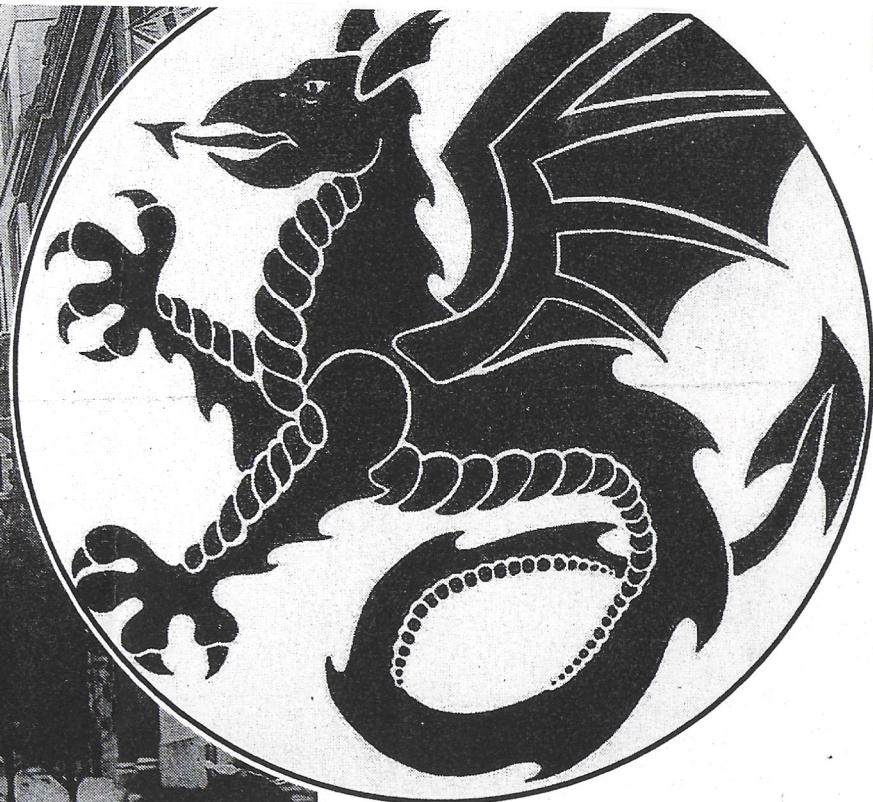
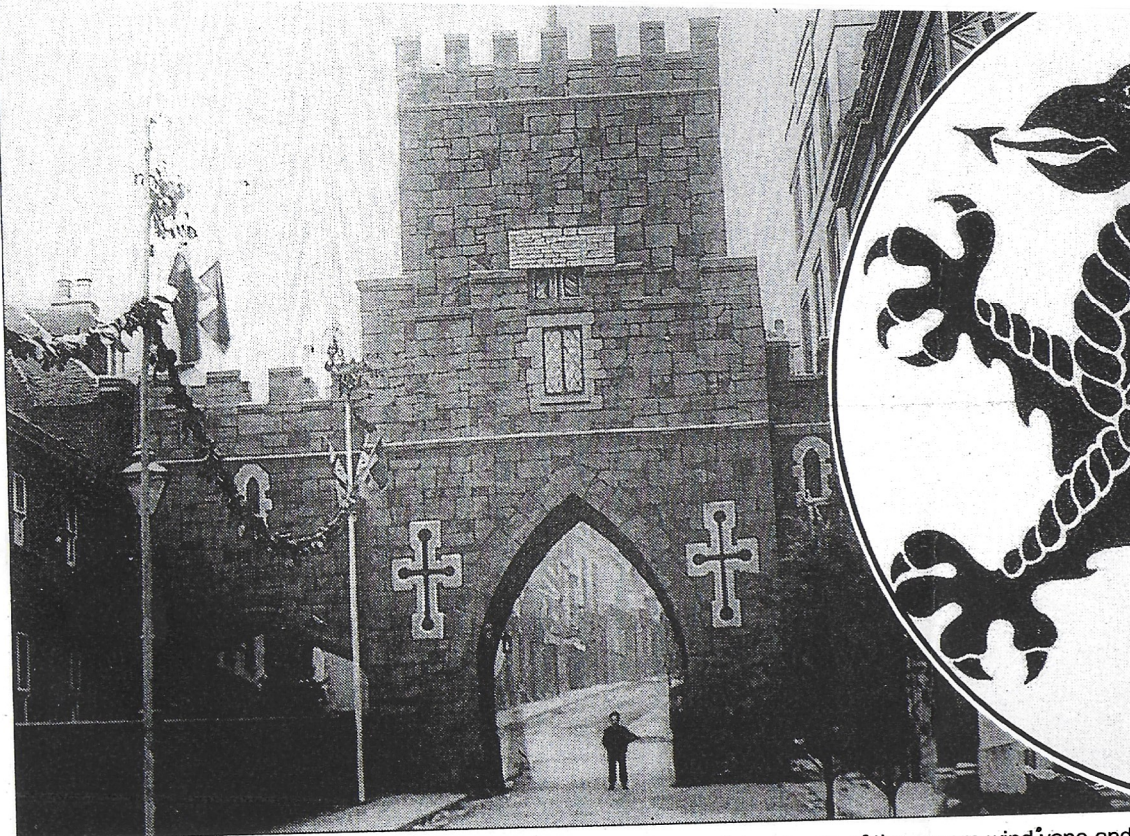




MYTHICAL MONSTER: This mock-up of the city's old Northgate — original home of the wyvern wind vane and demolished in 1769 — was put up for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee celebrations in 1897. Inset: The mythical beast the wyvern, which the wind vane, now in the Guildhall, represents

THE mythical beast the wyvern is half dragon, half griffin, with two legs, wings and a long tail.

Exeter has strong links with the beast with the barracks in Topsham Road being called 'Wyvern', while the Exeter Civic Society has the mythical character for its logo.

The three-foot long wind vane on the city's Northgate was in the shape of a wyvern. Its long flat tail caught the wind very satisfactorily — it also caught shotgun fire during the Civil War from soldiers on St David's Hill.

In 1769, the Northgate became the

Hazel Harvey discusses Exeter's links with the mythical wyvern



first of the city's gates to be dismantled as it was a hindrance to traffic. The wyvern wind vane was preserved and removed to the Quay. In 1897, to mark Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee, it flew once more in its original position. A tall pole — which carried the wyvern — rose from a stone plaque to mark the exact site of the former Northgate.

In 1976, Bill Lovell, of Exeter Civic Society, was asked to repair and restore the Northgate wyvern as the

society's contribution to the year being nominated as a Heritage Year. Bill erected tower scaffolding, regilded the wyvern, repainted the pole and replaced the lanyard.

The society decided to hold a small ceremony to commemorate the restoration. Members borrowed a rather large Union Jack from the Guildhall, hoisted it up with the new lanyard, invited the mayor to attend, the sun shone and everyone applauded.

They should have lowered the flag after that — but they didn't.

A high wind got up in the night and wrapped the flag firmly around the wyvern. Bill had contacts with SWEB maintenance staff and discovered it had an appropriate vehicle passing the Iron Bridge at 7.30am the next day.

Bill prevailed on a young civic society member, Peter Wadham, to let himself be hoisted into the air to free the flag — which was wet and heavy by then — and to carry it back to the Guildhall.

Exeter Civic Society decided to adopt the wyvern. Its honorary secretary, Mrs Julia Kumik, climbed to the car park level of the recently opened Guildhall Centre to sketch the wyvern. The logo has been used ever since on the society's notepaper, newsletters and badges.

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