

say, diagonal legs moving together rather than both legs together on each side, as in the unnatural gait of heraldic beasts, inherited from the statuary of the ancient Middle East. Some bears can move in this fashion, as do specially-trained trotting horses or “pacers,” but lions never do - at least not in real life. The best guide to this subject was written by my old Zoology Professor, James Gray, in his book *How Animals Move: The Royal Institution Christmas Lectures 1951*, illustrated by Edward Bawden (Cambridge, 1953), which deals comprehensively with crawling, walking, running, jumping, swimming and flying. Bears, bats and pterodactyls are all covered, but not dragons (he was, after all, a Professor of Zoology).

Bawden’s drawing (*right*) of “The pterodactyl, showing the enormously enlarged fourth fingers, with membranes extending to the body and hindlegs to form wings,” reminds me that one of my teachers at school always called these creatures “dray-gon-birds” and was convinced that they were the source of dragons in mythology, believing that the earliest primitive mammal ancestors of humans could have been so impressed by these monsters that a memory of them would have survived all through the lengthy evolution of what eventually became our human species. If this is true, our own dragon has too many legs, and we should return to the so-called wyvern pattern. But for the present, he is too attractive to abandon.



### An Alphabet of Queries (27)

What sort of a beast is a Xantia? In fact, though it may be fabulous in the colloquial sense, it is certainly no beast, but a “beaut,” as we say in the trade. Mine is a turbo-diesel automatic, and is a joy to drive. We are told that the name Xantia does not mean anything, but was chosen because the manufacturer was following an X-theme (other models being the AX, BX, CX, XM, Saxo and Xsara), now abandoned. The name may suggest exotic power, but was unique to the marque. If it suggests some sort of monster to the mind, I would be glad to see a sketch (*like this one ?*), but otherwise, I am afraid, no score.



# Dragonlore

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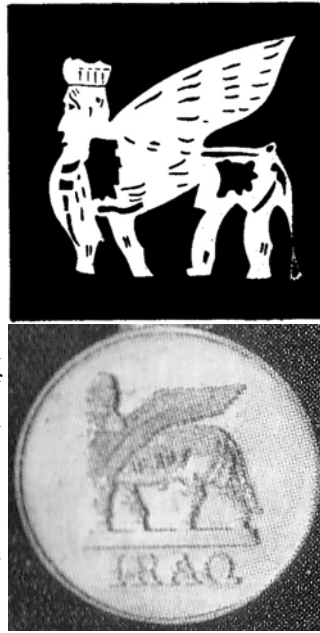


Lamussu from Assyria, drawn by Anne Marie Jauss

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

*We welcome new members Joan Jordan and Michael McCarthy.*

The beast on the cover is taken from a sculpture from Khorsabad in Assyria, dating from the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. (from Lum, 1952). Called a Lamassu, and used as a gate-guardian, it is generally regarded as a type of Sphinx, and although this one has a bull's body, other similar ones have the body of a lion like the more familiar Egyptian Sphinx. It was used during the second World War as the emblem on the formation sign of the British 10<sup>th</sup> Army (right, gold on black), which was stationed in Iraq, and has been called into play again recently to stand on the reverse of the latest Iraq Medal, awarded to those who served in and supported the operations in 2003 known as Operation Telic (below). It is now recognized as the appropriate symbol to stand for service in the region once known as Mesopotamia, just as the Sphinx of Gizah stands for service in Egypt, as seen on many regimental cap badges (see No 2).



Edward the Martyr, King of the West Saxons, was born in 963, the eldest son of King Edgar the Peaceful (and not to be confused with Edward the Confessor, celebrated on 13<sup>th</sup> October). Under the influence of Bishop Dunstan, he became King of England in 975, but through the intrigues of his stepmother Elfthryth, who wanted her son Ethelred to be king, the anti-monastic party brought about his violent death at Corfe on 18<sup>th</sup> March 978, the day on which his martyrdom is now commemorated. His cult as saint and martyr began in 1001, and still stands in the English calendar of saints.

Although the Saxon kings reigned before heraldry was introduced, the Tudors attributed arms to them all retrospectively. To the Kings of Wessex they assigned a golden dragon or wyvern, on a blue field for the pagan West Saxons, changing to a red ground when they converted to Christianity. It is likely that the Saxons used a dragon or wyvern as an ensign or totem. In the Bayeux Tapestry, some Norman warriors are shown with wyverns decorating their shields, but in the Battle of Hastings it is the Saxons who carry a dragon standard in the form of a wind-sock at the end of a pole, carried aloft in one

The Roman alphabet spread all over their empire, and still forms the basis of the alphabets used throughout western Europe, while the Griffin too became a firm favourite, turning up in large numbers in the Bayeux Tapestry, in gothic architecture and book illustrations, and of course in heraldry, where it remains the most popular of fabulous beasts.



*Bayeux Griffin*

*Gothic Bestiary Griffin*

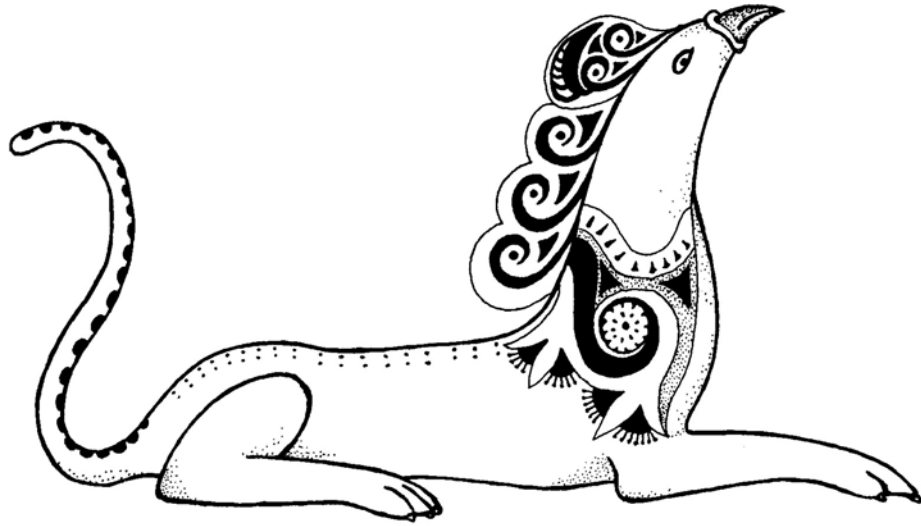
*16th Century  
Heraldic Griffin*

## Our very own Dragon



This pesky crittur, specially drawn for us by Kevin Arkininstall, has come out of hiding, perhaps encouraged by the warmer weather and lighter evenings, and now takes his bow. Compared with the standard heraldic Dragon (as seen on the cover of No 29), it has a longer neck, larger wingspan, and legs moving in the manner of all reptiles and almost all other quadrupeds, that is to

**Griffin Wanderings**



*Griffin Guardian of Minos in the Throne Room of the Palace at Knossos in Crete, 1500-1400 B.C.*

According to David Sacks in his book *The Alphabet* (London, 2003), the Griffin was one of the things besides the Alphabet, that the ancient Greeks borrowed from the Phoenicians, others being improved ship designs, navigation techniques, tree-of-life designs in art, and the goddess Astarte (Ashtoreth in the Bible), whom they re-named Aphrodite, possibly due to mistaking some of the letters. Greeks took their alphabet to Italy (along with the Griffin), where it was borrowed by the Etruscans, and this is probably when the Griffin became the symbol of Perugia, the chief Etruscan town, which remains as their coat of arms to this day (see right). In turn, the Etruscan alphabet was borrowed by their neighbours, the Romans. In each case, the alphabet was adopted into an



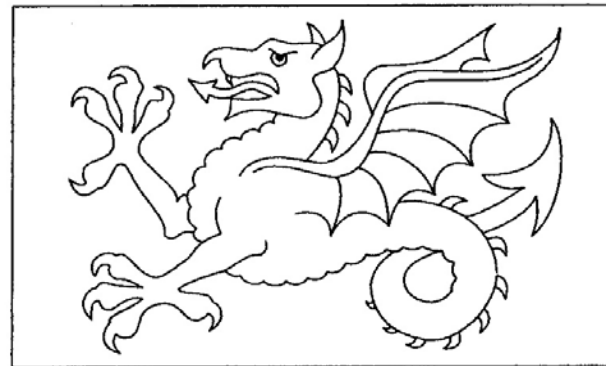
entirely different language, and adapted to its new sounds as required, for a hitherto unwritten speech-system. The Griffin, too, seems to have been welcomed at each stage, and certainly the Romans made much use of it in their architectural decorations (see left).



place (left) but brought to the ground nearby (right), in a short scene where the action moves from right to left (see also No 23).



In modern heraldry, dragons and wyverns appear in many West Country arms, in Somerset, Dorset and Wiltshire, and a golden Wyvern on a blue square was the badge of the 43<sup>rd</sup> (Wessex) Infantry Division (below) that fought from the Normandy landings in June, 1944, across France and Belgium, at the forcing of the Rhine crossing in March, 1945, and then across Germany up to the final surrender in May of that year. Recently, with talk of Regional Assemblies, a suggestion for a Flag for Wessex has been put forward in *Flagmaster, The Journal of the Flag Institute, No 96 (Winter 1999)* which has a golden Wyvern on a red field (below). Since the Norman Conquest, Wessex has had no place as an official name for anywhere, but Thomas Hardy revived it in his novels as the name for the West Country in general and it became very popular in tourist circles. Now a Royal Prince has been created the Earl of Wessex, but will it remain a romantic fancy or will a Western Region take it as its official name? It is too soon to say. For some years Viscount Weymouth (now the Marquess of Bath) promoted the idea of a Wessex government, but it is doubtful whether the proposed Regional Assembly is quite what he had in mind.



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**Manaia** is the name of a creature found in Maori wood-carvings. Neither Cherry nor Rose list it, but Roger Barnes has kindly sent this drawing of a pair of them supporting the arms of the New Zealand Law Society. They have mulberry-coloured bodies with blue eyes, and when used in pairs symbolize the spiritual nature of an opposition such as right and wrong, or justice and injustice, very appropriately for a Law Society.

## Comet disaster throws new light on dark age

By Roger Highfield, Science Editor (from *The Daily Telegraph*, 5 February 2004)

A MONK'S apocalyptic book and Arthurian legend are united by a study that shows how a comet plunged Britain into a dark age in the sixth century.

Studies of tree rings showed the Earth underwent a series of very cold summers around AD 536-540, a Cardiff University team reports in the journal *Astronomy and Geophysics*. They believe the chill was caused by a comet exploding in the Earth's upper atmosphere.

Historical references from the Dark Ages are sparse, but what records there are tell of crop failures and summer frosts. Gildas Bandonicus, a Celtic monk, in his book *Concerning the Ruin of Britain* (*De Excidio Britanniae*) recorded that "the Sun gave forth its light without brightness."

Folklore also suggests that the death of King Arthur - in either 539 or 542 depending on your source - plunged Britain into a dark age. Merlin, Arthur's magician, is depicted in mythology as a "red fiery whooshing dragon flying in the sky" - an account consistent with a comet impact.

[Dragons turn up in the most unexpected places. This one was worth reporting. Another possible comet-dragon is seen in an elaborate painting of the Field of the Cloth of Gold, with a wyvern in the sky surrounded by a burst of sunlight (*below*). Some think that this is the Salamander badge of the French King, but others believe that it may represent a comet portent of good or ill tidings.]

