



pendragon

Fellowship of the King

XXXVI

No 2



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editorial

Early members of the Pendragon Society received an enamelled metal badge with which to recognise each other. It featured a golden wyvern on a blue field, recalling the winged dragon that Geoffrey of Monmouth described Uther Pendragon seeing in the sky. Five decades on, it is a rare token, no longer reproduced because of its expense, and a reminder perhaps of more innocent days.

The Society's founder, in 1959, was Jess Foster, a minor children's author who felt that in the post-war years a younger generation needed a focus which moved it away from the more military aspects of some youth organisations. Just a few of those young Pendragons are still around from those early years in Winchester and Bristol, a little longer in the tooth perhaps, providing a fragile link with that past.

Since then Arthurian Studies has evolved till now, in the Society's Golden Jubilee year, we can sense that one of its original aims – to stimulate interest in *King Arthur and his contemporaries* – is largely defunct. Nearly everyone these days has a theory about Arthur and his times.

The second aim – to investigate the history and archaeology of the Matter of Britain – and a further clause added later – to study the significance, past, present and future, of the Arthurian legends – are both self-evidently being pursued by myriads of academics, authors, artists and enthusiastic amateurs immeasurably outnumbering the Society's membership at its greatest extent. Most significantly, that society of Arthurian students that

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Pendragon was set up for is well catered for in the world of the internet, in which you don't have to leave the comfort of your swivel chair to pursue Arthur or join a virtual fellowship. What call is there for a print journal in the 21st century when the click of a mouse can call up what you need – even if there is no substitute for having something solid to treasure and keep?

The letters pages contains a gratifyingly large number of appreciative comments from subscribers and others, most of whom, while understanding the reasons why, can still express regret at the demise of the Society, ironically at the very time when it is celebrating fifty years of existence.

The news is not all bleak, however. There will be a final Round Table to look forward to, where fellowship can be celebrated face-to-face instead of online. The *Pendragon Jubilee Anthology* will provide a memento of all those strands of Arthurian study that the journal reflected, in the authentic language and prejudices of the time! And, in this and back issues, suggestions are offered for ways of continuing that obsession, that "private vice" in one correspondent's words, which has kept many of us busy and off the streets for many a year.

If I may speak personally for a few lines, as a (to coin a phrase) Contributing Editor at the Court of King Arthur, I have very much enjoyed my stints in the post from 1977 to 1987, and from 1987 to the present. It has been hard work at times but always gratifying, my horizons have been expanded and I have profited from the support and encouragement of a great many people, not least the present excellent journal team and loyal regular correspondents.

If at the end of it all I am still no wiser as to the existence of Arthur, I suspect – as I have always suspected – that if he didn't exist then we will have had to invent him. And what an invention that was!

This issue is a bumper one, and commemorates many aspects of the **Fellowship of the King**. Our thanks to all those who have made the life of the Society and its members a little richer, and our best wishes go to all those who continue to pursue those many strands of Arthurian Studies. *Chris Lovegrove*

PENDRAGON

The Journal of The Pendragon Society

Established 1959 ISSN 0143 8379

Pendragon pursued Arthurian Studies: history & archaeology; legend, myth & folklore; literature, the arts & popular culture

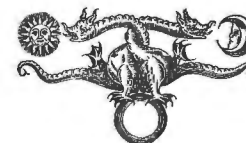
Vol XXXVI No 2 Winter-Spring 2008-9

Issue theme The Fellowship of the King

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Pendragon 2009 Round Table
Caerleon, 4th September 2009



Pendragon Jubilee Anthology
Vol XXXVI Nos 3 and 4

Illustrations / picture research Ian Brown, Chris Lovegrove, Kate Pollard, Simon Rouse, Fred Stedman-Jones **Cover illustration** Simon Rouse
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Printed by Catford Print Centre, PO Box 563, Catford, London SE6 4PY

☎ 020 8695 0101 post@catfordprint.co.uk www.catfordprint.co.uk



Pendragon Society founded 1959



Stamp design by Simon Rouse, stamps
sponsored and produced by Mark Valentine

APPRECIATIONS

Like most of your readers and contributors, I am going to miss *Pendragon*. Nevertheless, through the years the magazine has provided a most wonderful treasure-trove for all Arthurian devotees, whatever their angle of interest, with a plethora of articles, essays, stories and poems, not to mention the many imaginative illustrations. May all concerned close the *Pendragon* annals content in the knowledge that they have fulfilled the needs of their readership in every way. Good luck to you all in the future.

Pamela Constantine, Uxminster, Essex

I was very sorry to hear that *Pendragon* is closing up, especially as I have been a relative newcomer to the Society and the Journal. I will miss reading it. On the other hand, the 50th Anniversary *Jubilee Anthology* will be much appreciated. Thanks for the stamps: nice souvenirs! Please keep the \$8 as a donation, the least I can do for the pleasure the Society gave me.

Jane Perr, Huntington, NY, USA

Issue number 36/1 just arrived along with the sad news that you are ceasing publication of the journal. The news prompted me to turn to my file of back issues where I see that the earliest one is Vol 11 No 3 dated July, 1978 – the cover announces the subjects: The Round Table, Psychometry, King Alfred.

It has been a delightful journey with you. At times a bit far from my primary interest in Arthurian literary history, but always providing something that caught my attention and enlarged my understanding of the legend's place in our common culture. It has also put me in touch with several individuals – they know who they are – who made valuable contributions to *The Arthurian Annals*, my own contribution, with my co-author Phil Boardman, to the Arthurian literary tradition.

Pendragon always seemed to take me by surprise. Gathering the mail on an ordinary day I would find that brown envelope containing the latest issue, and I would set the bills and advertisements aside, pour myself a beer, and settle in for a pleasurable read – good articles, sometimes quirky opinions, news of British publications and productions, and a feeling of long-distance companionship.

This has been particularly true in recent years when the journal has stepped up several levels in content. My best wishes to all of you, and thanks.

Dan Nastali, Kansas City, Missouri, USA

Shock! Horror! No more *Pendragon*! How shall we all survive without our regular fix of Arthuriana? What am I to do now with all those brilliant articles, stories and poems I was going to write one of these days when I had the time?

Arthur will be revolving in his grave so fast that he's likely to bore his way to the surface and solve the everlasting mystery of, as I wrote in a song many years ago, "Where do Arthur and Guenevere lie?"

Well, there will be consolations for some – I'm sure that you and your indefatigable colleagues will lay down

your responsibilities editorial, secretarial, financial, illustrative etc with a sigh of relief, not, I hope, untinged with regret. We are all in your debt for your dedication, imagination and scholarship – thanks very much.

I have a shelf-full of back numbers, starting with a reprint of Volume I No 1, then a 1979 (winter) edition, and from the 1992 Winter (XXIII No 1) edition onwards more or less the full set, over fifty magazines, so when I grow nostalgic I shall be able to dip into those past treasures of erudition and inspired speculation to stimulate my own abiding interest in the Once and Future King.

Geoff Roberts, Condom, France

A real shock to hear that *Pendragon* is closing down after one more issue and a 50-year anthology – I will really miss it, always eagerly anticipated and, when it arrived, always able to make me drop whatever I was doing and settle down to read it cover-to-cover right away. I think you've done a remarkable job of balancing all the different strands of Arthurian interests while at the same time ensuring that the magazine was consistently lively, interesting and visually appealing. Mentioning which, the cover of the latest is a gem – a most notably mysterious, yet solid, castle out of story and legend.

Steve Sneyd, Huddersfield, W Yorkshire

I was saddened to learn that *The Journal of the Pendragon Society* will cease to exist after the next issue. I have enjoyed each issue and looked forward to their arrival.

Larry Mendelsberg, Teaneck, NJ, USA

Thanks for your note about the final 50th anniversary edition of *Pendragon*. I will miss the journal. As you say, Arthurian Studies is well established, but there has been a lot of information in *Pendragon* that is not readily available elsewhere – at least to those of us in America. Barbara and I send our thanks to all who have worked on *Pendragon* and made it such an interesting and informative journal over the years.

Alan & Barbara Lupack, USA

I can't believe that I will no longer have *Pendragon* dropping through the door – I am so glad now that I have kept all my

copies and can re-read them. Thank you for all the hard work that you have all put in.

Daphne Phillips, High Wycombe, Bucks

Sorry to hear about the passing of *Pendragon*, but the anthology is a fine idea. Don't forget to throw that sword back in the lake before the end...

Mark Valentine, Keighley, W Yorkshire

Whilst I am sad to hear the news about *Pendragon*, I am also looking forward a lot to the – final! – Round Table at Caerleon. I can see that different aspects of the Journal have been pulling in different directions for a little while; particularly the poetry / fiction and the more academic pieces ... One thing I will miss a lot about *Pendragon* will be the news sections – it would be great if some aspect of this could continue, perhaps on a web-based forum.

Geoff Sawers, Reading

The journal has been the best I have ever come across and the team should be proud of such an achievement. I, for one, will keep reading through its pages and value it in my archive. I hope something online will survive.

Paul Parry, Prestatyn, North Wales

The world is coming to an end.
Giants to be replaced by pygmies
But many thanks to all for everything
50 is a good score.
As one door closes, another opens.
We'll meet again!

Laurence Main, Machynlleth, Mid Wales

• Laurence wrote the above poem after he'd proofed the obituary of Mary Caine in the *Society of Ley Hunters Newsletter*, before hearing that John Michell had died and finally that *Pendragon* is finishing soon.

It was with great sadness that I discovered that you are closing the journal. I understand your reasons, but for me, nothing will replace the enjoyment I have had on receiving and reading the journal over the years. The other irony is that I had just finished reading Rosemary Sutcliffe's trilogy, for the first time in my case, as I had only just managed to get myself a copy! So Arthur does indeed live on, and long may it be so, and for all he stood for. The

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qualities that Arthur had, I imagined, I could always find in *Pendragon*. I shall miss you. Best wishes to you and all members.

Shelley Turner, Eastbourne, E Sussex

It was a great surprise and very sad to hear that production of the Journal will cease soon. Although I have been a member for a relatively short period during *Pendragon's* long history, I have welcomed its arrival in the post. So, too, have I found it to be full of diversely interesting articles, highly informative and, moreover, enlarging not only the knowledge and understanding of the 'Arthurian' novice, but perhaps also adding something to those whose expertise in this field far exceeds that of many of us. Certainly I, for one, have learned a lot and I thank you for that.

At a time of pronounced health problems I found acceptance of some of my own writing to be great boost to my morale. For that I shall be eternally grateful and, hopefully, some of my thoughts shared with other readers have helped them in some way. Luckily my health has improved enormously, if not perfect.

Having previously edited and been heavily involved in the research and production of a magazine myself (not Arthurian) some years ago, I realise how much effort and time actually goes into such work. I'm sure many readers – past and present – would wish to join with me in thanking you for sharing your talents, skills and knowledge with us and [providing] a platform to countless contributors like myself.

Sonja Strobe, Hénon, France

I am very sorry to hear that *Pendragon* is ceasing publication – I'd like to thank the editors for publishing some of my poems over the last few years. I've always found the journal full of interest and entertaining.

Steve Gunning, Stevenage, Herts

I was sorry to hear of the demise of the journal, which I have enjoyed for nearly 20 years now, but I suppose all good things come to an end.

However, I look forward to receiving the Jubilee edition, so I can read articles published before I subscribed, and

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reread others! I have quite a large collection of Arthurian books, so I shall never be short of reading material, but *Pendragon* always added something new. Best wishes.

Eric Fitch, Maidenhead

Sorry to hear about the *Pendragon* Society – but as you mention in your note the Arthur memplex is firmly embedded in the national and international consciousness these days – though with scarcely the erudition and scholarship found within the pages of the journal. Strangely enough, I was showing some issues to my sons the other day – including of course some of my poems. My elder son has just graduated in English and one of the poems in his dissertation was Arthurian.

To quote from one of my efforts:

*Beneath the British asphalt lies Albion asleep
Within the soul soil sterile, his seed lies
buried deep*

*We'll shake him from his slumber, we'll tend
that seed until*

Those beacons burn once more on Badon Hill

I think that the *Pendragon* Society can be very proud of its role in the consciousness-raising process.

Tom Byrne

Many thanks for all the fascinating journals which I have followed since picking up a copy as a teenager in a shop in Bristol – and never stopped reading. My interest in Arthurian matters remains as high as ever. All the best for the future.

Nick Grant, Exeter, Devon

I'm sorry to hear that the *Pendragon* Society is coming to an end. If you ever thought of bringing out an "occasional" *Pendragon* type publication at any time in the future, I would certainly be interested. Many thanks for all your efforts, and best wishes.

M Potschka, Luton, Bedfordshire

Many thanks for all the *Pendragons* over the years. I wish all concerned a long and happy retirement in Avalon.

Katherine Knight, Twickenham, London

Many thanks for such a marvellous journal.

Susan Draper, Nordelph, Norfolk

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Many thanks to all at *Pendragon* for the fascinating magazines which I have been reading for the past ten years or more.

Guy Wigmore, Southport, Merseyside

I have been a member of *Pendragon* for many years and have greatly enjoyed receiving the magazine. So I am sorry that it has come to the end of its life. Nevertheless I have all of the magazines and shall look back on the *Pendragon* years with affection. My only regret is that I never felt competent enough to make any contributions.

David Lister, Grimsby

Goodbye *Pendragon*, and thanks for everything – I'll miss you.

Val Stockley, Hove, E Sussex

Very sorry that *Pendragon* is ending, it will be missed. Thank you for all the work that everyone has put into the Society and journals.

Keith Pugh, Wolverhampton

I was saddened to get your letter saying that *Pendragon* was now ceasing publication. I have much enjoyed reading exchange copies of the magazine (with Meyn Mamvro) over the years. Although Arthurian matters are not my speciality, I always found something of interest in the magazine.

Cheryl Traffon, Cornwall,
editor Meyn Mamvro

Just got our Vol 36/1 issue of *Pendragon* and very sad to hear the Society is closing down. I feel like an old feller on a park bench, wondering where *The Ley Hunter* and 3rd Stone went, and now you! Best wishes to everyone at *Pendragon* and do let people know that *Northern Earth* is very much open to articles on Arthurian themes.

John Billingsley, editor Northern Earth

AN ARM CLOTHED IN WHITE SAMITE

It was with shock and great sadness I discovered from the papers enclosed with *Pendragon* XXXVI No 1 that the *Pendragon* Society and its magnificent journal are to cease in this Golden Jubilee year. I cannot imagine this was what anyone had in mind when we were asked for suggestions last year, on how to best celebrate this special anniversary

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in 2009.

Having been involved in the writing and production of small-press journals at some level for 35 years, I am well aware of the difficulties and joys of doing so, and can fully appreciate the wonderful job our last Editor, Chris Lovegrove, has performed in helping to maintain the very highest quality of *Pendragons* consistently throughout his second tenure in the role, beginning with the Autumn/Winter 1997 issue (XXVI No 4). His editorial to that issue began: "No, *Pendragon* is not a dead parrot, more a phoenix!" Would that that were still true.

The splendid body of authors and artists who have graced the journal with their works, thoughts and inspiration over the years has made receiving *Pendragon* always a delight, and a pleasure to be looked forward to. Its absence will create an unfillable void. I hold it a privilege to have been counted among the journal's authors in recent times, and wish everyone involved with *Pendragon* from its production to its readership the best of fortune for the future.

Long stood Sir Bedivere

Revolving many memories, till the hull
Look'd one black dot against the verge of dawn
And on the mere the wailing died away.

Tennyson, "Morte d'Arthur" (1832)

Alastair McBeath, Morpeth, Northumberland

● I should add that Alastair was very disappointed that the announcement of the decision to close came out of the blue and without any warning. We thought long and hard about this, but it seemed best for us to go out with a bang not a whimper, having previously found ourselves in this very same position in the past and suffering a very great deal of angst as a result. 50 not out is a very honourable score at which to retire!

AUTHOR'S RESPONSE TO CRITICISM

Thank you for mailing the copy of *Pendragon* XXXVI No 1 to my address. I note August Hunt's [sic] most recent comments concerning my *King Arthur and Britannia*, AD 495 on page seven of the issue.

AH [sic] states 'Despite promptings he was not able to establish what his PhD was in'. I have received no such request – I would have been very glad to answer such a query by email or whatever. My PhD was awarded in 1991 by Monash

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University, Australia for archaeology and anthropology, its title is 'The Protocivilisation of Albion and Erin', 120,000 words with many maps and illustrations. *Pendragon XXVII*, page 20 lists that title in the bibliography of my contribution article titled 'Gwyddbwyll and Fox and Geese'.

AH [sic] goes on to state there is no clear evidence to support my observation there was a 'closely settled urban style population' in Britain. May I suggest he browse through many episodes of *Time Team* to convince himself the Arthurian Romano-Celtic population lived in cities and towns and on quite large manor farms all over the country about AD 500. There had been fifteen generations of Romanisation and Latin culture by King Arthur's time. Whilst the total population was small in our terms today, the very nature of Romano-Celtic life and work necessitated an urban lifestyle. In my book I observed the invading Saxons and Angles had customarily lived on scattered farms in Europe, not in cities and towns. Which led to my thoughts on the AD 540 bubonic plague pandemic and the subsequent Dark Ages – the plague had a much more deadly effect on the Arthurian population.

Would you be interested in my hypothesis concerning the Cymraeg 'haul' and 'heulwen', nouns and adjectives used in Arthurian times and still in use today?

Dr Neil L Thomas, Australia

• Dr Thomas did indeed tell us his specialism way back in Volume XXVII, which I'd forgotten, though I had asked him twice in recent emails.

I'd still question his sources and interpretation if *Time Team* is his main source for Dark Age archaeology in Britain, and was interested to note that throughout his latest reply he confused the reviewing editor with author August Hunt [AH]. This correspondence, however, is now closed.

THE GORGON AND THE CHIMERA

In the 'Plots and themes' section of his fascinating article on Tristan and Isolde (XXXVI No 1, page 15), Dave Burnham seemed to have missed a minor trick in item one of his list. The version of the Perseus and Andromeda myth he mentioned, with Perseus spotting Andromeda while holding the Gorgon's

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head flying on Pegasus, is actually the post-Classical conflation of the Perseus and Bellerophon myths. Perseus' slaying of Medusa allowed both Pegasus and the oft-forgotten golden warrior Chrysaor to be born from her severed neck. Perseus had no need of either, Pegasus least of all, since he still possessed Hermes' winged sandals. Bellerophon flew-in on Pegasus to defeat the Chimera quite separately later. There are though a number of similarities between the tales of Perseus and Bellerophon that perhaps would be worth exploring further in the context Dave employed the conflated story. Sadly now, it will need to be in another place than *Pendragon*.

I am not sure just when the conflation of these two myths may have first happened. Classical authors seem to have understood them to be quite separate (albeit linked by Pegasus), and though I suspect there must be other items between that I've missed, the earliest use of Pegasus by Perseus I can recall would be in the 16th / 17th century AD, with Rubens' painting, and Shakespeare's mentioning Perseus' horse in *Troilus and Cressida*.

Alastair McBeath, Morpeth, Northumberland



KATE ON KATE

My name is Kate Foster. I am Jess Foster's granddaughter (daughter of Ben Foster). I live in the US now, but we were in Bristol earlier this month [June 2009] for a family ceremony and social gathering for Kate Pollard [née Foster] – Jess' daughter and my aunt (who I'm sure you are aware passed at the

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beginning of the year).

I grew up knowing about Pendragon but have no ownership of anything belonging to or written by my grandmother. I stumbled across your webpage recently and was saddened to see the Pendragon Society closure. I expect it's the end of an era. I did see though that you are publishing a jubilee book to commemorate the society's 50 years and I would be extremely interested in obtaining a copy. I know my dad (as well as myself) would be thrilled to have something back that was associated somehow with his mother.

Kate Foster, USA

I was sorry to hear about Kate Pollard. Thirty years ago I stayed at her house for a Pendragon weekend. My condolences to her family.

Rita Spencer, Beeston, Nottingham

• As most readers by now know, Jess Foster founded the Pendragon Society back in 1959, and was its prime moving force until her death in 1979. As we reported last issue her daughter Kate helped to keep the Society alive in the late 70s and early 80s (and the Pendragon-sponsored early medieval dig at Llanelen until the end of the 20th century) though in recent years other matters took up her energies. Alex Schlesinger who, as a Pendragon member in Bristol, first met Kate Pollard in the early 60s, contributes his memories below. ☾

KATE POLLARD

An appreciation by Alex Schlesinger

If you walk round any of the larger, older churches in England; you will see no end of marble memorials on the walls. Amongst those will be a fair number of monuments recording the usually pious but uneventful lives of genteel ladies who bore their long drawn out illnesses with accepting humility. Well, Kate Pollard wasn't anything like that.

Her final illness that went on for not just years, but for decades, was pushed aside with impatient irritation; as Kate got on with the latest project she had taken under her wing, whilst still attended to all of the others, too.

I first met Kate when I was about

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fifteen and she was about twenty. At that time she was an art student at Winchester College, and occasionally staying with her mother, Jess Foster. Those who knew Jess will recall that her physical, moral and intellectual statures were remarkably well matched to one another. In those days our free time centred on the Pendragon Society and its archaeological and historical research projects. Kate made the occasional appearances on this scene, but it was only as Jess's physical strength began to fade, in the mid-1970s, that Kate became more prominent.

She became a general organiser of many Pendragon events, but especially the Llanelen dig, a significant excavation of an early medieval church site, on the Gower Peninsula. Kate, herself, would never have put the word *archaeologist* on her CV, although she was a good amateur one. But then, she would not have put the words *brilliant organiser of things and of people*. And whilst archaeologists are two-a-penny, a good organiser is worth more than rubies.

Working with Chris Lovegrove, Kate became a general organiser of anything Pendragon, whilst bringing up two small children, running a house and keeping down full-time or part-time jobs.

Whilst living in Redland, and as a mother of two children, she had organised CRAPPA, a crèche for the Redland Green area. Then as the children of the area grew older she organised a youth club.

In the late 1990s she took on the role, initially part time and then full time, of Community Development Officer at Shirehampton, in Bristol. Using projects and events including a centenary celebration of the Shirehampton Hall linking it with the early 20th century composer, Vaughan Williams, Kate revived the hall's fortunes bringing new life into the local community.

Later, after her move to Totterdown, Kate became a very active member of that community. She organised a local residents Group: TRESA; its full name is more telling: *Totterdown Residents Environmental and Social Action*. And such was her drive that from an initial meeting in her sitting room, attended by nine people, within a year the group had seventy members and was publishing a

regular Newsletter circulated to 2000 homes in the area. She also obtained a £10,000 publishing grant to carry forward both the Newsletter and her last major project: *Totterdown Rising*, a book tracing the history and municipal mismanagement of the Totterdown area.

The book's sub-title tells you the story in the book: *The Story of a Community, Enduring and Surviving a Planning Disaster*. In the book, Kate recounts how 2000 people were driven from their homes in the 1960 and 70s. She tells how street upon street of perfectly sound Victorian housing was swept away: all for a ring road that was never funded, that was never approved by the elected council and, eventually, was never built.

How one wishes now for a Kate Pollard in every community up north, presently being devastated by the central government's Pathfinder Project.

When not involved in community

events and action, Kate was closely connected with the Southville Community Centre and local theatre development, including the Tobacco Factory and the Bristol-based puppet group, The Puppet People.

Finally, and in her spare time: Kate spent twenty years as a patient at Bristol Royal Infirmary's Oncology Department, where she endured all the usual and sometimes unusually horrendous treatments for cancer.

One obituary described Kate as a mover and shaker of the community. However, that is only part of the story. She was a leader of a very special kind. Some leaders lead from the front: all shouting and sword waving. Others lead from behind, moving others without appearing to move themselves. A very few lead as Kate led: by walking alongside you. Chatting, laughing, but, above all, listening. ☾



Dear Kate – What Memories

A week at Llanelen and the food you would prepare
Then off to the dig upon the hill, where
An ancient chapel ruin lay
And this was the start of another day

Covered in dust we would return
To have a mid-day break
And your sarnies and frowl mix –
No trail mix for us
Always a welcome, you made no fuss

Then back to the dig, sometimes in pouring rain
But not one of us ever seemed to complain
Around the campfire for the evening meal
Burgers and sausages, potatoes tossed in the embers
Songs and much laughter, one remembers

Then into the caravan for coffee, games and a chat
Always glad of our beds after that
At Winchester and Gloucester for the Annual General Meeting
Trips and picnics, all took some beating

Some friends and loved ones may now have passed
But happy memories are sure to last

Thank you, Kate

Anne Tooke

The Camelot Company

Pamela Constantine

I had been spending a pleasant evening with my friend Jim, relaxing before a roaring fire. Jim lives in a comfortable old cottage and still prefers the living warmth of an open fire to modern central heating. I had to admit the cosiness was a draw – that, and our long-standing friendship which dates back to schooldays.

There had been the usual convivial hours spent in Jim's cheerful company. Although he had not been himself of late, experiencing inexplicable bouts of discomfort which the doctor had not yet been able to diagnose, Jim's cheery nature was always in evidence.

The world outside was in considerable turmoil but his place was an oasis of calm, like the man himself. Of course, like many, we enjoyed voicing our views as to how we would put the world to rights if only we had the power and influence, but that was as far as it went.

That night was different. And it changed everything.

We had lapsed into a companionable silence as we sipped our drinks, when I suddenly became aware that the silence had markedly deepened. I glanced towards Jim, wanting to comment but feeling somehow constrained – and a shockwave hit me. His face was no longer familiar. His eyes were closed, his face looked waxen, even the contours of the face were different – broader, firmer; and I could have sworn he was sporting a beard. There was also a sense of presence about him I had never experienced before.

Then his lips moved.
"It is time for good men to act."

Even as I was reeling from the fact that his voice sounded more like that of some majestic stranger, the words brought to mind an old

adage:

All that is required for evil to triumph is that good men do nothing. This startled me even more. Earlier that evening Jim and I had been decrying those who did wield power and influence but seemed to do so little to eradicate injustice and poverty. We saw ourselves as averagely decent people who deplored the prevailing global problems but had never thought of ourselves as being able to do much to help resolve them.

Again the lips moved. Again the commanding voice declared, "It is time for good men to act."

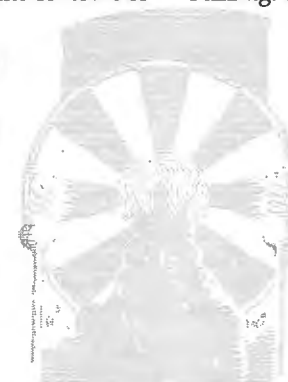
It was then I knew – though it went entirely against the grain of my beliefs – that this was not my friend talking.

"Do not be alarmed," the voice continued. "I have been preparing your friend for this moment. Please convey my apologies to him for any discomfort this may have caused. Before I proceed I would ask that neither of you ever mentions my coming or my identity. Now to the point. I have been observing you both since you were mere striplings and waited for you to take action. Now the times are urgent it has become necessary to make contact in any way I can. I hope my coming will not prove to have been in vain."

I could not speak. My mind was buzzing. What was happening here?

"Do not suppose," the speaker went on, "that my knights and I have been sleeping. We are in a wider world now and see more of the picture. Yours is a time of great crisis. We are working to reach all of good heart who have still not been spurred to act for the common weal, but have not yet become entirely immersed in the selfishness of the times.

"That which we stood for we stand for still: courage and compassion among



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men, love and loyalty among women, and the betterment of all lives downtrodden and oppressed. Two-thirds of the race is without sufficient food or clean water, a roof over their heads or clothes upon their backs. Unfair distribution of resources is at the root of all the unrest. Is this not cause enough for all of good conscience to act?"

I knew him now. Arthur Pendragon. There was no mistaking him. And even so, I could not manage to speak up, though my heart was responding to his every word.

"I am not asking you to form a charity or work voluntarily in society," he continued. "I am calling upon you to draw on all those knightly qualities that are inherent in yourselves. Like so many, you have become apathetic and with the passage of time decided to leave any altruistic action to those younger in wind and limb, even though you are both still in reasonable health."

It was all too true. Even Jim's recent spells of indisposition had not kept him from working in his beloved garden or following his normal daily pursuits.

There was a pause in which I felt the royal one awaited some appropriate response from me. Still I could not find my tongue, though my mind was busy questioning why he should have chosen to visit two such ordinary people as Jim and myself. His next words demonstrated that he had my thoughts.

"I have secretly visited full many like yourselves, of good heart and character but lacking in incentive, the fire which ignites latent compassion and instigates committed action. I will answer you plainly as I did them. I have come to blend my purpose with yours, my energies with yours. I am more powerful now than when I dwelt in the limitations of mortality."

And all at once, a veritable tornado engulfed me. It spun around me like a vigorous, encircling wind and there were sounds like those of the snapping of lightning. Then my everyday consciousness seemed to be lifted up high above the fire lit room. I could see nothing. Perhaps my eyes were shut, as Jim's had been. But I could feel this giant of purpose informing me through his energetic enfoldment of a deep desire that the planet be served and the needy

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assisted and cared for.

For a moment or two I hovered in this elevated place of high intent before the spiralling energy ceased and I was brought gently back to earth. I got my bearings gradually and looked across at Jim. He still looked decidedly unlike himself. Then the lips moved again.

"Remember this night when our destinies were combined. Go forth and through whatever form your true qualities take serve the purpose on which you too are now bent. Share with your friend all that has taken place. And remember, it is not myself or my knights that should be called upon but those same qualities in you which, for so brief a while, lifted Camelot into the sublime and brought blessing to all its citizens.

"Others whom we have awakened will come into your lives. Band together with similar intent. Together, as we were in Camelot, you can become that influence which in turn draws good from others to serve the common cause. This is the historic moment for all who are like-minded to make the vital difference. It can be done. The time to act is now."

Wordlessly, I vowed to do as he had asked.

"Finally," he added, "I would ask that you convey my thanks to your friend for his service to me this night. I will not disturb his atoms again."

The royal voice fell silent. Then the fire in the grate spluttered and the room came slowly back to normal. So, after a while, did Jim. I watched anxiously till the colour returned to his cheeks and his face regained its natural shape and beardless appearance. After a while he stretched his arms and opened his eyes. "Sorry, pal. I must have dozed off," he grinned.

I gave a deep sigh of relief.

"What?" Jim asked. "Have I missed something?"

What on earth could I say to him? I had been given an impossible task.

"You know," he went on, "I feel really good, as if things have settled down. Must have been something in that forty winks."

"There sure was," I said.

"How do you mean?"

"If I told you, you wouldn't believe me."

"What is there to believe?" Jim

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inquired. "A fellow can have a catnap after a glass or two of wine, can't he?"

"He can," I said, "but while he's having the nap he usually remains the same."

"I don't follow."

I shifted uncomfortably and prevaricated further.

"You really wouldn't believe me."

Jim gave me a deep, penetrating look. He's nobody's fool.

"Go ahead," he said. "Try me."

So I plunged right in and told him. Everything.

After a thoughtful few seconds, good old Jim said, "Well, you know me pretty well by now. Would you credit me with a subconscious desire to be King Arthur ..."

I had to laugh. Unambitious, down-to-earth Jim did not even rate modern monarchy.

"Not in the least."

"And," he went on, "the words make sense, however and by whomever they were spoken."

I began to think Arthur Pendragon had done his job well.

"And I must confess, I'm feeling energised enough to do something – something that could make a difference. After all, the world needs every scrap of help it can get. This is no time for complacency."

Yes, for sure, Pendragon *had* done a good job.

That night, we talked into the small hours. We were like two eager young boys, filled with drive and enthusiasm. I recall remembering then how Jim with his cheerful ways had always wanted to light up people's lives – and had become simply an electrician; how I, who had dreamt of being a famous playwright, had been content to eke out a living playing bit parts written by others.

Our new-found zest did not let us down. I began to write plays again, modern plays about injustice, poverty, sharing and caring. The organization in Pendragon's wider world must be quite something: as promised, new people came into our lives, actors of similar outlook and commitment to beneficial change. My modern dramas play to packed houses wherever we go and at least some in the audiences seem fired with good intent as we had been. As for Jim, he lights up many peoples' lives and

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has become our chief electrician. With his electrical skills and his warm nature he irradiates people in more ways than one.

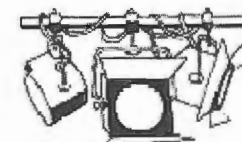
All this has come about because one man who possessed the calibre and determination made it his business to reach two ordinary men in a rut and galvanized them with his ardour, in turn to ignite the dormant good in others.

I can only hope our small but meaningful and expanding contribution can keep the flame of good intent burning till many others are kindled. Camelot was born in similar chaotic times. May we also bring some blessing to the countless needy citizens of today.

As to the actors, stagehands and makeup artists with whom we are privileged to work, Jim and I are convinced that all of them must have been visited by Pendragon and his knights, though no one has ever referred to it. We sense it about one another and sometimes a secret smile or wink will be exchanged. It is enough to bind us strongly together "in common cause".

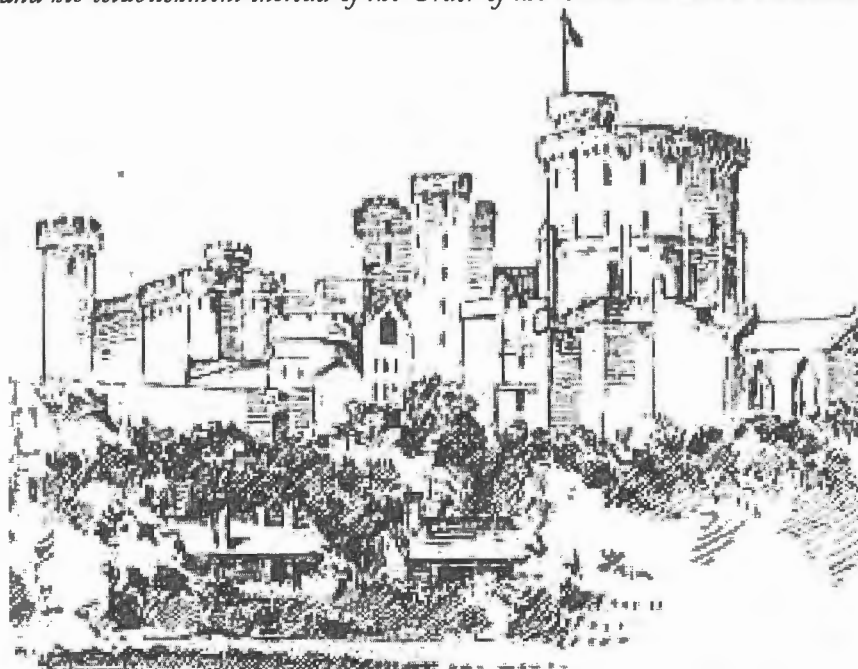
I think all of us now recognize what is meant by the phrase "the once and future king": not his physical return but that of his spirit inspiring ours to take on the high challenges of modern times... And I don't think he would mind at all that we have called our troupe

The Camelot Company. ☾



Why Was Arthur Abandoned?

The story of Edward III's oath to institute an Order of the Round Table and his establishment instead of the Order of the Garter **by Dave Burnham**



In January 1344 after a four day tournament at Windsor Edward III, dressed in rich velvet, swore on the Gospels to an assembled throng of hundreds of knights (perhaps thousands of people in all), that he would institute an Order of the Round Table (ORT) just like Arthur's. The 300 knights of the Order would sit in a great round building to be constructed in the castle and the first meeting of the order would take place the following Whitsun. Building work began immediately.¹

¹ The bulk of the material for this article comes from; Ian Mortimer's *The Perfect King: The life of Edward III father of the English Nation* (2006 Jonathon Cape), Munby, Brown and Richard Barber's *Edward III's Round Table at Windsor* (2007 Boydell), Alison Weir's *Isabella: She Wolf*

But it ceased only months later. In April 1349, on St George's day, in the very same place, Edward held the first meeting of the Order of the Garter. This order funded clergy for St Georges Chapel and consisted of 26 knights, including himself and his firstborn son, Edward (later known as the Black Prince). The Order of the Garter is still with us and the ORT disappeared without trace (until *Time Team* discovered the footings of the unfinished building in 2006).

So what made Edward change his mind about an Arthurian Order? Why was Arthur abandoned?

of France, Queen of England (2005 Jonathon Cape), William Ormrod's *The Reign of Edward III* (1990 YUP)

Tournaments

Despite much talk about chivalry in the Middle Ages there were few occasions to practice its virtues in wartime. Read for instance Bernard Cornwell's *Harlequin* (2000), a fictional reconstruction of the 1346 Crécy campaign and the battle itself. It gives an idea of how bestial mediaeval warfare was, more so even than modern battle because so many deaths were inflicted face to face, steel to flesh, always personal.² But there were examples of chivalry in war. In 1338 for instance Edward was again trying to quiet the Scots. As winter drew on the Earl of Derby's troops approached Melrose and was confronted by the Earl of Douglas and a group of knights. It was decided that 12 knights on each side should engage in a 'joust of war' (possibly to decide who held Melrose over the winter). 'Jousts of peace' were what happened in tournaments, with lances capped and blades blunted. Jousts of war were for real. Of the 24 knights who took part two Scots and one Englishman died and the Scot's captain was so badly wounded he had to be carried off. This joust of war was what knights trained for, but very rarely experienced. Fourteenth century warfare consisted of sieges and skirmishes, often hacking away in close quarter melee. The massed charging of knights was rare and for the English in the 1340s and 1350s almost unknown, because in set piece battles the English tactic was for the vast majority of men at arms and knights to dismount and fight on foot.

So for the knightly classes the tournament became the primary occasion to show skill and courage and to establish a reputation. The monarch and his earls held tournaments across the year, some up to five days long. They attracted knights from across the country and sometimes even from across the channel. Barber records Edward III holding or participating in eleven between 1339 and 1344 alone, although there may have been more. Edward's brother in law, William IV of Hainault was obsessed by them and in 1344 jousted in seven tournaments as far apart

² For something more formal read Sean McGlynn's 2008 *By Sword and Fire* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson)

as The Hague, Brussels, Beauvais and Metz.

Tournaments served several functions. In peace time they allowed the scores of rich, aggressive young men the chance to let off steam in a controlled way. The king could also keep an eye on them, spotting likely champions and trouble makers. They in turn would have seen him leading the field in mock battle, being the king; a sure way to establish and maintain his prestige. And Edward III would have cut an attractive figure, for he was a committed and accomplished jouster, as were many of his confidants and supporters. Apart from the powerful landowners and the several hundred household knights kept on by the king and his earls, there were independent men as well, who had enough revenue from their lands to afford the considerable cost of a destrier (warhorse) or three, a full set of armour, several lances and other weaponry; men to groom, feed and shoe the horses, make, mend and manage the weapons and armour and other clothing. He also had to have the time to learn how to ride and fight wearing three stone of restrictive, pinching, padding, leather and metal. All those taking part in tournaments were seriously rich, the sort of people today able keep a string of polo ponies or a race horse or two. There would have been a few thousand of them across the country, that's all.

The occasion for tournaments varied, but many coincided with religious feasts, when the court attracted men and women from across the country. Tournaments also might be held to mark the end of military campaigns, the birth of a child or a betrothal. A strong competitive element would have spurred on many, leading to rivalry, enmity, grudges. Sometimes knights fought in groups, Edward on occasion taking on all comers and at many tournaments groups of knights were formed into 'battles' of eight, or ten or 13 men each. Reputation, pride, revenge, all would have been played out here.

Round Tables

More than this tournaments were meant to be fun – they were at 'holiday time' when people let their hair down, when feasting and jollity was the order of the

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day – and Edward, certainly at the January 1344 tournament, made sure plenty of young women were invited (townsmen's wives and daughters). This would certainly have pleased the lusty, fit, show-offs who made up the corps of his knights. At that tournament there was 'kissing' and no doubt more besides; other tournaments attracted comments from chroniclers that men and women 'debauched' themselves whatever their marital status. Add to this military mix the hundreds of grooms, blacksmiths, armourers, personal servants and all the domestic servants needed to run the show and the image conjured up for me is something like Derby Day, Badminton horse trials or Royal Ascot, but where the audience and participants were more or less interchangeable. Knights would have had supporters and detractors, there would have been challenges, side bets, gamesmanship, cheering for favourites, jeering for losers and even the occasional nobbling.

Also like Royal Ascot 'the quality' wore brand new clothes specially made for the occasion – Edward certainly did for the January 1344 Tournament. And at some events, such as the gathering at Christmas 1347 at Guildford (an occasion of great rejoicing as Calais had just been taken), the King ordered what can only have been fancy dress.

Forty two masks bearing the likeness of women ... angels heads in silver ... fourteen dragon's heads ... fourteen pheasants heads and pairs of wings for these heads ... fourteen swans heads ... fourteen tunics painted with stars.

What was prepared here seems to be a uniform 'strip' for the king's 'team'. This extravagant and careful preparation of sumptuous and uniform clothing for the 'in crowd' was a regular feature of tournaments, as was dressing up in gay colours, with people dressed often as angels, devils, deer, lions, all sorts. More than this many tournaments and games had definite themes, many of them Arthurian. These were sometimes referred to as 'Round Tables' and some at least included scripted interludes, where 'actors' played out scenes which offered a pretext for the jousting to come. A disguised knight might enter the hall demanding redress for a slight, or a distressed maiden might seek rescue

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from a troop of wicked knights chasing after her. Knights and their ladies took the names of Round Table knights and fought or acted as that character. Edward III as a young man took the name Lionel, unusually, on more than one occasion, and in 1338 gave it as a baptismal name to the son born to him that year. 'Lionel' if you read Malory was the knight sent to France as ruler after Arthur had conquered it. Ian Mortimer suggests that Edward took the name Lionel because in the various *Bruts* of the day Lionel and his brother Bors had been cruelly treated as children by an interloper who had replaced the king their father.



The most notorious 'Round Table' perhaps was that of Roger Mortimer, the interloper in Edward's life. Mortimer plotted the downfall in 1326 of the incompetent, foolish and tyrannous Edward II. He led the plot, using as authority the support he had from Edward's queen, Isabella of France, who had with her the child heir, the future Edward III. Roger Mortimer was a brave knight, competent manager of his vast Marcher estates and had been trusted with subduing and managing Ireland. He was also via his great grandmother (Gwladys) descended from the princes of Gwynedd, with therefore a strong claim to be descended from Arthur himself. But he had fallen foul of the easily spooked Edward II and his grasping favourites, the Despensers, father and son. Exiled in France Mortimer plotted

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with others but principally Isabella, and then scandalously took her as his lover. Taking courage she and Mortimer landed in East Anglia with a thousand mercenaries from the Low Countries, but were soon joined by thousands of others in what turned into a triumphant progress across England, finally catching the hated king with a tiny band of followers. The Despensers were gruesomely killed and the king forced to abdicate in favour of the 15 year old Edward III.

Both Mortimer and Isabella, and perhaps this was part of the attraction, were fascinated by the romances of the day, especially by tales of Arthur and his knights. There are records of Isabella owning seven books of romance, which came into her possession in 1327. Were these gifts from Mortimer? Was Isabella's interest in romances revived by her relationship with this 'descendent' of Arthur? And did she play an obvious role in Mortimer's spectacular Round Table in September 1329? The occasion, at Wigmore castle, was his daughter's wedding. Not only did Mortimer order the usual grand array of clothing and food, he entered the lists as King Arthur himself, flaunting his 'ancestry' and announcing, in a none too subtle way, a grand view of himself and his ambitions. Isabella was present, although not mentioned in the record, her putative role as Guinevere perhaps a slight embarrassment given their relationship and Ian Mortimer's suggestion that Isabella may have been pregnant³. But why shouldn't Roger Mortimer play at winning the ultimate prize in this way? He owned vast estates across England and Wales, more now Isabella was regent for the boy king. He had military experience across England, Ireland, Scotland and France. He was de facto ruler of the country, was bedding the old king's wife and was descended from

³ Ian Mortimer is a careful and engaging writer, although he does skirt close to the sensational. There is no evidence Isabella was pregnant – just as there is only tangential, circumstantial evidence that Edward II was not murdered in 1328 but survived impoverished on the continent until 1342. But Ian Mortimer investigates both proposals with glee.

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King Arthur himself. All that stood in his way was this untried youth. But young Edward struck first, guided by his friend and mentor William Montague, with about twenty others. Famously sneaking into Nottingham castle by a secret passage they surprised, arrested, dragged away and executed Mortimer and that was that.

Change of Heart?

So what of the Round Table Tournament of January 1344? As we have seen Edward loved show, dressing up, jousting and camaraderie and was well aware of the potential political uses of such gatherings. In 1344 his political position was not strong. He had made his claim to the throne of France through his own Plantagenet line, but also because Isabella had a firm claim herself. But he had failed miserably to make military progress against the French. Worst of all he miscalculated the acquiescence of his barons in agreeing to further taxation in 1340 and was forced to call a Parliament which curbed his financial ambition. Richard Barber suggests that the announcement of the ORT, especially his call for 300 knights to be members was a recruiting device for his coming French campaign – the campaign of 1346 which culminated in the startling victory at Crécy.

Use of Arthur as a chivalric ideal by Edward should come as no surprise. His grandfather, Edward I and earlier Plantagenet forbears had used the name and his own personal interest in Arthurian romances seemed as strong as his mother's. He had visited Arthur's 'tomb' at Glastonbury in 1331 and in 1345 ordered a search there for Joseph of Arimathea's body. But the ORT announcement was the only time he so obviously associated himself directly with Arthur, as Arthur. Building work begun so assiduously as soon as the January Tournament closed had petered out by the autumn – and nothing more was heard of ORT – by 1348 Edward was preparing for the first meeting of the Order of the Garter.

So why the change of heart? The classical response is that by 1348, Edward was his own man and did not have to pray in aid myths or legends to maintain support. Neither did he need

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recruit to men, the much smaller Order of the Garter (26 men including the King and the Prince of Wales) being established to reward his great captains. Evidence for this is that in 1347, Edward was offered the prestigious but entirely symbolic role of Holy Roman Emperor by the electors. He turned it down – needing no bolstering with a meaningless title.

There is merit in this view. Remember at the time the French were seen as the pre-eminent military power in Europe. Their knights were more numerous, more skilled, more chivalrous, more dashing than anyone else. The English were a small nation, a peripheral player, whose Arthurian romances were more powerful than any practical military reputation. So the comprehensive defeat of the French on 26th August 1346 at Crécy, whose army was reckoned to be three times the size of Edward's, was a shock across the whole of Europe. The taking of Calais eight months later compounded that shock. Add to this the stunning amount of loot sent back to England after the pathetically easy fall of Caen in July 1346 and thousands had cause to laud the king. For a modern comparison to Crécy/Calais think of the Battle of Britain, El Alamein and D-Day rolled into one. Not surprising then that in England as a result Edward could walk on water.

The other major change between 1344 and 1348, still unfolding when the first Garter tournament was held, was the uncontrolled progress of the Black Death. No attempt was made to close the ports in 1348, when it was known the pestilence was raging through France and the plague reached the south coast of England and spread northwards inexorably in the autumn of 1348. Epidemics and famine were common then but this was unprecedented, caused the death of at least a third of the population and disrupted commerce, agriculture, transport, everything. Edward himself lost his daughter Joan to the plague, but decided, a little like George VI during the Blitz, to act as if life was going to continue – travelling around, rather than holing up as some did, and holding tournaments and courts. He continued to behave like a king. In the circumstances what else was

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there to do?

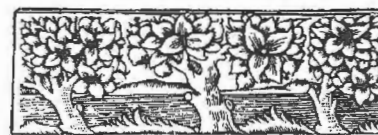
So a great deal had changed between the 1344 and 1349 Windsor Tournaments. But the comparison is not as simple as that. For one thing the Order of the Garter was intimately associated with the endowment of St George's College and the rebuilt chapel of St George at Windsor. Founded at the same time as St Stephen's Chapel in Westminster in August 1348, the King ordained that a College, attached to the Chapel of Edward the Confessor, the Virgin Mary and St George (subsequently known as St George's Chapel, Windsor) should be established consisting of a dean with canons, vicars, clerks and choristers to whom he assured an income of £500 from church lands from around about. Twenty-four poor knights, impoverished veterans, were also to be supported, men down on their luck who were fed and housed and whose job was to pray for the living⁴. This endowment was very much of its time, the way the royal gave thanks to God and secured their own path to Heaven.

The Order of the Garter then, as it developed was embedded in a religious endowment. ORT however had, it seems, was a different more radical idea. Orders of Chivalry had been around for a couple of hundred years by the mid-fourteenth century, but had been overwhelmingly religious affairs. The template were the religious/military orders, epitomised by the Holy Land based Templars and Hospitallers originally set up to guard pilgrimage routes and generally offer protection to Christians from the locals. The Teutonic Knights similarly had a religious basis. The expulsion of the Franks from Outremer in 1282 compromised their purpose and the return of the Templars, a highly trained military force, to their European 'homelands' was too much of a threat to

⁴ From William Page ed (1909) 'Colleges: Royal Free Chapel of St Stephen, Westminster', *A History of the County of London: Volume 1: London within the Bars, Westminster and Southwark* (Victoria County History) 566-571 <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=35386> Date accessed: 28 May 2009

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the burgeoning nation state of France, and the famed Templar riches too much of temptation as well. Philip the Fair's coup against the Templars, when the leaders were arrested on trumped up charges on Friday 13th October 1309 and subsequently killed or exiled, was brutal, opportunistic and almost inevitable. But the idea of these special bands of brothers was too powerful to subside. Soon afterwards princes across Europe began to tie knightly supporters to them with bonds of chivalry, in temporal chivalric orders. One of the earliest and most prestigious was Alphonso XI of Castille's Banda, or Order of the Sash. Philip IV of France rushed to emulate Edward's ORT in 1344 with the establishment of his Order of the Star. These had oaths and rules, mottoes and limited membership and celebrated themselves at tournaments and other entertainments. It could have been that the proposed ORT was Edward III's bid to emulate Alphonso and establish a longstanding secular order binding hundreds of knights to him.



The long view or the whim?

With events that took place a long time ago, especially when those events seem to have modern echoes, we tend to take a long view of history. Take Magna Carta. It was a document designed to control a recalcitrant king in a particular set of circumstances. The ideas were so good though that periodically it was revived in subsequent decades and slowly became viewed as the earliest formulation of the sacred freedoms of democracy. Reading it confirms it is nothing of the sort, but something framed for a particular time and purpose.

Edward operated as we all do, a lot of the time on a day to day, year by year basis. His personality also seemed to pick up on ideas quickly; militarily for instance he was a great innovator. But he moved on if the idea's time had passed.

In addition he seems to have been a practical joker, preparations for which

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were often elaborate and expensive, but after which he moved on to something else. Ian Mortimer observes:

The whole court ... were dressing up, role playing and changing identities in line with the king's whims and passions.

One of the most elaborate jokes was what he did in 1357, on the Black Prince's return from the battle of Poitiers. At Poitiers the Black Prince had not only defeated King John of France (as usual with a larger army), but managed to capture him – a circumstance heralding a fantastic ransom. The Prince, with king John and his entourage, landed on the south coast on the way home. On the road to London the king arranged for the Prince's party to be 'ambushed' by 50 elaborately clad outlaws. The Prince was forced to 'protect' king John, who no doubt was startled by this peculiar welcome. Edward appears to have arranged for or been involved in such japes regularly. Not only that, he took upon himself names and mottoes for particular events, which never appeared again. Thus he used the name Lionel for a while then dropped it. At the February 1342 tournament in Dunstable the king fought against 13 knights dressed up as the pope and his cardinals. Later the same year Edward had suits and banners made up for himself and his entourage with the motto in English reading *It is as it is*. This did not appear again. It must have meant something to him and his confidants at the time, enough to go to the expense of making all those clothes. But what passing fad or fancy was it? Similarly at another event the motto used was *Hay, hay, the White Swan, by God's Soul I am thy man* – a comment about or to a lady who had caught his eye? And at Crécy itself he had a great banner unfurled, the Dragon of Wessex. *Drago* it was called, an ancient idea representing the deepest English past, a counterpoint to the red glamour of the French Oriflamme, a fillip to his men, but not used again.

Edward stayed loyal to St George all his life, but otherwise, as a young man anyway, he flitted from motto to motto, always having different themes and colour schemes. Some might have had political significance, but others have the feel of jokes, 'in jokes' at that; ideas that may sound puerile to outsiders but have

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sidesplitting significance to a group of friends – short lived possibly but fun, fun that binds groups of friends together.

But that was not the case with the announcement of the ORT in 1344, was it? Chroniclers reported the announcement as a solemn oath. But was it meant as that? He announced a meeting the following Whitsun (which did not take place). Was the round building started with such haste after the January tournament, supposed originally to have been finished for Whitsun? Unfinished it could not be used for Whitsun, funding dried up thereafter and the following spring Edward was in the midst of preparations for the Crécy campaign. After that, of course, the world changed. But in the light of his track record of providing elaborate amusements for one off events the question hangs in the air: did he make the oath to establish a long-standing ORT, or did he just promise to hold a Round Table in Whitsun 1344, as a follow up to the fun of January?

Whatever his intention, his enthusiasm was probably soured immediately after the tournament when his best friend and mentor, William Montague, Earl of Salisbury died after being injured at Windsor. Montague was 12 years older than Edward, his constant companion and guide, and who knows, fellow japester in the various entertainments recorded above. Such a loss may have made Edward think twice about the ORT, about tournaments. After Crécy/Calais, although there were a round of entertainments and tournaments immediately after the triumph, and regular meetings of the Garter knights, Edward's enthusiasm for jousting seems to have waned somewhat. He was seen in the saddle at tournaments into his fifties (showing himself still as warrior king), but his involvement seems to have dipped considerably, with tournaments he attended being primarily in Windsor or Smithfield, almost formal occasions. This could have been because after Crécy at 37 he was getting on a bit or that after the plague (in which he lost one of his own children) he developed a more serious cast of mind. Or perhaps Montague's death took the edge off this form of fun. Or, could it have been that

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the ORT was Montague's idea? Could it have been that the strange mottoes and fancy dress liveries, the shortlived groupings for particular events, owed a great deal to Montague's imagination?

It seems to me most likely his oath to form the ORT in 1344 was made lightly, not quite spur of the moment, but of a piece with previous mottoes and play acting – and that any thought of following through was knocked sideways by the events described above. The vast expense of the proposed building was only in line with the vast expense of other one off entertainments.



Similarly I am not convinced that the Order of the Garter was designed as a long standing order from the outset. Juliet Vale offers clear evidence that the idea of the company of the Garter, a small band of Edward's captains, was current during the Crécy campaign, as early as 1346, much like earlier groupings of his friends dressed in 'uniforms' in previous tournaments. So originally the Garter company may not have been designed for a long life. Firstly the name itself. Useful as garters were in holding leggings, grieves and thigh armour in place, they were not the most romantic piece of equipment – just one of a number of straps and ties holding everything in place. By the by, at the time ladies did wear garters to be dropped for the king to pick up.⁵ They did not wear garters for stockings but ties. To name a company of knights in honour of such a humble item of male dress could have been the sort of thing that amused Edward's captains on campaign. In comparison with the shining Banda Knights of Alphonso's court, with their safe displays chivalry decked out in their honourary sashes, Edward's captains on campaign were grubby, ragged lumps of men. Perhaps the humble garter seemed a more fitting symbol for their earthy circumstances; self deprecation, irony, something like

⁵ Pipponier, Francoise and Mane, Perrine (1997) *Dress in the Middle Ages* (Yale University Press)

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our use of the phrase 'The Order of the Boot' for getting the sack.

If the name started as a joke the first selection of 24 men as Garter Knights seems, in part at least, to have been fortuitous. Several of Edward's more senior captains were absent from Windsor in April 1349, campaigning in France; people Edward owed a great deal to, who were amongst his most effective and grandest supporters: Northampton, Sir Walter Manny, Reginald Cobham, Thomas Dagworth, Huntingdon and Suffolk. But these men were not made Garter Knights, not then anyway. Only those men present at Windsor tournament of 23rd April 1349 were installed as Garter Knights. So originally the Garter membership did not consist of the most revered knights, just those present on the day – not a very solemn start. Of course the Garter meeting was held the following year on St George's Day and the order quickly became esteemed before any other across Europe. Would it have done so had it not been associated with one place, the religious college and chapel at Windsor and the fixed calendar point of St George's Day? As we have seen, Edward's involvement in tournaments and come-day-go-day 'companies' of knights with liveries and mottoes before Crécy/Calais had been regular and committed. After Crécy/Calais his interest waned. Could it be that we have the Order of the Garter today and not the order of the White Swan or the motto *It is as it is* associated with a grand order of chivalry because the Order of the Garter was the king's current whim when the music stopped?

Arthur?

And what of Arthur? It is interesting that, despite his passion for romance and the traditional Plantagenet use of the Arthurian legend, Edward never made claims about being in the place of Arthur as strongly as Roger Mortimer had. Because of Mortimer's claims and his relationship with Edward's mother could Edward's attitude to Arthur have been more distant than it might have been had there been no Mortimer? His oath about ORT was unusual: the number of knights was much greater than the small companies he had gathered round him

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before and the grand building. He also, in effect, set himself up to be Arthur himself. How wise was this? The idea of Arthur as the wise ruler and leader of a famous warrior band in peace time has great attractions, but once he had gone to France and 'conquered' it, as Arthur had done, the parallels become less attractive. The different versions of the *Brut* vary, but the plotting of Mordred while Arthur was away, the ambivalent role of Guinevere, and the civil war on his return was a regular feature. Surely, Edward was best keeping away from this territory?

So Richard Barber is probably right – that the ORT oath was made as a recruiting device to attract hundreds of knights to Edward's service. In terms of his leadership of groups of knights it was an aberration. But perhaps the oath was made lightly, in the vein of many other conceits devised for one off tournaments. And considered in the cold light of day Edward could not play out his life as Arthur – too many dangerous parallels for that. So the establishment of a long standing Order of the Round Table was never a real possibility, while the survival and longevity of the Order of the Garter was more a matter of chance than is often implied. ☾

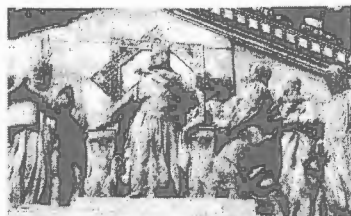
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Ian Brown



FREDERICK STUPOR MUNDI



"The sun of the world with its bright glory among the peoples,
the sun of justice and the palladium of peace has set"

Manfred Hohenstauffen

"When the warfare waxes great, too much for man to still,
The Emperor Frederick, wise and free, will come again, as is God's will"

Unknown Meistersinger

Frederick died of dysentery in the castle of Fiorentino in Southern Italy aged 56 on 13th December 1250 after a 38 year reign. His body was taken to Palermo, escorted by his imperial guards, both German knights of the Teutonic Order and his Saracen household bodyguard. He was laid to rest in the cathedral at Palermo in an impressive red Porphyry marble sarcophagus [pictured], the 'purple' stone reserved for Byzantine emperors, near to those of his parents and his grandfather Roger II. He was dressed as he had directed in the white habit of the Cistercian order.

His will divided his extensive lands between his sons, leaving Conrad the imperial and Sicilian crowns and Manfred the principality of Tarento. His favourite son Enzo received Sardinia and Henry the kingdom of Arles or Jerusalem. Manfred's letter to Conrad on hearing of their father's death rang true in the perception of many people of the time. It seemed impossible that this unconquerable soul no longer existed - he who had been sent by God to restore the integrity of the church and to establish anew the Roman Empire of the German nation, a realm in which law was administered with justice and the oppressed protected.

Frederick's will surprisingly stipulated



that all the lands he had taken from the church were to be returned to it, that prisoners should be freed and taxes reduced. He had tried to make peace with the pope in 1245 but Innocent IV's reaction had been to declare this unacceptable, to renew his excommunication, to depose him as Emperor and to order the Germans to elect another king. We can imagine Innocent's delight when, in 1248 after the battle of Vittoria, his Lombard allies captured the emperor's treasury and imperial insignia. To celebrate, they placed the imperial crown on the head of a hunchbacked beggar and carried him into the city in mock triumph. The pope's personal reaction to the death of the emperor was certainly not expressed in terms that we might have expected from Christ's vicar on earth.

The Meistersinger's song written a century after Frederick's death is in marked contrast, *he will free the Holy Sepulchre in bloodless victory, he will restore equality under the law, make subject all pagan lands, reduce the power of the Jews and break the craft of the clerics. But he will lay down his crown when everything is achieved...that in the end all sovereignty, authority and power will be cast aside and the Kingdom delivered unto the Father.*

This theme reflects certain apocalyptic

prophecies which circulated in Medieval Europe, claiming that a Last Emperor would emerge shortly before the End of the World, to fight Antichrist and prepare for the Millenium. Frederick was one of several rulers to whom this prophecy was attached and stories soon spread that he was still alive, living in exile as a pilgrim or hermit.



For many years impostors claiming to be Frederick appeared, the most famous of these false claimants appeared in the Rhineland in 1284 to lead a rebellion, gathering a considerable following of the poor. He was defeated and burned at the stake in 1295, forty five years after the emperor's death. In the 14th century a story circulated that Prester John, the legendary Christian emperor of the East, had given Frederick a potion to keep him young and a ring to make him invisible. As late as 1434 it was still said that he would live until the end of the world and that *there has never been and shall be no proper Emperor but he*. It was not until the sixteenth century that the story of the sleeping king, first told of Frederick II, was replaced in German legend by that of his grandfather Frederick I, Barbarossa.

I shall look next at some aspects of how historical figures may be seen as legendary or mythic heroes. In his recent article "Harry Potter and the Betrayal of the Hero Myth" (Pendragon Winter 2007) Dave Burnham wrote about the patterned hero myth and Charles Moorman's suggestion that recognising mythical patterns in literature can hardly be more than a diverting party game. This raises the question of whether history is a form of literature, narrative, the telling of stories, and it also raises the argument that telling the 'truth' in

historical narratives is a relative thing. C S Lewis wrote in *The Discarded Image*, his study of the medieval period, "the question of belief or disbelief was not of paramount concern; the true significance of reading history was simply to read the story." In *Albion, The Origins of the British Imagination* Peter Ackroyd writes, "in England

history has always been considered a manifestation of literature ... telling the 'truth' in historical narratives is a relative thing ... the verse fiction concerned with Arthur, Layman's *Brut*, became the standard vernacular text-book of late-medieval England."

Dave concludes that picking over the bones of old tales for themes is of little merit unless *something positive is done with the bones* and points out that post-war analysis of mythical tales has served a real purpose by offering a reflection for our own experiences as aspiration, warning, comparison, or as an offer of hope. Hugo von Hofmannsthal the Austrian author takes this much further when he says *nothing becomes reality in the political life of a nation that was not present in its literature as spirit*.

I shall next summarise the mythical aspects of Frederick Stupor Mundi's narrative by plotting it on the stages of a Hero Pattern. I scored Frederick on Raglan's pattern at least 16/22, Arthur

scores 19 as does Jesus, but real life historical personages are supposed not to score over six because Raglan's pattern is intentionally based on the stories of selected mythical heroes, in order to distinguish them from real life heroes and real life heroes from them.

I shall use a slightly refined version of Raglan, whose definitions are sometimes too narrowly or imprecisely



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worded. This can also be justified by the small number of heroic figures included in his study and its limited coverage of national heroes.

A Hero Pattern

(1) The hero's mother is a queen (2) who has had no previous children. (3) His father if human is a king. (4) The hero's conception is unusual or miraculous. (5) He is reputed to be a son of a god. (6) Evil forces attempt to kill the infant or boy hero. (7) He is taken to safety and (8) reared by foster parent(s). (9) We learn few details of his childhood aside from unusual precocity. (10) He journeys to his future kingdom and triumphs over some great enemy, the reigning king and/or a giant, dragon or wild beast. (11) He marries a princess, often his predecessor's daughter. (12) He becomes king himself and for a while he reigns relatively uneventfully. (13) He promulgates laws. (14) Later he loses favour with his subjects or with the gods and is driven from the throne and city. (15) He meets with a mysterious, unusual or unexpected death, (16) often on a hill, a high place. (17) If he has children they do not succeed him. (18) His body is not buried, but (19) he has one or more holy sepulchres.

Frederick's Story Patterned

Mythically patterned figures generally score most heavily on the narratives concerning their births and deaths. Frederick's death stories obviously score well but his birth is also surrounded by mythic events, which include his mother's 'virginity'. Constance was not betrothed until she was thirty, which is unusual for a princess. Some said that she was a nun and required papal dispensation to forsake her vows in order to bear an heir to the Holy Roman Emperor, an immensely powerful godlike figure. Dante places her in the Moon sphere of heaven, singing *Ave Maria*. She dreams that she will give birth to a dragon, an ambivalent symbol which here represents the Antichrist as Deliverer, the concept of the Cistercian prophet Joachim of Fiore which inverted the concept of the Antichrist to be good



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rather than evil. She gives birth in public to prove her son's legitimacy and he later refers to the town of Jesi as his 'Bethlehem', making his birth seem to be that of a Messiah, a term often used of him by his admirers.

His parents both die while he is an infant and his mother ensures his future protection by making the Pope his guardian.

The pope assures him that the church is a better 'mother' for him than his earthly one was. He is left largely to his own devices as a boy and wanders around Palermo where he observes all aspects of the citizens' lives. He has both papal and Arab tutors and learns several foreign languages; he also absorbs much information about the earlier Roman, Byzantine and Eastern cultures of Sicily. He has dreams of having to swallow the summoning church bell which he hears constantly from his lonely room.

He writes a letter to all the Kings of the world and to all the Princes of the Universe, from the innocent boy, King of Sicily, called Frederick. No king am I, I am ruled instead of ruling; I beg favours instead of granting them. My subjects are silly and quarrelsome. Since, therefore, my Redeemer liveth, and can raise me out of such a pool of misery, again and again I beseech you, O ye princes of the earth...to set free the son of Caesar, to raise up the Crown of my kingdom, and to gather together again the scattered people. He is the Puer Apuliae, the Boy of Sicily, both ordinary and extraordinary; Joseph Campbell's 'Child of Destiny'.

There are plots against his life by ambitious, disloyal subjects until at 14 he takes on his role as king, happily marries the 25-year-old widow of the King of Aragon and has a son. She is the first of three wives - the triple-goddess trope. He takes control of his kingdom, dispensing justice and punishment. At the age of eighteen the Boy of Sicily crosses Northern Italy with a handful of followers, dependent upon friendly cities for protection and escort, braving constant perils from men and the hardships of the Alpine snows. He is seen at first as the parson's orphan, an innocent and harmless pawn in the struggles of the ambitious German houses for supremacy.

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Among others, his scholarly Chancellor and publicist Piero della Vigna applies Virgil's Fourth Eclogue to Frederick. Rome's great poet imagined a golden age of peace and prosperity ushered in by the birth of a boy heralded as 'great increase of Jove'. There are also Christian similarities between the Eclogue's prophetic themes and the words of Isaiah, a little child shall lead them.

By a sequence of lucky circumstances and accidents Frederick defeats the deposed emperor Otto practically without a battle. He is welcomed as King of Germany and Emperor of the Roman Empire by the German princes, cities, clerics and people. Ten years after his election by the German Princes, in 1220, Frederick is crowned Emperor of the Romans by Pope Honorius III when he is 26 years old. From that year he fights against the Papacy until his death in 1250. He is inspired by his coronation, has a vision of his future greatness and promises to lead a crusade to free the Holy Land for Christian pilgrimage. He returns to Sicily in royal state.

He is excommunicated for delaying to set out on Crusade and from thereon the succession of seven popes becomes his greatest opponent. Collectively, they represent Joseph Campbell's archetypal 'Holdfast', the dragon or monster of the status quo, the 'Keeper of the Past' who relies on the authority of his position to negate the hero's developing vision of his mission as the 'Champion of things becoming'. He marries a princess aged 17 who is the heiress of Jerusalem, displacing his father in law as king. His followers compare his entrance into David's city to that of Christ on Palm Sunday. He is also seen as the boy who was David who has now led the hosts to David's royal city. He crowns himself King of Jerusalem in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, he visits the Mosque of the Dome to hear Islamic prayers, all without shedding a drop of blood.

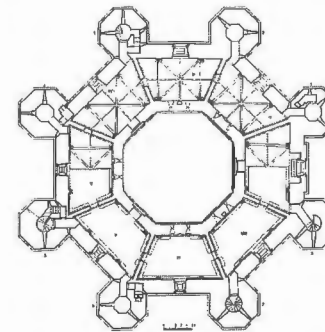
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Pope Gregory sees this successful enterprise as disobedience to his authority and pronounces Frederick to be the beast that surges up from the sea laden with blasphemous names, and raging with a bear's paws and a lion's maw...his gaping mouth offending the Holy name unceasingly, even hurling his lance at the tabernacle of God and His Saints in heaven. This is not the language that this ex-canon lawyer would have used in a courtroom of course, but religious, mythical, vivid metaphorical imagery to conjure up his opponent as an apocalyptic monster, an incarnation of the conventional evil Antichrist.

In contrast, a monk Brother Arnold of Schwabia prophesies that Frederick will confiscate the riches of Rome and distribute them among the poor. This is St Francis's vision, the holy man who is alive preaching such things and will go to the Holy Land when Frederick leads the way - to attempt to persuade the Sultan and his people to become Christian.

Frederick returns to his own land, defeats his enemies and rules his people wisely, creating humane laws, a university and hospitals. His court becomes a renowned centre of learning and culture. He builds the beautiful octagonal Castel del Monte [pictured] on a hilltop as an omphalos, a symbol of Divine Order, of the New Jerusalem. He is the world's wonder, imitator mirabilis the amazing bringer of changes. Piero della Vigna, sees him as the God-Sent Saviour, the Prince of Peace, the Messiah Emperor.

But a later Holdfast, now in the guise of Pope Innocent IV, denies him his right to rule and plans his downfall. He struggles on undefeated, then suddenly falls ill and dies unexpectedly in the tower of another castle on a hill. He is not buried but a sarcophagus contains his body. At first his sons succeed him as rulers but Holdfast invites foreign forces to help depose them. In just 22 years the proud Hohenstauffen line ends in 1272



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when Golden Enzo dies in the Bologna prison where he has languished since his capture in 1249.

Dante later refers to Frederick and his son in *De vulgari eloquenti* as those illustrious heroes Frederick Caesar and his happy-born son Manfred, displaying the nobility and righteousness of their character...disdaining what is bestial; whatever was best attempted first appeared at the court of these mighty sovereigns.



It was not until six centuries later that the Germans were integrated into a new Second Reich, forged by the Iron Chancellor Bismarck and broken apart by Kaiser Wilhelm in the 1914-1918 war. In May 1924, on the 700th anniversary of the founding of the University of Naples by Frederick, a wreath was laid at his sarcophagus in the cathedral at Palermo. The inscription read *Seinen Kaisern und Helden, Das Geheime Deutschland*: 'to its Emperors and Heroes from the Secret Germany'.

During the unrest of the decadent and defeated post-war Germany of the Weimar Republic a biography of Frederick was published in Berlin in 1927; it became a best seller immediately. Its opening sentence reads *enthusiasm is astir for the great German rulers of the past, in a day when Kaisers are no more and it ends with the story of Frederick's apocalyptic return from Etna. It is an aesthetic-cultural, tragic biography of the great Holy Roman emperor written by Ernst Hartwig Kantorowicz [pictured] a young German Jewish intellectual. Reviewers complained that it was literary mythmaking and not a work of serious historical scholarship. They said that in creating a Frederick II who slumbers not nor sleeps Kantorowicz had drawn heavily on manifestos, panegyrics, prophecies,*



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anecdotes and rumours. Many professional historians considered these sources as too subjective and hence 'untruthful'. They did not concede that Kantorowicz did affirm the importance of seeking the truth but that only part of the truth he was pursuing was 'historical'. The book was in fact immaculately researched from sources in seven languages and most elegantly written; it is a peon of praise for the concepts of charismatic leadership and national

renewal, an instruction manual for the Germans on the spirit of heroic, messianic leadership - written when these qualities seemed lost to the nation.

Kantorowicz's book was considered by American medieval historian Norman Cantor as *the most exciting biography of a medieval monarch produced in this century* and David Abulafia of Cambridge, pays a generous tribute to Kantorowicz in his critical article: *gratitude is owed to him for cultivating so gorgeous an apple of discord*. In 1930, Kantorowicz was appointed professor of medieval history at Frankfurt until, dismissed from his post by Nazi pressure in 1934, he went to Oxford first and then to the U.S. He was at Berkeley from 1940 to 1949, and after 1951 he was a professor at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton.

Kantorowicz's book had been nurtured and published through the encouragement and assistance of Stefan George, 1868-1933, a German poet and leader of the revolt against realism in German literature. The group of young writers and admirers that formed around him were known as the 'Georgekreis' and he was addressed as 'Master' by his followers who saw him as their leader, father, ruler, and prophet. His seminal work *Das neue Reich*, 'The New Empire', was published in 1928. It outlines a new form of society ruled by a hierarchical spiritual aristocracy; a kingdom that

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would be led by intellectual or artistic elites, bonded by their faithfulness to a strong leader. His earlier book *Das Geheime Deutschland* was the notion of a mythical Germany that lay beyond territorial or other material limitations - it signified the biblical-classical notion of an 'elect' or elitist nation, *a nation among whom the gods dwell and sire their heroes*. This neo-platonic ideal can be seen as central in Kantorowicz's biography, where he depicts Frederick's attempts to create such a state in Italy in the 13th century based on Augustan principles and the myths of King David and the Messiah.

George's poetry emphasizes self-sacrifice, heroism and power and these themes gained him admiration in National Socialist circles. But George did not see the Nazis as the fulfilment of his dreams, he refused the honours they offered him and shortly after the Nazi seizure of power he left Germany for Switzerland as a voluntary exile. There is little doubt however that, in spite of his wishes, his work fed the myth of the Nazi Führer. Kantorowicz's book was highly esteemed by Dr Goebbels, Hermann Göring, Himmler and by Hitler himself. When Hitler surprised one of his generals reading the book during the war the officer feared that the Führer would object; instead Hitler told him he had read the book twice. During the war he gave orders for his troops to fight a bloody rearguard action while engineers removed the Memorial stone of Frederick from the field of battle in Italy and brought it back to Germany.

Many of the leading members of the German Resistance had been close to George, notably the von Stauffenberg brothers. He met Berthold, his twin Alexander and their younger brother Claus [pictured] around 1923. They belonged to one of the oldest and most distinguished noble families in Germany and were models of the elite that George envisaged as the leaders of a new Germany: strong, handsome, athletic and confident, they were also intellectually alert and responsive to his ideas, qualities he hoped to develop



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in his 'disciples'. In them he saw a living connection to Frederick II, the epitome of a monarch who had been the essence of majesty, the supreme and omnipotent ruler. He dedicated his two books to Bertold Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg. He saw Claus as most like Frederick.

Both Claus and Bertold took part in the 20th July plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler. On July 20, 1944, Colonel Claus Count von Stauffenberg carried a bomb to Hitler's HQ as part of a military conspiracy to rid Germany of its evil Führer. It failed to kill him, he had a miraculous escape - it wasn't his destiny to die that day. The failure of the conspiracy to end the war, the inevitable suffering of the armed forces on both sides and the destruction of Germany was greater than all that of the previous years of conflict - the *Götterdämmerung* of German legend. German legend is aristocratic and over all the heroes hangs an inexorable fate, duty is all and only an honoured name assures immortality. This theme persisted even after the German peoples were Christianised and the Nazis had reverted to the *volk* paganism of the past. Some people have seen Hitler's end in the bunker amidst the flames of Berlin as true to the image he might have wished for himself as a defeated but heroic Kaiser of his people.

Claus had flown back to Berlin thinking Hitler was dead; he was preparing to put the takeover plan into effect when he was captured, wounded and summarily executed by firing squad that night with two other conspirators. His body was cremated by the SS the following day. As he faced his executioners Claus called out his last words *Long live the Secret Germany* - he had continued to cherish the memory and message of George. When some of the conspirators had wavered before the event he would recite the Master's poem *The Anti-Christ* to encourage them. He truly believed that a new and better Germany could arise, like the mythological phoenix from the ashes of destruction, an image he often used. Claus's brother

Alexander wrote later that a nation's secret destinies are revealed in its poetry, and that Poetry itself was the nation's destiny when through the Poet the man of action was moved to act, or to sacrifice himself if he failed. From the deeds of such heroes and the songs of poets and prophets about them myths are made. Like Arthur's knights they belong to the Fellowship of the King – a king who will return again to lead his people for one brief shining moment into a new and Golden Age.

It was my intention to follow up this article by exploring further the concept of *mythistory*, ie narrative in which myth and reality is combined as being of equal significance. Joseph Mali's book is excellent on this subject and Robert Segal's is interesting if you would like to explore and to extend your thinking about hero myths. Segal has an interesting preface and includes the narratives of historical figures such as the Duke of Wellington, George Washington, Garibaldi and Christopher Columbus, alongside those of legendary ones including Sigurd, Finn, Robin Hood, and Eve – a defiant Biblical heroine. Anti-heroes and female heroes demand our attention as well these days. He does not include Arthur; I had planned to analyse his and several other myths of Arthurian heroes in a future article.

Instead, my parting words are a comment on Charles Evans Günther's belief that *Pendragon* has lost its way. I urge you to continue to follow your individual quests for Arthur, the Matter of Britain and the Grail in every direction that you can. Arthur's myth is as vibrant around the world today as it ever was; don't be content just to search for our hero's dry bones for, as T S Eliot said, of course one can 'go too far' but, except in directions we can go too far there is no interest in going at all; and only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go. Just like Parsifal and Galahad. ☪

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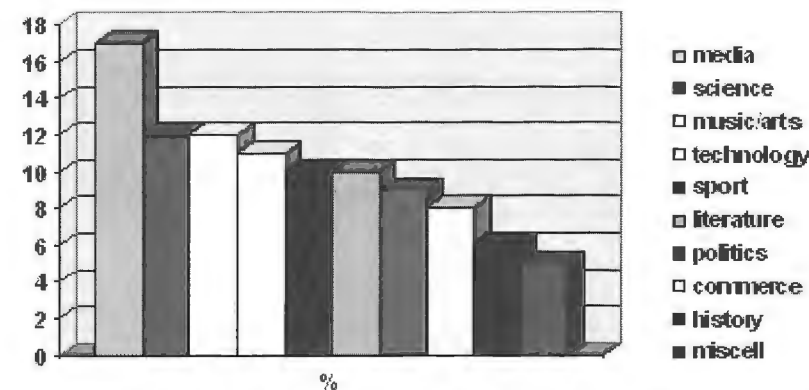
F C Stedman-Jones, MA
Chairman 1989-2009

• The final article in a series was preceded by "Frederick II" in XXXV No 1 (2007) 43-7



Unholy Grails: Galahad's Last Quest

Research by Steve Sneyd, text by Chris Lovegrove



As has appositely been noted here before, by Ian Brown, the Holy Grail must itself be the "Holy Grail" for reporters wishing to indicate the ultimate or the unobtainable when referring to their chosen subject: for example, "The holy grail is the elusive Higgs boson," reported *The Week* on September 6th 2008 in an article about the Large Hadron Collider, which was in the news at the time.¹

The metaphor in question has become the hackneyed phrase that lazy journalists automatically reach for when other parallels fail them (they thus eschew the alleged dictat of a former editor of *The Daily Express* that "All clichés should be avoided like the plague"). Worse, the ultimate in ineffability, with its associations of sacredness and awe, is routinely demeaned by being appropriated for the trite and the banal.

It has not always been thus. Back in the early 90s the holy grail of clichés was



definitely *not* the object sought by incipient Galahads. The epitome of anything may well have instead been the *jewel in the crown*, and the unobtainable was likely to have been a *will o' the wisp* or *El Dorado*. The phrase doesn't, for example appear in the indefatigable Nigel Rees' *Bloomsbury Dictionary of Popular Phrases* (1990, paperback 1992). But, as Richard Barber's *The Holy Grail: imagination and belief* (Penguin) showed, the incidence of the term 'Holy Grail' in major newspapers (drawn from the electronic databases of two US papers, four UK dailies, and one paper each from France, Germany, Italy and Spain) rose during the 90s, revealing a steep increase in mid-decade. Barber estimated that the proportion of references to the legend and related works (such as the Monty Python film) was around 10% of the total, making 90% of references largely secular and of a trivial nature. Back in 2004 he believed that after becoming commonplace from 1995 onwards the occurrence of the phrase appeared to be "levelling off". Five years later, the trend may statistically have plateau'd, but the Holy Grail shows no sign of decreasing in popularity with hacks and the like.

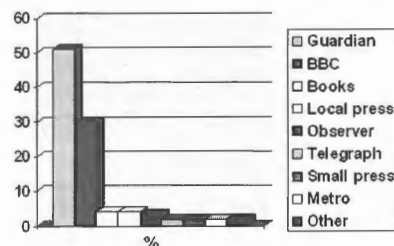
For the past few years Steve Sneyd has

¹ Chris Lovegrove, Steve Sneyd "The Holy Cliché Quest" XXXII No 4 (2005) 42-44, "Unholy grails" XXXIII No 2 (2005-6) 32-33; "More unholy grails" XXXIII No 3 (2006) 42, "Unholy grails" XXXIII No 4 (2006) 38-9, "Unholy grails" XXXIV No 3 (2007) 40,47

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assiduously scanned the press (principally *The Guardian*) and the airwaves (particularly BBC Radio) for instances of the sacred metaphor – purely in the cause of research, of course. Now is the moment to draw conclusions, if there are any, from the frequency and use of the phrase in the modern media. The instances he collected were sorted by broad category, specific subject and its context, source and date. Some interesting patterns appear, despite the serendipitous nature of the sampling, which, coincidentally, was found to include just one hundred instances, thus simplifying the maths.

Sources



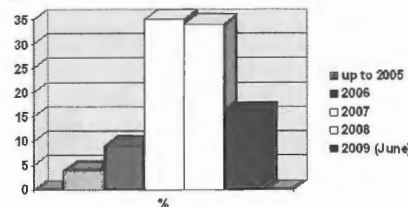
The Guardian, with 51%, dominates this sample, and instances were drawn from the main paper and its various supplements (*G2*, *Weekend*, *Sport*, *Review* and *Guide*). BBC Radio comes next with 30%, drawn from Radios 2, 4, 7 and the World Service. Four books (on lost languages, cosmology, rock music and politics) display the researcher's catholic tastes in subject matter. Four instances come from the local press in Huddersfield – in contrast, constant vetting over the same period of the weekly paper in Pembrokeshire, the *Western Telegraph*, revealed no instances at all (despite its predilection for dreadful punning headlines). Free paper the *Metro*, normally a fruitful source for the metaphor, yielded just two examples, while other sources (the *New York Review of Books* and *The Independent*) provided one example each.

Frequency

Most of these instances date from 2007 onwards; previous examples appeared without detailed analysis in earlier reports in *Pendragon*. Disregarding two

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undated instances from the *Guardian* (both since 2007), thirty-five grails were noted from 2007, thirty-four from 2008 and, up to the end of June 2009, sixteen. These figures effectively illustrate Barber's "levelling-off" observation from 2004, showing that journalistic taste in Holy Grail imagery demonstrates no real sign of abating.



Categories

All grails were placed in ten broad categories – miscellaneous (5%), history and archaeology (6%), commerce (8%), politics (9%), literature (10%), sport (10%), technology (11%), music and the arts (12%), science (12%) and the media (17%).

Admittedly, some categories are very broad – science includes astronomy and cosmology, biology and botany, ecology, physics and palaeontology, for example – but on the whole these categories suggested themselves, with awkward grails – driving skills, tourism, education, gardening and sociology – being netted by the miscellaneous group.

Unholy grails

So, what exactly are these precious and maybe unique relics that commentators seek to distinguish with their imaginative journalese? In gardening the holy grail of building raised beds is "scaffold planks", for motoring school students it is "to pass the test without faults at the first attempt", for travellers on a budget it's "pretty, quirky Parisian hotels", for human society in general it's "discoveries in lunar exploration" and for pupils in primary school painting it's ... "how to make brown". These are all genuine; you couldn't make it up.

You would expect **history and archaeology** to make up a large part of this sample – after all, the grail is the relic *par excellence*, is it not? But no, this category features just six instances: for archaeological decipherers the Holy

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Grail is the earliest signs of historic script and for the historian it is a room full of ancient documents; in the ancient world it was apparently the source of the Nile (this despite the fact that the grail hadn't yet been invented); for modern Greeks it is – of course – the return of the Elgin Marbles, while for early 20th century Italy it was Mussolini's Third Way between Nazism and Communism; and – *la crème de la crème*, this – for researchers of scouting memorabilia it is old photos of Huddersfield Scouts HQ.

What's the Holy Grail? It's the economy, stupid. Commerce dreams are more mundane and, strangely enough, mercantile. Its grails include emerging markets for the fashion industry, the hydrogen fuel-cell car for the motor industry and (reports the BBC World Service) AI or Artificial Intelligence for scientists in business. For commercial shipping it is the opening up of the fabled North-West passage due to global warming (a mixed blessing, this) and for the transport industry it is moving goods off roads onto rail. For British entrepreneurs it is China, and for ex-pats it is quality of life. And finally, a white badge represents the grail as far as having the freedom to meet the movers and shakers at a world economic summit.

IMF imposed cuts may represent the Holy Grail of economic stabilisation in **politics**, but for President Sarkozy it's a new French scheme for fighting the problem of internet piracy, and for British diplomacy in Europe it's the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy. The Liberal Democrats believe it's electoral reform, we're constantly and reliably told by hacks, though Lib Dem deputy Vince Cable is himself described as the "holy grail of economic comment" by the Tory Business spokesman. For political theorists (who may have nicked this idea from physicists) it's a single grand theory to explain disparate phenomena, in contrast to political correctness, allegedly Britain's grail in 2007. Back during the Second World War self-sufficiency was the grail for the Ministry of Agriculture, while in local government the grail of job

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satisfaction for local councillors is represented by extra responsibility and development opportunities.

Literature, which was midwife to the whole grail paradigm, provides a mixed bag of examples. The grail of writing is "the perfection and replication of a single tone", but if that's too high-minded for you, then it's judging the Arthur C Clarke award for a science fiction fan. Crime-writing supplies obscure grails, such as Labyrinth crossword puzzles for a compiler, or the name of a missing schoolgirl as a clue in an Inspector Morse mystery. *The Call of Cthulhu* was the grail for H P Lovecraft's career in pulp literature, in contrast to the Great American Novel being Literature's Holy Grail. For the publishing industry it was Alistair Campbell's diaries, while you can't get more obscure than the tracking down of a tape of Henry Cohen (writing as Roland Camberton) by Iain Sinclair (unless it's mathematician Darren Crowdy who, according to poet Matt Harvey, may be a kind of grail in geometry).² Lastly, Carrie O'Grady, in a review of a Nicci Gerrard novel, asked "Domestic bliss – oxymoron, or holy grail?" I'm damn sure I didn't like the answer.

Sports writers, by definition, indulge in overblown language, and it's not surprising to find Galahad's object of desire purloined for unusual applications (apart from being used as a synonym for the FA Cup). The ultimate in overblown must surely be the grail of gene screening in football development: the "funding and developing of players who'll help clubs win titles and reap profits on the transfer market". No less pseud is



² *The Applied Mathematician* by Matt Harvey is a "sonnet celebrating the elegance, ingenuity and sheer cerebral power of Darren Crowdy's creative use of Schottky Groups to complete the Schwarz-Christoffel formula so that it works with irregular shapes and those with holes" and includes the lines "You're out there where the holy grail or chalice is..."
<http://www.thepoetryexchange.com/viewto pic.php?f=9&t=103p168>

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Chelsea winning the Champions League for the first time, Manchester United winning the league in 1992-3, David Beckham's first trophy at Real Madrid, football transfer windows, a salary cap for football club finances and a run of six or seven games for any footballer, especially Joe Cole. Four Masters championships in the same year must be the grail for all golf players, just as breaking the four-minute mile must have been in athletics, while for Scrabble players (is this a sport?) it must be a "nine-timer" – two triple word scores in one go.

The grail is regularly conjured up in the field of **technology**. In medicine it's stem-cell therapy, in bio-technology it's spider-silk as a material or a bull bred to pass on the traits of producing low-fat milk. In renewable energy it's wafer-thin solar cells, for believers in technology as a means to save us from catastrophic climate change it's a device to suck carbon dioxide from the air. In computer programmes it's successful voice recognition, in games technology it's AI (again). In stealth technology it's a device that gives no reflection and casts no shadow, for satellite production teams it's a satellite on a chip. For TV producers it is technology to make sure viewers watch programmes on purpose rather than by accident, and for the iron industry in the 18th century it was the use of coal in smelting.

Music and the arts, while a broad category, certainly has its share of the sacred metaphor. Rock and pop music dominate: the *I'm Not There* album was the grail of Bob Dylan bootlegs, for British bands it was "breaking America", for Northern Soul it was perhaps a Motown release used for a chicken takeaway TV ad, in pop song it was the album *Dusty in Memphis*, in pop memorabilia it was a mid-50s South Californian boy band, for jazz it was the ability to swing, and for kid-friendly pop groups it was causing zero offence. Bizarrely, an unnamed pop track was the grail of "tootles", while a re-mix of original Beatles tracks was "tampering with the Holy Grail". In a report on the arts, innovation was the grail, though the archaeological discovery of The Theatre, built in 1576, was the grail for those with an historical interest in English theatre.

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Science is also a rich field for grail-seekers. In astronomy it's the Hubble telescope, discoveries in lunar exploration or finding the Tunguska asteroid impact crater, it's ripples of the background radiation of the universe or planets with life for those searching for evidence of water vapour outside the solar system. In human biology it's the reaction to finding the G-spot – really – and in botany it's the lady's slipper orchid (don't mix these two up). In ecology the grail is finding the tiny particles in ice clouds behind climate change or, for gardeners, it's simply destroying slugs. The grail that keeps coming up again and again is a unified theory of physics, an exceptionally simple theory of everything; failing that, how to relate quantum mechanics to gravity will do instead. And finally, in palaeontology it's a fossil called Ida and in vulcanology it's an early warning system of major volcanic eruptions.

But, head and shoulders above all the categories where the grail as superlative looms large is the **media**, which prostitutes the whole concept of a holy relic imbued with miraculous properties. Be ready for your sensibilities to be blunted by the sandpaper of trivial thinking.

In reality TV it's the art of becoming famous, or perhaps conflict among the participants (mentioned on two separate occasions in the *Guardian*), while in the TV programme *Parks & Recreation* it is respect at work. In the film *National Treasure* the fictional Book of Secrets detailing US conspiracies is the grail, though for director David Lynch obsessives it's the secret of the *Eraserhead* baby; for aficionados of missing bits of silent film it's the uncut version of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* re-discovered in Argentina, and the grail of film versions equally brilliant as the original novel it's Visconti's *The Leopard*.

In the game *Guitar Hero: World Tour* it's the secret track-listing leaked on the web, and for the broadcast networks the grail is 18-year-olds, or alternatively the elusive 18-30 audience. On Radio 2 it is 39 points, the highest score in the Popmaster quiz. In advertising it's positive word of mouth or perhaps monitoring web browsing, or for lesser talents it could be the well-paid

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hinterland between literature and show business. And, in the media-obsessed world of fashion, for shoppers it's finding a pair of perfectly fitting jeans (yes, I know, for some this really is a matter of life and death).

The end of questing

Galahad and all his fellow questers must feel that they've been confused with jesters, so ridiculous have been so many of the grails detailed here. Have they – or we – learned anything enlightening from this slog of a search?

On the positive side we can note that writers and media presenters routinely reach for an Arthurian image when they want to express a Big Idea and, however debased the currency has become, that can't be a bad thing if it keeps a medieval coinage in circulation, can it?

On the obverse side of the coin, the resonances of the Holy Grail, for scholars and students alike, must be completely lost as far as a significant proportion of the audience are concerned, so that its original associations could well in future be relegated to an unread footnote, as so many obsolete words and phrases are now. Or, worse, the poetic trope will become utterly confused with the modern holy bloodline myth, as author-historian Antony Beevor notes:

'The barrier between fact and fiction is eroding fast... My wife and I went to see [the film of *The Da Vinci Code*]. At the end of this hocus-pocus, we overheard a young man behind us say in awed tones: "It makes you think, doesn't it" I did not know whether to laugh or scream. Not long afterwards, a survey revealed that almost half the nation believed that Mary Magdalene had had a child by Jesus and that their bloodline continues.'³

Beevor asserts that there is a far greater danger lurking beyond the blurring of fact and fiction and the corruption of historical truth. This has been called "counter-knowledge", covering the "propagation of false legends and conspiracy theories often used for political purposes or fundamentalist religious propaganda".

Maybe it just boils down to people unable or unwilling to tell the difference between fantasy and reality. ☾

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Caerleon after Camlann

Three only stood as far apart as stone round Roman giants made permits

to make empty ex Round Table seem a little fuller just mutual shame

to have survived can't / won't say how the final battle then crow harsh silence broken all three

speak at once time to go quick now before anything forgotten hunt down bard to tell good lies

Steve Sneyd



With years well gone

"They robbed us blind, those finiered horsemen" old priest, old peasant agree – in shadow well from poor fire young girl cries for what she missed

Steve Sneyd

³ *The Guardian Review* July 25 2009



DARK AGE CAERLEON

Cardiff University and University College London archaeologists followed their 2007 exploration of Caerleon's Roman legionary fortress into the summer of 2008, excavating what they believed to be a Roman warehouse in Priory Field, along with possible remains of granaries and barrack blocks.

An undisturbed site just by the gate that led to the wharfs on the River Usk was thought to be an ideal location for a warehouse, which could have stored supplies and provisions for up to 6000 soldiers. Later occupation was suggested by large amounts of rubble lying on top of the Roman remains, with medieval pottery sherds found in this layer alongside Roman finds.

A flagstone floor, found running over the top of the line of a Roman wall, was noted as having sunk either side of the wall, with cracked stones "probably" indicating quite heavy use. The exciting possibility was that some of the buildings suggested by this flagstone floor might "go right back to the end of the Roman occupation of the site and just after".

The archaeologists will be returning in 2009 to try to clarify what was on this site and possibly indicate what was going on here not only in the late fourth century but after the Romans left.¹ ❧

LIGHTING UP THE DARK AGES

Archaeologists continue to build models to elucidate the so-called Age of Arthur, two recent ones finding their way into the pages of *Current Archaeology*.

Miles Russell argues that British history in the immediate post-Roman period was effectively one of conflict between rival warlords, and that many "Anglo-Saxon" leaders, such as Cerdic and Cynric, were simply Britons whose names were anglicised. This is nothing essentially new, but he goes on to suggest that Aelle and Ambrosius Aurelianus, one a Saxon, the other "the

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last of the Romans" were really one and the same. The author, a senior lecturer in prehistoric and Roman archaeology at Bournemouth University, has been leading a three-year project to examine "the textual minutiae of *Historia Regum Britanniae* and *Historia Brittonum* forensically" – good luck to them.²

Stuart Laycock, author of *Britannia: the failed state*, has now penned *Warlords: the struggle for power in post-Roman Britain* (The History Press). Rather than interrogating historical texts he has been investigating military remains such as buckles, belt-fittings and strap-ends to see if they can be correlated with traditional historical narratives of the period. He thinks that the distribution of horse-head buckles and insular dolphin buckles are evidence of British militiamen accompanying the pretender Constantine III across the Channel. The distribution of so-called Quoit Brooch Style items linking the former territories of the Dobunni tribe and Kent suggest a context for Vortigern's career, he believes, while later stylistic developments lead him to conclude that "some Early Anglo-Saxon settlers arrived in Britain wearing what is basically Late Roman military kit". He asks whether this is confirmation of Gildas' testimony in the 6th century. ❧

MILLION-POUND MANUSCRIPT

In early 2009 Sotheby's sold a 14th-century manuscript known as the *Courtenay Compendium* for £937,250. It contained a large number of valuable historical texts including the fullest version of Gildas ever reported, never before used in any scholarly edition of the Gildas text.

All three parts of Gildas' *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* are present in the manuscript – only four extant manuscripts of the complete text were earlier known, ranging from the 11th to the 14th century – together with Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (History of the Kings of Britain). A final

² Miles Russell "Rewriting the Age of Arthur: the Dark Ages brought to light" *Current Archaeology* 229 (2008) 40-45; Stuart Laycock "Buckles, belts and borders" *Current Archaeology* 234 (2009) 12-19

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section of the *Compendium* contains twenty-three separate accounts of visions and prophecies in prose and verse. Sotheby's suggest that the manuscript "most probably" contains the only substantial record of the collection of prophetic texts once in the library of Glastonbury Abbey.

The MS, which had been missing since the 16th century, was following the auction apparently bound for a dealer in France. However, the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest (RCEWA) – administered by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) – met in early February 2009 to consider the export application. An expert adviser had objected to the export of the manuscript "under the third Waverley criterion", that is on the grounds that it was "of outstanding significance for the study of the early history of Britain and its relations with the wider world, and for the textual study of its many components".

The expert's submission to RCEWA stated that "The Courtenay Compendium [is] a late 14th-century decorated English manuscript on vellum containing important texts relating to early British history and accounts of medieval travellers in the Near East and Far East. It may have been assembled by a monk in the Augustinian priory at Breamore in Hampshire in order to provide his house with a scholarly collection of important historical texts. These were possibly copied from sources in the library of Glastonbury Abbey, the chief medieval library in the south west of England. At the Dissolution of the Monasteries, Breamore Priory was granted to Henry Courtenay, Marquess of Exeter. This volume was certainly in the possession of his descendants in the eighteenth century."

Some of the texts were said to be rare, particularly the revised version of the *Encomium of Queen Emma* (an anonymous biography of the woman who was wife of both King Aethelred the Unready and, later, King Cnut) and Gildas' *Ruin and Conquest of Britain*. Eastern texts such as *The Travels of Marco Polo* occur in very few medieval English manuscripts, and the collection of visions and prophecies of English origin included some of which

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may be unique.

The Committee agreed that the manuscript, which had been unknown to Anglo-Saxon scholars until recently, was a major source for the study of both pre-conquest English history, and also of medieval England's perception of the wider non-Christian world, and the *Compendium* was found to meet the third Waverley criterion because of its importance for the study of medieval historical scholarship.

In early March, the *Compendium* was placed under a temporary export bar by Culture Minister Barbara Follett. A decision on the export licence application was deferred until early May, possibly extended until August if a serious intention to raise funds for the purchase of the manuscript at the matching price was expressed. This provided a last chance to raise the money to keep this exceptional manuscript in the UK.

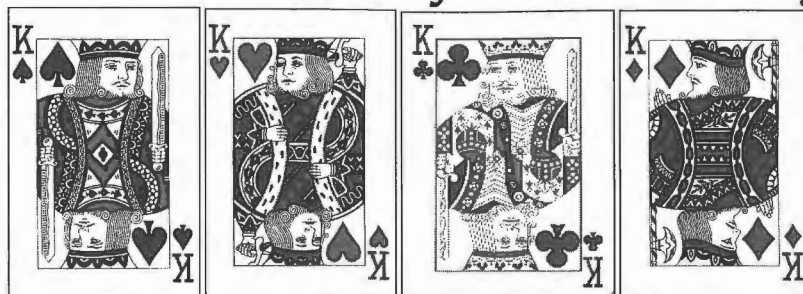
According to Sotheby's the *Compendium* (with 219 leaves, four of which are blank) is "evidently the long-lost manuscript of historical tracts used by the scribe of the Burghley transcripts, last seen in the sixteenth century, and containing the only substantial Marco Polo manuscript to come to the auction market in nearly a century ... and a number of other important and rare historical texts including accounts and assessments of medieval Islam and the Near-East".

As for provenance, Breamore Priory and its possessions were leased to Henry Courtenay, Earl of Devon and Marquess of Exeter who "most probably took the present manuscript from the library at the same time; perhaps its Near- and Far-Eastern history appealed to him as his family had a rich crusading history, and an ancestor, Pierre I de Courtenay (1126-83), had held office as emperor of Constantinople, Edessa and Jerusalem, and as ruler of the Turkish Empire during the Crusades. The manuscript remained in the family home of Powderham Castle for centuries, and has passed by descent to its present owner, the 18th Earl of Devon".

Sotheby's assert that "the manuscript almost certainly has an unbroken line of provenance since the fourteenth century, and has never been sold since the day it was written." ❧

¹ <http://www.caerleon.net/history/dig/2008/index.html>

Instead of History Pamela Harvey



What if? In the world of might-have-beens, history could have been re-written in a more glorious way, a more enlightened way. We could have charted the progress of the human race, not merely in science and greater knowledge of its own small planet but in compassion, tolerance, understanding and wisdom. As it is, when we look back on the often depressing, even mournful record of history, as far as that can be in the region of accuracy, let alone be trusted, we look to a Golden Age which may or may not have existed, and/or we look to Heroes – and Heroines.

Did Arthur exist? Many people think so. Historians and archaeologists endeavour to identify him with a warrior leader of post-Roman times. He seems plausible enough. Later on, perhaps, we get the medieval grafting on of the code of chivalry which, sadly, we are told (but happily we may also doubt) many of the knights did not obey; and then well-known stories of the Round Table and the ladies of the court, though the roots of these stories date from much earlier (eg the *Mabinogion*). But, if Arthur and the rest did not exist, would we have to invent them? We seem to need heroes; we need men who are charismatic and somehow more than most humans, and we need women who are glamorous, mysterious, and, it seems, capricious to a degree. And we need semi-human, more than human, figures whose background is enmeshed in mystery, such as Merlin, adept in Wisdom, and a Son of the world of Faery.

Yet, it is a popular notion in this afflicted time we live in that we no longer have need of Gods, or, for that matter, Goddesses. If humans cannot totally sort the world, it will never get sorted. There are exceptional humans, nobody can deny, but in the last analysis have we outgrown the childhood of humanity which seeks Divine protection? That is nothing at all to be ashamed of, since we are frail in many ways. And even if we attain what may be described as the adulthood of Wisdom, surely we will still need a helping hand, a listening ear, a word of advice?

We are part of the wider Cosmos. Out there, are there possibly other 'Arthurs'? Will the legend fade if the Space Age ever really gets a 'lift-off'? I don't think so. And if, as the stories say, Arthur returns again, will he find a world feeling itself to be part of a much greater Whole? With true Knowledge that Heaven and Earth do blend in quantum harmony?

In the story of Arthur's journey to Avalon, as in the versions which say he went there to this mysterious Otherworld to be healed of his wounds, do we not see some comparisons with the story of Jesus, whose wounds were at least on the way to be healed at His Resurrection? And also in the promise of both to return again?

Many traditions speak of Gods who are resurrected from the dead, and also who leave us, one day to return; many heroes also, who are near to the definition of Gods as many feel is the case with Arthur. His grave is reputed to be at Glastonbury, but his spirit wanders Avalon, the land beyond where spirits are as corporeal as here. One day he may return, and settle all the conjecture about him. We need to believe, whether in such men of legend as Arthur, or in the Gods, or God. Atheists say no,

and when I look back on life, and the world, I find I can't blame them. I nearly joined them in my mind, but never in my heart. But intuition, and experience, *has* told me also that there is a 'touching place', for our need, where our world is interdimensional, and sometimes you can literally feel its presence. Faery stories throughout the ages support this, and that it is real and corporeal. And, we may hope, our heroes live on there and some may find ways to be present among us.

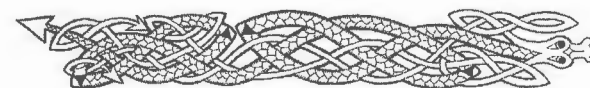
There are places in our awareness where religion and folklore meet. That is an interesting point about Arthur. He inherits a Christian Roman legacy, but also the aura of paganism. In the time he would have lived, people, whether predominantly of Roman descent or Celtic, would not have forgotten their pagan roots. They would often have been Christian, yes, but the pagan consciousness would have been strong within their psyche.

They might, too, have been more tolerant of the amours of Guinevere and Lancelot, and Tristan and Isolt, than those Victorians who heard these stories. Tennyson writes of Guinevere "who could not love they lord", but one suspects she never really lost that love, but was tempted, like many of us, and possibly felt neglected when her lord was attending to matters of state. We women of today, at least quite a few of us, can sympathise with the woman who loves two men at the same time, and who does not want to choose.

But in the story of Guinevere's being sent to a nunnery, do we not also see the mystical aspect of the tales of Arthur? Might she not have honoured, even worshipped him as a Hero there? (It's said that in medieval London Arthur was afforded divine status.) Was she not perhaps always, too, a priestess, perhaps of Merlin also? Such women in the ancient world were not feminists who argued with men about the rights of women, but women whose mysterious femininity made men more aware of it and its sacred qualities.

There were many levels to their appreciation of the male. But they honoured the Hero as well as the Gods, if in a lesser category (though some Heroes may also be Gods), and sex was not a sin, nor the serpent necessarily a villain! Indeed, the serpent is a symbol of Wisdom in most ancient religions. Arthur is known as Pendragon, a title he shared also with his father, Uther. It means Chief, but also embodies the idea of the Dragon, a very ancient title.

Dragons also were Wisdom keepers, and Merlin is much associated with them. Will Merlin return in our time? I hope so. I have need of my Heroes, and one day want to echo the words of the old song: "The Gods have come again." The stories, like the quest for the Grail, are on a human, and more than human, theme. As in two worlds, they touch and blend. ☚

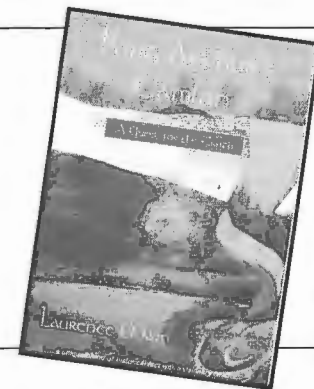


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Pendragon XXXVI No 2

Butterfly Lady: a duet for Guinevere and Lancelot

Fire flickers in the hearth,
The Lady makes no sound.
Azure wings unfolding now,
Her beauty all around.

Chorus

Oh come now closer, Lover dear!
Come gently dance with me!
For Love still travels with the night,
And in my eyes you'll see.

Butterfly Lady, sing to me!
Tell me what you've found!
What stories hide behind those eyes?
What skies they've danced around?

Chorus

Oh how can I reveal to you
The sorrows, shame, and smiles?
The path of life curls on and on,
Its secrets our distant prize.

Chorus

But I will show the scars of strife
Enfolded in these wings:
Of nations locked in blood and knife,
Yet minstrels on will sing.

Chorus

© Dr Sonja Strobe

The Lady's Swallow

Fast it swoops,
Then circles round;
Now dives
To take its prize:
A gentle insect
Hovering there,
Unaware,
The swallow makes
No sound.

Summer comes round once again
And doth the tale renew.
Few insects gather now
Alas! 'tis said,
Where swallows once they flew.

Fellowship of the King

Yet one Lady, all alone,
Doth hover there
And fans the water's edge.
Then Swallow swoops
And seals their yearly pledge.

© Dr Sonja Strobe



— *The Knight's Mistress*

The King's bride must wear
A new dress
Tonight,
With false threads and silks
Sewn on rich velvet,
Skin tight.

She must paint up the corners
Of her sorrowful smile,
Tint her faraway eyes
With love-drops that beguile,
And hide
The powerful passion
Screaming inside.

Chorus

And she lifts the lid
Off rainbow colours
Lying in her box of tricks;
Slowly paints away the Truth.
A gallant knight hopes
The lies will mix.

She must cover her skin
In a creamy coating
Of slippery slyness;
Screen tears of loneliness,
Feign words of foreverness,
Assume a sleek cloak
Of togetherness;
While her good knight awaits
Far, far from her side.

Chorus

© Dr Sonja Strobe

Guinevere's Ode to the Ladybird and the Butterfly

Oh let me take a walk into the countryside!
The lovely Lady cried.
Let me feel the warmth of sunshine
And Arthur's lips divine!

She glided into Spring-time,
Daffodils, cowslips and celandines
At her feet; yet a gnawing isolation

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Seemed never to retreat.

She spied a solitary ladybird
Waiting on a branch;
No movement, sound or utterance,
Immobile in her trance.

Oh! Sweet ladybird! So faerie in your way,
Why do you linger? Pray,
Are you waiting for someone to play?

Still you hang on to the cold, leafless bark;
I wonder what your heart tells
When it is dark?

Don't give up your fight!
Soon a loved one
Will make your heart light.

Ah! See! There you stay
Clinging to the green, wooden raft;
Fixed in memories of times
When you laughed.

Now flutters a courtly butterfly,
Searching for her lover ev'rywhere.
Not content to stay seated
She combs the Spring-time air.

She dances and darts,
Getting into people's hair.
But still the Lady can't find
Her Lancelot anywhere.

Don't give up pretty winged one,
Soon you'll be on fresh ground!
There grows a fragrant flower,
To make your heart proud.

Gently on soft petals
You'll lay your furry down;
Together you will harmonise:
Your true love is found.

Don't give up my lovely ladybird,
Nor my butterfly friend
As on your weary way you wend!
The buds in the trees are opening;
The river is running deep.
The Angels of Love are descending;
No more will you weep.
Gone will be forever
Your fortress isolation.
Love's lights flicker
In a distant constellation.

Fellowship of the King

So, come now, sweet partners in Nature!
Pick up your dainty feet!
Dance in the meadow with me!
Then happiness we'll greet.

On and on we'll fly together,
Soaring over hill and dale.
Can you hear the music play
In the river rushing by?

Listen now! Easter birds are singing;
Spinning in the twilight sky
Sweet names of knights and lovers,
And a tale so old, we cry!

© Dr Sonja Strobe

Inequality

If the prickles in my back
Could talk
They'd make the sound
Of grey-day rain
Raspin' 'gainst the window pane.
Strange! I think,
As I watch the raindrops track,
How some drip down steady
Meet no flak!
While others have to
Twist and turn,
Stumble o'er ev'ry
Bump and crack.
Same surface! Same space! Same time!
Listen! In the distance
Sad bells still chime!

© Dr Sonja Strobe¹

Lancelot 11 (Guinevere in Sarra)

A glance is all she gets, but is enough
she can cup that thought in her palms
as she lies on her pallet by the kitchen maids
blinking out their gossip
and cups her hands before her eyes
and holds that instant forever...

a pebble, a thought, an apple, a plum
a heart, an eye, a hand and a breast
lights, water, wine and stars
tears, clouds and laughter
each a moment then gone,

Geoff Sawers

¹ Although this was not written with Guinevere or Arthurian legend in mind, I'm sure Guinevere (and others like her) would share the sentiments expressed.

Pendragon XXXVI No 2

Riverside

The gods dwelt here when we were young,
And we were bright and free;
They moved in every blazing bush
And sang in every tree;
And the river flowed from Camelot
By hamlet, mead and mere,
Carrying childhood's kingdom
To our lone sanctum here.

This was the knowing of heaven
We thought to keep forever,
But minds that once were clear and wise
Grew capable and clever;
Too soon the mists had claimed us.
We wandered far and wide,
Thinking that with childhood's death
The last of heaven died.

We left the fabulous region
So long, so long ago;
But now in my fallow season
Again those waters flow.
I am carried to that valley,
To the very hallowed spot
Where childhood did its dreaming,
Hard by Camelot.

Again I hear the singing gods,
My bones cast off their cold:
I am the lost of Paradise,
Returning to the fold.

Pamela Constantine

Lament of Guinevere



I first saw you long ago, through oak trees by the stream.
I was so very young then; now it seems like just a dream;
I knew, though, in that moment that I would, could not forget –
And though my life had moved on and many years have sped,
I realised I had always wished that at that time we'd met.

And later on, dear Lancelot, when you came to the Court
My mind knew it was then too late; I tried to hide my thought.
But somehow I could not control the yearnings of my heart,
And though I loved my Arthur – and know I always will –
My feelings were so troubled; in a deep despair unsought.

Now Convent walls enfold me, not our bodies closely twined.
Today I am distracted, cannot get you from my mind.
You always had remembered that first time you saw my face,
Though I had not known you saw me, kept my feelings to myself,
For I was just a girl then; boldness would have meant disgrace.

But Lancelot, I love you, though my world is torn in two,
For I still love my husband and to him I would be true.
Now I walk the misted cloisters, wishing somehow it could be

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Ian Brown

Pendragon XXXVI No 2

That we might be together, if in secret, yet I dare
To feel that even here, in stillness, you belong to me.

But Arthur is my true lord, and to him I yet would hold.
You are a shadow on the Sun; my morning has grown cold.
If he could still forgive me, though he cannot forget –
I am no longer young now; so much my thoughts can fret.
I know if our tomorrows mean you are far away
This love I have in sorrow will ever with me stay.

Love is deeper than our lifestream; firm as trees that bloom in May,
And my senses know new blossom of our long-lost yesterday,
When we might have met in springtime in a time not meant to be,
And on life's bitter pathway both my loves have gone from me,
But I keep all their enchantment in my Soul eternally.

Pamela Harvey

Invaders

From the sea they attack at dawn
invade our land, take all we have
defile our women and slay our sons
raze our holy temples to the ground

But we will fight back with all our might
defend our land from the heathen hordes
on the battlefields our swords bite deep
and we drink to victory's bloodstained call

We've beat them back again this time
but the price is always high in blood
the warrior's blade has won once more –
our heroes lying in the mud

When the wolves cry in the wilderness
seeking immortality
we understand their lonely song ...
life is a struggle to be free

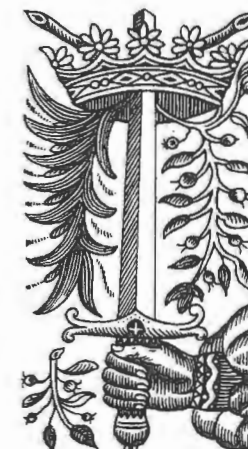
One day the tide will turn on them
and fate will play a cryptic hand
and the woods and streams will sing once more
for this truly is a wondrous land

Steve Gunning

The old order changeth

shared interests, in
fellowship enfolded, but
are friends now untied?

Chris Lovegrove



Reviews

Wendy Webb and guest poets

Idylls of the King
Poetry Monthly Press 2007
9781905126897 PB 100pp
Originally £5.50 plus £2.00 p&p, now
£6.00 including p&p
39 Cavendish Road, Long Eaton,
Nottingham NG10 4HY

Despite the title, this *isn't* a Tennyson reprint. It is, though, Arthurian poetry, albeit often tenuously so. The puzzle is how this book should be categorised. Is it an "anthology", as the back cover blurb describes it, "of Arthurian tales and legends", in which case it is more than somewhat dominated by the work of its editor – of the 75 poems here, 44 are by Wendy Webb, the remaining 31 shared between 15 poets – or is it, as the Acknowledgements would suggest, a collection of her Arthurian poetry with added "Guest Poets"?

Turning from this mystery to the actual content, it must first be said that, given the diversity of the poems here, and the varied, often tangential, ways they approach the Matter, generalisation is difficult.

However, among the Webb poems at least certain features tend to be characteristic. In her work, for instance, many trace the Grail influence on heroes far distant in time, and sometimes space, from the original Arthurian era. Indeed, contributor Norman Bissett, on the book's back cover, wittily describes the sensation of encountering so many such as providing "the same kind of pleasure as the Oscar Award ceremonies", noting among them Cleopatra, Sheba's Queen, Rameses, Gabriel, Nelson ("The Kiss" is a five-page poem of his death at Trafalgar), Boudicca, Botticelli's Venus, Leonardo, John Donne, Edith Cavell, Michelangelo, and the (considerably less famous) Butcher of Norwich: here aplenty is that juxtaposition, regardless of actual era of origin, of figures that still cast gigantic shadows which is so characteristic alike of folktale's view of "history" and critic-enthralled postmodernism. Also among her poems here are ingenious new slants on more established Arthurian Matter: in

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"Playing Cat and Mouse", for example, she reframes the tale of the "what women will" riddle, to include football imagery (and a resounding renaming of Tintagel as Tintagalon!), while her "Rings of Sorcery" is a vivid, ingenious exploration of the tricking of Merlin by a Morgan-assisted Vivien, in a castle overlooking the Farnes, "an opal of silence, / where shags raised batwings of spells in the dark", and, in a curiously evocative literary reference, "Jeckyll was blessed with this beauty of place ... where Avalon sinks white in mist, / when blood is shed, a scabbard on the tide." (The poem's ending has Blakeian allegorical power, also, as Vivien follows Merlin to "the Valley of Delight and Joyousness, where prophecy could lie / coiled in the valley of a serpent's bite".)

Features of her work include adapting well-known titles like "Lark Rise to Candleford" for new purposes, boldness and freshness in treatment of language, whether when ingeniously coining neologisms like the portmanteau "abandonscape" or turning grail from noun to verb *etc.* and, frequently, a subterranean associativeness, often surreal in its results, which moves freely beyond rigid boundaries of overt sense to aim for meanings accessible only, yet hauntingly so, at a subconscious level for the reader. At times, such conjunctions are reminiscent alike of Dada's experimentations designed to shock the mind into seeing the world afresh, freed of the limitations of conventional categorisations, and the grotesque bedfellowings of medieval misericord carvings. To select just one of a myriad possible instances, from "Origins of Norwich": "revelations, oh, so divine: that blood and death / can slice a little dot of carrot where a woman finds a mate".

The same poem also well illustrates, its sole Arthurian reference in "until the close where Mary grails the sky / and there the uncreated order pours," how in many of these poems the link is tenuous, tangential, even near subconscious, often with such words as Grail or Pendragon acting rather as the American flag did on the Moon in 1969, an isolated symbol of connection with a larger entity, as indeed happens in "Peter's Fish, Kinneret": the apostle, meditating by Galilee's waters,

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sees in the catch-preserving ice "splintered Grail-sweet ice-melt stars like fish" in a poem indicative both of the temporal and geographic spread of subjects and Webb's associative imagery.

Webb is open, too, to variety in forms, from traditional, including the demanding intricate, through the reversed pattern of "Merlin's Ribcage", which starts and ends with the powerful "Bones rim the world's horizon, arced to breathe" to such ingenuities as, in "Quest for Truth (Incubus/Succulus [sic] poem)", having standard and bold set textlines alternate: reading only the former, or the latter, gives two separate poems, while reading without discrimination between the two reveals a third. "Magdalene's Grail (A Found Poem)" consists of lines from 21 of George Herbert's Christian poems, with patient ingenuity linked into a new whole.

Far from Christian, though, is "Transmigration"'s resurrection, instead of being Celtic-sinister, as "corpses ... at a round table / crossing swords ... fry flashing in sockets (...) a pair of bleeding moons" begin to "breathe new lungs, now out now in." An eclectic cross-cultural Annwn appears in "Arthur's Labyrinth", effective despite the ill-judged punning of "tail of a tale", as the poet demands: "Paint me a cave-dwelling ceiling / where shades flick in cavernous shades (...) Where Excalibur bleeds deep in mountains, / sweet roof-touching Sistine of healing."

Her three-page-plus reminting of the "Morte D'Arthur" mingles a time when "roots of knights are torn from their find seats / to seed a forest of felled stumps that stretch / the seat of Arthur to the farthest sea" with Bedivere's dream visions of the far future taking him past the bloodbath Somme to today's London by night, complete with "its Livingstones safely tucked in bed", its "crag of Parliament", "rumbling seas of Eurostar close by", "all-seeing Eye" and, near the memorably imaged "Two sphinxes, dark as Camelot new-sacked", the Avilion barge under the moon, "a Siamese of black and white".

One of her directly Grail-visioning poems, "Alabaster Cup", intriguingly localises Gerard Manley Hopkins' concepts of instress and inscape, exteriorising them as physical

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descriptions rather than modes of poetic approach, in the line "at inscape shores of Avalon, destroyed, (...) where pastured islands graze, instress a priest / of Arthur's bones laid scattered in the void".

"Lark Rise to Candleford", already mentioned for its redirection of a well-known title, is a curious freeflow of erotic imagery, difficult to extract, reminiscent at times of Dylan Thomas or Walt Whitman in the strangenesses of its visionings of arousal focused around the femality of grail and maleness of Excalibur: "Let me dive-weave thighless harpies through orb pools at Midas' touch ... / (...) bare-cheeked moons (...) ungainly entry grail's a cup-spilt sanctum to delight (...) Leave me in your dishcloth skydive..., / to a dovecote crooning droppings whitewashed where the mouse hole stinks. / Leave blessed bride-wide thighs in fantail, where blanchmange is purely dressed (...) Sip my cup within a dell where crusty crescents lark mystique, / where sweet-fowl pigeon-crater-scapes crush rare juices to oblique."

"Blue Blood" is another instance of this poet's skill in creating, mind-map like, associative clusters of energy which would baffle attempts at a prose exegesis yet which, at some deeper level of the mind, down in the proverbial reptile brain perhaps, powerfully convey essences of the mythic strangenesses of Arthurian story, successfully mimicking their irresistible access to the archetype-preserving realm of the human unconscious. The poem, appropriately epigraphed by Seamus Heaney's line "to see myself, to set the darkness echoing", summing up how all find identification with one or another among the Matter's participants, is again a poem that requires fairly extensive quoting to give any sense of its essence: "sick to echo hooves / of treacle dripping my dry bones to life / where Guinevere lavish curls (...) shield tournament and lance / will glance an anvil of a tiger's brain (...) / for only Arthur, once and future king, / can rain stressed steel (...) Excalibur quails anvil's nape-shaped laugh (...) as treacle inhales sweaty kingship's palm".

The book's other poets include Norman Bissett, Richard J Bradshaw, Norman Brown, Peter Davies, Bryn

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Fortey, Ronnie Goodyer (to whose "lizard reality" the volume is dedicated), Martin Holroyd, Bernard M Jackson, Claire Knight, Etelka Marcel, Les Merton, Sidney Morleigh, Francis Arthur Rawlinson, Joan Sheridan Smith, and Peter Geoffrey Paul Thompson, who also provided the Foreword; [space prohibits] specific mention here of a few of their poems I found of particular interest for their unusual approaches to Arthurian themes... *cs*

Steve Sneyd

DJ Tyrer editor

Grail 3

Atlantean Publishing 2009 41pp
Illustrations Chris Catt James, David Leverton, Ian Brown, Alan Hunter, Pamela Harvey, DJ Tyrer and Joe Miller
£3.99 (cheques payable to "DJ Tyrer")
Overseas orders £5.00 (sterling, payable to "DJ Tyrer") or US\$10 in dollar bills,
Atlantean Publishing, 38 Pierrot Steps, 71 Kursaal Way, Southend-on-Sea, Essex SS1 2UY, UK
<http://atlanteanpublishing.web.officelive.com/grail3.aspx>

Once again, perhaps for the last time considering that DJ Tyrer stated in his introduction that he is going to let the grail theme rest for the immediate future, it is my pleasure to review the latest edition of *Grail*, *GRAIL 3*. As in the two previous editions, all entries are more or less grail related.

GRAIL 3 opens with thought-provoking and amusing poems by Aeronwy Dafies, Ann Keith, the always intriguing Steve Sneyd, and DJ Weston. Several other equally entertaining poems are held back to be found between the short stories throughout this volume. An excellent 'Grail Haiku' by DJ Tyrer is even thrown in to distract and delight the reader.

Twelve short stories are contained in this issue covering a wide variety of themes and genres. Almost all of the authors of these excellent tales are past contributors to previous editions of *Grail*. The first offering, *Question Time*, by Steve Sneyd, involving aliens in search of the grail gives us a glimpse of the lengths an aggrieved lover will go to get revenge on her former beau. Next, DJ Davidson's *Jin Yu & The Grail* appears to be a premier instalment of what may be a continuing

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series. Jin Yu of the Shao Lin Monastery must travel to London to prevent the evil Chou Hu from obtaining the grail and using it for nefarious purposes. For your pleasure, Bryn Fortey reveals a different kind of hereafter for musicians in his story, *The Place*.

Panopticon is an intricate and sophisticated science fiction tale of a twist in time and space that enables a woman to meet the parents she never knew and meet the child that will eventually grow up to become her. *The Pyramid of Light* takes us on ironic, light-hearted and humorous trek through the jungle in search of the grail. Both are contributions by DJ Tyrer.

The talented Pamela Harvey enriches this issue of *Grail* with two stories that are both up to her customary high literary standards. She explores her favorite themes of the mystical, ethical and moral nature of mankind and the universe in *A Breath of Hellfire* and *The Refugee*.

Ian Brown proves that obtaining the grail by any means available does not always produce the results one was hoping for in *The Long Road*. Ash Miller conjures up shades of *Soylent Green* in her short story, *The Coolsleep Corporation*. Angela Morkos paints a poignant portrait of a woman that seeks her grail, affection, through music and daydreams in *The Lonely Housewife's 'Food of Love'*. *The Tinker-Man's Tale* by Cardinal Cox explains the mythological origin of tinkers. Rounding out this fine collection is Joe Miller's superb tale of a knight's quest for redemption throughout the ages after losing the grail, *In Those Days*.

Unless circumstances change, this will most likely be the last issue of *Grail*. If it is, we can at least be comforted by the fact that all the issues have been a pleasure to read and have given us the opportunity to read the works of authors whose voices we would not have heard without its existence.

We can always hope that the circumstance that DJ Tyrer describes will appear sometime in the future. In the meantime we can take solace in the fact that other anthologies based on other topics will continue to be published for our continued entertainment. *cs*

Larry Mendelsberg

Pendragon XXXVI No 2

Geoffrey Ashe

Merlin: the Prophet and his History

The History Press 2008 £9.99

978-0-7509-4150-1 PB 190pp illus

Ashe produced his first book on the Arthurian legends – *King Arthur's Avalon* – in 1957, and fifty years on he still returns to the Matter of Britain, most recently in this overview of Merlin (first published in 2006 as a hardback by Sutton, now subsumed into The History Press). Jess Foster consulted Ashe when she founded the Pendragon Society, and he was the first of only two Presidents (the other was Bill Russell) until differences led to a parting of the ways.

In his own words Ashe "traces the evolution of the legend, the growth of Merlin as a character, his possible historical aspect, and the principal treatments of him in literature," and adds a supplementary list of modern transformations. There is a select group of illustrations which reflect different aspects of Merlin's developing story, and a useful bibliography (would that it had been divided up into fiction and non-fiction).

Ashe was famously described as a "middlebrow" author, and here he writes with his customary confidence, born of long familiarity with the material, eschewing scholarly references (or even, disappointingly, an index) and revisiting old themes of his. As always, he writes with flair and ease, and there is the usual oblique approach to some of the strands he teases out which means the subject is illuminated as if by flashes of lightning. This is, above all, a personal response, as befits someone who lives on a site in Glastonbury chosen as Merlin's "nest" by novelist Persia Woolley. *cs*

Chris Lovegrove

Brian John

The Bluestone Enigma

Greencroft Books 2008 £9.95

978-0-905559-89-6 PB 160pp illus

Trefelin, Cilgwyn, Newport,
Pembrokeshire SA42 0QN

Brian John, who lives in Pembrokeshire, has had a long interest in this whole subject area. A Geography graduate of Jesus College, Oxford, he went on to obtain a D Phil there for a study of the Ice Age in Wales. Among other occupations he was a field scientist

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in Antarctica and a Geography Lecturer in Durham University, and is currently a publisher and the author of a number of articles, university texts, walking guides, coffee table glossies, tourist guides, titles on local folklore and traditions, plus books from popular science to local jokes. His credentials are self-evident when it comes to discussing Stonehenge.¹

One of the strongest modern myths about Stonehenge to have taken root is that the less monumental but no less impressive so-called bluestones were physically brought by prehistoric peoples from the Preseli Hills in south-west Wales to Wiltshire. The second strongest modern myth is that the whole saga was somehow remembered over a hundred or more generations to be documented by Geoffrey of Monmouth in the 12th century as a feat of Merlin. In this self-published title Dr John examines these and other myths and finds them wanting in terms of echoing reality.

His key points include the fact that not only do the bluestones derive from at least fifteen different locales in West and South Wales (not just the Preselis), there is no evidence at all for any stone-collecting expeditions from as far afield as this, let alone cultural links between Wessex and West Wales.

He deduces that bluestones were present "on or near" Salisbury Plain at least a millennium before Stonehenge was commenced, and were not especially selected for their quality, their supposed magical significance or healing properties. How did the stones get to Wessex? The author's expertise in geomorphology allows him to discourse authoritatively on how Welsh stones could have been brought by the great Irish Sea glacier as far east as Bath, the Mendips and Glastonbury (though uncertainty still exists whether it reached as far as Salisbury Plain).

If there was no Grand Designs project to transport the stones from the Preselis (and the author effectively demolishes the case for prehistoric technology being up to the task) then it follows that the tale of Merlin moving stones from Ireland to Wessex is not a reflection of

¹ <http://www.netcomuk.co.uk/~brianj/bluestones59.html>

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historical reality. (Does it not seem likely that this is Geoffrey of Monmouth's elaboration of the folktale motif of a demigod or the Devil – Merlin was the son of the Devil after all – moving landscape features around at will?)

While *The Bluestone Enigma* doesn't come up with definitive answers to tell us the final story of the bluestones, it does put paid to the imaginative but impractical theories of certain archaeologists and writers of popular accounts of Stonehenge. Whether it will silence the myth-makers is another matter however. ☾

Chris Lovegrove

Angus Konstam

British Forts in the Age of Arthur

Osprey Publishing 2008 £11.99

9781846033629 PB 64pp illus

Fortress 80 Illustrated by Peter Dennis

"When the Romans left Britain around AD 410, the unconquered native peoples of modern Scotland, Ireland and Wales were presented with the opportunity to pillage what remained of Roman Britain," runs the blurb, repeating the time-honoured scenario of "Post-Roman Britons [doing] their best to defend themselves". This they largely did, suggests this book, by refurbishing Iron Age hillforts in the west of Britannia, and *British Forts in the Age of Arthur* focuses on "key sites" such as Dinas Powys, Cadbury-Congresbury and Castell Degannwy, as well as the more famous Tintagel and South Cadbury.

The first thing to be said is that this is an attractively illustrated paperback, largely in colour, with maps, photos and original reconstructions of the sites of Tintagel, Wroxeter, Dinas Emrys, South Cadbury, Birdoswald and Bamburgh. The second thing to be noted is that you have to use the utmost care in accepting the author's statements as gospel: there are plenty of half-truths and out-of-date bits of information, such as retailing the old theories about Castle Dore in Cornwall having a Dark Age hall. The bibliography shows an over-reliance on books published in the 70s, since when much re-evaluation has gone into Late Antiquity.

If you take the text and artist's reconstructions with a large pinch of salt then Konstam's book forms a useful

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introduction to the broad military background of the period and its evocation of "the most famous warlord of the 'Dark Ages'" and his "doomed" attempt to "unite the Britons in the face of Saxon invaders". ☾

Chris Lovegrove

Roger Simpson

Radio Camelot:

Arthurian legends on the BBC 1922-2005

D S Brewer 2008 £50.00

978 1 84384 140 1

As a boy growing up during World War II I am truly aware that the 'wireless' was a vitally important background and contribution to our lives, a prime source of news, entertainment, information and culture. With no distracting rival visual medium the eye didn't come into it so we could do two things at once: we ate our meals, played cards and board games, stuck model kits together, even did our homework with one ear on the radio. It was always there to keep us company but it was not insidious and certainly did not turn us into 'couch potatoes' so that we had no time for other things.

Later I was to study and practise sound and broadcasting techniques professionally and became far more conscious of the unique power of this medium, how it can conjure up imagery and deep response from within the listener because it doesn't restrict the imaginative process by presenting images of other people's interpretations. A well written, produced and acted radio drama can cross all boundaries and take you where there are no limits. For me Camelot always looks like a fairy tale place in television and films, the heroes look only human, their clothes are not quite appropriate, their dexterity with weapons too practised. Radio does not impose these visual limits on us, when we hear the echoes of footsteps in long corridors, the clash of steel on steel, the commanding resonance of the voice of an unseen King Arthur and the fatal beauty of Guinevere that enchants Lancelot we are given the freedom to see for ourselves what we would wish these to be.

I still recall hearing a radio play about Joseph Meyrick the Elephant Man when

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I was an adolescent, a time when one questions one's own identity and acceptability. What remains in my memory to this day is a haunting awareness of the terrible loneliness and isolation of this most unfortunate man. William Devlin's voice was alone sufficient to communicate this and the awed and guarded tones of the other actors portrayed the cruel tragedy of this god-forsaken man's condition – a sensitive and loving soul trapped in a hideous misshapen body – this surely is the power of the best that radio can offer us. The film of this story was good I admit but it took an actor of the calibre of Anthony Hopkins as the doctor to convey some of this unspoken pity which he did successfully throughout.

This reference work, a volume in the valuable Arthurian Studies Series of this publisher, is a unique and authoritative record of broadcast music, drama, literature and documentary programmes with Arthurian connections that were broadcast between 1922 and 2005 by the BBC. Radio has been described as the fugitive medium because programmes were not recorded at all in the early years and only since the 1960s more consistently, and for some reason the recordings that exist are only available to BBC employees anyway. This valuable resource has been compiled from an exhaustive analysis of:

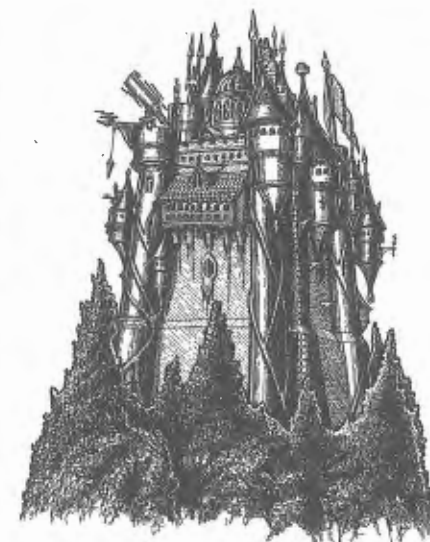
- i. The BBC Written Archive (scripts and correspondence around the productions);
- ii. The *Radio Times*, the BBC's organ since the beginning (listings, casts, articles and a collection of the splendid drawings which were the hallmark of the journal in the past; 35 of these are reproduced in black and white, a fine resource to have in itself);
- iii. *The Listener*, 1929-1991 (the BBC's own weekly analysis of programmes and important talks);
- iv. Private Recordings (only possible since tape recorders became widely available).

The material is written in five chapters, covering roughly twenty years each, divided into sections covering Music; the Historical Arthur; Reading and Adapting; 1. Medieval, Literature, 2. Post-Medieval Literature, 3. Drama, and 4. Making it New. There are ten

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invaluable appendices and a detailed index, all of which adds up to my firm recommendation to you: by hook or by crook, you must read this book. ☾

Fred Stedman-Jones



Serge Laget and Bruno Cathala Shadows Over Camelot

Days of Wonder 2005 \$49.95

For 3-7 players, ages 10+
60-80 minutes to play (manufacturer's notes)

www.daysof wonder.com

In my discussion of recreating the worlds of Arthur in games (*Pendragon XXXIII* Nos 3 & 4, *XXXIV* No 3), I split the games into three main groups: boardgames, figure wargames and roleplaying games. To a degree, *Shadows Over Camelot* draws together aspects from all three branches. It is a boardgame, or rather a boards-game, since there is one main 'Camelot' board (incorporating the Round Table, and the 'perpetual quests' of an area for besiegers of the castle, a tournament ground to battle the Black Knight, and representative areas of Pictish-marauder moorland and Saxon-invaded shore), plus three separate 'quest' boards, to allow the winning of Excalibur, the Grail and Lancelot's Armour (by defeating Lancelot in combat over a bridge). These three are magical trophies which grant a

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minor power to the possessor, or permit a one-off negation of a more powerful game-effect. Once the 'Lancelot' quest is completed – successfully or not – that board is flipped-over, and a fresh quest against a mighty dragon may begin. It is a figure-wargame, as a series of plastic figurines represents the, up to seven, player-Knights of the Round Table, each with his own unique game-ability (Arthur, Galahad, Gawain, Kay, Palamedes, Percival and Tristan), the Saxon and Pictish warriors and siege engines that may find themselves in conflict with the Knights, plus miniatures for the three quest trophies. It is a roleplaying game, since the player-Knights must cooperate with one another to defeat the game, but one of them may be secretly a traitor, working with the game against the other players instead.

The game mechanics revolve almost entirely around drawing and playing from two card decks, White and Black, effectively 'Good' and 'Evil', the former of benefit to the players, the latter to the game. Most cards relate to the completion of the various quests, though each pack has a few 'special' cards to add further complications. 'Merlin' cards can counteract the forces inimical to the Knights, for instance, while Morgan (le Fay) cards have different abilities to increase the players' problems, and might even manage to kill a wounded Knight. Guinevere, Mordred and Vivien feature among the cards too, but only in the Black pack. White cards are held concealed by each player, and may be used when appropriate to help complete a quest or maintain the Knights' strengths. Black cards generally come into play immediately.

The rules are fairly straightforward, and setting aside the explanatory notes, component and example illustrations, would fit into about eight of the twenty pages in the 'Rulebook'. A second, 16-page, "Book of Quests" reiterates and clarifies how the quests operate. It lists the player bonuses or penalties involved in successfully completing or failing them respectively, concluding with summaries of the cards and the Knightly special abilities.

Up to three points – Swords – are scored for each quest completed, White

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for player success, Black for the game's, and the game ends when a total of twelve Swords of either kind have been collected. It may end sooner, if seven Black Swords have been amassed, twelve siege engines have surrounded Camelot, or if all the Knights have been killed (other than the traitor).

All the components, including the two booklets, are beautifully-produced in a 'high-medieval' style, and, except for the miniatures, are in full colour (though the Knight figurines have a separately-coloured base each to help identify them easily on the board), creating a delightful visual impression to game with. The miniatures will take acrylic or enamel paint readily, for those wishing to complete the whole in colour.

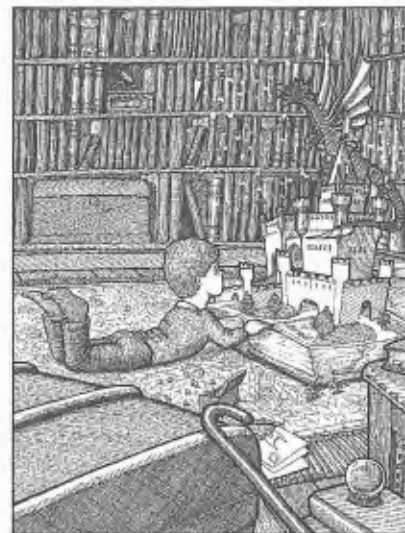
As with many of the better adult-oriented boardgames, the relative simplicity of the rules belies the complexities and challenges of successful game-play. The title indicates the setting is the latter stages of Arthur's reign, and there is often a sense of doom over the players' struggles, since even with skilful play and an average run of the cards, the players beat the game less than half the time in my experience. More players increase the chances of winning somewhat, but if one is a traitor who survives the game unmasked, that alone can turn around what seemed a narrow victory, as two White Swords become Black. Consequently, you need to be in the right frame-of-mind to tackle the game, knowing you may well lose despite everyone's best efforts. Although the manufacturer suggests three to seven players may participate, I've found six or seven is preferable, five rather borderline, with three or four probably best avoided. The game recommends playing three-handers without using the traitor rules, though even this seems unsatisfactory to me, while I've never yet won a four-hander where a traitor was present. This naturally creates problems in bringing together sufficient interested people who would be willing to play the game, as the potential presence of a traitor makes it difficult for fewer players to successfully 'double-up', and play more than one Knight each.

Overall, I've been slightly disappointed by *Shadows*. It does capture the flavour of the 'late' period of

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Arthurian tales, when all can seem Grail and Wasteland, with too many challenges to ever overcome. However, even a victory for the players can seem uncomfortably marginal. There can be entertainment along the way despite this, dependent on what player-interaction occurs. For example, players cannot communicate directly to each other regarding the cards or card-values they hold, and such conversations must be couched in character-terms, which as with all roleplaying, can create a wealth of possibilities, and add to the atmosphere of the whole. Perhaps in this case, it is indeed 'better to travel hopefully, than to arrive'. ²

Alastair McBeath



bookworm

Views and previews of Arthurian books

NON-FICTION

The Knightly Tale of Golagros and Gawane, edited by Ralph Hanna (Scottish Text Society / Boydell & Brewer £35.00/\$70.00 192pp HB 9781897976296), is described as "the finest of all Older Scots romances". Written during the last quarter of the fifteenth century, and appearing in print in 1508, it deals with "matters of sovereignty and chivalry [with] its persistent interest in negotiated

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exchanges rather than outright warfare, and ... moving depictions of the limitations of an aristocratic ethos fundamentally dedicated to destructive violence". The introduction and notes make it clear that the verse romance was derived from a prose continuation of the Old French *Perceval* but was also influenced by the earlier romance from the borders of north-western England, *The Awntyrs of Arthur at the Tarn Wadling*.

Edwin Pace's *Arthur and the Fall of Roman Britain* (Invermark Books 978 0955420 146 £12.95) claims to be "the first genuine narrative history for fifth century Britain", with the author suggesting that the only real explanation, given the evidence, is that "a powerful military ruler known as the Dux Bellorum dominated Post-Roman Britain for two decades". Pace believes that Vortigern, "the Proud Tyrant" of Gildas and Nennius, must be identified with both Arthur and Riothamus. "Exhaustive re-examination" of Gildas' writings tell us "precisely who the Arthur of legend really was" and proves, the author asserts, that the *Historia Brittonum* and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* "actually derive from an accurate chronology for fifth century Britain".²

Marilyn Floyd has lived in and around Avallon for ten years and was asked by the editor of *Burgundy Today* to research the connections if any, between Avallon in Burgundy, King Arthur and Morgan la Fay. With the help and guidance of Geoffrey Ashe she has spent the last three years doing just that.³ Her forthcoming book *King Arthur's French Odyssey: Avallon in Burgundy* is due to be published in October 2009 (Pegasus Elliot MacKenzie Publishers Ltd, Cambridge). "King Arthur belongs to France too!" she proclaims, "in particular the association of the Neolithic / Celtic / Roman healing sanctuary, Les Fontaines Salées, with Riothamus' retreat from Bourges." She believes that this is a completely new thesis, and that no other site or book links the two.

² <http://www.invermarkbooks.co.uk/page14.html>

³ Many of the results are on the site in the *Historic Places, Myths and Legends* section www.burgundytoday.com/historic-places/myths-legends/index.htm

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CS

King Arthur Lives in Merrie Carlisle, by Stephen Matthews (Bookcase £15.00 PB 226pp 9781904147411), suggests that Carlisle is the setting for more stories about King Arthur than any other city, with Malory placing his most dramatic scenes in Carlisle. Tracing King Arthur's association with Carlisle throughout the Middle Ages, one reviewer thinks this book is "full of more questions than answers as to the role of Carlisle in this powerful tradition", but it's questionable whether the town was "like Spitzbergen in its isolation after the Romans left".⁴

Ralph Ellis likes challenging Biblical orthodoxy, and has written six books to prove it. His *King Jesus* (Edfu Books £18.00) was published in April 2008, and his website claims that the Romans wanted to impose taxes on King Jesus and Queen Mary Magdalene, the richest couple in Syrio-Judaea, an imposition that provoked the Jewish Rebellion. "King Jesus fought and lost that war, and so he was crucified, reprieved and sent into exile in Roman England. In those remote lands, King Jesus became known as Atur-tti (the Egyptian) or 'King Arthur and the twelve disciples of the Last Supper Table'." This identification of Jesus as a wealthy, royal, warrior-hero of first century Judaea may sound bizarre, but that is what the texts say." *The Western Daily Press* said that Ellis'

⁴ Angela Locke "Legend's rich tapestry" *The Cumberland News* April 3 2009

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theories are "highly controversial, and have often been dismissed, but never refuted, by mainstream theologians and historians" – maybe because these mainstream scholars thought better than to concern themselves with a stagnant pond.⁵

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight by Anon was at the top of the *Guardian's* list for Ten of the Best Christmases in fiction (December 20 2008) – Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* only came in at No 4.

FICTION

The Road to Camelot, an anthology of short stories aimed at young adults, which Sophie Masson compiled and edited in 2002, has just been re-issued by Random House Australia. The anthology features fourteen of Australia's "best writers of fantasy", including Garth Nix, and "centres around the childhood and adolescence of characters from the Arthurian legend, from Arthur himself to Merlin, Lancelot, Guinevere, Mordred, Gawain and many more".⁶

Philip Kelly's *Duncan of the Britons* (Pegasus Publishers £7.99) is set in 1380, "three hundred years since the Norman invaders took the Kingdom from the Saxons. Destined to be branded with the mark of his ancestor, Arthur, thirteen-year-old Duncan faces a life of hunger and poverty like the rest of his people, the remaining band of Britons. A chance encounter, a Saxon plot to regain the throne, and the boy is thrown headlong into adventures he could not have dreamed of, in Royal Palaces, fighting with Mediterranean pirates, at the court of a great Eastern Potentate, in London – a city in the turmoil of the Peasant's revolt."

Jacob Polley's *Talk of the Town* (Picador £9.99 256pp) is set in Carlisle at the end of the summer holidays in 1986. A boy called Arthur, who is in trouble with a local gang, has disappeared. and his friend Chris goes out of the city into the wilderness in what one reviewer calls

⁵ <http://www.edfu-books.com/books.html> and Geoff Ward "Jesus and the link to legend of King Arthur" *Western Daily Press* May 23 2008

⁶ A book trailer for *The Road to Camelot* has been uploaded onto You Tube, at www.youtube.com/sophievmasson

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"a modern quest narrative, in which the grail is both innocence and experience" partly focused on the recovery of that lost friend and partly on "an escape from a life that offers [...] nothing but boredom and hidden sorrow".⁷

Andy McDermott's *The Secret of Excalibur* (Headline £19.99) features Dr Nina Wilde of the UN International Heritage Agency. She has already discovered Atlantis and the tomb of Hercules in previous novels, and is now in search of the mythical sword which "holds the power of an incredible energy" with the help of a former SAS serviceman who happens to be her finacé.⁸

Alastair Reynolds' *Zima Blue and Other Stories* (Gollancz £18.99) is a SF collection of 14 stories and novellas, with a "thrilling" Merlin trilogy featuring "a starship fleeing a merciless alien foe" as Merlin tries to use ancient technologies to save humankind (Reynolds is from South Wales).⁹ Conversely, *The Last Watch* is the 2008 sequel of a Russian SF trilogy by Sergei Lukanenko translated by Andrew Blomfield (Heinemann PB £12.99 376pp) in which magician Anton Gorodetsky polices Dark magicians, and encounters vampires in Edinburgh as battle rages for "control of Merlin's legacy on the seventh level" – a magical realm, it goes without saying.¹⁰

And now, a trio of items about Geoffrey Ashe's theory that Arthur was really Riothamus, a historical leader of the Britons. Isabelle Merlin's new book, *Cupid's Arrow*, comes out in August this year in Australia (Random House Australia). She describes it as "a romantic thriller for teenagers, based on a bedrock of Arthurian legend, and set now in the French (Burgundian) town of Avallon. Amongst other things, it brings in elements of Geoffrey Ashe's theory about Riothamus". 16-year old Fleur Griffon has had weird and scary dreams

⁷ John Burnside "Yer doin nowt" *Guardian Review* July 11 2009

⁸ Denis Kilcommons "Never a dull moment" *Huddersfield Daily Examiner* December 5 2008

⁹ Eric Brown's SF choice *Guardian Review* April 2009

¹⁰ Review *Daily Telegraph* October 25 2008)

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since childhood, and is really "creeped-out" when she starts dreaming of being hunted by an unseen, sinister archer. But when her bestselling-author mother inherits the magnificent library of Bellerive Manor, former home of French writer Raymond Dulac, Fleur forgets all about her fears. Bellerive Manor is near the ancient French town of Avallon, reputedly the last resting-place of the 'real' King Arthur. In the nearby magical green forest Fleur meets a handsome, mysterious young woodsman. But, as all good dust jackets tell you, "the nightmare is just about to begin..."¹¹

Tony Hays' mystery novel *The Killing Way* (Tor Forge / Macmillan) is described by Geoffrey Ashe himself as "an outstanding contribution to modern Arthurian literature". Set in fifth-century Britain, at Cadbury hill-fort in Somerset, the novel includes an "accurate" map of the fort to add "verisimilitude for the reader familiar with that location". The Britons have a leader called the Rigotamos or Supreme King, what Geoffrey Ashe assures us is "the authentic original form" of Riothamus. Arthur is the favoured candidate to be a new leader but sinister happenings ensue, and detective work follows. "This book comes closer to the probable reality of the time than any other work of fiction I've read," writes Ashe. "Yes, it might actually have been like that." The publishers advise you to "think *CSI: Medieval*: gritty, powerful, and with the true ring of historical perspective and a character who sees more than those around him ... the first in a mystery series that is sure to be a hit with both mystery readers and historical fans alike."¹²

Bruce Beatie, Professor Emeritus of Classics and Comparative Literature at Cleveland State University, Ohio, drew attention on Arthurnet to science-fiction writer Poul Anderson's now twenty-year-old novel *The Boat of a Million Years* (1989) which "follows the lives of

¹¹ A trailer appears at www.youtube.com/isabellemerlin – more about *Cupid's Arrow* and the author's other books appears at <http://isabelle.merlin.googlepages.com>

¹² www.tonyhays.com and <http://us.macmillan.com/thekillingway>

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four humans who, to their surprise and discomfiture, turn out to be immortal, over more than 2000 years... In chapter 11, the oldest of them reveals his history to Cardinal Richelieu in 1640; and as part of his story tells the following about how he became a baptized Christian: "It was in Britain after the Romans were gone, at the court of a warlord. They called him Riothamus, their High King, but mainly he had some cataphracts. With them he staved off the English invaders. His name was Artorius... "Oh, I was no knight of his, merely a trader on my rounds... Nor did I meet any Lancelot or Gawain or Galahad, nor see any glittering Camelot. Little of Rome lingered there. In fact, it's only my guess that this was the seed corn of the Arthur legend."

One web review calls it "clearly a deeply personal work, written by a man late in his career who has all of his life to look back upon, and for whom mortality is still perhaps a great and wondrous — but no longer frightening — mystery."¹³

A self-taught Russian Jewish immigrant to the US, Albert E Kanter, set up Classic Comics after coming up with the idea of "adapting famous tales and classic novels into comic book form and thereby [interesting] youngsters in these great stories". In October 1941 he published the first comic working of *The Three Musketeers* under the heading Classic Comics, but by the late 1960s the company foundered and in 1971 *Classics Illustrated*, as they had become known, stopped being produced. In 2002, Jaak Jarve (trading as Jack Lake Productions Inc) acquired the publishing rights to the *Classics Illustrated* series "and re-introduced *Classics Illustrated Juniors*, *Classics Illustrated* and *Classics Illustrated Special Issues* to a new generation of readers". Classic Comic Store Ltd is now publishing the series throughout the UK, Republic of Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and Republic of South Africa, with the first twelve issues beginning with *The War of the Worlds* and continuing via *Oliver Twist* and *Robin Hood to Jane Eyre*. These titles are gradually re-appearing in retail outlets and will include *Knights of the Round*

¹³ <http://www.sfreviews.net/boatmillion.html>

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Table as one of those twelve re-issues.¹⁴

PEOPLE

Scott Lloyd, a Masters student at the Department of History & Welsh History at Aberystwyth University, is putting the finishing touches to his thesis on the *Arthurian topography of Wales* and is hoping a book version will be in print by Christmas 2010. It covers every site in Wales either bearing the name Arthur, associated with him in folklore or any of the literary sources. Currently the gazetteer runs to about 250 sites split into two, sites that can be identified (or nearly!) and those that can't. Every site has been traced back to its earliest source.

Also included will be a detailed look at any Arthurian source that refers to Wales and currently breaks down roughly into six chapters on Latin texts, French/romance texts, Welsh texts, Humanist works, Antiquarian/tourist texts and 1820 onwards. The main aim of this was to try and get to the bottom of these topographical references and see how they actually came about. Do they really preserve some sort of tradition? Unlikely, in his view, but he says that there are some interesting snippets along the way!

"I do intend to extend the scope to include England and Scotland in a later work if I get a chance ..." He thinks that Geoffrey Ashe and Thomas Green's works are the best currently available for the rest of the country and Chris Grooms' *Giants of Wales: Cewri Cymru* (Edwin Mellen Press 1993) is also worthy of note. Scott spoke to the Society on his research at the Hay Round Table in 2007.

J R R Tolkien's *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrun* (HarperCollins £9.49 HB 384pp 978-0007317233), edited and introduced by Tolkien's son Christopher, was published in May 2009. This previously unpublished work, Tolkien's own retelling in English narrative verse of the epic Norse tales of *Sigurd the Völsung* and the *Fall of the Niflungs*, was written while Tolkien was Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford University during the 1920s and 30s, before he wrote *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the*

¹⁴ <http://cijlpreprints.classiccomicstore.com/>

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Rings. It tells the story of the Norse hero, Sigurd, the dragon-slayer, the revenge of his wife, Gudrun, and the fall of the Nibelungs.

No part, apparently, has ever been reproduced or quoted from since it was written over seventy years ago. Introducing the work is one of Tolkien's lectures on Norse literature, itself the single greatest influence on Tolkien's writings, with many of the events in Sigurd and Gudrun traceable through to *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* and, of course, finding parallels in many Arthurian stories.

A recent reference to Wikipedia's article on T E Lawrence drew attention to the fact that "among the books Lawrence is known to have carried with him on his military campaigns is Thomas Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*; accounts of the 1934 discovery of the Winchester Manuscript of the *Morte* include a report that Lawrence followed Eugene Vinaver — a Malory scholar — by motorcycle from Manchester to Winchester upon reading of the discovery in *The Times*."

The T E Lawrence Studies website discusses the three books that Lawrence carried and read during the Arab Revolt. Writing to D G Hogarth on April 7th 1927, Lawrence declared that "My books in Arabia were the *Morte*; Aristophanes (I read all the *Peace*, very gratefully, and without much technical trouble) and *The Oxford Book of English Verse*." To Robert Graves he wrote, "As a bookman you may be amused to know that I carried with me during the desert war, 1) a *Morte d'Arthur*, 2) Aristophanes, 3) *Oxford Book of English Verse*. And no other books." Graves quoted directly from part of this letter in his biography *Lawrence and the Arabs* (London, 1927). The copy of the *Morte* was "probably not" the copy that was in the Clouds Hill library when Lawrence died, according to the website.

In 1926, as recounted in Lawrence's *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, "after two or three comfortable days in Khartoum, resting and reading the *Morte d'Arthur* in the hospitable palace, I went down towards Cairo..." Elsewhere he wrote that in his "saddle-bags was a *Morte d'Arthur*. It relieved my disgust..." Lawrence was born in 1888, just over 120

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years ago.¹⁵ (Incidentally, Nicholas Lezard recommends the "sturdy OUP hardback edition" of Malory for holiday reading, "surprisingly easy to read after five centuries, and steeped in atmosphere". Alternatively, he suggests *The Once and Future King*, including the gruesome description of Morgause boiling a cat alive.¹⁶)

Penelope Lively's 16th adult novel, *Family Album*, was the reason for a recent *Guardian* interview exploring some of her past oeuvre. *Astercote* (1970) was her first children's novel, but it wasn't until *The Ghost of Thomas Kempe* (1973) that she found her register. In between were three others — *The Whispering Knights* (1971), *The Wild Hunt of Hagworthy* (1971) and *The Driftway* (1972) — but she dismisses them now as "crap, quite honestly". A shame, as *The Whispering Knights* is her only overtly Arthurian tale, in which three children, William, Susie and Martha, inadvertently conjure up Morgan Le Fay. More a novella than a novel, the book's title refers to an old legend about the Rollright Stones in Oxfordshire. *Treasure of Time* (1979) is one of her adult fiction titles, the story of an archaeologist whose personal life is disturbed by the present.¹⁷

Author Hilary Mantel, whose claustrophobic *Beyond Black* (2005) was shortlisted for the Orange Prize, wished herself a boy when young and contemplated a life as a knight errant. As

¹⁵ Jonathan Evans "The Winchester Manuscript" and Walter F Oakeshott "The Finding of the Manuscript," in J A W Bennett ed (1963) *Essays on Malory* (Oxford: Clarendon), quoted in http://www.telawrence.info/telawrenceinfo/life/biog/biog_faq.shtml Nicholas Lezard recommended the "sturdy OUP hardback edition" of Malory for holiday reading, "surprisingly easy to read after five centuries, and steeped in atmosphere". Alternatively, he suggested *The Once and Future King* (including the gruesome description of Morgause boiling a cat alive);

¹⁶ Nicholas Lezard "Pack a punch" *Guardian Review* July 19 2008

¹⁷ Sarah Crown "In old age you can close your eyes and summon your youth at will..." *Guardian Review* July 25 2009

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she plans her next book in a taxi she thinks of "the later Henry VIII, and his poor health, and I wonder what it was like for his advisers to roll in for the morning strategy meeting and find him surrounded by his doctors." She takes out her notebook and writes "Basin of blood. Urine flask. Holy Grail?" Then she worries in case of a road accident "people will think it is my shopping list."¹⁸

Fantasy writer Diana Wynne Jones has written another sequel to *Howl's Moving Castle* entitled *The House of Many Ways*. It continues the story of Sophie Hatter who, now married to the wizard Howl, is thus known also as Mrs Pendragon. Blessed with the ability to talk life into objects, she and Howl have a young son named Morgan. A charming (but at times disturbing) tale it is worth seeking out, as are all of her novels.

Peter Dickinson, now in his eighties, has authored a wide range of books including children's books and detective stories. Rather to his disgust he is perhaps best-known for his *The Changes Trilogy* which appeared as separate children's novel around forty years ago, beginning with *The Weathermonger* (1968) and continuing with *Heartease* (1969) and *The Devil's Children* (1970). *The Weathermonger*, while perhaps the weakest of the three, is the most Arthurian. In the author's own words, "The Weathermonger sprang from a nightmare. I had lain awake retelling the dream, putting myself in charge of it, outwitting or defeating its monsters, in order to get back to sleep, but instead had spent the rest of the night finishing the story in my head." This dream furnished the premise of the trilogy, "set in a near-future England in which use of machines is equated with witchcraft", all brought on by the chance re-awakening of Merlin.

There are Arthurian allusions other than Merlin scattered through the trilogy – in *The Weathermonger* two brothers called Basil and Arthur (Basil of course derives from the Greek for "king") and in *The Devil's Children* a village leader called Arthur Bernard (the name Bernard derives from "bear") who comes,

¹⁸ Hilary Mantel "Author, Author" *Guardian Review* November 15 2008

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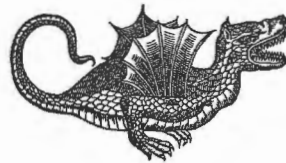
literally, to a sticky end – while, of three thousand British exiles who left France for Britain, only "seven returned in two stolen boats" to France, like Arthur's raid on the Otherworld.

When Gollancz published an omnibus edition to coincide with a TV adaptation (re-published by Puffin Books in 1985) Dickinson did his best to account for inconsistencies by adding linking passages between the three episodes, but it remains clear that the three books are powerful and detailed descriptions of survival in a Britain beset by a new Dark Age. The treatment of a revived Merlin is rather different from C S Lewis' *That Hideous Strength*, and it would be interesting to compare the new barbarian Britain conjured up in Simon Lister's *Shadow Lands* trilogy mentioned last issue with Dickinson's re-imaginings.¹⁹

Dickinson has also written *Merlin Dreams* (1988), linked stories, illustrated by Alan Lee, on Arthurian themes. He sets them "in a framework of Merlin drowsing the centuries away under his rock, waking from time to time and recalling some item from the Celtic past, and then dreaming a story suggested by it." Finally, *The Flight of Dragons* (1979), illustrated by Wayne Andersen, is a witty "pseudo-scientific paper on dragons as nature's only attempt to evolve lighter-than-air flight", well worth searching out as I recall from a sight of it in the early eighties. It remains in print, in a UK paperback from Paper Tiger and from Overlook Press in the US.

His son, John Dickinson, is also a writer of fantasy for young adults, and his sequence, beginning with *The Cup of the World* (2004), features a kind of anti-Grail in a trilogy of really dark and unrelenting novels.²⁰ CG

Chris Lovegrove and Steve Sneyd



¹⁹ http://www.peterdickinson.com/Biblio_YA.html#Changes

²⁰ <http://www.john-dickinson.net/index.html>

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PEOPLE

The death was announced in 2008 of artist and authoress Mary Caine (born 1916). Mary had a long association with the Pendragon Society, from at least the heady days of the Mind, Body and Spirit festivals in the 70s and 80s, and contributed letters and articles for the journal over the years.

She is best known for having continued the work begun by Katharine Maltwood (1878–1961) on the alleged Glastonbury Zodiac, which they both believed to date back to around 2700 BC.¹ As one commentary has it, on Katharine Maltwood's deathbed "Mary was passed the baton and she has dedicated herself to breathing life and human interest into the symbols that her predecessor, a sculptress and Theosophist, had identified in the landscape around Glastonbury".² Mary herself believed that "the Zodiac describes the journey of humanity towards union with the soul", and that the Glastonbury Zodiac, "representing the heavens on Earth, if consciously activated, could assist and support us in so many ways."

She was unabashed that, archaeologically, many of the features delineating the zodiac giants were made in recent times, and that etymologically the placename evidence she cited was incorrectly interpreted, authoring the self-published *The Glastonbury Zodiac: Key to the Mysteries of Britain* (Grael Communications 1978). She went on to identify a terrestrial zodiac in her part of the world (*The Kingston Zodiac* was produced by Capall Bann Publishing in 2001) and to champion her view of the past in *Celtic Saints and the Glastonbury Zodiac* (also Capall Bann).

While believing, with Katharine Maltwood, that the Glastonbury Zodiac

¹ http://www.maltwood.uvic.ca/k_maltwood/index.html

² <http://www.dkfoundation.co.uk/FriendsFoundationMaryCaine.htm>

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was "the fount and origin of all Arthurian and Grail myth", Mary was nevertheless generous in praise and support for the Society which was generally pursuing rather different directions in its various interpretations of the Matter of Britain, and willing to respond positively to issues raised in the journal.³

Then in 2009 the death of Old Etonian and Cambridge graduate John Michell at the aged of 76 was announced. Ironically *Fortean Times* was just about to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the publication of his counterculture classic, *The View over Atlantis*.⁴

The Pendragon Society first met him just before the publication of his first book, *The Flying Saucer Vision: the Holy Grail Restored* in 1967, and he contributed a short article to the journal on King Arthur and alignments (to be re-published in the *Jubilee Anthology*). Two years later *The View over Atlantis* introduced so-called ley lines, sacred engineering and evidences of lost civilisations to the general public, a book described by *Fortean Times* as "probably the most important book in the history of the hippy/underground movement and one that had far-reaching effects on the study of ancient phenomena".

After National Service he read modern languages at Trinity College. At this time he became addicted to marijuana (he eventually died from lung cancer, exacerbated no doubt from smoking what he called "the philosopher's friend"). His wide reading led him to Alfred Watkins and the concept of leys or landscape alignments. Michell believed that these were a kind of British version of feng shui in the countryside, harnessing powers that could levitate large rocks, among other things, and utilised by ancient societies.

He championed the Imperial system of measurement, founding the Anti-Metrication Board, studied UFOs and crop circles and held "conferences" on

³ Mary Caine "Child and Man: Ancient Mystery" *Pendragon XXVI* No 2 (1997) 24–28

⁴ Jonathan Sale "Champion of New Age ideas and author of the counterculture classic *The View Over Atlantis*" *Guardian* May 6 2009

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them. In 1971 the Glastonbury Fayre, precursor of the Glastonbury Festivals, was held on the first of the famous pyramidal stages, designed by Michell according to the "sacred geometry" he'd divined from studying and measuring ancient structures. (It was for this event that Pendragon published its "Glastonbury Fayre edition", now a rare collector's item.) No wonder satirist Richard Ingrams described him as "a conservative anarchist" for these and similar idiosyncrasies.

His wide-ranging interests and his inquisitive nature reportedly brought him "the status of a Merlin-like magus among his many followers and friends". These included the Rolling Stones (whom he apparently took to Stonehenge to hunt UFOs) – his family's Victorian estate near Newbury was later bought by Mick Jagger, and Jagger's former wife Jerry Hall appeared as a guest at his 70th birthday party.

One of his many books was *The Old Stones of Land's End*, which he dedicated to Prince Charles. This was a study of ancient alignments of Cornwall in which members of the Pendragon Society played a small part by ferrying him around the peninsula and thereby locating lost megaliths.

In 2006 it was reported that Michell surprised friends and family by marrying Denise Price, the Archdruidess of the Glastonbury Order of Druids, after a courtship of less than a month. His grown-up son Jason Goodwin said that two months later she threw him out. On this year's May Day, the ancient Celtic festival of Beltane, he was brought to be buried in Stoke Abbott church on a gypsy flat cart (bearing the painted legend "General Dealer") by a Welsh cob called Ruby.

Fred Stedman-Jones mentions Claus von Stauffenberg in his article on the Emperor Frederick, and his third son, Count Franz Ludwig von Stauffenberg, is reported to be "leading the German resistance against the Lisbon Treaty".⁵

The *Mail* article noted that he had secured a ruling from the constitutional court that "the powers of the Berlin

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parliament must be significantly strengthened" before Germany becomes a signatory to the treaty that the British right wing sees as creating a federal Europe. A prolonged delay before ratification could put the date after a British general election and a possible change of government – an outcome relished of course by the *Mail*. Stauffenberg, an attorney, was a member for the conservative Christian Social Union party of Bavaria in the Bundestag from 1976 to 1987 and a Member of the European Parliament from 1984 to 1992.

THE BOARDS

The *Guardian* gave five stars to the London Barbican recent production of Purcell's *King Arthur*, describing every second of it as "glorious and life-enhancing". This performance celebrated Henry Purcell's anniversary year (he was born in 1659) with British soloists and a French choir, orchestra and conductor. *King Arthur*, with a text by Dryden, flattered the Stuart line by linking it to Arthurian legends, and there are references to Sidney's *Arcadia*, Spencer's *The Faerie Queene* and Shakespeare's *The Tempest* with Merlin as "a latter-day Prospero".⁶

"What is Lohengrin about?" queried the *Evening Standard*'s critic in a notice about the Covent Garden production of *Lohengrin* in April: "The hero issues a stern injunction to his bride, Elsa, not to enquire about his identity or origins." The answer of course is that the distantly Grail-related story is an ancient folk-tale motif, and nothing to do with "real" life. This production, with only a 2-star rating, was castigated for being the sixth revival of a thirty-year-old staging with a misconceived "big idea", namely the confrontation of the old paganism and the new Christianity.⁷

The last year or so has definitely been the year for the emerald warrior and his adversary, particularly in Huddersfield. In late October 2008 at the Lawrence Batley Theatre there was a production of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* with puppetry and live music for audiences

⁶ Tim Ashley review, *Guardian* May 9 2009

⁷ Barry Millington review, *Evening Standard* April 28 2009

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aged 8 and upwards, presented by the New Perspectives Theatre Company. Based on Huddersfield boy Simon Armitage's translation, the text was adapted for the stage by artistic director Daniel Buckroyd and starred Leigh Kelly as the Green Knight in a cast of just four actors, with music by Matt Marks and design by Juliet Shillingford. The local paper's critic was disappointed with the language of an adult morality tale "neglected for easy laughs", while a national paper felt that the hero was played by Freddie Machin as a gormless teen or even "like a young Kenneth Williams" in a kind of *Carry On Camelot*: "make Gawain a sissy and you diminish the work's passion and mythic potency".⁸

A month later, on December 3rd, the "internationally acclaimed" storyteller Tim Ralph was joined by experimental percussionist Ashley B W B Tuck in another adaptation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* at the Marsden Mechanics Hall Library in Marsden, near Huddersfield. Tuck "weaves filmic sound scapes while [Ralph] unfolds the narrative through story and song". This was billed as suitable for adults and older children aged 12+, so presumably there was less slapstick in this PG performance than the LBT production.⁹

SCREEN NEWS

It's reported that Warner Bros will be adapting T H White's Arthurian quartet *The Once and Future King* for release in 2010, though this project has been rumoured since 2001 at least.¹⁰ The projected film is to be produced by the

⁸ Val Javin "Stage is set for LBT's classic world premiere" *Huddersfield Examiner* October 17 2008; Val Javin "Green Knight who should have listened to Simon's words" *Examiner* October 24 2008; Brian Logan review *Guardian* October 27 2008

⁹ "Magical retelling of Arthurian knight's tale" *Huddersfield Examiner* November 28 2006

¹⁰ Frank Kurtz "Once and Future King Scribe: Warner Bros. readying King Arthur movie project" *Hollywood Reporter* December 5 2001
http://www.mania.com/once-future-king-scribe_article_31517.html

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Mutual Film Company and the Mark Gordon Company and directed by Kenneth Lonergan, who may also be writing the screenplay. Principal photography is to take place in Ireland in early 2009. This follows two previous film adaptations, Disney's animated *The Sword in the Stone* (1963) and Lerner and Loewe's musical *Camelot* (1967); incidentally, the singing voice of Lancelot (played by Franco Nero in *Camelot*) was dubbed by session singer Gene Merlino.¹¹

Fantasy Arthurian movie *The Book of Beasts* was premiered in the US on the SciFi channel on Saturday 30th May, 2009. Set at or after the fall of Camelot, it was formerly titled *Merlin and the Book of Beasts*. Starring *Battlestar Galactica*'s James "Baltar" Callis and Laura Harris, it is set more than twenty years after the death of King Arthur when an evil wizard uses a magical book to take control of Camelot. Arthur's daughter (Laura Harris) teams up with the sons of the Knights of the Round Table to lure the legendary Merlin (James Callis) out of exile so he can help them fight the evil wizard in a blaze of CGI and clichéd screenplay. The DVD will be available in the US towards the end of August, and the trailer may still be available on the net.¹²

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight was broadcast early on Saturday June 13th on TV digital channel BBC Four. Introduced by Simon Armitage, the West Yorkshire poet went on the trail of what the BBC website calls "one of the jewels in the crown of British poetry", written about 600 years ago by an unknown author.

Armitage viewed as a combination of action-packed adventure, ghost story, steamy romance, morality tale and what he described as "the world's first eco-poem". He followed in the footsteps of Gawain from Camelot (here represented by Tintagel) through the Welsh Marches and the Wirral, ending up in the suitably atmospheric (and damp) Lud's Chapel in Staffordshire. He quoted passages from his own alliterative version of the poem, and presented a televisually captivating

¹¹ <http://www.thependragon.co.uk/OnceAndFutureKingFilm.htm>

¹² <http://www.imdb.com/video/screenplay/vi3315401241/>

⁵ Peter Osborne "A final victory in the war against euro-dictatorship" *Daily Mail* July 4 2009

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counterpart of his various radio explorations of the poem.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight was twinned with *Michael Wood on Beowulf* and broadcast immediately before, late on June 12th, also on BBC Four. In this lengthy programme, Michael Wood returned to the early medieval world of his first TV series for the BBC, *In Search of the Dark Ages*, which were aired in the early 1970s. Ranging from Sutton Hoo in East Anglia to Ruthwell in Scotland, the programme also featured poet Seamus Heaney (who translated *Beowulf*) and actor Julian Glover (who has done solo performances of *Beowulf* since the early 1970s, including a memorable presentation in the round at Bristol Old Vic attended by one of the compilers), and gave the first ever sight on TV of the original manuscript. Both programmes were part of the BBC Poetry Season.

The Lifeboat was a TV series created by Lynda La Plante and produced by Bloom Street Productions, running for just one series of nine episodes in 1994. The plot revolved around the lives and missions of the crew of a Welsh rescue boat and starred Brendan Gleeson among its many regulars. Pendragon interest centres on the St David's lifeboat station, originally built in 1911, and the nearby Ramsey Island (Ynys Dewi or St David's Island) which took on the fictional name of **Pendragon Island**. The series might even be available on DVD.

Last year Welsh actor **Ioan Gruffudd** starred as Tony Blair in Oliver Stone's *W*, another "heroic" role to add to his parts in *The Fantastic Four*, the eponymous seaman of the *Hornblower* TV films and *Lancelot in King Arthur*. He has also been made a bard at the National Eisteddfod – a role of which he may well be the most proud.

BBC's *Merlin* TV series finally aired on NBC in the States, to mixed reviews. *Variety*'s view seems to be typical regarding this "imported fantasy the Brits quaintly call a 'tea time' show" which name the reviewer thought appropriate "since this is a rather tepid drink". The hope was that *Merlin* "will disappear without much lamentation" as it was "clearly shopping for tricks in the bargain bin".¹³ Oh dear.

¹³ <http://www.variety.com/review/>

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The BBC spent over £45,000 to launch this first series of *Merlin* in 2008, with a party for more than 300 at the Oxo Tower in London. A spokesperson said it was "the most cost-effective way possible" to launch a new TV drama series, adding "We don't party for party's sake".¹⁴

The Da Vinci Code got its UK terrestrial premiere on TV channel Five in May 2009, a week before Dan Brown's prequel *Angels & Demons* opened in British cinemas. In interviews with the *Radio Times* Tom Hanks agreed that the book had "a lot of cockamamie stuff" though he found it hard to put down, while director Ron Howard said that "Religion clashing with technology is a hot-button issue Dan Brown has tapped into," though leaving it ambiguous as to whether he believed any of "the facts".¹⁵

Of peripheral Arthurian interest is the 2008 film *Miss Pettigrew lives for a day*, which is set just before the Second World War in London. Insignificant Guinevere Pettigrew becomes social secretary to American film actress Delysia LaFosse and their lives are changed forever. The novel by Winifred Watson (1907–2002) on which the film is based was first published in 1938 and reissued in the UK in 2000, selling over 22,000 copies. One review called it "an enchanting piece of fluff", but one would need to read the novel to see if the Arthurian links are limited to the use of Guinevere's name.¹⁶

Newly available to buy in 2008 was BBC DVD *Doctor Who: Battlefield* (Cert PG £19.99 96 mins), featuring Sylvester McCoy as the timelord. The Doctor gets caught up in a feud between King Arthur and Morgaine (played by Jean Marsh) when they recognise him as Merlin.

A very curious Arthur-related fact came in a footnote in Cardinal Cox's poetry pamphlet *One Night at the Brentford Burlesque*: the part of Llud in *Arthur of the Britons* (1972–3) was

VE1117940500.html?categoryid=32&cs=1

¹⁴ "BBC defends £45,000 bill for Merlin launch party" *Guardian* December 17 2008

¹⁵ "The Tom Hanks Code" *Radio Times* May 9–15 2009

¹⁶ "From rags to bitches" *Huddersfield Examiner* August 18 2008

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played by Jack Watson (1915–1999), the son of Vernon Watson who had been, pre-war, the music hall comedian Nosmo King. Nosmo took his stage name from a pair of swing doors with those very words written across them.

BROADCAST

In the BBC World Service Arts programme *The Strand* (April 10 2009) Laura Hubbard talked to Tom Williams about his new biography of **Raymond Chandler**, on the 50th anniversary of Chandler's death. Williams mentioned that he had noted the author's obsession with **Arthurian legend** in the book, and suggested that Chandler named his detective hero Marlowe as a veiled tribute to Malory, but while this theory has been about for some time it's not clear whether there is any evidence for it or if it is pure speculation. Chandler was a British citizen from 1907 (at the age of nine) until 1956, three years before his death, and was resident in Britain for many spells. One of his novels has the Arthurian-sounding title *The Lady in the Lake*, while *The Big Sleep* has a character called Moose Mallory.¹⁷

BBC Radio 3's Sunday Feature for April 26 2009 was *Leland's Travels*. Medievalist David Wallace explored the life and work of John Leland, commissioned by Henry VIII to search through the ancient libraries of all the religious houses of his kingdom and catalogue their literary treasures. When Leland discovered the truth of the matter – that the monasteries were to be dissolved and their libraries dispersed – he apparently went insane. The programme, which touched on his Glastonbury visit and attempts to prove

¹⁷ Christopher Routledge, in "Chandler's Reverse Romances", writes that General Sternwood, who appears in the first novel, *The Big Sleep* (1939) has "sometimes been described as a Fisher King, weakened and living on heat 'like a spider.' He looks out from his hothouse on a wasteland of spent oilfields. Marlowe is an Arthurian knight in a leaky convertible and General Sternwood chooses him restore order to his kingdom." <http://therumpus.net/2009/03/chandler%E2%80%99s-reverse-romances/>

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Arthur's existence, included extracts from Leland's diary read by Jeremy Northam.

BBC Radio 3's *Drama on 3* for July 12th was *The Idylls of the King* to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth of Alfred Lord Tennyson (in the same year as Charles Darwin). The *Radio Times* praised the programme's "cracking pace" and "careful variation of mood and voices in this atmospheric adaptation by poet Michael Symmons", produced and directed by Susan Roberts. Tim Piggot-Smith was both Narrator and Tennyson, and Arthur, Lancelot and Guinevere were played respectively by Jonathan Keeble, Simon Harrison and Kathryn Hunt. The producer described Tennyson as "a radio poet before the age of the radio". Look out for repeats, if you missed it.

EVENTS

North Americans have much opportunity to indulge their appetite for all things Arthurian. For example, a Medieval Fair was held at Reaves Park in the appropriately named Oklahoma town of **Norman** in early April this year. Held annually since 1976, this event "relives the Middle Ages with arts and crafts, food, games, jousting tournaments, human chess games, costume contests, and more," including "Games & rides for all ages! Face painting and wax hands! Fighting demonstrations!" and, of course, "**King Arthur and Sir Lancelot!**" One of the six stages is the **Camelot Stage**, on which human chess games and the costume contest takes place. You'll be glad to hear there is a weapons policy which states that "all weapons must be in a sheath or peace-tied [*sic*] at all times".¹⁸

An Arthurian-themed exhibition at the National Steinbeck Center at Salinas in California runs from August to November 2009. The 29th Steinbeck Festival Exhibition, *From This Stone and Anvil: Arthurian Legend Exposed and Abstracted* will be showcasing the works of The Octopi Collective, a "group of young, multi-faceted, professional artists" who use illustration, photography, encaustic works and

¹⁸ <http://www.medievalfair.org/index.html>

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sculptures in contemporary form that relate to the stories and characters of John Steinbeck's *The Acts of King Arthur and his Noble Knights*, taking inspiration from "imagery and notions conjured from the famous novel and Arthurian legend, to create works of art harkening to the illuminated manuscripts of the time period".

The Society for the Study of Popular Culture and Middle Ages and the unlikely-sounding Alliance for the Promotion of Research on the Villains of the Matter of Britain invited proposals for their upcoming sessions at next May's International Congress on Medieval Studies. Their two session topics are "The Evergreen Romance: the Reception of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in Popular Culture" and "Why Arthur? Reflections on the International Appeal of the Matter of Britain in the Post-Medieval World". The latter will be – of course – a round table discussion. The Society is "particularly interested in answering the following question: Is the Arthurian legend simply a good story, which appeals to individuals around the world, or is there another reason (eg nostalgia for a lost age or hope for a better world) beyond the worldwide distribution and popularity of the Matter of Britain, even in countries with little or no ties to British culture? Participants in these sessions will offer a global perspective on the reception and appropriation of Arthurian characters – both heroes and villains – and themes from the end of the Middle Ages to the present."¹⁹

The 45th International Congress on Medieval Studies takes place in May 2010 at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, and as usual there are several sessions devoted to Arthurian Studies. Sponsored Sessions – sessions organized by learned societies, associations, or institutions – are planned to include *Arthurian Geography* (given by Elizabeth Archibald of the University of Bristol, England) and several sessions sponsored by the Center for Medieval and Early Modern Studies, University of Florida, including *The Archaeology of*

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Early Medieval Europe (Ironworking in the Middle Ages; Early Medieval Hillforts in Central Europe: Strongholds or Central Places? and Albania in Late Antiquity). The International Arthurian Society, North American Branch sponsors sessions on The Young(er) Arthur; Food and Drink in the Arthurian Tradition; The Seven Deadly Sins in the Arthurian Tradition; and Clothing and Textiles in the Arthurian Tradition.

The Tristan Society introduces *Tristan Locales, Fanciful, Real, and Metaphoric*, while the International Marie de France Society is sponsoring *Performances of Bisclavret* (a pre-Arthurian werewolf tale), and the Pearl-Poet Society has *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and the Arthurian Tradition*. Special sessions include a "Round Table" on Laurie Finke and Martin Shichtman's 2004 King Arthur and the Myth of History. Further details are all on the University's website.²⁰

The Carmarthenshire town of Newcastle Emlyn believes it is the home of the Welsh dragon, whose birth was re-enacted there on July 4th 2009. The story of the death of the old dragon and the birth of the new was recounted along with those of Owain Glyndwr, Merlin and Tiamat, with a procession of dragons through the town in the afternoon.²¹ The "Last Dragon in Wales" was supposedly killed in Newcastle Emlyn, by a young man using a musket and trickery. It's claimed that the story originated as a record of a battle in 1403 when Owain Glyndwr (whose standard was a red winged Gwiber or serpent) seized the castle from the occupiers, and that the fall of his gwiber flag marked the end his resistance.

The Merlin Festival returned to Carmarthen this summer: a collaboration between town and county councils meant the event was given the go-ahead for August 8th. Following four years of funding from Objective One and the Carmarthen Festivals initiative, the town council has now set aside £10,000 for its survival. Organiser Catrin Bradley from the council said: "We don't want the festival to stop. People enjoy it and it's

²⁰ <http://www.wmich.edu/medieval/congress/index.html>

²¹ "Fun, games and dragon tales galore" *Western Telegraph* July 1 2009

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been running for a long time. The festival brings vibrancy to the town, and this year will have the usual mix of colourful activities."²²

Previously, Merlin himself had appeared at Pembrokeshire's Picton Castle at a family fun day on July 29th. "Resident magician Merlin will be making spellbinding jokes and mixing ghastly potions in the courtyard, as well as turning balloons into critters," promised the local paper, with shows in the theatre to keep children entranced even further.²³

New York musician Rhys Chatham is known for his use of multiple electric guitars in non-standard tunings and often at full volume. For the last 20 years he's been an ex-pat in Paris, and in 2005 the City of Paris commissioned him to compose a piece for their all-night La Nuit Blanche Festival. This 12-hour piece in three movements, *A Crimson Grail*, brought together 400 guitarists, bass and percussion at Sacré-Coeur performed to either 1,000 or 10,000 people and watched by thousands more on national TV. Chatham has now reworked *A Crimson Grail* for a more 'modest' 200 guitars and 16 bass guitars for a performance on August 8th as part of New York's Lincoln Center Out of Doors event.

NAMING AND SHAMING

King Arthur Pendragon was, after ten months of protest against limited access to Stonehenge, formally evicted from outside the monument. Living in an old caravan parked on a lane known as the Drove, he was angry over fencing that made it more like "stalag Stonehenge". The former soldier and biker John Rothwell changed his name by deed poll, but all his attempts to change authority's stance seemed to have failed in May.²⁴

The self-publicising "historian" Alan

²² "Merlin Festival gets set for summer" May 29 2009

<http://www.thisissouthwales.co.uk/travel/Merlin-Festival-gets-set-summer/article-1034831-detail/article.html>

²³ "Treats will leave you spellbound" *Western Telegraph* July 29 2009

²⁴ Steven Morris "Trust the king: Pendragon faces eviction battle" *Guardian* May 2 2009

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Wilson, who claims to have discovered the grave of a king called Arthur at St Peter's Super-Montem in Wales, was at the centre of in-fighting last year. A former neighbour of his in Cardiff told the police in Newcastle that he was concerned for the author at his new home in Tyneside, and the police duly broke into Wilson's home while he was supposed to be lecturing in Brussels. Wilson claims he is "on the verge of revealing the whereabouts of the Ark of the Covenant" and that the call to the police was the act of a rival. On the basis of a few invitations to speak at university societies he now lays claim to the title of "academic".²⁵

It bills itself as "the" confidential detective agency, with 36 years of police and private surveillance experience: "you can rest assured that you will receive one of the highest levels of service available from Merlin Detective Services", according to an insert in West Wales *Yellow Pages*. However, this Carmarthen-based business has a rival: Myrddin Investigations also hails from Carmarthen, based in King Street...

The Wolverhampton Wanderers manager asserted that after three years of slow but steady progress at the Wolves ground "my initials stand for Mick McCarthy, not Merlin the Magician".²⁶ Meanwhile Merlin Entertainments notched up a 20% rise in earnings with an 8% rise in visitors, despite the recession in 2008. The group, which is the world's second biggest visitor attraction operator behind Disney, believes the secret of its magic may be in families "staycationing" instead of vacationing abroad.²⁷

Media company Avalon specialises in management (reportedly having a reputation for sometimes being over-demanding on behalf of clients), live shows and TV production. Many of the comedians it manages (such as Harry Hill) get their own shows on TV (made

²⁵ Tom Mullen "Historians battle over Arthurian intrigue: I've found legendary king's grave, says Tyneside academic" *Evening Chronicle* June 12 2008

²⁶ Stuart James in *Guardian Sport* November 29 2008

²⁷ "Merlin's hopes for summer" *Metro* April 27 2009

¹⁹ See their blog at <http://popularcultureandthemiddleages.blogspot.com/>

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by ... Avalon TV).

The far-right British National Party has high-jacked the name *Excalibur* for its merchandising arm, which is run by activist **Arthur Kemp**. Rhodesian-born Kemp worked for the white supremacist South African Conservative party before moving to the UK in 1996, and has authored the disturbingly-titled *March of the Titans: a History of the White Race*.²⁸

DA VINCI MEETS INDIANA JONES

Thomas Mitchell, ex-RAF codebreaker and music teacher, teamed up with his composer son Stuart to decode the 213 "intricately carved cubes" to be found in Rosslyn Chapel near Edinburgh, notorious for its appearance in *The Da Vinci Code*. "In a eureka moment" they realised that the cubes depicted patterns made by sound waves, specifically a well-known phenomenon called cymatics or Chladni patterns produced when a sheet of metal or glass covered in powder is vibrated at different frequencies. Different notes produce flowers, diamonds, hexagons and so on, as represented on the sculpted cubes. Naturally they have reconstructed the music to complete *The Rosslyn Motet*, and unsurprisingly they believe this is "the Holy Grail of music".²⁹

Anne-Marie D'Arcy, who lectures in medieval literature at Leicester University, specialising in later Medieval and early Renaissance texts and their contexts, may have had something to say about the Mitchell motet, as she is interested in the **power of myth**, having become fascinated with the grail as a seven-year-old in Dublin. She has published *Wisdom and the Grail: The Image of the Vessel in the Queste del Saint Graal and Malory's Tale of the Sankgreail*, a study which provides an iconological reading of the *Queste del Saint Graal* and examines the influence of St Bernard of Clairvaux's concept of the New Knighthood on the knight-hermit figures

²⁸ <http://www.eveningleader.co.uk/news/Storm-over-BNP-book-distributed.4482404.jp>

²⁹ Richard Alleyne "Team cracks music mystery of Da Vinci Code Chapel" *Telegraph* May 10 2007; Auslan Cramb "The Da Vinci chapel echoes to sound of Saturn" *Telegraph* May 29 2007

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in the *Queste*. She sees *Holy Blood and Holy Grail* and *The Da Vinci Code* as conspiracy theory responses to the death of Pope John Paul I and the American fear of secret societies respectively.^{30 31}

Back in 2007 NASA announced a mission to study Moon's interior with more than 100 times the sensitivity of previous missions by measuring irregularities in the Moon's gravity field. Called **GRAIL** (for Gravity Recovery and Internal Laboratory), it will launch in 2011. The mission will see two spacecraft flying in orbit around the Moon for several months, measuring the gravity field on both the near side and the far side.

The way the strength of gravity varies above the Moon's surface can reveal how mass is distributed inside the Moon, and previous missions have revealed the gravity field is much lumpier than Earth's, making it harder for spacecraft to navigate there – especially important starting in 2020, when NASA plans to return astronauts to the Moon. GRAIL will use the same basic technology as GRACE (Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment), a similar pair of spacecraft launched into Earth orbit in 2002 which solved the mystery of a low-gravity area above Canada.³²

Various silly **grails** – an unstoppable phrase for journo (see also "Galahad's last quest" this issue) – here follow, though we will definitely have to break the habit of collecting these now! For Sherlock Holmes in a BBC Radio 7 broadcast it was apparently his collection of various insects. Amusingly, maverick politician George Galloway is "the Holy Grail of comedy", according to Sandi Tostvig on BBC R4's *The News Quiz* (June 19 2009), though she may have had her tongue in her cheek.

The Holy Grail of box sets is "the much anticipated remastered Beatles albums" available from September 9 for £135.00. "Donnington is a gas. It's the holy grail, was the assessment of a proposed (but cancelled) Monsters of Rock Festival in 2007, celebrating 40

³⁰ John Crace "The Da Vinci code-breaker" *Guardian* May 23 2006

³¹ <http://www.le.ac.uk/ee/staff/darcy.html>

³² <http://moon.mit.edu/>

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years of heavy metal music, though according to a Planet Rock DJ in October 2008, it was the Guns & Roses *Chinese Democracy* album, delayed for 14 years.

A new tumour-removal drug is one of the holy grails of prostate cancer research, according to a Mayo Clinic spokesman on BBC R4 *News* (June 20), while the holy grail of scientific research was confirmed as nuclear fusion on the BBC World Service *News Hour* (June 17).

Other superlatives heard on the World Service include "the holy grail for activists is to win a case in the US that goes before a jury" (June 9) and, unsurprisingly, "Football is the holy grail" (June 29). Enough, already.

WEB RESOURCES

Author Mark Oxbrow has drawn attention on Arthurnet to a Google Map dealing with Arthurian associations, created by a Bristolian calling him- or herself Vulcaneer.^{33 34}

You can study **King Arthur online** at a US graduate class at Longwood University with Professor Raymond Cormier. Although it is only a few weeks long, the syllabus is 24 pages or so, and the readings are "substantial". Students are asked to contact him if they would like a copy of the syllabus, and urged to "Sign up Now! Plan Ahead!" The course module details are *English 611: British Medieval Literature (The Worlds of King Arthur)* from December 14 2009 – January 8 2010 (Winter Intersession). For information and/or a syllabus, contact cormierj@longwood.edu.³⁵

The Longwood site suggests that the course can be taken by students seeking a Longwood MA in English Literature, or by non-degree-seeking students. Judy Shoaf of Arthurnet says that this could be "a great chance to read/brush up on the major works and have a chance to discuss them in an intensive and

³³ <http://maps.google.co.uk/maps/ms?msa=0&msid=114671179950717505132.00044d434744ec1a2d1a0>

³⁴ Arthurnet also provides a marvellous "new" medieval literary term from an Arthurian Legend test: a **Beau Incontin**, which the contributor took to be a nobleman with gastrointestinal issues

³⁵ www.longwood.edu/graduatestudies

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informed context".

A contributor to Arthurian discussion group Arthurnet has indicated his wish to form an actual group based in this area for the study of **Dark-Age Cornwall**, particularly looking at the Irish in Cornwall and Arthur but not exclusively. Edwin Deady would like to examine inland routes and ports and their possibilities on the ground with meets and walks. Other opportunities for even a small group include: "Living History" displays and experiences, visits to relevant sites such as Chun Castle and Tintagel, early maritime history (the boats of Njall of the Nine Hostages, for example). This year Edwin tells us he will have been on the Helford River in July with his cowskin-covered Boyne coracle and the curragh of a local researcher – see Britannia's site for what might be possible eventually:

<http://www.durolitum.co.uk/articles/curraghs.html>

Arthurian Fantasy could feature as well, such as the purely nonsense but fun Battle of Camlann at Tintagel. Suggestions and expressions of interest are apparently welcome from potential local members and also those too far away to normally participate. There is a new Google group at

dark-age-cornwall@googlegroups.com or you can contact Edwin through his website dark-age-boats.co.uk

A **Gazetteer of Sub-Roman Britain** (AD 400-600) has been compiled by Christopher A Snyder, Assistant Professor of History, School of Arts and Sciences, Marymount University. Though last updated in 1997, as an early medieval resource it is a useful starting point: http://intarch.ac.uk/journal/issue3/snyder_index.html

The **Celtic Inscribed Stones Project** (CISP) is an on-line database based in the Department of History, and the Institute of Archaeology, University College London. The database includes every non-Runic inscription raised on a stone monument within Celtic-speaking areas (Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Dumnonia, Brittany and the Isle of Man) in the Early Middle Ages (AD 400-1000), with over 1,200 such inscriptions. In dealing with such a large corpus limitations of time have meant that, for this first version of the database, the entries for Wales,

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Scotland, Dumnonia, Brittany and the Isle of Man, are fuller than those for Ireland. Information on the stones has been broken down into three main types – site, stone and inscription. View it at <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology/cisp/database/>

PERIODICALS


Jeremy Harte (who wrote the *Northern Earth* article on Maiden Castles which was one of the sources for last issue's "The Mystery of the Maidens' Castles") mentioned an extensive article on the topic from a couple of years back; this was "Maiden Castle, Geoffrey of Monmouth and Hārūn-al-Rasīd" by Richard Coates in *Nomina* 29 (2006: 5-60), with a gazetteer of sites of that name. Harte doubts Coates' conclusion that the British instances derive from Qasr-al-Banāt, and came here as a result of the First Crusade – he doubts both because of pre-1094 references here (*inter alia* the 1093 Edinburgh one mentioned in the *Pendragon* article) and doubts as to the early origin of the Middle East examples.

Harte also says that "the story of the giant, his sweetheart and her cows in Mortimer Wheeler's *Maiden Castle* represents Wheeler's own attempt to explain the name by analogy with *Caer Drewyn*; it's not a Dorset tradition".

Current Archaeology (No 229 April 2009) featured the lengthy article "Rewriting the Age of Arthur: the Dark Ages brought to light" by archaeologist Miles Russell of Bournemouth University – see Old News for more on this – plus a letter on the Tintagel "Arthur Stone". Martyn Dowell suggested that the list of signatories on this slate was the sealing 'page' of a Roman contract, possibly, given the context, an international shipping contract.

Cornish earth mysteries journal *Meyn Mamvro* (No 69 Summer 2009) included news on Tim Team's medieval digs on and near Looe Island (which we noted in last issue's Old News) and an item entitled "The Tintagel Slate unravelled" (which was also covered last issue). The *Society of Leyhunters Newsletter* #30 (May 2009) commemorated the passing of John Michell and Mary Caine. *Northern Earth* (No 118 Summer 2009) also included appreciations of John

Fellowship of the King

Michell, plus an Arthurian cartoon by Dick Foreman, from an idea by NE editor John Billingsley. Under a picture of our hero all in a tizzy was the informative caption *Great Historical Misunderstandings* #1: 'King Arthur was Britain's greatest worrier'. 

Chris Lovegrove and Steve Sneyd

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