

An A to Z of Dragonlore

ALCE, found in German heraldry, was probably an elk, but was said to have jointless legs.

ALERION, a legless, beakless, sometimes headless eagle found in the arms of Lorraine, of which it is almost an anagram.

ALLOCAMELUS, front half camel, back half donkey (symbolic of hard work?) made one appearance in the arms of the East Land Company of Tudor times, but seen no more.

ALPHYN, a Tudor composite with Tyger's head and body and eagle's front legs.

AMPHISBOENA, started in classical times as a double-ended earthworm, but grew as the years went by until it became a fierce dragon-like serpent with wings and clawed feet and a head at both ends, that could move equally well in either direction. It was popular for mediaeval church decorations especially on misericords.

AMPHITERE, a classical serpent with wings but no feet.

ANTELOPE, the heraldic variety with serrated horns, tusks on its nose as well as in its jaws, and covered in tufts of hair, quite unlike any antelope seen in Africa, is another Tudor concoction.

APRES, a Tudor blend of bear and bull said to be found in Russia (a yak?) designed for the Muscovy Company.

ARGUS, the classical monster with a hundred eyes who never slept. After Hermes slew him on the instructions of Zeus, Hera transferred his eyes to the tail of the peacock.

BAGWYN, a Tudor invention with cloven hooves, bushy tail and curiously ragged horns or antlers; only a couple of examples exist.

BANDERSNATCH, a frumious creature from Jabberwocky.

BANSHEE, the wailing keening cry has been heard in Ireland and the Celtic fringe but no sign has ever been seen of the supposed female creature that does the screeching.

To be continued. Also coming in the next issue: Army Badges

Published from Longbridge House, Warminster, Wilts.

Re-issued Midsummer 2001
from Orland, Clent, Stourbridge, Worcs DY9 9QS

Dragonlore

The Journal of The College of Dracology

Number 1

Michaelmas 1946



The Arms of
Somerset County Council

from C. W. Scott-Giles
Civic Heraldry, London 1933

The College of Dracology for the Study of Fabulous Beasts

In the summer of 1945 a group of boys and girls in their last year at school in Minehead, in Somerset (whence the school had been evacuated at the beginning of the War from Streatham in London), diverted themselves by developing an interest in dragons and other fabulous beasts, convinced that these images originally embodied genuine experience rather than idle fancy.

To formalise their researches, they decided to call themselves the College of Dracology. Those involved were John Davy, Richard Fox, Eva Frommer, Jane Hampton, Angela Richards, Colin Voake and myself, Ralph Brocklebank.

Now, a year later, the War being over and the group dispersed, I thought it would be a good idea to have some kind of newsletter to keep in touch and share our researches, and perhaps reach a wider circle, and this Journal is the result.

R B, Michaelmas 1946

A Note on Terminology:

A classic writes: "A purist would argue that the word 'Dracology' is a hybrid of Latin and Greek and the true form of all-Greek derivation should be 'Draconology.' However, we accept 'bicycle' and 'television' as good words, and Dracology certainly looks the nicer word in English, so I would suggest that you stick with it."

W. Hamilton

Heraldic Monsters: Dragons, Wyverns, Griffins and Unicorns are all well known charges in heraldry. The Red Dragon of Wales is famous as a symbol and appears in the coat of arms of many Welsh towns and districts. Less familiar is the dragon of Wessex which occurs in the arms of Somerset County Council, holding a civic mace to signify local government, as seen on the cover. This red dragon holding a blue mace on a golden yellow shield was granted in 1911. (You might like to colour it in for yourself!). The red dragon of Wessex is also seen in the arms of Wiltshire County Council granted in 1937.

REVIEWS

A Book of Fabulous Beasts

Old Stories retold by A. M. SMYTH

Illustrations by DOROTHY FITCH

Oxford University Press 1939 repr 1946 (Chameleon Books 6) 2/6 all ages

If we are to discover the truth about these creatures, we must first get to know them and the stories told about them. This delightful little book, although written for the younger reader, makes an excellent introduction to the subject and covers a dozen examples, with a fine scraper-board drawing of each; they are the Phoenix, Barnacle Geese, Basilisk, Gorgon, Were-wolves, Centaur, Salamander, Unicorn, Pelican, Sphinx, Gryphon and Dragon. Most of these are of classical origin and of great antiquity, but a few are from the mediaeval period. None of the fantastic inventions of the Tudor heralds is included, which is just as well, as they are unlikely to survive outside the limited sphere of interest of the heraldic antiquaries. On the other hand, the Minotaur, Hydra, Vampire, Kraken, Mermaid, Harpy and Chimaera might have deserved a place; perhaps there is scope for a second volume.

Dragon Doodles from Fantasy to Fact

by Howard Kelly, London, Watts & Co, 1946

This curious book starts from a consideration of the twelve ornaments on the Chinese Emperor's ceremonial robe, which include dragons and a phoenix, sets out the beliefs that each was supposed to represent, and then explains how in each case ancient superstitions have been replaced by scientific intelligence so that nowadays we really understand the sun, the moon, the stars and planets and so on, in a way that the early Chinese did not. In passing, there is a lot of interesting information about the origins of dragon legends and the like. Their dragons were evidently elemental beings, with different varieties for earth, water, air and fire, but Kelly does not apparently think that these could have been based on real experience, but only on imaginative fantasy. I have my own idea about the origin of Chinese air dragons, but this had better wait for a later occasion.

R B