

pendragon

Journal of
The Pendragon Society



Merlin's Study

XXXII No 2 Winter 2004-5

editorial

Vol XXXII No 2 Winter 2004-5



Merlin's study

Ian Brown's cover illustration was the excuse for this issue's miscellany, loosely linked with Arthur's multi-talented adviser. One scholar has characterised Merlin's late 20th century representations as *atavism*, *anachronism*, *avatar*, *adaptation* and *commodity*.¹ And so it is that we countenance allusions to Merlin's prophetic, astronomical and scholarly skills, for example, even though not all are explicitly stated. You might also have fun spotting how often the man gets mentions in the regular features – not surprising given that his is the second-highest placed Arthurian keyword using internet search engines.

Future themes

Following a successful appeal for offerings, **Arthurian Beasts** is the theme for the spring issue. There may still be space for short items on *avancs*, dragons, giants,

¹ Peter H Goodrich "Merlin in the Twenty-First Century" in Alan Lupack ed (2002) *New Directions in Arthurian Studies* (D S Brewer, Cambridge) 149-162

lions, parrots, questing beasts, ravens, wyverns and their ilk – submit by April!

We have featured a number of women from Arthur's court over the years – Guinevere, Morgan le Fay, Helen, Ceridwen and the Lady of the Lake, for example – but surprisingly not Arthur's mother **Igraine**. This will be the theme for the summer issue (submissions by early July, please) as responses to the recent questionnaire requested more on named characters, and particularly on ladies at court.

Another theme, based on a nominated topic from that questionnaire, will be **The Treasures of Britain**, planned for autumn 2005, with submissions in by early October. Finally, a review of the **primary sources** for the Arthurian period (*The Gododdin* and so on) has also been mooted, and this could appear as next winter's theme. In amongst all these themed articles will appear more poetry and articles on topics as diverse as courtly love, alchemy, grails, Gerald of Wales, Arthur in Japan and even Macbeth!

Competitions

The deadline for clerihe-style entries to the synopsis competition (a witty précis of an Arthurian title in 25 words or less, in poetry or prose) has been extended to the end of April to allow more of you to submit! The prize? Stephen Evans' study *Lords of Battle* (an indirect reference to Nennius' description of Arthur as *dux bellorum*). The winner of the *King Arthur* film poster competition was **Anne Tooke**, who correctly identified Antoine Fuqua as director of the movie. **Geoff Sawers**, who found the most ludicrous grail metaphor, wins a copy of *The Grail Anthology*, and details of his winning entry – and a number of other ludicrous grails – should appear next issue.

Members

Condolences go to the families of **Otto Munthe-Kaas** Pay from Oslo, Norway and **Brian Scorthorne** from Toronto, Canada, who passed away last year. As Simon Rouse says, "we feel our members are more than just names on a mailing list, they're more kindred spirits," and we are particularly sorry to lose such long-standing members, both of whom have been with the Society since the eighties.

pendragon

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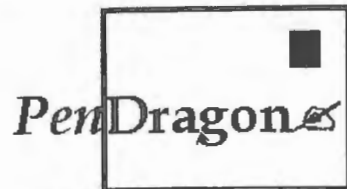
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Letters

KIND WORDS

Many thanks for the Spring issue of the magazine [XXXI No 3 "The Muse"]. As usual, *Pendragon* had much within it to enjoy and afforded me much pleasure. It is nowadays mainly through a few magazines in the alternative press that the life of the Imagination is fed. Some of the material in *Pendragon* is invaluable in this respect.

I particularly appreciated [Simon Rouse's] excellent review of *King Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table*, and am fortunate to have a copy myself of this fine book. So much that was of similar high quality was written in the 1950s. I also enjoyed Fred Stedman-Jones' "Voyage to Annwn" which I found really inspiring for its depth of perception.

Pamela Constantine, Upminster, Essex

Having been out of contact for many years, I just want to say what a splendid job you are doing at *Pendragon*, which provides food for the soul and the imagination in our predominantly drab urban world.

Richard Carder, Bath, Somerset

♦ Thank you from all of us for your kind words. (It should be pointed out that no money changed hands in the writing of these unsolicited letters.)

THE WORD IN THE STONE

Further to Terence F Dick's thought-provoking discussion of the geometry of the inscription on the Glastonbury Cross ("Some Special Secret" XXX No 4, Spring-Summer 2003) and Terence kindly asking directly my views on the tilting of the design to the right allowing only half of the geometric pattern to be incorporated into the cross (XXXI No 3, Spring 2004, 10), I've been looking at the cross some more, and it really is a fascinating conundrum, whether as a purely hypothetical exercise or as something deeper (and, yes, only half of the design is apparent in the cross itself). Apologies to Terence for having taken so long to reply, but I've been waiting until I had the time to give the matter the attention it deserves.

One chance observation, which initially raised another question of choice of letters, might have an intriguing twist; but I'll come to that in a moment. First of all, in looking at the cross and reading anything into it, it's important to bear in mind when it might have been made: was it actually made, or inscribed, in the twelfth century, when the Abbey was in its later form; or was it perhaps designed just before the Dissolution, as Terence has speculated; or is it an earlier design, possibly from the time of the original burial of (supposedly) Arthur, or some time in between the earliest possible date and the twelfth century? Any answer to these questions would naturally have a bearing on the interpretation. If, for example, the cross was described before the Abbey took its later form, then any correspondence with the design of the two could only be looked upon as pure coincidence. If, however, the cross was made during the latter years of the Abbey, then this would add more credence to the argument. Of course, that very puzzle in

itself could be turned on its head: if the geometry matches and something is discovered, then it might tell us when the cross was made.

So, to the geometry itself (and, of course, we need to look carefully at the accuracy of Camden's drawing and any further copies of such). Starting, as did Terence F Dick, with the X, just to check the lines described, I noticed that the arms of the X might not only describe lines leading to corners of the cross; but, depending on how tight an angle one uses (and this is a bit of a problem with the puzzle: the accuracy of angles), they might also point to the I in *HIC* and the I in *INSULA* (or the L in *INSULA* – again, the angles aren't too sharp). Naturally, I wondered why an I might be just as relevant as an A (Terence F Dick has pointed to the As – and these could indeed indicate Arthur, Avalon or even Alpha, I suppose). Then I remembered that (in his passage *X marks the spot*, page 23), Terence comments on the combination of the Greek letters I and X making the *Jesus Christus* symbol. So, is the letter I relevant, and being indicated by the X? I'm not suggesting anything by this question: it's just another possibility of the pattern, which could strengthen or confuse the discussion, and I felt that it might be worth mentioning.

Ian Brown, Middlesbrough

♦ Validating a funerary object for which there is no provenance – and particularly one like the Glastonbury Cross which is no longer extant – can still cause problems. An antiquity which surfaced in 2002 (XXX No 3: 6) purported to be a genuine 1st-century AD limestone coffin with a secondary inscription "Yakov, son of Yosef, brother of Yeshua" scratched on it. There was no archaeological context for it, however, and a radio report by Biblical archaeologist Jerome Murphy-O'Connor ("The Jesus Box" BBC R4 December 4 2004) rather suggested that "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus" had been added only recently, and probably by a dealer. The Israel Museum in Jerusalem has now identified the forgery ring involved, including a former head of its antiquities laboratory ("Fifth forgery suspect named" Guardian/AP January 5 2005).

NODENS' "LONG-NECKED SEALS"

Prof Russell's comments regarding the Roman sea-creature mosaic from the Temple of Nodens at Lydney (*Pendragon* XXXII No1, 7-8) set me thinking about the very ancient nature of intertwined serpent-necked creatures of all kinds. The guilloche, 'twisted-rope', or 'figure-of-eight' style artforms are a natural doodling shape, and recur with most civilisations throughout time. From my own investigations, I'm aware of leonine-draconic quadrupeds with intertwined serpentine necks from ancient Mesopotamia dating back well into the 4th millennium BC (illustrated on pp. 97 and 131 of my *Tiamat's Brood*, Dragon's Head Press, 1999), for instance.

In the case of the Lydney temple mosaic (Plate XIX.A in the "Report on the Excavation of the Prehistoric, Roman, and Post-Roman Site in Lydney Park, Gloucestershire", by R E M and T V Wheeler, OUP & Society of Antiquaries, 1932), I've never been entirely convinced that the 'serpent-heads' shown intertwining were originally heads. The very fragmentary nature of the mosaic as drawn, and the fact it has not survived to be re-examined since it was found in the 19th century, mean we can never be certain about it. However, on better-preserved Roman mosaics with marine motifs, creatures such as dolphins are very commonly shown in twisted forms the natural animals could never have achieved. They were usually sketched with foliate tails, and often other leaf-like fin-edges, the tails frequently with three lobes to them. It seems possible to me the 'necks' at Lydney were thus really tails, which would have been a very natural and typical Roman mosaic artform.

It would be nice to think they were a locally-influenced sea monster variant – similar to some of the intertwined mammalian 'sea-creatures' found on the Pictish symbol-stones, perhaps – but I have my doubts. I confess too that I may have been partly biased from very early on, as I first saw the Lydney design redrawn and described only as 'dolphins' in Anne Ross's *Pagan Celtic Britain* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967).

Alastair McBeath, Morpeth, Northumberland

EXCALIBUR IN SICILY AGAIN

A few years ago, I mentioned Richard I's present of a sword alleged to be Excalibur to Tancred of Lecce, the bastard usurper of Sicily. 'I had no idea', I added, 'that the Angevin exploitation of the legend went to the length of (pardon my pun) forging a sword!' Well might Peter of Langtoft write of this: *la meyllur espeye ke unkes fu forgez* – 'the best sword that ever was forged'.²

In his interesting paper on 'Foreign Exchange',³ Dave Burnham asks: 'Why was Tancred – a small player on the world stage, with not much chance of hanging onto Sicily – worthy of such a gift?' I believe at least part of the answer to this lies in the relations between the Angevin dynasty of England and the Hohenstaufen dynasty of Germany.

In the 12th and early 13th centuries, two dynasties, the Welf and the Hohenstaufen, competed for control of the Holy Roman (that is, German-Italian) Empire. After 1152, the head of the Welf was Heinrich the Lion, Duke of Saxony and Bavaria. (Unlike modern Saxony, the medieval dukedom of this name was in northern, not eastern Germany.) In the 1160s, the two potentates were temporarily at peace and even on good terms. It was then that the Angevin king Henry II of England was quite friendly with Barbarossa, who rather short-sightedly encouraged Henry to marry his daughter Matilda to the Lion. The result, of course, was a firm connection between the Angevins of England and the Welf of Germany.⁴

In the 1170s, the conflict between the two German houses flared up again. The lesser German princes backed the Emperor, and in 1181 the Lion was deprived of both his dukedoms, restricted to the district of Brunswick, and exiled for three years.

Returning in 1185, the Lion was exiled again in 1188, when the Emperor was leaving for the Third Crusade. On both occasions he naturally took refuge in England, where his father-in-law treated him well. From then on the Angevins were definitely on bad terms with the Hohenstaufen.⁵

In Sicily, the last Norman King, William II, died on the 18th of November, 1189.⁷ Tancred of Lecce, who usurped the throne in 1198, was the bastard son of Roger Duke of Apulia, a son of King Roger II who predeceased his father.⁸ The rightful king of Sicily was Barbarossa's son, Heinrich of Hohenstaufen, who that year succeeded his father as the Emperor Heinrich VI. Barbarossa, on his way to the Third Crusade, had drowned in the river Calycadnus in Cilicia.⁹ In 1184 Heinrich had married Constance, the legitimate daughter of King Roger II and the heiress of the Norman dynasty, whose legitimate males had died out.¹⁰ Heinrich was busy in Germany, but Tancred knew that sooner or later he would come to Sicily to claim his kingdom.

When Richard I of England landed in Sicily on the 23rd of September 1190, on his way to the third Crusade, he had a bone to pick with Tancred, who had withheld some property from Richard's sister Joanna, widow of William II. But Tancred, terrified of Heinrich VI, was desperate to secure an alliance with the powerful English king. He did everything to conciliate Richard, offering both Joanna and Richard himself enormous sums in compensation for his previous treatment of her.¹¹ He must surely also have played on the Angevin hostility to the Hohenstaufen. As long ago as the 4th century BC, Kautilya, the Indian Machiavelli, had observed that the enemy of our enemy is our friend.¹² At any rate, Tancred succeeded in winning the Angevin over, and on the 3rd of March 1191 they met at Catania

to seal their alliance with an exchange of gifts.

Since Tancred was the one who badly needed the alliance, the exchange was decidedly in Richard's favour. The sword called Excalibur had allegedly been found beside the alleged body of Arthur, allegedly exhumed at Glastonbury under rather suspicious circumstances.¹³ Since the alleged exhumation was made only at the beginning of 1191, in the words of John Julius Norwich, 'Excalibur would have needed all its magic properties to reach Sicily by early March'.¹⁴ Even if Richard was credulous enough to believe in the sword, it was at best only a symbolic gift, and what he got in return was something more solid – 'five galleys and four horse transports'.¹⁵

Richard paid – literally – for his hostile act against the Hohenstaufen in encouraging the usurper. While returning from the Crusade, in December 1192, he was captured by Duke Leopold of Austria, and handed over to Heinrich VI, who extracted a colossal ransom.¹⁶

More seriously still, a few years later, the Angevins paid dearly for their alliance with the Welf. It is to be noted that in 1171 Barbarossa had entered into an alliance with the French against the Welf and the Angevins, and this alliance was confirmed in 1187.¹⁷ In 1214, King John of England put together a coalition, in which his English forces were joined by those of Count Ferrand of Flanders, who was resisting French influence, and Otto of Brunswick, a cub of the Lion, who had got himself made the only Welf Emperor, as Otto IV. The forces of the coalition were utterly smashed at the battle of Bouvines, one of the most decisive in history, by Philippe II Auguste of France. As a result, Otto was deposed, and Heinrich VI's son, the young king of Sicily, became the Hohenstaufen Emperor Friedrich II – Philippe Auguste sent him the

imperial eagle captured on the field of Bouvines. The Count of Flanders was captured, and France gained control of Flanders and became a great power. As for the Angevins, they lost all their French possessions north of the Loire.^{18 19 20}

But in the long term the Anglo-Welf connection was to come into its own. The Hohenstaufen line died out in 1268, when Friedrich II's grandson Conradin was murdered by Charles of Anjou. But, centuries later, the descendants of the Welf were Electors of Hanover, whose territory corresponded roughly to that of the medieval dukedom of Saxony.²¹ And so we can trace to that Anglo-Welf connection the reign of our present monarch, HM Queen Elizabeth II.²²

In trying to answer Dave Burnham's question, I hope I have shown once again what so many other contributors to *Pendragon* have shown, and continue to show, namely the enormous range, reach and ramifications of Arthurian studies.

W M S Russell, *Reading Berks*

LONG-TERM ORAL TRADITIONS AND THE CONSTELLATIONS

I was disappointed to find, in the midst of W M S Russell's otherwise generally fascinating extended commentary on Ronald Hutton's recent book, *Witches, Druids and King Arthur* (in XXXI No 4, 11-18), such very weak evidence presented as a counter to the argument that accurate oral traditions probably will not survive much more than c 200 years. There is a particular problem with Prof Russell's notes on the supposed solely oral transmission of the constellations

¹⁸ Kinder, M ed (1999) *Medieval Warfare: a History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 113-114

¹⁹ Kinder, H, Hilgemann, W, Bukor, H and Bukor, R (1974) *The Penguin Atlas of World History. Vol 1* (transl E A Menze, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books) 159, 161, 173

²⁰ Heer (ref 4) 195

²¹ Chadwick, H M (1945) *The Nationalities of Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 96

²² Russell, W M S (1999) 'Dante and Arthur' *Pendragon* 28 No 1: 32-37, especially 34

¹ Russell, W M S (1999) 'Excalibur in Sicily' *Pendragon* 27 No 4, 6

² Norwich, J J (1976) *The Kingdom in the Sun 1130-1194* (London: Faber and Faber) 372

³ Burnham, D (2004) 'Foreign Exchange' *Pendragon* 32 No 1, 22-25

⁴ Heer, F (1963) *The Medieval World: Europe 1100-1350* (transl J Sondheimer, New York: New American Library) 186-187

⁵ Pacaut, M (1967) *Frédéric Barberousse* (Paris: Fayard) 19 (map of medieval Germany), 77, 82 (family trees), 101, 107, 165-166, 175

⁶ *Ibid* 247-254, 294

⁷ *Ibid* 299

⁸ Norwich (ref 2) 394 (family tree)

⁹ *Ibid* 374

¹⁰ Pacaut (ref 5) 271

¹¹ Norwich (ref 2) 365-368, 370

¹² Rangarajam, L N ed transl (1992) *Kautilya: The Arthashastra* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India) 556-557

¹³ Hutton, R (2003) *Witches, Druids and King Arthur* (London: Hambledon and London) 68-70

¹⁴ Norwich (ref 2) 372

¹⁵ *Ibid*

¹⁶ Poole, A L (1955) *From Domesday Book to Magna Carta 1087-1216* (Oxford: Clarendon Press) 362-366

¹⁷ Pacaut (ref 5) 216-217, 285

recorded by the ancient Greeks, for over two millennia previously.

The Greek star-patterns, as given by the earliest surviving source (Aratus' *Phaenomena* of the 3rd century BC, itself based on the lost *Phaenomena* by Eudoxus of Cnidus from the 4th century BC), and largely as still used – with modifications – today, were a pre-existing amalgam from several other sources in the Near East and Eastern Mediterranean. A significant number of these constellations can be directly traced in written forms, in some cases back to c 2000 BC, in Mesopotamia, with clear indications that now-lost texts going back into the third millennium BC originated such lists of constellations and stars there. Details can be found, or sourced, via Hermann Hunger and David Pingree's *Astral Sciences in Mesopotamia* (Brill, Leiden, 1999).

While this does not preclude parallel oral traditions, the evidence that these were not the sole means of transmission between the third millennium BC and the time of Aratus is very strong. As the written sources also attest, elements of the constellations were amended over time, so neither the oral nor textual transmissions "faithfully preserved" an exact duplicate of the material over the whole c 2500-year period anyway.

Alastair McBeath, Morpeth, Northumberland

MAKE MINE A DOUBLE

Dennis Oldham's suggestion of King Arthur having two doubles ("The Secret Lives of King Arthur" XXXI/ No 4, Summer 2004) is an interesting and quite believable idea, and I don't see any reason why a battle leader might not employ someone to represent him. I'd suggest perhaps taking the idea a little less literally, though, for a couple of reasons.

First of all, if the political climate was unsettled, then employing a double might be asking for trouble, as it would be all too easy for a double to usurp Arthur's position (mind you, Mordred tried just that, didn't he?), so would Arthur take that risk?

Secondly, an actual double might not be necessary to rally troops and the people in general around Arthur's cause. As long as his warriors turned up at the scene of battle, with a leader representing Arthur, whom everybody knew not to be Arthur himself, but acting in his stead, then morale would be

almost as high; and if Arthur's name was also, in some way, a kind of title, then that could easily lead to later confusion believing that he was there in person. Let's say that Arthur was known as the Pendragon, and he sent a representative Pendragon to lead his warriors in battle, whilst he was engaged elsewhere, then it's only natural that people, in hearing that the Pendragon had turned up, would later – or even at the time – believe that it was Arthur himself.

In essence, then, although it doesn't require doubles of Arthur, the idea would seem to strengthen Dennis Oldham's suggestion.

Ian Brown, Middlesbrough

MERLIN PLACENAMES AND PEOPLE

Merlin Moncreiffe is better known as Lord Erroll, the Hereditary High Constable of Scotland and Slains Pursuivant at Lord Lyon's Court. He is eldest son of the Chiefs of Clan Moncreiffe and Clan Hay. His father was the later Sir Iain Moncreiffe of that Ilk, Albany Herald at Lord Lyon's Court, but Merlin's title comes from his mother's line, the Hays of Erroll in Gowrie, Perthshire. The Lord High Constable of Scotland takes precedence above all titles bar the Royal Family's.

Gowrie stretches along the north bank of the river Tay, and in early times included Perth and Scone, the latter being the ancient inauguration site of Scots kings and holding place of the Stone of Destiny or Stone of Shadows. Gowrie is named after Gabrain, father of Aedan of Dalriada, grandfather of the 6th-century Artur, the lands perhaps having come to Gabrain through marriage to Lluan, daughter of Brychan II.

Local legend has it that Buck Inch or Island on the river Clyde at Renfrew, Scotland, was Prince Merlin's castle site. Due to the river being widened and deepened in recent centuries the island now forms part of the north bank at Scotstoun. On the south bank, however, is an ancient pathway called The Merlinoft that leads to the Clyde. The story was acknowledged some years ago by naming some recently built roads near the site as Merlinoft Crescent, Merlinoft Avenue and Merlinoft Way.

Eileen Buchanan, Houston

WHERE DOES SCOTLAND START?

I was a little confused by some of Charles Evans-Günther's early comments (p26 of his entertaining "King Arthur in Scotland" article in *Pendragon* XXXII No1), where he seemed to be suggesting Hadrian's Wall marked the Anglo-Scottish border. Typing this some 25 km (15 miles) north of the line of Hadrian's Wall, yet still very firmly within England, I couldn't let such a concept pass unremarked. This slip seemed to have been further compounded by his subsequent note about there being no Anglo-Saxon settlements in Scotland, which appeared to ignore the fact that the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Bernicia once included everywhere north and west from modern Northumberland to the mid Forth-Clyde valley line west of Edinburgh. There was also Cumbria's former Strathclyde extension into part of what is now south-west Scotland, at around the same time.

Alastair McBeath, Morpeth, Northumberland

Merlin's Study (What does he see?)

What does he see?
What does he see
When he reads through his books
And watches the stars
And gazes through his microscope
At worlds within worlds?
How does he know?
How does he know
That he's asking the right questions?
Does he recognise the answers when they come?
Is his knowledge in his learning
Or his wisdom's intuition?
Is his wisdom in knowing
How little he truly knows?
What does he hear?
What does he hear
When he listens to the seashell
And the music of the spheres
Or his own inner voice
Telling stories from his heart?
What does he think?
What does he think
In the passing of the ages
As he waits for Arthur's homecoming
From fabled Avalon?
Do the centuries inspire him,
Or our histories appal him
As he watches and waits, all alone?

How does he feel?
How does he feel
In perceiving the world
From his deep crystal sanctum?
Does he marvel at our progress
Or despair?
What will he say?
What will he say,
In his ancient gentle wisdom,
This prophet who foretold the end to come?
Does he see a new beginning
In the turning of Fortune's wheel?
Will the Holy Grail be brought
Into our world again?
What will we do?
What will we do
When Arthur returns
And Merlin emerges?
Will the Golden Age come with them?
Will we build a new Round Table,
A bright Camelot for all people;
A Summer Land of peace eternal?
We can hope.

Ian Brown



Magranne's Song

Search for me not in fairytale,
In legend, myth or song.
I have gone from the human haunts of man
Where all true loves belong.
Look for me not by sun or moon
Nor by the rushing weir.
I have travelled beyond the Rubicon
Where the mind is still and clear.
Search for me not in modern times
By city, wood or beck.
I have gone by the ancient trysting-place
To the castle of Carbonek.

Pamela Constantine

old news

STAFFORDSHIRE'S GRAIL MONUMENT ...
Two possible solutions to the mysterious **Shugborough** Shepherd's Monument inscription were unveiled by Bletchley Park codebreakers at a recent press conference, but reactions showed that both public and press remained as mystified as ever.

The first came from an anonymous American defence expert based in the UK. Using *Et in Arcadia Ego* and the mysterious **O U O S V A V V** letters flanked by **D** and **M**, he subjected them to 82 decryption matrices. Eventually **SEJ** appeared, or **JES** reversed, and the expert reasoned that **JESUS** was a keyword.

Now using a flag grid with the suspected keyword, another phrase appeared: **JESUS H DEFY**. If **H** represented the Greek letter *chi* (and *chi* it is suggested stood for Messiah, though I think *Christos* "the Anointed" is meant), then this macaronic (if not moronic) cryptic phrase *might* be denying that Jesus was Messiah or the Son of God. And if the Ansons, who erected the monument in the mid-18th century, were members of a secret society – such as successors of the Templars, or the Priory of Sion – then, in the words of the general manager of the Shugborough Estate, Richard Kemp, "This confirms a link with the Templars." And then, of course, the Grail.

Convinced? No? Then try this alternative suggestion. The eight central letters could represent a Latin poem from one of the Anson males to a lost loved one:

*Optima[e] Uxor[is] / Optima[e] Sororis
Viduus Amantissimus / Vovit Virtutibus.*
"Best wife, best sister, widower most loving vows virtuously," runs the decoders' imperfect translation. "Consecrated with much love by a widower to the virtues of a wonderful wife and sister," suggests Malcolm Schofield of St John's College, Cambridge rather more elegantly.

Nobody seems to have asked how the poem was fleshed out from the initial letters, or where the **D** and the **M** fit in. Richard Kemp also likes the theory that other Anson monuments on the estate produce

alignments that pinpoint the grail's position. This seems to be related to Andy Collins' suggestions that the alignment of the Shepherd's Monument and the nearby Cat Monument, "both designed by astronomer, architect and mathematician Thomas Wright," located French mystery village Rennes-le-Château within its landscape. What does it all mean?

"Has the mystery of the Holy Grail been solved?" asks one newspaper. I think we know the answer to that one. **CL**

♦ "The Grail Code" *Pendragon XXXI* No 4 7f; Neil Tweedie "Letters remain the holy grail to code-breakers" *Telegraph* November 26 2004; Steven Morris "Has the mystery of the Holy Grail been solved?" *Guardian* November 26 2004; Malcolm Schofield "Latin lover" *Guardian* November 29 2004

♦ Andrew Collins (2004) *Twenty-first century grail: the quest for a legend* (Virgin Books) 112-113

... AND HERTFORDSHIRE'S HOLY GRAIL

Not only was a group from **Hertford** claiming to be Knights Templar said to be demanding an apology from the Vatican for their persecution nearly seven centuries ago, but the Vatican was reportedly giving "serious consideration" to the matter (though confirmation on this is hard to find).

The *Hertfordshire Mercury* was told that a secret (not-so-secret now, eh?) network of tunnels under Hertford not only was used by the order but also housed treasures of "immense importance." Among them is, it is whispered, the **Holy Grail**. Local amateur archaeologists have however been crudely warned off investigating "hidden areas of the labyrinth" by an anonymous message on a local website, it is alleged.

Spokesman Tim Acheson, who traces his ancestry to a Scottish Templar family, told a *Guardian* reporter that a modern window in the church of St Andrew (Scotland's patron saint, as it happens) shows Jesus and Mary Magdalene looking at each other "in a very meaningful way" (though to the reporter Jesus mainly looked "a bit depressed"). But when asked directly if he knows where the Holy Grail is, Acheson confesses that he doesn't. A storm in a cup, perhaps? **CL**
♦ Oliver Burkeman "Hertford, home of the Holy Grail" *Guardian* G2 January 4 2005

The Sinking Tower

from Wace's *Le Roman de Brut*

Lines 7309 – 7542 translated by Geoff Sawers



As this section begins, the Saxons have just betrayed the British ('Bretuns') and their king Vortiger at the 'Night of the Long Knives', by Amesbury Abbey. **GS**

Vortiger left everything there, and fled far beyond the Saverne; deep into Guales he wandered and stayed to talk with the people. He sent for his soothsayers and for the best of his men; and he sought counsel of them, of how he could maintain himself; if a stronger force should invade, how he could defend himself. The advice that they gave him there was to erect a tower so strong it could not be taken by force nor conquered by the arts of man;

within it he could live safely where no evil men could kill him. So the king sought widely for a safe place to found this tower. The place he chose that suited him to found it was on mount Eir. He sought the best masons he knew, setting them to work with all speed. And the masons began to work, to lay down stone and mortar, but what they built in the daytime sank into the earth every night; the higher they built the tower the deeper it sank, to the ground. In this way many days' work sunk uselessly into the earth. When the king began to perceive that his work would not succeed he asked his sorcerers again: "Truly, he said, I am amazed that this thing should come to pass; the earth cannot sustain it. Search, inquire what is happening and how the earth can hold it." They cast oracles and divined, although, perhaps, they were lying, that if a man could be found out who had been born with no father, he should be killed, his blood taken, and spread over the mortar, and in this way the work would last thus the work should be assured. And so the king sent them all out to search throughout all Guales that if such a man could be found he should be brought before him. Many men were sent out to search for this man through many counties. Two of whom, travelling one road, arrived together at Kermerdin. Before the city, at its gate, there was a crowd of children, who had gathered there to play; and the two men stopped to watch them. Among all the others at play were two who were arguing, named Merlin and Dinabuz,

and one was angry with the other; holding forth against him and dismissing his lineage: "Quiet, Merlin, Dinabuz replied; I come from a higher line than you so you must be quiet. Don't you know who you are, poor thing? How dare you try to slight me or disparage my family? I was born of kings and counts, but take stock of your parents, you cannot name your father, you don't and will never know him. You have never known your father you don't even have a father." The two men who were listening, and who were seeking such a man, when they heard the boys argue thus, went to the neighbours nearby to enquire who this boy was who had never had a father. One of the neighbours replied truly the boy had no father, nor did she who had borne him know who had begotten him. Of his father they knew nothing, but his mother they all knew, daughter of the king of Demecie, she was a nun of blameless life in an abbey in the town. Then the men went to the provost; and on the king's behalf they asked that Merlin, who had no father should be taken to the king. The provost did not refuse; he had both taken to the king. The king received them warmly and talked to them amiably: "Lady, he said, tell me the truth, for only by you can I know, who was it who begot your son." The nun hung down her head a while; whilst she thought about her answer: and then she said, "As God helps me, I never knew nor did I see who it was who begot this boy. I never heard, I never knew if it was a man who gave me him. But this I know to be true and for truth I do confess it, when I was a novice, not a nun, I do not know if it was a ghost, but something came to me often which kissed and held me closely, like a man I heard him speak,

and like a man I felt him, many times he talked with me who never showed himself to me. So often did he come to me and so often did he kiss me, I lay with him and I conceived, no other man have I known. This boy I had, this boy I have, I did no more, I can tell no more." Then the king summoned Magant, a wise and learned lettered clerk, and asked if it were possible that which the nun had told them. "We find it written, Magant said, that a kind of spirit exists between the moon and the earth. Who wishes to know their nature, in part their nature is human in part it is supernatural. They are called incubus demons; and all the air is their domain but upon earth they also walk. They cannot do any great harm; they cannot do great evil but subterfuge and mockery. To slip into human shape agrees kindly with their nature. Many maidens have been deceived and ravished in this manner; thus perhaps Merlin was born and thus perhaps he was conceived." "King, said Merlin, you sent for me; what is it that you want of me?" "Merlin, said the king, you shall know; that which you desire, you shall hear. A tower has been begun here and mortar has been laid on stone, but what is done in the daytime sinks into the ground in the night. Perhaps you have heard of this, we cannot do more in the daytime than the earth consumes in the night; much that I have has been wasted. And my sorcerers have told me I will not complete my tower unless your blood is within it for you were born without a father." "God forbid it, cried Merlin, that through my blood your tower shall stand. I will show these men are liars, if you make them come before me, those who predicted about me; they are all liars, and they lied." The king then commanded it that they should be brought to Merlin.

When the boy had seen them all, he spoke: "My Lords, who prophesy, tell us what it is you have said of why this building will not stand. If you cannot tell us all why this tower sinks into the earth, then how is it you can divine that through my blood it will stand? Say what is in the foundations that makes the tower always sink, and then say how it could stand how it can be made to hold firm. If you cannot know what it is underneath the tower makes it fall, then how is it credible that my blood should make it stand? Tell the king what is the problem and then tell him what should be done." The sorcerers all held their tongues they could say nothing in reply. "Lord King, Merlin now said, listen; underneath, in the foundations, there lies a great and deep lake because of which the tower sinks. And, so that you should believe me dig up the ground so we can see." The king made them dig and he found the lake of which Merlin spoke. "My Lords, Merlin said, listen, all you who went to search for me to mix my blood with the mortar, tell us now what is in this lake." They all remained quiet and mute, speaking neither good nor evil. Merlin turned back to the king, and spoke out before his men. "Drain the lake," he said, dig a trench, to carry away the water. At the bottom two dragons sleep lying curled in two hollow rocks. One of the dragons is all white, The other is as red as blood." When the water had been drained and carried off by the trenches, two dragons arose from the depths, and flew against each other; with great fierceness they attacked then in the sight of all the barons. They could see their mouths foaming and the flames jetting from their throats. The king sat down then by the pool; and he prayed Merlin to tell him what the two dragons signified who fought so hard in their anger. Then Merlin gave those prophecies

of which you have heard, I believe, of all the kings who were to come, and of those who would hold the land. I have no wish to translate them for I cannot interpret them; I would rather say nothing more in case it did not come to pass.

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Judith Weiss (1999) *Wace's Roman de Brut: a History of the British* (University of Exeter Press)



Assured of a place as metaphor

Has come to me indirectly – words overheard, passed on, the lesser unregarded hearing talk of the warrior great, serving girls passing on grooms' pillow talk, and so and so across miles and months, castle to castle how the ways wind on – that he, entranced, saw me in hawk's prey's blood in snow, and was so lured, held, remembering me he could not speak and only blindly fight each interruptor of his dream of past happiness. This is no pride to me or pleasure, only torment, twice – first, that I should remember such hero come to worship me, and cannot recall such episode, that's bad enough, but worse to think, real, soldly flesh in myself and warm with need, that to a swordsman's mind I am no more than my monthly blood strewn on cold empty sheet of what winter brings, bare death of things. Damn him, I am spring!

Steve Sneyd

Where was King Arthur born?

Anita Loughrey



Ian Brown *Merlin's Cave, Tintagel*

There are many sites which lay claim to be Arthur's birthplace and what you believe will depend on who you believe Arthur was. Was he a great king who ruled over Britain or was he a Christian warrior who fought against the invading Saxons? Did he exist at all or was he just a figment of someone's active imagination that grew out of all proportion?

The Welsh *Brut y Brenhinedd* (Chronicle of the Kings) states that Arthur was born in a coastal location called *Dindagol* in the region of Kernyw. The region of Kernyw has many variations of spelling, such as, Kerniw, Cernyw, Cerniw and Cornubia, which have led to the various claims for his place of birth around Britain.¹ Some of the locations that have professed to be the birthplace of Arthur are Boverton in South Glamorgan, Carmarthen in Dyfed, Castellmarch in Gwynedd, Pendragon Castle in Cumbria, Caerlaverock in Dumfriesshire, Camelon in Falkirk and Tintagel in Cornwall.

The traditional conclusion is that Kernyw is Cornwall and Dindagol is Tintagel. The word Dindagol can be split into two parts. The first part comes from the Cornish word

dyn meaning fort, the second part from the Cornish word *Tagell* meaning throat. This provides the translation 'Fortress of the Narrow Entrance'.²

Indeed, Tintagel was situated on a piece of land surrounded by sea on three sides. The only entrance was a narrow neck of land. Tintagel Castle's *English Heritage Guidebook* explains that, during the fifth century AD, a ditch was dug along a natural fault line. The earth from the ditch was used on the far side of the gully to build a wall, which was then reinforced with wood and stone. This produced a sturdy stronghold that could be easily defended. The link between the mainland and the now Island would have been much wider and higher than it is today, as over the centuries the sea has eroded the original access.³

It was Geoffrey of Monmouth's book, *Historia Regum Britanniae* (History of the Kings of Britain), that places Arthur's birth at Tintagel in North Cornwall. His work was written about 1135 AD and became the foundation upon which most of the later accounts of King Arthur were based. Even

Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* published in 1485 AD, would have used Geoffrey of Monmouth's manuscripts to source his work as they were presented as, and believed to be at the time, a true historical account.⁴

According to Geoffrey's *Historia*, King Arthur was conceived through deception when Uther Pendragon became infatuated with the Duke of Cornwall's wife, Igraine. He disguised himself as Gorlois, the Duke of Cornwall, using a magic potion from Merlin. Uther promised Merlin that in exchange for a night of passion with the beautiful Igraine, Merlin could have any child that might result from the bonding. On the same night Uther seduced Igraine, her husband Gorlois died in battle. When Uther heard the news of his death he made Igraine his queen and moved into Tintagel Castle where Arthur was subsequently born.

Lord Tennyson used Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* to locate Tintagel as Arthur's birthplace. But, rather than being born in Tintagel Castle, Arthur is born from the sea and deposited in the cove known as the Haven where the entrance to Merlin's Cave is reported to be.

And then the two
Dropt to the cove, and watched the great
sea fall,

Wave after wave, each mightier than the
last,

Till last, a ninth one, gathering half the deep
And full of voices, slowly rose and plunged
Roaring, and all the wave was in a flame;
And down the wave and in the flame was
borne

A naked babe, and rode to Merlin's feet,
Who stooped and caught the babe, and cried,
'The King!

Here is an heir for Uther!'

(Alfred Tennyson, 'The Coming of Arthur'
from *Idylls of the King*)⁵

Many people argue that Tintagel could not have been the birthplace of King Arthur as the existing castle remains at the Tintagel site only date back as far as the early

thirteenth century and this medieval castle was built for Reginald, the Earl of Cornwall at this time. However, archaeological digs in 1983 discovered a Roman fort and Dark Age buildings on the Island, and it is widely believed that the original fifth century castle is underneath the present Norman castle ruins. Excavations on the eastern terraces of Tintagel Island, in July 1998, have more recently uncovered a piece of Cornish slate 8" by 14" bearing the name *Artognov*.⁶ This suggests that Arthur had connections with Tintagel. Whether this is because that is where he was born is still ambiguous.

Wales or Scotland?

In contrast to Geoffrey of Monmouth's account of the birth of King Arthur, Steve Blake and Scott Lloyd, in their book *The Keys to Avalon*, claim that Kernyw is the Llyn Peninsula on the southwest coast of Gwynedd. Blake and Lloyd identify Arthur's mother as Eigyr, the daughter of Amlawdd Wledig and wife to Gwrlais, the Earl of Kernyw. Blake and Lloyd believe Gwrlais's castle to be the remains of an earthwork, on the Llyn Peninsula overlooking the sea, called *Castellmarch* (Castle of King Mark). They maintain that Castellmarch is the 'real' Dindagol, the original site of Arthur's conception.⁷

The *Llandaff Charter*, held in Llandaff Cathedral, Cardiff, lists every Glamorgan and Gwent King and Prince since 400 AD. This charter lists an Arthur, or Athrwys, whose birthplace was at the former military station of Caput Bovium, now *Boverton*, near Llantwit Major in South Glamorgan.⁸ Could this be King Arthur's 'real' birthplace?

The *Llandaff Charter* states that Athrwys' father was King Meurig of Morganwg, who was married to Queen Onbrawst, daughter of Gwergant Mawr, the King of Ering. Even if you take variation of spelling into consideration this does not tally with other documentation of Arthur's parentage. But, Uther Pendragon was a title received through battle, meaning Victorious Head Dragon, and there would have been more than one person with this title. So King

¹ Steve Blake and Scott Lloyd (2000) *The Keys to Avalon – The True Location of Arthur's Kingdom Revealed* (Element Books Ltd)

² <http://www.kmatthews.org.uk/arthuriana/tintagel.html>

³ Brian K Davison (2000) *Tintagel Castle, Cornwall* (English Heritage)

⁴ Norris J Lacy and Geoffrey Ashe with Debra N Mancoff (1997) *The Arthurian Handbook* (second edition, Garland Publishing, Inc)
⁵ Christopher Snyder (2000) *Exploring the World of King Arthur* (Thames and Hudson)

⁶ <http://www.britannia.com/history/ebk/articles/artstone.html>

⁷ See reference 1

⁸ <http://www.inter-play.com/kingarthur/faq.htm>

Meurig may have been an Uther Pendragon.⁹

David F Carroll believes that Arthur was a Scots warrior called Arturius who lived and fought in the Kingdom of Manann, and has charted the story in his book, *Arturius – A Quest for Camelot*. He claims that Arturius was born, raised and lived at an old Roman fort at Camelon in Falkirk. Carroll is so convinced of his theory that he has set a £1000 challenge, payable to anyone who can disprove his version.¹⁰

The *Senchus Fer nAlban* (History of the Men of Scotland), compiled in the seventh century, catalogues three main tribal groups from this period.¹¹ This Scottish chronicle lists a prince called Artúr born in 559, to Ygern del Acqs and Gwyr-Llew, Dux of Carlise, at his mother's castle on the Northern shores of the Solway, Caerlaverock in Dumfriesshire. When her husband died Ygern got re-married to Aedan of Dalriada (western coast of Scotland). The Catholic priest Columba ordained King Aedan of Dalriada in 574 and records show Artúr as being Aedan's eldest son.¹²

British

It has also been suggested that Arthur could be more than one person and could be a title in the same way Uther Pendragon could be, especially if you take into account that the pronunciation of the Gaelic word for Lord sounds a lot like Arthur.

Whether you believe that the legendary King Arthur was Artúr mac Aedan of Dalriada born in Scotland, Athrws born in Wales, or Artognou born in Cornwall, or all of the above, it is always going to be open to debate. The whole Arthurian legend is shrouded in mystery and that is what makes it so fascinating. However, if you take into account that the Brythonic language spoken in all non-Saxon Britain, which would include southern Scotland and modern Cornwall, was an ancient form of Welsh, then while it is impossible to say where Arthur was

definitively born, it is possible to say that King Arthur was 'Welsh'.¹³



Alone in his own space Steve Sneyd

Memory of today twists Merlin's face
– that damn bird correcting his rusty Latin,
AGAIN, as if it wasn't bad enough how
king preferred its clichés to
time-proven wisdom'd won him
his throne ... cheap gaudy thing, too,
crude red, yellow, blue, fool's colours ...
how could Arthur hang so on each word?

a thought strikes, and scowl goes,
replaced with look as near to glee
as millennia's stiffening still
permits his features ... yes, the odd tweak
or two, the correct new additive, required
spell, and megaegg in current mode
of clay-furnaced incubation would at
due time, conveniently soon, give
up its contents suitably improved:

ah, at hatchtime, unleashed not just
vast creature he had prophesied,
renewed proof of his across-time
insight such as must restore royal faith,
worryingly weakened down these prosperous
years ... even those damnable Christians
saw through
princely gratitude ... better still, he'd
make sure now his new dragon'd hunger for
one snack
above all ... with luck'd even snap up mid-
sentence!
Then "goodbye parrot, welcome home
Arthur's ear"

⁹ <http://www.alanhassell.org.uk/uther.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.legendofkingarthur.com/press.htm>

¹¹ <http://www.mun.ca/mst/heriocage/issues/1/haad.htm>

¹² <http://www.ayrshireroots.com>

¹³ <http://users.ox.ac.uk/arthsoc/Cauldron/where.html>

An annotated timeline

of significant astronomical and meteorological events
around and during the supposed lifetime of King Arthur of Britain, 460-545

AD

Compiled by Alastair McBeath



460 November, comet in modern Cetus, China [Hasegawa 312], [HPY]
461 April 13, numerous falling stars, China [Tian-shan]. April 20, comet in modern Cygnus, China [Hasegawa 313]; red coloured [HPY]
462 April, thousands and tens of thousands of falling stars, China [Tian-shan]
463 Global climate upset; Nile failure and Eurasian famine [Schove]
464 April, innumerable falling stars, China; July 31 innumerable falling stars, China [Tian-shan]; July 20, annular solar eclipse across Brittany, western France, central Europe, southern Russia to the Himalayas [Schove] Comet, December 464 to January 465, China [Hasegawa 314]; passed near Vega in modern Lyra [HPY]; minor comet [Schove]
465
466 April 8, stars fell past counting, China; July 21, hundreds of falling stars, China

[Tian-shan]

467 February, comet, China, Europe [Hasegawa 315]; February 6, comet with a tail across half the sky, possibly an aurora (?) [HPY]; great comet, China, Portugal, Italy, Constantinople, 'cloud shaped like a trumpet' in several sources [Schove]; June 3, 'another sun seen after sunset' in Gaul – comet (?) [Schove]; partial lunar eclipse of June 3 (?), aurora (?) [Schove]; death of Uther Pendragon [Ulster]
467-468 heavy rains, Asia Minor, Constantinople [Schove]

468

469 Cold European winter [Schove].

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471

472 November 6, eruption of Vesuvius; volcanic darkness and cinder-rain at Constantinople [Schove]

473, 473-474 bright auroral displays, Europe [Dall'Olmo]

474

475

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479 Peak in auroral displays [Schove]

480 Some (?) comets (?), Europe [Hasegawa 316]

481

482

483 November-December, comet, China [Hasegawa 317]; seen in month between

Nov 16 and Dec 14 [HPY]; China and Athens (?) [Schove]

484 January 14, deep total solar eclipse, stars seen during it, Greece, Persia [Schove]

485 May 29, false date often given for Gregory's eclipse of 497 [Schove]

486 May 19, total solar eclipse, Syria/Arabia [Schove]

487

488 Comet, Europe [Hasegawa 318]

489, 489-490 maximum in auroral displays [Schove]
 490
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 493 January 4, but probably 496-497 instead, sunrise solar eclipse, Syria [Schove]
 494
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 496 October 22, probable annular, possibly total (?), solar eclipse, SW Asia/Near East, but no clear surviving record [Schove]
 497 April 18 (or 496 October 22?) annular solar eclipse, SE Mediterranean; also recorded in [Ulster], but neither date's eclipse was properly visible from Ireland, suggesting Irish information was borrowed, probably from Marcellinus [Schove]
 498 December, comet, China, Europe [Hasegawa 319]; seen in month from Nov 29 to Dec 28, comet reached Milky Way [HPY]
 499 January, or 500, comet, Syria [Schove]
 500, 500-530 many auroral displays (and many naked-eye sunspots reported from China) [Schove]
 501 February, comet, China, Europe [Hasegawa 320]; February 13, comet stretched across heavens [HPY]; April 14, another (?) comet, or the same one still visible [HPY]; comet (?), aurora (?), wrong date (?) [Schove]; aurora seen south into Iraq [Schove]
 502 August 22, bright auroral display, Europe [Dall'Olmo]
 503
 504 Comet, England [Hasegawa 321]; legend (?), comet (?), Scotland (?) [Schove]
 505
 506
 507 August, comet [Hasegawa 322]; August 15, comet seen to NE [HPY]; 507-511 droughts, Italy, southern Europe [Schove]
 508
 509, 509-511 narrow tree-rings, Germany [Schove]
 510
 511 January 15, possible total solar eclipse at sunset, Constantinople (but this eclipse's totality track passed across the Sahara and Tripolitania, ending over the sea between Benghazi and Sicily, so could not have been seen as total from Constantinople) [Schove]
 512 bright auroral display, Europe [Dall'Olmo]; June 29, deep total solar eclipse, Mediterranean including

Constantinople; stars visible during it (according to John Lydus); also recorded in [Ulster], apparently after Marcellinus again (see 497), but [Ulster] failed to report the total solar eclipse over Ireland of 507 March 29 [Schove]
 513
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 519 October-December (?), comet, Rome [Hasegawa 323]
 520 October, comet, China [Hasegawa 324]; October 7 (possibly October 1?), 'bright as a flame' [HPY]; great comet, China, Mediterranean, including [Malalas], [Schove]
 521
 522
 523
 524 Possible comet, or bright nova (?), Rome [Hasegawa 325]
 525 Possible bright auroral display, Europe [Dall'Olmo]
 526 September 22, annular-total solar eclipse, NW Africa to Kenya, passed apparently unrecorded [Schove]
 527
 528
 529 Cold winter, SE Europe [Schove]
 530 April 9, thousands of falling stars, China [Tian-shan]; August-September, Comet Halley, China, Rome [Hasegawa 326]; August 29 comet seen in morning sky, then September 4 in evening sky, becoming barely visible by September 23, and not seen again after September 27 [HPY]; China, Mediterranean, including [Malalas], comet blamed for the drought, famine and mortality which followed afterwards, Europe [Schove]; called *lampadius*, lamp-like, and although bright, this was not one of Comet Halley's greatest returns [O&S]. The 531-532 Nika riots were preceded by the great comet, "The Torch", after which riots and murders followed across the world [Theophanes].
 531 Comet, Constantinople [Hasegawa 327]
 532 August 28, stars fell like rain, China [Tian-shan]; 531-532, great movement of stars, evening till dawn, the like of which was never seen before [Theophanes]; a great shower of stars [Malalas]
 533 'Stars appeared dancing in a strange manner' in summer [Zachariah]. March,

comet, China [Hasegawa 328]; March 1 (or possibly 532 January 16, but this is probably incorrect) [HPY]
 534 April 29, annular solar eclipse, starting at sunrise in west Africa, passing from the eastern Mediterranean to the northern Urals and into Asia; may be related to chronicle records of eclipses in 538, 539 or 540 [Schove]
 535 April, comet, China [Hasegawa 329]; crossed a large part of the sky [HPY]; 535-537 harvest failures paved the way for the plague, Near East, Europe [Schove]
 536, 536-537 portentous very poor weather, dimmed sun and moon, possibly lasting 12 to 18 months, c.March 536 to c.June 537, Europe, noted by Procopius (*History of the Wars*), Cassiodorus (*Variae*), Michael the Syrian (*Chronicle*), [Theophanes], [Zacharias], etc; detected in tree-rings, but dates thus obtained globally are not always consistent; probable cause, volcanic eruption [Schove], though the subject of much modern speculation concerning the role of possible comet impacts (the latter remains an unproven hypothesis only)
 537 probable severe winter, Mediterranean (somewhat fragmentary text, might be 536-537 or 537-538) [Zachariah]; February, comet, China [Hasegawa 330]; possibly in month between January 27 and February 24 (one source suggests 538) [HPY]; minor (?) comet [Schove]
 538 February 15 (NB not 16), total solar eclipse, Mediterranean [Schove]; despite being recorded (with the wrong date) in the epitome to Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, and

subsequently erroneously copied into the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and elsewhere, this eclipse was not total, nor readily visible, from Britain. Comet, Europe [Hasegawa 331]; comet in 538-539 (possibly Hasegawa's comets 331 and 332, due to source's inaccurate dating?) [Zachariah]
 539 Comet, Europe [Hasegawa 332]; November, comet, China, Europe [Hasegawa 333]; comet seen November 17 to December 1 [HPY]; comet in Procopius' *History of the Wars* probably seen sometime between December 539 to February 540, at odds with the Chinese reports; great comet, China, Mediterranean, and Mediterranean famine followed appearance of comet [Schove]
 540 June 20, deep total solar eclipse, with stars visible during it, Mediterranean including Rome – see 539 notes regarding Bede and *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, etc, as this eclipse was not properly visible in Britain either [Schove]
 541 February-March, comet, China, France [Hasegawa 334], [HPY]; minor (?) comet [Schove]; next comet not until 560 [Hasegawa]; December 3, annular solar eclipse, Cyrenaica to eastern Asia Minor, but apparently passed unrecorded [Schove]
 542, 542-543 plague spreads from Ethiopia and the Middle East to the British Isles [Schove]
 543
 544
 545

Sources

[Dall'Olmo]: U. Dall'Olmo (1979) "An Additional List of Auroras from European Sources from 450 to 1466 A. D.", *Journal of Geophysical Research* 84: 1525-1535 (Standard text, as it also provides brief dates and notes for events within its timespan to all previous catalogues.)
 [Hasegawa]: I. Hasegawa (1980) "Catalogue of Ancient and Naked-Eye Comets" *Vistas in Astronomy* 24: 59-102 (Standard text, though sometimes a little uncritical of the various European sources especially, some of which reproduce information on what was probably the same comet in different years, eg 530, 531. The numbering is to Hasegawa's own catalogue numbers.)
 [HPY]: H Peng Yoke (or H Ping-Yu) (1962) "Ancient and Medieval Observations of Comets and Novae in Chinese Sources", *Vistas in Astronomy* 5: 127-225. (Standard text for Chinese sources, used and corrected where necessary by Hasegawa; contains more detail on specific events than Hasegawa's table, including Chinese constellation sky-maps, so the rough position of all comets so-recorded can be estimated easily.)
 [Malalas]: E Jeffreys, M Jeffreys, R Scott transl (1986) *The Chronicle of John Malalas*, Australian Association for Byzantine Studies
 [O&S]: G Ottewill, F Schaaf (1985) *Mankind's Comet: Halley's Comet in the past, the future,*

and especially the present Astronomical Workshop. (Details every return of Halley's Comet back to 1404 BC, with text, sky maps, and 3-D solar system diagrams.)
 [Schöve]: D J Schöve (1984) *Chronology of Eclipses and Comets, AD 1-1000* Boydell Press.
 (Unfortunately, sources for specific meteor, auroral and meteorological activity are often unstated, and derive chiefly, like his comet information, from Appendix tables only. Consequently, these reports should be treated with some caution, where they appear to contradict others. His eclipse details are very full, including sources, however.)
 [Theophanes]: C Mango, R Scott (translators and commentators) (1997) *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History, AD 284-813* Clarendon Press.
 [Tian-shan]: Z Tian-shan (1966) "Ancient Chinese Records of Meteor Showers" *Acta Astr. Sinica* 14 37-58 (reprinted in *Chinese Astronomy* 1, 1977: 197-220). (Standard text.)
 [Ulster]: S Mac Airt, G Mac Niocaill *transl* (1983) *The Annals of Ulster (to AD 1131), Part I: Text and Translation*, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies
 [Zachariah]: F J Hamilton, E W Brooks *transl* (1899) *The Syriac Chronicle Known As That Of Zachariah of Mitylene*, Methuen & Co, (1979 reprint). (Some of the dates in the text do not tally—for example the meteor storm of 532 is presumably what is recorded as dancing stars in 533.)

Notes

Not all the dates in the above list are absolutely fixed. The Chinese records are generally more reliable in this regard than others. Similarly, Chinese observers were much more diligent in recording astronomical objects and events, so not all of their comets would have been reported by casual witnesses elsewhere, as being too faint.

The relatively short-lived nature of some strong meteor activities means some of the "falling star" events may genuinely have been visible over only part of the world.

An annular solar eclipse is one where the Moon is a little further from the Earth, so a ring of the Sun remains visible around the dark Moon during the near-total phase. Latin *annulus* = 'a ring'. Occasional eclipses can show an annular and a total phase along parts of their tracks, but not at the same place.

For auroral displays, the offset between the geomagnetic and rotational poles, though variable over time, has always tended to favour Europe over China during recorded human history, so the reports of aurorae tend to be less complete than for other types of astronomical event.



The Knight from Carbonek

Across the pulsing plains I ride
 To the land of hardened snows,
 Bearing in my heart-of-hearts
 A sword, a shield, a rose.

I seek the self in mortal dress
 For whom the right is lord.
 To him I give with blessings true
 This, my victor's sword.

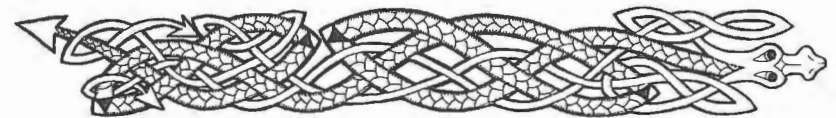
I seek the self of tenderness
 Who yet will never yield.
 To him I give with praising heart
 This, my survivor's shield.

But to the one who left me once
 To journey and be whole,
 To her, to her alone I give
 This rose, my living soul.

Pamela Constantine
 First published in *Renaissance*

Dancing with Arthurian Legends, Druidry and Jung

Sonja Strode



Marginalisation

Le Cycle du Graal pulls together books relating to Arthurian legend, expanding 'knowledge about human evolution' (Markale 2000: 11). Yet research suggests *le cycle arthurien*, has been marginalised (*ibid*). This 'marginalisation' may be part of a process of 'othering' and 'distinction' (PODs) – a term I develop more fully elsewhere (Strode 2000), albeit in discussion of different issues. Part of that 'demi-absence' may be attributed to the marginalisation or absorption 'into other cultural frameworks' of a vanquished Celtic civilisation (Markale 2000: 12).

There has, though, been a general acceptance that 'medieval Christianised versions' of Arthurian legends are rooted in Celtic lore: the quest for the Holy Grail representing 'Arthur's quest to Annwn for the cauldron of rebirth' is a prime example (Rouse 2003: 32). But understanding the legends may be marred because they tend to form a somewhat disorganised *corpus* – disorganisation resulting from diverse cultural authorship at different points in Time and Space. Also the ideological content synthesises a druidic tradition and judaeo-romano-christian context coinciding with political, intellectual, spiritual questioning and change that occurred in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries (*ibid* 15) when certain beliefs and practices were considered heretical.

There is now more intellectual interest in Arthurian legends, even though key characters have permeated folklore for centuries. Some theorists purport a 'Celtic-Druid connection' may aid the emergence of 'a green alternative Jesus or, combined with a 'Pythagorean connection', a 'cosmic Christ' (Strachan 2003: 261). However,

Barber argues Chrétien de Troyes made up the Grail story (Hughes-Hallett 2004: 46).

Markale's work reveals the interplay between Arthurian legends, Druidry and Christianity. He discusses how 'The Grail' was Christianised into *Y Seint Greal* (Williams 1876) or 'The Holy Grail', 'in spite of its pagan aspect of being a cauldron of plenty, inspiration and rebirth typically found in Celtic culture' (*ibid* 18).

Emergent on the current world stage is 'an indirect homage attributed to that famous Round Table sponsored by Merlin and Arthur (Druid and King) with a view to establishing a world of brotherly friendship; of idealistic, utopian values and harmony between the collective and the individual' (Markale *op cit*). If we do not fully understand what the mysterious *Graal* or 'Holy Grail' is, nevertheless, at a time of much spiritual turbulence in the world, Arthurian legends prove stimulating, thought-provoking, and even soul quenching. The Grail quest is: 'to try to find one's Self in the midst of the worst forms of blindness'. All, wittingly or unwittingly, are engaged in this quest (*ibid* 13).

Perceval

Via casting the spotlight on my 'dance' with Arthurian legend, Druidry and some Jungian thought, perhaps readers may see how the process involved in Perceval's quest shapes one's life, feelings and thought.

Writers on modern Druidry refer to its broad philosophical, spiritual umbrella: followers hold a variety of religious beliefs and faiths like Christianity, Buddhism, Wicca, Taoism and others. Some tend towards a teasing out of threads from many religions as they trace their 'Quest', simultaneously, perhaps, spinning the prospect of a new age religion or spiritual

philosophy. Spinners and weavers are working the threads; the shape, the colour of the cloth is as yet uncertain. The reality is the quest for the 'Grail' or 'Holy Grail' is still alive.

Jung and Von Franz (1988: 169) indicate: 'the King of the Grail's suffering plunges Perceval into deep reflection. The narrative continues with the adventures of Gawain who is ... Perceval's double'. For Carl Jung the duality indicates 'an unconscious element reaches the conscious level'. Wolfram von Eschenbach sees Gawain as perfect Christian knight whereas Perceval acts 'more human. Alone, he faces a religious problem. In this way he becomes a hero who makes an effort to develop, at the spiritual level, a greater consciousness whereas Gawain evolves in a world where rules are well established'. In Wolfram's and the Christian version, Gawain and Percival are complementary. Gawain is not a 'fraternal shadow' (Wolfram) but *le héros solaire* – a role that 'incarnates the collective consciousness predominant in the pagan world' – a repressed role so that 'the natural, earthly and human principle of *anthropos* may be erected theoretically as *directeur supreme*. Thus for Wolfram both knights battle against each other without knowing. Afterwards Perceval declares: 'I have fought against myself'. Gawain replies: 'You have conquered yourself'. The more human of the two emerges victorious. Thus 'the ability to doubt one's Self, to choose alone one's path, whilst hesitating, taking one step at a time, represents a feat of consciousness far more remarkable than the naïve, unthinking adoption of collective ideals' (Jung and Von Franz 1988: 170). Perceval's uncertain, humble stance appears more in keeping with that experienced by many engaged today in the Grail quest. Unlike Gawain, they seem reluctant to accept tradition without question, not a wholesale rejection: rather they need to engage, struggle with *le Graal*, in their own way, to find its meaning. Thus: 'the role of the hero falls to Perceval the guilty or sinful one who in contrast to all the others faces up to the problem of the Grail' (Jung and Von Franz 1988: 172). While Gawain fights for just causes,

Perceval seeks God, lost or forgotten, and his soul'. Many people today do both.

Personalising the grail-trail

Many years after my first encounter with Carl Jung's work in my school library in Wales, I find myself reconsidering his insights, philosophy and links with my interest in Arthurian and Celtic myth, legend and history. Such interest led me to Broceliande – the forest in Brittany that seems saturated in what Romans called *numen* or divine energy (Hutton 2003: 31).

In the Sixties I also read Freud, and work discussing the, then, very limited knowledge of the biological workings of the human brain. I have therefore long been interested in the human psyche, consciousness, and relationship to the spiritual – an interest triggered during the mid-Sixties by Milton's lines in *Paradise Lost* Book 1: 'The mind is its own place and in itself can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven'. My doctoral research led me into various avenues including Prof Greenfield's books on the human mind; ideas from Eastern philosophers, poets (Tagore) – all adding to the development of my own theoretical ideas on being and becoming.

Memories of glimpsing Druids in the Sixties provoked some questions in me. Who were these people? Were they really people to be frightened of as some friends and school readings of Caesar's *Gallic Wars* in Latin lessons had all suggested? I wondered on the truth behind this 'minority' group. Were people, ostensibly lovers of Nature, really that terrible: just interested in sacrificing humans when they were supposed to be philosophers, poets, musicians, judges, keepers of the Peace, lovers of Nature?

My background embraced a very strong affinity with Nature, having lived in a very beautiful area in Wales. Holidays, weekends, evenings would be spent playing near the brook; walking along the leafy lanes, wondering about the dancing light; or telling my little sister stories about the trees. Either alone or with a group of friends, I would sit on the mountain top staring at the river rolling in the valley below; gazing on sunsets; watching, listening to fish

ajumping; wondering what lay behind it all. Later years in England, too, promoted reflective, poetical moments.

Love of nature was, then, deep inside me – a key part of my early experience, mingled too, with my parents' stories or recollections, near the crackling winter fire or out in the sun. Nature and, yes, a somewhat magical 'oral tradition' fostered by my Celtic, English and Estonian ancestors shaped my formative years – mind, body and spirit. 'I was already in the charms and spells of old Merlin's forest.' (Celui du pays...1998: 3).

Jungian psychology

But back to Jung! Freud believed his sexual theory would counter occultism (Crowley 1998: 15), 'occultism' being Jung's love: philosophy, religion and mysticism. Later, Freud and Jung parted company over Jung's book *Psychology of the Unconscious* (eventually called *Symbols of Transformation*) where myth offered a key to understanding the human psyche. The Perceval story is related to this.

But Jung's focus changed from 'individual psychology' to the 'psyche of the human race – its dreams, myths, visions, the religions and spiritual traditions that express them' (*ibid* 15). He saw myth and the unconscious mind as essential for humans: the link between the past and present. 'Individual consciousness was only 'the flower and the fruit of a season, sprung from the perennial rhizome beneath the earth'; and it would find itself in better accord with the truth if it took the existence of the rhizome into its calculations. For the root matter is the mother of all things' (*ibid* 15).

Jung proposed a radical idea: 'a human group mind: the collective unconscious'; perhaps, I maintain, with a space for a growing spirituality (if not 'traditional' religion). Notions of an individual and collective unconscious mind have long interested me and figured in my research. Suffice it to say that in my doctoral thesis, linked to cultural / community studies:

(a) I do not explore fully the spiritual realm, yet recognise this space. The thesis is,

though, part and parcel of that divine, universal energy;

(b) it relates to the 'Self' and 'others';

(c) it highlights, aids understanding of: processes shaping the Self and relationship with others; and that 'magical / alchemical' transformation of the Self and wider world community;

(d) it explores opposing forces and the paradoxical;

(e) the theoretical model developed could provide a framework for understanding various aspects of human development, including people's experience and the history of diverse paths to spirituality, including 'alternative'.

My continued quest is to marry my ideas in a critical 'dance' with wide-ranging religions and alternative spiritual movements, Arthurian legends, mythology, and history. This writing represents a few steps in that 'dance'.

Journeying towards 'Self' transformation

Life for Jung was a sacred journey with 'meaning and purpose' (Crowley 1998: 18) where the 'inner journey', akin to shamanism (Matthews 2003: 234), is not selfish but: "by freeing us from the barriers which prevent us developing our abilities to the full, will at the same time, allow us to use those abilities more constructively for others and so for society at large" (Crowley 1998: 19).

Jung saw people as made of many layers peeled away in the process of self-discovery [Cf. Taliesin's notions: "I have been a blue salmon" etc. (J Matthews ed 1997: 290)]. Our individual lives are full of 'shape-shifting' moments affecting our Self and others. When, how we reveal such moments to others are an individual choice. Merlin embodies such a notion, seemingly representing the 'soul', for the only 'animal' shape-shifting of Merlin takes place in the form of a stag (Walter 2002: 173). Arthur perhaps symbolises the 'spirit' as in the unicorn (Jung and Von Franz 1988: 185). Arthur may also symbolise the embodiment of a conjoining of 'old' and 'new' ideas and beliefs.

(a) *Persona*

The first layer (above) is the *Persona* – or 'mask' (O'Neill 1980: 26ff; Crowley 1998): what people pretend to be or how others depict them – sometimes, falsely. Essentially it hides the 'real me'. Self-realization begins with differentiating between one's artificial self and 'real me'. Crowley's notion of humans as like icebergs is useful; it enables us to recognise the conscious mind is only a small part of us with far more underneath.

(b) *Facing the 'shadow'*

Important in any Self transformation is acceptance of the Shadow or 'unacknowledged impulses' (Crowley 1998: 23): repressed anger, suppression of natural emotions, or the projection of negativity onto others. Recognising the Shadow, we can move on, channelling energy into creativity as in the Perceval story (Jung and Von Franz 1988).

(c) *Unmasking the anima / animus*

Our 'journey' then takes us on to unmasking other hidden aspects of ourselves, including an acknowledgment of our affinity with the Earth, Nature, and Divine Consciousness. We then recognise the presence of both *anima* and *animus* in our being: those feminine and masculine qualities in us (Crowley 1998: 26–7; 46–7). This notion weaves through the Perceval / Gawain stories. Thus Jung and Von Franz (1988: 174) describe Gawain's mission as discovering *la lance, le symbole masculine*, "which will destroy the kingdom; it is why he must set off in search of the dark refuge of his adversary". Perceval seeks the welcoming feminine 'vase' or the Stone – symbol of totality: it transcends opposing forces and brings reunification. The game of chess involving Gawain and female friend involves symbols with which Gawain has to grapple: particularly the 'strength' of the feminine aspect of himself, symbolised as the more powerful Queen and weaker King on the black and white chess board.

(d) *'Soul' searching*

Perceval has to face deeper problems – often unfamiliar or not fully worked out

within him (*ibid* 175). One problem is undoubtedly his lost faith in God (*ibid* 176); and the estrangement from his unconscious: his 'dead' soul, symbolised in the death of his mother (*ibid* 177). If the soul is dead then so too is God, the Great Spirit, the One, or 'Big Mind' (Tagore in Dutta and Robinson 1995), Being or Divine Consciousness. It is in the 'vase of the soul' that Great Spirit unfolds, becoming 'visible' to humans. Merlin, remember, is the one weeping in the forest, as the harpist plays (Markale 2000: 235). In not asking the question concerning the 'Grail' Perceval becomes estranged from his real Self, his 'real me'. In concentrating on material aspects rather than considering the symbolic aspects of the 'vase' Perceval was blind to the 'spiritual, mystical' aspects of the 'vase' (Jung and Von Franz 1988: 179–81).

(e) *Shaping up the Self*

Jung, shaped partly by his early childhood, was also steeped in Eastern religions and culture by his educated European parents (Crowley 1998: 73); and by visits to the East. He derived some notions of the Self from Hindu thought and the Atman (Divine Self within) especially that 'at the core of our being is a divine spark that is part of the greater whole which is the divine energy of the universe' (*ibid* 38).

The Self is the whole psyche – conscious and unconscious. The inner Divine Self is the whole perfect being 'our psyche would like us to become'. Images of this possible Self are in all of us, emerging in many forms, often (although not always) in fantasy and dreams, appearing not as 'human' but as some "sacred and holy object like the Grail" (*ibid* 38). All have occurred in various cultural myths as images of the Self. Our spiritual quest seeks such seemingly elusive 'treasure' or 'Holy Grail'.

Notwithstanding the importance of experiential aspects of human life – living, feeling, working with the Earth and Spirit – increased listening to, reading about, working in and studying the world and the psyche also aid connection with the 'ideal' or 'archetype'. These are part of human

experience; they emerge from human experience, reflection, divine inspiration. All link us to Divine Consciousness or help us find the 'Great Goddess', Sophia, Wisdom, within. Throughout time people have responded to that source of inspiration in different ways; yet all responses bring alive that sense of Divine Consciousness or Holy Grail.

(f) *Revealing the source and the true Self*

Intricately woven into all this is the keeper, revealer of mysteries, 'the archetype of the Poet', 'the mouth piece of the inspiration of the Divine Imagination' whose 'words are leaves, the living force of experience ... who offers us a road map we could use to help us gain a 'new understanding of the relationship between the macrocosm – the universal world – and the microcosm in ourselves': The Green Man (Anderson, 1990: 133; 163).

Art and science, then, are all used by human imagination to express, explore, reveal Divine Consciousness or Imagination. For Coleridge imagination 'is the mind's approach to self-knowledge', reached via 'stepping stones of metaphor' and symbols like The Green Man, the latter a sort of bridge between our outer and deeper Selves (*ibid* 163–4).

This process involves our moving, like Perceval, beyond *Persona* into 'true Self' with a dip into the unconscious (the latter often symbolised mythically by water – the sea especially; it is intuitive and harbours memories). Poetry, song lyrics – all may convey the Self and the inner search for it. Sometimes we do not recognise this! Until later! (Crowley 1998: 43)

Direct contact with Nature inspires us; so do other people's own experiences, some of which may sensitise us to Divine Consciousness, like the time an English teacher gave me Walter De la Mare's poem *The Snowdrop* to read. Another text alerted me, in the early Sixties, to types of human suffering, degradation, injustice and abomination of Nature I had never encountered: torture of a young black American boy in the woods – a space already internalised by me as a sacred

nemeton (MacEowen in Carr-Gomm 2003: 133).

Perhaps my response symbolises murmurings already present in my spiritual and social sense of 'Self'. My 'journey' has been developing them since; it continues, guided by a long term understanding of a duty 'to study and acquire knowledge; teach others; make peace and put an end to all suffering' (Welsh triad cited in Cowan 2003: 3).

Arthurian legend, like Druidry, Christianity, and other religions 'shaped by a fierce sense of social consciousness' (*ibid*), has always supported such ideals, perhaps even leading us to this sense of Self: "pure awareness, light and illumination, the fulfilment of one's destiny. It is not the state of unconsciousness of a stone or matter ... It is not a metaphysical concept or a hypothesis of science, but a matter of experience, supported by all the mystics and prophets of the world ... the end and aim of the journey of life". In short, it is the quest for the *Graal* (Crowley *ibid* 40).

Jung emphasised the spiritual aspect of human being: also, the connection between people. Moreover, he saw the unconscious as linked to the future and in the process of creating new ideas, eventually expressed consciously.

(g) *Individuation – personal, social and political*

Individuation describes the Jungian journey to find the Self. Perceval appears to 'anticipate symbolically the path of individuation borrowed by modern man' (Jung and Von Franz 1988: 181). *En route*, like Perceval, we inevitably meet various difficulties and must face up to aspects of our selves and others – often a painful, disruptive process involving painful decisions about relationships, activities etc; some may no longer fit with our next stage on the journey. 'Making peace' (Cowan *op cit*) is no easy task. Perhaps, too, some people have to start anew. Seasonal changes reveal such a process, including rebirth, is an intimate part of all our being; it is the circle, the wheel of life. Various rituals, ceremonies and symbols are used in

many religions and philosophies to recognise and support such a process. All help us swim on our journey to our authentic Self, to our Soul.

Individuation is not confined to the individual: it has a social benefit, enabling ultimately, a better society. The experience other people have had of their journey can influence, shape other aspects of our individual and collective lives. Thus not only working with, breathing, feeling the Land, the Earth, the Planet and all that is found there, but artistic and academic work can also be viewed as part of the same holistic process; part of Perceval's journey or quest for the Grail.

Many people have espoused the Jungian world-view – sometimes almost unwittingly. Native American Indians in New Mexico or

North African Arab cultures, however, also believe in the *immanence* (dwelling in Nature) of the divine. Yet 'love of nature, history, geography, healing and justice' (Steve Wilson, in Carr-Gomm 2003: 102) must go beyond mere study of the past. The modern *filidh*, Shamanic Bard (Wilson 2003: 96–99) or Merlin (Markale 2000: 125), then, must direct his/her thoughts, writing, research, creativity to aid understanding of and improve our relationship with the environment and our selves (Wilson *ibid*). Critical engagement with Arthurian legend can be part of that.

To be concluded

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Dumas and Merlin in the Rhineland

W M S Russell



Few writers have led such an active life as Alexandre the Great. I call him that to distinguish him from two of his relatives, both also called Alexandre Dumas – his father, the mulatto general (son of a French noble and a Haitian slave girl) and his son, the author of, among other things, *La Dame aux Camélias*, the source of the still more famous opera *La Traviata* by Francesco Maria Piave and Giuseppe Verdi.

In his 68 years (1802–1870), Dumas did an astonishing number of things. Like his father, the brave revolutionary general, he was a sturdy republican, and did his gallant bit for the republican cause in 1830, 1832 and 1848. In 1860, he played a part in Garibaldi's spic campaign, as war correspondent for a Paris journal, and also as a purchaser of arms for the little patriot army. He was with the general in Palermo and Naples, where Garibaldi put him in charge of museums and excavations, and they became great friends. The hero dictated his memoirs to the writer, and they were published that year.

Besides these public conflicts, Dumas fought several duels, and acted as a second in others. He travelled in France, Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Spain, North Africa, Turkey, Greece, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He ran a theatre, several journals, and a long succession of mistresses, mostly actresses, for as a dramatist Dumas was

often busily involved with the theatres of Paris.^{1,2}

All this activity did not prevent him from being one of the most prolific writers in history. Altogether, he published well over 500 books and plays,³ and since many of the books were of several volumes, he could tell Napoleon III in 1864 he had published 1200 volumes.⁴ No wonder he once dreamed (as he told the great illustrator Gustave Doré) he stood on the peak of a mountain, every stone of which had the form of one of his books.⁵

It is true that after 1840 he had an intelligent and hard-working collaborator in Auguste Maquet,⁶ who contributed to 18 of the great historical novels and a number of plays, and that Dumas only once gave him a credit – in the play *Les Mousquetaires*, based on the novel *Vingt Ans Après* (*Twenty Years After*), performed in 1845.⁷ But all Dumas scholars are agreed that the great author put all his genius into these joint works, giving them all the qualities which make them both great and enjoyable. It is quite fair to think of Dumas as like a Renaissance master who let an apprentice rough out a picture, and then himself put in the difficult parts and added the master touches that made it a great painting. When Maquet finally asserted himself and sued Dumas in 1857–1858, the court awarded him 25% of the profits of the 18 novels, but, no doubt rightly, refused him a share of the ownership.⁸

Dumas's works were as varied as they were numerous. Before he had published a single novel, he was, with Victor Hugo, one of the two most famous dramatists in France, and his play *Antony* was quite as

¹ Chanteur, I and Schopp, C eds (1986) *Alexandre Dumas: Mes Mémoires* (Paris: Plon, first published 1851-1854)

² Schopp, C (1985) *Alexandre Dumas* (Paris: Mazérine) *passim*

³ Dumas, A (1991) *Excursions sur les Bords du Rhin* (Paris: Flammarion, first published 1841) 503-510

⁴ Schopp (ref 2) 509

⁵ Decaux, a "Preface" in Chanteur and Schopp (ref 1) i-v, especially v

⁶ Schopp (ref 2) 328

⁷ Chanteur and Schopp (ref 1) 715

⁸ Schopp (ref 2) 467

great a sensation as Hugo's *Hernani*. But today he is better known as the greatest historical novelist after Scott. In 1831, at the age of 29, Dumas was incredibly ignorant of French history – with his usual candidness, he tells us he then thought Clovis and Charlemagne were ancestors of the Bourbons.⁹ But the next year he set out to remedy this, and determined to teach French history to the public by writing a series of novels covering the whole span between Charles VI (reigned 1380-1422) and his own times.¹⁰ Amazingly, he carried out this plan. He is probably most famous, at least in Britain, for the superb series of novels covering the stretch of time from Charles IX (reigned 1560-1574) – *La Reine Margot* – to Charles X (reigned 1824-1830) – last part of *Le Comte de Montecristo* – most of them written in his Golden Period, the 1840s.¹¹

Besides this tremendous sequence, he wrote historical novels about other countries, for instance the Netherlands (*La Tulipe Noire* / *The Black Tulip*) and Naples (*La San-Felice*). His very first historical novel, published in 1838, was *Acte* about the freedwoman whom Nero made his mistress. (The real *Acte* and two old nurses were the only people who managed to be fond of this appalling Emperor, who in preposterous conceitedness and cruelty as a persecutor was matched only by the Nero of France, Louis XIV. They alone gave him funeral rites.)

The French series, especially, is a marvellous introduction to French history – it certainly was so for me as a boy. But one has to make many corrections later, to allow for Dumas's incorrigible imagination and urge to dramatise history. Honest as always, according to Sainte-Beuve, he said history was the nail on which he hung his pictures.¹² For instance, the real Bussy d'Amboise was an intriguing, quarrelsome ruffian, little better than a bravo of Henri III's brother, the Duc

d'Alençon (later d'Anjou),¹³ in *La Dame de Monsoreau*, Cagliostro was found completely innocent of taking part in the famous swindle of the diamond necklace in the reign of Louis XVI;¹⁴ in *Le Collier de la Reine* (*The Queen's Necklace*) Dumas makes him an accomplice. In *Acte*, his imagination really lets rip. He makes Nero such a fine athlete he *genuinely* wins a chariot race in the Greek games. In real life, thanks to the sycophancy of the Greek umpires, the Emperor really did win 'every single event, including one race in which he fell out of his chariot and never reached the finishing line, and several for which he was not even entered'.¹⁵ Dumas cannot resist having his heroine converted by St Paul and nearly martyred in the arena, and he introduces her to a community of Christians living secretly in a catacomb to escape Nero's persecution. In fact, burial in catacombs only began nearly a century after Nero's reign, and there is no evidence that Christians used the catacombs for anything but burials and occasional services or feasts at the tombs to commemorate family members or martyrs. The 4th century AD was the great age of catacomb use, after persecution in Rome was ended in 313 by Constantine's magnificent toleration Edict of Milan. Use of these underground cemeteries ceased in the 5th century, because the Romans could no longer afford such costly excavations. No more is heard of the professional excavators (*fossores*) after AD 430. Later cemeteries were above ground.¹⁶

Ever since 1832, Dumas had dreamed, as his supreme ambition, of writing a vast 30-volume novel about the Wandering Jew, covering some fifteen centuries of world history. In 1852, he began to publish the first serial episodes of *Isaac Laquedem*, enough for the first two of the thirty volumes. But the work was promptly banned by the idiot

¹³ Erlanger, P (1948) *Henri III* (Paris: Gallimard) 246-247, 287-288, 294-296

¹⁴ Funck-Brentano, F (1901) *L'Affaire du Collier* (Paris: Hachette) 312

¹⁵ Russell, W M S (1980) "Plutarch as a Folklorist" in Newall, V J ed, *Folklore Studies in the Twentieth Century* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D S Brewer) 371-378, especially 371

¹⁶ Stevenson, J (1985) *The Catacombs* (New York: Nelson) 23-25, 39-40

⁹ Chanteur and Schopp (ref 1) 715

¹⁰ *Ibid* 782

¹¹ Schopp (ref 2) 535

¹² Russell, W M S (1998) "Henry Kuttner and Morgan le Fay" *Pendragon* 27 No 1, 4-10, especially 7

censors of the Second Empire, and Dumas never wrote any more of it.¹⁷ Disillusioned by this disappointment, and harassed by financial disasters due to his extravagance, Dumas descended to unworthy pot-boilers, using the Marquis de Cherville and other ghost writers, far inferior to Maquet as collaborators.²⁰

But Dumas still had at least two shots in his novelist's locker – his fine historical novel about Naples, *La San-Felice* (1864) written without ghosts, and a marvellous Gothic novel, one of the best ever written about a pact with a demon, *Le Meneur de Loups* (1857 – *The Wolf-Leader*). This was drafted by Cherville,²¹ but Dumas must have put his all into the finished product, for it is lovingly set in the villages and forests of his childhood in or around Villers-Cotterêts, in the Valois district North-East of Paris. He introduces a real character from his boyhood, his father's game-keeper Mocquet,²² to tell the story.

Merlin's gifts

Besides historical and fantasy fiction, and novels and plays set in his own time, the most successful being his play *Antony*, Dumas wrote an enormous amount of non-fiction, popular history, biography and essays on literature. His *Mémoires*²³ are delightful, and his travel books even more so, especially those on Switzerland²⁴ and on Belgium and the Rhineland,²⁵ the second of which will specially concern us in this paper. They are crammed with good stories – historical anecdotes, local legends and personal experiences associated with each of the places he visited. In these two books he also gave free rein to his wonderful genius for comedy, and they are often

hilariously funny. But, as in the historical novels, we must be on our guard against his imagination and his dramatising urge. One example will suffice.

In his book on Switzerland, Dumas has a whole chapter about an inn at Martigny where he was given bear steak, which to his surprise he found delicious. The episode is described in circumstantial detail, with all Dumas's gifts for dialogue and humour.²⁶ But in his *Mémoires* he calmly admits that he invented the whole episode as a good story, and tells of its terrible effects on the unhappy inn-keeper, as tourist after tourist (who had read the book) asked for bear steak and, on being told it was not available, went away in a huff.²⁷

Even Dumas would not expect us to believe what he has to say about Merlin. We usually associate Merlin the magician (as opposed to Merlin the mad poet) with Wales, Cornwall and Brittany, but for Dumas he is firmly associated with the Rhineland. He does not seem to have reached Switzerland – at any rate, Dumas does not mention him in his book on that country.

In August 1838 Dumas set off for his two-month tour of Belgium and the Rhineland.²⁸ He was accompanied by his current mistress Ida Ferrier (stage name of Marguerite-Josephine Ferrand).²⁹ (In 1840 he actually married this one,³⁰ but the marriage was not a success, they parted company in 1845, and Ida went to Italy and became the mistress of the Prince of Villafranca.³¹) On this trip Ida was an indispensable assistant for the collection of local historical anecdotes and legends, for, unlike Dumas, she was fluent in German.³² The couple were joined in Frankfurt by Gérard de Nerval: the two writers were great friends.³⁴

¹⁷ Chanteur and Schopp (ref 1) 402 n 450

¹⁸ Schopp (ref 2) 430-434

¹⁹ Anderson, G K (1965) *The Legend of the Wandering Jew* (Providence, Rhode Island: Brown University Press) 263-264

²⁰ Schopp (ref 2) 478, 480

²¹ *Ibid* 465-466

²² Chanteur and Schopp (ref 1) 42, 46-50

²³ Chanteur and Schopp (ref 1)

²⁴ Dumas, A (1982) *Impressions de Voyage en Suisse* (2 vols, Paris: Maspero, first published 1833-1837)

²⁵ Dumas (ref 3)

²⁶ Dumas (ref 24) Vol 1, Chapter 8

²⁷ Chanteur and Schopp (ref 1) 885-889

²⁸ Schopp (ref 2) 305

²⁹ *Ibid* 545

³⁰ *Ibid* 316-321

³¹ *Ibid* 359

³² *Ibid* 306

³³ Schopp, C "Les Excursions de Dumas sur les Bords du Rhin" in Dumas (ref 3) 489-501, especially 496

³⁴ Fernandez, D "Introduction" in Dumas (ref 3) 9-27, especially 9-10

On the 26th of August, they visited St Goar, and Dumas tells the story of the remarkable saint who gave his name to the place.³⁵ St Goar was both a hermit and a ferry-man, who carried passengers across the Rhine. Hearing of Charlemagne's violent and forcible conversion of the Saxons, he wanted to do his bit for the pious work, and had a brilliant idea. On reaching the middle of the river, he would ask his passenger his religion. If he was a Christian, the saint carried him right across, and gave him a cup of wine in his hermitage. If he was a pagan, the saint hastily baptised him, and then threw him into the river, to ensure his going to Paradise without any time for backsliding. The Emperor, hearing of this pious activity, visited the saint incognito, but the saint recognised his majestic countenance. After commending his work, Charlemagne promised him two gifts, which arrived a few weeks later.

The first gift was a tun of wine, which was always full, provided one only drew wine from the bung-hole. The other gift was given in response to a complaint of the saint. Word having got around of his conversion method, the wicked deceitful pagans told him they were Christians, were ferried across, drank his wine and departed with a grin and a rude gesture. So the second gift was a necklace, harmless to Christians but liable to contract as soon as a pagan began to drink the wine. It is not clear whether he was actually strangled or just weakened enough to be thrown into the river from the bank, but the saint was perfectly satisfied with both gifts. He bequeathed them to the monks of the monastery he had founded, who kept them for nearly eight centuries.

In 1794 French troops took St Goar and sacked the monastery. Impatient at the slow flow of wine from the bung-hole, they fired several bullets into it. By the evening the regiment was happily drunk, but the tun had lost its magic property for ever. As for the necklace, the drum-major took it as a collar for his poodle. Finally it was lost for ever when master and dog perished in the retreat from Russia.

Now both these wonderful magic objects were the work of the enchanter Merlin.

³⁵ Dumas (ref 3) 303-306



Legend

Soon after this, in early September, the travellers were enjoying the view from Falkenstein in the Taunus range. In the middle of the panorama rose the Castle of Eppstein. Having heard a legend about this castle, Dumas made it the basis of his other great Gothic novel, *Le Château d'Eppstein*, published in 1844.³⁶

Though Merlin only appears (as a prophet) on one page of this splendid novel,³⁷ he is the most important character, for his prophecy is the mainspring of the whole plot.

The story is told by the German Count Elim to a cosmopolitan house-party in Florence. (A German *Count* is of course a *Graf*, but Dumas habitually makes it *Comte*, so I shall make it *Count*.) He has been visiting a rich merchant in Frankfurt, and made friends with a fellow-guest, the tutor of his host's son. They go hunting together on the slopes of the Taunus, and Count Elim gets lost in the forest in a storm. Wet and hungry, he arrives at a dilapidated castle, where he is given shelter by an old manservant and his wife. They explain that their master, Count Everard of Eppstein, is away, but they royally entertain their guest. Against their advice, he sleeps in the Red Room, the bed-chamber of former Counts. In the middle of the night, a female ghost enters, apparently from a secret passage behind a tapestry, comes to the bed, says 'It's not him', and retires behind the tapestry. In the morning he is unable to locate the secret passage. After an excellent breakfast, the old servant guides him out of the forest and he returns to Frankfurt, where he asks his tutor friend about the castle. The tutor invites him to dinner and tells him the whole story, which he writes down and now reads to the assembled house-party. *To be concluded*

³⁶ Schopp (ref 2) 535

³⁷ Dumas, A (1998) *Le Château d'Eppstein* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres) 50



News, views and previews of
Arthurian matters in popular culture

WIZARD NEWS

Life almost imitated art back in 2003 in the case of a lucky toddler called **Merlin**. Two-year-old Merlin Reid had wandered alone through a half-kilometre obstacle course made up of a railway line, a barbed wire fence, a slurry pit and bogs near his home in Sussex, ending up with his legs "wedged between two tree roots, dangling over [a] stream". He was eventually found at midnight after a search by police and volunteers, and cut free.

There is just a hint of *déjà vu* from an incident from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Life of Merlin*. The prophet apparently proves he is mad by predicting on three separate occasions three different deaths for a youth: he will drown, fall from a cliff, and hang. The outcome is strangely as prophesied – the youth falls from horseback over a cliff, hangs upside down from a tree branch and drowns with his head in a river. Fortunately, young Merlin Reid survived *his* descent down the bank of a ditch, trapped by tree roots, with only his feet in the stream.

In West Wales, Haverfordwest boasts the intriguing **Merlin's Bridge**. Did his feet walk here in ancient times? Probably not: the name is apparently a corruption of Maudlen's or Magdalene's Bridge, after a nearby religious foundation. The Welsh name Pont Myrddin is a modern back-formation; nevertheless local football team Merlin's Bridge are nicknamed the Wizards.

Carmarthenshire is where you are more likely to encounter Merlin's legend. **Merlin's Hill Centre** (Canolfan Bryn Myrddin) is located at Alltgyrddin, "a farm steeped in history, shrouded in mystery and rich in wildlife". In the shadow of the Iron Age hillfort you are encouraged to "listen for Merlin's ghostly wailings, for legend has it he is imprisoned within this hill". Alternatively, have your breath taken away by the views and learn about farming, past and present, at the farming award runner-up centre Fferm

Alltgyrddin, Abergwili, Carmarthen (01267 237808). You may be lucky and come across several red kites (not merlins, sadly) after being guided up the hillfort by Meg the sheepdog.

Not short of a bob or two? Not worried about possibly being taken for a ride? The Silver Cross limited edition **Merlin Rocking Horse** may still be available at £2800, including delivery. Merlin, made of hand-painted hardwood, set on a solid ash stand and supplied with a grooming kit, is described as "a true English [sic] thoroughbred". Only 100 pieces will be made, to maintain its exclusivity. Info from:

<http://www.babybirds.co.uk/ToysMerlin.php>
or 01305 853799 or sales@babybirds.co.uk
♦ "Toddler survives 10-hour ordeal" *BBC News* (news.bbc.co.uk accessed 30.10.2004); John Matthews (2004) *Merlin: shaman, prophet, magician* (Mitchell Beazley) 24-6

BIG SCREEN

Filming *The Da Vinci Code* is due to start in May 2005, directed by Ron Howard, with Tom Hanks, Audrey Tautou and Jean Reno. It has been generally reported that permission has been given by the French Culture Ministry to shoot the opening scenes inside the Louvre, in a bid to boost tourism and provide local jobs. The film, based on Dan Brown's bestseller, features *Holy Blood, Holy Grail's* grail-as-bloodline theory and is due for release in 2006.

According to the UK Film Council's mid-year review, 2004 was good for the UK and Irish box offices, with cinema sales and visits up. Heading the list of top UK films were the third *Harry Potter* film, *Troy* and *King Arthur*, all "largely shot and edited" either in the UK or Ireland.

New tourist body Visit Britain came up with a **King Arthur Movie Map** designed by John Matthews to coincide with the summer's Arthurian movie. Included are old favourites Tintagel and Glastonbury, plus Pendragon Castle in Cumbria, Richmond Castle in Yorkshire and locations for other popular films and TV shows. A free copy of the map is available on 0845 456 2003, from Visit Britain, Thames Tower, Black's Rd, London W6 9EL and from

www.visitengland.com/movies

The Guardian asked how Britons' sense

of national identity is changing and what it will mean to be British in 2020. "A mixture of pragmatism and self-preservation has blended British culture and politics into new forms many times over the centuries," declared Tom Bentley, and he identified three strands in how this pattern might unfold in the next 16 years: hybrid culture (Britain as a "mongrel nation"); the rise of the city-region as a source of economic dynamism and therefore vehicle for identity; and Britain's cultural relationship with the rest of the world (will the Far Eastern "Tiger economy" result in a form of reverse colonialism?).

Hybrid culture was typified by *King Arthur*, which "self-consciously relocated the familiar legend to a different period ... The film is a masterclass in the art of myth-making through breeding hybrids. It purports to document the birth of a Greater Britain and the rise of its English [*sic*] icon, Arthur. The plot races through imperial withdrawal, Saxon invasion, Celtic resistance, the compassionate defence of women and children, an embryonic theory of equality through free will, military triumph against the odds, and romance, climaxing in intermarriage and the birth of a new British dynasty. Not bad for two hours," is the comment, "especially given the number of battles the film-makers had to slot in."

* Dan Milmo, Richard Wray "Magic helpers enable cinema box-office to notch up a wizard 11% increase" *Guardian* November 22 2004; "Arthur and the movie map of Britain" *Huddersfield Examiner* August 14 2004; Tom Bentley "Building a new Briton" *Guardian* 2020 magazine 2 "Our Nation" September 18 2004

AUDIO-VISUAL

The British-born monk Pelagius featured briefly in *King Arthur* (see John Matthews' interview with the film's script writer last issue). He also featured – vicariously – in the first programme of *The Great Debates* (BBC Radio 4 December 15 2004). His teachings on the origins of good and evil, human nature, free will and the concept of Original Sin were denounced as heretical by the North African St Augustine of Hippo in the early 5th century. In the Pelagian corner was theologian Martin Palmer, while Augustine's august champion was professor of religion, politics and ethics John Milbank.

We don't know what happened to Pelagius (in the film he was killed offstage by pro-Augustinian orthodoxy) but his sense of humour, as much as his rejection of Original Sin, won the support of Jane Anderson in *Radio Times*. Augustine's concept of the priest as intercessor and dispenser of sacraments interposed at the very least an administrative level between individuals and God. The Pelagian approach of cutting out the middle man seems to be reflected in modern British attitudes to bureaucracy and authority, while the likely 5th-century declaration of independence from Rome is probably matched by a 21st-century antipathy to the EU. Perhaps the spirit of Pelagius still lives!

Michael Wood went *In Search of Myths and Heroes* on BBC Two in February 2005 (including Shangri-La, the Queen of Sheba, Jason and the Golden Fleece and, of course, *King Arthur and the Holy Grail*). Tony Robinson revealed *The Real Da Vinci Code* on C4 and James McConnachie, contributor to *The Rough Guide to The Da Vinci Code*, appeared on the *Richard & Judy* show. More details appear next issue.

DRAMA AND DRAWING BOARDS

Peter Whelan's play *Earthly Paradise* put a famous Pre-Raphaelite *ménage à trois* under the spotlight in a production by Robert Delamere at London's Almeida Theatre at the end of 2004. William Morris, his wife Janey and Dante Gabriel Rossetti lived out the story of the *Arthur-Guinevere-Lancelot triangle* while at Kelmscott Manor in the early 1870s (or is it Mark, Isolde and Tristan?), and *Earthly Paradise* explores this relationship. But reviewers (such as Michael Billington) were "puzzled by the play's lack of wider resonance. Does anyone today still model their love-life on myths? Do artists even seek some past paradise?" There was praise though for Nigel Lindsay, Saffron Burrows and Alan Cox as Morris, Janey and Rossetti.

Eric Idle's musical *Spamalot*, based loosely on *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, debuted in Chicago just before Christmas. Director Mike (*The Graduate*) Nichols admitted that he "had to know that crucial thing: what is this show really all about?" From Tim Curry's pronunciation of "Round

Table" he realised that "everything English is, finally, about class. I knew where to go from that moment on." And now, before *Spamalot* transfers to Broadway in March, he declares that this is a show in which "you laugh and laugh, and at the same time you don't know why you are so moved".

Running from December 16 to January 3 in The Heated Big Top on London's Clapham Common was *Quest: The Legend of The Green Knight*. This unusual take on the Gawain narrative by Carolyn Spedden included jousts, stunt riders, actors, musicians, re-enactors and acrobats, plus projections, special effects and fourteen fights, with a circus tent standing in for Arthur's Christmastide court. But despite Maev Kennedy's assertion that "Morgan le Fay ... doesn't actually appear in *Gawain*," there she is, named as *Morgne la Faye* and Merlyn's lover, at line 1446.

Merlin the Magnificent, playing through most of December 2004 at the Dundee Rep by the Dundee Ensemble, was well received despite the age of its script. Stuart Paterson's Christmas show first saw the light of day in 1982 but conversely, in this production directed by Robert Paterson, "it's the darker aspects that work best". This battle between good and evil featured John Buick as Merlin, Irene Macdougall as Morgana, Ewan Donald as Arthur and Keith Fleming as Morgana's wicked assistant, Face. One reviewer was less enamoured of the operetta-style songs and comic subplot, but his seven-year-old was totally gripped.

Merlin and the Winter King ran at the Derby Playhouse from January 4th to 22nd 2005 in place of the traditional pantomime. Written by the theatre's chief executive Karen Hebden and directed by Stephen Edwards, this version of the tale of Arthur (James Hedley) was "seen through the eyes of his guide and mentor" (Ben Roberts).

The talented scholar-artist C Walter Hodges, who died aged 95 on November 26 2004, was best known for his long interest in Shakespeare's plays and their performances at the Elizabethan Globe Theatre in London. He was also a distinctive artist for periodicals such as *Radio Times*, and wrote and illustrated several historical adventure stories for young people including an *Arthurian trilogy*.

Rutland Boughton is best known for his Arthurian music dramas being rarely performed nowadays, but one of his non-Arthurian dramas, based on the Coventry nativity play, did recently get staged. Director William J Wych and musical director Brendan Sadler presented *Bethlehem* at St John's church in Glastonbury on January 7 and 8 2005.

* *Earthly Paradise* review by Michael Billington *Guardian* November 25 2004; Hugh Davies "And now for something completely familiar" *Telegraph* December 20 2004; Fiona Mountford "Quest: The Legend Of The Green Knight" *Evening Standard* *Metrolife* December 10-16 2004; Maev Kennedy "Knights in tight settings" *Guardian* December 14 2004; *Merlin the Magnificent* review by Mark Fisher *Guardian* December 20 2004; *Merlin and the Winter King* notice by Mick Martin in *Guardian Guide* December 4-10 2004; C Walter Hodges obituary *The Times* December 7 2004; Smallweed column *Guardian* December 1 2004

HARD DRIVES, HARD TIMES

Microsoft's new "presentation technologies", *Avalon*, has been mentioned here before. It is reported that Microsoft has now previewed it for developers, and plans to make it available soon for Windows XP and Server 2003 rather than wait for the launch of the next generation version of Windows, Longhorn. More details from

<http://tinyurl.com/4mmnb>

Apparently, electronic greetings are not as widely predicted sounding the death knell of greetings and postal cards. However, the easy possibility of dispatching e-cards "has prompted mass goodwill" from companies such as the Manchester leisure park *Camelot Castle*. Its musical e-card asks recipient to forward the greeting because "if you make one person in the world a little less lonely by sending it to them, you will have done a great thing". Seasonal wish or cynical tosh?

A local newspaper column has listed some entertaining historical howlers attributed to school students, including some choice Arthurian facts. Did you know that the inhabitants of Egypt were called mummies, lived in the *Sarah Dessert* and travelled by *Camelot*? And that during the Middle Ages King Alfred conquered the Dames, King

Harold mustered his troops before the Battle of Hastings and King Arthur lived in the Age of Shivery?

• Jack Schofield, Eric Doyle "Avalon unveiled" *Guardian* 17 November 22 2004; e-cards item: *Guardian* November 29 2004; Denis Kilcommons "The Diary" *Huddersfield Examiner*

BOOKWORM

Two intriguing non-fiction titles you may have missed are Peggy McCracken's *The Curse of Eve, the Wound of the Hero* deals with war, sacrifice, menstruation, monstrous births, the grail and the Holy Blood, as its subtitle *blood, gender, and medieval literature* may imply. Published by the University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia in 2003, it retails at £27.50 (ISBN 0 8122 3713 7). Michelle R Warren's *History on the Edge: Excalibur and the Borders of Britain, 1100-1300* (ISBN 0 8166 3491 2) is another academic study whose subtitle speaks for itself. Volume 22 in the University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis & London *Medieval Cultures* series appeared in 2000 at £24.50.



CORRECTIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS

Editorial blunders meant that in Dave Burnham's "Foreign Exchange" last issue *Sarmatian/s* appeared throughout as *Sarmation/s* and *The Arthurian Annals* were inconsistently italicised in "Tracing a Tradition" by Dan Nastali. Another blunder meant that in W M S Russell's "Sea birds and beasts" (last issue, 7) note 9 should have begun "Russell (ref 6) 3-5" and not as published. The argument in Old News' "East Saxon royal burial" was somewhat blunted by the tiny reproduction of the Prittlewell gold-foil cross (illustrated below). All other mistakes may have been deliberate. Or not.

Chris Lovegrove and Steve Sneyd



JOURNALS AND SOCIETIES

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Northern Earth *Journal of the Northern Earth Mysteries Group* £1.70 / £6.50 (£8.50 EU, £11.00 RoV) "Northern Earth Mysteries Group", John Billingsley, 10 Jubilee Street, Mytholmroyd, Hebden Bridge, W Yorks HX7 5NP www.northernearth.co.uk

The Round Table *Occasional Arthurian poetry and fiction* Alan & Barbara Tepa Lupack, The Round Table, Box 18673, Rochester NY 14618, USA (enclose IRC)

Wiðowinde *Periodical of the English Companions: Anglo-Saxon literature, history and culture* £3.50 "Da Engliscan Gesiðas (The English Companions)", BM Box 4336, London WC1 3XX www.tha-engliscan-gesithas.org.uk

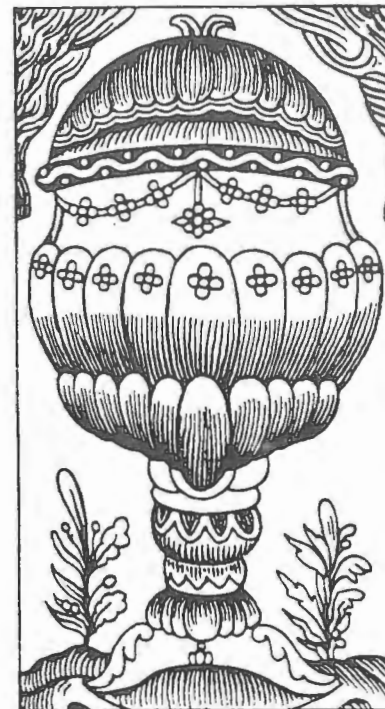
Reviews

Richard Barber *The Holy Grail: the history of a legend*

Penguin Books 2005 £9.99 0 14026 765 4 pb 464pp

John B Marino *The Grail Legend in Modern Literature* *Arthurian Studies* Vol 59

D S Brewer 2004 £40.00 1 84384 022 7 hb 175pp



Despite some inevitable overlap, these two studies take rather different routes through the Sargasso Sea of grail research. At journey's end each study certainly conveys a sense of great navigation and exploration, but, perhaps in keeping with the nature of their subject, there is no triumphant flag-planting ceremony on dry newfound land. Instead, we can be allowed a little satisfaction that some sea-mists have been dispelled and fog-bound sand-banks have been avoided.

Enough of metaphor, the bane of grail-seekers! John Marino leaps straight into discussion of the grail's influence in modern popular culture, particularly interpretations

offered on film by *Excalibur*, *Apocalypse Now*, *The Fisher King*, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* and *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*. He demonstrates how these 20th-century "texts" (as well as traditional printed texts) are indebted more to 19th- and 20th-century academic and populist theories than a close reading of the original medieval texts. Of course he then gives an overview of the most influential of the medieval texts: *Perceval*, *Peredur*, *Perlesvaus* and *Parzival* – all named after the original grail quester – plus Robert de Boron's incomplete works (and the related Didot *Perceval*), the French Vulgate Cycle and Malory.

Marino examines the cultural contexts when these medieval texts were rediscovered in the 19th century in an atmosphere of new and innovative scientific enquiry, particularly affected by Darwin's evolutionary theories. Medieval conceptions of the grail were subjected to scrutiny, and the origins of this extraordinary object were sought in Celtic paganism, Christian orthodoxy, mystery cults and fertility rituals, a process that continues right down to our own times. These theories soon established a symbiotic relationship with imaginative literature, as the author shows in a wide-ranging discussion. This has resulted in a 20th-century "cultural conflict between a relativist pluralism and a Christian absolutism" which more recent Grail fiction has attempted to syncretise and harmonise, arguably not very successfully.

Up against religious interpretations of the grail come humanist approaches, sceptical of a reality of the visions and secularising the grail in purely psychological or metaphorical terms so that it becomes a symbol of whatever you want it to be. Not unexpectedly, Marino argues, a further reaction to this set in so that on the one hand the Grail in its various manifestations became the goal of 'New Age' mysticism or

spirituality and, on the other hand, a physical reality beloved of conspiracy theorists, in the guise of a bloodline or an object of power. At this stage, one senses, the boundary between fact and fiction has become very blurred.

The Grail Legend in Modern Literature provides a very thorough trawl through British and American grail texts and a few other works in translation, within a roughly chronological typology that successfully charts how fashions in interpreting the enigma of the grail have changed over two centuries. Slight criticisms however may be levelled. For example, Marino seems unaware (48-50) that George Moore's 1926 "novel" *Perronik the Fool* is, like Andrew Lang's Victorian translation, a version of a 19th-century Breton folktale (which may or may not already have been freely adapted in its first printed appearance). Secondly, no overview can hope to cover everything in depth but there is, despite discussion of *The Mists of Avalon*, little space given to feminist interpretations of the grail (eg Redgrove and Shuttle's *The Wise Wound*, which lead to *le graal* becoming *la graal* in recent texts) and the influence of Robert Graves' *The White Goddess* (often at second- or third-hand). Finally, Marino's detailed synopses of narrative plots often interrupt the flow of his arguments and risk losing this reader at least.

Richard Barber's 2004 study – now available in paperback – is much more ambitious in its scope while also inspiring confidence in its interpretations. *The Holy Grail* also begins with an outline of the main French and German medieval texts, though here in considerably more detail. Barber then discusses what the Grail and the quest for it may have meant to contemporary readers of (and initially listeners to) these romances, which began as poems and then moved into prose as if to underline their supposed historicity. As he shows, in the medieval mind "the Holy Grail [existed] in the borderline between orthodox doctrine and lay devotion" and, though studiously ignored by the Church, reflected "the religious enthusiasm for relics, and for the Eucharist" by well-to-do but pious laity.

The Reformation dealt a blow to the

literary grail – as it did to a universal Christian doctrine and a devotion to relics – and it only re-emerged, as Marino's book also concluded, in the last couple of centuries when the climate of belief had changed irrevocably. Re-discovered by scholars, and then by creative artists, the grail now reflected the pre-occupations of individuals increasingly addressing a multiplicity of literate (and, latterly, not so literate) audiences, who neither knew nor cared what the grail may have meant to its medieval authors and readers. In scholarly but accessible prose Barber chronicles where what he calls "the interplay between imagination and belief" leads: into fascinating territory, certainly, but sadly not to Sarra or Carbonek.

"Where our medieval forebears reached for the spiritual and intangible, our materialistic age reaches only for the top shelf in the supermarket," Barber writes. So, here there is no code to be deciphered or secret to be divulged; instead, here we have a diverting and detailed pilgrim's guide to the holy places, available on the shelves of all good bookshops. If you only buy one book on the grail, this should be it.

Chris Lovegrove

Guy de la Bédoyère

**Gods with Thunderbolts:
religion in Roman Britain**

Tempus Publishing 2002 £25.00
0 7524 2518 8 hb 288pp illus

A delightful and very well researched work, covering various aspects of Roman religion in Britain, and discussing the nature of archaeological and historical research into such issues, the author puts into perspective the importance – especially in archaeological excavations – of the reliance on hard evidence far more than speculation, when discussing religion in any ancient society (such as: when is a votive offering intended as such, and when is it simply a discarded coin or lost ornament; and when is a refuse pit exactly that, and when is it a pit for offerings to the gods?).

Taking us through the development of religion, and including a background of the politics of the time, from the documentary and archaeological evidence we have,

throughout the period of Roman Britain, and seasoned with delightful anecdotes and asides, this is a pleasant and enjoyable read, as well as an authoritative work putting the whole nature of what we do know (or believe we know) into perspective, and includes a useful appendix listing major and minor gods possibly worshipped at the time.

Ian Brown

John Matthews

King Arthur:

dark age warrior and mythic hero

Carlton Books 2004 £14.99

1 84222 934 6 hb 128pp illus

In the wake of the release of the film, *King Arthur*, John Matthews has produced another clear, concise and well-presented introduction to, and discussion of, the history and mythology behind the Arthurian legends, taking us from possible mythical and historical origins of Arthur himself, touching upon such subjects as Merlin, the Holy Grail and the Lady of the Lake, and culminating in a brief analysis of the development of the legends in contemporary culture.

Richly illustrated, with excellent appendices of Arthurian characters and reference sources, this is an ideal introduction to anyone interested in the legends, and a decent addition to any Arthurian library. Apart from a smattering of irksome typographical errors which do occasionally distract from the work, this is another fine example of the quality of research and scholarship which is a hallmark of John Matthew's work.

Ian Brown

Richard Barber

King Arthur: Hero and Legend

Boydell Press 2004 £16.99

0 85115 254 6 pb 209pp illus

Richard Barber's classic Arthurian study is here deservedly dusted off and re-issued to coincide with the film of the same name. Its first appearance (in 1961 as *Arthur of Albion*), despite being presented to a middle-brow audience, by its style betrayed its origins in academic research; it still occasionally appears on second-hand

bookshop shelves. Next, *King Arthur in Legend and History* appeared in the 70s during a boom in larger format non-fiction paperbacks; unfortunately the glued binding was poor quality and all the colour plates in my copy fell out.

The present revised and extended reincarnation is substantially the same as that which appeared in both hardback and paperback in the 80s and 90s, and this time the plates stay put and the format is more friendly. Barber's text is authoritative but accessible, and while you might not agree with or welcome all his *ex cathedra* pronouncements – Glastonbury fans may well lose their phlegm – there's no denying that he knows of what he speaks. He also is clearly a besotted enthusiast of middle-brow Arthuriana, not surprising when his publishing interests are taken into account.

The only *lacuna* in this otherwise admirable survey is any detailed discussion of everyday, man-in-the-street responses to the Arthurian mythos. If you are searching for analysis of the appearance of Arthurian archetypes in popular culture and consciousness, you will need to look elsewhere; but if you want a reliable overview, over time, of this phenomenal figure as he is developed and re-furnished, then you can't do much better than this.

Chris Lovegrove

Paul Devereux **Fairy Paths & Spirit Roads**

Vega / Chrysalis 2003 £12.99

1 84333 704 5 pb 224pp illus

Danny Sullivan **Ley Lines:**

the greatest landscape mystery

Green Magic 2004 £

0 954296 34 6 pb 200pp illus

Two former editors of the late (and often still lamented) periodical *The Ley Hunter* offer their views on what Alfred Watkins called the old straight track, with this difference: while one concentrates on their straightness the other focuses on tracks – not all of which are straight!

The Pendragon Society's acquaintance with *The Ley Hunters Club* goes back to the early 60s, when Watkins' original thoughts on the physicality of his aligned paths were beginning to be modified not just by astronomical theories but also by

speculations about mysterious energies, UFOs and landscape geometry. Danny Sullivan's study captures these halcyon heady days, and moves forward into the controversies regarding the interpretive parameters of alignments before settling on environmental awareness issues. Quite a balanced and informative introduction, this, with well selected illustrations though sadly lacking an index.

Paul Devereux has almost come full circle back to Watkins' initial vision of physical routes, but with a twist, as his book's subtitle *exploring otherworldly routes in the Old and New Worlds* might suggest. After a period when Devereux pursued so-called earthlights and other anomalous phenomena associated with alignments, like Sullivan he also settles on a respectful relationship with the earth as a way forward. Tracing paths connected with ghostly funeral processions, fairy folklore, shamanic rituals and Neolithic monuments, he concludes that communities as far afield as Europe, South America and Australia invested their local landscapes with a kind of 'spirit geography' as a means of establishing and maintaining a vital connection.

Whether or not you believe in the landscape patterns so delineated, it is not hard to conceive how the naming of topographical features and the relating of an associated narrative in Australian aboriginal journeyings could be paralleled in Britain. When you trudge down King Arthur's Hunting Causeway near South Cadbury, or read of Merlin's prophecy concerning St Levan's Stone at Land's End, Cornwall, or, standing at the top of Pen-y-Fan in the Brecon Beacons, recall the belief recorded by Gerald of Wales that it is really Cadair Arthur, or Arthur's Chair, you may well be witnessing part of a worldwide practice of incorporating a location's mythical with its physical features.

Both titles include a sampler of typical alignments or routes and supporting notes and bibliography. If you are a nostalgic child of the sixties, or somehow missed all the fuss in the first place, these two publications will set you back on the road.

Chris Lovegrove



J Trench

Docken Dead

Penguin, Harmondsworth 1960

Arthurian themes turn up all over the place, but one does not expect them in a detective story. But there *is* such a story, by the distinguished soldier-author John Chevenix-Trench. All the chapters of this novel have epigraphs quoted from Geoffrey, Malory, Tennyson and so on. And this is legitimate, for an important element in the plot is a sixth-century British chronicle discovered in Brittany. More I cannot say, without committing the unpardonable sin – giving away the plot of a detective story.

W M S Russell

P R Moredun

The Balance Between

Rookstone Publishing 2004 £12.99

0954717309 hb 312pp

I read this book before I heard it had been featured on *Richard & Judy*, honest! Although the Arthurian content of *The Balance Between* is limited to marginal, passing references, I do think it will be of interest to many *Pendragon* readers.

The first volume of an ambitious (if unspecified in extent) series 'Unearthly History' is set partly on the east coast of England in the run-up to the first world war, and owes something to Philip Pullmann in the way that a fantasy world is interleaved with an Edwardian detective story. There is a possible nod also to Roald Dahl's *The Witches*, but the end result is rather darker (and in places more grisly) than either.

The whole book is tightly plotted, but unfortunately the writing is somewhat uneven. It reads rather as though the author had been given a year to plot the book, but

then a ruthless or impatient editor forced him to write it out from start to finish in one go. We get sentences like "The wizard could see and feel the man's state of anxiety. He was very frightened." This is terrible writing, and it is a real shame, because in other parts of the book the writing is excellent, both descriptive and comic ("The bear roared once, looked around the room and said, 'Excuse me, are you James's mother?'").

I may be quibbling. I enjoyed the book hugely, and look forward to the next volume. What's more it is well produced with a beautiful, striking cover (a baby dragon in a jar of formaldehyde), and deserves to do well.

Geoff Sawers

Molly Cochran

The Third Magic

Griffin Publishing 2003 £17.99

031286440X hb

Molly Cochran's most recent Arthurian novel is both exciting and exasperating – exciting in the passages set in modern-day North America, exasperating when the action shifts to Dark Age or prehistoric Britain. In the descriptions of the young reincarnated Arthur living in the American Midwest, and the characters he encounters and the situations which develop, Cochran has that sure touch that comes from following the advice that all debutant writers are given: write about what you know. Within the thriller genre that she utilises, these episodes work well, with reasonably complex characterisation and hugely enjoyable edge of the seat action.

Cochran's Dark Age Britain is not one that I even vaguely recognise, however. The characters have anachronistic Malorian names, Orkney [sic] seems to have become a land-locked forest kingdom, knights speak like actors in early British talkies ("I say," is their usual preamble) and, most preposterously of all, Arthur's people are referred to as the English, who then fight against the Anglo-Saxon invaders! Feminist fantasy takes on the Matter of Britain do not need to justify themselves, but I feel Cochran's mixing of genres in this novel is unsuccessful and mistaken.

Despite these strictures, this novel by the end repays persistence, and the final resolutions are unexpected and lyrical. Worth a second look, *The Third Magic* is also available as a Tor paperback (ISBN 0812545125).

Chris Lovegrove

bookworm

Forthcoming for June is *Arthur of Wales: Collected and Historical Sources, Volume 1* by Steve Blake and Scott Lloyd (Welsh Academic Press £18.95, 400pp, paperback ISBN 1860570747). According to the blurb in the Gazelle 'Esoterica' catalogue, "The book will gather all of the earliest source material written before 1300 complete with translations, notes and appendices ... All the sources will be indexed bringing this whole corpus of material together in one comprehensive and up-to-date volume." It all sounds a bit like the traditional answer to a maiden's prayer, and I'm a little wary about this being 'Volume 1' – especially given the severe problems in translating medieval Welsh into anything anyone can understand.

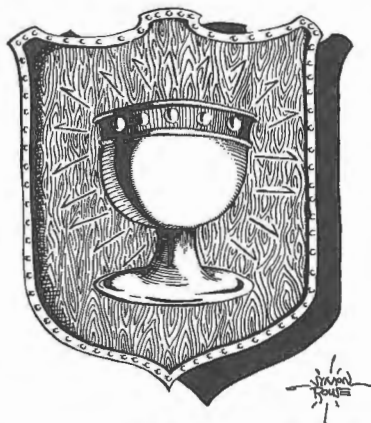
Further down the Gazelle list [is] *Stanzas of the Graves: the Search for the Graves of Arthur and the Warriors of Britain* (Welsh Arthurian Sources Series) again by Steve Blake and Scott Lloyd. This is scheduled for June too from Welsh Academic Press (£30.00, 250pp, hardback ISBN 1860570623). The blurb suggested it would be a study of *Englynion y Beddau* as found in various Welsh medieval MSS, to re-assess topographical evidence and suggest burial sites for various warriors, including Arthur. The book is also to feature indices of personal and place names, and a detailed discussion of Arthur's final battle at Camlan. Again, sounds too good to be true, but the price-tag is rather more off-putting on this one.

Alastair McBeath

♦ More BookWorm in this issue's *The Board* and in the next issue, and more reviews of course, including recent and not-so-recent publications.

The Cup

and everything that followed
A true Avalon saga (2)
Steve Sneyd



In *The Avalonians*¹ Patrick Banham teased out an intricate sequence of intriguing people and events across a century of connections with Glastonbury. Part One of "The Cup"² traced the connections Banham established between John Arthur Goodchild, the Tudor Poles and the cup dubbed the Holy Grail now kept by the Chalice Well Trust in Glastonbury.

Frederick Bligh Bond

Meanwhile, Goodchild was becoming increasingly involved with gematria – the uncovering of hidden meanings and significances by calculating the mathematical values of words – an enthusiasm with which, before his own death in February 1914, he had imbued the Bristol architect Frederick Bligh Bond. Bond, an expert on medieval churches, had in 1907 been appointed by the Somerset Archaeological Society to excavate in the ruins of Glastonbury Abbey.

¹ Patrick Banham (1993) *The Avalonians* (Gothic Image Publications, Glastonbury)

² Steve Sneyd (2003) "The Cup and everything that followed (1)" *Pendragon XXXI* No 1, 16-18

Bond was already an enthusiast for psychical research – it had helped cause his 1898 marriage break-up, followed by endless custody disputes over their only child – and from the beginning determined to apply these techniques to aid him in his hunt for the lost exterior chapels of the Abbey. He calculated that the overall length of all the structures must have been 888 feet, for example, because this was the number of the Greek word for Jesus, and relied on messages received by automatic writing for architectural details of the structures he sought.

Bond even included verses thus received, possibly from his main "contact", the errant medieval monk Johannes, in an archaic-style scroll presented to the King and Queen on the occasion of their 1909 visit to Glastonbury to formally hand over the deeds of "the despoiled shrine" to the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Abbey ruins having been purchased in 1908 by the Church of England with the proceeds of a public appeal.

Bond's relationship with the Diocese of Bath and Wells soon became difficult. His ex-wife's campaign of accusations soured the atmosphere; embarrassment was compounded as hints of his use of psychic methods spread, although it was not till 1924 that Bond himself publicly confirmed them in his book *The Company of Avalon*, named for an unseen "Company" sleeping underground, also called by him "The Watchers" – he quoted verses received, including the lines *Then ye grasse schal bee as glasse* and that once again *Glastonys glory shal be seene*, which Bond interpreted as meaning that submission to their instructions would ensure success; did not his rediscovery of the lost Edgar Chapel confirm the rightness of these unconventional methods?

The Diocese, however, made its unhappiness increasingly clear, in 1912 complaining about the untidiness of his excavations, in 1913 depriving him of his prized title of Honorary Architect, then letting it be known that accusations as to his integrity as an excavator were taken seriously, particularly the suggestion that the Edgar Chapel's "apse" (a feature first made known to Bond by a mediumistic message) had in fact been created by his interference with the stone rubble. Attempts in the early

twenties to control him by committee having failed, in 1924 his key to the ruins was taken away, and the right to excavate handed over to the Society of Antiquaries; he was soon stopped from even using the Abbey Kitchen to sort finds already made.

Endless appeals to various authorities, up to and including the Archbishop of Canterbury, failed, but he clung on in Glastonbury, hoping against hope for at least a chance to prove his theories of buried treasures at locations indicated by dowsing rod. Finally, in October 1926, he took his friend Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's advice to make a lecture tour of America. He stayed there for ten years, at first working for the American Society for Psychical Research, then succoured by fellow Briton the Right Reverend Brothers, Archbishop and Metropolitan of the Old Catholic church in America.³ Bond returned to Glastonbury in 1936, to find his "apse" gone from the Edgar Chapel. Accepting defeat at last, he retired to North Wales, dying in 1945.

Alice Buckton

Alice Buckton, mentioned earlier as having fallen under the spell of the cup, first at Wilberforce's, then at the Clifton oratory, was the daughter of an entomologist, and as a child helped him to prepare his research results for publication. This began her lifelong interest in communicating ideas, increasingly those of social enlightenment, and particularly of enabling women to achieve, ideas implicitly present in her much performed *Eager Heart*, a "Christian Mystery" of 1904, which was the first play to overcome the Lord Chamberlain's ban on stage portrayals of the holy family.

Having visited Glastonbury itself with the "triad", Alice Buckton decided to establish a women's educational community there, and with the aid of her companion Annet Schepel, a German educator who had

already helped her run the Sesame Child Garden new thought school in London, bought the former Catholic seminary at Chalice Well. Bond designed for her a linked ironwork cover for the actual well itself, of intersecting circles symbolising the blended spheres of spirit and matter; she soon came to share his belief in "The Watchers of Avalon" – "the heavenly company of one-time monks who will oversee the spiritual rebirth of Glastonbury and England".

Her plans for a college having come to nothing, she decided on a programme of "dramatic productions aimed at encouraging a revival of interest in ancient lore and legend". These ideas overlapping with those of Rutland Boughton for a Bayreuth-like festival, it was agreed that Boughton would present larger plays involving professional actors and musicians as well as locals: Alice would put on smaller "plays of a legendary character" using only local residents, in the "open air wattle theatre with pillars of straw and puddled clay" she had built.

Never charging admission to the performances, and with only a small income from her guest house and crafts shop, she encountered growing financial problems during her thirty years in Glastonbury, particularly after Anna Schepel died in 1931. In 1937 there was something to celebrate, Glastonbury's first Labour Mayor – she presented him with a poem of her own expressing her "back to the simple life" socialist views – but with the war, shortages, lack of money and failing health forced her to leave Chalice House in 1944.

After her death, her trustees could not fulfil her vision of an international centre of culture and healing, and in 1949 sold the property to a school; nine years later Wellesley Tudor Pole purchased it and in 1959 established the still-extant Chalice Well Trust. Christine Allen was installed as first Warden – this was during her brief return from South Africa, where she took her final vows as a Roman Catholic nun, Sister Margaret Brigid; she died in 1945, Christine, back in South Africa, in 1973.

Rutland Boughton

Rutland Boughton, meanwhile, had for a time made Glastonbury the centre of a noted Festival. This son of a grocer and a school-teacher, born in 1878 in Aylesbury, was an

³ Brothers, born in Nottingham in 1887, and who lived till 1979, much later became friend and confessor to the hippy colony of upper New York state, including Bob Dylan, and encouraged the Woodstock Festival, itself one inspiration of the Glastonbury Festivals at Pilton from the 1870s on – another may have been memories of an abortive 1963-4 attempt to revive the pre-war Glastonbury Festival.

almost entirely self-taught composer. Moved by Edward Carpenter's "vision of a society of equality and peace, and his mystical and poetic proclamation of the dawn of a socialist world order", he set Carpenter's epic poem *Towards Democracy* to music as the choral symphonic piece *Midnight*, performed at the 1909 Birmingham Triennial Festival. Its success brought admirers, including Alice Buckton and George Bernard Shaw, who became a powerful advocate of Boughton's music and later a strong supporter of his Glastonbury experiment.

Two years earlier, Boughton, already seeing the Arthurian legends as suitable for music-drama (the first opera he wrote, *Eolf*, in 1903, featured an incidental appearance by King Arthur) along the lines of Wagner's use of Teutonic myth, and met Reginald Buckley, a young journalist and poet already working on an Arthurian verse cycle. The two co-authored a book, *Music Drama of the Future*, which included the first part of Buckley's Arthurian Cycle, *Uther and Igraine* (later renamed *The Birth of Arthur*), and dreamt of an annual festival to present it.

In 1910, separated although not divorced, Boughton began living with young art student Christina Walshe, who introduced him to the work by Fiona Macleod which was to become the text of his most successful piece, and the centrepiece of his Festivals. Encouraged by Sir Edward Elgar's positive view of his plans, Boughton was seeking a location when Philip Oyler, a "lover of Glastonbury and its traditions", and who had had a psychic revelation as a result of seeing the cup, suggested the area. At a public meeting in nearby Wells in June 1913, attended by, among others, Kitty Pole and Janet Allen, Boughton's plan was supported by Alice Buckton, who "pleaded ... that Glastonbury might become a centre at which sacred plays might be performed ... especially those concerned with the Arthurian Legends."

From the beginning, however, there was an echo of the problems caused for Bond locally by his ex-wife; the Vicar of Glastonbury's hostility because Boughton was not legally married to the "woman who purported to be his wife" meant *The Birth of Arthur* had to be premiered in Boumemouth. In October, however, extracts were performed at Street near Glastonbury,

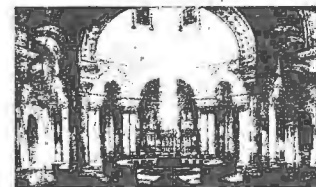
supported by the Clark shoe-making family, to be Boughton's patrons for many years. By the next summer, the Glastonbury Festival Players had been established, and performed Boughton's setting of Fiona Macleod's mystical drama *The Immortal Hour*, not just in the town but also in London, Bristol, Bath and Boumemouth. Boughton (his attempts to obscure his "marital" situation by keeping two rented addresses failing to prevent some parents stopping their children from attending his Festival School for coaching in music and drama) continued the Festival, its performances in the Assembly Rooms often attended by Shaw, until late 1916, when he was conscripted as a military bandmaster.

In 1919 the event resumed, although lack of money, and the premature death of Reginald Buckley, meant abandoning plans for a Mount Avalon festival theatre. In 1920 Boughton left Christine for a pupil, Kathleen Davis, causing further difficulties with parents over the Festival School, but the Festival went ahead with another performance of *The Immortal Hour*, having been described by Elgar as a "work of genius", in London two years later it broke all records for a serious English opera with 216 performances, followed by a further 160 in 1923.

In Glastonbury itself, the 1922 event took the form of a Festival of Greek Drama, directed by Boughton, with Sir Thomas Beecham as resident conductor. Meanwhile, to date only two parts of Buckley's Arthurian cycle had been set and performed, *The Birth of Arthur* and *The Round Table* – he finally completed the rest during World War II, but was then unable to get it performed. Instead he now set Thomas Hardy's play *The Queen of Cornwall*, performed in the author's presence at the 1924 Glastonbury Festival.

The Festival, and the Glastonbury Festival Players themselves, ceased to exist in 1926, after the financial disaster of a London run of Boughton's musical play *Bethlehem*; he staged it in modern dress to convey an anti-capitalist message, in response to the General Strike. Settling on a Gloucestershire smallholding, Boughton continued to compose, his 1929 music drama *The Ever Young* having a Glastonbury echo with its *The Dome of Bride*.

To be concluded



Camelot

And I dream once more of Camelot ...
of silver knights clashing in green fields
Their armour flashing in the morning breeze
Sword on shoulder as they kneel

Of maidens fair of hair and hand
– flowing mead in goblets gold

(While Merlin casts his eerie spells
among the woods and standing stones)

Of Lancelot and Guinevere
– the burning hunger of desire
As Morgana stirs the pot of sin
With a craving for unrivalled power

And Arthur's ghost
walks solemnly
Among the ruins of a
blighted land

Where once his knights gathered
honourably
Telling of great deeds at
the Table Round

Searching so long for what
was lost
In the sacred name of the Holy Grail

(And Perceval kneels before the shrine
praying to God for deliverance)

And Galahad lifts the ancient cup
above the souls of all
mankind

as Arthur's final battle heals the land ...

And then I wake and behold
only concrete streets of greed and loss

So I turn my face away again

And dream once more
of Camelot ...

Steve Gunning

Dusk at Tintagel

That evening held the ambience of a dream:
Tintagel's ruined castle in the dusk
Close to rough tides; upon the misted air
The timeless scent of rosemary and musk.

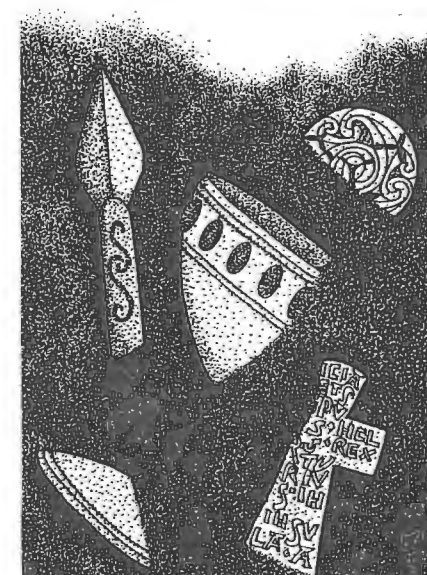
I had been thinking on past battle won,
Of present times, the immanence of war;
And formed for Arthur's ghost a fervent cry:
"This is the hour. What are you waiting for?"

Then down among the shadows I beheld
A figure standing at the castle door –
A stalwart form in armour, sword aloft,
Whose voice boomed out above the tidal
roar.

"Men think Excalibur was made for strife
But the souls of warrior cry out for peace.
I wait till peace becomes the planet's pledge.
Only then will my spirit find release."

Pamela Constantine

First published in *The Light of Camelot*



Simon Rouse

Talking Head

Fred Stedman-Jones

MERLYN OF CAMELOT

*Don't let it be forgot that once there was a spot
For one brief shining moment that was known as Camelot...*

The Editor refers in his editorial to Merlin as Arthur's much-talented adviser which introduces neatly my theme, which is to look at Merlyn's role in Lerner and Loewe's magical stage version of T. H. White's writings. In doing so I shall take the opportunity to recall some very precious memories of a real life Merlin, Richard Burton's much-talented personal adviser who helped him to ascend to Arthur's throne as a memorable avatar of the Once and Future King. I once knew this Merlin, too.

Burton made his home in the French-speaking area of Switzerland, and is buried there at Céligny on Lake Geneva. His sword Excalibur does not lie in that lake, however, he presented it to 'Tim' White himself and they toured around the New York night spots with it - knighting taxi-drivers, waiters and actors indiscriminately. White wrote a *Vodka Poem* to Richard Burton and Richard later wrote of him, 'What a maniacal and lovely mind!'

An American genealogy website allows the leaving of tributes and images of flowers at 'gravesides' and there are 223 on Burton's at the Protestant church at Céligny. One records: *You were the best King Arthur on stage. I shall never forget seeing you perform and the echo of your wonderful voice calling out for Merlin. Thank you for an evening my family and I continue to cherish. God Bless, - Ashley.*

This reminds us of Merlyn - White's and Lerner's spelling - as Arthur's teacher and adviser, taken away from him early in the action of the play leaving him alone to struggle to fulfil his destiny. His efforts to follow Merlin's teaching echo throughout the play and obviously fixed themselves forever in this playgoer's memory.

It is important to remember that there is no

definitive stage script of Camelot, scenes and songs have been cut and included in the many different productions and the film version was rewritten by Lerner with a more serious emphasis and little comic irony. For the following analysis I have used the 1961 script which seems to reflect the original 1960 New York production most faithfully.

After a very difficult period of creation, the play opened on Broadway with Burton playing Arthur and Julie Andrews as Guenevere, 873 performances followed. In 1963 the production went on tour for two years with a new cast. The original London production, with Laurence Harvey and Elizabeth Lerner, opened in August 1964 at Drury Lane with revisions based on the Australian production. The film version, with Richard Harris and Vanessa Redgrave, was released in October 1967.

Burton appeared again in a successful revival in 1980 but became ill with back and shoulder troubles which became too painful for him to even raise Excalibur and he eventually left the show to undergo serious surgery. Harris, his replacement, obtained the rights of performance and toured widely as Arthur.

Let us now look at Merlyn's role in the musical play. He appears in only three scenes but the part affords the actor excellent opportunities and his influence resonates throughout the action, mainly through Arthur's recollections of his teachings.

In Act 1,1 Guenevere (Jenny) wilfully decides to emerge from her carriage at the bottom of the hill, breaking with all tradition which dictates that royal brides shall be met at the top. Merlyn solves the problem pragmatically by creating a 'brand new



tradition' and reversing the locations, an amusing example of his ability to 'fix things' logically.

Left alone with Arthur up a tree trying to steal a glimpse of his bride-to-be, still very much Wart the boy uncertain of himself, Merlyn is seen as the mentor on whom he has relied totally to guide him - often by changing him into animals so that he can gain new perspectives on life. Arthur remembers the wonderful freedom of flying as a hawk and later longs to be able to leave his crumbling Camelot and soar away to freedom. He regrets that Merlyn has never taught him about love and marriage but is told sharply that they are two different things and he had not paid attention when the lesson was delivered!

The scene also reveals that Merlyn lives backwards in time and has the double task of remembering the future as well as the past. He tells Arthur that Nimue will soon steal his magic powers and lock him away in a cave for centuries. Alone again, Arthur meets Guenevere and, shy of her beauty and seductive femininity, does not reveal his identity - longing for Merlyn *the wisest man alive* to come to his aid. Guenevere eventually recognises him and they fall in love so that his problems are resolved for the next five years.

Not so Merlyn's. In Act 1.2 alone at night he rejoices that at last Arthur is ambitious, all his life he has tried to teach him to think. He looks forward to watching him *put together the pieces of his destiny*, but at this very moment Nimue's voice is heard offstage singing a hauntingly bewitching song (*'Follow me'*) and as a stairway rises and stars fill the sky we watch Merlyn's memory fade away. He desperately tries to remember what he should warn Arthur about: *'Have I told him everything he should know? Did I tell him of Lancelot - did I warn him of Lancelot and Guenevere?'* The two towers on either side of the stage proscenium are occupied in momentary fading visions by Lancelot and Mordred who are the cause of Arthur's downfall. He cries, *'my magic is all gone'* and as he climbs the steps to exit he calls back, *'Oh, and Wart, remember to think!'*

In the years ahead we see Arthur trying to follow this injunction and he succeeds



"... and that's what simple folk do"

splendidly, deciding to create an order of chivalry with the motto of 'Might for Right'. With Lancelot's arrival, Arthur recalls Merlyn's prophecy that he will prove to be the greatest knight to sit at the Round Table. The struggle to understand how he might rule his queen's mind and Merlyn's advice to *'love her, merely love her'* tragically foreshadows his eventual loss.

In Act 1.8 Merlyn appears for the last time, a shadowy figure with seas swirling around him *'calling from some limbo'*, begging Nimue to let him go to Camelot. She has stolen his magic but left him his memories. Nimue is the important enchantress of this play, Morgan le Fey appears briefly as a selfish but harmless, greedy woman, beguiled with candy by Mordred to temporarily trap Arthur in her forest long enough for Lancelot and Guenevere to declare their love to each other. The way is now clear for Mordred to have Guenevere arrested, tried and sentenced to be burnt at the stake and for his plan to bring down the Round Table to succeed.

Lancelot rescues Guenevere and Arthur follows them to France with an army. In the last scene before the conflict begins Arthur reflects, *'what a blight is thinking, how I wish I'd never tried to think at all.'* He sees his vision as nothing better than an idea, a mistake. Then a boy, Tom arrives to fight for him and he finds that the Round Table is alive like a glowing ember in the boy's mind. His hope is rekindled as he knights Tom of Warwick. The theme music of *Camelot* creeps in to underline the idea that a boy such as he had once been in Merlyn's care is the torchbearer to hand on the ideals

Arthur had thought dead. We hear the company sing, 'don't let it be forgot, that once there was a spot, for one brief shining moment that was known as Camelot...!

The last image we see as the light fades is of Arthur, King Pellinore and four knights kneeling, with a priest giving a battle benediction - then, Arthur alone in a shaft of light, holding Excalibur up like a crucifix as darkness falls. Wart has proved to be a worthy king; Merlyn's faith in him has been justified.

Now for the happy recollections. Richard Burton, originally Jenkins, took his name from his schoolmaster Philip Burton (PH), Head of English at Port Talbot Secondary Grammar School, who became his guardian in December 1943. In September 1943 I won a scholarship to the school and soon discovered that PH had established a strong tradition of dramatic production there, as he had in the town also. He also wrote scripts for the BBC which he directed at Cardiff, some involving pupils from the school.

An exciting event each November was when the pupils walked from school to the YMCA hall to watch the school play. That year it was *Pygmalion*, produced by Philip. I was spellbound by the production, especially the performance of Richard Jenkins, then just 17, as Professor Higgins. The miracle of how Richard later became a superstar was evident to all - a collier's son whose first language was Welsh was speaking without affectation in a neutral and beautifully modulated voice, as a professor of English linguistics. The voice was always there and so was the deep sensitivity to words and language but PH had taught Richard how to control and project it and use it expressively. Emlyn Williams's words capture my memory of seeing him act, 'a boy of seventeen, of startling beauty and quiet intelligence...he looked - as very special human beings tend to look at that age - he looked...imperishable'.

Immediately after the play Richard left school to take up his first professional role, in Liverpool and London in *The Druid's Rest* by Emlyn Williams. After launching Richard's career PH left teaching to join the BBC, first at Cardiff then London, training personnel as well as writing and directing many radio scripts. Richard and he can be

heard together on the BBC recording of *Under Milk Wood*. He later became a playwright, theatre director and actor, eventually moving to America to become, among many other achievements, head of the American Musical and Dramatic Academy in New York and an American citizen on 2nd March 1964.

The story of Camelot's difficult conception is told in Lerner's biographical *The Street Where I Live*, a wonderful read. The show was plagued by misfortune. Loewe had a massive coronary in 1958 from which he was still recovering. Lerner suffered a haemorrhage from a burst ulcer and Moss Hart, the dynamic director, had a heart attack and died a year later. The show soon became known as *Costalot*, a *Medical* rather than a musical. It first played in Toronto in a version that ran for 5 hours and was in full swing at midnight! One critic praised it for *helping to shorten the winter!*

It is surprising to learn that Richard and Philip, now living in New York, still worked together on his stage roles, as they had done in England on his roles at Stratford and the Old Vic, including *Henry IV*, *Coriolanus* and, especially - *Hamlet*. Richard Burton was made to play Arthur, he was always at his best playing princes and kings and the mixture of charm and melancholy in the part came easily to him, it was his hallmark.

Before rehearsals for *Camelot* began they worked on his three solos and the duet and ran over his lines together. Philip watched the overweight Camelot at Toronto in September and judged that 'the show was in real trouble and needed major constructional surgery'. He went again the following night and made detailed notes for Richard who studied them and gave an inspired performance which galvanised the whole company. This prompted Roddy McDowell, Mordred, to cut a cast party on Sunday to discuss his part with PH 'for several hours'.

Back again in New York Philip heard of the director's heart attack and realized that Alan J. Lerner, recovering himself, had the whole task of cutting, rewriting and directing the show on his shoulders. Rumours of disaster were spreading, it seemed a lost cause. The show moved to Boston and PH



Philip
Burton
rehearsing
Camelot

went to Richard's 35th birthday party there, held onstage after the show. Alan Lerner invited PH to have lunch with him the next day, it seems Richard had shared his notes on the script with him, probably Mordred added his weight as well - PH was invited to take over the active direction of *Camelot*!

Three weeks of intensive work ensued. PH watched all the performances, giving notes afterwards; he rehearsed 5 hours a day and had discussions with Lerner at his hotel into the early hours. Cuts were made, new scenes and numbers were written by Lerner and Loewe and the cast coped with playing eight performances a week of the old show while rehearsing the new material by day, until it could be substituted into the performances. A new set was built and painted, new costumes were designed and made and 1½ hours were cut from the running time. The show had been rebuilt sufficiently well to take to Broadway.

Richard pitched in too, rehearsing the understudies, learning new lines in the afternoon and performing them in the evening, responding to all worries with, 'Don't worry, luv, we'll get through'. He was not a stealer of scenes, he did not throw his weight about, the cast were his 'family' and they adored him. He even gave up drinking! According to Lerner it was only the leadership of Richard that held the company together and got the show to Broadway. He wrote, 'God knows what would have happened if it had not been for Richard Burton, if ever a star behaved like a star in every sense of the word, it was he.'

And Philip? Moss Hart, ill in hospital, had begged Lerner not to appoint another director

but to keep the show going himself. Philip had agreed to be adequately paid but to allow Moss to retain billing as director. A note on the Broadway first night programme thanked him for undisclosed help with the production. When Lerner's book was published years later it made no mention of Philip's work on *Camelot*, it gives the impression that he alone took over the direction of the show when Moss Hart had to leave. Philip was happy, he had received much heart-warming appreciation from the company, 'they knew what I had done'. Richard gave Lerner 5 minutes of 'ice-cold hell' for not mentioning it, 'it was you who saved the show, I'll make up for it in one of my pieces one of these days. He didn't live to write that piece.'

The American choreographer Agnes de Mille has written the preface for PH's autobiography and described him as, 'a craftsman, an expert, a precisionist...the more he sees, the more he marvels, and all he says to his pupils is: Read! Recognize! Think!' She asks, 'what drove this rather reticent, rather pedantic schoolteacher to master the demons, to shape, incite, promote and proselytize? Not religion, not patriotism, not social reform - but the dreamings and ravings of wild immortal poets'.

She asked Philip why he had taken on such an onerous job as *Camelot* without recognition; Merlin answered, 'Because Richard needed me.'

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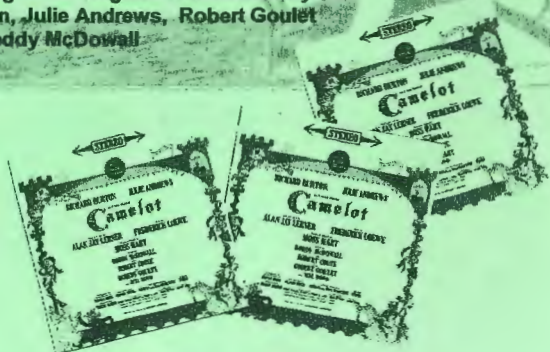
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