



The Monsters and Beasts from Bodmin's Past

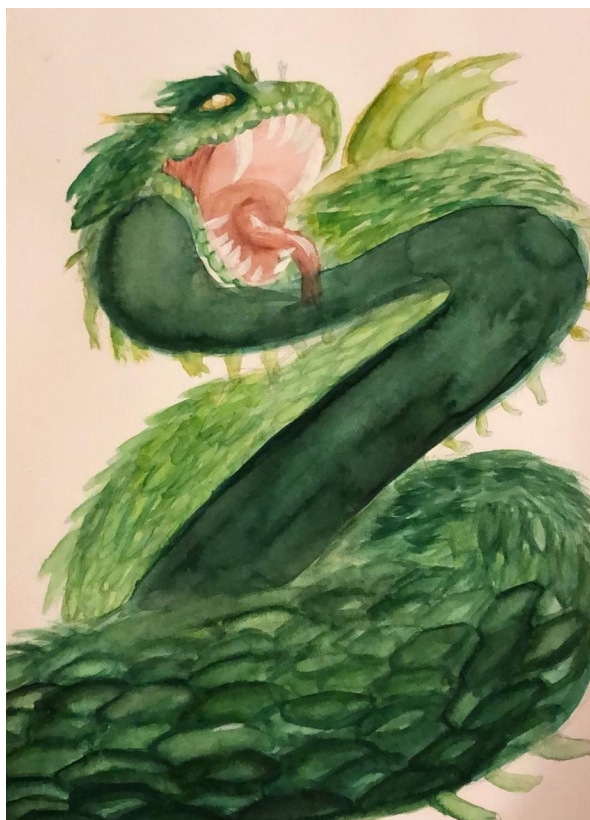
There have been stories told of monsters and beasts in Bodmin for thousands of years.

St Petroc and the Dragon-worm

One of the earliest is the story about St Petroc taming an enormous dragon-worm or snake. St Petroc died in 564 AD, nearly 1500 years ago but his name lives on in Bodmin in places like the school and the church. There is also a charity that helps homeless people named after him.

The story goes that the lord of Bodmin at the time was an evil man called Teudur and to punish criminals he would throw them into a marshy lake full of snakes. When Teudur died, his son thought this was bad, and he stopped throwing men into the lake.

Without people to eat, the snakes got hungry and started to eat each other until there was only one enormous creature left. He was now so big that he could no longer wriggle like a snake but was like a monstrous dragon.



He got out of the lake and terrorised the people of Bodmin, eating farmers and their animals.

St Petroc lived in Bodmin with his monks and he decided that he and two other saints, Wethnoc and Samson, would try to tame the beast and lead it away to the sea.

They approached the beast with an invisible shield and St Petroc tied its jaws together with a piece of cloth. He started to lead the dragon to the sea with Wethnoc and Samson following behind, praying to God that the dragon would be tame. As they walked, they met a group of mourners carrying the body of their dead prince. When they saw the dragon, mourners fell to the ground in fear, but St Petroc and his two helpers prayed, and the dragon stayed quiet. The dead prince was also restored to life by the prayers.

St Petroc continued on his trip to the sea with the dragon, sent him away and told him never to harm a human again.

The Beast of Bodmin Moor

In more recent times, there were tales that the moor was home to a monstrous black animal that was described as a cross between a giant hell-hound and a panther, with savage jaws and teeth and dark matted fur and with a foul smell. These stories inspired a famous man called Arthur Conan Doyle to write a Sherlock Holmes novel called *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

It is said that these tales about monsters and scary creatures are often kept alive through the years by mothers telling their children about them as a warning not to be out late at night “or the Beast will get you”

These myths and stories have become part of our culture and on the day of the Bodmin Riding and Heritage Festival, the Beast is chased and caught by the Hellers (the hunters) and is taken in procession in chains.



The wonderful artwork (pictured below) by artist Harry Maddox can be seen at Dennison Car Park and illustrates the importance of the Beast in Bodmin's cultural identity.



Since 1990 there have been many sightings of large cat like creatures on Bodmin Moor and reports of sheep and other small animals being killed and savaged. People say they saw a large dark coloured cat-like creature with white or yellow eyes. A proper investigation was carried out in 1995 by scientific experts who said it did not exist and that it was too cold on the moor for a large cat like a puma or leopard to survive. But since then there have been around 600 reported sightings of a large creature that looks like a big cat.



So, is it fact or is it fiction? We can never know for sure, can we? What would your Beast of Bodmin look like?