



SCOTLAND YARD'S SECRETS

INSIDE THE CRIME MUSEUM

CITY IN THE SKY FLOATING SKYSCRAPERS SEEN OVER CHINA
ERNEST THE GOBLIN EXORCISING A SUPERNATURAL SEX PEST
POLTERGEISTS AND POLITICS LABOUR MPs VERSUS GHOSTS

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HEX AND VIOLENCE

THE CURIOUS CASE OF THE HEADLESS EVANGELIST

MODERN ART IS MURDER

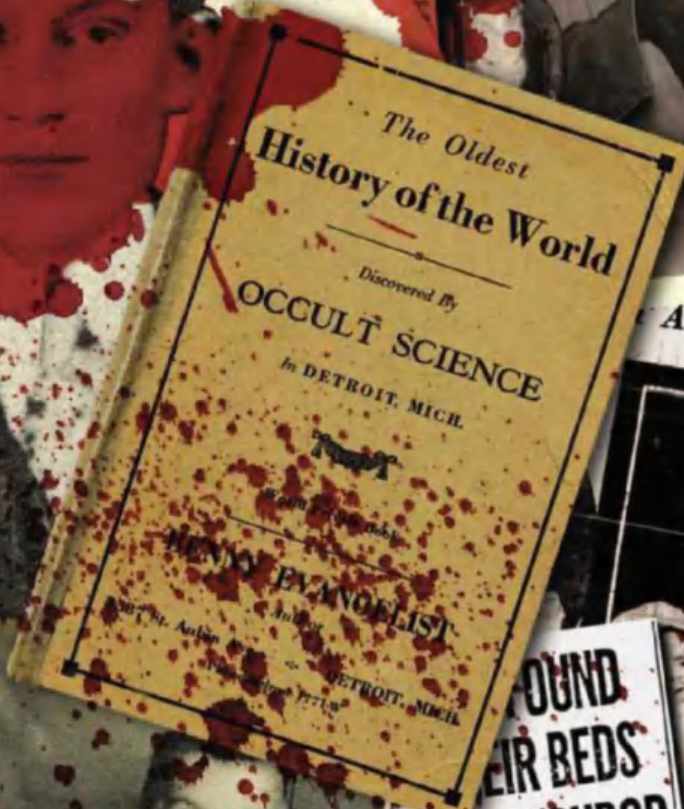
MAGIC, SURREALISM AND THE BLACK DAHLIA KILLING

A WOLF IN THE FOLD

THE BLOOMSBURY GROUP AND THE RIPPER MURDERS

Border Man Says He Killed Leader Of Fantastic Cult

Benny Evangelist Who Resides Here
Multiple Slayings Of
His Family
er Cries
ok His



AX MURDERER



FOUND IN THEIR BEDS BY NEIGHBOR

Detroit "Mealer," Wife and Four Children Victims of Slaying.

MAN'S HEAD SEVERED

Weird, Fanatical Rite Suspected by Police in Action



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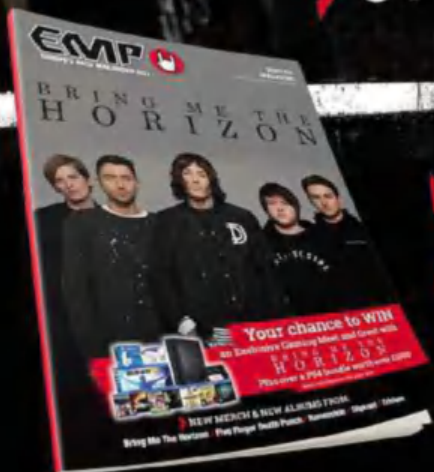


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strange days

Floating city over China, phantom siren haunts Swansea, escapological mishaps, back from the dead, UFO outsider art, epic sneezeathon, Mothman anniversary, knitted alien autopsy, history's earliest beheadings – and much more.

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A considerable distance, geographical and social, separated the elegant squares of Bloomsbury from the slums of Whitechapel, and yet there exists a curious network of connections between one of England's most celebrated novelists and Jack the Ripper, as **THERESE TAYLOR** explains.

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ETIENNE GILFILLAN

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JOSH EDELSON / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

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EDITOR
 DAVID SUTTON
 (drsutton@forteanimes.com)

FOUNDING EDITORS
 BOB RICKARD (bobrickard@mail.com)
 PAUL SIEVEKING (sieveking@forteanimes.com)

ART DIRECTOR
 ETIENNE GILFILLAN
 (etienne@forteanimes.com)

BOOK REVIEWS EDITOR
 VAL STEVENSON
 (val@forteanimes.com)

RESIDENT CARTOONIST
 HUNT EMERSON

SUBSCRIPTION ENQUIRIES AND BACK ISSUES
 www.subsinfo.co.uk
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LICENSING & SYNDICATION

FORTEAN TIMES IS AVAILABLE FOR INTERNATIONAL LICENSING AND SYNDICATION - CONTACT:

Syndication Senior Manager

ANJ DOSAJ-HALAI TEL: +44 (0) 20 7907 6132

Anj_Dosaj-Halai@dennis.co.uk

Licensing Manager

CARLOTTA SERANTONI TEL: +44 (0) 20 7907 6550

Carlotta_Serantoni@dennis.co.uk

Licensing & Syndication Assistant

NICOLE ADAMS TEL: +44 (0) 20 7907 6134

Nicole_Adams@dennis.co.uk

YOU CAN REACH FT ON THE INTERNET

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 30 Cleveland Street
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GROUP PUBLISHER
 IAN WESTWOOD
 020 7907 6000

CIRCULATION MANAGER
 JAMES MANGAN
james.mangan@seymour.co.uk

EXPORT CIRCULATION MANAGER
 GERALDINE GROBLER
geraldine.grobler@seymour.co.uk

SENIOR PRODUCTION EXECUTIVE
 DANIEL STARK
 020 7907 6053
daniel_stark@dennis.co.uk

ADVERTISING DIRECTOR
 STEVE NICOLAOU
 020 7907 6633
steve_nicolaou@dennis.co.uk

SALES EXECUTIVE
 BRADLEY BEAVER
 020 7907 6701
bradley_beaver@dennis.co.uk

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GROUP FINANCE DIRECTOR

FINANCE DIRECTOR

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

COMPANY FOUNDER

IAN LEGGETT

BRETT REYNOLDS

KERIN O'CONNOR

JAMES TYE

FELIX DENNIS

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editorial

Crimes and wonders

MURDER MOST WEIRD

This issue of *FT* makes for rather grim reading, we're afraid; each of our three main features focuses on a particularly bloody murder - or series of murders - that exercised a morbid fascination for the press and public of the time. The Ripper murders of 1888 quickly entered the folklore of London and continue to make waves even today: witness the ongoing controversy surrounding the recently - and, many would say cynically - created Jack the Ripper Museum in London's Spitalfields. Detroit in the 1920s was rocked by the brutal murder of an entire family that appeared to be just the latest and bloodiest in a cluster of killings believed to have ritualistic and cultic overtones. Post-war Los Angeles was the scene of a number of shocking and savage murders of lone women, the most terrible of which was the baffling despatch and mutilation of Elizabeth Short - the 'Black Dahlia' - who has died again and again in books and films ever since.

All three cases remain officially unsolved to this day, despite - particularly in the case of the Ripper and Dahlia murders - an endless parade of putative (often wildly unlikely) suspects and ever more ingenious theories being offered by writers and researchers. We suspect the continued fascination of these grim tales, aside from some dark obsession with the problem of human evil, resides precisely in their ability to sidestep any 'final solution' (despite the claims of Ripper-crazed publishers); like most forteana, these open-ended mysteries allow plenty of room for new research (a novel factual nugget might emerge even now) and endless reinterpretation (Ripperology, like ufology, is a virtual cottage industry). And then, of course, there are the fortean aspects of the cases themselves, as explored in our features. Therese Taylor traces the curious web of connections between English novelist Virginia Woolf and Jack the Ripper - threads that link Bohemian Bloomsbury to the mean streets of the East End (pp40-46).

Brian J Robb examines the Black Dahlia murder in all its horror - be warned, we chose not to include any of the more graphic crime scene photos, but some readers may find the images disturbing - and assesses the theories that the killing served an occult or even an artistic purpose (pp48-54). The least familiar case is that of the 'Headless Evangelist', here investigated by Robert Damon Schneck, a bloody family slaughter that brought to a head fears about 'hex murders' and folk magic that had been bubbling up for some time (pp32-38). It's an astonishingly odd story - and still a mysterious one.

THE \$50,000 RAINBOW

There are some cheerier items to be found within these pages, thankfully: a bumper harvest of giant vegetables (pp6-7), an Indian village protected by the Hindu god of Saturn (p20), a knitted alien autopsy (p12) and a

floating city photographed in the skies above China (p4). This latter story - which prompted theories that the floating city had been created artificially by NASA - reminded us of another controversial aerial portent from earlier this year.

Back in August, legendary American band the Grateful Dead (no strangers to these pages; see **FT88:34-38, 164:24-25, 188:52-56**) launched their mini-tour with a two-night stand at Levi's Stadium, Santa Clara. Entitled 'Fare Thee Well', the concerts were quite possibly the last time that all four surviving members of the Dead would share a major stage together (they keep on truckin', but they're not getting any younger) and proved an emotional experience for the thousands of gathered fans. The first set of the first night ended not just with a monster 17-minute version of 'Viola Lee Blues' but also a glorious rainbow encircling the massive stadium. As one Deadhead reportedly put it: "This is the band that jams with God". Online debate as to the meaning of this sign in the sky couldn't settle whether it was indeed the deity offering a final benediction to the Dead and the Heads or the departed Jerry Garcia signalling his approval of hard-won gay rights; but the strangest explanation came from music industry magazine *Billboard* (28 June 2015), which reported that the band had actually created an *artificial rainbow* - at a cost of \$50,000! One Dead lighting techie suggested on Twitter that this had been achieved by suspending "600 Vari-lites on a building two miles away", but this was quickly revealed to be a joke. Snopes.com (the go-to site for checking the status of urban legends) has since concluded that the rainbow was indeed a real one, and *Billboard* amended its story accordingly, with the words: "This article has been updated to include the continuing debate over the appearance of the rainbow, which upon further investigation appears to have been real. Turns out this band really does jam with God."

And, to remove any doubt, we'd cite the occasion in August 2002, at Alpine Valley, Wisconsin, when we saw all surviving band members play together for the first time since Garcia's death seven years earlier: on this memorable evening, a *double rainbow* appeared over the outdoor venue. Now beat that.

David Sutton
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Bob Rickard
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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

strangedays

Floating city, hidden siren

A city seen in the sky over China and a ghostly air raid siren heard in Wales



ABOVE: Video footage of the floating city appeared on YouTube and seemed to show skyscrapers in the clouds above Foshan.

CITY IN THE SKY

In October 2015, several websites reported that the image of a floating city had appeared over Jiangxi and Foshan in China's Guangdong province at an unspecified but recent time. The mysterious apparition lasted only a few minutes; many allegedly believed it to be supernatural. The grainy video footage, first posted on YouTube on 9 October, appears to show towering skyscrapers poking out of the clouds and looming over the ground below. Explanations for the event ranged from a glitch in the matrix, alternate universes opening up, and NASA attempting to establish a new world order headed up by the Antichrist by simulating – by means of holograms – either an alien invasion of Earth or Christ's Second Coming, through something called the "Blue Beam Project".

Meteorologists attributed the event to a rare type of

mirage called Fata Morgana – an optical illusion caused by specific weather conditions refracting light rays. It occurs when the Sun heats up a layer of the atmosphere while the layer below remains cool, generating temperature and density gradients, resulting in the apparent elevation and/or distortion of distant landscape features. Some believe the phenomenon is behind the legend of the *Flying Dutchman*. Fata Morgana is the Italian for the Arthurian sorceress Morgan le Fay. These mirages, often seen in the Strait of Messina, were believed to be fairy castles in the air or false land created by her witchcraft to lure sailors to their death. Fata Morganas can be seen on land or at sea, in polar regions or in deserts. They can involve almost any kind of distant object, including boats, buildings, islands and the coastline.

Failing all that, China's floating city could just be another of

the Internet's many hoaxes. Despite being shown on Chinese television, this video is the only piece of evidence to suggest that the phenomenon occurred. The initial reports claimed it was witnessed by 'hundreds' (later morphing into 'thousands') of people – but no eyewitnesses were identified or quoted across the web, and no one posted any *different* images of the mirage on services such as Weibo. *Independent*, 18 Oct; *iflscience.com*, *snopes.com*, 19 Oct; *[AP] telegraph.co.uk*, 20 Oct 2015.

GHOSTLY SIREN

A ghostly wail like a wartime siren is keeping Swansea residents awake at night. The source of the sound has yet to be traced, despite dozens of complaints over two years. Reports have become more frequent in recent months. Older residents say that the noise, which occurs in the early hours of the morning, sounds

exactly like the air raid sirens used to warn of the approach of German bombers during the Blitz. The Luftwaffe bombarded Swansea between 19 and 21 February 1941, targeting vital coal shipments. 230 people were killed and 400 injured. Flames from bombed oil refineries were visible 75 miles (120km) away.

Noise abatement officials from Swansea council launched an investigation but have so far been unable to identify the noise. One resident, Debbie Leyshon, said: "Everyone around here has heard it around dawn and into the early morning. It sounds just like a siren you hear in the war films. It always sounds like it is away in the distance but loud enough to wake you up if you are a light sleeper."

Residents have been exchanging experiences on Facebook. Stella Elphick said: "Been going on for at least the last two summers and through the winter. Day and night." Pete Rose said: "It drives my mother insane and I often hear it when visiting her." Damian Holt said: "Every morning around 4.30/5am till 6am or 7am most mornings." Debbie St Peter said that it was so annoying that she couldn't sleep. Sian Richards added: "That noise has been tormenting me since the beginning of the year."

Theories about the source of the noise include factory sirens, train horns and even a council department.

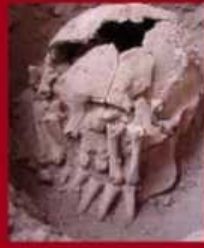
One man posted on a local website: "I live in Cockett and often hear this siren which keeps my whole family awake during the night. It's especially disturbing for my 92-year-old grandfather, who insists on wearing his tin helmet and ARP warden's badge and evacuating the whole family to the garden shed at 3am." *Western Mail*, *Times*, 24 Sept 2015.



EXORCISING ERNEST

How a Bulawayo suburb got rid of its trouble-making resident goblin

PAGE 8



DON'T LOSE YOUR HEAD!

Evidence emerges of the earliest ritual decapitations

PAGE 16



MEETING MOTHMAN

West Virginia town celebrates its infamous uncanny visitor

PAGE 21

The Conspirasphere

NOEL ROONEY considers the curious history of the tin foil hat and finds further evidence of serial reincarnation in photos of Stephen Hawking's gnashers.

Mind control fundamentally divides the conspiracy theorists from the sceptics. Despite the fact that hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people have claimed to be victims of mind control, no segment of the conspiracy grand narrative is more likely to provoke derision. In many respects, it is akin to the subject of alien abduction: a large coterie of believers who claim to be victims; a larger cohort of people who believe the victim stories and see themselves, and



mind control for telepathy, this is a curiously rational response, derived from fiction, to a real effect, transformed into a fiction through the filter of paranoid belief.

It's a little ironic that the sceptics are amused by the gullibility of the tin foil hat brigade; after all, gullibility is technically the basis for the very idea of mind control.

I found a fascinating addition to my ongoing file of serial reincarnators recently: it seems that Stephen Hawking actually

all of us, as potential victims; and a vast number of people who see the whole arena as a comic metaphor for the pathetic gullibility of a mentally unstable minority.

The image that sums up the divide most neatly is surely the tin foil hat. The term has effectively become a metonym for conspiracy theorist.

The idea that a piece of metal headgear might protect a person from the effects of mind control comes originally from a short story by Julian Huxley, "The Tissue Culture King", first published in 1927:

Well, we had discovered that metal was relatively impervious to the telepathic effect, and had prepared for ourselves a sort of tin pulpit, behind which we could stand while conducting experiments. This, combined with caps of metal foil, enormously reduced the effects on ourselves.

The idea is not in itself completely fictional; a tin foil hat is in effect a partial Faraday Cage, a device that reduces the effects of radio frequency electromagnetic radiation. There have even been a few academic studies on the efficacy of the tin foil hat, which suggest that it does, at least in part, do what it says on the – erm – tin. So if one substitutes weaponised

died sometime in the early 1980s, and has since been replaced by a series of doubles. Pespicious readers will note that Hawking's magnum opus, *A Brief History of Time*, was published in 1988. As usual, the main evidence for the substitution is photographic (although the author of this particular piece, Miles Mathis, also points out that Hawking is by far the longest-living survivor of Lou Gehrig's Disease; although it kills most of its victims in under a decade, Hawking has lived with the condition for an amazing 52 years).

A series of photos from the early 1980s onwards purports to show that the Stephen Hawking we all know and some of us love is, in fact, a sequence of pseudo-scientific stand-ins (perhaps sit-ins is more appropriate). The crux of the evidence is in the teeth: either serial reincarnation investigators are all orally fixated, or we are living under the shadow of a Grand Dental Conspiracy; you have been warned.

www.revolutionsf.com/fiction/tissue/07.html; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tin_foil_hat; <http://milesmathis.com/hawk3.pdf>; www.scientificamerican.com/article/stephen-hawking-als/

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Ancient armoured fish invented sex

D.Telegraph, 20 Oct 2014.

Forecaster warns of cold weather to come this winter

Hull Daily Mail, 18 Oct 2014.

Our underwear is not magic, say Mormons

D.Telegraph, 23 Oct 2014.

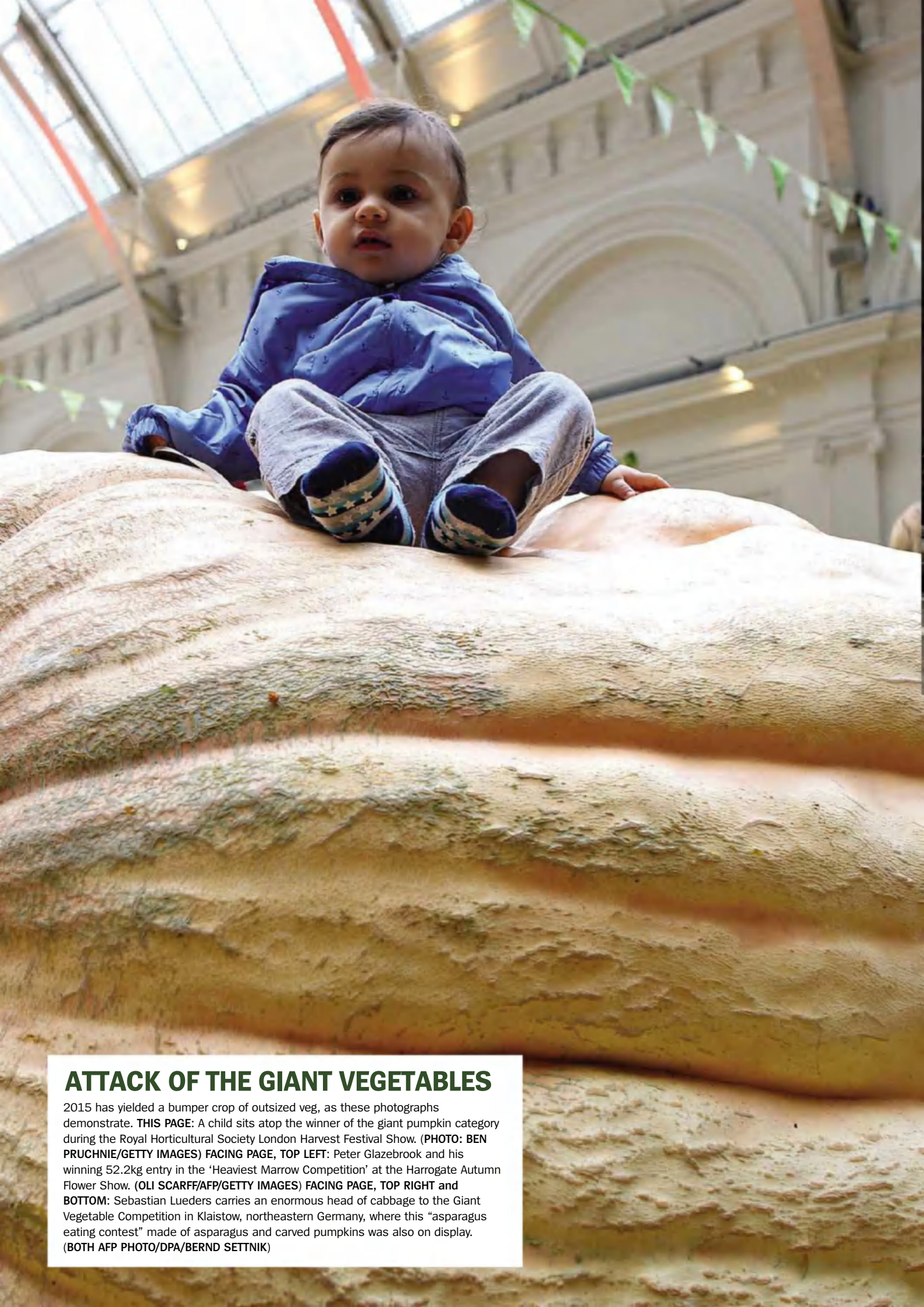
'Remote-controlled rats' could help paralysed patients walk

Daily Press, 21 Aug 2014.

WOLF 'MADE ME SLEEP WITH PAL'

Daily Press, 21 Aug 2014.





ATTACK OF THE GIANT VEGETABLES

2015 has yielded a bumper crop of outsized veg, as these photographs demonstrate. **THIS PAGE:** A child sits atop the winner of the giant pumpkin category during the Royal Horticultural Society London Harvest Festival Show. (PHOTO: BEN PRUCHNIE/GETTY IMAGES) **FACING PAGE, TOP LEFT:** Peter Glazebrook and his winning 52.2kg entry in the 'Heaviest Marrow Competition' at the Harrogate Autumn Flower Show. (OLI SCARFF/AFP/GETTY IMAGES) **FACING PAGE, TOP RIGHT and BOTTOM:** Sebastian Lueders carries an enormous head of cabbage to the Giant Vegetable Competition in Klastow, northeastern Germany, where this "asparagus eating contest" made of asparagus and carved pumpkins was also on display. (BOTH AFP PHOTO/DPA/BERND SETTNIK)



SIDELINES...

DOPE DELIVERY

Maya and Bill Donnelly woke up to a loud bang at their home in Nogales, Arizona, on 8 September. Thinking it was thunder, they went back to sleep. Later that morning, however, they discovered a 23lb (10kg) package of cannabis had crashed through the plywood roof of their carport and destroyed their German shepherd's doghouse – which was a mere 1,000ft (300m) from the Mexican border. The weed was valued at \$10,000. *ABC News, 28 Sept 2015.*

NEAR MISS

A baby shark (probably a smooth dogfish) landed next to Sue Bowser's backyard pond in North End, southeastern Virginia. The assumption was that it had been dropped by an osprey returning to its nest in First Landing State Park. *Hamptonroads.com (southeastern Virginia), 1 July 2015.*

PRIME PLONKER

Adam Hirtle, 30, shot himself in the foot twice on 10 June to find out how it felt – and then faced charges of reckless endangerment in Colorado Springs, Colorado. *gazette.com, 11 June 2015.*

UNCONVENTIONAL HOLSTER

Jennifer McCarthy, 48, ex-wife of Cormac McCarthy (author of *The Road*), was arrested in Santa Fe, New Mexico, for threatening her boyfriend with a Smith and Wesson revolver she pulled out of her vagina after an argument about space aliens. *(Queensland) Courier-Mail, 20 June 2015.*



MARTIN ROSS

Ernest the Goblin

Team of exorcists rids Bulawayo of a supernatural pest



LEFT: Three of the witch hunters who exorcised the troublesome goblin
BELOW: Ernest, who was later burnt.

In early October, a team of four *tsikamtandas* (witch hunters) exorcised a notorious 'goblin' called Ernest that was terrorising residents of Bulawayo's Cowdray Park suburb in Zimbabwe by stoning their homes, breaking windows, and sleeping with women in the area. Some also claimed to have been attacked while walking at night. Hundreds of enthralled residents thronged the home of a woman who was allegedly housing the 'goblin'. During the exorcism, the leader of the team, Mafirakureva, said the owner of the 'goblin' failed to pay the dues of a certain traditional healer she and her husband had visited to seek prosperity. The healer was now getting his own back by sending the creature to terrorise, or even kill her. After the exorcism, the *tsikamtandas* emerged from the house bearing a scary rat-like creature with a horn and feathers. It was later burnt after being paraded through the neighbourhood.

Residents related their different experiences with Ernest. Thulani Dube said: "I woke up one night and found my wife acting as if she were enjoying sexual activities with someone. I can't wait for this thing to be removed today." A woman called MaNyoni said: "I was terrified when I heard Ernest clapping his hands, saying I must hurry up and finish bathing as he could not wait any longer."

A whole bunch of goblins had invaded Cowdray Park

Some women victims said when Ernest was raping them, there were in some kind of dream. "I could dream about sleeping with a white man," said one, "and when I wake up in the morning it would be as if I were involved with a man." *thezimbabwean.com, 6 Oct 2015.*

• Another news website (*iharare.co.zw, 19 Aug 2015*) said a whole bunch of goblins had "invaded" Cowdray Park, throwing stones at anyone walking after 8pm, though remaining invisible. "I was walking home from work when

a stone hit me on the back," said one resident. "I stopped to check on what was happening and saw these stones were being thrown from different directions." Baffled by the incident, he "ran for dear life".

• On 15 January 2014, a family from Bulawayo's Nketa 7 suburb delivered a 'goblin' in a suitcase to Tshabalala police station, claiming it belonged to their tenant. A curious crowd gathered, and a traditional healer who had come with the family opened the suitcase. A weird-looking creature jumped out of a bottle filled with blood. "No one told anyone it was time to run," said a policeman. "One minute, the charge office was full, the next, it was empty. I think some people went out through the windows because we could not all have fitted through the door. Fat cops and slim cops all ran for their lives screaming."

Police officers gave differing descriptions of the goblin. Some said it looked like a snake with a dog's head and others said it resembled a dog with scales like a pangolin. However, all agreed that it smelt foul. The traditional healer is said to have overpowered the 'goblin' and burnt it. Bulawayo Police Assistant Inspector Bhekimpilo Ndlovu confirmed that the incident had indeed taken place. *Bulawayo24.com (Zimbabwe), 17 Jan 2014.*





Nearly six feet under

Escapologist's 'Buried Alive' trick goes horribly wrong



FACEBOOK



KEYSTONE / GETTY IMAGES

Escapologist Antony Britton, 43 (or 38, pictured above), who hoped to trump Harry Houdini after being buried alive, was lucky to escape with only a broken rib after he failed to emerge from under 6ft (1.8m) of soil, almost nine minutes into the challenge at a charity event on 5 September. Britton – from Linthwaite, West Yorkshire – had written online: “I will be buried in a grave with over six tonnes of soil on top of me. I will not be in a coffin nor will there be any masks, pipes or oxygen tanks. The job is clear, I must escape the grave unaided.” He was handcuffed, and had a microphone round his neck so support staff could keep in contact.

An anxious audience at Slaithwaite Spa, West Yorkshire, watched as the daredevil was hauled out by crew members, taken to a waiting ambulance and given oxygen, before coming round. “I was just seconds away from death,” he said. “It was

scary. The pressure of the soil was crushing around me. Even when I found an air pocket, when I exhaled, the soil around me was crushing me even more. I could feel myself losing consciousness and there was nothing I could do. I was pretty much dying. But everyone was on the ball and the crew was well drilled. They knew pretty much where I would be under the soil and after the digger had moved in behind me, the team were hand-balling the soil until they could reach me.” He added his biggest disappointment was to discover he was just two feet from the surface when he had to be rescued.

He is only the third person in a century to attempt the Buried Alive challenge – although in 1992 a 32-year-old American magician, Joe Burrus, died in his attempt at a variation of the stunt. He was crushed to death when the Perspex casket he was

interred in was unable to hold the weight of soil and concrete that he had told helpers to pour on top. Houdini was already world famous when he devised the stunt in the US in 1915. He too had to be dragged out unconscious. British escapologist Alan Alan, 22, was filmed by Pathé News when he tried the trick in 1949, but he also failed and nearly suffocated being dug out. Britton’s brush with the Grim Reaper wasn’t the first time he had misjudged his act. Last year, crowds watched in horror as he tried to repeat another of Alan Alan’s tricks (shown above) by wriggling out of a straight-jacket suspended upside down by burning ropes during a performance in Bradford, West Yorkshire; and in 2013 he was left badly burned when ‘Lucifer’s Chamber’ – the 8ft (2.8m) steel cage inside which he was fastened – became engulfed in flames. *theguardian.com*, 8 Sept; *D.Telegraph*, 9 Sept; *D.Mail*, 9+12 Sept 2015.

SIDELINES...

SACRIFICE DENIED

Kenya’s Vice President Michael Wamalwa died aged 58 in the Royal Free Hospital in Hampstead, north London, while being treated for a chest infection in 2003. Relatives and members of his Bukusu clan arrived at the hospital on 17 August this year, seeking permission to hold a traditional *khulotia* to bring back his soul and improve the clan’s fortunes. A ram was to be sacrificed at the “site of his death”, a hospital ward. Permission was denied. *Metro*, 24 Aug 2015.

CURE-ALL

On 19 June, the North Korean Central News Agency announced a new drug – Kum-dang-2, made of ginseng and unnamed ingredients – that can prevent and cure Aids, Ebola, Mers and Sars. Meanwhile, an outbreak of Mers in South Korea had killed two-dozen people and sickened more than 160 in a month. There is no vaccine for the disease. *Irish Independent*, 20 June 2015.

MAIDSTONE MIRACLE

Peter Rabbatts, 62, had a heart attack at the wheel while waiting at traffic lights in Maidstone, Kent. He survived because a doctor, nurse and medic were driving by – in three separate cars – and stopped to help. “It has to be a miracle,” said his wife Jane. *Metro*, 10 July 2015.

BIZARRE POLL

More than half of people living in Hackney, east London, (51.3%) have seen their neighbours naked compared to the national average of 24.7%, a poll revealed. *Sun*, 31 May 2015.



MARTIN ROSS



SIDELINES...

UNIQUE INJURY

A 19-year-old student from Sheffield who suffered whip-lash in a car accident in 2004 lost the ability to read and write in the only case of its kind in the world. The injury caused a cyst to grow on his brain. Unable to recognise any letter, he spent years being re-educated, but returned to college in 2009 and obtained a first class degree. *Metro*, 17 Mar 2015.

IN THEM THAR HILLS

Forrest Fenn, 84, an antiques dealer from New Mexico, instigated a huge (and ongoing) treasure hunt in 2010 by burying 40lb (18kg) of gold coins and nuggets somewhere in the mountains that stretch across four states between Montana and New Mexico. The location can be found using nine clues in a 24-line poem he has written. The finder will be allowed to keep the haul, worth millions of dollars. *D.Mail*, 13 July 2015.

MORE GULL MISCHIEF

A handbag stolen from a hotel bedroom by a seagull was returned after the bird dropped it in a street in Minehead, Somerset. *Sunday People*, 23 Aug 2015.

HALF AN HOUR EXTRA

On 15 August, North Korea moved its clocks back 30 minutes to create a new "Pyongyang Time", breaking from a standard imposed by "wicked" Japanese imperialists (who ruled Korea from 1910 to 1945). *[AP]* 8 Aug 2015.



Back from the grave

Reports of their deaths were indeed greatly exaggerated



Neysi Pérez, 16, who was three months pregnant, fell unconscious in early July this year after waking up at night to use the outside lavatory at her home in La Entrada, western Honduras. She may have collapsed after hearing a burst of gunfire in the nearby town. When she started foaming at the mouth, her parents called the local priest, believing she was possessed by an evil spirit. The priest tried to exorcise her, but she later appeared lifeless and was rushed to hospital, where three hours later doctors declared her dead. She was buried in the wedding dress she had recently got married in.

A day after her funeral, her husband Rudy Gonzales was visiting her grave when he heard banging and muffled screams from inside the concrete tomb, and raised the alarm. Film footage shows grieving family members breaking through the concrete with a sledgehammer before bringing out and opening up her coffin to try to revive her. The glass viewing window on her coffin had been smashed, and the tips of her fingers were



Rudy heard screams from inside the concrete tomb

bruised. Cemetery worker Jesus Villanueva said he had also heard noises coming from the grave. "I convinced myself that the screams were coming from somewhere else," he said. "I never imagined that there was someone alive in there." Ms Pérez was taken to the nearest hospital

LEFT: Grieving family members break into the tomb of Neysi Pérez after hearing banging and muffled screams.

in San Pedro Sula, but medics found no signs of life and she was returned to the cemetery to be reburied.

One hypothesis is that she suffered a severe panic attack that temporarily stopped her heart; another is that she had a cataplexy attack, an abrupt temporary loss of voluntary muscle function typically triggered by a strong emotional stimulus such as stress or fear, during which the victim maintains full conscious awareness. She may then have died from lack of oxygen after waking up inside the closed coffin. Her cousin, Carolina Perez, said: "Once we had taken her out of the tomb I put my hand on her body. She was still warm, and I felt a faint heartbeat. She had scratches on her forehead and bruises on her fingers. It looked like she had tried desperately to get out of the casket and hurt herself." Ms Perez's mother Maria Gutierrez believes her daughter was buried alive. "Even after a day in the tomb the colour of her body was normal, her corpse didn't smell, she just looked like she was in a deep sleep," she said. "There was no rigor mortis, it was impossible that she had been dead for so many hours. We were all so happy. I thought I was going to get my daughter back." *D.Express*, 25 Aug; *thetimes.co.uk*, 26 Aug 2015.

- A 14-year-old boy trapped 6ft (1.8m) underwater in an Italian canal for 42 minutes has made a complete recovery. His heart stopped and rescuers who pulled him from the water in Cuggiono near Milan assumed he was dead. They were stunned when they were able to restart his heart using a defibrillator and massage. "Some people are talking about



a miracle,” said Alberto Zangrillo, who treated the teenager in hospital. “I have to see this from the point of view of medical science, but I cannot explain it completely.”

The boy, who is half-German and named only as Michael, jumped from a bridge into the canal on 24 April, but remained trapped by an underwater obstacle after his friends surfaced. Fire service divers were eventually able to free him and paramedics discovered that he had suffered a cardiac arrest, but were able to restore a faint heartbeat. Within an hour he had been taken to the San Raffaele hospital in Milan where Dr Zangrillo and his team pumped oxygen back into his bloodstream. They used a technique called extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO), which extracts oxygen-deprived blood from the body, warms it, inserts oxygen and pumps it back into the body. This procedure helped to save a three-year-old who fell into a frozen pond in Austria in 1999. “According to the rules, there is no point using ECMO if the patient’s blood has stopped flowing for six minutes,” said Dr Zangrillo. However, the technique was used for 10 days and Michael, who had been put into an induced coma, was still alive, although circulation problems meant that his right leg had to be amputated below the knee. Awake within a month, he remembered everything and appeared to have no brain damage.

Temperature can influence how long a body can survive underwater. “We know of cases in Finland and Norway of people surviving under water for 20 minutes, but that is at five degrees centigrade,” said Dr Zangrillo. “At lower temperatures the brain needs less oxygen and can survive longer [see FT45:28-29, 131:8, 146:6 – Editor]. But Michael’s body was at 29 centigrade in the canal, which is not low enough. What did work in his favour was that his larynx closed as a reflex action. It meant water stayed out of his lungs.” Dr Zangrillo is a personal physician to Silvio Berlusconi, the former prime minister of Italy. *Times*, 28 May 2015.



ABOVE: The canal in Cuggiono in which a 14-year-old boy was trapped for 42 minutes.

- A man declared dead after being stabbed in the heart shocked doctors when he woke up. They initially failed to revive the unnamed father of three, 39, but he was found alive in a hospital bed in Bogota, Colombia, 45 minutes later. “It’s indescribable,” said hospital director Juan Ernesto Oviedo. “We are amazed by this case.” *Metro*, *D.Star*, 25 Oct 2013.
- A baby “came back from the dead” 10 hours after being sent to a morgue. The little girl was born prematurely when mother Jenny Hurtado was 27 weeks pregnant. Medics in Quibdo, Colombia, carried out a caesarean section, but declared the baby dead 35 minutes later. She was put in a box and taken to a morgue, but as her father collected what he thought were the remains of his child he heard a soft cry. The child – now named Milagros, or miracle – was flown to a clinic in Bogota and was taken to intensive care where she was treated for underdeveloped lungs. *D.Mail*, 19 Nov 2013.
- A terrified funeral parlour worker fainted when a ‘corpse’ he was preparing for burial began wiggling its toes. Miro Jurisic, 20, had stripped the 80-year-old heart attack victim and was about to wash her when he saw her move. At the time of the report, the unnamed woman, who had been on the slab for 10 hours, was recovering in hospital in the Croatian capital, Zagreb. *Sun*, 6 Mar 2015.
- Another funeral parlour fainting took place later that month, in Germany. An undertaker passed out in shock on 22 March in a refrigerated room when a coffin lid slid open and the 92-year-old woman inside groaned: “Where am I?” She had been pronounced dead hours earlier at a care home in Gelsenkirchen and taken to the Munstermann funeral parlour. When the undertaker recovered, he saw the woman lying in the coffin with both eyes open. She was rushed to hospital but died 48 hours later. The doctor who initially declared her dead is due to stand trial for criminal negligence. *D.Mail*, 25 Mar, 30 July 2015.
- Samuel Ledward, 30, was thrown from his motorbike in 1936 when his front tyre burst. He was declared dead at the scene. As he was being taken to a morgue, an attendant noticed his hand move and diverted the ambulance to a hospital. He was in a coma for five days and in hospital for six months. Ledward, who worked as a cabinet maker and butcher in North Wales, lived for another 79 years to become one of the oldest men in the UK. He died in Blackpool on 18 August this year at the age of 108. *D.Express*, 20 Aug 2015.

The last round-ups of the “Lazarus phenomenon” were in FT280:26-27, 289:10-11, 306:8-9, and 323:26-27.

SIDELINES...

YELLOW PERIL

Since 1960, visitors to Tisdale, Canada, have been greeted with a large sign welcoming them to the “Land of Rape and Honey”. This reference to rapeseed production and beekeeping drew complaints from outsiders and the town has asked its 3,200 residents if they want to change the slogan. *D.Telegraph*, 24 April 2015.

MARINE INTRUDER

Michael Duffy, 48, was awoken on his boat at the San Diego Yacht Club at 2.30am by snoring and sneezing. He thought it might be a friend crashing from a night out, but couldn’t find anyone. Once it got light, he heard it again and found a 35lb (16kg) sea lion pup on another bunk, curled up like a dog on top of his clothes. *Dundee Courier and Advertiser*, 13 May 2015.

RECORD WITH A STING

Peter Wellman, 24, has set a world record after eating 96ft (29m) of nettles in an hour. He took the record and first prize at the World Nettle Eating Championship held at The Bottle Inn in Marshwood, Dorset. A record was also set at the women’s event, with Naomi Chard munching through 58ft (18m). *Times*, 23 June 2015.

VEGETABLE CHORUS

Cold nights and recent warm weather caused a growth spurt in cauliflowers in late June, resulting in the loudest “cauliflower creak” in Cornwall and Lincolnshire since 1991. The fast growth causes the plants’ florets to rub together, making an eerie creaking sound. *D.Mail*, *Metro*, 26 June; <i> 27 June 2015.

CRABS ON THE RUN

Several dozen crabs were filmed scuttling across the platform at Gateshead Metro Station at 9pm on 17 September. They had apparently escaped from a fisherman’s carrier bag. The surviving crabs were taken to a marine life centre in Tynemouth. *Liverpool Echo*, 19 Sept 2015.



SIDELINES...

WHAT HAVE WE EAR?

Police were searching for a man whose severed diamond-studded ear was found on the pavement in Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, after it was bitten off in a fight on 3 May. It was thought he had not sought medical treatment, despite suffering significant blood loss at the scene. Two men were arrested on suspicion of wounding. *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 5 May 2015.*

HOLIDAY TREAT

While swimming in an Alpine lake on 11 August, a 16-year-old girl found a 500g (17oz) gold bar, worth about £11,200, at about 6ft (1.8m) below the surface. She handed it to police. The lake in question was Königssee, a popular tourist spot near Berchtesgaden on the Bavarian border with Austria. Divers made a thorough search of the area, but nothing more was found. Could it be Nazi loot? *<i> 13 Aug 2015.*

SIBLING HELL

Donna Ayres, 33, mother of four, has been terrorised by what she believes is the ghost of her brother who died in 2009. It has pinned her to the bed, bruised her and played the guitar (!). She has moved house five times in a vain attempt to escape. She has filmed a levitating spoon and a Ouija board flying across a room at her Blackpool home. *Metro, 17 Mar 2015.*

ORNAMENT ALERTS

Animal welfare officers, tipped off about a donkey in Airdie, North Lanarkshire, tied to a fence without any shelter, found a fibreglass replica named Joshua that had appeared in nativity plays. A day later, responding to reports of a snake on the loose at a block of flats in Sutton, southeast London, police found a "venomous adder" that was "lying very still on a patio". After a tense standoff for "several minutes" or "almost an hour", a resident told them it was a garden ornament with paint peeling off. *Sun, 12+16 June, D.Telegraph, 16 June 2015.*



Knitted dissections

Emily Stoneking lives in Burlington, Vermont, where she studies German and History at university. In her spare time, though, she employs her crafting skills to create crocheted and knitted dissections. "I got started because I have always really loved old anatomical illustrations, but I am terrible at drawing," she told *FT*. "So instead of recreating them using pencils and paint, I thought I could do something similar, but in wool! I love the history of science, and I really like that moment during the 18th and 19th centuries when art and science were so closely linked. A nice byproduct is that (hopefully) people stop to think about anatomy in a new way, through seeing something that is supposed to be icky rendered in a material that is so often associated with comfort." Emily has made dissected lab rats, frogs and bats, all pinned to boards with their internal organs neatly displayed, but her most forteen creation must be her alien autopsy. You can find Emily's work at www.aKNITomy.etsy.com.



PHOTOS: EMILY STONEKING



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A POX ON BOTH YOUR HOUSES

The war between vaxxers and anti-vaxxers has raged for centuries. **DAVID HAMBLING** looks at how immunisation has often been caught between science and superstition.

The history of immunisation is a dance of science and superstition that has continued for centuries and is as lively as ever. Republican US Presidential candidate Donald Trump is on the side of the 'anti-vaxxers,' and has promised to include vaccination in his presidential agenda.

As far back as the 11th century, Taoist alchemists in China carried out a procedure known as variolation. This involved blowing powder into the patient's nose through a silver straw. The powder was made from the scabs of a smallpox sufferer, and was reputed to prevent the patient from catching the disease.

Western doctors regarded the practice as dangerous oriental superstition. They had no answer themselves to smallpox, which had a mortality rate of 30 per cent in adults and a much higher rate in children. The survivors were left with disfiguring pockmarks for life and it was greatly feared.

In 1717, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu wrote enthusiastically of a type of variolation in Turkey that involved placing pox-bearing material under the skin. She had the procedure carried out on her five-year-old son, Edward Montagu. The boy survived to become a notable traveller and writer. After successful trials in England and, in spite of opposition, variolation became an accepted practice. It was medicalised: rather than being something anyone could do, variolation required bleeding and a deep incision. In America, Cotton Mather, more famous for his role in the Salem witch trials, was the most important promoter of variolation, having learned of it from a slave who had been treated in Africa.

Variolation gave resistance to smallpox, but although most



subjects only suffered a mild attack of fever, a few died. Then Edward Jenner heard a dairymaid boast that she would never have a pockmarked face. This was because, like many dairymaids, she had already had cowpox, a disease of cattle that causes a mild infection in humans.

The belief that cowpox gave protection from smallpox was a well-known superstition, but Jenner was the first person shrewd enough to investigate it scientifically. In 1798 he published his results, showing that inoculation with cowpox from a cow protected against smallpox without the risks involved in variolation.

This unnatural procedure with cowpox was not something that everyone could accept. A famous Gilray cartoon of 1803, "The Cow-Pock, or, the Wonderful Effects of the New Inoculation" (above) shows recipients of Jenner's treatment sprouting horns or cows' heads from various parts of their anatomy.

Having jumped the barrier from folkloric superstition (or damned, unexplained phenomenon) to accepted scientific effect twice, vaccination has struggled to stay there. Many people remained suspicious of alien substances injected into their bodies. "A peculiarly filthy piece of witchcraft," was George Bernard Shaw's verdict on vaccination — in

spite of his having almost died of smallpox. It's a revealing choice of words for the great writer to use.

The Anti Vaccination Society of America was founded in 1879. A smallpox outbreak in 1902 led to Cambridge, Massachusetts, introducing compulsory vaccination. The legal battles that followed went all the way to the Supreme Court, which ruled that mandatory vaccination was legal. Since then there have been vaccination scares over contaminated vaccine, mercury, or the effects of particular vaccines or combinations.

The latest round was set off by a British researcher, Andrew Wakefield, whose 1998 paper claimed there was a link between the MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) triple vaccination and autism and bowel disease. This immediately set off controversy, and the claims were investigated by other scientists. Wakefield's co-authors no longer support the claims, and *The Lancet* dropped the paper after it was found that some of the evidence was fraudulent. Wakefield's claims were "based not on bad science but on a deliberate fraud," according to *The Lancet's* editor. Wakefield was convicted of dishonesty by the General Medical Council and struck off in 2010. Most importantly for science, other researchers could not replicate the findings. Any link

between vaccination and autism remains unproven. Wakefield maintains that his work is valid, and it is still widely believed by many people. Including, it seems, Donald Trump.

"We've had so many instances, people that work for me, just the other day... a beautiful child went to have the vaccine, and came back, and a week later got a tremendous fever, got very, very sick, now is autistic," Trump said in a CNN interview.

The anti-vaccination groups or "anti-vaxxers" now fund their own research. A group called SafeMinds whose mission is "resolving the autism epidemic" is one such. Between 2003 and 2013 SafeMinds gave a quarter of a million dollars to a group headed by Laura Hewitson, director of research for the Johnson Center for Child Health & Development, for studies on the effect of childhood vaccines on rhesus macaque monkeys. However, the title of the latest paper from this research speaks for itself: "Administration of thimerosal-containing vaccines to infant rhesus macaques does not result in autism-like behaviour or neuropathology". The testing involved 79 monkeys, which were divided into groups that received different inoculation regimes. Studies of the monkeys' behaviour, and in some case post-mortem brain examination, found no difference between groups. Sallie Bernard, director of SafeMinds, still thinks somewhere in the data there may be an effect. "We believe there is a subset that have [sic] an adverse reaction to their vaccines," she said. "By looking at the raw data, not data in aggregate, we may be able to identify the subgroup that had that reaction."

Cherry-picking enough data can often throw up apparent correlations. If you look hard enough you will see what you want to see.

The dance of science and superstition continues. The number of children receiving the MMR jab dropped as a result of Wakefield's claims, and cases of measles shot up. In England measles went from one or two cases a year to over 2,000; the disease is at its highest levels for 18 years. With a mortality rate of one per 2,000 to 3,000, the science-free MMR scare is likely to claim victims.

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ARCHAEOLOGY

Our archaeological round-up is brought to you by **PAUL DEVEREUX**, Managing Editor of *Time & Mind – The Journal of Archaeology, Consciousness and Culture* (www.tandfonline.com/rtam)

HEADS WE LOSE

The grim crew that calls itself 'Islamic State' has appalled the world with its beheadings and destruction of ancient sites. These two dreadful practices came together most starkly with the crew's murder of Khaled al-Asaad, 83, since 1963 the guardian of antiquities for the ancient city of Palmyra in Syria, and the considerable destruction wrought by it of parts of this remarkable site – notably the Temple of Bel (or Baal) dedicated in AD 32, and, even as this column is being written (October), the monumental arch erected under Septimius Severus (AD 193-211). Khaled al-Asaad would not swear allegiance to the jihadists nor tell them where precious artefacts were being hidden, for which bravery he was publically beheaded on 18 August and his body hung on a traffic light. Ironically, two recently announced archaeological finds underline the fact that the grisly act of decapitation has been with us for a long, long time.

The oldest archaeological evidence of beheading in the Americas has come to light in Brazil: what appears to have been the remains of a ritual decapitation of a young man have been uncovered in a rock shelter in Lapa do Santo ("saint's rock shelter"), an area already known for its prehistoric finds and rock art. Eerily, the decapitated skull had an amputated right hand placed palm down on the left side of the face, with fingers pointing to the chin, and an amputated left hand placed palm down over the right side of the face with fingers pointing to the forehead, unusual details which make an already macabre find even more disturbing, and indicates a ritualised killing. What really astonished the international team of archaeologists, though, is the dating of the remains to before 7,000 BC. The head-hunting predilections of various cultures and tribes in the ancient Americas is of course well known (the Arara people in the Brazilian Amazon used skulls of conquered enemies



ABOVE AND BOTTOM RIGHT: Palmyra's monumental arch and Temple of Bel, destroyed by IS or Daesh.

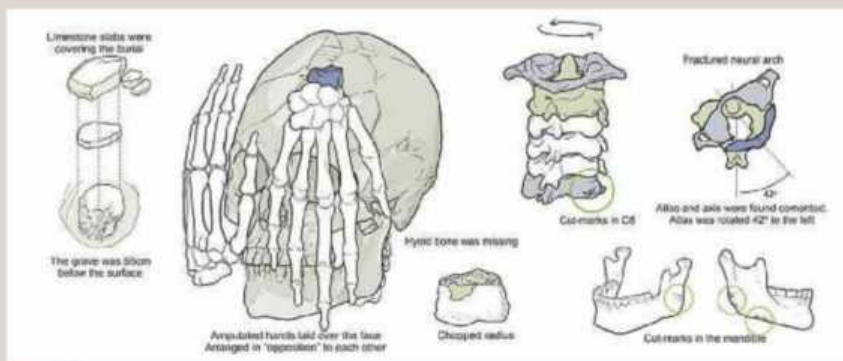
as musical instruments, for instance, and the Inca turned skulls into drinking vessels), but no one had guessed that the practice of decapitation started there so far back in time. *LiveScience*, 23 Sept 2015 (original paper in *PLoSone*, 23 Sept 2015).

Ghoulish archaeological finds of a similar kind can be made on this side of the Atlantic too, as testified by discoveries in the remote 'Sculptor's Cave', halfway up the sea cliffs overlooking the Moray Firth in Scotland. Remains there from the late Bronze Age show evidence for (hopefully already) dead children having had their heads cut off for display in the entrance. The cave appears to have been used for rituals by the somewhat mysterious tribal people known to us as Picts, who survived into the early centuries of the historical era. The announcement of this find at this year's British Science Festival caused particular media interest because the cave is in a remote part of the Gordonstoun estate, location of the public school where Prince Charles and other royal children had part of their education. *Mail Online*, 15 Sept 2015.

(Interestingly, the 21ft (6.5m) monolith known as Sueno's Stone stands in the general district of the Gordonstoun estate. This is the largest surviving carved Pictish stone, and among its mass of imagery is a detail depicting several decapitated bodies – probably enemies beheaded after a battle.)

THE MAGNIFICENT FIVE

A happier footnote to the deep outrages at Palmyra has been provided by the BBC's Jeremy Bowen writing in the *New Statesman*. Somewhat like the men in George Clooney's movie set in World War II, *The Monuments Men*, he describes how a group of five archaeologists managed to remove all the feasibly moveable artefacts in Palmyra's museum from under the noses (and literally under the fire) of the ISIL crew and, in a mad dash for their lives, the men hid them in a secret location well away from Palmyra. Three members of the group were the sons of Khaled al-Asaad. One can almost hear the spirit of the old man having the last laugh. *New Statesman*, 22 Sept 2015.



ABOVE: A schematic representation by Gil Tokyo of the Lapo do Santo burial showing the amputated hands placed over the decapitated head of a young man.



CLASSICAL CORNER



FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

193: FAT CHANCE

(Dedicated to Billy Bunter, Mr Creosote, Andy Dalziel, Ken Clarke, and Eric Pickles)

“According to us the fat man is nearer godliness than is the thin man” – Fort, *Books*, p107.

Our fretting over fatties is nothing new. Both Old and New Testaments denounce gormandising: Proverbs 23. 2. 3; Ezekiel 16. 49; Daniel 1. 12; Romans 12. 1; 1 Corinthians 6. 19-20; Titus 1. 1. Jerome summed up: “A fat stomach never breeds fine thoughts” – did Fort know this aphorism?

Deuteronomy 21. 20 endorses the stoning of obese children – Britain might consider re-establishing this practice, less expensive than sending our Bunters to Fat Camps.

Hippocrates’s remedies are less extreme, generally in keeping with modern prescriptions. He was, though (*On Airs, Waters, Places*, chs20-2), obsessed with the Scythian tendency to corpulence, blaming their embonpoint (also their trouser-wearing – what price the ‘Father of Medicine’ in a kilt?) for loss of sexual libido.

Roman poet Horace was one refutation of this. According to himself (*Epistles* 1. 4. 15, 1. 20. 24), and to Suetonius’s mini-biography, Horace was stout (also prematurely grey and irascible – no jolly fat man, he), a “sleek pig from Epicurus’s sty”. Yet he was “excessively lustful”, both anticipating and out-reflecting Hugh Hefner in a bedroom “lined with mirrors and tartlets so that whichever way he looked he could see the action.”

Suetonius describes (e.g.) Nero and Domitian as ‘paunchy’. No surprise to find rubicund Roman rulers. Fattest by far was the (as Gibbon dubbed him) ‘beastly’ Vitellius (pictured at right) with his four banquets a day and other trencherman exploits – albeit not including the claim (ubiquitous on the Internet) that he once consumed a thousand oysters at a sitting.

Another notorious Roman ostreophage was Montanus, who appears in Juvenal’s Fourth Satire as one of Domitian’s privy-councillors advising that emperor on how to cook a giant turbot. He was such an oyster-expert that one taste sufficed to identify from which bed it came. And, the intake of a fellow whose entrance is described as “Montanus’s belly came in followed by Montanus himself” must have been impressive – reminds me of Orson Wells, said in all seriousness to have been so

incapacitated by obesity that he had to diet in order to play Falstaff.

Logically enough, the biggest collection of ancient fatties is provided by Athenæus, *Learned Men at Dinner*, bk12 paras 549-50. From “many such cases” he gives special attention (reproduced verbatim in Aelian, *Historical Miscellany*, bk9 ch13) to Dionysius, tyrant of Heracleia, whose flab was immune to pain from needles inserted by his doctors – though this might be seen as primitive acupuncture; cf. Claudio Bevegni & Gian Franco Adami, ‘Obesity and Obesity Surgery in Ancient Greece,’ *Obesity Surgery* 13 (2003), 808-9 (online) for the passage in full and their diagnosis. Also singled out are “the monstrously fat” Magas (another tyrant) who choked to death, the orator Python who boasted he could share a bed – presumably a double-double at least – with his even fatter missus, the matricide Ptolemy Alexander, and his father Ptolemy VII ‘Physkon’ (‘The Fat’) whose belly “you could not measure even with your arms.” This Ptolemaic gene apparently by-passed Cleopatra (last of the line; cf BBC’s ‘The Cleopatras’), only to re-surface in Elizabeth Taylor, thus providing a corpulent inventory of fat jokes for Joan Rivers – Google has gaggles of giggles.

“Outside every fat man there was an even fatter man trying to close in” – Kingsley Amis, *One Fat Englishman*.



THEY ALSO WALKED THE EARTH

This column recently reported on the finding of the fossil remnants of a previously unknown strain of the human genus that disappeared [FT329:14]. Well, now comes the report of the discovery of yet another human species. This hominin has been called *Homo naledi* (“star”) in acknowledgement of the find spot, the Rising Star cave near Johannesburg in South Africa. Thousands of pieces of bone were glimpsed by researchers in a further cavern (the ‘Dinaledi’ chamber) through an 8in (20cm) -wide crevice at the back of the main cave, and a group of slim female palæontologists had the tricky job of navigating the narrow gap to recover just some of the bones – 1,550 of them to be precise. What the bones – of several individuals – actually signify is still controversial, but the discoverers insist that some at least are of one previously unknown species that had both human and apelike characteristics. This sounds something like what used to be called the ‘missing link’, when it was naively thought there was only one single line of human evolution. The bones seem to indicate the site was some kind of graveyard, and if the claims about the bones are accurate, this raises the prospect that very early pre-*Homo sapiens* had some ritual sense associated with death. *Guardian*, 10+11 Sept, *PhysOrg* 14 Sept 2015.



ABOVE: A composite ‘skeleton’ of *Homo naledi* made up of bones from multiple individuals.

LEE ROGER BERGER RESEARCH TEAM



GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE looks to the Left and surveys the haunting experiences of Labour politicians

HAUNTED HEALEY (& CO)

Veteran Labour politician Denis Healey (1917-2015), who died on 2 October, was one of the few British politicians in the post-WWII era to have admitted encountering a ghost whilst in an official residence. Unusually, the first part of this story appeared in the *Guardian* in 1969. This newspaper, which proclaims itself “The world’s leading liberal voice”, generally avoids covering matters ghostly, and often adopts a tone of superior scepticism (sometimes justified) in its treatment of such topics. However, in June 1969 the paper reported: “Something strange is happening in Admiralty House... No one has actually seen anything nasty in the woodshed, but some at least have complained of things that go bump in the night. The Ministry of Public Buildings and Works, ever helpful and ever correct, will say no more than that it is investigating complaints about the water system in Denis Healey’s flat at the end of the Mall”.

However, from inside sources at Westminster, the *Guardian* had learned that the phantom of a young woman had been seen ‘floating around’ in the Healeys’ bedroom by the then Defence Secretary, his wife and children. The Healeys were reported to be quite relaxed about the appearance, treating her as one of the family, as the apparition caused no trouble or alarm, but simply floated about.

According to stories then circulating, previous incumbents of the flat, including Winston Churchill and Harold Macmillan, had also been similarly haunted, but without either making any complaint. The *Guardian* reported that “the best and most appealing guess” is that the ghost was Martha Ray, the mistress of the Earl of Sandwich, a Lord Commissioner of the Admiralty in the 18th century. She was shot dead one night in 1779 when leaving Covent Garden and her portrait hung in the state of room of the Healeys’ flat. *Guardian*, 25 June 1969.



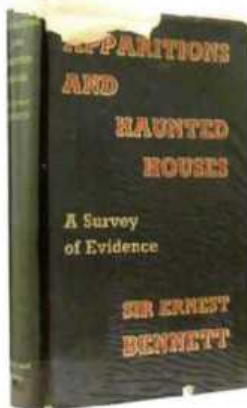
That was where the matter ended until 1972 when ghost hunter Andrew Green decided to include the case in his book *Our Haunted Kingdom* (1973), a survey of active ghosts and poltergeists reported in the previous 25 years. Andrew duly contacted the Ministry of Works and in April 1972 received a short and laconic reply simply informing him: “The flat in question is one of three official residences in Admiralty House, Whitehall, London SW1”. The letter was signed “M.J. Ray”, which was either a coincidence of names or someone at the Ministry having a bit of a joke. Andrew Green then wrote to Denis Healey, by then no longer Minister but an Opposition MP. Healey replied on 5 May 1972 stating: “I am afraid that my wife and I are not able to give you the material you wish as the person directly involved does not wish to be approached.”

Accordingly, Andrew Green had an entry

LEFT: The late Denis Healey, one of a number of Labour MPs to experience otherworldly apparitions.

on the haunted flat in his book the following year, but included no more information than had appeared in the original *Guardian* report. No further sightings were received and there the matter again rested until 2010 when, on my having become literary executor to the Andrew Green estate, I decided to make some enquiries with the by then ennobled Lord Healey. He kindly replied to my enquiry, telling me in a letter: “We did all see a ghost in our bedroom in Admiralty House, but it was not Martha Ray but Duff Cooper’s bride Diana” (*Pers. comm., Lord Healey, 17 Mar 2010*). Thus, the original rumours had some foundation in an actual sighting, even if the ghost had been erroneously identified, and it is good to be able to put the record straight with such a case (a tradition that the *Guardian* always prides itself upon honouring, of course). Denis Healey was a cultured man, with interests extending far beyond politics and had clearly taken the experience of the ghost in his stride.

Denis Healey was not the only Labour MP to be troubled by ghosts at his London home during the late 1960s. John Stonehouse, one time Minister for Post and Telecommunications who infamously later staged his own disappearance in Australia and was later jailed for fraud, reputedly suffered a haunting at a flat in Kennington in 1969. Stonehouse denied that he left the flat in October that year on account of ghosts, but his son Matthew complained of hearing inexplicable noises in the property in which two previous occupiers had maintained a poltergeist was present and an apparition had been seen. Earlier that same year in



ABOVE LEFT: Admiralty House, where Churchill, Macmillan and Healey encountered a female ghost. **ABOVE RIGHT:** John Stonehouse also lived in a haunted London flat.



March, restaurant owner Peter Norwood had left the same flat after stating that strange incidents had occurred in the first few months of his occupancy. Doors opened by themselves and a wicker basket was seen floating in the air. His flatmate Peter Earl also confirmed how the wicker basket was thrown across the room by an unseen force and stated that one night he had been taking part in a bridge game with three friends when all of them saw “a grey figure” pass by one of the open windows.

One pre-World War II Labour MP who took ghost sightings very seriously was Sir Ernest Bennett. Following a broadcast appeal on the BBC in 1934, he compiled a classic collection of accounts under the title *Apparitions and Haunted Houses* (1939), concentrating on first-hand and well attested ghost reports. Amongst reports received from the public was the still unsolved case of the phantom house seen at Bradfield St George in Suffolk in 1926 by two young women, and he also included a selection of cases gathered by the Society for Psychical Research, particularly in the 1880s and 1890s when it optimistically thought it could solve the problem of apparitional appearances. Most of the cases gathered by Sir Ernest Bennett were recognisable human forms, often appearing when least expected and capable of being mistaken for ordinary people. Most appeared to be oblivious of the witnesses, although one or two hinted at a surviving consciousness closer to the traditional idea of a ghost as a spirit of the deceased. The book also made it clear that ghosts were no longer confined to traditional locations such as historic castles and ruined abbeys but could be encountered in suburban homes and streets.

An even earlier radical and socialist figure – and from the perspective of his contemporaries the most surprising to have ever have embraced any belief in survival after death – was the radical campaigner and journalist Robert Blatchford (1851-1943). Active in the early ILP (Independent Labour Party), and co-founder and editor of fiery popular socialist newspaper *The Clarion*, Blatchford also became notorious as a propagandist against religion. Described as the “man who was at one time the greatest opponent of religion that Britain has produced for some time”, Blatchford lambasted all forms of religion, particularly Christianity, as a barrier on the path to social reform. He became infamous for publishing a series of articles under the caption ‘Did Jehovah make the world?’ which many at the time saw as blasphemous. Like Richard Dawkins and a number of prominent philosophers today convinced that human beings were produced entirely by heredity (as genetics was then known) and environment. Consequently, he was a complete determinist and further denied belief in God and a spiritual dimension on the grounds of the existence of suffering in the world and the presumption that such pain could not be permitted by a benign deity.



Overall from this, he concluded that human beings had no free will and were shaped by external material forces. He asserted there was no condition of sin and ultimately human beings were perfectible. Unfortunately, whilst Blatchford was considered totally honest and incorruptible and “as gentle a man who ever breathed” according to the writer Stuart Martin, some of his followers “took full advantage” of these doctrines and “indulged in outbreaks of coarseness and lack of restraint which degraded the discussions where these took place” (a similar phenomenon can be observed with many of the disciples of Richard Dawkins and the followers of Stephen Fry’s twitter feed today).

However, the man who preached materialism for a lifetime was ultimately to amaze everyone when he admitted being convinced of the survival of consciousness after death and direct contact with his deceased wife through a spiritualist medium. In his book *More Things in Heaven and Earth* (1925), Blatchford wrote of a sitting with the noted medium Mrs Leonard on 23 September 1923, as follows:

“Away from the medium and away from me, my wife spoke directly to me. She said, in an eager, anxious tone, ‘Bob, I’m here. I am with you, Bob.’ Before I could recover my presence of mind Feda [the spirit guide of Mrs Leonard] began to speak again and I lost the chance to reply. But it was my wife’s voice I heard and she pronounced the word Bob as she always did when with us. I think it is suggestive that she spoke my name twice. I had always said that if I heard a medium utter my name in that way I should think the evidence important.”

Blatchford stated that at the sitting of Mrs Leonard, his wife “spoke directly to me, she pronounced my name Barb, and she used the name twice, as if on purpose to convince me of her identity. Barb, I’m here. I am with you, Barb.’ When I related that incident in *The Sunday Chronicle* several readers suggested

FACING PAGE: Sir Ernest Bennett was responsible for the classic collection of ghostly accounts, *Apparitions and Haunted Houses: A Survey of Evidence*. **LEFT:** Fellow Labour man Robert Blatchford went from being an implacable and outspoken materialist to a believer in the evidence for survival after death after his experiences with spirit mediums.

that I had imagined I heard the voice... But my wife had been dead nearly two years, and I had never imagined I heard her speak until I sat with Mrs Leonard.”

On 19 November 1923, at a sitting of a Johannesburg spiritualist circle, a message, purporting to come from Blatchford’s wife, was written automatically by another medium, Mrs Purchas. It stated: “Will you tell Barb that I am now very happy, as he is of my faith? Strange that it should have taken your South African Circle to tell my dear husband that I am alive. We are most grateful. No, I will not sign yet – can’t have everything at once.”

Blatchford observed: “My wife always pronounced my name as spelt in the above message. But it was quite impossible for anyone in the circle to know that. How then did the word Bob come to be written Barb?” At a further sitting on 1 June 1924, with Mrs Leonard, Blatchford asked Feda if his wife had really spoken to him, or if he had imagined it. Feda replied: “She spoke to you. It is a thing that does not happen in hundreds of sittings with me. There was a lot of power.” Blatchford considered: “Now one would suppose that Feda heard my wife speak to me. Yet, on the 1st of June 1924, Feda repeatedly addressed me as ‘Mr Bob’. She had not picked up the inflexion. How then did the inflexion get into an automatic message given at a distance of 7,000 miles to a group of sitters not one of whom had ever heard my wife speak?”

From his experiences with spiritualism, Blatchford reversed a lifelong stance of materialism, although he still confessed to doubts, as his previous position was hard to suppress. Not long before his death in 1943, he was again quoted in *Psychic News* as saying: “I have said all I can say about human survival. The evidence in favour is strong: I cannot refute it... There is a strong case for survival; there is no case against it. But – I don’t know. Anything I could write about survival would be mere speculation”. This was an echo of what he stated six years earlier in the same paper in 1935: “My mind, after 80 years thinking, is fuller of whirling doubts and bewildering wonders than the Mind of Hamlet... That is my present state of mind. I feel that the evidence of survival is valid: I cannot controvert the witnesses; but my spiritual discernment faints before the vision of such beatitude. My position, you see is quite illogical, and therefore very human”. (Sources *More Things in Heaven and Earth* (1925) by Robert Blatchford; *Ghost Parade* (1945) by Stuart Martin).

HOLY SECURITY

One Indian village has no need of locks or doors because its inhabitants believe they are protected by the Hindu God of Saturn



ABOVE: In Shani Shingnapur the houses have no doors and the local bank has no locks – just a glass door to keep out stray dogs. **BELOW:** The black iron and stone slab, which local legend says was found in a nearby river over 300 years ago, now stands in a square at the centre of the village where it is adorned with garlands of flowers.

In Shani Shingnapur (pop: 5,000), a village in the western Indian state of Maharashtra, most residents see no need to lock anything up, because they have special protection from Shri Shanidev, the Hindu God of Saturn. As farmers trundle the roads in bullock carts piled high with sugarcane, they pass rows of homes bearing empty doorframes – a village tradition that goes back for generations. Jayashree Gade, a female resident, explained: “Years ago, Shani came in the dreams of devotees and told them you don’t need to put any doors on your homes. He said: ‘I will protect you’. That’s why we don’t have any doors.” In fact, there is an unofficial ban on all normal safety mechanisms like latches, windows and doors.

However, there is some discrepancy about the exact nature and frequency of criminal acts. Many point out that there has not been a theft in their time, while others note that thieves are always attempting to rob them but that their deity always sends the items back to them. “There have been no robberies in the village,” said the village chief from 2004. “When someone has tried they have gone blind and unless they confessed they were unable to leave the village.” She did, however, add as an aside: “We keep our money in banks that



have been built outside the village”.

According to legend, an iron and stone slab about 5ft (1.5m) long washed up in a nearby river during a flood “more than 300 years ago” (or “about 150 years ago”). Villagers were mystified by its texture and overall look and were even more surprised to find that it bled after being poked and probed with sticks. Initial fear of the black stone gave way to wonder when people started having dreams that linked it to Lord Shani. Soon they received instructions

through their dreams to construct an open-roof shrine for this earthly representation of their deity. The roofless feature was followed by the doorless village concept, both of which emphasised the close bond between Lord Shani and his people.

Today the stone stands in an open square adorned with garlands of flowers, drawing crowds of pilgrims. Stalls lining the dusty main road sell souvenirs and flowers. “The power of Shani is such that if someone steals, he will keep walking all night and think he has left the village, but when the Sun comes up he will still be there,” said mill

worker Balasaheb Borude. Some villagers said they put loose panels against their doorframes at night, but only to keep out wild animals. Similarly, the local branch of state-owned UCO Bank prides itself on its ‘lockless’ status. Although money is kept in a strongroom, the front of the building has just a glass door with no lock, to avert stray dogs. “We have no trouble,” said bank official Nagender Sehrawat, gesturing to the queue of customers when asked if they were happy with

the arrangement.

Shani Shingnapur rose to fame across the country after appearing in a devotional Hindi film about its deity in the 1990s. “The whole world got to know that there is a place called Shani Shingnapur, where houses have no doors, there are trees but no shadows, there are gods but no temples,” said Sayaram Bankar, a trustee at the shrine. “Devotees from across the state and across India started pouring in to see this unusual village.”

Shani Shingnapur’s reputation has been somewhat dented in recent years by reports of a few thefts. In 2010, a visitor from northern India complained that cash and valuables worth 35,000 rupees (\$553) were taken from a vehicle. Bankar dismissed reports of stealing, saying it only happened outside the village. According to a pamphlet handed out at the shrine, Shani Shingnapur is not just free from theft but from all sinful behaviour, a “model village” in contrast to the corrupt outside world. “Professional robbers, thieves, dacoits, non-vegetarians, drunkards, never come here,” the pamphlet confidently stated. “If they come, they behave like gentlemen.” As for doors, a few have popped up over the years, but villagers were sure their tradition would continue. *weirdasianews.com*, 15 Sept 2009; *[AFP] dailymail.co.uk*, 6 Jan 2015.

A^Z ALIEN ZOO

KARL SHUKER presents his regular round-up from the cryptozoological garden

A MEETING WITH MOTHMAN

During the third weekend of September each year, the town of Point Pleasant in West Virginia hosts a festival commemorating its most infamous, controversial visitor – Mothman. This was the uncanny winged entity whose unexplained appearances here from November 1966 to December 1967 preceded the terrible disaster that took place on 15 December 1967 when the Silver Bridge, spanning the Ohio River and connecting Point Pleasant to Gallipolis in Ohio, suddenly collapsed, causing 46 deaths, and inspiring Mothman investigator John Keel to speculate whether the two events were in some way linked. Happily, the annual Mothman Festival is a much more upbeat occasion, and this year, in its 14th staging, the festival's speakers included such cryptozoological celebrities as Ken Gerhard and Lyle Blackburn. Nevertheless, on this occasion it was uniquely poignant too, because sculptor Bob Roach, who had created the spectacular 12ft (3.7m)-tall stainless steel statue of Mothman unveiled here in 2003 (and an iconic focal point not only for the festival but for Point Pleasant tourism in general), had passed away on 30 August, just three weeks before the festival. He was 81. www.cryptozooneews.com/roach-obit/ 4 Sept; <http://mothmanfestival.com/> accessed 3 Oct 2015;

KILLER VAMPIRE SQUIRREL NO MORE

According to traditional native folklore in Borneo, its jungles are home to a race of killer vampire squirrels that leap down from trees onto the backs of small deer called muntjacs, bite their necks so that their hapless victims bleed to death, then drain their corpses of blood and eat their entrails. Inevitably, such fearsome creatures have never been filmed... until now. In September 2015, conservationist Erik Meijaard revealed that a motion-activated video camera set up in Indonesian Borneo's Gunung Palung National Park had actually succeeded in filming one such squirrel in clear, close-up detail, enabling him to identify the much-dreaded creature with ease. It proved to be a rare species known as the tufted ground squirrel *Rheithrosciurus macrotis*.

Far from engaging in vampiresque, deer-slaying activity, however, it is notable merely for its large ears and its absolutely enormous fluffy tail – so immense, in fact, that it is equivalent to 130 per cent of the mass of the entire remainder of its body. Scientists speculate that it may use its extraordinary tail as a decoy for predators, causing them to focus upon this huge mass of hair rather than



upon the squirrel's head and body, thus assisting it to escape their jaws when fleeing. As for any bloodthirsty dietary preferences, in reality the tufted ground squirrel consumes nothing more dramatic than nuts and the seeds of the cheeseweed, though it certainly needs powerful jaws in order to bite through their tough shells. So its ability to bite fiercely if need be may be the origin of superstitious local claims that it is a savage bloody-fanged vampire. <http://news.sciencemag.org/plants-animals/2015/09/vampire-squirrel-caught-film> 2 Sept 2015.

SPIDER SURPRISE

Staying on the subject of bloody fangs: A few months ago, Australian National University ecologist Mark Wong was spending a day in New South Wales's Tallaganda State Forest observing spiders when he flipped over a stone and spied a burrow that he recognised as belonging to Sutherland's funnel-web spider *Atrax sutherlandi* – a venomous species formally described by science as

recently as 2010. Idly poking a stick into its burrow, Wong expected to see a spider with a glossy black back, a deep brown or plum-coloured belly, and black fangs (chelicerae) emerge. Consequently, he was very surprised indeed when the spider that did emerge, and very aggressively too, sported a blood-red belly. Even more startling – and decidedly strange – was that one of its fangs was also bright scarlet, looking as if it too had been freshly dipped in blood. Its overall morphology confirmed that this specimen was indeed a Sutherland's funnel-web, but none displaying its bizarre coloration had ever been recorded before. So Wong captured this anomalous arachnid and brought it back with him to his laboratory at the university. Sadly, it later died, but its red-hued riddle lives on, because arachnologists have so far been unable to explain why its belly and one of its fangs were blood-red. They suspect that it is a genetically induced freak specimen, its extraordinary coloration due to the expression of a hitherto-undocumented mutant gene form (allele). It could be of no useful visual benefit to this spider, however, because its species is solitary, spends much of its life in total darkness within its burrow, and has very poor eyesight. Might its coloration be of external origin, however, with some form of red substance encountered by the spider having stained its belly and fangs? I wonder if anyone has examined the inside of its burrow in case any such substance is present there? At the moment, the mystery of the scarlet-fanged spider remains unsolved. <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/2015/09/150902-spiders-animals-australia-science-world/> 3 Sept 2015.



TOP: The Mothman statue in Point Pleasant. CENTRE: The tufted ground squirrel caught on camera. ABOVE: The scarlet-fanged Sutherland's funnel-web spider.

THE CRIME MUSEUM UNCOVERED

INSIDE SCOTLAND YARD'S SPECIAL COLLECTION

ROGER CLARKE delves into the capital's hidden history of mayhem and murder at a new exhibition of the Met's criminal curiosities.

Curators Jackie Keily and Julia Hoffbrand at the London Museum have taken roughly one third of the Metropolitan Police's private 'Crime Museum' and created an exhibition, for the first time, for the benefit of the general public. People expecting the lurid may well be disappointed: a strict ethical remit has specifically avoided this. In reality the 'Crime Museum' is not a horror show but the debris of a bureaucracy, an ad-hoc toolbox of crime-scene items, dowdy and sad, gathered without any methodology or guiding intellectual principle over 150 years. Most of the items have not been well preserved by museum standards and look handled and re-handled by generations of trainee detectives, and any ghostly glow about them has long gone. Some were excluded – we're not told how many, though I asked – for reasons of taste and sensitivity towards surviving victims and their families. At least 50 objects were referred



to an ethics committee when problems about their display emerged.

Maybe it's the exhibition's livery – orange rather than incarnadine. It has an educational feel and a sense that some effort has gone into making it more boring than it really is. Anyone expecting a gaudy Jack the Ripper treasure trove will find a poster and a book – most of the Ripper documentation after all now rests with other institutions. The gallery of used nooses that line up the second

room like a wall of bell-ropes in a vitrine are more pitiful than sinister, articles of dispatch for mostly forgotten villains. Once these execution ropes were sold by the inch in London pubs, though the exhibition does not mention this. The modern exhibits speak of utility rather than imagination – there are quite a few bombs, one of Fenian antiquity, concealed weapons, rubber abortion kits, and a great deal of rusty and ill-kept knives.

Of the oddest items and a genuine discovery by the Museum

of London team is a Lilliputian recreation of furniture in a murder case from 1924 set in a bungalow in Eastbourne – a case known for a number of innovations, including the subsequent introduction of a 'murder-bag' (pathologist Sir Bernard Spilsbury attended the scene and was appalled to find himself having to gather up body-parts with his bare hands). For the first time in British courts, photographs of the crime-scene were used. And newspaper photographs of the moment of conviction of Patrick Mahon (who had murdered his mistress) caused such outrage that legislation was hastily introduced, forever forbidding the use of photography in a courtroom. But where is the offending photograph? Not displayed.

A model reconstruction of the bungalow was actually made by a policeman in Brixton police station and here it is – a smudged sofa, crude little chairs, and the coal scuttle against which Mahon claimed Emily had hit her head in an accident. They're like little bits of outsider art, or the sort of thing you could imagine a prisoner in solitary making for an



TOP: Inside the Metropolitan Police's hidden Crime Museum at Scotland Yard, c. 1900. **ABOVE LEFT:** Miniature furniture used to reconstruct the murder scene of Emily Kaye, 1924. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The spade used by Dr Crippen to bury his wife, Cora, in 1910.



ABOVE LEFT: Medicine case belonging to poisoner and Jack the Ripper suspect Dr Neil Cream, c.1892. ABOVE RIGHT: Charred chair used by Samuel Furnace to fake his own death, 1933. BELOW: Inside the Metropolitan Police's hidden Crime Museum at New Scotland Yard, 2015.

ALL IMAGES: © MUSEUM OF LONDON

imaginary daughter.

Another striking item is a stark skeleton of a badly burned chair from 1933 in which a charred body had been found in a house in Camden – but not evidence of Spontaneous Human Combustion as I'd hoped. But there's a strange little element of fortaean curiosity in the actual name of the villain in question: Samuel Furnace. He'd hoped that people would mistake his murder victim for himself after a fake suicide note and some vanishment.

Crippen's spade is there. He used it to bury his wife Cora. There are bits of her hair and pyjamas from a Holloway Road store used to wrap the body. There's a brutal presence to this spade, riveted, slightly spatulated at the end, with chipped blade and looking early Victorian in style.

But my favourite and easily the most fortaean item is a knife near the entrance. Most people pay it little attention. It's rusty like the others, with a wooden handle, almost elegant, and with the numbers '459' stamped upon it.

After lunching in Hanover Square on 16 December 1897, the actor William Terriss (real name: William Charles James Lewin) was making his way south to his own evening performance

The spade Crippen used to bury his wife is there

at the Adelphi Theatre, appearing in William Gillette's *Secret Service*. After a while at his club, he continued towards Covent Garden, and just after 7pm he approached the stage door of the theatre. Out of nowhere came a familiar face, a fellow actor, in an agitated state. This man's name was Richard Prince (or 'Archer') and he had come there

to kill Terriss. Prince produced a knife and savagely attacked and killed the dapper leading man. He was found insane, and died in Broadmoor in 1936.

Here's the knife. This knife is a ghost-maker. The unquiet spirit of William Terriss is now said to haunt both Covent Garden tube (a figure on the staircase seen by London Underground staff was named as him after a spiritualist medium visited the station in the 1960s) and the Adelphi Theatre.

There were several portents of the Terriss death. His character understudy, Frederick Lane, told the *Times* how he had come into the theatre the day before to tell of a violent dream; he

had seen Terriss lying prone in the theatre with gaping wounds and surrounded by theatre staff, adding the dramatic detail "that he was raving". Terriss was also said to have been warned of his fate by a palmist: the theatre trade magazine *Era* had asked several famous actors to have their palms read for a feature and he afterwards told his actress lover Jessie Millward that the palmist had predicted a violent end (as detailed in her autobiography of 1923 called *Myself and Others*). He stayed quiet in his grave until his shade was seen in Maiden Lane in 1928 by a witness who later recognised Terriss's face from a photograph, and that year another actress inside the theatre heard his cane give a characteristic two-rap knock to the room that Jessie once used. It was the relic, the echo, of a private lovers' signal. As to his attachment to Covent Garden tube station many decades later, it is said that it was built on the site of his favourite bakery, and was a sugar-based haunt.

'The Crime Museum Uncovered' runs from 9 October 2015 – 10 April 2016 and will be accompanied by a publication and programme of talks and events. Tickets available from £10 online. www.museumoflondon.org.uk



MEDICAL BAG

Hearing aids lead to lifeboat rescue, Texan's non-stop sneezeathon, yearning for blindness, and planning the world's first head transplant...



ABOVE: Christine Bowden, whose new hearing aids picked up cries for help half a mile off the Cornish coast.

PROVIDENTIAL RESCUES

• A profoundly deaf woman saved the lives of two sailors when her new hearing aids picked up their cries for help that others could not hear. Christine Bowden, 77, was in her garden tending to her vegetable patch on the Cornish coast on 27 June, around 500 yards from Plaidy beach, East Looe, when she heard shouts from half a mile out to sea. The retired secretary – who had bought the hearing aids only the day before – spotted an upturned dinghy and raised the alarm. Two lifeboats were scrambled. One man in a life jacket was found desperately trying to swim to shore, with the second man clinging to the hull of the upturned 10ft (3m) boat without a life jacket. The first of the two had hypothermia and was close to exhaustion when he was hauled from the water. The second was also rescued and their boat was righted and towed back to shore. The lifeboat crew told Mrs Bowden that the men, two middle-aged holidaymakers, probably owed their lives to her and her two new hearing aids, as no one

else had alerted the coastguard. “I could not understand why, on a Saturday afternoon, there had been no other response at all,” said Mrs Bowden. “My husband thought I was going mad. But then he got the binoculars and could see for himself.” *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 1 July 2015.*

• An amateur rugby player regained his sense of smell after being kicked in the face – then sniffed out a major gas leak. Edward Baker, 41, had been unable to detect odours for 20 years after breaking his nose repeatedly while playing field sports. Even an operation in 2013 was unsuccessful, but after another bloody nose playing for Hampshire-based New Milton III, his sense of smell returned. Days later, the managing director smelled gas near his office in Bournemouth, Dorset. He called gas board engineers who sealed off the road and fixed the leak. “Although I haven’t been able to smell gas for years,” said Mr Baker, “I still recognised the pungent smell right away. The leak was in

a built-up area with a school and nursery just yards away, so the guy who kicked me in the face potentially prevented a serious situation.” *Sun, Metro, 4 Dec 2014.*

A-CHOO!

Katelyn Thornley, 12, from Texas, sneezes up to 20 times a minute, or 12,000 times a day. The exhausting condition came on suddenly after a clarinet lesson three weeks before the news reports. She could no longer attend school or play her clarinet in the school’s band. “It just started in little spurts,” she said. “I’m constantly in pain with my abdomen, my legs are hurting because I’ve been weak and I can barely eat.” She had seen six doctors and they had ruled out allergies and viruses. Some suggested it could be stress-related. The sneezing only stops when she falls asleep after taking antihistamines and listening to the Beatles. “Sometimes I wish I could leave my body for a little while so I could watch myself sleep,” she said, “because even in my dreams, I sneeze.” *[CBS] 5 Oct; Sun, 7 Oct 2015.*

SHE'D SEEN ENOUGH

A woman was so desperate to become blind she convinced a psychologist to pour drain cleaner into her eyes. Jewel Shuping, 30, from Raleigh, North Carolina, has BIID (Body Integrity Identity Disorder), which makes people believe they are meant to be disabled. As a child she stared at the Sun to destroy her sight, and in her teens began using dark glasses and a white stick, and learned to read Braille. In 2006 she found a sympathetic psychologist who performed the gruesome deed. “It hurt, let me tell you,” said Jewel, whose family have disowned her. “My eyes were screaming and I had some drain cleaner going down my cheek burning my skin, but all I could think was, ‘I’m going blind, it’s going to be OK.’” It took about six months for the damage to take full effect. The liquid destroyed her left eye while scars, cataracts and glaucoma closed her right one. Supported by her blind fiancé Mike, 50, she said: “I feel I should have been blind from birth. This is not a choice. It’s a need based on a disorder of the brain... People with BIID get trains to run over their legs to make themselves paralysed. It’s dangerous. They need professional help” – though perhaps not the kind of ‘help’ she got.

All the reports stem from a Barcroft TV clip, with no corroboration. Snopes, the contemporary legend website, points out that in a 17 April 2015 article about Shuping by North Carolina station WNCN, she went by a different name (Amber) and had a different story: “Amber Shuping, 29, lost her eyesight in a freak accident at the age of 20. I was pouring drain cleaner down the drain and it splashed back in my face,” Shuping said. Depression set in following the accident but Shuping said she learned to cope with her loss. ‘Once I learned that my life wasn’t over, I was OK with it,’ she said.” However, the Yahoo! discussion group ‘wanwannabe blind 2’ includes archived posts from mid-2008 in which a woman named Jewel discussed her

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY HUNT EMERSON

desire to be blind and her plans to achieve that state, writing on 18 June 2008 that she intended to use drain cleaner to destroy her eye and make it appear that she had suffered an accident. This whole queasy tale, therefore, is of undetermined veracity. *Sun, Metro, Snopes.com, 2 Oct 2015.*

OFF WITH HIS HEAD!

An Italian-Chinese medical team plan to perform the world's first head transplant in China. Ren Xiaoping, along with Italian surgeon Sergio Canavero, hope to attempt the procedure within two years, but only if the preparatory research and tests go according to plan.

"A lot of media have been saying we will definitely attempt the surgery by 2017, but that's only if every step before that proceeds smoothly," said Ren. Canavero, who leads the Turin Advanced Neuromodulation Group, first announced his project in 2013, saying at the time that such a procedure could be possible as soon as 2016 – but this seems unlikely. Ren is clearly more cautious than his Italian colleague. If this operation is indeed feasible, it implies that spinal nerves can be successfully reconnected, which would be wonderful news for thousands of paralysed people, so why isn't this a much bigger news story?

The man who has volunteered for the operation is Russian-

born computer scientist Valery Spiridonov, 30, who suffers from Werdnig-Hoffmann disease, a progressive and incurable muscle-wasting ailment. Ren said the operation would likely take place at Harbin Medical University in China's northeast Heilongjiang province. The procedure is expected to last up to 36 hours, and will require Spiridonov's head to be cooled as well as the donor's body, to extend the period during which the cells can survive without oxygen. Ren declined to say where a donated body might come from and said he was unsure if the donor would be Chinese.

High demand for organs in China and a chronic shortage of donations mean that death row inmates have been a key source for years, generating heated controversy. China has pledged not to use the organs of executed prisoners, but experts have voiced scepticism about the plan, arguing that organs will continue to be harvested from inmates but that they will now be classified as 'donations'. China banned trading in human organs in 2007, but demand for transplants far exceeds supply in the country of 1.37 billion people, opening the door to forced donations and illegal sales. Organ donations are not widespread as many Chinese believe they will be reincarnated after death and therefore feel the need to keep a complete body. *Sunday Mirror, 14 June; [AFP] news. discovery.com, 11 Sept 2015.*



ABOVE: Dr Sergio Canavero is reportedly planning the world's first head transplant.

The myth

Microwaves cook food from the inside out.

The "truth"

Those old enough to remember when domestic microwave ovens were new-fangled will also remember how they worked: instead of the slow, old-fashioned method of heating food from the outside through to the core, these *Tomorrow's World* marvels did it the other way round. Somehow, it was the centre of the meal that cooked first, with the heat then spreading outwards, and (also somehow) this was why they worked much faster than conventional ovens. Many people still believe this story. To put it simply, it isn't true. Microwaves cook from out to in, just like any other oven. You could test it yourself with a meat thermometer if you could be bothered, and if you don't mind your dinner getting ruined while you're messing around with it. The most obvious possible source of the myth is that microwaves pass through cooking vessels, such as glass dishes, but agitate the water molecules inside the food, causing friction and thus heat. Heat then passes from "wet" to "dry" matter by conduction. Finding the soup warm while the bowl was still cool perhaps gave early microwave-man the illusion that the heat was radiating outwards like a Big Bang.

Sources

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Disclaimer

This column, believing ignorance to be the foundation of knowledge, is always open to corrections and elaborations via the letters' column.

Mythchaser

Until quite recently, travellers to foreign lands were always told: "Don't drink the water." The idea seemed to be that tap water in each country contained microbes which were harmless to the locals, but likely to cause stomach upsets in tourists whose immune systems hadn't previously encountered them. Two readers want to know about this: one enquires "Was it ever true, and, true or not, was it only the British who didn't drink the water abroad?" The second asks – perhaps somewhat more urgently – whether the advice still holds true today.



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NECROLOG

This month we celebrate the work of outsider artist Ionel Talpazan, whose early encounter with a “beautiful blue light of energy” triggered a lifelong fascination with UFOs



LEFT: Ionel Talpazan with untitled work. BELOW: 'Fundamental UFO', 2002.

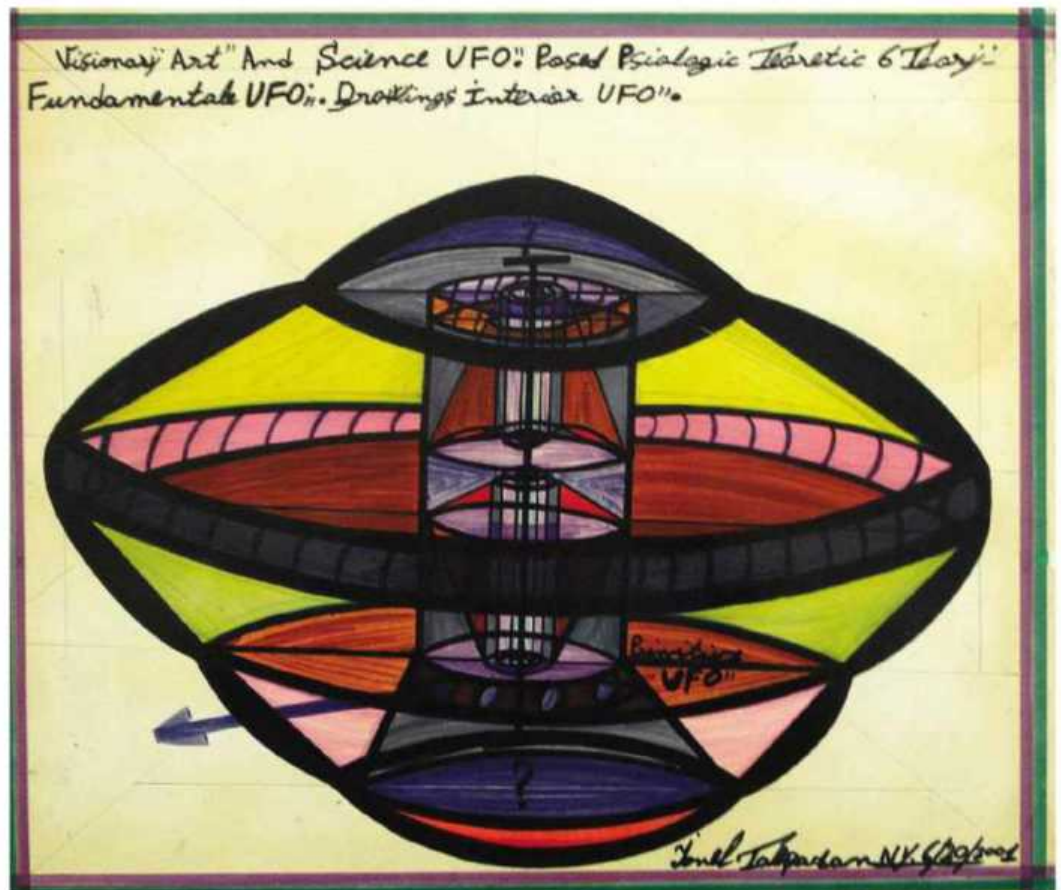
theories around the edges of an image or right across the surface, using an almost indecipherable hybrid of Romanian and English.

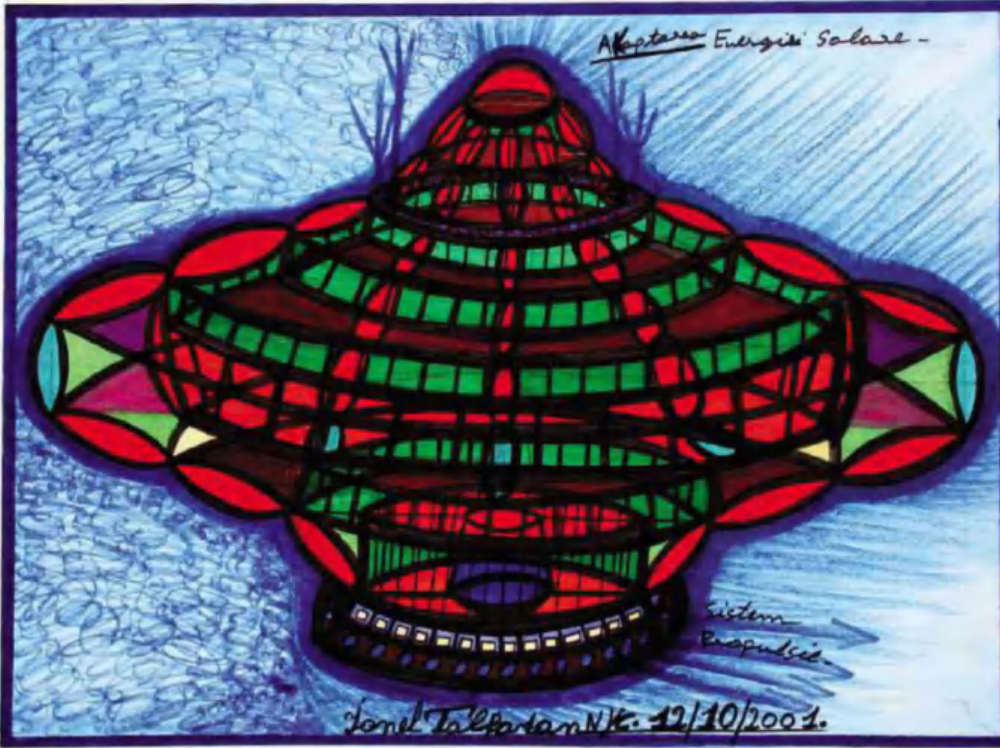
In 1987, he fled Ceausescu's Romania by swimming across the Danube to Yugoslavia, and settled in New York after being granted political asylum. At times he lived and worked on the street; for a while he lived in a cardboard box near Columbus Circle. As his fortunes improved, his one-room flat in Harlem filled up with artwork. His repertoire expanded to include smooth plaster sculptures, a little wider than a frisbee, painted silver or blue, then outfitted with brightly coloured portholes and exhaust pipes and mounted on blue pedestals made from scavenged parts. Their purpose was always meant to be instructive as well as creative. Talpazan maintained

IONEL TALPAZAN

Talpazan was born in the Romanian commune of Petrachioaia. His parents sold him to another couple when he was a baby, and his upbringing thereafter in the village of Mainasca remained unhappy. His foster mother drank heavily, and there were regular beatings. When he was eight years old, hiding outside the house to escape one such punishment, a “beautiful blue light of energy” descended from the sky. After enveloping him briefly, it disappeared, leaving him convinced of its extraterrestrial origins.

Four years later, he began to draw what he had witnessed. It was the start of a collection that would eventually comprise more than 1,000 artworks. Some were meticulous diagrams of the UFOs' inner workings, each individual segment filled in with a different colour. Others were positively psychedelic, patterned with swirling dots and eye-like nebulae. Talpazan would often inscribe his own notes and





LEFT: 'Energie Solare' 2001. CENTRE: 'UFO: Art & Science', 2002. BOTTOM LEFT: 'Mystery & Misticism', 2003. BOTTOM RIGHT: 'UFO Sculpture', 2013.

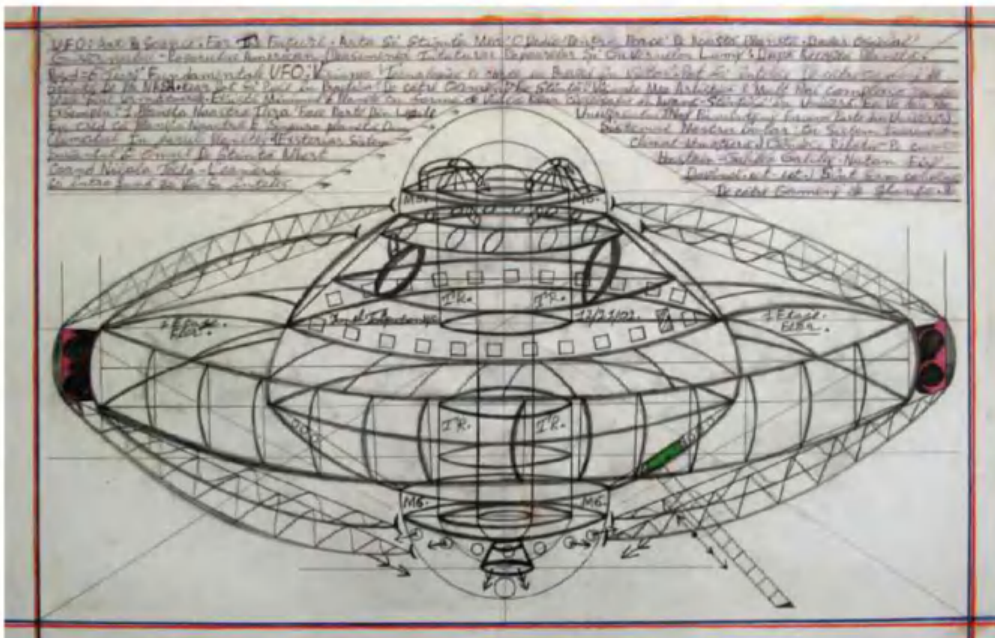
that he had caught a glimpse of a method for harnessing cosmic forces to the benefit of mankind. "My dream is to collaborate with researchers at NASA," he explained. "My work is a combination of art and science." He claimed that his pictures articulated the magnetic forces and antimatter at work in the propulsion systems of his spaceships. Though NASA never took an interest, local art dealers were more forthcoming. A dozen of his paintings covered a wall at a 1996 show in Manhattan's American Primitive Gallery. His work featured in the Museum of Everything in Paris, the American Visionary Art Museum in Baltimore, and in the Hayward Gallery's 'Alternative Guide to the Universe' exhibition in London, as well as in San Francisco, Raleigh (NC), Madrid and Berlin. Images of his work appeared in the sci-film *K-Pax* starring Kevin Spacey and Jeff Bridges.

"My art shows spiritual technology, something beautiful and beyond human imagination, that comes from another galaxy," he once told the *Western Folklore* journal. "So, in relative way, this is like the God. It is perfect." In 2013 he said: "The artist is like an astronaut. With the mind, you can travel the entire universe."

Even with his growing success into the new millennium, Talpazan refused to produce work on commission. He owned no telephone or computer, leaving people to track him down at his apartment. On receiving American citizenship towards the end of his life, he changed his name to Adrian da Vinci. He is survived by four siblings.

Ionel Talpazan, outsider artist, born Petrachioaia, Romania 16 Aug 1955; died (from diabetes and stroke) Manhattan 21 Sept 2015, aged 60.

Many of Talpazan's works are held by the Henry Boxer Gallery, the largest collection of outsider and visionary art in the country. www.outsiderart.co.uk/





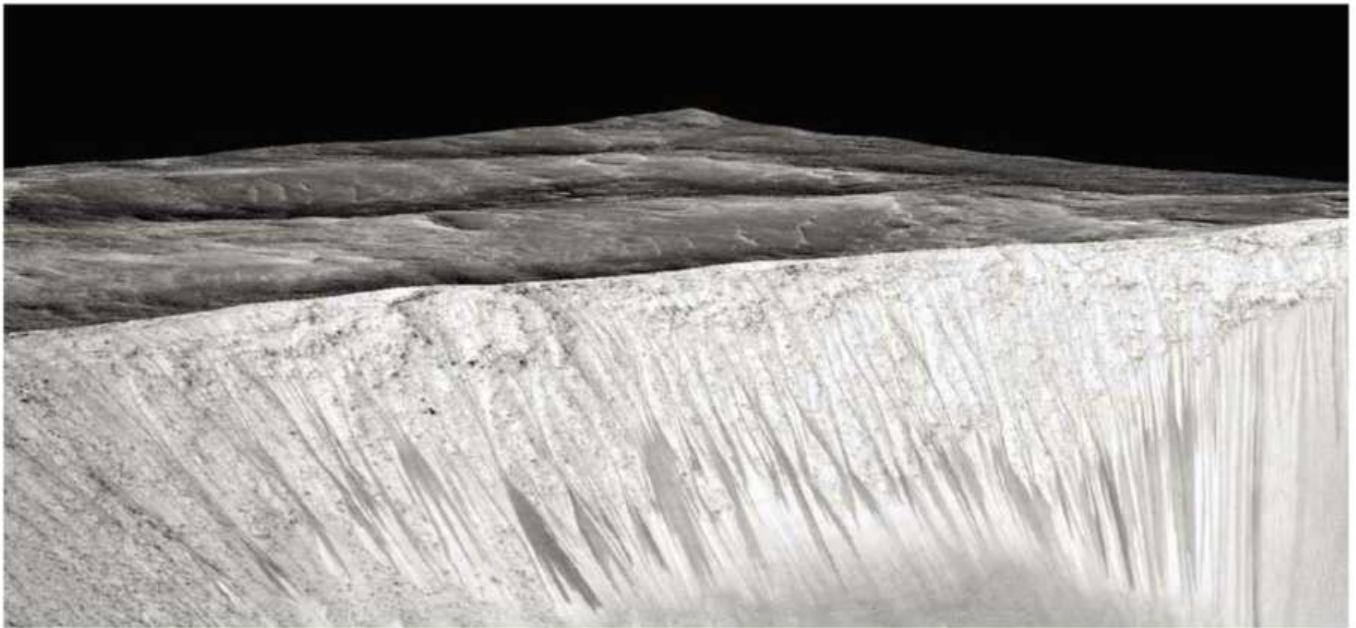
the UFO files

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UFO CASEBOOK

JENNY RANGLES PONDERES THE IMPLICATIONS OF SIGNS OF FLOWING WATER ON THE RED PLANET



ABOVE: This image from NASA's Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter shows dark streaks on the walls of Garni Crater that may be formed by the flow of water on Mars.

LIFE ON MARS

The NASA announcement on 28 September 2015 that water existed on Mars millions of years ago as salty oceans, and has been filmed flowing and sculpting the planet's surface today, is one of the great scientific discoveries of the century. Flowing water is considered essential for life to flourish and vastly improves the prospect that it will have occurred on Mars – perhaps just as microorganisms that lived when the Red Planet was more hospitable or that even survive in hardy pockets today.

The revelation came on the same day that another red planet filled our skies amidst the prophecies of doom that such astronomical events often bring. But this celestial showpiece was the first of its kind in our age of mass communication and was snapped by millions on their mobile phones and posted on social media. That prelude to the news from Mars was simply a 'blood Moon' (see **FT333:5**) taking place while our satellite was at its closest possible distance and coinciding with a total lunar eclipse – a rare combination neatly appropriate for the historic revelations that followed.

Confirmation that water once existed as oceans on Mars and oozes from underground or sublimates today was no shock to anyone

following the remarkable explorations of the Martian surface from orbit and the Curiosity laboratory that has been wandering the planet for several years. It has been sending back extraordinary 'selfies' as it probes the rock and soil and does spells of lengthy mountaineering. The geology of Mars has been unwrapped bit by bit and has pointed towards this day since what looked like flowing rivulets were filmed on mountain slopes in 2011.

That Mars had at least one salt-filled ocean, and quite possibly life within it, is of vast importance to our understanding of the Universe; it also increases our expectation that such worlds must be numerous if two formed independently in one small Solar System. There is also the bigger question of the Martian apocalypse that struck possible life inside that early ocean around 3.2 billion years ago, causing the water – then thousands of metres deep – to all but vanish or go underground, threatening the very existence of any organisms it spawned.

But, of course, for those interested in UFOs the questions go beyond such science. What does it mean for us to know that we may not be alone in this small corner of the Galaxy? Especially when we're talking about distances that we have already bridged without any

need for the science fiction concepts that we necessarily project onto aliens coming here from other solar systems.

The answer might not be what you were expecting, or that some were declaring within moments of the NASA announcement as vindication of everything from alien contact, government cover-ups, the fabled 'face on Mars' and pretty much every other simulacrum seen in photos from the surface of the Red Planet and interpreted on the net as levitating spoons or rabbit-like creatures.

These artefacts are all merely rock formations viewed in the harsher planetary light of Mars and via non-Earthly geological weathering processes within an alien atmosphere. This tricks the pattern-making centres of the brain into turning such formations into what we want them to be: so we see them as longed-for evidence that we are not alone in the Universe and hope that what is out there might arrive to enlighten us or save us from our human indiscretions like the Cosmic Cavalry.

Sadly not: any life on Mars today is constrained by the battering it takes from deadly Solar radiation, because billions of years ago Mars lost its protective magnetic shield – something which the Earth happily retains. Today's Martian life will be no more

NASA

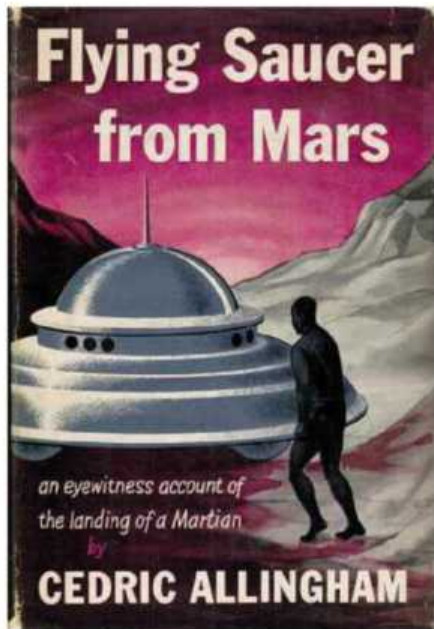
than bacteria or primitive organisms: it will still be an extraordinary discovery, but the chances any Martian life will be taking control of a spaceship and heading for Earth is next to zero.

Of course, Mars has long been the alleged source of numerous UFO encounters. One occurred in February 1954 according to *Flying Saucer From Mars* by Cedric Allingham. He supposedly saw a hovering disc as he walked near Lossiemouth in Scotland, though his photo looks unconvincing and the occupant was way too human to be very convincing: a tall man who communicated in English via sign language. After some revelations about water flowing in canals on the surface, Allingham then met a fisherman called James Duncan who had seen the whole thing from a nearby hill. Yet subsequently Duncan could not be traced to back up this story and Allingham 'died' soon after publication of the book.

In UFO research, the Allingham case is widely believed to be a hoax involving someone knowledgeable about the Solar System. Some have even claimed evidence that its author was the famous astronomer and TV presenter, Patrick Moore – a noted expert on Mars. In 1986, while making a UFO documentary for the BBC, I got Patrick to agree to appear with me after we had worked together on a previous BBC venture. I asked him off the record if he would publicly deny his alleged involvement in the book and he got very upset, made remarks about crackpots and pulled out of the documentary on the spot. I was never sure which way to take this response, as Patrick did possess a wicked sense of humour. Ironically, I was going to reveal that a witness had come forward who had met the otherwise mysterious James Duncan. Duncan said he had refused to be involved in promoting the Allingham book because it had exaggerated the truth into a Martian landing when all that was seen was an unexplained object.

Most Martian UFO contacts date, like Allingham's, from at least 50 years ago when space exploration was in its infancy and our expectations of life on Mars were greater than today. With the gradual erosion of hope of finding those canals or a population of humanoid inhabitants, Mars ceased to be the go-to world for UFO origins. The home planet of the more recent UFO visitors has slipped ever outwards into the distant reaches of the cosmos, and today the idea of a Martian abducting someone in their flying saucer would look about as archaic as the 7am commuter train to Waterloo arriving to pick you up behind a wheezing old steam engine.

So the increased prospect of life on Mars is most likely completely irrelevant to the question of whether UFO encounters really involve alien visitors. It does, though, make it all but certain that worlds with flowing water are widespread in the Universe, and that if life has indeed emerged twice in our tiny sample



ABOVE: Allingham's account of his meeting with a Martian included a photo of this not-very-alien looking chap. BELOW: Astronomer Patrick Moore was believed by some to have been the real author of Allingham's book.



of nearby worlds, then – given the numbers out there – advanced intelligent life must exist somewhere. It might even have visited us... which is not, of course, the same as saying that it has.

And yet there is one more possibility to consider, one that writer Nigel Kneale speculated about brilliantly in his 1958 story for the BBC, *Quatermass and the Pit*. Neale understood fortaean topics well and wove many insightful ideas into his stories, such as the 'stone tape' theory of timeslips in which structures like old houses can record an event and replay it afterwards like a video signal.

In his 1958 story Kneale describes in terrifying detail the discovery of a spaceship buried beneath the London Underground. It unleashes horrific visions of an alien race of insect-like creatures that spread a psychic contagion, unleashing memories dormant within our shared unconscious. These memories have been there for millions of years, because this now long-dead race of Martian insects in fact came to Earth and engineered the human race into existence. Our latent recall of this race of insect-like demons was inherited across generations within our primitive brains.

Intriguingly, modern alien abduction witnesses often report, via hypnosis, images of small insect-like beings as their captors. Maybe Kneale was right and insect entities did exist in the early Mars environment and burrowed underground when their then habitable planet faced its looming apocalypse – although such 'bugs' were probably not building and flying spaceships, of course. However, spacefaring Martian insects are not crucial here, because rocks from Mars reach Earth as

meteorites all the time. This debris has been ejected from the planet by cosmic collisions, which are more common there due to the thin Martian atmosphere. In 1996, tests on a small piece of Mars discovered in Antarctica controversially implied that it had carried microbes here from that planet (**FT90:23-26**).

So who knows? Perhaps Martian DNA from a time when more advanced bug life existed there reached our still primitive world in this same way to play a role in terrestrial evolution. Interestingly, life on Earth did leap forward around this point in time and – *much* later – led to the appearance of humanity. Perhaps some Martian DNA was sprinkled onto our atmosphere via a massive impact of a chunk of Mars and we were, as Kneale suggested, (though accidentally) 'engineered' by long dead Martians...

Kneale's story is, of course, just that – but he may have identified a grain of truth at a time when astronomy was much less open to the theory that life on Earth could have been seeded here from outer space. Humans do seem to have been obsessed with the whole idea of life on Mars, as stories from HG Wells's *War of the Worlds* to Allingham's 'true' adventure suggest. Curiously, a common theme in many such science fiction (and some UFO) stories has been of the Martians facing disaster as water disappeared from their world causing them to head for Earth. This was long before these recent scientific revelations, which makes such tales seem almost prescient – not about Martian cities and canals, perhaps, but about the ancient ocean that vanished from the Red Planet.

Could it be that something deep in our psyches has a primitive awareness of our ancient biological link to such Martian seeds? Does it well out through our imagination and in 'real' alien contact stories, seeking to express a broad awareness of truth via a host of colourful, mythical tales? Perhaps we have known all along where part of us comes from, and soon we will fly our spaceships there to dig up the evidence in fossil form – and finally reveal that our ancestors really were Martians.



BLASTS FROM THE PAST

FORTEAN TIMES BRINGS YOU THE NEWS THAT TIME FORGOT

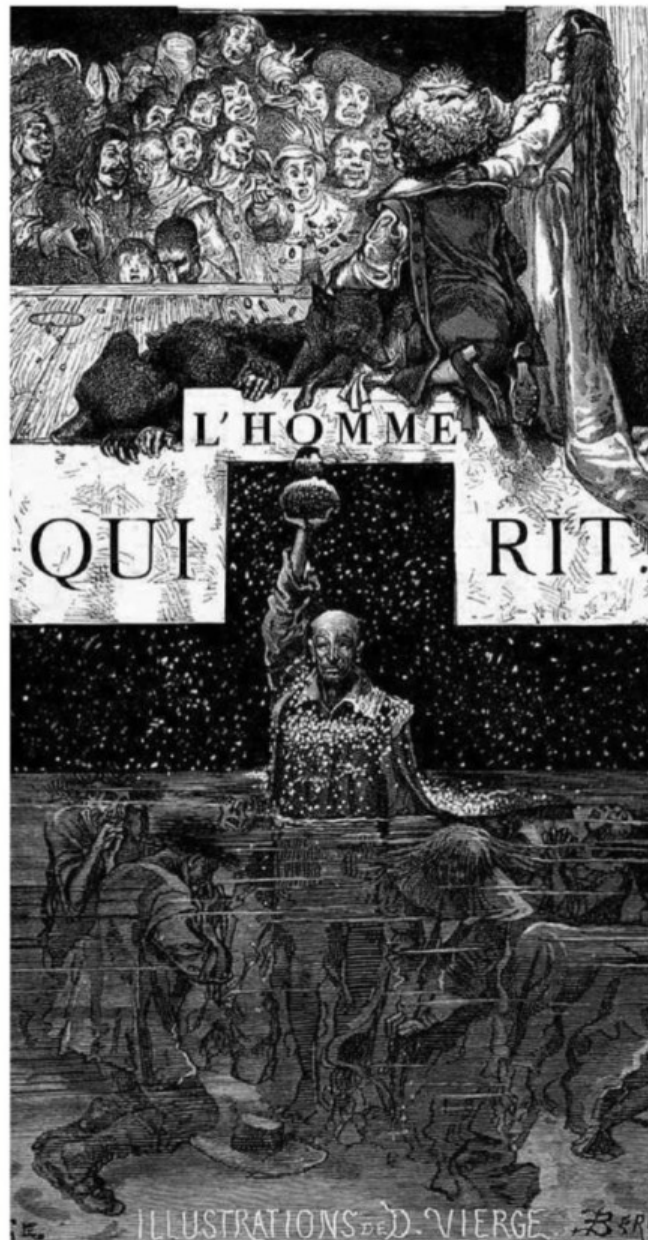
60 THE MONSTER MAKERS

THEO PAIJMANS uncovers the literary source behind 19th century fears of child abduction and torture

In 1873, several French and even one Dutch newspaper commented on the death of a man named Femorus, who, during his life, had elevated the creation of artificial monsters and abnormalities to an unsurpassed art form. It had not only been his profession, the newspapers remarked, it had also been his all-consuming passion. For a while he was content with creating rabbits with five paws, horned rats, hares with hairy spurs, double-tailed snakes and calves with two heads. Then the idea struck him to use humans for his grotesque art, with dire consequences: “In 1854 at Troyes he tried to grow the wings of a swan on the back of a two-year old child, but he was tried and convicted to a prison sentence of five years for doing so. The child did not die but today is a corporal in the 14th line. After he was released from prison, he used corpses for his experiments. He created foetuses with three legs and four arms and sold these to anatomical museums in the provinces and abroad. Finally the idea arose within him to mutilate himself and to grow a cockscomb on his forehead; as a consequence thereof he developed an abscess, due to which he died after 14 days.”¹

A strange story, and trying to ascertain whether there is any truth in it uncovers a world even more bizarre; the trail might also contain the key to what caused the European missing children panics of 1869, which Fort mentioned in *Lo!*²

A Parisian newspaper commented on Femorus’s passing, giving a clue as to the veracity of the fantastic tale: “Unless I am mistaken, this Femorus never existed outside the imagination of the reporters of *l’Evenement*”.³ If a hoax or canard, then what contemporary trend caused such an outré tale to be published? Was there some murky but genuine circumstance



“In 1854 he tried to grow the wings of a swan on the back of a two-year-old child, but was tried and convicted to a prison sentence of five years for doing so”

of which it was an echo? There is a telling allusion in the Parisian press. Introducing the strange saga of Femorus to its readers,

one newspaper observed: “We have already talked, several months ago, about a maker of monsters, who conducted,

right here in Paris, the horrible industry of the ‘Comprachicos’ of *l’Homme Qui Rit*.”⁴

L’homme Qui Rit, translated as *The Man who Laughs* (filmed in 1928), is Victor Hugo’s most obscure novel. It was published in April 1869. Hugo transports the reader to 17th century England, but also introduces two elements that have haunted readers ever since. The first is Gwynplaine, the man who laughs, whose face was terribly mutilated as a boy, turning it into a clown’s mask, his mouth carved into a perpetual grin – the progenitor of Batman’s Joker and John Keel’s Grinning Man.

The second element is Hugo’s introduction of the world of the Comprachicos, to which the Parisian newspaper alluded. The word is Hugo’s invention, which he based on the Spanish for ‘child-buyers’. According to Hugo, this band of child-buyers makes its living by mutilating and disfiguring children who are then forced to beg for alms on the streets or who are exhibited as carnival freaks. At the opening of his novel, Hugo provides lengthy descriptions of the history, habits and terrible art of the Comprachicos, chilling imagery that today would not have been out of place in a lurid horror novel or high strangeness abduction story: “The Comprachicos worked on man as the Chinese work on trees. They had their secrets, as we have said; they had their tricks, which are now lost arts. A sort of fantastic stunted thing left their hands; it was ridiculous and wonderful. They could touch up a little being with such skill that its father could not have known it... Sometimes they left the spine straight and remade the face. They unmarked a child as one might unmark a pocket-handkerchief. Products, destined for tumblers, had their joints dislocated in a masterly manner – you would have said they had been boned.

“Thus gymnasts were made.

“Not only did the Comprachicos take away his face from the child; they also took away his memory. At least, they took away all they could of it; the child had no consciousness of the mutilation to which he had been subjected... Of burnings by sulphur and incisions by the iron he remembered nothing. The Comprachicos deadened the little patient by means of a stupefying powder which was thought to be magical, and which suppressed all pain...”⁵

The Comprachicos gather at appointed places for meetings. Hugo describes four 17th century rendezvous points: one in Spain, the pass of Pancorbo; one in Germany, the glade called the Wicked Woman “near Diekirch, where there are two enigmatic bas-reliefs, representing a woman with a head and a man without one”; one in France on a hill in the old sacred wood of Borvo Tomona; and one in England, in the garden of William Challoner, Squire of Gisborough, in Cleveland, Yorkshire, “behind the square tower and the great wing which is entered by an arched door”.⁶

The Comprachicos proved such a vivid, albeit gruesome, idea that various extensive researches were conducted to find out whether they had really existed. In 1913, a detailed report was published in, of all places, the *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, the detailed result of a joint enquiry into the problem of Victor Hugo’s child-buyers.⁷ Was there any reality to Hugo’s invention? Its author, John Boynton Kaiser, admitted “that the problem is beset with difficulties is given further evidence by the fact that our leading criminologists can offer slight assistance. Dr Constancio Bernaldo de Quiros, who has examined the historical annals of crime in Spain... answered a general query put to him by saying that there is no documentary proof for this chapter in Victor Hugo, but he admitted that occasional instances of the buying and selling of children do occur in Spain. He named Hurdes and Ancares as regions where it was not entirely unknown.

“Professor Hans Gross, of Graz, whose researches have led in part into similar fields admits that he, too, has never found documentary proof of any such practices as are ascribed to the Comprachicos. Although he has been for many years engaged in tracing to their sources the accounts occasionally seen in

the newspapers of London, Paris, and Rome, of children stolen or purchased and then artificially deformed for the purpose of begging, he has found none of them authenticated by evidence. He gives it as his belief that some such newspaper account is the basis of this romance of Hugo’s”.

Although the word did not exist in Spanish, Hugo had chosen it with great care, so that etymologically it could have been a Spanish word. As to the child-buyers, Hugo had pointed to his sources in his book, and even in a conversation to a friend. Yet, when after much searching the crucial source was located, a 17th century German professor of Oriental languages at the Academy of Tübingen, nothing pertaining to the Comprachicos was found in his works. The report concluded that, although the Comprachicos may have been Hugo’s fancy, there was plenty of evidence in various historical records to demonstrate that similar bands had existed, observing: “And so the history of an obsolete phase of human society gives evidence of the artificial production of teratological cases and that, too, before the days of experimental teratology...” With regard to Hugo’s evocative creation, the report concluded that: “The Hugonian word Comprachicos is used to describe a people whose characteristics are an unhistorical conglomeration of much that was once actual but then obsolete in the history of human society...”

Hugo’s novel was published in instalments between April and May 1869. It was not very well received and even today it remains his most obscure novel. Yet in August, three months after its publication, newspapers reported the sudden eruption of child-snatching panics in the poorer quarters of the cities of Cork and Brussels and even as far away as the Spanish town of Lorca. Although the rumours in Cork were quickly defused after an investigation by a local newspaper, elsewhere the situation was much more volatile. In Brussels, hysterical crowds stoned Englishmen suspected of these misdeeds on a number of occasions. Another Englishman was almost killed by a local mob in Lorca, when he was believed to be one of the “Tios del Sain”, rumoured child stealers who caught children to butcher them and use the fat of their entrails to repair the telegraph wires.⁸

Another notable feature of newspapers following the publication of Hugo’s literary romance was the inclusion of regular reports of a novel phenomenon – that of the cripple factories, unholy laboratories where, it was said, children were maimed, mutilated and reconfigured into grotesque and monstrous forms. In 1872, newspapers in France and the United States told of an establishment in London, “an old house, situated in a secluded alley in Highgate”, where the police were reported to have discovered an establishment “for which the familiar ‘mangling done here’ would be the most appropriate placard... Persons brought their children of tender years to have their legs twisted and their bodies otherwise dealt with in a manner most likely to ‘draw’ from the pockets of the benevolent.”⁹ Wagging its finger, one French newspaper put it thus: “The police have discovered in London, in an old house... situated at the back of a dark ally, a cripple factory. Don’t laugh, because the case isn’t funny, far from it...” It then published a price list for the various mutilations one could order.¹⁰ The account and the price list were even reprinted more than a decade later in a publication by a French society for the protection of apprentices and children in factories.¹¹

These remarks were not confined to the sensational press but began to appear in the day-to-day discourse of the era. A French traveller in Spain commented in 1883: “Let’s now stop for a moment and consider the abundance and variety of

the cripples in Valencia, the thousands... cripples, blind, twisted, hunchbacked and the rest... There must be a cripple factory in Valencia...”¹²

And in London there was Professor Sheard, in all aspects a man like the fictional Femorus, whose business it was, according to the American and French newspapers which reported on him in 1887, to “manufacture artificial monstrosities and curiosities of every description, and who holds himself ready at any time to imitate any curiosity already in existence, or to carry out any idea that a customer may have.

“At the time of the visit of a London reporter the professor was finishing off what appeared to be the mummy of a negro child rejoicing in the possession of two heads and four arms. His books enumerate the following monstrosities as having been made by him for the use of various museums: A woman’s skull with horns growing out of the forehead; a baby with wings; a baby with two faces, but with only one head; a child half monkey; an infant with an eye in the centre of the forehead, and a child possessing one body with two perfectly formed heads. For such an attractive curiosity as the two-headed negro baby, the professor charges \$100”.¹³

Although Hugo’s novel failed in the literary arena, his Comprachicos and their terrible art struck a dark chord that served as the unwitting catalyst for the great 1869 child-snatching panics and the horrid tales of the cripple factories which were retold well into the late 19th century.¹⁴

NOTES

1 *Le Rappel*, Paris, 31 Jan 1873; *Amhemse Courant*, 11 Feb 1873.

2 See Theo Pajjmans, ‘Cities of the Lost Children’, **FT323:32-33**.

3 *Le Voleur illustré*, Paris, 7 Feb 1873.

4 *Le Rappel*, Paris, 31 Jan 1873.

5 Victor Hugo, *The Man Who Laughs*, pp17-28.

6 *Ibid*, pp25-26.

7 John Boynton Kaiser, ‘Comprachicos’, *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 4:2, 1913, pp247-264.

8 See **FT323:32-33**.

9 ‘Deformities’, *New York Times*, 29 Jun 1872; ‘Deformities. A cheerful Establishment In London’, *Inter Ocean*, 6 July 1872; *Nashville Union and American*, 7 July 1872; *San Francisco Chronicle*, 13 July 1872; *Inter Ocean*, 15 July 1872.

10 *Le Rappel*, Paris, 7 Oct 1872.

11 *Bulletin de la Société de Protection des Apprentis et des Enfants Employés dans les Manufactures*, Dix-Huitième Année, Tome XVIII, Janvier-Mars, Paris, 1884, p202.

12 Fernand de La Morandiere, *Espagne-Maroc-Portugal*, 1883.

13 ‘Le Professeur De Monstres’, *Le Rappel*, Paris, 14 Apr 1887; ‘Making Monstrosities. The Interesting Business Carried on by Professor Sheard, of London’, *Shippensburg Chronicle*, Pennsylvania, 16 Jun 1887.

14 A connection that was not lost on *Le Rappel*, which wrote in its 13 June 1872 edition with reference to the rumours of a cripple factory operating in London for a number of years: “Very well, but despite the name and address given, I continue to believe that this mysterious factory exists, very close to us, in France, in a fairly well-known work, and that is entitled *l’Homme qui rit*.”

THE HEADLESS EVANGELIST

In July 1929, the city of Detroit was rocked by the bizarre and bloody killing of an entire family. Benny Evangelist was an oddball sorcerer and self-proclaimed prophet - but why did someone cut off his head and slaughter his wife and children? Was it a case of magical murder or ritualistic revenge? **ROBERT DAMON SCHNECK** investigates one of the strangest unsolved cases in the annals of American crime

The *Oldest History of the World Discovered by Occult Science* (1926) describes 20 years of visions experienced by a mystic named Benny Evangelist (right). The story begins before Creation, when the Universe consisted of seven winds blowing between the sea and sky. The winds were always quarrelling, so they created someone to govern them by assembling a chariot from clouds; 90 days later, God emerged. He was:

“[A] phenomenon the aspect of a human being. It had arms, no legs, two large wings on the arms and one on its back, a blond beard, and it was seven times the size of a normal man. The phenomena [sic] was so strong and bright he gave to the air and wind, a surprise and gave him a great enthusiasm and was pleased to have their first child”.¹

18,588 years later, at 10.30am, 3 July 1929, a real-estate broker named Vincent Elias climbed the steps of Benny Evangelist’s two-story wooden house at 3587 St Aubin Avenue, Detroit, Michigan. Elias was selling him a farm and, since the front door was unlocked, he stepped inside and into the small room used as an office. There he found Evangelist slumped forward on a roll top desk, fully dressed, while his head lay face-up on the floor. Blood was everywhere, and Elias hurried to the delicatessen next door and phoned the police.

Two patrolmen arrived first. They followed a trail of bloody footprints leading upstairs to the bedrooms and the bodies of the Evangelist family; there was Benny’s pregnant wife, Santina, 38, lying in bed nearly decapitated, and with a deep gouge



THE PATROLMEN FOLLOWED A TRAIL OF BLOODY FOOTPRINTS LEADING UPSTAIRS TO THE BEDROOMS

that suggested the killer was trying to chop her arm off. The other arm held the battered remains of the couple’s youngest son, 18-month-old Mario.² In the next room, the bludgeoned bodies of Matthew, six, and Jenny (Eugenia), four, were in their

beds, and the eldest child, eight-year-old Angelina, was on the floor. The children’s bodies were horribly mutilated.

While crowds gathered outside, the house was “invaded by dozens of officers of the law, coroner’s deputies and assistants, the clever curious, the prosecuting attorney and the newspaper men,” all intent on seeing what was then the worst mass murder in Detroit’s history.³

THE CELESTIAL BASEMENT

Benny Evangelist was the neighbourhood sorcerer, and the search turned up a number of unusual items. Plants drying in the attic were assumed to be herbal cures or ingredients in magical potions; there were two swords (not used in the slayings), a false beard and wig, possibly worn by Evangelist during his ‘readings’⁴, a long wooden staff, and “three large pictures of a child in a coffin... strewn on the floor”.⁵ The office contained a typewriter, miscellaneous furniture, boxes of assorted junk, copies of *The Oldest History of the World*, and a collection of lingerie tagged with the owners’ names.

Police also found a shrine in the basement. Its walls and ceiling were hung with pale green cloth, “which bulged out in places like the walls of a padded cell”.⁶ There was some kind of altar, and grotesque life-sized figures hung from wires so that “with every current of air the monstrosities swayed like shrivelled dead men on a gallows.”⁷ Surviving photographs show what looks like a winged head, a bearded man holding a baby (described in the caption as “flying Neptune”), and beak-nosed figures wearing what look like tuxedos or hooded robes. An enormous

SIX VICTIMS OF DETROIT AX MURDERER



MURDER OF SIX SEEN

BY WANDERING DOG

Eye Witness to Brutal Detroit Axe Slaying Finally Turns Up

Detroit, March 15.—(AP)—An eye-witness to the brutal axe murder of a family of six was available to Detroit police today, but the circumstances of the murder remained as much a mystery to them as ever.

The witness is a shaggy brown mongrel dog, which belonged to the children of Benny Evangelist. The animal disappeared at the time Evangelist, his wife and the four children were hacked to death on July 3, 1929.

In the course of routine a record was made of the dog's license number, but the dog was not found.

Yesterday a woman reported that a dog with a 1929 license number 23039 had come to her home. When she learned who had owned the animal she decided not to adopt it.

Bodies Are Found In Home At Detroit

Detroit, July 3.—(AP)—Benjamin Evangelistia, 43, his wife, Santima, 40, and their four children, were found slain in their home in St. Aubin avenue here shortly before noon today. All apparently were victims of an axe slayer. Evangelistia's head was completely severed and the heads of each of the others had been beaten in.

The children were Angeline, 8; Margaret, 6; Jean, 4; and Marrow, 18 months.

The body of Evangelistia, known in the Italian neighborhood as a religious healer and something of a mystic, was found seated behind his desk on the first floor. His arms were folded across his chest. The others were found in the second floor bedrooms.

Discovery of the bodies was

Axe Used To Kill Parents And Kiddies

Paul Evangelist, Wife and Tots Hacked To Death

Known As Mystic

Dead Man Was Religious "Healer;" Head Cut Off and Put on Chair

DETROIT, Mich., July 3. The entire Detroit police force was mobilized this afternoon to search for the fiend who slashed the head off Paul Evangelist, 43, erstwhile carpenter, herb doctor and "healer," then hacked Evangelist's wife and four children to death and escaped, leaving a bloody trail smeared over the family's small home at 3537 St. Aubin avenue.

The bodies were found in the Evangelist home shortly before noon today by Vincent Elias, a real estate dealer, who was a friend of the family. The bodies of Evangelist and his wife were in their bed on the first floor with the body of 18-months-old Marrow across his mother's breast. On a chair near the bed was the head of the "healer," in a tableau remindful of the stories of St. John the Baptist. They were nude, but unstairs in their twin cribs the bodies of Angeline, seven; and Margaret, five, were found in their night-dresses. On the floor by the beds was the horribly mutilated body of four-year-old Jeanne Evangelist.

KNOWN AS MYSTIC

Evangelist, a carpenter by trade, was known as a mystic in his neighborhood, and prescribed herb medicines. Blood was smeared over the two rooms in which the bodies were found, and bloody finger prints were on the door leading to the street.

"This is the most unusual case," James Burgess, Wayne county coroner for 18 years, said after

Continued on Page 8, Column 4, This Section

SEEK TO LINK MANIAC TO AX KILLING CASE

Detroit Sleuths Check on Records of Lancaster, Pa., Fugitive

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eye, with an electric light inside, represented “the Sun” and a sign in the cellar window informed passers-by that the “Great Celestial Planet Exhibition” was inside.

The killer’s footprints showed that he was small, while the injuries were inflicted by someone strong, left-handed, and armed with a heavy-bladed weapon; perhaps a sword or machete. A set of fingerprints was discovered, but the investigation was sloppy and police gossip claimed that the prints belonged to a sightseer (“To this day, mention of the print will bring a knowing smirk from some of the old timers”).⁸ More than 60 detectives were assigned to the case,⁹ but with nothing valuable stolen and few clues, some began digging into the victims’ pasts.

THE PROPHET’S PROGRESS

Born “Beniamino Evangelista” in Naples, Italy, in 1886, Benny Evangelist was one of three boys and, according to his older brother Antonio, “perfectly normal”.¹⁰ Antonio came to the United States in 1901, settled in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and sent money to Benny who joined him two years later.

Benny’s visions began in Philadelphia on 2 February 1906 and would continue every day from 12 to 3am for exactly 20 years. They were one aspect of a growing fascination with the occult that proved too much for the conventionally religious Antonio; so, in 1909, Benny left the city to work as a section hand



A SIGN INFORMED
PASSERS-BY THAT THE
“GREAT CELESTIAL
PLANET EXHIBITION”
WAS IN THE CELLAR

for the Pennsylvania Railroad.

Out in rural York County, Pennsylvania, he lived alone in a shack with “books and fetiches”¹¹, and lectured the other labourers about mysticism until he was nicknamed “Benny the Preach”. During this period he allegedly learned the traditional Pennsylvania Dutch folk magic called “pow-wowing” (See *Hex & Violence* sidebar), and is supposed to have performed magical rituals with another labourer named Aurelius Angelino.

Evangelist and Angelino were around the same age, with similar backgrounds, but in 1919 Angelino clubbed his twin four-year old boys to death, dragged their bodies outside and chopped them to pieces with an axe and knife.¹² Angelino was committed to the Farview State Hospital for the Criminally Insane at Waymart, but kept escaping until a train ran him over in 1923.

Benny’s extended sojourn in the heart of pow-wowing country, and his alleged relationship with Angelino, would influence how the Detroit murders were reported and investigated.

MOTOR CITY MAGICIAN

By 1920, Benny was living in Detroit with Antonio and his family.¹³ The older brother worked in a car factory, while the younger did carpentry, learned plumbing, and had a budding reputation as a healer. According to



TOP: Crowds gather outside the Evangelist house after news of the murders spreads. ABOVE: The bizarre life-size figures found hanging in Benny Evangelist’s basement.

one romantic story, he met his wife through healing.

Santina was supposed to be a wealthy and brilliant woman whose health was broken by excessive study. She was carried to Benny on a stretcher and seemed to be beyond help, when he announced: "I can cure this woman but she must marry me."¹⁴ Which she did. Whatever the truth, they probably wed around 1920-1921.

Both were enthusiastic occultists, though their priest, Father Francis J Beccherini, considered Santina the more fanatical of the two.¹⁵ The couple had five children, including an unnamed boy who died in 1924 and became a red herring during the murder investigation;¹⁶ but this loss, and Benny's various eccentricities did not prevent the Evangelists from prospering.¹⁷

In addition to carpentry, Benny did general building and contracting, bought and sold real estate, and saw numerous clients; his magical services cost up to \$10, at a time when men on the Ford assembly line earned five dollars a day (and were the highest paid factory workers in the country). The state of Michigan also recognised Benny as a legitimate healer and gave him "a permit to practise medicine so long as he did not, use drugs or prescribe medicine."¹⁸ But Evangelist's ambitions went beyond curing warts and dispensing love potions.

He hired the George P. Johnson Flag and Decorating Company to drape the basement, and build the celestial beings from papier-mâché, cloth, and hair; Benny provided rough sketches and instructed their artisan to make the figures "as horrible as possible."¹⁹ In February 1926, his visions ended, appearing in printed form as *The Oldest History* that same year. At some point, he also acquired business cards reading "Mr Benny Evangelist: divine profetil (sic), author and private history writer."²⁰ As a declared prophet, with a sacred book and shrine, all he needed was converts.

Benny applied for permission to open the Great Celestial Planet Exhibition to the public, but police feared that it would cause a disturbance in the neighbourhood and denied the request; he also spoke of turning *The Oldest History* into a Hollywood film. This was a month before the murders and nothing remarkable happened in the interval, though Benny reportedly appeared preoccupied.

On 2 July 1929 he sold a house to a man named Umberto Tecchio, then visited a demolition site and bought salvaged lumber, telling the watchman that a truck would collect it in the morning. He went home, and a neighbour later saw Benny's office light burning at midnight, although this was not unusual, since clients visited him at all hours. A lady across the street thought she saw a dark figure loitering around the porch of 3587 St Aubin, but it was not enough to rouse the two dogs in the Evangelists' backyard, and everything seemed normal until Vincent Elias raised the alarm.

INVESTIGATIONS

Three thousand people attended the funeral at San Francesco Church, crowding the

THE BOOK OF BENNY

Evangelist planned to write four books, beginning before the creation of God, and ending with the "reincarnation of the Son of God that we call Jesus Christ".¹ He managed to cover the first 5,421 years in volume one, *The Oldest History of the World*.

God is a volatile character who is calmed down by his consort, Eternity. There are nine lesser celestial beings, including the Sun, Moon, Saturn, and Eldom, a gardener who cultivates the Earth. Eldom fashions a helper for himself by mixing dolphin's milk with dust and creating "our first father, Adam"², a small hairy being with a dolphin-like head.

Adam is one of a handful of biblical figures that appear in *The Oldest History* and are almost unrecognisable.

Cain strangles Abel, then falls off a mountain and breaks into pieces, so that "His head rolled in front of Adam and Eve's hut. When Adam saw his sons' [sic] head he knew that something serious had happened."³ There are several decapitations, along with some cannibalism, and it was suggested that these passages inspired the Evangelists' killer.

In fact, most of the book is devoted to the countries of Caiol, Aiel, Caion, Ape, Cainon (Canaan?), Nile (Egypt?), and Afra (Africa?). There is an Oz-like quality to these places; the borders of Ape are protected by lions and bears, the Caionites make the man with longest beard their king, and Cainon is ruled by a malevolent witch who disconnects children's joints at night. Prophets are important – they spend much of their time condemning laziness, and telling people to live in peace – but there are also giants, devil babies, and fortean phenomena: "In Caion for two days and nights it rained snowballs."⁴ Book one of *The Oldest History*

sanctuary and spilling out onto the street. Father Beccherini conducted High Mass while mourners, spectators, and gawkers contemplated the five opal-coloured caskets (Santina and Mario shared theirs), that ran single-file down the centre aisle. The priest considered Benny insane and a charlatan, and never persuaded the couple "to abandon their occult practices, even though he tried hard to do so."²¹ Yet the children had been baptised and Angelina was a student at San Francesco's parochial school. After the service, the bodies were buried in an unmarked mass grave at Mt Olivet Cemetery, the second family murdered in two weeks.

On 17 June 1929, a woman and her three children were beaten to death with a hammer at nearby River Rouge. The St Aubin killings followed, and the carnage proved too much for a Mrs Florence Morris who became

ends after the death of Miel, a great prophet whose peace-making efforts were assisted by the power to cause earthquakes, and the countries have slipped back into wars and witchcraft.

The contents owe little to Roman Catholicism or the folk Christianity of pow-wowing, but there are scattered elements of astrology, Theosophy, eugenics, and Italian folklore. There is a walnut tree, for instance, "planted for power's sake of the witches". An evil giant "developed many witches",⁵ under its branches, which recalls the ancient Italian connection between witches and walnut trees. The city of Benevento, northeast of Naples, is notorious for a tree around which witches congregate, coming "from all parts of the peninsula to the Grand Councils held under the walnut-tree..."⁶

Evangelist's *The Oldest History* eventually became so obscure that Colin Wilson could incorporate the book and murders into

the Cthulhu mythos for his 1969 novel *The Philosopher's Stone*. A new edition of *Oldest History* did not appear until 2001, and a revised version is online with a valuable introduction and supplementary material at: <http://kobek.com/oldesthistory.pdf>.

NOTES

¹ Benny Evangelist, *The Oldest History of the World Discovered by Occult Science*, privately printed by Francis Slunder, 1926, p 25. Evangelist wrote that the four books would be completed "if I live", which sounds ominous, but volume one took 20 years.

² Ibid, p20.

³ Ibid, p59.

⁴ Ibid, p129.

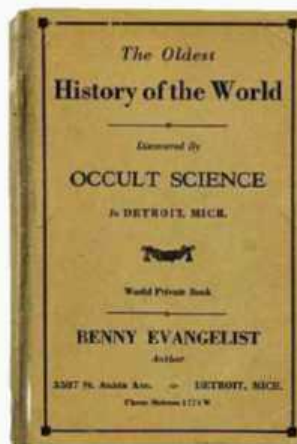
⁵ Ibid, p180.

⁶ JB Andrews, "Neapolitan Witchcraft", Folk-Lore Transactions of the Folk-Lore Society, Vol III, No 1, March 1897, p1.

terrified for her own family and, on the day of the Evangelists' funeral, leaped to her death from Detroit's Barlum (now "Cadillac") Tower. Police did not believe that the slayings were connected and River Rouge never became part of the Evangelist investigation.

Detectives conducted over 500 interviews and interrogations, including men from the neighbourhood, notably Umberto Tecchio,²² Benny's business associates, and the Black Hand gangs that extorted money from Italian immigrants.²³ The collection of labelled lingerie appeared to be souvenirs of Evangelist's sexual adventures, which meant a jealous husband (or husbands) might be involved, but the items were used in a magical procedure that required a garment worn next to the skin.

Working on the assumption that Benny had a cult, many suspected that weird rituals





and the hideous puppets had caused a member to run amok, or that the leader of a rival cult had assassinated him to eliminate competition.²⁴ The rival cult leader was apparently discovered three years later when Robert Harris, deranged “King” of “the Order of Islam”, crushed a man’s head with the rear axle of a car then stabbed him to death on a makeshift altar. The murder happened 10 blocks from the Evangelists’ former home, but the killer’s fingerprints did not match those found at St Aubin Avenue and Harris did not arrive in the city till months after the family was dead. (The “Order of Islam” later became the “Nation of Islam”.)

A Detroit police lieutenant suggested another possibility. He carried out a study of murders committed around the holidays and concluded that 40 unsolved homicides, including that of the Evangelists (killed before the Fourth of July), were the work of a hypothetical serial killer he dubbed the “Holiday Ripper”.²⁵ It was an unusual theory, but those involving Aurelius Angelino were even stranger.

According to one version, Angelino went to Detroit and slaughtered the Evangelists “because of some injury in the past or through some quirk of religious fanaticism”.²⁶ The train had not killed him, of course, and his wife identified the mangled remains of a stranger as her husband in order to remarry. Another story claimed that it was Benny Evangelist who killed the Angelino children and their vengeful father (or other relative) had exterminated the Evangelists in turn. It was also suggested that Benny and Aurelius Angelino were the same person, or the high priests of a secret blood cult one of whose adherents, “moved by Abrahamic insanity... perpetrated the child murders for which Angelino was sent to the asylum and had later hunted down and offered up as a sacrifice the lives of Evangelista, his wife and

THERE WAS A
PRIMITIVE QUALITY TO
THE BUTCHERY AT ST
AUBIN AVENUE THAT
SEEMED OUT OF PLACE
IN MODERN DETROIT



TOP: Crowds gather to watch as police remove the bodies of the Evangelist family from the murder scene. ABOVE: The funeral procession for the Evangelist family. Six caskets are wheeled through the streets of Detroit; police detectives were present, apparently searching the crowd for any sign of the murderer or murderers.

children.”²⁷ Theories aside, the investigation made so little progress that a medium named “Princess Lazuli”; was allowed to hold a séance in the office where Evangelist was beheaded.

She sat in Benny’s chair, in the position the body was discovered, and made contact with his spirit, but it would only speak to her in Italian, which the Princess did not understand.²⁸ The séance proved no more successful than the police investigation and, in the end, no one was charged with murdering the Evangelists.

MASSACRE AVENUE

By 1930, a vague consensus arose that the solution would be found in the “forbidding hills where Evangelista and Angelino had first come to believe in voodooism”.²⁹ One detective, whose inquiry brought him to York and Lancaster counties, declared: “Somewhere up here, there’s an answer to the whole question.”³⁰

Assuming the police did not have confidential information, the main reasons for believing this seems to be the Hex Murder (see sidebar), and the doubtful connection made between Evangelist’s occultism and powwowing. Perhaps there was also a primitive quality to the butchery at St Aubin Avenue that seemed out of place in a modern urban setting (one writer called them the “Dark Ages Murders”), yet Detroit has had a sinister, even diabolical, quality since its creation.

Its *genius loci* is the *Nain Rouge*, a grotesque “Red Dwarf” that cursed the city’s founder and returns to celebrate disasters. A Michigan demonologist classified the *Nain Rouge* as a “principality” – a variety of evil spirit that holds sway over places – with



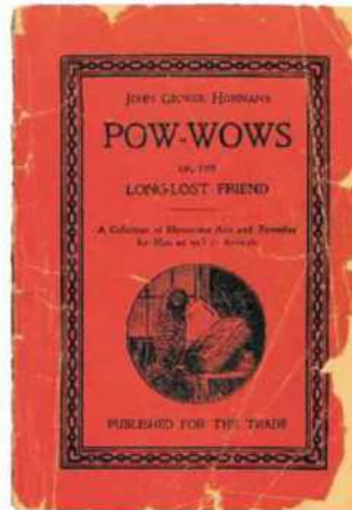
HEX AND VIOLENCE

Pow-wowing is a European form of folk magic that came to the United States with German-speaking Protestant immigrants. The Pennsylvania Dutch call it *braucherie*, but the popularity of John George Hohman's book, *Pow-Wows; or Long Lost Friend*, gave precedence to the Algonquian word, meaning "a gathering of medicine men".

First published in 1820 as *Der Lange Verborgene Freund* (*The Long-Hidden Friend*), it is one of several spell books used by "pow-wow doctors" for healing, and driving away evil influences. There are charms and cures (remove warts by rubbing them with roasted chicken feet, then bury the chicken feet under the eaves), amulets (including the famous SATOR square), spells for crops, livestock, and a variety of situations, from catching fish to winning lawsuits. *The Long Lost Friend* also protected its owner, but the book's power could be used maliciously, a belief that led to the murder of a pow-wow doctor named Nelson D Rehmeier.

In 1928, an unhappy man named John Blymyer became convinced that Rehmeier had hexed him, and convinced two companions that they were likewise jinxed. The curse could be lifted, however, by burying (or burning) a lock of Rehmeier's hair along with his copy of *The Long Lost Friend*. On the night of 27 November, the three of them broke into the pow-wow doctor's York County farmhouse, and ended up beating and strangling Rehmeier to death. They tried concealing the crime by setting the house on fire, but it did not catch, and the trio was soon arrested.¹

The "Hex Murder" and subsequent trial became "a national and international sensation"² that ended with the conviction of Blymyer and his accomplices in January 1929 (he was sentenced to life and released in 1953). Rehmeier's slaying caused Pennsylvania magic traditions to "explode into the national



consciousness"³ and "City people, who supposed that the last US beldame had long since ridden up the wind and that the rattle of wild laughter in the autumn air

ABOVE LEFT: The Rehmeier house, also known as Hex Hollow, on Reymeyer's Hollow Road, photographed at the time of the murders. It still stands and is believed by many to be haunted. ABOVE RIGHT: Nelson Rehmeier. LEFT: A copy of John George Hohman's *Pow-Wows; or, The Long Lost Friend*, a book of *braucherei* spells central to the 'Hex Murder'.

had never been heard since Salem, were surprised to learn of the York witches."⁴ Nine months later, Benny's time in York County, along with his occult healing and strange death, would lead to the Detroit murders being interpreted as another violent manifestation of pow-wowing.

There is, in fact, no evidence that he practised "brauch". One woman describes Evangelist healing her child by reading "something from a book – it wasn't in English or Italian."⁵ That might have been *The Long Lost Friend*, *Egyptian Secrets of Albertus Magnus*, *Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses* or other pow-wowing title available at the time, but there is no mention of police finding a spell book in the house. There is also some question about whether Evangelist could even read and write; a secretary was reportedly hired to type *The Oldest History*. Moreover, Italy has its own folk magic traditions, whose *guaritori* ("healers") and *pratico* ("wise people") make pow-wowing redundant.

NOTES

- 1 The scorch marks and bloodstains are still visible in Rehmeier's house, which stands on Rehmeier's Hollow Road, in North Hopewell Township, Pennsylvania. It is reportedly a legend-tripping destination.
- 2 Owen Davies, *America Bewitched*, Oxford University Press, 2013, p153.
- 3 Ibid
- 4 *Time*, 21 January 1929.
- 5 RD Kingslyn, "Sinister Swordsman", *Master Detective*, 1953, p55.



LEFT: The demonic *Nain Rouge* or Red Dwarf that holds sway over the city of Detroit, as commemorated by a contemporary craft beer.

Detroit revealing “its demonic damage from the principality with vacant lots, high crime rates, gangs and poverty”.³¹ Strange cults flourished, Aleister Crowley visited in 1918-1919, and the city often has the highest homicide rate in the United States;

30 October, “Devils’ Night”, is marked by annual widespread arson.

From this perspective, asking if the Evangelists died because “Benjamin conjured up the denizen of some nether region?” or suggesting that “the small shadowy figure seen by one of the witnesses was a demon”³² is less immediately dismissible.

At a minimum, history suggests that St Aubin Avenue (now St Aubin Street) is an inauspicious address³³; six people were murdered in a crack house at 17850 St Aubin Street in 1990, a crime that became known as the “St Aubin Street Massacre”.

The Evangelist home, scene of the original St Aubin Street massacre, reportedly became a funeral parlour. It might have gone on to become a spectacularly haunted house, but the building was torn down in the mid-1940s; most of the surrounding neighbourhood is also gone, with nothing but a weedy vacant lot to show where the Divine Prophet lived and died with his family.³⁴ **FI**

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



ROBERT DAMON SCHNECK is interested in the stranger aspects of American history and is the author of *The President’s Vampire* (Anomalist Books, 2005) and *Mrs Wakeman vs the Antichrist* (Tarcher, 2014).

He is a regular contributor to *Fortean Times* and *Fate* magazine. Visit his Facebook page, Historian of the Strange.

NOTES

- 1 Benny Evangelist, *The Oldest History of the World Discovered by Occult Science*, privately printed by Francis Slunder, Detroit, Michigan, 1926, p26.
- 2 Contemporary reporters were apparently unfamiliar with Italian names and reported Mario’s name as “Marrow”. Alan Bradley, *Detroit Occult Murders*, May 17, 2014.
- 3 *Detroit Free Press*, 10 July, 1929.
- 4 *Detroit Free Press*, 4 July, 1929.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 Edwin T Woodhall, *Crime and the Supernatural*, John Long, Ltd, 1935 (reprinted by Kessinger Publishing), p147.
- 8 Royce Howes, ‘Six Killings and a Cult’, from *Detroit Murders*, Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1948, p111.
- 9 *Detroit Free Press*, 11(?) July, 1929.
- 10 *Detroit Free Press*, 5 July, 1929, Beniamino might have been born in a village named “Casino” near Naples, between 1885 and 1888, though no village by that name seems to exist today. Another possibility is that the Evangelists came from city of Cassino, while Antonio Evangelista says they came from Naples. That presumably settles the question, but Antonio was distancing himself from Benny and might have been protecting family in Italy.
- 11 Woodhall, *op.cit.*, p148.
- 12 *New Oxford (PA) Item*, 22 May, 1919. According to Woodhall’s *Crime and the Supernatural*, “The following day two milk cans bearing the sign ‘For Sale’ appeared

- on Angelino’s lawn. They contained the mangled bodies of the twin boys” (p158). Another source gives 1926 as the year Angelino was run over by a train.
- 13 Antonio gave the impression that he was estranged from Benny and had almost no contact with him after Philadelphia. The census of 1920, however, shows that the brothers were living together in Detroit.
- 14 Woodhall, *op.cit.*, p 142
- 15 *Detroit Free Press*, 5 July, 1929.
- 16 The boy was photographed in his coffin and the pictures were found on the floor of Benny’s office after the murders. Police, anxious to find a motive, thought they might show a child who died under Evangelist’s care and that the family was killed for revenge. In some accounts this nameless child is a girl and no mention is made of whether it is buried with the rest of the family at Mt Olivet Cemetery though this information might be available in the archives of San Francisco church or the diocese of Detroit.
- 17 Evangelist used to stand on the sidewalk, staring into the sky and waving his arms. If *The Oldest History* is any guide, he was looking for divine messages in the clouds.
- 18 *Detroit Free Press*, 4 July 1929. Major John F Roehl, health department investigator. Several sources repeat an improbable claim that Benny saw 75 clients a day.
- 19 Woodhall, *op.cit.*, p153.
- 20 Police questioned the book’s printer, Francis

- Slunder, without results. There is no mention of how many copies Evangelist ordered, or the number found in the house, only that there were “ample copies for souvenir purposes and happily a few [left] over for police archives.” (Royce Howes, ‘Six Killings and a Cult’, from *Detroit Murders*, Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1948, p97.) If the cult existed, and each member had a copy, then comparing the number printed to the number discovered might provide a rough idea of its size.
- 21 Woodhall, *op.cit.*, p143. “‘It is sad,’ said Father Beccherini, ‘that a couple so beset in many ways should also be cursed [with occult beliefs].’”
- 22 Umberto Tecchio was not only present at the scene before the murders, but also knifed his brother-in-law to death three months earlier. Police accepted his claim of self-defence, but Mrs Tecchio divorced him, remarried, and, in 1932, her new husband committed suicide under suspicious circumstances. Also that year, police again questioned Tecchio about the Evangelist murders. He died in 1934, after which his landlady threw herself under a train, and witnesses that had been afraid to talk to police, came forward. In 1935, the former Mrs Tecchio said that Umberto took her to Evangelist for treatment, and she saw two machetes hanging on the office wall. A young man named Frank Constanza, who was 14 years old and a paperboy in 1929, claimed to see Tecchio standing on the porch of Evangelist’s house on the morning of the

- murders. No machetes were ever found and Tecchio’s footprints and fingerprints either did not match those found at the scene, or were unavailable for comparison. Aurelius Angelino’s fingerprints had not been taken, and Benny had to be exhumed a month after the funeral to compare his prints with the killer’s. Royce Howes, ‘Six Killings and a Cult’, from *Detroit Murders*, Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1948, pp111-112.
- 23 The gangs “signed” their extortion letters with an ominous black handprint that inspired the name “Black Hand”. In 1926, a Louis Evangelista fatally shot a Black Hand then fled Detroit. It was suggested that the Evangelists were killed in retribution, but it is not certain that they were related, and “Veterans of the black-hand squad” argued that “[it] isn’t like Italian extortionists to butcher an entire family”. Woodhall, p151.
- 24 Detroit police never found anyone who claimed to be a member of Benny’s cult, which several sources claim was named the “Union Federation of America”. This seems to be a misreading, however, of the name that Evangelist invented for the United States of America.
- 25 *The Windsor (Ontario, Canada) Daily Star*, 21 August 1945. Detroit police lieutenant Royal Baker’s “Holiday Ripper” recalls the “Smiley face murders” theory currently being used to explain the alcohol-related drowning of young men across the United States.
- 26 Woodhall, *op.cit.*, p158.
- 27 Woodhall, *op.cit.*, p158-159. There is no proof

- that Aurelius Angelino and Benny Evangelist were even acquainted. Evangelist reportedly had no close friends when he worked for the railroad.
- 28 *The Windsor (Ontario, Canada) Daily Star*, 13 August 1929. Seven years earlier, Lazuli and her then husband, went into the woods of northern Maine naked, and attempted to live off the land, a stunt previously performed by “Nature Man” Joe Knowles in 1913. After a month, the “Adam and Eve Experiment” ended when the couple was arrested for poaching. They were released and joined a theatrical company. <http://weirddetroit.blogspot.com/2011/08/prince-lazuli-footnote-to.html>.
- 29 Woodhall, *op.cit.*, p159.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p160.
- 31 Greg P Haggart, *Mechanics of Demonology*, Blue Lion Publications, 2009, p176.
- 32 Brad Steiger, *Real Zombies, the Living Dead, and Creatures of the Apocalypse*, Visible Ink Press, 2010, p79. Colin Wilson used the idea in a novel, as did filmmaker Brandon White. His short movie *Evangelist* was shown at the NYC Midnight Madness Movie-making Festival in 2006.
- 33 St Aubin, Saint Albinus of Angers (470-550), was a miracle-working bishop invoked for protection against pirates.
- 34 <http://benny.weirdlectures.com/2013/07/17/3587-st-aubin-avenue-then-and-now/>. Accessed 8 Dec 2014.

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VIRGINIA WOOLF

AND THE WHITECHAPEL MURDERS

A considerable distance, geographical and social, separated the elegant squares of Bloomsbury from the slums of Whitechapel, and yet there exists a curious network of connections between one of England's most celebrated novelists and Jack the Ripper, as **THERESE TAYLOR** explains.

Virginia Woolf is an icon of 20th-century literature, a novelist admired for her modernist fiction, her contribution to feminist thought, and her fascinating correspondence and journals, which link her to many prominent British figures. She died in tragic circumstances when, in 1941, she drowned herself in the River Ouse, having suffered all her life from episodes of bipolar depression, which ran in her family. Woolf's graceful portrait is reproduced whenever anyone writes of Bloomsbury, women's writing, or the modern novel.

It is remarkable, then, that this brilliant woman was also linked to a whole series of figures accused of involvement in the crimes of 'Jack the Ripper' – the speculative name given to the unknown serial killer who terrorised the women of the East End of London in 1888. He is credited with five murders, and there is a possibility that other violent unsolved crimes might have been the work of the same individual. The Ripper's crimes quickly entered the popular folklore of England; possibly because the murders were never solved, perhaps also because this was the first such series of 'thrill killings' to claim public attention. Many stories have been created to explain these crimes, and many individuals have been suspected of being the murderer (see **FT155:43-47, 310:40-41**).

Virginia Woolf's uncle, Sir James Fitzjames Stephen, was an eminent legal figure and was made a Baronet by Queen Victoria. He presided over important murder trials, including that of Florence



Maybrick in 1889. This trial was caused by the suspicious death of James Maybrick, a merchant in Liverpool. James Maybrick became a suspect for the Whitechapel murders in 1893, when *The Diary of Jack the Ripper* was published. This purported to be a diary Maybrick had written, and gave an account of a murderous spree in the East End in 1888. Although the sensational diary was regarded with great scepticism, it drew attention to the sombre history of the Stephen family, especially as the son of the judge in the trial of Florence Maybrick – also called James Stephen – was another figure linked by rumour to the Whitechapel murders.

PRINCE AND POET

James Stephen (1859-1892) was the first cousin of Virginia Woolf. Following the tradition of his family, he attended Cambridge University, and was a member of the elite secret society, the Apostles. During the interwar years, the Apostles' membership was to include the Cambridge spies – most notably, the art historian, Soviet agent and friend of

the Royal family Sir Anthony Blunt. While at Cambridge in the 1930s, Blunt had a short-term romantic relationship with Julian Bell, the nephew of Virginia Woolf. Blunt's dramatic career revealed the circles of power, male privilege and secrecy that always seem to accompany the involvement of the Apostles. These features were already in place in the 1880s, when James Stephen was a member.

At Cambridge, Stephen was appointed tutor to Prince Albert Victor, Duke of Clarence, known as Prince Eddy. He was

VIRGINIA WOOLF'S
EMINENT UNCLE
PRESIDED OVER
IMPORTANT
MURDER TRIALS



also his companion, and helped to organise his social life. A close bond developed between them, but they saw each other only occasionally after the Prince graduated from the University in 1885. By 1888 – the year of the Whitechapel murders – Stephen was showing signs of mental instability. Despite these intervals of illness, he was a respected intellectual and poet.

Virginia Woolf, when reminiscing about her family, described how ‘Jem’ Stephen would rampage through their house, often casting himself at her older stepsister, Stella Duckworth. Jem was infatuated with Stella, and wrote her passionate letters and poems, some with violent themes, and Virginia remembered that one morning he rushed into the house and stabbed a loaf of bread with his sword-stick.¹

As an eight-year-old child, Virginia was obliged to tolerate the company of “this great mad figure” who told them that Dr Savage had pronounced him to be losing his reason. Dr Savage, who had tried vainly to assuage the symptoms of James’s mental illness, later took on Virginia as a patient, and knew the family history. She also remembered that her cousin James once took her, as a young child, to his rooms at De Vere Gardens, saying that he would paint her portrait. Stephen’s artistic impulses cause one to wonder if he ever took art classes in London. Vanessa Bell, Virginia’s sister, became a painter, and was acquainted with Walter Sickert – artist, art teacher, and Ripper suspect.

In 1892, Stephen starved himself to death in the St Andrew’s Hospital mental asylum in Northampton and was forgotten by everyone, except biographers of Virginia Woolf. But then his name entered Ripper lore in 1972 when Michael Harrison published *Clarence*, a biography of Prince Albert Victor. The book described Stephen as a violent misogynist who was most probably responsible for the Ripper crimes. The evidence was slight, but it accorded with the long-standing hearsay

that the Ripper was in some way connected to the British royal family, and had been confined to an asylum in order to put an end to his reign of terror. Another rumour was that the Ripper, a gentleman with high social connections, had committed suicide. Stephen fitted the bill on both counts; but he was not the only figure in his social circle who did.

DRUITT’S DOWNFALL

James Stephen’s many social connections suggest that he would have been familiar with Montague Druitt, an Oxford graduate who qualified as a barrister in the same class as Stephen. Druitt, who worked in a private boy’s school as well as pursuing a legal career, is another suspect for the Whitechapel murders. In 1987, Martin Howells & Keith Skinner published *The Ripper Legacy*, setting out the case against him.

Druitt is alleged to be the person mentioned, in private notes, by a high-ranking police officer called Melville Macnaghten. Macnaghten referred to a gentleman who “disappeared around the time of the Miller’s Court (i.e. Mary Jane Kelly’s) murder and his body was found in the Thames... I have little doubt from information received that his own family suspected the man to be the Whitechapel murderer; it was alleged that he was sexually insane.” These notes were not made until 1894, and are supported by no factual information at all, but seem to rely upon a shared understanding by those close to the case.

Other details in Druitt’s life suggest that he was linked to Prince Eddy, James Stephen, and other men who formed a close social circle with homosexual overtones. They may have frequented the male brothel in Cleveland Street that was raided in 1889, leading to a sudden flurry of unexpected legal moves and the silencing of the press. It has often been alleged that aristocratic patrons made the Cleveland Street brothel

a topic too risky to investigate. If Montague Druitt was associated with homosexual circles, this alone would have made him ‘insane’ and a suspect in the worst kinds of crime in the eyes of the police of the 1890s.

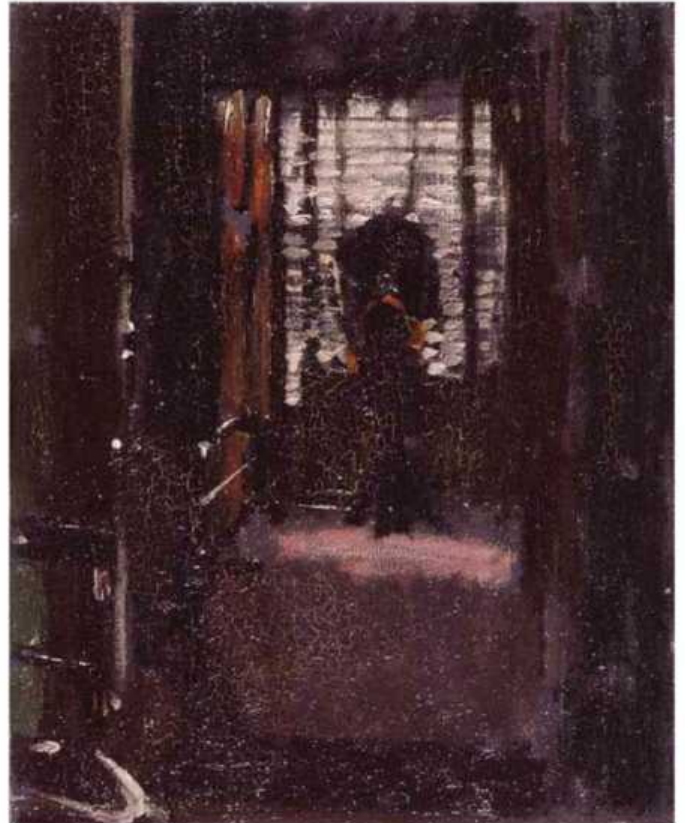
Druitt was found drowned in December 1888. His death was ruled a suicide, but recent investigations have raised the possibility that this murder suspect might himself have been murdered. Shortly before his disappearance, Druitt was dismissed from his job at Valentine’s School, Blackheath, for an unspecified but serious scandal. He then went to visit a location near ‘The Osiers’, a holiday house at Chiswick Mall maintained by barrister and Cambridge Apostle Harry Wilson. This was a meeting place for young Cambridge men, including Prince Eddy and James Stephen. Then, two weeks later, Druitt’s body was found floating in the Thames at Chiswick.

These details are rather suspicious; Druitt’s journey to Chiswick Mall appears to have been a visit to close friends at a time when he was facing a scandal. If he had wanted to commit suicide, he could have done so in London. However, he purchased a return rail ticket, and set out for The Osiers, a meeting place for men involved in secret friendships and forbidden sexualities. He apparently resided there for a short while, as he left London on 1 December and the inquest records that he had been seen, apparently at Chiswick, on 3 December. Where he was staying during these days is not known. As historian Deborah McDonald has stated: “Druitt’s death, in suspicious circumstances, appears to have, in some way, involved Eddy and Stephen and their friends.”² The presence of someone involved in a serious scandal – someone like Montague Druitt – could have threatened disruption and exposure for the whole group. His death closed off all questions.

Prior to his sudden downfall, disappearance and death, Druitt had been



ABOVE LEFT: James Stephen, Woolf’s first cousin. ABOVE CENTRE: Prince Albert Victor, Duke of Clarence, known as Prince Eddy. ABOVE RIGHT: Montague Druitt.



ABOVE LEFT: Artist Walter Sickert took a keen interest in the Ripper murders and claimed that he had lodged in a room once used by the killer. A number of authors have argued that Sickert was either involved with the murders or was himself the Ripper. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Sickert's painting "Jack the Ripper's Bedroom", c. 1907.

a well-connected man. By an extraordinary coincidence, at the very time he disappeared, newspaper reports published a notice that Prince Eddy requested the company of a list of invited guests at a ball in Bournemouth, including Montague Druitt.

It is unlikely that James Stephen ever mentioned Montague Druitt to Virginia, but he did talk of Cambridge, and her brother Thoby Stephen was later to attend the University and become an Apostle. Others retained their memories of Druitt, and Sir James Monro, the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police at the time of the murders, had many papers in his possession concerning the case. He died in 1920, and his heir Charles Monro destroyed these documents, apparently because he felt that Sir James's theories about the killer were "a hot potato". Christopher Monro, the Commissioner's grand nephew, spoke to Charles about this and said that Sir James had "uncovered almost all of the degenerate 'Apostle' cult in which JK Stephen was the high priest: Druitt, although an Oxonian, was quickly drawn into the circle of Stephen's disciples when studying for the Bar."³

As decades passed, the Ripper crimes passed into legend. Many people repeated stories about various suspects. One of the most imaginative of these raconteurs was an artist who encouraged the work of Vanessa Bell, Virginia Woolf's sister.

THE ROYAL CONSPIRACY

Walter Sickert was an eminent British artist who bridged the Victorian and modernist eras. During his most active years – from

SICKERT WAS FASCINATED BY THE MURDERS AND TOLD PEOPLE HE KNEW THE KILLER'S IDENTITY

the 1890s to the 1930s – he was acquainted with the Stephen family, most especially the painter Vanessa Bell. Virginia Woolf wrote a review, *Walter Sickert: A Conversation*, in 1934, in which she noted that the world of "the lower middle class interests him most – of innkeepers, shopkeepers, music-hall actors and actresses". Sickert frequented the East End, and liked to associate with the less privileged, including prostitutes whom he employed as models.

During the late 20th century, rumours began to gather around Sickert's name. He was known to have been fascinated by the Ripper murders, and to have told people that he knew the real identity of the murderer. Some believed Sickert himself was the Whitechapel killer, and that references to the crimes can be found in his paintings.⁴

These indefinite ideas were suddenly

turned into a bold narrative and published in 1976 by Stephen Knight in his book *Jack the Ripper: the Final Solution*. Knight's story relies upon the testimony of Joseph Gorman, who claimed to be Sickert's illegitimate son. Gorman claimed that Sickert had told him that he had been a friend of Prince Eddy, and knew him from his days as a visitor to Cleveland Street, where the artist had a studio. Here, the Prince had met and secretly married Annie Crook, a servant girl, who gave birth to a baby daughter, Alice Margaret. The authorities in the Palace then stepped in to separate the pair,

sending Annie Crook to a workhouse and arranging that Prince Eddy meet an early death. They then used Masonic rituals in the murders of a group of East End prostitutes who knew of the scandal and were threatening blackmail. The little girl, Alice Margaret, was then taken away in secret by Walter Sickert, who arranged for her care. In time, she became Sickert's companion, and was Joseph Gorman's mother – as well as being

the lost heir to the throne of England.

This story is improbable, dramatic and dismissed by any qualified historian. However, it has a strong presence in our culture, and has been the basis for two films and bestselling books. As a narrative, the 'Royal Conspiracy', as it is called in the



A 'RIPPER MURDER' ON BLACKHEATH



On 26 January 1931, Virginia Woolf briefly surveyed the news headlines of the day for her diary: “Gandhi set free. Pavlova to be buried on Golders Green. Ripper murder on Blackheath”.

This murder, of Louisa Maud Steele, remains an unsolved case. A biography of Bernard Spilbury, the leading British pathologist who conducted the autopsy, notes that: “On the morning of January 25, this poor girl’s body was found on Blackheath, stripped of clothing except for one stocking, and mutilated... She had been strangled by the neck-band of her frock, and of her other injuries... some of the worst were inflicted after death.”¹

Louisa Steele was a respectable young woman, only 19 years old, and employed as a maid by Miss Mabel Andrews, a professor of music. Police could find no motive for her brutal slaying, nor any information about her movements after she left her residence for an evening walk. There was an absence of blood or any evidence of struggle at the death scene, where her body was laid out and covered with a coat. It was suspected that she had been killed elsewhere and carried to this place.

In 1931, the British media reported her death as another example of a Jack the Ripper-style murder. By a striking coincidence she appears to have been linked to a man of that name. At the inquest, evidence was given that police found “a piece of paper in the dead girl’s room addressed ‘Dear Jack’, but there was no clue as to who Jack was or how she was connected with him.”² Several later memoirs and biographies of investigators associated with the case included statements to the effect that: “It is understood in well-informed circles that an educated man of well-to-do family was strongly suspected”.³ This suspect was now incarcerated in a mental asylum.

These assertions are very similar to the

statements made by retired police officers who had investigated the Whitechapel murders. The killer is often described as a person with a socially privileged family, known to the police yet not arrested, and now either dead or securely locked away in an asylum.

The location of Louisa Steele’s residence, Lee Road, is only a 15-minute walk from Eliot Place – where Montague Druitt had been employed at Valentine’s boarding school. In 1896, George Valentine sold the school and retired. He then moved to the home of his nephew, George Herbert Valentine, in Lee Road, and died in 1912.⁴

George Valentine was closely linked to the mystery of Montague Druitt’s disgrace and death. Valentine had apparently dismissed Druitt from his employment at the school, where he was in “serious trouble” that has never been explained. The inquest into Druitt’s death, in 1888, states that one of his last letters was addressed to George Valentine. The content is unknown.

The final residence of George Valentine, 57 Lee Road, is very near the house at 72 Lee Road where Louisa Steele was a maid in 1931. She thus lived only a few doors from the family home of a man who had inside information about Montague Druitt, who in his turn was a friend of Prince Eddy and a focus of anxious speculation in later years.

It is possible that whoever murdered Louisa Steele was taking direct inspiration from the Ripper crimes, or knew of some of the history that linked knowledge of the crimes to the vicinity of Blackheath.

Those who find ritualistic aspects to the Ripper murders will note that the name of the locality, Blackheath, is an antonym for Whitechapel. When Louisa Steele was found: “The body was lying on its back with arms spread-eagled – as though dropped ... Gripped in the right hand of the girl was one of her black high-heeled court shoes...

She was wearing only one light-coloured stocking”.⁵ With one leg clothed and one bare, she was, therefore, ‘slipshod’: the dress of a Masonic initiate. The holding of one shoe is also a ritual gesture. Masonic handbooks state that: “The Entered Apprentice first removes and submits one of his shoes”.

The body was placed in a part of Blackheath Common bordered by three roads. A local who worked as a lamplighter discovered the body “in the centre of the large triangle of green known as the Horse Ring”.⁶ Triangles have significance in occult and mystical rituals, and the colloquial name Horse Ring for a triangular area may be a reference to the May Day rituals of the Hobby Horse, vestiges of pagan sacrifices preserved in British folklore. The names of the bordering roads may have had resonance to the killer or killers of Louisa Steele. “The corpse was in that triangle of the Heath bordered by Shooter’s Hill Road to the north, Prince Charles Road to the west and the Prince of Wales Road to the east.”⁷

This murder prompted the only direct written reference to the Ripper crimes that Virginia Woolf ever made. It is an event laden with symbolism and coincidences of time and place.

NOTES

¹ Douglas G. Browne, 1952. Cited in a post by Jeffrey Bloomfield, 29 June 2004, www.casebook.org/forum/messages/4923/7372.html

² Jonathan Oates, *Foul Deeds & Suspicious Deaths in Lewisham & Deptford*, Wharncliffe Books, 2007.

³ Inspector Neil, 1932, cited by Jeffrey Bloomfield, op cit.

⁴ Stawell Heard, ‘Mr. Valentine’s School,’ *Ripperologist*, No 32, December 2000.

⁵ *Daily Mirror*, 24 Jan 1931, <http://victorianripper.niceboard.org/t1418-louise-maud-steele>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Oates, op. cit.

community of Whitechapel scholars, has allure. It's possible, too, that this long-running rumour is not merely a 1976 invention of Stephen Knight; there are indications that the Royal Conspiracy as a basis for the Ripper Crimes derives from oral traditions and the folklore of the East End in the late 19th century. This, in turn, may be based on older British ideas – about lost heirs, royal enigmas, hidden murders, and other potent themes – going all the way back to the late mediæval era and the Princes in the Tower.

After the publication of *The Final Solution*, other writers took up Stephen Knight's theme, in elaborated or varied forms. In 1991, *The Ripper and the Royals* by Melvyn Fairclough appeared. The author gave a new version of the 'Royal Conspiracy', derived from the irrepressible Joseph Gorman. In this later narrative, Annie Crook, the secret wife of Prince Eddy, is introduced as a member of the Stephen family: "Walter told Joseph that Eddy met Annie Crook for the first time in 1883 or 1884. He was introduced to her not by Walter Sickert, as was stated by Stephen Knight, but by Eddy's Cambridge tutor, JK Stephen. Annie Crook and James Stephen were related by marriage. Annie's mother, Sarah Annie Crook, whose maiden name was Dryden, married William Crook, whose mother was a Stephen. In fact, she was the sister of James Stephen's grandfather. JK Stephen and Annie Crook were therefore second cousins."⁵

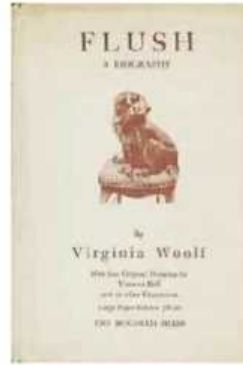
This startling genealogical claim goes on, with no documentary references, but with a further alleged link to the Stephen family through Alice Crook, sister of Annie. "She married Alfred John Richard Jackson... who was the father of Julia Jackson, the second wife of JK Stephen's uncle, Leslie Stephen, and the mother of Virginia Woolf."⁶

This account is not considered reliable, and Melvyn Fairclough later distanced himself from his own book, stating that he had

developed doubts: "Although I do believe that Joseph Sickert told me this story sincerely and I wrote it down as he told it."⁷ Those who disputed *The Ripper and the Royals* focused on grander issues than the odd side-story that Annie Crook, supposed secret wife of Prince Eddy, might have been related to Virginia Woolf. The entire tale is considered fanciful, and I do not know why this detail was added; it is intriguing, though, because it offers further evidence of the tendency to spin threads between Woolf and narratives of the Ripper crimes.⁸

FICTIONS AND DREAMS

There is no mention of the Whitechapel murders in any of Virginia Woolf's writings, and she had no particular interest in crime. In her diary for January 1931, she noted "Ripper murder on Blackheath", in reference to the mutilation murder of a young maidservant, Louisa Steele. This is unusual, and she made no further mention of the case. However, when one considers her family connections, she was in an excellent position to have heard rumours about the



Ripper crimes, which were now part of the folklore of London, and there are indications that she had a consciousness of some of the orally transmitted stories that appeared in print in later decades, becoming part of the Ripper mythology.

In 1933, Woolf published *Flush: A Biography*, an imaginative novel that recounted the life of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's pet dog. This is the only novel in which Woolf gives a description of a quarter of the city which

had "long been given over to the poor... In Whitechapel, or in a triangular space of ground at the bottom of the Tottenham Court Road, poverty and vice and misery had bred and seethed and propagated their kind for centuries..." *Flush* includes an account of the dog being kidnapped by an East End criminal gang who threaten to kill the animal unless they are paid a ransom.

Literary scholar Susan M Squier, in *Virginia Woolf and London: The Sexual Politics of the City*, has suggested that this section of *Flush*, with its description of mutilations, is a reference to "violence characterised for an entire generation by the Jack the Ripper murders. Furthermore, Woolf's parallel phrasing and choice of details remarkably similar to those of the Ripper murder case imply that the link between the two seemingly diametrically opposed London environments – Wimpole Street and Whitechapel – was misogyny and sexual oppression."⁹

Hermione Lee, Woolf's biographer, informs us that Woolf began work on *Flush* in January 1931. Was she thinking of the East End and its unsolved crimes as she researched and wrote the novel? The author's diary offers some hints. On 8 June 1931, Woolf noted that she had awoken after "a dream of Daphne Sanger, and how she was proved to be the heir to the throne of England." The idea of a missing girl, who is the lost Royal heir, haunts many stories linking the Ripper crimes and Prince Eddy. If one looks more closely at Virginia Woolf's whimsical dream, one finds it has references to Whitechapel and the autumn of terror.

Daphne Sanger was the daughter of Woolf's friend Charlie Sanger, a Cambridge academic and Apostle. Daphne herself was a pioneer in the professionalisation of social work and was active in social reform. Her only published work is a book chapter she wrote with Clara Collet, entitled "Changes in wages and conditions of domestic servants in private families and institutions in the county of London", published in 1930.

It is notable that Sanger's co-author Clara Collet spent time as a researcher in the East End during 1888. Clara Collet was engaged by Charles Booth to investigate the lives of working women, and was walking the streets of Whitechapel at the time of the murders.¹⁰ Collet and Sanger could also have heard, and shared, the stories that circulated about royal secrets and lost heirs. It's interesting that Woolf's dream attached the story of a woman

THE LINK BETWEEN WIMPOLE STREET AND WHITECHAPEL WAS MISOGYNY AND SEXUAL OPPRESSION



ABOVE: Slum dwellings in Berner Street (now Henriques Street) in Whitechapel, seen from Ellen Street. It was near here that Elizabeth Stride was murdered by Jack the Ripper on 30 September 1888.

“being proved to be the heir to the throne of England” to one of her acquaintances with first-hand knowledge of the East End in 1888.

Virginia Woolf’s older half-brother George Duckworth was also involved with Charles Booth’s work of social enquiry, and used to visit the East End in order to help gather survey material. His sister Stella Duckworth was also there doing charity work, including an initiative to provide low cost housing. As a lady, Stella always went to the slums accompanied by servants when carrying out her acts of benevolence. The youngest girls of the family, Virginia and Vanessa Stephen, were sometimes taken on these excursions and made the fleeting acquaintance of paupers in the workhouse, to whom they presented baskets of strawberries.

Ladies visited Whitechapel in a spirit of generosity, while remaining distant and protected from the immediate society of the area. Gentlemen could be freer in their ways. The historian Alison Light records that George Duckworth “liked to join the raucous cockneys at the Music Hall in Bow and have the thrill of an evening spent in the slums”.¹¹ This was in the years 1888-1898, the decade in which the murders took place and the rumours followed. Considering that George Duckworth is otherwise known for his disgraceful role in Virginia Woolf’s life – she revealed, in a later privately circulated memoir that he had sexually abused her during her youth – I am surprised that no one has fingered him as a Ripper suspect. He was, by our standards, a sex offender, and so might be seen as likely to commit greater crimes. He was certainly familiar with the East End in 1888.

MURDEROUS STREETS

Stella Duckworth, a more benign figure than her brother, died at the age of just 28 in 1897. She had contracted an unspecified internal infection shortly after her marriage. While her own health was failing, she tried to look after her younger half-sister Virginia, who was then 15 years old and prone to nervous upsets. As a treat, she offered to take Virginia with her on charity visits to the East End of London, but this suggestion was met with the most extraordinary fear. According to Quentin Bell, a family member and Woolf’s first biographer, Virginia suddenly became horrified by the suggestion that she accompany Stella on carriage rides in 1897: “It seemed to her that the streets had become murderous”. Virginia started saying that she had seen a lady run over by a cart, a collision between wagons, and that a carhorse had fallen in the street in front of her. She was too terrified to go outdoors, and constantly repeated stories of a near-miss when a girl or woman had almost been killed in the street. Quentin Bell doubtfully asks: “Did these accidents really occur?”¹²

Virginia had been under great strain, and her preoccupation with accidents was a sign that her mental health was affected. She spent much of 1897, after the sad death of Stella Duckworth, on a rest cure. Her illness, and psychological fragility, is not surprising, but the particular form of her delirious fear is worthy of notice.



ABOVE: Stella Duckworth, Woolf’s half-sister, used to take Virginia on charity visits to London’s East End.

As a delusion, this fear of murderous violence and vehicles on the street is markedly similar to a story recorded by Stephen Knight – that the “abominable coachman” John Netley several times made attempts on the life of the child Alice, Sickert’s ward, by attempting to run her down with his carriage: “At the height of the Ripper murder the child was knocked down by Netley’s coach in Fleet Street or the Strand, said Sickert. She was nearly killed... The incident was repeated in February 1892. On this occasion Netley charged along Drury Lane in his carriage just as Alice Margaret was crossing the road with an elderly relative...”¹³ Similar stories are recorded by Jean Overton Fuller, who attributes to Florence Pash a story that she was walking with Alice near Charing Cross “when a coach came straight at them.”¹⁴

One wonders when these stories about a murderous coachman began, and how widely they circulated. Knight heard the tales about John Netley in 1975. If he was receiving a much older legend, which had echoed down from street talk in the late 19th century, it is possible that the young Virginia Stephen heard similar tales. Her fear of the coach that menaces a female pedestrian is vivid, and uncharacteristic of her. None of the hallucinations attributed to her during her illnesses, except this one, are in the form of threats or accidents. Usually, when insane, she experienced delusions such as hearing the birds singing in Greek. Woolf was not afraid of motorcars in later life, and also once witnessed the wreck of a crashed plane on a hill, but regarded it with stoic indifference.

However, the haunting fear of the girl and the horse-drawn coach remained in her mind till the end of her life. In her last novel, *Between the Acts*, one of the characters is described thus: “Wife of the gentleman farmer, a goosefaced woman with eyes protruding as if they saw something to gobble in the gutter, said... how odd it was, as a child, she had never feared cows, only horses. But,

then, as a small child in a perambulator, a great cart-horse had brushed within an inch of her face.”

It is possible that Woolf knew of the legend of a Royal heir, the girl chased by a menacing coach, associated with the Whitechapel murders. It is also possible that these frightening and strange stories lodged in her consciousness and appeared in fragments during dreams and deliriums, times when her guard of reason was dropped.

Exactly why so many writers have discerned family connections between Virginia Woolf, so eminent a literary figure, and so otherwise transcendent of histories of crime, and the Ripper lore is not clear. However, the story continues, even past the age of the Whitechapel murders.

In 1995, *Killing for Company* by Brian Masters was published. This well-referenced book told the story of Dennis Nilsen, a serial killer who preyed on young men in London during the 1980s. Masters traces Nilsen’s ancestry and reveals a link to “JK Stephen, who was eventually committed to hospital and never released. One account goes so far as to name him as the notorious Jack the Ripper... Through his great-grandmother, then, Dennis Nilsen must be a very distant cousin of Virginia Woolf...” **FT**

NOTES

- 1 Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf A Biography*, Vol 1, Hogarth Press, 1973, p37.
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- 4 Mentioned as an unsourced rumour by Donald McCormick, *The Identity of Jack the Ripper*, Arrow Books, 1959, p171.
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- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 Fairclough, quoted in Simon Edge, “My grandfather was the heir to the throne and Jack the Ripper killed to cover it up”, *D.Express*, 15 Dec 2001.
- 8 *The Ripper and the Royals* was brought out by Duckworth, a prestigious London publishing house, that did not usually publish books on crime and was founded in 1898 by Gerald Duckworth, the elder stepbrother of Virginia Woolf and brother to George and Stella. Another strand in the web of coincidence.
- 9 Susan M Squier, *Virginia Woolf and London: The Sexual Politics of the City*, University of North Carolina Press, 1985, p132.
- 10 Deborah McDonald, ‘Clara Collet and Jack the Ripper,’ www.victorianweb.org/gender/collet/ripper.html.
- 11 Alison Light, *Mrs Woolf and the Servants: The Hidden Heart of Domestic Service*, Penguin Books Ltd, Kindle Edition, Kindle Locations 1454-1455.
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- 13 Stephen Knight, *Jack the Ripper, the Final Solution*, Harrap & Co, 1976, p212.
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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



THERESE TAYLOR is an historian. She teaches at Charles Sturt University, Australia, and has lectured on the life of Virginia Woolf. She is the author of a scholarly biography, *Bernadette of Lourdes: Her Life, Death and Visions* and has contributed numerous pieces to FT.

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BLACK DAHLIA: THE ART OF KILLING

Was one of the 20th century's most notorious unsolved cases a ritual killing or even a homicide planned as a work of art? **BRIAN J ROBB** examines the evidence in the shocking murder of Elisabeth Short, better known as the Black Dahlia.

On the morning of 15 January 1947, the body of a murdered woman was discovered on a vacant lot in the Leimert Park area of Los Angeles. Betty Bersinger, out walking with her young daughter, was the first to stumble upon the gruesome sight at around 10am that morning. Bersinger assumed the figure to be a dumped store mannequin, not a human corpse. The naked body was mutilated, cut in two at the waist, washed clean, and drained of blood. The murder had occurred elsewhere and the body had been posed at the location where it was discovered. Who was the victim? What was the purpose behind the bizarre, possibly ritualistic, 'laying out' of the body?

The Black Dahlia case remains unsolved almost 70 years later, with a plethora of suspects named, investigated and mostly discounted. Many of the facts of the life and fate of the victim, Elisabeth Short, remain in dispute even after all this time. The very deliberate mutilation and positioning of the corpse suggested a ritual, perhaps Satanic, element to the slaying. The failure of Los Angeles's notoriously corrupt police department to solve the case has allowed a hundred conspiracy theories to bloom. With over 300 suspects considered and more than a dozen confessions (from so-called Confessing Sams), the police still couldn't get to the bottom of who had killed Elisabeth Short and why. The case remains open to this day, officially unsolved.

DOOMED DAHLIA

At the time of her death, Elisabeth Short was just 22 years old and an aspiring actress, although she was not making much headway. She'd been born in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1924, but the west coast of California, especially Hollywood, had been her most recent haunt. She'd worked at an Army camp in 1943 and been arrested on an underage drinking charge, so her fingerprints were on file at the FBI, making identification of her corpse a little easier. One of five sisters,



THE BODY HAD BEEN
SURGICALLY SLICED
IN TWO AT THE WAIST
AND DUMPED ON THE
VACANT LOT

Short had lived on and off with her long absent father Cleo in Vallejo, California, since the age of 18. She wanted to be an actress, but had most often worked as a waitress or so-called 'B-girl' – bar girls who plied lonely men with expensive drinks in clubs. Lacking cash, she'd relied on dates with various men to pay her way and fund her chaotic lifestyle; in the last six months of her life, Short had lived at five different Hollywood addresses. According to friends, she claimed to have once been engaged to a major in the Air Force who'd been killed in 1945, however this appeared to be a fantasy. In the final days of her life, Short had supposedly been "living in fear" of someone or something unknown. She

was last seen at LA's Biltmore Hotel on 9 January by her companion that evening, Robert 'Red' Manley. The married 'family man' was rapidly designated a suspect, then exonerated.

The killing of Elisabeth Short was no ordinary murder, even by LA standards. The body was clean and had been surgically sliced in two at the waist (with the organs intact), an act apparently completed elsewhere before the body was dumped on the vacant Leimert lot. There were other mutilations, such as the removal of the right breast and the gouging of slices of flesh in a geometric pattern from the left breast. A rectangle of flesh had been carved out of the left thigh (believed to have been the site of an identifying tattoo), and the abdomen was slashed (possibly suggesting a botched hysterectomy or abortion). Her cheeks were cut either side of the mouth forming a wide smile that today is associated with Batman's Joker but was then related to the 1928 silent movie *The Man Who Laughs* in which Conrad Veidt's character, Gwynplaine, sported a similar facial grimace (see this issue's 'Blasts from the Past', pp30-31, plus FT268:26-27).

The body had been deliberately positioned so the two halves were slightly apart, the top half to the left of the lower part, drawing attention to their separation. Short's arms were placed above her head, forming a square bent at the elbows. All that was found nearby was the remnants of a paper sack that once contained cement, believed to have been used in moving the body. The result was mannequin-like, hence Betty Bersinger's comment to *Severed* author John Gilmore: "It had to be a dummy... there were legs and a section of hip that seemed to be disconnected from the dummy's waist like a mannequin in a department store window..."

Los Angeles Examiner crime reporter Will Fowler, son of Hollywood screenwriter Gene Fowler (*I Was A Teenage Werewolf*), claimed to be first on the scene after Bersinger – a claim disputed by others. He and photographer Felix Paegel were on



ABOVE: In this crime scene photo detectives stand by the vacant Leimart lot in Los Angeles. Elizabeth Short's recently discovered body is visible in the grass to their right.

another story when the police radio in their car reported the discovery of a corpse and directed officers to attend. Writing in his 1991 memoir *Reporters*, Fowler wrote of the body: "Both halves were facing upward. Her arms were extended above her head. Her translucent blue eyes were only half-opened, so I closed her eyelids".

Despite Fowler's seeming sympathy for the victim, others at the *Examiner* used every dirty trick in the book to get the scoop on Elizabeth Short. One reporter called Short's mother Phoebe before the police were able to inform her of her daughter's death, claiming Elizabeth had won a beauty contest and they were looking for some background biographical detail. He squeezed as much information from the unwitting woman as he could before finally admitting the real reason for calling. The photos which appeared in the paper the next day, alongside the information gleaned from that phone call, were 'tidied up' both to make the explicit pictures publishable but also to hold back some details of the crime which could be used to eliminate hoax confessions and to hopefully identify the perpetrator. The nickname 'Black Dahlia' was first used in the newspapers after it was discovered that Short was noted for her black clothing, and it has stuck ever since.

After six months of investigation, the case of the Black Dahlia was all but abandoned by the LA Police Department. One line of inquiry related to the seemingly precise

bisection of the body, a feat many believed could only have been achieved by someone with some surgical training (something similar had been said about the perpetrator of the 1888 Jack the Ripper killings, and the investigation of both cases were diverted by such suppositions). Since the 1940s an entire cottage industry has grown up around the Black Dahlia, providing speculation and theories as to who could have committed the killing and how they might have got away with it [see sidebars].

OCCULT CONNECTIONS

The manner of the death of Elizabeth Short alone would have been enough to shock 1940s America, but the seemingly ritualistic aspects of the way her corpse was prepared and publicly displayed threw another, uncanny light on the case. Was there some occult symbolism encoded within the placement of the body? Did the arrangement of her limbs and the fact that she'd been severed at the waist mean something? And if so, for whom was such an arcane message intended?

The view that there was something ritualistic about the Black Dahlia killing recurs in various occult explanations, but the most popular might be the so-called 'Saturn death cult' theory. The bottom line here is the belief that all the world's contemporary ills are connected to a 'fall from grace'. There's a lot of mumbo-jumbo about the

planet Saturn functioning as a second Sun to the Earth, but the 'theory' states that mankind once enjoyed a prosperous Golden Age from which we have degenerated to a society concerned with the obsessive pursuit of wealth and power for the few rather than the many. Ritualistic murders, such as that seen in the Black Dahlia case, are claimed to be part of an elite movement that believes in sacrifice as a way of maintaining its own power. This conspiracy is supposedly behind all contemporary ills, from the financial meltdown of 2008 through child sex abuse, sexual trafficking, wars over oil, and the control of the populace through drugs.

Much of this might seem silly, but connections can be made with various magical, esoteric, and occult traditions. The 'ritual' is a public display of one person's ultimate power over another, an act associated with and perpetrated by those who consider themselves to be part of some kind of 'elite', whether social or financial, or maintained through bloodlines and religious and occult beliefs: in today's world, these bogeyman elite figures are bankers, royalty, VIP paedophiles, and senior politicians. The kidnap and imprisonment of Elizabeth Short, followed by her torture, mutilation and death, may have been the ultimate expression of such power: the power to take a life. Not only did the perpetrator elude capture (perhaps due to 'collaborators' within the complicated and inter-related

‘power systems’ that dominated 1940s Los Angeles), he was able brazenly to display the result of his handiwork. It was a statement of ultimate ‘freedom’ – the freedom to commit an act that few others would contemplate or have the will to carry out. The ‘reveal’ on a public lot close to the pavement ensured the crime’s discovery, and the media of the time (primarily newspapers, but also radio) played its part in communicating the horror of the Black Dahlia case to a spectacle-hungry public.

What end was this horrific action intended to achieve? Might the murder of Elizabeth Short be seen as a form of social control? In the wake of WWII, when women had asserted themselves in professions and roles far beyond what they could have expected in the 1920s and 1930s, displaced and damaged men returned from battle expecting the status quo they’d fought for to be reinstated. That proved problematic: many women wished to retain the social progress they’d made. Younger women especially, who’d come to adulthood during the war years – like Elizabeth Short – were reluctant to lose their new-found freedoms.

As well as work and social roles, some of these freedoms, during and after the war, were sexual. The powerful elites hiding behind such ritualistic displays as the Black Dahlia corpse had good reason to want to scare the population, especially these newly liberated women. Female freedom was a threat to the established order, so if the fear of an unknown maniac chopping up random women across town kept them in line, so much the better. Fear as a form of social control is well-known: indeed, it is alive and well today in the form of such bogeys as ‘terrorism’ or ‘unemployment’, things which successive recent governments of all political persuasions have used to alarm, and thus control, the populace.

THE ART OF MURDER

There is an even weirder, though strangely beguiling explanation for the Black Dahlia



THESE POWERFUL ELITES HAD GOOD REASON TO WANT TO SCARE NEWLY LIBERATED WOMEN

murder case than the occult: was it, in fact, a twisted act of ‘modern art’? This outlandish but intriguing theory centres on George Hodel (see *Daddy Was The Black Dahlia Killer!*, p52), a Hollywood doctor specialising in sexually transmitted diseases (and possibly an illegal abortionist).

Hodel made the official suspect list in 1949 when the case was re-examined by the Los Angeles grand jury. Accused and acquitted (despite the testimony of two eyewitnesses) of sexually molesting his own 14-year-old daughter, Hodel was put under surveillance by the LAPD in early 1950. The resulting recorded conversations made reference to illegal abortions, payoffs to law enforcement, and the suspicious death of his secretary almost five years earlier. One transcript reads: “Supposing I did kill the Black Dahlia? They couldn’t prove it now. They can’t talk to my secretary anymore because she’s dead...”

Hodel’s secretary, Ruth Spaulding, was the ‘keeper of secrets’ at his VD clinic – was Elisabeth Short ever a client there? Spaulding died in 1945, officially as a result of an overdose – possibly forced. Hodel quickly left America for China during that investigation, and he again hurriedly quit the US in 1950, spending the next 40 years abroad, mostly in Asia.

He died of heart failure in 1999 at the grand old age of 91. As a doctor with connections across affluent and influential Los Angeles society, he had the surgical know-how to carry out the murder and the pull to have it covered up. More importantly, he was an aspiring artist who had connections with one of the prime movers in contemporary surrealism, the photographer Man Ray. Like Orson Welles (see ‘Orson Welles Did It!’ opposite), Hodel was seen as something of a child prodigy, being a natural musician with a high IQ. He was said to be charismatic, sex-obsessed (he had 11 children by five different women), and domineering – although he also suffered from an arrested emotional development and had a hatred of women. The VD clinic files gave him leverage over



ABOVE LEFT: Elizabeth Short’s face had been mutilated with slashes across her cheeks, here recreated for an episode of the TV series *American Horror Story*.
 ABOVE RIGHT: This disfigurement was perhaps meant to evoke the perma-grinning rictus of Conrad Veidt as Gwylplaine in the 1928 film *The Man Who Laughs*.

ORSON WELLES AND OTHER CELEBRITY SUSPECTS

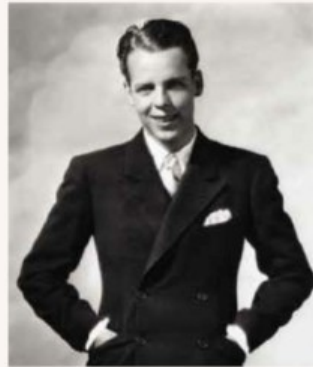


PETER STACKPOLE / THE LIFE PICTURE COLLECTION / GETTY IMAGES

Could the whizz kid Hollywood auteur behind *Citizen Kane* (1941) really be the Black Dahlia killer? Author Mary Pacios claimed no less when she fingered Welles as a suspect in her 1999 book *Childhood Shadows: The Hidden Story of the Black Dahlia Murder*. Pacios, a former neighbour of the Short family when they lived in Medford, Massachusetts, was just 12 years old when Elizabeth Short's body was discovered on 15 January 1947. The proliferation of bizarre stories about both Short and her killer spurred the author to add to the canon with her own, even more bizarre theory of the crime.

Her suspect was one of the oddest to be publicly named. In 1947, Orson Welles's star was beginning to fade. A dramatic innovator on stage (in his 'voodoo' *Macbeth*) and on radio (notably his controversial update of HG Wells's *The War of the Worlds*; see **FT199:42-47**) in the 1930s, the precociously talented Welles had come to Hollywood at the dawn of the 1940s, learned the basics of filmmaking from a standing start and produced the widely acclaimed (although a controversial flop at the time) *Citizen Kane*. His follow-ups, *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942) and *Journey into Fear* (1943), were failures and he found it difficult to secure work with the Hollywood studios.

In early 1947, he was shooting



TOP: Orson Welles reveals the bisected body of his female magic act victim, cut in half at the waist. ABOVE: Suspects Woody Guthrie and Arthur Lake.

The Lady from Shanghai, starring Rita Hayworth, and it is this film upon which Pacios hangs her theory. Focusing on a 'fun house' sequence eventually deleted from the finished movie, Pacios constructs an elaborate explanation of Welles's motive for the killing. Personally overseen by Welles, the fun house set featured a number of bisected female mannequin figures, whose disfigurements were said to closely match those inflicted upon Short. The film footage apparently no longer exists, so Pacios based her claims upon surviving stills.

She also connected the fact that Short's body was cut in half to Welles's wartime magic act, in which he regularly performed the old standby of sawing a woman in half. During the war years, Welles set up *The Mercury Wonder Show*, a

magic revue hosted in a tent on Cahuenga Boulevard in the middle of Hollywood, to entertain the troops. Marlene Dietrich was regularly chopped in two by Welles and lived to tell the tale – a clip from the act appears in the 1944 movie *Follow the Boys*. Unfortunately, Pacios got the location of the *Mercury Wonder Show* tent wrong, claiming it had been pitched upon the vacant lot in which Short's body was ultimately discovered.

Pacios formulated the idea that the creatively frustrated Welles suffered from a mental illness (often diagnosed in serial killers) called 'diphasic personality' that led to uncontrolled aggression. In one of her final letters home, Short had claimed to be about to undergo a screen test for a Hollywood movie director called George (Welles's given first

name). Pacios claims that Short and Welles did meet, based upon testimony from a former waitress at Brittinghams restaurant in LA. Unusually, shooting on *The Lady from Shanghai* was cancelled the day Elizabeth Short's body was discovered. Finally, on 24 January 1947, the day that someone (supposedly the killer) mailed a packet of evidence (the first of several enigmatic letters) to a Los Angeles newspaper, Welles applied for a new passport. He soon thereafter left the United States for a 10-month stay in Europe, abandoning the editing of his film of *Macbeth* in the process – was he a guilty killer on the run?

Welles was not named by police at the time as a suspect in the Black Dahlia murder investigation, and few give much credence to Pacios's outlandish suggestions. Despite critics highlighting errors in her theory, Mary Pacios does make an admirably forfean claim for her work: "Everything is factual. People can draw their own conclusions".

Orson Welles wasn't the only Hollywood figure to be suspected of involvement in the Black Dahlia case. Actor Arthur Lake (the mild-mannered Dagwood Bumstead in the *Blondie* movies between 1938 and 1950) was questioned by police because he had socialised with both Short and an earlier murder victim, Georgette Bauerdorf. Lake was married to Patricia Van Cleeve, believed to be the illegitimate daughter of newspaper tycoon William Randolph Hearst and actress Marion Davies.

Folk singer Woody Guthrie made the list of suspects due to his stalking of an entirely different woman and the sending of explicit material through the post. Notorious gangster Bugsy Siegel was named as the killer of Elizabeth Short by author Donald Wolfe as part of a complicated conspiracy; Siegel was killed six months later, in June 1947, by gangster rivals.

Other suspects included LA nightclub impresario and owner of the Florentine Gardens Mark Hansen (who'd let a room to Short) and rogue abortionist Dr Walter Bayley, who died two years later in 1948 and was revealed to be suffering from a degenerative brain disease.

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

DADDY WAS THE BLACK DAHLIA KILLER!



Steve Hodel isn't the only Black Dahlia researcher to point the finger at his own father as the likely killer – there was a vogue for putting the blame on Daddy.

Janice Knowlton's *Daddy Was the Black Dahlia Killer* is an on-the-nose titled confessional in which the author not only blames her father for that killing but claims he killed eight others, including her own infant son, all thanks to dubious 'recovered memories'.

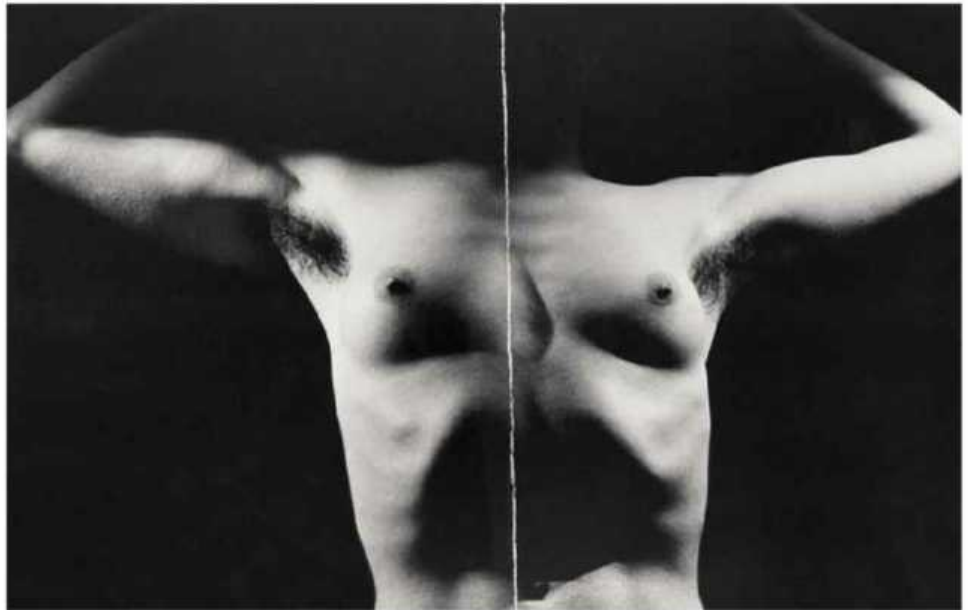
Co-written with crime writer Michael Newton, the book was enough to get police to look into Knowlton's allegations about her father George. The author claimed Short lived in a makeshift bedroom in her father's garage and that is where she was murdered. In 1995, following her claims, the area around her childhood home was excavated but no evidence was found. LAPD detective John P St John did not see a connection. "We have a lot of people offering up their fathers and various relatives as the Black Dahlia killer," he said. "The things that she is saying are not consistent with the facts of the case". Knowlton died from an apparent drug overdose suicide in 2004, having inadvertently created a sub-genre in which writers accused their own father of being the killer. Steve Hodel, meanwhile, may have queered his pitch by going on to claim that almost every unsolved murder in California was also down to Dr George Hodel, including the Lipstick Murders, the work of the 1960s Zodiac Killer in San Francisco, and several others abroad, including in the Philippines where George Hodel lived, that have similarities to the Black Dahlia case.

the rich and powerful people who used his services. Could he have been a Jekyll and Hyde character: charismatic doctor by day, killer by night?

Hodel's career led him into the medical field, but his social circle consisted of artists, including film director John Huston, whose ex-wife he married. Much of the theory pointing to Hodel for the Black Dahlia murder hinges upon the uncanny similarities between the deliberate positioning of Elizabeth Short's corpse and key works of Surrealist art, especially a photograph entitled *Minotaure* by Man Ray, a close personal friend of Hodel. Authors Mark Nelson and Sarah Hudson Bayliss produced an inventive exploration of this topic in *Exquisite Corpse: Surrealism and the Black Dahlia Murder*. The divided or dismembered female figure is a recurring Surrealist image, seen in all sorts of art from multiple Man Ray photographs and sculptures to works by Salvador Dali, Max Ernst, Marcel Duchamp, René Magritte, Hans



RIGHT: A detective examines Elizabeth Short's torso. **BELOW:** *Le Minotaure* (1935) by Man Ray. **BOTTOM:** *La Poupée* (1935-36) by Hans Belmer, one of many Surrealist works of the period to dwell on the fragmented or dismembered female form.



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GAUTIER POUPEAU / CREATIVE COMMONS



ABOVE: George Hodel in the swanky, ultra-modern John Sowden House. BELOW: Hodel was a wealthy LA doctor, a frequenter of artistic circles, counting Man Ray as a friend, and – according to his own son – the killer of Elizabeth Short.

Bellmer (see FT325:36-39) and several others. Surrealism – described by Hudson and Bayliss as “an interplay of irrationality, eroticism and violence” – came to America in the wake of WWII, an art-form exploring dreams and nightmares, free of moral and social concerns. However, this work was theoretical not practical, representational not real.

Man Ray’s *Minotaur*, specifically, is an image of a female torso in which the arms are positioned above the head as if to form the horns of the mythical monster of Greek legend. Hodel dabbled in Man Ray-like photography, but his efforts were pale imitations of those of the Surrealists with whom he associated. Might he have channelled his efforts into the creation of an unnatural – indeed, homicidal – work of art that would shock the population and perhaps win him the grudging admiration of the Surrealists themselves?

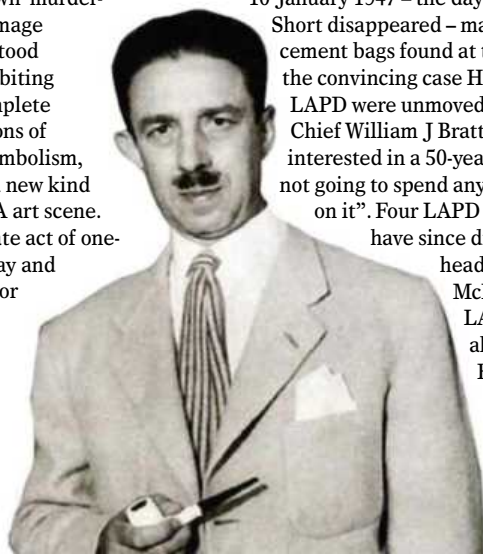
Steve Hodel, George Hodel’s son and a retired LA cop, has investigated his father as a prime suspect in the Black Dahlia murder. “Dad worshipped Man Ray,” said Hodel. According to *LA Times Magazine*, Ray in turn “attended wild sex and drug parties” at the Hodel house. “There was also a competition. Dad thought of himself as an artist. The Black Dahlia was his masterpiece, using his scalpel as a paintbrush and her body as his canvas”.

As the world’s only known ‘murder-artist’, Hodel created an image that would only be understood by those in the know. Exhibiting Short’s bisected torso, complete with significant desecrations of the body and ritualistic symbolism, announced the arrival of a new kind of artist upon the 1940s LA art scene. It was, perhaps, the ultimate act of one-upmanship: where Man Ray and the others simply painted or photographed their ‘fake’ images, Hodel had the dark imagination and perverse will to make

his art real, even at the expense of a human life. In this savage act, Hodel transcended the limits of society and declared himself free of such limitations. This fits with Hodel’s illusion of superiority, something he’d been taught to believe from childhood: such criminal characters see themselves not only as separate from normal human society but above the generally agreed rules of civil conduct. The domination of an individual in the act of murder has its limitations: if done ‘right’, no one will ever find out about it. Hodel and his ilk, however, feel the need for an audience, hence the public display of Short’s corpse, with its hidden messages, that only the illuminated elite could properly decipher: the crime scene as canvas.

Ironically, Steve Hodel had originally set out to prove his father’s innocence in the Black Dahlia case. When he first published his book, *Black Dahlia Avenger*, he had no idea his father had been officially listed as a suspect in the DA’s later investigation or that transcripts existed of the bugged conversations that all but incriminated him – both were only discovered after the book came out. “I had to follow the story,” said Hodel. “Any good detective would have done the same”. A key piece of evidenced found by Hodel were receipts that belonged to his father for cement bags dated 10 January 1947 – the day after Elisabeth Short disappeared – matching the type of cement bags found at the scene. Despite the convincing case Hodel laid out, the LAPD were unmoved. In 2004, then LAPD Chief William J Bratton said: “I’m not interested in a 50-year-old-case, and we’re not going to spend any more time or money on it”. Four LAPD officials, however,

have since disagreed, and former head of detectives James McMurray has said the LAPD can now “go ahead and clear the Black Dahlia case”.



THE BLACK DAHLIA IN FICTION

One of the first novels to fictionalise the Black Dahlia case is one of the most interesting. Published in 1962, *The Other Girl* was author Theodora Keogh’s ninth novel. Keogh had been born Theodora Roosevelt in 1919, the granddaughter of US President Theodore Roosevelt. Initially a dancer, she worked in costume design in Hollywood after WWII, before switching to novels, specialising in lesbian pulp fiction. *The Other Girl* focused on Hollywood wannabe Marge Vulawski, whose life intersects with that of another aspiring actress, Betty, whose murder ends the book. Keogh completed one other unpublished novel, but retreated into obscurity following *The Other Girl*.

In 1977, John Gregory Dunne published *True Confessions*, the source for the 1981 De Niro movie, which focused on the lives of two brothers in post-war Los Angeles, one a cop, the other a priest. The Black Dahlia case is the true-life source for the fictional crime in the novel, although the book is more concerned with Catholic angst (Dunne himself was a lapsed Catholic). James Ellroy’s 1987 fictionalisation of the case, *The*



Black Dahlia, was heavily indebted to Dunne and it too became a movie, despite playing fast-and-loose with the facts (Ellroy had earlier skirted around

the case in his second novel, *Clandestine*).

The most recent novel to tackle the case is *Angel in Black* by Max Allan Collins (published in 2001), the 12th in his award-winning series of Nathan Heller period detective novels begun in 1983. Like Ellroy, Collins provides his own fictional solution to the Black Dahlia mystery, putting his series detective front and centre in the case. Heller attaches himself to a *Los Angeles Examiner* reporter (modelled on ‘first on the scene’ Will Fowler) to investigate the case and avoid becoming a suspect himself. While these novels offer a variety of fictional solutions, it seems that when it comes to the real Black Dahlia murder we may never know the truth.

THE BLACK DAHLIA AT THE MOVIES



None of the movies based on the Black Dahlia case has been particularly reverential towards the facts. The best known is *The Black*

Dahlia, the 2006 film directed by Brian De Palma and based on the novel by James Ellroy. The film follows Ellroy's novel in spinning a totally invented story from the real-life case. It was a box office flop, but Mia Kirshner won good notices for her portrayal of Short. *True Confessions* (1981), starring Robert De Niro and Robert Duvall, was the first feature film to fictionalise the case, but it was only superficially connected to real events. Directed by Ulu Grosbard, it was based on the 1977 novel. The earlier 1975 NBC TV movie *Who Was the Black Dahlia?*, directed by Joseph Pevney, stuck closer to the facts. It starred Lucie Arnaz as Short (Arnaz was the daughter of Lucille Ball, who feared the killer might still be alive and would target her daughter). Almost drama-documentary in its approach, it follows Efrem Zimbalist Jr's detective, who devotes his career to solving the murder.

More recently, the case was the basis for a first-season episode of the acclaimed anthology TV show *American Horror Story*. Mena Suvari starred as Short (and her ghost) in the 2011 episode "Spooky Little Girl", which saw Short fall victim to a mad dentist. Worst of all has to be the exploitative *The Black Dahlia Haunting* (2012), an extremely low budget 'paranormal thriller' that follows a young woman who in investigating the death of her father awakens the spirit of the Black Dahlia. Earliest of all were the film noir movies inspired by the case. Just as the 'Black Dahlia' nickname appears to be a reference to the 1946 movie *The Blue Dahlia*, so the 1953 Fritz Lang film *The Blue Gardenia* was a reference to the unsolved Elizabeth Short case. The victim is male and the chief suspect is the woman he was last seen with (Anne Baxter), given the nickname of 'The Blue Gardenia'. The character of Joe Gillis in Billy Wilder's classic Hollywood noir *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) is introduced by Jack Webb with the telling line: "Folks, you all know Joe Gillis, the well-known screenwriter, uranium smuggler, and Black Dahlia suspect".



HOUSE OF HORROR

Between 1945 and 1950, George Hodel lived in the impressive John Sowden House (above), built in 1926 by Lloyd Wright, son of architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Now a registered historic Los Angeles landmark, the house aped Lloyd Wright senior's Mayan architectural style (as seen in the famed Ennis House, featured in *Blade Runner* and *House on Haunted Hill*, among other movies). The striking facade at 5121 Franklin Avenue is much as it was in the 1940s. It is thought Hodel may have incarcerated, tortured and killed Elizabeth Short in the basement, before laying out her body in Leimart Park. Tests by a forensic anthropologist using a police 'cadaver dog' in 2014 detected 'human remains' in soil samples taken from the basement, but overall they proved inconclusive.

Of course, it is always possible that Elizabeth Short's death was the result of a romantic assignation gone wrong, a side effect of her chaotic lifestyle. Perhaps it was a simple accident, or the random act of a lone madman. Perhaps the state in which she was found was the result of entirely practical matters: bisection made transport of the body by one person easier, a purely practical solution to a tricky problem. Perhaps there is no meaning whatsoever to be read into the entire Black Dahlia case. That,

however, would be so much duller than exploring the variety of theories that have kept the story alive to this day and ensured that, at least in the manner of her dying, aspiring Hollywood star Elizabeth Short gained a level of fame very few ever attain, alive or dead. **FT**

FURTHER READING

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Mark Nelson and Sarah Hudson Bayliss, *Exquisite Corpse: Surrealism and the Black Dahlia Murder*, New York, Bulfinch Press, 2006.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



BRIAN J ROBB is a regular contributor to FT and the author of books on silent film, Steampunk, Philip K Dick, Wes Craven, Walt and Laurel and Hardy, as well as a best-selling biography of Leonardo DiCaprio. He is co-editor of the *Sci-Fi Bulletin* website and lives in Edinburgh.

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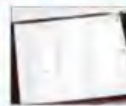
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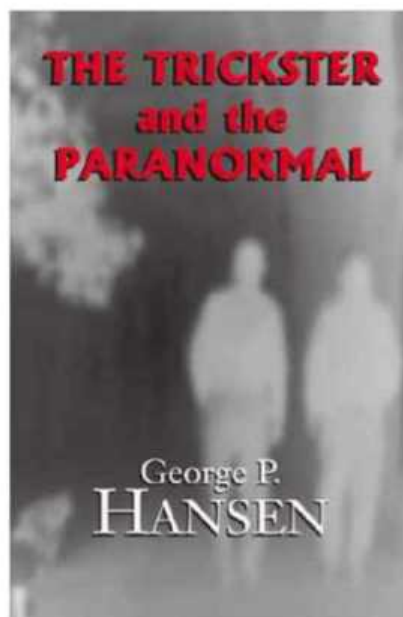
5. A TRICK, A TREAT, AND SOME STARTLED HARES

If thou want'st to read an eccentric, essential, provocative book on 'the paranormal', hie thee to George P Hansen's *The Trickster and the Paranormal*. Hansen himself intended the book to provoke thought, rather than indignation, and makes no bones about it being eccentric. The questions he raises – “What do the funding sources for psi research have in common with liberal churches downplaying miracles? What is the connection between the MUFON headquarters and mysticism? Why discuss tabloids' front pages along with controversies within religion?” – seem, as he writes in the Introduction, “to be a random hodgepodge, unsuited for any single book or reasonable discussion. It appears preposterous to lump them together. They are out of place.” But, he declares: “I will show that this is indeed the nature of the phenomena. They do not fit in our logical world.”

Indeed, things are slightly worse than that. Later he remarks: “In earlier cultures, the supernatural was known to be dangerous and was surrounded by taboos. Today's scientists have no comprehension why, and with their naive terminology [i.e. labelling the supernatural 'anomalous'], they become vulnerable to the phenomena.”

On the other hand, Hansen's very first paragraph seems to place his work within a certain convention: “This book is about foretelling the future, the occult, magic, telepathy, mind over matter, miracles, power of prayer, UFOs, Bigfoot, clairvoyance, angels, demons, psychokinesis, and spirits of the dead. These all interact with the physical world. This book explains why they are problematical for science.” Hansen is taking advantage here, somewhat obliquely, of the habit people have of indulging the jaded idea that (as with religion) there is an inevitable, inherent opposition between science and the paranormal. He tempts one in with the apparently familiar, but then his explanation – insofar as he really explains anything – is more than somewhat unexpected (despite the book's title). His point is not that tricksters engage on occasion in paranormal activity or feats. It is that paranormal phenomena and their exponents (be they flying saucers and abductees or spooks and spiritual mediums) are like unto a vast *mélange* of tricksterism made manifest and sometimes personified.

Here we had better declare an interest, or at least a prejudice. Thirty-odd years ago, Michael P Carroll suggested in “The



Trickster as Selfish- Buffoon and Culture Hero” (*Ethos*, Vol. 12, No. 2, Summer 1984, pp 105-131; also online) that the term ‘trickster’ had become so nebulous as to be unhelpful, because anthropologists and folklorists were so naming various mythical figures who might more accurately be described simply as deceitful. Carroll proposed a sharper definition: that the core trickster figures – the spider, hare, raven and coyote of various tribal cultures – (a) were solitary creatures – did you know that of 33,000-odd known species of spider, only 30 are social? (b) while cunning and ingenious, were often too clever by half (or more) in their deceits, so that their tricks ended in ignominious failure, (c)

had monstrous, amoral sexual appetites (with gigantic genitalia to illustrate the point) and an insatiable hunger, not to say greed, for food, but (d) are at the same time culture heroes, bringing such boons as fire, medicine, plants – in one instance by self-evisceration – and the skills needed to cultivate them to society. There is a paradox here, one need hardly say: an anti-social, larcenous, priapic-beyond-the-point-of-incest, farcically incompetent, taboo-breaking con artist who brings great benefits to humanity. Carroll doesn't directly address the apparent contradiction, but it may be resolved by looking about one. We have our own cultural hero in the figure of the romantic Outsider, and admire him or her for originality, lateral thinking, defying convention, unshakeable courage of convictions, and so on. Such characters are often drunks, drug addicts, sexually voracious and/or ‘not very good at relationships’ and deceivers. By harping on the ruinous consequences of defying custom and communal *mores*, one aspect of trickster mythology emphasises the importance of these values for the survival of decent social life; but this conformist moral is balanced by dramatising the tendency for innovation (‘progress’) to come from transgressing such rules and precedents and pressures. Only the self-sufficient will be independent, creative – even courageous – enough to steal fire from the gods.

Such a character is still reckoned to be more than a bit dodgy, despite the lip service we pay to the romantic rebel. Would you, for instance, lend Lord Byron a fiver – or let him date your sister? Such a character *belongs* nowhere in our rationally sorted taxonomies of social roles and categories. He, like the trickster, crosses too many boundaries, has his feet in too many territories and fingers in too many pies, and can thus be called (again like the trickster) a liminal figure. Hansen has said that he finds it “impossible to give a succinct, comprehensible, and comprehensive explanation of liminality. But briefly, it involves change, transition, transformation, flux, ambiguity, instability, blurred boundaries, and uncertainty.... The trickster exemplifies the concept.” Thus

the trickster is in one sense indefinable, fitting nowhere and everywhere, a kind of cultural kaleidoscope – an instrument, we recall, that depends on mirrors for its effects.

With all that tucked into the back of the mind, let's return to George P Hansen and his excellent book. As he explains in the Introduction (which, by the way, is available, along with other extracts, online via www.tricksterbook.com/HomePage.htm), chief among his philosophical touchstones in his approach to paranormality are William Braud's model of lability and inertia in psi processes, Victor Turner's concepts of liminality and anti-structure, structural anthropologist Edmund Leach's work, and sociologist Max Weber's notions of rationalisation, disenchantment, and charisma. Directly or by implication, these ideas deal in states – such as psi phenomena – that are 'betwixt-and-between', neither fact nor fiction, real or unreal. Almost inevitably, therefore, another key is Ernest Hartmann's observations on psychological boundaries. Hansen could have created a thoughtful and original work on the paranormal from these starting points alone. It's not clear where his thinking began to develop beyond them, but somewhere along the line he came upon the trickster, and Barbara Babcock's work in particular, and here we have the upshot: 419 pages of text in 26 chapters, plus 134 pages of notes, references and index, representing eight years of labour. After all that effort, Hansen might be forgiven for expecting you to read every page: he pulls his own small trick by telling us we can read the chapters in pretty much any order (which is true), and may even leave some out if we feel like it. Not a lot of writers are that generous.

Hansen likes to set off hares, and manages the feat approximately every third page. So he doesn't let the mind laze its way through his writing which, while a good thing in itself, makes constructing a synopsis of the book a tad difficult. But one can't be sure that this isn't deliberate. Hansen devotes a chapter to the slightly tricky concept of reflexivity – awareness becoming aware of its own awareness, in its basic paradigm – and takes in the far trickier matter of ethnomethodology on the way. The point, it would seem, of these apparent divagations is to map the many traps and snares that await the unwary pilgrim in search of objective truth. To the extent that he is gently sceptical of the possibility of attaining this grail, he is sympathetic to post-modernism, but not without recognising its flaws. And while one may look with a baleful eye on the likes of Derrida, Foucault, Baudrillard and their brood, it is surely a simple psychological (and logical) truth that in reflecting on the nature of subjective experience, it's almost inevitable that one ends up reflecting on the nature of one's



LEFT: The hare-eared Nanabozho is the trickster figure/culture hero of the Ojibwa.

ONE OF THE
GREAT THINGS
ABOUT BOOKS
IS SOMETIMES
THERE ARE SOME
FANTASTIC
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George W Bush

reflections thereon. (The irony is that this process is often launched in the quest to give an *objective* account of one's findings, of making them comprehensible to others.)

All this drives Hansen's argument that not only are paranormal phenomena tricksterish, but that those attempting to study them become themselves marginalised, relegated to the realm of unofficial knowledge. Hansen notes the paucity of funding supporting parapsychological research – the tiny number of individuals involved full-time and the lack of large organisations involved – due to the inherent instability of the subject matter. While he makes no bones about his conviction that paranormal phenomena are real, neither does he shy away from the amount of fraud, fakery and hoaxing that goes on: for that is part of the trickster character. His longest delve into ufology in the book, for instance, is a rehearsal of his, Joe Stefula's and Richard Butler's work in nailing the Linda Napolitano/Cortile abduction story as most probably fiction. He also has fun with the early years of the Society for Psychical Research, a penetrating criticism of the SORRAT 'experiments', and a swingeing account of CSICOP (now CSI)'s zealotry, especially its talent for collecting money. Hansen is no swivel-eyed believer.

US-style 'scepticism' intrigues him. One of his most informative, and subtlest,

sections is devoted to the granddaddy of organised scepticism, Martin Gardner (1914–2010), who was perhaps not all he seemed to many of his avid readers. Hansen writes: "One cannot understand Gardner and his involvement in the paranormal without considering the entire corpus of his writings including those on conjuring, mathematics, logic, paradox, and religion. He freely intermixes these and does not treat them as separate, clearly demarcated fields of inquiry. This boundary blurring befits a trickster character. His views on the paranormal are intricately linked not only with religion, conjuring, and philosophy, but can even be seen in his writings

on mathematics. Both in his person and in his work, he brings together topics that others keep separate." Hansen grants that Gardner was a consummate expert in 'close-up' conjuring, where the performer may be but inches from his audience, which uniquely qualified him to detect trickery in mediums and psychics. But Hansen says that Gardner was "enraged" by claims for the paranormal, which led him to make "naive and emotional outbursts." This was partly because, he admitted, the idea of psi made him uneasy: "I also value the privacy of my thoughts. I would not care to live in a world in which others had the telepathic power to know what I was secretly thinking, or the clairvoyant power to see what I was doing" while "PK opens up even more terrifying possibilities. I am not enthusiastic over the possibility that someone who dislikes me might have the power from a distance to cause me harm." Gardner was not entirely the cool rationalist he has been taken to be. And Gardner, it turns out (unlike many of his fellow skeptics), was no atheist. In his early youth he was a fundamentalist Christian. At university he lost his Christianity but did not reject God, considering himself a deist thereafter. Consequently, he considered scientific enquiry into Biblical miracles or the power of prayer an insult to God. By extension, *all* paranormal research was blasphemous, an offence only made worse when ineptly performed. Retaining a sense of mystery in the world was important to Gardner, and we should thank him for that.

The Trickster and the Paranormal draws no simple conclusions – if indeed it draws any. This makes it for a *par excellence*. It is essential reading – but be prepared to read it more than once. **FT**

The Trickster and the Paranormal
George P Hansen, Xlibris, 2001
www.tricksterbook.com/

For an interview with George P Hansen, see **FT175:40-41**.

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Death comes to Zones 1 & 2

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Before Bondeson there was Roger Wilkes's 'An Infamous Address' but what is it about murder houses that is so appealing to some?

The first thing you do when you pick up one of these books (as a London-dweller) is to look

up your own house. Where you live now. Then you look for the houses of your friends. Then you move on to look at places where you used to live. I found four murder sites within yards of my old flat and discovered that the so-called 'Soho Strangler' had struck at 66 Old Compton St a few doors down. Late one night in the spring of 1936 working girl 'Dutch' Leah Hinds was seen by a hotel porter picking up a punter. She brought him back to her second floor flat, where she was found next day, after the door was broken down, garrotted with a thin wire, her cooling body poignantly attended by her puppy dog. The redtops declared her to be the fourth victim of a serial killer called The Soho Strangler, who was never found or even identified. Some suggested he was the same man who also became known as 'The Blackout Ripper' during WWII, though his 'MO' and physical description is not a match, Bondeson assures us. Another possible serial killing of Soho prostitutes is later posited as taking place in 1947-1948 and was dubbed 'Soho Jack'. This again remains unsolved, the police file closed in 1975, the neatly dressed man in a blue suit never found.

Another nearby murder site is now a Thai restaurant. This property is the site of the gangland murder of 'Big Tony Mella' in January 1963 when it was called The Bus Stop Club. Directly opposite the flat, I discover from Bondeson's books, there was an amusement arcade murder in 1974 at 36 Old Compton St where 'Italian Tony' Alfredo Zomparelli was shot dead - Barbara Windsor's husband Ronnie Knight stood

"Outside Zone 1, we're more likely to find the deaths are sadder and more personal"

trial for it. It's now a café called Muriel's Kitchen, which sadly has no link to that other Soho denizen Muriel Belcher. At a former club at 24 Frith St, now the convenience store Dodo I once used occasionally, dodgy French bruiser Charles Baladda was murdered in 1926, as the result of a money-lending arrangement gone wrong.

Most of the best known murders are modern ones and are covered in these books - Lord Lucan, Dr Crippen and Dennis Nilsen for example (the latter elicits a particular waft of disgust from Bondeson). But a good deal of these murders seem to have been furnished by that model of curtain-twitching surveillance, so familiar to readers of *Fortean Times*, *The Illustrated Police News*.

The cosmopolitan nature of London means that the objects and subjects of murder can have an international flavour, involve actors and aristocrats, even the King of Greece in one instance. But after the organised crime nexus of Soho, things ripple outwards.

Outside Zone 1, we're more likely to find the deaths are often sadder and more personal. There are still some sensational cases: a 'Kensal Rise Bluebeard', a 'Demon Barber of Earlsmead Road', 'a Hampstead murder

triangle', a 'Tooting Horror' (which claimed eight lives), an 'Acton Atrocity', an 'Ealing Weirdo' and a 'Brixton Matricide'.

A surprising number of murder houses still stand, but London's sole 'triple murder pub' The Charlie Brown in Limehouse was pulled down to make way for the Dockland Light Railway. The authorities were so appalled by the behaviour of ghoulish souvenir hunters they went to considerable efforts to disguise locations (most usually by changing street names) after what happened with the Red Barn murder in 1828 where William Corder murdered Maria Marten: sightseers to the Suffolk barn stripped it for souvenirs and plants from it were removed and sold as memorial toothpicks. Her gravestone too was reduced to a stump by people chipping away small bits of it.

These days such ghoulish pleasure is largely catered for by the benign ambulation of walking tours.

Though most of London's murder victims appear to be women killed by men, women who killed were hypocritically held up as especially evil. Was the skull found during renovations of Sir David Attenborough's house in Richmond really the head of murder victim Julia Thomas, a former schoolmistress whose body was otherwise boiled in a copper and the bones dumped in the Thames by her foul-mouthed servant Kate Webster? The consensus seems to be yes.

The truth is that in central London you've never far from the site of historic crime.

Last night I went to a

Continued on page 60

Marginalising the odd

A mechanistic approach to studying the mind is unhelpful and hostility to the paranormal undermines scientific objectivity



Crimes of Reason

On Mind, Nature and the Paranormal

Stephen E Braude

Rowman & Littlefield 2014

Hb/ebook, 221pp, \$70.00, ISBN 9781442235755

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £47.95

Since the 1970s, the American philosopher Stephen Braude has set out to challenge how science and parapsychology study the mind and the paranormal. In a review of Braude's first book, *ESP and Psychokinesis* (1979) in *Theta* (the *Psychical* 1963–1990), the Egyptologist Bob Brier proposed philosophy as an ideal frame of reference to debate the paranormal for “the phenomena studied do not fit in easily with our ordinary way of viewing the world and call for a revision of concepts.” He pointed out that Braude writes accessibly, a refreshing change from most philosophical scholarship. *Crimes of Reason* brings forth a spectrum of Braude's essays, expanded and updated. The more speculative essays are of particular value for fortéans.

Braude covers diverse ground in this collection. His overarching critique is on how theoretical models are created to explain mental states and human abilities, but their explanations are inadequate. In particular, he takes aim at mechanistic theory through which scholars and scientists represent things like human behaviour, personality traits, and the retention of memories governed by physiological and brain processes. Proponents of mechanistic theories tend to critique harshly or avoid

the value of folk psychology through which people are able to predict and explain others' behaviour. They also cast doubt on conditions such as dissociation and multiple personalities – which Braude argues can advance our understanding of the nature of mind.

While relevant to the collection as a whole, these five essays will likely be more difficult to work through for most paranormal enthusiasts.

The juiciest material for fortéans are the last three essays, which cover extraordinary human abilities, parapsychology, and how scholars who study paranormal things tend to be marginalised in academia – something Braude has experienced personally and reflects candidly upon. Those essays could be expanded into their own book. ‘Parapsychology and the Nature of Abilities’ contributes to a growing body of humanities scholarship which compare extraordinary claims between the sciences and religious studies (see also Jeffrey Kripal, Tanya Luhrmann, and Ann Taves). Often psi is denoted as ability, and usefully Braude challenges this notion as premature, perhaps even inappropriate. He highlights how psi experiences vary between people; they are idiosyncratic and subjective, much as a savant's talents may be unique to them. In that respect, Braude finds value in comparing the skills and capacities of savants, with claims such as that of pianist Rosemary Brown to channel dead composers. Such comparisons guide better research.

This has implications for how people with “wild talents” are studied. Braude argues that the methodology of parapsychology, rooted in laboratory-based replication attempts such as those JB Rhine established at Duke University, is often inappropriate. Psi seems more related to human

behaviour, which requires analysis based on observations of people in their natural environment.

In another essay, Braude sees parapsychology as making a significant contribution to comprehending religion, such as the efficacy of prayer, particularly when tested outside the lab. Closing his philosophical toolkit, he responds to the marginalisation of academics studying “phenomena whose existence other professionals deny”.

He looks at the “intense hostility uncharacteristic of and inappropriate to objective scientific inquiry” (p. 201) and how researchers should not waste too much time responding to that mode of criticism and focus on doing the best quality work they can. Researchers will benefit and be motivated from reading these three essays.

The publisher put a \$70 (nearly £50) price tag on the book and made the ebook nearly as expensive as the library-quality hardback. This is a collection of previously published essays (many of which have versions available to read on Braude's website) that deserve to be read by a broader audience of paranormal enthusiasts and researchers.

Hopefully, to encourage readers, a softback edition will be significantly cheaper and the publisher will implement fairer ebook prices.

Not all of Braude's essays will deliver a punch for those interested in researching anomalies, but much of the book comprises useful ideas to advance the work of parapsychologists as well as humanities scholars looking to collaborate with the sciences.

Christopher Laursen

Fortean Times Verdict

RETHINKING RESEARCH... WITH A HEFTY PRICE OF ADMISSION

7

Continued from previous page

restaurant in Artillery Passage near Liverpool Street and I thought I'd check the address in the book. Sure enough there had been a restaurant murder a few doors down; in 1868 the small eating house where the psychopathic 18-year-old kitchen boy Alexander Mackay attacked his bossy employer Emma Grossmith with a rolling pin; Mackay was finally caught with one of the first ever examples of a photograph being circulated to governmental agencies.

In these three books there are 49 unsolved murders, 15 of which were of prostitutes. Five involve gay pick-ups, six are shop murders committed by careless or desperate robbers, nine are the elderly killed by burglars and three are gangster slayings. Two are apparently well-known to genre aficionados – the *Bravo Mystery of 1876* (a lawyer is poisoned with antimony) and *The Harley Street Mystery of 1880* (a tiny dead woman is found in a barrel in a cellar).

The best value and most recommended of the three is the basic one – *Murder Houses of London*.

Roger Clarke

Fortean Times Verdict

EVERYTHING YOU'LL EVER NEED TO KNOW ABOUT MURDER HOUSES

8

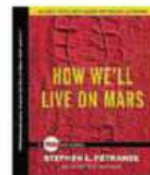
How We'll Live on Mars

Stephen Petranek

TEDE Books 2015

Hb, 124 pp, illus, £7.99, ISBN 9781471138881

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £7.59



This book starts from a valid premise: that it would be possible in principle for humans to fly to Mars using technology that exists today.

Few people would dispute that (it's only rocket science, after all), but most of us can see plenty of practical reasons why it's not going to happen any time soon. Stephen Petranek, on the other hand, is a starry-eyed idealist. He has neat, sound-bite-sized answers to all the usual objections,

whether from science (there's bound to be plenty of water and nutrients in the Martian rocks), engineering (we'll use the same off-the-shelf vehicles that take crews into low Earth orbit), politics (the private sector can do in a decade what hidebound governments have failed to do in half a century) or economics (since the tickets are one-way, the customers – mostly multi-millionaires – will be happy to give us all their money).

As an idealistic dreamer, it's inevitable that Petranek is going to underestimate the huge technical problems in areas like life support, failsafe systems and energy requirements. But his biggest mistake is to assume everyone involved in the undertaking will share his starry-eyed vision. In the real world, when a vast multi-billion dollar engineering project is announced, the most likely response of potential subcontractors isn't "How can we help make this project a success?" but "How can we get a chunk of that money?"

This is a short but nice-looking book, with high production values and some stunning colour photographs. It's meant to be a personal view, rather than a balanced account of the subject – and you need to keep that in mind when reading it. Even if you disagree with the author on most things, as I do, it still provides plenty of food for thought. I was particularly interested in his assertion that "within a decade or so of the Apollo mission that landed the first humans on Earth's moon, we could have landed humans on the Red Planet"... if NASA had gone wholeheartedly down the Mars route, instead of wasting its time on the Space Shuttle ("a dated rocket plane") and the International Space Station ("a pretty useless hunk of technology"). He may be right – but the fact that history didn't happen that way makes a statement about the world's priorities that Petranek really ought to listen to.

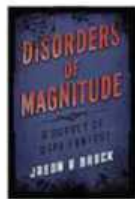
Andrew May

Fortean Times Verdict

IDEALISTIC ARGUMENTS FOR GOING TO MARS – MOSTLY WRONG **5**

Postwar SF grab-bag

A rambling study of SF, fantasy and horror covers a lot of ground (possibly too much), but needs an editorial machete



Disorders of Magnitude

A Survey of Dark Fantasy

Jason V Brock

Rowman & Littlefield 2014

Hb, 320pp, illus, ind, bib, £52.95, ISBN 9781442235243

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £52.95

Jason V Brock claims that *Disorders of Magnitude* is "an eclectic survey" of science fiction, fantasy and horror, and he's not wrong. In this volume of collected essays, he sets out to discuss subjects as diverse as the history of SF fandom, the career of Ray Bradbury, body horror, surrealist art, the history of comics, horror magazines and the special effects of Ray Harryhausen. The book is made up of short articles, many of them published elsewhere, and includes interviews, introductions and broader personal musings.

Despite the wide range of topics covered, Brock's main focus is on post-war American science fiction, particularly the work of the Californian writers known as 'The Group', which included Ray Bradbury, Richard Matheson, Charles Beaumont and *Twilight Zone* creator Rod Serling. The Group, together with other Californian fans and writers, dominate the first half of the book. Even interviews with people outside The Group, such as low-budget movie legend Roger Corman, focus on the work of its members, such as Corman's film version of Beaumont's novel *The Intruder*.

The remaining articles in the book are something of a grab-bag, ranging from brief overviews of various periods in the history of fantastic fiction to interviews with

people in the field. The breadth of Brock's interests is revealed here: we get an interview with Bruce Campbell, another with Lovecraft scholar ST Joshi, a pair of conversations with Australian fantastic artists and so on.

This breadth is one of the things that makes *Disorders of Magnitude* somewhat unsatisfying. Other than that they're broadly involved in the fantasy field, it's hard to see what Bruce Campbell and ST Joshi have in common, or how both interviews would illuminate the same broad concepts. Similarly, Brock interviews Bluewater Productions' Darren G Davis – that is, the publisher of his own comics – in what feels a little bit like an ad. It's not obvious what role Bluewater, a small publisher best known for its political comics, plays in the overall history of speculative fiction. Articles like these make the collection feel less like "a survey of dark fantasy" and more like 'Jason V Brock: Miscellaneous Articles'.

The strongest section of *Disorders of Magnitude* is undoubtedly the section on science-fiction writers in interwar and postwar California. Even here, however, the nature of the collection sometimes gets in the way. Because articles originally appeared separately, Brock often repeats the same information. If you didn't know that William F Nolan created a number of sequels and ancillary works to his novel *Logan's Run*, for instance, you will by the end of the book... It's the same for many of the recurring figures. This made sense when articles were introducing

these concepts for the first time, but it's unnecessary here.

Brock's references are often somewhat idiosyncratic. In a discussion of comic books, for example, he mentions comic publisher Dark Horse and cites two of its titles: *The Mask* and *Age of Reptiles*. Never mind citing slapstick comedy *The Mask* as an example of a comic with "adult themes", are these really the first two Dark Horse titles that spring to mind, rather than, say, *Hellboy* or *Usagi Yojimbo*? (This section talks about the three largest US comics publishers – and also Bluewater.) Similarly, Brock cites Martin Scorsese in a discussion of how the serious cinema of the 1970s was abandoned by viewers seeking easier comedy and action, an odd choice considering Scorsese's enduring critical and commercial success. At least, that's what Brock seems to be saying, but it's hard to tell among all the nested parentheses and em-dashes.

Disorders of Magnitude could have used a firmer editorial hand. There's a lot of good material, particularly for readers interested in The Group and other writers of their era, but it's unevenly presented and mixed in with bloggish rambling and Fandom 101 material. Collecting Brock's various articles in a single volume is a good idea, but perhaps an exhaustive, high-priced hardcover is not the ideal format.

James Holloway

Fortean Times Verdict

SOMETHING FOR PHILOSOPHERS TO CHEW ON, PERHAPS **6**

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Pleasuredome

Xanadu and other utopias, built or imagined, can be viewed as undesirable



Imaginary Cities

Darran Anderson

Influx Press

Pb, 560pp, illus, £12.99, ISBN 9780992765590

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £11.69

What happens when we build our dreams? Darren Anderson shows how over-reaching visions led to the micro-managed dystopias of the 20th century and the palimpsest cities of today – impossible unbuilt structures live on in those that became reality. There are no pictures, and few footnotes, but it's a page-turner, and there's always Google.

We whizz from Xanadu to Gotham City via Jetsons futurism – you can still see it in air-traffic control towers and suburban churches. We meet many of the usual suspects: John Martin, Lovecraft, Boullée, Le Corbusier, even our old friend the “parrot who was the last speaker of a lost language”, encountered on a quest for Eldorado.

Why think small? “Ziggurats, Gothic crags, proto-space age and proto-brutalist monoliths” were proposed as London's unbuilt Eiffel Tower. Adolf Loos forbade all ornament. Leon Trotsky aimed to perfect mankind. Bruno Taut saw the entire Alps as a “radiant city of glass”, and yearned to “unite humanity through architecture in peace”, his crystalline structure replicating until it covered the Earth.

But makers, not dreamers, reached the future first. Corb stole from – sorry, “was influenced by” – ships and grain silos; Buckminster Fuller nicked ideas

from “automobile chassis, ship rigging and bicycle design”. The cramped Frankfurt galley kitchen was modelled on train buffets.

There was a common urge to tidy humanity away: house everybody in termite mounds, and destroy any trace of the past. Personal space would go: we'd live in barracks, eat in canteens, share bathrooms, train in the gym, swim in the lido. Sounds like boarding school (or the current crazy vogue for hot desking), except space would be provided for “some procedure which contributes to population increase”, per Russian writer Ilya Ehrenburg.

But without landmarks, how would you know where you were? How would you find your friends? You'd need 3D satnav. And how would the planners persuade the workforce to build their own hell?

In the 1960s we were told that the entire built environment would be flattened and replaced. Modernism was the future for ever and ever. We couldn't stand in the way of “progress”. Now the uprush of Walkie-Talkies and the social cleansing of the working classes don't even have this pseudo-mystical excuse.

The trouble with utopia, says Anderson, is that the perfect life means a total loss of freedom. “The puritan urge to mould and monitor the lives of others is both futile and dangerous. The goal of cleansing and perfecting the human is not just improbable but undesirable.” Utopias don't just decay into dystopias: lies “collide with illogic – Catholic cosmology, Puritan sexuality, Stalinist economics...”. Let's hope he's right. Lucy R Fisher



Meteorite

Nature and Culture

Maria Golia

Reaktion Books 2015

Pb, 208pp, illus, £14.95, ISBN 9781780234977

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £13.49



Few, if any, strange phenomena have made the transit from scholarly dismissal to universal acceptance as

clearly as meteorites did in the years around 1800. In 1790 the assistant director of the Imperial Natural History Collection at Vienna described previous beliefs that iron fell from Heaven as ‘fairy tales’, an indictment of the ‘terrible ignorance then prevailing of natural history and practical physics’. Within 20 years the weight of evidence – stratum geology, chemical analysis and credible witness reports – had converted these beliefs into scientific orthodoxy. Maria Golia opens her enjoyable survey with this historical controversy and shows that meteorites still occupy an anomalous space where science, myth, art, commerce and apocalypse collide. The voices captured at the moment of the 2013 Russian fireball (‘Judgment Day!’, ‘I don't want to die!’, ‘What the fuck?!’) echo the awe that inspired meteor worship from the ancient Egyptians to the Hopi to the Aboriginal Australians.

All these cultures held the modern scientific view that the objects of their veneration were of extraterrestrial origin, along with a dizzying spectrum of other beliefs (fans of Tintin's *The Shooting Star* will be pleased to learn that the association of meteors and mushrooms has a long pedigree). The emperor Elagabalus hauled a meteorite back to Rome in a gilded chariot and installed it on the Palatine hill. The jury is still out on whether the Black Stone in the Ka'aba at Mecca is a meteorite.

Before the era of metallurgy, meteorites were for most peoples the only native source of iron-rich alloy. They were the source for metal beads found in an Egyptian burial site dated to 3300 BC, and for earrings unearthed in prehistoric Ohio burial sites. ‘Lightning iron’ has retained its

preternatural power ever since. A meteoric knife was buried with Tutankhamun, and a gold-inlaid extraterrestrial dagger made in 1621 for the Mogul emperor Jahangir can be seen at the Smithsonian. It has recently been claimed that the Tibetan ‘Iron Man’ statue discovered by the Nazis in 1938 is part of the Chinga meteorite that fell in Mongolia around 15,000 years ago [FT295:4].

The ancient awe of meteorites is expressed in the modern age by a collectors' market in which they can fetch, ounce for ounce, a thousand times the price of gold. Competitive collecting dates back to the age of empire, when patriotic claims were staked on meteor fields and exhibitions mounted to far-flung territories to haul back specimens.

Harvey Nininger's life was changed when he witnessed a fireball explode over Kansas in 1923. For 50 years he criss-crossed the American West amassing a collection that was eventually purchased by major institutions including the British Museum.

More recently they have been introduced to the top-end art market by Darryl Pitt, who presents them as ‘natural art from outer space’. Pitt has snatched even the rarest and most expensive meteorites, such as those from the Moon and Mars, from under the noses of museums and scientific researchers to sell to Saudi princes and movie royalty including Steven Spielberg and *Armageddon* star Bruce Willis.

Meteorite is an object of beauty, with the sumptuous colour illustration we have come to expect from Reaktion's natural history monographs. The images include ancient artefacts, pulp illustrations, ethnographic tableaux and stunning aerial photography of craters, but focus primarily on the meteorites: portraits that reveal the patterns sculpted by heat and g-forces in their passage through the atmosphere, and precision-cut magnified sections that turn their fine-grained structures into kaleidoscopic works of art.

Mike Jay

Fortean Times Verdict

BE VERY CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR - IT MAY COME TRUE

9

Fortean Times Verdict

AN OTHERWORLDLY FUSION OF SCIENCE, ART AND MYTH

9

ALSO RECEIVED

We leaf through a small selection of the dozens of books that have arrived at Fortean Towers in recent months...

Confessions of a Reluctant Ghost Hunter

A Cautionary Tale

Von Braschler

Destiny Books 2014

Pb, 177pp, ind, \$16.95, ISBN 9781620553824

Yet another memoir from one of the burgeoning population of American ghost hunters, who have turned the vocation into a profession, complete with lecture circuit. Braschler declares himself a life-long Theosophist as well as a 'sensitive' and gives us the benefit of his experiences in Oregon in the 1980s. Probably more interesting than his successes are the 'banishings' that go wrong – the book is subtitled 'A cautionary tale' – resulting in sage advice for would-be ghost-hunters. It's for believers in the reality of ghosts; others need not bother.

I Would Still Be Drowned in Tears

Michelle L Hamilton

Vanderblumen Publications 2014

Pb, 174pp, refs, bib, \$14.95, ISBN 9780964430464

This slender but precise study of the role of spiritualism during Abraham Lincoln's presidency (1861–1865) and the concurrent Civil War makes fascinating reading and lays out a neglected aspect of American history. Hamilton shows how Lincoln's wife, Mary Todd – socially accomplished and well educated, but depressed and even suicidal in later life – shared his strong belief in the prophetic power of dreams. In the 1840s, when Lincoln practised law in Springfield, Illinois, the couple sought a cure for Mary's migraines in the clinics run by Mesmerists. As Hamilton notes: "An unexpected side-effect from being mesmerized was that during trances many patients claimed that they had seen spirits and had gained clairvoyant powers."

Inevitably, the Lincolns developed a strong interest in spiritualism, which played some part in his political decisions. The popularity of séances in the northern states

of the US was powered by the rise of the Fox sisters (from 1848 onwards) and their reported demonstrations, and their fame was at its peak when Lincoln was assassinated in 1865. During Lincoln's presidency, Mary Lincoln convened séances in the White House, but this was not the first spiritualist incursion there. Nine years earlier, in 1853, when Franklin Pierce was president, his wife Jane had summoned the Fox sisters to the White House to hold a séance for their three sons who had met early deaths.

A telling story of those superstitious Lincolns concerns the Great Comet of 1861, one of the brightest in the modern era, that blazed (even in daylight) across 100 degrees of the sky that April, just as the Civil War began. Like many, Olla, a female slave of a family known to the Lincolns' children, believed the celestial apparition was an omen of disaster. A biography of Lincoln's youngest son Tad tells of Olla's description of it as a great sword with its handle pointing south; her interpretation was that the North will win over the South. She is said to have added: "But dat Linkum man, if he takes de sword, he's gwine perish by it." The story was passed to the Lincolns minus the prophecy. When the Lincoln children told their parents, "Mrs Lincoln laughed, but the President seemed strangely interested."

Hamilton, a historian of the period, writes clearly, holding even a general reader's interest without overwhelming it with detail.

Fearless in Tibet

Matteo Pistono

Hay House 2014

Pb, 351pp, ind, refs, gloss, notes, \$17.95, ISBN 9781401941468

The Dalai Lama praised Pistono's previous book – an account of his decade-long journey through Tibet – for its descriptions of the social and religious life of modern Tibetans. Pistano says that it also brought him, by stages, to an awareness of the importance of

Tertön Sogyal, regarded by many as a visionary saint and one of the most influential mystics of the 19th century.

This book presents, for the first time in English, a detailed study of the life and teachings of Tertön Sogyal, a teacher and companion to the 13th Dalai Lama. Of interest here – besides an extraordinarily robust mysticism that accommodates reincarnation, visions, prophecies and 'spirit-entities' that personify either emanations of Buddhas or subjugated demons – is Pistano's portrait of the Tertön's yogic training, endurance and antique discoveries. In Tibetan tradition, the title *tertön* is bestowed upon those who discover *termas*, 'treasures' – which may be texts, ritual objects, relics or long-hidden teachings, etc – believed to have been concealed by Padmasambhava – the Indian guru who promoted Buddhism in Tibet in the eighth century – until the time was right for their revelation.

Fearless in Tibet also records the historic meeting of the two present day 'simultaneous' incarnations of Tertön Sogyal, one of whom, Sogyal Rinpoche, provides the book's introduction. Given all that weight and solemnity, Pistono's writing gallops along and enlightens as it entertains.

So You've been Publicly Shamed

Jon Ronson

Picador 2015

Pb, 296pp, bib, \$18.95, ISBN 9780330482287

Always entertaining, Ronson's wit and perception is here focused upon the modern phenomenon of outing or shaming via the Internet, a form of cyber-bullying that can range from simple trolling to harassment and even 'revenge porn'. Ronson investigates and dissects notable cases, interviewing both victims and their persecutors.

While public shaming can be traced back through mediæval stocks and naked penance in church to even earlier forms of

humiliation, its modern form can involve assuming the victim's identity to post offensive material, the circulation of private pictures or letters, or having one's email address 'bombed' by countless spammed emails. A silly joke, a clumsy phrase, an awkward photo, even an earnestly expressed point of view may trigger the bullying response; in truth, the perpetrators need very little provocation to unleash their torrent of digital psychological harassment. The book is not essentially fortean, but Ronson's search for an explanation dissects human motivation as manifest through the Internet; he can only offer the suggestion that such events perform like 'control loops' attempting to 'normalise' social interaction according to vague and pathological ideas about what is normal.

Five Weeks in a Balloon

Jules Verne

Wesleyan University Press 2015

Hb, 357pp, notes, illus, bib, \$35.00, ISBN 9780819575470

For those who hanker for old-style tales of wonder, Verne's novel of 1863 perfectly captures the worldwide fascination with the period's leading-edge technology of ballooning – with higher, longer and more comfortable flights – combined with adventure on an old and barely explored continent. Subtitled 'A Journey of Discovery by Three Englishmen in Africa', this Wesleyan edition has been prepared by two leading Verne scholars with fascinating introductions to Verne and to the history of ballooning; a gallery of ballooning heroes and writers; restoration of over 80 of the original steel-engraved illustrations; and full notes and bibliography. Expanded from one of Verne's first stories, written when he was just 20 years old, the modern reader will be surprised at the sophistication of his craft, wit and humour, while dealing with two ever-present fears: of heights and of falling. It would make an inspiring present for a young reader's imagination, or even for anyone interested in the original genre of steam-punk.

SEND REVIEW COPIES OF DVDS, BLU-RAYS AND GAMES TO:
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The Walking Dead Season 5

Created by Frank Darabont, US 2015
Entertainment One, £29.99 (DVD), £39.99 (Blu-ray)

The first episode of Season 5 of *The Walking Dead* begins with the horrifying reality of Terminus, the supposed sanctuary toward which Rick's scattered group of survivors had been heading at the end of Season 4. The clue was always in the name: Terminus – not as in Roman god of protected boundaries, but as in the end of the line. The summary throat slitting in a human abattoir of rows of bound victims – Rick, Daryl, Glenn and Bob among them – is a suitably shocking opener.

One thing *The Walking Dead* manages to achieve in its ongoing series format is to effect a negative transformation of core characters yet still take you with it. Rick, ironically, becomes increasingly inhuman as he strives to protect what he sees as the human heart represented in his 'family'. Glenn and Maggie have their do-the-right-thing outlook severely tested. But for the reappearance of Morgan (more about him later) you might begin to question the transformational story arcs of the black cast members: practically sidelined in Michonne's case; two others eaten alive, and only one of them by zombies; Sasha become a reckless nihilistic assassin; and last but not least, there's Father Gabriel

Stokes, whose self-serving cowardice makes the snivelling Dr Zachary Smith in *Lost in Space* look like Captain Kirk. The Washington pilgrims from Season 4 provide some reassurance; as does Daryl, forever the lone wolf, gradually coaxed to the campfire of civilisation but now going walkabout again. This time, he's a rebel with a cause: to find Beth, last seen being driven away by abductors unknown. Nor is Daryl the only one on the prowl. The 'Wolves', child-men without their gaming consoles to desensitise them, seek out humans as their source of sadistic amusement and are a lurking threat.

Beth proves herself a resourceful survivor in Grady Memorial Hospital, run by cops with an attitude that would do the late Governor himself proud (our way or the left shaft). The quest for Beth and a bloody climax alternates with unfinished business involving the butchers of Terminus. This leads to the mid-season finale and the discovery of Alexandria – a would-be idyllic condo, walling itself off from reality and attempting to reinstate First World problems of the middle class Mumsnet variety. Even Rick appears to succumb, donning freshly starched sheriff's attire once more while he patrols the place. Morgan Jones (the survivor Rick encountered way back in Season 1, now a gnomish and Ninja-like badass) turns up just in time to discover how far Rick has descended in his scramble for

survival, and witnesses his summary execution of an Alexandria inhabitant. It's all set up for Season 6, with further ructions among the rhododendrons to come, never mind those Wolves prowling the big bad zombie real world beyond its walls...

Nick Cirkovic

Fortean Times Verdict

ANOTHER EXCELLENT SEASON
IN THE TV ZOMBIE SAGA

8

Contracted: Phase I

Dir Eric England, US 2013
Primal Screen, £9.99

Originally released in 2013, this gruesome horror movie concerns itself with what happens in the period immediately *before* most zombie movies begin. It presents, in revolting detail, three days in the life of Samantha (Najarra Townsend) after she has unprotected sex with a stranger at a party. As her body starts – and there's no nice way of putting this – to rot, Samantha's mind starts to crumble too; her friends and family react at first with concern and then revulsion.

Initially, you wonder why you're watching, as this doesn't seem to offer anything new either visually or thematically; but once you realise this is actually the precursor to a zombie movie, it becomes rather fascinating. Take for instance Zack Snyder's recent remake of *Dawn of the Dead*: it begins with a hospital

admitting patients displaying bite marks and erratic behaviour. *Contracted* deals with what might have happened before we got to that point. So, in a neat twist, it takes 'Day 0' as its end point and begins back at 'Day -3'.

The characters are vapid, but fortunately the acting is good. Najarra Townsend wins this week's Tom Hardy Award for most alarming physical transformation, and Caroline Williams (memorable as the heroine of *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*) as Samantha's mother effects an equally disturbing change of her own, from concerned parent to horrified Christian zealot. Safe in the knowledge that he has a good cast, writer-director Eric England is content to let the actors do the work and avoids unnecessary camera histrionics. He must also have had a good effects team, because some of poor Samantha's symptoms are genuinely repellent.

In terms of a date movie – on a scale between zero and Gaspar Noe's *Irreversible* – this is almost off the chart, being principally about the traumatic effects of a nasty sexually transmitted disease. However, viewed in the confines of your own home, where a good scrub-down is readily available, it's very watchable indeed. Should you require a further dose, if you'll pardon the expression, the sequel *Contracted: Phase II* is on the way. Daniel King

Fortean Times Verdict

WHAT HAPPENS BEFORE THE
ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE?

7

Beyond

Dir Joseph Baker & Tom Large, UK 2014
Kaleidoscope Home Entertainment, £7.99

It's difficult to know where to start with *Beyond*. It's a low-budget British SF film about how a young couple cope with an alien invasion – or is it? Well – SPOILER ALERT – it's low-budget and it's British...

It starts with Our Hero, Cole (Richard J Danum) confronting an armed youth in a convenience store, and the youth shooting and seriously injuring the shopkeeper. That seems to have nothing much to do with anything until towards the end of the film. Cole meets Maya (Gillian MacGregor) at a party, and they get together. Then we jump forward in time, and Cole and Maya spend most of the film out in the wilds of Scotland trying

to hide from a huge alien spacecraft as their relationship falls apart, largely through Cole's pig-headedness. There are repeated flashbacks to the early days of their relationship, and to discussions about an asteroid that is approaching Earth and likely to collide with us. The implication is that the "asteroid" was actually one or more alien spacecraft.

It would be unfair to give away the ending of the film; suffice to say that the oldest cliché in storytelling overturns everything that has gone before, or at least the very large part of the film that follows two squabbling people across wild Scottish countryside while evading a spaceship. The flashbacks are revealed to be now-time; the supposed now-time scenes – most of the film – are imaginary flashforwards. Is it even an SF film, or is it just a bad relationship drama (ambiguity intended)?

What else is wrong with this film? It's dull; two people constantly whingeing at each other does not make for compelling viewing. There's no real plot, beyond the beginning-and-end framing of the story. Yes, there are all sorts of subtle clues, echoes and parallels between the now and the then, but they're pretty pointless if the story isn't interesting. The two characters (there are a few others, but they're largely insignificant) spend much of their time shouting or whining at each other, so their dialogue is often unclear – and there are no subtitles on the DVD, let alone any other extras. What's good about it? The desolate Scottish landscape; too bad the film only uses it as a metaphor for a crumbling relationship.

David V Barrett

Fortean Times Verdict

NO ALIEN INVASION, NO SF, JUST ENDLESS BICKERING

2

Hard to be a God

Dir Aleksei German, Russia 2013

Arrow Academy, £12.99 DVD, £15.99 (Blu-ray)

The Russian novelist brothers Boris and Arkady Strugatsky wrote one of the great sci-fi novels in *Roadside Picnic*, which in turn became Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker*, one of the great sci-fi films. They also wrote the novel on which *Hard to Be a God* is based and, perhaps appropriately, the

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; @revpeterlaws)

HELLRAISER: THE SCARLET BOX

Dir Clive Barker, Tony Randel, Antony Hickox, UK/US 1987, 1988, 1992

Arrow Video, £69.99 (Limited Edition Blu-ray)

By 1987, movies already had a healthy pack of horror icons – then Clive Barker's Pinhead strode amongst them. I can just imagine them, pausing in the midst of their killing and eyeing one another nervously. Who the heck is this guy?

He stood out – and it wasn't just the black leather skirt. Michael Myers, for example, was a deliberately blank 'shape'. He was silent, unrelenting and with an extremely specific mission. Pinhead, on the other hand, was erudite and philosophical, with ambitions far grander than the slasher tropes of holiday-themed revenge. Similarly, the narrowly focused, work-booted Jason Vorhees just looked scruffy next to this elegant, fashionable Cenobite. Picture them in conversation. P: "I have such sights to show you, Jason." J: "Grrr. Ug. Ug." You could imagine that Pinhead polished every nail on his head before embarking on a hard day's corruption. The last decent bath Jason probably took was when he drowned as a kid. Then there's Freddy, who certainly spoke a lot. Too much, in fact. But his dialogue and grubby tongue-wagging felt infantile when set against this kinky, sophisticated and stereotypically English monster.

What's more, Pinhead was scary too, summoned from the crackling ether via a fiddle with a Terry's Chocolate Orange cum Rubicks cube. Remember, this was the smartphone free 1980s: hand-held puzzles were huge back then. Crack the configuration and Pinhead would swoop in, arching his fingers

and booming thoughtful, chilling dialogue about pleasure being pretty much the same as pain. All this, while his fellow Cenobites leered and chattered at shocked, bewildered audiences. These days you can turn on BBC3 or E4 and you'll see a gaggle of body modifiers and gaping wounds. Back then, this idea of extreme piercing and splayed flesh was strange, new... and scary.

Watch these three releases however, and you'll gradually see how the sequel machine turns the new into the neutered. The original *Hellraiser* remains the best: a repressed English housewife carries on a twisted romance with the skinless, greedy corpse she keeps in the attic. Here, Pinhead floats on the edges of the story, fuelling its power. He's all the more scary for it. By part two, things get way more epic, with Pinhead and pals showing us the delights of Hell itself. Turns out it's very geometric, rather like a demonic Ikea. The film is silly in places, but there's still enough visual intrigue to fascinate.

By part three, though, Pinhead's wedged into a wooden column and being shipped to the USA. It's like when the Amityville curse was downloaded to a floor lamp a few years



earlier. Here he barks out kill-for-me instructions to Marky Mark from the Funky Bunch (at least I thought it was him at the time). Pinhead's now the clear star, throwing out witty quips, just like Freddy. It's way too similar to what action movies were doing at the time. You know – Schwarzenegger drilling someone to death while shouting "Screw You!" This set wisely limits the downturn by sticking with the first three movies.

That's not to say the *Hellraiser* Franchise became a waste of time. It has moments of merit and hordes of fans. All I'm saying is that Arrow's lovingly produced release is like a subtle case study in the gradual commodification of new horror visions. The fearsome and mysterious new guy in the horror fraternity becomes the pseudo anti-hero. Yes, he might make us want to punch the air and chuckle, but when he first appeared, he made the air feel like it might choke us. The change isn't a problem for many, but it's a trajectory worth noting. Unlike Freddy, at least Pinhead had the good sense not to do a single with the Fat Boys. Seeing him struggle to keep his headphones on while mixin' up da muffins would have reached a level of pain even the most hardened cenobite would struggle to find the pleasure in.

Fortean Times Verdict

A STUDY IN HOW THE SEQUEL MACHINE'S NEUTERS THE NEW

7

film it most resembles is Tarkovsky's *Andrei Rublev*. Both depict, in stark black and white, brutal life in the Middle Ages (or something like it), witnessed by a central character who for various reasons declines to participate. In this film, that character is Don Rumata, a scientist who has travelled from Earth and is deeply embedded as an observer on Arkanar, a distant planet which resembles ours but is 800 years behind in technology and thought. The inhabitants believe him to be a god, and Rumata rules as such. However, he is forbidden from interfering in Arkanar's development and under no circumstance is allowed to kill.

The recreation of the period is jaw-dropping. I've never experienced such a wholly convincing depiction of an impossibly remote era, not even in Tarkovsky's film. The primitive conditions endured by the population appear so real that it's difficult to remember you are watching a 21st century fiction film. The pitiless weather, appalling sanitation, scarcity of food and, above all, arbitrary, casual, brutality are explicit, and director Aleksei German rubs your nose in the sheer filth of it all. This is necessary, though, because the story revolves around Rumata's attempts to remain above the squalor and retain the humanity and decency that has yet to emerge on Arkanar. The temptation to descend into barbarism and indulge his whims is what drives the narrative and indeed provides the film with its title. On this level, the piece works flawlessly and is a hugely impressive feat of imagination and technical ability.

However, I should add two major caveats. First, the period detail is so successful that the film is frequently repellent: for instance, every conceivable bodily fluid is represented and the violence is extremely graphic. Second, it is punishingly long at three hours, which, combined with a rudimentary plot and often ugly visuals, makes it something of an endurance test. Even the hardened hacks at the screening I attended indulged in world-class fidgeting. In its own way, this is a monumental piece of work, but one probably best enjoyed on DVD.

Daniel King

Aquarius: Season 1

Created by John McNamara, US 2015
ITV Studios Home Entertainment, £19.99 DVD, £29.99 (Blu-ray)

There's a definite appeal to this piece of self-described TV 'historical fiction': take a typical police procedural, lavish on it a *Mad Men*-esque fetish for 1960s period detail, and set it in 1967's so-called 'Summer of Love', when San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury was awash with flower children, LA was still twitchy from the Watts race riots and a young Charlie Manson, fresh out of prison and gate-crashing the hippy party, was collecting naïve young girls for his budding 'Family' in Topanga Canyon. Into this volatile social milieu *Aquarius* introduces its fictional characters: old school Hollywood homicide detective Samson Hodiak (an amiable David Duchovny) and his young partner, undercover narcotics officer Brian Shafe (Grey Damon), searching for a missing teenage girl who, they discover, has joined Manson's ragtag commune. The runaway is the daughter of Hodiak's old flame Grace (Michaela McManus), over whose lawyer husband Manson (Gethin Anthony, who gets away from the usual swivel-eyed lunacy but is maybe a bit *too nice*) seems to have some mysterious hold.

The continuing arc concerning the formation of the Family and Manson's role as narcissistic hippy Messiah runs in tandem with more typical cop show storylines, some more effective than others, tackling the Black Panthers, drugs, institutional sexism (shades of *Agent Carter*) and anti-Vietnam protestors. Much of this is quite compelling and entertaining, and the series's unstated but omnipresent theme of generational conflict – the breakdown of the old family and the emergence of a new one – gives it a weightier underpinning than most cop shows. Whenever it does veer into genre cliché, the multiple plotlines and large cast usually get it back on track. It will take at least another couple of seasons to move things along to the inevitable, bloody end of the hippy dream with the Tate-La Bianca slayings; seeing how the show decides to get there should be interesting.

David Sutton

SHORTS

UNHALLOWED GROUND

Kaleidoscope Entertainment, £9.99 (DVD)



Six annoying public school pupils patrol the school grounds as part of their end of term officer cadet training. While doing so they encounter not only two oiks who are trying to break in but also the vengeful spirits of four pupils who died in mysterious circumstances hundreds of years before. A juicy set up, but the film builds agonisingly slowly, with 40 minutes going by before anything much happens. It eventually picks up steam and barrels along to a climax that I didn't see coming. However, the narrative is really two stories squashed together: at times the horror stuff disappears completely, leaving us with a so-so crime tale, while at others there are so many different ghosts popping up that it's hard to keep track. The acting is variable, the special effects rudimentary and the dialogue a bit clunky, but credit to writer (and co-star) Paul Raschid for the unusual setting and for attempting to introduce some social comment and even the occasional literary flourish. The photography and lighting are miles better than the norm for a low-budget British horror film, so that despite its flaws this looks superb. **DK 5/10**

DRACULA

Odeon Entertainment, £9.99 (Blu-ray)



I've wanted to see Dan Curtis's *Dracula* for decades, and it's finally been re-released – on Blu-ray, no less. Fresh from *Dark Shadows*, Curtis shows a natural affinity for the material, but it's refreshingly close to Stoker's original too. It makes its own diversions of course, but the frantic, train-hopping chase vibe of the book gets a welcome outing here. It's Jack Palance who really elevates it, though. His tortured, regal, angry approach elicits great sympathy. At times I wished that Van Helsing and his fellow spoilsports would just leave Drac alone and let him get on with his (un)life. **Rev PL 7/10**

TOWER OF EVIL

Odeon Entertainment, £19.99 (Blu-ray)



It's death, mayhem and frequent boobage on the craggy isle of Tower of Evil. A boatload of investigators come ashore, looking for treasure and trying to figure out what left previous visitors mad or dead. The film went for all-out shock at the time, and to say that it still retains some of that 'up yours' power 40 years on just shows how hard they pushed the button. The characters are fun and the story intriguing, but it's the location that really stands out. The lighthouse set may well be entirely studio-based, but it's so well designed you feel as if you're stuck out at sea with the cast. The brilliant Jonathan Rigby provides some excellent extras. I could listen to him talk horror movies for hours. Even on a creepy, green island. **Rev PL 8/10**

THE EXORCIST: THE COMPLETE ANTHOLOGY

Warner Home Video, £19.99 (Blu-ray)



A bargain-basement, extra-light repackaging of all five movies in the franchise in the flimsiest of cardboard cases, with HD transfers ranging from excellent (the original film, in both the theatrical and director's cuts) to OK (*Exorcist II*). It's certainly worth grabbing them all at this price though. **DS 7/10**

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A REMARKABLE EXPERIENCE
IF YOU CAN TAKE IT

7

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THE TIMES THEY ARE A
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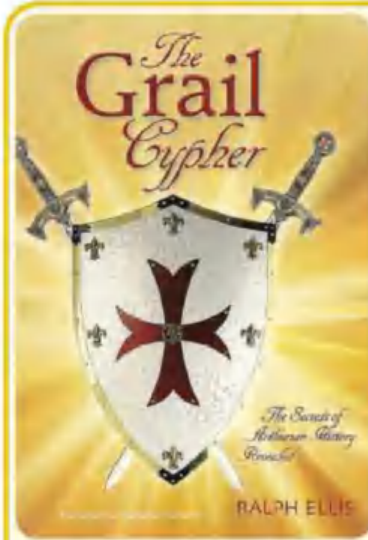
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Dear FT...

letters



Hobs and ego

Bob Fischer's "Aye, we're flitting" tale [FT330:58] got my metaphor detector twitching. I found numerous versions of the story online, usually concluding with the farmer returning home since there was no point in moving somewhere unfamiliar and starting again if the hob – or boggart in several retellings – was coming along too. It strikes me that this can be read as a parable warning against the widely demonstrated belief that "everything will be okay if I just move house / get that job / start a new relationship / buy that car" (delete as appropriate). Do these hob tales teach us that whatever external adjustments we make to our life, our inner self remains the same, and we must take it and all its attendant problems everywhere we go?

This notion is reinforced by Nils Erik Grande's letter on the subject [FT332:75] and his explanation of the Norwegian expression *nissen på lasset* (the hob on the cartload), meaning a piece of bad luck that seems to follow one around like an inescapable curse.

But what of the idea that a helpful hob can be offended into desertion by a gift of clothes? I'm reminded of "God moves in mysterious ways" and any number of related maxims about going with the flow. Attempting to corral good fortune, to inspect and improve the gifts of the Universe (e.g. dressing your hob according to your tastes or mores) is to impose your preferences on Providence. Does this folkloric motif then serve to warn us that the ego can act in opposition to what is best for us by seeking to control that for which we should simply be grateful?

Rob Bray

Old Stratford, Northamptonshire

Warminster dawn

Re the 50th anniversary of 'The Thing' at Warminster [FT 332:28]: I must disagree that "Despite decades of UFO sightings... the town has never really capitalised

Simulacra corner



Graham Rootes noticed this mossy tree stump 'walrus' emerging from the River Frome in Somerset. *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 address.*

on what could potentially be a year-round tourist honey-pot." I well remember many times staggering off Cradle Hill in the grey dawn, numb with cold, stiff with discomfort, and exhausted with sleeplessness, having spent the night staring at satellites ('Amber Gamblers'), car headlights, planets, military flares and Sirius, on the fringes of a credulous and awed coterie of the favoured round 'Arthur'. But there at 6am on Sunday morning in Warminster High Street like an oasis mirage was open the café (alas I forget its name), serving 'Man-sized breakfasts for Watchers on The Hill'. My word, nothing has ever tasted so good! "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, But to be young was very heaven".

Roger J Morgan

London

Dadd and Capgras

With regard to Nick Warren's suggestion that Richard Dadd might have been suffering from the Capgras delusion [FT332:75], we should consider confirmation bias. When Richard Dadd said

"The man who calls himself my father", that could easily be a common figure of speech, as in "He's my father but he doesn't live up to the title".

Also, I was interested to read of the Moon Landing Hoax in relation to Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*, because the way I heard it was that he died on 7 March 1999, which was 666 days before the start of the year 2001, which is the title of his film *2001*, and so the Illuminati must have been "sending a message" about him spilling the beans once too often in *Eyes Wide Shut*. Or it's just a spooky coincidence.

James Wright

By email

Proto rap

David Thruswell's survey of songs about the JFK assassination [FT333:42-46] omits singer-songwriter Homer Henderson's Country & Western classic 'Lee Harvey

was a friend of mine'. The Youtube video is well worth watching. On a similar note, SD Tucker in "The Strangest Family in England" [FT333:36-41] doesn't mention that Dame Edith Sitwell was a pioneer of 'rap' music (e.g. *Façade – An Entertainment*, first performed in 1923).

John Rowe

By email

Green ink

Fascinating article about the *Unexplained* partwork [FT331:48-49]. Peter Brookesmith expressed surprise that they didn't get letters written in green ink. The reason why green ink was used for cranky missives dates back to the old days of massive engineering factories. New projects, proposals, designs etc. would be written up, then passed around the relevant departments for comments. Obvious mistakes, spelling errors and so on would be crossed out in red ink. The people involved would then make extra comments in blue or black ink according to department and seniority. Then the material was sent back for reworking. When everyone was finally satisfied, the Head Man would sign off the completed work by appending his signature in green ink. So, green ink was a sign that the missive came from an important and reliable source. Hence its use by unreliable sources.

Ray Vickers

Huddersfield, West Yorkshire



PAUL TAYLOR

Japanese ghosts

On a recent visit to England, my Japanese friend Miho Igi told me of a strange event that occurred to her and her partner Katsu. In the spring of 2007 they were driving along a rural road in Yamanashi prefecture. It was around midnight and raining. Miho recalls that they were close to a river and near a rural bus stop. A figure loomed into the middle of the road. It had long, slightly curly, wet hair that hung down covering its face. They couldn't tell if it was male or female. It was dressed in a long, white kimono and a headband with a white triangular shape on it. The outfit sounds like those used in Buddhist funeral rites. The figure looked solid and not at all insubstantial, but seemed to be leaning forwards at an impossibly acute angle. It would lean forwards, without toppling over like a person would, then rise back up to its full standing height. It kept repeating this movement over and over. This is what made them think it was a *yurei* [ghost]. Katsu had to swerve to avoid hitting it and, looking in the rear view mirror, they both saw the figure still in the middle of the road and still performing its strange movements. There were other cars on the same road that had to swerve to miss the thing. Her description reminded me of the *funayure*, maritime ghosts said to sink ships in Japanese folklore.

In another story Miho told me about the son of a friend of hers who lived on Shikoku Island. In 2010 he saw something in a field of corn. It was tall, thin and white. It swayed from side to side. Later whilst watching the anime series *GeGeGe no Kitaro* he recognised the *Ittan Momen* as what he had seen. The *Ittan Momen*, generally associated with Kagoshima district, is a weird *yokai* [apparition] that takes the form of a 10m (33ft)-long roll of animated cotton that flies about at night. It winds around its victims and smothers them. Apparently, the boy can see *yokai* but does not generally tell anybody for fear of ridicule.

Richard Freeman
Exeter, Devon



Frozen horses

SD Tucker mentions a World War II account of hundreds of horse heads protruding from the surface of a frozen lake [FT333:67]. This comic/horrific image is reprised by the Canadian director Guy Maddin in his wonderfully odd homage to his hometown *My Winnipeg* (2007, pictured above).

Concerning the article about the Sitwells – I wonder if Vivian Stanshall had Sir George Sitwell in mind when he was writing the character of 'Sir Henry at Rawlinson End'.

Oliver Tate
Brighton, East Sussex

I am Spartacus

Paul Screeton plausibly argued [FT332:58] that the "I am Spartacus" scene in Kubrick's film may derive in part from Hazlitt's 'Dr Topping' story. However, there is at least one additional possible source. The play *Fuente Ovejuna* is by the Spanish writer Lope de Vega (1562-1635). It concerns a village, the Fuente Ovejuna of the title, suffering under a cruel government administrator, who is eventually murdered. A scene near the end involves villagers being interrogated, with a view to discovering who killed the official. Each villager gives the same answer "Fuente Ovejuna did it". Obviously this is not quite the same as saying "I am the murderer". However, it functions in the same way as saying "I am Spartacus" by showing solidarity with the wanted criminal and protecting his identity, while putting

oneself at risk. In this way it is closer to the film than the Hazlitt story, where the motive of those shouting "Dr Topping" appears to be simply amusement.

Whatever Lope de Vega's intentions, this play was interpreted by some communists and socialists in the 20th century as sympathetic to their notion of the need for solidarity amongst the common people against their oppressors. For example, a Soviet ballet in the 1930s was based on it. Given the involvement of Dalton Trumbo, the screenplay author, in the left-wing movements of the time, it seems likely he would have been familiar with *Fuente Ovejuna*, either directly or hearing about it from his fellow communists.

Sandy Hobbs
Glasgow

Habit of secrecy

The review of *Operation Gladio* by Paul L Williams [FT330:65] brought back memories of teletype messages that mention Operation Gladio – an apparent stay-behind infrastructure that would resist during occupation by Soviet and Warsaw Pact forces. These messages are FBIS (Foreign Broadcast Information Service) unclassified overt media summaries. The FBIS was an arm of the CIA. It is now called OSC (Open Source Center). FBIS in Chiva Chiva, Panama, covered the Caribbean nations as well as Central America. I worked special comms in Panama at the highest level. We received an average of 300 FBIS teletypes daily from the couple of

dozen FBIS stations worldwide. During my years in special comms (roughly 1971 to 1984) we learned that most Allies of the US were excluded from seeing sensitive compartmented intelligence.

Terry W Colvin
Prachuabkhirkhan, Thailand

Gull menace

I was disappointed and concerned by your ignorant dismissal of the issue of gull attacks. Far from being a 'media panic', this is a very real and frightening situation across Britain. The small number of reports referred to in your article "Gulls Behaving Badly" [FT331:18-19] do nothing to reveal the true extent of the situation, with reports of attacks from as far north as Buckie in Scotland, one of which left a woman bleeding. I have witnessed attacks myself in Helensburgh. Gull attacks are far more widespread than just Cornwall and are getting worse. [Actually, besides Cornwall, FT reported incidents from Anglesey, Devon, Dorset, Liverpool, and County Kerry in Ireland – Editor.]

To dismiss the physical and psychological impact on people who have been attacked, witnessed attacks and suffered the violent and distressing deaths of beloved pets or indeed witnessed the deaths of other wild animals and birds as a result of gull attacks, is grossly inconsiderate. Why shouldn't Mr Cameron consider the daily safety of UK residents as a pressing issue, not to mention the horrific deaths of beloved pets? (Of course we all know that animals other than humans rarely warrant consideration, when in reality they are just as important).

Unless the situation is dealt with, people will resort to taking steps themselves; some already have. While I do not condone poisoning, I do empathise with those whose lives are so affected that they see no other solution. (Certainly, until local authorities have the power to take steps to address the situation, there is no way for people to defend themselves).

I do agree that our wasteful ways have exacerbated the situation, but gulls are increasingly learning that there are no con-

sequences to their actions. They are claiming our seaside towns as their territory and attempting to drive us out. Their mentality is changing as they gain power. They are intelligent and are using that. Until you witness for yourself the level of violence with which these birds attack, together with the distress, fear and pain generated, please reserve judgement on the situation.

Penny Ward

Clarkston, North Lanarkshire

A real monster

In his excellent article “The Misguided Monster Hunters” [FT331:55], Brian Regal asks the question: “What shall we do with cryptozoology today?” and ponders whether it’s time for a new direction. He points out that although no monsters have been found, cryptozoologists have helped us to understand more about nature, animal behaviour and the environment. For example, an FT copycat magazine recently featured an article claiming the ‘sea serpent’ sighted by the crew of the *Daedalus* off the Cape of Good Hope in 1848 was actually a surfacing sei whale (*Balaenoptera borealis*). The author compared the classic depiction of the sea monster with a photograph of a sei whale showing how this species of rorqual displays its head at the surface while other whale species do not.

Regal remarks that future commentators “may very well remember this period as a colossal waste of time”. The search for hidden animals has resulted in a colossal production of books, magazine and TV shows that have certainly made some people quite rich (and famous). And who doesn’t enjoy curling up with books by such authors as John Keel and Stan Gordon and reading about late-night encounters with Bigfoot and other monsters?

In January Loren Coleman will host the Cryptozoological Convention in St Augustine, Florida, during which there will be a trek to the beach where the ‘St Augustine Monster’ was discovered in 1898. But it was a former curator of the now-defunct Marineland of Florida – Forrest G Wood – who

really opened the specimen jar of mystery when he conducted his own investigation in the 1950s after finding a yellowed newspaper clipping about the carcass that washed ashore more than a century ago. Wood discovered that Dr DeWitt Webb of St Augustine had sent samples of the carcass to the Smithsonian Institution and with the help of a biologist from the University of Florida concluded the ‘monster’ was a giant octopus having a 200ft (60m) armspan! So sea monsters really do exist.

Greg May

Orlando, Florida

Frogs and fishes

While reading an FT account of some frogs that were found “growing” in pea pods, it struck me how truly alien these animals are: like fish, they always seem to turn up in places where they’re

not supposed to be... in rocks, on isolated mountain crags, deserts, etc. At times, they even survive their arrival. Then I recalled an earlier theory I’d heard about frog and fish falls, suggesting that they could be getting ‘dropped’ here from another dimension.

Recently, however, a rather more sinister possibility has occurred to me: in modern times, fish stocks are vanishing before our eyes (well, not so much vanishing as being eaten); frogs are vanishing too (well, not so much vanishing getting run over by cars and poisoned by pesticides). Perhaps the ancient alien theorists are halfway right after all, and someone ‘up there’ has been looking after us throughout the industrial era by conveniently depositing extra fish and frogs when we’ve killed off large numbers of our own? After all, scientists are always telling us we’re doomed

once the frogs or the fish run out. Perhaps those alien ancestors have been putting a bit of food in our planetary goldfish bowl.

Alex Elliott

Germany

Experiment exonerated

In his article “The Night Doctors” [FT332:30-31], Theo Paijmans lists the Tuskegee syphilis experiment as another example of evil white doctors committing racist mayhem on innocent African-Americans. Readers will be as surprised as I was to learn that this is mistaken. Richard A Schweder, a noted cultural anthropologist, has written an article about Tuskegee that is a myth-busting eye-opener; it can be found at www.spiked-online.com/newsite/article/14972#.VfWGb7QhsWx.

Cyrillic glitch

On 17 August I was feeling moody about something and decided to mock-up an image of a *Runcorn Weekly News* flag flying above The Reichstag, as depicted in the iconic World War II photograph of Red Army troops in Berlin. It was a rough rushed job using Microsoft Paint to create my ‘flag’ from a *Weekly News* masthead then Adobe Photoshop to rotate it and add a sepia tint before returning to Paint to reduce it to fit onto a downloaded image of the Reichstag photograph. I used the pipette tool to blur out the obvious deficiencies in my cut-and-paste ability. I then posted it on my Twitter feed and emailed it to two colleagues.

A week later, on the evening of 24 August, I had another look at the mock-up image and realised that the first ‘R’ in ‘*Runcorn Weekly News*’ had reversed so that it appeared as a Cyrillic letter. No other letters were reversed and the only other discernible change was some slight warping of the letter ‘n’, but it was more or less the same.

My initial reaction was one of feeling spooked – in more ways

than one – and a slight sense of awe. The first theory to spring to mind was that someone in a Russian government department had played a good-natured prank and hacked Twitter somehow and doctored the image. I then considered that maybe it was just the work of an independent hacker or Russian patriot. The next day I raised it with my boss who found it amusing, and also with one of my colleagues. She reminded me that I had sent the image via email and not just on Twitter so I went back and checked the original in the email, which was sent at 5.14pm, five minutes before I tweeted the image. I also retrieved what I presume to have been the ‘original’ from my desktop recycle bin. Both featured the reversed ‘R’. I remain completely baffled and am eager to find out if anyone else has had such an experience or can explain it.

At present the most likely



explanation appears to be a combination of a software glitch and coincidence. My concern is that people, quite understandably, will suspect I have done it myself as a prank or publicity stunt, but as a news reporter I realise that such a strange claim could undermine my credibility. The decision to go public is not taken lightly, but in the spirit of complete honesty and inquiry. An unusual truth is still a truth and to erase it from public record for the sake of reputation would be dereliction of duty. Publish and be damned.

Oliver Clay

Reporter, Runcorn and Widnes Weekly News (Cheshire)

Dr Phene's House

I have described one of the most extraordinary houses in London, Dr Phene's House of Mystery at the corner of Oakley Street and Upper Cheyne Row [FT303:48-52]. The wealthy eccentric and property magnate Samuel Phene, who claimed to possess a doctorate from an unspecified foreign university, had this house built between 1901 and 1905. Nobody ever lived there, except for an elderly housekeeper in the basement, since the elaborate façade was designed to celebrate Phene's distinguished family connections. Already during his lifetime, the house fell into disrepair, and after his death in 1912, the decay accelerated.

On the previously unknown picture postcard reproduced here, the many broken windowpanes, through which birds could enter the House of Mystery to cause damage to the interior, are only too visible. The signs outside the house say that the freehold is for sale, possibly for the construction of some 'Dwarf Residences', but after its demolition in 1924, a large house in a vaguely neo-Elizabethan style was erected on the site.

Dr Jan Bondeson
Newport, Wales

An undated postcard [1919-1924?] showing Dr Phene's House of Mystery.



Sensational plays, films and novels to the contrary, no African-American prisoners were injected with syphilis. In fact, the experiment was ethical, worthwhile and supported by the leading African-American medical organisation of the day and the African-American nurse who administered the programme.

I can't help wondering how many of the other cases of racist malpractice noted by Paijmans would also dissolve under closer scrutiny. To me, they read like the 19th century airship hoax stories mixed with the Mad Gasser of Mattoon.

Michael Guerra
By email

Pilot perception

I read Geoff Clifton's letter [FT331:69] with interest and a certain amount of wry amusement. That's in no way meant to

denigrate his valid point of view, but as a pilot with some military and civil experience amounting to over 8,000 hours, and stick time on aeroplanes ranging from the Ford Trimotor and DH Tiger Moth to the Boeing 747, I feel qualified to make an observation.

We may think of ourselves as witty, good looking, steely-eyed heroes, but we're just as fallible as the next man or woman; perhaps more so in the specific context of witnesses to aerial phenomena. I understand that studies have shown us to steadfastly insist upon interpreting anything anomalous through a filter of our experience, so that we report what we think we saw based upon our expectations and previous experience, rather than just dispassionately reporting what we actually saw. We can't help it – we just mould things to fit into a context we can understand. Pilots make very poor witnesses of air crashes for example, as we

can't help 'filling in the gaps' to make sense of what we saw. Like everyone else, we're also prone to the usual misinterpretations. I remember flying back east across the Atlantic one night. As dawn broke, I was transfixed and genuinely excited by a brilliant, pulsing, multi-coloured object on the horizon ahead. As I gazed bleary-eyed and jet lagged at this object, it slowly rose and changed colour. It must have taken a full 10 minutes for my fogged and fatigued mind to realise that it was Venus, the most obvious of misidentifications, and one that I should have thought of instantly. But it caught me out!

My point is that pilots are not to be thought of as infallible witnesses. Our testimony needs to be viewed as dispassionately as that of any other person. We are perhaps more familiar with aerial phenomena than average, but that doesn't necessarily make us more reliable witnesses. I don't think it's

a case of, as Mr Clifton puts it, our faculties being substandard, but we nowadays undertake specific training in 'Human Factors', which deal with things like confirmation bias, optical illusions, and various other human failings, in order to make us aware that we are subject to misperception and misinterpretation. If we can remain alert to these human vulnerabilities, we can take steps to overcome them. An awareness of our human failings doesn't make us less competent – it actually makes us significantly safer. We can perhaps use our experience to discount or explain more sightings than most people, but that sadly doesn't mean we can't be fooled, confused, or simply wrong. Just ask my wife...

Name and address on file

A bat, maybe

Jenny Randles invites readers to make suggestions for solving a Cheshire UFO mystery [FT332:29]. Here is my contribution. As the object is less than a few inches in size, has a heat signature, moves in a 'controlled' manner, was seen on one occasion to "disappear when above a tree" and seems a regular visitor to the shopping mall I would suggest a small, flying, living creature, maybe a moth but more likely a bat. Bats being mammals would give off a small heat signature, live in trees, hunt insects by night and can be nearly invisible due to the rapid movement of their wings. One came into my bedroom at night once and seemed to me only just visible within a 'blur' caused by its wings. It soon found its way out the window again, no doubt using its sonar. A bat detector would readily identify the presence of a bat and probably allow a definite identification of which species. When the flying object seemed luminous to the naked eye, I would suggest this is because the bat has become covered in bioluminescent particles from rotting wood or honey fungus. Such a phenomenon has been observed on several occasions with barn owls. Of course what holds true for bats and barn owls also applies to insects and I would suggest this as a likely explanation for a variety of 'spook light' or 'will-o-the-wisp' type sightings over the years.

Paul Harris
By email

First-hand accounts from *Fortean Times* readers and posters at forum.forteanimes.com

Bird-headed

Tony Eccles's very interesting letter about culture shock, stress, and paranormal experiences mentions Michael Harmer's ayahuasca trance encounter with a group of bird-headed people [FT330:75]. This reminded me of a very vivid dream I had in the mid-1960s. No drugs were involved.

I dreamed I saw something in the distance fall from the sky onto a hill. Curious, I approached the hill to find a baby lying down with one finger pressed against its lips in Horus fashion. Suddenly I became aware that a group of large, bird-headed people had gathered around me. Later I discovered that they resembled the depictions of Sumerian/Babylonian bird-headed figures. The suddenness of their appearance was quite a shock. Then, as if testing the reality of the situation, I touched the thigh of one of these creatures. I awoke immediately on feeling an Esau-like hairiness. Such was the shock that my eyes seemed to revolve in their sockets much like the whirling turn of an old pub fruit machine. It seemed to me an experience both alien and transgressive – but very real. A truly 'eye-goggling' experience. I had not come across any pictures of bird-headed people before my dream.

Echoing in my head – whether emanating from the dream figures or not – were the words "I am the dragoman of Zurvan". I believe I had already read Robert Zaener's book *Zurvan, a Zoroastrian Dilemma* (1955), so was aware Zurvan/Zervan was a Persian word for 'Eternity'. [Wikipedia tells us that a dragoman is "an interpreter, translator and official guide between Turkish, Arabic and Persian-speaking countries and polities and European embassies... and trading posts." – Editor]. Whatever they signified, I definitely heard the words: "I am the dragoman of Zurvan". Many are the Carrollian rabbit-hole worlds of wonder we enter when we seek to unmask the truth of a dream by a considered reflection.

Terry Little
Sherbourne, Dorset

The Visitor

I'm an American expat living in Japan. A month after we moved into our new house my husband's company transferred him halfway across the country. That's how things are done here. His boss insisted he'd only be gone six months, home one weekend a month. Because it was such a short time there was no reason to spend money to move the entire family. Plus, I was told, since our five-year-old had just started kindergarten, it would be too traumatic for him to change schools mid-year. It was decided we stay put while my husband moved up north for this new project.

The situation before he left was that we all slept in the same room, lined up against the wall: my husband, me in the middle, my son on my other side. After the move my son and I were lonely, but we soon developed little nightly rituals



to keep us entertained: brush teeth, pro wrestle, storybook, sleep.

It must have been the second month of my husband's absence that I developed an overwhelming feeling of dread. Something bad was going to happen. At first it was a vague anxiety, but as the days and weeks passed it grew. And it grew until I was certain something tragic was going to happen to my little boy. It got to the point where after sending my son off to kindergarten in the bus, I'd grab my keys and immediately jump in the car and follow them. I was the creepy mom hanging around the school fence waiting for whatever the bad thing was to happen. I felt if I was near him that maybe I could prevent it or mitigate it somehow.

The dread continued. And then around the fifth month of my husband being gone – about the time we learned the contract was probably going to take a lot longer – I started having bad dreams. Nothing I could remember on waking, however. But the nightmares, too, got worse until finally, one night after our pre-bedtime ceremonies, we both fell asleep. Except I had a lucid dream. It began with a man violently shaking me awake. I tried to get up but he kept using the butts of his hands on my shoulders to push me back down. I'd try again. Down. The final time he sat back and allowed me to sit up. He smiled. I was aware of my son sleeping beside me, but I knew if I looked over to see if he was okay that's where this man-creature-thing's attention would also go. So I froze. Finally, without a word, the man reached his arm out and pointed at me. Still smiling, he leaned in until his finger pressed into my chest. He kept pushing and it felt like it went half way through me. I remember how shocked I was at the pain.

I wanted to scream but couldn't.

My next memory is waking up the following morning. My shoulders and chest where he had touched me still burned and I felt frightened and physically ill about the whole thing. Since I didn't want to upset my son, however, it was business as usual. That is until over breakfast he asked me if Daddy could play with him today after kindergarten. I said, no, sorry. Daddy was still out of town and wouldn't be back for a while. My son looked at me with a funny look, as if he knew I was lying to him. He explained to me that no, he had woken up the night before and saw a man – he assumed was his dad – sitting beside me in bed.

A month later I went to the hospital for a check up and was diagnosed with breast cancer. The feeling of dread, the nightmares, and the visit by the dark man all ceased as soon as I started treatment. In better news, my son just turned 20, my husband is back working in town, and I've been (knock on wood) cancer-free since then.

Thersa Matsuura
Yaizu, Shizuoka, Japan

Musical mice

Three decades ago, I worked for some years as an administrator in the Musicology department of the University here in Oslo. We had about a dozen rehearsal rooms equipped with pianos, and one of my duties was to check that they were in reasonable working order. (Students being students, they took a lot of abuse.) Those familiar with the workings of an upright piano will know that the keys actually go on for several inches inside the instrument. When you strike a key, the other end goes up and connects with the hammer through the 'action', a complicated series of levers, springs and assorted movable bits.

One day I found an abandoned mouse nest on the flat surface that the extended keys make inside the piano. This must have been a very smart mouse, because the nest was placed over the very lowest bass keys, which would seldom be used under normal classical playing. (A budding jazz or rock pianist might give them a bit of a pounding, though.) Even more impressive was the fact that the nest was built entirely from short lengths of cotton thread that had been patiently harvested from each of the 88 or so key actions. Every action is made from several small pieces of wood, felt and leather, and none of these had been touched.

Instead, the mouse had – consciously or not – managed to remove just about the only piece of the action that would *not* result in mechanical failure. I am not an expert on this, but it seems that the threads in question had some non-essential function, so that removing them made no noticeable difference to the 'feel' of the keyboard. I gathered up the beautiful little nest in an empty box and kept it in my office. Stupidly, I forgot to take it with me when I quit the job.

Nils Erik Grande
Oslo, Norway



FORTEAN TRAVELLER

104. The Missing Lake of Guerlédan

BRIAN SHARLAND surveys the strange, post-apocalyptic landscapes and 'drowned villages' revealed by the draining of a lake in Brittany.

Imagine, if you will, the earth so fiercely and deeply cracked that normal walking is difficult; only by negotiating a series of what appear to be stepping-stones does movement become easier in places. Imagine, too, blackened, barkless trees, their dark branches reaching for the sky, and a valley littered with various boats, yachts, rowing boats and even some small launches.

Nearby is a roofless house, with black walls still standing and rooms intact, surrounded by the dead orchard that once provided it with fruit. There are metal structures, eroded though upright, twisted into strange shapes by huge pressures. At this point you could be forgiven for thinking this post-apocalyptic landscape is the site of some nuclear accident or ravaging firestorm.

Yet the truth is quite different: this is the bottom of the lake at Guerlédan in Central Brittany, France. The lake was created in the 1920s by damming

the Nantes-Brest canal, which itself was created from the River Blavet, and it is seven miles (12km) in length and 150ft (45m) deep. Locals say that when the dam was originally built, a village was drowned here; in reality, only a few lock keepers' cottages and various smallholdings were covered by the water. Yet one cannot look upon a group of ruins, a short walk east of the Anse de Sordan, without a little sadness, and wonder if this is what they meant by a village? The buildings form a relatively prosperous looking estate consisting of a largish main house and several outbuildings, all surrounded by the trees of what must have been an apple orchard. It must have been a very nice place to live.

Yet historically the Valley of Blavet wasn't always a pleasant spot. The area was well known for its slate mines, which were originally started by Cistercian monks from the nearby Abbaye de Bon Repos in the 17th century. The huge risk of fire posed

BELOW: Cracked earth and wrecked boats on the bed of the lost lake.

by the then conventional use of thatch made the monks turn to alternatives such as slate to roof their buildings. By the 1920s, these mines were privately owned and a source of much hardship to the workers who toiled in them. The area around Tregnanton contains many such mines, which were simply holes dug as either open cast or pits, some up to 40m deep. The workers had no machinery to descend into the pits except ladders or, in some cases, steps cut into the side of the shaft. There was no ventilation at the bottom of the shafts and children were employed to bring candles down to monitor the available oxygen – once the candle went out, one assumes, there would have been a rush to escape. Likewise, there was no machinery to carry the slate to the surface, and each miner would carry on his back an astonishing 60-100kg (132-220lb) as he went back up the shaft. The stone would then be deposited at the cutters' shelter, where the cutters would dress the stone into the required sizes. It should be noted that the 'shelters' were not intended to protect the cutters from the elements but to prevent the sun and the wind drying out the slate and making it harder to handle. The workers themselves could be identified as either cutters or miners by their skin colour or posture: the miners' faces would be blue from inhaling the slate dust, while the cutters were permanently stooped due to the position they had to work in. The labour being as hard as it was, the mineworkers were given the opportunity to retire at 50 – though due to their unhealthy working conditions, few lived past 40 anyway. They were paid minimal wages but were encouraged to refresh themselves at a café known as "Mrs Thomas's" – Mrs Thomas being the wife of the owner of the mines. The café not only sold cider, food and clothing but legend insists it was also a 'den of ill repute', with stories of prostitution and gambling going on along with the drinking. The workers were not only encouraged to spend what little money they earned but to run up a slate, whereby a tally of what each worker spent at the café and anything over and above the money he was owed in wages was kept. This often resulted in pitiful scenes on payday when workers' wives and dependents would line up on the route to the café and try to extract what money they could before the men entered the place. To add to the men's misery, Mr Thomas's overseer, the man responsible for working out the men's wages, had been systematically cheating them out of their money. Events took a darker turn when the overseer was found out: a violent crowd, anger inflamed no doubt by the café's cider, took justice into its own hands, and the man was brutally murdered by the mob. The





ruins of Mrs Thomas's café can still be seen to the east of Tregnanton, where it is now surrounded by the rapidly growing smartweed, a member of the polygonum family known as *renouée* in France and bloodwort in England. Indeed, since the lake was drained in April 2015, the growth of this weed has been so rapid it has taken it less than three months to cover the 12km (7.5 mile) long valley.

The conversion of the River Blavet into the Nantes-Brest canal brought slate mining to an end in Tregnanton because of competition from other, more efficient, mines elsewhere. Even the canal's working life was to be short-lived: bad planning of the route meant that using the canal to get from Nantes to Brest could take a whole month, and the advent of the railway to the area sounded its death knell too.

The lake was drained in April 2015 to enable the energy authority (EDF) to rebuild part of the dam and put systems in place that would render it unnecessary to ever drain the lake again. If everything had proceeded to schedule, the work would have been finished by November, with the lake starting to refill after that through rainfall and the river itself. However, it seems unlikely that the works will be finished on time so the lake could be empty well into 2016. When the lake was full it was a huge tourist attraction with beaches for swimming and sunbathing set up at various locations, such as the Anse de Sordan, the Anse de Guerlédan and Beau Rivage. There was a sailing school, and at Beau Rivage there is even a dock for big pleasure cruisers; it's strange indeed to see the boats not only grounded but also 40m (130ft) up a steep slope. Campsites abound

The ruins of the café are now surrounded by bloodwort

too and, this being France, each has its own very pleasant restaurant for a full meal or just a snack. Along with these, enterprising locals set up stalls making crêpes – delicious washed down with local cider. With the draining of the lake, these have stayed open. In fact, the previous draining of the lake, in 1985, proved to be a massive tourist draw when an estimated 3,000,000 tourists descended on the area, which was quite unprepared for such an influx. The memory of the traffic chaos on minor country roads lives on to this day, so this time around the area has been efficiently controlled with red routes, blue routes and parking restricted to certain locations. Be warned: these parking restrictions often mean walks of over a kilometre before you even arrive at the lake bed, which heaves with visitors.

Cycling makes it possible to visit the whole lake in a single day. Walkers have a tougher job of it, as the slopes are steep and a lack of care while descending could result in a serious fall. EDF, the company that runs the dam and sponsors the whole tourist machine through the Offices de Tourisme du Pays Centre Bretagne, has forbidden pedestrian access to the dam floor, but are aware that it's impossible to police

such activity. Instead, guides advise the tourists intent on reaching the lake floor that it is forbidden – but if they do go and then injure themselves, the responsibility is entirely theirs.

The risk is well worth it though. The scenery is amazing, from post-apocalyptic scenes to breathtaking panoramas. Wildlife makes good use of the area too. On the two visits I made I saw herons, buntings, mallard and birds of prey, and over 70 different species winter in the area. The large number of daytime visitors, though, makes early visits a must for the keen birdwatcher. Surrounded by the Forest of Quénécan on its west and south banks, the natural attractions of the area are obvious.

Once Brittany's biggest lake – and soon to be so once again – Guerlédan is also one of Brittany's best kept secrets. With the proximity of Les Abbayés de Bon Repos, Liscuis, site of prehistoric dolmens, and le Forge des Salles, the lake (full or empty) is well worth a visit or even a prolonged exploration at any time of year. On a final note I asked the guide who escorted me around the area if the lake had any ghost stories, signs of activity by the Breton fairies (known as Corrigons), BVM sightings or weird local legends? Her disappointing reply was: "No, it's pretty quiet round here".

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BRIAN SHARLAND is a landscape photographer and chronicler of his local environment. Currently staying in Brittany as an artist-in-residence, he is working to complete a project photographing the Brittany countryside and seascape accompanied by poetry and prose. Normally he lives in London.

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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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SOON AFTER MEETING OLCOTT, Madame BLAVATSKY WROTE HER COLOSSAL BOOK "ISIS UNVEILED" - WITH THE OCCASIONAL HELP OF SPIRITS...



THIS WAS THE FIRST EXPOSITION OF HER SYSTEM OF THOUGHT, WHICH SHE CALLED THEOSOPHY! TO THE AMAZEMENT OF ALL, "ISIS UNVEILED" BECAME A FREAK BEST-SELLER!



SHE AND OLCOTT FOUNDED THE FIRST THEOSOPHICAL LODGE IN NEW YORK... THEN SET OFF TO INDIA AND CEYLON TO SPREAD THE WORD...



SHE IMPRESSED MANY INDIANS WITH HER STRANGE ABILITIES - TO CONTROL FLAMES...



...TO MAKE FLOWERS APPEAR IN THE AIR...



...AND TO LOCATE LOST PROPERTY!

...THIRD DRAWER DOWN, UNDER THE PILLOW CASES...



BY THE TIME SHE LEFT INDIA, THERE WERE MORE THAN 100 BRANCHES OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY THERE!



SHE CAME TO ENGLAND FOR HER FINAL YEARS. MANY FAMOUS PEOPLE VISITED HER, INCLUDING WB YEATS, WHO CLAIMED THAT:



SHE DIED FROM FLU IN 1891... HER FOLLOWERS CALL THIS "WHITE LOTUS DAY"...



BUT SHE BECAME EVEN MORE INFLUENTIAL AFTER HER DEATH! AMONG THOSE WHO ADMIRER HER WERE:



AND THAT'S ALL THIS COMIC HAS TO SAY ABOUT MADAME BLAVATSKY! THEOSOPHY, HER SPIRITUAL CLUB, HAS ADHERENTS EVEN TODAY, BUT NOT AROUND HERE

COMING NEXT MONTH



A LONDON HAUNTING IN SEARCH OF THE GHOSTS OF BERKELEY SQUARE



ROUND THE HORNS THE STORY OF THE ABBOTTS BROMLEY HORN DANCE



ALAN GARNER,
SHADOW PEOPLE,
BIBLICAL BOTANY,
AND MUCH MORE...

FORTEAN TIMES 335

ON SALE 10 DEC 2015

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL



Hideto Ueda, a 66-year-old Japanese man, was taking a selfie at the Taj Mahal in Agra, India, on 17 September when he fell backwards down a flight of stairs and suffered a fatal head injury. He was thought to be the 12th person this year to die from taking a selfie, compared with just eight fatal shark attacks worldwide. Four of the selfie deaths were caused by falling. The next leading cause of deaths was from being hit by trains. Earlier in September, college student Deleon Alonso Smith, 19, shot himself dead by accident as he posed with a gun for a selfie in his room in Houston, Texas. The father of two was believed to have found the weapon earlier in the day and had been playing with it. In August, a man was gored to death by a bull while taking a selfie at the bull running festival in Villaseca de la Sagra in Spain.

Concern over the dangers inherent with posing for a photo without taking in what is happening around you is leading to selfie bans in public areas. Waterton Canyon in Denver, Colorado, had to close because visitors couldn't stop trying to take selfies with the bears. Disney has banned selfie sticks at all its theme parks over safety concerns, and it seems every week another establishment follows suit. In July, the Russian Interior Ministry released a brochure, warning about cool selfies that "could cost you your life." *Sun*, 3+19 Sept; *D.Mirror*, 19+21 Sept 2015.

A drunken man in India died after he fell into a hole and construction workers built a road over him. Latori Barman, 45, was returning home from a fair in Sleemanabad, Madhya Pradesh, on 18 September when he fell into the crater. Failing to notice him in the evening light, labourers filled the hole with molten tar and used a heavy roller to flatten the surface. Local people saw the man's shirt (or his hand) three days later and his body was pulled out of the road. Two workers from the road repair crew were arrested. *D.Telegraph*, 22 Sept; *Metro*, 23 Sept 2015.

A drunken husband with a penchant for hiding from his wife until he had slept it off drowned in a giant water jar. Yaem Chaileang, 37, was found dead by his wife Kith Sreyya, 35, following a boozy night out in Poipet, Cambodia. He died despite the jar containing only a small amount of water. *Metro*, 30 Sept 2015.

A lonely shepherd dropped dead after having sex with a scarecrow. Police discovered the rotting remains of Jose Alberto, 58, after neighbours reported a foul smell coming from his house in San Jose de Balcarce, eastern Argentina. He was naked from the waist down and the scarecrow was lying next to him. "I initially thought there were two bodies but then I realised one was a scarecrow wearing lipstick and a long-haired wig," said police spokesman Rodolfo Moure. "There were no signs of violence and we are working on the assumption that the man died during sex with the scarecrow. Straw had been stuffed inside old clothes that had been sewn together to make the scarecrow. We are awaiting the results of an autopsy." A neighbour said that

Alberto "was a solitary man, not very talkative and we never saw him have any friends round." *D.Mirror*, 4 April 2015.

Andrej Gajdos, 19, of Weston-super-Mare in Somerset, worked out twice a day and used steroids to turn his 7ft 2in (2.18m) frame into 19 stone (120kg) of muscle. He aimed to beef up like wrestling and film star The Rock, but the steroids made his heart grow 50 per cent bigger than average. He died outside a supermarket when his thoracic aorta, a part of the chest's main artery, burst. *Sun*, 24 Sept 2015.

Rugby coach Rob Walton, 36, nicknamed Yogurt, was killed by a massive wave that broke his back while he was swimming off the coast of Landes, southwest France, on 10 August. Walton, 6ft 9in (2m) tall and weighing 252lb (114kg), was knocked out and dragged underwater when the impact of the wave had a whiplash effect. He died at the scene. A rugby colleague said: "He was a massive person in every sense. He was honest, reliable, a fantastic individual and a big personality." *Metro*, *Sun*, 12 Aug 2015.

A golfer was stung to death on 9 September when he disturbed a bees' nest looking for a ball. Darryl Dever, 64, followed a wayward shot deep into undergrowth and unsettled the swarm on the ground. The bees stung him at least 20 times in the head, neck and shoulders, and he collapsed, fighting to breathe. A doctor tried to save him, but he died on the course at the Treetops Resort near Gaylord, Michigan. Dever had no known allergy to bee stings, but enough stings can be fatal even to someone without an allergy. A friend said: "It was just too many, too fast." *[AP]* 10 Sept; *D.Mirror*, 12 Sept 2015.

On 11 August, Clive Southall, 83, of Brierley Hill, West Midlands, was at his holiday caravan in Welshpool, Mid Wales, clearing woodland when he slipped and accidentally disturbed a wasps' nest. The swarm that attacked him was so large that his family could "hardly see his face". He ran to his caravan and tried to wash them off in the shower, but went into anaphylactic shock and collapsed. He was airlifted to hospital but died later that day. *D.Mail*, *Sun*, 4 Sept 2015.

Retired primary school teacher Rosemary Turnbull, 62, was fatally crushed between two horses. She suffered multiple wounds to her chest and heart as she led the animals ahead of a hunting pack. The horses were often 'spooked' by the dogs and might have tried to escape during the incident, on a farm in Tonbridge, Kent. Ms Turnbull was pronounced dead at the scene. *D.Telegraph*, 28 Feb 2015.

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