

An Alphabet of Queries (7)

Does the Dragon deserve greater deference? This is obviously a matter of opinion, but two recent examples raise doubts. Though the £1 coins for 1995 and 2000 have a truly excellent Welsh Dragon in relief, when it came to new stamps we were in for a surprise. Previously the special stamps for Wales had a little dragon in the corner above the prominent Queen's head, but from 8th June 1999 there was a new design with a tiny Royal head above a prominent Dragon. However, it is not the Red Dragon of Wales but a metallic silver one on a dark green and black ground. Since the colour code for first class stamps is orange, a Red Dragon would have fitted well; indeed, Scotland has its "red lion ramping in a field of gold" and very fine it looks, but no doubt a trendy designer thought traditional colours were unnecessarily old-fashioned. In fact the stamp was designed by Tutssels, based on a forging from Welsh steel by Toby and Gideon Petersen, and it must be said that this dragon is very well modelled and would make an excellent regimental cap badge.



Another case is the badge of HMS DRAGON, which was designed by Charles ffoulkes in 1919 for the light cruiser of 1917 that was eventually sunk as a breakwater off the Normandy coast in 1944 to help protect the landings. This ship was the fifteenth of her name in the Royal Navy, the first having been a ship of 1512. As that was clearly named after the Welsh Dragon of the Tudors, it is odd that ffoulkes did not use a Red Dragon, but a gold one on a red field.

A new class of warships with D-names has been announced, so there is a good chance that another HMS DRAGON will join the fleet. Will it keep this badge? Wait and see!

Dragonlore

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Wyverns on the shields of two Norman Warriors
from the Bayeux Tapestry

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The College of Dracology for the Study of Fabulous Beasts

Colour is for a celebration. Our cover dates have been chasing through the years, following up notes and records, and have now caught up with the time when the College of Dracology was revived with the re-issue of *Dragonlore*. Few of our original founder members survive. Eva Frommer has retired, though her book *Voyage through Childhood into the Adult World* (Oxford 1969) is still regarded by many as the best guide to Child Development, dealing with the work of Gesell, Piaget and other leading paediatricians, but most especially with Rudolf Steiner's insights in this field. She remains a devoted dracologist. Richard Fox has also retired from his career in psychiatry. He will be remembered by some for his collaboration with Anna Bidder on the book *Towards a Quaker View of Sex*, which in the early sixties was considered as outstanding for its frankness. Sadly, we have just heard that Anna Bidder has died at the age of 98. She will be best known as a champion of women's education and professional advancement and as the first President of Lucy Cavendish College in Cambridge, but I knew her as a zoology demonstrator when I was an undergraduate. She gave me some blunt advice: "If you want to do dragons, go to art college. If you want to do zoology, keep dragons for Sundays. How could you spend time on imaginary creatures when there are so many little-known real animals waiting to be investigated?". Her own special field was in cephalopods, and when Lucy Cavendish College got a coat of arms, she arranged to have a Pearly Nautilus as its crest. (While revisiting Cambridge after our last go in 1949, we note that Homerton College has acquired a Demi-Griffin as a crest, New Hall has a silver Dolphin on its shield, and Robinson College a golden Pegasus.) But her advice probably had its effect, as Dracology took a back seat until I retired, though I kept notes which have proved useful for this revival—made possible almost entirely as a result of the support and encouragement of Mark and Keren Brocklebank-Smith. Writing these notes in October 2001, we have already produced ten issues with a mailing list of forty newly-recruited dracologists, and a considerable back-log of material to get through. If we keep going at the present rate, this copy should be issued early next year and it should then not be long before the cover date coincides with the date of issue (on the back page), which may well call for another celebration.

R. B.

Edward the Confessor, who figures prominently at the start of the Bayeux Tapestry, and was England's Patron Saint until supplanted by St George in the fourteenth century, is celebrated on 13th October.

Fabulous Beasts in the Bayeux Tapestry

The remarkable embroidery telling the story of the Norman invasion of England has been the subject of very many books ranging from the popular to the erudite, and the one chosen is *THE BAYEUX TAPESTRY: The Norman Conquest 1066*, by Norman Denny & Josephine Filmer-Sankey (Collins, London 1966), largely because it reproduces almost the entire length of the work in colour with a brief but adequate text. Fabulous beasts occur throughout, mostly as marginal decorations, but there is one significant appearance near the end where the Saxon Wyvern Standard is shown both raised on a pole and also brought down to the ground. From this little outline, reconstructions (such as this one by John Ferguson) have shown the standard as a kind of windsock on a pole with a wide open mouth at the front and a long hollow tail that would have wriggled in the wind. Speculators have supposed that this may have been a relic of the dragon standards of the Roman cohorts (less well known than the eagle standards of the legions).



Wyverns also appear as decorations on shields, both for Norman warriors (as in the example on our cover) and for Saxons. This seems to be sure evidence that though shields were decorated at this time (late 11th century), also with crosses, bands and spots, they did not have unique designs identifying the bearer, as happened later with the development of heraldry under the feudal system. Apart from the seven Wyverns on shields and those on the standard, there are another thirteen shown in the margins, along with three Centaurs, two Winged Centaurs with wings instead of arms, two Winged Lions, two Winged Horses, one possible Unicorn in a group that may represent Adam naming the beasts, and no fewer than forty-one Griffins. These are mixed in with a great many recognizable animals and birds, as well as little scenes of country life, Aesop's fables and episodes of sheer ribald amusement. Other than the Wyverns, some of which have knotted tails, and all with feathered rather than bat-like wings, there are no Dragons as we understand the term, with four legs as well as wings, though the profusion of Griffins is noteworthy, hardly any two the same.

The skill and artistry that went into this production, though likened to a strip cartoon and all achieved with very simple means, make it one of the Wonders of the World, and an important source for early Dracology.