

their regular stock-in-trade of Griffins, Cockatrices, Unicorns, Wyverns and the like had no material existence, and that they were therefore free to make up as many newly invented monsters as they liked, particularly if they could flatter a client by giving him an absolutely unique creature of his own. It is of course open to question whether these intellectual inventions should count as truly fabulous beasts, with a proper place in mythology. The habit of making up new hybrid creatures for heraldic purposes has become quite common in recent years, and Dennys did warn against an unnecessary proliferation of arbitrary monstrosities, urging heralds to make sure that there was good reason for each of their innovations. We do not know what reason the peoples of the Ancient Middle East had for their collection of hybrids – winged human-headed bulls, Griffins, Minotaurs and the like – but they may well have arisen from their dream-like experiences of the spirit world. At least, that would be in accordance with their own descriptions. For the present, here are a few recent concoctions:-



### MORE FROM THE POSTBAG

**Jack Campbell-Kease** sent a card from the Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh with a picture of a gold brooch from the Isle of Bute, dated about 1300, in the form of a chain of six Wyverns grasping one another's tails to make a ring. The eyes seem to have been tiny inset gemstones, possibly garnets, most of which are missing. Jack also sent more information about St Wulfric (*see No 96*) who, before he became the anchorite at Haselbury Pluncknett, had been at one time the vicar of Deverill, south of Warminster, where I was brought up and where the very first issue of *Dragonlore* was produced.



**Roland Symons** sent a drawing of the badge of RAF Squadron 109 with its Panther steaming from its ears, which we had shown already in No 11.

**Paul Thorning** sent a very appreciative note, just such as encourages us to keep going in spite of the difficulties we encounter. Similar encouragement has been received from Gordon Casely, Stuart Emerson, Kevin Greaves and Robert Noel, among others, apart from those named for sending in contributions.

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# Dragonlore

The Journal of The College of Dracology

No.99

St Pancras' Day 2008



Sea monsters supporting the arms of the Chartered Insurance Institute



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

*We welcome electronic members David Cottrell and Richard Greening.*

St Pancras, who died in 304, is celebrated on 12<sup>th</sup> May. Here is what John Vince had to say about him:-

“Pancras was a Roman martyr whose name was introduced into England by Saint Augustine. Ten churches bear the name of Pancras but some seem to be dedicated to Pancras of Taormina – of Greek origin. The name is best known in England as a London railway terminus. Pancras’s emblems are a sword and stone in his hand; and an armed youth holding a book and palm with a Saracen under his feet, as on the memorial brass of Prior Nelond at Cowfold, Sussex.”

St Pancras railway station has recently been modernised as the terminus for the Eurostar express trains, with a new high-speed track to the Channel Tunnel, so has been much in the news lately. Railway trains were likened to dragons when they first appeared, steaming and blowing sparks and flames through the countryside, but the modern electric variety may be better compared to the Python of old.

The picture on the cover was sent in by Cathie Constant, who found it in a collection of cuttings from the Bristol Evening Post celebrating the 1979 Annual Conference of the Chartered Insurance Institute, which was held that year in Bristol. Briggs (1971) does not illustrate these arms, but he records them thus (for the sake of those who like their heraldry in colour):-

“Azure, between two chains fessewise three anchors argent, in chief a salamander in flames and in base a garb Or. **Crest:** Out of a Saxon crown Or, an arm embowed in armour proper, the hand also proper grasping by the blade a sword in bend sinister, point downwards, gules. **Supporters:** On the dexter side a sea unicorn argent, the foreparts gules, armed, bearded and finned Or, and on the sinister side a sea lion also argent, the foreparts also gules, finned gold; each holding by the exterior leg a book, the spine turned outwards from the breast, azure, edged, garnished and with pendent marker also gold. **Motto:** Consilium scientia. Arms granted 25 September 1933; Crest and Supporters granted 3 June 1957.”

We have previously noted that Salamanders were a favourite charge or emblem for insurance companies (*see No 66*). Here, for comparison, is another Salamander, from *Fabelwezens* by Carl-Alexander von Volborth, not the one shown in No 94.



Roger’s third reference is to *The Cambridge Armorial* by Cecil Humphery-Smith and others (1985) because the fifteenth-century Buckingham College was re-founded in 1542 by the same Thomas, Lord Audley of Walden, as ‘The College of St Mary Magdalene’ and Magdalene College, as it is now known, uses his arms as their own. However, they use the shield only, and neither the crest with its Wyvern nor the odd supporters, though a painting of the Audley Beast is to be seen in the college hall.

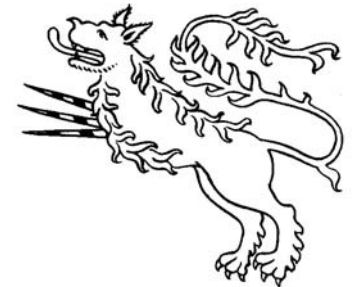
The last of these references is to Thomas Woodcock & John Martin Robinson, *The Oxford Guide to Heraldry* (1988), in which there is a coloured illustration (Plate 19) of two pages from the College of Arms records, known as ‘Prince Arthur’s Book,’ showing eighteen banners of mid-sixteenth-century Knights of the Garter, each held by a single supporter, including a number of fabulous beasts. These are a Theow (Cheney), a Cockatrice (Kingston), a Yale, a Male Griffin (both Carey), a Unicorn (Seymour), a Griffin (St Leger) and a Panther (Sackville) as well as the so-called “unidentifiable monster” for Audley, with its red body and golden horns, collar and chain, although in this case it has but two horns. This appearance is evidently additional to the one described by Dennys, but lacking three horns it was clearly a different beast in his eyes.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary for 1951 has no mention of a **tricorn**, but the 1971 edition includes it (along with the hat) as an “imaginary animal” with alternative spelling **tricornie**, which is more usual for the hat! We are grateful to Roger for bringing this rare beast and its literature to our attention.

## Yet another singular monster

On the same page as he describes the Audley beast, Dennys notes another “very odd creature in the records of the College of Arms” (*right*) which appears “to be incognito.” He calls it the West Beast, since it appears as the crest of West of Sudbury. For it, “there are three manuscript references : the earliest is in a Visitation of Suffolk in 1561, the others are of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. All three claim to be verbatim copies of a confirmation of arms by Roger Leigh, Clarenceux King of Arms, on 23 July 1446, of an earlier confirmation of arms by Roger Durroit, Lancaster King of Arms, in 1386, to Ralph West of Sudbury in Suffolk. There was also a confirmation of these arms in 1447 by John Wrexworth, Guyenne King of Arms. The arms themselves are quite straightforward, *Sable a Lion rampant or collared argent* ; but the crest, which is not blazoned, shows a beast rather resembling a heraldic Tyger salient gold, but instead of forelegs it has three straight tapering spikes protruding forwards from its breast, each spike wreathed with alternate bands of sable and gold.”

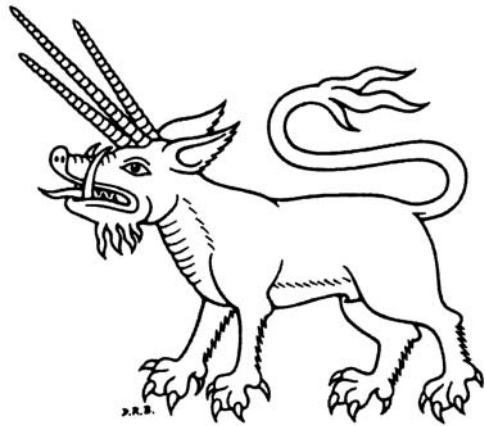
The drawing here is by Alison Urwick after that in the College manuscript. It is clear that those early heralds were quite imaginative, frivolous even, and had no hesitation in devising odd monsters. Perhaps they had already come to believe that



fabulous beast, but in the mean time it should probably remain in the category of stylised animals, along with the Chinese lion, the heraldic lion and a few others. Any more learned opinions would be welcome.

## THE TRICORN - Another Addition to the A to Z

Not a cocked hat with the brim turned up on three sides, but a rare monster occurring once in a painting in the Talbot Shrewsbury Book of Romances (dating from 1445 or thereabouts, in Rouen) and once again in a manuscript held in the College of Arms in London, as supporters to the arms of Thomas Lord Audley of Walden, KG (1540), Lord Chancellor of England. Based on the former, in which the beast is shown being slaughtered by Alexander, this drawing by Roger Barnes (*below*) has appeared in *The New Zealand ARMORIST*, No 106 (Autumn 2008), together with four references.



The first reference is to *Monsters & Grottesques in Medieval Manuscripts* by Alixe Bovey (British Library, 2002) – a booklet which deserves a full review in these pages and will get one soon – which reproduces three illuminations from the Romances of Alexander showing the great king (in full mediaeval armour) attacking with his lance first dragons, then giant crabs and finally the three-horned beast that Roger has now drawn in clear outline.

The next reference is to Rodney Dennys, *The Heraldic Imagination* (1975), where the monster is called the

Audley Beast. Dennys has this to say:-

“Its only appearance is in a manuscript in the College of Arms, compiled in the early seventeenth century. This depicts the two supporters of the arms of Thomas Audley, who was created Baron Audley of Walden, Essex in 1538, and Knight of the Garter in 1540 and who held the office of Lord Chancellor from 1532 until his death in 1544. Each supporter is drawn somewhat like a Lion with a Lion’s tail, but with more slender legs, and the head of a dog; each has three long, straight, smooth gold horns (rather like those of a Unicorn) arising from the forehead; and each is collared gold with a line pendant and flexed over the back.” (*right*) He adds that there is no clue as to the significance of the beast. It would be good to know whether the herald responsible for these supporters had ever had a chance to see the picture in the Romances of Alexander.



## The Basilisk and Other Curious Creatures

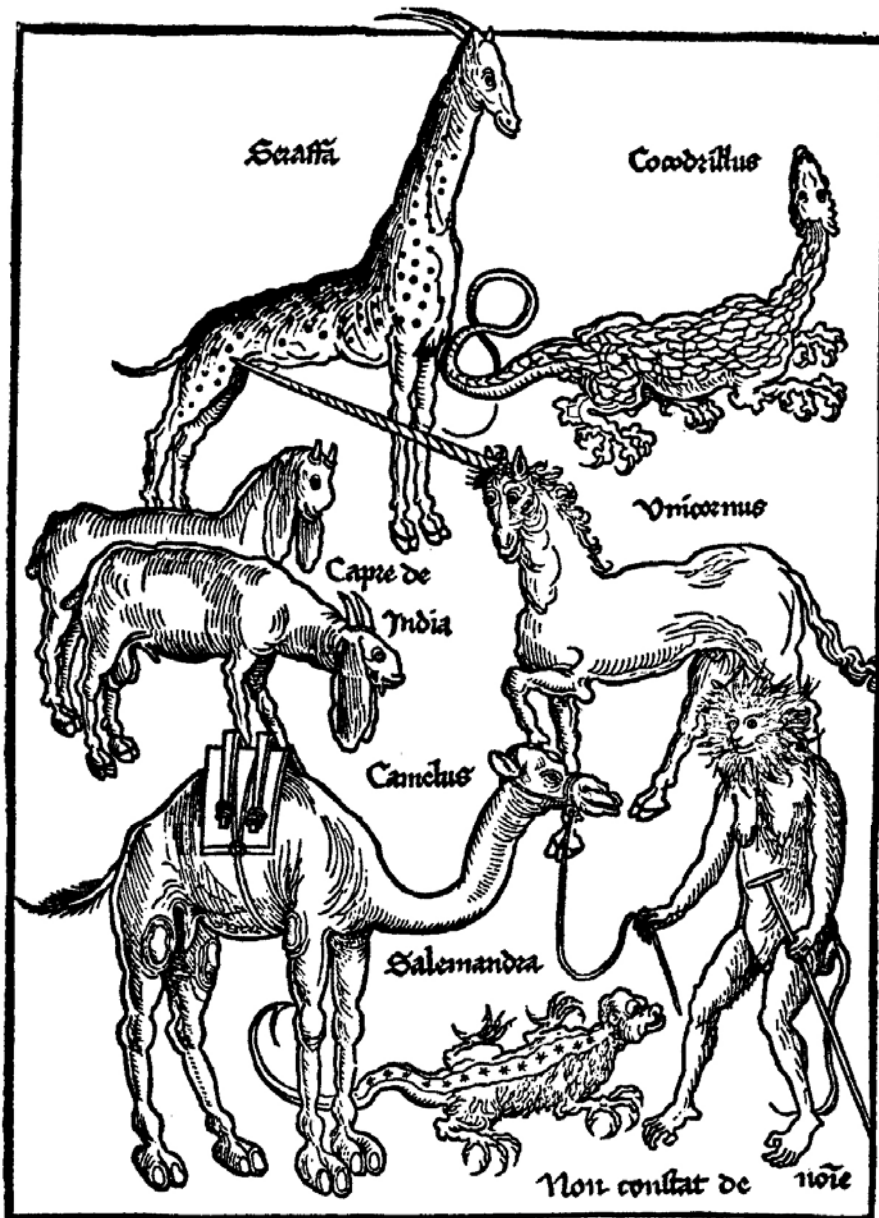
Cathie also sent in a book, *The Cat Orchestra & the Elephant Butler: The Strange History of Amazing Animals* by Jan Bondeson (Stroud, 2006) which includes a chapter on “The Riddle of the Basilisk” that is quite the best discussion of this legendary monster I have come across. Starting from its earliest appearance in the literature and following through with great thoroughness as the legend gradually accumulated more and more bizarre details, Bondeson also describes the various natural phenomena that might have led to each of these additions. The first description of this “King of Snakes” might well have been an accurate account of the Indian Cobra, which does sometimes glide along with its head and neck held erect off the ground, and has a coronet-like pattern on its head, or its hood. Some cobras also spit poison at their prey, thus giving the appearance of killing at a distance, maybe the origin of the “deadly gaze” belief. Quite independently, cases of eggs being laid by cocks and containing little serpents, could have arisen from the fact that some aged hens do develop male characteristics, such as cock’s plumage and the tendency to crow, while still being able to lay miserable little eggs, and at the same time may have been infested with roundworms which could have strayed up the oviduct and become incorporated into the white of the egg or into the shell. These distinct possibilities may well have led to those quite genuine observations that tended to keep the legend of the basilisk alive even long after the more unlikely aspects of the story had been discredited. Deformed chickens with snake-like tails have also been reliably reported, but the link between these strange fowl and the deadly serpent is still hard to grasp. There may be a link in the curious detail that serpents depicted in the Bestiaries are nearly always shown with little chicken-like legs and wings half-way along their serpentine bodies, these being the dragons of early mediaeval heraldic seals as used for decorative infilling, though they may have had an offshoot in the direction of the Basilisk. Bondeson does not go into heraldry, concentrating on the supposed zoology as recorded through the ages, with plenty of quotations from a multitude of authors together with a few examples of carefully manufactured fakes, sold to incredulous noblemen and often preserved in museums of natural history until quite recently.

In another chapter, Bondeson deals with “The Vegetable Lamb and the Barnacle Geese” and covers the question of Spontaneous Generation of Life, at one time thought to account for the origin of all lower forms of creature before their life cycles had been carefully observed, and still regarded as a necessary beginning of all life on this planet. The vegetable lamb of Tartary, or Boramez, and the goose-tree from which barnacles grew that later turned into birds, were first brought to the attention of Western Europe by Sir John Mandeville (*see No 20*) and they too lasted much longer in popular belief than experience justified. Again, Bondeson gives a thorough account of the descriptions that occur in the literature, and discusses the various theories put forward to explain such oddities. One intriguing detail is that as late as the twentieth century some devout Catholics would cheerfully eat barnacle geese during Lent on the grounds that they were indeed fish.

The rest of the book covers tales of all sorts of curious activities by animals, mostly quite true if sometimes misunderstood, but for these two chapters, on the

Basilisk and on the Boramez and Barnacle Goose, Bondeson deserves the gratitude of all serious dracologists. Many thanks to Cathie for bringing his book to our attention.

### BIBLICAL BEASTS and some other monsters



This is a woodcut showing animals seen in the Holy Land, as reported by travellers, from Bernhard von Breydenbach's *Peregrinationes in Terram Sanctam* (Mainz, 1486), another of the illustrations from the Dutch "Kunstschrift" 2002, No 2, sent in by Jan Keuzenkamp. Note particularly the Unicorn and the Salamander and the horned Giraffe (or perhaps it was a Camelopardel). Also from the same journal are these pictures of misericords from the Great Church in Breda, showing a bat-winged Harpy, a bird-winged Harpy and a Wyvern.



Another of the treasures that Jan sent was a precious postcard by Robert Louis, that indomitable French heraldic artist, showing the Grand Arms of Roussillon with its fierce Dragon crest (*held over*). And finally, he sent a drawing by the same artist of the arms of the town of Tarascon in the Department of Bouches-du-Rhone, near Marseilles, showing their indigenous six-legged Dragon, or *Tarasque*, cruelly consuming a young man. Note that the monster is eating his prey in true serpentine fashion, starting with the head, unlike the snake in the Visconti arms (also to be seen on the badge of Alfa Romeo cars) which is eating the unfortunate child feet first.



TARASCON (Bouches-du-Rhône).

### A Pre-Columbian Pottery Puzzle



This piece of ancient Peruvian ceramics was spotted in the Museo Larco in Lima by Steven Henriques, on a visit which he recommends as a truly great experience. It is said to represent "the lunar animal" and Steven thought it was of dracological interest. My feeling is that, in spite of the highly stylised treatment in the manner of the art of their times, the large fangs with rows of teeth, the four feet with long claws and the curly tail, all point to it being a cougar or puma, animals that hunt by night and so could be said to be "lunar." Of course, if it had its own name, and had any myths or legends attached to it, it might qualify as a