

DECORATIVE DRAGONS

Roger Seabury visited the newly refurbished Royal Pavilion at Brighton and was delighted at the number of colourful Dragons in the decorations, including this one:-

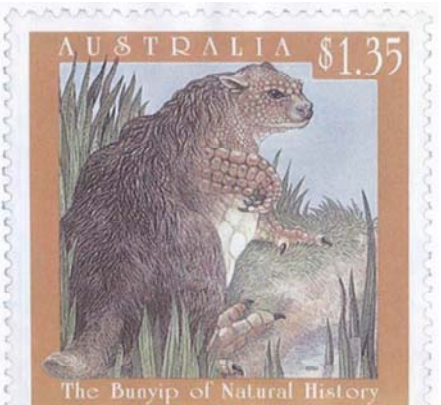


Dragonlore

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St James the Great 2008



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Australian postage stamps showing the Bunyip in various guises.



The College of Dracology for the Study of Fabulous Beasts

James ben Zebedee was one of the earliest of the disciples of Jesus, and is mentioned in the Gospels as being present at most of the major events described. Later, he came into dispute with the Jewish authorities and was martyred in 44 AD in Jerusalem, being beheaded under Herod Agrippa. His remains were taken to Compostella in northern Spain, which became a centre for pilgrimages. Legend has it that he had been there himself on one of his journeys to preach the Gospel, and his emblem of the scallop shell has been widely used as a mark of honour for those who had visited his shrine. His feast day falls on 25 July. He is known as "The Great" to distinguish him from that other disciple, James the brother of our Lord.

The Bunyip featured in our A to Z in No 13 and was described thus: "A huge water-monster like a bull-headed seal (though descriptions vary) that occurs in tales told by Australian aboriginal people." Now **Richard d'Apice** has sent a mass of information on the creature, which starts with the statement:- Dragonlore is incomplete without the archetypal Australian dragon, the Bunyip. Regrettably, I cannot yet find an heraldic use of the beast [Richard is the President of Heraldry Australia].

In 1994 Australia Post issued a highly popular series of four postage stamps which featured different images of the Bunyip (*see cover*):-

A Bunyip of Aboriginal Legend 45c

Aboriginal artist Toogarr Morrison depicted his bunyip as part human and part spirit, and it is the guardian of the waterholes in the south-west of Western Australia which is Morrison's home territory. This bunyip has a flat tail which is used to strike the water and lure passers-by to their doom.

The Nature Spirit Bunyip 45c

David Lancashire drew on a traditional European depiction of the monster in art. He saw his bunyip as something akin to the mediaeval gargoyle.

The Bunyip of Berkeley's Creek 90c

Ron Brooks' illustration adapted from the 1973 children's picture book *The Bunyip of Berkeley's Creek* is now a classic image known to over two generations of young Australians. His amiable and endearing bunyip peers into a mirror, asking, "What am I?"

MYTHS and MONSTERS – unravelling the Truth

This was the title of an imaginative exhibition in the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, that Stuart Emerson took me to see. In amongst paintings such as "Theseus and the Minotaur" by Edward Burne-Jones, Picasso's Minotaur and others showing the Roc, Harpy, Sphinx, Centaur and Satyrs, there were craft objects from their collections including exquisite Chinese dragon-infested pottery and embroidery, Gothic gargoyles, an antler-headed mask, and even a Jenny Haniver. But the chief attraction lay in half-a-dozen huge animatronic models that waved their arms, blinked, growled, hissed and made convincing movements, of a giant Yeti, a fearsome Dragon, a three-headed Chimaera that roared from the lion's head, bleated from the goat's and hissed most malevolently from the serpent's head on the end of its tail, besides a Unicorn, a Cyclops devouring the leg of a deer (*right*), and an Alien from Outer Space. It is not surprising in this present age that the captions, in spite of asking lots of questions and encouraging the viewers to come to their own decisions, all hinted at materialistic origins of the myths, whether as incompletely observed natural phenomena, or speculative explanations of unfamiliar discoveries such as fossil dinosaur bones. Only in the case of the Chimaera was there a hint that this creature might have been purely symbolic, an intellectual invention, and nowhere was there a suggestion that ancient people may have experienced these monsters in their dreams. Nevertheless, the exhibition was well conceived and brilliantly executed, with lots of opportunities for children to take part and "do their own thing." The people who devised it and put it on deserve to be congratulated. It is open until 31st August.



FEEDBACK (1)

The drawings by Peter Vos showing a young Griffin hatching from an egg (No 98 and below) raise some searching questions about Griffin natural history. The youngster (chick?) is shown with a hooked beak already well developed and therefore unable to suckle. Although we have seen a depiction of a mother Griffin suckling its young, evidently having been born as cubs with soft mouth parts, perhaps (as with mules and hinnies) there are two distinct breeds of this fabulous creature, one the hybrid offspring of a cock eagle with a lioness and the other the result of mating between a lion and a hen eagle, the former giving birth to cubs and the latter laying eggs. Those that hatched from eggs would naturally not have to suckle, being primarily bird-like, unlike those born as cubs. Would either of these result in a Friggin? Kevin Greaves is convinced that all Griffins are hybrids, and thus infertile, so was the mother Griffin we saw suckling foster children? Obviously, more research is needed, but in the mean time perhaps there is scope for a new heraldic charge. It having been established that all extant heraldic Griffins are undoubtedly male, and since Lionesses have now been admitted as heraldic beasts, could we now see some genuine female Griffins in the field of heraldry? Would they be Hen Griffins or Griffinesses?



geborene van een griffioen



uit de jeugd van een griffioen

FEEDBACK (2)

Stephen Slater was reminded by the picture of the Tarasque in No 99 (page 5) that he had actually seen this monster on a visit to Tarascon.. It was unceremoniously lying dumped in a back-street garage, and was only brought out for the annual parade, being rather like the well-known Snap in Norwich.

The Bunyip of Natural History \$1.35

Marg Towt depicted what is perhaps the most plausible-looking creature of all in the series. It is based on the reports of settlers last century whose strange experiences in the Australian bush convinced many that bunyips really existed.

The Bunyip is an old Aboriginal legend which has somehow over the years become ingrained in Australian folklore. No one is quite sure when the first white settlers heard the story of the Bunyip but it is now a well-known tale and most Australian children have at least heard of the Bunyip and most probably picture the Bunyip as some kind of large monster-type creature.

In fact the Bunyips are actually the Aboriginal spirits and haunt rivers, swamps, creeks and billabongs. The main goal for these hauntings is to cause nocturnal terror to humans by eating people or animals in their vicinity. They are renowned for their terrifying bellowing cries in the night and it is told that some Aborigines have been too frightened to approach any water source where a Bunyip might be waiting to devour them. The Bunyip's favourite prey is said to be women.

White settlers did on occasion report Bunyip sightings and many more have gone looking for it but it is hard to determine what to look for as different Aboriginal tribes rarely give similar visual accounts of the Bunyip. Some say it looks like a huge snake with a beard and a mane, others say it looks like a huge furry half-human beast with a long neck and a head like a bird or a gorilla-type animal (similar to the American Bigfoot).

Most Australians consider the Bunyip to be just a creature of myth although some scientists believe it did exist and was actually a dinosaur (*Diprotodon*) that has been extinct for 20,000 years. This could be an explanation for the myth which has become firmly entrenched in Australian Legend.

Common anatomical features in Aboriginal drawings of the Bunyip include a horse-like tail, flippers, and walrus-like tusks or horns – though one image looks to my mind more like an armoured beaver. Indeed, the Bunyip legend is thought to be attributable to seals that occasionally get caught in the higher reaches of Australia's vast river systems, calling and rising out of the water before disappearing again. Still, I'm not sure I'd want to meet even one of these more furry versions of the Bunyip in the middle of the night.

R d'A

This is a slightly shortened version of the text that Richard sent. Spirit-creatures that frequently change their shape are common to many ancient experiences from the dream-world (compare the Greek Lamia and Proteus), and attempts to explain them in physical terms as misrepresented beavers or seals or whatever are equally widespread in this materialistic age. As for the scientists' belief in a dinosaur, one must ask, were there Aboriginal people around 20,000 years ago, or were dinosaurs supposed to survive very much later in Australia than elsewhere? Cartoonists often draw cavemen with dinosaurs in the background or even as pets, but scientists should know better. Whatever the true explanation, we are grateful to Richard for his comprehensive exposition. Our original definition was all right, as far as it went.

BOOK REVIEW

MONSTERS & GROTESQUES in Medieval Manuscripts by Alixe Bovey (The British Library, London, 2002)

This well-illustrated survey contains, apart from the Tricorn noted in No 99, a good selection of dragons, griffins, unicorns, mantichors and the like as well as a hydrus, a siren and a centaur, and a great many of those incongruous hybrids that were a favourite subject of mediaeval illustrators. Also featured are the apocalyptic monsters that we know from the Revelation of Saint John, the serpent that tempted Adam and Eve (shown with two little legs) and a variety of fearsome demonic creatures. Here, for example, is an English drawing from about 1050 showing a rather complacent Saint Michael attacking a somewhat unconcerned dragon, and, below, a German picture from about 1175 to 1200 of a comical hybrid illustrating the opening lines of Horace's *Ars Poetica*. This is an excellent little booklet, mostly in colour, and we are grateful to Roger Barnes for bringing it to our attention.



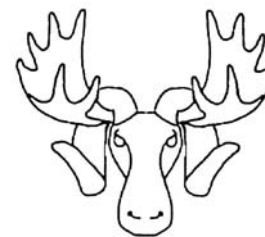
The Coat of Arms (No 215, Spring 2008) has a long article by Clive Cheesman on "Partridges: history of a prohibition" and though these birds are not in themselves fabulous, the stories told about them certainly are. These tales of unseemly behaviour were the reason for the prohibition, and were found in the Bestiaries, which are, of course, the source of almost all we know about our favourite fabulous beasts, from the unicorn onward. As a perfect example of an academic study, we cannot be quite sure that Clive did not have his tongue in his cheek, as the essay is close to being a parody and is great fun to read.

The Heraldic Craftsman (No 64, June 2008) has a nice Bedford Yale on the cover, part of an elaborate painting by Anthony Wood of the arms of "John of Lancaster, brother of King Henry the fifth, Regent of France and the first Duke of Bedford." Also in this issue are the arms of the de Veres, seen in *Dragonlore No 100*, and a picture of the arms of Queen Elizabeth I with a spritely Welsh Dragon supporter.

The Heraldry Gazette (No 108 New Series, June 2008) has a Demi-Unicorn on the cover, the crest on the arms of the Association of British Neurologists, and inside there are some more arms of newly-created Life Peers with plenty of Dragons, a two-headed Eagle and a winged Unicorn as well as that rarity the Caladrius, on the crest for Baron Crisp. Garter has been enjoying himself.

Gonfanon (Vol 19 No2, Summer 2008), amongst a wealth of colourful heraldic items, features the arms of Jorge Luis Rivera with its green Wyvern, alongside his bookplate by Gordon Macpherson that we saw in No 93, as well as his earlier assumed arms with a golden Griffin in the crest. The back page of *Gonfanon* shows a carving of the arms of the Canadian Heraldic Authority with its red-and-white hybrid Raven-Bear supporters.

The Prairie Tressure (Issue 11, Spring/Summer 2008) has among other joys a short article on the Musimon (*right*), entitled "Mythical No More" on the grounds that some varieties of sheep do indeed have four horns and that it is not necessary to assume a cross between a sheep and a goat. It goes on to say that the Musimon should not be confused with the Moosimon, an entry in their



Critter Contest, which is "a large creature with the body, head and antlers of a moose, and the feet and horns of a bighorn sheep" (*left*).



JOURNAL SCAN

Aspects of Heraldry (No 22, 2008) shows a "Male Griffin" as a supporter for Anne Boleyn and a Unicorn likewise for Jane Seymour, in an article by Leslie Barker on the *Heraldry of the English Consorts to Henry VIII*, and red Demi-Griffins in the Pearson arms and crest of the Viscount Cowdray, illustrating the review of a book on *The Pearson Connection* by Hugh Murray.