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Arthurian Pageants in Twentieth-Century Britain

ROGER SIMPSON

Despite their apparent lack of historicity, adaptations of the Arthurian legends played a significant role within British historical pageants in the twentieth century. (RS)

In 1905 a new art form was introduced into Britain by Louis Napoleon Parker (1852–1944), a playwright and former music master at Sherborne School in Dorset. Before his time, there had, of course, been pageants. Derived from the medieval pageant cart of the mystery plays, the term had been broadened widely to embrace a diverse range of allegorical chariots, *tableaux vivants*, ceremonial processions, and sumptuous spectacles. But in his *Sherborne Pageant*, Parker contrived a new thing—the *historical* pageant, a chronicle play in which a social body rather than an individual is the hero. Intended to commemorate the twelve-hundredth anniversary of the school, bishopric, and town, this event immediately set the pattern of the genre that seems to have sprung fully formed from the brain of its creator.¹

Essentially the Parkerian pageant was educational and participatory. By presenting local history against the overall frame of the national story, a town could define its importance and take justifiable pride in having played a part in the march of progress. A pageant's initiation might be private but its organization would be civic, headed by local dignitaries and worthies, and given strong ecclesiastical and military backing. Serving this public cause would be the combined skills of various arts. Often a professional and renowned pageant master might be invited to run the show but, because all the performers and support-staff would be local amateurs, emphasis would be on the group rather than the individual. With the whole community involved in the fun and effort, the image of a hierarchical, co-operative, and unified society was projected. Profit was not to be a prime motive; if any money were made it would go to charity.

The proceedings were formulaic. An open-air setting in summer was thought ideal, preferably in front of an abbey, cathedral, castle, stately home, or picturesque ruin. The narrative would be episodic, loosely linking scenes from diverse historical periods. Visually it would be spectacular, entailing intricate choreography of a huge cast in colorful costumes, exuberantly supported by bands, choirs, and displays of horsemanship. There would

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be a printed guide, adulatory newspaper reports, and photographs. It was supposed to be the experience of a lifetime. To preserve its unique flavour it would not be held in the same place again until a new and untried generation had arisen.

Parker's innovatory art form caught on rapidly, whether controlled by him or by others. Warwick put on its own version the next year and, from then on, pageants were rampant, spreading to Bury St Edmunds, Liverpool, Oxford, Potter Heigham, and St Albans in 1907, to Chelsea, Cheltenham, Dover, Pevensey, Sussex, and Winchester in 1908. Interrupted only by the two World Wars, for half a century they continued to play a significant role in numerous towns and villages, periodically deriving fresh stimuli from great national celebrations such as the Silver Jubilee in 1935, the Festival of Britain in 1951, and the Coronation in 1953.

Inevitably variations of scale and style crept in. Sometimes religious, political, or industrial subjects were taken as themes. Some pageants were more like plays, others like processions. Major writers could be involved.² Dramatic incident was expressed variously, ranging from the medium of ornate verse to mime. Music could be specially commissioned or consist merely of a selection of popular numbers. Floodlights and microphones were introduced. It often rained. Indoor venues might occasionally be chosen. The desire for income could loom large for zealous fundraisers. But, overall, pageants remained remarkably homogeneous in topic and in shape.

By their nature they were ephemeral. We can no longer fully recapture the sound, sight, or atmosphere, the sunlight, shadow, and breeze of those distant events. Many of the smaller ones have doubtless vanished without trace. For the larger we have only partial records in newspaper reports, in some lavishly printed programs, in surviving postcards, a few pioneering films, and the occasional photographs that resurface on the Internet. Besides these transient evocations of lost splendors, we may also, at a further remove, view creative transformations through descriptions of pageants, actual or imagined, which crept into contemporary novels. The Winchester event was, for example, introduced into Arthur Quiller-Couch's *Brother Copas* (1911), while a classic detective novel, Victor L. Whitechurch's *Murder at the Pageant* (1930), used an invented village performance as setting for the dastardly crime. Most importantly, in *Between the Acts* (1941) Virginia Woolf incorporated a like village event as structural hub of her novel and made it a complex symbol, and critique, of contemporary England. None of these novels is, however, Arthurian. The sole instance of such is John Cowper Powys's *A Glastonbury Romance* (1933), at the heart of which he created the great civic pageant that Glastonbury had not in reality mounted at that time, and whose dominant section is Arthurian.³ It is thus ironic that what is now perhaps the best known of all twentieth-century Arthurian pageants is set

within a work of fiction. For, though largely forgotten, actual Arthurian pageants did take place.

BEFORE THE FIRST WORLD WAR

In stressing the *historical* aspect of his pageants, Parker asserted that episodes needed to be based on accurate records and preparatory antiquarian research. Such a strict approach to historical accuracy might now be thought prejudicial to the chances of Arthur's appearance within this milieu. Certainly the hortatory guidelines were sedulously observed at Winchester, Chester (1908), and Bath (1909), at none of which was Arthur even mentioned within the dramatic episodes.⁴ But the British historical tradition had been so deeply infected by Geoffrey of Monmouth's pseudo-history and by the romance tradition, abetted by provincial fondness for local folktales, that an Arthurian presence is pervasive. It is noticed first in Parker's *Warwick Pageant*, which was held in the Castle grounds from 2 to 7 July 1906 to commemorate the thousandth anniversary of the Conquest of Mercia by Queen Ethelfleda. Here, though, the Arthurian personae make only a very minor entrance. James Rhoades's Opening Chorus addresses the Druids as 'Sages of the sea-girt isle / That Clas *Merddyn* hight erewhile,' while Episode 2, which is set in AD 500, provides a little more detail. At the feast held to celebrate the momentous capture of the bear that will forever feature in the Warwick coat of arms, one of the captors is asked to give his 'news of Arthur and Guenever and the Table Round.' In this, however, he is immediately forestalled by the arrival of Archbishop Dubritius, who, as the man 'who set the crown on Arthur's brow at Caerleon,' can provide more up-to-date tidings of the king. What these tidings are we are not told. But in Parker's later *Dover Pageant* (27 July–1 August 1908) Arthur plays a very significant role.⁵ The *Book of Words* displays him prominently on its cover, his helmet mounted by a dragon crest, his sword symbolically raised in exalted leadership. And in the pageant itself, Canon Henry Bertram (a local vicar who had been instrumental in setting up the event) looked the perfect embodiment of a Tennysonian Arthur, magnificently sheathed in plate armor.

As at Warwick the pageant is staged picturesquely—on the grounds of Dover College—and opens with a verse chorus written by James Rhoades, but this time sung by the Elder Knights of the Round Table, who prepare us for the first episode by describing Arthur's capture of the port from the usurping Mordred. The episode, written by Harry James Taylor, acknowledges Malory as source, and indeed follows the broad outlines of *Le Morte Darthur*, but some incidents are subtly reassembled to suit the pageant's controlling themes. The first of these is to stress local virtues, and this is achieved by morally elevating the character of Sir Gawayne, who may be deemed a local hero for his grave is traditionally sited in Dover Castle. After writing, as is customary,

his farewell letter to Sir Lancelot, he is—unusually—afforded a vision of the Holy Grail, and after death his body is escorted to burial by Lady Ettard. This is rather a surprise because, according to Malory, she had died long ago (IV, xxiii). Sir Gawayne is thereby endowed here with great spiritual values and, by having such a noble lady in attendance—no mention is made of his earlier dishonorable treatment of her—his demise is treated as a holy and quasi-Arthurian passing. Some further local relevance is given by the named inclusion of Sir Pettipase of Winchelsea. Though making only a very minor showing in Malory—yielding to Sir Tor (III, ix) and later unhorsing Sir Sadok (VII, xxviii)—he has prominence here because Winchelsea is a neighboring town, later linked to Dover by Edward I in a famous defensive alliance to protect the South Coast against French attacks.

That brings us to the second, and overriding, theme: royalty. All seven episodes are based on a monarch, from Arthur to Charles I. By dominating the first episode and presiding over the final tableau, Arthur not only provides a structurally unifying role but serves as a symbolic precursor of Britain's present king, Edward VII, who will one day outmatch even Arthur's imperial might in war and peace. For the time being Arthur displays his own patriotic martial prowess by defeating Mordred at Dover. He shows his sterner side, too, in rebutting the claims for tribute demanded by the ambassadors from Rome but, as in Malory, he treats these representatives humanely and generously. More importantly, there is no indication that he will launch a Continental war, for he leaves Dover immediately to oppose Mordred at Barham Down. Indeed he displays laudable international magnanimity by releasing Sir Ferrant of Spain, who had previously fought against him. Again this is a remarkable textual innovation, for Malory's Sir Ferant had been slain years previously by Sir Florence during Arthur's Continental expedition (V, xi). Finally, and forestalling our knowledge of the tragic outcome of the approaching confrontation with Mordred, Arthur makes the traditional promise of an eventual return:

For in my sleep I shall be listening, and, in need, I will come to help. Or if one greater than I sit on the throne, whose aim like mine is Peace and the glory of Britain, summon me, and I will do him homage. (9)

In practice we don't have to wait very long because Arthur and his knights reappear in the closing tableau. The earlier broad hint that an even mightier monarch than he will occupy the throne is now made clearer:

King Arthur himself should homage pay
To a mightier one of wider sway,
Whom North, South, East, and West obey,
Lover and Lord of Peace.
O winds, be whist, O waters dumb!
The King is coming, the King is come!

In other words, it is Edward VII, Emperor of India, the Peacemaker, the promoter of the Entente Cordiale with France in 1904, who now dons the Arthurian mantle. Arthur and his knights are there to lend historical sanction. Grouped at the back of the scene they preside over the final proceedings: an appropriate hymn ('All people that on earth do dwell'), the National Anthem, and the March Past.

If Dover may have seemed a slightly unlikely venue for such an Arthurian fanfare, that of the next two Arthurian pageants would rest more firmly on the traditional home base in South Wales. The first of these was the *National Pageant of Wales* (26 July–7 August 1909), directed by G.P. Hawtrey, which was held in the vast Sophia Recreation Grounds next to Cardiff Castle, the home of the Marquess of Bute, whose Marchioness acted a focal role (as Dame Wales) within the performance.⁶ It ran for a fortnight and boasted a cast of five thousand, almost double that of any previous pageant. Its grandiose scale presented, though, some problems, *The Times* reviewer noting the 'natural difficulties of the ground' and opining that field glasses would have been helpful for the spectators. Disappointingly too, the first day's attendance was less than expected (especially in the cheaper seats) despite the brilliant sunshine. Nonetheless, 'the mass and splendor' of the production drew praise: for 'not even the Arthur of Dover...could match the fine figure of this Henry V with his superb armor, his kingly bearing, and his resonant voice.'

Emphasis was on sight rather than text. Speeches were short. There was a succession of very brief and dramatic scenes (from earliest times to the Tudor Act of Union), punctuated by a brass band playing Welsh songs and classical favorites. The text was by Owen Rhoscomyl (Captain Owen Vaughan), who prefaced the printed program with his theory of three historical Arthurs. These comprised the 'great' Arthur of Malory, who was killed in 537 at Camlann (allegedly modern Camaloc in Flintshire); a second, commemorated in Walter Map's *High History of the Holy Grail*; and a third, the Arthur of *The Mabinogion*, who died in 635. It is, however, the first that the pageant chiefly honors. His name is proclaimed in the opening scene when the County of Flint advertises her links with the hero, while Episode 2 shows how he becomes King of Tegaingl. This occasion has a determinedly Dark Age ambience: in both physical location and moral ethos, life seems fiercely combative and brutally direct. At the funeral procession of King Cynvor, Prince Arthur (played by R. Graham) is present with his wife Gwenuver, who is attended by Lancelot (with a significantly bandaged arm), and Morwen Levain (= Morgan le Fay). The Archdruid Merlin (Ivano Jones) lays the blade of kingship on the cromlech, and invites Arthur to lift the blade and assert his regal claim. Initially Arthur is loath to do so, preferring to remain a free warrior, but when Black Yrien tries to reach for the blade himself, Arthur suddenly seizes it and stabs Yrien through the heart. Merlin

then gives the slayer the crown, which he takes but immediately tosses to Gwenuver for 'something to play with.' As Cynvor is carried off to burial, Arthur prepares to start fighting again. A later scene informs us that the Christianized second Arthur, King of Dyved, had won the battle of Mount Aconet. A further scene features a very different and intellectual level with Arthurian shadings: the high medieval literary culture of a Welsh court, where Robert Consul, the Prince of Glamorgan, is (quite anachronistically) met by three famous writers—Geoffrey of Monmouth, Walter Map, and Giraldus Cambrensis—all of whom present him with copies of their books. After this, however, the pageant makes no mention of any other manifestation of the triple Arthur.

Another great Welsh event was enacted at the *Pageant of Gwent*.⁷ This was organized by the Misses Gertrude and Edith Mather Jackson, who had staged a White Castle pageant two years previously.⁸ The master was W. Bridges Adams, and it was held 'under the most perfect conditions' for one day only, on 4 August 1913, in the fields adjoining Maindiff Court, Abergavenny, on the occasion of the Royal National Eisteddfod of Wales. Although the time span of this work was wider than that of the National Pageant of Wales (it went on to the reign of Charles I) its narrative had greater sophistication and coherence. There were fewer scenes, and these were better written, wittier, and more dramatic. The Arthurian component was thematically prominent and well integrated with the rest of the pageant, for it was embedded at the beginning and the end. Unlike the Cardiff pageant's hard edge barbarism, the atmosphere here is much softer, nobler, more Tennysonian. The verse prologue is given by a mounted Arthurian knight, Sir Tristram (Geoffrey Gwyther), who maintains that though Arthur himself may now have passed to Avalon, he (Tristram) and his fellows are still loyal to the Arthurian ethos of knighthood in their continuing struggle to subdue the Beast and Heathendom. The core Arthurian action takes place in Episode 4: 'The Camelot Episode from the City of Logres.' Created by Caroline A. Cannon, and stage-managed by Alice M. Buckton, it consisted of three masque-like scenes in which music largely replaces speech. The first, showing the processional return of Arthur (played by J. Bevan Bowen) and Guinevere from the coronation at Caerleon, ends with choral singing of lines from Tennyson's 'Blow trumpet...' set to music by Miss Troubridge. In the second scene, Taliesin sings while the Round Table is physically assembled from parts brought from the four points of the compass. Arthur himself bears the cross-key with which he locks the four sections into one. A widow then seeks, and is given, assistance by the King. Galahad is armed by Blanchefleur and sits briefly in the Siege Perilous before departing on the Grail quest, followed by other knights and leaving Arthur vulnerably alone. The third scene reveals the passing of Arthur, borne on high as for his coronation (with Caroline

Cannon figuring as one of the Mystic Queens). The hero's enduring story is, however, picked up and used contrapuntally in the following Episode 5 ('The Massacre of Seisyllt by William de Braose, 1161'), for the treacherous slaughter of the Welsh by the Normans is conducted offstage while on stage a minstrel sings an ironically apt, tragic ballad about Arthur's betrayal by Guinevere. This Arthurian resonance continues into Episode 11: 'King Charles I at Raglan, 1645.' Here, townsfolk loyal to the Royalist cause greet Charles on his arrival after the disastrous battle of Naseby and load him with gifts, but his response is somewhat languid. The ubiquitous minstrel then sings another ballad (composed by Charles Williams) about Arthur, 'who will never die,' waiting in Avalon upon his golden throne. He sings it to 'the tune of the dance, for no man remembers the old tune.' Whereupon Charles asks who Arthur was. To which the minstrel replies, 'He was a king, sire.' The clear implications are that Charles is culpably ignorant of Welsh history, that Arthur is a greater king, and that, like Arthur, Charles will be brought down by rebellion. Immediately after this episode, the Court of Arthur enters processionally. They occupy the centre of the stage, while the other Episodes file slowly in review before them in a Finale and Grand March Past, to the strains of 'Land of My Fathers' sung by the Ebbw Vale Choir.

In an accompanying pamphlet Caroline Cannon sets out a detailed explanation of her Arthurian Episode, covering her own residence 'for many years' in Gwent, a summary of the historical and literary background of the legend, and her moralistic interpretation.⁹ She notes, moreover, the proposal that a 'masque' of the Arthurian Legend should be given in London the following year. This proposal came to its promised fruition in *The Pageant Play of King Arthur* written and produced by Nugent Monck, an experienced pageant master and a theatre producer of some importance, who was a pioneer in steering Shakespearean productions away from the conventional proscenium stages.¹⁰ Composite in form, this pageant-play was performed on 8–9 July 1914 in the grounds of Abbey Lodge, Hanover-gate, Regent's Park, by permission of the Baroness Deichmann, who was very active in philanthropic and theosophical circles, proceeds from this show going to the Children's Country Holiday Fund. The audience included a generous sprinkling of aristocratic titles. Watching too were Robert Withington (the great American expert on ancient and modern pageantry) and *The Times* reporter. A second performance was restricted to an invited audience. From the newspaper report we learn that many socially distinguished people participated in the pageant itself. It was organized by Lady Herbert of Llanarth, who also played a minor role in the procession; Count Bassewitz (a German diplomat) was one of the knights; while Baroness Deichmann herself took the part of the aged Abbess. We can trace too some connections that linked this occasion to the *Pageant of Gwent*. In the latter, Lady Herbert had played a role in

Episode 8, and among the performers she had brought to London with her were probably the two young men (Arthur and Elydir Herbert) who had previously taken the roles of Percival and Geraint. In Gwent, Baroness Deichmann had been one of the Four Queens, and some of the music on both occasions was arranged by Amy Troubridge, a relative of the Baroness. Musically the event was indeed ambitious, for Michael Birkbeck conducted the Southwark Diocesan Orchestra, the choir was supplied by the London College for Choristers, and boys from Covent Garden sang the Grail Music from Wagner's *Parsifal*.

The first half of the printed program consists of an expanded version of Caroline Cannon's Gwent essay, providing a gloss (laden with religious symbolism and quotation from *Idylls of the King*) on the attributes of the main personae: Arthur represents, for example, the spiritual principle, Guinevere the material, whereas the three Mystic Queens symbolize the three (unspecified) principles running through spiritual and material life. On costume she is similarly didactic. Believing that an 'Eastern cast of thought' pervades these legends, she wishes to show the influence of Byzantine modes on Roman dress. Accordingly, Arthur (who would be played by Geoffrey Douglas) wears golden Roman scales over a British tunic, but for the Coronation Procession dons a Byzantine dalmatic. This information may have led *The Times* reporter to claim that the Arthurian legend was now 'presented for the first time in the dress of its own period.'

The second half of the program is devoted to Nugent Monck's script for the ten episodes. For the core structure he preserves Caroline Cannon's essential schema, and the action remains ritualistic, processional, heavily symbolic. To this outline Monck adds other scenes from the traditional story: Joseph of Arimathea's Bringing of the Grail, the Sword in the Stone, the Beguiling of Merlin, and Guinevere in the Convent, all of which are dramatized in sub-Tennysonian blank verse, but without detailed exploration of psychological motivation. Mordred's role is, for example, left wholly unexplained. At heart this is a deeply pious Christian fable, which culminates—extraordinarily—in Arthur being granted a vision of the Holy Grail at his Passing:

I see my old young self rise again,
To the eternal office of the Priest and King. (52)

The audience could then leave with the program's uplifting epigram by Cannon in their hands:

And having felt the glory,
And having heard the song,
And having seen the holy Light
Whose Vision makes you strong—
Go forth into the world of men,

Lest love and duty fail,
 And ever in your heart shall grow
 The Vision of the Grail. (1)

In the following month a very comparable dramatic event occurred in Glastonbury. This was written and produced by Alice Buckton, another person who had been involved in the Gwent Pageant: she had been stage manager there for the Arthurian Episode. In 1912 she had bought the Chalice Well at Glastonbury and, making the place her home for thirty years, she would be influential in restoring the town's religious and cultural vitality by establishing a hostel and developing an arts-and-crafts center, besides writing and staging masques, mysteries, and pageants. Among these was *The Coming of Bride*, a pageant-play first performed on 6 August 1914, and twice repeated at neighboring locations, before publication that Christmas.¹¹ This play tells the saint's story from her childhood stay with the Druids on Iona, to her Christian vision in Ireland and later pilgrimage to Avalon, where she meets Ambrosius Aurelianus. To him she makes a great Arthurian prophecy about the coming hero's twelve victories, his creation of an order of Round Table knights, and their quest for the Holy Grail. In the climactic scene the benevolent Arch-Druid raises a naked sword and summons the spirit of Arthur, but the priest's overtly male paganism is then given female, Christian, pacifist counterbalance by a Voice of the Hour (played by Alice Buckton herself), who advises him to raise the sword 'cross-hilted,' because the ancient deities of Thor and Woden are now too dangerously dominant. As the Arch-Druid complies he recites an excerpt from the noble Eisteddfod hymn, before the Voice of the Hour hands him the sword to place on the altar, where it will remain until 'the heavenly Grail / Rain down the Glory of the Most Great Peace!' (53). They leave together, but the curtains then open to reveal a vision of the Grail glowing in the hands of the Guardian, white-robed with the jeweled cloak of Bride upon her shoulders.

BETWEEN THE WARS

In spite of Buckton's prayers, the gods of Valhalla would rule for the next four years. Historical pageants were over until peace broke out again. When it eventually did so, a flush of Victory pageants heralded twenty more years of copious pageant making.

The first of these post-war events to have significant Arthurian content was *The Town of the Ford: A Pageant Play of Guildford*, which was staged at the Guildford Theatre Royal from 18–30 May 1925.¹² It was written and produced by W. Graham Robertson, who had enjoyed literary and artistic renown in late-Victorian London, and was now living nearby. Though performed indoors this work may be considered within the genre of historical pageant, as it had a large amateur cast (of over four hundred) and traced the town's

history in eight scenes from the arrival of Phoenician traders to the news of the Battle of Waterloo. The orientation is, though, decidedly literary. A dramatization of part of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* is, for example, included on the slender pretext that an old Pilgrims' Way passes near the town; and the fact that Bunyan once lived in the neighborhood gives rise to a Vanity



Design by W. Graham Robertson (1925).
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Fair vision. Robertson himself took the roles of both Chaucer and Bunyan, and illustrated the program cover with what was deemed the most popular incident of all: Episode 3, 'The story of Elaine, the Fair Maid of Astolat.' For his identification of Astolat with Guildford, Robertson could cite *Le Morte Darthur* (XVIII, ix) as authority, and he faithfully dramatizes the Malorian narrative, interspersing it at key moments with songs set to music by the distinguished composer Thomas F. Dunhill. Thus a male chorus of tenors and basses introduces news of the forthcoming lists at Camelot, and Elaine's sad fate is presaged by a religious lullaby sung by her bower maidens (soprano solos) and the Voice of the River (contraltos). Robertson's

text seems to have been remarkably well integrated with Dunhill's orchestral score, performed by the Guildford Symphony Orchestra. Among the actors, the performances of Sylvia Walsh (Elaine) and the Reverend Dudley Hiam (Sir Tirre) won especial praise.

The reputations of Robertson and Dunhill ensured considerable newspaper coverage, national as well as local. As early as a month ahead of performance *The Times* was giving an amply informed description of the pleasures in store, presumably in the hope of attracting visitors from far beyond the town. Evidently it needed these because locals did not patronise the opening night very well. Nonetheless, whatever disappointment that may have caused the organizers, the event produced two lasting memorials: Robertson illustrated a handsome souvenir volume, while Dunhill worked up his incidental music into *The Guildford Suite*, which was frequently broadcast on BBC Radio in the years before the Second World War.

As if anticipating the charge that his pageant was insufficiently historical, Robertson's Epilogue whimsically maintains that the spirit of fantasy pervades the town of Guildford:

The Town of the Ford is still Astolat, the Dream-Town of old-world beauty and romance. There are still dreams to sell in her High Street, and her stones

still ring to the tramp of mailed feet; King Arthur looks down from the Castle into the bower-garden of Elaine the White, and litanies of long-dead Pilgrims echo from the Ancient Way. When Guildford shall forget her Dreams she will cease to be, and those who truly know and love her go softly, lest she wake.

This spirited defence of the imagination would, however, be contested when a new pageant was mounted in 1957. On this latter occasion, which was attended by the Queen, the pageant master was the redoubtable Christopher Ede. No Elaine of Astolat was included. That aspect of Robertson's Dream-Town had been quietly buried.

But—to return to the 1920s—a proclaimed spirit of 'legitimate imagination' would maintain its Arthurian dimension in the *Carlisle Pageant* of 6–11 August 1928, held 'in a sylvan setting' at the foot of the Castle.¹³ In the Mayor's opinion, 'the aim of the pageant was to lift Carlisle out of the maze of obscurity into a place in the sun.' As it was accompanied by an Industrial Exhibition that week, there was a clear intention that the twin events would encourage economic revival in the area. The great pageant master Frank Lascelles was in charge, music was composed by Dr Wadely, the Cathedral organist, while the text, in verse and prose, was largely written by J.S. Eagles, his Episode 2 bearing the title 'King Arthur and the Picts, AD 500.' This episode's action was brief and clear cut. Immediately the Romans have withdrawn from the region, savage Picts (played by soldiers from the Border Regiment) cross Hadrian's Wall and collect prisoners. One of their female captives not unnaturally calls out for rescue. Thereupon King Arthur (Dr J.R.K. Thomson/R.B. Pakenham) and his Knights (arrayed 'in shining armor'!) promptly charge in, rout the Picts, and release the prisoners. The latter then endorse Arthur as their King for the defence of Britain. Merlin (the Reverend W. Mancroft) duly prophesies that Arthur will succeed in the short term, but that Britain will finally fall to the Anglo-Saxons. Nevertheless, Arthur's spirit 'will sleep always in this land' and will wake 'in the hour of utmost peril.' The Knights then process out of the arena to the chant of 'Till Arthur wakes in Lyonesse.'

Although the pageant was visually spectacular and well shaped by the governing theme of Passing Time, its stilted prose too often fatally weakened the dramatic scenes, e.g.:

GIRL PRISONER Fain would I know thy name, noble warrior, that I
might thank thee.

ARTHUR Damsel, men call me Arthur, the son of Uther
Pendragon; and this Company are my knights of the Round Table.

GIRL PRISONER Art thou indeed that Arthur, famed in Britain, whom
we call King? (28)

Despite this lack of vivacity, the text was preserved intact when a new pageant was held under the direction of Lionel Lightfoot to commemorate the Festival of Britain in 1951. 'Daring feats of horsemanship' by King Arthur's Knights were noted in *The Times* report. A quarter of a century later yet another Carlisle Pageant was planned, this time to mark the Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977. Advice as to a suitable text was sought from Sir Michael Balcon and George Macdonald Fraser (who was Carlisle-born). Both advised that the original script should be retained as it was now itself 'an historic piece' and would match the pageant genre perfectly. Preparations therefore went ahead to do the 'King Arthur and the Picts' episode once again. But the new Pageant Master was David Clarke, who had worked as assistant to Christopher Ede on the 1957 Guildford Pageant, and who had very firm ideas about how to update proceedings and to excise dead wood from texts. Consequently, though he retained most of the original pageant script, he eliminated Wadely's music, the verse, the high seriousness, and the Arthurian episode.

From 26 to 28 June 1928, the same year as the first Carlisle pageant, a more ambitiously Arthurian event was performed in another traditional Arthurian heartland, at a Somerset town lying only about twenty miles from Glastonbury.¹⁴ Written and produced by a local landowner, Major M.F. Cely Trevilian, *Defendamus: A Pageant of Taunton* was performed in the Crescent Field and Shirehall Grounds, involved a cast of sixteen hundred, and was proclaimed 'a triumphant success.' Though its immediate intent was to celebrate anniversaries of the town's three charters, it is noteworthy for presenting this within a structure that revolves entirely around Arthur. The lengthy Prologue is set on Midsummer Eve, the night on which Arthur is traditionally believed to be heard riding from Queen's Camel to Glastonbury. On that evening the Britons appropriately yearn for the return of their vanished hero, but the prayers of the Druids succeed only in raising the Spirit of their Countryside, Nimue, the Lady of the Lake. After she recasts their pagan prayers in a Christian mode, Arthur appears, lying in a barge steered by Pelleas, and guarded by the Queen of the Waste Lands, the Queen of Northgallis and Queen Morgan le Fay. Looking at 'this stricken land' Arthur acknowledges his failure to make people 'strong / And self-reliant' but, aware that his own return as leader of such a disorganized mob would be futile, he urges the Britons to find leaders instead among themselves:

Arms ye must make, and learn to use the same.
 Your own hearts discipline; make even law
 For rich and poor, for greatest and for least.
 Fair custom ye shall keep in all your bounds.
 Strive to deserve the freedom that ye crave. (25)

These arms, however, should be employed for defence against invaders, not for attack: 'to defend the right / Against the wrong, weak 'gainst the strong.' To assist them, Arthur will send Pelleas and the Three Queens from Avillion as guides, under the overall supervision of Nimue. The latter is urged to retrieve Excalibur from 'the deeps,' and only when the country has finally absorbed the guides' lessons should she should summon the absent Arthur back to Britain.

The central section of the pageant is then structured around the lessons taught by the guides in historical sequence: defense of country, defense of custom, defense of law, and defense of freedom. Anglo-Saxon kings protect the first; medieval churchmen and traders establish local and commercial practice; the opposing factions in the Civil War ultimately seek legal compromise; and the tyrannical James II is opposed by the rebellious Duke of Monmouth. The town's motto of 'Defendamus' [Let us defend] has thus revealed its practical relevance.

The Epilogue brings all these strands together. Confident that Britain has now learned the necessary fourfold lesson, Nimue carries in Excalibur, and Arthur (Major Lawson on a white horse) appears 'in glory' with his knights. Questioning the present Mayor of Taunton he learns that three kings have well conserved the people's liberties with charters, while from other kings he hears of the thousands of folk who have died selflessly defending the land. Aware that his own type of Camelot is irrecoverable, however, he promises that in place of his abiding presence Nimue will remain on earth as a 'comfort in sorrow, spur to noble deeds' (91). He is handed Excalibur, but immediately relinquishes it to her. She in turn gives the sword to the Bishop of Winchester (formerly lord of the manor of Taunton). He places it point downwards in a cleft rock, a lasting symbol of the Christian faith.

Trevilian's message is genuinely inclusive, aiming for harmony among all: Christian and Druid; Catholic and Protestant; Briton, Saxon, Dane, and Norman; Roundhead and Cavalier. By means of these broad sympathies he tries to show continuity of religious and familial values, and how a 'lost' Arthurian mythology can be made relevant to the modern age. Though he addresses major themes, his dramatic focus is on the lives of ordinary men and women, and, despite his writing never attaining any great heights, it is serviceable and fit for purpose. Trevilian's original and well-organized text was complemented by music composed by Laurance E. Tanner, which included orchestral sections ('Entrance of Nimue' and 'Entrance of King Arthur') and choruses ('Arthur of the Flashing Brand' and 'Defendamus'). It seems to have enjoyed some separate success later, for 'The Entrance of King Arthur' was given a concert performance by the Former Bristol Hippodrome Orchestra on BBC Radio in 1933.

Of all the Parkerian guidelines, the one most frequently waived was the issue of profitability. The sharp noses of altruistic fundraisers soon sensed that pageants were a very effective means of obtaining money for their favored causes. One of the most focused of all pageants in this respect was the *Romance of King Arthur*.¹⁵ The background to this event was the decision of the Church Commissioners in 1928 to sell off the former glebe land lying between Tintagel Church and the sea. As their proposal prompted fears that the land would be built on, it sparked a wave of protest, leading to the formation of the Tintagel Cliff Preservation Fund Committee. This group aimed to raise the £2000 necessary to purchase the land, which could then be transferred to the National Trust, who would preserve it as a public open space. Among those determined to help the Committee raise the money required was Deaconess Beatrice Morrell, a frequent author of minor church pageants, who now lived in south London but was Cornish born and bred.¹⁶ She decided to write and produce an appropriate pageant. Consequently her *Romance of King Arthur* was performed at St Mary's Parish Church, Lewisham, on 4 October 1928 and repeated at the Guildhall School of Music on 18 October. According to press reports it used a single set aptly representing rugged cliffs, and evoked the Cornish seacoast through the intermittent sounds of winds and waves. The drama itself comprised a prologue and eight scenes, written in Tennysonian blank verse. These presented Arthur's claiming of Excalibur, his marriage to Guinevere, and the continual plotting of Mordred and Morgan le Fay. An ecclesiastical tone was paramount. Not only was Galahad prominent, but St David of Wales was introduced, as was St Madwyn, the patron of Tintagel Church; and after Arthur's passing the pageant concluded with the entry of St Joseph of Arimathea bearing the Holy Grail. In keeping with the 'semi-sacred character of the production there was no dancing': the flowing rhythm of the music and the haunting quality of the verse were thought to provide sufficient support. After the success of the London performances it was taken down to Cornwall and acted on the grounds of the Tintagel Vicarage from 12 to 19 August in the subsequent year. On this occasion over a hundred performers took part, twenty of whom had featured in the London productions. Following the final scene, in which the saints of Cornwall gather to greet St Joseph, the company formed a procession through the village. In all, the Deaconess's production raised nearly £270. Other sources contributed to the cause: £200 was given by J. Pierpont Morgan, while smaller donors included the Knights of the Round Table Club, 'Four Friends at Dartmouth College, USA,' the London Cornish Association, the Norwood Poetry Circle, the North Lewisham Rangers Company, and 'A Cornishman's Granddaughter.' Frequent press mention had been made of the Prince of Wales's public support for the venture. When details of the donors were issued it was clear that the princely sum he gave

was £5. Happily to relate, the necessary total was raised, the fifty-six acres were bought, and the National Trust acquired the land for public enjoyment in perpetuity.

Prompted, one assumes, by the success of Beatrice Morrell's entrepreneurship, a comparable event was held at St Agnes, a few miles south of Tintagel, on 23 August 1929.¹⁷ Written and produced by Carl and Winifred Bailey, the *Cornish Pageant* ranged widely in its eight episodes, involving not just the Arthurian legends, but Druid sacrifices, the Mermaids of Zennor, Phoenician traders, wreckers, John Wesley, and the Cornish Saints. Its fiscal aim was, however, very precise: to aid the Society for the Preservation of Rural England. During an interval, the eminent Cornubian, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, acted as spokesman, explaining that the specific purpose was to help in rescuing some coastlines which 'should be sacred, not only to Cornishmen but to Englishmen who had any sense of history.'

A similar frankness about its aims accompanied the *Students' War Memorial Pageant*, which was combined with a Fête and held in Cardiff on 24–25 June 1931.¹⁸ The 'war memorial' of the title may, perhaps, mislead: the envisaged memorial was not a cenotaph—Cardiff already had a fine one by J. Ninian Comper—but a larger recreational facility. In 1918 staff and students of the University College of Wales and Monmouthshire had decided to commemorate the hundred and ten students killed in the Great War by establishing a students' social union building. One was accordingly obtained, but the rising number of students soon made a larger venue desirable. Hence the fête and pageant to raise funds. This was a major event. The Marquess and Marchioness of Bute gave permission for it to be held on the Castle grounds, the Marchioness herself again acting in one episode 'with a stately old-world grace,' Hubert Redford was engaged as Pageant Master, while music was supplied by the National Orchestra of Wales (under Warwick Braithwaite) and a colliery brass band. In addition, a special scene was written solely for broadcasting on the BBC's Cardiff radio station. The pageant itself would present the history of Cardiff in five episodes, from the acclamation of Constantine the Great as Emperor to the Grant of the Charter of Privileges in 1340. One scene involved novel Arthurian interest. This came in Episode 3: 'The Marriage of Mabel Fitzhamon to Robert, Earl of Gloucester.' Mabel was the sole heir to Robert Fitzhamon, the Norman conqueror of Glamorgan, and was made a ward of the English King Henry I, who arranged her marriage to his son Robert. This latter, who became known as Robert the Consul, was a wise and generous patron of literature, and had already been celebrated as such in the earlier National Pageant of Wales by Owen Rhoscomyl (see above). Because of his putative friendship with Geoffrey of Monmouth and Walter Map, a similar laudatory aura surrounds Robert here. Immediately following the wedding a Masque of

Arthur's Blessing is performed, in which a grievously wounded King Arthur is brought by the Queens to the green isle of Avalon, where he is healed. Quiet years go by until the restless winds bring news of the marriage of Mabel Fitzhamon to Robert. King Arthur then sends his Spirits of Joy to shower marriage gifts upon the bridal pair. The legendary Celtic past is thus shown to be harmoniously united with the Norman/Plantagenet hegemony. This masque was created by Catherine Carr, a teacher at the Cardiff Girls High School, and it was sung and danced by pupils from that institution. Their remarkably happy performance is singled out for press commendation, since the joyful youth of the performers would have made a fitting complement to the entire event's emphasis on the younger generation. Happily, too, the fund-raising was successful, and a suitable extension to the Union was completed by 1933.¹⁹

During the next eight years there was no slackening in the output of pageants, but only two events seem to have included Arthurian features. Both of these appear at the end of the pre-war period, and both are unusually inventive in their treatments of the Arthurian matter. The venue of the first may seem surprising. From 27 June to 2 July 1938 Manchester marked the centenary of its Charter of Incorporation by staging in Platt's Fields a *Manchester Historical Pageant*, involving ten thousand performers, three thousand of them schoolchildren.²⁰ For this the Pageant Master was Nugent Monck, and the script was by W.T. McIntire, who had previously contributed some scenes to the Carlisle Pageant of 1928. As may be expected his narrative's chief concern is with the commercial and industrial development of the city, but Manchester's traditional association with an Arthurian tale is not forgotten, and he takes up the story of Lancelot and Tarquin, which for the last three hundred years had been frequently cropping up within a Mancunian context because the giant Tarquin was said to have established his stronghold in Manchester. And since Lancelot also has strong Lancashire connections in comparable accounts, he would not have had to travel far to meet Tarquin. McIntire adopts the story by—wholly anachronistically—making it the key point of a Pre-Roman Prologue. In this scene, the Goddess Truth appears to modern Manchester children, who are so weary of the city's tumultuous noise that they long for the rest and quiet of the countryside. Truth promises to show them how their city arose. In an incident heavy with allegory, and presented in fustian verse, they are first shown the giant:

A giant, Tarquin, I, of matchless might,
Son of old Erebus and darkest night,
Who o'er this hold undisputed sway,
And vanquish all who dare my onslaught stay. (22)

All this is overheard by a mounted Lancelot, 'clad in steel from head to foot' (the role being played by F.E. Bates, a member of the Manchester Police

Force), who dislikes what he hears and forthwith advances to silence the boaster—which he summarily does and, when the soft-hearted Woodland Elves mourn the fall of Tarquin as local champion, Lancelot consoles them by explaining that it is Nature's law that the Old must submit to the New, and that each succeeding age hands down its own poetic heritage. Modern progress, which has thus triumphed over 'the powers of darkness and destruction,' will create its own distinctive forms of poetry and romance. He therefore summons up the fairies of the new mythology—the Cotton Plant, Steam, and Electricity—to 'join in joyous dance with the wood-nymphs' (21). In the ten conventional historical scenes that follow there is only a single involvement of Arthur, in that the choristers at the seventeenth-century founding of Chetham's School sing 'King Arthur had Three Sons,' a traditional ballad for which a Lancashire provenance is often claimed. But, doubtless, Lancelot and Tarquin would have returned in the Final Tableau to reinforce the city's association with fabled antiquity.

The second, and slighter, Arthurian incident occurs in the *Kenilworth Castle Pageant*, which was held in the castle grounds from 8 to 15 July 1939 to mark Lord Kenilworth's generous gift of the building to the nation.²¹ This pageant was produced by Anthony Parker (a grandson of Louis), had music composed by Dr Blackall, was mainly written by L. Edith Thomas (a teacher at Leamington High School) and involved over two thousand participants. Although her lively script includes a scene showing Queen Elizabeth I's visit to the Earl of Leicester's castle, when George Gascoigne's famed *Princely Pleasures* masque was performed, Thomas chooses not to enact the Arthurian sections of this, wherein Merlin and the Lady of the Lake had featured. Instead, her 'Arthurian' scene is located in 1279, when a pseudo-Arthurian tournament was held at Kenilworth. After their feats of arms, the combatants sit down at a mimic Round Table, and drink toasts 'to perpetuate the glorious memory' of King Arthur's Knights of the Round Table. Eleven separate toasts are drunk: to Arthur and ten of his knights. Unfortunately, as with Leicester's festivities of 1575, the pageant experienced problems with the weather. On the opening night the Round Table celebration was, according to *The Times* reporter, scarcely diminished by the rain but, alas, such a downpour soon ensued that the noise on the iron roofs of the stands muffled even the loudspeaker announcements. Nevertheless, though that performance had to be abandoned, others probably took place without mishap, and the Round Table episode was given a studio broadcast in the BBC Midland Service on 11 July. But a far greater storm was on the horizon and for the next six years the insubstantial pageants of peace would have to make way for a sterner drama.

AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The eventual return of peace brought a rush of Peace and Victory pageants once again. Among these was a London pageant procession that took for its theme *The Quest for Peace and Goodwill*, and followed a route from Hyde Park along Piccadilly, Regent Street and Oxford Street on 2 August 1948.²² Organized by The People's Trust Association it was intended to emphasize 'the need for new moral leadership to prevent world famine and to lead mankind to a new era of peace and security.' King Arthur and his Knights rode in the procession and symbolic tableaux were borne on lorries. It was meant to conclude with a play in Hyde Park, which would have portrayed 'the assembled nations seeking a solution to the world's problems, and the revealing of the world law of peace and goodwill by King Arthur from the wisdom of the Holy Grail.' This play did not take place because it rained that afternoon. No answer to the world's problems was therefore disclosed.

The Festival of Britain of 1951 provided the impetus for another outbreak of celebratory pageants. Among them there finally occurred the long overdue Glastonbury version. Occasion for this arose during the Glastonbury Festival in late June, the main focus of which was the Anglican and Roman Catholic Pilgrimages to the Abbey, but on two evenings a pageant, *Glastonbury—Its Legends and Traditions*, was performed in the Abbey Grounds. Over a thousand people had been involved in the production, and the first night audience numbered about fourteen hundred.²³ No script can now be traced, but a local newspaper report provides an intelligently enthusiastic description. The producer and main author of the pageant was Kenneth Janes, who gave it an original shape and interpretation by positioning two actors (representing History and Legend) to the left and right of the stage. These provided continuity and presumably offered contrasting ideological perspectives on the Abbey's history. The ten episodes presented a wide time-scale ranging from a Druid sacrifice to the establishment of an eighteenth-century spa, and included two Arthurian scenes: 'The Burial of Queen Guinevere' (attended by Arthur [Maurice Coffey], Bedivere, and Lancelot) and 'The Burial of King Arthur' (attended by The Three Queens). Here the reviewer especially praised the music, the 'riot of colour,' and the beautiful speaking of Morgan Le Fay (Muriel Straw). Set against the floodlit Abbey ruins, and with a distant view of the floodlit tower on the Tor, the production would have been highly impressive.

For the Coronation in 1953 there was an even greater flurry of events. Of these the major Arthurian interest is found in the *Cambridge Pageant for Coronation Year*, which was held in the grounds of St John's College from 1 to 4 August.²⁴ This was a joint effort between Town and Gown, with proceeds going to the Cambridge Residential Home for Old People. It was largely devised by a fellow of King's College, the historian John

Saltmarsh, and produced by Camille Prior, who was well known for her opera productions at the city's Arts Theatre. Music was composed by Paul Burbridge, Nigel Glendinning, and Alan Percival. In contrast with most other historical pageants, its reference is national rather than regional: Cambridge itself is not the focus of interest. The writing, too, is remarkably composite in that each of the six historical scenes was written by a different undergraduate—among them some names later to become very famous. A typed script in the University Library identifies the contributors and provides the text, except for the role of Merlin, a key figure, since it is he who establishes structural unity by speaking the Prologue and all later linking passages. He was played by another fellow of King's, Donald Beves, and it is quite possible that Beves wrote his own part. As in the Taunton pageant, the Arthurian theme is dominant. It is announced in the first episode, 'The Passing of Arthur' by Thom Gunn, where the Opening Chorus likens the interdependency between English [sic] monarchs and their subjects to the symbiotic relationship between giant trees and smaller sheltered organisms. After a ruinous civil war, the dying King Arthur, we are told, has to think 'only of his people and his land.' What this entails is apparently to follow the Malorian rite of forcing Bedivere to cast Excalibur into the water:

The arm of right shall take the sword of might.
Then may the true King rest, the ghosts all laid.
Arthur is only free of burden when
 His utmost debts are paid.
His memory for all succeeding men
Polished by good deeds, pure and polished bright. (2)

The Three Queens appear, and in a song recap the two essential acts in Arthur's story. He had answered the initial 'call' by drawing the Sword from the Stone, and assuming responsibility for a divided kingdom. Now he must answer the peaceful call to leave the stricken land for the vale of Avilion. There he will await another call to aid Britain once again, though not to reign. Arthur (played by David Calcutt) then hands his crown to the First Queen, asking her to set it on the head of her who will be queen when he returns. As a Hidden Chorus sings, 'The bearer dies, the office still remains. / One for all.'

The grand scheme is brought to fruition in the sixth episode, 'The Young Queen of England' by John Mander. Here the three wise statesmen who approach the seventeen-year-old Victoria with the news of her summons to the throne are promptly supported by the arrival of Merlin and The Three Immortal Queens carrying Excalibur and Arthur's crown. The First Queen forthwith places this crown on Victoria's head. Arthur and his Knights ride in. Excalibur is returned to Arthur, who passes it to the newly crowned English Queen. Merlin then announces that Arthur and 'all England's manhood

and valour' will ride close behind to guard her. The royal cavalcade departs, accompanied by a solo voice and chorus hymning the praises of the Queen and King Arthur. The inference is surely that the young Queen Elizabeth II, in whose honour this pageant was staged, will herself prove another Victoria, and inherit too the glorious Arthurian aura.

Gunn's involvement in this pageant is not listed in his bibliography nor does he mention it among his Cambridge memories.²⁵ Yet as he did recall how affected he had been at Cambridge by reading the fourteenth-century *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and as he would go on to write a fine Merlin poem himself, his role in this Arthurian pageant may seem a comprehensible literary rite of passage on his part.²⁶ The same applies to John Arden, who wrote Episode 4, and would later co-author a major Arthurian drama.²⁷ But in the light of their later careers, it may now appear extraordinary that Gunn and Arden should have participated so closely in a pageant endowed with such a high royal and patriotic tone, a tone that would not survive the deep cultural changes that affected Britain in the late 1950s. That decade indeed marks the end of the great pageant genre created by Parker a half-century earlier. Later pageants were mounted but only sporadically. An English summer could no longer be deemed a pageant season.

A rare exception came in the late 1960s, when archaeological excavations at South Cadbury were reawakening interest in the possible verification of an historical Arthur. This interest led to a related drama being presented as part of the Bath Festival Fringe. It was named the *King Arthur Pageant* and performed in the Abbey Churchyard from 7 to 18 June 1967.²⁸ Written by Barbara Robertson, who was for many years a major force in local arts activities, produced by Veronica Crallan with *son et lumière* effects, and lasting for just under an hour, it was an extremely original treatment in concept and manner. Apparently actors mimed to recorded and amplified voices, and the 'crashing music' had 'a spine-chilling, attention-riveting quality.' Sadly, however, only a synopsis and a review of this remarkable production can now be traced. Though titled a 'pageant' and involving a large amateur cast, the inventive production seems to have had more in common with stage conventions of medieval stage pageants than with the Parkerian genre. Two stages were used. On the lower one appeared only those persons who could be historically vouched for. These consist of 'historians' (Gildas, Nennius, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Chrétien de Troyes, and Geoffrey Ashe); soldiers (Tristan, Kay, Bedevere, and Gawain); and sundry others (St. Illtyd, Ambrosius, etc.). On the upper appear the mythical characters who have been assimilated into the Arthurian legend: Merlin, Lancelot, Guinevere, Elaine, etc. During the play the four soldiers can ascend to the upper tier as Knights, but Lancelot *et al* are confined to their upper 'unreal' level. By contrast, Arthur (played by Laurie Probert) operates on both levels. As a

Romano-British commander trying to stem the Anglo-Saxon invaders he acts on the lower stage, whereas he climbs the stairs to the upper world when he becomes the legendary King of the Round Table. The *Bath and Wilts Evening Chronicle* admired the technical quality of the production, and thought the ‘appealing simplicity’ of the script made a ‘direct emotional appeal’ to the audience to believe in Arthur as a national hero. And thus with Robertson’s intriguing reinterpretation of the myth Bath possibly made some amends for omitting the hero from its 1909 event.

More recently there has been a valiant attempt by Mike McFarnell over the last twenty years to resurrect the Dover Pageant on a regular basis.²⁹ Since 1983 eleven pageants have been held, and a permanent website launched. In the modern Dover versions the Parkerian model has, however, been radically reinvented, for the historical episodes are now overwhelmed by horseless ‘chariot’ races, drum majorette competitions, and performances by pop singers: overall narrative sequence has thus been replaced by a very mixed bag of separate turns. The program is modified from year to year, but only the 1999 and 2002 events have retained any Arthurian feature, the website photograph for the latter year portraying Arthur pulling the Sword from a very unconvincing Stone. There is, nonetheless, some determination in Dover to maintain impetus by mounting a centenary pageant in 2008, supplemented by a promotional DVD giving full details of the 1908 event.³⁰ Sales of this DVD, it is hoped, will provide funding for a film about Parker’s achievement. Perhaps, then, contemporary announcements of the death of historical pageantry may, like that of Mark Twain’s supposed demise, turn out to have been greatly exaggerated.

CONCLUSION

In comparison with the vast number of pageants produced, not many were Arthurian. The main cause of the Arthurian shortfall is probably the awkward fact that a conviction of Arthur’s historical existence is not a truth universally acknowledged. An historical pageant was intended to be historical, and Arthur was not a very safe choice. Even if his existence were conceded, the question remained of where to site him. Where, for example, was the battle of Badon fought? Although putative reminders of Arthur may be found scattered over many landscapes, he has not so many connections with identifiable towns. Predictably most of the Arthurian pageants stemmed from the traditional Arthurian heartlands of South Wales (3), South-West (6) and North-West England (2), and though, as may be expected, Glastonbury, Taunton, Tintagel, and Carlisle all celebrated him, other places that one might suppose likely to have done so—Bath (1909), Chester, and Winchester—did not. The reason is probably that they already had a sufficient wealth of authentically recorded history. The attraction of Camelot paled beside that of more tangible later achievements.

Of all the Arthurian material presented, only the 1967 Bath pageant (and possibly that at Glastonbury) may be considered truly historical in that it attempts to survey and sift the historical evidence. Two others—Wales and Carlisle—may be deemed quasi-historical at best. Both rely on imagined incidents and employ dialogue that is wholly invented, yet both try to place Arthur within a credible historical context, by making him either a minor Welsh chieftain involved in tribal rivalries or a fierce defender of north-western Britain against the invading Picts. Only the Carlisle pageant makes any reference—and that a brief one—to what may be thought an historical Arthur's main achievement—his defensive war against the Saxons—but pageant writers seem generally to have taken good care to avoid any embarrassing discontinuity in their tales of national development, and have airbrushed out a potentially subversive racial conflict. In other cases where pageants have some definite historical orientation—Dover, Taunton, and Cambridge—their sources are literary rather than historical, and are based on Malory's romance or rather a filtering of it through the dominant nineteenth-century versions of Tennyson and the Pre-Raphaelites. The theme of royal defender is endemic but is suffused with the mythic coloring of a divine king's continuing protection and messianic return. Even more tendentiously, the question of historicity is often largely evaded, for in the work of Cannon, Monck, Buckton, and Morrell the interest in Arthur is essentially ahistorical, mythico-religious, with an ultimate emphasis on redemption and a vision of the Holy Grail. Of the two works that focus on other Arthurian personae, the Guildford pageant is patently a Malorian offshoot, while the Manchester story of Lancelot self-confessedly belongs to a prehistoric realm of faerie. The inclusion of Arthurian legend may thus indeed sometimes seem to press hard against the limits of historical pageantry. Yet the heightened imagination and the lofty nobility conveyed through the Arthurian myth were entirely consonant with the implicit ethos of the Parkerian form. The later attempts to make pageants mainly a matter of 'entertainment' (as with Ede) or of social realism would steer pageantry into areas more successfully performed by other media, and deprive the genre of its essential spirit.³¹ Those of the first half of the twentieth century have, by contrast with what followed, an inspirational drive, which may stem from religion, patriotism, or ethics, that infuses the passing show with, in Frank Lascelles's phrase, the 'breath of the eternal.' When that could no longer be sustained the historical pageant withered.

Although Arthur played a relatively minor role within the whole scheme of British pageantry, he was present on sufficient occasions to be reckoned a force. In these works not only did he sometimes perform significant isolated deeds and act (with some help from mystic queens) as a major tutelary guardian for succeeding ages, but his legend could itself form, in the work

of Monck and Morrell, the total subject of a pageant. If such a limited focus on one figure may seem to create a time span too restrictive for the genre, it might be argued that the traditional Arthurian story is so extensive (lasting from the hero's conception to his passing), and involves such a diverse cast, that it inevitably breaks the bounds of the conventional theatre. Its diffuse narrative threads, derived from romance, are, in fact, better accommodated within pageant form than in a modern stage play or conventional novel. In sum, the legend has once again shown its remarkably protean powers by surviving so strongly within civic culture in such a wide variety of locations, and so successfully adapting itself to fit a new twentieth-century form.

NORWICH

Roger Simpson has retired from the University of East Anglia. He is now researching BBC Radio's treatment of the Arthurian legends from 1922 to the present.

NOTES

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- 1 See Robert Withington, *English Pageantry: An Historical Outline*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1918).
- 2 Among these were E.M. Forster, who wrote two with strong environmental concerns for productions near his Surrey home (1934, 1938), and T.S. Eliot, who composed dialogue and verse choruses for *The Rock* (1934), a pageant to raise funds for new churches in the London suburbs.
- 3 But Alice Buckton created a *Film Pageant of Glastonbury* in 1922. Though none of the five scenes was explicitly Arthurian, it is possible that 'The Arrival of Joseph of Arimathea' alluded to the Grail. See 'Glastonbury's Pageant Scenes,' *The Times* (13 November 1922): 10; and Tracy Cutting, *Beneath the Silent Tor* (Wells: Appleseed Press, 2004), pp. 48–60.
- 4 *The Winchester National Pageant* (1908) included 'The Reception of the Emperor Charles V by King Henry VIII,' a scene written by Arthur Quiller-Couch, which was set in the Great Hall of the Castle. But, although the handbook provided an illustration of King Arthur's Round Table, which hangs on the wall there, the pageant's dialogue made no reference to it or to King Arthur.
- 5 *Dover Pageant. Book of the Words* (1908); Dover Pageant Society website.
- 6 *The National Pageant of Wales, Cardiff: Book of the Words* (1909); *The Times* (26, 27 July 1909); *Illustrated London News* (31 July 1909).
- 7 *Book of the Pageant of Gwent* (1913); *Pageant of Gwent: List of Organisers and Performers in each Episode* (1925); *The Arthurian Episode in The Pageant of Gwent* (1925); *South Wales Argus* (4 August 1913).

- 8 Gertrude (1858–1920) and Edith (ca. 1862–1944) were younger sisters of Sir Henry Mather Jackson, chairman of Monmouth County Council and owner of the ruined White Castle. Gertrude was an early student at Girton College, Cambridge (1876–80), and later served as member of the College Council. College prizes for Mathematics were founded in her memory by her family.
- 9 She was born at Cheltenham in ca. 1861. The 1871 census shows her living in Brighton with her mother, but by the 1881 census her father had retired from his service in India (he was a surgeon-general in the Bengal Army), and the family had settled at Wonastow Court in Monmouthshire. It is likely that Caroline would have known Gertrude and Edith Mather Jackson, who were then resident about eight miles away at Llantilio Court. The Cannons had probably left Wonastow by 1886, when the property was advertized for letting, and by 1891 they were certainly living in London's Belgravia. In 1901 Caroline was living with her widowed mother at another Belgravia address. She was received into the Roman Catholic Church in 1919.
- 10 *The Pageant Play of King Arthur* (1914); *The Times* (6, 9 July 1914).
- 11 *The Coming of Bride: A Pageant Play* (1914).
- 12 *The Town of the Ford: A Pageant Play of Guildford* (1925); *The Town of the Ford: A Pageant Play with Music* (1925); photographic postcards; *Surrey Advertiser and County Times* (16, 23, 30 May, 6 June 1925); *The Times* (18 April, 18 May 1925); *Daily News* (19 May 1925); *Daily Telegraph* (19 May 1925).
- 13 *The Carlisle Historical Pageant. Book of Words* (1928); *Carlisle Historical Pageant: Official Souvenir* (1928); *Carlisle Historical Pageant. Book of Words* (1951); *The Carlisle Pageant* (1977); *The Times* (3, 8 August 1928, 7 August 1951).
- 14 *Defendamus: A Pageant of Taunton* (1928); *Somerset County Gazette* (23, 30 June 1928); *The Times* (26 June 1928); Michael Woods, 'Performing Power: local politics and the Taunton pageant of 1928,' *Journal of Historical Geography* 25. 1 (1999): 57–74. A one-minute film of the event survives: see item 2426.12 on the British Pathé website.
- 15 *The Times* (19 December 1927, 27 July, 25 September, 6 October 1928, 21 June, 13, 20 August, 1 October 1929, 7 April 1931); *Lewisham Borough News* (10 October 1928); *Cornish and Devon Post* (24 August 1929).
- 16 The daughter of an Anglican minister, she was born at Redruth in ca. 1876 and later lived at Madron until 1884, when her father moved to Devon. A calendar published in 1930 by the *Cornish Echo* (and reprinted as *King Arthur in Cornwall Millennium Calendar* [1999]) contained two anonymous blank-verse extracts from an unspecified 'Pageant.' It is possible that these extracts were taken from Morrell's text.
- 17 *The Times* (26 August 1929); *Royal Cornwall Gazette* (28 August 1929).
- 18 *Fête and Pageant in Cardiff Castle* (1931); *Western Mail* (8, 22, 23, 25, 26 June 1931).
- 19 Less happily, it was bombed in 1941.

- 20 *Manchester Historical Pageant: Official Souvenir Programme* (1938); *Manchester Historical Pageant: [Book of Words]* (1938); *Manchester Evening Chronicle* (23, 27 June 1938).
- 21 *The Kenilworth Castle Pageant: The Book of the Words* (1939); *The Times* (17 June, 10 July 1939).
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