

Tintagel: In the footsteps of Rudolf Steiner

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On his final visit to Britain, Rudolf Steiner's schedule of lecturing was hectic. He delivered three lectures a day during the Anthroposophical Society's Summer School at Torquay (11-22 August 1924) - but that is another story.

Steiner took one day out of that busy schedule to be a tourist for a day. The decision took him as far west as he ever ventured in his lifetime - to the west coast of Cornwall.

Tintagel is the legendary home of King Arthur, Merlin, the sword Excalibur, the Lady of the Lake, the Knights of the Round Table, Sir Lancelot, Queen Guinevere, and the court of Camelot. Ashley (2010) dates the Arthurian period as between 400-600 AD but there is no extant documentation to distinguish between myth, legend, and veridical history.

Midway through the Torquay Summer School, on Sunday August 17th, Rudolf Steiner declared "I want to go to King Arthur" (Eleanor Merry, 1956, in Villeneuve, 2004, p.1051). A cavalcade of three cars ventured forth from the southern beachside resort town of Torquay, across the verdant moors of Dartmoor, to the spectacularly positioned Tintagel, on the west coast of Cornwall. The journey took them through the centre of Dartmoor to Tavistock, then across to Boscastle, and down to Tintagel (B, C & D in Figure 1). Although Villeneuve (2004, p.1052) states that it was a "50-mile journey", it is today a drive of 69 miles and of two and a quarter hours.

Eleanor Merry and D.N. Dunlop were the two organisers of the Torquay Summer School (Steiner, 1924b). Both were part of the entourage to Tintagel. Merry reports that: "At last we came again to the sea, and straight ahead of us, at the top of a green cliff, were the last fragments of King Arthur's castle of Tintagel. A deep rocky chasm divided this from a second rugged cliff, where still other remains could be seen" (quoted in Villeneuve, 2004, p.1052) (Plate 1).

Merry continues: "Dr. Steiner was at first silently absorbed in the wonderful view. All around was sunshine, and fleeting cloud-shadows and little hurrying rainbows - and a stormy and angry sea" (in Villeneuve, 2004, p.1052).



Figure 1. Map of Rudolf Steiner's round trip from Torquay to Tintagel (maps.google.co.uk).

In a poem, Steiner related what he experienced at Tintagel as “eloquent castle ruins ... strength to mould the soul comes storming from the sea ... Striking the soul in force” (in Villeneuve, 2004, p. 1055) (Plate 2).

Daniel Dunlop recollected: “My impression of him ... near the site of King Arthur’s Castle at Tintagel ... was that his consciousness was fully awake in the spiritual and physical worlds at the same time ... As we descended the cliff, we went into what is traditionally called Merlin’s Cave. Inside it was a wonderful natural structure” (in Villeneuve, 2004, pp.1054-5) (Plate 1).

Plate 1: Tintagel Castle ruins with Merlin’s Cave visible below.



The entourage to Tintagel included Marna Pease who later became the first secretary of the Anthroposophical Agricultural Foundation of Great Britain which was founded in 1928 (Paull, 2011b).

The entourage included at least two of the 111 attendees of Steiner's Agriculture Course at Kobierzyce (then Koberwitz), namely Dr Elisabeth Vreede and Guenther Wachsmuth (Paull, 2011a). That course (7-16 June, 1924) laid the foundations for the development of biodynamic agriculture.



Plate 2: Tintagel Castle entrance ruins.

Wachsmuth remembered: "On that unforgettable day Rudolf Steiner went with us to the place on the rough rocky western coast of Cornwall, Tintagel, where the castle of King Arthur had once stood ... That strangely densified spiritual atmosphere we shall never forget, so intensely to be felt as Rudolf Steiner climbed the strange projecting cliff on the lonely coast of Cornwall where the last walls of the castle of King Arthur towered over the roaring sea ... He spoke there, standing on the cliff, about the experience of the Knights of King Arthur ... He spoke of the teachings of Merlin ... The immediacy of the spiritual vision in this place was so intense that, during his descriptions, the entire reality, the external life and action ... of King Arthur's knights, stood before us as actual experience" (Wachsmuth, 1989, pp.563-4).

Mabel Cotterell relates that "Afterwards we all rested in the big hall of the castle hotel with its round table inscribed with the names of the knights" (in Villeneuve, 2004, p. 1055). The nearby hotel is now called 'Camelot' (Plate 3). It is situated spectacularly on the cliff-front of the promontory adjacent to the Tintagel Castle ruins. Villeneuve (p.1055) describes the hotel as "the monstrous Victorian pile of King Arthur's Castle Hotel, located in the dominant position on the neighbouring Fire Beacon Cliff". Albert Steffen, then editor of the periodical *Anthroposophical Movement* (Steiner, 1924a), reports Steiner's comment that "The only disturbance is from this hideous hotel, in which there even stands the ape of Arthur's Table" (in Villeneuve, 2004, p. 1055) (Plate 4).

The party's return journey bypassed Dartmoor entirely and took a route via Wadebridge, Liskeard, and Plymouth (E, F & G in Figure 1).

Plate 3: Camelot Hotel at Tintagel.



The Tintagel visit occurred just two months after Steiner's Agriculture Course and less than six weeks before Rudolf Steiner retreated from public life entirely. On this, his tenth visit to Britain, Steiner taught of Anthroposophy and Waldorf education. An opportunity for agriculture lectures in

Britain did not arise, and there had been no Anglo attendees at the Koberwitz course. We can speculate that the attendance of Wachsmuth and Vreede, who had attended at Koberwitz - as well as Tintagel, in this case along with Marna Pease - may have seeded the early interest in Britain in Anthroposophic agriculture and which evolved into biodynamics agriculture.

Marna Pease went on to be the secretary of Britain's Anthroposophical Agricultural Foundation which was founded in 1928 (Paull, 2011b). Elizabeth Vreede attended, in London, as a guest at the first Annual Meeting of the Anthroposophical Agricultural Foundation (AAF, 1929). Pease subsequently translated several farming texts: *Nine Lectures on Bees* (Steiner, 1933), and *The Moon and the Growth of Plants* (Kolisko, 1936); and she authored the pamphlet *A New Farming and Gardening: For Enquirers* (1937).

Despite the intensity with which Rudolf Steiner engaged with his missions, including the Torquay Summer School, he was, by this time terminally ill from being poisoned eight months earlier (Whitehead, 2010). Wachsmuth described this final visit to Britain: "During ... the last trip of Rudolf Steiner in his life on earth, he suffered tragically from the destructive illness. Outwardly, nothing of this could be observed. He



Plate 4: Knight's table at the Camelot Hotel.

met daily all the requirements of the comprehensive program and his lecturing activity. He spoke introductory words at artistic programs, had numerous conferences, and took part in the excursions, but every meal caused in his ill condition renewed suffering, which he bore courageously without a word of complaint ... He permitted nothing to be known by those at the conference regarding his illness” (Wachsmuth, 1989, p.563).

Just a month after this tenth visit to Britain, Rudolf Steiner retreated entirely from public life (on 28 September, 1924), and he died on 30 March 1925 (Collison, 1925).

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