pendragon

XXXIV *No 3* • ***Otherworlds*** • Role-playing • Another Arthur

editorial

Vol XXXIV No 3 Spring 2007

Themes
This issue focuses on **Otherworlds**, a catch-all theme that takes in role-playing scenarios and film, the parallel worlds of science fiction, fantasy, historical fiction and fictional history, as well as versions of the Celtic Otherworld such as Fairyland, the islands of Grassholm and Avalon, and Mount Etna. In this way a number of outstanding contributions which haven't fitted our projected themes conveniently at last manage to find their way into print in appropriate company.

This also fits in well with our **2007 Round Table** at Hay-on-Wye. This is the town which many will know made a unilateral declaration of independence to publicise its wealth of bookshops and its literary festival. As a result of this it holds itself, as befits a truly border town, to be neither in England nor in Wales and so is in a liminal state, a notional No Man's Land and in national limbo. Or so it claims.

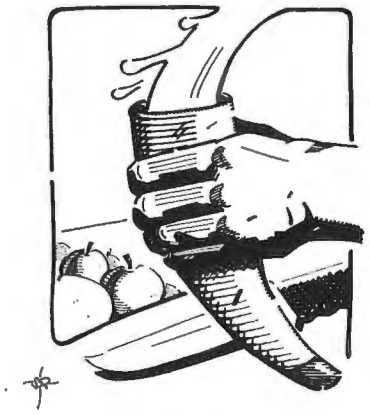
The advertised theme for this issue of **The Fisher King** is now pencilled in for the summer number, giving for those who intended to produce something on this topic an extension of the deadline until mid-August 2007.

Electronic news
Pendragon is back on the net with its new website – **www.pendragonsociety.org** – for which thanks go to the Cedar Tree Committee, particularly Anita Loughrey (webmistress), Fred Stedman-Jones and Dave Burnham, and to artists Ian Brown and Simon Rouse. Do take the time to visit and to pass on your comments (via **pendragon59.subs@btinternet.com** if you prefer). But don't get confused by other organisations masquerading under the same name: we were the first – accept no substitutes! In the meantime you may contact the editor via **ed.pendragon@yahoo.co.uk** regarding editorial matters (but no attachments, please). All these developments are not only to take Pendragon into the 21st century but to spread the word about its activities, sort of word-of-mouth on-line.

Thanks
Grateful thanks go to Anita Loughrey, Fred Stedman-Jones and Dave Burnham for their Herculean efforts variously over the website and the 2007 Round Table. Simon and Ann Rouse provide smooth administration for subscriptions and journal despatch, and as usual there wouldn't be any journal were it not for the contributors, both occasional and regular.

Appreciative remarks continue to be very welcome. Bill West found Simon Rouse's "keyhole" cover illustration for last issue "quite intriguing," Val Stockley declares her last annual subscription resulted in "another great year!" and Dot Parfit rates *Pendragon* as "an enduringly interesting magazine". We hope this issue does it for you too.

Chris Lovegrove



Simon Rouse

Haiku

Arthur Pendragon
Messiah of Avalon
Scion of the sword

Roger S Neville-Neil

Coming soon
A Gaelic Arthurian ballad, more of Bill Russell's extended medieval narratives review, Twrch Trwyth in America, Peronnik the Fool, original Arthurian fiction, reviews and much, much more.

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Contents

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Letters to PEN-DRAGON

ANTIPODEAN FAREWELL

Following correspondence via e-mail with Sophie Masson and Felicity Pulman, I've been asked to pass on to *Pendragon* the rather sad news that the **Arthurian Association of Australia** is being wound up and will henceforth cease to exist due to the organisers having to many commitments elsewhere. Sophie has just brought out her series of children's fantasy adventures based around the character Thomas Trew, Felicity is concentrating on works such as her Shallott series, and both are involved with research and various other projects. They have asked me to pass on their best wishes to all at Pendragon, and to wish everyone well for the future.

Ian Brown, Middlesbrough, Cleveland

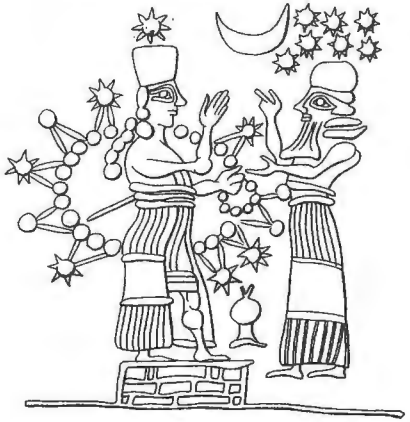

Fig 1

THE ANOMALY OF THE PENTAGRAM

I thank Alastair for his kind comments regarding my article and for drawing attention to the history and origins of this very intriguing symbol ["Of illusions and pentagrams" *XXXIV* No 2, 4-5]. He is quite correct in his assessment of the eight pointed star as stellar and its later, more common association with the deities Inana and Ishtar. When used in this context, it was depicted above the head of the character denoting their deific status. However, I wish to respectfully disagree with Alastair's statement that this symbol was unknown in ancient Sumer and would draw his attention to the highly significant use of the five pointed star in early art and iconography of Mesopotamia. In figure 1 we can see Ishtar / Inana surrounded by a nimbus of stars ranging from *five* points to seven.[1]

Without a dated description relevant to these images we can only speculate that this depiction of five points refers to stars. But it does provide unequivocal proof of the historical use in the period in question of this archaic symbol. Moreover, another image on a cylinder seal, figure 2 depicts the deity believed to be Marduk (both historical and mythical king / deity) wearing several amulets upon his chest, one of which is clearly a *five* pointed 'star' symbol.[2] Again we can only guess its significance, but its design and inclusion as royal impedimenta is indisputable. It is worth noting the qualities of Marduk were said to include magick and wisdom, traits later associated with the pentagram. Lenormant[3] too makes an interesting observation in the use of 'breastplates' of precious stones worn as part of the 'Royal Insignia'. This supports statements made within my article, to which Alastair has deemed incorrect.

But could the symbol here represent a stylised hand, often used to represent the power of a deity to inflict harm and disease or protection from it?[4] Two deities are known to be associated with this 'hand' symbol – Utu/Samas (whose powers were subsumed by Marduk) and Ishtar, the goddess of 'Fate'! Does the hand therefore maintain an amuletic quality coterminous with the hand of Fatima?

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[1] After Jeremy and Anthony Green (2003) *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia* (British Museum Press) 108

[2] *ibid* 128-129

[3] François Lenormant (1999) *Chaldean Magic* (Samuel Weiser Inc) 160

[4] Jeremy and Anthony Green (2003) *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia* (British Museum Press) 67, 102

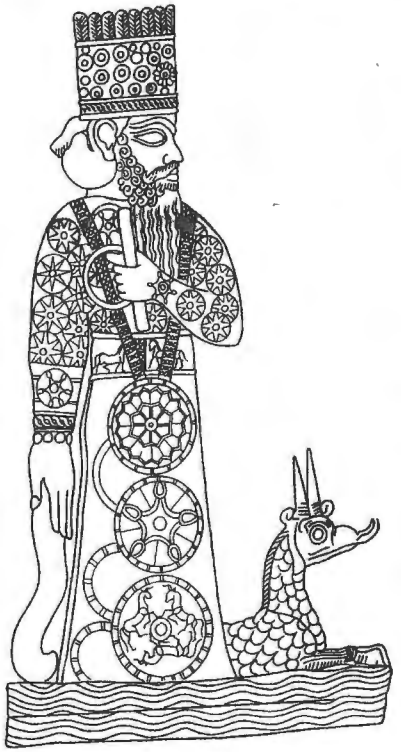


Fig 2

Never-the-less, the importance of the number five is again emphasised in this tablet (figure 3) by its repeated use, especially in conjunction with the eight pointed symbol.

Both five and eight are significators of the synodic cycle of the planet known to us as Venus (we do not have the Sumerian or Babylonian reference for this planet, although we do know they used the term 'goat star'). The conjunctions of this planet around the sun form a five pointed star or pentagram! Co-incidentally, the goat has, over millennia become associated with the pentagram and (occult) magick. Mercury is known to trace a path describing a six-pointed star, indicating application of both five and six pointed stars due to increased study of the motion of the planets noticeable to the naked eye in these archaic periods.

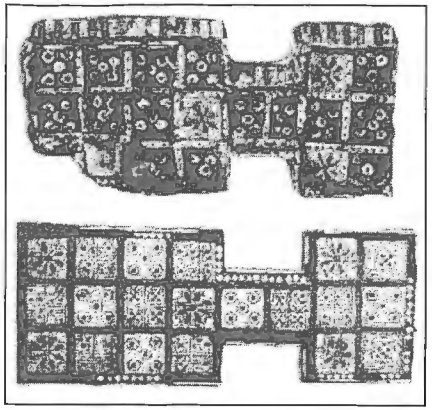


Fig 3: Royal tombs of Ur, Mesopotamia
On the top: PG 800 nį U 10478, 2700-2500 BC, 35x12 cm, Museum of Philadelphia.
On the bottom: Schub-ad queen grave, PG 513 nį U 9000, 2700-2500 BC, 27x12 cm, British Museum E 66216.
Both have been restored. They were made of lapis-lazuli, shells and bones inlaid with tar.

The five pointed star was indeed prevalent throughout Egypt, but its earliest known form was *circa* 2,600 BCE where it adorns the ceilings of the Pyramid of Djoser at Saqqara. Other symbols shared by the Sumerians and the Egyptians include the djed pillar and the ankh. In my article I state that the archaic symbol of the five pointed star is found in the 'dust of Sumer'; I did not intend this to imply the later rather stylized pentagrammic graphic of modern use, simply its origins. That the five pointed star did not attain its graphic and mathematical form until utilised by Pythagoras approximately 2,000 years later is however, highly improbable, especially when it is speculated that he may have based his esoteric doctrines on those drawn from within the Babylonian Cosmology. Furthermore, his placing of the elements within the points of the pentagram could be logically agued to overlay those of the five directions I also refer to in my article. I did not claim these to be the four *cardinal* directions (as Alastair intimated), of which there can obviously only be four. The fifth element of spirit / aether of Pythagoras has been suggested by others to refer to the heavenly

regions, above, thus equating with the fifth point. This fifth point of spirit acknowledged as 'upwards' in the direction of the heavens, has remained sacred to the indigenous tribal peoples of the Americas and others the world over. Incidentally, the 'Four Directions', Alastair also mentions do not in fact refer to the cardinal points (also known as the four winds), but to the four rising and setting points upon the horizon of the sun at the solstices.

Jacobsen[5] asserts an extremely complex cosmological Sumerian / Akkadian world view as comprising of the earth plane of four cardinal directions, surrounded by the mighty ocean (salt sea), three bands of heaven above and one of Abzu below; below that is the netherworld, of shades and the dead – all simplified by Alastair as, earth, heaven and underworld. This can be varyingly described as anything from three to eight layers if we include the encircling ocean! Though aware of Abzu, and the Ocean and the horizon, it was the four cardinal directions and the heavens that dominated their lives, both on mundane and religious levels. The Gods were supplicated daily, with the 'lifting of the hands'; a gesture towards the heavens. Circles encompassing the four cardinal points were marked out for magickal purposes and invocations were made of the spirits of these four compass points and to the spirits of air (above). Clearly this indicates five directions of considerable importance to them.

Finally, historical the Temple of Sin at Harran, rebuilt three times during the first millennium BCE, was described as round, *pentagonal* and octagonal.

According to my original sources[6], the pentagram is a registered pictogram within the Labbat's Sumerian dictionary, at least five thousand years old. Another source[7] lists it as a symbol of imperial power. One other speculative source also suggests its use as an amulet of protective design upon pottery for the preservation of its contents.[8]

When interpreting rather than analysing myth, I endeavour to employ lateral thinking, which hopefully supports the solid core of known facts in such a way as to render the overall summation interesting, inducing renewed interest and verve. It is a device of mine designed to invite the curious reader to research for themselves certain obscure, controversial or contentious points, not yet widely known or atrophied by academic empiricism. We have to remember the myths are themselves not only multi-layered which therefore invite subjective perception, but the narrators and scribes were oft indulgent of dubious inclusions and comments.

My own interpretation of the Gawain myth ["Green Knight" *XXXIII* No 4 and *XXXIV* No 1] neither rises nor falls upon this rather short and insignificant comment, added as an encyclopaedic inclusion concerning one aspect of the origin of the pentagram. My main focus was upon the links between the Pythagorean pentymychos and its correlation with both Fate and Strife seen in the deities of Morgana and Mars / Teutates. Both these aspects can now be seen to be additionally supported by these further investigations into a simple throw away comment, included in the text of the article for interest only. The study of the unknown origins and significances of the pentagram from the Neolithic to the present is worthy of an article in itself, but points were selected for their relevance to this particular tale.

I apologise for the length of this response to Alastair's comments and ask the indulgence of *Pendragon* readers in matters not strictly relevant to the theme of the magazine, but hope this incursion into a highly fascinating area has proved of some interest to them. Thank you.

Shani Oates, Wingerworth, Derbyshire

[5] Thorkild Jacobsen (1976) *The Treasures of Darkness: a History of Mesopotamian Religion* (Yale University Press) 168

[6] www.absoluteastronomy.com/encylopedia/p/pe/pentagram.html

[7] www.mysticalplanet.com/lib/pentagram.html

[8] B G Walker (1983) *The Woman's Encyclopaedia of Myths and Secrets* (Harper & Row Publishers) 782

SICILY, SWORDS, STONES AND SKY

The piece on meteorite iron [Alastair McBeath's "Swords from the Stars"], and particularly the lightning-meteorite iron association, would explain, if Excalibur was a garbling of Caledbwlch (*ie* lightning), how the name arose of that was, or was believed to be, the source of the sword's material. I've just been reading *A Newton Among Poets*, Carl Grabo's fascinating 1930 book about Shelley's use of science in *Promotheus Unbound*, and in that is mentioned that Erasmus Darwin and other scientists of the period associated meteors with electrical phenomena in the sky, so the association persisted till the early 19th century at least.

It also set me wondering if the iron crown of the Lombards was meteorite iron, and that was what gave it significance: after they conquered most of Italy, they certainly would have had access to gold and jewels in plenty, so why, otherwise, stick with mere iron (although I suppose it could be ancestral piety, *ie* the crown had perhaps come with them all the wandering way from their Baltic homeland).

I was also intrigued by the different slant on the Tancred/Richard interaction [Fred Stedman-Jones' "Excalibur in Sicily"]: a classic example of the way, in so many aspects of Arthuriana, the same pieces of data can be endlessly rearranged into different plausible patters.[9] Whether or not the two kings did end up in a state of mutual respect and alliance, though, Richard's initial act of not just erecting his "portacastle" on Sicilian soil without permission but giving it such an offensive name, Mategriffon[10] implies that his opinion of Tancred's subjects (and the insult would also specifically include Tancred's mother, *if* she was a Sicilian Greek by ethnicity), and thus by association their king, was contemptuously low when he arrived. So what changed it?

There were many other fascinating things, including [the] very useful comprehensive summary of related sword myths and legends ["The Symbol in the Stone"] and the strong indications in the Gaimar text [Geoff Sawers' "Le bon liuere de Oxeford"] that Geoffrey's of Monmouth's "Welsh book" really did exist.[11]

Steve Sneyd, Huddersfield, W Yorkshire

[9] Reminds me of a toy I loved when about six or seven, a kaleidoscope tube, each turn producing a new colourful shape to be viewed inside – and with no need for a computer!

[10] A modern parallel would be a British army post in Afghanistan officially named something like "Up yours, towelheads".

[11] Unless, to be cynical, Geoffrey did a Iolo Mogannwg and forged his source before starting his own book, but that would seem an excessive amount of trouble to go to in order to muddy the waters and/or cover his tracks – though of course forgery did rather go with the Church's territory, peaking with the Donation of Constantine, so that sort of double bluff wouldn't be impossibly out of professional character for a cleric. That damn kaleidoscope again!

MORE TALES FROM A *SHY GORILLA*

According to Stephen Oppenheimer, in *Eden in the East*, discussing the origins of civilisation with an eye to Southeast Asia, identifying the transition of Prehistoric rice cultivation "... is still a Holy Grail"[12] whilst Colin Ronan, in 1967, discussing the history of astronomy, mentions the "work of the observer who has pursued the holy grail of accuracy."[13] Then again, Richard Hammond, whilst test-driving the British-engineered Ascari supercar for *Top Gear*, claimed that the supercar Holy Grail is the achievement of 200mph.[14]

From technology to mythology, and from metaphor to comparison: Peter James, in "The Sunken Kingdom", claims that the subject of Atlantis has become "... a modern legend, a potent image as integral to Western civilisation as the Holy Grail or Superman."[15]

Ian Brown, Middlesbrough, Cleveland

• A ***Shy Gorilla** is an anagram of 'Holy Grails' – but, as Ian says, "I'm sure you guessed that'. More shy gorillas appear in The Board this issue, and there's more of them to come...*

[12] Stephen Oppenheimer (1998) *Eden in the East* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson) 69

[13] Colin A Ronan (1967) *Their Majesties' Astronomers* (The Bodley Head) preface, viii

[14] *Top Gear* BBC2 January 1 2007

[15] Peter James (1995) *The Sunken Kingdom: the Atlantis Mystery Solved* (Random House) 2

Arthurian Sicily ∞ *Part 2*

Fred Stedman-Jones

Last time[1] we left Richard sailing away from Sicily to the Holy Land in his impressive Armada, flags flying, trumpets blowing; he was a consummate showman always. Some more questions and thoughts follow.

Q. Why did he say it?

We know that Roger of Howden wrote that the sword Richard had given to Tancred was Excalibur. Did Richard himself say it was? How can we ever know the answer to that question? If Roger was the only witness present who has said so it is important to ask *when* did he say it or write it? Was he likely to have been telling the truth and what is truth anyway? We are all *experts* by knowing things Arthurian that other people have told us and our scholarship depends on our knowing the value of these sources, but we don't really *know* for certain.

Obviously there are factors we must take into account when judging Roger's evidence. He was a medieval historian / chronicler. We need to learn what those terms mean and how important verifiable facts needed to be for them to record events in their works at that time. The quality and variety of these histories are highly variable, with some entertaining and appealing examples.

Roger had served as a royal clerk under Henry II. Between 1185 and 1190 he worked as Henry's Justice of the Forest, an important position. Later he accompanied Richard the Lionheart on the Third Crusade, joining him at Marseille in August 1190. He left for Europe in August 1191 in the entourage of Philip II of France. On his return Roger retired to Howden in Yorkshire where he began to compile his *Chronica*, a general history of England from 732 to his own time, including episodes from his own experiences. His work breaks off abruptly in 1201. His being at Sicily when Richard might have put on a big act to impress Tancred was *recollected in tranquillity* as Wordsworth would say – a big moment for him to report on years later. Did he romanticise the moment – give it extra glamour and significance? Would he have done such a thing? Have we any more possible examples from his pen of this permissible medieval giving of symbolic significance to events? There is at least one that suggests he was a man of his time.

Henry II and Philip the King of France had been approached by the Pope to go on crusade at a great event in France on 28 January 1188. They made public vows that they would take up the cross and the holy emblem would have been sewn onto their clothes for all to see. Howden records that at that moment the crowds saw a great cross appear in the sky above the kings' heads and knelt in awe at this vision of God's approval.

This was the zeitgeist of the period; if we can't understand that medieval mindset we shall always ask the questions of a 21st century inquirer – looking at them from afar, dismissing it all as naivety rather than as a different mental perspective from our own.

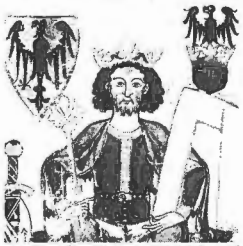
Q: Who else tells the story later?

Walter of Coventry for one (late 13th century) in his *Historical Collection*; the tale is now well afoot:

On the fourth day, the king of Sicily sent many great gifts in both gold and silver, as well as horses and silk garments, to the English king… Moreover, the king of England gave to King Tancred an excellent sword called Caliburn, formerly belonging to King Arthur of England. Then Tancred gave to the King of England four great ships, called 'Ursers', and fifteen galleys.

Robert Rouse and Cory Rushton have an engagingly modern but nevertheless valid interpretation of Richard's motives; we must not allow ourselves to get too sentimental about believing these tough noblemen didn't manipulate such moments and modes of thought for their own ends, the higher clergy, too! They point to the fact that Richard only asked Tancred for a ring and gave him what would have been a great treasure, so ending up with much more: galleys and transport ships of great worth for his armada. Did Tancred suspect it wasn't Caliburn? Did he know it wasn't? Richard was his only hope.[2]

Q: What happened in Sicily next?



It was shameful that Richard, the heroic leader of the Third Crusade, should have become a fugitive and virtual outlaw on his journey home from the crusade in 1192 because of the machinations of Henry Hohenstaufen, Philip of France and his own brother John. In spite of Tancred's spies advising him of several dangers, Richard was captured by Leopold of Austria and held for ransom in Austria then Germany (1192 -1194).

Incidentally, the first Arthurian story in German about Lancelot was a poem in rhyming couplets called *Lanzelet* by a Swiss priest, Ulrich von Zatzithoven; in this work Lancelot is kidnapped as a baby and raised by a sea fairy. It was translated from an Anglo-Norman MS brought to Austria by a hostage for Richard's ransom, Hugh de Morville, probably the same man who took part in the murder of Thomas Becket when he was a young hotblood. David Boyle asks: *was he expiating his sin – not just by acting as a hostage for the king but by spreading the Grail legend across Germany?*

Henry's ransom terms demanded that Richard would sail with him to Sicily, providing galleys and 200 soldiers to help wrest the island from Tancred. Richard's release with the payment of ransom money and Tancred's unexpected demise in February 1194 enabled Henry to conquer Sicily himself and crown himself at Palermo on Christmas Day, 1194. He ruled over Sicily brutally for three years, when he died suddenly at Messina on 23 September 1197 while planning a crusade to the Holy Land.

Another example of medieval historical writing marks those unhappy days. In the *Legenda Aurea* of Jacobus de Voragine, the 13th century archbishop of Genoa, he records that in Henry's time there were terrible storms when *square stones the size of eggs fell with the rain, destroying trees, vines and crops and killing many people*, and if that wasn't enough, *crows and great flocks of birds were seen flying through these storms, carrying live coals in their beaks and setting houses afire.*

It was obviously a hard time to be alive in the Emperor Henry's lands.

By 1199 Tancred, Henry and Richard were all dead. The doctrine of purgatory was being rethought at that time and a seminal didactic treatise appeared written by Henricus of Sawrey, the *Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii*, examining afresh Augustine's division of purgatory into four parts, now seen to be a *place* of the afterlife rather than a *state* of being. One wonders in which category the three kings had each been placed: the *boni* (saved), the *mali* (the damned), *the non valde mali* (the not completely evil, or middle state) *or the boni non valde* (the not completely good, another intermediate state). The good and evil went to their appropriate homes in heaven and hell while the in-betweens, according to their moral / religious gradings, to purgatory (the *non vale mali*) or – until the council of Lyons abolished it in 1274 – to the Earthly Paradise (the *boni non vale*) to get better prepared for heaven itself. Dante was yet to write his masterpiece.

Evidences were sought for purgatory in visions and apparitions, dreams and stories, which included King Arthur – no longer necessarily secure in a tolerant pagan Celtic Otherworld. Italy was clearly aware of this material early in the 12th century – the architectural features at Modena and Otranto cathedrals on the mainland demonstrate this.[3]

[1] Fred Stedman-Jones "Excalibur in Sicily: some ramifications" *Pendragon XXXIV* No 2 (2007) 18ff

[2] Gransden, Antonia (1992) *Legends, Traditions & History in Medieval England* (The Hambledon Press, London); C Rushton & R Rouse (2005) *The Medieval Quest for Arthur* (Tempus Publishing Ltd)

[3] David Boyle (2006) *Blondel's Song* (Penguin Books, London); W G Ryan

Q: Are there other Sicilian Arthurian-related folktales?

Yes. The Norman Conquest of southern Italy was a remarkable achievement by a handful of swashbuckling knights, the sons of Tancred de Hautville, in search of adventure and personal gain rather than by an organised army like that which had conquered England in 1066. By 1127 all Sicily and southern Italy was ruled by the Norman Ruggeiro I, Roger Guiscard, who took Sicily from the Arabs. Roger assumed the title of Great Count of Sicily. Such exploits naturally become the stuff of legend and folklore which is often grafted onto earlier tales.

The Normans also brought new stories to add to the broad and fertile ethnic culture of Sicily, among them the legends of King Arthur. The natural process of assimilation ensured that aspects of this romantic cycle of new tales soon began to be localised in and around the island itself. Mount Etna became the focus of several of these tales. After their treaty of mutual friendship, Tancred had been eager to show Richard some of the sights of his kingdom and took him on a five day sightseeing tour. Etna, once thought to be Vulcan's forge in Greek myths, was and is the major dramatic showpiece of Sicily, towering almost 11,000 feet over the Strait of Messina. As most Arthurian associations in Sicily were with Etna at that time we might conjecture whether the two Norman kings decided to return the sword Excalibur to the surrounding sea or even into the volcano itself, it hasn't been seen since!

Morgana's land of faery was located within Etna in the French romance of *Florian and Florete*, and her kingdom is described before Arthur's arrival. Morgan, the enchantress, a mysterious contradictory figure, first appeared in Geoffrey's *Vita Merlini* (1150) as

the ruler of Avalon, a skilled healer and shape shifter.

J Wood Brown (1897) writes

The Fata Morgana, as she is called, is still remembered on these southern coasts. When the mirage appears in the straits of Messina, and houses and castles are seen hanging in thin air, the people call them by the name of that mysterious princess. They think that the sides of Etna have become transparent and that what they behold is the realm of faery with the Fata Morgana's palace in the midst.

The Fata Morgana is a mirage, of course, an optical illusion caused by temperature inversions. Another phenomenon in the Strait is a natural whirlpool which is linked with the classical legend of Scylla and Charybdis.

Morgana features again in a story concerning Roger I, who conquered Sicily from the Saracens. Legend tells how, while on a beach at Calabria, Roger I was besieged by Sicilian refugees begging him to free Sicily from the Saracens. When he hesitated, Morgana appeared in her glory before him. She showed him her white coach drawn by white horses and offered to carry him across the Strait and made towns and palaces on the other side appear so near that Roger could touch them. He refused her help!

Wood Brown again:

Gervase of Tilbury tells us that near the town of Catania lies the burning mountain of Etna, called by the people Mongibello, and famed among them as the abode of King Arthur. One story has a groom searching for a lost horse venturing to enter an opening he perceived in the hollow part of the hill. Here he found a narrow winding path which led to a pleasant land within Etna and to a palace, the home of Arthur.

Carter von Heisterbach repeats the tale with a significant variation:

in his pages the pleasant land of Avalon, with its peaceful palace, becomes the dark abode of fire, answering more nearly to the actual phenomena of the mountain. Arthur hence issues a dread summons to the owner of the palfrey, bidding him appear in that infernal region within a fortnight.

It would seem that the location has now become the Christian purgatory and Arthur its monarch![4]

transl (1993) *Jacobus de Voragine: The Golden Legend. Readings on the Saints* (Princeton University Press, NJ)

[4] Norwich, J J (1976) The Kingdom in the Sun: 1130-1194 (Faber paperback): Rev J Wood Brown (1897) Enquiry into the Life & Legend of Michael Scot

Q: Who succeeded Henry in Sicily?

The death of Henry 1197 brought the crown of Sicily to Frederick II before his third birthday; his mother became his guardian for six months before she also died. At that tender age Frederick became King of Sicily under the regency of Pope Innocent III (1198 to 1216) who became regent and his guardian. On 26 December 1208, the day of his fourteenth birthday, he proclaimed himself of age and immediately assumed control of his kingdom, preferring to live in Southern Italy rather than Germany. With both Norman and German blood, he identified with his mother's heritage and a remarkable renaissance occurred in Sicily two hundred years before elsewhere. He was known as *Stupor Mundi*, the Wonder of the World, and a new Arthurian Age had begun. He will be the subject of my third article in this series.

The Crystal Cave

Eileen Buchanan

Spar Cave, Isle of Skye is a large limestone cavern accessible only at certain times because of the tides, and entered through a high-sided rock passage into which they flood. It is now despoiled due to Victorian tourists carrying sooty torches and snapping off its stalactites for souvenirs, but in earlier times must have been an awesome sight to the visitor.

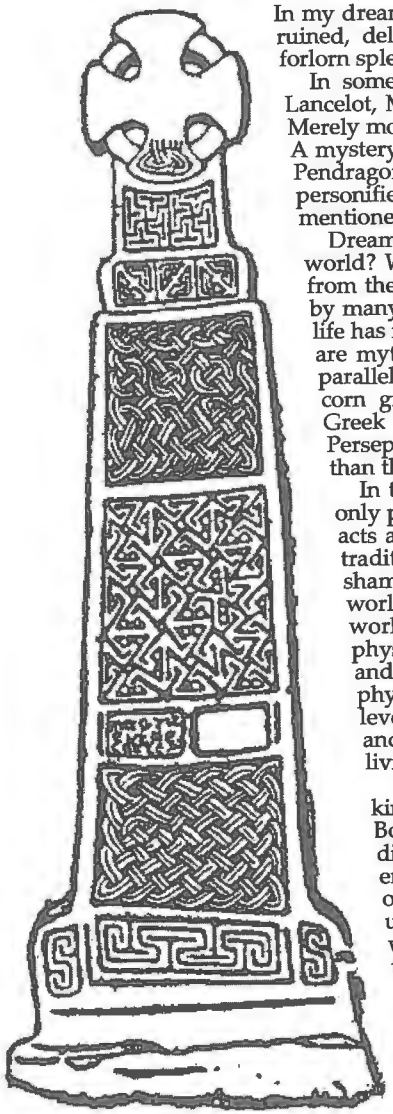
The entrance to the cave is some way along from Dun Grugaich, Fort of the Young Woman, at Glasnakille Village near Grid Ref. NG535135:[5] Skye is in Highland Region, but part of it perhaps was in Dalriada (Argyll) in the 6th century when a cell of monks from Iona was visited by St. Columba there. According to St Adomnan, Aedan of Dalriada was inaugurated king by Columba and Aedan's son Artúr is, I believe, the earliest recorded historical Arthur of that period.

Although Spar Cave cannot now be viewed as it was, thanks to recent archaeological excavations and the Internet we can take a virtual tour of another 'crystal cave' nearby: High Pasture Cave,[6] at Grid Reference NGRNG 594197. Its beauty gives us an idea of what Spar Cave's interior must have been like. Skye has been settled since pre-history and we can only imagine what these early peoples must have made of such a wonder. Tales of Nine Maidens attach themselves to the island, tales too of Scathach the female warrior and her sisters who trained Cu Chulainn.[7] The antiquarian John Toland (b 1670) attributed Eratosthenes' (276-194 BCE) 'Temple of Wings' to Skye,[8] whose name means the Winged Island in Gaelic *an t-eilean sgitheanach*. It is tempting to link these stories in the mind and envisage a sacred island of breathtaking beauty, a goddess cult centred on a Winged Temple and a Crystal Cave...

Eileen Buchanan, Beltaine 2006

[5] www.ealaghol.co.uklpictures/sparcave
[6] www.high-pasture-cave.org (click onto 'virtual tour')
[7] McHardy, Stuart (2003) *Quest for the Nine Maidens* (Luath Press, Edinburgh)
[8] Nichols, Ross (1975) *The Book of Druidry* (Thorsons, London)

The Way Beyond *Pamela Harvey*



In my dream the clouds look down on the Abbey: silent, ruined, delicate of line, expressing vulnerability in its forlorn splendour.

In some unexplained intuition I remember Arthur, Lancelot, Morgan le Fay and Merlin. Who was Arthur? Merely mortal man? In some legends he is like to a god. A mystery of divinity surrounds all of these. The name Pendragon means Chief; in ancient times it also personified Wisdom, *eg* the Dragons of Wisdom mentioned in Sanskrit writings.[1]

Dreams, memories, what do they mean to today's world? What knight in shining armour can rescue us from the burdens of existence in a material world felt by many to be the only possibility in our lives, where life has no hope of immortality? But everywhere there are myths of Gods and Heroes and stories of other, parallel worlds we normally cannot see, where the corn grows high, as in Celtic myth; while in the Greek Eleusinian Mysteries the wheat seed, Persephone's child, is more complex and resilient than the grass seed it resembles.

In the Arthurian stories Merlin is a son of Faery, only part human and adept in the arts of Magic. He acts as adviser to Arthur and his Court. He would traditionally, as in all the ancient world, be a shaman who could bridge the gap between the world of the elves and humankind. This unseen world was also the abode of the dead. Many physicists now speak of the Quantum Universe, and scientists first began research into quantum physics in the 1920s and 30s. Now they postulate levels, worlds, even universes parallel with ours, and often overlapping ours. We may even be living in a world within a world!

All this would not be new to Merlin and his kind, nor to Arthur and his contemporaries. Both Celts, with their druidic lore, and Romans did not doubt there was more to life and its environment than met the eye. There are obviously lines of magnetic spectra unseen by us, *ie* the ultra violet and infra red and radio waves. Many insects and birds and animals see the world differently from us.

Galaxies spiral outwards and onwards. The spiral is one of the most ancient sacred symbols. The Celtic Knot manifests twists and complicated turns. The twisted loop is also very ancient. In a Science Fiction story by Arthur C Clarke of the 1950s called "The Wall

[1] Is there possibly a dinosaur connection? We all have DNA from them, and part of our brain is still reptilian. But that may be a digression! Though there are worldwide legends of star and sky peoples also called Dragons or Serpents.

of Darkness" there was a mysterious wall which when the intrepid hero climbed and walked along it proved to be one-sided! I will not reveal the story further, but this fact was also demonstrated with a sheet of paper twisted around. Also, a piece of string can be twisted to that it appears to have two levels but there is only one, an indication of the nature of our universe and our world of three dimensions, that we are misled by our merely five senses.

Psychics, and sometimes everyone, may sense that we are always in a bigger picture than we see. Grief can give rise to such a perception, even if it is too fleeting, but at times we might literally feel we touch those we have lost. If the physicists acknowledge that our world may be within another world, is it so strange that sometimes we might sense this? In a television picture, different lines produce a different scene – or even different stations! Perhaps the entire Universe tunes in its planets and stars to varying wavelengths. After all, matter is not solid: it is full of holes!

Have we come a long way from Merlin and his functions in Arthur's Court? I do not think so. All wisdom is filtered through greater minds and experience than are available at this level of being. Mysticism is a kind of radio link with those who know more, perhaps Adept beings, as said in legends of long ago Atlantis (or Atzlan, as Native Americans call it), where people could travel with these beings to the planets or even the stars, where the Third Eye granted clear vision, where humans were not inhibited as today by its withering in the face of abject materialism and greed. Merlin may have been originally one of those described by the ancients in *The Book of Dzyan* or the Mayan *Popol Vuh* as a Lord of the Dazzling Face, who subsequently left this planet "in wrath" at its decline into barbarism.

We need once again to open our eyes. Our bread comes not only from our fields but from the secret world of the Elysian Fields, the hidden Universe where Nature concentrates her power and the Sun still shines through mists of sorrow and doubt. In the evening of our civilisation's day we may yet find a "touching place", in some measure, both scientific and intuitive, be attuned to the Whole.

I open my eyes and look up. The Moon has risen. The dark is light enough. ☙

Magranne's Tale

I have seen how the brash world's whisper
Calls up the forgotten brave,
How the hour of direst danger
Empties the kingly grave.

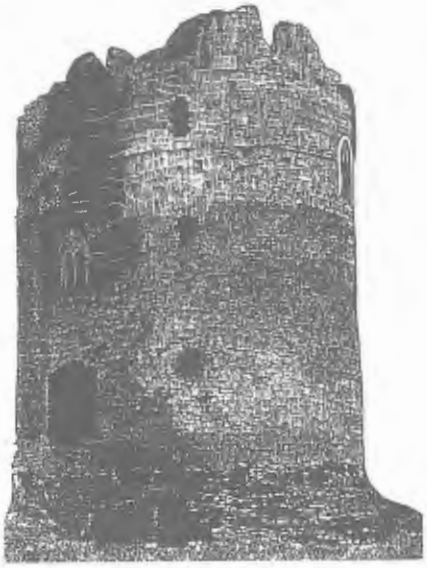
I have stood on the borders of knowing
Where the air grows rare and thin
And the being awakes to the future time
Of Arthur and his kin.

Through clouds of purple thunder
I have watched their approaching steed,
Flashing sparks from flying hooves
The lightning of their need.

For I still live in the valley
Of Galahad's font and start
And the steps winding down from Camelot
Are rooted in my heart.

Pamela Constantine

The Rotunda Code ◙ *Ian Brown*



About a decade or so ago, I spent five years researching in Warwickshire and the West Midlands, during which time certain information came to my attention: information and dues which led to further obscure and lengthy research, bringing to light a revelation that, if it were proven to be true, could shake established beliefs of the known world to their core. It has taken this long to reveal the secrets uncovered during this time, as the knowledge has been so well hidden that it might not be there at all, and only the most tenacious and determined searching has been able to draw the information to light, delving into the darkest recesses of speculation, seeking for ancient archives which one would not in reality expect to find at all. A truth, apparently, has long been concealed: the fantastic existence of a civilisation or society hinted at only in myth and legend. Once, long ago, a certain people might have haunted a particular place within this land, and, if this were to be true, it could well be that they are awaiting their chance to return.

The first hint of the nature of this secret came to me when, journeying from Warwickshire into the West Midlands and studying a map of the route, I was quite suddenly reminded of a certain enigmatic inscription which has long remained a puzzling conundrum to many researchers; but perhaps it would be best to start at the beginning of this mystery and the legends within which it is hidden.

I would not be the first to suggest a link between Warwick Castle and Camelot. Indeed, it has been mooted that the Bear and Ragged Staff, the arms of Warwickshire, have descended directly from their original bearer, King Arthur himself.[1] Might he have held court in this noble castle in Warwickshire: a castle which is still inhabited to this day? There was a time when such a suggestion might have been doubted, but there is too much corroborating evidence described here to gainsay the possibility.

The greatest city in the West Midlands (a county which now adjoins Warwickshire) is, of course, Birmingham, known as Britain's second city. Its proximity to Warwick Castle, and its boast of being the City of a Thousand Trades, is interesting. Celtic myth and legend could bear out the origin of this appellation of manufacturing skill and trading. Might it be no less than a reference to Lugh, the Celtic sun god, who boasted many skills? Could it be possible that his skill at arts and crafts have been remembered on a subliminal level? He is not the only Celtic god to make such a claim, either. According to the *Mabinogion* another Celtic god, Manawydan, son of Llyr, was also skilled in many trades and travelled to England for a while to earn his living.[2] Why should there be a link to not one, but two Celtic gods, right in the middle of a land that would later become England? If such a connection could be verified, the results might be intriguing.

If this is not sufficient to prove the Celtic and Otherworldly origin of that

[1] For a brief discussion on the Bear and Ragged Staff, see Phillips and Keatman, (1993) 181-184

[2] Many traditions claim that the Irish Leprechaun was originally the Celtic sun god Lugh, who was reputed to be an expert at many tasks. See also references in the *Mabinogion* to Manawydan Son of Llyr, who also exhibited these many skills – "Manawydan Son of Llyr" in Jeffrey Gantz (1976) – where Manawydan plies his trades in England.

busy city, remember that Birmingham is also often considered the gateway to the Black Country. Although the reason for this region's name is usually given as the preponderance of vast industries, coal and pollution of the area, which, although still noticeable, were particularly prevalent during the most productive years of the Industrial Revolution, it is also worth remembering that Gwynn ap Nudd, as Lord of the Underworld, ruled a land of darkness, and was essentially the opposite of Lugh. Both sun and darkness are thus referenced in the titles of Birmingham and the West Midlands: it is therefore both the kingdom of summer and of winter.

As if this evidence were not enough, there is even more. Perhaps the two most famous landmarks of Birmingham are the Bull Ring and the tower known as the Rotunda. It is interesting to note that, with all the levels of development that the city has undergone during the past century, the Bull Ring has remained in one form or another; and, even with the recent revitalisation of the city centre, the run-down tower known as the Rotunda has been preserved. Of course, I have heard claims that the Bull Ring began as a bull-baiting ring; but could it be that worship of the bull-slaying Mithras was first enacted there? Perceval, in his Grail quest, defeated the last bull worshippers when he destroyed the copper bull.[3] Did he come to Birmingham to do this? Perhaps the bull worshippers were there even before the Round Table. Bull worship, after all, was traditionally a part of the Atlantean culture, thousands of years before the worship of Mithras,[4] and it is worth noting that the mysterious metal of Atlantis, described by Plato as *orichalcum,* might have been a copper-zinc alloy.[5] As Birmingham is, of all Britain's cities, the farthest from the coast, is it not likely that any survivors of the sinking of Atlantis would wish to settle far inland, upon a plateau level enough for substantial building, where they felt safe from further oceanic flooding?

As further corroboration of the possibly arcane symbolism of the copper bull, it might be worth asking why a statue of a bronze or copper-coloured bull has now been erected in Birmingham's city centre.

What about the Round Table itself? Well, again, we have the aforementioned landmark giving evidence of a mysterious tradition: what manner of ancient knowledge might be concealed beneath the Rotunda? Why was it so essential that, amidst all the redevelopment, the tower should be preserved? Why a round tower? Does it hide a Round Table somewhere within its foundations?

A further hint to the veracity of this idea is given by more architecture in the city; for, just a mile or so across the city centre is another of the tallest towers, the Alpha Tower: is it a coincidence that its name begins with (indeed *is*) the letter "A"? A for Arthur? Even, perhaps, A for Atlantis or Avalon? Standing alone, this evidence might not be sufficient, but, combined with the evidence of the Bull Ring and the Rotunda, it all begins to come together.

Even still, could this be proof enough of the Arthurian origin of the city? Could it be that Camelot and the Otherworld met in Birmingham? Well, this is where this mysterious map begins to unravel the whole mystery. It was a tattered map, containing plans of the streets of the city, indicating routes used by people coming into, and passing through the area.

When I first looked at that creased and tom document, I was struck by the fact that it not only hinted at traditions of travellers, perhaps even migrants from the lost land of Atlantis, if origins of such maps could be traced back far enough, but, being a map of the region, it also contained the word "Midland". That in itself, of course, is not remarkable, for the document itself depicted the city centre; but my ongoing research had already uncovered other speculative connections

[3] Perceval's destruction of the copper bull is described in Book XVIII, Title XIII of *The High History of the Holy Grail*. It is worth also noting the description of the environment in the preceding chapter: "... the serjeants of copper were striking great blows with their iron mallets. Of one thousand five hundred that there were, scarce but thirteen were not all slain and brained of the iron mallets." Could this be a description of a nightmare industrial factory?

[4] For Atlantean bull worship, see description in Plato's *Critias*

[5] See Eberhard Zangger (1992) 137-140 for discussion of possible origins for the term *orichalcum*

with the Arthurian legends, finding riddles where there had been none before; and so a certain carving which has purported links with the Holy Grail came to mind.

The Shepherd's Monument in Shugborough (which itself reputedly has links with the Holy Grail and secret bloodlines) contains, beneath its cryptic letters, two additional letters: DM.[6] At this point, it is worth noting that there is a gap between these two letters, as if a word were missing. If we invert these two letters, they read M...D. These are the first and last letters of Midland. To verify the significance of these reversed letters, we might return to Celtic mythology. In the Celtic Otherworld, many rules were reversed. Elves from the Otherworld laughed at funerals and cried at birth; day was night and night was day. Life in this world was death in the Otherworld: death there was birth here. So it is natural that D...M should become M...D. Has a part of the Shugborough code now been cracked?

So, where does all this lead us? We have the Bear and Ragged Staff at Warwick, the mooted badge of Arthur. Not far away, we have the City of a Thousand Trades, a possible reference to the sun god Lugh and Manawydan Son of Llyr. In the same region is the Black Country, which we have suggested as a reference to the land of Gwynn ap Nudd, Lord of the Underworld. The Bull Ring hints at Atlantis. The Rotunda could conceal the Round Table. The Alpha Tower hints strongly that we may be guided to Arthur and his knights by the local architecture. Then we have the DM of the Shepherd's Monument at Shugborough, leading us to see a bloodline link with the Midlands.

So, whose bloodline are we searching for? Do Arthur and his knights lie sleeping beneath Birmingham's busy streets? Is a more noble family concealed somewhere in the Midlands? Are remnants of the Atlantean *race* living in our midst to this day? This conundrum must await further research; but I have already found that the quest for truth must be worthwhile. For, amongst all of my searching, questioning and detective work, I have found not one piece of corroborating evidence. Not one document with a name of Arthur or his knights. Not one article to directly link any city architecture with King Arthur, Atlantis or any legendary bloodline of significance. Obviously, this suspicious lack of any proof whatsoever can be seen as proof in itself of a cover-up. Is there a conspiracy here? If anyone's bloodline is being kept a secret in Birmingham, it seems to be someone incredibly important.

As if this were not enough, certain events whilst I was in Birmingham aroused my suspicions further. Interviewing the now late Pat Roach, a local celebrity, ex-wrestler and star of such television dramas as *Auf Wiedersehen Pet* and various feature films, he was understandably disappointed with the result of (at the time) recent filming abroad.[7] Stephen Spielberg had employed him to appear in his three *Indiana Jones* films. In the first, he appears as a German airman, who is decapitated by a propeller whilst fighting the eponymous hero. Is this symbolic of a beheading test, as experienced by Gawain in his encounter with the Green Knight?[8] In the second, he is an Indian taskmaster and mine supervisor. Is this symbolic of the Underworld? In the third, interestingly enough, although Pat was involved substantially in filming a fight scene, when the film came out his scene had been cut out of the film; and the film itself? It was *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, a film about the quest for the Holy Grail. Was this excising of Pat's presence in the film a coincidental occurrence, or a conscious and symbolic choice to remove a Midlands celebrity from a Grail quest? Are we being given a veiled message here? Was Pat's appearance removed from the film in order to avoid giving too many clues to the public? Again, I have found not one hint of evidence, not one iota of proof, which can obviously only mean, to anyone looking with sufficient suspicions, that there is some kind of conspiratorial cover-up happening.

If this is so, it might be nothing new. After all, why, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, when Edmund Spenser included the figure of Arthur in his epic poem, *The Faerie Queene*, did that other literary genius of the time, William Shakespeare, decide not to create an Arthurian masterpiece? Could it have any connection with the fact that Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-

[6] See *Pendragon XXXIII* No 3, Old News

[7] Private interview with Pat Roach

[8] See *Gawain and the Green Knight* in Cawley and Anderson (1998)

Avon, in Warwickshire? Is this another case of a local celebrity being silenced, or is it pure coincidence?

So, what is the mystery? Whose bloodline is it anyway? Does Arthur lie sleeping beneath the Alpha Tower or the Rotunda? Could the landmarks of Birmingham indicate a sacred Zodiac or symbolic geometry (indeed, the main elevation of Birmingham's Central Library is reminiscent of an inverted step-pyramid: could this be a covert reference to inner knowledge of the feminine principle)? In fact, if a line is drawn to join the Rotunda, the Alpha Tower and the Central Library, a triangle is created. Is there any significance to this form, perhaps Masonic or more ancient still? Are clues laid out in the landscape? Is the line of Arthur waiting to return from the City of a Thousand Trades?

As I sit here now, surrounded by research notes, yet without one scrap of supporting evidence, I cannot help but wonder at the strange workings of the mind and the unbelievable mystery of it all. If nothing else, it does go to show that, wherever we search with a determination to find a conspiracy, we will find one. ☙

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Ian Brown

Obsession

The determined seeker after facts
Lays siege to the Castle of Disinformation
Wherein the Minister for Truth lies captive

He *will* expose this conspiracy of silence
In which so-called experts hide that
Which should be broadcast freely

One little question nags, however:
Where mental obsession is concerned
Who is besieged, and who the besieger?

Chris Lovegrove

Kate Pollard

Gone to ground again?

A suggested final home for Bran's head

Steve Sneyd

"What A Long Strange Trip It's Been" sang The Grateful Dead in *Truckin'*, and if, as has been suggested, a linking thread can be drawn between Brennius, the chieftain who led the Celts to a brief conquest of Rome itself in 390 BCE, through subsequent apotheosis into the god Bran,[1] and on to the name Bron as that of the Fisher King in the Grail story, the Dead's description does certainly apply.

Bran, as a severed but still talking and, indeed, prophesying head, came into traditional Arthurian story as "himself" rather than as Bron, having been dug up by Arthur from under White Hill or Tower Hill in London, where he had instructed the followers he had previously entertained for eighty festive years in an otherworldly hall on the island of Grassholm to bury him as the protector of Britain.[2] Arthur had dug the head up on the basis that the country should rely for its defence on itself, and indeed himself, not on a supernatural entity.

But the question not usually tackled is, what happened to the head then? That is, what was the next destination along the story arc of the charismatic cranium's long strange trip?

A fascinating speculative answer was offered by C D F Shepherd, in his article "The Grail Procession: a Reconstruction", in the Glastonbury counterculture magazine *Torc*, back in 1972, namely that Arthur took it to Avalon.[3] This, in Shepherd's view, involved reburying it in Glastonbury Tor. Indeed, he visualised the head as being so huge that, as his cutaway elevation sketch shows, it in effect filled the hill. Although the article does not mention this, the Tor was also believed to contain the underground palace of the Otherworld ruler Gwyn ap Nudd, which conjures pictures of a very uneasy relation of neighbours, Bran perhaps driven to continuous weeping – Shepherd saw the source of Chalice Well as being tears from Bran's right eye, far underground – by insomnia caused by the endless unstoppable revelry of the wild hunt leader's court, clamouring away day and night straight into his ear.

The article, incidentally, also contains a variety of other picturesquely thought-provoking speculations, among them the idea that the story of the drawing of the sword from the stone in fact originated in Arthur's removal of an earlier Christian cross from the summit of the Tor as an obstacle in the way of his activities – the reburial of Bran's head, presumably, and specifically "to extend his fortifications", and also that, on Shepherd's interpretation of extant and vanished features of the Tor, they together represented "a picture of the Grail Procession, frozen into stone."

[1] A parallel to the way Arminius, leader of Germanic tribes who destroyed four Roman legions at the Teutoburger Wald in Emperor Augustus' time, was later transformed into the Germanic god Irmin, still commemorated here in Ermine Street

[2] As ravens were his symbolic bird, this story has been taken as the original source of the belief that, if the ravens desert the Tower of London on the self-same site, the country is doomed.

[3] C D F Shepherd "The Grail Procession: a Reconstruction" *Torc 8* (1972) 19-21

Arthurian Gaming

Part III – Talking the Circle

Alastair McBeath

T H Robinson

Introduction

Having examined ways of bringing The Matter of Britain to life in board and figure gaming earlier in this series,[1] this final part looks at roleplaying and storytelling games, in which map boards and figures can be used, but are far from essential. In both cases, verbal descriptions are employed to build an imaginary setting by a group of players, to create an interesting, challenging, and hopefully entertaining, game. With many of the more experienced sets of roleplayers, the difference to storytelling can be fairly marginal, but because roleplaying works to a more rules-based approach, I shall discuss the two separately.

[1] "Upon the Board" *XXXIII* No 3 (2006) 22-26; "Round the Table" *XXXIII* No 4 (2006) 8-12

Roleplaying games

Roleplaying games began as "Fantasy Gaming" back in the 1960s, where players could take on the roles of characters in an imaginary, if typically vaguely medieval, world, created and run by a non-playing umpire, and have adventures there, governed by specially-designed sets of figure wargaming rules. The earliest of these were very basic, and rather limited in the scope of what characters could do. By the early 1970s, they were replaced by the first of the true roleplaying games, of which "Dungeons & Dragons" was probably then the best, and now is probably the best-known, first published in 1974. These allowed invented characters to exist in an imaginary world setting, with rules to allow them to do anything their real-world counterparts might, and a lot more besides (such as fighting monsters, and using powerful magical spells), amazingly innovative and exciting concepts at the time.

However, the early rule sets were rather complex in parts, using mathematics and tables as figure wargaming did (and still to an extent does) to regulate the outcome of activities, and were often confusingly poorly-written. The latter usually could be resolved by anyone keen enough to have bought the rules in the first place, but while the former aspect was scarcely surprising, as the games had grown out of figure wargames, it was not to everyone's liking, and variant sets using different ways of resolving the action grew up over the next twenty-odd years. Virtually all still relied (indeed rely) to some degree on numerical probabilities and dice throws to control the variability of what could happen, but as time went by, umpires running games over several years started preferring their own sense of what would be beneficial for the storyline in the game, rather than always using the dice, to determine many actions. The best umpires in the more mature groups continue to do so, though when starting out in the genre, a rules-set is invaluable for getting you into the way of things.

It is easy to see how roleplaying systems could be adapted to run games in an Arthurian setting, and this has been done by many people already. The

great thing with such games is that with no need for physical props very often, the only limits are the imaginations of the umpire and the players. The umpire is essential, to create the scenario and general world background for the players to interact with, to maintain the necessary air of mystery and uncertainty as to what might happen next. The players too have to be willing to suspend disbelief and cooperate with the umpire (not necessarily with the characters being run by the other players, however!) to make the whole work, so this kind of game does not suit those who insist on arguing over minute rules details, or who are highly competitive.

Unlike other games, there is often no clearly-defined "winning post". Even having your game character survive is not always a priority: a heroic death in the game's context can be just as fulfilling as living to fight another day, for instance. This really can be one type of game where the taking part is all-important, not who "wins" or "loses", as scenarios need not work out in so black-and-white a fashion.

It would be possible to rework almost any published set of roleplaying rules to suit, or indeed to construct some of your own, but there is a set which already deals in depth with one version of Arthuriana, which it seems highly apt to discuss in this journal: *Pendragon*.

Pendragon

The game's full title is actually *King Arthur Pendragon: Epic Roleplaying in Legendary Britain*, though it is obvious from this why the short form is preferred. It was first published in 1985, and has been revised several times since. The most recent version I am familiar with is the fourth edition (Stafford 1993), but a fifth edition, just as *King Arthur Pendragon*, was published in late 2005 by Arthaus.[2] The fifth edition is a "cut-down" version, however. If you are interested, and can still find a copy, my recommendation would be for fourth edition, which almost all my comments below are drawn from. The fifth edition rules will need several supplementary texts just to get to the stage of fourth edition's standard rulebook, so I would not wait too long to try tracking it down.

Pendragon draws on the literary Arthurian tradition for its background, and uses elements between Chrétien de Troyes to T H White, of the key sources we are all familiar with. From these, a synthesis is created of an entirely imaginary Arthurian land, where anything from the medieval stories through to the most modern prose versions using a medieval backdrop can be accommodated. As Stafford puts it (*op cit* p4), the setting "is a time of glorious and deliberate anachronisms, brought together because they are of King Arthur, a timeless hero." Using the late 5th to late 6th centuries AD as its setting for dates and loose political circumstances, it then draws on the customs and fashions more appropriate to Malory's time (Malory being the main inspiration for much of the game), the "High Middle Ages".

The starting point is the institution of feudalism by Uther around 480-495, with chivalric conduct added on Arthur's accession in 510. Arthur marries Guenever in 514, creating the Round Table at the same time, which is broken only in 563. The Grail Quest begins in 554 by this chronology, with Camlann ending the cycle in 565. This fixed schedule provides a defining framework over and within which adventures can take place. Magic exists, but is practised successfully by relatively few, along with the Otherworld of Faerie, from which the magic ultimately derives. Religion is important too, with the "old" paganism still alive, together with the "new" Christianity. Practitioners of either define those who may use magical and miraculous powers.

The original version of *Pendragon* had the player-characters almost exclusively as male knights (which fifth edition has reverted to), but in the fourth edition, female characters and magicians/priests could be created too. While the "knightly tales" aspect is very Malorian, it caused problems for umpires needing other kinds of character to flesh the world out with, and is rather restrictive for players keen to experiment beyond these limits, further reasons for my fourth edition preference. The basic game location has remained a pseudo-medieval, if rather heavily wooded, version of what is

[2] www.arthausgames.com

modern England south of Hadrian's Wall, and Wales. Some details are provided on other places too, including the lands north of the Wall up to the Orkneys, and west to the Hebrides, Ireland, and south to France, as well as the people living there. Adventures chiefly revolve around gaining glory (or for magician characters, insight), plus the interest and satisfaction of "living" an imaginary Arthurian lifestyle.

At 350+ pages, the rulebook seems pretty "epic" too, but much of this is not essential reading for creating characters and beginning to play, providing the umpire is familiar with the rules, and has a suitable storyline prepared. The game mechanics are a little complicated in places, and this is not an easy first roleplaying game to tackle without prior experience, but it is more rewarding than many others. I have a great fondness for it, I must say, and it lends itself to solo play rather better than many others, because its basic structure allows the use of event tables to help give more background to starting characters, as well as to help determine a character's activities between adventures. Using these, with some additional ones personally constructed, it is quite possible to run solo campaigns, as I have done on occasion.

A number of supplements for the fourth edition were available too, three of which also gave extra depth to Ireland (Carnahan 1994), the lands north of Hadrian's Wall (Lampard *et al* 1995), and Scandinavia, allowing the use of characters from *Beowulf* (Hind 1996). Although all the *Pendragon* books contain a lot of detail, written by people with a genuine love for and appreciation of matters Arthurian, providing more "meat" for the "bones" of this sketched-out imaginary world, they need be regarded as nothing more than ideas and guidelines, since the whole point of such a game is to create a world-setting tailored to your own concepts of an Arthurian land.

Pendragon has long enjoyed a reputation as one of the very best roleplaying games, going back to its earliest versions. It has only improved with time in my view, prior to its fifth incarnation at least, and it remains one of my three favourite published roleplaying systems.

Storytelling games

As roleplaying games developed, there was a tendency for some to move away from highly structured, rules-led systems, to a freer, more storytelling approach, as I have remarked already. A few of these threw off all pretence at roleplaying, to become true storytelling games. Clearly, a group of people could simply sit down and tell stories, or parts of a story, each, among themselves, but the more interesting and entertaining games of this sort I have been involved with, used a deck of special cards.

The most professional set of these is for the game *Once Upon A Time*, designed by Richard Lambert, Andrew Rilstone and James Wallis, published first in a crude black-and-white version in 1993, but later in a smart, full-colour, second edition deck by Atlas Games[3] in 1995. It is still available today. It has 168 cards, 112 story cards and 56 ending ones, a random selection of some of which story and one ending card are dealt to each player in the group. Two to six players can be accommodated, but 4-6 seemed optimum in my experience.

The story cards each have a generic element from a fairy story on them, perhaps a character or a phrase, and the idea is that the first player (defined as the player with the longest beard, or

[3] www.atlas-games.com

failing that, the oldest), lays down a card and begins telling a story. Other players are free to interrupt if an element is mentioned on a card in their hand, and to take on the role of storyteller, each adding new pieces to it from the cards they hold, but each trying to bring the story to fit their own ending card. The ending card can be played only when all other cards in that player's hand have been used up.

On most occasions, the "winner" is largely irrelevant, as the story and the group's interaction to create it is the central purpose. With a group of interested and not too shy individuals (the consumption of a modest amount of alcohol was sometimes found beneficial), able to think and improvise on the instant, this can be an outstanding experience.

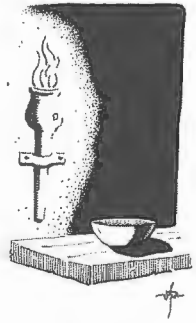
Such a generic system could be used to tell "only" Arthurian stories, or the system adapted quite readily into a more tailored Arthurian version, by anyone with enough knowledge and enthusiasm. One idea which I have tried with varying degrees of success (not specifically in an Arthurian mould, however), is to use a tarot deck for the story cards, part of which is randomly dealt to the players, with a pickup deck made of the remainder, including allowing the discarding and replacement of a card for times when someone was stumped by the cards in their hand. One card from each player's initial deal should be placed face down in front of the individual, designated as their personal ending card, and the story then created from elements on the face designs of the cards (not necessarily the symbolic meanings the card's designers suggested). For spice, a wild card or two might be stated, such as the zero card, "The Fool", where a player could take a brief flight of fancy away from the main plot of the story on their turn only, and entirely irrelevant to it, for light relief – or in desperation, sometimes. As in other storytelling games, players should be free to applaud (or boo) to show favour at an especially nicely-constructed piece of storytelling (or mock displeasure at a wholly implausible attempt to dispose of a "difficult" card!). The game is as much a social event, as a competitive effort. There are certainly Arthurian tarot packs available, which might be worth experimenting with in this regard.

Game shops

There are a good few specialist games shops about now where things discussed in this series that are still in production can be seen and bought. In England, there are also two good groups of stores I am familiar with – *Forbidden Planet*[4] and *Travelling Man*,[5] both of whom also do mail order.

Conclusion

In this short series, I have tried to give some ideas for being creative about Arthuriana in a way which does not seem to have been heavily represented in the pages of *Pendragon* before (at least, not in the decade or so of my involvement with it). I hope it will encourage some of you to try Arthurian gaming of whichever kind, so that you may have another outlet for your thinking around The Matter of Britain. Whatever the case, enjoy what you do. Games are meant as play, after all! ◎



S Rouse

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[4] www.forbiddenplanet.com
[5] www.travellingman.com

Lanval and the Otherworld

Chris Lovegrove

The Otherworld as the Land of Fairy, and occasionally as the Realm of the Dead, famously figures in many Celtic folktales and legends. Its names are various – Hy Brasil, Tir na nÓg, Annwfn, Ynys Afallon – and it naturally encroaches on the Arthurian world, usually in the form of Avalon. One of its early Arthurian appearances is in the *lai* by Marie de France called *Lanval*.

Marie de France is the enigmatic 12th-century author of *lais* and other works. We know very little of her other than from her existing writings which, as well as the *lais* (poems translated from the Breton language), include a collection of fables translated into French from English and a translation from Latin into French of the *Espurgatoire Saint Patrice*, or "St Patrick's Purgatory".[1] Scholars have surmised she lived in the second half of the 12th century, probably moved from France to Britain, most likely knew Gaimar's *Estoire des Engleis* ("History of the English") and Wace's *Brut*, and moved in courtly circles, but despite strenuous efforts to identify her – Burgess and Busby (1999) note at least five rival candidates nominated by scholars – we simply do not know who she was other than that she was called Marie and came to England from France.

As Burgess and Busby point out, among the many strands that the *lais* share unevenly among themselves, "it is incontestable that the world of the *lai* is a fairy-tale world where the unexpected can happen at any time without rational explanation". The plot of Marie's *Yonec* reappears quite naturally in a 19th-century folktale from Turin, *Il Principe canarino* ("The Canary Prince"), with no overt hint as to its links with a literary work from seven centuries before (Calvino 1982). *Eliduc* contains motifs which look back to *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and forward to the classic fairytales of *The Sleeping Beauty* and *Snow White*. It is these fairytale elements that provide some of the appeal of Marie's poems.

Of twelve surviving *lais* attributed to Marie, two can be described as Arthurian, and one other uses a theme that later gets drawn into the Arthurian orbit. *Lanval* itself is set in and around Arthur's court, while *Chevrefoil* ("Honeysuckle") features an incident in the tale of Tristan and Iseult; *Bisclavret* is the tale of a wronged werewolf which, with the names of the characters changed, later developed into an Arthurian tale. Before we examine *Lanval* as the most Arthurian of all Marie's poems, a glance at an anonymous medieval literary *lai* will help to set the scene.

Graelent

The Lay of the Death of Sir Graelent, which concludes with the words "This adventure of the good steed and of the stout knight, who went to the land of faery with his love, was noised abroad throughout all Brittany," is a classic 12th-

[1] St Patrick's Purgatory, located in Lough Derg and approached through a cave on Station Island, is an Irish version of the Otherworld, and was well-known from at least the 12th century.

century version of the tale of the fairy-mistress found in folk tales around the world (Mason 1911: 148-162). In essence the story has four features (MacKillop 1998: 179-80):

1. A mortal falls in love with a fairy;
2. the liaison is conditional on not breaking a taboo;
3. the mortal breaks the taboo and loses the fairy;
4. difficulties attend the attempt to regain contact.

However, in *Graelent* (and the various versions of *Lanval*) the story naturally divides into three stages, as we shall see.

Graelent is a vassal of the King of Brittany whose unnamed Queen attempts unsuccessfully to seduce him. The Queen complains to the King, who withholds Graelent's wages, reducing him to penury. By the month of May Graelent is left with only a squire and a horse, but his landlord's daughter lends him a bridle and saddle. Leaving the town, he enters a great forest and, as he approaches a river, spies and chases a white hart. At a clearing he sees a damsel 'disporting' in a spring, attended by her two maidens. Seizing her clothes, he promises not to hurt her if she emerges from the well to dress. Despite this inauspicious start they fall in love, and the damsel promises him her love as well as riches on one condition: "Never must you speak a word by which this hidden thing is known." She will remain by his side, unseen by others unless he speaks of her 'vainly and boastfully'. Graelent returns to his lodging where he gains a servant and a warhorse, and is able to pay his debts and give generously to poor knights.

At Whitsun a year later, the King holds a feast at which he rashly asks, "Is there any lovelier [woman] than the Queen?" Only Graelent keeps quiet, to the Queen's displeasure, and he unadvisedly says that he knows a fairer dame, thirty times more gracious than the Queen. She naturally demands a direct comparison to judge whether Graelent is right or merely malicious.

He is imprisoned for a year for his slight, but when he is freed to produce his love he despairs and shuts himself up in his lodging for another year, his luck having deserted him. When brought to court, the King's barons withdraw to consider their verdict, and all looks black for the unfortunate knight. Suddenly two outstandingly beautiful maidens arrive to tell the King that their lady is arriving to plead for Graelent, and the Queen, filled with shame, departs from the hall. Two even fairer damsels then announce the imminent arrival of their mistress. She appears to say, "Very hasty and foolish was [Graelent's] tongue," but all agree that she is fairer than the Queen, and Graelent is declared free. His punishment is not over, however, for she refuses to answer him as he follows her back to her own land. Twice she warns him not to cross the stream in the forest, twice she has to rescue him. She then, relenting, 'brought him safely into her own land, and none has met Sir Graelent since that day'. From that day no Breton has succeeded in taming his abandoned steed which appears, grieving, every year at Whitsun.

The basic three-stage plot of *Graelent* – knight meets fairy mistress who grants conditional love; knight rashly breaks condition; knight regains fairy after a period of suffering – will be met again in *Lanval* and its successors, despite changes in geography, characters and details and timings of incidents. At his point it is worth pointing out that the route to Fairyland involves entry to a forest and the crossing of a dangerous stream, and that Graelent has effectively entered the realm of the dead by crossing this Breton Styx. There are familiar echoes of course – the seizure of the fairy's clothes is reminiscent of the stealing of swan-maiden's feathers in other fairytales, the chase of the white hart is often a prelude to a magical encounter and the King's cry of "Is there any lovelier than the Queen?" is very like the wicked stepmother's request to the mirror on the wall in *Snow White*.

Lanval

Whether Marie took the plot of *Lanval* from *Graelent* or simply adapted a Breton variant of the *fée-maîtresse* tale is now impossible to know, but her *lai* proved popular in Europe for at least two centuries or more. *Lanval* appears in all four existing copies of her *lais*, and subsequently was translated or adapted into Old Norse, Middle Dutch and Middle English (Jongen 2000: 170-1).

Marie sets the adventures of her hero (his name "in Breton" is Lanval) at Kardoel (Carlisle in Cumbria) where, despite wars with the Scots and the Picts, Arthur is holding court at Whitsuntide. Many envy Lanval for his many knightly qualities, but he is overlooked by Arthur when gifts are distributed and he finds himself penniless. Leaving the town, he rides to a meadow where his spooked horse is let loose to graze and Lanval lies down with his cloak folded as a pillow. He then sees two beautiful damsels approach him from downriver; they then conduct him to their mistress' sumptuous tent, where she lies, naked to the waist because of the heat. She has left her country to be with Lanval, and he is smitten. She gives him a boon (*un dun*) – whatever riches he spends it will be replenished, but he must never reveal the secret or he will lose her. In addition, she will be with him whenever he wishes but he must never speak of her. They eat, then sleep together. Thereafter he is able to offer lavish hospitality and enjoy her company at will.

On St John's Day – midsummer – Gawain brings Lanval to a gathering of knights beneath the Queen's tower lodgings. Although Lanval withdraws, impatient to be with his beloved, the Queen attempts to seduce him. When he refuses her, not wanting to betray the King, the Queen accuses him of having 'no desire for women' but enjoys himself with 'well-trained young men' (*vallez bien afeitiez*). Goaded, Lanval declares his love for one who is worth more than the queen 'in body, face and beauty, wisdom and goodness'. Angry and humiliated, the Queen accuses Lanval in front of the King of making advances and then insulting her when she refused by boasting of a worthier love. Lanval, who realises he has broken his promise, is upbraided by the King, but maintains his innocence while also admitting his boast. A day is set for his trail, with Gawain standing bail.

On the day Lanval is told he must 'send for his beloved to defend and protect him,' but he says no help will be forthcoming. As judgement is about to be made on his banishment, two maidens arrive on palfreys asking for chambers to be made up for their lady. As the court is again pressed by the king for judgement, two further maidens arrive on Spanish mules with the news that their lady is coming to speak to the King. The Queen is now getting impatient and angry. Lanval's mistress finally approaches on a white palfrey and stuns everyone with her beauty. She defends Lanval and judgement is made in the knight's favour. Lanval leaps from a mounting block onto the back of the maiden's palfrey. 'He went with her to Avalun (*sic*), so the Bretons tell us, to a very beautiful island. Thither the young man was borne and no one has heard any more about him...'

There are clear differences with *Graelent*, for example where the Queen of Brittany's attempted seduction of Lanval, so reminiscent of the Old Testament story of Potiphar's wife, is the explicit cause of the knight's penury; in *Lanval*, there is no motivation to account for the king overlooking the hero when gifts are distributed. Nevertheless the three-part plot is common to both *lais*.

Marie relocates her Breton hero's adventure from the Matter of Brittany to the Arthurian Matter of Britain, placing Lanval and his eventual route to the Otherworld apparently in Cumbria. Here the Otherworld is explicitly called Avalun or Avalon; we must suppose that – just like Graelent – Lanval approaches the Otherworld via a river, as his fairy mistress' maidens originally arrived to greet him from downstream by an unnamed river.

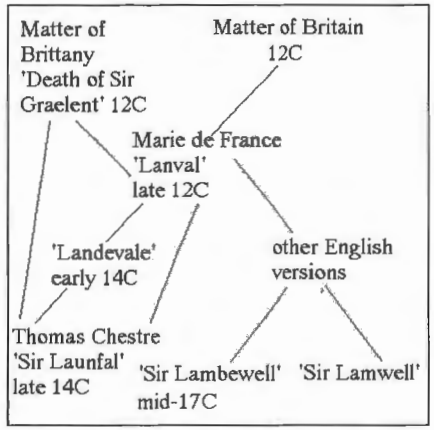

Figure 1: The Arthurian fairy-mistress tale

English versions of *Lanval*

The *lais* of *Graelent* and *Lanval* proved to be particularly popular in medieval England, judging by the several versions of *Lanval* that survive (*fig 1*). *Sir Landevale* is an anonymous version from the early 14th century which survives in a single late 15th-century copy (Shepherd 1995: 352-364). This follows Marie's *lai* quite closely, with only a few additions. Our interest focuses on the description of the fairy as the daughter of the 'King of Amylion'; at the end Landevale is brought from Cardoyll [Carlisle]

into a joly yle
That is clepyd Amylyon
That knowith every Brytan.

Marie's Avalun is transformed into Amylion, and associated with the inhabitants of Brittany.

The author of *Sir Launfal* was a contemporary of Chaucer who may or may not be the Thomas Chestre who identifies himself at the end of the poem (Sands 1966: 203-232). The author is familiar not only with English versions of *Lanval* (such as *Sir Landevale*) but also with a version of *Graelent*, because he borrows some themes and sequences of events from the anonymous Breton *lai*, as well as adding some superfluous incidents. Here he names the fairy as Dame Tryamour, probably concocted from French *trier* and *amour*, "to choose love". In *Sir Launfal* Arthur's queen, Dame Gaynour, receives a brutal punishment for her harassment of the young knight: Dame Tryamour blows on the Queen's eyes and thus blinds her.

Geography gets a little more confused: Kardevyle may be Cardiff rather than Carlisle, as it is close to Karlyoun or Caerleon; and Dame Tryamour is identified as the daughter of the King of Olyroun, who is also the 'Kyng of Fayrye' to the west. Olyroun, 'a jolyf ile', may be meant as Oléron, the island off the west coast of Brittany.

Further evidence of *Lanval*'s continuing popularity comes in the form of the English ballads *Sir Lambewell* from the mid-17th century and *Sir Lamwell*, which survives in written and printed fragments. Elsewhere, however, rather different versions of the fairy-mistress tale survive, the best-known being the German legend of Tannhauser (as made famous by Wagner) and the Scottish tale of Thomas the Rhymer. Here it might be pertinent to briefly examine a Welsh folktale type.

The Lady of the Lake

The most detailed and rather literary version of the Carmarthenshire tale of the *Lady of Llyn y Fan Fach* appeared in 1861, as told by a Mr Rees of Tonn (Davies 1911: 92-102). Set in the Black Mountain, below the Carmarthenshire Peaks, the tale tells of a widow's son who, while herding his cattle, sees a lady sitting on the surface of the waters of Llyn yFan Fach (the Lake of the Lesser Peak). On three occasions he offers her his bread – over-baked, under-baked, then just right – and she accepts the final time. She agrees to be his bride until she receives three blows without cause (*tri ergyd diachos*). There then follows a test by her father, the deity of the lake: the widow's son has to distinguish his bride-to-be from two other fair maidens, which he achieves with a little help from her.

He receives a considerable dowry of sheep, cattle, goats and horses, and the couple raise three sons at a farm outside Myddfai. All goes well until he inadvertently gives her the three causeless blows, at which she calls back all the livestock and disappears back beneath the lake. She only ever appears to her sons, to instruct them in the art of medicine, a skill which is handed on through the generations, down to the 19th century.

The Celticist John Rhys noted the 19th-century tradition of crowds visiting the lake on the first Sunday in August to see the water "boiling", heralding the approach of the Lady of the Lake and her livestock. The 14th-century poet Dafydd ap Gwilym alluded to the Physicians of Myddfai, which suggests the tale existed at least as early as the 13th century. Essentially the same tale was told of the lake at Llangorse near Brecon by the 12th-century writer Walter Map, in his *De Nugis Curialium* (Briggs 1976: 136), but without the motif of the gift of medical skills.

Motifs

Katherine Briggs, in her discussion of fairy bride stories, enumerates the motifs that the several tales across time and place seem to share. There is often the

token capture of the bride (found in *Graelent*, *Sir Launful* and the Llangorse lake story, for example), and in all of them there is a taboo imposed.

The token capture in *Graelent* comes when the hero steals her clothes (F302.4.2.1, a motif common to swan-maiden and seal-maiden tales), while at Llyn y Fan Fach and Llangorse Lake the future groom manages to eventually detain the fairy (after he has been given strong hints how to do it). Often the fairy offers gifts to the man to be her paramour (F302.3.2), whether livestock in Carmarthenshire or limitless riches as in the *lais*.

Before the marriage or liaison with the fairy (F300) there are the taboos to be kept: the taboo against offending the supernatural wife (C31) or of boasting of having a fairy mistress (C31.5). When, as is inevitable, the taboo is broken, there is the faint chance for the recovery of the fairy mistress (F302.6.2) but this seems to involve giving up life in this world, as far as the medieval tales are concerned. The modern legend of Alien Abductions (apparently a significant proportion of Americans believe this has happened to them) shows that the idea of fairy seduction or abduction continues to survive into the 21st century (Michell 1967: 97-120).

Otherworlds

The concept of the Otherworld as a Land of Fairy clearly fascinated medieval minds as well as modern. In the *lais* the Otherworld – Avalun, Amylion or Olyroun – was reached by fording a stream, though was also described as an isle to the west (*fig 2*). In the Welsh folktales fairyland was called Annwn, but only its inhabitants seemed capable of passing from one world to the next, via the waters of a lake – Llyn y Fan Fach or Llangorse Lake – not ordinary mortals.

As befits a country from whose borne no traveller returns, there are no descriptions given; the tellers of the tales seem strangely incurious about it, though perhaps it was not imagined as much different from their own. Perhaps it was only the inhabitants that merited comment – for their looks and their skills, and their ability to interact at will with the people of our world.

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Figure 2: Gateways to the Otherworld: some sites described in the text

Arthur on film

Dave Burnham

Have you ever seen an Arthurian film you've not been disappointed by? No, neither have I. The most celebrated, John Boorman's *Excalibur* (1981), never got off the starting blocks for me – too much supernaturalism with Helen Mirren and Nicol Williamson hamming up their roles as magicians. I preferred *First Knight* (1995) even though I have difficulty accepting American accents in classical or mediaeval roles and associate Richard Gere with his sleazy characters in *American Gigolo* and *Pretty Woman*. On the other hand I always think he has shifty eyes, so perhaps he was well cast as Lancelot. And I did enjoy Ben Cross as a suitably deranged Malagant. The most notable feature of the much earlier *King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table* (1954) for me was not Robert Taylor's stilted acting or Ava Gardner's risible performance as Guinevere in her upholstered bra, but the Technicolor so bright it could maim people from a hundred yards. Thinking back, I enjoyed Bruckheimer's recent *King Arthur* (2004). The premise was peculiar of course, and the usual selection of faux Arthurianisms was irritating. Did Clive Owen have to deliver all his lines like the Queen at Christmas? Why was Hadrian's Wall built in the middle of a field with a gate that didn't lead anywhere? And the marriage at the end under the lintel of a borderland Stonehenge made me grind my teeth (John Matthews, where were you when that stunt was being dreamed up?). But Ray Winston was grand, the Saxons were so cruel they made your eyes water, the good guys won in the end and Keira Knightley (more Twickers than Wiccan perhaps) wore her woad very prettily.

None of these films were British, and the history of British Arthurian films is a slim one. It is also a late one. Although there were silent versions of *Tristan and Isolde*, and two inter-war American versions of *A Connecticut Yankee at the Court of King Arthur* (1921 and 1931[1]) there was no British Arthur of any sort brought to the screen until the early 1940s. I have written elsewhere about the decline in Arthur's popularity after the Great War, and it is perhaps not surprising that such a 'modern' medium as film would not easily offer the vehicle for a hero seen in the 1930s as so old fashioned.[2] So it's not surprising that Arthur first crept onto the British Screen from an odd angle – in the form of a diminutive, but highly popular comic.

The first British feature film made using Arthurian themes directly starred Arthur Askey. Hands up those of you who remember him? Quite a few, but not many of you under forty-five I'll bet. Askey was a stand-up comedian who passed directly from his music hall roots to radio just before the war and then

[1] Neither of these films should be confused with the 1949 version with Rhonda Fleming and Bing Crosby. This was a huge hit

[2] Dave Burnham (2006) "Two Historians and a Cavalryman" *Pendragon Vol XXXIII* No3, Spring

effortlessly into film work and later TV. He was still appearing in TV programmes into his seventies. A tiny man his act was based on the appeal of his size, an inane grin behind huge saucer spectacles, silly songs and sillier dances. Known as 'Big Hearted' Arthur after one of his film titles he had a range of catch phrases, 'Before your very eyes', 'Ithankyeou', and his intro line 'Hallo Playmates'.

In 1939 a new BBC National Service radio show, *Band Wagon*, had a poor start to its run. Originally intended as a vehicle for a variety of comedy performers the right balance eluded the producers and it was decided to drop it. Before it was taken off the air Askey and Richard Murdoch were given free run of the scripting and production of the show while a replacement programme was devised. They created a blend of sound slapstick and quick fire comedy around the notion of the pair of them living in a flat on top of Broadcasting House. This was an immediate hit and soon attracted large audiences. On the back of the success of *Band Wagon* Arthur Askey starred in a number of film roles during the war. Although he never threatened the gormless but engaging George Formby as the number one British box office draw in the early years of the war, Askey was for a while the fourth most popular face in British film. That the only others ahead of him were Gracie Fields and Leslie Howard shows just how popular this little man was.

King Arthur was a Gentleman (1942) was a low budget formula film from the usual Gainsborough films team. Gainsborough, set up by Michael Balcon in 1924, was by the time the war broke, a subsidiary of British Gaumont, but still maintained its own production team. The shooting schedule for Gainsborough wartime films was in the region of three weeks, so you can imagine how they were thrown together. Marcel Varnel directed. He was one of the most successful directors of British films in the 1930s, teaming up with comedian Will Hay to produce among other things the still funny *Oh, Mr Porter!* The writers were Val Guest and Marriott Edgar. Guest became justly famous in the 1950s for directing three Quatermass films and other science fiction offerings, while Edgar, a Scot and a poet, is best remembered for the verse comedy *The Lion and Albert* (usually known as *Albert and the Lion*) made his own by Stanley Holloway.

But despite the talent of the production team and the popularity of the star *King Arthur was a Gentleman* was a peculiar concoction. It is a complete mixture of ingredients, but without the benefit of a much of a recipe. The mixture includes slapstick, topical references, an impersonator taking off radio favourites, pathos and four song and dance numbers to showcase the talents of Evelyn Dall the diminutive female lead. An American cabaret star, who had previously sung with the Ambrose orchestra, Dall's American accent sounds distinctly odd set in this very British comedy. The strange mixture does not make for natural narrative flow – in fact the plot is dragged forward in short excerpts between songs and comedy routines.

Askey plays Arthur King, a civil servant at some government ministry, who is too small to get into uniform but yearns to do his bit. He is obsessed by the glamour of King Arthur, but a gormless failure. Everyone else thinks his obsession with this unfashionable figure is ludicrous, Arthur being seen by the young generation as a fairy tale for children or half remembered literary fantasy of their grandfathers. One character comments of the Askey character that 'he's useless'. 'No', says his girlfriend, 'he's just a bit too romantic for the modern world'. When Arthur succeeds in joining up his platoon mates take the mickey as well and he has difficulty fitting in or doing anything well. So the film uses the interwar attitude to King Arthur as yesterday's hero, an old fashioned idea which did not fit in the contemporary world. And that fits with the film persona established by Arthur Askey. The tiny man could not hope to essay the classic leading man, so he offered instead the charm of the pathetic failure used so successfully by Charlie Chaplin before him and Norman Wisdom in the 1950s and 1960s.

His pals offer Arthur King a sword they pretend is Excalibur and Arthur achieves military success using the

magic of the sword to boost his confidence. When he learns that it is in truth a stage prop he is crestfallen. But then he understands that he has achieved things on his own without reliance on the magic. He flings his failed Excalibur away, only, in the final shot, to see a samite-clad hand rise from the lake and grasp the sword before drawing it gracefully beneath the surface. So the magic, placebo or not, has worked. And the unusual film manages to extol the importance and power of a half forgotten national myth as well as presenting the statutory Second World War celebration of the bravery of 'everyman'.

So does this film have any significance in the developing idea of Arthur in the mid twentieth century? Not much I guess, not much compared to the impact of T H White's child Arthur in *The Sword on the Stone* (1938) and R G Collingwood's historical roving cavalry general introduced in *Roman Britain and the English settlements* (1936) – but it may have given a small fillip to the idea that King Arthur had a role to play in a modern world, and was not just a hangover from Victorian chivalry.

Of encounter with Fomorions

through glass walls
of his sailing tower sees
ragged shiploads
close in scarecrow figures
at birdbeak prows attempt
to grapple grip be foiled
by rough wavecrest updown
hurling neat paradox of milk
smooth surface won't let
hooks ropes knives scrapenail
roughsinew bluetattoo
hands get grip: and yet
and still they won't give up
sail round & round greedy peering
peeping can't see through
he knows blur as cataracted
eyes from outside his
interior world yet
maddened in frustration
hurls treasures one by one
at walls just bounce back
at him unharmed how foolish
he has grown alone he thinks
weak tears dripping down to
beard and has to hope to
wait for storm will scatter
them away how gannets
before wind that once
one wandwave'd've sent
lost to farthest earthcorners
till that damn woman
walled as glass her youth
from him taking never giving
and wished his treasures
rocks instead
how heart at his age
should be not weak-dentable
as loss instead
stone more suited to throwing
at encasing glass
to dream breakout escape to
sail beside those ragged
pesterers clear in
dogsnarl dirty faces
all forgetters wherewhat
they came from
crying as wind current
at last shoved them on their
way "Wait for me" just as if
any could hear through
glass case walls 'd
somehow steer to his will to find
forgetting world

Steve Sneyd

Reviews

Books

"The story of Arthur – as it *might* have happened"

The Great Captains by Henry Treece first appeared in 1956. Savoy Books produced the first paperback edition in 1980, and that is the one I was lucky enough to obtain second-hand recently, having had it recommended long before as a classic Dark Age realism treatment, one of the earliest such.[1]

Treece, his teaching career resumed after wartime service as an RAF intelligence officer, first became a published author as a poet, a leading figure and spokesman of the Apocalyptic Movement of the late '30s and '40s. This movement aimed to "attack chaos on all sides in an effort to obtain something like a unified vision", to quote Treece's own 1946 summation, using a "prophetic, incantatory, even musical" approach to what Michael Moorcock in his enthusiastic introduction speaks of as a "world of madness". This description certainly fits the world frenzy of World War II. It also can be applied without difficulty to the chaotic Britain left to fragmentation and mayhem as Roman rule collapsed, making it possible for Treece to keep a continuity in his approach when he came to write a novel of Arthur as part of his '50s move into the writing of historical novels, many with Celtic settings.

Treece in his own Preface to this novel says "I do not presume to have found out who Arthur was, all that I know is that Malory and Tennyson were wrong!" Of the characters who make up his "story of 'King' Arthur, as I think it might have happened", he says "whatever one does ... to throw off the accretions of legend and later poetry, and to see the situation with an objective historical eye ... they loom and fade, slide sideways, shift out of focus, the pathetic and malevolent ghosts of a period quite unlike any other in the history of Britain."

About his own treatment, as well as specifically noting that "I sympathise with Medrawt, who has had a 'poor defence in the Court of History" and, of Arthur, "Men very much closer to his time called him *ursus horribilis*, which should give a clear enough clue", he adds more generally "to see them only as men, stripped of their doom-driven greatness, is to represent them on too trivial a scale. To draw them as massive heroes only would be to recreate them as inhuman cyphers."

Treece deals the pack of characters after much shuffling – in other words, many of his answers to the puzzles of the story are thoroughly unexpected ones – this is not a book to read if you find fresh placements of the cards distracting. Michael Moorcock, he of this edition's glowing "Foreword", in his own science fiction and fantasy novels draws much on the concept of the multiverse, rooted in quantum physics – *ie* that different, variant, strands of reality, having alternative counterfactual histories, to a greater or lesser degree divergent from our own, coexist – and in a sense Treece's tale is that of an altiverse Dark Age, not far removed from the familiar story cluster of the Matter in the sense that most of the names are familiar, but distant indeed in the origins and actions of many. To take the book's very beginning as an instance, an old, blind, defeated Count Ambrosius, abandoned by his last troops, is being led across Britain by his adoptive son, Medrodus, originally one of the Romanised equivalents of the American South's "poor white trash", plucked as a child

[1] Henry Treece (1980) *The Great Captains* (Savoy Books; first published by John Lane The Bodley Head 1956; introduced by Michael Moorcock, illustrated by James Cawthorn)

from the gutters of a Colchester in terminal decline by the Count himself. After the Count's death, he Celticises himself in name and lifestyle, the process of abandoning *Romanitas* assisted by a terrifying visionary encounter with a gruesome Merlin figure, to become a very different Medrawt from the usual consensus of that figure's origins and nature, one, despite various treacheries, more obsessed would-be bloodbrother than consistent enemy to Artos. Again, Treece makes the roll-call of Gildas-denounced kings like Aurelius Caninus into Arthur's contemporaries and rivals, telescoping a gap of generations.

Artos is first encountered ploughing with bulls, his – laughed-off – punishment not just for disrespecting his father Uther (in Treece's text a near-savage ruler of Powys) but also for impiety towards the older gods, and specifically the crime of having a child by his illegitimate half-sister (here the first of the three Gwenhyfars in his life), soon abandoned as his power grows. The other two Gwenhyfars include a beautiful slavegirl, originally a temple prostitute, whom Artos renames, marries, then has cruelly killed for her adultery by forcing her, unarmed, to confront a bull in Caerleon's amphitheatre, an act which shatters loyalties in his warband. The third is a captured Angle girl-child, again renamed, and kept as a kind of pet *cum* honorary granddaughter to amuse and cheer the by then old and weakened king.

The sword-in-stone episode is reworked to root it in hardnosed reality rather than magic. Blind old Ambrosius, seeking a worthy inheritor of his office as Count, has come to Powys, where he plans to symbolically make his choice the bearer of his ceremonial Roman sword: a drunken Artos, erupting into his father's feast, from which he has been forbidden, snatches the sword, himself plunges it deep into a chopping block as a feat of strength, and is then the only one able to remove it again, thus unceremoniously claiming it to the humiliation alike of Ambrosius and his protégé.

Among other intriguing slants Treece gives to the material some – like the confrontational situation created between Caerleon, Arthur's HQ, and Caerwent, just over the hills, where the established kings systematically plot his downfall, and the cunning strategy by which their plans are foiled – are very believable. Others, like the way Londinium has become, in effect, a multiethnic free city, intent only on making money from all sides while giving allegiance to none, seem more questionable, redolent more of the high Middle Ages.

One overriding element of the approach, the elimination of any air of glamour, to leave a squalid snake-pit of violence and treachery, culminating in a Camlann that in effect pits a mercenary rabble against a disillusioned handful of jaded thugs, gang warfare rather than a clash of civilisations, where any tender or positive emotion or purpose is seen as doomed from its inception, convinces as a picture of its own time and of all too many aspects of Treece's world and our own. It also, paradoxically, throws into sharper relief the scale of what was at stake, unrealised at the time by the participants in its struggles, than any more nuanced approach, and makes it thus more possible for the reader to sense how such figures could so ineradicably become embedded in the psyches of this island's peoples as archetypes of human interaction.

This is a grimly gripping book, hard to put down, difficult to forget, well worth seeking out, and surely overdue for reprinting. Now that the Arthurian Matter in all its forms is riding such a renewed wave of interest, so individual a treatment deserves to be rediscovered and to share in the current boom.

Steve Sneyd

Dugald Steer
Wizardology:
the Book of the Secrets of Mer1in
Templar Publishing 2005 £17.99
1840113375 HB 30pp fully illustrated

This is a little gem and a delight, and should be suitable for children and growed-ups of just about all ages. Richly and beautifully illustrated, and packed with all manner of amusing and intriguing esoteric facts, from how to furnish a wizard's workshop, to conjuring and naming a familiar, recognising magical beasts, casting spells and much more, this is a decidedly

eccentric introduction into the magical arts for all young apprentice wizards. To quote from the introduction: "In the absence of a real wizard of flesh and blood then this book will offer you the assistance, encouragement - and frequent castigation – you would receive at my hands were I standing before you as your master." And so the wizard begins his foray into all aspects of the ancient art.

The book itself is a mini adventure, with excellent drawings, diagrams, fold-out maps, envelopes containing such treasures as fairy flags, hidden clues to riddles throughout the book, snippets of folklore and magical charms. It really is an enthralling tongue-in-cheek journey into wizardry, and for any younger readers, or anyone young at heart, who enjoys good illustrations, this little treasure, if not exactly the most deep or profound reference source available, is certainly worth more than a passing glance.

Ian Brown

Sean Martin
Alchemy & Alchemists
Pocket Essentials 2006 £9.99
1904048625 HB 160pp

Although essentially outside the scope of Arthurian legends, this modest pocket book does contain a few relevant references, such as the links between the Holy Grail and the Philosopher's Stone.

The author covers, clearly and succinctly, the essential elements of alchemy (both of laboratory experiments including attempts to transmute base materials into gold, and the inner spiritual transformations of the more esoteric aspects of the art). He also describes a brief history – and mythology – of alchemy through the ages, in the Eastern and Western world, and concludes with a list of alchemists, scientists and followers of Hermetic practices (alchemy, astrology and magic), from ancient till modern times.

Claims of direct correlations between alchemy and the Arthurian legends come specifically on pages 37 to 38, under the heading, "Philosopher's Stone, Holy Grail" in which the author focuses on Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, not only linking Wolfram's description of the Grail as a stone with the alchemists' Philosopher's Stone (which claim is, of course, nothing new), but also claiming that much alchemical symbolism (emphasising the balance of opposites) runs through the rest of the romance, being especially personified in the black-and-white nature of the piebald Fierefiz.

He goes on to suggest that much alchemical lore filtered into Europe through the Arthurian legends. It might be worth quoting part of his discussion here:

"It can be no coincidence that alchemy appeared in Europe at exactly the same time as the Arthurian corpus was emerging through the works of Wolfram, Chrétien de Troyes and Robert de Boron. Both alchemy and the Arthurian works (or at least Wolfram's) were coming into Europe through the Arabic filters of the universities of Spain and through contact with Sufi groups during the Crusades. And it is also no coincidence that both traditions are also aware of the Divine Feminine, which saw a huge resurgence during this same period and found expression in the popular cult of the Virgin Mary, and in the songs of the Troubadours. The Grail, the Arthurian Corpus, the Cult of the Virgin and the songs of the Troubadours all, like alchemy, play important parts in the underground tradition of the West..."

There are doubtless many similarities between some of the Arthurian – and, especially, Grail legends – and certain aspects of alchemy; but just how much of alchemy is deliberately embodied in the stories is perhaps less certain than is suggested here.

A few other areas that tend towards an Arthurian interest include the claims that, in the tenth century, Saint Dunstan, Abbot of Glastonbury Abbey, performed alchemical experiments in the Abbey kitchen (p 111), and that, in the sixteenth century, John Dee found the Philosopher's Stone at Glastonbury Abbey (p 73).

For anyone with more than a passing interest in alchemy and alchemists, this is actually quite a useful book, with a helpful bibliography, and it does make pleasant fireside reading.

Ian Brown

Donald Henson
The Origins of the Anglo-Saxons
Anglo-Saxon Books 2006 £19.95
1-898281-40-8

This is a very ambitious book. Henson's aim is to come to a realistic view of the beginnings of Anglo-Saxon England by attempting a full review of all the evidence he can find from historical, archæological, linguistic and anthropological sources. His starting point is his own dissatisfaction with the current debate on the matter, which he sees as being polarised between the supporters of 'continuity' and those of 'immigration'. That is, between those who believe that changes in society occur through developments within the indigenous population and the opposing view that it was mass immigration that brought in new social, economic and political forms during the first two centuries of the Anglo-Saxon period.

Henson sets out on his mission to examine all the evidence, both for and against the migration model, for and against the continuity model and at the same time to look at his own preconceptions and also those of the protagonists. This is a tall order by any standard but one which he tackles with vigour and with a great deal of success. However to suggest that he comes up with the 'correct' answer would in fact be an indication of a failure to recognise just what he is trying to do. This is to show that neither of these simple generalised solutions fit the actual evidence we presently possess. The origins of Anglo-Saxon England are confused and open to different interpretations, not simply because we don't have as much hard evidence as we would like, but because the situation was indeed very complex. For example, the change from a Romano-British identity to an Anglo-Saxon one in Kent was different from what happened in East Anglia, while the experience in Wessex differed from both of these areas, not only in nature but in time, and Shropshire was different again. Only after recognising these different experiences and histories can a realistic view of the period begin to emerge.

Henson explores the contentious question of the genetic descent of the Anglo-Saxons. He understands that the genetic makeup of the population was only one aspect of the formation of Anglo-Saxon England. As he says "anthropologists have long known that kin-ship is not necessarily based on genetic relationships". He sees the creation of Anglo-Saxon England as being as much about the creation of a new Anglo-Saxon identity from the discontinuity of the old British one rather than a simple the replacement of one people with another. To him the more important identity markers are language, religion and material culture, especially artefacts designed for display, Also important was the perception of 'the other', *ie* that which was not Anglo-Saxon, in this case it was the 'British' identity. This is not to say that substantial migration did not occur in some parts of what was to become England, nor is it to say that parts of later Anglo-Saxon England was not made up from a substantial number of people of British genetic origin. Rather, it was a new identity that was created, not a new racial group.

The path through these arguments is loaded with a mass of detail, so to follow much of his evidence back to the sources would be a great labour indeed. There are also over 40 pages of useful appendices and a further 30 or more pages devoted to a time line, documentary and archæological sources and maps. Therefore, unsurprisingly, this book is not particularly easy to read. But for those who wish to come, at last, to a reasoned view of the origins of the Anglo-Saxons it is a valuable, and indeed, an essential read.

Harry Ball[2]

Neil Faulkner
The Decline & Fall of Roman Britain
Tempus Publishing 2004 £12.99
0 7524 2895 0 PB 287pp

A popular TV series, repeated endlessly on digital history channels, was entitled *What the Romans Did For Us*. It's true that we are indebted to them for a lot of technology and for the cultural legacy left to us in history, literature, religion, the law and so on. But freelance historian and *Current Archaeology* features editor Neil Faulkner argues that the Roman Empire was "a system of robbery with violence, that it was inherently exploitative and oppressive, and that it was crisis-prone, unstable and doomed to collapse;" furthermore, its main use is as an awful lesson to us in the modern world, "dominated as it is by corporate capital and imperialist war," just as it was in late antiquity. His arguments are powerful and cumulative if, as he says, "essentially negative".

This 2004 paperback edition reinforces his political views and includes a new final chapter on Dark Age Britain entitled 'From Commune to Kingdom' which puts the final nail in the coffin of Roman Britain.

Chris Lovegrove

Kings and Continuities

Leslie Alcock
Kings and Warriors, Craftsmen and Priests in Northern Britain AD 550-850
Society of Antiquaries of Scotland Monograph Series, Edinburgh 2003
0 903 903 24 5 HB 487pp £39.99

This, the last book by the excavator of Cadbury Castle, is, not just a massive tome, but a relatively expensive one, albeit certainly overall real value for money given not just the size but the quality of its content. (Arthurians doubtful about the investment might wish to first borrow it Interlibrary loan, by which it is available, to decide on its relevance to their own particular areas of interest.)

As Alcock's work on the Arthurian era was so significant a part of his richly deserved reputation, why here start so relatively late? In his own words, "on mature reflection I would reject the mythical history, legend and speculation which passes for history in the later 5th century".

Nevertheless, to use Alcock's own term, the "inertia of history" means many continuities over the centuries, certainly enough to make it viable to read back his picture of post-Arthurian societies to illuminate the Arthurian era itself. The author demonstrates that inertia by instances ranging from contemporary trivia – the long-pointless yet still-present cuff buttons of men's jackets – to the vividly dramatic, as in custom of a new chieftain having to prove his worth by a cattle raid, doubtless long predating its writing down in the earliest Irish laws, which lived on in the Western Isles as late as the 17th century, or how pre-Roman Celtic emphasis on taking and retaking of king's heads remained "an important concomitant of warfare" at least into the 7th century.

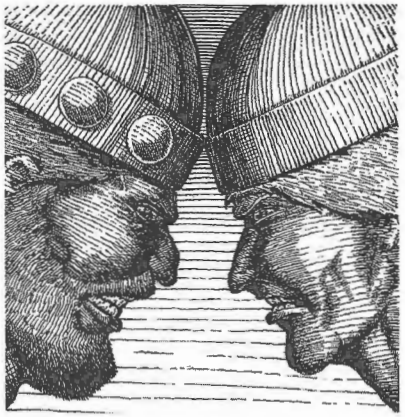
Alcock's starting point here relates to the contemporaneity of a number of powerful named kings in the North, of whom some reliably usable record survives of deeds and policies: Ida of the Bernician Angles, Gobhran of the Scotti, their by then half a century old Argyll settlement now a functioning state, and Bruide among the Picts, the end of whose separate kingship at the hands of Kenneth MacAlpine, along with the full flow of Viking incursions, explain his termination date for a period his names for which – rejecting the term Dark Ages, he opts either for the Heroic Age or the Early Historic – seem slightly unfortunate, as being equally applicable to quite other eras.

In terms of general approach, as well as distancing himself from some of his own earlier ideas, and questioning earlier conclusions of others, he particularly challenges the too prevalent tendency of archaeologists and historians to work in isolation from each other, not

[2] This review first appeared in *Wiðowinde 141* (2006) 50, and is republished here with permission

even as rival camps but as it were with an unbreachable Chinese wall between them (hence this book's willingness to draw on the findings of both, and indeed also of other specialities, such as art history). He sees as much to be learned from the artistic activities of these peoples as their more functional artefacts, and explores the battle poetry of the time alongside more conventionally "historical" annals. However, he does realistically emphasise the impracticality of trying to use what are in effect the poems' snapshots of individuals in conflict to derive coherent accounts of military actions, adducing for example the hopelessness of trying to use the Catraeth poem to try to establish the route followed from Etin to the target, or what if any real military significance the probably long-deserted fort at Catterick might still have had. This cross-fertilisation approach that breaks down jealously-guarded academic boundaries is, to him, essential: "at a period when historical evidence of any kind is scanty and fragmented [it is wrong to deny ourselves any potential source of information."

The scope of the North he examines covers all mainland Scotland, plus the Inner Hebrides, and on down to an Eden-Stainmore-Tees line at the southern terminus of Strathclyde / Rheged and Deira. While admitting this splits cultural continua, he notes this would apply whatever cut-off line was chosen: moreover, he does not hesitate to draw from outside his self-defined area where this aids completer understanding.



The book's five sections are an introductory overview, then Structures of Society, Warfare, Physical Structures of Society, and finally Arts, Crafts and Peaceful Pursuits. For this review, having said generally that I found this book thoroughly illuminating, I will focus on a few aspects of particular personal interest, beginning with his treatment of the subject of fortifications, with its generous ration of clear site plans: the combination of thoroughness and thought-provoking insights he demonstrates on this topic can fairly be taken as characteristic of the book as a whole.

Fortifications

Alcock first looks at the general problems of dating, given conservatism of techniques in the design of hillforts and of duns, of palisaded enclosures and of crannogs.[3] He notes the number of sites long thought purely Iron Age which have, when excavated, revealed post-Roman material, and on occasion that only. Having given a taxonomy of types of defensible structures used in the period, he then turns to the purposes they served, going well beyond pure defence *per se*.

They provided, for instance, centres for control of trade, venues for royal inaugurations, and for the collection of tribute in kind. Cattle could be driven to a fort, but other food levies would be difficult to transport: it made more sense to eat it near source, on the same principle as later medieval royal progresses. So there would be a need for a network of forts throughout a territory for this purpose as well as for defence in depth and to dominate outlying and frontier zones.

Iconography mattered, too, as Alcock

[3] Those last defensible structures on man-made islands, commonest in the Scotti lands of Argyll, he notes are also found in Brythonic Strathclyde – so it's tempting to speculate that the Lady of the Lake could have a basis in reality, as owner of one such, perhaps one of those with its approach causeway just below the water's surface, so an attacking enemy could not readily find it, and an occupant using it would indeed appear to walk on water!

emphasises, in the use of strongholds to reinforce and further the royal image, and not just in the basic sense of the king dominantly looking down on his people, and they(and envoys ,or enemies) having to look up to him, where the location was on a rocky height (though this also had practical purposes: harder to attack, able to signal to other forts over longer distances, and not taking up precious land suitable for agriculture, even when it meant paying the price of irregular sites in inconveniently cramped usable dwelling space).[4]

Alcock also points out what could be called a "sacred landscape" aspect to iconography, instances where a fort would occupy a site which had a skyline silhouette reminiscent of part or whole of the female body. He cites, for example, Broninis, name of the original Lindisfarne fort, the first element, *bron*, being Brythonic for breast, reflecting the shape of the hill supporting the structure, or, an even more vivid instance, Mither Tap fort, 1200 feet up in the Highlands, its Scots name, meaning Mother Top, translating the earlier Gaelic, and reflecting how the site appears as nipple on a breast-like hill, in turn part of a ridge shapewise reminiscent of a pregnant woman. He suggests that, in such cases, the ruler was deliberately associating himself with the protective power of the pre-Christian Mother Goddess.

Iconographical reasons could also have been a factor in the frequent-reuse of sites after a Conquest, even if the strategic benefits of a site often seem sufficient on their own to explain such recycling: the factors that made a location defensibly suitable to rulers of one people would also be likely to appeal to rulers of another having the same purpose in mind, obedient to the

[4] On which aspect the author does make the point that war-bands which would need accommodating could be remarkably small: he works back from later hidage figures to calculate that that of the Pennine kingdom of Elmet would have been little more than a hundred men, to take an extreme example, and for even the large realms in his era they would have been in the higher hundreds, or low thousands at most

principle known as the Law of Conservatism of Sites. Hence it is not hard to see why, for instance, the Angles of Bernicia came to reuse such strongholds of the predecessor Celtic kingdom of Berneich as Broninis, already mentioned, Dinguaroy / Bamburgh, or Dunbar, that last combining near-impregnable promontory with the harbour which made it the natural successor to Traprain Law hillfort inland, as offering control of sea-borne trade.

Yet some other sites reused seem to offer few such strategic advantages, and to have been chosen mainly to emphasise the change of mastery. A relatively minor instance is the Lammermuirs site of Doon Hill, where an Angle hall overlays a British one. Much for striking is the complex royal Angle site at Yeavering, successor to a British stronghold, where, not only did the new rulers include a highly symbolic structure, a "grandstand" modelled on a Roman theatre, but incorporate a careful alignment from that, via halls, to a ring ditch at the East end – and with the intriguing, perhaps sinister, feature of the burial on the alignment of a body with a surveyor's staff: did the man who laid out the alignment, having completed his work, then be given a burial in a place of honour to mark his achievement, or was he killed on completion, either sacrificially to give protective luck, or to prevent him working later for another ruler? wonders Alcock. And, as with the ring ditch mentioned, there could also be a symbolic linkage with far earlier usage to enhance significance and suitably reinforce the site's ability to reflect royal power, hence alignments to Neolithic or Early Bronze Age henges.

Iconography is also the key to the purpose of the puzzling phenomenon of vitrification of hillfort ramparts, where intense heat has in effect turned their rubble core to glass. Alcock demonstrates the impossibility of achieving the temperature required during a siege, given the immense quantities of brushwood which would have to be piled around the walls, then burned uninterruptedly over days to achieve the temperatures required. However, after a fort had been

successfully taken, this would be feasible, probably using the conquered as labourers, and the days of burning would then serve as a powerful symbol, visible for miles, of victory, even though vitrification would not destroy defensibility for the future.

He reinforces the point by noting, in his useful listing of known military involvements of North British forts - sieges endured, adjacency of battles, *etc* – the unsuccess of such attempted burnings as part of an actual siege as that at Bamburgh where a change of wind drove smoke and flames back into the attackers' faces, leading to abandonment of the attack.

He also offers an explanation of something that had long puzzled me, in his account of a siege occurring slightly after his nominal cut-off point, that of Dumbarton by two Norse kings from Dublin in 870; the puzzle was why, given that the Vikings' normal raiding policy was a quick in, then out with the loot, they had in this case persisted for a whole four months against such a formidable fortress-cum-town, one which in the end fell only because its well failed at last of water.

I had imagined that the kings, in committing 5000 men in 200 ships to this long siege, had been were obsessed by visions of the Strathclyde ruler's store of treasure, but surely they could have looted a half dozen wealthy, defenceless monasteries in the same length of time? Alcock's answer is simple, if initially unexpected: that the aim was to open the whole Clyde basin to a massive slave raid. He makes the general point that forts could be easily by-passed by a fast moving attacking army, but that, in an era when loot was what made warfare economically viable, such an army, slowed to a crawl by its burden of captured men and animals, and the bulk of plundered goods, as it headed homeward, would become intensely vulnerable to irruptions by fort garrisons. That would equally apply to a human spoils-laden fleet having to pass an untaken Dumbarton again before it could safely regain the open sea.[5]

Alcock also points out, of Dumbarton, that it didn't just control the Clyde estuary gateway, but also a major Northwards artery, up the river Leven, from its mouth alongside the fort, to Loch Lomond, then via the Great Glen into the heart of Pictland: indeed trade was the reason for the move, parallel to that from Traprain Law to Dunbar, from the earlier tribal capital inland at Carman fort.

The output of skilled metalworkers was both economic and iconographic at this time – the useful necessities of tools, utensils, and above all weaponry, but also the striking ornaments of status, brooches and so on, worn by rulers and used as gifts to maintain war-band loyalty or seal agreements with other chiefs, and even the chains to be worn by hostages whose presence in the court was another sign of kingly stature. In this context, Alcock examines the belief that such craftsmen were in effect corralled into royal forts, to practice their trade under the monopoly control of the ruler, and shows that, although metalworking was indeed provably associated with some royal sites, it was not exclusively so – moulds and crucibles have been found even in quite small "family" duns, and he also cites the fascinating case of the Mote of Mark in Galloway. This small rocky outcrop-set fort has revealed no trace of any high status dwelling, yet intensive metalworking had certainly occurred within its defences, raising the intriguing possibility of a group of independent craftsmen able to defend themselves and their craft, while the church too undertook metalworking: even some high status clerical figures were skilled in the craft, in Britain as well as on the Continent, from which Alcock quotes a vivid description of Gaul's Bishop of Troyes – gold-smithing – in an open-air pit!

But if monopoly control of metal-smithing eluded them, the kings of the

[5] That those ships returned loaded with thousands of captives destined for slavery is a useful reminder that the institution did not vanish from the British Isles with the Roman departure, nor only return with the notorious Atlantic slave trade, abolition anniversary of which is currently (2007) being marked.

time had a variety of other ways to manipulate their image, or have it manipulated, including, Alcock notes, using David and other "warrior kings of the Old Testament as ... role models ... divinely ordained": even Jesus was reconfigured as archetypal hero-king! The Bible was also drawn on for enemy-bashing propaganda, as in Gildas' bestialising denunciatory listing of the kings of South-West Britain (Alcock handily tabulates their individually ascribed sins) or Bede 's borrowing from the Book of Samuel's account of Doeg the Edomite's massacre of women and infants to blacken Cadwallon's actions. The author also notes the way king lists were manipulated, to link, for instance, usurping dynasties to earlier legitimacies, and indeed to serve the interests of recently established Christianity, as when Bede openly admits: "those who compute the times of kings ... agreed to expunge the memory of certain apostate kings".

Having looked in such depth at the book's treatment of one representative cluster of topics will, I hope, serve to give a fair indication of how else of interest is to be found in its treatment of other aspects of the "peoplescape" of the time.

I cannot, though, resist at least a couple of direct illustrations of the truth of this statement. First, as instancing an almost Sherlock Holmesian eye for the significance of apparently trivial detail, the way he uses the fort(uitous – excuse pun!) discovery together of all the broken pieces of a beautiful fluted glass goblet to undermine the prior belief that, in this era, fine glass reached North Britain solely as already broken fragments, employed as convenient ballast in Mediterranean trading ships, then traded to the natives as cullet to make ornamental glass beads.

Secondly, although Pictland, save for a couple of "Arthurian apocrypha" – of Arthur's red-haired Alcluith-born son becoming a king there, and of Arthur himself having Guinevere torn apart by wild horses in Pictish country for her unfaithfulness plays little part in the Matter, it bulks sufficiently large, and so fascinatingly, in this book as to demand mention at the very least of the author's ingenious explanation, completely new to me, of the enigmatic Pictish symbols as being filiation markers, visually conveying descent (although the camel realistically rising from its knees on the Meigle stone seems an unlikely ancestral clan totem!). Still in Pictland, he also speculatively explains the dramatic bull stones found at Burghead (sadly, only a handful survive of the thirty unearthed during the 19th-century building of a new port there) as the scant remains of a spectacular processional approach to the great promontory fort's interior, truly a lost wonder of the North.

Finally, a few general points. As well as being notably free of typographical errors, the book is profusely illustrated, with quality colour photographs (although some of the black-and-white text ones are rather small and "muddy" – Dunadd's particularly so) and clear line drawings. The Bibliography is massive (although, curiously, an earlier Alcock publication, referred to in the text, is not listed!) and the thorough Gazetteer is helpfully complete with OS grid references.

Steve Sneyd

bookworm

Children's author Philip Reeve, best known for his fantasy series beginning with *Mortal Engines* – and the *Guardian* Children's Fiction Prize 2006 winner to boot – has a new Scholastic hardback published called ***Here lies Arthur*** (Scholastic £12.99 304pp). According to the cover blurb, "Everyone's heard of King Arthur. But no one's heard the truth..." In a 2006 interview he's quoted as stating that "much of his inspiration comes from films: he credits *Star Wars* (which took him off into reading Asimov and Bradbury) and John Boorman's *Excalibur*, which led him into the Arthurian stories and Malory's retellings, as the two defining experiences".[6]

Ian Brown reports that Mainstream Publishing are creating a series of A-Z

[6] Julia Eccleshare interview with Philip Reeve *Guardian Saturday Review* September 30 2006

guides (such as *An A to Z of Atlantis* by Simon Cox and Mark Foster, currently available in hardback for £12.99, 184596 0807) and are planning the publication of ***An A to Z of King Arthur and the Holy Grail*** by Simon Cox and Mark Oxbow. According to Waterstones booksellers, release was due in April of this year.

John and Caitlin Matthews report that ***King Arthur: the Many Faces of a Hero*** is due out this autumn, only available to members of the Folio Society, who have commissioned this book as an original title. It's been the most amazing journey to be able to write in this much detail, following the career of Arthur through the ages. Lots of new research has surprised and excited us, revealing internal connections between many early Arthurian poems and texts that throw further light on the historical Arthur. Our brief in this book has been to follow the kaleidoscopic changes of Arthur's appearance through the historical, mythical and literary material."

Boydell Press will in November publish the first critical edition of Geoffrey's *Historia* to appear since 1929. ***Geoffrey of Monmouth: The History of the Kings of Britain*** is edited by Michael D Reeve and translated by Neil Wright. This collation of 14 manuscripts has a facing English translation, and includes a comprehensive introduction, critical notes, and a full index of names (£50.00 / $85.00 1843832062 hardback 320 pp).

Boydell & Brewer back-catalogue is full of Arthurian goodies, from its academic volumes (Arthurian Archives and Arthurian Studies) to paperback issues of its more popular titles. From biographies (William of Malmesbury, Henry Plantagenet) to mythology (The Green Man, Dictionary of Northern Mythology) and on to Arthurian legends (Merlin and the Grail, Perceval), there is a wealth of treasures to suit all pockets. Go on-line at www.boydell.co.uk or ring 01394 610600 for catalogues (*eg* Medieval Studies).[7]

[7] Kathryn Hughes "The dark side of Camelot" *Guardian* June 2 2007; Matthews' Arthur book details at http://www.hallowquest.org.uk/; Geoffrey of Monmouth book details and others at http://www.boydell.co.uk/

Unholy Grails

Some more metaphorical superlatives are now offered for either your delight or dismay, starting with a folio of literary examples. Imre Kertész's recent novel *Liquidation* centres on the search for a **missing manuscript**, a "novel which will finally make sense of the Holocaust;" one review describes this as a "literary Grail" which any number of characters in the book may possess, or possibly not. Another superlative, what is claimed as American publishing's "new holy grail", is **custom outlets**, where books can be sold almost anywhere rather than in bookshops. For one bibliophile, his "personal holy grail" was finding (in a book store) a hardcover first edition of Alasdair Gray's ***Unlikely Stories, Mostly***: "more than just a story collection, this is a work of art."

Moving on to entertainment, the game of **Scrabble** has its own holy grail, we are told – "two triple word scores with one go". Meanwhile, egg was left on some faces when recordings attributed to a recently deceased British pianist were denounced as fakes: one critic who claimed to have discovered **Joyce Hatto's CDs** said it was "like finding the Holy Grail". Over in Hollywood, Elizabeth Taylor is said to have "managed the Holy Grail of **celebrity adoptees**" by adopting a child with bone deformities.[8]

"The Holy Grail for airlines [is] squeezing as many of us as possible into **economy class**," according to Simon Calder of *The Independent*, while the *Guardian* offers us a range of methods we might try "in the quest for the holy grail of an **upgrade**".

Continued on page 47

[8] Michael Faber "After Auschwitz" *Guardian Saturday Review* September 23 2006; Ed Pilkington "Custom outlets—US publishing's new holy grail" *Guardian* March 4 2006; Patrick Ness "Do judge a book by its cover" *Saturday Guardian* December 2 2006; Nicky Campbell "Scrabble's scramble for China..." *Guardian Sport* January 4 2007; Martin Beckford "Classical world rocked as pianist's virtuosity is called into question" *Telegraph* February 17 2007; Lucy Mangan "There is only one true Hollywood star..." Guardian September 23 2006

Uther and Merlin

Uther: Give me Igraine, for my heart is charged
with fierce desire. Give to me her wild embrace, and I
will gladly pay your price.
Merlin: Then you'll surrender me your unborn child, and what you
have lost, he shall find.
Uther: Merlin, why do you vex me so! Was I not born
to be a king? Tell me now, my destiny – for it
seems that I could never win!
Merlin: – A sacrifice of flesh and blood! To show
your love for this strange land –
Uther: Held in my soul, and this sacred sword here
in my hand.
Merlin: Arthur will be his name, and no man shall
deny him. For his is the courage of all the seas,
and the winds that boldly drive them.
But you, Uther, are doomed to grief – but do not rail at
me so! For you are the father of a righteous king, and all things
true shall flow from him.
Uther: Although your words are harsh to me, verily I accept
my doom. So let my desire for Igraine lead me straight
unto my tomb – and my love for her will live
in Arthur, and proudly will he rule.
Merlin: Then it is done, and I shall wait beyond the shadows of
a distant realm, until the time
has come.
Embrace me, Uther, now farewell.

Steve Gunning

Lancelot

The old wound burns
inside my heart

it burns

Guinevere my love for you
is strong enough to take my life –

Of mortal men I have no fear
undefeated under coat of arms

So strange it seems to meet my match
battling a ghost I cannot fight

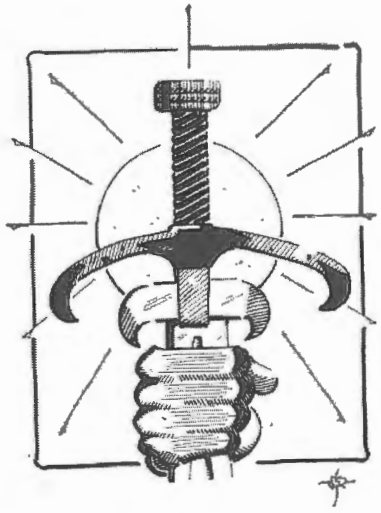
Arthur, my friend and king
my allegiance never left your side

Our banners blazed through chivalry
how many fled our battle cries?

But Guinevere is in my blood
although I never wished it so

And I still cling to this dream we had
a dream we all had, long ago ...

Steve Gunning



Simon Rouse

Lancelot 7

in the wastes of Sarras
a barren maid
if that is not *too much a contradiction*
rubbing red eyes shoulders her pack

grey mist clamped to level land
old pollard oaks, crack willow
an aching throat
stasis in motion

and apple-grey dawn, like a bath of milk
who has ever had—
a cowl to hide her face
trust no-one on the road.

it must be some where soon
the skin on her heels is cracking
a howl of tears lashing, lining her face
some time now.

Doctor at the gates inspects
(as is his job, no doubt)
finds her *intact*, but can not
comprehend her mission.

The Dean echoes his bafflement
seeks second opinion from the Abbot
but only the chapter entire can grant
access to the relic.

A delicate matter. She has encamped
by the west porch, in full view of all.
Blankets and rags, but I am afraid, sir—
Of what? I do not know, sir. There is something

I cannot place, that speaks to me
of *nobility*.
And remember—'Nac anghofiwch...'
Speak English here! Your pardon.

'For many have entertained angels unawares...'Yes, yes.
But the relic is usually sought
by *married* ladies...

She sighs and hoods her eyes.
If she knows why she has come
—and all presume she must—
she wastes no words on us.

The sun hangs low now, its warmth long gone
and a pale coin springs in the western sky.
The owl is there again.
He has come to claim his promise.

Geoff Sawers

the board

PEOPLE, PLACES AND PRODUCTS

The archaeologist **Richard Avent**, who died recently, was inspired by his experience as part of Leslie Alcock's excavation team at **South Cadbury** hillfort, reputed site of Camelot. The range of his interests included Anglo-Saxon jewellery, museum curating, medieval Welsh castles, the historic landscape and the re-listing of historic buildings in Wales. He was Chief Inspector for Cadw, a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries and a founder member of the world heritage committee of Icomos (UK).

It was reported that "the famous wizard, **Merlin**, had returned to life and was living in rented accommodation" in Bristol. According to a TV journalist "George Vernon discovered he was Merlin while out fishing as a lad of 11" when voices in his head told him "Merlin, Merlin, Merlin, you're back." Equipped with a pointy hat and silk cape George dreams up inventions like a machine to make you invisible. Alas, the machine has now disappeared.

The **Prince of Wales**, who champions some alternative therapies, has bought a 192-acre estate called *Llwynywormwood* near Llandovery in Carmarthenshire, Wales. The 17th-century property (the name means Wormwood Grove) was bought from organic garden experts, and is near the village of **Myddfai**. The origins of the property's name "may be bound up with the legendary Physicians of Myddfai, doctors renowned across Europe because of their knowledge of herbs". As press reports reminded us, "The Physicians are reputed to have been bequeathed their knowledge by the **Lady of the Lake**, who vanished into the waters in unhappy circumstances and is said to haunt the area". The Prince, who champions alternative medicine, will be pleased to know that local farmers still grow medicinal herbs, though some locals are not happy at his acquiring what is, in effect, another bloody holiday home.

Camelot Properties is a management company specialising in protecting "unusual empty properties". A new type of renter seeks out listed buildings such as churches and warehouses in the heart of London, and by renting them cheaply through Camelot become their 'guardians'. Camelot's brief presumably does not extend to Carmarthenshire. Over in Wigan, **Avalon Packaging Ltd** found itself in hot water for breaking laws on cutting waste – for ignoring regulations aimed at meeting European targets for recycling plastic packaging waste they were fined £50,000.

The first ever Welsh National Firework Championships and a place in the final of the British Firework Championships in Plymouth this summer (August 14/15 2007) has been won by **Pendragon Fireworks** from Newport. A crowd of several thousand at Chepstow Racecourse on 5th May watched the Welsh championship, which involved three displays by professional firework companies (Westcoast Fireworks, Celebration Fireworks and Pendragon). Details of all the year's events can be found at www.britishfireworks.co.uk.

The travel pages of newspapers remind us periodically about Arthurian connections at **Snowdon**. At 1085m, the

highest point is Yr Wyddfa ("the Tomb"), the grave of a giant slain by Arthur, while nearby Bwlch y Saethau ("Pass of the Arrows") is where "King Arthur is said to have been killed by his nemesis". Another place conjuring up the once and future king is **Huddersfield**. A correspondent to its local paper declared – with only the merest hint of tongue-in-cheek – that "like King Arthur and his knights slumbering while they await their heroic return to save Britain from its enemies, the old Huddersfield is patiently waiting for the brass band fanfare to herald it glorious return".

The UK's Adult Learning Inspectorate (Ali) has now been subsumed under the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted); it had "a dual function, inspection and improvement, using a process it devised, called **Excalibur**". Its former head felt that splitting this process between Ofsted and the Quality Improvement Agency was a mistake, so presumably Excalibur no longer exists. Geoff Sawers spotted another pointless Excalibur in the case of a dangerous vehicle in Carson City, Nevada. David Eddings was making repairs to his "broken-down **Excalibur sports car** ... when some fluid started leaking out". Next thing was "I didn't want to leave a tankful of gasoline slowly leaking onto the garage floor, so I lit a piece of paper and threw it into the puddle of liquid, to test if it was flammable". You can guess the rest. "One word comes to mind," the 75-year-old fantasy novelist said. "Dumb."[1]

[1] "Richard Avent" *Telegraph* August 17 2006; Richard Macer "You only live twice" *Guardian Guide* April 28–May 4 2007; Steven Morris "The only prince in the village" *Guardian* November 23 2006; Camelot Properties in *Observer Magazine* April 1 2004; Comment "We must all take part in the green crusade" *Manchester Evening News* April 30 2007; "Pendragon storms through in first Welsh National Firework championships" http://www.fireworks-mag.org/news41.htm; Jake Brown "It's a peak performance" *Metro* September 8 2006; Alex Vickers "Food for thought" *Huddersfield Examiner* April 7 2007; Peter Kingston "What the inspector did next" *Guardian* April 24 2007; Victor Lewis-Smith "Funny Old World" *Private Eye* May 2007

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS

Last issue provided a bumper crop of errata and obfustications. A hiccough occurred between editing and printing stages which resulted in Pamela Constantine's "Magranne's Tale" (page 8) unfortunately being severely truncated. This appears in full elsewhere in this issue. Bill West's "Sir Bedivere", previously published in 2006 (*XXXIII* No 2), was intentionally included, but Pamela Constantine's "It is living yet" and Steve Sneyd's "On Merlin's Traces" reappeared through faulty editorial filing systems: be warned, this may not be the last time this process is blamed.

As the republication of Jess Foster's review indicated, the original 1974 *Pendragon* critique of John Heath-Stubbs' *Artorius* was not of course in 1973 (*pace* the note on page 26). In "The Symbol in the Stone" the full reference of Ranelagh 1979 was omitted; this should have been E L Ranelagh (1979) *The Past we Share* (Quartet Books); you may also have realised that it was *Sigurd* and not Sigmund who killed Fafnir (page 12).

As is usual now, The Board was compiled by the editor and Steve Sneyd, but this was not attributed. Meanwhile, Bill Russell's review was peppered, as is traditional, with minor editing mistakes – rather inevitable with such complex texts as his. Finally, in John Billingsley's review (page 32) a missing phrase rather confused his argument: in part this should have read "though *Arthurian and Celtic legends are not* necessarily from a similar source ... there is no denying the roots of much Arthurian material in a so-called Celtic milieu".

For those keen to acquire publications from **Oakmagic** (The Board *XXXIV* No 1), the current address of this peripatetic publisher is Weavers Cottage, 5 Goughs Yard, The Street, Corpusty, Norwich NR11 6QP.

EVENTS AND COURSES

2007 is the 300th anniversary of the union between Scotland and England and a number of events were planned for London with a British theme, though many centred on St George's Day. As well as Shakespeare films projected on the outside of the Globe Theatre and dancing in Covent Garden put on by the Royal Society for St George, a screening of ***Monty Python and the Holy Grail*** took place in Trafalgar Square on April 23rd.

The **International Celtic Congress** is celebrating "the contribution to the world of arts, science and industry by the Celtic diaspora" by running a week of Cornish and Celtic activities, including concerts, field trips, visits, workshops, presentations and poetry and language events. This takes place in the Combined University in Cornwall at Tremough, Penryn from 23rd to 28th July 2007. All-in tickets are £280 (£150 students, £80 under-12s) with day tickets for non-residential attendance also available. Contact Jerry Rogers on 01344 775946 or jerryrogers@francescos.org.uk or write to 17 Chiltern Road, Sandhurst, Berkshire GU47 8NB.

Preceding the Congress will of course be Pendragon's own **Round Table 2007** at Baskerville Hall Hotel near Hay-on-Wye. As noted last issue this was planned as an occasion for fun and friendship with an Arthurian slant; reports on the midsummer proceedings should appear next issue.

Chris Gidlow (author of *The Reign of Arthur*) will be giving a Lunchtime Lecture on Monday 29th November at 1.00 pm entitled ***King Arthur – from history to legend*** at the new lecture theatre at the Tower of London, Tower Hill, EC3. Though this is a free event you will be asked to make a donation of £2.00 to cover the cost of tea, coffee and biscuits. Further details are available at www.tower-of-london.org.uk or from the Education Office, Tower of London (phone 020 7488 658 or e-mail educate.tower@armouries.org.uk

Founder member of the Pendragon Society **Don Bryan** runs Heritage Tours from Winchester, taking clients on customised tours including Arthurian sites in the south and south-west. Visit the **Heritage Tours** website for more details.[2]

[2] Arts Diary "Britain to celebrate St George with Monty Python and the knights who say'Ni!'" *Guardian G2* March 14 2007; Chris Gidlow: http://www.pooloflondon.co.uk/events/showevent.php/519.html; Don Bryan: www.heritagetours.co.uk

BROADCAST

BBC Radio 7 recently ran a Sherlock Holmes stories series and, in "**The Three Garridebs**", the geekish Nathan Garrideb exclaims "My Collection ... the Holy Grail" to Homes and Watson. Neither of us is enough of a Sherlockian, sadly, to know if there are any other Arthurian references in the Conan Doyle stories. One fleeting reference appears in Howey and Reimer's *A Bibliography of Modern Arthuriana* (D S Brewer 2006: 113): in his historical short story, "**The Last of the Legions**" (in *The Last Galley*, published in 1911), Conan Doyle mentions a British leader Caradoc, with Mordred as "one of the violent men whose actions doom Caradoc's dream".

YouTube.com provides alternative viewing to the commercial fare produced by most UK terrestrial and digital channels. A 1959 movie, ***Santa Claus***, directed by René Cardona, featured a strange mixture of mythical characters – Santa Claus himself, Lucifer and ... Merlin the Magician. Quirky aspects of this Mexican film included Merlin and Santa teaming up against Lucifer's minion, and Santa giving to the rich and not to the poor while also sinisterly spying on sleeping children. Japanese director Isao Takahata's ***Little Norse Prince*** was broadcast on digital channel FilmFour from January 7 2006. Described as one of the first animé classics, this 1968 film fantasy set a Japanese myth in a Nordic setting, reportedly with Arthurian overtones such as the young hero pulling a sword out of a stone. BBC2 transmitted John Duigan's 1997 film ***Lawn Dogs*** on April 14, which *The Guardian* described as a quirky, unsettling, unusual and absorbing drama about a young girl and a gardener ("lawn dog") in "a well-heeled Kentucky suburb called **Camelot Gardens**". It's not clear if any Arthurian sub-text was intended.

Archaeologist Neil Oliver fronted ***Face of Britain***, Channel 4's series about the genetic make-up of Britain based on ongoing research undertaken by Sir Walter Bodmer at Oxford University and funded by the Wellcome Trust. The three-part series, which began on April

14, concentrated on the human-interest angle (rather along the lines of the BBC's *Who do you think you are?* programmes) so there was less on the possible mechanisms of population admixture and implications of ethnic identity. Certainly we found out that people in East Anglia were more like their counterparts in the Low Countries than those in West Wales – no surprises here then – but there still remained much for a general audience to gain some enlightenment and perhaps to question their assumptions. It remains to be seen whether this will reduce teasing of red-haired people – so-called "ginger bashing" – which a *Metro* correspondent linked to "the English persecution of the Celtic nations".

June 2007 sees the 25th anniversary of the bombing of the *RFA Sir Galahad* during the Falklands War, and BBC2's ***Timewatch: Remember the Galahad*** (April 2) looked at the circumstances surrounding and the repercussions following this tragic incident in the Malvinas conflict. There have been Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessels with the same name since, but this is the one that everyone will remember most.

Also available on a screen near you is the PSP game ***Ultimate Ghosts 'n Goblins*** (produced by Capcom at around £30.00). King Arthur (who starred in previous versions of the Ghouls 'n Ghosts franchise) returns "for a fourth tour of duty among the cartoon undead" battling enemies with lances, axes, fiery potions and other magical weapons, protected by armour worn over his boxer shorts.[3]

THE BOARDS

Though not obviously Arthurian, the Young Vic's community opera ***Tobias and the Angel*** was basically a story of a redemptive quest in the tradition of Wagner's *Parsifal*. Based on the Old Testament apocryphal story, Jonathan Dove and David Lan's opera from last autumn mixed amateur and professional input, and one critic described Darren Abraham's Tobias as "the eternal innocent hero, like Parsifal in a soccer-jersey, finding his own true self".

And They All Sang is the title of a highly rated recent book by Studs Terkel subtitled "The Great Musicians of the 20th Century Talk about Their Music" (Granta 2006). In this we learn that singer John Vickers turned away from Wagner, feeling that ***Tristan und Isolde*** is "a great love story between two quite horrible human beings". It's also been often difficult to take seriously a short squat Tristan and a well-endowed Isolde as the world's ideal lovers, on a par with Shakespeare's star-crossed lovers.[4]

PERIODICALS

The featured walk in the Autumn 2006 issue of ***The National Trust Magazine*** invited members to "go inland for a Northumbrian walk along the 2000-year-old Roman wall crossing the neck of England". Though not explicitly Arthurian the circular walk, from Housesteads Roman fort included views of **Sewingshields Crags** (scene of a couple of notable folk-tales featuring Arthur) and **Broomlee Lough** (which a previous issue of the magazine had suggested was one of the many final resting places of Excalibur).[5]

JOURNALS AND SOCIETIES

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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* £3.50 / £12.00 "M A Howard", BM Cauldron, London WC1N 3XX *www.the-cauldron.fsnet.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)

The Newsletter of the Society of Ley Hunters *Patterns within the landscape* £10.00 (£18.00 non-EU) A Hyde, 7 Mildmay Road, Romford, Havering, Essex RM7 7DA *leyhunter@ntlworld.com*

Wiþowinde *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*

[3] David McNamee "YuleTube sensation" *Guardian* December 23 2006; R Carriere "Bullying ginger people insults Celtic heritage" *Metro*; Stephanie Billen "In Memoriam: RFA Sir Galahad *Observer Guide* April 2 2007; Nick Gillett games preview *Guardian Guide* September 16 2006

[4] Michael Billington "Redemption song that serves to heal" *Guardian* October 2006

[5] Gemma Hall "Hadrian's Wall" *The National Trust Magazine* (Autumn 2006) 83

Unholy grails *Continued from page 40*

A music industry spokesman felt that the holy grail would be "when the **rise in digital sales** offsets the fall in CD sales"; the British Film Institute is offering hundreds of thousands of film and TV works, some now in **High Definition**, "the new holy grail/emperor's new clothes of digital media" it's said.

Other science and technology news now: the holy grail of **robotics** is "making **machines work together** to complete tasks with minimum human direction," according to the freebie *Metro*, that giant among science journals. Did you know though that because of its unique properties "spider silk is the Holy Grail of biomaterials"? Professor John Zanecki says that **finding water** is "sometimes described as the holy grail of life" (especially if discovered on Mars), though a scientist as CERN physics laboratory still holds that the holy grail of physics is "a unified theory of physics" – a claim we've heard often before. A collection of **light-bulbs by Thomas Edison** – made over a century ago and recently sold at auction – could be switched on after being screwed onto a modern light fitting, but this experiment "would be as blasphemous as using the Holy Grail as a shaving bowl".[6]

Finally, we come to sociology. For one NHS nurse, the government's drive to eliminate waiting lists impacts particularly on acute sector staff, because of a belief that "a **rapid discharge** following a hospital stay is the holy grail of healthcare". A former RAF Tornado pilot asks whether "the much-vaunted holy grail of **democracy**" has been worth the cost of human life in Iraq. More frivolously, "the holy grail of British domestic economics" is reputedly **property ownership**. Lastly, church musicians will be familiar with ***The Grail Psalms***, which for over forty years now has provided a faithful translation of the Hebrew text along with sensitivity to their rhythmic and literary structure – perhaps the antidote to all the preceding unholy grails.[7]

[6] Simon Calder, BBC World Service news April 11 2007; Benji Lanyado "How to blag a free upfsgrade" *Guardian Guide to Free Stuff* January 2007; music industry spokesman, BBC R4 news, January 17 2007; Phelim O'Neill "The public spirit award goes to..." *Guardian Film and Music Supplement* September 8 2006; "Bot team" *Metro* August 10 2006; "Pick of the day" *Guardian Guide* November 9 2006; Zanecki on Melvyn Bragg's *In Our Time: Mars*, BBC R4 January 11 2007; Tejinder Virdee "How close are we to a unified theory?" *Guardian* December 30 2006; Maev Kennedy "First Edison light bulbs may fetch £300,000" *Guardian* December 9 2006

[7] Karen Moffat "Nurses can't walk away" *Guardian* April 28 2006; John Nichol "Has the cost of human life been worth it?" *Metro* March 21 2007; "Pick of the day" *Guardian Guide* December 4 2006

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