

Courtenay Arthur Raleigh Radford

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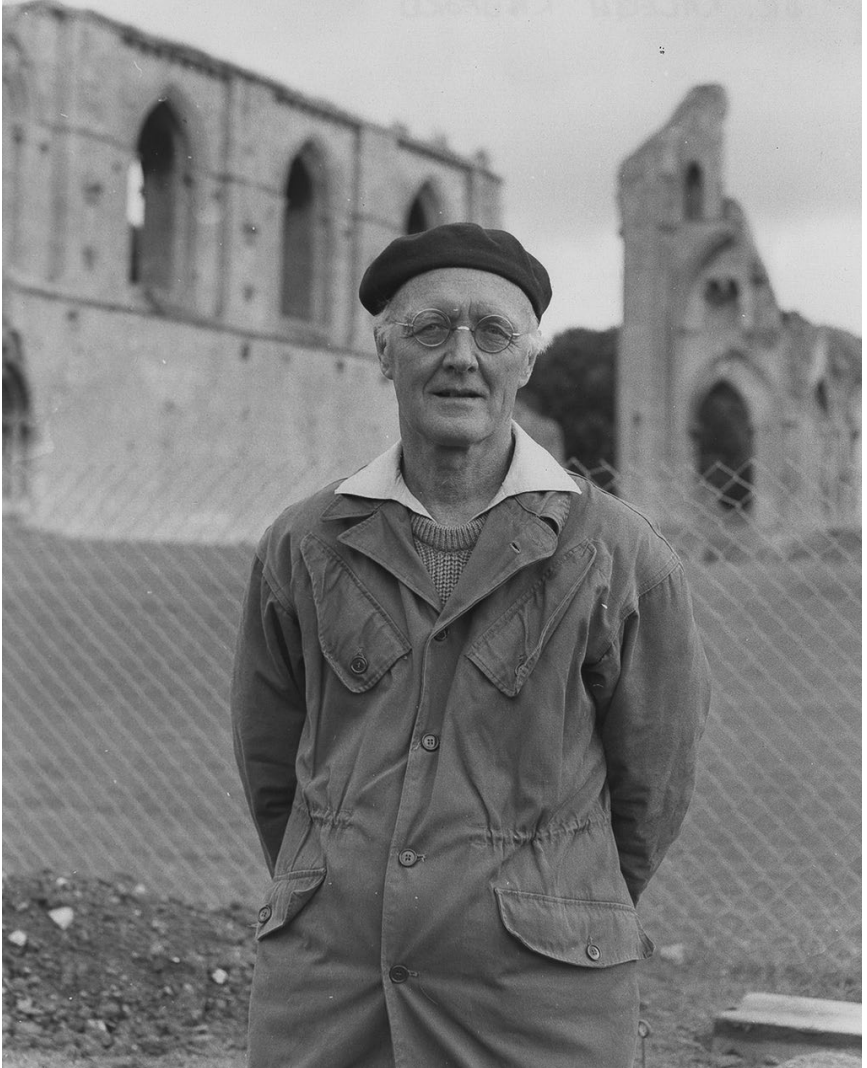
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RALEGH RADFORD

Pictured in 1957, in front of the ruins of the church at Glastonbury Abbey (Somerset).

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Courtenay Arthur Raleigh Radford

1900–1998

C. A. RALEGH RADFORD was one of the major figures of archaeology in the mid-twentieth century: his intellectual contribution to the discipline is rated by some as being comparable to giants such as Mortimer Wheeler, Christopher Hawkes and Gordon Childe.¹ Radford is credited with helping to shape the field of medieval archaeology and in particular with inaugurating study of the ‘Early Christian’ archaeology of western Britain. He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1956, awarded honorary doctorates from the universities of Wales (1963), Glasgow (1963) and Exeter (1973) and the Gold Medal of the Society of Antiquaries (1972).² Forty or fifty years ago, his influence on archaeological scholarship and policy was profound; in 1980 and 1990, his eightieth and ninetieth birthdays were affectionately celebrated by *Festschriften*.³ Yet today, few students of medieval archaeology are likely to have heard of him.⁴ By current standards, he published relatively little and many of his theories have been challenged by subsequent generations. What, then, is Radford’s intellectual legacy to archaeology? Why has his influence apparently been short-lived?

¹A. Saunders, ‘Raleigh Radford’, *The Independent* (8 Jan. 1999).

²*Who’s Who & Who Was Who*, 2012: <<http://www.ukwhoswho.com>>. His nomination paper for election to the British Academy was signed by Cyril Fox, J. G. D. Clark, O. G. S. Crawford, I. A. Richmond and Mortimer Wheeler.

³S. M. Pearce (ed.), *The Early Church in Western Britain and Ireland: Studies Presented to C. A. Raleigh Radford* (Oxford, British Archaeological Report 102, 1982); and L. Abrams and J. Carley (eds.), *The Archaeology and History of Glastonbury Abbey. Essays in Honour of the Ninetieth Birthday of C. A. Raleigh Radford* (Woodbridge, 1991).

⁴The standard history of the subject mentions Radford only once and incidentally: C. Gerrard, *Medieval Archaeology. Understanding Traditions and Contemporary Approaches* (London, 2003), p. 67.

Radford was a solitary and enigmatic character: little is recorded of his private life, personal relationships or professional motivations. This may help to explain why his memoir has been delayed by fourteen years, despite him having been held in great esteem by the Academy and the discipline more widely. Consequently, this account is written by someone who never actually met the man and who is several academic generations distant from him. However, the author has gained close professional acquaintance with Raleigh Radford through his unpublished archive of excavations at Glastonbury Abbey (1951–64), a source which provides new insight to his working practices. I will begin with an account of Radford's life and career, before considering his scholarly contribution with particular reference to the two sites with which he is inextricably linked: Tintagel Castle (Cornwall) and Glastonbury Abbey (Somerset).

'The last of the Gentlemen Antiquaries'⁵

(Courtenay Arthur) Raleigh Radford was born on 7 November 1900 at Cedar House, Hillingdon (Middlesex), the only son of Arthur Lock Radford and Ada Minnie, née Bruton.⁶ He was perhaps the last of the leisured class of antiquaries who characterised the study of archaeology in the nineteenth century: he inherited a private income founded on copper and coal money together with a family interest in antiquities. His father and grandfather were friends of William Morris; and his father, two uncles, an aunt and a cousin were all elected Fellows of the Society of Antiquaries.⁷ The family had strong West Country connections that are reflected in the selection of Radford's forenames. They returned to Devon to reside at Bradninch, a Jacobean manor house near Exeter. Arthur Lock Radford (d. 1925) was close friends with Frederick Bligh Bond, the excavator of Glastonbury Abbey between 1908 and 1921.⁸ He took his 10-year old son to visit the excavations in 1910, launching a lifelong fascination with the medieval monastery and its Arthurian connections.⁹

⁵ C. Thomas, 'C. A. Raleigh Radford 1900–1998', *Medieval Archaeology*, 42 (1998), 104–6.

⁶ M. Todd, 'Radford, (Courtenay Arthur) Raleigh (1900–1998)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004): <<http://www.oxforddnb.com>>.

⁷ 'Courtenay Arthur Raleigh Radford' (1999), <<http://www.sal.org.uk/obituaries/Obituary%20archive/courtenay-radford>>.

⁸ T. Hopkinson-Ball, *The Rediscovery of Glastonbury: Frederick Bligh Bond, Architect of the New Age* (Stroud, 2007), p. 202.

⁹ In the acknowledgements of his 1981 interim report on Glastonbury, Radford wrote: 'Most of those in charge of the earlier excavations were personal friends of my father or of myself; from

Radford and his sister were educated at St George's, Harpenden (Hertfordshire). He went on to read Medieval and Modern History at Exeter College, Oxford, 1918–21. Afterwards, he was employed as a private tutor in Cornwall and then worked under Sir Charles Peers for four years; Peers was a close friend of Radford's father.¹⁰ Radford never worked on Peers's excavations at Whitby Abbey (1920–5), nor did he visit the site until the 1980s, but he assisted in the 1940s in writing up the excavations.¹¹ Radford did not embark on a postgraduate degree but was a scholar at the British School at Rome in 1924 and took the opportunity to travel throughout Italy. He was subsequently a scholar at the British School at Athens in 1928, the year in which he was elected Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, at the age of 28. His first professional appointment was as Inspector of Ancient Monuments in Wales and Monmouthshire (1929–34).¹² His excavations at Tintagel commenced in 1933 and continued until the outbreak of war (discussed below).

From 1936 to 1945, Radford was Director of the British School at Rome (BSR). He was recommended to the post as a friend of Mortimer Wheeler's and was approached to succeed Colin Hardie after 'various Oxford Dons' had declined.¹³ Radford's time at the BSR was marked by a successful campaign of new building: he raised funds to extend Edwin Lutyan's original complex by adding a south wing to complete the quadrangle. It was constructed in 1937–8 and the wing was opened in January 1939 by King Victor Emmanuel III of Italy. In the same month, the School was visited by Neville Chamberlain and Lord Halifax, during the negotiations with Mussolini that followed the Munich Crisis.¹⁴ Radford is remembered at the BSR as a highly competent administrator and a generous host. Unfortunately, there was no opportunity for him to initiate fieldwork immediately prior to the outbreak of war, since foreigners were banned from excavating by the fascist government. He continued to work

1925 onwards I visited the site every year while the excavation was in progress': C. A. R. Radford, 'Glastonbury Abbey before 1184: interim report on the excavations, 1908–64', in N. Coldstream and P. Draper, *Medieval Art and Architecture at Wells and Glastonbury* (British Archaeological Association Transactions IV, 1981), pp. 110–34.

¹⁰ Somerset Record Office DD/OH/10. Transcription of interview with Radford by Adam Green, 6–15 May 1993.

¹¹ R. Cramp, personal communication; C. R. Peers and C. A. R. Radford, 'The Saxon monastery of Whitby', *Archaeologia*, 89 (1943), 27–88.

¹² Thomas, 'C. A. Raleigh Radford 1900–1998', p. 104.

¹³ A. Wallace-Hadrill, *The British School at Rome. One Hundred Years* (London, 2001), pp. 91–6.

¹⁴ R. Hodges, 'An old European: Raleigh Radford at ninety', *Current Archaeology*, 128 (1992), 337–40.

in the summers at Tintagel and Castle Dore (Cornwall) and conducted fieldwork with Mortimer Wheeler, FBA, on hillforts in Brittany. While living in Rome, Radford was received into papal society and he became closely acquainted with Pope Pius XII (1939–58).¹⁵ Fifty years later, Radford recalled his memories of Rome during an interview with Richard Hodges, then director of the BSR. Hodges recorded Radford's recollections of Rome in a bygone age: 'what struck me was the crystal clarity of his memory ... he witnessed the twilight of the Grand Tour ... a northern passion with the Mediterranean, its environment, culture, people and light'.¹⁶

Accounts of Radford's activities in Rome before the war are directly contradictory: some imply that he worked comfortably with the fascist regime and supported the climate of appeasement;¹⁷ others state that he was actively working for British intelligence. The latter assertion is perhaps supported by the fact that he burned his papers when the School was closed in 1939, before returning to England.¹⁸ Accounts of his war service are sketchy but Radford confirmed that he worked for the European Service of the British Broadcasting Service, the Air Ministry, and by 1943 was Chief Intelligence Officer in the Department of Psychological Warfare at Allied Headquarters in Algiers, achieving the rank of lieutenant colonel.¹⁹ He returned to Rome briefly in 1944, serving as Director of the BSR after missing the Disney Professorship at Cambridge in 1939. The chair went instead to Dorothy Garrod, FBA, the first female professor at Oxbridge; the world of the gentlemen antiquaries was changing. Radford continued to work for the Department of Psychological Warfare in Rome, which used the BSR as its base. He resigned from the school at the end of the war, later explaining that it would have been inappropriate for him to remain in Rome, since he had been associated with Mussolini's Fascist government in the 1930s, and because he feared that the post-war government in Italy would be left-wing and anti-Papist.²⁰ Radford returned to Britain and took up the post of Secretary of the Welsh Royal Commission on Historical and Ancient Monuments from 1946 to 1948. In 1947, he was appointed OBE; in 1970, he declined the award of CBE.²¹

¹⁵ Somerset Record Office DD/OH/10.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹⁷ Wallace-Hadrill, *The British School at Rome*.

¹⁸ <<http://www.sal.org.uk/obituaries/>>.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*; Thomas, 'C. A. Raleigh Radford 1900–1998'; Saunders, 'Raleigh Radford'.

²⁰ Somerset Record Office DD/OH/ 10.

²¹ The Prime Minister's Office wrote to Radford on 8 May 1970 indicating that a recommendation would be made to Her Majesty to appoint him a Commander of the Order of the British Empire.

From 1948 to 1998, Raleigh Radford elected to live as an independent scholar supported by his own private means, residing at 'Culmcott' in Uffculme (Devon), a home packed with Jacobean furnishings. He used the Athenaeum as his base for frequent visits to London, a suitably masculine environment. He divided his time between personal research, excavating and service to the discipline. In addition to his archaeological investigations in the south-west, he excavated Early Christian sites at Whithorn, St Ninian's Chapel and St Ninian's Cave (Dumfries and Galloway), Birsay (Orkney), the Roman villa of Ditchley (Oxfordshire) and Peel Castle on the Isle of Man. He was a Member of the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (1953–76), President of the Prehistoric Society (1954–8), the Royal Archaeological Institute (1960–3), the Cambrian Society (1961) and the Society for Medieval Archaeology (1969–71), and Vice-President of the Society of Antiquaries (1936–7; 1954–8); he also served as Vice-President and editor for the Devon Archaeological Society, President of the Devon and Exeter Institution (1950–62) and as joint editor of the Devon and Cornwall Record Society. He was elected a Bard of the Gorsedd of Cornwall in 1937.

Radford was a committed advocate and supporter of local period societies and he was concerned to make his research accessible to the local audience.²² Because his career was conducted entirely outside universities, he had no cohort of undergraduate or postgraduate students to continue his work. However, he mentored some key figures in the succeeding generation of medieval archaeologists, in particular Charles Thomas, FBA, who was a supervisor at Radford's excavations at Glastonbury. He also encouraged Philip Rahtz (1921–2011): Radford's patronage helped Rahtz to make the transition from school teacher to professional field archaeologist.²³ Thomas has sometimes been referred to as Radford's 'disciple', but it was Thomas who presented the most cogent and sustained challenge to Radford's interpretation of Tintagel.²⁴ Rahtz reinterpreted Radford's analysis of the Anglo-Saxon monastery at Whitby and was highly critical

Radford replied on 11 May, noting his tremendous appreciation but declining on the grounds that 'for many years I have held no full-time appointment; the contribution that I have been able to make in my field of work has therefore been limited'.

²² A. Watkin, 'Preface', in Abrams and Carley, *The Archaeology and History of Glastonbury Abbey*, p. i.

²³ P. A. Rahtz, *Living Archaeology* (Stroud, 2001), p. 88.

²⁴ Beginning with C. Thomas, 'East and West: Tintagel Mediterranean imports and the early insular church', in Pearce, *The Early Church in Western Britain and Ireland*, pp. 17–34.

of his excavations at both Castle Dore and Glastonbury.²⁵ However, both Thomas and Rahtz stressed the important role that Radford had played in laying the foundations for subsequent scholarship.

Ralegh Radford died at the Old Vicarage Nursing Home in Cullompton (Devon) on 27 December 1998. His considerable estate was divided between the Society of Antiquaries, the University of Exeter and the British School at Rome. His personal correspondence is deposited with the University of Exeter and his archaeological archive is with the National Monument Record at Swindon. He bequeathed original William Morris textiles and books to Kelmscott Manor (owned by the Society of Antiquaries) and specified that the Antiquaries' portion of his estate should be used to support Kelmscott and the Library at Burlington House.²⁶ His paintings and Jacobean furniture were gifted by his executors to Buckland Abbey (Devon).²⁷

Early Christian archaeologist

Radford's publications are numerous and spanned the period from 1928 to 1995; however, the great majority are guidebooks, pamphlets and notes on individual monuments, with relatively few synthetic papers and not a single monograph to represent his life's work. His knowledge was conveyed principally through lectures and oral exposition, delivered in an idiosyncratic style: 'eyes closed, rocking from side to side and speaking in a high-pitched clerical voice'.²⁸ He was a small, slight man, who wore distinctive gold-rimmed spectacles. He was a formidable presence when attending lectures, sitting in the front row directly in the view of the lecturer, closing his eyes firmly at the beginning so that one never knew if he was awake or asleep! Only interim reports of his major excavations were ever published. The wartime bombing of his Exeter home precluded full publication of his work at Tintagel; an extended interim report on Glastonbury was published in 1981 and he was working on draft chapters

²⁵ P. A. Rahtz, 'Appendix C: the building plan of the Anglo-Saxon monastery of Whitby Abbey', in D. M. Wilson (ed.), *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1976), pp. 459–62; P. A. Rahtz, 'Castle Dore—a reappraisal of the post-Roman structures', *Cornish Archaeology*, 10, 49–54; P. A. Rahtz and L. Watts, *Glastonbury: Myth and Archaeology* (Stroud, 2003).

²⁶ <<http://www.sal.org.uk/obituaries/>>.

²⁷ Letter from George Radford to Charles Thomas, 15 Oct. 1999.

²⁸ Saunders, 'Ralegh Radford'.

for a book on the abbey well into his nineties.²⁹ He was hailed as ‘one of the last of the polymaths’, drawing on ‘preternatural powers of instant and total recall, remorselessly informative’.³⁰

Radford was highly respected for the breadth and depth of his knowledge, particularly in ecclesiology, which included an impressive grasp of architectural history, medieval documents and epigraphy. He was an early champion of multidisciplinary approaches, for example drawing on descriptions in Irish saints’ lives to reconstruct the liturgy and internal arrangements of seventh-century churches.³¹ His wide experience of Continental archaeology contributed a comparative dimension to his scholarship that was much needed in British medieval archaeology.³² This is perhaps best evidenced in his reinterpretation of the excavations undertaken by E. T. Leeds at the Anglo-Saxon rural settlement of Sutton Courtenay (Berkshire, now Oxfordshire).³³ Radford compared the evidence uncovered at Sutton Courtenay with excavated sites in Germany and the Netherlands. Leeds had concluded that sunken-featured buildings were the preferred dwellings of the Anglo-Saxons. Radford argued instead that two types of structure could be discerned at Sutton Courtenay: rectangular buildings of spaced timbers (halls) and sunken-featured buildings. Radford’s interpretation was proven by subsequent excavations at Anglo-Saxon settlements and remains the standard view today.

One of his most enduring contributions was the recognition at Tintagel of imported Mediterranean pottery comprising Late Roman amphorae and fine red tableware. His experience working in Mediterranean archaeology meant that he recognised the origins and significance of this imported pottery: he published an important essay in 1956 outlining a classification based on four distinct wares.³⁴ In fact, he misunderstood the implications of this pottery for the interpretation of Tintagel (discussed below); nevertheless, Radford established a major breakthrough for early

²⁹ Radford, ‘Glastonbury Abbey before 1184 ...’, pp. 110–34.

³⁰ S. Cruden, ‘C. A. R. Radford: a tribute’, in Pearce, *The Early Church in Western Britain and Ireland*, pp. 1–4.

³¹ C. A. R. Radford, ‘The earliest Irish churches’, *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 40 (1977), 1–11.

³² D. Wilson, ‘The foundation and early years of the Society for Medieval Archaeology’, in R. Gilchrist and A. Reynolds (eds.), *Reflections: 50 Years of Medieval Archaeology* (Society for Medieval Archaeology Monograph 30, 2009), pp. 11–21 at p. 16.

³³ C. A. R. Radford, ‘The Saxon house: a review and some parallels’, *Medieval Archaeology*, 1 (1957), 27–38.

³⁴ C. A. R. Radford, ‘Imported pottery found at Tintagel, Cornwall’, in D. B. Harden (ed.), *Dark-Age Britain* (London, 1956), pp. 59–70.

medieval archaeology in western Britain.³⁵ Subsequent study has refined our understanding of the dating and precise origins of these wares and one of Radford's original classes (C ware) is now recognised as dating to the thirteenth century. However, the Mediterranean pottery first identified by Radford was to become hugely important to the study of early medieval archaeology. It remains the primary indicator for high status sites dating from the fifth to the eighth centuries; the inhabitants of these settlements were exchanging tin and other British commodities for wine, oil and fine pottery from North Africa and the eastern Mediterranean.³⁶

Radford pioneered the study of Celtic monasticism in western Britain and advocated the study of the post-Roman period as 'Early Christian archaeology'. His motivation in shaping this field may have been connected to his personal beliefs, which he described as 'High Anglo-Catholic'.³⁷ His characterisation of the period as 'Early Christian' was challenged by Rahtz in a lecture to the Cambrians in 1966: he argued that the term leads to 'an undue emphasis on the ideological, specifically Christian, aspects of the period, influencing the choice of sites to be dug and the interpretation of the evidence recorded'. Rahtz proposed the term 'Dark Age' archaeology as an alternative. Radford took issue with this suggestion, apparently retorting: 'Mr Rahtz: over my dead body!'³⁸ Radford's terminology influenced the work of Charles Thomas and many other medieval archaeologists from the 1970s to the early 1990s.³⁹ For the past twenty years, the term 'early medieval' archaeology has been adopted in preference to either Radford's 'Early Christian' or Rahtz's 'Dark Age'.⁴⁰

Radford is acknowledged as a founding member of the Society for Medieval Archaeology, having served as one of the first Vice-Presidents in 1958 and President from 1968 to 1971. It is less well known that he opposed the motion to establish the society in 1957; indeed, he was the

³⁵ Rahtz, *Living Archaeology*, p. 149; C. Thomas, *Tintagel, Arthur and Archaeology* (London, 1993), pp. 62–3.

³⁶ E. Campbell, *Continental and Mediterranean Imports to Atlantic Britain and Ireland, AD 400–800* (York, 2007).

³⁷ Thomas, 'C. A. Raleigh Radford 1900–1998', p. 105.

³⁸ P. A. Rahtz, 'Pagan and Christian by the Severn Sea', in Abrams and Carley, *The Archaeology and History of Glastonbury Abbey*, pp. 3–37.

³⁹ C. Thomas, *The Early Christian Archaeology of North Britain* (Oxford, 1971); N. Edwards and A. Lane (eds.), *The Early Church in Wales and the West: Recent Work in Early Christian Archaeology, History and Place-names* (Oxford, 1992).

⁴⁰ For example, N. Edwards (ed.), *The Archaeology of Early Medieval Celtic Churches* (Leeds, Society for Medieval Archaeology Monograph 29, 2004).

only dissenting voice.⁴¹ Despite his reservations, he soon joined the society and contributed wholeheartedly to its first journal and subsequent development. We may surmise that Radford judged the fledgling discipline not yet ready to stand independently of history. His attitude to the subject naturally reflected that of his generation: the role of medieval archaeology before the Second World War was to obtain building plans and to ‘confirm or contradict’ the facts of history.⁴² Radford stated explicitly that he approached archaeology from the written record and excavated ‘as an historian’.⁴³ His aim was to harness archaeological evidence to validate historical sources or to substantiate legendary or traditional associations. Working from documentary sources could prove fruitful: for example, he was the first to recognise that Cheddar (Somerset) was the location of an Anglo-Saxon royal palace, based on a bishop’s enquiry in 1321 investigating the origins of the royal free chapel on the site.⁴⁴ On the other hand, to use legends as a starting point for archaeology could prove misleading, particularly in his quest for Arthurian connections. Radford adopted a highly romantic view of the post-Roman period in the West Country: he regarded these centuries as a ‘golden’ or ‘heroic age’ linked to the figure of King Arthur.⁴⁵ In the 1960s, Radford was instrumental in establishing the programme of excavations at Cadbury Castle (Somerset) as chair of the ‘Camelot Research Committee’. He had undertaken field walking at the site in the 1950s and identified Mediterranean pottery and post-Roman glass. He asserted that this evidence proved the traditional identification of Cadbury as the Camelot of Arthurian legend.⁴⁶ Radford was not alone in his romantic obsession with Arthur, which took hold of many medieval archaeologists in the 1960s and 1970s.⁴⁷ But he played a formative role in stimulating the Arthurian agenda and this predilection coloured his excavations at Glastonbury (discussed below).

⁴¹ Wilson, ‘The foundation and early years of the Society for Medieval Archaeology’, p. 16; C. Gerrard, ‘The Society for Medieval Archaeology: the early years’, in R. Gilchrist and A. Reynolds (eds.), *Reflections: 50 Years of Medieval Archaeology* (Society for Medieval Archaeology Monograph 30, 2009), pp. 23–46 at p. 24.

⁴² Gerrard, *Medieval Archaeology*, p. 83, quoting O. G. S. Crawford in 1921.

⁴³ Cruden, ‘C. A. R. Radford: a tribute’, p. 3.

⁴⁴ Rahtz, *Living Archaeology*, p. 82.

⁴⁵ C. A. R. Radford and M. J. Swanton, *Arthurian Sites in the West* (Exeter, 1975), pp. 8–9.

⁴⁶ Rahtz, *Living Archaeology*, p. 157.

⁴⁷ L. Alcock, *Arthur’s Britain: History and Archaeology AD 367–634* (London, 1971).

Radford at Tintagel Castle and Glastonbury Abbey

Tintagel is a dramatic site located on a peninsula that juts from the rugged coast of northern Cornwall. A castle was built there in the thirteenth century, but Tintagel is better known as the traditional birthplace of King Arthur, a legend first recorded by Geoffrey of Monmouth in the twelfth century. Raleigh Radford excavated at Tintagel from 1933 to 1938 (and again in 1955). His excavations took place in preparation for opening Tintagel to the public as a Guardianship site; he was asked 'to test the basis of the Arthurian traditions'. Given his later fascination with Arthur, it may seem surprising that he was immediately sceptical of Tintagel's Arthurian claims. The young Radford was firmly drawn to an alternative model which proposed Tintagel's origins as a Celtic monastery.⁴⁸ This theory was proposed by Henry Jenner (1848–1934), a charismatic antiquary and the first Grand Bard of Cornwall; it was also Jenner who popularised the 'Holy Legend of Glastonbury', which purports that Christ was brought to Britain by his uncle, Joseph of Arimathea, while in pursuit of the tin trade.⁴⁹ From the start, Radford pushed a monastic interpretation for Tintagel; he was perhaps also influenced in this goal by his mentor, Sir Charles Peers (1868–1952), the Chief Inspector of Monuments, who had led the excavations at the early monastic site of Whitby (1920–25).

By 1935, Radford had published an interim report and guidebook stating unequivocally that he had found the remains of an early Celtic monastery at Tintagel, including clusters of rectangular monastic cells.⁵⁰ The monastery could be dated by copious quantities of imported Mediterranean pottery, which Radford recognised as typical of the fifth to sixth centuries. He argued in 1942 that a community of between twenty and a hundred monks pursued an agrarian lifestyle at Tintagel, cultivating herb gardens or tiny fields.⁵¹ For nearly fifty years, Radford's monastic interpretation was accepted on the basis of very slim archaeological evidence. Records of the site were poor: it had been dug by local workmen under the supervision of a foreman, with Radford making only periodic visits.⁵² Radford's

⁴⁸ Thomas, *Tintagel, Arthur and Archaeology*, p. 55.

⁴⁹ A. W. Smith, '“And did those feet ...?”: the legend of Christ's visit to Britain', *Folklore*, 100 (1989), 63–83.

⁵⁰ C. A. R. Radford, 'Tintagel: the castle and Celtic monastery—interim report', *Antiquaries Journal*, 15 (1935), 401–19.

⁵¹ C. A. R. Radford, 'Tintagel in history and legend', *Journal of the Royal Institution in Cornwall*, 25 (1942), 26–41.

⁵² Thomas, *Tintagel, Arthur and Archaeology*, p. 56.

interpretation of Tintagel as a Celtic monastery finally came under pressure in the 1970s as more comparative plans of early monasteries were amassed. Tintagel lacked key diagnostic features such as a chapel and cemetery; its rectangular cells were not replicated at any other monastery; and there were no Christian or monastic artefacts among the thousands of small finds excavated.⁵³ Ian Burrow was the first of several dissenters to voice the view that Tintagel was not a monastery at all, but a defended secular stronghold.⁵⁴

An additional challenge came from a new study of Tintagel's Mediterranean pottery by Charles Thomas. He recognised that Radford had failed to take two major factors into account when considering the implications of the pottery for interpreting the site. First, Radford did not distinguish between primary imports and the secondary use of pottery, for example fragments made into utilitarian objects such as spindle-whorls (for spinning yarn). Thomas astutely observed that spinning was an exclusively female concern in the early medieval period; the presence of such activities indicated a mixed community of women and men, rather than one exclusively of male hermits. Secondly, Radford failed to address the incongruity of an eremitic monastery engaging in the long-distance trade of luxury goods. Thomas's reassessment of the imported pottery recognised the remarkable quantity of material from Tintagel: the site produced more than any other in Britain or Ireland, estimated to represent one or two complete shiploads, or 600 to 700 amphorae. Radford had excavated only five per cent of the accessible area but even this sample indicated luxury trade on a massive scale—an activity surely not consistent with the ethos of an ascetic monastery. Finally, Thomas concluded that there was no stratigraphic or spatial evidence linking the imported pottery with the reputed monastic cells.⁵⁵

English Heritage funded new excavations at Tintagel during the 1990s, prompted by a major fire in 1983 on the south-west part of the top of the island. Survey work following the fire revealed a vast and continuous landscape of buildings that was obviously not monastic in character. Christopher Morris was given a 'post-Radford agenda' for the new excavations, tasked with gaining a better understanding of Tintagel and

⁵³Rahtz had reinterpreted the plans published by Peers and Radford of the Anglo-Saxon structures at Whitby to show that they were not cells, but more likely to be ranges of buildings: Rahtz, 'Appendix C . . .': Peers and Radford, 'The Saxon monastery of Whitby'.

⁵⁴I. Burrow, 'Tintagel—some problems', *Scottish Archaeological Forum*, 5 (1974), 99–103.

⁵⁵Thomas, *Tintagel, Arthur and Archaeology*, pp. 67–74.

Radford's work.⁵⁶ Records of Radford's excavations were almost non-existent, following the destruction of the archive when his Exeter home was bombed during the war; only three site notebooks were extant, together with a small number of photographs and survey drawings. New survey work was undertaken in order to locate Radford's trenches and it became clear that he had excavated a larger area than had been acknowledged previously. The structures uncovered by Radford were confirmed as being of post-Roman date and they were shown to be part of a much larger and more complex settlement. The site is now understood as a single promontory fort containing almost thirty acres. There is evidence of significant Roman occupation and major refortification in the immediately post-Roman period. Extensive, high status remains date from the fifth to the seventh centuries, including stone buildings, evidence for literacy and imported luxuries from the Mediterranean, south-west France and southern Spain. It has been suggested that Tintagel may have been the primary point of entry into Britain for trade in Mediterranean goods. Thus, Radford's 'monastic model' for Tintagel was gradually unravelled by critical reassessment and new fieldwork from the early 1970s through to the 1990s. But Radford remained unshakeable in his conviction that Tintagel was a Celtic monastery: in a television interview in 1991, he repeated his familiar monastic narrative of the site.⁵⁷

Between 1951 and 1964, Raleigh Radford excavated at Glastonbury Abbey, a site which also evokes the 'golden age' of the Celtic south-west. Glastonbury is located on a peninsula which rises from the surrounding marshland of the Somerset Levels and ascends steeply to the summit of Glastonbury Tor. The abbey enjoys legendary status as the earliest Christian church in Britain, first recorded in the tenth-century *Life of St Dunstan*. It is also closely interwoven with Arthurian myth and is popularly believed to be the burial site of King Arthur. The site is open to the public and managed as a charity by a board of trustees. Previous excavations at the abbey had been directed by William St John Hope (1904), Frederick Bligh Bond (1908–21), Theodore Fyfe (1926–7), and Charles Peers, Alfred Clapham and Ethelbert Horne (1928–39). In 1949, the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society sought a 'properly qualified ecclesiologist ... to continue the direction of excavations at Glastonbury Abbey; there is a

⁵⁶R. C. Barrowman, C. E. Batey and C. D. Morris, *Excavations at Tintagel Castle, Cornwall, 1990–1999* (London, 2007).

⁵⁷Thomas, 'C. A. Raleigh Radford 1900–1998', p. 106; Barrowman *et al.* (2007), p. 306.

sum of at least £200 available for this work'.⁵⁸ Radford was the obvious choice for the post, based on his professional pedigree, his monastic specialism and his West Country associations. He directed ten seasons of excavations on the site and published six short summaries in *Somerset and Dorset Notes and Queries*. The intention was to focus on the early phases of the monastery and to recover the plan of the church before its major rebuilding following a fire in 1184. In particular, it was hoped that the plan of the church and buildings begun by Abbot Herlewin (1100–18) would be recovered.⁵⁹ More than merely excavating the site, Radford immersed himself in Glastonbury for the remainder of his years. He knew the primary sources and the architectural remains inside-out; visitors to the abbey recall how he could 'bring the site alive in an extraordinary way'.⁶⁰

The excavations were successful and substantial remains of the Anglo-Saxon monastery were uncovered. Radford announced that he had found a vallum enclosure, a cloister dating to the tenth century (reputedly the earliest in Britain) and craft-working activities including unique glass furnaces dating to the late Saxon period. The results of the excavations were highly significant in their time; but decades passed and still the evidence remained unpublished. An extended interim was finally published in 1981, which for the first time presented phased plans, section drawings and photographs.⁶¹ Following his death in 1998, Radford's archive of the Glastonbury excavations was deposited with the National Monuments Record. A current research project is analysing the full archive of excavations at Glastonbury Abbey and reassessing the collections of excavated material, with particular focus on Radford's campaign.⁶²

In contrast with the situation at Tintagel, Radford's Glastonbury archive is largely complete. We are able to reconstruct his working methods and to analyse his findings, although it has been immensely challenging to disentangle primary evidence from conjectural interpretation. With regard to field techniques, Radford favoured the use of narrow excavation trenches (1.2 m wide) and relied on section drawings to establish phasing. Long, narrow trenches were also characteristic of his excavations in the

⁵⁸ Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society *Newsletter*, Volume 2, number 4 (Aug. 1949), p. 67.

⁵⁹ Radford, 'Glastonbury Abbey before 1184 ...', p. 127.

⁶⁰ James Carley, personal communication.

⁶¹ Radford, 'Glastonbury Abbey before 1184 ...'.

⁶² R. Gilchrist and C. Green, *Excavations at Glastonbury Abbey, 1904–1979* (London, in preparation). The pilot project was funded by the British Academy (2007–8) and the full analysis was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (2009–12).

1930s at Tintagel and Ditchley Roman villa.⁶³ Many artefacts were discarded without full recording, creating a biased assemblage. Despite his close personal acquaintance with Wheeler, Radford does not appear to have been influenced by Wheeler's field practices, nor his imperative that excavations should be published promptly. Radford cited his greatest archaeological influences as J. P. Bushe-Fox (1880–1954), the Chief Inspector of Ancient Monuments who trained him in field techniques, and his friend, the German archaeologist Gerhard Bersu (1889–1964).⁶⁴

Basic stratigraphic evidence is available at Glastonbury for approximately one quarter of the small finds and material was retained only selectively (as was common practice at the time). Radford's previous excavations had employed workmen as diggers but at the abbey he recruited skilled supervisors and a loyal band of volunteer diggers, some of whom are closely involved with the current research project on the archive. Radford was self-employed by this time and was able to be on site for most of the season, in contrast with his episodic presence at Tintagel. Most section drawings were executed by Radford himself and a surveyor was employed from 1954 onwards. Site records comprised a series of small red notebooks, kept both by Radford and by individual volunteers. There was no consistent programme of photography and the site photographer visited just once or twice each season (and sometimes not at all). There are some indications that Radford's field methods responded to contemporary advances in medieval archaeology: he experimented with excavating larger open areas in 1954, 1955 and 1964, after the approach was trialled by John Hurst at the deserted medieval village of Wharram Percy (North Yorkshire).⁶⁵ However, he lacked understanding of how to record open-area excavations and virtually no plans or sections survive from the final season of excavations on the abbot's hall in 1964.

Radford's Glastonbury archive includes plans and section drawings for all trenches, site notebooks, photographs, letters and drafts of work towards publication. The records of individual trenches are decipherable, but the excavations lacked any overall spatial framework. In order to map Radford's trenches accurately, it has proven necessary to use geophysical survey to establish ground truth. Radford recognised stratigraphic relationships and relative phasing but his chronological framework relied entirely on historical documents and personalities. He used descriptions

⁶³ R. Morris, *Time's Anvil* (London, 2012), pp. 116–17.

⁶⁴ Somerset Record Office DD/OH/10.

⁶⁵ Gerrard, *Medieval Archaeology*, p. 117.

recorded by medieval chroniclers to assign dates and interpretations to excavated features; these features would then be used in turn to build up a relative chronology for the site. For example, the twelfth-century historian William of Malmesbury recorded that St Dunstan had enclosed the cemetery and raised the ground level as part of his rebuilding of the abbey in the tenth century. Radford's excavations in the cemetery identified a layer of redeposited clay as the material that was laid down by Dunstan; he assigned a tenth-century date by virtue of the description in William of Malmesbury.⁶⁶ Clay makeup layers in the cemetery were identified thereafter as a tenth-century horizon ('St Dunstan's clay').

Radford's tendency to twist the archaeology culminated in his 1962 excavations in search of Arthur's grave. A popular legend emerged during the twelfth century that King Arthur had died at Glastonbury Abbey and was buried there. For political and financial reasons, it was expedient for the monks of the abbey to produce tangible evidence of his remains.⁶⁷ They announced in 1191 that excavations in the cemetery had discovered the joint grave of King Arthur and Queen Guinevere, a story which has fuelled Glastonbury's Arthurian associations ever since. Radford embraced the story of Arthur's exhumation without reservation: he used the account of Giraldus Cambrensis (c.1193) to identify the approximate site of Arthur's grave in the cemetery. Giraldus described the grave as between two stone pyramids that had also been recorded by William of Malmesbury, while a fifteenth-century account by William of Worcester located the remains southwards from the second window from the east end of the Lady Chapel. Using these accounts to orientate himself, Radford selected a spot and began to dig. After discounting the first promising candidate for Arthur's grave site, he found a pit which he felt was more convincing. The report of his 1962 excavations states that there is a 'high probability' that this represents the exhumation site of Arthur's grave in 1191.⁶⁸ By 1975, he was much more confident in his interpretation:

There is no reason to doubt the actual report of a twelfth-century exhumation. Excavation has shown that between the presumed site of the two standing crosses, a large irregular hole had been dug out and then shortly afterward refilled in the 1180s or '90s. The evidence for this precise dating is found in the

⁶⁶ C. A. R. Radford, 'The Excavations at Glastonbury Abbey, 1951-4', *Somerset and Dorset Notes and Queries*, 27 (1955), 1-7.

⁶⁷ A. Gransden, 'The growth of the Glastonbury traditions and legends in the twelfth century', in J. Carley (ed.), *Glastonbury Abbey and the Arthurian Tradition* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 29-54.

⁶⁸ C. A. R. Radford, 'The excavations at Glastonbury Abbey, 1962', *Somerset and Dorset Notes and Queries*, 28 (1962), 114-17.

occurrence in the hole of masons' chippings of Douling stone, which was then first used at Glastonbury in rebuilding the Lady Chapel in 1184–89. The bottom of the hole had disturbed two (or possibly three) of the slab-lined graves belonging to the earliest phase of the Celtic cemetery.⁶⁹

In his interim report dated 1981, this feature was described without qualification as 'the graves identified in 1191 as those of King Arthur and Queen Guinevere'.⁷⁰

The excavation records confirm that this feature was merely a pit; its identification as Arthur's grave was based entirely on the spatial descriptions provided in accounts dating to the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, respectively. The basis on which the pit was dated is easily refuted, since Douling stone is the principal building material used in all phases of Glastonbury Abbey. It has been identified among the Anglo-Saxon carved stone from the abbey and was certainly used before the rebuilding of the Lady Chapel in the late twelfth century.⁷¹ The slab-lined graves were cut into the 'Dunstan clay' and therefore must be later than the tenth century. The greater issue is this: did Radford truly believe that Arthur had existed and that he had died at Glastonbury in the fifth or sixth century? It would seem so and, at the very least, he accepted the accounts of chroniclers writing in the twelfth century as wholly truthful. Radford suspended critical judgement of the historical sources and the archaeological record in support of his personal belief in the Arthurian story.

Radford fully intended to publish his work on Glastonbury and was still toiling on a book manuscript well into his nineties. However, the manuscript does not present a critical analysis of the excavations. Instead, it is a highly interpretative, historical narrative that was structured according to his preconceived ideas about the site. It presents the historical and legendary accounts of the early 'Celtic monastery' as purely factual and uses evidence from the excavations to describe the rebuilding of the later medieval abbey by successive abbots. Although Radford acknowledged that his excavations at Glastonbury had failed to produce any archaeological evidence earlier than the eighth century, he continued to assert that the abbey began as a Celtic monastery in the fifth or sixth century.⁷²

⁶⁹Radford and Swanton, *Arthurian Sites in the West*, p. 45.

⁷⁰Radford, 'Glastonbury Abbey before 1184 . . .', p. 115.

⁷¹R. Cramp, *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture. Vol VII South West England* (London, 2006), pp. 153–8.

⁷²New analysis of the pottery and radiocarbon dating of charcoal has confirmed earlier occupation at Glastonbury Abbey dating to the sixth and seventh centuries: Gilchrist and Green, *Excavations at Glastonbury Abbey*.

*‘Éminence grise of medieval archaeology’*⁷³

Radford’s work at Tintagel and Glastonbury demonstrates that he was essentially a romantic, attracted to sites steeped in the mythical traditions of his beloved West Country during its ‘heroic age’.⁷⁴ His fieldcraft was decidedly pre-war in outlook; his ideas about the role of medieval archaeology were rooted to a time before rigorous standards of source criticism were developed by medieval historians and archaeologists. Raleigh Radford was truly the ‘last of the gentlemen antiquaries’ and it is perhaps not surprising that modern excavations and critical reassessments have challenged his findings at Tintagel, Glastonbury, Whitby and Whithorn, among other sites.⁷⁵ But it is important that we do not judge a man born in 1900 by the standards of our discipline in the twenty-first century.

Radford’s approaches must be understood in the context of his generation and training, which took place in an era when archaeology was regarded merely as a tool to validate historical facts.⁷⁶ He was also a polymath and an intellectual who influenced the first generations of a new discipline. Radford was a pioneer of Celtic archaeology at a time when the subject was dominated by Anglo-Saxon studies. He demonstrated multidisciplinary and international approaches, situating the evidence of medieval British archaeology in a wider European context. His commitment to ‘Early Christian’ archaeology continues to influence the practice of medieval archaeology in Britain today, with its distinctive emphasis on churches and monasteries. But Radford was not only interested in the study of religious elites: he pushed for the investigation of settlements reflecting a wider social structure.⁷⁷ Paradoxically, Radford’s contribution to medieval archaeology can be viewed as both ephemeral and substantial. It was exercised largely through verbal erudition, political acumen and force of personality—after all, this was a man who had achieved the rank of lieutenant colonel in the Department of Psychological Warfare. Courtenay Arthur Raleigh Radford is perhaps best remembered as the

⁷³ Wilson, ‘The foundation and early years of the Society for Medieval Archaeology’, p. 12.

⁷⁴ Radford and Swanton, *Arthurian Sites in the West*, p. 9.

⁷⁵ P. Hill, *Whithorn and St Ninian: the Excavation of a Monastic Town, 1984–91* (Stroud, 1997).

⁷⁶ Gerrard, *Medieval Archaeology* (2003), p. 83.

⁷⁷ R. Cramp, ‘Milestones in early medieval archaeology over the last 50 years’, in R. Gilchrist and A. Reynolds (eds.), *Reflections: 50 Years of Medieval Archaeology* (Society for Medieval Archaeology Monograph 30, 2009), pp. 47–63 at p. 54.

éminence grise of the emerging subject of medieval archaeology, the king-maker who moulded the formative discipline behind the scenes.

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