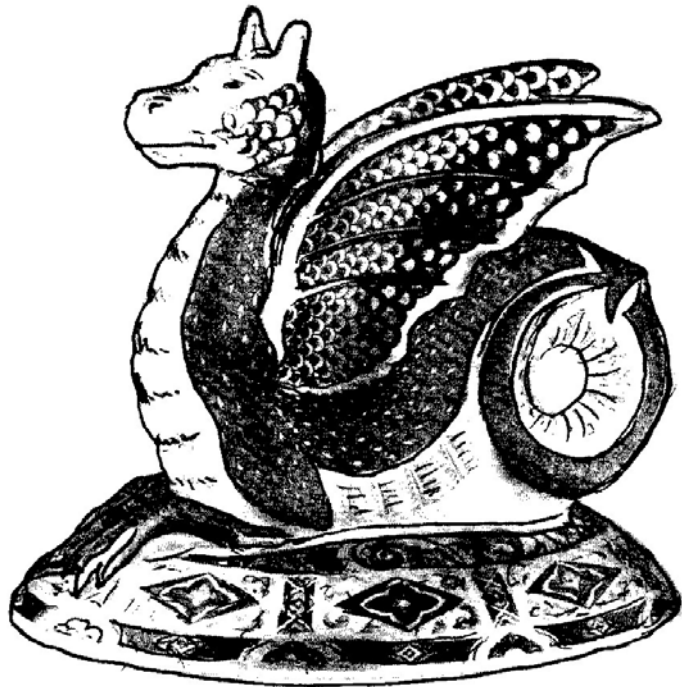


upper jaw and hold the lower one still. From their dung is made an ointment with which old women and faded whores anoint their faces, and appear beautiful until their sweat washes it off.

*Translated by Richard Barber, 1992 (see No 20). We know that crocodiles are not dragons, but when the Chinese first came across them they conducted tests to determine whether they were dragons or just animals that could be killed without fear of retribution, and decided in favour of animals. The bestiary writer evidently thought so too, and had a separate entry for "dragons" under "serpents."*

### The Wessex Wyvern



This elegant paperweight, just 5 ½ inches long in the base, designed by Louise Adams and made by Royal Crown Derby in a limited production of 2000 pieces, could be yours for £255. It is based "on the ancient two-legged dragon that was the standard and emblem for King Harold at the Battle of Hastings in 1066," and is red, cream and gold on a multi-coloured base. The agents are Govier's of Sidmouth. (This is not an advertisement.)

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# Dragonlore

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Griffin design on a chalice case lid



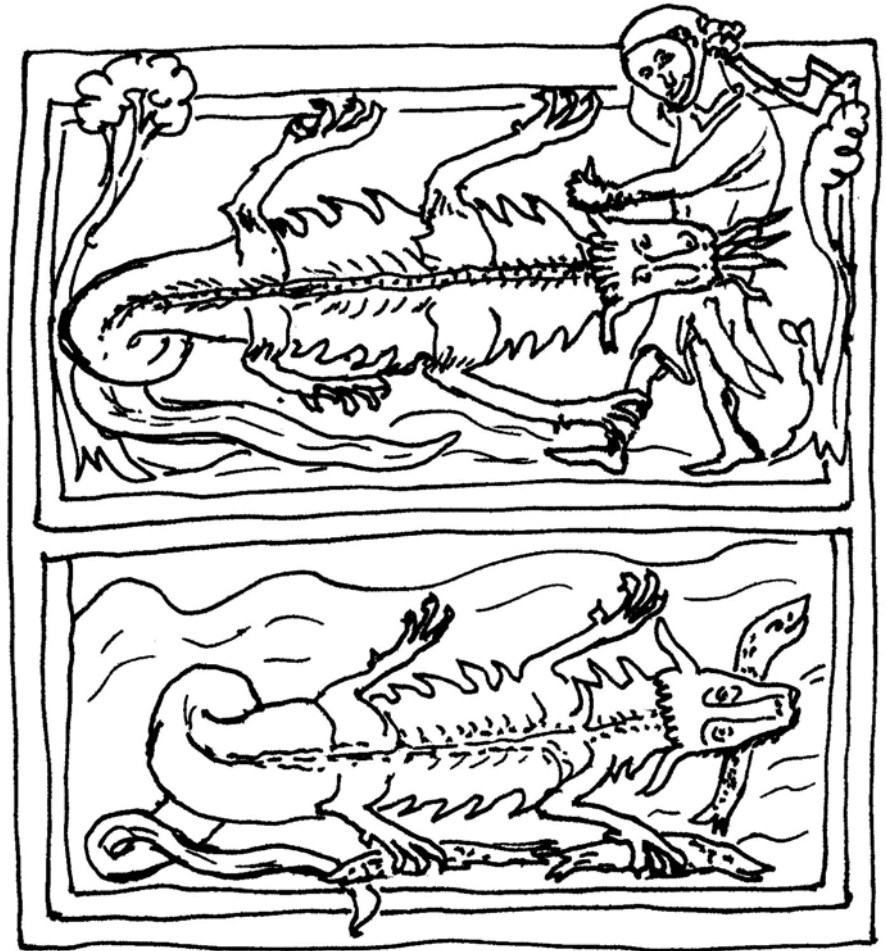
### The College of Dracology for the Study of Fabulous Beasts

The design on the cover was sent in by Tony Sims and is taken from a leather lid with a punched pattern. It is alleged to be from a chalice case, but Tony thinks that at 22 cm in diameter, it is rather large for that. However, the inscription, which translates as “Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews,” points to a religious connection. The significance of the Griffin is not clear. Tony guesses that it may be a protective charm. If anybody has some more information about this, we should be pleased to hear.

Another Griffin is this one (*right*) from the badge of the 1935 destroyer that was transferred to Canada in 1943 after most of her sister ships had been lost. She served briefly as HMCS Griffin before being renamed HMCS Ottawa (after the river, not the city, nor the Indian tribe, as we said in those days), and getting a new badge. She was sold off in 1946. The Griffin badge was one of the designs by Charles Foulkes, and has a golden griffin on a blue field. The destroyer of 1935 was the twelfth ship in the Royal Navy to bear this name, many of them spelled “Griffon” as they had been captured from the French, but whatever the spelling, they were regarded as having the same name and were thus eligible to collect all their various battle honours. The earliest of these was for the Armada 1588, with five more collected during the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries, and no less than nine earned by this very active destroyer between 1940 and 1943. Note that the current HMCS Griffin is not a ship but the naval reserve division in Thunder Bay, Ontario, on the Great Lakes, as I am informed by Dave Freeman, author of *Canadian Warship Names* (St Catherines, Ont., 2000) who is now working on a companion book on Canadian Warship Badges.



### The Crocodile, from a 13<sup>th</sup> Century Bestiary



The crocodile is so called from the colour of crocuses. They live in the River Nile, four-footed animals, equally at home on land or in the water and more than twenty cubits long. The crocodile is armed with monstrous teeth and claws and has such a tough skin that however hard you throw a stone at it, it will not hurt the beast. It goes into the water at night and rests by day on the land. It lays its eggs on land, and both male and female take it in turns to hatch them. A certain kind of fish whose serrated spines tear open the soft part of their belly kills them. Alone among animals they can move their

across the river), and a short way upstream from Wormingford, but on the Suffolk bank, the village of Bures also has its legendary dragon, perhaps even the same one. This may be a case of ancient county rivalries. The earliest record of the Bures dragon has it being brought back from the Crusades in the twelfth century. Richard the Lion-Heart is said to have been given a crocodile by Saladin, which was brought back to England and kept in the menagerie in the Tower of London. From there, it escaped and swam downstream, last being seen in the Essex marshes.

The next report is from a chronicle of 1405:- “Close to the town of Bures, near Sudbury, there has lately appeared, to the great hurt of the countryside, a dragon, vast in body, with a crested head, teeth like a saw, and a tail extending to an enormous length. Having slaughtered the shepherd of a flock, it devoured many sheep.” After an unsuccessful attempt by local archers to kill the beast, due to its impenetrable hide, “...in order to destroy him, all the country people around were summoned. But when the dragon saw that he was again to be assailed with arrows, he fled into a marsh or mere and there hid himself among the long reeds, and was no more seen.”

There was one more sighting later in that century, on the afternoon of Friday, 26<sup>th</sup> September, 1449, to be precise. Two giant reptiles were seen fighting on the banks of the River Stour. One was black and the other reddish and spotted. After an hour-long struggle, the black monster yielded and returned to its lair. In none of these reports is there a slaying, the dragon last being seen swimming off downstream. From Bures, that would be in the direction of Wormingford. Could it be that the good knight of Wormingford actually slew the dragon of Bures? So much for county rivalries!

One difficulty with these stories lies with the timing. Either the original crocodile was very long-lived, or had established a breeding colony (not easy if there was only the one), or else the stories are unconnected. It is just about possible that the crocodile that escaped from the Tower made its way through the Essex marshes and up the Stour as far as Bures, where it was spotted and driven away downstream, to be caught and slain at Wormingford. Like many legends, in the retelling, its precise location in history would become uncertain. Among the many dragon-slaying legends of the British Isles (*see No 30*), this seems to be the only one that includes a crocodile, most of the dragons or worms being serpentine, but had a crocodile suddenly appeared in the mediaeval countryside, it would surely have been taken for a dragon.

## Two Mediaeval Monsters

This pair of curious creatures, which nearly always appear together, were great favourites with the artists and woodcarvers who decorated our churches, and are often to be found on misericordes. The **Chicheface** (Fig. 1) is shown like a skinny wolf with the fore legs of a dragon and the hind legs of an ungulate. He is always shown emaciated because he feeds only



Fig. 1

on wives who are submissive to their husbands. His partner is the **Bigorne** (Fig. 2) who feeds on over-obedient husbands who begged him to end their misery, and is usually shown bloated, with the head of a wild cat, the scaly back and tail of a fish and legs like a lion's. These drawings, by the late Paul

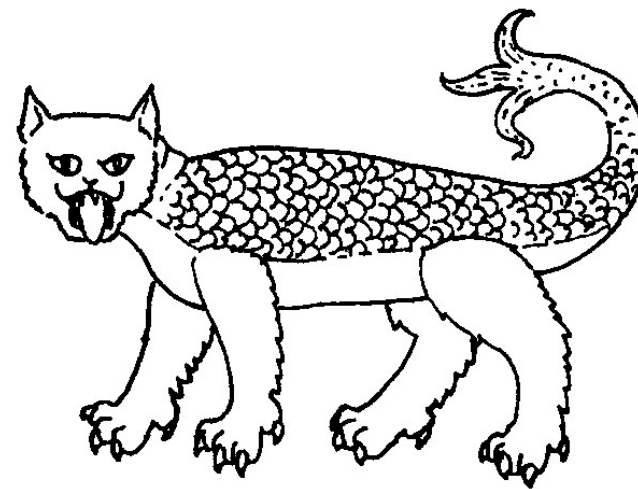


Fig. 2

Franke, were taken from a painting of 1515 in the castle courtyard of Villeneuve-Lambron in France, and illustrated a brief article he wrote for *The Coat of Arms* (No 110, 1979). Not surprisingly, although popular with mediaeval moralists, these monsters do not seem ever to have made their way into heraldry.

## BOOK REVIEW

Those who have read our Nos 41 and 45 about the dragon-in-a-jar hoax will know about the fantasy novel **Unearthly History** by P.R.Moredun, the pen-name of Alistair Mitchell (Rookstone Publishing, 2004, no address given, but available from Waterstone's Booksellers). The jacket gives the above title, but also *Volume One: The Balance Between*, but the title page just has "The Balance Between," confusingly. All a bit amateurish, one might think.

The story itself is a fashionable mixture of incredible adventures, jumping back and forth between 1895 and 1910, though the two plots come together at the end, with parallel worlds, one historical and scientific, the other magical and timeless, with a full quota of spies, policemen, politicians and civil servants, wizards, ventriloquising dwarves, elves, talking animals, werewolves, monstrous *olorcs* (rather like Tolkien's *orcs*), a fourteen-year-old boy as hero, and of course plenty of dragons. Perhaps the most unusual fabulous creatures, though perhaps inadvertent, are the "beaurocrats" in Whitehall. The Kaiser's smart new cruiser *Ausburg* plays a prominent part; - perhaps *Augsburg* was intended?

As for the dragons, they are all barren females who may be killed but do not grow old and die, and who spend most of their time as outcasts from the magic world, disguised as humans. Intriguingly, when they transform, the ladies' arms become their wings and two new little front legs grow out of their collarbones. Their wicked plot to take over the world and rule for ever, with the unwitting help of the Kaiser, is frustrated by the boy hero with help from his talking dog and bear friends, a couple of dwarves and an elf or two, not to mention a regiment of the British Army. The two leading dragons are slain in gory detail, though enough escape to leave scope for the sequel to develop in due course.

The bookshop had this title placed under "Children - 9 to 12" which leads one to suppose that these days such youngsters are used to all the gore and sexual innuendo and would probably skip the wizard's lengthy philosophising about the meaning of the universe, and of course they would be unlikely to notice all the anachronisms and mis-spellings. It must be said that there is little in this book to add to our understanding of dracology, but then it is only meant as entertainment.

## A Dragon Charm

This little silver pendant was a present from Helen Murray, who found it in a "weirdy" shop in Thornbury. It was designed by Helene Llewellyn in 1995, and the label says, "To the Celts the Dragon symbolised the energy in the land reflected by dreams and inner visions. The Dragon is worn as a powerful symbol for Realisation of those Dreams."



## An Essex Legend

Richard Fox and Vernon Rolls have both sent in cuttings about recent events in Wormingford, an Essex village in the Stour Valley whose Old Vicarage has been put on the market. Local legend claims that this was the site of a dragon-slaying by Sir George of Layer-de-la-Haye, and that the name of the village is derived from *worm*, the old English name for a dragon. Although the village is recorded in Domesday Book as *Widemondefort*, with variants in later years (they were not very good at spelling in those days) which is interpreted as "the ford of Withermund," there is no reason why efforts to simplify the name should not have taken into account a little local folk-etymology, to commemorate the village worm. The parish church of St Andrews has a stained glass window that portrays the legendary slaying. But that is not the whole story.

The River Stour forms the boundary between Essex and Suffolk along its entire length from near Haverhill on the edge of Cambridgeshire until it reaches the sea between Harwich and Felixstowe (apart from a short diversion where the Suffolk town of Sudbury claims a few contingent fields