

ARTY Cats

The Bayeux Tapestry

By Greg Balagian

Nearly one thousand years ago, as William the Conqueror sat on the English throne, a group of embroiderers created an amazing tapestry* on a linen canvas to immortalize his achievements.

The tapestry chronicles the Norman conquest of England and the famed battle in 1066, and is one of the most famous works of medieval art.

Weighing 350 pounds, the tapestry is 76½ yards (70 m) long and almost 20 inches high (50cm).

However, since it was "rediscovered" by scholars in the 18th century, its original final scene has been missing.

No one is certain how much longer the original tapestry is or what it showed, but most experts believe it was an eight or ten feet piece depicting William's coronation on Christmas Day in 1066.

A team of embroiderers on Alderney, a small island just off the coast of William's native Normandy, have finished the job. The project took a year to complete and every effort was made to ensure it fitted in with its famous forebear. Craftsmen used the same techniques, fabrics, colors and types of wool as the original Bayeux Tapestry.

The new tapestry is ten feet long and is the same height as the original, with our panels showing events following the Battle of Hastings, culminating in William's coronation. The finished work is set to be displayed in the room next to the original tapestry at the Bayeux Tapestry Museum in Bayeux, France.

The design of the original tapestry and the new one consists of continuous panels with decorative narrow borders on

the top and the bottom depicting images of various animals, mythological beasts, plants and flowers. Naturally among the beasts are numerous felines, winged felines and part-felines.

In my opinion, the original tapestry has somewhere between 180 to 200 beasts which can be identified as cats or possible cats. The tapestry panel from Alderney bears the images of seven such animals: four lions and three griffins.

Half lion and half eagle, griffins are mythical beasts with the body, tail and back legs are of a lion. Griffins were thought to be powerful and majestic.

At the top left of the panel, a pair of griffins are facing each other (Fig. 1).

Next along the top are a pair of lions facing each other with two warriors between them (Fig. 2).

Figure 3 has two vignettes with cats. A red lioness is fighting an unknown beast and a black griffin is facing a doglike animal.

Near the end of the second row, a lion has his long tail wrapped around a donkey; a puffin and a frog are also in the design (Fig. 4).

Alderney issued a beautiful set of stamps on May 28, 2014 and a souvenir sheet which is printed on a real textile. [See the front cover.] The lion motif in Fig. 4 is also on the cachet of the first day cover. [See page 82.]

The Bayeux Tapestry is listed as a 'Memory of the World' by UNESCO. 🐾

*An actual tapestry is woven with colored threads rather than embroidered. Bayeux Tapestry Museum, <http://www.tapestry-bayeux.com/>

Alderney's Bayeux Tapestry: The Missing Panel

Embroiderers from Alderney created the missing final panel of the Bayeux Tapestry. An enlargement of the panel is shown below in two halves. Seven of the figures are either full or composite felines: four lions and three griffins.

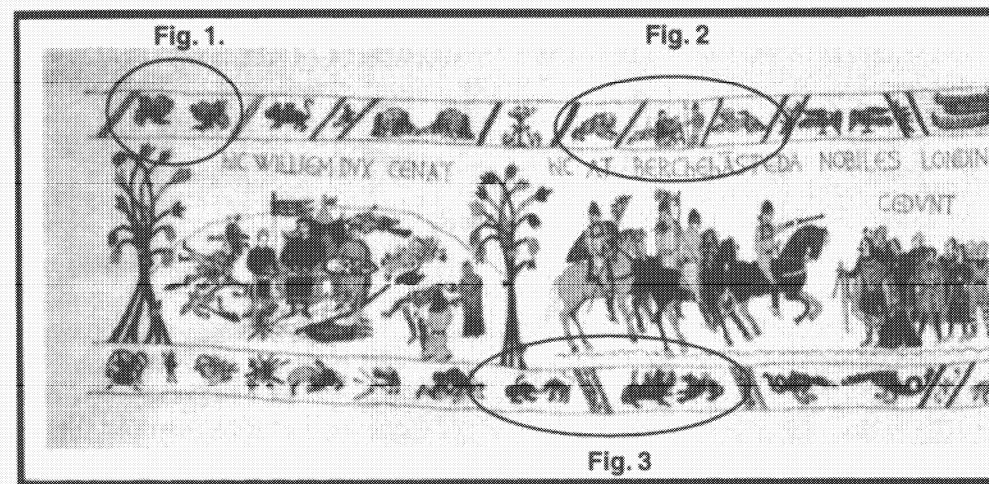


Fig. 1. Pair of facing griffins; Fig. 2. Two lions are on either side of two warriors; Fig. 3. A lioness is fighting a beast and a black griffin is with a doglike animal.

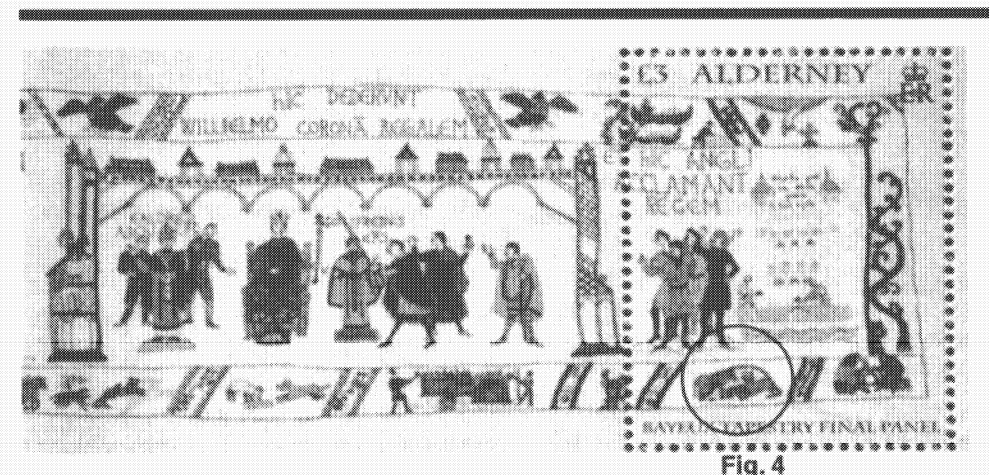


Fig. 4. A lion has its long tail curled around a donkey; a puffin and a frog are also in this vignette. This motif was chosen for the first day cover.