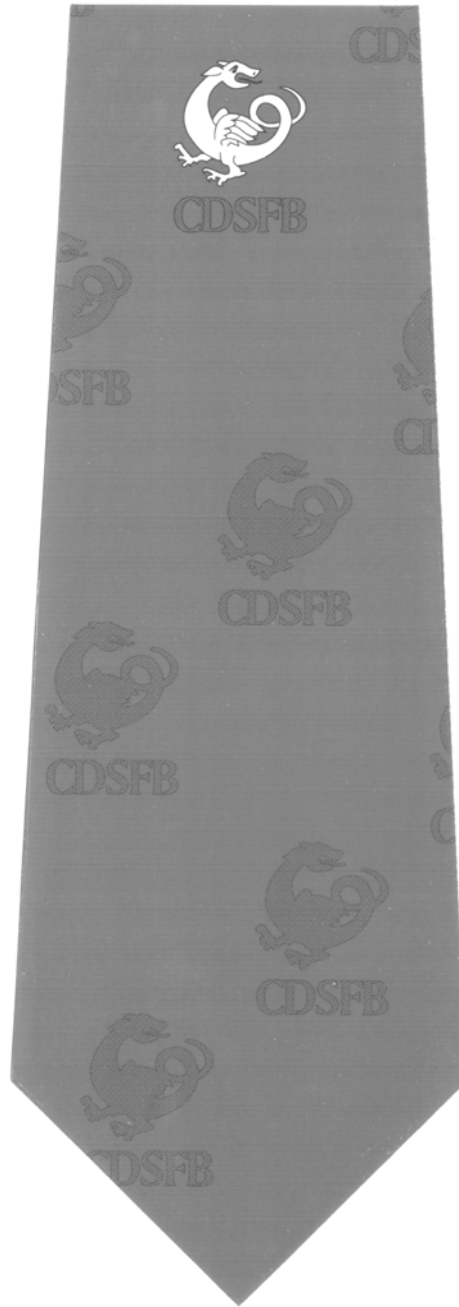


ADVERTISEMENT

It was Gordon Casely who first suggested that we should have a College tie. Sadly, the splendid dragon on our masthead that was drawn by Kevin Arkininstall proved to be too finely detailed for the weavers to manage at the scale required, but a scan through our pages revealed this little fellow that passed the test. It was a good choice, because it shows a true mediaeval dragon (which should please Ben Elliott), and it comes from Hereford, not too far from Clent. We were advised that deep blue is by far the most popular colour for ties, and since blue and gold are my family livery colours, it was not hard to decide that we should have a deep blue tie with the dragon picked out in gold. The outline of the dragon together with the letters CDSFB (*see page 2 if in doubt*) is repeated in shadow form throughout the fabric to vary the texture. David Taylor, the neckwear expert, has been most helpful, and we can now offer the tie to all our members at cost, for £8 each, inland postage included.

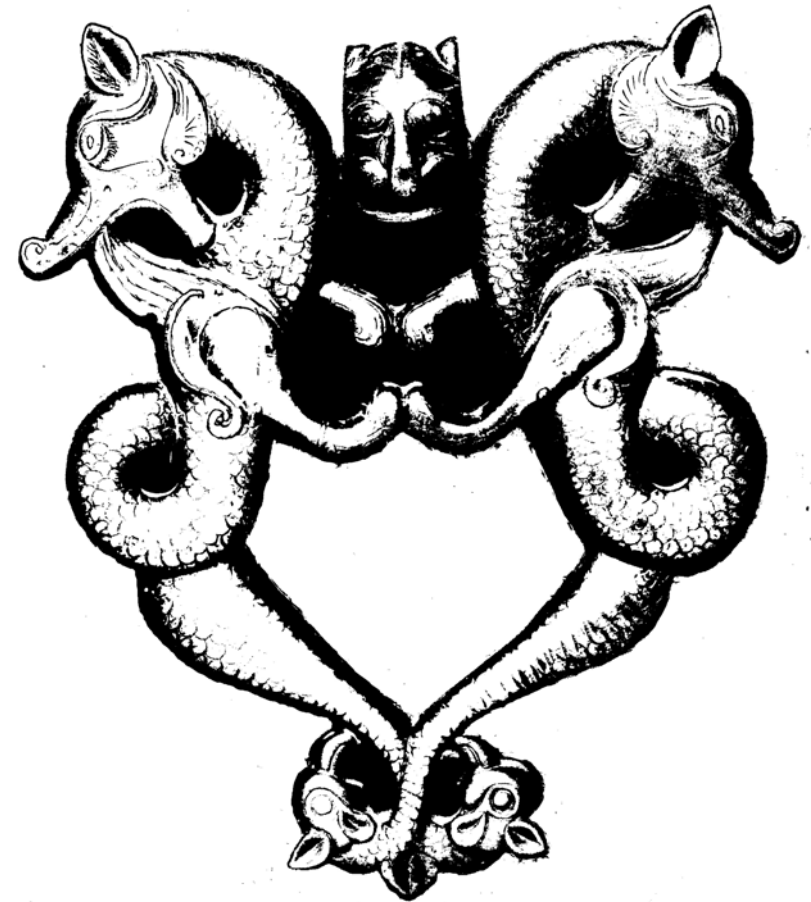


Dragonlore

The Journal of The College of Dracology

Number 58

St Cuthbert's Day 2005



Turkish doorhandle or knocker from the 13th century



The College of Dracology for the Study of Fabulous Beasts

The news is that, through the kindness of Guy Brocklebank, Mark Brocklebank-Smith and Paul Doherty, we now have a website (www.dragonlore.co.uk) which carries all back numbers of this Journal in the form of the master copies from which prints may be obtained, together with some other matters which may be of interest. At the same time, we now have the facility to send and receive e-mails, my address for this purpose being ralph@dragonlore.co.uk We hope that this will be helpful. Paul must now be welcomed as a new member, and indeed as our Webmaster.

Cuthbert was a shepherd boy who, having seen a vision of St Aidan's soul being carried up to heaven, became a monk at Melrose in 651, and then prior in 661, travelling widely to preach the good faith. When he retired in 676, he lived in retreat as a hermit on the Holy Island of Lindisfarne until he was made the Bishop of Hexham in 684, but he arranged to return to Lindisfarne, where he died in 687. During the time of the Danish invasions, in 793, his body was removed for safety, and after extensive travels, reached Durham in 999, and was moved in 1104 to the new Norman Cathedral where it remains, their most prized relic. There are many legends about him, involving horses and otters, but none about dragons, though the story with the otters, which rescued him from the sea and nourished him until he had recovered, bears some similarity to the Irish story about the Onchu or Enfield (see No 34). Saint Cuthbert's Feast Day falls on the Twentieth of March.

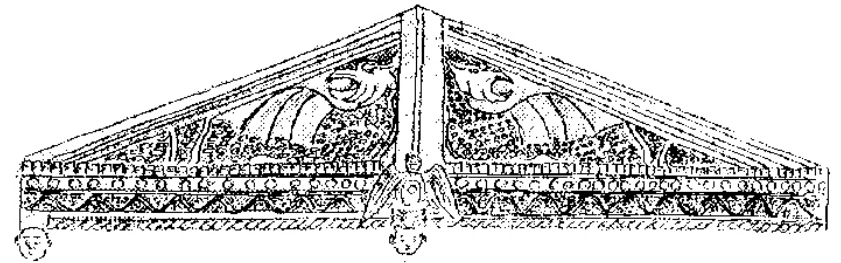
The elaborate door-furniture pictured on the cover is taken from the Gallery Guide to the Turks exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts, kindly sent in by Ken Mourin. The two brass dragons with bird-headed tails and the bronze leopard's head between them are of thirteenth century workmanship and come from Cizre in Turkey. They are remarkably similar to European architectural decorations of that period, so it is hard to say who was influenced by whom.

THE ODD STREAK from The Daily Mail, 12 March 2005



A Host of Dragons

On a brief tour of Somerset with Roger Seabury, we visited among other places the Parish Church of Saint Michael and All Angels in Somerton, with its unusual octagonal tower rising from the south transept. One of its glories is the great west window, showing Christ in Majesty supported by all nine of the Hierarchies of the Heavenly Host – Angels, Archangels, Principalities and Powers, Might, Dominions, Thrones, Cherubim and Seraphim – each represented by a great winged figure. The central place naturally goes to Saint Michael, for the Archangels, dressed in armour and holding a sword, but with no dragon at his feet. However, the roof of the church, which is covered with hundreds of small carved wooden panels, is supported by huge beams, and in each of the triangular spaces between each beam, the kingpost and the roof rafter is a carved wooden dragon. We counted twenty, but the guide-book says



22, so we must have missed a couple. Strangely, they do not get a mention in Brian Wright's book on *Somerset Dragons*, though they are rather similar to the ones reported from St Mary's church in Bishops Lydeard (see No 49).

Solving Secret Scripts

If there were those who failed to decipher the secret scripts shown in No 55, here are a couple of well-known alphabetful sentences to practise on.



This wyvern script exploits the figure-and-ground illusion and may be read more easily by deploying a couple of pencils.



The second one is the hippogriff's demotic script, rather easier to read than their hieratic script shown before, but both need the same trick – give the page a quarter turn clockwise and then read downwards from the top.

always said that the Welsh had no sense of timing), but there is no shortage of imaginative invention. The word “Dragon-lore” occurs, in the sense of the ancient wisdom that dragons are supposed to possess, rather than what we know about them. Their message is very much an ecological warning with a moral attached – look after nature and be kind to one another, or fear the worst. However, it is the pictures that are outstanding, with a great variety of shapes and colours in the dragons depicted, though none of them are a bit like the traditional Welsh heraldic dragon, having mostly much longer necks and tails and more fragile wings. The human-style emotions attributed to the dragons in the stories are well brought out in their various facial expressions, one seen here. In spite of the sentimentality, this book is altogether a bit of a treasure.

A Blackwork Griffin

An article on “Heraldry in Stitches” by Philippa Sims in *The Norfolk Standard* for January 2005 is illustrated by this example of her own handiwork (right). She has explained how it was made with a variety of black stitches on to linen painted to look like gold cloth.



“The Last Dragon” – a Television Programme

On Saturday 5 March, Channel 4 showed a two-hour programme that was a mixture of documentary and science-fiction romance, purporting to show the discovery of the remains of a dragon that had survived into historical times, interspersed with computer-generated reconstructions of past events, starting with a fight between a specimen of *Tyrannosaurus rex* and an early dragon species, which, though a juvenile, was as large as the dinosaur.



This sketch (right), done from memory, gives a rough idea of the dragon shown as a two-legged creature with rather feeble-looking wings. The fictional palaeontologist, who suspects that dragons were real creatures that may have survived until recent times, accounting for their widespread appearance in folklore, but needing positive proof, follows up rumours of a rare discovery in the Carpathian mountains of Romania, and, after a series of dramatic adventures, eventually finds what he has been hoping for, buried deep in the icy vaults of a glacier. He argues that, in order to escape the catastrophe that eliminated the dinosaurs, some dragons must have taken to the oceans to become sea-serpents, and then evolved back into various land-based species, including the serpentine but wingless Chinese woodland dragons as well as the flying, fire-breathing European mountain variety. To account for their ability to fly in spite of their wings being too small to support their body-weight, he postulates methane and hydrogen-filled lung-like bladders (though his physics was a bit faulty, as hydrogen can only give lift if it can expand to displace the air, and could not do so if compressed into the size of the dragon bodies that we were shown - left), and to account for their fiery breath, he reckons that traces of platinum on their teeth, which they got by gnawing at certain rocks, would act as a catalyst to ignite bursts of methane and hydrogen from its bladders. Also, he muttered some rather unconvincing details about limb-forming genes to explain the development of six-limbed creatures from four-limbed ancestors, and he thought that, although they were extraordinarily long-lived, dragons would need to mate and breed in order to prevent them becoming extinct. Thus, in the reconstruction, we saw their courtship, but with no marked morphological distinctions between male and female. It must be said that their mating ritual, culminating in a final interlocked spinning dive, was most spectacular. Sadly, the dragon’s story ended in tragedy, as a group of mediaeval warriors, upset at losing all their sheep, sought out the monster in its mountain retreat, and though they themselves mostly perished, the dragon received a mortal wound in the fight. Centuries later, its frozen remains were discovered by the

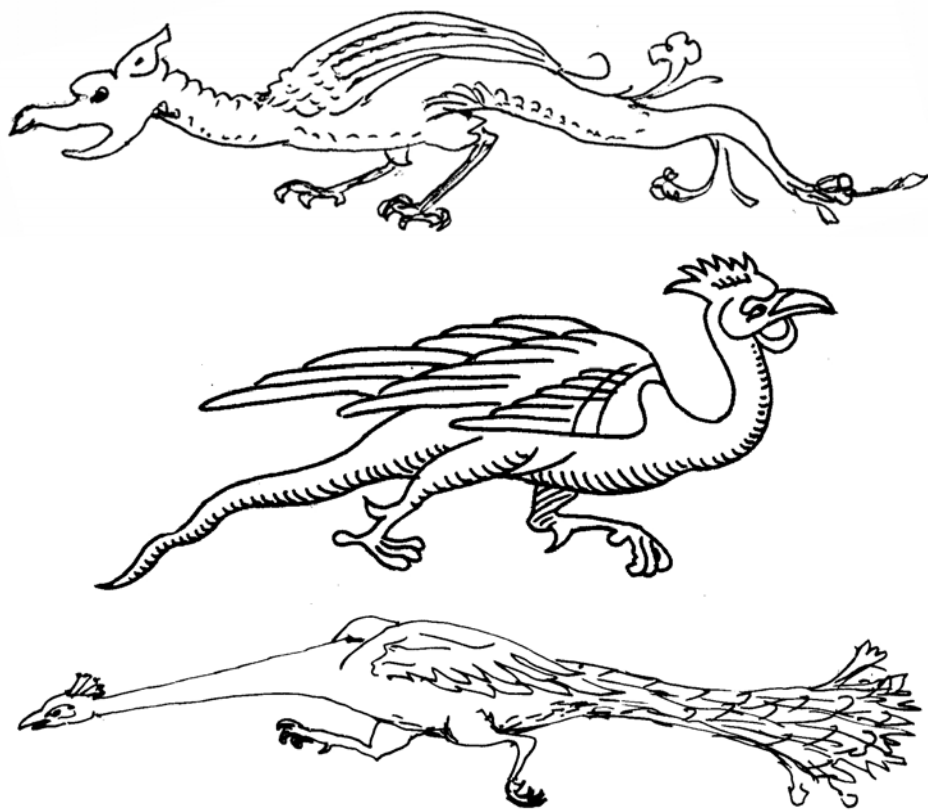


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intrepid palaeontologist, who brought the evidence back to the Natural History Museum and earned a professorship.

The whole story was related by a voice-over in the style of an *Horizon* documentary, and one wonders how many gullible viewers will now think that the existence of “real” dragons has been “proved.” Indeed, Cecil Humphery-Smith has written that the programme was interesting and quite convincing, and was particularly impressed with the scientific explanations (though one suspects that his tongue may have strayed into his cheek), while on the other hand, Drusilla Armitage thought that the programme should have been held over and transmitted on April the First. Again, Vernon Rolls found the entertainment delightful, compared it to a cross between *Walking with Dinosaurs* and *Indiana Jones*, and especially liked the twist at the end, when the Professor is shown a message, is told, “It is only two months old,” and taking it as a fresh sighting, runs off like an excited schoolboy. There is hope yet!

An Observation and a Comparison



Here are three drawings. At the top is a creature from an eleventh-century seal of the

Earl of Lancaster, with bird-like beak, wings and legs and feathery additions round its tail. In the middle is a Cockatrice from a twelfth-century Bestiary. At the bottom is a creature I saw running across my garden, drawn from life. I wish I could show its iridescent blue neck, pale green back and tail and light chestnut-coloured wings. It is, of course, a peacock, that roosts most nights high up in a lime tree just outside my bedroom window. It spends most of its days walking round the village looking for things to eat, and several of my neighbours put out dishes of food for it. It is a male, but has not yet grown its tail-feathers to their full extent. When crossing the road to get to my garden it pays little attention to the traffic, and one day I saw an impatient motorist actually run over its tail feathers, since when one or two of them stick out at an odd angle. To get up on to walls of two or three feet in height, it just jumps, but for six- to eight-foot leaps it makes short flights with its busy little wings flapping. To get up to its roost takes four or five stages, from the road up to the garden wall, then up to the roof of the garden shed or the kitchen extension, thence to the main roof of the house and finally from the gable end up into the branches of the tree.

When he is walking about, he is generally a slow and stately mover, with his long flexible neck sometimes held upright like a periscope, sometimes stretched down to the ground or curved into a delicate S-shape for preening or dozing. But when running, as seen here, with his neck stuck out in front, his wings flapping and his tail feathers streaming out behind, he is a surprising sight.

Peacocks are native to southern India and Ceylon, but were introduced to the Middle East and Europe in ancient times, and have been kept in the gardens of palaces and stately homes ever since. Some have escaped, like ours, to lead a life of their own. I wonder whether the unexpected sight of a running peacock might have inspired some early depictions of the curious creatures we have come to think of as dragons.

BOOK REVIEW

Dragon Days, (Llandysul, 2004), a book of stories and poems by a dozen authors, all illustrated by Brett Breckon, who also wrote the Introduction, was recommended by Anthony Jones, and is a tribute to Welsh creativeness in the literary and visual arts. The stories are mostly rather fey, with a strong Celtic flavour, and the poems are poor on rhyming and even worse in scansion (but then my music teacher

