

The Arthurian Battle of Badon and Braydon Forest, Wiltshire

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MOUNT BADON, where Arthur defeated the Saxons and for decades halted their conquests, is a British location of legendary fame, like Camelot and Avallon. Yet (unlike them) it was a real place, mentioned by Gildas in the sixth century and Bede in the eighth. The question of where the battle was fought has concerned historians since the twelfth century, when Geoffrey of Monmouth took Badon as Bath in western England (a view with supporters even now). In this paper, we not merely rule out Bath and every other contender so far, but make a new proposal on the battlefield's whereabouts. We further maintain that it had nothing whatsoever to do with the historical Arthur, a warrior of the 530s fighting in southern Scotland. Before that, we examine previous discussion of Badon, where there has been little advance since Victorian days, scholars having often repeated not-very-logical statements by their predecessors.

We begin with Charles Plummer (1851-1927). Despite quoting one version of Gildas's *De Excidio* on the siege of Mount Badon as allegedly "near the mouth of the River Severn," his main interest was its date, where (following Bede) he preferred 493 to the 516 of *Annales Cambriae*, which would give 537 or so as when Gildas wrote (Plummer II 30-1). Hugh Williams (1843-1911) of Bala said more. He quoted the claim in *Origines Celtae* by Edwin Guest (1800-80) of Cambridge that Badon was not Bath but Badbury Rings, Dorset, where the "elevated site, its great strength and evident importance, and its name, all alike favour the hypothesis" that this Iron Age hill-fort was the site of a British victory. Williams disagreed. Although Freeman and Green accepted the hypothesis, "it is one extremely difficult to fall in with, and must, one feels, be put aside for the older view." There were hills in plenty at Bath, and later traditions of the Welsh leave no doubt that they saw the siege as being there (Hugh Williams, *Gildas*, 61-2). Yet he did not ask why Gildas should refer to Bath by an English form, as if the British had no name of their own for it. The same objection applies to Badbury Rings (at National Grid Reference ST 9603, between Blandford Forum and Wimborne Minster in east Dorset), for all its massive concentric ditches and ramparts.

Sir John Lloyd (1861-1947) offered caution and inclusion. He favoured Arthur as the champion of Badon, for "such a victory could surely only have been won under the leadership of a great captain." There could be "little doubt that a great warrior named Arthur led the Britons to victory about the beginning of the sixth century," his wars being waged not in Wales but "the south and east of the island." But Lloyd thought "mons Badonicus" still unidentified. Despite wide acceptance of Guest's arguments for Badbury Rings, he quoted W. H. Stevenson (1858-1924) on the forms as not identical (Lloyd 125-6). Hugh Williams returned to the subject in a posthumous work, observing how Gildas never mentions Arthur, perhaps because "he had no complaint against" him. After a review of the battle in *De Excidio* and the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum* (setting out Arthur's twelve battles) and *Annales Cambriae*, he concluded that "Arthur's warfare took place in the north and in the south; in the south he fought against the West Saxons, in the north against the Angles of Bernicia" (Hugh Williams, *Christianity*, 349-52).

There are pertinent remarks by Sir Edmund Chambers (1866-1954). The *qui prope Sabrinum ostium habetur* quoted by Plummer is a thirteenth-century gloss of no authority. It probably echoes Geoffrey of Monmouth's guess that Badon was Bath, as does the thirteenth-century *Mabinogion* tale of the Dream of Rhonabwy, which tells of Arthur's mustering his troops on the Severn before advancing on enemies at Badon. Chambers, who cited William Camden (1551-1623) for a location at Bannerdown Hill on the Avon upstream from Bath, and E. W. B. Nicholson (1849-1912) for a

(non-existent) British noun *bad* “bathing place,” nevertheless had doubts. It was “safer to abandon any attempt to treat Geoffrey as a serious historical authority,” with Anglo-Saxon archaeology indicating a battlefield better sought “along the Thames” and its tributaries, or on the borders of Hampshire. The Badbury Rings proposed by Guest is unlikely, for Gildas would not use a Saxon name for the place of victory, and the same objection applies to Badbury Hill (NGR SU 2694) in the former north-west of Berkshire and Badbury (NGR SU 1980) in north Wiltshire, as also Bedwyn in Wiltshire, and Baydon, Beedon, Bowden, and Bown Hill elsewhere in southern England. The “result of all this remains, once more, inconclusive” (Chambers 197-201).

John Lloyd-Jones (1885-1956), listing *Baddon* in his glossary of early Welsh, gave its location as unknown, even if the Welsh came to think of it as Bath (Lloyd-Jones 49). The Chadwicks, taking Badon in chapter fifty-six of *Historia Brittonum* as the conflict mentioned by Gildas (who says nothing of Arthur), noted that it differs from *Annales Cambriae* in saying nothing of Arthur’s carrying the Cross of Jesus Christ, so that the two will have different sources. The Latin of *Historia Brittonum* doubtless reproduces a vernacular poem cataloguing battles. The source of the latter, as with Camlan in 537, is “unknown” (Chadwick and Chadwick 149, 154-5). Myres, who gave much attention to the conflict, including an appendix on Gildas and its date (with the comment that Bede used a text of *De Excidio* “three hundred years nearer to Gildas’s *ipsissima verba* than any we now possess,” a point worth notice), stated loftily, “We shall never know where Mons Badonicus was, nor who besieged whom at the famous siege” (Collingwood and Myres 379). If there is cogency in this paper, of course, his “We shall never know” will be turned upside-down.

Badbury in Wiltshire is recorded by the English Place-Name Society from a record of 955 as *Baddeburgi* “stronghold of Badda,” a known Old English personal name (Gover, Mawer, and Stenton 281, 418). A textbook, citing “the latest and rather ingenious explanation of the Arthurian legend,” quotes Collingwood on Arthur as cavalry leader and “the last of the Romans: the last to understand Roman ideas and use them for the good of the British people.” Yet the site of Badon is “not yet identified.” All we know is that it gave the Britons “an interval of peace for half a century” (A. H. Williams 73). Henry Lewis (1889-1968), editing a medieval Welsh translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth, observed drily on *obsessio Badonici montis* that “despite much debate it has not yet been determined where this hill was. But there was no doubt in the mind of Geoffrey,” who put it firmly at Bath (Lewis 269).

Despite early confidence in Badon as Bath or Badbury Rings, then, most scholars had by the 1940s come to regard its situation as unknown or even unknowable. This changed thanks to papers by Kenneth Jackson (1909-1991), whose prestige and penetrating intellect gave conviction to a case which on philological grounds alone did not deserve it. The process began in 1945 in discussion of Gildas’s *obsessio Badonici montis* and of *bellum in Monte Badonis* (with Arthur’s eleven other conflicts) in *Historia Brittonum* (Jackson, “Arthur’s Battles”). His comments were influential. Melville Richards (1910-73) repeated Jackson’s view that “for historical reasons, the battle of *mons Badonis* is probably to be looked for somewhere in central southern England” (Richards 46). Jackson summarized these historical reasons elsewhere, stating that the “site of the battle is unknown, though Badbury Hill above the Vale of White Horse and Badbury near Swindon are possible candidates. In any case the enemy was evidently the Saxon settlers of the South-East.” If they were not from Kent, they may have been from the Upper Thames Valley, with “the great wall of Wansdyke”, certainly of the fifth or sixth century, being thrown up by the Britons of Wiltshire against them (Jackson, *Language*, 199, 202, 222). Because the battlefield is below placed a mere eight miles from the Wiltshire Badbury, Jackson’s discussion of Saxon versus Briton in the years about 500 will retain its importance (Jackson, “Site of Mount Badon”).

Because Jackson was not known for rash statements, his support for the Wiltshire Badbury encouraged others. In a popular history, Badbury Rings in Dorset is described as too far west for a

major attack by West Saxons in about 500. What is known of Kent and other English kingdoms will hence “transfer the focus of our attention to the Liddington Badon,” close to the “enormous defensive line called the Wansdyke,” of which the “impressive ditch and rampart run fifty miles from Inkpen [in Berkshire] through Savernake Forest, along the Marlborough Downs, past Bath and Stantonbury and thence brokenly to the Bristol Channel.” As for the Iron Age fort of Liddington Castle (NGR SU 2079), nine hundred feet up and visible from miles around, this would be “exactly the spot for Arthur to await the invaders with his main mobile force” (Ashe, *King Arthur’s Avalon*, 77-8).

Jackson returned to the theme in another influential study. He believed that dating of Mount Badon after Gildas to about 500 “suits remarkably the known history of southern England,” where Anglo-Saxon penetration halted then for fifty years or so, once the English had reached the borders of Salisbury Plain. Only his footnote on the English personal name “Badda” of Badbury near Swindon, Badbury Hill near Faringdon, and Badbury Rings has a flaw, and that a grave one. He maintained that “Badda” here reflects original British *Badon*, ignoring the fact that no such Celtic form is known. He went on to dismiss the more than “imaginative” argument of Collingwood for Arthur as “high sub-Roman officer,” as also the case for Arthur’s battles as in what is now southern Scotland, because no amount of ingenuity could make Badon “anything but a battle against the Saxons or Jutes in southern England,” so that “there is definite reason to think his greatest victory was in Wessex” (Jackson, “Arthur”, 2, 8-11). The purpose of this paper is to support Jackson’s confidence in a Wessex locale. It vindicates the soundness of his historical (not linguistic) judgement.

Arthur’s battles were given exhaustive treatment by Count Tolstoy, who was “convinced that our older historians were right in placing this battle at Bath in Somerset,” partly because the Welsh thought so later, partly because he regards “Bath” as from (unattested) British *Badon*. What that might mean he does not explain. Nor does he answer the obvious objection that Bath was so called by the Saxons, not from an obscure Celtic form, but because it had baths, being a famous spa. Unlike other scholars, however, he grapples with the difficult problem of the entry for 665 in *Annales Cambriae*, referring tersely to the “Second Battle of Badon.” This has been perplexing. He quotes Jackson on how it is hardly the engagement of *Biedanbeafod* mentioned by the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for 675 (which did not involve the Welsh and where the dates do not fit) and H. M. Chadwick for the (supposed) implication that Badon was in British territory even by the late seventh century. More relevant is Jackson’s inference that this second battle was on the site of the first. Tolstoy (rightly) rejects Jackson’s view that it was Badbury Rings, Dorset. He would see it as a hill south of Bath, with the Britons of north Somerset repelling a Mercian attack (Tolstoy 143-9). Yet this is hard to reconcile with what is said by Jackson and others on the West Saxon victories of 652 at Bradford on Avon (near Bath) and 658 at Penselwood, in west Wiltshire, when the English drove the Britons in flight to the River Parrett of mid-Somerset, so that the “whole of Somerset up to the Parrett and perhaps the Blackdown Hills and the Vale of Taunton” fell into English hands. In 682 the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle speaks of Britons routed to the sea, implying conquest of the rest of Somerset and even parts of Devon. If the case for the first Badon as at Bath is weak, that of the second is weaker. There was no rousing victory of Britons in 664, to be noted by the Welsh. What that action really was is suggested below. Nevertheless, despite these criticisms, Tolstoy’s paper repays study as a full, original, and genuinely learned piece of research.

Hunter Blair observed on the siege of Mons Badonicus that nothing would further “understanding of the Anglo-Saxon invasions than exact knowledge about the site, date, and consequences of this British victory. But on all three of these points we remain in doubt,” although his preferred location for the first was Badbury Rings, Dorset (Hunter Blair, *Roman Britain*, 176-7). At this point may be mentioned an archaeological-historical map. It charts Roman roads, Anglo-

Saxon burials, the massive earthworks of Wansdyke, and battlefields other than the one discussed here. Amongst the last are three on or near the Winchester-Cirencester road, from south to north being Bedwyn in 675, Beranburh in 556, and Ellandun (south of Swindon) in 825. Also marked is Ashdown, the edge of the Marlborough Downs east of Swindon, which gave access to armies not by a Roman road but by the ancient Icknield Way or Berkshire Ridgeway, running not north-south but east-west (Anonymous). The map aids us in the quest for Badon. Since, unlike many of the books and journals cited in this paper, it may not be readily available to readers, perhaps one may say a little more of it. Although the purpose of this paper is textual and historical, not archaeological, even a non-archaeologist will appreciate the clustering of early Anglo-Saxon graves around Winchester and Salisbury (especially to the north of the latter), as well as in the Upper Thames valley, in comparison with their absence from Somerset or Gloucestershire. The impression is of populations of the English massing in the fifth and sixth centuries on the edge of Celtic Britain's heartland. It needs little imagination to see how Cirencester, which had been Roman Britain's second city and thereafter Celtic Britain's first city, became dangerously exposed. The Roman roads which had given security to the island now enabled English settlers to raid and conquer.

After cartography, a return to texts, where an archaeologist speaks cautiously of Badon as "an unidentified site perhaps in the south-west" (Frere 382-3). In a collection of essays is the view on how "Liddington Castle, with its adjacent Badbury, is a modern theory which may be plausible but lacks any traditional background. Some prefer Badbury Rings in Dorset" (Ashe, "Extending the Map", 150-1). Another contented himself with the adjective "unidentified" (Kirby 15). In the first of various comments, John Morris of London refrained from locating Badon, but stressed its importance in bringing peace to the early sixth century (Morris, "The Evidence," 59). Bishop Hanson assigned Badon as perhaps to "the Iron Age hill-fort called Badbury Rings, near Wimborne in Dorset" (Hanson 19). Editors of Bede give the engagement's whereabouts as "uncertain" (Colgrave and Mynors 54 n. 1).

Copious discussion of Badon was offered by the archaeologist Leslie Alcock. Amongst his claims are these: first, that Gildas saw it as between Britons and Saxons; second, that no Pict was involved; third, that the later action at Badon, dated not to 665 but probably 667, would probably be in the same place and between the same combatants. Unfortunately, nothing corresponds here in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle or Bede. Therefore, because the English cannot have thought the conflict serious, "we have no real hope of using the second Badon to help us locate the first." Warfare at this date having a "very fluid nature", even the bounds of Wessex provide no answer. Here the notion, supported in 1959 by Jackson, that English Badbury represents an unattested Brittonic "fort of Badon" is also criticized. There is no evidence to suggest that the Anglo-Saxons had a war-god called Badda with a penchant for living in hill-forts. Second, the "d" of Gildas's *Badon* would give modern English "Bathon", with the "th" of *this*, and not "Baddan". Alcock thus preferred to take the spot as Bath or a hill above Bath, where the Saxons "assimilated its [unknown] British name to their own word for 'baths' because of the remains of hot baths." Although Alcock was unworried by the singular coincidence of baths at Bath, he did not think that the conflict involved a hill-fort, even the one on Bathampton Down. He took this notion as "introduced into the discussion to strengthen the identification with *Baddanbyrig*, where the fort element is certain" (Alcock, *Arthur's Britain*, 68-71).

Simon Evans (1921-98) of Lampeter discussed Ambrosius Aurelianus, a romanized Briton of good family and linked with the area "around Gloucester." Under his leadership the Britons for a while stemmed the advance of the English invader in the 470s or thereabouts, which was followed in the early sixth century by the British triumph at "Mount Baddon." (Evans here used Welsh spelling, with short "a" and "dd" representing the "th" of English *this*.) Its site is "impossible to determine with certainty." The likeliest place is Badbury in north-east Wiltshire, although Jackson

“with some enthusiasm” followed Edwin Guest for Badbury Rings, while admitting that this was far from Saxon territory in about 500. The hero of the day may have been Arthur (Evans, “Our Early Welsh Saints,” 27-8).

Sir Frank Stenton, as one might expect, was here perceptive. Although Mons Badonicus was won by the Britons “at a place, not now to be identified,” it gave them a respite for forty years and more; while Gildas’s failure to mention Arthur by name “may suggest that the Arthur of history was a less imposing figure than the Arthur of legend. But it should not be allowed to remove him from the sphere of history, for Gildas was curiously reluctant to introduce personal names into his writing.” A “king who had sinned in moderation had no interest” for him. Hence, perhaps, his attacks on Maelgwn of Gwynedd and his fellow-tyrants, but silence on other rulers (Stenton 2-4).

Leslie Alcock, in much-publicized excavations at South Cadbury (near the small town of Castle Cary, Somerset), seen as perhaps Arthur’s headquarters, again considered Badon as Bath to be “very probable”, and not Badbury Rings in Dorset or Badbury, Wiltshire. There is at least agreement on its being a conflict with “the Anglo-Saxons in southern England”, where archaeology proves their “vigorous settlement in the Upper Thames valley from the 450s.” As for its date, the nineteen-year-frame (the lunar cycle) of early Easter Tables may place it in 499 and not the 518 of *Annales Cambriae*, so that Gildas on this basis would be writing in 542 (Alcock, “By South Cadbury”, 194, 216).

With John Morris comes a return to imaginative reconstruction and cocksure identification equalling those of Geoffrey of Monmouth in the twelfth century. Amongst them are these. “Badon was in the West Country; one direct statement, and several early English spellings, identify Bath with Badon.” Advancing with unwarranted confidence, he declared that an English army which “could penetrate so far to the west must have been exceptionally large, the joint force of a number of kingdoms.” There will have been cavalry as well as infantry, so that he selected as the favoured place of the siege the one hill near Bath which is “sharply escarped on all sides, small enough to be defended with ease by a body of dismounted cavalry, Solsbury Hill by Batheaston. Though there are endless possibilities, this site fits best both Gildas’ choice of words and the nature of the campaign” (Morris, *The Age of Arthur*, 112-14).

Hunter Blair, despite accepting Badon as historical, regarded none of the many conjectures on the place of the siege as “well-founded” and so refused to guess, even if the “second Battle of Badon” might offer a clue (Hunter Blair, *Introduction*, 30). Dorothy Whitelock similarly named no names, but did cite Jackson’s paper of 1953-8. She followed Molly Miller for a dating of 502 x 506 or 512 x 516 (Whitelock 647). Another cites Alcock for its location at Bath or elsewhere (Stephen Johnson, 187). Peter Salway, also citing Molly Miller, used the conflict to mark closure for Roman Britain. Changes brought about by it mean that a date “around 500 is a point at which we can end the narrative part of this book” (Salway 485, 501).

Writing on Morris’s “mighty and rumbustious” *Age of Arthur*, Charles Thomas (b. 1928) urged doubt. He echoed David Dumville in insisting that, while Ambrosius Aurelianus is historical, Arthur is not. Nevertheless, there is agreement on Gildas’s writing in about 535 and publishing before about 550, so that Badon would have inaugurated a long peace in 495 x 500 or so. As an archaeologist, Thomas has an awareness of place relevant for arguments below on where this engagement (which he abstained from locating) was. He thus observed that Gildas’s account of south Britain may indicate Cirencester as an ecclesiastical centre; the court of the *superbus tyrannus* and his circle would be no farther north than Wroxeter (on the River Severn below Shrewsbury); the Aureliani would govern Gloucester (a *colonia*) and the lower Severn; and “Gildas’ contemporary Aurelius Caninus is most at home if located between the Severn and the Mersey” and perhaps in the Gloucester-Cirencester-Bath region captured by the Saxons in 577 (Thomas 245-9, 251-2). These places in the south-west Midlands may be kept in mind.

James Campbell (b. 1935) refers to battles of Celt and Saxon which culminated at Mount Badon, with the “security thus gained” lasting until Gildas’s day, and on the *Annales Cambriae* entry for 516, with Arthur “carrying the Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ for three days and nights on his shoulders,” on which (he remarks crisply) “the imagination of the learned and unlearned has run riot.” Arthur has been seen variously as Britain’s last emperor, or “commander of a field army for such an emperor or for a federation of British rulers.” The “inexhaustible, if rather ridiculous, interest in trying to work out who the ‘real’ Arthur was” is at least a reminder of how many great men and events in the fifth and sixth centuries are now unknown (Campbell 23, 27). As for Morris himself, a posthumous volume shows him unrepentant to the last, with his bold reference to how the men of Kent, Sussex, and Winchester “led their armies deep into the British Cotswolds, to besiege Arthur on Badon Hill, near Bath. They were decisively defeated, and the war ended in a British victory” (Morris, *Londinium*, 338). In contrast is Professor Sims-Williams of Aberystwyth, who merely implies a British victory somewhere in southern England (Sims-Williams 25-6).

A study edited by Lapidge and Dumville enables advances in understanding Gildas and Badon, even though the location of both is never pinned down. Michael Lapidge (b. 1942) shows in detail that Gildas’s style is “highly polished and sophisticated and implies an audience” of “similar sophistication.” It reveals his education as secular, not monastic. Since there is no reason to think that Gildas received it abroad, the startling conclusion is reached that, in the early sixth century, not only did traditional Roman schools of law and rhetoric survive in Celtic Britain, training their products for a career in public life and administration as in the palmiest days of Cicero, but the structures of Romanization must have remain intact for such an education to be of value. Unfortunately, Professor Lapidge wastes his considerable energy in worrying a red herring, namely the comment by Gildas’s Breton hagiographer that he studied in *Iren*. Taking this (quite illogically) to mean “Ireland,” Lapidge is categorical in then showing that this cannot be so, for Ireland had no schools of Latin retoric (Lapidge, 33, 50). The significance of *Iren*, place of learning, as regards Badon, place of war, will be explained later.

Wallace-Hadrill stated that the site of Badon remained unidentified. E. T. Leeds in 1933 was convinced of its being Bath, H. P. R. Finberg seemed to agree, but Bath is unlikely “on linguistic grounds.” It could have been Badbury Hill near Faringdon, Berkshire/Oxfordshire, or Badbury near Swindon, Wiltshire. “It depends in part on the direction from which one supposes the English advanced.” Stenton “makes no guess” (Wallace-Hadrill 25-6, 215-16). Here it may be said that Bath is not “unlikely” on linguistic grounds but impossible, as Jackson would have been quick to point out. Dr Oliver Padel (b. 1948) makes a point on Gildas’s account of the conflict. The oldest complete text of *De Excidio* is in London, British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius A.vi, of the tenth century and from St Augustine’s, Canterbury. Other complete copies are of the twelfth century or later. The Cotton text was damaged by the fire of 1731, but shows no paragraph break in what Gildas says of Ambrosius Aurelianus and then Badon, even though many take them as in separate paragraphs. The implication is, if the whole passage is read as one, that “Mount Badon reads naturally as the victory which crowned the career of Ambrosius Aurelianus himself.” He regards this interpretation as weakening any link with Arthur (Padel, “The Nature”, 16-19), whose later fame gave him laurels robbed from Ambrosius Aurelianus. It will be seen that arguments below for Badon’s true site strengthen the case for it as a battle of Ambrosius Aurelianus (who could not have had Arthur under his command).

Clare Stancliffe summarizes David Dumville’s research on *Annales Cambriae* as kept regularly from the 790s at St Davids in Wales and thereafter, at some date between then and 954, being extended backwards to the fifth century, the earlier entries being from Irish annals, but from 573 onwards including others from North Britain (Stancliffe 84). Unfortunately this casts no light on Badon in 516 or Camlan in 537. Their source is unknown. It was not Irish. Gildas’s words on how,

since the triumph of Ambrosius Aurelianus against the Saxons, “sometimes our countrymen proved victorious, sometimes the enemy” until “the year that saw the siege of Mount Badon, pretty well the last but not the least slaughter inflicted on the villains” are reproduced in a useful handbook (Ireland 168). David Dumville (b. 1949) has produced an accurate edition of *Annales Cambriae*, although sources for its earliest entries, including those on Badon and Camlan, remain problematic (Dumville ix-x).

Professor Higham of Manchester provides an essential guide to recent Arthurian scholarship, in which he quotes Jackson on Badon as a historical event of around 500, fought in the south, perhaps at Badbury Hill in Berkshire/Oxfordshire or Badbury, Wiltshire. Despite this, its attribution to Arthur is improbable (Higham, *King Arthur*, 24, 150). In a work of popular scholarship, Badon Hill is described as at “an unknown location in southern Britain” and hardly anything to do with Arthur, a “northern leader” (Murdoch 41). John Koch provides a map for post-Roman Britain, but it is less useful than the Ordnance Survey one of 1966, because it excludes Anglo-Saxon evidence (Koch 100-1). Karen George, who takes T. D. O’Sullivan’s 1978 book on Gildas more seriously than does Professor Dumville, comments on the date of our battle but not where it was (George 3-4). Nor does Professor Aurell of Poitiers (Aurell 88).

Recent discussion adds little to our knowledge. Professor Higham stresses Scriptural origins for Arthur’s role at Badon (Higham, “The Chroniclers,” 14-17). Dr Padel, in a repaginated reprint of a study of 2000, speaks of it as “probably in southern England” and by implication a victory of Ambrosius Aurelianus (Padel, *Arthur*, 3-4). Professor Charles-Edwards paraphrases Gildas and puts the conflict as perhaps in the 480s or 490s (Charles-Edwards, 56, 217). Professor Halsall of York, in a best-selling book perhaps better passed over in silence, declares of Badon and all but one or two of Arthur’s engagements, “THE LOCATIONS OF ALL OF THESE BATTLES ARE UNKNOWN AND UNKNOWABLE” (Halsall 67), which merely repeats (if less elegantly) Myers’s “We shall never know where Mons Badonicus was, nor who besieged whom at the famous siege” of 1937. In research of the early 1990s published only now, the independent scholar Flint Johnson at one point mentions Badon at Bath (Johnson, F. F., *Evidence*, 77), south of the Bristol Channel, but prefers “west and south-west of the Wye river”, which is north of the Bristol Channel (Johnson, F. F., *Hengest*, 95).

So this first part concludes inconclusively. Geoffrey of Monmouth in the twelfth century plumped for Bath, and was followed by Camden in the sixteenth; Guest in the nineteenth proposed Badbury Rings, Dorset; Jackson in the 1940s and 1950s lent his prestige to Badbury near Swindon, Wiltshire; but in recent decades scholars have abandoned all of these, with Dr Padel speaking of Badon merely as in “probably in southern England.” Yet the second and final part of this paper proposes a new location for the siege, only a few miles from Badbury and Badbury Hill, respectively south and east of Swindon.

The argument is this. Nobody, not even Kenneth Jackson, has ever provided a derivation for *Badonicus*, despite agreement that it must be Celtic. This failure to find an etymology is suspicious. Might the form therefore be corrupt, as place-names (especially those in minority languages) often are in manuscript texts? Once the possibility is allowed, two possible solutions emerge. The first would be emendation to *Bladonicus*, referring to Bladon in Oxfordshire, famous as the burial-place of Sir Winston Churchill. Bladon is now a village, but its name originally denoted the River Evenlode, flowing thirty-five miles from Gloucestershire to join the Thames near Oxford (Mills, 39). The River Bladon/Evenlode is crossed by two Roman roads which go to Cirencester, so that a hill about it would a suitable place for the British route of an Anglo-Saxon attack on the city. Nevertheless, this option must be rejected, if only because there are no hill-forts near the places where those roads cross it.

Preferable, therefore, is a second solution, that of Braydon, six miles west-north-west of

Swindon, Wiltshire. Braydon, a region of poorly-drained lowland, did not attract early or medieval settlers. In the thirteenth century it was a royal forest (Poole 28). To this day it has much woodland. Richard Coates has related the form to Welsh *brad* “treachery,” and this is surely correct (Coates and Breeze, 339). *Brad* is a known Welsh place-name element, applied to rivers which were dangerous to cross, but in the case of Braydon (an ancient forest without swift rivers) perhaps because, situated near important Roman roads, it was a den of thieves (Breeze 313-14). The notion that it is “unexplained” can hence be dismissed (Watts 76). What matters for our purposes is that Braydon Forest, lying west of the Roman road from Winchester to Cirencester, has a stronghold overlooking it. This is Ringsbury Camp (at NGR SU 0786, and misnamed “Kingsbury” on old maps), a bivallate Iron Age hill-fort just outside the village of Purton, itself with Roman and Anglo-Saxon remains (Pevsner, 376). Ringsbury, positioned 450 feet up on a spur with extensive views of the plain beneath, is more likely to be Gildas’s *Mons Badonicus* than the hill-fort of Bury Camp (NGR SU 0590) three miles north-west, which is on a modest rise. As for emendation of his *Badonicus* to *Bradonicus* (with Vulgar Latin voicing of original *Bratonicus*?), it is not difficult to find medieval scribes who omit letters in Celtic place-names, as with the Ravenna Cosmography’s “Caleba Arbatium” for *Calleva Atrebatum* “grove of the Atrebates” or Silchester, Hampshire (Rivet and Smith 204). Enthusiasts should, however, be warned against the name of Battle Lake near Braydon Manor. The English Place-Name Society’s Wiltshire volume instead relates it to medieval estates of Battle Abbey, Sussex.

Not only does emendation of Gildas’s *Badonicus* to *Bradonicus* (from earlier *Bratonicus*) offer an etymology for this place, but it also coincides with the mysterious second battle in *Annales Cambriae* for 665. It is claimed that nothing in other Welsh or English sources explains this. Yet the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for 661 relates how *gebergeade Wulfhere Pending of æscesdune* “Wulfhere, Penda’s offspring, raided as far as Ashdown” and then attacked the Isle of Wight, giving its people to the king of the South Saxons. Wulfhere, Mercia’s warrior-king, came to dominate all southern England (Venning 70-1). The entry for 665, on his crushing of West Saxons, will allude to the British victory of about 500, when the West Saxons were previously crushed in the same region. It suggests that in the seventh century, when the annal was written, the Britons still knew where the Anglo-Saxon invader had been vanquished, even if by then or later the corrupt reading “Badon” had replaced original *Bradon* or *Braton*. If it is objected that an English battle would not interest a Welsh chronicler, it may be said in reply that the Welsh were well aware of the consequences for them of Anglo-Saxon battles and deaths of English kings, which appear regularly in their annals.

If, then, Gildas’s Mount Badon is rightly taken as the hill-fort of Ringsbury, three miles west-north-west of Swindon, it supplies an answer in part to Hunter Blair’s remark in 1963, on how nothing more than “exact knowledge about the site, date, and consequences of this British victory” would forward our understanding of the Anglo-Saxon invasions. There seem to be six ways in which this new light pierces the darkness of that period. First, archaeological investigation of Ringsbury might establish whether it was the site in about 500 of a decisive siege, and who was besieging whom. It has a better claim to be associated with the events of those years than Cadbury Castle in Somerset, object of media attention in the 1960s. Second, it tends to strengthen the case for a victory there of Ambrosius Aurelianus or his family. Gildas implied that their links were with the Gloucester region. Braydon would lie on their southern frontier. Third, it may imply that Wansdyke, if of the fifth century (and not sixth, as may be the case), was not a British defence against Saxons, but a Saxon defence against Britons. Fourth, it adds to evidence for Gildas as trained at Cirencester, still a city of wealth and education (if his style is a guide), and the obvious target for a West Saxon attack in about 500 (it eventually succumbed in 577). Fifth, “Mount Bradon” may be added to corrections of Bede’s text, like *Deguistan* “Dewi’s Stone” for “Degsastan”, the great victory of 603 of the Northumbrians over a Scottish host from the Argyll region.

Sixth, the hill-fort of Ringsbury overlooking Braydon Forest should *not* become a pilgrimage place for Arthurians. It can have no historical link whatever with Arthur. There are two reasons for this. Sources cited above show Badon as quite unknown in British vernacular tradition until it was contaminated by Geoffrey of Monmouth's inventions in the twelfth century, when the Welsh began thinking of it as an Arthurian victory outside Bath. Second, of Arthur's eight other battlefields listed in *Historia Brittonum*, seven can be located in southern Scotland, plus one on the River Glen in north Northumberland. To these can be added Camlan in the Welsh annals, which is now located at *Camboglanna* or the fort of Castlesteads on Hadrian's Wall, near Carlisle. Together, these show Arthur as a North Briton (and perhaps Strathclyder) active in the 530s, who fought the men of Rheged and Gododdin, but not the English. His campaigns were all waged north of the Wall of Hadrian. Future generations may hence regard an Iron Age camp near Swindon as the historical Mount Badon (or Mount Braydon), where the Britons in the late fifth century won a great victory over the Anglo-Saxons, for two generations halting their advance west. But they should know that that triumph has no historical connection with Arthur, who was surely a North British hero of the early sixth century.

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