns (2). We see an idealised picture of human conditions: poor saintly grail-bearer wandering through a threatened mountain region pursued by evil persecutors, agents of a despotic king. They are given protection and noble patronage and live out anchorite lives, exiled from the world in holy poverty. Their duties done they are buried in unmarked graves but the relic associated with them becomes a prized possession - the power flows on. The story is fully euhemerized in Isabel Hill Elder's "The Cup of the Last Supper" (3). The insistence on the number 7 is interesting: it brings to mind the seven survivors in the story of Bran who journey through Wales with their beloved king's head.

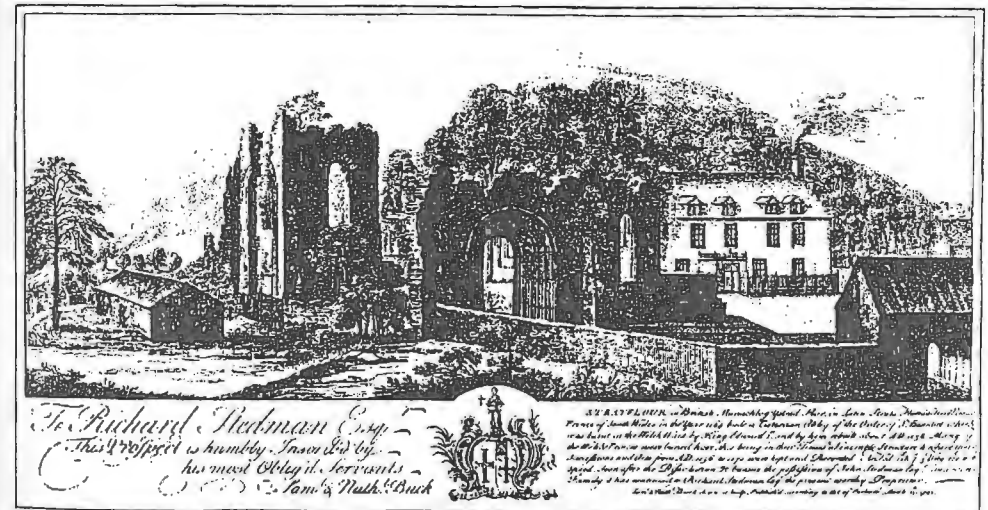
The 'tradition' ignores the complex political events of 1530-39. Affairs moved too swiftly and unexpectedly for anyone to have foreseen where such a relic might be taken for safety - certainly not to another abbey! Strata Florida, classified as a 'minor' house, should have closed in 1535 but Abbot Talley paid a large delaying fine. It was 'visited' in 1536 and a detailed inventory made by the King's commissioners. Whiting of Glastonbury had been assured in 1538 that his abbey would not be appropriated but commissioners arrived there on the 19th September without notice to arrest the old Abbot. He was hanged, drawn and quartered on the Tor on November 15th.

Professor Treharne's comments are apt:

"Why . . . the monks of a great Benedictine Abbey in England should have sent so precious a treasure as the Grail (supposing them to have had it) to a small and, by that time, very decadent Welsh Cistercian Abbey having no known connection with Glastonbury, it is difficult to imagine. . . ." (4)

The journey to Wales through robber-infested country would have been sheer lunacy for a party of innocent monks and their attempts to cross the fearful wasteland of Mid-Wales (the 'Green Desert') is terrifying to contemplate. It would have been more sensible to have taken a ship to

THE WEST VIEW OF STRATFLOR ABNEY, IN THE COUNTY OF CARDIGAN



Samuel & Nathaniel Buck's 1741 print of Strata Florida and Abbey Farm, the Stedman seat.



**Pilgrim Effigy from
Llandyfodwg Church,
Glamorganshire**

Ireland or the Continent.

A corroborative detail sometimes added to the story is that the monks rested overnight in the remote church at Ozleworth in the Cotswolds and there is a brass tablet in the church telling how the Grail was placed in a niche in the tower. The present vicar assures me he has never heard of any such notice; two previous incumbents knew of a 'vague tradition'.

If the monks ever got to Strata Florida they must have had a shock - for the Stewardship and the Court of the Abbey were in lay hands, even before its dissolution in 1539. John Stedman was agent and bailiff of the Devereux family, Earls of Essex, who held the first lease. Later he purchased the Abbey and its lands himself, but he claimed in a legal case that Richard Talley, the wily Abbot, had leased lands to his family as early as 1533. The Stedmans lived in part of the conventual converted buildings before Abbey House was built. If the Cup was handed over to anyone it would be John Stedman, for the Powells did not move to Nanteos for another hundred and fifty years!

The second tradition varies in detail. In 1887 the Bishop of St. Davids, Basil Jones, Oxford scholar and Welsh speaking squire of Cardiganshire, gave a presidential address to the Cambrian Archaeological Society at Lampeter. On display in a temporary museum of interesting curios was the Cup, labelled "healing cup from Nanteos, believed to be made of wood of the True Cross". The Bishop spoke of old traditions and beliefs of West Wales and told how the Cup was borrowed from the Nanteos family by local farmers. He described the Cup as a possession of Strata Florida, "which passed with that demesne from the Stedman family to the Powells". He believed the monks had preserved it as a relic "to which thaumaturgic powers were ascribed" and conjectured that "the new lords of Strata Florida probably had some belief in its efficacy" (5). Most Welsh commentators have held

consistently to this tradition for Strata Florida lay on the pilgrim routes between Holywell and Bardsey in the North and St. Davids in the South and most abbeys hoped to draw pilgrim money by displaying a collection of relics.

It has always been the ladies of the family who have served as Guardians of the Cup. In 1903 the penultimate Mrs. Powell confided to a visitor that the Cup was older than the monastery of Strata Florida - indeed, the monastery was built to receive it. It had been handed down from abbot to abbot through the ages and in each age its secret was told to one or two: "this Cup is none other than the one from which Our Lord drank at the Last Supper" (6). We must therefore conclude that the Cup did not come from Glastonbury to Wales, it was there all the time! It was the last Mrs. Powell who made the equation: GLASTONBURY GRAIL = NANTEOS CUP, under the influence of Tennyson's "Idylls of the King", I believe. In 1938 she was seeking a book she remembered seeing at her son's prep. school long before because she thought it contained the story she had come to believe. What is certain is the old lady's reverence for the Cup; she would not let anyone touch it unless they had washed their hands.

A senior member of the Powell family sent me the following information in 1986: "Stedman, son of a duke of Arabia - a knight of the Sepulchre - was brought to this country by Richard Coeur de Lion in 1191. He brought the Cup with him from the Holy Land and gave it into the safe-keeping of the monks of Strata Florida Abbey." The lineage of the Stedman family is more complex than this account, of course. Their romantic ancestor - and 150 such Saracen allies are known to have returned with Richard's army after the Third Crusade - was married to Joan, an heiress of the

house of Tattershall, Lincolnshire. This family were of Breton ancestry and were holding their lands in 1085, according to the Domesday Book. The Stedman ancestry is recorded in heraldry and Welsh genealogical rolls.

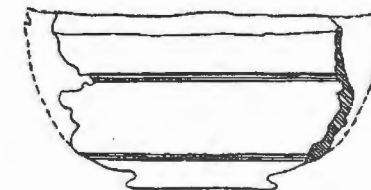
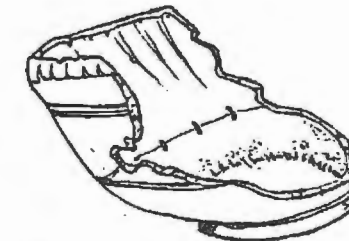
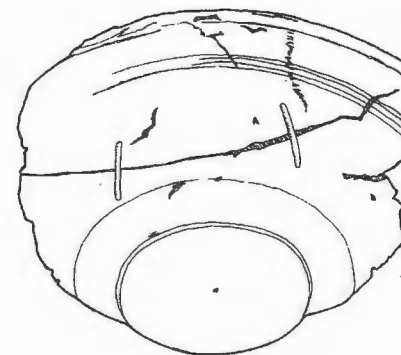
Six generations of Stedmans lived at Abbey House, Strata Florida after the dissolution and were sheriffs and magistrates of the county. The last of the line, Richard, married Anne Powell of Nanteos and died intestate. His estates and possessions passed to his brother-in-law and chief creditor Thomas Powell in 1747. Thomas had built the present Nanteos in 1739. Richard's coat of arms seems well suited to his possible role of Grail-Keeper.

There is no room here to talk of Strata Florida, the 'Westminster' and 'Iona' of Wales. The history of the Princes was kept at the Abbey, and the Red Book of Hergest (source of the Mabinogion) transcribed. The Cistercians in Wales replaced the old Celtic Church in the people's affections; the abbots of Strata Florida were all Welshmen. One Cardiganshire scholar has claimed that the Cup was at the Abbey soon after its foundation in 1164 and "was the object of pilgrimage" (7).

The Cup is made of dark wood. It was originally about five inches in diameter and three inches in depth, with a shallow base roughly one and half inches in diameter. It is badly cracked and held together with several rivets. Less than a half remains because sufferers have nibbled away pieces of the wood. (As early as 3385 A.D. armed deacons surrounded the True Cross at Jerusalem in order to prevent pilgrims from kissing it and taking splinters away in their teeth.) It was whole as late as the middle of the 19th century, when it is reported that a silver hoop was fitted to the rim - but this was removed because the Cup ceased its healing.



**Conjoined arms of
Richard Stedman (left) and
Anne Powell of Nanteos (right)**



**Three views showing what remains
of the Nanteos Cup,**

Constant handling has distorted and obscured the patina and grain of the Cup, making it very difficult to identify the wood. Most writers state that it is made of olive wood but this has been never proved. Timber experts could probably identify it scientifically and date it from a shaving of the wood but Mrs Mirylees refused to allow this. Her pragmatic view was that it heals and nothing would be gained "by finding out that it was made in Birmingham".

In 1977 the Cup was carefully examined over two days by a group of experts from the University of Wales and the Forestry Commission. Their conclusion was that it was made of Wych-Elm. If true this would cast serious doubt on a Palestinian origin for the relic. These implications must be left for a future article.

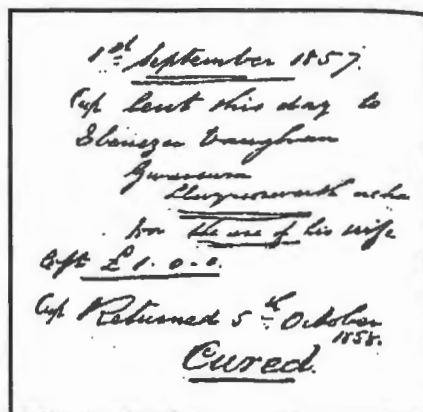
The vessel is kept in a small wooden box with a sliding glass lid. With it are handwritten receipts spanning the 19th century recording borrowings, many marked "cured". Then it was borrowed by local families who left a coin or watch as a token of faith. The average loan was three and a half weeks. It was invariably borrowed on behalf of a female at that time. In 1887 the well-known Welsh harper John Roberts scoffed at the power of the Cup whilst playing at Nanteos: that night he suffered great disquiet of mind. Next morning he returned to Nanteos to handle the Cup and wrote on an old playbill: "This cup was handled by John Roberts, Telynor Cymru, on the morning of the 4th of May, 1887. Mind completely at ease." Arthur Machen mentions this in "The Great Return", his Grail romance (1915).

The Cup feels unusually cold to touch, a privilege I have been allowed. It is not impressive to look at but it does impress one far more than I had ever anticipated. Simon Appleyard wrote in 1979, "... as I held the Cup in my hands I felt rather humble ... it seemed wholly credible that it could be the kind of plain bowl that Christ would have used for his Last Supper on earth. No-one will ever know for certain if it is really the Holy Grail, but the many letters testifying to its healing powers make it an object of reverence as well as deep mystery." (8) I would concur with this.

The relic continues its miraculous healing, the present guardian has letters from many who claim to have been cured by drinking water from it. Actually, this is not possible now - instead the Cup is immersed in water placed in the glass dish in which it is kept. These modern cures include epilepsy, failing sight, deafness, arthritis, a brain tumour, leprosy and multiple sclerosis. Mrs. Mirylees' belief was kindled when her young daughter Jean lay mortally ill with a head fracture caused by a fallen ladder. In desperation she held the Cup and prayed, soon after the hospital rang to report an unexpected recovery.

Following a magazine article in the 50s, the Mirylees family were besieged; 3,000 letters were received pouring out personal sadnesses and cranks wrote demanding the return of the Grail to their care! Visitors would barge into the house and demand to see the Cup. Today it seems to be known world-wide; in 1974 it was loaned to the Sangreal Foundation in Dallas, Texas. Large sums of money have been offered for it over the years.

Major Mirylees died in 1979 and the family moved again, mainly to escape this unbearable pressure for Mrs. Mirylees felt the responsibility of the Cup to be a heavy one. She did not wish to deny its healing to those who believe but her own privacy had to be preserved. When I called I was received with patience and understanding, and I was deeply grateful to Mrs. Mirylees for answering my questions and allowing me to hold the Cup. Since then the present guardian has been equally kind and I have promised not to reveal her whereabouts; in true Grail tradition the



A testimonial from Ebenezer Vaughan "for the use of his wife" in 1857.

Cup is not lost but hidden and must be the object of a personal quest.

The stewardship is to continue "until the Church shall claim her own". Has it done so? In 1938 the Rev. Lionel Smithett Lewis, Vicar of Glastonbury, led a pilgrimage of four to Nanteos to view the Cup and ask for its return. Mrs. Powell decided no. Later he formally requested its return under the seal of his church. This was done a second time by Rev. Knapman in the 60s. Sir Charles Marston accompanied Lewis to Nanteos, he is the only expert in the archaeology of the Middle East to have seen the Cup, I believe. He reserved judgment, unfortunately.

"But which church?" asks Mrs. Mirylees. St. Davids would seem the best choice if the Cup is a Celtic relic or a mass cup from Strata Florida Abbey. Downside Abbey has replaced Glastonbury as the great Benedictine house in Somerset, its abbots sometimes bears the honorary title 'Abbot of Glastonbury'. Can it be merely a coincidence that it is built on the estate of Mount Pleasant once owned by another Stedman family who bore the same arms as the Stedmans of Strata Florida?

Would the Church welcome its return? It is an anachronism, such things shouldn't exist in the 20th century, surely? It would seem to belong to a lost age of faith, when pilgrims thronged to the cathedrals, abbeys and churches of Christendom seeking miracle cures. Can this broken fragment really be the Cup with which Jesus instituted the Holy Eucharist at the Last Supper, brought to this land by Joseph of Arimathea? Or could it be a chalice made of the wood of the True Cross, entrusted to the care of a Christianized Saracen Knight? Such enigmatic guardians are met with in the medieval stories of the Holy Grail.

Many say the Nanteos Cup should return to the mansion of that name, but if it is the Holy grail, and many say it is, whom should the grail serve in the 21st century?

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I would very much like to hear from anyone who is interested, especially anyone who has seen the Cup or has information about specific cures.



Stained glass window, St. Joseph of Arimathea (C. 19th) - Kilhampton Church, North Cornwall. Was the Nanteos Cup once kept in such a reliquary?

Seeking the Winter King

An interview with Bernard Cornwell

by John Matthews

Bernard Cornwell is best known for his series of novels set in the time of the Peninsula War and featuring the dashing Major Richard Sharpe. To date he has written 18 Sharpe novels, as well as a series set in the time of the American Civil War, and several contemporary thrillers. Sharpe has been successfully transferred to television, with Sean Bean in the role of the hero. Now Cornwell has turned his attention to Arthur, and has produced the first two volumes of a trilogy [or possibly a quartet] of books under the title of *The Warlord Chronicles*. The first of these **The Winter King**, appeared in 1995, and the second **Enemy of God** has just been published by Michael Joseph. Both books have shot immediately into the best seller lists and are continuing to do well. They may soon be made into a television series. Bernard Cornwell, who is British but lives in New England, has just completed a successful tour to promote the latest book. I went to meet him in his London hotel, and we talked of his approach to the story of Arthur and some of his own favourite authors in the field.

JM: From Sharpe to Arthur? What took you from one kind of hero to another?

BC: Well, they're both military heroes. I don't think they're linked, except in my head. I'd always been fascinated by the Matter of Britain. It's not quite the foundation myth but it's sort of become it. It's certainly the foundation myth for the Welsh. I can't quite see the interest for the English. They've taken it over.

JM: This series of books is something you've been thinking over for a long time? It certainly reads as though you've done more than a couple of years research.

BC: I've been fascinated for some time. Like you, I've read all the Arthur stuff, and that made me very nervous of doing it, obviously because of T.H. White and so on looming in the background - or John Cowper Powys. A big hero of mine. But you can't be put off by that if you're really going to do it.

JM: So why did you choose particularly to set it in the Dark Ages, rather than a medieval, romantic period?

BC: Because I think that's when Arthur was. I mean, there's a temptation to a very realistic story, which I guess would have meant cutting out Lancelot and cutting out Merlin and cutting out any mention of Camelot. I probably shouldn't have mentioned Camelot anyway, but in the end, it's a powerful word I thought to hell with it, we'll go with the anachronism and make a confession in an historical note. It just doesn't work if you leave all that stuff out My theory of Arthur is that he must have existed. I know that's arguable, but you know the arguments as well as I do and it seems to me most probably that someone called Arthur did exist. It also seems likely that he was what Nennius calls him, the dux bellorum, I doubt he was the king, but it doesn't really matter. He had the power anyway It seems likely that he was the guy who beat the Saxons back at Mount Badon and so gave the Welsh a generation of possession of what is now England. And that is as much as we know. I mean, that's as much as we can really put our hand on our hearts about.

JM: There was someone there

BC: To be precise, someone who beat the Sais [Saxons]. He was a great man. As the rest of it, most of the time you're groping in the mist and trying to read from the various legends to find some other aspect of him. But if you cut out everything that was added in the twelfth century,

you cut out the heart of the story. The heart of Arthur is this man with an Achilles heel called Guinevere. And the glory of the story is Camelot and the establishment, in the midst of chaos, of a state that does offer peace and justice and security. So, yes, the power of the legend drew me back into putting some of that stuff back in because you can't do without Merlin. Arthur without Merlin is hopeless. But one thing I really wanted was that the magic, Merlin's magic, would work. You can't have a sword and sorcery magician in a book like this. I think that's essential for today's audience. You've got to have a magician whose magic makes sense, so that when he's given an hallucinogenic drug, for instance, I know and you know it was a red cap.

JM: Right, good old *anima muscaria*. Accuracy is essential even in a work of fiction.

BC: The other day I discovered this thing on the front page of **The Times** - what a place to do your research - a shellfish called the pinnock. It's glorious! This shellfish is now rare, it's an endangered species, but it was once obviously very common. It looks very much like a pale muscle. But the wonderful thing about the pinnock is that if you handle it, it leaves a slime or something on your hands which glows in the dark. Now I know that Merlin's going to be glowing in the dark in the next book! (Laughter) That's hugely powerful. And it will terrify the natives! The point is, I can show the reader how it's done.

JM: It's a piece of natural magic.

BC: Exactly.

JM: That's tremendous. I've got a feeling in fact that in one or two places you're almost taking a swipe at the more romantic angle, making Lancelot, you know, certainly not a hero in the conventional sense.

BC: It's fun to swipe about. Originally I was not going to have any Round Table in it at all, but I got beat over the head about that, so I had it put back. With Lancelot, I ended up taking a swipe. I think that I always had trouble with the idea of two peerless heroes. And one cuckolding his best friend who is our hero. Because essentially, like it or not, being cuckolded does detract from the hero.

JM: So, what about Guinevere?

BC: She's simply made a terribly evil choice. But to prefer one hero over another diminishes the second hero, and I did not want Arthur to be diminished I don't think he's diminished by this episode.

JM: There are certainly some interesting variations in your version of the story.

BC: I think you have to feel free to make variations. You can't get too trapped. I mean, Nennius' twelve battles are far too confining, imposing a pattern on the book that I didn't want.

JM: So you felt free to change things?

BC: Yes. Even to some of the relationships that are accepted, such as Galahad being the son of Lancelot and so on. I think because these periods are very hazy about their relationships, I can afford to be hazy too. What's more important is to get the Mordred/Arthur relationship right. To me, I mean, it's not normal relationship, but it works.

JM: Well, that's the sister's son in the traditional stories. He had a good claim to the throne, certainly, making him king right from the beginning and Arthur his protector is a wonderful idea, I think. It does work well.

BC: I know it's not the traditional story, but on the other hand, if you tell the traditional story, what's the point of telling the story? OK, you can tell it better, maybe, or worse, but all you're basically doing is varying the prose. I just don't think the story is fixed in stone.

JM: It shouldn't be, though some people will claim that it is.

BC: But which stone - Is it Nennius', or is it before that? Or is it the MS. in the Fitzwilliam which says that Arthur was cruel from a child? Or is it the life of St. Cradoc, who says he was a rapist? Or is it Malory? It's very shifting sands.

JM: So were you consciously trying to reconstruct an *Arthuriad* in a way from fragments, because they are very fragmented?

BC: I don't know. I think that would have been terribly pretentious. I think really just trying to tell a story, which is based on what little we know or guess or surmise, in which I'd like the reader just occasionally to say to themselves, Ah, that's where that one came from. That's why there's a sword in the stone. Which is the point of the redactions throughout the book, where Igraine talks to Derfel. It explains things But I think to do a whole Arthuriad you probably would have to have a much better writer than I am. Someone like Cowper Powys or T.H. White. I haven't read some of that yet, I confess, so I don't know. Anyway, ten years, two years, six months from now, someone's going to do better. This story is always going to keep coming.

JM: *That's what's so wonderful about it. It's always recreating itself.*

BC: New life every time. In our case it looks as if Scottish Television are going to do a series based on the new books.

JM: *That would be wonderful. There hasn't been a decent Arthur series or movie for a very long time.*

BC: It's so difficult to do, though

JM: *Well, because it's so big.*

BC: If you get the casting wrong you've had it. I didn't see **First Knight** for example. I was writing the **Enemy of God** at the time and I said I will NOT go. But my wife, who's a huge Arthur fanatic went, and was very disappointed.

JM: *It was a disappointing film. Especially considering that it had Sean Connery as Arthur, because for me the man was always meant to play Arthur. But somehow it still didn't work.*

BC: I want Connery to play Merlin, but I don't suppose we can afford him.

JM: *After the success of **Sharpe** on TV I would think you have a good chance of succeeding with this new series. If STV can do a decent Dark Age Arthur, that would be wonderful.*

BC: Well, the programme director knows his stuff. You know, he's read it all. I didn't know until he told me that Glasgow is a Welsh name. All those Scottish lowlanders in fact are the same people as the Welsh. The names are Welsh. That's where his interest comes from. So I expect to see a bit of the book moved into Scotland. Which is fine by me.

JM: *Everyone seems to have a claim on Arthur. There seems to be a new theory every month.*

BC: I got a very angry letter after **The Winter King** was published (Indignant stage voice): Everyone knows he was born in Walthamstow! (Both laugh)

JM: *Why do you think this story has retained such a powerful hold on our imagination?*

BC: I think there's two things. I suspect Arthur really is a peerless hero. With an Achilles heel. And his Achilles heel is Guinevere. And the second thing - and that's Camelot. I would simply suggest that in the midst of this simply appalling occurrence - civil war or invasion, all the rest of it - maybe after Mount Badon, maybe before, who knows - that Arthur did succeed for a time in living the brief shining moment. And what the brief shining moment was, was to create a state in which there was peace and security and justice And it might be very fleeting, but there's a period in which the Brits could actually have succeeded. They remembered it years and years later, even when the Church was trying to destroy Arthur - they remembered this wonderful hero who had given them their pride back, who had defeated the enemies, who did run a place where your kids could grow up safely, where your crops could be sown and reaped. People remember a golden age. That's why they remembered the reign of Elizabeth the First. Not the fact of it, because it was probably pretty bloody. That didn't matter, because they felt good, it was the feel good factor. And I think that's the power of the myth in America. America more than any other country believes in the idea of perfectibility. Camelot. I hate the fact that Kennedy's wife grabbed the name.

JM: *Still, it's interesting that the myth was used that way, whatever one feels about it.*

BC: It's very powerful. But that to me is the power of the whole myth. There was a shining moment.

JM: *You mentioned the fact of the Church trying to destroy Arthur's reputation. There's a very*

strong undercurrent, actually not far beneath the surface, of almost a religious war going on.

BC: Yes. For years I was very curious about how you could give this soaring Christian hero, Arthur, Holy Grail, Galahad . . . and at the same time Merlin. I mean the two just don't work. But they sit together because the story has been shoved and bullied and banged into making it work. But taken to it's core, it seemed a terrible mystery. Well, of course, it wasn't a mystery, because Merlin's stuff came later. And so did the Christianisation of Arthur. It seems that the Holy Grail is plainly a Cauldron quest And it just seems to me that in fact what I perceived as a conflict at the heart of the story, in fact wasn't there, there was no conflict because the Christian element was a later addition. But I think the hostility of the early Church, as we see in the Saints' Lives, has to do with Arthur as pagan. He certainly seems unfriendly to the Church, and the obvious answer is that he was pagan. I know that Peter Beresford Ellis claimed that Druidism and Christianity coexisted. I don't buy it. Christianity never coexisted with any other religion! It just doesn't make sense. Christianity has always been a cuckoo - its gets in there and shoves the other birds out!

JM: *There's a very interesting book by an Irish writer called John Minhan called **The Christian Druids** which produces some interesting evidence that does in a way support the belief that there was at least a token agreement.*

BC: I don't believe it. There may have been agreement at the local level, there may have been in the country, where people coexist. I simply do not believe that the Church militants were happy to accept the existence of paganism. Remember at one time Christianity itself was a minority religion. But gradually, as it gets more powerful, it gets more and more intolerant. Anyway I needed some enemies and there's nothing better than a pack of Christians for that!

JM: *Well, you've made short work of them. So far.*

BC: So far. . . .

JM: *Talking of the religious background, I was really intrigued that you made Guinevere a worshipper of Isis. This is something I haven't seen before.*

BC: Well, no, I made it up.

JM: *Was there any evidence for Isis worship in Britain at this time?*

BC: Oh, yes. But only as a very minor religion. They knew it as one of the ones the Romans left behind. What appealed to me was basically it was a early feminist ritual, and so it worked for Guinevere, of whom I'm very fond. A lot of people don't like her in my books. If so, then I've failed, because they think she's much too hard, but I want her to be hard. I like hard women!

JM: *She compares well to some of the softer characterisations. It's not an unsympathetic portrait.*

BC: Yes, this is a powerful chick. She's not going to have a terrible fate. I'm very fond of Guinevere. I think she's right most of the time. Like when she says of Mordred: "Slit his fucking throat!". (Both laugh) It was obviously the thing to do!

JM: *I love her description of him as a child . . . farting and drooling About the use of names? You used a lot of the more medieval, romantic names like Lancelot, Galahad, and so on. You didn't want to change those to the earlier Celtic ones?*

BC: I kept Excalibur instead of Caledfwlch. It is just basically annoying when the story is this well known - to use the very obscure versions. I wanted the earliest possible ones to give it the feel of the fifth or sixth century. But, at the same time, I've read Arthur stories where suddenly Guinevere is Gwenhwyfar and you think why? I know that on the grounds of consistency I should have done, but somehow

JM: *I noticed one significant absentee from the gallery - Gawain. Did you leave him out for any reason?*

BC: I didn't really assign room for him. I think I've got him in the notes. He might come in the third book. I'd have to go back to my notes. I was aware of it, but isn't he mentioned once? He might have got knocked out in the editing. I think he will appear, just not yet. I had to have some things held back. There might be four books in all.

JM: *I suppose this is a question you won't be able to answer yet because you haven't written it,*

but how do you think you are going to handle the end? Are you going to give Arthur a romantic end, vanishing into the mist? Or will you kill him off?

BC: If you notice the beginning here, right on page 1, its says I've been thinking about the dead, right?

JM: Yes.

BC: And he lists the dead? One name is conspicuously absent from the list . . .

JM: There's no mention of Arthur!

BC: First clue. I'm not saying he's still alive. I'm just saying he's not dead . . .

JM: The element of mystery . . .

BC: I think you have to have it like that. You can't reject the whole thing. And it's so terribly powerful. It would be a tragic thing if he died. (Pauses) But it's touch and go.

JM: Do you have a favourite modern Arthurian writer. You mentioned Powys . . . I assume you mean **Porius**?

BC: Yes, Powys is just wonderful, even though he does mention rabbits, which weren't in Britain at that time. And of course T. H. White is hugely enjoyable. But John Cowper Powys is just the best.

Child and Man - Ancient mystery MAGY GAINÉ

This article is intended as a rider to Chris Lovegrove's series of interesting and scholarly articles, whose thesis (if I've got it right) is that the tradition of the Virgin and the Child on Arthur's shield is ancient, being hinted so far back as the 8th century History of the Britons credited to Nennius.

There is a relevant passage in "**Perlesvaus**" (**The High History of the Holy Grail**) written c. 1200 in Glastonbury Abbey, which shows where the connection of Arthur with the Virgin and Child may well derive.

At the beginning of the book Arthur has fallen on evil days; only 25 knights of the 366 that once thronged his court are left. Guinevere, in tears, counsels him to renew his reputation and vigour by visiting St. Augustine's Chapel - which he does. For his sins he is mysteriously debarred from entering, but sees a strange vision through the open door.

"He beholdeth an image of Our Lord within. He looketh at the holy hermit that was robed to sing Mass and seeth at his right hand the fairest Child that ever he had seen, with a golden crown on his head loaded with precious stones that give out a full brilliance of light. On the left side was a lady so fair that no beauty in the world could compare with her. When the hermit went to the altar, the lady took her son and went to sit on the right side towards the altar upon a right rich chair, and kissed him full sweetly, saying 'You are my Father and my Son and my Lord, guardian of me and all the world.'

"King Arthur looketh at a window behind the altar and seeth a flame come through, brighter than any ray of sun, moon or star. Then the lady took her child and offered him into the hands of the hermit, who set him upon the altar and began his sacrament. And it seemed to the king that

the hermit held between his hands a man, bleeding from his side, his palms and his feet, and crowned with thorns. And he looked again and seeth he is changed into the shape of the child he had seen before. . ."

It seems that this vision renewed the king, for after being well told off for his feebleness by the hermit, he overcomes a Black knight and summons all his former retainers to a great Court at midsummer, which was gladly attended by all, greatly relieved at his recovery.

Is this not a calendar-myth? If, as Katharine Maltwood suggested, Arthur is Sagittarius in the Glastonbury Zodiac, the aging sun-king of December in need of annual renewal, one can see why he only had 25 knights (nights) left of the original 366 - the days or nights of the **sidereal year**. I dare any skeptic to show that these numbers, so specifically stated, are meaningless. And if they have meaning, what else can they indicate but the Temple of the Stars? I'm sure I need not remind your scholarly readers that "sidereal" means the stary year, which is one day longer than the solar one. And when we remember that **Perlesvaus** was written at Glastonbury . . . Logical, eh?

Moreover, Helinand, the French monk-historian wrote in his Chronicle (c. 1220) that an angel had revealed the original history of the Holy grail to a hermit in Britain about 720 A.D., i.e. 500 years before he was writing. Whether this date is accurate or not, there must be some substance in this, or Nennius, so soon after, would not have recorded that Arthur bore the image of the Virgin on his shoulders at the battle of Guinnion. Presumably he meant that he bore his shield with its image on his shoulder; anything else would surely have seriously hampered his valorous exploits - for he hundreds on that day!

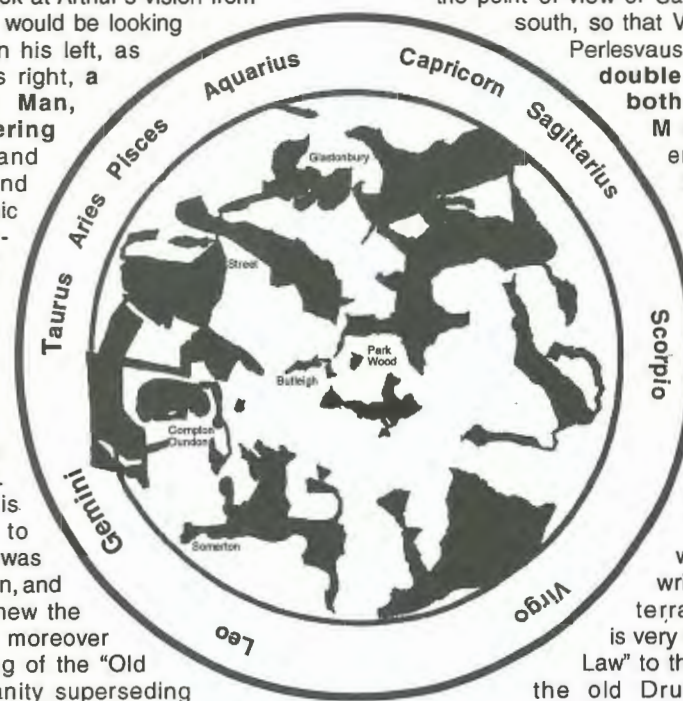
Let's look at Arthur's vision from Zodiac. He would be looking would be on his left, as effigy to his right, a **Child and Man, and Suffering** modelled and Dundon and The Messianic by the ram-British makes it far Christian. these ram-man-made, probably the natural saving the of hard work.

There is evidence to **Perlesvaus** was Vale of Avalon, and man who knew the whole book moreover the changing of the "Old not Christianity superseding exemplified by this Zodiac?

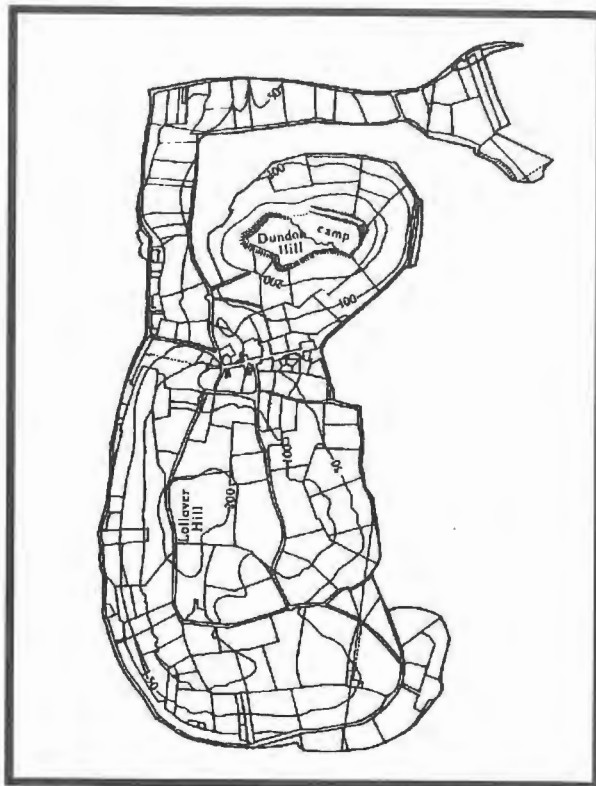
To supersede is not to suppress, and it seems the writer wanted the old figures remembered, rather to build the "New Law" on them, and show how alike these figures were to Christianity, their teaching essentially alike. It is notable how popular the Zodiac was when he was writing, for its figures appeared at the time on the floors, porches and windows of so may cathedrals then being built.

the point of view of Sagittarius in the south, so that Virgo the Virgin Perlesvaus, with Gemini's double image, both both foetal Babe **Messiah**, engraved on Lollover hills. face is profiled parts of a Camp, which older than And though parts are they followed contours, diggers a lot

much other suggest that written in the written by a local terrain well. The is very concerned with Law" to the New. Is this the old Druid teachings,



It is certainly true that the main themes of the Christian story are prefigured in Glastonbury's Zodiac; the Annunciation by the Dove of Libra flying south from dying Sagittarius' god-head to inseminate Virgo's Earth Goddess; the Bethlehem birth of Gemini's babe, surrounded by Taurus the ox and the Assella stars (the ass and her foal), and the Manger stars, all in Cancer; the Crucifixion by Gemini's suffering god-man, with both hands tied above his lolling head; and by Sagittarius' outflung arms, as if on a cross; the Resurrection by Aquarius' eagle or phoenix, flying free from the Tor after the god's entombment in Capricorn's wintry sign, the grave of the year. And is the Tor itself not an astonishing symbol of resurrection, with its traditional cave-tomb beneath, and rising so suddenly like a steep pyramid from the flat sea-moors? The ancient "family" Trinity is shown too, by the equilateral triangle of Sagittarius, Virgo and Gemini across the circle - the only human figures in this design.



Is it just coincidence that the third member of the Druidic Trinity was Esus or Hesus?

There are other correspondences lurking there, for those with a mind to tease them out - but examples given should suffice to show why a Celtic monk might want to preserve their memory - albeit in the oblique and secretive form of **Perlesvaus**. Secrecy was necessary, for the Catholic Church fell into far more literal interpretation of these dogmas than the Celts, who could never understand why they should be put to the rack for comparing Christ to Belin, Apollo (Avalach the maimed Grail-king of Avalon), or Arthur.

Katharine Maltwood, who found this Zodiac while living near it and reading **Perlesvaus**, claimed it as the original Round Table in Avalon, with Arthur and his chief knights, Guinevere and Merlin still seated about it as the Zodiac signs. This would explain the siting of Arthur's grave in the Abbey, which stands between Aquarius and Pisces - in earlier times, due to the precession of the equinoxes - at year's end.

It also offers an explanation of the bizarre mosaic of Arthur riding a goat in Otranto Cathedral, c. 1120, on the heel of Italy. ("Whither has the flying fame of Arthur not spread...?") For although Arthur-Sagittarius in this Zodiac is mounted on a horse, his foot descends into the grave of Capricorn the goat, whose horn, the long rampart of Pointers Ball, is still locally known as the "Golden Coffin". Or was, when K.M. enquired. When I tried to verify this years later, I was assured by the oldest inhabitant, that there was a tree on the rampart that bore that name! Absurd, of course: the Golden Coffin, whose memory had lasted so long, was already fading from local minds.

If the Golden Coffin has now been displaced into a tree it need not surprise us that Arthur's mount has been displaced into Capricorn over forgetful centuries. This goat indeed was long remembered as climbing the Tor. (The nose of its effigy presses against it.)

Early folk-tales abound of Arthur as a Fairy King, sleeping with his men in an underworld

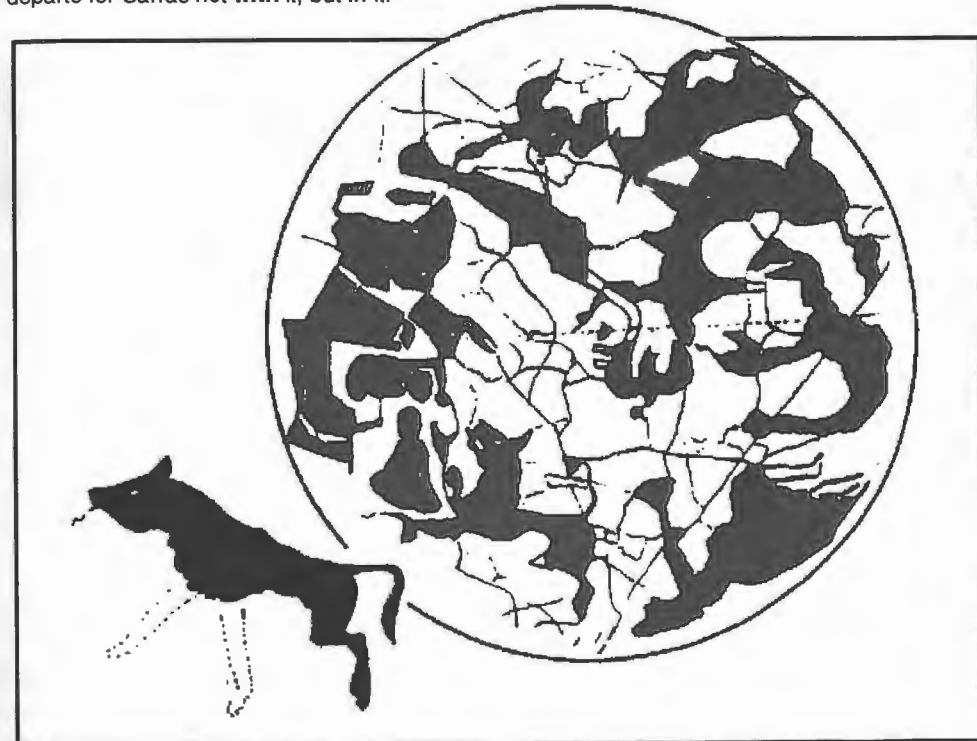
cavern, guarding piles of gold (the buried sun?) and riding on horses no bigger than greyhounds; one or two even mention his goat. By then he had shrunk from an effigy 5 miles long to a dwarf - though still a noble one, king of the Little People. He appears in Geraint's tale in the Mabinogion as the Little King, whose kingdom is surrounded by a hedge of mist reaching to the sky wherein enchanted games were played, and from whence no man ever returned. Significantly, it lay east of the Severn and contained apple orchards. It's worth noting however that the memory of Giants hereabouts had not entirely faded, for Geraint is half-killed by three of them just before he meets the Little King.

But as usual, I'm digressing. Let's get back to the double-vision of Gemini, young son of the sun. It is a persistent memory, for Malory uses it, giving it to Galahad. An old man (no less than his ancestor Joseph of Arimathea) appears, borne on a chair by angels, to celebrate Mass to him and a few chosen knights in the Grail Castle. I quote from **Morte D'Arthur**, Book 17, Chap. 20:

"He took an ubbly (oblation?) which was made in likeness of bread; and at the lifting up there came a figure in likeness of a child, which was red and bright like fire, and smote itself into the bread . . . Then they looked again, and saw a man come out of the holy vessel, that had all the signs of the Passion of Jesus Christ, bleeding all openly."

Christ himself tells Galahad to bear the holy vessel with him on his Quest, "for this night it shall depart from the realm of Logris, and never more be seen there, for they be turned to evil living."

For most authorities "Logris" was all England east of Wales; but Geoffrey Ashe has narrowed it down to the land between the Somerset Axe and Parret rivers - Avalon. And evil-living though we may still be, the suffering Man is still there, for those who can see it, in his boat or Vessel. (Is "Vessel", so often used of the Grail, a sacred pun to reveal and conceal the Mystery? Galahad, whose very existence as the Christ-like knight surely stems from this figure, departs for Sarras not with it, but in it.



For Sarra means "star-city". Saracens studied the stars. He did not need to move from the spot - from this Star-Temple - to **see himself** - the object of all knights in the Grail-Quest, but one which few indeed achieved . . .

We are here among the ancient Celtic Mysteries, for although the poem was written in Celtic Christian times, the poet (perhaps Taliesin) castigates the ignorance of contemporary monks; they "pack together like wolves from their meetings with their witches," they know nothing of Nature's laws, so diligently enquired into by the Druids. One feels he is a bit hard on Celtic Christians, who adopted much Druidic lore; but he is obviously a passionate adherent of the "Old Law" and fears that it is in danger of extinction. Had he lived long enough to read the original version of **Perlesvaus**, by a monk in 720, he might have been comforted.

In the **Spoils of Annwn** we are not only in the Ancient Mysteries, but in Avalon's Star-Temple, for one of the names of the awesome place into which Arthur descended was **Caer Sidi** - Starry castle, sometimes translated as the Zodiac. Where else could he be, at once in the Underworld and among the stars?

Techniques for changing states of consciousness were practised here, perhaps by deliberately induced near-death-experiences, as other old poems hint; and Arthur, long before Galahad, sits in his ship, head bowed, plumbing the depths of his own unconscious self; learning who he is and who he was, discerning how to redeem himself and emerge inspired and reborn. For the vessel that contains him is the Zodiac's maternal sign of Cancer, at once womb, tomb and moon-boat. Which is doubtless why the Virgin in **Perlesvaus** moves over from Virgo on the left (as seen from Sagittarius) to the altar on his right, takes her new-born son in her arms, and gives the initiate his second birth. The aging Arthur of Sagittarius is renewed by this vision, becoming the new Sun of Gemini.

Is this why Christ told St. David, abbot of Glastonbury, in a vision, that He had already dedicated the Abbey to his mother? And why the Abbey, and Arthur, always bore the Virgin and Child on their coat of arms?

Arthur in the stars

by Gwilym ap Iorwerth

Around 6,000 years ago our ancestors began to leave an impression on the landscape. Causeways, enclosures, stone circles, barrows and standing stones began to appear throughout the British Isles. Some of them, like tumuli, tend to be self-explanatory, while others still remain somewhat mysterious. In recent years it has become the in-thing to connect certain monuments with a method of calculating the seasons for agricultural people. Both professional and amateur scientists have taken this theory on board and much has been written about the subject. Whatever the actual use of these ancient sites, many have been linked with the name of Arthur.

A few years ago John Godfrey Williams published a 36 page booklet entitled **Arthur - Prehistoric sites and Place names**. This is a list of places throughout the British Isles which have some connection, however tenuous, with the name Arthur. Other places listed relate to poles, greyhounds and bears. In the introduction it is pointed out that Mr. Williams considered Arthur to be "Arth" and "Vawr" meaning Great Bear as in the constellation. Though strictly speaking "Vawr" should actually be "Mawr" which can mutate into "Fawr" - the "f" is pronounced like a "v", the "Arth" element does mean "bear"!

Throughout Wales there are many prehistoric sites connected with Arthur: Bwrdd Arthur (Arthur's Table), Cadair Arthur (Arthur's Chair), Cegin Arthur (Arthur's Kitchen) Coetan Arthur (Arthur's Quoit), Craig or Carreg Arthur (Arthur's Rock), Croes Arthur (Arthur's Cross), Ffynnon Arthur (Arthur's Well), Maen Arthur (Arthur's Stone), Moel Arthur (Arthur's Hill), Pen Arthur (Arthur's Head), Picell Arthur (Arthur's Spear) and so on. There are also places such as Llanarth and Penarth, amongst others, with the element "-arth". The first elements are: Llan, a holy site - in

other words "a church" and Pen "a head", "end", "top" or a geographical term like "headland". However, the second element could have two meanings: "-arth" could be "bear" or the mutated form of "garth" - an enclosure, garden, hill or ridge.

Moving on to England and Scotland, again, there are so many sites that it would not be possible to list them all. They range from King Arthur's Hall in Cornwall or Arthur's Seat in Forfar. Of course, there are parts of England that seem to have no references to Arthur. Here Mr. Williams finds sites linked with bears or poles, remembering the Pole Star is in the tail of Ursa Minor - the Lesser Bear. It is difficult to be sure that these sites, such as Barford, Barton, Bear, Beara, Bearstone and so on, are actually connected with the Old English word "bera". Eilert Eckwells points out that such places may actually be from the name Bera, "bere" - barley, "bar" - boar and so on. Nevertheless, there are possibilities!

From stones we move to stones and stars. In **Astronomy Now**, Feb. 1996, Richard Roberts, President of the Port Talbot Astronomical Society, wrote an article entitled "The Arthur Stone". Mr. Roberts had made a study of a collection of stones found near Cefn Bryn on the Gower Peninsula, South Wales. Known from antiquity as Arthur's Stone with its legend - St. David smashed it to pieces with his sword - and ghostly story - sightings of knights in armour and a white lady on a horse - it once must have been a cromlech. The author shows that it points to the north towards the Pole Star, the circling constellations of Ursa Major and Ursa Minor and the stars Vega and Arcturus. Three thousand years ago the Pole Star would not have been Polaris but Alpha Draconis, nevertheless, the Bear constellation still circled the Pole Star of that time. Mr. Roberts then goes on to make tentative connections between the bears in the sky with the bears on the earth. Since there is this element "arth", meaning bear, in Arthur's name, is it possible that Arthur, bear and the Bear stars are all related?

It is highly unlikely that our ancient ancestors would have seen the same images in the sky as did those people living in Mediterranean area. The names of stars and constellations differ throughout the world, so it is reasonable to believe that the Bronze Age and Iron Age Britons did see group of stars like Leo, Cancer or Sagittarius. Marie Trevelyan in her **Folklore and Folk Stories of West and Mid-Wales** lists some Welsh version of the constellations: Lyra was called Arthur's Harp, Orion - Arthur's Yard and the Great Bear was known as Arthur's Plough Tail. Others, which cannot be located easily, include the Great Ship, Eagle's Nest, the Trefoil, the White Fork, the Hawk and so on. Is it possible that certain names corresponded with the constellation names known to the Greeks and Romans? Or, could it be that, people being what they are, Romans discussed the sky with Celts and names, like the Great Bear, were adopted by the Romano-British?

Dr. Rachel Bromwich in the second edition of her *Trioedd Ynys Prydein* (1978) relates how Dr. C. Bullock-Davies drew her attention to six 12th and 13th century writers who used an alternative version of the name Arthur. The earliest is the novice master, and later abbot, Ailred of Rievaulx. The Yorkshire monk wrote in **Speculum Charitas** (c. 1131) "*in fabulis, quae vulgo de nescio quo finguntur Arcturo*" when talking about a novice who was moved to tears more by the fictitious tales of "*somebody named Arcturus*" than by pious readings. Geoffrey of Monmouth in line 930 of his **Vita Merlini** (c. 1150) says: "*Duximus Arcturum nos conducente Barintha*" when referring to Arthur being transported to Avalon by Barintha. Some forty years later Peter de Blois, a secretary of Henry II, also seemed to vacillate between Arcturus and Arthur in **De Confessione**. In the **Gesta Regis Richardi** (c. 1192), credited to Benedict of Peterborough, the line "*Rex autem Angliae dedit ei gladium optimum Arcturi, nobilis quondam regis Britonum, quem Britones vocarent Calibum*" can be found. It relates to King Richard I giving Excalibur to Tancred, King of Sicily! Gervase of Tilbury in his **Otia Imperialia** (c. 1211) also seems to use both Arcturus and Arturus went telling a tale about Arthur appearing on the slopes of Mt. Etna. And finally, Caesarius of Heisterbach tells a story in his **Dialogus Miraculorum** (c. 1240), told to him by Godescalus, canon of Bonn, of a strange event also in Sicily. Decanus was looking for a lost steed when he met an old man and when he asked him if he had seen a particular horse, the old fellow stated he knew where it was. When Decanus inquired about its location the man replied: "*In Monte Gyber; ibi eum habet dominus meus Rex Arcturus*" - that the horse was with King Arthur on Mt. Gyber.


Were these slips of the pen, spelling mistakes or the possibility that during this period it was not unusual to use both Arcturus and Arturus to mean Arthur? It is interesting that the Latin writer

Lucan called the Gauls "arctos gentes" - "people of the north". If you check in a Latin dictionary you will find Arctos - the Great and Little Bear, hence the north and the night. Arctos is from the Greek $\alpha\rho\chi\tau\omicron\varsigma$ meaning a bear. Arcturus - $\alpha\rho\chi\tau\omicron\upsilon\rho\omicron\varsigma$ - is also from the Greek and means "bear warden".

Arcturus is the fourth brightest star in the heavens and can be found in the lower part of the constellation Boötes, which Greeks also gave an alternative name of $\alpha\rho\chi\tau\omicron\upsilon\rho\omicron\varsigma$ or $\alpha\rho\chi\tau\omicron\phi\upsilon\lambda\alpha\chi$ - Arctophylax - the "bear keeper". Legend tells that Callisto and Arcas were changed into bears and thrown into the sky by Zeus, who also placed Boötes the Herdsman there to drive them around the Pole Star. Callisto and Arcas became the constellation Ursa Major and Ursa Minor. The former was also called Helice - the twister - and Septentrio - the seven plough oxen, and the latter was also known as Cynosura - dog's tail (the English word cynosure means "guiding star") - and has at the end of its tail the star Polaris - the pole star. Other names for these two are the Dipper and Big Dipper. However, that the Bear stars should be linked with a plough brings us full circle back to the Bronze Age and the building of the stone monuments.

Before finishing here are some interesting pieces of information. In Welsh a plough is "aradr" while a ploughman is called a "trowr", "aradwr" or "araddwr" - the latter being rather similar to Arthur. And there is a legend from Flintshire of a site known as Carreg Arthur - Arthur's Rock - but the story tells not of knights or even Dark Age warriors but of a ghostly bear! Further east, in Greece to be precise, there are found in a number of inscriptions the name ΑΡΤΩΡΙΟΝ - Artorion which can after dropping the "-ion" and using the long Welsh "u" - can easily form the name Arthur.

It is guesswork, but educated guesswork, that these ancient sites and their connections with Arthur could have something to do with the Bear constellations - Ursa Major, Ursa Minor and the Bear star Arcturus. It might be these had some significance to those ancient agriculturalists and their calculated positions related to certain rituals necessary for the fertility of the earth. They knew these stars were important and when the Romans introduced them to the Latin/Greek equivalent of these constellations and star they adopted the names. Later the Bear stars became mixed up with the stories of a fabulous warrior called Arthur and thus became irretrievably linked with certain prehistoric sites.



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WHAT THE PAPERS SAY!

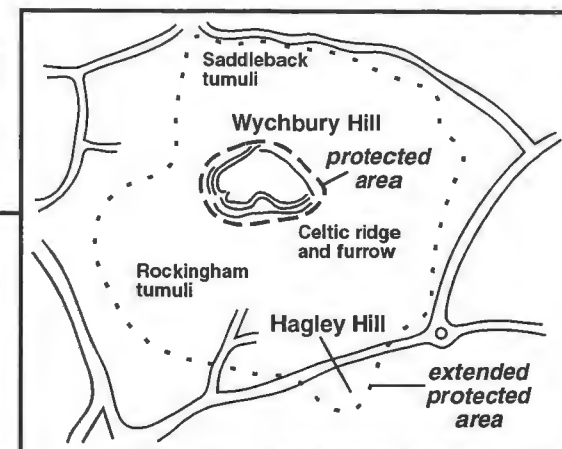
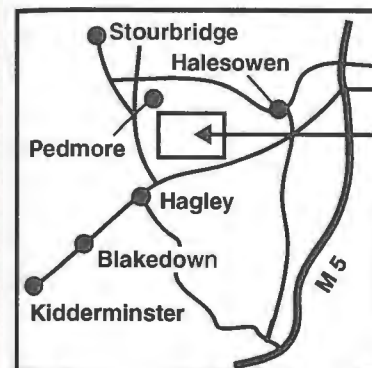
SPRING 1997

The Legend Seeker

Last year local newspapers in the West Midlands reported the efforts of the Wychbury Archaeological Society, and Granville Calder, in the defence of a site of historical importance. The vicinity of Wychbury Hill is threatened by the Kidderminster, Blakedown and Hagley Bypass. The Hill camp is a protected area but Granville Calder wants this extended to take in a number of tumuli, a Celtic field system and Hagley Hill. However, Mr. Calder also believes that this site has an Arthurian

time but history does not recognise a clash of this size anywhere in the country until hundreds of years later. If it was not Arthur's battle of Mount Badon, which one was it?"

Wychbury Hill is situated on the edges of the sprawling metropolis of Birmingham in the hills south west of Halesowen. At first glance an Arthurian battle would seem remote but this area has changed considerable from



connection. There is a local legend that a battle had been fought in the area between the Saxons and the Britons in the fifth century. Burial mounds on the site have yew trees which can be dated as being around 1,500 years old. He postulates that "[t]here was definitely a major battle on the hills at this

what it was in the Dark Ages. Here once were the great forests of Morfe and Arden. What are the possibilities of a battle fought here 1,500 years ago? Pendragon looks forward to further information on this subject and we hope soon that light will be shed on the legend of Hagley!

Wanted: Volunteer proofreader, with a good standard of English, to help improve the quantity of Pendragon. Become part of the team. Please contact the Editor on 01352 731343 or write to Charles W. Evans-Günther 9 Earls Lea, Flint, Flintshire, CH6 5BT.

More than Seven Wonders

Stuart Wavell sparked off by recent finds off Alexandria wrote an interesting article entitled "Wonder workers go for the big one" in **The Sunday Times**, 19th January 1997. He looked mainly at the Colossus of Rhodes but also asked whether there are any other lost wonders around. These included the Lost Tomb of King Alfred, King Arthur and Camelot, The Ark of the Covenant, Noah's Ark and the missing bit of the Bayeux Tapestry.

The Arthurian part goes: "King Arthur and Camelot are much more problematic. Was the once and future king a Roman general or Welsh leader? A recent theory, by historians Alan Wilson and Anthony Blackett, is that he was buried on a Welsh hill near what is now a modern wind farm at Brynna in central

Glamorgan. A promising funeral slab was found in a ruined church, but when it was lifted nothing was there. The historians claimed the body was buried 80 yards away, but the local farmer refused permission for any more digging to take place."

In **The Sunday Times**, 2nd February, a letter was printed from Alan Wilson and Baram Blackett of Penylan, Cardiff. They say that they didn't need anyones permission to excavate at St. Peters Church since they own it but they "were reluctantly forced to excavate by opponents"! Their dig, they say, was a great success and "provided vital clues which led to the very clear identification of the grave site." They will be publishing their fifth book called **The Holy Kingdom** in the near future.

Merlin the Magnificent: Arthurian panto

Reports from the **Sunderland Star** and the **Newcastle Journal** (both dated 19/12/96) tells of Arthur in panto. The Northern Stage production of "Merlin the Magnificent" was loosely based on the legend of King Arthur. Despite a cast of only eight actors, Stuart Paterson's play seemingly was a great success. It told of how Arthur was found as a baby, his childhood and how Morgana le Fay

and her three-faced assistant Face set out to kidnap him.

One 10-year old summed up with "I felt like part of the story, not just part of the audience". Unfortunately, since it finished on the 11th January 1997 most of us missed it! Let's hope that this panto is repeated and reaches other parts of the country in the future because it sound really entertaining.

King Arthur supports Liverpool dockers

On Saturday, 12th April 1997, a riot broke out during a march to support striking Liverpool dockers. The march, which had attracted over 3,500 people, were protesting to bring attention to the plight of the poor and also Liverpool dockers who had been sacked 18 months ago. Despite the march including children, a riot broke out as they neared Downing Street.

Twenty nine people were arrested including one Arthur Pendragon, whose three foot long sword Excalibur seized.

Arthur Pendragon, 43 year old head of the Loyal Arthurian Warband, according to

Greg Swift, in **The Express**, 15th April 1997, made an usual sight at Bow Street Courtroom. Dressed in Druidic costume, Arthur claims he is the reincarnation of King Arthur and has a spiritual age of 1,453. At the hearing he said: "I cannot carry on my normal life without my sword. As sword bearer I even sleep with it. It never leaves my side. It is only unsheathed at religious rituals."

Arthur Pendragon was accused of possessing an offensive weapon but his case was adjourned for two weeks. The article feature a photograph of him in robes and trainers!

Quest

Short notes, queries, reviews and events - past, present and future.

Beyond the Border 5

4-6 July 1997

St. Donat's Castle, Llantwit Major, Vale of Glamorgan, CF61 1 WF
A festival of story telling and story tellers from all over the world, including The Company of Storytellers, TUUP & Jan Blake, John Campbell, Yoshi Oida's Zen stories and music from Norway.

For more information tel: 01446 794848

6th Festival at the Edge

18-20 July 1997

A weekend of storytelling, music and dance happening in & around Stokes Barn on Wenlock Edge, Shropshire. Includes story walks, concerts, workshops, campfire stories and a special festival for children. There is also on-site catering and a bar.

For further information tel: 01952 504929

World Tree - Poetry, Prose and Painting

15 September 1997

Trees in myth, literature and painting with Kevin Crossly-Holland and Elaine Shemilt. (Kevin Crossley-Holland worked with Gwyn Thomas and Margaret Jones on books on Welsh mythology including: Tales from the Mabinogion, The Quest for Olwen and Taliesin.)

Parsifal: The Landscape and the Wounded King

20-25 October 1997

An exploratory retreat with Hugh Lupton and Eric Maddern

'Beyond the Border' Autumn School of Storytelling

"The story of the Wounded King and the Quest for the Holy Grail has its roots stretching back to earliest times and deep into the European imagination . . ."

This will be a retreat for experienced storytellers and some knowledge of the material is essential.

For information on the last two items contact: Taliesin Trust, Tŷ Newydd, Llanystumdwy, Cricieth, Gwynedd, LL522 0LW, tel. 01766 522811 or fax 01766 523095

The Quest goes on . . .

It is important that members inform us of what is going on, when and where. If you have any information on various events let us have it. Keep in mind that the deadline for the next issue is July. We are also interested in news of events, etc., that have already taken place. So, whatever you have please send the material to us.



OTHERWORLD was set up in early 1992 after I spent many years being interested in ancient history, especially in mythology. The business started off small, appearing at craft shows and festivals. It then evolved and I found a permanent pitch for the stall in Oxford. After a year the stall became too crowded

and the business moved into a small shop in the heart of Oxford.

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We also stock a large range of Arthurian items including books, cards, figures, music tapes and storytelling tapes, tarot cards, paper knives and jewellery.

All Pendragon readers will be warmly welcomed.

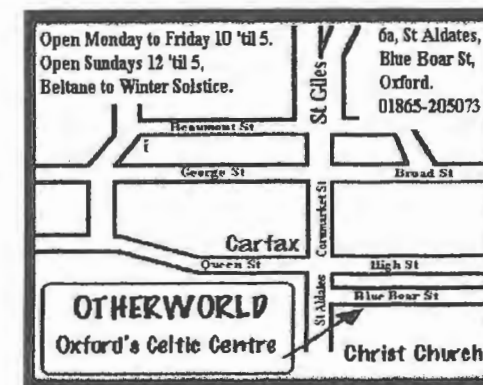
Hope to see you soon

Debbie White

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BookReviews

Keeper of the King

by Nigel Bennett & P.N. Elrod

New York, Baen Publishing, 1996, pp 400, \$21.00

Given the current fascination with vampires it was probably inevitable that sooner or later someone would come up the idea of doing an Arthurian vampire story. As far as I know this is the first. Written by Nigel Bennett (better known as the vampire La Croix from the TV series *Forever Knight*) and P.N. Elrod, familiar as author of various straight vampire novels, *Keeper of the King* suggests that its hero Richard d'Orleans became a vampire at some unspecified period of the Middle Ages, and then went on to become the guardian of King Arthur, one of his incarnations being Lancelot! Just how this medieval knight came to be guarding a 6th century king is not made clear, but the book moves on from its opening premise to the present, where the undying Richard is now a special agent for the Canadian government. His subsequent adventures involve the pursuit of a killer who just happens to have an interest in Arthurian lore, and this in turn leads him on a quest for the Grail (hidden beneath Glastonbury Tor, where else!) to save both himself, and the vampire who sired him, from being consumed by the beast within which is present in all vampires and as they get older begins to take over.

Despite this rather unpromising scenario, *Keeper of the King* is a real page-turner, and once I had given up snorting at the inaccuracies and the strange twists given to the mythology, I thoroughly enjoyed it. Juicy reading for a cold afternoon, and interesting for the new spin it gives to the old story.

John Matthews

Sources of the Grail

John Matthews

Floris Books, Lindisfarne Press, 1996, ISBN 0-86315-233-3, hbk., 575pp., £25

This is another of John's invaluable collections of hard-to-obtain, often long out-of-print texts around a theme. This time he has chosen to make available nineteen extracts from material as diverse as *The Spoils of Annwn* to Ari Berk's *The Grail in the Utmost Vessels* (Vessels of Power, Plenty and Tradition in American Indian Mythology and literature). The material is organised into three sections, with full introductory essays and editorial comment: *The Celtic Dream*, *The Medieval Quest* and *The Continuing Search*. The latter section includes R. S. Hawker, Francis Rolt-Wheeler and Arthur Machen, just to name a few. The translation of the Prologue and Introduction to Robert de Borron's *History of the Holy Grail* fell into my hands like manna from heaven, thank you for that alone, John.

You'll need to save up for this one, I joined a book club to get it on introductory offer!

Fred Stedman-Jones

The Celtic Legends of Glamorgan

Anthony Rees

Llanerch Publishers, 1996, ISBN 1-86143-021-3, pbk., illustrated, 120pp., £6.50

Anthony Rees is another name known to Pendragon readers; whilst still a student at Lampeter University College he established himself as a Celtic artist, the cover of our recent *Caerleon* edition was an example of his work. This is Anthony's first book and the first volume in what he intends to be a series on the Welsh counties, so it is fitting that he should begin with his own (and my) native shire.

The preface emphasises that folklore and legends are not simple stories made up 'by ignorant

peasants to entertain on cold nights... but, with closer study, patterns and meanings emerge... they are the end result of at least a thousand years of Celtic culture in Wales'. Anthony discusses the oral tradition that has been central to the culture that gave rise to these stories and had its roots in the mythology of his people. As a Welsh speaking Welshman, he writes with a deep understanding and love of the heritage of which he obviously feels himself a part.

Eight tales are chosen for retelling; the origins and roots of these stories are examined and their themes and motifs are most interestingly discussed. Several of the tales have Arthurian connections and these include *King Arthur in the Cave*, *The Sparrowhawk Knight*, and *Glamorgan's Merlin*. The history of the county and its seasonal festivals are allocated special chapters of their own and an authoritative bibliography is provided. To crown his authorial debut Anthony illustrates the book with his own distinctive interpretation of Celtic/Saxon artwork.

As a first venture by a still very young man this volume is a personal triumph; even more exciting is the anticipation of more works by this committed Welsh writer. Congratulations are very much in order to Anthony, also to Derek Bryce of Llanerch who knows a good thing when he sees it. A very enjoyable read and very modestly priced.

Fred Stedman-Jones

Bloodline of the Holy Grail: The Hidden Lineage of Jesus Revealed

Laurence Gardner

Element Books Ltd., 1996, hardback, ISBN 1-85230-870-2, UK: £16.99, USA: \$29.95, Can. \$39.99

This is a large book, over 500 pages long with 25 b/w photographs, 11 maps, 9 diagrams/illustrations, 17 charts in the body of the book, 4 diagrams/illustrations and 29 charts in the appendices, together with notes, references, appendices, bibliography and a ten page index.

This all sound quite impressive but then so did John Morris's *The Age of Arthur!* Unfortunately, I found this publication to be a disappointment. It varies in content and seems to move from fact into fantasy with an ease that worries me greatly. *Bloodline of the Holy Grail* supposes to be a survey of the descendants of Jesus Christ from the 1st century up to 1990s.

I am not going to go into the complex story of the family tree of Jesus I will say that I found the way Mr. Gardner uses various sources of considerable interest. This book as a vast amount of information and to go through all, or even a part of it, would take most of the pages of this present issue of *Pendragon*. I found myself immersed in a labyrinth of material and trying to separate the chaff from the wheat became time consuming (and after a while rather pointless!). Where to end was a problem — there being so much to comment upon. Having read the book through a couple of times (I had to do this to at least be fair that I had not missed something vital, having put it down numerous times due to boredom or falling asleep while reading) I found myself constantly returning to the genealogical charts. The study of family trees is fascinating to me and even when it has no bearing on a subject I am interested in, I am still drawn to genealogical information.

Gardner, however, brings in fictional characters into his pedigrees and does some unique twisting of information to suit the overall premise of this book. We get to read about characters like Arviragus, Brân, Lucius, Joseph of Arimathea, Coel, Galahad and Viviane as if they were historical. Surely we are dealing with mythological people here rather than persons that actually lived. Take Arviragus who becomes the son of Cunobelinus rather than the Brigantian rebel living during the reign of Emperor Domitian (AD 81-96). The character only appears in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain!* Brân belongs to legend not history and any connection between him and South Wales and Christianity belongs to the wishful thinking of certain antiquarians. Lucius is claimed to have been a king in Britain who is said to have requested the introduction of Christianity the country. The earliest reference is in the last decades of the 5th century and it is general accepted now that this Lucius was not British but the king of Britium in the east of the Roman Empire. Coel is another creation of Geoffrey of Monmouth. There was a historical Coel but he lived in the north of Britain and had no connection with St. Helena. The latter of course was not British at all and ample records show she was the daughter of an inn-keeper, perhaps at Drepanum in Bithynia.

Joseph of Arimathea is one of those characters who have played an important part in the folklore and legend of Europe for some time. Little is found in the Gospels and none of it seems to correspond to Mr. Gardner version of the story. That Joseph was really Jesus's brother James needs to be discussed but I am going to leave that to the theologians. That Joseph became connected with the Grail stories is well documented but it is legend and not fact. At one point he is said to be called Ildid in Wales. But, if that is so, he must have had a sex change since Ildid is feminine and in fact St. Julitta. Interestingly, the only person to link St. Ildid with Joseph of Arimathea is Edward (Iolo Morganwg) Williams.

Later we find Viviane being "married" to Taliesin and their daughter being Ygernia who is at one point married to Gwyr Llew and later Aedan McGabran of the Dalriada. Ygernia and Aedan's son was of course Arthur who married Gwenhwyfar daughter of Leo de Grace. I must admit at this point, on the first reading, I gave up and put the book aside. I had had enough and hoped that someone else would write in with a review of this publication. Unfortunately, no one did and does that say anything?! That Arthur should be the son of Aedan McGabran is not a problem. There is reference to an Arthur being Aedan's son or grandson, but this would place Arthur at the end of the sixth century being killed in a battle against the Picts and being survived by his father! The Scots have never bothered to claim that King Arthur was a son of Aedan and the earliest references to Ygernia have her as the daughter of Amlawd Wledig. Galahad also appears as the son of Lancelot and Elaine, with Lancelot being son of Ban le Benoit and Viviane daughter of Taliesin and Viviane. Not content with using fictional characters created by Chrétien de Troyes, we find Titirel and Anfortas from Wolfram von Eschenbach's Grail story.

I tried hard to be fair to this book but the more I read it the worse it gets. At times I get the impression it was produced just to glorify Prince Michael of Albany, who claims descent from Bonnie Prince Charlie and has been Alexander IV, King of the Scots, since 1963. **Bloodline of the Holy Grail** is a mishmash of various theories from numerous books including **Jesus the Man** and **The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail**. It also covers such familiar material as Mary Magdalene, Templars, Freemasonry and the Tarot. If you are into this sort of adventure or you are a supporter of the Jacobites, you will find this a fascinating book. It has got a bit of everything for everybody and it even has some history!

Charles W. Evans-Günther

The Search for the Grail

Graham Phillips

Arrow Books Ltd., 1996, paperback, ISBN 0-09-953941, £5.99

You may already have read **King Arthur: The True Story** and/or **The Search for the Grail**, well, this is the paperback version of the latter with a bit of the former thrown in for good measure. It is basically a cut-and-paste (graphics term) book. However, it does have some new bits including text and photographs.

Like most books of this genre - secrets, secrets, mysteries and more secrets - there are hidden clues in the search for the Holy Grail. Arthur has a secret identity and the Grail is not quite what you might be expecting. It's actually a six centimetre onyx receptacle - more of Holy Egg Cup than the Holy Grail!

Much of the information in this book follows the same lines as the two previous publications except some of the chapters are in a different order and others left out - all together - so it isn't quite a complete combination of the two books. The interesting extras begin on page 86 and continue to page 90. This tells how Graham Phillips and Martin Keatman contacted **Schofield's Quest** and how they went in search of King Arthur's grave! They quote from **Marwnad Cynddylan** adding a bit from a poem within the **Song of Llywarch Hen** called **The Churches of Bassa**. The latter could be from an 8th or 9th century original while the former is only found in a corrupt 16th century copy but may be much older. As with the previous books they ignore that the name Arthur is, in fact, absent from **Marwnad Cynddylan** (the "artir wras" does not mean "Great Arthur" but "strong-handed") or that there is no evidence that Arthur or his secret identity (Owain Danwyn, they persist on using, incorrectly, Owain Ddantgwyn) had any connections with this area of Shropshire. (Actually,

this is not completely true - there are a number of places in Shropshire that do have tales connected with King Arthur, but since they don't mention them . . .). When they translate **Marwnad Cynddylan** they use the penultimate lines of each stanza to give an indication of where King Arthur may be buried. One particular line they say reads "I shall mourn till I enter Travail's Acre . . ." as if they last two words are some kind of field name. If the word "trafael" - "travail" is used it would indicate an adoption from Old French or Middle English, making this poem very late. However, recent research suggests that the word is not "trafael" but "tra gwael" changing their translation of the line to "I will mourn till I enter a very lowly plot of land . . .".

They go on to locate "Travail's Acre" as being near a fortification known as The Berth. Low and behold using an archaeological method known as geophysics and with the help of a dowser they find something. Is this the grave of Cynddylan, who is descended from Arthur or Owain Danwyn? If so could Arthur be buried somewhere nearby? Nothing was actually dug up and so far I have not heard of anything being excavated. Nevertheless, if they do find something - they indicated what could be a shield boss and thus a warrior's burial - it is unlikely to have anything to do with Cynddylan or Arthur. Christians didn't include burial goods with their dead and so no shield or sword would have gone into a Christian Dark Age grave. However, pagan Anglo-Saxons did bury weapons and armour with their dead!

Personally, I don't think this new semi-combined publication adds anything to the two previous inaccurate books, both of which have already been severely criticised in **Pendragon**. Nevertheless, on my travels I am still meeting people who have read **King Arthur: The True Story** and see merit in it! The problem is that because someone has done some research, got it printed and published, it must have something. It takes a lot of work to go through such publications, looking at their sources and cross-checking information, so people who haven't got the time or facilities to do such will have to take the authors' theories as being accurate. Messrs. Phillips and Keatman's theory has been looked at before and there is not enough space to go through it all over again!

Charles W. Evans-Günther

King Arthur - A Military History

by Michael Holmes

Blandford, London, 1996, 179 pp, 11 maps, hardback, ISBN 0 7137 2633 4, £15.99

Studies of King Arthur and aspects of the Arthurian legend are not exactly scarce. In fact just about every publishing house seems to have one or two Arthurian titles, and more come out every year revealing this or that hitherto unexplored aspect of the legends - he was a Roman, he was a Christian, he was a Celtic chief, he was a shamanic initiate, and so on. New books therefore have to present something pretty dramatic to promote themselves - thence titles such as **King Arthur - The True Story**, which sells so much better than **King Arthur - Another Unsubstantiated Guess**.

Michael Holmes here presents a further concatenation of the Arthurian research of Leslie Alcock (**Arthur's Britain**) and John Morris (**The Age of Arthur**). Briefly, Holmes's Arthur is a post-Roman military leader; he takes command of the Romano-British war-machine after the retirement/disqualification/death of Ambrosius Aurelianus; he builds a fortified base in the West Country (you guessed it - South Cadbury); his troops are regiments of light cavalry who are more than a match for the heathen rabble from Scandinavia, and so on. This is actually all familiar stuff which has been examined, dissected, trashed and salvaged in a hundred books before. One particular failing of this line of research is the uncritical use of the sources: there is so little written evidence for the period 400-600 that Holmes (quite rightly, following Morris and others) squeezes every last nuance from the scant records; but in doing so he fails to take a step back and reflect on the evidence dispassionately. Basically, no-one should trust the dates and 'invasion' entries in the early Anglo-Saxon Chronicle which are largely anecdotal (some are just there to explain place-names, after all) nor the Welsh Annals which are if anything more difficult to use (being almost trustworthy in places, and spurious in others). The testimony of Nennius, writing in the ninth century, is given weight with that of Gildas, writing in the 6th; and following Nick Hyams's reappraisal of Gildas's work (**The English Conquest**) even this near-contemporary record should be regarded with the utmost suspicion.

However, Holmes does develop an interesting point in this book: both Britannia and Gallia were late Roman provinces with an essentially Celtic population overlaid by Roman hierarchy, law and government; both were invaded by Germanic tribes in the late 400s and in both the invaders were successful. Why then is it that the Frankish conquest of Gaul was accomplished in around thirty years and the Anglo-Saxon one of Britain took a hundred and fifty? Even more interestingly, the Frankish conquest was swift and superficial, leaving most of post-Roman Gaul intact and replacing one élite with another, while in Britain the Anglo-Saxon conquest was slow and thorough, resulting in the Germanic state of Angelcynn in which Roman law, government and economic life simply longer existed. In Gaul, French a Romance (Latin-based) language with a small number of specialist words drawn from Frankish; in Britain, English is a Germanic language with very little terminology supplied by Celtic or Romance languages (until Christianity and the Normans came, of course). Why should this be? Michael Holmes suggests that the answer lies in the manner of conquest: the Frankish leader Clovis was a supreme military commander who quickly outmanoeuvred both the Gallo-Romans and his own rivals to seize power across much of Continental Europe. Among the early Germanic settlers in Britain, no one leader emerged with the élan and authority to overcome the native resistance, while the British did have just such a man: Arthur. The long struggle of the English advance out of their seaboard bridgeheads meant that they had plenty of time to secure their holdings and absorb the locals into their society. Holmes goes on to claim that the success of the English as a world language and the English as a colonial power is therefore attributable to one man: Arthur, the father of the Anglo-Saxon language (and the indirect author of every event in subsequent British history!)

Now it hardly needs to be stated that the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is not by any standard a reliable document for plotting the course of events in the Arthurian period (say, late 400s, early 500s) and it is therefore totally unsafe to suggest that for example Ælle of Sussex was contained in his coastal bridgehead for a decade or more simply because the ASC doesn't mention any victories of his. By Holmes's own admission, the most important English settlement areas were in East Anglia and around the Wash, and there is no record at all in the Chronicle of events there. Do we then assume that nothing was happening to or among these people? Of course not, but Holmes finds it necessary to hypothesise at great length to reconstruct an Arthurian campaign against the Angles of Norfolk. In fact there is so much hypothesis involved in this that the whole proposal comes across as pure invention, which is a little unjust because there is no doubt that the East Angles felt threatened by the folk to the southwest, and constructed large earthworks in Cambridgeshire to deter them from using the remaining network of Roman roads as a highway into their territory. Holmes argues that (Arthur's) light cavalry would not have been able to overcome defended earthworks, because their lack of stirrups made it impossible for to attack uphill against determined infantry (with long spears, one assumes). This is entirely reasonable, and may well help to explain the Angles' success in defending their territory from the British in the early days of the settlement. But it does nothing to substantiate claims for the existence of Arthur.

That really is the nub of all objection to books such as this: the author has done a lot of research and evidently reflected long and hard on the merits of various strategies to defeat the English and drive back them back into the sea. He has, he implies, decided to ignore the legendary and mythical material in the Arthurian stories and concentrate on the facts. But where are the facts? Surely the earliest records of Arthur - for example, **Culhwch and Olwen** - show him in a very heart of myth, and only the later embroideries of Romance try to place him in a quasi-historical context, where he does not sit very comfortably. If the Welsh treasured records and memories of the last great British leader up to the tenth century, then why did they abandon any further record of him once the Normans took over the Matter of Britain? It seems to me that the essence of the pre-Norman Arthur is in Annwn and the mythical landscape of the Otherworld.

This is not to deny that the Romano-British (some at least) put up a stiff resistance to the English, and that they were often successful in their battles. They were ultimately unsuccessful in their war, though, and never managed to dislodge the Germanic settlers from their east coast bases. There is little evidence to show that they were coordinated in their approach to this problem, and even if one could find evidence for a leader of the British side, it would still be a huge step to name him Arthur and link him to the later Welsh legends. Many have been prepared to take that step, yet it remains more a leap of faith than part of any logical progression.

Steve Pollington

King Arthur - A Military History

by Michael Holmes

Blandford, London, 1996, 179 pp, 11 maps, hardback, ISBN 0 7137 2633 4, £15.99

When I heard about this book I really looked forward to reading it and having done so, I find myself almost in complete agreement with Steve Pollington's review above. There are, however, a few points worth mentioning.

Not everyone will agree with Steve that "the essence of the pre-Norman Arthur is in Annwn and the mythical landscape of the Otherworld"! I am a member of the school of "there is no smoke without fire" and feel that there may have been a historical figure behind the legendary Arthur. It can also be shown that the Welsh did not abandon Arthur after the Normans adopted the Matter of Britain. There are quite a number of pieces of poetry, triads and prose works which are untouched by the Normanised version of Arthur. And then there is **The Dream of Rhonabwy** which looks like it is a satire on the Normanised Arthur. The Welsh bards knew more about Arthur than what has come down to us that's for sure! And there may also be traditions which show Arthur in a different light and other parts of Britain.

Let us now turn to the book itself. Steve points out that Michael Holmes relies a lot on John Morris's **The Age of Arthur** and, to a lesser degree, Leslie Alcock's **Arthur's Britain**. One wonders if Mr. Holmes knows of the unprecedented review by D.P. Kirby and J.E. Caerwyn Williams in **Studia Celtica**, X/XI, 1975/6. Here they show in 33 pages how Morris misused the sources. They end with the following: "Dr. Morris says that an author who pretends to be free of bias is 'always misleading, and usually dull'. . . . Dr. Morris is not (on the whole) at all dull: but he is, it seems fair to say, misleading." Sadly, this publication continues to mislead!

Michael Holmes is not the first to attempt a military history of the "Arthurian" period. Squadron Leader Arthur J. Young published **The Swords of The Britons: A Military Review** in 1984. Though a very interesting book, and Squadron Leader Young did have military experience while Mr. Holmes is a physicist, there was too much reliance on Geoffrey of Monmouth's **History of the Kings of Britain**.

Turning now to what this publication is supposed to be all about, we find that barely 46 pages out of a total of 179 are about a possible reconstruction of Arthur's war against the Anglo-Saxons. Steve, above, has pointed out some of the problems when using Gildas, the **Anglo-Saxon Chronicle**, the **Welsh Annals** and Nennius's **History of the Britons**. Discussing the Nennian battle list indicates many problems and even an expert like Kenneth Jackson in his 14 page survey for the article "Once Again Arthur's Battles", **Modern Philology**, XLIII, 1945, threw up his hands in despair! Mr. Holmes hardly does the list justice, jumping to conclusions with virtually no explanation why a place should be picked.

First of all, we can not be sure that any of these battles are truly connected with Arthur! There may have been a poem written sometime before the **History of the Britons** was compiled but there are a number of different versions of manuscripts and some cause problems. This poem may have known that there was a great warrior called Arthur but could not identify the actual battles so borrowed from various sources.

The way the Nennian battle list is used is always interesting. Since the battles seem to be in various parts of Britain then certain conclusions are made. Arthur must have had a highly mobile force and it must have been fighting several enemies - Angles, Saxons, Jutes, Picts and Scots. However, if the list is to be accepted at all why ignore the previous sentences:

"In that time the Saxons increased in numbers and grew strong in Britain. With the death of Hergest, Oetha his son came from the northern part of Britain to the kingdom of the Kentish, and from this one rose the kings of Kent. At that time Arthur fought against them with the kings of the Britains, for he was the leader of battles."

Who **them** were is important if this list is accepted. Were they the Saxons in general, the Kentish in particular or those Oetha left behind in the "northern part of Britain" possibly under Ebissa? Of course, if this list is just part of the growing folklore of Arthur then it doesn't matter who they were.

Mr. Holmes goes on to look at what happened after Badon and discusses Camlann from a

rather different, though not new, viewpoint. However, there is no evidence for his East Anglian Campaign at all. That Walton could be Dommoc is a good theory and may well be correct but it is tenuous link with Medraut and Arthur. The likelihood of an obscure Welsh saint being connected with Dunwich or Walton on the east coast of England is, to put it mildly, improbable. A number of churches are dedicated to St. Dyfnog but all are in Wales. The reference to his family tree is in Bonedd Y Saint (Lineage of the Saints), number 51: *Dyunawc sant m. Medrawd m. Cawrdaf m. Caradawc ureichuras* ("m." indicates "son of" and the 'u's should be taken as 'v's - 'f' in Modern Welsh). Caradoc Freichfras, a borderline character hovering between fact and legend, is sometimes linked with the Radnor area (now part of Powys) and two places dedicated to St. Dyfnog are also located in this part of Wales. Nevertheless, the east coast Dommoc may be a place name of Celtic origin.

Unlike Steve, I believe that Arthur was a Dark Age warrior who played a part in Britain's defence against the growing power of the Anglo-Saxons but I do not agree with John Morris or Michael Holmes that Arthur can be credited with so much! The problem with **King Arthur: A Military History** is that it doesn't go into enough detail and it is written by a physicist rather than an expert in military strategy. This publication hardly scratches the surface. If we are to understand what happened in the fifth and sixth centuries it is necessary for a concerted effort from various fields - archaeology, history and military strategy - to produce a survey of the British Isles and see where, when and how a possible war (if war is the right word) took place. They would not only have to look at the history (what there is of it) but walk the possible sites and use up to date archaeological evidence of burials and settlements. **King Arthur: A Military History** falls incredibly short of this. Ideas and theories are all fine but here we have too many ifs, buts and maybes.

Charles W. Evans-Günther

King Arthur in Legend and History

Edited by Richard White

J.M. Dent, a division of Orion Books Ltd, 1997, hardback, ISBN 0-469-87782-8, £25.00

This is a big book - just over 600 pages. It consists mainly of quotes from various texts in English, with an eleven page introduction, 2 page chronology of key Arthurian texts, 5 maps, 18 black and white illustrations, 12 pages of notes, just over six pages of sources, a page and a bit of suggestions for further reading and a five page bibliography. The main body of this book is divided into seven parts: Early Works, Geoffrey of Monmouth and the 'Brut' Chronicle Tradition, Arthur in Early French Romance, The Vulgate Cycle, Later French Romance, German and English Romances, and Historical Texts. Each piece of text has a short introduction telling the reader about the author and an overview of the particular piece of literature or chronicle.

Richard White has made a selection of material taking in more or less the main sources of the Matter of Britain. He begins with the early chronicles such as Gildas and Nennius and then various hagiographies of Welsh and Breton saints. Also included in this first section are quotes from William of Malmesbury's **The Deeds of the English Kings**, which has the famous statement: *"It is about this Arthur that the Britons tell such trifling stories even today. Clearly, he is a man more worthy to be extolled in true histories, as the leader who long preserved his tottering homeland and kindled an appetite for war in the shattered minds of his countrymen, than to be dreamed of in fallacious fables."* In his introduction he admits that he has left the Welsh material feeling it to be "too obscure or fragmentary to be of much interest to the general reader". This is a pity since there is some interesting stuff from Wales often overlooked.

In the second section there are quotes from Geoffrey of Monmouth's great **History of the Kings of Britain** and its spin-offs. Of the latter I was interested to read Robert of Gloucester's **Metrical Chronicle**, Robert Mannyng of Brunne's **Chronicle**, with the crowning of Arthur at Cirencester, and the three Scottish chronicles, which tend to report Arthur in a slightly different light. By the time John de Fordun, Andrew of Wyntoun and William Stewart were writing King

Arthur was looked upon as an English King and, in general, most Scots had not forgotten the conquest of their homeland by Edward Longshanks. In fact Edward I had used Arthurian chronicles as justification for his invasion and conquest of Scotland.

The next three sections concern the beginnings of the classical Arthurian tales starting with Chrétien de Troyes. These stories laid down the basics of all that was to follow. Adapting the work of Geoffrey of Monmouth, these French writers set the scene for King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table and all that represented. Though Geoffrey introduced Merlin and Wace the Round Table, Chrétien was instrumental in given the world of literature Lancelot, Camelot and the Holy Grail, as well as firmly setting King Arthur on the sideline rather than being a player-manager.

Section six is mainly English Romances but begins with pieces from **Diu Krône (The Crown)** by Heinrich von dem Türlin. Strangely, Wolfram von Eschenbach, Hartman von Aue and Gottfried von Strassburg are not included in this section. The rest of this part is taken up English classics like **Of Arthur and of Merlyn**, **Sir Percivell of Gales**, **The Anturs of Arther**, **Sir Gawain and the Green Knight**, and Sir Thomas Malory's **Le Morte d'Arthur**. But there are also some lesser well known pieces like **The Fair Unknown** and Thomas of Chestre's **Syr Launfal**. Here we have King Arthur in British setting - a little rougher than the French Romances.

Finally, there are the historical texts - not stories of King Arthur and his Knights but quotes from chronicles that were dealing with other historical events and topographical material. Included are famous pieces like Herman of Tournai's story of the fight over whether Arthur was dead or sleeping, Gerald of Wales's description of the excavations at Glastonbury and Jean Froissart's **Chronicles**. Some of the remaining quotes have such strange things as King Arthur in Mount Etna and Richard the Lionheart giving King Tancred of Sicily the sword Caliburn - Excalibur! And there is one entry I would like to quote in full - **Polychronicon** (1327-42) by Ranulph Higden:

Since Geoffrey [of Monmouth] is the only writer to extol Arthur, many have wondered how it is possible to learn the truth about what is said about him, because if Arthur (as Geoffrey writes) had acquired thirty kingdoms, if he had conquered the kingdom of the Franks, and killed Lucius procurator of the republic of Italy, why do all Roman, French and German historians utterly fail to mention such a man, while recording the minor deeds of lesser men?

Geoffrey relates how his Arthur overcame Frollo, King of France, and yet no mention of Frollo is found in French records. Also he says Arthur killed Lucius Hiberius, procurator of the [Roman] republic in the time of the Emperor Leo, although among all the Roman histories there is no mention of any procurator Lucius at that time, while Arthur neither ruled, nor was even born in the time of Leo, but during Justinian's reign, who was the fifth emperor after Leo. Moreover, Geoffrey asserts that he finds it astonishing that Gildas and Bede make no mention of Arthur in their accounts; but I find it quite incredible that Geoffrey himself should glorify such a man, whom all ancient, true and famous histories leave almost untouched; but it is the custom of every nation to extol someone of their own country with excessive praise: thus the Greeks celebrate their Alexander, the Romans their Octavian, the English their Richard, the French their Charlemagne, and the British their Arthur.

Right on Ranulph! What a modern perspective on history from a fourteenth century writer!

I'll finish as I began by saying this is a big book and it has a wealth of material. Of course, it is impossible to get everything in but Richard White has done an excellent job. One thing I would like to comment on is the continuing mention that the Welsh believed that King Arthur was going to come back from Avalon and save the British race. Mr. White mentions this in his introduction and a few references, such as from the Monk of Malmesbury, are included. However, I have not been able to find any support for this outside of Welsh versions of Geoffrey of Monmouth's work or much later folklore. When the poem *Armes Prydein* (The Prophecy of Britain) called for Celtic people to rise up against the Saxons it was not Arthur they expected but Cynan and Cadwaladr. And later it is an Owen who is called on to save Wales.

None of the latter is a problem - only a touch of nationalism from the present reviewer - and does not detract from a rather useful and interesting publication. No controversies, no theories, no secret identities and no hidden messages - refreshing to say the least!

Charles W. Evans-Günther

Dragon Dance

An anthology of art & poetry from Dragon Chronicles: 1993-1996
 Edited by Ade Dimmick,
 Dragon's Head Press, 1997, paperback, ISBN 0 9524387 1 2, £1.99

Here are forty pages of poetry and pictures by 20 poets and illustrators, some of whom are members of Pendragon. So if you are a fan of dragons – all shapes and sizes from all walks of life – (and I willing to admit I'm a bit of a dracophile myself) then you might enjoy this publication. And there are some really nice illustrations - I like Sunila Sen-Gupta Heavy Metal dragon myself.

If you are interested why not contact Dragon's Head Press, PO Box 3369, London, SW6 6JN.

Charles W. Evans-Günther

What Time Has Use For

Steve Sneyd

Expanded Second Edition, K.T. Publications, 1996, Book Ref: K.T. 57, paperback, ISBN 907759 66 1, £4.95, £5.50 by post, £7 or \$15 Overseas

Pendragon member Steve Sneyd has produced a forty four page book of poems on Arthurian themes. Poetry is rather subjective so I do not feel that I can review this publication, however, the poems range from three liners like Morgana le Fay to two and a half pages with King Morgan's Castle. The book ends with a bibliography of Arthurian books - non fiction, fiction, poetry and myth, and a glossary.

Steve has had published a number of other works including another collection of Arthurian poems entitled The Rex Quondam File (1976), Two Humps Not One (1980), Stone Bones (1983) and a short story, The Other Side of the Rainbow (1986).

If you are interest in What Time Has Use For I suggest you contact K.T. Publications, 16, Fane Close, Stamford, Lincolnshire, PE9 1HG, England.

Charles W. Evans-Günther

Ancient: The Bi-monthly Review of Antiquity

Vol. 5, No. 55, February 1997, £1.80

This magazine includes a few articles that may be of interest to members. "The Waterworks on Hadrian's Wall", "The Fall of the Roman Army" and "Coins and the Fall of the Roman Empire" stand out but equally "Health, Healing and the Ancient World" is worth reading.

Information about Ancient can be found in Pendragon's "Magazine Exchange" section.

Charles W. Evans-Günther

Where you see a black horse . . . The Landscape and King Arthur

Lisa Jarvis

Hexapen Wordsmiths Publications, Ref. 005, 50p

This is a quite interesting publication consisting of a A3 card folded to A5 making eight pages. It looks at possible Arthurian sites in the Gloucester area using a connection with black horses. However, the theory that pubs named the Black Horse can somehow be linked with Arthur is extremely dubious. Whether black horses were common in the Post Roman period is hardly reason to make any connection with Arthur. In Celtic tradition leaders usually rode white horses (in other words grays) rather than black. There are a few things in this publication that are interesting, for example that Arthur was crowned at Caer Vudei, and the links with Woodchester.

If you are interested in getting this leaflet contact the publishers at 2 Spring Cottages, The Vatch, Stroud, Gloucester, GL6 7JY or phone 01453 758738. By the way Lisa is also publishing a book called King Arthur through the Kaleidoscope.

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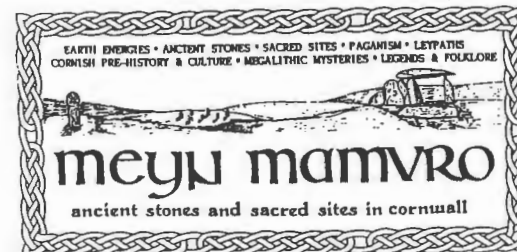
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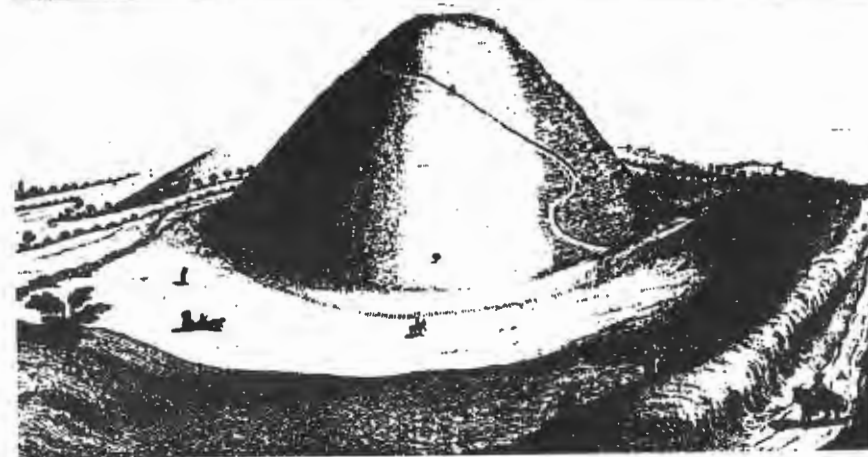
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