CHRIS BARBER

KING ARTHUR

The Mystery Unravelled

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To my friend David Pykitt
without whose support and invaluable research
this book would not have been possible

This book is also dedicated to the fond
memory of the late Ruth R. Ingall, our
kindred spirit across the Atlantic –
David and myself are eternally grateful to
Ruth for her wisdom and generosity

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Chris Barber

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Preface

To provide a convincing solution to the matter of Arthur is an extremely difficult task for it is very difficult to unravel the truth behind the legend. One has to deal with both a mythical Arthur and a literary Arthur, while somewhere lurking in the background there is a historical Arthur. Unfortunately, there is no reference to Arthur from his own time and even Gildas, his contemporary, fails to mention him.

Stories of Arthur used to be related by the Celts of Wales, Cornwall and Brittany, and fact mingled with fiction made him the hero of some ancient tales that existed even before he was born. The deeds of Arthur are celebrated in French songs and German legends, while the Celtic stories of the *Mabinogion* provide glimpses of heroic events that happened long before they were written down.

It is accepted that the time of Arthur straddles the fifth and sixth centuries, which are often referred to as the Dark Ages, but it must be stressed that this term is not an accurate description of the years following the withdrawal of the Roman legions for it was one of the most interesting periods in the history of Britain. In many respects it was a time of enlightenment and renaissance achieved by the activities of men of vision operating in a well-organised society. It was a formative period that saw the birth of most of the languages, the ideals and traditions that still today predominate in the greater part of the British Isles.

Britain at that time was divided and sub-divided into petty kingdoms which were governed by independent sovereigns and were often at war with each other. There was no Wales, England or Scotland, just the Island of Britain, which had been governed by the Romans for about four centuries. In this book we reveal that the story of Arthurian Britain is one of a titanic struggle for supremacy between two rival factions led by members of two opposing British dynasties.

Geoffrey of Monmouth was a monk posing as a historian and in his famous book *History of the Kings of Britain* he presented Arthur as an epic hero who has been treated with disbelief. Yet it is possible to identify an authentic figure who provided the basis for the story.

It was the medieval writers who brought Arthur into their own period

so that he could be more easily identified, and between 1250 and 1450 stories of this heroic king and his 'knights of the Round Table' appeared in almost every western European language. A fairy tale kingdom was invented for Arthur and accounts of his daring deeds recounted by bards in Cumbria, Wales, Cornwall and Brittany.

The identity of Arthur as a historical figure was the theme of my previous book *Journey to Avalon*, co-authored with David Pykitt and first published by Blorenge Books in 1993. During the following two decades we continued an intensive programme of research to reinforce our theories. By using a wide variety of sources and re-examining various manuscripts it is possible to show that a misinterpretation of early Welsh genealogies has obscured the identity of the Celtic prince who can be identified as 'Arthur'.

A time slot was needed in which to place Arthur and if one considers that the Battle of Badon most likely took place between 490 and 520 then it is reasonable to assume that he would have been around in that period. Next it was necessary to identify his most likely area of operation and it very soon became evident that Gwent and Glamorgan, the ancient land of the Silures, was the true realm of a historical King Arthur.

Following the time of Arthur, the Cymry were forced to retreat to the hills and valleys of the west which became their only refuge. Wales, as it was later known, was to prove the natural stronghold for the survival of the Britons. Here flourished a people who retained their language through the passing centuries to become the Welsh nation of today.

English publishers who looked at the manuscript of *Journey to Avalon* turned it down because it was packed with Welsh personal and place names, and it was even suggested that we should try anglicising them. We pointed out that it is only by giving Welsh names that the truth of the matter can be revealed. The anglicisation, suppression and corruption of Welsh history are the very reasons why the story and identity of Arthur has been obscured.

Three-hundred years after Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote his *Historia Regum Britanniae*, Henry Tudor sailed with an army from Brittany to land in Wales. Marching under the Red Dragon of Cadwaladr, he won for the true line of the Britons the Crown of England on Bosworth Field. Then using Geoffrey's work to boost his claim to the throne, he called his first born son Arthur, who had he outlived his father would have succeded to the throne as Arthur the Second.

PREFACE

The idea that the famous Arthur of history and legend was in fact a 'Welshman' is hard for many people to accept. Confusion and brainwashing through the passing centuries has made this Dark Age Celtic warrior a legendary hero of England. This is largely due to the romantic writings of Sir Thomas Malory, who transformed him into a fifteenth-century hero leading a band of knights clad in shining armour. Likewise, the Poet Laureate Alfred Lord Tennyson made him a symbol of England's greatness. It seems remarkable that his enemies, the very people against whom he waged an unrelenting war, have turned him into their own national hero. Arthur the battle leader has become in legend King Arthur of England!

Welsh history continues to be ignored by the majority of Arthurian scholars and it is only by getting to grips with the complex matter of ancient Welsh names, titles and geography that the answers to many previously unanswered questions can be provided.

Chris Barber
Llanfoist, 2016

CHAPTER 1

Who was King Arthur?

It was the early bards who first mentioned a man named Arthur in their epic war poems which were composed in Rheged, an area of Britain now known as Cumberland. These verses celebrated the military prowess of a man named Arthur and it would seem that in the beginning he was more famous in the north than he was in the south. This has led some historians to locate his story in the border region of Scotland, while on the other hand there are others who firmly believe that his realm was in the West Country. However, the object of this book is to provide proof that the truth of the matter can only be found in Wales.

I will endeavour to explain why so much confusion has arisen and to locate Arthur in his correct place, but first of all it is necessary to sort out the identity of the various Arthurs who have been suggested as the basis for the King Arthur of legend and history.

Arthur of Dalriada

It was in the seventh-century Latin manuscript relating to the *Life of St Columbanus* (543–615) that the name of Artur (Arthur) was first mentioned.[1] It was written by Adomnan, a successor of St Columba, at the monastery of Iona.[2] This Artur (born c.570) was the son of Aedan mac Gabrain, King of Dalriada (now Argyll and Kintyre), the area on the north-west coast of Scotland, colonised by the Irish Gaels.[3]

Artur died fighting the Picts at the Battle of the Miathi, which was fought near the River Forth in Manau Guotodin in about 590–6.[4] Miathi appears to be the Irish form of the tribal name Maeatae, described by the Roman writer Dio Cassius as a tribe hostile to Rome, living next to the Antonine Wall.

While Artur mac Aedan is the earliest verifiable personage with the name 'Arthur', he is much too late to be the historical King Arthur.[5] To identify this Artur of Dalriada with the Arthur of legend is to disregard the evidence contained in Nennius's *Historia Brittonum* and the *Welsh Annals*, and to deny him his most famous victory at the Battle of Badon, fought in c.516. Aedan

was well known to the British and he has never been represented in the Arthurian legend.[6]

Arthurian place names were once common in Strathclyde, a good example being Ben Arthur, near Loch Long, which may be named after Artur mac Aedan.

The Arthur Mentioned by Aneurin

The bard Aneurin in his epic poem *Y Gododdin*, written in about 595, describes the feats of a certain British hero, called Gwawrddur, by saying that his valour was remarkable, 'although he was no Arthur'.[7] This statement suggests that everyone at that time would have known who Arthur was. Roman names had by then gone out of use in Britain and the Latin name Arturius or Arthurius became shortened to Arthur through changes in speech.

The Votadini were a tribe living in the Edinburgh area and they were fighting the Angles of Deira. The Arthur referred to in this poem was most likely Artur, the son of Aedan mac Gabrain of Dalriada.

Although presumed to be written in the sixth century by the bard Aneurin, the poem may in fact date from the tenth century, or perhaps the ninth, but no earlier. Too much weight has been attached to one line: 'gochore brein du ar uur/caer ceni bei ef arthur' – 'fed black ravens on the rampart of a fort, although he was no Arthur'. This line only appears in one of two versions of the text which casts doubt on its being part of the presumed original sixth-century poem.

There were at least three men named Artur living in south-western Scotland at the time that *Y Gododdin* was compiled. These were Artur mac Aedan, Artur mac Conaing (probably named after his uncle Artur mac Aedan) and Artur mac Bicoir, who slew Morgan mac Fiachna of Ulster in 620/625.

Artorius the Roman Soldier

In 1925 the suggestion was made that the story of Arthur is based on Lucius Artorius Castus, praefectus castrum of the Sixth Legion. This Roman soldier lived in the second century (c.140–200) and served the Empire in the Middle East, Romania, Italy, Britain and Yugoslavia. He was stationed in Britain and served as praefectus (or prefect) of the VI Victrix Legion, which he led from York in AD 184 to suppress a rebellion in Armorica (Brittany).

There are two monuments near Split in old Yugoslavia which commemorate Lucius Artorius Castus, and one of the inscriptions tells us that he attained the rank of *dux* in the Roman army. It is relevant that while

in Britain, Artorius, just like the Arthur of legend, commanded a band of cavalry, for this could explain why Nennius, writing in the eighth century, using a 'heap of material', referred to Arthur as a *dux bellorum* (battle-leader).

Arthur of Dyfed

A reasonably historical Arthur (c.570–615) once resided in Dyfed (south-west Wales). Of Irish descent, he was Artur mac Petuir (Arthur son of Pedr) and his great-grandfather was Vortiporius (c.470–c.545), whose memorial stone can be seen in Carmarthen Museum.[8]

Lineage of the Kings of Dyfed

Eochaid Allmuir ('from Overseas')
Corath
Aed Brosc
Triphunus Farchog ('the Knight')
Aircol Lawhir (Agricola 'the Long-handed')
Gwerthefyr (Vortiporix)
Cyngar
Pedr
Arthur
Noe (Nowy)

The Latin Name of Arthur

During the Roman occupation of Britain the name Artorius was quite common, and in post-Roman times it continued to be used. In the latter part of the sixth century there were at least four or five people called Artorius who lived in the Celtic areas of the British Isles.

It is important to emphasise that no Latin sources refer to Arthur as Artorius, but instead the Latinised Welsh version of the name is used, i.e., Arthurus, Arturus or Arturius. If Arthur's name had come from Artorius we would expect to find the Latin form of the name used in Latin texts such as the *Annales Cambriae* or the *Historia Brittonum*, but in both works the name appears as Arthur.

The *Historia Brittonum* (attributed to Nennius) refers to Arthur as Arturus and this name can be found in the earliest of the surviving manuscripts dating from the tenth or eleventh centuries. In the ancient *Book of Llandaff* the name Athruis appears and is most likely derived from Arturus.

The normal ending for an individual's name in Latin is *us* and such an ending was often added by the Britons to non-Latin names to give them a

Latin appearance (hence Arthurus). In the earliest Latin of Nennius and the *Welsh Annals* the form Arturus is found.

Legend of St Goeznovius (1019) Arturo
Lifric of Llancarfan (c.1073) Arthurus/Arthurius
Vita Carantoci (c.1100) Arthur
Vita Illtuti (c.1100) Arthurii
William of Malmesbury (c.1125) Arturis
Henry of Huntingdon (c.1129) Arthurus/Arturus
Geoffrey of Monmouth (c.1136) Arturus
Caradoc of Llancarfan (c.1150) Arthuro
Giraldus Cambrensis (c.1191) Arthuri
Ralph of Coggleshall (c.1200) Arturi

Seventh–Ninth-Century Arthurs

An entry in the *Annals of Tigernach* for 620–5 records that 'Mongon mac Fiachna Lwgan was struck with a stone by Artuir son of Bicoir the Briton and died'.

Athrwys ap Fferfael was the descendant of Athrwys ap Meurig and he ruled Gwent in the time of King Offa of Mercia, who came to power in 757.

Arthgen, King of Ceredigion, is noted in the *Welsh Annals* as having died in 807. He was the son of Seissil and grandson of Clitauc.

Arthgal or Artgal, one of the last British kings of Strathclyde, died in 872.

Arthur the Soldier

The ninth-century manuscript attributed to Nennius tells us that Arthur was a *miles*, a soldier, and he states that many men were more nobly born. He also tells us that Arthur fought 'Cum regibus Brittonium sed ipse dux erat bellorum' – 'with the Kings of the Britons, although he was the leader in battle'.

This has resulted in doubt being cast upon Arthur being an actual king and some writers have downgraded him to the role of mere battle-leader. This statement has been much debated and needs careful consideration, for while Nennius states that Arthur led the other kings in battle, he does not definitely say that he was **not** a king himself. It suggests that by fighting with the British kings he was of equal status. Perhaps, just like William the Conqueror, Arthur was a *dux* (duke) who became a king.

The words *dux bellorum* may have been intended as a descriptive term meaning 'Commander in Battle'. It implies that Arthur held a military title similar to the *Comes Britaniae* (Count of Britain) or *Dux Britaniarum* (Duke

of the Britons) which were appointed in Britain during the latter years of the Roman administration.[9]

As a *dux bellorum* Arthur was something apart and distinctive, and the formal title quite literally means 'leader of wars' in the tradition of the Count of Britain. He was the leader of the British resistance against all invaders whose role was to protect Britannia and this he did alongside the rulers of petty kingdoms, he himself being the generalissimo of the Romano-Britons. In this capacity, he commanded a formidable cavalry force, the mobility of which enabled it to move rapidly from one area of Britain to another, opposing external invaders wherever the need was greatest.

It is likely that the medieval romances of Arthur's knights of the Round Table represent a genuine folk memory of a mounted war band led by Arthur. The Romans had certainly made use of cavalry and two units served in Britain during the fourth century. It would appear that Arthur established a similar mobile force a century later. The best description we have of a sixth-century war-band riding to battle is contained in Aneurin's epic poem *Y Gododdin.*

Arthur the Emperor

In a poem called 'Geraint son of Erbin', contained in the *Black Book of Carmarthen*, Arthur is described as 'Arthur amherawdyr' – Arthur the Emperor. The Welsh have borrowed the Latin title *imperator*, 'emperor', and made it into 'amherawdyr' and it was probably used in its original meaning – that of Commander-in-Chief. This may be explained by the fact that when the Roman *imperator* no longer had any interest in Britain, the title was given to the highest officer in the island, namely the *Comes Britanniae* and in this way arose the title 'yr Amherawdyr Arthur' – the 'Emperor Arthur'.

This officer had a roving commission to defend the province wherever his presence might be required. The other military captains were the *Dux Britanniarum*, who had charge of the forces in the north, especially on Hadrian's Wall, and the *Comes Litoris Saxonici*, who was entrusted with the defences of the island's south-eastern coast.

The successors of both of these captains seem to have been called 'gweldigs' (rulers), so Arthur's suggested position as *Comes Britanniae* would be in a sense superior to theirs, which fits in with his being called emperor (*imperator*) and not *gwledig*.

How the Name Changed from Artur to Arthur

In the sixth century the name was written as Artur or in Latin Arturus or Arturius. The name Artur was Latinised to Arturius and the 'h' was added by

medieval writers and Artur thus became Arthur. The spelling of Arthur with 'h' did not develop until the twelfth century.

Artur – Arturius – Arthurius – Arthur

A good comparison is the Latin name Antoninus – Antony – Anthony. Latin names were also sometimes abbreviated, such as Marcus to Marc. Thus Arthurius may have been shortened to Arthur. It is significant that Latin writers refer to Arthur as Arturus or Arturis but never Artorius.

The Celtic Origin of the Name Arthur

It is necessary to understand that the name Arthur is derived from a number of similar sources which through the passing centuries became very confused. In the Welsh language 'Arth Fawr' means the 'Great Bear' and in ancient times this was the name given to the polar god who symbolised all the forces that came to us from the region of the seven main stars of the constellation called Ursa Major, which is Latin for Great Bear. The word Arctus comes from the two celestial constellations which are commonly called Ursa Major and Minor and Arcturus is a star near the tail of the Great Bear. Accordingly, Arcturus seems a more likely Latin root for Arthur than Artorius for it dates back to pre-Roman times and it is derived from the early Celtic form Artorix, meaning 'Bear King'.

Arthur was undoubtedly known as 'the Bear' and it is relevant that Celtic personal names and nicknames that referred to animals were popular during the fifth–sixth century period: Bran (crow), March (horse), Morvran (sea crow), etc. Gildas in his *De Excidio et Conquesta Britanniae* names five British kings and speaks of them as animals: Aurelius Caninus – 'the Dog', whose father is the 'Lion Whelp'; Vortipor is 'the Leopard'; Maglocunus (Maelgwyn) is referred to as 'the Dragon'; and Cuneglasus 'the Bear'.

Was the Name Arthur Derived From a Title?

The word 'Arthwyr' is a title given to someone of importance, indicating that he was strong and powerful just like a bear. In times of national crisis the Britons elected such a leader who was given this title as a token of respect. It meant 'the Bear Exalted' and was a reference to the Celtic Bear deity.

In 506 an 'Arthwyr' was elected by the Council of Britain to exercise sovereign authority, just like previous princes had been chosen as 'Pendragons' or 'battle commanders' in times of danger. He was to become the historical King Arthur who became a legend in his own lifetime. Other

examples of Dark Age figures who are remembered by their titles are Vortigern and Emyr Llydaw.

The name Arthur may even be a copyist's error for Arthwyr, an epithet that in time became a name. When copies of manuscripts were made, one monk would read aloud while another did the writing, and this obviously led to names being spelt in different ways.

So Who was the King Arthur of History and Legend?

The King Arthur of history and legend was identified by writers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as Athrwys ap Meurig, the hereditary King of the Silures, the Celtic tribe that inhabited south-east Wales.[10]

Lewis's *Dictionary of Wales*, published in 1759, comments: 'Meurig ap Tewdrig, a man of great valour and wisdom, was the father of that Arthur who is now regarded by Welsh writers as that hero whose exploits form so distinguished a feature of the British annals and who succeeded Meurig in his domain.'

The Revd John Whitaker, in his book *The History of Manchester* (1775), observes: 'Arthur was the Arth-uir, great man or sovereign of the proper Silures and therefore the denominated King of Gwent, the Venta Silurum of the Romans and the British metropolis of the nation.'

David Williams, in his *History of Monmouthshire*, published in 1796, also appeared to have no doubts that this was the person who can be identified with King Arthur:

> The celebrated Arthur had an actual existence; though the place of his birth is uncertain, his family, like that of other princes, combined against the strategums of Vortigern and the ferocity of the Saxons, frequently varying their residence in Siluria, in Damonium and in Armorica. He was the son of Meurig, Prince of Siluria or Gwent; succeeded his father in the Principality . . .

David Williams was also aware that Arthwyr was a title:

> Athrwys or Athruis, the son of Meurig ap Tewdrig, King of Gwent, assumed the appellation of Arthwyr, or the Bear Exalted. In 506 Arthwyr was elected by the states of Britain to exercise sovereign authority, as eminence in consequence of superior abilities and bravery; having been until then only a chieftain of the Silurian Britons.

David Williams also realised that Arthur was known by various names:

> Meurig son of Tewdric, or Theodric; who is celebrated for his wisdom owes his celebrity principally to his son . . . Arthyr; who is variously called Arthwys, Arthras, Adras, Adros, Arthwy, Arthur, Uthur, and is probably the great Arthur of the British History.

William Owen Pughe, in his *Cambrian Biography*, published in 1803, made a similar statement, but disagreed slightly with the date of Arthur's election: 'About the year 517, Arthur was elected by the states of Britain to exercise sovereign authority . . . having been from 510 till then only a chieftain of the Silurian Britons, being the son of Meurig ap Tewdrig'.

John H. Parry states, in *The Cambrian Plutarch* (1834) that: 'Arthur was the son of Meurig ap Tewdrig, a prince of the Silurian Britons at the commencement of the sixth century, and who is in all probability, Uthyr or Uther of legendary celebrity.'

Copying errors by monks confused names, and Arthwyr in the *Llandaff Charters* became Athrwys. This was the way it looked or sounded to the scribes who copied and re-copied the documents through the centuries. The name is variously spelt in different documents as Arthwys, Arthwyr, Athwys, Athwyr, Arthmael, Arthmail and Arthur.[11]

Athrwys first appears in the grant of Cilcinhinn, Conuoy and Llangenni made by King Meurig, accompanied by Queen Onbrawst to Bishop Oudoceus. His brother Idnerth is also among the witnesses to this grant which commemorates his grandfather King Tewdrig.

Athrwys is also mentioned several times in the charter grants of his son Morgan who is styled as King Morgan, for example: 'Be it known that Morgan son of Athrwys gave the church of Ystrat-hafren, with an uncia of land, to God, and to St Dubricius, and St Teilo, and in the hand of Bishop Berthgwyn, and to all his successor in the Church of Llandaff.'

Arthur, Hereditary King of the Silures

Of all the heroic people of Britain encountered by the legions of Imperial Rome, the Silures, inhabiting what is now designated south Wales, were the most valiant and cultured. Tacitus, writing of them in the first century of the Christian era, bears the following testimony: '*Silurum gens non atrocitate, clementia mutibatur; validamque et pugnaccem Silurum gentem*' – 'Neither violence nor clemency could subdue the valiant Silurian'.

The Silures were a branch of the Veneti who left Armorica in western Gaul during the second century BC and entered south Wales by way of Cornwall. They probably landed on the bank of the Severn, at Sudbrook,

where a camp was constructed. They later established their main fort at Caermelin (Llanmelin), just to the north of present-day Caerwent.

In due course, the bulk of the Silures occupied the lowland coastal areas of Glamorgan and Gwent and the valleys of the Black Mountains with the River Wye forming their eastern boundary with the Dobunni tribe. The cluster of small defended settlements centred on the upper reaches of the River Usk, in the heart of the Brecon Beacons, can also be regarded as part of the Silures's territory.

In AD 43 the Emperor Claudius sent his general Aulus Plautius with 4 legions (Second, Ninth, Fourteenth and Twentieth), with their accompanying auxiliaries, making in all a force of probably 50,000 troops, to conquer Britain and to make it the northern frontier province of the Empire. A particular attraction was the rich corn lands of the south and the mineral wealth of the country. The Roman army landed on the coast of Kent and advanced inland to cross the Thames west of London. They succeeded in capturing the Belgic capital of Camulodunum and within three years all south-east Britain as far as the Fosse Way had been captured.

When in AD 43, Caratacus, the last of the eastern kings, led an army of Belgic and Cantian warriors against the Roman invaders, he was defeated in a two-day battle on the River Medway. He then fled westwards to the land of the Silures and set about organising further resistance. This tribe, together with the Ordovices, was one of the most formidable opponents of the Romans, and they appointed Caratacus as their battle leader. For the next nine years he became a thorn in the side of the Roman legions trying to conquer the Silures. Of all the heroic people of Britain who the Roman soldiers encountered, the Silures were by far the most valiant and they were not amenable to negotiation or threat.

Tacitus, writing in the first century of the Christian era, described them as 'exceptionally stubborn' and commented that Caratacus, who fought the Romans for nine years, 'had in many battles, both indecisive and successful, raised himself above all other generals in Britain'.

In AD 51, Caratacus and his tribesmen were heavily defeated by Ostorius Scapula in a battle fought on the border of mid-Wales. Numerous sites for this battle have been suggested, but the most likely one is Caer Caradog near Church Stretton in Shropshire, since it is known that the battle was joined 'in the territory of the Ordovices'.

Caratacus managed to escape and headed north to seek refuge among the Briganti tribe, which inhabited what is modern Yorkshire. It was an unfortunate choice, for Queen Cartimandua, fearing reprisals upon her people

if she aided the fugitive, betrayed Caratacus to the Romans. He was taken to Rome as a much-prized prisoner and led through the streets of the capital in a great triumphal procession.

Tacitus provides a record of the speech made by Caratacus to the Emperor Claudius which ended with the words, 'Spare me, and your clemency will be remembered forever.' The dignified bearing of the captive British king impressed the Emperor so deeply that he ordered that Caractacus and his wife and daughter should be set free, though they were not allowed to return to Britain.

The Silures are Finally Subdued

After the capture of Caratacus, the struggle continued with the Silures keeping up their resistance to Roman attempts to penetrate their territory. In AD 50 the Roman General Aulus Plautius was succeeded in command by Publius Ostorius Scapula, and it is recorded by Tacitus that the Silures managed to defeat a legion in a hard-fought battle. It is believed that this incident took place at Clyro near Hay-on-Wye.

When Ostorius Scapula died in AD 52 he was replaced by Aulus Didius Gallus, who had accompanied Claudius to Britain as the General of Cavalry and had been promoted to high command. By constructing an intricate system of forts and roads, he managed to contain the Silures, but it was not until AD 71–4 that the Silures were finally subjugated by Julius Frontinus.

In AD 75 Frontinus founded the Roman legionary fortress of Isca Silurum (Caerleon-on-Usk). Tacitus tells us that he used this fort as a base 'from which he conquered the powerful and beligerent tribe of the Silures, managing with difficulty to master not only courageous enemies, but a treacherous terrain'.

The Romans converted the old Celtic tribal name of Syllwg to Siluria and referred to the natives as Silures. The military fort that had been constructed a short distance from the old landing point at Sudbrook on the Severn Estuary was developed into an impressive stone walled fortress town. It became known as Venta Silurum when some of the Silures were persuaded to leave their hill-top fort at Caer Melin, a mile to the north, and sample the Roman way of life in this new town.

There is no doubt that the Romans never succeeded in fully subjugating the Silures and eventually a compromise had to be reached which resulted in the Roman Republic of the Silures. Disarmed, the tribe was allowed to flourish and their territory expanded to Pencraig in the east and Moccas in the north, reaching within a few kilometres of Hereford. Their territory also

included large parts of Gwent and extended west into Glamorgan and east into Gloucestershire.

By now all the traditional tribal centres had been converted into capital towns by the Roman architects. The development of such towns as CALLEVA (Silchester), DURNOVANIA (Dorchester), VERULAMIUM (St Albans), DUROVERNUM (Canterbury), CORINIUM (Cirencester), RATAE (Leicester), ISCA (Exeter), VENTA BELGARUM (Winchester), URICONIUM (Wroxeter) and VENTA SILURUM (Caerwent) were the results.

These new Romanised towns were called *civitates* and the name came to mean not only the towns themselves but the whole tribal areas. They all had a council which was the local version of the senate in Rome with elected officers and magistrates. It was the equivalent in today's terms of a county council. Delegates from each tribal senate were sent to an annual Provincial Council which met at Camulodunum (Colchester) and it is quite likely that for a time this procedure still took place after the Romans had departed.

Venta Silurum (Caerwent) continued to function as the administrative centre of the *civitas* up to the fourth century, if not beyond. In total the Romans governed Siluria for a period of 365 years and on their departure in about 407 the native princes resumed the government of the area.

In 410 the Emperor Honorius informed the *civitates* of Britain that they could no longer rely on the Imperial armies to defend them. It was from that time that the period generally referred to as the Dark Ages began, symbolised by the mystery shrouded story of Arthur.

The Silurian commonwealth re-emerged when Glywysing, named after its founder-king Glywys, became united with Gwent. The first ruler of the united kingdom was Tewdrig Fendigaid (the Blessed). His son and successor Meurig married Onbrawst, daughter of Gwrgant Mawr (the Great), King of Erging, and as a result of this marriage alliance Meurig was able to extend his domain into present-day Herefordshire. It was their son Athrwys who was the hereditary King of the Silures.

The Identification has been Obscured by an Academic Muddle

Unfortunately, present-day historians claim that the reign of Athrwys ap Meurig was of little consequence and that he lived a century later than the time of Arthur. Such a mistaken belief has caused an academic muddle with the result that the true identity of Arthur is ignored and appears to be impossible to ascertain. This academic muddle was explained in my earlier publication *Journey to Avalon*, and this present book sets out to strengthen the case for identifying Athrwys ap Meurig as 'The Real Arthur'.

Reviewers of *Journey to Avalon* commented that we had been influenced by the writings of Iolo Morganwg (Edward Williams), who is regarded by many as a forger. However, this was not the case for the identification of Arthur with Athrwys ap Meurig had already been made by Llywelyn ap Rhisiart (Lewys Morgannwg), who flourished 1520–65, and Llewelyn Sion of Llangewydd (1540–1615) long before the time of Iolo Morganwg (1757–1826).

Was Arthur a King?

It has been argued by many writers that Arthur was not a king but merely a battle-leader and this belief is due to the fact that Nennius (*Historia Brittonum*) does not claim royal birth for Arthur. He refers to him as *miles*, a soldier, and states that many men were more nobly born than he was. However, by referring to Arthur as a *dux bellorum* (leader of battles) Nennius implies that Arthur was something apart and distinctive.

At the time when he was fighting his series of battles, Athrwys ap Meurig (Arthur) was probably only a sub-king of Erging. His father Meurig ap Tewdrig was still alive and Arthur was acting on his behalf as a warrior prince and battle-leader.

Geoffrey of Monmouth tells us that Arthur was crowned king at Caerleon after defeating his enemies at the Battle of Badon. It is significant that when Cunobelinus, after annexing the territory of the Catuvelauni (Middlesex and Hertfordshire and later that of Kent), made himself ruler of south-eastern Britain, he was referred to by the Romans as *Rex Britonnorium*, King of the Britons.

Athrwys ap Meurig appears frequently in the *Book of Llandaff* as a witness to charters and grants but he is never identified as a king. This can be explained by his father Meurig probably living to a great age and during his reign Athrwys was just a sub-king of Erging.

Arthur was also Known as Arthmael and Armel

It is not unusual for important Celtic characters of this period to be known by more than one name, and confusion is often caused by part of their name incorporating a title as an indication of their status. So it is not surprising that Athrwys ap Meurig was also known as Arthmael (Bear Prince) and the key to the real identity of King Arthur is to understand that his story is based on the man who was known by both of these names.

In the search for proof that Arthmael, Athruis and Athrwys are alternative names for the same person, we can find a significant statement in the *Life of St Cadoc*, compiled in the eleventh century by Lifris or Lifricus, son of Bishop

Herewald, Archdeacon of Glamorgan. He mentions that a grant of land, now known as Cadoxton-juxta-Neath, was made to St Cadoc by a certain King Arthmael. This was where our identification really started to make sense, for, according to the genealogy contained in the *Book of Llandaff*, the ruler of Morgannwg and Gwent at this time was Athrwys ap Meurig.

It also became possible to sort out why Arthur has such strong connections with Brittany. There is an interesting statement in a book entitled *Early History of the Cymry or Ancient Britons from 700 BC to AD 500*, by the Revd Peter Roberts (published in 1803). He refers to Arthur as an Armorican prince. Such a prince can be none other than Arthmael, the Messiah of Brittany. This great soldier-saint was known to the Bretons as Armel. During his life he founded churches in Brittany at Plouarzel, St Armel-des-Boschaux and Ploërmel. The name of Arthmael, like all Celtic names of that period, has taken many variants: Armel, Ermel, Ermin, Armail, Arzel, Armahel, Hermel and Thiamail. In Latin it is written as Armagillus.

The earliest record of King Arthur originated in Brittany and this was the country where he spent his last days, so it is quite naturally the place where legends concerning his life are particularly strong.

Armel (Arthmael) is remembered for the part that he played in liberating the Bretons from the tyranny of Marcus Conomorus (otherwise known as King March and Hound of the Sea), and he established a persistent legend of a King Arthur operating in Brittany which is remembered to this day. In Breton, a bear is 'arz' and Arth (Arz) mael, means bear prince. The key to the identity of King Arthur is to understand that Athrwys ap Meurig and Arthmael (known by the Breton name of Armel) were in fact the same person.

It is most unlikely that there would have been two leaders with the same name flourishing during exactly the same period. The Arthmael who reigned over Glamorgan and Gwent in the time of St Cadoc must have been the same man who liberated Domnonia in Brittany from the tyranny of Marcus Conomorus in 555. This important incident will be dealt with in Chapter Twenty.

Albert Le Grand, who compiled the *Life of St Arthmael* in 1636, states that Arthmael was born in 482 at the Roman station of Caput Bovium, which in later times became known as Boverton. It is situated to the south-east of Llanilltud Fawr (now anglicised to Llantwit Major) in the old cantref of Penychen, which in modern terms is in the Vale of Glamorgan.

The name of Arthmael's parents is not given in this account but they may be determined from the genealogy of the kings of Morgannwg and Gwent contained in the *Book of Llandaff*. Athrwys (Arthmael) is named as the son

of Meurig and Onbrawst, the daughter of Gwrgant Mawr ('the Great)', King of Erging.

There are relevant statements in the *Life of St Efflam*, the text of which is contained in Arthur de La Borderie's *Annales de Bretagne*, written in 1892. Although ignored by the majority of Arthurian students, it is of interest that Arthur is referred to as Arturus Fortissimus ('Arthur the Mighty'). In some writings he is referred to as 'The Hammer of the Saxons' and it is interesting that other warrior kings have also been given similar nicknames. For example, Edward I was known as 'The Hammer of the Scots'.

The fact that Arthmael was not only a religious leader but also a military commander ties in extremely well with Nennius's description of one of Arthur's victories 'in which he carried the portrait of Saint Mary, the virgin, on his shoulders, and the pagans were routed on that day, and there was great slaughter of them through the power of our Lord Jesus Christ and the strength of the Holy Virgin Mary, his mother . . .'.

Dr John Morris, in *The Age of Arthur*, makes a very significant statement: 'The most important of the sixth-century immigrant leaders was probably Arthmael but little is known of him . . .'. It would seem that Dr Morris had failed to look at the writings of Albert Le Grand and the lack of interest by other Arthurian scholars in the *Life of St Arthmael* has resulted in the true identity of the historical King Arthur remaining a mystery.

The Territory of Arthur

Wales, Cornwall and Brittany all claim to be associated with the legends of King Arthur and his knights, and this book sets out to show how each claim is justified. Through his 'life' and the 'lives' of his kinsmen, St Samson and St Paul Aurelian, it is possible to follow the activities of King Arthur from Glamorgan and Gwent, across Cornwall to Brittany. In Wales he is the celebrated Arthwyr, King of the Silures; in Cornwall he appears to have been confused with his brother-in-law, Count Gwythian; and in Brittany he is remembered as the great soldier-saint Arthmael or Armel.

The area generally supposed to be Arthur's main sphere of activity is Wales, Somerset, Devon, Cornwall and the Welsh Marches. This territory fitted neatly within the Roman boundaries of Britannia Secunda and its capital was Isca, otherwise known as Caerleon-on-Usk, where Arthur, in the tradition established by Geoffrey of Monmouth, is supposed to have held court. Undoubtedly, the key to the identity of King Arthur is the fact that the Glamorgan and Gwentian princes held territory in south Wales, Cornwall and Brittany, for these lands became the main field of his influence.

CHAPTER 2

Geoffrey of Monmouth

Geoffrey of Monmouth was born in about 1090, the son of a Breton family who settled in Monmouth a short time after the Norman Conquest.[1] He was probably educated at Monmouth Priory and as a Welshman by birth and upbringing it may be assumed that he spoke Welsh. It is possible that he was of Breton blood on his father's side and of Welsh blood on his mother's. His Welsh connections would have made him sympathetic with the plight of the Celtic people still living in Britain, who had suffered at the hands of the Romans, the Anglo-Saxons and the Normans.

We are told by Caradoc of Llancarfan, who was a contemporary of Geoffrey, that 'Galfrai' (Geoffrey) was the son of Arthur, the domestic chaplain of William ap Robert (William, Earl of Gloucester). He also tells us that Galfrai 'was the foster son of Uchtryd, Archdeacon of Llandaff, being his brother's son; an archdeanery was bestowed on him on account of his learning. He was the instructor of many nobles.' This statement tells us that Geoffrey of Monmouth was the son of Arthur, the private priest to William, Earl of Gloucester, the son of Robert Consul, who became Geoffrey's patron, and that he was brought up as the foster-son of Uchtryd, his paternal uncle, who was then Archdeacon and later Bishop of Llandaff.

Geoffrey at Oxford

By 1129, Geoffrey was living in Oxford, serving as a secular canon in the small college of Augustinian Canons of St George. The first authentic record we have of him is in the foundation charter of the Abbey of Osney which was granted in 1129. His name is appended as a witness to this charter, and is one of a list headed by Walter Calenius, Archdeacon of Oxford.

Geoffrey, in January 1139, witnessed a charter connected with the dedication of Godstow Abbey and he signed as 'mag Galf Arthurus'. The use of the word 'mag' (*magister*), meaning 'master' implies that Geoffrey was a graduate, presumably a Master of Arts of Paris, for the University of Oxford was not yet in existence. In total, his name appears as a witness to

six charters, between the years 1129 and 1151, all concerning religious houses near Oxford.

During the twenty-two years that Geoffrey spent at Oxford, he wrote three manuscripts, copies of which have survived to this day. These were his *Historia Regum Britanniae*, the *Prophetiae Merlini*, which he later incorporated into it, and the *Vita Merlini*, which first appeared in 1151 as a Latin poem of over 1,500 lines, purporting to represent the life and prophecies of Merlin.[2]

***Historia Regum Britanniae* (*History of the Kings of Britain*)**

Geoffrey claimed this work to be a history of the Island of Britain from about 1170 BC down to the death of King Cadwaladr in AD 689. The section relating to Arthur occupies about one-fifth of the entire work and it is here for the first time in literary history that Arthur is portrayed as a great conqueror.

He tells of Arthur's conquests, not only in his own country, against the Saxons, the Irish, the Scots and the Picts, but over all Western Europe. We see Arthur, after annexing Ireland, Iceland, Gothland and the Orkneys, following up these victories by subduing Norway, Dacia (presumably meaning modern Romania), Aquitaine and Gaul. After such triumphs there was nothing left for him but the overthrow of the Roman Empire. This he practically achieved, but the rebellion of Mordred (Medraut) brought him back home to deal with an uprising, which resulted in the end of his reign at the Battle of Camlann.

Geoffrey compiled his book by assembling a complex jigsaw puzzle with badly fitting pieces. By blending legend with glimpses of history he has given us a riddle story in which the very existence of Arthur has been doubted. Yet, soon after Geoffrey wrote his *Historia*, Arthur was also mentioned by both William of Malmesbury (*De Regibus Anglia*, which appeared in 1143) and Henry of Huntingdon (*Historia Anglorum*, c.1129). All three chronicles were sponsored by Robert, Earl of Gloucester, and Alexander, Bishop of Lincoln.

It is certainly necessary to reject much of Geoffrey's *Historia*, yet it is possible at the same time to identify statements that are seen to be supported by other sources. Names have been given Latin terminations and these, with errors of transcriptions, have much disguised them, but divested of their Latin endings they are found to be perfectly Celtic.

Geoffrey continued to work on revisions of his *Historia* after its first appearance in 1136 and the final version was completed by 1147. By the end of the twelfth century, thanks to Geoffrey of Monmouth, the story of Arthur was known in France, Spain, Italy, Poland and Byzantium.

For six centuries after it was written, Geoffrey's *Historia* was accepted by the majority of readers as accurate history; while the medieval poets found in its content a wealth of material for the basis of their poetry.

The *Historia Regum Britanniae* survives in 191 manuscripts in 49 libraries situated in 11 countries. In the British Museum alone there are no less than 35 copies.

There is no doubt that Geoffrey based his *Historia* on strands of oral tradition, existing manuscripts, historical fact and his own fertile imagination. Yet, at the same time there is a kernel of truth in his book which when carefully examined and compared with other sources can be explained.

Geoffrey's Source Book

Geoffrey refers to his source book as the 'Liber Vetustissimus' (the 'very ancient book').[3] He tells us in the first chapter of his *Historia* that:

> Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford, a person, pre-eminent both in eloquence, and his knowledge of foreign history, offered me a very ancient book in the British tongue ('quendom Britannici sermonsis librum vetustissimum'), which in a continued regular story and elegant style related the actions of all the British kings, from Brutus down to Cadwallader, the son of Cadwallon. At his request, therefore, I undertook the translation of that book into Latin.

This statement has provided much debate among historians as to whether Britannici refers to Brittany or to Wales. It certainly does not refer to England for the name Britannia had ceased to be used in the time of Geoffrey of Monmouth, having been replaced by Anglia. However, the name Britannia (meaning Cymry – Wales) significantly occurs in the *Book of Llandaff*, which was possibly edited by Geoffrey of Monmouth.

A further clue to the answer to this question is provided by Geoffrey of Gaimar (Chaplain to Ralph FitzGilbert), who wrote a poem titled, *L'Estoire des Englies* (*The History of the English*) in c.1140, in which he states:

> Robert the Earl of Gloucester
> Had this history translated
> According to the books of the Welsh (Waleis)
> Which he had, about the British Kings.

This statement confirms that the book used by Geoffrey of Monmouth

originated in Wales. Gaimar's poem in fact refers to two books, one of which may well have been Geoffrey's original. Gaimar says that he could never have compiled his poem had he not obtained, through the assistance of his patroness, the lady Custance, 'the book of Walter Especx'. This, and 'the good book of Oxford, which belonged to Walter, the archdeacon', were both used by him in composing his poem.

Geoffrey, in his *Historia*, mentions this 'British Book' three times and if he was lying about its existence then Archdeacon Walter would certainly not have been at all pleased, as the statement was made while he was still alive.

At this time Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford, was the Provost of the College of St George, and he appears as a grantor or as a co-witness with Geoffrey to no less than five charters. Geoffrey signed a sixth charter towards the end of 1151, a few months after Walter's death.

Geoffrey's friend Walter Calenius is often confused with Walter Mapes of Llancarfan who also became an archdeacon of Oxford in the twelfth century (1197). Walter Calenius was also known as Walter of Wallingford in Berkshire, which was the place of his birth. Walter Mapes was also fascinated by the story of Arthur for he wrote a *Histoire de Roy Artur*, which was the principal source for Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*.

Was Geoffrey's Source Book One of the Welsh Chronicles?

There exist Welsh translations or adaptations of Geoffrey's *Historia*, in widely variant forms, under such titles as *Brut Gryffydd ab Arthur*, *Brut y Brenhinedd* and *Brut Tysilio*. These manuscripts range in date from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries. It is possible that the original compilation of one of these works could have been the very ancient book to which Geoffrey refers.

The* Brut y Brenhinedd *(*Chronicle of the Kings*)

There are over seventy surviving manuscripts of this chronicle but the earliest dates from around 1200 and it has been generally accepted that it is merely a Welsh translation of Geoffrey's *Historia*. However, it contains material that is not in Geoffrey's book, and it is quite possible that it relates to the original ancient book that Geoffrey translated.

***The* Brut Tysilio – Tysilio's Chronicle**

Tysilio was the son of Brochfael Ysgythrog (of the Tusks), Prince of Powys, who flourished in the sixth century and was a son of Cyngen ap Cadell Ddyrnllug. After Brochfael was defeated at the Battle of Chester in 616,

St Tysilio fled with a party of monks to Armorica. They sailed up the estuary of the Rance and landed by a little creek where they established a monastery. Tysilio died there in about 650.

No manuscript copy of *Tysilio's Chronicle* is believed to exist in Brittany now; but there is sufficient evidence that ancient chronicles were once numerous in that country. The *Prophecies of Guinclan*, written in the fifth century, were extant in the Abbey of Landevence in 1701. Furthermore, two Chronicles of Brittany: *The Brief Chronicle of the Armorican British Kings* and *The Genealogy of the Princes of Dumnonia*, by Ingomar, were both examined by the French historian Lebault, about two-and-a-half centuries ago, but are now lost.

It is possible that Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford, came across a copy of Tysilio's work while travelling in Brittany for he informs us that he possessed the *Brut* or *Chronicle of Tysilio*, and that: 'I, Walter, archdeacon of Oxford, translated this book from the Welsh into Latin and, in my old age, have again translated it from the Latin into Welsh.' Why did he do this? It may be because he had given the original Welsh copy to Geoffrey of Monmouth, or perhaps because the language of Tysilio was growing obsolete, and not easy to understand among the 'modern' Welsh.

It would not have been possible for this *Brut* to have been compiled by St Tysilio in its entirety for it ends with the death of Cadwaladr Fendigaid (the Blessed) who died in 664, some fourteen years after the death of Tysilio, but the work may have been continued by a later hand. It is possible that *Tysilio's Chronicle* was written about the year 1000. It cannot be earlier since the state of Britain is alluded to as late as the reign of Athelstan, who died in 940. Also, the state and condition of Britain are referred to in a kind of historical retrospect, which suggests a lapse of about fifty or sixty years may have taken place subsequently and this brings us down to the year 1000.

Tysilio's Chronicle was not extensively circulated as it seems to have been unknown to Geoffrey of Monmouth and his colleagues. It perhaps only became available when Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford, came across a copy, while travelling in Armorica.

The manuscript was not printed in book form till the end of the eighteenth century, when it appeared in the *Myvyrian Archaiology*. Afterwards, it was edited in a translated form by the Revd Peter Roberts, in 1811, in a quarto volume, from a transcript of the copy preserved in the *Red Book of Hergest*, formerly belonging to Margam Abbey, and now in the library of Jesus College, Oxford. It is possible that the *Red Book of Hergest* contains a unique original copy of *Tysilio's Chronicle* from its purest text. The Revd Peter

Roberts became convinced that this chronicle was in fact the 'Liber Vetustissimus' which Geoffrey of Monmouth used for his *Historia Regum Britanniae*.

The Welsh antiquary Evan Evans believed that the original of *Tysilio's Chronicle* had been lost and that the author was an Armorican who wrote c.930. His work was perhaps translated into Welsh by Walter, and Geoffrey of Monmouth turned it into Latin. Evan Evans, referring in 1785 to the Welsh version translated from the Armorican by Walter, asserts that John Jones of Gellilyfdy in the parish of Ysgifiog, 'says that he had part of the original translation by Walter in his custody in the year 1640'.

The current opinion is that the *Red Book of Hergest*, and all copies of *Tysilio's Chronicle* adopting more or less the same text, are mere translations from the Latin of Geoffrey of Monmouth, with the omission of some of the more absurd parts.

But is this correct?

Take for instance the names Asclepiodotus and Livius Gallus, in Geoffrey's *Historia*, which correspond to Alysgapitulus and Belysgalys in *Tysilio's Chronicle*. It is evident that the latter names could not have been manufactured from the two former ones; but it may be easily conceived that Geoffrey might have Latinised the two names from Tysilio.

There are obvious symptoms of editorial management in various parts of Geoffrey's work: such as introducing fresh information, giving certain references, altering various details, and, in particular going more eagerly into the marvellous than the original, which itself is not deficient in this respect. By deliberately mistranslating place names from Welsh into Latin Geoffrey no doubt was aiming to satisfy his Norman masters and the interests of his patron Robert of Gloucester.

A Possible Source from Breconshire

According to the *Brut Dingestow*, the Welsh version of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, Meurig ap Caradog journeyed to Rome to meet Macsen (Maximus) to encourage him to visit Britain. He was well received in Rome and persuaded Maximus to return with him to Britain. They landed at Southampton but Eudaf Hen (Octavius the Old), who thought they had hostile intentions, sent Cynan Meiriadog to meet them with an army. Meurig advised Macsen to say that he had come as a messenger from the Emperor. Meurig was present when his father Caradog persuaded Eudaf Hen to marry his only daughter to Macsen and make him heir to the throne.

Although somewhat historically inaccurate, the above has an essence of