

CAMELOT

The very name **conjures** up visions of chivalry and magic, romance and adventure. Back in the mists of time half way between history and myth there came man to lead his people to glory - Arthur. Under the guidance of Merlin he drew the sword of destiny from the stone and won the crown.

In British legend, Camelot was the capital of the kingdom of King Arthur. According to legend, he **reigned** there over Briton before the Saxon conquest. Archaeological evidence confirms that during the 6th century the **fort** was occupied by a powerful British warrior **chieftain**.

Modern attempts at identifying Camelot have sought to place Camelot at the ruins of Cadbury Castle in Somerset, excavated in the 1960's. There is much **underlying** tradition to support this belief. Cadbury Castle (in Somerset) is an isolated earthwork fort of the Iron Age, which looks over the Vale of Avalon to Glastonbury. Nearby is the River Cam, and the village of Queen Camel (once known as Camel) The antiquary John Leland, in the reign of Henry VIII speaks of local people who refer to the fort as "Camalat" and as the home of Arthur. According to the romancers, Camelot was named after a pagan king called Camaalis.

At Camelot Arthur established a brilliant court and seated the greatest and most **chivalrous** warriors in Europe, the Knights of the Round Table. Camelot was the starting point of the Quest for the Holy Grail, and by the 1200's, it came to symbolize the centre of the Arthurian world.

King Arthur, Guinevere, Merlin, Lancelot, Camelot and Excalibur are names rooted in British tradition and culture.

Their stories have been recreated through centuries; **hence** there are many versions. From the poets and romancers of France and Germany through the poetry of Tennyson and the music drama of Wagner to successful stage and screen adaptation.

Local tales and folklore are spread over a vast stretch of territory, from Scotland through Northern England and Wales to Cornwall, and extending also into Brittany, where a great part of the legend is thought to have originated.

The south west of England possesses a powerful tradition of independence, a **strain** of mysticism taken from early Pagan times and modified by Christianity and a breathtaking combination of scenery and climate. This area was the home of a man of greatness and fighting **prohess** who became a folk-hero.

KING ARTHUR

King Arthur is one of the greatest figures in English folklore. **King Arthur Pendragon of the Isles of Britain**. Son of Uther and of his wife, Igraine of Lionesse. According to legend he lived in the late 5th and early 6th centuries at a time when Britain was the scene of the final bloody struggles for domination between the Romano-British Celts and the Saxon invaders. Born at Tintagel but taken by Merlin to London to be brought up by Sir Hector de Mowen.

He proved to be the lawful King of England by drawing the Sword from the Stone. Founder of the Order of the Knights of the Round Table, the members of which had to **adhere** to the

rules, which **governed** the fellowship, the basis of which was the love of God and men and noble deeds.

ARTHUR THE MYTH

Some people believe that King Arthur is so **inextricably** tied up in Celtic Mythology that he must, in origin, have been, not a man at all, but a God. Like so many other characters featured in the Mabinogion, Arthur in his earliest form appears almost entirely mythical. He and his companions have superhuman strength and abilities, and consort with giants and other mythological creatures. In the early Welsh poem "Preiddeu Annwfn", Arthur visits the Celtic Underworld, Annwfn, and his adventures closely parallel those of the **cauldron**-seeking God, **Bran** the Blessed. He died of wounds received in the battle against Sir Mordred at Slaughter Bridge, near Tintagel. Arthur was carried to the mystical Avalon, apparently the Underworld home of the Celtic god, Afallach. Many legends around the country attest to Arthur's immortality. He sleeps in one of numerous caves waiting to return and lead his people. The name Arthur itself appears to derive from the Celtic word Art, meaning "bear". Could Arthur, like so many other Celtic gods, be merely a personification of the many **revered** animals of the wild? Some theorists claim Arthur was a late addition to the Celtic pantheon during resurgence in pagan worship, or possibly a mythical hero, the offspring of a human and a bear. There is no evidence for either.

MERLIN

Merlin, Arthur's adviser, prophet and a magician. After Arthur's birth, Merlin became the young boy's tutor, while he grew up with his foster-father, Sir Ector (alias Cynyr Ceinfarfog (the Fair Bearded)). In the defining moment of Arthur's career, Merlin arranged for the Sword-in-the-stone contest by which the lad became king. Later, the magician met the mystic Lady of the Lake at the Fountain of Barenton (in Brittany) and persuaded her to present the King with the magical sword, Excalibur.

Legend then tells us that after the Roman withdrawal from Britain and the **usurpation** of the throne from the rightful heirs, Vortigern was in flight from the Saxon breakout and went to Snowdonia, in Wales, in hopes of constructing a mountain fortress at Dinas Emrys where he might be safe. Unfortunately, the building kept collapsing and Vortigern's house wizards told him that a human sacrifice of a fatherless child would solve the problem. One small difficulty was that such children are rather hard to find. Fortunately for Vortigern's fortress, Merlin was known to have no human father and happened to be available. Before the sacrifice could take place, Merlin used his great visionary powers and attributed the structural problem to a subterranean pool in which lived a red and a white dragon. The meaning of this, according to Merlin, was that the red dragon represented the Britons, and the white dragon, the Saxons. The dragons fought, with the white dragon having the best of it, at first, but then the red dragon drove the white one back. The meaning was clear. Merlin prophesied that Vortigern would be **slain** and followed on the throne by Ambrosius Aurelianus, then Uther, then a greater leader, Arthur. It would fall to him to push the Saxons back.

EXCALIBUR

King Arthur's magical sword, said to symbolise both destruction and fertility. In one version of the legends of Arthur, the future king proved his right to rule by pulling Excalibur out of a stone, which no other man could do. In another version, he received the sword from the Lady of the Lake. As Arthur lay dying he asked Sir Bedevere, one of his knights, to return Excalibur to the lake, where an arm rose up out of the water to receive it.

The Sword in the Stone, sometimes a sword in an **anvil**, is drawn by Arthur as proof of his birthright and of his nobility. It is both a test and a miraculous sign of his royalty. The sword drawn from the stone is different from the one given to Arthur by the Lady of the Lake.

THE KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND TABLE

The Round Table was first described in 1155 by the poet Robert Wace who held that Arthur **devised** the table to promote equality among the knights. A table said to be the Round Table hangs in the Castle Hall in Winchester but this dates only from the 13th century.

The fellowship of the knights of King Arthur included Sir **Bedivere**, Sir **Bors de Ganis**, Sir **Gaheris**, Sir **Galahad**, Sir **Gareth**, Sir **Gawain**, Sir **Kay**, Sir **Percivale**, Sir **Tristram** and Sir **Lancelot**. Their most famous adventure was the quest for the Holy Grail, which was eventually found by Sir Galahad.



THE HOLY GRAIL

The sacred cup said to have been used by Jesus at the Last Supper. It became an object of quest for the Knights of the Round Table who included Sir Galahad and Bedivere. In one story, it was kept in the Grail castle of the crippled Fisher King. According to legend, the Grail is said to rest beneath the spring on Glastonbury Tor.

SIR LAUNCELOT (Lancelot)

He was the first Knight of the Round Table, never failing in courtesy, courage and gentleness, or in willingness to serve others.

In some versions of the legend, one of Lancelot's first tasks as a knight was to fetch Arthur's bride, Guinevere, to Camelot for their wedding. During this journey, Guinevere and Lancelot fell in love. In other stories, Guinevere was already **established** at court when Lancelot arrived, and he soon became one of the Queen's Knights, a sub-order of the Round Table of which young, aspiring knights belonged before they had fully proven themselves. Lancelot quickly established himself as the greatest knight of all time after successfully completing several quests. So, Lancelot became a full Knight of the Round Table and Arthur's closest companion and champion.

When Guinevere was abducted by Meliagaunce, the son of King Bagdemagus, Lancelot pursued him in a cart and had to cross a sword bridge to reach the castle. Suffering from a guilty conscience, Lancelot pursued quest after quest in order to be away from Guinevere.

Lancelot, the greatest of Arthur's knights, was destined to become part of the eternal triangle with Arthur and Guinevere. When Lancelot and Guinevere were discovered together in her chamber by Mordred, just when they had decided to end their love affair, Lancelot **fled** and Guinevere was sentenced to burn at the stake. Lancelot returned to rescue her.

A war between Lancelot and Arthur **ensued**, but was broken off when Arthur had to return to Camelot to deal with Mordred's rebellion. Hearing of this, Lancelot returned to aid Arthur but arrived too late to save him from a mortal wound. After the war, Lancelot visited Guinevere one last time in a nunnery at Amesbury and then put aside his weapons and armour to become a **hermit**, which was how he lived out the rest of his life.