

THE WORLD OF STRANGE PHENOMENA

# ForteanTimes

FT179 JANUARY 2004 £3.20



## ELFLAND

MEETING  
THE LITTLE  
PEOPLE  
P38

## SEX, LIES AND ECTOPLASM

A SÉANCE ROOM  
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P30

## PRAYER POWER

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# DEATHLINE

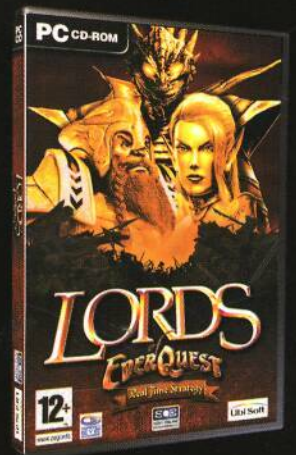
TAKE A ONE WAY TRIP ON LONDON'S NECROPOLIS RAILWAY

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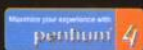


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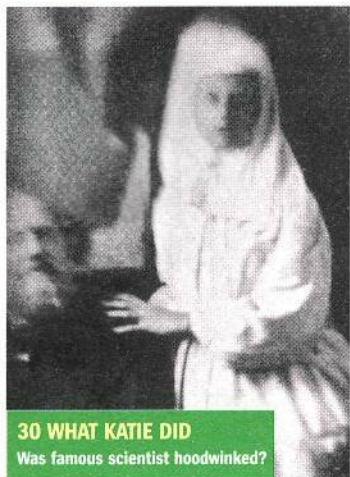
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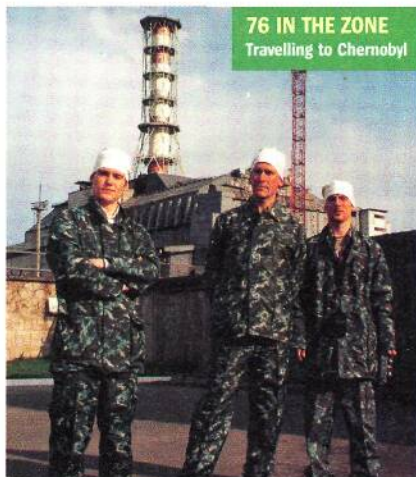
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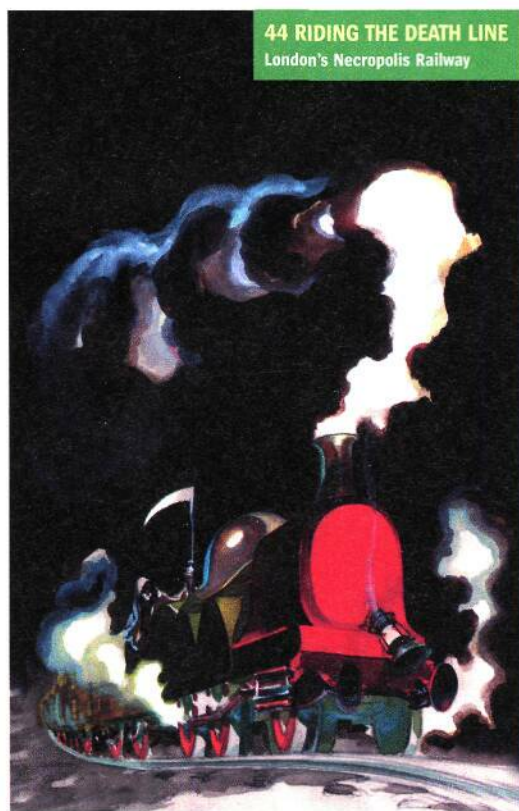
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**44 RIDING THE DEATH LINE**  
London's Necropolis Railway

### 38 INVITATION TO ELFLAND

Away with the faeries



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# editorial

## Funeral trains and fairy tales

### WHAT THE VICTORIANS DID FOR US

In a recent issue of *Skeptical Inquirer* (Sept/Oct 2003), there appeared a fascinating story concerning William Henry Salter, former Secretary and President of the Society for Psychical Research. Salter died in 1969, but left two sealed trunks of letters, manuscripts and séance transcripts in the custody of Trinity College, Cambridge, not to be opened until 1995. When researcher Gian Marco Rinaldi came to examine the contents of this strange bequest he unearthed some peculiar stories of the early days of the SPR (most notably their plan to create a new 'Messiah' through a process of 'psychic genetics') and some fascinating assessments of the many mediums the Society had dealt with over the years.

One story concerned Polish medium Stanislaw (or Stasha) Tomczyk and her relationship with Everard Fielding, then Honorary Secretary of the SPR. When in a trance state, Stasha would often manifest another personality, 'Moyenne', described as "a very attractive child of about thirteen". While Fielding was largely indifferent to Stasha, he "flirted outrageously" with Moyenne, falling in love with and eventually marrying her.

Such cases of supposed 'scientists' falling for the charms of visitors from the spirit world may not be all that unusual. In this issue ("What Katie Did", p30), Peter Brookesmith recounts the far more tortuous tale of how respected scientist and enthusiastic investigator of spiritualism Sir William Crookes became besotted with the spirit form of Katie King, as 'materialised' by the charming young medium Florence Cook. The mind boggles at the kind of three-way hanky-panky that might just have been going on in the darkened séance rooms of Victorian London.

The Victorians, of course, were fascinated not just by 'the other side' but also by the whole process of getting people there, which they did in some style. In this golden age of funerary finery and exquisite interments, it's no surprise that another great invention of the age - the

railway - should have found itself pressed into service as a method of ferrying departed souls across the Styx; or, at least, to the Surrey Necropolis of Brookwood. Paul Slade brings us the full history of the world's first funeral train service (see *The Necropolis Railway*, p44) and demonstrates that even in death there was no escape from the grip of the British class system.

Fairies, too, enjoyed their heyday in Victorian culture (more on this next issue), celebrated endlessly in the popular art and literature of the time. The little people, although doing quite nicely in sanitised Hollywood roles and Christmas adverts, have been far more reticent for most of the last century. It's good to hear, then, that they are still hanging on in some of the remoter corners of the British Isles - though if Moyra Doorly's personal account (*Elfland*, p38) is anything to go by, they are perhaps best left undisturbed.



COVER IMAGE: ALEX SEVERIN

### UNCONVENTION 2004

We'd like to say thank you for all the kind letters and emails we received in connection with our 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue. It would have been impossible to keep *FT* going for three decades without the unflinching support of readers all over the world.

The one event at which we actually get to meet some of you is UnConvention, so we thought we'd put you in the picture as to plans for 2004's event. At the 2003 gathering the rumour mill seemed to be in overdrive, with many people seemingly convinced that they were attending the last ever UnCon. We're pleased to announce that this is not the case - UnCon will return in 2004, but at a different location and on a different date. We can't say much more for now, except: make sure you're around in late October 2004.

*David Sutton*

DAVID SUTTON

*Bob Rickard*

BOB RICKARD

*Paul Sieveking*

PAUL SIEVEKING

## What do we mean by fortean?

Everything you always wanted to know about Fortean Times but were too paranoid to ask!

© SEE PAGE 66



AN  
ANCIENT  
CONSPIRACY

A  
BROKEN CODE

AN  
UNSOLVED  
MURDER

THE  
ULTIMATE  
ADVENTURE

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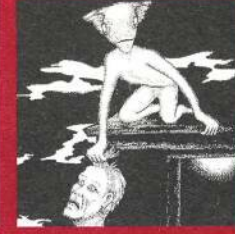
# strangedays



**TOGETHER FOREVER?**  
We look at conjoined twins around the world  
**PAGE 6**



**CASTRATION ANXIETY?**  
Not if these self-taught surgeons are anything to go by...  
**PAGE 8**



**UFOLOGY**  
Kelly-Hopkinsville's 'little men' and the Kecksburg 'ball of fire'  
**PAGE 22**

## Cannibal apology

In the former Cannibal Islands, villagers apologise for the missionary whom their ancestors ate, with relish



LEFT: Peniasi Matavudi with the murder weapon.  
BOTTOM LEFT: Rev Thomas Baker.  
BOTTOM RIGHT: The cannibal accused of the killing.

a mat. The chief, thinking it was a gift, put it in his hair. Baker then tried to take it back, thus breaking the taboo on touching the chief. He paid for this infraction with his life.

Those struck down included Baker, his native assistant Shadrach Seileka, and six young converts. Two of the party, Aisea and Josefata, escaped and bore the dreadful news to the missionary headquarters. The victims' bodies were cut up on a flat rock at the base of a ravine, anointed, roasted, and eaten with a sweet relish made from the borodina plant, which is similar to a tomato. Baker's bones were propped up in a tree as a warning to other tribes. Determined warriors boiled Baker's leather boots for a month, but found them too tough to eat. The desiccated remains of one, along with the bowl in which Baker was allegedly served, can be seen in the national museum in the Fijian capital Suva.

The British consul in Fiji forbade white settlers from mounting revenge attacks, judging that Westerners would be slaughtered in the inaccessible terrain; but Ratu Cakobau, the king of Fiji and a Christian convert, led a force to avenge Baker's death. He lost 84 warriors in a bloody battle. Seven years later, Fiji became a British colony. There are now more than 260,000 Methodists in Fiji, the largest Christian denomination. Five years ago, a pair of entrepreneurs caused uproar in Fiji with a plan to sell "cannibal chutney" based on a traditional recipe.

The six-hour ceremony of atonement, known as *ai sorotabu*, was held on 13 November 2003, in the Navosa village of Nubutautau, which lies in the heart of Viti Levu. During the ceremony, villagers presented woven mats, kava roots, a dozen whales' teeth (*tabua*) and a slaughtered cow to 10 of Baker's Australian descendants, asking them to forgive the murder and help them lift a curse which they

believe has blighted their lives. The village has no electricity, piped water, or school. A jungle logging track, built two weeks before the ceremony, is the only link to the outside world. Unwanted pregnancies, incest, child mortality and drug use are widespread and there is a feeling that the village had been forgotten by the rest of the country and the world, a state of affairs that the ceremony would remedy.

**W**iping away tears, 65-year-old chief Ratu Filimone Nawawabalavu (or Wawabaluva, according to *The Guardian*), dressed in his robes made of pressed grasses, offered gifts and kissed the cheek of Les Lester, 56, a plant manager from Bundaberg in Queensland and Baker's great-great-grandson. The chief handed back Baker's Bible and comb. "I feel that the spirit of Thomas Baker is at rest," said Mr Lester.

Fijians trekked from distant villages on foot and horseback to witness the ceremony, which was attended by the Prime Minister, Laisenia Qarase, who flew in by helicopter. Also in the crowd of about 2,000 was the great-great-grandson of Nakatakataimosi, the chief who ordered the killing, Brigadier General Sitiveni Rabuka, who led the first of a series of coups in recent years, and members of the Grand Council of Chiefs. For many of the village children, it was their first sight of white people. A pig wrapped in palm leaves was roasted in the visitors' honour. A dozen villagers re-enacted the moments leading up to the massacre, with one wielding the battleaxe that allegedly killed Baker.

Prompted by misguided political correctness, the social anthropologist William Arens in *The Man-Eating Myth* (1979) denied that cannibalism was ever customary in any tribal societies, blaming racism and overactive colonial imaginations.



Sorry sight: Chief Ratu Filimone Nawawabalavu apologises to Baker's great-great-grandson Les Lester.

term "long pig". Cannibalism was also practised in New Guinea, Sumatra, on some Polynesian islands, by the Maoris of New Zealand, and by various tribes in West and Central Africa.

Researchers from University College London, having identified gene-based resistance to diseases of the mad-cow type among the Fore of Papua New Guinea – who only recently gave up eating their dead – went on to identify it in human populations worldwide. John Collinge of UCL sees the pattern of chromosomal modification as due to the evolutionary "selection pressure" of past cannibalism-related

diseases.

Medicinal cannibalism was popular in Western Europe up until the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The ingestion of human remains, particularly powdered human skulls, fingers and hands, was thought to stave off disease. A lucrative traffic in Egyptian mummies ensured that no reputable apothecary was without his jar of powdered ancient corpse, offered as a treatment for ailments ranging from skin diseases to infertility. [FT124:34-38]

In the 1930s, widespread cannibalism was reported in China and the USSR (particularly the Ukraine) during periods of famine, as it is today in North Korea. It was also sanctioned during the Cultural Revolution in China, when hundreds of "counter revolutionaries" were killed and eaten [FT69:48]. Today, cannibalism is occurring in the war-torn Ituri province of north-eastern Congo, where Lendu and Hema militiamen prey on the pigmies. (*London Times*, *Irish Times*, *Guardian*, *D.Mirror*, 15 Oct; *D.Mail*, *D.Telegraph*, 15 Oct, 14 Nov; *Queensland Times*, 21 Oct; *Scotsman*, 14 Nov 2003.

### The spirit of Rev Baker is now at rest

However, he was quite wrong – the evidence for cannibalism is both cogent and widespread. Wild chimpanzees and 70 other mammal species have been observed killing and eating each other, while the two-million-year-old *Homo habilis* cranium known as 'Stw 53' is covered with deliberate cut marks. Neanderthal skulls from Croatia and *Homo sapiens* bones from Cheddar Gorge in Somerset, dating to around 11,000 BC, show tell-tale marks of butchery.

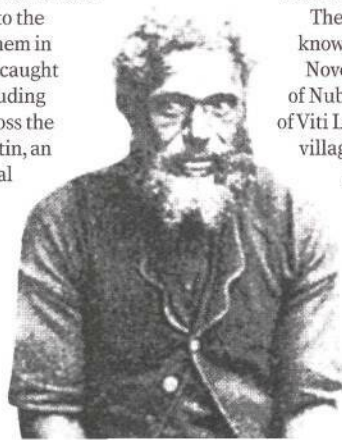
In the New World, the Aztecs of Mexico, the Asanazi of the south-western United States [FT113:16] and several other tribes of both North and South America regularly ate their enemies. In Fiji, human flesh was a legitimate source of food, indicated by the Melanesian pidgin

**O**n 13 November, a ceremony was held in Fiji (once known as the Cannibal Islands) to atone for the death of Rev Thomas Baker, hacked to death with a battle-axe, cooked and eaten on 21 July 1867, the only white victim of cannibalism in Fiji. "We ate everything but his boots," one local boasted at the time. This outrage was big news back in England and helped contribute to the stereotype of missionaries in cooking pots surrounded by dancing natives, so familiar from cartoons. The incident prompted Jack London to write a short story about it called "The Whale Tooth". According to a spokesman for the London Missionary Society, another missionary made a "similar cultural error" in Papua New Guinea around the same time and was also eaten.

Baker, 35, a Wesleyan minister born in Playden, East Sussex, was working on the Fijian island of Viti Levu to convert the natives to Christianity – called

"the Lotu" or "the worship". Missionaries were making good headway, but local chiefs would declare themselves converted before secretly reneging and feasting on the flesh of enemies to terrify their tribal rivals. Body parts such as tongues were sometimes cut off and eaten while the victim was still alive.

Baker planned to cross Viti Levu to Vuda on the north coast, converting natives on his way, before returning home by sea. Nakatakataimosi, a chief of the Navatusila tribe in the Navosa region of the central highlands, gave Baker's group shelter overnight in Gayadelavatu and then offered to show the Christians the path to the north coast before ambushing them in thick reeds. "It seems Baker got caught up in some sort of inter-tribal feuding relating to his right to travel across the island," according to Lance Martin, an archivist at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. Another account, regarded as a myth by historians, said that Baker used a comb and placed it on



BOTH PICTURES: GETTY IMAGES / AFP

### EXTRA EXTRA FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM NEWSPAPERS AROUND THE WORLD

**MILKY WAY IS ENCIRCLED BY GIANT RING DOUGHNUT**  
*Times*, 7 Jan 2003.

**GAY GIRLS TO CAUSE STORM**  
*Sky News online*, 8 Jan 2002.

**FOX ADMITS BEING PART OF CAR GANG**  
*Gloucester Echo*, 9 Jan 2003.

**IMPS ANGRY AT SMUGGLING CLAIM BY MPs**  
*D.Telegraph*, 10 Jan 2003.

**CORONERS SEEK PLAN FOR DISASTER**  
*Melbourne Age*, 11 Jan 2003.

**BARKING DOG TALKS**  
*Westside News (Queensland)*, 15 Jan 2003.

**MAN ATTACKED BY RIVER**  
*Kidderminster Shuttle/Times*, 16 Jan 2003.

**PRESIDENT ATTACKS MOANING GERMANS**  
*Scotsman*, 17 Jan 2003.

**POET DIES TRYING TO HANG HIMSELF**  
*D.Telegraph*, 20 Jan 2003.

**JOGGER STRANGLES AGGRESSIVE OSTRICH**  
*Ananova*, 21 Jan 2003.

**CHICKEN FARM VISITS HAVE INSPECTORS ON WILD GOOSE CHASE**  
*Irish Times*, 28 Jan 2003.

**THEFT USED IMAGINARY CHILDREN**  
*Teletext London News*, 29 Jan 2003.

**YOUNGSTERS GET EATEN BY 40FT DINOSAUR AT SCHOOL**  
*Bucks Herald*, 29 Jan 2003.

**LIONS DANCING IN THE STREETS**  
*Bristol Eve. Post*, 1 Feb 2003.

# Destined for a dual life

Some choose separation surgery, while others face a lifetime of enforced togetherness



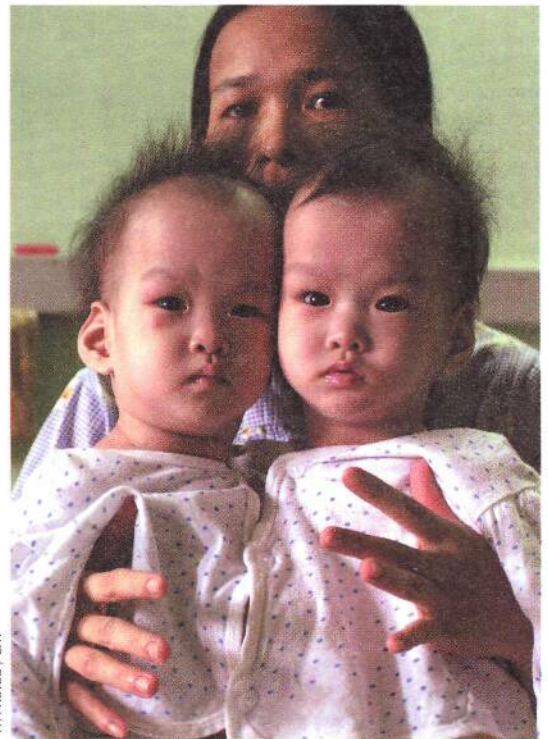
PA PHOTOS / EPA

**F**ollowing the death of Laleh and Ladan Bijani (below), the Iranian twins joined at the head, on 8 July [FT160:27, 175:11], Ayara and Jayara Ratun, 34-year-old twins from West Bengal (seen top left on opposite page), decided never to seek separation. Joined at the waist and sharing a single pair of legs, they travel across India appearing in fairs to support themselves and their six siblings. They are almost certainly the conjoined twins named as Ganga and Jamuna, who featured in *India Today* seven years ago – unless there are two sets of West Bengal twins of the same age, both joined at the waist, which seems unlikely. Ganga and Jamuna were born in Keshabpur village in Basirhat, West Bengal. Their father is named as Belatali Mondal. In 1993 they gave birth by caesarean section to a baby girl who died after a few hours. The sisters argued frequently. Ganga loved fish, while Jamuna preferred meat. Ganga enjoyed listening to music; Jamuna found a sound sleep more tempting. *India Today*, 29 Feb 1996; *Ananova*, 14 July 2003.



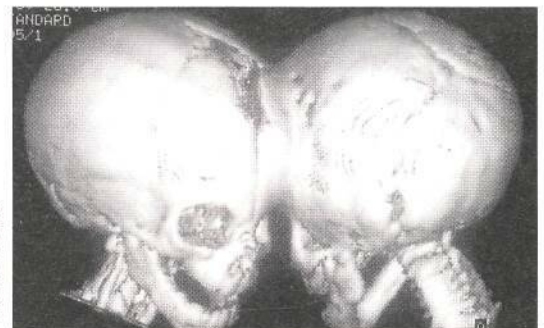
PA PHOTOS / EPA

Ahmed and Mohamed Ibrahim, craniopagus twins (joined at the head), were delivered by caesarean section on 2 June 2001 in the Egyptian town of el-Homr, 400 miles (644km) south of Cairo. On 12 October 2003, they were successfully separated after 26 (or 34) hours of risky surgery in the Children's Medical Center in Dallas, Texas (seen above, prior to surgery). The operation required more than a year's preparation and involved a medical team of more than 60, including five brain surgeons, working in shifts. Each twin had his own brain, but they shared about 10 per cent of their brain tissue. After separating their brains, the procedure involved reconstructing their skulls and covering the wounds with skin. Extra skin had been created by skin expanders inserted in the boys' heads and thighs five months earlier. They were kept in a drug-induced coma for three days. At the time of writing, the twins appear to be making satisfactory progress. *Eve. Standard, Int. Herald Tribune*, 13 Oct; *Guardian*, 13+14+16 Oct 2003.



PA PHOTOS / EPA

Trinh Thi Binh, 30, with her baby girls, 10-month-old Le Thu Cuc (left) and Le Thuy An, who were joined at the belly, at the National Hospital of Pediatrics in Hanoi, Vietnam, on 10 October. They were due to be separated five days later. [R] 10 Oct 2003.

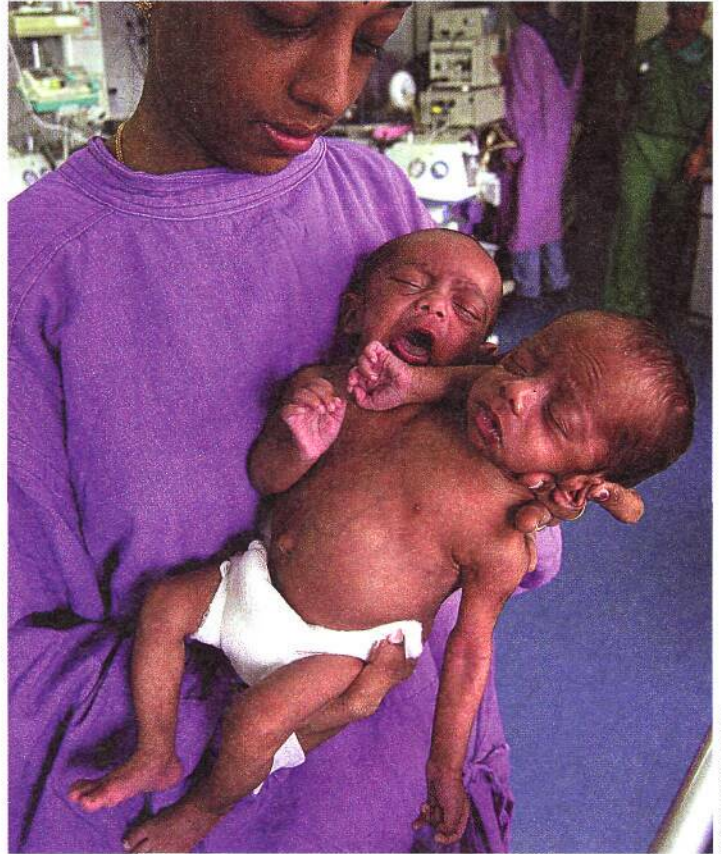


REUTERS / WS ITALY

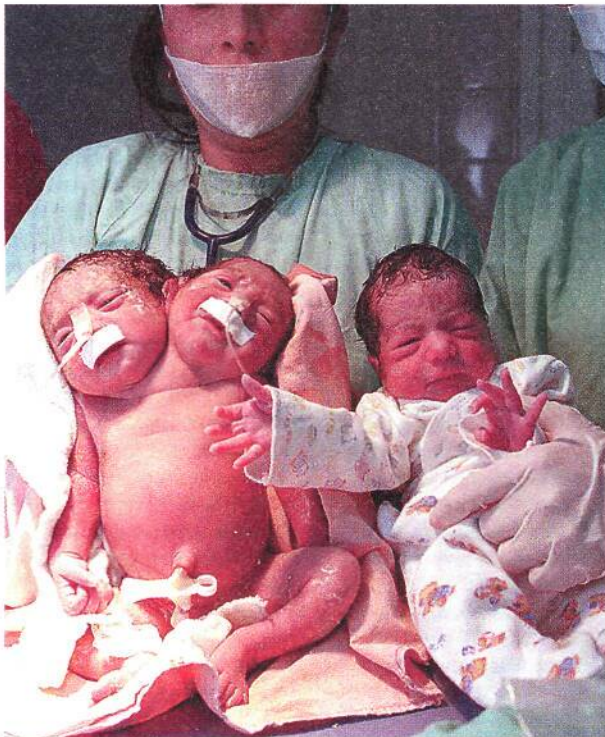
Four-month-old Greek twins joined at the temple were separated on 11 October following a 12-hour operation in an Italian hospital. Three days later, doctors said that, if there were no complications, the girls, known only as A and B, could lead a full and normal life and should be ready to return to Greece within two weeks. [R] 14 Oct 2003.



AP PHOTO / DIVAKANT SOLANKI



AP PHOTO / GAUTAM SINGH



PA PHOTOS / EPA



AP PHOTO / PIKIRAN RAKYAT DAILY

A nurse holds a pair of conjoined twins at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi, India, on 20 July. The 35-day-old boys had separate stomachs, lungs and spinal cords, but their liver, bladder, intestines and genitalia were fused. Separation was not advisable as each leg had a separate set of nerves linked to the two independent nervous systems – meaning they would have only one leg each on separation. [AP] 21 July 2003.

Omphalopagus twins Lourdes and Lujan, born 23 June in San Juan, Argentina, did not survive. They could not be separated and died on 10 July, survived by their sibling Guadalupe. [EPA] 11 July 2003.

These two-day-old twin boys were born in the west Javanese town of Bandung on 12 July. They were fused at the stomach, making them omphalopagus twins. [AP] Bangkok Post, 15 July 2003.



## SIDELINES...

### STRANGE SHOE FIND

A Swedish couple hiking on a remote mountain in Sweden's far northern province of Jaemtland have found 70 pairs of shoes all filled with half a kilo (1lb) of butter. There were trainers, high heels, boots and tap shoes. The find is similar to a display arranged by artist Yu Xiuzhen in 1996. His exhibit "Shoes With Butter," was laid out in the Tibetan mountains surrounding Lhasa. We are not told if Yu had visited Sweden. [AP] 9 Oct 2003.

### LOST LUGGAGE RETURNS

A suitcase full of clothes belonging to a German hairdresser was lost by an airline after he went on holiday to Senegal in 1979. Twenty-four years later, in September 2003, it was found lying outside a police station in Düsseldorf. Where had it been? [R] 9 Sept 2003.

### LIBRARY DANGER

Henry Kuttner's visit to Swiss Cottage Library in north London was almost the death of him. Mr Kuttner, 73, of Edgware, spent three days in Barnet Hospital after the library's electronic security barrier drastically reset his heart pacemaker, leaving him sweating, giddy and lethargic, with alarmingly low blood pressure and a racing heart. *Times*, 21 June 2003.

### VOW OF SILENCE

Rainer Herpel of Bad Embs in Germany was so upset by his father's opposition to him becoming an artist that he vowed not to talk till the old man died. He ate only hamburgers alone in his room and never had visitors. He wore ear covers when out, to stop people talking to him. Following his father's death last year, Rainer spoke for the first time in 29 years. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 June; *Independent on Sunday*, 15 June 2003.

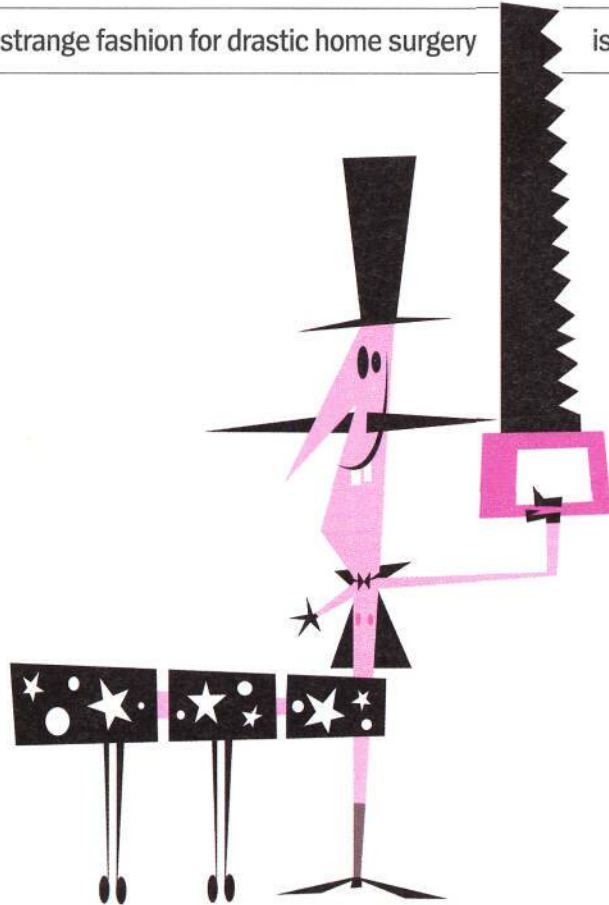
### BOY DODGES MISSILE

On 7 August, Anthony Elliss-Galati, 10, saw an odd-shaped object heading towards him as he played outside his house in Safety Bay, about 30 miles (48km) south of Perth, Western Australia. He hid behind his mother's car and watched the bird-sized object smash a hole in the driveway and shatter. The silver-coloured fragments looked as if they had melted, and were thought to be from a meteorite. They were to be scientifically tested. *Canberra Times*, 13 Aug 2003.

# First cut is the deepest

A strange fashion for drastic home surgery

is making gentlemen wince



CHRIS GARbutt

Andreas Walter, 18, from Halle in Germany, hacked off his penis and tongue with garden shears after drinking hallucinogenic tea made from "angel's trumpet flowers" (of the genera *Datura* or *Brugmansia*, both of which contain belladonna alkaloids). His mother said he had disappeared into the garden for a couple of minutes and returned wearing a towel wrapped around him and bleeding heavily from his mouth and between his legs. Doctors found the missing organs but were unable to sew them back. *Ananova*, 23 Sept; *D.Mirror*, 25 Sept 2003.

George Mamaril from Malasiqui in the Philippines cut off his penis, wrapped it in newspaper, and put it through the window of his estranged wife's parents, shouting: "Piano ag ka la manududa ya onkakaraw ak" (So you will not suspect I am courting another girl). Evelyn Palaganas Mamaril, 35, handed the 3in (7.6cm)

## He cut off his genitals "to teach his wife a lesson"

organ over to the police, who got an embalmer to preserve it in a bottle until the husband could be found. He was last seen walking away from the house "grimacing in pain". The couple had been estranged for three years after the woman's parents persuaded her to live with them. They said the man had been incapable of looking after her and their two children, as he was unemployed. *Ananova*, 27 Feb; *Metro*, 28 Feb; *Guardian*, 4 Mar 2003.

**Eduardo Veliz, a 36-year-old Peruvian, cut off his penis outside**

parliament in Lima in September 2000 after failing to meet Congress President Carlos Ferraro to ask for work. It was successfully reattached. On 20 August 2001, he returned to see Ferraro to complain about his low wages as a labourer. Frustrated once again, he cut off his right testicle. Carlos Viera, spokesman at the Dos de Mayo hospital, which treated Veliz on both occasions, said Veliz could still enjoy "a normal sex life". [R] 21 Aug 2001.

A Kenyan father of nine cut off his penis and testicles with a knife last May following a row with his wife. Ochola Adebbe, 50, from Kajulu West, near Kisumu, said he wanted to split from his wife, whom he accused of infidelity. Doctors at Nyanza Provincial General Hospital managed to save his life. *Ananova*, 12 May 2003.

Another Kenyan from the same area did the same thing in September. Alfonse Mumbo, 38, of Kajulu Wath Oregu, near Kisumu, cut off his penis and testicles with a kitchen knife "to teach his wife a lesson". The former barber accused his wife, Penina, 29, of infidelity and said he wanted "to give her a free hand to go after other men". Mrs Mumbo came home with her brother-in-law 10 minutes after the incident to find her husband unconscious in a pool of blood. She dismissed her husband's allegations of unfaithfulness, saying she loved him very much. He was taken to the same hospital as Mr Adebbe, where medics managed with difficulty to stem the blood. *Ananova*, 24 Sept; *Sunday Times*, 28 Sept 2003.

This October, a 24-year-old Tanzanian man cut off his genitals in an attempt to win sympathy from creditors after squandering their money on prostitutes and alcohol. His condition was improving after he received treatment at his local hospital in the country's northern Manyara region. It was the second self-castration in the area in two months. [R] 20 Oct 2003.

# Mob rule returns to taunt

The new 'Flash Mob' craze threatens to annoy and confuse in equal measure



PA PHOTOS / CHRIS YOUNG

FLASHING SIGHTS: The *Daily Mail's* mobbing event at the London Eye, near Waterloo Station.

Last June, hundreds of people crowded round a nondescript Oriental rug in Macy's department store in Manhattan. When sales people questioned them, they said they all lived together and were shopping for a "love rug" for their "suburban commune". Ten minutes later, they all left. This was the second example of what has become known as "flash mobs"; the first was at Claire's Boutique accessories store in Manhattan. The phenomenon has now spread around the world. Hundreds of people following emailed instructions have suddenly converged on a location, acted out a loose script, and then dispersed after a preset time, usually 10 minutes. To protect the planned serendipity of each event, participants aren't told exactly what the mob is supposed to do until just before the event happens.

For one event on 2 July, participants passed around an email telling them to assemble at the food court in Grand Central Station, where organisers (identifiable by the copies of the *New York Review of Books* they were holding) then gave mobbers (or mobsters?) printed instructions regarding what to do next. The result: shortly after 7pm, about 200 people suddenly assembled on the mezzanine level of the Grand Hyatt

Hotel next to Grand Central Station in Manhattan, applauded loudly for 15 seconds, then left. On another occasion, mobbers met in Central Park to tweet like birds, crow like cockerels and chant "Nature!"

Similar events took place in the following weeks in at least 40 cities around the world. In San Francisco, hundreds of people spun around in circles like children. In Dortmund, a mob gathered round a washing machine display in a department store and everyone ate a banana. In Rome, 300 people entered a bookshop to ask for a non-existent title. At precisely 6.31pm on 7 August, Sofas UK, off Tottenham Court Road in London, was besieged by 250 people who called friends on their mobiles and praised the merchandise without using the letter 'o'. After seven minutes, there was a round of applause and everyone left. Flash mobs also occurred in Amsterdam, Berlin, Birmingham, Boston, Bristol, Chicago, Manchester, Minneapolis, Nashville, Paris, Singapore, São Paulo, Vienna and Zurich. "This is just the sort of thing that happens when you forbid New Yorkers to smoke," said Tobias von Schönebeck, a Berlin tour guide.

"I guess it's hard to see the point," said David Danzig, 32, who attended three flash mobs in New York during the summer. "For me,

that's a reason to keep going and to try and figure out the point. It's art." According to Internet guru Howard Rheingold, author of *Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution*, such occurrences will increase as people make use of the Internet and mobile telephones to arrange all sorts of "ad-hocracies", whether for performance art, to promote serious political and social movements, or just to "freak people out". Commentators have found flash mob precedents in Dada and the Situationist movement; in the "happenings" of 1950s New York; and in San Francisco's holiday tradition of the Santa Rampage, in which odd Santas pop up in various neighbourhoods to hand out weird gifts to locals.

On 14 August, the *Daily Mail* organised their own flash mob at the London Eye, a sure sign that the phenomenon was on the wane, although it didn't arrive in New Zealand until 2 September, when 200 people piled into a Burger King in Auckland and mooed like cows.

"Unless people start coming up with new ideas, this is going to die out quickly," said Sean Savage, a San Francisco designer. One new idea is the Antimob, suggested by someone who attended a flash mob in Minneapolis. Complaining of the group mentality and the reliance on scripted behaviour, the anonymous Antimobster suggested a co-ordinated effort to abandon a location rather than populate it. "The sudden ghost town appearance of a place like Grand Central Station or the Motor Vehicle Bureau in Chicago will be stunning," he said.

*Lewiston (ME) Sun Journal, Chicago Tribune, 24 July; Boston Globe, 25 July; New York Times, 4 Aug; Guardian, 7+8 Aug; Times, 8 Aug; D.Mirror, 9 Aug; [AP] 14 Aug; D.Mail, 16 Aug; Brisbane Courier-Mail, 3 Sept 2003. Selected websites: smartmobs.com, chessbikini.com, flashmob.info, flocksmart.com, flashmobs.co.uk, geocities.com/londonmobs/*

## SIDELINES...

### LATIN UPDATED

The Vatican has issued a new two-volume Italian-Latin Dictionary, *Lexicon Recentis Latinitatis*, covering some 23,000 terms. Many modern terms are given their Latin equivalents, such as: *pastillum botello fartum* (hotdog); *escariorum lavator* (dishwasher); *conformitatis osor* (hippie); *orbium phonographicorum theca* (disco); and *tempus maximæ frequentiæ* (rush hour). *Independent, 15 May 2003.*

### OUT DAMNED SPOT!

A man tried to get rid of a paint stain on his trousers by putting a litre of petrol in his washing machine. The resulting explosion wrecked not only the machine, but also the kitchen and two walls in his Moscow flat. *Sun, 14 Oct; Independent on Sunday, 19 Oct 2003.*

### TROUSER SNAKES

Per Johan Adolfsson, a 28-year-old Swedish glazier, was arrested at Sydney airport on 22 September when eight snakes were found under his trousers. He had stuffed them into socks and strapped them to his calves. The four highly venomous juvenile king cobras, measuring between 28in (71cm) and 37in (94cm), had died in transit, while the others, South American emerald tree boas, were put in quarantine at Taronga Zoo. Adolfsson had smuggled the snakes from Copenhagen via Bangkok. He was jailed for two months. *Gold Coast Bulletin, Brisbane Courier-Mail, 24 Sept; Sydney Morning Herald, 2 Oct; D.Telegraph, 23 Oct 2003.*

### BLACK HOLE FREQUENCY

Astronomers at NASA have found the deepest note ever detected, coming from a massive black hole in the central region of the Perseus galaxy cluster, 250 light-years away. The pitch is equivalent to B-flat - 57 octaves lower than a middle-C, more than a million billion times deeper than what we can hear. This sound might explain why the surrounding gas does not chill out as existing theory predicts. *Yahoo News, 9 Sept 2003.*

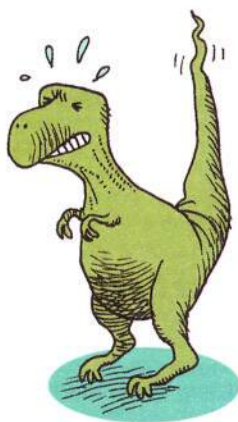


MARTIN ROSS

## SIDELINES...

### THEY MUST NEED GLASSES

Burglars trying to drill their way into an electrical goods store in Vara, Sweden, broke through the wall but found they were in an opticians instead. So they tried again and broke through to the opticians again. After four attempts they burst into the electrical shop, but an alarm went off and they fled empty-handed. *Sunday Times*, 13 July 2003.



### CHAMPION TURD

A fossil found near Onefour in south-eastern Alberta has been identified as the world's largest dinosaur dropping. The 75-million-year-old coprolite is about the size of a kitchen stove and contains well-preserved dinosaur muscle tissue, which is extremely rare. A paper on the find was published in the scientific journal *Palaios*. [UPI] 7 Sept. 2003.

### TRAVELLING TOSSER

A 32-year-old man from Barrie near Toronto in Canada, stopped for speeding on 1 August, was making dinner in a slow cooker in the front seat and tossing a salad. *Toronto National Post*, 5 Aug 2003.

### GOATS FRIED

On 15 July, 67 goats burnt to death in the Mojave Desert near Los Angeles when a pile of manure spontaneously combusted, scorching their one-acre enclosure. Firefighters managed to extinguish the flames in about 20 minutes, but by then all the goats had perished. [AP] 17 July 2003.

### TOY ALERT

Swiss police called out to dispose of a deadly Mamba snake in Allschwil near Basle took more than an hour to realise it was only a rubber toy dropped by a child into a well. *Independent*, 21 June 2003.

## New Religion News

### Aussie werewolves, an unexpected Wiccan model, plus new followers for the Aesir. By Mark Pilkington

#### BARK AT THE MOON

Concerned mothers have been contacting Australia's Cult Information Hotline to report that their children are being lured away by a pack of werewolves. The unnamed group, thought to number at least 50, is said to encourage members to wear wolf masks, eat raw meat and howl at the moon.

"My son left and moved into a house with this fellow and another bloke," said one Queensland mother. "They would dress up in costumes like wolves and take my son on a leash to South Bank (Brisbane's cultural centre). They drink blood and eat raw meat. My son lost a lot of weight."

Social worker David Ward, who spoke to the woman's 19-year-old son, said: "This boy was going through normal adolescent stuff. They go through an identity crisis, where they wonder who they are, and they're vulnerable... My concern is these kids believe they can turn into werewolves and start eating raw meat, which makes them sick."

*Werewolf: The Apocalypse* is also the name of a popular role-playing game. It's entirely possible that these teens have extended their role-playing into the mundane world, perhaps for no more threatening reason than a bit of fun.

The Australian pack referred to here are not named, but a quick search of the web found numerous werewolf communities worldwide, including one based in Australia. "Just another shifter sick to death of normal humanity and interested in talking to others," wrote one Australian message board member. "I'm 19 and i can shift," stated another. "I dont do animals at the moment and i dont plan to soon that doesn't mean i dont know what it's all about" [all sic].

Lycanthropy and shape-shifting delusions are not uncommon amongst sufferers from manic psychosis, depression and schizophrenia [see FT176: 22]. As empowering fantasies they may

also be attractive to adolescents undergoing physical, mental and circumstantial changes in their lives. Deliberate shape-shifters – who call themselves therianthropes – make sure to distance themselves from such "pathological" lycanthropy, pointing out that the creation of spirit bodies in animal form is a key component of both ancient and neo-shamanic practice. A very small number of shifters insist that they can alter their actual physical form; however most therianthropes remain sceptical of such claims.

Readers keen to research Australian lycanthropes further may enjoy the 1987 film, *Howling III: The Marsupials*. *Sunday Mail (Brisbane)*, 9 Nov 2003.

#### HOODOO DOLL

In time for Halloween, American toy makers Mattel™ unveiled the latest in their long-running line of Barbie dolls, Secret Spells Barbie. No doubt inspired by the popularity of "teen witch" TV programmes like *Buffy*, *Sabrina* and *Charmed*, this Barbie comes with a sparkly pink "Charm Girls" (the name of Barbie's coven?) jacket, a cauldron that looks like a cocktail glass, a wand, a spell book with secret compartment and a pet dragonfly. The dragonfly is a symbol of regeneration and immortality for some cultures and, in others, of weakness, instability and irresponsibility.

The response to Secret Spells Barbie, and her Charm Girls companions Christie and Kayla, has been predictably mixed. There were offended Christians: "Barbie has always dressed like a harlot, and now she even casts spells, both going against God. Is anyone really surprised?" [sic]; "This is sick! What's next, a demon Ken doll?" Offended Pagans: "...this version will twist young minds

even more. Wicca is a religion, not a fashion statement"; "I say burn her like they burned us." And the eminently sensible: "I never thought I'd see the day that someone's religion is shaken by a Barbie"; "Gold llame [sic] pants? EEK! Maybe Barbie can summon some spirits to help her with her fashion sense."

My Cryptic Ken scrying mirror is unable to determine whether Secret Spells Barbie will produce more teen witches, or signifies the beginning of the end for Nu-Wicca.

See Secret Spells Barbie for yourself at: <http://www.webdesk.com/secret-spells-barbie/>

#### OKEY LOKI

Almost 1,000 years after they were banned following the establishment of Christianity, Forn Sidr – The Ancient Customs – have finally been recognised by Denmark as a religion. There are approximately 240 worshippers of the Old Gods in Denmark, and they will now be free to have legal marriages, receive donations and enjoy tax breaks like other religious groups.

Worship of the ancient Norse gods was approved in Iceland in 1972, and since then the faith has been known worldwide as Asatru. There is some debate whether the word is originally Icelandic or Norse, but it relates to the Aesir – the Old Gods such as Odin, the wise one, Thor the Thunderer and Frey, god of peace. Another group, called Vanatru, is predominantly concerned with the Norse goddesses, including Frigg,

patroness of the household, Freya, goddess of love and Skadi, goddess of death.

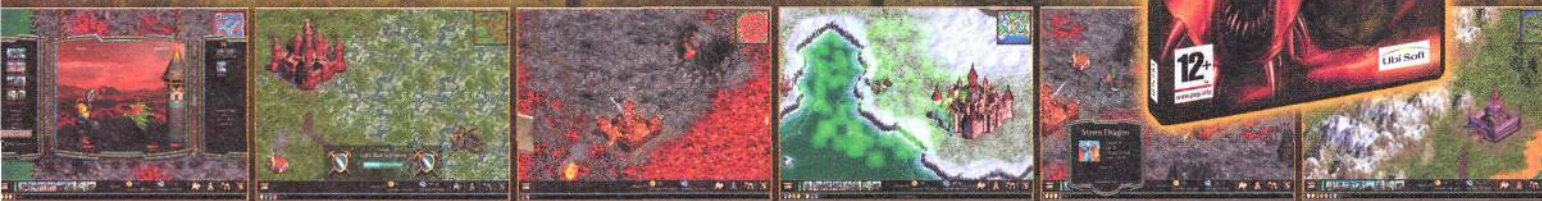
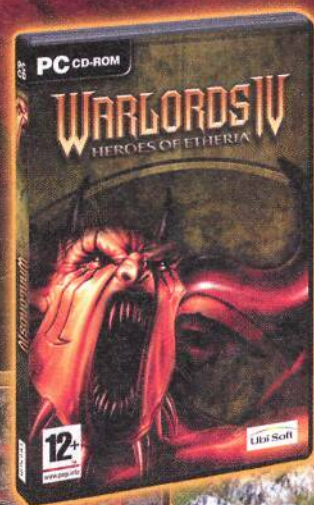
The loose-knit followers of the Aesir usually refer to themselves as Heathens rather than Pagans. They celebrate many of the same solstice and equinox dates as other neo-pagans, with the Yule period between Mother Night (the night before winter solstice) and Twelfth Night (New Year's Eve) being the most important. *Sapa-AFP (France)*, 6 Nov 2003.



# WARLORDS IV

HEROES OF ETHERIA™

THE LORDS OF STRATEGY  
RETURN



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**SIDELINES...**

**POINTLESS HIJACK**

In 1999, 15 minutes before a British Airways plane was due to land, Auburn Mason, 62, grabbed a stewardess, threatened her with scissors and said he would blow up the plane unless he was flown to Gatwick. This year, he was sentenced to four years in jail. It was all rather unnecessary, as the plane was heading for Gatwick anyway. *Xit (Aland, Finland), May 2003.*

**NEW AGE TOSH**

"Cutting-edge information has established that a sub-strand in our DNA connects us through the energy grid to one of 12 sacred sites, stargates or electromagnetic vortices to enable the vibrational rate of Mother Earth to be energetically stabilised. Glastonbury is one such site. Its guardians are the time-travelling grail lines of Celtic/Gaelic Britain: you!" *From an "Avalon Rising" leaflet at the Glastonbury Festival, July 2003.*

**SWEET TOOTH**

A man who had never eaten sweets in his life ended up in a coma after consuming 33lb (15kg) of honey in 10 days. After he regained consciousness a day later, Hayri Ates, 53, said he got fed up with abstaining and wanted to "catch up". Doctors in Bolu, northwest Turkey, said the sugar content in his blood had risen to 760mg. He vowed to moderate his sugar intake. *Metro, 6 Aug 2003.*

**MELANCHOLY RITE**

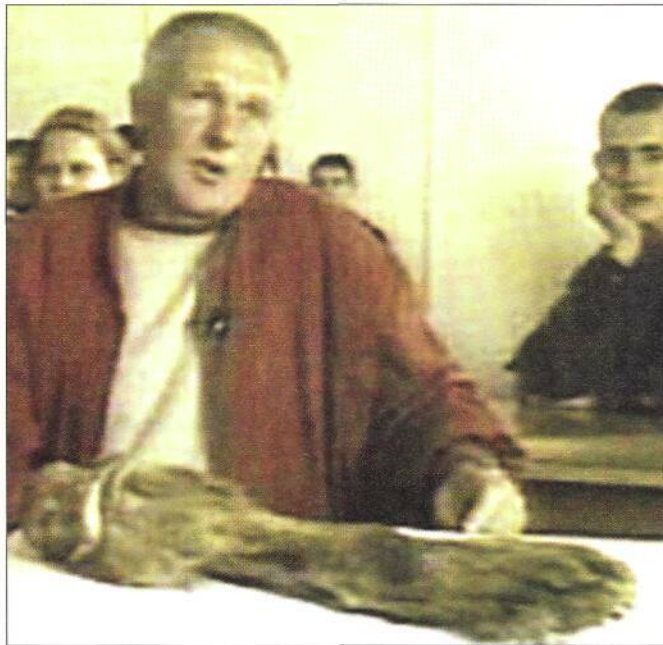
A Chinese couple won an 80 per cent discount after the restaurant hosting their wedding reception played 'inappropriate' music. As the pair toasted their union, the joint played mournful tracks such as 'You Took Away My Woman' and 'Why Do You Love Someone Else?' *Independent on Sunday, 6 July 2003.*

**CENTRAL ASIAN RATS**

An unusual breed of rats, immune to the usual poisons, is devastating Kyrgyzstan's Dzhahal-Abad region, killing farm birds, damaging crops and attacking people. As they can climb trees, they are also destroying a great deal of fruit. An Uzbek specialist bred the species by crossing an ordinary rat with a muskrat. *Interfax, 20 Sept 2003.*

# Is yeti really a meti?

Mountaineers make claims for ursine identity for the Abominable Snowman



**ABOVE:** Russian Mountaineer Sergey Sememnov displays the severed limb which he discovered in the Siberian Altai Mountains. **TOP RIGHT:** The underside of the foot shows its furry nature. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** An example of the Himalayan brown bear, *Ursus arctos*.

Makoto Nebuka, 56, a Japanese mountaineer who has spent 12 years climbing in the mountains of Nepal, Tibet and Bhutan, claims that the yeti is really a *meti*, a local Tibetan dialect word for the Himalayan brown bear (*Ursus arctos*). He said he had pictures of bear paws and other artefacts from the animal being venerated by mountain tribespeople. (In his 1998 book, *Yeti - Legend and Reality*, the famous mountaineer Reinhold Messner also maintained the yeti was really a bear, a claim made in the 1930s by Ernst Schäfer. See FT129:7).

Dr Nebuka's announcement was greeted with a chorus of stern disapproval from leading Nepalese officials. A letter from Bha Dawa to the editor of the *Kathmandu Post* headlined "Yetiquette" suggested Dr Nabuka might have spent too long in the wrong mountains and had himself mixed up his words. Both *yeti* and *meti* mean a near-mythical beast, said Mr Dawa. Tirtha Badadur Pradhanga, the chief government surveyor, said it was too soon to "simply deny that the yeti exists". He said the word *yeti* means "rock animal" in the Sherpa language, and should not be confused with *meti*. "No one should draw conclusions based on linguistic coincidences," said Professor Ram Kumar Pandey, a linguist at Tribhuvan University.

Rivalry between Japanese mountain-climbers is certainly a factor in the argument. A recent press conference by Dr Nabuka came just weeks after Japan's most celebrated yeti-hunter, Yoshiteru Takahashi, left his country to make "the definitive attempt" to photograph the beast. Takahashi claims to have found a

yeti cave on the slopes of Dhaulagiri, the world's fifth highest mountain, in western Nepal. His camera apparently froze in 1994 when he tried to photograph the denizens of the cave. This year, he is using nine infrared cameras with motion sensitive shutters, wrapped up well against the Himalayan chill. "We'll get a picture this time," he insisted, "and then all disbelievers will learn their lessons." [AFP] 23 Sept; BBC News, 26 Sept; D.Telegraph, 27 Sept 2003.

Sergey Sememnov (or Semenov), climbing at an altitude of 11,500ft (3,500m) in the permafrost of the remote Altai Mountains of Siberia (presumably last September), came upon a furry limb with padded paw, which he popped in his bag and took home. Local people said the creature must have walked on snow, because the sole of the foot was furry. There was vague talk that it could be from a yeti, as there have been many yeti sightings in the region. Scientific tests and X-rays are said to show that the bones are several thousand years old (how?), but attempts to identify the creature remain "inconclusive". Yuriy Malofeyev, vice-president of the Russian association of veterinary anatomists, told Russian TV that the mummified limb "looks very human". The length of the foot is about 24cm (9.4in) - about average for a human being. However, from the photograph, FT's zoological consultant Dr Karl Shuker thinks it is merely a bear's paw. *www.gazeta.ru, 8 Oct; BBC News, Sky News, 9 Oct 2003.*

# Teach yourself surgery



Following the drama of Aron Ralston, who gave his right arm to survive after being trapped by a boulder in Utah last April [FT173:12], an Australian coal miner found himself faced with the same dilemma. At 10.30pm on 28 June, Colin Jones, 43 (right), was working two miles (3.2km) underground at the West Wallsend Colliery (above) at Killingworth near Lake Macquarie on the New South Wales coast, when his tractor rolled over after hitting a hole on a sharp bend. His right arm was pinned against a wall by the roll bar of the machine, which was carrying four tons of lime dust.

Fearing an explosion from leaking fuel, he begged workmate Laurie Machin to cut off his badly crushed arm below the elbow even though emergency rescuers had been alerted. Machin hesitated, so Jones used his own Stanley knife.



**In a panic, he used the scythe to chop off his poisoned hand**

Machin packed his severed limb in a plastic bag and applied a tourniquet to the still-conscious miner, who walked up two flights of stairs to reach a lift, and was rushed by helicopter to the John Hunter Hospital in nearby Newcastle. Surgeons were unable to reattach his badly crushed arm in an emergency operation. Jones, known to locals as Bozo, was in a stable condition two days later – although he will have to give up his banjo playing and golf. *Ananova, 29 June; [R] (Sydney) D.Telegraph, Sydney Morning Herald, 30 June, 1 July; Brisbane Courier-Mail, 1 July 2003.*

**Bruce Osiowy, 53, a farmer from Abernethy, Saskatchewan, caught his thumb and little finger in a stone picker on 5 June. When no one had found him after 66 hours, he freed himself by cutting off his trapped digits with a Swiss Army knife and drove his tractor to his farmhouse, where he was able to call for help. Toronto National Post, 12 June 2003.**

Somanath Bahinipati, an Indian doctor, accidentally chopped a cobra in two while trimming his garden with a scythe; but the snake wrapped itself around him and bit him. In panic, he used the scythe to chop off his hand and prevent the venom spreading. He was recovering in hospital in Bhubaneswar. *Sun, 17 July 2003.*

## SIDELINES...



**AFTERLIFE ENTERTAINMENT**  
Locals were startled to hear music coming from China's Tongzi Cemetery. An investigation revealed that relatives of a music-loving farmer had buried his radio with him – tuned to his favourite station. *Sunday Mercury, 25 May 2003.*

**MAD TRADE**  
Wang Chaoying, head of a mental hospital in Huazhou in China's southern Guangdong province, has been arrested for selling off women patients as wives. He made more than 20 transactions since 1998, receiving "thousands of yuan" for each one. (1,000Y is £75). He drugged the women in order to keep the buyers from realising they were mental patients. Some men later demanded refunds. China has 70 million bachelors unable to find wives. *[R] 20 Aug 2003.*

**GERBIL PLAGUE**  
China is deploying eagles and poison to control giant gerbils, whose burrowing has damaged almost 5 million hectares (12.4 million acres) of grassland in the north-western Xinjiang province in the most severe rodent crisis in a decade. About 33,000 hectares (81,540 acres) have been completely destroyed. As many as 790 burrow holes were found per hectare in some areas. The giant gerbil (*Rhombomys opimus*) can grow up to 16in (40cm) and is known to carry bubonic plague. *[R] 19 Aug 2003.*

**DRASTIC MEASURE**  
Svetin Gulisija, 26, from Seget in Croatia, started a fire in woods behind his house because he was too knackered to have sex with his wife Oleandra after working on a building site all day. The couple had to be evacuated as firefighters battled to bring the blaze under control. Gulisija was jailed for two years. *Ananova, 22 July, 11 Sept 2003.*

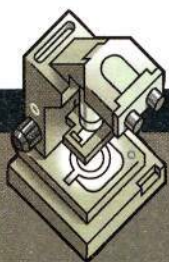
## The Adonis of Zschernitz

What is thought to be the oldest male statue discovered in Europe, dating back 7,000 years to the Neolithic, was unearthed on 18 August during work on a gas pipe outside the German town of Zschernitz, near the Polish border. Only the torso, from around the navel to the top of the thighs, remains intact. Judith Oexle, state archaeologist for the state of Saxony, said the fragment measured 3in (7.6cm) and that the original figure was about 10in (25cm) tall. The genitals were

oversized, suggesting it was made as a fertility statue. "If so," she said, "this would force a rethink of Neolithic theory, as until now it was thought that only women were seen as fertility symbols." The Adonis also has deliberate cuts along its bottom, which are not indications of clothing but probably represent tattoos, as these have been seen on other figurines from the period. The statue was due to go on public display in Dresden in September. *D.Telegraph, 23 Aug 2003.*



AP PHOTO / ANTHONY RIETSCHER



## A spirited exchange

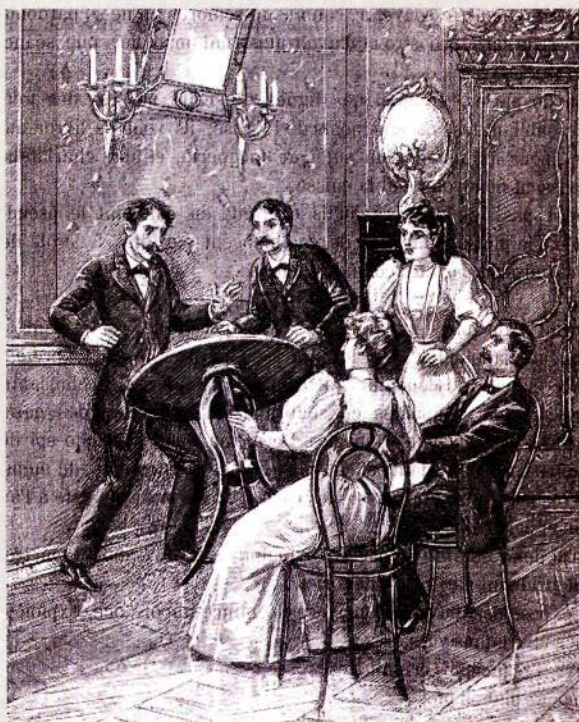
**B**y the mid-19th century, the relationship between science and religion was becoming awkward. The unpleasantness with Galileo was past, but geologists and astronomers were making discoveries that challenged Genesis. Evolution was stirring, and physicists and biologists were exploring electricity, which seemed tantalisingly close to the divine spark of life itself. A new religion arrived in this arena, one which embraced the latest scientific thinking and put its miracles on display for examination.

Spiritualism, which has at its heart the communication between the dead and the living, was a response to the age-old question: "Why should I believe?" The Church's answer was Faith, and it refused to produce miracles to order. In contrast, spiritualism insisted on evidence. The spirits of the dead communicated by rapping or tilting tables, spoke via a medium, appeared in photographs and materialised flowers and other objects, all under the close scrutiny of observers.

"Sceptics have said, 'Let me see a table move, and I will believe anything,'" said Elizabeth Barrett Browning, a keen spiritualist. "Now the table moves, all Europe witnessing."

Backing this up was the language of science and a scientific approach to evidence of the paranormal. When Jesus produced loaves and fishes, nobody checked him beforehand to make sure he had nothing up his sleeves, but before a séance the medium was searched thoroughly to prove to the sitters that no trickery was involved. Mediums allowed themselves to be tied up or their hands held to show that they were not producing table rappings or other effects by physical means.

Spiritualism took its terminology from the scientists. The ancient Greeks used *aether* to apply to a substance that filled all space. It was all-pervading, elastic enough to stretch anywhere. It existed to conveniently ensure that there was no vacuum in space, as the existence of 'no-thing' was difficult for some philosophies. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the concept had been adapted to the lumeniferous (or light-bearing) ether. Light had been shown to be composed of waves, so it seemed there was something waving: sound waves need air to travel through, surfers can't have waves without water. A wave must be made of something waving, and for light



**"Let me see a table move, and I will believe anything"**

the 'something' was ether. Electromagnetic waves have different frequencies of vibration, with properties that correspond to waves in an elastic solid. Visible light, heat, radio and X-rays were all vibrations of the ether, their different frequencies giving them different properties.

This fitted well with spiritualism, which involved an invisible, all-pervading other world filled with unseen forces. Anton Mesmer's work with 'animal magnetism', employing magnets to produce hypnotic effects, provided the missing link between electromagnetic waves and spirits. Clearly, the two were closely related. Just as a radio receiver was sensitive to the vibrations of a radio signal, so a medium was sensitive to the subtle vibrations of spirits. This would also explain why séances had to be conducted in the dark – radio transmissions travelled further in the hours of darkness, and so did spirit

messages.

An interest in communication with the spirit world flourished from 1848, and a series of superstar mediums wowed America and Europe.

The Fox sisters from New York blazed a trail that was followed by Henry Slade, Daniel Dunglas Home, Florence Cook and others.

There were casualties along the way. From the very start the field was riddled with frauds, as conjurers and escape artists from the musical halls or vaudeville worked out clever ways of producing 'supernatural' effects. But although individuals were exposed, the movement carried on – just because one medium was a fraud did not mean that the others were not genuine.

But spiritualism also ran into scientific problems. Anton Mesmer was never on a very sound scientific footing, having had a bad press from the establishment since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Victorian experimenters found out much about electricity and how it affected animals, but animal magnetism failed to emerge as the vital force of the Universe.

The existence of the ether was disproved by the famous Michelson-Morley experiment. Since then scientists and schoolchildren have had to deal with the complexities of light being both a wave and a particle at the same time. The famous medium Madame Blavatsky predicted that

science would reject the existence of the ether. This prediction would be more remarkable if it had not been made in 1888, a year after Michelson-Morley.

Improved radio reception in darkness was found to be the result of reflections from the ionosphere when the sun had gone down. This is not an effect that can be reproduced by closing the curtains.

Of course spiritualism still persists, but it has been broken with science. Its terminology is still frozen in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, but the ether and vibrations of spirits belong to a world of their own, a world that is beyond physicists' attempts to explore or disprove. These days you wouldn't try to measure good vibes with a spectroscope.

You could see spiritualism as a brave attempt to bridge the gap between science and religion, an admirable goal from a fortaean perspective. The miraculous should not be sealed off from scientific scrutiny, but brought squarely into the spotlight along with other strange phenomena.

But perhaps there are two warnings we can take from spiritualism: one is that science moves on, and we should beware of explanations that lean too heavily on the currently fashionable scientific theories. The other is that when the spotlight is turned on, it is likely to expose fraud and trickery among the miracles.

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# CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD  
COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

## 46. NILE-ISM

To avoid multiple space-consuming references, all Herodotean items come from book two of his *Histories*. Manetho, for those who – to adapt Peter Cook – do not have the Greek for the judging – is Englished in the Loeb Classical Library edition (1940) of WG Waddell.

“Egypt has more wonderful things than any other country” – Herodotus:

1. Egyptian men urinate sitting down, women standing up. This statement was omitted from our school edition. Alastair Craig, glossing Jasper Gerard’s ridicule of Swedish feminists’ demands for reversing the “gender positions” of pissing, says it is common in Tamil South India – *Spectator*, 22 & 29 April 2000.
2. “In Mendes, not long ago, a goat tupped a woman in public, a most surprising incident.” One can but agree. Unsurprisingly excised from our school text.
3. Two doves spoke with human voice. Branding this “an obvious impossibility,” Herodotus rationalises that the words were actually uttered by avianly twittering priestesses.
4. Flying snakes in the Delta desert. His Penguin translator, Aubrey de Sélincourt, gibes that Herodotus had been told tall stories about locust swarms and fishbones in a dried-up lake. But RW Hutchinson’s article in *Classical Quarterly*, vol7, 1957, pp100-02, vindicates the historian, if not the “fiery flying serpents” of Isaiah, ch30 v6; cf. Fort, *Books*, pp93-4,638, for reports of falling and flying ophidians.
5. Necrophile sex indulged in by professional mummifiers – another item deemed unfit for schoolboys. Elsewhere (bk5 ch92), the same practice is imputed to the Corinthian tyrant Periander – “He put his loaves into a cold oven.”
6. Blindness cured by bathing the eyes with the urine of a faithful wife – you guessed it, no sighting of this in our cadet edition. One recalls Indian PM Desai’s famous daily quaffing of his own pee.
7. The Egyptian army scuppered by invading field mice which ate their bowstrings, quivers, and leather shield straps; cf Fort (*Books* p592) for myriad murine manifestations.

Manetho wrote a century or so after Herodotus. A Greek-writing Egyptian priest, his books survive only via fragmented quotations.

### Fortean items:

1. Manes, the first pharaoh, carried off and dispatched by a hippopotamus.
2. The cruel pharaoh Achthoes went mad and was killed by a crocodile.
3. Artaxerxes is nicknamed “The Long-Handed”, implying some physical oddity.
4. The First Dynasty ends with “many portents” (unspecified) and a great pestilence.
5. The Nile flowed with honey for 11 days – portending someone’s sticky end? Cf Fort (p749), “No line of demarcation can be drawn between emotions of minds and notions of rivers.”
6. A “terrifying” waxing of the moon; cf Fort (passim) for lunar oddities.
7. Solar eclipses that caused headaches and stomach upsets in humans.
8. A lamb spoke, prophesying Egypt’s conquest by the Assyrians. Ælian (*History of Animals*, bk12 ch3) jeeringly expands the anecdote – this agnine seer had eight feet, two heads, and two tails.
9. Lions never sleep. The Byzantine *Etymologicum Magnum* dictionary and Homeric commentator Eustathius (on *Iliad*, bk11 v480) preserve this item, both dubbing it “hard to believe”; cf. the Tokens’ hit, “The Lion Sleeps Tonight”.

# Niagara folly survivor



BOTH PICS: AP PHOTO / TERRY McMULLEN

ROCKY ESCAPE: Kirk Jones waits after his miraculous survival; and with rescue crew.

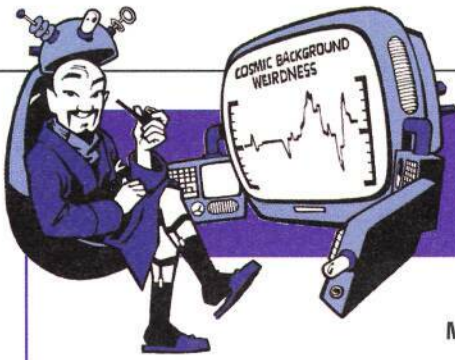
About 12.45pm on 20 October, Kirk Jones plunged over Niagara Falls and lived, the first adult to do so without protective devices. Holidaymakers watched as Jones, dressed in casual clothes and a Parka, climbed over a wrought-iron barricade on the Canadian side above the Horseshoe Falls, slid down an embankment to the rocks below, stepped into the water with a smile and was swept over the 180ft (55m) drop. He disappeared for four minutes, then swam to shore and walked out of the gorge with only a couple of sore ribs. He was later charged with unlawfully performing a stunt, which carries a maximum fine of \$10,000 Canadian (about £4,500).

Jones, 39, from Canton, Michigan, had been considering the stunt for years and scouted the area during a trip with his parents in September. He had recently lost his job when his parents shut down the family business, which made tools for auto parts manufacturers. He said he had been suicidal, but the experience made him want to live. This contradicted statements from the authorities suggesting he was simply a daredevil. The only other person to have survived the drop without being inside protective apparatus, such as a barrel, was seven-year-old Roger Woodward from Niagara Falls, New York, who was thrown into the water in a 1960 boating accident – but he was wearing a life jacket and Jones wasn’t.



The Niagara River rushes over the falls at 150,000 gallons (682,000 litres) per second and smashes into a rock-strewn gorge. The first person to go over and survive was Annie Taylor, a 63-year-old Michigan schoolteacher, strapped inside a padded barrel on 24 October 1901 [FT45:62-66]. Since then, 14 reckless people, a number also in barrels, have attempted the feat – and 10 lived. Charles Stevens, a 38-year-old English hairdresser, went over in a barrel in July 1920, with his feet tied to an anvil. All rescuers found of him was an arm still strapped to the barrel.

Steven Trotter went over twice: in a barrel wrapped in inner tubes in 1985, and 10 years later with his girlfriend in a contraption built for two. The body of a man who went over in a kayak in 1990 was never found. Robert Overacker rode over the falls on a jetski with a rocket backpack in 1995. The rocket failed and he was crushed on the rocks. Suicides are not uncommon, but police do not give out numbers. No one has survived a trip over the narrower and rockier American falls. *Eve. Standard*, 21 Oct; [AP] *D. Telegraph, Times*, 22 Oct; [AP] *Int. Herald Tribune*, 23 Oct 2003.



# The Hierophant

IN HIS FORTRESS OF ARROGANCE, DEEP BELOW THE HIMALAYAS, THE IMMORTAL ASCENDED MASTER KNOWN AS THE HIEROPHANT TRAVELS THE MORE DISREPUTABLE PATHS OF FORTEANA...

As winter draws its icy cape around us, our thoughts inevitably turn to holidays, which can be something of a vexing matter for us forteans. After all, when one's work consists of lurking in the jungles of Bomeo looking for the elusive *orang pendek*, or drifting the lakes of Scandinavia in search of monsters, a weekend in Filey somehow fails to tempt as a holiday destination. A big thank you, then, to Steve Currey, who deserves some sort of recognition as the first person ever (to the best of my knowledge) to offer a holiday in the interior of the planet. His press release starts reasonably enough, explaining that his proposed expedition intends to "conduct some scientific observations in the Artic [sic] that is hoped will resolve once and for all whether the hollow earth theory has any validity... the most plausible location for a north polar opening that leads into the interior of the earth is located at 84.4 N Latitude, 141 E Longitude." Things soon get extremely weird: "Don't miss this chance to personally visit that paradise within our earth via the North Polar Opening and meet the highly advanced, friendly people who live there. We are of the opinion that they are the legendary Lost Tribes of Israel who migrated into the North Country over 2,500 years ago and literally became lost to the knowledge of mankind."

Please go on, Steve... "The Great High Priest over all the land of Inner Earth is King David, and sits on the legitimate throne of David, a direct descendant of David, who was the founder of the ancient nation of Israel in



Palestine, from which the Lost Ten Tribes migrated to the North Countries in about 687 B.C. The estimated round trip to and from the hollow earth North Countries of Inner Earth via the North Polar Opening is about 20 days." As if all this excitement wasn't sufficient, you even get to ride a monorail! "Expedition members could take an inner earth monorail train to visit the lost Garden of Eden located under America on the highest mountain plateau of the Inner Continent. It is also the capital city of Inner Earth, according to Olaf Jansen. Perhaps in this City of Eden we can visit the palace of the King of the Inner World..." And perhaps not; perhaps, in fact, this is all some sort of plan to separate the mind-bogglingly gullible rich from their money then ditch them in the Arctic with only polar bears for company...

A communication arrives from Mr Antony Riddell, asking for assistance of some sort. I quote it in full, largely because Mr Riddell's precise point rather eludes me: "Is anyone willing to join me in Walking against Probability when the poltroons who maintain human behaviour rip the fingernails and head from benign Possibility in a seeming bid for fun (at everyone else's expense)? In this ghastly light Probability is a rude guest. Help! I suspect treason." If you suspect treason, too, you can contact Mr Riddell at [meniscus137@yahoo.com.au](mailto:meniscus137@yahoo.com.au).

We've had cause to mention Larry O'Hara and his various feuds here previously. Things are moving up another notch with the arrival of yet another O'Hara-inspired broadside in the shape of another issue of *Notes From The Borderland* featuring "The Usual Suspects: Anatomy of a disinformation campaign in ufology" by Max Burns. This time round, *FT* contributor Andy Roberts is outed as a specialist in "hoaxing [and] snide piss-taking" and, more sinisterly, "not [a] genuine ufologist, but something else entirely." A vampire, perhaps, or an occasional table? A small tortoise with extracts from Fitzgerald's *Rubaiyat* inscribed on its shell in a pleasing arabesque script? The nation of Turkmenistan? I'm afraid you'll have to buy the magazine to find out, at the bargain price of £3.50, from Dr Larry O'Hara, BM Box 4769, London, WC1N 3XX.



## KONSPIRACY KORNER

ROBIN RAMSAY, EDITOR OF *LOBSTER*, REPORTS FROM THE BUNKER

Is a 'conspiracy culture' developing? Well, there are signs of it. Three of the books in Germany's top 10 best-sellers are conspiratorial interpretations of 9/11, one of them by a former German cabinet minister, Andreas von Bülow. A survey in Germany in September 2003 found that one in five Germans believe that the 9/11 attacks were carried out by the American government. The *Independent's* 'Sunday Review' of 16 November, 'the conspiracy issue', devoted nearly 20 pages to sneering at conspiracy theorists. Mind you, there is plenty to

sneer at. The Internet provides a uniquely fertile field for conspiracy theorising – access to vast amounts of data and no editors asking questions about sources and methods. And it's still growing. In June 2002, the search engine Google produced 42,000 hits when asked for '9/11 conspiracy'; in October 2003 it came up with 281,000 hits. Much of this is nonsense, but at the serious end of the 9/11 story there is writing and research as dense as anything produced in the 40 years of work on the Kennedy conspiracy. Try <http://physics911.org/net/modules/news/article.php?storyid=3>

(an analysis of the Pentagon wing debris) for example. Some of this is as difficult as the medical evidence in the JFK case. A publisher suggested I write a book about the Promis affair. Promis is a piece of software which may have been stolen by the United States Justice Department, triggering law-suits – and conspiracy theories. In a 10-minute skim of the Net I found that Promis had been stolen by Mossad; had been given to the Russians by a mole in the FBI; had been adapted by Mossad and/or the CIA and given a 'backdoor' so Mossad and/or the CIA could snoop on other

computer systems using it; and was sold by Mossad agent Robert Maxwell to many countries. Among those who now own Promis is one Mr Bin Laden who got his from a former KGB agent. Any or all or none of this may be true.

In 1962, looking at the electronic communication of his day – before faxes, computers and the Internet – the late Marshall McLuhan (in his *The Gutenberg Galaxy*) said: "the new electronic interdependence recreates the world in the image of a global village". What he didn't say was that a village contains its fair share of idiots, and is always awash with gossip, most of it inaccurate. Perhaps the burgeoning Internet 'conspiracy culture' is merely the gossip of the global village?



# alien zoo

DR KARL SHUKER's monthly look at the animal kingdom reveals a couple of unusually pigmented water dwellers plus a rather surprising reptilian relic.

## Colourful critters



NORTHWEST FLORIDA DAILY NEWS / MARI DARR-WEICH

### FOREVER AMBER ALLIGATOR MELLOWS OUT

Leopards cannot change their spots, nor alligators their scales – even if they are the wrong colour. So it is with the aptly-named Mellow Yellow, a 3ft (90cm) long alligator on exhibition in a private enclosure at Fudpucker's restaurant in Florida since arriving there in July 2003 from a South Florida alligator farm. Eschewing the drab grey appearance of typical specimens, Mellow Yellow sports a pale amber-hued skin, which would make her vulnerable in the wild by denying her the protection of camouflage, but highly popular with visitors to the restaurant. 79 normal alligators are maintained in a huge pond there, called Gator Beach; but to ensure her safety while also emphasising her distinctiveness, Mellow Yellow shares her enclosure with just one other alligator, a normal-coloured male. Her condition's nature is undetermined, but it may well be an example of xanthism – in which the expression of a mutant gene

form (allele) results in abnormally yellow body coloration. Pythons and certain other reptiles are prone to this condition, but this is the first potential case in crocodylians that I have encountered. *Tampa Tribune*, 31 Aug 2003.

### I'VE NEVER SEEN A PURPLE FROG...

Staying with herps of a different colour, the discovery of a remarkable new species of frog in the Western Ghats Mountains of southern India has recently been announced. Its notable nature is twofold. Firstly, its skin colour is a spectacular, vivid purple, which, combined with its small head and tiny eyes but bloated body, makes it look more like a plum than a frog. Secondly, it is a bona fide 'living fossil', a very primitive relict species whose closest living relatives taxonomically are the sooglossid frogs found only in the Seychelles, some 2,000 miles (3,200km) from India. Indeed, its discoverers, Drs Franky Bossuyt and SD Biju, deem it sufficiently distinct to merit creating an entirely new taxonomic family to accommodate it – the first since 1926. [R] 15 Oct 2003.



(C) SD BIJU & F BOSSUYT



## Beast of Eden

One of the most enigmatic yet hitherto-obscure zoological relics held in any scientific establishment must surely be the 8in (20cm) by 4in (10cm) piece of scaly rusty-red leathery skin contained inside Archive Box #1920.1714 within the very sizeable collection of the Chicago Historical Society. For according to its yellowing French label, this is supposedly a genuine piece of skin from the very serpent that tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden. Indeed, the label goes on to say that the serpent was killed by Adam on the day after its treachery to Eve, using a stake whose traces can be seen on this skin sample, which was preserved by his family in Asia. Affixed to the skin is a document written on vellum or similar hide in an Asian script. The society purchased this mystifying exhibit, along with many other items, in 1920 from the eclectic collection of Chicago confectioner Charles F Gunther – a grand collector of curiosities.

Although the society's chief curator,

Olivia Mahoney, has no doubt that it is a fraud (as opposed to a bona fide piece of snakeskin dating back to the dawn of time), no research has ever been conducted on it to ascertain what it really is. Moreover, Mahoney is very reluctant to permit any, in case the skin is damaged, and also because in her view it is so evidently a fake. That may well be, but it still doesn't answer what – if not a sample of skin from the Eden serpent – this anomalous object is. As noted by the *Chicago Sun-Times's* religion writer, Cathleen Falsani – who viewed and wrote about this Biblical(?) relic in October 2003 – after watching it being carried back in its box to the society's archives: "I couldn't help thinking about that scene from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, where the Ark of the Covenant, and all of its power, is crated up and wheeled into a military warehouse among thousands of other generic crates. I wonder what else might be hiding anonymously in a quiet corner of a museum archive somewhere else, waiting to shock us with its mystery". What else indeed? *Chicago Sun-Times*, 10 Oct 2003.

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Occupation \_\_\_\_\_

Religion: \_\_\_\_\_

Build:

Attractiveness:

- Slight  V. Attractive  
 Medium  Attractive  
 Large  Average

### Your Personality

tick which traits closely describe you

- Affectionate  Fashionable  
 Serious  Practical  
 Considerate  Conventional  
 Shy  Reliable  
 Romantic  Adventurous

### Your interests

Please tick for a liking, cross for a dislike or leave blank for no pref.

- Wining/Dining  Jazz/Folk music  
 Pubs  Classical music  
 Sports/Keep fit  Theatre/Arts  
 Politics/History  Watching TV  
 Reading  Smoking  
 Travelling  Mixing with friends  
 Science/Tech  Children  
 Cinema  Homemaking  
 Pets/Animals  Gardening  
 Pop music  Countryside

### Your Attitudes

tick for yes, cross for no or leave blank if you don't feel strongly

- I prefer town life  
 I involve myself in community activities  
 I have many friends of my own sex  
 I am interested in current affairs  
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### Your Ideal Partner

Min. age: \_\_\_\_\_

Max. age: \_\_\_\_\_

Height min. \_\_\_\_\_

max. \_\_\_\_\_

Don't mind

Marital Status:

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Build:

Attractiveness:

- Slight  V. Attractive  
 Medium  Attractive  
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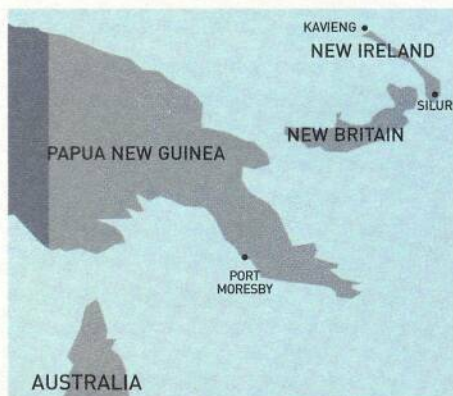
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# Gold fever in Papua

Rumours of lost Japanese gold rise again on Pacific island



**ALL THAT GLITTERS:** Ingots were said to be found in rotting wooden crates in a cave in New Ireland, Papua New Guinea.

Papua New Guinea is awash with rumours that the government is searching New Ireland, an island 530 miles (853km) north-east of the capital, Port Moresby, for 10 tons of gold bars. The treasure, worth an estimated £230 million, is said to have been mined and processed by the Japanese during World War II. When the plane carrying the gold crashed into a mountainside, villagers allegedly stashed it in a cave. There are also rumours of gold hidden

## A village elder revealed that the cave contained gold bars

in the depths of a bay, based on a story that a submarine carrying some of the treasure sank there after an American plane bombed it.

The latest rumours started in September, after an elder revealed on his deathbed that a villager had located the cave in the mountains and discovered the gold bars in rotting wooden crates. The story reached the government's ears and the Papua New Guinea cabinet is said to have sent defence forces and police, including helicopters and divers, to try to secure the treasure. Chief Secretary Joshua Kalinoe said that soldiers and police had only been sent to the province to keep the area calm, while training in preparation for a tour of duty in the Solomon Islands.

New Ireland Governor Ian Ling-Stuckey has urged people not to get too excited about the claims, saying he does not believe the gold exists at all. He has appealed to the government to make an official statement on the issue, saying he was worried that people were inundating his office, expecting the bullion to be distributed across the province. However, even before the current excitement, some prominent New Irelanders are said to have tried to form a company to salvage the gold. Villagers in Kalili, where one of the military police camps is based, say the military has digging tools and is fending off curious onlookers. A team of journalists attempting to verify the story at one of the villages said they were sent away under military escort and told to leave New Ireland in 24 hours. *D. Telegraph, 8 Oct; BBC News, 10 Oct 2003.*

## SHORTS

### UNITED BY A COOKIE JAR

Bob Kunath, 48, a hair salon owner in Orlando, Florida, saw a cookie jar he fancied in a flea market in the town of Webster, but at \$150 (£90) it was too expensive. Later, he searched on eBay and found another just like it for only \$35 (£21), which he snapped up. Kunath was adopted when he was an infant and knew from his adoption papers that his father was called Harry Saylor and his mother June Shaw. His adoptive parents told him that he had two siblings, a sister and brother, but he had never attempted to contact them.

When he took delivery of the jar, he noticed that the vendor's name was Harry Saylor. By email, he discovered that Saylor came from northern New Jersey, just like Kunath's biological father. The two connected by phone, and Kunath

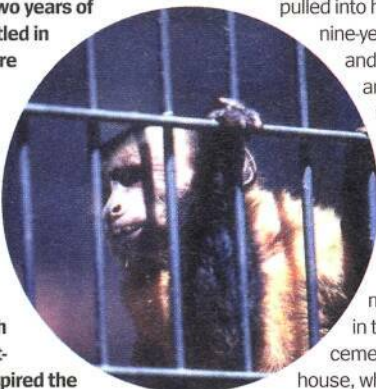
found out that Saylor's mother's name was June Shaw. He had found the brother he had never met.

Saylor, who owns an art gallery in New Jersey, was unaware he had a brother. Kunath's young, unmarried parents had put him up for adoption when he was born in 1954. They married within two years of his birth and settled in New Jersey, where they had two more children. The daughter died in 1991. Kunath and his brother share a penchant for some of the same obscure, retro artists such as Shag and Holt-Howard, who inspired the cookie jar that brought them together. Kunath said finding his brother doesn't mean the two will become instant friends. He said he just wants to get to know him

better. "Right now it's an open road. If this whole thing has taught me anything, it's that you never know where the road will take you." *Orlando (FL) Sentinel, 17 Sept 2003.*

### MONKEY PUZZLE

On 26 August, Lorraine Myhill pulled into her drive with her nine-year-old daughter and heard screaming and crashing noises. They looked up and saw what looked like two brown and greenish-coloured "organ-grinder monkeys" in a tree in the half-acre cemetery next to their house, which is in Northwold, 13 miles (21km) north-west of Thetford in Norfolk. The cemetery, which fell out of use during World War I, is filled with apple trees, providing a plentiful food source.



About eight weeks earlier, Mrs Myhill's husband had woken her up, saying there was a monkey in the garden, but they laughed it off.

Officers from Norfolk Trading Standards' animal health unit reported seeing "movement in the trees" on 27 August, but didn't actually see any monkeys. There were suggestions that they could be from a pack of 10 marmosets stolen from Locksley Road, Norwich, about 30 miles (48km) from Northwold, on 9 August – although this wouldn't explain the Myhill's first sighting in July. Banham Zoo, near Diss, suggested the creatures were capuchins, a fairly common medium-sized primate from South America.

In the following week, wildlife officials called by the cemetery twice a day, but never saw anything. Humane traps were set with tempting fruit; nothing was caught, although Mrs Myhill saw the monkeys again on 1 September, as did another local the following day. *(Norwich) Eastern Daily Press, 28+29 Aug, 6 Sept 2003.*



## Kitten canoodle

Tigger, 3, had lived on Jack Bellman's farm in Terang, Victoria, Australia since he was a kitten, but once Annie the pony appeared, they formed a stable relationship. *Brisbane Sunday Mail, 19 Oct 2003.*

## GLOBSTER GENE GEN

Two independent DNA analyses conducted on tissue samples taken from the globster washed ashore in Chile during June 2003 [FT175:58-59] have confirmed that its gelatinous remains are indeed from a sperm whale – the identity promoted in scientific circles following the discovery of spermaceti organ tissue amid this decomposing mass by Chilean zoologists in July. The DNA analyses were performed by Auckland University-based Chilean scientist Carlos Olavarria and by marine biologist Dr Sidney Pierce at the University of South Florida. *National Geographic News, 25 Aug 2003.*

## LIFE JUST GOT HOTTER

Scientists have discovered the world's toughest life form. The discovery was announced last August in the journal *Science* by

Derek Lovley and Kazem Kashefi of the University of Massachusetts at Amhurst. The single-celled microbe, provisionally called "strain 121", can survive up to 130°C (266°F). The previous record holder was a microbe called *Pyrolobus fumarii*, which can survive up to 113°C (235°F).

After 10 hours in an autoclave at 121°C (249.8°F), strain 121 was still alive and well. It took a temperature of 130°C to finally kill



COURTESY OF PACIFIC MARINE ENVIRONMENTAL LABORATORY, NIGATA

it off. The microbe was collected in the Juan de Fuca ridge, which separates tectonic plates in the Pacific, 2,400 metres (7,900ft) deep, which regularly vents iron and sulphur compounds. Prof. Lovley became interested in organisms living at high temperatures when he noticed large amounts of magnetites – rocks containing a high proportion of iron – tuming up in unusual environments, such as deep in the Earth's crust. Magnetites are produced where "iron-breathing" micro-organisms exist, and they are therefore good evidence of the presence of life.

"As you go deeper in the Earth it gets hotter," he said, "so as you increase the known temperature limit for life, this increases the depth at which you might find life." It also means that life may have begun when the planet was hotter, and therefore older, than previously thought. *Guardian, 15 Aug 2003.*

## C'EST LA GUERRE



"I'm sure there's a perfectly rational explanation for all this."



## Little monsters attack

### KELLY-HOPKINSVILLE ON FILM

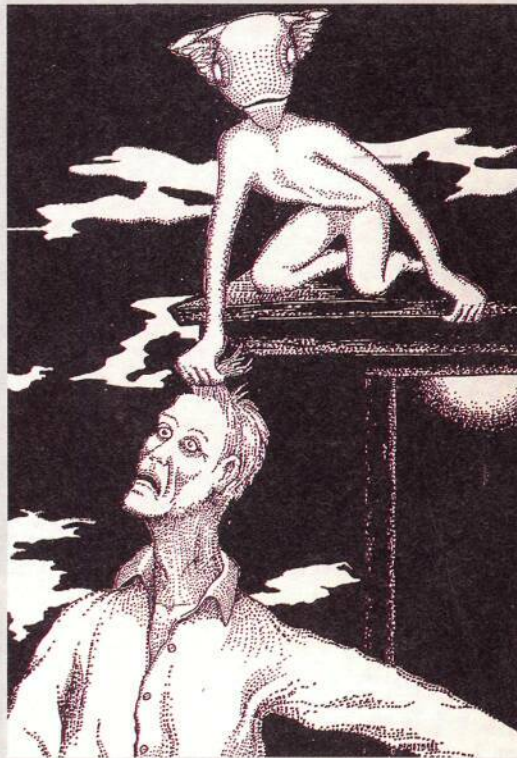
In *The Mothman Prophecies*, Hollywood brought the UFO-related mothman flap of West Virginia to the big screen. Now, a new documentary film is being made of another classic UFO/monster incident in which members of a Kentucky family were terrorised by a group of "little men" who laid siege to their farmhouse. The events began with a UFO landing near the home of Cecil 'Lucky' Sutton at Kelly-Hopkinsville on the night of 21 August 1955. As was the custom in those parts, two younger members of the family grabbed their shotguns and decided to shoot first and ask questions later. The creatures seemed impervious to bullets and, as the men retreated to the house, began peering through windows. The "little men", now recreated by special effects artist Bryan Moore, had large eyes; long, thin mouths; large ears; thin, short legs and hands that ended in claws. After several hours the family fled to the police station, where their shock and terror were real enough for officers to investigate further. They found nothing, other than spent shotgun cartridges and bullet holes. This bizarre case was one of just a handful of UFO creature reports investigated by the US Air Force "Project Blue Book", which placed it in their "crackpot" file. We suspect the documentary, which will be aired on the Sci-Fi Channel before release on DVD, will take a different point of view. *Hopkinsville (Kentucky) New Era*, 27 October 2003; [www.virtuallystrange.net/ufo/updates/2003/oct/m28-009.shtml](http://www.virtuallystrange.net/ufo/updates/2003/oct/m28-009.shtml)

### ALIEN ABDUCTION PROJECT

The craze for "alien abductions" may be on the wane, but social scientists are beginning to take a long overdue look at this fascinating phenomenon. In October, psychologists at Goldsmiths College, University of London, announced the launch of a 10-month project that will investigate the source of these experiences. Are people really being spirited away by aliens for experiments, or do the 'aliens' originate in the unexplored regions of the human mind that may also produce experiences with such entities as fairies, angels and the 'Old Hag'? The research, supported by a €36,000 (£24,630) grant, is led by Professor Chris French, Head of the Anomalistic Psychology Research Unit (APRU). He said: "Abductees report a wide range of experiences; the research project aims to test not only the psychological aspects of the abduction experience, but also to find out more about the other kinds of experiences that abductees

report, and includes some tests for psychic abilities."

Anyone who believes that they have had an alien abduction experience and would like to take part in the project should email [apru@gold.ac.uk](mailto:apru@gold.ac.uk) or contact Rachel Fox, 020 7919 7171 (ext 4389) for further information. [www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/press-releases](http://www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/press-releases)



## The creatures were impervious to bullets

### CONSPIRACY CORNER

It's hard to believe, but we have been placed at the centre of a bizarre conspiracy. UFO buff Max Burns accuses us of working for the government to prevent him revealing 'the truth' about the so-called 'Sheffield Incident'. The *Alice In Wonderland* nature of ufology is well known to all serious students of the art, but this excursion into the chaotic thought processes of one of ufology's more 'adventurous thinkers'

redefines the word "bonkers". In the interests of entertainment we urge all our readers to check this out by reading Max's article, in the pseudo-political journal *Notes from The Borderland*. The 'Sheffield Incident' is well worth studying as a *pièce de résistance* of radical misperception; its conspiratorial aftermath illustrates just what happens when individuals become obsessed with a case and are unable to force their world view on to rational investigators.

[www.borderland.co.uk](http://www.borderland.co.uk);  
[www.mysterymag.com/current/html/the\\_howden\\_moor\\_incident.html](http://www.mysterymag.com/current/html/the_howden_moor_incident.html)

### CATCH A FALLING STAR?

On 9 December 1965, a 'ball of fire' dropped into woods at Kecksburg, Pennsylvania [see **FT171: 18**]. Police and the military investigated, and over the past 38 years a story has developed that a UFO had crashed and was retrieved. The tale has swirled round the rumour mill for so long that the Sci-Fi Channel has taken an interest, dubbing the event "The New Roswell". The programme makers also supported legal action against NASA to force the release of official documents on the mystery. Witness testimony to the events at Kecksburg is interesting but doesn't square with the fact that the ball of fire was also seen falling to earth at 17 other locations in six states (they can't all be the "New Roswell"! ). Searches at Kecksburg and other locations revealed nothing and it seemed that once again misperception had turned a natural phenomenon into a UFO. Ironically, for those promoting the idea of a cover-up, astronomers identified the object as a meteor in 1965, but their evidence and conclusions have been ignored by those promoting the "New Roswell". When NASA released the "secret files" in November they revealed the agency knew nothing about the incident and relied upon newspapers for their information. Perhaps ufologists of a certain persuasion should add this equation to their investigation kits: natural phenomena + military involvement x the rumour cycle = a UFO crash retrieval incident.

[www.hq.nasa.gov/office/pao/FOIA/Kecksburg-UFO.pdf](http://www.hq.nasa.gov/office/pao/FOIA/Kecksburg-UFO.pdf); [www.debunker.com/kecksburg.html](http://www.debunker.com/kecksburg.html)

### TIME FOR UFOS

January 2004 sees *Timewatch*, the BBC flagship historical documentary series, taking a long, cool look at UFOs in the UK. Focusing primarily on the period from the Cold War to the end of the 1970s, the show features dramatisations of significant cases and interviews with the likes of Sir Bernard Lovell and Lord Mountbatten's daughter, Lady Pamela Hicks.

[www.bbc.co.uk/history/programmes/timewatch/index.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/programmes/timewatch/index.shtml)

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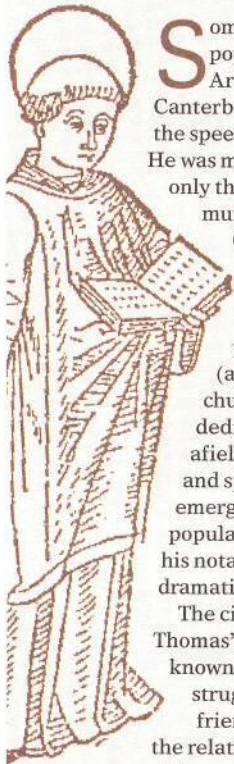




## FOR ALL THE SAINTS

FORTEAN TALES FROM THE CHURCH  
COMPILED BY GRENADINE GRAY

### THIS MONTH: Thomas Becket of Canterbury († 1170)



Something of the popularity of Thomas, Archbishop of Canterbury, can be gauged from the speed of his canonisation. He was made a saint in 1173, only three years after his murder. By this time

Canterbury was vying with Compostella for the title of second-most popular pilgrimage destination (after Rome) and churches were being dedicated to Thomas as far afield as Iceland. A huge and spontaneous cult emerged. The size of his popular following was due to his notable charisma and dramatic death.

The circumstances of Thomas's murder are well known. After a political struggle with his former friend, King Henry II, over the relative rights of Church and State, Thomas was sent into exile.

Despite the mediations of Pope Alexander III and King Louis VII of France, he remained banished for seven years. Determining to return, Thomas knew that he had sealed his fate. His last words to the

French king were: "I am going to seek my death in England."

Thomas's demise had also been predicted during a reported near-death-experience:

*Some days before the saint's martyrdom a young man, who had died and been miraculously restored to life, said that he had been led to the highest circle of the saints. Amidst the apostles he had seen one empty throne. He had asked whose throne that was, and an angel had answered that it was reserved for a great priest from England.*

The auguries were accurate: in a rage, Henry ordered Thomas to be killed. Four assassins struck him down in a side-chapel of his own cathedral. The vengeance of God brought the murderers illness, madness and death; it is also related that some of them gnawed their fingers to bits. Other records, however, say that they all died 'true penitents'.

As soon as the knights left, every drop of Thomas's blood was collected and pots were placed beneath his wounds to catch any further drips. The blood's miraculous powers were immediately evident. While it was 'yet warm', it was smeared on the eyelids of a blind man who instantly recovered his sight.

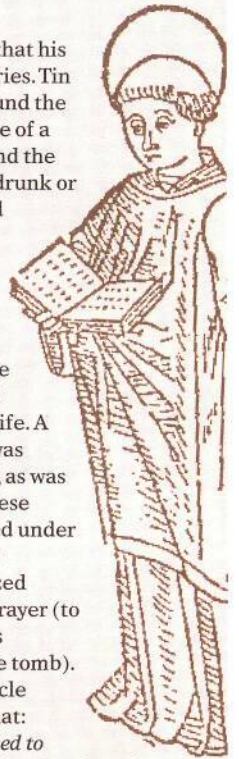
There would soon have been a shortage of blood if applied neat, but it was just as efficacious watered down. In a method that resembles mediæval homeopathy,

each minute drop was repeatedly diluted so that his blood lasted for centuries. Tin or lead phials worn round the neck became the badge of a Canterbury pilgrim, and the potentised water was drunk or applied to the affected area.

Petitioning Thomas in prayer also worked many wonders – the blind saw, the deaf heard, the lame walked, the dead were brought back to life. A mislaid loaf of bread was miraculously restored, as was a missing horse. An obese man, who had squeezed under railings to lie on top of Becket's coffin, squeezed himself out again by prayer (to the relief of the monks preparing to smash the tomb). Another unusual miracle effected by him was that:

*A bird that had learned to speak was being chased by a hawk, and cried out a phrase that it had been taught: "Saint Thomas, help me!" The hawk fell dead and the bird escaped.*

The feast day of St Thomas is celebrated on 29 December.



## Vicar versus vampires

Over a period of three months, two men claiming to be reincarnated vampires who drank each other's blood tormented the Rev Christopher Rowberry, 45, his wife and their two teenage children. Scott Bower, 26, and Benjamin Lewis, 25, recruited Lewis's girlfriend, Natalie Gibson, 19, to their campaign of hatred. They howled outside the vicarage, ran around the churchyard

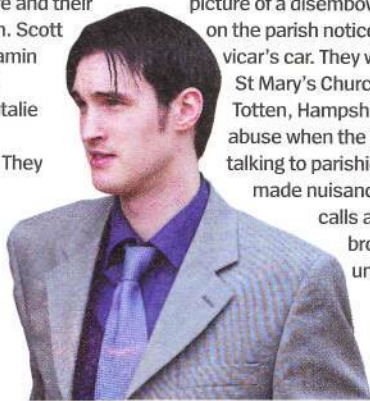
ringing bells in the middle of the night, chased bell-ringers, set off fireworks and posted offensive and pornographic material, including a picture of a disembowelled Christ, on the parish noticeboard and the vicar's car. They would drive past St Mary's Church, Eling Hill, Totten, Hampshire, and shout abuse when the vicar was talking to parishioners. They made nuisance telephone calls and placed broken glass under the tyres of

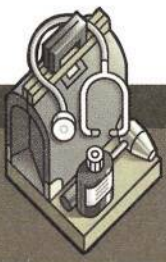
his car. The three were finally arrested in December 2002, the first people in Britain to face charges of religiously harassing a Christian.

At their trial in Southampton in October, Lewis, a hotel porter from Totten, denied he was a Satanist and said he "identified with the Lord Jesus Christ" because, like Him, he was an outcast. While claiming to be a vampire, he said: "I don't mean all that silly film stuff about crosses and garlic." He was more of a "psychic vampire" who

"absorbed energy from other people". Like his friends, all of whom dressed as Goths, in black or crimson clothing, he had experimented in bloodletting and blood-drinking, to see whether it gave him strength. All three were found guilty on 17 October. Lewis got 12 months, Bower six, and Gibson a three month suspended sentence. *D.Telegraph, 10+11+14+15+18 Oct; Ananova, 17 Oct 2003.*

THESE GUYS SUCK: Benjamin Lewis (far left) and Scott Bower (left), the wannabe vampires of Hampshire.





# medical bag

PAUL CHAMBERS could swear he's written this somewhere before... a look at *déjà vu*

## Familiar happenings

In 1849 Charles Dickens's fictional hero David Copperfield had a strange experience after being told some bad news by his rival Uriah Heap. "He seemed to swell and grow before my eyes; the room seemed full of the echoes of his voice; and the strange feeling (to which no one is quite a stranger) that all this had occurred before, at some indefinite time, and that I knew what he was going to say next, took possession of me."

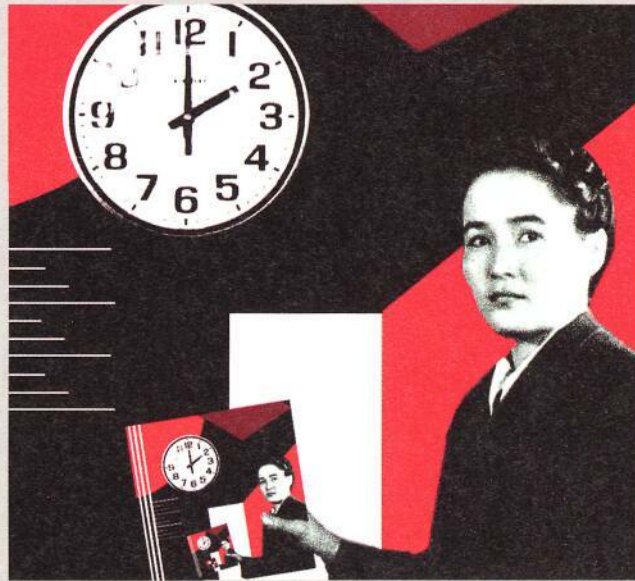
Dickens did not have a name for the 'strange feeling' that overtook David Copperfield but nowadays we would call this experience *déjà vu* and, while this phenomenon is familiar to almost every person on Earth, explaining what it is remains a big problem.

The key characteristic of *déjà vu* is an overwhelming and peculiar feeling that a new situation that one is currently experiencing is somehow familiar, often to the degree that you feel as though you know what's going to happen next. The following description is typical.

"While the other fellow was talking, there came this strange, almost physical up-welling of visual experience, a visual warping, and at the same time an eerie realisation that everything happening now had happened before, maybe many times. Now here was this man telling me something he had said, word for word, in time-past. I knew what he was going to say. Everything about the situation, the big room, the people walking around, the music, the noise, space and clutter, all had happened exactly this way before, right down to the last detail, and now was happening again in this new absolutely unstoppable, dreamlike dimension."<sup>1</sup>

A typical *déjà vu* experience will last only a matter of seconds and has statistically occurred to around 95 per cent of people at one time or another.<sup>2</sup> Scientists have studied this problem for well over a century and yet have made very little headway in understanding what it is and why it occurs.

Part of the problem is that *déjà vu* is so universal. Surveys consistently fail to find any pattern to this experience at all. It is not associated with any major illness or psychiatric condition and can affect anyone regardless of their age, sex, social status or intelligence. In fact, the only firm correlation is between *déjà vu* and another experience called *jamais vu* in which a person is unable to recognise a familiar scene or person (i.e. the opposite to *déjà vu* where new scenes seem familiar).<sup>2, 3</sup>



## There came a strange physical upwelling of visual experience

Early explanations for *déjà vu* focused on Freudian notions of personality, the belief being that the brain's subconscious was 'seeing' a scene momentarily before its conscious self. The fact that the same memory was now stored in two portions of the brain made the conscious self feel as though the scene was familiar, when in fact it wasn't. Related to this were complex theories about time lags between the hemispheres of the brain and the time it takes the mind to process and understand images from the eye.<sup>4</sup> Despite extensive practical research and experimentation, none of these theories was demonstrable in the laboratory and by the 1970s several dozen different theories existed; but even so, *déjà vu* was still considered to be an unsolved problem.<sup>2, 3</sup>

Not surprisingly, the absence of a workable scientific solution and the strange nature of *déjà vu* has attracted the attention of some members of the paranormal community. The familiarity of *déjà vu* has been seen by some as proof of reincarnation and that the person experiencing it had been there before but in a past life.<sup>5</sup>

Another school of thought believes that *déjà vu* is evidence of precognition, telepathy or of a person's astral body having visited a location ahead of them.<sup>4</sup> However, one of the consistent problems with these theories is that although people experiencing *déjà vu* have a feeling that they know what is going to happen next, there are no recorded examples of anyone actually being able to use their experience to make a testable prediction. While this may in part be due to the spontaneous and short-lived nature of *déjà vu*, it presents a real problem to those who support a paranormal interpretation of this bizarre experience.

Despite the multitude of different explanations for *déjà vu*, for a long while both the paranormal and science communities gave it up as a bad job. However, in recent years advances in neurology may have made some progress toward solving the problem.

Several different studies have noticed a link between *déjà vu* and

enhanced electrical activity in the temporal lobe region of the brain. Many neurologists have already linked the temporal lobe region with other paranormal experiences such as alien abduction, ghost sightings and religious visions. [See Mike Jay's "Religion on the Brain", FT76:51.] Could *déjà vu* be related to this area of the brain as well?

The evidence is still far from conclusive, but a recent resurgence in the study of *déjà vu* (there have been 11 studies published this year alone) has almost exclusively pointed to the temporal lobe region as the source of the trouble.<sup>6, 7</sup> Not only do many aspects of the *déjà vu* experience tie in with reported features of seizures in the temporal lobes but experiments in which the lobes are electrically stimulated have also caused the subjects to report *déjà vu*-like sensations. The recurring mystery that is *déjà vu* may soon be laid to rest.

### NOTES

- 1 <http://neuro-www.mgh.harvard.edu> See also Eric Shakes's letter in FT83:57.
- 2 *Psychological Bulletin*, vol.129(3), pp.394-413, 2003. [Recommended]
- 3 *American Journal of Psychiatry*, vol.147(12), pp.1587-95, 1990. [Recommended]
- 4 Graham Reed, *The Psychology of Anomalous Experience* (Prometheus, 1988).
- 5 *Proceedings of the Society of Psychical Research*, vol.53, pp.264-286, 1962.
- 6 *Psychopathology*, vol. 36(1), pp.49-51, 2003.
- 7 *Journal of Neuropsychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience*, vol.14(1), pp.6-10, 2002.

# Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

## 66. STOLEN TO ORDER



### The myth

Whenever a famous work of art disappears from a museum or gallery anywhere on Earth, journalists and police will invariably announce that it's been "stolen to order," presumably by criminal masterminds on behalf of a wealthy, unscrupulous private collector.

### The "truth"

Stealing famous works of art seems daft, since it's impossible to sell them for anything like their real value. That, no doubt, is why the "Dr No myth" remains popular. In practice, say experts such as former Scotland Yard art detective Charles Hill, art thieves are usually ordinary criminals, and their intention is generally ransom. Paintings often find their way back to their owners after a reward has been paid to a middleman. Naivety also plays a part, with crooks stealing millions of pounds' worth of canvas and only then discovering that they can't unload it for more than a few quid. Sometimes paintings are recovered after thieves, desperate to be shot of them, simply dump them.

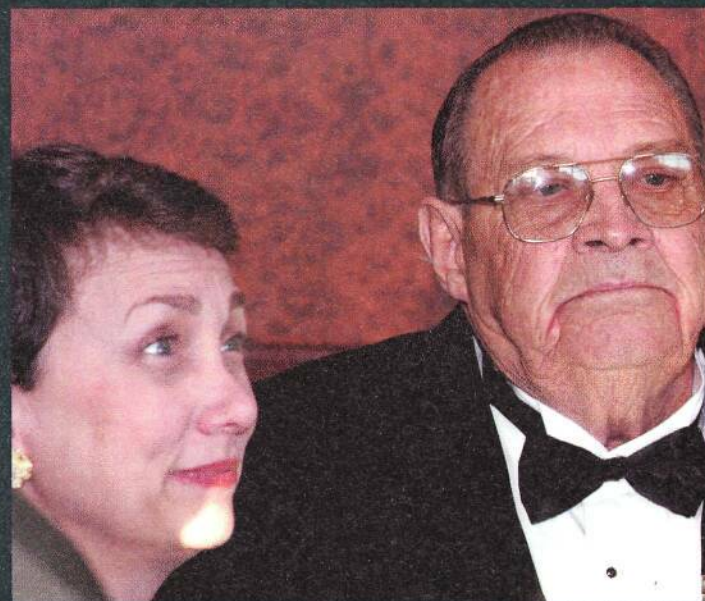
**Sources** *www.theartnewspaper.com*; *Observer*, 8 June 2003; *D. Telegraph*, 18+29 April 2003; *New Zealand Herald*, 13 Aug 2003.

**Disclaimer** Interestingly, revisionist studies of the supposed sacking of Iraq's National Museum in 2003 suggest that contrary to reports, no looting took place. Only a few dozen major items went missing – and they were probably (yes...) "stolen to order" for senior Ba'athists; though this debunking is in turn dismissed as a cover-up by many critics of the US occupation. Either way, does anyone know of even one verified, specific incident of stealing to order?

### Mythchaser

Is it true that if you place an egg between two mobile phones, and call one phone on the other, the egg will cook? Robert Rankin says so in one of his novels – and he should know, he's mad.

# When one life isn't enough



LEADING A DOUBLE WIFE: Douglas S. Cone, or is it Donald Carlson? (right), with the new Mrs. Cone.

As their wives drove Rolls-Royces and moved among the elite in Tampa, Florida, businessmen Douglas S. Cone and Donald Carlson seemed ever busy. Cone, the 74-year-old millionaire owner of a Tampa highway construction company, was gone most weekdays. Carlson was also frequently away from home – an absence his family attributed to a sensitive government job that required him to travel for long stretches. In fact, Douglas S. Cone and Donald Carlson were the same man.

Cone lived a secret double life for nearly 30 years, raising two affluent families in lavish homes 20 miles (32km) apart – one with Jean Ann Cone, his wife of 52 years, and the other with Hillary Carlson, 19 years her junior. He fathered three children with his wife and two with Carlson. The double life unravelled this year when Jean Ann Cone, 75, accidentally asphyxiated herself in the family garage in March and Cone married Hillary Carlson two weeks later. Friends said they learned of his new marriage in Sumter County, about an hour north of Tampa, when the *St Petersburg Times* printed a listing

of local marriages last June. Both Jean Ann Cone and Hillary Carlson served as trustees at their children's prep school. Facilities at the school bear their names – the Jean Ann Cone Library and Carlson Field – after donations by their husbands. It is not clear when Douglas Cone met Hillary Carlson, although in the late 1970s she worked as a secretary for one of his companies. [AP] 13 Aug 2003.

Brian Fitzgerald, 58, a wealthy building company boss, lived a double life for 18 years with families just 500 yards (457m) apart in Salford, Greater Manchester. Every morning, he left his wife Brenda, a primary school teacher and mother of his three children, and drove to work in his black Jaguar, personal registration BEF 4T. At the end of the day he would call in on his mistress, Teresa Haliniak, 48 (or 45), and their son, for a few hours, before heading back to his wife.

Both women visited the same dentist, doctor, and beauty salon, where they used the same stylist. They also shared the same birthday – 14 July – drove silver Escort cars

and lived at the respective No 12 in their smart, suburban cul-de-sacs. Neither woman knew of the other's existence.

Fitzgerald's secret was discovered last year when he was admitted to hospital with a bad back and Tracey, 38, his eldest daughter, made a surprise visit to see him – and discovered Miss Haliniak at his bedside. Then Mrs Fitzgerald, 55, discovered that, between 1995 and 1997, her husband had cashed two endowment policies in her name worth £12,000 to fund his life with Miss Haliniak – which prompted her to call the police. On 16 June, he was given a six-month suspended prison sentence and fined £1,000. Fitzgerald married his wife in 1964 when he was 19 and she was 17. She discovered that he had been seeing Miss Haliniak for 18 years. He had even taken her and their son Zachary to an apartment in Benidorm that he had bought with his wife. Fitzgerald is now divorced and living with Miss Haliniak. In October 2002, they had a second child, a daughter named Madison. *Sun*, 21 May; *D. Mail*, *D. Telegraph*, 17 June 2003.

• The Fortean Archives hold several similar tales, which have not been published in these pages. Here's one from 1991:

Every Friday evening for 28 years, Harry Glenn Davis left his wife Ruth at their farm in Oxford, Alabama, and told her he was going gambling in New Orleans. Then he would drive 300 miles (483km) to Tallahassee, Florida, to spend the weekend with his other wife, Flossie, in their comfortable house there. He would depart every Monday morning, telling Flossie he had to return to Alabama to look after business.

The wives discovered about each other when Mr Davis died of a heart attack in 1988. "I cried day and night for three weeks when I found out," said Ruth, 76. "I was so mad I wanted to go to his grave, dig him up and wring his neck!" Both women laid claim to his \$10 million fortune. In September 1991, they settled the case out of court. Ruth, his wife for 51 years, got \$8 million, while Flossie, 55, his wife for 28 years, pocketed \$2 million. *National Enquirer*, 9 Oct 1991.

# Strange deaths

## UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THE MORTAL COIL

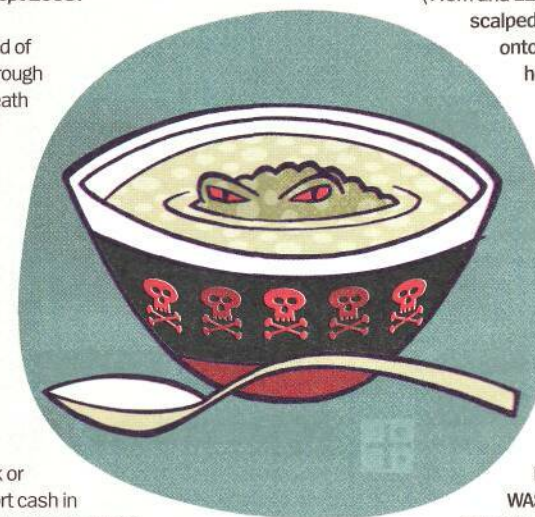
VLADIMIR GARIN, 15, THE YOUNG RUSSIAN STAR OF Andrey Zvyagin's *The Return*, shown at the Venice Film Festival in September, drowned in an accident with haunting echoes of the film itself. After filming finished, he was dared by friends to jump into a lake from the top of a tower on which the film's opening sequence was shot. He plunged to his death. In those opening shots, he joins in with other boys who taunt his younger brother when he is too scared to leap. The film ends with a death in a fall from a similar structure. Another tragedy marred the Cannes triumph of the Turkish film *Distant*, which won the Grand Jury prize. Its leading man, Mehmet Emin Toprak, who had just been married, died in a car crash on the day director Nuri Bilge Ceylan's film was accepted for the main competition. He had planned to spend his honeymoon at Cannes. *Guardian*, 5 Sept 2003.

BABA JALLOW, 28, accused of stealing a man's penis through sorcery, was beaten to death on 9 October by about 10 people in the town of Serekunda in the Gambia, nine miles (14km) from the capital Banjul. For many years, *FT* has noted regular reports of penis-snatching in West Africa. Purported victims often claimed that alleged sorcerers simply touched them to make their genitals shrink or disappear in order to extort cash in the promise of a cure – though sometimes the attacker just vanished. [R] 12 Oct 2003.

THREE CHINESE CHILDREN AND THEIR COUSIN DIED two hours after eating a toad soup cooked for them by their mother in a bid to improve their digestion. The woman prepared the lethal broth after capturing the toads in the wild. A month later, a 38-year-old Vietnamese woman died after eating toad soup. "Toad is a very popular dish and is widely available," said a doctor at the Long An provincial hospital in southern Vietnam. "People love toad meat because it is delicious and rich in protein, but it must be prepared carefully." (That's because toad skin contains tetrodotoxin, one of nature's deadliest poisons.) Vietnamese traditionally feed their babies porridge made from toad meat (it says here). *Edinburgh Eve. News*, 2 Sept; [AFP] 9 Oct 2003.

A 27-YEAR-OLD THAI MAN WITH A PROSTHETIC LEG WAS electrocuted when he urinated near a power pole on the side of a highway in Bangkok. The victim's father told police they had stopped their car near a tollbooth during a rainstorm on 3 July, after nature called. It was thought that the victim had urinated on a flooded ground line, with his prosthetic leg acting as a strong conductor. [DPA] *Queensland Times*, 5 July 2003.

AMUSEMENT PARK OPERATOR DOUG MCKAY, 40, WAS spraying lubricant on the tracks of the Super Loop 2, a roller coaster-type ride at the Island County Fair on Whidbey Island, Washington State, on 16 August when his long hair got caught on a car full of fairgoers. McKay, co-owner of Paradise Amusements, based in Post Falls, Idaho, was pulled between 25ft and 40ft (7.6m and 12m) into the air and scalped before falling, back-first, onto a fence. He died later in hospital. [AP] 17 Aug 2003.



PATRICIA HALL, 72, from Eastbourne, East Sussex, who suffered from chronic schizophrenia, drank so much water that her blood was diluted and fluid built up in her lungs. She died in hospital. *D. Mirror*, 3 Sept 2003.

KIMBERLEY MASON, 20, WAS A PASSENGER IN A CAR driving down Frederick Street in

Detroit at 2am on 18 April when a bullet crashed through the roof and hit her in the head. She died later in hospital. "It appears that it was a bullet coming down from the sky after having been fired in the air," said homicide inspector Craig Schwartz. *Detroit Free News*, 19 April 2003.

ON 10 SEPTEMBER 2000, JANE MURRAY, 47, WAS stung by a wasp as she ate breakfast in the garden of her Surrey home that she shared with her husband Richard, the chairman of Charlton Athletic football club. She suffered anaphylactic shock and slipped into a coma seconds after flicking the insect out of her hair. She died on 12 July 2003 without regaining consciousness. There are about 40 recorded deaths from bee and wasp stings every year in the UK. *Times*, 19 July; *Metro*, 3 Sept 2003.

# FBI

## FORTEAN BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION



## 55. Canterbury Tales

Is Western medicine finally in search of its soul?  
**PAUL DEVEREUX** attended an unusual conference in the holy city of Canterbury to find out.

**D**uring a long weekend in the steamy British summer of 2003, medical practitioners of various stripes and other interested professionals made a pilgrimage to King's School, Canterbury, in search of "healing, prayer and forgiveness" – at least, that was the title of the conference they were attending in the very shadow of the great cathedral.

Given that our trainee doctors may receive pitifully few lectures on the basic health issue of nutrition, let alone alternative therapies, such a pilgrimage perhaps reveals a suspicion that modern Western medicine, despite its undoubted technical achievements, is not the whole story when it comes to the complex matter of healing.

This was directly addressed in the opening presentation given by senior cardiologist Mitchell Krucoff and cardiologist nurse Suzanne Crater. They recounted their initial visit to the Sri Satya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences in Puttaparthi, India, founded by the controversial guru Sai Baba. This medical establishment has state-of-the-art facilities and provides free medical treatment in a country where medical resources are limited. Krucoff argued that whatever one thought of Sai Baba himself there could be no denying the value of the medical institute. But while the centre could technically match a modern Western hospital, it was the patients themselves who really impressed Krucoff and Crater. They "beamed" Krucoff declared; they seemed buoyed up spiritually and emotionally, the very opposite of what is usually the case with Western hospital patients.

The two Americans visitors learned that, in addition to advanced conventional medical care, patients at the Puttaparthi establishment experienced much more human contact and sensory and spiritual enrichment than ever happens in Western hospitals. Krucoff was inspired by his visit to study ancient Indian and Tibetan medical

texts, such as the Treatise of Sangye Gyamtso (1653-1705) and its collection of medical paintings known as The Blue Beryl. These show not only organs and skeletal information recognisable by any modern doctor but also features such as *chakras* ("energy wheels" at certain points on the body) that modern science says do not exist. Krucoff suspects we have far more to learn about ourselves than our medical knowledge currently embraces.

On returning to Duke University Medical Center, North Carolina, Krucoff and Crater organised a pilot study they called the MANTRA (Monitoring and Actualization of Noetic Trainings) Project in which imagery, stress reduction, touch and prayer were offered to heart patients in addition to conventional high-tech medical intervention. They specifically wanted to see if adverse reactions after heart surgery (such as death, heart failure, post-procedural ischemia, repeat angioplasty, or heart attack) could be reduced by the application of these "noetic" efforts. In all, 150 heart patients were involved, and these were divided into five groups – one received standard cardiac care, while each of the other groups also received one of the noetic interventions. In the imagery group, people were taught to practise "soft abdominal breathing" while holding a mental image of a favoured place; patients in the stress reduction group used a similar breathing protocol linked to a personal phrase that gave them encouragement, and those in the therapeutic touch group received hand placements on *chakra* centres. The fifth group received intercessory prayer: Krucoff and Crater enlisted eight prayer groups, some of them outside the USA, incorporating Christian, Jewish and Buddhist groups. The name, age, and illness of each

patient assigned to the prayer intercession were sent to each prayer group, but the prayer work was double-blinded to patients, family and staff.

Although some of the noetic interventions showed only slight lessening of adverse effects of cardiac disease outcomes, the prayer intercessions provided outstanding results, with 50 per cent fewer complications in the patients concerned than in the standard treatment group. Smoothing the overall results, there was a 25-30 per cent reduction in adverse outcomes in MANTRA patients compared with those who received only standard care.

Results from a more ambitious phase of the MANTRA programme involving nine hospitals and consequently a much larger number of patients are due in by the end of 2003.<sup>1</sup>

Another American speaker, Jeff Levine, explained that as an epidemiologist he dealt with

probabilities, studying health and illness issues through the lens of existing large data sets relating to factors such as population, demography, environment, sociology and psychosociology. Levine felt obliged to emphasise this because of the nature of what he had discovered. He described how many years ago he (accidentally) began studying connections between religion and health. He couldn't imagine there being any possible connections himself, so was startled when his initial searches came up with some papers on the topic, and further epidemiological burrowing produced a few hundred more. Now there are 1,600 academic publications on the subject and 1,200 empirical studies. Overall, these studies reveal 75-90 per cent positive findings – in epidemiological terms that means there is decidedly a link between health and religion, or, perhaps more accurately,

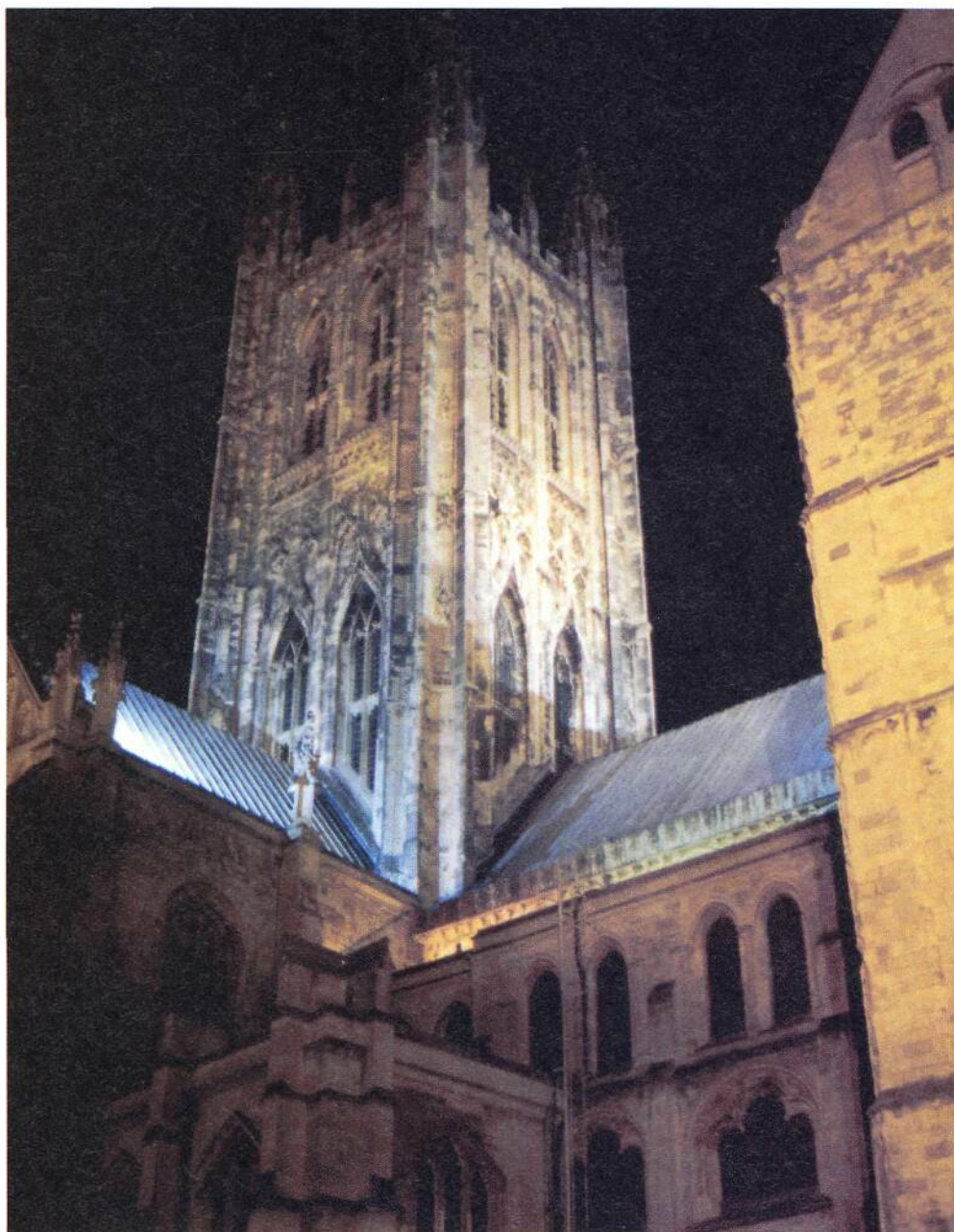
spirituality. But why? Levine identified several possible factors, including the social support provided by a community holding common beliefs and salutary thoughts and expectations, but he felt these could not be the whole answer.

Levine then discovered the work of PA Sorokin (1889-1968), a sociologist of an extraordinary (and controversial) kind. He attempted a scientific, pan-religious study of altruistic love (for instance, compassion and generosity), seeking to find out how love for others is associated with an ego-transcending sense of godhead, universal power, or



TOP: Epidemiologist Dr Jeff Levine at the podium.

ABOVE: Dr Janet Quinn speaking at the conference.



however else one might envisage God. This led him to practical suggestions as to how inter-group warfare could be curtailed and to make links with health, specifically mental health. To Sorokin, love was to be treated as an actual force, not some sentimental emotion. Levine concurs, and feels it may be this force that is figuring in the epidemiologically revealed links between health and religion.

Levine developed a research tool he called SMILE, standing for "Sorotkin Multidimensional Inventory of Love Experience" (Americans do like their acronyms), with which he conducted a study of 205 people. Those with a sense of the divine in their lives tended to be more positive and less depressed, have more self-esteem, and feel more comforted. And they had better health statistics. Levine suggests that currently unexplained variations in physical and mental health in populations may in part be due to spiritual, transpersonal factors. An active spiritual (not specifically religious) life may be

#### NOTES

1. In a BBC2 TV documentary called "Does Prayer Work?" transmitted on 23 October 2003, the results of the Krucoff/Crater Mantra II programme were aired. The results of the prayer segment were not particularly positive. However, Krucoff pointed out that the 9/11 tragedy in New York occurred during the time MANTRA II was running, and it became clear from the documentary that the US Christian prayer groups were being highly dismissive of the prayer groups belonging to other religions. Krucoff and his team decided to install further prayer groups to pray for the original set of prayer groups! Interestingly, the patient results achieved after that modification were significantly positive.

## Love might change body chemistry

protective against morbidity, Levine surmised. Love can be therapeutic. All the great mystics and poets have emphasised the crucial nature of love, and now the first glimmerings of medical appreciation seem to be occurring.

Although not directly mentioned by Levine, it could be that the experience of selfless love – or even weaker approximations of that ideal, such as the sense of being part of something greater than the personal ego – actually changes bodily chemistry. This possibility was brought home by what British neuropsychiatrist Peter Fenwick

had to tell the conference. He showed how sophisticated modern monitoring instrumentation and brain imaging was now allowing clinicians to realise that thought can affect the body's chemistry. He went into the recently confirmed physiological details of how negative thoughts can adversely affect the immune system. Death rates in those experiencing high levels of hopelessness were two to three times higher than in those with lower levels. He described how meditation can change brain chemistry and reduce blood pressure, and how prayer has been shown to apparently affect the properties of blood. Fenwick concluded that mind, the "ghost" in the brain, could have effects on the electricity and chemistry of the brain, and the brain in turn could likewise affect the body. Mind, brain and body formed a tightly coupled system and their effects on one another are real.

Other speakers included Janet Quinn, another American, who drew attention to the worldwide shortage of nurses and argued for therapeutic touch and ritual to be made part of standard, mainstream nursing practice, and Canon Beaumont Stevenson, among other things the official Oxfordshire exorcist (but, surprisingly, yet another American), who spoke with much humour on Group Analysis. There were also presentations on "soul-centred therapies", "psychology, religion and spirituality", and a garden of forgiveness in Beirut. Despite some of the touchy-feely subject matter, none of the presentations descended into New Age sentimentality. That was vividly the case when Dutch obstetrician Bart van der Lugt paid multi-media homage to still-born babies: at least one of the delegates was noted reacting to the stark imagery by burying his face in his hands throughout.

Given the conference's subject matter, and with delegates moving among the mellow mediaeval buildings of King's School and the adjoining cathedral cloisters, there was a sense of being at some otherworldly medical school, a "Hogwarts" of its kind. While some of the messages conveyed by the conference speakers might have been difficult for a secularist to stomach, the emerging data spoke for themselves, if only in whispers as yet. These medical Canterbury tales, told next to the cathedral, hinted that health and holiness might go hand in hand.

*The conference was organised by the Scientific and Medical Network ([www.scimednet.org](http://www.scimednet.org); tel. 01608 652000) in their "Beyond the Brain" series, and took place 21-24 August, 2003. **FT***



**PAUL DEVEREUX** is director of the Dragon Project Trust, a prolific author and a regular contributor to *Fortean Times*.

# What Katie did

When an eminent scientist invited a celebrated young medium to live in his home, under the pretext of a rigorous investigation of her supposed abilities, was a drama more of the flesh than the spirit being played out?

**PETER BROOKESMITH** enters the sexually charged world of the Victorian séance to try and provide some answers.

In that thick square book, whose pages are of granite and whose bindings are of brass, titled *The True Believer's Bible, or Ten Thousand Rules for Swallowing Rubbish Whole*, there is an article of faith that runs: "If a man of science supports your claim, it must be true." Thus, flying saucers must be real because some Americans with PhDs think so, and crop circles must be made by aliens, despite the repeated admissions of large numbers of male humans who, stoically facing middle age, can think of no better ways to meet girls and while away their weekends.

For those who regard spiritualistic mediums as providing evidence, or even proof, of life after death, one medium is unanimously acclaimed as the greatest exponent of her craft: Florence Cook, who between 1872 and 1874 regularly produced the fully materialised spirit of Anne Owen Morgan, better known as 'Katie King'. Cook was neither the first nor the only medium to succeed in this feat. Katie King was something of a favourite with Victorian mediums, and others before and since have – according to them – generated ectoplasm of sufficient quantity and quality to support a materialised Katie King, as well as other 'spirit' forms. What makes the Cook-King double act so appealing to believers is the shadow cast over the case by eminent scientist William Crookes [see panel p32], who enthusiastically defended Florence's integrity and the reality of the spirit she claimed to materialise.

Florence Cook was born into modest but respectable circumstances in then-affluent Hackney, east London, in the 1850s. Quite when she was born is obscure, although the issue becomes critical when pondering her motives and her genuineness. In 1874, Crookes believed her to be 15 years old, although Florence herself maintained that she was 16 in May 1872. If so, she was born in the first half of 1856; her birth was never registered, however, and her parents were wed in January 1856. In his classic work on Cook, Trevor

## Florence Cook produced the fully materialised spirit known as Katie King

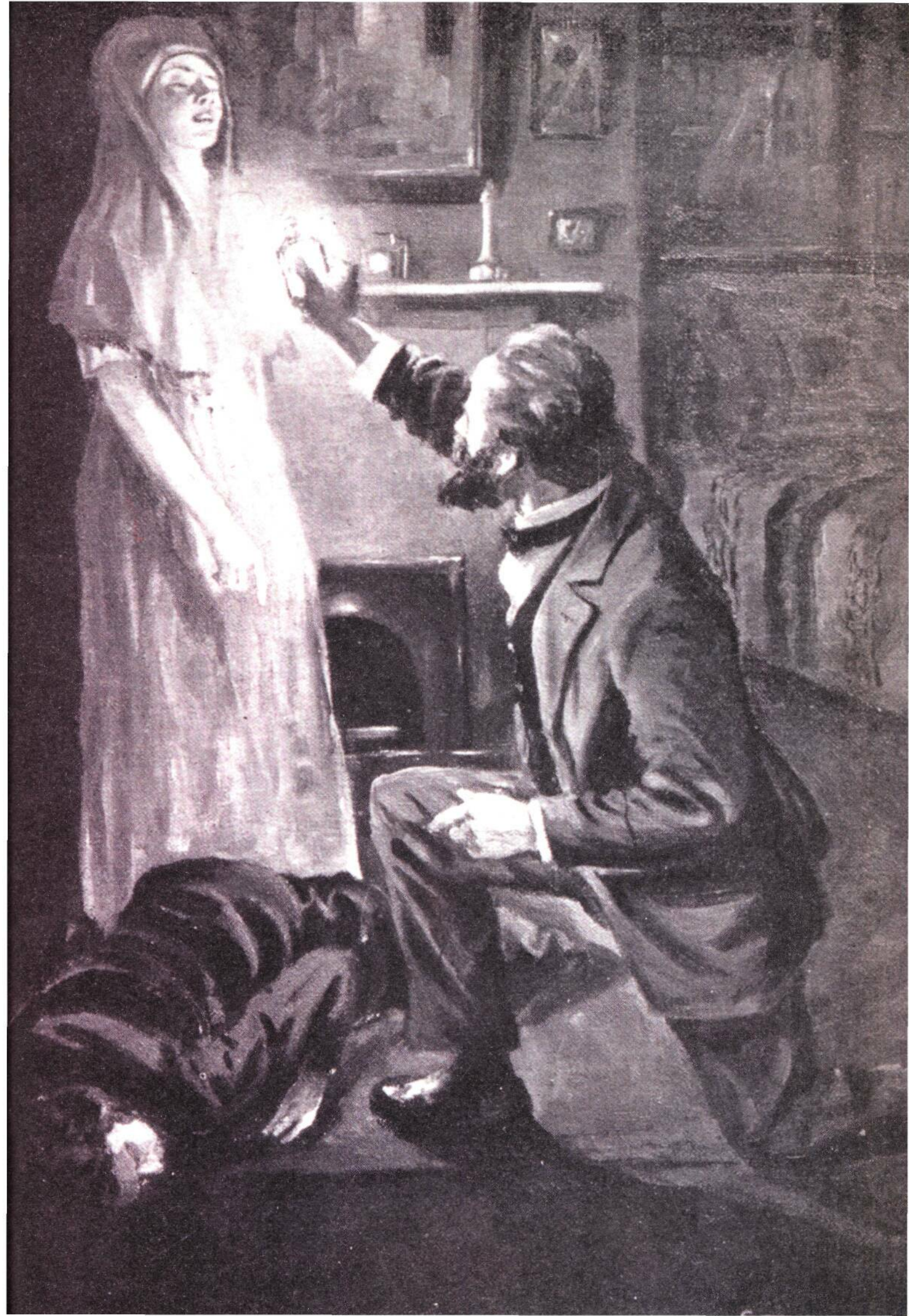
H Hall considered her handwriting in June 1872 to be remarkably mature for a 16-year-old, and notes that when she secretly married master mariner Edward Corner in April 1874 she concealed her exact age on the marriage certificate beneath the words "under age".<sup>1</sup> She could, therefore, have been as old as 20 at that time – at least two years older than she made sure she was generally taken to be.

Another of true belief's naive axioms has it that the younger a claimant to paranormal experience is, the less likely he or she is to be indulging in calculated fraud. Doubtless it helps not to be too ugly, as well.

Florence Cook was also counting on particular presumptions and concepts of innocence and virtue among the Victorian middle classes in this deception about her age: and the idea certainly appealed powerfully to Crookes. In 1874 he expostulated that it did "violence to one's reason and common sense" to suppose that "an innocent schoolgirl of 15 should be able to conceive...so gigantic an imposture as this, and [yet]... should submit to any test that might be imposed on her."



LEFT: Sir William Crookes, Katie King and a prostrate Florence Cook. RIGHT: Sir William Crookes, Katie King and a prostrate Florence Cook.



Florence first came to public attention in the early summer of 1871, through an article in *The Spiritualist* (15 June 1871) written by Thomas Blyton, secretary of the Dalston Association of Enquirers into Spiritualism. Therein Blyton described how at a séance at his house, with him and her parents as the only sitters, Florence was floated on and off a table by unseen forces, and the table “was then thrown with great force over into the fireplace, and Miss Cook carried very rapidly about the room.” At a second séance on 2 June, Blyton wrote, furniture again moved, “a portion of Miss Cook’s dress was removed”<sup>2</sup>, raps were heard, and the entranced Florence engaged in dialogue with the spirits through automatic writing. As a result of this article, she was nearly famous.

Both Blyton and Cook had good reason to publicise themselves. Blyton’s group of spiritualist ‘enquirers’ was being funded by a credulous, rich, and generous businessman, Charles Blackburn of Didsbury, Manchester. It was clearly in Blyton’s interests to ‘discover’ a bright new medium, and it was in Cook’s interest to bring herself to the attention of a man of known philanthropic tendencies in the spiritualist world.<sup>3</sup> And Blackburn, duly impressed, obliged. In his own words he “made a little arrangement of compensation with the family”.<sup>4</sup> Apart from the hard cash, a huge advantage

lay in Florence Cook now having no further need to charge for public séances; these could now be held strictly ‘by invitation only’, in front of sitters carefully selected for their willingness to believe, and whose decorum in not interfering with the medium or her manifestations could be relied upon. Florence could count on her good looks, youth, and (it turned out) somewhat un-Victorian lack of inhibitions to take her from *petit-bourgeois* Hackney to more rarified reaches of London society. In those more deferent times, the *imprimatur* of the nobility bestowed a certain irrational weight to the claims of the spiritualists. More than one titled gentleman was fascinated by spiritualism, and perhaps too by something less ethereal about young

## She said she was charged with proving the truth of spiritualism

BELOW: Sir William Crookes in scientific mode, as seen by ‘Spy’ in *Vanity Fair*, 1903...

BELOW LEFT: ...and as a believer in Spiritualism accompanied by the ‘spirit image’ of the late Lady Crookes.

female mediums.

The febrile atmosphere that could arise at materialisation séances is well illustrated in a report of one such held in the 1860s in the USA:

“The spirit beckons to someone; and a series of enquiries by the various members of the audience, ‘Is it me?’ ‘Is it me?’ presently shows that a young man is wanted who goes forward nearly to the curtain and is whispered to, embraced, and very audibly kissed; and the spirit then goes back behind the curtain, but reappears again for a moment to exchange some more kisses. Then a similar performance is gone through with another sitter, a young woman, who is so excited that she nearly faints away, the kisses being very animated and prolonged again... Then comes a short delay, and a figure in man’s clothes emerges from the cabinet and seats himself affectionately in the lap of a young woman and kisses her warmly.”<sup>5</sup>

In the summer of 1872, the ‘spirit form’ with whom Florence Cook will forever be associated made her first appearance. At a séance in the Cooks’ home that April, Katie King was first heard speaking through Florence as she lay in a trance.

She was, she said, the spirit of the daughter of John King, known in his ‘Earth life’ as the pirate-made-good Henry Owen Morgan (1635-1688) who ended his life as Lieutenant-Governor of Jamaica. There is no historical record that Morgan had a daughter, but Katie King claimed to have been just that, and to have been named Anne Owen

Morgan in her earthly incarnation. By the time of her death at the age of 23, her ‘spirit’ said, she had not only married and had two children but, no doubt inspired by her father’s example, pursued a life of crime that did not stop short of murder.

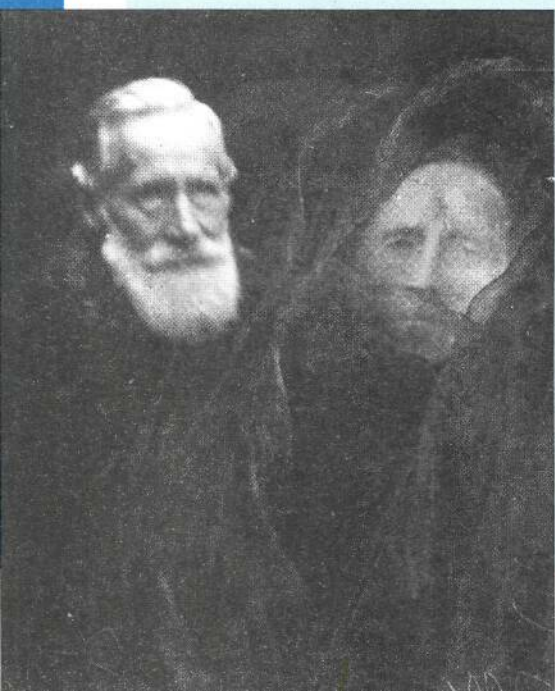
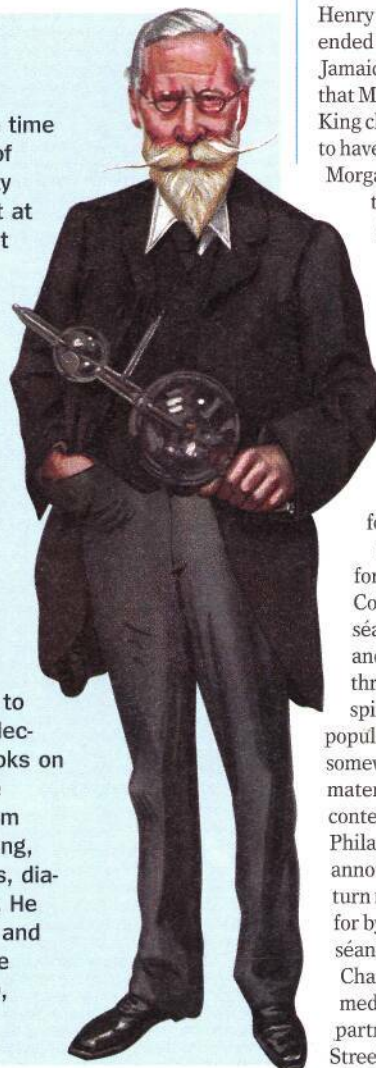
It was said that, having repented of all this once dead, she had been charged with proving the truth of Spiritualism to redeem her former wickedness.

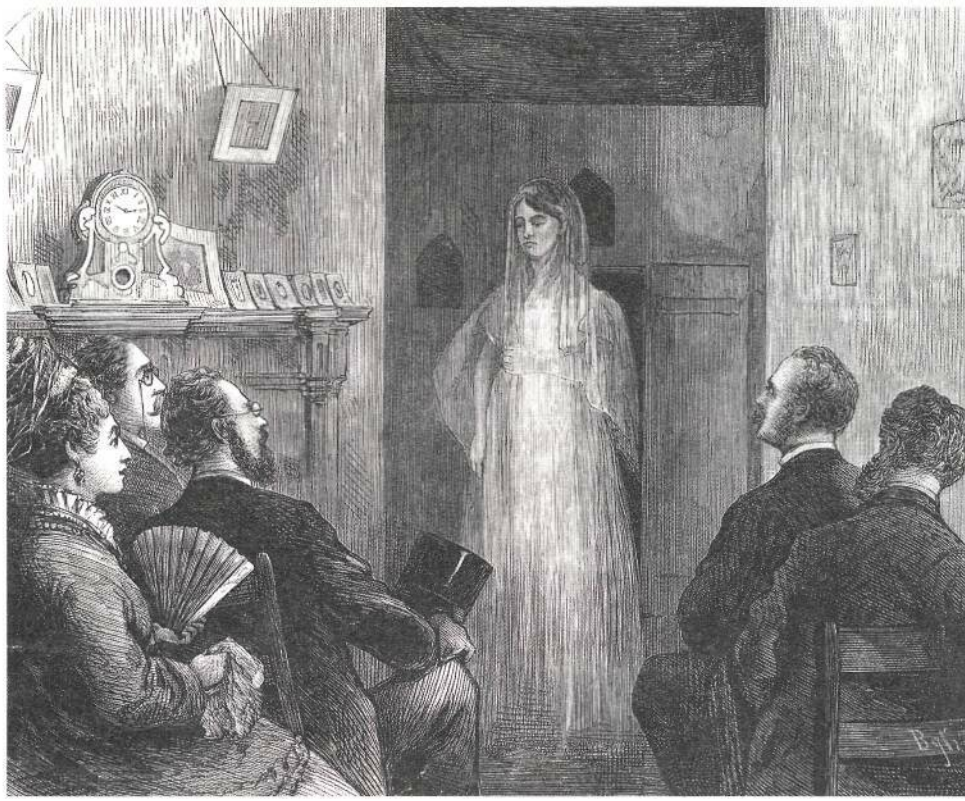
Katie King did not spring fully-formed from the head of Florence Cook. She had been appearing at séances all over the United States and Europe, and had first ‘come through’ in 1850, in the early days of spiritualism’s first great flush of popularity. She had appeared, looking somewhat more like a ghost than a fully materialised spirit, to judge from a contemporary illustration, in Philadelphia only a short while before announcing herself to Florence. She in turn might have been expecting Katie, for by April 1872 she was presenting séances with Messrs Frank Herne and Charles Williams, successful mediums who operated in partnership from 61 Lamb’s Conduit Street, London. Herne specialised in

## SIR WILLIAM CROOKES

Crookes was born on 17 June 1832, and was thus 42 by the time he completed his work on the Cook-King case. He was one of the last gentleman-scientists, having had no formal university training. From 1848 to 1854 he first studied and then taught at the Royal College of Chemistry. He then became an assistant meteorologist at the Radcliffe Observatory, Oxford, and in 1855 was appointed teacher of chemistry at a teachers’ training college in Chester. In 1858 he inherited sufficient wealth to pursue his own interests, and set up a laboratory at his house in Mornington Road, Camden Town, London.

Crookes was an original and inventive scientific thinker and had extremely wide interests. In 1861 he discovered the element thallium (one of his chief claims to fame) and his work on vacuum tubes and cathode rays led to the invention of a successful electric light bulb and to the discovery of the electron. He published books on chemical analysis, the extraction of sugar from sugarbeet, textile dyeing, agricultural antiseptics, diamonds, and fertilizers. He was knighted in 1897 and made a member of the Order of Merit in 1910,





BETTMANN / CORBIS

materialisations of both John King and his wife. At ‘the direction of the spirits’ (of course) Florence became their pupil.

Both Herne and Williams were later caught in more than one flagrant fraud, impersonating with such paraphernalia as turbans, wigs, and false beards the very spirits they had purportedly materialised. In late 1872, Cook also benefited from the tutelage of visiting American mediums Mr and Mrs Nelson Holmes, who produced a levitating version of Katie King. On their return to the USA there was uproar when their landlady in Philadelphia confessed to having impersonated King at their sittings. Some might say Florence had apprenticed herself well.

Katie King announced in 1872 that she would stay with Florence for three years, and during this time would attempt to make herself visible – that is, that her spirit form would take on material form, specifically through the medium of ectoplasm, which she would ‘draw off’ from Florence’s body. Her first attempt to do so took place in April 1872 in Hackney, and consisted of a deathly, mask-like face that peered out through the curtains of Florence’s ‘cabinet’.

It took roughly a year before the complete form of Katie King came forth. According to the Cook family, she appeared almost daily, walked about the house in Hackney, and even shared Florence’s bed with her. In August 1873, the Rev. Dr C Maurice Davies reported (under a pseudonym) in the London *Daily Telegraph* that the fully materialised form of Katie King, swathed in white, emerged from Florence’s cabinet while she, dressed in black, was tied up within and the knots sealed. He took some photographs of Katie King’s form, but was not entirely free of doubt: “The difficulty I still felt,

## The spirit of Katie King even shared Florence’s bed with her

with the form as with the faces, was that it seemed so thoroughly material and flesh-and-blood-like.”

So material indeed was this spirit that even the most credulous witnesses, one imagines, would have wanted to see both the medium and the materialised form together, proving that Katie was not Florence. Strangely, and despite numerous sceptical comments on the Cook-King phenomenon in the spiritualist press, no one in the Cooks’ circle seemed to consider this necessary.

Late in 1873, William Crookes, later to be knighted for his achievements in science, agreed to investigate Florence’s claims as a medium – at her request. There was good reason for her to make the appeal. She was in grave danger of losing her useful income from Charles Blackburn. For on the evening of 9 December, there had occurred a curious scene that had served to fuel already widespread speculation and suspicion that Florence Cook was cheating her sitters – that she and Katie King were, indeed, one and the same “beautifully made woman”, as the novelist Florence Marryat described her. More than one

ABOVE: The ghostly apparition of Katie King in Philadelphia, only a short while before she announced herself to Florence Cook.

commentator had remarked on the striking resemblance between medium and materialisation.<sup>6</sup>

At a séance that evening, one of the sitters, William Volckman, had become exasperated at the striking resemblance between Florence and Katie, and had grabbed her. Two stout parties had promptly intervened to protect Katie, there was a struggle undignified enough for the ‘spirit’ to part Volckman from a portion of his beard. Volckman maintained that he had satisfied himself that he had indeed seized none other than Florence Cook, and that in the *mêlée* she had slipped out of his grasp and back into the cabinet. Other witnesses maintained that Katie King had partly dematerialised, flipped herself away from Volckman, and then vanished into thin air. After a decent interval of five minutes was allowed to elapse by those in charge, Florence herself was discovered still – or once more – taped up in the cabinet, and the seals on her bonds were unbroken. These had been impressed with the signet ring of the Earl of Caithness, one of the sitters.

For objective investigators, then as now, this business of knots and tapes and seals in the medium’s cabinet guaranteed nothing. Incredibly enough, one standard practice at Victorian séances was to leave the medium alone on a chair in the cabinet with a length of rope on her lap. After a while the medium would call in some trusted aide to witness, and often to seal with lead or wax, the knots that *the spirits themselves* had obligingly tied. At Florence Cook’s later sessions, others did the tying, and searched the medium’s body for props. Unfortunately, Florence was habitually prepared in this way by Mrs Amelia Corner and Miss Caroline Corner, pillars of the Dalston Enquirers, and in due course her mother- and sister-in-law respectively.

There were other difficulties that spiritualists put in the way of sceptics. It was forbidden to touch a materialised spirit form uninvited, on the grounds not merely of ill manners, but because it might upset the delicate etheric and ectoplasmic balance obtaining and actually kill the medium. The literature contains no record of such a tragic demise, although it does contain many instances of grabbed ‘spirits’ who turned out to be mediums or their accomplices. Amazingly, they all lived to ripe old ages.

Once the medium was tied down in the cabinet, as long as half an hour would then pass before any manifestations occurred, a period that the sitters would while away by being ‘vehemently exhorted’ to sing psalms or spiritualist hymns, conveniently covering any suspicious shufflings and bumpings made by the medium slipping her knots, changing into white muslin ‘spirit’ garb (often concealed in her drawers), and preparing props to





LEFT: Florence Cook lies in a trance, with the spirit form of Katie King behind her, at the home of Sir William Crookes (see footnote 7).

sad joke.

It was ostensibly in the interests of maintaining control over his experiments that Crookes, having been to several séances at the Cook family home, brought Florence to live in his own house, the better to ensure that she would be out of reach of any accomplices. In such circumstances, if he could witness Katie King and Florence together at the same time, there would be no doubt that Florence was neither impersonating Katie nor using a stand-in. That, at least, was the theory.

Crookes did indeed witness the two together, but there was no sure proof that Florence did not have a collaborator, even in the Crookes household. Florence's sister Kate, presumably in the role of chaperone, also moved into the house in Mornington Road, Camden Town. Less happily for all concerned, so did one Miss Mary Rosina Showers, who also professed to produce materialisations of a spirit called Florence Maple. These two, and the Cook sisters' mother, Emma, along with Crookes's eldest son (aged 14) and one Dr James Manby Gully, seem to have been the main, and most regular, witnesses of the experimental séances. At least once, the two girls' spirit forms appeared together and paraded "with their arms entwined, schoolgirl fashion" about the place. Crookes apparently accepted this exhibition as genuine, until Mary Showers confessed to the professional medium Mrs Fay that she had been cheating, and Mrs Fay informed Crookes. At about this time, too, Showers was caught out at a public séance standing on a chair in her cabinet, wearing a ghostly headdress purporting to be the 'spirit form' of Florence Maple. It is exceedingly difficult to imagine that Florence Cook was either ignorant of Showers's mountebankery or was producing genuine phenomena in concert with a confessed fraud. In such an unlikely case, wouldn't it have been in Katie King's own best interests to denounce the impostor?

Worse, and indeed weirder, was to come. In June 1874, somewhat before she was expected to leave, Katie King announced that her time was up and she was parting from Florence. Crookes described in extraordinary terms the final séance in which he saw – and as it transpired, felt – Katie King materialise. At this last session, Katie put her arm through his.

"Feeling... that if I had not a spirit, I had at all events a lady close to me, I asked her permission to clasp her in my arms, so as to be able to verify the interesting observations which a recent experimentalist [i.e. Volckman] has recently somewhat verbosely recorded. Permission was graciously given, and I accordingly did – well, what any gentleman would do in the circumstances... the 'ghost' (not struggling, however), was as material a

astonish the company. There was, naturally, another iron rule: any peeping behind the curtain at this time was forbidden, for that would entirely upset the production of ectoplasm and the process of materialisation.

Various witnesses to Cook's séances pointed out that many objections could be disposed of were the curtain to the cabinet to be thrown wide, at least while the 'spirit' was abroad among the sitters. Cook however always had a red shawl wrapped around her head in the cabinet. She told Crookes, during his experiments, that Katie King *herself* "muffled her medium's head up in a shawl" to protect her from the flash of his photographic lights, but it is apparent, from Crookes's own account of a Cook-King séance he had attended *prior* to the Volckman fiasco, that this business of the shawl was standard practice at a Cook performance.<sup>7</sup> Crookes himself referred to the Volckman episode as "a disgraceful occurrence" and Florence as "young, sensitive and innocent". Clearly, he too was suitably primed.

## Crookes both saw and felt Katie King

**B**y the time Florence Cook approached Crookes, he had investigated DD Home, the 'sorcerer of kings', to his own satisfaction at least, and was convinced of the reality of psychic forces (but not that *everyone* who claimed to possess them actually did so). He claimed to have tested Florence rigorously, the experiments taking place between mid-December 1873 and 21 May 1874. What really happened is anyone's guess, but the most worldly interpretation of the known facts leaves Florence's reputation as a medium in tatters and makes Crookes's claim to be objective a

being as Miss Cook herself.”

This veritable mish-mash of Victorian doubletalk (what would a true gentleman have done ‘in the circumstances’? – surely not what we can only imagine Crookes did) becomes more suspect in the light of Crookes’s other remarks on Katie’s person. As he appreciatively wrote: “Photography was inadequate to depict the perfect beauty of Katie’s face, as words are powerless to describe her charm of manner. Photography may, indeed, give a map of her countenance; but how can it reproduce the brilliant purity of her complexion, or the ever varying expression of her most mobile features?”

Others noticed Crookes’s unusual interest in Katie King. One was the Rev. C Maurice Davies, who remarked: “The Professor acted all the time as Master of Ceremonies, retaining his place at the aperture [to the cabinet]; and I fear, from the very first, exciting suspicion by his marked attentions, not to the medium, but to the ghost.”<sup>8</sup>

**W**hatever the frame of mind in which Crookes thought he began his investigation of Florence Cook, by the end he seems clearly to have become infatuated by Katie King. This is an important distinction, and bears strongly on the issue of whether Crookes colluded in Florence Cook’s fraudulence or whether he was duped by her – and on the identity of Florence’s collaborator who impersonated Katie King, if indeed that was the manner in which she created her illusions.

So, was Katie really Florence, as has often been proposed? Trevor Hall suggested that Florence seduced Crookes and that he responded by becoming so besotted with the lovely young medium that he colluded in her fabrications. Psychological research became a cover for a clandestine affair: distinctly more a matter of weak flesh than willing spirit. Alternatively, Crookes may have been besotted indeed, but only to the extent that he could not bring himself to tell her that he had found her out. As a result he publicly presented as good evidence what he knew to be insupportable.

But what if ‘Katie King’ was actually neither herself nor Florence, but another young lady? In light of Crookes’s gushing panegyrics on Katie King’s personal charms, it was this person, not Florence, who was the object of the eminent scientist’s sprightly lust. The obvious question is: Who was the ‘Katie King’ ‘materialised’ by Florence?

The testimony of EW Cox, Serjeant-at-Law, is useful here. Cox was no unbeliever, but as an eminent jurist he did demand high standards of proof for the reality of séance phenomena. He was one of the few to witness Katie King and Florence Maple together, “coming out from the room in which Miss Cook

and Miss Showers were placed, walking about, talking, playing girlish tricks, patting us and pushing us. They were solid flesh and blood and bone. They breathed, and perspired, and ate, and wore a white head-dress and a white robe from head to foot, made of cotton and woven by a loom. Not merely did they resemble their respective mediums, they were facsimiles of them – alike in face, hair, complexion, eyes, teeth, hands, and movements of the body. Unless he had been otherwise so informed, no person would have doubted for a moment that the two girls who had been placed behind the curtain were now standing... before the curtain playing very prettily the character of ghost.”<sup>9</sup>

It does not require an exceptionally expert eye to discern the striking likeness between Florence Cook and Katie King in the surviving photographs of the latter. The believer’s standard rationalisation for this – that materialisations take on the medium’s form at first, while the medium gradually gains the power to generate

## This was a matter of weak flesh rather than willing spirit



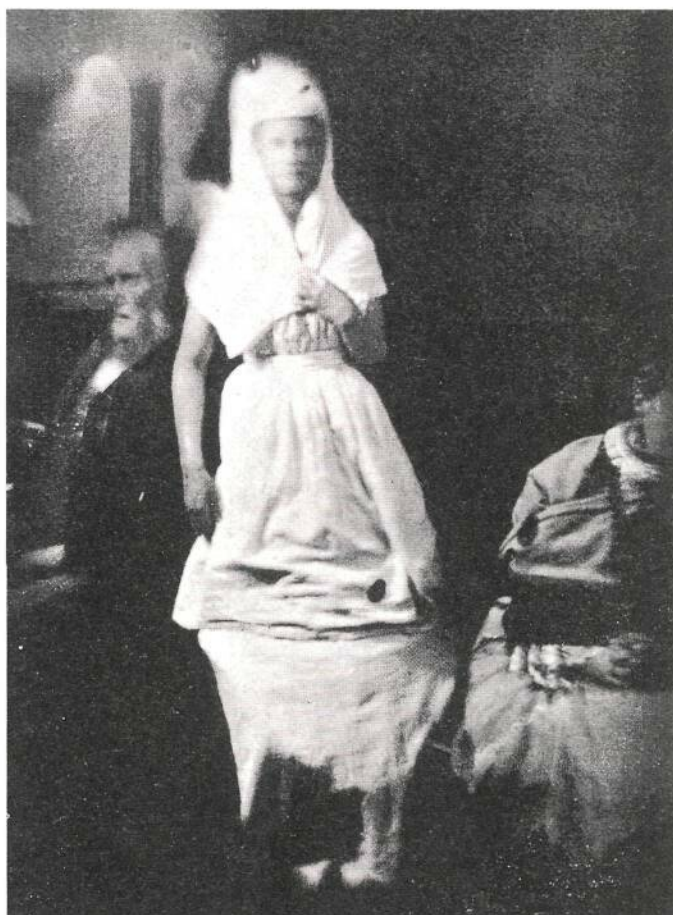
BELOW: The fully materialised Katie King at the home of Sir William Crookes in 1874.

the spirit’s own true features – can be dismissed on its own terms alone. Mediums *always* materialised spirit faces first, and Florence Cook had been performing this trick for two years by the time the photographs were taken. She had surely logged the requisite practice hours.

**A**t least some of the time, then, we can be certain that Cook managed her own impersonations. Hall considers her most likely accomplice, at Crookes’s house in Mornington Road and at King’s final appearances in Hackney in Spring 1874, to have been Mary Showers. Unfortunately, we don’t know what she looked like. And it does seem unlikely that, even if Crookes was prepared to be fooled, others would not have recognised her and spoken up. One such might be Maurice Davies,<sup>10</sup> who was present at the last series of Hackney séances orchestrated by Crookes, and who recognised that this time medium and spirit had “no resemblance”. He spoke to those who were led, by the dim glow of a phosphorus lamp, into the cabinet to lay a hand on the recumbent medium, “and their opinion was that the ‘ghost’ was a much stouter, bigger woman than the medium; and I confess that certain unhallowed ideas of the bedroom door and the adjacent kitchen stairs connected themselves in my mind with recollections of a brawny servant girl who used to sit sentry over the cupboard in the breakfast room. Where was she?”

Crookes published his own impressions of the differences between medium and spirit form. He calculated that Katie King was between 4.5 and 6 inches (11.4 and 15.2 cm) taller than Florence. He also noted that whereas Katie’s ears were not pierced, Florence’s were, that Katie King’s fingers were longer, her face larger and her complexion fairer. At the last séance at which Katie appeared, Crookes reported, “Katie’s neck was bare... the skin was perfectly smooth both to touch and sight, whilst on Miss Cook’s neck is a large blister, which... is distinctly visible and rough to the touch.”<sup>11</sup> Most striking was the difference in their hair on the last occasion Katie King appeared through Florence’s mediumship. After the séance, Crookes wrote: “Miss Cook’s hair is so dark a brown as almost to appear black; a lock of Katie’s which is here before me and which she allowed me to cut from her luxuriant tresses having first traced it up to the scalp and satisfied myself that is actually grew there, is a rich golden auburn.”<sup>12</sup>

It seems indisputable that on this climactic occasion, and very likely on others, someone other than Florence Cook was playing the part of Katie King. The final séance is noteworthy, indeed, for this exposure of Katie’s hair. The usual form, for reasons that are obvious, was to keep it well hidden.



But we might consider the photographs again, and the likeness of King to Cook. The one person who might be predicted to resemble Florence Cook is her sister Kate who, interestingly enough, really was 15 years old at the time of the final appearances of Katie King. Here again we are unfortunate in having no contemporary pictures of her, although she was once described as “decidedly *spirituelle* in appearance”.<sup>13</sup>

We do know something, however, about Kate Cook’s unscrupulousness. Florence’s months with Crookes paid off, in that Charles Blackburn continued to support her through the summer of 1874, but by the end of the year he had become disillusioned. Her secret marriage to Edward Corner, a growing suspicion about the nature of her relationship with Crookes, her failure to produce materialisations after the departure of Katie King, and perhaps increasing doubts about her genuineness altogether, led him to cut off her allowance. It was almost immediately, not to say miraculously, discovered that Kate too had mediumistic powers, and in due course she produced a materialised spirit known as Lillie Gordon. Her manifestations were eagerly communicated to Blackburn, who was soon persuaded to pay her a comfortable allowance. Curiously, Crookes took no interest in Kate’s mediumship, while she herself sought no publicity for her séance work. Perhaps she had learned from her sister’s experience.

Kate Cook worked hard on her relationship with Blackburn and when, in 1883, he moved to London into a

## Florence dropped Crookes like a hot brick

substantial residence in Elgin Crescent, Notting Hill, the entire Cook family – Kate, her parents Henry and Emma, sister Edith, and brother Donald – moved in with him. Thereafter, they lived either in Blackburn’s various London houses or in ones bought with his money. By various means, but in particular by playing on Blackburn’s concern for his mentally-deficient daughter (whom they took into their charge in return for a considerable income), and with ‘Lillie Gordon’ judiciously reinforcing their case and their position in ‘spirit letters’ to him, the Cooks managed to do very well, materially, out of Blackburn. When he died in 1891, they inherited virtually all of his estate. Florence, however, received nothing in his will, although her husband benefited by £800.

Compared to this long-maintained campaign of fraud and virtual extortion by Kate, acting as stand-in for her sister would surely be small beer. If she, and not Florence, was the object of Crookes’s infatuation, and if Crookes was not in collaboration with the medium but being gulled by her, several things fall into

ABOVE: Two views of an apparently ‘flesh-and-blood’ Katie King at a séance at the home of Sir William Crookes in 1874.

place. One is Crookes’s specific and uncharacteristic silence on the Cook-King ‘case’ once Katie had departed – usually intolerant of critics, he refused to be drawn by objections to his research. Another is his general indifference to the spiritualist scene thereafter. Embarrassment, particularly embarrassment at having fallen for a spirit form, and an understandable desire to avoid a recurrence of such a lapse, could well have informed both decisions. Crookes’s finding in favour of Florence would then indeed be the result of a certain kind of entrapment, emotional or carnal, certainly of Florence’s creation but not requiring her indulgence. And it may have been part of the sisters’ plan that if Crookes had tasted the pleasures of Kate/Katie’s flesh outside the séance room, *believing her to be a materialised spirit*, he would be all the more driven to find all the evidence he could for her actuality *within* the séance room.

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of Crookes’s subsequent reticence is his failure to engage in any way with Kate Cook’s mediumship. Yet the reason he did not champion her – assuming he was not too chagrined to consider it – may not be hard to find. It is apparent that, once his final endorsement of her mediumship was published and Blackburn’s continued financial support was assured, Florence Cook dropped Crookes like a hot brick. It is equally clear that one of the reasons Blackburn finally withdrew that support at the end of 1874 was his conviction that he had been paying for

sittings “under the rose”, in the quaint euphemism he used, with Crookes.<sup>14</sup> Kate King, hard-nosed as she was, would not want to risk arousing Blackburn’s suspicions again by associating with the man who had already betrayed his trust once.

Entertaining as it is, it is not essential to presume that Crookes actually slept with either of the Cook sisters, although he may have slept with both. He was, after all, phenomenally short-sighted<sup>15</sup> and may not have known the difference; and hence Florence could probably manage, if the need arose, to impersonate her sister outside the séance room while her sister impersonated Kate within it.

**S**o why stop there? Let speculation thrive! Perhaps Crookes discovered the joys of troilism. One is led to this impression not so much by the accounts of Katie King’s remarkably free conduct in the séance room or by the fact that in June 1874 Florence astonished Crookes with the news that she had married a mariner, Edward Elgie Corner, on 29 April that year, as by one of Corner’s subsequent remarks on the nature of their conjugal relations. He told the novelist Florence Marryat<sup>16</sup> that he felt that he had married two women – Katie King as well as Florence – and that at times he was not sure which was his earthly wife. If it was Kate who was impersonating Katie,

the mind reels at the possible implications. And when one learns that, after Florence died in 1904 Corner married her sister Kate as soon as it was legally possible, one feels justified in wondering if all of them were party to more than one kind of threesome. Perhaps Crookes was too.

It is certainly not impossible that the sisters had more adventurous tastes than might be expected in conventional young ladies of the 1870s. These were not conventional ladies, and Florence is known to have had affairs after her marriage. She told two of her lovers, Francis Anderson and Jules Bois, that her mediumship was fraudulent, and that she had had an affair with Crookes.<sup>17</sup>

Whatever the precise truth about Florence Cook and William Crookes, Katie King herself continued shamelessly to appear at séances. In 1930 she was photographed during one held by Dr Glen Hamilton in Winnipeg, Canada. In July 1974, she materialised and was photographed at a séance held by Fulvio Rendhell (*sic*) in Rome, in the presence of 23 people. In this picture she displays appropriately Italianate features, and resembles neither Florence Cook nor the Katie King of the Crookes photographs. And in 2002, the proprietor of the Mercuriosity Shop posted this message on his website:

“I happened to purchase a fairly large cabinet one day. I found it in an antique store, and I was drawn to it. It was old

and a bit distressed, but it had a sense of rustic charm. And it was inexpensive. Once I got it back to the Shop, I kept noticing the door ajar, and assumed it had been opened by Püs, the cat that lives here. Then one night I found a woman standing at the foot of my bed (not that that is unusual). She climbed into the cabinet and closed the door behind her. I opened the cabinet, and no one was there. I did some nosing around, and found the cabinet at one time was owned by one Sir William Crookes FRS. And that’s when I discovered I had been visited by the one-and-only Katie King. Miss King, though a shy and demure ghost, occasionally visits me during the night, in my bedroom, upstairs from the Mercuriosity Shop. Incidentally, after I learned the history of the cabinet, I’m just glad a damned lusty pirate didn’t show up at the foot of my bed.”<sup>18</sup>

You can’t keep a good spirit down: old or young, they don’t even fade away. **FT**

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## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



**PETER BROOKESMITH** was the sinister mastermind behind the part-work magazine *The Unexplained*. He is the author of *UFO: The Complete Sightings Catalogue* (1995) and *Sniper: Training, Techniques and Weapons* (2001).

## NOTES

1. Trevor H. Hall, *The Spiritualists: The Story of Florence Cook and William Crookes*, London: Duckworth 1962, pp.1-3. Hereafter referred to as ‘Hall’. This book is still in print under the title *The Medium and the Scientist* (ISBN: 0-87975-276-9) from Prometheus Books.

2. In later, popular retellings of the Cook-King saga, this event is usually inflated into the spectacle of the comely Miss Cook being entirely disrobed and floating naked over the heads of the sitters. In this elaboration the folk mind seems to have picked up the *frisson* of sexuality implicit, and sometimes explicit, in Cook’s and King’s activities, and which in varying degree was an unmentionable subtext of the whole spiritualist field of the time. It became apparent in due course that Florence Cook had a powerful sexual drive whether in or out of the séance room.

3. Hall, p.8: “The Dalston Association, formed in 1870, thrived during the next few years on the fame of the mediumship of Florence Cook. As the Dalston society increased in importance after 1871, Mr Blyton grew with it and eventually became the Secretary of the British National Association of Spiritualists, established in 1873. A possibly more significant fact is that the

principal financial supporter of the Dalston Association was the wealthy Charles Blackburn of Manchester who also contributed to the cost of publication of [the weekly] *The Spiritualist* from which [its editor] WH Harrison’s livelihood was presumably partially derived. When Florence was safely launched, Harrison was able literally to fill his columns with accounts and eulogies of her marvellous mediumship. Indeed, so much space was devoted to the activities of Florence that the editor of *The Spiritualist* annoyed Mr Harrison by suggesting that *The Spiritualist* be renamed *Miss Florence Cook’s Journal*... It is noteworthy that when occasional contributors to the paper were sufficiently bold to describe circumstances at Florence’s sittings which seemed to indicate trickery, the editor almost invariably attempted to suppress the letters.”

4. Hall, p.9: Blackburn revealed the arrangement in *The Spiritualist* (17 April 1874); the second comment is from Traill Taylor, quoted by HE Thompson in *The Medium and the Daybreak* (19 Dec 1873). (These two journals were the main British spiritualist weeklies of the time, and took opposing sides in the debate over Florence Cook’s mediumship.)

5. Quoted by EW Fomell in *The Unhappy Medium: Spiritualism and the life of Margaret Fox*

(Austin, TX, 1964: p.145; cited by Ruth Brandon, *The Spiritualists*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson 1983, p.123).

6. Referring to faces of ‘spirits’ appearing at the aperture of the Punch-and-Judy-style medium’s cabinet (as Katie King’s did for months before finally emerging in whole form into the seance room to pass among the sitters), Traill Taylor, in *The Medium and the Daybreak* (13 Dec 1872) spoke for many when he wrote that “in the opinion of those who have seen the spirit... it too often bears a decidedly unpleasant resemblance to the medium. No means can be taken to test the genuineness of the differences between the two entities, for, by a pretty fiction, the spectators... are presumed to be invited as private guests to the residence of the medium, and no person could be guilty of such rudeness as to ‘test the spirit.’”

7. Crookes remarked on the red shawl in his published reports on the Cook-King experiments, during which he took some 44 photographs of the medium. (See RG Medhurst, ed., *Crookes and the Spirit World*, Souvenir 1972, p.138.) Only a handful of these have survived: accounts vary as to whether he destroyed the rest shortly before his death, or whether others did so shortly after it. One extant picture purports to show Florence Cook, slumped on the floor against a chair and apparently

unconscious, with Katie King, wrapped all in white, standing behind. Much has properly been made of the alleged materialisation’s face being covered, so that it is impossible to tell if the figure is not, say, a dressmaker’s mannikin; true believers maintain this is because the materialisation is incomplete, ignoring the tradition established by many mediums that it is the face of a spirit (or a mask-like edition thereof) that appears first. To this spiritualistic infidel the picture is interesting for another reason. Plainly no tapes, chains, ropes or other bonds sealed or otherwise were holding the medium in her chair when the magnesium flares ignited. It appears Crookes so trusted his subject that he did not deem such precautions necessary and, having locked the *second door* into the library used as a cabinet, allowed Cook to enter and arrange herself – lying “down upon the floor, with her head upon a pillow” (*loc cit*). Why should Crookes think he held the only key to that door?

8. CM Davies, *Mystic London* (London 1913, p.317), quoted by Hall, p.54.

9. *The Spiritualist*, 15 May 1874, p.230; quoted by Hall, p.76. Some hilarity might be had from the precision of this resemblance. While under the Holmes’s tutelage, at a séance at 16 Old Quebec St on 14 December 1872, Cook ‘materialised’ the face (only) of

Katie King at the cabinet’s aperture. On this occasion the ‘spirit’ had the good grace actually to apologize for looking so like its medium. And during the later full-form phase of King materialisations, Emily Kislignbury recalled in 1878, at one sitting the King form “arrayed itself in a garment recognised as the property of Florence Cook”. Miss Kislignbury wrote: “Katie King made full confession and excused her delinquency by saying that the power had not been very strong and she had saved herself trouble by using things belonging to the medium.” (Hall, p.20) Kislignbury’s tranquil faith in the spirit’s reality seems to have remained undisturbed.

10. CM Davies, *op cit*, p.318, quoted by Brandon, *op cit*, page 118. The chamber used for the final Hackney sittings (30 April to 21 May 1874) was divided by folding doors; the part used as a cabinet had a second door leading to a passage and the kitchen stairs, “and so”, in Davies’s words, “with the universe of space in general.” The implication is obvious. Whether a servant girl would be deemed sufficiently trustworthy by a socially-climbing family like the Cooks is a rather more moot point.

11. *The Spiritualist*, 3 April 1874; reproduced in Medhurst, *op cit*, pp.135–6.

12. *The Spiritualist*, 5 June

1874; reproduced in Medhurst, *op cit*, p.140.

13. Quoted without attribution by AS & J Berger, *Encyclopedia of Parapsychology and Psychological Research* (New York: Paragon House 1991), p.78.

14. See Hall, pp.113-4, for a summary of Florence Cook’s final letter to Blackburn written at the end of 1874 or beginning of 1875. The phrase “under the rose” derives from a line in the poem *Love in a Village* by Isaac Bickerstaffe (1735–1812): “We all love a pretty girl – under the rose.”

15. Crookes’s contemporary Sir William Ramsay said of him: “He’s so short-sighted that, despite his unquestioned honesty, he cannot be trusted in what he tells you he has seen.” Quoted by MH Coleman, “William Crookes to Charles Blackburn: Another Letter”, *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, Vol 47 No 759 (March 1974), p.310.

16. Florence Marryat, *There is no Death* (London: Psychic Book Club, 1917; p.140); cited by Hall, p.67.

17. See Hall, Ch Six (p.99-108) for how these revelations eventually came to light.

18. See URL: <http://www.mintchaos.com/mercuriosity/archives/000625.shtm>. The post is dated 14 October 2002 and is signed ‘Ned’.

# Invitation to Elfland

Elves and fairies are usually considered to be part of our folkloric and literary heritage, not creatures we might actually meet. MOYRA DOORLY certainly thought so until, living on a Scottish Island, she had a series of unnerving encounters with the Little People. Illustrations by JOHN BUERLING.

**T**inkerbell has a lot to answer for, as have the gossamer winged creations that flutter among the flowers in children's story-books and the saccharine-coated characters of Walt Disney films. All these have played a part in relegating fairies to the realm of whimsy, which is why contemporary folklorists, Pagans and those who claim to have seen them avoid using the word. Instead the term 'faery' is preferred, or 'elfin race', or 'longaevi' – anything but fairy.

As someone who belongs to the third category and claims to have seen them, I prefer 'nature spirits' for two reasons. Firstly, because in all my encounters with them I saw nothing resembling Tinkerbell, (although my partner at the time claims to have seen some very small sylph-like beings flitting among the flowers on a hot summer afternoon) and secondly, because this

term has a distancing effect – which for someone who was actually invited to go and live in Elfland and turned down the offer, is a necessary safeguard. For they have the power to enchant, which is where their danger lies.

In *Paradise Lost* (1:780) when the belated peasant stumbles upon the faery elves at their midnight revels by a forest-side or fountain, "At once with joy and fear his heart rebounds" while, "they, on their mirth and dance intent, with jocund music charm his ear."

In the old tales the combination of joy and fear is a common reaction among those who stumble inadvertently into Elfland. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word panic derives from the Greek word 'panikos' and describes the reaction of those who stumble upon the god Pan in the woods and glades and run away in terror. (see FT141:30-31; FT148: 54; FT153:54) That was my first reaction – to run away. It couldn't be true, I remember thinking. Fauns, elves, imps, fairies, dwarfs, giants,

Robin Goodfellow, Jack o' the Green and all the rest aren't supposed to exist in the modern age.

There have been many attempts to explain

## Nature spirits were relegated to the realms of fancy

the imaginative demise of the nature spirits and many predictions of their eventual departure from the world. Many commentators point the finger at the Church for its view that belief in nature spirits was a remnant of Paganism and for its attempts to stamp this out. Chaucer's Wife of Bath observes that in the time of King Arthur,

"This was a land brim-full of faery folk.

The Elf-Queen and her courtiers joined and broke

Their elfin dance on many a green mead ..."

"...But no-one now sees fairies any more,

For now the saintly charity and prayer  
Of holy friars seem to have purged the air;"

However belief in them survived long enough to condemn a woman in 1576 to burning at the stake in Edinburgh for 'repairing with' the faeries and the 'Queen of Elfland', and it continued despite serious attempts to demonise them during the post-Reformation period. In the *Daemonologie*, III, i, King James I claims,

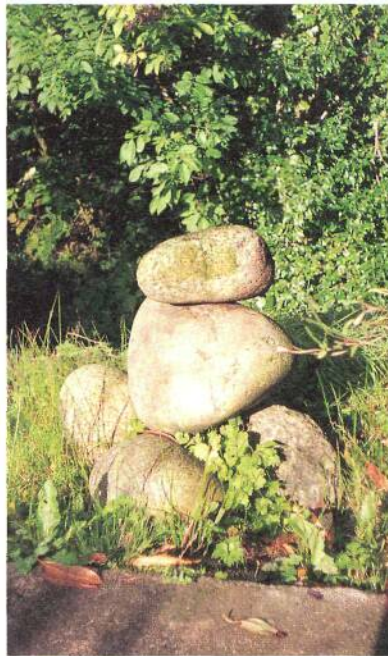
"That kinde of Devils conversing in the earth may be divided in foure different kindes... the fourth is these kindes of spirities that are called vulgarlie the Fayries".

A darkening of superstition during this period severely tainted the image of the nature spirits, according to CS Lewis. Industrialisation and increasing human domination of the natural world also meant that the

question of whether, for example, the elves could turn milk sour became less important. Our connection with them was severed and they were relegated to the realms of fancy and children's fiction. In the 20th century their significance was noted by psychotherapists and anthropologists who claimed that fairy tale themes and characters could help the human being journeying into his or her own inner world. By studying Elfland and the adventures that occurred there, the individual would be better equipped in the search for the self. No longer were the elves to be encountered deep in the forest but in the deepest recesses of the human unconscious.

**A** local folklore expert on Arran, the Scottish island where I was living when I encountered the nature spirits, said that the fairies left when electricity came. There's some truth in this claim. The techniques I practised for several months before the first encounter were very simple but required considerable patience and perseverance. They were also, I found out later, almost identical to the technique involved in developing 'night vision', which must have been a necessary skill before the





MOIRA DOORLY

LEFT: Shrine built by the author for the Little People.

Opportunities for such encounters simply do not exist as they once did.

After months of practice of what I thought was simple meditation, and with no clear aim, the first encounter happened. It was a mild summer evening in the garden of a house where a stream flowed from a forested hillside. Suddenly there was a soft, silvery light and a procession of little figures led by a faun walked up the bank from the stream. The faun was small – about 3ft (90cm) tall – and seemed pleased with himself. I saw short legs strutting with pride and heard tiny hooves clip-clopping on the paving stones. He had horns too, about 6in (15cm) long, and a wrinkled face. He could have come straight out of a book of fairy tales or myths.

The little faun brushed past me and I panicked and ran back to the house where I was hugely relieved to find the television on and the news reporting a meeting of European Union heads of state. This is reality, I remember deciding, while only barely able to suppress my excitement. What if? What if? There was one way to settle the matter – ask my partner, Peter, if he could see them too.

And he did, and he seemed equally shocked as he described a little creature that was definitely male and had horns, shaggy legs and hooves. It had been fussing about down by the stream and appeared quite agitated, Peter said, as if some kind of male rivalry issue had been involved. There had been other little beings there too, but they weren't clear enough to see properly.

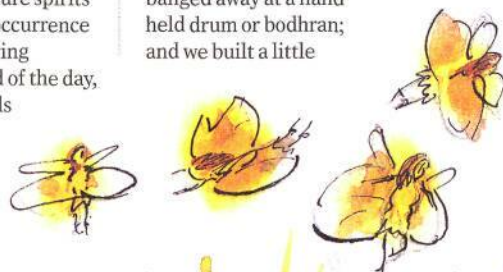
This was just the beginning, and more encounters followed, which in our head-spinning excitement we did everything to encourage. We left oats and milk out for them because this was supposed to be traditional in the West Highlands; Peter played his bagpipes for them while I banged away at a hand held drum or bodhran; and we built a little

darkness was illuminated with so much electric light.

The fairies didn't leave, of course. What happened was that people stopped being able to see them; and to see them you have to be able to see without looking. The technique I practised is similar to that required to see the hidden holographic images in Magic Eye pictures. It involves detaching the vision from the object by focusing beyond it and allowing the mind to rest. On a pitch black, moonless night, the aim is not to frantically look for the path ahead but to defocus the eyes and wait for the vague shapes of things to emerge. Rest long and patiently enough and the rocks, trees and hedges will slowly reveal themselves and a slow but safe progress can be made home.

This surely goes some way to explaining the disappearance of the elves in the modern age. The world is filled with noise, artificial light and activity which stimulate the senses rather than allowing them to rest – the very opposite of the state required for such

seeing. Stumbling upon nature spirits by accident is a common occurrence in folklore, especially during journeys home at the end of the day, and the person often feels that he or she has intruded upon the scene.



## Fairy Types

Tradition suggests that if the Faeries could be put into categories, they would fall into three broad groups –

\*\*\*\* The 'High Faeries', who were well known in the Middle Ages. They dress in velvet and gold, wear glittering jewellery and live in fabulous castles, complete with knights on white steeds and armies with trumpets and banners.

\*\*\*\* The 'Little People', who are the imps, pixies, brownies, sprites, fauns, dwarves and leprechauns who inhabit woodland and dale and are most often met by those who work on the land. Some

may be helpful while others are known for their mischief-making.

\*\*\*\* The 'Bugbears', who are best avoided. They include kelpies who lure travellers into lakes where they drown; hags who linger where death is imminent; banshees whose terrible screams foretell doom; and a host of spirits who inhabit stagnant pools and bog land and encourage passers-by to lose their way.



## Dos and Don'ts

Don't ever ask a nature spirit's name. This is bad manners and, besides, they won't tell you. It is said that knowledge of a faery name by another confers

power over the faery on that person. Never eat their food, even when offered, because something may be asked for in return. Accepting the faery cake may put you under an obligation to them.

Some nature spirits dislike being disturbed by humans or even being seen by them. Never intrude. If they run from you, don't give chase and if they ask you to leave, go.

Never put a faery down or make comparisons that put them in a bad light. Claiming, for instance, that a child is fairer than a faery is certain to provoke their anger.

Some traditions warn of even speaking of the faeries.

Above all, tread lightly.

Or stay away. An Irish lady was asked if she believed in the little people. Her reply was that she didn't believe in them but that she knew they were there. Maybe she had the best idea.

shrine beside the stream in honour of them. The aim was to build many more at strategic places all over the island, but we only managed three more.

A little elf boy soon turned up and started coming into the house. I remember standing in the sitting room while a small figure dressed in mottled greens and browns looked up at me with an expression of sinister mirth. If he had been a child, his height would have put him at around six years old, but he bore no resemblance to any child I have ever met. His face, which was unusually long and well defined, seemed the face of one who had lived for a thousand years.

The first indication that we were meddling in matters beyond our experience and knowledge came when I followed a second procession of nature spirits along the

## We were meddling in matters beyond our experience

stream. These were very tall and slender and seemed to move without moving. They were dressed in wildly striped clothes of browns and greens, which was why I called them 'stripies', and had lots of dull greyish hair. Also in the procession were a number of chattering and dancing imps in bright green who pulled me along while offering me clothes like the 'stripies' which I wouldn't put on, although I'm not sure why.

We were soon inside a hall which looked as if it had been hewn out of rock. There was a long table where preparations for a meal had been made. Again the imps tried to make me

change my clothes but I refused. The stripies stood very still, as if in anticipation. Perhaps they were waiting to see if I would sit at their table, which I couldn't bring myself to do. Then I heard the words: "You are the first person to come this way for 200 years. Come and be with us."

At that I turned away and found myself back at the stream. My impression was that there was nothing in the stripies to 'connect with', that there was something 'absent' about them and an emptiness in their languorous, dreamy air. My impulse was not to linger in their presence or at their table. I might forget too much, too quickly.

Traditional folklore makes it clear that it is dangerous to meddle with the faerie folk. People who stray inadvertently into Faery land rarely return unscathed, if they return at all. The grandmothers must have



## Iceland: where elves are citizens

According to Iceland's Tourist Board, 80 per cent of Icelanders believe in elves. This is more than an attempt to attract tourists to the land of fire and ice, since 25 per cent of the population of Hafnarfjordur, Iceland's second largest port, actually claim to have seen them.

The local authority in Hafnarfjordur has a set-aside policy for elves, the largest clan of the 'Huldafolk' or 'hidden people'. Land is designated in the town as being of special importance to elves and cannot be built on. Throughout Iceland, whenever a building or underground cable-laying project is suffering disturbances which indicate that the elves are upset, an elf medium is called in to negotiate. Pipelines have had to be re-routed and buildings re-sited as a result.

## Fairy forests

The Forestry Commission has 794,000 hectares of plantation forest in the UK. Currently, timber prices are at rock bottom and likely to stay there for the foreseeable future. Yet harvesting of timber is set to increase, because the plantations are now mature. Most forestry projects involve replanting native woodland to benefit wildlife and for recreational purposes. Planted forests have only commercial value, and a low one at present.

But the Forestry Commission has created something wonderful without realising it. Deep within its plantations lie secret wonderlands where nature spirits



have been given a free hand since the trees were planted some thirty years ago.

Because no-one goes there and the plantations are largely left alone, trees rot where they fall; moss grows several feet thick without being trampled by human feet; and vegetation creeps into clearings at its own pace. In these places the presence of the elves is almost tangible and the air vibrates with their intensity

Would it cost anything to set these areas aside and leave them alone, to allow the work to continue without human interference?

The elves would probably not thank us for this gesture. Why should they, and would it matter? It is enough, surely, to know that they are there.

encouraging the encounters and ought to pull back. This we tried to do, although it took some effort. We dismantled the shrines and avoided going near the stream, but every so often came the desire to walk in the forest in the hope of catching just one more glimpse

On one such walk I heard a strange singing and found out later that there were others who had heard singing in the forest (see FT:152:53). I also saw the 'fairy lights' reported by some of the older people on the island, which appeared as balls of light and hovered on the air before shooting off at great speed to disappear among the distant trees. They were small, about 4 or 6 in (10-15cm) in diameter, and very bright. They made no sound but sometimes made little dances in the air before flying away.

When early autumn came I caught sight of another group, which I called the 'stiks' because they looked like trees that have been stripped of their leaves and left stark and bare. They weren't friendly at all and I remember that several of them came and stood around me, willing me to leave. I didn't linger, not after they said:

"Why are you here? This is no place for you."

And when the late autumn came another group appeared which I dubbed the 'misties'. A visitor to a late autumn forest might find him or herself in a place where the mist seems colder and denser than before, where it barely drifts on the air and where the way forward might be obscured for a while. That is where the misties will be, and their presence might induce a mild rush of fear and stumbling. But to me they gave the impression of being neither friendly nor hostile, their effect being only to confuse temporarily.

There were no more encounters on the island after that. Perhaps when late autumn turned to winter, when the first frost had appeared and shallow puddles had turned to ice, we might have encountered (you've guessed it) the

'frosties'. But we didn't.

Since then I have caught only occasional glimpses of the nature spirits, among the potted plants on a friend's balcony overlooking a busy London street, or in a city park. Wherever nature is, so are they, our unacknowledged fellow citizens. And yet in the modern age they have all but disappeared from view, their invisibility a consequence of both the prevailing materialist and scientific worldview and the bad press they have received. Yet they go about their business as ever.

Considering my desire to end the encounters, and the fact that we dismantled the shrines, it may seem a little odd to be proposing a set-aside policy for elves. (see panel above). But the idea is to challenge the situation in which the natural world is either ruthlessly exploited or else managed beyond recognition. 'Set Aside for Elves' would mean leaving nature, and the nature spirits, alone. The irony is that forestry plantations are man-made and yet because they are untouched after planting, nature is able to create within them something that is almost beyond the imagination, and in no longer than the span of a generation.

Nature has no obligation to us, but we have an obligation to nature. We are obliged to consider the consequences of our actions, nature isn't. We need forests but forests don't need us. Fish need clean rivers and rivers need fish. We need clean rivers but rivers don't need us.

The best offering we could make to the natural world would be to allow nature to take its course. **FT**



known more than they realised when they whispered that the oddball of the neighbourhood was 'away with the fairies'. Perhaps he or she had wandered too far into the hillside one day and never properly returned.

Peter then reported that he too had been asked to go and be with them, and this prompted a serious discussion as to whether we had been rash in

### AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



**MOYRA DOORLY** has written for the *Guardian*, *New Statesman* and *Tatler*. She is currently exploring the connection between the architecture of space and the architecture of sacred buildings.



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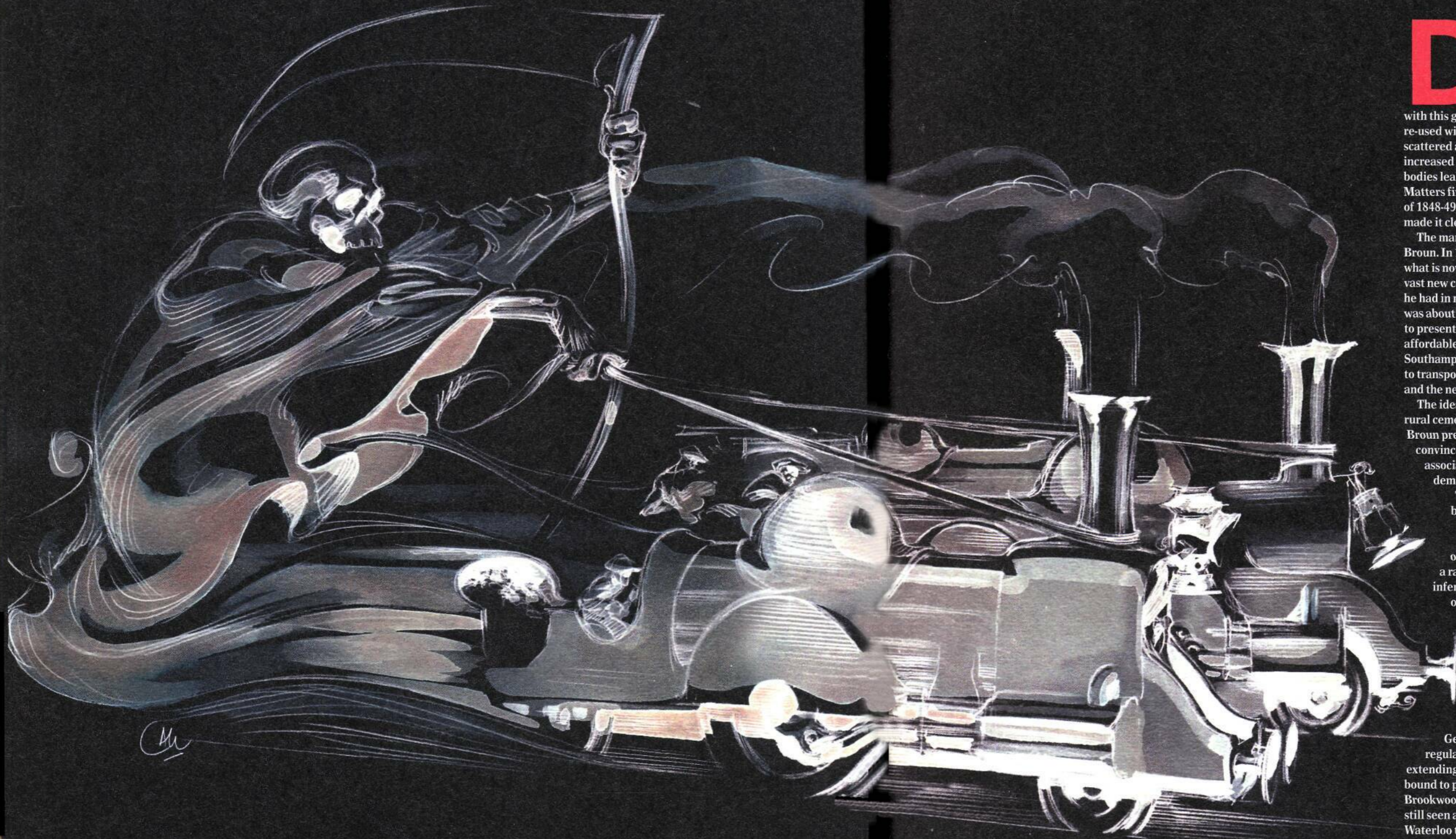
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# RIDING THE

# DEATH LINE

For bereaved Londoners in 1850, finding a cemetery where their loved ones could be left to rest in peace was no easy matter. **PAUL SLADE** buys a one-way ticket for the world's first funeral line. Main illustration by **ALEX SEVERIN**.



**D**uring the first half of the 19th century, the capital's population had more than doubled and the number of London corpses requiring disposal was growing almost as fast. Cemetery space in the city had spectacularly failed to keep pace with this growth. This led to graves being desecrated and re-used with alarming regularity, disinterred bones left scattered across the churchyard grass and a greatly increased risk of disease as material from decomposing bodies leaked into nearby drinking wells and springs. Matters finally came to a head with the cholera outbreak of 1848-49, which killed nearly 15,000 Londoners and made it clear that drastic action was needed.

The man who came up with the answer was Sir Richard Broun. In 1849, he proposed buying a huge tract of land at what is now the Surrey village of Brookwood to build a vast new cemetery for London's dead. The 2,000-acre plot he had in mind – soon dubbed “London's Necropolis” – was about 25 miles (40km) from the city, far enough away to present no health hazard and cheap enough to allow for affordable burials. The railway line from Waterloo to Southampton, Broun realised, could offer a practical way to transport coffins and mourners alike between London and the new cemetery.

The idea of using the railways to link London to the new rural cemeteries had been in the air for some years when Broun presented his plan, but not everyone was convinced. Many thought the clamour and bustle they associated with train travel would not suit the dignity demanded of a Christian funeral.

There were other fears too. In 1842, questioned by a House of Commons Select Committee, Bishop of London Charles Blomfield said he thought respectable mourners would find it offensive to see their loved ones' coffins sharing a railway carriage with those of their moral inferiors. “It may sometimes happen that persons of opposite characters might be carried in the same conveyance,” he warned. “For instance, the body of some profligate spendthrift might be placed in a conveyance with the body of some respectable member of the church, which would shock the feelings of his friends.”

It is worth remembering that, in 1842, train travel itself was still a novelty. George Stephenson had introduced the first regular passenger service as recently as 1830, and extending this noisy innovation to funeral traffic was bound to prove controversial. John Clarke, author of *The Brookwood Necropolis Railway*, says: “Train travel was still seen as revolutionary. The first through train from Waterloo to Southampton ran in 1838, which is the date of



that route being fully opened. Waterloo itself was only completed in 1848, and the first Necropolis Station came along just six years after that. Arguably, at that time, it was a major addition to the service.”

Despite a widespread suspicion of rail travel, MPs took Broun’s idea seriously and, in June 1852, they passed an Act of Parliament creating The London Necropolis and National Mausoleum Company, a name later shortened to The London Necropolis Company. London & South Western Railway became LNC’s partners in the scheme, and looked forward to making an estimated £40,000 a year from the extra fares they believed the service would generate. LNC bought 2,000 acres of Woking Common land from Lord Onslow, and set aside 500 acres of that for the cemetery’s initial stage.

Several delicate problems, though, remained to be solved. L&SWR’s shareholders had already decided that they did not want the passenger stock they were lending to LNC mixed up with the carriages used on their mainstream passenger services. If L&SWR’s existing customers suspected they were being asked to travel in carriages which had earlier been hooked to a funeral train, the directors feared, they would stay away in droves. It was decided, therefore, that the Necropolis trains would have to be run as an entirely separate service, with its own dedicated rolling stock and timetable.

The Bishop of London’s worries were addressed by ensuring that every Necropolis train would offer six distinct categories of accommodation, and that dead passengers would be given just as wide a choice as their live companions.

The first distinction was between conformist funeral parties and non-conformist ones. In a train carrying two hearse cars, for example, one would be reserved for the Church of England’s dead, and the other for everyone else. The passenger carriages would be allocated on the same principle, and

## The world’s first funeral train was ready to roll

each hearse car yoked to the appropriate passenger section. Following this idea through, LNC took care to plan for two stations at Brookwood. One would serve the conformist area on the sunny south side of the cemetery, the other the non-conformist graves on its chilly north side.

The second distinction depended not on what religion you professed, but on

ABOVE: The proposed London Necropolis and National Mausoleum in an engraving from 1852.

BELOW: The cover of an 1899 London Necropolis Company brochure showing the cemetery and a funeral train.

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP: Westminster Bridge Road Station c. 1902. At left, First Class platform and waiting rooms can be seen. A glass screen protects the toffs from seeing the Third Class platform and caretaker’s flat, at right.

whether you bought a First Class, Second Class or Third Class ticket. Each class offered a few more home comforts than the one below it, and each cost a great deal more than the last. The dead were no less segregated than the living – coffin accommodation was divided into three classes too, with each hearse car split into three sections of four coffin cells each. LNC justified the higher fares it charged for First Class coffin accommodation by pointing to the higher degree of decoration provided on its First Class coffin cell doors and the greater degree of care which First Class coffins were given at both ends of the journey (see *Dear departed*, opposite).

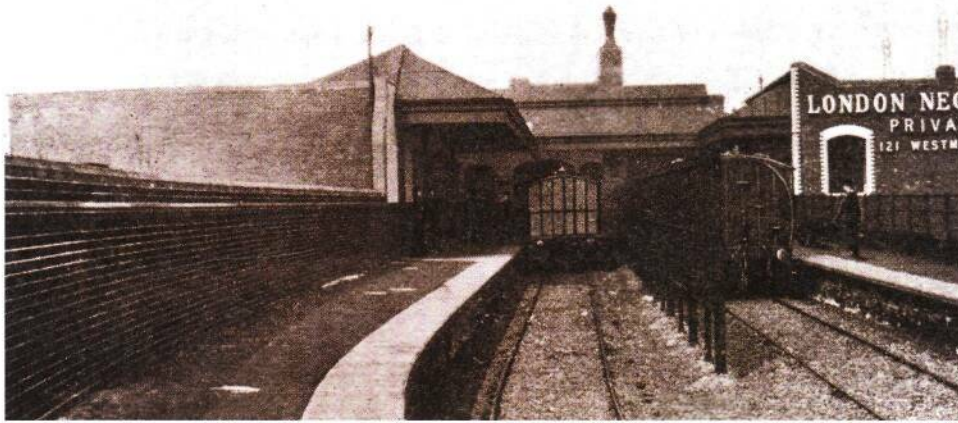
Throughout 1854, work to prepare the new service proceeded at a frantic pace. Work on designing and building a London terminus just outside Waterloo for the service started in March of that year. By July, the two cemetery stations were complete. The first sections of branch line track to take trains off the main line and through Brookwood’s grounds were laid in September. In October, the London terminus was completed and the first two custom-built hearse cars ordered. Timetables were drawn up allowing for a daily service between London and Brookwood (Sundays included) and detailed rules devised for passengers and corpses of every class. On 7 November 1854, Brookwood’s grounds were consecrated. Six days later, the world’s first funeral train was ready to roll.

### CITY OF THE DEAD

When LNC drew up its original plans for Brookwood, it hoped to create a cemetery big enough to take all of London’s dead for centuries to come. In the words of Andrew Martin, author of the Brookwood-set thriller *The Necropolis Railway*, “the idea was that it would take everyone who died in London. It would simply be an



JOHN W. CLARKE COLLECTION



alternative London—for the dead.”

While LNC never came remotely close to fulfilling that ambition, it did continue to expand the Necropolis service throughout its first 50 years. In 1855, cellars were added to the two cemetery stations, allowing their existing coffin reception areas to be turned into Third Class waiting rooms. In 1864, a brand-new mainline station called Brookwood was opened, which stood directly opposite the cemetery’s entrance and allowed normal passenger trains to stop there. In 1899, two larger coffin vans were built for the service, each capable of carrying 24 coffins instead of the original 12.

This last development raises the

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## DEAR DEPARTED THE BENEFITS OF FIRST CLASS

For anyone who could afford it, First Class travel on the Necropolis trains conferred some very definite privileges. First Class passengers were relentlessly pampered at every stage of the journey, and constantly protected from having to mix with the lower orders.

To illustrate the difference between the various classes of travel available, we’ve taken the example of a 1903 Necropolis run and assumed the funeral services involved would have taken place at Brookwood rather than in London. In cases like

this, a horse-drawn hearse would usually collect the body from the deceased’s family home and take it directly to LNC’s London terminus as part of a funeral procession. LNC chaplains would travel down on the train and conduct whatever services were required at Brookwood.

### 1 AT WESTMINSTER BRIDGE ROAD

**I) FIRST CLASS PASSENGERS:** First Class funeral parties were asked to arrive at the LNC’s Westminster Bridge Road terminus at least 10 minutes ahead of the train’s scheduled 11:55am departure time. Mourners would be directed to one of the station’s private waiting rooms, while the day’s First Class coffins were hoisted one by one to platform level by lift. When the coffin was ready for loading, the mourners were offered the option of gathering on the First Class platform to watch it being slotted into a First Class compartment in the appropriate hearse carriage. When the coffin was safely on board, the funeral party accompanying it would be shown to their own private compartment on the train. The First Class fare in 1903 was six shillings for mourners (return) and £1 for coffins (single).

**II) THIRD CLASS PASSENGERS:** Third Class funeral parties would have to turn up at Westminster Bridge Road half an hour before departure time, where they would wait in a communal waiting room on the Third Class platform. An opaque glass screen shielded this platform from the view of the toffs opposite. Third Class mourners were not allowed to watch “their” coffin being loaded into its Third Class compartment. The fare for Third Class travel in 1903 was two shillings for mourners and two shillings and sixpence for coffins. Third Class travel to Brookwood may have been basic, but at least it offered the poor an affordable way to bury their dead promptly. When only more expensive conventional funerals had been available, poor families would often keep the corpse at home for over a week while they scraped together the undertaker’s fees.

### 2 IN TRANSIT

The Necropolis train left Westminster Bridge Road at 11:55am and was scheduled to arrive at Brookwood at 12:52pm. This journey time of 57 minutes was one of the few features of the Necropolis train which was exactly the same for passengers of all classes.

### 3 AT BROOKWOOD

**I) FIRST CLASS PASSENGERS:** The train would pull off the mainline at Necropolis

Junction and run onto the single-track line taking it through the cemetery itself. Proceeding at a respectful walking pace, its first stop would be North Station. First Class passengers with bodies of non-conformists to bury would be taken to the chapel near North Station, while the appropriate coffin was loaded onto a hand bier for the same trip. A funeral service could then be held at the chapel before committal at the graveside. Meanwhile, the train would proceed to South Station, where Anglican funeral parties would go through the same procedure.

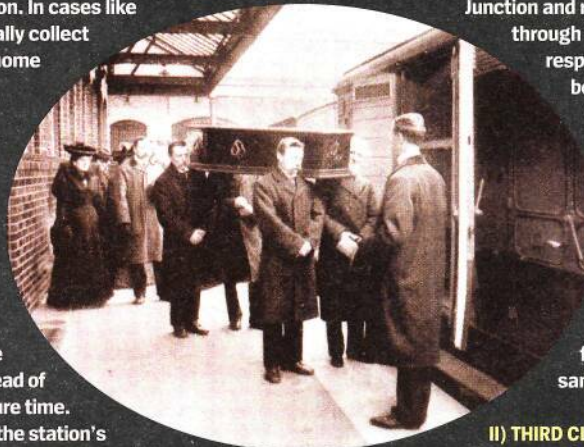
### II) THIRD CLASS PASSENGERS:

Non-conformist Third Class funeral parties would also be directed to the chapel, where a single service would be said over all the Third Class coffins of non-conformists from that particular train. However, it is worth pointing out that even a Third Class (or ‘pauper class’) body got a plot to itself at Brookwood, as opposed to the communal pit to which it would have been consigned at many other cemeteries of the time.

### 4 THE RETURN JOURNEY

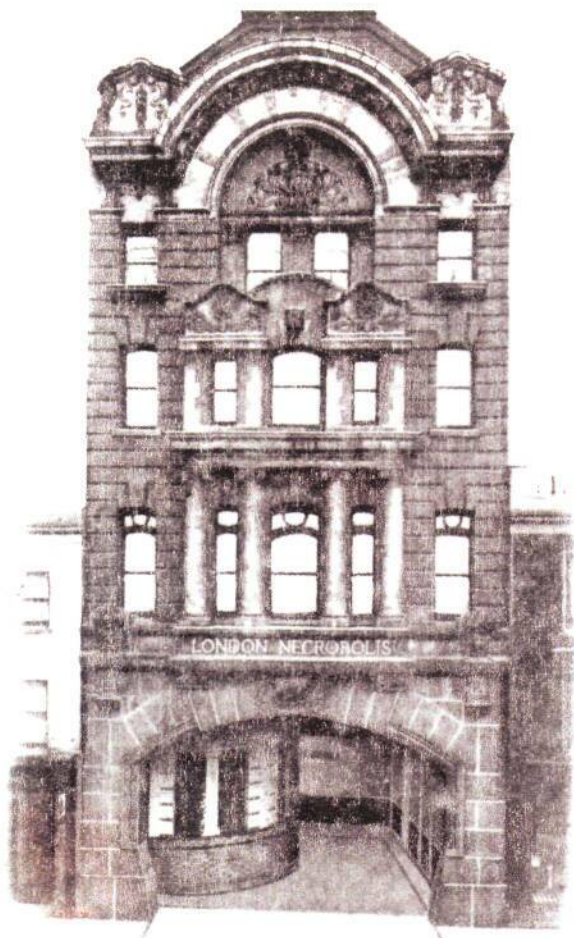
**I) FIRST CLASS PASSENGERS:** After the committal service, mourners could either enjoy a pleasant walk through Brookwood’s grounds, or return directly to their station, where they could wait in a private room for the train to take them back to London. The train was scheduled to leave Brookwood at 2:35pm, allowing mourners time to enjoy lunch or a drink in the station’s refreshment room. If all went according to plan, they would be back at Westminster Bridge Road at 3:26pm.

**II) THIRD CLASS PASSENGERS:** Third Class passengers would also return to the station after their own committal services, but had to share a communal waiting room when they got there. It is not clear whether Third Class passengers were allowed to use the stations’ refreshment rooms.



JOHN M. CLARKE COLLECTION

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PAUL SLAIDE

question of how many corpses the Necropolis train might have carried when fully-loaded. First, let's consider the original hearse cars, each of which had a capacity of 12 coffin cells. According to Clarke, "there could have been anywhere between four and eight 12-coffin hearse carriages provided at various dates after 1854, and it's quite conceivable that all of those would have been used on a single train. So far, the highest number of funerals we've discovered for a particular date is over 60."

When it comes to the 24-coffin cars, the picture is slightly clearer. We know that no more than two hearse vans were

used on any Necropolis service after 1899, which suggests a maximum load from that date onwards of 48 coffins per train.

**It was known affectionately as the "stiffs' express"**

LEFT: Entrance to Westminster Bridge Road Station, c. 1902.

RIGHT: the same, as of January 2003.

BELOW: Site of old King's Cross Cemetery Station, January 2003.

As people got used to the trains, they gradually came to accept them, even giving them affectionately tasteless nicknames such as "the dead meat train" or "the stiffs' express". For those working at Brookwood, the Necropolis trains were simply part of their normal working day. John Clarke recalls that one of his earliest contacts at Brookwood was "one of the old masons who used to work there. He made the point that when he worked in the masons' yard and the train was running, it wasn't anything special. It was just a way of life. It's extraordinary to us now, but it was very ordinary to him."

## STIFF COMPETITION LONDON'S OTHER FUNERAL TRAINS

**T**he Necropolis trains were not the only ones operating a regular funeral service from London to the surrounding countryside. Rival trains running between King's Cross and the Great Northern Cemetery at New Southgate started up in 1861, and continued for at least six years.

In this case, the partners running the trains were The Great Northern London Cemetery Company and The Great Northern Railway Company. The service worked from its own London station in Rufford Street, N1, which has since been demolished. The advantage it enjoyed over its Waterloo rival was

the fact that trains took only 15 minutes to travel the seven-and-a-quarter miles from King's Cross to the Great Northern Cemetery, against the 50 minutes which Necropolis trains were taking in the 1860s to reach Brookwood. At their peak, King's Cross services are thought to have run twice a week.

Like the LNC's two London stations, the King's Cross terminus had its own mortuary facilities and allowed mourners to pay their respects there. An article in the October 1954 issue of *The Railway Magazine* by RG Lucas says of the station: "With its wedge-shaped steeple and



PAUL SLAIDE

gothic arch windows, it might appear to be a disused chapel when seen from the line".

The King's Cross funeral trains ended some time between 1867

and 1873, by which time falling demand had made them unprofitable. The station at the cemetery end was demolished in about 1904.

# DEAD DRUNK ALCOHOL AND THE NECROPOLIS TRAINS

**O**ne controversial decision made by the London Necropolis Company was that the refreshment rooms at its cemetery stations should serve alcoholic drinks. It is said that each of these rooms had a sign above the bar reading: "Spirits served here". If so, no doubt the concession was appreciated by Brookwood's permanent residents!

There are several tales of drunken behaviour on and around the Necropolis trains, although the station bars were not always to blame. On one occasion in the 1850s, two mourners turned up at LNC's York Street station in such a state that the caretaker refused to let them board the train. A ticket collector on another Necropolis train found one group of passengers so drunk that they were dancing round their carriage

during the return journey to London.

Sometimes the staff got drunk too. On 12 January, 1867, the Necropolis train's driver enjoyed a liquid lunch while waiting for the day's funerals to be completed. When he reported back for duty, he was clearly incapable of driving the train, so the fireman had to take over and pilot it back to Waterloo. The driver was sacked. When the matter came to be

investigated, L&SWR suggested that the driver must have got drunk at one of the cemetery stations. LNC denied this, saying he had not been served on their premises, but had retired to a nearby public house instead. It was eventually decided that LNC would supply all future train crews with a free ploughman's lunch and a single pint of beer so they wouldn't be tempted to go to the pub.

## DECLINE AND FALL

The next big change in the service came when L&SWR realised that the LNC's York Street terminus was severely restricting its passenger services' access to Waterloo by creating a bottleneck there. If the growing rail company was going to build the extra passenger lines it needed at Waterloo, it would have to demolish York Street terminus first. But the LNC had a 999-year lease on the property, and that gave it the whip hand in all the negotiations that followed.

L&SWR did eventually persuade LNC to give up York Street, but only after agreeing to build a replacement station for the company, give it a new 999-year lease at a peppercorn rent, pay £12,000 in compensation for LNC's inconvenience, supply a new train for the Necropolis line and agree to accept LNC tickets for travel back to London on L&SWR's other, more expensive, services.

The discrepancy in ticket prices had arisen because LNC's fares were fixed

by the 1854 Act which created the company, and not increased again until 1939. By 1902, when LNC's replacement terminus opened, this had produced a situation where a First Class return ticket from Waterloo to Brookwood cost eight shillings on L&SWR's normal service, but only six shillings on the Necropolis trains. Golfers travelling from London to West Hill Golf Club, which stood right next to Brookwood's grounds, sometimes took advantage of this, dressing up as mourners to ride the Necropolis train down, and so pay a lower fare. The remains of a rough footpath from Brookwood Station to West Hill's clubhouse can still be seen at the cemetery, and Clarke believes it was cheapskate golfers who originally tramped it down.

The site selected for LNC's new London terminus was just behind Waterloo Station at 121 Westminster Bridge Road. Like York Street, the building was equipped with two mortuaries, caretaker's accommodation,

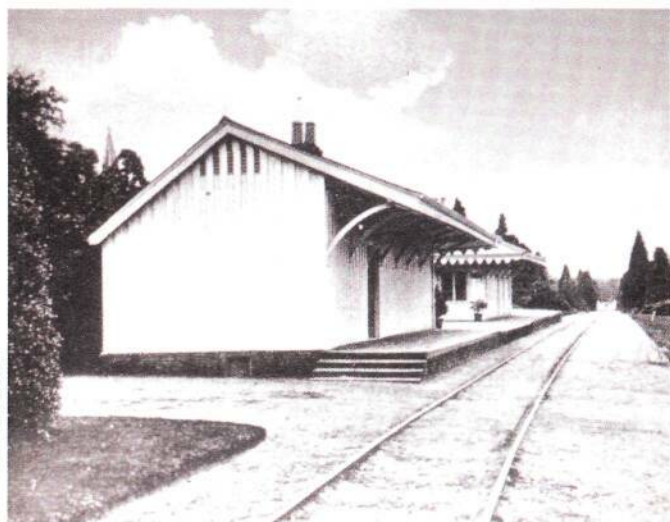
waiting rooms of various classes, workshops and all the usual station facilities. In the case of Westminster Bridge Road, however, L&SWR's enforced largess also made it possible to give the station its own mortuary chapel, where bodies could be laid in state for a while or funeral services arranged for mourners unable to make the trip to Brookwood. The new station opened for business in February 1902.

So, as the 20th century began, the Necropolis Railway looked like it was in pretty good shape. But even in the first 20 years of its operation, the number of people using Brookwood never came close to the hordes LNC had envisaged. Between 1854 and 1874, the cemetery averaged only 3,200 burials a year, accounting for less than 6.5 per cent of London's deaths at the time. Many of the 'missing' bodies would have gone instead to one of the 32 new London cemeteries opened during the same 20-year period.

In October 1900 the Necropolis

BELOW: The Necropolis train en route to Brookwood, passing Wimbledon, 25 June 1902.





TOP LEFT: North Station at Brookwood Necropolis, c. 1900.

TOP RIGHT: South Station and chapel at Brookwood Necropolis, 1930s.

BELOW: Ruins of LNR's Waterloo Bridge Road Station after the 1941 air raid.

21 June 1912, when a passenger train travelling from Manchester to Leeds was derailed near Hebden Bridge. A coffin containing the remains of Charles Horsfield was ejected from the brake van and its contents spilt onto the track. The next day's *Halifax Courier* reported: "The coffin was found all splintered and the corpse, though unmarked, was pinned under the debris and partly exposed". A rumour at the time (apparently untrue) insisted that Horsfield's body was one of those recovered after the sinking of the *Titanic* just 10 weeks earlier. It was not, in fact, until 1988 that British Rail announced it would no longer carry coffins.

In the 60-odd years since 1941, almost all physical evidence of the Necropolis Line has disappeared. The frontage of the Westminster Bridge Road station is still there, although the words "London Necropolis" which once appeared over its main entrance have gone. There's still a train service from Waterloo to Brookwood, but all the rail lines inside the cemetery were removed in about 1947.

## The German Luftwaffe delivered the death blow

the 1950s. The most likely procedure seems to be that the coffin would be loaded into the luggage space of a passenger service's brake car, the mourners would travel down in reserved compartments on the same train and everyone would transfer to waiting cars at Brookwood for the remainder of the ceremony.

Transporting the dead in this way was much more common than we now imagine, and many passenger rail services around the country sometimes carried coffins in their brake vans. This led to a particularly grisly spectacle on

Railway dropped Sunday services from its timetable. The frequency of the service declined steadily from that point onwards until, by the 1930s, it was running only once or twice a week. The London authorities, having provided all those new cemeteries, must take part of the blame. The introduction of the motor hearse, which made its English debut in 1909, did not help either. When the Necropolis Railway's final death-blow came, however, it was neither of these culprits that delivered it. That task fell to the German Luftwaffe.

### END OF THE LINE

April 16, 1941, was one of the worst nights of the London Blitz. Thousands of high explosive and incendiary bombs rained down on the city that night, starting over 2,000 fires and costing more than 1,000 Londoners their lives. Westminster Bridge Road, where the Necropolis train was berthed in its siding overnight, did not escape. By next morning, all that remained of the terminus was its platforms, First Class waiting rooms and office accommodation. The mortuary chapel, the workshops, the caretaker's flat and the station's entrance driveway were all destroyed. Reports written the day after the air raid describe the Necropolis train itself as being "wrecked" or "burnt out". LNC closed the station down, stopped running the Necropolis trains and waited for the end of the war to decide whether it should rebuild, but by 1945 the Necropolis Railway was no longer a commercial proposition. Even with compensation from the War Damage Commission, rebuilding the Westminster Bridge Road Station would have been expensive. Replacing the rolling stock destroyed or damaged in the raid would have cost money too, as would getting the cemetery's now-neglected line back up to scratch. Demand for the trains had all but disappeared even before the air raid, and it was clear this amount of investment could not be justified. The Necropolis Railway had breathed its last.

Although the Necropolis service ended in 1941, there is some evidence that single coffins continued to be conveyed to Brookwood by rail well into



# THE MEMBER FOR INDIA A NOTABLE NECROPOLIS FUNERAL

The Necropolis Railway played a part in many remarkable funerals during its 87-year history, but none more so than that of Charles Bradlaugh, MP.

Bradlaugh, who died in 1891, was a well-known freethinker and founder of the National Secular Society. Throughout his life, he championed then-unfashionable causes such as birth control, republicanism, atheism and anti-imperialism. He wrote for *The National Reformer* under the pen name 'Iconoclast', went on to edit the paper, and later published a controversial pamphlet favouring birth control which led to his arrest. He was sentenced to six months' imprisonment, but successfully appealed and had his conviction overturned on a legal technicality.

In 1880, Bradlaugh was elected as Liberal MP for



Northampton, but prevented from taking his seat in the Commons when other MPs claimed that his atheistic beliefs prevented him from properly taking the oath. Nothing daunted, Bradlaugh stood in three successive by-elections at

Northampton, won every one, and was eventually allowed to take his seat in 1886. Two years later, he succeeded in passing new legislation allowing atheists to affirm an oath in Parliament or the courts, rather than swearing by a god they did not believe in. He was still MP for Northampton when he died, by which time his strong support for Indian self-rule had won him the nickname "the Member for India".

Bradlaugh died on 30 January 30 1891, and his funeral was arranged for 3 February. The day before the funeral, his body was taken to LNC's York Street station, where it lay in a private mortuary overnight. Next morning, it was taken down to Brookwood by the normal Necropolis train. That morning, the streets around Waterloo were jammed with thousands of mourners hoping to attend Bradlaugh's funeral, and LNC

was forced to lay on three special afternoon trains to accommodate them.

Bradlaugh was buried in a family plot on the non-conformist north side of the cemetery. Many of London's resident Indian population were at the graveside to pay their respects, including Mohandas Gandhi, then just 21 years old and studying law at University College, London. Gandhi later reported overhearing a noisy row while waiting for his return train at North Station, where he found an atheist and a clergyman deep in furious debate.

A bronze bust of Bradlaugh was bought by public subscription and placed on his grave. In a bizarre postscript, however, this bust was stolen on 12 September, 1938, the night before a group from the World Union of Freethinkers was due to visit the grave.

JOHN M. CLARKE COLLECTION

The two cemetery stations survived for a while as refreshment bars, but both have now been demolished. North Station (by then North Bar) was closed around 1956 and demolished in the early 1960s because of dry rot. South Station (South Bar) was closed in about 1967 and used as a mortuary and storage building for the next five years. In September 1972, it was badly damaged in a fire and bulldozed soon after. All that remains of the two cemetery stations is their platforms, complete with the characteristic dip in their trackside edges to help LNC staff unload coffins from the hearse vans' bottom shelves.

The two stations' chapels have also survived. South Station Chapel has been carefully restored by the St Edward Brotherhood, an orthodox order of monks who worship at the chapel and maintain a shrine there containing the bones of St Edward the Martyr. The Brookwood Cemetery Society conducts regular walking tours of the cemetery, following the route of its old railway line and pointing out the odd bit of track hardware which remains.

The Necropolis Railway continues to exert a strong hold on writers'

imaginings. The first book to tackle the subject in recent years was Basil Copper's *Necropolis*, a 1980 gothic novel which uses the funeral trains as its setting. The first edition of John Clarke's history of the service followed in 1983 and Andrew Martin's murder mystery in 2002.

Clarke first became fascinated by the railway in the mid-1970s, when his interest in the First World War led him to visit Brookwood's Commonwealth War Graves section. Strolling round the cemetery at random, he chanced on the remains of North Station, and wondered what a railway platform was doing in the middle of a cemetery. From that moment onwards, he was hooked. "It was the unusual nature of the railway that drew me in," he says. "It was the first railway funeral service in the world and, as far as I'm aware, it was the one that lasted the longest."

Andrew Martin's interest was sparked when researching Waterloo Station for his 'Tube Talk' column in the *London Evening Standard*. "I bought a copy of the *Oxford Companion to British Railway History*, and I came across it in there," he recalls. "All the time I was writing 'Tube

Talk', I kept on coming back to it. It was so moody and so atmospheric. The whole thing seemed to have been invented exactly so that someone could write a novel about it. But, of course, it was very logical. It remains logical. I think it would be rather nice to be carried to your last resting place on a train." **FT**

## CEMETERY TOURS

The Brookwood Cemetery Society offers regular guided tours, including one which follows the route of the old rail line. For details, see [www.tbcs.org.uk](http://www.tbcs.org.uk), or phone Margaret Hobbs on 01344 891041.

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



**PAUL SLADE** is a freelance journalist who has spent the past 20 years writing about personal finance. Death makes a very pleasant change. This is his first article for FT.

## RECOMMENDED READING

**Basil Copper** *Necropolis* (Sphere, 1981).  
**Andrew Martin** *The Necropolis Railway* (Faber & Faber, 2002).

## SOURCES

In writing this article, I have drawn heavily on the information in John M Clarke's *The Brookwood Necropolis Railway* (Oakwood Press, 1995). It's an excellent history of the trains, and anyone interested in the subject

should have a copy. The book is priced at £8.95, and available from [www.oakwood-press.dial.pipex.com](http://www.oakwood-press.dial.pipex.com) or 01291 650444.

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# forum



## Atlantis welcomes...

Do you ever wish you could discover Atlantis? **ANDREW KORN** reveals how, and that you too can do the same!



**ANDREW KORN** is a freelance journalist, editor and consultant specialising in information technology, but to be honest he finds mythology and ancient history more fun.

**A**tlantis is the legend that keeps on giving. Schliemann found Troy, but the glory of discovering lost Atlantis can be shared by all. Unlike more conventional archaeology, finding Atlantis is a game the whole family can play. First locate some monumental ruins that can't be attributed to a well-known culture (Ancient Egypt, Rome, the Klingon Empire). Next, link to some ancient catastrophe – flooding is best, but any unexplained depopulation will do fine. Finally, “prove” your hypothesis by listing all the parallels between your Atlantis and Plato's, and you too can have your Schliemann moment.

I found my first Atlantis in the quiet English farmlands of Herefordshire. I had been sightseeing at an ancient hill-fort that dated to the late Bronze Age. The archaeology of this site is reasonably well understood, but a short walk from the site itself I stumbled across something rather more mysterious.

Some way below the summit, I noticed a deep cliff-like gouge cut into the side of the hill. On closer inspection, it did not look like a natural cliff, but rather a massive broken wall constructed of smallish stone blocks. Behind it the earth of the hillside had mounted up, the wall only open on one side. The “brickwork” appeared extremely weathered, almost fused by erosion.

My first reaction was to assume that the structure was connected in some way to the site above. However the scale was simply wrong – this was just too big, more like the walls of Troy than the typical remains of the British Bronze Age. Perhaps it was natural? In that case, why so regular? Why the short kink as if some inner wall at right angles had tumbled?

And why did it seem to be made from cut blocks? A short distance in front of the wall I found what appeared to be a fragment of the first few runs of another wall, parallel to the main wall. It seemed even less credible that this could be a natural structure.

There was no mention of this mysterious site in the visitors' guide, and the Ordnance Survey map merely showed an “earthwork”. One of the locals I quizzed had a vague memory of hearing that it was Roman, but the style was wrong, and it's hard to see why the Romans would have built a construction such as this, massive even by their standards, so far from any known Roman settlement.

If I were wearing my rationalist's hat I would suggest that this was a quarry site used in the construction of the hill fort. The “bricks” could be an artifact of quarrying, the damp environment of the hillside exaggerating the regular lines as water runs down them. Fortunately I left my sceptic's hat on the bus and I'm wearing my Pick-Your-Own Atlantis hat

**RISEN FROM THE DEPTHS:** With your Pick-Your-Own-Atlantis hat on, a stone wall in Hertfordshire might also be part of ancient legend...



instead.

OK, so we require proof that Atlantis was Britain. Nothing easier! Can you name any other large, fertile islands beyond the Pillars of Hercules? Plato tells us that from Atlantis one can reach other islands, and journey from them to a whole other continent. Again, only Britain fits – it's almost an island-hop from Europe to North America via Britain, the Orkneys, Iceland and Greenland. We can even tie in an inundation – the rise in sea level which cut Britain off from the continent started around the date Plato gives. Plato tells us Atlantis had conquered the coast of Africa as far as Egypt, and Europe as far as Tyrrhenia – pretty much exactly the scope of the megalith-building civilisation which blossomed in the British Isles. We even have local parallels to the legend, the sunken land of Hy-Brasil mentioned in Irish chronicles and the Breton myth of the catastrophic inundation of the city of Ys.

Pretty persuasive stuff, but don't let that get in the way of your own efforts – you too can discover Atlantis. It might be at your favourite holiday spot, or even your back garden. Fortunately Plato left us DIY Atlantologists one saving legacy – that of doubt.

My Atlantis does not make your Atlantis impossible, because neither of our Atlantises fits all the data, and none ever will. The story of Atlantis outlined in Plato's *Timaeus* and *Critias* is about a war between a dominant world power of 9,600 BC and the brave Athenians. There was no Athens in 9,600 BC, not by a long shot. That means that we must either ignore the claim for Atlantis' enemy or the claim for Atlantis' date. We have to ignore at least some of Plato's testament, and it's up to each of us to choose which parts. My Atlantis fits perfectly into those parts of the story I choose to accept.

Ignatius Donnelly, the “father of Modern Atlantology”, was so certain that Atlantis was to be found in the mid-Atlantic ridge that he proposed the only thing left to do was to dredge up “A single engraved tablet... from Plato's island”. While his location has fallen by the wayside, his instinct was correct. Atlantology will remain an entertaining but basically pointless sport until some future Schliemann stumbles across a signpost, hoary with age, which reads “Atlantis Welcomes Careful Drivers”.

ANDREW KORN

## A whiter shade of whale

**KARL SHUKER** reports on the return of Australia's white humpback whale and its cultural precursors.



**KARL SHUKER** is a zoologist, lecturer and regular contributor to *Fortean Times* since its early days. His most recent book is *The Beasts That Hide From Man* (2003).

Many bizarre animals have starred in famous works of fiction, but they have sometimes been eclipsed by their real-life counterparts – as in the case of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, bane of Captain Ahab. For although this malevolent white whale is often thought of as being an albino, according to Melville's description only his forehead was entirely snow-white – his body was merely “streaked and spotted and marbled with the same shrouded hue”. Conversely, there are a number of bona fide white whales on record whose ghostly demeanour would put *Moby Dick*'s albinistic aspirations unequivocally to shame.

One such individual, whose recent appearances in the waters off eastern Australia hit the headlines worldwide after an absence of sightings for three years, is Migaloo – a 46ft- (14m)-long, totally white humpback whale. No previous albinistic example of this species had ever been recorded, so when Migaloo was first reported in 1991, off Cape Byron in northern New South Wales by Paul Hodda, president of the Australian Whale Conservation Society, the cetacean community was initially sceptical. In 1992, however, Hodda was vindicated by a sighting made by Prof. Paul Forestell in Hervey Bay, north of Brisbane, Queensland.

Since then, over 50 sightings have been logged, and Migaloo – whose name is local aboriginal for ‘white fella’ – is now estimated to be around 17 years old, which is half his species's normal lifespan. Moreover, the mutant allele (gene form) responsible for Migaloo's pallid coloration may well persist into future generations, as he has been seen in the company of a female humpback whale and calf, which he has presumably sired. Like other male humpbacks, Migaloo has been heard singing, and apparently migrates each

year, from Antarctica northwards along the Queensland coast, in the company of a pod of normal humpbacks. Migaloo's distinctively curved dorsal fin as well as a unique bump on the left side of his head readily identify him to dedicated whale-watchers, thus verifying that observations of a white humpback in these parts for the past decade are indeed of the same individual.

Of course, whereas Migaloo is a humpback whale, the infamous *Moby Dick* was a sperm whale, and unlike the unique status of Migaloo, there have been several records of albino sperm whales. Undoubtedly the most famous, however, was Mocha Dick – named after the island off Chile in whose waters he was frequently spied, and widely believed to be the inspiration for

**SPECIAL INTEREST:** Migaloo the white humpback whale photographed off Australia.



Melville's fictional equivalent of 1851. First seen around 1819, Mocha Dick was a belligerent individual, credited with the destruction of 20 boats and seven ships, involving the deaths of at least 30 men, but in 1859 he was taken by a Swedish whaler off the Brazilian Banks, extensively scarred and blind in one eye. Almost a century later, on 19 April 1957, a 35ft- (11m)-long pure-white sperm whale bull was caught and killed off Japan by the *Seki-maru No.3* vessel and was documented with photographs by Seiji Ohsumi the following year in a report published by Tokyo's Whales Research Institute. Other albino sperm whales include Fighting Joe, New Zealand Tom, Old Tom, Shy Jack, Timour (=Timor?) Jack, and Ugly Tom. In addition, there are various Soviet records of unusually pale-coloured sperm whales with pinkish white eyes – the hallmark of true (complete) albinos.

Other species of giant whale known to have yielded albino individuals are the Southern right, bowhead, grey, and fin whale, and there are a number also on record from the smaller species, including the killer whale, Atlantic pilot whale, Dall's porpoise, harbour porpoise, bottlenose dolphin, Pacific striped dolphin, saddleback dolphin, and spinner dolphin. Some of these have even been exhibited in captivity. One such specimen, inevitably christened *Moby Dick*, was an all-white killer whale on show during the 1970s at Sealand of the Pacific, in Victoria, British Columbia. Another was a pure-white 8ft- (2.4m)-long female bottlenose dolphin dubbed Snowball, who was captured alive (together with her normal-coloured calf) during the early 1960s after a number of sightings of her had been reported in the area of St Helena Sound, off South Carolina, and was subsequently maintained at the Miami Seaquarium.

A century earlier, whalers would have swiftly brought to an end the lives of such eye-catching creatures as Migaloo and Snowball. Today, in somewhat more enlightened times, they have survived. On 16 August 2003 a 30ft- (9m)-trimaran somehow managed to collide with Migaloo, but happily the whale was not injured. Nevertheless, the incident was sufficient for Australian environmental officials formally to declare Migaloo a ‘special interest’ animal shortly afterwards, a decree that will now enable them to use legal powers to keep people from approaching him too closely – and thus, it is hoped, protect and preserve this unique white wonder of the seas for many years to come. **fi**

## The 'Exorcist' effect

ALAN MURDIE examines the demise of a disturbed young woman – was *The Exorcist* behind her terror?



**ALAN MURDIE** is a barrister who specialises in intellectual property rights, chairman of the Ghost Club and a frequent contributor to *Fortean Times*.

**O**n Sunday 1 June 2003 the British press reported the suicide of Jennifer Elliot, 37, daughter of the British actor Denholm Elliot. Jennifer's body had been found hanging in the garden at the family villa in Ibiza. She had been suffering severe depression. Her father, whose long film career had taken in everything from *The Cruel Sea* to *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, had died at the same villa in 1992; her mother Susan was reported to be very ill in hospital and unable to make any statement about her daughter's death.

One newspaper implied that Jennifer's problems were ultimately ascribable to her parents "famously dissolute" marriage and that "there are those on Ibiza who believe the children were chronically neglected in the couple's relentless pursuit of self gratification".<sup>1</sup> But a book published by Susan Elliot in 1994 points to an entirely different cause behind Jennifer's troubled life and ultimately tragic end.<sup>2</sup> Contained in her mother's colourful memoir *Quest for Love* are details suggesting that her daughter's problems were ultimately traceable to childhood trauma triggered by readings from William Peter Blatty's novel, *The Exorcist*.

During the 1970s, the Elliots lived in Ibiza and employed a series of nannies for their children. One evening, a local girl was employed to look after Jennifer who was then aged 11 and her younger brother Mark, then eight.

According to Susan Elliot: "When we arrived home that evening there was the most horrendous smell in the house. We let the girl go – she was herself only 18 years old – and then I went to check where the smell was coming from. I followed it to Jennifer's room. She was huddled in a corner of the room. The stench was the smell of fear... the fear had been triggered by the babysitter,

who had decided for a bedtime story she would read out loud to Jennifer excerpts from *The Exorcist*."

Susan Elliot records a strange phenomenon as she surveyed the results: "As I stood there trying to get my wits together a glass that was standing on the floor shattered into a thousand pieces. The sheer force of energy in the room had caused that."

The trauma of that night, according to Susan Elliot, left her daughter with lasting mental problems: "Jennifer's personality as a fun-loving, carefree little girl went away forever that evening. We tried everything... I think my efforts might have done some good but I know that Jennifer never fully recovered from the experience." Subsequently, Jennifer began taking drugs, finally suffering heroin addiction.

Furthermore, although she does not make a direct connection, Susan Elliot explains that the nanny was engaged because of a mysterious, undiagnosed ailment suffered by Mark, causing him to vomit and go into fits and trances. One cannot help noting a passing similarity between these symptoms and those of the possessed girl graphically described in *The Exorcist*. Perhaps Jennifer's young mind made a terrifying link between the story and her brother's condition?

Of course, it could well be seen as excessive – and convenient – to blame adult tragedy upon a single frightening incident in childhood. Equally, it might be tempting to see the story as a self-serving claim to explain parental failures. But medical, psychological and legal literature is replete with examples which illustrate how traumas in childhood may affect people for the whole of their lives. In marked contrast to the picture painted by the press, *Quest*



**SCARED TO DEATH:** Linda Blair in a scene from *The Exorcist*.

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- 1 'Drug addict daughter of Denholm Elliot hangs herself in Ibiza villa' *Mail on Sunday* 1 June 2003.
- 2 Susan Elliot, *Quest For Love*, 1994, Headline Books.
- 3 J C Barker, *Scared To Death*, 1967, Frederick Muller.
- 4 Owen Davies, in *Witchcraft Magic and Culture 1736-1951*, 1999, citing a report in the *Somerset County Herald* 26 November 1881.
- 5 Claude M Bristol, *The Magic of Believing*, 1959.
- 6 Andrew Green, in *Ghost Hunting – A Practical Guide*, 1975.
- 7 Reported in the *East Anglian Daily Times* 22 May 2003.
- 8 Andrew Green, personal communication.

for *Love* repeatedly shows how both parents were desperately concerned with their children's well-being. Whilst the Elliots were far from being a conventional couple, the book charts their repeated efforts to try and free Jennifer from drug addiction. Susan Elliot acknowledges that influences ranging from a bad choice of schools to hereditary factors may have played a part in her addiction, but one is left with the impression that these compounded damage already done.

It seems that in rare cases the minds of children can be gravely damaged by the implantation of supernatural stories and that in the most extreme cases the effects may even prove fatal. It makes no difference if the stories are fictional. In a book entitled *Scared to Death* (1967), the late Dr J C Barker concluded that "predictions" made by fortune tellers to a person during childhood could trigger a fatal subconscious reaction many years later in adulthood.<sup>3</sup> In other cases, a general terror might suffice. In 1881 a girl of 10 named Kate Weedon living in Hoxton, East London, apparently died of fright on hearing a phoney "Mother Shipton" prophecy that the world would be ending that year. An inquest heard that on the night of 17 November the girl had gone to bed weeping and wringing her hands, saying the end of the world was approaching. Around half past three her mother heard a loud cry and found Kate suffering a fit. A doctor was called but within two hours Kate was dead. The prediction was wholly fictitious, having been invented by a journalist called Charles Hindley in 1862.<sup>4</sup> Equally, it should be noted that positive suggestions of future success made to children by seers have also been claimed as efficacious in the lives of Marie Curie and the future Empress Eugenie.<sup>5</sup>

And what of the shattering of the glass? Such a phenomenon may also be created by the subconscious mind; it appears in the literature of psychical research, typically accompanying ouija board séances or experiments in psychokinesis. One such event reportedly occurred in the 1950s when a group succeeded in breaking a tumbler after fourteen and a half minutes of mental concentration.<sup>6</sup> The spontaneous breaking of beer glasses is a favourite trick of pub ghosts – even the smallest pub in Britain, the Nutshell at Bury St Edmunds claimed just such a manifestation the week before Jennifer Elliot's death.<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, at least one researcher considers the stresses of pub life can provoke the unconscious minds of staff and licensees into generating psychokinetic effects.<sup>8</sup> **IT**

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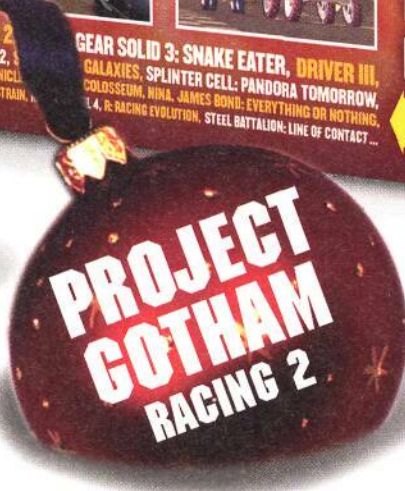
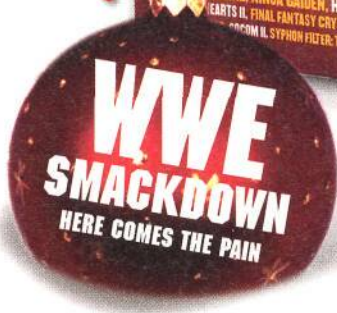
**PLUS**

**68**

**HOTTEST GAMES OF 2004**

**TURISMO 4, DOOM III, HALO 2 ONLINE, NINJA GAIDEN, HALF-LIFE 2, HEARTS II, FINAL FANTASY CRYSTAL CHRONICLES, FROM THE SYRPHON FIFER: THE OMEGA STRAIN...**

**GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER, DRIVER III, GALAXIES, SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW, COLOSSEUM, NINA, JAMES BOND: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING, L4: RACING EVOLUTION, STEEL BATTALION: LINE OF CONTACT...**



This month's books, films and games

# reviews



## Little theatres of the world

The cult of curiosities, strangled by the cold hand of Newtonian rationalism, gets a new lease of life, thanks to this erudite panorama of past worlds in miniature

### Cabinets of Curiosities

Patrick Mauriès

Thames & Hudson, 2002

Hb, 256pp, notes, bib, ind, photos, £39.95, ISBN 0 500 51091 1

**A**n extravagant visual feast of 272 illustrations, this sumptuous book covers the history of the cabinet of curiosity – or *estude*, *studiolo*, *theatrum mundi* or *Wunderkammer* – which blossomed in the 16th and 17th centuries as a successor to mediæval relic collections and royal treasure chambers. The aim, as laid out in Francis Bacon's *Gesta Grayorum* (1594), was to compile “a goodly, huge cabinet, wherein whatsoever the hand of man by exquisite art or engine has made rare in stuff, form or motion; whatsoever singularity, chance and the shuffle of things hath produced; whatsoever Nature has wrought in things that want life and may be kept; shall be sorted and included.” In other words, a microcosm of the world – all knowledge, the cosmos arranged on shelves, in cupboards, or hanging from the ceiling, “infinite riches in a little room” at a time when individuals could still aspire to know everything.

For the princely collectors of Renaissance Italy, the arrangement of individual objects in their *studioli* was crucial, placing them in a neo-platonic framework of meaning and correspondences, revealing unity in multiplicity. As Patrick Mauriès says: “Cabinets were perpetually susceptible to the passion for finding analogies, a theme that belongs as much to the realm of magic as to that of aesthetics.” The hierarchical view of society inherited from mediæval scholasticism found expression in a hierarchy of spaces, a sequence of containers of ever-diminishing volume nestling one within the other, like Russian dolls.

A great pioneer of curiosity-gathering was the French Duc de

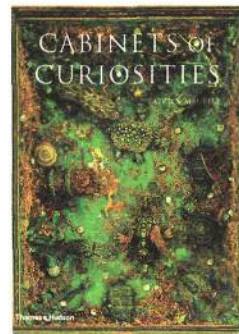
Berry (1340–1416) who amassed “ostrich eggs, wild boar tusks, mammoth bones, snake skins, amulets to protect against poison, shells, and objects with occult powers”. A *studiolo* rich in curiosities was made in Florence by Pietro de Medici (1414–69), and inherited by Lorenzo the Magnificent. Princely collections proliferated between 1560 and 1580, enriched by wonders garnered from the New World. These ranged from the well-labelled and accessible *Kunstammer* of Duke Albrecht V of Bavaria, to the more hermetic cabinet of Francesco I de' Medici in Florence.

A special place was reserved for hybrids (such as composite creatures and petrified living things), which exemplified the continuities between *artificialia* and *naturalia*, the treasures of art and the wonders of nature, just as automata bridged the divide between animate and inanimate. The quest for rarity encouraged the acquisition of aberrations and freaks – unicorn horns, two-head animals, marvels of miniaturisation – as well as scientific instruments, carvings and metalwork of incredible virtuosity.

Archduke Ferdinand II of Tyrol (1529–95) created one of the great *Wunderkammern* in Schloß Ambras near Innsbruck [see ‘The Old Curiosity Schloss’ by Mike Jay, *FT87:23–25*], which after his death became an appendage to the grander collection of Rudolf II of Habsburg. Mauriès points out that Rudolf, like many of the major collectors, was melancholic and obsessed by the passage of time.

The first non-aristocratic collectors appeared in the 16th century and were mainly medical men such as Ulisse Aldrovandi in Bologna, Francesco Calzolari in Verona, and Ferrante Imperato in Naples, who eschewed the occult symbolism of the *studioli*, and whose cabinets more closely resembled an apothecary's shop. Aldrovandi's posthumous *Monstrorum Historia* (1642), a compendium of animal and human

### Cabinets belong as much to the realms of magic as to that of aesthetics



monstrosity, is of particular fortean interest. Outstanding cabinets of the 17th century included those of Ole Worm in Copenhagen, Manfredo Settala in Milan, Athanasius Kircher in Rome, and Frederik Ruysch in Amsterdam.

The pioneer curiosity buffs in England were Sir Walter Cope, Sir Thomas Browne (another medical man) and John Tradescant whose collection of ‘Rarities’ [see ‘Tradescant's Ark’ by Ian Simmons, *FT66:32–35*] passed to Elias Ashmole, royal astrologer, founding member of the Royal Society and England's “first known freemason” (Frances Yates). In 1683 this formed the basis of Britain's first purpose-built museum, the Ashmolean in Oxford. It included a wealth of fortean artefacts such as “a piece of wood from the cross of Christ”, “the hand of a mermaid”, “blood that rained in the Isle of Wight” and “a goose which had grown in Scotland on a tree”, many of which are now sadly lost. One thing the Ashmolean does still have is “the passion of Christ carved very daintily on a plumstone”.

Paradoxically, the waning of encyclopædic collections in the 18th century coincided with the great *Encyclopédie* of the Enlightenment. The champions of the Age of Reason poured scorn on the naivety and archaic approach of their predecessors. Fine art, craftsmanship, antiquities, ethnography, natural history, and mechanical invention were separated out from the chaotic jumble of the cabinets and the cult of curiosities declined. In the eccentric collections of Horace Walpole and William Beckford, “the only cult celebrated... was that of art as such, and of memory”. In a rational Newtonian world, bizarre and inexplicable oddities were by degrees banished to the realm of low culture and fairground sideshows.

In the 20th century, the cult of curiosities received a new lease of life in the ‘ready-mades’ of Marcel Duchamp and the *objets trouvés* central to surrealist aesthetics. Torn from their mundane associations, these objects became imbued with the mysterious and the irrational.

Mauriès rounds off his erudite survey in a nondescript Los Angeles suburb, home of David Hildebrand Wilson's ‘Museum of Jurassic Technology’, which he describes as “an inscrutable statement and performance piece that can claim its place as a work of art alongside the most complex of installations”. In its pre-modern and post-modern amalgam of fact, faction and fantasy, visitors experience a disconcerting slippage, a loss of familiar contexts [see ‘Exhibiting Ambiguity’ by Ralph Rugoff, *FT100:22–24*].

Despite its steep price, this book is a worthy addition to any fortean library – though it barely skims the surface of an absorbing subject.

Paul Sieveking

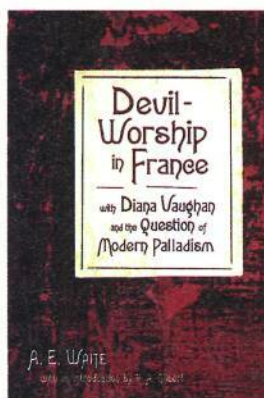
### Fortean Times Verdict

CURIOSLY ENTRANCING TALE  
OF THE *THEATRUM MUNDI*

9

# Plotting the Mason-Taxil line

Revealing the truth behind the lies behind the tomfoolery: how a bit of anti-esoteric jiggery-pokery became part of anti-masonic literature



## Devil-worship in France

with Diana Vaughan and the Question of Modern Palladism

A. E. Waite

Weiser Books (redwheelweiser.com), 2003  
Hb, 305pp, \$50, ISBN 1578632862

In the 1890s, Europe – especially France – was rocked by a scandal. Freemasonry, it seemed, not only had mixed male–female lodges, but they worshipped the Devil and performed black magic and thoroughly orgiastic practices. Furthermore, the whole of worldwide Freemasonry was run by the American Albert Pike, who had written that Lucifer was God. How did we know all this? The high priestess of “Palladian Masonry” had turned back to the true (Roman Catholic) Church, and was now making a full kiss-and-tell public confession, and very luridly, of her sins.

Anti-masonic literature mushroomed. The RC Church had a field day. Then, in 1896, an English scholar of the esoteric published a book – this very one – which pulled the pins out of the story until it collapsed under its own ludicrous weight. The entire story of Diana Vaughan, high priestess of Palladism, was the fabrication of one Leo Taxil (pen name of Gabriel Jogand), a

former author of pornography and blasphemous satires.

Taxil called a public meeting, ostensibly to unveil Diana Vaughan, but instead confessed that the whole Palladism story was a hoax. He was no friend of Freemasonry, true, but his main aim had been to prove how utterly credulous the RC Church could be – as indeed it had been.

This is a fascinating episode of 19th century anti-esoteric tomfoolery, but why republish Waite’s exposé 107 years later? Because, when he wrote it, nearly all anti-masonic writing was Catholic; “outside this Church there is no hostility to Masonry,” writes Waite. But now, anti-masonic vitriol spill from the pens of fundamentalist Protestants – and many of them quote Taxil’s inventions of Palladism, Diana Vaughan and “the Luciferian” Albert Pike, as straight fact.

But if you’re a fundamentalist, you have The Truth, so why worry about the facts? A few years ago I wrote to the author of a book entitled *The Truth about Masonry* (hahl!) correcting straightforward factual errors; his reply ignored my corrections and told me “You are a pagan who is on his way to an eternal hell.” And yes, his book accused Pike – and Waite! – of being Luciferians; it’s what he wanted to believe.

More worryingly, Martin Short’s dreadful but influential anti-masonic book *Inside the Brotherhood* quoted Pike’s supposed statement about Lucifer being God, then went on: “There are problems with this quotation: its meaning is not immediately clear and its authenticity is in doubt. It was first attributed to Pike in 1894 by a French authoress who detested Freemasonry, yet no original text seems to exist.” Why, then, does Short include it? Here’s the wonderful bit, a hallmark of

writers-with-an-agenda; Short continues: “Yet the quote sounds authentic... If genuine, it indicates there is a Satanic – or Luciferian – strain in American Masonry.” What scholarly writing!

People read this, and remember it, and quote it, and Taxil’s carefully-constructed fiction continues to be believed a century later. And that’s why Waite’s exposé needs this reissue.

Waite’s rebuttal of Taxil is written with a dry humour, gentlemanly and deceptively gentle. For example, for aficionados of all those books by speculative historians (Hancock, Bauval, Gardner, Picknett & Prince etc), Waite provides a gloriously deadpan blueprint of how to write such a book, devoid of any scholarship or logic.

There is so much of this book I would love to quote, but the passages would have to be long for the full effect to be appreciated. Some find Waite’s prose to be pompous and pedantic, but he was a scholar of his time. So we get such non-PC cultural gems as “Freemasonry as an institution is not suited to women any more than is cricket as a sport, but they have occasionally wished to play at it...”

This edition of Waite’s book also includes the first ever publication of a much shorter sequel, written after Taxil owned up. There’s a useful introduction by Masonic historian RA Gilbert; my only criticism is that Gilbert could have added a few explanatory footnotes to some of Waite’s more opaque contemporary allusions. Also, it’s a little over-priced. But this is essential reading for anyone with an interest in esoteric history.

David V Barrett

### Fortean Times Verdict

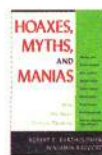
A SCHOLARLY VICTORIAN GEM OF THE FIRST WATER

9

## Hoaxes, myths and manias

Robert Bartholomew & Benjamin Radford

Prometheus Books (prometheusbooks.com), 2003  
Pb, 229pp, ind, refs, \$20, ISBN 1591020484



Benjamin Radford is the managing editor of *Skeptical Inquirer* and sociologist Dr Bob Bartholomew has written prolifically on mass

hysteria. One might expect that this would be a cool rationalisation of mass panics and collective delusions; so it is refreshing to see a new – and overdue – tack developing. The book presents fair summaries of varied examples of extreme collective behaviour including the recent Indian ‘monkey man’; belief in crashed UFOs; the mediaeval dancing mania; shrinking genitalia panics; the notorious Martian invasion panic created by Orson Welles; the ‘mad gasser’ of Mattoon; the New England airship hoax of 1909; and the curious, suggestive *latah* state of mind that afflicts Malay women. These form the grist for the most interesting aspect of the book – its discussion of the importance of critical thinking. Differentiating facts from fiction; how panic and rumours spread; the extent and power of emotion, credulity and gullibility; the values and dangers of being uncritical about popular beliefs; what is ‘normal’ and what is ‘deviant’ or ‘irrational’ are covered sufficiently to prepare the reader to face up to a subject that challenges conventional thinking. The authors present a number of strategies for critical thought – ask questions; be willing to wonder; define the problem; examine the evidence; analyse assumptions and bias; avoid emotional reasoning; resist oversimplification; consider alternative interpretations; and accept a degree of uncertainty – which could equally well serve as the basis for a sound fortran approach.

Although it is constructed like course material for senior students, it could be introduced to the syllabus of any middle school. Religious studies, psychology and sociology, general studies, sciences and even history would benefit from the insight-provoking exercises presented here. I would have liked to see some discussion of the difference between explaining and explaining-away and some recognition that not all popular beliefs are bogus; but the first, most important step is to develop habits of

critical thinking at an early stage... and this book is a splendid start.

Bob Rickard

### Fortean Times Verdict

CRITICAL THINKING 101: EVERY SCHOOL SHOULD HAVE THIS

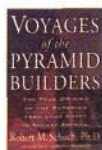
8

## Voyages of the Pyramid Builders

Robert M Schoch with Robert Aquinas McNally

Tarcher/Putnam, 2003

Hb, 350pp, \$24.95, ISBN 1585422037



Schoch is known for his work on the dating of the sphinx, where his geological expertise sheds an interesting light on the patterns of weathering on the monument. But this is an excursion outside his area of expertise. Little in the book is original or adds much to the debate on pyramid origins; I learned nothing new about either pyramids or diffusionism, although it's interesting to see how the alternative and orthodox points of view have begun to converge in certain respects.

Mainly, Schoch engages in arm-chair circumnavigation: the catalogue of Old and New World correspondences; climatological and catastrophist evidence of an ancient environment radically different from received wisdom; archaeological work which pushes back dates for the beginning of 'civilisation'. This is not the first book to draw these themes together.

Schoch undermines his theorising by the way he orders the evidence. Having established the standard global correspondences, he moves the chronological goalposts with catastrophism, and by the end of the book, it's unclear what the thesis is.

Much here relies on Stephen Oppenheimer's *Eden in the East*, a thought-provoking take on flood myths and what they tell us about human origins. Oppenheimer turns up in quite a few popular books; Graham Hancock uses a lot of his material in his *Underworld*.

In all the global exchanges and intrepid early travelling, pyramids don't figure centrally at all; they are tacked on to other stories, like modern stowaways tagging along with the ancients. The argument goes like this: such and such an

ancient culture travelled long distances; we have evidence of pyramids in these people's history; ergo, they brought their pyramid technology with them, and bequeathed to the people they visited, who also have pyramids, though not necessarily at the same, or even a closely related time.

This is lazy syllogism passing for logic, and pays little respect to the evidence (or lack of it) around the actual monuments. I almost prefer the 'god was a spaceman' approach, with all its flights of fancy, to this vicarious and slightly dishonest academic holiday-making.

Noel Rooney

### Fortean Times Verdict

COULD DO BETTER: A LAZY AND UNREVEALING PIECE OF WORK

3

## The Alien Chronicles

Compelling evidence for UFOs and extraterrestrial encounters in art and texts since ancient times

Matthew Hurley

Quester, 2003

Pb, 167pp, bib, illus, £22, ISBN 0 9541904 1 6



Beginning with images found in Creation stories and moving through pre-historic art, Western religious art and depictions of

UFO accounts from 498BC to AD1900, Hurley has collated a wealth of puzzling artwork. Whether any of these images depict an alien craft is open to question, but Hurley has done ufology a great service by gathering them together in one place.

Many reflect astronomical or meteorological phenomena but are no less interesting for that. Others are obviously religious symbols used to represent something 'other'. That they look like the 21st century view of alien craft might be a red herring. Hurley concludes that the evidence leans strongly in favour of an ET origin for at least some of the images, but he's not dogmatic: "Ultimately it is for each one of us to make up our own minds on what we read and see".

This well-written, beautiful book should be on every Fortean's shelves.

Hurley's site is [www.ufoartwork.com](http://www.ufoartwork.com)

Andy Roberts

### Fortean Times Verdict

WHATEVER THEY REPRESENT, THE PICTURES ARE GORGEOUS

7

## MAGWATCH

Recent periodicals perused, praised or panned

### PHENOMENA NO 1

The launch issue of a new mass-market glossy magazine is something of an event in Fortean publishing, although the subtitle – "The World's Finest Alternative Genre Magazine" – inspires more confusion than confidence, and the Editor in Chief's boast that this is the "dawning of a new era" and a publication that will "cover ground never before touched in a major magazine" may leave FT readers somewhat unconvinced.

So what's in it? News, reviews and opinion pieces, but essentially a big and varied bag of features by everyone from high-profile believers like Linda Moulton Howe (on high strangeness in Brazil) and Whitley Streiber (on UFO cover-ups) to writers familiar from the pages of FT – Alan Alford on the Great Pyramid, Nick Redfern on Noah's Ark and the CIA. There's a genuinely Fortean variety of topics and viewpoints here (as well as a certain amount of New Age-ism) and a lot is packed into the magazine's 98 glossy pages. All of this is to the good, but British readers may be slightly put off by the unrelenting, po-faced absence of even a glimmer of humour.

*Phenomena*, Mania Entertainment, LLC, 220 Main Street, Suite C, Venice, CA 90291; tel: (310) 339 8001; web: [www.phenomenamag.com](http://www.phenomenamag.com) (\$19.95 for six issues; add \$10 for outside US)

### BIGFOOT TIMES

A special updated reprint of Danny Perez's 'Bigfoot at Bluff Creek', an overview of the 1967 Patterson film and its history – "the cornerstone of the entire Bigfoot mystery". Includes an excellent detailed bibliography of the case up to July 2003.

Available for \$9 (\$15 for European customers) from: Daniel Perez, 10926 Milano Avenue, Norwalk, California 90650-1638; tel: (909) 509 2951; email: [Perez@worldnet.att.net](mailto:Perez@worldnet.att.net)

### ANIMALS & MEN NO 31

The house journal of the Centre for Fortean Zoology rounds up all the cryptozoological news fit to print, as well as conference reports and articles on the 'Beast of Walsall', the late survival of sabre-toothed cats in Europe and the 2003 CFZ expedition

to Sumatra.

*Animals & Men*, CFZ, 15 Holne Court, Exwick, Exeter, Devon, EX4 2NA; tel/fax: 01392 42811; web: [www.cfz.org](http://www.cfz.org), email: [cfz@eclipse.co.uk](mailto:cfz@eclipse.co.uk) (£10 for four issues, cheques payable to Jonathan Downes).

### INTERNATIONAL UFO REPORTER

#### VOLUME 28 NO 1

This issue of the journal of the J Allen Hynek Center for UFO Studies (CUFOS) rounds up a typically diverse collection of cases for scrutiny, including a re-examination of the 1957 Levelland, Texas, sightings and a Spanish military encounter from the 1970s, as well as an interesting piece by Jerome Clark on 'proto-UFOs' from the 19th century.

*International UFO Reporter*, CUFOS, 2457 West Peterson Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60659; tel: (773) 271 3611; web: [www.cufos.com](http://www.cufos.com); email: [Infocenter@cufos.com](mailto:Infocenter@cufos.com) (\$25 for four issues, plus \$5 for overseas).

### THE PARANORMAL REVIEW NO 28

The Magazine of the Society for Psychical Research is the younger sister of the heavyweight *Journal*, providing a variety of accessible shorter articles and reports on the Society's core areas of investigation – psychical research and parapsychology. This issue looks at mediumistic sittings, recurrent spontaneous phenomena linked to UFO sightings, an apparently shared out of body experience and (my own favourite) "A case suggestive of reincarnation of cats?"

*The Paranormal Review*, SPR, 49 Marloes Road, London W8 6LA; tel: 020 7937 8984 (£12 for four issues, free to SPR members).

### FOLKLORE FRONTIERS NO 43

Paul Screeton's latest collage of urban legend and tabloid culture celebrates boozing and boozers – from piss-soaked pistachios at the bar and bowling with frozen chickens to America's Wanker beer and

Spain's monument in the shape of a human liver.

*Folklore Frontiers*, Paul Screeton, 5 Egton Drive, Seaton Carew, Hartlepool TS25 2AT (£6 for three issues, cheques payable to Paul Screeton)

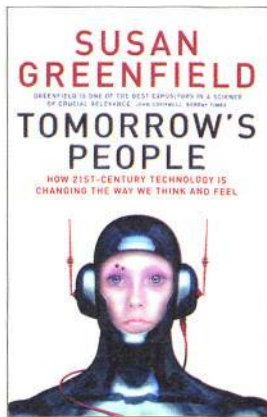
DAVID SUTTON





# The Extropian dystopia

Technology may become ever more immersive, but what happens to the (trans)human condition when even your clothes can crash?



## Tomorrow's People

How 21st Century technology is changing the way we think and feel

Susan Greenfield

Allan Lane, 2003  
Hb, 284pp, ind, bib, £20.00, ISBN 0713996315

Susan Greenfield is arguably the most prominent female scientist in Britain. She is a neuroscientist of considerable standing and has two best-sellers about the brain to her credit. Now she has decided to look beyond the mind, at society overall and how technology will change who we are.

*Tomorrow's People* is a brave stab at imagining a future based on what we know about today's technologies, but I doubt it will look remotely like this. Greenfield sees developments in science and technology overwhelming humanity and obliterating individuality. Within 100 years she sees us living in an immersive interactive environment where our reality is so technologically mediated that the boundaries between the real and the virtual dissolve. Our clothes, homes, vehicles – even our bodies – are infused with nanocomputers, extending our minds and bringing our environment under mental control. The overlap of our minds will render privacy meaningless and personality liminal. We will be

more powerful and less human, and will blur the boundary between biological and silicon life. By the end of the century, she foresees life as a mutable wonderland of post-human extremes.

So, how likely is her scenario? Not very. She is excellent at technological fantasy-tripping, but fails to take account of the cussedness of human nature and the generally disappointing level of real technology. Greenfield extrapolates from the explosion of connectivity that is the Internet and infuses everything with it. However, instead of erasing individuality, the Internet has allowed people greater self-expression. You can find all kinds of thriving online niche groups – anything you can imagine is there, and quite a lot you can't. Further immersive tech is more likely to enhance individuality than erase it. Likewise privacy; while the Internet makes our lives more transparent, technology has also led to increases in privacy – anyone can now have access to firewalls, virus checkers and PGP software to keep intruders out and personal information under ferocious encryption. This trend is more likely to favour efforts to retain privacy than its casual erosion.

Greenfield seems vague about the cost of all this. Even if computing power is cheap, it will still cost. Who exactly will partake of this glorious warm bath of technology? She also avoids the business of unreliability. Today's machines are always breaking down; extrapolate that to a world where even your clothes can crash and imagine the problems. She also misses out on the perversity of our relationship with machines. William Gibson saw it straight away, with his axiom "The street finds its own uses for things", but in Greenfield's future everything

is used as it should be. Given the nature of people, I reckon Gibson's future is the likelier one.

There are also significant flaws in the structure of *Tomorrow's People*. It started life as a novel, and it shows. Instead of a careful marshalling of fact, there is impressionistic rush. Most of the book is written as a second-person narrative. In a couple of pages, she can go from hydrogen power to e-commerce to the make-up of the US workforce, barely pausing for breath. She can be irritatingly superficial, too, prone to statements like "attitudes to GM food have changed in a relatively short period of time" but without giving a convincing how or why. There is no attempt to address the increasingly irrational rejection of new tech which has made reasoned debate on GM difficult and threatens to stifle nanotechnology at birth. Although she has a chapter on terrorism in the future, she offers unsatisfying platitudes rather than convincing analysis.

I would have liked more reasoning here, explanations of why trends seem likely, references to source material and the like. You get the impression she has surfed a lot of Extropian web pages and splurged the lot onto the page. Indeed, she apologises for the shortcomings of the bibliography on the grounds that much of it comes from ephemeral web pages. This strikes me as a surprisingly shallow and ill thought out book from Professor Greenfield. I have enjoyed her other books and have considerable respect for her, but I feel she has missed the mark here. Also, she really should have called it *The Tomorrow People*.

Ian Simmons

### Fortean Times Verdict

PLUS ÇA CHANGE. OR NOT. WHATEVER...

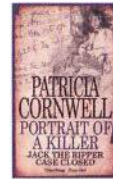
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## Portrait of a Killer

Jack the Ripper: case closed

Patricia Cornwell

Time Warner, 2003  
Pb, 468pp, ind, illus, £6.99, ISBN 07515 33599



In his 1976 book *Jack the Ripper: The Final Solution*, the late Stephen Knight first accused the British artist Walter Richard Sickert of taking part

in the JTR conspiracy. Knight's book linked him with a Masonic conspiracy to murder poor prostitutes. It sold by the shed-load until Knight's early death in the late 1980s.

The only significant difference between the hardback and later paperback editions of Knight's work was that the former accused Sickert of doing away with his erstwhile maid and model, Marie Hayes. Everyone loves a Masonic conspiracy theory; there is not a scintilla of evidence to support Knight, but that, of course, is precisely because we are dealing with a conspiracy!

Now, the American crime novelist Patricia Cornwell has resurrected Knight's theory. Even where he was possibly correct, she turns out to be provably wrong. Far from being traumatised by a congenital malformation of the penis, Sickert did not suffer from it; his 1865 surgery was for an anal fistula.

Just about every JTR student knows that Walter Sickert painted 'Jack the Ripper's Bedroom'. This came as a revelation to Cornwell. The painting is in the Manchester Art Gallery, and depicts a room at 6, Mornington Crescent, London NW. This room, according to Sickert's landlady, had been occupied by JTR, a consumptive veterinary student. My research some years ago ruled out this possibility.

Patricia Cornwell's fictional serial killers have always had ultra-male medical defects. In JTR, she favours a person in touch with his feminine side, in the face of all evidence to the contrary. She attributes to Sickert the condition of hypospadias, in which the opening of the penis is on its underside. This, she asserts, would have made him squat to pass water like a woman.

Why did Cornwell choose this moment to re-try the Sickert case? Apparently, she had a considerable

amount of DNA evidence, none of which proves anything. Most of her comparison material comes from items such as the hoax letters written to the police at the time, which no one now believes to be the work of the murderer.

Her consonance between Sickert and JTR appears to be based upon a single DNA base pair at the 16294 (T/C) position. A 12-point identification is required by a court of law, and about 90%+ of all human DNA is shared by all of us, anyway.

Cornwell has fallen back on the idea that Sickert was, in some way, inherently evil. He was undoubtedly eccentric, but never evil, and certainly not the long sought-after JTR.

Nick Warren

### Fortean Times Verdict

CASE NOT CLOSED. BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD... **3**

## Kolchak

The night stalker

Moonstone ([www.moonstonebooks.com](http://www.moonstonebooks.com)), 2003  
Pb, 56pp, \$6.50, ISBN 097 101 2938



Some of you may remember the misadventures of wise-cracking reporter Carl Kolchak, who featured in a TV

movie *Night Stalker* (1972) and a six-episode series in 1974. Kolchak – who stumbled upon fortan menaces including vampires, lizard-men in city sewers and a murderous Mexican mummy – was acknowledged as a major influence by *X-Files* creator Chris Carter. All credit, then, to Moonstone comics – who are in the forefront of a US-led revival – for resurrecting Kolchak from the graveyard of forgotten heroes for a new, eponymous series of graphic novels written by Stefan Petrucha (himself a veteran of *X-Files* for Topps comics and a novelist) and Joe Gentile (Moonstone's founder). The first two stories – involving nanobots and a minotaur – are well illustrated by Trevor Van Eeden and establish a standard of narrative worthy of the venerable horror genre.

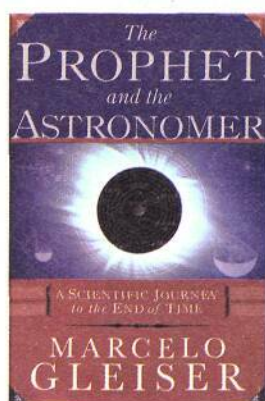
Bob Rickard

### Fortean Times Verdict

FORTEAN GRAPHIC NOVEL WITH A GRIPPING NARRATIVE **9**

# The geometry of destiny

An elegant look at the ultimate fate of the Universe helps put the romance back into astrophysics and integrate science and religion



## The Prophet and the Astronomer

Apocalyptic science and the end of the world

Marcelo Gleiser

WW Norton, 2003  
Pb, xiv+320pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, \$15.95USD/\$24CDN,  
ISBN 0 393 32431 1

In 1997, Brazilian astrophysicist Marcelo Gleiser published his acclaimed *The Dancing Universe: From Creation Myths to the Big Bang*, examining how modern theories of the Universe's origin recall ancient creation myths. In this semi-sequel, he addresses the other end of the story, from mythological apocalypses to current scientific thought on the ultimate fate of the Universe. Gleiser kicks off the eschatological adventure with an overview of astrological and meteorological portents and legends of destruction from the sky, taking in highlights of Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian and other mythoi. A more scientific consideration of the world and its fate gradually emerged with Newton's studies of the heavens motivated, in part, by an attempt to precisely date Biblical events and to work out how long we had to wait until Judgment Day. Gleiser also includes a run-through of apocalyptic cults, from militant Anabaptists in 16th

century Germany to the comet-hitching Heaven's Gate mass suicide of 1997.

The second part of the book looks at the cataclysmic events that have shaped the Solar System and the evolution of life on Earth, although some readers may be disgruntled by the lack of any credit to Velikovsky, the arch proponent of 'worlds in collision'. There's a disturbing account of what happens when a major meteorite hits, such as the one at Chicxulub which doomed the dinosaurs (allegedly), and the worrying note that it's not a matter of whether another serious impact will happen, but when.

Gleiser then considers the same questions of apocalypse and fate on a stellar and galactic level, moving from legends of the Sun-worshipping Inca and Shinto cultures to the Sun's likely end as a self-devouring red giant. Other stars have more spectacular ends as supernovæ, another phenomenon taken as a celestial portent, and then there's that great cosmic bogeyman, the black hole – an excuse for Gleiser to provide a painless introduction to the theory of relativity and an idiosyncratic account of the effects of a black hole on an unwary space traveller, presented as a rewriting of Poe's 'A descent into the maelstrom'.

The final section turns to the really big question of the ultimate fate of the Universe. Cosmologists are now confident that the Universe is expanding, but do not yet know whether this expansion will slow, stop and reverse into the inevitability of the Big Crunch; or whether it will continue until entropy takes dominion over all – a cosmic version of Robert Frost's dilemma over the world ending in fire or ice. The key to the ultimate fate of the Universe lies in exactly what happened in its first moments, before energy, matter and the fundamental forces

separated into their discrete identities. Answering that question will depend on constructing that holy grail of modern physics, the Theory of Everything (TOE) – what Gleiser playfully suggests should rather be called the Geometry of Destiny (GOD).

Addressing issues of science and religion and their approaches to these fundamental questions can be a controversial undertaking. Many people, including many scientists, prefer to separate the two, but Gleiser argues that science can do more than just provide a rational view of the world which can then be reconciled with religion. It can transcend its immediate role of quantifying the workings of nature through an effort to understand the unknown, which is the fundamental impulse behind both science and religion. The common element is the anxieties rising from a finite existence in an apparently infinite cosmos. And as he notes in the last pages, the more we know about the Universe, the more we seem not to know.

*The Prophet and the Astronomer* is elegantly written throughout, even in this translation from the original Portuguese, with eloquent summaries of ancient myth and modern cosmology interspersed with personal reminiscence which helps put the romance back into astrophysics. My only quibble is with the offputtingly New Age-y and somewhat misleading title of this English (or rather, American) translation. I would much prefer the original Portuguese title, which translates as something like 'The end of the Earth and the Sky: the apocalypse in science and religion'.

Tim Chapman

### Fortean Times Verdict

BRIEFING FOR A DESCENT INTO THE MAELSTROM **8**

### Classic TV

# It's a question of survival

The series that asked: What happens *after* the end of the world?

## Survivors: The Complete First Series

UK 1975. DVD, DD Video £49.99

In the wake of 2003's SARS epidemic (see **FT172:32-37**), there's probably never been a better time than now to revive *Survivors*, Terry Nation's 1970s drama in which (at least in the memorable title sequence) a butter-fingered Chinese scientist accidentally unleashes a modern-day plague. Many of us will have strong memories of this programme (refreshed by Danny Boyle's shameless appropriation of much of it in his derivative *28 Days Later*), but for nearly 30 years we've had nothing *but* our memories to go on, as *Survivors* (which ran for 38 shows over three series) was never repeated.

This four-disc DVD set collects the 13 episodes of the first series (plus extras), and gives us the opportunity to compare recollection with reality.

Nostalgia, for a change, comes off second best; this was, in retrospect, one of the decade's key TV programmes; a simple, yet powerful, concept rich in potential storylines.

The question underlying the series is straightforward: with most of the human race wiped out by a mysterious 'plague', how does society reinvent itself? It's a question that applies both to physical resources such as food and transport and to ethical and social systems; each episode is devoted to a different facet of this fundamental problem, from fuel and agriculture to religion or law and



## Survivors is the dark twin of *The Good Life*

order. The first episode views the global catastrophe largely through the eyes of a middle



class housewife, Abby, whose placid world is shattered. To invoke another hit TV show of the era, Abby has to transform herself from Margot into Barbara, learning how to grow vegetables, keep livestock

and handle firearms. In fact *Survivors* is very much the dark twin of *The Good Life* – the same dream of turning away from the alienation and anomie of contemporary British life and replacing it with something more authentic sustains them both. As a viewer one can't help but feel (as Nation must have done) a genuine pleasure in sweeping away the accumulated rubbish of centuries, in wiping out an overpopulated, over-sophisticated society, over-dependent society. The themes of self-sufficiency and relearning old

skills are very much of their time, but they also take us back to the home front of WWII, where the watchwords were 'make do and mend' and the Albert Memorial was surrounded by allotments. Nation's happy apocalypse, removes all that followed (the welfare state, the growth of consumerism etc), and will strike you as either revolutionary or reactionary depending on your own position, but the essential idea of *starting again* is irresistible. Nation's vision, despite its emphasis on craft and community, doesn't lapse into a mediævalist rural idyll; conflict is unavoidable, because what's at stake is the shape of the future; ex-trade unionists, religious groups and patriarchal scions of the aristocracy all have competing ideas of what it should look like.

With intelligent scripts and excellent performances from the likes of Carolyn Seymour and Ian McCullough, *Survivors* has survived rather well.

David Sutton

### Fortean Times Verdict

A SEMINAL SERIES, MORE RELEVANT THAN EVER

9

## The Man who Sued God

Dir Mark Joffe, Australia 2001

Universal Home Video, DVD £17.99



*The Man Who Sued God* tells the story of Steve Myers (Billy Connolly), a man who has abandoned a stressful career as a lawyer to enjoy the simple things. Now a free spirit, living on the ocean waves as a

fisherman, his idyll is shattered when his boat is struck by lightning during a freak storm and the insurance company refuses to pay out, claiming the accident was an 'act of God'. Myers decides to fight back by suing God and putting his earthly representatives (in the form of prominent Church members and a rabbi) in the witness box.

When he encounters hard-nosed journalist Anna Redmond (Judy Davis, coming on far too intense for such a light movie), on the prowl for a big story, Myers becomes a national hero in the media-frenzy that ensues as he takes his case to court. And as the two get to know each other, their relationship takes its inevitable course...

Saccharine-sweet, fraught with cliché, and interspersed with some truly cringe-worthy slapstick scenes, this is not a great movie. Nevertheless, Connolly shines in the courtroom scenes, in which some clever exchanges take place as the little guy takes on the corporate giants of the insurance companies and the Church. Just when it looks like Myers has them up against a wall, he backs down and the movie returns to its initial froth. A waste of Connolly's talents.

Winnie Liesenfeld

### Fortean Times Verdict

A MOVIE SUFFERING FROM A MULTIPLE PERSONALITY CRISIS

7

## COMPETITION

Thanks to DD Video we have FIVE copies of *Survivors: The Complete First Series* to give away. Just tell us: WHO PLAYED ABBY'S HUSBAND IN THE FIRST EPISODE OF SURVIVORS?

Answers on a postcard to: 'FT179 SURVIVORS COMPETITION', Dennis Publishing P O Box 154, Bradford, BD1 5RZ (include the code CFT04179) or by email to: competitions@dennis.co.uk with 'FT179 Survivors comp' as the subject line by 30 Jan 2003.

Please include your name, address, daytime phone number and email address (and age if under 18). Please tell us if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers or new products from specified companies. Please indicate whether you are a current subscriber to Fortean Times. Terms and conditions: Winners will be notified by post. No cash alternative. The editor's decision is final. All the other usual competition rules, conditions and restrictions apply.

### Mace Griffin Bounty Hunter

GMX Media/Matrix Games, PC £29.99, PS2/Xbox £34.99



If ever a game has given me a dizzying sense of déjà vu, then this sci-fi shooter is it. Crawling through ducts, jumping across broken

bridges, blowing stuff up by shooting barrels of explosive – every done-to-death generic cliché of the FPS is on display in *Mace Griffin Bounty Hunter*, and delivered with considerably less panache than in (what feels like) a million other games. The FPS levels are broken up by unspeakably dull and totally unconvincing arcade-like excursions into space, where you get to blast enemy space craft to bits. The Western-in-space revenge plot and sub-Star Wars/Star Trek settings are equally unmemorable, as is singing-and-shouting bloke Henry Rollins' performance as the titular hero. At the end of the day this is as tired and unimaginative as games get. Save your money.

R C Samson

#### Fortean Times Verdict

ANOTHER TIRED, NOT TO SAY TIREISOME, SCI-FI SHOOTER

4

### Squad Assault: West Front

GMX Media/Matrix Games PC £29.99



Yet another WWII-set real time strategy game – and one that could have been very good indeed were it not for some persistently frustrating flaws.

You control either the Allied or Axis forces, guiding your men through a number of post D-Day battles or extensive campaigns, capturing vital bridges, clearing occupied villages or breaking through enemy-held lines. You have troops and vehicles of various kinds at your disposal, which need to be selected with some care in relation to mission briefings, and these are controlled via a simple interface which allows you to give orders such as 'march', 'attack', 'defend' and so

on. Each soldier on the battlefield is individually modelled – not just in terms of their relative firepower, but also in terms of morale; if they see too many comrades mown down in a hail of enemy fire they will probably panic, disobey your orders and break for the nearest cover. This can certainly lead (quite realistically) to utter confusion in the heat of battle, but a handy pause feature allows you to issue complex orders in relative calm before all hell breaks loose again.

If this all sounds rather familiar, it is; this is essentially *Close Combat* in a full 3-D environment complete with a mobile, controllable camera allowing you to pull back from an individual soldier to an overhead view of the whole battlefield. All of which is fine until you find yourself struggling to change your viewpoint at a crucial moment only to be left seemingly glued to a patch of earth where nothing important is happening while the wholesale slaughter of your troops continues somewhere else.

Overall, the muddy looking graphics leave plenty of room for improvement (and watching soldiers walk through the thick hedges of the *bocage* or the walls of Normandy farmhouses as if they were phantoms does serious damage to one's sense of a real battle).

AI is sometimes unpredictable; while the enemy are often smarter than you, they sometimes throw themselves into your line of fire in an appallingly careless fashion, and your own troops can prove just as capricious on occasion – which is considerably more annoying.

Having said all that, if you can forgive graphical glitches and AI lapses, there is plenty here that is good, from the large number of historical engagements available (and the bundled mod editor means you can create your own) to the genuine difficulty (and concomitant satisfaction) in achieving any degree of tactical success. *Squad Assault* has potentially got more going for it than more superficial (though prettier) recent efforts like *WWII: Frontline Command* so it's a shame that it doesn't deliver on that promise more convincingly and wholeheartedly.

David Sutton

#### Fortean Times Verdict

NOT A TOTAL ROUT, BUT THIS IS HARDLY A MAJOR VICTORY

6

## Add-ons abound

### X-planes, werewolves... and gridlock



In a lean month at least we can squeeze a tad more enjoyment out of some old favourites...

#### Battlefield 1942: Secret Weapons of WWII

EA Games PC £19.99

A mixed bag of historical curiosities straight out of *FT175's* Nazi UFOs feature and outright fantasies make up this enjoyable, if slightly disappointing, addition to *Battlefield 1942*: *Sturmtigers*, *Natters*, experimental amphibious vehicles, grenade launchers and jet packs (!) are all thrown gleefully into the mix, and while the single player option probably won't keep you busy for too long, the online multiplayer possibilities are entertaining to say the least.

8/10

#### The Elder Scrolls III: Bloodmoon

Ubisoft/Bethesda Softworks PC £19.99

Another expansion pack for the already dauntingly large world created in the excellent and slow-burning RPG *Morrowind*, *Bloodmoon* invites you to travel to the icy north and the island of Solstheim. There's exploration aplenty to be done, a mining colony to be built, lots of intriguing new flora and fauna unique to the island, and a more open-ended set of quests than in

*Tribunal*, the last *Morrowind* expansion. And, perhaps most toothsome of all, you might even get to become a werewolf this time around. 8/10

#### Medal of Honour: Breakthrough

EA Games PC £19.99

Another add-on pack for what was, until recently at least, everyone's favourite WWII shooter, this has taken a bit of stick from the

critics; but while *Breakthrough* might not offer anything radically new, it's still recommended to fans of the original game. It's not exactly a cohesive whole, but the multiplayer maps are good, and fighting it out at Monte Cassino and Anzio or

finding yourself caught up in a North African sandstorm offer some nice set pieces. 7/10

#### Sim City 4: Rush Hour

EA Games PC £19.99

As if London's own ongoing transport crisis isn't enough to be going on with, you can now create your very own through spectacular mismanagement of resources in this *Sim City 4* add-on. If that's not your idea of fun, you can also take the wheel on a number of driving missions, something quite new for this ever-popular series.

7/10

David Sutton



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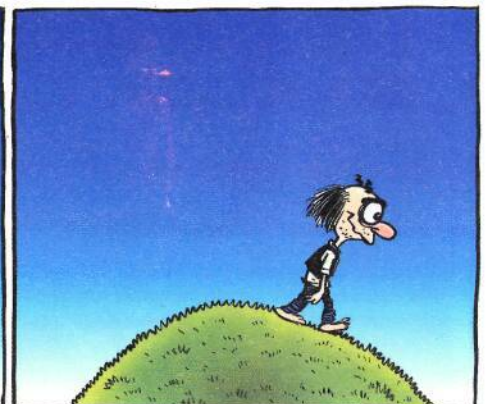
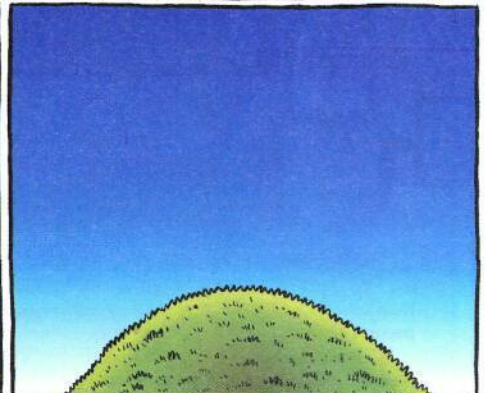
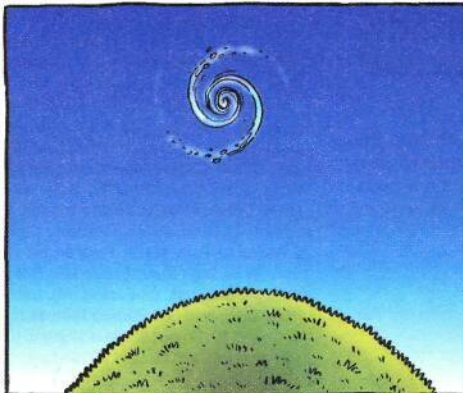
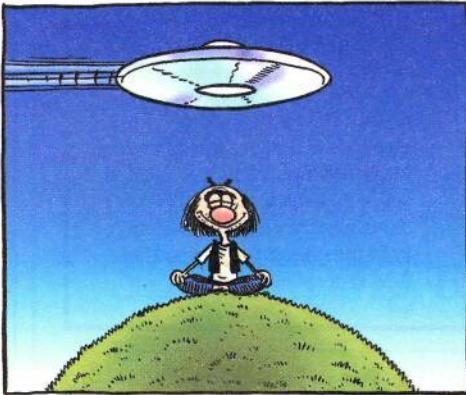
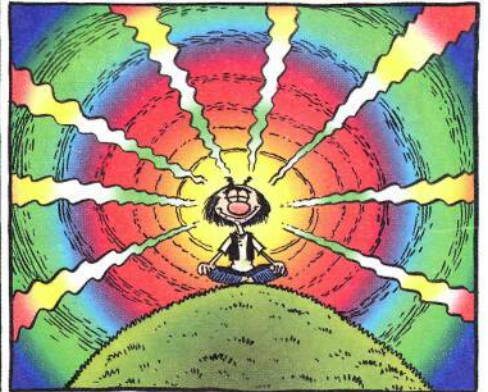
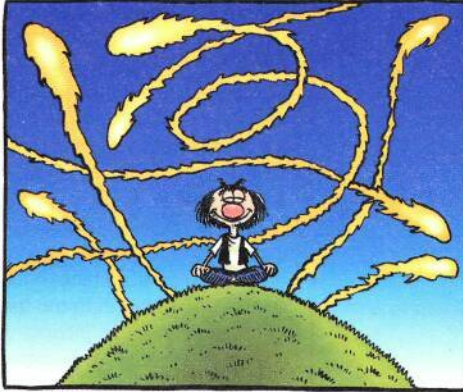
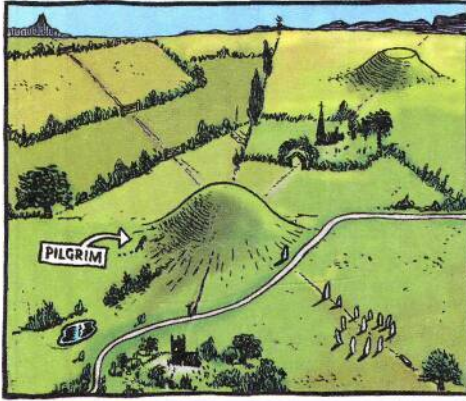
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# Why Fortean?



**F**ortean *Times* is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874-1932). Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data was ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient

nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Africa to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown. From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

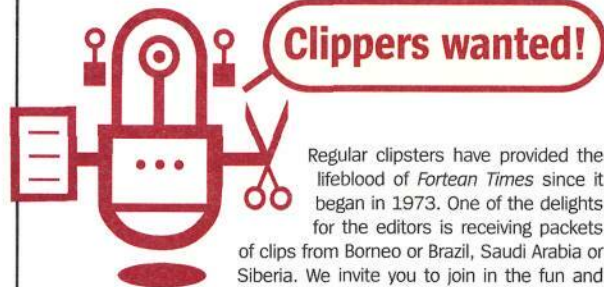
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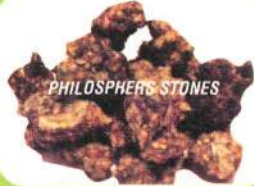
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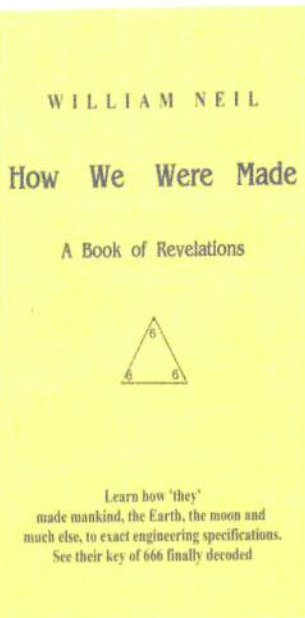
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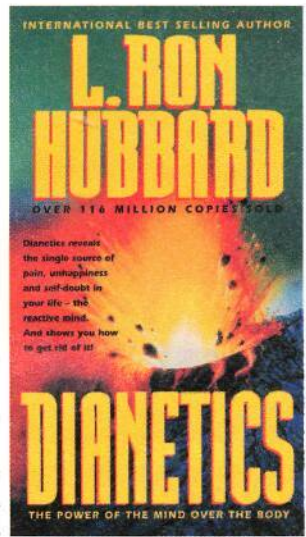
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Dear FT...

# letters



## ODD POST

Without wishing to create an extended correspondence in your letters pages, what was the difference between your regular monthly postbag at *FT* and the "Letters from the edge" in the 30th anniversary issue [FT177:76-77]?

**Patrick Sheehy**

*BMS Special Risk Services Ltd, London*

Editor's note: There was no hard and fast distinction; but some letters do appear stranger than others. This is of course a subjective judgement. If any readers took offence, inferring mockery of the afflicted, we apologise. *FT* is committed to publishing minority viewpoints with minimum editorial interference.

## NEUROLOGICAL CLOCK

Very often I wake up in the morning just a few minutes before my alarm clock is set to go off. Sometimes my waking precedes the alarm by just a few seconds. I have almost always had a sound, uninterrupted night's sleep when this happens, and am sure I have not sleepily glanced at the clock before waking fully. Either my brain is capable of measuring eight hours or so without reference (and without noting the exact time when sleep began), or my subconscious mind is expert at gauging the time by light levels or traffic noise. I find either explanation to be quite incredible – or am I tricking myself somehow? If anyone has another explanation, I'd love to hear it. I bet many other readers have the same (seeming) ability, perhaps without realising it.

**Joe Sawyer**

*By email*

## MERLIN'S TOMB

While in Brittany last summer, I saw a crocodile that had been caught in the Paris sewers and now lives in a very fine aquarium. I also saw a French 'jackalope' that my hotel hostess told me was called a *calou* and had been found wandering in

the gardens on New Year's Day. The greatest surprise, however, was finding that Merlin, Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table (allegedly) lived in France rather than Somerset. Merlin's tomb in the Forêt de Broceliand – the remains of a Neolithic burial mound that now consists of two stones and a hawthorn tree – is visited by thousands from all over Europe, from as far afield as Spain and Poland, who come to put little messages and prayers to the great enchanter and taste the waters of the Fountain of Youth (sadly dried up on my visit).

**Ian B Dunne**

*Southampton*

## NAZI TECHNOLOGY

Kevin McClure is to be congratulated on an excellent article on Nazi-UFO mythology [FT175:42-47] as this subject has needed a good dissecting for a long time, in much the same manner as the Area 51/reverse engineering fairy tales. One has to wonder why a political war machine like Nazi Germany would have hesitated to use a super weapon like a flying disc that could have easily outclassed the Allies' air weaponry.

The simple answer, revealed by McClure, is that the Nazis never

had them. However, a far more provocative view comes to mind when one considers what other military hardware the Nazis were actually working on, things that were in the planning stage at least, and in some cases were operational. Examples include the Sanger long-range rocket bomber with a forward speed of 13,000mph (21,000km/h), which could have flown from Germany to New York in no more than two hours; the Focke-Wulf Ta 183, which eventually provided the Russians with the technical design data for their successful MiG-15 jet fighter; and the Messerschmitt Me 262 jet fighter, which saw some use just before the European war ended.

At least one documented incident raises more questions than answers. On 2 November 1944, B-24s of the 489th Bomber Group were sent on a raid to destroy the railway marshalling yards at Bielefeld, and were being defended by P-47 fighter escorts. The pilots were then surprised to meet several Me 262s, in one of the earliest jet attacks against US heavy bombers. The surprising twist to this incident is that the Me 262 jets were chased off by the P-47 escorts, and the 489th BG suffered no losses. One has to wonder why the German pilots didn't use what

they should have known were faster fighter planes to outrun the US fighters and attack the bombers. Were they just out on practice flights? That seems unlikely, given the date and the area. Were the Me 262s not fully equipped for battle? Unlikely again, especially if they were scrambled to attack the bombers. The answers to this mystery, I think, might be even more interesting than a Neo-Nazi's revisionist fairy tale about flying discs.

**Mike Reese**

*Chicago*

## CRYPTOZOLOGY ON TV

In their review of '30 years of cryptozoology' [FT177:28], Karl Shuker and Loren Coleman mention *The X-Files* using the term 'cryptozoology' in a 1995 episode. I seem to remember the term being used on mainstream TV in the bigfoot-themed US sitcom *Harry and the Hendersons*, which was aired in America 1990-93 and in the UK 1991-95. I'm almost sure the monster-hunter character in the show described himself as a cryptozoologist. Can anyone confirm this?

**Pete Mella**

*Sheffield*

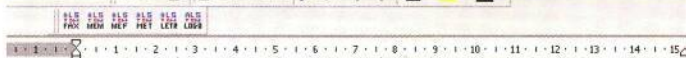
## Simulacra Corner



**Dean Wilkinson of Stockton** noticed that the leaves from a bush on his lawn had arranged themselves into the shape of a duck.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them to the PO box address at the top of the page (with a SAE or international reply coupon) and we'll pay a tenner or 20 dollars for any we use.

## Virtual phantom text



1. From the available VMWARE sessions (See minimized icons at bottom of screen) select the CINCOSM Test session.
2. Re-boot this VM. Do this by pressing CTRL-ALT-INSERT. Then follow the normal procedure. Wait for VM to restart, this will take a few minutes and the screen will look just like a normal PC re-boot.
3. Login to the newly-re-booted VM session using:

m.xczm,.,.,,  
Clearing 'Stuck' sessions from Crowns:

```
#m/vvx  
#czvvm*  
/  
vmm  
v*v,.*#vmv*c**,*vmcz#x
```

I work in IT, have done for just over five years. I was covering for an IT department in our Wolverton site in Milton Keynes (I'm normally based in Borehamwood, Hertfordshire). Both the regular staff were off for the week and I found myself at the deep end of a host of network-related problems. As I was typing up a procedure I heard the familiar sound of a mobile (that doug-doug-doug sound) just before the ring tone kicks in. I stared at my company mobile (Nokia 6110) expecting it to ring at any moment, but it didn't. When I looked back at my screen to the document I was typing, a series of seemingly random letters and symbols had appeared above one of my sub-headings. (The application was Word 97 on a Windows 2000 machine). I assumed that I'd brushed the keyboard, so I deleted the typo and carried on. Less than 30 seconds later I heard a pre-mobile ring tone again, but this time I kept watching my screen and with each "doug" I saw another letter appear. This time I took a screen-print of the document and the typo.

To make sure the error was not in my head, I tried a simple experiment. I put my company mobile by my PC and phoned it several times from a land phone on the desk next to me. The results were quite odd. I let the mobile ring, so I heard the doug-doug-doug followed by the ring tone itself. As the ring continued, I witnessed more text appearing on screen, moving slowly and returning itself automatically to the next line. The text was appearing in sync with the ring tone. I took a screen-print of this as well. In total there were now five lines of phantom text.

Working in IT, one does see some strange things – for example, problems have a habit of disappearing from PCs once you stare at them. And we've all seen and heard the TV screen crackle or the radio go fuzzy when a mobile goes off in close proximity. I'm just a humble IT support engineer and have no background in electronics. However, I've never heard of a radio/digital signal/frequency manifesting itself as written characters within a virtual environment. If this were a common problem, then radios would be outlawed in all computerised office environments. Is there a cryptic message in the phantom text? Do I now hold the key to messages from beyond? Or is it simply that Microsoft™ products are crap?

Joel Lawrence, *By email*

## SPOOKY MESSAGE

I would like to add what little info I have to the debate on the spooky message in Burnley, Lancashire [FT139:51, 156:52, 170:58, 174:71, 176:71.] I myself am from Burnley, and have a vivid memory of the said phone message, "Help me, Suzie's dying". In either 1980 or 1981, three other girls and I were loitering with the intent not to go back to school

after lunch. We were messing around in a phone box near to school, calling random numbers and talking rubbish if anyone answered (well we thought it was funny!).

One of the girls said she knew a number you could call to hear a "spooky message" – I think there were 3s and 2s in it. When she called this number we all heard the message as quoted in previous correspondence. I have no doubts as

to the phrasing of what I heard. It was a clear voice with no audible distortion. Needless to say, we were all a bit freaked out by this and when a British Telecom van pulled up nearby we made a hasty retreat and returned to school.

Tracey Maclean

*Knaresborough, North Yorkshire*

## 911 CONSPIRACY THEORIES

With regard to Ian Henshall's article on 911 conspiracies [FT176:54-55], the claim that explosives were placed in the World Trade Center was never part of the official explanation. Instead the idea has been a key part in most 911 conspiracy theories over the past two years, but sadly one based on very bad science.

The early versions of the theory had it that the steel in the towers would not have collapsed unless the fires had been hot enough to melt the steel, around 1,400°C (2,552°F); but aviation fuel fires only burn at 800–850°C (1,472–1,562°F), so the fire couldn't have caused the collapse by itself; thus "they" planted the explosives (several tons of it without the occupants noticing) to make sure the towers collapsed. This is of course nonsense. Steel doesn't have to be heated to melting point to suffer collapse, indeed it will lose half its strength at 600°C (1,112°F), so even an ordinary domestic/office fire which can reach 1,000°C (1,832°F) would have been sufficient to cause the already weakened towers to collapse. Recently the conspiracists have been forced to accept this and, in the best traditions of conspiracy theory, have changed the evidence to fit, now claiming that the fires didn't "rage" at even 800°C but just smouldered gently at around 250–300°C (482–572°F). A claim usually supported with even worse science than before.

www.whatreallyhappened.com provides as good an example as any.

Mr Henshall also points the finger at NORAD for the delay in getting fighters airborne whereas the timeline on the Co-Operative research site (probably the most comprehensive yet available) clearly shows that the delay originated with Air Traffic Control (ATC). Taking Flight 11 as an example, ATC decided it had been

hijacked at 8:20 when its transponder was switched off, yet it wasn't until 8:40 that they notified NORAD. NORAD scrambled two F-15s from Otis Air Force Base at around 8:46, just as Flight 11 struck the first tower, and they were airborne at 8:52.

[www.cooperativeresearch.org/timeline/main/dayof911.html](http://www.cooperativeresearch.org/timeline/main/dayof911.html)

Conspiracists also blame the Gulf of Tonkin fiasco on the 4-5 August 1964 for the Vietnam War without mentioning that on the 2 August the destroyer *USS Maddox* was attacked by three North Vietnamese torpedo boats. They did little damage, but unlike the incident two days later, when the US Navy expended a lot of ammunition shooting at shadows, it was real. Anyway, by that time there were 3,000 US troops stationed in Vietnam, over 100 of whom had already been killed, so the slow process of the US being sucked into an unwinnable war had already begun; and therein lies the only real parallel with modern events.

Phil Hide

*By email*

## MARINE FOOTNOTES

The responses to my article on marine mysteries [FT172:46-52] warrant a rejoinder. I was torn between including the *Great Eastern* and *Mary Celeste* stories against those of the ghost of John Pedder on the *Queen Mary* and the legend of Admiral Sir John Tryon of the RN flagship *Victoria*. (You can find both of these at <http://paranormal.about.com/library/weekly/>). However, as there appeared to be a new angle on the *Mary Celeste*, the old phantom won the day, and *The Great Eastern* is always worth another trip around the lighthouse.

With regards to the *Mary Celeste*, Roger Musson enters into the fortaean spirit by at least claiming to have 'enjoyed' this collection of yarns. However, in my defence, I can hardly be blamed that Captain Williams's website was moved elsewhere after my feature had been submitted. Secondly, although the reference to Zurich and earthquake detection was indeed a sloppy error, it certainly wasn't "Bainton's addition" – this misinformation was definitely available on the Net at the time I

put the feature together (although it has since vanished). I had no knowledge of Zurich's relevance to earthquake detection and wouldn't have opted to make a sucker of myself by making such a wild guess. I offered Captain Williams's hypothesis simply as an alternative to much of the Conan Doyle-based claptrap about the case of the *Mary Celeste* which has persisted down the years.

Roger Downham castigates me for what I did write, in this case the initial ill-fated attempt at cable-laying by Brunel's *Great Eastern* – but largely for what I didn't. Yes, most of the vessels mentioned in my piece probably had very successful careers despite any isolated phenomenal occurrences. I utterly agree with Mr Downham that the *Great Eastern's* cable-laying feats were an amazing technical achievement; yet one has to admit that the life of this huge ship was punctuated with more than her fair share of bizarre bad luck.

Finally, I must thank Phil Hide for setting the record straight as unlike many researchers (this one included) he appears to have actually inspected the records of the ship breakers Henry Bath and Sons in Birkenhead. A search for the culprit for the 'bodies in the hull' yarn always leads back to James Duggan and his *Great Iron Ship* (1953). However, perhaps the ship-breakers hushed things up – we'll never know. As Charles Fort wrote: "There is a fictional coloration to everybody's account of an 'actual occurrence', and there is at least the lurk somewhere of what is called 'the actual' in everybody's yarns."

**Roy Bainton**

*Mansfield, Nottinghamshire*

## GOLDFISH MYSTERY

On 14 September 2001, my girlfriend and I and our one-year-old boy were staying with my brother Paul in Brisbane, Australia. I turned in at about 1am, while my brother stayed up till about 2am watching football. I awoke from a bad dream at about 3am which is very uncommon for me. At the same moment, our boy had also awoken, and was crying for a feed. As I was very used to waking up in the middle of the night, I felt quite alert, and walking through the

lounge to the kitchen I noticed nothing out of the ordinary. Our boy next woke up at 6am, so I got up with him and went to the adjacent lounge to veg out to early morning kids' TV. It was early spring, and feeling the chill I checked to see if the windows had been closed the night before – they had.

Next to the TV was a small 12 x 6 x 6in (30 x 15 x 15cm) fish tank on top of a large, old stereo speaker. I think I was just staring blankly at it when I realised that it appeared to have been emptied. My first thought was that somehow it must have sprung a leak. On close inspection, I saw that the tank had been emptied save for the bottom inch (3cm) of water, and weirdly the little goldfish was swimming in a sea shell at the bottom of the tank, which contained just enough water to hold the fish. I couldn't see a single drop of water on the floor around the tank or in the speaker box. Later, we refilled the tank and to this day no leak has occurred.

Where did the water go? As mentioned, it was cool in the house with all the windows closed. When my brother awoke I filled him in on this little mystery much to his complete bafflement, and being a scientist he set out to solve it. Two years later we're still scratching our heads. The best scenario we could come up with is that it may have been some kind of bizarre prank, but I strongly doubt that anyone would have gained entry to the house without waking at least myself because the front steps and wooden floor creak very loudly, the walls are thin, and I'm a light sleeper. Today the same goldfish swims happily in the same tank.

**Michael Metcalfe**

*Melbourne, Australia*

## MAGIC GUITAR SOLOS

Christopher Joyce ['Haunted Cassette' FT174:72] has probably fallen foul to the idiosyncrasies of old tape equipment. As an amateur recording enthusiast, I have often encountered the bizarre and amusing effects of using a variety of cheap and/or decrepit equipment. I am also interested in how this relates to EVP (Electronic Voice Phenomenon) – the appearance of unusual voices on recordings.

An ageing (creaking?) tape transport system and a favourite

well-worn tape can crinkle or loosen and produce sounds very similar to what Mr Joyce describes. Rewinding can stretch the tape back to normality. Many machines have a faster forward wind than a reverse one, so that if he had accidentally hit fast forward he might have wound the tape sufficiently far into the blank run-out to defeat several quick attempts to rewind to the audio. The sound of breathing beneath the hiss he describes is extremely reminiscent of blank tape, on which very quiet backward signals bleed through from the tape's other side.

I would also like to mention the 'magic guitar solo' effect that often occurs in recording sessions and to which I am sure many musician readers can attest. Odd background noises in the mix of a song can combine to create the illusion of a counterpoint melody. Most frequently, the effect is like a quiet extra guitar line, but sometimes can even resemble distant backing vocals. I've lost count of the number of times musicians have turned to me and asked if I have recorded an extra instrument while they were out of the session.

The background sounds can be snatches bleeding through from

previous takes or other random effects, but sometimes they only appear as a combination of all the sounds on the tracks playing together. What is remarkable is how often they complement the song and provide inspiration. Sometimes an additional part is worked out from the suggested backing noise and actually recorded, sometimes the effect is powerful enough just to leave in 'as is'. I hope spirit musicians aren't sticking their oars into the creative process... a kind of EMP (Electronic Music Phenomenon)!

When all else fails, I and many producers take to recording random improvised noise or static samples over songs and seeing where the brain can pick out half-imagined extra melodies to complement the music. Is the human brain's overwhelming propensity to perceive patterns in nonsense coming to the fore, or is the creative process almost shamanistic in its opening up of the mind to outside influences? As a songwriter, I can certainly agree that songs are not so much written consciously as 'given', the best popping into the head unbidden and almost complete.

**Ryan Shirlow**

*York*

## The face in the window

We thought you would like to see the picture my friend Jenny sent me of a face at the window. I know the family well and they are definitely sane. Early on Sunday evening, 19 May 2002, the family was having dinner when someone asked whose face was on the window. It was a perfect imprint of a face, beautifully detailed, on the inside, made visible by the sunshine. It didn't resemble anyone in the family.

**Tracy Phipps**, *Newbury, Berkshire*



## PYE'S STARCHILD

Jim Lippard [FT176:71] is right to upbraid me for my hyperbole; it was exaggerated and probably misleading. However, a mere numerical recital of hominid finds is potentially equally misleading, given the relatively small (not to say tiny) size of many of them.

Pye's own analogy at the lecture (which I should have quoted) is more accurate than either of our attempts. He said that if you laid out all the acknowledged hominid specimens, they would struggle to fill a tennis court. This neatly makes the point on the relative paucity of evidence from which a succession of grandiose theories derive.

While we're on the subject, in a recent forum piece [FT175:55] Jon Downes made a case for the starchild skull being an example of cryptozoology rather than a human (or alien) phenomenon. It seems to me that a couple of things militate against this.

First, bone density: as I understand it, all primates other than humans have much denser bones than we do, indicating a larger relative muscle mass. Pye's find doesn't fit this picture; if anything, the skull's bone morphology is finer than most humans.

Second, the DNA evidence so far, partial as it is, indicates human parentage, at least on the maternal side. That said, I tend to agree that, if the skull is evidence of a genetic or physical abnormality, then it is not one presently known; obviously, there is the possibility that isolated peoples in the past have suffered syndromes which are no longer around, and the starchild might have been a sufferer from a disease we no longer recognise.

Sitchin and the aliens aside, the skull is certainly worthy of serious investigation, and it's good that so many people are contributing to the debate.

**Noel Rooney**  
London

Oh dear! First we had Pye-in-the-sky aliens travelling from the non-existent planet Annunaki to Mexico to impregnate Chihuahuan maidens [FT127:42-45, 173:34-35]. Now Jon Downes dismisses the Annunakians and suggests that the real culprits responsible for inseminating the Mexican maidens were local boys, a

gang of mythological cave-dwelling dwarfs [FT175:55]!

Downes notes "dozens of major differences" in the starchild skull from "the basic human 'template'", but neglects to inform us what these aberrations are. He does, however, describe the cranium as being symmetrical and "perfectly designed".

Unlike Downes, I have not handled the cranium, but from the published photographs, as others have previously affirmed, it is clearly that of an indigenous Indian child, possibly suffering from mild hydrocephalus, with extreme occipital flattening resulting from the use of a cradle-board. The Smithsonian Institution in Washington has a remarkable collection of artificially deformed and pathologically altered human skulls – if there are any left after the politically correct campaign for the 'repatriation' and reburial of Indian remains. Similar collections are also present in the national museums of Mexico, Bolivia and Peru.

**Herbert Opiaro**  
Newport, Essex

## MADAME BLAVATSKY

Christopher Hale's important archival research into the SS expedition to Tibet [FT175:30-39] is marred by some gratuitous libelling of Madame Blavatsky, whom he calls an "odd charlatan" who "concocted" a history of the Masters, and whose journey to Tibet was "all nonsense". Moreover, "she was caught out writing the letters which she claimed were precipitated by her Mahatmas." (p.37)

The Mahatma Letters, which are in that same British Library where Hale

began his research, are not in her handwriting, even disguised. So concluded Dr Vernon Harrison in his paper "J'Accuse" in the *SPR Journal*, April 1986. Blavatsky's cosmology in *The Secret Doctrine* does indeed have some Tibetan affinities, although earlier sources were Sanskrit. David Reigle, a translator of Sanskrit Buddhist scriptures, has argued this in many papers, some collected in *Blavatsky's Secret Books* (San Diego, Wizards Bookshelf, 1999.) The point about the Tashilumpo monastery in Shigatse is that it was the centre of the Tashi or Panchen Lama who was then especially associated with the Kalachakra tradition. Reigle, who is initiated in this, believes Blavatsky was linked to it too.

The suggestion that Theosophy became more popular among Germans after 1933 has a hollow ring. The Nazis prohibited the Theosophical Society, which had always been interracial as well as interreligious.

Essential information about Blavatsky's western and eastern sources has been published since 1985 by the quarterly *Theosophical History* ([www.theohistory.org](http://www.theohistory.org)), which is neither for nor against any particular interpretation.

**Leslie Price**  
Wallington, Surrey

## EXPLODING MOBILES

Regarding 'exploding mobiles' [FT176:30]; it is unlikely that 'sparks from the battery' or 'air being heated by electromagnetic waves' could cause an explosion. There is a problem with high-powered portable phones, in that the radio waves from the phone can induce a voltage in any conductors exposed to them. Where

the induced voltage is high enough, a spark can jump to an earthed point, risking an explosion. This was much more of a problem with the old CB radios, which were powerful enough in some cases to cause a spark, though even then the main concern of the petrol retailers was the fact that petrol pump readings could be affected. Power levels on mobiles are now much lower, presenting little risk of an explosion.

**Leo Bjorkegren**  
By email

It is a bad idea to use any electrical equipment near highly flammable fumes unless it is specifically shielded. Any electrical equipment can generate a spark, particularly if it is faulty. The injuries from explosions caused by static electricity while filling up at petrol stations are well documented, with 30 incidents in 2002 in the US alone (see [www.pei.org/static/fire\\_reports.htm](http://www.pei.org/static/fire_reports.htm)). The idea of mobile phones causing fires is indeed (so far) an urban legend, but it is theoretically possible. While there are as yet no documented cases, it is much better to err on the side of caution. Besides, there are documented cases of mobile phone batteries spontaneously exploding. See [www.theregister.co.uk/content/68/32462.html](http://www.theregister.co.uk/content/68/32462.html) and FT172:10 for examples. Imagine if that happened while filling up with fuel.

**Robert Euston**  
Beare Green, Surrey

## 23 SKIDOO

The phrase "23 skidoo" [FT175:23, 177:71] comes from Death Valley, California, according to what I read in 1981 when I visited the area. Mining borax there must have been extremely difficult in the early days, and getting it out was equally challenging. It took 23 mules to haul the borax carts to Skidoo, where it was loaded onto trains to the Los Angeles area for processing.  
**Lucas Mudskipper**  
San Francisco, California

**Editor's note:** F Gwynpayne Macintyre writes to support the notion, advanced by fellow New Yorker William Hohausser [FT177:75], that "23 skidoo" originates from windswept 23rd Street in New York, made even more windy by the erection of the famous Flatiron Building in 1902.



## It happened to me . . .

First hand accounts from the message board of [forteantimes.com](http://forteantimes.com)



### Indian time slip

In the summer of 1985, I was working for the Kansas Department of Transportation, doing traffic studies at the intersections of remote rural highways. It was a dull job, but it afforded me some time to read and earn some money for college.

One particular hot July afternoon, I found myself doing a traffic study overlooking the Smokey Hill river valley in west central Kansas. It had been a rather uneventful day. All of a sudden I heard a very high-pitched noise akin to electronic feedback. My first reaction was to turn down the car radio, which I did to no avail. The irritating sound seemed to come from the back of the vehicle, so I got out to investigate. As I walked down the road, a movement to my right caught my eye. I turned my head and saw an Indian on a horse coming down the highway embankment. This was not a modern-day Native American, but an Indian brave circa 1840. He was naked except for a leather loin cloth and a pair of moccasins and was riding bareback without any conventional bridle, just a rope tied around the pony's head. In his right hand was an antique looking rifle and in his left the rope.

The sight took my breath away and all I could think of was saying "Hi!" He ignored me as if I were not there. As he

approached the far side of the road, he stopped and intently scanned the river valley below. I turned to see what he was looking at. Down in the valley was a large herd of buffalo strung out for miles. This sight made my head swim because the mighty herds of buffalo had been exterminated in Kansas over a century ago.

I caught my breath and turned back to observe the Indian, but he was gone. I ran over to where I had last seen him and looked down the hill. There was no sign of the Indian and now no trace of the buffalo either. As the hot sun beat down on me, I slowly walked back to the car and noticed that the annoying sound was absent, too.

**Keith Manies**

*By email*

### Person-shaped hole

I was a student at Birmingham University at the beginning of the 1980s, but used to drive home to Nottingham most Friday nights, returning to Birmingham on the following Sunday. The journey was about 50 miles (80km) each way, and it was on one such drive home that I witnessed a phenomenon for which I have absolutely no explanation.

Part of my journey used to take me along a straight country road through the village of Lount in Derbyshire. Just before

the village, there is a steep hill (downhill in the direction I was going) as it passes Lount landfill site. It was dark, though the moon was out. There were no streetlights on that stretch of road, but my car headlights were lit. As I passed the entrance to the landfill site, I was suddenly aware of a figure running into the path of my car from the opposite side of the road. The figure wasn't so much a "shadow" as a silhouette. The edges were clearly defined, but there were no details to be seen. It was just as if someone had cut a "person-shaped" hole in space itself.

From the size and shape, I estimate that it was a boy of maybe 13 years old. The shape ran in front of my car before I had a chance to take evasive action. In that instant, I hit the brakes and braced for the impact. The car slewed to a halt, but there was no bump. I pulled the car into a lay-by a little way down the road, and made a good search, but there was nobody to be seen. No bump, no body and no signs of anything untoward. I sat in the car, upset and shaking for a good five minutes, and then continued on my way.

**Chris Shilling**

*By email*

### Growing slime

One night, when I was about 12 or 13, my fellow boy scouts and I were on a night hike through Warwickshire fields and lanes. At some point, I stopped with a friend to look into a crack that had formed in the ageing tarmac. It was about a foot (30cm) long and we wanted to see how deep it was. We shone our torches into the crack and saw what looked like a bright green slime (like the stuff kids play with), and it seemed to glow independently once we took our torches off of it. The other scouts had carried on up the lane and the scoutmaster shouted at us to catch up, so we never got a chance to see what it actually was. Is there some sort of algae or vegetation that behaves like this?

**Stuart Donooe**

*By email*



# FORTEAN TRAVELLER



## 28. The Zone, Chernobyl, Ukraine

STEVE KOKKER turns on his Geiger counter and enters the Tarkovskyan world of Chernobyl's exclusion zone



dispensing alcohol, cigarettes, peanuts and Pepsi. People came in for the booze – either downed on the spot or tucked under an arm to be taken away. A white plastic lawn table and chairs sat in the corner for those too shaky to stand. I had occupied one of those chairs just a few hours before.

A walk around town in the morning air would do me good, I thought. Instead, my surroundings were taking on a dizzyingly surreal quality. What was attributable to Stolichnaya and what to stray radioisotopes I didn't know.

Signs that things weren't

quite as they appeared were everywhere: people were on the streets, but not one of them was a woman; there were well-kept houses with gardens, but they sat lonely and conspicuous among abandoned and decaying homes, left untouched for 16 years, their rusted post-boxes standing as ghostly sentinels; there were kiosks and bars, but they catered to a very specific clientele: workers risking their health to deal with the continuing after-effects of the planet's worst nuclear accident.

*A Through the Looking Glass* feel hung over our two days in Chernobyl. Everywhere, it seemed, parallel universes vied for space. Walking past quiet, overgrown fields, the only indication that all was not as peaceful as it seemed was the screeching of our Geiger counters. As we attempted to wrap our heads around the enormity of the catastrophe that had occurred here, our buxom, effusive and interminably jovial guide Rimma kept us in stitches with her witty remarks in an English more fluent than that of most of my friends and with well-timed quotes from Joseph Conrad and Dr Seuss.

I might have been prepared for *Heart of Darkness* in this post-nuclear landscape, but Dr Seuss? Yet nowhere else on Earth, I thought, would green eggs and ham find a more appropriate setting.

Truth is a relative concept in the prism of



STEVE KOKKER

## The Zone has its own laws, different from those outside

Chernobyl's multiple realities. It seemed that everyone offered different versions of the current dangers presented by the defunct reactor, from our bubbly guide to Volodymyr Kholosha, head of the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone, to Dmitri, the Kalashnikov-toting policeman guarding a radioactive metal dump. Web sites present still different statistics. These, in turn, contradict the findings of local and international scientists as well as reports from ordinary citizens living in contaminated areas. Facts and figures, the pallbearers of truth in a world whitewashed by information, were what underwent the most serious mutations in Chernobyl.

The Zone has its own laws, different from those on the outside. There are elderly folk who, years after having been forced to leave, moved back to their contaminated villages to live out their days in abandoned villages, feeding on the vegetables they grow on irradiated land. There are people who sneak across the Zone's poorly-guarded borders to steal car parts and scrap metal from dump-site repositories of some of the world's most radioactive vehicles – the trucks, helicopters and tractors used in the initial cleanup efforts.

Then there are the workers themselves, who



ETIENNE GUILLETAN

shrug their shoulders when asked if they worry about the consequences of their jobs: What can we do? What choice do we have? What's a little radiation – we all have to die sometime.

It was with mixed feelings that we drove to Chernobyl, 130km (81 miles) north of Kiev, Ukraine's stately, impressive capital. Excited to visit one of Earth's final frontiers, we were also buoyed by a dash of self-congratulatory pride: we were doing what many were too squeamish to do. What kept us from feeling too giddy was a guilt-laced ambivalence over being tourists in a place that had caused so much pain and devastation – and the uneasiness of not knowing what exactly was floating in the air around us.

Dot-on-the-map villages spread out thinner the further from Kiev we drove. Once we passed the control post (no one gets through without

government-issued permits) and entered the Exclusion Zone, however, it was as if humanity itself had vanished and all that was left were shoulder-high weeds obscuring views of abandoned wooden homes.

Fields untouched for years stood either side of the paved road leading to the once-bustling town of Chernobyl, which had a pre-accident population of 18,000. A light drizzle had begun by the time we reached our radioactive Timbuktu, dropping God-knows-what from an ominously grey sky. Today, some 4,000 people call Chernobyl home, albeit a temporary one. They are shift workers, scientists and forest rangers whose main jobs are the continued dismantling of the station (Chernobyl's remaining reactors were shut down for good in 2000), researching the effects of radiation on surrounding nature and wildlife,



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ABOVE LEFT: One of the check-points for the Chernobyl area, located 3km (1.9 miles) from the power plant. ABOVE: Rimma, our guide, reassures us that radiation levels outside the station are nothing to worry about. LEFT: The road to Chernobyl is dotted with villages reclaimed by the forest

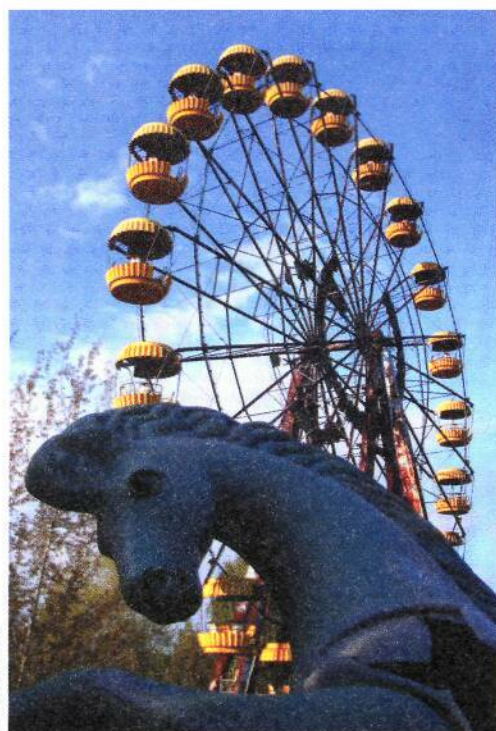
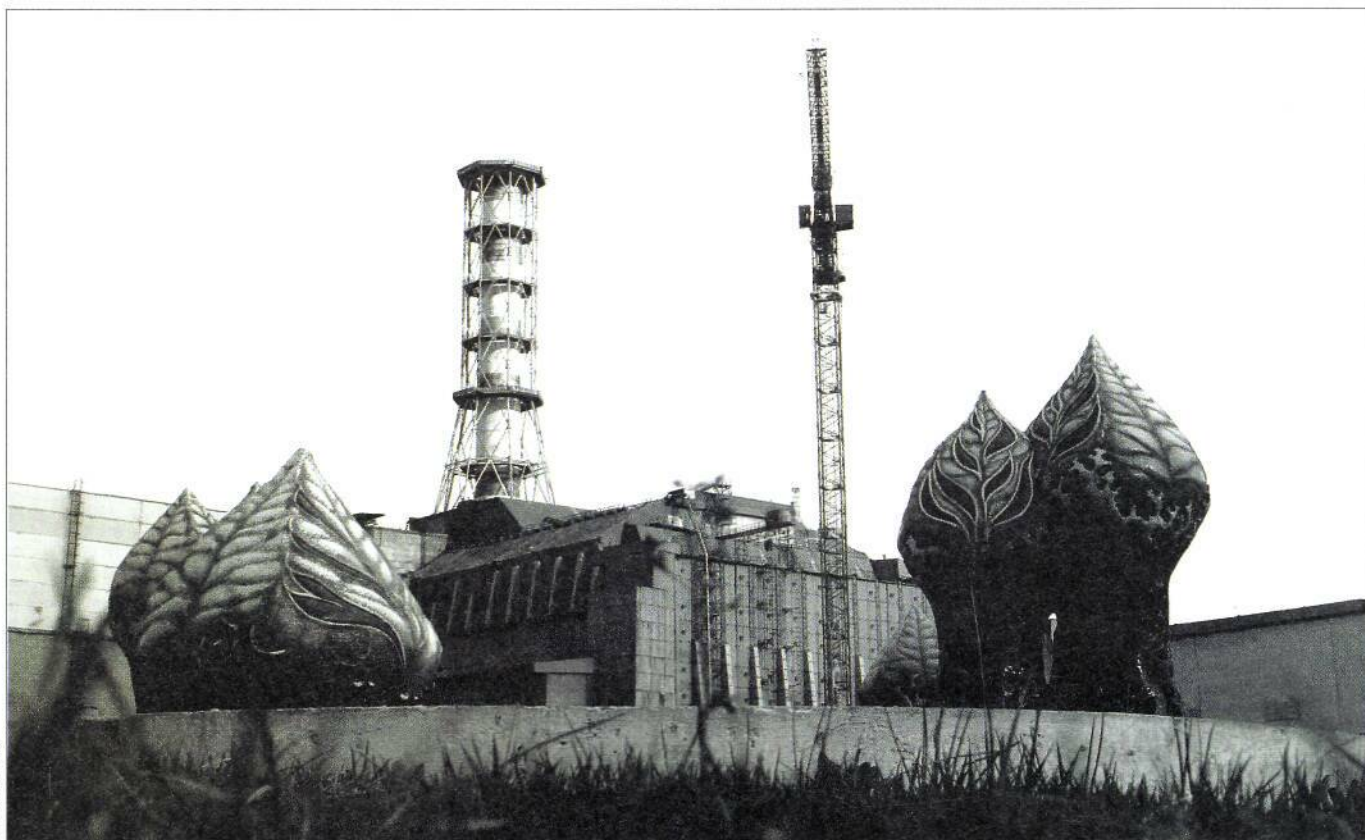
guarding equipment from vandalism or looting, and ensuring the prevention of forest fires. The average wage inside the Zone, when it's paid at all, is \$150 (£90) a month (those working in the nuclear station itself can make two to three times more).

There's another mini-industry developing out of Chernobyl's smouldering ashes: tourism. It's mainly doctors, scientists, biologists and other specialists who make their way into the Exclusion Zone, but more recently, a small number of artists and adventurers have found their way there, seeking the exotic, the forbidden, the unimaginable. All of which can be had in Pripjat, on whose outskirts the infamous nuclear station lies, 18km (11m) from the town of Chernobyl. Where 50,000 people once lived, all that remains of the city are endless blocks of abandoned, vandalised concrete apartment buildings interspersed with wild parks and lawns.

Due to its status as a closed city, Pripjat had one of the best standards of living in Ukraine. Now it looks like the forgotten set of a 1950s post-apocalyptic sci-fi flick. A football stadium has been overtaken by shrubs and overgrowth; a decaying amusement park is now half-covered in moss that gives off more than 100 times the maximum allowed radiation.

"This is perhaps the saddest place of all," said Rimma as we walked among the rust-eaten metallic rides, carousels and bright yellow ferris wheel. "I don't like to stay here very long."

April 26th 1986 was the day of the meltdown, when the fourth reactor blew up. It remains the biggest nuclear accident in history. The resulting explosion and release of radioisotopes exposed



local residents to 100 times the radiation released by the bomb at Hiroshima, and sent radioactive particles spewing across the globe.

The residents of Pripyat say the explosion was small – most slept through it. Many ventured close to the plant the next day to watch the firemen put out the blaze. They were told there was no danger. Only 36 hours later were they evacuated, with the promise that they'd be back within a few weeks.

"There were 31 people killed by the accident," Rimma told us as we drove in a rickety Lada towards the station itself. I looked dumbfounded at the other two journalists bouncing in the cramped backseat with me. Our guide's tone was almost challenging. She paused,

waiting for our anticipated rebuke. We had all read estimates of Chernobyl's death toll as ranging from 10,000 to 60,000, including those resulting from cancer and other illnesses contracted as a direct or indirect cause of the meltdown. In 2001, even Russia's usually tight-lipped Minister of the Interior, Boris Gryzlov, admitted a death toll of 10,000, with at least 35,000 more disabled. Approximately four million people reportedly still live in contaminated areas in Ukraine and Belarus, many of them suffering from a range of health defects.

"The media has greatly exaggerated the accident," said Rimma, turning around from the front seat and offering us a wide smile. You

TOP: Chernobyl power station looms behind the inaugural sculpture installed at the time of the plant's commissioning; the flowering buds represented the new life and prosperity people hoped the plant would bring to the region.

ABOVE LEFT: A rusty carousel, one of the remnants of Luna Park in the ghost city of Pripyat.

ABOVE RIGHT: An abandoned school decays slowly.

wanted to believe her. Her expansive mat of blond, curly hair was one of the softest sights in Chernobyl, and her powerful, admirably chunky frame underscored her intellectual might. She had the daunting physical presence of a Soviet shot-putter, the kind you'd marvel at in 1970s-era Olympic Games, yet displayed a keen



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intellectual rigour. Was she downplaying the tragedy? Had we entered the Soviet zone of reality-twisting *disinformatia*?

"The present-day health problems you hear about are a result of living in an economically deprived region made worse by the accident, not from the radiation itself. Journalists will print anything to get a good story! The lies I've read, incredible! Two-headed cows and such! And all the talk about thyroid cancer! Thyroid cancer is caused by the absorption of gamma rays, which have very short half-lives. Therefore, those reported cases have been caused by other factors."

Curious then, that instances of child thyroid cancer in areas contaminated by Chernobyl are strikingly higher than they were before the accident – estimates vary from 15 to 1,000 times higher. And recent studies have shown that exposure to long-term radiation, even at low levels, can greatly increase the chances of human genetic mutations – not leading to B-movie monstrosities, but to more insidious genetic changes whose effects on long-term health are unknown.

Visible from the nuclear reactor site is the southern border of Belarus, where the world's first radioactive nature reserve has been set up to study the effects of radiation on the ecology. Aside from a burgeoning population of elk, bison and other mammals whose numbers have increased in the absence of human predators, the main changes in the area have been under the surface: several insects and rodents are turning out to be on an evolutionary high-speed treadmill. The rate of genetic mutation in some of

## The populace have become guinea pigs

these critters is up to 100 times faster than that of their cousins living outside the Exclusion Zone. Such invisible changes invite an obvious question: to what extent might humans have been similarly affected?

While second-generation transmission of congenital heart defects has been noted in the offspring of Chernobyl cleanup workers, most of the accident's health consequences go unreported. That's partly because it was the first nuclear accident on such a vast scale; the surrounding regions have become testing grounds, its populace guinea pigs.

Yet politics obscure the truth even more. In Belarus, the country which suffered most from the accident, the petty dictatorship of Alexander Lukashenka has embarked on a programme of old-school disinformation. Despite the fact that almost 25 per cent of the country's land remains contaminated, and that 1.8 million people still live in these territories, the government has cut subsidies for health programmes, discouraged public discussion of Chernobyl, encouraged the resettlement of polluted areas and has taunted and jailed those who dare speak out publicly about the ever-present dangers.

The driving force behind these

actions is economic. In the early 1990s, 20 per cent of Belarus's annual budget was directed to dealing with Chernobyl; under Lukashenka, that has decreased to eight per cent. Ukraine has decreased its spending on Chernobyl-related matters to two per cent of its national budget. Keeping mum about Chernobyl's after-effects makes good business sense.

By the end of the second day, we were happy to get going. We had toured a land where time stood still, frozen like the lives interrupted here long ago. The remnants of those lives – photos and letters lying on crumbling apartment building floors, rubber boots left to dry on wooden fence spikes, a child's ballerina slippers poking out of a nursery school locker – became unnerving. There's nothing like the sight of a decaying child's toy lying in the corner of an abandoned apartment to clear the mind of a hangover.

"It's a job; not a bad one," Rimma assured us as we prepared to leave. "I get to meet interesting people from around the world, though sadly no one has proposed to me yet! This is a shame, for I'd make someone a good wife. Chernobyl is fine, but Spain or England would be better." **FT**

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# TALES FROM THE VAULT

EACH MONTH WE SEND FORTEAN TIMES FOUNDER **BOB RICKARD** DOWN INTO THE DARKEST, COBWEB-RIDDEN DEPTHS OF THE VAULTS OF FORTEAN TOWERS IN SEARCH OF STORIES FROM FT'S PAST.

## JANUARY 1974

Did a UFO crash in Wales this January? And did the UK government 'cover up' the recovery of alien bodies? The event that began this rumour occurred against an interesting background as Comet Kohoutek was still visible and there was a flurry of meteorite reports around Christmas [FT3:16]. On the evening of the 23rd, there was a loud explosion near the village of Llandrillo in the Berwyn Hills. Many people saw a flash in the sky – some even spoke of streaks of light across north-east England – and it was thought that a meteorite had come down. Our first reporter, Phil Ledger, went to Llandrillo before the news reports appeared on the 25th and described the military bomb squads and UFO hunters combing the hills. No trace of an impact was found and Bill Porter wrote a full report for us in FT5.

Perhaps the most fascinating aspect was the bickering between scientific experts who argued that the audible explosion, the widely-witnessed flash and bright streaks of light in the sky, and the recorded simultaneous seismic tremor were, somehow, just a coincidence. Today, the still-baffling incident has been elevated to the status of 'UK's Roswell' – more info can be had in *UFOs That Never Were* (David Clarke, Jenny Randles & Andy Roberts, 2000). FT3:16-17, 4:4, 5:10-13

The small religious community of Tranquillity, Ohio, was stunned when Edna Combess, a mother of three, claimed she had a vision while saying her nightly prayers. "I wasn't asleep," she said, but had just finished praying. "I saw this beautiful person and believe with all my

## HE WAS STARING AT A TATTOOED MUMMIFIED HEAD

heart it was Jesus." The figure sported a sky blue aura of light and was speaking to children. He was telling them "it was time to come home." Mrs Combess interpreted it as a warning the End Times were near. Shortly after, another lady in the same community had a vision of rising flood waters and a celestial voice telling her not to be afraid. FT15:3

Frozen ducks fell from the sky over the Arkansas town of Stuttgart. They were in good condition and the townsfolk had them for dinner. It was thought they had been caught in a tornado and were described as "iced over, like aircraft".

About the same time, a Scottish trawler heading for Norway with tons of herring on board found three seagulls frozen stiff in the crates of iced fish. They were thawed out and promptly flew away. FT3:10

## JANUARY 1984

'WW2 shell falls into backyard.' I'd expect this kind of headline from the *Weekly World News*, but here it was in a respectable Associated Press wire-story. Fred Simons, 79, of Lakewood, near Los Angeles, and his neighbours remember hearing a whistling sound before a heavy thump. Outside in his yard, Fred found an oval crater, 4ft (1.2m) deep, with the rusty 22lb (10kg) shell in it. A bomb squad was called, but they said there

were no explosives in it. The local sheriff blamed "an aerial prankster" Either that, or it had been displaced in time and space for 30 years and thousands of miles. FT42:14

It could be a scene from a Hammer film... A man goes into a phone box in Islington, London, and is shocked to find himself staring at a strangely tattooed mummified head. It was identified as that of a Maori chief and probably 300 years old. As far as we know, no museum or collector claimed it. FT43:19

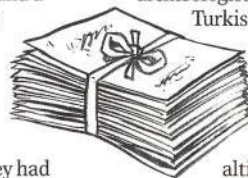
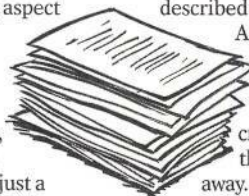
## JANUARY 1994

David Fasold and his team of Biblical archaeologists received permission from the Turkish government to do a test dig at a site near Mt Al Judi which, according to the Koran, was the final resting place of Noah's Ark. The 515ft (157m) long boat-shaped feature, at an altitude of 7,000ft (2,134m), was said to have been first spotted by the

Turkish airforce in 1957, attracting two previous investigations. Despite Fasold's claim that ground-penetrating radar had revealed floorboards, the feature was later revealed to be a fossilised mud-flow. FT74:47

Prolonged and torrential rains in the Peruvian Andes uncovered a previously unknown complex with canals, rooms and tombs. The citadel is thought to be at least 1,000 years old, possibly a remnant of the pre-Inca Wanka culture. FT74:8

In the Argentinian Andes, more than 20 tourists at Lake Nahuel Huapi were surprised when a huge unidentified creature surfaced noisily near them. 'Nahuelito' was described as "about 10 metres [33ft] long with several grey-green humps", and it "snorted or lowed really loudly". Lake Nahuel's tradition of a water monster is far older than that of Loch Ness (see Ulrich Magin's article in FT92:28-30). FT77:16



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