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LEGENDARY KINGS OF BRITAIN



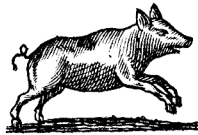
Britain does not pay much attention to its mythological origins or legendary kings. The main source of our knowledge is the writings of Geoffrey of Monmouth, in particular his *History of the Kings of Britain*, which first appeared around AD 1136. Monmouth loved a good story more than he cared for historical accuracy, and as a consequence reputable English historians tend to dismiss the stories and pass them over to their literary colleagues. But these are our foundation myths and should be treasured, just as we treasure stories of Romulus and Remus, and Odysseus and Achilles.

BRUTUS

Reigned *c.* 1160–1137 BC

Brutus, according to legend, was the first king of Britain and gave his name to the island (Brutus was his Latinized name; contemporaries would have known him as Brut or Brit). He was a Trojan descended from Aeneas, who survived the sack of Troy and whose descendant Romulus founded Rome.

Brutus led a group of Trojans to Britain where they wiped out the native inhabitants, a race of giants. The last giant standing was Gogmagog, who met his end in a wrestling match with the warrior Corineus, one of Brutus's companions. Corineus went on to be the first Duke of Cornwall, while Brutus set up his capital, Troia Nova (New Troy), on the banks of the Thames, which later became the site of London. It was here that Brutus is said to have been buried twenty-three years after arriving in Britain.

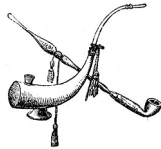


BLADUD

Reigned *c.* 937–917 BC

A couple of hundred years later, the heir to the throne, Prince Bladud, contracted leprosy and was banished from the royal court. Earning a living as a humble pig herd on the banks of the River

Avon, he noticed that his pigs were cured of their skin complaints after rolling around in the mud near some hot springs. Bladud followed suit and was cured of his leprosy. He was welcomed back to court, and in time became king. He founded Bath near the site of his miraculous cure and became a renowned necromancer, experimenting with elemental forces. Determined to conquer the air, he made himself a pair of wings and soared over New Troy (now called Trinovantum) but lost control and crashed down on to the Temple of Apollo and was killed.



LEIR

Reigned c. 917–857 BC

Bladud's son, King Leir, made famous by Shakespeare's dramatized version of his life, ruled for sixty years. In his old age, Leir wanted to divide his kingdom among his three daughters, but decided to test their love. Regan and Goneril flattered the old King and received a share of the kingdom, but his favourite and youngest daughter, Cordelia, would only say that she loved him as a daughter ought to love her father. Furious, Leir forced her into exile. However, he was gradually stripped of his power by Regan and Goneril, and finally he fled to France, where his youngest daughter was now married to the King of the Franks. Cordelia treated him with respect and his honour was restored. Together they won back the kingdom, and Leir regained the throne for the last three years of his life. After his death, Cordelia ruled Britain for five years before being imprisoned by the sons of her sisters. She could not bear the loss of her kingdom and committed suicide in prison.

LUD

Reigned *c.* 73–58 BC

King Lud is said to have been the brother of Cassivellaunus, who led the defence against Julius Caesar's second attempt to invade Britain in 54 BC. Lud rebuilt the city of Trinovantum with magnificent new walls, huge towers and splendid palaces. The city was renamed *Caer Lud* or *Lud Dun* (Lud's Fort) and later became London. It is said the King was buried at Ludgate.

