

Finally, Alex Troblov has sent in another of his Fantasies...



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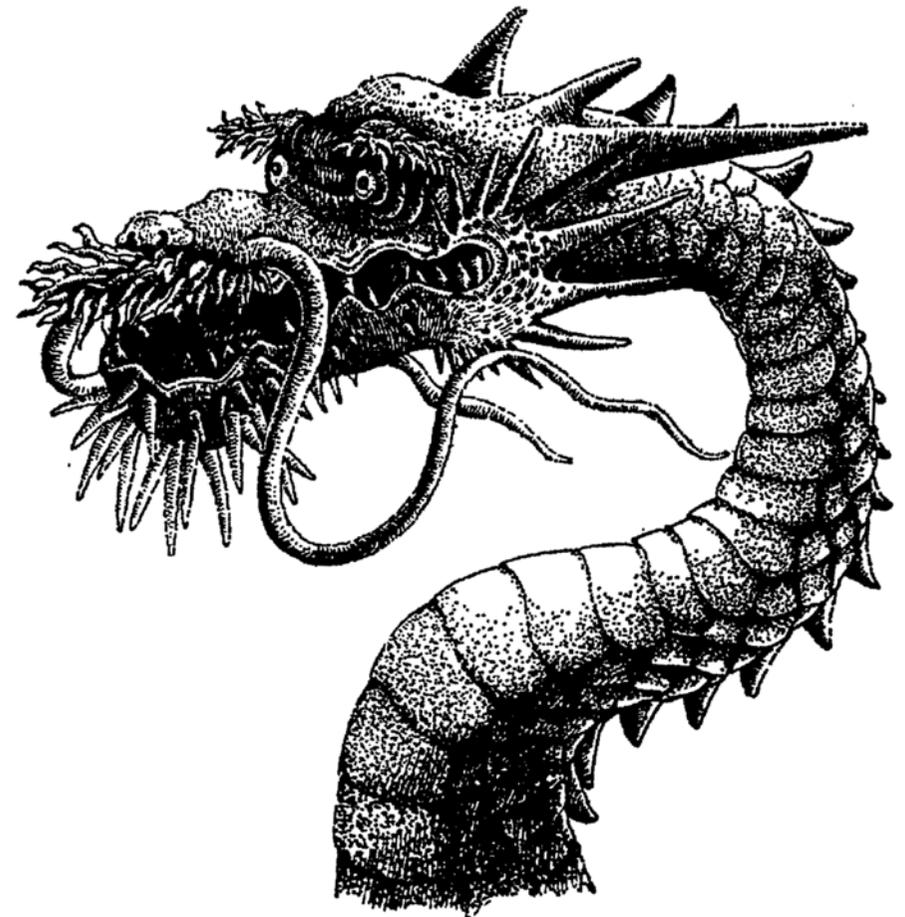
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# Dragonlore

The Journal of The College of Dracology

Number 65

St Wilfrid's Day 2005



Japanese Dragon's Head drawn by Mary I. French



## The College of Dracology for the Study of Fabulous Beasts

The drawing on the cover is taken from *A Dictionary of Monsters & Mysterious Beasts* by Carey Miller (London, 1974) which was reviewed briefly in No. 6. Although somewhat frightening in appearance, oriental dragons are basically kindly and are responsible for the weather, especially when it is windy and wet.

Saint Wilfrid was born in 634, the son of a thegn of Northumbria, and was educated at Lindisfarne, then a stronghold of the Celtic Church, but he went to study in Rome and returned as an active evangelist and became the Bishop of York. At the Synod of Whitby, which was called in 664 to decide the proper rules for calculating the date of Easter, after Bishop Colman of Lindisfarne had spoken in favour of the Celtic tradition, said to be based on the method of St John, Wilfrid put the case for the Roman way of fixing Easter, allegedly derived from St Peter. King Oswy, presiding, wished Christian Britain to be united in its observances, and voted in favour of the Roman method, reckoning that St Peter guarded the gates of heaven and would not be pleased if opposed. It was not just the dating of Easter that distinguished the Roman from the Celtic Church. The old church of Ireland had spread over Scotland and northern England, and saw Christianity as a fulfilment of the ancient pagan beliefs, converting old sacred sites and festivals from their pagan origins to accept the revelations of Christ, whom they saw as the incarnation of their ancient Sun god. For them, Christianity was an experience of the spirit which all could share, very different from the practice of Rome, which saw it as a set of beliefs that had to be imposed by authority. I suspect that many of the tales of the conversion of pagans by missionaries from Rome (and Wilfrid was well up in the league tables here) actually referred to Christians of the Celtic Church being persuaded to accept Roman authority. Indeed, I recall a forceful television programme on the history of the Celtic Church given by a Roman Catholic Archbishop of Armagh in which he deeply regretted the loss of spirituality that the imposition of the Roman rule had entailed. It was as if his love of Ireland had overcome his loyalty to Rome. Back in the seventh century, when the crunch came at Whitby, Wilfrid certainly recognized where the greater power lay, and encouraged the king to take the part of St Peter and Rome. Later he was made Bishop of Hexham where he died peacefully in 709. His feast day falls on 12th October. And what has this to do with dracology? The Celtic Church was sympathetic to paganism, and still saw dragons as benevolent nature spirits, as they remained in China, and to some extent in Wales to this day, whereas the Roman Church taught that they were evil creatures, the expression of Satan and the enemies of heaven, to be fought to the death by Saints such as Michael, George, Margaret and

**Helen Murray** has sent a picture of a Pictish stone with strange carvings on it, one of which depicts a creature known as a “beastie” that may be an early form of Kelpie. Below it is the serpent and z-rod emblem, and there are a couple of horses with riders. It is known as Martin’s Stone and is found near the village of Tealing in Angus. There is naturally a legendary story attached to the stone, summarised in this children’s playground verse-game:

Tempted at Pitempton  
Draigled at Baldragon  
Stricken at Strathmartin  
And killed at Martin’s Stane.

A useful guide to Pictish symbolism is *Picts, Gaels and Scots* by Sally M. Foster (London, 1996) which illustrates a number of their carved stones, but not this one, though it does show the “beastie” and “serpent and z-rod” emblems.



**Roland Symons** has sent in a couple more badges of Royal Air Force Stations. Colerne, whose badge was granted in 1944, is situated very near the place where the three ancient counties of Wiltshire, Somerset and Gloucestershire meet, so it shows the dragon from the arms of the first two and a horseshoe from the arms of the last. Kai Tak was the RAF Station in Hong Kong and so has a traditional Chinese dragon on its badge, granted in 1940. The motto translates as “Ability and Ambition of the Highest.”

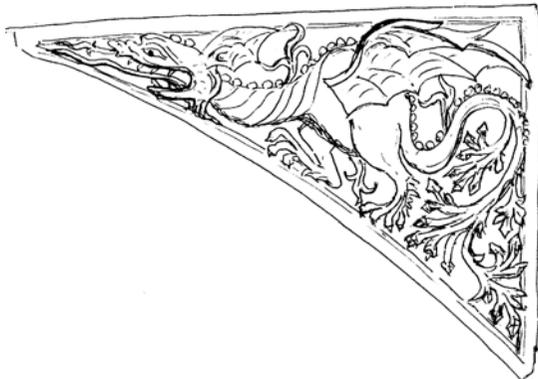


## FROM THE POSTBAG

**David Vaudrey** sent in a photograph of some gates next door to his cousin's house in Fordingbridge, Hampshire, which had the most unusual hinges in the form of ancient dragons, which shape also appeared on a windvane where one might expect to see a weathercock. Enquiry of the owner, Mr Robert Christoforides, as to their origin, elicited the information that he had been stuck in a traffic jam near Tooting Bec in London and had seen them on a church, and being much taken with their design, had them copied for the gates to his house yard. Here is a rough sketch of their outline.



**John Dent** sent a postcard, provided by **June Marriage**, showing the carved and painted mediaeval dragon that forms a feature of the Dragon Hall in Norwich, a fifteenth-century timber merchants' hall, and from which it derives its name. Its tongue and wing are pinky red and the rest of it is greeny grey. The only one still surviving, it is supposed that it must originally have been one of an opposing pair. In fact, if other mediaeval buildings are any guide, there might have been a whole series of them along the length of the roof, in the spandrels. This dragon is a true example of the type, as seen in early bestiaries, before the heralds started to give them an extra pair of legs. Following heraldic convention, John thought that this specimen ought to be called a Wyvern, but in fact that would be an anachronism. It is a pity that some of the publicity for the Dragon Hall uses a disneyfied dragon (see No 49, page 8) instead of this authentic creature.



many another holy figure. Did the dragons themselves change their nature and switch sides? Or was it a necessary step in the evolution of human society from dependence on nature towards a greater freedom of action? There are still questions to be answered.

## BOOK REVIEW

**"Nothing but Blue Skies"** by Tom Holt (London, 2001) was a gift from Annie Robertson, and is a witty fantasy based on the idea of a struggle between TV weather presenters, who are blamed for bad weather, and Chinese weather dragons, who are actually responsible for it. These dragons can assume human form, sometimes so successfully that they even deceive their own kind, and the plot is so complicated and full of unexpected twists that it keeps the reader alert. In the end, some of the weathermen turn into dragons themselves, so it is hard to say who has won, but virtue is rewarded and wickedness overcome, so it is really a kind of happy ending. From the point of view of dracology, one has to say that Holt does not understand that traditional Chinese weather dragons could fly because they were spiritual and did not have wings, though this is a detail that does not mar the enjoyment of the story. It is possible that modern Chinese dragons have been made to follow the fashion of their European counterparts, and have felt it necessary to grow wings after all.

Annie also gave us an oriental dragon carved in Bali from a five-inch cube of wood, that she brought from Thailand. I have to report that it is winged, albeit with the feathered bird-like variety rather than those of a bat. This drawing hardly does it justice.



## FEEDBACK with an Addition to the A to Z

Jan Keuzenkamp has written that the strange creature holding up the shield of Brielle and illustrated on page 6 of No. 61, is not actually a Centaur but a **Capirussa**, a kind of satyr with the ears of a spaniel, as seen in his own drawing of the supporter, shown here in silhouette. Could the name possibly be a corruption of *capripus*, meaning "goat's foot"?



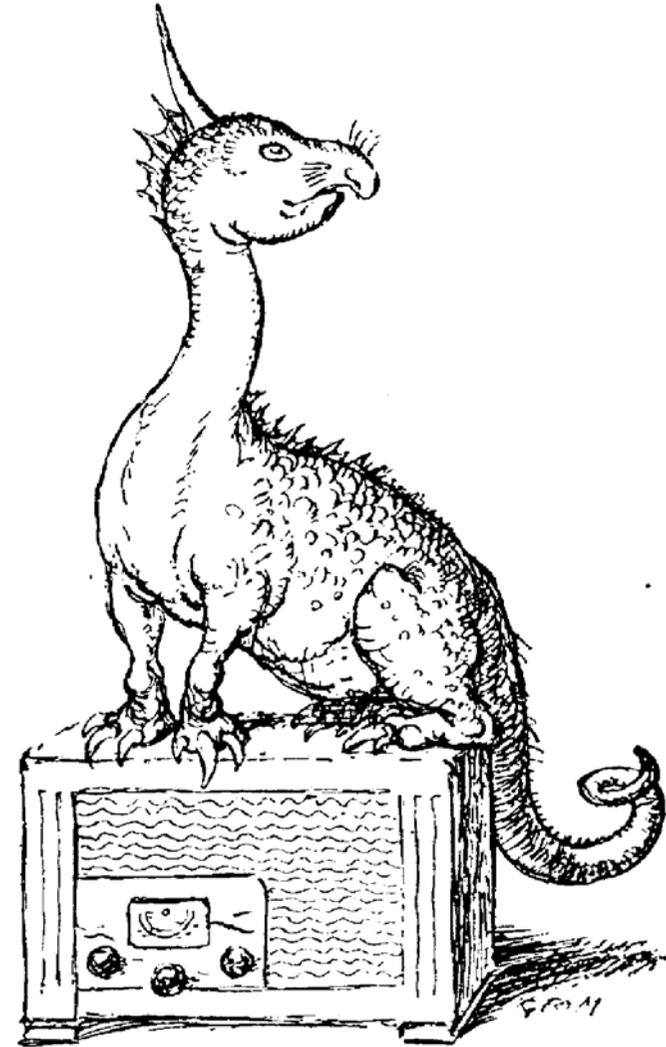
## GRIFFINS from CANADA

The arms of George Mervyn Beley of Brockville, Ontario were originally granted in 1856 to George Beley of Bootle, and then exemplified in 1954 by the College of Arms in London (*see right*). The shield is gold with blue charges, thus:- *Or a chevron between two griffins' heads erased in chief and a cross patty fitchy in base azure*, while the crest is *A griffin sejant Or winged vair resting the dexter claw upon a plate*. George Beley of Brockville was a leading light in the early days of what is now the Royal Heraldry Society of Canada, and has an annual lecture named in his honour. This year's Beley Lecturer was Darren George, who spoke on *Monsters and Critters in Heraldry*, and will be well known to our readers, having contributed often to these pages.



The other griffin here (*left*) is on the shield of the Faculty of Law of the University of British Columbia, holding the sword and pair of scales traditionally held by the figure of Justice, though this griffin is not blindfold as is Justice.

## A CLASSIC CARTOON



"There was an extraordinary thing on the wireless last night." This was the caption to George Morrow's cartoon which appeared in *Punch* in March 1945, reprinted in the Annual Selection, *The Pick of Punch*, and kindly sent in by Una Lewers. Wittingly or unwittingly, it has been followed by innumerable versions of the same theme ("There was such a funny thing on the TV yesterday," for example) though this must be the earliest. Asked to identify the species of Morrow's creature, even a practiced dracolologist would not find it easy. Suggestions will be welcomed.