

# Pendragon

Storybook & Fiction • Poetry • Folklore

XXXV No 3



*Briefly in a quiet moment*  
 thinks to herself how kind she was  
 left him in time-capsule she made him  
 go into to be forever out of her way  
 not just all his mantoy trinkets  
 treasures he called them all books  
 of his she didn't need having made  
 part of memory scaffold of herself  
 all that mattered but even special  
 treat surprise pastime for his eternal  
 being there wispdouble of herself  
 of ice of fire of snowdrop dogrose  
 perfect in every way and would obey  
 give what would've turned her gut  
 to give to such old wrinkled parasite  
 of oak mistletoe for brain of use yes  
 but decayed hollow trunk no use to waste  
 her springtime on and must sometime  
 she thinks when no better way to spend  
 time using all her powers on the world  
 must take a look beyond spacetime wall  
 she having made must sureforsure be  
 able if she wish to breach enough  
 to voyeur through and see how old man  
 youngyoung spiritshape are getting on  
 and if his luck better at getting  
 embraces of the fake than the real one

Steve Sneyd



**Storybook** Just as the man in the advert says, this issue does what it says on the tin. With a title inspired by Ian Brown's evocative cover picture, we contemplate fictional narrative in the form of poetry, folklore and short stories. Geoff Sawers translates episodes from the Tristan legend and Larry Mendelsberg in a provocatively headed article examines the variety within the Arthurian short story tradition. Reviews this time round also focus on fictional narrative, and the remainder of the contributions mostly feature Arthurian storytelling in the form of verse and prose.

All this squeezes out some non-fiction reviews and *Old News*, which consequently will be accommodated in the forthcoming *Guinevere* issue (nominally this summer, but thanks to the jet stream we in the UK haven't had it yet). Regrettably, this Late Spring issue is overdue thanks to unforeseen commitments and circumstances on the part of the editor; normal service will be resumed as soon as possible. CL c3

# pendragon

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Chris Lovegrove left Simon Garbutt right

### FOLIATE HEADS AND TONGUES

Thanks for *Pendragon* XXXV No 1 – though its dating makes me wonder if you are having seasonal disruption from climate-change in the far west, as I see it is dated, Autumn 2007, but my copy did not reach me until April 2008?!

More worrying nonsense occurs on page 29 where that ridiculous description of the drawing as a 'Gorgon's Head' is peddled – as it has for many years by the Bath Tourist Office idiots.

The Gorgon was a female whose head was covered in writhing snakes, whereas the drawing depicts a male head with a substantial moustache, and no snakes in sight! Local experts now agree it is more likely a picture of a Sun-God, or perhaps of King Bladud, who founded the city.

Richard Carder, Bath

In XXXV No 1, page 29, I was struck by the extraordinary resemblance of the Bath temple pediment Gorgon's head to a Green Man representation – I wonder if its later finding / misinterpreting could have fed into creating the latter mysterious visage.

I wonder if the "language deprivation experiment" was a more general myth trope, applied to kings who were seen as outside the norm – the fascinating "Frederick II Part I" notes he "was said" to have tried this; I've read the same story was told of Scottish kings, of James IV and elsewhere of James VI/I, ie that a

child or children were placed in babyhood on an island in the Forth, with only a deaf-mute nursemaid, as a royal experiment to see if the infant(s) would spontaneously begin speaking Hebrew, and thus prove that to be the prime / divine language; which seems a close parallel.

It would be interesting to know if such an experiment was ascribed to others rulers. That the idea of such spontaneous language development must intrigue at some deep level is indicated by how, in the bizarre case of the Austrian children and their mother imprisoned in the cellar, several news reports have claimed the children had developed their own language, which seems illogical as they would have heard German from their mother, sharing the imprisonment, or even if her ongoing ordeal had made her unable or unwilling to speak, from the TV they had.

Steve Sneyd, Huddersfield, W Yorkshire

• For comparison, the Bath Gorgon is above shown with a carving from Ludlow. Several studies have suggested that the foliate head would have had a long ancestry in different media (sculpture, manuscripts), familiar from at least the Roman period but also found in other cultures across the world. *Pendragon* member Jeremy Harte's excellent (and easily obtainable) Pitkin Guide *The Green Man* (2001) is a fine introduction to the subject.

As for the Bath pediment sculpture, close examination suggests at least two, and possibly four, snake heads are present, and in Ancient Greece many Gorgon's heads (gorgoneion is the technical term) were shown bearded and even moustachioed (based on monstrous leonine heads with manes evident). A Gorgon's head is eminently suitable for Minerva's temple; Bladud however first appears in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History* and has no clear roots in classical antiquity.

### LUNAR ROTATIONS

The arrival of *Pendragons* XXXV Nos 1 and 2 in rapid succession recently (my subscription expired between the two; I'm sure some of you lucky people will have enjoyed both simultaneously!) has rather swamped me with much to interest, inform and entertain, as always. For instance, Steve Sneyd's letter in XXXV No 2 (4) asked when it was first

realised the Moon always keeps the same face pointing towards the Earth, and thus when the fact the Moon must rotate on its own axis like the Earth was initially realised. This is a very good question, but sadly, I don't have an equally good answer for it.

Many modern astronomy texts which mention this lunar 'captured rotation' (ie that the Moon's rotational period is almost identical with its orbital period around the Earth, at 27.3 days) unhelpfully make an assumption that this was always self-evident to the peoples of the earliest civilizations, so needs, and thus receives, no discussion. This contradicts what little evidence has survived from earlier times on the subject. For instance, in the 4th century BC, Aristotle specifically stated that the Moon does NOT rotate on its own axis, which is why it always shows the same face to the Earth.<sup>1</sup> The complex "epicyclic" planetary orbits-on-orbits about the central Earth – which itself might or might not axially rotate – that formed the theory of planetary motion (including for the Sun and Moon) from sometime in the 4th-3rd centuries BC to the 16th-17th centuries AD, when the Sun-centred Solar System theory finally supplanted it, would seem to create huge problems for how the Moon's axial rotation alone could be understood as producing the observed same-face-visible effect throughout those circa two millennia. On the various epicycle models, a good introduction is given by G J Toomer in *Astronomy before the Telescope*.<sup>2</sup> This same tome has a helpful discussion of the adoption of the Sun-centred model in N M Swerdlow's "Astronomy in the Renaissance" chapter.

Consequently, while I cannot prove it, and may have missed some key comment somewhere along the line, my suspicion is that the Moon's axial rotation may not have become an accepted fact for why the same face of

the Moon always points to the Earth until, at the earliest, the 16th century AD. I'd like it to be otherwise, and certainly there are enough non-mainstream ancient Greek theories known to suggest somebody may have thought this long before then, without it ever becoming a widely-held belief. However, as usual, we should be very cautious about what modern concepts can be safely back-projected, and how far, into earlier times. If I should turn up anything more specific, I'll come back here with it.

Alastair McBeath, Morpeth,  
Northumberland

### CHAMPIONS AND WONDER HORSES

John Matthews' suggestion that Gawain could be seen as champion of the queen / goddess is a role that could also apply to Lancelot, saving Guinevere from the stake after the revelation of their adultery etc, and more generally as an enlightening alternative slant on the triangular relationship. Also, I seem to recall that Victoria at her coronation had a hereditary Champion present (one of the Dymoke family, if memory serves), so the concept lived on in the royal "community".

The white horse does indeed seem otherworldly at dusk. Tetley's Brewery until recently had a team of white horses, kept to draw a decorated dray as a publicity device, and in between engagements their home was a hillside pasture at Thurstonland, a few miles from here; at that time of day they had a most ghostly air: the pale / white horse also having death associations (applying also to the chalk horses of the Downs etc?).

Again going on memory, I seem to recall that at coronations of certain Dark Age kings in Ireland, a white mare was slaughtered and the new king bathed in its blood, which seems to emphasis the sex / death ambiguities / multi-layering of symbolic meaning involved.

Steve Sneyd, Huddersfield, W Yorkshire

• The coronation ritual is mentioned by Gerald of Wales in his *History* and *Topography of Ireland* (1185). Chapter 102 is entitled (in John O'Meara's revised 1982 Penguin edition) "A new and outlandish way of confirming kingship and dominion" (109-110) and describes a ceremony which Gerald alleges happens in

<sup>1</sup> "On The Heavens" II.VIII, page 189 of the Loeb translation by W K C Guthrie, Harvard University Press & William Heinemann, 1939

<sup>2</sup> G J Toomer's "Ptolemy and his Greek Predecessors", in *Astronomy before the Telescope* (edited by C Walker, British Museum Press, 1996)

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his own time in Donegal, though scholars have doubts over its historicity (note 67, pp 134-5).

Much as I enjoyed the 'Gawain' issue, I am afraid I have to take issue with John Matthews' piece. I'm not sure that I quite follow his account of Gawain's 'descent' from Goddess-worshipping hero to treacherous villain, presumably at the hands of narrow-minded Christian clerics.

It is true that the earliest texts show Gawain as a model warrior, and that from this he develops into the courtly hero of the middle-ages – and that there is a strong sub-text of mocking his predilection for the fairer sex throughout much 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> century writing – *Le Chevalier à l'Épée* and *La Mule sans Fresne* are good examples. But the texts that show him as 'degenerate' are contemporary or earlier than many in which he remains a hero, such as *Gawain and the Green Knight*. It is an interesting hypothesis that Matthews has produced, but I do not believe he is justified in using terms like 'fact' and 'the truth' for it. Personally, I see a much more fragmented picture.

On another note, Bill Russell mentions that one of Marie de France's *lais* – *Chevrefoil* – is Arthurian, as it touches on the Tristan story. There is another too – *Lanval* – a beautiful Breton story, that deserves to be better known.

Geoff Sawers, Reading  
• Discussion of *Lanval*, "*Lanval and the Otherworld*", appeared in XXXIV No 3, the appropriately named *Otherworlds* issue; the *lai* is indeed as delightful as Geoff suggests.

### MYSTERY CLOUD AGAIN

The various competing theories about the c 540s AD supposed climatic downturn, including whether it happened, and if so how severe it was, continued to feature in early 2008 since my last note on the matter in XXXV No 2 (4), with the publication of another paper on the near-polar ice-core evidence in February.<sup>3</sup> For those struggling to keep

<sup>3</sup> L B Larsen et al "New ice core evidence for a volcanic cause of the A.D. 536 dust veil" *Geophysical Research Letters* vol 35, February 29 2008

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pace with it all, the free Cambridge Conference Network's, CCNet's, e-mail circulars are a valuable resource. The archive is available at: [www.staff.livjm.ac.uk/spsbpeis/](http://www.staff.livjm.ac.uk/spsbpeis/) and CCNet 42/2008 for March 24, 2008 has the latest notes and web-links. I can do no better by way of explanation than cite CCNet Editor Benny Peiser's own summary of the matter, extracted from that issue:

It would appear that the 6th century "mystery cloud" has just become more mysterious still. We now appear to have evidence for two acidity peaks in various ice cores: a strong acidity peak at around AD 529 and a weaker signal around AD 533/534. These sets of ice-core evidence look conspicuous and do not seem to match 6th century tree-ring data. Dendrochronological records do not show any evidence of a significant volcanic event at AD 529. And according to tree-ring data, the coldest year of the 6th century was in AD 540, 5 years after the alleged volcanic eruption. Thus, there remain serious problems with the statistics and interpretation of proxy-data that are casting new doubt on the nature, magnitude and chronology of the 6th century mystery cloud. More importantly, it is worth remembering that the written documents from the 6th century seem to contradict sharply with the notion of what has been called the "worst climatic disaster in recorded history."

This CCNet compilation repeated a couple of earlier commentaries on the topic, including a summary of his own detailed review of all the physical and written evidence on the c 536 AD event, published in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 59 (December 2006) by Antti Arjava, which is pretty well essential reading for anyone seriously interested in following this topic. There was also a review of David Keys' book *Catastrophe* by Ken Dark, repeated from *British Archaeology* in November 1999, which book I spotted Ian Brown had recommended seeing on page 31 of *Pendragon* XXXV No 2. I was unimpressed by the TV presentation of this work back in 1999 (*Pendragon* XXVIII No 1, 40-41), but hadn't seen the book then. I have since, and find I concur with Ken Dark's generally negative assessment of it. For me, as with too

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many texts on this subject, it cherry-picks some data, ignores those which contradict its thesis, muddles up factual and pseudo-historical evidence, often relies on debatable or incorrect material, and ultimately fails to convince because of this; but don't let that put you off making up your own mind!

Alastair McBeath, Morpeth,  
Northumberland

### ARTHUR IN ABERDEENSHIRE...

Thanks for the note on the Mither Tap of Bennachie [Old News last issue] – I hadn't picked up on that update from *British Archaeology*!

Stuart McHardy, in his book *The Quest for Arthur* (Luath Press 2001), states that at one time a large cairn called *Arthourscairne* was visible on the south side of the summit of the Mither Tap (NJ6622).

Certainly, there's a nearby placename *Lord Arthur's Cairn* at NJ5119, four miles north-west of Alford, Aberdeenshire. The height of the mountain is 518 metres, and it lies a few miles south-west of Bennachie: an old military road runs between these sites.

Eileen Buchanan, Houston, Renfrewshire,  
Scotland

### ... IN CUMBRIA ...

My belief that Arthur's real base was Carlisle, or better yet, Stanwix, may have been recently confirmed. There is a tradition that Etterby hard by Stanwix was called Arthur's burg (*Arthuriburgum*) from early times. Now Etterby is Ettard's by, with Ettard being a French form of a German name (Ekwall). My thinking at this point is that Arthur's burg is actually a reference to Stanwix itself, which is hard by Etterby.

Background source information/references on this are coming in from the Cumbrian library and from the archaeologist who excavated a possible Roman marching camp at Etterby. The long and short of it is this: I may have finally found at least a tradition which places Arthur right where I thought he had to be.

Daniel Hunt via e-mail

• Daniel, who writes as August Hunt, has had published *Shadows in the Mist, a study of the origins of Arthur* reviewed next issue, a copy of which he kindly supplied.

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### ... AND IN BRITTANY?

I've recently come back from France – a small tour of Brittany with a visit to the interceltic festival in Lorient. While I was there I found out that Les Champs Libres in Rennes has a major Arthurian exhibition on *Le Roi Arthur: Une légende en devenir* (details can be found at [www.leschampslibres.fr](http://www.leschampslibres.fr)). It's on until 4 January 2009.

Unfortunately, although I did have a stop over in Rennes, the lack of baggage facilities at the train station meant I couldn't go. I did pick up a special issue of *Bretagne Magazine* 'La Légende du Roi Arthur' (ISSN 1289-5984) on the exhibition. Although my utter lack of French is a disadvantage in trying to translate the text, it does have a healthy Breton aspect to it. The Ile d'Aval is situated in Pleumeur-Bodou. And there's me thinking it was in the West Country.

Kevin Mantle via email

You may already have information from other sources about the enclosed [a report on the exhibition *King Arthur – a Legend in the Making*] but I thought it worth sending on anyway.

I've highlighted a piece I particularly disagree with ["What is important is not the historical Arthur, who we don't know and probably never will, but the character. He might have historical origins but he has been transformed into a hero and a myth"]. Maybe we don't know the historical Arthur / Arturius / Artos or whoever and 'probably never will', but the question has always been a tantalising one for me, and searching for and speculating about the answer has provided me with some of the most stimulating and absorbing moments of my intellectual life, so I don't propose to stop delving into it yet!

Geoff Roberts, Condom, France

• See The Board for other responses to the exhibition curator's thoughts.

### NARRATIVES

Roland (mentioned in the continuation of W M S Russell's invaluable overview – even if is also a painful reminder of how many of the mentioned items I've never read) as the name of an epic figure had a curious contemporary reappearance (I was reminded as the song was on the radio yesterday) in Warren 'Werewolves

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of London' Zievon's extraordinary narrative track "Roland, the headless Thompson gunner". Having had his head blown off by a "friend" at the behest of the CIA, this mercenary from Scandinavia continues his profession as a headless undead, first getting revenge on the false friend, then fighting on at trouble spots around the world (and finally killing Patti Hearst!), neatly parallel to the immortalisation and other anachronisms and geographical impossibilities of the medieval tales.

Anyone wanting to read the text of *The Land of Cockayne*, mentioned in the same article, can find it, along with related folk utopia material like the American song "Big Rock Candy Mountain", with background info on that genre, in "Poor Man's Heaven - The Land of Cockayne: a 14th-century Utopian Vision" by Omasius Gorgot (surely a pen name!) on the Past-Tense publishers website (the paper version is now out-of-print) at [www.past-tense.org.uk](http://www.past-tense.org.uk)

Steve Sneyd, Huddersfield, W Yorkshire



### PENDRAGON THE MOVIE

Last I heard, the Burns Family Studio had moved the release date [of *Pendragon: Sword of his Father*] to January 2009 and are looking for distribution. I think whether or not it comes to the UK will depend on the distribution company. I hope it does. I believe it will be a very nice film.

I enjoyed writing the article ["An Epic Preview" last issue]. At this point Nathan doesn't know if he is going to work on the sound for the film. If he does we will let you know and talk about a follow-up article.

Lydia L Ashton, via e-mail

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● Lydia later wrote that the Burns Family Studio "have delayed release to sometime this winter. They are still interested in having [husband] Nathan do the Foley. He would be starting on that in August or September. If everything goes as planned and you are still interested at that time Nathan would love to write an article for the magazine at that point about creating the sound-scape for the *Pendragon* movie."

She added that she found the magazine very interesting, especially enjoying the article on Harry Potter and hero myths.

### SARGONIC THOUGHTS

I caught Dave Burnham's passing reference to the ancient Mesopotamian king Sargon in his splendid discussion of the Hero Myth in XXXV No 2 (24-31, especially 28). In fact, for anyone interested, there are a number of parallels between Sargon's tales and Arthur's which might be instructive, in terms of how such things can grow beyond their original bounds.

Sargon was a genuinely historical king of course, and from what survives of his own inscriptions, he seems to have unified the lands of southern Mesopotamia into one kingdom c 2300 BC in a series of 34 battles as no one had managed so successfully before, founded a great new capital city (whose location remains unknown), made safe the trade routes from the Mediterranean to the Gulf, possessed a fine body of troops, and restored prosperity to the land. The Akkadian language which he made the state tongue remained the official Mesopotamian language for most of the time after his day till c 260 BC. He was deified after death, with cult statues to him receiving offerings for at least another 1800 years, and he became the ruler all others who aspired to greatness in the region wished to emulate, to the point where later Babylonian kings in the 7th-6th centuries BC attempted to discover archaeological remains from his time. The post-mortem legendary which grew up around him, and the other kings of the Akkadian dynasty he founded, helped further immortalize him, and may have introduced several of the earliest recorded aspects of the hero myth Dave mentioned in his twelve-point list.

For anyone seriously wishing to take

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up the challenge of a spot of some extra-Arthurian studies in this sphere, I'd recommend starting with Joan Goodnick Westenholz's *Legends of the Kings of Akkade: The Texts* (Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, Indiana, 1997). The surviving historical inscriptions are available with translations in Douglas Frayne's *The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Early Periods/Volume 2 - Sargonic and Gutian Periods* (2334-2113 BC) (University of Toronto Press, 1993).

Those who prefer to 'test the waters' first, might wish to see "The Sargon legend" available in original-language transcription and English translation online as item 2.1.4 of the Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, at: <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/>

Alastair McBeath, Morpeth, Northumberland

### DISSENTING...

Having miserably failed, for longer than I care to remember and despite the best intentions, to send you a contribution or even a letter, I thought the least I could do now was to write to say that I respectfully dissent from Charles Evans-Günther's criticism of how the magazine has progressed over the last few years.

Though occasionally I find the themed approach a little limiting and some fairly recent contributions have struck me as too 'academic' for our sort of mag (no names, no packdrill) I have always found lots of interesting and stimulating material in each issue and I have no intention of severing my links with the Arthurian community. Charles will be missed, but of course he has every right to voice his personal opinion and act upon it.

Geoff Roberts, Condom, France

### ... AND APPRECIATING

I wish to express my gratitude and warmest regards to all readers whose comments critical or otherwise have shown interest or appreciation in my writings. It is with regret that due to an ongoing illness, I shall be unable to tender further contributions to *Pendragon* for some considerable time, in order that I may concentrate on prior commitments. Hopefully, I may in the not too distant future pick up the thread and make meaningful contributions to an excellent

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magazine. Thank you.

Shani Oates, via e-mail

● I'm sure we all wish Shani a speedy and full recovery, and express thanks for her several stimulating and thought-provoking articles.

### PIVOTOUS RAYS (anag.)

As the person whose name seems to be misspelled more often than any other in *Pendragon*, I feel a certain proprietary interest in turning the spotlight onto some of the typographical slips that crop up from time to time in this journal. Of course, I notice that quite a proportion of news items which feature here are from *The Guardian* daily newspaper, long a source of proof-reading failure jokes in Britain (commonly known as "The Grauniad" as a result), so there may be some subtle influence at work.

*Pendragon* XXXV No 2 produced a few fresh items in this respect, but the contexts didn't really work to best advantage. For instance, a delightfully royal "wee" for "were" cropped up on page 46 (para 1), but in connection with asteroids, not really 'golden rain' territory, while Footnote 10, page 36, of the late W M S Russell's extended review in the same issue really needed a 'Rag' or 'Rig' of some kind fitted to the publication place of "New Yrok" to make it work better.

However, since I started this note by mentioning names, and regrettably seeming to single out Steve Sneyd's "The Board" compilation, albeit not by design, again from page 46 (and 47), I can scarcely let pass the Neddie (incorrect variant "Neddy") Seagoon and Major Denis Blood[k]no[c]k slips! I can't believe I just corrected the spelling of names of two fictional characters, from the Goon Show no less, but not my own...

Alaf Vilstair McBeath, Morpeth, Northumberland

● The moral is, do not rely on a scanner to weed out typos but do it yourself!

### BATTLE SWORDS

I wonder if you can help me find the book I search for. I need to acquire an archeology book clearly showing what 3rd-7th century Welsh and/or Celt battle swords have been recovered from the eleven battle sites of the historical Dark Age warrior chieftain "Arthur".



I have a few sword books, however none show what could be Uther Pendragon's sword in the anvil/stone that Arthur pulled out to become King, and none show what could be the Lady of the Lake sword "Caliburn/Excalibur" and scabbard.

I trying to find what the real Welsh battle swords of that period looked like. I intend to have a blacksmith create these swords in replica, and the smiths need to know and see what the historic swords looked like. What books can I purchase?

Will Richmond, California, via email

• Will had many of the titles I'd suggested to him, as well as replica swords. There are no "real Welsh battle swords of that period" extant however, the nearest equivalents being of Irish and Anglo-Saxon origin, often a little later in time. I also pointed out that the two swords associated with Arthur are entirely legendary, though he didn't respond to that!

#### POP CYMRAEG

The diverse and fascinating world of Welsh popular music has long seemed to be one sealed off, almost hermetically, from the outside. However, the two *Welsh Rare Beat* compilations (on Finders Keepers records, 2005 and 2007) may change that a little.

Concentrating on psychedelic / folk music from the late 60s / early 70s, Volume 1 contains a number of tracks that may be of interest to *Pendragon* readers. Adapting stories from the *Mabinogion* has been popular over the years – to the point of cliché in some people's eyes. But three stand out. Huw Jones' "Mathonwy" is a slow, brooding number: "Mae'r ysbyrd Mathonwy," he croons, darkly, "yn crwydro trwy'r tir..." By contrast, Gillian Elisa's soaring ballad "Hedfan" comes from a folk opera *Mellteth ar y Nith*, based on the story of *Branwen ferch Llŷr*. And lastly, Y Diliau's "Blodeuwedd" is a strangely jaunty take on yet another *Mabinogion* legend, all jangly guitars and cute harmonies. For all those who will struggle to follow the lyrics, both CDs/LPs have extensive sleeve notes in English.

Geoff Sawers, Reading

• Letters to the Editor are always welcome, but please do indicate clearly any material not for publication. ☞

#### Old News

#### New Cornish Dark Age site

Numerous circular and semi-circular shapes, along with linear features and enclosures running across the clifftop fields, all evidenced by aerial photographs of crop marks and geophysics surveys dating from 1998, prompted Channel 4's Time Team to visit the site at Lellizzick, near Padstow in Cornwall.

The circular features were confirmed as the outlines of roundhouses, with internal pits, hearths and so on, used and re-used over a long period. There had been small-scale industrial activity, including metal-working, and other material indicated occupation during and well before the Roman period, possibly back to the Bronze Age.

A bank and ditch cutting off the headland was noted as a typical feature of an Iron Age promontory fort, indicating a possible political centre of a powerful tribe.

The site retained its importance in the Roman period: a bone stylus from about 200 AD may well be "the earliest known evidence of writing yet discovered in Cornwall", according to Channel 4. The excavators suggested that Lellizzick was a trading station importing exotic goods such as wine, oil and pottery from as far away as the western Mediterranean. These imports may have been exchanged for Cornish copper, tin and related metal products throughout the Roman period.

This trade continued after the end of the Roman period, evidenced by sherds of North African red slip ware – fine table wares and coarser cooking pots – typical of the fifth and sixth centuries.

Both the Camel estuary and the Padstow area were pivotally important in Celtic Christianity, with St Petroc and St Samson as visitors and a chapel dedicated to St Samson formerly situated a few hundred metres from Lellizzick.<sup>4</sup>

☞

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.channel4.com/history/microsites/T/timeteam/2008/padstow/padstow-found.html>

## Thomas of Britain's *Tristan* (c 1170) lines 1770-1927, 1968-1997

Translated by Geoff Sawers

*Thomas of Britain's Anglo-Norman Tristan poem survives only in fragments, although the outline is known from a Norse translation from the 1220s, and can also be guessed from Gottfried von Strassburg's adaptation, circa 1210. As this section opens, Ysolt is living in England as the wife of King Mark. Tristan has married the other Ysolt (White Hands) but regrets it, and has just crossed over from Brittany to find the queen again. ☞*



Tristan was overcome by love.  
He dressed himself in poor clothing,  
poor clothing, vile garments,  
so that no-one, man or woman  
might perceive that he was Tristan.  
He tricked them all with a herb:  
making his face swell up  
inflamed as though he were sick;  
for his safety and concealment  
he blackened his feet and his hands.  
All clothed as though he were a leper,  
he took up a goblet of maple-wood  
that the queen had given him  
the first year that he had loved her;  
putting a ball of box-wood in it,  
thus he made himself a clapper.  
Then he went to the king's court  
and approached the gates,  
wanting much to know  
and to see how the court stood.  
Often he begged, rattling his clapper,  
but he could hear no news  
to gladden his heart.

One day the king was holding a holy  
day  
by going to the high church  
to hear the great service;  
he came out from the tower,  
and the queen came after him.  
Tristan saw her, and begged from her,  
but Ysolt did not recognise him.  
He followed after, rattling his clapper  
calling after her at the top of his voice,  
asking alms of her, for God's love,  
piteously, with great tenderness.  
The serjants laughed at him,  
as the queen moved on;  
some poked him, others knocked him,  
and they pushed him out of the way.  
Some threatened him, others beat him.  
He carried on, begging them  
that by God she should give him  
something.  
He would not be put off by threats.  
They all thought him a menace;  
not knowing how great was his need!  
He followed right into the chapel,  
crying and rattling his goblet.  
Ysolt stood there, much annoyed,  
looking at him like a maddened woman,  
and wondering what about him  
could make him act like this.  
Then she saw the goblet and recognised  
it;  
she realised that this was Tristan  
by his fine frame and manner,  
by his great stature.  
It struck terror into her heart,  
and colour into her face,  
because she greatly feared the king.  
She took a gold ring from her finger  
but did not know how she could give it  
to him;  
she wanted to throw it into his goblet.  
But as she held it in her hand  
Brenghen noticed it.

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She looked at Tristan and recognised him, and understood his cunning. She told him that he was mad and a fool to set himself against the barons; she called the serjants idiots for allowing him among the healthy, and told Ysolt that she was pretending: "Since when have you been so saintly as to give so generously to a sick or a poor man? You wish to give him your ring; by my faith, lady, you will not. Do not give a gift so great that you will regret it afterwards, if you do give this to him you will surely regret it." She told the serjants who were there to put him out of the church. And they put him out by the door and Tristan dared beg no more.

Now Tristan saw and knew well that Brenguein hated him and Ysolt. He did not know what he could do; and his heart was in great anguish: that she had thrown him out so vilely. His eyes weep most tenderly, Pleading his fate and his youth, that he had ever become involved with love: he had suffered through it such grief, such pains, such fears, such anguish, such dangers, such trials, such exile, that he could not help but weep. There was an old tower in the courtyard: dilapidated and in ruins. He hides himself under the staircase. He laments his misfortune and his great suffering, and his life, that had brought him to this. His travails have weakened him much, such fastings and waking nights, such hard work and troubles. Tristan languished below the staircase, wishing for death, hating his life. It would need others to lift him from this. Ysolt was deeply pensive: she felt sad, a helpless prisoner having to see one leave

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*There follows a lively debate between Ysolt and Brenguein. The queen's relationship with her maid seems at times to be quite as tortuous and volatile as hers with Tristan, but without the relief of the occasional consummation. In the lines below, remember that Kariado, queen Ysolt's suitor, has accused Tristan's companion Kaherdin, who had courted Brenguein himself, of cowardice.*

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that she, the queen, loved so; and yet, she did not know what to do. Often she wept and sighed; cursing the day, cursing the hour that saw her linger like this.

Having heard service at the minster, they went back to the tower to dine, where they remained through the day in merry-making and festivity; but Ysolt did not give herself to it. It happened that before the night the porter felt a great cold in the lodge where he was: he told his wife to go out to find wood and bring it. The lady did not want to go out: under the staircase she could find dry wood and old timbers, and she went without delay. And there in the darkness she found Tristan asleep; she felt his rough pilgrim's cloak she cried out, and could not keep her wits, thinking that it was a devil because she did not know what it was. In her heart was great horror, and she went to tell her husband. He went to the ruined hall, lit a candle and looked about, and found Tristan lying there, he was already close to death. He wondered what it could be and he brought the candle closer, till he perceived by its shape that it was a human being. He found he was colder than ice, he enquired who he was and what he was doing, how he came to be beneath the staircase. Tristan revealed all to him about himself and the reason why he had come to the house. Tristan put much trust in him, and the porter loved him for it: with much effort, much pain, he helped him to the lodge, made him a soft bed to lie in, sent for something to eat and drink; he took his message to Ysolt and to Brenguein, as he was used to...

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...she flattered so much, begged so much, promised so much, asked for such mercy, that she [Brenguein] went to speak to Tristan, in his lodge to give him comfort. She found him sick and very weak, his face pale, his body wasted, thin and colourless. Brenguein saw how he cried, and how tenderly he sighed and begged her piteously to tell him, for God's love why she bore him such hatred, to tell him the truth. Tristan assured her that it was not true that which she thought of Kaherdin, and that he would bring him to the court to disprove Kariado's lying. Brenguein believed him, had faith in

*All voyaging having at last some end  
over night's stormwaves'  
roar, greater crash: all rush down,  
then torches show no  
broken ship – puzzle best then  
left for dawntime when beachrocks  
glitter all broken glass; through  
seawrack tangles lie  
flotsam litter, rust-battered  
oddment artefacts,  
worthless junk no doubt – adults  
turn away, down-eyed: one child  
dressed up in scrap  
goes purely from all sight tho  
tide-edge footprints go  
on, soon glee-shrieks "Can't see me"  
gull-harsh to fear won't come back*

Steve Sneyd

### Ye men of Precelly

Ye men of Precelly,  
Come forth from the hills;  
Come forth from the mountains  
Like Spring-flowing rills.  
Dyfed's chieftains are calling  
From cromlech and grave;  
Ye, men of Precelly,  
Come forth and be brave.  
King Arthur's not sleeping,  
Carnabwth was right –  
In the throes of oppression  
The hill-men will fight.  
Ye men of Precelly,  
Brow-beaten and hard;

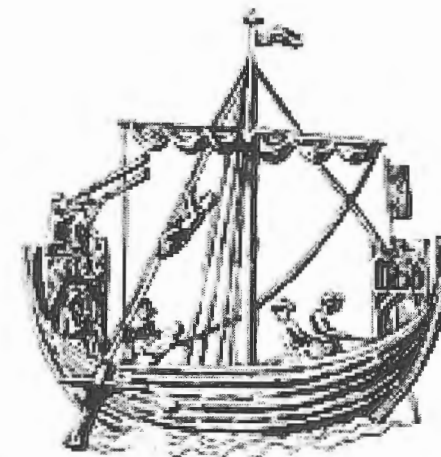
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him, and by this they were reconciled. And so they went to the queen, up in a marble chamber; they were reconciled by their great love and to give comfort for their pain Tristan and Ysolt gave themselves to each other. After most of the night had passed he took his leave at dawn and left for his own country. He found his ship waiting, and crossed the sea with the first wind...

❧

### References

Stewart Gregory ed (1991) *Thomas of Britain's Tristan* (New York: Garland)  
<http://www.anglo-norman.net>



The homeland's in danger,  
Ye are the "Home" Guard.

E Llywd Williams

• Williams wrote these lines as part of a campaign to keep the Preseli Hills in Pembrokeshire free of military presence in the late 1940s. After a local campaign attracted national support the War Office capitulated. Local hero Thomas Rees, known as Twm Carnabwth, was an instigator of the famous Rebecca riots in 1839 against the setting up of toll-gates, an entirely appropriate figure to conjure up along with King Arthur.



## Reviews

Broadcast

*In Search of Tristan*

BBC Radio 4

March 4, repeated 31 Aug 2008

Twyn Morys, the presenter of *In Search of Tristan*, said he was going to track down the truth of the story, but other than mentions that the name appeared in ancient Welsh genealogies and in the Llandaff Charters; that some said the name was Pictish but he was sure Cornish (the origin of the name itself is pretty meaningless either way, to me, as a guide to the "nationality" of the person); and the rather confusing statement that the Drustan Stone is "in" Castle Dore (it's in the neighbourhood of, not in, the fort, and no evidence that I know of that it ever was inside the fort), was mainly a brisk rush backwards through uses of the tale from Wagner (a nice quote from Nietzsche to the effect that hearing Wagner's opera more than once would send you mad!) to the earlier versions.

Interesting as to Wagner introducing the deathwish-of-the-lovers element, never present in the Gottfried, Beroul etc versions: that the medieval pair were adventurers, improvisers to get out of scrapes, trying as far as possible to maintain their normal roles in society (as for example Tristan fighting for the Round Table, with Yseult shown as the quicker-witted in terms of tricking Mark) rather than mopers like Wagner's pair.

The presenter noted elements of mockery of religion in the earlier versions, "playing with fire" (for example, the love potion has elements of the eucharist, the lovers' cave an altar analogy) Beroul even implying that God was on their side, getting them out of fixes, despite the technically particularly terrible double crime of Tristan in seducing the wife of his lord and technical incest. Mark was shown as increasingly villainous to cause listener

sympathy for the lovers.<sup>1</sup>

Various other points were made, *inter alia* analogies to doomed Irish lovers like Deirdre and Grania, also trapped by a *geas*-type fate. One minor puzzle was that threaded through the programme were quotes from an – unsourced rhyming couplet ballad-like account of the tale, which ended with a variant of a frequent ballad image (cf "Barbara Allen") of entwining roses growing from the lovers' graves: in this case a briar grew from Tristan's over onto Yseult's, three times cut away, until finally Mark in effect said to leave it alone, in life he leapt from bed to bed, let him do so in death!

Steve Sneyd

### Factual

N J Higham ed

*Britons in Anglo-Saxon England*

Boydell Press 2007 £50.00

978-1-84383-312-3 HB

What happened to the native Britons when the Angles and Saxons invaded and took over political control of Britain between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries? Generations of historians believed that through a combination of slaughter, slavery, expulsion and flight, they were more or less eliminated as a significant element of the population of Anglo-Saxon England. Certainly there is literary evidence for all of these fates befalling the Britons. More recently, in the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the tide of scholarly opinion has swung against this view, with the historical records seen as lurid and unrepresentative. Surely it is more likely, it is argued, that the Britons remained, conquered and assimilated by relatively small numbers of overseas settlers, adopting the Anglo-Saxon culture and becoming invisible in the archaeological record. And if they were still there, then we need to ask, what was their role in English society?

The papers in this book are the published fruits of a Manchester conference to review current research in 2004. After an introductory overview by

<sup>1</sup> There was also the intriguing suggestion that both the Gottfried and the Beroul versions were unfinished because they couldn't, or didn't want to, resolve the situation.

editor Nick Higham, the papers fall into two parts, *Archaeological and Historical Perspectives* and *Linguistic Perspectives*. This reveals an intriguing division of opinion; the historians tend to be of the view that the Britons must have formed a significant part of the population of Anglo-Saxon England, whereas the linguists argue that the lack of British influence on the English language and English place-names simply cannot support this position.

This collection is far from being the final word on this subject. Firstly, whilst the potential contribution of genetic research to this debate in the future is acknowledged, at present the evidence is seen as simply too limited and contradictory. Secondly, a number of these essays are both technical and specialist within their discipline and not easy to absorb. Finally, it is not the purpose of this book to attempt to reconcile the opposing positions of the historians and linguists; thus there is no essay synthesising the evidence and taking a multi-disciplinary approach to the question.

However, there is much of interest here and a number of contributions are particularly striking. Martin Grimmer reviews the late-7<sup>th</sup> century laws of Ine, king of Wessex, which notoriously make separate legal provision for the Britons but at a lower social status than the Saxons. Ine's laws offer little incentive to maintain a cultural identity as a Briton and every reason to become a 'Saxon'. Is this what the recently conquered Britons of the West Country (what later became Devon, Dorset, and Somerset) then did? This at least seems a convincing scenario for one particular area of the country at one particular period of time. But contrast this with Richard Coates' study of the evidence for British impact on English vocabulary. This impact is near-zero – fewer than ten British words have crossed over into modern English. In parallel circumstances where an invading aristocratic elite imposed themselves on an indigenous population, this just does not happen; the local language survives or at least strongly influences any new dominant language. Clearly this debate has a long way to run yet.

Nick Grant

Martyn Skinner

*The Return of Arthur:*

*a poem of the future*

Chapman & Hall, London 1966

*The Return of Merlin* would in many ways have been a more accurate title for this verse epic, since Arthur himself is, it must be said, very much a cipher in it, often a rather feeble one, whereas Merlin throughout is firing on all cylinders.

Set in what was when it was published the future, ie through 1999 to a culmination in the Millennium year of 2000, although from our perspective now reading instead as an alternative past history, it tells of the arrival of Arthur and Merlin as would-be saviours sent to combat a decaying Left-wing dictatorship attempting to maintain its would-be total grip on Britain in the wake of a nuclear war.

In three Books, each with profuse explicatory endnotes (there is also a prefatory Contents, best avoided before reading the poem, since it is in effect an over-revealing complete plot synopsis), overall totalling 520 pages (each of the three, incidentally, had earlier appeared separately, in 1951, 1955 and 1959 respectively), Skinner tells his story using Chaucerian rhyme royal verse, ie 7-line stanzas rhymed in *ababbcc* pattern. The form makes for smooth, speedy reading, although the poet occasionally resorts, or is driven, to rather forced rhymes, and to the type of mosaic rhymes, several sequential short words to be in effect read as one, which, although working impudently well in the classic Great American Songbook showtunes, can seem clumsy on the page.

Much of his story is science fiction (including an ample use of ingenious neologisms for the technological innovations, and in particular devices of control, employed by the tyranny) but overall it would be more accurately described as science fantasy, partly because of Merlin's use of magic, alongside a grumbling, employment of this future's electronic devices which he complains limit his creative flair, partly because the framing device which begins the story – the interference of heavenly forces, and the visiting alike of otherworldly Avalon and an updated



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Hell – move the early portions of the epic into the realm of fantasy.

Events begin to take shape when an angel committee, driven almost to despair at the successes the "rival power" has achieved by manipulating mankind via the twin thrusts of technological advance and secular revolutionary ideologies, decides to release Merlin from under the stone where Vivien had entrapped him – and where he had remained throughout the centuries not just fully conscious but able, using his farsight, to keep in touch with developments in the world. Merlin is then tasked to hoick Arthur himself out of his contented, effectively mindless, retirement with fellow heroes in the timeless Avalonian paradise.

At this point, incidentally, Skinner provides one of his most vivid pieces of poetry, as Merlin's arrival reintroduces time and its ravages along his path from the island's bounds to where he locates Arthur: plants begin to decay and leaves to turn and fall along his path, and even the eternally youthfully smooth-skinned legendary derizens begin to wrinkle!

Having extracted Arthur from this place of bliss, Merlin feels the need to brief him as to the changes that have occurred since his departure from earthly matters, and decides this is best done by sneaking them both, disguised by Merlin's art, into a – very high-gloss, high-tech – Hell, to sneak-view a diabolic propaganda film updating the lesser ranks of devils on the successes their leaders have achieved in terms of disrupting humanity and twisting it to their long-term will.

With Arthur thus brought up to speed, Merlin then takes him to the English coastal village known to its inhabitants as Lichen, and to the state as LU90/Z12/WR, where they establish themselves in a Gothicised mansion once owned by the Pendragon family, descendants of Arthur himself. The family link, with its psychic benefits in helping the revenant king adapt successfully to very different times, is one reason for Merlin's choice of base camp, but even more important to this choice of location is that Lichen is near to the location of Newtopia. This is the grand project of the dictatorship, intended to show that despite all the

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difficulties caused by nuclear devastation, Progress can successfully be re-established. Newtopia is to combine a state-of-the-art new supercity with the launch site for a manned expedition to the planet Mars, the impending date for the city's official opening-cum-rocket launch to be Marx Day of the first year of the new Millennium.

Hence key figures of the regime have based themselves in Lichen to keep a close eye on progress as the deadline grows increasingly near: the idea of establishing a resistance movement under the very noses of the enemy leadership, and hence a place where they are unlikely to look, is one of the keys to Merlin's ingenious plans, plans which also involve manipulating the superstitious beliefs, among the impoverished, rationed, and regulation-trapped indigenous farming community, and indeed the downtrodden populace generally, which have rushed in to fill the gap left by the regime's banning of organised religion. Furtively, all are convinced that among them are present, in disguise, visitors from other planets brought by UFOs, far more powerful, should they ever choose to intervene, than the human rulers who oppress and bind their miserably restricted daily lives.

The scene thus set, a host of "alarms and excursions" follow, as the intricate plot works its way towards the climactic events of Marx Day in Newtopia (followed by, in Canto 12 of Book 3, a rather low-key aftermathic section: I suspect the author himself found it hard to take much interest in this, in effect, tidying-up epilogue, while feeling forced to supply it.)

But, in this post-review, I won't follow events any further, not wishing to act as a spoiler for any *Pendragon* readers wanting to explore this, certainly unusual, book. (I have never come across a second-hand copy, but it is readily available by Inter-Library loan – that, incidentally, I was given an unusually long loan period, two months, is sadly indicative of lack of demand to borrow it!)

Instead, a few overview remarks might be helpful, beginning with an expansion of the earlier comment that *The Return of Merlin* would be a more

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appropriate title. It is certainly true that there are amply enough medieval Arthurian romances in which the king himself is a shadowy, even inert figure, a dispatcher of others to adventure rather than any longer an active adventurer himself, for Skinner to have justifiably claimed precedent for his very low-key portrayal.

Nevertheless, it is also certainly the case here that Arthur is a near-cipher, while Merlin is a vivid protagonist – indeed, to me, almost the only character among the "goodies" who really comes to life on the page, whereas the villains – including Dr Scient, the devious Mars-rocket designer, the venal, lecherous, inventively torturing police chief H K Hengist with his cave-located circus of pain, the official culture supremo-cum-martial arts expert-cum-frustrated spinster Martha Proctor, and above all Morgana, seductress-manipulator supreme (albeit that her "love magic" is entirely technology-based) are all vividly memorable: a striking case of what might be called *Paradise Lost Syndrome*, since in Milton's much earlier, greater epic, despite the author's intent, it is the arch-baddie, Satan, who rules the reader's responses.

Indeed, only a handful, just four, among the Resistance "goodies" other than the two principals are ever even named. They include the near-perfect couple who are the movement's first recruits: the down-to-earth (excuse pun!) farmer rather over-symbolically named George Alban, and his somewhat romantic wife Mary – who by her eventual Joan of Arc-esque charismatic ability to infuse continued belief in future liberation, even in the face of setbacks, into the menfolk around her, eventually succeeds in dispersing the women-aversion, brought on by reawakened memories of how Guinevere's treachery destroyed his realm, that is the main factor in effect paralysing Arthur's will and leaving him prey to apathetic Avalon nostalgia as he devotes his time, when not rather passively chairing meetings of the Resistance committee like a glorified county councillor, to reading the patriotic histories of England, forbidden by the new rulers but still surreptitiously circulating under misleading covers, in

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search among other things of references to himself (this, by the way, as with T H White's protagonist, is very much an Englishman of an Arthur, not a trace of a Celtic root to be found!).

The only others named on the Arthurian side are the saintly (in this case, unfortunately, a term tending to be synonymous with tedious) Leo Bennett, former vicar, now a political prisoner and inspiration to his fellow prisoners, forced to labour to build Newtopia as part of punishment euphemistically described as rehabilitation, and the rather sad figure of Leo, the poet initially tasked by Martha Proctor as a temporary farm labourer so he can learn enough about agricultural life to fulfil his urgent official commission, namely to produce a deceptive propaganda poem, depicting the supposed bliss of rural life under the regime's all-seeing guidance, to be performed at the Marx Day ceremony, and who subsequently finds himself forever torn between conflicting loyalties.



There are plenty of problems for the reader: the one-dimensionality and cardboardishness of much character-drawing, dramatic implausibilities – outbursts of poetic description from the supposedly dependably stolid George, for instance, or the screechingly unlikely sudden conversion to "down on your knees" obsessive religious belief of arch-villain Hengist, brought on instantaneously by a sudden burst of illuminating light through a Grail-decorated window (this episode is not alone in betraying a tendency to preachy religiosity, but is by far the most embarrassingly unconvincing), and too much "tell not show", at its worst in the spatchcocked-in attacks with which Skinner relieved clearly personal venom against figures of the literary world of his time, as in the digs at the success of Pylon School poets like Auden, and at the strictures of unkind literary critics. So, excuses can be found from time to time to take up the poet's own rather despairing permission to skip sections of a book which would arguably have gained much by being freed of less relevant matter.

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The wider world in which events take place, too, is inconsistently as well as fragmentarily depicted. In England, great areas, like the whole Chilterns, have returned to wolf-infested wilderness, while wolf-like men rule most suburbs as criminal fiefdoms. Both these are believable after effects of nuclear conflict *per se*, but the evidence they provide of huge swathes of the country outwith the government's reach sit uneasily with the portrayal of the regime as an all-controlling tyranny whose iron grip can only be broken by a hero and a wizard out of legendary times. In a wider, more global context, while we are given depictions of destruction across Europe, like vivid scenes of a Venice nuked back to swampy lagoon, and as far afield as Asia, with a passing mention of Malaya having been devastated, the post-nuclear political situation is left nearly inexplicable: two rival Kremains threaten another nuclear war, it seems, but is the English regime an ally of either, or a neutral? And, huge gap in understanding the situation, there is no mention of the fate of the USA at all.

Yet there are also many strengths, real areas of enjoyment to be found in this epic, both as poetry and as narrative. Skinner has a true gift for painterly description of the weather and landscape setting of his events, as the year turns through them, and a gift, too, rare among poets, for successful slapstick: there is, for instance, a glorious verbal equivalent of a Max Sennett 'Krazy Kops' film, when, early on, Hengist and his uniformed thugs get their humiliating, if strictly temporary, comeuppance in the Alban farmyard, and the rich variety of scenes of attempted seduction in Morgana's "magical" gardens and caverned boudoirs, cleverly modernising the enchantress' traps and trappings in Ariosto and the like, ingeniously balance the sensuous and the darkly comic.

Likeably clever running gags, too, cluster round the larger-than-life figure of Merlin, with his inability to resist showing off his skills even at the risk of giving the game away, as when, attempting to make their HQ look deserted, so Hengist will believe they have left the area, he so over-eggs the pudding in his lavish provision of

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picturesque trappings of Gothic decay that the building looks as though abandoned for decades, not days, arousing rather than lulling suspicion.

This, then, is an odd, flawed, Arthurian epic, but one with quite enough gusto – and gifts – to be well worth tackling.

Steve Sneyd

## New poetry

K V Bailey

**The Sky Giants**

Hilltop Press 2008 £3.50 / \$7.00

978-0-905262-40-6 PB 52pp illus

The late Kenneth Vye Bailey, as Steve Sneyd's useful Foreword tells us, was a significant exemplar of that strange hybrid, the science fiction poet, and in his packed 90 years accomplished much of distinction, including this 1989 sequence *The Sky Giants*. Bailey's own preface tells us that his narrative draws on episodes from medieval romance, relocated "within such spatio-temporal frames as are often imagined in certain fabulising and mythopoeic forms of science fiction", and he acknowledges debts to poets such as William Blake and mythographers such as Joseph Campbell. A promising tradition, then; so does the end result live up to that promise?

Bailey's sixteen short poems (many fit onto just one A5 page) take episodes and names from Parsifal's quest and transform them into a space opera. As numerous TV SF series have demonstrated, knights in armour transmogrify successfully into men in spacesuits, monsters and sirens into aliens, and castles into spacecraft or planets. Bailey does this masterfully in finely crafted language; images are powerful, stanzas encapsulate deeds and thoughts, concepts are taut but not obscure.

Ian Brown's monochrome illustrations are a perfect counterpoint, stressing the cold and loneliness of space for the questing hero, his graphic novel style ideally suited to the subject matter. Unrelieved by humour and stark in its limited *dramatis personae*, this mini-epic makes you feel you have joined Parsifal on his perilous journey to Carbonek.

Chris Lovegrove

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## Fiction

Thom Madley

**Marco's Pendulum**

Usborne 2006 £6.99

978 0746067604 PB 457pp

The cover blurb gives it away: *Is the Holy Grail buried at Glastonbury, or something much darker?* Well, of course, you know the answer to that, because this would be a rather tame young adult's novel otherwise. Townies Marco and Rosa find themselves separately set down in Somerset, both saddled with parents who don't seem to understand them and set about by bullies and by strange and very unsettling psychic experiences. Pretty soon they find themselves thrown together and flung into a claustrophobic labyrinth under Glastonbury itself (reminiscent of the endings of both *Tom Sawyer* and Alan Garner's *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen*) in a narrative that is hard to put down and preferably *not* to be read at night. Well, not by adults anyway.

Thom Madley is better known as Phil Rickman, writer of the highly regarded Merrily Watkins mysteries set in the Welsh Marches. Here he uses the same technique for the Somerset town, skilfully mixing real locations with imagined locales and reality itself with imagined terrors, rather in the manner of Umberto Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum* (which must have inspired Madley's own title if not its atmosphere). The recently published *Marco and the Blade of Night* also picks up on an Arthurian theme: you can guess which sword they're talking about...

Chris Lovegrove

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## bookworm



## FICTION

Philip Reeve's *Here Lies Arthur*, which was reviewed in XXXV No 1, has won the Carnegie Medal for Children's literature. "The Booker of the playground" is an annual prize, judged by UK librarians, for an outstanding work of fiction for young people. Michael Portillo presented the prestigious CILIP Carnegie Medal to Reeve for "his fresh, bold retelling of the Arthurian legend". "I didn't believe it at first," Reeve said, "but as I got over the shock and it began to sink in, I felt totally honoured. It is very special to win the CILIP Carnegie Medal. It has such a history and I admire so many past winners' work; it is quite humbling to be ranked alongside them."

"*Here Lies Arthur* is an outstanding book, and deserving winner," Tricia Adams, Chair of the twelve-strong librarian judging panel declared. "Reeve's is a consistent story-telling voice that brings us a subtle and credible retelling of the King Arthur myth. It is both a page turning adventure story and a clever historical novel. It also has clear political resonance for our times, demonstrating humanity's need to





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sustain hope and optimism, and our tendency to favour myth over reality to achieve that end."<sup>2</sup>

Five-year-olds should enjoy *Green Smoke* by Rosemary Manning, with illustrations from Constance Marshall, about a fifteen-hundred-year-old dragon (Jane Nissen Books £6.99). Little Susan is on holiday in Cornwall's Constantine Bay when she discovers the creature, formerly tamed by St Petroc, who has developed a taste for almond buns while picnicking with mermaids. R Dragon (for it is he) entertains Susan with tales of King Arthur. Jane Nissen Books specialise in republishing children's classics: *Green Smoke* first appeared in 1957, while Manning died in 1988.

Jim Donaldson's *Celtic Twilight* website invites you to "read my novels of the Dragon Skies, a thrilling, dark and sensual story of war and revenge set in 6th-century Celtic Scotland". The titles include *Beneath a Dragon Sky*, *The Last Dragon Harper*, and *Dragon Harper Curse*. The latest addition to the series is *Red Knight and Dragon Skies*, described as "the history of Myrddin, the last Dragon Harper". This series is a historical fantasy of the life of Lailoken, whom Donaldson believes to be Myrddin ab Morvryn, "the Scottish Merlin, one of the three great harpers of Britain". Taking this story from fragments of Dark Age poetry and legend, he blends history and Celtic myth with his beliefs of what may have been possible, with aspects, motifs and legendary fragments of the Arthurian period woven into the history. The Dragon Skies web page has more information.<sup>3</sup>

### NON-FICTION

Now available in paperback is Nigel Bryant's translation of the 13th-century romance of *Perlesvaus*, titled *The High Book of the Grail* (Boydell & Brewer 2007 £17.99 PB 304pp 9781843841210).

<sup>2</sup> Anita Singh "Arthurian adaptation wins children's book prize" *Telegraph* June 27 2008; [http://carnegiegreenaway.org.uk/pressdesk/press.php?release=pres\\_car\\_a\\_nn\\_2008.html](http://carnegiegreenaway.org.uk/pressdesk/press.php?release=pres_car_a_nn_2008.html)

<sup>3</sup> <http://gorddcymru.org/dragonskies/index.htm>

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First published in 1978, this authoritative translation of a fascinating but deeply unpleasant version of the grail legend is still known from Sebastian Evans' translation as *The High History of the Holy Grail*. Also newly available in paperback is *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes* (Boydell & Brewer £19.99 PB 264pp 9781843841616), edited by Norris J Lacy and Joan Tasker Grimbert; a review of this useful collection of essays should appear here shortly.

The 74th report from the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of London, co-authored by Rachel Barrowman, Colleen Batey, Christopher Morris is the promising if prosaic *Excavations at Tintagel Castle, Cornwall, 1990-1999* (2007 HB 370pp 978-0854312863 illus). In the 1930s Dr Raleigh Radford discovered huge amounts of eastern Mediterranean and North African pottery dating from the fifth to the seventh century, indicating that Tintagel was a "western British site of iconic importance in the economy of the late Antique and Byzantine world". The promontory site was subsequently the scene of several seasons of research in the 1990s combining modern excavational techniques with previously unpublished work by Radford and his architect J A Wright.

We now know that there was a lot more complexity and variability of buildings and other types of occupation at Tintagel. The site also had wide-ranging trading connections in the fifth to seventh centuries, and the area protected by its so-called Great Ditch emphasises that this is "the largest promontory or hill-top site of its period". Along with its Mediterranean pottery and "unique" glass assemblage the site now boasts the infamous "Arthur stone". With its probable imperial inscription to Honorius the stone attracted graffiti alluding to three post-Roman individuals, Paternus, Coliavus and Artognou, the latter mysteriously but mistakenly conflated with the name of Arthur by the general media.

Nona Rees' *St David of Dewisland* (Gomer Press PB £5.99) is a re-issue of a popular 1992 publication written by the librarian of St Davids Cathedral. For a more scholarly view, *St David of Wales: Cult, Church and Nation* (Boydell 2007

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£60.00 HB 464pp 9781843833222) looks at the archaeological, historical, toponymic, hagiographical, and liturgical evidence for the cult of St David, including a re-examination of the saint's relic enshrined in the cathedral. A volume in the Saints in Celtic History series, *St David of Wales* (which arose from a 2006 conference in Lampeter) is co-edited by Wyn Evans, now Bishop-Elect of St Davids as well as an experienced historian, and Jonathan M Wooding, Senior Lecturer in Early Medieval Religious History at the University of Wales, Lampeter.

*Britannia, the Failed State: Ethnic Conflict and the End of Roman Britain* (The History Press £18.99 256pp 978-0752446141) by Stuart Laycock paints a picture of how tensions and conflicts between the constituent tribes of Roman Britain could have contributed to Roman Britain's fall and Anglo-Saxon immigration. It analyzes Roman Britain "as a collection of different peoples with a history of long term conflict", finding parallels in modern conflicts.

The late Kurth Sprague's *TH White's Troubled Heart* is an analysis of women in *The Once and Future King* (Boydell 2008 £25.00 HB 9781843841630). Drawing on unpublished material from the Ransom Center, White's misogyny is examined along with his other obsessions.

Barbara Tapa Lupack's *Illustrating Camelot* (D S Brewer 2008 £30.00 HB 9781843841838) claims to be the first comprehensive study of Arthurian illustration, examining the "special collaboration" between illustrators and authors and exploring how "the best Arthurian illustrators move beyond mere reproduction to become interpretive readers of the texts they embellish".

The former Academic Dean at New York State University (SUNY) and Fulbright Professor of American Literature in Poland and France examines artists as diverse as Gustave Doré, Julia Margaret Cameron, Aubrey Beardsley, Walter Crane, Arthur Rackham, Howard Pyle and our own Anna-Marie Ferguson, including nearly eighty illustrations to make her points in what promises to be a landmark study, due out this autumn.

The poet Robert Graves reconstructed (as he saw it) the mystic basis of the Irish writing system called variously *ogam* or

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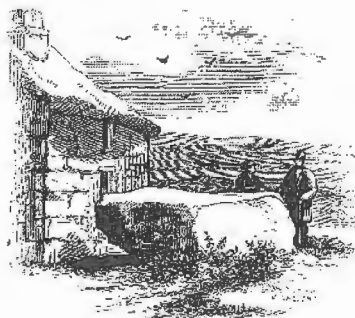
*ogham* in his *The White Goddess*, a system much in use on Dark Age memorial stones in the west, and Margot Miller no doubt picks up aspects of Graves' interpretation in her *Ogham: the magical Celtic tree alphabet* (Ogma Publications 2007 129 pp 978-0954116149). Her book is available from the author at 25 Nover Wood Drive, Fownhope, Herefordshire HR1 4PN for around £13.99, or you can email [margotmiller1@compuserve.com](mailto:margotmiller1@compuserve.com) for more information. A set of 25 cards drawn by Jenny Jones "for focus and guidance" is also available from the author for £7.00 (including p+p).

Chris Lovegrove and Steve Sneyd





## THE BATTLE OF VELLAN-DRUCHAR\*



THE Sea Kings, in their predatory wanderings, landed in Genvor Cove, and, as they had frequently done on previous occasions, they proceeded to pillage the little hamlet of Escols. On one occasion they landed in unusually large numbers, being resolved, as it appeared, to spoil many of the large and wealthy towns of Western Cornwall, which they were led to believe were unprotected. It fortunately happened that the heavy surf on the beach retarded their landing, so that the inhabitants had notice of their threatened invasion. That night the beacon-fire was lit on the chapel hill, another was soon blazing on Castle-an-Dinas, and on Trecrobben. Carn Brea promptly replied, and continued the signal-light, which also blazed lustroously that night on St Agnes Beacon. Presently the fires were seen on Relovely Beacon, and rapidly they appeared on the Great Stone, on St Bellarmine's Tor, and Cadbarrow, and then the, fires blazed out on Roughtor and Brownwilly, thus rapidly conveying the intelligence of war to Prince Arthur and his brave knights, who were happily assembled in full force at Tintagel to do honour to several native Princes who were at that time on a visit to the King of Cornwall. Arthur, and nine other kings, by forced marches, reached the neighbourhood of the Land's-End at the end of two days. The Danes crossed the land down through the bottoms to the sea on the northern side of the promontory, spreading destruction in their paths. Arthur met them on their return, and gave them battle near Vellan-Druchar.

So terrible was the slaughter, that the mill was worked with blood that day. Not a single Dane of the vast army that had landed escaped. A few had been left in charge of the ships, and as soon as they learned the fate of their brethren, they hastened to escape, hoping to return to their own northern land. A holy woman, whose name has not been preserved to us, "brought home a west wind" by emptying the Holy Well against the hill, and sweeping the church from the door to the altar. Thus they were prevented from escaping, and were all thrown by the force of a storm and the currents either on the rocky shore, or on the sands, where they were left high and dry. It happened on the occasion of an extraordinary spring-tide, which was yet increased by the wind, so that the ships lay high up on the rocks, or on the sands; and for years the birds built their nests in the masts and rigging.

Thus perished the last army of Danes who dared to land upon our western shores.

King Arthur and the nine kings pledged each other in the holy water from St Sennen's Well, they returned thanks for their victory in St Sennen's Chapel, and dined that day on the Table-men.

Merlin, the prophet, was amongst the host, and the feast being ended, he was seized with the prophetic afflatus, and in the hearing of all the host proclaimed—

"The northmen wild once more shall land,  
And leave their bones on Escol's sand.  
The soil of Vellan-Druchar's plain  
Again shall take a sanguine stain;  
And o'er the mill-wheel roll a flood  
Of Danish mix'd with Cornish blood.  
When thus the vanquish'd find no tomb,  
Expect the dreadful day of doom."

\* Vellan (mill), druchar (wheel). Extracted from Robert Hunt (1865) *Popular Romances and Superstitions of the West of England* (second series) 305-6; the illustration is of the Table-Maen rock at Sennen – see page 48.

## King Arthur is gay? Larry Mendelsberg



Wow, King Arthur is gay and having an affair with Mordred. No, he is an alien being from another solar system, an evil spirit, a tyrannical sadist, a naïve fool or a wandering minstrel. He didn't exist; he *did* exist. Oh my gosh, Lancelot was not really a man; he was a woman warrior, or maybe a god reincarnated from mythology. Read this! Cai was really a sensitive, loving guy who really wanted to marry and raise children. Look, Morgan le Fay was really misunderstood; she loved and helped Arthur secretly all through his life. Guinevere was a manipulating shrew, a loving and faithful wife or actually a priestess of Avalon. Merlin: Merlin was a treacherous power hungry demon, a confused philanthropist, the power behind Arthur's ascension, the cause of his fall from grace and the downfall of Camelot. Every time I turn a page each of my beloved characters changes into someone I never knew with completely different personalities and behavior. How can this be happening to the legend of the immortal Once and Future King?

If you are confused, just remember there is almost no evidence that there really was a King Arthur and in the hands of an imaginative and talented science fiction / fantasy writer anything

goes. I started out about as interested in the Matter of Britain as anyone else, which is not very much at all. I had read and reread Malory and got caught up in the slaying and slashing, the heartbreak of betrayal, the bravery and cowardice, the attainment of and loss of honor and, of course, the quests both knightly and holy. I thought I saw and understood all there was to see about the rise of righteousness and its ultimate destruction by deceit and evil. Then I read MZB's *The Mists of Avalon*<sup>1</sup> and my perspective shifted slightly. However, I was not moved far from my starting point. This was just a brief diversion. Arthur was not yet a focal point in my life.

Then one day, about eighteen years ago, I picked up a copy of Mike Ashley's anthology of Arthurian short stories, *Pendragon Chronicles*.<sup>2</sup> That was the beginning of a full shift of my Arthurian axis. Suddenly every episode in *Le Morte d'Arthur* could be seen through different eyes and every character could act in a completely new and surprising way. The entire story could be told and retold an

<sup>1</sup> MZB: Marion Zimmer Bradley

<sup>2</sup> Mike Ashley ed (1989) *The Pendragon Chronicles* (Robinson Publishing)

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infinite number of times yet remain fresh with each retelling. It was like watching an episode or your favorite childhood television series knowing that it could go on forever without becoming stale or boring. If that volume had ended with the last story, my life may have continued without any real diversion, but for better or worse, it didn't. There at the end of the book was the item that would cause me to be absorbed into the Arthurian legend for the next eighteen years and probably the rest of my life, a bibliography of Arthurian literature over a one-hundred year span. It was as if a switch had been flipped and my sanity left me. I contacted Mike Ashley by snail mail (I did not even own a computer back then) and he replied with the names and addresses of several sources for obtaining the volumes listed in his bibliography. I quickly contacted several of the booksellers he mentioned and I was on my way. I began ingesting Arthurian fiction by the truckload. I couldn't get enough. I ordered scarce and rare volumes through interlibrary loans and devoured the books as soon as I got my hands on them. I was hooked. I became totally immersed in the world of Arthur.

Mike and I began a regular correspondence that continues to this day and I have been granted the privilege of helping him obtain material for his subsequent Arthurian volumes and commenting on his tome about the historical King Arthur. I corresponded with other Arthurian junkies like Charles Wyatt, Sam Wenger (owner of Three Geese in Flight Books), Rodney Parrish, Dan Dockery, and Dan Nastali, and Jim and Lynne Owens, owners of Thorn Books. I learned of many items that I would never have heard of if not for their willingness to share their knowledge about our common passion. My collection grew and so did my obsession.

I spent weekends going to book fairs and any book store within driving distance. I called book stores in every state in the USA including Alaska and Hawaii and achieved favored customer status with several British booksellers. I was truly crazed. I would be remiss here if I did not mention that my wife did not only allow me to continue living in our

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home during this manic period, she actually supported my insanity. God bless her.

I knew that there were many Arthurian bibliographies already published, after all I had used many of them to feed my compulsion but I realized that most of the short stories that I really enjoyed were not listed in any of them. Although drawn from traditional Arthurian sources, they were new and fresh, entertaining and fun and, at least to me, exciting. One of the most rewarding aspects of collecting Arthurian materials was discovering a previously unknown Arthurian piece hidden away in a periodical or anthology amongst all the other non-Arthurian works. I had read literally well over one hundred novels and hundreds of short stories and filled my house with Arthurian books of every genre. Now I needed to share my treasures and enthusiasm with the entire Arthurian community. I called and e-mailed all my contacts and asked them if they thought the idea of putting together a bibliographer of Arthurian short stories was a good idea, sort of my own feasibility study, and found no resistance or objections to the idea. Now I was off and running.

Approximately eight months later my house was filled with notes on paper, books and rough drafts but my bibliography was ready. Alan Lupack had agreed to host my bibliography on his excellent Camelot Project website and rearrange it so that it was computer compatible. I can't remember when the actual unveiling took place but it happened with very little fanfare and with just minor technical adjustments. With several hundred additions it appears in the same form on that website today thanks to Alan and his assistants. The bibliography has grown to over five hundred authors and over one thousand stories and still counting.<sup>3</sup>

Have I gotten any joy from this project? Absolutely is the only answer I can give. I still get a thrill when I find a

<sup>3</sup> Larry Mendelsberg "Modern Arthurian Short Stories: an Arthuriana / Camelot Project Bibliography" <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/acpbibs/lmbib.htm>

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new Arthurian story hidden in an anthology or a periodical or read a new Arthurian novel. Then there are the conversations with authors, booksellers and Arthurian fans that began when I initiated the project and are still taking place today. John Matthews, Mike Ashley, James Work, Elizabeth Wein, Sophie Masson and many others still take time from their busy schedules to respond to my inquiries in a friendly and gracious manner. One of the nicest authors and most helpful was Peter Garratt (d 2004). He was knowledgeable and enthusiastic as well as warm and open. I feel privileged to have met him. His early passing was a terrible loss.

If you are interested in Arthurian fiction, I urge you to take a look at my bibliography. If you haven't read many short stories, begin with the first section on completely Arthurian short story anthologies or the section on Mike Ashley's books and you can't go wrong. Almost all these books are readily available on the second hand market for very reasonable prices. *Invitation to Camelot* edited by Parke Godwin was one of the first collections I read and it still remains one of my favorites.<sup>4</sup> If you get hooked, simply work your way through the paperback and hard cover anthologies and then hit the big time by trying to find the periodicals listed in one of the last sections. If you are having financial problems, try the free internet stories. They may not all be good but the price is right.

My fascination with Arthurian literature is an avocation not a profession and, so, I must also work to earn a living. Not realizing how much more value there is in a bibliography that contains synopses of the works as well detailed indexes, I merely created a list of Arthurian short stories. Since then I have had enough time to continue sharing my passion for Arthurian literature by finding new stories and adding them to my bibliography every so often, which requires monthly trips to newsstands and bookstores to check out new anthologies and periodicals as they are published. My greatest regret is not including those short synopses of each

<sup>4</sup> Parke Godwin (1988) *Invitation to Camelot* (Ace Books)

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story and detailed indexes so the bibliography could be more valuable to researchers in Arthurian pop culture. That project will have to wait for my retirement but it is a definite goal.

Thanks to Chris Lovegrove for all his help; it has been a thrill and honor to write this article for the Journal of the Pendragon Society. I hope all of you will take a look at the bibliography and feel comfortable contacting me with any questions you may have. I would enjoy hearing from you!<sup>5</sup> If anyone knows of an Arthurian short story that is not listed, please let me know. You can help make this bibliography as complete as possible. Hopefully, my quest will continue for a long time to come and the bibliography can be of some service to other lovers of Arthurian fiction. ☾



### Sonnet XVI

When in the chronicle of wasted time  
I see description of the fairest wights,  
And beauty making beautiful old rime  
In praise of Ladies dead and lovely Knights;  
Then, in the blazon of sweet beauty's best,  
Of hand, of foot, of lip, of eye, of brow,  
I see their antique pen would have express'd  
Even such a beauty as you master now.  
So all their praises are but prophecies  
Of this our time, all you prefiguring;  
And for their look'd but with divining eyes,  
They had not skill enough your worth to  
sing:  
For we, which now behold these  
present days,  
Have eyes to wonder, but lack tongue  
to praise.

William Shakespeare

<sup>5</sup> menlar@aol.com



## The Cave of Coventina

Pamela Harvey



Sarabeth Claudia threw the coin into the well. It was a silver coin; her fervent wish was for Macrinus' safe return. He had been gone over a year now. She gazed imploringly at the carving of the nymph Coventina, the *genius* or more accurately *genia loci* of the spring outside the Roman fort of Brocolitia, on Hadrian's Wall. Such pagan practices were frowned on by the local Bishop in this year of 450 Anno Domini, but people always needed good luck, and ignored more serious breaches than this of the Church's narrow parochial advice against idolatry. Some pagan Gods and Goddesses and not a few of their attendant elves, sprites and nymphs had been conveniently transformed into saints or angelic beings, and the old ways, both Celtic and Mediterranean, were secretly and often openly continued by people who, like all humans, wanted some continuity with their ancestors. Especially at times of trouble like these: the Saxons, Angles, Frisians and Picts had been coming and going in raids and more recently

forming settlements for longer than the oldest person could remember. But now in Britain there was no clear leader. Rome was no longer their ruler and mentor; it was fought over by barbarians, some worse than the Saxons or Picts.

Sarabeth Claudia was glad of her Roman family name and through that inheritance her patrician blood, but also she was proud of her Celtic ancestors and many mixtures of race from her mother's side, where soldiers of former times with the Roman army had been drawn from different parts of the Empire, and merchants had been included, too. She walked away from the shrine to the water nymph; not too far away were the ruins of the Temple of Mithras which local legend told had been vandalised by Christians. As a woman, Sarabeth knew nothing of the rites of Mithras, the Unconquered Sungod, the deity of Roman soldiers and merchants, whose temple in Londinium was still frequented by members of a secret society forbidden by the Church, but which they had been unable to suppress. Sarabeth knew Macrinus made visits to Londinium about which he said little. He felt himself to be a Roman soldier – Sarabeth felt, too, that he was a natural leader of men. For the followers of Mithras it was indeed *Roma Aeterna*, and one day they hoped it would be re-established as Capital of the Empire alone. Constantinople was a secondary choice and in any case Britain was far away from it. But the British tribes were becoming helpless against pirate invaders, and their own internal quarrels did nothing to help. "Perhaps I should have prayed for a leader," thought Sarabeth. She had prayed in church for such a person to deliver them.



As the shades of evening strayed over the crumbled stonework of Mithras' temple the sun went behind a cloud. It was a dark cloud, its edges well defined by sunlight, but brooding, ominous. Streaks of light slanted over the ruins, the night wind sighed and a solitary bird called to its mate far away. Dusk grew stronger and mists rolled across the hills. Sarabeth shivered and pulled her cloak tightly around her shoulders. It was lonely and unwelcoming here. She would leave. She turned – then saw the figure. Shadowed by the retreating sunlight, wreathed in mist and with wild hair blowing in the breeze, he looked not quite human. Sarabeth gasped. Perhaps he was of the elven race. A changeling of the Faery People – she recalled her mother's stories. "Yes, child, we too have the elven blood." The word was of Saxon origin, too. That fact had not escaped Sarabeth. Was she also Saxon? Oh well, if it was a family secret, so what? All Saxons were not barbarians – they had known a few families who had settled at first farther south – quite civilised people. But Sarabeth had never met a man of the elves. Would he abduct her? Would she be enchanted and spend time in the Faery Kingdom? Only to find when she returned that she would be old, as passage of time in Elfland seemed fast to mortals, and some, like Ossian of legend, had returned to earth to find a century or more had elapsed in what to him was but a few days.

She jumped visibly as the man spoke.

"This is a desolate place for a young lady. Do you live far? I assure you I will not harm you if I escort you to your home."

Sarabeth shrugged. That was the obvious approach. She was naturally wary. It had been silly to make this long walk; she knew she could never get back home before daybreak at least – whatever had possessed her? Since the attempted destruction of their home by the Pictish band of raiders last month her mother and sisters had not gone out; her father was serving with the local militia even though he was more than sixty years old. She had been stifled by this state of imprisonment. At seventeen and the youngest all she wanted was for Macrinus to return and marry her. She smiled to herself, aware that the stranger was scrutinising her narrowly. Perhaps he could be disappointed to discover she was not a virgin, but she would not give him that chance. Reluctantly she agreed that he should accompany her, but told him how far it was. His smile only increased her unease, despite his not unhandsome appearance. The Moon appeared suddenly, crowning his head with an aureole of pale light and making his already rather dark skin more Mediterranean in nature.

For a long time they walked in silence. At last, exhaustion claimed Sarabeth. She collapsed against a hillock. She felt strangely undisturbed as her tunic revealed her naked breast. Curiously she regarded him. "I just can't go on," she confessed. What would his reaction be? She was almost beyond caring. Almost – but not quite, as he sat down beside her and touched her arm. He slightly overbalanced. Was it deliberate? His breath was close to her cheek. She could feel the heat of the arms that went around her. She struggled to move. Her lips – surely accidentally? – brushed his mouth; she felt his embrace harden. He rolled over, pressing close against her, but definitely allowing escape. "Stop it," she shouted. "I didn't mean to touch you like that. Get off me."

To her surprise he released his hold, but not before he had planted a firm kiss on her mouth. As she opened it to further protest he kissed her again, this time more intimately. Sarabeth felt somehow as if they were alone in time and space. "You are of the elfin blood," he whispered. "It is alright. You will never yield to a true human, but I, too, am heir to the *sang real*. We belong together; I have foreseen it."

"I am to be married shortly," said Sarabeth, as she pushed him away. Why were her arms so weak? And her voice so timid and uncertain?

"Oh yes, Macrinus will return to you – he is safe. And we need descendants of the Romans, and you are that, too. Your children will maintain their Latin heritage."

"Then what do you think you are doing?" Sarabeth's reply was now spirited.

"You lout – taking advantage of a poor girl ... I will report you when I get to my village. I bid you goodbye – I will be much safer alone."



She got up and dusted herself off. To her surprise the sky was beginning to lighten. She walked on for a good half hour, only stumbling a little over hidden stones and rocks. To her increasing astonishment, the sky began to display the first yellow-gold streaks of dawn. Shortly the sun burst through in all its splendour. Only once had she looked behind her. The stranger had not followed. She could see only the retreating mist rolling over the hills, as an eagle soared to meet the sun.

Sarabeth trudged on, her limbs aching more and her feet hurting with blisters. With every step as the sun climbed to the heat of July midday she was once again nearer to exhaustion. She almost wished she had succeeded in her frustrated half-hearted and stupid attempt to titillate the strange man. So, he did possess a modicum of chivalry... She smiled, though her lips cracked. Was he perhaps one of King Arthur's knights? They were famed among bards and storytellers around Britain. Their daring feats in battle, their sometimes daring feats in love... The poets were always exaggerating, weren't they? After all, most of them originated in Gaul, and men of Gaul had a reputation... Like Lancelot, the Queen's lover. Lascivious storytellers told of events that made a girl like Sarabeth blush... Well, girls something like Sarabeth. She gritted her teeth. She was hungry and thirsty as well as tired. An awful thought assailed her. Was she going in the right direction for home? The sun should be that way...

The green hill seemed to appear abruptly. She climbed an escarpment and there it was – it was round, yes, like a hill of the faeries, the *sidhe* or people of the hill, in the Gaelic. A low, square door loomed ahead in it, the dark recesses gloomy but in this penetrating sun cool and inviting. Sarabeth stopped. She could fancy she could hear the elfin laughter and see long, spindly hands reaching out to her as they took her captive in their firm immortal grip. She could imagine the welcoming faery food and drink that went down so well into the stomach but left it empty as it evaporated seconds later. But she had had enough walking. She did not know what to do. She bent down and dived in. The darkness was almost total after the brightness outside. And, yes, there was the tinkle of water somewhere. Her eyes adjusted, and she could see a tiny waterfall trickling down into a little pool, from where a muddy streamlet flowed into the hidden recesses of the Underworld.

Then another sound above the waterfall, the ripple not of water but of laughter, feminine laughter.

*Oh, Lancelot, my mother will be furious. And so will your Guinevere. She is your Guinevere, isn't she? Oh, Lancelot, please. You are naughty!*

Sarabeth sighed. Had she come upon a lovers' trysting place? Could this be just a cave and not a *Sidhe* hill? No, she had not been mistaken.

A moment later she gasped. A figure, a young woman not much older than herself, literally shimmered into view, shining like the tiny shaft of sunlight that came from the ceiling. Her eyes had the elfin slant, and their size and width were more than human. Her chin was pointed, her slim body well shaped but almost childlike. Her face was young, but strangely and – disturbingly – old as well. She spoke. Her voice was younger than Sarabeth's, high but delicately pitched.

*I am Coventina, nymph of the spring where you made your wish. It will be granted. This, she waved her slim hand around the cavern, is my own special cave. I dream my dreams here – I talk with the Gods and Goddesses, including my mother, Morgana. And recently with her beloved, Arthur, who has inherited the mantle of Uther Pendragon, to protect this our land.*

Sarabeth remembered her teasing words to the – for her – unseen Lancelot. "Why are you interested in Guinevere's human, and Gaulish, lover, when all you want to do is protect our country?" She felt the words to be a little impolite, but Coventina only laughed. *If Queen Guinevere is with Lancelot, then Morgana can go back to Arthur, she replied simply. And I can get some peace with my Roman, or nearly Roman, officer, Macrinus.*

Sarabeth blurted out: "No – you can't. He's – mine. I thought he was in Europe, fighting the Goths!"

A voice with a heavy Pictish accent sounded from the depths of the cave. "Why fight the Goths, lassie, when you can fight us? Only ye canna win. We will always have Hibernia – or Caledonia as you folks say. We don't care if our Saxon friends here get their Angle-land."

A big red-haired man with large, strong features came into the shard of sunlight. It seemed to get bigger to accommodate him. The Pict came also. He was naked, his skin covered with blue woad dye, once the warpaint of all the Britons.

"I'll have yon bonnie lass!" he said, making a move towards Sarabeth. "No!" she shrieked, lashing out with her foot. Like many Celtic women she had been trained to some degree in martial arts. Her foot connected with the Pict as he lunged towards her, just where the blue began to turn a delightful purple.

He yelled, swearing in Pictish, which fortunately Sarabeth had never had the opportunity to learn. "Get her, Wilfred!" he shouted, his face contorted with pain and fury.

Wilfred hesitated. "The little lady is scared," he answered calmly, though his sword belt was unfastened, and Sarabeth did not look any further.

"Arthur!" she shouted at the top of her voice, the name of the warrior hero echoing around the cave.

Another figure shimmered like silver rain into human-like form. But it was not human; it, too, had an elfin cast of feature that Sarabeth had noticed the evening before...

*Arthur, King of the Britons; Lord of the Faeries!* Coventina's voice was clear above the din. Arthur stepped over to Sarabeth and this time she did not tell him where to go. Instead she looked up gratefully at his serious face.

The Pict started forward again, his hand grasping a dagger. Arthur turned to the ceiling: "Mordred, is this one of your tricks? Or Morgana – one of your enchantments? You should know I will never leave Guinevere, though," he turned momentarily to Sarabeth, "I could just fancy a little dalliance – as she does with Lancelot. And Morgana, though you are my half-sister – we are of the Gods begotten, not human. Different rules... But since our loves are so complicated, why don't we all just slip across the channel to Gaul?"



Wilfred had seen his chance. The big, tough Saxon was no illusion, no will-o'-the-wisp. He struck at Arthur with his heavy sword. Lightning swift, Arthur parried. The two men fought, weaving and leaping as the thin ray of sunlight played on their forms and the cave echoed to their war cries. After ten minutes or so Wilfred stood still, holding out his sword threateningly. He cleaned off it some drops of Arthur's blood, casually. He was unhurt, but his sweat dripped on the dank floor.

Arthur was very slightly injured. He held up his hand in a gesture of conciliation to the unscathed Saxon. "Victory, for now, is yours," Arthur said ruefully.

Wilfred laughed. "Since I learned the arts of war from the Valkyrie and crossed swords with my teacher, the lord Siegfried, I have feared no mere man of the human breed," he replied. "But I am of the elven people – as I see you are, too – do you not see on me the mark of Morgana? She is my mother too. We must make peace with her and all the Gods. Blood should not be spilled in here, but you will bear the scars that only the greatest of mortals have, and you will never die, but be immortal, and show men their own immortality beyond the veil in Avalon." He touched Arthur lightly. "Defender of Romano-Celtic Britain, by magic more than the sword, your initiation is complete."

Sarabeth was outside again. It was night. She was alone. Had it all been a dream? Or a vision in which she had had a part? Such as Macrinus had had as an initiate of Mithras, the Roman sun god?

A familiar voice beside her made her jump. "Macrinus!" she cried in joy. Her memory was getting vague.

"Sarabeth, my love! I was worried, especially for you – in your state of health. Your mother told me. She wants to be a grandmother, so we will just marry and it will be alright."

"Macrinus, I am not pregnant. We haven't seen each other for over a year – and there's been no-one else." She turned to him. "But I do feel tired. Is that your chariot? Has there been fighting here – oh, you are injured!"

Macrinus said it was nothing – a band of Picts had teamed up with a few Saxons – that was all. The Romano-British soldiers had made short work of them. All except one of them had fled. "But Wilfred, he was a tough fellow, all six and a half feet of him..."

Sarabeth was remembering, puzzled: "And Arthur?"

"Who? King Arthur? Who the druid Merlin has said will one day rule all Britain? You must be joking. He is too worried about his wife's love life right now. You can never trust the Franks – the invaders of Gaul, or their half-Gaulish offspring. Speaking of which, the seer Merlin has prophesied that Arthur's son will eventually make peace with most of the Saxons... What's the matter, dear?"

"N-nothing. I just remembered – a dream. I met a man who brought me some of the way home – and then I recalled this dream about him. A few months ago I started dreaming it night after night..."

She heard clearly in her mind Coventina's voice. *Macrinus won't mind, later on. At times you, as Arthur's priestess, will come close to him. Arthur is the power of the sun, the strength of the ocean tides, the gentleness of a summer breeze and the deepest desire of a human heart. But he is not – really – a human. We, of the Sidhe, only explain – to those who can understand. Just like time, we are different, and our loves never eclipse human love. And your kin is of us, too, the sang rael, the Gods of Earth.* ☪



*Note "The Cave of Coventina" was first published in Monomyth magazine. Two of the illustrations of sculptures above are of bas-reliefs from Carrawburgh in Northumberland; the fort and settlement on Hadrian's Wall were first excavated in 1876, and the nearby well, which seems to have been desecrated by Christians in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century, contained a mass of votive deposits, including coins, brooches, rings, pins, glassware and pottery. ☪*



## What Dragons Do

Pamela Constantine

It was a sultry Saturday afternoon. The local High Street was packed with a moiling mass of shoppers, Xavier among them. Traffic lined the street, a bus waited patiently at the traffic lights, and a little old lady on his right was trying unsuccessfully to reach the bus stop.

Xavier found himself jostled to the kerb, set off-course by the crowd. Or perhaps it was destiny. Because that was when he met the dragon.

One minute he was gazing with heat-moistened eyes at the long tailback of gleaming cars, the next, there it was: huge, muscular, with multi-coloured metallic scales, breathing at that moment quite gently, giving off smoke but no fire, and staring steadfastly at him with blazing eyes that reminded him of sun-dazzled glass.

Xavier, who had no previous experience of dragons, felt a surging mixture of fear and resentment. If he had been brought by unknown powers to this unexpected meeting-point, at the very least he should have been equipped with a sword! The dragon snorted.

"We are not all villains," he retorted.

A mind-reading dragon.

"You, sir," said Xavier, made clumsy by nervousness, "are a monster."

"And you, sir," said the dragon, "have created monsters far greater whose fiery tongues lash the very skies and scorch whole nations in the cause of domination. Whereas, what we were created for, we do."

Xavier was taken aback. What *did* dragons do?

"We," said the mind-reading beast,

"enable such as you to get to know yourselves. Such as I reveal that there is a greater monster who does not do what he was created for. My name, by the way, is Dee," he added disarmingly.

Xavier forgot about the lack of a sword.

"You, then, are really of us?" he asked, less nervously.

"All are of one another," Dee corrected him kindly. "But your clan were meant for higher work than mine."

"Higher work? What work is that?" asked Xavier, somewhat pacified.

"Well," said Dee, "we have our place in the scheme of things as you have yours. We work best in subterranean areas. We love challenging your instincts, keeping your intuitions healthy, polishing up your perceptions. There's no end of work, I can tell you. We subtle fellows are very work-conscious."

"Yes, yes," Xavier said impatiently. "That's what your clan does well. What about mine?"

"It's come to something," Dee sighed, "when one of my clan has to point that out to one of yours. Haven't you got a conscious mind and a degree of aware feelings?"

"Of course. So?"

"So," said Dee, spelling it out as though to the youngest dragon, "you have some evolutionary advantages. To help you understand what manner of being you are. And to help others do likewise. You do your job, we do ours. But if you don't play your part, the whole chain stops moving – those

behind us, those ahead of you. It's a matter of interdependence."

"That's a big responsibility," Xavier said soberly.

"It needs facing up to," said Dee.

"Is that why you and I have met?" Xavier asked.

"That's it."

"Needs thinking about," Xavier said.

"Your clan have had twenty centuries -- and you call *us* slow," said Dee.

"I'm a fair man, I think," said Xavier.

"I'll give what you say some serious thought. Am I likely to encounter you again?"

"Not if you do as you say," Dee replied, looking suddenly more relaxed. He began to fade into the scenery.

"Just a minute!" Xavier called.

Dee drew himself wearily back into human focus.

"What is it?"

"If your kind doesn't possess the natural advantages of my kind, how did you surface to address my reason and appeal to my everyday feelings?"

"We don't need your advantages when you descend to our level," said Dee.

A motor revved up, exuding exhaust fumes, and Dee disappeared in a puff of smoke. It was Xavier's turn to refocus. He was still on the kerb, facing a street of snorting cars, their metallic bodies panting in line, sun sparking their polished windows. People were pushing impatiently past, immersed in their problems. Hoardings on the wall opposite carried slogans designed to bring out the blatant worst of consumer self-interest. Dee was right. What, indeed, was the human clan but another kind of monster?

Xavier felt a sudden rush of gratitude that Dee and others like him were unobtrusively at work trying to help the confused human species, wanting no reward, taking no credit. No wonder there was an evolutionary logjam. Dee for Dragon: he would not forget.

It was time to get things moving.

The little old lady was still trying to reach the bus stop. Xavier touched her shoulder.

"Follow me," he said; and calling politely but firmly to the crowd, "Make way there!" he parted the people and led her through.

She caught the bus. It was a start.

Xavier felt gratified. This dragon, at least, was henceforth going to keep things moving....

First published in *The Dragon Chronicle*



CL

### Conjuration

Waiting till I slept, Merlin appeared  
Holding between pulsating hands  
With deep and delicate care  
A spinning object like a living platter,  
Dear, familiar, perilous;  
A gyrating nucleus upon fine axis:  
Our own rotating earth,  
And laid it, for a second, in my hands.

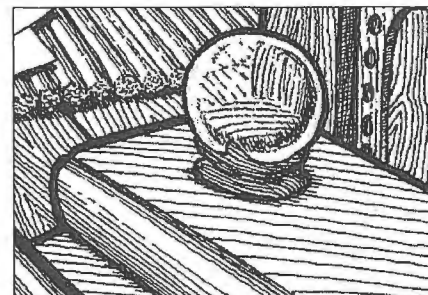
Even in dreams, the responsibility  
Turned me to ice. Softly the master said  
"Let your heart melt. Let your heart be  
the ocean."

And as I observed the people of the  
world,  
The abundance of life, the glory of  
creation  
Yearning to rise into a distant freedom,  
The ocean flowed: I held the wavering  
planet  
Buoyed up on love, on all I had to give.  
But the cosmic wizard knew: he took the  
weight  
Before my soul ran out, and disappeared.

I wept, until I woke and understood:  
I am but a dreamer of a global dream  
Conjured to stir the conscience of  
mankind.  
Who else will remember when they also  
wake?

Pamela Constantine

## What you seek & Chris Lovegrove



I suppose you could say that, for me, Merlin was just like the proverbial bus -- you wait for ages and then two come along. Actually, I wasn't really waiting for either, they just turned up. And, in a strange sort of way they were related.

I had been out mowing the grass, the way you do when the weather has turned fine after a very wet winter. Stupid of me to forget to wear a mask as I promptly came down with the first symptoms of hay fever -- sneezing, bunged up nose, itchy eyes, all the usual things. I had to get to a chemist quick, and as I needed things at B&Q in Carmarthen, it seemed sensible to look out a pharmacy there.

All very humdrum so far, you'll agree. But then I did one of those little things we all do that set in train a whole bunch of events that take you down unexpected paths. And perhaps life is never the same again.

On the way I stopped on a whim at friends who were doing their cottage up. I say "doing up" advisedly, because there seemed to be more demolition than construction. But that's by the by. They'd just had a visitor, one they had always threatened to unleash on me, a friend who claimed he was the reincarnation of Merlin. "You'll both have a lot to talk about," they'd tell me with a glint in their eyes. "Don't you dare!" I'd say, but only half jokingly.

Today they kindly refrained from spilling the beans on my Arthurian interests, but it was to no avail. The reincarnation of Merlin -- yes, he had a beard and long hair, but for some reason

he was wearing a boiler suit -- launched forth into an excited monologue.

"I've discovered the identity of the Holy Grail!" he announced, to anyone who would listen. One of my friends slipped off to "make some coffee". I raised an eyebrow at boiler-suited Merlin. "And it's located at Llandeilo!" This was a village -- well, a hamlet really -- just south of where I lived. My other friend began to mix some cement in a wheelbarrow. "It's really the skull of St Teilo!" enthused the bard, now focusing all his attention on the audience that was left to him.

Twenty-five minutes later I managed to excuse myself. Even if I'd wanted to interrupt, Merlin was in full flow, and there was no point in arguing with him over the details of his mini-lecture. In any case, it was getting more and more difficult to breathe, other than through my mouth, and so with genuine sneezes and convincing nose-blowing I resumed my journey, leaving Merlin to seek out a new audience.

Luckily Merlin's revelation distracted me from the hay fever en route to Carmarthen. I'd vaguely heard about the legend of St Teilo's skull, but as I usually dismissed most local saints' tales as hagiography of the most pious kind, this vagueness was not surprising. But Merlin was convinced that this was somehow the true Holy Grail, and that the better-known Nanteos Cup had acquired, even stolen its status. Moreover, the skull of the Dark Age saint had been used at his well in the Pembrokeshire Llandeilo for the relief of various complaints -- visitors would drink the well water from his skull and would come away cured, exactly like the Nanteos Cup.

It was all cobblers, of course, but running through the ramifications of what my friends' Merlin had said made the journey to Carmarthen so much quicker. I decided to go straight to a pharmacy and visit B&Q on the way home. As it turned out, this was another off-the-cuff decision that had unforeseen knock-on effects.



After passing the metal sculpture of Merlin's oak tree located inaccessibly on a traffic roundabout, I parked and indulged in what I suppose you could call "wandering purposefully" – anyway, that was what I was doing when I came across an alternative wholefoods sort of place, down one of those curving lanes you mysteriously get in old towns (and not surprisingly in Carmarthen, which bills itself as the oldest town in Wales). On a whim, I went into the small bustling store – with its part hippy, part rustic, part Scandinavian décor – and enquired, amid snuffles and itchy eyes, if they had some homeopathic or other remedy for hay fever.

After purchasing a minute bottle of pills for a kingle's ransom I began browsing the small selection of alternative books packed onto a couple of shelves, my eye drawn to vaguely Arthurian titles with the word "grail" featuring prominently. Was there something here on Teilo's skull, I wondered.

I was suddenly aware of a small figure at my side. It resolved itself into a small dumpy woman, with shoulder-length steel-grey hair and a garish poncho – I remember the poncho, thinking, who wears ponchos anymore? – who, like a latter-day Ancient Mariner, fixed me with her eyes, laid a ring-festooned hand on my arm and stated, as a matter of fact, "By the end of the week you'll find what you seek." With that, she nodded at me before turning and disappearing out of the shop.

I supposed I obviously looked rather dazed because the shop assistant came across to me, murmuring something or other. I registered that she said, "You're very lucky. You've just got a personal prophecy from Merlin!" I must have looked even more dazed then, because she took a booklet off the shelf to show me. "This is a book she's written. She's a reincarnation of Merlin you know." She repeated, "You're very lucky!"

In all honesty I couldn't *not* buy the booklet – only a minor lord's ransom, after all – which I then took out into the May Carmarthen sunshine to read on the first available public bench. *The New Prophecies of Merlin*, I noted on the cover, with a short biography of my second

Merlin of the day and a photo of her (disappointingly, minus a poncho) on the back cover. Inside, there was a selection of numbered epigrams, some gnomic, some in the kind of doggerel verse I'd been honoured with. All appeared to be vague aphorisms concerning love, money and health of the type you'd see in popular horoscopes, nothing of the fiercely political and religious nature that medieval prophecies attributed to Merlin specialised in. I remember sighing before getting up to make my way back to the car.

I was halfway home before I realised I'd forgotten to go to B&Q. The reason was that I couldn't get the prophecy out of my mind. *By the end of the week you'll find what you seek.* What was I seeking? At the very time she prophesied I was thinking of King Arthur ... grails ... Teilo's skull. Maybe that was it! No, my rational self argued, it's mere coincidence! What was it the great Ambrose Bierce said about prophecy? I looked it up later: "the art and practice of selling one's credibility for future delivery," he wrote in *The Devil's Dictionary*, and I tended to agree with him.

But I couldn't get that damned pseudo-grail out of my mind. What if there was something in what Merlin Mark I said? I worried about it all the way to the fork in the road where I could either drive home or carry on to Llandeilo. And so it was that I found myself looking at a clump of stones (no, obviously *not* home!) in what remained of an ancient graveyard. At the nearby farm were, Merlin Mark I had told me, the remains of Teilo's Well where his skull was dipped into the water for sufferers from whooping cough to drink from. It all looked very unprepossessing for a presumed Chapel of the Holy Grail.

However, I remembered that the churchyard may originally have held two large ogham-inscribed stones, now moved to the shelter of another village's church. I decided I'd follow this up – after all, if a Dark Age chapel with Dark Age people buried in its graveyard had a healing relic of a Dark Age saint's skull, perhaps this was something for Dark Age soldiers to go in quest of, a kind of grail after all!

So, for the next couple of days I threw myself into research. I visited the church guarding the ogham stones and examined the impressive inscriptions in Latin and Irish script. I discovered that three generations of Dark Age men were commemorated on these and other nearby stones: Cavetus, his sons Andagellus and Coimagnus and his grandson Curcagnus. I also tracked down *The Legend of Saint Teilo's Skull*, a booklet by a local author, subtly and suitably illustrated by a gifted artist neighbour of ours. In this I learnt that after the nineteenth century the skull disappeared to Australia, but later returned to Wales, ending up in Llandaff Cathedral. Alas for Merlin Mark I, the skull was probably a thousand years younger than St Teilo, a late medieval head which, perhaps through rumour rather than outright knavery, metamorphosed into that of the saint who gave his name to the well and chapel.

And what about Merlin Mark II's prophecy? Well, oddly enough that came true. What was I seeking in that alternative shop if not a cure for my hay fever?

Of course, by the end of my week of focusing on pseudo-grails I had no time to notice that my ailment had disappeared of its own volition. And not through drinking from St Teilo's skull, nor yet from taking any alternative remedy; because in my haste to read Merlin's *New Prophecies* I had left my little bottle of pills on the public bench. ☾



### Old News 6TH-CENTURY LOGBOAT

The undeveloped area of Langstone Harbour which lies between Portsmouth and Hayling Islands is important for its archaeological features, wildlife and plant species. It includes four islands and, exposed at low water, mud flats, shingle banks and sand banks. Artefacts found include Neolithic arrow heads, cremation urns from the Bronze Age and Saxon wattle work. Back in 2003 a logboat was excavated from the shore of Long Island in Langstone Harbour and a radiocarbon date of AD 500 (plus or minus 100 years) was recovered. According to the Hampshire and Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology "it was apparent that the boat was in several pieces due to fractures in the timber caused by time and tide".

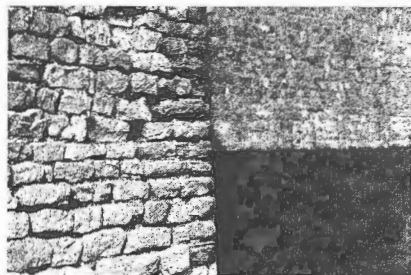
Sampling of sediments and other material was intended to throw light on the logboat's palaeo-environment, while work continued on cleaning and drawing the pieces of the logboat. Nigel Nayling of the University of Lampeter in Wales determined that "the tree used was a fast grown oak and that it was a poor specimen due to the high number of knots". While a dendrochronological or tree-ring date proved impossible, there being not enough rings present in the wood for a good sample to be taken, a second radio carbon date was acquired from a piece of wood from close to the heartwood-sapwood boundary "to enable a date close to the felling of the tree to be obtained and confirm the initial date".

Julie Satchell, the Archaeological Officer for the Trust and site director of the excavation, who is currently writing up the results of the project for publication, confirmed that they had another radio carbon date which backs up the initial date of around 500. In an email she tells us that since 2004 the boat has been with the Mary Rose Trust for conservation and is due to be completed later this year, 2008. After this the boat will be passed to Portsmouth City Museum for curation and display alongside other finds from Langstone Harbour.<sup>1</sup> ☾

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.hwtma.org.uk/projects/langstone/logboat.htm>

# Perhaps the answer is also the question

*Steve Sneyd*



"You've done me a very big favour."

John Ramsden's head spun with the craziness of it all. Yesterday ... could it only have been yesterday ... this beautiful woman had set him up to be killed. Now here she was, calm as if nothing had happened, thanking him ... for what?

Again he tried to move his arms, his hand at least ... it was only inches to the bellpush that would call a nurse, a witness, someone to protect him, get her removed.

It was still just the same as when she'd come into the little four-bed cottage hospital ward seconds ... minutes ... it seemed like terrifying hours ... before. His mouth had opened to scream for help the instant he saw that classically pure, timeless face ... again he'd thought, irrelevantly, as when he first saw her, that she could be any age from 20, 30, 40, even a botoxed fifty, one of those fine boned pale skinned ones that never seem to age till they suddenly go completely ... and had found his face muscles refused to obey, and then as he attempted to move, leap from the bed, planning to rush at, past, her in the doorway, nothing would work. He was locked rigid as if in one of those terrible dreams where you're sure you're awake and it's really all happening, and you have to run, and can't.

"At last I can move on," she said now. "You've set me free. It was like having old love letters from someone you can't

even remember, but can't bear to throw away, only worse, because this was a physical existence, a responsibility I couldn't make myself shrug off. You've done it for me."

John strained again to move his mouth, this time, to answer, to denounce her, to ask questions, he didn't even know which, his mind a whirling scramble.

She smiled, a minimal movement of her mouth as if a statue tried to act human. "Don't distress yourself trying to talk. You won't be able to stir till I release my hold. Be glad of it, you won't feel any of your aches again until then."

As if cautiously exploring a minefield, John's mind sought round its sensations. It was true. Before she came, he'd ached all over, harsh piercing discomfort seeming to be everywhere, unfocused on specific parts of himself, despite the strong painkillers the pleasant little nurse told him he'd been given when he first woke around dawn, so early still in August. Now, no pain at all. "Be thankful for small mercies," he thought.

She was speaking again. He tried to concentrate, make sense of her words. "...won't believe my explanation, and certainly if you tried to tell anyone else they'd think you crazy, or suffering brain damage from what happened to you". As she spoke she moved forward from the door towards his bed.

Instinctively he tried to move himself back, away from her, but still the strange paralysis held him rigid. She came closer and closer. Unable to move his neck, raise his head, even turn his eyes upward, as she came closer he could no longer see her face, then her neck, just the upper body. The voice descended on him from immediately above, "Lucky the hospital is so quiet today, no one else in this ward, I can speak freely." The clear voice, an odd combination of softness and absolute command, ceased. The whole of her came back into view, taking a chair from beside the door, moving it so that its back faced him, by the end of the bed, then smoothly lowering herself to sit on it back to front, her arms along its back, legs astride.

"I wonder how much you remember of yesterday. Think back, recall as much as you can. Do it now."

The day had begun very early. First Saturday bus from his terrace house in south Leeds, the first stopping train up into the Dales, and yet plenty of ramblers aboard, like himself wanting to make the most use of the day. A dozen or so got off at the same upland halt, but within a mile or so they'd dispersed onto different paths or tracks, and he was alone, the last still on a metalled road. Busy at first with traffic rushing past, distracting him from the peace of the country, but quieter once he turned off onto the route up Gawkdale. He planned an unambitious day, much slower at walking than he used to be these days. Up to the head of the dale, one new to him but never all that steep according to the OS map, shouldn't have trouble with his legs if he took it nice and steady, then drop down, still on the road, no rough cross-country tramping to set the pains off again, down into the next, Tuskerdale, with luck find a pleasant pub in the small town, a quiet pint or so, then the short stretch to the line's next station that served the place, a last uphill but only a short one. All day for that undemanding programme, weather forecast good and settled, not too warm, a light pleasant breeze, what could go wrong?

John suddenly realised he'd forgotten to be afraid of the watching figure. Long dark-red hair, coppery almost – probably dyed but if so done by an expert, looked really natural. Too far to make out eye colour. Either no lipstick or a very pale shade. Patient stillness as she watched him. He couldn't look away, but somehow it didn't matter. After all, if what she said was true, it was her fault he couldn't move his eyes. A pleasant sight, he thought, and suddenly his frantic fear of her, so recent, seemed totally childish, irrational. And yet yesterday had happened, HAD happened. Surely it had, he couldn't have imagined it. Anyway, something had put him in hospital, bruised and battered – even if the nurse had said they'd be able to discharge him soon, as soon as the doctor came to sign him off as safe to release and something could be sorted about getting him taken back to civilisation – her joke, not his.

Something had done it ... take remembering step by step ... his own

unconscious pun irrationally amused him ... there he'd been, walking steadily through the morning, by now tending towards noon, up the dale, looking about him, pasture separated by drystone walls, rising up valley sides that steepened and closed in, the flattish valley bottom ever narrower, hillside to left, river to right, ever nearer to the rolls and twists of increasingly patched-up and potholed tarmac, as he got past half way to the dalehead. That, though, was, still hidden from him, the route, a mile or so ahead, doglegging to the right and going behind a great outcrop scar of rocks in dark silhouette.

Peering ahead at that silhouette, thinking of it as his next objective – once past it, he'd be able to see his half way mark, the end of the hardest part, his big climb ... not that big at all, but big when you'd not been doing any real walking in far too long ... would be in sight, and being in sight was halfway there, the old saw had it. Then he'd deserve to stop for a bit of a rest, would've earned it, was already thinking ahead to a treat from the snacks in his little rucksack. It was then he'd noticed what seemed to be a thin line coming out of that bent, dropped, like water from a fountain's mouth. A waterfall, a big one too, to be visible at this distance like that. The map confirmed it; peering more closely he saw the symbol for a ruin marked on the cliff edge above, beside the upland stream that fed the waterfall ... force they called them round here, apt term if it was as big as he guessed.

She spoke again. "You remember how you met me." It wasn't a question. The house was tall, dark as if smoke-blackened, though here in the Dales there'd never been the industry to darken it like his own Leeds home. It was tucked up against the hill as if growing out of it. *Force Hall* and a date in the 1700s over the narrow door. Why had he knocked? Why had he left his planned route? He'd reached the point on the road, risen now a little above the valley floor, where he was looking straight across at the fall, leaping from a cliff face out of what looked like a dark mouth. He was never good at guessing heights, but the drop must be, what, eighty feet or so. The noise was tremendous, it must've been building

and building as he got nearer this point, but now for the first time he was truly conscious of it. Above the water's emergence, the cliff went on up. At the top it seemed to wear a ragged crown of stones, and out of that sprout two high horns. That must be the ruin. He'd wondered what it was, wished the map more informative. It did show a building at the base of the cliff, just past the fall upstream, and a branch off the road over a bridge to it. And it showed a footpath up the cliff above the house. One that went past the ruin, and then across a sort of plateau at the top, straight to the dalehead.

The idea had suddenly obsessed him, demanding obedience. Climb up there, then cut across to rejoin his planned route. He'd get a closer look at the fall, see what the ruin was. The way up'd be steep, certainly, but if he went very slowly, stopping for plenty of breathers, he should be all right. A good test of his legs, and he'd plenty of time in hand, and it'd mean all the climbing'd be done with in one go, after that it'd be near enough flat to where he remeth the road, then downhill. It'd be cowardly not to do it. Right. A few yards on, there was the little road off downhill to the right. Dead End sign, that T symbol, but not Private Road, anyway, must be a right of way, on foot anyhow, if a footpath led off the end of it. And before he'd time to become indecisive, he was off down it. A couple of minutes, and he was on the little bridge, over the tumble of stream, full of rocks, brown with peat, the air roaring with the fall off to his right, filling the air with rainbow sparkle where it impacted into the wide deep-looking pool the stream widened into to receive its downpour. And there in front of him the house – now where did the path start? Should be at the right hand side, but he couldn't see any sign of a gap in the wall of what must be a roughly triangular garden tucked against the rise – must be constantly dark in there, what on earth would grow? The wall went right to the river edge, no opening in it.

It came back – that was why he'd knocked ... knocked? Yes, not with his fist – had used an antique-looking, though probably modern repro, brass knocker, shaped like a funny bearded

face staring out, eyes and mouth slits in puffy cheeks, meant to be some fancy river god, no doubt, he'd thought irrelevantly ... to ask where the path started, didn't want to trespass, anyway, how could he get any further, wall too high to climb, looked far too dangerous to try to scabble along the river bank below it, must be a nasty drop judging from how high it was under the bridge. No one answering. Ok, he'd give up, go back up to the road, forget the whole silly idea. Obviously no one in. He felt a wave of relief at not having to tackle the steep above him, and was just about to turn away, when the heavy door opened.

And she was there ... this she.

"You stammered ... like little boys who ring the bell and plan to run away, but get caught. Only unlike them these days you didn't come up with a mouthful of threatening abuse. Finally you got your words together to ask your question about the path."

He was embarrassed all over again now, feeling the idiot he'd been. Ludicrous, first she terrified him coming here to the hospital, after what'd happened, and now she was making him feel an inch small. Idiot, he'd mistaken the map, not thought properly. Of course, minute she'd said it, it was obvious, the path started at the other, upstream, end of the house. "Just beyond the barn, you can't miss it, a little gate, footpath sign pole's still there though the sign rusted off." Aye, he'd thought, and bet you never told the National Park people, didn't want to encourage path being used, half the landowners probably vandalise the signs themselves. That didn't stop him feeling small at being so unobservant. He'd mumbled an apology for troubling her, muttered "Thanks, cheers, bye", then at his back she'd said, as if an afterthought, "Interested in seeing the Tower up there?"

"You turned back to me, didn't you?" How did she know so precisely how far his remembering had reached? "You couldn't resist the idea of the ruin. You stalled for time, asked what it was, that the OS just said ruin, no name or detail."

And you told me just enough to make me even more curious, he thought, that it was a peel tower, to watch for Scots raiders. John knew it wasn't true they

only got into the Borders, at the height of the wars they got right down, wintered once at Morley south of Leeds, here in the Dales the risk would be there, Scots'd've known all the backways in from driving cattle down to sell at times of truce. "Yes, I would – is it freely accessible?" he'd said, then wished he hadn't worded his question like some textbook boring old fart.

"I told you I owned it, didn't I? And you asked if it'd ok to go in, and I said you couldn't get in, that there was a locked gate in the walls, to stop vandals."

John felt it was like one of those "I said and then she said" conversations you overhear in doctors' waiting rooms, this recall process, every word said coming back loud and clear. His disappointment had been sharp – if he borrowed the key, he'd have to come back down the steep to return them, and that'd take time, and he'd still have the climb up the rest of the dale, he couldn't face it. At the time, he thought she'd read his mind, because before he could explain the problem, she'd said, "I'll go up with you. I've got an hour or so to spare, and I could do with the exercise. Anyway, I'm never happy anyone wandering round there on their own, in case of accidents, I'd be responsible. Just a minute." He'd waited on the step, she'd come back with, not one key, but two, big heavy dark things on a ring. "This way," and they were past the house, past the big barn linked to its end, through the little gate, and then it was nothing but up, she ahead from the start.

Almost instantly he started to feel the need to stop, to rest his legs, onset of pain in them almost instant. The path zigzagged, sometimes uneven stone steps, sometimes narrow stretches of short grass and scabbly stone, sometimes a muddy wedge between tall bracken that brushed at him, sometimes dizzyingly out to points of overhang between clumps of heather already fast coming into bloom, the ling at least though not the bell yet. The roar of the waterfall off to his right seemed to mock the way his breath pained, struggling upwards. Suddenly he'd realised something strange, that outside the house must've been a trick of acoustics, a zone of silence, there'd been no need to shout talking to the woman. She was

well ahead now, moving swiftly, gracefully. He wanted to ask her to slow down, but he'd've had to shout to be heard over the waters roaring away. Somehow that would've been even more humiliating an admission of weakness than having to speak the request, word it as wanting to stop and look at the view or some such.

The pain in his knees had spread down into the upper legs, his chest hurt, seemed to burn. His mouth tasted of metal. He wanted a drink of water ... he wanted to stop, needed to. But he couldn't. Pride ... stupidity ... unwillingness to admit weakness ... all were at work at once. Perhaps in a minute she'd look round, see how far behind he was, stop without his having to ask, give him a chance to catch up ... perhaps. She'd been almost out of sight, he'd stopped noticing surroundings, only the nightmare of the path seeming to go on forever above him, up, up ...

"Then the roar eased, remember. You were above where the fall sprang out of the cliff." He did remember. For an instant, noticing that, the first thing he'd noticed apart from the damn upthrust of the way in ages, the looking right and down to confirm he was seeing the fall from above now, he'd felt new energy, pains eased, fear a heart attack was starting all gone.

But it'd only helped for an instant, then they were back, almost worse than before after the brief release. He was sweating heavily now, too, clamminess all across his back through the shirt where the rucksack, so tiny and light when the day started, feeling such a ton weight now, pressed against it.

And then, looking up, he saw the by-now tiny figure ahead had stopped moving. Then moved, but this time sideways, on the flat. That must be the ridgeline. Keep going, keep going, he'd thought, count, count, can't be more than ... he'd counted to a hundred, the distraction, the concentration not to lose count, helping. Started the second hundred, and suddenly in front of him, not more upward movement, but a wide sweep of gently rolling ground, patchwork of heather and tussock grass patches. He wanted to slump to the ground, lie gasping ... but if he did that, he might never get up again. Where'd



she got to now?

A blur of movement, then, as if a film speeded up. A glimpse of the stream across the plateau, vanishing suddenly under a rough grass and rock knoll. Hustled, as if his arm held though he was sure it wasn't, up that selfsame knoll's short steep rocky slope, a great door unlocked, blocking an arched opening in a low ragged wall of great rough stones and rubble fill. A glimpse close up from below of those great devil horns he had seen from across the valley, horns, which were, close up, two opposing walls to near full height of a great tower, on their insides shapes of torn away stairs and floors and the gaps of narrow window slits and openings, the tower's other sides reduced now to that overgrown field wall of a surround. Over unevenness of foundations, not courtyard but onetime interior, steps down into gap of cellarage. And then another door, heavier still, the second key in play. All that hot sweat suddenly a cold hand grasping his body everywhere as they moved into cold near-dark, a low barrel-vaulted underground room. Ahead of him her figure still moving. In one wall another great door, another key, must've been three, not two on the ring, again his observation'd failed. His consciousness was scarcely there, now, it seemed, trapped in a mass of pains, breath still not fully back, heart still a wild race, more, slippier, must be damp underfoot, steps down, and then a little light, entering where roar of water came from his left, rushed almost to his feet, coming from his left began, rushed on to almost at his feet, plunged past to roar hollowly into darkness to his right.

"I told you, didn't I, you were honoured. I never let visitors down to that level, too much danger of them falling in. But then you wouldn't be moving around, would you? I froze you into place against the rock, fixed as you are now, and left you."

Now John knew why the sense of being unable to move any part of himself, even the least, a blink of eyelid, was so familiar. Not from lucid dreaming, but from a horribly real yesterday. At least, then as now, the pain had stopped. Somehow, he had gone into doze. Something had woken him.

A terror had done it. The draggy, snuffly sound must've shaken his doze. Now he saw it, silhouetted against the small light gap upstream, hard to make out, but clearly horrible, hugely fat in body and limbs, spiderlike almost except what must be matted mass of hair and beard round rolled fatlump face in which tiny dark brightnesses, crazy contradiction that sounded, of eyes glittered. It was thrusting down at his face, towards his neck, stenching vilely, a million bad eggs smell, huge greaselipped mouth drooling, slobbering, jagged great teeth, only two or three left but huge, jagged as the tower's horns high above where the day was John was sure he would not see again, the teeth somehow catching light reflected somehow off the waterrush only feet, inches maybe, away.

Was it strength the ultimateness of this terror gave, he'd no way of knowing, but John did know that somehow the trap of immobility that froze him into helpless stillness was broken, broken at instinct level, reptile-brain level, he'd, long before any thought or intent, been hurling himself in a frenzied leap like salmon at too-high dam up against the monster entity, grabbing at its filthiness but in the same movement heaving, shoving, to get past and then he was falling into an endless roaring that hurtled him forward, out like rebirth into daylight again, a hugeness of thing clung at him like old man of the sea in intolerable gripping embrace and then the film in his head stopped in blackness.

She turned the chair round, sat conventionally in it, then leaned forward in intent seriousness.

"At dusk when I drove back to the house from doing some shopping over in Reeth, from the bridge I spotted a big black shape floating round and round in the waterfall pool. I hooked the body in. It was definitely dead. I thought should I preserve it, but what was the point. It was over at last. I burned it - luckily enough wind to shift the smell, and by now mostly a kind of blubber, so it burned well. The stream took the ash happily enough - if any big pieces'd resisted burning, there might've been a problem, had to go in the chemical toilet perhaps, but as it was, not a trace. I

suppose now you're wondering about yourself. You'd been lucky, drifted onto a flat rock at the side, just downstream. Still unconscious, of course. Ambulance fetched you here. I said I couldn't tell them what had happened to you, just that when you'd left me after I showed you round the tower, you'd been fine."



For an instant that strange smile showed again. "Which was very nearly true, because I don't know how you broke out of the stillness I'd put on you, or how you overcame ... or how you survived coming down the fall ... three licks perhaps ... perhaps my grip failed when I drove out of the dale, a maximum range it works at, I'd never tested that ... and perhaps ... even in the state he's been these last many years, I'm sure he could still foresee ... he must have known what would happen, maybe he wanted an end to it ... or greed blinded him, as lust did that let me first take command of him and do the imprisoning there ... but why the fall killed him, not you ... still, even such a seeing one as he was, or I am, requires a little mystery to add flavour to existence's meal." Still it all made no sense - who was *he*, the term she kept using so the thing must've been human of some kind at least. All she said clearly made sense to her, and once more he felt a total fool that it was such blank fog to him.

She stood up, and her stance, though as immaculately still and poised as before, clearly conveyed that she was about to leave. How could she go, without explaining anything properly? That was worse than trying to kill him, somehow. He'd go mad, he was sure he would, trying to understand. She reached into the handbag, embroidered with curious whorls, pulled out two things, threw them onto the foot of the bed. A bundle of papers and ... oh god, even the sight of them brought back a wave of fear, those keys. "These are yours now," she said, "payment for

setting me free from my obligation - I was a fool not to free myself from it long ago, but it was like a pet or a child, now I can go. No more finding someone like you every century or so, when I sensed his need had become intolerable, to be taken in, absorbed, replace the blood and other essential corporeal elements even my arts could not restore, that had to be human, I tried animals and it never worked, a chore, a binding chain that meant I had to keep coming back. Had to keep ownership, too, of the place, had to mate with its chiefs of my own time, its Norman warlords, its peel builder and owners one step up from ignorant sheep farmers, had to keep being my own heiress, distant relative of myself, name after false name, harder and harder everyone of your human lifetimes as the paperwork built and built and now the tracking watching recording computers everywhere, like being endlessly caught up in a tightening web, it wastes my powers, my intellect, my essence, to deal with and work around. Now I'm free of all that at last."

She was nearly at the door. Again that strange little smile: John wondered if, like the Cheshire Cat's, it would stay in the air after she went. "Those papers are all legal. The place is yours now. In time you will agree such reward fully repays your brief suffering. Once I am gone, you will be able to move again very soon. Don't be fool enough to tell anyone how you became the owner. No one would believe you. In any case, I will be unfindable, changed past all recognition, new-named far beyond this land." Then the door was empty. The smile did not linger, after all, in space, though John knew it would endlessly in his mind. He felt, like a tide slowly creeping in through marshes, sensation, movement, gradually coming back. As soon as he could move his hands, he lifted the documents. Heavy legalese, but he could make out they were deeds and sale documents, fully witnessed and including his name ... how had she got that? Off Reception here, probably, and doubtless a couple of nurses witnesses. Force Hall, that was the house ... described environs including ... would he move in ... or let as a holiday home, be too far to commute to work from ... or maybe he'd sell right away, not wanting

to go near again ... or ... "How are we feeling, eh? Ready for home, I imagine -, well, we've got your transport sorted." The doctor briskly checked him over, advised a week or so of rest from work, nothing organic wrong but time for the bruising to heal. "Don't worry that you can't remember exactly what happened, probably a fall, mild concussion, all's well that ends well," accepted thanks, and went. "Don't forget your belongings, Mr Ramsden," said the nurse. The deeds went into the little rucksack, though John couldn't help wondering if by the time he got home they would have turned into dried leaves like fairy gold. The keys ... he was tempted to leave them, no, that'd give the hospital the trouble of getting them back to him. Throw them out of the car window? No, he'd better keep them, at least till he decided what to do about his crazy windfall.

On the way back into Leeds, somewhere in the outskirts, the driver left the vehicle, glorified car really, not a proper ambulance at all, to escort the only other patient being carried, an old lass who'd babbled on all the way, clearly not expecting a reply, the few steps to her door. Feeling oddly furtive, as if peeking at something he'd stolen, John couldn't resist checking the deeds were still there. All ok. Something on the front caught his eye, name of vendor. Ms Naomi Vivyan. A frightening woman ... a crazy one too, all that drivel about centuries, and being her own grandmother or whatever it was, already the details of her words fading as the busy city environs took over ... and yet ... he wished somehow he could have impressed her, made her want to see him again, show her gratitude in some way other than her wild gesture over the property ... though, he told himself, it was rightful compensation he truly and totally deserved, really ... wished too, she'd said goodbye, wished him luck, just something personal, as if he'd really existed for her. He shrugged the thought away, daft wishful thinking ... his eye moved along the page ... description of property ... "including the structure generally described as" ... that name ...

that was a kind of hawk, he'd seen them hover, then plummet like a stone onto small prey, amazing things, just sort of place you'd see one, or analogy, place hung up there like a hawk in the sky. Of course, there was the character of that name in stories, but that idea was rubbish ... like the tales themselves, really, kids' stuff.

Ah, here was the driver coming back, nearly home now. He quickly shoved the deeds back out of sight, sensed a corner catch on those damn keys. Horrible things - those he certainly wouldn't ever use. As the car moved off, he stretched luxuriously, and the driver grinned, "Just you wait, hospital tea takes the aches off ok, it's that not doctors does most NHS cures, but it goes through you a dose of salts for days, you'll be up and down like a fiddler's elbow all night". John smiled back, and then his mind went back to the name, must be for the hawk, anything else'd be ridiculous, silly fairytale stuff for kids. Back at the house, looking at himself in the bathroom mirror he expected to see a mass of bruises, and plenty of new worry lines to go with them, but no, anyone who didn't know would think he was in perfect nick. Again he smiled, realised as he did so that he was imitating the enigmatic Ms Vivyan's, and, trying to shake that memory, in a resounding faux-posh voice trumpeted at his reflection: "Greetings, O mighty new master of Merlin Pele." ☿



# The board

## Arthuriana in popular culture



### EVENTS

Way back in April 2007 (rescheduled for Friday the thirteenth!) the University of Northern Iowa held an intriguing conference entitled *Culture and the Medieval King* on campus in Cedar Falls. The conference was billed as an interdisciplinary conference which investigated "all cultural manifestations of King Arthur and Arthuriana in medieval and post-medieval times". The majority of the contributors were from that institution, with other papers presented by academics from Southern Mississippi, Minnesota-Twin Cities, Illinois State and Missouri-Columbia universities.

The papers ranged from studies of medieval Arthuriana (Malory's Arthurs; Christianity in Layamon's *Brut*; shame and guilt in *Gawain and the Green Knight* and modern translation of this poem) to more recent parallels and responses to Arthuriana (treason in medieval England and terrorism in modern America; Dryden's attitude to music in Purcell's *King Arthur*; ideal societies portrayed in the 17th-century Restoration; and using *Gawain and the Green Knight* to prepare students to be professional). Other sessions examined Mark Twain's contribution to the genre (Technological Savages, meritocracies and the futility of time travel), modern cultural resonances (the power of the 'Round' Table;

Victorian concepts of racial superiority; Merlin as the New Man), and individual responses (Lacanian psycho-analysis; rebirth and Barr and Bolland's graphic novel *Camelot 3000*; adultery in William Morris' poetry; Martyn Skinner's Arthurian epic [see Steve Sneyd's post-review this issue]; and Deepak Chopra's Arthurian routes to self-fulfilment). Abstracts for all these fascinating papers may still be available from the university's website as PDF files.<sup>1</sup>

The curator of the exhibition held at Rennes University for the International Arthurian Society's 22nd conference, was quoted for her apparently provocative views: "King Arthur is propaganda, say French," screamed the *Telegraph*. Sarah Toulouse, who put together *King Arthur: a Legend in the Making*, declared that "King Arthur is a mythical character who was invented at a certain point in history for essentially political reasons. If he had really existed there would be more concrete historical traces of him."

Member Geoff Roberts sends us French reports of Sarah Toulouse declaring that attempts to trace the "real" Arthur were "futile" and that we don't know, and probably never will, the historical Arthur. Meanwhile Arthurian scholar Elizabeth Archibald, Reader in Medieval Studies at the University of Bristol, underlined for *Telegraph* readers the fact that Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* was from the first politically inspired, while George Ford thought the 19th century cult of medievalism was more to do with the urge of English creative types "to hide from the squalor, confusion and dubious social values of a rapidly urbanising Britain".<sup>2</sup>

As we reported last issue, Edward Burne-Jones spent the last twenty years of his life working on *The Last Sleep of Arthur in Avalon*, which is now on view at Tate Britain until March 2009. He

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.uni.edu/~utz/cv/cvarthur/program.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Oliver Roland "King Arthur and his Breton links" *The Connexion* August 2008; Peter Allen "French put King Arthur in a spin" *Telegraph* June 30 2008; see also [www.leschampslibres.com](http://www.leschampslibres.com) for details in English of the exhibition in Rennes, which runs until January 4 2009

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began it in 1881 but it remained unfinished at the time of his death in 1898. "Avalon is my chief dream now," he wrote, "and I think I can put into it all I most care for."

Over 9 feet high and 21 feet wide, the painting "depicts a moment of stillness and inaction," writes a critic on *The Victorian Web*. "King Arthur lies on a bench with mortal wounds while three queens and numerous attendants watch in suspense for a summons from above; a call that will awaken him to perform more acts of faith. The background is overwhelmingly architectural with a marble canopy bathed in light hanging just over Arthur's body, depicting the legend of the Holy Grail. Two extended colonnades on the right and left frame the center narrative with black marble columns and eastern inspired capitals; the architecture itself doubly framed by external castle walls of medieval influence and a garden filled with trees and flowers."

The commentary goes on to say that the group of eight women who directly surround Arthur's body "have long braided hair, forever a symbol of sexuality, and are bejeweled in large stone-inlay crowns of typical aesthetic ... decoration with Byzantine influence."<sup>3</sup>

### STAGE AND SCREEN

"A wild boar with poisonous bristles, carrying a pair of scissors, comb and razor on his head is about to drop into Ammanford Miners' Theatre, Saturday June 14," ran a report passed on by Fred Stedman-Jones, "but fear not, this strange wild animal hasn't escaped from a zoo, he's the cursed son of Prince Tared in Ammanford Junior Gateway's production of pantomime production of *The Legend Of Twrch Trwyth*."

We're told that this performance "launches Mencap's annual Learning Disability Week campaign in the local community, spotlighting the theme of respect". Staff, volunteers and youngsters in Carmarthenshire's Ammanford Junior Gateway's Purple

<sup>3</sup> Amanda Lahikainen "The Last Sleep of Arthur in Avalon — a Biographical Statement" <http://www.victorianweb.org/painting/bj/paintings/lahikainen8.html>

## Storybook

Dragon and Active Dragon clubs performed in the play that, we understand, featured characters from the *Mabinogion* story of *Culhwch and Olwen* as well, intriguingly, "from *The Wizard of Oz* and the *Shrek* movie trilogy". All proceeds went to both Mencap's Lesotho Project and a Rehabilitation Fund.

Following the mention last issue of the re-release of Bresson's *Lancelot du Lac* in a DVD box set, this was discussed on the BBC Radio 4 *Film Programme* on May 2 2008. The critic praised its tremendously refreshing starkness, and pointed out that the deadpan acting, which she admitted could seem a little wooden and boring, was a deliberate part of the director's vision, he having said he treated his non-professional actors as "his models" to be manipulated.

She also pointed out that the bareness of the castle interior, where most directors would have had it lavishly furnished, again was deliberate, not just a function of limited budget (unlike the repetitions of a scene of knights riding through the same patch of woodland!), and that this barrenness psychologically paralleled the absence of women — Guinevere is the only female character, and very seldom seen, though the knights keep peering up at the tower hoping for glimpses of her.

She also said that Bresson's use of gore, inspired by Peckinpah (and spoofed by *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*) reaches its extreme in one scene which she vividly described in words to the effect of a "the leg comes off like eating a 1950s school meal strawberry jam roll, all red syrup spraying out".

Audrey Wells' 1999 film *Guinevere* has student Harper Sloane (played by Sarah Polley) fall for aging photographer Connie (Stephen Rea). Rather late she discovers that he names all his serial conquests "Guinevere" (true to the concept of the Welsh Triad where Arthur has three brides all called *Gwenhwyfar*). *The Guardian* called the film an "engrossing if solt-centred romance ... a little clunky here and there, but overall well acted and affecting" when it recently aired on Channel 4.

Around the time of the release of *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* much media attention

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centred on the supposed models for Steven Spielberg and George Lucas' archaeologist hero. A Channel 5 programme proposed two originals, American adventurer Roy Chapman Andrews and German Otto Rahn. The former discovered the first-known fossil dinosaur eggs on a 1923 expedition to China and Mongolia, while the second is known to have genuinely searched for the Grail in Cathar strongholds in southern France. However, others have been suggested, among them the explorer of Egyptian antiquities Giovanni Battista Belzoni and British archaeologist Colonel Percy Fawcett who disappeared in 1925 searching for lost cities in Brazil; Hiram Bingham III, archaeology professor at Yale University who rediscovered Machu Picchu in 1911 Peru, and American Robert Braidwood, a "contemporary" of Dr Jones who led an expedition to Turkey in the 1930s, are seen as more plausible prototypes.

Maverick American Biblical archaeologist Vendyl Jones claims he was the inspiration behind Indiana Jones, wherein Vendyl became "Endy" and then "Indy". However, George Lucas and Philip Kaufman based their idea of an archaeologist hunting for the Ark on Saturday action films of their youth, while Indiana was the name of Lucas's pet dog (whose vocalisations were taken over by the *Star Wars* character Chewbacca). Indy was originally to be named Indiana Smith after Harold Robbins' creation Nevada Smith, but Steven Spielberg changed this to the now familiar Indiana Jones.<sup>4</sup>

The last of the first (?) series of *Bonekickers* (on BBC1, August 12 2008) was entitled "Follow the Gleam"; Victorian aficionados will recognise the Tennysonian allusion. In the synopsis in *Radio Times* we were told that "a find near Glastonbury fuels Gillian [Magwilde]'s obsession with the famous sword of Arthurian legend. But death stalks those linked with the discovery and, as her obsession grows, Gillian puts at risk both her reputation and friendships".

Critics of this cross between *Dr Who* and *Time Team* lambasted it as cliché-

<sup>4</sup> Bruce Black "Digging Deep" *Flipside* 31 (June 2008) 26-29

## Storybook

ridden and unrealistic, while devotees of the so-bad-it's-good school delighted in the self-same features. What with finding a round table at the foot of Glastonbury Tor and breaking into Well Cathedral for Excalibur, the guest appearances of Tennyson and of Arthur Hallam may well have come as no surprise.

Finally, the 13-part *Merlin* series pencilled in for BBC TV's autumn schedules has been confirmed, and is set to be a colourful lead-up to Christmas.



### TRANSFORMATIONS

First, *Merlin* in a rather sad context: the threat to Jodrell Bank due to the financial crisis (ie general shambles) with Science and Technology Facilities Council, the quango which funds astronomy. On BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme Phil Diamond, Jodrell Bank Director, said in March that the cuts could mean the shutdown of the *Merlin* network of seven radio telescopes, or even complete closure of Jodrell Bank, which in effect would end the UK presence in radio astronomy of which this country was such a pioneer. The project was at risk because the STFC has an £80m shortfall in its budget; and an assessment panel had listed the project as a "lower priority" for UK physics and astronomy. "The loss of funding in 2009 — the year e*Merlin* was due to launch — would mean the work could go to waste," reported BBC News online.

Fortunately, in July Professor Diamond was told that the STFC had agreed to restore funding for e-*Merlin*, meaning the facility is secure for the medium term, or at least for the next three years.

The continued successful spread of the *chough*, one of the birds in whom the spirit of King Arthur is supposed to





reside, is generally acknowledged. The RSPB report that choughs bred on Rathlin Island for the first time in 20 years: in 2007 a pair successfully reared three fledglings on this island off the Northern Ireland coast after the RSPB and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development worked with farmers and landowners to create suitable habitat.

As we've previously noted, the re-introduction of choughs to Cornwall after an absence of over half a century goes from strength to strength, with a total of nine chicks reared in spring 2007.

Wales has three-quarters of the UK's chough population, with 55 breeding pairs in Pembrokeshire alone. The Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority has co-ordinated two projects (the Conserving the Coastal Slopes scheme and the Pembrokeshire Grazing Network) which, by providing short, open turf and bare soil have resulted in "large spectacular flocks" becoming a relatively common sight over the last eight years.

Just off the Pembrokeshire coast, Ramsey Island (Ynys Dewi, "St David's Island") has seven breeding pairs, which have profited from the introduction to the island of 200 ewes, whose job is to keep the grass short for choughs to access the soil. In previous year the island has had "a substantial rabbit population to maintain these grazing duties, but an outbreak of myxomatosis in 2007 wiped out many rabbits," according to the RSPB warden.

Reuters report that a **white stag** has been sighted and photographed in Scotland. As *Widowinde* notes, White Stags, "which commonly appear in folklore including the Arthurian cycle, are not albinos, but suffer from leucism, a genetic condition which reduces the normal brown colouring in hair and skin." Because of constant danger from poachers the exact location is being kept secret.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.manchester.com/News/General\\_Manchester\\_news/Jodrell\\_Bank\\_professor\\_remains\\_hopeful-18680181.html](http://www.manchester.com/News/General_Manchester_news/Jodrell_Bank_professor_remains_hopeful-18680181.html); "Success for choughs"

## WORLDWIDE

The gradually developing and very promising **Pendragon Historical Society** website ([www.thependragon.co.uk](http://www.thependragon.co.uk)) is run by Arthurian enthusiast Alan Campbell and includes diverse info on Arthurian books, TV (including the BBC *Merlin* mini-series) and films (including news of a Warner Bros production of T.H. White's *The Once And Future King* currently in development and set for release in 2010). For news on the BBC mini-series go to <http://www.thependragon.co.uk/MerlinBBC2008.htm>

Another Arthurian enthusiast is the transatlantic Jim Donaldson, who runs the Celtic Twilight site. This is described as "an informational and speculative site" with "an extensive repository of Arthurian and Celtic material" with a target population of "visitors of all ages interested in the Dark Age myths and Celtic lifestyle." He seems to provide a broad range of books, artwork, music and related items on a site originally dedicated to the Arthurian legends "but growing to embrace the surrounding myths and stories and the vast range of Celtic culture." Particularly useful are the online resources that are largely in the public domain: <http://www.celtic-twilight.com/camelot/oas.htm> and Christopher Bruce's extremely extensive *Arthurian Name Dictionary* at [http://gorddcmru.org/twilight/camelot/bruce\\_dictionary/index.htm](http://gorddcmru.org/twilight/camelot/bruce_dictionary/index.htm)

## GRAILING AND ASSAILING

A Spanish Tourist Board supplement in the *Guardian* listed the "top five things to do and see in Valencia", and Number One was "See the Holy Grail". Claiming that "Dan Brown must be kicking himself," the mini-list described how in a "semi-dark chapel in Valencia's cathedral lies the Holy Grail, a cup made of agate and decorated with pearls". It goes on to repeat the legend that the cup was brought there by a Spanish soldier in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and subsequently

*Birds* Vol 21 No 8 (November 2007) 11; "Choughed to bits: a National Park success story" *Park Life* (Winter 2007) 4; "Island lambs on an RSPB reserve" *Y Barcud* (RSPB News from Wales, August 2008); *Widowinde* 145 (Spring 2008) 35

looked after by monks, dukes and kings.<sup>6</sup>

A 1998 issue (No 29) of *Hobilar*, the Journal of the Lance & Longbow Society, has an eleven-page article by Richard Andrews, "Le Morte d'Arthur and Fifteenth Century Warfare". In this, Andrews sees *Le Morte*, as written by a militarily experienced person (assuming the Newbold Revel Malory the author), as a useful source for the military history of his own time. He touches on such aspects mentioned in it as the use of scouts, how armies are split into division, that the only instance of mention of guns – in the siege of the Tower – "may well have been inspired by the Yorkist siege [of the Tower of London], which featured the use of guns", a reference (V 2 P 36) to fireships, and archery tactics, including Lancelot's unhorsing by archers slaying his steed (V 2 P 432), of which Andrews says "victory for the archers ... reflects the reality of fifteenth century warfare rather than the chivalric ideal." In the magazine there's a mention that back issues were then £3.50 each, but see the Lance and Longbow Society's website for up-to-date details.<sup>7</sup>

Chris Lovegrove and Steve Sneyd

## EXCHANGE JOURNALS

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**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](http://www.labyrinthos.net)

**The Cauldron** Paganism, folklore, witchcraft £3.50 / £14.00 "M A Howard", BM Cauldron, London WC1N 3XX [www.the-cauldron.fsnet.co.uk](http://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](http://www.hallowquest.org.uk)

**Meyn Mamvro** Cornish ancient stones and sacred sites £2.50 / £7.50 "Meyn Mamvro", Cheryl Traffon, 51 Carn Bosavern, St Just, Penzance, Cornwall TR19 7QX [www.meynmamvro.co.uk](http://www.meynmamvro.co.uk)

<sup>6</sup> "Modern Spain – An Architectural Adventure" *Guardian* June 14 2008  
<sup>7</sup> <http://www.lanceandlongbow.com/index.html>

**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](http://www.northernearth.co.uk)

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

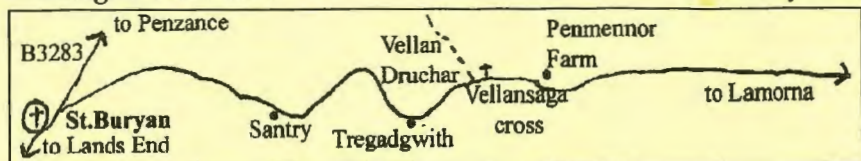
**The Newsletter of the Society of Ley Hunters** Patterns within the landscape £10.00 (£18.00 non-EU) A Hyde, 7 Mildmay Road, Romford, Havering, Essex RM7 7DA

[leyhunter@ntlworld.com](mailto:leyhunter@ntlworld.com)

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



The Santo Caliz, which is displayed in Valencia Cathedral, is often referred to as Spain's Holy Grail



The blood of Vellan-Druchar *œ* Raymond Cox, from *Meyn Mamvro* 64 (2007) 8-9

The wayside cross of Vellan-saga at SW 4266 2585 sit by a cottage in the valley of the Lamorna stream at midpoint of the quiet back road going east from St Buryan. Charles Henderson (in *Antiquities*) described the location as "one of the sweetest spots in Cornwall" with the cross by the garden wall entwined with "periwinkles and other beautiful plants". My own clear memory of this place years ago was of a sudden shaft of bright sunlight just illuminating the cross itself. Originally it may have been set close by at a ford across the stream where there was a mill. It is certainly on a churchway path, to St Buryan to the west and to Paul arid Mousehole to the east.

At this point the Lamorna stream is also at mid-point from its rising near Cam Euny to its journey to Lamorna Cove. To the left of the cottage a gateway leads to a track upstream to what must be one of the most lonely and remote places in West Penwith - and one of the most legend-haunted. It is Vellan-druchar, which means *wheel mill* and the Cornish gave the name Melyn-Drucky or Velyn-Druckya to the mills which were used to dip, clean and dress homespun cloth. The track eventually gives out into an open area and then the stream is lost in a marshy and wooded section. There are no tracks and no dwellings visible along the streamside. There are no extant ancient stones of any kind in this area either. The place seemed somewhat ominous and quiet except for birdsong which seemed oddly distant when I was there. Perhaps the legend has its effects to this day.

For this was the stream said to have flowed with the blood of the Danes at the battle with legendary King Arthur, and it was a great victory for Arthur. It was the location of the Battle of Vellan-druchar! It is almost at mid-point again between two other locations connected with the Arthur legend, as there is Merlin's Rock off Mousehole, and at Sennen Table-Maen, the stone where Arthur dined with Cornish kings after being summoned from Tintagel to repel, the Danish invasion. The Danish had landed apparently at Gwenver beach in Whitesand Bay, as safe a spot as could be found on that coast. In the peat in this semi-moorland area of Vellan-druchar remains of weapons have indeed been found, *e.g.* arrow, spear and axe heads. Is there anything else remaining? The little stream is calm as its upper reaches become hidden, but the valley is not enclosed. There is no sign of a further track and a way through. One seems constrained to turn round and with a firm tread return to the road for another look at the old cross and to experience in the general environment of at least some civilisation a more comforting mood. *œ*



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