

FROM THE POSTBAG

Stephen Friar has sent the logo now used by the West Dorset District Council, based on their crest of a Sea-Wyvern (see No 10 for the full arms drawn by John Ferguson). Steve said it took three months to persuade the District Council, on which he serves, to retain its sea wyvern badge rather than adopt the Cerne Giant as a logo. He adds that, though it is a modern interpretation, it could have been much worse. In fact, in design terms, the figure composed of 'swish' elements, as seen in the emblems of the Liberal Democrats (bird), the Natural History Museum (tree), the Children's Society (hands) and the former Midland Bank (griffin), to name but a few, is no longer thought to be very modern – but then neither is West Dorset, in all likelihood.



Ann Gooding sent a clipping about a newly discovered South Dakota fossil dinosaur with 'an armour-plated head of almost magical configuration, covered with knobs and spikes, horns and crests,' and named *Dracorex hogwartsia* in honour of Harry Potter's school. The author, J K Rowling, said she was "absolutely thrilled" by the honour.

Vernon Rolls sent a postcard he picked up in Santorini showing an elaborate icon of St George in action, painted by Katerina Ioannidou, whom he met, "a lady in a beautiful studio overlooking the sea, so blue you can hardly believe it."

ODD STREAK from *The Daily Mail*, 5 June 2006.

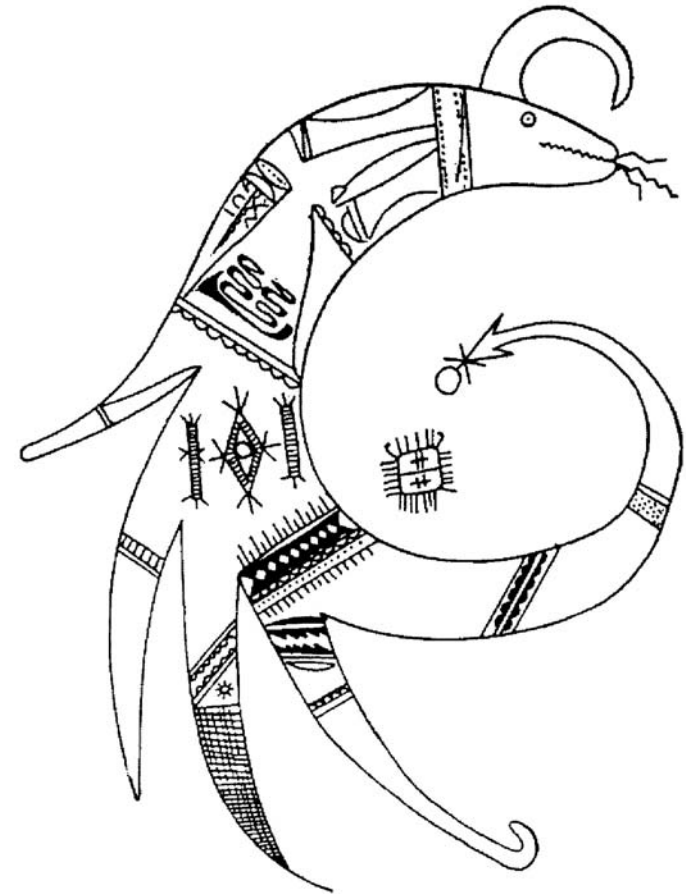


Issued 8 July 2006 by Ralph Brocklebank, Orland, Church Avenue, Clent, Stourbridge DY9 9QS
E-mail:- ralph@dragonlore.co.uk

Dragonlore

The Journal of The College of Dracology

Number 75 St Withburga's Day 2006



A Horned Serpent from the Hopi people of North America



The College of Dracology for the Study of Fabulous Beasts

We welcome a new on-line member, R Kevin Lindsay.

“Saint Withburga was the daughter of the King of East Anglia, born about 670 AD. She founded a church and convent at East Dereham in Norfolk. Such was her reputation for good works that, when she died in 743 and was buried at the church of St Nicholas in the town, so many pilgrims flocked to her grave that the monks of Ely moved her remains to their own monastery. St Withburga’s Well, site of her original burial, is still outside the west door of the church.” (From John Vince, 2001)

There are no dragons here, but we do have some members in East Dereham! Do they still celebrate St Withburga’s Day on 8 July?

“The Horned Serpents are a particular genre of creature to be found mostly in the legends and traditions of the Native American people of Canada and the United States. The characteristics of these creatures are their immense length and vast head with huge, gaping jaws and two horns on the top of the head. Sometimes there are eyes or horns on the neck as well. These Horned Serpents are ambivalent in their relationships to humans and can be both benign and malevolent, in much the same way as the water horses of Northern Europe.

“Some legends tell of the magical pacts humans made with the Horned Serpent for the magic of their powdered blood, only to find that it causes the downfall of the recipient. Such a legend is that of Tijaiha of the Hurons, who, after sacrificing his mother-in-law to the Horned Serpent to kill his enemies, is forced to flee and live with them to escape the wrath of his own people, who later kill him. A legend of the Mandan people tells of the cooking and eating of such a serpent, which then turns the person into a water serpent and guardian of the Missouri River. In the legends of the Mississagnas, people always avoided a cavern close by Lake Ontario, where a Horned Serpent swallowed the Iroquois hero Gun-No-Da-Ya, who was rescued by Thunder. The Iroquois believed that storms were caused on the lake when the Horned Serpent was angry. In the legends of the Shawnee people, young women at puberty or during their periods were particularly vulnerable to the attentions of the Horned Serpents, while in the folk beliefs of the Sauk people, a young woman once produced eggs from a Horned Serpent on the shores of the lake that it inhabited.” (From Carol Rose, 2000)

The picture on the cover is taken from J W Fewkes, *Designs on Prehistoric Hopi Pottery*, New York, 1973, and is typical of their style of decoration. In contrast, the petroglyph from the Kennebec River shown in our last issue is so much in the

BOOK REVIEWS

One that slipped by unnoticed but is worth a mention is **A Dictionary of Fabulous Beasts** by Richard Barber and Anne Riches (Woodbridge, 1971, reprinted in paperback, 1996) with stylish illustrations by Rosalind Dease, based on well-known originals. Barber is better known for his books on Arthurian Legends and Tournaments, but this one is a scholarly addition to the field, with a useful Introduction, which mentions in passing the near-appearance of a new creature, ‘Aquarius, the water beaver.’ The misprint was spotted in time! There are about 600 entries, with many from North American native legends and a strong sprinkling from Lewis Carroll, and a bibliography with 294 references. Here is a sample entry, based on an item in Conrad Gesner’s *Historia Animalium* (Frankfurt, 1585-1617):-



Su A creature from Patagonia, very violent and cruel. It was trapped by digging pits and camouflaging them. It carried its young on its back, but always destroyed them before the hunter could reach them. It is probably the giant anteater, or even the giant sloth, redrawn from an early traveller’s report.

Dugald Steer has also been busy, with two new additions to his *Dragonology* series:- **Bringing up Baby Dragons** (Dorking, 2005) and **Tracking and Taming Dragons** (Dorking, 2006), both labelled “A guide for Beginners.” Brilliantly illustrated by Douglas Carrel, and full of handy tips and sound advice, these two handbooks carry the whole fantastic enterprise into new depths of detail, and cannot be too highly recommended.

looking out upon its eponymous vale and the northern marches of the old Wessex, has long been known to be a prehistoric figure.

In local lore, however, it was for centuries associated with King Alfred, who was born a few miles away at Wantage and whose victory over the Danes, it was always said, was won nearby at Ashdown. White horse or white dragon? Its highly stylised, attenuated image readily bears either reading, and, either way, its adoption as an emblem of the Saxons, though unprovable, is a tempting possibility. The strange knoll halfway down the slope below the horse is known as Dragon Hill.

William Packer, London SW4

SIR – Dr Robyn Lewis boasts that the red Welsh dragon killed the white Saxon dragon. Legend has it that the Malvern Hills are a sleeping dragon.

I suggest that our Saxon dragon is not dead, just taking a nap.

Ruth Thompson, Malvern, Worcs

SIR – As far as I know, we are one of only two companies selling the white dragon flag. Despite being more expensive than the mass-produced St George's Cross flags, during the run-up to the World Cup the white dragon has outsold all five versions of the more traditional flags put together – which has come as something of a surprise.

Julien Crighton, Nottingham

SIR – I have first-hand knowledge that dragons exist. Many are white, have four limbs and very fiery tongues. One I know personally is my mother-in-law.

David Alexander, Aberdeen

And on that note the correspondence ended. Apart from legend and a single showing of a wind-sock dragon totem carried by Harold's men in the battle depicted in the Bayeux Tapestry (*right - actually red*), there is very little evidence for a white Saxon dragon, and in any case few English people today think of themselves as Saxons. My view is, let us get the facts right, but why revive ancient animosities? That this danger still survives was illustrated by an extraordinary story that appeared in *The Daily Mail*, also on Tuesday 6 June. It seems that Mrs Angie Sayer, landlady of the New Inn in Wedmore, Somerset, was questioned for two hours by police on suspicion of causing racial hatred. What she had done was to hold an archery contest to celebrate St George's Day, and the only dragon she could find for the target happened to be on a Welsh flag.

Ron Gadd tells me that the New Inn is his local pub and that the man who made the complaint to the police refused to sign his name to the statement, so of course no further action could be taken. However, they have had plenty of calls from Welshmen in support of Mrs Sayer, saying please do not think that all of us are that stupid.

European style that one wonders, petroglyphs being notoriously difficult to date accurately, whether it might not have been made by an European visitor to Maine or perhaps by a native who had seen a picture of an European dragon.

St. Vigor – a saintly dragon tamer.

Somerset is a county well known for its many dragon connections, and has a lot of churches dedicated to both well known dragon saints such as George and Michael, as well as more obscure Celtic ones such as Carantoc and Dubricius. One of the even more obscure 'dragon' saints, only discovered after *Somerset Dragons* had been published, is St. Vigor. The Somerset church dedicated to him is at Stratton-on-the-Fosse, and is one of only two churches dedicated to him in Britain, the other being at Fulbourne in Cambridgeshire.

St. Vigor was not a Celt but a native of Normandy, who was born in the mid-fifth century in a village now called St. Vigeur le-Grand. An eighth century 'history' of the saint describes him as a man of noble birth who was destined for a life of spiritual achievement and so chose a life of religious austerity rather than worldly comfort, and who became the Bishop of Bayeux in 511 AD.

Vigor founded a church at Redeversus (now called Reviere) at the mouth of the River Seulles, and was there when a powerful landowner, called Volusian, came to ask the saint to travel to Cerisiacum (now Cerisy) to free his people from the threat of a monstrous dragon. Vigor agreed to do so and went to Cerisy to confront the dragon. The saint fearlessly confronted this terrible monster, making the sign of the cross on its head when it immediately became docile. Vigor tied his stole around its neck and gave it to his faithful follower, Theudemir, who led the dragon back to its proper domain – the sea.

Volusian, in gratitude, presented St. Vigor with vast landholdings in and around Cerisy, and the tamed dragon became the symbol of St. Vigor. In Normandy more than thirty churches and monastic establishments are dedicated to him, and the priory of St. Vigor at Mont Chrismat still houses a convent of white robed nuns.

So why a St. Vigor church in Somerset? In 1204 the manor of Stratton passed to a Norman family called Sancto Vigore, who came from the village of St. Vigeur le-Grand, and it is probable that they caused the church to be rededicated to their 'personal saint' at this date.

Brian Wright

Brian sent in this piece, regretting that he had not found out about it until after his book on Somerset Dragons had come out, but although there is in Somerset the church dedicated to this saint, the dragon itself can hardly be said to belong to the county. One wonders what sort of a creature it might have been. An amphibian of sorts, evidently. A walrus might have frightened the people without actually eating them, and could conceivably be led back into the sea with a stole round its neck. It makes a good story and we are grateful to Brian for letting us add it to our stock. Subsequently, Brian has discovered that St Vigor is celebrated on 1st November, which is All Saints' Day.

A WHITE DRAGON FOR ENGLAND ?

An ancient controversy has been aroused by a flurry of letters which appeared in the pages of *The Daily Telegraph* (set off by the presence of large numbers of flags produced to support a team representing an England side in an international sporting contest), starting with this one on 31 May 2006:-

Flying the flag in support of England

SIR – The so-called flag of St George is not the flag of England or the English. The red cross is a Papal/Norman confection foisted on the English by successive Norman rulers intent on demolishing as many English customs as they could comfortably manage.

The White Dragon flag of Anglo-Saxon England was replaced by the red cross; St Edmund the Martyr, the patron saint of England, supplanted by St George and so on. The correct flag of England is the White Dragon – seen on the Bayeux Tapestry and acceptable to all.

John Green, Hayling Island, Hants.

On Saturday 3 June there came this response, illustrated by the same picture we used on the cover of No 23 (though not in colour, as ours was):-

History behind the white dragon flag

SIR – One would be grateful for more information about an English white dragon.

Records say that, after the Roman army departed in AD 410, taking their eagle standard with them, a dragon battle-banner was being used by the Romano-British chieftains all over the country in their skirmishes with the invading Saxons.

This dragon emblem had been brought here by Artr, the fabled Sarmatian mercenary captain. Artr's dragon transferred to the beleaguered British tribes and endured over the centuries until finally beaten back westwards to where he now lives with the Welsh. This dragon is red.

In the Bayeux tapestry, there are elongated Norman-style shields that bear the wyvern-type of dragon with the coiled tail and only four limbs, and one is certainly white. [See the illustration mentioned] I have not yet noticed a true six-limbed fire-breathing dragon banner flying in the breeze.

Moira Maidment, West Clendon, Surrey

There was also a letter from Celia Haddon about the coronation stone, but on Monday 5 June, the following was printed:-

True English dragon

SIR – The “true six-limbed fire-breathing dragon” appeared only in the 14th century, invented by heraldic artists probably influenced by the griffin.

Early dragons, as known since antiquity, had only two legs and a pair of wings or fins, and did not breathe fire because they came from a life in water, either as sea

monsters (ketos) or as the legendary lindworms in springs and caves.

The Bayeux Tapestry has far more griffins than dragons in it, and the latter seem to be used as emblems by both Normans and Saxons.

The Tudor red dragon, now the symbol of Wales, has become the standard form in English heraldry, but I suggest that the white Saxon dragon, shown fighting the red Celtic dragon in mediaeval legends, should really have only two legs.

Ralph Brocklebank, Orland, Worcs

[I did put ‘The College of Dracology’ in my address, and that may have helped them decide to print the letter, even though they left it out!]

The correspondence continued the next day, Tuesday 6 June, with two more letters:-

Roaring dragon

SIR – A little knowledge about dragons is a dangerous thing, if only because the species is rather variable.

The “dragon” battle banner with Sarmatian origins alluded to by Moira Maidment was more in the nature of a windsock on a pole. It was the Draco – in use by the Iron Age Dacians of modern Romania when they were conquered by Trajan between AD 103 and 106 – and is depicted on Trajan's Column, as are the Sarmatian cavalry in their scale armour. Dacians served in the legions in Britain, for example on Hadrian's Wall.

The Draco had a brazen head, often of a wolf, probably with a vibrating tongue, so that the creature made an intimidating roar in the wind, or when waved vigorously in battle, rather like a bull roarer.

John Nandris, Merton, Oxon

SIR – Ralph Brocklebank tells us a good deal about the red (Welsh) dragon and the white (Saxon) dragon.

True, legend has it that they fought, though I know nothing of the number of legs either may have had, save that our dragon is always portrayed with four.

But I do know, as the *Mabinogion* tell us, that the red dragon of Wales won the fight, killing the white Saxon dragon.

Dr Robyn Lewis, Archdruid Emeritus of Wales, Nefyn, Gwynedd

[Of course, history may tell a different story from legend! And ‘always’ should be read to mean ‘since the 14th century.’ Oddly enough, the only other time we had a coloured cover, on No30, was to show a 15th century picture of the red and white dragons fighting.]

Further letters appeared on Wednesday 7 June, under a picture of a pub sign in Woolstone, showing “The White Horse” at Uffington (right):-

Myths behind the white dragon

SIR – The White Horse above Uffington, on the north flank of the Berkshire Downs,

