



Stuffed Crocodile - Supposedly that of the Stratton Legend

How Folk of Stratton Came to be Called Crocodiles

No-one knows exactly how Strattonians became to be known as 'Crocodiles', but there are a couple of newspaper articles that give credence to legend/myth of strange creatures being seen out and about at night. Transcriptions of both known articles are below. Make your own mind up.

Extract from Evening Advertiser 10th March 1856

THE SEA SERPENT ASHORE - On Friday evening, February 29th, the inhabitants of Stratton were in the great state of alarm, occasioned by the appearance of a monster, supposed to be nearly akin to his Satanic Majesty, uninvited, had thought to proper visit the neighbourhood. It appears a man while walking between the cross-roads and an old Roman Bridge, was startled by a monster lying across his path, which, at his approach reared itself, and, with a terrific hiss, appeared ready for the attack. In terror, he alarmed his neighbours, who valiantly arming, rushed to the combat. Spades, pickaxes, prongs, choppers, dragged from their peaceful avocations, were carried forward to annihilate the monster. Thus armed the sallied forth; but imagine their disappointment, the enemy had vanished. Not to be outdone, they watched for several succeeding nights in breathless anxiety awaiting its appearance; nor was their ardour cooled until information reached them that the monster had been captured, the first night, by a lady, who, having passed the spot a few minutes previous, had occasion to retrace her steps; seizing it by the middle, she returned, and our hero, with fifty chosen men, she met advancing, fully determined to annihilate her Boa!

With thanks to Swindon library for the Extract.

Extract from Evening Advertiser circa 1901

CROCODILE TEARS SHED FOR LEGEND.

It was Christmas Eve at the turn of the century, (1899), three men left the Kingsdown Arms in the village of Stratton to weave their way home. Alerted by a noise from a ditch they investigated and froze in horror at the sight that met their eyes - a fully grown crocodile.

Fleeing in terror back to the pub they roused the village and most local people rushed to the scene - but the crocodile had vanished.

For days the area was searched, but of the crocodile there was no sign. News of the sighting spread but most people put it down to hallucinations caused by the good strong ale brewed in the village.

Over the years, often after a night in the pub, people reported seeing the mythical creature. Riders said their horses shied and pioneer motorists reported a strange shape crossing their path in the dim headlights. Dogs, cats and sheep went missing and bits of cattle were found lying around.

Some time after the first sighting Sara Grace, a barmaid at the Kingsdown Arms, left the pub to walk home to Stanton house, where she lived and had another job. She was never seen again. Her lover, William Black, was arrested, tried at Winchester for murder, and found guilty. He went to the scaffold protesting his innocence to the end.

About a year later the owner of Stanton house, a great hunter, died and left his extensive collection of trophies, including stuffed heads of stags, lions and tigers, to local educational establishments and museums. While going through his property one of the staff found a dead but perfectly preserved crocodile in the ice house!

It was taken to a taxidermist to be stuffed – and when the stomach was slit open out fell a bracelet with the inscription “From William to Sara with love”.

And that, so they say, is how the crocodile came to be in the Bath Road Museum in Old Town, Swindon. To this day Stratton folk are known as “crocodiles”.

From a news cutting mounted in Kingsdown public house.

OPC NOTES (Administration)

This item sparked the curiosity and so a little further investigation into the facts reported in the above have found the following although this research is not complete or detailed.

There is no record of a Sara Grace in Wiltshire in either the 1891 or 1901 census that would fit the Sara Grace mentioned in the legend. There is no death recorded between 1899 and 1910.

We were unable to find a news report of a trial or execution of William Black from 1899 to 1910 in any local newspapers or any from further afield.

There seems to be no record of any of the incidents mentioned in the legend reported in newspapers across the land at the time of the initial sighting or reporting the loss of livestock under mysterious circumstances. Although in a recent article it is suggested that the locals that went to the pond on the night of the incident reported seeing a log floating in the pond.

We were unable to find anything reporting the disappearance of Sara Grace.

We have not been able to confirm at this point any of the reports of sighting by riders or motorists.

We are able to confirm however that the owner of Stanton House, Herbert W. E. Agar Esq., died in 1901 aged 77. There is no mention of his occupation in any of the census returns as recorded as living on own means or as a parsons son. We have been unable to find an obituary that might mention his hunting prowess and his collection of taxidermy.