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THE BUSSY BEAST

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Abstract

The Bussy crest has long been something of a puzzle. This article examines the evidence and arguments that have been put forward over the last two centuries and, in the light of a newly discovered manuscript, attempts to suggest a possible solution.

Banners, standards and guydons were essentially the personal flags of nobility and knighthood, indicative of a man's presence in the field of battle and his hereditary superiority.[1] Sir Miles Bussy of Hougham in Lincolnshire, who lived at the end of the fifteenth century and died about 1526, was a member of one of the knightly families who were required to provide military service.[2] Mustering and rallying functions in the field were performed by livery flags - notably the standard and the guydon. It is Bussy's standard that is the subject of this article.

The standard was long and narrow and was "to have in the cheife the Crosse of St George, to be slitte at the ende, and to conteyne the crest or supporter, with the poesy [poetry, or motto], words and devise of the owner."[3] They were usually authorized by the College of Arms.[4] The design had the cross of St. George as the hoist of allegiance nearest the stave; next came the ground of the livery colours with the primary and secondary devices strewn across the field; and finally came transverse bands containing the motto. The ground could be a solid field of one colour, or two, three, or even in as many as four parts of different colours. The primary device was the largest and placed nearest the hoist, while the secondary devices were smaller. They were often the owner's crest (placed on a wreath), his badge, or some visual reference to charges in his coat of arms.

Sir Miles Bussy's standard bore, as the device, a version of his crest, repeated thrice, and the motto "*Aussy bien come je pouroy*" (with a variety of spellings) on the transverse bands. This device has been the subject of much controversy. One of its first appearances was in a manuscript compiled between the years 1510 and 1525 which originally belonged to John Cocke, Lancaster Herald (from 1559), who died in 1585. His executors sold it, in 1590, to the antiquary Joseph Holland.[5] It eventually came into the possession of the College of Arms where it has the Press mark I.2. During the years from 1829 to 1831,

1 Stephen Friar, *The Companion to Heraldry* (1992), pp. 224-5.

2 For his pedigree see Rev. Canon A.R. Maddison (ed.), *Lincolnshire Pedigrees*, Harl. Soc. vol. 50, (1902), p. 215.

3 *"Standards"* [by Thomas Willement] in Samuel Bentley (ed.), *Excerpta Historica or Illustrations of English History* (London, 1833, pp. 50-63, 163-70. Hereinafter Willement

4 CA *Newsletter*, no. 48, October 2016, Grant of a badge to Sir John Carre of Hart co. Durham, 14 March 1515/16 showing his standard.

5 Lord Howard de Walden, ed., *Banners, Standards and Badges from a Tudor Manuscript in the College of Arms* (1904) hereinafter de Walden, p. v.

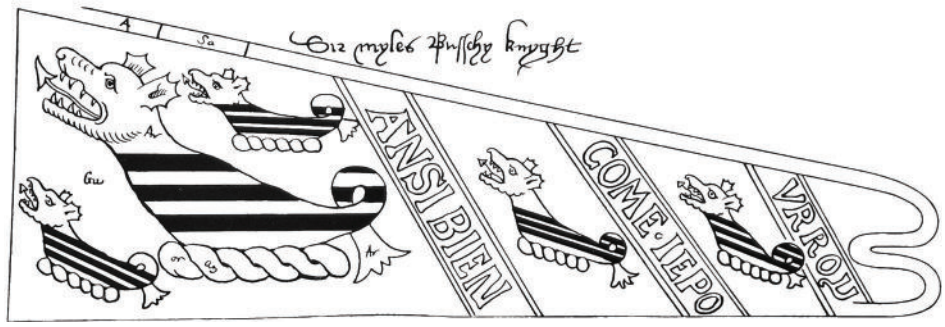

Figure 1: Sir Miles Bussy's standard, after CA Ms I.2., source cited in n. 5, p. 75.

Thomas Willement, the stained glass artist and writer, was allowed to make a complete set of tracings of the banners and standards in that manuscript in the apartments of his friend G.F.Beltz, Chester Herald.[6] It was in 1904, with the collaboration of Joseph Foster, that facsimiles of the tracings were published by Lord Howard de Walden.[7] Included in this collection is the standard of Sir Miles Bussy, which is reproduced in **Figure 1**. The field is red, the primary device is the Bussy crest, on a wreath, argent, charged with three barrulets (untinctured in the facsimile, but as they are inspired by the charges on his coat of arms, sable), with the same repeated twice as secondary devices, and the motto "Ansi bien come ie poveroy", the fringe silver and black.[8] The device is blazoned in the text beneath the illustration as a sea-wolf. This was subsequently incorporated into Rodney Dennys's menagerie of chimerical creatures in his *Heraldic Imagination* of 1975.[9] However, in a review of this book, Sir Colin Cole, then Windsor Herald, said that it was manifest that the genesis of this sea-wolf lay in an imperfect rendering of the Bussy crest and that it really was a dragon, if it was anything[10] although he had also suggested earlier that it might be derived from the wyvern crest of Dyve, whose heiress one of Bussy's ancestors had married. He made the observation that on the seal of Sir John Bussy (dated 10 Hen IV, 1408-9), the simple mantling flowing from the helm gives the outline shape of the so-called sea-wolf with its nowed tail. It was, he continued, not due to any stretch of the Herald's imagination, and that "the appellation rests on an error by Foster in his *Banners, Standards and Badges*." The blame for this, however, cannot, on this occasion, be laid at the door of the hapless Foster. It has a much longer pedigree. The term was used by Thomas Willement in 1833, when he contributed a blazon of the standards in CA Ms.

6 *Ibid*. At his death the tracings (in three volumes) were acquired by John Gough Nichols, whose library was sold in 1874, when they passed into the possession of Sir William Richard Drake, at whose death in 1890 they were purchased by Sir Arthur Vickers, Ulster King of arms.

7 *Ibid*, p. x.

8 *Ibid*. p. 75.

9 Rodney Dennys, *The Heraldic Imagination* (1975), p. 165. In a much earlier seal of John Bussy of Bernardeston and Kedyngton the crest was described as "on a helmet and short mantling, a griffin's head, couped and collared", *BM Seals* nos 587 and 7979. A summary of the standards and badges is also included in *Siddons Badges* vol. 2 pt. 2 pp. 56-7.

10 Sir A. Colin Cole, *CoA*, no. 98 (Summer 1976), pp. 50-1.

Figure 2: the Bussy coat of arms from CA Ms. I. 2, see n. 13.

Figure 3 and 4 : two versions of the seal of Sir John Bussy from Camden Soc. vol. 43, pp. 67-8, see n. 15.

I. 2 to Samuel Bentley's Excerpta Historica - "a sea-wolf tail nowed."[11]

The concept of a sea-wolf is not unique, for in the same manuscript the badge of the Lord Hawthe of Ireland is shown as a sea-wolf statant "of a darke tawnoy [tawny or tan coloured]" with fins along the back, belly, and upon the hind legs, of "a water color."[12] In 1616 William Smith, Rouge Dragon pursuivant, drew, as the Bussy crest, the same beast as in CA Ms. I. 2[13] (**Figure 2**) and the "imperfect rendering" was copied exactly the same into an almost contemporaneous manuscript, Thomas Wriothesley's Book of Standards of circa 1540.[14] As mentioned earlier, Sir Colin Cole called in aid for his argument the seal of Sir John Bussy, which was reproduced in facsimile in Sir Henry Ellis's *Visitation of the County of Huntingdon, 1613*.[15] Whilst the mantling may have been mistakenly incorporated into the design of the nowed tail, the head of the beast looks nothing like a dragon's - it has a wolf's head, ears, and tongue, as shown in **Figure 3**; and there is a second seal (dated 15 Ric II, 1391-2) reproduced in the same work which clearly shows the crest as a wolf's head, as shown in **Figure 4**.[16] So for those who tussled with the identity of the device on the standard in the early nineteenth century, and were required to describe it, there was at least some evidence to support the sea-wolf theory. It may not have originated in the herald's imagination but it did exercise the imagination of heralds

11 Willement, op. cit. p. 56.

12 *Ibid*. p. 282. John Fennar bore *Argent a chevron between three wolffs maryn sable, langued gules, finned or, eyes and inner ears gules* in a patent by Thomas Hawley 1556, Henry Bedingfeld and Peter Gwynn-Jones, *Heraldry* (London,1993), p. 66; there is a variant spelling "wolues marine" in the Queen's College Oxford Ms. 139 no. 69.

13 William Smith, Rouge Dragon pursuivant, *Promptuarium armorum*, *The book of coates and creasts, Begonne the 28 of May 1602*, New England Historic Genealogical Society Ms. 1180 f. 14, Harold Bowditch Collection.

14 *BL* Add. Ms. 45132, Wriothesley's Book of Standards, circa 1540, f. 55v.

15 Sir H. Ellis (ed.), *The Visitation of the County of Huntingdon, 1613*, Camden Society, vol. 43 (1849), p. 67.

16 Ibid., p. 68.

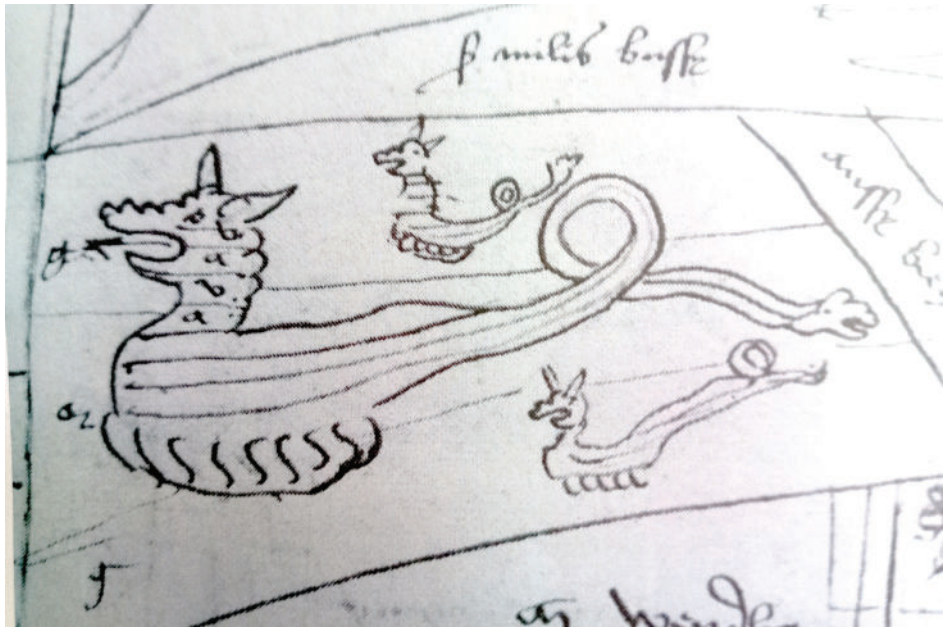

Figure 5: the Bussy beast as drawn by Christopher Barker, BL Harl. Ms. 4632, f. 249r see n. 17.

and heraldic writers.

The uncertainty continued, especially with regard to the tail ending, which was never quite resolved satisfactorily. However, there was another contemporaneous manuscript which offered more detail. It has received less attention because it is so crudely drawn in places that it is difficult to identify the charges with any degree of certainty, and in this respect the Bussy crest is no exception. It is a manuscript volume compiled by Christopher Barker, as Richmond Herald, and executed between the years 1522 and 1534.[17] The manuscript certainly belonged to him, and appears to have been written for the greater part in his own hand.[18] It is probably a poorly drawn transcription from a more highly finished work which is now lost. It comprises a collection of sixty-five standards, mostly in trick. It was blazoned by Thomas Willement in 1836 in *Collectanea Genealogica et Heraldica*.[19] Whilst it is similar to CA Ms. I. 2, the two collections differ not only in the names of the parties to whom the standards belonged (although there is a good deal of overlap) but also in the bearings on those standards ascribed to the same

17 *BL* Harl. Ms. 4632, ff. 234v - 250v.

18 His arms are at the beginning as Richmond Herald with a note of the birth of his son dated 1522 and the badge of Wriothesley given under the name "Master Garter." *Collectanea Topographica et Genealogica* , vol. 3 (London, 1836), "Banners, Standards and Badges Temp. Henry VIII", pp. 49 – 76 (at 63).

19 *Ibid.* p. 63, citing Harl. Ms. 4632 f. 249; a second head is also recorded in *Smith's Ordinary*, CA Ms. EDN 22 f. 66r, though it is drawn in a slightly thinner pen than the rest of the crest and does not have the barry lines and is, perhaps, a later addition. I am grateful to Dr James Lloyd, Archivist at the College of Arms for this information.

Figure 6: the Bussy beast from the Montagu manuscript, see n. 24.

persons. Included in the original manuscript is a rough trick of the standard of Sir Miles Bussy (**Figure 5**).

Here the field is different, having three bands of red, yellow, and red. The device is a wingless, legless dragon charged with barrulets, inspired by the charges on the coat of arms. The tail of the beast, however, is indistinct. That on the primary device appears to be a head, indecisively drawn - there seems to be a mouth and an eye. This was not noticed by Willement in his blazon of "a demi-dragon sans wings". The tails on the secondary devices are so crudely and inconsistently drawn as to offer no other clues, but they would have repeated the tail on the primary charge. It is not the usual tail of a dragon. It resembles Bossewell's two headed serpent, described as "a prodigious serpent [argent] called Amphybene for that he hath two heads ut initio sic et cauda caput [with a head at the front and also at the tail] as though one mouth were too little to custe his venyme."[20] It must be acknowledged, as Rodney Dennys has pointed out, that sixteenth-century heralds drew their creatures with considerable freedom.[21] For example, although the cockatrice is usually depicted with the coiled tail of a dragon, John Curson "enteryng into France xvi June v Henry VIII (1513) bayryth in hys standart a cockatrice displayed goulls with a hed in his tayll his fette and his wattelles asur" [Gules with a head in his tail his feet and his wattles azure].[22] Alovandrus considered the Amphibaena's watchfulness to be an attribute - when one head sleeps, the other keeps watch; or it could both defend

20 J. Bossewell, *The Workes of Armorie*, (London, 1572), p. 63.

21 Dennys, *op. cit.*, p. 185, citing BL Cotton Ms. Cleopatra C.v. ff. 59v - 62v.

22 H. Southern and N.H. Nicolas (edd.), *Retrospective Review*, second series, vol. 2 (1828), "Badges, Standards and Supporters", p. 521.

and attack at the same time.[23]

The question about the beast at this stage remains unresolved, and would remain so were it not for another manuscript which has never hitherto been noticed because it has remained in private ownership since its inception. In 1841 Frederick Montagu of Lackham in Wiltshire, the designer of bookplates, drew and painted a collection of sixty-five standards in the time of King Henry VIII, which he presented to the publisher William Pickering, as a mark of his esteem.[24]The original manuscript, of which this is a copy, may have been owned by his father George Montagu, who had a good collection of heraldic manuscripts, some of which came to him by descent from the antiquary Thomas Gore of Alderton.[25] The original is now lost. Montagu's manuscript is a collection similar to Barker's book. Its contents are the same and so is the order in which the standards are listed, with one or two exceptions: but there are significant differences - for example the fringes on the standards, which are largely absent from Barker's work, are depicted; some of the livery colours are different; and some of the devices and tinctures are also dissimilar. It is a highly finished work. The Bussy standard as drawn by Montagu is shown in **Figure 6**. The field has three bands of red, yellow, and red. The primary and secondary devices show the wingless legless dragon on a wreath, with headed tails clearly drawn, all *Argent barry vert*.[26] This depicts an Amphybene (amphibian?) dragon quite distinctly. The stave is painted with red and yellow stripes and there is not the silver and black fringe in *CA* Ms. I. 2

In conclusion, although the idea of the sea-wolf was discredited in the 1970s, the problem of the tail was never convincingly resolved. Those who attempted to depict it drew a variety of shapes and it was only on closer inspection of Barker's book that the notion of an Amphybene dragon came into being, though even this was tentative. The Montagu manuscript, however, clearly shows this, and in the absence of any further information coming to light, appears to solve the problem. The Bussy beast appears to be a wingless sea dragon.[27]

23 T.H. White, *The Book of Beasts*, (1954), pp. 177-8.

24 F.C. Montagu, *Standards borne by Peers and Knights in the tyme of King Henry the Eighth* (1841). The manuscript passed from William Pickering to his son Basil Montagu Pickering, at whose sale in 1879 it was purchased by Charles Keene, thence to the 5th Earl of Rosebery, and afterwards to Revd. E.E. Dorling. It then passed into private ownership until the present day.

25 Thomas Leman, *The Visitations of Wiltshire 1565 and 1623*, manuscript 1806-10, f. 224; F.C.Montagu, *The Descent of the Manors of Lackham and Alderton,* manuscript 1838, ff. 1 -5. Both of these manuscripts are in private collections.

26 Montagu, op. cit., f. 13

27 Editor's note: such watery dragons–although I have yet to encounter a double-headed one–are occasionally to be met with below medieval baptismal fonts, to signify overcoming the devil. A winged and legged variety is carved below the twelfth-century font of Dearham church in Cumberland.