

Roland Symons never fails to find a new dragon in an RAF badge. This one, granted to 104 Wing at Benson in 1946, is blazoned *On a plate a dragon rampant vert*. The green dragon symbolizes the enemy whose activities are shown up by the activities of the Wing. (Perhaps the plate, a white disc, represents the beam of a searchlight!) Roland asks whether “the colours of dragons indicate any characteristics. Are green dragons more evil than red ones?” Traditionally, in heraldry, if a dragon was said to be ‘proper’ or its colour not mentioned, then it was coloured green, often with golden breastplates, but then were dragons ever as evil as some made out? Certainly the Red Dragon of Wales is not regarded as in any way evil. Why should a green one, or a white or silver one (London) or a black one (Ulster), be any different? On the other hand, the dragons being overcome by St Michael, St George and St Margaret are often shown in different colours (silver, green and red, respectively, *see No 45*), and they are all supposed to be symbols of evil.



David Vaudrey sent a Victorian version of the arms of the Earl of Westmeath with its green Cockatrice crest and matching supporters. The Nugent arms (first quarter) are blazoned: *Ermine, two bars gules*, with a Crest: *A cockatrice, wings elevated and displayed, vert, tails nowed,, combed and wattled gules*. The Supporters are: *Two cockatrices, wings elevated, vert, tails nowed, combed and wattled gules*.



Note that this artist has not *displayed* the wings of the crest, though in other versions the dexter wing is shown pointing forwards while the sinister one still points to the rear. David has identified the second quarter (*Quarterly Or and Gules a bordure Vair*) as FitzJohn but can anyone say what the other two quarters are?

Dragonlore

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The Mighty Multimiscegene designed and drawn by Roger Barnes



The College of Dracology for the Study of Fabulous Beasts

We welcome new members Dawn Richardson, Tony Ryan and Bill and Pat Worship

Saint Joseph was the husband of Mary, the mother of Jesus. St Matthew and St Luke both give accounts of the birth, though very different, and each gives a genealogical descent from King David down to Joseph, but again by very diverse lines, the one from David's son Solomon and the other from another son, Nathan. This disparity leads some people to suppose that there were two distinct families, and indeed Joseph, Mary and Jesus (or Joshua in its local form) were common names in widespread use and the biblical prophecies were well known at that time. Also, since Jesus is said to be 'of the House of David' some would argue that Joseph must have been his true biological father, if not his spiritual one, but these are theological matters rather beyond the scope of dracology, just as long as we are clear whose day we are celebrating. Since a decision made in 1621, St Joseph's day of commemoration has fallen on 19th March.

[For those interested, see *The Two Children* by David Ovason (London 2001)]

The picture on the cover was sent in by Jim McCready and first appeared in *The New Zealand Armorist*, No 61, which he then edited, in 1996. Roger Barnes is well known to dracologists, and it must be said that his composite monster derived from many heraldic beasts is even more splendid in colour. Its head and neck are green with red beak, wattles, comb and forelegs; the horns, tusks, flames, ears and wings, as well as the dorsal and tail fins, hooves, claws and leg-tassels are all golden, while the lower body and hind legs are white with coloured spots (black, purple, blue, yellow, green red, orange and pink) leaving the tail itself grey-blue. Beasts contributing to the monster include the Basilisk or Cockatrice, Yale, Griffin, Panther, Dragon or Wyvern, Boar or Antelope, Unicorn and Dolphin. Perhaps he should be submitted to Darren George's Critter Contest, as most entries are incongruous hybrids of just two creatures whereas this one is derived from eight or nine. One would like to see a more friendly name for it, as Multimiscegene is a bit of a mouthful; what about 'Polydrake'? Other suggestions would be welcome.

Una Lewers sent a headline clipped from a newspaper which reads: "Trading standards have ruled that a sausage called the Welsh Dragon be renamed as it doesn't contain dragon." This does sound ridiculous, but the real reason seems to have been that the label did not state what kind of meat the sausages really **did** contain, and the trading standards officer's little joke was made to look like officious stupidity.

Gordon Macpherson has sent another of his intricate bookplates, this time one he did for Colin John Mumford in 1996, with lots of dragons. Note especially the unusual dragon's head *affrontee* as part of the badge in the upper corners.



The Questing Beast

This strange creature was listed in our A to Z in No 9, drawn by Paul Franke and discussed by Professor Roland Rotherham in No 36, and illustrated more fearsomely by Michael McCarthy in No 50, but here is a picture of it contemporary with Malory's description of the animal and its legend which shows it much more like the hound of Professor Rotherham's tale than the dragon-like beasts in the other drawings. Bear in mind that in those days dragons were shown with dog-like heads and had not developed the horns and knobs of later times. Malory said that the Questing Beast had the remarkable ability to make a noise in its belly "like unto the questing of thirty couple hounds," but "all the while the beast drank there was no noise," and here it is shown drinking from a small pool in a stream.



FROM THE POSTBAG

Lesley Holt sent a photo she took of a little dragon that she found in a Denbighshire church. "He was snuggled between the arches in the north aisle. Painted a rather naked-looking pinkish red, he is gripping his tail between his teeth, which I think is symbolic of everlasting life." A circular dragon biting his tail was certainly a symbol of eternity, but this one makes more of a figure-of-eight. However, in mathematics, a sideways figure-of-eight, or lemniscate curve, is used as a symbol for infinity, an abstruse concept that stands to space as eternity stands to time, so there may well be some connexion.



A Worshipful Griffin

Bill Worship is a Fellow of the Birmingham Society, and his wife Pat is keen on Dragons. Bill's arms contain references to his interests in football and golf, but it is his splendid crest that is of most interest to us. It is blazoned *Upon a capital Or a Griffin Argent holding with the dexter foreclaws a rose Argent and a rose Gules the joint stalk leaved Vert*, seen here in a drawing by David Hopkinson.

While on the subject of Griffins, it is worth seeing what Margaret Young had to say in Friar's *Dictionary*, illustrated as usual by Andrew Jamieson:-

Griffin Of the animals in mythology the griffin or gryphon is the most magnificent. The lion is the king of the beasts and the eagle the king of the birds, but in the griffin the majesty of the two

creatures is joined together. Its head, wings and talons are those of an eagle, to which are added a pair of sharp ears, as it has very acute hearing. Its body, hindquarters and tail are like a lion, and thus it combined the strength and vigilance of both animals in one.



The griffin was associated with the Gods in Minoan, Greek and other civilizations of the Near East. It was an animal of the sun, and pulled Apollo's chariot across the sky, but it had a double role, and also pulled the chariot of Nemesis, the God of Justice. Griffins guarded the gold mines in the mountains of Scythia, and were always at war with the one-eyed Arimaspians, who tried to steal the gold

to adorn their hair. These people always rode horses on their raids into the mountains and engendered hatred in the griffins who, ever since, have regarded horses with great hostility. The griffin is one of the Royal Beasts of England, and Cardinal Wolsey, amongst other great men, used them as supporters.

There are many medieval stories about the griffin, its claw was believed to have medicinal properties, and one of its feathers could restore sight to the blind. It was also sculpted on churches to denote the union of the divine and human natures. The griffin is reputed never to have been captured and its attributes have made it a popular heraldic emblem since the fifteenth century. Appropriately it appears in the arms attributed to Alexander the Great, as four of these animals were used to carry him in a specially designed basket in flight above the earth.

There is in armory a separate animal called the male griffin, which has sharp spikes protruding from its body instead of wings. However, there is no suggestion of this version amongst legendary griffins, and in these stories there does not appear to be any distinction between male and female, and in armory both creatures possess the usual male attributes.

When depicted in the rampant attitude, the griffin is said to be segreant.

MY



REVIEW

The Element Encyclopedia of Magical Creatures by John and Caitlin Matthews (London, 2005) is said to be “the ultimate a-z of fantastic beings from myth and magic.” It is a massive volume, weighing over 3lb (or 1870g for those who prefer metric measures) containing about 1575 entries in alphabetical order as well as a bibliography of 207 items, but surprisingly, no pictures. The entries include items from mythologies of all different countries, many of them with impossibly long names and perhaps just different tribal names for what are essentially the same nature spirits or imaginary beings, but they also include many non-fabulous beasts about which fables are told, such as the bear, owl, fox, woodpecker, jackdaw and so on. Also included are beings from fairyland such as pixies and elves, which are in no sense beasts though they certainly rate as fantastic beings. The introduction is very perceptive and one section of it is worth quoting in full:-

“Magical creatures and fabulous animals form part of the order of nature that we can call the supernatural. The place of their existence is not in the physical world, but in the otherworldly realms that surround and permeate our own world. Because the Otherworld and our own everyday world overlap at different points, where time and place interface with timeless space, these are the points where we encounter its inhabitants. For example, the unicorn does not just live in times past because the stories we tell about it seem fabulous, it has its own timeless existence in the Otherworld. It can cross out of that realm and appear when it chooses and to whom it chooses.

“Those who go in pursuit of the supernaturals must be prepared to follow them into other dimensions. It is only time- and place-bound folk who deny their existence, because they have lost the flexibility and sense of adventure to go in quest of them. These otherworldly dimensions and the coordinates of transfer between realms have become less known and frequented in an age that is becoming sealed into one side of reality. This reserve or scepticism about other realms is not a problem that has arisen just in our time, as Shakespeare shows in *Henry IV*, where Hotspur rants about Glendower’s arcane beliefs:- ‘*Sometime he angers me*

*With telling me of the moldwarp and the ant,
Of the dreamer Merlin and his prophecies,
And of a dragon, and a finless fish,
A clip-wing’d griffin, and a moulten raven,
A couching lion, and ramping cat,
And such a deal of skimble-skamble stuff
As puts me from my faith.*’

Around us are many such muggles as Hotspur who are content to inhabit mundane reality, just as in the world of Harry Potter, where magicians are distinct from non-magicians. But we do not have to become magicians in order to explore the world of the supernaturals, though it does help to have a flexible imagination that is prepared to follow dreams, listen to travellers’ tales and explore the ways in which

we can encounter these magical creatures for ourselves. If we are prepared to loiter on the borders of the worlds we will find what we had never imagined as well as some of the things that we did.”

After this splendid passage, which suggests that the authors believe that dreams and visions can indeed be a source of knowledge, they rather spoil the scene by stating, against all the evidence from history and mythology but in keeping with modern materialistic views, that dragons probably originated in attempts to explain dinosaur bones. However, we might forgive them and consider their reputation redeemed by this single sentence:- “...in our dreams and imaginations there is no ‘extinct’ or ‘yet-to-be’ – only an eternal present where all creatures meet together.”

Before leaving this huge work, there is one other brief passage worth quoting:- “Leonardo da Vinci wrote about the creation of imaginary animals, ‘You cannot make any such animal without making its limbs bear some resemblance to those of other animals. If you want your dragon to look natural, than take the head of a mastiff or setter, the eyes of a cat, the ears of a porcupine, the nose of a greyhound, the eyebrows of a lion, the crest of an old cock and the neck of a turtle.’”

This sounds very like the formula for painting a Chinese Dragon quoted in No 9, and one suspects that Leonardo was having a little joke, but it is worth noting that in the Bestiaries most of the serpents including the Dragon were shown with dog-like heads. It should be remembered that however detailed the description of dreams and visions may have been, what we actually see has been the creation of artists. It is all the more unfortunate, then, that this great volume is entirely unillustrated.

But if Jackdaws are magical creatures, then here is a delightful scraperboard picture of a pair of them, drawn by Richard Allen and taken from a little book of **Friendship** by Ralph Waldo Emerson (London, 1988), a gift from Peggy Jackson.

