

An A to Z of Dragonlore (*eighth instalment*)

OPINICUS, derived from the classical griffin with eagle's head and wings but four lion's legs, the Tudor heralds designated this a distinct beast and granted it as a crest to the Barber Surgeons Livery Company, since when it has occasionally been used to indicate a surgical connection, often with a strangely long pointed beak.

ORC, a voracious sea-monster, named as the beast that threatened Angelica before she was rescued by Rogero riding a Hippogriff, now the name of the killer whale.

ORTHUS, a two-headed hound, son of Echidna and father of the Sphinx.

PANTHEON, a Tudor invention like a hind with its body covered with stars.

PANTHER, the Tudor heralds took this beast as described in mediaeval bestiaries and developed it into a fantastic monster, described as "incensed" with flames coming out of its mouth and ears and spots of all different colours over its body. The so-called Styrian panther with horns and probably derived from a steer, possibly got its name just because of the flames coming out of its mouth, originally its red tongue. It is likely that the flames issuing from the panther incensed are a vain attempt at illustrating the sweet odours emanating from this creature as noted in the bestiaries.

PARANDRUS, a shaggy stag-like creature described in early bestiaries and seen in heraldry but once, and perhaps due for revival.

PEGASUS, the winged horse of Greek mythology born of Medusa by Poseidon and tamed by Bellerophon, a favourite image in all three Armed Services.

PELICAN, this genuine but unlikely-looking bird gained mythological status when it was said to succour its own dying young in times of drought by pecking its breast and feeding them with its blood. This image became a symbol of Our Lord's sacrifice and in heraldry the resulting vignette is called a "Pelican in her Piety."

PHOENIX, a mythical bird from the Orient, it periodically builds a nest and sets light to it, perishing in the flames, but rising anew from the ashes and resuming its fabulous life. It can be interpreted of a symbol of the sun, dying in the flames of sunset and rising again each morning, but is also used as an image of spiritual renewal or rebirth.

POLYGER, a beast like a lion with antelope's horns recorded in Tudor times.

POLYPHEMUS, the name of the Cyclops blinded by Odysseus.

PROTEUS, an ancient Greek sea-god, he could change into any shape he wanted.

PYTHON, the monstrous serpent of Delphi in Greek mythology, a name later given to the huge constrictor snakes of the jungle.

QUANGLE-WANGLE, an invention by Edward Lear which is delightfully eccentric but without the charming human characteristics of his other creations, the Jumblies, Pobble and Dong.

To be continued...

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Dragonlore

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A Selection of Ships' Badges from the Royal Navy

The College of Dracology for the Study of Fabulous Beasts

There have been a few good developments in the last couple of years:

A New Dictionary of Heraldry, edited by Stephen Friar (A & C Black, London 1987), a thoroughly detailed reference book for all matters heraldic, it covers some 70 entries for fabulous beasts, including 16 substantial items contributed by Margaret Young and illustrated by Andrew Jamieson.

A talk on **The Origin and Development of Anti-Christian Dragons** by the Rev. Ben Elliott was given on 17th November 1988 to the Middlesex Heraldry Society, making an important contribution to the understanding of dracology.

Cover Illustration —

Top row, direct images of Centaur, Mermaid and Unicorn (winged for an Aircraft Carrier):

Middle row, indirect allusions, a Wyvern from the Duke's arms, a Sea-dog as an obedient animal, and the Minotaur as slain by Theseus:

Bottom row, historical associations, a Dolphin from the arms of General French, victor of the Marne, a Griffin (see next page), and a Tyger from the arms of Admiral Keats, commander of an earlier SUPERB.

All these drawings of badges are by Dominic Frost and are taken from **A Companion to the Royal Navy** by David A. Thomas (Harrap, London 1988). Each badge starts its life as a coloured Approval Sketch, originally a rough drawing just to indicate the idea but more recently a fine piece of graphic art from one of the Herald Painters at the College of Arms. From this line drawings and other versions will be taken for stationary and so on, and it will be interpreted by a skilled carver in a full-sized relief version in wood. This is used to make a mould from which are produced as many castings as are needed (these days made in resin but originally in metal). Finally the cast badge is hand painted to yield the splendid version seen on the bridge-front of the ship. The full magnificence of these badges may be appreciated from the photographs reproduced in Peter Smith's book reviewed in the last issue (Number 7).

Fabulous Beasts in the Royal Navy

Each of the Tudor monarchs had a Navy Royal with numbers of ships dedicated to the defence of the realm and other warlike purposes, and these ships carried names which in many cases have been used again and again down the ages to the present time. Among such famous warship names as Dreadnaught, Vanguard and Warspite, some forty of them were of heraldic birds and beasts, including many of the fabulous variety such as Antelope, Dragon, Griffin, Mermaid, Pegasus, Phoenix, Salamander and Unicorn, and since Tudor times many others have been added.

In 1919 the Admiralty decided to approve official badges for all major warships to replace the host of devices that had appeared during the war years, ranging from the pompous to the impudent. The new designs would conform to a standard pattern, be simple and easy to recognise, colourful and appropriate to the name of the ship. Where possible, the name would be illustrated directly, and among the 1800 or more badges that have been approved since 1919, 32 show fabulous creatures if we include cases where the heraldic version has been chosen rather than the natural animal. These are: Antelope, Basilisk, Bherunda (see Eagle in A to Z), Centaur, Charybdis, Cockatrice, Dolphin, Dragon, Fairy, Firedrake, Gorgon, Griffin, Hydra, Mermaid, Minotaur, Naiad, Nereide, Pegasus, Phoenix, Salamander, Satyr, Scylla, Sea Devil, Seahorse, Sealion, Seawolf, Sphinx, Triton, Undine, Unicorn, Vampire and Wyvern. If direct illustration was not feasible, then the name would be indicated by allusion, either by some feature characteristic of the name (for instance, a lion is Fearless, a dragon is Vigilant) or by using some heraldic detail referring to a person or place named (the Harpy from the arms of Benbow, the Martlet for Sussex), and if this in turn proved too difficult, then recourse would be had to an historical association. Thus HMS GRIFFIN has a badge showing a Griffin, HMS GRENVILLE also has a Griffin (standing on a cap) because that was the crest of Sir Richard Grenville after whom that ship was named, and so does HMS REVENGE (a demi-griffin rising from waves of the sea) since that was the name of the ship that Sir Richard commanded in the famous action recounted in Tennyson's poem. Nearly all the 32 creatures named above also appear in badges based on allusion or historical association, and among the total of 146 approved badges containing some manner of fabulous beast, other creatures featured include Cerberus, the Chinese Royal Dragon, a two-headed Dragon, a two-headed Eagle, a Flying Fish with Scorpion's tail, the Harpy, the Martlet, Seabear, Seadog, Sea Griffin (both winged and wingless), Sea Pegasus (or winged Seahorse), Seaserpent, Sea Unicorn, the Taniwha from New Zealand, the monster Tiamat, the heraldic Tyger, a Winged Lion and the great Zimbabwe bird, making a total of over 50 different fabulous beasts displayed by Royal Navy ships. Argus, Cyclops and Polyphemus are not illustrated as such on their badges.