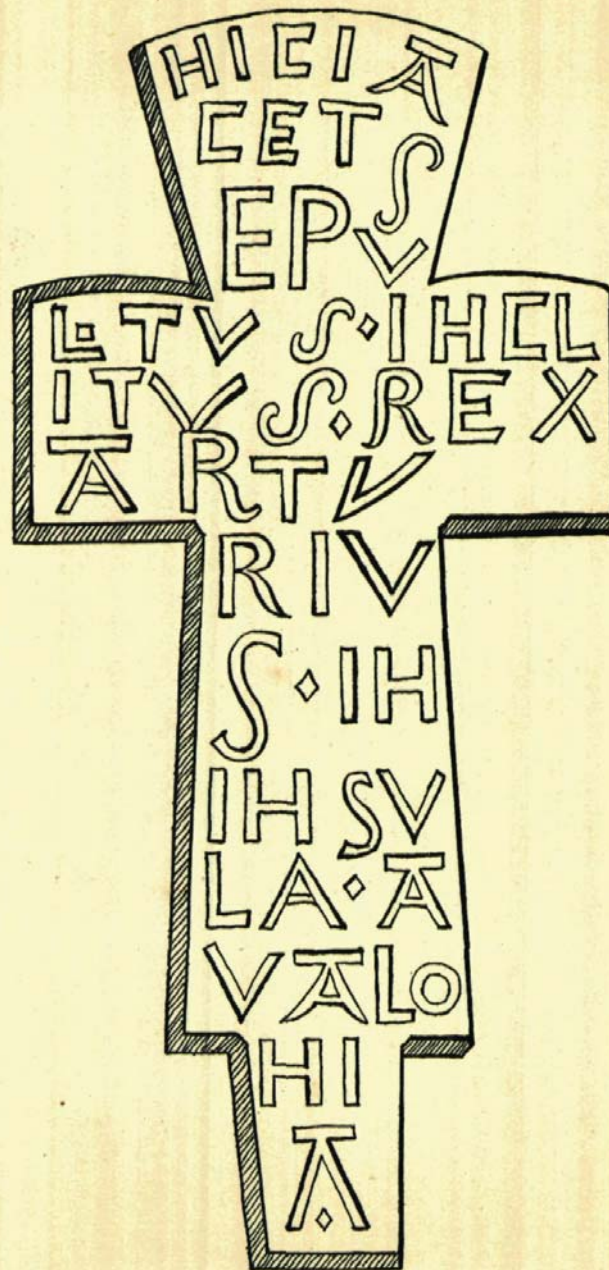


HANTS FIELD CLUB AND ARCHÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY.



LEADEN MEMORIAL FROM KING ARTHUR'S TOMB,
AT GLASTONBURY.

COPIED FROM CAMDEN'S BRITANNIA, ED. GIBSON, 1695.

KING ARTHUR AND THE ROUND TABLE AT WINCHESTER.

BY T. W. SHORE, F.G.S.

The Round Table in the County Hall at Winchester has been one of the antiquarian relics of Hampshire for centuries, and there are some early references to it:—

John Harding a poetical historian of the 15th century refers to it as "hanging yet" in the hall at Winchester.¹

Towards the end of the same century, William Caxton in the preface to the Arthurian romance, the *Morte d'Arthur* alludes to it as surviving evidence of the existence of King Arthur. In the 16th century it is referred to by John Leland in his "*Assertio incomparabilis Arturii*." Paulus Jovius, or Giovio, also a foreign writer says that the table was shown to the Emperor Charles V. in 1522, and that the marginal names of the knights had at that time been corroded by decay, and unskillfully restored. He tells us that it was held in great esteem.² A Spaniard, also named Diego de Vera, who was present at the marriage of Philip II. of Spain and Queen Mary at Winchester in 1554, gives a short description of it, and mentions the colours green and white and the names of the knights as they now appear on it.³

As regards King Arthur himself, so much that is undoubtedly mythical has been written about him, that the historical references which point to the existence of a real king of this name have become obscured by the romances of the Middle Ages in which he and his knights have been so much glorified. It is therefore necessary in writing of Arthur to bear in mind the two-fold character in which he appears in English literature; first and very largely, as a hero whose career and adventures were the invention of the romancers of the Middle Ages, based partly on earlier traditions, and secondly as a

¹ Journal of the Archaeological Institute—Report of the Winchester Meeting, 1845. Paper by E. Smirke, p. 62.

² *Regionum et Insularum Descriptiones*.

³ Journal Arch. Inst. Report. Ibid, p. 54.

real British king or chieftain, who lived in the early part of the 6th century, during the period of the struggle between the British people and the invading Saxons. It is necessary to remember that traditions similar to those connected with the Round Table of king Arthur are to be found in the early literature of Brittany as well as of Wales. The Arthurian romances mainly date from the 12th to the 15th century, but the earlier traditions of a Round Table and a hero identical with, or similar to the Arthur of the later romances, have come down from a remote antiquity.

In all old countries there is a time when history dawns, but before that dawn men lived and died, concerning whom only traditions were transmitted to the historic period. Unless there is something very doubtful and inconsistent in such traditions it seems unreasonable altogether to reject them because they are prehistoric, but if such traditions are supported by archaeological discoveries, their rejection becomes unwarrantable.

The age of King Arthur is in this sense mainly prehistoric but traditions of him as a British King, connected with Cornwall, Caerleon, Silchester and other parts of the country came down to the historic period. The Welsh tradition that Arthur was buried at Glastonbury is very old, certainly older than the date of the discovery of his tomb. This is established by the Chronicle of Tysilio supposed to have been compiled about A.D. 1100, and by the statements of Geoffrey of Monmouth about his burial place. The historical value of Geoffrey's writings is indeed of little account, but as evidence of the existence of a certain tradition they are acceptable.

The Britons at the time of the Saxon invasion were Christians, and the traditional accounts of Arthur show that he was influenced by christian sentiments, and that after he had been wounded at Camlan in Cornwall he was conveyed by water to Glastonbury, where according to all early authorities a British monastery existed. We are led to understand that he was taken there, in order to avail himself of the best medical skill he could get, which was to be obtained at that time only in the monasteries.

The earliest writing in which Arthur is mentioned at any length, is that of which Nennius is the reputed author, and

known as the "Historia Britonum" probably dating from the 8th century. He is also mentioned incidentally in the "Annales Cambriæ," a compilation believed to date from the 10th century. Nennius tells us that Arthur owed his elevation to the chief command of the Britons to his own merit and not to any accident of birth. The probable date of his assuming the chief command is variously believed to have been between A.D. 508 and 516. Nennius says "Then it was that the warlike Arthur with all the Kings and military force of Britain fought against the Saxons."

A Latin MS. poem preserved in the British Museum¹ which cannot be regarded as history, but which we may accept as evidence of a tradition shows what was the early traditional account of Arthur's conveyance to Glastonbury, where he died. The Abbey Records of Glastonbury, viz.: the "Parvus Liber" and the "Magna Tabula Glastoniensis" record the discovery of his tomb there in the reign of Henry II. The most detailed account however of this event is that given by Giraldus Cambrensis, a voluminous author, and one of the most reliable of 12th century writers. He was Archdeacon of Brecon, a man of note in his time, who travelled much, both in England and Wales.

William of Malmsbury, a chronicler also contemporary with the discovery of Arthur's tomb at Glastonbury records this event, and Malmsbury is a reliable chronicler. Giraldus visited Glastonbury about fourteen years after the discovery of this tomb, and he says that he gives the account of this occurrence as he received it from the lips of the then Abbot, who had also been an eye witness of the search and discovery. The date of this visit was 1184, but the accounts which Giraldus wrote in his "*Speculum Ecclesiæ Distinctiones IV.*" and in his "*De Principis Instructione*" do not appear to have been written until many years later and at two different times, which probably accounts for some slight discrepancies in the two narratives. In the former he gives the fullest account, and says that Arthur had been buried between two obelisks, which had been afterwards erected in the cemetery, and that the abbot possessed this clue from some ancient

¹ Vita Merlini per Galfridum Monemutensem versu heroico ad Robertum Lincolniensem Cott. MSS. Vespasian, E, IV.

writings, and inscriptions on the obelisks. A broad flat stone was found about seven feet below the surface, and the sarcophagus or coffin nine feet below the stone. He tells us also that a leaden cross was discovered inserted not on the upper, but on the lower surface of the stone slab bearing the inscription "HIC IACET SEPULTVS INCLITVS REX ARTVRIVS IN INSVLA AVALONIA." (See Plate)

Giraldus tells us that he saw this cross which was shown to him by the abbot. He says: "Thus were found the remains of Arthur, not in a marble tomb, as became a distinguished King, not in one of stone, or Parian, but even in a wooden sepulchre—an oak trunk, hollowed out for the purpose, and this, moreover, sunk 16 feet or more under ground, a mode of interment for so great a Prince, indicating haste rather than honour, according to the exigencies of those troubled times."

There is a discrepancy of some importance to be noticed. The inscription on the leaden cross as given by Giraldus in the "*Speculum Ecclesiæ*" contains the words "cum Wennevereia uxore sua secunda" and these words do not occur on the engraving of the cross as given by Camden, a copy of which accompanies this paper. This discrepancy is not surprising when we consider that Giraldus did not write his account until many years after his visit to Glastonbury. The engraving of the cross which Camden had made must undoubtedly have been copied, as he says it was, from the original drawing of it, and the inscription on this contains no mention of Guenevere, Arthur's second wife.

On the other hand, in addition to the contemporary evidence of Giraldus, William of Malmsbury, and that which has come down to us in the records of the abbey, there are two circumstances pointing to this tomb having been the tomb of a real King Arthur, which far outweigh any slight discrepancies in the narratives, or other circumstances connected with its discovery; viz; —

The remains of the body were found in a coffin hollowed out of a solid oak tree, which adds greatly to the reality of the alleged antiquity of the tomb, for this is a form of burial known to have been used in the 6th century:—

The form of the letters on the leaden cross which are of the debased Romano-British type, confirms the alleged antiquity of the sepulchre.

In *The Antiquitates Glastoniensis* it is said that the search for Arthur's tomb was made soon after the return of Henry II. from Wales, and there is no record that he revisited Wales after the year 1169. The following year A.D. 1170 is thus considered to have been the date of the exhumation.

We have also evidence nearer to our own time. Leland, the antiquary, states on the authority of a monk of Glastonbury, that Edward I., with his Queen, visited Glastonbury in 1276, and caused the shrine of King Arthur to be removed from the position where it was first deposited, and to be placed before the High Altar.¹ The leaden cross which had meanwhile been deposited in the Treasury of the Abbey was in the time of Henry VIII. seen by Leland, as he himself tells us. Camden says that his engraving is drawn out of the first copy "in the Abbey of Glascon." What became of the original cross after the dissolution of the monastery is not known.

This discovery at Glastonbury was either a real or a fraudulent discovery. By some writers it has been alleged to have been planned and carried out for a political purpose. In any case a stone having a cross attached to it, of which we possess a copy, bearing the inscription: "Hic jacet sepultus inclitus rex Arturivs in Insula Avalonia," in debased Romano-British letters of the 6th century, was found and shown at Glastonbury Abbey for more than four centuries, and was declared to have been discovered over King Arthur's burial place about the year A.D. 1170. The circumstantial details of the discovery as recorded by writers contemporary with the date of the discovery have also come down to us.

The political circumstances of that time which have been considered as possibly pointing to some collusion or deception are these:—It is well known historically that the Welsh people of the 12th and earlier centuries were very superstitious, and so greatly impressed with the legends of Arthur that they believed he still lived and would return at some time or other, conquer all his enemies and again rule over the whole of Britain.

This belief had a firm hold on the popular mind in Wales. It has been pointed out that it was to the interest of Henry

¹ Leland, J. *Translatio Reliquiarum Arturii*; *Collectanea* V. 54

II., after he had conquered North Wales while the people of South Wales held out, to prove beyond the possibility of a doubt that King Arthur was really dead. It probably was so, but that does not prove a conspiracy of deception. Let us grant that it would have been a political advantage to the king at that time to have proved to the Welsh people that their superstition concerning King Arthur was baseless and that he died as others die. With this object in view, believing that the king was buried there; or with another, that of adding additional dignity to the church at Glastonbury, he caused a search for this tomb of King Arthur to be made, where it was by tradition said to exist. The discovery of such a burial place, and the exhumation of the remains, could not have been carried out by the King alone. He must, if he meant to deceive the people, have had confederates, among whom must have been the abbot and many of his monks. Can we believe that such a pretended discovery could have been made without the collusion of the abbot and his monks? Is it credible that a great religious community, the most renowned in all England, would lend itself to such a deception? I do not think it is. Henry II. certainly ordered a search to be made for Arthur's tomb and it was found, but this was done apparently in order that the remains of this King might be honoured by their removal to a more royal sepulchre in the church, and the church enriched by his shrine. Another circumstance critics have seized upon as evidence of the discovery having been spurious has been found in the last three words of the inscription "in Insula Avalonia." It has been argued that as the inscription begins "Hic jacet" and "hic" refers to Glastonbury in the Isle of Avalon, it was unnecessary to add the words "in Insula Avalonia" and that this addition raises a doubt as to this being a genuine inscription of the 6th century. We have however heard of redundant inscriptions on other tombs. The words "in Insula Avalonia" may have been added for the purpose of emphasizing the circumstance that Arthur was buried in this island and not in Cornwall, where the accounts of his death state that he received his mortal wound. The words may however have been added for another purpose. The custom of burial in an island is one which has come

down from antiquity. An insular position was supposed to keep evil influences away. The words "in Insula Avalonia" may therefore have been used to emphasise the circumstance that this burial was made in accordance with the ancient reverence for an insular site.

At the time of the discovery of this tomb the Abbot of Glastonbury was Henry de Blois, who was also bishop of Winchester and Papal Legate in England. It is incredible that an ecclesiastic of such high dignity would lend himself during the last year of his life to such a conspiracy as has been suggested. That this abbot, a Cardinal, the aged bishop of Winchester, the benovolent founder of the Hospital of St. Cross, a man who had braved the wrath of kings, would, when nearing the end of his earthly pilgrimage, consent to become, in collusion with his monks at Glastonbury, the chief conspirator in a national deception such as this, it is impossible to believe.

The discovery of the tomb of a real King Arthur must therefore be regarded as an assured event.

The period during which Arthur appears to have held the British chieftainship, or sovereignty, is from about A.D. 516 to A.D. 542. Among his contemporaries were Aurelius Ambrosius, who preceded him as supreme chief, and Caradawg, the prince who succeeded him.¹ The name of Aurelius Ambrosius has survived in that of Amesbury.

The battle of Badon Hill, where the Britons inflicted a crushing defeat on the Saxons, is an historical event in which Arthur emerges out of the historical gloom, with which he is surrounded.²

Professor Rhys tells us that in Welsh literature Arthur is never called a *gwledig* or prince but emperor. "The Welsh have borrowed the Latin title 'imperator' and made it into 'amherawdyr' and later 'amherawdwr,' so it is not impossible that when the Roman emperor ceased to rule in Britain, this title was given to the highest officer in the island, viz. the Comes Britanniae, and that in the words "Yr Amherawdyr" in Welsh literature, we have a remnant of our insular history."³

¹ Guest, Dr. E. *Journal of the Archaeological Institute*, XVI., 125.

² Church, A. J. *Early Britain*, p. 100.

³ Rhys, J. *Studies in the Arthurian Legend*, p. 7.

In their "History of the Welsh people," Professor Rhys and Mr. D. Brynmor Jones say:—"The Welsh are well endowed in the matter of imagination or fancy—from which there sprang among the Brythons of yore a spirit of romance, which held the people of Europe of the Middle Ages, bound, as it were, under a spell. There is no literature of the continent which does not betray the influence of the Brythonic hero Arthur, whom his people, as late as the time of Henry II., expected to see returning from the Isle of Avalon, hale and strong and longing to lead his men and countrymen to triumph over their foe and oppressor."¹

The glory of King Arthur was adopted at the court of the Plantagenets as one of the foundations of the epics of chivalry.² With some of the earlier Plantagenet Kings, Winchester was much concerned, and it is perhaps to the influence of these kings that we must ascribe the origin of the Round Table there.

It is worthy of note that the mythological fictions which have given rise to the doubts and disbelief as to the reality of this king had their origin or main development on the continent and not in Britain. In the earliest poetical literature of the Cymry, Arthur is represented only as a great and distinguished military chief.³

The doubt which has been cast on the existence of a real king Arthur, by the exaggeration of some of the early chroniclers, is very unfortunate.

In Geoffrey of Monmouth's account of him the probable is so blended with the marvellous, that not only the truth of the whole story, but Arthur's very existence as a real personage has been called into question by these exaggerations. In considering this subject therefore we must give no credence to Geoffrey's statements independently of the testimony of more reliable historical writers. In Geoffrey's time the historical accounts of Arthur were being converted into the mythological and romantic. His writings have done untold harm to the verities of early British history.

¹ Rhys, J. and Jones D. B. *The Welsh people*. p. 592-3.

² Elton C. J. *Origins of English History*, p. 348.

³ Jones, Rev. W. A., on *The reputed discovery of King Arthur's remains at Glastonbury*. Somersetshire Archaeological Society's Proceedings 1859. p. 129.

There is one interesting traditional connection between Hampshire and King Arthur, and it may have been this tradition, combined with the circumstances that Winchester is often mentioned in the Arthurian romances which led to the construction of the Round Table as an ornament to the royal hall. In the Welsh traditionary accounts, Silchester was the coronation city of the Pendragons or supreme kings of Britain, after the departure of the Romans. The "Historical Triads of the Island of Britain" state that Caerleon upon Usk, Edinburgh in North Britain, and Cellewig were the three chief courts of King Arthur, and Arthur is said to have been crowned at Silchester by St. Dubritius Archbishop of Caerleon upon Usk. Caerleon is now the site of a ruined city as Silchester is, but the Welsh Triads mention Cellewig and not Silchester. The question where was Cellewig has been asked, and I think satisfactorily answered by Canon Isaac Taylor in "Notes and Queries." Canon Taylor who doubts the existence of a real King of this name¹ has pointed out the identity of the name Cellewig with Calleva the Roman name of Silchester. He says Calleva with the Welsh formative suffix *ig* would become Cellewig.² I lay no undue stress on the Welsh traditions of Arthur's connection with Silchester, but it is interesting to find that the name Cellewig in the Triads is practically the same as Calleva. The point to notice, is that the identity appears without any effort on the part of the writer to show this identity, except perhaps to his own countrymen. The 12th century writer of the Triads, must have firmly believed in King Arthur, and although much of the detailed accounts of the King, the dates of various alleged events connected with him, such as his coronation at Silchester and the entire destruction of that city by Ælla King of the South Saxons early in the 6th century, cannot be received as history, the firm belief of the writer in the personality of the King at a time contemporaneous with the discovery of his burial place at Glastonbury, is a circumstance worthy of consideration.

One of the objects of this paper is to set forth the evidence of the existence of a real King or Chieftain named Arthur.

¹ Notes and Queries. 8th Series. VII. 232.

² Notes and Queries. 8th Series. VI. 132.

Doubtless there were before this King's time, Arthurian legends of a mythological kind derived from a more remote antiquity. The real Arthur may not even have been the first of his name, for the same name may have been given to an imaginary hero of a still earlier age, from whose mythological adventures, and those legendary accounts of the 6th century Chieftain, the romances of the 12th and succeeding centuries may have been compiled. In Anglo-Saxon literature, the name Offa is mythological in its earlier usage, and historical in its later. The existence of a real King Arthur, appears to be established by the discovery at Glastonbury. Notwithstanding all the marvellous accounts of the Arthur of romance, which were current in the Middle Ages, the existence of a real King on whose life and history these legends were mainly based appears to have been a matter of common belief. It can scarcely be doubted that the Tudor Kings, in claiming descent from King Arthur believed themselves that the ancestor they claimed was a real man and not a myth. Henry VII journeyed with his Queen by short stages to Winchester in order that their first child might be born in the old West Saxon City, and after his birth he named him Arthur. This was done no doubt with a political object in view, but Henry VII as a Welshman had no necessity to conciliate the Welsh, and if the English people of his time had believed King Arthur to have been only a myth, he would apparently have defeated his own object. The myths of antiquity and the legends of the Middle Ages with which Arthur's name was connected in the time of the Tudors were part of the fiction of that age, and were no doubt understood to have been fiction, in the same way as a modern historical novel is so understood in our own time. If we could imagine that there was no contemporary history of the reign of Henry VII sent down to posterity recording the birth of his son Prince Arthur at Winchester, and no contemporary accounts of his life, except tradition supported by the statements of subsequent historians, but yet his burial place was discovered, in say, the 18th Century, the remains being found in a coffin of a shape characteristic of the period of the Tudor Kings, and having on it an inscription recording the name of the Prince in special characters peculiar to

that age, should we not be justified in believing in this Prince Arthur? By a similar course of reasoning it will appear that we are justified in believing in a real King Arthur whose coffin made of an oak tree hollowed out, and whose memorial cross with an inscription in letters characteristic of the 6th Century were found at Glastonbury.

That the existence of King Arthur of Caerleon as a real man and not merely as a myth, as some modern English writers have represented him, was believed not only in England as late as the early part of the 16th Century but also on the continent, is probable from the statues surrounding the monument of the Emperor Maximilian I. in the Hofkirche at Innsbruck. These statues, twenty-eight in number, represent supposed mourners and torch bearers, placed there in honour of the Emperor, and among them is one inscribed "*Artur König v. England*." This figure in bronze is attributed to Peter Vischer, of Nurnberg,¹ and was cast in 1513.² Among the earliest potentates represented by these statues are those of Clovis, king of the Franks, and Theodoric, king of the Ostrogoths, both contemporaries of Arthur of Caerleon. The statues are all those of known emperors and sovereigns, or personages who were relatives of the Emperor Maximilian. It can hardly be doubted that those who placed these statues round this monument believed in a real Arthur, king of England or Britain, the Arthur of Caerleon, who was the hero of the mediæval romances, otherwise they would not have placed his statue as one of a series representing historical personages. This statue of Arthur at Innsbruck is the only one of him which exists, and he is represented in the dress of the 16th Century. Its existence round the monument of the emperor Maximilian at Inns-

¹ Notes and Queries. 8th series, II. 81.

² Dr. Schönherr, (*Jahrbuch der kunst-historischen Sammlungen des oesterreichischen Kaiserhauses*, Vol. xi., 1890, pp. 140-268) has written on the statues. He has also published reproductions of some designs for statues prepared by Gilg's Sesselschreiber, artist of several of the statues in the group, and not carried out. One of these sketches represents the British king holding a shield . . . with the inscription "Kuenig Artus zu Enngellandt & Grave zu Habsburg." This proves beyond doubt that the artist meant to represent King Arthur of the legend and that he was under the impression that Arthur, of Caerleon, was a Count of Hapsburg, and an ancestor of Maximilian. Notes and Queries. 8th Series, III, 471.

bruck has some indirect connection with the Round Table at Winchester. The colours green and white on the table are those of the Tudor dynasty, indicating the time of Henry VIII. as the time when it was so decorated, and Henry VIII., who claimed Arthur as his ancestor, was an ally of Maximilian. They had met on the continent and their troops had fought together against the French.

There can be no doubt that the Tudor Kings derived reflected glory from Arthur, who, in the literature of the Middle Ages, had for centuries been described as a model of chivalry, and Henry VIII. was proud of his Tudor descent, which rightly or wrongly was traced to Arthur.

When he met the French king on the Field of the Cloth of Gold the two monarchs rivalled each other in chivalrous display, and that Arthur and his legendary history were kept in mind is certain. On another occasion, when Henry VIII. met the young Emperor Charles V., the grandson and successor of Maximilian, at Calais, he caused a gorgeous banqueting house to be erected, in which he intended to receive his guest. Over the principal door of this house statues were placed of three kings, and the middle one, which was raised higher than the others, represented King Arthur. The statues were of life size, well painted and gilded, and on the shield of Arthur was an interlaced device "*Cui adhereor pro me est*," which has been understood to read "He whom I cleave to is before me," a motto which was intended to represent Henry's reverence for his Tudor ancestor, the first, greatest, and most renowned of the heroes of chivalry, as the literature of the Middle Ages had long represented him. King Henry's great banqueting house was, however, not used for the purpose for which it was intended, as it was destroyed by a storm. A description of it will be found in the Chronicles of Calais, printed by the Camden Society, and in a French tract printed at Arras in 1520.

Two years later, in 1522, when the youthful emperor was again Henry's guest at Winchester, the King was more fortunate in his arrangements, and it is a matter of history that the Round Table of King Arthur was one of the objects of chivalry which was displayed to the emperor on that visit. It is indeed probable that it graced the banqueting hall in

which the emperor was entertained—the hall of the Castle; on the wall of which it still hangs. Milner, in his History of Winchester, quoting the Trussel MSS., says that the Table was newly painted for this occasion and that the following distich, which was legible for a long time afterwards, was placed beneath it in honour of Henry's imperial visitor:—

CAROLUS, HENRICUS VIVANT; DEFENSOR UTERQUE;
HENRICUS FIDELI, CAROLUS ECCLESIAE.¹

This special inscription was probably what was placed below the Table just before the visit, but the Table itself appears to have been repainted a few years earlier, for an Exchequer Roll shows that a sum of £66 16s. 11d. was expended in the repair of the "Aula regis infra castrum de Wynchestre et le Round Tabyll ibidem" in 1516-17, and the money for this purpose appears to have been advanced by the collectors of customs and subsidies in the port of Southampton, between 24 August, 1516, and 31 January, 1517.²

The names of the knights as they appear round the edge of the table at Winchester are:—

Sr Galahallt	Sr Blubrys	Sr Kay
Sr Lancelot deu Lake	Sr Lacote male Tayle	Sr Ector de Maris
Sr Gaweyn	Sr Lucane	Sr Dagonet
Sr Percyvale	Sr Plomyds	Sr Degoré
Sr Lyonell	Sr Lamorak	Sr Brumeur
Sr Trystram de Lyens	Sr Bors de Ganyys	Sr Lybyus Dyscophorus
Sr Gareth	Sr Saser	Sr Alynore
Sr Bedvere	Sr Pellens	Sr Mordrede

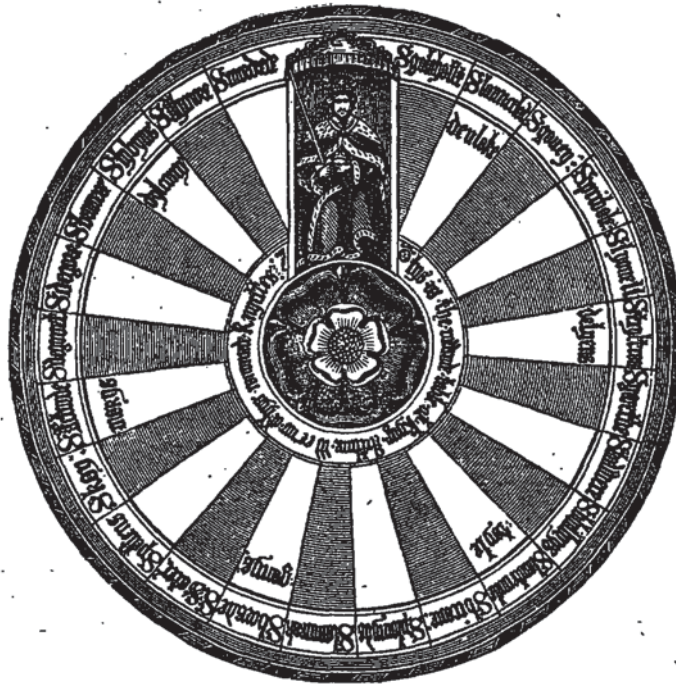
Round the double rosé in the centre, which was the Tudor King's badge, the inscription reads "*This is the rownde Table of Kyng Arthur with XXIIII. of his namyd Knyhtes.*"

In the romances we read of Arthur holding a tournament at Winchester, and the most probable conclusion at which we can arrive concerning the Round Table is that in the 13th century, and probably in the time of Henry III., this table was constructed as the symbol of a tournament actually held there in the 13th century, and that the painting of King Arthur and the names of twenty-four of the knights mentioned in the romances were adopted for its ornamentation.

¹ Milner Hist. I. 322.

² Melville Portal, "*The Great Hall at Winchester*," p 87, quoting the Exchequer Roll.

The double rose in its centre was almost certainly placed on it in the time of Henry VIII. who claimed Arthur as his ancestor. The Table has suffered from unskilful restoration

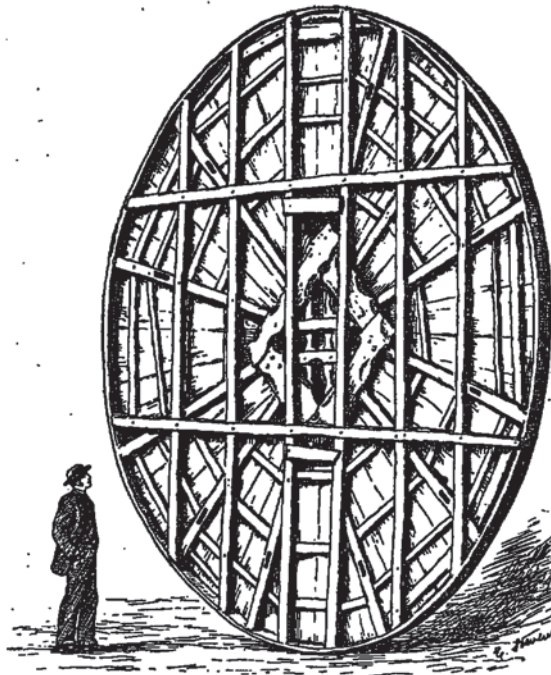


THE ROUND TABLE AT WINCHESTER.²

for some of the letters in the names of the knights appear to have been changed into others something like them. Certainly some of the names as now painted round the margin cannot be identified with the names which appear in the romance. That which has been read Sir Ray, should without doubt be Sir Kay, the seneschall of the romance. Others can easily be identified with the names given in the Arthurian-story, varied in the spelling, such as Sir Galahalt, Sir Launcelot du Lake, Sir Gaweyn, Sir Bedvere, Sir Lucane, Sir Lyonel, Sir Bors de Ganys, Sir Ector de Maris, Sir Percivale, Sir Trystram, Sir Lamorak, Sir Gareth, Sir

² Arch. Inst. Winchester Volume 1846.

Modred, Sir Le cote male tayle, and Sir Dagonet the court fool, whom King Arthur made a knight with his own hands, and loved passing well.



THE ROUND TABLE : UNDERSIDE.

When the Round Table at Winchester was taken down in 1874, it was possible to examine its construction and it was found to have been put together in the form of a wheel with twelve radiating ledges or spokes, in each of which is a mortice hole to receive a tenon with two stout pins left in it, thus proving beyond all doubt that the table, originally had legs and that what we now see was supported as the top of a table.¹ In addition to the legs there are traces of some central support, such as would be given by a stout central leg or block of wood. The wood used in its frame shows two distinct dates of carpenters work and the use¹ of

¹ Melville Portal. "*The Great Hall at Winchester*," p 90. Mr. Portal's volume to which we are indebted for the above illustration, contains an exhaustive description of the Table and its history.

different kinds of tools at these periods. It is composed of stout oak plank and is about 18ft in diameter.¹ If we multiply this diameter by $3\frac{1}{2}$ we find that its circumference must be about $56\frac{1}{2}$ feet. This would give ample space for 25 persons to sit at it.

The Round Table is mentioned in legendary history at a very early date. Athenæus, a writer of the 2nd Century, tells us that the Gaulish chiefs feasted at round tables, their shield bearers standing behind them with their shields, a statement which shows that the legend extends further back than the age of Arthur. Although we have no Welsh writings which approach this date in antiquity yet the lore of the Celtic Bards has undoubtedly come down from a remote age and the Round Table was one of their themes. The earliest existing Welsh MSS. are probably as old as the 12th Century.

An old MS.,² the date of which is not given, quoted in *Archæologia Cambrensis* states that 24 knights always dwelt at the Court of King Arthur and were arranged in distinctive classes as follows :—

1. Three golden tongued knights, concerning whom it is said there was neither king nor lord to whom they came, who would not listen to them.
2. Three chaste knights, who were such that wherever they went, neither a giant nor a sage nor an unspiritual person could withstand any one of them.
3. Three knights of battle, who had as their characteristic quality that they would never retreat through fear of spear, or sword, or arrow.
4. Three knights who had the power of illusion, who appeared on an emergency in any shape they liked, and therefore no one could overcome them.
5. Three royal knights whose renown was that no king nor emperor could refuse them any favour, in time of peace because of their fairness, and in war neither private soldier nor champion could withstand them.
6. Three just knights whose characteristic was that they would put to death whoever committed wrong however powerful he might be.
7. Three knights of repugnance whose peculiarity was that nobody could refuse them anything, one because he was so fair, another because he was so ugly, and the third because he was so big, so strong and so cruel.

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Archæologia Cambrensis* I p. 48.

8. Three counselling knights whose characteristic was that whatever difficulty occurred, they gave Arthur such good counsel that none were able to overcome him.

So much for the knights of the Welsh tradition.

The words Round Table have to be considered in reference to their use in the Middle Ages in a double sense, viz:—

1. A Table of a circular shape.
2. The name for a knightly order, or knights assembled for a tournament.

King Stephen is said to have introduced the Round Table into England in connection with the meeting of knights.¹

Matthew of Westminster, in his *Flores Historiarum* under the year A.D. 1252, says "*Facta est hastiludium quod Tabula Rotunda vocatur.*" Here the expression Round Table is used as the symbol of a tournament.² The historian does not mention where the tournament was held in 1252, but he says that Henry III. kept Christmas at Winchester in 1253 and as he begins the account of this year at that feast this must have been 1252-3 Old Style.

As there was a great rejoicing and other festivities at Winchester at the end of the year 1252-3 this record of Matthew of Westminster comes near to proof of the date at which the table was made:

A Round Table was established at Kenilworth in 1280 by Roger de Mortimer for the encouragement of military pastimes.

Edward III. established a Round Table at Windsor, an institution which appears to have been the precursor of the Order of the Garter. Later on, we read of a payment made by Edward III. to the prior of Merton for 30 oaks taken from his wood near Reading for the Round Table at Windsor.³

The bibliography of the historic Arthur is small, viz. that contained in Nennius' *Historia Britonum* and perhaps that in the *Annales Cambriae*. The mythical history of the Arthur of the romances is large and begins with the pretended history of Geoffrey of Monmouth in his *Historia Britonum*, written about 1147. Geoffrey states that his materials came from Brittany, and his narrative was seized on by the

¹ *Regis Stephani*,—*Gul. Newbrigen*.

² *Hastiludium*, *Torneamentum*, *Ducange*

³ *Issue Roll of the Exchequer*, 18 Decr., 30, Edward III.

metrical chroniclers and romancers, enlarged from age to age, with the result that the very existence of a real king of this name has been doubted in modern time. One of the greatest of our Celtic scholars however, Professor J. Rhys, apparently believes otherwise for he writes "It may be taken for granted that there was a historical Arthur, who may have held the office which, under the Roman administration, was that of the *Comes Britannia*, and that he may, like Aurelius Ambrosius, have been partly of Roman descent. As regards his name he says "it was either the Latin Artorius or else a Celtic name belonging in the first instance to a god Arthur," for the Latin Artorius or "the mythological Artor, of which the genitive would be Artoros," and "would equally yield in Welsh the familiar form Arthur."¹

The fabulous story of Arthur was repeated by Wace and Gaimar in Anglo Norman, and by Layamon in English, in the 12th and succeeding centuries, new details being added by Walter Mapes, de Borron and others, until in the 15th century it had acquired the completeness in which it is found in Sir Thomas Malory's "*Morte D'Arthur*" or "The Book of King Arthur and of his noble knights of the Round Table."

The city of Camelot figures prominently in this story and Camelot, according to Sir Thomas Malory, is Winchester. It was at Camelot, the romance tells us, that the Holy Grail, covered with white samite so that none "might see it nor who bare it," was borne through the hall in which Arthur and his knights were assembled.

There are a considerable number of old MS. copies of the Arthurian romances still in existence. Sir Thomas Malory, the 15th century writer, flourished about 1470. In his book he informs his reader many times that he derived his narrative from "the Frensshe book." His *Morte d'Arthur*, which he says he finished in the ninth year of Edward IV., was printed about fifteen years later by William Caxton. It is interesting thus to note that this "History of King Arthur and his knights of the Round Table," which has been so long commemorated by the Round Table in the ancient royal hall at Winchester, was one of the earliest books which issued from the English press.

Rhys J. *The Arthurian Legend*, p. 48.