

KING ARTHUR  
OF CAMBRIDGE



THE ASTONISHING  
RESULTS OF A NEW AREA  
OF RESEARCH

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## Chapter One: Legend?

It generally makes me smile when the King Arthur story is dismissed as 'only legend' because I enjoy pointing out that the word 'legend' originally meant 'a story that recounts an event or happening'. The wider use of the word (implying that the original meaning was still in use) to include 'a story that is based on non-history, a myth' did not appear until the late 14<sup>th</sup> century. That this time period should coincide with exactly where I place King Arthur, it almost looks as though the story itself is the cause of the change of meaning. The true or original meaning of words will pop up frequently in this book as this is a path that most Arthurian researchers have not properly explored.

It still intrigues me too that is no shortage of books from those who are considered 'serious' researchers that attempt to stretch what amounts to twenty or thirty coincidences to fill several hundred pages. It is also interesting how easy it seems to be to pick a few King Arthur facts and apply them to any county in Britain to find these coincidences. Despite having childhood 'fancies' that Cambridge could be Camelot and the Isle of Ely the mysterious Isle of Avalon it is only recently that I ventured into anything that could be called research. As soon as I started, I realised that fitting this

story to the area where I live (the Cambridgeshire fens) was actually going to be a very easy task as I was turning up coincidences almost daily. These coincidences very quickly indicated that not only was I probably 'on the right track' but that the story was in all likelihood true and that it been hidden on purpose!

So here I present my findings, a massive collection of coincidences packed into only a few pages. I make no apologies for the size of the book or the lack of images and references. This is not an academic study that purports to reveal the absolute truth of Arthur, but rather a renewing of enthusiasm for a legend that so seems part of Britain that for many people it feels like part of their 'cultural DNA'. Indeed, this feeling is often ascribed to the oral history of indigenous peoples of today and would it not be nice to hear something that is not 'his-story' but 'Our Story'?

I hope that this book provides much in the way of entertainment for readers, so if I have provided you with nothing more than 'a nice thing to read' then I have achieved my goal.

## Chapter 2: Where is Camelot?

I will actually start where other researchers have also looked when searching for Camelot – where is the location of the earliest capital city of Britain? Julius Caesar states that the capital (*principia*) before the Roman Invasion was a city called Camulodunum. Where I would expect an attempt to translate the name, I am always provided with the *meaning* instead. Camulodunum is said to mean ‘British fort of Camulos’ (Camulos is a Germanic hero/god) but if we translate directly from the Latin into English we arrive at ‘British fort’ (*dunum*) ‘of the’ (*ulo*) ‘crooked river’ (*cam* – *occasionally describing an enclosure but more often referring to a river*). ‘British fort of the Cam’ is already starting to look like a candidate for Camelot but what of Camulos? Well he does have one feature that fits our story – he was known for carrying a magic sword. It looks most likely then that his name is derived from the place.

So, let us translate Camelot. A ‘lot’ is a marked out or designated piece of land and in place-names this would best be translated as an estate. So, Camelot actually means estate by or of the Cam. The site of Arthur’s last battle was at a place known as Camlan. A ‘lan’ is also an area of land but here it is referring more to the substance of the land itself so the most

appropriate translation here would be land or fields of the Cam. When we see that the Roman name for Cambridge, Camboretum, also means district/area of the Cam the whole notion of Camulodunum being the original name for Colchester (which was the Roman capital of Britain – not the British capital) what we are told in the ‘official narrative’ starts to look a little shaky particularly as there is no evidence at all that Colchester is the true location. For those of you who believe that Durolipons is the Roman name for Cambridge maybe we should translate this name too. Durolipons directly translated into English actually means ‘fortified little bridge’ Is it not interesting then that when we search for Camboretum today we are directed to the village of Lackford in Suffolk (which is situated on the river Lark, a tributary of the Cam directly East of Cambridge) where an aerial view provides us with what can only be described as a fortified little bridge? While the bridge at Cambridge would not have been described as little nor was it fortified (being a few hundred metres from Cambridge castle). Incidentally this place-name swap happened at almost the same time as taking Arthur out of the medieval period and shoving him where ‘the sun doesn’t shine’ into the Dark Ages.

Now let us take a look at history in the city of Cambridge itself to see if it can provide us with material to support the story. Cambridge did have a castle though all that remains today is the mound on

which stood the 'motte' of what is described as a 'Norman motte and bailey Castle'. I would have to disagree with the Norman reference as the only evidence for a 'keep' as such is a round tower that is shown as around 20 meters in diameter on archaeological plans, a fact confirmed by a perfect ring of the same size atop the mound which can be seen from the air. This tower which must have been at least 50 meters high if we compare the diameter with the height in all depictions of the tower while it still stood. The archaeological plans indicate that the drawbridge entrance included two impressive gatehouses spanned by a solid bridge of some 30 metres long and at least 3 metres wide - room enough for some 14 horses or so if riding two abreast just like in the romantic medieval Arthur movies.

The medieval name for Cambridge, 'Cantabrigia' (which is not Latin!) and the sometimes used 'Grantabrigge' used up to 17<sup>th</sup> century are highly suspicious and as their use seems to stem from the same period as the disappearance of my proposed King Arthur the changing of the name of the river and the town look deliberate.

Camelot was said to have generous fields for grazing, where many visitors could camp and take part in fairs and tournaments. The mention of more than one field here is of note as Cambridge was known to be the only town in England with two fields.

They were, like Camelot known to be used for grazing, tournaments and fairs and hosted camping visitors there because most letting rooms in Cambridge were for scholars and support staff. We have seen that the name Camlan reveals that the fields of Cambridge are a not unlikely site for the battle. The official narrative explains that there is no evidence of a battle in Cambridge but a little digging reveals that this may not be the truth. An excavation at St. John's College in Cambridge close to the site of the old hospital of the Knights of St. John reveals a series of burials that we are told are patients of the old hospital.

There are over 4000 skeletons. Only 1300 or so are complete, the rest are in pieces. There were very few shrouds and even fewer caskets. Clothing and grave goods were very rare. There were no children or young women. There were no signs of disease! It gets more interesting that a battle is not even hinted at in the narrative when it is known that battles occurred around St. John's hospitals during the peasant revolts (a decade or two before activities of my proposed Arthur), because it was the Knights Hospitallers who collected the new heavy poll taxes that were imposed to pay for the Hundred Years War with France.

Close by is St. John's college playing field which was widely talked about by people in Cambridge as being the location of some 5000 'Saxon' burials. Cambridge west field originally extended beyond the

playing field to an area now covered by tennis courts and such owned by other colleges. Midsummer Common, part of the East field is also known to contain 14<sup>th</sup> century burials, and it is not unlikely that Jesus' Green is similar. It is said that these are most likely plague victims, but it appears this is untested. Thomas Mallory points out in his Morte D'Arthur (Mallory was part of a similar rebellion to that of the late 14<sup>th</sup> century but 2-3 generations later) that leading up to the battle of Camlan, Mordred's forces held London, Kent, Sussex, Suffolk, Norfolk and Hertfordshire which also points to Cambridgeshire as a likely place for this battle. One of the most interesting aspects of this proposed site is that the river Cam borders both fields, so it would very easy to sail a boat from literally the edge of the battlefield Northwards some 20 miles by river directly to Ely. As Ely is proposed in this book as the legendary Isle of Avalon, this is where we will be heading next.

## Chapter Three: The Isle

Ely is much the perfect location for the legendary Isle of Avalon for many reasons. Ely was an island (roughly 7 miles by 11 miles) for a least several hundred years continuously up until the draining of the fens in the mid-1600s. During this time Glastonbury was a mostly tiny headland (land to the East of Glastonbury is sitting at least 30 metres above sea level while Ely is still surrounded by land at or below sea level) and would have only become a complete island during extreme weather or natural disasters such as the tidal wave that came up the Bristol channel in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Although the fens were not permanently covered with water, the expanse of fenland bog punctuated by large flooding rivers and a great number of smaller streams would have made it every bit an island all year round. The bog was treacherous, reaching up to 4 metres deep. There were few places where a boat could pull up from the river to the edge of firm ground so even if you were to find the island it would be almost impossible to reach.

The few places where Ely could be seen as an actual island were probably only the Great Tower at Cambridge castle, the top of the abbey at Ely (built on ground at 80 feet above sea level) and the top of the

earliest church at Haddenham - a village close to Ely (built on ground at 130 feet above sea level - the highest point of the Cambridgeshire fens).

Writers from many periods inform us that Ely was more secure than any fortress because of its topography. The safest way to reach the Isle was to use one of the three known (from different time periods - only one was in use in each era) causeways to cross the rivers and the marshy ground. One of these was not built until after the 14<sup>th</sup> century (now a road known as Hill Row Causeway) and the other two (not even used in the same era) fell into disrepair frequently, sometimes for as long as decades for they were often under the responsibility of Bishops, some of whom cared not for their maintenance. By far the clearest idea that we can get of the difficulty of getting to Ely is the fact that Ely was not 'taken by William the Conqueror' until 7 years after the Norman invasion. A local hero, Hereward the Wake made Ely his stronghold and had an easy time guarding the few small landing places, had a habit of burning down any attempt the Normans made at building a suitable causeway, but was finally given away by the monks at Ely who showed the Normans a little known 'safe' way to approach Ely on foot through the fens.

We can already see that Ely was so isolated that it certainly fits what is said about Avalon as being a peaceful idyll where concerns of the outside world may

slip away and one could lose all sense of time. The interpretation of 'Avalon' meaning apples fits Ely too. We know that Somerset is an apple growing area, but Ely was actually famous throughout England for its apples in the Medieval period. Ely was certainly a self-contained paradise where work was not required in order to live.

The eventual draining of the fens was a total disaster for the ecology and bounty of the fens, large stocks of fish (many others besides eels!) as well as the loss of possibly tens of millions of waterfowl and other birds (including seabirds). Agriculture was only required for supplementing the bounty from the many fruit and nut (not just apples!) trees and many other plant edibles growing in the meadows and hedgerows. This best use of plants would have extended to medicine and textiles in many ways too. Avalon was said to be a place where many pearls could be found. Ely would have had oyster beds some 20 miles North that rivalled those of the Thames estuary and piles of oyster shells left by our ancestors still turn up in Cambridge today. Certainly, closer to Ely freshwater mussels which also yielded pearls would have been much more in evidence than they are today. Ely had its own potteries too. By the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century it was one of the wealthiest and most densely populated parts of England despite its difficult access. Writers describe river traffic of this period as heavy and it is known that luxury goods destined for fairs in

Cambridge arrived by boat (using the rivers Ouse and Cam) via Kings Lynn.

So, what of Ely as a spiritual place? East Anglia and particularly Cambridgeshire and Norfolk are often described as the holy land of Britain because there is such a large number of church buildings. It is well known of course that the largest number of churches are built on what were originally pagan sacred sites. This has echoed through to the present through the enormous number of churches in the area dedicated to St. Mary which allude to the importance of goddess worship in the past - prevalent in wetland areas (is it a coincidence that Ely cathedral has the largest Lady Chapel in Britain?).

Examining the true meanings of place names around Ely has produced some very interesting results. We have some very highly thought-of books of English place name meanings which seem mostly to have derived from a book written in the 1880s by a professor of Anglo-Saxon studies from Cambridge University. I have examined only the parts of this book that relate to Cambridgeshire and I would encourage other researchers to examine the rest of it. I was already doubtful of the meanings presented particularly as there was such a high incidence of a place being ascribed to a particular person. In earlier times navigating Britain could only have been really done by examining the landscape so logically place names

would mostly have described the geography or industry of the area. Wilburton for example is listed as meaning 'town of a woman called Wilbur' and nearby Haddenham as 'farmstead or village of a man called Hadda'. It only took seconds using an Anglo-Saxon dictionary to realise that 'wilbur' is Anglo-Saxon for wild boar which makes perfect sense as the monastery between Wilburton and Haddenham had orchards and vineyards on the southern slopes of the island - an area which is still bears a track-way known as 'Hogs Hill Drove' today. I then discovered that the Saxon word 'hadden' means a heath covered or sand covered hill. Interesting that Haddenham is indeed built on a hill the top of which has soil comprised mainly of sand several feet deep and Haddenham High Street was originally known as Sand Street. These obvious errors led me to have serious doubts about the meanings of the names of other places close by particularly as close to Haddenham are the villages of Witcham, Witchford, and Coveney. That the first two are described as being linked to Wych Elms (trees are rarely used in place names because of their impermanence). Another example of this error is Aldreth, also near Haddenham, which is said to mean 'landing place near the Alder Trees'. The correct translation is actually 'Old landing place', which makes perfect sense as this is known to be the one of the oldest locations of a causeway. Coveney is said to mean 'island in the cove' which would have been a true

geographical description and therefore not an unreasonable interpretation. However, 'village of the witches', 'crossing of the witches' and 'island of the 'coven' (witch-meaning wise woman/healer and coven meaning a community of spiritual women - having the same root as convent) seem much more appropriate considering other features of this area. Coveney was linked to the Isle by a causeway which was over time replaced by a road which is still known as 'Long Causeway' today. Another small island was also linked to Coveney by yet another causeway later becoming a road which is still known as 'Short Causeway' today. This other island is known as 'Wardy Hill' and is described only as a hillfort. The word 'wardy' can only relate however to this 'hillfort' actually being a hospital or healing centre. Interesting too that the fen below Wardy Hill is known as 'Hale Fen' - as in 'hale and hearty', nursed back to full health. With the Isle of Avalon having been home to Morgan-le-Fey and her healing sisters, Ely is already starting to look very like the perfect candidate for its location.

The venerable Bede points out in his 'ecclesiastical history of Britain' that Haddenham was the location of the palace of Tondbert, Prince of the southern Gyrwas (fen people) again pointing to the historical importance of the isle.

An interesting feature of the monastic buildings that still remain in the grounds of Ely Cathedral is

something unique in Britain known as a 'bougre'. This comprises accommodation for knights with an attached Great Hall where the knights met and feasted. The word 'bougre' although used as an insult in the medieval period actually translates in the 14<sup>th</sup> century as 'heretic'.

Ely is taken to mean 'island of eels' by locals to the extent that there is now an annual eel festival. Although this meaning is one that is agreed with by academics (there are one or two others - mainly relating to willow trees which are also a feature of the area), I cannot help thinking that whoever came up with this was playing some kind of joke. When we examine the earliest writings and maps Ely is shown as 'Elig' All Saxon words that were originally ending in 'ig' and now end in 'y' are a substantive word - they describe the quality of something. An example would be speedy which in Saxon would have been 'speedig'. Are we being told that Ely has the qualities of an eel? Certainly not (let me know if you ever see Ely wriggling around the mud!). The long EE sound in Saxon is written as 'Æ' an eel was known as an 'ælfisc' or an 'ælfix' (eelfish). The correct pronunciation of Elig would have used the short 'e' sound as in 'egg' so I propose that the correct pronunciation of Ely has been changed to the long 'ee' sound on purpose. There are very few words in Anglo-Saxon that start with 'el' compared with those that start with 'æ'. Most el words relate to foreign, strange, mysterious, elven, fairy-like.

I propose then that the true meaning of Ely is actually 'mysterious'. Also of interest is the fact that the boy's name 'Ely' in modern German means 'famous fighter', which brings us to the next chapter where we discuss the most likely candidate for King Arthur (though we shall return to Ely at the end of his story too).

## Chapter Four: King Arthur

There are a number of reasons why Owain Glyndwr makes a great suggestion for our King Arthur. Owain led a rebellion of the Welsh against the English immediately after the peasant revolt of the 1380s. he was the last ever Welsh Prince of Wales. His personal crest was that of a dragon - not the familiar red four-legged dragon we see on the Welsh flag but a two-legged golden one. Interestingly 'Pendragon' is likely to mean 'dragon chief' or 'king dragon' - I think a gold dragon depicts that perfectly. The cover of this book shows Owain's personal seal where he (and his horse!) are wearing this crest. He is considered by the Welsh as someone who will return one day to free them from the English - 'the once and future king'. It is known that University students (only Oxford is mentioned - deliberately?) dropped out to join his rebellion. Although he has no confirmed links with Cambridgeshire, he took part in battles all over Britain at least as far East as Birmingham. As there is only one county between Birmingham and Cambridgeshire it can be seen that Owain would only have to push a little harder in order to reach the battle site, and of course Ely was such a secure place that a rebel leader would fight pretty hard in order to reach it to use as a centre of operations (in the same way that many other

rebel leaders before and after Owain had also done).

Although nothing appears to be written of Owain's religious belief we know that he was fighting for an independent Welsh church as well as an independent Wales. William Shakespeare, in Henry the 4<sup>th</sup>, portrays the man as Owen Glendower, a man who 'was ruled by magic and tradition' and could 'conjure spirits from the vasty deep'. It would not be unfair then to state that contrary to the belief that Arthur was a Christian King, fighting pagans, it is more likely that he was fighting with pagans to halt the domination of indigenous spirituality by the boot of the Catholic church. Of course, the outright torture and murder of millions of people in France was happening for the same reasons, and to a certain extent the whole of Europe was engaged in a war of the church against paganism.

Now we return to Ely and the subject of place names. There is a place in folklore local to Ely known as 'the lost city of Cratendune', a place where the first church is said to have been built. So far, I have not been able to locate the name Cratendune in any literature. The official narrative tells us that this is a place that is mentioned in 'Liber Eliensis' (a very early history of Ely) known as 'vallis cracti'. This cannot be Cratendune for vallis crati translates as 'valley' or 'low-lying land belonging to Cractus', where the direct translation of Cratendune from Anglo-Saxon to English reads 'hole in the (sandy) hill'.

It makes sense of course that the first church on an island would have been built on its highest point (previously chosen by pagans for the same reason). Seeing that Haddenham and Cratendune both refer to a hill (both sandy at that), it is more than likely that they are the same place. So, does Haddenham have a hole? Indeed, it does. A few hundred metres from the highest point in Haddenham there exists in a field a hole dug in the sand some twenty meters across and around ten metres deep. This hole is known as the 'Ballyhole', its name said to have been derived from the fact that Irish navvies dug the hole in the 1840s for ballast for the Haddenham railway. This does not actually make sense as the hole would have contained mainly sand, which just not suitable as railway line ballast - one needs a much larger size aggregate or heavy gravel. The fact that this hole was dug by the Irish leaves us a clue that Ballyhole (as 'bally in Ireland means 'place of') might actually indicate 'the place of the hole'. On the earliest maps that show the hole the shallow entrance facing Ely Cathedral has a dot by it. A dot on a map is not a mistake but shows the position of a monument or marker stone.

In Haddenham churchyard (Holy Trinity) sits a replica of a monument, (the original of which now stands in Ely Cathedral surrounded by a guard rail) which was said to have been found in the 1790s outside a pub (The Three Kings) nearly opposite the church. It

consists of a roughly square stone base - the face of which bears a Latin inscription - surmounted by a squarish section stone column the top of which has long been broken off and lost, and is thought to have been a Celtic cross. The Latin inscription translates as 'Lord grant light and rest to thy servant Ovin'. We are told that this refers to St. Ovin a servant of St. Etheldreda (Æthelthryth) who founded the original abbey at Ely but of course Owain or Owen would have been written as Ovin in Latin and although we are told the stone is 8<sup>th</sup> century it could just as easily be early 15<sup>th</sup> century.

It is said that Owain Glyndwr disappeared after his last battle and eventually died but, still classed as an outlaw his body (the location of which had become known) was later removed from its tomb and reburied in his homeland. Stories of Arthur relate that after being taken to Avalon to have his wounds healed, he peacefully lived out the rest of his life there and was buried in or under a hill.

## Chapter Five: Conclusion

There is actually quite a lot more I could add on the subject of King Arthur in Cambridgeshire, as what I have written so far represents a fraction of the results of my research. This research is ongoing so may form the content for an enlarged edition or a companion volume. I would like to raise a couple of interesting points though.

A history of Welsh Kings (though set in the Dark Ages) shows there were two Arthurs around 200 years apart that come from the same family. I have looked at candidates for around the year 1200 (assuming Owain to be Arthur the second) and there are several likely possibilities including Lewellyn the Great and Cadwallader for Arthur the first. If we assume that Owain may be Arthur 1<sup>st</sup> though, something else shows itself. Oliver Cromwell fought for an independent way of life for English people (against the Catholic Church) while being an MP for Cambridge and used Ely as his power base. Not only was he of Welsh descent but his name means 'ancestral relic' (Oliver) 'of the crooked river' (Cromwell). I believe that the draining of the fens (the destruction of Avalon) contributed to the start of the English Civil War.

There is evidence in Cambridge, of a centre of learning that predates Cambridge/Oxford by a least

200 years. The Isle of Mona (the location of the druids' last stand) translates from the Greek as 'solitude'. I believe Ely is a more likely location for Mona purely for the fact that druids were not stupid and would have chosen a place that was known in Britain as the securest stronghold- a place that was easy to defend. While the suggestion that Anglesey was Mona is popular, I believe it got its name (Isle of the Angles/English) from the English assembling a force there from Ireland to deal with Owain's uprising. Anglesey is a poor choice for a refuge because it is bounded to the West by the Irish Sea. I would therefore like to propose (however outrageous this may sound) that the druids were forced out of Cambridge into the fen to defend themselves at Ely and that, rather than this event occurring 2000 years ago, it was probably closer to 800 years!

That is all I have to say for this volume other than, whether what I have written be true or not, I am happy to believe that I was 'born and bred' and spent the first half of my life at Camelot and have lived for the last two decades in peace on the Isle of Avalon. In parting if you happen to have a passion for the mysteries of our past and you would like to indulge in the revival of an Avalon 'current' then a pilgrimage to Ely is a great place to start. What are you waiting for?





