

## THE BEASTS OF BOTREAUX

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We owe the modern revival of the word "Beast" in its heraldic sense to the late Mr. H. Stanford London, Norfolk Herald Extraordinary. It was he who taught us to look at carvings of animals on ancient buildings in a new light. They might be no more than ornaments, but on closer inspection and consideration they might turn out to be heraldic Beasts.<sup>1</sup> The series of Queen's Beasts outside the annexe of Westminster Abbey at the Coronation in 1953 was founded upon his learning and research.

Animals are found in heraldry as badges, crests, charges on shields, and supporters. A Beast may be derived from any of them. Sometimes a Beast is found supporting a banner or a shield. Its heraldic character is then obvious, but that is not always so obvious when the Beast is not in such a context. A single animal is particularly difficult to recognise as a Beast, unless it happens to be in some way unusual. Fortunately Beasts often appear on buildings in series and it is then easier to identify them as Beasts. When assorted animals are found on a medieval or Tudor building it is always worth considering whether they are in truth a set of Beasts rather than mere ornaments chosen at the whim of the carver.

The late A. W. Vivian-Neal initiated the sport of Beast-hunting in Somerset by identifying the creatures carved on the eight corbels below the parapet of the tower of Staple Fitzpaine Church as Beasts of the house of Percy.<sup>2</sup> After reading Mr. Vivian-Neal's paper, Lord Hylton felt convinced that the carvings of animals on the outer wall of the north aisle of Kilmersdon Church were of heraldic significance. He therefore suggested that certain members of the Society should visit the Church with him, and the writer was invited to make one of the party.

The north aisle was added to Kilmersdon Church in the fifteenth century, almost certainly by William, the last Lord Botreaux (d. 1462)<sup>3</sup>, and the animal carvings have every appearance of being of this period.

<sup>1</sup> H. S. London, *Royal Beasts* (East Knoyle, 1956), pp. 3-8.

<sup>2</sup> A. W. Vivian-Neal, 'Livery Badges and Personal Badges in Early Tudor Work at Cheddon Fitzpaine and Staple Fitzpaine', in *Proc. S.A.S.*, 105 (1961), 77-86.

<sup>3</sup> Hylton, *Notes on the History of the Parish of Kilmersdon* (Taunton, 1910), pp. 10, 64.

Fortunately for our present purpose the heraldic zoology of the Botreaux family includes a creature which is very rare in heraldry—the toad. *Argent, three toads erect sable* was borne by Botreaux from early times, and was formerly to be seen on the tomb of Lord Botreaux in North Cadbury Church.<sup>4</sup> We owe to Thomas Gerard of Trent the information that this was a canting coat, for he states that he had seen ‘in an old manuscript booke of Blason the elder kings of France to bear D’or a trois botreaux de Sab. which was as many toads’.<sup>5</sup> Although very few English families are credited with the toad as a charge, the three toads of Botreaux appear as a familiar quartering in many representations of the arms of their Hungerford and Hastings descendants, e.g. in the many-quartered shields on the fine tomb of Francis, second Earl of Huntingdon at Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Leicestershire.<sup>6</sup>

It is therefore no surprise to find that the westernmost animal of the series at Kilmersdon is a toad. This can be identified as a Beast without hesitation. We do not have to look far for another Beast, for next to the toad eastwards is a griffin. The Botreaux family was unusual in having three coats of arms, though, like Thomas Gerard, ‘I know not the reason of it’ and the cause ‘I leave to those more skilful in heraldry than myselfe to shoue’. Suffice it to say that one of the three coats was *Argent, a griffin segreant gules, armed azure*. A griffin statant also appeared as a crest on the seal of Lord Botreaux appended to the contract made on the occasion of the marriage of his daughter Anne to Sir John Stafford in 1426.<sup>7</sup>

Here we clearly have another Beast; but the other Botreaux coat was *Checky or and gules, on a chevron azure three horseshoes argent* and so cannot have been the source of any more Beasts.

Continuing eastwards, the next carving to the griffin is an antelope. This is clearly heraldic, for it is gorged with a ‘ducal’ coronet and chained. Although it is devoid of colour, it seems to be

<sup>4</sup> T. Gerard, *Particular Description of the County of Somerset* (Som. Rec. Soc. 15, 1900), p. 190.

<sup>5</sup> Gerard, *loc. cit.*

<sup>6</sup> The toads can be seen in each of the shields on this tomb illustrated in K. A. Esdaile, *English Church Monuments 1510 to 1840* (1946), pl. 51, opp. p. 58. A less obvious field for heraldic toad-hunting is in the Poole Municipal Offices where the windows of the modern Council Chamber contain some of the dismembered fragments of what must once have been a magnificent achievement of the arms of Henry, third Earl of Huntingdon.

<sup>7</sup> *Collectanea Topographica et Genealogica*, iv (1837), 255.





KILMERSDON CHURCH: EXTERIOR OF N. AISLE

*(All photographs in this paper by G. A. Moorhouse, Midsomer Norton)*



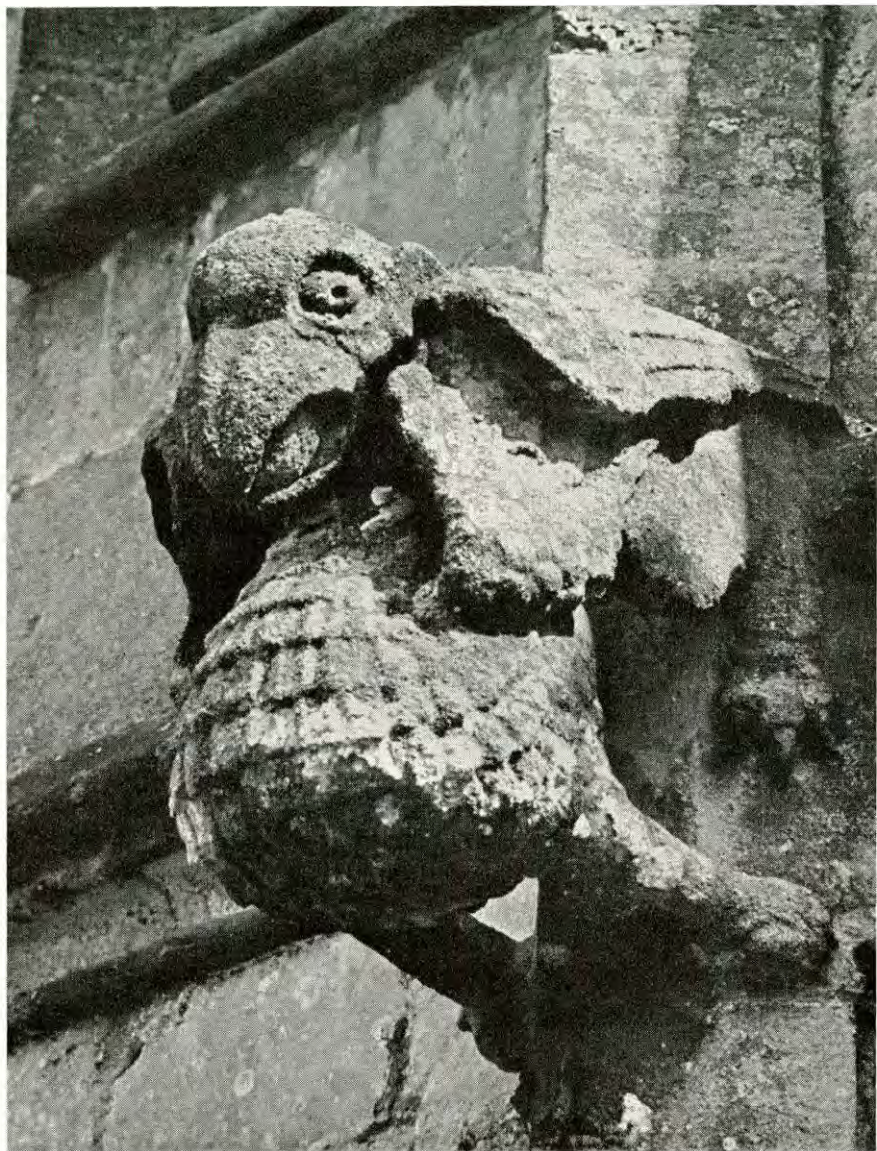
PLATE V



KILMERSDON CHURCH: TOAD



PLATE VI



KILMERSDON CHURCH: GRIFFIN



PLATE VII



KILMERSDON CHURCH: ANTELOPE



PLATE VIII



KILMERSDON CHURCH: TYGER (?)



PLATE IX



KILMERSDON CHURCH: LION



intended as a silver antelope, the well-known badge of the Bohuns, which is also to be seen on the corbel at the south-west corner of the tower at Staple Fitzpaine. If that is the correct identification, the reason for the appearance of the antelope at Kilmersdon is no doubt the marriage already mentioned of Anne Botreaux to Sir John Stafford; for the silver antelope passed to the Stafford family through the marriage of Eleanor Bohun, the elder daughter of Humphrey, Earl of Hereford, to Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester, and the marriage of their daughter Anne to Edmund, Earl of Stafford.

The fourth Beast, for we may now regard the carvings as a series of Beasts, presents some difficulty. In general appearance it is like the antelope, but it has no collar or chain and it is also without horns, though these may have disappeared. However, it is clearly not intended to be another antelope, for its feet have claws instead of cloven hoofs. The prominent tusks and the form of the feet point to the heraldic tyger (which does not at all resemble the tiger of the jungle); for there seems to be no other creature in the heraldic bestiary which combines these features. If it is a tyger, there seems to be no obvious reason why Lord Botreaux should have included it among his Beasts. He had another son-in-law, Robert Hungerford, who is not otherwise represented in the Kilmersdon series of Beasts, but I know of no heraldic association between tygers and the Hungerford family.

The fifth and sixth Beasts are both lions. One of them we may take to be a golden lion from the arms (*Azure, semy of fleurs-de-lis, a lion rampant or*) of John, fourth Lord Beaumont, whose daughter Elizabeth was the first wife of Lord Botreaux. Since it is unlikely that two Beasts would be duplicated in so short a series, it is probable that the other lion was intended to represent one of a different colour appertaining to some other family. This other family may have been that of Everingham, which bore *Gules, a lion rampant vair*, for Elizabeth Beaumont's mother was Catherine, daughter and heiress of Thomas Everingham.

This completes the tale of the Beasts on the north wall of the aisle. On the east wall there is a much weathered creature, which appears to be another lion, though it has no trace of a mane. Whether this creature has any heraldic significance is doubtful, for in the corresponding position on the west wall is a representation of a bagpiper, which can only be ornamental.