Public Archaeology

ISSN: 1465-5187 (Print) 1753-5530 (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ypua20

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To cite this article: Hilary Orange & Patrick Laviolette (2010) A Disgruntled Tourist in King Arthur's Court: Archaeology and Identity at Tintagel, Cornwall, Public Archaeology, 9:2, 85-107, DOI: 10.1179/175355310X12780600917595

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1179/175355310X12780600917595

PUBLIC ARCHAEOLOGY, Vol. 9 No. 2, May, 2010, 85–107

A Disgruntled Tourist in King Arthur's Court: Archaeology and Identity at Tintagel, Cornwall

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'Welcome to Tintagel, the birthplace of King Arthur' is a phrase often repeated at this small village on the north coast of Cornwall where legend, childhood stories and merchandise all serve to attract thousands of visitors per year. As 'a place to go', the area provides stunning coastal scenery, a romantic ruined castle and a highly commercialised village. Tintagel Island, owned by the Duchy of Cornwall but managed by English Heritage, plays centre stage as the 'birthplace' in question. On-site, the character of Arthur is largely debunked as a literary phenomenon and, furthermore, a survey of day-trippers revealed that visitors were left in an interpretive limbo — arriving with ideas of Arthur and leaving knowing little about Tintagel.

Whilst the aesthetics of the castle and scenery go some way towards mitigating against disappointment, on site encounters with kitsch representations of the past combine with more amorphous senses of pseudo-spiritual atmospheres as well as experiences of walking, eating and drinking to ultimately provide a 'grand day out'. The marketing ephemera and heritage presentation all serve to create, reinforce and suppress different identities of place which are revealed as being a fairly cohesive package of Celtic-Arthuriana. This paper questions the ways in which visitors' expectation and imagination are mediated through experience of place.

KEYWORDS Arthurian legend, Castle, Celtic Cornwall, Heritage, Place identity, Public archaeology, Tourism

Introduction

> CAMELOT — 'Camelot', said I to myself. 'I don't seem to remember hearing of it before. Name of the asylum, likely'.
> (Mark Twain, 1889: 27)

 DOI 10.1179/175355310X12780600917595

A large village on Cornwall's North Atlantic coast, Tintagel previously existed as a medieval farming hamlet called Trevena. In AD 1900 the hamlet was renamed 'Tintagel' when the telegraph arrived and the postal system was updated. What was being branded was a late medieval castle (Figure 1), built in the early thirteenth century and its association with King Arthur, the legendary ruler of the Britons (Thomas 1993: 10).

The village centres on map reference NGR SX 050 890. It is located approximately six miles north-west of the market town of Camelford and can be reached by a network of minor coastal roads. In the summer months tourist activity focuses on Tintagel's numerous car parks, its shops, pubs and other eating establishments along Fore Street (High Street in Cornish) and Tintagel Island which is accessed from the village via a footpath. Tintagel Island is slightly misnamed as it is a granite summit still joined to the mainland by a spur of land and navigable by bridge and roughly cut stone steps. Spanning both the mainland and island sections are the wards of Tintagel Castle.

It could be argued that without its legendary associations Tintagel would be like many of the other coastal villages in the area — relatively unknown except to hardy coastal walkers who venture inland off the coast path in search of victuals. However, awareness developed through childhood of the Arthurian legend in combination with the homogenous and coherent local marketing of the legend attracted over 180,000 visitors to the English Heritage site in the year spanning 2005/2006, raising

FIGURE 1 Tintagel Castle.

approximately £745,000 in site income and making Tintagel Castle the fourth most visited English Heritage location that year (English Heritage 2006).

Previous research, survey aims and methods

This paper builds on previous research by Robb which considered visitor experience within Tintagel village and Tintagel Island, conceiving of both as an 'integrated heritage complex' with the village providing 'touristic resources' to the site. Robb questioned the degree to which Tintagel provided a successful and satisfying heritage experience and concluded, mainly through observation, that the weight of 'legendary and literary accretion' and its relationship to the landscape and the archaeology was not adequately explained within official interpretation. Indeed, whilst English Heritage dispelled the idea that the castle was Camelot, merchandising within the shop played on Arthurian motifs and a lack of interpretation regarding the archaeology on the island created a confused and confusing message (1988: 580, 593–594). Therefore, considering the eighteen years which have subsequently passed it is timely to return to Robb's research and provide an update, but importantly one which includes survey data — to quote Mellor by asking 'the punters what *they* think' (1991: 100). In subsequent sections we will explain where dissemination of information, within the village and the island, has clearly changed and where it remains the same.

A further aim of this paper is to examine the ways in which heritage informs public opinion on the identities attached to places. Identities of place are here defined as consciousness of what a place is and what it is not including ideas of how the place is special, different or unique (Smith 2004: 2; Tilley 2006: 8–9). Identity is a tricky concept, not least within non-essentialist debates and approaches which view it as invented and mutable. For instance, Uzzell argues that identities of place are created through the emphasis of certain characteristics which stand as metonym and metaphor. Whilst all places contain characteristics it is the process of ascribing significance in relationship to the past which creates heritage and in turn creates a labelled and commodified past that can be used to attract visitors (1996: 219–221). This in turn leads to a consideration of the ways in which heritage providers, shops and businesses within Tintagel represent and sell themselves to outsiders (the visitors) and how those outsiders in turn perceive different identities of place at Tintagel.

We acknowledge that Tintagel is only one of a long list of sites that are connected to the Arthurian legends. For instance, the Arthurian devotee could visit Dozmary Pool on nearby Bodmin Moor which is said to be the lake into which Sir Bedivere cast the sword Excalibur after Arthur's fatal wounding. Also nearby the town of Camelford is the purported site of King Arthur's Court at Camelot and consequently the seat of the Round Table (Laviolette forthcoming). Or further afield tourists could of course, visit Glastonbury, Arthur's fabled final resting place. There are many other Arthurian sites (c.f. Snyder 2000); however, the geographical parameter of this study is solely the village of Tintagel and Tintagel Island. It is hoped that this research, albeit site specific, will nonetheless contribute to other studies on Arthurian heritage.

Ethnographic fieldwork was conducted from 6 to 12 July 2006 by Hilary Orange. The focus of the fieldwork was an interviewer-led questionnaire survey with visitors

which was designed to gather both qualitative and quantitative data. The questionnaire interviews were held at three separate locations: outside Tintagel Visitor Centre, outside King Arthur Bookshop (both within the village) and on the footpath to Tintagel Island (Figure 2). The survey was of adults-only to ensure gaining informed consent from participants. Every fifth person was approached. Questionnaire interviews were conducted with 50 visitors; in terms of demographics twenty-three males and twenty-seven females took part, relatively few were aged 16 to 24 with the majority aged 55 and over and the majority were from the British Isles. Only three people declined to take part in the survey, one of whom did not speak adequate English. In addition interviews were held with local shop-owners and heritage managers, observations were recorded and secondary data in the form of marketing material was collected for content analysis. All names given in the paper are pseudonyms.

The literary sources of the Arthurian legend

As Snyder points out the legend of King Arthur is 'one of the most influential [myths] in the western tradition' (2000: 8). Indeed, Arthur's popular appeal is such that there are over a thousand texts dealing with the legends, various adaptations have appeared in film and television (Monty Python and the Holy Grail (1975); Excalibur (1981)) and a search for 'King Arthur' on *Google* will return tens of thousands of hits.

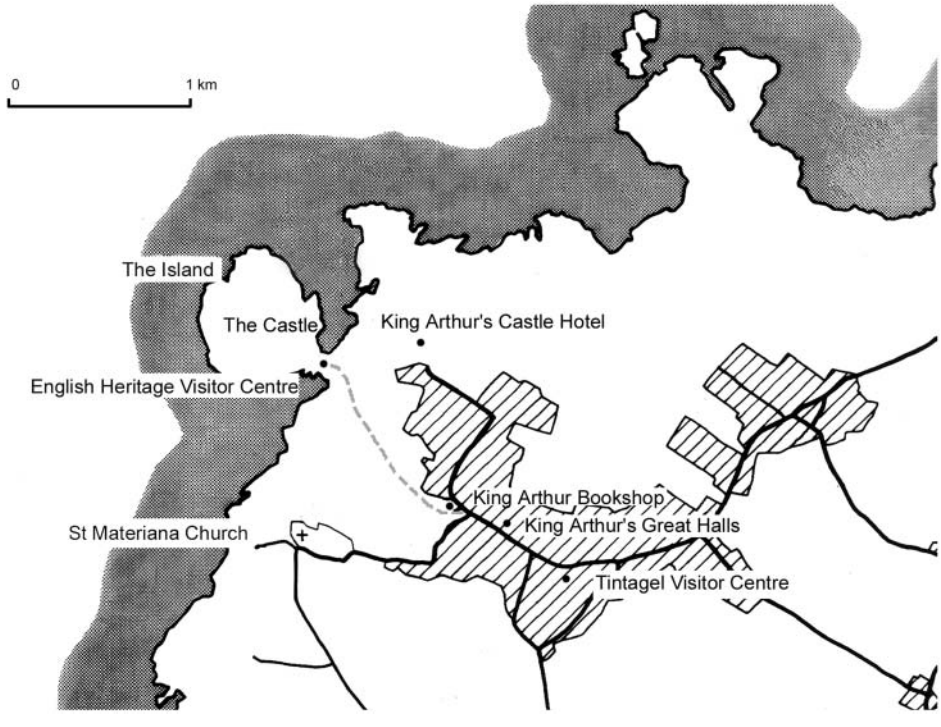

FIGURE 2 Location of Tintagel Island and map of the village.

According to the legends Arthur was born in Cornwall, brought up as a young man in Wales and through prowess in battle he became King of the Britons, repelling the Saxon invaders. He lived between the fifth and sixth centuries AD and resided in Camelot Castle (Hutchinson *et al.* 1999: 4). Beyond these bare 'facts' there are many varied components to the legend including the magician Merlin, Arthur's mentor, the Knights of the Round Table and their search for the Holy Grail and as an additional romantic component, a love triangle between Arthur, his wife Guinevere and the knight Lancelot (Snyder 2000: 8–10).

The literary roots of the legend can be traced back to a collection of manuscripts, *The History of the Kings (Historia Brittonum)* commonly ascribed to a Welsh monk called Nennius writing at some time in the ninth century (Morris 1980). Within the assorted texts is reference to Arthur — a British leader who fought against the Saxons. However, it was another Welsh cleric, Geoffrey of Monmouth, who provided the first major literary source, with much of the detail of Arthur's life infilled, and importantly connected Arthur to Tintagel. In his *History of the Kings of Britain* (1136) Monmouth named Tintagel as the pre-Norman seat of Cornish royalty where Arthur was conceived by magic. Thereafter French and German writers began producing romances based on Monmouth's adaptation (Snyder 2000:15). The '*History*' was hand-copied in large numbers and the stories were spread by itinerant musicians which perhaps explains Arthurian connections in places as far apart as Brittany, Ireland, Norway and even Iceland (Hutchinson *et al.* 1999: 4; Lewis 2001: 22).

In the early thirteenth century Tintagel Island was purchased by Earl Richard of Cornwall, the second son of King John. He commissioned a slate-walled castle, built circa AD 1230. According to Cornish archaeologist Charles Thomas the interesting thing about the castle is that it was built at all, for the site had 'no military strategic value or function'. Records suggests that Richard was literate and educated; he very likely would have been aware of Monmouth's *History* and of the Cornish-based legends of the doomed lovers, Tristan and Isolde which were also well known in the twelve and thirteenth centuries. Thomas argues that the building of the castle was a 'statement in stone, a message, a discourse' drawing on existing notions of identity, romance and power during the thirteenth century. Tintagel Castle can therefore, slightly rudely, be thought of as a medieval folly or theme-park (c.f. Liddiard 2005 for literary factors affecting castle location). Whether this is true, it is known that Richard chose to style himself as Gervase de Tyntagel, which does suggest that the place-name carried certain kudos (Davison 1999: 29; Thomas 1986: 10–28).

Over two hundred years later whilst locked up in Newgate Prison Sir Thomas Malory pulled together earlier English and French accounts of Arthur to form a major re-telling of the stories with the poem *Le Morte D'Arthur* (1485). Replete with knights, courtly love, wizards and the quest for the Holy Grail — Malory's version of the tales is often interpreted as an Anglicised Arthuriad and one which had great influence on latter perceptions of Arthur (Davison, 1999: 37; Lewis, 2001: 23; Snyder 2000: 16). Indeed, the nineteenth century Romantic Movement returned to these themes and Tennyson wrote the poem *Morte d'Arthur* (1842) at Tintagel which he later incorporated into the widely acclaimed *Idylls of the King*, (published between 1856 and 1885). This collection of twelve poems created a highly stylised and ethical portrait of Arthur which reflected the attitudes of Victorian society (Lewis, 2001: 23).

The writers Hardy, Dickens and Swinburne also visited Tintagel during the nineteenth century, attracted to the legends and looking to use the site as a literary source. Illustrating the legend's geographical reach the American Mark Twain parodied romantic depictions of the Middle Ages in his satire about Britain's feudal history in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) which drew attention to and helped popularise a general fascination with the ambiguity surrounding mythological heraldries (the latter presents an uncanny parallel to the Kennedy-Camelot myth perpetrated in post-assassination America) (Snyder 2000: 175). As the nineteenth century progressed and Tintagel's standing as a literary place gained momentum further developments conspired to bring tourists to North Cornwall.

Deindustrialisation and the growth of tourism

During the late nineteenth century Cornwall's traditional industry, tin and copper mining, went into decline. In the 1860s and 1870s foreign competition and crashes in metal prices forced mines to close and forced miners to migrate abroad in the search for work. By 1896 the industry was facing extinction with only nine mines left in operation (Payton 2004: 205–220). In North Cornwall, in the area around Tintagel, the slate mining industry was also in decline (Lewis 2001: 33; Thomas 1993: 130). Tourism began to be seen as an economic panacea and marketing campaigns (notably the early twentieth century 'Cornish Riviera' campaign of the Great Western Railway) adopted the maritime scenes popularised by the Newlyn painters whilst guidebooks described the region's mild 'Mediterranean' climate, its ancient sites and romantic legends including 'King Arthur's Land' (Payton 1997: 36; Payton and Thornton 1995: 94–98). In the late 1880s when the railway arrived at nearby Camelford tourists descended from trains named Merlin, Lyonesse and Pendragon and were perhaps taken to Tintagel in barouches to stay in King Arthur's Castle Hotel which at the time was advertised as one of 'the most romantic spots in England' (Hutchinson *et al*., 1999: 3; Perry, 1999: 98).

Concomitantly a determination to overcome industrial decline resulted in a project to 're-invent' Cornwall (Payton 2004: 237; Thomas 1988: 421). By the late nineteenth century a new post-industrial identity began to form through a growing interest in the 'revival' of Cornish/Celtic language and arts. As a precursor, the motif of 'The Celts' had emerged as a popular theme within the nineteenth century English Romantic Movement (c.f. Collis 2003 for the development of the concept of Celtic people in Northern Europe). Within post-Darwinian science the Celts stood for 'mankind in an aboriginal state' and guidebooks to Cornwall elaborated on the 'brooding Celtic emotionalism' of its native inhabitants (Perry 1999: 95; Samuel 1998: 59–66). The subtext of such statements demonstrated that Cornwall was different from England and, furthermore, it was a place that time forgot. It can be noted that in the present various temporal notions are still inherently bound up with the manifold constructions of Cornishness, for instance the common understanding of the different pace of life that exists in the Duchy and the idea that it is behind the times. As a vehicle for thought, time-travel obviously applies well to all issues concerned with history and heritage (c.f. Holtorf and Petersson's *The Archaeology of Time Travel Project*) and returning to Twain's 1889 parody of King Arthur's Court, the novel was remarkably innovative in dealing with the literary device of time travel.

The Cornish/Celtic question

Some have argued that the idea of a Cornish/Celtic identity is a large-scale pseudo event — an English invention created to give tourists what they want (Lowerson 1994). Such a notion by no means diminishes the significance and meaning of Cornish/Celtic culture within modern-day communities. For its part Celticism most often informs an essentialist view of the Cornish as a separate ethnic group, drawing on immutable concepts of culture connected to ideas of birth and soil with a Cornish nationalist discourse seeing Cornwall as different to England (Jones 1997). Where Arthur is concerned he can be viewed as a local Celtic hero or as a British, largely Anglicised, icon (Lewis, 2001: 22). The tension between a local Cornish, and a national, or other identity can be exemplified by the removal in 1999 of English Heritage signs at Tintagel by members of the Cornish Stannary Parliament (a pressure group which campaigns for Cornish cultural recognition) in order to demonstrate 'English' Heritage's cultural illegitimacy in the region (Payton 2004: 288; Peters 2005: 195).

Since the 1960s and 1970s Tintagel has played host to the interests of a number of over-lapping counter-cultural movements including the Neo-Pagans, the Neo-Celtic Revivalists and the Neo Celtic-Christians, who are collectively often classed under the umbrella term 'New Age'. Over time the wider landscape around Tintagel has taken on folkloric and spiritual significance. At Rocky Valley, which lies approximately two miles north-east of Tintagel, votive offerings are regularly pushed into cracks and ledges close to Bronze Age rock art depicting labyrinthine designs. At nearby St Nectan's Kieve Waterfall and Tea Rooms, adult pilgrims can pay £2.99 for entry to the on-site hermitage, including a meditation room. This overlooks the picturesque waterfall where legend states that the Knights of the Round Table received blessings before embarking on their quest in search of the Holy Grail (Lewis 2001: 31).

As Peters notes, many of the souvenirs within Tintagel's shops draw on the folk cultures of the modern Celtic and New Age groups (2005:198). Most of these things have nothing to do with Tintagel's ancient past — but portray the range and flexibility of cultural symbols which marketing has to draw on and they act as markers, defined in MacCannell's seminal work on tourism as 'pieces of information' about a site which can draw people to the site and form souvenirs or representations on and off the site (1976: 41). These markers all jostle for economic, political and social power and in turn they serve to construct or destruct a Cornish or Celtic or English or Arthurian or Pagan brand.

The Cornish have not succeeded in bringing about political change and wider public awareness of their ethno-cultural claims for difference in the same way as Eire, Scotland or Wales has done. To date, the British Government has rejected all requests to recognise Cornwall as anything other than an English county. It was an expectation that visitors to Tintagel would recognise many of the cultural symbols of Arthuriana and Celticness (as widely known and found in other regions); however, visitors may not be aware of Cornish claims for political autonomy.

Tintagel village: shops and visitor information

Aside from Tintagel Island other notable landmarks in the locale include King Arthur's Castle Hotel, built in 1895 and situated on the headland, the Norman parish

church of St Materiana situated picturesquely on the cliffs and within the village a National Trust managed fourteenth century manor known, due to later use in the nineteenth century, as 'The Old Post Office'. The village retains its medieval street plan, however, an effect of burgeoning tourism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was that many of the medieval buildings were knocked down to make way for boarding houses and commercial premises and the more recent architecture, with a few notable exceptions, is arguably nondescript (Thomas 1993: 31).

After parking in the village's many (and reasonably cheap) car parks the visitor's experience become historicised on Fore Street (see Figure 3) where shops such as 'The Celtic Legend' and 'Merlins Gifts' sell jewellery made of 'real' Cornish pewter, *Lord the Rings* chess-sets, marijuana-leaved tins and incense. Meanwhile, pubs and cafes advertise 'real' Cornish cream, fudge and pasties as well as 'real' Cornish ale, cider and mead. Howlett describes this artefactual kitsch (as opposed to culinary) as 'straightforward bad taste' (2004: 44).

According to Robb the visitor in 1988 was able to buy books and souvenirs of Cornish folklore including 'ghosts, pixies, folk-tales, Cornish wrecks and the like' as well as Arthurian themed merchandise (584). The range of souvenirs within Tintagel's shops in 2006 was more variable. For one thing, the cinematic success of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (released in 2001, 2002 and 2003) was clearly reflected in shop displays with miniature figures of Aragorn and Gandalf placed alongside Arthur and Merlin and the variety of Celtic themed jewellery was also notable. Tintagel Village has two information centres which provide books and guides. At the inland end of Fore Street a rather esoteric selection of information and merchandise is available at King Arthur's Great Halls; a commercially run operation which serves to present the eccentric and quasi-religious headquarters of the Order of the Fellowship of the Knights of the Round Table established in 1927 by Frederick Thomas Glassock, a custard millionaire who was a partner in the well-known firm Monk & Glass (Hutchinson *et al*. 1999). Compared to Robb's description, the Halls remain unchanged. A visitor will still find an 'elaborate granite throne and round tables, fine stained glass windows, and an audio-visual presentation by the actor Robert Powell' (1988: 584). Whilst the Halls only present and sell Arthurian material, in close proximity is Tintagel's Visitor and Tourist Information Centre, purpose built by North Cornwall District Council in 1999 in their existing car park. The centre presents a range of high-quality information boards, artefacts on loan from the Royal Cornwall Museum in Truro and a small shop selling guidebooks, toys, maps and the obligatory Celtic and Arthurian tomes. The information boards cover different aspects of the locale's geology, archaeology, legends, fauna and flora and these are reproduced in a 38 page Souvenir Guide which can be bought for £3.99 (Lewis 2001). The guide contains over a 100 colour illustrations; its front cover shows an illustration of a bearded man (presumably Arthur) and in total 14 pages are devoted explicitly to the legends.

The Visitor's Centre also has an introductory video to the area, and within the video the character of Arthur neatly ties together the county's Celtic traditions and modern day commercial aspirations as this transcript from a segment entitled *Celtic Connections* recorded on the 8 July 2006 illustrates:

FIGURE 3 Plastic Excalibur.

Tintagel lies at the heart of Cornwall's Celtic spirit. What can conjure up a better perception of the Celtic traditions than Arthur, the final bastion of Celtic nationhood, holding at bay the hoards of invaders who would destroy the very soul of what makes Cornwall a land apart [. . .] The mystical images of the past, with their belief in natural gods and cycles of the seasons and in the other world, appeal to those who aspire to different

lifestyles and values. Such evidence can be seen in numerous shops and is carefully linked to the mysticism of Arthur and Merlin.

Here Arthur becomes emblematic of Celtic Cornwall, notably defending Cornish traditions and ways of life. Ironically, the 'alternative' New Age beliefs which step in synch with environmental and anti-Capitalist movements somehow retain a certain degree of intrinsic magic for some, despite being transformed into physical economy. Yet there would seem to be little mystery in the invitation at the end of the video that visitors might like to 'browse in the shop and talk to the staff'.

Motivations to visit and ideas of Arthur

During questionnaire interviews visitors were asked why they had decided to visit Tintagel in order to gauge the extent to which King Arthur (believed as fact or fiction), the medieval castle, the scenery or some other factor/s had motivated their visit. Responses indicated that motivations to visit were largely connected with the anticipation of an enjoyable 'heritage experience' — heritage here used broadly and loosely to denote a range of activities from, for example, the eating of traditional food (cream teas and pasties) to viewing the literary landscape or sensing the intangible presence of King Arthur.

Almost all the visitors had a prior association of Tintagel with the legends of King Arthur; only two people admitted to knowing 'nothing'. Knowledge of Arthur had been formulated in childhood and several British visitors referred to school lessons and picture books. Visitors from France and Eastern Europe spoke of their own national sagas such as the *Nibelungen-Sage* in Germany. One visitor professed to reading Arthurian literature as an adult. Susan (aged 55 plus) from Alaska and her daughter Nikki (aged 25–34) from Washington had flown from North America to visit Tintagel and other Arthurian sites. Whilst Susan admitted to believing in the legends Nikki admitted that she was simply along for the ride.

The visitors were asked 'Who do you think Arthur was?' and 'When do you think Arthur was supposed to have lived?' Responses reflected an idea of Arthur as drawn by Malory's adaptation; he was a king who went on crusades and he was a knight in Medieval times. For some, a 'real' Arthur was seen in terms of a local leader — of a clan or tribe. As Andrew (aged 16–24 from Plymouth) put it 'the definition of power would have been different back then'. For others Arthur took on the role of Alfred the Great (AD 849–899) with a few visitors asking if 'he was the one who burnt the cakes?' The parallel cults of Arthur and Alfred in the Victorian and Edwardian periods may go some way to accounting for such conflation and as a more recent example in the episode *Merlin the Magician* of the 1960s US science fiction TV series *The Time Tunnel* Arthur fought off a band of Viking invaders. A broad date range from 400 BC to the fourteenth century AD was given for Arthur's life; however, the majority of responses peaked more accurately between AD 400 and AD 900.

Visitor reactions to Tintagel village

Opinion on the village was mixed. Anna from Devon (aged 55 plus) felt it to be over-commercialised and was 'still playing on the Arthur connection and cashing in'.

Kelly from Devon (aged 25–34) was 'not surprised by the touristy village' whilst Stephen from Warwickshire (aged 25–34) declared it 'Celtic commercialism'. Nikki (aged 25–34) from Washington felt that the souvenirs were 'touristy but high-quality'. The village's cheap car-parking was noted and appreciated. It appears that although the village was seen as commercialised it could be more so and crucially it appeared to fulfil visitors' expectations, it was what the majority of visitors wanted and expected.

English Heritage shop and exhibition

The front of the English Heritage flyer on Tintagel reads:

VISIT
TINTAGEL CASTLE
CASTEL DYNTAGELL
GREAT DAYS OUT IN 2006
King Arthur's legendary home

The text inside the leaflet largely inspires a romantic version of Tintagel's past with '2000 years of history' mentioned in the same paragraph as Merlin's Cave and the Queen Igraine (English Heritage 2006). The site is clearly marketed through the legends. Signposted at the western end of Fore Street, Tintagel Island can be accessed via a track which descends a valley, a walk of about 500 metres to the ticket office, shop and exhibition (Robb 1988: 585). A café provides refreshments above Haven Beach which is a small beach, covered at high tide and relatively difficult to access. For those that do clambour down to the sands, there is the opportunity at low tide to explore Merlin's Cave. Seventy percent of the visitors interviewed had visited the island — a figure which concurs with Thomas' 1993 estimation that 'two-thirds of visitors venture from the village to the Castle and Island' (1993: 131).

The English Heritage shop and visitor centre provides merchandising and related publications, much of it, to echo Robb, 'transmits immediate and obvious Arthurian signals' (1988: 587). Reference to Tintagel's Cornishness is evident within the marketing material on site through the use of Old Cornish for 'Fortress Tintagel' (*Dyntagell*) although it could be questioned whether visitors would recognise the word as Cornish. The shop also sells Cornish wine, Cornish postcards and a few books on local history and archaeology. One publication on sale of note is Thomas' comprehensive 139 page *English Heritage Book of Tintagel: Arthur and Archaeology* (1993) described by Robb as an 'unusual' guide for considering in depth the archaeological and the mythic aspects of Tintagel in the past and in the present (1988: 582–583). Subsequently, a shorter (at 44 pages) English Heritage guide has been published (Davison 1999). At a cost of £3.99 it is highly illustrated, includes site plans including a suggested walking route by following ten numbered way-markers around the site. The guide contains 19 pages concerning Tintagel's history/archaeology and 18 pages on the legends.

A small exhibition centre attached to the shop is dominated by seating for a seven-minute introductory video to the site which post-dates Robb's 1988 fieldwork. Visitors were observed walking straight past glass cases containing Mediterranean ceramics in order to sit comfortably in front of the screen to watch the video entitled

Searching for King Arthur. In it Arthur is effectively slain and presented as a purely literary phenomenon; the video states for example that the site is 'remote and littered with enough bones of history to stretch a good story' before going on to describe how 'myths are made and how they lead us back to history'. Thus Arthur's presence on site is legitimated but only in the sense, to quote Fowler, 'that the belief has itself existed for a long time' (1992: 50).

When asked if they still believed in Arthur after watching the film several visitors indicated a discomfort with the myth-busting. Some still wished to believe in an historical Arthur revealing a desire to suspend disbelief as well as the power of popular perceptions of the past. Yvette (aged 35–44 from the Midlands) responded 'But it feels like it could be true' and Lesley (aged 35–44) from London a bit more loquaciously stated:

> I always believed it to be true, but have seen the short film; they are advertising the myth but tracing the story of how people invented it over the centuries. In a way I feel a bit let down. I would have loved to hang on to the legend — I still hope to. A lot of history books aren't right. It's little to do with Arthur — it was a subsequent king.

Other visitors believed that there was some truth to the legends with the stories handed down through oral traditions and that over time different 'historic' characters had merged into one. The minority that still believed in the legend's historical truth after seeing the video indicated that they sensed history as Ian from Scotland (aged 16–24) put it 'but something happened here'. Then there were those who sat on the fence, as George from London argued (aged 55 plus) 'it's one of those things you can't prove or disprove'. On this last point, before considering the remaining on-site interpretation it is pertinent to summarise the archaeological evidence on Tintagel Island.

Tintagel Island: excavation, survey and changing interpretation

Aside from the castle there are extensive archaeological remains on the island dating to the post-Roman era (Figure 4) with much of the research over the years being deftly summarised by Charles Thomas not least through his contribution in analysing pottery types. In 1929 the Duchy of Cornwall exercised its powers under the Ancient Monuments Act and placed Tintagel under the protection of H.M. Works. During their clearance of the medieval castle Ralegh Radford undertook the first series of excavations, starting in 1933, with the aims of exposing and consolidating both mainland and island sections of the castle for public viewing and investigating the earlier history of the site in order in 'test the basis of the Arthurian traditions' (Radford 1935: 401).

Radford found a number of rectangular buildings of stone and slate buried beneath the heather and grass in association with extremely large quantities of high-class Mediterranean wares. The buildings, which were interpreted as relating to a much larger settlement, were excavated, largely unrecorded and then rebuilt using excavated stone (Figure 5). The pottery included some Roman table wares, but mostly was of a post-Roman date from c. AD 400 to AD 700 and consisted of plates, dishes, wine-jars and glass vessels originating in Tunisia, Carthage, Asia Minor, Byzantium

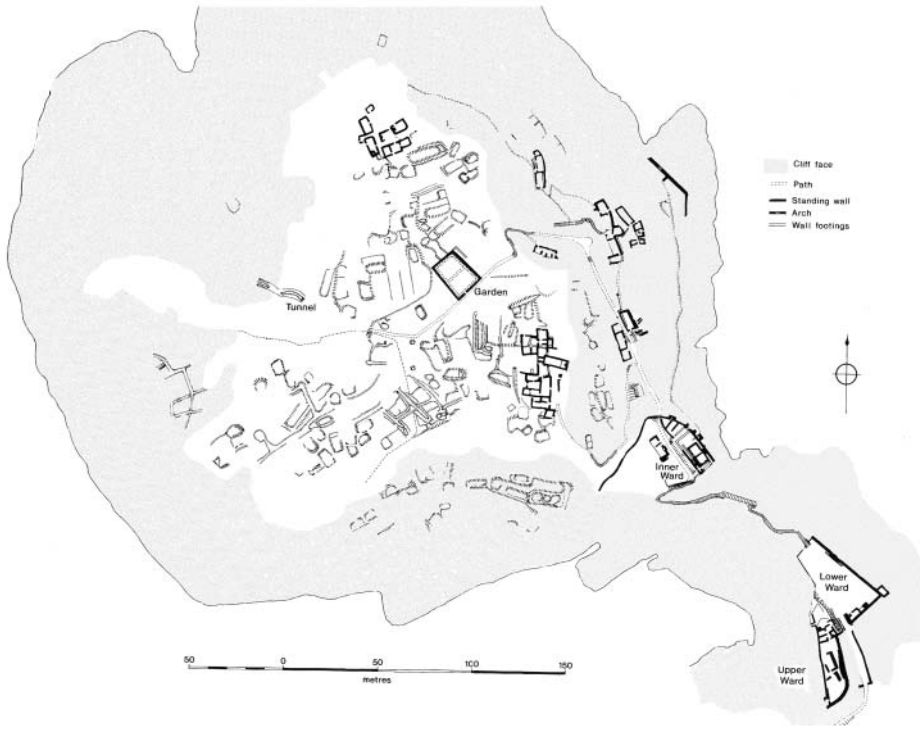

FIGURE 4 Plan of Tintagel Island (adapted from Thomas and Fowler 1985).

and the Aegean (Davison, 1999: 8–9; Radford 1935; Thomas 1988: 424). Whilst Radford found no evidence to suggest that the settlement represented 'a palace or royal town' (1935: 417) and thereby refuted the site's legendary connections, he interpreted the post-Roman phase, largely on the basis of the ceramic evidence, as a large monastic establishment, an interpretation which by the start of World War II had, according to Thomas, 'hardened into dogma' (Radford 1935: 417–419; Thomas 1993: 55–57).

Intermittent small-scale excavations took place following World War II and Radford's interpretation persisted largely unchallenged for a further twenty years but by the 1970s a number of people, notably Thomas and Burrow, were reconsidering the evidence. Thomas did much work reappraising fifth and sixth century pottery types and both disentangled the sequences of artefact and feature from Radford's original excavation reports. In 1973 Burrow gave a paper to the Scottish Archaeological Forum and pointed out that 'little reliance could be placed on the association of pottery with the structural remains' given that, to quote Radford, most of the pottery was 'found lying outside the buildings in unsealed layers' (Burrow 1974: 100 quoting Radford 1935: 415; Thomas 1988). Furthermore, the rectangular buildings had resemblance to vernacular architecture of possible post-Norman date, and therefore may not have been as early as the post-Roman finds. The site was re-interpreted as a defended stronghold, with fifth to seventh century structures lying undiscovered and the artifactual evidence pointing to periods of occupation when the site operated as

FIGURE 5 Reconstructed post-Roman building on the eastern side of the island.

a trading port or commercial centre (Burrow 1974: 101–102). A serious grass fire in the summer of 1983 provided new evidence. On the summit of the island the fire uncovered burnt but recognisable sherds of pottery and foundations of some one hundred and fifty possible structures (Davison, 1999: 22; Thomas, 1993: 75–76). A survey in 1985 by Norman Quinnell and Martin Fletcher for the Royal Commission on the Historic Monuments of England confirmed that the top of the island was a vast and continuous site which appeared to comprise of two types of structure; large rectilinear (supposedly medieval) buildings and smaller, less substantial structures; all were untypical of a Celtic monastery (Thomas and Fowler 1985). The report of the most recent excavations by a team from the University of Glasgow working on behalf of English Heritage concluded that Tintagel may have had a trading role during the Roman period but was 'at its height' in the post-Roman period with interpretation favouring 'a major high-status enclosed post-Roman citadel' (Barrowman *et al*. 2007: 334–335).

Evidence for Arthur?

There are also a number of folklore features on Tintagel Island which could variously be described as Arthurian geological furnishing which serve to illustrate the way that meanings become ascribed to landscape and place. They include King Arthur's Seat, King Arthur's Cups and Saucers and King Arthur's Bed, Elbow Chair or Hip Bath and are a combination of natural geology, weathering and deepening by

hand. Close to the southern cliffs is an eroded hollow, known as King Arthur's Footprint, which is similar in form to a type of footprint found in other parts of the British Isles, for example Dunaad Fort, Argyle, Scotland which may have played a role within inauguration ceremonies for tribal chiefs, a practice that it is believed to have continued into medieval times (Thomas, 1993: 49, 98).

In 1988 Robb references the popularisation of these features (along with Merlin's Cave) to promotion by the former site warden's who acted as guides during the early decades of the twentieth century but noted that they had eroded away from latter official interpretation (1988: 589–590 citing Duxbury and Williams 1979). In terms of the more recent guides, Lewis' Souvenir Guide (sold by Tintagel Visitor Centre) lists a number of 'Folklore Features' alongside 'Archaeological Features' and indicates the position of both on a plan (2001: 9). Davison's English Heritage guide makes no explicit reference to the features, however, the position of way-marker no 9 (Figure 6), which is placed at some distance from the southern cliffs, presumably to prevent accidental fall, contains the following description in the guide:

> If Tintagel was indeed the stronghold of a Dark Age king or prince of Dumnonia, then this area on top of the Island may have played an important part in ceremonies, when his noble ancestry was proclaimed, his power was demonstrated and oaths of loyalty were given (Davison 1999: 11–12).

Despite all contrary assertions, no firm archaeological (or historical) evidence has so far been found to support the site's legendary connection. In 1998 the University

FIGURE 6 Way-marker no. 9.

of Glasgow team discovered an inscribed slate, broken and re-used as a drain cover, in securely dated sixth century contexts from the eastern terraces. Its Latin inscription read '*Pater Coli Avi Ficit Artognov*' a likely translation being 'Artognou, father of a descendent of Coll, has had (this) constructed'. The name Artognou could mean 'descendent of Arthur', but the *arth*-element, signifying 'bear' appears in many contexts aside from the name Arthur and is a common element within Celtic languages (Barrowman *et al*. 2007: 191–200; Peters 2005: 116). However, ART was enough to start a media frenzy with newspapers across Britain heralding the discovery of direct evidence of King Arthur, a claim refuted by English Heritage' (BBC 1998; English Heritage 2001: 37).

Exploring Tintagel Island: interpretation and visitor perception

Beyond the ticket office, where adults pay £4.30 for entry to the site, visitors can climb a steep path to the mainland ward or by crossing a wooden bridge across the collapsed isthmus of rock they can ascend another steep set of steps which leads to the island courtyard and the rest of the island (Figure 7).

Despite the de-bunking of myth during the introductory video, upon entering the site interpretation boards which pre-date the video and closely correspond with Robb's 1988 commentary (587) resurrect Arthur by suggesting that in the right kind of weather visitors could imagine him there:

FIGURE 7 Crossing onto the Island.

> The history of Tintagel spans nearly 2000 years and is still shrouded in mystery. What is know provides little basis for the Arthurian legend. However, when the mists come swirling through Merlin's cave, it is easy to see how the myth has survived to this day.

From the island courtyard visitors can wander haphazardly around the network of paths or those who have bought the guidebook can follow the numbered way-markers which indicate for example, the Island courtyard, some Dark Age houses, the medieval garden, medieval tunnel and a well. Generally without the aid of a guidebook interpretation and presentation of the archaeological remains is minimal, or non-existent. Some features are emphasised, for example, the walled garden and tunnel offer small plaques with rather limited information (Figure 8). This lack of authoritative information perhaps explains alternative interpretations, for example, the medieval tunnel is thought to be a food store in association with the castle but it is perceived as many things: Merlin's cave; a passage to the underworld; a channel for recharging crystals; or a spiritual space to commune with spirits (Thomas 1993: 47). The restriction on interpretation is, according to English Heritage 'to avoid intruding into the wild character of the site' (2001: 39).

Visitor reactions to the castle and the island in 2006 were either sensory/emotional or reflected intellectual/economic disappointment. The castle and the scenery were commonly described as 'beautiful', 'stunning' and 'very nice'. Some visitors were

FIGURE 8 Medieval tunnel (the text on the plaque reads 'The tunnel was cut using metal tools, but its exact date remains a mystery. Its purpose is also unknown but it may have been a medieval cold store'.

drawn to the site because of its esoteric or spiritual associations, for example, Claire (aged 35–44 from Brighton) visited the island for religious reasons. While on the Island she 'feels' the lives of women in the late medieval period and these feelings were particularly strong within the walled garden.

Those who had paid for the guidebook were extremely positive about the information contained within what they described as an excellent factual and authoritative guide. Other satisfied visitors felt that they did not need a lot of information; they preferred to use their imaginations to fill in the gaps. In the main, however, visitors felt that English Heritage 'could do better' — the castle was visually stunning, the location enjoyable but they wanted to know more about each 'bit' of the site. Disgruntled complaints from a significant number of visitors focused on what was perceived to be an expensive entrance charge. This was declared by John from Torquay (aged 45–54) to be 'expensive national patrimony' and by Edgar from Leeds (aged 55 plus) to be 'extortionate'. Yet upon closer examination, these misgivings reflected the lack of on-site narrative or interpretation. In particular, these visitors wanted more plans and drawings to help them visualise the buildings. Furthermore, they wanted small stories about everyday life; not necessarily a grand narrative to replace the Arthurian myth, but to know more about mundane things as Mike (aged 55 plus) from the Midlands responded:

> The information is very poor. I think archaeologists fail to pass on to the general public their findings and conclusions. There's evidence for lots of buildings — what were they used for? Who lived in them? What did people who lived in them do for their duties?

It was therefore notable that although the castle had the ability to evoke a feeling of history and imagination no one really said what they had learnt about a non-Arthurian past at Tintagel. Indeed, the visitors appeared to have learnt little to nothing about Tintagel's 'real' history beyond the place's legendary associations. Very few could give more than the basic facts about the island's history whilst roughly a half felt that they knew nothing about the place which was not to do with King Arthur. This is surprising given the range of information in the Tintagel Visitor Centre on local industry, the medieval settlement and archaeological narratives on the island. So it seems that the extent of Arthurian myth-protecting within the locale submerges 'historical' narratives underneath a gloss of Arthuriana, which perhaps visitors cannot see beyond. In such a literary place, visitors were left without replacement narratives and consequently appeared unengaged by the archaeology, spending their time on site like Moai statues staring out to sea but in large part ignoring the archaeology. It can be argued that they can get the same views for free on the neighbouring coast path.

Identities of Tintagel

In order to gauge how the different signifiers of place identity combined in an overall place identity — informants were asked to choose one or two of five pre-selected place identities Celtic, English, Cornish, Arthurian or Pagan which they felt best described Tintagel (see Figure 9).

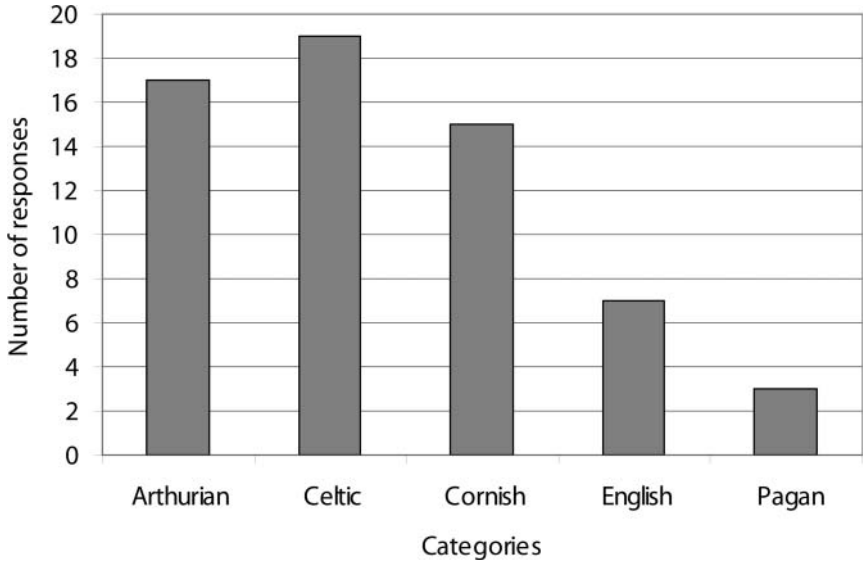

FIGURE 9 Visitors' descriptions of identities at Tintagel.

In the main, responses indicate that visitors perceive Tintagel as Arthurian, Celtic and Cornish with visitor comments reflecting ideas which were cultural, symbolic and geographical. Given the nature of the data Tintagel can indeed be described as Arthurian, however this identity becomes problematic when the public perception of what Arthur represents is considered, as discussed above. If Arthur is viewed as a British, or largely Anglicised icon Tintagel may hold more reference to England than the data first suggests with 'Arthurian' possibly denoting Englishness. We would therefore argue that within this context an Arthurian identity probably continues the Anglicisation of place as discussed above in terms of literary developments and the historical context of Celtic tourism within the locale.

For example, Lesley (aged 35–44) from London felt that Tintagel represented 'the history of England, kings and castles and battles and the struggle against the Saxons' a statement which in itself would be interesting to deconstruct in terms of the perception (or misperception) of political identities in the Early Medieval period. From a geographical/administrative standpoint Alex (aged 55 plus) and Natasha (aged 45–54) a couple from the Midlands noted that Tintagel was in Cornwall but it was run by English Heritage. Finally, another couple argued between themselves: Tim (aged 55 plus) was Cornish born and bred and he felt that Tintagel was Cornish. His English partner, Maria (aged 55 plus) argued that since Cornwall was part of England, Tintagel was English.

The data from the sample also supports a perception of Celtic 'difference' at Tintagel. It is important to question in this context whether the signifier Celtic represents Cornwall, the county and its culture or whether again it is symbolic of a more Anglicised notion of past societies and contemporary cultural symbols. The choosing of the signifier 'Celtic' demonstrates an awareness of a 'different' and 'exotic' sense of place. Visitors could be getting this from the wildness of the coastline, the gothic

ruins, or the Celtic crosses in the local churchyard. We would argue that this is not necessarily indicative, however, of any real understanding of Cornish ethno-cultural claims to difference. Rather, we postulate that this 'difference' is likely to be a superficial one based on MacCannell's notion of the power of site + marker + tourist = attraction (1976: 41) and the visual nature of tourism as described eloquently by Urry (1976: 41; Urry 1990). Visitors could simply be reflecting back what they read on shop signs and marketing material. As cultural signs Cornish, Celtic and Arthurian identities act interchangeably, as prefix and suffix and as hyphenates — they can stand for each other, hence the sign Celtic can stand for romance, standing stones, jewellery and King Arthur and the sign Celtic can stand for the Cornish. Such signs therefore work on a variety of levels and when such connections are made repeatedly they become naturalised (Deacon, 2004: 18). Furthermore, the conflation of Iron Age, New Age and medieval imagery in turn conflates Celtic into Arthurian; added to this markers which are referential to a Celtic Cornwall and there is an explanation, we suggest, as to why Celtic as a category was chosen more than any other.

What is very clear is that the visitors surveyed do not associate Tintagel with a Pagan identity. A Pagan-Arthurian identity was chosen by the visitor from Brighton mentioned above whilst another admitted to choosing this category because she had once worked in a theatre which idiosyncratically had Pagan in its name. Again questions can be raised as to what 'Pagan' could mean. It could be used as an alter-Christian description associated with Wicca, Heathenism and other forms of animistic practice. The elements of Pagan magic which are woven into the Arthurian stories extend beyond Celtic-Christianity to its origins in Pagan and Celtic mythology (Lewis, 2001: 31). However the Arthurian stories were Christianised over time, for example the morality inherent in concepts of chivalry and the notion of the physical and spiritual quest. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that Arthur and hence Tintagel is not associated with Paganism despite Cornwall's claims to a Celtic past.

Conclusions: the past is a floating country

Tintagel Island is thus marketed as an Anglicised 'national' British if not European site, partly through the failure to present the archaeological remains within a 'local' context. What is clear is that Celticism is sold mainly within the village and, despite English Heritage's introductory video, the island remains Arthurian. As Robb noted it is Arthurian within much of the publicity, simply because 'Arthurian myth has become inextricably linked to visitor expectation' (1988: 583) yet the message remains mixed with 'one voice, critical and reflective of officio-agnosticism on Arthur, the other drawing deeply on the legendary and literary accretions to sell T-shirts and posters' (1988: 587). Nearly twenty years later, and despite some changes in the types of souvenirs on sale, new guidebooks, visitors centre and introductory video, Robb's broad conclusions still hold true.

Ultimately Tintagel maintains the potential for being the legendary birthplace. So even if Arthur no longer exists in 'fact', there is still a Celtic past, the temporal context within which a person like Arthur may have lived. This is a past both legitimated and slightly confused through heritage presentation on site. It is also reinforced through marketing and souvenirs in the village, an existing awareness of Arthur and

the imagination. Contrarily the village more prosaically is a pit-stop for refreshment and the buying of trinkets. Consequently, an Arthurian identity at Tintagel is conflated with ideas of Celticity, Paganism and New Age beliefs. The public negotiate these markers of distinction and their symbolic/epistemological significance to find relevance for their interests. These identities of place are not necessarily competing or that different from each other — as Robb noted within his concept of an integrated 'heritage complex' there is a certain degree of cohesion to the Tintagel 'package'. Yet paradoxically, Tintagel's success lies in its ability to sell different components of the package. Everyone who visits can in some sense find their *own* Tintagel.

The affront to the site entry charge does not mean that a visit to Tintagel Castle is necessarily expensive. Rather for many, it does not appear to be good value for money. Those who paid to enter but did not buy the guidebook were left disappointed by the lack of authoritative on-site narrative. Whilst the Arthurian legends are accessible and well-known, the public does not 'know' a Tintagel beyond imagination, myth-making and marketing. So a significant number of visitors were left in a certain state of interpretive limbo. If one of the roles of heritage is to create a new sense of reality in the present, we would argue that there are opportunities at Tintagel to 'refill the emptied commodity with meaning' (Jhally 1989: 221). For others, however, the landscape, the feeling that 'something happened here', the books, the legends, the pseudo-archaeology is all the evidence they need to construct an alternative, romantic or mythological relationship with the past. But it must again be stressed that for the majority Tintagel is just an interesting place to visit in the present. Feifer defines 'post-tourists' as those who 'seek pleasure' in the multiplicity of tourist games, they 'know there is *no* authentic tourist experience, that there are merely a series of games or texts that can be played' and Tintagel's visitors were aware and accepting of the commercialisation of the village (Urry 1990:11 citing Feifer 1985). Some were even happy to engage with a dialogue that presented Arthur as a purely literary figure. Others still chose to suspend a resultant disbelief for the day. As creative and reactive agents within the process of negotiation between myths, fact, experience and the material world, Tintagel is about the way that we choose to represent ourselves — a view which changes over time.

Acknowledgements

For their valuable comments, our thanks to the convenors and participants of the ASA 2007 panel *Great Expectations? Anticipation, Imagination and Expectation in the Tourist*, where a first draft of this paper was presented. Thanks also to the referees and to Andrew Gardner, Gabriel Moshenska and Caradoc Peters for commenting on earlier drafts of this paper.

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