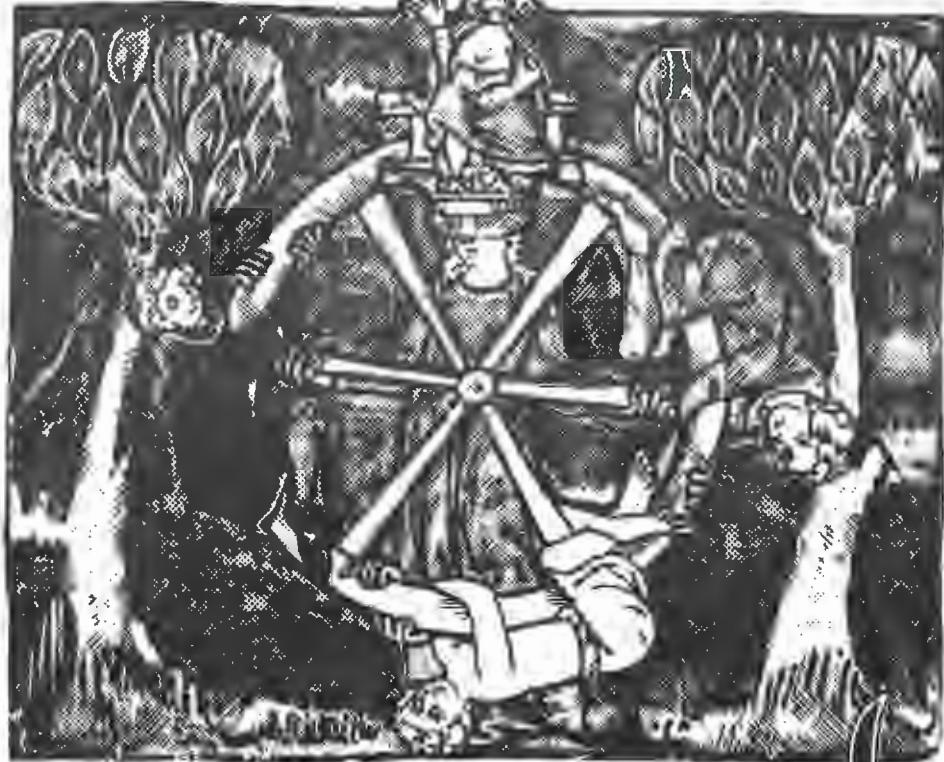


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The Journal of the Pendragon Society



Vol XXIX No 1 Winter 2000-2001

*The old order changeth, yielding place to new.***O Fortuna!**

Whatever your view of whatever the fuss truly signifies (perhaps only a celebration of an artificial decimal calibration) and whether the starting point was accurately calculated in the first place (it wasn't), the third millennium in fact begins at the start of 2001. This is as good a point as any for a little retrospection, a spot of taking stock, and some anticipation – hence the usual mixed bag of articles offered up for your perusal!

The cover pictures a version of the medieval Wheel of Fortune. Currently the Arthurian legend seems to be at a zenith, with new books appearing almost by the day and sites proliferating on the web. This could be the prelude to an inevitable if temporary decline – it has happened before – but it is hard to be certain, even for dedicated Arthur-watchers.

W M S Russell's piece on Byzantium reminds us that Dark Age Britain can quickly become very peripheral to a more cosmopolitan view. His other contribution, on T S Eliot's *The Waste Land*, explores a theme that some environmentalists and astronomers predict could become a terrifying reality, and sooner than we think. C W Evans-Günther concludes his essay comparing the figures of Jesus and Arthur, calling into question their historicity, which might throw into doubt what exactly the millennium is supposed to be celebrating.

R D Webster's republished article takes us back to a variant of the Wheel of Fortune, the Round Table, a painted version of which has recently been the subject of a mammoth study. Paul Screeton's theme is the perennial appeal of the not-dead hero, while Chris Lovegrove ponders post-devolution Arthur and Sophie Masson proves Arthur is alive and well in Australia! *The future of Arthur*, then, is the issue they could be said to be addressing in this current edition of the journal.

Next theme

In hand are submissions for example on Malory's work and on Arthur's near contemporary Maelgwn. We also propose continuing to republish appropriate articles from past editions of *Pendragon*. Bearing in mind that themes seem to develop on a rather *ad hoc* basis despite being flagged up in advance, it may be foolhardy to suggest **Dark Age People** as a possible focus, but hey! let's live a little dangerously! Following on that, **Avalon** could be the next theme ... The deadline for the Spring issue is March 1st for a projected April-May publication.

People

Veteran Pendragon member and author Mary Caine is reportedly making a good recovery after a severe heart attack – we wish her continued good recuperation.

Thanks are here due to Steve Sneyd and Fred Stedman-Jones for continuing to ply the editor with Arthuriana.

A year's free subscription is offered to potential winners of two prizes, named after key figures in the Society's history: the **Jess Foster award** for the most recent promising new contributor to the magazine, to encourage those who have yet to submit an original item, whether article, artwork or similar; the **Eddie Tooke award** for the most recent lateral-minded contribution, reflecting either a diverse, speculative or mischievous approach to the Matter of Britain (or indeed any combination of these). Winners so far have been Forrester Roberts, Ian Brown and Beryl Mercer, and we look forward to some new recipients soon!

A cross [X] in the box above indicates that your subscription is now due.

The Pendragon Society investigates

- Arthurian history and archaeology
 - legend, myth and folklore
 - literature and the arts


Journal of the Pendragon Society

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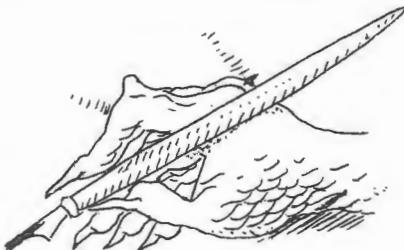
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Letters



IMPRESSIVE

I am truly honoured that you chose to use a couple of my drawings to accompany Sophie Masson's very powerful and compelling "The Questing Beast" [last issue]. What an utterly absorbing and thought-provoking work that is. I'd certainly say that Sophie has a gift for describing the profound.

The covers of the past couple of editions have been excellent. Simon Rouse's dreamy illustration has an otherworldly aura of Arthur in equipoise between pagan and Christian beliefs, the Otherworld and this world, the past and the present. Anne-Marie Ferguson's work is also superb. The cover illustration for the latest edition of *Pendragon* gives a deep and subtly powerful feeling of ancient mystery. As soon as I can, I will definitely be ordering a copy of her illustrated version of Malory. I truly am impressed.

Ian Brown, Middlesborough, Cleveland

Any chance of doing a CD-ROM featuring all the artwork used in *Pendragon*? Bits as well as the Masterpieces? I liked the latest cover very much – quite impressive.

Paul Smith, Burton, Staffordshire
 • Nice idea, and very complimentary, but copyright would be a problem, not to mention the initial outlay, plus marketing, and administration ... Glad you liked Anne-Marie Ferguson's cover, drawn with a tight deadline, especially for *Pendragon*.

Many thanks for the latest issue of *Pendragon* – I was almost going Arthurian cold turkey when it arrived. I really would prefer a quarterly, but I understand the problems. Anyway, an excellent edition as usual. A very nice cover – Anne-Marie Ferguson seems to be a very competent artist. Her picture on the cover and the one within both have considerable atmosphere. The mystery of Arthur deserves both good writing and pictures.

When it comes to Ceridwen I have always preferred the older of the two tales and it is known that Lady Charlotte was influenced by some of the strange translations of Welsh folktales by Iolo Morganwg and followers (see my article mentioned in Chris' reference and further reading). The Ellis Gruffydd version is probably closer to the original and doesn't make Gwion Bach son of Gwreang of Llanfair Caereinion or have Taliesin joining King Arthur's court. In fact, working from memory, this story makes no mention of Arthur at all. And the witch Ceridwen is much more sinister. People have tried to link her with some ancient Celtic triple goddess – particularly strongly emphasised in Graves' *White Goddess*, a book Graves years later disowned and wished he'd never written.

Charles W Evans-Günther, Japan

EVOCATIVE

Nice to get new *Pendragon* today – almost made me late to tutoring a creative writing class, as couldn't resist dipping in right away and almost missed bus as a result.

Extremely evocative cover design, full of mysterious implications. Which links in mood (though no idea if illustration is meant to apply to it, certainly seems to fit) to the very interesting Merlin / Virgil article ["A Tale of Two Wizards" by W M S Russell]. The whole Virgil-as-wizard trope is fascinating – I can see why the Church approved of him as a "good pagan", as they interpreted a prophecy in the *Aeneid* as a prediction of Christ, but the origin of the wizard link is odder – perhaps, to speculate, because of the famous Cumae Sibyl scene in the epic, on the theory that a poet who writes so knowledgeably of such matters must have "the power" himself, or perhaps via the custom of the Sortes Virgilianae, with its supernatural flavour, *ie* using the *Aeneid* as a sort of Roman *I-Ching*, opening at random and letting the first phrase you saw be your personal prophecy (which persisted through the Middle Ages, and even to, I think, the 17th century, so it's possible to imagine Merlin himself using the technique on a precious surviving copy of the *Aeneid* in post-Roman Britain).

There's another Arthurian link to Virgil – Wolfram in the *Parsival* (p 328, Penguin Classics edition) describes Clinschor, Master of the Castle of Wonders, as "a scion of the stock of one who devised many enchantments – Virgil of Naples."

Andrew Smith's point re, in the French, it being the "castle of the four stone-throwing catapults" [PenDragon, last issue] is very intriguing – though with the presence here of several Fourstones placenames, I wonder if it is a case of going full circle – the French writer

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trying to make sense of a name that came to him, and Malory, perhaps knowing the actual places (since there were Malory lands in the North), altering it back, not erroneously but knowingly?

Steve Sneyd, Huddersfield, W Yorks

♦ The cover's theme was actually based on Ceridwen's cauldron and Lake Tegid, but with enigmatic elements that kept us all guessing!

Dorothy Sayers, who translated Dante, reminds us that in Vergil's fourth Eclogue the poet looked forward "to the birth of a Wonder-Child who should restore the Golden Age", and that Dante's Purgatory section of *The Divine Comedy* (XXII 70-72) echoes the medieval belief that this was an "unconscious" prophecy of Christ.

The spectacular marble pavements in Siena Cathedral, dating from the 14th to the 16th century, include portraits of ten Sibyls who also allegedly prophesied Christ's advent, and are part and parcel of this medieval concern with pagan recognition and anticipation of the Christian era.

AT SLAUGHTERBRIDGE

Thanks for the latest *Pendragon*, an admirable piece of work. Well done!

We are still plodding away at the once and future Cornish exhibition [*The Board*, last issue] and there's still miles to go before we sleep. Might be up and running for next Easter given a fair wind and a calm sea. Mind you, Joe and Sam Parsons have done pretty darn well to get this far considering that the exhibition site was only a windswept muddy knoll last spring. Now there's a smart new timber hall where the grass and dandelions grew and the carpets have been laid and the lights are installed ...

Forrester Roberts, Tuffley, Gloucestershire
 • I briefly met Joe and Sam Parsons while passing through North Cornwall earlier in the year, where they remain enthusiastic about the slow but steady development of The Arthurian Centre at Slaughterbridge, and where the exhibition building was developing apace.

AT GIBRALTAR

A sudden attack of tedium has struck, I'm afraid. Andrew Smith is, of course, perfectly entitled to have an opinion as to the whereabouts of whatever place he chooses [PenDragon, last issue]. As I am. I wonder if he has read *Jaufre*, however? When a character is described as the *fada de Gibel* and her castle is called "Gibalda" it seems reasonable to me, at least, to assume they belong together. All the textual evidence points that way. If Andrew prefers to put the lady of the castle in Sicily or wherever else he fancies

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that is a preference which would, in this case, in this romance, take some justification, but of course he can do that if he chooses. I am making no sweeping generalisations about what "Gibel" may represent in other romances or folklore, just the romance of *Jaufre*, where the lady and her castle seem to belong together.

For what it's worth, the romance, as I seem to remember saying at the time, garbles geography in a way we're used to seeing in American film versions of Robin Hood. It doesn't matter too much where Gibel or Gibaldur are *really* ... for the purpose of the romance the lady's castle is to be found by following a tunnel which leads from the depths of a fountain near the castle of Montbrun. I would be surprised if this was a real tunnel, wouldn't you? Probably, as most interested scholars have concluded, the entire geography of the tale is intended to give a flavour of some strangely (de)formed Brittany.

I'm constantly bemused by the various attempts of writers of books and articles to pin down exact places and names. In *Jaufre*, as in so many other medieval texts, the context and the content of the tale was the important part, and the details of place, reality, authenticity and so on were subservient to telling a good tale. As in the American films of Robin Hood, come to think of it. Which is really what my whole article was about in the first place. I doubt if any medieval author ever thought that their work would be analysed and dissected by some twenty first century "detectives" for clues!

Anne Lister, London E1

AT THE CITY OF LEGIONS

For some time I have been mulling over a statement made by Gildas in *The Ruin of Britain*. He says a strange thing concerning the martyrs who gave their lives for Christianity. He tells us that the citizens have been deprived of the possibility of visiting the graves and places where the martyrs were tortured because of "the unhappy partition with the barbarians". Gildas continues: "I refer to St Alban of Verulam, Aaron and Julius, citizens of Legionum urbs, and the others of both sexes who, in different places, displayed the highest spirit in the battle-line of Christ."

If I am reading Gildas correctly, he is suggesting that both Verulam [Verulamium] and Legionum urbs – the City of Legions or *Cair Legion* in Old Welsh – are within enemy territory. Michael Winterbottom [1978] translates the latter as being Caerleon, probably because there is a tradition of SS Aaron and Julius in that area. But how old is that tradition? Is it pre-Geoffrey of Monmouth or did it appear only after his use of Caerleon in South East Wales, to represent the City of Legions?

That *Verolam* – if it is the present St Albans – was in English territory in the mid-sixth century would make sense. But that Caerleon was out of reach of British citizens doesn't seem to make any sense! Is it possible there was another City of Legions? Suggestions made for the City of Legions being Chester equally do not fit in with Gildas's statement: Chester was within British territory until the beginning of the seventh century! Therefore there must have been a third city that suited the appellation.

We know that Chester today is called *Ygaer* in Welsh, but it was known in the ninth century as *Cair Legion*, and Caerleon as *Cair Legion Guar Uisc*, to differentiate it from the northern one. Both are linked strongly to Wales and both were a legionary fortress that developed into a town. And both were in British territory in the sixth century. I would suggest, tentatively, that all ex-Roman cities that were occupied by the Roman Army were at one time called a City of Legions. This makes reasonable sense since there are a good few around and most were in English territory by the sixth century. Still in British hands at the time were Wroxeter, Gloucester, Cirencester and Carlisle, but Leicester, Colchester, Lincoln and York were out of reach to the British pilgrims.

Is it possible that one of the legionary fortresses situated in the eastern part of present-day England was the (or a) City of Legions? May I urge Pendragon members who live in or near a one-time Roman fortress city or town to search their local library or archives to see if there is any tradition of SS Aaron and Julius being connected with that area? It may be worth the effort and might solve the problem of Gildas's enigmatic statement. Happy hunting!

Charles W Evans-Günther, Japan



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AT ARTHUR'S CAMP

At end of May was at Oakleaf Circle Camp – weekend arts etc event on farm near Ripon – to do a poetry workshop. Had chance to meet Arthur Pendragon / the Stonehenge Litigant. Found him very impressive, not a crank or crazed egomaniac at all, had retained a genuine sense of humour through all the endless court cases. Apparently, now last of them done / won, and Stonehenge Exclusion Zone wiped out, there's a book about the whole saga in the pipeline – will definitely be one to look out for.

Steve Sneyd, Huddersfield, W Yorks

♦ See *The Board* for more on King Arthur Pendragon.

GEOFFREY'S HEIRS

The latest allegations of Roger-René Dagobert, Guy Patton and Robin Mackness are only updated varied manifestations of the myths and legends of the Priory of Sion and Rennes-le-Château. Books like *Web of Gold* are far more interesting for their omissions than for their inclusions, revealing the authors' intended manipulations of their readership.

There was nothing extraordinary or remarkable about Saunière's activities, there was nothing fantastic or magical about his source of wealth – the main attraction to this subject matter. It is the mundane world of the politics and religion in 19th century France that we are dealing with, not with the world of the esoteric and the occult. That Saunière's church contains 'occult esoteric' symbolism has always been in dispute. Crucially, this is a story that has been enhanced through the introduction of fantastic allegations – allegations so attractive they produce the effect of wonder and awe. I myself am trapped in the world produced by Plantard, but I acknowledge it to be the world of historical fiction.

Plantard lived as a young man in the world of fictional right-wing esotericism during the 1940s, therefore already steeped in the knowledge of the esoteric history of France from that time on (the contents of *Vaincre* need to be consulted). His later 1960s exploits were mere extensions of all this, and it would not have been unusual for him to be well versed in the history of 19th century occult France [...]

Reference is often made to the 'trouble' Plantard took with regard to the composition of the 'Priory Documents' – but what about those 'Rennes researchers' who produced monumental pseudo-historical theories and books of their own, of which *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* is the best-known example? Geoffrey of Monmouth, writing during the 12th century, composed his epic masterpiece *History of the Kings of Britain* by using the very same methods

as Plantard, by twisting and turning historical facts to his advantage, producing in the process a mythical history of Britain which entranced the book reading public of his period. He had a good knowledge of his subject matter. Widely popular in its day, *History of the Kings of Britain* is lambasted by today's academic scholars who yet marvel at its creative rhetoric. Geoffrey of Monmouth beat Pierre Plantard to it by some 800 years!

Saunière's actions were normal and mundane considering the context of who he was, what he believed in, and what was politically happening in France during his time. If this story were not hijacked first by Noël Corbu during the mid 50s and then by Pierre Plantard during the mid 60s, would there be such an urgent interest in the activities of Bérenger Saunière?

This subject matter has been around for some 45 years now and the mystery buffs have not managed to substantiate their claims after all this time. All the various claims and theories have been put to the critical test and have all been found to be bogus. All that remains is an exciting, good story, which, like the book by Geoffrey of Monmouth, is disguised as historical fact.

Paul Smith, Burton, Staffordshire

♦ Paul has been researching this and related subject areas for well over two decades now, and has contributed to *The Rennes Observer* as well as *Pendragon*. Read more on the fruits of his studies at www.tsj.org



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ORIGINS OF ARTHUR
Thank you for the Summer 2000 (Cardwen) issue of *Pendragon*. All very fascinating and interesting. Thank you for publishing my article, "Arthur – Origins and Future", and also for reviewing *The Wellspring*, co-authored by me with Anna Franklin ... I would just like to say that I thought your opinion of Helen [Field]'s illustrations a little unfair, but of course you have a right to your personal opinion. I like them very much, and so do many people.

Pamela Harvey, Edmonton, London

I most appreciate the comments by Pamela Harvey and Andrew H W Smith about the first part of my article "King Arthur and Jesus Christ". Anyone who knows me will tell you I do not consider myself to be an expert but rather a student of the subject. Therefore, what appeared in it is open to discussion. The ideas are not hard-held beliefs and aren't, as they say, carved in stone. Equally, I will not sit on the fence. I believe Arthur was a Dark Age warrior who had some effect on the growing power of the Anglo-Saxon nations living in Britain. I don't believe he was a king, and the stories, from early Welsh folktales up to Malory, have their origins in the primordial hero.

Andrew's statement concerning the figures related to Lord Raglan's theory are fair. I was not clear in pointing out that the scores were those given by him on pages 180-189 of his book *The Hero*. So the score for King Arthur is Lord Raglan's, not mine. However, the one for Jesus Christ is, and though my calculations may have been a tad off, try as I might I can't get the score down to Andrew's 8. To answer Andrew's question – I did not intend to use Raglan's 'arbitrary schema' solely as a basis for my argument. He will have to read the second part of the article [printed this issue] but some anomalies in the accepted beliefs were mentioned in the first part.

Pamela's comments are also interesting but I must repeat there are religions that do not need founders – Hinduism, Shintoism, native religions and many ancient 'pagan' beliefs too, for example. My article wasn't primarily about religion but it is about beliefs. Certainly, there are often real people mixed up into mythology. But separating the two can be terribly difficult – nevertheless interesting. Mythology, and history were, and are, to many inseparable, and even so-called histories (and I include recent material) can contain as much myth as history. (Take for instance the trial earlier this year of a prominent historian who claimed that the Nazi treatment of the Jews didn't amount to a holocaust. He has managed to create a modern myth that many people accept as truth.)

She is right to ask where we draw the line. And to be honest I really don't know. So much mythology and folklore has become attached to characters like Arthur, Charlemagne, Alexander the Great, Alfred, Harold, even Hitler, that it is difficult to be sure we are dealing with facts. We have to depend on chronicles and written records but these too can be manipulated to suit the writer. In legend often when the hero dies, or enters the underworld, chaos reigns. when King Arthur is taken to Avalon, after Camlan, the Fellowship of the Round Table collapses and the glorious age is at an end. In the *Welsh Annals* when Arthur and Medraut fall at Camlan, it is followed by a plague in Britain and Ireland. Is the chronicler recording genuine history or following a formula?

I'll finish with a quote from J R R Tolkien: "History often resembles 'Myth', because ultimately they are both made of the same stuff." I hope my article makes people think rather than take everything for granted. However, I am not sure it will be an answer to Pamela's question.

Charles Evans-Günther, Japan

MUSICAL NOTES

I made an effort and listened to the whole of the Ernest Chaussan opera from 1903, *Le Roi Arthur*, broadcast on Radio 3, September 30 ("probably the first time it has been heard in Britain"). As was only about third opera I'd ever heard right through, I'm no judge, but did seem at "easy-listening" end, pressing very obvious emotional buttons with the music. The rustiness of my French, and the distorting effect of opera singing, meant I made out very little of the words, though it had been introduced by a thorough description of the libretto, which covers events from Mordred discovering Lancelot / Guinevere relationship, via Arthur having confirmed to him by Merlin, to battle between Lancelot and Arthur - Guinevere, watching, sees Lancelot lose, strangles herself with her own hair (I wonder if physically possible?), Lancelot dying watched by Arthur, Arthur throwing Excalibur in sea and sailing away in the enchanted boat - so some interesting variations on the usual scenario - but as music, as said as someone with no real knowledge, came across as being at the banal film music end.

Would be fascinated to know the reaction of any member(s) who heard it and do know enough about classical music to comment more meaningfully.

Steve Sneyd, Huddersfield, W Yorks

BOLTS FROM THE BLUE

A brief response to the letter page of *Pendragon* 28/4. Beryl Mercer replies most perfectly. She quotes Clarke who quotes various astronomers

that the Taurid meteor stream was to blame for the Tunguska event. We might ask why a piece of comet should be associated with the Taurids and the answer, according to Bill Napier of Armagh Observatory, is that the Taurids are the remains of a comet that broke up several thousand years ago. The complex contains not just meteoric material with an origin in the former comet's tail, but actual pieces of the disintegrated comet itself - of a size greater than the meteoric grains and dust.

Alastair's letter is interesting. As a subscriber to *3rd Stone* I'm aware of his article on Comet Myths, and also the series of articles on the constellations he wrote for another magazine (involving dragons). However, I don't know of anyone who has actually claimed 'fire from heaven' involved burning hot meteorites. In the Biblical tale of Elijah the prophet is able to command hot coals to fall out of the sky - but that can be taken with a pinch of ash. I must admit I was under the impression meteorites would be hot after passing through the atmosphere, like most people I suppose. On reflection, as they are objects from deep space, which is cold, Alastair's scenario makes a lot of sense. Thankyou. I don't know what 'fire from heaven' might be but even in the Matter of Britain the British king Vortigern was consumed in his bastion by 'fire from heaven' i.e. explicitly falling out of the sky. Should we see this as real fire with licking flames or simply something very hot - hot enough to peel the skin. The latter might apply to blast phenomena from an explosion in the lower atmosphere - an event something like Tunguska. A late dynasty 19 text speaks of the star Anat burning in the sky and falling on Libya (= North Africa). It describes the Libyans as being more or less cooked rather than burnt, and this again suggests great heat rather than actual fire. The star Anat could easily apply to a piece of bright cometary material entering the atmosphere. The Taurids are of course invisible, as noted by Beryl, arriving suddenly, but not necessarily unexpectedly.

Josephus attributes the Sennacherib incident to plague. The link is thought to be the mice, possibly as carriers of disease and plague. Even the Bible hints at some kind of sickness. King Hezekiah almost died - but this happened before the deliverance of Jerusalem. In any case, epidemics often accompanied natural disasters. This is a particular feature of the Babylonian *Era Epic* for example, which involved tribal invasion, drought, famine, and an epidemic, coinciding more or less with the Biblical reign of David. The Bible is not history and the author has acknowledged more than one incident, but for his own reasons redistributed the facts and made each disaster specific to one thing, such

as drought, famine, or the plague etc. In reality they would have occurred in conjunction with each other as they do in the *Era Epic*. All this is a long way from Arthur and Excalibur but myth is very often a repeating motif or theme, regurgitated on many occasions. This is perhaps how we should view Arthur's association with the 6th century - or at least the unearthly aspects of the tale. There is no reason why an actual human Arthur was not involved as well, and I hope he was. The interpretation of *caled-bolg* by Professor O'Rahilly is a perfect description of a Tunguska explosion (he was himself quite unaware of the implications). The idea of 'crushing lightning' resurfaces in a Sumerian description of an attribute of the god Enlil, 'pressing downwards' as in a great storm or burst of air, *le* the phenomenon of blast.

It is quite true the Sennacherib incident is attributed to the actions of an angel of the Lord in Kings and in Chronicles. However, the incident is purportedly prophesied by Isaiah - see II Kings 19:7 and Isaiah 37:7, and Yahweh is said to say, 'I will send a blast upon him (Sennacherib) ...'. According to Talmudic sources, which includes Jerome's commentary on Isaiah 10:16, where the blast has inexplicably become a 'burning like the burning of a fire' etc, no mention of plague is made. Indeed, the Berossus account of 'pestilence' was perhaps misinterpreted by Josephus, and meant something like 'murrain'. In Ginzberg, *Legends* volume 6, the blast explicitly came out of the sky. Herodotus associated the event with mice and bows. The mouse was the sacred animal of Letopolis in Egypt. Bronze mice have been found by archaeologists to prove the point. Letopolis was also known as the city of the Thunderbolt, and mice were apparently symbolic of them - which was obviously not understood by Herodotus' rational Greek mind. See also Robert Bauval's *The Orion Mystery* where he quotes the Egyptologist Wainwright on page 211, regards Letopolis and thunderbolts.

Philip Clapham, High Wycombe, Bucks



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ANOTHER DEBATABLE ISSUE?

There's a new Arthur book out by Michael Warren called *History on the Edge*, and that's just what the Arthur story is, for it sits there on the cutting edge of at least three clashing cultures: Celt, Saxon and Norman, whilst at the same time it is bobbing up and down on three converging and contesting streams of religion: pagan, Celtic Christian and Roman Christian.

And more and more it becomes apparent that Celtic Christianity had much more in common with the paganism it replaced than the religious invasion that came from Rome. Did you know for instance that the probable reason why Vortigern got such a bad press from the church of Rome clerics was because he was a Pelagian Christian? Vortigern was a devotee of Morgan, a spiritual teacher from Glamorgan who sent to Rome in the 380s and was called Pelagius there. He preached that all men were born equal and that their spiritual destiny lay in their own hands - evil and sin were external not hopelessly internal - and that people could gain salvation simply by the proper exercise of free will. This was much closer to Druid philosophy than the doctrine of original sin preached by Rome, and the Church was horrified and branded his teachings as heresy.

So while Morgan had a huge following in Britain he was never declared Saint Morgan or Saint Pelagius. You only hear of Saint Germanus who was sent by Rome to stamp out such dangerous free thinking - particularly Pelagianism.

Truly it is said that history is written by the conquerors. It makes you wonder how history would have been cast if the Nazis had won World War II. What a handsome panoply of saints could have graced the stained glass in our cathedrals. Saint Goebbels could have been our patron saint of script writers and holiday makers could have quietly touched their image of Saint Goering patron saint of aviation as they took off ... If you think this flight of fancy is a trifle exaggerated, look at these two accounts written after the death of Simon de Montfort who burned so many other free thinkers on behalf of the Roman Church:

25th June 1218, before Toulouse
Who could write what followed without sorrow, or
tell it without tears, or hear it without sobbing?
Whilst the valiant Count was defending the
machines, a stone thrown from a mangonel by
our enemies hit the head of this valiant knight of
Jesus. He fell dead and everything died with him.
He was the courage of the feeble, the solace of
the afflicted, the refuge of the miserable. He
dwells beside his Saviour now in glorious bliss.

Pierre des Vaux-de-Cernay

On Montfort's tomb it states that he is a saint and a martyr, but perhaps the truth is thus: If anyone can win Jesus Christ by killing and torturing, preaching murder, burning, pillaging, ruining barons, debasing honour, exalting pride, fostering evil and snuffing out goodness or by massacring women and children, then indeed Sire Simon must shine resplendent in heaven.

The first is written by a monk of the Church and the second by a local chronicler who was perhaps not quite so biased.

Forrester Roberts, Tuffley, Gloucestershire

LAST ISSUE

Nice to see Tim Porter's "Arthur and Alfred" reprinted – it deserves to be! I was impressed with it when I first read it years ago. His points about Arthur and Robin Hood are important. These two characters – both most likely based on real people – are also very much two aspects of the primordial hero. Tim's article also indicates that history and myth tend to become joined at the hip even when we have a lot of factual information.

Beryl [Mercer] should stick in there and keep trying – *ganbatte kudasai* (don't give up – do your best) as the Japanese say! I remember talking with Helen Hollick when we first met years ago and discussing characters and the like. Beryl, it's your story, you should not be too worried what others say or that whether you are right or wrong. You are producing a novel, not factual history. Sometimes a novel has more to say than a factual work and may well be as correct! No one is going to try and prove you wrong and the material is not going to be criticised as to whether Arthur was born in Caerleon or Timbuktu. There is no reason to apologise to Cornwall – it's had a lot out of Arthur so far and I'm pretty sure it will get a lot more, even if tomorrow someone finds a grave in Durham inscribed "Arthur, defender of the Britons" and the contents are carbon-dated to the sixth century. Good luck!

Despite my reservations about *The Keys of Avalon*, there are a couple of references which I found enlightening. I knew this information but it hadn't really hit home till I read it in the above publication. The importance of Robert of Gloucester to the origin of King Arthur may well be the most significant thing in this book. A study of the life of Robert of Gloucester and the period leading up to the writing of *The History of the Kings of Britain*, I would suggest, may well produce some interesting results.

Charles Evans-Günther, Japan

Letters to the Editor for inclusion in Pendragon may be sent to 125 York Road, Montpelier, Bristol BS6 5QG.
Please include a SAE if a reply is required.
If your letter is not for publication, please indicate this at the time of writing.



old news



LAND OF ARTHUR

Tourism operator and lecturer John Wake has formed a committee to push Wales as the land of Arthur. "We've supplied the greatest legend the world has ever known," he asserted. "There's not a country in the world that doesn't know about the sword in the stone and Merlin and we supplied it."

Another member of the four-man committee, Geraint ap Iorwerth, vicar of Pennal near Machynlleth, said that Wales had as much right, if not more, as any other area to claim possession of the Arthur legend [reports *The Western Mail* in an item sent by Terence Rees].

Robin Gwyn of the Wales Tourist Board said that any imaginative ideas to highlight historical icons with Welsh connections would be welcome. John Wake has suggested building a hand clutching a sword in Cardiff Bay. (Isn't this a little reminiscent of an arch built by Saddam Hussein in Iraq, however?)

Elswhere in Wales, the world's rarest apple tree has been linked with the legend of King Arthur's Avalon, according to an item in *The Daily Mail* forwarded by Mark Cooper. The two-mile long island of Bardsey off the Lleyn Peninsula is home to the last survivor of an ancient apple-tree orchard that may have originally been tended by Dark Age monks.

Lemon-scented apples grow on the only remaining tree dubbed by leading expert Dr Joan Morgan, of the Brogdale Horticultural Trust in Kent, as the Bardsey apple.

"Boldly striped in pink over cream, ribbed and crowned," the apple was recognised by Ian Sturrock, from Bangor in Gwynedd, as unusual, and he plans to sell the strain grown from cuttings to raise money for Bardsey Trust.

Bardsey ("isle of bards") or Ynys Enlli has often been identified as the legendary Avalon and connected with Arthur. Chris Barber and David Pykitt (1993) even went as far as to suggest that Bardsey was also the mythical Castle of Glass, from a kind of crystal palace or greenhouse they believe existed on the island, though obviously we know now they were mistaken when they declared that "no trees survive there".

Certainly, however, it seems that Bardsey was indeed an Avalon, from Welsh *afallenau* – apple-trees – and home to a unique variety, "hardy and resistant to disease" according to Simon Glyn, director of Bardsey Island Trust. All in all, "an amazing linkage of Welsh legend, apples and Arthur," notes Fred Stedman-Jones.

♦ Rhodri Hornung "Support for call to market Wales as land of King Arthur" *The Western Mail* September 18

♦ James Tozer "Arthur's apple" *The Daily Mail* November 8

♦ Chris Barber and David Pykitt (1993) *Journey to Avalon* [Bloreng Books] 139

ARTHUR OF BRITTANY

A German academic has declared that Arthur was most likely a Breton. Professor Wolfgang Wagner, of the Max Planck Institute for the History of European Law in Frankfurt, identifies Arthur as *Riothamus*, a thesis usually associated with (but not originated by) Geoffrey Ashe.

At an international conference last year in Exeter, on the history of ancient and Roman law, Prof Wagner claimed that a 5th century document, the best-known Celic law book from north-western Gaul, was to be associated with Arthur. Even if Arthur-Riothamus did not write the *Canones Wallci*, it was "clear he had knowledge of it" (reported *The Western Morning News* in an item passed on by Beryl Mercer).

Of the three surviving contemporary records of Riothamus, "two are descriptions of battles against the Visigoth King Euric and his flight with the remainder of this army to [the] east. The third record is a note from bishop Sidonius Apollinaris introducing a farmer from his diocese" whose slaves had been enticed away. Prof Wagner suggests this account "tallies with the way slaves were claimed back under the *Canones Wallci* and that this proves that this

set of laws were promulgated by Arthur-Riothamus.

Seeking the law book of a legendary king "is like solving a puzzle or a murder mystery. I can only hope that I have cast light over the shadow of these dark times." Prof Wagner is quoted as saying. It is worth mentioning, however, that it is not at all accepted by historians that the existing fragment of a Latin version of the ancient Breton laws dates from as early as the 6th century (Giot et al 1988).

• Chris Ferris "King Arthur was French, not Cornish" *Western Morning News* 22 September 1999

• P-R Giot, G Bernier, L Fleuriot et al (1988) *Les Premiers Bretons: la Bretagne du Ve siècle à l'an mil* [Éditions Jos] 7-8

DARK AGE SQUATTERS

At one of the longest-running archaeological digs in England evidence shows some continuity from the Bronze Age right through into the Dark Ages.

The Roman villa at Frocester Court was first constructed in the late 3rd century on a site which began with a well by a territorial boundary ditch and adjacent to a hollow way around 1600 BCE, and then became an Iron Age farmstead overlooked by the Uley hillfort on the Cotwolds two miles away.

In the later 4th century CE the successor Roman villa was, according to the excavators, given "a major make-over", turning it into a "gentleman's country residence" with two or more storeys and a bathhouse.

The building remained in use until the early 5th century but then burned down and was abandoned, with useful structural ironwork salvaged (as this is otherwise absent). Only the front corridor of the villa was roofed over and converted into a longhouse; the west end was fitted out with ox-stalls and the east end adapted for domestic use, evidenced by remains of grass-tempered pottery typical of the Dark Age period in the South-West. The surviving corridor mosaic, featuring guilloche borders, was used as a hard standing.

South of this longhouse a timber building was constructed, though the remains are described as ephemeral. Outside the ruins of the south-facing Roman walled garden a new three-bay timber-framed building was constructed, possibly a feasting hall if the huge mound of animal bones outside it is anything to go by.

Behind the ruined bathhouse an annular bead and a piece of an early Anglo-Saxon claw beaker testify to occupation which may have continued down to the 570s. By the Middle Saxon period the villa site was abandoned and the focus of interest moved a quarter of a mile to the east, to Frocester Court itself.

The post-Roman occupation at Frocester has been described as of "an increasingly impoverished type" and ascribed to "squatters", though elsewhere such easy labels tend these days to be avoided. Nearby Uley hillfort, by the way, was the site of an early Christian church in the post-Roman period.

• Andrew Selkirk (2000) "Frocester Roman villa" *Current Archaeology* 169 11-19, after work by Eddie Price

THE REALLY DARK AGES

Mike Baillie's theory of a literal Dark Age period brought about by a comet was re-aired at the British Association's science festival which took place in September this year.

The science of tree-ring dating, dendrochronology, has led Professor Baillie, a palaeo-ecologist from Queen's University in Belfast and author of *From Exodus to Arthur*, to the conclusion that a cosmic catastrophe not only plunged Europe into the real dark ages but also was "a key to the world painted in the legends of King Arthur".

"The coincidence of low growth in annual rings from around AD540 were evidence of darkened skies and chilly summers, of successive failed harvests and wide-spread famine." The *Guardian* reported, and "in a succession of upheavals, up to a third of the people perished." In a magisterial statement, Prof Baillie gauged the 540 event as "the worst or the second worst or one of the four worst events in the last 1,500 years". (Or maybe none of them.) And this could be evidence of the earth's bombardment by a swarm of comet fragments, although there was little or no contemporary written evidence.

Apparently three British astronomers had calculated back in 1990 that the earth had been at risk of cometary bombardment between AD400 and AD600. In these pages, however, Alistair McBeath has doubted whether the particular climatic problems of the 530s/540s were caused by an increased cometary or meteoric flux.

In any case, Baillie's various dates for the death of Arthur (537, 539 and 542) are not based on near-contemporary documents and so are suspect, and the "wasteland" motif of the grail stories only attaches itself to the Arthurian legends in the later medieval period.

• Tim Radford "Arthur myth gives clue to disaster of sixth century" *The Guardian* September 9 2000 [Steve Sneyd]

• Alistair McBeath's review of *From Exodus to Arthur* appeared in *Pendragon* 28/1 40f

• The British Association's Creating Sparks festival website may still be accessible at www.infosite.co.uk/sparks/festival.htm

A Byzantine View of Britain

W M S Russell



In the sixth century AD it is amazing how completely the civilized world had lost touch with the island of Britain. This appears most strikingly from the work of the last great historian of the ancient world, Procopius of Caesarea in Palestine.¹

Procopius was born in the later fifth century, when Arthur was winning his victories in Britain. In AD 527, the historian was appointed as legal advisor on the staff of Belisarius, the greatest general of the Emperor Justinian. He accompanied the general in all three of his great campaigns, in Mesopotamia, Africa and Italy, as well as residing for some time in the capital at Constantinople. He was thus quite exceptionally well informed about three continents, the whole of Mediterranean Europe and the Near East. What did he know about Britain, a few decades after Arthur's death? We can learn this from the few references to Britain in his three books.

Procopius's longest work is his eight-volume history of the three campaigns. The first seven volumes were published in AD 550, the eighth one about 554. Also in 554 he produced a book on the architecture of the Empire, designed as a panegyric of the Emperor, perhaps to make up for the slightly critical tone of the historical work. When he began his history, he was full of enthusiasm for his general, and for the campaigns in which Justinian sought to restore the Empire. But by the end of the Italian campaign, Procopius had become disillusioned even with Belisarius, and cordially detested Justinian and the Empress Theodora. He thought Justinian had, through jealousy, failed to give Belisarius the support he should have had in Italy. He logically disapproved of the financial pressure on the upper classes, without which the conquest could not have been financed anyway. More reasonably, not being a religious fanatic, he disapproved of the Emperor's persecution of

pagans and heretics, and obsession with Christian orthodoxy. In 560, therefore, he wrote a *Secret History* for posthumous publication, containing one of the most ferocious invectives ever produced, in which he assassinated the characters of Justinian, Theodora, Belisarius and the general's wife Antonina. He himself probably died soon after this.

The references to Britain all occur in the main historical work on the wars. In the third volume, he mentions the loss of Britain under the Emperor Honorius.² In the sixth volume, he mentions Belisarius offering the Goths the island of Britain, quite obviously insincerely, as a diplomatic manoeuvre.³

But his really fantastic degree of ignorance appears in the eighth volume.⁴ He now places a country called Britannia West of Spain: he is probably referring here to Brittany, and has forgotten he earlier referred to Britain as *Britannia*. The Britain he now describes he calls *Brittia*. It is occupied by three peoples, the Angles, Frisians and Britons. Britain is divided in two by a long wall, but Procopius is quite unaware that the Romans built it. Moreover the wall divides not north and south but east and west, and the west side is uninhabitable and uninhabited. Procopius states firmly that the islanders do not even know what a horse is, and have never seen one, so if they visit other countries they have to be lifted on horseback by other people.

Now in the early Roman Empire, there was no Latin word for many technical expressions regarding the cavalry, and drill orders were given in Gallic or Ibero-Celtic throughout the service. By the end of the second century AD there were twenty-eight Roman cavalry units of Celtic origin, including units from Britain.⁵ So the Byzantine historian's conception of Britain is truly weird.

But it gets weirder still. He reports a story that fishermen on the French coast have the function of ferrying over to Britain the souls of the dead, the boats being invisibly loaded on the voyage out and empty on the voyage back. Such is the view of Britain for a well-informed civilized person of the sixth century AD.

1 Avril Cameron (1985) *Procopius and the Sixth Century* [London: Duckworth] *passim*

2 Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 3.2.31-38

3 Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 6.6.28

4 Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 8.20

5 W M S Russell (1999) "Arthur as a Cavalry Leader" *Pendragon* 27 No 4, 4-5

A Need for Heroes

The concluding part of

King Arthur and Jesus Christ

Charles Evans-Günther

Inconsistencies

An intriguing book worth reading is *Jesus and the Scrolls* by Ken Clayton.¹ In this the author picks up many inconsistencies between Biblical and Rabbinical writings, linking them up with material from Josephus and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Clayton asks: who was it that was betrayed in the time of two high priests, deserted by his followers, questioned, asked to do miracles, and then killed on the eve of Passover? The answer is a Galilean named Onias the Just, known in Rabbinical writings as Honi the Circle Drawer. He was considered during his lifetime something of a heretic but was so well respected that no one would speak out against him. Hyrcanus, son of Alexander Jannaeus, had Onias stoned to death because he refused to support him against his brother Aristobulus, whom he was besieging in Jerusalem. The author suggests that the body of Onias would have been hung from a tree following the execution. Clayton links Jesus, Onias and the "Teacher of Righteousness" – the Moreh-Zedek of various Dead Sea Scrolls.

Another book that may take us even further back is *The House of the Messiah* by Ahmed Osman. In this book the author, like the previous writer, discusses the inconsistencies in the Bible and shows that it is possible that Jesus was the "Teacher of Righteousness" and that he lived many years before the accepted period. He indicates that when Isiah was talking about the "suffering Servant" it was in the past tense – not about the future – and that the Essenes, who it was believed were responsible for some of the Dead Sea Scrolls, kept a tradition about the Messiah being killed and expecting his return.

He goes on to say that the editors of the Torah tried to hide the truth that they had killed their own saviour. Osman links Jesus with Joshua and believed that it was Joshua who was the Messiah killed by his own people (the Joshua famous for the conquest of Palestine and the walls of Jericho that "came tumbling down" was a deception proved partially by archaeological evidence) and that the real Messiah was killed when Moses and the Israelites were at Mount Sinai. Therefore Jesus, according to this author, was the Messiah of the

The Future of Arthur

Hebrews but lived over a thousand years before the Common Era.

Ernst Sellin suggests that Moses was the Messiah.² Sellin believed he had found evidence in Hosea that indicated that Moses had met a violent death at the hands of his own followers; Sigmund Freud took up Sellin's ideas in *Moses and Monotheism: three essays*.³ Sellin also linked Moses with Akhenaten, the rogue pharaoh of Egypt.⁴ That Moses was an Egyptian, followed the beliefs of Atenism and was killed by his followers prompted Freud to make this interesting statement: "The murder of Moses provided the stimulus for the wishful phantasy of the Messiah, who was to return and lead his people to redemption and the promised world-domination. If Moses was the first Messiah, Christ became the substitute and successor."

Whether you believe that Jesus was Moses, Joshua, the Teacher of Righteousness, Onias the Just or whoever, it is reasonably certain that anomalies in the New Testament throw a shadow on the historicity of Jesus. There can be no doubt that during the first two hundred years of the Common Era the Palestinians were almost in constant revolt against their Roman masters and tens of thousands of people were executed by the authorities. Galilee alone saw thousands of crucifixions. Also there had been a growing feeling throughout the country, for some time, of the imminent return of the Messiah – many had taken up the mantle and suffered for it. Pontius Pilate is known to have been a cruel ruler and is said to have put down a number of revolts as well as causing some! In this atmosphere a number of new sects arose and one – Christianity – fostered the legendary "Son of God".

The return of the hero

It would seem that there is a need for heroes. How far back this goes can only be guessed at, but it is likely to be from times so ancient that stories were only recorded by word of mouth. Hero worship, I would suggest, is as old as humankind. There is little doubt that the concept of the hero (and heroine) is an integral part of the human make-up. We want and need heroes. Look at the stories that continue to go around about Elvis Presley or Bruce Lee. Elvis, despite eating himself to death, is often seen by people and Lee, who died from over-use of steroids, is working as an undercover agent for the CIA.

Then there are the conspiracy theories such as those links to the assassination of President John F Kennedy. Did Oswald do it on his own, was he and his rifle capable of firing that number of rounds so accurately and so fast, or was there a second (or even a third) assassin on the Grassy Knoll?

Pendragon Journal of the Pendragon Society

Kennedy, Elvis, Lee and so on have become icons of our day. The hero dies but we just can't accept what happened. The hero dies, goes to the Underworld and returns. The *Welsh Annals* state that Arthur died in battle and yet, by the end of the 12th century, we are told that the Welsh accepted the belief that Arthur would return to save them. In fact there is virtually no evidence that the Welsh did believe in the return of Arthur. There are no tales, triads or poetry recording this belief until after Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*. Henry II may have seen Wales as a threat and used Geoffrey's ideas to foster the need to find Arthur's remains – but this is a complicated story that still need to be investigated fully. In later tales 'King Arthur' will return to save the English!

Myth and belief

When I was in college in South Wales one of my liberal studies lecturers was John Romer (he of the TV series *Testament*, *Valley of the Kings*, *The Rape of Tutankhamun* and *Seven Wonders of the World*). John is a marvellous character full of fascinating stories. One, true or apocryphal, is the tale of some American archaeologists who, while excavating a graveyard in Jerusalem, found the remains of a body believed to be a man in his early thirties. On the stone coffin was inscribed in Aramaic writing (known to have been used in the first century of the Common Era) the name Jesus son of Joseph. The archaeologists happened to be members of one of those American Christian groups who believe implicitly in the Bible and so this could not be the body of Jesus Christ since, according to the New Testament, he physically ascended into heaven.

It is likely that Jesus Christ is based on the myth of the dying god who returns from death, so common to the Middle East, with something of Moses, the Teacher of Righteousness, Onias and a first century rebel all rolled into one. Without going into any further detail I would suggest that Christianity developed over the period of the first centuries BCE and CE and that the stories in the Gospels are a mixture of fact and fiction. This I believe is equally true of King Arthur.

What we have left is that, like Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History*, the Gospels may well be more fiction than fact and that both "Jesus Christ" and "King Arthur" were probably myths. My point is that we have taken too much for granted. Doubts about the authenticity of the Gospels and Jesus Christ will be anathema to some and, I am sure, there are those who would hate the idea that Arthur was little more than a 'two-bit' warrior leader who fought a few battles against some equally insignificant Anglo-Saxon

illegal immigrants, but truth and belief are two different kettles of fish!

Was "King Arthur" real – or is he a myth? Was "Jesus Christ" the creation of a first century sect or an historical person? I feel that it is necessary to qualify the above by first removing "King" and "Christ" and then maybe it might be possible to find the fact behind the fiction. But then again, as Byron put it: 'Tis strange, but true; for truth is always strange; Stranger than fiction.



References and notes

- 1 Originally published as *Jesus Identified*
- 2 Ernst Sellin (1922) *Mose und seine Bedeutung für die israelitisch-jüdische Religionsgeschichte* (Leipzig). As far as I'm aware this has not been translated into English
- 3 Sigmund Freud (1939) *Moses and Monotheism: three essays*

- 4 Ahmed Osman also wrote two books of Egyptian interest: *Stranger in the Valley of the Kings and Moses: Pharaoh of Egypt*

Much of my thinking concerning the 'primordial hero' was originally influenced by Jean-Pierre Hallet and his book *Pygmy Kitabu*, which he wrote with Alex Pelle. This book is well worth reading. It led me to read Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*

♦ The first part of "King Arthur and Jesus Christ" appeared in *Pendragon XXVIII/3* 12-14

The Future of Arthur

Resurrection Shuffle

From King Arthur to Rock 'n' Roll Olympus

Paul Screeton

Every rock star who has ever died
is really still alive (and vice versa);
Penny Stallings¹

If mythology has a single most important component it is death – along with rebirth. Death and shaman are chicken and egg. Who escorted the first dead human soul to salvation? Who paid the first ferryman? Who showed the first ferryman the way? Certainly a cult of the dead appears almost as old as man's emergence.

Also, it seems death has hardly seemed the final act in many cultures and societies. "In the film, the pair, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, were pictured in a last heroic action. Like Barbarossa, King Arthur or even Jimi Hendrix, they were held by some not to have died in a hail of bullets at San Vicente, Bolivia, but to have been seen back in the USA."² Heroes, outlaws even, are popularly imagined able to beat destiny's rap.

And so this persistent story that certain individuals have cheated an obvious death resurfaces all over the world. Did many Nazi leaders begin new lives in South America and Adolf Hitler escape to Iceland in a U-boat? More persistent are tales of immortality. In its strongest form we find that persons chosen for their outstanding personal qualities are retained in a form of limbo in readiness for a time when they will again be required. This motif that the national hero who lived once and will live again when his country is in peril is immutable and universal. For 1000 years King Arthur has been Britain's sleeping hero and today he is still extolled as a shining example of national idealism. The tale of Arthur – *rex quondam rexque futurus*, The Once and Future King – appeals to the oppressed and most strongly in times of strife or perseverance.



Archetypal

I will leave to others the argument as to the historicity of a real King Arthur, but stress that the tale is archetypal and widespread in its variants. Other candidates in the suspended animation field have been Northern hero Harry Hotspur and hounds holed up by a landslide at Hell Hole in the Cheviots awaiting release by a call on a hunter's horn; Earl Gerald, who lies below the Rath of Lullaghast, from which he will emerge to drive out the British and unite Ireland; Roderick, last of the Goths; Don Sebastian of Spain; Welsh heroes Owen of the Red Hand and Owen Glendower; King Wenzel below Bohemia's Blanik Mountains; Frederick Barbarossa beneath a mountain in Thuringia; and Ogier the Dane, who after 200 years in a supernatural land was required when France needed a saviour and who after accomplishing the necessary returned to his place of enchantment.

This motif that Arthur would return was fuelled by William of Malmesbury's statement that Arthur's grave could not be located. By the 12th century the rumours of Arthur's still being alive had spread to his having been reported in so unlikely a location as the subterranean depths of Mount Etna. Gaimer stated in his *Story of the English* that the Welsh of that time (1150) threatened the Normans that they would win back their land through Arthur and restore the name of Britain.

An early record of Arthur being encountered after his death is recounted by Peter des Roches, Bishop of Winchester, in *The Lanercost Chronicle* (1216). The story goes that he was out hunting when he came upon a splendid mansion. Here the servants invited him to dine with their master, a man who introduced himself as Arthur. In order to convince sceptics of the veracity of his tale, he is said to have been given the power of producing a butterfly from his closed fist at will.

The survival story also manifested strongly among the Bretons, a people whose origin has even been suggested as Atlantean survivors, with Henry of Huntingdon (1139) stating that they denied Arthur's death and awaited his return. Snoring William of Newburgh (1198) scoffed that "the Bretons are such brutes that they still expect Arthur to return and will not hear of his death." Giraldus Cambrensis (1120) and Peter of Blois (1160-75) compared the Breton view as identical to the Jews awaiting the messiah.

Impersonators

Also in France, Baldwin IX, Count of Flanders, set off for the Holy Land, and during his Crusades trip took Constantinople in 1204 and was installed emperor. Within a year he was captured and executed, but his people back home refused to accept his death. When 20 years later a tall, bearded stranger appeared from the woods around Tournai, Flanders folk took him to be their rightful leader, who had been rumoured as having become a penitent living in obscurity as a wandering vagrant. In fact, this hermit impostor had been a minstrel who once served the real Baldwin and had impersonated others before publicly confessing his most recent impersonation. Even after the impostor's execution there were those who continued to worship the memory of this wretched Bernard of Rey.

Other sleeping heroes were also to have their impersonators, and even whilst living Mao Tse Tung jumped into a river and was pictured swimming so as to scotch rumours that he was dead ... and then newspapers showed a picture of several identical Mao lookalikes getting out of a taxi!

Arthur and Britain

Back in Britain, hundreds of sites are associated with Arthur in legend and the latest theory interprets these places as identifying locations of specific sanctity. Yet basically the attraction of the tale of Arthur is that it fits our tradition of salvation, resurrection and immortality, and is as strong today as when the stories coalesced into the Matter of Britain. He may have been a military leader, but he can also be seen as an immortal solar hero; his twelve battles being the astrological months and his deeds related to the passage of the sun through the ecliptic.

We may believe that nations have souls and that for Britain the archetype of Arthur is in truth an aspect of this. Nations' fortunes ebb and flow and this rise and fall through culture, economics and politics is part of the psychic flow; but should serious danger threaten, then the image of Arthur will be activated and allow for a rallying of the people. The rumour of a sleeping Arthur therefore is poetic, but also at a deep level is a sign of our having anthropomorphised the nation's soul.³

That rumour becomes reality was to be witnessed during the 1982 Falklands conflict when two of the task force ships were Sir Tristram and Sir Galahad, named after two of Arthur's Knights of the Round Table.

Modern Snow Whites

Yet 20th century belief, denying the certification as dead of various screen idols and popular music figures as untrue and the victim actually being secretly alive yet often tragically disfigured, suggests there are alternatives to the hypothesis that it is only oppression which nourishes belief of heroes in suspended animation.

Valentino's death provoked 80,000 people in New York to riot, and the hysteria generated unlikely stories such as that he was buried in a huge bronze coffin, had been engaged to Pola Negri, was a secret fascist and, of course, still alive.

The cause of death of kung fu hero Bruce Lee is even more bizarre than the rumoured notion that a hostile Oriental martial arts sect was to blame. The healthy, tough Chinese-American superman took one tablet for a headache, became allergic to it, lapsed into a coma and never recovered. Or did he?

For Hollywood happiness, who probably brought more into the lives of generations of people than anyone else but Walt Disney?

Author Robert Anton Wilson had his dead daughter Luna preserved medically in the hopes that medicine will one day be able to bring her back to life. Luna Wilson has been preserved by the Bay Area Cryonic Society voluntarily free of charge as an expression of gratitude to the publicity her father had given their work. Not unsurprisingly a *Fanatic* interviewer commented: "There's a persistent story that Walt Disney was one of the first to opt for cryonic burial ..." *Illuminatus* co-author with Wilson, Robert Shea, first interlocuted by commenting that: "One version of the rumour is that he's in a permanently locked chamber in Snow White's Palace in Disneyland, because people have seen hoar frost coming from under the door."

Wilson added "The Disney Organisation always denies it. But it is a fact that before he died he made a series of films, one of which is shown each year to Disney executives as a kind of pep talk. And at the end of each film he says, 'I'll be seeing you,' which could refer to the next film or it may have referred to the fact he is ironically suspended."⁴

The King is dead

But since Disney's day less wholesome mythologizing has taken over. It's become all sex 'n' drugs 'n' rock 'n' roll. And few rolled more joints and had other drugs, plus getting his rocks off with more girls, than that other King, Elvis Presley.

Seriously, how could a man make records like *Heartbreak Hotel*, *One Night*, *Hound Dog* and even later *Suspicious Minds*, yet create that

series of banal films? His twin brother Jesse did not die at birth – it was he who did the acting while Elvis made the discs. Moreover, the drug-abused, junk-food-bloated body found in the bathroom was Jesse's. Old Elvis is alive and well and south of the border. Or, in 1968 he paid ten million dollars to be cloned by a California genetics institute and a year after Elvis's death the young replica escaped and is somewhere in Los Angeles. Many more Elvis rumours exist and maybe the author thought up a part of the selection on April 1.⁵

The live-fast-and-die-young philosophy usually entails a third ingredient, high profitability. The question could be asked: is the singer / investment better dead than alive?

One rumour claims Bob Dylan's motor-cycle accident in 1966 claimed his life. The person who now makes Dylan records and tours is a talentless lookalike recruited to salvage record company interest. Nothing "Dylan" has done for a decade can have been greatly persuasive to those who suspect a substitution.

Ciphers

But what of the secret ciphers on records? I have a bulging file of supposed infiltrations. Mostly they are argued to be satanic and usually you have to play the record backwards to hear the message (Simon Bates' column led with Prince's backwards Second Coming prophecy on *Darling Nikki*).⁶

This was, of course, also part of the mystique that Paul McCartney was dead and a substitute provided. So it goes, among much other circumstantial evidence, John Lennon mumbles "Paul's dead," (or "Paul is dead, man") "miss him, miss him" when the White Album is played backwards (or between numbers when played slow), and on *Magical Mystery Tour* (or the end of *Strawberry Fields Forever*), John supposedly says, "I buried Paul."

For many the cover of the *Abbey Road* LP itself clinched the rumour. It showed all four Beatles crossing the street by way of a zebra crossing. There was the way they dressed: John the minister, Ringo the undertaker and George the gravedigger. Only Paul was barefoot and out of step with the others. The numberplate of a parked car read LMW 281F – or 281F; if Paul had lived. In America this macabre theory created a crop of ghoulish songs, while preposterously there were cynics who suggested the Beatles themselves masterminded the scam as a publicity stunt.⁷

So did Paul die in a car crash on November 9 1966, and was he replaced by a "double" – unlikely choice being a Canadian student who won a McCartney lookalike contest that year?⁸ The lengths to which fans – and possibly fast

buck entrepreneurs – went to probe or fuel this rumour would do any political conspiracy buff justice.

Yet only a year ago I came across a curious new twist. The duo Tear for Fears were talking to a teen magazine, and I'll quote verbatim: "There's a bit of backward singing on 'Pale Shelter' and people thought it meant, 'Curt Smith is dead.' And we had loads of letters saying, 'Curt Smith is dead.' And I was. I came out of it alright, though I was dead from the age of six actually. It come from being born ego first." What a stupid Curt!

Only sleeping

Certainly we can accept a more spiritual reason for the rumour surrounding Bob Marley's death from rampant cancer. For millions of Rastafarians, and as a spokesman for the Third World, Bob was deemed to have supernatural powers and direct contact with God. Former fellow Wailers member Peter Tosh, in his eulogy to Marley, said: "Death is not pain because Rastas do not die." A soothing sentiment which might be heard at any funeral. Yet for many of his followers the Lion Sleeps Tonight, but he is not dead and is somewhere else in another form.

One spoilsport, fuelled by the undead rumour but doubting it, is Robert Keen. Inspired by doubts that The Doors' singer Jim Morrison died – or did not die – in Paris in 1971, Keen has scripted a film based on a fictional rock star keen for immortality. However, his subject would make a mysterious disappearance stage-managed by a shady organisation. He talked of it in 1983 but I've heard nothing since.⁹

One thing's for certain though, Keen need look no farther than Arthur if he's looking for someone who lived fast, dangerously, died dramatically and left a highly profitable corpse / corpus. Look no further than the library or bookstore! Oh, the sleeping hero aspect? Yes, will, how's about Allenshead? That's where I'm told on very good authority our hero lies ... waiting. Unless, of course, you know better.

¹ Penny Stallings (1985) *Rock 'n' Roll Confidential* [Vermilion]

² Nigel Pennick (1980) *Anarchist Review* 5

³ Paul Scretton (1981) "Arthur, Merlin and Old Stones" *Pendragon* XIV No 4

⁴ "Illuminatus", *Fanatic Supplement* 1977

⁵ See reference 1

⁶ *Daily Star* March 9 1985

⁷ *Look-In* February 27 1982

⁸ *New Musical Express* November 10 1982

⁹ *New Musical Express* April 25 1983

¹⁰ This article was first published in *Pendragon* "Landscapes" edition, Winter 1989

Arthurian News from Australia

Sophie Masson

The Arthurian Association of Australia, a very new organisation only formed late in 1999, has hosted four major events in 2000.

The first was a full-day seminar at Macquarie University in Sydney, titled *Arthur: a Man for all Seasons*, convened by AAA Vice-President, Dr Mirielle Mazzocato, and comprising a rather eclectic round-up of approaches to the Arthurian legend: historical, literary, cultural and New Age. The seminar was well-attended, and well-supported by the mainstream media, who appear to have a great deal of interest in things Arthurian!

This was followed in October by a half-day seminar, *The Once and Future: Arthurian fiction past and present*, convened by Canberra member, Dr Gillian Polack, and held at the National Jewish Centre in Canberra. The seminar consisted of four very interesting papers: one given by member and author Felicity Pulman, on writing a novel based on *The Lady of Shalott* (Felicity's novel, *Shalott*, which is for children, will be published by Random House Australia in April 2001); one given by Dr Polack herself, who is a cultural historian and lecturer of some note, on the images of women in medieval Arthurian romance, with particular reference to Marie de France's *Lay of Lancelot*; another given by Canberra member, retired anthropologist and author Dr David Pfanner, on the modern futuristic Arthurian cycle, *The Keltiad*; and finally, a paper given by AAA president and novelist Sophie Masson, on the image of the fatherless son, as hero, in Arthurian fiction past and present.

Dr Polack then presented a most interesting addendum on a medieval Hebrew Arthurian story, in honour of the Centre which had hosted us; and there were also some brisk and wide-ranging discussions. The AAA will be publishing these papers, including the discussions, and a great list of modern Arthurian fiction, compiled by Dr Polack, and they will be available for purchase. Contact Sophie Masson at smasson@northnet.com.au or 16 Kendall Road, Invergowrie via Armidale, NSW 2350, Australia, for further details.



Our next two events were held in November, and featured the inaugural Camelot Day on November 14th. This was celebrated with a most gorgeous poetry and music evening, entitled simply *An Evening in Camelot*, and held in the NSW Writers' Centre. We listened to medieval Arthurian poetry in Welsh, English, French and Italian, and listened to the music of Alex and Megan Cronin, who are part of the fantastic early music group, *Pastance*. After an interval, we heard from three modern Australian poets who are influenced by the Arthurian legend: Peter Kocan, Ruth Drobak, and Margaret Bradstock. Each of these poets see the legend in a very different light, and it was a treat indeed to hear them, and to know that Arthurian poetry has certainly not died! They are all well-published poets, with several collections to their names, and several major prizes under their belts.

The next evening, November 15th, there was a talk at the State Library of NSW on *Arthur in Fact and Fiction*, given by Sophie Masson. This event, which was very well-attended, also featured some of the rare Arthurian books from the Library's collection, including one very rare one dating from 1690.

2001 looks set to be a good year too, with another major event planned in April, as well as more publications and much else. Watch this space!

For more general information about the AAA write to PO Box 337, Epping NSW 1710, Australia.

Whose Arthur is he anyway? Chris Lovegrove

Humptydumptydom

Celt. Anglo-Saxon. British. English. Scottish. Irish. Welsh. We used to have a good idea what terms like these meant. But, increasingly, we seem to be living in a post-Tower of Babel world, Humptydumptydom, in which, much like the character in *Through the Looking-Glass*, we are inclined to say, in rather a scornful tone, "When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less."

In a letter to *Pendragon* and an article in *Widownde*, Alison Skinner raised a number of interesting questions.¹ One of these was "How does interest in the post-Roman period of history contribute to people's feeling of national identity?" Recent debates – knee-jerk reactions in some cases – on devolution and the European Union, on statues in Trafalgar Square or outside the Houses of Parliament, on whether "Britishness" is no longer politically correct, have rather muddied the issues. Will beginning at the beginning clarify a complex topic a little more?

Ancestors

As the year 2000 ran its course, a team of French and Kenyan archaeologists reported that they had found humankind's oldest precursor – dubbed Millennium Ancestor – dating back to about six million years ago.² The Kenya Palaeontology Expedition discovered the chimpanzee-sized fossilised remains of five individuals who, though with tree-climbing skills, walked upright and sported small canines and full molars similar to those of modern humans.

The dating is close to predictions of when the common ancestors of chimpanzees and humans lived before divergence took place – between five and seven million years ago. The finds predate Australopithecines by at least a million and a half years, and the emergence of *Homo erectus* by about four and a half million years. Nobody, however, is saying "missing link" yet!

Elsewhere, the fossil record shows that around 2 million years ago the brain size of our ancestors started to increase. This may have been due to living in coastal environments, or watery environments like Africa's Rift Valley, with access to marine nutrients that provided the particular fatty acids (DHA and AA) that encourage the development and effective functioning of larger brains.³ (This, by the way, is not quite the same at the so-called Aquatic Ape theory.)

Swedish and German researchers, led by Ulf Gyllensten at the University of Uppsala, have been looking at the total mitochondrial DNA of

53 people from around the world.⁴ Mitochondria are cellular structures inherited only through the mother, and by using advanced DNA sequencing technology it has been possible to support the so-called "out of Africa" hypothesis – that all modern humans can be traced back to a small group of women who lived in Africa about 170,000 years ago. (Previous research had suggested that modern human mitochondria had derived from one single maternal ancestor, dubbed "mitochondrial Eve", from about 140,000 years BP.) This recent research, published in *Nature*, also suggests that descendants of these women migrated out of Africa out across into other continents about 50,000 years ago.

On the other hand, paternal ancestry can be traced using DNA variations in "male" Y chromosomes. A recent international genetic study, led by Peter Oefner of Stanford University in California and reported in *Nature Genetics*, analysed the Y chromosome of over a thousand men from twenty-one different regions of the world.⁵ They deduced that "Y-chromosome Adam" lived much later than mitochondrial Eve, between 50,000 and 70,000 years ago.

Soon after this appeared, another research project based on study of Y chromosomes (published in the journal *Science* and reported nationally) suggested that 95% of 1007 males in the study, from across Europe and the Middle East, were related to just ten male lineages.⁶ After analysing twenty-two genetic markers the researchers (led by Dr Ornella Semino, from Pavia University) proposed that the descendants of these ten groups migrated westwards into Europe over the last 40,000 years, in three major waves.

The study suggests that more than 80% of European men "have inherited characteristics from two waves of Palaeolithic ancestors" – 50% have characteristics that can be identified with the archaeologically-defined Aurignacian culture (about 40,000 before the present) and 30% with the Gravettian culture (about 25,000 BP). These two waves represent just two of the lineages.

The third wave probably arrived, after an ice age, about ten millennia ago. Associated with a Neolithic farming culture, the remaining lineages established themselves mainly in southern Europe after travelling along the coasts from the Middle East and the Urals.

So, what do all these recent studies suggest? Surely we can first of all draw the conclusion that despite obvious differences we all share a common humanity, probably evolved over at least six million years. Secondly, as modern

Homo sapiens sapiens we particularly share a common ancestry arising out of origins in Africa one hundred and seventy millennia ago, and dispersed through the world about 50,000 or so years ago. The fossil record suggests that there may have been parallel hominid developments elsewhere, such as the Neanderthals, but these new studies point to all modern humans being related to mitochondrial Eve(s) and Y-chromosome Adam.⁷ From around 40,000 years ago the slow trek of the first distinctive Europeans seems to have begun.

Historical footprint

If the concept of millions of years, even scores of millennia, seems a little too distant in time to shed a bright light on the question of national identity, then other recent developments might help to bring it a little more into focus.

In 1997, when investigations into the DNA of Cheddar Man revealed that the 9000-year-old human was related to a modern Somerset teacher, the idea that the past was relevant to the present was brought home to a great many people.

Continuity of a different kind was demonstrated by the more recent discovery of a 4700-year-old Neolithic temple near New Radnor in mid-Wales by the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust.⁸ Purportedly "the largest Stone Age structure ever found in Western Europe," the eighty-five acre site is half a mile across and thirty times the size of Stonehenge. The egg-shaped Hindwell temple was constructed of 1400 oak obelisks each up to seven metres high and apparently functioned as a religious site through the Bronze and Iron Ages until slighted by the Romans.

Can continuity in both culture and descent be demonstrated? Research conducted some years ago by Phyllis Jackson, a retired chiropodist, revealed some interesting differences between the feet found in so-called Celtic and Anglo-Saxon populations of the British Isles, which found some correlation in Dark Age cemeteries.⁹

"Celtic" feet (those from Ireland, Scotland, Wales and Cornwall) tend to be slim in structure with a relatively long longitudinal arch and a rather level toe-line from the first to the fifth. The traditional English foot, for which shoe manufacturers in this country tend to design their footwear, is broader, shorter in the arch, and with a steepish angle from the first to the last toe. She noted also that communities in rural areas of Herefordshire and the Cotswolds conformed more to the "Celtic" norm than the standard English foot shape.

Jackson then looked at human remains from a Saxon cemetery at Lechlade in the Cotswolds and discovered that an examination of one

diagnostic foot bone, the cuboid, did indeed indicate the two foot types. In addition, a nearby Roman cemetery at Cirencester showed no "Saxon" feet, only "local" feet of the "Celtic" type. This could have implications for helping determine the level of Anglo-Saxon incursion in different areas of what was to become England.

But what is also interesting is that a hereditary shape of foot tended to persist in different areas. For example, the feet of the pre-Saxon population of the Cotswolds (the Dobunni) differed significantly from those of several sites investigated in the Wessex area near Danebury (Durotriges? Atrebates?), suggesting an overall "tribal" foot shape from these areas. These characteristic shapes, despite some modification in the intervening millennia, were apparently present from the Neolithic period through the Iron Age, the Roman period and on to the Dark Ages, a remarkable example of physiological continuity over an extended period of time in relatively discrete geographical areas.

Current developments in DNA research technology and the science of archaeology are a considerable advance on, say, the categorisation by blood type or cranial physiognomy that used to be determinants of origins, sometimes for dubious political purposes. Sadly, though we can illustrate that within our common human heritage we also have a rich and diverse cultural heritage, particularly in these islands, it is also self-evident that all is not now Happy Families.

Britishness

An issue that seemed to generate more heat than light was introduced by *The Daily Telegraph* with the provocative headline "Straw wants to rewrite our history". This was the fall-out from a report by the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain following an inquiry set up by the Runnymede Trust and launched by the Home Secretary, Jack Straw, and published on Wednesday October 11. The reactions to the report in a right of centre paper such as *The Daily Telegraph* clearly indicated the polarisation that instantly appears as soon as such a can of worms gets opened. 'British' is a racist word, says report, trumpeted their Home Affairs Editor, Philip Johnston, and Thinkers who want to consign our island story to history headlined his analysis. What was the fuss about?

The whole topic was that heady mixture of culture, race, religion, language and politics. Criticise one aspect and you criticise the lot. *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain*, produced with Lord Parekh in the chair, suggested that Britain is "at a turning point, a crossroads. England, Scotland and Wales could either become narrow and inward looking, with rifts among themselves and among their regions and communities, or they

could develop as a community of citizens and a community of communities ... There has never been a single British way of life. The idea that Britishness is universally diffused across society is seriously misleading."



In the matter of a few sentences the report unconsciously played on some people's fears of immigration, devolution, regionalism, republicanism, European integration and erosion of the status quo.¹⁰ In particular, the notion that people with different cultural, religious, ethnic or linguistic backgrounds should "integrate" more was a common response to the report, and brought back unwelcome memories of Norman Tebbit's notorious "cricket test": *Which national team do you cheer for?*

Denigrators of the report (for whom, it seems, England, Britain and the UK were interchangeable terms) seemed happy to play Humpty Dumpty to Lord Parekh's Alice. Philip Johnstone lambasted the report as "a cauldron of political correctness, agonising over what is white or black". Tom Uttley noted that in its "400 pages of balderdash" the commission "rejected the idea of making up new words," yet in almost the same breath he labelled the members of the commission with a neologism, "quangocrats". *Political correctness, balderdash and quangocrats* – apt illustrations of particular words, that no-one can describe as neutral in tone, taking the place of reasoned argument.

Earl Russell, in a letter to *The Daily Telegraph*, put some of the Humptydumptyisms regarding Britishness into some sort of context. "The report's mistake is its failure to go back to the creation of Britain in 1603, and therefore its failure to appreciate that there never has been a single British culture or British nation."¹¹ There was no British state for the first century after the dynastic union of the sovereign states England and Scotland under James, despite the latter being proclaimed in 1604 as King of Great Britain.¹²

Earl Russell reminded us that the British state was only later created by the "pooling of sovereignty" through the 1707 Act of Union. The United Kingdom itself was created in 1801, on the first day of the 19th century, when Great Britain and Ireland were united, so nowadays "British citizenship means allegiance to the state that is rightly described as the United Kingdom and was therefore multinational, multi-ethnic and multicultural from the beginning."

But Russell's voice was almost alone in taking a longer view. He could in fact have gone further back and mentioned the influences which led to William Camden's choice of title for his *Britannia* (1586), Henry VIII's legal assertion that the realm of England was "an empire" in the Roman sense of *imperium*, and the Plantagenets' donning of the mantle of Arthurian Britain. But he didn't, and would anyone have listened if he had?

Unfortunately, any sensible discussion of what Britishness meant was inevitably muddied by contemporaneous news items which ought instead to have informed the debate: for example, either Birmingham or (more likely) Leicester was forecast to be "the first city in Britain to have a majority non-white population," while Scotland Yard figures suggested that "More whites become victims of racially motivated crime."¹³ Simultaneously, *The Guardian* was intent on initiating a Republican debate by mounting a legal challenge of the law banning non-Protestants from the throne, searching for Catholic descendants of Queen Victoria in Germany and running articles on feudalism and anti-Royalist sentiment.¹⁴

The search for national identity seems to have been distracted by the waving of red rags to various John Bulls. Is it possible to get our feet back onto surer ground? For what it is worth, here are some proposed working definitions (open to further debate, of course):

- Britain is really only a geographical term, and increasingly less a political entity
- to be British is to be native to Britain, whatever the origins of one's antecedents; alternatively one can be British by adoption
- Britishness is the sum total of all Britain's living culture to date, and therefore always in a dynamic state (illustrated, for example, by the changing accent of the Queen)¹⁵

If Britishness really is dynamic – and you may disagree with this – where does that leave King Arthur? And whose Arthur is he, anyway?

A very British hero?

The strength of the Arthurian legend in the centuries following the runaway success of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* was due in part to its defining of Arthur as

a very British hero. The whole island of Britain could take heart from a monarch whom most European nations acknowledged as suzerain and who even challenged the might of Rome. In turn, Europe acknowledged Arthur as an epitome of chivalry and an idealised prince of Christendom whose fame stretched from Scandinavia to Spain, Portugal to Palestine.

Arthur's status as premier national hero must inevitably be diminished once his historical and therefore cultural significance is claimed as purely parochial. In recent years we have had closely argued publications confining an historic Arthur and his achievements to Gaul, Brittany, Cornwall, the West Country, South Wales, North Wales, the Marches, the Isle of Man or lowland Scotland. A definite sense of loss or, at the very least, impoverishment has ensued.

At the same time this parochial "local hero for local people" way of thinking has coincided with legitimate devolution in the United Kingdom and with calls for self-government by the English regions. The parallels with the story of the break-up of the Round Table fellowship are hard to resist.

And yet the fact is that "King Arthur" is more popular than he ever was – books, films, websites, commercial enterprises, brand names, you name it, all testify to something that resonates with a large number of individuals, here and abroad. It seems to matter little to most fans that he may have lived a nasty, brutish or short life, spoken in vulgar Latin or Old Welsh, or be unacquainted with round tables, wizards or swords in stones. Everything appears to contradict what E K Chambers wrote three-quarters of a century ago – "the flames which once burnt around the memory of Arthur have long ago sunk into grey ashes. He wakes no national passions now ..." – as when, for example, an elected Mayor of London vetoes the idea of an official statue of the Venerable Bede on the dubious grounds that he deliberately failed to mention Arthur in his writings.

In other respects, however, Chambers was correct:

"He has been taken up ... into the Otherworld of the heroic imagination. His deeds are the heritage of all peoples; not least of the English folk against whom he battled."¹⁶

The heritage of all peoples. Celts. Saxon. Australian. Japanese ... Vive la différence! Whose Arthur is he? You tell me.

References and notes

- ¹ Alison Skinner "Debating Issue" *Pendragon* 2/3 Spring 2000 4; "Anglo-Saxons in Popular Historical Literature" *Widowin* 120 Winter 1999 35ff

² Roger Highfield "Meet Millennium Man, our oldest ancestor" *The Daily Telegraph* December 5 2000; Claire Ainsworth "The oldest strider in town" *New Scientist* December 16 2000; the announcement was made at a press conference, but the research has neither yet been peer-evaluated nor published

³ Kate Douglas "Taking the Plunge" *New Scientist* November 25 2000

⁴ Philip Cohen "Out of Africa" *New Scientist* December 6 2000

⁵ Philip Cohen "Eve came first" *New Scientist* November 4 2000

⁶ Roger Highfield "The 10 families of man who settled Europe are revealed in gene tests" *The Daily Telegraph* November 10 2000

⁷ In 1997 mitochondrial DNA was isolated from the original Neanderthal individual discovered in the Neander Valley near Dusseldorf in Germany in 1856. This indicated that Neanderthals and modern humans were not closely related but may have had a common ancestor in *Homo heidelbergensis*, dating from around 600,000 years ago. Heidelberg Man may have evolved into *Homo sapiens neanderthalensis* in Europe and into *Homo sapiens sapiens* in Africa (John Musty's Science Diary *Current Archaeology* 155, 1997 423ff)

⁸ David Keys "Found: temple sacred for 3,000 years" *The Independent on Sunday* November 26 2000

⁹ Phyllis M Jackson (1995) "Footloose in Archaeology" *Current Archaeology* 144, 466-470

¹⁰ "People in these isles are at a crossroads": extracts from *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain* published in *The Daily Telegraph* October 12 2000; *The Parekh Report* published by Profile Books £9.99; as a counter-balance to some hysterical press reactions, *The Guardian* of Bhikhu Parekh (Maya Jaggi "First among equalisers" *The Guardian* October 21 2000) emphasised Lord Parekh's solid academic credentials and philosophical background

¹¹ Letters, *The Daily Telegraph* October 11 2000

¹² The term had previously been used to distinguish the island of Britain from *Britannia minor, ie* Britain

¹³ *The Daily Telegraph* October 12 and December 8 2000

¹⁴ "A challenge to the crown" *The Guardian* December 6; A C Grayling "Never mind the forelocks" and John Mullan "A bibliography of treason" *The Guardian* December 9 2000

¹⁵ David Derbyshire "Blimey, what became of the Queen's English?" *The Daily Telegraph* December 21 2000

¹⁶ E K Chambers (1927) *Arthur of Britain*, 232

Arthur and the New Age Tim Harris

The popularity of Arthur arises from diverse sources; there is the historical aspect, the mythological, the cultural, the psychological and the literary. There seems little hope of ever discovering the 'true' Arthur, in the sense of identifying him conclusively with a real past individual, and what difference would such a discovery make? In terms of the continuing interest in Arthur it may perhaps be better for his identity to be untold, even if somehow known.

The human race may be moving into its most significant era, with our economy and technology threatening our survival and the survival of most higher forms of life on the planet. As a society we must become more responsible and mature, or we shall most likely perish. It is in this context that the future of Arthur may be decided.

There seems to have been a general rise in interest in Arthur since World War II, and over roughly the same period there has developed the 'New Age' movement. I do not think this is a coincidence. The 'New Age' philosophies represent a widespread search for a more spiritual view of life than that provided by the materialistic hegemony of modern capitalism. The appeals of Arthurian myths to such a search are obvious: not only is there the quest for the Holy Grail (the pursuit of truth) and the construction of Camelot (the foundation of Utopia), but the whole background to the stories is significant. The Arthurian myths are set in a world suffering from decline – the collapse of Rome and the barbarian invasions – and in this picture Arthur and his knights are heroes of cultural renewal.

At a time of crisis and transformation everything becomes uncertain. When social norms change, the sense of what is sane and meaningful disappear, so that everything seems crazy and futile. It becomes difficult to act rationally, as the consequences of behaviour are less predictable. Myths can help to guide individuals and society in such times by serving as a model. Obviously, it is important to choose a good model, otherwise problems may be increased rather than overcome.

Directions

There are limitless directions in which our society can develop, but if it is to continue for more than the next fifty years then the path it must choose is one of only a limited number. The Arthurian myths can provide us with a model that corresponds to one of the positive directions our society could take.

What the world needs to become is unified (that is to exist as a single society rather than a multitude of squabbling countries) and to become just (that is to function in an egalitarian and co-operative way rather than an elitist and exploitative manner). Legend attributes Arthur with the unification of the British Kingdoms against the Saxon tribes, and the establishment of a rule that was based on justice and equality. Furthermore, the tragic events that bring down Arthur can serve as a warning, may urge us to find a way to learn from history rather than to continue repeating it.



Of course, the Arthurian mythology could be interpreted quite differently, and (mis)used to back a nationalistic, conservative, authoritarian and regressive ideology. This would bring doom to Arthur, for he flourishes only while we live; the end of our species will see the death of all our myths.

Immortal as amoeba

Away, but in no leafmould-soft manger laid, this one, though Resurrectionless as yet; they whisper, waits still. That, as Toad clay-cased in far desert dune for rain-return Logres Once and future king remains, stone-held under hollow hil Rome's works wind-gate now, Saxon swordsman time-toothed Into dust-eddy; yet inwarded in height-backboned, cloud-limbed land – Under let's side-mouth whisper for instance, where this very steepside lanebank Shows yes just here beneath lichen-capped slab gap eyeslit wide into Round fine-wrought tunnel mouth that even hand-scrabbling of new earthfall Exposes little more of, so soon as wormflight curve away into dark descent, lies Xenophon's master in ability to save, one who could use up as spring again

Steve Sneyd

♦ Previously published in *La Pierna Tierna USA*

Lady of the lake

Soft as a moonbeam
a trickling brook's murmur
stirring summer dreams

Lady of the lake
silent, sleek, and electric
eyes as bright as ice

Restless souls stirring
across a chilly full moon
vapour clouds exhaled

Lay of the lake
a siren of seduction
misty hair flowing

Guardians of sleep
watching over warriors
moving between worlds

Flowing angel-hair
cascading pools of ice
radiating light

Waking the dragon
slumbering amongst the stars
fragments of souls

Electric silver
falling from the midst of space
in languid pools

Gaping dragon's mouth
drooling cavern framing space
in pools of stars

Glorious column
roaring like a butane flame
white water veil

Roger Neville-Neil

T S Eliot and the Grail

W M S Russell

Eliot and Arthur

If we consider T S Eliot as an Arthurian, perhaps a first question concerns the famous character of Sweeney, who figures in the poems imitated from Gautier's *Sweeney Erect*, *Sweeney among the Nightingales*, *Mr Eliot's Sunday Morning Service*) the weird playlet *Sweeney Agonistes*, and, briefly, in *The Waste Land* itself. Did Eliot know that Sweeney is Anglicised from Suibhne, king of Dal nAraide in Ulster, the 'Irish Merlin'? I can find no evidence of this. The name appeared early: when Eliot was only eleven years old, he brought out eight issues of his own magazine, and here we find the name 'Dr Sweany'.² But according to Vivian de Sola Pinto, Sweeney was 'founded apparently on memories of an Irish American pugilist whom Eliot had known in his youth'.³ So this lead comes to nothing. On the other hand, *The Waste Land* is unmistakably part of Arthurian literature, and the most important specimen of this in the twentieth century, and in what follows I will be concerned exclusively with this great poem.

'The Waste Land' was composed in fragments over a period of time, starting in 1914.⁴ In 1921 the poem took final shape, and, significantly, this was a year of drought – 'no rain fell for six months'.⁵ Eliot sent the poem to Ezra Pound, who cut large sections, advised on the rest, and fully earned the dedication he got when the poem was published the following year.⁶

The Notes were added because the poem was 'inconveniently short' when the poem was published in book form.⁷ Eliot was later apologetic about some of these notes, but we need not take this seriously: he was 'inclined later in life to make disparaging remarks about his early works, not all of which need be taken as gospel'.⁸ In fact these notes are invaluable. They begin as follows:-

'Not only the title, but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem were suggested by Miss Jessie L. Weston's books on the Grail legend: *From Ritual to Romance* (Cambridge).

Indeed, so deeply am I indebted, Miss Weston's book will elucidate the difficulties of the poem much better than my notes can do; and I recommend it ... to any who think such elucidation of the poem worth the trouble'.⁹

So any approach to *The Waste Land* must take three stages: first, an account of the Grail romances themselves, second an account of

Weston's theory, and third its application to the poem.

The Grail Romances

The chief Grail romances may be listed as follows:¹⁰

1. *The Perceval* of Chrétien de Troyes;
2. 3. 4. 5. Four continuations of this, two anonymous, one by Manessier and one by Gerbert de Montreuil;
6. *The Parzival* of Wolfram von Eschenbach;
7. The Welsh romance *Peredur*;
8. The *Didot Perceval*, so called from a former owner of the manuscript;
9. *Perlesvaus*, a romance from northern France or Belgium;
10. The *Prose Lancelot*, third member of a huge four-part work called the Vulgate cycle;
11. The *Queste del Saint Graal*, the fourth member of the same cycle;
12. 13. Two romances with Gawain as sole hero;
14. The *Suite de Merlin*, with the story of Balin and the Dolorous stroke;
15. The *Sone de Nansai*, probably by a poet of Brabant;
16. Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, which compiled in an English version much of the French material;
17. 18. Robert de Boron's *Joseph d'Arimathie* and the *Estoire del Saint Graal*, the first member of the Vulgate Cycle, two thoroughly Christianised works giving the supposed early history of the Grail.

Except for Malory (printed in 1485) and the *Sone* (late thirteenth century), all the romances mentioned were produced between about 1180 and 1230 AD.

From Ritual to Romance

We can now consider Jessie Weston's theory. It is, to my mind, extremely convincing, and makes excellent sense of the whole mysterious Grail literature. In an early book on the subject, Roger Sherman Loomis supported Weston;¹¹ in a later book, he unfortunately changed his mind, substituting a much less convincing theory based on an obscure folktale.¹² I think it is extremely fortunate for literature that Eliot's poem is based on Weston and not on the later Loomis.

In ancient and medieval beliefs, there were essentially two different ways in which a country became a Waste Land, suffering from drought, sterility of plants and animals and human beings, general devastation, and lawless violence. The first condition is the presence of a dragon or water monster. In the words of a fine radio play of Louis Macneice, 'see the deserted port, The

ruined shacks, the slag-heaps covered with lichen And behind it all the frown and fear of the forest. This is the Dragon's demesne'.¹³



The dragon or monster may be generally destructive, like those slain by Perseus or Heracles or Beowulf or Sigurd or St George or Sir John Lambton or Alexander (in a Syrian romance) or Ardashir the Sassanian.¹⁴ But often the dragon specifically denies access to water, creating conditions of drought, which are relieved when it is slain. This applies to the dragons killed by the gods Indra or the Iranian hero Thraetona or a couple of Armenian heroes or Dieudonné de Gozon, third Grand Master of the Knights of St John at Rhodes.¹⁵

The dragon motif is peripheral in the Grail romances, but occasionally creeps in as an odd extra. In *Peredur* the hero kills a typically Celtic monster called the Addanc, and later a dangerous serpent,¹⁶ and in the prose *Lancelot* Sir Gawain encounters a huge dragon, though it does him no harm.¹⁷

The other condition believed to result in a Waste Land was the death, decrepitude or genitaly wounded condition of the king of the land, who thus became incapable of reproduction, and hence, by sympathetic magic, made the whole land sterile. Frazer had shown that this belief was still the basis for practice in

two African tribes, where a king who could no longer satisfy his wives was regularly killed and replaced by a younger man – the king is dead, long live the king.¹⁸ There is no doubt that the belief was widespread in ancient and medieval times. It is attested in the early Irish legends, in Homer, and by a Delphic oracle given to the Spartans.¹⁹ In all these cases, a sterile king is regarded as a disaster for the land. In AD 1258, when Hulagu stormed Baghdad, he was told that 'if the caliph is killed the whole universe is disorganized, the sun hides its face, rain ceases and plants grow no more'; unfortunately, the temible Mongol was not impressed, and killed the caliph and most of the city's population.²⁰

Weston relates all this, especially 'the king is dead, long live the king', to the ancient myths of vegetation gods, who die and are resurrected annually, Tammuz, Osiris, Adonis and the castrated Attis.²¹ To understand these vegetation gods, we have to go back beyond Weston to the great book of Grant Allen, *The Evolution of the Idea of God*.²² He showed that, like all gods, these ones started as dead ancestors. Burying a corpse would automatically serve to cultivate and weed a plot, and if seeds were offered to the dead, there would be an excellent crop. By a natural misunderstanding, this would lead to human or animal sacrifice in the crop field, to ensure a good crop, and the myth of the dying and resurrected god would be a natural consequence. In the course of time, as Frazer had abundantly shown, the sacrifices became merely symbolic ceremonies.

At this point, we can return to the Grail romances, and consider their chief incidents. The hero typically arrives at the Grail castle, where he finds the king either dead, decrepit or wounded in the genitals. He is called the Fisher King, because of his association with the waters so crucial for the fertility of the land, which is now dry and wasted. There are sometimes two kings present instead of one, but this seems to be a confusion in the stories. The king's injury was caused in different ways in the different romances. In the *Suite de Merlin*, he was wounded by the knight Balin, the so-called dolorous stroke.²³ In the *Sone de Nansai* Joseph of Arimathea was injured as a divine punishment for marrying a heathen; Wolfram's king Anfortas was similarly punished for a sexual offence.²⁴ In a curious Grail story prefixed irrelevantly to Chrétien's *Perceval*, there were said to be maidens in a land, who gave travellers food and drink. But a king called Amongons raped one of these girls and stole her golden cup, and his knights did the same with the other girls, after which the land became a Waste Land.²⁵ This last version is specially important for Eliot's poem, as we shall see.

In the Grail castle, certain symbolic objects are carried into the hall where the hero sits with the Fisher King. In the first instance, the hero fails to ask any questions about these objects, and so fails to cure the king and restore the land. After many further adventures, he returns and this time asks the crucial questions. At once the king is cured and the land restored, though the king himself either retires or promptly dies on being cured, and is replaced by the hero as king of the Grail castle and the land – the king is dead, long live the king.

The two main symbolic objects are a lance and a vessel, carried typically by a man and a woman: in some versions the lance is 'upright in the vase'.²⁶ Weston is surely right in seeing this as genital imagery, and cites a parallel symbolism practised by the Samurai in Japan.²⁷ And she gives examples of ritual marriages as fertility ceremonies designed to promote crop growth.²⁸ The vessel or vase is the Grail (though for Wolfram it is a precious stone instead); sometimes it is a cup. Two other subsidiary objects also brought into the hall are often a sword and a dish. Weston notes that lance, cup, sword and dish are the suits of the Tarot pack of cards, and that both in ancient Egypt and in ancient China 'the original use of the "Tarot" would seem to have been, not to foretell the Future in general, but to predict the rise and fall of the waters which brought fertility to the land'.²⁹

Several specific points fill out Weston's picture. Women traditionally mourned for Adonis, and in the prose *Lancelot* twelve maidens weep bitterly in the Grail castle, for no obvious reason.³⁰ The women mourning for Adonis were also supposed to cut off their hair,³¹ and in *Perlesvaus* a maiden is bald, but recovers her hair when the king is cured.³² A very interesting sidelight on the whole system is provided by the mumming plays found in various places in Britain. The characters always include St George (sometimes transformed into King George), as a vestige of the Dragon's demesne motif.³³ The saint kills one of the other characters, who is promptly revived by a Doctor who also always takes part – an obvious enactment of the death and resurrection of the vegetation god. Now in 1989 Gareth Morgan showed that the mumming plays of north-western Europe were brought from Greece in the thirteenth century AD by Flemish nobles returning from thence, especially after the fall of the Latin empire of Constantinople.³⁴ I then pointed out that, according to Athenaeus, there was something very like a mumming play in ancient Sparta, including a Doctor, who talked mumbo-jumbo, just as he does in the British mumming plays.³⁵ So these plays can be traced back to the times of the Adonis and Attis myths.

In some of the Grail versions, there are indications that Gawain and Peredur may have been adept at healing, and Weston suggested that originally the hero may have cured the king as the Doctor revives the dead man in the mumming plays, directly, as opposed to by asking the crucial question.³⁶

Finally, Weston produced evidence that the Gnostics took over the Attis mystery religion virtually as it stood, Christianising it in a very superficial way.³⁷ She postulated that some kind of mystery initiation ceremonies, obviously surreptitiously, continued to be practised in the Dark and early Middle Ages in Western Europe. There are many indications of such semi-pagan survivals.³⁸ Weston supposes that the early romances embody vague distorted memories of such initiations. Eventually, Robert de Boron and the authors of the *Queste* and the *Estoire*, probably under the influence of the Cistercian order, gave the stories a totally Catholic orientation.³⁹ The Grail became the dish of the Last Supper, or the receptacle for Christ's blood,⁴⁰ and the lance is one used to pierce his side.⁴¹ We have now completed the account of Weston's theory, and are ready to turn our attention to the poem itself.



The first part of the poem is headed *The Burial of the Dead*, taking us straight back past Weston to Grant Allen. The poem then opens on the Starnbergersee, a beautiful lake south of Munich, with quotations from the memoirs of Countess Marie Larisch, related to the Empress Elizabeth and to King Ludwig II of Bavaria.⁴¹ Eliot's poem is not a simple narrative but rather, like Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*, a succession of Freudian free associations to the main theme. The Countess appears because of her close relationship to Ludwig, whose ghost she claimed to have seen after he drowned himself in the Starnbergersee. Ludwig was, of course, the great patron of Richard Wagner, whom Marie had actually met. And Wagner is of course relevant because of his Arthurian operas, *Tristan* and *Parsifal*. Both *Tristan* and the *Ring* are actually quoted in the poem.

More problematic are the many quotations from Dante who, as I have shown, goes out of his way to avoid Arthurian references.⁴² But for Eliot Dante was by far the greatest of all poets, and he cannot resist frequently quoting him. Besides, the pains of the *Inferno*, and more reassuringly of the *Purgatorio*, reflect the agony of the Fisher King. He appears several times, 'fishing in the dull canal', 'the sailor home from sea' (identified in one of Eliot's notes as a 'dory' fisherman), and finally 'fishing, with the arid plain behind me'.

We are back with Grant Allen and the vegetation god again when the poet addresses an acquaintance at the end of the first part: 'That corpse you planted last year in your garden, Has it begun to sprout?'

As for the Grail Castle, in the words of Everet A Gillis, who relates Weston to the poem in detail, it 'appears twice in Part One, once in Part Two, seven times in Part Three, and two times in Part Five; and under several bizarre disguises: once each as the city gas works, a cheap hotel, an ornate boudoir, a brothel, a rented flat; and twice each as a tower and a church'.⁴³

The second part of the poem, *A Game of Chess*, reflects the chess-board found in the Castle in several of the Grail romances, but also refers to Middleton's play *Women Beware Women*, in which a mother is distracted by a chess game while her daughter is raped by the Duke of Florence. Eliot has here been influenced, evidently, by Weston's mention of King Amangons raping the girl, and he repeats this theme by referring to the rape of Philomel 'by the barbarous king so rude forced'. The rapes are extreme, but all the sexual encounters in the poem are very unattractive, watched

cynically by the trans-sexual prophet Tiresias: they are devoid of love or enjoyment, and serve as sterile parodies of joyous fertility ceremonies, hardly likely to cure any Fisher King.

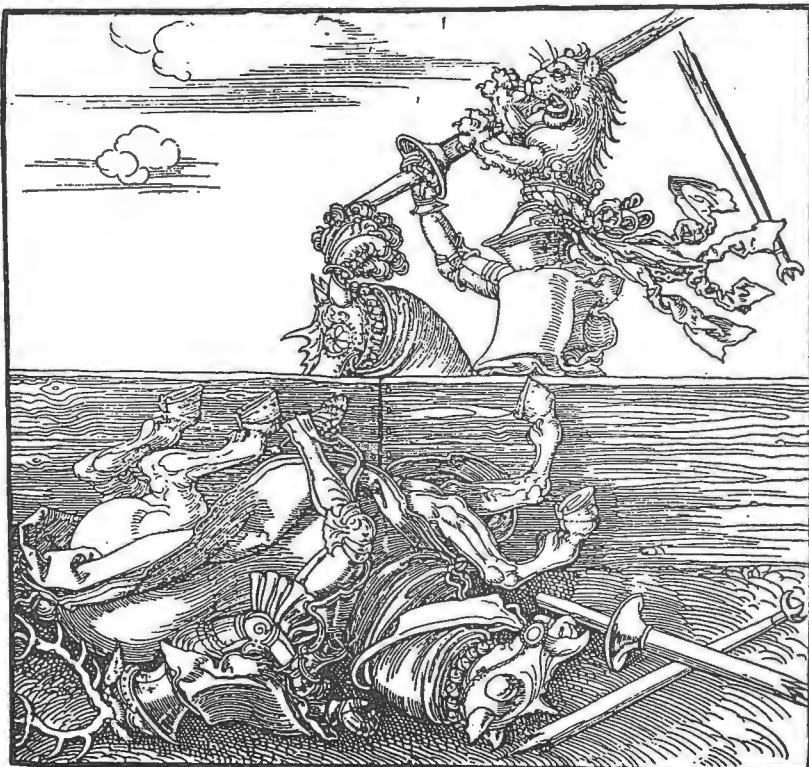
The Tarot episode has similarly been trivialised to the patter of a charlatan fortuneteller. There is indeed little sign in the poem of any hero succeeding in the quest, or any restoration of the Waste Land, and the closing words, *Shantih shantih shantih*, which Eliot translates as 'the Peace which passeth understanding', can scarcely compensate for the bleak effect of the poem as a whole.

And yet that fifth part, headed *What the Thunder Said*, though containing a desperate representation of the horrors of drought, also includes a passage of exquisite beauty, the water-dripping sequence, with the hermit-thrush, 'whose "water-dripping song" is justly celebrated' (Eliot's note).⁴⁴ Eliot himself realised that this passage is the very best thing in what is, with all its bleakness, a wonderful work of art.⁴⁵

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reviews



A S Esmonde Cleary
The Ending of Roman Britain
 Routledge 2000 £16.99
 0 415 238 984 pb

• Originally published 1989 by B T Batsford

The aim of this book – to see how far archaeological evidence can give any meaningful picture of the withdrawal of Roman control from this island, and to compare this with the picture given by written sources – results in a book full of detail, but one where the author manages to avoid losing sight of the wood for the trees.

One of his particular themes is the necessity to also look at archaeological evidence for the same period from the Continent, rather than examining Britain in isolation, and this enables him to seriously weaken a number of commonly-accepted conclusions, for example the assigning of a particular type of belt to Germanic *feoderati*, one which he believes rather to have been a widely-issued standard Roman official wear, or the belief that absence of late Roman artefacts from Germanic graves represented a "cultural resistance". Cleary draws on Rhineland interments to contradict this.

Using data as diverse as the ending of coin series, 'dark earth' deposits in Roman towns (and an absence of the burnt layers to be expected from written accounts of violent destruction), the relative size of late Empire urban defences in Britain and Gaul, the alignment of interments, and much else, he offers a series of fascinating suggestions.

To summarise ruthlessly, these include the view that the cessation of Roman taxation in Britain after the defeat of the usurper Constantine III and the non-replacement of his administration led to an end to the need for coin use. This triggered a collapse of the market economy of the towns, and hence their function, along with industries like pottery. Society reverted to an almost "Year Zero" subsistence level, which persisted for several decades. Anglo-Saxon settlement did not, in his view, begin till well into that period, indeed only shortly before Celtic society began to recover (as an aside, he views Tintagel as in essence a fortified entrepot for revived foreign trade). Most controversially, he views the majority of the Anglo-Saxon population as in fact descendants of the peasantry of post-Roman Britain, Celts who adopted Anglo-Saxon culture and language, citing among other factors the relative population numbers, the appearance of Celtic-style interments among majority Germanic-style ones (eg at Norwich) etc.

When it comes to the 'written record', he downvalues most sources as too late, too remote geographically, or the work of writers distorting the situation for particular propagandist reasons. Although on occasion seemingly illogical and inconsistent in this analysis (he explains, for example, Gildas' failure to mention Constantine III as being because this usurper was irrelevant to the intended message, yet calls the omission by Gildas of mention of Arthur evidence that the latter did not exist!), it is a salutary reminder of the difficulties under which the writers of the time laboured in obtaining data, and also how different their purpose usually was from what could be called 'objective history'.

Although long out of print, [this book has recently re-appeared,] and remains well worth reading as a, literally, 'earthbound' view of the period, seemingly continuingly relevant in the way that forensic reports are to trial evidence, not the whole story but by no means to be ignored.

Steve Sneyd

Chris Barber
Mysterious Wales
 Blorenge Books 2000 £9.99
 1872730 09 4 pb 239pp

Fellow Pendragon Chris Barber has revised and updated his memorable works *Mysterious Wales* and *More Mysterious Wales* [both originally published by David & Charles]. These inspired many to go out and wonder at the riches of the Principality in the 1980s. The new book contains elements of both of the former titles and is easy to read and attractively illustrated. There is a chapter on Arthur and Myrddin, and

grid references and Landranger map numbers are given for easy location of sites.

My only complaint is that this new book lacks an index. The entries are listed under categories, ranging from standing stones to holy wells and places associated with witches and wizards to romantic rocks.

This is a selection rather than a comprehensive compilation. The local will be drawn into a deeper investigation of the subject, however, while the tourist will be eager to thread the featured sites into their itinerary.

Laurence Main

Charles Thomas

Christian Celts: messages and images

Tempus Publishing 1998 £19.99

07524 1411 9 hb 224pp illus

I suspect that I was not the only person to look at post-Roman inscriptions on stone and wonder how it was that they could have lost the art of monumental lettering and "proper" Latin spelling and grammar. If we take the famous 7th-century Catamarus stone from Anglesey, this reads:

CATAMANUS
REXSAPIENTISI
MUSOPINATISM
USOMNIUMREG
UM

Translated and restored, this comes out something like

Cetamarus, king, wisest, most famous of kings but classicists have criticised the spelling (ideally *sapienissimus* and *opinatissimus*), the layout of the text and the "debased" letter forms (a clumsy adaptation of half-uncial forms developed for manuscripts). Catamarus, who died around 625, had a name which notionally should have been "Catumando", subsequently developing into "Catumannus" for monumental inscriptions (manuscript genealogies give Catman, modern Cadfan), so they apparently couldn't even get his name spelled correctly! Dark Ages indeed! (And ammunition for modern critics who would argue for a new Dark Age in modern English schooling.)

However, Thomas questions whether we have got this right. What if these alleged orthographical errors were deliberate, with messages and images concealed in the layout? I have to admit that I thought that Professor Thomas had lost it, and had reneged to the Rennes-le-Château school of crypto-conspiracy.

After consideration, I am now less sceptical. I accept that the Class II group of insular inscribed stones follow on from an established classical practice of including puns, anagrams, acrostics, alliteration, consonance, rhymes and letter squares, along with mathematical conceits such

as letter-number correspondences, and added to these a great number of explicit and sometimes implicit Biblical references. The Catamarus inscription can give us a flavour of some of these processes if it is re-written as a four-line stanza:

CATAMANUS REX
SAPIENTISIMUS
OPINATISIMUS
OMNIUM REGUM

This a/b/b/a scheme gives us two words in the first and last lines which include the word 'king' or 'kings', and two middle lines which are superlatives. There are also letter correspondences in the paired lines: M N U REX (or M N U REG) and PI N TISIMUS.

If the 48 letters are placed in a notional grid, one possible arrangement would give

C A T A M A N U S R E X
S A P I E N T I S I M U
S O P I N A T I S I M U
S O M N I U M R E G U M

with its arresting vertical and diagonal letter correspondences. This leads us to a concept that I am less easy with, namely that arrangements of letters on a notional grid can lead to the creation of mental images, many of which though plausible certainly depend on the eye of the beholder. Thomas suggests that drawing little frames around similar adjacent letters and half-closing the eyes will result in a "kind of Lego-man outline" of a corpse showing sexual excitement, and may be a "cryptic joke, a spoof" by Cadfan's grandson, who re-interred him. While I am leery of Thomas' exact interpretations of this and other similar mental images, there is no doubt that something odd is going on.

This is a book that is worth persevering with – despite its often complex arguments it is shot through with Thomas' dry wit and apposite asides, and, coming as it does from an acknowledged expert in the field of church history and archaeology, it is also worth taking seriously.

Chris Lovegrove

R I Page

An Introduction to English Runes

Boydell & Brewer, Woodbridge 1999 £30.00
0 85115 768 8 hb 249pp illus

This long-awaited book is the second volume of that title, the original – published in 1973 – having long been out-of-print. There is a publishing paradox here, since a great many less worthy book on runes have come and gone, many in several reprints, while this fine volume remained a book-lover's rarity, available secondhand at a premium over its original published price.

In the twenty-odd years since the introduction first saw the light of day a good many new finds have been made, and these are taken into account in the text (apart from those discoveries made since mid-1999 when the manuscript must have been delivered to the publisher). Yet the original layout and much of the original book is still in place.

Nothing if not comprehensive, the book covers just about every aspect of runology available through the English texts: who wrote in runes, what they wrote, when and where; the *fuþorc*; the surviving records; manuscript runes and the rune-names; runic codes; quasi-runic inscriptions; coin legends; rune-stones; combinations of runic and roman script; a brief history of the study of the script. The material dealt with is all Anglo-Saxon, with Norse runes in the British Isles only figuring slightly in the text.

Page is renowned as the foremost expert on English runes, and his opinions have enormous weight – the more so as he is famous for his pragmatic, no-nonsense approach to the script. There are few flights of fancy in this book, since speculation is clearly something Page does with both feet firmly on the ground. While he concedes that magical interpretations of some texts is the only probable answer, he dismisses such writing as "gibberish", which is a little harsh (and may deter others from attempting its interpretation).

The book is well-written, with a fine sense of irony and the odd hard-headed whimsical touch, as when he introduces the bibliography: "If there are too many of my own publications in it, this is because, like most runologists, I suspect that only my own opinions and observations are valid." It is refreshing to see a scholar come clean on this point!

This book is an important work, a classic in its field, and should have a place on any Anglo-Saxonist's book-shelf – if necessary, throw away all those books on "Celtic Runestones of the Goddess" to make room. Not only art historians and archaeologists, but also students of the language and the culture of the English – Christian or heathen – should have a knowledge of the script and its principal records. You could find no better starting point than this.

Steve Pollington

• This review first appeared in *Widowin* 121 (Spring 2000) and re-appears with permission.



T D Breverton

The Book of Welsh Saints

Glyndwr Publishing 2000 £24.99

1 903529 01 8 hb 606pp

The author has taken up the subject of Welsh saints as a means of reviving the economy of Wales. Re-awakening their feast days will attract tourists. The resulting prosperity will bring a national renewal in confidence. Leaving aside thoughts of ends, means and justifications, let alone reality, this book is a massive undertaking, obviously done with the enthusiasm of an amateur. As the author warns on page 15, "this is not a 'dry' academic tome ... if a saint is associated with Arthur, it is mentioned".

A study of the Welsh saints can be very rewarding for the Arthurian researcher. Indeed, it can be vital. Yet it is so often neglected. In my own parish, our St Tydecho is known to have been a nephew of King Arthur. His mother was Anna of Gwent, Arthur's sister. Here, immediately, is confirmation of the Arthur (and I acknowledge there were several Arthurs) who features in *The Mabinogion* and, in the particularly relevant case of my parish of Mawddwy, fell at Camlan in 537 (or 539, 542 ... if you must).

The Lives of the British Saints by Sabine Baring-Gould and Joh Fisher is a frequent cause of my travelling miles to the nearest reference library. Luckily, I now have my own copy of Elissa Henken's excellent *Traditions of the Welsh Saints*, but Henken only deals with a select band (in commendable detail). T D Breverton's book details hundreds of our saintly friends.

You will have to wade through paragraphs on such unlikely items as Glamorgan sausages, beer and 'real' crisps (much as I love the salt and black pepper variety even I wonder at their relevance in a book on Welsh saints) and face the author's other idiosyncrasies. The use of apostrophes where they are not required (like the greengrocer marking his orange's and apple's) offends the eye. Your heart does warm to this compiler as his luck leads him to turn over golden nuggets, however.

Breverton reveals that he has Pelagian sympathies and that he thinks Camlan may have been fought between Arthur and Maelgwn. He hasn't tried to uncover the truth about 'Saint' Illud, but then the arch-manipulator and controller of the sixth-century version of 'the media' did make that difficult! He follows Chris Barber up the false alley of identifying St Armel (the brother of Derfel Gadarn) with a post-Camlan Arthur surviving in Brittany.

Double entries occur, of course (it's not easy untangling the lives of Welsh saints), as with Brannoch / Brynach, Dyfan / Tyfanog and Canwg

Tanwg. Most usefully, many who aren't saints are detailed, such as Ceraint the Drunkard and Maelgwn Gwynedd. There are also the like of Dic Penderyn and Dr John Davies.

T D Breverton has compiled a most extensive and useful reference book which aids all those interested in King Arthur and/or Wales. I didn't hesitate to spend £24.99 of my own meagre income to purchase a copy.

Laurence Main

H A Guerber

The Myths of Greece & Rome: their stories, signification and origin
Wordswoth Editions 2000
1 84022 504 1 pb 271pp

Pendragon member Professor Russell has provided a new introduction to this re-issue, one of a series entitled *Myth, Legend and Folklore*. This new series is the result of a collaboration between Wordswoth Editions and The Folklore Society which it is intended will make the archive of the Society more generally accessible than at any time since its beginnings in 1879.

Unlike modern academic tomes, there is no extensive bibliography – indeed, none at all, as Guerber's contemporary references are now well out of date. However, there remains the nineteenth-century penchant for quoting classical and contemporary poetry at appropriate points in the text. For all that the text reads easily enough, with sub-headings to chop up the text in bite-size chunks and a useful index to locate names (though the numerous but bald page references for Heaven, Earth, Love etc are a bit daunting – a bit of cross-referencing would have been more useful).

Every so often someone will lament the passing of an age when to be educated meant being as familiar with the ancient Greek and Roman myths as with your own neighbourhood. For better or worse that is no longer the case but, as with the practice of straitjacketing the English language with Latin grammar, this knowledge could often constrict the creative imagination. Maybe the passing of time may lead to public re-acquaintance with this ancient matter, resulting in a kind of mini-renaissance.

Or maybe not! Professor Russell's introduction reminds us nevertheless that classical myths and folk-tales have inspired modern writers in unexpected ways, especially science-fictioners such as Asimov, Arthur C Clarke, Sprague de Camp and Brian Stableford; one tale-type even provided the name of pioneering rock band The Grateful Dead! And as you yourself read through these various stories, and immerse yourself in tales of boar hunts, and wild hags decapitated by heroes, and kings with animal ears betrayed by barbers, and ships

returning with black sails, you may well begin to wonder if there is anything new under the sun except a change of name and a new context.

Chris Lovegrove

Paul Devereux

The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Ancient Earth Mysteries
Blandford/Cassell 2000 £18.99
0 7137 2764 0 hb 182pp
and *Shamanism and the Mystery Lines*
Foulsham/Quantum 2000 £9.99
0 572 02664 1 pb 238pp

Earth Mysteries now has a valuable encyclopedia, easy to use with its alphabetical organization and cross-referencing. Arthur and the Grail are two entries amongst all from Acoustics to Zuni in this attractive, colourful book. *Shamanism and the Mystery Lines* is an important book on the subject of leys and earth mysteries, written by the former editor of *The Ley Hunter*. First published in 1992, this revised edition is another chance to buy a book which reveals and interprets this subject.

Laurence Main

Laurence Main

The Spirit Paths of Wales
Cicerone Press 2000 £8.99
1 85284 289 X pb 144pp illus

This book, in common with many of Laurence's other works, entertains and exasperates all in one. Careful hand-drawn maps and contour profiles of twenty walking routes sometimes need a magnifying glass because of reduction to fit the walker's needs for a practical pocket-size guide, while lively and fascinating accounts of the sites visited are spoiled by a lack of critical referencing and strong reliance on hearsay, speculation, psychic questing, dowsing and the evidence of dreams – all readily acknowledged by the author, I have to say.

Having said that, you can take it or leave it and still enjoy the walks for themselves, the text for its capacity to evoke a sense of place and the numerous author's photographs for their ability to whet the appetite. For the *Pendragon* reader, numerous sites have Arthurian associations, real or imagined – Bardsey Island (candidate for Avalon), Moel Ty-Uchaf (Arthur's Table), Strata Florida (the Nanteos Cup), Castell Olwen and, of course, Dark Age saints' churches such as St Cadoc at Gelliagor – which is a point in favour of acquiring this book, whatever your view on ley lines, the "spirit paths" of the title.

Chris Lovegrove

Larry Niven, Jerry Pournelle and Steven Barnes
The Legacy of Heorot
Victor Gollancz hb 1987, Orbit pb £6.99
1 857 23134

Though not a recent publication, *Pendragon* readers who may not yet have encountered *The Legacy of Heorot* may still enjoy it for some evocative use of Arthurian themes. *Waterstone's Guide to Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror* (edited by Paul Wake, Steve Andrews and Ariel) describes Niven as "a Hard SF writer who incorporates speculations based on the concepts of modern physics into his work". So, *Legacy* centres on a pioneering colony established on a planet in the Tau Ceti system, but what makes this SF novel particularly memorable is its rehandling of themes from other fiction.

The plot is a conscious reworking of (as you might guess from the title) *Beowulf*, with a hero, Cadmann Weyland, acknowledging a Gwent ancestry and dealing with Grendel-like monsters. The New Guinea-sized Camelot Island situated on Tau Ceti Four – a planet called Avalon – is the site of humankind's first interstellar colony. Avalon's moons are named Merlin and Nirmé; the river that runs through Camelot is called the Miskatonic, however, which in effect makes the island another Arkham in the H P Lovecraft tradition. As Alberto Manguel and Gianni Guadalupi note in *The Dictionary of Imaginary Places* (1980), "Travellers visiting the city [Lovecraft's Arkham] do so at their own risk but they are warned that the consequences of such a visit may haunt them for the rest of their lives" – a fitting description too of Camelot Island and the gripping action that takes place there.

In addition, there are episodes which use the themes of the Fisher King and the Wounded King, and the hero Cadmann fulfills the function of a Lancelot at times. This is a novel worth seeking out for sheer enjoyment as well as its resonances. There is a highly readable sequel too, *The Dragons of Heorot* (1985), also republished by Orbit [1 85723 373 5, reprinted 1999] – during an environmental Ragnarok on the mainland of Avalon a second generation colonist plays Mordred to Cadmann's Arthur.

Chris Lovegrove



Neil Gaiman

Smoke and Mirrors

Headline Feature £5.99 pb

Neil Gaiman is a fine writer, possibly known to *Pendragon* readers for his splendid book, *Good Omens* co-written with Terry Pratchett, possibly for his fine tv serial *Neverwhere* and possibly for his graphic novels or other writings. This collection of short stories is absorbing and intriguing, but sold itself to me instantly in the bookshop where I was browsing because of the first tale, "Chivalry".

From the opening line "Mrs Whitaker found the Holy Grail: it was under a fur coat" to the conclusion it held me giggling and entranced. Without giving away too much here's another quote ...

'Mrs Whitaker answered the door. It was a young man with shoulder-length hair so fair it was almost white, wearing gleaming silver armour, with a white surcoat.'

"Hello", he said.

"Hello," said Mrs Whitaker.

"I'm on a quest," he said.

"That's nice," said Mrs Whitaker, noncommittally.

"Can I come in?" he asked.

Mrs Whitaker shook her head. "I'm sorry, I don't think so," she said.

"I'm on a quest for the Holy Grail," the young man said. "Is it here?"

"Have you got any identification?" Mrs Whitaker asked. She knew that it was unwise to let unidentified strangers into your home when you were elderly and living on your own.

Handbags get emptied, and worse than that.'

Suffice it to say I shall view Oxfam shops with a fresh eye from now on. You never know what you'll find there, after all.

Anne Lister

Ralph de Tunstall Sneyd

Vivian and Merlin

Hill Top Press 2001 £1.99 / \$4.50
0 905262 28 X card covered illus 8pp
This version of the classic tale of an old man's infatuation with a younger woman dates from 1929, and reflects some of the author's varied interests, particularly a fascination with the Arthurian legends and Druidism. Written within an *abab* rhyme scheme, the poem begins inauspiciously with lines close to doggerel:

*Old Merlin, skilled in Bardic lore,
Well versed in many a mystic rite ...
with many a fain and I ween. However, gravitas
is gained after an increase in line length, and
with the description of a storm following on the
heels of Merlin's beguiling comes an inkling of
the poet's gift for transcending mere mechanics:
The twilight faded; rustling sounds were heard;
The lightning flashed, and echoing thunder
rolled;
Far down the valley, bustling torrents roared;
The light did gleam, and darkness did enfold
The oaks, the rushing stream, and grassy sward,
And thicket deep, and solitary glade,
And vast expanse of forest grandly spread ...*

The mystery of Merlin's whereabouts is not resolved – *No mortal knows where mighty Merlin sleeps* – though the poet hazards some sea-girt isle or, with Vivian, *'midst waters blue!*

Ralph de Tunstall Sneyd (1862 - 1947) was a distant relative of Steve Sneyd; unaware of their parallel interests in Arthuriana, antiquarianism and landscape until about ten years ago, Steve has now re-published the poem following its first appearance in 1929 and then re-appearance on a University of Rochester internet site in 1997. The text is enlivened by three illustrations from artist and Pendragon member Ian Brown, and includes biographical notes on the author and background on the artwork and artist.

For a copy, order from Hilltop Press, 4 Nowell Place, Almondbury, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, HD5 8PB, making cheques payable to 'S Sneyd'.

Chris Lovegrove



Many of the following hardback fiction titles have been highlighted by Ronan Coghlan of Excalibur Books. We begin with the prolific Rosalind Miles – her latest is *Guinevere 3: the Child of the Holy Grail* [Simon & Schuster £16.99 384pp, paperback £9.99], featuring Mordred's coming of age.

Merlin is the thread running through the next set of books: Robert Holdstock's *Celtica*, also published by Simon & Schuster [£16.99 352pp] is the first volume in the Merlin Codex series, and finds Merlin beffriending Jason during his quest for the Golden Fleece; Robert J King's *Mad Merlin* 'unlocks the secrets of his past and the reasons for his supernatural power' as well detailing the Arthurian episodes [Tor £16.99 480pp]; finally, Christopher Davison's 411-page *I, Merlin – a Historical Recreation* is published by the Book Guild at £18.50, though no further details are yet available.

British heroic fantasy author David Gemmell featured in *Prism*, the magazine of the British Fantasy Society [David J Howe "Heroes and Legends" June 2000, sent in by Steve Sneyd].



BookWorm attempts to digest some of the latest published offerings on Arthurian-related themes

FICTION AND POETRY

Arthurian fiction has multiplied like rabbits in the run-up to Christmas. First, Diana Paxson has completed the final Arthurian novel of the late Marion Zimmer Bradley, which has now been published as *Priestess of Avalon* [HarperCollins 0 00 224709 7 £16.99 400pp]. The previous titles in the series, *Mists of Avalon*, *Forests of Avalon* and *Lady of Avalon* are all now available in a uniform edition in Penguin paperbacks. Bernard Cornwell, meanwhile, has set his new Grail novel, *Harlequin*, in the 14th century "on the killing fields of France during the Hundred Years' War". The first of a new series called The Grail Quest, it is published in hardback by HarperCollins at £16.99, with a version on audiobook at £12.99. HarperCollins' website features free chapter downloads, video author interviews and offers on signed gift copies:

www.fireandwater.com

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British heroic fantasy author David Gemmell featured in *Prism*, the magazine of the British Fantasy Society [David J Howe "Heroes and Legends" June 2000, sent in by Steve Sneyd].

According to *Prism* he has written at least a couple of books inspired by Arthurian legends – *Lion of Macedon* and *Dark Prince* – both part of the Slipstrass series of novels (available from Orbit). But shome mistake here, surely? These are set in the Greece of Alexander the Great – or have I missed something?

A new collection of poems from Steve Sneyd himself, the arrestingly entitled *Gestaltmacher, Gestaltmacher, Make Me a Gestalt* (The Four Quarters Press), is now available; it contains just one Arthurian poem, to avoid overlap with *What Time Has Use For* (K T Publications). You can order direct from the author (£6.50 including post and packing, cheques etc payable to "S Sneyd") at 4 Nowell Place, Almondbury, Huddersfield, W Yorkshire HD5 8PB (WTHUF only £5.50).

Steve also writes that he has recently read a new poetry collection by Phil Nicholls, *The Dreams of Grandfather Heron*. 'One poem, "The Summer Palace", suggested Arthur's ongoing sleep is under Lady's Broad (all the poems are set in Norfolk Broadland) in the underwater palace of Viviane – presumably a local tradition, one new to me as yet another candidate for the resting place location.'

And, from Kevin Byrne, is a notice of Terry Deary's new series of "exciting detective stories where a gang of children set out to investigate and solve real-life historical mysteries" (*The Northern Echo* June 1st). Included in the *Time Detectives* series is *King Arthur's Bones* – no publication details were available, but *The Northern Echo* (Darlington, Co Durham DL1 1NF) might give further info, or any bookseller.

FACTUAL

Christopher Snyder, author of *An Age of Tyrants: Britain and the Britons* (reviewed in *Pendragon* 28/1), has produced another in Thames & Hudson's wide-ranging and well-illustrated series of tomes, entitled *Exploring the World of King Arthur* [hardback £17.95]. A sort of *Quest for Arthur's Britain* for the end of the century, it provides, mostly free of value judgements, an overview of all aspects of Arthur. The Society gets a mention on its listings section, though sadly with out-of-date details. A discount of 20% can be had by ordering on-line via their website [www.thamesandhudson.co.uk]. Full review next time.

James Carley is no stranger to either Arthurian matters or Glastonbury, so the publication of *Glastonbury Abbey and the Arthurian Tradition* will come as no surprise. This 384-page hardback will retail at around £50.00.

Tempus Publishing bring us Ken Dark's *Britain and the End of the Roman Empire* [0

7524 1451 8 hardback 272pp £25.00]. Subtitled *British Archaeology and History AD 400-600*, this promises to question current assumptions and present a radical interpretation of the period.

Interest in matters Celtic continues unabated, appearing in many guises. Miranda Aldhouse Green is a prolific author, not just of academic titles (*The Gods of the Celts*) but also of more populist books (such as Thames & Hudson's *The World of the Druids*). Together with Ray Howell she has produced *A Pocket Guide: Celtic Wales* [University of Wales Press paperback, 144pp £6.99] giving a succinct introduction the subject from the Iron Age to the post-Roman period.

Thames & Hudson have also recently published Elizabeth Rees' *Celtic Saints* [208pp, hardback, £14.95], another in their Ancient People and Places series. Published in 1999, *The Life of Columba* is an abridged translation of Adamnón's Vita from Floris Books [64pp, £5.99, 0 86315 288 0]; the text is by John Gregory and the photographs of Columba's landscapes by Geoff Green.

The Earliest English Kings by D P Kirby was first published in 1991, and the new revised edition has been republished by Routledge in a 258-page paperback at £15.00 [0 415 24211 8].

Gordon Strachan's *Jesus the Master Builder* [Floris Books paperback, 302pp, £11.99, 0 86315 295 3] asks how Jesus acquired his great knowledge, and its subtitle *Druid Mysteries and the Dawn of Christianity* suggests his solution.

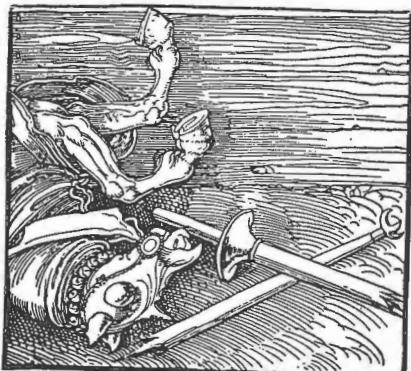
"Could Druid explorers [sic] have visited the East Coast of the United States over 2,500 years ago?" asks publicity material from US publishers Llewellyn. Before you send in your answers on a postcard, paranormal researchers Marianne Horrigan and Philip Imbrogno have already addressed this query in their *Celtic Mysteries in New England* [\$12.95, 1 56718 357 3] by claiming to have found a definite connection between ancient stone structures in suburban New York and those built by the ancient Celts.

Laurence Gardner's *Realm of the Ring Lords* (£18.99 hardback), despite its Tolkien-esque title, apparently describes five millennia of Grail kings. According to Ronan Coghlan, this was due to be self-published due to Element Books going into receivership.

John and Caitlin Matthews, who had a number of their titles published by Element, were still trying to save some of these from pulping – "Yes, this is what happens to stock when publishers have given up!" they write in their *Hallowquest Newsletter* 43 for November. HarperCollins apparently may be picking up some of the Element titles, though which ones are not yet known.

The 'Board'

Roger Davie Webster



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

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

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

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

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

Robert de Boron in about 1220 suggests that Uther Pendragon, not Arthur, founded the Round Table. His version appears to be based upon the Grail Table of Gautier's *Joseph* (a history of the Grail before Perceval of which only a fragment remains). De Boron's Table has the famous Siege Perilous, which may only be filled by a knight who has achieved the Grail. His *Brut* was also the source for the legendary 'Sword in the Stone'.

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

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

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

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

* This article first appeared in *Pendragon XI* No 3 (1978) 3f



The Board highlights the dynamism of the Arthurian legend as reflected in popular culture

HARD DAY'S KNIGHTS

At the end of August many may have wondered if the Civil War was being refighted between Royalists and Republicans – Sir Richard Branson, leading light of the People's Lottery, was attacking the integrity of national lottery operator Camelot as the rivals battled to run the operation for the next seven years [all papers]. An intriguing image, then, of a Knight, former defender of a Virgin's honour, besieging King Arthur's capital, but Camelot won out in the end.

By September some parts of the media were talking of a white knight who would rescue the Millennium Dome or the London stock exchange or similar. The Smallweed column in *The Guardian* [Saturday September 16] revealed how to spot one – "you can tell them by their gleaming cuirasses, breastplates, bascinets, armets, pauplrons, gorgets, lower beavers and morions ...".

Intrigued to know "how the term ever got into the language of company rescue" Smallweed trawled through Malory but failed to find a knight "of the appropriate hue". He discovered Black Knights, Green Knights and Red Knights, but the only white knight who "ambles into Smallweed's mind" is the chessboard one who rides into chapter 8 of *Alice Through the Looking Glass*. "That's the sort of white knight, I fear, who would turn up to rescue the Dome," he concluded.

A simple blood test developed in California was dubbed by the media in Britain as the Holy Grail for its early detection of thirteen common types of cancer. However, caution was urged by NHS experts and cancer charities [Andy Coghlan and Michael Day "Experts warn on hype over cancer blood test" *New Scientist* 11 November 2000, 6].

The same line was taken a month later. A gene nicknamed *Indy* was claimed by University of Connecticut researchers to be a key to arresting ageing and middle-age spread in humans. Experiments on mutating the gene in fruit flies doubled their age "so that they lived the equivalent of a human life span of 150 years" [Roger Highfield "Indy" gene may be Holy Grail for longevity" *The Daily Telegraph* December 15]. As the gene is also found in humans this has profound implications.

Dr Stephen Helfand of the University of Connecticut Health Center was reported as saying that the gene responsible "was named *Indy* in homage to the film *Monty Python & The Holy Grail* in which a plague victim uttered the words 'I'm not dead yet' while being hauled off for burial". I wonder, however, if *Indy* may also be a reference to the hero of *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, which involves the Grail as a kind of Fountain of Youth.

MERLIN'S MART

More news of enterprises cloaking themselves in Arthurian mystique to sell their products – and why not? – arrives by the postbag. Here is a clutch (flight? flock?) of Pendragons to start this section off.

Horror story collections are what Pendragon Press of PO Box 12, Maesteg, Mid Glamorgan, South Wales CF34 0XG specialise in, noted by Steve Sneyd. Presumably they are not to be confused with Pendragon Press, PO Box 888, Launceston, Cornwall PL15 3RY. The latter have been publishing for some time now, from John Badger's *Arthuriad* epic of the 70s to more recent offerings from Paul Broadhurst (*Tintagel and the Arthurian Mythos*, 1992, and the recent *The Dance of the Dragon*) via other pieces by Pendragon members like the late Frank Woodhead and the late R D Hoskins. Nor are they to be confused with the Pendragon Press who publish academic books solely on musicology (www.pendragonpress.com/).

The Greater London local education authority of Lewisham boasts a Pendragon Secondary School, though grooming for kingship is unlikely to be on the curriculum. Presumably the school takes its distinguished name from Pendragon Road (Downham, Bromley BR1 5LD) and I would guess it is slap bang in the middle of a new Arthurian-inspired housing estate. The school has only been in existence since 1996 and, with only 131 pupils in 1999, seems to be only gradually building up to a round (table?) number.

Across the Atlantic is Pendragon Theater who are to be found at 148 River St, Saranac Lake, NY 12983 and at pdragon@northnet.org

Supported by public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts, they bill 2000 as the "Twentieth year of the Dragon".

Steve Sneyd recently asked about a metal band called *Pendragon* (the musical kind, not a torc!). We were in contact with them during the late 1970s – they used one or two *Pendragon* illustrations as part of their publicity – but we subsequently lost contact. They do, however, still exist, and details can be found on the web at any number of sites. This progressive rock band was founded by Nick Barrett and others in 1978, and albums include *The World* and *The Window of Life*, with *Not Of This World* due in 2001. The following website (in German) underscores the fact that they are better known on the Continent than in Britain:

www.insideout.de/Bands/Pendragon.html

Their record label is at www.toffrecords.com/ or you could try contacting

toff@pndragon.demon.co.uk

Unconnected with the aforementioned band are *Pendragon Records*, a newly acquired American subsidiary of Metropolis Records who specialise in "industrial/gothic/electronic" artists [label@metropolis-records.com]. Meanwhile, DJ Mark Sinclair "invokes the Tribal Celtic Spirit" in an enterprise called – yes – *Pendragon*.

Finally, *Arthur Pendragon*, unconnected with modern druid King Arthur Pendragon, is a beer from Hampshire Brewery, mentioned on a website last updated in 1997:

www.beerline.co.uk

while *King Arthur Pendragon* himself can be e-mailed at pendragon@warband.org.uk or viewed online at www.warband.org.uk (info from Steve Sneyd).

Still on kingship, the Homeview catalogue is offering the *Excalibur Professional* 5-piece knife set for only £14.99. Comprising bread knife, carving knife, parer, vegetable knife and an all-purpose knife, this set is dishwasher safe – naturally, if it's going to get chucked in a lake in the end! – and comes with a lifetime guarantee. Spotted by A H W Smith, the advert shows the set in what appears to be a self-sharpening drum container. For more "Arthurian" products, see the *Wormwide* section below.



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STAGE, SCREEN AND SUCH

Centred Theatre Company staged their performance of *Merlin's Child* in the grounds of Caldicot Castle on August 27th. Preceding the performance a series of morning workshops, open to adults and children, explored the legend of Arthur using story-telling, physical theatre, beginners' stage fighting, music and soundscapes [Western Mail August 15, noted by Terence Rees].

There have been two productions of Robert Schumann's opera *Genoveva* this year, the most recent by Opera North at the King's Theatre, Edinburgh in September and then on tour, beginning with the Grand Theatre in Leeds. As a review by Andrew Clements in *The Guardian* ("Season of the witch" September 4) points out, "Schumann intended to write an Arthurian opera and only abandoned the idea when he heard of Wagner's plans for *Lohengrin*. But in a curious way *Genoveva* is precisely that work transplanted to central Europe: for Arthur, Lancelot, Guinevere and the Holy Grail read Siegfried, Golo, *Genoveva* and war against the Moors."

Schumann's own libretto tells the story of Genevieve of Brabant, whose husband Siegfried goes off to fight the Moors, leaving Genoveva with his best friend Golo. When Golo's advances are snubbed, Genoveva is accused of adultery with Drago the court steward, partly through the machinations of the witch Margaretha, a Morgan Le Fay-like figure. The returning Siegfried condemns his wife to execution but her Christian faith protects her – she is exiled to a wilderness – until the truth is discovered.

Reviews of the production were generally favourable ("an immensely worthwhile and revelatory show") and, though not a "flawless masterpiece", *The Guardian* thought the work – Schumann's only opera, written in the 1840s – "totally absorbing and at times dramatically gripping". Thanks to Steve Sneyd for spotting this.

Member Beryl Mercer asked if Shakespeare ever wrote a play about Arthur. The answer is no, though BBC Radio 4 did broadcast Martyn Wade's "enjoyable" play *Another Shakespeare* on Wednesday 19th April earlier this year. According to *Radio Times* this comedy was based on "the real-life story of an 18th-century forger [who] in order to convince his father that he has great literary skills ... provides him with a number of Shakespearean documents, including an exciting new and undiscovered play." The alleged new play by the Bard was entitled *Vortigern*. *Another Shakespeare* starred James Grout, Julian Rhind-Tutt and Tessa Worsley, and was produced by Cherry Cookson; the

dramatised story of William Ireland was among RT's choices for the day.

BBC Radio 4 also gave us what *The Guardian* called "intriguing modern takes" on *The Canterbury Tales* on Tuesday October 24 at 2.15pm. *2000 Tales* (noticed by Steve Sneyd) included Elizabeth Spriggs reading from *The Old Wife's Tale*, Peter Sansom's modern version of Chaucer's Arthurian *The Wife of Bath's Tale*.

"The hero of popular legend, or just a thug?" If you were wondering when Channel 4's *Time Team* would get round to King Arthur, then wonder no more. On Christmas Eve they headed for Glastonbury to see what they could unearth, in *Time Team: the Real King Arthur*. Tony Robinson calls the period between the Romans and the Vikings "one of the most fascinating" in our history. "We do know about a King Arthur fighting to protect Romano-English [sic] civilisation from the Saxons," *Radio Times* quoted him as saying. "We wanted to see if we could find out who he might be."

The children's film mentioned here before, *Merlin, The Return*, starring Rik Mayall as the wizard, opened on December 22 in time for Christmas, and reportedly is "engaging" with sword fights and battles and horses and "brilliant" special effects, according to an interview with Lynn Barber in *The Observer Life Magazine*. Review maybe next issue, from a member with small kids?

WEAVING STORIES

Fred Stedman-Jones draws our attention to some hands-on events. A tourist attraction which focuses on storytelling in an innovative way by encouraging visitor interaction is *Mythstories*. Open to the general public every day except Tuesday from April to October, the Museum of Myth and Fable is located in Shrewsbury, and, with a packed events diary, they suggest you allow an hour and a half for your visit. Find them at 19 Hills Lane, Shrewsbury, Shropshire SY1 1QU, or phone 01743 357140 or visit [url: http://www.mythstories.com](http://www.mythstories.com) or e-mail stories@mythstories.com

The 10th anniversary of the *Festival at the Edge* takes place in July 2001, but they are whetting the appetite with residential storytelling workshops before that. You will have missed Amy Douglas in November, but leading up to the celebrations is a workshop from 15th to 20th July at Wrekin College, Wellington, Shropshire with Mary Medicott and Shonaleigh Cumber. Details can be had from 3 High Point, Little Wenlock, Shropshire TF6 5BT, or phone 01952 504 882 or visit www.festivalattheedge.org

If interacting with the landscape appeals to you, then you might find geomancy of interest.

The Earth Healing School runs programmes in Derbyshire and Sussex on labyrinths, stone circles, dowsing and related fields. Contact this school of geomancy at 110 Foxhall Road, Forest Fields, Nottingham NG7 6LH or phone 0115 985 6058 or e-mail info@earth-healing.co.uk or visit [earth-healing.co.uk](http://www.earth-healing.co.uk)

WORMWIDE

While we await news of members' favourite Arthurian websites, here are the *Top 10 Most Popular Sites for "King Arthur"* according to Microsoft's MSN Search. Most popular is from "the internet's most comprehensive survey of British History", *Britannia's King Arthur and the Early British Kingdoms: History and Legend*

<http://www.britannia.com/history/h12.html> followed by *The Historical King Arthur Web Site* <http://freespace.virgin.net/david.ford2/arthur.html>

and *The Historicity and Historicisation of Arthur*, Tom Green's opus magnum on the Matter of Britain: <http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~tomgreen/arthur.html>

Fourth and fifth in the rankings MSN give as *Legends – King Arthur – Sources* <http://www.legends.dn.net/kingarthur/index.html>

followed by <http://www.geocities.com/SoHo?Nook?9779/artdeath.jpg>

The remaining five entries were not at all rated favourably by this particular search engine. Alan Lupack's University of Rochester sponsored site, *King Arthur: texts, images, basic information* is at <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/arthmenu.htm>

while *Was king Arthur real did he live in Wales?* is the King Arthur's Labyrinth website:

<http://www.corris-w.dircon.co.uk/arthur.htm>

More legendary stuff is found at *The Mystic Realm of King Arthur* and at the *Arthurian Legend Home Page*, respectively

<http://www.public.iastate.edu/~camelot/arthur.html>

<http://www.vmi.edu/~english/arthur.html> In between the last two, at number 9, is *King Arthur Flour*, allegedly America's oldest flour company, providing tips, recipes and classes:

<http://www.kingarthurflour.com/> At the last count MSN had located 95 sites for "King Arthur", including *King Arthur CD* (featuring a rock symphony), *King Arthur Clock and Jewelry*, *King Arthur's Amazing World of RPGs* (role-playing games), *Origami in King Arthur's Court* and the intriguing *King Arthur's Tools* (chainsaw products, since you ask).

Other key words or phrases you could try on your search engine (many of them in fact cross-reference to other search engines) are "Arthurian", "Excalibur", "Camelot", "(Holy) Grail" and, obviously, "Pendragon" – that is, if you have lots of spare time ... Enjoy your questing!

FEATURED SOCIETIES

The Folklore Society has been around since 1878, promoting awareness, discussion and research on traditional culture for both enthusiasts and academics. So, what is folklore? "Folklore is the way that people fill their lives with meaning, through the stories they share, the daily rituals they perform."

It can be *the expression of our individuality* and also give us a *sense of community*. "From standing stones to biker gangs, from ancient riddles to the latest joke craze, from King Arthur to the playground, from birth to death, folklore is the stuff of life." A broad canvas, then.

As well as an elected committee there are a number of specialist groups and regional sections; it also organises events such as conferences and its annual Katherine Briggs memorial lecture, and publishes an academic journal entitled, naturally, *Folklore*, together with monographs, pamphlets and a regular newsletter *FLS News*. For further details contact The Folklore Society, University College London, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT or phone 020 7387 5894 or e-mail folklore.society@talk21.com

Ronald Millar has seen success as a writer of script adaptations for films such as *Deliverance*, *Jean de Florette* and *Manon des Sources*. He is best known to Arthurians for the diverting but wayward *Will the real King Arthur please stand up?* [Cassell 1978], which argues – entertainingly, but not persuasively – that Arthur was a Breton.

His 1997 title, *The Green Man: companion and gazetteer* [S B Publications] is equally uneven (for example, whether or not Sir Gawain's adversary, the Green Knight, is related to the foliate head is, as he acknowledges, debatable) but the book, as well as being handsomely illustrated, does contain details of *The Company of The Green Man*.

The latter is a group which researches and compiles lists of Green Man representations as well as publishing a newsletter containing members' contributions. For details send a stamped addressed envelope to:

Ronald Millar, *The Company of The Green Man*, 5 Chancton House, Goring Road, Steyning, West Sussex BN44 3GS



POET'S CORNER

That inveterate collector of Arthurian trifles, Steve Sneyd, has kindly supplied the following items:

The summer issue of *Dragonsbreath* reviewzine mentioned that the first issue of a new Australian SF mag, *Wine Dark Sea*, carried an article on Arthurian imagery in *Star Trek* (gave address as POB 367, Southgate, Sylvania, NSW 2224, price \$16.95 Australian). Also, new issue (no 2) of *Phoenix New Life* magazine has a lengthy article, "The Holy Grail, Its Origins and Meaning" (predominantly New Agey / mystical) by Desmond Tarrant, and cover art by editor David Stringer is a grail / Excalibur illustration linked to it. £2.50, cheques payable to The Universal Alliance, post to D A Stringer, Four Turnings Bungalow, Newtown, Fowey, Cornwall PL23 1JU. [This may be the same David Stringer who used to contribute to *Pendragon* in the 1970s.]

A review in *The Exclusive 6* (music mag) covered four albums from a US group called Blacklight Braille on Arthurian / Round Table themes. Titles: *Abalon Tower*, *Old Bones & Sacred Stones*, *Zauzomank Castle*, *The Castle of the Northern Crown*. Says 15 musicians, instruments include "Chinese bell tree, wind chimes, and glass bottles". Details of price etc from Vatco, 5825 Vine Street, Cincinnati, OH 45216.

Also – a very silly joke on our local radio station, Horne 107.9 (September 12 – DJ said came off the Internet): "Who invented Sir (sic) Arthur's Round Table?" "Sir Cumference." No wonder folk say 'net full of unsorted rubbish!'



FEATURED JOURNALS

Professional periodicals scarcely need publicising in the pages of small press magazines, but I cannot help making an exception for *Current Archaeology*. Edited by Andrew and Wendy Selkirk since the late sixties (I have been subscribing on and off since issue 14), this is really an amateur publication in the original and best sense of the word. Though in a glossy full colour format, this is a magazine characterised by a strong editorial voice and devoid of any advertisements which still manages to exude the same enthusiasm (and some would say idiosyncrasy) that it displayed from its inception.

Number 169 has much to interest the armchair archaeologist, whatever their period (see the Frocester Court item in *Old News* for example). As well as articles on Neolithic ritual features in Cranborne Chase, Iron Age slag heaps in East Yorkshire, and the discovery of a 'witch bottle' from Reigate, the letters pages include a note by Pendragon member Rodney Castleden on the Cerne Abbas Giant. This questions the revisionist review of the chalk hill figure as relatively modern; instead, he advocates the financing of an Oxford Archaeological Unit research design (costing £58,000), similar to that which eventually yielded a 800 BCE date for the Uffington White Horse, as a surer way of establishing its origins. Contact him at 15 Knepp Close, Bevendean, Brighton, E Sussex BN2 4LD if you wish to support this project.

Subscribing to *Current Archaeology* costs £15.00 for six issues from 9 Nassington Road, London NW3 2TX. Alternatively you can email subs@archaeology.co.uk or look up the website www.archaeology.co.uk

An article in *New Scientist* No 2264 (11 November) caught my eye. In "Return to Avalon" Gail Vines writes that "you could argue that orchards stand as one of humanity's finest achievements, living proof that our species really can negotiate mutually beneficial relationships with nature". The domesticated apple tree (Welsh *afallen*, plural *afallenau*) is an important part of the food chain, yet nowadays "the allure of old orchards is increasingly something we experience only through legends and fairy tales" such as in the Celtic island paradise. The modern pesticide-treated dwarf bush plantations "are no place for heroes, dead or alive".

Gail Vines (an appropriate moniker, surely!) argues that "a revival of care and concern for these magical places should be at the top of every planner's agenda" before it is too late – "social memory is frighteningly short" – though there are promising signs of a reversal, such as environmental charity Common Ground's Apple Day, now held annually on 21 October. "As the

orchard revival gains ground, who knows? Perhaps the heroes of Avalon, patiently awaiting their return to the mortal world, may judge that the time has come at last." [See also *Old News*.]

Among the many pagan magazines available *White Dragon* stands out for its pragmatic approach and, above all, sense of humour (eg they welcome articles "but please – no poetry, fiction, spells or bloody recipes"). Issue 28 (Summer / Lughnasa) features Phil Vance's "A Personal Grail Quest", an exploration of how grail, chalice and cornucopia have represented ideas of burgeoning life, plenty and fertility down through the ages, and Liam Rogers' "The Nazi Necromancer?" which touches on Heinrich Himmler's recreation of Camelot at the castle of Wewelsberg near Paderborn in Westphalia. Edited by Rowan, with the usual news clippings, reviews, letters and other expected magazine features, this well-produced A4 periodical ("witchcraft, magick and sacred landscapes for Mercia and beyond") is good value at £2.50 for one issue or £10.00 annual subscription. Cheques are payable to "White Dragon", from 103 Abbotswood Close, Winyates Green, Redditch, Worcestershire B98 0QF.

No 83 of *Northern Earth* features on its cover one of those enigmatic Pictish stones under the caption *The Sword in the Stone?* Inside, Dave Vickers' article "Excalibur found in Scotland?" makes the intriguing suggestion that a symbol, variously called *notched rectangle with curved end* or, less prosaically, *tuning fork*, literally represents Arthur's sword. The problem is that, compared with some other Pictish symbols which closely resemble their real-life counterparts (eg hammer and anvil, birds and animals), the proposed sword is rather unconvincing, even as a broken weapon. There are also some factual inaccuracies and misconceptions in the article, but nevertheless the idea is certainly appealing.

Issue 39 of *3rd Stone* includes an article by Diana Coles on "King Arthur's Hall", enquiring whether the Cornish site so-named is a megalithic monument or a medieval pound; and *Ceridwen's Cauldron* for Trinity 2000 follows up one of Charles Evans-Günther's *Pendragon* articles with one by Chris Gidlow on the subject of "The Crown of Arthur" – was it really the crown of Alfred?

Lastly, Fred Stedman-Jones recommends *Cambria*, a quality bi-monthly magazine on Welsh lifestyle, history and culture "for all who live in, and those who love, Wales". To get this excellent journal for one year costs £18.00 (for two, only £35.00) from Cambria Subscriptions, PO Box 22, Caerfyrddin / Carmarthen SA3 7YH, Cymru / Wales or call 01267 290188 or 02920 667200.

