pendragon

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years

editorial

Vol XXVIII No 1 Summer 1999

This issue
Forget Nostradamus, the Eclipse and the Millennium - the event of the year will be the **fortieth anniversary** of the Society! Pendragon was founded in 1959 by Jess Foster in Winchester, and overviews of the last four decades will be found in this issue. Included then are further details of the Society get-together in October at Glastonbury, at which are planned a number of events as well as the AGM.

Some of the artwork also reflects this milestone, including commemorative pages by Ian Brown and Simon Rouse. Additionally, the original of Simon's cover, measuring 35 by 24 cm (approximately 13½ by 9½ inches), is for sale at £35.00, with 20% generously going to Pendragon funds.

Other contributions reflect the idea of narrative, with studies particularly of medieval Arthuriana relating to Dante, Lancelot, Jaufre and Gawain, so this issue's overall theme has come out as **Stories**. Other items in hand include original **Fiction and poetry** plus investigations of the **Origins of Arthurian legend**, so these will be the themes of the next two numbers of the journal - though not necessarily in that order. (Forget I ever mentioned ***humour***!) There has been some response to the request for themes last issue - please keep these coming in so that we can reflect your interests.

Last issue
You may recall that Parcel Force managed to lose the Celtic West issue for over a month. The deadline for the Dark Age Saints edition was subsequently extended, but then an unlucky combination of holidays, car accidents and courses delayed that even further, followed by Parcel Force losing the whole lot again! Fortunately it only took a week for the Saints to come marching in - apparently they'd been delivered to a different street altogether. *May the Force be with you?* Maybe not.

Submissions
An increasing number of you are sending submissions on disk, which makes my job easier, especially in the case of longer articles! Please ensure these are compatible with Microsoft Word (version 6.0) or, at a pinch, Works.

Venue
For those who are unfamiliar with Glastonbury the venue for Pendragon 99 is just off the High Street. As you look up High Street, a passage on the right, on the opposite side of the road from Gothic Image, leads into a courtyard with shops (Nos 2 - 4), and steps lead up to the Library of Avalon.

Incidentally, it was at Winchester that a great dragon (possibly a comet) was said to have appeared in the sky and caused Merlin to prophesy the birth of Arthur. For this reason the founding members chose the gold dragon (in the form of a wyvern) on a blue field as the badge of the Society. Hmm, perhaps those 1999 celestial events are portents after all ...

Subscriptions
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The Pendragon Society investigates Arthurian history and archaeology, legend, myth and folklore, literature and the arts

PENDRAGON

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PENDRAGON 99
AGM / weekend

Dear Members

Well, we have been working away again behind the scenes preparing for this year's Pendragon AGM and open evening at **Glastonbury**. I hope this year we get an even better response, because if we could get this going it could be a great annual event for the members.

As you know we looked at various locations and venues to hold this event but we had a few false starts and a couple of let downs, so we decided to return to Glastonbury.

The main reason for this is the **Library of Avalon,** our venue for the evening. The Library again has generously donated the use of their hall for no charge, enabling us to put on this weekend at no cost to our members.

Although we will not be charging any fee there will be a donation box at the entrance to the library and we ask members if they would make a small donation towards the running of the Library.

I suggest we meet in the Abbey car park at 12.45 for a 1.00 start. As we toured the Abbey last time I suggest we go to the **Chalice Well** gardens this year. But this is open to suggestions - if enough people would rather tour the Abbey that would be no problem!

Later in the afternoon there will be enough time to browse the many shops within the town, many selling Arthurian books and gifts.

Last year some of the feedback I got concerned the lack of time people had to converse and mix with each other so this year I have tried to keep this in mind.

The **AGM** will start earlier this year, at 6pm in the Library of Avalon. This part of the evening will be for Pendragon members only (partners would of course be welcome as well) This would last for no more than one hour.

7-9pm would be the open part of the evening and I think we have a good and very interesting line up. We will start with our editor Chris Lovegrove talking about the **early years** of the Pendragon Society, followed by our former editor Fred Stedman-Jones talking about the more **recent years** of the Society.

This will be followed by a selection of Arthurian **poetry and verse** read by Andrew H W Smith. Andrew is a member of the Oxford Arthurian Society and the editor of their journal *Ceridwen's Cauldron*.

The last speaker of the evening will be Mark Valentine, published author and Pendragon member. His talk will focus on **The Holy Grail in English fiction**.

We will also have a few special guests who include the renowned Arthurian writer Geoffrey Ashe, and Helen Hollick, Pendragon member and fiction author. As with last year, both of the above have kindly offered to sign any of their books that the members bring along. We will be running a **raffle** again so all those authors, artists, singers *etc*, who would like to donate signed copies of their work, we would be most grateful.

We should finish off before 10pm so I for one will head for the local hostelry - anybody wishing to join me would be most welcome!

On Sunday we will head for **Cadbury** again. People said last year how much they enjoyed walking around the old hillfort so we will repeat it this year. Chris Lovegrove has said he will be able to join us this year and has kindly offered to share his knowledge of the site and the Cadbury-Camelot sixties dig.

Last year we had an impromptu get together on the top of the hill with everybody sitting on the ramparts telling of their Arthurian experiences, so this year we are going to try and expand this a bit and have a theme: 'the spark that lit the flame of your Arthurian interest'. If everybody could say a few words about themselves and their interest in Arthur then it could be a very good informal chat in a beautiful location. [Do however bring suitable clothing, as the site is quite exposed and who knows what October will be like!]

Could people wishing to attend the weekend (or just the day) please let me know so I have an idea on numbers. I can be contacted by mail, e-mail or phone (answerphone if I am not in).

See you all in Glastonbury!

Regards

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◆ *For accommodation contact Glastonbury Tourist Information Centre, The Tribunal, 9 High Street, Glastonbury BA6 9DP, tel* 01458 32954

Letters

THE CELTIC WEST

Very pleased to let myself get distracted from what should've been doing into reading new *Pendragon* [*The Celtic West XXVII* 3]. Very intrigued by the many skulls of St John [Tristan Gray Hulse's "More Relics of the Grail"]. The "head cult" element makes me wonder if that's why the church put his day on June 24, to make more palatable the takeover of Celtic midsummer ritual/festival - the days are so near as to seem unlikely to be coincidental.

The mention of horse cults in the Mark/Tristan context [Tala Bar's "Tristan and Isolde"] reminded me of seeing yet again fairly recently a newspaper article about the persistence of attacks on horses, particularly eyes, genitalia, manes, tails, and necks. The various odd features mentioned - that no one to date has been caught, in a pattern of such ritual-sounding mutilations over many years, and that the people concerned, whoever they may be, are clearly used to handling horses, *ie* not just random town-based vandals - makes me wonder if it is a very debased survival of some form of horse cult. Have the attacks ever been analysed for regional focus (*ie* whether there is any geographical association with sites of shrines of Epona) or seasonal pattern?

I could appreciate Gwilym ap Iorwerth's feelings ["Stolen Past"] but I suspect it's a cry for the moon, and not just because "the verdict of folksingers is irreversible". The Arthur story in a sense is like a wheel: the hub of whatever original events bred it, the spokes of takeover by invaders - following the ancient pattern of incomers adopting the gods and heroes of those they overcome/displace - and the rim of the chivalric/literary overlay are now so mutually interlocked as to be impossible to disentangle. Even if tomorrow a Byzantine merchant-spy's report turned up with full historical facts, the other elements wouldn't go away, because they also serve so many needs.

Steve Sneyd, Huddersfield, W Yorks

GOOSE CHASE

This character Stuart Pendragon [XXVII 3] - fascinating! But who would want to be the long lost half-brother of Prince Charles - there are enough weirdoes in the 'Royal Family' already!

I feel it is necessary to make some comment concerning Neil L Thomas's "Gwyddbwyll & Fox and Geese". Writing from Japan, however, I do not have access to my files and can't cross-reference the following; I only hope my memory serves me well enough.

I am pretty sure that *gwyddbwyll* is a game of two opposing armies, one led by a king. The king's object is to reach the edge of the board (possibly to the cordoned-off areas on the far corners since any edge seems too simple!). The enemy's aim is to capture the king by surrounding him on four sides. It is not a one-piece-against-the-rest game! In the process the king is protected by his bodyguard and fights occur. This happens when a piece is surrounded on two sides, at which point a piece is removed, or possibly a dice is thrown to determine the outcome of the confrontation!

The story of Maxen riding out with 32 kings is probably a coincidence. Fox & Geese was probably introduced into Britain by the French, in the same way that Chess grew in popularity having come from the Middle East but originating in India (or was it China?). The number 33 seems doubtful to me. I can't remember exactly how many pieces were used by the king had, I think, eight bodyguards. This fits in well with Celtic tradition, *eg* Cunedda and his eight sons. The opposing army, set at four edges, probably numbered at least twice as many. A small board of 7x7, like the Ballinderry one, is likely to have had 25 pieces - bodyguard of eight, the king and sixteen enemy. A bigger board - 9x9 (which has been found) - probably had more enemy. The empty spaces (squares or holes) were necessary for movement.

The Caergwrle Bowl I must add was not found in Gwynedd but near the town of Caergwrle in Flintshire. A replica of the bowl is kept at the little museum in the county town of Mold, not far from the site of the Arthurian Collection at the Library HQ on County Campus.

Gwyddbwyll is probably Irish in origin, though it is possible it is either much older, or much later, there being Scandinavian versions of it. To play devil's advocate, it should be pointed out that there were Viking connections in Ireland, and Wales had considerable contact with that country. For example, Gruffydd ap Cynan's mother was Irish-Viking, and Gruffydd was born and brought up in Ireland. Later, he recovered his rightful inheritance and introduced many Irish influences to Gwynedd!

What I am sure of is that 'axes' don't play any part in the name *gwyddbwyll*! *Gwydd* can also mean "weaver" and "loom" and *bwyaill* (plural *bwyeill*) mutates into *fwyaill*, giving *gwyddfwyaill* not *gwyddbwyll*. Therefore I accept the standard derivation of the name. Certainly, a *gwydd* is a goose, but it is also connected with "science", *gwyddoniaeth* and *gwyddor*, the latter being *Yr Wyddor*, the alphabet.

Dr Thomas is correct to point out the various references in the collection called the Mabinogion, but it should be pointed out that all three are late, and "The Dream of Rhonabwy", chronologically, the last! The latter is very complicated and has become used for various interpretations, though I doubt it is as mysterious as some would like!

Gwyddbwyll coming from *fidchell* may have some connection to *ogham*, that unique way of cutting into stone or wood. The cuts always number up to five and it may be connected with the four directions and centre, as Dr Thomas points out! Celtic symbolism makes use of certain numbers. Three is predominant, but four, five, seven, eight and nine and variables of three can also be found. Eight is strange! Take for example the Welsh for one week, *wythnos* (*wyth+nos*, eight-night) and *pythefnos* "fortnight" (*pwy*, *wyth*, *nos*, two-eight-night, sixteen nights). Three times three and 3 x 3 x 3 is possibly connected to the lunar month.

Anyway, I doubt *gwyddbwyll* is connected with Fox and Geese - though I could be wrong!

Charles Evans-Günther, Japan

◆ *Charles has also provided a couple of fascinating articles, one on Maelgwn, the other on Jesus and Arthur, both of which should appear in due course.*

DARK AGE SAINTS

The Dark-Age Saints theme works very well, and makes for a pleasingly unified issue. (I think the stricter themes work better: something as loose as *Avatars of Arthur* could include anything, and so fails in its purpose of shaping the issue.)

When the Oxford Arthurian Society visited Llanderfel in the late eighties, it was apparent that Derfel's supposed horse had feet that were more like a stag's than a horse's [*see Helene K Matthews "Saint Derfel" last issue*]. There is also supposed to be a stone trough known as 'Derfel's bath' somewhere in the parish, but we didn't have time to search for it. Readers of David Jones's *Anathemata* may like to know that the 'English sixteenth-century rhyme' that mentions 'Davy Dervel Gatheren' (p 151 of the Faber edition) runs in full:

David Darvell Gatheren
As saith the Welshmen,
Fetched outlaws out of hell;
Now is he come with spere and shilde,
In harness to burn in Smithfelde,
For in Wales he may not dwell.

And Forest the Friar,
That obstinate liar,
That wilfullie shal be dead,
In his contumacie
The gospell doth denie,
The King to be supreme head.

This was posted on Forest's gallows (15th May 1538) and appears (with appropriate changes of tense) as part of a ballad dealing with the contemporary destruction of images, called *The Fantasies of Idolatrie* (printed in Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, v 404). The words 'with spere and shilde, / In harness' represent about all we know of the image's appearance.

Andrew H W Smith, Oxford

◆ *Andrew, who is editor of* ***Ceridwen's Cauldron****, has also promised a reply to Tristan Gray Hulse's St Meriadog piece of last issue.*

Pleased to see the Spring issue of *Pendragon* ... An interesting issue, certainly. I'm not very up on the Welsh / South-western British saints, but there were some interesting coincidences between the various ones covered. I can't help feeling there's something of potentially large significance in the various girdles / scarves / belts being used to lead the suddenly quiescent dragon away from its lair. The ancient Mesopotamians seem to have known a dragon they called "the dread girdle", and there is some evidence to suggest this may have been repeated as the constellation we now recognise as Draco the Dragon, wrapped round the ecliptic pole, and perpetually near the sky's rotational pole as well. Getting the connection to survive so far across time is the tricky part.

Alastair McBeath, Morpeth, Northumberland

◆ *Alastair's perspicacious comments about recent TV programmes appear in the Reviews section.*

I have to admit that I'm not very interested in saints, being an atheist, though I do revel in the bizarre names of some of the Cornish saints. Most of these don't appear in the *Penguin Dictionary of Saints* - not even Saint Nectan of the famous Kieve (glen). My own favourite is St Veep - delightful name - don't know if male or female, but there's a small village named for him / her, between Lostwithiel and Fowey. Not in the dictionary saints; not even in G H Doble's *Saints of Mid-Cornwall* - in fact, the only place I can find a mention is is Arthur Mee's *The King's England: Cornwall*, which just gives a brief description of the 14th century church.

The only St Agnes in the dictionary is the famous 4th century martyr - Roman - but 'our' St Agnes has both a town and a Scilly island named after her. The town is only three miles north of here, and boasts a beacon on which a Midsummer Eve bonfire used to be lit every year, until some old fusspot decided to clap heavy insurance on the event, which the Old Cornwall Society couldn't afford.

There is also a legend concerning the lovesick Giant Bolster, and how Agnes dealt with him. Visitors are assured that they can still see the Giant's blood on the rocks of the cave below Chapel Porth. (It's a type of red lichen, but it makes a good yarn ...) Incidentally, Agnes was one of several who were said to have come here from Ireland, sailing on various unlikely sea-crafts such as millstones, cabbage leaves *etc*.

Beryl Mercer, Truro, Cornwall

◆ *St Nectan's Kieve is by Tintagel, and imagined since the early 20th century to be where the grail quest was begun. Other items about Tintagel appear in* **The Board***. Beryl has also sent in a version of the St Agnes / Giant Bolster story which should find a future place in these pages.*

SAINT GAWAIN

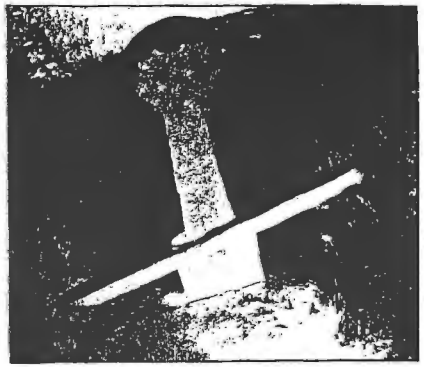
[Medieval Italy is] one of many periods I keep meaning to read up on again - some wonderful stories, my favourite being of Ariosto, when governor of a thieves' kitchen in the Apennines called Garfagnana, attempting to keep order by summoning the troublemakers and reading interminable extracts from *Orlando Furioso* and asking for their comments (cruel and unusual punishment?) as his masters had given him insufficient troops to keep order.

Re your own comments ["From San Galgano to Sir Galahad"] I wondered if the "contamination" had a common source for both the Arthurian and Galgano sword-in-stone episodes in the Branstock business in the Volsung Saga, where Odin at the feast plants in the oak support of the roof the sword which all are challenged to try to withdraw, and fatal discord follows - as, although the versions of the Saga preserved are latish, it is believed to draw on very early Germanic matter, and would have certainly been early enough to influence the other two.

Steve Sneyd, Huddersfield, W Yorks

Congratulations on another splendid issue... I enjoyed all the articles, but was specially intrigued by the one about St Galgano, and your fascinating idea of his two-way relationship to Arthurian literature - *ie* after being given an Arthurian name he contributed a new motif to the legend. I wonder if the erudite T H White knew of the Saint and his friendliness to animals, and thought of this when he had all those animal friends encourage the Wart to pull out the sword.

W M S Russell, Reading, Berks



THE CAMELOT PROJECT

Congratulations on the latest *Pendragon* issue. It's good, *Pendragon* seems to get better and better.

Curiosity finally got the better of me and I journey'd down to Tintagel and Worthyvale Manor to get the lowdown on what was going on there. It all turns out to be very interesting... The key figure down there is Dan Parsons, a very engaging and hospitable chap... The place is full of possibilities and he has gone a long way towards realising them. As always there is a tension between commercialism, which is necessary to ensure a viable cash flow, and his wish to create something of worth in an Arthurian context. I'm sure more is going to come of all this, but it's early days. I'll keep you posted...

◆ *See* **The Board** *for more details on The Camelot Project. Forrester Roberts has produced a number of popular posters on Arthurian and related subjects. Some are in both English and French versions, including* ***L'Esprit de la Croisade*** *(from which illustrations for his article "The Big Sting" XXVII No 1 were taken).*

It's my theory that much of the Arthurian mystique stems from that disgusting event [the Albigensian holocaust] *ie* intense religious inclinations were screwed out of existence by the church forcing them to spring up in another guise. If you had an edition on origins of Arthurian legend, I could possibly try a piece on that.

Forrester Roberts, Tuffley, Glos

◆ ***Well, readers, what do you think? Can you get excited by Origins of the Arthurian legend*** *as a theme?* ***Humour*** *seems to be a dead duck!*

ARTHUR, BOADICEA AND THE ICKNIELD

Odd the coincidences you find. I spotted a letter in *The Independent* for 27th July commenting on Boadicea's burial beneath platform 10 at King's Cross (not Paddington as Geoff Simmons suggests in *Pendragon* [last issue] page 5), referring to a piece on the subject in the same newspaper on July 15th, which latter I missed. The letter writer, David Hibbert, comments that the re-numbering of the platforms there now means her burial must be under platform 8, not 10, doubtless vital only for pilgrims to the site ...

The weekly *Independent* letter on Boadicea / Boudicca (*etc etc*) cropped up again (5th August, letters page), this time laying the King's Cross burial site at the feet of those fine old Victorian antiquarians (busy, busy people...). The author, David Hayes, signing himself "Associate Editor, *Camden History Review*", goes instead for her suicide "at an unknown spot in the Midlands, on the line of the A5"; perhaps wisely, he doesn't go on to suggest a possible burial site at all. Apparently, "historians generally agree" on this as a site for her death. Historians agreeing? That really would be a novelty ...

Following on with Geoff's letter, I'm not sure how many people would necessarily link up the Icknield Way with the Ridgeway at Goring (though the tracks certainly seem as if they should flow into one another there), while carrying it on past Uffington's White Horse to Cerne Abbas is entirely speculative, since I know of no ancient trackway nor even a Roman road which follows the course he suggests (based on the OS maps and also Ivan Margary's authoritative text, *Roman Roads in Britain*, London 1973).

There is also the question of how the Roman road later called Ryknild Street fits into all of this. Such ancient road-name duplication is extremely common in the UK, and cannot realistically be used to imply any kind of definitive link with this or that tribe / people / leader (see my essay "The Watling Streets of Britain" in *3rd Stone 29*, 1998). As far as I'm aware, such names cannot be traced back beyond the Saxons in any case.

In addition, numerous Roman road also have important sites alongside them, along with places that have associated myths and legends. I suppose this is inevitable as they continued in use through till the time of the turnpikes in places (*eg* the Roman road and bridge over the Tyne were still in good repair in 1201 when John came north treasure hunting in the remains of the Roman fort at Corbridge). Despite all this, I still thought Geoff's thesis was entertaining, and, who knows, he may be right!

Alastair McBeath, Morpeth, Northumbria

Uther's Soliloquy

The Black Wind casts its Daemons to the Night
Crost Jeru's gate, an ill-starred flag unfurled
Proclaims the Maker's hand upon the fight
And Uther's doom. The dragon-coloured world
Devours itself in rolling shrouds of mist
A sinful love -- A mighty Kingdom lost!
Accursed these lips of mine, Damnation kissed
Accursed my wayward Spirit, tempest tossed
Eternally thorough Night's Stygian heart.
How cruel Man's earth-bound lot
where Love destroys
And is itself destroyed, for Death must part
Each Soul from each and all from Lovers' joys.
My sinful love! My own heart's wife, Ygraine!
Tonight my death is written in the stars --
Tomorrow I shall leave this world of pain
This night -- this one grim night alone is ours
A night of untold terrors, countless charms --
And tho it mark the end of Uther's reign
I only pray you'll take me in your arms
And be my wanton lover once again

Michael Pendragon

◆ *We welcome letters for publication, though these may be shortened for reasons of space. If any correspondence is* **not** *for publication please let us know at the time of writing.*

Reappraising Gawain

Pagan Champion or Christian Knight?

John Matthews

Gawain is without doubt one of the most popular figures in the Arthurian cycle. However, despite this popularity, a curious contradiction exists concerning the way in which he is portrayed.

In the Celtic texts which record his earliest exploits, Gawain is a hero of tremendous stature and abilities. He "never came home without the Quest he had gone to seek" it says in the Mabinogion story of *Culhwch and Olwen*. "He was the best of walkers and the best of riders. He was Arthur's nephew, his sister's son, and the first among his companions." Elsewhere, in that marvellous collection of Celtic story-themes known as the Triads, we are told that Gawain is among the "Three Fearless Men of the Island of Britain", and that he was "the most courteous to guests and strangers". In a later text, he very nearly becomes Emperor of Rome.

And yet, in the Middle Ages, from the 13th century onwards, with few exceptions a very different image is projected. Here, in texts like the *Prose Tristan* and the *Queste del Saint Graal*, Gawain is cowardly, discourteous, and a libertine. He is persistently criticised and unfavourably compared with other knights such as Lancelot and Perceval. Finally, in Malory's great book *Le Morte D'Arthur*, he is portrayed a murderer, capable of fanatical hatred which leads to a bloody vendetta.

How did this come about, and, more importantly, why did it happen at all? Of what crime, or association, was Gawain guilty in the eyes of the Medieval clerks and romancers, which called for this systematic blackening of his character?

The usual answer, from those who have noticed the phenomenon, is to say that Gawain was displaced from his position of superiority by other heroes - most notably Lancelot, who became the best of the Round Table Fellowship at the expense of earlier figures. To a certain extent this is true, but I believe there is another reason.

Put simply, I believe that Gawain was a unique figure within the Arthurian corpus, who represented the last dying strains of an ancient theme - one which dated back to the very earliest days of Celtic story-telling, and which incorporated even earlier religious beliefs. Gawain, I believe, was the Champion of the Goddess, and I had better say right away what precisely I mean by "goddess" in this context - as well as what the role of Champion entailed.

Romano-Celtic goddess from Ashcroft, Cirencester (Chris Lovegrove)

Goddess

It is difficult to say with any degree of certainty just what the Celts understood by the term Goddess, or what, for that matter, it meant to certain other people in the Middle Ages. Celtic religious beliefs are still little understood, though

we do know that they worshipped deities of wood and water, sky and sea - indeed that each of the elements was of prime importance to them. So that when they spoke of Goddesses they were probably thinking of what we would call an abstract principle, represented in the form of a woman.

The best example of this is the Goddess of Sovereignty, with whom Gawain, as we shall see, had a particular relationship. For the Celts, particularly the Irish, the concept of Sovereignty, as of kingship, was of a unique kind of link with the earth itself. Thus the King was believed literally to mate with the Goddess of the Land - the otherworldly representative of the particular area over which he reigned. Without the sanction of Sovereignty thus gained he could not rule wisely or honestly, or ensure that the Kingdom remained strong and virile.

By the period of the Middle Ages much of this had been forgotten - or at least re-assimilated. It takes many hundreds of generations for a new set of religious beliefs to supersede an earlier strata, and that while the process is taking place a situation exists in which the shadowy forms of earlier traditions mingle with those of the new.

This is the situation which existed during most of the time the Gawain romances were being composed, and reactions to it came in two distinct forms. There were those who took the stories that came to them, mostly from wandering singers and story-tellers, and who simply turned them into Medieval romances by dressing them in the fashions of the time. And there were those who saw these same stories as an opportunity to put forward the tenets of Christianity in a unique form, and who recognised the "pagan" origins of much of what they saw. It is to these writers that we owe the degraded view of Gawain, who saw in him a champion of the old ways and sought to discredit him in the eyes of the world.

In considering this view we must not allow ourselves to forget that the subject of belief, of faith and theological teaching, was much more to the fore in educated society than it is today. Yet it was among the so-called "ordinary" people that the stories that went into the making of the Matter of Britain originated. In the process of becoming literary creations, they underwent a considerable degree of change and adaptation - to suit both the era and the audience.

Champion

Gawain thus began life as a simple Celtic hero and ended it as one of the best loved and most complex figures in the Arthurian cycle. Yet it seems that even then the authors who chose him for their hero - or who found him almost forced upon them - did not wholly understand him. Hence their often ambiguous attitude to his character, which resulted in what becomes, at times, an almost comic misinterpretation of the facts.

In several stories from the 13th century onwards the treatment of Gawain is almost burlesque - see for example the story of *Meraugis de la Portlegues*, where, among other things, Gawain is required to dress as a woman! However, in the same story there is another aspect of his characterisation which points to a very different understanding of his character. Here Gawain is discovered, having defeated an earlier incumbent, as Champion to the Lady of the Castle. And we are told that whoever becomes the champion must remain there until a better man appears.

This is a very ancient theme indeed. It is summarised conveniently in Fraser's *Golden Bough* under the heading "Rex Nemorensis" or King of the Wood. It dates back to a time before history when the idea of annual kingship was still practised. In this, the chosen candidate, having undergone various tests and trials - including his mating with the reigning Queen - became king for a year. At the end of that time he had to do battle with a new contender, a combat which he was not allowed to win. So a new King was appointed and the whole cycle began again.

Gradually, the period of rulership became extended. The Old King perhaps found substitutes who fought and died on his behalf. Only the Queen, the earthly representative of the Goddess, continued her uninterrupted reign, watching the cycle of Champions come and go. Eventually, the role of the champion likewise became subtly altered, merging with that of the King himself and extending beyond the boundary of a single year. It is this role which I believe Gawain inherited from the many nameless heroes who had gone before. It was to ensure his continuing fame, and at the same time cause him to be steadily degraded into the unsympathetic figure we find in Malory and elsewhere.

Origins

So much for theory. What textual evidence can we find to support it? There is, in fact, a considerable amount, but before we look further at this we should pause for a moment to reflect on Gawain's origins.

As we have seen, the earliest references are in Celtic story and tradition. Here he is known as *Gwalchmai*, the Hawk of May, and earns a considerable reputation as a hero. However, it is his relationship to Arthur which is most often emphasised. He is generally described as being the son of Arthur's sister and King Lot of Orkney - the name of his mother being variously given

as Anna, Gwyar, Morcades, and finally Morgause, which continues unchanged into the time of Malory.

Each of these ladies has an interesting history. Gwyar, whose name appears in several early texts, is believed to derive from an ancient Celtic word which has the meaning "to shed blood". The great Celtic scholar Sir John Rhys thought this probably meant that Gawain's mother had at one time been a Battle Goddess - and this is borne out by the identification of Morcades/Morgause. Both derive, by a complex series of mythic relationships, from the figure of the Irish War Goddess known as the Morrigan. She it was who became an implacable enemy of the hero Cuchulainn, eventually engineering his death where all others had failed. This in itself is significant because it can be proved that Gawain derives many of his heroic abilities from Cuchulainn; while the Morrigan also metamorphosed into an even more famous character from the Arthurian legends - Morgan le Fay.

So, we have, at the beginning of the Middle Ages, a character whose adventures were still only circulating orally, but who was soon to become a great literary hero, who derives many of his abilities from even earlier heroes, and whose mother may well be a Goddess of War.

With these elements in mind it is not really surprising that the first major appearance of Gawain in Arthurian literature show him as a brilliant soldier, and a valiant knight - for as such he is portrayed in both Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Brittaniae*, the *Bruts* of Wace and Layamon, and the various anonymous Welsh chronicles which derive from them. The first signs we have of the direction which Gawain's career is about to take come in a much neglected Latin romance known as *De Ortu Waluuanii nepotis Arthurii* or The Rise of Gawain, Nephew of Arthur.

The Rise of Gawain

De Ortu Waluuanii tells a strange and extraordinary tale of Gawain's youthful exploits how he was abandoned by his mother after she bore him illegitimately to Lot. Given into the care of some rich merchants, he is taken to Europe where a fisherman steals him again - along with considerable treasure - and brings him up as his own son. After a few years the fisherman travels to Rome and sets himself up as a wealthy nobleman. He soon comes to the attention of the Emperor and becomes his close confidant. His son is enrolled in the Emperor's personal guard and rises quickly through the ranks, astonishing everyone with his grace, courtliness and bravery. Finally, the fisherman turned courtier falls ill and, near to death confesses all, handing letters to the emperor which prove that Gawain is the rightful nephew of King Arthur.

More adventures follow, as Gawain goes from strength to strength, being adopted by the Emperor, leading his armies against various enemies, defeating a pirate Queen, and finally, on the death of the Emperor, being offered the throne of the Empire. At this moment news comes from Britain of the Saxon invasion, and Gawain decides to lead a relief force to help Arthur. In Britain of course his real identity is revealed, and he decides to remain there, already beginning to prove himself a worthy knight.

Service

This story shows to what extent writers at this point saw Gawain as an exemplary hero - and indeed there is a tradition which continues to see him in this light, despite an increasing number of texts which take a contrary view. It seems that the belief in Gawain as a representative of something important refused to die. In one version of the *Prose Tristan* - the most strongly anti-Gawain text of any - one reader or owner has systematically crossed out the hero's name and substituted that of his less popular brother Gaheries! (An early form of censorship!)

Three texts which present Gawain in a wholly positive light - and which incidentally carry our argument to something like a triumphal conclusion, are the Middle-English *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*; the less well-known *Marriage of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnall*; and a Middle High German poem by Heinrich von dem Tulin called *Diu Crone* or The Crown.

Within the structure of the first two poems, both of which originated in a part of the country - the West Midlands - rich in ancient culture and Goddess lore, Gawain is rigorously tested by the earthly representative of a Goddess. A test which involves the question of sovereignty in *Gawain and Ragnall*, and of the yearly test of the

Beheading Game in *Gawain and the Green Knight*. The combination of these two gives us a scenario in which Gawain is tested by the Goddess, passes her trial, and receives as his reward her favours - marrying or mating with her just as the ancient Year Kings once did in order to win their tenure as her Champion.

In the German poem, alone among the dozens of texts dealing with the quest for the Grail, Gawain is successful in achieving this highest of Christian spiritual goals. And, interestingly, he is enabled to do so through the help of another Goddess, the great medieval figure of Fortuna (Fortune), who brings her endlessly turning wheel of fate to a halt when Gawain enters the hall of her castle, and whose advice gives him the necessary understanding to complete his task.

Thus in all three texts Gawain is successful in his tasks because of his relationship or service to a Goddess. Just how clearly the medieval authors recognised these facts we cannot say with any degree of certainty. That they knew something of the truth is indicated by the manner of Gawain's gradual descent from hero to murderer and libertine. Yet even in the latter case, where he is constantly portrayed as light of love, as being unable to remain faithful to any one woman for more than a day, even here we can see a reflection of his original role. He who was the servant and champion of the Goddess of course loved all women as her earthly representatives. To the medieval, and especially the Christian interpreters of the story this could only be seen in the way it was, by making Gawain an opportunist who played upon his fame and good looks to enable him to bed as many women as possible. Only in a few romances, such as those examined here, did a distant echo of his original role remain, embedded in the marvellous adventures of the Round Table knights.

The Beheading Game (above)
The Green Man (Ian Brown)

Sources

For a full exploration of Gawain see my book: *Gawain, Knight of the Goddess* (Thorsons 1990).
For the main texts mentioned in this article see:
M L Day *ed trans* (1984) *De Ortu Waluuanii* (Garland, New York)
J W Thomas *ed trans* (1989) *Diu Crone* (University of Nebraska)
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The Birth of a Literary Character

Sir Lancelot in Chrétien de Troyes' Le Chevalier de la Charrete

Edward Ford

In their 1994 *From Scythia to Camelot* C Scott Littleton and Linda Malcor suggest a derivation for the name Lancelot: "might the name in question be derived from an as-yet unattested sobriquet 'Alanus à Lot', that is, 'the Alan of Lot'?"[1] The problem with this unattested definition is that it fails to take into consideration the literary context in which the name Lancelot first appears. It is only by examining the name Lancelot within the context of *Le Chevalier de la Charrete* that we can come to an appreciation of its origin.

The name Lancelot is recognized by scholars as being a late addition to Arthurian literature which first appears shortly after 1160 in the Chrétien de Troyes poem *Le Chevalier de la Charrete* ("The Knight of the Cart"). Thus it is to this poem and to this poem alone that all question of the origins of Sir Lancelot's name must be directed.[2]

In this essay I will suggest that a close reading of the context in which Lancelot's name first appears actually enables us to witness the birth of a literary character. I will argue that the name Lancelot was originally not a name designating a person but a title, *l'ancelot* ("the servant"), designating a social function: service. I will further argue that some of Lancelot's actions in the latter half of the poem may be explained as being based on the *ancilia* otherwise known as the shields of Mars.

Examples of names taken from social functions are commonplace. Millers, carters, carpenters and wrights were all social roles which became family names. First there was the function of, let us say, a carter, then along came an individual who performed the task of a carter so memorably that he and his descendants became known as carters. The use of the title as a name is a secondary development.

In a like manner I would suggest that the term *l'ancelot* designated the social function of service until one individual knight came along who fulfilled the role so spectacularly in Chrétien de Troyes' poem that he assumed the name Lancelot.

Such an interpretation means that all of the evidence is contained within this particular poem. There is no need to posit mysterious lost sources for Lancelot's origin. The poem itself offers us a chance to observe the birth of a literary character.

Before examining the name Lancelot itself, which does not occur until just after the midpoint of the poem, let us begin by examining the title by which the knight is known throughout the first half of the poem, "The Knight of the Cart".[3]

Titles

First, and most importantly, we notice that the title "The Knight of the Cart" is not a name. It is a title which does not refer to a particular person in the modern sense of an individual, but rather to whomsoever would assume the title of "The Knight of the Cart" by mounting into a cart. It is only after an unnamed knight appears in the woods and climbs into a cart that he is thenceforth known as The Knight of the Cart. Thus, the title is indicative of a social role, and, as with the titles May King and May Queen,[4] the role is of more importance than the individual who plays it.

Significantly, throughout the poem The Queen is referred to by her title, as "The Queen", and not by her name. Only twice in the entire poem is "The Queen" named and these instances are easily explained.[5] Thus, even doubters must concede that the heroine of *Le Chevalier de la Charrete* is designated by title and that the hero is designated by title throughout the entire first half of the poem. These characters do not have names, they have titles. This underscores the fact that the poem is describing social roles; and that we should not assume that the poem is about actual individuals. T H White's *The Once and Future King*, for example, assumes that the Arthurian characters are actual people and develops a fanciful story. But this is a modern reading which has little to do with the original texts.

The word "Lancelot" first appears just after the middle of the poem in the scene where "The Knight" is battling Meleagant in his attempt to liberate "The Queen". A serving girl (in Latin *ancilla*) asks his identity and is told *Lanceloz del Lac* (line 3660).[6] Through his attempt to rescue The Queen, The Knight reveals himself to be in her majesty's service; and it is understandable that it is only at this point, when he comes within her sight for the first time in the poem, that he takes on this new title.[7]

Service

Lancelot's serving The Queen, coupled with the presence of the serving girl (*ancilla*) provide insurmountable contextual evidence that the name "Lancelot" is simply derived from the old French word *ancel* meaning "servant" (Latin *ansel* whence "ancillary" in Modern English).[8] Such a derivation of the word "Lancelot" draws strong support from Sir John Rhys' Welsh derivation of the name of Lancelot's opponent Meleagant:

> Maelgwas, which six centuries earlier would have been Maglouassos, readily analyses itself into *mael* and *gwas*, the latter of which means a youth or young man, also a servant.[9]

The two derivations fit together perfectly. "Lancelot" and "Meleagant" were bitter opponents because they were simply two young men vying for the title of the Queen's servant.

In summation, the name "Lancelot" was originally not a name but a title like the titles The Knight of the Cart and The Queen, and The Cart.[10] This interpretation is not original:

> The origin of the name Lancelot has been a subject of considerable debate among scholars, and has given rise to the most widely differing explanations. M de la Villemarqué, who was a warm advocate of the Welsh origin of the Arthurian stories, derived the name from the French *l'ancelot*, a youth or servant, which he held to be a translation of the Welsh Melwas, or Maelwas (Weston 8).

This interpretation was opposed by none less than Gaston Paris who argued that there was no evidence of "Lancelot" being used as a proper name which, of course, misses the point that it was a title, not a name. With such a noted authority against it, the derivation from *l'ancelot* has been generally ignored throughout the twentieth century.[11] However, as we have already seen, Gaston Paris' assumption that the characters in the poem have names rather than titles was false. M de la Villemarqué's derivation was correct in so far as the French part of it is concerned. With regard to Welsh sources, I view them as illusory and in a moment shall argue for the classical origin of the latter parts of the poem.

Death

It now remains for us to define the social roles to which the knight in question's two titles refer. Let us first return to Lancelot's original title "The Knight of the Cart".

In the title "The Knight of the Cart", the word "cart" is not the name of an individual cart, but rather it refers to one specific type of cart in general. The poet makes this clear when he writes that this "type" of cart was kept in most villages for a specific purpose:

> *De ce servoit charrete lores*
> *don li pilori servent ores,*
> *et en chascune boene vile,*
> *ou or en a plus de trois mile,*
> *n'en avoit a cel tans que une,*
> *et cele estoit a ces comune,*
> *ausi con li pilori sont,*
> *a ces qui murtre et larron sont,*
> *et a ces qui sont chanp cheü,*
> *et as larrons qui ont eü*
> *autrui avoir par larrecin*
> *ou tolu par force an chemin:*
> *qui a forfet estoit repris*
> *s'estoit sor la charrete mis*
> *et menez par totes les rues.*[12]

(In those day carts served the function of our pillories; and in every sizeable town in which there are more than three thousand now, there was only one then that was jointly used, like our pillories, for murderers and robbers, for those defeated in trials by combat, for thieves who had made off with other people's goods or taken it by force on the roads. The convicted criminal was set on the cart and led through all the street.)

In this passage the author seeks to explain the meaning of the term *charrete*. The word *charrete* is always translated into modern French and English literally as "cart", for indeed that is what it means. Yet the author was dissatisfied with such a simple use of the word and felt it incumbent upon him to add an explanation so that the exact function of the vehicle would be clear to his readers: *ausi con li pilori sont* ("carts served the function of our pillories"). A pillory is a stock whose function is to expose criminals and various malefactors to public ridicule; and this is just what happens in the poem where the public ridicules The Knight for riding in the cart.

Thus it is to a particular type of badly viewed cart that the author is at pains to show that he is referring. Given the author's own reservations about the term *charrete* and his concern that readers understand its function, I would venture the hypothesis that the word *charrete* is an example of what is known as a linguistic "false friend" - a word which would seem to translate literally but does not. Could it be more effectively translated into modern English by the term "hearse"? Today hearses are a stylized type of vehicle that are readily recognisable, found in all sizeable villages, reserved for one particular function, and, naturally, before the advent of automobiles, they were a type of cart.

Such a translation of the word *charrete* is, of course, entirely hypothetical. Yet, were we to translate the title of the poem as *The Knight of the Hearse*, then The Knight's identity and function would become glaringly clear. The

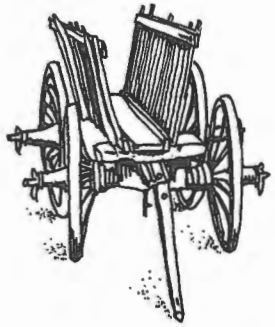
Knight would be representing death. "The Knight of the Hearse" would then be the central character in the European-wide Lenten or spring ritual that is generally termed by Frazer as "Carrying out Death".[13] The local practice described in the poem was apparently both ancient and widespread (having been practised in "every sizeable town") and "The Knight" was "led through all the streets" in order to carry out Death from all of its neighborhoods. The people marvelled at the appearance of The Knight for he was the central figure in the rite of spring that they were performing:

> *Del chevalier, que cil aporte*
> *sor la charret, se mervoillent*
> *les genz, mes mie nel consoillennt,*
> *einz le huient petit et grant,*
> *et le veillart et li anfant,*
> *parmi les rues a grant hui;*
> *s'ot molt li chevaliers de lui*
> *vilenies et despit dire* (402-9).

(The people marvelled at the sight of the knight riding in the cart. Not bothering to whisper, everyone, highborn and low, old and young shouted and jeered at him in the streets. The knight heard them uttering many vile reproaches about him.)

In vilifying The Knight who incarnates Death, the citizens are simply Death his due. They purge their hostile emotions at the same time that they purge their city of winter death.

Those familiar with European folk ritual will naturally recognize this cart from purificatory and death rites.[14] For example, in the spring of 1003 Pope Sylvester II's body was placed on a horse-drawn cart without a driver and was buried where the cart came to a stop.[15] The hearse itself may be seen in depictions of St Bavon of Ghent[16] as well as in Seznec's seminal study *The Survival of the Pagan Gods* which includes a series of illustrations of an effigy of the Roman god Mars both seated and standing in a cart carrying his sacred lance and shield (190-1).[17]



The weapons of Mars

Thus far we have seen that the characters' names are not in fact names but titles which designate their functions. Secondly we have observed that the "Knight of the Cart" was a Death figure involved in the annual ritual known as "carrying out death". Now we will examine annual spring rituals and notice a complex of references associating Lancelot with the *ancilia* - *ie* the sacred shields of Mars.

The practice of "carrying out death" - Death was also commonly known as the Old Mars or the Old Year - was only one half of an annual ceremony whose principal function was devoted to "bringing in life" with the month of March and the new year.[18] It is in connection with this latter half of the ritual that the sacred lances (*hasta*) and shields (*ancilia*) of Mars are associated. In ancient Rome these relics were kept in the Regia:

> A Roman commander "went into Mars' shrine and first moved the sacred shields, next the spear carried by the image itself, saying 'Mars, awake'. But we know that in the old days there was no image of Mars or anyone else to hold a spear in its hand; the earliest war-leaders, therefore, shook the *numen*-charged arms themselves, and in so doing aroused the *mana* of their god. The sanctuary no doubt was in the regia, and the interesting and significant thing is that the arms *were* Mars."[19]

The spirit of Mars was thought to be immanent in the sacred weapons and accordingly Mars, like the other Roman gods, was not originally personified. Mars was thought of as being asleep during the winter when his lances and shields - stylized versions of branches and leaves - were dormant. Every March the weapons were then awakened by the Salii who carried them in their sacred dances and songs.[20]

How is Lancelot associated with a spirit of vegetation or leaves and their symbol a shield?

After rescuing the Queen, Lancelot is imprisoned, whence he escapes to attend the tournament of Pomelegoi. He arrives the night before the tournament and stays in a tavern at the edge of town. He hangs his shield up on the outside of the door of his lodging: *Lanceloz ot mis son escu / A l'uis de son ostel defors* (5546-7, "Lancelot hung his shield up on the outside of the tavern door"). A passing Herald (*hyraut d'armes*) takes note of Lancelot's shield:

> *L'escu trova a l'uis devant,*
> *Si l'esgarda, mes ne pot estre*
> *Qu'il conëust lui ne son mestre*
> *Ne set qui porter le devoit* (5562-5).

(He noticed the shield on the outside of the door
And stared at it, but could not decide
If he knew it or its markings

Or who was allowed to carry it.)
There was apparently some law concerning who could carry such a distinctive shield. The Herald enters the tavern, recognizes Lancelot lying in bed, and then begins heralding (*ie* living up to his name "The Herald" which is the title of a function and not a name) the news that this is the knight who will be victorious at the tournament on the morrow.

On the whole, the scene is similar to the annual waking of the sacred shields (*ancilia*) and lances of Mars described above. At the tournament the next day Lancelot fights according to "The Queen"'s wishes and shows that he is eminently willing to be her servant. He is also victorious just as The Herald predicted.

Lancelot's final appearance in the poem comes a year later when he fights his ultimate battle with Meleagant; and this scene again associates him with a shield. Lancelot is late in arriving, and in his stead Gauvain accepts Meleagant's challenge. He dons Lancelot's armor, is armed, and then, just as Gauvain is reaching for his shield, Lancelot makes his sudden appearance:

Et voloit son escu prandre,
quant il vit devant lui descendre
Lancelot, don ne se gardoit.
A grant mervoille l'esgardoit
por ce qui si soudainnemant
est venuz; et, se je n'an mant,
mervoilles li sont avenues
ausins granz con s'il fust des nues
devant lui cheüz maintenant (6785-92).

(At the very moment when Gawain was about to take up his shield, he saw Lancelot whom he had not expected descend in front of him. Gawain marvelled at him because of his sudden appearance, and, if I do not lie, I will tell you that a miracle had occurred which was as great as if Lancelot had just now fallen out of the clouds at his feet.)

How should we interpret Lancelot's appearance "as if he had fallen out of the clouds" at Gauvain's feet? In Latin the term *ancile* specifically refers to the sacred shields of the god Mars (*ie* not shields in general which would have been *clivus* or *scutum*). That is why Lancelot appears just as Gauvain reaches for the shield. The scene is based on the story of the origin of the sacred *ancilia* of Mars that Ovid describes in *Fasti* under the heading March First:

credite dicenti: mira, sed acta, loquor.
a media caelum regione dehiscere coepit;
summisere oculos cum duce turba sup.
ecce levi scutum versatum leniter aura
decidit. a populo clamor ad astra venit.
tollit humo munus caesa prius ille iuvenca,
quae dederat nulli colla premenda iugo,
idque ancile vocat, quod ab omni parte recisum est.[21]

(Take my word for it: what I say is wonderful but true. At the Zenith the sky began to yawn; the multitude and their leader lifted up their eyes. Lo, swaying gently in the light breeze, a shield fell down. The people sent up a shout that reached the stars. The king lifted from the ground the gift, but not till he had sacrificed a heifer, which had never before submitted her neck to the burden of the yoke, and he called the shield *ancile*, because it was cut away [*recisum*] on all sides.)

The correlation between these two passages is such that we may safely assume that the Chrétien de Troyes poet (especially given the fact that he was well acquainted with Ovid's work) based the scene of Lancelot's sudden appearance directly on this passage from *Fasti*.[22]

The Green Man

The fact that the miraculous shield in question was in actuality a leaf enable us to identify Lancelot with Adonis who was often represented with leaves, usually Oak, in his mouth (as for example in the well known *Ianus Divi* bust; and often on coins the image of Adonis was replaced by garlands). This means that in our search for the origins of the character Sir Lancelot we must now look to Adonis figures associated with leaves. In England such depictions of Adonis survive in the form of the famous "Green Man", some fine illustrations of which are to be found in Lady Raglan's article "The 'Green Man' in Church Architecture" in *Folklore* magazine. The Green Man can be seen "in twenty-three counties of England, as well as in Midlothian,"[23] and he has a capital importance in religious architecture:

> [I]n many churches, it (the Green Man) is the sole decoration, and surely if we were about to choose one carving only for the decoration of our church, we should choose the person or the symbol that was in our opinion the focal point of our religious ideals (Raglan 47).

The "Green Man" is generally represented as a head surrounded by leaves; but in many cases he is reduced to being just a pair of eyes peeping through leaves and it is not hard to imagine an earlier state in which the eyes were left off and the leaf itself was the symbol.

Perhaps the best known living Arthurian scholar is Geoffrey Ashe who, in his *The Arthurian Handbook* (1988), makes the typical observation that Lancelot is a late addition into the Arthurian cycle: "Early Welsh materials never mention him, or offer a fully convincing prototype, nor does Geoffrey of Monmouth."[24] Ashe is certainly correct in that these sources do not specifically mention a person named

Lancelot. However, they do include a very interesting prototype in the form of a leaf that is associated with the Queen's lover. Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini* is commonly dated at 1157 - just slightly before *Le Chevalier de la Charrete*. In the following scene the Queen has just returned from a tryst in a garden in the course of which she got a leaf caught in her hair:

Perque manum suscepit eam jussitque sedere
et dabat amplexus et ad oscula labra premebat,
convertensque suos in eam per talia vultus
vidit in illius folium pendere capellis.
Ergo suos digitos admovit et abstulit illud
et projecit humi letusque jocatur amanti (65-70).[25]

([The King] took her by the hand and begged her to sit down. He put his arm about her and kissed her; and in doing so he turned his head and saw a leaf hanging caught in her hair. So he reached up, pulled it out and threw it on the ground, with a cheerful joking word to his wife.)

This same scene is repeated in the Welsh story of *Meldred and Lailoken*:

> The on the third day the king was in his court, sitting on the high seat, when his wife came in to him, gracefully wearing on her head a tree-life which had been caught up in her shawl. When the king saw it, he pulled it off and in pulling broke it into tiny pieces (Monmouth 231).

In this second version of the scene the leaf will actually be personified and referred to as the King's "friend" (232). It would certainly appear that originally the Queen's lover was the leaf and that originally Lancelot was none other than the leaf itself.[26]

Birth of a character

In conclusion, it would appear that the Chrétien de Troyes poem *Le Chevalier de la Charrete* affords us the unique opportunity to witness the birth of a literary character. The poet saw folk practices going on in the town in which he lived and had read accounts of ancient Roman ritual in Ovid. Seeing similarities and differences between the two he set about composing a poem that would clarify the relationship between them for Mediaeval listeners and readers.

The poem *Le Chevalier de la Charrete* became popular because people recognized the characters from their own folk practices. It would never have occurred to the Mediaeval listener to assume that the works were about individual people in the modern sense of the term. *Le Chevalier de la Charrete* is an important poem because it is where the spirit that was once thought to be immanent in the first leaves of spring and that was known to folklore by a variety of names first takes on a name and becomes a literary character.

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[1] C Scott Littleton & Linda Malcor (1994) *From Scythia to Camelot* [Garland, New York and London] xxvi

[2] Poems such as *Le Bel Inconnu* are literary, not mythological, in character and are therefore of little value to us in seeking origins.

[3] This is indicated by the final line of the Chrétien de Troyes poem *Le Chevalier de la Charrete* which tells us *ci faut li Romans de Lancelot de la Charrete* (here ends the romance of Lancelot of the cart).

[4] The poem certainly refers to a spring celebration, and specifically a May celebration. This is shown by the datation within the poem itself and most obviously by the fact that Malory's version of the story is entitled "The Queen's Maying".

[5] The references are to be found in lines 1099 "Guenievre" and 3207 "Ganievre". In both instances she is a mental image upon which the knight concentrates in order to overcome apparent physical dangers as he crosses a threshold or boundary. Thus, like the Vestal Virgins, she is associated with the crossing of thresholds. Often her name is derived from the Celtic for "White Phantom"; however, in the context of this particular poem the word is clearly the same as *geneivre* meaning "juniper" and refers to the apotropaic hanging of juniper sprigs on doorframes. Accordingly, in the first instance when The Knight crosses the threshold it is guarded by knights whose axes could "cut the root of a juniper" (1107). For a thorough discussion of this topic see W L Hildburgh's various writings on "indeterminability"; notably: "Indeterminability and Confusion as Apotropaic Elements in Italy and in Spain" *Folklore 50* (1944) 133-49.

[6] The origin of Lancelot's surname *du Lac* is central to my case, but, as its rather simple derivation is actually somewhat involved, it will have to be addressed separately. In short, the Queen and the lake are one and the same.

[7] Likewise in the Ulrich von Zazikhoven *Lanzelet* it is only after the unnamed knight has demonstrated his willingness to serve his lady that he receives the title *l'ancelot* from her servant: "Thanks be to you and to God," said the messenger, "that you have accomplished for my lady what she desired of you, and that you have succeeded so well since. Hitherto your name has been concealed from you. Learn it now through

my commission. You are called Lanzelet" (Ulrich von Zatzikoven *Lanzelet* [New York, Columbia UP, 1951] 89).

[8] Shortly after the fight with Meleagant Lancelot took the opportunity to speak to the Queen and make his role as her servant clear: *Dame, je vos ai molt amee / et molt servie et enoree / puis qu'an ma baillie vos oi; / onques chose feire ne soi / que volontiers ne la feïsse, / mes que vostre enor i veïsse* (3765-70): "Lady, after you came under my care, I was devoted to you and served you honorably. I was pleased to do all I could to enhance your honor." This title is in no way derogatory for, in religious contexts one is proud to call oneself a "servant" of one's Lord. For example, the Pope refers to himself as a servant, and Wace refers to St Marguerite as the *ansela* of God.

[9] Sir John Rhys (1981) *The Arthurian Legend* [Oxford, Clarendon] 51. Unfortunately we must reject Rhys' derivation of the name Meleagant in favor of Mars' ill-fated son "Meleager" - the boar who was slain by Adonis (whose name, again, is not a name but the title "lord") - in book seven of Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. That the Chrétien de Troyes poet was well versed in Ovid is a well-known fact.

[10] *Le Chevalier de la Charrete* has long been thought to be a version of the Persephone myth - although such as interpretation is generally rejected offhand by writers such as Poirion in the introduction to the Garnier edition - however, understanding that the characters' names to have originally been titles supports this identification in that it enables us to see the linguistic mechanism by which the two are connected.

[11] Often the word "Lancelot" is spliced into the two words "Lance" and "Lot" which gives rise to discussion of lances, Celtic sun god Lug, the Scottish district of Lothian and King Lear of Shakespearean fame. It has also been related to the French name "Lancelin" (Weston 218). A recent popular book offers another interpretation: "It is popularly supposed that he has no Celtic counterpart. His name is generally thought to be a double diminutive of the German word *Land*; but R S Loomis has argued that Lancelot is the same character as the one called Llwch Lleminawc in *Preiddeu Annwfn* (Ronan Coghlan 1991 *The Encyclopaedia of Arthurian Legends* [Element, Rockport MA] 139-140). In a sense such derivations are not entirely incorrect because once a character such as Lancelot strikes the popular fancy he then becomes associated with various heroes, places, and things that were quite irrelevant, as they are in this case, to his true origin.

[12] Troyes, Chrétien de *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* [Paris, Garnier 1989] 323-37.

[13] The ritual is most commonly practised during Lent or in the month of February from the Latin *februum* "means of purification". February being the last month of the year the rite was a necessary precursor to the beginning of the new year in March. To give but one of Frazer's examples of the practice: "Every year on the fourteenth of March a man clad in skins was led in procession through the streets of Rome, beaten with long white rods, and driven out of the city. He was called Mamurius Veturius, that is, "the old Mars," and as the ceremony took place on the day preceding the first full moon of the Roman year (which began on the first of March), the skin-clad man must have represented the Mars of the past year, who was driven out at the beginning of a new one. Now Mars was originally not a god of war but of vegetation" (James Frazer *The Golden Bough* [New York, Macmillan 1958] 669).

[14] For a discussion of carts in European folk culture see the recent article in *Folklore* 1993.

[15] F S Burnell (1947) "The Holy Cow" *Folklore 58* 377-81.

[16] See *Folklore 60* (1949) 256-7.

[17] Note the similarity between these paintings and the Robert de Boron painting on the cover to the Garnier *Charrette*. In all cases the knight is clearly an effigy and not an actual person (Jean Seznec 1953 *The Survival of the Pagan Gods* [Princeton, Princeton UP] 190-1).

[18] Likewise, in Christian ritual Christ's walking the *via dolorosa* through the city and crucifixion outside it are but preliminaries to his resurrection on Easter Sunday.

[19] H J Rose (1959) *Religion in Greece and Rome* [New York, Harper and Row] 169.

[20] The name "Salii" is usually derived, by Varro for instance, from *salire* "to leap" and thus their name also designates a function.

[21] Ovid Publius Naso *Fasti III* [Cambridge MA, Harvard UP 1977] II 370-7

[22] That the Chrétien de Troyes poet was familiar with Ovid's work is a well-known fact which is specifically referred to in the introduction to *Cligès*; and which, as we shall see, is rather significant.

[23] Lady Raglan (1939) "The 'Green Man' in Church Architecture" *Folklore 50* 45

[24] Norris Lacy & Geoffrey Ashe (1988) *The Arthurian Handbook* (New York, Garland) 366.

[25] Basil Clarke *ed* (1973) *Geoffrey of Monmouth: Life of Merlin* [Cardiff, University of Wales Press] ll 256-261.

[26] To this day we commonly refer to leaves that are shaped like spear heads as "lanceolate".

Pure Magic

Jess Foster

A movement taking shape in Britain began to show vaguely as some kind of underlying trend in the late 1950s, when books about King Arthur seemed to be falling round us like leaves from the trees in Autumn. It was difficult to know whether they were leaves and the evidence of a long and sad decline, or whether they were acorns and the evidence of a fruitful spring to come. I had a hunch they were acorns and set to work to gather them together for closer investigation.

The result was bewitchment, botheration and bewilderment. No ordinary person would ever have guessed, off the cuff, that so many books could be written about one person; that one person could have so many personalities, meanings, angles, areas of activity and non-activity. It was staggering.

Mentally battered and bruised I went to a friendly girl in the County Library and said, "Please find me a book about King Arthur that makes some sort of modern sense." She gave me a book by Geoffrey Ashe called *King Arthur's Avalon*, published by Collins. It was not only interesting and readable, it revealed the reason for the current interest. Moreover, it proved to have the right chemical to bring a lot of other ideas together in my mind and make them jell.

About thirty years previously I had stood in the middle of a field and unintentionally overheard some scraps of conversation between some Guiders and a newly-appointed Commissioner. "And above all," this woman said in firm tones, "there must be no more quests."

That was the day I decided to remove myself hastily from that world. In a mood of fury against the speaker I made an inward vow that please God, somewhere and somewhen, I would start a bigger quest than that Commissioner ever visualised.

Years later again it had been borne in on me, slowly and sadly, that my children belonged to a deprived generation. They were deprived of contemporary heroes, heroic plans and purposes, even of national pride and self-respect. The time was over-ripe for that galvanising quest I had promised myself once and had long since forgotten, but there seemed little chance of it.

Now, in the late 1950s, when my children were grown up and independent, it seemed to me that there was a vague smell of Spring in the air. Every now and then someone said or did something that inspired a flash of hope. When I had re-read *King Arthur's Avalon*, quite a number of possibilities began to open up gently before me. One of my sons had confided in me that although the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme was admirable for certain children, there were still many boys and girls who were unimpressed by what they considered to be mere exhibitions of brawn and bravery: there was space, my son thought, for some project a little more subtle, less obviously a way of keeping the young in training for another possible war. I began to believe that I might have found the nucleus of that something else, albeit very vaguely and nebulously, in a Quest for the historical Arthur. I made an appointment to meet Geoffrey Ashe in London... (1)

As a result of that meeting the Pendragon Society was formed.

It sounds easy, but of course it called for many meetings and some manoeuvring. It would have taken longer and been more difficult if I had not already acquired a considerable list of correspondents and names of people locally who would be interested in joining and helping. Its official aims were:

To stimulate interest in King Arthur and his contemporaries, and to investigate the historical and archaeological background of The Matter of Britain.

Geoffrey Ashe was appointed Chairman of the Committee. I was to be the Honorary Secretary; other members included Desmond Hoskins who was then living at Farnham, and Willoughby Gray who was living near Andover; the rest were local patriots who were willing to be coerced.

We realised that a very small trumpet had been sounded to wake the Sleeping Arthur. If we were really going to rouse him and fetch him from his cave, we should have to find some big drum and sound it purposefully. The most obvious project would be an Arthurian Festival and the most obvious venue would be Winchester. Malory, in his *Morte d'Arthur*, proclaimed Winchester to be Camelot, and tourists from all over the world already visited Winchester in order to see the famous Round Table which hung in the Law Courts. In our simplicity we believed that Winchester would welcome the opportunity. (2)

However, no financial backing could be found to further these plans... At the end of three years of monumental industry I had vast piles of correspondence to show for my efforts, an overdraft at the bank and exactly nothing else. For the first time in my life I had a widely-dispersed circle of friends and a concentrated number of enemies.

The county magazine printed an article of mine in which I outlined the ideas and plans of the Pendragon Society. The only upshot of this was a letter from a fourteen-year-old boy called Richard who told me he was much interested in history and wondered if he might be allowed to join. He assured me he had quite a number of friends about his own age who were equally interested. So I abandoned the adults and turned my attentions more fully on the young. After all, the original idea had been that we should start a fact-finding project in which the young would play a major part.

After a few weeks we managed to pull in a few more recruits and we started to ramble over the Downs. We weren't sure what we were looking for but Desmond Hoskins had written helpfully to tell me we should be looking for three graves: the grave of Ambrosius, the last of the Romans; the grave of Arthur; the grave of Cerdic, the first of the Saxons. Needless to say we never found any of these but - oddly - graves were exactly what we did find. It was in the course of one of our rambles along the river bank that we came on the little abandoned church of Otterbourne.

Here we came to rest, whispering and wondering. Who had gone and deserted this entrancing, mysterious and obviously holy spot? Could we get permission to come and clear the brambles and the creepers from the gravestones, and plant new flowers on the graves themselves? Perhaps we could even repair the ruined Sanctuary? It looked hardly safe to enter as it was now. The young were more excited than they had been for weeks.

Thus began the first Adventure, about which much could be written. The Vicar gave us permission to go in and tidy up the churchyard. We learnt that the County Archivist would be glad to have a list of those names and dates we could decipher on the old grave-stones. We learnt the whole history of the parish, we chatted with passing wayfarers, and we talked of Arthur and his Knights as we threw rubbish on the bonfire and the smoke filtered upwards through the encircling elm trees.

We finally completed our Task and we have the list of those lying in those ancient graves even to this day, to prove that we saw it through.

Five years had elapsed since the formation of the Society. Circumstances were pressuring me to move to Bristol. Within three months we had a new Task Force. Almost at once we found we had a new project.

We had learned to our cost that Winchester had no ambition to be known as Camelot, but there was another possible Camelot not too far from Bristol. An equally resounding gong would be sounded if we could initiate a gigantic dig at Cadbury Castle in Somerset. If Arthur ever had a stronghold and anything like a permanent fortification it would have been at Cadbury.

To initiate a dig at Cadbury was like trying to dislodge the Rock of Gibraltar. The reasons for not having a dig were enumerated to me a dozen times.

1. There was no need for a dig. Cadbury would be there for another thousand years and no one was likely to plan any building on it.
2. Archaeologists were far too busy carrying out emergency digs elsewhere where building or road-making was already in progress.
3. No archaeologist would agree to become Director because the dig would be so important he would be risking his future career if it failed.
4. Cadbury was privately owned and the owner was not likely to give permission. It was also under the Ministry of Works who would probably oppose the suggestion.
5. We were just a bunch of nobodies and no archaeologists would give us even a passing glance.

After months of discussion and manoeuvring a Committee was formed of representatives

from various learned bodies which was to be called The Camelot Research Committee. As a representative of the Pendragon Society I was invited to sit on this Committee. Dr Ralegh Radford acted as Chairman and Geoffrey Ashe became Honorary Secretary. Sir Mortimer Wheeler agreed to become President. Mr Leslie Alcock, of Cardiff University, was chosen to be Director of the dig when it got started.

After long months of such meetings I was obsessed by the consciousness that time was again passing and we were no nearer to raising the necessary funds than we had been when the Committee was first formed. I went to the local press in Bristol and with some difficulty persuaded them to open the account by giving the Committee a cheque for £100. Rosemary Sutcliff, author of so many historical books, persuaded Messrs Hodder and Stoughton to add £10 and it became obvious that the fund was actually launched. Geoffrey Ashe persuaded the BBC to contribute a further £200 and so, propelled into business by the Pendragons, the Camelot Research Committee felt able to go ahead...

When the dig at Cadbury was finally started [1966], those in charge made it abundantly clear that in spite of the advance publicity about Arthur and Camelot, the dig was to be a serious investigation of the hill fort and was in no way intended to advance the notions of "Romantics". What we might expect to find would be evidence of Iron Age occupation, probably some Roman, and - just possibly - some evidence of a Saxon Mint. Anyone digging up Arthur, or Guinevere, or even a Knight in Armour, would be dealt with severely.

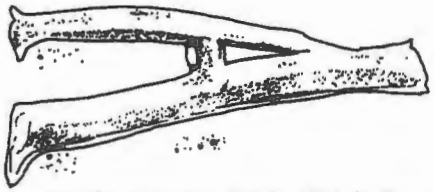
Quite early on I found myself in a narrow ditch on the side of the hill, digging alongside another Pendragon called Patrick, and conversing with him in low tones as we worked. A third Pendragon, the previous day, had dug out a bit of rusted metal which had been identified as a Dark Age knife - rather reluctantly. We realised that were already, so to speak, under suspicion and not anxious to make ourselves conspicuous.

In mid-morning Patrick uncovered a scrap of metal which the supervising student identified as a bit of a Roman soldier's buckle. Half-an-hour later I uncovered an object, about the size of an ordinary pair of scissors, and exclaimed in sheer delighted disbelief: "Well, well! Just look what I've found - A for Arthur!"

The words sprang spontaneously from one accustomed to playing constantly with small children, and Patrick immediately exploded with laughter, just as I did. It was undeniably a gilt bronze letter A.

But in the Forest Sauvage there are no small children, nor grandmothers taking part in digs when they should rightly be assigned to geriatric wards. The words rang through the Forest like a cry of "FIRE!" and immediately every branch of the Fire Service was rushed to the spot to douse the flames before they could reach the Press and become a conflagration.

A pity, because it was, of course, a moment of pure, un-premeditated Magic: the kind that occurs only once in a lifetime. Some archaeologists are still not convinced that I didn't "plant" it on them...



Over the years the crowds came in their thousands; they came from all over the world. We introduced the idea of having a marquee for their protection when the weather was bad; as a meeting place for talk; as a spot for handing out lists of reading matter; with a stall for refreshments since the hill itself did not offer so much as a drop of water and the climb to reach it was stiff and arduous.

Came the day when, after five long seasons of monumental endeavour, the Director was able to announce that we had uncovered evidence, on the summit, of a one-time Great Hall of the type that would have been occupied by a chieftain of considerable importance; and at the southwest gateway, evidence of re-fortification during the Dark Age period. These proved the existence of a Dark Age war leader, if not Arthur himself, then someone of Arthur-type character.

From the Pendragon point of view, the Cadbury dig was worthwhile. It had stimulated interest in Arthur so much that many, many people were now studying the history of Dark Age Britain and re-reading the legends. We had made many new and charming friends and met many interesting people. We shall always remember with gratitude and affection all those many local residents at South Cadbury who were endlessly kind, helpful and hospitable.

For a couple of summers some members of the Society went back to Somerset to dig out a Roman villa, but most Pendragons had had enough of archaeology, and anyhow they saw no

future in Roman villas (3). Moreover, one of the friends we had made on Cadbury was John Michell who had interested us in Dragons and Leys and Standing Stones. At the time of the dig he was travelling about the countryside researching material for his first book.

We were, therefore, Questing over a very wide and open Plain when Geoffrey pointed out to us that our terms of reference did not permit us to do any such thing. We got over this hurdle by adding a further clause to our Constitution:
To study the significance - past, present and future - of the Arthurian legends.
We enjoyed the new freedom bestowed upon us and interpreted this new clause in our own way. However, we also made two resolves: one was to improve and enlarge our magazine and the other was to organise a series of lectures.

The first lecturer to come to us was Keith Critchlow (architect, lecturer, and an Executive member of the Research Into Lost Knowledge Organisation which is based in London). He came to give us a Talk on "Signs and Symbols", a significant pointer to the future though we did not see it then). Perhaps it is best to quote from a back copy of *Pendragon*:
"Mr Critchlow is searching for hidden knowledge built into Gothic Cathedrals, and seeking correspondences in much earlier buildings in other parts of the world."

Amongst the audience that night was a group of young people, at that time living on a farm in Somerset, preparing for the now-famous Glastonbury Pop Festival. It was to be held at the time of the Midsummer Solstice and we were invited to attend (3). At the time it seemed as if the sun had risen, but this hope turned out to be premature.

A second lecture by Keith sent us out to study certain churches in Bristol, especially the Church of St Mary Redcliffe, and the ruins of the old Temple Church. This put us on the track of the Order of the Knights Templar, "Guardians of the Grail", and masters of astronomy, geometry, symbolism and cyphers. All of which, of course, reminded us of some of our earlier reading about the Great Bear in the sky and the fact that Arthur was known as the "Bear of Britain".

A series of books and television programmes now began to focus our attention on that third Grail we had heard of before: the Grail hidden in the Pyrenees. The first book was *The Cathars and Reincarnation* by Arthur Guirdham. Soon after the appearance of this book we were focusing again on a mystery in the same area, this time beginning with a television programme. "A small village in southern France bears the following sign at its entrance - *Fouilles Interdit* - excavations prohibited. This is not so strange when one learns that the tiny village of Rennes-le-Château conceals a dark and unusual mystery..."

Fate, at this point, took us to Wales where Prof E G Bowen gave us further food for thought. The south-western coasts of this island had witnessed a trafficking in all kinds of merchandise, much of which was not carried in the holds of ships but in the minds of men. Let us remind ourselves that the Egyptians were great alchemists, the Arabs were great mathematicians, the Phoenicians were great astronomers, the Phrygians were great miners and metal-workers. Prof Bowen told us that all this knowledge flowed from the Middle East to Britain by a route we had overlooked. The early traders did not much like our stormy peninsulas so they portaged across them; the main route being along the coast of Brittany, then across to Cornwall, from there across to Ireland and then back to Wales and Somerset. Prof Bowen told us that one of the early Celtic Saints, St Samson, had a reputation for being something of a magician. We began to visualise an Arthur who was a "free-thinker" being guided and advised by Merlin who had picked up his knowledge in the Middle East, or from those who came there.

The following year [1973] we were invited to go and investigate a patch of land in the Gower peninsula. It was covered in brambles, scrub and rubble, and even when this was cleared away there was little, at first, to indicate what might lie underneath. However, careful excavation revealed the outline of a small Christian church.

This dig opened up a fresh interest, apart from the discovery of the church. The Gower still lies heavily under the influence of St Illtydd, and though little reliable evidence can be gleaned about this man there are a number of charming stories told about him. More, he is thought to have been a cousin of Arthur, and he is said to have served with the Roman legions before becoming a monk. Illtydd founded the famous college at Llantwit Major, the college that produced remarkable people such as Saint Paulinus, Saint David and that same Saint Samson that we heard about earlier. St Samson founded a number of communities including one on Caldy Island and another at Dol, in Brittany, along that trade route that Prof Bowen pointed out to us.

In medieval times pilgrims travelled these routes, from one Community to another, even as far as Compostella on the coast of Spain. With staff in hand and scallop shell badge on hat, they faced the dangers and exhaustions because this,

they believed, was the way to escape from hell - Hell being Chaos. They passed through Europe in such thousands that they actually changed Europe's way of thinking.

In 1946 the philosopher Denis Saurat wrote a strange kind of autobiography called *Death and the Dreamer*. In this book he postulated that in everyone's life there is, so to speak, a climactic moment when life for the person begins. This notion about Time was first put to Saurat by an ancient and obscure priest in Northern France. He said:

"You people think that time is something that unrolls itself, beginning to count one, then becomes two, three, four, and so on. That is stupid ... If you bang a gong, the sound flows in all directions: it does not come from the left, enter the gong, and then flow to the right."

Saurat came to understand, much later. He said: "We understand only after the event, in spite of innumerable pointers of destiny."

Let us postulate that for the Pendragon Society the finding of that letter ***A*** was like the bang of the gong. Geoffrey has written and talked a lot about that "Something Else" that we are all looking for. I postulate that the Something Else is pure Magic: not the business of rituals and incantations, of predictions or power-play, but the Magic that happens quite suddenly and inadvertantly when two or three are gathered together.

It was so splendidly funny, too, that letter ***A*** on Cadbury, because it sparked unexpectedly. On the hill that day, amongst Pendragons anyhow, there was considerable if subdued hilarity, and a joyful sense of uplift. So it would seem that Magic has also something to do with levity - which is not really surprising when one remembers that the word comes from the Latin *Levitas - Levis*, LIGHT.

References

1. Jess Foster (1972) *Till Hope Creates: an informal history of the Pendragon Society* [Zodiac House, London]. All of the above is condensed from this and the following work
2. Jess Foster (1975, 2nd ed 1978) *A for Arthur* [Pendragon Society].
3. T M Staples (1969) *Excavations at Cattle Hill, Somerset 1968 and 1969: first interim report* [Pendragon Society]; T M Staples (1970) *Excavations at Cattle Hill, Somerset during 1970: addendum to first interim report* [Group Archaeology].
4. *Pendragon: Glastonbury Fair edition* was produced for this event, 1971

Task Force

Chris Lovegrove

Jess Foster died on January 28th 1979, nearly twenty years after the Society had been founded. The Task Force, as she called it, had been based in Bristol since her move there in the early sixties, and its members were now faced with decisions about immediate plans and future directions. Social activities were no problem, with most members of the Task Force virtually on the doorstep, but the general membership were more widely spread and the search was on for projects that could involve them more.

At this time the more esoteric aspects of the Matter of Britain seemed to be to the fore as we endeavoured to examine "the significance of the Arthurian legends, past, present and future". To this end themes which emerged in practice and in the magazine's pages ranged from the Templars (in their guise as guardians of the grail), unexplained noises (noted for example at Arthur's Stone in Herefordshire) and mazes (symbolic of the quest) through to digs in the Mendips (looking for non-existent Roman roads) and resistivity surveys at Cadbury (to discover possible Dark Age cavities). These were duly reported in the magazine which had, since 1977, been produced in A5 format by a magazine committee consisting of Kate Pollard, Roger Davie Webster and Chris Lovegrove.

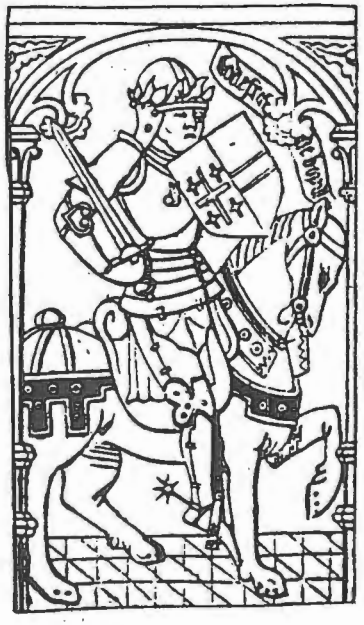
There was also an wide-ranging series of talks in Bristol, including Ian Wilson on the Turin Shroud, Paul Newman (not *that* one!) on Dragons, Andy Collins on psychic questing, Bob Gilbert on matters magick and Michael Baigent (of *Holy Blood and Holy Grail* fame) on Cathars, Templars and the Priory of Sion. There were links with magazines, societies and groups as diverse as the Research Into Lost Knowledge Organisation and Tim Porter's Green Branch Opera, which last treated many Celtic themes close to Pendragon's heart.

There were occasional outings to places like Silchester, and memorable AGMs in Winchester and the Cotswolds. Increasingly, however, energies began to be focused on two main activities, the production of the magazine and the running of the archaeological dig at Llanelen in the Gower, South Wales. The excavation, directed by Alex Schlesinger and Colin Walls (with Don Bryan and Steven Banks), frequently took two seasons annually, and began to yield significant results. Not only was there evidence of occupation and activity on the site in the late

Middle Ages (up to the Black Death) but also from the Early Medieval Period - or the Dark Ages, if you prefer!

There are no instant answers in archaeology however, and the long series of seasons, from 1973 to 1985, was followed by further years of unromantic analysis and discussion before publication, under the auspices of the Llanelen Research Committee. Its successor, the Llanelen Research Group, pursues research on other unanswered questions concerning the site. Meanwhile, the magazine still continued to feature a diverse number of subjects. To some members these were increasingly quixotic, though themes were anchored firmly in the Matter of Britain - Glastonbury, Celtic Christians, St Helen, Merlin's Isle and the Grail, for example.

But things were not well. Amongst other things, the Bristol Task Force numbers were dwindling, and the pressure of keeping to a timetable of regular quarterly issues resulted in a slippage away from nominal publication dates. The resignation of the present writer as then editor was merely one reflection of the crisis the Society had reached at the end of the eighties.



Keeping the wolf from the door

Random thoughts from the past ten years

Fred Stedman-Jones

In April 1987 Kate Pollard sent a letter to the membership; it was later to become the 'Howl for Help'. In it she paints a bleak picture, describing the Society as being at an all time low. Funds were virtually nil, numerous leading members had dropped out over the years and not been replaced and the infrequent appearance of the magazine was losing members - in fact all the ills that beset such ventures as ours periodically. This is the time when subs are not renewed and anxious, sometimes aggressive, letters are received.

One hesitant inquirer had asked about the structure of the 'hierarchy'. Kate's reply was that there was no 'hierarchy', only a 'lowerarchy', and she and Chris had kept Pendragon alive for over ten years. Now she stood alone, for the moment she *was* Pendragon. Finally, Kate threw down the gauntlet, asking directly: 'Do you still want a magazine? Your opinions are called for, if none are forthcoming we may assume not.' She added that she was willing to carry on as Secretary and magazine producer if a new Editor could be found.

About a quarter of the membership replied with suggestions and opinions, a few with *money*. Jacky Salter of Peterborough, an M Litt student in Arthurian Literature, volunteered to be editor and 'The Graves Edition' (ominous title) appeared as 18/4 Winter 1988. Jacky apologised for the 'inordinate delay' and promised that 'normal service' would resume. No 19/1 followed next Summer, a 'temporary editor' had stepped in to produce a 36-pager, after receiving Jacky's resignation a few days before. Guess who?

In the Spring of 1989 Kate sent us a bundle of photocopied material (19/2); she also tendered her resignation because of ill health. She should have had an OBE but we gave her Life Membership instead - in 1994, when we invented it. Bless you Kate, for everything.

Kate also announced that Eddie Tooke, 'he of the atrocious puns', was willing to keep members in touch. This name had already caught my eye in 19/1 below an article titled 'Myths - are they

Female Moths? An in-depth study by an out-of-his-depth student.' I felt kinship with the man; after reading many articles by Arthurian experts at least I knew what myths and moths were.

Soon after, I received a flyer from Eddie as Acting Secretary. He had been negotiating with Charles Evans-Günther, editor of *Dragon*, a journal focusing on Arthur via Dark Age studies, mainly historical and archaeological. A merger had been considered but finally abandoned because Charles's readers were suspicious that our 'catholic' and 'holistic' view of Arthurian studies included 'myth and mysticism'. Jess had pioneered the archaeological digs on Cadbury Hill in the sixties, and our digs at Llanelen in Gower, South Wales during the seventies and eighties have resulted in a major article in the Journal of the Royal Archaeological Institute (1).

Charles eventually killed off *Dragon* in 1993, due to lack of fodder to feed his dying beast, and he has been very committed to Pendragon since, editing three editions for us (Vol 26).

And now for some hard facts: how we of the Tooke dynasty learned to become Arthurian experts and to suffer the slings and arrows for ourselves.

I wrote to Eddie in May 1989 to offer my help and was welcomed to the 'Team' which comprised Eddie, his wife Anne, and Simon Rouse, who is now well known as a Celtic artist of distinction. Twenty-five of our covers since 1989 have been his, including all nine of my editions. My favourites are Excalibur (23/3), Rex Ubique (24/2) and The Sleeping Lord (24/3). Many thanks, Simon. He also designed some splendid T-shirts in 1991, for members to identify themselves to each other at events and to advertise the Society, but, disappointingly, members showed insufficient interest for us to proceed. At the Cardiff AGM (1994) a member suggested that Society T-shirts would be a good idea and he would be proud to wear one!

Eddie confessed that he didn't feel competent to edit a magazine but thought that the Team could produce 'a superior sort of newsletter' to keep the membership in touch. In June his first magazine arrived unexpectedly (19/3). Sid Birchby had encouraged Eddie to go for booklet form, telling him it was as easy as collating a newsletter - thank you, Sid. From there we never looked back; we produced sixteen journals, four a year, for the next four years (1989 - 930, all virtually on time.

Reactions were favourable and we were encouraged to hold an AGM in September to elect a committee and revise the Constitution - the previous AGM had been at Gloucester in 1985. It was held at 'Chinook', the Tookes' home at Twyning, Tewkesbury, and was an all day event with food and drink laid on. Eleven members came, including Kate and Chris, who gave us their blessing and good advice. I emerged as Chairman, Eddie as Treasurer, Anne became Secretary and Marilyn Vice-Chairman. Very late that night Mary Caine gave the four of us a slide lecture on the Glastonbury Zodiac before disappearing into the dark to find Upton-upon-Severn. It took another nine years for us to meet up with Mary again, at the Glastonbury AGM in 1998. Lots of love, Mary.

Eddie was using an old Commodore Plus computer with a Multifont dot matrix printer to produce the mag, and we all marvelled at his ability to keep it going by his remarkable mechanical skill. It gave him lots of trouble, needing hours of calculations and bullying to make it print in two columns (hence the whole-page format of much of these early editions). Later he bought an Amstrad PCW9512.

I bought a Canon Starwriter word processor in 1992 and thereafter was able to submit articles and 'Talking Head', my Arthurian news column, set up in suitable formats ready for photocopying. All my own journals were produced on the Starwriter which has an inbuilt inkjet printer. It was still necessary to do a past-up job of illustrations, however, and this led Bob Trubshaw of *Mercian Mysteries* to jest, 'It's good to know these old folk customs are still alive!' Cheers, Bob, and thanks for the bottle of whisky.

The magazines were reduction photocopied and collated for us by Geoff Dando, a longstanding member from the old Bristol days. Unfortunately his machine had a mind of its own, deciding to estimate tone values without human interference. The result was pages of differing balance, some faint, others dark. Nothing seemed to improve this problem and it was a constant worry to Eddie and Anne how their carefully prepared masters would be received by this wayward machine. another problem was that the magazines were collated by hand and pages were often stapled out of sequence. Only much later did I find they had been checking every copy individually before despatching it. Well done, Anne. It is only fair to say that Geoff's prices enabled us to keep the Society going, at that time every last penny counted. Until Eddie's thrift gradually established a safe margin.

My memories of those first four years are very warm. The Team soon became firm friends despite wide age differences. I have a lever-arch file full of letters that bear witness to the fun of it all: the planning ahead and the sharing, with jokes aplenty - but the telephone bills! Before and after AGMs we would discuss the venue, arrangements, activities and agenda and Anne and I would ensure the minutes were accurately

recorded and printed up as a permanent record. Eddie would publish a membership list every six months to keep us in touch with the membership. It was all done by the book!

We met up at Gupshill Manor, Tewkesbury for the AGM in 1990, in the skittle alley! There was excited gossip, group readings, good food and guests from Caerleon. In 1991 Kate invited us all to 'totter down to Totterdown' in Bristol where we were again fed heartily, shown the Llanelen finds and admired Beryl Mercer's Phoenix Runes. We also discussed a new structure for the Society, to enable volunteers to slot into areas that appealed to them. The slots are still empty!

Members may be surprised to hear that everyone pays full subs, except a few Life Members who have reciprocated by setting up prizes. The Eddie Tooke Prize is for original writing and the Jess Foster Prize is awarded for first time contributors. John Matthews, Mary Caine and Helen Hollick generously give us copies of their books to be raffled at the AGM last year. Our membership these days remains stubbornly at around two hundred. Perhaps we should recognise that we really recruit two categories: subscribers and society members. The first come and go, the second stay - but they are the rarer breed. If we could push our overall numbers up we could produce a larger journal, hire meeting venues, etc. How about recruiting someone for us? Is there anyone you could blackmail?

As Chairman I have always made it my special responsibility to recruit members and to blazon the name of Pendragon. It was a great joy to enrol Courtney Davis, Professor Russell, John and Caitlin Matthews and Nigel Pennick but Morgan le Fey appeared mysteriously of her own volition. Yes, she does actually belong, her name is printed on her cheques. We have also made Geoffrey Ashe, Dr Anne Ross and Count Tolstoy honorary members. Last year Geoffrey gave us a talk at the Glastonbury AGM and we are hoping to welcome him again this year.

When Eddie's health began to fail in 1993 he asked me to continue producing the magazine and to carry on Jess's vision (it was also his vision). I was honoured to say yes. It was soon obvious that he would have to give up his other responsibilities also, and Marilyn and I visited Twyning to be briefed and to bring away all the Pendragon records and papers. Between 1993 and 1996 we ran the Society alone, filling the roles of secretary and editor, treasurer and membership secretary. Simon was also ready to contribute his fine artwork and be vice-chairman. Thanks again, Simon and Anne. It was a heavy

load in retrospect but we felt motivated and it was lucky that we had both retired early.

My first unhappy experience with Geoff's copier sent me off in search of professional litho printing and I discovered Catford. At that time their costs were little more than Geoff's were for photocopying. Through Catford I was able to produce a 'new-look' for the magazine and their fine standard has become our hallmark. Recently Chris's computer-generated layouts have taken us another step further and the magazine has never looked better than it does now. Well done Chris.

In 1994 we hosted the Welsh Academy Arthurian Day at Cardiff College of Music and Drama, and held our AGM there. There was a fascinating programme of lectures, book and craft stalls and all-day bar facilities, followed up by a superb buffet meal at the evening party. Our group sat with Nikolai Tolstoy who regaled us with the story of his pet donkey who would bray deafeningly to his sweetheart across the Oxfordshire countryside at midnight until all the donkeys joined in. It was also Eddie's last appearance at a Pendragon function. He died in October 1995 and tributes to him appear in 25/3-4, 1996, my final 'Caerleon' edition. God bless, good friend.

Charles had been a regular contributor during my editorship and it was an easy transfer for him to take over for a while when my own health played up in 1996. We spent a most enjoyable day together, driving Ronan Coghlan around the Arthurian and Celtic sites in the Ruthin / Llangollen area when he came over to give the Annual Arthurian lecture in 1995. In 1998 Charles's love affair with Japan took him away and he is still exiled there, though still contributing letters and reviews. *Iechyd da*, Gwilym.

We had enough money in 1997 to produce the magazine so I didn't need to howl; instead I gave a Squeak for Support in No 26/3. Our present team emerged to keep *Pendragon* on the road. John and Linda Ford took on the roles of Secretary and Treasurer - which also involves despatching the magazine, a very time-consuming task. Chris Lovegrove, the longest serving Editor we have eve had, agreed to take up the pen again. We are very fortunate to have Chris actively with us, he is also vice-chairman of the Society.

Last year John and Linda arranged the successful AGM at Glastonbury when old and new members 'bonded' happily on Cadbury Hill on the Sunday. We are repeating similar arrangements this year. Well done, both. Next year we are hoping for an exciting new venue - wait and see!

Finally, I recognise that over the years I have just occasionally defended the aims, integrity and the continuity of the Society rather fiercely and I offer my sincere apologies to anyone who may have been bruised in the process. Now that my often-stated goal - to keep *Pendragon* alive to reach the millennium - is almost realized, I can relax. What visions of Arthur lie ahead in the next century, I wonder? (Theme for a magazine, Chris?) One thing is certain: we are well prepared to continue the Quest - our future is far more optimistic than it was in 1989.

Reference

1. A Schlesinger and C Walls, with J Kissock, C Lovegrove, K Pollard and N Wright (1997) "An early church and medieval farmstead site: excavations at Llanelen, Gower" *Archaeological Journal 153* 104-147

The Return

Long ago
the last days of beauty
surrendered to the darkening time
in the Vale of Avalon,
where sleeps the lost heart
for just a little longer.
The long age of matter
is closing down in pain
as spirit cries for heart's release
from where was left the promise,
whose fulfilment is demanded now,
by orphans picking up the Grail
from the Vale of Avalon.

At the 1971 Glastonbury Fayre, Worthy Farm, Pilton "one young man, who preferred to remain anonymous, sat down beside us and wrote a little poem for us" (J Foster Till Hope Creates *1972)*

A Sense of Humour in the Medieval Occitan Romance of Jaufre

Anne Lister

It's interesting to note that with all the scholarship that's been carried out on the medieval Arthurian romances of Chrétien and his contemporaries, very few people (in fact, I can't think of any - can you?) have looked at what the romances were written *for*. Yes, of course there are layers of symbolism, layers of Celtic mythology, layers of Christianisation and so on. But why were they written? Why does anyone write anything? For an audience, of course. We write to communicate to a group of other people, essentially, and in medieval days not only could few people read but of course there were also few copies of manuscripts available in the first place. The romances were written, first and foremost, to be read aloud to an audience. And, of course, to entertain as well as possibly enlighten or elucidate.

This makes a big difference, of course. I spend a lot of time in front of audiences of all kinds, telling stories and singing. With the more specialist material in my repertoire, I find that the better informed my audience is, the greater the reaction to what I say. The people who are still finding their way through the story and still getting used to the characters will be concentrating on those parts of what I'm saying and singing. Those who know a little about the whole subject area will be following every nuance of every phrase, and responding accordingly.

This leads me to a few conclusions, because I don't think audiences have changed that much over the millennium. I think, for example, that Chrétien's approach was rather more like Jane Austen, with quite a lot of dry, wry humour, and his audience would be ready for this. They were, remember, much more used to listening than we are today - no visual support from photos or videos, no pre-recorded sound effects or mood music, and the troubadours were appreciated for the subtlety of their metre and rhyme schemes as well as the content of their songs. How good are we at spotting those today, just in the listening? It sounds to me too as if his storylines were fairly new to his audience, or at least had a twist that made them seem new.

Jaufre

When we come to the romance of *Jaufre*, however, written in Occitan (therefore from the south and west of France or the south and east of Spain) there's a very different style. It's not particularly well known to us today and relatively few people have read it in translation - still fewer in the original. But it contains a wealth of clues that the whole of the Matter of Britain was pretty familiar to the audience, as well as a vast amount of other intriguing areas to explore.

Most of these clues come from the use of humour. Impossible to imagine anyone making *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* if the Grail story wasn't already known to us. Parodies, or playful re-workings have to follow the serious version. Again, I've read some very serious academic studies of the deeper meaning of some of these motifs in *Jaufre* - my deep and dark suspicion is that the writers of these studies have never stood up to entertain any audience except possibly students in a lecture theatre.

We don't know the date of the composition of *Jaufre* with any degree of certainty. We don't know anything at all about the author, except that tribute is paid to the King of Aragon, so we assume that we're looking to the west of the Pyrenees here. It's generally thought that the author wrote in the late part of the 12th or early part of the 13th century, but it doesn't really matter.

There's a mention of *Cligès* (an early non-Arthurian creation by Chrétien) but there are many other names preserving very different spellings, which must indicate the knowledge of other traditions as well, now lost to us. Guenevere, for example, is Guilalmier. Kay is Quexs. He has all the usual attributes of boorish behaviour, but is also seen holding an apple branch as a sign of his position at court. Morgan le Fay comes into the story under the name of the "Fada de Gibel" (the fairy of Gibraltar) - not, as far as I know, a name we find too often elsewhere. Lancelot is there, but no mention of any liaison with Guenevere. Yvain is there, but no mention of his lion. Jaufre's main antagonist is Taulat de Rogemont... Chrétien does mention a Taulas in two of his tales, but as a brave and courageous knight fighting on the same side as Arthur, so my conclusion is that Chrétien's characterisation comes later, once Jaufre has rehabilitated him.

The story

The plot is hard to summarise, because it is very episodic, but the brief outline is that Jaufre arrives at Arthur's court and rides out again to avenge an insult to Arthur and Guenevere, vowing not to eat or sleep until he has been successful in his quest. On the way he does

battle with a good number of evil beings, from a giant leper and a mysterious Black Knight to a dwarf guarding a mysterious white, gleaming lance. He falls asleep in an orchard of singing birds which belongs to the Lady Brunessen and when he and the lady meet they fall instantly in love. However her lands and the lands around are subject to a strange mourning ritual, and whenever Jaufre asks about this he is severely beaten up, so he leaves her to find out the cause (there's a wounded overlord involved...ringing a few bells here, perhaps?) and complete his quest (these two objectives luckily fit together neatly).

On his way to Arthur, with Brunessen, he is distracted by the Fada de Gibel who pushes him headfirst into a fountain, and at the bottom of this fountain he finds himself in her country where she is under attack by another wicked being, Felon d'Albarua, and has to rescue her. Eventually of course he makes his way back to Brunessen and Arthur and the story ends happily. At the beginning and end of the story there are two "end pieces" in which Arthur is seen to be taking action against some mysterious beasts.

A sense of humour

I talked of humour. The style in which this tale is told is conversational and lively. The descriptions are light and realistic. The events generally have a fair amount of humour within them, and if, as I think, the audience was familiar with the more conventional tales, then the whole blend of style and choice of events would have been enough to raise a smile and, at times, a chuckle or a belly laugh. Let's see if I can convey some of this to you.

The opening scenes have Arthur with his court waiting for an adventure before starting their Pentecost feast. As time passes Arthur decides that they will set out to look for an adventure, as none has come to them, and they all saddle up and ride out. Arthur hears some cries and sets off alone to investigate. He reaches a mill, where a woman is in deep grief, complaining that a strange horned beast is inside the mill eating all her grain. Arthur goes in search of the beast and initially takes up a classic fighting stance with his shield in place and his sword ready. The beast ignores him and carries on eating. Arthur concludes that it's not a wild animal (in the text - because it doesn't try to defend itself!) and takes his sword to strike the beast with the flat blade. Still no reaction. So Arthur grabs hold of its horns and pulls and shakes the beast instead, and tries to raise his fist to hit it on the head, but can't move his hand. The animal then sets off at a brisk trot, with Arthur clinging on behind because he can't let go of the horns.

Off they go, through the forest, and Gawain catches sight of them from a watchtower and comes up with his lance ready to run the animal through. Arthur has had time to think by now and tells Gawain to leave the animal alone, as it doesn't seem to want to hurt him and killing the animal might have the worst consequences. So Gawain, Tristan and Yvain (who were together in the tower) watch as the animal suddenly heads for a steep rock and, at the top, puts its head down so that Arthur is dangling into nothingness.

The rest of the court catch up - Kay immediately goes into a rather exaggerated lament about the loss of valour and falls off his horse and down the valley - but Gawain has the bright idea of asking the others to strip off and make a pile of clothes at the bottom of the rock to break Arthur's fall. They do this, stripping naked in their haste to help ... while Arthur, above, tightens his grip on the horns because, as the author tells us, he's really not keen to let go at this precise moment.

When the beast sees the naked courtiers it leaps nimbly down from the rock, releasing Arthur as it does so, and Arthur lands safely in the midst of his ladies and lords. The beast turns

into one of Arthur's knights who has been practising magic and had made a deal with Arthur that if he could successfully transform himself into some other creature for a feast day he would win a gold cup, a fine horse and a kiss from the prettiest girl at court. And, as he says, he's done a fine spell to make the others all strip naked as well. There's then some realistic detail about the squabbles about whose clothes belong to who in the pile before the party head back to Cardeuil (Carlisle - next to the forest of Broceliande for the purpose of this tale) and have their feast.

So there's some slapstick (naked courtiers and Kay falling off his horse and sliding down the valley after his rather inappropriate lament), some sniggers at the chivalric code (Arthur in battle pose with a wild animal), some very realistic comments (Arthur holding on for dear life at the top of the rock, the arguments about the clothes), some smiles at the classic story features (no adventure comes to them, so they go and look for one instead) and the humour of the episode itself. This is fairly typical of the style of the whole work.

Some of the motifs I outlined in the summary of the plot will give you a flavour. Python-like, Jaufre can't attack the giant leper on equal terms so he slashes away at his legs. The gleaming white lance is so gleaming because the dwarf has to keep washing it. Jaufre is sleeping in Brunessen's orchard and she sends her seneschal and other men in her household to get him. He is still half asleep when he knocks each one of them flying, and they return to Brunessen "all dusty behind", so eventually she has to send a whole posse together to take him. Although he falls in love with her on sight (and she with him) he's still desperately sleepy and doesn't spend any time at all thinking of their momentous meeting before sleep takes over again. She, meanwhile, chiefly remembers that he's told her he'd like to hold her naked in his arms. These feel like contemporary human beings we can identify with!

Then again, we have a quasi Wasteland set up, with a wounded overlord on a bed watched over by two weeping women, and a question. The difference is that this time it's really hazardous to ask the question (you'll be beaten up) and the wounded overlord has wounds that won't heal because the cruel Taulat de Rogemont makes him climb a mountain every time he starts to get better.

I have a great fondness for the moment when the Fada de Gibel pushes Jaufre into her fountain, too. Nothing like a hands-on approach to getting help, and it's elaborated by the wonderful funeral laments that all the characters speak about the supposedly drowned Jaufre, when the listener knows perfectly well that he's alive and well below the water. Leaving the humour aside for a short moment, the land under the water is one of many motifs in the plot that have close similarities with other folktales ... again raising the unanswerable question of which came first.

Entertainment

This story, although not so well known to us today, travelled widely around the world. It was known to Cervantes (and some say influenced his writing), it turned up in the Philippines in a version in Tagalog, and there were translations into French and English at different times in the past. There are comparisons to be made with *Jack the Giant Killer* as well as many other folk tales. It's a rich and fascinating text and one day I hope to finish the work I started to do on it, looking at all the folklore motifs and relationships with other Arthurian tales. But I think it's useful to remember that from time to time I need to remove my academic spectacles and read the story as a story, or even to tell parts of it to groups the way it was once told, because I think that's the only way I will remind myself that the author didn't intend it to be an exercise in detective work. It was, almost certainly, intended as an entertainment, just as many of the other stories about Arthur were, and it would be a pity not to enjoy the humour and the sense of mischief because we're too busy following a wild Grail chase or identifying solar heroes.

My greatest regret is knowing that we will never know the extent of the material this author drew on to write this funny, irreverent romance, and my unanswerable question is whether we've lost other romances in Occitan which might have shed more light on the stories of Arthur we still have. It's good to know, though, that T H White (and Malory, too, at times) was following a fine tradition with the use of humour, and it's probably good to keep in mind that Chrétien too had his tongue firmly in his cheek some of the time. My suspicion is that, as I said at the beginning, his approach was more akin to Jane Austin whereas the author of *Jaufre* is much more Monty Python - or possibly Wodehouse. And every so often I wonder whether scholars in the future will be as full of theories about the Knights Who Say Ni as we have been about the Grail question ...

Dante and Arthur

W M S Russell

The *Divine Comedy* of Dante is not only one of the very greatest masterpieces of world literature, it is also a compendium of the civilization of the peoples of medieval Western Europe - their history, literature, folklore, science, art, technology and world view, including their view of the ancient civilizations of Greece and Rome. 'All the noblest thought and work of the ages that passed between the fall of the Roman Empire and the closing year of the thirteenth century ... finds supreme artistic expression in his great poem.'[1] 'The masterpiece of Dante is an encyclopaedic and gigantic dream ... not of Dante only but of the closing European Middle Ages.'[2]

Now the Matter of Britain occupies so large a proportion of the finest medieval European literature, especially in the vernacular languages, that it surely ranks as a central feature of the region's culture. We therefore expect Arthur and Arthurian themes to figure very largely in the *Divine Comedy*. Several considerations reinforce this expectation.

Arthurian vogue

To begin with, there was 'an early and widely-diffused vogue of the Arthurian legends in Italy';[3] 'the Matter of Britain exercised a powerful influence on the Italian imagination during the Middle Ages'.[4] As all Arthurians know, the earliest visual representation of Arthur, labelled ARTVS DE BRETANIA, is in a sculptured frieze on the archivolt of the North portal of the marvellous Romanesque cathedral of Modena.[5] He is one of several knights rescuing a lady from a castle, and the scene is generally thought to be of an abduction of Guinevere. The frieze was carved in or soon after 1099 by sculptors from Bari in Apulia, then a headquarters of the Normans engaged in conquering Southern Italy and Sicily.[6] In 1096-7 the Normans were visited by the Duke of Brittany and his knights, on their way to the First Crusade, and Loomis suggested the Bari sculptors heard the tale of the abduction from a Breton storyteller in the Duke's entourage.

But the Normans themselves probably helped to introduce Arthurian themes to Italy. In the cathedral of Otranto, also in Apulia, a mosaic made in 1165 depicts a king, labelled ARTVRVS REX, rather oddly riding a goat.[7] In the Straits of Messina is one of the many under-water palaces of Morgan le Fay.[8] Under certain conditions this palace can be seen, under the sea or even above it, as the famous mirage known as the Fata Morgana.[9] The mirage is first recorded in 1558, and the name in 1617, but Morgan is generally thought to have been brought here by the Normans.

By the 1190s, Arthur was believed to be sleeping in an underground palace on the slopes of Mount Etna or another mountain in Sicily.[10] By the thirteenth century there were Italian Arthurian romances, and copious references to the French Arthurian literature by Italian authors in both Italian and Latin,[11] as well as a rambling Arthurian romance in French by an Italian, Rusticiano da Pisa, later the cell-mate and amanuensis in a Genoese prison of a certain Marco Polo of Venice.[12]

In view of all this, it would have been impossible for the enormously erudite Dante to be unfamiliar with the Arthurian literature. 'It is not known exactly how widely Dante read in the (vast) medieval Arthurian tradition',[13] but, as we shall see later, it is certain he read the *Prose Lancelot* and the *Mort Artu*, two components of the huge series of prose romances, composed in Northern French between 1210 and 1230, known as the *Vulgate Cycle*.[14]

There are two Arthurian references in his minor works. In the *Convivio* (Banquet), written in 1302-8, Book 4, Chapter 28, he praises Lancelot for abandoning all pleasure and worldly

activity at the end of his life, when, according to the *Mort Artu*, he became a hermit. In his Latin work about vernacular languages, *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, written in 1303-5, Book 1, Chapter 10, Dante praises the *langue d'oil* (Northern French) for its great prose works, including 'the convoluted but very beautiful narratives of King Arthur' (*Arturi regis ambages pulcherrimae*) a probable reference to the elaborately interlaced stories of the *Prose Lancelot*.[15]

Individuals

If we now turn to the *Divine Comedy*, we must notice first of all that it is the culmination of a long series of visions of the afterlife. These began in pagan times, with visions reflecting Stoic or NeoPythagorean views, described in several of the myths concluding dialogues of Plutarch.[16] They continued vigorously during the Christian Dark and Middle Ages.

Historical characters often appeared in these visions.[17] Gregory the Great wrote of a hermit who saw Theodoric being thrown into the crater of a volcano, such craters being considered as entrances to Hell. Dagobert I of the Franks and Magnus of Denmark were seen undergoing the same sort of punishment. Charles Martel used Church property to pay the troops with which he saved European Christendom from the Moslems at the Battle of Tours, and was accordingly seen by a monk burning in hell, an expression, in Gibbon's words, of 'the gratitude of the clergy, who are indebted to his sword for their present existence' (Chapter 52 of *The Decline and Fall*).

Political opinions were freely expressed in these visions. Thus Scottish visionaries saw Edward I carried off to hell by demons, and William Wallace 'borne up to heaven by angels, in company with innumerable souls released from Purgatory by the merits of that most glorious martyrdom!'.[18]

The *Divine Comedy*, of course, far transcends these visions in every way. Over 700 individuals are mentioned or alluded to in the poem.[19] Curtius made a rough count of about 580 characters who actually appear; of these 250 came from what was for Dante recent history, 80 from the bible, and 250 from the ancient world.[20] The ancient figures include a great many from legend - Jason, Ulysses and so on. In the gulf of the flatterers (*Inferno* Canto 18) Dante even sees Thais, a character in Terence's play *Eunuchus*, whom he found either in Cicero's essay on friendship or in the *Policraticus* of John of Salisbury.[21] So whether the medieval figures of Arthur and his court were envisaged as historical (which they were for most people), legendary, or literary, they could all perfectly well have appeared in the *Divine Comedy*.

Arthurian references

And now it is time to list the Arthurian references in the poem. In Canto 5 of the *Inferno*, Virgil and Dante are blown about by eternal winds. Virgil points out and names more than a thousand individual sinners, of whom Dante mentions seven, the last being Tristan.

Then Dante is allowed to speak to Francesca da Rimini, who is being whirled about with her lover Paolo Malatesta, brother of her husband Gianciotto Malatesta, who murdered them, and is allotted to the lowest (ninth) circle of Hell. Dante asks how their love began, and Francesca tells him they were reading a book about Lancelot. They came to the passage where the hero's friend Galehaut (Galeotto in Dante's Italian) introduces him to Guinevere, and when they read of the lovers' first kiss, they themselves kissed. So says Francesca, the writer and the book were a Galeotto for them. The passage is in the *Prose Lancelot*, and proves Dante read it; Galehaut, like Pandarus (who brought Troilus and Cressida together), was often used as a synonym for 'pander'.[22]

There is another brief reference to the *Prose Lancelot*, which shows Dante read it thoroughly, in Canto 16 of the *Paradiso*. In the Heaven of the warriors of God, Dante is greeted by his own ancestor Cacciaguida, and indulges in a little outburst of family pride. His guide to Heaven, Beatrice, gives a warning smile, which Dante likens to the warning cough given by a lady at the first weakening of Guinevere, who was beginning to respond to Lancelot.[23]

And then ... and then ... that is it! One character actually appearing (Tristan), and 16 lines of reference to Arthurian characters in the 14,230 lines of the *Divine Comedy*![24]

But what about Arthur himself? We might expect to find him either among the warriors of God, along with Charlemagne, Roland and the epic hero William of Orange, or among the just rulers, along with David, Hezekiah and Constantine. But there is no sign of Arthur anywhere in Heaven. Nor is he in Purgatory, expiating his incest.

To find an extremely oblique reference to him in two lines (bringing our grand total up to eighteen!), we have to descend to the lowest (ninth) circle of Hell, where the traitors are embedded in ice. In Canto 32 of the *Inferno*, Dante sees two sinners pressed close together, and is told who they are by a third sinner, who adds that if he looks through that whole division of the circle (traitors to kin) he will not find a spirit more worthy to be fixed in the ice - no, not the one whose breast and shadow were pierced by Arthur at one blow. This un-named traitor is Modred, and the reference proves Dante had read the *Mort Artu*, in which Arthur drives his

lance through Modred's body, and when it is withdrawn a ray of sunlight passes right through the hole.[25]

Why, contrary to expectation, is Arthurian legend and literature given such scanty recognition in the *Divine Comedy*, and why does the greatest of medieval heroes never appear, and only get a mention to identify someone else, who also never actually appears, and that at the bottom of Hell? I believe I have found the answer, but to understand it we must make an excursion into the politics of medieval Italy, and its effect on the life and thought of the poet himself.

Guelfs and Ghibellines

For over a century, from 1159 to 1268, Italy was torn apart in the struggle between the Papacy and the Holy Roman (German) Emperors of the Swabian House of Hohenstaufen.[26] This struggle intensified when the Hohenstaufen acquired the Kingdom of Sicily and South Italy, through the marriage of the Emperor Heinrich VI with Constance, heiress of the last Norman king, for the Papal States were thus encircled.

In the 1260s, two French Popes invited into Italy Charles of Anjou, brother of the French king (Louis IX the Saint). By 1268, Charles had eliminated the last Hohenstaufen males, in the battles of Benevento and Tagliacozzo, two of the last battles won by feudal cavalry.[27] Charles became king of Sicily and South Italy.

But in 1282 the Sicilians rose against the French in the famous Sicilian Vespers, killing anyone who could not pronounce the word *ciciri* (chick-pea). Pedro III of Aragon, who had married a Hohenstaufen princess, was invited to take over the island, while the Angevins retained control of South Italy. The Papacy was then for some time in conflict with Aragon and with new dynasties of Holy Roman (German) Emperors, and closely associated with the French.

The supporters of the Hohenstaufen were called Ghibellines, and those of the Papacy Guelfs.[28] The term Ghibelline arose from an Italian mispronunciation of Waiblingen, a castle of the Hohenstaufen near Stuttgart. The term Guelf was derived from the House of Welf, originally Dukes of Saxony (then referring to a region of Northern rather than Eastern Germany) and Bavaria, the chief rivals of the Hohenstaufen in Germany. The Welf were not very successful in medieval times, but the future was theirs, for their descendants included the Electors of Hanover, and hence H M Queen Elizabeth II.[29]

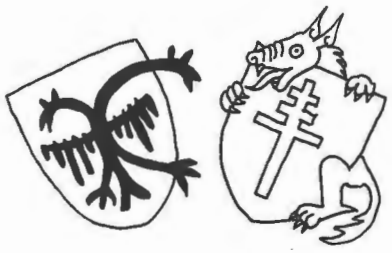
The names were first used in Germany as war-cries in 1140 at the Battle of Winsberg fought between the two great families. They became established as names of the two factions in 1208-1218, during the war between Otto IV, the only Welf Imperial claimant, and the Hohenstaufen Emperor Friedrich II.

The terms thereafter largely applied to Italy, the main battleground of the conflict. In theory, the Ghibellines were country nobles, who expected the Emperors to uphold their feudal prerogatives, and the Guelfs the city merchants, who expected the Emperors to interfere with their communal privileges. But in practice the two factions simply absorbed, in a more or less arbitrary way, the endless feuds between families and cities with which Italy was cursed. If your enemies were Guelfs, you were Ghibellines, and *vice versa*.

After 1268 the Guelfs were associated with the French as well as the Popes; the Ghibellines sought support from later dynasties of Emperors, but became largely an independent force: several of their leaders became city despots on their own account, and founded local dynasties.

In Florence, the two factions were traditionally believed to have formed in 1215, when a murder began a deadly feud between two groups of noble families, who adopted Guelf and Ghibelline policies, respectively.[30] For decades the two factions alternated in control of the city, but with the coming of Charles of Anjou the Guelfs became permanently supreme, exiling 3000 Ghibellines and seizing their property in 1268-9.

Towards the end of the century, in nearby Pistoia, a feud developed between two branches of the powerful family of the Cancellieri, known as the Blacks and Whites. By 1300 the feud had infected Florence, where the Guelf party split into two, called Black and White Guelfs. The Blacks persisted in the alliance with France and the Papacy; the Whites began to see these powers as greater threats to communal privileges than the Emperors, and moved towards negotiation with the Ghibellines. This time the Blacks tended to include most of the Guelf nobles, while the Whites were politically the Popular party. The Whites were led by the Cerchi family, the Blacks by that of the Donati.



Dante in Florence

Dante (or Durante) Alighieri was born in Florence in 1265.[31] In 1289 he fought in the cavalry at the Battle of Campaldino against the Ghibellines. In 1292 he married Gemma Donati, related to the future leader of the Blacks. But in 1295, when he entered politics, he began to show that distrust of the French and Pope Boniface VIII that made him definitely a White when the split occurred.

In June to August 1300 he was one of the six Priors, supreme magistrates of the city, the usual duration of this rotating office. A riot broke out between the two factions, and Dante and his colleagues exiled the leaders of both sides in the riot, one being Corso Donati. After June 1301, Dante seems to have been away from the city, though his exact whereabouts are in dispute, so he was absent when a great disaster occurred.

For in that year Boniface took a leaf out of his predecessors' book, and called in the brother of a king of France. This time it was Charles of Valois, brother of King Philippe IV the Fair, and ancestor of the Valois dynasty.[32] Boniface asked him to 'pacify' the Black-White conflict in Tuscany, and drive the Aragonese out of Sicily.

While Valois was at Siena with his troops, Corso Donati paid him a bribe of 70,000 florins, raised by Black bankers. Accordingly, Valois got permission to bring his troops into Florence, by swearing not to interfere in the city's politics, and, as soon as he was admitted, promptly turned the city over to the Blacks, destroying a third of it in the process.

The Blacks established a reign of terror, throwing more than 600 Whites out of Florence, and seizing all their property, with a generous share for Valois on top of the original bribe. Valois went off to Sicily, where his campaign was a complete fiasco. The Florentine chronicler Giovanni Villani later summed up his expedition to Italy: 'Charles came to Tuscany to make peace, and left it at war. He went to Sicily to make war, and there made a dishonourable peace'.

In 1302, Corso Donati had Dante accused in his absence of graft. Throughout the whole of his terrifying journey through Hell, Dante is only once in personal danger, when he has to be rescued by his guide Virgil from angry demons. This is beside the gulf where the grafters are immersed in boiling pitch (*Inferno* Canto 23). Possibly his over-sensitive conscience was troubled by some innocent irregularity while he was in office, which gave a handle to his enemies. But the charge was certainly a vicious party attack, and the Black Guelfs of Florence have earned eternal infamy by condemning the greatest poet of medieval Europe to be burned alive if he ever returned to the city.

Heirs of Empire

Dante spent the rest of his life in poverty and exile from his beloved city, dying in Ravenna in 1321, soon after completing his great poem. He had wondered all over Italy. He became more and more deeply involved with the cause for which he suffered. The exiled Whites, Dante among them, made abortive alliances with the Ghibellines, and Dante himself was protected by Ghibelline despots, especially the Della Scalas in Verona.

But his passionate devotion to the Holy Roman Empire came to exceed that of any Ghibelline. He saw the Emperors as the only hope of peace and justice for Italy and indeed for European Christendom. When the Emperor Henry VII, of the House of Luxembourg, visited Italy in 1310-13, Dante wrote passionate letters to the Emperor and others, expressing his hopes for the visit. Unfortunately, Henry died in Italy without achieving anything against the powerful Guelf resistance.

In 1314, Dante wrote, or completed, his great Latin work *Monarchia*.[33] This is a glorification of the Holy Roman Empire, with an elaborate reasoned exposition of its essential and Providential nature. Not surprisingly, in 1329 Pope John XXII condemned the book to be burned, and in 1564 it was one of the first works to be put on the Index of Prohibited Books.[34]

The Holy Roman Emperors claimed sometimes to be the heirs of the Roman Emperors of antiquity. So did the Popes: in 1299, Dante's *bête noire* Boniface VIII received the envoys of the Emperor Albrecht I wearing a crown and a sword and shouting ' I, I am Emperor' (*ego ego sum imperator*).[35] Naturally Dante took the first view, and his enthusiasm for the Holy Roman Emperors extended to their precursors, the rulers of the Roman Empire. One third of his *Monarchia* is devoted to showing that the rise of Rome and the Roman Empire were the work of Providence, and crucial for God's plans for world history.

Dante's enthusiasm for both the medieval and the ancient Empires is a running theme throughout the *Divine Comedy*. Two striking examples will suffice to show this. In Canto 20 of the *Paradiso*, we find in the Heaven of Just Rulers, none other than the Emperor Trajan! Now there was a story that Trajan had shown justice to a poor widow (Dante is shown a carving of this scene in the *Purgatorio*, Canto 10), and that this so impressed Pope Gregory the Great, centuries later, that he prayed for Trajan to be released from Hell long enough to become a Christian and thus earn Heaven. Dante could have found this story in several sources.[36]

So Dante had some authority for putting Trajan in Heaven. But still, all the same! Dante was in Verona in 1316, where at that time the humanist Giovanni de Matociis was working on a manuscript of the correspondence of the younger Pliny.[37] Dante may therefore have seen Trajan's letter to Pliny (Book 10, Letter 97) confirming that Christianity is a punishable offence. If he did see this, putting Trajan in Heaven is still more bizarre.

The legendary Trojan Ripheus is in the same Heaven. To us, the presence of these pagans here seems a gross injustice to all the other virtuous pagans - including even Dante's beloved Virgil - who are relegated to Limbo. Dante himself feels uneasy about it, and has himself in the poem ask how this is possible: he is fobbed off with an evasive answer. But of course the presence of Trajan here is a measure of Dante's enthusiasm for the Roman Empire, and he felt equally strongly about Trojans, as the presumed ancestors of the Roman people.[38]

Even more strikingly, in Canto 34 of the *Inferno*, at the very bottom of Hell, we find the monstrous three-headed Lucifer, flapping his bats' wings to keep the Hell of the traitors eternally frozen by an icy wind. In each of his three jaws he chews on an ultimate sinner: in the middle one, naturally enough, is Judas Iscariot, but in the two outer ones - how it would have amazed Cicero, Plutarch and Shakespeare - are none other than Brutus and Cassius! Julius Caesar himself, the effective founder of the Monarchical Empire, is in Limbo (Canto 4) but this scene at Hell's core makes him only a little inferior to Jesus Christ. Such were Dante's feelings about the Roman Empire.

Revolt

Now, as Geoffrey Ashe showed long ago, the real Arthur was probably regarded, by himself and others, as a last representative in Britain of Roman civilisation and the Roman Empire.[39] But of course by Dante's day the real Arthur was completely forgotten, having been replaced by the Arthur created by Geoffrey of Monmouth. And unfortunately Geoffrey, eager to aggrandise his hero, had him refuse tribute to Rome, take on the armies of the Roman Emperor, and soundly defeat them. He is about to advance on Rome, when news of the treachery of Modred has him hurrying back to Britain. The Continental romancers, unimpressed by this bit of British chauvinism, tended to leave it out. But a few of them retained the attack on the Romans, including the author of the *Mort Artu*, which, as we have seen, Dante certainly read.[40]

This assault on his beloved Roman Empire would have acted on the Italian poet like a red rag on a bull. I suspect he would dearly have liked to put Arthur in the ice as a traitor to his natural lord. The hero's enormous and universal popularity would have made that too shocking. Still, by referring to him as betrayed rather than betraying, Dante does manage to mention him in htat ultimately infernal place. And despite his admiration for the Arthurian romances as literature, he allots them only a miniscule place in his mighty poem.

I have had to make a long detour through medieval history, but I think I have shown why the greatest medieval legendary hero is treated with such scant regard by the greatest medieval poet.

***Le roi Arthur** from a wood-engraving analogous to 15th century playing card designs [W M S Russell]*

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n = Note

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[21] Curtius (*n* 20) 567.

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[23] Oelsner and Wicksteed (*n* 22), Vol 3, 202, and Viscardi (*n* 4) 423.

[24] The total number of lines in the poem is given by Curtius (*n* 20) 569.

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Reviews

Merlin
Channel 4 6.10 April 4 and 7.00 April 5 1999
Hallmark *Starring Sam Neill, Isabella Rossellini, Miranda Richardson, Helena Bonham Carter and Martin Short*

I have a rather strange tale to tell about this programme. I had my elder son David and his family spending the holiday with me, and we were all interested to see what this new version would be like. About twenty minutes into it, I said, "I know I haven't seen this before, yet it's very familiar."

And then I remembered. In the spring of 1995 I came into contact, via Bill MacQuitty (producer of *A Night to Remember* in 1957), with one Simon Mills, who had just produced a book called *The Titanic in Pictures* (recommended for *Titanic* buffs like me). After some sporadic correspondence that year, we lost touch until in June 1998 Simon sent me what he called "a blast from the past!" His letter accompanied a hefty TV script - entitled *Merlin* ...

He described it as "the first draft screen-play of a two-part American television mini-series on which I finished working in mid-February, and you can tell by the title that sooner or later Arthur would have to appear within its pages. I no longer have any need of this script so please feel free to read or throw it away as you see fit.

"The final programme was somewhat different to the original version, but as to how faithful it is to the legends of Gildas, Geoffrey or Malory (and Nennius?) I will leave to your better judgement. I can probably guess what you will think of it, but if you do read it, then please try to look at it as nothing more than a fictional device for the benefit of an American TV audience that absolutely insists on a happy ending."

A later letter said that "the final version went out in America over two nights (27th and 28th April) on NBC ... If I understand correctly it has been sold to Channel 4 and is part of their line-up for their autumn schedule." (I don't know why it was delayed until Easter 1999 ...)

Since I too like happy endings, I read his script in the spirit in which he had written it, and quite enjoyed it. Even, as I told Simon: "the daft love-interest between Lancelot and Guinevere." And I quoted Breton Professor Jean Markale's scathing remarks (in *King of the Celts*):
There is ... too great a tendency to portray Arthur as a downtrodden but happy cuckold ... The story of Lancelot and Guinevere's love, which a horrifying naïve Arthur is always ready to help along, must be one of the silliest tales mediaeval literature has given us.

Fairly early on Easter Monday morning I had a second nose-bleed which landed me in hospital again for 24 hours, so Laura (daughter-in-law) video'd the second part for me. Once again accepting it for what Simon had said it was, I enjoyed it - a rattling good adventure yarn featuring some familiar characters, plus some extras - I liked 'Frik', Mab's side-kick! The only oddity was that I didn't see Simon's name listed as screen-play writer, so I rang him up and asked him why not? He said, oh yes, it was there, so I took a closer look - and found him listed as "focus-puller" - whatever that may be! If I didn't have this 'shooting script' (in two hefty parts) as proof that it came from him, I think I might list him as 'leg-puller' ...

The special effects were good, as were most of the cast, especially Miranda Richardson as Mab and the Lady of the Lake. I would say that, since the mediaeval scribes felt free to mess about with the original legend, adding bits and people and denigrating the female characters, I reckon that modern scribes like Simon have a perfect right to do their own messing-about, as long as it produces an entertaining story. Which, in my opinion, Simon did. Hooray for happy endings, let's have lots more of 'em!

Beryl Mercer ◆

Anne Lister
Singing on the Wind
Hearthfire HF005CD 1999 £11.00 includes p&p
34 Nightingale House, Thomas More Street, London E1 9UA
http://freespace.virgin.net/anne.lister/

This album moves from a mythic level to a personal and then back out to the universal with themes like love, death, paradox and nature. Though Irish myths are focused on there are many analogies with motifs from the Matter of Britain such as the Loathly Lady and the naked sword in the bed. The opening of the title song, "I could write this down in fancy words, but I prefer them plain," could as easily refer to the lyrics as a whole, unadorned but direct.

The melodies are in traditional folk style, varying from diatonic to modal, while Anne's confident singing is accompanied by her own guitar playing and supported very ably by fiddle, whistle, pipes, harp, sax, bass, percussion and voice (not all at the same time though!).

Of the thirteen tracks my favourites, for different reasons, were *Oisin*, *The Well Beneath the Sea*, *Breakers* and *Devil in the Garden*. A thoughtful yet passionate album, then, attractively packaged with a haunting illustration by Cilla Conway, well worth repeated listenings.

Chris Lovegrove

Christopher A Snyder
An Age of Tyrants
Britain and the Britons AD 400-600
Sutton Publishing 1998 £14.99
07509 1929 9 pbk 403pp

An Age of Tyrants is an evocative but appropriate title for this new study of the history and archaeology of the post-Roman period. The Late Roman historian Jerome, referring to the end of the Roman period, describes Britain as 'a province fertile of tyrants'. Richard Snyder focuses on the tyrant as the apex of the new political organisation of the Britons in this period.

Snyder's book is divided into four main sections. Firstly, he examines Late Roman Britain, concentrating on the crucial years 406-410, which ended in the abandonment of the province by the Roman emperors. This is followed by two lengthy sections on the history and archaeology of the post-Roman centuries. The historical section firstly surveys the documentary sources, then examines in detail the use and development of a number of key political, social and religious terms. The archaeological section surveys the evidence from excavated sites: towns, forts, rural sites, and religious sites. The final section discusses and synthesises the evidence presented in earlier sections. There is also a lengthy bibliography and extensive notes.

Snyder analyses the trends that have arisen in recent studies of the period. The written sources are more abundant than is often thought, but they are fragmentary, unreliable and variable in quality, context and meaning. So much so, in fact, that after exhaustive and frustrating analysis, historians have recently tended to reject all but a few key texts such as Patrick and Gildas, and abandon any attempt to write a continuous narrative history of the period AD 400-600. Instead, they have turned to archaeology to enlighten our knowledge of the social and economic conditions of the period. Snyder suggests that we can steer a third way. He agrees that the documentary evidence is fragmentary and discontinuous. But he goes on to argue that through the study of certain key terms that appear in the documentary sources, and by analysis of the archaeological evidence for the settlements of the Britons, we can draw a picture of a distinctive British society and culture.

The most original and interesting part of Snyder's work is his study of certain key terms, such as *Britanni* (Britons), *cives* (citizens), *tyranni* (tyrants) and *patria* (homeland). The evolution of these terms through their use by secular and Christian authors from the Late Roman period in Western Europe through to sub-Roman Britain and beyond is carefully traced. Thus Snyder sees, for example, the word *tyrannus* as having a derogatory meaning to Late Roman writers, meaning a usurper who seizes power illegitimately. However, in a religious context, for example in the writings of Gildas and Patrick, a *tyrannus* could mean also a wicked, sinful monarch. Then later, the term seems to have been absorbed into the Celtic language as simply a local term for the ruler of the district, without a moral dimension.

The archaeological survey concentrates on the main sites only. It is useful, but inevitably it has the difficulty of having to harmonise, in a site-by-site description, the evidence from a wide number of sites excavated at different times, by different excavators, to different levels of detailed examination. It is possible to link the historical and archaeological evidence, however, and Snyder attempts to do this. Thus, for example, if the *tyranni* mentioned above were living in, say, hillforts, what can the archaeological evidence tell us about their lifestyle and contacts?

Much of this book is a summary and analysis of previous research, both historical and archaeological. It is a useful, well-written and clear study, with thoughtful and compelling arguments. Snyder sees the year AD 400-600 as more than just a transitional period between Roman Britain and Anglo-Saxon England. He argues we can establish a distinctive identity for this historical period, with its own unique social, political and religious institutions, reflecting a change from a magisterial to a monarchical society. But here it is only too clear how fragmentary our evidence remains, because for all Snyder's patient analysis, the synthesis remains sketchy and cautious, occupying just one-tenth of the total text. However, if it is too early for firm conclusions, Snyder's book certainly points scholars in the right direction, and will stimulate further discussion and study.

Nick Grant

Mike Baillie
From Exodus to Arthur
Batsford 1999 £19.99
hbk 272pp
Secrets of the Dead: *Catastrophe*
Channel 4 9.00-10.00 July 27, August 3 1999
Producers Gary Johnstone and Mike Chrisman
Consultant David Keys

Following on from discussion [*with the editor*] about draconic comets in Geoffrey of Monmouth's day, I got hold of a copy of *From Exodus to Arthur*, whose theme of a cometary impact in the 540s is currently being questioned in the two-part Channel programme in the "Secrets of the Dead" strand.

I've so far been unimpressed by much of the "evidence" presented both by Baillie's book and in the C4 programmes (which are based on David Key's recent book *Catastrophe*, which I haven't seen yet). The tree-ring material is interesting, but all it shows is some kind of climatic problem in the 530s-540s. I've seen only a few tenuous comments to suggest what this might be; "frost damage" is a phrase commonly bandied about, but there are oddly no corroborating examples of other frost damage shown to back this up. The ice-core material which could help to support one or other theory is rightly questioned by Baillie because of its poor time constraints - *ie* it can't be accurately dated, certainly not as accurately as the tree-rings - yet what evidence there is in the ice-cores tends to support a volcanic event in any case. There is certainly no evidence to support either an increased cometary or meteoric flux during the 530s-540s. The nearest of those increased fluxes is a century adrift from this time.

The C4 programmes seem to be favouring a volcanic eruption as an alternative explanation. However, this concept is also poorly-developed, since the magnitude of the eruption would have been of far greater significance than any previously known, and again the supporting evidence for this (suggested in the C4 programme[s] as Krakatoa, or rather an earlier, more dramatic version of the 1883 eruption / explosion there) is highly circumstantial, and not at all well dated (sometime between 6000 BCE and 1215 CE).

I think what bothers me more than anything else in all this is that other possible causes have been ignored in the hurry to find some single catastrophic event of unknown likelihood. A severe El Niño event could have been equally responsible, as El Niños have recently been found to have started *c* 3000 BCE. The latest one of these meant we had no summer here last year, for instance, and it rained nearly every day from April to September, with scarcely a glimpse of the Sun on many days. Such an event coupled with a major volcano or two, or severe forest fires, could easily have had the desired effects being claimed for the 530s-540s.

There is also the question over whether solar activity might have been involved. Times when there were very few sunspots coincided with the late medieval to early modern Little Ice Age, for example, a climatic downturn that persisted over several centuries with different degrees of severity, and solar influence on the Earth's climate has just been discussed again in the August issue of the RAS journal *Astronomy & Geophysics*.

On the whole, I'd feel more comfortable with all this if the other avenues had been more fully explored, or investigated at all, and if so much of the "evidence" didn't depend so heavily on someone's reinterpretation of event dating and/or the few surviving written texts from the period. This often seems to be trying to "force" the evidence to comply with a preconceived notion, and not really looking at what the evidence itself suggests.

The second part of ***Catastrophe*** was pretty disappointing, I felt, with a succession of unclear or questionable data points being trotted out as support for the volcanic theory. The evidence could be quite strong, but the presentation of it left me feeling it really wasn't, otherwise it would have stood on its own, without the need for fancy graphics and pointless landscape long-shots to disguise it all.

New Scientist (7th August, *163:2198*) has a supplement "Nine days that shook the world" in it. Pages 12-13 of that have a discussion of the Tambora eruption of 1815 by Fred Pearce. I'm not too up on the event, since most of the work was done after my geology studies ended (the main conference on it was only in 1989), but assuming the editorial is right, Tambora was more violent than any other eruption for the last 10,000 years, and threw out at least seven times as much rock, dust and ash as the 1883 Krakatoa eruption, shooting more fine particles into the upper atmosphere than any other event in recorded history.

It happened on 10 April 1815, and crops were blighted in a few parts of the world (notably New England and China) in 1816, the famous "year without a summer" in Europe and North America. China had terrible harvests again in 1817, However, that was it as far as global climatic problems were concerned. The Sun being dimmed was recorded only from sites within 2000 km or so, not right round the world, as has been claimed for the *c* 540 event.

What concerns me is that even if some of these figures are a little out, why did neither Keys nor Baillie draw attention to it? Keys's theory, as expressed in the C4 programmes, referred only to Krakatoa - a damp squib compared to Tambora, according to *New Scientist*. I can't help but feel the evidence for the supposed "event" (more likely events) in the 530s-540s needs a far more thorough comparative review than either author attempted.

Alastair McBeath ◆

Further reading
Victor Clube and Bill Napier (1990) *The Cosmic Winter* [Basil Blackwell, Oxford] chapter 7 "Doomsday"
M E Bailey, S V M Clube & W M Napier (1990) *The Origin of Comets* [Pergamon Press, Oxford] chapter 4 "Medieval commotion"
Alastair McBeath (1998) "Comet Myths Ancient & Modern" in *3rd Stone 31* 13-16

◆ The two *reviews marked with a diamond are extracts from letters to the editor.*

Paul Wilkinson
Beowulf in Kent
Faversham Paper 64, The Faversham Society, Fleur de Lis Heritage Centre, 13 Preston Street, Faversham, Kent ME13 8NS £3.95
The Saga of King Hrolf Kraki
translated and introduced by Jesse L Byock
Penguin 1998 £7.99
0 14 043593 X pbk illus 99pp
The Saga of the Volsungs
translated and introduced by Jesse L Byock
Penguin 1999 £7.99
0 14 044738 5 pbk illus 145pp

The medieval Icelandic works, presented in new translations by Prof Byock, make generally available again two sagas drawn from the Dark Age world of northern Europe. Partly set in the migration period, the 13th century *Saga of the Volsungs* blends tales of Burgundians, Goths and Attila the Hun with mythic tales of Odin, the valkyries and Sigurd the dragon-slayer, in a tale which shares material with *The Nibelungenlied* and which was composed around the same period. *The Saga of King Hrolf Kraki* is set in the same period (though written down in the 14th century) and shares themes of lust, revenge and magic. Both editions have introductions, notes, maps, appendices and glossaries of proper names, and both are in unadorned translations that let the stories speak for themselves.

Both sagas also illuminate the Matter of Britain, for example in terms of motifs. Odin provides a parallel for Merlin when he sets up the test of the sword that can only be drawn by the rightful one; in *The Saga of the Volsungs* this is Sigmund, son of King Volsung, who draws the precursor of Sigurd's sword Gram from the trunk of the Barnstokkr, a tree in Volsung's hall. Sigmund later unknowingly commits incest with his twin sister Signy, though (un-Mordred-like) their son Sinfjotli is a supportive companion for his uncle-father Sigmund. More incest results in the birth of Hrolf in *Hrolf's Saga*, and Hrolf's bane is his aunt / step-sister, who shares some characteristics with Arthur's half-sister, Morgan le Fay. Bodvar Bjarki, one of Hrolf's champions, also draws out a sword embedded in the rock, set there before his birth by his father Bjorn ("Bear") in the guise of a were-bear.

Other parallels come in the story of Bodvar Bjarki, who closely resembles both Beowulf and Arthur in that the latter two can also be described as berserkers or bear-warriors [see my "Arthur-types" in *Pendragon XXVII* No 1 (1998)]. For example, Arthur kills a witch in a blind fury in *Culhwch and Olwen* and, similarly, the giant of Mont-St-Michel in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History*. In *Hrolf's Saga* Bjarki boldly kills a monster by Hrolf's hall at Hleidr (probably the modern Lejre in Zealand). In *Beowulf* the monsters Grendel and his mother are killed by Beowulf next to the hall called *Heorot* ruled by a certain Hroðgar, apparently in Denmark.

Now there are some curiosities here, which lead to the intriguing speculations in Wilkinson's *Beowulf in Kent*. I see that in *Hrolf's Saga* Hrolf's kinsman Hroar marries Ogn, daughter of Nordri, an English king, and Hroar eventually settles in his father-in-law's English kingdom "in Northumberland". (*Are you awake at the back there?*) Now this Hroar appears in *Beowulf* as Hroðgar (Hrothgar), aforementioned ruler of *Heorot*. Next, Wilkinson has found a place called *Heorot* in the Isle of Sheppey, Kent, in the 11th century. Other details in *Beowulf* are suggestive not of Zealand, in Denmark - nor even of Northumberland - but of the Kent coast, and Wilkinson lists these coincidences (if that is what they are).

So the intriguing possibility is this: the story of Bjarki's defeat of a monster near to Hrolf's hall at Hleidr (Lejre), in Denmark, has been adapted to describe Beowulf's defeat of Grendel at Heorot (modern Harty) in Kent, the hall of Hrolf's kinsman, Hrothgar. And Hrothgar (Icelandic Hroar) is described in *Hrolf's Saga* as spending some time in England. (*Are you still with me?*) Except that the *Beowulf* incident is in a text that pre-dates the Icelandic saga!

I am not suggesting of course that we read these early texts merely as clues in some early medieval whodunit. They stand on their own merits, grabbing the imagination in the way that good folktales should, melded here with dollops of mythology and history. But if you're interested, there is further discussion of Wilkinson's sleuthing in *History Today* Vol 48 (12) December 1998, and *Widowinde 17*, Spring 1999.

Chris Lovegrove

bookworm

NON-FICTION

That classic study *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages* is appearing in separate volumes, completely revised: ***The Arthur of the Welsh*** has this year been followed by ***The Arthur of the English*** (other Arthurs to follow!). Edited by W R J Barron and published by the University of Wales Press [0 708 31477 5], the hardback retails at £35.00.

TV presenter Michael Wood (so good they've named some M5 motorway services after him) is to take a new look at Arthur in his ***In Search of England*** (Viking publication October 1999). This follows his ***In Search of the Dark Ages*** (BBC Books 1981) where he threw cold water on the whole Arthurian affair.

Denise Stobie was on the question-and-answer panel for Pendragon 98 at Glastonbury. Just published are two photographic studies of hers, both available in hardback at £14.99 from Collins & Brown. Entitled respectively ***Exploring King Arthur's Britain*** [1 85585 695 6] and ***Exploring Celtic Britain*** [1 85585 687 5] they appear from initial impressions to be handsome in presentation and wide-ranging in legendary sites.

Alastair McBeath writes that he has been advised, by a colleague who runs Morpeth's main bookshop, of the forthcoming (or maybe just published) title ***Camelot's Frontier*** by Peter McKenzie. This apparently is a short review of Arthurian evidence in northern England, complete with suitably "moody" colour photos of appropriate parts of the scenery, published by Longhirst Press in Morpeth, Northumberland. More details when available.

The French Celtic scholar Jean Markale has produced a number of studies of interest to readers. A new translation has just been published of his *Le Graal* (1982, Retz, Paris) titled, unsurprisingly, ***The Grail***. Produced by Inner Traditions [0 892 817143] it costs £12.99 in paperback.

FICTION

A promising new anthology entitled ***Arthurian Literature by Women*** is now available. Edited by Alan Lupack *et al*, the paperback is published by Garland [0 815 33483 4] at £12.99.

Described as "the first novel in a Guenevere series", Rosalind Miles' ***Guenevere: the Queen of the Summer Country*** is published by Simon & Schuster at £9.99 for the 500-plus page paperback [0 684 85134 2]. Entertaining reviews of Miles' novel are to be had in *Ceridwen's Cauldron*, which looks too at A A Attanasio's ***The Perilous Order: Warriors of the Round Table*** published by Hodder & Stoughton [340pp hardback £17.99].

James Mallory's ***Merlin: The Old Magic*** [Voyager paperback 335pp £6.99] and ***Merlin: The Complete Script*** by David Stevens, Peter Barnes and Edward Khmara [Channel 4 Books paperback 241pp £6.99] - the latter two based on the TV mini-series reviewed above - also get the once-over in *Ceridwen's Cauldron*, and are found wanting.

A new retelling of Arthurian tales from Geoffrey of Monmouth, Malory, the Mabinogion and Tennyson is available as ***Discovering King Arthur*** by Beryl Beare. Illustrated, and with an introduction by Geoffrey Ashe, this new paperback is available at £12.99 from Quantum [0 572 02367 7]. In contrast, the first complete English translation of the 12th century Irish text *Acallam na Senórach* is now published as ***Tales of the Elders of Ireland***, at £6.99 from Oxford World Classics [0 19 283918 7]. This version by Ann Dooley and Harry Roe is noteworthy for its mention, the first in Gaelic literature, of Artúir son of the king of Britain.

MISCELLANEOUS

Capall Bann Publishing, who produce a range of titles on alternative topics, are now issuing a free magazine *Inspiration* to allow customers to get a better idea of the contents of their books. The first issue includes "Merlin - a Biography" by Chris Thomas, though, like me, you may be hard pressed to recognise Chris' portrait of "the caretaker of humanity and the arbitrator of fate". More enlightenment may be had from his ***The Fool's First Steps***, just published at £9.95.

Capall Bann also offer ***None But Seven***, an album by **Spiral Castle**, with title and band both appearing to be based on Arthurian motifs. "Inspired lyrics ... excellent musical back-up ... thoroughly enjoyable" are some of the descriptions of this CD of both traditional and "upbeat" folk, priced at £11.00 including post and packing from Capall Bann Publishing, Freshfields, Chieveley, Berks RG20 8TF.

the board

ARTHURIAN PROJECTS

Promoted jointly by the Arthurian Heritage Trust and the British Library, **The Camelot Project** is scheduled to be launched in the autumn at **Worthyvale Manor**, Slaughterbridge, Cornwall. The collaboration will bring

unique and priceless Arthurian manuscripts to Cornwall in digitised form for the benefit of an international audience, for scholarship and for the development of a schools outreach programme.

The Arthurian Heritage Trust includes in its charitable objects

the development of greater public accessibility to the Arthurian stories and texts, and associated literature, art and music.

Sample courses offered will include art, archaeology, history, myth and legend. literature, and modern cultural and political responses to the Arthurian genre. Workshops will include calligraphy and manuscript illumination, dyeing, medieval music and dance, traditional farming skills and crafts. In addition, 80 acres of land surrounding the Centre will be the focus of an exciting ancient landscape project (which may include introducing wild boar!). Watch this space! Or, better still, visit the official website at

www.kingarthur.co.uk

Cairns Boston, the Westcountry tourist board chairman, said that "Arthurian material has had a profound influence on the course of European history ... This promises to be the ultimate Arthurian resource centre ... that will enable everyone - not just academics - to derive a great deal of benefit from it" [Geoffrey Gibbs "From Avalon to cyberspace" *The Guardian* May 18 1999].

Tourism Minister Janet Anderson knew its real value, of course. "In terms of tourism I think the potential here is enormous, particularly for those from North America," she said [*Western Morning News* Aug 4 1999, from Beryl Mercer].

Forrester Roberts, who passed on most of this information, also tells us that the mayor of **Paimpont** in Brittany has expressed interest in an Arthurian exhibition for the millennium but that negotiations with him are still in progress.

Meanwhile, **North Cornwall Tourism** were due to open a £200,000 Arthurian visitor centre at **Tintagel** in May 1999 (unless this is the same as The Camelot Project) which is supposed to distinguish between the "real" and "mythical" Arthurs. Good luck to them.

A new Arthurian theme park, costing £625 million, is at the planning stage. Provisionally named **Legend Court**, it is to be built on a 1,200-acre site near **Newport**, not far from Caerleon, a Camelot contender [*The Daily Telegraph Weekend*, March 27 1999"]. Author Giles Milton reports [in "King Arthur doesn't live here any more", also published as "Battle for a legend - whose king is Arthur?" in *The Weekly Telegraph 402* 28-29] that the park will be "the biggest Arthurian venture in the world" and is expected to attract more than three million visitors annually to Wales. Interactive displays will include exhibits from the Dark Ages on loan from the National Museum of Wales, and Alan Gunter, MD of Legend Court, states that "we now know that he was certainly Welsh and had a close relationship with **Caerleon**".

However, Scotland, Brittany, Glastonbury (incidentally, now in Wiltshire, according to Giles Milton) and - especially - Cornwall will not be giving up without a fight: Bob Flower of North Cornwall District Council is adamant that "everyone knows Arthur came from **Tintagel**. This theme park will be glorified tat and it won't convince anyone, least of all the Americans..." Methinks the laddie doth protest too much.

Whether convinced or not, US member Dan Nastali writes that the **Arthurian Annals** project "is very much alive and keeping me busy ... The database continues to grow and will probably include close to 10,000 Arthurian works of every sort when done." The *Annals* won't be completed until some time in 2001 as Dan and Phil Boardman have set a date limit of 2000 ("a nice round six centuries worth") for the database, which comprises items of Arthurian bibliography, filmography, discography *etc.*

WHO, WHAT, WHERE

The Kennedy administration of 1960s America was famously dubbed after the Arthurian capital and court. The connection, with its implicit doom-laden connotations, was revived in the wake of the recent JFK Junior aircraft tragedy.

Married to the former President's son in 1996 on an island off the coast of Georgia, the late **Carolyn Bessette Kennedy** was seen as a blend of Princess Diana and Jackie Onassis. She was voted "The Ultimate Beautiful Person" by classmates at her Greenwich private high school and "Camelot's New Queen" by the US tabloid *The Daily News* [BBC Online Network's News pages feature ***Carolyn: Camelot's Queen*** July 18, 1999].

Lady **Ygraine**, on the other hand, is alive and well and owns an occultist business in Port St Lucie, Florida, according to the OverTheTop section of *The Guardian* ["Spooky sponsor", Feb 6 1999]. A junior baseball team - age range 5 to 12 years old - turned down the witch's offer of $250 sponsorship, and she was then believed to be considering court action for discrimination after the league president called her "disturbing". Lady Ygraine asserted that the **Church of Satan** promotes responsibility and self-empowerment, ideal qualities for a baseball team.

A flurry of excitement greeted the news that **Prince Edward**, on his marriage to **Sophie Rhys-Jones**, had become the first **Earl of Wessex** for more than nine centuries. The last earl reputedly got one in the eye at the Battle of Hastings, but there is more than "a hint of Arthuriana here" as Ade Dimmick points out. Cerdic, claimed as an ancestor of the present Queen, was traditionally the first ruler of Wessex which in time expanded to cover present-day Devon, Dorset, Hampshire, Berkshire, Wiltshire and Somerset. "It had existed only in the realms of fiction, Arthurian legend and England's distant past," mused Martin Bright in *The Observer* ("It may be a myth, but it's England" June 20 1999). He went on to tell us that the area is now associated with New Age religions, ancient British beliefs and ley-lines linking Stonehenge, Glastonbury Tor and Cadbury Castle, "possible location for King Arthur's Camelot".

Meanwhile, eco-warriors who are opposing the second runway at Manchester Airport were occupying **Arthur's Wood** at Styal in Cheshire (*Manchester Evening News* March 5 1999). The airport owners wanted to cut down trees on land owned by the National Trust "to secure a safe flight-path for planes using the expanded airport". The protesters were given permission to take their fight to the House of Lords.

As noted before (in *Pendragon XXVII* No 2, 34) the runway is very close to **Alderley Edge** in Cheshire, where an unnamed king and his warriors are said to be sleeping. Who exactly was the eponymous owner of the wood was not explained, however.

Steve Sneyd, who spotted the last two items, has also been monitoring the much-maligned and under-rated BBC Radio 2. Rick Wakeman's ***Arthur Suite*** got a passing mention on Radio 2's Richard Allinson show for May 17th, he reports, while **Rosalind Miles**, author of a new Guinevere novel, was another interviewee later in the summer. "She was described as 'journalist, racing driver, renowned academic, hailed feminist writer, and contributing editor, *Cosmopolitan*'. She described her Guinevere as being 'warrior, lover, muse' saying 'you have to fill in the women's parts'." Finally, Steve hears that the makers of *Baywatch* are planning to move filming to a coast resort called **Avalon** in Australia [Feb 24 1999].

EVENTS

Staying downunder, Australia's first Arthurian conference was held from 10-14 June at Sydney University. ***Grail Quest***, themed around the Arthurian legend, also took in all kinds of other Celtic, medieval and fantasy elements. Keynote speakers were due to be Caiseal Mor and Haydn Middleton, and there were presentations in the art, music, academic, gaming (roleplay and wargames) and theatre fields. Information may still be available from Cathy Simpson at

grailQ@healey.com.au

Info from BBR Directory, March 10, 1999, thanks to Steve Sneyd.

Back in Blighty: John Billingsley of *Northern Earth* has furnished details of an Arthurian dayschool at Bradford University. ***King Arthur of the Britons***, fronted by David Weldrake of the West Yorkshire Archaeological Service, is scheduled for Saturday, November 6 1999, 9.45-4.00. "This dayschool examines the historical setting of the early stories and traces their enduring popularity from early Welsh sagas to the undying folk hero of the present day." The venue is Room D4 at **Bradford University**'s Richmond Building, and pre-booking is required. Contact the Centre for Continuing Education, 2 Claremont, Bradford BD7 1BQ, or phone 01274 235363, fax 01274 235915. Cost? £19.00 or £15.00 for the retired, £12.00 for claimants.

Philip Rahtz has been associated with the excavation of a number of Dark Age sites, particularly in Somerset, over the last forty years. A public lecture, ***How the Dark Age in the West was won***, was given by him on Feb 25 1999 at the University of Bristol, by all accounts a personal history of his involvement with sites like Cannington, Cadbury-Congresbury, Glastonbury Tor, Beckery and so on. Prof Rahtz has been rather poorly of late but though retired has been still involved with excavations. After the recent death of **C A Ralegh Radford** links with senior generations of Dark Age archaeologists remain very precious.

In common with similar institutions, the **University of Bristol**'s Public Programmes Office continues to run courses and dayschools of interest to Pendragons. The 1999 - 2000 prospectus includes *Roman Britain through literature and inscriptions*, *British and European Towns: archaeology and landscape 400-1350*, *The Pre-Raphaelite Artists*, *Reconstructing Anglo Saxon Estates* and *Celtic Saints and Monks*. Further details from PPO, 8-10 Berkeley Square, Bristol BS8 1HH, or 0117 928 7172 (fax 925 4975), email: cont-ed@bris.ac.uk and website

www.bristol.ac.uk/depts/PPO/

The **Summer Academy** is again offering study holidays, this time for the year 2000. There are over one hundred courses at fourteen centres in Britain and Ireland; sample titles include *From Celts to Vikings (Ancient Kingdoms of the North)*, *The Pre-Raphaelites*, *Rituals, Shrines and Sacrifice in the Roman South West*, *The Green Man*, *The Wild Man of the Woods* and *The Origins of Christianity in Britain (a Millennium Perspective)*.

The week-long residential courses start at £390, and the 2000 brochure, available from November 1999, can be ordered from 01227 470402 / 823473 (fax 01227 784338). The email address is

summeracademy@ukc.ac.uk

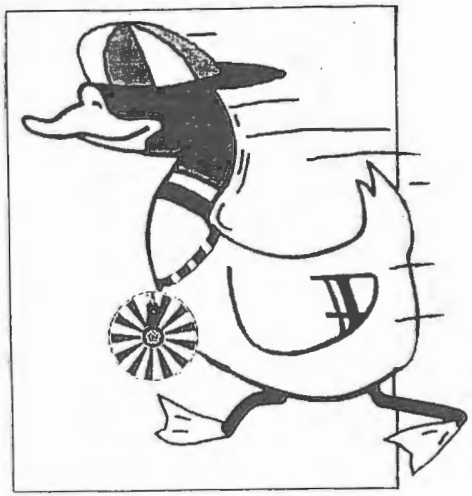
and the website is

http://www.ukc.ac.uk/sa/index.html

A notice in *The Psychologist* for August 1999 (Vol 12 No 8) informs us that the **British Psychological Society** is holding its annual conference in April 2000 at **Winchester**'s Guildhall. It calls for submissions for its programme in the form of symposia, individual papers, posters, workshops and, wait for it, **round tables**... Do you think someone should tell them they haven't far to go for one of those?

Sunday July 4th was the date of this year's **Great Pendragon Duck Race and Gala** "in the Summer Wine town of Holmfirth". According to a feature in the West Yorkshire *The Weekly News* (from Steve Sneyd) the duck race, now in its 16th year, is one of the major charity events in the town's annual calendar, with plastic ducks journeying downstream to Sands.

The **Huddersfield Pendragon Round Table** organise the race and, as the young men in it automatically cease to be members at 40, new blood is always needed (Wives, however, belong to the Ladies Circle). *Tel* 01484 608888 if you are interested in joining.



MERLIN'S MART

Camelot definitely exists! It's on the map at Sidcup in Kent where you can get up to 50% off new windows and off conservatories with names like ***Guinevere***, ***Lancelot*** and ***Merlin***. Andrew H W Smith writes that Camelot (*"your home is your castle"*) "seem to have been advertising in the *Greenwich and Charlton New Shopper* since before the world was made". The centurions in their ads are "a nod in the direction of Dark-Age 'authenticity'" but have "recently been replaced by the knights in full plate armour clutching laughably short lances". For a colour brochure phone 0181 300 8 666 (if you dare!) or call in at 122 Maidstone Road, Footscray, Sidcup.

Meanwhile, if you are buying or selling your property in Rochester, NY, contact Joanne Wells of **The Prudential King Arthur Realtors**, for "service pure and simple". Larry Farsace sent this notice (via Steve Sneyd): the agents from 2968 Chili Avenue, Rochester, NY 14624 are busy "negotiating the best terms for *you*!". Perhaps for somewhere to put that conservatory?

And when you have settled in, where better to get your home entertainment than **Excalibur Films**, "the world's largest mail-order distributor of adult video movies" (according to *The Editor* supplement of *The Guardian* for March 6, 1999, noted by Steve Sneyd). No stone throwing, please. Or listen to a CD instead: try an album by a band called **Dr König Arthur**, available on the Slappy Duck label, 35 Midhurst Road, Ealing, London W13 9XS [from an ad in music magazine *Aquamarine*].

SCREEN NEWS

A Disney TV movie, ***A Knight in Camelot***, was aired on US small screens last November. This apparently is the remake of *A Connecticut Yankee* mentioned before in these pages, starring Whoopi Goldberg, Amanda Donohoe and Michael York, with Ian Richardson as Merlin.

Provisionally titled ***Merlin - the Return*** (according to the 1999 Easter *Radio Times*), a new British movie, with Rik Mayall this time as the wizard, is due for release later this year or early next, while Jason Connery is apparently yet another Merlin in a Canadian film now in production. The magician has more incarnations than Dr Who!

CORRECTIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS

The illustration of "Tristan and Isolde" on page 24 last issue was in fact of Merlin and Nimue. The village of St-Efflam in Brittany is not actually on the Pink Granite Coast as I implied in "Arthur and the Saints", though a *rocher rouge* still exists west of the beach of Grève St-Michel, proof perhaps of a dragon coughing up blood. And apologies to Paul Smith for the garbled bits in his review, proof positive of the value of scanners!

A reference in W M S Russell's *Moorcock, the Grail and the Fall of the Nazis* (last issue) was inadvertently missed off:
13. R Payne (1975) *The Life and Death of Adolf Hitler* Corgi Books, London 777
The author writes, "Certainly if anyone deserves to be left out it's the Führer!"

OLD NEWS

Hitler is under flak elsewhere too. Under a photo of **King Alfred**'s statue in Winchester, Nicholas Tate, chief executive of the Qualifications & Curriculum Authority, asks "Can you name this great man?" [*The Guardian* Education supplement July 27 1999]. The answer? *Probably not, if you're a history student.*

There are two stories behind this provocative headline. First, the Oxford, Cambridge and RSA exam board's plan to drop most of Anglo-Saxon history from its new A-level syllabus and, second, university history departments' complaint that freshers are ignorant of any pre-twentieth century history.

The resulting controversy reassures Dr Tate: "A society that is not passionate about its past is in danger of losing its identity... There can be too much recent history. Hitler at age 13-14, followed by Hitler for GCSE, Hitler for A level, and Hitler again at degree level, is not uncommon."

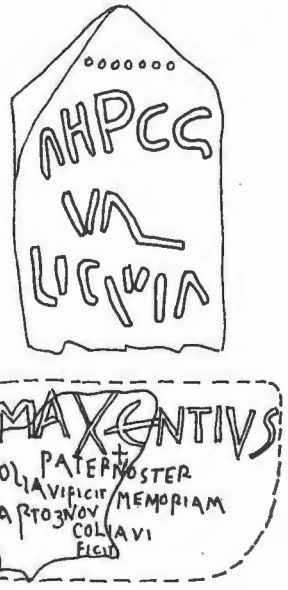
The claim is that some universities are being too heavily demand-led, and that exam boards are under pressure to ensure consistent grading and to keep down costs and fees, thus squeezing out minority interest periods such as the Anglo-Saxon (and, by implication, the rest of the Dark Ages).

But Dr Tate soon expects more commitment concerning earlier periods. "In a week in which archaeologists are turning upside down a Winchester car park in a final search for Alfred's bones, the nation expects nothing less."

More on that so-called **Arthur Stone** appears in a letter in *Current Archaeology 163* (June 1999) 278. Roger Irving Little of Boscastle Pottery comments on the ***A X E*** inscription which predates the *ARTOGNOV* wording. Could this be part of the name of the Roman experor **Maxentius**, he asks: Maxentius ruled the western empire between 306 and 312.

Maxentius' co-emperor was **Licinius** (308-325) "who just happens to have his name on a 5 ft high lump of sandstone in the parish church only 450 yards away from where the Arthur stone was excavated". Restored this milestone reads *IMP C G VAL LIC LICIN* which translates as "Emperor Caesar Galerius Valerius Licinianus Licinius". This coincidence would not only be "truly peculiar"; it would also reinforce the context of the later Dark Age inscription for the Tintagel slate.

Tintagel milestone and slate (after Little 1999)



Other correspondents disagree [*Current Archaeology 164* August 1999 318-19]. Guy de la Bédoyère says that although the suggestion that the inscription represents the name Maxentius is "very sensible" this cannot be the Emperor Maxentius: "the style, particularly of the *E*, is unparalleled on Roman inscriptions in Britain."

Keith Gardner also thinks the suggestion "quite plausible" but points out that "there is another Maxentius who would surely fit the model much more closely, and that is **Maxentius**, brother of Budic of Brittany referred to by Gregory of Tours in his *Historia Francorum*." This Maxentius and Budic "would appear to have been part of those generations of British lairds whose interests spanned the west from Brittany to Demetia."

He goes on to say, mysteriously, that they were "contemporaries with one Theodoric, a Gothic mercenary who was active in disputing South Wales with the Irish in the early 6th century." This assertion stems from John Morris' *Age of Arthur*, and we are now back with the story of Tewdrig mentioned in Malcolm Morris' article last issue...

WANTED!

Miscellaneous websites of Arthurian interest, for publication here! Samples:

David Carroll's thesis that Arthur was a prince of Dalriada is published in his book ***Arturius, a Quest for Camelot*** and on website

http://www.webworld.co.uk/mall/arthur

From Mary Mayer, via Beryl Mercer, we have a site for P F J Turner's ***The Real King Arthur: a History of Post-Roman Britannia AD 410-593*** ("a book about the truth behind the legend" in two volumes at $29.95 from S K S Publishing, PO Box 101038, Anchorage, Alaska 99510-1038):

http://members.aol.com/PFJTurner/SKS.html

For detailed information about every **Penguin Classic**, with biographies and pictures, critical essays, historical backgrounds, reader's guides *etc* (Late Antiquity texts include Ammianus Marcellinus, Boethius, Justinian and Procopius):

www.penguinclassics.com

The inestimable mag ***Current Archaeology*** has its own site which can be reached at

http://www.archaeology.co.uk

We regret to announce the death in April of Ward Rutherford, author and editor of exchange journal *Ancient*, and send condolences to his family and colleagues.

** Compiled by Steve Sneyd and Chris Lovegrove*

Exchange Journals

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9TH-10TH OCTOBER 1999

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Saturday afternoon tour of Chalice Well

Evening meeting at the Library of Avalon

❑ 6.00 pm AGM ❑ 7.00 - 9.00 pm Open Evening *including*
The Holy Grail in English Fiction
talk by author and Pendragon member Mark Valentine
Arthurian Verse *read by* Ceridwen's Cauldron *editor*
and Pendragon member Andrew H W Smith
Forty years of Pendragon *presented by editors past and present*

Sunday tour of Cadbury hillfort
guided by Chris Lovegrove