



The Quest for Arthur's Britain

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The story of Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table is the chief myth of Britain. But is it something more than myth? Solid facts have emerged through the recent work of archaeologists. This book examines the historical foundations of the Arthurian tradition, and then presents the results of excavations to date at Cadbury (reputed site of Camelot), Tintagel, Glastonbury and less-known places.

The Quest for Arthur's Britain Details

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From Reader Review *The Quest for Arthur's Britain* for online ebook

Amy Wolf says

Just LOVED this book about the search for an historical Arthur. Ashe actually lives in Glastonbury so he is on-the-spot to investigate sites such as Cadbury and the River Cam. He's a great guy: I was doing some research, wrote to him, and he wrote me back with the answer! Great pictures as well. A must-have for any Arthurian fanatic!

Chris says

The 60s saw a rapid rise in interest in all things Arthurian, spurred on by a New Age zeitgeist which embraced all forms of fantasy from Tolkien to comics and by other aspects of popular culture, including musicals like *Camelot*. In the middle of it all a more archaeological approach to the little-understood post-Roman period in Britain was emerging which sought to throw light on what was popularly known as the Dark Ages; and the epitome of this approach was the five-year investigation (from 1966 to 1970) of the Somerset hillfort of South Cadbury Castle by the provocatively-named Camelot Research Committee. Perhaps as a direct result of the publicity surrounding the excavations the 1967 film of *Camelot* actually featured a map which placed the court roughly where the hillfort was situated.

Most of the contributors to this 1968 volume were directly or tangentially associated with this Committee, and preparations for the book began as the results of the first year of excavation were being processed. The result was a compendium that was, for the time, an authoritative summary of the history, archaeology, literature and continuing cultural appeal of the Arthurian period and the Arthurian legends, plentifully illustrated with maps, line drawings and photos. After its appearance in hardback it was frequently re-issued as a paperback by Paladin, thus literally extending its shelf-life.

As a snapshot of what was known or could be surmised about the Arthurian 'reality' it was of its time, but in retrospect much of it still stands up to scrutiny four decades and more later, despite advances particularly in archaeological research. Its influence was immense, so much so that non-academic writers still ill-advisedly use it as their Arthurian bible, when Christopher Snyder's more up-to-date 2000 study *The World of King Arthur* would provide a better overview (though even this is very dated now).

The Quest for Arthur's Britain is particularly nostalgic for me as I spent part of one season as a volunteer digger at South Cadbury helping to excavate the southwest gate and part of the summit, and also met or knew some of the contributors to this volume; sadly most of them have since passed away. Although the text only hints at this, the dig captured the public's imagination and made archaeology very rock & roll (in much the same way as *Time Team* was to do in its way at the end of the century); it's difficult now to fully appreciate what an impact it made in popular culture, though it certainly made a lasting impression on me.

<https://wp.me/s2oNj1-questing>

Richard Thomas says

Slightly more new age than Alcock but worth reading.

Sarah says

A little dense. But good.

Steven Hernacki says

Excellent read. Good mixture of archaeology and literary history. Last section traces the influence of Arthurian legend through the ages and its impact on British cultural and political development.

Daniel Benshana says

I read this as a teenager after years of reading the myths in various editions. this was a welcome, deeper analysis of the history in as far as there is any, of the myth and the times.

Sandra says

I bought this book because I was interested in the history behind the Arthurian Legend, which I love. I learned a very important lesson: do NOT try to search for the truth behind a legend, because it takes away some of the magic. At least that's what it felt like for me.

The informations on the various digs mentioned in the text is very extensive. It talks in detail about any relevant place (such as Glastonbury), what was found there and what it proves. I'm sure that for some people that would be an absolutely fantastic read. But I don't belong to that group of people and this bit of information bored me out of my wits.

I liked how they traced the history of the Arthurian Legend and how they tried to trace the real Arthur. It's interesting to see what things of the Legend that we know now showed up before Geoffrey of Monmouth, who appears to have been talking both truth and nonsense. For instance, Merlin was completely his invention and that makes me a bit sad. (Okay, so technically there was an inspiration for the character of Merlin, but he could never have met the 'historical Arthur', unless a very young Merlin had happened to meet a very old Arthur, which just sort of ruins it.) I'm just sad that most of the times it was just the men that were mentioned (even Morgan Le Fay only gets one mention, and at that point we're over 200 pages in) since I love the Arthurian women so much. But given the historical period, that's probably not surprising.

Pete daPixie says

From very distant memory I've given this 3 stars. It must be going on at least 30 years since I read this. However, I think this book is a good starter for those readers on the quest for the historical Arthur. Forget Richard Harris and Vanessa Redgrave!

Claire Baxter says

In fairness I can't really say I read it as I only got about a third of the way through. If you have a real interest in the topic or a lot of background knowledge it might be interesting but it was far too wordy and detailed for what I was looking for.

Pat Theo says

I cant remember! Must read it again though since then more theories are around, more archeological digs have taken place, so it is probably dated

Flint Johnson says

One must remember one thing when reading Geoffrey Ashe, that he ran a touring business centered around King Arthur and Somerset. With that bias in mind, a quick overview of his jointly written book is more useful. Ashe was able to acquire the best experts of the time in writing his book, and when they spoke of clothing, weaponry, and other non-geographical details they came up with some useful information. However, as Alcock even mentions in his essay, the authors were asked to make certain that all of their conclusions agreed; which is good for sales and bad for the truth. There are good points made in the book, but it is not to be trusted. Ashe had his own agenda. In all of Alcock's later works he often referred to his own materials (as the leader in the field). It is noteworthy that I have never found a single citation of his back to this book.

Ron says

Despite many of Ashe's conclusions being overtaken by later scholarship, *Quest remains a good resource for the soil from which Arthurian legend sprouted.*

Roger says

Re-reading this. Interesting summary of the development of the Arthurian legend and the historical facts

behind it.

Erik Graff says

I read Welch's *Britannia*, a scholarly book about Roman Britain, in order to prepare to read Ashe's *Quest* as anything about Arthurian legend, emotions being what they are, is unlikely to be objectively disinterested.

Ashe's collection, perhaps unlike some of the books (he's practically an industry) he wrote entirely by himself, is not bad. It's interested certainly and one imagines Ashe was careful to take material generally congruent to his own ideas, but for the most part the quality of scholarship is good and the weight of evidence substantial.

Jon Laiche says

This book helped to direct and define my early career as scholar, historian, teacher, and modern pagan.
