

## Historical Arthur

King Arthur is the figure at the heart of the Arthurian legends. He is said to be the son of UtherPendragon and Igraine of Cornwall. Arthur is a near mythic figure in Celtic stories such as *Culhwch* and *Olwen*. In early Latin chronicles he is presented as a military leader, the *dux bellorum*. In later romance he is presented as a king and emperor.

One of the questions that has occupied those interested in King Arthur is whether or not he is a historical figure. The debate has raged since the Renaissance when Arthur's historicity was vigorously defended, partly because the Tudor monarchs traced their lineage to Arthur and used that connection as a justification for their reign. Modern scholarship has generally assumed that there was some actual person at the heart of the legends, though not of course a king with a band of knights in shining armor--though O.J. Padel in "*The Nature of Arthur*" argues that "historical attributes of just the kind that we find attached to Arthur can be associated with a figure who was not historical to start with."

If there is a historical basis to the character, it is clear that he would have gained fame as a warrior battling the Germanic invaders of the late fifth and early sixth centuries. Since there is no conclusive evidence for or against Arthur's historicity, the debate will continue. But what can not be denied is the influence of the figure of Arthur on literature, art, music, and society from the Middle Ages to the present. Though there have been numerous historical novels that try to put Arthur into a sixth-century setting, it is the legendary figure of the late Middle Ages who has most captured the imagination.

It is such a figure, the designer of an order of the best knights in the world, that figures in the major versions of the legend from Malory to Tennyson to T. H. White. Central to the myth is the downfall of Arthur's kingdom. It is undermined in the chronicle tradition by the treachery of Mordred. In the romance tradition that treachery is made possible because of the love of Lancelot and Guinevere.

From: <http://www.kingarthursknights.com/arthur/historical.asp>

## Legendary Arthur

### Name

The name Arthur may be (and according to K. H. Jackson certainly is) a form of Artorius, a Roman gens name, but, according to J. D. Bruce, it is possibly of Celtic origin, coming from artosviros (bear man) - see

Welsh arthgwyrr (T. R. Davies). Bruce also suggests the possibility of a connection with Irish art (stone).

### Life.

An outline of the hero's life is given by Geoffrey of Monmouth (twelfth century) in his *Historia Regum Britanniae* - History of the Kings of Britain. Just how much of this life was Geoffrey's invention and how much was culled from traditional material is uncertain. He tells us that King Arthur was the son of Uther and defeated the barbarians in a dozen battles.

Subsequently, he conquered a wide empire and eventually went to war with the Romans. He returned home on learning that his nephew Mordred had raised the standard of rebellion and taken Guinevere, the queen. After landing, his final battle took place.

The saga built up over the centuries and Celtic traditions of Arthur reached the Continent via Brittany. Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* would become what many considered the standard 'history' of Arthur. In this, we are told of Arthur's conception when Uther approached Igraine who was made, by Merlin's sorcery, to resemble her husband. The child was given to Ector to be raised in secret. After Uther's death there was no king ruling all England. Merlin had placed a sword in a stone, saying that whoever drew it out would be king.

Arthur did so and Merlin had him crowned. This led to a rebellion by eleven rulers which Arthur put down. He married Guinevere whose father gave him the Round Table as a dowry; it became the place where his knights sat, to avoid quarrels over precedence. A magnificent reign followed, Arthur's court becoming the focus for many heroes. In the war against the Romans, Arthur defeated the Emperor Lucius and became emperor himself. However, his most illustrious knight, Lancelot, became enamoured of Guinevere. The Quest for the Holy Grail began and Lancelot's intrigue with the Queen came to light.

Lancelot fled and Guinevere was sentenced to death. Lancelot rescued her and took her to his realm. This led Arthur to crossing the channel and making war on his former knight. While away from Britain, he left Mordred in charge. Mordred rebelled and Arthur returned to quell him. This led to Arthur's last battle on Salisbury Plain, where he slew Mordred, but was himself gravely wounded. Arthur was then carried off in a barge, saying he was heading for the vale of Avalon. Some said he never died, but would one day return. However, his grave was supposedly discovered at Glastonbury in the reign of Henry II (1154-89).

From: *1993, Illustrated Encyclopedia of Arthurian Legends - Claremont Books.*

## KittyJay'sGrave, Dartmoor, Devon



Jay's Grave  
Dartmoor, Devon

As you travel the road between Heatree Cross and Hound Tor you come upon one of Dartmoor's most poignant monuments, the raised grave of Kitty Jay.

Standing on an earthen path and guarded by a tangle of skeletal trees, **Jay's Grave** has a distinct aura mystery about it and no-one who pauses alongside it can fail to be moved by its melancholic feel.

Although little is known about the woman who supposedly lies here, tradition tells that she was an 18th century workhouse orphan who, having been ruined and deserted by a fickle lover, hanged herself and was buried at a crossroads with a stake driven deep into her heart, as was the custom for dealing with suicides then.

In 1860 her bones were re-discovered and re-buried in this wayside grave on which for years afterwards, fresh flowers would mysteriously appear each morning.

Even when the blizzards of winter had covered the moor with a thick blanket of snow, the flowers would appear, although no footprints were ever found in the snow surrounding Jay's Grave.

Today there are frequent reports of a footless, female figure that is often seen floating eerily above the wayside grave of Kitty Jay.

From: [http://www.haunted-britain.com/jay%27s\\_grave.htm](http://www.haunted-britain.com/jay%27s_grave.htm)

## Lady Godiva

Some 900 years ago an extraordinary occurrence took place on Market Day in the English midlands town of Coventry.

Two monks at St. Albans Abbey in Hertfordshire first recorded this amazing story in Latin. Roger of Wendover wrote of it in the twelfth century and Mathew Paris in the early thirteenth century. As the Abbey stood at an important road junction, it would seem that the monks may have heard the story from travellers who were on their way from the Midlands to London.

The astonishing tale that has come down to us through the centuries, is that sometime in the eleventh-century a proud, pious lady rode through Coventry on Market Day completely naked, covered by nothing but her long hair!

Was this true? Apparently so!

Who was this pious medieval streaker?



*Lady Godiva by John Collier*

Lady Godiva was the lady, wife of Leofric, the Earl of Mercia. Earl Leofric was one of the all-powerful lords who ruled England under the Danish King Canute.

Lady Godiva was a rich landowner in her own right and one of her most valuable properties was Coventry.

Leofric was a tyrant, he tyrannised the Church and did not hold the same religious convictions as his wife, nor her fondness for the Midlands and its populace.

He mercilessly demanded from the people of Coventry an oppressive tax called the Heregeld. This tax paid for King Canute's bodyguard and Leofric made sure that the people of Coventry paid it!

Lady Godiva pleaded with Leofric to stop this hated tax and he is reputed to have said, "You will have to ride naked through Coventry before I will change my ways".

He was quite sure that his demure, modest wife would never do such a thing.

But Lady Godiva took him at his word, and on Market Day in Coventry she rode naked, veiled only by her long golden hair. As her hair was long enough to cover all her body, only her face and legs could be seen.

Leofric was so stunned by the whole incident that he believed it was a miracle that no one had seen his wife's naked body, and he immediately "freed" the town from paying the hated Heregeld, and at the same time ceased his persecution of the Church.

Leofric appears to have undergone a religious conversion after this incident and he and Godiva funded a Benedictine monastery in Coventry where they were both buried. Unfortunately all traces of this monastery have long since disappeared.

By the 17th century the story appears to have been altered slightly. The new version of the story said that before her 'ride', Godiva sent out messengers to go throughout the town insisting that all the people stay indoors with their windows shuttered on the day. As she was very popular with the people (unlike her husband) and every taxpayer realised that they stood to gain from her 'heroic act', they did as she requested.

Everyone complied with her request except for one man who couldn't resist peeping, a tailor, 'Peeping Tom'.

He was, the story goes, 'blinded by the wrath of Heaven' for his temerity in not obeying the order.

A statue supposedly of Peeping Tom, a strange wooden effigy, can be seen in Coventry's Cathedral Lanes Shopping Centre. The eyes in this effigy appear blank, but that may be because the paint has worn off over the years.

The annual Coventry Fair kept alive the Godiva story until the Reformation when the festival was banned and it was not revived until 1678.

From this time on Godiva rode through the streets on a snow-white horse, accompanied by a man whose chief skill lay in his ability to make rude, suggestive gestures. Peeping Tom again!! The Godiva Procession has been revived in recent years and takes place annually in June.

Today a visitor needs only to look in front of Coventry's Cathedral Lanes Shopping Centre to see a replica of the sight which tradition insists struck Peeping Tom blind!

From: <http://www.historic-uk.com/CultureUK/Lady-Godiva/>