

A

King ARTHUR

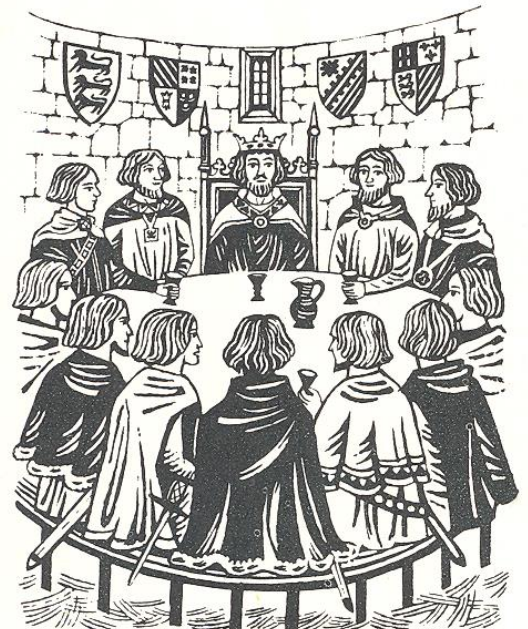
Who was King Arthur?



Historians say that the real King Arthur may have been a British general who lived in the fifth century. He is mentioned in a historical account which was written in 830. The writer, Nennius, says that Arthur fought against the Anglo-Saxon tribes who invaded Britain after the Romans left. The Britons were driven to Cornwall and Wales and they took with them many stories about Arthur's strength and bravery. As time went on, stories of heroism were told about Arthur and many legends grew up around him.

In these days when few people knew how to read and write, the memory of the past was kept and passed on in stories. These were told to the next generation, and the storytellers added many details and marvellous events as they told their tales.

By the 11th century Arthur had become an almost magical and heroic figure, and the stories tell of his life right from his birth at Tintagel through to his mysterious death. Queen Guinevere and Merlin are in the story too. There are stories of the Knights of the Round Table at Arthur's court at Camelot.



In the 15th century Sir Thomas Malory collected all the stories he could find about King Arthur and put them together in a book which he called 'Le Morte D'Arthur' (the Death of Arthur). Most of the stories which we know today about Arthur are from Sir Thomas' book.

One of the best known of these stories tells how Arthur became king. As a child he had been Sir Ector's page, and the knight looked after the boy and brought him up. No-one knew that Arthur was the old King's son. After the old King died, the noblemen quarreled for a long time about who would rule them as the old King didn't have any children.

Merlin the wise old magician decided to settle the argument. He invited all the knights to come to a special Christmas service. By now Arthur had grown into a tall youth who had learned how to use a spear and a sword.

After the service, the noblemen noticed a large stone with an anvil on it, and the anvil had a magnificent sword buried deep in it. On the stone it said: 'Whoever can draw out this sword is the rightful King of Britain.'

Each one of the knights thought that he must be the rightful king, so they all rushed to try to get the stone out of the anvil. Each one of them tried his hardest but the sword just would not budge.



Then messengers were sent out all over the kingdom to take the news that there would be a great tournament at Easter, and any knight who wished to try his luck would be able to attempt to get the sword out of the anvil.

Sir Ector came to the tournament with his son Sir Kay and his young page Arthur. When Sir Kay was about to join in the feasting he remembered that he had left his sword behind. Arthur went back to fetch it for him, but the house was shut and he couldn't get the sword. Then he remembered the sword in the anvil. He grasped the hilt and pulled, and it came out easily. When he went back to the company of knights and they saw him with the sword, they were amazed. Straight away they all realised that Arthur was indeed the rightful king of Britain.

There are many exciting stories of the bravery and courage of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. The tales end with the account of the death of King Arthur when Sir Bedivere carries him to the lakeside and lays him in a mysterious barge. The barge floats away silently and carries the dying king to the Island of Avalon.

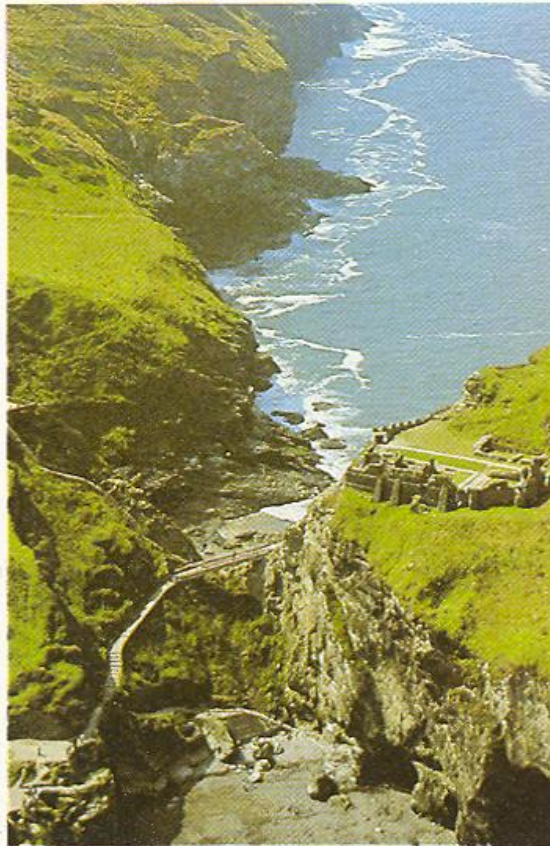


Today the power of the legends of King Arthur is as strong as ever. Although there are very few facts behind the legends people have been inspired by the idea of his heroism over the centuries. Historians think that the legends have helped people to be strong in times of war and trouble in the past.

B

Tintagel

A village on the Atlantic coast famous for its association with Arthurian legend, which says that King Arthur had a castle here. The remains of a castle stand partly on the cliffs and partly on a narrow spit of land, but this was built for the Earl of Cornwall in 1145. It fell out of use about 300 years later and was already in ruins in Tudor times. The Old Post Office, a manor house restored to give it the appearance it had in Victorian times, when it was a letter-receiving office, is open to the public. Paths descend from the village to a shingle beach and Merlin's Cave.



TINTAGEL Legend has it that King Arthur was born in Tintagel Castle, and the whole area is steeped in Arthurian lore. Below the castle is Merlin's Cave

KING ARTHUR

What is a legend? Tick the box to say which one you think it is.

a fairy story

a story that is partly true and partly made up

a story that has been written in a history book

The two passages A and B are from different sources. Read them carefully and say where you think each one came from. Look at the table below, and write A and B next to the two places where you think the information came from.

newspaper	
story book	
encyclopaedia	
history book	
guide book for tourists	

Use both passages to answer the following questions in complete sentences:

When do we think that the real Arthur lived?

.....

In which county can we find the village of Tintagel?

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According to the legends, where was Arthur born?

.....

In the legends, what was the name of the court of King Arthur and his queen Guinevere?

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No-one really knows where King Arthur's court was, but people often say that it was at Tintagel Castle. The ruins of Tintagel Castle can be seen today. Could the real Arthur have lived in this castle? Give a reason for your answer.

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Who was Merlin? Where is his cave?

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In the legend of Arthur, why were the noblemen quarrelling?

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What is an anvil and what is it used for?

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What was stuck in the anvil?

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What happened after Sir Kay forgot his sword? What did everyone find out about Arthur after this?

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Why were the knights unable to remove what was in the stone when they tried?

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Look at the picture of the old castle, mysterious in the moonlight and majestic in its lonely setting beside the dark water and the brooding hills. Let your imagination wander ...

Who lived there? What tales were told there by the storytellers in the firelight? See if you can create a word picture - write a poem - or create a story suggested by the old castle.

