Background for Monty Python and the Holy Grail

• Canterbury Tales (1387)
  – By Geoffrey Chaucer

• The Legend of King Arthur
  – Mostly by Geoffrey of Monmouth
    • The History of the Kings of Britain (1136)

• Reign of King Arthur
  – c 499 to c 533
  – Battle of Badon (Badr) c. 500 Anglos vs Saxons
The Canterbury Tales

Geoffrey Chaucer (1333-1400)

Canterbury Tales (1387)

– Collection of 24 stories
– Method of stringing together shorter tales to become a full novel
– Pilgrims meet at an inn on the road to Canterbury
– Each tells a tale
– Chaucer is a fellow pilgrim; tells two tales
– Sampler of the times, as pilgrimage runs across class lines, wealth lines, education lines, etc.
– Chaucer also narrates dialog at the inn between the tales
The Tales (1)

- General Prologue
- The Knight's Tale
- The Miller's Tale
- The Reeve's Tale
- The Cook's Tale
- The Man of Law's Tale
- The Wife of Bath's Tale
- The Friar's Tale
- The Summoner's Tale
The Tales (2)

- The Clerk's Tale
- The Merchant's Tale
- The Squire's Tale
- The Franklin's Tale
- The Physician's Tale
- The Pardoner's Tale
- The Shipman's Tale
- The Prioress's Tale
- Sir Thopas' Tale,
- The Tale of Melibee,
- The Monk's Tale,
- The Nun's Priest's Tale
- The Second Nun's Tale,
- The Canon's Yeoman's Tale
- The Manciple's Tale
- The Parson's Tale
Canterbury Tales Motifs

- Canterbury Tales
- Monty Python
Tales of the Grail Seekers
Tales of the Grail Seekers

...who had nearly fought the Dragon of Angnor.

...and who had personally wet himself at the Battle of Badon Hill.
The Arthurian Legend

• Geoffrey of Monmouth (c.1095-c.1155)
  – The History of the Kings of Britain (1136)
  – His sources:
    • Folklore
    • Annales Cambriae (mid-10th century)
    • Historia Brittonum (c.828)
    • Writings of Gildas the Wise (c. 500-c.570)
    • His own imagination
The Arthurian Legend

• **King Arthur** (c.<499-c.533)
  – Son of Uther Pendragon
  – Pen = Chief
  – Dragon = mighty warrior

• Reputed to have battled
  – against the Saxon invasion
    • Battle of Badon (c.500)
  – and to have battled many other worldly creatures

• Reputed to have been mortally wounded while killing Mordred, and died in Avalon

• Wife Gwenhwyfar from Glastonbury
Arthurian Side Stories

• Guinevere and Lancelot
  – Not part of original tale
  – Probably evolved from Tristan and Iseult romance legend (c. 1200)
Arthurian Side Stories

- **Camelot**
  - Probably was the Tintagel Castle at the southwestern tip of Wales.
  - Created when the Romans saw the area as a source of tin.
Arthurian Side Stories

- Camelot/Tintagel Castle
- Alleged birthplace of Arthur Pendragon
Arthurian Side Stories

• Tintagel Castle Today
• Narrow footbridge entrance
  – Possible “Bridge of Death”?  

• North Wall
Arthurian Side Stories: Holy Grail

• **Perceval, the Story of the Grail**
  – (1180s to 1190s)
  
• **Author: Chretien de Troyes**
  (1130-1190s)
  – The quest of knights Perceval and Gawain for the Holy Grail,
    • which might have been a serving dish instead of a goblet
    • Sir Gawain is Arthur’s nephew
  – Perceval was returning from King Arthur’s court when he saw it.

• **Legend of the Fisher King**

  • Perceval comes across the Fisher King
    – fishing in a boat on a river,
    – who invites him to stay at his castle.
  
  • Fisher King is so injured, he can only fish
    – May be derived from Bran the Blessed of Celtic mythology
  
  • Only the grail can heal him, but it must be asked the right question
  
  • Correct question is “Whom does the Grail serve?”