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STONEHENGE SURPRISE

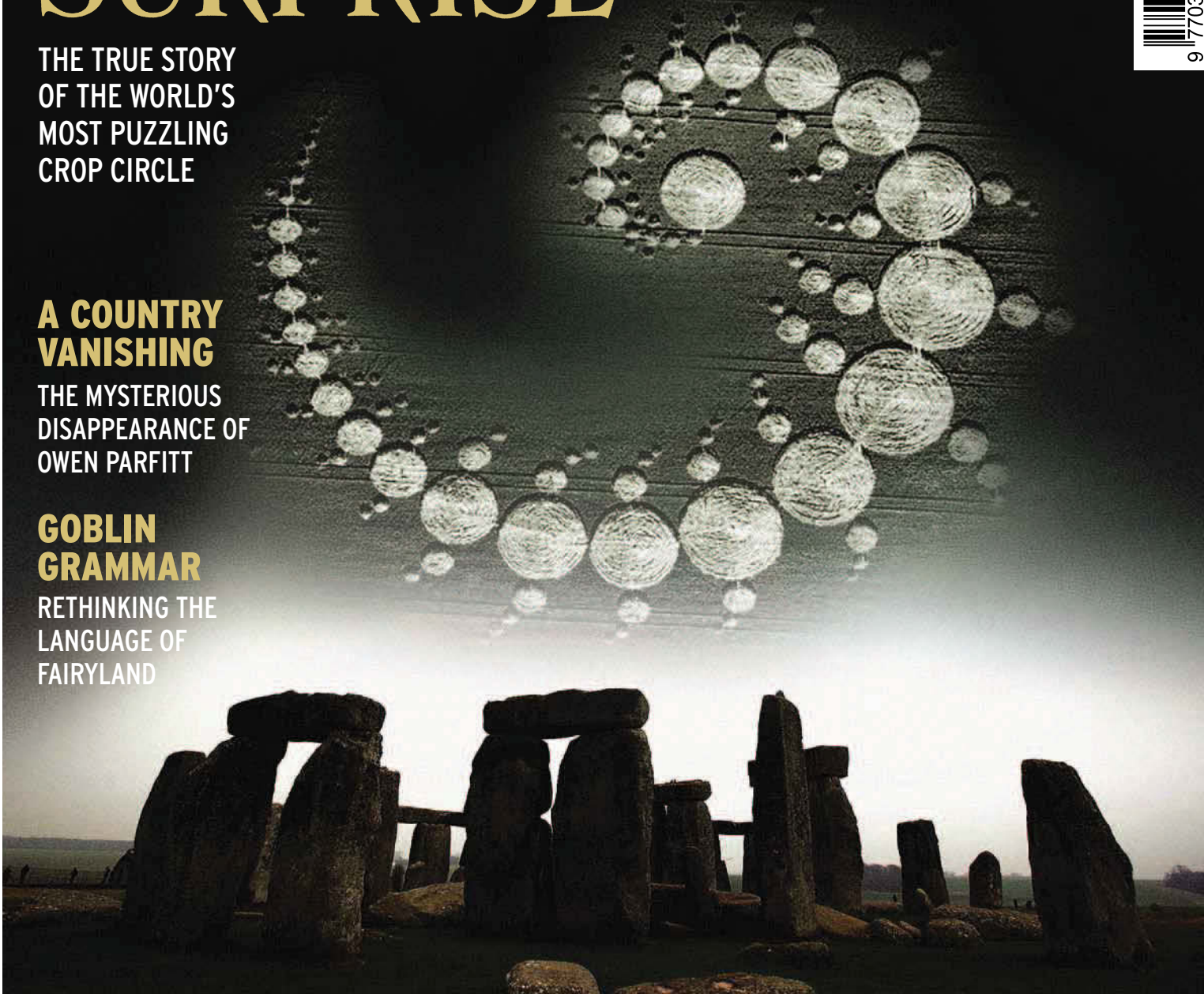
THE TRUE STORY
OF THE WORLD'S
MOST PUZZLING
CROP CIRCLE

A COUNTRY VANISHING

THE MYSTERIOUS
DISAPPEARANCE OF
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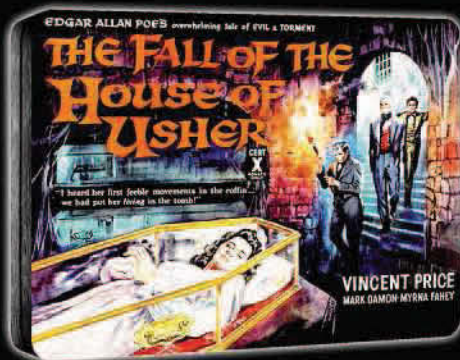
GOBLIN GRAMMAR

RETHINKING THE
LANGUAGE OF
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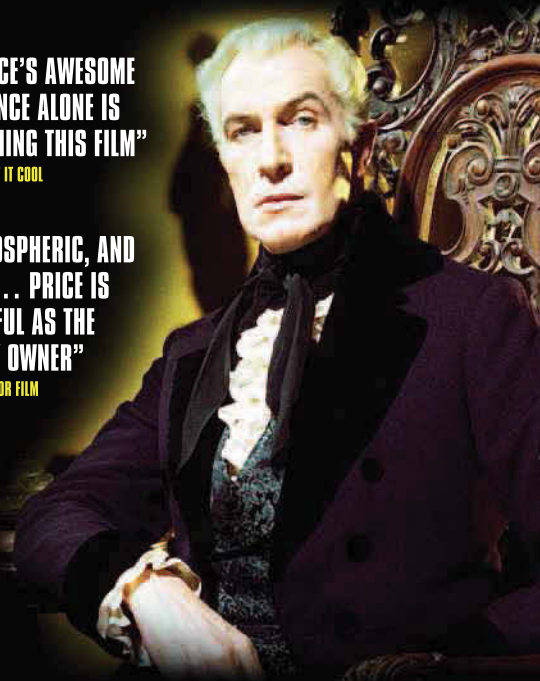
VINCENT PRICE STARS IN ROGER CORMAN'S CLASSIC ADAPTATION OF EDGAR ALLAN POE'S THE UNGOLDLY...THE EVIL...

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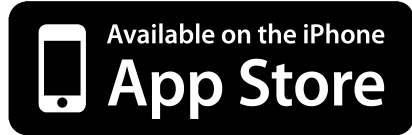
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strange days

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FORTEAN TIMES is produced for Dennis Publishing by Wild Talents Ltd. Postal address: Fortean Times, PO BOX 71602, London E17 0QD.

You can manage your existing subscription through <http://www.subsinfo.co.uk/> – this should be your first port of call if you have any queries about your subscription.

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 Other overseas subscriptions: +44 (0)1795 592 909
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PRINTED BY BENHAM GOODHEAD PRINT LTD

DISTRIBUTION
 Distributed in UK, Ireland and worldwide by Seymour Distribution Ltd.

2 East Poultry Avenue, London EC1A 9PT
 Tel: 020 7429 4000 / Fax: 020 7429 4001
 Queries on overseas availability should be emailed to info@seymour.co.uk

Speciality store distribution by Worldwide Magazine Distribution Ltd, Tel: 0121 788 3112 Fax: 0121 7881272

STANDARD SUBSCRIPTION RATES
 12 issues: UK £39.98; EU £47.50

Fortean Times (USPS 023-226) is published every four weeks by Dennis Publishing Ltd, 30 Cleveland Street, London, W1P 4JD, United Kingdom. The US annual subscription price is \$89.99.

Airfreight and mailing in the USA is by Agent named Air Business, C/O Worldnet Shipping USA Inc., 149-35 177th Street, Jamaica, New York, 11434.

Periodical postage paid at Jamaica, NY 11431, USA.
 US Postmaster: Send address changes to: Fortean Times, 3330 Pacific Avenue, Suite 404, Virginia Beach, VA, 23451-2983, USA.

REST OF THE WORLD £55; US \$89.99 (\$161.98 for 24 issues)

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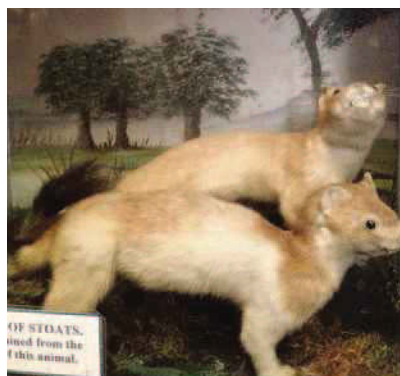
Member of the Audit Bureau of Circulations.
 Circulation 17,024 (Jan-Dec 2011)

Printed in the UK. ISSN: 0308 5899
 © Fortean Times: SEPTEMBER 2013

editorial

Country pursuits

After last issue's paranoia-fest, we mark the end of summer with an issue in a more bucolic vein, with a celebration of such popular, if eccentric, British pastimes as anthropomorphic taxidermy and crop circles. Jan Bondeson investigates a classic, if little known, vanishing from 18th-century Somerset, attempting to strip away the centuries of accreted myth and get to the truth about what happened to Owen Parfitt (p30). Benjamin Radford likewise tackles another cherished country tale (p24) – the celebrated Julia Set crop formation that turned up in a field near Stonehenge in July 1996 and has often been cited as the best case for the non-human origin of crop circles. But did it really appear spontaneously in a matter of minutes, or does a closer look at the witness accounts reveal something quite different? More fieldwork, as circlemaker Rob Irving reveals why he didn't accept the Crop Circle Challenge 2013 when the gauntlet was thrown down earlier this year (p52); actually, no one did and the event was cancelled. Lee Brickley gets outdoors too, exploring the high strangeness that, according to local lore, is concentrated around Staffordshire's Cannock Chase – UFOs, werewolves, a bigfoot-type creature, and the legendary Pig-Man (p70). One horror he doesn't, thankfully, investigate is the area's notoriety as the 'dogging' hotspot ("Turn right at the German War Memorial") where ex-England footballer Stan Collymore was caught in the act in 2004. Perhaps the porcine squeals reported by terrified locals and visitors have a distinctly non-supernatural origin after all...



of Taxidermy, from which we present an illustrated extract (p36). Perhaps we can at least take heart from Ian Simmons's look at fantastic taxidermy (p42), which suggests that there's been something of a revival of the art in recent years..

ERRATA

FT304:8. Our own Mat Coward spotted a myth-conception in need of busting in the Sidelines item 'Cheese Rolling'. As

Mat points out, we repeated "the myth that the Gloucester cheese rolling was banned since 2010 by 'health and safety spoilsports'. Actually, it was stopped because of traffic chaos caused by the enormous crowds. See, for instance, www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-gloucestershire-12851174."

FT304:10. A number of readers commented on a story revealing our lack of sporting knowledge. On Twitter, Michael Call was amused by our "formal and quirky use of Nottinghamshire County instead of Notts County, FC," while Mark Andrew Pardoe of Hitchin, Hertfordshire, emailed us to comment: "It is sadly obvious you do not particularly follow football by naming the oldest league club in the world 'Nottinghamshire County'; the team's official name is actually 'Notts County'.

I can explain why this is the case, but it is probably not the subject for the premier magazine reviewing the world of strange phenomena". Apologies to all Notts County fans; at least now we know.

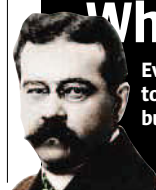
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Why fortean?

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



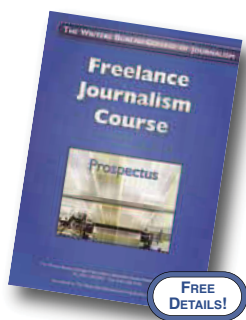
SEE PAGE 78

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Putting Area 51 on the map

CIA admits to the existence of secret site that has launched a thousand conspiracy theories

The existence of Area 51 near Groom Lake in Nevada has finally been acknowledged officially in CIA documents newly released in response to a freedom of information request made back in 2005. The Agency has always denied Area 51's existence, even though it has been a badly kept secret for decades. Maps have only ever shown a disused mine at the site or a large area of restricted airspace, and it has never appeared on satellite images. Most mentions of the site in declassified papers have been heavily redacted. Such secrecy has led to the site featuring in countless novels, films, comic books and the minds of conspiracy theorists as the place where the US government stores crashed flying saucers, reverse-engineers alien technology, and performs alien autopsies. Some have suggested it is the HQ of the fabled MIB (Men in Black), or the research centre for weather control, time travel and teleportation for military purposes.

However, according to the newly released paperwork written in 1992, the site was merely used for testing ultra-secret military aircraft technology – specifically the U-2 and Oxcart aerial surveillance programmes. “High-altitude testing of the U-2 soon led to an unexpected side-effect – a tremendous increase in reports of unidentified flying objects,” according to the documents, which attribute the UFO sightings to the U-2's ability to fly at more than 70,000ft (21,000m), considered by the public at the time as too high for manned flight. Boldly and perhaps rashly,



The Agency has always denied Area 51's existence

the CIA announced that “U-2 and later Oxcart flights accounted for more than one-half of all UFO reports during the late 1950s and most of the 1960s.”



LEFT: A sign on the edge of Area 51. BELOW: The map released by the CIA.

The Lockheed U-2 has a 100ft (30m) wingspan, but climbs so steeply after take-off that it quickly becomes invisible to the naked eye from the ground. U-2 aircraft have been used to conduct surveillance since the 1950s and were used to spy on the Soviet Union, China, North Vietnam and Cuba during the Cold War. With regular technical upgrades to their sensors, they are still in use, detecting nuclear missiles or hunting for roadside bombs. Other top secret planes, including the Lockheed A-12, the SR-71 Blackbird and more recently the F-22 Raptor stealth fighter were also tested at Area 51.

The site was founded in 1955 after G-men and Lockheed-Martin employees spotted a disused World War II airstrip near Groom Lake while flying over Nevada. “President Eisenhower approved the addition of this strip of wasteland, known by its map designation as Area 51, to the Nevada test site”. To make the desert facility more attractive to workers, it was named Paradise Ranch.

Ringed by mountains and sharing a border with the site used by the government to test nuclear weapons, Area 51 has long been a no-go area for the public and even non-essential military personnel, a perfect place for secret hardware. There are some mentions of Area 51 that remain blacked out in the documents, providing fuel for further fevered theorising. *Guardian, D.Telegraph, D.Mirror, 17 Aug 2013.*



BACK FROM THE DEAD
A round-up of remarkable returns from the other side
PAGE 10



DARK LIGHTNING
How science continues to find mysteries in the storm clouds
PAGE 12



PRETTY IN PINK
The amazing Australian slug that's a gigantic good-looker
PAGE 15

Kazakhstan Pentagram

Latest Google Maps discovery is down to Soviets, not Satanism

A pentagram within a circle measuring roughly 1,200ft (366m) in diameter, etched into the Earth's surface on the southern shore of the Upper Tobol Reservoir in northern Kazakhstan, shows up vividly on Google Maps and has led to excited speculation: could it be linked to devil worship or denizens of the underworld? Of course, the pentagram is a common symbol used by many cultures and religious groups, such as the Mesopotamians, Pythagoreans, Christians, Freemasons and Wiccans. There are almost no other signs of human habitation in the area; the closest settlement is the town



of Lisakovsk, about 13 miles (21km) to the east. The region surrounding Lisakovsk is riddled with Bronze Age settlements, cemeteries and burial grounds, many of which have yet to be explored.

The Kazakh pentagram certainly isn't the first odd discovery gleaned from Google Maps. Etched onto the desert floor of New Mexico are two large diamonds surrounded by a pair of overlapping circles, reportedly the site of a bunker belonging to the Church of Scientology; in the Gobi Desert there is a Yagi antenna array, a device that

looks like a giant piece of cracked glass but is used for atmospheric research; and in a remote corner of Nevada there's an enormous KFC advertisement, featuring the smiling face of Colonel Sanders.

The explanation for the five-pointed star on the steppes of central Asia turns out to be mundane. "It's the outline of a park made in the form of a star," said Emma Usmanova, an archaeologist with years of experience working in the Lisakovsk area. It is marked by roads that are now lined with trees, which make the star shape even more distinct in aerial photos. Additional images of the site, now abandoned and overgrown with weeds, can be seen at englishrussia.com. Older readers will recall that the star was a popular symbol during the Soviet era and stars were used throughout the Soviet Union to decorate building facades, flags and monuments. *livescience.com*, 3 Aug 2013.

GOOGLE EARTH

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Chocolate had to be put to sleep

Hull Daily Mail, 14 Feb 2013.

Toads inspire Australia

Hull Daily Mail, 13 Mar 2013.

Green giants toasted at renewables awards

Hull Daily Mail, 2 Mar 2013.

Traffic rises on bridge

Hull Daily Mail, 14 Feb 2013.

The Russian army surrenders to socks

Guardian, 17 Jan 2013.

Gallery's works set to materialise in a new dimension

Lincolnshire Echo, 22 Nov 2012.

Dead Briton is called to trial into her death

Metro, 7 Sept 2012.

Shot girl mistaken for skunk

Metro, 24 Oct 2012.

Higgs boson is found but secret of universe is not

Metro, 15 Mar 2013.

Chopsticks reach a fork in the road

Canberra Times, 16 Mar 2013.

Scientists wasted 400 years chasing cash for research projects

Sydney Morning Herald, 21 Mar 2013.

Jedi marriages at Gretna Green

D.Telegraph, 21 Mar 2013.

SIDELINES...

ROYAL LIFE OF PI

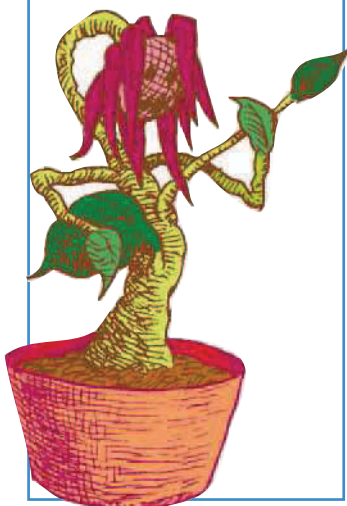
Prince George was born on 22 July – ‘approximation of Pi’ day – 22/7. His father Prince William is a member of C Flight of 22 Squadron RAF Search and Rescue, whose patch incorporates the symbol for Pi. This arose because of 22 Squadron’s support of the 7th Wing in WWII – 22 over 7. *D.Mail*, 25 July 2013.

PLUGGING INTO THE FORCE

An urban legend that a mobile phone signal can be boosted by dialling 999 and hanging up has been causing chaos for a police force. Cleveland Constabulary in Middlesbrough usually receives about 30 abandoned emergency calls every day and has to check out each one, but this number has been increased dramatically by phone owners who think a 999 call can restore a lost signal, boost a weak one or even save battery power. *D.Telegraph*, 1 July 2013.

LETHAL CLIFF

Heavy metal music – specifically Black Sabbath – helps plants to flourish and resist disease, according to Chris Beardshaw from Radio 4’s *Gardeners’ Question Time*. However, in the experiment conducted by horticultural students, where *alstroemerias* (Peruvian lilies) were played different styles of music, the plants played songs by Cliff Richard “all died”. *D.Telegraph*, 19 April 2013.



MARTIN ROSS

Sir Benjamin’s Beast

Baronet christens his big cat the ‘Beast of North Newton’

Sir Benjamin Slade is worried about a “big cat” seen on his grounds. The supposed Alien Big Cat (ABC) was photographed in the early hours of the morning on about 12 July by one of his staff at the 98-acre (40ha) Maunsel House estate, near Bridgwater in Somerset. The pictures are indistinct, but appear to show a large black animal with powerful haunches walking through a meadow of tall grass and wildflowers. Tom Baker, 25, a night porter, took them on a mobile phone while putting out rubbish. “I saw something about 150 metres [164 yards] away and didn’t know if it was a deer, but it looked strange,” he said. “I zoomed in and took the images. The photos certainly look like it’s a big cat and I have no other explanation for it.”

Sir Benjamin, 67, who has nicknamed the creature “the Beast of North Newton” after the village nearest his 13th century manor house, believes he has previously seen the animal emerging from a World War II pillbox nearby, and in recent months he and his staff have found piles of feathers from dead chickens and the mangled remains of a fox. ABC chroniclers have noted a “substantial” number of ABC reports from Somerset in the past year.

While the baronet is convinced that the photograph confirms his suspicions that an ABC is roaming his land, he admits that the picture is far from clear. In fact it is typical of nearly all ABC shots over the last half-century: blurry, ill-defined, and with nothing to provide scale. “They don’t exactly stand still and pose, which is the problem,” he said. “It’s got a long tail and seems to be quite big. Apparently, these things will do 30 to 40 miles [48–64km] in a night. We are next to the Somerset Levels, which are 250 miles [400km] of fields and bogs where nobody lives. There is a possibility that this



STEVE ROBERTS / LOCAL WORLD



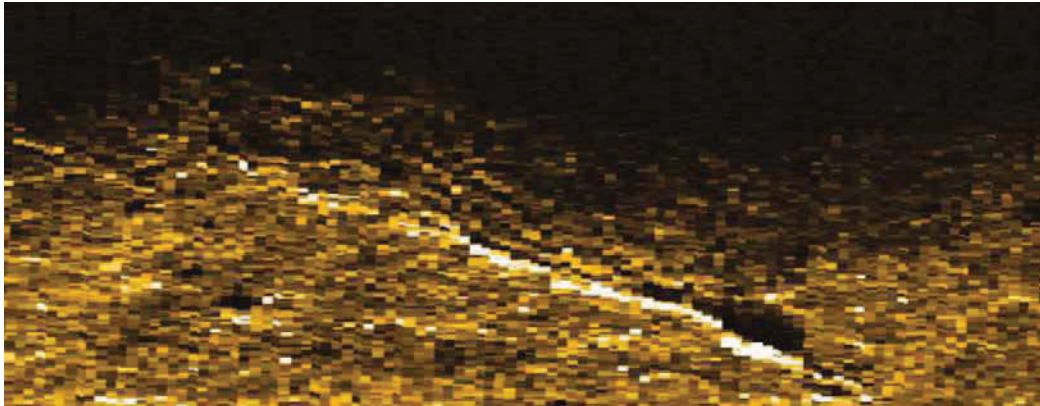
thing is bigger than a puma – it is probably quite frightening. We have put signs up telling people to keep their dogs in the car because there is a big cat about. We need this thing out of the way before it eats somebody. I’ve got a wedding business here and we are very worried

ABOVE: Sir Benjamin goes a-hunting. LEFT: Alien Big Cat?

about our guests – they might wander off piste and get gobbled up.” Sir Benjamin, a childless millionaire who once planned a reality television show to find an heir, said hunters had contacted him asking if they could come to his estate to look for the cat. “I might be able to sell the shooting rights if it goes on like this,” he joked. The next time a dead chicken or fox is found, he plans to take samples of hair and droppings from the scene and send them off for DNA analysis. *D.Telegraph*, 26 July; *D.Mail*, 27 July 2013.

Earhart wreck found?

Anomaly spotted underwater off an uninhabited atoll



TIGHAR

ABOVE: Sonar image of an anomaly: "It's the right size, the right shape, and it's in the right place to be part of the Electra."

Air crash investigators may – just possibly – have located the wreckage of the plane piloted by Amelia Earhart on her ill-fated attempt to circumnavigate the globe, more or less following the Equator. She had become world-famous in 1932 as the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic. Earhart and her navigator Fred Noonan vanished on 2 July 1937 after they took off from Papua New Guinea in a twin-engined Lockheed Electra E10 en route to Howland Island. With no wreckage found, conspiracy theories abounded, among them that the aviatrix had been captured by the Japanese after landing on occupied Saipan (see p.66) – or had decided to go incognito and return to live in New Jersey. On 28 April 1992, the ever-reliable US tabloid *Weekly World News* announced that she had been found as a hale 95-year-old on a "South Pacific island paradise".

Last July, the International Group for Historic Aircraft Recovery (TIGHAR) chartered a research ship to scour the seabed around an uninhabited atoll called Nikumaroro (formerly Gardner) Island, one of the Phoenix Islands in what is now the Republic of Kiribati, where Earhart and Noonan are thought to have crash-landed. The expedition used robotic underwater vehicles to map the

seabed, but found no sign of a plane. However, in March 2013 a member of the public noticed an object in a sonar picture that the expedition had made public. It amounts to no more than a golden streak on a grainy image of a reef at a depth of about 600ft (180m), but the 23ft (7m)-long object matches surviving parts of fuselage from other Electra accidents. Earhart's craft was 38ft 7in (11.76m) long.

"Our minds tend to make things be what we want them to be, we know that," said Ric Gillespie, TIGHAR's executive director. "Maybe it's a fishing boat nobody knew about. Maybe it's an unusual coral reef. But it's the right size, the right shape, and it's in the right place to be part of the Electra." TIGHAR, a non-profit organisation, has been hunting for Earhart's wreckage for the last 25 years. Searching Nikumaroro in 1998, the group found an aluminium panel that might have come from Earhart's plane, and a shoe bearing the imprint "Cat's Paw Rubber Company, USA" – but experts were not convinced that these had anything to do with the mystery. In 1940, Gerald Gallagher, a British colonial officer, found human bones along with a 1930s-style sextant box, under a tree on the island. The bones were sent to British HQ in Fiji, where

a Dr DW Hoodless concluded they were male. However, in December 1998 Gillespie received a report from two US forensic anthropologists who had used computer technology on the bone dimensions given in the wartime records to show that the bones belonged to a white female of European stock, about 5ft 7in (1.7m) – the height of Amelia Earhart [FT123:18]. Nothing more seems to have been said about this line of enquiry.

TIGHAR's 10th expedition in June 2010 yielded American beauty and skin care products that may have dated to the 1930s, such as flakes of rouge and a shattered mirror from a woman's cosmetic compact; parts of a folding pocket knife; traces of campfires bearing bird and fish bones; clams opened in the same way as oysters in New England; "empty shells laid out as if to collect rain water"; and American bottles dating from before World War II, their heat-warped bottoms showing they "had once stood in a fire as if to boil drinking water". TIGHAR hopes to return to the atoll in 2014 with a tethered remote underwater vehicle that can film video footage of the mysterious object. *Guardian, Independent, 1 June 2013. For more on the mystery, see "Amelia's Final Flight" by Duncan E Turner [FT289:38-43].*

SIDELINES...

EAR, EAR

On 24 April, a man walking his dog in the graveyard of St Mary the Virgin Church in Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, found a human ear. It was sent for analysis to determine if it was "current rather than historic". The last burial in the graveyard was a century ago. *Guardian, 26 April 2013.*

IMPERIAL RELIC

A lock of hair belonging to Emperor Franz Joseph I, who ruled Austria-Hungary from 1848 to 1916, sold at auction in Vienna last April for 13,720 euro. The lock, which belonged to the estate of the Emperor's valet, Eugen Ketterl, had been valued at a mere 450 euro. *Irish Times, 30 April 2013.*

GHOST LOAD

Nine illegal immigrants who leapt out of a lorry in a traffic jam on the M26 outside Otford, Kent, on 14 May were easily caught because they were covered in flour from head to toe. One motorist told police they could not miss the nine, as they all "looked like Casper the Ghost". The driver was unaware of the stowaways. *D.Telegraph, 16 May 2013.*

RED FACES DOWN UNDER

A Qantas jet was forced to return to Auckland Airport 90 minutes into its flight to Sydney on 7 April, after a suspicious item was found in an overhead locker, provoking a bomb scare. "The item turned out to be part of the aircraft that is not normally visible," New Zealand police announced. *(Sydney) D.Telegraph, 8 April 2013.*

BESTING A BEAR

A Bosnian shepherd killed a brown bear with his bare hands when it charged him as he tended his flock in a mountainous region near Foca. Blazo Grkovic, 48, gave the beast a "bear hug" and strangled it as it swiped him with its paws and tried to bite him. He was treated in hospital for deep wounds on his arms and head. *Metro, Sun, 28 May 2013.*



SIDELINES...

TURBINE MARTYR

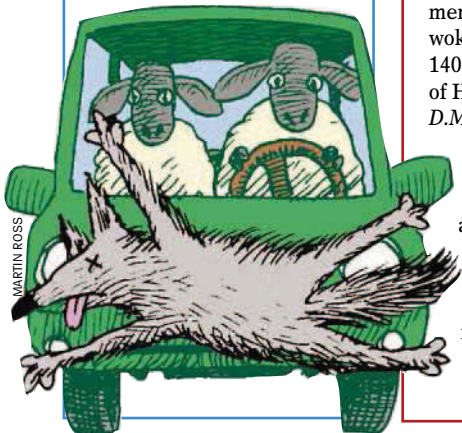
A group of about 40 twitchers trekked to Harris in Scotland's Western Isles to see a white-throated needletail. The swift breeds in Asia and winters in Australasia, and had only been spotted in Britain eight times since 1846, most recently in 1991. Alas, the world's fastest bird – top speed 106mph (170km/h) – flew straight into the blades of a wind turbine and was found 'stone dead' with wings outspread. *Scotsman, (Aberdeen) Press and Journal, D.Mail, 28 June 2013.*

GOING APE

Pastry chef Rachel Bowering, 42, was travelling home to Offwell in East Devon after work in Sidmouth on 5 June when she saw what she insists was a chimpanzee walk slowly across the road on all fours in front of her car towards a wooded area. She had seen it before, back in February, but didn't give it much thought till she saw it again. Both sightings were between 9.30 and 10pm. No primates were reported missing from nearby wildlife sanctuaries. *Honiton Herald, 12 June; Sidmouth Herald, 14 June 2013.*

RETURN OF THE WOLF

Experts said they were 98 per cent certain that an animal hit and killed by a car near the village of Luttelgeest was the first wolf to have been found in the Netherlands for 150 years. Scientists said the teeth, fur and feet suggested it was a female wolf aged up to three years old. *10 July 2013.*



MARTIN ROSS

Back from the dead

FOR A FEW, DEATH IS MERELY A SPEED-BUMP ON THE ROAD THROUGH LIFE

- Mourners preparing for the funeral of a 101-year-old woman were shocked when she sat up and spoke just as she was being put in her coffin. Peng Xiuhua wanted to know why there were so many people in her house in Lianjiang, Guangdong province, China. Declared dead 10 days after a heavy fall, she had no pulse and her body had gone stiff. "I'm a lucky woman," she said. "I woke up before they cremated me." *Sun, 1 Feb; MX News (Sydney), 4 Feb 2013.*

- A prostitute who 'died' during sex with a customer in Zimbabwe revived as she was being placed in a metal coffin. She screamed, "You want to kill me!" and jumped out, according to witnesses at the Manor Hotel in Bulawayo. Her client had fled the scene. *MX News (Sydney), 28 Mar 2013.*

- Retired cook Lyudmila Steblitskaya, 61, apparently died in hospital in Tomsk, Russia, from a heart condition. Three days later, a pathologist was about to cut her open when she woke up. *Sun, 30 Dec 2012.*

- Mourners attending the funeral of Brighton Dama Zanche, 34, in central Zimbabwe were filing past his coffin when Lot Gaka, his employer, noticed his legs twitching. Zanche was taken to hospital and released after two days on life support. He had been unwell for some time and was laid to rest the day before his resurrection. He had no recollection of his 'death'; his memory only returned when he woke up in a hospital in Gweru 140 miles (225km) southwest of Harare. *D.Telegraph, 14 May; D.Mirror, 15 May 2013.*

- A hospital patient froze to death after doctors put him in a morgue freezer. The 57-year-old man had been declared dead after his apparently lifeless body was found at his flat in Pskov, Russia. However, a post mortem examination found that he was alive when



THE SIBERIAN TIMES

ABOVE: Lyudmila Steblitskaya, who 'died' and then came back to life...

A pathologist was about to cut her open when she woke

he went into the morgue. *Metro, 11 Feb 2013.*

- The family of a boy was stunned when – 20 hours after he had been declared dead – he sat up in his coffin and asked for a glass of water before lying down again, lifeless. Kelvin Santos, two, apparently died

from cardiac-respiratory failure and dehydration in a hospital in Belem, northern Brazil, on 1 June 2012, after a five-day bout of pneumonia. His family were given the body in a plastic bag to take home and he woke up the next day, an hour before he was due to be buried. "Everybody started to scream," said his father, Antonio Santos. "We thought a miracle had taken place." He was returned to hospital, but this time he really was dead. *dailymail.co.uk, 6 June; Metro, D.Mirror, 7 June 2012.*

- On 9 July, Jenifer da Silva Gomes, 22, gave birth to a girl in Londrina, southern Brazil,

CATERERS NEWS AGENCY



ABOVE: Mohammed Eisa Danial Hayat was rescued from a bodybag after a supposedly fatal accident on a pilgrimage to Mecca.

but the baby stopped breathing immediately after birth. Doctors at the Lincoln Graca hospital tried several times to revive her, but she was finally declared dead at 11am and a death certificate issued. Her body was placed in a box and left in the hospital chapel by a nurse who “couldn’t face sending her to the morgue”. When her grandmother and an undertaker came to pick up her body for burial, three hours after her birth, she kicked a leg and opened her eyes. The girl, named Yasmin, was in a stable condition in intensive care. *D.Mail, Metro, 12 July 2013.*

- Mohammed Eisa Danial Hayat, a baby boy from Newport, South Wales, was with his family on a pilgrimage to Mecca when

the Saudi taxi they were in hit a bridge and flipped over on 8 February, killing the driver and all five of the boy’s kinsfolk – parents, grandparents, and an aunt. The unconscious toddler was zipped into a body bag and taken to a morgue. As his body was being put into storage, officials saw the bag moving and rushed the boy to hospital. He had suffered a dislocated shoulder, broken arm and ribs, but survived thanks to his grandfather, Shaukat, 56, who had held him tightly in his arms. Eisa, now two and fully recovered, is being cared for by his extended family in Newport. *D.Telegraph, 20 May 2013.*

- Carina Melchior, 19, in a coma after a catastrophic car crash in

Denmark, regained consciousness after doctors in Aarhus Hospital declared her brain dead and switched off her life support. They were about to harvest her organs when she opened her eyes and started to move her legs. She was making a good recovery at a rehabilitation centre – where she could even ride her horse, Mathilde. *D.Mirror, MX News (Sydney), 18 Oct 2012.*

- Colleen S Burns, 41, was hospitalised in Syracuse, New York State, after taking a drug overdose. She was declared dead, so her family agreed to turn off her life-support – but she woke up in the operating theatre on 20 October 2009, as surgeons were about to harvest her organs for transplant. They had ignored a nurse who had seen her toes curl from the simple reflex test of running a finger along her foot, and another who said her lips and tongue had moved. Burns committed suicide in February 2011. The case only came to light after a freedom of information request by a local paper. *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, MX News (Sydney), 10 July 2013.*

The last round-ups of the “Lazarus phenomenon” were in **FT280:26-27** and **FT289:10-11**.



ABOVE: Kelvin Santos died nearly a day after being pronounced dead.

SIDELINES...

DODGY BY NAME

A solicitor was banned from his practice in Blackburn, Lancashire, and struck off for “deliberate, calculated and repeated” misconduct over the handling of clients’ cash since he set up 13 years ago. The legal authorities had long overlooked a telling clue: his name was John Swindell. *Lancashire Telegraph, 4 April 2013.*

EXCREMENTAL

Research by Alex Yuen Kwong Ip of the National University of Singapore has shown that *Pelodiscus sinensis*, the Chinese soft-shelled turtle, urinates through its mouth. Dr Ip was assisted in his work by a chap called Shit Fun Chew. *New Scientist, via The Register, 12 Oct 2012.*

CANNY LEMURS

A group of ring-tailed lemurs arrived at Tropiquaria Zoo, Watchet, Somerset, shortly before Christmas 2012. During January, their wall heater was repeatedly found to be turned up to maximum. After watching the primates discretely for some time, zoo director Chris Moiser discovered that on particularly cold nights they were reaching into the heater cage and turning up the thermostat. *Western Daily Press, 22 Jan 2013.*

LIKE A LEAD BALLOON

The Spanish Navy’s new £1.9 billion submarine has been found to be too heavy and will sink like a stone. The 233ft (71m) *Isaac Peral* – the first of four commissioned from shipbuilder Novantia – was at least 75 tons overweight. Correcting the problem will take up to two years. *D.Telegraph, 23 May 2013.*

BIG ON THE WEB

A new species of tarantula the size of a dinner plate (8in/20in across), first spotted in the Sri Lankan village of Mankulam in 2009, has been named *Poecilotheria rajaei*. “Locals kill them,” said a scientist, “but they are not fatal to humans.” *Sun, 6 April 2013.*

SIDELINES...

BREATHTAKING

Ship's cook Harrison Okene, 29, survived almost 60 hours trapped 100ft (30m) under water by breathing in a 4ft (1.2m)-square air pocket. The tugboat *Jacson-4* had capsized in heavy seas 12 miles (20km) off the Nigerian coast while stabilising an oil tanker. South African divers recovered 10 bodies on 28 May and were astonished to find Okene alive. *Guardian*, 13 June 2013.

BUG MUNCHER

Customs officers at Gatwick Airport seized 207lb (94kg) of dried caterpillars in the luggage of a 22-year-old man travelling from Burkino Faso via Istanbul. The giant haul of tens of thousands of insects was split over four large Hessian bags and shrink-wrapped for freshness. The man said they were for personal consumption, but they breached import controls and were confiscated. *Western Daily Press*, 4 Mar 2013.

TOUCH WOOD

A tree surgeon got stuck up a tree in Woodland Way, Petts Wood, in Orpington, south-east London, and was rescued by a fireman called Allister Woods. *Sun*, 18 June 2013.

BREAST IS BEST

The singer and model Myleene Klass has revealed that her father used to take breast milk in his tea – and that after she gave birth, she continued the family tradition, inviting family and friends to try her own. “It’s not weird,” she insisted. “It tastes just like those pro-biotic drinks.” *D.Telegraph*, 10 June 2013.2013.



MARTIN ROSS

Long time no see

Father and son hermits are ‘rescued’



MINH DUC / SAX ROHMER LTD

ABOVE: 41-year-old Ho Van Lang had lived in the forest since he was one year old.

A father and son who fled their village during the Vietnam War 40 years ago have been discovered living deep in the forest in Tay Tra district of Quang Ngai province, in central Vietnam. Ho Van Thanh, 82, had shunned contact with the outside world after his house was bombed in 1972, killing his mother and his two eldest sons. He had been a soldier, fighting for the North, but left the army after the bombing and became mentally unbalanced. He moved to another house with his wife and surviving sons, but after assaulting his wife he fled into the jungle with his one-year-old son, Ho Van Lang. When he returned after a few days, his neighbours lied to him, saying his wife and youngest son had died, since they were afraid that he would beat her again. Thanh and Lang then left, never to return – until now.

Thanh and his son, now 41, wore loincloths made of bark and used a homemade axe to chop down trees

The pair are barely able to communicate with outsiders

for firewood. They made a range of wooden tools and some wooden statues. Thanh had made a *dan nhi* (a Vietnamese two-chord fiddle), and had a small copper bell for use in ritual worship. They had a garden of fruit trees on a slope surrounded by many small streams. They hunted and trapped small game, and grew rice, corn, cassava, sweet potato, onions, sugar cane, sesame, and bitter melon. At some point, local people had given them seeds to grow saffron and citronella, which they used to flavour venison and fish from the streams. They also cultivated betel, areca, tobacco and tea.

Inside their main dwelling, 15ft (4.6m) up in the treetops, the pair kept a stash of arrows and knives for hunting and poignant mementos of their previous life. The father kept his soldier’s trousers folded in a corner. Beside them was the little red coat his son was thought to have been wearing when they fled. They had also constructed four other homes, moving from one to the next on a seasonal basis. These were protected from predators by sharpened stakes. One had a water supply, delivered from a stream by a system of bamboo tubes; another was next to their cultivated crops and served as a place of rest during the harvest.

Vietnamese media tracked down Ho Van Tri, Thanh’s younger surviving son, who was just six months old when his brothers were killed. Tri said that when he was 12, his mother, then on her deathbed, told him to find his father and brother in the forest. He discovered them 20 years ago, but had not been able to persuade them to return to modern society. He brought more people to see them in the forest to help bring them home, but they would hide quickly whenever they saw anyone approaching. The pair are barely able to communicate with outsiders, with Lang knowing only a few words of the local dialect of the Cor ethnic minority group to which he belongs, while his father had fallen out of the habit of speech.

They were discovered by a two local people who ventured 25 miles (40km) into the forest looking for firewood. They spotted the tree house and reported it to local authorities, who ‘rescued’ (or captured) the two hermits on 7 August. Thanh was carried out of the forest on a stretcher, surrounded by curious villagers. District authorities confirmed that he had once lived a normal life with his family in the commune’s Tra Kem hamlet, south of Da Nang.

Thanh was being treated for malnutrition at a medical centre while his son was being looked after by his nephew, Ho Van Bien. “My uncle doesn’t understand much of what is said to him, and he doesn’t want to eat or even drink water,” said Bien. “He’s very sad. He doesn’t say anything now. We know he wants to escape to go back to the forest so we have to keep an eye on him.”

[AAP] *D.Telegraph*, *Metro*, *Bangkok Post*, 9 Aug; (*Sydney*) *D.Telegraph*, <i>, 10 Aug; *Thanh Nien News (Vietnam)*, 18 Aug; *Tuoi Tre (Youth) News (Vietnam)*, 22 Aug 2013.

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DARK LIGHTNING

Scientific investigation of the mysteries of lightning throws up new questions all the time. **DAVID HAMBLING** looks at the weird world of Terrestrial Gamma Ray Flashes...

Lightning is a dramatic natural phenomenon; it's also an everyday occurrence and one that most of us have seen. In spite of being so common and easy to observe, lightning remains deeply mysterious. We have some idea of the underlying cause – how positive and negative charges build up on clouds – but what triggers it remains a mystery. As often happens in science, the quest for answers has unearthed more mysteries and peculiar phenomena, including blasts of radiation, unexplained antimatter and lightning's dark twin.

The first gamma ray bursts were observed in the 1960s. Gamma rays are a form of 'hard' radiation, more energetic even than X-rays, and typically produced by nuclear explosions. The US Vela satellites were looking for covert nuclear tests carried out by Russia or other nations. As well as looking down, they also looked up, in case the Soviets tested nuclear warheads in space. The Vela satellites did pick up flashes of gamma ray radiation, but they were nothing to do with Russia: they were traced to galaxies billions of light years away. Their cause remains mysterious, though they are thought to be produced when stars collapse into black holes.

In 1991, cosmic gamma ray burst researchers were surprised to find a source much closer to hand. A NASA satellite, the Compton Gamma Ray Observatory, picked up flashes coming from the heart of thunderstorms. Known as Terrestrial Gamma Ray Flashes (TGF), these appeared to be rare, with less than 10 a year being recorded. The situation changed with the launch of a new satellite called RHESSI in 2002; with its better instruments, it detected at least 50 TGFs a day, some of them with phenomenally high energies. TGFs are among the most energetic things on Earth, rivalled only by the output of some larger particle accelerators. The total number of TGFs may be higher, but they are only rarely detected because they are released in a narrow beam.

One current explanation for



Is there a risk to air passengers from these gamma bursts?

TGFs is that they are the result of 'runaway electron avalanches'. When a cosmic ray (a fast-moving particle from space) hits the Earth's atmosphere, it strikes air molecules and ionises them, blasting electrons away from atoms. In the intense magnetic field of a thunderstorm, these newly freed electrons are accelerated enough so that they too knock loose further electrons. The accelerating electrons may approach the speed of light; as they slow down, they emit gamma rays. The technical name of this is *Bremsstrahlung*, which is simply German for 'slowing down radiation'.

The avalanche of electrons eventually causes the storm's electrical field to collapse as charge is transferred. Scientists calculate that the total current carried by an electron avalanche

may be similar to that of a visible bolt of lightning, even though it does not emit light – it is in fact dark lightning.

Is there a risk to airline passengers from these high-energy gamma bursts? According to Joseph Dwyer, a physicist at the Florida Institute of Technology and TGF researcher, passengers in an aircraft passing close to a thunderstorm might receive radiation equivalent to about a hundred chest X-rays or a full-body CT scan. Fortunately, this would be an extreme case and such a high intensity is rare. As it happens, pilots tend to avoid thunderstorms for fairly obvious reasons. So the overall level of radiation exposure from TGFs, even for frequent flyers, is less than you get from background radiation while flying anyway.¹

The Russian physicist Alexander Gurevich believes that the cosmic rays that trigger TGFs also act as the seeds for lightning. Recent observations appear to back this up. A team of scientists from the University of Bergen published a paper this year documenting for the first time the simultaneous sighting of lightning and a

gamma ray flash from the same thunderstorm, using sensors on two separate satellites.² By chance, RHESSI and the orbiting Lightning Imaging Sensor were both within 300km [186 miles] of the storm at the right moment. They showed the TGF was emitted from deep inside the storm during the initial stage of a cloud-to-cloud lightning strike. The storm was over Lake Maracaibo in Venezuela, an area known for its frequent and intense silent thunderstorms (see **FT137:46** for the author's experiences there).

In addition to the visible flash and the TGF, the Bergen team also recorded a simultaneous pulse of radio energy. These pulses have long been associated with thunderstorms, and it was always assumed that they were produced by visible lightning. However, the new observations support the idea that the radio pulse is really caused by the dark lightning electron avalanche.³

However, the connection between cosmic rays, dark lightning, visible lightning and TGFs is by no means clear-cut. A study from the University of Bologna published this year, using data from the AGILE satellite, showed that the distribution of TGFs was different from that of visible lightning. The likeliest explanation is that only some types of lightning are associated with gamma ray flashes and that there may be two or more types of visible lightning.⁴

Another mystery relates to the discovery of positrons in the electron avalanche. The positron is the antimatter counterpart of the electron, and its presence suggests that the process that creates TGFs may have additional complexities.

Scientists have gone some way to unravelling the mysteries of lightning, but they are turning up plenty of new mysteries in the process.

*David Hambling's new e-book, **Shadows from Norwood**, is available now from Amazon*

NOTES

- 1 www.livescience.com/28594-dark-lightning-zaps-airline-passengers.html
- 2 http://web.ift.uib.no/~nikost/papers/Lis_Rhessi_rev_bold.pdf
- 3 <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/grl.50742/abstract>
- 4 <http://adsabs.harvard.edu/abs/2013EGUGA..15.7347F>

SCARED OF THE DARK ? YOU WILL BE !



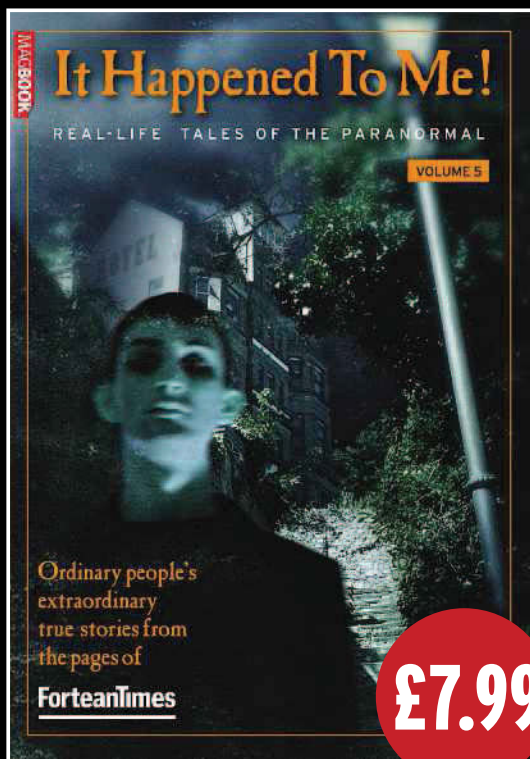
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MEDICAL BAG

Hydrocephalus treated in India, seeking paralysis in Utah, and dead man walking (or at least he thinks he is) in the UK

HEAD DRAINED

Roona Begum, a 16-month-old Indian girl, had an advanced case of hydrocephalus ('water on the brain'), which resulted in her growing skull expanding to three times its normal size to contain the build-up of cerebrospinal fluid and preventing her from closing her eyes properly. Her father Abdul Rahmen, 19, who earns a mere £1.79 a day in a brick factory in Argatala, in the north-eastern Indian state of Tripura, was too poor to afford the necessary operations. Of the 400,000 children stricken with the illness every year, more than three-quarters are in the developing world, usually with no access to life-saving care.

When British doctors saw the photographs of Roona published in the *Sun* last April, they thought it was probably too late to save her because the fluid should have been drained soon after birth. However, the publicity generated sufficient funding for a series of operations at Fortis Memorial Research Institute in Gurgaon, near New Delhi (the subcontinent's largest private hospital). An initial operation reduced the swelling by about a third from 37in (94cm) cranial circumference to 29in (74cm), and a second operation on 15 May reduced it to 24in (61cm).

"The prognosis is much better than expected," said Dr Sandeep Vaishya, director of neurosurgery, "and baby Roona is responding well to treatment. When she came here, she was almost immobile. Now, she is moving her head from side to side easily, it shows that her neck muscles are already getting stronger. The next big step will be for her to sit up. Neurologically as well, the baby shows several signs of improvement. She can see better, her limb movements are much better."

On 27 June a third operation reconstructed the little girl's skull, which was severely disfigured when the fluid was drained. Its circumference was reduced to 23in (58cm) – the size of an average adult woman. Her mother, Fatima Khatoun, 24, said: "We are looking forward to taking Roona home [to



ABOVE: Roona Begum before and after the three operations to drain her skull

the village of Jirania] so she can start life as a normal child." She was discharged from hospital on 2 August. *Sun*, 13 April, 16 May, 28 June, 2 Aug; *huffingtonpost.co.uk*, 15 May; *zeenews.india.com*, 3 Aug 2013.

PARALYSE ME, PLEASE

Chloe Jennings-White, 58, longs to be paralysed from the waist down and even wants a surgeon to sever her spine to stop her legs working. As a child, London-born Ms Jennings-White – who now lives in Salt Lake City, Utah – would climb trees and play dangerous sports

in an attempt to hurt herself. She also suffered skiing and car crash injuries, probably in a subconscious bid to make her dream come true. Her obsession began when she was four. She visited her aunt Olivia, who was using leg braces after a bicycle accident, and admits that she wanted them too. Aged nine, she deliberately pedalled her bike off a 4ft (1.2m) stage on Hampstead Heath, landing on her neck, but escaped with bruises. She broke five bones between the ages of 12 and 16.

In 2008 she was diagnosed with BIID (Body Integrity Identity

Disorder), a rare psychological condition that makes sufferers want to be disabled. "Clinical diagnosis," wrote therapist Gershen Kaufmann, "is an imaginative grouping of facts." Anyway, Ms Jennings-White is relieved that her odd urges have been given a label, and no longer sees herself as a freak. "Something in my brain tells me my legs are not supposed to work," she said. "Having any sensation in them feels wrong." In 2010 she found a surgeon willing to sever her sciatic and femoral nerves to paralyse her – but the unnecessary operation would have cost £16,000, way beyond her means. Doctors have told her to use a wheelchair and leg braces to control her urges to damage her spine. "Being able to use a wheelchair is a massive relief, and the closest I will probably come to being paraplegic," she said. For the related BDD (Body Dysmorphic Disorder or "ugly duckling syndrome"), see **FT134:16-17**. *Sun*, 16 July; *Metro*, 17 July 2013.

WALKING CORPSE SYNDROME

A man's account of living with Cotard's delusion (or Cotard's syndrome) offers insight into this rare condition. The British man, identified only as Graham, awoke from a suicide attempt in 2004 feeling as though his brain were dead. "I just felt like my brain didn't exist anymore," he said, recalling his bizarre state of consciousness after surviving an attempt to electrocute himself in his bathtub. "I kept on telling the doctors that the tablets weren't going to do me any good, because I didn't have a brain. I'd fried it in the bath."

Graham was diagnosed with Cotard's delusion, a mysterious psychiatric condition first identified in 1882 and marked by "the fixed and unshakable belief that one has lost organs, blood or body parts" or has no soul, according to a definition in a 2003 report in the journal *Neurology*. It was named for the 19th century French physician Jules Cotard, who originally called it *déjà vu de negation*, the delusion that you no longer exist. It is also known as "walking corpse syndrome"

A^Z ALIEN ZOO

KARL SHUKER presents his regular round-up from the crypto-zoological garden

because it can make people think they have turned into zombies. As Nick Warren noted in "The Quick and the Undead" [FT159:25]: "Some victims believe they can smell their own rotting flesh (an olfactory hallucination) or feel worms crawling through the skin (formication). The sufferer may request immediate burial, since he has become a stinking corpse."

"I didn't want to face people," said Graham. "There was no point. I didn't feel pleasure in anything. I used to idolise my car, but I didn't go near it. All the things I was interested in went away. I lost my sense of smell and my sense of taste. There was no point in eating because I was dead. It was a waste of time speaking because I never had anything to say. I ended up spending time in the graveyard because that was the closest I could get to death. The police would come and get me, though, and take me back home."

Graham's recent diagnosis gave doctors an opportunity to look inside the brain of a Cotard's patient. What they found was extraordinary. "I've been analysing PET scans for 15 years," said Dr Steven Laureys of the University of Liège in Belgium, "and I've never seen anyone who was on his feet, who was interacting with people, with such an abnormal scan result. Graham's brain function resembles that of someone during anaesthesia or sleep. Seeing this pattern in someone who is awake is quite unique to my knowledge."

While Graham's brain was intact, his brain activity looked like that of someone in a coma. "It seems plausible that the reduced metabolism was giving him this altered experience of the world, and affecting his ability to reason about it," Dr Laureys said. Graham said he struggled to find pleasure in life, calling the fact that he wasn't actually dead "a nightmare". However, with the help of therapy and medication, Graham says he has managed to shake his zombie-like state. "I don't feel that brain-dead anymore," he told *New Scientist*. "Things just feel a bit bizarre sometimes. I'm not afraid of death, but that's not to do with what happened – we're all going to die sometime. I'm just lucky to be alive now." *ABC News, D.Telegraph, 27 May 2013.*



THINK PINK - AND BIG!

Sometimes, the most surprising discoveries can be right before our eyes, unrecognised. Take the remarkable case of the giant pink slugs of Mount Kaputar in New South Wales, Australia. Measuring a very sizeable 8in (20cm) long and boasting an extremely bright, shocking pink body coloration, these exceptionally eye-catching molluscs are found nowhere else on Earth. They have long been known to scientists, but until very recently were simply assumed to be a variety of the red triangle slug *Triboniophorus græffeii*. Named after a distinctive triangular marking present upon its mantle, this is a smaller, less vividly hued but very common species along Australia's east coast. Following a new study of their morphology and genetic make-up, however, Mount Kaputar's giant pink slugs have been exposed as a distinct, valid species in their own right, now awaiting formal description and naming. What makes its belated taxonomic recognition zoologically significant is that it is now the only species belonging to the family Athoracophoridae that is known from inland Australia – all other species within this particular family of land slugs (known as leaf-veined slugs) are of coastal occurrence. Its separate species status means that it also becomes Australia's largest native species of land slug. <http://newswatch.nationalgeographic.com/2013/06/10/new-hot-pink-slug-found-in-australia/> 10 June 2013.

A BUSHMEAT BONANZA IN LAOS

Markets in tropical countries selling bushmeat (wild game obtained legally and frequently illegally too) have often yielded some remarkable zoological surprises, offering up specimens of species hitherto unrecorded by science, and it happened again in September 2012, when a team of wildlife researchers from the National University of Laos were surveying markets in central Laos for squirrel specimens. Postgraduate student Daosavanh Sanamxay came upon a single specimen of a very large, distinctive flying squirrel that proved to belong to a species never previously encountered by science. Further investigations uncovered about 10 other specimens in the freezers of the bushmeat sellers. The species has now been formally described in a 2013 *Zootaxa* paper, and named *Biswamoyopterus laoensis*, the Laotian giant flying

squirrel. This is only the second species known from the genus *Biswamoyopterus*; the other one, the much smaller *Namdapha* flying squirrel *B. biswasi*, is known from just a single specimen, obtained in the Indian province of Arunachal Pradesh in 1981, and has not been sighted in the wild since 2002. <http://news.mongabay.com/2013/0806-kimbrough-giant-flying-squirrel.html> 6 Aug 2013.

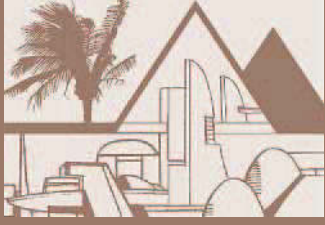
BEHOLD THE MONSTER OF LAKE WASHINGTON, AGAIN!

They say that history never repeats itself, but that is not always true of cryptozoological history. Back in November 1987, after many years of uncorroborated reports of gigantic duck-devouring monsters there, a huge sturgeon was found dead in

Seattle's Lake Washington, measuring 11ft (3.35m) long, weighing 410lb (186kg), and believed to be more than 80 years old. In recent years, reports of monstrous duck-devourers in this lake have resurfaced, unlike the monsters themselves – until now, that is. During the first weekend of August 2013, a family water-skiing in the northern portion of Lake Washington encountered the dead body of a huge sturgeon, floating upside-down. Brad James, a biologist at Fish and Wildlife in Vancouver, Washington State, confirmed its identity, disclosed that it measured 7ft (2.1m) long, and revealed that it may have been living there for years. <http://www.king5.com/news/pets-and-animals/Eight-foot-long-dead-sturgeon-found-floating-in-Lake-Washington-218555201.html> 6 Aug 2013.

TIGER, TIGER, BURNING WHITE?

The only form of tiger traditionally known to inhabit China in modern times is the exceedingly rare South China tiger subspecies, *Panthera tigris amoyensis*, and even this may now be extinct in the wild. According to a fascinating article published in Chinese on the tieba.baidu.com website, however, drawn to my attention by Canadian cryptozoologist Sebastian Wang who kindly provided an English summary, a very different and extremely mysterious tigerine felid may also exist here. As recently as May 1994, in the Shennongjia region of China's northwestern Hubei Province, the article's author claimed to have spied a giant cat measuring 13-16ft (4-5m) long (and therefore much larger than any normal tiger), with white fur bearing vertical yellow stripes. It also sported a pair of huge canine teeth up to 9in (23cm) long and therefore reminiscent of a prehistoric sabre-toothed tiger's. (It's worth noting, however, that sabre-toothed tigers were not related to true tigers). The sighting's precise location was on the tallest peak of the eastern Shennongjia region, at an altitude of 9,200ft (2,800m). The article's author subsequently learnt that a few such cats had previously been killed by local hunters. If only a pelt or skull had been preserved for scientific examination – but perhaps some hunter does possess such objects, as trophies displayed proudly in his home. If so, he may own specimens of immense cryptozoological significance. http://tieba.baidu.com/p/806911199?pn=5027&is_bakan=0&mo_device=1 accessed 29 July 2013.



ARCHAEOLOGY

By **PAUL DEVEREUX** Managing Editor of *Time and Mind – The Journal of Archaeology, Consciousness and Culture*



MYSTERIOUS FINDS

Previously in this column, we have reported the discovery in Orkney of a remarkable and seriously enigmatic Neolithic complex [FT296:24], which had monumental walls and had been painted in coloured pigments. Excavations at this non-funerary 2.5ha (6 acre) site on the Ness of Brodgar, between the Ring of Brodgar and the Stones of Stenness, continue to yield discoveries. Molly Bond, an archaeology student from Willamette University, Oregon, found a carved stone ball during her stint on the site. At the time of writing, the object has not been cleaned (a delicate process), but it

may be made from basalt. It fits comfortably in the hand and has six projections, “four in a circle and two on top” as Ms Bond describes it. Over the years, hundreds of roughly similar prehistoric stone balls have been found in Scotland and yet their nature, their purpose, remains a mystery. Years ago, however, architect and master geometer Keith Critchlow made a detailed analysis of these objects. In his book *Time Stands Still* (1979/2007), he convincingly shows that whatever their purpose might have been, the more sophisticated examples not only show exceptional craftsmanship, but clearly represent Platonic and complex geometric

solids. Perhaps this discovery is a clue to the great Orkney complex having been a major centre of learning, a kind of university campus, whatever else it might have been. *Orkney Jar*, 7 Aug; *Stone Pages*, 11 Aug 2013.

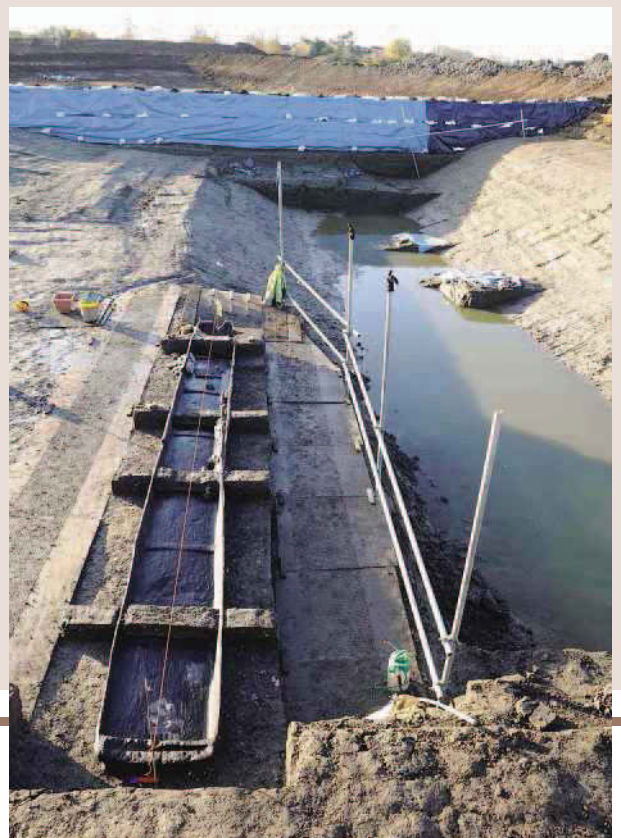
And the ball isn't all. Some 450 examples of Neolithic decorative art have been found at the site so far, and that tally has now been augmented by what is probably the best example of Neolithic art uncovered in Britain – an engraved stone (left) with its sides incised, variously, with a chevron design, cup marks and a major pattern of interconnecting triangles. One wonders what else might yet be unearthed at this extraordinary, internationally important 5,000-year-old place – only part of which has so far been excavated. *Orkney Jar*, 31 July 2013.

AHOY THERE!

It is a notable enough archaeological event when a Bronze Age boat is unearthed, but now a whole fleet of them has been uncovered in a quarry near Peterborough, Cambridgeshire. Eight of the prehistoric vessels have been excavated, including one that is almost 9m (30ft) long. One boat has extensive decorative carving on it, and another the traces of a fire that had been lit on its flat deck, presumably for cooking purposes. One of the vessels was even still able to float. Carbon dating is awaited, but it is thought the oldest of the boats dates to the middle of the second millennium BC, with the most recent one being some hundreds of years younger. The boats were in a former creek from which ritual offerings have been recovered, and seem to have been deliberately sunk – their transoms (boards for closing the sterns of boats) had



ABOVE AND RIGHT: The Bronze Age boats unearthed in a quarry near Peterborough in Cambridgeshire – note the decorative carving on the vessel pictured above.



168. THE GUNS OF SINGAPORE

The myth

When the Japanese invaded Singapore in 1942, all the guns mounted on the fortifications were fixed in position, permanently pointing out to sea. This would have been fine, except that, with devilish cunning, the Japanese invaded from the other direction – through the jungle, which the chinless British buffoons who ran the place had confidently declared to be “impenetrable”.



HUNT EMERSON

The “truth”

Most of Singapore’s batteries were, in fact, capable of a full 360-degree traverse; not only *could* they fire on the advancing enemy, but they did so for several days, only stopping when they ran out of ammunition. A very few of the guns did, indeed, have a “dead arc” – those which had originally been mounted on battleships. It may be that this immobile minority is what gave the story enough credibility to last so long. There’s no reason to suppose that anyone involved in the defence of Singapore considered an attack from land unlikely, let alone unthinkable.

Sources

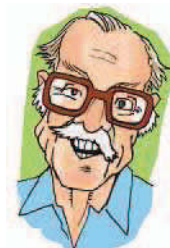
<http://s.coop/singabook>; www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/worldwar2/theatres-of-war/asia/investigation/singapore/sources/photos/3/; www.awm.gov.au/atwar/remembering1942/singapore/transcript.asp

Disclaimer

Some historians claim that the debunking of the original story is exaggerated, and has itself become a new myth. Also subject to dispute too complex for this space is a) whether Winston Churchill, blame-dodging after the fall of Singapore, created the original myth; and b) whether the ammunition used was ineffective against land forces. As always, readers with additions or corrections to make to this column are invited to turn their fire on FT’s letters page.

Update

The latest addition to our list (**FT:152:26, 180:26, 225:17, 257:19, 281:21, 289:19**) of self-lookalikes is broadcaster Alan Whicker, who was once one of the world’s most impersonated celebrities. According to obituaries (e.g. *Western Daily Press*, 13 July 2013), once, while in the USA, “he heard about an Alan Whicker impersonation contest. He entered and came third.”



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been removed – perhaps as offerings in some sort of ritual activity spanning centuries. Made from huge timbers, the vessels are undergoing conservation work at the Flag Fen site. *Guardian*, 4 June 2013.

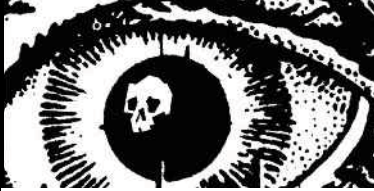


A VERY OLD IRISHMAN

“Bog bodies” are the remains of ancient human beings, some from as far back as the Iron Age, found in peat bogs. They are usually relatively well preserved due to the anaerobic nature of such bogs. Now, what may be the oldest bog body discovered anywhere in the world has been found in Cashel Bog, County Laois, Ireland. “Cashel Man”, as he is being called, has been found to date back to 2,000 BC – the early Bronze Age. He is a young adult, his arm broken by a blow, and bearing deep cuts to his back (his head, neck and chest were damaged when the body was discovered, so the possible full extent of his injuries cannot be known). The body was placed in a crouched position and the spot marked by wooden staves. He had also been interred near what archaeologists call an “inauguration site”. In light of these factors, it is assumed Cashel Man was a ritual sacrifice – an explanation also often offered for the Iron Age bog bodies that show evidence of violent death. *Irish Times*, 2 Aug 2013.

SPEAKING UP FOR NEANDERTHALS

Neatly complementing the report we made in **FT304:19** about findings that the bones in the middle ear of very early human-like beings, hominins, would have enabled them to hear like modern humans, a recent study of Neanderthal DNA by researchers at Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics at Nijmegen in the Netherlands shows that Neanderthals, the strain of humanity that preceded modern humans in Europe and may have co-existed with them for a time, possessed a gene known to be associated with language and speech. Furthermore, Neanderthals’ skeletal architecture included a bone that, with its muscle connections, assists the movement of the tongue and allows pharyngeal and laryngeal manipulation, enabling a range of sounds to be produced. Human beings, it would seem – from the early hominins through our near cousins, the Neanderthals, to our own modern human ancestors in the Stone Age – could speak and hear, and doubtless sing and make music, as we can today. It is literally in our DNA. *NBC News*, 11 July 2013.



GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE examines more hauntings linked to the presence of human remains

UNQUIET GRAVES, PART TWO

Last month's column mentioned the recent report from Godalming, Surrey, where a young lady linked a recurring dream of someone being buried under her haunted family home with the discovery of bones nearby in an excavation.

Stories like this seem to have been popular in Great Britain from the mid-18th century to the mid-20th century. Skulls and bones were a 19th century obsession featuring in controversies over history, biology, intelligence testing and crude attempts at racial profiling to determine national characteristics, some of which even reached the courts. In 1869, Lord Hatherley summarised the claim of a plaintiff in a copyright case over a book on English ancestry who "proceeded to shew that the modern English skull is long oval, and that the modern Teuton skull is, on the whole, round and short". He duly reached "the conclusion that all the evidence, without exception, points to the Cymry [Welsh] as the progenitors of those English people who possess the longer oval skull, and who constitute the bulk of the nation". This the plaintiff averred was by "the results of my personal examination of 4,848 heads in London" (*Pike v Nicholas*, 1869, L.R. 5 Ch App 251; *The Mismeasure of Man*, 1981, by Stephen Jay Gould).

Such interest formed the backdrop for the comment in John Ingram's classic *The Haunted Homes and Family Traditions of Great Britain* (1888) that "Many a curious chapter has been written about the human cranium". Some 15 per cent of Ingram's collection were stories and legends of hauntings featuring skeletons, skulls and bodies denied proper burials, helping establish the category of "screaming skull", as opposed to ordinary examples.

From the mid-20th century, the screaming skulls seem to have rather quietened down. The last report of one appears to be a skull displayed in a Brighton antique shop in December 1953 which originated from Warbleton Priory, Sussex (see *Reynold's News*, 27 Dec 1953; *Haunted Brighton*, 2006, by Alan Murdie), although one or two tales of ill-luck with others have circulated since.

An example was the skull at Chilton Cantelo, Somerset, where two researchers suffered accidents following jocular remarks made about it in 1977; one had a car accident on his return to London whilst the other set his trousers alight after dropping a match in the turn-up. However, the relic seems to have been treated more with affection than fear, as when Mark Alexander visited, he found it possessing a visitor's book with entries stretching back before World War II (see *Ghosts of Somerset*, 1985, by Peter

Underwood; *Phantom Britain*, 1975, by Marc Alexander). Unfortunately, such tolerance was not shown with the reputedly female skull, 'Dickie' of Tunstead Farm, Chapel-en-le-Frith, Derbyshire, which after many years as a tourist attraction was apparently buried some years ago by a superstitious owner at an unknown location. (There's a real challenge for any budding map dowers keen to test their powers!)

Perhaps the 20th century's most famous example of a discovery of bones connected with ghostly manifestations was the unearthing of a jaw-bone declared that of a nun beneath the floor of the ruins of Borley Rectory, Essex – "the most haunted house in England" – in 1943. The Rectory and its environs had long been haunted by a ghostly nun with a sad expression. The find has created endless debate and argument; the fragment was re-interred in Liston churchyard in 1946. An even greater number of skeletal remains turned up in Borley church during renovation work in 1947, but no firm connection with the alleged haunting was made. (Source: '3 men try to lay a ghost and find bones' *D. Mail*, 27 Mar 1947; pers. comm., R Blythe 15 June 2011).

Of course, along with unpleasant factoids such as one never being far from a rat in Britain, it must be the case that one is never any great distance from human bones. Admittedly, some reports – if believed – are attributable to wishful thinking. For instance in 1927, the *Daily News* published an account from a correspondent who reported that the kitchen fire of a cottage in Cheshire would never burn beyond a dull smoky

red, forcing the cooking to be done in the sitting room grate in cold weather. Years later, the skeletons of two tiny children were found under the gloomy and troublesome hearth (*Warnings From Beyond*, 1927; *Elliot O'Donnell's Ghost Hunters*, 1971, by Elliot O'Donnell, edited by Harry Ludlam).

One discovery which caused a national sensation occurred at Craigie Lodge at Ventnor on the Isle of Wight in October 1921. A gardener was digging holes for shrubs in an earth bank along a lane dividing the property and unearthed the lower jaw of a child. He took it to his employer Mrs Capell, who happened to be being visited by Mrs Hugh Pollock, a psychometrist. Mrs Pollock placed the bone against her forehead and declared a second skeleton would be found lying near that of the child. Another skeleton was subsequently discovered, apparently fulfilling this prediction. The press of the time was greatly impressed, with one London paper stating: "Evidently then, there is such a faculty as clairvoyance; and who knows how far that demonstrated fact may lead us, how far it may widen the bounds of human knowledge and human consciousness." (Sources: *Evening News*, 21 Oct 1921; *Ghost Parade*, 1944, by Stuart Martin).

On occasion it has even been claimed that buried bones can exert an unfortunate influence on the living. An example is a little known case from Banffshire, Scotland, in the 1870s examined by the Society for Psychical Research. In June 1870 William Moir, the bailiff responsible for a farm at Boyndie near Banff, had a strange and vivid dream in which he saw the dead body of a man with blood on its face, lying on a slight mound on some sloping ground that bounded his farm and stretched to the seashore, about 16ft (4.9m) from the high water mark. Moir, described as an "intelligent, steady, and modest man, 35 years of age, and married", was deeply affected by the dream. It became an obsession, taking so firm a hold, "that never was he a moment unoccupied but the idea and the vision returned to him".

In July 1870 there came what initially appeared to be the fulfilment of the dream. A man who had been an inmate of the Banffshire Lunatic Asylum, at Ladysbridge, was found drowned at a point about 200 yards (180m) from the place in Moir's dream. Together with some menservants, Moir had been out sea fishing and from their boat they observed the dead body. Hastening ashore, Moir was the first person to put his hand upon the corpse. He and one of his companions proceeded



LEFT: A postcard of Dickie, the Tunstead Farm skull. OPPOSITE: Borley Rectory.

o carry the body to the village of Whitehills nearby. Whilst carrying the body, they passed over the exact spot Moir had seen the dead man lying in his dream. When about six yards beyond this, Moir's companion slipped and dropped the board upon which the body lay, causing it to fall to the ground. Moir, keeping hold of his end of the board, observed blood upon the face of the corpse, and he looked upon the incident as the fulfilment of his dream. However, more was to come.

The vision in the dream returned repeatedly to Moir through 1871, to the point it disturbed him so much that he could not go out walking or sit down at home in the evening without recalling it. He was conscious of becoming taciturn, morose, and absent. Finally, at the end of January 1872, he went down to a place known as Stakeness, about 400 yards (370m) from the place in his original vision and began digging with a spade. He immediately turned up a human skull, followed by the lower jaw with teeth and shoulder bones. Further digging brought up other bones of a human body as far as the thigh. Realising he had dug up a skeleton, Moir fetched one William Lorimer, the cattleman at the farm, to help with the digging and they brought out the lower bones of the skeleton. Both men then deposited the bones in the cavity, and covered them up, and Moir went to the village of Whitehills to consult Mr Taylor, a local shopkeeper. An Inspector M'Gregor of the county police happened to call into the shop at the same time. Moir immediately told him what had happened and they hurried to where the bones lay. It being dusk, the inspector arranged the removal of the skeleton the next day and reported the matter to the Procurator Fiscal.

The place where the bones were found seemed an unlikely one for a grave, there being only a thin layer of mould and earth above the shingle; nearby were some discoloured stones, suggesting it might have been the site of a kiln for burning kelp, a local industry that had been discontinued about half a century earlier. No murder or disappearance was known locally to account for the discovery. It was suggested that Moir might have heard something in childhood, but in fact his family did not live in the district at the time. The bones were estimated to be at least 50 years old.

"Curiosity will naturally exist as to how the finding of the skeleton has after a time affected the mind of Mr. Moir," wondered the *Banffshire Journal*. Moir duly confirmed his experiences to the editor of the *Banffshire Journal* on 19 July 1872 and the paper



HE TURNED UP A HUMAN SKULL, FOLLOWED BY THE LOWER JAW AND SHOULDER BONES

recorded that, "After meeting with Inspector M'Gregor, the subject of the dream ceased to harass him, and he has since enjoyed an entire immunity from his previous mental troubles."

However, when enquiries were made about the case in 1883 by a Mr Stewart on behalf of the recently formed Society for Psychical Research, it was soon learned that the story had not ended happily as the press suggested. Stewart discovered that Moir had fallen into what was described as "a state of religious depression such as seriously to unhinge his mind before his death," which occurred in October 1873. Stewart located people who confirmed Moir had been a troubled man until the finding of the skeleton, and after its discovery he divulged his belief that "his dream proceeded from an unaccountable feeling, as if he himself had somehow been witness of, or implicated in, the murderous act".

Moir's wife Jessie confirmed her husband's strange reactions from the night of his dream until the day he dug up the grave. She recalled begging him to share his mental burden with her, but "he had not the power" to do so. She stated that although the dreams had stopped after the bones were found, the shock to his system led to his death. She also revealed that old people living in the village of Boyndie knew that a man named Elder had disappeared suddenly some 40 or 50 years before. He was said to have left for America, but it was generally believed that he had been murdered in the room in which Moir later slept! She believed

the matter had been hushed up to protect local people.

Stewart reported: "It seems incredible that a man should be thus affected by a distant skeleton and yet capable of fulfilling the ordinary duties of life; which in the case of a serious Scotch bailiff must undoubtedly have included attendance, in the midst of buried skeletons, at church. The facts of this case are unusually clear and well-evidenced; the interpretation is more than commonly difficult."

Considering the case, the psychical researcher Frederic Myers (1843-

1901) found himself contemplating "a conception of a strange and painful kind... A man – himself, as the tradition hints, not blameless – is murdered in a bedroom of a Scotch farmhouse. His body is carried out and hastily buried in the open field. For 40 years the murdered man retains some consciousness of this tragedy. He broods over the fact of his death in that room, his interment in that stony hillock. At last the bedroom is occupied by a man sensitive to the peculiar influence which (on our hypothesis) these broodings of deceased persons diffuse. The dream of the dead passes into the dream of the living; it persists in Moir's mind with the same intensity as in the murdered man's own imagination. The purpose once achieved, the discovery made, the obsession ceases.

"And we may indeed say that if we carry our ideas of telepathy into an unseen world, this is the kind of haunting which we should expect to find. We are dealing presumably with a world of influences; and we can believe that a man may come within a current of influence against which no ordinary means of self-defence can avail, and which may persist as long as certain links between the unembodied and the embodied mind hold good."

Over 130 years later, the fundamental issue posed by this and numerous other cases is still with us. Reducing it to a skull-sized question: is human consciousness limited to existence within the confines of skull or can it extend beyond it? For materialists, consciousness is trapped "in the small, bony prison cell of the human skull" (quoting Carl Williams) and disappears at death. But to maintain such an assumption involves shutting one's eyes to much interesting evidence, as well as very long established traditions and beliefs.

Sources: *Banffshire Journal* 30 Jan 1872; *Proceedings of the SPR* 1889-90 vol 6; 'Conceptual Metaphor: A Meaning-Oriented Approach for Parapsychology' by Carl Williams *Journal of the SPR* vol 77.



NECROLOG

This month, we mark the passing of a Ukrainian physicist, ufologist and fortean who wrote a classic study of the Tunguska event, and mourn the last of the Beguines



VLADIMIR RUBTSOV

Rubtsov, a member of the Russian Academy of Cosmonautics, won international praise for *The Tunguska Mystery* (2009), which presented his 35-year study of the huge explosion in 1908 in remote Siberia. He published internationally nearly 200 papers and articles on a variety of fortean topics that were always thorough and typically sober in tone – even when dealing with sensational material such as the ‘Black Ball’ found in 1975 in West Ukraine in a clay layer estimated to be 10 million years old.

He was the founder-chairman of the Research Institute On Anomalous Phenomena (RIAP), the main platform for his and colleagues’ research into alleged extraterrestrial objects that hinted at alien technology. His interests took in what he called ‘visitology’ (ET visitations, such as a folktale of an airship that crashed in a small town in the Caucasus mountains during the 19th century) and its terrestrial equivalent ‘palæovisitology’ (e.g. Phœnician inscriptions found in America).

He was well versed in the writings of Charles Fort, whom he thought “ahead of his time”. His 2011 book *Investigating the Anomalies: Mysteries from Behind the Former Iron Curtain* followed the rigorous scientific model that was the RIAP trademark: detailed presentation of data and logical conclusions without sensationalism. He saw Fort’s work as trail-blazing “an expression of open protest against the centuries-

old habit of considering the Earth as a planet isolated from outer space and therefore not subject to any cosmic influences during its history.” Indeed, he often declared that the entrenchment of specialisation in the sciences was holding back the multi-disciplinary approach needed to resolve many so-called ‘mysteries’.

Vladimir Rubtsov obtained a degree in computer science in 1972 before joining Dr Alexey Zolotov’s laboratory in Kalinin (now Tver), where he became fascinated by the mysterious event at Tunguska. In 1980 he was awarded a PhD in the philosophy of science from the Moscow Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, with a thesis on the ‘Philosophical and Methodological Aspects of the Problem of Extraterrestrial Civilizations’. It was the first topic of its kind in the USSR.

On returning to Kharkov, Rubtsov continued his work on Tunguska, collaborating with Professor Nikolay Vasilyev, probably the foremost scholar of Tunguska studies. Rubtsov was skilled in the methodology of interdisciplinary research, the sociology of science and technology, and in general epistemology. In 1984, he was awarded the prestigious Award of the Moldavian Academy of Sciences for a monograph on the scientific and philosophical problems presented by contact with extraterrestrial civilizations. He was a member of the Society for Scientific Exploration, USA; the Expert Group on Anomalous Atmospheric Phenomena of the Russian Academy of Sciences; and the SETI Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

He witnessed and participated in the rise and collapse of Soviet ufology. “In the years before *perestroika*, information on Soviet UFO sightings was for Western researchers a real gem, because of the high barriers that it had to overcome on its way to the West. These were the barriers of the dead silence of mass-media and the witnesses themselves, as well as the problems of translating and sending abroad unauthorised

materials.”

Rubtsov became interested in UFOs in 1962, when Donald Menzel’s book *Flying Saucers: Myth, Truth, History* was translated into Russian. “It was done in order to ‘calm minds’,” he said, “but ironically it only increased interest in the UFO problem among Soviet readers.” His own article differentiating between “guests from outer space and atmospheric phenomena” was published in the Ukrainian language periodical *Knowledge is the Price* (1966). Rubtsov was proud that “this was the first publication in the Soviet press in which ‘flying saucers’ were not dismissed ‘as fabrications of the bourgeois press’.”

His first book, *UFOs and Modern Science* (1991), was published by the Russian Academy of Sciences. It was intended to be the first of a series, he later told Bill Chalker. “Alas, immediately after it was published, the Soviet Union disintegrated and all hopes for serious work in this direction have dissolved too.”

Rubtsov was most proud of the accolades from Western scientists and astronomers (not to mention ufologists and forteans) for the culmination of his Tunguska work – *The Tunguska Mystery* (2009), edited by another UFO scholar, Edward Ashpole, and reviewed by Bill Chalker (**FT258:64**). Rubtsov criticised the level of discussion of the Tunguska event outside the old Soviet republics. Compared to the Soviet scientists’ love of rigor, he said, “their Western colleagues are as a rule dealing with simplified and perhaps distorted pictures”. Apart from knowing only that a swath of Siberian forest was flattened by a mystery blast, they seemed unaware of the associated phenomena, including a large area of “light burn”, a geomagnetic storm, genetic mutations and a palæomagnetic anomaly. There was so much information in the book new to Western readers that the late William Corliss declared that reading it “was like viewing the sky with a new telescope”.

In anomaly research generally, as Rubtsov demonstrates with the Tunguska case, the

language barrier and scientific specialisation have been obstacles to the development of a proper interdisciplinary approach. He also kept an eye on the rise of pseudoscience in Russia. It was no longer a problem confined to the West; the Presidium of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS), reviewing the work of its recently created Commission for the Struggle Against Pseudoscience and Falsification of Results of Scientific Studies, commented: “The elite of Russian science are disturbed by the uncontrollable pseudoscientific publications in the mass media; the emergence of ‘public academies’, and the penetration of pseudoscience into the RAS itself.”

Of his own work on Tunguska, Rubtsov felt that the ‘Alien Spacecraft’ hypothesis was “worthy of further consideration”. Relatively unknown are the reports that, on the morning of 30 June 1908, two artificial objects flew over Central Siberia and one of them exploded at Tunguska. “Whether this should be interpreted as an ‘aerospace combat’ or as a ‘failed rescue operation’, is a matter of taste,” he wrote. “When I was younger I preferred the former interpretation; now I am more inclined to the latter.” What really excited him was that “now we have the opportunity to solve the problem. It is very likely that a large remnant of the Tunguska space body may still be lying in a small morass not far from the epicentre of the explosion... waiting for the spades of daring investigators.”

Vladimir Rubtsov, physicist and fortean, born Kharkov, Ukraine 10 Dec 1948; died 6 May 2013, aged 63.

Bob Rickard

MARCELLA PATTYN

Pattyn was a Beguine, a member of the religious movement of laywomen founded in the late 12th century by the Flemish priest Lambert le Bègue (Lambert the Stammerer), who established a community in Liège for the widows of Crusaders who had not returned from the Holy Land. Beguines lived



in walled districts called Beguinages, which sprang up spontaneously in and around the cities of the Low Countries, spreading to northern France and the Rhineland. (They never took off in England, Norwich being the only city where there is evidence of such informal female communities.) By the 20th century the movement had largely retreated to a few Beguinages in Belgium.

Beguines led lives of prayer, chastity and service, but were not bound by vows. They could leave; they made their own rules, without male guidance; they were encouraged to study and read, and were expected to earn their keep by working, especially in the booming cloth trade. They could own property – wealthy Beguines often brought their servants with them. They existed in a state of autonomy that was highly unusual for mediæval women and highly disturbing to mediæval men – some were burned at the stake. They have been described, anachronistically, as mediæval feminists.

Pattyn, who was almost blind, was accepted into the Beguinage of St Amandsberg in Ghent in 1941, moving to the Beguinage of St Elizabeth at Courtrai in 1960, one of a community of nine. She spent her days praying, knitting clothes, weaving and making Beguine dolls to sell to tourists. She played the organ in the chapel and serenaded the sick on banjo and accordion. In her later years she became a familiar figure in Courtrai, whizzing around the alleyways in a motorised wheelchair, her white stick dangerously levelled like a lance. By 2008, when she moved into a nursing home, she had become, officially, the only surviving Beguine in the world. *Marcella Pattyn, the last Beguine, born Belgian Congo 18 Aug 1920; died Courtrai, Belgium 14 April 2013, aged 92.*

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

New Zealand-born computer hacker Barnaby Jack was found dead in San Francisco on 25 July aged 35, a week before he was due to address the Black Hat hacking convention in Las Vegas on how to hack into pacemakers and defibrillators. He planned to reveal how to kill a heart patient from 50ft (15m) away with an 830-volt power surge triggered by a wireless transmitter. An episode of the US TV series *Homeland* had shown a terrorist using a computer to hack into the Vice-President's pacemaker and speed up his heartbeat until it kills him. The assassin needed the serial number of the pacemaker, but Jack argued that in reality knowing the code was unnecessary.

Police reportedly have ruled out foul play in Jack's demise, but the medical examiner's office said it could be months before cause of death was announced, allowing an orgy of online conspiracy speculation. Jack was not known to have any pre-existing medical condition. He became one of the world's most famous hackers following a 2010 demonstration of 'Jackspotting' (getting cash machines to spew out money). Last year he showed how an insulin pump is vulnerable to a hack that would allow a hacker to dispense a fatal dosage of insulin from 300ft (90m) away. Since last October, he had been director of embedded-device security for Seattle information-security firm IOActive. *D.Mail, stuff.co.nz, 27 July; Independent, 30 July 2013.*

At an amateur football match in Brazil on 30 June, an angry mob of fans dismembered the referee after he fatally stabbed a player for refusing to leave the pitch when given a red card. This grand guignol took place in the remote town of Pio XII, named after a former pope, which lies in the northeastern state of Maranhão. Otavio da Silva Catanhede Jordan, 20, pulled a pocketknife on Josenir dos Santos Abreu after the 30-year-old reportedly punched him when handed his marching orders. Fans stormed the pitch, stoned the referee, tied him up and cut off his hands and legs below the knee. They then decapitated him and impaled his severed head on a stake in the middle



of the pitch. Grim footage leaked after the attack showed doctors reassembling the dismembered corpse at the mortuary. Police chief Valter Costa was quoted as saying: "Actions like this do not collaborate with the legality of state law." (FT presumes the original Portuguese was better than this mangled verbosity.) Mr Santos Abreu was taken to hospital after being stabbed, but died on the way there. A 27-year-old man was arrested and two more were being sought. *Times, Metro, 8 July 2013.*

A man in his 70s died after breaking his leg while going through a set of revolving doors at South Tyneside district hospital in South Shields. The doors have subsequently been switched to automatic slide – but patients now complain of draughts. *Sunday Mirror, 24 Mar 2013.*

Sharon Dixon, 54, a former pub landlady and hairdresser known to friends as Big Shaz, began to choke while taking part in a boiled egg-eating contest at the Wellington Arms in Grimsby, Lincolnshire. Friends and staff tried to help her and dialled 999 when she began to turn blue. Paramedics arrived within four minutes, but were unable to revive Ms Dixon, who died in hospital two days later. Ironically, she did not even like eggs. *D.Telegraph, 13 April 2013.*

Following an argument with her husband David Kerrigan, Jean Ryan, 52, set fire to her wedding dress and threw it in the pond at their home in Hampton Hill, south-west London, to extinguish the flames. The next day, after taking their two children to school, Mr Kerrigan, 47, found his wife lying face-down in the pond. It seemed that she had drowned trying to retrieve her dress. *D.Telegraph, 20 Mar 2013.*

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FLAPS FROM THE WORLD OF UFOLOGY

UFO BULGARIA

'Good' UFO sightings recorded on film are few and far between these days. Perhaps because it's easy to spot a fake, or perhaps (whisper it!) because despite the fact that just about everyone in the world carries a phone or camera capable of taking excellent images, there just aren't any 'real' UFOs to photograph. But when video footage does come along, it's worth a look. On 4 August a 'UFO' was filmed over Haskovo in Bulgaria. The fast-moving circular light can clearly be seen passing behind structures and changing its colour and light intensity. Even a UFO sceptic contacted by *The Huffington Post* pronounced it as authentic and not hoaxed, precisely because hoaxing an image that passed behind distant objects would be very difficult. When it appeared on Youtube, others claimed to have seen the same object, all firmly believing it was a genuine 'UFO'. And so it may have been, but it could equally well be a variety of celestial objects or space debris. The part of the UFO lobby still clinging to the idea of 'structured craft of unknown origin' are going to have to come up with better evidence than this to convince forteans that any 'truth' there is about UFOs is a) 'out there' or b) filmable.

www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/09/bulgaria-ufo-video-no-hoax-says-ex-fbi-agentnt_n_3721600.html

TRAINED OBSERVERS FOOLED

An example of just how bad humans are at interpreting things seen in the sky emerged in July, when it was revealed that that a UFO panic in India was caused by bright planets (see 'Aliens over India', **FT297:10-11**). For a three month period in 2012, units of the Indian Army based in the Ladakh region of Jammu and Kashmir reported more than 150 sightings of 'yellowish spheres' that appeared to 'lift off from the horizon on the Chinese side and slowly traverse the sky for three to five hours before disappearing'. The flap led to a 'high level meeting' in the Prime Minister's office, as army top brass believed the UFOs could be Chinese drones being used to probe airspace along the disputed Himalayan border. With tensions running high, the scare led to a heated three-week-long stand-off in April this year when India accused the Chinese of setting up camp on its side of



the disputed border. But when astronomers from the Nehru Planetarium in New Delhi were asked to investigate, they found the appearance and movements of the 'drones' were consistent with the positions of the planets Venus and Jupiter. Venus is known as the 'Queen of UFOs' and is responsible for many UFO sightings, including one by the former US President Jimmy Carter. The *Calcutta Telegraph* said the trained observers who spotted the 'drones' should be let off lightly because 'planets can appear much brighter as a result of the different atmosphere at altitude and the increased use of surveillance drones by both sides'. A similar panic gripped Iran following the invasion of Iraq in 2003, when bright stars and planets led thousands to believe lights in the sky were American drones (**FT186:24**). Ironically, the Iranians captured a real US unmanned drone in December 2011 (**FT285:16**) and announced they intended to carry out 'reverse engineering' on the unmanned aircraft. doubtfulnews.com/2012/11/mystery-spheres-of-light-reported-by-indian-soldiers/; *Daily Mail*, 26 July 2013

A VICTORIAN UFO TALE

When it comes to UFOs, there's very little new under the Sun. A recent archive snippet published by the *Harrogate Advertiser* resurrected a 'sighting' report made 150 years ago. On 31 July 1862, one Fred Bainbridge told the paper: "Last night, a little before 12 o'clock, my attention was arrested by a brilliant light

proceeding down Oatlands Lane, which at the moment I concluded was a lamp of a carriage which seemed to emerge from the front of Mr Paley's house... this light had proceeded down the road across the common for about 150 yards when it was followed by another taking the same direction at first, but which made a sudden turn on approaching the first light, darting off towards the railway, the first light speedily following, but not so far. They both then wandered up and down, at one time slowly and then rapidly,

much faster than a locomotive steam engine, moving with a gliding swiftness peculiar to meteors. At the same time as these two lights were passing about, now quickly now slowly, or coming to a standstill, a third light was stationary in the direction of the pool in Miss Paley's land, but which did not appear so brilliant as the others. For half an hour I watched the vagaries of this Will of the Wisp or *ignis fatuus* which I very soon concluded it to be, and then entered my house and directed my wife's attention to it." Today, the likely explanation would have been a 'UFO', or even perhaps a 'flying saucer', but of course in the 19th century those terms did not exist and people did not habitually associate such lights with alien visitors. But experience demands explanation, and so Mr Bainbridge had to frame his sighting at the limits of Victorian science. Thus the lights became a 'will of the wisp' or 'foolish fire', labels applied to unexplained lights generated by marsh gas. Stories such as these abound in the fortean literature and should serve to remind us all that nothing is what it seems – or at least what it is named.

www.harrogateadvertiser.co.uk/news/a-victorian-ufo-tale-1-2660073



The Royal Pump Room and Old Sulphur Well at Harrogate

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

THE REAL DEAL 1: A WELSH WONDER

In the summer of 2013, the Ministry of Defence opened its final batch of files, taking us up to the closure of its 'UFO desk' (FT304:28-29). As FT columnist Dr David Clarke has discovered whilst stewarding thousands of records into the public domain, the UFO community is never satisfied. Some enthusiasts think that these files are not the 'real deal'. On UFO sites and blogs there are suggestions of top-secret archives containing all the best stuff, as opposed to these cast offs left for public consumption.

There is, however, an effective way to counter this speculation, because some of the cases in the released files were pursued by other people, often more effectively. These weren't secret teams lurking in the shadowy corridors of Westminster. They were UFO researchers with much more time and inclination to do something about the sightings than the MoD with its understandable 'file and forget' mentality.

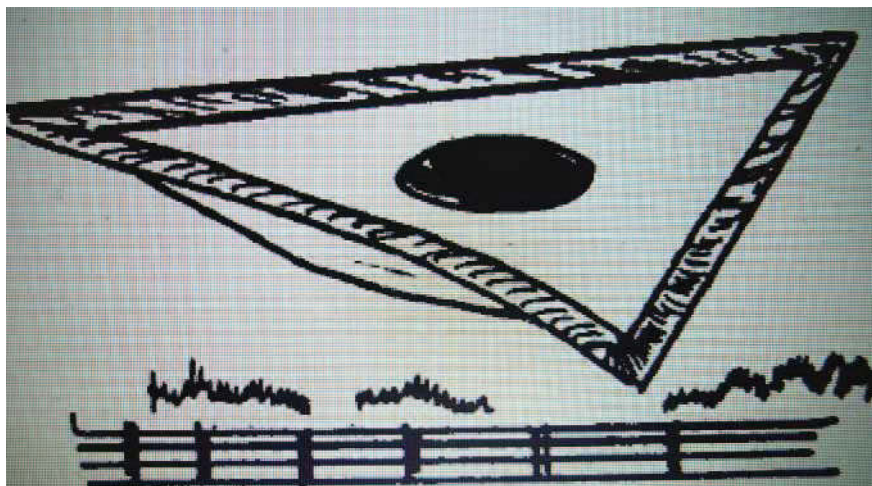
Many of the sightings mouldering away in MoD files whilst also being researched by UFO groups have simple explanations; but that is the way of UFO cases everywhere, 95 per cent of which turn out to be Identified Flying Objects. It is the few – usually about five per cent – that are not so easily solved that are interesting. Indeed, the number of such cases in the MoD files reflects this overall trend, so we indeed find about five per cent of the cases are intriguing UAP and even alien contact stories; luckily, some of them were also investigated by the UFO community.

Unexplored reports are, of course, hard to follow up due to the redacting of witness names and addresses prior to release. But in one typical sighting (from Cwmbran, Wales, in autumn 1982) the censors left enough clues to track the witnesses. The sighting was no big deal in itself – a light moving over a mountain – but the observers confirmed that they had reported what they had seen to the police and yet nobody had then contacted them. They had no idea that there was a file lurking in the MoD archives about their sighting. Many such cases must be awaiting the efforts of eager UFO detectives.

One example – a MoD file involving a sighting on 19 January 1983 near Cardiff, South Wales – will reveal what can emerge from such efforts.

The MoD record for this case gives the broad details: a witness with no name, but described as an RAF aircraft engineer, saw a bright light that he knew was not an aircraft at Llantwit Major. If released years later, this file would be nigh on impossible to investigate. Witnesses might have moved or died, even if there was a clue as to where to start looking. And with so many report forms to choose from, how do researchers know which cases have potential and which are best left on file as just 'lights in the sky'?

With the above case we had two advantages. The first was that the MoD file was sent direct to me soon after the



All agreed that it was a huge triangle with its apex towards them

events had happened; the other was that these events were also reported to BUFORA (the British UFO Research Association) by a different set of witnesses. The threads could therefore be joined together, allowing for an actual investigation. I spent some time in Cardiff digging further. Again, the MoD had never pursued this file beyond logging the form sent by an RAF desk clerk describing "red and blue lights", but I was able to interview several witnesses to these 'lights' in separate locations some miles apart and watch as they independently drew near identical images of a seemingly structured object.

At Llandaff, three witnesses were in a car (a doctor on a night call, his wife and a professional driver) on an open road (the A5054) parallel with the River Taff. At first, they saw just a stationary light. However, as they turned north over the river they obtained a panoramic view to the west across fields and tennis courts. Now they could see that the light was a huge triangular object and they quickly (but safely) came to a halt on a sharp bend – not something they would have done but for the extraordinary circumstances.

The driver told me he was surprised that none of the passing cars or people on the side of the park appeared to look up and see the UFO as it was large (two or three times the size of the Full Moon). His wife added that its motion "defied the laws of perspective".

As she elaborated to me, the object never altered orientation towards them despite the three of them moving about as they watched in awe. All agreed it was a huge triangle with its apex towards them. There was a steady white light coming from all three sides and a

steady red glow from the centre, illuminating a "light metal superstructure" attached beneath the triangle.

There were other interesting aspects to this case – for instance, the wife claimed to have had spontaneous experiences of ESP and precognition and also a series of strange dreams: in them, a disc-shaped UFO landed in front of her, which she approached and was just about to board when she woke up. Many an abduction case has started from such a flimsy premise and the use of hypnosis – although such techniques were not adopted here.

The RAF engineer from the MoD file witnessed something not dissimilar whilst coaching a group of children playing football. This was south west of Llandaff, near St Athan. Other witnesses included a police sergeant at Swansea, further west, who saw a large "zeppelin" with a triangle full of lights at its rear, and 22 children at Egwys Wen School, Cardiff, whose quick-thinking teacher got each of them to sketch the triangle on their own, revealing the same UFO.

All witnesses agreed that the triangle was slow moving and silent, refuting the best of the theories put forward by the authorities – that it was an air sea rescue helicopter, which would have been extremely noisy. My suspicion is that we might be looking at some other kind of hardware on test – perhaps a pilotless drone or balloon of some kind – or even a high-flying mid-air refuelling exercise from a distant RAF or USAF base (although wouldn't an RAF engineer have recognised this?)

This case is exactly what UFO researchers would regard as a 'good un', and certainly not just a run-of-the-mill sighting as the MoD file implies. It appears to be just the sort of case that *would* be put in those 'secret files' that have supposedly been spirited away from public access... if they actually existed. Yet, of course, it was not hidden away but released, to be explored further by researchers.

And, indeed, this story is not unique, as we shall see next month when we investigate another case that the MoD simply filed as 'lights in the sky' – a potentially dangerous daylight encounter between a UFO and an aircraft at a British civil airport.

STONEHENGE SURPRISE

BENJAMIN RADFORD takes a closer look at the ‘best case’ for crop circles - the celebrated Julia Set formation that appeared in a field next to Stonehenge in the summer of 1996 - and asks whether the evidence presented for its non-human origins really stacks up.

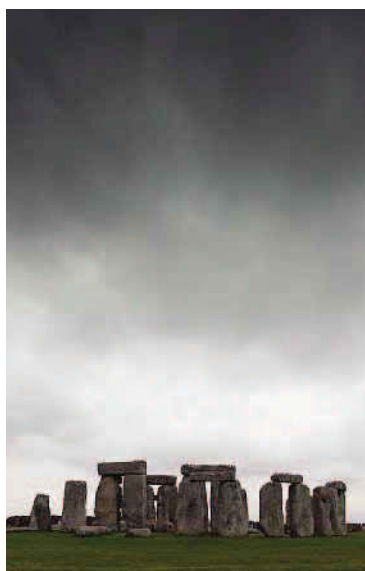
On Sunday 7 July 1996 what has been called “one of the most complex and spectacular crop circle designs ever seen”¹ appeared in England. It’s an astonishing fractal pattern called a Julia Set, which clearly demonstrates some sort of (at least human-level) intelligence behind the design. It is unique in crop circle history for several reasons, including the fact that it appeared not far from the mysterious and world-famous Stonehenge monument in the Wiltshire countryside, and that it apparently appeared during daylight in less than an hour.

The crop circle became one of the most famous and important in history and has been claimed to be, in essence, one of the best cases for crop circles – as well as the most puzzling. Indeed, “noted researcher Colin Andrews expressed the sentiments of many when he said at several public conferences... ‘If these Julia Sets can be proven to be made by humans, then we can all pack our bags and go home’”.²

THE JULIA SET APPEARS

In addition to claims that have become standard with most significant crop circles (such as, for example, the difficulty of making the designs and quotes from occasional baffled “experts”), this strange case has many unique features. The circumstances surrounding its appearance are, at first glance, straightforward and impressive enough: a pilot flies over a field opposite Stonehenge late one afternoon and sees a normal, undisturbed

IT WAS ONE OF THE MOST SPECTACULAR CROP CIRCLES EVER SEEN



OPPOSITE: The Julia Set near Stonehenge, photographed from the air in 1996.

field below; on his return flight, less than an hour later, he is stunned to see the spectacular 600-ft [200m] fractal crop circle below him in that very same field. Soon, word of the circle’s discovery spreads and it makes national news.

Yet there exist no photographs or videos of it being made; it seeming spontaneously appeared in minutes. The validity of this crop circle rests almost entirely on eyewitness testimony and a timeline of events suggesting that the circle must have appeared in between the two flights, approximately 20 to 45 minutes apart. Of course, these time frames are upper-limit approximations; since (with one exception discussed later) no one saw the complex Julia Set being made, it could presumably have even been created, fully formed, in milliseconds.

WAS IT A HOAX?

The question of hoaxing was soon raised. Hoaxing is undeniably rampant in crop circles; sceptics suggest that crop circles are man-made, while believers acknowledge some hoaxes but insist that some of the patterns cannot be hoaxes. This case in particular has several aspects, which if true, seem to rule out hoaxing. For example, not even the fastest hoaxer could hope to create such a complex pattern so quickly; they might have been able to make a few of the simple circles in 20 to 45 minutes, but such a fractal series would truly require superhuman – or perhaps supernatural or extraterrestrial – abilities. If the story is true as told, it is a genuine mystery.



However, the hoaxing explanation gained significant credence in 1996 when researcher Michael Lindemann interviewed a man named Rod Dickinson who confessed to making the circle – or at least knowing who did. Dickinson answered the claim that the circle was created in about 45 minutes. “That isn’t true... It was made the previous night, by three people, in about two and three-quarters hours, starting around 2.45am [on Sunday morning, 7 July]. It was there all that day.”

How exactly could the Julia Set have been created? “You start with the large central circle, which is placed right next to a tram line. People asked why it had the large central circle, which is a little out of place in a Julia Set. Simple. To avoid damaging surrounding crops, you have to have a large central area already laid down, from which you can measure out diameters to other parts of the formation. After making the first circle, they measured out a work line for the rest of the formation. This is how the spiral was made, drawing portions of the arc from different centre points inside that first circle, using a tape measure.... You keep moving the centre point around that first circle, and lengthen the tape for each new part of the arc. You make the work line by just stepping down the grain with your feet, just a thin line. All the centres of all the main circles in the formation are along that line”.³

Some crop circle researchers have suggested that the fact that the circle makers themselves didn’t confess indicates that Dickinson’s explanation is bogus – perhaps an attention-grabbing ploy, or perhaps Dickinson himself was duped. Or perhaps the whole story is a part of a government-guided disinformation campaign. (There is significant crossover between UFO researchers and crop circle researchers, and it’s ironic that many people who rely heavily on anonymous sources for information about crashed saucers, alien bodies, and government cover-ups are so quick to dismiss an anonymous source about crop circles that doesn’t suit their purposes.)

As Dickinson asked: “If they came forward and made another one just like the Stonehenge Julia Set, what would it really prove? Would it convince the believers that there are no real circles?” The answer is of course, no. Employing a form of the special pleading fallacy, crop circle advocates would simply find some reason to dismiss it, such as that it wasn’t done at night, or it wasn’t done exactly the same way, or even if it was done at night under the same conditions, they’d claim that a person driving by would have seen them, and so on.

“Once you identify the artist,” Dickinson insists, “all the mystery and magic is gone. Before, you had something beautiful that inspires people; afterward you’ve just got disillusioned believers and artists in trouble. Nobody wins. Why should the artists come forward?” Indeed, as the Hierophant’s Apprentice has noted in this very magazine (FT236:48-50): “The distance between a



LEFT: Veteran crop circle researcher Colin Andrews was sure that witness accounts meant the circle could not have been hoaxed.

BOTTOM: Circlemaker and artist Rod Dickinson hinted to researcher Michael Lindemann that he might have been involved in the creation of the Julia Set formation.

THE EYEWITNESSES

Many crop circle researchers dismiss the hoaxing claims because, they say, there are simply too many first-hand witnesses in this case. Indeed, it involves a remarkably large number (and wide variety) of potential eyewitnesses. Colin Andrews, who has written a

length about this mystery, sums up a key point of the anti-hoaxing argument: “It is far-fetched to believe that an entire day went by without anyone seeing the enormous formation – including the farmer who owned and worked the fields”.⁵ But just how far-fetched is it?

Andrews writes in his 2003 book *Crop Circles: Signs of Contact*, that “one of the most convincing arguments for the Julia Set’s authenticity is that honest, respectable people have attested to its almost instantaneous appearance. These are credible people telling of incredible things. Nowhere is this more evident than in the accounts provided by people who would have nothing to gain, and a great deal to lose, by making up such a story.”⁶

Veteran forteans will recognise this as a classic “false choice” logical fallacy: suggesting that either the Stonehenge Julia Set crop circle must be real and authentic or any eyewitnesses vouching for its authenticity must be lying. Yet we need not malign anyone with accusations of deception because another valid (and indeed more likely and charitable) explanation is that people may simply be mistaken or inattentive. With that in mind, let’s examine the most widely cited accounts of who saw what, and when, starting in chronological order.

THE STONEHENGE GUARDS: THE NIGHT BEFORE

The hoaxing explanation has been dismissed by some who claim that if the crop circle had been made the night before it was discovered it surely would have been seen much earlier, and the hoaxers spotted in the act. Colin Andrews makes much of the fact that Stonehenge “which is across the road from the field where the Julia Set appeared, is guarded 24 hours a day by a team of at least three, and often four, professional security guards. These guards can see the field from the patrolled, elevated ground on the northern side of the Stonehenge standing stones, but they did not see the pattern until after 6pm on the day it appeared.”

Andrews paints a picture of a crack team of highly trained professionals vigilantly and constantly scanning the skies and surrounding fields for anything unusual. Yet their charge (and thus their attention) was

“THE ACCOUNTS CAME FROM PEOPLE WITH NOTHING TO GAIN AND A GREAT DEAL TO LOSE”



good comedian and a good hoaxer is not that great. Both are in the entertainment business – even if, in some cases, the people to be most entertained are those who never, ever admit to pulling a stunt”.

For some, whether the Stonehenge crop circle was man-made or not was rather beside the point, since, either way, a few pounds could be made from its fortuitous appearance. As Freddy Silva notes in his book *Secrets in the Fields*, the farmer who owned the field dispatched his son to the site, where “the enterprising young man daubed several words across a weathered old board and placed it at the entrance to his field: See Europe’s Best Crop Circle”. Entrance was £2.⁴ While no one got rich, the tourism potential of such a remarkable crop circle not far from Stonehenge was not lost on locals.



COLIN ANDREWS

ABOVE: Farmers soon realised that there was a way of turning crop circles into cash; admission to see "Europe's best crop circle" was apparently £2.

right in front of them – the ancient stones and their immediate surroundings. The guards were not being paid to watch over neighbouring farmers' fields, and, for all we know, they passed another uneventful night playing cards, listening to music, or chatting like many night-shift security guards. This is not to suggest that the guards stationed that night were inattentive or incompetent – quite the opposite, because their attention was where it was supposed to be – merely that it's unreasonable to assume that they would necessarily have seen three people in a dark field in the dead of night.

Furthermore, this argument ignores the fact that the A303 road lies between the Stonehenge security guards and where the circle was made. Andrews and others are at pains to describe how heavily used the road is, yet fail to realise that any lights that might have been created by the hoaxers and seen from Stonehenge would likely be ignored as coming from passing vehicles. Even if a few flashes of light had been seen from that angle from a field across the headlight-streaked A303, the guards would have paid it little mind, since they would not be allowed to leave their post to investigate something on private property anyway.

FARMER SANDELL: THE MORNING AFTER

The first person who (retrospectively) claimed to have examined the area where the circle appeared was the farmer who owned field, a Mr Sandell. The book *Crop Circles: Exploring the Designs and Mysteries* states that: "Farmer Sandell claims to have personally inspected the field on that Sunday morning and not noticed anything unusual".⁷

Assuming he made that statement, the claim that Sandell "personally inspected the field on that Sunday morning," is rather

unlikely to mean what the authors (and others) seem to think it means. The confusion may stem from urban crop circle researchers and writers misunderstanding the nuances of a rural farmer's daily life and routine.

Farmers (especially those who may have hundreds or thousands of hectares of land) do not routinely and personally inspect their entire crop on a regular basis. When a farmer speaks of inspecting a field, this does not mean that he personally walks back and forth through each field, or that he hires a helicopter to fly over his crops just to have a look at them from the air. Instead, "inspecting a field" typically means going to the edge of a field at the most convenient and accessible location and inspecting the condition of some of the plants growing there. There's no reason for a farmer to venture into the field itself during a routine inspection since the plants at the edge of the field are (quite reasonably) assumed to be representative of the condition of the plants in the rest of the field. If you want to know if your corn, wheat or other crops need more water, you don't need to examine each of the hundreds of thousands of plants; you can look at a few of them. Thus it is misleading to suggest that "inspecting the field" involves a close, careful examination of the entire field that without a doubt would have revealed the presence of any crop circle within.

THE PILOT(S): BEFORE AND AFTER

By far the most important eyewitness in this case was the pilot who first spotted the crop circle. As Colin Andrews notes: "The formation was first spotted from an aircraft at 6:15 PM. The pilot crossed over the field with a passenger (a medical doctor taking pictures) at 5:30 PM and both reported that there was no formation in the field at that

time.... The pilot took off again and crossed the field at 6:15 when he saw the Julia Set formation in the field".⁸

If this account is true, and the crop circle did not exist at 5:30 on the pilot's first flight, this fact should be easily proven by an examination of the aerial photographs supposedly taken by the medical doctor passenger. Yet, strangely, these photographs never seem to have surfaced; surely if they indisputably showed an undisturbed field across from Stonehenge at any time before 6pm, Andrews would have been eagerly touting them.

There is some confusion over whether it was the same or a different pilot that saw the field both before and after; Colin Andrews states that it was the same pilot, while Lucy Pringle, in her book *Crop Circles: The Greatest Mystery of Modern Times*, offers an account that differs in several important details: "Early in July 1996 a pilot flew a light aircraft over the field opposite Stonehenge at 5:50 PM, on his way from Exeter to Thruxton, and saw nothing in the field. Half-an-hour later, a second pilot spotted the enormous and spectacular Julia Set in the previously empty field".⁹

Which is correct? Did the first flight occur at 5:30, or 20 minutes later at 5:50? Was there a second potential witness photographing the journey, as Andrews claims, or was he solo, as Pringle suggests? And perhaps an even more basic question: Was the pilot who previously saw the empty field the same pilot that saw the crop circle in that field later, or was it a second, different pilot, as Pringle states? The answers aren't clear, but if two well-known crop circle researcher/writers can't agree on basic facts such as these, it raises serious questions about how thoroughly this presumed best case was investigated.

A303 MOTORISTS: BEFORE AND AFTER

The press notes for the documentary film *Crop Circles: Quest for Truth*, by Academy Award-nominated director William Gazecki, offers the Stonehenge circle as one of the most important and most baffling in history: “In July 1996, a 915ft [280m] spiral of 151 circles appeared in full view of the busy A303 road, opposite England’s ancient monument Stonehenge, within a 45 minute period one Sunday afternoon”.¹⁰

With a few corrected facts and clarified assumptions, Gazecki’s breathless statements can be seen in a different light. For example, the Julia Set circle did not in fact appear “in full view of a busy” road. The A303 can indeed be busy at times, but it is not constantly busy, and in any event the topography is incorrect. Perhaps if the field had been located on the side of a steep hill facing the A303 it would be in “full view,” but for most of the road in the area it was about at the same level, and of course obscured by tall wheat on either side. As Rod Dickinson noted: “If you went there, you’d see how the field slopes down and away from the road. The formation was in a kind of bowl, below the level of the road. Going by in a car, you couldn’t see it. You would have to get out and walk toward it and look down into that bowl-shaped area to see it”.¹¹

It’s important to remember that the field where the circle appeared is in the opposite direction to Stonehenge. When passing through the area, most drivers and passengers will naturally direct their



**“SPEAKERS WERE
DENOUNCING ME
AND AROUSING
MEN AGAINST ME”
MEN AGAINST ME”**

attention to the side of the road where one of the world’s most famous monuments sits – not the (presumably) empty wheat fields on the other side. This is not to say, of course, that a few passing motorists might not have glanced in the direction of that field at some point as they drove by. But the suggestion that drivers on the A303 would have been paying attention to a particular patch of field that’s identical to countless kilometres of fields coming before and after, instead of hoping to catch a glimpse of Stonehenge, is simply absurd.

THE STORY OF M: AN EYEWITNESS?

Crop circles are notoriously shy; there are no authenticated photographs, films or videotapes of crop circles appearing spontaneously. For sceptics, this is considered strong evidence that the circles are made by hoaxers; after all, even if they are caused by some unexplained natural (or even supernatural or extraterrestrial) phenomenon, there’s no logical reason why this couldn’t be recorded by cameras. Furthermore, unlike many other fortan phenomena there is a glaring dearth of first-hand eyewitness accounts of crop circles being formed.

Except, it is claimed, in this case. Just as the Julia Set circle is said to be unique in other ways, according to prominent crop circle researcher Lucy Pringle it is also the first time that a crop circle was witnessed being formed right before the amazed eyes of dozens of eyewitnesses.

A witness she refers to as ‘M’ (whom she



MATT CARDY / GETTY IMAGES

TOP: Researcher Lucy Pringle, to whom the witness known as ‘M’ told her story. ABOVE: Traffic rumbles past Stonehenge on the busy A303 road.

first heard about from a friend of a friend of a taxi cab driver) and a passenger were driving on the A303 in July 1996. As they passed Stonehenge they noticed the crop circle and a large number of cars pulled over to the side of the road near the field opposite. Curious, the pair stopped and “got out and joined the crowd of other people who were also watching what was happening. ‘There was an apparition, an isolated mist over it and as the circle was getting bigger the mist was rising above the circle. As the mist rose it got bigger and corn circle got bigger,’ M said. ‘There was a mist about 2-3ft [60-90cm] off the ground and it was sort of spinning around and on the ground a circular shape was appearing which seemed to get bigger and bigger as simultaneously the mist got bigger and bigger and swirled faster. It was gradual and you are standing there and you are thinking ‘What is going on’ and everyone is discussing it and more and more traffic is building up and everything and you just think that all the time you don’t really realise what is happening and then you think then that’s it and the thing is getting bigger.”¹² M claimed they stayed there for about 20 minutes before continuing their journey, only relating the incident to a taxi driver some 13 years after the fact. M remains the only person in the world who has told this story; no one else has come forward to corroborate it.

M’s account is vivid and dramatic – and wholly implausible. For one thing, as has been noted, the crop circle was not visible from the A303 at the point in which it passes Stonehenge, so it’s unlikely that M or her passenger could have seen it. Second, it strains credulity to suggest that out of the dozens (or potentially hundreds) of people present, not a single person photographed the amazing event or apparently mentioned it to anyone else. No newspapers were called to report something that had never happened before in human history: a unique fractal Julia Set crop circle had been created right before astonished eyewitnesses – and across the A303 from Stonehenge, no less!

Furthermore, the idea that not a single crop circle researcher found out about it until over a dozen years later either suggests ineptitude on the researchers’ part or a world-class cover-up and silencing of eyewitnesses. That is, of course, assuming it happened. If it did not happen – and M’s story is a mistake, faulty memory, confabulation, or even a prank – then there is nothing to explain.

Most damaging to the story, M’s eyewitness account is contradicted by the (presumably credible) pilot who first sighted the crop circle. In his account he made no mention of the dozens of cars and crowds of people M claims had gathered with her to gawk at the amazing event (and who would have been clearly visible from the air). Either the pilot is mistaken (or lying), or ‘M’ is mistaken (or lying) – they cannot both be correct. It is curious that no one has noticed or explained this glaring contradiction.



STEVE ALEXANDER / TEMPORARYTEMPLES.CO.UK

ABOVE: The Julia Set – just because no one noticed it, doesn’t mean it wasn’t already there...

CONCLUSION

One by one, the seemingly ironclad witness statements proving the Julia Set event wither under analysis. As fortune tellers are often fond of noting, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, and this case is a perfect example of that axiom: the fact that no one noticed the crop circle in the field until past 6 o’clock does not mean that the crop circle was not there. The same holds true for the fact that the circle makers were not detected while they worked the previous evening/early morning.

The much-lauded story of the Stonehenge Surprise falters under one of the most important scientific principles, Occam’s Razor. This idea (attributed to William of Occam, who devised his version in the 1300s) is that, other things being equal, if you have a phenomenon to be explained and several different theories are proposed as solutions, the simplest one (or the one with the fewest assumptions) is likely to be the correct answer.

In this case, the simplest explanation for M’s (literally) incredible eyewitness account of seeing the Julia Set circle created right before her eyes is that she is simply mistaken, confused or lying. Similarly, the simplest explanation for the fact that a pilot, Stonehenge guards, farmers, and A303 motorists didn’t report the crop circle prior to 6pm is that they simply didn’t notice it, because most people don’t spend their time paying attention to farmers’ fields. And the simplest explanation for the circle itself is that it was created the night before by the three field artists (or hoaxers, depending on one’s point of view) who admitted to making it (albeit anonymously) – not in under an hour in broad daylight.

The simplest explanation is not always the most satisfying one, but in the case of the Stonehenge Surprise, it is surely the correct one. As Colin Andrews said, if this

celebrated circle “can be proven to be made by humans, then we can all pack our bags and go home.” Croppies may want to start looking for their luggage. **FT**

NOTES

- 1 Colin Andrews: Eye witness to the formation of a crop circle opposite Stonehenge, available at www.colinandrews.net/JuliaSetStory.html.
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- 5 Colin Andrews and Stephen Spignesi, *Crop Circles: Signs of Contact*, New Page Books, 2003.
- 6 Ibid.
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- 10 William Gazecki, press release/promotional material for *Crop Circles: Quest for Truth* documentary film, 2002.
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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



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THE DISAPPEARANCE

In the mid-18th century, a crippled tailor called Owen Parfitt disappeared from the sleepy West Country town of Shepton Mallet and was never seen again. Was he taken by the Devil, cursed by black magicians, murdered by vengeful pirates or even abducted by aliens? **JAN BONDESON** investigates a classic fortean vanishing described by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle as a “freakish, insoluble, borderlands case”.



ABOVE: Owen Parfitt's sister discovers that he has disappeared, from *Famous Crimes Past & Present Vol IV*, 1905

*THERE lived, in Shepton Mallet late,
Of unrecorded fame,
A taylor, born to luckless fate,
And Parfet was his name.*

*His race from Cambrian mountains wild,
First issued, but few know when; -
His parents, therefore, gave their child
The christian name of Owen.*

*He plied his trade both late and soon
By honesty to live;
And happy was from morn to noon,
From noon to setting eve.*

Thus begins a long and rambling poem, published in the *Monthly Magazine* of 1799.¹ The author was not named, but Robert Southey exposed him as Cambridge graduate Amos Cottle, a budding poet whose career was cut short when he died the following year.² The subject of Cottle's poem is the strange disappearance of the old man Owen Parfitt from the sleepy West Country town of Shepton Mallet. This enduring fortean mystery has been discussed in more than one collection of stories about the unexplained, including John Michell and Bob Rickard's classic *Phenomena* (p98). Although the crippled Somerset tailor disappeared as early as 1768 (or possibly 1763), the story is well verified, and certainly worth investigating further,

making use of modern online resources as well as some good old-fashioned historical detective work.

A TRULY AUTHENTICK STORY

*The wind blew keen one winter night,
And fast came down the rain;
Then Owen in unguarded plight,
Was drench'd upon the plain.*

*Now, pains rheumatic writh'd him sore,
And piteous 'twas to see
Poor Owen now, unable more
To live by industry.*

The earliest account of the disappearance of Owen Parfitt, from the *Bath Chronicle* of 1789, deserves to be given in full:

E OF OWEN PARFITT

The following story is truly authentick. I have no doubt of its being disbelieved by strangers to the fact, as it appears improbable; but as many respectable people in this town well remember the circumstances I have related, and would (if necessary) attest the truth of them, I will proceed to the relation without further preface.

*And am, Sir, your most obedient servant,
SHEPTONENSIS.*

*Previous to the year 1765, an ancient man, by name Owen Parfitt, lived in a house at Wester-Shepton, in this parish, adjoining the turnpike road leading to Wells. His occupation had been that of a taylor, and in his youth he had served as a soldier in America. He had, many years before the extraordinary affair now under consideration happened, been in a very weak state, confined to his bed, and totally deprived of all bodily strength. In a word, he was reduced to a mere skeleton, and as incapable of manual exercise as a dead stick. He was reduced to the utmost poverty, and had subsisted many years upon the charitable donations of his good neighbours. He was of a serious religious turn, and was taken care of by an ancient sister. Sometime in the summer of 1765, he had a desire of being brought downstairs (having, as before observed, been bedridden many years) which, with the assistance of some of his neighbours, was accomplished, and he was placed in an arm chair, for the benefit of the air, in the passage of the house in which he lived; one door of which came immediately against the turnpike-road, the other a court surrounded by dwellings. In this situation he was left a few minutes, and, strange to relate, he has never been seen, nor heard of since. This extraordinary affair happened at or about noon, and although every possible means were used by many gentlemen of Shepton-Mallet to discover the true cause of it, their endeavours were fruitless, and the matter still remains involved in mystery and doubt. It is by no means my intention to make any comments on this unaccountable affair, or to aim at misleading the judgment of any one. My only reason for requesting an insertion of this relation in your excellent paper, is, that I think it ought not to be buried in oblivion. It will be naturally enquired by what means this man could so suddenly disappear. It will be easily seen that he was utterly incapable of disappearing by his own endeavours, and extremely improbable that any violent means had been used by others for that purpose; as from the extreme poverty of the man, no temptation could be an inducement, and no traces of this kind could be found. I have not exaggerated things, but as far as recollection and the best information will serve, have related no more than real facts, and leave every one to judge of them as they please.*³

Aside from a sarcastic letter in the *Chronicle*, casting doubt on Sheptonensis's

account,⁴ this is how matters rested with regard to the Parfitt mystery until 1791, when John Collinson's monumental *History and Antiquities of the County of Somerset* was published. A credit to its author's thorough antiquarian research, this classic county history contains a lengthy account of Shepton Mallet and its worthies, including a note of the disappearance of Owen Parfitt:

Of the curious occurrences of this town and its vicinity, the following seems particularly worthy of recording. In the year 1763, one Owen Parfitt, an old man, by trade a taylor, but who had in his younger years served as a soldier in America, was living at Western-Shipton in this parish in the turnpike-road to Wells. By long illness and a melancholy turn of mind, he was reduced to such extreme weakness as to be obliged to keep [to] his bed, and was emaciated almost to a skeleton. He depended upon his neighbours for support, and was taken care of by an aged sister. By his own desire he had several times been brought down stairs in an elbow chair, and placed in the passage of the house for the benefit of the air. In this situation he was left one evening for a few minutes, but on his attendant's return (strange to tell!) this

*helpless man was missing, and no where to be found; nor has he since been heard of. A man of his description was observed the same evening in the West Woodlands of Frome; but his person could not be identified. It is generally supposed, that seized by some sudden set of phrenzy, or impelled by some extraordinary effort of nature, he quitted his seat, and that leaving the town, he rambled through the by-paths till falling in some pool, pit or cavern, his appearance and existence on earth were at once terminated together.*⁶

It is obvious that either Collinson had read the article by Sheptonensis, or that they based their accounts on a mutual older source, which has since been lost or forgotten. The ending, with the bedridden invalid reduced almost to a skeleton rambling through the woodlands until he reached Frome more than 10 miles (16km) away, is all new, however. The normally careful Collinson provided no source for his remarkable statement, leaving it unclear whether this 'ending' to the story was a local tradition he had heard, or his own effort to 'solve' the mystery. Had his conclusion been derived from another published work, this bookish antiquary would surely have given this source in a footnote.

HE WAS NOWHERE
TO BE FOUND; NOR
HAS HE BEEN
HEARD OF SINCE

DR BUTLER INVESTIGATES

*But now, what fain I would not tell,
My story must unfold -
To Owen Parfet what befell.
When he grew faint and old.*

*Hit sister, on a summer's day,
Remov'd him from his bed;
And placed him near the public way,
Fast by his humble shed.*



ABOVE: Shepton Mallet High Street in the 19th century, seen in a postcard of the time.



ABOVE: Thomas Strode finds the skeleton in his garden, from *Famous Crimes Past & Present Vol IV*, 1905.

Samuel Butler was born in 1774, and educated at Rugby School and St John's College, Cambridge, where he enjoyed success as a classical scholar. In 1798, he was appointed headmaster of Shrewsbury School, which he transformed from a well-nigh moribund establishment into a thriving public school. Dr Butler's interest in historical and antiquarian matters continued, and he published a schoolbook on ancient geography, and a controversial edition of Aeschylus.

Having dealt with Aeschylus, Dr Butler took on another challenge, namely to solve the mystery of Owen Parfitt. Since his mother owned property in Shepton Mallet, he had long been acquainted with the story. He had tried to persuade Mr Hyatt, the local solicitor who looked after his mother's affairs, to take depositions from the old people who had known Parfitt, but the solicitor was unwilling to perform unpaid work, pleading age and

WHEN SHE HAD GONE OUT, SHE FOUND ONLY THE CHAIR AND COAT

deafness as an excuse. In November 1813, a skeleton was found in the garden of a man named Thomas Strode, just a few hundred yards from the cottage where Owen Parfitt had disappeared. Dr Butler immediately went into action, instructing the younger and more active solicitor William Maskell to collect depositions from Shepton Mallet's elderly

citizens.

Mr Maskell did an excellent job, and soon Dr Butler had a neat pile of depositions to pore over.⁶ The story that most of them adhered to was that one bright June day in 1768, Owen Parfitt had been taken downstairs by his sister and her part-time servant, to sit in the sun with a greatcoat around him. He was left outside around 15 minutes, as his sister and the maid made his bed. The farmers were making hay, and there were a lot of people about. When the sister called out "Owen!" there was no reply, and when she went outside, she found only the greatcoat on the chair. A hue and cry was raised, and the roads and fields searched. Not long after, a tremendous thunderstorm struck Shepton Mallet, with much lightning, and the old people made up their minds that the Evil One had claimed old Owen for his sins.

Several witnesses agreed that in his youth, Owen Parfitt had been a soldier, serving in America. He later returned to Shepton Mallet, married, and settled down to work as a tailor in a small cottage at the Wells Road. A quiet, sober man, he did his best to save money. After his wife and daughter both died, his intellect became temporarily deranged. The old woman Joanna Mills, a distant relation, could remember Owen coming to her house in the middle of the night "with nothing more on than his shirt and shoes, alarmed, as he said, by the loud whisperings of his departed wife." Owen later moved into a house at Board Cross, where the lane from Catsach joined the Wells turnpike road, sharing it with his much older sister. Owen had been born around 1700, and in the 1760s he became increasingly crippled, having to walk with a stick. He still worked as a tailor, as well as he could, and was taken care of by his sister, who was becoming quite old and feeble herself. She was allowed some money by the parish for looking after him. Most of the Shepton Mallet witnesses described Owen Parfitt as a complete cripple, bedridden and incapable of independent locomotion, by the time he disappeared. The only dissenter, Joanna Mills, argued that he could hobble along a short distance, with a stick or a crutch.

The most important deposition came from the 81-year-old Susannah Snook, the maid who had helped Owen's sister carry him downstairs half an hour before he disappeared. He had been dressed only in his nightshirt, with an old greatcoat thrown over his shoulders. She had then left the cottage, but when the alarm was raised that Owen had disappeared, she returned to find the old sister sorrowing bitterly for the loss of her brother, and very much agitated at not knowing what had happened to him. She told Susannah that after she had made his bed, she had gone downstairs. Not hearing her brother, she had called out "Owen!" but there was no response. When she had gone out, she found only the chair and the greatcoat. Susannah described Owen as being of middle stature, and rather stoutly built; she had nothing bad to say about him. The thunder and lightning had begun about an hour after he had disappeared, and it had continued the greater part of the night, although

not deterring the hardy townspeople from continuing the search for old Owen.

Another witness, the 84-year-old Jehosaphat Stone, claimed that the sister had heard a noise from outside the house, and when she had gone out, she saw that the empty chair had been moved from its original position. The general opinion in Shepton Mallet had been that Owen had been carried off by supernatural means. The 100-year-old Samuel Bartlett agreed with Joanna Mills that the disappearance had taken place in May or June 1768. The sister had been around 15 years older than Owen. The brothers Joseph and Benjamin George agreed with Susannah Snook and Jehosaphat Stone that Owen had been a helpless cripple. Their father had owned the field opposite the Parfitt cottage, and they had seen him almost every day. Joseph's own clothes had been made by the crippled old tailor. The aforementioned Joanna Mills contradicted many of the other witnesses when she denied that Owen had ever been a soldier or a sailor. He had been a rather wild character in his youth, and visited both America and Africa. In the latter continent, he had once encountered a man who claimed to be a magician, and who offered to show Owen his a vision of his friends back home in Shepton Mallet, but Owen had declined his offer.

HUMAN REMAINS

*But there, poor Owen did not stay; -
Yet how he went, or whither,
No mortal, ever, from that day,
By search or wit could gather.*

*The alarm is spread both far and near,
The townsmen stand aghast;
In vain they seek, - and pale with fear,
Believe that day, the last.*

At the time of the disappearance of Owen Parfitt, a rustic cottage about 150 yards (137m) from his had been inhabited by a widow named Lockyer, whose reputation locally had not been the best. It later passed to a man named Strode, and in 1813 his nephew Thomas lived there. When, in November that year, Thomas Strode was digging in the corner of his garden, he came upon a piece of old wall. At the end of this wall at the depth of just two feet (60cm), was a human skeleton, buried face downwards in an awkward heap.

In 1813, the disappearance of Owen Parfitt was still well known in Shepton Mallet, and many people thought that the mystery had finally been solved. But when the Shepton Mallet surgeon Mr West and some of his professional friends examined the bones, they positively declared them to have belonged to a youth of 14 or 15 years. They were certainly not the remains of a decrepit old man. Superstition and supposition were again at work regarding the disappearance of Owen Parfitt, a magazine commented.⁷ Dr Butler insisted that the bones should be sent to him, and inspected by two more competent anatomists, but their conclusion was that the bones belonged to a young woman.

A solution to the Parfitt mystery seemed

no closer, but Dr Butler did not give up. He wrote to Maskell, demanding that Jehosaphat Stone and Susannah Snook should be confronted with regard to the important discrepancy in their accounts of how Owen's disappearance had been discovered, but all that resulted was that Stone admitted that his information had come from hearsay only. No other living witnesses could be discovered, and the Shepton Mallet clergy had no record of Owen's birth, age, or disappearance; nor could the name of his sister be detected. There was nothing to implicate the widow Lockyer in his disappearance, nor was there anything to suggest that Owen's elderly sister and Susannah Snook would have conspired to murder him. Owen did not have any pension or annuity, and the sister's only income was the pittance she received from the parish for taking care of him. When confronted by the accounts of the other witnesses saying that Owen had been bedridden, Joanna Mills persisted that he had been able to walk a little, although not enough to get away by himself. The same old woman also made the remarkable statement that a person answering Owen's description had been seen at a public house at Leighton, near Frome, the day after his disappearance. He had enjoyed a pint of ale and a halfpenny cake. She could not remember where she had heard this remarkable story.

The confounded Dr Butler next instructed Maskell to consult the Rev. Thomas Smith, the curate of Shepton Mallet. Knowing the local gossip, the clergyman wrote back that Strode's cottage had once been inhabited by a gardener and his wife, who kept lodgings for travellers. It was believed that they had murdered and robbed at least one of these lodgers, and disposed of the body in the garden. In spite of his profession, the gardener never broke the earth in his own garden, and his wife always kept a light in the house during the night, to deter the ghosts of their victims. This criminal gardener and his wife were strongly suspected of being responsible for the skeleton found near Strode's cottage. Smith knew about another skeleton, found some years earlier in a garden in West Shipton, but he could not provide any details about it.⁸



ABOVE: Board Cross, Shepton Mallet, photographed in 2012.

HYPOTHESES

*They drain next day each pond and well,
Each nook and corner spy; -
They ransack thicket, brake, and dell,
And long on Owen cry.*

*The busy search next day they plied,
Thro' town and hamlet near;
And ten miles round the neighbours ride,
Nor tale nor tidings hear.*

The disappointed Dr Butler never published the results of his quest for Owen Parfitt. He carried on as headmaster of Shrewsbury School for many years, with considerable success, before ending up as the Bishop of Lichfield. His papers, including the dossier on the Parfitt case, passed on to his grandson Samuel, author of *Erewhon* and other books.

William Maskell, the Shepton Mallet solicitor, had also taken good care of his copies of the depositions in the Parfitt case. He left them to his only son William, a controversial clergyman who had converted to the Roman faith. In 1867, William Jr. published a short account of the case, wrongly claiming that his father had been instrumental in starting the investigation back in 1813. After reviewing the witness accounts at length, he considered four alternative hypotheses. The first one is that of Collinson – namely that Owen had leapt up from his chair and run off in a frenzy. But with the fields full of people and the roads full of carts due to the haymaking, would nobody have noticed the night-shirted cripple hobbling away? The next possibility was murder – but who would have had anything to gain by killing the harmless, impecunious invalid? Certainly neither of the last people who saw him alive: his sister and Susannah Snooks. Maskell knew about spontaneous human combustion, but old Owen had not been a drunkard, nor had any ashes been found near his chair. The elders of Shepton Mallet were still of the opinion that Owen had been carried off by Old Nick, and Maskell commented that “in 1868 the people of Shepton were separated only by a few years from the time when their town had rather an evil reputation; witches were not uncommon,

and the devil had a good many friends and acquaintances there.”⁹

When Dr Butler's grandson, the author Samuel Butler, published his *Life and Letters*, he explained his grandfather's passion “to attempt the elucidation of a mystery that had long fascinated him”, making clear the subordinate role that Maskell had played. Samuel Butler also took an active interest in the Parfitt mystery, the attempted elucidation of which he considered one of the



ABOVE: Owen Parfitt's old house, and his later cottage at Board Cross. BELOW: The yard of Parfitt's house, showing the walled-up door where he had been placed just prior to his disappearance. These are some of the photographs taken by Samuel Butler during his visit to Shepton Mallet in 1891.

most interesting episodes of his grandfather's life.¹⁰ An experienced photographer, he made a pilgrimage to Shepton Mallet in 1891. Amazingly, Owen Parfitt's old cottage was still standing, although the doorway where the old man had been placed had been bricked up. The cottage, which was not in good repair, was set back from the road with a small front yard.¹¹

When Samuel Butler asked the old lady who lived next door if she could remember the Parfitt case, she replied: "Yes, but whether it was true or whether it was a miracle, that we shall never know." The author of *Erewhon* "felt like one who has stooped to pick up a piece of glass and has found a diamond", as he expressed it. Strode's cottage nearby was still in good repair, and another informant could remember Mrs Strode living there.

At the same time Samuel Butler was busy researching his grandfather's life, a spicy newspaper version of the Owen Parfitt story was published. Owen had been an old pirate and slave trader, who had settled down in Shepton Mallet. He became a blackmailer, extorting money from other 'retired' pirates and villains he had come across during his travels. In 1768, the Bristol pirates had finally had enough of the old man's blackmail. They made an expedition to Shepton Mallet, abducted and murdered Owen, and buried him in the garden of their accomplice, the Widow Lockyer.¹²

A "BORDERLAND CASE"

*Just as he vanish'd, some declare,
At gaping crowds stand round -
They heard a tumult in the air,
And wonder'd at the sound.*

*Some dreamt of late strange things at night,
But others grew more bold;
And Owen saw, they said out-right,
Fast in a demon's hold.*

Modern retellings of the strange story of Owen Parfitt have been full of distortion and untruth. The prolific author Andrew Lang provided the basic facts of the

case, with some invented dialogue, and the inventions that Owen's sister had been named Mary, and that he had suffered from 'rheumatism'.¹³ Sir Arthur Conan Doyle described Parfitt as a piratical John Silver, whose (fictional) visits to Bristol might have been connected with blackmail; his disappearance was "a freakish, insoluble borderland case".¹⁴ The crime writer CL McCluer Stevens depicted Owen Parfitt in a lurid light: a bearded old pirate, paralysed below the waist, who had accumulated a collection of heathen idols. He had not been abducted by the Devil, as the superstitious locals believed, but kidnapped and murdered by a certain Captain Hall, a nautical villain Owen had been blackmailing. The skeleton in Strode's garden had been the niece of another blackmailer, 'silenced' by the Captain's accomplice, the Widow Lockyer.¹⁵ Isobel Mary Thorn, who wrote non-fiction books under the name Elizabeth Villiers, left it open whether Owen had been murdered by 'Men from Bristol' whom he had been blackmailing, or if the servant Susannah Snook had settled the score with the unpleasant old mariner, and stolen his belt of gold.¹⁶

The elderly Downside monk Dom Ethelbert Horne, an authority on Somerset antiquarian matters, suggested that Owen Parfitt had committed suicide by leaping into a well, and that his body had become stuck at the bottom.¹⁷ But, surely, the Shepton Mallet people would have noticed the water in this well was far from palatable, and made

the relevant investigations? In his *Folklore of Somerset*, the Rev. Alan Holt described Owen Parfitt as a pirate who brought a large sum of money back to Shepton Mallet before a stroke left him paralysed. Just before he had disappeared, a neighbour told him that a strange seafaring man had been asking for him locally, and Owen turned ashen white.¹⁸ In 1934, when demolition work took place near Board Cross, the local antiquary Charles Wainwright, who took an interest in the Parfitt case, had a good look around. He found a slab covering a well near where the Parfitt cottage had once stood. Had Dom Ethelbert been right after all? No: when the slab was raised and the well drained, no human remains were found.¹⁹

In the Internet Age, the corruption of the story of Owen Parfitt has continued apace. The Shepton Mallet Internet homepage confidently states that Owen's career "involved piracy, smuggling, banditry and black magic in the West Indies, India, Africa and America, as well as a scandal involving his young cousin Dorothy." The superstitious believed that he had been carried off by the Devil to pay for his life of sin; others suggested that the ubiquitous 'Men from Bristol' had murdered him to steal the secret of his pirate treasure.²⁰ According to a fanciful newspaper article reproduced in a Warminster UFO magazine, Owen disappeared in June 1872, the same day a mysterious light had been spotted in Taunton. Had creatures from outer space walked the Somerset lanes that summer, and taken poor

Owen with them to some faraway planet?²¹

AN ORDINARY TAILOR

*But some this vile aspersion quick,
Indignantly withstood;
And said, that Owen, for old N— k,
Was certainly too good.*

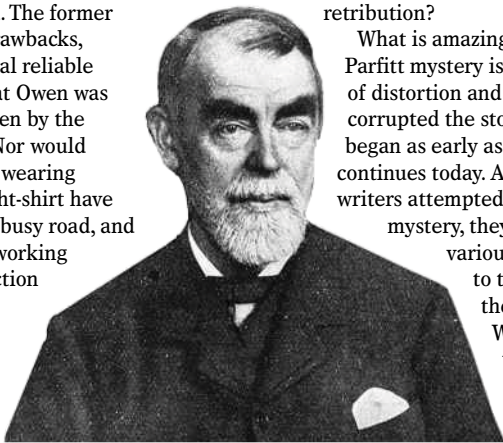
*More like they said, some hand unseen
Had loosed each mortal fetter;
And kindly whipp'd him off this scene,
To place him in a better.*

What we know for sure about Owen



Parfitt is that he was born around the year 1700, that he was apprenticed to a Shepton Mallet tailor, and that he went abroad as a young man, probably to become a soldier in America. He returned to Shepton Mallet and married, but his wife and child both died. Owen was just an ordinary tailor: law-abiding, quiet and industrious, and well liked locally. When he got older and fell ill, he was taken care of by his elderly sister. The nature of his illness is not known. It may have been a series of strokes gradually incapacitating him; it may have been some form of large-joint arthritis. Since he was still able to work as a tailor, he is unlikely to have suffered from small-joint arthritis, or Parkinson's disease; since his decline was gradual, paraplegia or a single massive stroke are equally unlikely, Owen's disappearance was the only newsworthy action in the life of this harmless old man. Although when interviewed in 1814, some of the old people of Shepton Mallet confidently stated that the disappearance took place in May or June 1768, it still cannot be ruled out that he disappeared in 1763, as stated by Collinson and other reliable authors.²²

The disbeliever in UFOs, alternate dimensions and demonic abduction has two ways of explaining the disappearance of Owen Parfitt: either he ran away, or he was abducted. The former theory has many drawbacks, since in 1814, several reliable witnesses agree that Owen was practically bedridden by the time he vanished. Nor would a crippled old man wearing nothing but his night-shirt have got very far, near a busy road, and with many people working in the fields. Abduction and murder seems a more credible alternative. Since the impoverished Owen had no money and



ABOVE: Market Cross, from an old postcard. BELOW: Samuel Butler, who photographed the town in 1891.

no possessions worth stealing, the motive is likely to have been either revenge by some local enemy, or a random murder by some out-of-towner who had perhaps heard rumours that Owen had money. Or had some visiting agricultural labourers been snubbed by the locals, and had they abducted and murdered Owen Parfitt as some kind of retribution?

What is amazing about the Owen Parfitt mystery is the vast amount of distortion and falsehood that has corrupted the story. This process began as early as the 1890s and continues today. As imaginative writers attempted to 'solve' the mystery, they kept on adding various 'improvements' to the basic story, and the harmless old West Country tailor was transformed into a pirate, a slave-trader, an extortionist

and a black magician. With each retelling, the story got taller – particularly after the UFO enthusiasts and Internet quacks got involved. In this article, these fictitious additions have been removed, to expose the facts behind this enduring and insoluble fortaean mystery. I would agree with Amos Cottle, however, that:

*To tell his fate, I've no pretence; -
Conjecture none I make; -
But if the D— I took him hence,
He made a great mistake.* [1]

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



JAN BONDESON is a senior lecturer and consultant at Cardiff University, a regular FT contributor and author of many books, including *Amazing Dogs: A Cabinet of Canine Curiosities* (2011).

FOOTNOTES

1. *Monthly Magazine* 7, 1799, 480-1.
2. I Packer & L Pratt, *The Collected Letters of Robert Southey*, Part Two, letter to Edith Southey, 16 May 1799.
3. *Bath Chronicle*, 8 Oct 1789. Portions of the original story were reprinted in the obscure London paper *Oracle Bell's New World*, 14 Oct 1789.
4. *Bath Chronicle*, 15 Oct 1789; Sheptonensis's reply appeared on 22 Oct.
5. J Collinson, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Somerset* (London, 1791) Vol. 3, pp460-1.
6. These depositions are now in the British Library, Add Mss 34584 ff 18 and 67. See also W Maskell in *Once a Week*, 2 Mar 1867, pp233-8 and S. Butler, *The Life and Letters of Dr Samuel Butler* (London, 1896), Vol. 1, pp90-9.

7. *New Monthly Magazine* 1, 1814, p105.

8. Butler, Vol. 1, pp90-9; also British Library, Add Mss 34584, ff 24, 26 and 65.

9. W. Maskell, op cit. Unlike some present-day Irish coroners, Maskell was no believer in 'SHC'. Another Shepton Mallet mystery involves the witch Nancy Camel, who was allegedly taken off by the Devil after she had sold her soul to him. Nancy's dismal fate is mentioned by JE Farbrother, *Shepton Mallet* (Shepton Mallet, 1860), pp142-5 and CM. Ryall, *Sheptonians* (Shepton Mallet, 2011), pp25-34.

10. Butler, op cit.

11. The younger Samuel Butler's papers and photographs are in St John's College Library, Cambridge. Board Cross still exists today.

12. In a series called 'Curiosities of

Crime' in the *Licensed Victuallers' Gazette*, 2 Dec 1892, later reprinted in the *Bristol Mercury*, 5 Dec 1892.

13. A Lang, *The Strange Story Book* (London, 1913), pp146-50.

14. Sir A Conan Doyle in *Strand Magazine* 59 [1920], pp65-74, reproduced in his *The Edge of the Unknown* (London, 1930). According to P Costello, *The Real World of Sherlock Holmes* (London, 1991), pp156-9, Doyle gave a talk on 'Crime and Clairvoyance' before the Crimes Club, discussing Owen Parfitt and other mysterious cases.

15. LC McCluer Stevens, *From Clue to Dock* (London, 1927), pp89-95.

16. E Villiers, *Riddles of Crime* (London, 1928), pp7-19.

17. *Downside Review* 45 [1927], pp125-31. Dom Ethelbert rightly lambasted Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and a writer in the *Western Daily*

Press (14 Jan 1920) for their 'improvements' to the story.

18. AL Holt, *The Folklore of Somerset* (Stroud, 1992), pp121-5.

19. C Whyne-Hammond, *Ten Somerset Mysteries* (Newbury, 1995), pp74-82.

20. http://sheptonmallet.info/site/index.php?page_id=201.

21. www.ufo-warminster.co.uk/w_ufo_n/wun_no14/wun_no14-15_3.pdf. See also http://www.ufoarea.com/aas_disappearanceparf.php.

22. Farbrother, *Shepton Mallet*, pp145-6, alleges that Owen's disappearance was recorded "in the Parish books of 1763". Regrettably, the Shepton Mallet churchwardens' accounts for 1763 (or 1768) are not kept at the Somerset Archive and Record Service in Taunton.

THE CURIOUS WORLD OF WALTER POTTER

Victorian taxidermist Walter Potter created a bizarre fantasy world of rabbit schoolchildren, domino-playing rats and exquisitely attired kitten brides. **DR PAT MORRIS** tells the remarkable story of the rise, decline and fall of one of Britain's strangest collections.

Walter Potter was born on 2 July 1835. He spent all of his long life in the West Sussex village of Bramber, where he still rests in the village churchyard. A distinctive and bewhiskered man, he dressed in a three-piece suit, with a silver watch chain dangling from his waistcoat pocket and a white straw boater hat in summer. He always wore a top hat to church on Sundays, where he served as a churchwarden for 30 years and a parish overseer for even longer. In later life he spent his leisure time carefully tending his garden, where he worked long hours and grew flowers for sale.

Walter left school at the age of 14 to help his father, who became the publican at the village inn, at that time called the White Lion. Young Walter, initially employed as a labourer, was also a keen naturalist who kept tame jackdaws and taught pet starlings to speak. In his spare time, he learned to preserve birds and animals and began a small collection of stuffed animals, adding new specimens as they became available. He was allocated space in a small attic in the White Lion's stableyard and later was given the use of a small outbuilding to house his burgeoning collection.

Potter's first major creation was his tableau depicting 'The Death & Burial of Cock Robin'. The inspiration for this had come from the illustrations in a popular book of nursery rhymes that had been given to his younger sister Jane in 1841, when she was four years old. Potter began his great masterpiece in 1854, aged 19,

POTTER BEGAN HIS GREAT MASTERPIECE IN 1854, AGED 19

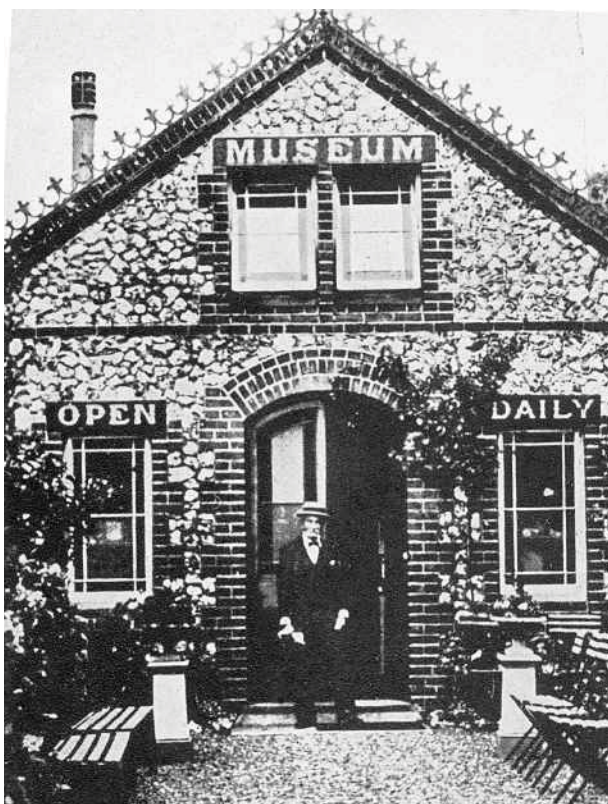
and it took him seven years to build in his spare time. It was finished in 1861, having provided an amusing hobby and also a constructive repository for large numbers of his spare stuffed birds. That tableau became his most famous creation, and perhaps the most widely known single item of Victorian taxidermy ever made.

POTTER'S MUSEUM

In 1861, the brewers who owned the inn generously provided a small summerhouse across the yard, recognising the value of Potter's work in bringing large numbers of thirsty customers to the otherwise undistinguished village of Bramber. Later, the expanding collection was moved to another building, where it remained for 14 years, before moving to a specially built museum on land next to the inn. It opened there in 1880, about the time that the White Lion was enlarged and renamed the Castle Hotel.

The new building was now officially designated 'Museum' by a prominent sign under the eaves. Constructed in a style highly typical of that part of Sussex, built of local flints with red brick at the corners and around the windows, it was set in a pretty little garden, where it and its contents remained almost unchanged for nearly 100 years.

Potter's fame continued to spread and visitors to the inn would commission him to preserve their pets and various dead animals that they found locally. There were



LEFT: Walter Potter outside his museum in Bramber, West Sussex.

bigger and better taxidermy businesses in Brighton and elsewhere in rural Sussex, but dead animals need urgent attention, especially in summer, and transport was slow. For the people around Bramber, Potter was the obvious local taxidermy practitioner to whom they would turn in times of need. Consequently he obtained sufficient commissions, supplemented by admission charges at the museum, to earn his keep and care for his family.

Walter married a local girl, Ann Stringer Muzzell, in the summer of 1867, when he was 31. In due course, Ann produced a son (Walter John Potter, 1869–1928), then two daughters, Annie (who died in 1893, aged 17) and Minnie (1877–1965).

The Potter family lived together in Bramber Villa, the four-bedroomed house adjacent to the museum.

Each evening, Walter would close the museum for the night, then walk next door to the inn for his regular pint of beer. At the bar, he had time to observe his fellow drinkers, who doubtless provided ideas for his anthropomorphic animal tableaux. There would also have been plenty of opportunity to discuss local natural history, such as ferreting for rabbits and tales of rats carrying away chicken's eggs, all of which would later feature in Walter's exhibits. No doubt the pub would also have been part of the local grapevine that resulted in Walter acquiring such a diverse assortment of curios from places both local and faraway. It is easy to imagine local workmen bringing Walter many of the bizarre bits and pieces he added to his collection such as the last village candle lamp or a giant coypu rat trapped on the local river.

ANTHROPOMORPHIC TAXIDERMY

At this time, Walter concentrated on creating his famous 'anthropomorphic tableaux', depicting groups of stuffed animals posed as though they were tiny humans. He appears to have been inspired by the illustrations in a small children's book, *Peter Parley's Present* (published about 1840). His focus on such novelty taxidermy may also have been inspired by a visit as a 16-year-old to the Great Exhibition of 1851. Children were encouraged to go to the newly-erected Crystal Palace and marvel at the exhibits there, among them German taxidermist Hermann Ploucquet's tableaux recreating some famous 18th-century illustrations of the story of Reynard the Fox. Ploucquet also exhibited frogs having



taxidermists far and wide were copying the style, most often using frogs and squirrels, as their shape and body proportions most easily lend themselves to imitating humans.

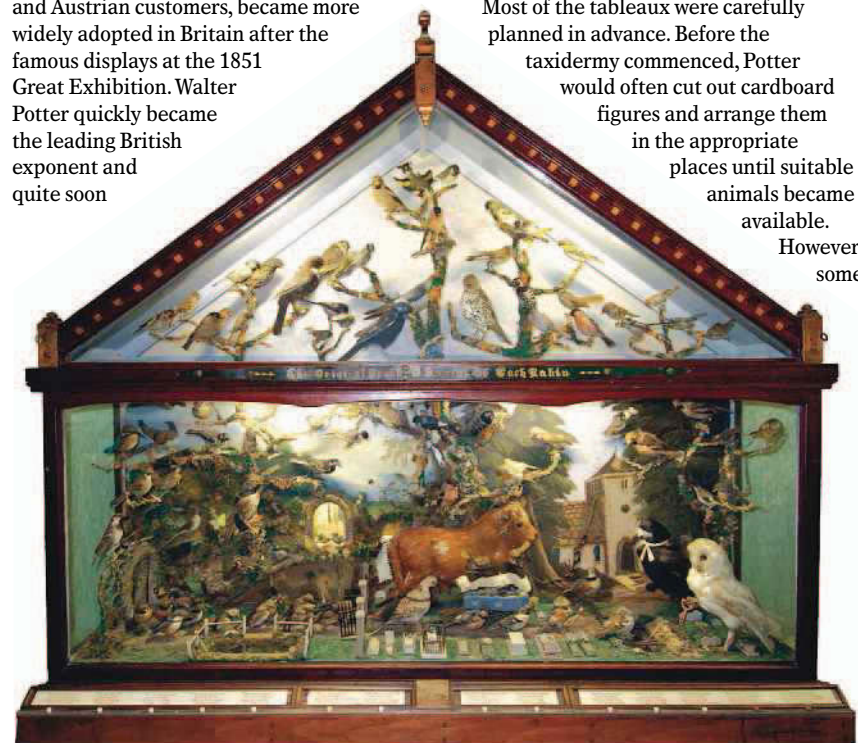
The late 19th century was the heyday of fashionable taxidermy. Stuffed birds were particularly prized domestic ornaments and no Victorian parlour was complete without its case of birds or other wildlife. Examples of Potter's work for customers rather than for his own collection do occasionally turn up at auction.

POTTER'S TABLEAUX

The anthropomorphic tableaux were the most famous and distinctive items in Potter's tiny museum; but for these, he and his collection would have been forgotten long ago. Today, they show us what some

aspects of Victorian life would have looked like, and in Potter's day many people would have instantly recognised the scenes. There is no question that the tableaux, as social commentaries, were both original and intriguing at the time they were first exhibited. Only later would there develop more ambiguity in people's reactions to what they saw before them.

Most of the tableaux were carefully planned in advance. Before the taxidermy commenced, Potter would often cut out cardboard figures and arrange them in the appropriate places until suitable animals became available. However, some



TOP: Walter Potter, aged about 80, holding a stuffed fox. ABOVE: 'The Death & Burial of Cock Robin', 1861.

of the tableaux were modified as Potter tinkered with the details. This is particularly apparent in 'The Death & Burial of Cock Robin', the prime exhibit in Potter's collection. Here, sometime after the scene was 'finished' in 1861, an additional box was added to the back of the case to allow more mourners to join the funeral party. In about 1960, electric lights and indicator bulbs were also added. Torch bulbs lit up to identify key features when buttons were pressed, but these burnt out frequently and were replaced by light-emitting diodes in the 1980s. After its case had been substantially completed, the squirrels' club gained some new members, inspired by a newspaper photograph. The museum's postcards also provide evidence of change over the years, at the instigation of the various curators who followed Walter Potter himself.

Potter also created a number of smaller cases depicting other children's stories, or tales from customers in his father's bar. The stories would perhaps have been more familiar to Victorian visitors, when they would have been in wider circulation than today. Some would have struck a chord with older people, reminding them of their own childhood and schooling. Others, such as those depicting the activities of rats, would stimulate lively discussion about their veracity and about rat behaviour in general. Again, rats and their activities would have been much more familiar to people then than nowadays.

One such smaller case, 'The Guinea Pigs' Cricket Match & Band', was probably Potter's third tableau and featured 35 animals. It measured 67 x 75 x 25 in (170 x 191 x 64 cm). The cricket match, started in 1873, is now frozen in time with the score standing at 189 for 7. Several of the players look a



LEFT: The interior of the Bramer museum. BOTTOM: 'Rabbits' Village School', circa 1888. OPPOSITE TOP: 'The Lower Five', late 19th century. OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Detail from 'The Kittens' Wedding', circa 1890.

FARMERS WOULD DONATE THEIR DISPOSED STOCK TO POTTER TO BE PUT TO GOOD USE

little corpulent for such activity, but the batsman, whose predecessor made 34 runs, concentrates intently as the bowler gets ready and the umpire stands patiently with hands clasped behind his back. The wicket keeper crouches expectantly and the scorer has refreshments to hand from the nearby tent. All is ready for the next ball, which will now never be delivered. One of the nearby bandsmen is being ticked off by the conductor for paying too much attention to the cricket.

The other bandsmen are seen playing silver

trumpets and other tiny musical instruments. Potter made these by carving moulds out of chalk, following the designs shown on a musical instrument catalogue. He melted tin in a clay pipe and poured it into the moulds, but the moulds often cracked on contact with the molten metal. Each instrument took him up to two days to make, and the whole job represented six months' work, owing to the difficulty of getting the molten tin to reach all parts of the mould. Potter told a visitor: "When I was in bed and asleep I worked them out in my dreams".

'The Athletic Toads', Potter's only mechanical tableau, portrays 18 toads enjoying a sunny afternoon in the park. They play on the swings and a see-saw, mechanically driven when an old penny is put in the slot. Toads and frogs are best skinned by turning them inside out through the mouth, which is why there is no ugly line of stitches visible on these animals' bellies. They also have similar body proportions to humans and lack a tail, so they are particularly suitable for anthropomorphic taxidermy like this. Following Potter's lead, many taxidermists used them for this purpose, especially as they could be obtained easily and in substantial numbers. By the late 19th century, thanks to Potter's inspiration and the fertile imagination of ingenious taxidermists, stuffed frogs could frequently be seen seated at dinner tables, and many others would be depicted playing cards, billiards or croquet, and even fighting duels with swords.

POTTER'S ANIMALS?

The miniature cows and a cockerel that were needed for some of the tableaux were made by purchasing small toys and gluing on real feathers or fur. Potter's own pets were also added to his expanding museum, including his white cat, neatly attired in a red bow tie, and large numbers of assorted species of birds and mammals. Many weird and interesting specimens were also added to the collection as gifts from local people, including freaks of nature from the local farmers. These included a three-legged piglet, a four-legged chicken and several examples of kittens born with supernumerary legs and even double heads. These aberrations proved particularly popular with visitors and at least five of the freaks exhibited were featured on the postcards sold at the museum for decades. Indeed, apart from some of the major tableaux, the two-headed lamb was reproduced as a postcard more often than any other single item.

Many of the birds that Potter mounted were brought in by visitors who had found them dead under telephone wires or killed by local cats. Most of the kittens came from a farm near Henfield, where a number of cats



roamed freely and bred without restraint. It was customary for cat owners, in those days before the spaying or neutering of cats was widely performed, to keep one of the kittens and destroy the rest; the proprietors of Henfield farm donated their disposed stock to Mr Potter to be put to good use. Young rabbits, similarly surplus stock and infant deaths, were obtained from Mr Feast, a rabbit breeder who lived down the road in Beeding.

The squirrels, red ones in those days, were shot by local foresters and gamekeepers, particularly in nearby Wiston Park. Grey squirrels only became widespread in Sussex well after Potter's death and did not feature in his collection at all. Local farmers encouraged their dogs to catch rats in abundance and Potter was never short of them. The stuffed remains of Spot the dog endured years of stroking by museum visitors until her face became quite worn.

Walter Potter confided some other details to a visitor who subsequently reported them in *The Idler* magazine in 1894–1895. Potter's confessions included the fact that some of the animals (notably rats and toads) were indeed killed by himself. This would have aroused little comment at the time, especially in respect of unwanted kittens that would anyway have been killed, usually by drowning. However, in later years, subsequent proprietors of the museum (probably beginning with Eddie Collins), responding to an increasingly concerned and squeamish public, found it expedient to gloss over this fact and even to assert that no animals had been killed specially for the museum.

LIFE AFTER WALTER

Well into old age, and long after the death of his wife, Walter continued to greet visitors to his museum, which remained open during World War I. An item in *The People* (4 January 1914) referred to a "museum never to be forgotten". Here, it said, "people may fail to recognise in the old gentleman, who is often to be seen seated near the door, a genius who has created a fairyland of nursery rhymes and who, notwithstanding his 78 years is as much wrapt up in the tale of Nature as he was some 60 years ago when he started his life's work".

Walter sadly never finished his last taxidermical scene, 'The Squirrels' Court, with Judge and Jury'. In 1914, in the early months of World War I, he suffered a minor stroke from which he never fully recovered. He died aged 83 on 1 May 1918.

After Walter Potter's death, the museum passed to his younger sister Minnie, who ran it with her husband, Edgar Weller Collins, for more than 20 years. Their son, Edgar Walter Collins, known as 'Eddie', took over the museum following World War II, running it as a famous and successful tourist attraction, with local coach companies offering daily outings from the popular coastal towns of Brighton and Worthing. Adventurous tourists were attracted from further afield by frequent articles in the press. Visitors apparently included the Bloomsbury Set, and Diana Dors (Britain's answer to Marilyn Monroe) posed among the museum's offerings for publicity photos in the 1950s. Queen Mary is also said to have enjoyed a visit. The prestigious



Gaumont British News filmed the museum in 1947 for use in cinema newsreels and so did British Pathé News in 1965. The museum's popularity steadily increased.

When Eddie died in 1969, his widow Nell struggled to cope and in 1972 sold the house, the adjacent museum building and its contents, to Anthony Irving, who wanted somewhere to accommodate his own extensive collection of smoking memorabilia, including 20,000 pipes. He sold the extraordinary assemblage filling the museum building to James Cartland, a relative of the famous novelist Barbara Cartland, who moved the collection (10 lorry loads) to a temporary home on Brighton's seafront. By 1975, Cartland had moved the collection to a more suitable site – the Old Post Office and Postmaster's House in Arundel, some 30km inland from Brighton – where it would remain for the next 13 years. The museum featured frequently in the media. Although the press articles sometimes referred to the collection as 'curious' and 'internationally famous', commoner adjectives included 'macabre', 'gruesome' and 'weird', with allusions to 'horrified' visitors. In Canada, the *Edmonton Journal* carried an item headed 'Odd museum not ideal spot for staid folks'. Views tended to be somewhat polarised. Following a TV programme broadcast in Sweden, a woman felt moved to write to the Swedish Embassy in London to complain about the museum. Her broken English somehow adds force to her emotionally driven reaction to Potter's collection, typical of many who have been affronted over the years: "Can this really be true that you do this to those kittens and other animals? If it is true I can not understand that anybody can be so cruel and cold hearted. Is not animals anything else to you than toys? Do people really come to the museum and looks at those ghastly things? I don't know what's the matter with you. If you don't just know that animals are living or if you are so cruel. Perhaps you are just mad. My friends think you are. To kill a lot of animal just to dress up and play with is much barbaric and can [not] be defenced". She ended by pleading that Mr Potter should "get new hobby". Perhaps a more balanced view was that of Mr Charles Steel, Keeper of Natural History at the Brighton Museum, who told a newspaper reporter in 1973: "The collection has no scientific value, it's true. But it should be kept as a piece of social, not natural, history. It is a period piece. It typifies the Victorian period. It is unique – thank God!"

In 1986 Cartland sold the collection to John and Wendy Watts, and it joined a small collection of Daphne Du Maurier memorabilia at Jamaica Inn on Bodmin Moor. The museum was reopened in its new home on 20 May 1988 by Lady Lucinda Lambton, who presented an engaging television programme about the enlarged collection. Situated alongside the busy A30 holiday route, the museum was a popular stopover and visitor attraction, offering food and hospitality at the adjacent Jamaica



A WOMAN WROTE TO THE SWEDISH EMBASSY TO COMPLAIN ABOUT THE MUSEUM



ABOVE: 'Monkey Riding a Goat'; both animals met untimely ends according to the museum's guide-book. **BELOW:** A kitten with two bodies, fused at the head, with two tails and eight legs.

Inn. It attracted some 30,000 visitors each summer, particularly when the weather was bad down at the coast.

THE END AND THE AFTERMATH
In 2002, it was announced that the collection was to be sold. Bids were invited, but only attracted offers for individual items. After more than a year, in which nobody came forward to preserve the collection intact, Bonhams was instructed to auction it in September 2003. Barely a month before the sale, a group of enthusiasts tried to raise the money to buy the whole collection, but it was too late.

The sale at Jamaica Inn was probably the highest profile event Bonhams had ever organised. The auction catalogue sold out in spite of its high price and the sale was spread over a two-day period on 23–24 September 2003. At the last moment, artist Damien Hirst was reported to have offered a million pounds to save the collection for the nation. Unfortunately, this offer came rather late



ABOVE: A detail from 'The Kittens' Tea & Croquet Party'. BELOW: Walter Potter winding threads round a sparrowhawk to hold its feathers in place while the skin dried.

and although it was reported in the media, it seems that the owners were unaware of it, so the collection was sold piecemeal by auction.

The sale attracted over 400 people, including dealers, media folk, people from the art world and collectors, despite the relative inaccessibility of the location on Bodmin Moor. A few minor items were purchased by Steyning Museum and returned to Sussex. The pop artist Sir Peter Blake bought *The House That Jack Built* and some smaller items. 'The Kittens' Wedding' went to America (for £18,000, plus buyer's premium), as did the 'Monkey Riding a Goat'. 'The Kittens' Tea & Croquet Party' sold for a hammer price of £16,000, but some of the other large tableaux fetched considerably less, and sold for under £10,000 each. The most famous of the tableaux, 'The Death & Burial of Cock Robin', was sold to the Victorian Taxidermy Company for a hammer price of £20,000, the most expensive item in the sale.

Potter's collection was no more. After nearly 150 years of delighting and mystifying more than two million visitors, this unique assemblage was scattered across the country and overseas.

The Victoria and Albert Museum borrowed *The Kittens' Wedding* for a major exhibition about significant aspects of the Victorian era, yet they did not express interest in saving the core of the Potter collection and declined to accept the author's own taxidermy archive collection, even as a gift. Many other museums in private or public ownership might also have stepped in, but did not, apparently

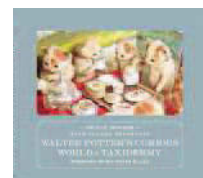


preferring to collect the folk artefacts of foreign countries rather than preserve a unique example of English whimsy. Perhaps their reticence was due to political correctness, but the whole point of museums and art galleries is to preserve examples that typify their times, not to attempt a retrospective censorship of things that have become unfashionable.

Already some of the Potter material has been sold on. The crocodile mummy, £1,900 at the original auction, was sold by Sotheby's in 2004 for about double that. The two-headed lamb, so popular on postcards of Potter's museum, was offered on the Internet in 2004 for £3,500 (50 per cent more than it fetched at the sale). Several significant items have gone abroad, divorced from

their cultural context, and cannot now be retrieved. These are rumoured to include 'The Guinea Pigs' Cricket Match & Band', which sold at Jamaica Inn for a hammer price of £2,800 and was later bought at Olympia for more than £15,000.

Doubtless Mr Potter would have considered these prices as amazing as visitors found his collection. He would also surely have been disappointed by the lack of vision shown by the official custodians of British heritage. Potter's work is now scattered at home and abroad, precluding any prospect of ever re-assembling the collection again.



This is an edited and abridged extract from *Walter Potter's Curious World of Taxidermy*, by Dr Pat Morris with Joanna Ebenstein, published

by Constable & Robinson, priced £20.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



DR PAT MORRIS was Senior Lecturer in Zoology at Royal Holloway, University of London. He is a DEFRA inspector for assessing the age and authenticity of antique taxidermy and has published seven illustrated books. His own collection includes Potter's 'The Death & Burial of Cock Robin'.

AMAZING STUFF

IAN SIMMONS explores the history of fantastic taxidermy and welcomes its current renaissance in the world of the arts

From its peak of popularity in the Victorian and Edwardian eras, taxidermy fell out of favour during the 20th century, reaching such a low ebb by the 1990s that even the Natural History Museum started to avoid including preserved specimens in its new exhibitions. However, over the last decade, there has been a steady revival of interest in the craft, particularly among artists, who have taken to using taxidermed animals in creative ways, either re-purposing Victorian specimens or creating new mounts themselves. In doing so, they have emphasised what used to be a minor branch of taxidermy – the art of making fantastic specimens out of dead animals or a combination of animals.

Taxidermy – from the Greek for ‘arranging skin’ – originates with hunters getting the skins of trophy animals tanned for preservation; some of them took to sewing the skins up and getting upholsterers to pad them out with rags and straw to give them some semblance of their original form – hence the term ‘stuffed animal’. Without any internal armatures, such specimens only had a very rough semblance to their living appearance. By the end of the 18th century, though, professional taxidermists were starting to emerge, building cotton and wire armatures to give mounts some form, and arsenical soap was used to preserve skins, giving them much greater longevity. This opened the way for the 19th century taxidermy boom that gathered pace through the century – to the point where no Victorian gentleman’s parlour seemed complete without its dome of hummingbirds or stuffed pheasant.

Almost as soon as it became possible to create armatures for mounting preserved skins, people began to take advantage of this to play games and create new creatures from the skins of old. The most notable early proponent of fantastic taxidermy was the 19th century naturalist and traveller Charles Waterton, a highly skilled taxidermist who preserved many of the animals he encountered on his expeditions. As well as preserving natural history specimens, he turned his skills towards making a whole variety of fantastic items including a tableau (now lost) of reptiles dressed as famous Englishmen entitled *The English Reformation Zoologically Demonstrated*. He also created a quasi-human entity out of a howler monkey, known as Waterton’s Nondescript, and *Luther after his Fall*, modifying a monkey with human features. Along with several other specimens of Waterton’s fantasy taxidermy these can still be seen in Wakefield Museum.

The other great 19th century proponent of fantastic taxidermy was, of course Walter Potter, who instead of satirical grotesques produced whimsical and humorous scenes



ABOVE: A Bavarian Wolpertinger, photographed at the Munich Oktoberfest in 2012.

in which the creatures retained their natural forms but were posed and dressed in fantastically detailed tableaux.

If there was a decline in taxidermy’s fortunes in the UK during the 20th century, it was in rude health among the hunting fraternity in Europe and the US, where there has always been a ready market from hunters getting their trophies stuffed. But alongside the heads-on-the-wall business, there was also a sideline in hunters’ humour – a vein of joke taxidermy that thrives to this day and includes such forlorn favourites as the Fur-Bearing Trout, the Jackalope and the Wolpertinger.

In the States, you’ll still find all sorts of weird taxidermy available (such as the deer’s rump mounting kit, a ‘one that got away’ joke to which you can also fit a bottle opener). A logical progression has been

the development of the novelty taxidermy roadside attraction, of which the Cress Funeral Home is a particularly fine example – a clear descendant of Walter Potter’s Museum, although perhaps a shade cheesier. In the basement of a funeral home in Madison Wisconsin, Sam Sanfillippo has created an utterly bizarre world intended to cheer up people attending funerals (you can visit by appointment when there are no funerals scheduled). A squirrel rocks back and forth in a chair while smoking a pipe and reading a book, fish spin eerily in wood-framed seascapes. The elaborate *Squirrel Bar* has white, brown, and black squirrels sharing brews, cigars and good times... forever. In *The Woodland Fair* diorama, chipmunks hang out at Lou’s Bar & Grill, ride a merry-go-round and eat cotton candy, while half-naked female chipmunks dance on stage.

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TOP LEFT: Pakistani artist Huma Mulji's *Arabian Delights*. **TOP RIGHT:** 'Storyteller 2: 2010' by Scott Bibus, on display at the Rogue Taxidermy Show in 2010. **CENTRE:** A Steampunk-styled sculpture by Jessica Joslin called 'Luca'. **ABOVE:** Polly Morgan poses with one of her creations at the Exquisite Corpse exhibition in London, 2007.

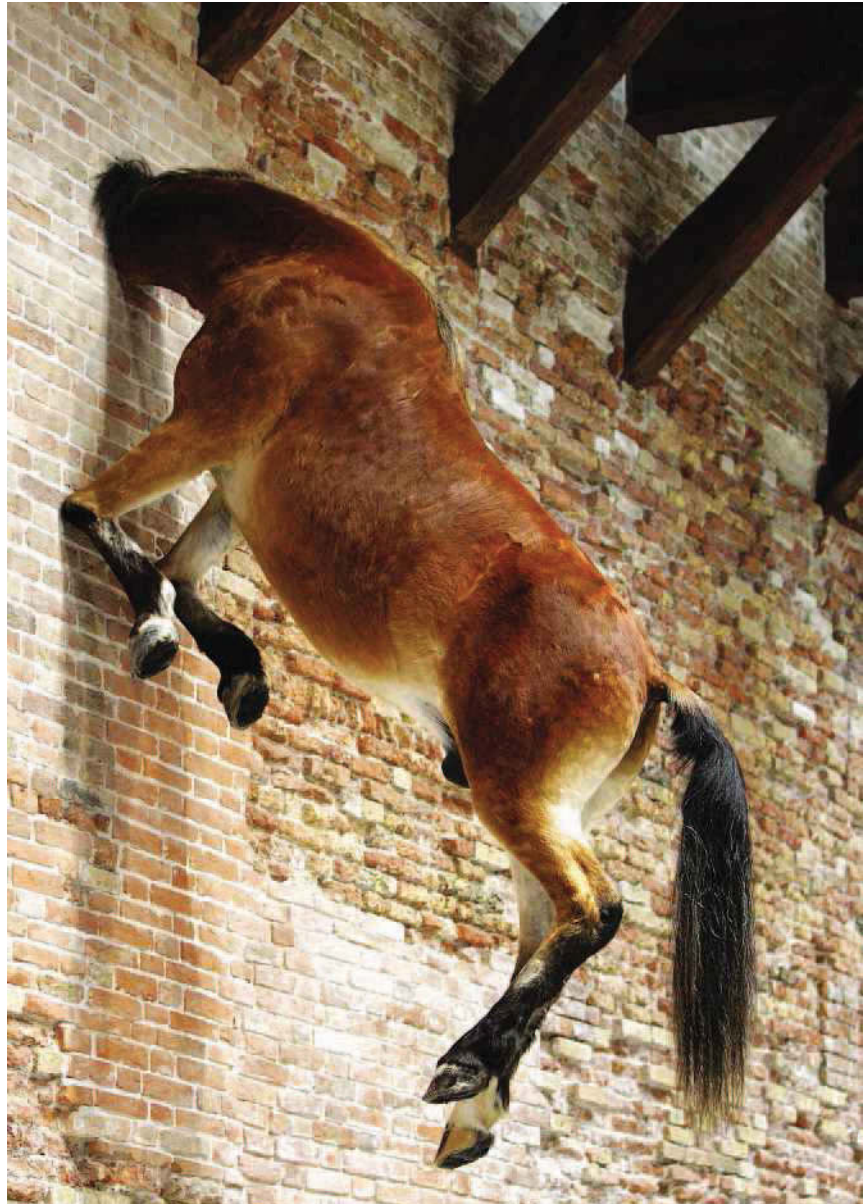
However, it's in the arts where access to easy preservation methods has led to the most unusual creative projects involving taxidermy. One of the first and highest profile artists to use taxidermy was Damien Hirst – although his best known animal pieces actually used specimens preserved in spirit rather than by taxidermy. While Hirst's formaldehyde mounts certainly put preserved animals back on the artistic agenda, this was not his sole contribution to the art side of fantastic taxidermy. Hirst, famously, has much of his work produced by assistants, like Emily Mayer, who has gone on to carve her own niche in the world of taxidermy art with pieces like *The Dogs Bollocks* – a rat rolling a jar containing some dog testicles. Working in a similar vein is Polly Morgan, who places her animals in non-anthropomorphic but unnatural settings, with the intention of making people look at animals without our normal preconceptions about them.

Further afield, a wide range of international artists are exploring the potential of taxidermy; Maurizio Catellan (famous for his sculpture of Pope John Paul II being struck by a meteorite; see **FT131:11**) has used taxidermied horses in a whole series of works, while Japanese artist Odani Motohiko's *Erectro* encases Bambi in Cronenbergesque metal calipers and Pakistani Huma Mulji strands a buffalo up a pylon in his work *Heavenly Heights* and packs a camel in a trunk in *Arabian Delights*.

Another element that has helped spark a considerable revival in fantastic taxidermy is the advent of the 'lowbrow' art movement in the US, which produces works that revel in an aura of high kitsch and a taste for artistically reimagined tack. There has been a ready reception for artists who base their practice on material like the aforementioned hunter's novelties and roadside attractions. The most prominent of the practitioners of this kind of fantastic taxidermy are the Minnesota Association of Rogue Taxidermists, a loose collective of artists whose intention is to create a "shared mandate to advocate the showmanship of oddities; espouse the belief in natural adaptation and mutation; and encourage the desire to create displays of curiosity". It was founded by Sarina Brewer, Scott Bibus and Robert Marbury and has more than 20 working and honorary members, creating mounts in a diversity of styles.

Scott Bibus's approach is distinctly horrorshow, including Siamese frogs, a cat zombie and a snapping turtle eating a human eye, while Ester Verschoor manages to combine rogue taxidermy and creepy little girl dolls to unsettling effect. Lisa Black has a more cyberpunk approach to her taxidermy, producing items like a cyberpunk deer and a bondage ferret.

Another recent upsurge in creativity in the US and elsewhere has centred round Makers Faires, which support the home craftsman and technologist, encouraging the creation of all sorts of innovative and often completely off-the-wall gadgets. If you have ever wanted a *real* mouse for your computer, the Instructables website (www.instructables.com) tells you how to build a computer mouse into a freeze-dried dead mouse.



TOP: One of Maurizio Catellan's numerous works involving horses. **ABOVE:** A student at a New York-based class in anthropomorphic taxidermy, which appears to be enjoying something of a renaissance at present.

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No 52: STIGMATA

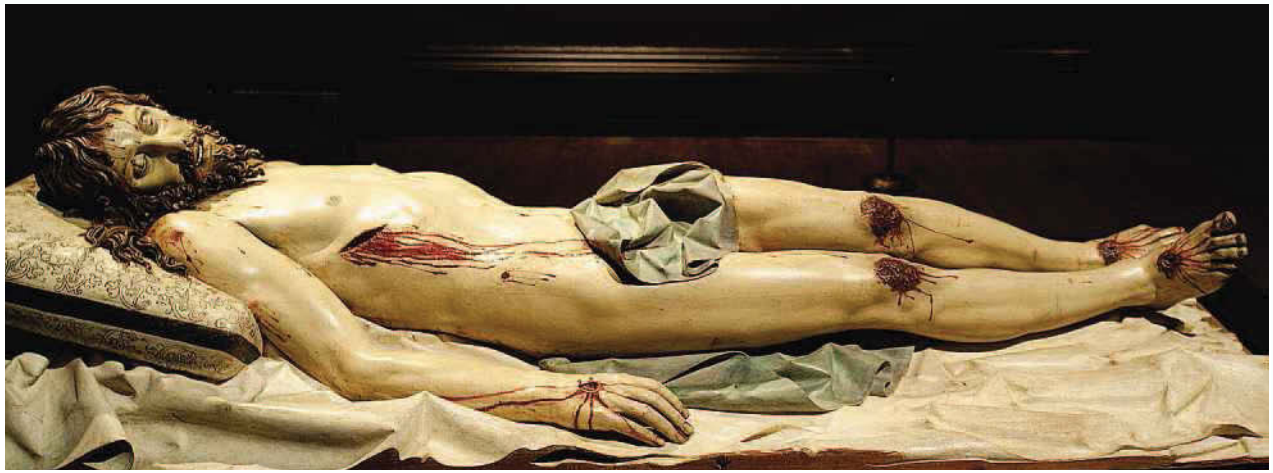
If you wanted to find a little-known underlying cause for the phenomenon known as stigmata, you could do worse than point the finger at St Anselm (1033-1109) – not himself little-known, but a Doctor of the Church, celebrated philosopher, and Archbishop of Canterbury from 1093 until his death. In *Cur Deus Homo* Anselm pondered how it might be possible for human beings to atone for sins against God. This, he considered, was too enormous a task for mere humans, whose very existence puts them already wholly in debt to God. There is simply no mortgage, not even the subbest of sub-primes, available to people with such a moral credit rating. Anselm put it thus: “When you give to God something that you owe him, even if you do not sin, you ought not reckon this as the debt that you owe him for sin. For, you owe all of these things... to God.” Jesus of Nazareth, however, was both God and man, and also free of sin. The Nazarene redeemed humanity by becoming flesh and accepting (or seeking) death – a portal through which gods do not traditionally pass, Norse mythology and Wagner notwithstanding.

There is many a paradox in this belief, not least of which is that God Himself pays off what is owed Him. This may be resolved by saying that He more than cancels the debt to divine justice



through divine mercy: but the paradox remains that, for this to succeed, Jesus must be both wholly man *and* wholly God (as defined at the AD451 Council of Chalcedon). Anselm's influential justification of the ways of God to man gave a fresh significance to Jesus's death and specifically to his *suffering*, in Western Christian mythology. One of the more recent affirmations of this emphasis on the cruelty of Jesus's end is the Roman Catholic Mel Gibson's film *The Passion of the Christ* (2004). Anselm was writing when the final schism in 1054 between Roman and Byzantine churches was still fresh: one may speculate that his pondering on this question, with its implications for the *filioque* doctrine¹ rejected by Byzantium, may have been intended to reinforce the righteousness of the Roman church. Certainly contemplation of the agonised Christ became a peculiarly Catholic tradition: depictions of

the crucifixion become ever more bloodstained and gruesome in Western art from the 12th century on. This is radically different from the Eastern Orthodox tradition. As Frederica Mathewes-Green explains it: “God the Father does not need payment... Instead, our salvation involves a real change in our being, a rescue from a state of decay. Christ's Incarnation permeated our common life to restore God's intimate, immediate presence. His



ABOVE: 'Dead Christ, 1625-30' by the Spanish sculptor Gregorio Fernandez (1576-1636). FACING PAGE: St Francis of Assisi (1182-1226), founder of the Franciscan Order and unconventional stigmatic.

resurrection destroyed death... In this story, the Passion plays an extraordinary part, but it is not the sole decisive moment.

Christ lives, and we live in a continuing interior communion that will assimilate us with his light and transform us to be like him. We don't dwell on the idea that he is like us; the energy is all going in the other direction. We would not presume to identify with him, as if we understand what he's going through and figure he feels about it like we would."²

The foregoing goes some way to explaining why it took the best part of 1,300 years for stigmatics to appear among devout Christians. But there is more context to come.

OUT OF CORRUPTION...

It's not precisely certain who was the first stigmatic, the apostle Paul presenting some ambiguity with comments in his epistle to the Galatians: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (2:20) and "From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." (6:17) But tradition says it was St Francis of Assisi, although curiously enough his case was far from typical of those that followed. To begin with, he was a man: whereas by far the majority of stigmatics have been women. And his stigmata appear to have been of a unique kind. According to the *Fioretti di Santo Francesco d'Ascesi* ('The Little Flowers of St Francis of Assisi', originally written about 1250-1 by Bro. Ugolino of Montegiorgio),³ on the Feast of the Most Holy Cross in 1224, Francis prayed:

"O Lord Jesus Christ, two graces do I ask of thee before I die; the first, that in my lifetime I may feel, as far as possible, both in my soul and body, that pain which thou, sweet Lord, didst endure in the hour of thy most bitter Passion; the second, that I may feel in my heart as much as possible of that excess of love by which thou, O Son of God, wast inflamed to suffer so cruel a Passion for us sinners."

Sensing his prayer had been granted, Francis "began to contemplate most devoutly the Passion of Jesus Christ and his infinite charity; and so greatly did the fervour of devotion increase within him, that he was all transformed into Jesus by love and compassion." A seraph with "six fiery and resplendent wings" appeared before him, bearing the image of Christ, who "looked upon him... lovingly". When the vision faded,

upon his hands and feet began immediately to appear the figures of the nails, as he had seen them on the Body of Christ crucified, who had appeared to him in the likeness of a seraph. And thus the hands and feet appeared pierced through the midst by the nails, the heads whereof were seen outside the flesh in the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet, and the points of the nails stood out at the back of the hands, and the feet in such wise that they appeared to be twisted and bent back upon themselves, and the portion thereof that was bent back upon themselves, and the portion thereof that was bent back or twisted stood out free from the flesh, so that one could put a finger through the same

as through a ring; and the heads of the nails were round and black. In like manner, on the right side appeared the image of an unhealed wound, as if made by a lance, and still red and bleeding, from which drops of blood often flowed from the holy breast of St Francis, staining his tunic and his drawers.

Francis, like some later stigmatics, did his best to conceal the wound and the 'nails', but finally confided in some of his brethren. The *Fioretti* adds: "Now although these sacred wounds... gave great joy to his heart, yet they caused unspeakable pain to his body" and Francis allowed them to be dressed – except on Fridays, "because at that time our Saviour Jesus Christ was taken and crucified, died and was buried for us." This 'Friday bleeding' too was a feature of many, but not all, stigmatics to follow.

One might have wondered why Francis should *request* such suffering, if one did not know the new theological emphasis initiated by Anselm. A yet more interesting question is why his example was, overwhelmingly, taken up by women rather than men. One contributing factor was the general and increasing contempt in which the Church was held in the mediæval period, attested by anti-clerical satire and ridicule found in popular song and vernacular literature. The illiteracy, drunkenness and lechery of parish clergy were more than matched by the corruption, nepotism, venality and sybaritism of bishops and cardinals. People considered it a misfortune, an ill omen, to meet priests, and took care to pass them by on the right side. One can't but be heartened to learn that inquisitors were routinely bushwhacked and so often assassinated that in 1240 the Dominicans (fruitlessly) petitioned to be relieved of the duty, while papal officials travelled at their peril. Church attendance and communion declined across the period.⁴

LADIES OF THE LIGHT

Christian salvation, not surprisingly, became more an individual quest, one that was reinforced by new orders of mendicant monks and friars, whose asceticism, erudition and vivid peripatetic preaching were understandably seen as more authentic than whatever was handed down via the rampant hypocrisy of the established priesthood. Even so, that priesthood was exclusively a body of men: women could contribute to religious life only by entering a convent or becoming a tertiary – a lay member of a monastic order. As such they sidestepped the perceived ruinousness of the Church and achieved moral stature; they were also free to explore their own spirituality, and many devoted themselves to intense meditations on the humanity and, in particular, the suffering of Christ. Many too became renowned for the wisdom and insight so gained. Ted Harrison describes the pattern thus: "Their call was to 'the cure of souls' and 'preaching', very much the same as the vocation of a priest. They were seen as channels of information which came directly from God and direct channels of Grace and forgiveness... They exercised a priestly role in all but name... To do this they had to demonstrate an authority which both superseded that of the Church and yet could not be



ABOVE LEFT: 'Mary Magdalene meditating on the Crucifixion', a sculpture dating from the 1660s after Pedro de Mena. ABOVE RIGHT: Tiffany Snow shows off her wounds. BELOW: A very bloody Therese Neumann. BOTTOM: Stigmatic Jane Hunt, whose condition apparently vanished following a hysterectomy in 1987.

denied by the Church.

"Among these extraordinary and often gifted women were mystics and visionaries who so passionately identified with Christ on the cross that, by one means or another, they manifested – or were rewarded by – the wounds he bore. This was their 'authority', and it imbued their preaching and writings with special significance".⁵

The Church treats (and treated) stigmata as *possibly* miraculous, but has always looked elsewhere, in the lives of the many female and few male stigmatics whom the Roman church has canonised, for evidence of saintliness. But it has never *denied* the stigmata. Partly this was for the political reasons implied above (the Roman church has always found the puritanism of its monastic orders a pain in its worldly neck), but also because its hierarchy was no different from its lay membership in accepting both the material world and what we would call 'the paranormal' as equal, valid, and co-existent. Indeed they did not separate these realms, or willingly renounce 'pagan' beliefs and sensibilities – as is evidenced by the folk songs of the era. Bob Zimmerman Dylan⁶ once described these songs as coming "from legends, Bibles, plagues, and [revolving] around vegetables and death", adding that "All these songs about roses growing out of people's brains and lovers who are really geese and swans that turn into angels – they're not going to die... mystery... – just plain simple mystery – is a fact, a traditional fact." Historian Carrolly Erickson, drawing on other sources, makes a related point in a different tone: recounting a 13th-century tale of a semi-magical pilgrimage by three Mesopotamian monks, she says of their various adventures: "The multiform reality which forms a backdrop to the monks' journey may be likened to an enchanted world in which the boundaries of the imagination and factuality are constantly shifting. At one time the observed physical limits of time and space may be acknowledged; at another they may be ignored, or, from another point of view, transcended. Yet so constant and so automatic is this expansion and contraction of the field of perceived reality that it goes on unnoted and unreconciled by medieval writers. It belongs to those tacit norms in all cultures which, because they are more basic than perception itself, are rarely explicitly acknowledged".⁷

Readers familiar with *Sir Gawayne and the Grene Gome* will recognise such seamless shifts between realities. Erickson elaborates thus: "[F]or us, what is unseen and immaterial is assumed to be unreal until its existence is proved by the verifiable data of the senses. Though they were far from being credulous,



the medievals did not ordinarily share this suspicion of the unseen, and used other means than sense perception to authenticate reality..

A simpler formulation of these ideas is the truism that the medieval world view was holistic. But this abstruse term eclipses the most striking characteristic of medieval perception – the extraordinary perceptual significance attributed to the visionary imagination".

We may take it from all this that the kind of doubt, or need for proof, that arises in the post-Enlightenment mind when confronted by stigmatics did not trouble those contemporaries who knew of St Francis, or St Margaret of Cortona, Blessed Angela of Foligno, St Frances of Rome, St Catherine de' Ricci, and so many others. In those days, the divine and the magical intermingled.

LET IT BE, LET IT BE

It may puzzle some fundamentalist materialistic modern minds that modern stigmatics *still* attract believers, followers and defenders, but their perplexity may be the result of refusing to accept that a world in which "lovers are really geese" (and crop

circles are made by otherworldly agencies, prayer has power, and werewolves stalk suburban gardens) is the world for a large proportion of humanity. If mediæval people strike us today as in some senses prototypical forterans, we should perhaps also remember that an ability to shift between the allegedly real and the seemingly magical is still, for many, a 'tacit norm'. In that visionary perception it is neither here nor there whether Padre Pio (St Pius of Pietrelcina) was or wasn't a fraud. For many, he demonstrated the *possibility* of otherworldly powers; and the effects of his wounds among the faithful are more important, and worthier of consideration, than the authenticity of his wounds.

Which is emphatically *not* to say that stigmatism should not be analysed critically. Anyone might raise an eyebrow at this, from the 1912 *Catholic Encyclopedia* – "The sufferings [of stigmatics] may be considered the essential part of visible stigmata; the substance of this grace consists of pity for Christ, participation in His sufferings, sorrows, and for the same end – the expiation of the sins unceasingly committed in the world. If the sufferings were absent, the wounds would be but an empty symbol, theatrical representation, conducing to pride" – wondering what it is about Christianity that attracts or encourages the martyr or (at worst) the masochist. Dorothy Kerin (a Protestant and a profoundly effective healer), who kept her stigmata secret, said that she never "wanted to be rid of the pain". Francis

of Assisi positively invited it. Why so? The case of Ethel Chapman is a kind of inversion of this pattern: paralysed by multiple sclerosis, she appealed thus – “Oh Lord, please show me in some way you’re there” – and was answered by feeling “myself being drawn on to the Cross. I felt the pain of the nails through my hands and through my feet... I felt myself all the agony and all the pain that the Lord Himself went through...”⁸ Such a response from the One who (mostly) taught mercy and forgiveness seems oddly lacking in lovingkindness.

And what was in the mind of cult Italian stigmatic Virginia Improta, who turned out to be embellished with false breasts, whose real name was Michele Improta? That revealed, he became strangely reluctant to undergo further examination, and lost his following after his prophecy of the date of his own death failed to come true. One might ask the same question of any stigmatic whose prelude to the appearance of wounds included ecstasies and visions (which means most of them): bluntly, are we dealing with some species of psychosocial pathology here? The question arises because stigmatics, who seem to fit a certain personal psychological profile, are nearly always Catholic, and their woundedness is often associated with tales of levitations, the sweet aroma of sanctity, an ability to live without sustenance, healing powers, extremes of body temperature, and the presence of bleeding or weeping Marian statues. Given the unfortunate reputation of that last marvel (see Dictionary of the Damned entry ‘Blood, Sweat and Tears’, FT258:49-52), it’s not unreasonable to look askance at stigmatics associated with it.

Otherwise, the *consistent* clustering of these wonders suggests that stigmatics themselves (or their devotees) may promote such tales in order to authenticate the grander claim through a more elaborate ‘authorised myth’. In this social context too we

note that until the 20th century the stigmata appeared on the palms and feet, following a long tradition of western art. But since about 1970, following the discovery in Jerusalem of a first-century crucifixee’s heelbone with a nail through it and the first widespread publicity for the Turin Shroud, which shows wounds

in the wrists, stigmatics have tended to conform to modern knowledge. An exception is the American Tiffany Snow (“Blessed” Tiffany to her followers, but not to the Pope); she received stigmata in 2005, having been struck by lightning in 1999, whereupon she “met God”. Snow also does whip marks on her back as well as the wound in the side, and certain statues weep in her presence.⁹

Protestants are rare in this company, and Eastern Orthodox examples vanishingly few. There is one alleged case of a Satanist manifesting stigmata.¹⁰ Here and there we meet assertions that some Islamic mystics have displayed stigmata in the pattern of wounds (gashes on his forehead and lip) received by Mohammed at the battle of Uhud in March 625. Ted Harrison reports on his own research: “I was never able to get names, chapter or verse. I suspect it is an Islamic version of an urban legend. Not only because getting to the detail proved impossible, but also because it would not fit the theology of stigmata. The battle wounds of Mohammed were incidental and not central to the story as the wounds of Jesus are to the crucifixion narrative.”¹¹ The conclusion that stigmatics are as much a socio-religious phenomenon as a personal mystical one is inescapable.

In that sense too it little matters whether the ‘phenomena’ are faked, or a psychosomatic effusion of faith, or the product of self-mutilation while in trance, or inflicted by a more than paradoxical divinity. As with many another enigmatic anomaly, the neglected aspect of stigmatics is the body – so to speak – of their followers. **[T]**



ABOVE: Pilgrims venerate the body of stigmatic Padre Pio.

ROBERTO SALOMONE / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

NOTES & REFERENCES

1 The dispute revolved around the esoteric question of whether the Holy Spirit “proceeds” from God the Father alone, or *filioque* (“and the son”) from both God and his Incarnation as Christ. The Byzantine church rejected the *filioque* doctrine, as does Eastern Orthodoxy today.

2 Frederica Mathewes-Green, “Bloody, to What End?”, 8 March 2004. (www.frederica.com/writings/bloody-to-what-end.html) The article is a critique of Gibson’s *The Passion of Christ*: one of its more telling passages runs: “The Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial in Washington is a wall of polished granite displaying thousands of names. But might someone say, in accord with the view of the Gibson film, that if we haven’t seen the

suffering, we’re not taking it seriously enough? Let’s add a photo next to each name, showing the person at the moment of dying, blown apart or bleeding. Since we don’t have those photos, we’ll put look-alike actors in makeup, with latex wounds and fake blood. If we honor soldiers for dying, well then, let’s watch them die. If your friend died in Vietnam, you would not want him treated that way. Why not give Jesus the same dignity?”

3 Brother Ugolino, *The Little Flowers of St Francis*, Christian Classics Ethereal Library (n.d.), pp118-9 of the PDF downloadable from <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/ugolino/flowers.html>.

4 See Carolly Erickson, *The Medieval Vision*, OUP 1976, pp69–76.

5 See Ted Harrison, *Stigmata*, Penguin 1996, pp114–25. Block quote: p124.

6 Bob Dylan, interview with Nat Hentoff, *Playboy* February 1966.

7 Erickson, *op. cit.*, pp3–28. Block quotes: pp5–6. Erickson also has an eye-opening chapter (“The Forces of Disorder”, pp148–180) on the rampant outlawry of the era, which gives extra piquancy to Huizinga’s comment (*The Waning of the Middle Ages*, Penguin 1968, p25): “So violent and motley was life, that it bore the mixed smell of blood and roses.” Mystics, ecstasies and stigmatics may count among the ‘roses’ in the chronic uncertainty of the times.

8 Quoted in “Stigmata”, *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology*, ed. J Gordon Melton, Gale 2001: p1495.

9 For more on Ms Snow, who cynics might say represents a classic case

of the stigmatic in a media age, see <http://tiffanysnow.com/page1.php>

10 In the one case of stigmata connected to Orthodoxy known to us, the link is somewhat tenuous: Heather Woods of Lincoln, England, is a deacon in “a small episcopal Church which traces its roots to pre-Roman Christianity in Britain and today has links with the Orthodox tradition.” (Harrison, p52).

The satanic connection was made in a comment (17 Nov 2010) by Arron Chard on the article on stigmata from the web-based *Encyclopedia of the Unusual and Unexplained* at www.unexplainedstuff.com/Religious-Phenomena/Stigmata.html – as follows [sic throughout]: “my little sister recently turned 7 shes been following in my path of satanism (god is evil and satan is the wise one) and one

time we were reciting the holy prayer in reverse as i opened my eyes i heard her scream,when i looked at her she appeared to be pinned to the bed but no one was there.i couldnt even lift her up but then blood dripped onto the sheets and i saw her wrists bleed and her feet. after i cleaned her up there was a hole on each wrist and when i covered the wound. it bled again please help me out here im not sure whether its stigmata or a demon torturing me by hurting the only person i have left in my family”.

To this, one Linnet responded with cold, impeccable logic: “Why are you worshipping the devil if you are scared of demons?”

11 Pers. com. 15 Aug 2013.

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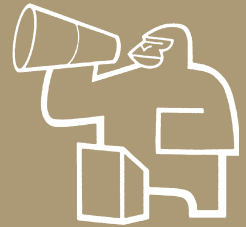
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Goblin grammar

Instead of using the term to “give to airy nothing a local habitation and a name,” **SD TUCKER** is of the opinion that it is about time the word ‘fairy’ was reclaimed as being an adjective rather than a noun.



SD TUCKER is a regular FT contributor whose latest book is *Terror of the Tokoloshe*. His next, *The Hidden Folk*, will deal with the many similarities which exist between poltergeists and fairies.

It is often said that if you ask 100 people to define the word ‘justice’, you will get 100 different answers. I sometimes think you would get much the same result if you asked 100 people to define the word ‘fairy’.

In researching an upcoming book on the subject, I came across an embarrassment of contradictory portrayals of the Little People. Some of them were much as you might expect, as with this 1842 account of fairies supposedly witnessed dancing at Stowmarket in Suffolk: “There might be a dozen of them, the biggest about three feet high, and small ones like dolls. Their dresses sparkled as if with spangles like the girls at shows at Stow fair. They were moving round hand in hand in a ring, [with] no noise from them.”¹ Other alleged sightings, however, are much less typical, such as the giant fairy-creature “in the rough shape of a human being” with skin “like the glistening luminosity of rancid butter that has been left in the sun” and eyes like “two dark caverns” which was allegedly seen peering over a wall by a little girl in Cork in 1914.² Even more aberrant was the account of a Buckinghamshire farmer concerning “a funny-looking little man ... with a body shaped like a toy balloon, long legs and a ‘pickid’ [pointed] nose” who used to sit on top of hurdles and then hypnotise sheep by pulling funny faces at them before galloping away across the fields and jumping over hedges whilst shouting “Hippy! Hippy!” like some miniature madman.³

Such is the multifarious variety of different fairy-folk on record that some people seem perfectly happy with the idea of having seen them in multiple forms themselves. For instance, a recent interview with Erla Stefánsdóttir – an



Icelandic piano teacher and ‘elf-map’ creator (see FT201:42-47) – featured the intriguing detail that the highly psychic Erla could see fairies in manifold guises. Pointing to a rubber-plant in her room, for instance, she described seeing beings “two fingerbreadths tall” with “little propeller-like wings on their backs”. At other times, though, the elf-psychic avers to have encountered another race of local elves who she says look just like ordinary humans – so much so, in fact, that as a child she claims to have attended several of their birthday parties without even realising anything was wrong!⁴

Ms Stefánsdóttir’s claims are particularly interesting because, whilst she is evidently sincere in her accounts of what she thinks she is seeing, her description of fairies with propeller-wings has clearly been influenced by fiction rather than fact – there seems to be no known genuine folk-tradition of fairies having had wings, this notion actually being derived from an unholy combination of romantic poets, sentimental Victorian illustrators and Walt Disney. Evidently, the idea of what exactly a fairy is has become so malleable that people can now have

visions of them in forms which have no genuine pre-modern history behind them.

Most obviously, this idea has been explored in relation to ufology, and many words have been written about the numerous similarities between the fairy-folk and ufonauts since the 1969 publication of Jacques Vallee’s book *Passport to Magonia*, but in truth fairies shade away into many other classes of fortean phenomena too, most of which are of older provenance than flying saucers. For example, in terms of cryptozoology the way that fairies merge into so-called ‘bogey-beasts’ – odd shape-shifting fairy-animals who were once said to haunt country lanes in the form of black dogs, calves, headless bears and more – is of obvious relevance. In terms of ghost-lore, likewise, there is the fact that White Ladies are often linked to ancient traditions about fairy-maidens; a late 19th-century account from Buckinghamshire of a miniature White Lady “about as big as a doll” and “dressed in silk and satin” seen walking along a hedge and acting as a death-omen seems particularly fairy-like, for instance.⁵ One specific old type of Yorkshire goblin called ‘Knocky Boh’, meanwhile, is supposed to have spent all his time rapping and knocking from inside walls and wainscots – an obvious cousin of the modern poltergeist.⁶ The recent academic work of Emma Wilby has even reclaimed some fairies as being witchcraft-familiars.⁷

How can we reconcile all of these competing conceptions of the fairy? Well, there may be a surprisingly simple solution to the conundrum. At present, the term ‘fairy’ is a noun, or ‘naming-word’. In times past, however, it was primarily a type of adjective, or ‘describing-word’. During the early Middle Ages, if you were to say something was ‘fairy’, then you would probably simply be saying that it seemed uncanny or enchanted, somehow.⁸ Essentially, the word ‘fairy’ back then was the old equivalent of our modern word ‘paranormal’ – a generic term which easily encompasses UFOs, ghosts, poltergeists ... and sightings of Little People.

If we were just to reclaim the word ‘fairy’ as being an adjective, however, then perhaps all these problems would simply disappear as suddenly and completely as the Good Folk themselves were once said to do come cock-crow. **FT**

NOTES

- 1 Jennifer Westwood & Jacqueline Simpson, *The Lore of the Land*, Penguin, 2005, pp704-705.
- 2 Dermot MacManus, *The Middle Kingdom: The Faerie World of Ireland*, Colin Smythe, 1979, pp140-145.
- 3 Westwood & Simpson, op. cit, p41
- 4 www.magazine.bilfinger.com/en/Magazine/Archive/Edition-1-07/Interview
- 5 Westwood & Simpson, op. cit, p46
- 6 Katharine Briggs, *The Fairies in Tradition and Literature*, Routledge Classics, 2002, p286
- 7 Emma Wilby, *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits*, Sussex Academic Press, 2010
- 8 Noel Williams, ‘The Semantics of the Word Fairy: Making Meaning out of Thin Air’ in Peter Narváez (Ed.) *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays*, University of Kentucky Press, 1997, pp457-478.

The Crop Circle Challenge

When a group called the Crop Circle Challenge threw down the cereological gauntlet earlier this year, **ROB IRVING** decided to change the rules of the game.



ROB IRVING is an artist, photographer and writer interested in the traffic between the objects of modern folklore and conceptual and/or visual art.

On the morning of 13 August 2001, the largest crop circle ever seen appeared in a wheat field atop Milk Hill, the highest point in Wiltshire. Its skeleton was laid out as six circular arcs emerging from a central circle, their ends meeting to form a graphic representation of a spiral galaxy. These lines were overlaid with circles of various sizes – 409 in total, the majority of which were small ‘grapeshot’ outliers. The pattern spanned more than 700ft (213m). “There are not enough words in the English vocabulary to describe how amazing this crop circle is,” wrote one pundit at the time. Let us therefore turn to Latin: it was a *magnum opus*, both in its size and the scale of organisation required to create it in one night.

Back then, the object of crop circle-making was simple: to create wonder. This meant making circles that a reasonable person would think were not made by people, especially in darkness, and that therefore some kind of non-human intelligence could be at work. As a consequence, the circles evolved to increasing levels of complexity and scale as separate teams merged to extend the limits of what could be achieved in one, and sometimes two nights. The Milk Hill Galaxy was a product of such an approach. It was fitting that it was situated at the highest point in Wiltshire, because it also represented a conceptual plateau and the beginnings of a gradual decline in ambition.

It was also a time when circle-makers followed a tacit code of ethics: “Make circle, leave field, shut the fuck up!”, a methodology pioneered by veteran artist/circle-makers such as Rod Dickinson, John Lundberg, Wil Russell, and myself. The art element was contained not so much in the artwork as in its reception – as with any sacred object, it is what is *brought* to a crop circle that defines its aura and efficacy. Crop circles are most effective when they are *affective*, and once this aura is removed (i.e., when the crop circle is identified as man-made art)



it is unable to sustain the effects/affects otherwise ascribed to it. Such artworks are made to be consumed by people who do not regard them as art. In this sense, crop circles act much like sigils, writ large upon the English landscape and reflecting whatever wonder glints in the eye of the beholder. Suffice to say, no one has yet admitted involvement in the making of the Milk Hill Galaxy, despite claims to the contrary.¹

Nowadays, this approach is an anachronism; this is an era dominated by circle-maker braggarts masquerading as artists – circle-making is about self-aggrandisement, about who’s in-the-know, rather than awe and mystery – so it’s understandable that deliberate ambiguity of authorship confuses croppies. In such a climate, if a circle is not claimed by humans it must be... right? Legend had it that the aforementioned circle-makers, known collectively and colloquially as Team Satan, were involved. A 3-D plan of the Milk Hill Galaxy featured on the front page of our website – circlemakers.org – and besides, hadn’t we admitted to creating the famous Julia Set crop

ABOVE: The Milk Hill Galaxy in a Wiltshire wheatfield in 2001.

circle at Stonehenge, an ancestor of the Galaxy? (No.) And so it was that in May 2013 our team was challenged by a group of well-heeled believers from the UK and US to make a facsimile of the Milk Hill agriglyph. This group, calling itself ‘The Crop Circle Challenge 2013’ (TCCC) but formerly known as EHA (‘Expanding Heart Awareness’) was fronted by the actor and author Sarah Miles. The bagman was a Slovenian gentleman called Janez Ferjancic, an associate of Benjamin Creme’s Share International, which is as certain as any church can be that crop circles are made by “space people” from Mars.

TCCC offered us a “reward” of £100,000 for the successful completion of the task. That is, successful in the eyes of unnamed “independent” judges and within an accuracy level of $\pm 2\%$. Of what exactly – an idealised plan drawing or an accurate map of what was actually on the ground – Ferjancic didn’t say. There’s little to be gained in persuading the persistently credulous of anything, so the fact that Miles, Ferjancic, and other croppies did not believe that the task was even possible may be unsurprising, but it is worth noting with regard to the potential outcomes of such a staged event. It is here that goalposts mysteriously move.

A similar challenge had been announced the previous year. It was open to all, but the rules were so prohibitive that no one took it seriously and there were no takers. This time, we were offered the freedom to make our own rules. Throughout, Miles and her partners were driven by the curiously misplaced assumption that “hoaxers” would want to reveal their hoax, and would therefore jump at the chance to participate. They either had not heard of our code or did not understand it, and they had another think coming.

A few days after we heard about the Challenge, we started to think of an appropriate response. John Lundberg thought the challenge reminded him of a story he’d recently read about one Henry Gribbohm,² who had lost \$2,600 in one evening on a carnival game, and all he had to show for it was a stuffed toy banana with a smiling face and dreadlocks, wearing a Rastaclat hat. The game was called Tubs of Fun, and Gribbohm told police that when he practised it was easy but something changed when he started playing and the balls kept popping out. The game of crop circles is like that. “It’s not possible that it wasn’t rigged,” said Gribbohm. As we were so well versed in the kind of tricks used to preserve a sense of mystery around crop circles, and thus to



ROB IRVING

keep the game going, we understood his concerns.

It was always unlikely that as 'old school' circle-makers we would agree to destroy the very myth we have worked so hard to perpetuate. Yet, like Gribbohm, we felt the seductive lure of the carnival, even though we were aware of the underlying intent behind it: as well known "hoaxers" and a prime target for ridicule by croppies, we would be set up and seen to fail, thus in the cockeyed view of the organisers proving to the world that no humans could have made the Milk Hill Galaxy. Bearing in mind our philosophy, we did consider colluding as Aunt Sallys in an epic fail. But instead, given a month to reply we took our time preparing a media release accepting the challenge, but with devilish riders. These included the following highlights:

- A sushi chef is on hand at all times.
- TCCC are responsible for paying our Healthcare charges in the event of any catastrophic 'act of God,' assassination attempts, food poisoning, accident, etc.
- Sarah Miles performs scenes of her choice from *Blowup*, *Ryan's Daughter*, *The Hireling*, *Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines*, *The Silent Touch*, *The Big Sleep*, and *White Mischief* in the crop circle as we are making it.
- A very large grandfather clock is

A grandfather clock is to be situated at the edge of the field

situated at the edge of the field to help us keep track of time.

- We are allowed breaks for a team of qualified Swedish and/or Thai masseuses to soothe away any muscular aches we may have before, during or after the completion of the task.
- In addition to the reward of £100,000, we will each receive a hearty pat on the back and a kiss from Sarah when the task is completed (Ms Miles not to have consumed any urine for at least one hour before kissing).
- We are provided with a private dressing room with Moroccan drapes, candles and a ping pong table, with quality snacks on hand such as Pringles/Dorritos and dipping sauces, custard creams, Rich Tea biscuits, cheese and pineapple on cocktail sticks, Ferrero Rocher, Wagon Wheels, Olives, Ginsters pasties, blue M&Ms,

ABOVE: Circlemakers at work in Italy.

Hobnobs, all to be served on china plates by TV chef Rusty Lee.

- The whole process is documented by film-maker Morgan Spurlock.

Ferjancic responded: "squeak[y] bum time, eh Irving... You have 24 hours to retract your reply and apologise." Or what? In the absence of any contrition on our part we were called "pussies" and "cowards", as well as the usual *agents provocateurs*, liars and deceivers. He then demanded that he should be able to edit whatever I write about the matter "in case you don't distort it" [sic]. Can we assume from this that Ferjancic expected us to take the challenge as seriously as he did, or am I underestimating his own penchant for parody?

Two points of interest emerged from this. One was a reminder that any attempt at falsification that is not considered possible is worth nought. Paradoxically, you have to have faith that it *could* work, but religious believers in a single idea rarely think like this. Why is that? The second concerns the emergence of a new legend. It runs along similar lines as the assertion that a 'genuine' crop circle can be identified by bent growth nodes on the stalks. This, it turned out, was TCCC's trump card, which they held close to their chest until it was obvious that 'Team Satan' was not interested. According to Ferjancic, the Milk Hill Galaxy was made in mature wheat that had passed its final growth stage, at which point the seed heads 'drop' or bend downwards. Yet in the floor lay, the seed heads were straight, an effect Ferjancic ascribed to the circle-making energies. It would not be possible to straighten the seed heads using planks as part of the normal flattening process. TCCC's money, it would appear, was safe all along; all they had to do was wait until the wheat was fully mature before inviting us at it, for there was no way we could replicate that effect. If negotiations had ever gone this far we would have pointed out the real cause of this phenomenon: The wheat is flattened when the heads are vertical, and therefore they remain in that condition when laid flat, sublimely unaffected by the gravity pulling on their upright siblings. From here, nature quickly takes its course, bending the standing seed heads. The difference is intriguing but hardly anomalous, as an experiment would demonstrate. TCCC would never have agreed with this insider point of view. Good legends are too hard to come by. **FT**

NOTES

1 Sarah Miles said in *Sussex Life* magazine (24 Oct 2012) that "four different teams claimed they'd made [the Milk Hill glyph], so I said: Go to it, but not one came forward. What's going on here, would you say?"

2 <http://tinyurl.com/gribbohm>

THE TRUTH ISN'T OUT THERE...

MAGBOOK

POPULAR MYTHS DEBUNKED AND DISPELLED

MYTH

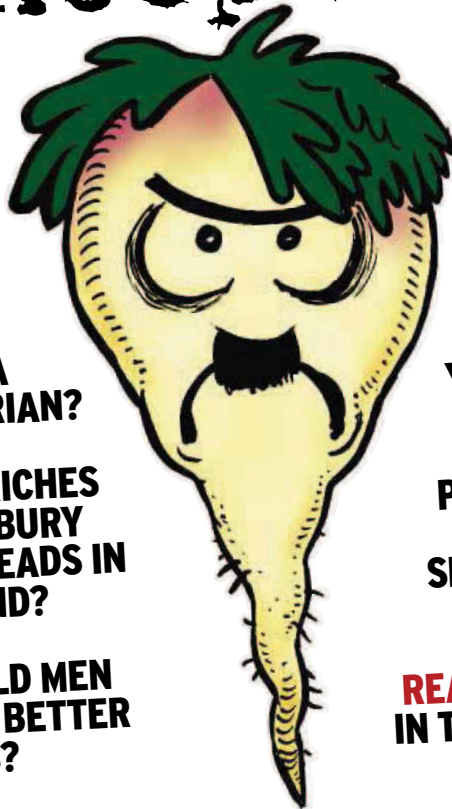
conceptions

FROM THE PAGES OF
ForteanTimes

WAS
HITLER
REALLY A
VEGETARIAN?

DO OSTRICHES
REALLY BURY
THEIR HEADS IN
THE SAND?

ARE BALD MEN
REALLY BETTER
LOVERS?



DOES COKE
REALLY
DISSOLVE
YOUR TEETH?

DO TIGHT
PANTS **REALLY**
LOWER YOUR
SPERM COUNT?

WERE PEOPLE
REALLY SMALLER
IN THE OLD DAYS?

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The modernity of witchcraft

Remarkably, more witches died after the Salem panic than before it, but the outrage might have hidden the unlikely survival of witchcraft beliefs in modern America



America Bewitched

The Story of Witchcraft after Salem

Owen Davies

Oxford University Press 2013

Hb, 289pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, £20.00, ISBN 9780199578719

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £18.00

On 17 March 1934, Albert Shinsky, a Lithuanian immigrant to Pennsylvania, shot dead a widow named Susan Mumme, believing her to be a witch who had sent a black cat to torment him. 'I was hexed', he explained in jail, 'There was nothing else for me to do. I had to kill her'.

Shinsky was judged to be insane and yet, as Owen Davies argues in this remarkable book, his passions and convictions were not so unusual. Sorcery, cursing and the experience of bewitchment sit uncomfortably with standard narratives of post-colonial American evolution: independence, ethnic struggles, slavery, civil war, the push westwards, industrial and agricultural growth, superpower status. Above all, old world magic appears inconsistent with a nation built on liberty and reason, freedom of religion and secular government. But, as Davies shows, witchcraft was not only a widespread curiosity: it was both by-product and constituent of US identity and culture.

One reason why the presence of witches seems so anomalous is that America, unlike most countries where witch-hunting

faded away, suffered a radical historical intervention: the Salem trials of 1692, when 20 New Englanders died and over 150 were accused. The backlash against this travesty of justice was swift, severe and sustained. Salem became 'a milepost to measure the distance America had progressed from a benighted colonial past' and a stick to beat Massachusetts, wielded by neighbours such as Connecticut (which had few trials), and in the Civil War era by southern colonies like Virginia (which also had few trials). Accusations of savagery relating to slavery were countered with accusations of persecution and judicial murder.

Davies demonstrates that outraged rhetoric and legal change did not necessarily affect, indeed might have concealed, what ordinary people actually did and thought. Into the 20th century, cats' blood was used to cure croup, epilepsy and skin conditions. There were cunning folk. European beliefs fused with indigenous and African ones, for example to associate peanuts with bad luck. Counter-magic mixed the familiar (to students of European witchcraft) with some more authentically American practices. So we find the water ordeal, weighing witches against bibles, and witch-bottles, but also silver bullets fired at images of suspected witches. In the 1870s a German family in Michigan, believing its livestock to be bewitched, invested in 'a witch-killer': a bull's head on a pole, decorated with horseshoes and wheat.

The export of folk religion might have been expected, but it didn't stop there. Davies has made the extraordinary discovery

"Beliefs were rooted in the evangelical and the advent of revival, mesmerism and spiritualism"

that more 'witches' died after the Salem panic than during it: at least 27, and more in Indian communities. These murders focused on witch-stereotypes such as Annie Boggs of Booger Hole, West Virginia, 'elderly, widowed, independent, sharp tongued, and living on the margins', shot dead in 1900. But, as in early modern Europe, they also involved men such as the Saxon smallholder killed in 1892 for allegedly using lethal maleficium to avoid repaying a debt. Like many older witch-trials, these cases displayed competition for authority and resources, irreconcilable conflict, and powerful beliefs fuelled by visceral emotion.

Davies tells a highly original story, yet one that makes instant sense. As America filled with migrants, so the environment became more conducive to witchcraft accusations regardless of Salem's lessons, of which most immigrants were, after all, unaware. This was true in urban as well as rural settings – anywhere people were 'thrown together in a chaotic multicultural whirlwind' and witchcraft linked rage and misfortune. What some anthropologists see as the modernity of witchcraft may seem paradoxical, but it is in the strains of social transition that so often we find its causes. Furthermore, beliefs were rooted

not just in tradition but 18th- and 19th-century innovation: the evangelical revival of the Great Awakening, the advent of mesmerism and spiritualism. Through proponents and opponents, all three movements heightened consciousness of the demonic in American spiritual life.

Unsurprisingly, European immigrants identified diabolic influences in Indians and African slaves more often than they did in themselves, even though the vitality of American witch-beliefs came from Europe's vexed soul. Native peoples condemned this hypocrisy, and accused colonists of bringing the Devil with them. Witchcraft was indeed imported in law as well as religion, and many statute books remained confused into the 19th century. Even when legislators stated clearly that witchcraft was no longer a crime, ambiguity crept into people's minds because of laws to prevent the pretence to conjuration. These drew explicitly on England's Witchcraft Act of 1736, a version of which Thomas Jefferson proposed for Virginia. Many would-be accusers, therefore, were surprised to learn that witchcraft was not a crime, leading some to resort to violence.

America Bewitched ends with the observation, commonplace for Europe but somehow startling here, that witchcraft accusations declined in America 'because they became less relevant as personal well-being became more secure thanks to the state'. This Davies pairs nicely with the thought that meanwhile 'Americans' sense of insecurity regarding a global threat grew to epic proportions'.

Continued on page 56

Going, going, (or)gone

The existence of the biological energy is an article of faith to Reich disciples, but its existence is not proved by this book



Artificers of Fraud The Origin of Life and Scientific Deception

Peter Jones

Orgonomy UK 2013

Pb, 160pp, figs, gloss, ind., £15.00, ISBN 9780957485006

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £15.00

Vast audiences used to listen to Wilhelm Reich's views on psychology. In 1968, a rallying cry of the Paris revolutionaries was "Read Reich and act accordingly". Forty years on, his public profile, such as it is, tends to be related to his discovery of the biological energy he called orgone and expressed through self-published volumes such as this which, despite being written by a disciple, manages to get his birth year wrong on the cover.

One of the tenets of orgone theory is that under the right circumstances, you can see vesicles of orgone, *bions*, in and around living tissue, which are the originators and sustainers of life, something which science refuses to acknowledge. Peter Jones claims that Robert Brown discovered bions in 1828 when he observed particles around burst pollen grains in water; he wrote a paper describing them and their motion. Later interpretations of this paper, including Brown's, were that the pollen particles were being buffeted by the molecules in the water. 'Brownian Motion' is now a mainstay of GCSE science courses.

Jones reckons that Brown's original view (that he'd discovered the origin of life) was suppressed, just as Reich's discovery of bions is. He sets out to demonstrate that bion and

the particles Brown observed are the same: they are orgone energy vesicles, not just a manifestation of Brownian Motion, the phenomenon he feels contemporary science uses to dismiss both.

Jones sets out in painstaking detail a series of experiments that he believes clearly show the phenomenon is not Brownian Motion. And he's right: what Reichians insist are bions are white blood cells in the observer's eyes. An evolutionary peculiarity means the blood vessels of mammalian eyes run in front of the light sensitive cells responsible for our sight.

We generally cannot see them, but in the right conditions, the larger white blood cells passing through the capillaries can be seen as small vesicles moving in a juddery fashion. You can try this by staring with slightly unfocussed eyes at a brightly lit white wall or a clear blue sky. This is known as the blue field entoptic phenomenon or Scheerer's phenomenon.

All the circumstances in which Reichians assert you can see bions are also those in which Scheerer's Phenomenon occurs. The experiments which Jones describes involve illuminated microscope slides, and looking down a microscope at a brightly lit slide is one of the best ways to make your white cells visible in this way.

What is on the slide is immaterial, so it is no surprise that he can see bions with inanimate minerals and living matter under the scope. He'd also see them with no slide at all under the scope.

If you have any doubt that what you are seeing are white blood cells, take your pulse while watching the vesicles; you will find that their jerky movements coincide with your heartbeat pushing them through the capillaries. You can also use

an instrument called a blue field entoptoscope, which is designed to create Scheerer's Phenomenon. You can not only see the same vesicles as in the bion experiments, but also the blood vessels through which they pass.

The identity of bions aside, there is a further problem with Jones's argument in this book.

His proposed experiments enable you to see the things he interprets as bions, but he then simply asserts that they are the orgone-carrying vesicles of Reich's theory. No experiment is suggested that demonstrates that these vesicles have the properties assigned them. Given that they are visible under a microscope and we can devise experiments that probe the properties of the sub-atomic Higgs boson, this should not be beyond the bounds of possibility.

Given Brownian Motion is a straw man, Jones and his fellow Reichians need to carp less about conspiracy theories and instead come up with experiments that will convincingly differentiate their bions from white blood cells. They might get taken seriously if they demonstrated that bions have the properties they claim for them rather than just attempting proof by assertion.

However, I doubt they will take this path. When I last mentioned this, they devoted their energies to *ad hominem* attacks on me for spreading 'anti-Reichian propaganda', making it clear that they no longer view orgone as the scientific hypothesis that Reich intended, but as an article of faith in an increasingly crankish cult.

As it stands, though, this book is simply pseudoscience at its most crude and inept. Reich's considerable legacy is ill-served by books like this.

Ian Simmons

Fortean Times Verdict

ABANDONED THEORY + ORGONE THEORY = BAD SCIENCE

3

Continued from page 55

Famously in the 1950s, American witchcraft's past and present were cemented together by Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible*, which used the Salem trials to allegorise the McCarthyite febrile hunt for communists.

This is a vivid, arresting, insightful book, written with sympathy and human understanding. It extends Davies's reputation as an original thinker in the field, when so much work is derivative or merely illustrative of well-established ideas. He extracts astonishing stories from a vast range of research material, especially newspapers, which by reporting the abuse of suspected witches exposed a disturbing substratum of American life. The photographed faces of those who suffered bring an immediacy to witch-hunting that no 17th-century woodcut can do, reminding us how terrifyingly real these beliefs once were and how devastating the compulsion to act upon them.

Malcolm Gaskill

Fortean Times Verdict

ORIGINAL, FASCINATING AND ACADEMICALLY RIGOROUS

10

Madame Blavatsky

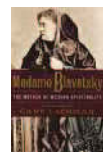
The Mother of Modern Spirituality

Gary Lachman

Tarcher/Penguin 2012

Pb, 352pp, notes, index. £14.99/\$16.95. ISBN 9781585428632

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £14.99



Although largely neglected today outside of the Theosophical movement that she founded, Helena

Petrovna Blavatsky was a powerful figure on the late-19th century occult and spiritual scene, and Gary Lachman's claim that she's the mother of modern spirituality probably isn't far wide of the mark. Her major works, *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*, the first a presentation of the Hermetic 'perennial philosophy', the second largely responsible for introducing Eastern thought into Western occultism, were the products of colossal industry and, particularly with regard to New Age thinking, enormously

influential.

There is a great deal of fortean interest in Blavatsky's life, including the production of mediumistic phenomena, apparent teleportation of objects, mysterious and seemingly impossible communications and, of course, contact with 'the Masters'. On the other hand, there are also accusations of fraud (although the debunking Hodgson report has itself been debunked, as Lachman demonstrated in these pages [FT302:32-37]), which have left her reputation rather ambivalent, to put it mildly. And, indeed, Blavatsky is, to some extent, a biographer's nightmare, particularly prior to the founding of the Theosophical Society in 1875, as she seems to have indulged in deliberate, large-scale obfuscation of her past prior to that date. Where exactly did she go on her travels, and did she actually spend some years in Tibet? Who were the Masters with whom she was in contact, and where were they to be found?

Lachman's excellently readable biography examines all these points in a remarkably even-handed (and, thus, commendably fortean) manner. Both the primary evidence and later scholarship is brought forward and discussed with, for example, the arguments for and against fraud presented in a balanced way that leaves readers free to decide for themselves, and there are copious sources for those who wish to explore further.

Ultimately, several unanswered questions remain about Blavatsky, and probably always will. But think of her what you will, her importance is plainly enormous and, as with so many of his other books of occult and spiritual history, Lachman's biography is a perfect introduction. For the general reader, though, it would probably have benefited from a few photographs of the main protagonists.

Steve Moore

Fortean Times Verdict

EVEN-HANDED INTRODUCTION TO AN INTRIGUING CHARACTER

9

The Dawn Man joke

The country solicitor behind one of archæology's greatest hoaxes had a track record in fooling the professionals



The Piltdown Man Hoax

Case Closed

Miles Russell

The History Press 2013

Pb, 157pp, illus, bib, ind, £14.99, ISBN 9780752487748

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £13.49

Few hoaxes in history have warped science as dramatically as the 'Dawn Man' of Piltdown; far too often, scientists find exactly what they are looking for. Through professional jealousy, politics, amnesia and wilful blindness, the Piltdown imposture lasted over 40 years. The discovery of human skull fragments, an ape-like jaw and worked flints in a gravel pit at Piltdown in Sussex, announced by Charles Dawson in 1912, was hailed as the most sensational find in archæological history – no less than the 'missing link' to prove Darwin's theory of evolution. Following exposure of the hoax in 1953, the obvious suspect was Dawson, a solicitor from Uckfield in Sussex, but it was thought that "a mere country solicitor" was incapable of duping all the experts (at least without assistance). Many culprits were suggested, including Tilhard de Chardin, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and even that irritating practical joker, Horace de Vere Cole.

Miles Russell shows pretty conclusively that Dawn Man was down to Dawson, whom he calls "the most successful archæological and antiquarian forger the world has ever known", one who had no need for any collaborators. Dawson (1864-1916) was a keen fossil hunter as a boy and was elected a Fellow of the Geological Society in 1885, aged only 21. His impressive find record earned him the epithet

'the Wizard of Sussex'. Aged 25 he co-founded the Hastings and St Leonards Museum Association, and a year later was conducting excavations around Hastings. His career of deception might have begun in 1891 when he filed down a fossil tooth and persuaded Arthur Smith Woodward, Keeper of Geology at the British Museum and the country's leading palæontologist, that it belonged to a hitherto unrecognised species transitional between dinosaur and mammal. Woodward named it *Plagiaulax dawsoni* in honour of Dawson, whose thirst for fame and recognition grew by the year. In 1895 he became a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, after which he set his sights on the Royal Society and a knighthood.

Missing links or transitional forms were a recurrent theme in Dawson's career: there was a transitional boat (half coracle, half canoe) and a horseshoe showing an intermediate stage between the Roman hippo-sandal and the more modern nailed variety; to crown them all, of course, there was Dawn Man, transitional between ape and man. Russell has established that at least 33 of Dawson's 'finds' are definite fakes, including the 'shadow' figures of Hastings Castle, a cast iron Roman statuette and a Chinese vase – and also (probably) the toad encased in a flint nodule now in Brighton's Booth Museum. After 1895, Dawson's interests continued to diversify into increasingly fortean territory: unusual forms of fish, genetic abnormalities in cart horses, even a 1906 sighting of the English Channel Sea Serpent.

While a modern forger of comparable versatility such as Shaun Greenhalgh (see FT245:22-24) took great pains to provide convincing documentation of provenance, Dawson was remarkably sloppy in this regard. His *modus operandi* included an unwitting academic dupe to provide credibility, a vague provenance and a significant time lapse between (supposed) initial discovery and final reporting of artefacts, to hinder any possible fact-checking – though no one seemed to bother with this in his case.

Following the discoveries of bones from 'proto men' in Java (1891) and Heidelberg (1907), English scientists were keen to trump these foreign missing links with something from the home of evolutionary theory, and Dawson was there to oblige. His academic dupe was once again Arthur Smith Woodward; as Woodward continued to search the Piltdown gravels long after Dawson's death, it's clear he was not party to the fraud and failed to realise that every bone and flint had been planted.

What of the 'cricket bat' fashioned from a fossil elephant bone showing *Eoanthropus dawsoni* to be the first Englishman? Russell suggests this obvious joke was planted by an enemy of Dawson to discredit him, but popular enthusiasm ruled out all scepticism.

Paul Sieveking

Fortean Times Verdict

DETAILED AND GRIPPING EXPOSÉ OF A MASTER FORGER

8

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Dragon hunts

Small is very beautiful in the case of this short guide to homegrown monsters



Legendary Beasts of Britain

Julia Creswell

Shire Publications 2013

Pb, 48pp, illus, refs, ind, refs, £6.99, ISBN 9780747812043

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £6.99

What stands out immediately from *Legendary Beasts of Britain* is the astonishing beauty of its illustrations – excellent colour reproductions of manuscript mediæval bestiary illustrations (the yales, dragons, basilisks and “worms” – with and without legs – from the British Library’s Harley manuscripts in particular), and photos of mythical beasts on coats of arms and on church misericords. *Legendary Beasts* is worth the very modest cover price – less than many of today’s glossy magazines – for its images alone.

Nor are the illustrations and subject matter exclusively of mediæval vintage or mythical in nature. There’s a spread of contemporary photos of Alien Big Cats, including the stuffed puma shot in 1980s Invernesshire, and a Morris-dancing Beast of Bodmin putting in an appearance at Bodmin Riding Day just two years ago. The heraldic griffins, mermaids and dragons

are neatly brought up to date with examples of logos – the Starbucks mermaid and Midland Bank and Vauxhall Cars’ griffin. Cryptozoological

pedants will be soothed by *Legendary Beasts’* quick clearing up of dragon–wyvern confusion, dragon–griffon and St Michael–St George confusion, with a sympathetic explanation of why heraldic dragons are so hard to confuse with griffins in the first place.

And the text’s strong as well, with a surprising amount covered in a mere 45 pages of narrative. Oxford mediævalist and linguist Julia Creswell points out some of the peculiarly British traits of our dragons – they’re less interested in guarding gold than their Continental cousins. UK dragons are also keener on stealing milk than devouring damsels, as well as statistically less likely to meet their end through the deeds of noble knights, and more likely to be dispatched by guile at the hands of cunning commoners.

There’s also a mention of what was probably Britain’s last dragon hunt, in the North Wales county of Denbighshire as late as 1812. What put the locals into such a sudden panic appears to have been the misidentification of an impossibly exotic-looking new arrival into the valleys – the pheasant!

Another national characteristic is the “British love for creating comic rather than frightening monsters”. It seems we British deal with our really terrifying monsters by turning them into children’s cartoon characters or soft toy versions of themselves. ‘Nessie’, it turns out, is an old Scottish pet name for Agnes.

It’s a fine introduction to the beasts of British folklore – as well as some very modern British cryptozoological phenomena – making it the perfect small gift both for seasoned forteans and not-yet-enthusiasts alike.

Matt Salusbury

Fortean Times Verdict

A SMALL THING OF GREAT BEAUTY – AND CHEAP AS CHIPS TOO 8

Chronicle of the World

1493

Hartmann Schedel, ed: Stephen Fussel

Taschen Books 2013

680pp + 88pp, illus, £34.99, ISBN 9783836544498

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £31.49



Printed in Latin and – as for this edition – Middle German, the *Nuremberg Chronicle*, to give its popular name, was a fortean-inclined Wikipedia of its day, outlining the history of the world from biblical times to the 15th century, a project made considerably more accessible to the semi-literate by hundreds of woodcuts.

It was assembled by doctor and book collector Hartmann Schedel from various works, and while overwhelmingly concerned with biblical events, town histories, lineages of nobility and clergy, the author also saw fit to record the anomalous and the marvellous. These make what is a groundbreaking work in the history of printed books also a touchstone for forteana, many examples of which are illustrated and splendidly hand-coloured after printing.

These images are very helpful marker points when searching for ‘monstrous’ births, strange creatures, ominous things in the skies, and other fortean goodies – especially if, like me, you don’t have the Middle German. This drawback can be overcome with an online translation courtesy of the Morse Library of Beloit College (www.beloit.edu), making for an indispensable, though not fully complete, unofficial companion.

Drawing on descriptions by classic authors (Pliny, Herodotus, Pomponius Mela, Augustine, Isidor of Seville, etcetera), the diversity of the world’s peoples are visually represented by monsters and mythical creatures that combine the myths of the Arab and Greek worlds with the fabulous beasts of the West – cynocephalic people, and the ‘anthropophagi’ quoted in Shakespeare’s *Othello*, their illustrations familiar from many subsequent works.

Strange celestial events and natural disasters are often noted, viewed as omens. We find that in the time of Emperor Louis (Lodovici), blood rained from the heavens for three days and nights at Brescia. In 973 a stone fell during a great storm, and “bloody signs of the cross appeared on the clothing of many people”. In 1040 a large floating timber beam was seen flying towards the west and falling to earth. A number of people in the west were so consumed by ‘holy fire’ that their limbs became as black as coals in 1128, and on the Ides of June in the same year it rained blood in various parts of Italy, and fiery rays appeared in the heavens and ‘stars’ fell to earth, making loud noise when water was poured on them. Meanwhile in Italy, an earthquake lasted for 40 days, and a woman bore a double-bodied monster, its two faces human and dog. The *Chronicle’s* woodcut of St Veronica holding the sudarium with the miraculous imprint of Christ is an early example of this new iconographic tradition.

The inclusions of fortean anomalies within a grand sweep of history, perhaps partly explicable by Schedel’s profession as a physician, reveals much about the mediæval mindset, their framing as omens setting the stage for the witchcraft hysteria poised to descend on Europe.

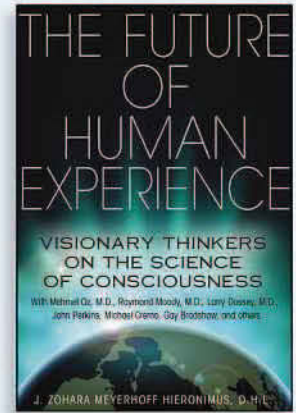
Little or nothing hasn’t already been mined for subsequent works, yet given the often frequent slack attitude towards accurate referencing, serious researchers should find this reprint indispensable. Beautifully facsimiled and slipcased, it comes with an 88-page illustrated guidebook in English giving background to its production, and discussion of the possible artistic involvement by Albrecht Dürer.

Jerry Glover

Fortean Times Verdict

EARLY FORTEAN SOURCEBOOK, SUMPTUOUSLY ILLUSTRATED 8





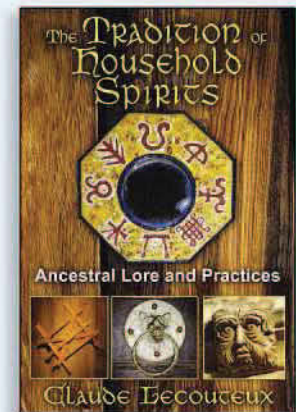
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We leaf through a selection of recent fortean books...

Before Galileo

John Freely

Duckworth Overlook 2012

Pb, 348pp, ind, illus, bib, £12.99, ISBN 9780715645369

Some histories of science declare that the Scientific Revolution did not begin until Galileo's notion that Earth revolved around the Sun came into conflict with the Catholic Church's doctrine of geocentricity, which had survived largely unchanged since Aristotle and Ptolemy. More modern historians assert that this historic moment was itself founded upon a transmission of scientific discovery and thought that goes back at least a millennium before the Renaissance. Freely – who teaches physics at Bosphorus University, Istanbul – surveys this succession from the ancient Hellenic world to the late Middle Ages, including the contributions of the Islamic scientists of the Abbasid era. He has a passion for the history of ideas and the drama of pioneering natural philosophers, who were often deeply religious, challenged by their own discoveries and conclusions. This deserves to be read by every young scientist and historian.

Why the World Around You Isn't As It Appears

Albert Linderman

Lindisfarne Books 2012

Pb, 169pp, bib, index, \$20.00, ISBN 9781584201213

Space permits only this modest marker for what may turn out to be a valuable book. Linderman attempts a manifesto for a 'New Enlightenment'. Where the earlier Enlightenment championed reason and observation against supernaturalism and gave rise to scientific materialism, the time has come, he argues, to develop reason and imagination as a counter to materialism, without reviving any reliance upon supernaturalism. He expounds the ideas of the philosopher Owen Barfield, who was one of the Tolkien's 'Inklings' group at Oxford, along with CS Lewis. For the next evolutionary step in human consciousness, Linderman argues that we need to develop four kinds of thinkers who will interact with each other productively: scientific innovators (like Bacon, Newton, Darwin, Einstein and Bohm, who never eschewed the role of intuition in their work); scientific clerks (like Edison, who refine ideas and straddle disciplines); poetic creators (artists who innovate new forms of social expression, including philosophy and politics); and poetic clerks (who develop and disseminate the

new artistic forms. Underpinning the thesis is the development of imagination as a creative tool that feeds into reason.

Haunted Lambeth

James Clark

History Press 2013

Pb, 95pp, illus, bib, £9.95, ISBN 9780752485775

An affable companion for your walking tour of this Thames-side south London borough (opposite Westminster). The book covers Brixton, Clapham, Lambeth, Norwood, Stockwell and Streatham, their haunted houses, phantoms, poltergeists, infamous murders, tombs and so on. It is part of the History Press's local history series.

Ghosts and Shamanic Tales of True Hauntings

Bety Comerford

Schiffer Publishing 2012

Pb, 160pp, illus, \$16.99, ISBN 9780764341281

Comerford is a "certified shaman and energy healer" from New England, and leader of a team "dedicated to helping spirits cross to the Other Side". To some of you that might say all you want to know to reject it as arrant nonsense. This is her casebook and she comes across as sincere and industrious and that might have some merit. However, all 12 cases of haunted places and haunted people are told as 'live action' narratives, which makes them useless as evidence of anything and convincing only to those who already believe.

Shadows on the Sea

Neil Arnold

History Press 2013

Pb, 190pp, illus, bib, £12.99, ISBN 9780752487724

Neil Arnold – who, endearingly confesses to an irrational fear of the sea – presents a fortean tour of strange events and curious phenomena from around the British coastline. Besides the expected categories of phantom ships, sea monsters and watery ghosts of this "mysterious place close to home", he packs this catalogue of his horrors (some illustrated by him too) with mystery animals, mythological creatures, local legends, historical mysteries, Black Dogs, fairies and curious people, much of which will be new (or, at least, unfamiliar) to our readers. A good addition to the fortean bookshelf; it would have been even better with more detailed references and an index.

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Ikarie XB1

Dir Jindřich Polák, Czechoslovakia 1963
Second Run, 12.99 (DVD)

Pre-dating *Star Trek* by three years and *2001: A Space Odyssey* by five, *Ikarie XB1* is a 1960s period piece; this reissue celebrates the 50th anniversary of this Czech classic based on Stanislaw Lem's novel *The Magellanic Cloud*. Set in 2163, it follows the journey of a spaceship named after Icarus, to Alpha Centauri to find the White Planet. At near light speed it's a 28-month round trip, though 15 years will pass back home. "What do you think today's date on Earth is?" asks a character. "In the morning it was the 18th, after lunch it was Christmas."

There's little plot, just episodes of day-to-day activity through the journey: eating meals, playing chess, learning the piano, dancing in the equivalent of dress suits and ball gowns, exercising in the gym (men in skimpy shorts, women in bikinis), discovering that one crew member is pregnant, encountering a derelict spacecraft... With little to do, the crew seem bored; the film is more interested in their psychology and sociology than in the mechanics of space travel. It follows their unease and the tensions that spring up between them; one man explodes at another for his annoying speech mannerisms.

The external SFX – spaceships crossing a starry background – are rudimentary by today's standards,

but not as laughable as they could easily have been. But it's the inside of the *Ikarie* that's the real star: often quite stunning, beautifully designed, futuristic in a typically early-Sixties way. It's closer to the style of the more science-fictional episodes of *The Avengers* than of *Doctor Who*; everything is clean and clean-cut. The ship is spacious, so that even a crew of 40 rattle around inside it.

SF details: there's a talking computer; the spacesuits are well-designed, functional and believable; cigarettes have been replaced by something that looks the same waved under the nose – possibly scent memories of Earth. Oddly, there's a puppy wandering around the flight deck. There are a few touches of comic relief including a not-very-bright robot called Patrick (though it proves its worth later) and an awfully stilted mid-22nd century dance scene.

Ikarie XB1 was filmed in Cinemascope in black-and-white (not originally in colour as some film books say). It had a 1963/64 English-language release in the United States, butchered by American International Pictures under the title *Voyage to the End of the Universe*, with 10 minutes of scenes and entire sub-plots chopped out, the search for the White Planet changed in the sub-titles to the Green Planet, and the ending completely rewritten (with spliced-in footage of New York) so that the *Ikarie* approaches Earth rather

than an alien planet at the end, completely changing the meaning of the story. They even anglicised the names of the cast and crew in the opening credits. This new release is faithful to the original 83-minute version, with "new and improved" English sub-titles.

There are no extras at all, but apparently a "booklet featuring a new essay on the film by Michael Brooke" which I haven't seen and can't comment on. With a newly restored film of this significance, you'd expect some sort of documentary about its place in SF film history, even just 10 minutes of a talking head, or some clips of the mangled American version – but there's nothing. So full marks for a well deserved re-release by Second Run, who specialise in bringing out neglected international classics, but minus a couple of points for a disappointing lack of context.
David V Barrett

Fortean Times Verdict

FASCINATING SNAPSHOT OF SIXTIES SCIENCE FICTION

7

The Untold History of The United States

Dir Oliver Stone, USA 2012
Freemantle Media £19.99 (DVD)

While Oliver Stone's love of a good conspiracy theory has never been in doubt, allowing his paranoid worldview free reign over 10 full-length TV shows might not have

been the smartest of moves.

Did you know Ford Motors was founded by a published anti-Semite whom Hitler revered so much that his portrait hung in the Führer's Berlin office?

Yes, I knew Ford was a Nazi and that many large companies; including ITT, Kodak and Singer continued to trade with Germany throughout World War II. Throw in the Cold War, Kennedy and Vietnam, and so it goes. This may be the untold history in the United States, but the average *FT* reader probably knows most of this material, right up to American oil interests in the Gulf Wars. Yes, it's all terrifying stuff, but not exactly groundbreaking. I was, I suppose, expecting something going right back to the Union's founding days and full of spooky Masonic conspiracies, not just the last century's more scandalous (mainly) economic cover-ups.

Further points are lost for over-ominous music from the usually reliable Craig Armstrong and allowing Stone to drone his own narration, which somehow serves to highlight the limitations and vanity-project feel of this whole endeavour. And even if the US is run by total bastards and we're all going to hell, at least throw in some decent tunes, Oliver; we know you've got good taste.

Tim Weinberg

Fortean Times Verdict

STONE'S UNTOLD HISTORIES WON'T SURPRISE FORTEANS

6

Hawking

Dir Stephen Finnegan, UK 2013
On UK release from 20 September

Stephen Hawking's theories about the Universe are extremely well known thanks to his 10-million-copy-selling book *A Brief History of Time*, not to mention his appearance in an award-winning episode of *The Simpsons*. Less well recorded is the story of his personal life. This new documentary, directed by Stephen Finnegan and written by the man himself (with the help of the director and Ben Bowie), is simply called *Hawking*, and looks into that life.

The story is "a personal journey" and is told with the aid of interviews, reconstructions, film and photographs. The interviewees, aside from Hawking himself,

include his current personal assistant, a selection of past carers, his first wife Jane, and even Benedict Cumberbatch (he played Hawking in a 2005 dramatisation of his life at Cambridge, if you're wondering). Their insights (especially Jane Hawking's, less so Cumberbatch's) give us a glimpse into the complications the scientist's illness causes, as well as the humour and attitude of mind that has no doubt contributed to his enjoying a far longer spell on this planet than anyone expected.

As a young man at Cambridge, Hawking, like many of his peers at the time, avoided work wherever possible in order to avoid becoming a "grey man". It transpires that the reason he immersed himself in his PhD work despite his illness was to earn a reputation that would provide him with enough money to get married – Jane gave him a reason to live and work.

At the age of 71, he still attends classes with current PhD students, appears at champagne receptions and conferences, meets world leaders and poses for photographs with Jim Carrey (Hawking appears to run over the actor's foot with this wheelchair in one of them). He seems to very much enjoy these public appearances; celebrity obviously agrees with him.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the darkest period of his life – his second marriage to then carer, Elaine Mason – is glossed over in a sentence or two. Suspicions that he suffered abuse at her hands were never proven because he didn't make a complaint, and he simply states that the police enquiry and media interest at the time caused him great distress.

One of the most joyful moments in the film is the video of Hawking floating in zero gravity – a man freed from the constraints his body has placed on him, eyes shining with pleasure. Hawking's obvious lust for life and his understanding of space surely mean he should be one of the first civilians to go there. I certainly hope he achieves his lifelong dream soon, in one of Richard Branson's space-ships.

Julie McNamee

Fortean Times Verdict

CINEMATIC CELEBRATION OF CELEBRITY SCIENTIST'S LIFE

7

THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth **REVEREND PETER LAWS** dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! (www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com)

DERANGED

Dir Jef Gillen, Alan Ormsby, US 1974
Arrow Video, £15.99 (Blu-ray)

MOTEL HELL

Dir Kevin Connor, US 1980
Arrow Video, £15.99 (Blu-ray)

Farmers are all demented cannibals. That's a fact. Or at least it is on Planet Horror, which sometimes can't help but air its prejudices in the films it makes. Think about it. Horror writers, producers, directors and fans are often middle class, urban and liberal. No surprise then, that in 1970s America the cinema gave rise to the equation: rural = folksy, backward, inbred and most of all... scary. *Deranged* and *Motel Hell* are two great examples of so-called "backwoods horror" and are out on crisp Blu-ray this month. Both feature insane farmers, killing people and finding other uses for the corpses (this is recycling taken to the extreme). And both crouch in the long shadow of real-life serial killer (and inspiration for Hitchcock's *Psycho*) Ed Gein.

Deranged (1974) has the most explicit Gein focus in its grim, often disturbing, re-creation of a man knocked for a psychological six after the death of his mother – a shock that

leads to an obsession with dead flesh. Told in a documentary style, the film has some hokey voice-over work and a presenter wandering into shot, hands pushed into the pockets of his duffel coat, telling the sordid tale of a rural killer. But it's Roberts Blossom's unnerving performance as killer Ezra Cobb that really injects a sense of creepy reality. That and the Tom Savini corpses (brain scooping now fully intact in this new release). There's a surprising sense of fun and black humour at work here too. Yet, near 40 years after its release, *Deranged* still has the power to unsettle. Ezra gladly admits to friends and neighbours that he's killed a woman and is keeping her body at his house. They laugh and slap him on the back: "Oh Ez, you say the funniest things!" The fact that the real Ed Gein did the same thing left me with a lingering chill long after the credits rolled. I'm not one for glorifying serial killers (a point discussed in one of the extras), but such incidents deserve to be explored, even in fictional form – not so as to flirt with the killers, but as a step toward understanding the true horror of their crimes and the tragic shifts in psychology that created them.



While *Motel Hell* (1980) has similar themes, it's far schlockier, with a beady pig's eye on comedy. Farmer Vincent makes the best cured meat in the state; he just doesn't tell anyone the main ingredient. So far, so Sweeney Todd, but the film has a bizarre surrealism that sets it apart – not least in asking why, in a world of hunger, is it so wrong to eat human flesh? Are we missing a trick? Farmer Vincent seems to think so; he treats his animals with respect and thinks he's doing the world a favour. Lance Rubin's wonderfully melancholic score adds a touch of class, but it's when Farmer Vincent dons a pig's head and swings his chainsaw that the film slips into horror legend.

Fortean Times Verdict

TWO CLASSIC EXAMPLES OF BACKWOODS HORROR

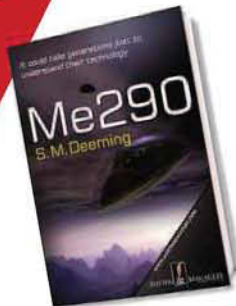
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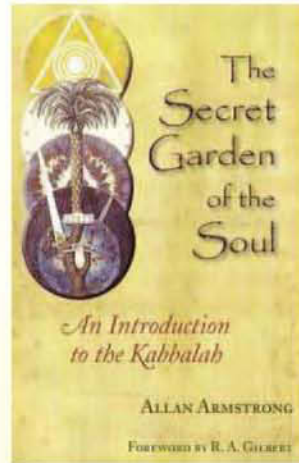
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Nexus Magazine review, Aug/Sept 2007

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David Icke

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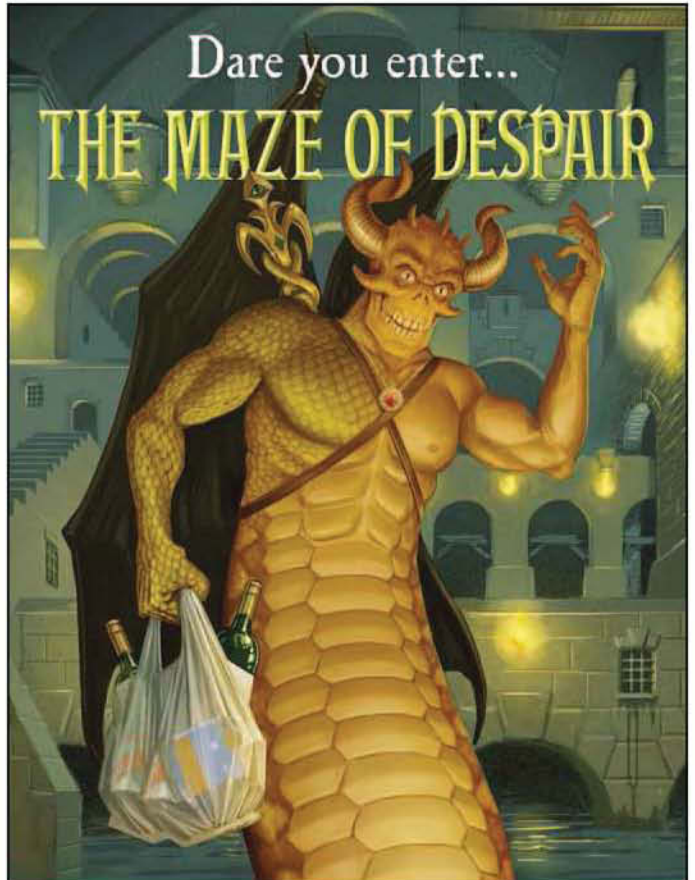
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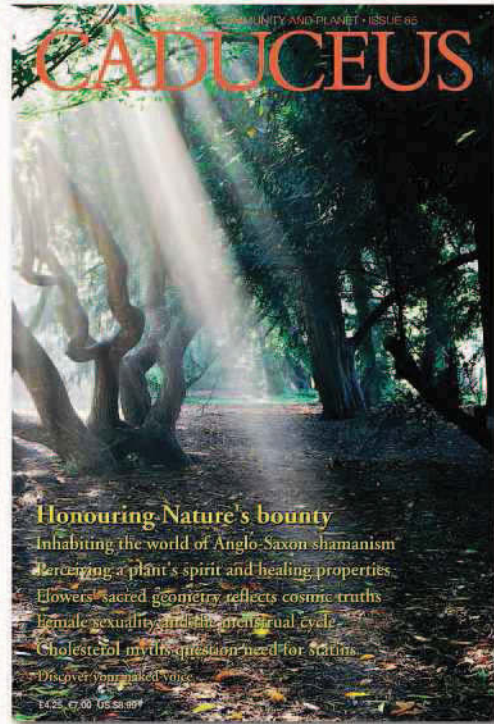
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Dear FT...

letters



Dave Clarke jive

How feeble to waste two valuable pages on the worthless 'British UFO Files' [FT304:28-29]. Dr Clarke must be aware that Britain along with the USA is the most secretive country in the world regarding our subject. We will never learn anything from this hotch-potch of poorly reported, carefully selected low-grade sightings. Also, it is perfectly obvious that many reports were merely Chinese lanterns, but why concentrate on them? These easy put-downs will not solve the real UFO situation(s). Try tackling the main events. Actually a good idea for a long running series? In no particular order: AVB-Brazil, Socorro, (researcher/debunker Mark Pilkington has had a crack at both these cases), Valensole, Jim Sparks, Travis Walton. The Andreasson Affair, Allagash, numerous American female abductees – among them Leah Haley, Katharina Wilson and Kim Carlsburg, the French wave of 1954, the St Brides Bay, Wales, events of circa 1976-78, the works of Bud Hopkins and John Mack – and the under reported Jorge Martin of Puerto Rico. Dr Clarke really does take the easy lazy route. It is a mystery why he bothers with the subject at all. MI6 anybody?

Mike Prentis
Nottingham

David Clarke replies: Mike Prentis clearly prefers his Boy's Own ufology to the reality on the ground, but he should expand his reading further than the collected works of Tim Good. Most of the 'main events' he lists have been expertly dissected in FT over the last 40 years and one of them – the sequence of events in Wales circa 1976-78 – by me [FT200:24-25]. FT's own Jenny Randles says the MoD cases cross-reference those she saw during her decades as Director of Investigations for BUFORA and "reveals there is nothing 'odd' about the MoD files; they reflect what you find elsewhere – something that would be unlikely if 'selectivity'

Simulacra corner



Matt Salusbury became aware of this sinister black long-haired cat watching him from the top of a driftwood log on Dingle Beach, Dunwich, Suffolk, on a recent visit. Then he took a few steps and it was revealed to be a charred driftwood log that had beached up against another one.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them to the PO box above (with a stamped addressed envelope or international reply coupon) or to sieveking@forteantimes.com – and please tell us your postal address.

of release of the best cases was occurring... We must be led by the evidence we do have and not the evidence we might suppose someone has gathered but chosen to hide" (<http://drdavid-clarke.co.uk/2013/07/05/finding-needles-in-the-mod-haystack-guest-blog/>). MI6 must have a lot of staff moonlighting for Fortean Times!

I enjoyed reading what I assume is the last instalment of *Britain's X files* by Dr David Clarke. However, those of us who suspect that some files may have been held back were inevitably dismissed as conspiracy theorists. Having been a middle-ranking civil servant myself (although not with the MoD), I

am all too aware just how secretive our government organisations can be, even when it comes to quite trivial matters. I am also reluctant to accept that files, particularly significant ones, can just go missing or be inadvertently destroyed. In my experience, such files may end up in unlikely places, but they rarely disappear irretrievably.

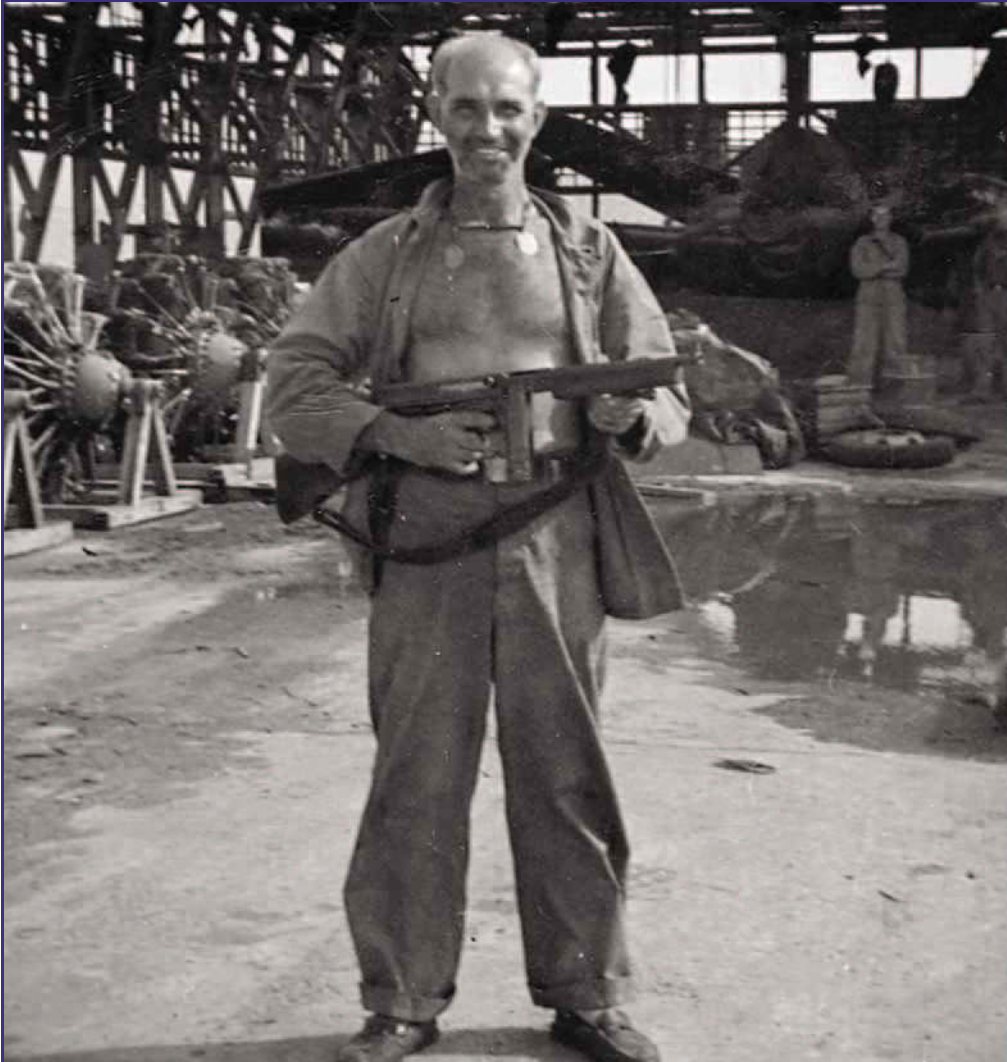
In fact, in Dr Clarke's book *Out of the Shadows* (co-authored with Andy Roberts), this very question is addressed (in Chapter 8). He mentions the late Ralph Noyes, a very senior civil servant with the MoD, who reports having seen the infamous gun camera footage (which Dr Clarke did refer to in a recent radio interview). In fact, it would be interesting to hear

Dr Clarke's latest thoughts on Mr Noyes' contribution to the UFO debate.

My view is that, although we have no option other than to accept the MoD's word that the files that have been released are all that there are, I have no doubt that if the MoD has significant or even disturbing evidence on UFOs (in the sense that they are intelligently controlled extraterrestrial vehicles), they will keep it secret for as long as possible.

This does not undermine the perfectly reasonable assertion that the Files' release programme was, in effect, a cost-cutting exercise.

Geoff Clifton
Solihull, West Midlands



Amelia Earhart

I am researching the enduring mystery of the disappearance of Amelia Earhart and Fred Noonan. Has any reader seen any photographs like this one? It appears to be a plane under a tarpaulin in a hangar at Aslito Airfield, the main Japanese airbase on the island of Saipan, shortly after it was seized by the US Army in the summer of 1944 and turned over to the Office of Naval Intelligence administered by Admirals Nimitz and King, reporting directly to Admiral Leahy, the right-hand of President Roosevelt. I found the photo in a collection from the estate of Commander Paul Belden donated to the US Naval Aviation Museum Archive. Thirty photos relate to Aslito airfield, where Belden was stationed briefly during the fighting to take the island.

The picture is worth studying as one hypothesis still in play contends that Earhart and Noonan were interred on Saipan along with the remnants of their Electra as picked up by a Japanese vessel from the splash point south of

Howland Island (e.g. McKean Island or Winslow Reef). It shows a senior guard wearing no identification standing between the Japanese hangar in the background and the curious trying to gain access. His itchy trigger finger is meant to intimidate the group of Belden's flying group bivouacked on the field from climbing over the seized Jap Zero fighters and Betty bombers. Two further shore patrol guards (visible in the background in their Sam Brown belted uniforms) are posted at the hangar's entrance in front of the mystery tarped aircraft. The Japanese Zeros parked just 50ft (15m) away were transferred to the US; one is now on display at the Smithsonian Air & Space Museum. The mystery aircraft partially hidden by the tarp did not make the trip. It has long been claimed by several authors (e.g. Devine) that this hangar contained the remnants of Amelia Earhart's Electra that was subsequently destroyed by orders from the highest levels of the US military.

David F Pawlowski
Midland, Michigan

Cosmic habituation

I enjoyed William Ashton's Forum piece, 'Cosmic Habituation' [FT299:52-53]. He describes the possibility that if the belief in a test for the paranormal diminishes so does the accuracy of the test or the degree of psychic phenomena 'produced'. He argues that actually looking for an effect may preclude it happening. So if you disbelieve it you reduce accuracy just as you do if seemingly you believe it – for to look for it implies you are hoping to see it. A case of damned if you do and damned if you don't. This reminds me of the quantum phenomenon that the act of looking for reactions itself alters them. It would be nice if the solution to this had implications for parapsychology – though I fear the two disciplines are not similar in that respect.

The predicament outlined above leads to the somewhat paradoxical situation that if we look for the non-appearance of paranormal activity then by creating the opposite effect we should in fact produce high psi outcomes. If only the sceptics had that problem! Seriously though, it seems that they do not – and this nips at the tail of Professor Ashton's arguments.

Simon van Someren
London

If the Decline Effect is indeed the product of Cosmic Habituation [FT299:52-53, 304:53], and the Universe is grumpy about the way we constantly subject it to experiment, then presumably scientific study of the Effect itself, as proposed in both your articles, will have far-reaching consequences: namely, that with successive identical studies of the Effect, it will begin operating on itself, becoming progressively weaker over time, and liberating all other scientific endeavour from its grip. This should permit puzzled psychologists, physicists, and others to go back and repeat experiments once dogged by the DE and achieve the exact same results they got in the first groundbreaking instance.

The question then will be how many studies of the Decline Effect are required in order to neutralise it across the known Universe, and whether it would be prudent to repeat these studies at regular intervals in order to ensure its permanent removal from the scientific equation.

Or is there a point in the cycle where further such studies might inadvertently re-awaken it?

Neil Fleming

Badwell Ash, Suffolk

Fortean themes

I recently borrowed a popular history book from my local library entitled *Cult Magazines A-Z*, edited by Earl Kemp & Luis Ortiz (2009: Nonstop Press, New York). Alongside the pulp horror, detective and sci-fi mags, there is an entry on *Fortean Times* by contributor Mike Ashley. Most of the entry is devoted to an overview of Charles Fort's career and philosophy, with Ashley plotting a loose lineage of fortean exegesis through the likes of pulp magazines, Tiffany Thayer's Fortean Society, and *Fate* magazine, culminating in *FT* itself.

Ashley presents some facts and assertions regarding the influence of Fort's ideas upon his contemporaries in the pulp and sci-fi fields that I had not previously encountered, and which I thought readers might find interesting (presumably biographical sources such as the writings of Mr X and Jim Steinmeyer were consulted, although no references are provided). For instance, the April 1923 issue of a pulp entitled *Science and Invention* featured a story by George Allan England entitled 'The Thing from - Outside' in which "a party of [Arctic] travellers find themselves possessed by some intangible being". Fort is referred to in the story as "the greatest authority in the world on unexplained phenomena". Ashley argues that Hugo Gernsback's reprinting of England's story in the first issue of *Amazing Stories* (April 1926) – soon to become one of the most popular and influential pulps – was instrumental in introducing fortean concepts to a wide audience of sci-fi writers and fans. For example, Edward Hamilton, a writer for the likes of *Amazing Stories* and the similarly well-known *Weird Tales*, is noted as a contemporary correspondent of Fort who 'exchanged data' with him. Hamilton subsequently worked fortean conceits into tales such as 'The Space Visitors' (*Air Wonder Stories*, March 1930) "in which vast alien scoops appear

from the upper atmosphere and grab samples of the Earth, regardless of content".

In this respect, Ashley singles out two figures from the later heyday of the pulps as notable acolytes of forteana. F Orlin Tremaine, editor of the pulp *Astounding Stories*, reprinted *Lo!* across eight issues of the magazine in 1934, and used fortean theories as the basis for creative writing exercises amongst contributors. This resulted in stories such as 'Exiles of the Stratosphere' by Frank Belknap Long (July 1935) in which "aliens living in the upper atmosphere occasionally send humanity their discards" – undoubtedly inspired by Fort's reports of rains of flesh and other organic matter. The use of fortean themes as imaginative frameworks for pulp narratives is also outlined as the modus operandi of Eric Frank Russell. Fort's famous dictum 'we are property' informed Russell's 1939 novel *Sinister Barrier* (also published in *Unknown* magazine, March 1939), which "tells of the battle against the alien overlords for humans to gain control of Earth"; while the story 'Dreadful Sanctuary' (published in *Astounding* magazine, June-August 1948) extrapolates on this idea by conceptualising Earth as "a dumping ground for mad racial rejects who are monitored by a secret society of Martians, which regards itself as the only sane life-form on Earth, but who are in reality the true psychotics who foment all of Earth's troubles". Ashley also outlines Russell as an active fortean researcher in his own right, collecting data on anomalies that he published in a 1957 book entitled *Great World Mysteries*.

Of particular interest to both forteans and pulp buffs is the claim that the eldritch master of weird tales, HP Lovecraft, was familiar with Fort's work. Ashley states that although "Lovecraft was condescending towards Fort's unscientific approach" – implying that Lovecraft had read and referred to Fort in his essays and/or correspondence (again, no references are cited) – he was otherwise 'fascinated' with Fort's data. The ostensibly fortean idea of life travelling through space (*The Book of the Damned*, for example, devotes several chapters to the

discussion of anomalous meteorites) is credited as an inspiration for Lovecraft's classic story 'The Colour Out Of Space' (1927).

While discussion of *FT* itself only constitutes a paragraph or so in the whole entry, Ashley praises founder Bob Rickard as "today's true champion of Fort" and commends the magazine for continuing "the true spirit of Fort's researches" through "reporting news of odd phenomena, questioning the unusual, and presenting strange facts to allow people to take matters further and draw their own conclusions".

Dean Ballinger

Hamilton, New Zealand

Bob Rickard comments: My own introduction to the writings of Fort was through a subscription to *Astounding* in my teens. The magazine was edited by John Campbell, who influenced a whole generation of SF writers and readers. He had been recruited by Tremaine to edit *Astounding Stories* (which later became *Astounding Science Fiction*, then *Analog*) and encouraged such writers as Charles Harness, Alfred Bester and Theodore Sturgeon to use themes from Fort's works. It was through SF fandom – particularly helping Peter Weston publish his award-winning *Speculation* fanzine – that I was encouraged to produce *The News*, which became *FT*. On this topic we are planning a future feature on Eric Frank Russell and the origins of the fortean tradition in the UK.

Faster, faster!

The article about a French driver whose Renault car kept accelerating and which only stopped when it ran out of petrol [FT300:21] is only one example of the fortunately rare problem of unintended acceleration that has occurred across the world with different car manufacturers, including Ford and General Motors.¹ There was a particularly famous US example when a family was killed in their Lexus and their last moments were recorded on tape from a 911 call.² This

and similar incidents led Toyota to recall nearly 8 million vehicles, leading eventually to a \$1.1 billion settlement.³

However, no definitive cause has been identified; even NASA could find no fault with the suspected Toyota and Lexus models included in the recalls, and many suspected driver error was a contributory factor.

One possibility has been suggested to me by Prof Mike Hennell,⁴ Technical Director of LDRA, a specialist technology company that provides automated analysis and testing tools for software applications⁵. This is that with so much of modern cars being controlled by software, and the different software systems interlocking with one another, there might be circumstances where two or more computer-based systems interact with one another and affect the malfunction. The problem is that the usual way to check for such effects is to isolate different functions in turn, to see what the impact might be. Given the nature of the problem, this is not something that lends itself to practical comprehensive investigation. Therefore unintended acceleration is a problem that is likely to recur, albeit infrequently.

Rob Gandy

By email

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JORODO



Singular experiences

SD Tucker asks for accounts of for-
tean experiences by mainstream
authors [FT300:57]. One very good
example of this can be found in the
Selected Letters of James Thurber,
ed. Helen Thurber and Edward
Weeks (OUP 1990). Those under
40 may not have heard of Thurber
(1894-1961) (pictured above), one
of his generation's most famous
humorists. As far as I know, he
never discussed forteana as such
in his large body of work. Never-
theless, in one of the published
letters (on page 113) he describes
a series of psychic experiences. As
I can see no reason why he would
be making it up, or pulling the leg
of his correspondent, I conclude
that it must be true. Thurber sent
it from West Cornwall, Connecti-
cut, on 26 December 1952, to Mr
Wainwright Evans, New City,
Rockland County, New York.

"Dear Mr. Evans,

I don't know what made you
think that my great friend Nugent
is psychic or touched by the
unexplainable. This makes you as
wrong as a Duke dice girl trying
to throw thirteen [a reference to
experiments at Duke University].

"My mother, who is eighty-sev-
en, and I have always taken men-
tal telepathy in our stride and we
regard it as far less remarkable
than television, the trans-Atlantic
cable, or even the telephone. Most
of our achievements in this field
of mental phenomena have been
trivial, such as my saying to my
first wife, as our train pulled out
of South Norwalk, 'Norman Klein
just got on this train about three
coaches up,' and my mother's
saying, at an 1898 party, 'Sam

Pancake will be about to ring the
doorbell when I reach the front
porch'. Norman Klein was on the
train all right, for the first time in
maybe ten years, since it wasn't
his regular road, and Pancake had
his finger on the doorbell. The
remarkable thing about him was
his name and the fact that he was
known to be out of town at the
time. 'Came back suddenly and
heard about the party,' he said.

"Mamma and I have done
literally hundreds of things like
this, and we used to put on our
exhibition of parlor telepathy
almost without a miss when she
was younger. Everybody thought
it was a trick. I would spread
twenty-five different objects on
the floor and think of one of them,
and she would pick it out. We
were not visible to each other at
the time, nor did we speak.

"It used to be nothing to me to
say to my brother, as I did one day,
ten blocks from the State House
in Columbus, Ohio, 'Ray Jackson
is in the rotunda'. He would bet a
couple of bucks, being too smart
to wager a fortune. Well, Jackson
was there all right that day, a
Columbus photographer about
forty-five, who said to us, 'I've
never been in this rotunda before
and I just decided to come in and
see what it's like. I suppose I've
gone through the State House
grounds two thousand times
without thinking of entering the
building.'

"The only valuable piece of
communication that I have ex-
perienced in this line hit me one
morning in 1900 when I was six
years old. I was playing about six
blocks from home with some kids
when I realized that my four-year-
old brother was in some kind of
danger. I ran all the way home to
find that he had set his bed on fire
by playing with the buggy whip
and dangling the lash in a lighted
gas grate. I mention this incident
in *The Thurber Album*, leaving
out the psychic factor. My mother
got him off the bed before the
flames reached him. He had been
asleep and the heat had given him
a sense of danger. At such times
he always thought of me because
he lisped and talked funny and I
was the only one who could under-
stand him. As simple as that.

"I got one of Dr. Rhine's books
a few years ago, but it's full of

charts and diagrams and too
damned technical.

"My four-year-old brother,
Robert, now fifty-six, must have
had a wonderful sending set
when he was a child. One Sunday
my mother jumped to her feet
while sitting with her own mother
and sister in the sewing room of
my grandmother's house, crying,
'Robert has been hurt!' It turned
out that he had been run over by
a milk wagon four blocks away
at that very moment. He was six
years old then. My father entered
the house carrying him about
five minutes later. He was not
badly hurt. I was in the house, but
I didn't get that message at all.
Even odder, my mother was down-
stairs at the moment her youngest
son was about to burn up and she
didn't know it until I dashed into
the house and told her.

"Make you stop and think,
doesn't it, Evans? Merry Christ-
mas and a Happy New Year.
'Sincerely yours, James Thurber.'

Nils Erik Grande

Oslo, Norway

In his autobiography *Strange
Places, Questionable People* (1999),
the BBC Foreign Correspond-
ent John Simpson describes a
strange encounter on the cliffs at
Dunwich, Suffolk, when he was
living there as a teenager in 1962:
"Behind me was a black figure
dressed in a cloak and hood. I was
on my own... The figure followed
me for half a mile in this most M
R Jamesian of landscapes. Each
time I turned around it was still
the same distance behind me."
After following him for some time,
"the black figure had stopped
and seemed to be watching me.
Then, when I turned around again
it had disappeared. I certainly
don't believe in ghosts, but all this
happened precisely as I have
described."

In his *Diaries* (1993), the
late Tory MP Alan Clark
describes his eerie
sighting of a Lancaster
Bomber one hot day
in August 1985. Like
Simpson he was alone in an
isolated rural location – in
this case a farm near
Trevinnick, Devon –
when he notes that
he "became
aware of

a deep heavy, roaring sound,
mingled with the fluttering noise
of airscrews on coarse pitch. And
very low, 200 feet [60m] at the
most, a single Lancaster flew
directly over the house, and on
across towards Exmoor, being soon
lost to sight." Later Clark remarks:
"There is only one Lancaster left.
And the 'Battle of Britain Flight'
is stationed a very long way from
Penhalt. And they are precluded
from flying below 1,000 feet
[300m], except at displays. But the
twenty-fifth anniversary comes up
in a few weeks' time. He must have
been practising".

In his biography of the actor
Alec Guinness (2003), Piers Paul
Read recounts an incident when
Guinness (pictured below) met
James Dean outside a Hollywood
restaurant in September 1955.
Dean proudly showed off his new
Porsche, but Guinness later wrote:
"The sports car looked sinister
to me... I heard myself saying in
a voice I could hardly recognise
as my own 'Please, never get in
it'. I looked at my watch. 'It is now
ten o'clock, Friday the 23rd of
September 1955. If you get in that
car you will be found dead in it by
this time next week'". Dean was
killed, whilst driving the Porsche
on 30 September, in a collision
with another car.

I agree with Mr Tucker that
what's interesting about these ex-
amples is their wholly unexpected
and isolated nature. That and the
fact that the authors have nothing
to gain, and potentially some
credibility to lose, by recounting
such events.

Danny Walsh

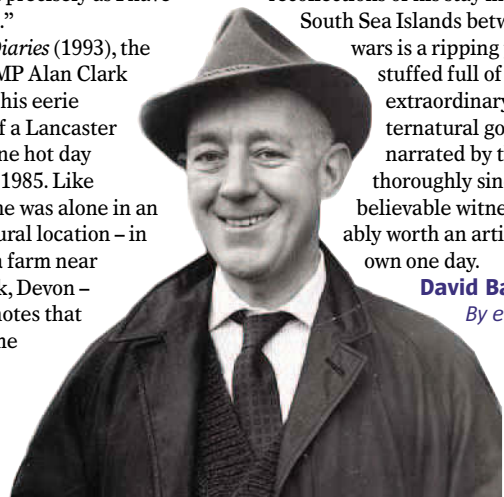
London

I'd like to draw your attention to *A
Pattern of Islands*, an inadvertent
fortean classic. Arthur Grimble's
recollections of his stay in the

South Sea Islands between the
wars is a ripping yarn
stuffed full of the most
extraordinary pre-
ternatural goings-on,
narrated by the most
thoroughly sincere and
believable witness. Prob-
ably worth an article of its
own one day.

David Banfield

By email



it happened to me...

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Pin man

I have witnessed something very similar to the stick man described by Colin Larkin [FT301:70]. When I was about seven or eight years old, my parents used to play cards with family friends every Saturday night, in a very ordinary bungalow, almost exactly opposite our own house in a Derby suburb. They had two children, younger than me, both very temperamental. We children would be put to bed in the house where the grown-ups were, and taken back to our own beds, usually protesting and half asleep, when our parents were ready to go home. We took turns at this, so we were in each house on alternative weeks, and I never really liked going to theirs, as something about the bungalow made me uneasy.

One night, in the bungalow, I awoke (or thought I did) to find a bizarre creature standing near the foot of the bed. It looked like a pin-man drawing, very like the illustrations in *The Saint* books, which I was then too young to have read. It was whitish and phosphorescent, and seemed to have just an empty circle for a head, yet I felt it did have some sort of expression – not a nice one. As I watched, paralysed with fright, it began to jump up and down. At this point, I must have screamed, and the parents came running. Of course, there was nothing there.

I was really traumatised and it took me ages to cast the image out of my mind; I was certain it wasn't a dream. I always hated sleeping in that room again, and when I was there, would look around the room, checking for anything that might have caused the illusion. The only suspect was an alarm clock with a luminous dial, but that was nowhere near where I had seen the creature, and in any case, even if it was the guilty party, it couldn't explain the rest of the apparent body.

I don't think I ever told the children who lived there, but they were unusually naughty kids, and I have wondered since if they had unwittingly conjured up the pin man. The bungalow changed hands several times in the years that followed, and I never heard of anyone else seeing it. A slightly fictionalised account of this is told in a story called 'The Pinman',

which is in my book *The Siren of Salamanca* (Leaf Books 2008.) I seem to recall seeing a reader's letter in *FT* some years ago, describing another similar-sounding apparition, which apparently disappeared into a mirror.

Brenda Ray
Mickleover, Derby

Aliens under the bed

In 1954, when I was coming up to seven years old, a doctor advised my parents to keep me inside for the whole summer holidays because of a bronchial cough that was actually hay fever – although it wasn't called that back in 1954. They set me up in a bedroom downstairs with a big old iron frame bed and school pals came to see me.

One afternoon I told them a silly story about 'dragons' and told them to look under the bed because that's where they were. I thought they would laugh but they went ashen and couldn't even speak, so I bent down to look expecting to see nothing and was amazed to see two smallish green-faced beings in what were later called spacesuits with large globes around their heads. They were carrying large see-through gun-like things with three different coloured rays showing and when I looked into their eyes they appeared as shocked to see me as I was to see them. I never ever had a friend round again because of this and no one ever spoke a word about what we had all seen – until now. As a teenager, I read a lot about UFOs and later joined BUFORA, training as an investigator.

Paula Simms
By email

Maybugs

The letter "Beetle Message" [FT303:74] reminded me of something that happened when I was a young child in the 1950s.

We lived in a small village in Yorkshire, where there was abundant insect life. I developed a dread of large furry moths, but my particular horror was cockchafer beetles, or Maybugs as we called them. My parents got used to my agonised screams for help whenever a large flying insect started batting

around the light in my bedroom. Some years, the Maybugs would go in for mass hatchings, when all windows had to be closed and the house would be under siege after dark as the bugs crashed against the windows. It was worse than any horror film for me. As years went on, however, changes in local farming practices led to a rapid reduction in the number of insects, and mass hatchings became a thing of the past.

One early evening I was in my bed near an open window, chatting to my parents as they said goodnight. I had just expressed a passing thought – "It's a long time since we saw any Maybugs round here" – when I caught sight of something zooming through the window. I threw myself to one side, and the biggest ever Maybug crashed on to the pillow where my head had been seconds before. And the hysterics had subsided and my father had dealt with the bug, I made a private resolve not to speak the insects' name out loud for the rest of my life.

Since that day, I have never seen another Maybug. Oh, except for the chocolate ones in a sweet shop in Germany – now that *is* weird.

Penny Heaton
Leeds, West Yorkshire

Future message

I was intrigued to read Ben Torgersen's account of a "Future Message" [FT304:75]. I had a similar experience in late 1989/early 1990, which my husband was a partial witness to. We lived in Blackley, Manchester, in a rented house, and were watching TV. I can't remember the programme, only that it was one of the commercial channels, probably Channel 4, and my husband David was making a cup of tea, as the ad

break was on.

Suddenly, the ads were interrupted by some kind of interference and what I can only describe as a sort of news report, similar to that described by Ben Torgersen, with news of the future. My memory is hazier than Ben's; however, the gist of the 'message' was that bad things would happen, but all would be well in the end... I was so amazed I called David in from the kitchen to come and see it. After a couple of minutes the 'transmission' disappeared and returned to normal ads. We thought it must be an innovative way of advertising a new sci-fi programme to be shown on TV; but the 'programme' never materialised, and in those days of only four channels, we wouldn't have missed it.

If anyone else has memories of this, I'd love to know.

Nicola Bramah-Taylor
By email

My life as a dog

I was once on holiday in Tywyn, a seaside resort on the Cardigan Bay coast in Wales, and was sitting on a bench with my grandmother and pet dog. My mother had just got up and walked away somewhere, and the dog began to whine as he always does when she walks away from him.

A little boy came up to us and asked what was wrong with the dog. My grandmother told him that the dog was crying because it wanted its mummy, and asked him: "Do you cry when you want your mummy?" He said: "I used to cry, when I was a dog," and told us that he had been an Alsatian.

Was he just being childishly creative and imaginative, or could he have been talking about a 'past life'?

John Wilding
By email

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FORTEAN TRAVELLER

87. Cannock Chase, Staffordshire

LEE BRICKLEY celebrates the otherworldly atmosphere of Cannock Chase... and uncovers dark tales of crashed UFOs, werewolves and the Pig-Man.

This beautiful stretch of Staffordshire wilderness has long been admired for its tranquil and almost magical atmosphere. JRR Tolkien certainly felt its spell, and used the area as inspiration for many of his bestselling folktale-based fantasy novels. After enlisting in the British Army in 1916, like thousands of other men, Tolkien spent months stationed on Cannock Chase, an area of woodland in the Midlands with considerable historical significance. The time he spent training on Cannock Chase undoubtedly had a huge and telling impact on the writer's imagination. One of his earliest works "Book Of Lost Tales", which is incidentally the publication that describes the early history of his mythical "Middle-Earth",

was penned in 1917 in this very forest – many believe that his magnum opus, *The Lord Of The Rings*, was also inspired by the area.

This is perhaps surprising; although 'The Chase' (as locals call it) is now designated a 26-square-mile (67km²) area of outstanding natural beauty, during both world wars – when Tolkien was around – the military camps constructed in the region at Brocton and Rugeley seriously disturbed the otherwise tranquil landscape. It's estimated that well over half a million troops passed through the training grounds on their way to the front line, and such large-scale activity left its scars on the woodlands and surrounding area. Interestingly, the origins of a famous Staffordshire monster known as "The Pig-man" can

BELOW: The woods of Cannock Chase have long held an air of mystery.

also be traced back to precisely this time and place.

As well as housing military training grounds, Cannock Chase also became

home to hundreds of German prisoners of war who had either been captured or shot down over Britain. Conditions at the POW camp were reputedly terrible, and although many people believe the German and Austrian graves located in the area represent soldiers who died in action, the vast majority of them breathed their last in badly maintained POW camps. In fact, most foreign soldiers buried in the region died as a result of the influenza pandemic.

Since the end of the war, the forest has been restored to its previous beauty and most traces of military occupation have now disappeared, leaving a seemingly non-belligerent, uninhabited landscape of forest and heathland. However, the Chase's apparent tranquillity, many believe, is merely superficial. For a large part of the last century, residents and visitors reported literally hundreds of UFO sightings in the area, some of them very well documented in Ministry Of Defence files.

One such sighting occurred on the night I was born: 16 May 1988. This event is recorded in MoD files, with around 10 different reports from people as far away as Stafford. Interestingly, Bill Cash, who at the time was MP for Stafford, received so many letters and phone calls from local witnesses that he wrote to the MoD himself to find out what was going on. The reply was less than encouraging, stating that the Ministry considered these sightings to be nothing more than civilian aircraft travelling towards Birmingham airport. When you read through the sighting reports, however, it becomes clear that this is definitely not the case. Most of the witnesses report seeing a triangular-shaped craft, hovering silently in the night sky, almost as if observing something below. They claim the vehicle was stationary for around 10 minutes, before moving slowly out of view – something a civilian aircraft could not have achieved at the time.

However, the best-known UFO incident related to Cannock Chase allegedly occurred in 1964 and has become known as "The British Roswell" (there are other claimants to this title, of course, like the Berwyn Mountain 'crash' of 1974; see FT252:30-35). The case involved an unknown craft exploding in the skies over mainland Europe, with a small section crashing to Earth in West Germany and another much larger section landing on a small, out-of-the-way road known as Cocksparrow Lane. It has been alleged that both NATO and RAF intelligence teams retrieved four bodies from the crash



CHRISTOPHER FURLONG / GETTY IMAGES

site – although the MoD flatly refuses to this day to acknowledge that a crash of any kind (unlike some of the other UFO-related activity in the area) actually happened. The only reason we know anything about the case is that in the early 1990s, Leonard Stringfield, a retired US Navy officer, released files detailing a Soviet transmission that was picked up by American intelligence personnel stationed in the Caribbean. Stringfield's files prove that an incident of some kind occurred, but the British establishment refuse to release any information concerning it. Cocksparrow Lane is now a Mecca for UFO enthusiasts, and many groups visit and investigate in the area. Although the lane is relatively small, it is surrounded by open fields, so it's a perfect location for sky-watching.

It's worth mentioning that author and ufologist Nick Redfern managed to track down a witness to the crash who claims to have seen military officers loading the wreckage onto an aircraft transporter on that night in 1964; full details can be found in Redfern's book *Cosmic Crashes* (Pocket Books, 2001).

If UFOs are your thing, the Pye Green Tower is another 'must-visit' location. Constructed during the Cold War as part of the 'Backbone' radio system, this telecommunications beacon is for many people an essential stop on their UFO tour of Cannock Chase. Standing an impressive 388ft (118m) tall, the tower is credited with being one of the only telecommunications structures in the UK built from reinforced concrete. Although many people would consider such a structure an eyesore, local residents seem to react to the building relatively favourably, thinking of it as Cannock's Eiffel Tower. In recent times, and with the Cold War over, the tower has been leased out for use by mobile phone companies, but the back-up communication system is still in place in case of emergency.

For the past decade or so, there have been numerous reports linking the tower with strange, orb-like lights and seemingly secretive military vehicles. Recently I was contacted by a lady from the Chase-bordering town of Rugeley who claimed to have witnessed a grouping of odd lights travelling at speed towards the Tower one evening in December 2012. After a few moments, the orbs allegedly merged, hovered in the sky for a few minutes, then faded to black right in front of her eyes. Luckily, I managed to interview the witness, and found to my astonishment that the weirdness hadn't stopped there.

Two months previously, at around 9pm, the landline telephone in her family home had begun to ring. Oddly, every time one of her family members stood up to answer it, the phone stopped ringing. Thinking there was must be someone outside the house looking in (this being the only rational explanation the family could come up with), the lady and her husband crept silently



Cocksparrow Lane is now a Mecca for UFO enthusiasts

ABOVE: Cocksparrow Lane, site of a 1964 incident sometimes referred to as the 'British Roswell'.

LEFT: The Pye Green Tower, a Cold War structure, has been linked to a number of UFO sightings.



BOTH PICS: LEE BRICKLEY

into their garden to see if they could identify the culprit. They claim that almost as soon as they had stepped on to the patio, an unusual buzzing noise could be heard, getting louder with every moment that passed. Looking up towards the sky, the bemused couple noticed a large, unlit, black, triangular-shaped craft they estimated to be some 100ft (30m) long, seemingly floating over their home. Perhaps the strangest part of the whole incident was when, as they told me, the craft "simply disappeared before our very eyes. It didn't fly away – it just appeared to fade out".

Such reports are widespread in the area, and with sightings of supposedly unmarked military vehicles occurring regularly, many people believe that

the Establishment knows all too well that something weird is going on in the forest, and many even suspect the Army is keeping a close watch over the region.

It's impossible to write about Cannock Chase without mentioning the "alien big cat" sightings that are so frequently reported in the national press. A BBC source recently admitted that the area lays claim to the highest concentration of ABC sightings in England – an impressive title. However, in recent years, I have found residents to be less forthcoming with their big cat stories. It's unclear if this is due to the stupefying amount of attention received when one speaks out. A man I chatted to recently told me there was no way he would report his sighting to the police or the press, as he felt sure someone would be sent out with a tranquilliser gun straight away, and as he put it: "I don't want anyone to be attacked by these wild animals, but at the same time, I don't want them shot. They surely have as much right to be here as us". I think he has a point; if there are big cats living wild on Cannock Chase, and they are not harming people, then surely they should be left alone.

A significant number of big cat sightings come from within the grounds of the German War Cemetery, a burial ground with an interesting backstory. After an agreement was reached between the British Government and the Federal Republic Of Germany in 1959, work began on transporting the already buried corpses of some 5,000 German and Austrian military personnel to their new resting place at the Cannock Chase site. In 1967, after eight years of incredibly hard and undoubtedly unpleasant work, the cemetery was officially opened to the public, and is considered by some to be the best and most noble gesture England could have made to its recent enemy. It certainly helped Anglo-German relations immensely – but has since become known for a number of terrifying werewolf and even Bigfoot-like encounters. Obviously, many people dispute the existence of such unlikely cryptids, but the sightings continue. Although these encounters can hardly be with real flesh-and-blood creatures (in my opinion), even the most experienced and knowledgeable people involved sometimes have trouble explaining their sightings away.

Take for example this report, sent to me from an Austrian man who had been in the area visiting the grave of his great-uncle: "I came to lay flowers at the gravesite on Cannock Chase and after I had done so, I took a stroll around the perimeter of the cemetery. That's when I saw this tall figure under the trees. It appeared to be around eight feet [2.4m] tall, was hairy and had glowing red eyes. I instantly froze and the thing stopped looking at me. I watched it walk back off into the woods



soon after.”

Similar accounts are surprisingly common; we have to accept that people really do see – or think they see – monsters in the German Cemetery.

The final location on Cannock Chase worthy of fortaean attention is the Iron Age hill fort known as Castle Ring. This ancient site sits at the highest point of Cannock Chase and was occupied some 2,500 years ago by a Celtic tribe known as the Cornovii. Not much is known about the tribe other than their dominance over the South Cheshire salt mining industry and their love of bright colours and eccentric clothing. Their name, perhaps rather eerily, translates as “People of the horn” and Celtic scholar Ann Ross, of Hexham Heads fame (see FT294:42-47, 295:44-49) proposed that it referred to the cult of a horned god followed by the tribe. Many researchers believe the Cornovii participated in strange and unusual rituals in the area, and some even suspect these rituals could be responsible for many of the peculiar events that take place around Cannock Chase today.

The view from Castle Ring is awe-inspiring – it’s sometimes possible to see the skyline of Birmingham, some 30 miles (48km) away. It’s unsurprising to learn that when the invading Roman army, under orders from Emperor Claudius, reached the area in AD 43, the Cornovii were long gone, having seen the troops approaching days before they reached the incredibly well-placed fort.

In modern times the ancient monument has become known for its high concentration of monster encounters, including many werewolf sightings and, even stranger, meetings with the elusive Pig-Man. For anyone unaware of the legend of the Cannock Chase Pig-Man, it might be worth recalling a rhyme (of mysterious origin)

recited in the area for many years that goes something like this:

*When night falls, enter the woods at your peril
For inside, lurks something worse than the Devil
Avoid at all costs, the gathering place,
Where at midnight the Pig-Man roams on Cannock Chase*

The Pig-man must be the scariest monster supposedly spotted on Cannock Chase. Reports suggest the creature is over 6ft (1.8m) tall, with a large head, “evil” eyes, and the ability to move extremely fast. Unlike Bigfoot, the Pig-Man is described as wearing clothes, suggesting that he is more human than animal, and his strangely high-pitched squeal has been heard on many occasions by walkers and tourists.

This report came to me from local couple John and Anne: “In October 1993, whilst walking around Castle Ring, we heard some strange noises coming from the surrounding trees. Thinking it was likely to be a local couple enjoying an illicit liaison, we quickly moved away from the sound and headed back in the direction of our car. Upon reaching the steps down to the carpark, I happened to turn around and lay my eyes on the strangest creature I’ve ever seen. This thing was 7ft [2m] tall. From the neck down it looked like a human and it had an elongated face with a snout-like nose. When I pointed it out to my wife, she became terrified”.

And this report from cyclist Claire, suggests the Pig-Man sightings might well have some basis in the paranormal: “After around a five-mile ride, I pulled my bike over to the side of one of the tracks to rest for a moment and catch my breath. I took a sip from my water bottle and began hearing a sort of rustling noise coming from between the trees to my left hand side. I thought I’d try to take a closer

ABOVE: The German War Cemetery at Cannock Chase – home to a Bigfoot-like entity?

Lee Brickley’s new book *UFOS, Werewolves & the Pig-Man* is available now from Yam Yam Books, priced £9.99.



look as I suspected there could be a fox or badger close by, but what I saw was truly shocking. Kneeling down in the dirt was what looked like a man, wearing trousers, a blazer, but no shirt. His face was totally deformed and I can almost certainly say he had a snout. Weirdly, when I blinked, he had gone.”

Some locals believe that the monster was created in secret underground structures by military scientists at the Army camps in the forest during World War II – or so the story goes. I was contacted by a man last year who claimed that his grandfather was stationed at the camps around that time and had been officially instructed to spread this rumour through the region as a way of keeping people away from the site; all very *Scooby Doo*. Perhaps, with so many German and Austrian prisoners-of-war being held in the area, the last thing the authorities wanted was local people getting too close. Whatever the truth, there’s no denying the numerous sightings over the years.

Numerous paranormal investigation teams have visited the locations mentioned in this article, and their findings have sometimes been quite interesting. More often than not, the groups see or hear something curious in the woods – usually howling or lights in the sky; sometimes they even claim to have seen a demon or two. This is probably the reason Cannock Chase ranks consistently high on lists of the UK’s most active supernatural areas and UFO hotspots.

Paranormal radio host Tim Swartz gave the location a considerable plug recently when he said: “At first glance, Cannock Chase is a wonder to behold with its amazing and abundant natural beauty. However, there is another part of Cannock Chase that dwells within the shadows. A place where madness has substance and nightmares have their own perverse allure. Cannock Chase is as mysterious as it is beautiful. It is a place where the veil is thin, allowing brief glimpses between this world and the next”.

Why are the woodlands of Cannock Chase so mystifying and unearthly? Why do so many seemingly reasonable people have unusual experiences there? The answer may lie with the area’s underlying geology and the lay of the land, or within the human psyche. But maybe, just maybe, the bizarre and sometimes horrifying tales of woodland weirdness have a basis in truth and this Staffordshire forest really does shelter fiendish freaks, ghastly ghouls, and malformed monsters. It’s certainly worth a visit. **FT**



LEE BRICKLEY is a paranormal researcher, cryptozoologist, author and publisher from the West Midlands. You can read more from him at:

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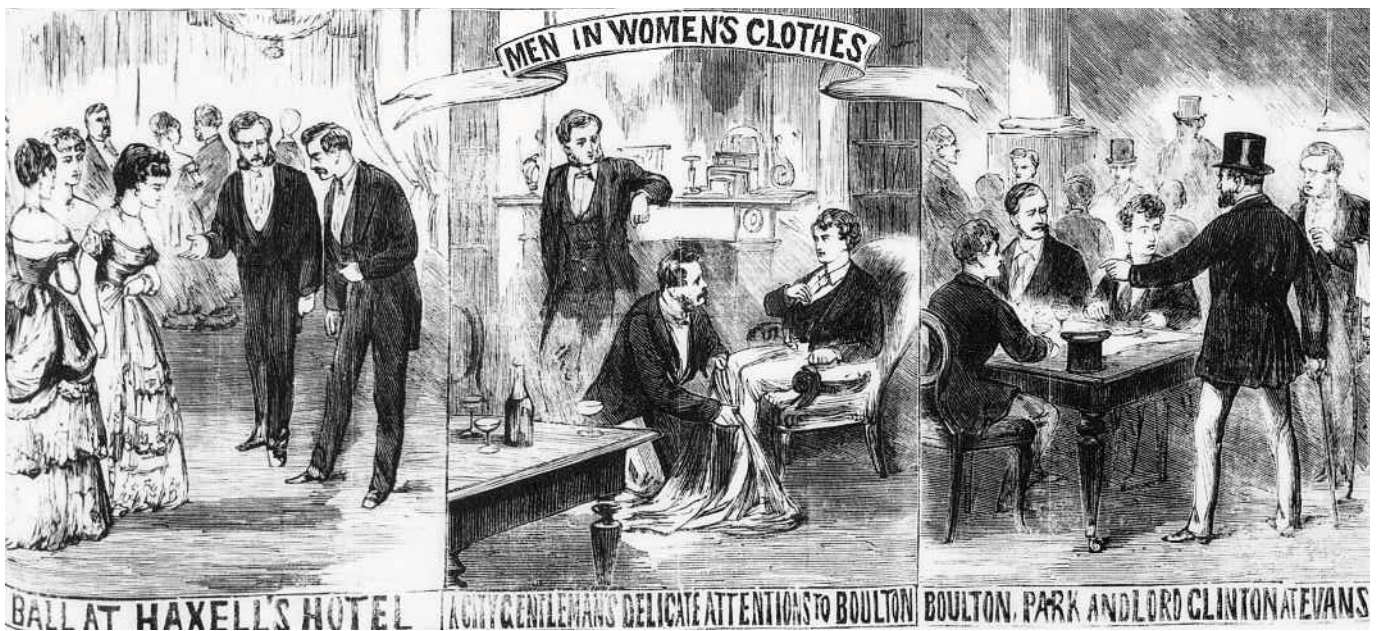
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JAN BONDESON presents more sensational stories and startling Victorian images from the "worst newspaper in England" – the *Illustrated Police News*.

25. THE STRANGE CASE OF BOULTON AND PARK

Ernest Boulton was a young London bank clerk with very unusual interests. From an early age, he had been obsessed with wearing female clothes. He was very effeminate and had once managed to trick his own grandmother into believing that he was the new parlour-maid. Ernest took to the mid-Victorian homosexual underworld like a duck to water. Together with his best friend, the law student Frederick William Park, he joined a theatrical company, both of them playing feminine parts. Ernest was quite a talented actor, with a fine soprano voice; he received many bouquets after the performances, some from his own set, others from people who did not realise that he was really a man.



ABOVE: Boulton and Park partying in London, from the *Illustrated Police News*, 28 May 1870. TOP: Boulton and Park are arrested, from *IPN*, 7 May 1870.

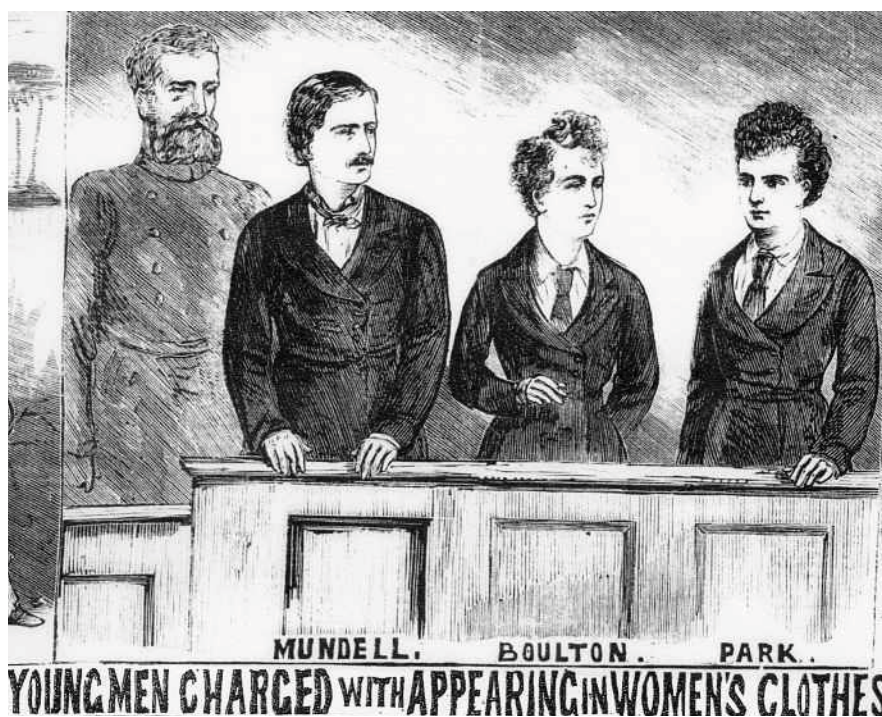
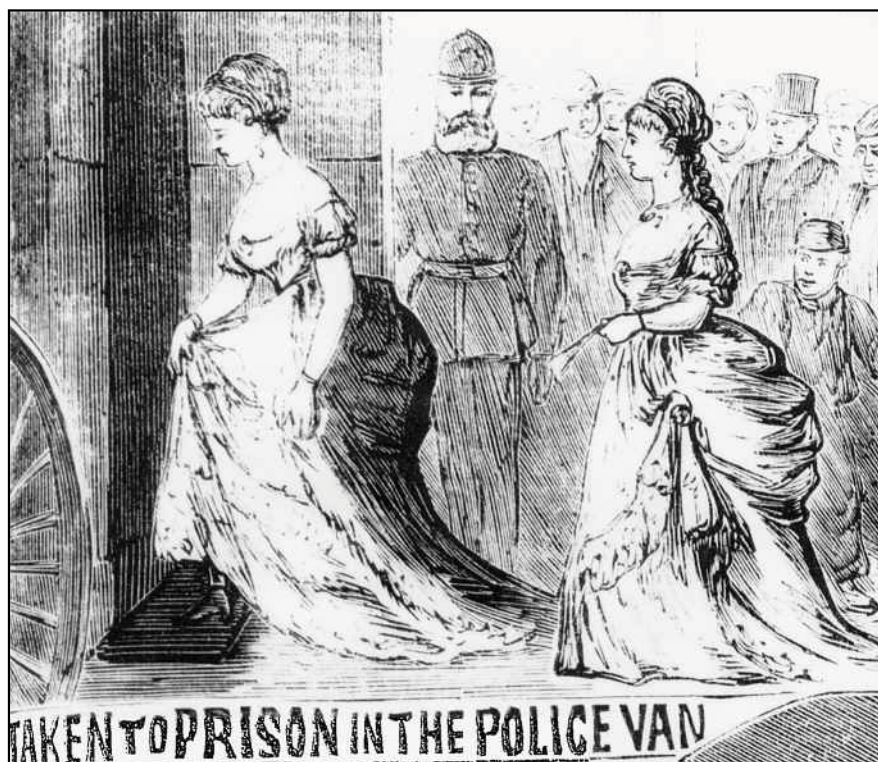
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Offstage, Ernest and his friend dressed alternately in male and female attire. When dressed as women, calling themselves 'Stella' and 'Fanny', their use of make-up and their choice of flashy and risqué outfits often led to them being mistaken for prostitutes. It seems to have been a rare occurrence that anybody suspected they were men; in fact, they were sometimes suspected of being women in disguise when wearing male attire! By 1868, when he was 20 years old, Ernest had acquired a permanent boyfriend, none less than Lord Arthur Clinton MP, the son of the Duke of Newcastle. A queer-looking cove with a balding head, a weak chin, and bushy whiskers, Lord Arthur became infatuated with the good-looking young Ernest. They even appeared on stage together, in the roles of Sir Edward Ardent and Mrs Chillington in the play *A Morning Call*.

When Ernest felt monogamous, he wrote love letters to Lord Arthur, wore the expensive wedding ring he had been given, and ordered calling cards in the name of 'Lady Stella Clinton'. But when they felt up to some serious hanky-panky, gay young 'Stella' and 'Fanny' went cruising at the Burlington Arcade and other haunts of homosexuals and transvestites, where they never had any difficulty in picking up fun-loving friends. They also liked flirting with heterosexual men, teasing them but keeping them at arm's length. A certain Mr Cox very much fancied the pretty 'Stella', whom he kissed at a jolly champagne luncheon. When he learnt, quite by chance, the truth about his new lady friend, his jaw must have dropped. When he next met 'Stella' and 'Fanny', dressed in their usual finery, he angrily cried out: "You damned set of infernal scoundrels, you ought to be kicked out of this place!"

Carefree young 'Stella' and 'Fanny' were wholly undeterred by this regrettable episode, however. In female attire, they attended the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race, the old Surrey Theatre in Blackfriars Road, and the Alhambra Theatre in Leicester Square. "I am consoling myself in your absence by getting screwed," Ernest wrote to Lord Arthur in 1869; his Lordship's reaction to this candid missive is unfortunately not known. Two of Ernest's other boyfriends were Louis Hurt, a clerk in the Post Office, and John Fiske, US Consul at Leith. Since his consular duties kept him in Scotland most of the time, the amorous American had to be content with sending his beloved 'Stella' long and passionate letters, which the latter kept.

In early 1870, the Metropolitan Police



TOP & ABOVE: Boulton and Park are taken to prison as women, and appear in court as men; *IPN*, 14 May 1870.

wanted to teach the undesirables infesting the Burlington Arcade a hard lesson. They had had their eyes on the fun-loving 'Stella' and 'Fanny' for quite some time. After these two had attended a ball at Haxell's Strand Hotel in full female attire, they were arrested and taken to the Bow Street police station. Without any court order, a police surgeon pulled up their elegant long dresses and examined their anuses to find evidence of 'pedication'. Still in female dress, they appeared at the magistrate's court the next day, to be charged with conspiring and inciting people to commit an unnatural offence. Ernest wore a cherry-coloured silk evening gown trimmed with white lace, bracelets on bare arms, a wig, and a plaited chignon. This lugubrious scene was just what the *Illustrated Police News* thrived on. The 'Capture of Men dressed as Women' could be milked for weeks, with drawings of the two miscreants being arrested, their cavorting with Lord Arthur and other admirers, the ignominious ending to Mr Cox's romance, and a grinning police constable making an inventory of Ernest's considerable wardrobe of dresses, wigs and elegant hats.

For stern Victorian moralists, the Boulton and Park scandal represented everything that was wrong with modern Britain: its loose morals, depraved young men, and the easy-going levity of the throng. It was thought perverted and obscene that a hearty London man about town would be at risk of picking up what he presumed to be a 'fast girl' at Burlington Arcade, only to find out that 'she' was really a he. Long before they were tried, Boulton and Park were marked men. Ernest's indiscreet letters from his various admirers led to these individuals being added to the charge-sheet. Lord Arthur Clinton died the month after, allegedly from scarlet fever, but more probably from suicide.

The police tried to cajole Hurt and Fiske to denounce Ernest, but these two showed unexpected bottle and 'stood by their man' with admirable constancy. When the case finally went to trial, in May 1871, the evidence for the prosecution seemed very feeble indeed. This time, the two main accused appeared in male attire; on the insistence of their solicitor, Ernest had grown a moustache and Park whiskers. In court, they appeared like a pair of silly and immoral young men, who had hob-nobbed with various 'consenting adults' within their own set, and certainly not incited any person to commit an unnatural offence. It was thought wholly blameworthy that they had been submitted to an anal examination by the police without permission from a higher authority. As a result, they were acquitted amidst cheers from members of their own set. In spite of his 'butch' moustachioed appearance, Ernest fainted when he heard the verdict, rather like the heroine of a Victorian novel.

The homophobic 'hearties' ground their teeth when they heard that these two transvestite buggers had been let off scot-free, without even a reprimand. What was Britain coming to when such catamites were allowed to prance round the streets, perverting public morals? When Ernest resumed his theatrical career, rotten vegetables came his way more often than bouquets. In Aldershot, he was nearly



ABOVE: Cor Blimey, look at these! A policeman makes an inventory of Boulton's wardrobe. *IPN*, May 14 1870.

lynched by some young officers, but managed to make his escape after the gas had been turned down. Clearly, there was nothing else to do but to change his name and flee the country.

In 1874, two novel artists appeared on the New York stage, the brothers Ernest and Gerard Byne, female impersonators. They had very considerable success, particularly the talented Ernest with his excellent voice. Their photographs sold very well, and newspaper reviews of their performances were excellent. Together with some male and female musicians, they formed a theatrical troupe of their own. In 1877, 'The Wonderful Bynes' came to Britain, touring the country and appearing in London, Wolverhampton, Gloucester, Hereford and other parts. But when they came to the Stuart Hall in Cardiff in April 1879, a very disagreeable letter appeared in the *Western Mail*. 'An Indignant Nonconformist' had seen a naughty poster for 'The Wonderful Bynes', with a picture of a gaudily-attired female displaying a large amount of stocking. He wanted it confirmed that the Bynes did not, as had been rumoured, include either of that notorious pair, Boulton and Park.

Clearly, the immense prejudice against Boulton and Park was still out there. The Bynes took refuge on the Channel Islands for some months, hoping the homophobic nonconformist's letter would be speedily forgotten, as it deserved to be. But in January 1881, the columnist H Chance Newton ('Carados' of the *Referee* newspaper) boldly stated that the once so notorious Ernest Boulton was still going in for female impersonations, now under the name Ernest Byne. After this cowardly disclosure, 'The Wonderful Bynes' disappeared for good. Frederick William Park, who may or may not have been the same person as 'Gerard

Byne', went to New York, where he hoped to act under the name 'Fred Fenton', but his career failed and he is said to have died later in 1881, aged just 33. The last trace of Ernest himself is that at the time of the 1881 Census, 'Ernest Byne' was lodging at No. 21 Euston Street, St Pancras; he described himself as an actor, and gave his age as 27 (he was at least 33 at the time). What happened to him after 1881 is not known; did he become an aging drag queen in some small-time American theatre, eking out the remainder of his life in obscurity?

Wikipedia, the essay-writing student's greatest friend, has a short and wayward entry on the Boulton and Park case, which concludes that it demonstrates the relative freedom of the Victorian homosexual sub-culture. This is not exactly the impression of a more astute observer, however, since without committing any crime, Boulton and Park were twice hounded out of the country by the hatred and prejudice shown toward them. And what about Lord Arthur Clinton, who had to pay a much higher price for his indiscretions? The homophobic attitude to Boulton and Park, and what they represented, is well illustrated by the following deplorable limerick:

*There was an old person of Sark
Who bugged a pig in the dark;
The swine in surprise
Murmured: 'God blast your eyes
Do you take me for Boulton or Park?'*

SOURCES

Contemporary newspapers; also W. Roughead, *Bad Companions* (Edinburgh 1930), pp149-83; R Pearsall, *The Worm in the Bud* (London 1969), pp461-6; C Upchurch (*Gender & History* 12 [2000], pp127-57); L Senelick, *The Changing Room* (New York 2000), pp295-325; M Diamond, *Victorian Sensation* (London 2004), pp120-3.



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Send to: Fortean Times, PO BOX 71602, London E17 0QD, UK.

Caveat

FT aims to present the widest range of interpretations to stimulate discussion and welcomes helpful criticism. The opinions of contributors are not necessarily those of the editors. FT can take no responsibility for submissions, but will take all reasonable care of material in its possession. Requests for return of material should be accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope or an International Reply Coupon.

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Regular clipsters have provided the lifeblood of *Fortean Times* since it began in 1973. One of the delights for the editors is receiving packets of clips from Borneo or Brazil, Saudi Arabia or Siberia. We invite you to join in the fun and send in anything weird, from trade journals, local newspapers, extracts from obscure tomes, or library newspaper archives.

To minimise the time spent on preparing clippings for a Fort Sort, we ask that you cut them out and not fold them too small. Mark each clip (on the front, where possible) with the source, date and your name, so that we can credit you in the listing (right) when we use the material. For UK local and overseas clips, please give the town of publication. For foreign language clips, we appreciate brief translations. To avoid confusion over day and month, please write the date in this form: **1 SEP 2013**. If you send photocopies, copy on one side of the paper only.

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Why Fortean?



Fortean 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 were 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 Greece 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."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

FT toes no party line.

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PHENOMENOMIX

ARTHUR MACHEN
PART 3

HUNT EMERSON & KEVIN JACKSON

WHEN MACHEN'S FIRST WIFE DIED HE WAS THROWN INTO DESPAIR...



BUT WHEN HE BEGAN TO RECOVER, IN 1900, STRANGE AND WONDERFUL THINGS BEGAN TO HAPPEN! EVERYWHERE HE WENT, HE COULD SMELL INCENSE...



HE FELT AS IF HE WERE WALKING ON AIR...



WEIRDEST OF ALL, HE BEGAN TO MEET CHARACTERS FROM HIS OWN FICTION!

ARTHUR - MAY I INTRODUCE MISS LALLY FROM YOUR NOVEL "THE THREE IMPOSTERS"...

AH, MR. MACHEN! I WANT TO HAVE A WORD WITH YOU!



DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR, HE WROTE "THE BOWMAN", A YARN ABOUT THE GHOSTLY APPEARANCE OF AGINCOURT ARCHERS TO HELP FIGHT THE HUN! IT GAVE RISE TO THE MYTH OF THE ANGELS OF MONS...



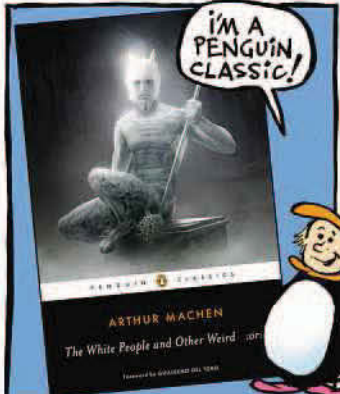
MACHEN CHANGED HIS PROFESSION AND TOOK TO THE STAGE FOR ABOUT TEN YEARS...

BUT HE CONTINUED TO WRITE WEIRD FICTION. SOME OF HIS TALES WERE BASED ON GRAIL LEGENDS - ANTICIPATING THE INDIANA JONES FILM "THE LAST CRUSADE"...



AND OTHERS WERE INSPIRED BY HIS BELIEF THAT BRITAIN HAD ONCE BEEN INHABITED BY A RACE OF HORRIBLE, DWARFISH CREATURES WHO CARRIED OUT HIDEOUS RITES IN SECLUDED PLACES!

HIS LIFE WAS HARD, BUT HE ENJOYED A CONTENTED OLD AGE, THANKS TO A GENEROUS PENSION ARRANGED BY HIS MANY FAMOUS FANS...



IN 2013 HE IS MORE FAMOUS THAN EVER - AND A NUMBER OF HIS BEST BOOKS ARE BACK IN PRINT. CHECK HIM OUT!



COMING NEXT MONTH



STATES OF PARANOIA
HALF A CENTURY OF KOOKS,
CRANKS AND CONSPIRACIES



JFK: 50 YEARS ON
TRACING THE HISTORY OF
CONSPIRACY'S GREAT MYSTERY



**LION WAGERS,
SHOOTING BIGFOOT,
QUANTUM ZENO EFFECT
AND MUCH MORE...**

FORTEAN TIMES 307

ON SALE 10 OCT 2013



HUGO PIETTE

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.

OCTOBER 1973

It is curious to see a phenomenon that would not have been out of place in the mediæval world recurring in our own times. Women in their "thousands" were said to be flocking from all parts of the world to a small field at Pæstum, outside Naples. They came to sit astride a large stone that they believed would help them become pregnant. The 3ft (90cm)-high, carved stone was once part of a temple to an unnamed goddess of love and fertility, dating to around 700 BC. One told a reporter: "I was married for 14 years and we desperately wanted a child. We had no success until I sat on the stone at Pæstum. Two months later I was pregnant." Campsite manager Donato Stromillo, who owned the field, had seen business flourish since the rumour spread. "It's just a stone," he said, "like many others you find at Pæstum, but women seem to think it has special powers of fertilisation. They sit there for as long as they like. Many come back later with a baby in their arms." **FT2:9**

In other ways, Time changes a great deal. Forty years ago this month the USA was in the grip of one its most intense media flaps over UFOs, during which there were reported sightings by the Governor of Ohio, Senator Barry Goldwater, the Governor of Georgia (Jimmy Carter), and Air Force Chief of Staff General George Brown – the latter claiming US forces in Vietnam were being plagued by the things. We also have the famous abduction of two Mississippi fishermen – Charles Hickson and Calvin Parker – from the Pascagoula River. A day later, on the 12th, a party of witnesses, including several sheriff's deputies, claimed a sheriff's car was attacked. Where are the great flaps of yesteryear? **FT2:18**

OCTOBER 1983

In mid-May, a peat-digger in Cheshire's famous Lindow Moss peat bog found a human skull. Remarkably preserved, it still had hair and one intact eyeball. Initial investigation determined that it was from a European woman aged between 30-50, and had been buried anywhere between five and 50 years.

Nearby was a cottage where, 23 years earlier, ex-airline pilot Peter Reyn-Bardt lived when his wife Malika Maria de Fernandez went missing. Reyn-Bardt, a homosexual, had married her in 1959,

to maintain his professional respectability. They separated shortly after, but she returned demanding money or she'd expose him to his employers. He said he paid up and didn't hear from her again. After the discovery of the remains in the bog, police re-interviewed Reyn-Bardt (then aged 57) and confronted him with the skull. He promptly confessed to strangling her, dismembering her body and burying pieces in the surrounding land.

Now here's the odd bit. This month results of fresh tests on the Lindow skull proved it was not Malika at all, but a woman who died there in AD 410. Reyn-Bardt pleaded not guilty at his trial in Chester, but was found guilty and sentenced to life. No trace of Malika was ever found. **FT42:37**

OCTOBER 1993

In Vietnam this month, 53 members of a Tai Dam ethnic group (a so-called 'Black Thai' hill tribe) committed suicide in the belief that they would be translated to Paradise. The tragedy occurred in the remote hamlet of Ta He, in Son La province, about 200 miles (320km) northwest of Hanoi. In 1985, an army deserter (from the Viet Cong or National army is not said) stumbled into the village (pop.71), and before long declared himself king. Later he prophesied that the world would be flooded in 2000, but he could save them if they paid him. On the first night of this month he called them all to his house, saying it was time to leave this world. They feasted on a roasted pig, burned their huts, killed their 'king' and then set about each other with ancient flintlock rifles, knives, and even their spades and hoes. Six of the eight families were wiped out, including 19 children. **FT73:7**

OCTOBER 2003

A Swedish couple, hiking in the country's mountainous northern province of Jämtland, stumbled upon a strange sight – 70 pairs of shoes of all types, all filled with butter. Just who had placed them there and why remains a mystery. The nearest comparable report comes from 1996, when Chinese artist Xu Xiuzhen created a contemporary artwork of shoes filled with butter on Tibetan mountains surrounding the capital Lhasa, but no more direct or tangible link between the two is known to us.

FT179:8

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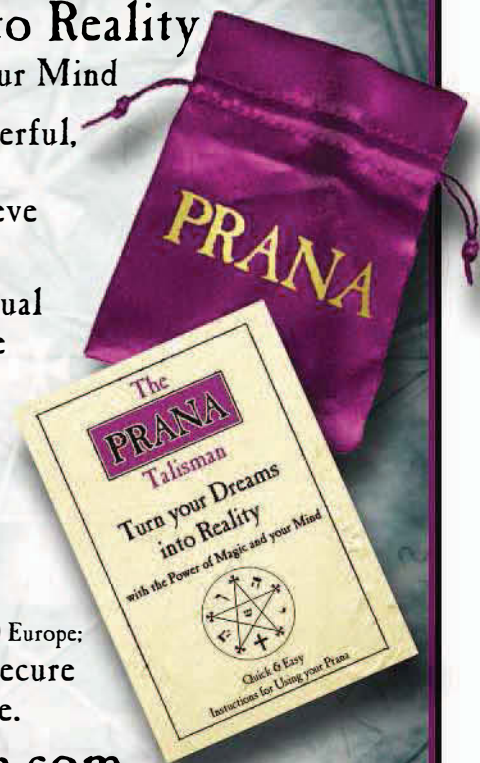
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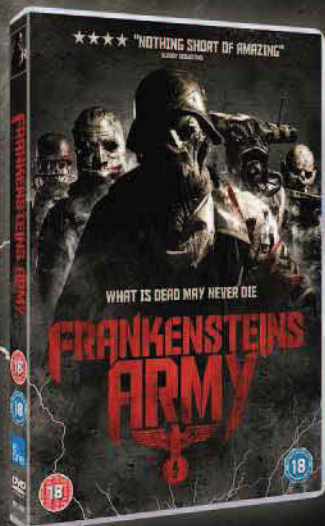
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