pendragon

XXXIV **No 1**

This issue ***Merlin***

editorial

Vol XXXIV No 1 Autumn 2006

Themes

The first issue with the specified theme of **Merlin** appeared in January 1978 (*XI* No 1). As Jess Foster noted in her lead-in, "Our Pendragon badge, a golden dragon on a blue background, reminds us that Merlin foretold the birth of Arthur, and that the Dragon appeared in the sky while Ambrosius was on his deathbed and before Uther had been proclaimed Leader of the Dragons. It seemed right, therefore, that the first issue of our magazine in its new format should be a Dragon issue, and that this one should be devoted chiefly to Merlin."

So here we are again, revisiting that most enigmatic of figures at the court of Camelot, and the items that appear this issue reflect on Merlin as soothsayer, magician, prophet, shaman, and builder – according to Robert de Boron – of the Round Table. There are also appraisals of T H White's *The Book of Merlyn*, which first appeared in 1977. We are frequently reminded of the lasting influence of White's creations on modern authors and critics, most recently by best-selling children's writer Cornelia Funke. When asked which book she would have most liked to have written, she replied, "Everything by Shakespeare, and then *The Once and Future King* by T H White."[1]

You will by now have noticed a few changes in format – though none as extreme as changing to A5 back in 1977 – and it would be useful to have some feedback. Does changing font from Arial (first used ten years ago) to Palatino Linotype improve legibility?

The theme of the winter edition is to be **The Sword in the Stone** (submissions by mid-February 2007, please). After that, **The Fisher King** is proposed – this allows scope for exploring or expounding on Castles, Quests, the significance of names and so on.

[1] Cornela Funke (2004) *Inkheart* (Chicken House paperback; hardback edition 2003)

People

Further appreciations of **Bill Russell** appear in this issue. His contributions on the welfare of laboratory animals ('The Three Rs' as pointed out last issue), as well as many personal qualities, were acknowledged in depth (and with no little affection) in a recent issue of the journal *Alternatives to Laboratory Animals* by numerous colleagues and friends. From Cleo Paskal, his literary executor, we learn that "Generous to the end, Professor Russell donated his body to science," and that there will be a memorial service in due course. Those who want to appreciate his range of interests beyond Arthuriana can view many of Bill and his late wife Claire's writings at www.askrussell.com – a three-part extended review (his last contribution to *Pendragon*) begins next issue.[2]

Other contributors' work graces the pages of this issue, and here we list the accomplishments of just a selection of them. **Bill West** is an American professor emeritus in the field of English Literature who, among other accomplishments, has had over a thousand poems published worldwide, while **Steve Sneyd**, no stranger to these pages, is also a noted poet. **Sonja Strode**'s PhD was in psychology, and she brings aspects of her specialism to bear on Merlin. **Alistair McBeath** is both an astronomer and mythologist, vice-president of the International Meteor Organization and Meteor Section director to the Society for Popular Astronomy, while **Shani Oates** writes regularly for pagan-interest magazines such as *The Cauldron*.

Further reading

A O H Jarman "The Merlin Legend and the Welsh Tradition of Prophecy" in Bromwich *et al* (1991) *The Arthur of the Welsh* (University of Wales Press)
William Shakespeare and William Rowley *attrib* (1989) *The Birth of Merlin* (Element)
Peter H Goodrich "Merlin in the Twenty-First Century" in Alan Lupack (2002) *New Directions in Arthurian Studies* (D S Brewer)

[2] "An Appreciation of the Life of Professor William Russell (26 March 1925–27 July 2006)" *ATLA 34* (2006) 469-487

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BILL RUSSELL

Professor
William M S Russell
D Phil, MA, C Biol, F I Biol

Our President Bill Russell is dead and we mourn his loss; I would like to pay a personal tribute to one of the most remarkable men I have known in my lifetime.

At the September 1991 Bristol AGM we discussed the need to create an honorary post of Patron or President, someone to give status to the Society by association. After a lengthy discussion we gave up the attempt, we couldn't decide on a 'worthy' candidate – we are a proud lot but we've been around the Arthurian scene a long time.

I took on the editorship in 1993 and was looking for new contributors when, in the summer of 1994, Eric Fitch put Bill in touch and we printed his first article: *H G Wells & the Sleeper King* in our Sleeping Lord issue. This was a version of an article from *The Wellsian*, edited and introduced by Eric – for which Bill gave him his thanks and compliments, the first of many such gracious acknowledgements to our contributors; all genuine and to be treasured by their recipients.

Two shorter articles appeared in subsequent issues and Bill's first letter was printed in Summer 1995. He wrote:
I have now enjoyed three issues of Pendragon *... so much so that I want more! So I enclose an application form and a cheque and I would like to join the Society.*
For twelve years this humorous, kind, wonderfully gifted and erudite man has contributed to our journals and graced our membership.

He and his equally gifted wife Claire, an exile from Hitler's Germany, a psychotherapist and poet, were married for 47 years and together wrote books and articles across an amazingly wide field of knowledge. *The Times* obituary to Bill says,
The Russells studied and wrote about almost all aspects of human behaviour, including human, animal, individual and social; in an era of academic specialisation, their breadth of knowledge was rare, and they developed theories of exceptional depth and range.

You can read extended biographies, about the scope of their work and much more on the website *Russell Studies* located in Zimbabwe at:
www.askrussell.com
This sophisticated website is a curious contrast to Bill's hand-typed letters, obviously knocked out with some effort and many corrections on an aging machine! I shall treasure my collection.

Sadly, Claire died suddenly of pneumonia in January 1999 and Bill wrote that he would not wish to receive letters of sympathy but hoped to keep in touch in the future; his pain was evident:
I shall probably try to distract my mind with writing, so the possibility of continuing to contribute to Pendragon *will be a boon, and I am sure that will keep us in touch.*

In the ensuing years he contributed to a huge variety of journals, writing serious and scholarly scientific papers and numerous letters and articles for other publications such as *FLS News* – the Newsletter of the Folklore Society – and, of course, *Pendragon*. Bill has been most generous to Chris and to me; we both have large collections of his articles, letters and books, all signed in his neat tiny hand:

But wishes, Bill

He has also given us renewed confidence to feel proud of the Society's efforts to explore Arthuriana in all its aspects over 47 years, coincidentally the duration of his own marriage

In 2001 I suggested that we had found our President at last; the decision was swiftly agreed this time. I wrote to Bill and his response was immediate.

Pendragon Spring 2002 introduced our new President and the Summer edition carried a letter from him, *A Message to All Members*, which I urge all members to read again. The letter expresses Bill's warmth and sincerity,
When I was invited to become your President I was overwhelmed with pleasure, pride and gratitude ... To be President of the Pendragon Society is for me a great pleasure and a great happiness ... I will do my best to be worthy of the honour that has been done to me. Meanwhile I send you all my very best wishes. May we long continue to follow in the footsteps (in Sir Walter Scott's words) of:
'British bards that tuned their lyres
to Arthur's and Pendragon's praise.'
W M S Russell, President.
His presidency of the Pendragon Society was listed in his international obituaries; he had already ensured it was included in his biography in *Who's Who*.

He had been diagnosed with kidney failure in 2001 and he underwent three days of dialysis a week from then until his death. He was obviously deeply disappointed not to have been able to attend our Round Table at Caerleon in 2003. A change in his treatment programme had prevented his travelling to be with us and so we did not have the opportunity to hear him sing his presidential speech in his rich bass-baritone voice nor enjoy his vivacious company. And now we never shall.

Bill was educated at Marlborough where he was a prefect and head of house, a Junior and Senior Open Scholar, and won a scholarship to New College, Oxford. At Oxford after the war, he directed and played leads in a revue and a musical comedy he wrote with a friend. In a second show he sang a number based on the Nightmare Song in *Iolanthe* – a glimpse of things to come! He would often break into song during his lectures, setting his words to the rhythms of Gilbert and Sullivan. He once did so at an international congress at Utrecht where he was the principal speaker; he received a standing ovation from the 900 delegates from 30 nations. In the late 70s and early 80s he represented the West Country on BBC Radio's *Round Britain Quiz* for eight years, often singing his answers to G & S tunes which made him an immensely popular national figure at the time.

His mother was Welsh, Gweneth Kate Moy Evans, and as a little boy, an only child, he would stay with his grandparents in Swansea. We once reminisced on the phone how we would walk down to the sea as boys, dig for lugworms, ride on the Mumbles Railway and eat cooked seaweed for breakfast. It was a Dylan Thomas world that I could share with him for I also had relatives in that beautiful ugly town with its glorious heron-priested bay.

Bill's name is internationally recognised for the Three Rs of animal experimentation; why his own nation did not honour him with a knighthood for his work in this field beggars belief, but such recognition is reserved now for footballers, 'stars' and 'celebrities' in our topsy-turvy world. The John Hopkins Centre for Alternatives to Animal Testing (CAAT) USA truly knew their man:
As a researcher, as a scholar, as a human being gifted with wit and wisdom and undying enthusiasm, Bill Russell has left a lasting and inspiring legacy.

In *Pendragon*, Winter 2004/5, in answer to Dave Burnham's question as to why Richard the Lionheart would have given the sword *Excalibur* to Tancred of Sicily, Bill reminded us of our own Three Rs which he had recognised we have dedicated ourselves to follow:
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.*

In another tribute to Bill from The Animal Welfare Institute we may recognise the President we have lost:
Compassion, dry humour, amazing enthusiasm and his tireless readiness to share his insights and discuss new avenues of scientific endeavour make Bill not only a most appreciated colleague but also a dear friend who cannot be forgotten.

Sadly, Bedivere standing there
Wounded and full of woe,
Said to the King, 'Are you leaving me?
Alas, where will you go?'
And Arthur, sorrowing, said to him,
'This day I must be gone
To heal my grievous wounds awhile
In the Vale of Avalon.'
Stanzaic Le Morte Arthur

F C Stedman-Jones

Letters to Pen Dragon

W M S RUSSELL

I'm so very sorry to hear about Professor Russell. Even though we didn't have a chance to meet, I feel as if I'm saying goodbye to a dear friend. In all of his writing for *Pendragon*, he consistently came across as being kind-hearted, generous of spirit, optimistic, erudite and quite a polymath; all in all, a true good egg, and I know he'll be sorely missed. He enriched *Pendragon* by his presence and he'll always be remembered with fondness.

Ian Brown, Middlesbrough, Cleveland

I must say how very sorry I was to hear of the sad death of Professor Russell. During my relatively short spell as a member of the Society I had come to enjoy and anticipate with relish his numerous articles. As I read them I had tried to conjure up some idea of what he was like as I knew very little about him. So it was with much surprise and interest that I read the information about him recently. What a sad loss, too, to the magazine. Once again, my sincere condolences to all who knew him.

Sonya Strode, Hénon, Côtes-D'Armor, France

• Thanks to others who expressed their sadness, such as Alistair McBeath who wrote "He will indeed be a great loss to the Society". Bill's three-part extended review on some recent scholarship will begin next issue, and we may re-publish some of his commentaries in future issues.

KNIGHT'S MOVE

Many thanks for yet another superb issue of *Pendragon*. From Simon Rouse's very eye-catching cover illustration onwards, every page is filled with fascination, insight, a veritable fest of food for thought, and a few timely chuckles here and there. That the Arthurian legends can constantly inspire such profound and varied poetry, prose and discussion speaks volumes of how alive and well Arthur still is today.

Ian Brown, Middlesbrough, Cleveland

As always, I enjoyed the latest issue – particularly the feast of giants!

The oak / holly pairing [Shani Oates' "The Green Knight"] recurs in another of the Gawain stories, when the hag who is to reveal what women want is, when first encountered by Arthur, sat between oak and green holly, in effect the doorguard of that liminal point or objective correlative of year-turn. Given Gawain's hints of solar links – the frequent trope of his strength waxing through morning until noon, then waning through the afternoon – there's perhaps also a final implicit metaphor of sun turning winter to summer, when he turns the hag-woman to beauty, if that's not over-interpretation of the under-layers.

Good to see more of Geoff Sawer's Lancelot sequence in *Pendragon*.

Steve Sneyd, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire

Merlin: Fool of Time *Marilyn Porter*

One of the most magical and certainly one of the most enigmatic figures in the whole Arthurian legend is Merlin. Although the "original" literary sources contain scant account of him, (1) many fictional writers such as Mary Stewart, T H White, Charles Williams and John Heath Stubbs (2) have filled out the little evidence we have with their various imaginings. Even so, at one level, there remains much painstaking work to be done searching out further scraps of evidence about Merlin – who he was, either in historical "reality", or in legend.

One thing at least is clear: Merlin predates Arthur, and Uther himself, and all the main elements of the legend. He existed, and he *directed the setting* of the Arthurian scenario. Nothing is known of his own origins, save for a few tantalising hints that they were not human. (3) During his brief sojourn in the legend, strange and mysterious characteristics are attributed to him. He was held in high respect, if not awe. Yet he disappears under circumstances that seem bizarre – almost trivial – long before the real drama is played out. He does not appear at all in the search for the Grail.

One other salient detail: like Arthur, Merlin is not dead, but sleeping, and they will both return at the time of need.

So much for the outlines. In this brief piece I simply want to draw attention to – what seem to me to be – two of the most evocative and enduring aspects of this mysterious figure, and to put them into conjunction. These aspects are: firstly, Merlin's peculiar relationship with the dimension of time; and secondly, his position *outside* conventional requirements of behaviour or ability. Although this esoteric exemption is common to the tradition of Sage or Magician I prefer to refer it instead to the tradition of Fool or Jester.

Time

To take the dimension of "time" first: specifically, I want to pick up the hint explored (fairly superficially) by T H White that Merlin lived backward in time. Many people have been fascinated with idea of escape from chronological time, (4) from tales like *Rip Van Winkle* to Dunne's *An Experiment with Time*, but these have in common an escape *from* the dimension. You may move backwards or forwards in time, but you yourself remain yourself. You have your "own" time, and with luck you return to it – or choose not to. Merlin, however, does not *escape* the dimension of time – he simply reverses it. Coming from unimaginable origins in the future he gets older as others get younger. The whole process is clearly way outside the normal lifespan – but the principles are there.

Merlin's gifts of prophecy, therefore, rest on the fact that for him they are not prophecies but *memories*. (5) He had been in the future. Where he had not been was in the past, and in youth, and this was his downfall. It is hard to imagine a man of great age, wisdom and – more important – integrity falling for the ruses of a mere nymph. Even Nimue's (or Vivienne's) most ardent defenders could scarcely call her subtle. Yet it is quite plausible if we imagine the effects of the sudden onset of adolescence after centuries of wise maturity. Such a linear explanation is too crude. The all-important cyclic element is reintroduced when we remember that in some accounts, at least, Merlin's mother was also called Nimue or Vivien. Death and rebirth – not incest. The eternal circle released Merlin in that shape, at that time, to do what he had to do. He was then re-absorbed, so that he could reappear when it is necessary for him to do so. This kind of speculation perhaps gains more validity when we see the way in which it enables legend and reality, normally so carefully separated, to be read in conjuncture.

Fool

This idea is contained more strongly in the second aspect that I want to touch upon. This is the concept of Merlin as the Eternal Fool. To describe Merlin's prophecies as "memory" is not in any way to belittle his stature as a great Sage in line with all the traditional sages,

Continued on page 36

T H White's *The Book of Merlyn*

2006 is the centenary of the birth of T H White, whose major contribution to Arthurian literature lives on in print, as a Broadway musical and in film (Disney's 1965 cartoon The Sword in the Stone *and* Camelot *in 1967).* The Book of Merlyn *was posthumously published in 1977, and the two reviews that follow – nearly three decades apart in time – attempt to evaluate this conclusion to the tetralogy.*

This book[1] was intended to be the fifth part of T H White's *Once and Future King*. It was discovered in a Texan library and is now [1977] made available in a glossy but remarkably priced edition at £5.25.

Its value is mainly historiographical: it is good to know more of T H White – a diverse and talented writer – and it is interesting to know how *he* intended *The Once and Future King* to end. However, I think his publishers made a wise decision at the time, and not only for reasons of wartime stringency. It adds nothing (except the final few pages on the deaths of Arthur, Lancelot and Guinevere) to our understanding of the Arthurian legend, and, if anything, it diminishes our respect for White as a fine narrative writer.

There are certain truly beautiful descriptive passages, notably of the wild geese, and of the English landscape as Arthur sits brooding over it. The main theme is the discussion of the 'problem of war' as it takes place in the 'Combination room of the College of Life'. It represents, of course, White's own troubled feelings about the outbreak of World War Two and the development of his personal position towards it. It is 'peopled' by animals and birds – our old friend Archimedes, the sensible and tenacious badger and the verminous hedgehog representing the sound sense of the salt-of-the-earth English countryman, all dominated by an increasingly tendentious and cantankerous Merlyn. As he honestly admits at one point, "The difficulty of living backwards and thinking forwards is that you become confused about the present. It is also the reason why one prefers to escape into the abstract". But the abstract, the debate on the problem of war, carried on mainly by reference to natural history, becomes sickeningly anthropomorphic – or rather, anti-anthropomorphic. However appealing in 1941, we can't all become white-fronted geese and fly to Siberia. In any case, men are only half animal; the other half is angel (or devil), but that is the dimension White cannot face. It is only as deficient animals that he can face his fellow beings.

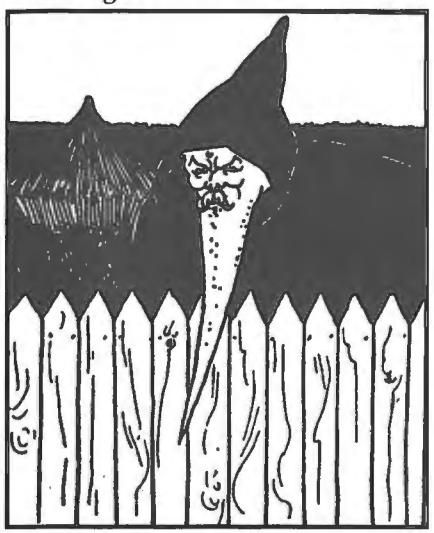
The political theory is frankly jejune, and even in 1941 (a long time ago now) such crude characterizations of the major philosophies of socialism, capitalism and fascism will not do. They cannot all simply be classified as life in an ant heap. The badger does his best, tripping Merlyn's logic where he can, pointing out difficulties with his (alias White's) rather crass anarchism (or rather, *laissez-faire* individualism). Nor could White's greatest admirer wholly accept that war is due solely to national property and gland deficiencies. In a final burst of quite un-animal-like patriotic feeling (which sends Arthur back to do his duty in the 12th-century and White in the 20th) the hedgehog's rendering of *Jerusalem* by the socialist Blake has a certain ironic relevance.

The editor, Sylvia Townsend Warner, is well aware of the book's deficiencies, as she makes clear in her prologue. She still felt it worth publishing, and I am glad she has done so. For those who are interested in White's own internal development the book is fascinating. For those who are interested in Arthur, leave *The Once and Future King* as it is with its four books.

Marilyn Porter[2]

[1] T H White (1977) *The Book of Merlyn: the hitherto unpublished conclusion to "The Once and Future King"*. Prologue by Sylvia Townsend Warner (University of Texas Press: Austin, Texas, and London) *xx* 136pp

[2] Review first published in *Pendragon* X No 4 (September 1977)



Reading this[3] enabled me to understand why, although White had written it by 1942, it took decades more to appear. His publishers had used such excuses as wartime paper shortages to stall (the full background is in Sylvia Townsend Warner's thorough introduction, 'The Story of the Book'). They also managed to avoid including it in 1958 when bringing his Arthurian novels together as *The Once and Future King*, even though White intended it to be the final instalment.

The problem, from a publisher's point of view, just as it is a problem for the reader, is that the book is, in essence, one long lecture on what is wrong with humanity, and how to start curing his faults and follies – an instructive sermon, in effect, albeit fitted into a story framework of sorts.

The lecturing is not totally relentless: there is a scene-setting encounter before the "preaching" begins, and a final wrapping-up after it ends, and in between there are interruptions of various kinds. They include two transformation scenes, engineered magically by Merlyn, of Arthur first into an ant, a nightmare excursion into a mindlessly dull totalitarian world, and then into a goose, to experience the ecstasies of flight. These, however, will be generally familiar to readers of the tetralogy since, rewritten, they were subsequently spatchcocked into the first edition's many pre-existing metamorphoses of young Arthur *aka* The Wart, imposed by his educator Merlyn.

The Book of Merlyn begins with Arthur, unable to sleep, brooding in his tent on the eve of his encounter with his rebel son Mordred and his army of Thrashers at Camlann (which White locates on Salisbury Plain). Merlyn suddenly arrives, manages to convince Arthur that he is not a figment of a dream, and persuades the old king to accompany him to his post-Nimue dwelling, to spend the night gaining further enlightenment, helpful, perhaps, in coping with the morrow's showdown.

Having travelled at magical speed, they reach Merlyn's new HQ, which proves to be a barrow-mound near Bodmin, at the heart of which a badger associate has constructed a sett large enough to have all mod cons, including a library. Here Arthur is introduced to a rather Disneyesque cast of talking animals, including, as well as the badger, a goat, snake, Archimedes the owl, a maddeningly Mummerset hedgehog, Cavall the hound *etc*, who share the dwelling and together make up Merlyn's Combination, a kind of think-tank, aimed at solving the world's problems.

After greetings, shows of respect and loyalty *etc*, the lectures begin, almost entirely delivered by the unstoppably verbose Merlyn. Topics covered include capitalism, fascism, communism and their flaws; the desirability of individuality and anarchy; the superiority of most creatures of the natural world to humankind; ingenious if generally naive proposals for substitutes for war, following a balance sheet of its benefits and disbenefits; a discussion on a more truthful replacement for the word *sapiens* in the species description *homo sapiens* (alternatives suggested including *ferox* and *stultus*) *etc*.

After his two creature metamorphoses, designed to prove various of Merlyn's points, Arthur proves so resentful of being dragged back from the

[3] T H White (1978) *The Book of Merlyn* (Fontana paperback 188pp; Collins UK hardback)

contentment he has briefly found in the goose world (where after the wonder of migration to Siberia he has been about to unite with an avian soulmate) that he rebels against any longer bearing the lifelong burden of leadership.

He is persuaded back to his duty by the hedgehog, who leads him to a high place, shows him the moonlit beauty of England (White is ever insistent on Arthur's Englishness!), and sings to him Blake's *Jerusalem* (the concept that Merlyn lives backwards through time allows innumerable anachronisms here).

He is returned to his tent in time to confront Mordred, albeit hoping for a peaceful compromise. Events then follow their traditional pattern; next White covers Arthur's divergent claimed ends, Lancelot and Guinevere's religious retirements and deaths – a few pages of fairly conventional retelling (although an implied timeleap lets the last few Round Table survivors meet their fate on Crusade) which Townsend Warner surprisingly describes as "among the finest that White ever wrote".

So why, unless you're a White completist, read this book?

First, there is some highly evocative writing. As well as the goose transformation episodes, with its beautiful descriptions of dawn on the marshes, flight amid clouds, and the flora and fauna of Russia's bogland (and one or two of the verses White provides as being the songs of the geese also work well), a notable high point comes when, Arthur having refused an elixir which would restore his youth for the night, Merlyn instead gives him a magical "cerebral massage", and he is able to see the world anew, including such striking details as the absence of light reflection in Merlyn's eyes, a falcon's saw-toothed beak, and the way his tent's motions fight against themselves.

Also, although many of the attempts at humour aren't really very funny, the running gag of the muddle Merlyn's papers are in, with many reduced to scraps by misuse for fire-lighting, and the vital spells always initially unfindable, can work well, as when an attempt to write Nimue a love-poem accidentally resurfaces, revealing his attempt to rhyme with her name had included *cooee* and *chop-suey*!

Again, although much of the interaction between Arthur, Merlyn and the animals teeters on the verge of sentimentality (as well as sometimes being, clearly unintentionally, funny in a Pythonesque way), it is on occasion genuinely moving.

Moreover, while the way that Merlyn's reverse trajectory through time enables him to display, and make argumentative use of, knowledge of times up to White's own is overused to a degree that can become tedious – to use today's terminology, overdone postmodernism, mixing and matching all eras in a kind of shapeless soup – it does also allow the author to insert a variety of items of curious knowledge, the sort of fossicked discoveries of unlikely facts which made reading the book worthwhile in themselves. (I won't spoil the treat in prospect for you by citing any of them here!)

Steve Sneyd

• *For more on T H White see Fred Stedman-Jones "Merlyn of Camelot"* XXXII No 2 (2004-5) 44-47; *Dave Burnham "Brownie, Silver and Gos: Arthur's Beasts"* XXXII No 3 (2005) 20-22

Skimble-skamble stuff

Merlin and prophecy *Chris Lovegrove*

In Shakespeare's *Henry IV Part I* Hotspur refers irritably to Owen Glendower's tales "of the dreamer Merlin and his prophecies ... and such a deal of skimble-skamble stuff". He leaves us in no doubt that Welsh divination is all "rambling" and "worthless" nonsense (as *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* interprets it). Prophecies attributed to Merlin have had mixed reviews over the centuries, largely depending on the mindset of the audience. Have they any relevance now?

Trying to divine the future has been a human activity that long predates press horoscopes. The Old Testament had its prophets and its interpreters of dreams such as Joseph, and Insular Celts were no less keen on divination than other cultures. However, unlike the personal divination familiar to folk practices, most foretelling that has been recorded historically relates to the political fates of societies, peoples and their rulers. To this latter class belongs the tradition of Merlin's prophecies.

One of the most famous of such political predictions was recounted in the early 9th century. This was in the tale of Emrys or Ambrosius from chapters 40-42 of the *Historia Brittonum*. Here the "child without a father" (even though he later declares that "My father is one of the consuls of the Roman people") interprets the two fighting dragons as symbolic of the Britons and the English:

"the white one is the dragon of the people who have seized many peoples and countries in Britain, and will reach almost from sea to sea; but later our people will arise, and will valiantly throw the English people across the sea" (Morris 1980: 31).

Not until Geoffrey of Monmouth three centuries later was this boy Ambrosius identified with Merlin; here a folktale motif (no doubt influenced by the model of another boy-without-a-father, Jesus in the Temple doing "my father's business") is utilised to raise Welsh hopes against the migrants from the east.

That prophecies were taken seriously in the early medieval period we need not doubt. According to the 6th-century Gildas, even the Saxons were motivated by them a century earlier when they invaded Britain in their three ships:

"Favourable [were] the omens and auguries, which prophesied, according to a sure portent among them, that they would live for three hundred years in the land ... and that for half [that] time ... they would repeatedly lay it waste" (Winterbottom 1978: 26).

By the early 10th century the Wessex king Athelstan, grandson of Alfred the Great, appeared to be reaching a rapprochement with Constantine, king of the Scots, and even with the princes of Wales. This did not suit all the Welsh, however, and around 930 appeared *Armes Prydein*, The Prophecy of Britain:

"Welsh and Saxons will come together on the bank, destroying and charging ... Saxons before Britons will sing their lament ..."

(cited in Fulton 2005: 114; Tolstoy 1985: 82)

The *Armes* predicted the expulsion of the Saxons from Britain by a combined army of Welsh, Irish, Scots and Cornish and, significantly, a prediction was attributed to an individual, with the line *dysgogan Myrdin*, that is, "Myrddin foretells". The soothsaying mantle of Ambrosius had now fallen on the person who was later to become known as Merlin, and it is clear from the lack of elaboration in the *Armes* that Myrddin's association with prophecy was not in dispute.

By the early 12th century there was enough of a body of prophecies attached to the name of Myrddin for Geoffrey of Monmouth to use as a basis for the seventh book of his *Historia Regum Britanniae*. We must beware of believing that it is a translation into Latin of genuine predictions made by a 6th-century personage called Merlin (as Geoffrey calls him). For a start, there are references to Normans and Normandy, a people and region which didn't start to come into being until the 9th century at the earliest, and so must be nearly contemporary with Geoffrey himself. However, the form and imagery of these alleged prophecies rely heavily on earlier models. Particularly striking is the use of animal imagery, applied (though not exclusively) by Gildas himself in his

attack on the British Christian rulers of his own times.

The success of Geoffrey's *History* encouraged the production and re-production of other political prophecies. Gerald Cambrensis planned to include a Latin translation of an "old" Welsh book of Merlin's prophecies, but it is either lost or he chose not to publish it. Some of these survive in his existing works, and it is clear that they post-date the putative Merlin by a good few centuries: one in particular refers to "a king of England and conqueror of Ireland", which can only refer to the successors of William, especially Henry II (Russell 2006: 26-7). The poems attributed to Myrddin in *The Black Book of Carmarthen* have additions from the 12th and 13th centuries, whatever the date of the earlier core of these poems (Pennar 1989); and *Les Prophecies de Merlin* – a continuation of the *Prose Lancelot* at the end of the 13th century – contained generalised predictions of natural disasters and catastrophes as well as references to Venice, the Crusades, the papacy in the 12th and 13th centuries and corruption in the Vatican (Goodrich 1988: 251ff).

Welsh versions of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* and Wace's Anglo-Norman *Brut* chronicle were called *Brut* (after Brutus, the supposed founder of Britain), and appeared soon after 1200. Indeed, in the later Middle Ages several Welshmen were described as interpreters of *brud* or *brut*, especially the translations of Merlin's Latin prophecies (themselves based on earlier genuinely Welsh material) with "additions, revisions and inventions" (Fulton 2005: 117). It is clear that, around 1405, Owain Glyn Dŵr was inspired by a particular prophecy both in the *Historia* and the *Bruts* which referred to the idea that three streams emerging from Winchester would divide the country into three. This gave him authority to propose that the island of Britain ought to be shared out between England, Scotland and Wales, ruled respectively by Edmund Mortimer as king of England, the Earl of Northumberland Henry Percy and Owain Glyn Dŵr as prince of Wales, in an agreement which became known as the Tripartite Indenture. Earlier, in letters to the king of Scotland and the lords of Ireland, Owain refers to "the prophecy" and "the prophet" in contexts which can only mean the *Brut* and Merlin.

However, the *Historia* was just as popular in the rest of Britain, and gave rise around 1312 to a widely read prophecy attributed to Merlin known as the *Six Kings to Follow John* or *Six Last Kings* (Fulton 2005: 109). Using animal imagery, the prophecy has King John followed by the Lamb, the Dragon, the Goat, the Boar, the Ass and the Mole (or Moldwarp). By 1399 the Ass and the Mole were naturally identified with Richard II and the Lancastrian Henry IV. Owain Glyn Dŵr was later accused by chroniclers such as Edward Hall and Raphael Holinshed (and ultimately Shakespeare) of following worthless pro-Yorkist propaganda ('skimble-skamble stuff'), part of a popular anti-Welsh bias of the time. There is no evidence that Glyn Dŵr saw himself as *mab darogan*, a hero prophesied to redeem the Welsh people like a Cadwaladr or an Arthur. But it is clear that Henry Tudor exploited this at the end of the 15th century, though it is ironic that the part-Welsh Tudors took the throne of England but also dashed Welsh hopes (until recent devolution) for self-determination by shifting political power to London.

Jonathan Swift later satirised Merlin-type prophecy, and Bob Stewart (1986) tried to vindicate it in the 20th-century (*eg* Merlin "predicted" the Channel Tunnel); but Nostradamus has now eclipsed the opposition. Such prophecies may enable you to see in a glass darkly, but more often it is only your own hopes reflected.

Helen Fulton "Owain Glyn Dŵr and the Uses of Prophecy" *Studia Celtica XXXIX* (2005)
Norma Lorre Goodrich (1988) *Merlin* (HarperPerennial)
John Morris *transl* (1980) *Nennius: British History and The Welsh Annals* (Phillimore)
Meirion Pennar *transl* (1989) *The Black Book of Carmarthen* (Llanerch Enterprises)
W M S Russell "Gerald the Welshman, Arthur and Merlin (2)" *Pendragon XXXIII* No 4 (2006)
R J Stewart (1986) *The Prophetic Vision of Merlin* (Arkana)
Nikolai Tolstoy (1985) *The Quest for Merlin* (Hamish Hamilton)
Michael Winterbottom *transl* (1978) *Gildas: The Ruin of Britain* (Phillimore)

"They seek him here, they seek him there"

or, Where is Old Merlin Now?

Steve Sneyd

Powerful older men throwing away their careers by becoming besotted with a much younger woman are tabloid catnip – so the story of how the mighty wizard Merlin made a fool of himself over a female would-be magician to the extent of revealing his secretest, most powerful spell to her pleadings, has plenty of resonance.[1]

But then what happened to him? Everyone knows, surely – or do they? Just as, in our day, theories as to what became of Lord Lucan abound, but unfortunately all contradict each other, so too with Merlin, or Myrddin, to give him his earlier name.

For starters, of course, there isn't even agreement on the name of his female nemesis, whose monicker gets variously reported as (deep breath advised)

Nenyve, Nimue, Niniane, Ninienne, Nineveh (again a contemporary resonance, as coincidentally the name of an ancient Iraqi city), Nivene, Nyene, Nyneue, Viviane, Vivien, Vivienne, and more.

Explanations as to the source of the name vary wildly too. A garbling of the Celtic horse-goddess Rhiannon, or the death-goddess Arianrhod, as American SF writer and mysteriographer L Sprague de Camp thought?[2] Or how about distortions of the Celtic female first name, still around, spelled Niamh (which leads easily to Nimue), pronounced *Neave*, from which it's not all that far to Veave and so Vivien. (For convenience hereafter, I'll abbreviate her to *V/N*, and her victim as *M*).

Fates

But uncertainties as to the name of the *femme fatale* are as nothing compared to the divergences about *M*'s final fate.

Does he wander under the earth forever, or over the seas, or is he in any other way not to be pinned down to any particular location; or is he to this day so precisely situated in his deathlessness that visiting the proclaimed sites would make up an excellently varied holiday?

First, let's look at those fates so general as to lead nowhere specific. Of these, the vaguest is that, in accordance with his own prophecy, *M* was "put in the earth quick," quick here being in its old sense of alive – that gives us the whole globe to go at. There is also the suggestion that he "went into the fire", presumably in preparation for Phoenix-like rejuvenated resurrection at some unstated time.

What about sending *M* off on a final, perpetual Flying Dutchman-style voyage? One of his main aims, said the Welsh bards, was ownership of all the Thirteen Treasures of Britain. One by one, the wizard tricked their rightful

[1] This is a revised and expanded version of an article which first appeared in *Monomyth Supplement 21* (May 2005)

[2] L Sprague de Camp and Catherine C de Camp (1972) *Citadels of Mystery* (Fontana Collins) Chapter VII note 9

owners out of them, beginning with the Horn of Plenty of Bran Galed, and took them to his Glass House for safekeeping.[3] *V/N*, this story goes, waited until he entered the glass house with the thirteenth and last Treasure, then, as he gloated over his at last complete collection, sealed him in, "never to emerge again", and set the house adrift, to sail the seas forever. (Raising the question of why she didn't grab the Treasures for herself first, before setting him adrift?)

Sir Thomas Malory, who specified that *V/N* was a "damosel of the lake",[4] gave a detailed-sounding account that yet manages to contain no geographic specific: the author of the *Morte d'Arthur* says she feared Merlin "because he was a devil's son" (referring to the story that the wizard was begot by a demon on a virgin nun)

"and so a time it happed that Merlin showed to her a rock wherein was a great wonder ... so by her subtle working she made Merlin to go under that stone to let her wit of his marvels there, but she wrought so there for him that he came never out for all the craft he could do."

Under a megalith or other stone is where, in folktale and ballad, often lies an entry to the Other world of Faerie. In the Post-Vulgate *Suite* the death-realm association is even more precise: *V/N* seals him in a tomb, from which he is last heard crying out that he has been delivered to death by the conjurations and words of a woman.[5]

[3] As an aside, houses, castles or mountains made of glass appear, throughout Northern European folklore, as otherworld or death dwellings – this belief may date back as far as the Bronze Age custom of decorating burial mounds with quartz, a custom which has a remote descendant when today graves are decorated with green glass pebbles – and hence is one of many hints in the stories that Merlin's real home was an Elfland afterlife realm.

[4] *ie* of the Other race of water-dwellers to which the Lady of the Lake – who fostered Lancelot in her underwater palace – and other enigmatic females in the Round Table story also belonged.

[5] This is discussed in detail by Marilyn Corrie in "Self-Determination in The Post-Vulgate *Suite du Merlin* and Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*" *Medium Aevum LXXIII* No 2

Also geographically unspecific is the tale that *V/N* trapped or imprisoned him in an oak tree of an unnamed forest, an appropriate end given *M*'s strong forest association at an earlier stage in his career – the main candidate for an "historical" Merlin, the poet Myrddin. Having supposedly gone mad after the bloody battle of Arthuret or Arfderydd, at which he slew a close relative, either of his own or of his patron, he thereafter lived long years in the wildwood of south-west Scotland, calling himself Lailoken and, among other picturesque activities, riding a stag he tamed and reciting his poems to a tame pig.

Location, location, location

The link with forests, however, also provides us with one starting point in the search for a specific final location for *M*. A variety of accounts locate it in a forest in Brittany, that of **Brocéliaunde** – a pretty large area, admittedly, but at least findable on maps. There, he's either imprisoned in a tower, possibly invisible, or in a whitethorn, blackthorn or may (hawthorn) tree (either in Brocéliaunde itself, or Bresilien, a magical "parallel

world" offshoot of that forest) or, a cunning attempt by some storyteller to reconcile discrepancies perhaps, a spell-bound tower disguised as a thorn tree! One very specific variant on this holds that *V/N* begged *M* to show her how to make a tower out of air. When he did this, she imprisoned him in it, the event taking place at the appropriately named Val Sans Retour – Valley of No Return – near the Fountain of Barenton, still in Brittany.

Why, though, should the Continent be allowed to keep hold of such a traditionally British figure? Already particularly rich in Arthurian associations, so logically first that should be named among this island's candidates for resting place (if such a hyperactive enigma could indeed be thought of as actually resting quietly anywhere), is **Glastonbury Tor** (which in other stories conceals the underground palace of Gwyn ap Nudd, a king of the Otherworld, so again that link is present). Alternatively he could be in a lesser hill of the former island on which the town stands (an island the Celts knew as Ynys Vitrin, "Glass Island": glass again!), namely Chalice Hill. From there, according to John Cowper Powys, he once managed to break free briefly, emerging for just long enough to indulge in behaviour that, even allowing for *V/N*'s brain-frying effect on him, seems notably odd: he first turned the wicked King Mark, who happened to be there on a visit, to dust. Then he called some herons to him from Brent Knoll overlooking the Bristol Channel, and used said dust to feed them, before himself being drawn back into the hill.[6]

Further down that channel is **Lundy Island**, and there too *V/N* left him imprisoned (indeed a busy, if geographically indecisive, woman – but then no statement is more clichéd than a woman's right to change her mind).[7]

By contrast, **Marlborough** is well inland; the Wiltshire town has long claimed Merlin, so convincingly King James I granted the place the motto *Ubi nunc sapientis ossa merlini* ("Where the grave of the wisest one, Merlin, is").[8] He supposedly rests in the grounds of Marlborough College public school, in a largish mound, probably originally Iron Age, a mush smaller "sister" of Silbury Hill (perhaps originally constructed for the worship of a river source goddess, since excavation did not reveal any signs of it having been intended as a burial mound). Later, in the reign of King Stephen, it was reused to support the keep of an Anarchy castle. Sad cynics, unfortunately, explain away the Merlin story as "folk etymology", an attempt to explain the first part of the name Marlborough by its fancied resemblance to the start of Merlin.

Still in England, although a lot further north, Lancashire folklore holds "the magician Merlin lies buried or imprisoned under **Martin Mere** near Burscough, now a wildlife sanctuary".[9]

Possibly in England, too, although ambiguous working doesn't help, is where Robert de Boron's late 12th-century *Perceval* leaves him, in an account in which, unusually, *V/N* fails to feature. In Nigel Bryant's translation,[10]

Then Merlin came to Perceval and to his master Blaise and took his leave of them. He said that Our Lord did not want him to appear to people again, but that he would not die until the end of the world.

"Meanwhile I shall make my dwelling place outside your house."[11]

The wizard then adds,

"And all who see my dwelling place will call it Merlin's *esplumoir*." With that Merlin departed, and he made his *esplumoir* and entered in, and was never seen again in this world.

The curious term *esplumoir*, meaning a "moulting cage", literally a place for the

[6] John Cowper Powys (1932) *A Glastonbury Romance* pp 407-7

[7] I owe information on the Lundy link to Ian Brown.

[8] J Simpson and S Roud *eds* (2000) *Oxford Dictionary of English Folklore* (OUP) "Merlin"

[9] Cited by Norman Darwen "King Arthur's Wells, Goosnargh" *Northern Earth 59* (Autumn 1994)

[10] Nigel Bryant *transl* (2001) *Merlin and the Grail:* Joseph of Arimathea, Merlin, Perceval: *The Trilogy of Arthurian romances attributed to Robert de Boron* (D S Brewer)

[11] Ah, but whose house? Perceval now rules in the Grail Castle, suggested locations for which occur all over Britain and on the Continent. Blaise's is in a cell in Northumberland, possibly at Blanchland.

shedding of feathers, appears to come drawn from falconry – a hawk, while moulting, and therefore vulnerable, would be kept in a secure place away from other falcons which might otherwise attack it. John Matthews discusses this in some detail in a note to the Prose or Didot *Perceval* extract, saying "this suggests the mage retires to ... leave behind the way of the world, and to watch from within all that takes place outside."[12]

Ian Brown

Just over the border from Northumberland is Drumelzier on the Tweed. Leslie Grinsell ascribes the legend of "15th century or earlier, that Merlin was buried 180m north-est of **Drumelzier** church" to the discovery of a Bronze Age cist, or chest-like grave.[13] John S Stuart Glennie has a very detailed account (again, one that excludes *V/N* from the magician's end) of how the wizard was slain by shepherds of the sub-king Meldredus of Tweed, near the *oppidum* or fortified settlement of Dunmellor, precursor of later Drumelzier. He was then buried either below the kirk, or where a cairn formerly stood in a cornfield, each being near where Pausayl stream enters the Tweed and a hawthorn of great antiquity grows. As a "fairy tree", lone hawthorns tend in folklore to be associated with "fairy hills" and other such Otherworld-linked sites.[14]

Wales, not to be outdone, has several places that claim the wizard's ongoing presence.

That he "entered the glass house in **Bardsey**" (the name means Bard's Island) doesn't necessarily put him in the Principality, since there are also two Bardseys in England, one in Yorkshire, one in Lincolnshire, the former having an earthwork castle associated with tales of mysterious treasure; but the Welsh one, an island off the north-west coast, long the home of monks, today a bird sanctuary, seems likeliest. Here glass could possibly refer not to the material but to the Welsh word *glas*, the blue-green colour of the sea, but in either case it is, like Lundy, an instance of a western island, and such islands are traditionally seen as a gateway to the Otherworld.[15]

The other Welsh claimants include a location in the parish of **Llanfihangel Glyn Myfyr**, in Denbighshire, west of Corwen, where Grufudd Hiraethog in the mid-16th century described a small round tomb within the Maen y Bardd (Bard's Stones) of which, in 1693, a Reverend Lloyd left a drawing, saying

[12] John Matthews (2002) *The Book of Arthur: Lost Tales from the Round Table* (Vega) 308

[13] L V Grinsell (1976) *The Folklore of Prehistoric Sites in Britain* (David & Charles)

[14] John S Stuart Glennie (1869) *Arthurian Localities, Their Historical Origin, Chief Country, and Fingalian Relations* (Llanerch Press reprint 1994)

[15] Alderney in the Channel Islands likewise has strong such associations, while readers of *The Lord of the Rings* will recall Tolkien's use of this trope to provide a destination for the departing Elven.

they were also known as the *llys an vab y lleian*, "the court or palace of An ab y lleian", a nickname for Merlin ["son of the *lleian* or nun"].[16]

Finally, three caves in the Principality compete to be the one in which *V/N* imprisoned the mage. **Ogof Myrddin** – the name means Merlin's Cave – is picturesquely sited in an overhang behind a waterfall on the Afon (River) Pib. Even more dramatically sited is the location Spenser endorsed in his epic poem *The Fairie Queene*, a cave below the picturesque ruins of the hilltop castle at **Dinefwr** near Llandeilo, long a stronghold of princes of Dyfed and Deheubarth, and now cared for by Cadw, the Welsh Heritage body, who have in recent years carried out excavation and reconstruction work. Here, in Spenser's version, Merlin is not alone, having the company of his familiar spirits instead.

The third cave, well hidden, nevertheless announces the wizard's presence by startling sound effects: on a still night, put your ear to **Bryn Myrddin** (meaning Merlin's Hill: it rises three miles east of Merlin's supposed birthplace, Carmarthen) and you'll hear chains clank and groans groaned. Take your choice of explanations as to their cause, whether it be *M* lamenting because *V/N* is forcing him to toil on her behalf, or demons expressing their resentment at being made to work for *M*, building a wall of brass to keep *V/N* well away from him, he having, too late, learned his lesson about her wiles!

Having thus listed so many traditional locations for "*M*'s Last Place", I'm still left strongly suspecting that there are others to be found, and would welcome hearing of them from other *Pendragon* readers. ☙

Somehow gets them all
nobody ever asks what
Niamh did after'd
learned his lot then
boxed Myrddin out of
way, off her back, skin-
crawler his wanting as
it'd been so long:
did she spend all her
time magicking young
studlies or just day
in day out laughing or
maybe more restrained
just every so often
smile oddly for no real
reason anyone could tell
nothing to do with what
was in current chatter
stretch her mouth along
her jaw lupine did she
work paid real or false
trickery from behind
mask not letting on
name or nature maybe
even let rumour spread
this mystery could solve
cure anything for any
cowherd to king really
Myrddin back again still
at it young again well
didn't everyone believe
lived his life backward
those eyes a curious
light past hazel into
how seems when about
to be storm evening
not quite dusk caught
on lastland edge towers
& her fingers do they
endless tinker with
round her neckchainhung
geode she says within
only inner eye can see
a hollow crystals spike
into as sphered hidden
stalactites or turrets
& doesn't say if or not
smalled by her mind fed
dregs of her gloating
thought for manna tiny
old longbeard as mouse
in wheel round & round
scurries and when she
spins pendant as kid's
top in her hands the
the chain wound then
unwound that smile
again knowing how he
tumbles head over
heels for her again.

Steve Sneyd

[16] Today, neither stones nor grave remain, say Steve Blake and Scott Lloyd (2000) in *The Keys to Avalon* (Element) 73-4.

Tripping the light fantastic over historical stories, songs and sources

The Grail and France

Sonja Strode

Myth and reality

A couple of months ago at a medieval market in France I came across an interesting book: *Graal et Littératures d'aujourd'hui* (1998). The cover of the book was totally beguiling, being a reproduction of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *La Demoiselle au Saint Graal*. The book's author, Dr Robert Baudry, researches at Angers University, France. He is also the founder of CERMEIL (Centre d'Etudes et de Recherche sur le Merveilleux, L'Étrange et l'Insolite en Littérature[1]); and he has collaborated on a world-wide project regarding a new edition of *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia*.

His 1998 book offers a fascinating insight into the influence and creative inspiration of *le mythe de Graal* and *la légende arthurienne*. Numerous and diverse writers through the centuries have been touched by such magical myths and legends, which represent for Baudry a foundation of French *patrimoine collectif*. With this in mind he travels through an expose of writers ranging from Julien Gracq, Jean Cocteau, Alfred Jarry, Anatole Le Braz, Apollinaire and Umberto Eco, to name just a few. In his exploration he traverses a whole gamut of artistic expression found in cinema, painting, opera, other forms of music, and even cartoons before offering his readers his own views or theory on 'myth' and the development of the 'Grail myth' throughout the centuries. In doing so Baudry (1998) cites equally varied sources, *eg* ethnologist and socialist, A M Hocart (1883-1939); anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942); or religious historian Mircea Eliade – all of whom seemed to have focused on the 'real' behind the myth. Thus (using my translation of Baudry 1998, 371-2):

(1) true myth ... has remained the reflection of harsh daily reality (Hocart);
(2) myth in its primitive form is not only a story told but a lived reality. It is not simple fiction but a living reality (Malinowski);
(3) myth only speaks of what has really happened (Eliade);
(4) myth is a story which describes and reveals via the use of images and symbols a structure, an aspect of our existence (de Rougemont).

C Bristow

George Sand: breaking the mould with Arthurian legend

However it was the more imaginary world of George Sand's fiction, as delineated by Baudry (1998: 43-44), to which my eyes were drawn as I thumbed my way through his weighty tome before buying it.

George Sand (for those not familiar with French writers) is the pseudonym of an early nineteenth century female writer, supporter of democratic values and social justice, whose friends and lovers included Chopin, Liszt, Barbes and Rousseau. Sand's life, interests, and political pursuits are worthy of study by anyone interested in individuals, especially women, who have broken the mould in societal as well as literary avenues.

[1] Translation: *Centre of study and research on the Wonderful, the Strange, and the Unusual in Literature*

Here, though, I concentrate on Sand's links with Arthurian legend. One of her first-names (before her adoption of a pseudonym) was 'Aurore' – French for 'dawn'. Yes, Sand truly represented a 'new dawn' in early nineteenth century popular literature for it was she who re-introduced Arthurian legend into French literature after an impasse of several centuries. This revelation in Baudry's (1998) work was quite a surprise to me, for although I had read some of Sand's work previously, and I had loved her pastoral, Romantic *La Mare au Diable*, her dalliance with Arthurian legend as in her *Consuelo. La Comtesse de Rudostadt*, produced in 1844, was unknown to me.

Consuelo allows Sand to steep herself in secret worlds and wonder via a narrative centring on a young, relatively simple-minded man who undergoes various trials and tribulations. Like Merlin he wanders into the woods, spends the night there, and crosses a treacherous ford, a forbidden frontier – all well known themes, too, in Breton novels. Eventually the young hero, together with his heroine, Consuelo, reaches a hidden château inhabited by what Baudry refers to as *une fraternité d'Invisibles*.

By now maybe you, like Baudry, have compared this château with that castle reached by Gawain in the Grail story. There, in a similar chateau, Sand's heroic couple are initiated into that society or *confrerie* which, allegedly, guards a deep secret. At the end of over 1000 pages the adventure curtails with the couple's marriage. The book, on the other hand, does not finish there. Suddenly, as Baudry indicates, an Epilogue appears revealing the name of the chateau – *Le Saint Graal*. At this point, Baudry tells us, Sand spells out to her readers the nature of *Le Saint Graal* and associated forgotten stories of the Middle Ages.

In his commentary Baudry (1998: 43) signals several other unusual features in Sand's version of the 'Graal'; I paraphrase, in English, some of his words here:

(a) *celestial liquor* that would only symbolise Christ's blood;
(b) ascetic chevaliers devoted in their quest for the grail 'liquor';
(c) the immortality they obtain;
(d) the secret they cannot divulge;
(e) their self-transformation;
(f) their disappearance from this world without passing via death.

Sand, history, and the Grail

According to Baudry, all of Sand's version tends to follow Wolfram's and others rather than the medieval French version. It appears, too, that Sand was also influenced by French historian Henri Martin who, apart from producing copious volumes on the history of France, was a fervent believer in the survival of the 'gallic soul' and druidic beliefs, leading to his publication of *Études d'archeologique celtique* in 1871.

Martin was familiar with Wolfram von Eshenbach's *Percival* – ideas for which, Martin maintained, could have been drawn from *les Templiers* of the south of France. Baudry indicates that during that epoch the 'Graal' would have been kept in Gaul, near the Spanish border. Titurel is said to have founded *le Temple* destined to shelter the sacred Graal with a contribution from Merlin and with the planning of the Temple directed by Joseph of Arimathea (Baudry 1998: 38).

Baudry (1998: 39) informs us that Martin refers to the *templistes* as *les chevaliers du Graal* depicting them as 'brothers' of the great builders *ie les Templiers* whose Order Martin assimilated into a type of ascetic Free-Masonry which, purportedly, would inject new life into the Saint Graal; Baudry though seems sceptical. Nevertheless, as Baudry states, it is highly likely that Martin's views would have been disseminated even more widely thanks to Sand's acclaimed *Consuelo*. A final point on Martin: Baudry further asserts Martin had little knowledge of or else decided to ignore Chrétien de Troyes.

Unearthing popular myths: Hersart de La Villemarque

At this point I would like to draw the reader's attention to some notable Breton writers – again highlighted and commented upon in Baudry's work (1998). One writer in particular, namely Hersart de La Villemarque (or 'Hersart' in brief), is my focus here. Born in 1815, Hersart is a folklore pioneer who was particularly fond of popular songs from

the Finistere region of Brittany, especially those, Baudry reminds us (35-36), mixed with a more 'Arthurian' flavour. On the one hand reference to his work reveals some of what I have termed processes of 'othering' and 'distinction' to which I referred in a previous article of mine (Strode 2005). On the other hand, Baudry's revelations unearth interesting comments possibly capable of provocative debate regarding 'ownership' of Arthurian legends and related myths.

In 1842 Hersart produced an essay in his *Contes Populaires des Anciens Bretons* where he asserted the Graal's symbolic use as part of the ritual of bardic initiation – something traditionally carried out at the heart of a type of Free-Masonry which would have inherited this druidic knowledge (Baudry 1998: 92 and 36). Nineteenth-century readers of Arthurian legends would have held the view that such works were purely a French invention. Baudry awakes us to Hersart's desire to prove that both the Welsh and Armorican branches of Breton literature were the Celtic roots which had formerly served as a model to Round Table poets. These views were ignored however by official bodies, according to Baudry (1998: 36) who also argues for the importance of Hersart's famous *Contes Populaires*, deemed equivalent to Chrétien de Troyes' novels. Thus we note: Gherent for *Erec and Enide*; Owen for *Yvain*; Peredur for *Percival*.

A comparison is made by Baudry (1998: 36) with similar characters found in legends emanating from the Côtes D'Armor area of Brittany and other Breton 'counties'. *Peronnik* is one: it is a version collected by a farmer in Vannes, southern Brittany. Outlined are various similarities in the two narratives, including the use of the prefix 'per' meaning *bassin* or 'pool' where the adventure begins. Was Sand influenced by this, since the setting for one of her books is *La Mare au Diable* or 'The Devil's Pool'?

Linked to the notion of a pool is *Peronnik*, in particular a quest for a pool of gold, analogous with the Grail quest. Likewise in *Peronnik* appears a diamond-studded lance! The hero, Peronnik, is also an innocent, relatively naïve or 'simple' soul who has to undergo numerous trials leading him on to higher places.

Baudry questions why Hersart's views were neglected by certain official quarters and for so long. Nowadays such folklore richness and Arthurian motifs thread through the work of many writers in France and beyond.

Merlin's voice: myth and reality

Hersart seems to aptly sum up the literary Arthurian legend malaise occurring at the start of nineteenth century France that George Sand eventually relieved. Speaking about what he recognises as *la voix de Merlin* Hersart states (I translate from Hersart de La Villemarque 2001: 240):

"This voice has also ceased speaking to poets and novelists in Europe. After they had treated Merlin with all sorts of respect and had owed him, in return, the best literary fortune, quite insensitively he was neglected and they finished by making fun of him; they bear the pain of their error".

Hersart also outlines how this respect was in evidence long before George Sand's adoption of Arthurian legend; he shows how Merlin in particular has aided the shaping of other non-literary avenues, even, perhaps, of history itself.[2] Thus Hersart refers to many individuals whose ideas or life trajectory Merlin – or rather associated myths and legends about him – has helped shape. One such was a Welsh priest from the Marches, chaplain to Henry 1's grandson, William or Guillaume. Others have included many English kings seeking solutions to great events via reference to Merlin's predictions without actually any probing on their part into the source of these. The result was that the Welsh were labelled as gifted seers or prophets (Hersart 2001:

[2] *Two Merlins?* Some suggest that two bards bore the name of Merlin: one born of a Christian woman and Roman soldier in the fifth century, under the rule of Ambrosius. This Merlin was said to have been the first divine Seer of his time; the other accidentally killed his nephew. That Merlin wore around his neck the symbol of Cambrian chieftains – a golden torque. He is believed to have lived at the end of the sixth century when he allegedly withdrew to the forests (Hersart 1997: 147f).

175). Hersart wonders if the 'inventors of prophecy' ended up believing their stories because certainly some of them came true. In this way some of the most powerful leaders in the Middle Ages fell under Merlin's spell. One such eminent person was the Bishop of Lincoln, nephew to Roger of Salisbury, who asked Geoffrey de Monmouth to translate Merlin's prophecies, apparently, to teach those who did not know any Breton (176).

In a paragraph taken by Hersart from the Latin in which Geoffrey de Monmouth delineates his rationale for doing the translations, it is clear that the public mood was bubbling with talk of Merlin. This mood pervaded the highest social milieux of the land. Since the Bishop of Lincoln was highly regarded by both clergy and lay people Geoffrey wished to answer his requests. Thus he translated into Latin the verse which the people were accustomed to say or sing in Breton, only following orders and 'repeating on his flute the popular tune' (my translation of Hersart 2001: 176). George Sand, of course, played the same 'popular melodies' years later with her *Consuelo*.

The Count of Gloucester and his Welsh princess had also requested a translation by the same author. Geoffrey de Monmouth's translations were criticised in some quarters, however; subsequently nevertheless these were overwhelmed by eulogies warmly welcoming his work, leaving his and Merlin's adversaries duly conquered (Hesart 2001: 177, my translation):

"The bards took their revenge at least, as far as opinion was concerned; they triumphed over their old oppressors".

Merlin's authority, on a par with David's (177), therefore became a uniting force between divided camps. Numerous copies of Geoffrey's work circulated bearing the Latin translations – writings snatched up as soon as they were produced, then sent far and wide throughout Europe as far as Iceland.

Merlin's influence even enveloped twelfth-century doctors and historians. Herodotus of Normandy was similarly struck especially by his realisation that historical events he was documenting had been predicted 600 years earlier by Merlin in the presence of the King of Great Britain. Abbeys, courts, castles and manor houses in France and in England were filled with quotations from Merlin, interpreted in various ways, always believed, and with each person searching within them for what they hoped to find (182). Alain de Lille, a famous historian from the Paris Académie, devoted much time and writing to Merlin, the latter believed by Hersart to have been in no way inspired by the devil or to be the son of Satan. For Alain (again I translate from Hersart 2001: 182) it is

"God who blows breath into his spirit and who has chosen his prophets in all nations. He could use Merlin like he used Job who was neither Christian nor Jew."

The power of myth and legend

It can be argued, of course, as Hersart does (191-200) that it was the very fear of the devil and a misuse of Arthurian legend, especially Merlin's prophecies, which were instrumental in both the condemnation of Joan of Arc and her death, following accusations of being an evil witch, worshipper of *fontaines* or wells, trees, and evil spirits (197). In short (here I paraphrase Hersart) an old 'allegorical song sung by the bards of old ... had been reworked to serve the interests which I will soon speak of and, modified in this way, it had passed from the mouths of Breton people to those of people living abroad' (Hersart 2001: 194).[3] Aiding and abetting in this climate

[3] *Merlin in Breton and Welsh poetry*
Merlin certainly appears to have been a mythical, historical and legendary figure appearing in Welsh and Breton poetry. Some Welsh poems, however, seem to have been changed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries for reasons of 'national interest', according to Hersart (1997: 147).
With regard to the Breton poems referring to Merlin, there seems to have been fewer of them. Hersart signals four in his 1997 book. These contain the following themes:
(a) Merlin's infancy told via a *chanson de nourrice* where his mother, trying to get him to sleep, tells or sings to him about his mythical origins (148-51).
(b) Merlin is depicted as a seer or prophet, certainly 'magical' (151).
(c) Merlin is a bard and harp player in this complete ballad (152-57).

of fear and witch-hunt of Joan were statements issued by Jean de Cornouaille and Alain de Lille. Joan was thus depicted as *La Pucelle* ("Virgin") who would emerge from *le bois chenu*, destined to put an end to a scourge of evil, her ultimate prize of Caledonian forests in one hand, and London Tower in another! Such was the view at the time. *Le bois chenu* was subsequently linked to a woody area near to the Marches of Lorraine where Joan lived, even though Merlin had made no such claim regarding Lorraine. Further some aspects of the Pucelle story or legend had been Alain's interpretation of folklore emanating from the Lille area. As Hersart affirms, however, what then occurred in history remains one of the greatest of human aberrations and tragedies (200). Some of the most erudite people of the time, both on French and English sides, brought to bear arguments to support the thesis that Joan was *La Pucelle* of Merlin's prophecy. Each party, Hersart claims, used the Merlin story and his predictions to justify their own different position and interests.

Concluding thoughts

Merlin, myth and legend have enchanted many lives and minds as historical study reveals. They also touched and shaped the lives of two unforgettable women – unforgettable irrespective of issues of 'taste', interest, or belief in literature or religion. One woman's fate, that of Joan of Arc who perhaps rather naively or unwittingly referred to herself as a *pucelle* with a small 'p' (Hersart 2001: 192) rekindles notions of darkness in the souls of many in the world, past and present. The other woman, George Sand endeavoured to open the dark doors in literary spaces at a time of social and/or literary exclusion of Merlin and other Arthurian myths and legends. Ironically both women had to adopt some aspects of what some may call a 'male' persona: certainly different from the then 'female' norm. Thus Joan broke the mould and led a military force; George, with her male pseudonym, broke a literary mould. Both help shine some light on the fiction and facts operating in many of our 'play' and power spaces.

Merlin is an enigmatic personality (see note below). Above we have seen the part he played in both women's lives as well as in the lives and minds of other people, predominantly male, as signalled above. Not that Merlin is or should be the property of either sex (although Viviane may disagree!). Yet he often appears as some membranous, ethereal agent, gifted in observation, reasoning, predictive and catalytic powers; simultaneously, too, his 'voice', it seems, can offer us a door into darkness or into light. How we 'hear' it may be dependent on our position in the scheme of things. Yet Merlin often offers a clear, unequivocal way, albeit in symbolic language. After his time of darkness

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(d) Merlin's conversion where instrumental in this is an amiable Breton Saint known as Kadok or Kado (157-58).

All the above poems manifest ancient Celtic beliefs; the struggle between those and Christianity; and the coming of what is described as *le bon genie de la nation bretonne* – the latter being a powerful magician with druidic roots. He is said to roam the forests accompanied either by a black dog or a wolf, ever searching for 'a sea serpent's red egg', believed to be invested with insuperable powers (159). On his journeys he would gather, along with mistletoe, the golden grass or medicinal herb highly favoured in rural Brittany.

Referring to (d) above, Hersart purports that some of the beautiful utterances found in that ballad or poem are very similar to those found in the Welsh poet's Lywarc'h Hen's work: *Namyn Duw nid oes devin* ('Apart from God there is no other divine being') (159). He then postulates that perhaps the Bishop responsible for Merlin's conversion had read these words. Other similarities between Welsh and Breton poems are noted by Hersart, including a shared love Bretons and Welsh had of apples which, apparently, led Merlin into a trap full of his beloved fruit! (160).

A poem from twelfth-century Wales written in Latin also adheres closely to Merlinesque language. Merlin, in that poem, is depicted as travelling through the forest; he alights upon a spring surrounded by apple trees. He shares the fruit with his companions. Soon all show signs of having been poisoned – seemingly by a former lover of Merlin's, seeking her revenge! His 'good star' saves him! A similar story is found in a Breton poem (160).

when Taliesin came to his rescue, indicating the healing powers of a nearby 'source' or Spring, Merlin spoke to Gwendydd.

"Even if the snake prowls in the shadows, it can still do nothing against the bear" (Markale 2000: 248-9, my translation).

Maybe it is an apt moment to insert here some of Tennyson's words directed at Merlin, as cited by Hersart de La Villemarque with my own translation (233):

The path of life will be filled with flowers for me,
With you as my sole guide and master, You!

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Merlin's Net

Jodrell Bank, Cheshire,
holding great Merlin's wide net –
purse seine telescope

star-birth's gas and dust –
a bright yellow ring of cloud
in infrared light

close Andromeda,
showing its bright clouded lights
in its spinning gas

in a magnet field,
synchrotron radiation,
electrons darting

gamma-ray bursters –
what extra-galactical
powerful event?

Bill West

Merlin and the Birth of Arthur *Ian Brown*

The Conjuration

Mind's eye begets icon;
Mage forms image.
  Description inscribed in grimoire;
  Grammar creates matrix.
Spell intoned so words become flesh;
Spirit breathed into life-filled limbs;
  Song works its enchantment...
But the creature, free-spirited,
  weaves its own glamour
    and the beguiler is beguiled.

Chris Lovegrove

Green Knight

Dark god of light: 2

Shani Oates

Wasteland

Optical phenomena known as 'Fata Morgana', resulting from a temperature inversion causes objects on the horizon to appear as elevated and elongated, suggesting 'fairy castles' to those of a poetic persuasion[1]. Nevertheless, poets and mystics have for millennia accepted this domain as that of the Goddess, of Fate and her Castle that spins between the worlds a destination of aspiration. Fate, aspected as many goddesses over this time, has accorded her many names: Morgana, Morgan la fey, Morrighan, Macha, Three/Triple Mothers, the Norns, the daughters of Allah, Kybele, Kali and Hekate. She is the organizing principle behind the narrative within the text of the *Green Knight* tale. She is the Lady of the Castle and her presence though limited is significant. As Goddess of sovereignty and fate she tests Gawain both here and in the tale of Lady Ragnall, though in the latter he does become her lover and champion. Matthews suggests this implies Morgana as the dark, Winter Queen, with Launcelot championing Guinevere as the Summer Queen (1993: 41-42). Whilst this indeed has great symbolic significance within Celtic folklore relating to the forces of nature and the changing seasons, it masks the praeternatural – the spirit realms beyond what we can 'see'. Morgana tests Gawain in both worlds, in Camelot and in the otherworldly Castle of Lord and Lady Bertilak de Hautdesert within the wasteland.

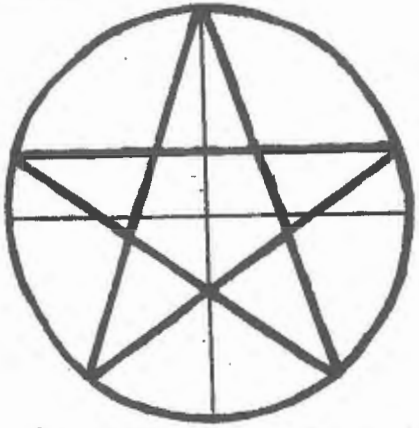
According to *The Dictionary of Symbols* (Cirlot, 1983: 205) the wasteland / marshlands that Gawain encounters symbolises the decomposition of the spirit. Here the elementals actuate the hand of fate in a pre-determined theatre of spectacles. Air and fire (active) are absent from the marshland, but earth and water (passive) are prevalent, both aligned powers to Al Khidir / Nagas / Green Knight. Immediately, Gawain is out of his depth in an alien, hostile landscape, seriously disadvantaged. Peril looms and the balance is tipped against him. As a pawn of the Goddess, he must stave off his own reckless and impatient nature; if he loses his wits, he is doomed to failure. Fourteenth-century literary allegories had returned to the devolvement of women, incorporating them only as vehicles of lust and temptation; they had lost their higher purpose as spiritual guides and initiators. Thus marginalized, they represent sin and the call away from duty and honour. Yet the poet does in fact warn us of the 'fate' that Lady Bertilak holds within her concealed nature. It is more than a play for love. Her purpose is clear. Barren landscapes also reflect the barren psyche and thus denote his inability to conclude his mission. Unable to recognize this scene as Hell – place of transformation – Gawain is truly doomed.

Spiritual elevation / enlightenment is perceived by Heer (1993: 147) as attainable only via transformation through 'Hell' engendered by encounters with the 'Devil' himself, the force for change and empowerment. Painful, rigorous trials facilitate a breach beyond the abyss towards salvation. Enchanted castles, fearful domains and the underworld are all classic motifs with this ancient process. Heer (*ibid*) further postulates Gnostic influences as germane to the medieval literary genre, providing a crisis of conscience within the reader. Examples of this may be found in the poem *Nekyia*, in which powerful and sophisticated oriental traditions are coupled with depth psychology, paralleling the trials of Gawain. Rationalising such devices as indicative of a return to the archaic and mystical power of paganism, Heer (*ibid*) concludes them to be a clear rejection of Christian preaching on morality.

John and Caitlin Matthews (1995: 162) adopt the popular view of the wasteland as the result of the abuse of power, a punishment for the loss of sovereignty, restoration of which will only occur when the spirituality of the Goddess is once again accepted as the prime mover.

[1] www.absoluteastronomy.com

Through union with her (Gnostic) priest, the Fisher King (Pelles – hence *pellar* for 'wiseman'), the land will be replenished and fecund once more. Once again, though relevant on one level, this oversimplification, paradoxically, obfuscates the true motive and goal of the grail legends. Although the grail is not mentioned within the tale of the Green Knight text, the author would have expected his audience / readers to be familiar with the many earlier grail legends through the works of Chrétien de Troyes, Wolfram von Eschenbach, Robert de Borron, the *Mabinogion* and others.



Once again we encounter occult motifs; the Grail has five forms, there are five grail knights: Gawain, Perceval, Launcelot, Galahad and Bors. Within this tale, Gawain's shield is emblazoned with a pentagram, a five sided symbol that upholds the five knightly virtues: generosity, courtesy, chivalry, chastity and piety[2]. It also represents the five senses, but this endless knot also denotes another link to Mars / Teutates, of severity yet harmony through strife and conflict. Symbol of the second degree in Gardnerian Wicca, the initiate is instructed to face their demons, to integrate the shadow / dark in order to become whole / holy and perceive the light. This ancient symbol, discovered in the dust of Sumer as an insignia of imperial power, was later developed by the Babylonians into a symbol of the five directions and major planets. For the Druids it represented the highest Godhead. But, most intriguingly, for the Greeks it became associated with the pentemychos (the five chambers of the heart), esoterically the gateway between the liminal realms of time and space, from the earthly plane of being to those of Tartaros – the boundless deep, the darkness of the abyss[3]. Hades, both a place and (Greek) God of the Underworld, represents the *Lux Mundi* in the fullest sense. All the treasures of the earth place him cognate with the Naga King, whose serpentine form correlates as the serpent of Wisdom, avatar of the divine mind (*nous*), imparting enlightenment and immortality to the Hero within *Nekyia* after his successful descent into the underworld castle and survival of rigorous trials within the city of the dead (Heer 1993: 157). His re-birth and salvation confirms his accession as *perfectus*, a priest of the pure.

Hekate, mistress of Fate, rules the underworld as the Lady of Tartaros; key holder, gateway and guardian she is invoked by Medea in the play by Euripides with the words *she who dwells in my inmost chamber* – the *mychos*[4]. By association, this relates to the soul as vehicle as it travels the wheel of life that she spins. Pythagoras considered this inmost chamber to be the seat of the soul and the core of being (*ibid*). Of course, symbolically the pentagram device upon his shield may simply represent the soul (*psyche*) as it journeys towards love (*eros*) as it yearns for enlightenment (*Unio Mystica*). Upon the reverse of Gawain's shield was an image of the 'Virgin', which if black would relate to her role as mistress of his fate on a deeper level. Serving then as an emblem of fate and of truth, his destiny was assured.

Severed head

Conceptually, the beheading game signifies much more than the defeat of one 'king' over another, or even more than the life and death aspects of the cycle of nature. It maintains elements of archaic beliefs associated with the Cult of the Head. Throughout the ancient world,

[2] www.mysticalplanet.com

[3] www.absoluteastronomy.com

[4] www.absoluteastronomy.com

the head was revered as the seat of power, of will and intellect. To take someone's head was in effect an act of subsumation. Those warriors and priests who carried heads as trophies or oracles, as in the legend of Bran the Blessed, were able to directly receive inspiration (literally *in-spirit*) from communion with and through them. A form of spirit possession also associated with the traditions of the Sufis via Al Khidir.

Sufis frequently use the term 'dancing headless' to denote a spirit entranced state, reached when passion overwhelms the intellect, the mind, rational seat of power. Such love under (true) will motivates apotheosis. In the rites of Mithras, a crown is removed / rejected by the aspirant, again to indicate the removal of the seat of intellect, the submission of the heart (fate) to the highest Love. Within the initiatory traditions of the Sufis also lies the ritual of 'removing' the head to engender realisation before replacing it as an act of re-birth into the sacred Mysteries. Destroy in order to become. Be-heading of initiates is also prevalent within the Cult of Kali, dark Goddess of Fate, Destiny and Time, for she is depicted holding aloft the severed head, exclaiming *he who loseth his life for me shall find it.* Wildly she dances upon the body of Shiva, maintaining ecstatic union as she performs her dance of creation from destruction (Campbell 1973: 170).

Chris Lovegrove

In all these things, the soul yearns for release, seeking as lover, union with the beloved – *Unio Mystica*, the alchemical fusion of the heart / soul (*mychos* or *psyche*) with the mind / spirit (*nous / pneuma)* of God. Within the *Greek Magical (London) Papyrus*, the litany invokes the 'Headless' One, erroneously cast as the Bornless One in one of the most arresting rites of true apotheosis I have ever encountered. Adapted from a rite of exorcism by Crowley it exemplifies the principle of at-one-ment with the Father (Goetia 1997: 12). That many ancient God-forms have animal masks or heads of beasts symbolic of certain pre-requisite qualities suggests to me a greater than totemic relevance. Association and identification with each head / mask facilitates elevation of consciousness into a spiritual merger, where the wearers own identity is suspended and replaced by the one invoked.

Medieval alchemists regarded the first stage of the process as the death of matter, the removal of flesh from the bone, revealing the true *heart of the matter*, a metaphor for the destruction of bodily passions that impede the progress of the soul... "If any man cuts off his head..." refers to essential decay for the transmutation of matter / *hyle* (Seligman 1997: 136). It is the mind of God (the divine self-*nous)* that replaces our own in the be-heading. As the seat of intellect, the head's removal leads to death. Re-birth occurs when it is replaced by a god form, thinking, seeing, feeling and becoming that deity – dancing headless, the body is ravaged by the ecstasy of union, as the heart / soul (*mychos*) animates the body in the bliss of *Premdeha* (union). Persian Muslims retained much of their former mystical heritage from Mithraism. Regardie (1970: 107) describes an initiate's three day death trance in the Osirion that culminates with the Crown of Glory emblazoning their head as a mandorla of solar light, *Xvarenah* divinely bestowed light nimbus of magickal sovereignty transfigures the mystic, separating the soul from the profane body; momentarily they are *cit*, pure consciousness. Love and death are not a duality but a unity.

"The Lover, beloved and love are one, for in the world of unity, all become one" (Campbell 1973: 162).

Meeting with the Goddess and at-one-ment through the Father binds and formulates two mythical concepts: *Yin* and *Yang* form an holistic holiness, the true meaning of androgyny as a spiritual not physical condition; Truth and Beauty as the Mother and Father 'Gods', whose Mysteries inculcate our creation, destruction and evolution into perfection / enlightenment – *Nirvana.* The female principle is *yum* / time; the male principle is *yab* / eternity – the tantric principle of Oneness, the union that creates the Universe.

Campbell (1973: 136-7) believes the Green Knight to act as Mystagogue, and cogently, this final rite of the fully realised soul within the Mithraic litany entitles the aspirant with the grade of 'Father', priest and earthly representative of the Celestial (solar) Father, spouse of (lunar) Anahita; a union of Sun and Moon. They are the spiritual fire, the heart of the universe. This spiritual fire represents the Holy Grail in the Arthurian Legends. Glorious visions are activated by the questers as they interact, engage and temper their passions in and beyond these material realms.

Harmony

Analysing the interplay of archetypes within the Grail Legends, it is clear that Gawain, like Launcelot, submits to worldly gifts and temptations of the flesh rather than spirit, a theme the author of *The Green Knight* used to great effect. Being too worldly, Gawain only glimpses the mystery; he fails to find the grail. Only Galahad, son of the flawed Launcelot and the Grail Maiden is pure enough to attain his spiritual goal. Perceval is assigned the role of guardian within the 'Castle'. Launcelot, the fallen and Bors remain on the periphery, having faith and vision but not the steadfast purity of the other three, but most ostensibly manifest within Galahad. Yet Bors receives his mission to bring the wonder of the Mystery to the outside world (Matthews 1996: 5). Matthews (*ibid* 36) posits independent salvation as an idiom of the Mysteries, wherein all questers are inherently mystics seeking apotheosis. Galahad was therefore pre-destined to succeed where others had failed. As the Angels carried him aloft, his parting words to the others were "... remember me to my father, and as soon as you see him, bid him remember this unstable world ..." [*ibid* 106]. This statement invites comparison with the Buddhist principle of impermanence. By successfully combining heart and mind, Galahad achieves enlightenment. Perceval, ascetic Holy Fool, impetuous but ignorant of his destiny, innocent and impervious to the distractions of the world is the bridge by which we all have access to the path and thus he is in opposition to the earthly passions of Bors, the way of the heart alone. The prize requires total harmony, equilibrium of spirit within the absolute face of divinity (*ibid* 107-112).

Unlike modern psychoanalysis, where the process of individuation is to release the patient from his own private 'Hell', to remove obstacles of assimilation and friction within a mundane existence, the purpose of the mysteries is not to place the individual back into a 'safer' environment, but to open their eyes to waken them from the sleep of ages to procure for them the true vision via detachment from delusion, achieved by destruction of their urbane impulses (Campbell 1973:164-5).

"Life therein, begotten by the Father is
compounded of Her dark and His Light.
We are conceived in Her and dwell,
removed from the Father, but when we
pass from the womb of time at death
[which is our birth into eternity] we are
given into His hands. The wise realize,
even within this womb, that they have
come from and are returning to the
Father, while the very wise know that he
and she are in substance One."
(Campbell 1973:169)

Gawain, blinded by his desire to live, rejected this gift of harmony offered through his ennoblement in acceptance of women as initiators and psychopomps, as their roles of the handmaidens of fate; this trust and surrender would have engineered his success. Perceiving them only as worldly creatures caused him to accept the gift of the enchanted girdle, failing to see the spiritual impedance in this act. Within

Hindu mythology, both male and female gods wear belts/cords denoting sacrifice, puberty, manhood, initiation and protection, fertility respectively. They also represent reality, passion and inertia, fundamental qualities of matter (2004: 31-32). Exploring these concepts further, Campbell (1973: 100, 129) interprets these cords to represent the threshold or sun-door indicating the wearer is at once in time and eternity. Lady Bertilak's gift of a girdle/cord becomes significant in this understanding. It's relevance no mere enchantment; moreover, it is green, the fairy hue of both the Green Knight and his Mistress (Fate), and therefore represents his initiatory powers of death/eternity and her protective powers of life/time. Girdles are of course strong literary devices, indicative of magickal dominion and the binding love/eroticism of the Goddess. But Gawain, in this later tale clearly rejects her love in favour of saving his skin.

But Lady Bertilak's role is ambivalent, she does not judge him, serving a higher purpose as the Hag, not the temptress; she simply acts out her role as instrument of his own fate. Evil is not distinct from good, the boundary is blurred; only the goal renders the cause pure. She wished him no malice, nor harm; there was no hostility, the choice was his, free will must prevail. So, blind to his fate, he lost his salvation. Pure love above lust (in the broadest sense) exalts the initiate beyond the mundane into the spiritual realms.

So as Gawain lay down and bared his neck within the Green Chapel, he failed to grasp the irony of his own observation of this dark and terrible place where one "might meet the devil himself" (Jones 1964: 111). He also failed to recognize and assimilate his passion for life, suppressing rather than embracing it, concealing rather than revealing it. He shunned death; flinching, he drew back from its Mysteries, shrinking from its embrace. He balked at the sun-door, the gate of wonders. He defaulted the vision of Eden, even as the grail slipped away from him. A vacuum gnawed at his wretched soul. Out of sync with his true will, the prize had eluded him. Thus he retained his 'head', for his struggle was with life, not death.

Union

Give all to receive all, total surrender and trust, burn always with passion. The Green Knight invites and challenges us to become, to embrace fully the mysteries of life and death, the agony and ecstasy of union and separation, the knowledge and horror of Truth and the awesome Beauty of being. Androgyny is of the spirit, not the flesh, a common misunderstanding; it is perfection and that can never occur in the physical realms of matter for once achieved, the spirit, beyond gender classification is freed from it. The sufferer within is that divine being, the redeemer waiting to be redeemed, the protecting 'Father' and we are one – the 'hunter and hunted are but one' (Roy Bowers). The enemy, the challenger, the guardian at the gate is both God and Satan, the Luciferian Gnostic principle of Light, Truth and Beauty.

Both paradise and hell co-exist upon this plane; we create and live with either, dependant upon our actions. This is Karma, the law of cause and effect, in the here and now, not some nebulous future. Only the righteous shall prevail to become one with the Universal Spirit – *Haq*, all others will be annihilated into eternal oblivion. Love is thus revealed as the *Pleroma* of the Law, ourselves as products of god. Love is submission. Love under (true) Will. Love is the Way, the Tao, should you offer anything less?

But this arduous path was never more so than during the medieval period, when Thomas Aquinas headed the intellectual camp of hard Aristotelian reason and logic; the mystical, intuitive, experiential camp was led by Francis of Assisi, fired by the passion of Rumi. Yet intellect is distant and cold; passion is chaotic and destructive. For true gnosis, one must harness passion to intellect, a marriage of heart and mind – evolve, in order to truly know and understand God, the *Unio Mystica*, allegorised as the marriage of the Sun and the Moon.

There are three alchemical stages in which we may approach *Unio Mystica*:

1	2	3
matter	soul	spirit
body	heart	heart/head
action	devotion	contemplation
ritual	prayer	mediation
service	worship	reflection

The final stage is mystical perception: *at-one-ment; Nirvana; Samadhi; premdeha; Unio Mystica* – the crown achievement of the mystic.

These basic principles filtered into literary motifs that utilised allegory as a vehicle of illumination, of spiritual instruction, and the author leaves us in no doubt of Gawain's miserable plight. The lament of failed attainment is not however as Brian Jones (1964: 11) asserts an anti-climax, for the Mystery revealed is one of great subtlety. It absolutely matters not whether the message is pagan, masked by Christian ideals or vice-versa, for it is delivered intact. Neither is it about the 'sin' of imperfection. In fact sin does not mean that which is wrong or evil, it simply represents those 'things' that keep us from God, in other words the 'things' that distract us, bar our way, shift our focus from a higher purpose. Rather, the poem is about the failure to attain ones destiny, to be blind to the choices that fate offers us. To miss the mark: *hamartia* (sin). Gawain's free will allowed him to reject and lose the ultimate prize; this tale is therefore cautionary. Mankind is given free will by the Creator and in order to receive the ultimate prize it must be fully surrendered – the real meaning of 'perfect love and perfect trust'.[5]

[5] Many leading academics believe the landscapes within *The Green Knight* reflect those of Staffordshire, the most likely origin of the unknown poet himself. 'Lud's Church' in the Dane Valley, an eerie, vetivert rich outcrop plausibly offers the inspiration behind the poet's description of the Green Chapel. Few visitors could fail to attest its authenticity in terms of both topography and geomancy.

In fate and the overcoming of fate lies the true Grail.

Roy Bowers

You will become who you are.

Nietzche

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The British Night Sky in 500 AD

Alastair McBeath

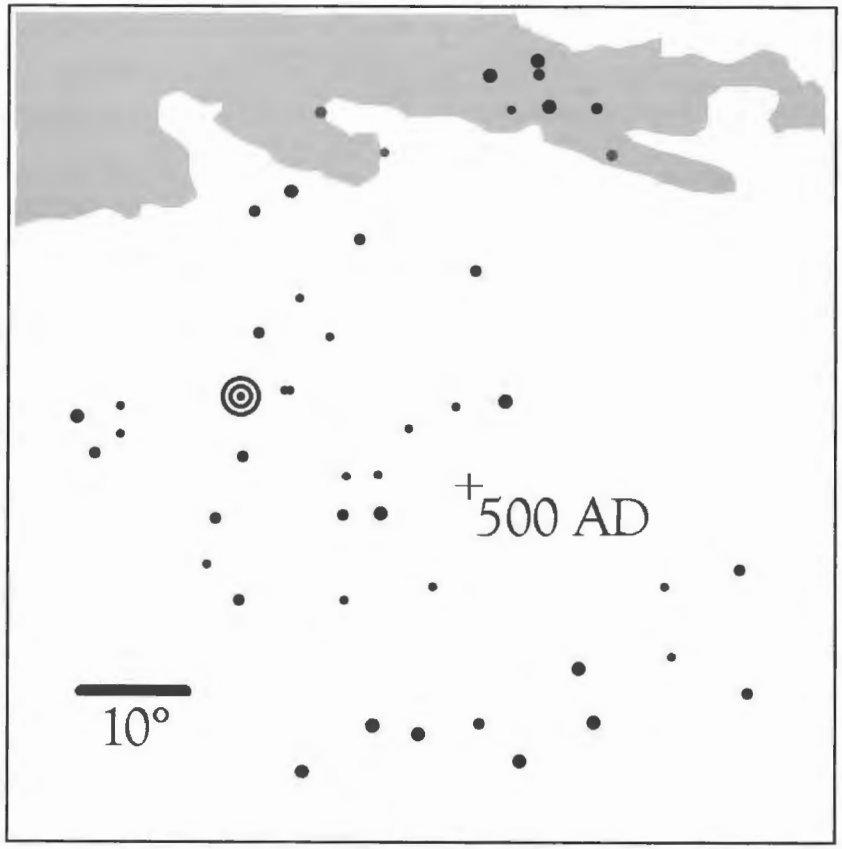

Figure 1. *A sketch map showing selected stars near the modern north celestial poles, drawn in a negative view (black stars, white sky) for clarity. The size of the star-circles indicates relative star brightnesses (larger = brighter), and the main part of the Milky Way in this region is shown shaded. A labelled cross marks the rotational pole in 500 AD, while the target symbol gives the ecliptic pole. The 10 degree scale-bar is roughly the distance across the clenched knuckles of a hand held at arm's length from the eye. To help with orientation, the "M"-shaped group of stars in the Milky Way to the top centre right is the constellation Cassiopeia, while the seven stars in a saucepan-profile shape near the bottom form the "Plough" or "Big Dipper" asterism in Ursa Major, the Great Bear. The pole and star positions here are based on a diagram in Ottewell (1983, 28).*

Introduction

Viewing a clear starry sky far from city lights still creates a profound sense of awe and wonder today. It is something all thoughtful parents want their children to see. No wonder the ancients projected their gods, heroes and things of importance onto that most magnificent of backdrops. Over the course of a typical human lifetime, the night sky's stars seem unchanging, the clichéd constant in an uncertain world, yet there are very subtle shifts which happen even during the biblical three-score-years-and-ten, which, though unnoticeable except to keen observers using specialised instruments over a period of this length, have a more significant impact on longer timescales, such as going back 1500 years to the "historical Arthurian" period, around 500 AD. This article follows on from my earlier timeline of astronomical and meteorological events in the decades to either side of this time (*Pendragon XXXII*: 2, 17-20), and highlights some of the known key differences in how the sky appeared then compared to now.

Precession

This topic has been touched on before in these pages. Of all the predictable effects, it has by far the greatest influence on where and when we see certain stars in the sky, over millennial epochs.

As most people know, the Earth spins on its axis once a day, giving us day and night, producing the effect of the stars, Sun, Moon and planets rising and setting. However, this diurnal spin means the Earth is not a true sphere, but instead is slightly oval – that is, its polar and equatorial diameters are not the same - leading to an equatorial bulge of a little over 42 km comparing the two. This kind of effect happens with many larger rotating objects in space. Among the planets of the Solar System, the giant Jupiter shows it most, having a markedly oblate form in a telescope or on any good images of the planet's disc as seen from Earth.

Furthermore, the Earth's spin-axis is tilted compared to the plane of its orbit. This orbital plane projected into the sky is the imaginary line of the ecliptic, which runs through the zodiacal constellations. All the other main planets in our Solar System have similar orbital planes, which is why they always seem to be near the ecliptic in the sky. As the Earth orbits the Sun, the Sun is never off the ecliptic.

The Earth's axial tilt is at 23½° to the ecliptic plane, which helps give us our seasons here in Britain, amongst other things. The gravitational pull of all the other bodies orbiting close to the ecliptic, plus that of the Sun, continually tugs at the Earth's equatorial bulge to try to force it to line up with the ecliptic, but the Earth's spin stops this from happening. The resultant battle between these forces causes the Earth's axis to perpetually tilt around the ideal alignment.

For an earthly observer, the practical upshot of this is that the position of the north and south rotational poles in the sky seem to change with respect to the stars, albeit very, very slowly. Each pole draws an imaginary ring in the sky 47° in diameter (twice the Earth's axial tilt) centred on the respective ecliptic pole. The northern ecliptic pole is fixed in the first coil of the constellation *Draco*, the Dragon. Tracing the ring's circumference proceeds at the sedate pace of one degree every 71.6 years (making a curious near-coincidence with the biblical human lifespan). Consequently, the full circle is completed once in 25,800 years or so, a continual process of "moving on", whose name derives from the Latin *praecessio*, "to go before".

The pole in 500

We live at an amazing time in the precessional cycle in the northern hemisphere, because we currently have the brightest, closest rotational pole star from the entire circuit, logically, if unimaginatively, called *Polaris* (Latin: "of the pole", from the noun *polus*, "the pole"). In 2006, Polaris was 0.72° from the pole. A century from now it will be at its closest, 0.42° away. Other brighter stars will be pole stars in their own time. By far the brightest is the glittering blue-white Vega in *Lyra*, the Lyre, which now lies almost overhead from Britain at midnight near the summer solstice. It was the pole star around 12,000 BC, and will be again towards 14,000 AD. However, none of these brighter alternatives will come as close to the pole

as our *Polaris*.

The name *Polaris* was first used for this star during the Renaissance (Kunitzsch & Smart 1986, 58), when the star was less than five degrees from the pole. Back in 500 AD, the pole lay virtually equidistantly from two almost identically bright stars in the constellation of *Ursa Minor*, the Little Bear, as *Figure 1* shows, there with *Polaris* to the pole's upper right, and the other, now called *Kochab*, to its lower left. The origins of *Kochab*'s name are uncertain, but may derive from the Arabic *kaukab*, unhelpfully meaning just "star" (*loc cit*), and also not applied to this star before *c* 1500 AD.

Consequently, there was no clear pole star in 500 AD. Human nature being reluctant to change in general, it is likely that the star we modernly call *Kochab* was still thought of as the only polar guide at this time. *Kochab* was nearest the pole *c* 1000 BC, about four degrees away, but was still the closest bright star up to c.500 AD, though increasingly distant from the true pole. Those most knowledgeable could have worked out that bisecting the line from our *Polaris* to *Kochab* would have given a more accurate location by *c* 500, however. The gradual nudging of precession would have meant that, by about 1000 AD, any keen observers should have preferred *Polaris*, or the fainter star next to it, used in forming *Ursa Minor*, modernly known as *Delta Ursae Minoris*, or sometimes *Yildun* – a misspelling of the Turkish *yildiz*, "star" – only used post-1800 AD however (*loc cit*). That "Polaris" as a name for the current pole star first appeared in the period from *c* 1500-*c* 1800 AD tends to support the overall human inertia concept in this regard.

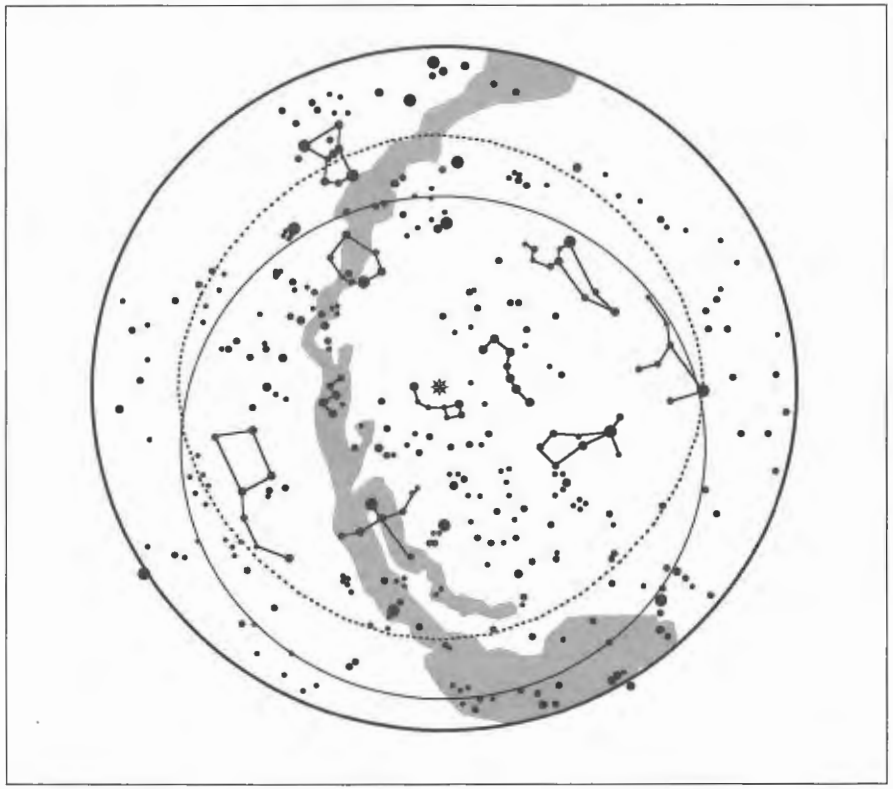

Figure 2 *(previous page): a negative view sketch map (black stars, white sky, shaded Milky Way) of the whole sky visible from a site at 55 degrees north latitude in 500 AD, bounded by the thicker, outermost circle. The rotational pole is marked with the compass-rose symbol, while the thinner solid ring shows the ecliptic, the dashed ring the equator. Only selected star-dots are given, with their simplified relative brightnesses reflected by their different sizes (larger = brighter). A few basic constellation lines have been added to help with orientation. Near the pole, these are for Cassiopeia, Ursa Minor and the "Plough" of Ursa Major. To the top left are Orion and the rough hexagon shape of Auriga, the Charioteer. To the right are Leo, the Lion, and Virgo, the Virgin, both near the ecliptic, with the kite-shape of Bootes, the Herdsman, below these and the "Plough". To the lower left are Pegasus, the Flying Horse (with its square "body" and triangular "head"), and the cross-shape of Cygnus, the Swan. Some small distortion of the constellations is apparent, due to the projection used. The Sun would seem to rotate clockwise along the ecliptic here, so the Sun's winter solstice position is to the bottom of this chart, and the vernal equinox to the centre left.*

The whole sky of 500

From the notes on precession above, it should be clear that it is not just the pole that drifts with time. It is the appearance of the entire sky. The celestial equator must always be 90° from the pole by definition, so if the pole moves, logically the equator must follow suit. However, the ecliptic remains almost fixed with respect to the stars (there is a very slight shift in it over extremely long periods, but this is so small we can ignore it for as short an interval as 1500 years). The result of this is a slow change in what stars can be seen at different times of the year, and more definably, in the positions of the solstices, where the Sun on the ecliptic is furthest north and south of the equator, and the two annual equinoxes, where the Sun crosses the equator, heading north in the British spring, and south in autumn. *Figure 2* shows the entire visible sky for a typical mid-British site in 500 AD.

Comparing this to a modern star map will show a fairly small, but significant, set of differences. For example, the 500 AD autumnal equinox point was very close to the bright star *Spica* in *Virgo*, while the same point now is near the "top right" star in the "lazy-Y" shape of *Virgo* shown here, modernly called *Beta Virginis*. Similarly, the modern summer solstice point is midway between the stars of *Taurus* and *Gemini*, almost due north of the bright star *Betelgeuse*, at the giant *Orion*'s armpit as seen now, but in 500, the Sun lay in mid-*Gemini* at that time. The overall effect is that any given star is highest in the sky at midnight now about a month later than it was in 500.

Perceptive readers will have noticed that two stars in *Figure* 2 lie south of the zone of visible stars shown by the outer circle. Both of these could just have been seen for a short while each year from southern Britain south of about 52° north latitude in 500 AD, but nowhere further north. The brighter of these stars, to the lower left of *Figure 2*, is known today as *Fomalhaut*, the leading star in *Piscis Austrinus*, the Southern Fish, while the other, to the lower right in Figure 2, is *Kappa Scorpii*, one of the stars in the "Sting" asterism at the end of the "Tail" of *Scorpius*, the Scorpion. The slow shift of precession means that nowadays, no stars in the Scorpion's "Sting" are visible from 55°N latitude – so the three stars north of *Kappa* which could just have been glimpsed from this part of Britain in 500, have effectively vanished from the skies here. In theory, all four can be seen from 51° north today, and southwards, but from Britain, none are at all easy. Meanwhile *Fomalhaut* is now visible low to the south for a few hours overnight from virtually all of Britain (though it is extremely difficult from Shetland) between late July to December, but first became visible north of 55°N latitude only around 1000 AD. Precession might be slow and subtle, but it can have dramatic effects at times, "destroying" or "creating" stars, as it might seem.

Stellar proper motions

All the effects above are produced within the Solar System, but the stars themselves have their own motions

through space relative to our Solar System, which can change the appearance of the constellations over a long enough time. Even most of the closer stars outside the Solar System are so incredibly remote that their positions seem to change scarcely at all over hundreds to thousands of years. However, a few do show a perceptible change in even 1500 years.

Of the stars visible from Britain in 500 AD, the brightest with the greatest of such stellar proper motions is the brilliant *Arcturus*, leading star of *Bootes*. It is quite close-by cosmologically, around 36 light years away (Hirshfeld & Sinnott 1982, 348), about 340 million million kilometres, and is cutting across our line of sight at such a clip, it actually lay almost a degree north-east of where it does now – nearly two Moon-diameters, or about a finger-tip's width held at arm's length from the eye – in 500. This is too small a change to show properly on the scale of *Figure 2*, but would have been enough to make a good, knowledgeable, modern observer notice it with the naked-eye, were they able to travel back in time to check.

Most of the other stellar proper motions would not create an appreciable difference to the naked-eye star patterns over this interval, but a careful examination of *Cassiopeia* in *Figure 1* compared with a modern sky chart, will show *Eta Cassiopeiae* seems slightly out of position, lying on the line from *Gamma* to *Alpha* in 500. Details can be calculated and confirmed from (*op cit* 17) for those interested.

Constellation and star names

Unfortunately, we have no surviving information from the 5th or 6th centuries to tell us what the various populations of the British Isles called the constellations or the stars. The continuation of Latin literacy in parts of Britain during these centuries, particularly in the Christianised areas (attested by various memorial stones and writing *styli*, for instance), implies that constellation lists from the Classical world could well have been employed here. The most influential of those, which is still used today in a modified and expanded form, was that by the Greek author Claudius Ptolemaeus, usually called just Ptolemy, who wrote a detailed description of the forty-eight constellations he knew of, *c* 150 AD. It is likely that any inhabitants of the British Isles who drew on Classical learning would have made full use of Latin texts of Ptolemy for their constellation lore.

After Ptolemy's time, there is a general hiatus in surviving fresh texts on the constellations, until the 8th century and later, when the Arab astronomers took up and expanded Ptolemy's work, notably al-Sufi, the 10th-century astronomer who introduced many of the star-names which still survive modernly, albeit often in a corrupted form. Before al-Sufi, hardly any individual stars, except for some of the brightest, and a very few fainter ones used as especial markers, were named. Ridpath (1988) and Kunitzsch & Smart (1986) are invaluable for tracing details on the history of the constellations and star names respectively from Classical times on.

Surviving material from the 18th-19th centuries AD, but which may be back-projected possibly for a century or two more, or increasingly speculatively still further, for example from Wales (Trevelyan 1909: 35-36, 74-75), Romania (Ottescu 1907) and Belarus (Avilin 2006), suggests local populations would have employed a mixture of common agricultural implements and animals, folk or Christian heroes and characters, locally significant semi-mythologized objects or places, and some elements of Classical lore, in constructing their own night sky beliefs.

It is clear in what survives from these later times that sometimes even neighbouring villages might not believe the same things about the same constellation patterns. There is also no indication of a general linking plan within individual constellation schemes, although a few star patterns might be connected by tales, or nearby stars might be seen as related to one another in some way. Indeed, there is a considerable

degree of seeming randomness even in the Classical lists (which themselves drew on aspects from several pre-existing versions of night sky lore), so those who seek hopefully for definite large-scale order in the mythology of past star patterns are unlikely to find it, unless they invent their own. From Julius Schiller in 1627, who replaced all the constellations with exclusively Christian biblical ones, thankfully all such attempts to impose this kind of order have utterly failed!

Conclusion

While we cannot say what constellations or star names the people of Arthurian Britain used around 500 AD, it is probable some at least saw the same patterns that Ptolemy identified, maintaining another link with the Roman past, at least for a while, much as the "more continuity than change" model of post-Roman Britain, as in Dark (2000) for example, might suggest. We can at least identify the main differences we would have noticed in the physical appearance of the night sky then compared to now, strangest of all to have had to operate without our familiar close-guide pole star. ☙

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Fool of Time *continued from page 7*

magicians, wise men and wizards of the ages. It is, rather, to point to the uniqueness of Merlin's contribution – not least in his willingness to literally "make" history. (6) To describe him (and all others like him) as Fools is not denigratory either – for Fools may be defined as those who stand *outside* society, and although therefore in some ways rejected by it, gain in compensation the right to *see* and to *comment* from a position that no-one inside that society can have. They gain immunity from the conventions and blinkers that prevent the rest of us from seeing ourselves. It also means that they can say things that ordinary men cannot; and sometimes they are listened to when "sensible" men would be laughed to scorn. Merlin was certainly one of these – and strange as his ideas seemed (*eg* the sword in the stone) he got his way.

This eccentric element is, of course, well known, and has marked out magicians and the like in all cultures. Perhaps the point can be made more powerfully by two contemporary "fools". Firstly, anyone who has seen Bob Fosse's *Cabaret* (United Artists 1972) will remember the stunning force with which Joel Grey as the Master of Ceremonies was able to comment on the emergence of Nazism in the 1930s when *no-one else could* – at least not openly. The second example comes from our own culture, and indeed the author claims for it an especial talent for "jesting". It is E P Thompson. (7)

"Never mind, we proceed, if circuitously, and there is perhaps more logic in the progress than I mean as yet to show. I have been jesting with you – you indomitable and season jester – because I am the product, perhaps the prisoner of a jesting culture. If you come before us to ask questions, I will ask questions of your questions... And in the end, one may only act and write as one is; that some day someone may turn – as Kent turns to King Lear – and say, 'This is not altogether fool, my lord'."

And in such ways Merlin lives today, both in special individuals, and in that part of all of us that learns to stand back, to question, to raise the quizzical eyebrow at the latest of our follies. ☙

Notes on page 40

Edward III's Round Table at Windsor

Eric L Fitch

Arthurians will all probably be aware of Channel 4's *Time Team* August dig at royal locations including Windsor Castle. Here they were looking for remains of the Round Table building of Edward III. Before discussing the fruits of the excavation, it would be apposite first to tell the story of the building's construction and demise, as far as it is known.

Hastiludes at Windsor

Edward III (1312-77), crowned in 1327 and father of the Black Prince, was born at Windsor Castle, since when he became known as Edward of Windsor. Still preserved in the Royal Closet in St George's Chapel is a painted window depicting an astrological horoscope of his nativity, although the building was not begun until a hundred years after his death. But there is a link between the Chapel and Edward, since it became the spiritual home of the Order of the Garter which he founded in 1348. Edward's original idea, however, was to form a chivalrous order in the fashion of King Arthur's Knights. He "did thereupon first design (induc'd by its ancient fame) the restoration of King Arthur's Round Table, to invite hither the gallant spirits from abroad, and endear them to himself'.[1]

Thus on New Year's Day 1344 he issued letters patent of safe conduct to various knights, earls, barons and gentlemen from England and other countries to invite them to a gathering on the Monday after the Feast of St Hilary, which fell on January 19th. His protection extended to their servants and goods and was to endure to 9th February. The intention was to provide "for the recreation and pleasure of the military men, who delight in the exercise of arms" and "the King would hold hastiludes and general jousts at his Castle of Windsor".[2]

[1] Elias Ashmole *The History of the Most Noble Order of the Garter* (Revised edition, 1715)

[2] Robert Richard Tighe and James Edward Davis (1858) *Annals of Windsor*

(*Hastiludes* was an early name for tournaments.)

Also present were Isabel, Edward's mother, his queen, Philippa and their daughter, Isabel, nine countesses and so many baronesses, ladies and girls that they filled the Great Hall. The King showed them all to their places himself, settling them in order of rank, while the Prince of Wales and all the male guests had to feed outside in a tent set up in the courtyard. The jousts continued for three days, when the King won three out of six prizes. There still exists an account of these gatherings, written by Adam of Murimuth, a former canon of Hereford and St Paul's, who appears to have been a guest. He says:

"At the costly banquet were the most alluring drinks in plenty, enough and to spare. The lords and their ladies failed not to dance, mingling kisses with embraces. Many entertainers made the most charming melody and sundry other diversions. The joy was unspeakable, the comfort inestimable, the pleasure without murmuring, the hilarity without care." [3]

On the eve of the fourth day the King announced that no lord or lady were to depart, since their presence was required the following morning. The next day Edward appeared wearing a mantle of precious velvet and the royal crown upon his head. After mass in the chapel everyone assembled and the King inaugurated the Round Table, at which he received that oaths of a number of earls, barons and knights.

The "King and all the others at the same time stood up, and having been offered the Book, the Lord King, after touching the Gospels, took a corporeal oath that he himself, at a certain time limited to this, whilst the means were possible to him, would begin a Round Table, in the same manner and condition as the lord Arthur, formerly King of England, appointed it, namely to the number of 300 knights, a number always increasing, and he would cherish it and maintain it according to his power".[4]

[3] Hector Bolitho (1946) *The Romance of Windsor Castle*

[4] Williams H St John Hope (1913) *Windsor Castle: An Architectural History*

After this trumpets and kettle-drums sounded and a great feast commenced.

Erection

Edward then lost no time and early commencement of the work to build a Round Table can be seen in the account roll for 1343-4 where, in the last week of January, we find the following:

To two carts with two men employed in the carrying sand for the covering the bridges of the castle with the said sand lest they be broken with the heavy carriage of the Round Table, for two days..... 2s 8d

To four men scattering the said sand upon the said bridges for two days 16d

More sand was brought for the same purpose in March and some repairs were carried out on the bridges within the Castle from April to July, probably on account of the heavy traffic on them. Actual work on the building began on 15th February and commissions were issued to the head carpenter, William of Hurley, and the master Mason, William of Ramsay, empowering them to collect workmen and materials.

Work carried on apace between February and November and Alan of Killum, the clerk of the works, received the sum of £461 8s 8d for his services. The wages sheets reveal large fluctuations in the number of men employed, as can be confirmed from records of works showing the number of chief artisans. It appears that there were many more stone carvers than ordinary masons and therefore it is likely that the building was highly decorated.

By the end of the third week the total wages had risen to £45 4s 10d after which all the workers were disbanded and for eleven weeks following Easter week the works were entirely in the hands of William of Ramsay, who supervised up to 28 masons. After 23rd October all the masons except Ramsay were withdrawn, and for the last seven weeks three carpenters were engaged on "covering the walls of the Round Table". By 27th November, Alan of Killum records that the works came to an end.

During that period raw materials were obtained and transported by river to the Castle. Much of the stone required was quarried at Bustlesham, but £40 worth of Caen stone was purchased from the Dean of St. Paul's. Wood was cut at Bletchingley, Reigate Park, Holshot and Ruislip. The accounts also show the purchase of tiles from Penn, Buckinghamshire, which was renowned for this product, as follows:

For forty thousand tiles bought for the covering of the walls of the house of the Round Table, and for covering the stones of the same place..... £4 0s 0d

F or carriages of stones of the same from Penn to Windsor £1 0s 0d

An account roll details that on 13th December a payment of 9d was made for "carting the tiles that were left from the covering of the walls of the Round Table for half a day". These tiles were placed on the walls to protect them from frost and it was the onset of winter which probably contributed to the cessation of work, and there is no evidence to show that the building was ever finished. Adam of Murimuth recorded that the King "for certain reasons afterwards ceased from it" and his ideas metamorphosed ultimately into the Order of the Garter.

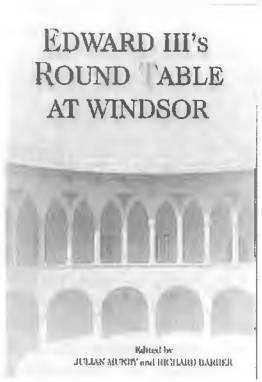
There is little further detail as to the appearance of the Round Table building except from a 14th-century chronicler called Thomas of Walsingham. Under the year 1344 his *Chronicon Angliae* contains an entry concerning the building, in which he states that the structure's diameter measured 200 feet, which gives an indication of its size. (He also records that Philip of Valois, King of France, began his Round Table to attract knights from Germany and Italy before they joined Edward.)

In addition one John Stow, who used Walsingham's version of events, mentions in his *Annales* that the Round Table's circumference was just over 600 feet. As to where it stood within the Castle precincts is not clear. The idea of a large structure such as this being erected merely for feasting would, in earlier days, have been considered frivolous, since castle were built as strongholds. However, by 1344 they had largely ceased to have this function and Windsor Castle was seen as not much more than the King's fortified residence. St John Hope therefore placed it in the great courtyard of the upper bailey. Indeed it is the only place where a building of this size could have been erected and, as we shall see, this proved

to be correct.

Demolition
The Feast of the Round Table was held again at Windsor in March 1345, but there is no evidence that the building was used for this nor that any work continued on it after November 1344. The feast was held somewhere, however, since the accounts of John Marreys, the King's tailor, show an entry for making robes and sundry garments for the King and others between September 1344 and August 1345. These included robes of valet and fur and a supertunic of ermine for the King, 202 tunics and hoods for the King's shieldbearer and serjeants-at-arms and 16 tunics and hoods for the King's minstrels. After this there are no records to show that a Feast of the Round Table was held in 1346 or thereafter.

During 1356-7 a number of old buildings at the Castle were demolished and it is to be assumed that the Round Table was amongst them. It is recorded in December 1356 that the Prior of Merton was paid £26 13s 4d for 52 oaks felled in his woods near Reading for the Round Table at Windsor. The oaks were then transported to Westminster for works ordered by the King there. This is therefore assumed to be the end of Windsor's Round Table. From then on whatever ideas King Edward may have had for his version of the Arthurian legend were forgotten, as sometime about the middle of 1348 he founded the Order of the Garter and the rest is history.



Edward III's Round Table at Windsor
Julian Munby & Richard Barber *eds*
(Boydell & Brewer)
Due April 2007
1 84383 313 0
hardback
190pp
£25.00

Includes recent archaeological research

Excavation
So, what did the Time Team come up with? Well the amazing news was that they actually found the foundation trench of the Round Table in the upper bailey, which turned out to measure the 200 feet as stated by Thomas of Walsingham and was bigger than the Pantheon in Rome. The walls were some 8 feet wide and thus could have supported a roof, but no post-holes of supporting timbers were found. However a complete, decorated floor tile from the works at Penn was found in situ which, although dating from the 14th century, was probably not part of the Round Table structure itself. In addition, in the same trench as the tile, a medieval flagstone surface was excavated with the flagstones also in situ. Thus the exact site and the dimensions of the building were confirmed after centuries of guesswork.

The building accounts allow some guesses as to what the building would have looked like. It was built out of stone, was probably elaborately decorated and would have had a single arcade about thirty feet high, rather like a cloister, together with a stone bench against the wall for the knights to sit 6n. It was likely that there would have been an actual round table in front made of stone for the knights and a fountain in the open, central area. However, the building was never roofed, as Edward diverted his resources to his attempt to conquer France.

Enactments
And so comes the question – what would it exactly have been used for? The favourite idea was always that its use would have been for jousting and tournaments as well as general festivities. However Richard Barber, historian and author of books on the Arthurian legends, was on site and gave his views. Firstly he explained that the medieval English kings were highly inspired by the Arthurian legends and it is even possible that Chrétien de Troyes may have come to Henry II's court at Windsor. Indeed, Wace's *Brut* was dedicated to Henry. A century later, Edward I held Round Tables, and he personally arranged them at Nefyn in Wales in 1284 and at Falkirk in Scotland in 1302.

Barber then explained that medieval Round Tables were not just physical objects, but a kind of festival with jousting, feasting and dancing. They became popular in the 13th century and increasingly so until by Edward III's time they had become very elaborate. He said that it was highly likely that it was a kind on theatre within which festivals took place with not only feasting and dancing, but also where enactments of the Arthurian tales were held.

In 1290 these festivities came to a climax with the construction of a real round table and a grand tournament at Winchester. This is the table which can still be seen in Winchester Hall to this day. An account of the proceedings survives in which a squire appeared demanding that revenge be taken on the Welshmen who had rebelled and attacked him. Another squire then came on the scene, bound hand and foot to his horse, claiming that the Irish were the perpetrators and that the Irish king had issued a challenge to Lancelot to meet him in single combat. Lastly the "loathly damsel" who featured in the story of Perceval rode up to the king and told him that Leicester and Cornwall had rebelled and the Perceval and Gawain should go forth and sort things out. Traditionally such "adventures" had to take place first before the meal could begin. So the Round Table was not so much a place of jousting as a theatrical stage, perhaps England's earliest. Thus Edward III was continuing and expanding upon a tradition which had been in vogue for some time already.

On historical grounds, this must have been one of the Time Team's greatest successes, discovering as they did traces of a fabled structure of which no features were apparent at ground level. And how exciting for us *Pendragon* readers![5] ☙

Other works consulted
Owen Hedley (1967) *Windsor Castle*
Slough & Windsor Express September 9 2006
Daily Telegraph August 29 2006
http://www.channel4.com/history/microsites/B/bigJoyal- dig/windsor/windsor _latest

Burnham, Buckinghamshire, October 2006

[5] This is a revised version of an article which first appeared in *Pendragon XXVI* No 1 (1996)

***Notes to Marilyn Porter's* Fool of Time**
(1) He does not appear at all in *The High History of the Holy Grail*, and only fleetingly in Malory, Geoffrey of Monmouth *etc.*
(2) Let us not forget Tennyson, Spencer, Hallan *etc.*
(3) See Mary Stewart (from Geoffrey of Monmouth) that he was the son of a Celtic princess and the Prince of Darkness.
(4) Definitively, of course, Einstein's great work proving the *reality* of the relativity of the fourth dimension.
(5) Anouilh in his latest play asserts, "We cannot experience experience, only memories".
(6) Notably when he arranged the conception of Arthur between Uther and Ygraine.
(7) E P Thompson "An Open Letter to Leskek Kolokowski" *Socialist Register* 1973
• This article first appeared in *Pendragon XI* No 1 (1978) 8-9, 13

On Merlin's traces

wizard's twin staves black how
midwinter dead buddleia heads still
point menace past life he
they once before roots took
him down girl's trick time's

Niamh dreams sweet as sugarpie

got to get rid of
pest somehow now eggdrained his
knowhow how about
remembered from far future
how dormouse got his her friend
to be Alice as
witness suppressed head down in
teapot could breathe stale
tea dregs for ever read in
leaves up nose how she'd beat him

The punishment fit the crime

up at peat-dark sky
lover's fort burns glass-black: down
here on couch grass'd
be market place if still town
four horses strain for release
one roped to each white
queen's limb – just time to save free
jester mask spits false grail

Steve Sneyd

old news

A PICTISH MONASTERY

On the north-east coast of Scotland a "major" Pictish monastery has been identified at **Portmahomack**, forty miles north-east of Inverness on the peninsula of Tarbat (Gaelic "portage"). The village of Portmahomack is itself named after the great Columba (Colm, Colman or Columcille), the 6th-century Irish saint who featured in a *Life* written a century later by Adomnán of Iona.

Giant cross-slabs and an inscribed stone in Latin from the Tarbat peninsula have long suggested that something important was going on here in the eighth century, and it was also suspected that "Columban monks in Pictland must have had and used, and almost certainly made, books of their own" (Sharpe 1995: 33). For a variety of reasons, then, Martin Carver, Professor of Archaeology at York (and veteran of research at Sutton Hoo), chose to investigate the enigmatic church of St Colman at Portmahomack.

After ten years of research (including aerial photography and excavation) Carver's team have established that here "was indeed a monastery, founded in the mid-6th century AD and largely demolished in the 9th century". Not only was there the expected church and burial ground but also a workshop area, mill and farm, all enclosed by a *vallum monasterii* or ditch. Nearly a hundred burials covered the date-range, the earliest in the classic so-called cist graves and the latest with only the head enclosed ('pillow' burials). The male monks of the earlier phase seem to have grown barley and raised cattle; in the later phase a slaughtering area and workshop pointed to industrial processes whereby cattle hides were turned into leather and parchment for export. Elsewhere a large "multi-tasking barn" provided evidence for corn-drying, malting, smithing and working precious metals and glass (for church plate?).

The monastery must also have produced the magnificent Pictish cross-slabs that still dot the peninsula and which dominate extensive sea-views. Further fragments of cross-slabs from around 800 AD were found built into the church when it was developed into a place of worship for the later parish after the early 12th century. Before that, but certainly after 800, the workshops had been incinerated and cross-slab fragments tipped on top of the debris. The golden age of St Columba's monastery was over.

It seems likely that the monastery was established by the saint himself at some time in the mid-6th century. We know that Columba visited King Bridei (son perhaps of the famous Maelgwn from Welsh history) somewhere near Inverness, north of Loch Ness (Adomnán II 33-5). According to Bede (III 4), he "came to Britain when the most puissant king Bruide, Maelchon's son, reigned over the [Picts] in the ninth year of his reign, and did by word and example convert that nation to the faith of Christ". Certainly by the time that Portmahomack emerges into certain history its church had acquired its link with Columba.[1]

LINCOLN GRAIL

Forget all those stories we've already run about the 'final' resting place of the Holy Grail. It's actually in **Lincoln Cathedral**, according to an investigator: Callum Jensen claims to have decoded a parchment revealing that the Grail is buried in the Cathedral grounds.

In April 2005 a glazier working on the east window "spotted something strange in a stained glass depiction of the Last Supper," the 50-year-old local author says. "What he spotted was that instead of a cup or loaf being on Christ's plate, there is actually a dog."

After finding further 'anomalies' in the cathedral, he was prompted to look at a coded Rennes-le-Château parchment supposedly providing clues to the whereabouts of a secret treasure. Having

[1] "A Columban Monastery in Pictland" *Current Archaeology 205* (September / October 2006) 20-29; Richard Sharpe *transl* (1995) *Adomnán of Iona: Life of St Columba* (Penguin); J E King *transl* (1930) *Baedae: opera historica* (Loeb Classical Library, Vol I); www.tarbat-discovery.co.uk; Elizabeth Sutherland (1997) *The Pictish Guide* (Birlinn) 124-6

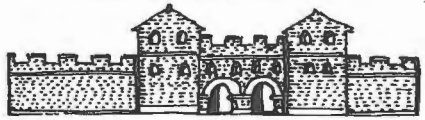
decoded the parchment – "in quite a short space of time" – he was excited to find it led him to the south-east corner of the cathedral. "It's the site where St Margaret's Church used to stand until it was demolished."

He believes that underneath the spot is the church's intact crypt, and he has requested permission to carry out a search using a penetrative radar scan. The cathedral's chief executive and chapter clerk say that Jensen's request was going through the relevant committees and that a decision is expected by the end of 2006.

How Christ's dog's dinner represents an encoded message is unclear. Lincoln's 13th-century stained glass was damaged in 1644, and in the late 18th century all the remaining medieval glass was collected from elsewhere in the building and shared between the south transept and choir aisles east windows. "The glazier of 1788 sought to find for each body a head, for each head a body," so that little sense can now be made of the images (Clifton-Taylor 1967: 92).

Jensen, author of two books based on *The Da Vinci Code* 'mysteries', says that "All the evidence I've uncovered does suggest that there is something down there." Presumably it is akin to the pot at the end of the rainbow.[2]

AFTER THE ROMANS



Over the last decade geophysical surveying ("geofizz") by Alan Biggins and David Taylor has produced a much fuller picture of life on **Hadrian's Wall** than is possible with limited and expensive excavations. Using both electrical resistance and magnetometry, they have so far surveyed thirteen sites, leading to new interpretations – including any post-Roman survival of the settlements known as *vici*.

The examination at Birdoswald, Maryport and Castlesteads of their *vicus* settlements shows that "no two sites are really the same": some grew organically, others were formally laid out, some appear as townships, others feel like unstructured villages. However successful these settlements may have been, once the Roman army officially withdrew around 400 CE – and their *raison-d'être* disappeared – "the *vici* quickly collapsed. The roots of proto-urbanism in North Britain were too shallow to sustain independent life."[3]

A Roman-period bath house may have been re-used "for Christian baptism or even Jewish sacred bathing" according to excavation director Paul Wilkinson. **Bax Farm**, near Faversham in Kent, is the site of one of several Roman estates lining Roman Watling Street. At the villa the Kent Archaeological Field School has discovered an "unusual" octagonal bath house, possibly arcaded, enclosing a central *frigidarium* pool over 5m across. In the early 5th century the pool was rebuilt as a circular plunge bath, with floor and tiled steps painted blue.

While this may represent a re-use as a Christian baptistery, the finding in the villa of a five-branched design on a lead seal, suggesting the *menorah* or seven-branched candlestick, could link re-use with Jewish ritual.

This interface between the official "End of Roman Britain" and what came immediately after has been investigated further at **Medbourne** in Leicestershire. This Roman so-called small-town was not founded as such and given local government responsibilities; instead, it was an *ad hoc* settlement which acquired "town-like" characteristics.

Lying north of the line of Gartree Road running between Leicester and on towards Colchester, the settlement originated in the Iron Age, peaked in the 2nd-3rd centuries and contracted in the 4th. The presence of Early Anglo-Saxon pottery suggested that the town has evolved into an early English village. An intensive dig, part of *Time Team*'s Big

[2] "Man's bid for Holy Grail search" *BBC News* June 2006; Alex Clifton-Taylor (1967) *The Cathedrals of England* (Thames and Hudson)

[3] "Soldier and civilian on the Roman frontier" *Current Archaeology 206* (Nov-Dec 2006) 9-19; S Sneyd "Dark Age halls on Hadrian's Wall" *Pendragon XXX* No 4 (2003) 16; "Roman pool may be for early Christian baptism" *British Archaeology 91* (Nov-Dec 2006) 8; "The Last Roman-Britons?" *Current Archaeology 206* (Nov-Dec 2006) 44-47

Roman Dig in 2005, took place to establish if there was evidence of continuity.

One trench yielded over a score of graves, probably Christian because the bodies were all "lying face up, the head to the west, the hands crossed". These were dated late 4th century at the earliest, based on a coin of the emperor Gratian found in an underlying silted-up ditch. A second trench revealed Anglo-Saxon occupation, but on a different alignment to Roman features. This was not a promising argument for continuity, despite the lack of any build-up of layers between the two layers.

However, Trench 3 – dug in what was a redundant churchyard, to the south-east – revealed two burials, one not only with Roman pottery but also with an iron tanged knife "typical of Anglo-Saxon grave-goods". The known presence of other Anglo-Saxon graves in the immediate area and the finding of a pierced Roman coin (for use on a pendant) argue strongly for this being the site of an Anglo-Saxon cemetery.

The conclusion of the team of archaeologists from Leicester University and the County Council was that here was likely evidence of continuity of human activity at Medbourne from Late Iron Age to the Victorian period, with the focus of settlement and burial shifting south, the pagan Anglo-Saxon cemetery later evolving into a Christian one; only further work can confirm this.

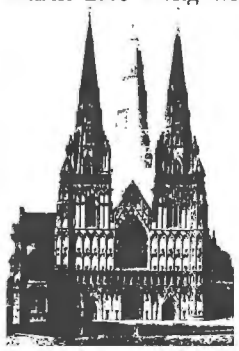
THE TOMB OF ST CHAD

Lichfield Cathedral's Archaeologist Warwick Rodwell, who has been long involved in church archaeology – he wrote the English Heritage *Book of Church of Archaeology* in 1989 – has crowned 25 years' association with the Cathedral by discovering the site of the Saxon shrine of the fifth and most famous bishop of that see.

In 672 "Chad died on the 2nd of March, and was first buried by St Mary's Church, but afterwards, when the church of the most holy prince of the apostles, Peter, was built, his bones were translated into it... The place of the sepulchre is a wooden monument, made like a little house, covered, having a hole in the wall, through which those that go thither for devotion usually put in their hand and take out some of the dust..." (Bede IV 3). This was the first of the shrines to St Chad, all of which have gone, but in 2003 a deep excavation, to be made in the centre of the 13th-century cathedral nave, provided the ideal opportunity to investigate the earliest building, and also possibly the site of that first shrine of the 8th century.

A small but highly skilled team found, below medieval and later graves, the foundations of what was almost certainly the Anglo-Saxon **cathedral of St Peter**'s. Within the earliest phase a sunken pit, probably with a timber lining, was very likely the site of St Chad's *hypogeum* or burial chamber, possibly originally surmounted by a *baldaccino* (canopy). In a nearby 10th-century pit a sculptured and painted limestone panel from the late 8th century was found. It bears the image of the Archangel Gabriel and is part of an Annunciation composition which would have originally included the Virgin Mary, and may well have been part of St Chad's shrine. As the excavator notes, "the ritual burying of desecrated or redundant church furnishings, especially altars, fonts and shrines, was common practice in the Middle Ages," and this looks to have been such a practice.

The so-called **Lichfield Angel** (which remarkably still retained some of its original paint) was publicly displayed in March 2006 along with the *Book of St Chad* (also known as the *Lichfield Gospels*). "For the first time in over a thousand years," Rodwell pointed out, "these two great 8th-century treasures were placed side by side at the site of the shrine."[4]



Chris Lovegrove

[4] Warwick Rodwell "The Forgotten Cathedral" *Current Archaeology 205* (September / October 2006) 9-17; Vida D Scudder *transl* (1910) *The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation by The Venerable Bede* (Everyman's Library) 170

the board

compiled by Chris Lovegrove and Steve Sneyd

STARRING MERLIN & CO

Huddersfield in West Yorkshire geared up for the festive season with its annual Festival of Light beginning on November 16. The town centre's Christmas lights were this year switched on by a "surprise" *Emmerdale* star and costumed characters from the Lawrence Batley Theatre's production of ***Merlin and the Enchanted Mirror*** – including, one hopes, the wizard himself. Distractions included aerial artists, fireworks, an ice rink and a Continental market.[1]

Yes, it's [cue music] ***Monty Python's Spamalot*** again. Apparently "the holy grail of fandom" is the annual Monty Python convention, and the fans are especially excited about the Broadway production which transferred to the Palace Theatre in the West End in October (the run ends May 26 2007). Tim Curry reprises his role as King Arthur after he temporarily abdicated for Simon Russell Beale in New York. We are reminded that the musical has "achieved the unusual feat of getting more men under 40 into the theatre than is usual – something of a holy grail, then, for the producers". I bet you didn't spot that metaphor coming.

Meanwhile, the global success (or at least in English-speaking countries) of *Spamalot* continues. Apparently Toronto is currently hosting Canada's touring version, in March the musical opens in Las Vegas and in autumn it will be Australia's turn. It has even been *banned* in Malaysia, even through there are no plans to stage it there! According to Eric Idle, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* is still playing in France: "there's apparently a 30-seat cinema in Paris that's played *The Holy Grail* for three decades." So the perfidious French are not immune to it either... If you can't get to London to see *Spamalot* then snippets of the Broadway show are available on the DVD *Monty Python and the Holy Grail: the Extraordinarily Deluxe Edition* which was released on October 9.[2]

BROADCAST

Howard Barker's "challenging" play *The Road, the House, the Road* was broadcast on BBC Radio 4 on July 13 2006. Starring Michael Pennington, Sean Baker and Barbara Flynn and directed by Richard Wortley, the play concerns the 16th-century humanist scholar Johannes Aventinus "travelling the roads of Europe on foot, poor, semi-mendicant, visiting great libraries, teaching". Hurrying to see his wife and new-born son, he dies before reaching home. His unusual winter quest is "one with **Gawain-like undertones**", we are told.[3]

A *Goon Show* from 1958 with King Arthur's sword as a major ingredient or pot MacGuffin was rebroadcast on BBC Radio 7 on October 16. The episode (title missed, unfortunately) involved innumerable confusing events, as always with the Goons, but the gist of the Arthurian element was that Seagoon becomes entangled in Major Bloodknock's search for **Excalibur**, finds it and manages to draw it from the stone with the aid of a blacksmith, and so proclaims himself king. He abdicates when a label is spotted on the sword revealing it as a modern theatre prop, "property of the touring company of nudes, knees, and Shakespeare".

In the media reviews section of the October issue of *Pablo Lennis* from the States there was mention that, in the latest Stargate season, that the SF TV series includes an episode called "The Pegasus Project". In this **Morgan La Faye** (*sic*), who has become one of the Ascended, poses as an angel hologram to try to obtain **Merlin**'s **weapon** which is needed to use against a species called the Ori arriving in spaceships via the stargate.

[1] "Fantastic festivities once again" *Hudderfield Examiner* October 21 2006

[2] Johnny Sharp "'We're all slightly mad. Heh heh!'" *Guardian Guide* September 30 2006; *Spamalot* notice *Guardian Guide* October 7 2006; Dave Eggers "And now for something completely difficult..." *Guardian* September 13 2006

[3] Gillian Reynolds "Radio Choice" *Telegraph* July 13 2006

Between 4th and 11th December "the world's favourite virtual world film festival" was available on the Second Life® website. The **avalon film festival** allowed you to "share the magic of the cinema in this global community event", courtesy of Linden Research, Inc, in association with 4talent, *The Guardian* and Rivers Run Red. Click on 'map', search for 'avalon' and teleport once you are logged on to www.secondlife.com

CORRECTIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS

Oakmagic Publications, originally at PO Box 74, Church Stretton, Shropshire SY6 6WY, have had correspondence returned as "addressee gone away". Do check before sending cheques for titles.

Several readers spotted the Merlinesque back-travel through time: the cover of last issue should have read *Volume XXXIII* and not *XIII* of course! For the curious-minded, *XIII* No 4 – dated Autumn 1980 – featured *Cornwall* as its theme, with items on Tristan, Iseult and Tintagel.

UPDATES, OR BACK TO THE FUTURE

Good news for Cornish Arthurians – the re-establishment of **choughs**, in whom the soul of Arthur is said to reside, goes from strength to strength. Five years after the first pair recolonised the county, a second pair have successfully bred, reports the Cornwall Chough Project. "A new pair, made up of a Cornish-born male from the 2004 brood and a female that came to the county two years ago, raised three youngsters." Since the recolonisation in 2001 twenty-three choughs have been raised, thanks to careful land management and volunteer surveillance.

The project, part of Action for Birds in England, is a partnership of various agencies including the RSPB, the National Trust and Natural England, and highlights the small successes that can emerge out of global doom-and-gloom scenarios.

Catholic extremists "pelted" local pagans in **Glastonbury** with salt, and the owner of a pagan shop was harassed with comments such as "burn the witches". Arrests and cautions were visited on antisocial elements of the conservative Catholic organisation Youth 2000 (which itself disassociated itself from such actions) who, like medieval witch-finders, reportedly aimed to "cleanse Glastonbury of paganism".[4]

JOURNALS AND SOCIETIES

Sample price / annual subs (overseas subs)
"Cheques payable to" – *e-mail or website*

Arthurian Association of Australia
19 Carcoola Road, Cromer, NSW 2099, Australia *www.arthurian.asn.au*

Caerdroia *Annual journal of mazes and labyrinths* UK £7.00 (Europe €10.00 USA $15.00) "Labyrinthos", Jeff and Kimberly Lowelle Saward, 53 Thundersley Grove, Thundersley, Essex SS7 3EB *www.labyrinthos.net*

The Cauldron *Paganism, folklore, witchcraft, Wicca* £3.50 / £12.00 "M A Howard", BM Cauldron, London WC1N 3XX *www.the-cauldron.fsnet.co.uk*

Celtic Connections *Journal of Celtic and related subjects* £1.25 / £10.00 (£18.00) "Celtic Connections Magazine", David Barton, 97 Rosehill Drive, Bransgore, Christchurch, Dorset BH23 8NX *www.Celtic-connections-magazine.co.uk*

Hallowquest *Caitlin & John Matthews' publishing and teaching programmes* £8.00 (£16.00) "Caitlin Matthews", BCM Hallowquest, London WC1N 3XX *www.hallowquest.org.uk*

Meyn Mamvro *Cornish ancient stones and sacred sites* £2.50 / £7.50 "Meyn Mamvro", Cheryl Straffon, 51 Carn Bosavern, St Just, Penzance, Cornwall TR19 7QX *www.meynmamvro.co.uk*

Northern Earth *Journal of the Northern Earth Mysteries Group* £1.95 / £7.50 (£10.75 EU, £14.00 RoW) "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 "Ða Engliscan Gesiðas (The English Companions)", BM Box 4336, London WC1 3XX *www.tha-engliscan-gesithas.org.uk*

[4] Kate Smith "Second pair of Cornish choughs" *Birds* 21 No 4 (Winter 2006) 87; Thir Shaikh "Catholic marchers turn on Glastonbury pagans" *Guardian* November 4 2006

Reviews

Alan Fenton
The Return of Arthur
Dovecote Press 2006 £14.99
1 904349 29 3 hb 480pp

Arthurian novels rarely match the excitement of the real thing. This one does. Alan Fenton has conjured up a highly topical story of an Arthur for our times of Islamic terrorists. A ripping yarn, I found I couldn't put the book down. Even Merlin's illuminated holographic head materialising in the bookcase rang true. The personal lives of the politicians add to the sense of reality.

This is a believable book. If your image of Arthur is of a man 'willing to sacrifice everything for a point of principle' this is a book for you. Here is *Y Gwir yn Erbyd y Byd* (The Truth against the World). Highly recommended – I can't wait to read the sequel.

Laurence Main

Tears in the Fence No 39
Autumn 2004 £6.00
Cheques payable to "David Caddy"
38 Hod View, Stourpaine, Blandford Forum, Dorset DT11 8TN

In this fairly tangential number there was a six-page eight-part poem sequence by Norman Jope called "Merlin Shadows – in memoriam Peter Redgrove". Direct Arthurian or Merlinian references are minimal – Merlin is really there as "the phantom constituent", implicit in the descriptions of reactions on Jope's part to Redgrove and his work in various Cornish settings, though section 3 does speak of avoiding

the spotlit hall,
the Excaliburgers, the plastic swords
and gnarled kitsch, for the climb
up honed and polished steps
to a place in which all weathers are...

The very last lines of the sequence hint at the Arthur-as chough reincarnation story and a parallel for Merlin / Redgrove:

the Cornish sky.
The ego's smashed to fragments
and you're here-un-here, imprisoned
in the magic circle, flapping your white [wings
with their bright black markings –
as vivid as any ghost can be.

Steve Sneyd

Hilary Rushmer
Celtic Journey
Swallow Music TTS CD4563
www.swallowmusic.co.uk

Though not Arthurian as such, this collection of tunes (many of them traditional) comes from the countries of the Celtic fringe – Wales, Scotland and Ireland – which largely preserved the legend of Arthur in its formative years. Supported by talented classical and traditional musicians on acoustic instruments, Hilary's own evocative arrangements (some with keyboard accompaniment) maintain a sense of timelessness for pieces both ancient and modern. Particularly effective were the heart-rending *Tom Bowling* and the beautifully modal *My Lagan Love*, but pretty much all the tracks that featured Hilary herself on gut- or wire-strung harp created just the right mood of place and occasion, ably assisted by guitar, mandolin, fiddle, cello, flute, whistles, bagpipes and bodhran. My only reservation concerns the keyboard registrations which, for my taste, don't always work, but other than that this is a CD that repays repeated listening.

Chris Lovegrove

New Excalibur # 10-12
Marvel Comics October-December 2006
Frank Tieri (writer)
Michael Ryan and Rick Ketchum (art)

Following on from the 'House of M' cross-over event at Marvel Comics, the superhero team Excalibur was re-formed under Captain Britain. In the distant past Camelot is destroyed and only the Black Knight (Sir Percy version: see Cardinal Cox "Arthurian Comics" in *XXXIII* No 4) survives. With the help of The Lady in the Lake (*sic*) Percy's mind is transported into the current Black Knight (Dane Whitman). After the oh-so-usual misunderstanding that happens in comics, Excalibur's members decide they must travel back in time to save Camelot.

So it's off to Merrie Olde England just before the disaster. Then it's battles with dragons, and (off page) one character makes a pass at Guinevere that results in her going off with Lancelot. Plus more is revealed about the sword that the Black Knights carry.

So, although not a great step forward for the mythology within Marvel's

universe, it did have a smidge of character development. If you want to try these issues, don't worry too much about not knowing any back-story to the characters, the guest Black Knight(s) is/are the only one that the background plays any part in, and that is explained as the tale unfolds.

Cardinal Cox

Nigel Bryant *transl*
Chrétien de Troyes
Perceval: The Story of the Grail
D S Brewer 2006 £17.99 / $35.00
1 184384 1029 pb xvi, 334pp

This new edition of Nigel Bryant's eminently readable 1982 translation of the first tale to feature the grail was timed to coincide with the release of the film of *The Da Vinci Code*, but is as far removed from that work's fantasies as the *Mona Lisa* is from a Barbie doll.

Chrétien's unfinished poem, beginning as a literary folk tale of a simpleton who makes good, was already within a few years of his death being embroidered and invested with more significance than was originally intended. Bryant's version includes the whole of Chrétien's text (as found in a key manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris) and extracts from its four Continuations linked by synopses. He has revised his translation of nearly a quarter-century ago with occasional substitutions or recastings, generally for stylistic reasons, it seems, and overall this appears to be for the better. Compare these two versions from a passage in which Perceval sees knights for the first time (1982 version first):

– Stay back! A boy who's seen us has fallen to the ground in fear. If we all advanced towards him at once he would be so frightened that he would die, I think, and could not reply to anything I asked him.

– Stay back! A boy who's seen us has fallen to the ground in fear. If we all advanced towards him at once he'd be frightened to death, I think, and couldn't answer any of my questions.

In 1982 *Perceval* cost £19.50 for the hardback; allowing for factors such as inflation, the transition to robust paperback and its limited popular appeal, this edition still represents good value. Even if the D D R Owen Everyman Classic translation of 1987 is substantially cheaper, it doesn't include the Continuations which allow us to witness the rapid evolution of a legend. All serious students should have a copy.

Chris Lovegrove

Terry Jones and Alan Ereira
Terry Jones' Barbanans
BBC Books 2006 £18:99.
0563493186 hb 288pp illus

Barbarians, thundering in from the wilderness, raping, pillaging and destroying everything before them, tearing down the edifices of civilisation and bringing ruin and desolation in their wake ... well, possibly not. Accompanying the television series presented by Terry Jones (of *Monty Python* fame), this page-turning fascinating read of a book presents a noticeably different slant on the history of various barbarian nations, often in strong opposition to the accounts we have previously been given: accounts mainly deriving from the Roman perspective. It seems that, indeed, there were occasions when so-called barbarian people brought ruin and destruction, but nowhere in this discussion do they seem any worse than the Romans themselves; and, indeed, it seems that it was the Romans who were often substantially worse, building their civilisation on genocide and a suppression of anything revolutionary or non-Roman.

The rise, supremacy, decline and fall of the empire is described succinctly, with what does seem to be a fair description of Roman and barbarian actions and interactions (and it does seem that often the delineation between "Roman" and "Barbarian" was merely a matter of political convenience: barbarians seem to have simply been people who were other than Roman; or, rather, those who refused to toe the Roman line).

As a suggestion of an alternative angle on accepted history, and an entertaining read, I'd certainly recommend this one: it's erudite, with plenty of references for those who wish to pursue further research, and the authors put across their tale and suggestions in a manner that feels more like sitting down and enjoying a good discussion than reading through any dry history book.

Ian Brown

Ann F Howey and Stephen R Reimer
A Bibliography of Modern Arthuriana (1500-2000)
Boydell & Brewer 2006 £125.00 / $180.00
1 184384 0685 hb 808pp

What is Arthuriana? The authors, both Canadian academics, choose to define it as "the Arthurian legend in modern English-language fiction", and include such manifestations as literary (but not non-fiction) texts, audio-visual media (film, television, radio, audio-books) and aspects of popular culture such as graphic novels and games. Aimed at students (academia as well as the general public), collectors and librarians, this compilation is ideal both as a reference work and as a treasure trove to dip into.

Six sections (prefixed by the letters A to F) list works under authors, performers or titles, as appropriate. The listings (literature; comics and graphic novels; film, TV and radio; music; games; fine art and graphic design) are supplemented by an index and a catalogue of Arthurian characters and themes; for most of the entries there are annotations after the publishing details, some terse, others more extended. The whole is a massive and impressive undertaking by these academics from the English Department of the University of Alberta, and is one that bears comparison with Philip Boardman and Dan Nastali's *The Arthurian Annals* (OUP 2004, though the latter covers a longer time span, and in two volumes). Such works need not be just the preserve of specialists, though sadly that is the target market, nor appeal only to completists.

Pendragon interest may focus on past and present members and associates, and they are well represented here. A random trawl produced Geoffrey Ashe, John Badger, Cherith Baldry, Pamela Constantine, Anna-Marie Ferguson, Jess Foster, Helen Hollick, Anne Lister, John Matthews, Simon Rouse, Steve Sneyd, Fred Stedman-Jones and Rosemary Sutcliff, and there are bound to be others. One or two errors appear – for example, Jess Foster, correctly noted as founder of the Pendragon Society, has mysteriously changed her gender, and under poet John Badger it is incorrectly stated that 'Pendragon House is the publishing arm of the Pendragon Society ... and claims to have been the instigator of the 1968 archaeological dig at Cadbury Castle (and thus responsible for "finding Camelot")' – but, such quibbles aside, it is not only gratifying for individuals to merit recognition in a North American compilation but also to appear in such august company as here presented.

Chris Lovegrove

bookworm

Regarded as one of the most famous early medieval sites in Scotland, the Perthshire royal capital at Forteviot is now the subject of a Tempus study by Nick Aitchison. ***Forteviot: a Pictish and Scottish royal centre*** (0 7524 3599 X £19.99 304pp) examines its role in the Pictish kingdom of Fortriu and then in an early Scots kingdom. Also from Tempus is ***The Anglo-Saxons: the verdict of history*** (0 7524 3604 X £17.99 240pp), Paul Hill's exploration of the legacy of the Germanic migration, its use as a counterbalance to Arthurian revivals and its meaning in multi-cultural England.

Kate Mosse's 2005 time-slip novel, a grail quest "with a twist", is now available as **Labyrinth Illustrated Edition** (Orion hardback 075287618X £20.00). For background details on this and other works in writers' own words go to www.meettheauthor.co.uk

Next issue we will be examining the conclusions of Stuart McHardy's new book ***On the trail of the Holy Grail*** (Luath Press), and several outstanding reviews on monsters – including Paul Broadhurst's ***The Green Man and the Dragon*** (Mythos) and Richard Freeman's ***Explore Dragons*** (Heart of Albion Press) – will belatedly see the light of day. New and recent Arthurian titles by Boydell & Brewer imprints will also be featured, as well as *Book*Worm's usual digest.

Chris Lovegrove

swallow music

Celtic Music by Hilary Rushmer

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Celtic Journey includes arrangements on traditional tunes such as 'Tom Bowlin' – beautifully played as a solo Cello with backing accompaniment on the keyboards; and a haunting melody, 'My Lagan Love', arranged for solo Flute. The album also includes oringinal compositions such as the opening tune 'Journey of a River' written to reflect the different moods a river might pass through on its journey from it's source to the open sea and 'Leaving Arisaig' reminisant of travels on the West Coast of Scotland.

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