

# Camelot Discovered?



**Carman Hill**

It is an obvious fact that the *Camelot* portrayed in French romances, English literature and Hollywood movies, as some grand and elaborate mediaeval castle or palace, cannot have been the reality of “King Arthur’s” capital.

The historical Arthur was a fifth century war-leader. It may be that he had a number of strongholds, but it is by no means unreasonable to suggest that there would have been some special base which he regarded as his main seat of power. What should sensibly be looked for in this regard is a post-Roman fort strategically placed within Arthur’s home territory.

\* \* \*

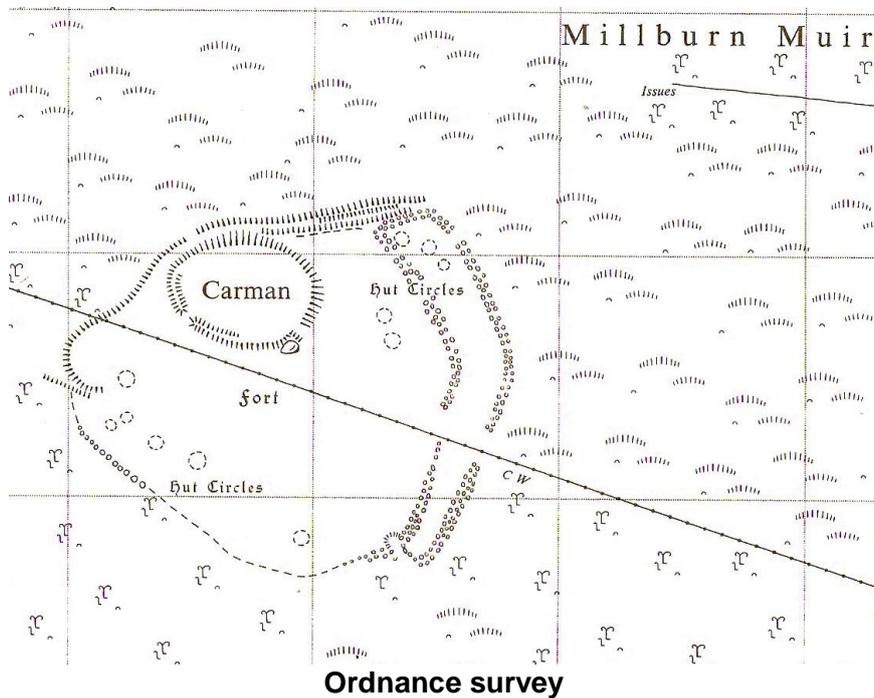
In 1954 the hill-fort on Carman Muir was discovered by aerial photography. The database of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland describes it as –

“Citadel Fort of Dark Age type C measuring 150 yards in diameter, with stone ramparts, ditches, and sunken approach roads.”

“This fort stands at a height of 230m OD overlooking the Firth of Clyde. The defences comprise two distinct elements, an inner enclosure or citadel, and an outer enclosure with an annexe on the E. Within the outer enclosure there are the remains of up to twelve stone-walled houses and there are a further three in the annexe.”



***Stones from the Fort***





***Modern Cairn at highest point in the Fort***

Archaeologists Leslie and Elizabeth Alcock have noted the size of the Carman fort and pointed out that it is considerably larger than the Dalriadan forts at Dunollie and Dunadd. ***This has led them to conclude that Carman was most probably a royal citadel and that it may have preceded Dumbarton Rock as the seat of kings. If they are right, then it is likely that this little hill, which now looks down on Renton, was once the capital of Strathclyde.***

\* \* \*

In the second century AD Ptolemy identified the people of the Clyde Valley as the ***Damnonii***. Indeed, with support from serious academic works, the Wikipedia entry for the Kingdom of Strathclyde maintains that – ***“The capital of the Damnonii is believed to have been at Carman, near Dumbarton.”***

**Continued >**



***East over the Vale towards Campsie Hills and Trossachs***

Intriguingly, Ptolemy mentions a certain Lindon, or ***Llyn Dun***, as being located in *Damnonia*. The name means “Lake Fort” and some historians have identified it with Balloch by Loch Lomond, but it is worth considering that Carman itself is but two miles from the loch.

\* \* \*

After the departure of the Romans (c410 AD) the people of Strathclyde were known as Britons.

The ancient citadel of Carman appears to have been in use immediately after the departure of the Romans and to have been a very important fortress of the kings of the Strathclyde Britons.

These conclusions, as can be seen, are based on the up-to-date opinions of conventional archaeologists and historians. Perhaps we may be permitted to go further –The actual historical person on whom the legendary King Arthur is based is generally agreed by historians to have been a war-leader of the Britons in the late fifth century. The earliest mention of Arthur in literature appears to have been in the poem *Y Gododdin* by Aneirn. It is said that this work was first committed to writing at Dumbarton Rock.

Historian James Knight, in his work *Glasgow and Strathclyde*, writes –

“Careful research seems to show that when we trace the Arthurian legends back to their origins we arrive at a real historical person... the head of a British federation in Strathclyde in the century after Ninian. His enemies were the heathen Scots on the west, the Picts on the north, and the Angles on the east...”



***The view north: a ridge with a deep gully between the Fort and it***

The late Prof. Ian Grimble wrote –

“After the Roman legions had left, the British kingdoms of southern Scotland fought to maintain themselves against the Picts and the Scots to their north, and against the expansionist English of Northumbria to their south. In their Welsh language the earliest surviving Scottish poem was composed, telling of the defeat of the Gododdin heroes by the English; and this poem contains by far the earliest reference to the British resistance leader, Arthur. When the old British kingdoms of Gododdin, Strathclyde and Rheged had vanished, the traditions of the Men of the North were preserved in Wales – the only part of the once predominantly British Isles in which their language remains to this day. The story of Arthur travelled south until he was given a new setting as far south as Tintagel in Welsh-speaking Cornwall.”

(The name “Carman” is thought to have derived from the Welsh “caer” meaning fort, and possibly the “Manau” of the Gododdin).

\* \* \*

Nennius, writing in the ninth century, tells us that Arthur led conflicts between the Antonine Wall and Hadrian's Wall – which is to say in Southern Scotland. Then Geoffrey of Monmouth, in the twelfth century, tells us that Arthur fought a number of battles in Scotland, one being on and around Loch Lomond.

Given that Arthur was a Briton, and that he was engaged in warfare so close to the capital of the Strathclyde Britons – which was *Carman* (prior to its being Dumbarton Rock) – it is surely not unreasonable to suggest that this citadel may have been his prime stronghold.



**South – Dumbarton Rock, the Clyde and the Kilpatrick Hills**

It is worth repeating – Arthur's main seat, his *Camelot*, would certainly not have been the anachronistic Norman castle of later literary imagination, but a much simpler hill-fort located in southern Scotland, rather than in England or Wales.

\* \* \*

Norman Davies is a highly esteemed academic who has taught at the Universities of London, Harvard, and various other prestigious seats of learning internationally. In his 2011 publication *Vanished Kingdoms*, Davies has this to say about the “unending riddle of King Arthur” –

“The historical Arthur was certainly British, since he was made famous by resisting the incursions of the Britons' enemies... After that one is looking for toponymic needles in a semi-historic haystack. Nonetheless, one is bound to be impressed by the recent surge of advocacy in favour of Arthur being a hero of northern as opposed to southern Britain. Everyone can understand the confusion between *Damnonia* and *Dumnonia*, or the

misattribution by the twelfth century Geoffrey of Monmouth of Welsh legends deriving from the ‘Old North’. Beyond that, one can only say that the Rock of Dumbarton is hardly less plausible than the rock of Tintagel. The Rock of the Clyde was known to antiquaries as the *Castrum Arturi...*”

\* \* \*

*“In the Exchequer Rolls of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries there appears on four occasions, among the payments of various blench-fermes to the sheriff of Dumbarton, that of Arthur’s Castle, identified by some older historians as Dumbarton Castle...Near the present Castlehill beside Cardross Road, Dumbarton, is a mound which has the appearance of a mediaeval motte and is named ‘Arthur’s Seat’ on the large-scale Ordnance Survey map.”*

(Dumbarton Castle: Dr I.M.M.MacPhail)

These older historians are likely to have been mistaken in their understandable assumptions. It is unconvincing that Dumbarton Castle would have been regarded in such a way by the Sheriff of Dumbarton, but it is interesting that an “Arthur’s Castle” was located within his sheriffdom, and the references could well have been to Carman. Equally, it is worthy of note that the so-called “Arthur’s Seat” is little more than a couple of miles from Carman. These traditional references merely reinforce the evidence that there were powerful and enduring local associations with Arthur.

\* \* \*



***North Westwards – the Clyde, Gareloch and Cowal***

Carman, located strategically by the gateway to the Highlands and with magnificent views of the Firth of Clyde and vast stretches of the Lowlands, is of the right era and of suitably “royal” size, but the fact that

it is regarded as having been the capital of the Damnonni, *alone*, makes it a serious contender for Arthur's *Camelot*.

There are, indeed, "ifs" and "buts" in all of this. The Carman site has never been excavated, and a thorough, professional excavation is required to answer some very interesting questions.

W. Scobie