

Illustration from "Fictitious & Symbolic Creatures in Art" by John Vinycomb, 1907

Hercules to clear the river bank, and return the flow to its proper course. The Hydra does not appear very often in heraldry, and the number of heads per hydra varies! Only one English, and seven European families are recorded as having a hydra in their arms. Of the Europeans, one has seven heads. The English one is the crest in the arms granted in 1927 to Alexander Crispin, Lord of the Manor of Dodbrook, and it is drawn exactly as a modern heraldic Dragon, but with seven heads.

The seven headed hydra bears a great similarity to the animal of which St. John speaks in Revelations. He saw in the sky a maiden clothed with the sun, and the moon at her feet, and twelve stars for a crown. Also there appeared to him a great red dragon which had seven heads and seven crowns. The dragon was waiting to pounce on the woman's new born baby, but she and the child were taken out of its reach, and St. Michael came down from Heaven and killed it. Perhaps the dragon's heads represented the seven deadly sins, and once again the story symbolises good overcoming evil.

Margaret Young (reprinted from The Heraldry Gazette, September 1993)

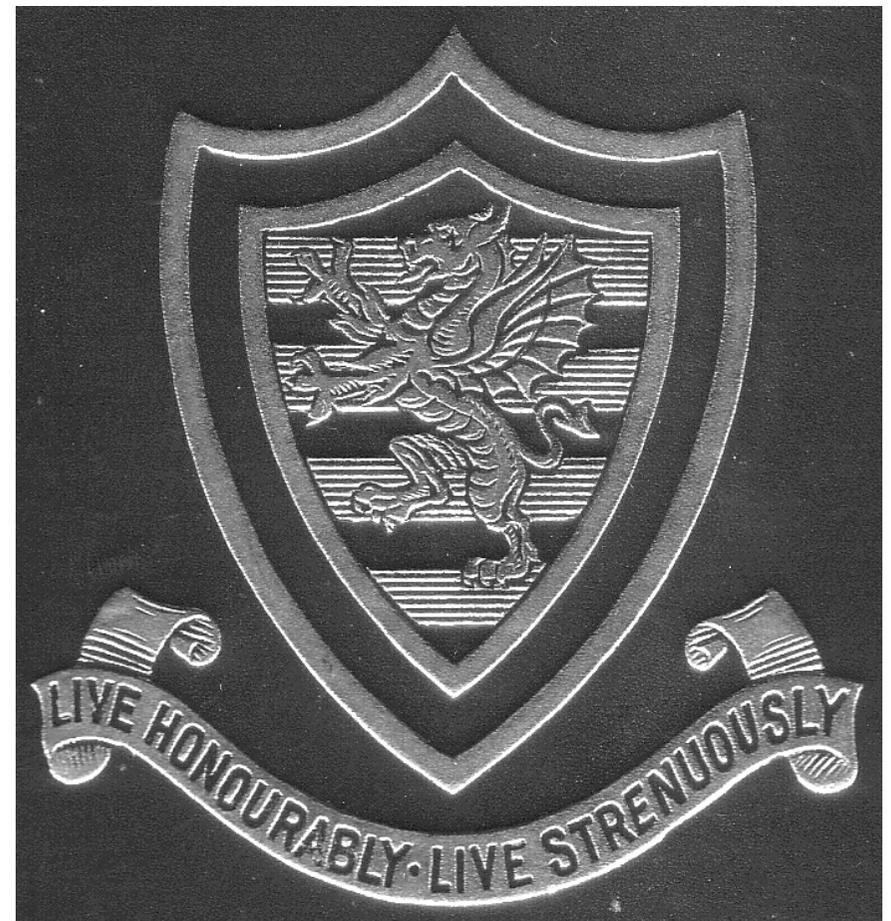
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Dragonlore

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A Cornish Dragon on the badge of St Piran's School, Maidenhead, Berks

The College of Dracology for the Study of Fabulous Beasts

With great sadness we report the death of Rean Meyer of Victoria, B.C., one of the more recent recruits to dracology. He was a good friend, most generous with his time and a stickler for accuracy, a pillar of heraldry in Canada and in particular the B.C./Yukon Branch, an indefatigable Editor of their Journals, and a wonderful companion. He will be sorely missed. Our condolences go to Shirley, his widow.

The Cornish Dragon on the cover, pretending to be a coat of arms, was the badge of a boys' preparatory school in Maidenhead and may well be the source of the initial impulse which eventually gave rise to Dragonlore. At the start of each school year, round about Michaelmas, the Headmaster gave his talk on the importance of Heraldry and Chivalry, linking it to the image of St Michael fighting the dragon, and that too may have had a lasting effect on my interests. Though the school was named St Piran's, there is nothing in the legends about St Piran to connect him with Dragons, apart from their recognition as important totems throughout the West Country. The school is still flourishing, no longer a boys' boarding school, but a vigorous day school with five or six times as many pupils, boys and girls, from kindergarten to common entrance. It has been suggested that the dragon badge, which is still in use, and looks splendid in colour (dark blue, light blue and gold), might become a genuine coat of arms.

Probably better known is the Dragon School at Oxford, whose official badge shows a rather prim Victorian Wyvern (*left below*), though they make much use of a livelier version (*right below*) which is anatomically believable. We are indebted to Richard Fox, one of our founder members, for providing this material.



The Feast of St. Michael and All Angels is held on 29th September.

Fabulous Beasts in Czech Heraldry

A delightful little book has come our way which was a gift from the artist to John Brooke-Little. **České erby** by Josef Janáček and Jiří Louda (Prague 1974) illustrates a hundred arms of Czech families in Louda's engaging style. They include two double-headed Eagles (indicating allegiance to the Holy Roman Emperor), one Liechtenstein Harpy, a Unicorn and an intriguing green Dragon which is wrapped around the gold and black shield of the Z Vartenberka family and is biting his own tail. Five out of a hundred is not a high score, but is worth recording.



An Alphabet of Queries (11)

HOW MANY HEADS HAS A HYDRA?

There seem to be several different ideas regarding the form of the Hydra. There is the river Hydra, or Hydrus, which was an aquatic snake, whom the ancients believed lived in the River Nile, and was the enemy of the crocodile. When the hydra saw a crocodile asleep with its mouth open, it would dash away and roll in the mud, making itself very slippery. Then it would return to the somnolent crocodile and slide down its throat. The crocodile, waking in surprise, would gulp it down, whereupon the hydra would burst its enemy asunder, and emerge again alive. As with many other medieval legends, there was a religious symbolism to this story, the crocodile representing Death and Hell, whose hydra enemy was the Lord Jesus Christ, who took upon himself the sins of the world - the hydra's coat of mud - and descended into Hell to break its power.

The medieval bestiaries also tell of a Hydra Dragon who lived in the marshy lands of Arcadia. If one of its heads was cut off, three would grow in its place, so that it might eventually have a great number of heads. This story has a natural connotation, being linked with the River Hydra, which burst its banks and ran through many rivulets to the sea. It was one of the tasks of

Fabulous Beasts in Irish Heraldry

A visit to Dublin to attend the XXV International Congress of Genealogical and Heraldic Sciences gave an opportunity to renew acquaintance with **Irish Families: Their Names, Arms and Origins** by Edward MacLysaght (4th edn, Dublin 1985) which illustrates in colour 243 coats of arms. Of these, 33 feature fabulous beasts, 16 on the shield and 19 on the crest (that is, only 2 have both), and by far the most popular creature is the **Griffin**, which appears in 12 of them, that is to say, nearly 5% of all family arms have a Griffin in whole or in part. Next come Dolphins with 4 appearances, Martlets, Mermaids and Pelicans with 3 each, Unicorns and two-headed Eagles each with 2, and single showings of a Dragon, a Wyvern, a Pegasus and an Enfield. Of this latter, more in a moment. A display of Civic Heraldry at the Congress (The Republic itself, the 4 Provinces, the 32 Counties and 3 Universities) was a bit of a disappointment, yielding only a Phoenix on the arms of Offaly and birds which may be Martlets for Louth.

Fergus Gillespie, Deputy Chief Herald of Ireland and Secretary-General to the Congress, threw helpful light on the name and origin of the Enfield (*see No 24*). Apparently a mythological hound, the **Onchu** had a name that English speakers found difficulty in pronouncing, so, just as O'Murchadha became Murphy, the Onchu became the Enfield in its anglicized form. The name means "spirit hound."

A **Unicorn** was the emblem of the Inisglas Community, near Wexford, run by Eve and Anthony Kaye until they retired. Eve showed me a little book, **Unicorns**, edited by Jeanne Griffiths (WH Allen, London 1981) with 25 pictures from a variety of sources, mostly in colour, and with facing quotations - very like the book on Dragons noted in the last issue, but even smaller in size. The Unicorn is evidently still a potent symbol, though its true meaning remains enigmatic; for Inisglas it was "a figure of purity and courage."

A handsome souvenir was **The Little Book of Irish Clans** by John Grenham (Dublin 1994) with 85 shields of arms by Myra Maguire, including two-headed Eagles for Browne and for Joyce, a Griffin for Griffin, a Wyvern for Macgillycuddy, Martlets for Nolan, a Pegasus for Quinn, Dolphins for Regan and Griffins' heads for Ryan.

Fabulous Beasts in the Thistle Stall Plates

One of the most beautiful books published recently was launched by the Heraldry Society of Scotland on St Andrews Day 2001. **STALL PLATES of the Most Ancient and Most Noble ORDER OF THE THISTLE in the Chapel of the Order within ST GILES' CATHEDRAL The High Kirk of Edinburgh**, by Charles J. Burnett *Ross Herald of Arms* and Leslie Hodgson (Edinburgh 2001) has a hundred amazingly realistic full-scale colour photographs of the enamelled metal plates fixed to the stalls, one for the arms of each of the Knights admitted to the Order. Of these, eleven feature fabulous beasts, including a Mermaid (Balfour 1901), Unicorns (Roxburghe 1902), a Double-headed Eagle (Maxwell 1932), Dolphins and a Unicorn's head (Cunningham 1945), another Unicorn's head (Dalhousie 1971), a Demi-Griffin (Birsay 1973), a Salamander (Selkirk 1976), a Chinese Dragon's head and a two-headed Eagle (MacLehose 1983), a Martlet (Younger 1995), a winged Demi-Bull (Macfarlane 1006) and an Oriental Dragon (Wilson 2000). This selection, and its proportion of the whole, is pretty typical of Scots heraldry.

FEED-BACK

Ben Elliott writes:- "In connection with the article on p.3 of No 22, I think it possible that as well as the Welsh Dragon having a Romano-British ancestry, appropriated of course by the Anglo-Saxons, they, along with the general move to give Wyvern-type creatures four legs, may owe much to mystery plays. To create a convincingly fierce dragon for George or other people to deal with, one really needs two men in the body (*one for the wings and one for the jaws - Ed.*). The evidence for this, however, is stronger in France than in England.....There is also, of course, the precedent of Gryphons..."

More of this in due course. We have already noted how four-legged Griffins greatly outnumber two-legged Wyverns in the Bayeux Tapestry (*see No 23*) and this may well have influenced the depiction of Dragons. There is also the question of when Dragons began to breathe fire. There is no evidence that early water-based serpent-dragons ever did so, but mediaeval fairground showmen seemed to have used this trick and could have employed it to make their dragon-costumed figures more frightening. It is now accepted as one of the fundamental defining features of any dragon - as when Norbert singed Hagrid's beard. Perhaps badly-drawn red tongues, possibly forked, were mistaken for flames. More research is needed.

An Essay in Three-fold Cubic Symmetry with a Family of Fabulous Beasts

Most are familiar with a Cube standing four-square on its flat square base, with four square walls rising from its edges, one on each side, and topped with a flat square roof. This is indeed the basic structure of nearly all modern buildings and packaging. Fewer know the three-fold symmetry of a cube hanging from one corner, with three ridges radiating out and down to a periphery zig-zagging round an hexagonal equatorial plane, and then three more ridges converging to the bottom point.

To replace abstract geometrical forms with concrete examples, consider the development of a commonplace, totally unfabulous creature such as a prancing horse. This animal, one of the Twelve Noble Beasts, can be seen as a three-fold composition. First is the head, the location of all the main senses and the centre of consciousness. Next comes the middle region with heart and lungs, the core of the rhythmic system, and shoulders and forelegs, used for steering and balance. Last are the hinder parts containing the organs of digestion, metabolism and generation and supported by the powerful hind legs, the main source of locomotive thrust.

Now the head can be enhanced by a horn, a symbol of cosmic awareness, to turn the horse into a Unicorn. (Not all Unicorns are derived from a horse, but some certainly are, and these will serve to represent the others.) If the plain horse is placed at the apex of the cubic structure, the addition of a horn is shown by a vector leading down and back to the left.

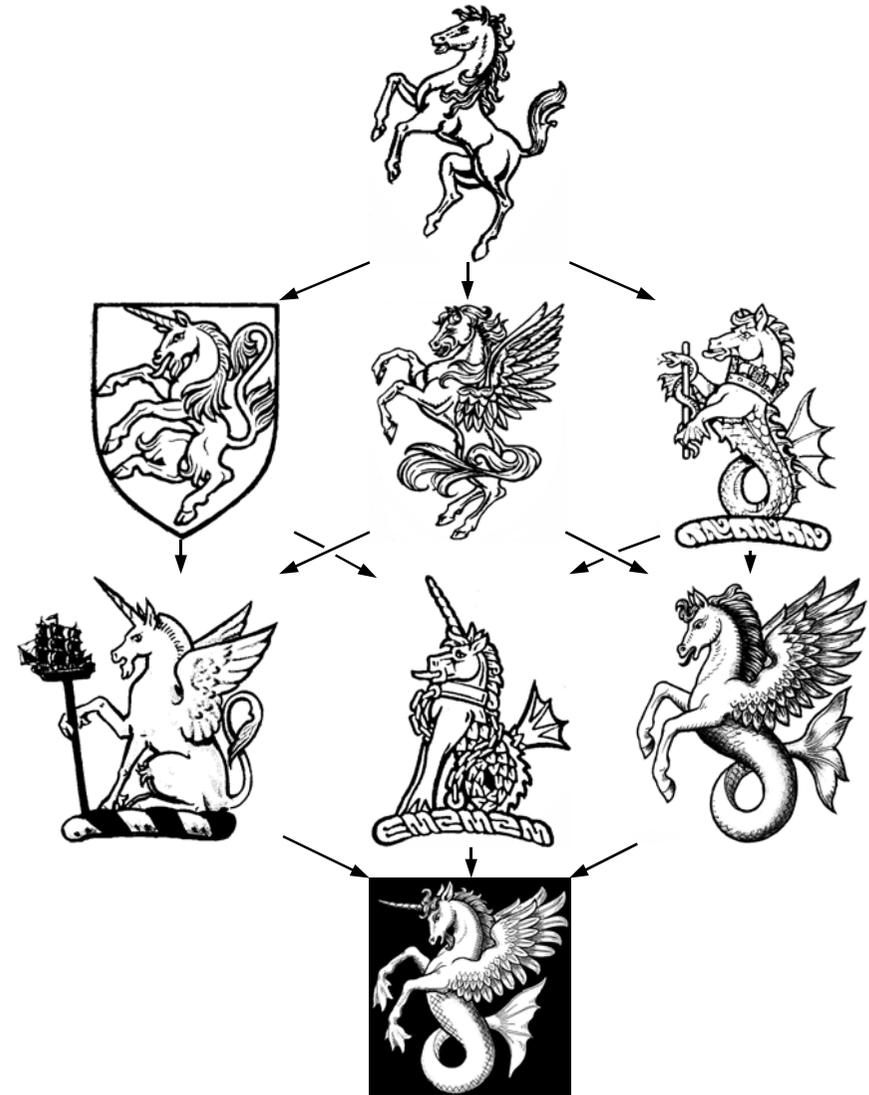
Next the middle region can be enhanced with wings, the symbol of spiritual breadth, shown by a vector leading straight down and forwards and yielding a Pegasus.

Last, the hind-quarters may be enhanced by turning them into a fish-tail, a symbol of universal etheric power, as the waters widely cover the earth, and shown by a vector leading down and back to the right, pointing to the Sea-Horse or Hippocampus.

There is now a tier of three Fabulous Beasts, to which the same three vectors may be applied in pairs to give three new Fabulous Beasts. The Unicorn can evolve into a Winged Unicorn or into a Sea-Unicorn, the Pegasus into a Winged Unicorn or into a Sea-Pegasus (Winged Sea-Horse)*, and the Sea-Horse into a Sea-Unicorn or into a Sea-Pegasus (Winged Sea-Horse).

Finally, from this lower tier, the three vectors can lead together, by different routes, to the culminating Fabulous Beast, the Winged Sea-Unicorn. This completes the cubic structure (*see opposite*).

* Some say that a Sea-Pegasus has hooves and a Winged Sea-Horse has webbed feet like an heraldic Sea-Horse.



Prancing horse - Arms of Kent County Council

Unicorn - Arms of Ballwil, Canton Luzern

Pegasus - Arms of the Inner Temple, London

Sea-Horse - Crest of Dr. Kevin Greaves FRHSC

Winged Unicorn - Crest of Norman Duncan Esq CBE

Sea-Unicorn - Crest of E.N. Taylor Esq FHS

Sea-Pegasus or Winged Sea-Horse - Badge of 894 Squadron, Fleet Air Arm

Winged Sea-Unicorn - Supporter of the arms of the Royal Overseas League