

SECOND RUN FOUR-YEAR-OLD BOY'S PAST LIFE IN 1930s HOLLYWOOD CHALLENGER CONSPIRACY SHUTTLE CREW'S SUSPICIOUS SURVIVAL ESTABLISHMENT ASSASSINS WHO KILLED LAWRENCE OF ARABIA?

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# Phantom Hitchhikers

Real-life meetings with Britain's road ghosts

Mushroom Clouds on Mars

and other anomalies from the red planet

# Mugabe's Magic Rock

Witches and weirdness in Zimbabwean politics







# **ForteanTimes**



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'Naga corpse' found in fishing pond





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# editoria

# Reopening the case files

## **UNCANNY ENCOUNTERS**

Such is the nature of much forteana - anecdotal evidence, scattered witness accounts, ephemeral stories culled from news clippings - that we don't always get the opportunity to revisit cases from the past, but in this issue we return to stories that have been covered previously in FTin the hope of adding to our knowledge about them and possibly similar incidents elsewhere.

Jenny Randles has, as regular readers will be aware, reopened her files on one of Britain's most baffling and high-profile UFO encounter cases - that of PC Alan Godfrey - and, in the fourth and concluding part of her reassessment

(pp28-30) Jenny presents some little-known material involving UAP (Unidentified Atmospheric Phenomena) that may allow us to make some headway in interpreting the strange sequence of events that led PC Godfrey to claim he was abducted by aliens in November 1980. As usual, there are no definitive answers here, but certainly new avenues for investigation, even in a case that dates back nearly 35 years.

Rob Gandy has also returned to an old case: back in 1990, he wrote of an intriguing 'Phantom Hitchhiker' encounter in

these pages (FT56:52-53). The account, which came to light in a chance conversation, offered the classic scenario in which a driver perceives a strange passenger in the back seat of their car, only for the 'hitchhiker' to vanish as mysteriously and suddenly as he had appeared. This now familiar mini-narrative is, of course, the stuff of friend-of-a-friend (or foaf) tales: stories of alleged events with surprising or supernatural twists that supposedly happened to someone known at second or third hand. (It's no surprise that Jan Harold Brunvand chose The Vanishing Hitchhiker as the title of his seminal book on urban legends). As Alan Murdie points out in this issue's Ghostwatch column (pp18-19), Britain is rich in folklore relating to haunted highways, and phantom hitchhikers are "the most ubiquitous and folkloric of all road ghosts with tales told for decades but with a distinct shortage of reliable witnesses". Well, Rob has made use of local media to see if any further encounters with the 'Old Man of Halsall Moss' had taken place in the intervening decades and turned up some fascinating - and seemingly reliable - new witness accounts that suggest that the lanes around the Lancashire village of Halsall are something of a hotspot for phantom hitchhiker encounters as well as other related oddities (pp32-39). If readers have any further stories to add concerning

similar encounters from the area - or, indeed, elsewhere - then please send them to us at the usual address or email. For a recent account of such an experience, see Nigel Suckling's letter in FT326:73.

### **ENFIELD ON SCREEN**

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"DON'T STOP! IT'S ONE OF THOSE

PHANTOM HITCHHIKERS!

Another fortean classic has received a fresh interpretation of a rather different kind. Hopefully, most readers will have been able to see Sky Living's excellent new three-part drama based on the famous Enfield Poltergeist case (we're two episodes in as we go to press, and eagerly await the conclusion). The Enfield

Haunting follows in the footsteps of the 2012 film When the Lights Went Out (which dramatised the 'Black Monk of Pontefract' case; see FT293:28-37) in bringing a notable British polt case to the screen and revelling in its 1970s period trappings (David Soul posters, terrifying wallpaper, KerPlunk). Where this TV drama really shines though is in its sensitive writing and wonderful central performances from Eleanor Worthington-Cox as Janet, the young girl at the centre of the outbreak, and Timothy Spall and Matthew Macfadyen as

SPR investigators Maurice Grosse and Guy Lyon Playfair. We asked Guy – a regular FT contributor over the years and the author of This House is Haunted, the book on which the series is loosely based - what it felt like to see the events of nearly 40 years adapted to televsision in this

'It was quite an honour to be portrayed by award-winning Matthew Macfadven," he told us, "whom I envy for his ability to seduce Keira Knightley twice - in Pride and Prejudice and again in Anna Karenina. How true to life he was as me is not for me to say. I suspect not very, but most of The Enfield Haunting didn't have much to do with reality as I recall it either, except the red E-type Jaguar which was absolutely authentic."





SEE PAGE 78



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# strangedays

# **Pirate loot... Possibly**

Wreck diver claims silver ingot is from the ship that William Kidd scuttled

Half a silver bar believed to be the first piece of the long-lost treasure haul of the Scottish pirate William Kidd has been found in shallow waters off Madagascar. The 110lb (50kg) ingot, engraved with the initials TS and dated 1695 - just three years before Captain Kidd's ship sank - was discovered in a hidden chamber of a wreck by Barry Clifford, 70, a diver from Massachusetts who has been exploring the bay for 15 years. The moment was recorded by a documentary film crew. If the wreck is confirmed to be Kidd's, it will bring to an end a global search for the privateer's booty that began almost the moment he was hanged for piracy in 1701 and which inspired Robert Louis Stevenson when writing Treasure Island

Clifford said he discovered the ingot just days before the end of his latest expedition as he tried to find Kidd's cabin buried under the heavy stones used as ballast in old galleons. "As I started to remove some of the stone and mud it opened up into a chamber," he said. "It was pitch black but the bottom was covered in metal - I could feel it and the detector I had with me was screaming. As I tried to move it I couldn't, it was too heavy." He made out a piece of "odd-shaped" metal in the ceiling, which then collapsed. Returning when the dust had settled, he discovered the stone was half of a silver bar.

The half-bar was guarded by soldiers as it was handed over to Malagasy president Hery Rajaonarimampianina on 7 May in a ceremony attended by the British and American ambassadors on Île Sainte-Marie. Clifford believes there may be hundreds more such bars lying in



# **Hundreds** more bars may be lying in the chamber

the chamber he unearthed. His team has discovered 13 wrecks in the area known as the Bay of Pirates, because of its popularity with buccaneers in the 17th century. It claims to have found Kidd's Adventure Galley, which he ordered to be burned and scuttled in shallow water just 30ft (9m) from shore - of which country or island has always been debated. There is a problem LEFT: A remarkably cleanlooking Captain Kidd hanging in chains - no sign of him being dipped in tar. BELOW: The silver ingot

here, not mentioned in the news reports: if Kidd ordered his ship to be scuttled, why did he not first retrieve its valuable cargo of bullion?

John de Bry, a Florida archæologist who works with Clifford and has seen lots of ingots from Spanish galleons, identified the silver bar as originating from an area once in Peruvian territory (probably the prodigious and remote mine of Potosí). Most of the pirates in the Madagascar area attacked ships coming

from the Orient with spices, silk and porcelain, but Kidd was known to have taken silver bars from a ship leaving Lima in Peru. While for centuries bounty hunters have searched for Kidd's treasure in Nova Scotia and Long Island outside New York, where he was eventually captured, few had thought to look around Madagascar.

UNESCO, the United Nations' cultural body, expressed concern that a professional archæologist had not been permanently on site to oversee Clifford's search. UNESCO clashed with him last year when he announced he had identified the wreck of Columbus's flagship that sank in 1492 off Haiti. The claim sparked global publicity but was soon disproved by UNESCO, which determined it was a ship from a later period. Clifford is best known as the discoverer of the world's first fully verified pirate shipwreck, the Whydah, in 1984.

Kidd is thought to have been born in Greenock or the Dundee area in about 1645. He was appointed by the Crown to tackle piracy and capture enemy French ships, but turned to piracy himself. In 1698, he looted the Armenian ship the Quedagh Merchant, which was carrying satins, muslins, gold and silver, while sailing under French colours. Unfortunately for Kidd, the captain was an Englishman, and it is thought that a large amount of the cargo belonged to the British East India Company. Captured and brought back to London, Kidd was found guilty of piracy and the murder of his crewman William Moore during a row in 1697, and sentenced to death. During his execution in Wapping on 23 May 1701, the first rope put around his neck broke, so he was strung up a second time. That rope also snapped, but the third one held. Afterwards, his body was dipped in tar and hung in chains at Tilbury for three years. [AFP] BBC News, 7 May; D.Telegraph, 8 May 2015.





# ENTER THE DRAGON

Thai villager finds corpse of mythical Naga in local fishing pond

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# MARTIAN MYSTERIES

Weird clouds and nuclear explosions on the Red Planet

PAGE 14



# BIGFOOT OR BIG FAKE?

Is this vintage Sasquatch snap just too good to be true?

**PAGE 21** 

# The Conspirasphere

Why let facts get in the way? **NOEL ROONEY** on the survivors of the Challenger shuttle diasaster and the organisation behind just about everything else...



Some examples of schadenfreude are closer to necrophilia than others. Take *Simonshack*, for instance: this individual would like us to consider the possibility that at least four members of the crew of the space shuttle *Challenger*, which famously (and, this writer would suggest, fairly publicly) exploded on re-entry in 1986, are alive and well. Given his investigative 'method', it will no doubt take only a short while for other intrepid conspiracy sleuths to find evidence for the suspicious survival of the other crew members.

The idea is simple enough. Take the names of crew members; Google those names, and look for people (there are bound to be some, unless the name is particularly outlandish, which isn't the case for the Challenger crew) of a certain age who could (if you don't look too closely) resemble those crew members 30 years on. Post a photograph, and if there is some kind of resemblance, you have yourself a theory. The chances of success are pretty high in a population of hundreds of millions.

And, if you can't find a photo-fit ghoul for a particular person, substitute that person's brother. Don't bother to check if the brother happens to have a birth certificate, or any other evidence of having lived his own life; just paste him in, cock your head to one side and say: just throwing it out there, you know, just saying it.

Well, no one's going to believe that, are they? Actually, yes, some people are going to believe that, because one of the enduring ironies of the knee-jerk end of the conspiracy spectrum is that what passes for doubt about establishment lies is so often a wrapping for a species of rampant gullibility,

where whatever people choose to just 'throw out there' will find a whole congregation of willing catchers. It's a little difficult to answer the standard *cui bono* question here, but that shouldn't stand in the way of necrophiliac narcissism, should it?

On an altogether lighter note, Preston James and Mike Harris have published an article on *Veterans Today* exposing the evil Khazarian Mafia, the organisation they suggest is responsible for (inter alia): the English Civil War (they hired Oliver Cromwell, apparently); the federal reserve, the IRS, the FBI, FEMA, and the department of Homeland Security. Not bad for a kingdom that bit the dust 1,000 years ago – but, then, when it comes to the various groups of bearded men under a hill who really run the world, reincarnation is a mere reptilian trifle.

At some point in their history, the KM morphed into the Rothschild family, and bought the world they were already running. I could go on, but I think you should enjoy the whole thing in full yourself; if you find they missed any of the usual elements of the conspiracy coconut shy, you can always add them yourself, while flicking through photos of elderly escapees from space shuttle disasters. Why worry that there just might be real political conspiracies going on out there when you can gloat over dead people who aren't, and vanquished kingdoms that just keep giving?

www.cluesforum.info/viewtopic. php?t=935&p=2395059#p2395059

www.veteranstoday.com/2015/03/08/ the-hidden-history-of-the-incredibly-evilkhazarian-mafia/

# **EXTRA! EXTRA!**

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

# Woman gassed up before vanishing

Seattle Times, 31 July 2014.

# Rats regret bad decisions, study says

BBC News, 9 June 2014.

SUSPECTED THIEF SMASHES HIS WAY INTO CAFÉ, MAKES CRAB CAKES

Daily Star, -Aug 2014.

# Man who pretended to be a ghost fined £35

Guardian, 8 Aug 2014.



Liverpool Echo, 12 Aug 2014.

# New bishop will embrace women

Whitby Gazette, 16 May 2014.





# SIDELINES...

## TRAUMATISED BY **EXORCISM**

Polish children who went to a camp expecting to celebrate Lent wept and screamed when the priest carried out a mass exorcism. About 1,000 pupils from the town of Gryfice went on the three-day trip, billed as helping "young people explore God." But Tomas Wieczorek, 37, was more interested in exorcising their demons. "It was like a mental asylum," said a student. "Some were writhing on the floor, others were laughing hysterically." mirror.co.uk, 30 Mar 2015.

### LARGEST EVER IMPACT

Scientists in Australia have discovered in the Warburton Basin what they say is the largest asteroid impact area ever found. The 250-mile (400km) wide area is buried deep in the Earth's crust and consists of two separate impact scars. The asteroid is thought to have broken into two before it hit at least 300 million years ago, with each fragment more than six miles (10km) across. No known extinction event has been found to match these twin collisions, BBC News, 24 Mar 2015.

# **ZEN BONFIRE**

A fire extinguisher factory in Chicago caught fire on 19 March and it took 156 firefighters all night to contain the ironic blaze. A HazMat team was called in out of fear that some of the extinguisher chemicals might be toxic because of the fire. Nobody was injured. nbcchicago.com, 20 Mar 2015.

# **DOUBLE RUBBLE**

A couple survived two homes being demolished in three months. First, a car smashed into the sitting room of Donna Hillyer's house; then the temporary home where she moved with her baby twins and husband Tim was wrecked by a gas blast. Donna, 33, of Walthamstow, east London, said: "We weren't home on either occasion, so maybe we have the best luck." (The Gang of Fort can think of better luck.) Sun, 18 Feb 2015.

# **SECOND RUN?**

OKIE FOUR-YEAR-OLD CLAIMS TO HAVE PARTIED WITH RITA HAYWORTH IN HIS PREVIOUS HOLLYWOOD LIFE

A boy has recounted in impressive detail what he claims is his past life as a little-known 1930s Hollywood agent. At the age of four, Ryan Hammons from Muskogee, Oklahoma, began directing imaginary movies. Shouts of "Action!" often echoed from his room. He also began having vivid nightmares that his mother Cyndi and policeman father Kevin couldn't account for. A year later he told Cyndi: "I used to be somebody else." He told her of his previous experiences: travelling the world, partying with Rita Hayworth and dancing on Broadway. He recalled how he was once punched by Marilyn Monroe's bodyguards for trying to talk to her. He said that he liked being Ryan but wanted to go back to his big house on the hill with a swimming pool. He recalled in detail trips to the café-lined boulevards of Paris and trips to the Eiffel Tower. His mother said: "His stories were so detailed and they were so extensive, that it just wasn't like a child could have made it up." As a Baptist, she had not previously believed in reincarnation.

Browsing a Hollywood memorial book borrowed from a library. Cyndi and her son found a still from Night After Night (1932), Mae West's first film. Two men in the centre of the picture were confronting one another. Four other men surrounded them. Cyndi didn't recognise any of the faces, but Ryan pointed to one of the men in the middle. "Hey Mom," he said. "That's George. We did a picture together." His finger then shot over to a man on the right, wearing an overcoat and a scowl. "That guy's

The book didn't provide any names of the actors pictured, but Cyndi found that the man

me. I found me!"



ABOVE: Gangsterish George Raft, with whom Ryan Hammons claims to have worked.

# "That's George. We did a picture together"

Ryan said was "George" was the film star George Raft, famous for his Mob connections and gangster roles (for example in Scarface and Some Like It Hot). However, she couldn't identify the man Ryan said had been him. She sought the

help of Dr Jim Tucker, a professor of Psychiatry and Neurobehavioral

Sciences at the University of Virginia, whom she had found through her online research. For nearly 15 years, Tucker had continued the work of the late Dr Ian Stevenson, investigating children, usually between the ages of two and six, who claim to have had past lives. Tucker passed the photo from Night After Night to film archivist Kate Cope, who after weeks of research discovered the scowling man's name: Marty Martyn, an uncredited extra in the film. He was born Morris Kolinsky in Philadelphia, the son of Ukrainianborn parents, Philip and Rebecca Kolinsky.

Tucker hadn't shared that



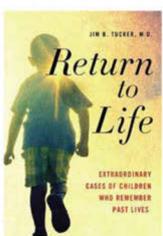
family when he visited them a few weeks later. He laid out black and white photos of four women on the kitchen table. Three of them were random. Tucker asked Ryan, "Do any of these mean anything to you?" Ryan pointed to one, saying she looked familiar. It was Marty Martyn's last wife. Not long afterward, Tucker and the Hammonses travelled to California to meet Martyn's daughter. Tucker had talked to the woman before her meeting with Ryan, and she confirmed dozens of facts Ryan had given about her father.

Ryan said he danced in New York: Martyn was a Broadway dancer. Ryan said he was also an "agent," and that people where he worked had changed their names: Martyn worked for years at a wellknown talent agency in Hollywood - where stage names are often created - after his dancing career ended. Ryan said his old address had "Rock" in its name: Martyn lived at 825 North Roxbury Drive in Beverly Hills. Ryan said he knew a man named Senator Five: Martyn's daughter said she had a picture of her father with a Senator Ives, Irving Ives, of New York, who served in the US Senate from 1947 to 1959.

Martyn's daughter had grown up believing her father had one sister. but Ryan told Tucker that he had had two, a fact Tucker was able to confirm. Tucker thought Ryan might have provided an incorrect detail about Martyn's life when he said he "didn't see why God would let you get to be 61 and then make you come back as a baby." According to his death certificate. Martyn had died in 1964 at the age of 59, not 61. However, after examining old census records, Tucker discovered that Martyn had been born in 1903, not 1905 as his birth certificate claimed, making Ryan's statement eerily correct. In all, Tucker was able to confirm 90 out of 102 details that Ryan had given about his past life.

The meeting later between Ryan and Martyn's daughter didn't go well. Ryan shook her hand then hid behind Cyndi for the rest of the time. Upon learning her age, he said: "She got old. Why didn't she wait for me?" Ryan was angry, seemingly unable to understand





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why his 'daughter' changed so much through the years and didn't wait for his return. He was later quoted as saying: "Same face, but she didn't wait on me. She changed; her energy changed. I don't want to go back. I want to always keep this family." Ryan is now 10 and his memories of his former life have almost faded away.

Roughly 70 per cent of the children in the reincarnation surveys of Stevenson and Ryan say they died violent or unexpected deaths in their previous life. Martyn had died rather young from cancer. Males account for close to threequarters of those deaths - almost precisely the same ratio of males who die of unnatural causes in the general population. More cases are reported in countries where reincarnation is part of the religious culture, but Tucker says there is no correlation

**ABOVE**: Dr Jim Tucker, who confirmed many of the details Ryan had given.

between how strong a case is deemed and that family's beliefs in reincarnation. One out of five children who report a past life say they recall the intermission, the time between death and birth. although there is no consistent view of what that's like. Some allege they were in "God's house", while others claim they waited near where they died before "going inside" their mother. In cases where a child's story has been traced to another individual, the median time between the death of that person and the child's birth is about 16 months.

Further research by Tucker and others has shown the children generally have above-average IQs and do not possess any mental or emotional disorders beyond average groups of children. None appears to have been dissociating from painful family situations. Nearly 20 per cent of the children studied have scarlike birthmarks or even unusual deformities that closely match marks or injuries the person whose life the child recalls received at or near his or her death. Most children's claims generally subside around age six, coinciding roughly with what Tucker says is the time children's brains ready themselves for a new stage of development. Jim B Tucker is the author of Life Before Life and Return to Life. mirror.co.uk, breitbart.com, 16 Mar; D.Mail, 23 Mar; University of Virginia Magazine, 27 Apr 2015.

# **SIDELINES...**

### **NASAL STRATEGY**

In the interests of "watch and wait" rather than invasive poking, experts at the University Hospital of Wales have worked out how long it takes various sweets to dissolve when stuck up a child's nostril: Polo mints, 40–45 minutes; Skittles, 35–40; Smarties, 30–35; TicTac, 25–30; Fizzers, 10–15. Sunday Telegraph, 8 Feb 2015.

### **SPINACH SHOCK**

Terri Powis, 33, opened a bag of frozen spinach from her local Asda in High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, on 19 January and found a severed rat's head – rather more off-putting than most accidental ingredients. *D.Mail, 18 Feb 2015.* 

### **VACULA BITES**

A South Korean woman who fell asleep on the floor was attacked by her robotic vacuum cleaner on 3 January. The 52-year-old from Changwon awoke in agony after the machine sucked up 2in (5cm) of her hair, and had to call firemen when she was unable to extricate herself. It required two paramedics to free her from the machine's nozzle. telegraph.co.uk, 9 Feb; Sun, 10 Feb 2015.

# **SOUND THIS OUT**

Thumping hip-hop bass lines could be used to put out fires. Two engineering students at Virginia's George Mason University have built a hand-held device that uses sound to extinguish flames. It works because low-frequency noise (which they liken to the thump of hip-hop) separates oxygen from fuel to stop a fire burning. MX News (Sydney), 17 Mar 2015.



# SIDELINES...

# **BART SIMPSON. MENACE**

Bartholomew Simpson, 37. found an object with his metal detector and brought it home to Laindon in Essex. Wiping off the mud, he found it was a World War II cannon shell and called police, who cleared the street. The shell was removed and exploded at a rubbish dump, Metro, D.Mail, 21 Jan 2105.

### **COMING TO GET CHOO**

Police are hunting a middleaged man in a tweed jacket who slaps shoppers if they sneeze. On 16 March he slapped a woman round the head after she sneezed in Carlisle town centre. The next day his victim was an 82-year-old woman in Scotch Street. Carlisle. The pensioner was left feeling "confused and upset". D.Mail, 21 Mar 2015.

# **CHOC CHALLENGE**

A chocolate museum in Minsk, Belarus, has told visitors to stop eating the exhibits. "If they don't," said a spokesman, "soon there will be nothing left." Metro, 19 Mar 2015.

# **DESPERATE DEED**

A 19-year-old youth from the city of Nantong in China's Jiangsu province, known only as "Little Wang", took a kitchen knife from the family home and hacked off his left hand in an attempt to cure his addiction to the Internet. He was taken to hospital. D.Telegraph, 4 Feb 2015.



# FRES & FREBALLS UNEXPLAINED FIRES AND THE DISCOVERY OF THE 'CORPSE' OF A MYTHICAL NAGA



ABOVE: The house where 150 unexplained fires broke out in less than two months.

# **FIERY PERSECUTION**

In March and April, a rash of unexplained fires broke out in the house of Lom Sakwan, 63, in the Tamot district of Phatthalung in Thailand, with 150 incidents in under two months. On 22 April Mr Lom was visited by a group of officials led by the town's governor Winai Buipradit. While they were checking the house, a wardrobe in one bedroom caught fire, ruining a pair of underpants in a drawer before being extinguished by family members. Mr Lom and his family had lived in the house since 2007. The first fire broke out on 17 March, destroying a makeshift shelter behind the house. Mr Lom consulted local sorcerers, some of whom predicted that there would be as many as 300 fires at his

The Mineral Resources Office, which collected samples of firedamaged objects for lab tests on 28 March, "initially assumed the fires [were] caused by a reaction to calcium carbonate, the chief component of limestone, carbon dioxide, gas and heat as the house was situated on layers of lime". Presumably that "initially" means they changed their minds. Sawai Ruyant, a television news reporter, stayed overnight in the house on 21 April and saw minor fires break out five times. Mr Winai promised

# A wardrobe caught fire, ruining a pair of underpants

to "coordinate with relevant agencies to inspect the house". He said Mr Lom insisted on staying in the house; but if the cause of the fires remained unknown and no measures could be devised to prevent them, Mr Winai would consult the provincial Red Cross office to build a new house for the family, but only with their consent.

A news team from Digital

Channel 8 arrived to investigate. Ten fires broke out in the house while the TV people were there, but they "could not find anything unusual". They then surreptitiously set up several hidden surveillance cameras to see if anything happened during the night. One of these caught a female relative of the houseowner "acting suspiciously near the room corner as if she were lighting something." The woman then walked out and returned seconds later with a small girl, directing her to the corner where she had been, saying "Fire, fire!" Many people then came in and put the fire out. The TV company seems to have assumed that the mystery was now explained and was a matter for the police to investigate. However, the notion that the so-far unnamed woman was behind every flaming outbreak in the house is a bit of a stretch - and what was her motive? As in many previous cases of combustion clusters, those keen to solve the mystery may well have jumped to premature conclusions. bangkokpost.com, 22 April; Thai PBS (broadcaster), 29 April 2015.

For other studies of combustion clusters and fiery poltergeist outbreaks, see: FT38:32 (Pyrenees); FT44:43-44 (West Virginia); FT55:28 (Italy); FT107:17 (Swaziland); FT183:8-9, 185:5, 231:24 (Sicily and Italy); FT281:40-44 (Malaysia and Queensland); FT302:42-45 (Turkey); FT308:40-

41 (Jamaica).



ABOVE: Bangkok's Channel 8 filmed a woman "acting suspiciously".



**DRAGON EXCITEMENT** 

In late April, hundreds of pilgrims gathered in Baan Kan Sai village, northeastern Thailand, to pray to what they believed was the corpse of a mythical beast known as the Naga, a snake-like dragon that features in Hindu and Buddhist cosmology. Sayan Chomkamsingha, 41, owner of the house where the alleged Naga was enshrined, said he found it on 20 April while fishing in a nearby pond. He said it was moving and slimy when he first encountered it, but turned into bronze the moment it touched the air. Police arrived on 23 April to take the figurine to a local office of the Department of Fine Arts, for experts to determine whether or not it was an archæological object and therefore a national treasure. Upon hearing the news, more than 300 local people began booing the officers and preventing them from taking the figurine. Village chief Teerasit Parkrit eventually convinced the crowd to back down, allowing the police to take the object to their van. However, some enraged pilgrims ran after the van and tried to break the vehicle's window, leading to another round of negotiations.

The object was eventually taken to the Department of Fine Arts. where it was determined to be less than 30 years old and returned it to the police. More than 100 people gathered in front of the police station. To avoid further disturbance. the object was returned to Sayan and the protesters dispersed. Sayan insisted the Naga was genuine, and said he had no intention

of exploiting anyone. His wife, Tiamchan Chomkamsingha, said she believes the figurine was the several months earlier. "When I was

same Naga she spotted in the pond





TOP LEFT: Naga statues in Bangkok. ABOVE: Sayan Chomkamsingha points to where the Naga was found, and pilgrims to Baan Kan Sai village marvel at the figurine.

selling food next to Manao Pond, almost every day I saw the Naga reaching up to the surface and playing with water," she said. "It's a miracle".

Alleged sightings of the Naga are common in northeastern Thailand. Every October or early November, thousands gather on the banks of the Mekong in Nong Khai province and elsewhere to watch the Naga shoot mysterious 'fireballs' into the sky. The event also brings annual heated debates over the source of the fireballs, which are variously explained as Naga 'eggs', pockets of flammable natural gas drawn to the water surface by lunar gravitation, or incendiary bullets fired from rifles on the Laotian side of the river. See FT105:22 and "In the coils of the Naga" by Richard Freeman [FT166:30-35]. khaosodenglish.com, 23 April 2015.

# SIDELINES...

# **NURSE FROM HELL**

A Japanese court has jailed a care assistant at a Kyoto hospital for three years for tearing off the toenails of elderly natients to relieve her own frustration. Akemi Sato peeled off the nails of four patients with dementia, some of whom were in their 90s. Sato had previously been convicted for the same offense. (Queensland) Courier-Mail, 10-11 Dec 2011.

# **FELINE FEAST**

Animal rights activists petitioned for roast cat in white wine and garlic sauce to be taken off the menu in Switzerland at Christmas. Few families admit to eating the traditional festive meal, but it would allegedly have been served up in about one in 20 homes. The Swiss also breed dogs for food. Metro, 27 Nov 2014.

## **NEVER THE BRIDE**

Jamie Jackson has smashed the world record for catching bridal bouquets at weddings and is seeking recognition for it from Guinness World Records. Jackson, a single woman from Salt Lake City in Utah, has caught 46 bouquets since 1996 and has the documentation to prove it. The current record of 11 bouquets caught by Stephanie Monyak of Pennsylvania has stood since 2004. irishexaminer.com, 17 Feb 2015.

## WHO TOOK HIS LEG?

Drunk Vusi Thani, 43, was killed by a car as he walked home from a bar in Mliba town, Swaziland. Shopkeeper Mxolisi Thindwa insisted that one of Thani's legs "was spirited away by witches to use for potions", but police think an animal ran off with it. Metro, 24 Mar 2015.

# **SENIOR PENGUIN**

Pat, Britain's oldest penguin, celebrated her 37<sup>th</sup> birthday at Living Coasts in Torquay, Devon, with a cake made of sprats, her favourite dish. Great grandmother Pat has a 'toyboy' called Eddie, who is only 13. Metro, 21 Jan 2015.

# SIDELINES...

### **SKULL MYSTERY**

Last July, a churchwarden at Lady St Mary's church in Wareham, Dorset, discovered a human skull on the church doorstep. It was in a bag and wrapped in tissue paper. Forensic tests showed that it dated from the 15th century. The police closed the case, though the skull's provenance remains unknown. *Church Times*, 19 Dec 2014.

### **GROOM IN RESERVE**

Indira, a 23-year-old woman, made sure her wedding went ahead when her husband-to-be, Jugal Kishore, 25, had an epileptic fit – by marrying her sister's brother-in-law, Harper Singh, instead. The bride and her family were furious that they had not been told about the epilepsy. The wedding took place in the northern Indian town of Rampur. MX News (Sydney), 19 Feb; D.Telegraph, 20 Feb 2015.

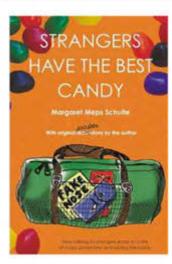
# **DEMON SNACKS**

The Fronda (conservative Catholic) organisation in Poland has warned parents about "demonic crisps" now on sale across the country. The cheese-flavoured Cheetos by PepsiCo come in packets labelled "Demon", "Vampire" and "Skeleton", with the crisps shaped accordingly. Promoted as "innocent family fun", the crisps could entice children into the "dangerous world of demons". D.Telegraph, 25 Mar 2015.



# Weird, but wholesome

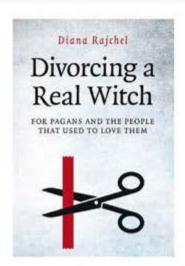
# Traditional values have returned to the Diagram book prize



The winner of this year's Diagram Prize for the oddest book title of the past year, announced by the Bookseller on 26 March, is Strangers Have the Best Candy, by Margaret Meps Schulte. "Quite frankly, I am relieved," said Tom Tivnan, features and insight editor at the Bookseller and co-ordinator of the prize. "With the public recently giving the Diagram crown to the likes of How to Poo on a Date, Cooking with Poo and If You Want Closure in Your Relationship, Start with Your Legs, I despaired for a populace becoming obsessed with smut and filth. I welcome the return to the clean, wholesome fun of the Diagram's roots."

The Diagram Prize was established by Trevor Bounford and Bruce Robertson in 1978 as a way of avoiding boredom at the Frankfurt Book Fair. The inaugural winner was Proceedings of the Second International Workshop on Nude Mice. There is no prize for the victorious title, although the nominator of the winning entry traditionally receives a "passable bottle of claret." The Gang of Fort fondly remembers the 1996 winner, Greek Rural Postmen and Their Cancellation Numbers. It just has that je ne sais quoi about it.

In the closest vote since the



prize was opened to public voting in 2000, Schulte's travelogue won with 26.1 per cent of the vote. A delighted Schulte commented: "Not since *The Stray Shopping Carts of Eastern North America* has the prize been awarded to a book with such a potentially wide audience."

The runner-up, with 25.1 per cent of the vote, was Diana Rajchel's Divorcing a Real Witch: For Pagans and the People who Used to Love Them, which had already drawn a wave of positive reviews from the Wiccan community. The publisher, Moon Books, said it "fills a huge gap in the resources that witches and pagans have in the areas of family and relationships." It details the break-up of Rajchel's own relationship, and covers Wiccan "handfasting" monogamous or polyamorous relationships with opposite-sex or same-sex partners - "with the same gravitas associated with the word 'wedding', no matter how long the intended handfasting".

The other five shortlisted titles – which highlights "a year of astonishing publishing depth, range and bat-guano eccentricity", according to the Bookseller – were Nature's Nether Regions (Viking), a book about the evolution of the genitals



THE UGLY WIFE IS A TREASURE AT HOME True District of Line and Marriage in Communical China

of "bugs, birds and beasts" by Menno Schilthuizen; The Ugly Wife is a Treasure at Home (Potomac), an exposé of love and sex under Maoist rule in China, by Melissa Margaret Schneider; Where do Camels Belong? (Profile), an investigation into invasive species by Ken Thompson: Advanced Pavement Research: Selected, Peer Reviewed Papers from the 3rd International Conference on Concrete Pavements Design, Construction, and Rehabilitation, December 2-3, 2013, Shanghai, China (Trans Tech), edited by Bo Tian; and The Madwoman in the Volvo: My Year of Raging Hormones (Norton), a menopause memoir by Sandra Tsing-Loh.

Before the vote, the Bookseller's diarist Horace Bent had touted Advanced Pavement Research as the frontrunner, pointing to its "echoes of winners past", such as Highlights in the History of Concrete, which took the prize in 1994, and Designing High-Performance Stiffened Structures, which won in 2000.

Tom Tivnan said that "Where Do Camels Belong? is the existential question which has plagued philosophers for centuries." BBC News, Guardian, 27 Feb; thebookseller.com, 26 Mar 2015.

# 



www.belltent.co.uk/fortean\_times



# SCIENCE

# MYSTERY CLOUDS OF MARS

Ever since astronomers discovered 'canals' on Mars, the Red Planet has thrown up new puzzles –so how about a nuclear explosion? **DAVID HAMBLING** looks at the evidence.

ars is the planet of mysteries. Our closest neighbour is sometimes portrayed as a second Earth, the most likely place in the Solar System to find alien life. The surface of Venus is invisible beneath thick clouds, and Jupiter and Saturn have similarly opaque atmospheres. But Mars has, so to speak, a glass roof and astronomers have been spying on the Red Planet for centuries. Even though the images can now be recorded, observers still argue about what they see. The latest controversy surrounds a mystery cloud, which some claim was produced by a nuclear explosion.

You might have thought that we have learned something since the days of the fabled 'canals of Mars'. These were discovered by the Italian Giovanni Schiaparelli and described by many 19<sup>th</sup> century astronomers, even though they do not correspond to any actual feature.

Mainstream scientists may dismiss claims of nuclear mushroom clouds on Mars, but their track record with Martian clouds does not suggest that they have all the answers. In 2012, amateur astronomers photographed a plume, or cloud of material, extending some 200km (124 miles) from the Martian surface. According to the established view, this should be impossible.

Dust clouds are common on Mars, some composed of particles so fine that they are more like smoke. But the atmosphere is very thin, and no dust cloud has ever been observed at an altitude of more than 50km (30 miles). One theory was that the cloud was composed of ice particles, either water ice or carbon dioxide dry ice. The problem with this theory is that the temperature at that altitude is a 100 degrees Celsius too warm for either. A third theory suggested that the plume was not made of particles at all, but was an unusually intense aurora, like the Northern Lights on Earth. "This observation is a big surprise," planetary scientist Aymeric Spiga



ABOVE: The photo of the Valles Marineris Canyon, 'mushroom cloud' at bottom left.

told *Nature* magazine in February 2015. "Another puzzle on Mars!"

The puzzle was not dispelled in March when NASA's Mars Atmosphere and Volatile Evolution (MAVEN) probe recorded two anomalies. MAVEN discovered not only an aurora that penetrates much closer to the surface than previously thought, but also a cloud of dust surrounding the planet at orbital altitudes, from 200km to 300km (124-186 miles). NASA was not able to explain how the dust could have got there. "If the dust originates from the atmosphere, this suggests we are missing some fundamental process in the Martian atmosphere," Laila Andersson of the University of Colorado reports on NASA's website. Hence perhaps the temptation to go over to the other side and embrace the wilder and wackier end of Martian studies that operates without the benefit of space probes, astronomy courses or, seemingly, a particularly firm grip on reality.

Perhaps the most surprising thing about a 2014 book called Death on Mars: The Discovery of a Planetary Nuclear Massacre is that the author, Dr John Brandenberg, is a real scientist with a background in space propulsion and plasma technology. However, the title is an accurate indication of the contents: "Analysis of recent Mars isotopic, gamma

# DID SOMEONE TRY TO ERASE THE FACE WITH AN ATOM BOMB?

ray, and imaging data supports the hypothesis that perhaps two immense thermonuclear explosions occurred on Mars in the distant past and these explosions were targeted on sites of previously reported artefacts."

'Previously reported artefacts' may be something of a stretch. As with the lost canals, nobody in the mainstream world has been able to recognise the pyramids and ruined cities claimed by astro-archæology enthusiasts. Brandenberg claims that Mars's red colour, as well as the concentration of uranium and thorium on the surface, indicated that the planet was attacked by aliens from outside the Solar System, bent on destroying Martian civilisation. Brandenberg suggests that this would explain the so-called Fermi Paradox, the inconsistency between estimates that there should be many galactic civilisations and the lack of any obvious aliens. He believes that Mars shows that one aggressive race may be going around erasing the competition.

Shortly after Brandenberg's book came out, India's Mars

Orbiter took a picture of the gigantic Valles Marineris Canyon with, it was later noticed, an odd mushroom cloud in one corner. For many people mushroom clouds are synonymous with nuclear weapons. In fact, they can have many other causes including volcanoes, meteorite impacts and conventional explosions, as well as forest fires on Earth. Inevitably though, the Internet was soon abuzz with stories that the cloud was the result of an ancient nuclear weapon.

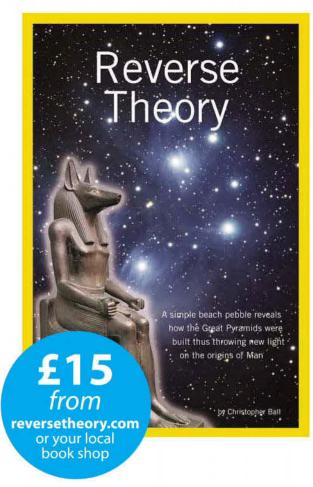
Closer examination of images of the same area taken at different times reveals that the picture does not show a mushroom cloud at all. "If you have a look at wide pictures of Mars, you can see the area of the 'mushroom cloud' with sunlight at a different angle, and slightly different resolution and angle - and it's clear that the 'cloud' and 'stem' are just areas of darker material on the surface." according to astrobiologist Dr Jonathan Horner of the University of Southern Queensland. In other words, it is canals of Mars all over again. There is literally nothing there.

Conspiracy theory provides a different way of joining up the dots. In 1976, the Viking Orbiter took a picture of the famous "Face on Mars" at Cydonia. The image was another one dismissed as "a trick of light and shadow" by the mission's chief scientist. It was not until decades later that probes with better cameras showed the face region was a natural-looking hill that only appeared as a face at low resolution with the right lighting.

Unless, sometime after the 1976 image was taken, someone tried to erase the Face with an atomic bomb? According to a poster on the AboveTopSecret site: "One of my friends, a high-ranking Air Force officer... suggested that the face on Mars was probably destroyed partially in a not-so-successful attempt by NASA to obliterate any pointers to a civilisation on Mars that may have existed in the distant past.' In this version, the mushroom cloud in the Valles Marineris Canyon was no accidental explosion millennia after the event. It was simply another NASA mission to destroy the evidence.

All of which goes to show that seeing and believing are two very different things. And the truth about Mars is still cloudy.

# Science: DISCOVER SOMETHING YOU DIDN'T KNOW



loser inspection of the humble beach pebble could spell disaster for the theory of evolution. The one fact that gives geology its timetable is the erosion process 'How long did it take that pebbled beach to look like that sandy beach' From solid rock to boulders, boulders to pebbles and from pebbles to sand. Our great scholars collectively agreed that to form all the sand in the world would take a thousand million years (an aeon) and confirmed "This Planet Must Be Old"

**Dictionary** – Sand - Created over the past half billion years.

From this point onwards everything known to the history of Mankind was constructed. Deeptime was born; sedimentation rates, dinosaurs, KT boundary, fossil record, unconformities, evolution and plate tectonics are all dated from this old planet perspective, and it's these facts that give radioactivity their sub atomic readings.

However' an aeon to form the entire world's sand is totally wrong because beach pebbles are formed by the process of tide-mark, they get bigger not smaller. Every dirty tide leaves a mark, a tidemark, a dirty stain over a previous hardened and scuffed stain. Broken layers clearly seen if one wishes to see them. Dirty layers around the rim, like a washbasin or seabasin, teacup or teaspoon, or grain of sand in an oyster, a pearl, and the process is the same. Consequently our foundation for Deeptime and thus radioactive dating is also wrong.

Sand has come from our missing landscapes, from places like the Grand Canyon and Great Butts of Arizona, removed when the forming limestone was still soft and mud-like. The steep sides of these canyons and gorges tell us how the Pyramids were built and knowing how the pyramids were built tells yet another story, a story quite different to evolution. It seems circumstances prevailed that took mankind on a course down to animal rather than the other way around. The complete Reverse Theory which just happens to be the name of this powerful and detailed book.

**But is RT right?** Only a closer inspection of the humble beach pebble will call for a geological recount.

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# ARCHÆOLOGY

PAUL SIEVEKING presents our round-up of archæological news, including an intriguing discovery in the Honduran rainforest, the latest UK coin hoards and evidence that we've been getting drunk since the dawn of time

# LOST CITY IN HONDURAS

A team of archæologists, engineers and anthropologists, led by Christopher Fisher of Colorado State University, and accompanied by Honduran troops and former SAS soldiers, has discovered the ruins of an ancient civilisation in the la Mosquitia area of the Honduran jungle, said to be the most undisturbed tract of rainforest in Central America. The riverside site in a crater-shaped valley encircled by mountains comprises a complex of plazas, mounds and an earthen pyramid. Some have even suggested the ruins belong to the fabled Ciudad Blanca (White City) filled with gold, first mentioned in 1526 by Hernán Cortés. Texts cite the city as the birthplace of the Aztec god Quetzalcoatl.

Back in 2012, Prof Fisher analysed images of the la Mosquitia area sent back from a laser light scanner called the LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging), which can map the ground though dense jungle canopy. He detected evidence of human-modified lands and settlement, such as possible irrigation canals, reservoirs and roads. "The LiDAR point cloud data clearly show the remains of large settlements that can be characterised as ancient cities based on their spatial complexity, size and organisation," he said, stressing that the area was probably home to several 'lost cities' or settlements rather than a single ancient society.

Theodore Morde, an American adventurer, may have found the site during a 1940 expedition. He described a city where a civilisation known as the Chorotegas worshipped a monkey god whose giant statue was buried under centuries of vegetation. Local tribes related myths of half-human, halfsimian children and said the city of the monkey god was cursed. Morde took thousands of artefacts back to the US, including stone utensils and tiny carved monkey masks. He committed suicide in 1954 without revealing the city's location.

Douglas Preston of National Geographic accompanied the latest expedition. "The tops of 52 artefacts were peeking from the earth," he wrote. "Many more evidently lie below ground, with possible burials. They include stone ceremonial seats (called metates) and finely carved vessels decorated with snakes, zoomorphic figures, and vultures. The most striking object emerging from the ground is the head of what Fisher speculated might be 'a were-jaguar', possibly depicting a shaman in a transformed, spirit state. Alternatively, the artefact might be related to ritualised ball games that were a feature of pre-Columbian life in Mesoamerica."

The artefacts are believed to date from AD 1000 to 1400. At Fisher's insistence, they were left in situ to avoid losing context and simply documented, though Steve Elkins



ABOVE: Virgil Finlay's drawing of Morde's "Lost City of the Monkey God", from the American Weekly, 22 Sep 1940. BELOW: Part of the hoard of Roman and Late Iron Age coins discovered in Reynard's Kitchen Cave

and Bill Benenson, the American film-makers who organised and funded the expedition, thought that portable objects should be moved without delay to the security of the Honduran capital Tegucigalpa to avoid looting. While the la Mosquitia region is barely populated, drug cartels use it to land small planes laden with Colombian cocaine on rough airstrips cleared by local hired hands. The site also faces a threat from ranchers who are cutting down the rainforest as close as 12 miles (20km) away for cattle for beef production. The exact location of the site is, for the present, being kept a closely guarded secret. Juan Orlando Hernández, the Honduran president, has ordered his army chief to deploy troops to protect the site, but it is not known how large or effective this force will be. dailymail.co.uk, 3 Mar; D.Telegraph, 4 +21 Mar; D.Mirror, 5 Mar; Relaxnews, 11 Mar 2015.

RARE COMBINATION

A hoard of Roman and Late Iron Age coins has been discovered in a British cave, having lain undisturbed for around 2,000 years. A member of the public

stumbled across four coins in the cavern in Dovedale in the Peak District, known as Reynard's Kitchen Cave, leading to a fullscale excavation. It is the first time coins from these two separate civilisations have been found together. Furthermore, Roman coins have not previously been unearthed in a cave. The find comprises 26 coins, including three Roman coins pre-dating the Roman invasion of Britain in AD 43, and 20 other gold and silver Late Iron Age pieces thought to belong to the Corieltauvi tribe (bordered by the Brigantes to the north).

In 2000 near Hallaton, south-east Leicestershire, an amateur archæologist discovered the largest hoard of Iron Age gold and silver coins ever found in Britain. More

than 5,000 coins, jewellery and a silver-gilt Roman helmet were among the treasures. Late Roman coin hoards, however, are often much larger, like the 22,000 Roman coins, dated between AD 260 and AD 348, found near Seaton in Devon

in 2013. There was rampant inflation and the fiscal authorities were very keen on "quantitative easing". <i>, Irish Examiner, 7 July; BBC News, 26 Sept 2014.

# DAWN OF BOOZING

It had long been assumed that alcohol was a relatively recent addition to our diet, 9,000 years ago in China [FT195:19], or possibly 11,500 years ago, when cereals were grown to make beer [FT272:17]. The oldest winery so far discovered was operating in Armenia 6,000 years ago [FT278:23]. Researchers, however, now think our primate ancestors first consumed alcohol 10 million years ago. They identified a variant of the gene ADH4 that emerged about that time, when hominids ventured onto the open savannah. It is thought that this gene mutation allowed them to metabolise fermenting fruit lying on the ground, giving them a selective advantage by enabling them to eat such fruit during times of food scarcity. D.Mail, 2 Dec 2014.

# PREHISTORIC CUISINE

DNA from an underwater site suggests that there was wheat in the British Isles 8,000 year ago, 2,000 years before farming arrived in the region. The research suggests that wheat somehow made its way from the Neolithic farmers of southern Europe to the Mesolithic hunter-gatherers of Britain. The farmers and hunter-gatherers may have been trading, said Robin Allaby, a plant geneticist at the University of Warwick and author of a report on the discovery in Science. Stone tools found at the site resembled those found in northern France, another indication of trade between the groups. The researchers analysed sediment core from Bouldnor Cliff on the Isle of Wight coast, and found ancient DNA from certain wheat strains. There was no evidence of cultivation, however, suggesting that the proto-Britons obtained the wheat as flour. So maybe they were making bread two millennia before adopting agriculture. Int. New York Times, 4 Mar 2015.

A 6,500-year-old oven found at a Neolithic site in Croatia provided cooked food, hot water and central heating, just like a modern day Aga (invented in 1922). The kiln was covered to protect the rest of the building from fire. "[The dwelling] was permanently heated all day long and as the residents came home after a day in the fields they ate hot food cooked by the oven. washed in warm water, and went to sleep in a room heated by the same kiln," said lead researcher Marcel Buric. D.Mail, 26 Aug 2014.



FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

# 188: DURA LEX - NO DUREX

At least up to the 1959 edition of the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, onanism was still defined as 'masturbation' or 'self-abuse'. Onan, though, never qualified as the patron saint of wankers. It's quite clear from Genesis 38:8-10 that in defiance of orders from father Judah to impregnate his brother's widow, he was practising coitus interruptus when "he spilled his seed upon the ground", thus giving countless budgerigars their name.

Despite its Latinity, coitus interruptus is not a classical expression. And apart from various Jewish writers and a couple of possible mentions in Hippocrates, the activity in extant texts does not (shall we say) come up until its furibund denunciations by such Christian writers as Clement of Alexandria, Epiphanius of Salamis, Jerome, John Chrysostom, and Augustine. Roman and Byzantine Christians extended this attitude to all forms of contraception,

blurring any distinction between it and abortion, indeed often equating the two.

Francis Grose's Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue (1796) defines this strategic withdrawal as: "To make a coffee-house out of a woman's privities, to go in and out and spend nothing."

(Favourite Anti-Vietnam War protest chant: "Nixon, Pull out like your father should have!")

A host of medical writers from Aristotle to Pliny to Soranus (careful how you pronounce his name) recommend a variety of herbs, ointments, and pessaries for birth control. Recommended unctions included goose fat, honey, white lead, rose oil, and olive oil - this last still being advocated by Marie Stopes in 1931. Axe-weed, cabbage, and anything sticky were common pessary ingredients - as messy as the old-time Gynomin foam optimistically employed in my young days.

Ætius more imaginatively suggests attaching to the left foot a tube containing cat's liver or lioness's womb fragment. Pliny (Natural History, bk29 ch27 para85) advises a woman to wear an amulet tied in deerskin containing worms extracted from a hairy largeheaded spider - doubt this is available from your local Boots or barber.

More physical tricks (Soranus, Gynæcology, bk1) include the woman either squatting down and sneezing (Gesundheit! indeed) immediately after intercourse, or jumping about with heels kicked up to the buttocks

- how much breath left for this after a good fuck?

Lucretius (bk4 vv1268-7): "Wives have no need of lascivious movements. A woman makes conception more difficult by offering mock resistance and wriggling around, diverting the furrow from the straight course of the ploughshare, thus causing the seed to fall wide of the plot. These tricks are employed by prostitutes to prevent pregnancy and make intercourse more fun for men. But obviously our wives can have no use for them." Presumably, they were supposed to lie back and think of Rome ...

What about johnnies? One single and curious text. Antoninus Liberalis (probably second-century AD), Metamorphoses, ch41, says that Minos, cursed with poisonous

semen, made a sheath from goat's bladder and inserted it into his partners'

vaginas to catch the stuff, thereby inventing the female condom. Even if this be myth, the fact that an ancient could envisage such a device

is suggestive. Male sheaths were the invention of Captain Cundum, an obscure Guards Colonel in Charles II's reign. Grose: "The dried gut of a sheep, worn by men in the act of coition, to prevent

venereal infection. These machines were long prepared and sold by a matron of the name of Phillips at the Green, in Halfmoon-Street in the Strand."

Grose adds that Mrs Phillips made a fortune, retired, but returned to business "upon learning that the town was not well served by her successors" - plug for a friend? A prime customer (London Journal, passim) was James Boswell, who dubbed these clumsy devices 'armour', frequently ignoring them (sometimes at his partner's request), whence his frequent bouts of gonorrhœa.

Venetian ones sound more like modern featherlites, Casanova being able to blow them up before use to test for holes - good policy, given his track record.

"Condominiums? Never use 'em" - Rocky Balboa

Further Reading: M Bujalkova, 'Birth Control in Antiquity,' Bratisi Lek Listy 108, 2007, 163-6 (online); K Hopkins, 'Contraception in the Roman Empire,' Comparative Studies in Society & History 8, 1965, 124-51 (online); A Collier, The Humble Little Condom: a History (Prometheus Books, Buffalo, 2007).



# **GHOSTWATCH**

ALAN MURDIE undertakes a hazardous journey on some of the world's most haunted roads

# **GHOST ROADS**

When it comes to travelling in the UK, a journey by road is far more likely to yield a ghostly encounter than any other sort of excursion. As John Harries put it in his *The Ghost Hunter's Road Book* (1968) the roads of Britain "are by repute chock-a-block with spectral coaches, supernatural hounds, restless suicides and murderers, mischievous sprites, good fairies and evil witches."

Recent months have certainly seen an upsurge in reports. On 23 and 26 February 2015 the A4076 in Dyfed between Milford Haven and Haverfordwest was recorded as having been "a hive of strange encounters". The first account came from two women travelling to Haverfordwest at 4.30pm on 4 February, who encountered a dark "shadowy human shape with long arms and legs". She said that it was so sudden that she was forced to brake sharply, fearing collision with a living person.

Four days later, another two ladies travelling early to work had a similar experience in Steynton just after 6am, seeing a tall, shadowy figure on the side of the road race suddenly across at high speed. The women preferred to remain anonymous because of the sensitivity of their employment, but on arriving at work a colleague told them such sightings were common on the road.

Another witness who had to brake in a hurry was a Mr Luke Mayhew, who when driving home through Steynton on 11 February saw a figure run suddenly across the road in front him. He said: "I'm 100 per cent certain I saw what I believe was a ghost/apparition. I saw it run right in front of me from one side of the road to the other. I had to slam on my brakes. In all the years I have lived in Milford I have never seen anything until last night. It was as clear as day!"

Gavin Davies from the Paranormal Chronicles website stated it might be a recording-type haunting linked with past tragedies, but did not rule out reflections of



ABOVE LEFT: The A4706 in Dyfed was reported to have been "a hive of strange encounters" in early 2015.

light produced from car headlights or "a hoax played out by a daring and suicidal prankster." (Western Telegraph, 23+26 Feb 2015).

These stories came a week after the Derby Telegraph for 4 February 2015 reported that a ghost of a woman in an old-fashioned floral pattern dress and hairnet had been seen earlier the same week by a woman named Lisa Fisher who was driving on a lane towards Bretby Hall at 2pm on 2 February. She was quoted as saying: "As I turned into the lane I could see a young woman with black hair standing with a bike by the side of the road, about a 100m [330ft] ahead. As I got closer I could see she was dressed in old-fashioned clothes (floral dress and hair net). The bike had a wicker basket and also looked old. She watched me as I passed her." When Ms Fisher looked back in her rear view mirror the woman had vanished.

However, the account reported as a sighting in 2015 actually appears to be a recycling of an account from the same witness Linda Fisher published in the *Derby Telegraph* and also the *Burton Mail* on 27 November 2014. Such a careless re-telling of months-old news as a current event obviously begs questions as to the reliability of the original sighting.

Undaunted, the *Derby Telegraph* published a further claim that a ghost – minus the bicycle – had been seen on 26 February by another driver, Jane Fielding – again in the area of Bretby Hall, supplying a very similar visual description, and adding the eerie detail: "When I passed her she turned her head and stared at me blankly. It was quite unnerving and creepy when she stared at me."

Claims of further sightings at Bretby
Business Park were carried by the *Derby Telegraph* on 4 March. They came from a
Matthew Roberts, who formerly worked at
Bretby Business Park and had heard several
stories about "a ghostly woman in a floral
dress". This apparition was said to have
approached a security guard and asked for
directions before vanishing, and was also
glimpsed walking around the business park or
sitting under trees. Mr Roberts added: "It was
always during winter time or when the weather
had been bad."

Elements of this story can be traced back even further to a 'Ghostly Hitchhiker' item in Bretby Business Park, posted on the 'Haunted Island' paranormal website as long ago as 29 October 2011. Here, not surprisingly, the trail appears to go cold, phantom hitchhikers being the most ubiquitous and folkloric of all road ghosts with tales told for decades but with a distinct shortage of reliable witnesses. As Victor Sims commented on phantom hitchhikers in Science and the Spook (1968): "One would require much more proof to convince even those who are not sceptical about the existence of ghosts that the events happened in exactly the way he described them". (Derby Telegraph, 27 Nov 2014; 4+26 Feb 2015; www.hauntedisland.co.uk/category/ *ahostly-hitchhikers* )

Interestingly, the notoriously dangerous roads of Thailand have generated two stories of ghosts causing accidents in the last year.

Last summer a report appeared claiming that Thai police had been told that "a dark, maleficent ghost" was responsible for the death of motorcyclist Prajuab Chaisomthip on the Bang Na-Trat Road in Bangkok on 22 July.



ABOVE LEFT: Bretby Business Park in Derbyshire: haunted by a bicycle-riding ghost in a floral dress.

Mr Chaisomthip, 49, was killed instantly when his motorcycle collided with an 18-wheeler lorry. However, according to the driver of the lorry, Nipon Karaung, the fault for the accident lay with a ghost riding as a passenger on the bike. He told police that he had stopped at a transition lane, when he saw Prajuab's motorcycle speeding in his direction, the wrong way down the highway. As he saw Prajaub's bike hurtle towards him, a person riding on the back of the motorcycle slowly reached out and covered Prajuab's eyes, with the result the bike rammed straight into the truck. Mr Karaung immediately got out of his vehicle to find Prajaub dead, but no trace of the passenger who had obscured his vision. The homicidal ghost was described as "black-skinned - and large". In the report, Mr Karaung is described as a 'long-haul driver', and one wonders if the effects of tiredness at the wheel and the trauma of the fatal collision impaired his perceptions and recollections of the incident.

The report came two months after the death of another motorcyclist attributed to Thai spirits, an unidentified man found lying next to his motorbike on the Phetksasem Road at Hua Hin, on 8 May 2014. The man was estimated to be aged between 25 and 30, and it was assumed that he had swerved for some reason and crashed into a tree. It was apparently not the first strange death at the spot. The tree concerned was a shrine to household spirits established by people living in the area. Local belief is that the shrines are homes for ghosts that are blamed for causing the accidents. Not surprisingly, motorists were now reported as being "very nervous and fearful" when passing the spot. However, police have blamed poor visibility along the road, arising from overgrown grass obscuring the vision of motorists, the local authorities having failed to maintain the highway properly. ('Death by ghost: Evil spirit blamed for fatal motorcycle accident' Coconuts Bangkok website 23 July 2014; 'Hua Hin: Another mysterious accident on Phetkasem road last night.' 9 May 2014 www.thaivisa. com/forum/topic/724840-mysterious-roadtraffic-accident-in-hua-hin-blame-it-on-theghost/)

Thus, it seems that Thailand has its equivalents of the vengeful road ghosts, which have been a reputed hazard for motorists in Britain ever since the invention of the internal combustion engine. These stories are less common than they used to be, though back in October 2012, I mentioned the story of the dangerous ghost of Betty Potter's Dip at Boxted, Essex, though statistical evidence failed to show any abnormal rate of accidents there in the last 100 years.

Undoubtedly, the best known tale is the 'Hairy Hands' of Dartmoor, in circulation since the early 1920s, but some more recent examples of such stories emerged in the mid-1970s where a medium named Michael Sadgrove claimed there were accident blackspots on roads in north-west Norfolk arising from what he termed 'psychic interference with the drivers'.



ABOVE: the Bang Na-Trat Road in Bangkok, where the death of motorcyclist Prajuab Chaisomthip was blamed on "a dark,maleficent ghost". BELOW: Revd Donald Omand exorcised Loch Ness as well as the A35.

# HE CONDUCTED AN EXORCISM ON A STRETCH OF THE **A35 BETWEEN MORECOMBELAKE** AND CHARMOUTH



One story concerned a lady driving between King's Lynn and Boston past Holbeach Marsh along a clear and empty road. She felt the steering wheel clasped by invisible hands and, "try as she might she could not hold the wheel, which was pulled over to the right, causing her car to cross the road, and finish upside down in the dyke." After recovering in hospital she took Michael Sadgrove to the spot to contact the entity. In an article 'The Haunted Roads of Norfolk' which appeared subsequently in the now defunct East Anglian Magazine (vol.34, 224-225) Sadgrove stated: "I walked along the road alone on that cold windy day and after some minutes was able to contact the spirit form of a young man of about 30. He told me he was a businessman and he and his wife and small daughter had been travelling along that part of the road when they were involved in a collision and all killed instantly. He admitted that he was responsible for interfering with drivers along that part of the road merely out of spite because his death was not his fault. he said. I was able to help him leave the place

and free it from the condition. Maybe many drivers going along there in future will not feel uneasy anymore."

Sadgrove identified another between Terrington St Clements and Boston where a driver and passengers were nearly killed by an invisible presence which seized the steering wheel and nearly steered the car into the path of an on-coming juggernaut. A week later, Sadgrove visited the site and communicated with "the departed spirit of a farm-hand of some 70 years of age. He was almost illiterate and attired in the rough working clothes of the beginning of this century [i.e. around 1900]. He explained to me that his wife had been killed on that part of the road by a motor and he was taking his spite out on all other drivers along there by interfering with their steering. He was only able to get at a few, he said. Having been able to remove him from that place, I assured the car passengers that they would experience no more trouble of that nature, and neither have they."

The East Anglian Magazine commented, "We would not ourselves express any views on this article but we have been given the names and addresses of the people concerned."

'Evil forces causing accidents' was a headline from the Bridport News (22 Jan 1971) concerning an exorcism conducted by the Revd. Donald Omand, vicar of Chideock, Somerset, along a stretch of the A35 between Morecombelake and Charmouth. The segment of road had been the scene of many serious (sometimes fatal) accidents, "most of which have been difficult to explain". The event was filmed by a BBC Unit for a programme 'People versus the Car' transmitted on 29 May 1971. Two other clergymen involved with the rite were filmed preparing for the exorcism at a special service in St Giles's Church, Chideock. Today broadcasting regulators would probably be a lot more wary of transmitting films of exorcisms. Two years later, the Revd. Omand conducted another televised exorcism at Loch Ness - to counter evil forces supposedly surrounding the famous Monster.

# **SERIOUSLY POSSESSED**

Academics, mediums and magicians meet to ponder possession. **DAVID V BARRETT** reports

e've all seen the films: a child speaking in a rough adult voice, cursing, twitching, foaming. Possession is one of our worst nightmares.

But what is possession? Nearly 250 people met at Goldsmiths College, London early in March to hear academics and practitioners (and in at least one case both) exploring the related themes of possession and exorcism in a conference organised by the Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena (ASSAP). As has become traditional, Prof Chris French, who runs the Anomalistic Psychology Research Unit at Goldsmiths, led off the day.

We're all dualists, he said: we think in terms of the physical world and our consciousness, the exterior and the interior, and no one has yet solved the body/mind question. But if the ghost is in the machine, could other beings get in and take control? Or can the ghost leave the machine? Skipping briefly through ideas including reincarnation, ghosts, the afterlife, past-life regression, dissociative identity disorder (formerly called multiple personality disorder) and more, he looked at a number of possible explanations for what can be interpreted as possession: psychological, neurophysiological, such as epilepsy or Tourette's, and socio-cognitive, or learned behaviour.

Some forms of possession are desired, such as glossolalia, or speaking in tongues, when Christians believe they are possessed by the Holy Spirit. Linguistic analysis shows that it's not a real language; believers new to it follow the example of those they see and hear: it's a learned behaviour. In some social groups a possessed person may be a respected member of a community, such as a

shaman; in others they might be peripheral, on the fringes, powerless, but now given "permission" to speak and behave differently and to be treated seriously.

Demons aren't going to be happy with a conference on possession, said practising occultist Duncan Barford - so he began his talk with a magical ritual, with some of the audience joining in, to trap any irritated demons in the room in a glass jam jar. He deconstructed the

practice of the Western magical tradition, contrasting the ways that magicians and scientists view the world: what magicians might call belief-shifting, scientists would call confirmation bias; manifestations observed by magicians are examples of Type 1 and Type 2 errors – erroneously seeing or not seeing patterns; magic is a means of experiencing truth, while science is a means of arriving at reliable knowledge. Discussing the Goetia or Lesser Key of Solomon, a grimoire cataloguing 72 demons with their names, seals, descriptions

and powers, and how to

summon them, he quoted

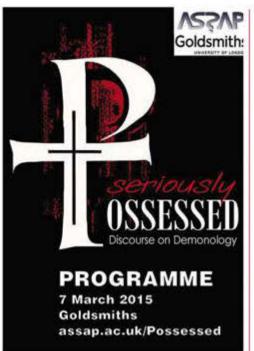
FT's favourite magician
Aleister Crowley on

"willed illusions" and how

"the spirits of the Goetia
are portions of the
human brain".

In the end,
he said: "It's
just a load

of stuff that



# "It's just a load of stuff that people made up"

people made up."

Most Haunted's Dr Ciarán O'Keeffe talked about Christian exorcists, and their approach to their work. The Vatican's exorcist says you can tell a genuinely possessed person by their aversion to the sacraments and to all things sacred - but not all cases are genuine. In one, someone claimed to be possessed by a demon from the time of Christ that spoke in Aramaic; but on careful examination it turned out that it was speaking

LEFT: Dr Amanda van Eck Duymaer van Twist, deputy director of Inform. RIGHT: History writer Jon Kaneko-James. in *modern* Aramaic, so couldn't have been a genuine demon! If people believe that possession is possible, then that can be sufficient, O'Keeffe said: "One of the most overlooked superpowers in life is the unbelievable power of our beliefs".

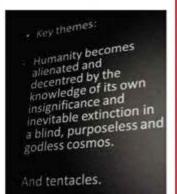
Dr Amanda van Eck Duymaer van Twist is deputy director at Inform, the research unit at the London School of Economics that studies alternative religions. She talked about the diversity of spirit possession. It may sometimes be desired, prayed for and encouraged by the use of drums, for example, or it may be involuntary; it can be benign or maleficent or neutral, as in Spiritualism. The Children of God (now the Family International) used comic strips to teach their children that if you don't pray, demons can creep in. More seriously, she cited cases of young children in England being mistreated through deliverance ministry in African Christian churches and communities. The "ministry" can include rubbing chillies on the child's eyes or genitals, the idea being to make it uncomfortable for the demon so it will leave. Some children have

In stark contrast, Susan Leybourne, a trance medium from Leeds, gave a free-flowing, unscripted talk about her experiences and her work. Today's mediums, she said, instead of

> having a spirit guide, often have a spirit team to work with. She distinguished between normal mediumship. where the medium is picking up contacts, and trance mediumship which has images and colours that the medium has to get past until they reach "a dark space, and then words will start to manifest". Many of the audience appeared

# A ALIEN ZOO

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



bemused when she told of being at a Candomblé ceremony in South America. For some reason she had taken against the medium, so when he had established his link to the spirit world she projected a pair of scissors and cut it, causing the entire ceremony to collapse.

Dr Justin Woodman was also a practitioner, but in a very different way. He talked about the Chaos Magick group he worked with when he was researching his Anthropology PhD who focused on the powers of Cthulhu in their magickal work. An introductory slide on Cthulhu read: "Humanity becomes alienated and decentred by the knowledge of its own insignificance and inevitable extinction in a blind, purposeless and godless cosmos. And tentacles." He normalised possession: "When you watch a film or read a book it's the same as possession; you become overshadowed by the experience... and you enter another reality." Lovecraftian occulture is not about worshipping the Old Ones, but identification with them. And he echoed Chris French's statement that becoming possessed is socially learned behaviour. "Fake it until you make it!" is a common Chaos Magick injunction, he told

Wrapping up the day, Jon Keneko-James talked about Roland Doe, whose exorcism by Catholic priests in the late 1940s inspired the book and film *The Exorcist*. Quoting mediæval religious historian Barbara Newman he made the interesting point that the possessed could be "viewed as sources of supernatural authority, treated with circumspect awe by priests". Awesome!

### **BEARLY A BIGFOOT**

In November 2006, Craig Woolheater at the Cryptomundo website was sent by a reader with the Cryptomundo user name Captiannemo [sic] a remarkable b/w photo, which Captiannemo claimed to have found online, and which Craig duly posted on the site. It depicted an apparent old-time hunter standing alongside what looked like a dead bigfoot, hung upside-down from a tree. The bigfoot was somewhat blurry, but although it was strongly suspected by many to be the result of photo-manipulation, this iconic image, soon aptly dubbed the 'dead bigfoot photo' and subsequently appearing on countless websites and blogs, was never exposed as a fake – until 11 April 2015, that is.

On this day, Facebook friend Tony Nichol brought to my attention an eve-catching vintage picture postcard that he had just noticed on eBay's American site. As soon as I saw it, I realised that it was of immense cryptozoological significance. It depicted a large dead bear hung upside-down from a tree - but everything else in the picture, including the hunter standing beside it, was identical to the 'dead bigfoot photo'. There could be no doubt - the latter controversial image was derived directly from this vintage picture, whose bear had been photo-manipulated into the bigfoot. Purchasing the postcard, I discovered that the specific Kodak AZO date stamp symbol code on the reverse dated the card's manufacture to 1904-1918. Moreover, the hunter in the picture proved to be Charles Emswiler, a famous Alaskan trapper/hunting guide during that period. After I'd documented my findings on my ShukerNature blog, Craig contacted Captiannemo, who finally confessed to having personally created the 'dead bigfoot photo' from the bear picture, using a copy that had been reprinted in a 1990s compendium of Field and Stream magazine articles and front covers that had originally been published during the early 1900s. After almost eight and a half years, the mystery of the 'dead bigfoot photo' was a mystery no longer.

http://www.karlshuker.blogspot.co.uk/2015/04/ exposing-dead-bigfoot-photograph-bear.html 11 April 2015.

### **GIANT EELS ON GUAM?**

Following my recent disclosure regarding giant freshwater mystery eels in Ohio [FT325:21], I have learnt that comparable crypto-fishes have also been reported from Guam – the largest island of Micronesia in the western Pacific. 'Justathought', posting on my ShukerNature blog, provided the following hithertounpublished information: "I was stationed in Guam during the late 80s/early 90s, at the Naval Magazine there, while enlisted in the Marine Corps. The Naval Magazine sits in the most heavily forested part of the island, and it is a protected game reserve, with the only 'lake' on the island, Fena Lake (reservoir). I have seen many eels exceeding 8ft [2.4m] in length in the streams and small rivers that run through this area, as well as quite a few eels of such length sliding down the spillway into the reservoir. If you could find other Marines who patrolled the jungle there, some will have seen such eels. Maybe some local poachers can also verify having seen eels of this length in this particular area, which is/was off-limits to locals, many of whom regularly came in over the hills to hunt deer and wild pig, set their shrimp and fish traps in the streams, etc.

"The 'lake', Fena Reservoir, was rumoured to be 'bottomless', and it does drop straight off from the edges, deeper than a full spool of 6lb [2.7kg] test line will take a weight. Some Navy divers went diving in that lake on their off day one day, and came out claiming that there were 'eels down there big enough to swallow a man whole'. I don't know about that, but it is a creepy place, day or night, and the Tilapia and bass that we pulled out of there were just enormous...

"Head to Guam, get a pass and some escorts from the Navy, and you will see these 8ft plus eels without a doubt, and if you are brave enough to don some scuba gear and check out Fena lake, you just might see one of those giant eels that is rumoured to feed on the buffalo, deer, and pigs that drink from its waters."

If the size of Guam's giant freshwater eels reported by 'Justathought' has been accurately gauged at 8ft (or more), this means that they are among the world's largest (and perhaps even *the* largest). Moreover, as the mottled eel *A. marmorata* is known to exist here, they may belong to this species. Named after

> its distinctive marbled or mottled patterning, it is the world's most widely distributed species of anguillid (true eel), recorded extensively in the tropical Indo-West Pacific and adjacent freshwater habitats ranging from southeastern Africa to the Society Islands (French Polynesia) north to southern Japan. At present, it is known to attain a maximum length of 'only' 6.5ft (2m), but if its existence is one day confirmed the giant eel of Guam may well extend this maximum size quite considerably. http://karlshuker.blogspot. co.uk/2015/03/





# strangedays 🛂

# **WORMS FROM THE SKIES**

A HEAVY SHOWER OF EARTHWORMS IN NORWAY AND AN HISTORICAL INCIDENT FROM GERMANY

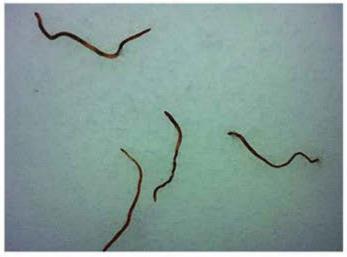
# **NORWEGIAN WORMS**

Biology teacher Karstein Erstad was skiing in the mountains outside Bergen, southern Norway, on 12 April when he saw thousands of earthworms on the surface of the snow. He said: "They seemed to be dead, but when I put them in my hand I found that they were alive." He estimated that there were between 10 and 20 worms per square metre of snow over a large area. Each worm was 5-6cm (2-2.4in) long. At first he thought that they had crawled though the snow from the ground beneath, but on reflection, he rejected this idea. "In many places, the snow was between half a meter and a meter [20-40in] thick and I think they would have problems crawling through the cold snow."

Since Erstad's discovery was reported on Norway's NRK news channel, there were corroborating reports from across southern Norway, with sightings of worm falls in Lindås and Suldal near Bergen, in Molde, and as far away as Lake Femunden on the Swedish border. "This is a phenomenon we know from the [scientific] literature, but it's the first time in my scientific career that I've had reports of it happening on snow", says senior researcher Trond Haraldsen at the Bioforsk research institute. (However, in 1957 the weekly publication Allers reported earthworms on an ice-covered lake in Sweden.)

Haraldsen and researcher Carl Støp-Bowitz speculate that last winter the worms had foraged on dead leaves to which they became attached with their sticky slime. The leaves were then blown skywards by strong winds. Rain and a rise in temperature dissolved the slime, and the worms were thrown off the leaves and fell to earth, perhaps from a great height. But hold on: do these worms really spend the winter on the freezing ground surface, glued to leaves? And where have these putative leaves gone? It's all unsupported speculation.

The standard theory for



# "When I put the worms in my hand I found they were alive"

creature precipitation suggests that the worms were lifted up by a thermal or waterspout and then brought back down miles away from where they started. While logical, this is unsupported by empirical observation. It also fails to account for some aspects of the phenomenon as recorded over centuries, such as repeated falls in the same area, homogeneity of the plummeting critters, and lack of violent weather. When more than 120 pinkish worms fell on schoolchildren playing football outside Galashiels Academy in the Scottish Borders on 29 March 2011, it was a clear, calm day with a cloudless sky.

Other worm falls are rare but not unknown. These include occurrences in Bramford Speke, Derbyshire (April 1837); Sangerfield, New York (Nov 1850); Bath, Somerset (April 1871); Bucharest, Romania (July 1872); Oslo, Norway (winter 1876); Virginia City, Nevada (April 1879); Randolph County, Virginia (Feb 1891); Clifton, Indiana (Feb

1892); Halmstad, Sweden (Jan 1924); Philadelphia (July 1946); Kinomacki, Finland (May 1955); and Jennings, Louisiana (July 2007) [see FT276:24-25]. The Gang of Fort has also heard that a heavy storm in Acapulco, Mexico, on 5 October 1967 was accompanied by maggots around an inch long. NRK (Norwegian State Broadcasting), 15 April; The Local (Norway), 16 April; Independent, 19 April 2015. PAUL SIEVEKING

# **BINGEN WORM FALL**

After the long and severe winter of 1798-1799, it rained worms and other insects in the region of Bingen, on the plateau at the mouth of the Rhine Gorge. There **LEFT**: The earthworms photographed by Karstein Erstad, BELOW: Bingen, site of a fall of worms and insects in 1799.

were dozens of witnesses. who collected specimens and wrote lengthy descriptions of the event. I base this account on a summary of newspaper and letter sources published by a very sceptical scholar, a certain Mr Brahm, which he sent to the natural history magazine Der Naturforscher (Nachricht von einem vorgeblichen Insectenregen [News about an alleged rain of insects], 1802, pp176-190) As the letter runs a full 14 pages, I give just some extracts here – about half of the writing is dedicated to explaining (or rather, explaining away) the phenomenon without ever having seen it, or having asked any of the witnesses.

The eyewitness Caspar Litzendorf wrote: "It was on 12 [Feb 1799] that a very heavy snow fell; at noon the weather changed, and it was now mixed with snow and rain; during this rain an enormous mass of vermin fell on all the Hunsrück [a mountain range], and up to Waldalgesheim, an hour from here, and in the Bingen forest. The vermin were so many, and all alive, that the people in the fields and in the forest were all forced to run away from them. It consisted, in the first place,



of an extraordinary amount of caterpillars, which were partly white, grey, red, yellow and black; in addition it was also raining worms about 3-4in [8-10cm] long. snails or mosquitoes, the latter about an inch long, grasshoppers and big flying ants, and among them were additional large green and black spiders. Yesterday in the afternoon I went behind the hunting lodge, and the ground there was still black, because it was covered with caternillars. spiders, locusts and the like, all of which, as I brought them home, were alive; these vermin will eat nothing, but consume each other... The people who were in the field could not fend them off, and the insects crept under their clothes and into their mouths, noses and ears."

The village priest Rupertus Woll confirmed: "On 11 February 1799 I walked... with four other men from Dachsweiler to Stromberg, and while on the way I found three kinds of caterpillars which fell with the snow. I also noticed two kinds of spiders; regarding the first, they were dark brown or brown with white stripes on their backs, and white ones with brown heads. The second kind was brown and dark green; we also saw worms of unusual size. brown in colour, which fell to the ground with the snow, then crept

Another eyewitness named Kollmann, reported: "On 11 Feb 1799 there fell in this neighbourhood, from the morning until the afternoon, a very heavy snow, and people of Dorsheim. Waldlaubersheim and Dörenbach, who went to Stromberg for business reasons, told me they had seen all sorts of insects falling with the snow, and then crawling around; because of this, several local residents went to the gardens and fields, and confirmed it: the schoolteacher Flach, who lives here, went to the so-called salt fields, and found, crawling on the snow, small brown and black caterpillars with six feet and four ear horns, their feet not dissimilar, but far smaller than those of the so-called woodlouse; further, a type of the so-called earwigs; furthermore,

a small type of so-called crane fly, ants, insects resembling mosquitoes; all of these tiny animals that have been collected on the snow I kept here in a glass, and I sent it to Coblenz to the Central Administration the very next day."

After reprinting a dozen precise accounts by local teachers, priests, and naturalists, who all said they saw the rain with their own eyes, the very un-fortean Brahm explains away what had happened, ignoring that report after report had stressed that the creatures fell with the snow, rather than being forced to come out of the ground due to a fall of snow:

"Now, as everybody who has only moderate experience in collecting insects knows, one can find these creatures partly in their grown state, partly in the larval or pupal state, throughout the whole of the winter if one knows their hiding places. Therefore, it is quite a common thing to encounter, in February, and even earlier, caterpillars and beetles under stones, bark, moss etc. and one even sees them outside of these hiding places."

Therefore all the witnesses must have been deceiving themselves: "First of all, I find the vague and conflicting accounts of the attestants about the insects falling with the snow, then creeping around, highly suspicious; second, the people only believed they had fallen with the snow as they had no other means to account for this unusual phenomenon, and so they took their conjectures for certainty."

I have seen in this area, after s snowfall, caterpillars crawling on the ice, so this explanation is not too far-fetched, but all the eyewitnesses stressed that the insects fell with the snow, and their reports can hardly be called vague. ULRICH MAGIN



In part excerpted from Ulrich Magin's new book Magischer Mittelrhein: Mystische Orte und

unheimliche Ereignisse am Rhein zwischen Mainz und Köln, Regionalia, 2015.

# **Mythconceptions**

by Mat Coward

# 189: THE INUIT'S MIRACLE DIET



# The myth

The Inuit people of Greenland never get heart attacks, because they eat so much oily fish.

# The "truth"

In the 1970s, two Danish doctors published studies seeming to show that the Inuit had very low levels of heart disease, and that this was because they ate a diet consisting almost entirely of meat from marine animals. The result of this breakthrough, in the West, was a billion-dollar industry devoted to selling fish-oil supplements, and recommendations from governments that we should all eat "fatty fish" at least once a week. There's only one problem with the so-called "Eskimo Diet": the Inuit don't have low levels of heart disease. The methodology of the original research has been criticised by subsequent researchers, and there has even been deployment of the scientifically damning phrase "wishful thinking". In short, the Inuit, when compared to local non-Inuit populations, are now said to have a life expectancy 10 years shorter, to be far more at risk of dying from strokes, to have double the overall mortality rate, and to be as likely, or more likely, to die of heart disease. Most strikingly of all, it appears that the Inuit's heart health improves when they adopt a more "Western" diet.

# Sources

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# Disclaimer

Oily fish, and/or food supplements designed to mimic it, may or may not be good for your heart; this column takes no position on the matter (beyond a general, and largely non-clinical, feeling of "Euugh! Oily fish!"). But if you can dispute the facts regarding the coronary health of the Inuit, please write in.

# **Mythchaser**

When a very young baby appears to smile, it's traditional to say "He's not smiling – it's just wind." However, it's now believed that babies in their first few weeks learn how to smile by mimicking the expressions of adults. So, a reader asks, does this mean that the "gas smile" has passed entirely into myth?

OUT NOW ONLINE AND IN ALL GOOD BOOKSHOPS

# **MEDICAL BAG**

BIZARRE CAUSES OF SORE THROATS AND HEADACHES, AN EVIL TWIN EXCISED, STONE BABIES, FEELING NO FEAR AFTER ILLNESS AND THE UPSIDE OF A BANG ON THE HEAD





ABOVE LEFT: The diphyllobothroid worm removed from a Chinese woman's brain. ABOVE RIGHT: The "embryologic twin" lodged deep inside an Indian computer scientist's brain.

### **POND HAZARDS**

Yin Meng. 29. suffered from headaches for six years before going to hospital in Zhaoyang, in Yunnan province, China, where surgeons removed a 4in (10cm) diphyllobothroid tapeworm from her brain. When she was told it could have been caused by eating a carrier of the worm, she recalled eating live frogs as a child.

On one occasion a frog was "jumping as it went down her throat". If the report is accurate, Ms Meng's brain worm was 10 times as long as the tapeworm removed from the brain of a Chinese man last November [FT324:8]. Metro, 25 Mar 2015.

A boy suffering from blackouts and a sore throat had a shock this April when doctors found a leech growing in his throat. Xiaobo Chien, 11, from China's Sichuan province, was probably infected a month earlier when he drank from a pond containing larvæ. "It had grown to 8cm [3in] and every time it curled up it blocked his airway, causing him to lose consciousness," said a hospital spokesman. "We were able to extract it and the boy is now feeling much better." Xiaobo said: "I won't be drinking water from a pond again." For a leech living up a voung woman's nostril, see FT321:10. Metro, 7 April 2015.

# A frog "was jumping as it went down her throat"

# TWIN ON THE BRAIN

Doctors in California have removed a tumour they have described as an "embryologic twin" deep inside a woman's brain. Yamini Karanam, 26, who had moved from Hyderabad. India, to Indianapolis to study computer science, had been experiencing difficulties with drowsiness, reading and concentration. Then even walking became impossible, and she could barely eat.

The rare tumour was removed using keyhole surgery and fibreoptics to burrow deep into the brain and perform the operation. The growth, known as a teratoma, had bone, hair and teeth. Ms Karanam jokingly described it as her "evil twin sister who's been torturing me for the past 26 years". Dr Hrayr Shahinian, who performed the operation at the Skullbase Institute in Los Angeles, said: "This tumour was smack in the middle of [the

corpus callosum], so extremely deep in the brain," adding that Ms Karanam would have died if she hadn't had the surgery. "This is my second one," he said of the intracranial teratoma, "and I've probably taken out 7,000 or 8,000 brain tumours."

Sometimes it's not until adulthood that people realise they have a teratoma. In 2009. a British man named Gavin Hyatt "gave birth" to an "undeveloped identical twin" when a small lump pushed its way out of his abdomen. Hyatt named the tiny creature "little Gav". In a case known as fœtus in fœtu reported in the Hong Kong Medical Journal, a three-week-old baby girl born in Hong Kong last February was found to be 'pregnant' with twins. She had surgery to remove the fœtuses, which were 8-10 weeks gestated, had limbs, spine, rib cages and intestines, weighed 14.2g and 9.3g each, and had an umbilical cord. MX News (Sydney), 9 Feb; Washington Post, 23 April; BBC News, D.Mirror, 24 April 2015.

# **ECTOPIC RECORDS**

Ivoti Kumar, an Indian woman aged 62, reportedly had the world's longest ectopic pregnancy, when in August 2014 a baby skeleton was removed from her abdomen after 38

years. Pregnant at 24, Kumar was told that her baby was growing outside her womb and that there was little chance of its survival. Fearful of the surgery, she fled from hospital and once her abdominal pain subsided, she assumed there was no further reason to worry. When the chronic tummy ache returned she feared that the lump in her abdomen was cancer, and had an MRI scan in the central Indian city of Nagpur. This revealed that she was still carrying her unborn child. A team directed by Dr Mohammed Yunus Shah removed a mass containing a small skeleton stuck between Kumar's uterus, intestines and bladder.

Dr Shah said the medical literature showed that the previous record for carrying an ectopic fœtus was 18 years in the case of a Belgian woman, but evidently he was not including what are known as 'stone babies'. When an 82-yearold woman went to Tuniuelito Hospital in Bogota, Colombia, with abdominal pain in December 2013, X-rays revealed a calcified fœtus (known as a lithopædion) in her stomach. It was thought she had been carrying it for 40 years. An even older lithopædion was found in an 84-year-old Brazilian woman on 6 February 2014, when she was admitted

to hospital in Natividade, suffering from severe stomach pains and dizziness. She said she became pregnant 44 years earlier, but the baby stopped moving and she thought it had been aborted. In March 2011, a lithopædion thought to be more than 30 years old was removed from the abdomen of a 59-year-old Haitian woman in Santo Domingo. The all-time record, according to data received at Fortean Towers, was a 61-yearold lithopædion recorded in the New England Medical Journal in 1989 [FT65:8]. For other cases, see FT33:41, 45:24, 85:18, 97:19, 141:16, 170:26, 197:10. MX News (Sydney), 30 Mar 2011, 13 Feb 2014; D.Mirror, 13 Dec 2013. IB Times, MX News (Sydney), 21 Aug 2014.

### RENDERED FEARLESS

A US woman has revealed how a rare disease has left her biologically unable to feel fear in life-threatening situations. She has been held at gunpoint and was also nearly beaten to death by her first husband, but never felt scared.

Doctors at the University of Iowa say the woman has a rare genetic condition called Urbach-Wiethe disease, which causes parts of her brain to waste away. (Sydney) D.Telegraph, 23 Jan 2015.

# **SPATIAL RECALL**

A US skier has been left with superhuman mental abilities after banging her head during an accident on the slopes. Besides sustaining a broken collarbone and concussion, the unnamed woman can recall exact details about every place she has ever seen and draw maps or diagrams of each location and building. The rare condition is known as acquired savant syndrome, a neurological trauma that leads to amazing musical, artistic, mathematical or recollection abilities. Currently, it is believed to affect just 50 people in the world. In the online magazine xoJane.com, the skier wrote: "I could remember everywhere, like flicking through the pages of a book. Every place I had ever been, but specifically buildings." D.Mirror, 18 April 2015.



ABOVE: The fœtus removed after the world's longest ectopic pregnancy – 38 years



Martin Springall, 38, photographed his four-yearold daughter (unnamed in the reports) standing near a rocky outcrop in Zushi, Japan, on 6 July 2014. At the time he was living and working in Tokyo, around an hour north, and wanted to send a picture to his wife, who was at work. "I took a series of them," he said. "It wasn't until I was checking them later in the evening that I happened to notice the boots behind her in that one shot... My daughter is really shy, and she wouldn't have posed for a picture if there was someone standing behind her, which I would have definitely noticed. I really don't like dwelling on stuff like this, to be honest - it freaks me out."

The photograph - which

also shows a patch of blue material below the girl's left arm - was uploaded to Reddit by Mr Springall's friend Brian Publicover. It provoked considerable debate, some speculating that the image had been modified, or that there was a person standing behind the girl... or was it just a trick of the light? Others suggested the feet belonged to the ghost of a samurai, as the place where the girl was standing was close to a samurai graveyard. Someone else thought it might be the ghost of a World War II sailor. Mr Springall, who now lives in Toronto with his family, insisted that the photo had not been Photoshopped and that there was no one else in the vicinity at the time, dailymail.co.uk. 22 April; ABC News, 23 April

# **DESPERATE JOURNEYS**

EATING JELLYFISH AND FIGHTING WOLVERINES: A ROUND-UP OF MIRACULOUS ESCAPES AND HAIR-RAISING RESCUES





ABOVE LEFT: Louis Jordan, rescued after 66 days adrift. BELOW: José Alvarenga trumped that by spending 14 months lost at sea. ABOVE RIGHT: Craig Johnson: wolverine fighter.

 Louis Jordan was rescued on 2 April 2015 - 66 days after he took off to do some fishing. The Houston Express, a Germanregistered tanker, found him sitting on the capsized hull of his 1950s sailing boat, Angel, which had lost its mast and was approximately 200 miles (320km) east of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. Standing 6ft 2in (188cm), Jordan, 37, was in good condition despite a broken collarbone and dehydration, and was able to walk unaided. He did not appear to have lost a drastic amount of his 230lb (104kg) weight. He was airlifted to a hospital in Norfolk, Virginia, and released the next day.

He had sailed out of Bucksport Plantation Marina in Conway, South Carolina, on 23 January, allegedly his first trip on open water. When he had been gone a week, his father Frank Jordan alerted the Coast Guard in Miami. They began a search on 8 February, but gave up after 10 days. Despite reports from other sailors claiming to have seen Jordan's boat, none of the sightings was confirmed and the case was suspended.

During a storm, Jordan's 35ft (10m) boat capsized, snapping the mast. "My boat got flipped and did a 180 [degree] on me while I was sleeping at night, and I was flying through the air

# He would scoop up fish and eat them with seaweed

and somersaulting and all my junk and all my equipment, all my GPS devices and everything, even my stove dislodged and it was all flying with me, all rolling around," he said. He lost his communication equipment, but managed to salvage the stove. He was unable to repair the mast as he had broken his collarbone when the boat flipped over. He waited for the shoulder to heal slightly before he was able to build up enough strength to fashion a makeshift mast and sail - but he was unable to fight the strong currents, he said, and the boat capsized twice more.

At first he ate two or three pancakes a day made of flour fried in oil, but his supply of food and fresh water soon ran out. After that, he collected rainwater in a bucket and, although he struggled to catch fish at first, he learned that they were attracted to his clothes when he put them in the ocean to clean them. The fish would swim through his clothes, so he would scoop them

up with a hand net and eat them raw, sometimes with seaweed. "One day I caught a jellyfish and I know you can eat some types of jellyfish," he said. "I put it to my lips and it stung so badly... I spat it out. I had to put charcoal in my mouth for 45 minutes to suck out the toxin."

The press reports are vague and contradictory: presumably he ceased to cook pancakes after the boat first capsized; though he lost his GPS devices "and everything", he evidently still had a bucket, a hand net, and charcoal; and how on earth did he manage to right the boat *three times* while suffering from a broken collar bone? He said that he read his Bible repeatedly from cover to cover (especially the "End Time Prophecies") to pass the time,

but that the ordeal "seemed a lot longer" than 66 days. "To us it's just a miracle," said his mother Norma Davis, of Jacksonville, North Carolina. "We're just so thrilled that he was found alive." dailymail.co.uk, 3 April; D.Telegraph, D.Mirror, Sun, 4 April; Mail on Sunday, 5 April 2015.

• Last year, José Alvarenga, a fisherman from El Salvador, was found in the Marshall Islands after more than 14 months lost at sea, having drifted 6,500 miles (10,500km) across the Pacific from Mexico [FT312:20-21]. He is now back in El Salvador writing a book, but having little money is considering returning to sea. He is being sued for \$1 million by a former lawyer, who is angry at being cut out of a book deal.

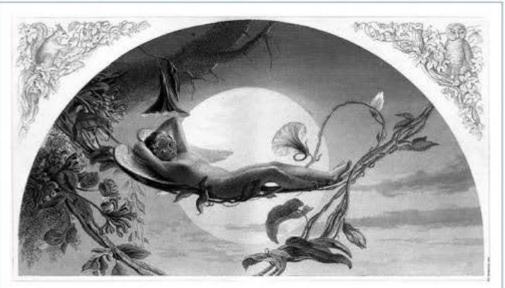


IOHNSON / AFP / GFTTY IMAGES

Last year, two men from Papua New Guinea survived five months adrift in the Pacific [FT323:25].

 An Alaskan man survived three days lost in the wilderness after plunging through ice and then being attacked by a wolverine. On 15 December 2014, Craig Johnson was travelling from the small town of Wainwright, on Alaska's frozen north coast, to see members of his family 80 miles (130km) away in the city of Barrow, for Christmas, Mr. Johnson, 38, was about halfway when his snowmobile fell through sea ice and sank along with a GPS device that would have allowed rescuers to locate him. Having suffered internal injuries from the crash, he crawled out and then, in soaking clothes, endured temperatures as low as minus 35°F (-25°C) as he stumbled on for about 30 miles (48km). As if the situation wasn't bad enough, he was then stalked by a giant wolverine. "You could hear it on the ice, just playing with me, toying with me," he said. After warning shots failed to scare it off and he ran out of ammo, he used a stick to jab at the predator whenever it came close. He eventually found an empty wooden box, used by hunters in the summer, where he hid. There was no survival gear or way to light a fire and the wolverine besieged him.

A search was launched involving dozens of people on snowmobiles, a plane, and a helicopter. Mr Johnson, who suffered a pierced lung and throat, severe frostbite and hypothermia, said: "That third night they passed right by me – not even 200, 300 yards - that's when I lost hope. I just lay back down in that box. It just felt like that was an open grave for me. I almost gave up... but I couldn't give up. I had to do it for my boys, my family." His father had died falling through ice in 1998 and he was determined not to share his fate. Eventually, Johnson's cousin Clifford Benson, who was leading a search team through the area, heard the missing man screaming for help above the noise of the snowmobile engines. This was certainly fortunate, since the wind and snow had all but removed Johnson' tracks from the area. "I've never heard someone yell like that anywhere," said Benson. People (online), 28 Dec; D.Telegraph, D.Mirror, 30 Dec 2014.



# FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

MYTHICAL CREATURE

# KENT'S LOST FAIRIES

The mythical fauna of Britain and Ireland are restricted to different parts of these islands. So, for example, Brownies are resident in

the lowlands of Scotland and, allegedly, Cornwall. The Sidhe are to be found in the old Gaelic-speaking areas of Scotland and Ireland. Red Caps, bogies with a penchant for human blood, are recorded on the Borders and in the English Midlands. Given the time, the resources and some sheer bloody-mindedness it should be possible to map each mythical creature into something like the Atlas of

European Breeding Birds: though any mapper would soon be driven crazy by overlapping terms and characteristics.

Now let us imagine for a moment that this work has been done and that a keen fairyologist flicks through the book to look at the British distribution of the Common Fairy (Fatus communis). The Common Fairy at least, like the sparrow, we would expect to find everywhere? Well, not quite. In the Celtic west fairies are, indeed, in many a glen, at least if we go back to the 18th and 19th century. However, in parts of eastern England the number of historical fairies from that period is low, and in one area it is apparently nil: namely, Kent. This author has found some stray fairy sightings from the early 20th century among spiritualists;

and even post-war urban legends of a leaf-man (!) from Aylesham. But if you go back to 18th- and 19th-century folklore there are, to the best of his knowledge, no fairy records from the south-eastern tip of England: there are more from nearby

London, while neighbouring Sussex has perhaps the richest fairy traditions in the Home Counties. In fact, the only exception from Kent I have been able to come up with is learned mumbling that the name Folkestone meant originally 'The Little People's Settlement': it was, as it happens, more likely Folca's Stone.

Broadly-speaking there are two possibilities to explain

this absence. First, there never was a fairy tradition in Kent: something in the past, be it the Jutes or proximity to France, meant that fairy belief did not take root. Second, there was fairy belief in Kent but it died out earlier than in the rest of England and was channelled into the rich witch and ghost traditions of the south east. I would go unhesitatingly with the second explanation and spend a lot of time fairy spotting in early records.

Interestingly, a Kentish rebellion in 1450 used, as pseudonyms for its leaders, the King and Queen of Fairyland. Are these the first (and last) memories of the fairy tradition of Kent? Possibly...

Simon Young writes on folklore and history and runs www.fairyist.com



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# **UFO CASEBOOK**

**JENNY RANDLES** WRAPS UP HER RE-EXAMINATION OF A CLASSIC BRITISH CLOSE ENCOUNTER

# FLAPPY VALLEY, PART 4

New evidence has turned the famous PC Alan Godfrey case on its head. We have heard the arguments suggesting that the officer misperceived an early morning bus surrounded by a nocturnal whirlwind, and we have heard the witnesses' arguments as to why such an explanation is insufficient to account for what they saw: to them, something real and strange.

However, there is a third possibility. That the whirlwind creating those very localised effects on Burnley Road was *itself* the anomaly: a UAP (Unidentified Atmospheric Phenomenon), totally natural in origin but with characteristics making it resemble a UFO.

Is there any evidence for this argument? Given the outstanding questions regarding this case posed earlier, it's worth examining the possibility that a UAP triggered Alan and Bob's encounter. In doing so, I offer some cases that appear relevant and yet where there is no possibility that a bus was the cause.

Firstly, here is an eyewitness account of a nocturnal whirlwind from a naturalist looking for foxes near Dundee at 4.25am in late August 1989. He was on an embankment above a field of barley when he heard a rustling 50ft (15m) away. Crouching down to observe the 'fox', he instead witnessed a sudden disturbance as

the wind swirled around crop in an area about 50ft across. Yet where he was positioned the air was totally still. This swirling continued for 30 seconds and ended as barley visibly flattened out into a circular area when the energy of the vortex collapsed downward. Walking into the circle, he found there was now no wind present but that the birds had all stopped singing. There was also a peculiar change in atmospheric pressure and a bristling sensation, as when a storm approaches.

Interestingly, when the witness returned to the field later in the morning to show the traces to a friend, a second, newly formed circle had appeared not far from the first. He had never heard of crop circles and assumed this was an odd weather phenomenon.

This case is relevant because it shares several key features with the Todmorden incident, such as the highly localised nature of the wind. It further reveals that this unusual type of vortex can remain static and even recur after dissipating, which may also be the case with the one over Burnley Road. There are further hints that more than just rotating wind is present – changes in air pressure or intense electrostatic charge that disturbed birds and was 'sensed' by the witness. This is akin to when a lightning discharge is about to strike and nearby humans detect the charge in the

air. Might this explain Alan's radio reception problem?

Of course, warm air at ground level is more likely in August than late November. But this next case avoids that problem, occurring just before 1am on 9 December 1986 in Kidderminster, Worcestershire. A local resident heard his window rattle and a noise like a "spinning top winding down". It lasted 15 seconds on an otherwise calm night. Going outside, the family found damage in one small area caused by an extremely powerful vortex. The metal casing on a lamppost, for example, was bent at a 90-degree angle. One family member also looked through the window on hearing the sound and saw some lights shooting away into the sky, presumably as the vortex departed.

Normal tornadoes do not create ionisation that might cause air molecules to glow; although in rare cases when tornadoes have become luminous at night meteorologists think that friction from debris being violently rotated might cause this. Possibly a vacuum created inside rare whirlwind funnels could become ionised and colliding charged particles emit light. So the type of sudden vortex occurring in these cases might not follow normal tornado rules. Certainly, there are enough reports describing air pressure anomalies and electrical charges to suspect this is a real effect

Meteorologist Terence Meaden checked the weather at the time of the Kidderminster vortex and found it very similar to that in Todmorden in 1980, with a clearing frontal system that had brought heavy rain now passing through; this clue might help explain how this particular type of weather event is formed.

These examples imply that a 'spinning top' vortex can become stationary and recur more than once in a narrow area over a limited time. It might feature air pressure changes and electrical emissions and occasionally become visible at close range in a form that could be described as a UFO: however, it results entirely from rare but naturally rotating air masses.

Still unconvinced? Here are a few more examples.

Nelson, Lancashire, 3.10am, 9 March 1977. Two mill workers in a car were returning to a night shift and described how a big glowing oval emerged from clouds over adjacent Pendle Hill (steeped in supernatural legend and 10 miles/16km from Todmorden). The mass was dark in the middle with orange 'coal fire' glows from each end and multicoloured speckled



ABOVE: PC Alan Godfrey discusses his experience on television in the 1980s.



lights across the base. It descended atop the car and stayed there for a couple of minutes as the vehicle's headlights faded and went out and the engine died. The terrified men leapt out and stood beneath the thing, hearing a humming noise that filled the air, like the tide ebbing and flowing. They also felt a dramatic change in air pressure pushing down onto their shoulders and described a tingling sensation that they likened to the electrostatic crackle you can get with nylon clothing. Leaping back into their car, desperate to escape, they found the engine would not turn over. But as the glowing mass drifted away to the south-east, the lights came back on spontaneously and the engine fired, allowing them to flee. Both men suffered minor physiological effects in the following days, notably headaches and watering eyes. I later received many other sightings from the two-hour period leading up to this incident from an area between Todmorden and East Lancashire. Something interesting excited the atmosphere that night.

Marple, Cheshire 11am, 15 June 1988. Roy Sandbach and myself investigated this incident on site for the *Journal of Meteorology* and it now seems strikingly relevant to the type of vortex witnessed at Todmorden. Happily, here we had multiple independent witnesses whom we could interview.

# Clumps of hay rose skywards from the field beyond the school fence

The area is on the Cheshire/Derbyshire border and geographically similar to Todmorden, with a steep valley rising northeastwards into the Pennines, and sloping south-west down towards Stockport. However, in the middle is a narrow strip with the Peak Forest canal and the River Goyt hemming in fields and villages between them.

Events began at 11 am at a local primary school when the headmaster saw through his office window loose hay rising up in clumps from the field beside the boundary. Suspecting children had left the grounds and were tossing it around, he went to investigate, but when he arrived it had stopped and the children were on the school side of the fence insisting the hay

had flown up into the air on its own.

At 12.45pm, the headmaster was supervising a lunchtime game of rounders when he and several children saw the phenomenon close up as clumps of hay rose skywards from the field beyond the fence, spiralling anti clockwise and rising to a height of about 120ft (37m). The clumps appeared to stick together as they continued rotating and formed into a dark oval mass looking like a 'UFO', as the kids noted. It seemed completely solid at this point.

As they watched in amazement this oval, about 20ft (6m) in diameter, hovered over the field, maintaining position and height for a while before moving laterally southwest right over the school grounds and their heads. It disappeared passing over the top of a church beside the school and down the slope towards Hazel Grove.

I guizzed these witnesses about their close encounter and they spontaneously referred to 'feeling funny' and a 'strange tingle' as the oval mass flew over them. The headmaster described what he felt as a downward pressure pushing his head and shoulders gently toward the ground. This, of course, is exactly what the witnesses at Nelson reported, and I have heard the same thing from witnesses in other UAP cases. This must be a physical effect relating to the balance of air forces within the vortex that causes both upward motion (as felt by Bob) and downward pressure, as here, allowing a 'hovering' balance where the oval mass can drift with the prevailing winds.

An interesting sequel is that one of the children claimed that when entering the field after school (which the others dared not do) he found a circle 'swirled about' some 15ft (4.6m) in diameter in the grass from which the hay had risen. It was barely visible a few days later and gone when Roy and I arrived. Meanwhile several residents in the houses between the school and the slope towards Hazel Grove went outside when it started raining hay. They had no idea what had just occurred at the school but now reported a more spreadout mass that was, one housewife told me,



TOP: Burnley Road, Todmorden, where PC Godfrey saw a mysterious vortex. ABOVE: Marple, Cheshire. This photo shows the field from which another vortex rose upwards, then passed right to left over the fence into the school grounds. The car-stop incident occurred on the lower slopes at top right.



ABOVE: Marple, Cheshire: looking from the field into the school grounds. The vortex/UFO came from the right, over the fence behind which the children and head teacher were stood, then headed away over the tall building in the background right of the tall trees.

shaped like a lens or discus and was larger (about 150ft/46m across). Her description resembles a spiral galaxy pattern formed, I suspect, from the ongoing anticlockwise rotation.

Intriguingly, I learned, just before the thing disappeared out of view, there was one central mass with five or so smaller masses on the spiral arms as if being cast out by centrifugal forces. Electrostatic cohesion was likely holding the hay, which now dissipated. None of these witnesses felt any sensations or pressure effects noted at closer quarters by those in the school grounds. However, many deposits of hay fell onto their gardens and were twisted into small spiral clumps an inch or two across, rather like mini bird-nests. The 'UFO' was last seen disintegrating as it passed over a large golf course on the western slopes

Clearly, this event was not a UFO as we know it but was caused by an atmospheric vortex on that summer day. Yet the detailed accounts reveal not just the complexity of the various physical forces involved but the suggestion of the same physiological sensations reported in other cases; not to mention the link with surface swirls, just as we saw on Burnley Road.

The pattern here seems striking and it is easy to imagine what the Marple case might have been like had this not occurred in daylight, its cause thus fully visible. At night, especially if any of the energy from friction or electrostatic forces had caused illumination, then a UFO would be a perfectly reasonable way for anyone to describe what they saw. The Marple hay object was flying and was only identified because witnesses saw it forming or because it deposited itself onto those who missed that part.

I could describe more cases of this nature to try to persuade you that this type of vortex is indeed creating some UFO cases, but I will just add one prequel to the Marple case. For at 9pm on 4 March 1968, something happened

up the road from Glossop, two miles across the same valley; it was investigated 47 years ago by aerospace engineer Roy Dutton, who documented it for UFO group BUFORA.

Now retired, the witness, Gordon, has recently described his recall of the events. He was 21 and driving his four-month-old Triumph Spitfire up a country lane when "two golden objects shot over the top of my car". They were travelling from New Mills in the south across a valley well known for reports of 'ghost lights'. As these objects came close to him they 'killed' the electrics on his car: the headlights died, the radio stopped and the engine cut out. Moments after the golden orbs passed to his north he says: "My lights came back on but my radio would never work again." His brother-in-law was a TV serviceman and tried to fix it without success, so he had to buy a new one. Gordon was able to restart his car engine immediately after the headlights returned. He owned the Triumph until 1970 and it never misbehaved again.

Roy Dutton was allowed to take the radio to his workplace at British Aerospace, and in tests he found that two key transistors had burned out, seemingly due to a power surge. Once Dutton replaced these items the radio worked perfectly.

So in the very area where a Todmordenlike vortex would appear 20 years later, a classic case of radio and car interference had occurred, just as there are links between Nelson and Todmorden and other local cases I have investigated. Is this all just a coincidence, or do we have an intriguing atmospheric vortex being perceived as a UFO?

In 2014 Gordon added an interesting postscript to his encounter. I am trying to trace details to confirm this as it is not a case known. to me. He claims that he discovered after his sighting that: "A few seconds after my car was stopped" a night security guard at a factory in Oldham, in the direction the UFOs had headed. saw something too. Moreover, at the rear of

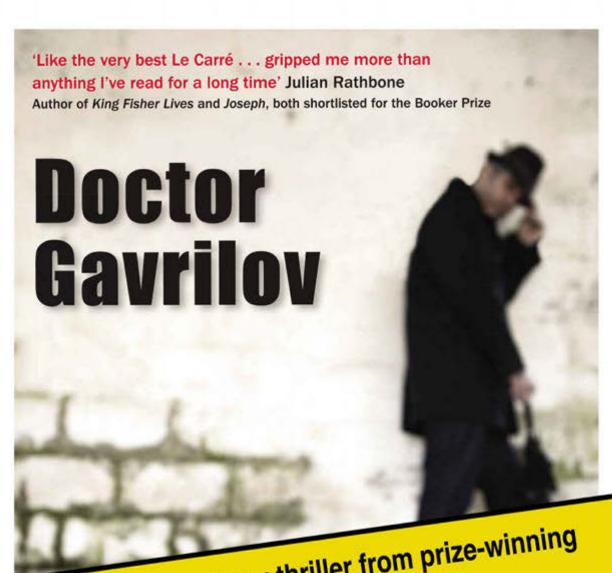
the mill "there was a field that had been cut and the chaff shot 100ft [30m] in the air as the UFO flew past".

Ultimately, all UFO cases are potentially explicable - even extraordinary ones. None are immune by definition, as the 'U' in UFO stands for unidentified, not unidentifiable. Past experience has shown that puzzling encounters can be solved when good fortune provides the key, often years later, and evidence involving a combination of unlikely events reveals an unexpected solution.

Is that what is happening here? Was the Alan Godfrey 'abduction' the result of a freak combination of events that all had to come together for this close encounter to emerge? Or was there actually a UAP in the valley, forged by the weather, that caused this abduction to come into being?

Either way, I find no evidence here of anything but honest witnesses describing what they saw: which was something real and a UFO in the truest sense of that word. Of course, and perhaps most importantly, this case became famous not for what we can all probably accept really was out there – be it a bus and/or a strange vortex: instead it was the jump in time and space along the road that Alan believes occurred and that as yet requires a different resolution. And it was the alien contact generated from this time lapse plus the regression hypnosis that revealed a tale whose origin even the witness is uncertain about.

Exciting accounts of alien kidnap captivate an audience - be it UFO researchers, magazine readers or the mass media – and so they tend to get overemphasised when common sense would decree caution. Our priority should be to investigate what we know happened objectively and to seek to establish the basis of that. Make progress with this part of any case and the elusive, perhaps illusory, alien contact might lose its dominance as an explanation for events of this kind.



The new conspiracy thriller from prize-winning novelist MAGGIE HAMAND 'Like the very best Le Carré' Julian Rathbone 'A compelling page-turner' Thomas Ovans 'Mesmerising' Mary Flanagan



# THE OLD MAN OF HALSALL MOSS

Phantom hitchhiker reports are usually filed under the rubric of urban legend, but once in a while first-hand accounts of such encounters come to light. Back in 1990, ROB GANDY wrote about one such example from Lancashire in these pages. This year, he revisited Halsall Moss to find that its lonely roads are as haunted as ever... Main photo by ETIENNE GILFILLAN

ike many forteans I have an interest in urban legends which was prompted by reading Jan Harold Brunvand's book The Vanishing Hitchhiker.1 Many of the friend-of-afriend (foaf) tales are seen as realistic stories concerning recent events (or alleged events) with an ironic or supernatural twist. Such yarns are perfect fodder for an evening in the pub. During one such session in the late 1980s, much to my surprise, a work colleague described his personal experience of a vanishing hitchhiker he had encountered whilst travelling across Halsall Moss between Southport and Ormskirk in West Lancashire. This presented a rare opportunity to record a first-hand event, so I wrote up the details for the Winter 1990 issue of Fortean Times [FT56: 52-53]. In summary what happened was as follows:

Bill (pseudonym) was driving his Mini along Gregory's Lane in the direction of Ormskirk. It was 11.30 on a Friday night in February or March 1965. The weather was clear, but it was pitch dark. As he neared the bridge over the disused railway he looked in the car mirror and saw the figure of a large elderly man, probably in his seventies, sitting in the back seat of the car. Bill looked long and hard enough to know his eyes were not playing tricks. There was a grey/ white scarf around the man's neck in the style of a cravat, and Bill got the impression that he was wearing a flat cap. Bill was frightened and brought the car to a halt. Getting out of the car he reached for the starting-handle to defend himself, but when he looked the man had vanished. Realising that there was no way the man could have got out of the Mini, Bill became more scared, jumped back in the car and drove off at speed. He was certain that it was not a trick of the light or an hallucination, and this was affirmed six or seven years later when by chance he met a man at a social event who described having had

# HE LOOKED IN THE **MIRROR AND SAW** A LARGE, ELDERLY MAN SITTING IN THE **CAR'S BACK SEAT**



virtually the same experience at exactly the same place. He too had seen an elderly man, of similar appearance, in the rear seat of his car who had then simply vanished.

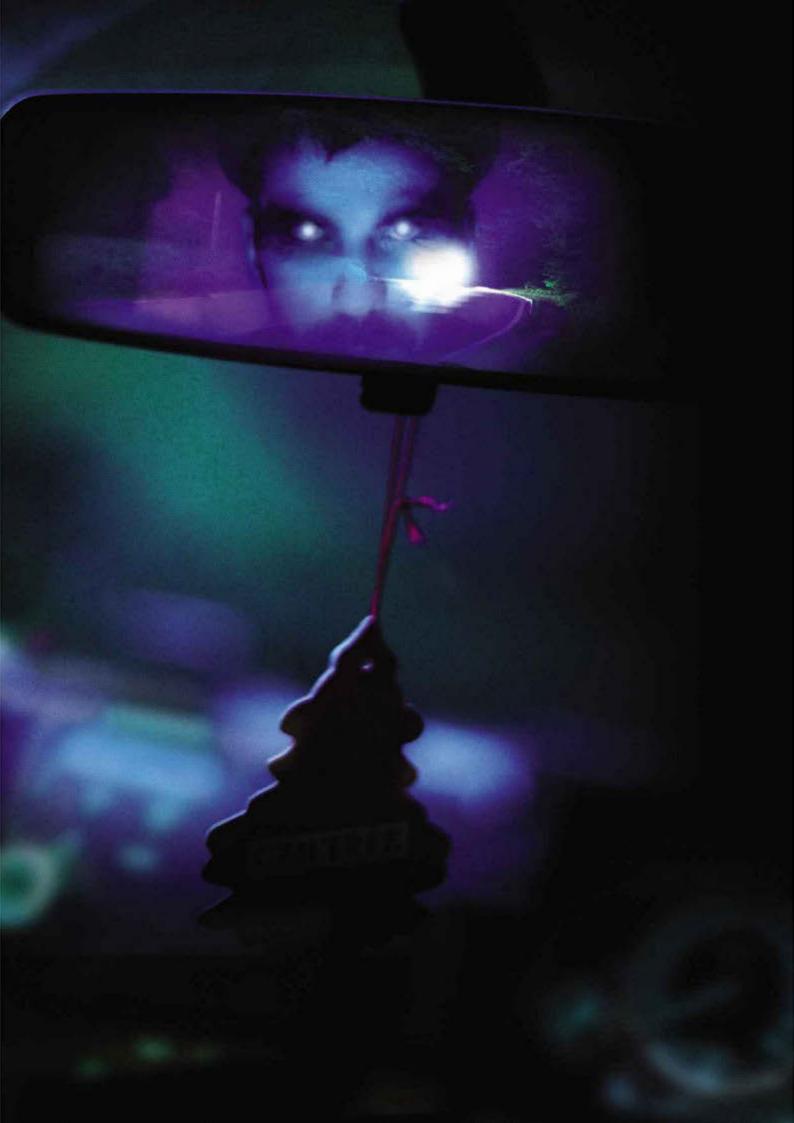
In late 2014, when I realised that the 50th anniversary of Bill's experience was approaching, I thought it would be interesting to find out if there had been

any repetition of such events during the intervening period. I contacted Champion Newpapers <sup>3</sup> (who provide free papers across the Sefton/West Lancashire area), who helped seek out related experiences from their readers. They published a piece in the Southport and Ormskirk & West Lancashire issues on 21 January 2015 under the heading of "Doc's appeal to unravel mystery of ghostly hitchhiker". <sup>4</sup> I specifically invited first-hand and, at the very most, second-hand reports, and deliberately did not reveal details about the figure observed by Bill so as not to inadvertently influence responses. This article provides details of the responses received and looks at whether there are any

# **HALSALL MOSS**

Halsall Moss is an area of very fertile farmland, reclaimed by drainage, which occupies much of the western part of the parish of Halsall, the name of the village originating from "rising ground near the edge of the great bog or mire". 5 The area's flatness is attested to by the fact that it was here that the first sod was cut at the commencement ceremony for the Leeds-Liverpool Canal in 1770; the event is commemorated by the 'Halsall Navvy' sculpture (pictured at left) by Thompson Dagnall at the Halsall Warehouse Bridge.

As can be seen from the map overleaf, Halsall Moss is at the centre of the various incidents and encounters described in the responses. It is part of a large area of West Lancashire, which stretches from the hills between Halsall and Ormskirk in the east, to the coastal towns of Southport, Ainsdale and Formby in the west. To the north is the Southport-Wigan railway line, running through Bescar and Burscough, and to the south the courses of the River Alt and Maghull Brook.





ABOVE: A map of the area showing the locations of the accounts (A-H) collected in this article.

## **RESPONSES**

I was pleased to receive six first-hand reports that related to vanishing hitchhiker phenomena, or something similar, plus two other stories (G and H) that had a degree of strangeness. In all cases, the wording of the reports has been agreed with the respondents, except for cases C and H, where the respondents said that they would trust me to collate and present their stories accurately. All respondents have been treated as anonymous.

I have decided not to try and prioritise the reports in any order, and simply start in the north and work my way south. Cases A-F are the first-hand reports, with the other two shown as cases G & H.

### **CASE A: WHITE VAN MAN**

"My mother and I had a very strange incident happen to us when travelling back to Liverpool following an overnight stay at my sister's home in Southport during the Summer of 2005. My mother sadly passed away last Christmas. I am a Nursing Sister at a major Merseyside Hospital, and due to me being on duty the next morning I had to get up with mum at 5am in order to be on time for my early shift at 7am that Sunday morning.

"I was driving my car along the main A570 trunk road towards Ormskirk, on the long straight stretch outside Southport and well before the bridge across the Leeds-Liverpool canal at Scarisbrick. My speed was about 30mph [48km/h]. Although it would have been around 5:50am, it was light and the

# "SHE TURNED HER HEAD AND SAW A MAN SITTING IN THE FRONT PASSENGER SEAT NEXT TO HER"

weather was so fine and warm that I had the driver's seat window down. There was no other traffic on the road.

"Suddenly, seeming to come from nowhere, was a white van that drove alongside my car as if it was about to overtake me. I looked over towards the car and could clearly see that it was being driven by a man, who just smiled at us. He was around 40 years of age and was clean shaven. The van appeared to overtake my car but then seemed to vanish into thin air. Strangely, there had been no sound from the van.

"I remember my mum being in complete shock as though she was the only one to notice what had happened. She asked "Who was that!?" Yet within two minutes, the same white van drove up at the side of me again and we saw exactly the same man driving. Then the van vanished completely.

"I pulled the car over to the side of the road to take on board what had occurred. My mum was in complete shock and neither of us could make any sense of what had just happened. There were no turn-offs from the road, and the area is quite flat, so there was no way that the van could have simply turned off the road without us seeing it."

# CASE B: THE MAN IN THE WOOLLEN WINTER COAT

In September or October 2004, Mrs B of Southport was returning home from work at around 9.30 in the evening. She was driving alone along the main A570 trunk road from Ormskirk. It was winter and dark.

As she approached the Blue Elephant restaurant, she had a feeling that there was someone in the car with her. Just beyond the restaurant, as she came up to the bridge across the Leeds-Liverpool Canal, adjacent to Scarisbrick Marina, she turned her head to the left and saw a man sitting in the front passenger seat next to her. She did not know who he was, but described him as wearing a man's woollen winter coat and a hat. She did not see his face.

The bridge is on a bend, and so Mrs B necessarily returned her attention to the road, but when she turned back the man had gone. She says that she was not frightened by the sighting, and it was only the next day that she really thought about how strange the event had been.

# CASE C: ALAN'S STORY

In the late 1990s Alan was a taxi driver, and early one Sunday morning in June or July, between 3am and 3.30am, he was driving west along Gregory's Lane from Halsall

towards Birkdale. He was tired and had just passed the bad bend in the road, heading towards the bridge over the disused railway line.

All of a sudden and right in front of him he saw "an oldish guy wearing a cap". He appeared to be wearing a farmer's-type jacket. Alan slammed on the brakes but the man had been so near that Alan was certain that he had run him over. He stopped his car and got out, shaking like a leaf. But when he looked where the car had been, and under the car, there was nothing there; the man had simply disappeared.

Alan wondered if he had run over an animal, somehow mistaking what he had seen. But there was no evidence of his having hit anything else. To this day, Alan knows that he had a genuine experience, but is unable to find an explanation.

#### CASE D: THE SHADOW ACROSS THE WINDSCREEN

Ms W of Ainsdale was travelling back from work at Ormskirk at around 5.30pm on a fairly unpleasant night in November 2013; it was particularly windy, rainy and very dark. She had just passed the houses in Gregory's Lane, into the national speed limit zone, and followed the turn in the road that bends quite sharply to the right, past the left turn into The Runnel, and with the Halsall Riding & Livery Centre directly in front of her beyond the field.

Ms W describes what happened at that

point as follows: "When you're sat stationary in traffic and a pedestrian crosses the road immediately behind your car, they cast a shadow right across your back windscreen. That was the sensation I experienced, but at the time I was travelling at 40mph [64km/h], so it was safe to say there was nobody walking behind the car! For a split second, the shadow encompassed the whole car and then it passed".

She felt slightly unnerved, but as it was such a vile night she put it down to the shadows cast by telegraph poles, lights from the barn on the corner, tiredness and so on. As nothing happened on her journey the next night, Ms W forgot about the event until it happened again in September 2014, and a third time in October 2014. Both subsequent events were around the same time of day, between 5.15 and 5.35pm depending on the traffic. Both subsequent incidents also happened on the same stretch of road, and again she was alone. Ms W does not particularly recall the weather on either occasion, which suggests to her that it was fairly calm out, although obviously dusk. She thinks of herself as an open-minded sceptic, and has given considerable thought to potential explanations. However, the fact that the experience has only happened three times and does not happen every evening causes her to rule out normal shadow effects caused by trees, telegraph poles, and suchlike. She does not find what happened particularly scary.

#### CASE E: THE MAN IN THE **GABARDINE COAT**

Mrs H is a professional lady who has worked in the high reaches of the NHS. She got in touch saying that the article in the Champion had struck a chord with her. Prior to the event described below, Mrs H described how on two occasions she had been driving along St Helens Road (A570) from the M58 towards Edge Hill College (now University) when she had seen a purple/lilac wisp fluttering across the road. This happened in the same place both times, where there were open fields either side of the road. She felt that the fleeting apparition was of a lady. On relating these experiences to her husband he said that she must have seen a ghost.

On a dark winter's night in the 1990s, Mrs H had been to college in Wigan and was dropping down to Halsall from Clieves Hill. It was late evening and she was travelling on her own along Narrow Lane. At the blind junction with Halsall Lane she stopped to check if the road was clear. As she bent forward to look, over her left shoulder she saw that someone was in the back seat of her car. The figure was misty, but was clearly a large man who appeared to be in his 60s. He was wearing a grey/beige gabardine coat, with a light, yellow/beige scarf around his neck tied like a cravat. Mrs H did not see what he had on his head, but he appeared perfectly normal and peaceful, and showed no expression.

Mrs H was not frightened, and admits that



ABOVE: A view across Halsall Moss, a large area of flat and fertile farmland reclaimed by drainage that lies at the centre of the strange encounters described by witnesses.



ABOVE: The B5195 at Downholland Cross. BELOW: The Scarisbrick Arms, where the ghostly, leather-aproned passenger appeared happy to exit the vehicle.

her immediate reaction was one of "I've got a ghost in the back of my car. If I can get back home quickly then I can show my husband!" She accelerated away towards home, but when she got there the figure had gone. Although the time involved was very limited Mrs H vividly remembers the event and the details.

#### **CASE F: POPPING OUT FOR A PINT**

A professional woman from West Lancashire got in touch with the following story:

"This event happened in 1998. I am unsure which month, but it was an autumn or wintery day, going dark early. I had visited my sick friend in Formby and was returning across the Moss towards Aughton. The road I took was the B5195 along Formby Lane past Great Altcar and Farmer Ted's Farm Park.

"It was a dark, early evening and the mist which came in patches across the Moss made visibility poor but not impossible. I drove slower than usual, as the road bends and twists at right angles and left angles and you can come to these bends unexpectedly. At one of the right angles, well before Farmer Ted's, as I slowed to take the corner I had the distinct impression that a man had got into the back seat of my car and sat directly behind me. Part of me knew it was impossible, yet I could sense that if I looked into the rear mirror I would see him. But I did not dare to look or turn round and look at him. I was terrified. I'd not experienced anything like it before and, even though I am not religious at all, I kept saying the Lord's Prayer over and over again out loud as if it would protect me from the feeling of him being there, or even protect me from him. He felt real.

"As I drove, I eventually felt that he would not hurt me and I was a little less terrified. I slowed down at Downholland Cross (where the

#### THE HITCHHIKER WAS NOT OF THIS **CENTURY**; HE HAD **BELONGED TO ANOTHER TIME**"



Scarisbrick Arms is) ready to turn left then right at the crossroads. As I slowed to a near stop, the man got out of my car, and I felt an enormous sense of relief. I caught a glimpse of him: he seemed to be of mature age, not an old and not a young man, but agile and strong enough. He had on what I could only describe as a leather skirt or apron.

"I should highlight that the car door did not physically open or close when the man got in, or when he got out. He just arrived when I slowed down at the corner, and similarly he just left when I slowed down at the cross roads.

"As I turned at the crossroads, into Broad Lane, I felt almost an amusement at what had happened. It was as if I had been used to give a hitch-hiker a lift to the local hostelry; but the hitch-hiker was not of this century; he had belonged to another time. I have tried to make sense of the experience. Perhaps the slowing down and the mist activated an old memory of someone getting into my car at another time, but I could not recall any such experience before. The explanation that I felt most comfortable with was that I had picked up a presence of a man from centuries before - even Roman, as he had that leather apron thing on - who wanted to get to the hostelry. I understand that the Moss was used after many battles of different sorts, to throw bodies into it."

#### **CASE G: STRANGE FIRE**

Mrs B of Birkdale told of how, around 2000, she was a passenger in a car travelling west along Carr Moss Lane towards Birkdale and Southport. This road runs parallel to Gregory's Lane, but at some distance. She was accompanied by a female and male friend, the latter driving. It was around 10pm and it was dark, so it was not summer.

Suddenly, the car went off the road and went down into a ditch. Fortunately no one was injured and they all got out of the car. About 20ft (6m) from the crash they saw a fire burning brightly on the edge of the road, which appeared to be freshly made. Mrs B said that they were "in the middle of nowhere", with the flat open expanse of the Moss on either side and no houses anywhere nearby. There was absolutely no one around. Who would have made a fire by the side of the road in such a remote spot, and why? They left the scene and made the long walk to get help to get home.

Mrs B's story does not include reference to the sighting of any apparitions, but she felt that her strange experience could be a useful



ABOVE: Gregory's Lane, Halsall Moss: this was the location of the two original incidents recounted in the author's 1990 article as well as two of those collected here.

contribution, given that she feels that Halsall Moss can have a strange atmosphere at the best of times.

#### **CASE H: POSSIBLE PORTENT**

Mrs C of Burscough told how her husband was tragically killed while driving a steamroller as part of a team repairing the road on Plex Moss Lane, which crosses Halsall Moss. His colleagues said that he had been driving slowly down the road and then moved over and crashed into a ditch. It was around 1pm on a beautiful sunny day in May 1986.

A few years later, Mrs C came across a lady who had been researching strange occurrences on the Moss. The woman told her that she had been expecting Mrs C to be in touch at some point, explaining that someone had reported the sighting of an apparition walking down the middle of the road near to where her husband had been killed, just before he died. The apparition was described as a WWII airman, wearing a flying jacket and helmet with a white scarf around his neck. He appeared from an old-style car of that era.

The lady said that there had been many sightings of this airman, usually just prior to deaths occurring on the Moss; his appearance arguably acting as a portent or premonition. She also told Mrs C that there were high numbers of deaths on the roads crossing the Moss, and that there had been many "ghostly sightings" and strange flashing lights.

Mrs C had no prior awareness of what the lady described, and confirmed that no one amongst her husband's work colleagues had made any claim about anything strange happening at the time. But she thought that she should tell me this story in response to the *Champion* article. It can be seen that the events are spread right across the area, rather than being concentrated in one or two specific places. However, Cases C & D are both on the same stretch of road as the two original cases described in FT56, and they are all near to the Halsall Riding & Livery Centre. The Centre is situated on Gregory's Lane, close to and just south-east of the bridge over the disused railway line.

Given its proximity to the sites of these four episodes, a telephone call was made to the owner to see if any of the people involved with the Centre had had any similar experiences, or if passers-by might have stopped there to report anything odd. The Centre has been in business since 1983/84, but there was nothing to report. The owner did add that when mist came down on the Moss the Centre could be completely enveloped by it, yet if you went up to the railway bridge it would be completely clear, giving a view of a sea of mist all around.

#### LEVEL OF ACCIDENTS ON HALSALL MOSS

Given some references to there being higher than average numbers of accidents on the roads crossing Halsall Moss, Danielle Thompson of the Champion made a Freedom of Information Request to Lancashire Constabulary, asking about the numbers over time. The response focused on the road that saw four of the eight episodes (Cases C & D and the two from FT56): New Cut Lane and Gregory's Lane (which run into one another). It covered the period 8 May 2008 to 28 Feb 2015 (inclusive), which was as far back as the new information system goes. These searches indicated that there had been 85 collisions/ accidents, of which 56 had involved "injury" and 29 recorded "damage only". The overall

period of six years, 10 months, suggests that there were on average around 12.5 collisions/ accidents per annum, or one a month. Given the road is an open lane, subjectively this seems a little on the high side, but of course making objective comparisons will always be difficult because there are no data on the total volumes of traffic.

#### WHAT IS GOING ON?

There can be no doubt that having eight first-hand accounts of Vanishing Hitchhiker phenomena (including the two original cases) in such close proximity is quite remarkable, and there is a great deal of consistency between them, albeit with variations. The following points can be drawn from the data:

All of the events involved a single person, except Case A which had two women together. The cases involved six women and three men. In all cases the (main) witness was driving the car. All cases, except Case A, were at night or it was dark. There was a variety of weather involved. Only in Case A did the phenomenon appear to interact with the witnesses, i.e. he "just smiled at us". All apparitions were of men (as far as can be told).

In his excellent book *The Evidence For Phantom Hitch-Hikers*, Michael Goss sets out the array of manifestations that have been attributed to the phenomenon. Many of these involve definitive interactions between the phantom and the witness – for example, the unaccompanied driver provides a lift and engages in conversation before the hitchhiker simply vanishes. What is made clear is that such events happen across all countries and cultures and have occurred across the centuries: the phantom hitch-hiker is a strong folklore motif, and belongs to a

broad tradition of ghost stories set on the open road.<sup>8</sup>

However, the cases described above fit into one end of the spectral spectrum, in that they are incomprehensible, open-ended or inconclusive: they just "happened" without clues as to why. As such, they are not usual in the folk tradition, and are more like the staple items of psychical research, whose vast literature is replete with ghosts that do little more than appear and then vanish forever. The credibility of the accounts derives from the witnesses, and having been in communication with each of them I can vouch for their total sincerity. A common thread was that my piece in the *Champion* 

was welcomed by them as an opportunity to present their experience.

One potential explanation for such experiences is physiological and psychological: when the eye receives photons of light (waves/particles) these hit the back of the retina and get transferred as electrical impulses travelling down the optic nerve. The information received is transferred and processed by a series of systems and processes which use neurotransmitters at the synapses (chemical transfer) and then electrical impulses

(action potential) to the back of the brain, where it is further processed. The eye does not process everything that impinges on the

# "DRIVING DOWN CARR MOSS LANE, ACROSS THE MOSS, THE CAR BECAME VERY COLD.."

retina, rather it focuses on significant angles, amount of light, objects, and colour, and the brain fills in the gaps by supposition and

THE

**Michael Goss** 

previous experiences/memory to make sense of what the eye and the optic system is processing. In other words, we actively make sense of what we see.<sup>9</sup>

It is reasonable to assume that many drivers will have a greater sense of awareness and concentration as they drive across Halsall Moss in the dark, as the nature of the roads in the area, with their sharp bends and lack of lighting, and the frequent presence of mists, can make driving hazardous, if not dangerous. Consequently, drivers will take in more

information from the environment than they usually do. In the circumstances, the experience of something like the presence of another person in the car may well be prompted by something in the environment – a mist, a smell, a taste, a sound; more than one sense being activated causes a person to try and make sense of the extra information.

#### **INTERNET TALES**

For the purposes of analysis, I have deliberately ignored two related stories that appeared on an Internet Forum entitled "Haunted roads in Southport and West Lancashire" because I had no way of liaising with the people concerned and questioning the details. But for completeness, and interest, I present them below: 10

One quoted a friend "driving down Carr Moss Lane, Halsall, across the Moss about 15 years ago about 1:30am in the morning, when he said the car became very cold and he looked in his rear view mirror and saw an old man aged about 75-80 years in the back seat dressed in clothes that dated from the 1900s; when he turned to have another look the man had gone".

Another stated: "About seven years ago I was driving down New Cut Lane about 8pm one night and saw an old man stood in the middle of the road at the bottom of the bridge. I drove slow and went round him. When I looked in the mirror there was no one there and my son asked me what I was looking for. He didn't see him. I had to stop the car a few minutes later as it really scared me".

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

That Halsall Moss is a strange and atmospheric area is beyond question, and



ABOVE: Carr Moss Lane, where the occupants of a car came upon a mysterious fire; it was also the location of an Internet report of the Old Man of Halsall Moss.





ABOVE: Out there: "That Halsall Moss is a strange and atmospheric place is beyond question, and there is clearly a long history of folklore surrounding it".

there is clearly a long history of folklore surrounding it. Yet the fact that I have come across eight first-hand testimonies relating to vanishing/phantom hitch-hikers, or whatever they might best be described as, in such close proximity raises questions. Is there a particular phenomenon which is generating these experiences? Or is the landscape conducive to people having them, perhaps for the sorts of reasons outlined above? All the episodes involved people travelling in their cars, and all apparitions were passive in relation to the witness(es), bar the smiling man in Case A. The paradox is that there is so much consistency between the accounts, yet there is also so much variation.

I am not going to try and determine the exact cause(s) for what has been witnessed because I know that the nature of these types of fortean events is such that definitive conclusions are impossible. That the events occurred sporadically over a considerable period of time does not diminish their value. I simply present them as evidence that there is a genuine phenomenon taking place, which is separate from the longstanding record of foaf-tales as described by Jan Harold Brunvand, and others. That the foaf-tales may themselves present subconscious prompts for such experiences cannot be excluded, but why might Halsall Moss represent a specific focus?

Perhaps the observed phenomenon is more widely spread but simply under-reported.

If this type of landscape somehow induces psychological reactions under certain circumstances then should there not be similar examples from the Fens in East Anglia and the Somerset Levels? Perhaps there are, but no one has found and collated

Initially I was not sure what sort of response I might get to the piece in the Champion, but I can say that getting six new first-hand experiences, plus the two other examples of strangeness, was more than I could have anticipated. Unfortunately, I had to exclude the foaf-tale I received about a "cavalier" on horseback floating across a road on the Moss, but you can't win 'em all. What is certain is that next time I drive across Halsall Moss I will probably try and keep my eyes tightly shut. [II]

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank Danielle Thompson and her colleagues at the Champion for their help in this research, particularly the invitation for people to submit their experiences and the Freedom of Information Request. My thanks and great appreciation to the people of Sefton and West Lancashire who got in touch to share their experiences.

I will be very happy to collect and collate first-hand reports of vanishing/ phantom hitchhikers from wherever they may occur; please forward any correspondence on the subbject to the editor.

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#### **AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY**



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ghostlore and football curses.

## WILD TALENT MALCOLM LOWRY, FORT AND MAGIC

Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano is one of the 20th century's greatest novels, although the crucial influence of Charles Fort on its author's life and work is seldom mentioned. **RUTH CLYDESDALE** sets the literary record straight.

n 25 October 2014, a new novel by Malcolm Lowry (In Ballast to the White Sea) hit the bookshops. Not an unusual occurrence, you might think. But Lowry's manuscript of the novel had been destroyed by fire in 1944 and Lowry himself had died almost exactly 12 years later. His life had been dominated by weird coincidences and strange events, and the pattern still seems to be unfolding.

Malcolm Lowry was born in New Brighton, Wirral, in 1909. Rejecting the comfortable life of his wealthy family, he went to sea at the age of 18 before studying at Cambridge. From then on he lived a restless life of travel, encompassing Spain, Italy, France, the States and - most famously - Mexico and Canada, before finally settling in England shortly before his death. He was already deeply enough into alcohol in his youth to inspire disapproval in his fellow sailors (quite a feat!), and although drink was his constant demon it also inspired his masterpiece, Under the Volcano.

Equally an obsession was his study of signs and portents, which gave him the conviction that he was living a fated and meaningful life. The fascination seems to have begun early; his first wife Jan Gabrial recalls that at the age of 23, Lowry was "beguiled by amulets and charms." 1 By that time he had already written his first novel, Ultramarine, in which he describes his hero consulting a fortune-teller. Jan notes that Lowry believed that the spirit of a sea-going relative whom he called the "Old Captain" watched over him, and he always wore as a talisman a silver coin that had belonged to the Captain. His faith was serious: when a Random House editor claimed that Ultramarine was plagiaristic, Lowry drafted and redrafted a letter of defence, pencilling several times in the margin, "Help me, O.C."

Gabrial also records that Lowry was fascinated by "Charles Fort's tales of frogs raining on London..." 2 and years later during his second marriage Lowry was still enthused enough to recommend Fort

#### HE WAS OBSESSED WITH SIGNS AND PORTENTS. **CONVINCED HE WAS** LIVING A FATED LIFE

to his mother-in-law, describing him as "a neglected but exciting American writer." He continued: "I look upon the day I first hit upon Lo! in a public library as a red-letter day in my life. I know of no writer who has made the inexplicable seem more dramatic

than Charles Fort." 3 So impressed was Lowry that he quoted Fort in three of his novels and a couple of short stories, and Fort is an invisible presence in all his other works. Lowry felt that Fort's evidence that the world is stranger than we think endorsed his own outlook, and that he himself had been "chosen of God or the devil to elucidate the Law of Series."

Lowry always based his books and stories on his own experience, and the books in turn affected his life, so that it's often hard to see where one ends and the other begins. Both his life and his work were tightly woven webs of correspondences á la Fort, in which every element was symbolic and interrelated. This is true above all for Under the Volcano, the book that both made Lowry's name and wrecked him. UTV is ostensibly the tale

of a man destroying himself through alcohol, but it is an immensely subtle work into which Lowry wove many layers of meaning: political, philosophical and

Lowry began writing UTV in Cuernavaca, Mexico. He and Jan had gone down there from New York in 1936 expecting to make only a short visit. However, Lowry swiftly fell prey to the allure of drinking cheap tequila and mescal in cantinas that opened at 4am. The folk-drenched Catholic culture with its emphasis on death and magic also entranced him, and so Mexico nourished both his imagination and his powerful self-destructive urge. Jan struggled to cope with Lowry's gargantuan boozing sessions; the marriage fell apart and she returned to the States. Lowry stayed on, still drinking prodigiously and suffering the torments of booze- and guilt-induced hell. In 1938, his long-suffering father came to the rescue and paid for him to go to Los Angeles, where Lowry met and fell in love with Margerie Bonner. They moved to Vancouver and then settled amongst fishermen in a ramshackle squatter's shack in Dollarton, on the shore of Burrard Inlet. Here they lived a



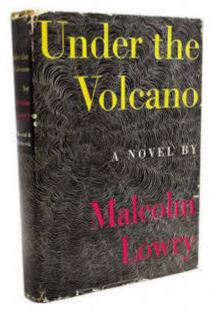
ABOVE: Popocatepetl, one of the two volcanoes that overshadow the semi-autobiographical characters and events in Lowry's 1947 novel Under the Volcano.

life of romantic hardship and isolation that helped Lowry sober up (by his standards, anyway), and he continued his somewhat obsessive writing and revision of UTV.

#### THE BABE OF THE ABYSS

In September 1943 occurred one of the strangest and most fateful moments of Lowry's life. He had just had the inspiration that the hero of UTV, the Consul, was a white magician gone to the bad; he asked Margerie to visit the library in Vancouver and bring him anything she could find on alchemy and sorcery. Lowry's knowledge of the occult was already fairly broad - he'd read Yeats, Blavatsky, Eliphas Levi, Ouspensky and the other usual suspects. However, his knowledge was only theoretical. Cue a knock on the door of the Lowrys' obscurely placed shack. Standing outside in the forest gloaming was a lanky figure who introduced himself as Charles Stansfeld Jones, a census-taker for voter registration. Lowry invited him in, whereupon Stansfeld Jones unexpectedly revealed himself to be a magician of some consequence: no less indeed than the mystical child of the notorious Great Beast himself, Aleister Crowley.

Stansfeld Jones's magical name was Frater Achad, though the Lowrys called him Stan. Like Lowry, he was an Englishman who had lived in Vancouver; also like Lowry, he'd hurled himself into the abyss. However, whereas Lowry's hell was of mescal, Stan's was a magical one. As a neophyte of Crowley's magical order Astrum Argentum, Stan had sworn the terrible Oath of the Abyss in 1916, intending thereby to shoot



straight up the Cabbalistic Tree of Life to the grade of Magister Templi. Living by the oath involved finding meaning in each and every event of life, no matter how trivial which was, of course, exactly what Lowry was already doing. Anyone attempting this view of life runs the risk of developing paranoia, from which Lowry - terrified as he was of all forms of authority and tormented by what he perceived as a malicious universe undoubtedly suffered. Nor did Stan escape lightly.

When news of Stan's action reached Crowley, the Beast recognised him as the magical son prophesied in his channelled

Book of the Law, the Babe of the Abyss who was destined to interpret that very book to him. But Stan unsurprisingly had a breakdown after taking the Oath. Prefiguring Lowry's character the Consul, he had reversed the Cabbalistic Tree of Life and fallen into the Abyss that is the punishment for hubris. Stan returned to England and became a Catholic, but not very wholeheartedly since he tried to persuade his fellow worshippers to adopt Crowley's Law of Thelema. Predictably, his efforts proved unsuccessful and he returned to Vancouver, where he allegedly achieved notoriety by stripping in public and wandering around town until he was arrested and jailed. By the time Lowry met him, Stan had long ago fallen out with Crowley and, although still deeply involved with magic, seemed to be on an even emotional keel.

The same cannot be said however for Lowry, who with Margerie began to spend intense sessions at Stan's home in Deep Cove consulting the I Ching and practising astral magic and yoga, as well as reading widely in Stan's extensive mystical library. A list drawn from Stan's books together with direct quotes from a couple of them found their way into UTV; more importantly, Stan's experience of misusing magical powers and plunging into the Abyss structured and thematised the novel. Lowry felt that he'd thereby developed the Consul from a mere "shallow drunkard"5 into a figure of esoteric and allegorical significance. Indeed, Stan's influence on UTV is so profound that it is hard to imagine what the book would have been like had Lowry never met him. And Stan seemed to have a

mystical link with *UTV* and its atmosphere of the Mexican Day of the Dead, as he died in 1950 on the very day that Lowry received his author's copy of the French translation of the book.

As usual, Lowry's inner world bled into outer reality, and he found to his discomfiture that the forces evoked at Deep Cove began to manifest in his life. Writing to a friend, he explained: "It seemed that by merely looking upon these things I had involved myself with a far more intricate karma, not to say set of ordeals." Lowry feared that he had permanently opened doors that should have remained closed. He abruptly ceased participating in Stan's magical evenings, although he continued to use his library and remained a close friend.

#### THE ELEMENT FOLLOWS YOU AROUND

The most immediate outcome of his magical explorations, as Lowry saw it, was terrible and twofold. In April 1944, while he was still working on UTV, Charles Jackson's novel The Lost Weekend was published, based on his experience of alcoholism. Lowry was devastated, feeling that no publisher would be interested in another book about a drunkard. And naturally, he identified uncanny similarities and coincidences between Jackson's work and his own life. Doubtless the fact that Jackson's main character invents a son called Malcolm aided his feeling of inauthenticity. UTV is unquestionably the finer book, but the eternally self-doubting Lowry lacked the confidence to believe so.

Hot – literally – on the heels of this disaster came the catastrophic fire already mentioned. The Lowrys' beloved shack was burnt to the ground along with their few possessions. Margerie managed to save the manuscript of *UTV*, and Lowry, badly burned, had to be dragged from the flames with the all-but-destroyed *In Ballast* in his arms. He later noticed that on four of the surviving pages, on which only a circle of legible typescript remained, the word "fire" appeared. Stan drove the Lowrys to hospital.

Lowry regarded UTV as "a kind of machine," remarking cryptically: "It works too, believe me, as I have found out." 7 As suggested above, it did, but not in positive ways. After a long period of recuperation, including another rather disastrous visit to Mexico, he achieved something he had never really expected: the book was published to rave reviews. He was shot to literary stardom overnight, and proved utterly unable to cope. Chronically shy and paranoid, he escaped into increasingly mind-boggling amounts of booze. Without doubt, UTV was the infernal machine that caused his ruin. His friend John Davenport had already warned him that the book was "an act of magic" 8 that would endanger its author, and his words proved prophetic.

In UTV the Consul lists the demons



LOWRY BELIEVED
THAT BY WRITING
HE COULD AFFECT
EVENTS IN THE
OUTSIDE WORLD



LEFT: Charles Stansfeld Jones, also known as Frater Achad. BELOW: Offerings of Tequila and beer on the Day of the Dead.

that torment him, quoting directly from SL MacGregor Mathers's The Book of Abramelin the Mage, which Lowry had read at Stan's. According to his friend Earle Birney, at a certain stage of drunkenness these demons became real to Lowry, who would retreat to a corner of the room and argue with invisible creatures: "He would suffer and he would sweat and just be torn by that terrible inner drama." 9 Lowry effectively suffered the same fate as the Consul, both the author and his character choosing the dark allure of suffering over the redemptive forces of love, creativity and white magic.

Whole books have been dedicated to unravelling the dense mystical and Cabbalistic symbolism of *UTV*, though Fort's influence upon it is seldom mentioned. <sup>10</sup> Suffice to say here that as the Consul contemplates a painting of drunkards being hurled into hell, Lowry uses the phrase "lost wild talents," <sup>11</sup> referring both to the hell-bound drinkers and the Consul himself.

hell-bound drinkers and the Consul himself. Lowry, as we have seen, believed that his own wild talent was that by writing he could affect events in the outside world; the burning of the shack simply strengthened his conviction.

And that conviction produced his most directly fortean work. After the fire, the Lowrys had gone to stay with friends near Oakville on Lake Ontario. Lowry was in a pitiful state, suffering nightmares of fire

and stopping strangers on the street to tell them that his house had burned down. Coincidences continued to haunt him. His friends owned a painting of a local house that Lowry liked because it reminded him of the Dollarton shack. Unsurprisingly, he kept imagining it bursting into flames - only for the actual house to do just that. Then the house next door went up in flames. A local shopkeeper remarked to Lowry, "The element is following you around, sir." This phrase became the title of a short story later incorporated into the posthumously published novel October Ferry to Gabriola. No longer content merely to quote a phrase from Fort, in this novel Lowry played an extended riff on fortean weirdness.

As so often, he embellished the facts. In the story, he describes a whole series of fires breaking out in an area where there have been none for years. The portentous nature of these is driven home by the apparition of floating lights in graveyards, a phantom ship sailing across the sky, a sea monster and a blue dog. Even the sober Chief of Police suggests that poltergeists are causing the fires. Searching for answers, Lowry's hero Ethan Llewelyn finds Fort's books in the local library.

He is instantly entranced, describing Fort as "obviously a genius if ever there was one,"12 and continuing to heap praise upon him for another couple of paragraphs. As always with Lowry, his hero is his alter ego, and here Llewelyn expresses Lowry's enthusiasm with absolute fidelity. He notes the compulsively entertaining quality of Fort's writing and the impressive weight of his documentation, deploring that Fort's name is not a household word.

There follows a complex couple of scenes in which Llewelyn reads a passage about the spontaneous combustion of a playwright with whose film script *The Wandering Jew* he happens to be obsessed. Then when

he tries to show the piece to his wife he can no longer find it. She however does appear to locate it (sensibly using the index), but it is completely different from what Llewelyn had read. Even worse, the passage she reads out develops the image of an author causing a death by merely thinking out a plotline, just as Llewelyn/Lowry fears having caused local

N BALLAST

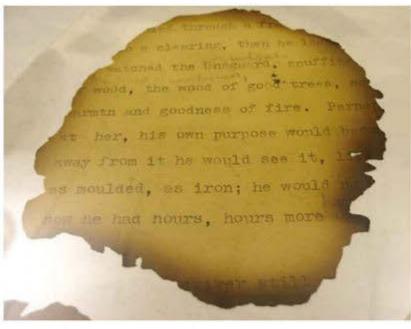
HE WHITE SEA

fires merely by the power of his own terror. Lowry must have been struck by Fort's comment about the case: "There are emotions that are as intense as religious excitation," 13 because Llewelyn's experience precipitates a mystical vision in which he merges with his surroundings. As the vision fades, he feels that he has been privileged to glimpse the nature of the universe constantly being reformed by the thoughts of God and man. The vision is a turning point, and Llewelyn is now able to

regain his emotional balance and plan a new life.

#### FORGET THE CRABS, TELL OF THE PERIWINKLES

Lowry's use of Fort's work in this tale reflects the critical and positive influence Fort had on his own life. Has any other major novelist used Fort's work so effectively as a plot device, let alone expressed such admiration? And as if to emphasis his debt to Fort, Lowry has now posthumously brought him to readers' attention once again in the recently published *In Ballast to the White Sea*. Lowry's biographers treated *In Ballast* as a lost work, but in 1997 rumours swept a Lowry conference that a second manuscript of it existed. Lowry's first wife Jan confirmed this three years later when the memoir of her



**ABOVE**: One of the few surviving fragments of Lowry's typescript of *In Ballast to the White Sea* to survive the 1944 Dollarton fire; the word "fire" is clearly visible.

marriage was published. Lowry habitually mislaid manuscripts, and he'd left this one with Jan's mother when the couple went to Mexico. Since the marriage ended during that trip, and he met his soon-to-be second wife on his return, he never collected *In Ballast*. Communication between him and Jan ceased, so although Jan picked up the

manuscript, she never let him know that she had it. What survives is an incomplete draft, with corrections and minor changes by Jan. The book was intended to take its place in Lowry's novels as part of a sequence he was to call *The Voyage that Never Ends*, and indeed it seems that with its publication the Lowryan voyage of discovery continues.

Lowry began writing In Ballast when he was reading Fort in the New York Public Library. The book is littered with direct

and indirect quotes from Fort, both in the characters' speech and as an epigraph to a chapter. In particular, Fort's work defines the outlook of the hero's brother, who is struggling to make sense of the world after the family cruise liner firm has suffered two inexplicable disasters. He finds the perfect metaphor in Fort: the Mad Fishmonger of Worcester. 14 FT readers will doubtless recall that the Fishmonger was posited by the press to explain the overnight appearance in 1881 of heaps of periwinkles and crabs on roads, fields and gardens near Worcester. 15 From Fort's treatment of this incident. Lowry's character learns that conventional explanations of strange events are no more than attempts to fit them into a wholly inadequate world view; the underlying truth is far weirder and reflects how little anybody understands how the Universe works. Fortean anomalies permeate the novel, from the unlikely multiplication of family catastrophes onwards. Very clearly, it was written while the thrill of discovering Fort's work was still fresh, but as we've seen above, Lowry's admiration for Fort continued to sustain him and inspire his work throughout his life. Lowry is the ideal novelist for forteans to read; he might almost be considered a disciple of Fort. His genius and Fort's have strong similarities, both revelling in patterns, portents and hidden meanings - which are also the stuff of magic.

In some heavenly region there must surely be an

eternal cantina in which Lowry, Stan and Fort sit around discussing the high strangeness of life on Earth and laughing heartily as they drink deep of the (200 per cent proof) nectar of the gods.

#### **FOOTNOTES**

- **1** Jan Gabrial, *Inside the Volcano* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p7.
- 2 Ibid, p50.
- 3 Harvey Breit and Margerie Bonner Lowry (eds), *Malcolm Lowry, Selected Letters* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p26.
- 4 Ibid, p49.
- **5** Quoted in Tony Kilgallin, *Lowry* (Ontario: Presse Porcepic, 1973), p153.
- **6** Gordon Bowker, *Pursued by Furies: A Life of Malcolm Lowry* (London: Harper Collins, 1993), p321.
- 7 Selected Letters, p66
- 8 Pursued by Furies, p410.
- **9** Douglas Day, *Malcolm Lowry, A Biography* (NY: OUP, 1973), p418.
- 10 See e.g. Perle S Epstein, *The Private Labyrinth of Malcolm Lowry* (NY: Holt, Reinhart & Winston, 1969).
- **11** Malcolm Lowry, *Under the Volcano* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1947), p330.
- **12** Malcolm Lowry, *October Ferry to Gabriola* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p138.
- 13 Charles Fort, *Wild Talents*, in *The Complete Books of Charles Fort* (NY: Dover, 1974), p1052; see p1051 for the tale of J Temple Thurston.
- **14** See Malcolm Lowry, *In Ballast to the White Sea* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2014), p28.
- 15 See Lo! in Complete Books, pp548-550.

#### **AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY**



RUTH CLYDESDALE is a lifelong Lowry enthusiast, and has diverted from her usual research subject of esoteric aspects of art to write about him here. She is the author

of *Secret Wisdom* (Arcturus, 2009) and *The Happiness Handbook* (Arcturus, 2011).

# REST IN PIECES

We usually think of death as the end of the story, but sometimes it's the start of a whole new one. **BESS LOVEJOY** has been chronicling the curious fates of famous corpses; here she relates the post-mortem adventures of some of the 20th century's key political figures.

#### **MUSSOLINI'S WANDERING BODY**

During the 20 years that Benito Mussolini (1883-1945) ruled Italy as "Il Duce" ("The Leader"), he succeeded even more than most dictators in building a cult around his image. His face appeared everywhere throughout the nation – in offices, schools, bakeries, drugstores, even on women's swimsuits. Mussolini invited his subjects to identify his image with the nation's power and strength, and for the most part, it worked. It's little wonder, then, that when Fascism failed, his body was subject to so much abuse.

Mussolini spent the final years of his life as a puppet dictator in the German-backed Social Republic of Italy. When the Third Reich crumbled, he tried to flee Italy with several hundred retreating German soldiers. But members of the resistance movement who had staked out the highways recognised their former ruler and arrested him. They shot him the following day, alongside his young mistress Clara Petacci and a group of top Fascist officials.

The morning after the executions, the resistance members loaded the bodies of Mussolini, Petacci, and their dead associates into a truck, then drove them to a square in Milan known as Piazzale Loreto, where they were dumped. The events that took place there on 29 April 1945, shocked the world. As the Sun rose, a crowd gathered, first dragging the corpses into a pile and then kicking them, beating them, spitting on them. Gradually Mussolini's head, once practically a piece of sculpture, began

to look more like a smashed pumpkin. One woman fired a gun into the ex-dictator's body, yelling: "Five shots for my five assassinated sons!" Soldiers tried to keep back the fray, but it was no use. Soon Mussolini, Petacci, and two Fascist officials were strung up by their feet from the roof of a gas station at the square's southwest corner. The bodies were cut down around 1pm, after complaints from a local cardinal and



ABOVE: The bodies of Benitio Mussolini and his mistress Clara Petacci hang in Piazzale Loreto. LEFT: 'Il Duce' had used his image as the centre of his cult.

#### FOR THE NEXT 100 DAYS, THE ITALIAN PUBLIC HAD NO IDEA WHERE MUSSOLINI'S CORPSE WAS

the US military command. Officials took the corpses to the city morgue, where an autopsy on Mussolini confirmed the damage his corpse had suffered: his face was all but unrecognisable, his skull and brain crushed, his upper jaw fractured, and one eyeball lacerated. His corpse was also riddled with bullets, including the four shots near the heart that had killed him. (American scientists later asked for, and received, a sliver of Mussolini's brain to study it for signs of syphilis; the results were

inconclusive, and the fragment languished in Washington, DC, for 20 years before being

returned to Mussolini's widow.) From then on, Mussolini's body became a controversial issue in Italian politics. To prevent further incident, the government buried him and his executed compatriots in unmarked graves at Milan's Musocco Cemetery. But the location was an open secret, and in the liberation celebrations that summer, anti-Fascists danced on the graves with an accordion. (It's said one woman also urinated on them, to the applause of her friends.) Such actions enraged Mussolini's remaining followers - and one young man in particular. Domenico Leccisi was a 25-year-old journalist, activist, and former official in Mussolini's government. In later decades, he would go on to become a politician nicknamed "the Bodysnatcher" for good reason. In the months after Mussolini's death, Leccisi was haunted by the fact that his idol had been buried in an unmarked

/ GETTY IMAGE

TOPICAL PRESS AGENCY / GETTY IMAGES

grave. One sleepless night in 1946, he resolved to dig up the body.

Leccisi and his neo-Fascist friends made their move on Easter Sunday 1946. It helped that the cemetery was empty thanks to the holiday; and, of course, the resurrection symbolism was perfect. The thieves had little trouble getting into the cemetery, and, fortunately for them, Mussolini had been buried in a wooden casket, which Leccisi was able to pry open with his hands. Inside his coffin, the head of Il Duce was still recognisable, his upper lip drawn back in a grimace. Leccisi doffed his hat in respect. The group lifted the body from the coffin and washed it in a nearby fountain, wrapping it in a sheet, and depositing it in a wheelbarrow, which they pushed to the getaway car. Before leaving the grave, they dropped in a note signed by Leccisi's "Democratic Fascist Party," which explained that the body had been stolen because it could no longer bear "the cannibal slurs made by human dregs organised in the Communist party." A few hours later, Leccisi phoned local newspapers to tell them that: "from Musocco the dead have sprouted wings".

For the next 100 days, the Italian public had no idea where Mussolini's corpse was. That didn't stop the newspapers from reporting sightings on boats, airplanes, and even a hot air balloon. Eventually a police investigation nabbed Leccisi and his partners, who revealed that the body had first been stored in a garage in a mountain village, then moved to a Milan convent staffed by sympathetic friars. After some negotiation, the friars agreed to reveal the location of Mussolini's body if the authorities promised to give the corpse a secret and Christian burial. The police agreed, and the friars took them to the convent closet where the body had been stashed. Having learned their lesson, the government kept the location of Mussolini's body a carefully guarded state secret for the next 11 years. The authorities were determined to prevent the gravesite from becoming a shrine for neo-Fascists, or being subject to further desecration. If anything, the secrecy only enhanced interest in Mussolini's resting place: his followers held memorial Masses attended by hundreds of people, and mounted a "Buried in Italy" campaign that asked each town to dedicate a small but visible spot to Mussolini's memory, so that he would have substitute tombs scattered throughout the country.

In 1957, Italian Prime Minister Adone Zoli agreed to return the body to Mussolini's hometown of Predappio. The body arrived in a wooden box marked "church documents." It hadn't been reburied at all, but instead spent the preceding 11 years in a Capuchin monastery, first near the altar, then in a cupboard after people noticed the smell. Today the tomb in the San Casciano cemetery features a ghostly white bust of Mussolini's head gazing out over his crypt. Just as officials once feared, it has

become a gathering spot for the neo-Fascist faithful: 80,000 to 100,000 visitors arrive each year, some offering Fascist salutes. The tomb is especially packed on three annual occasions: the anniversaries of Mussolini's birth, death, and the "March on Rome" that brought him to power in 1922. Meanwhile, local merchants do a vigorous trade in Mussolini-themed accessories and figurines, including tiny versions of the head that once appeared in images throughout the nation, and suffered so much violence at Piazzale Loreto.

#### **EVITA'S ODYSSEY**

Eva Perón (1919-1952) played many roles during her short life: child of poverty, radio actress, first lady of Argentina, charity maven, and finally, martyr. She was accused of being many other things as well: a prostitute, Fascist sympathizer, co-dictator, and harbourer of Nazis. These days, she is most often remembered as the glamorous Evita of musicals and movies. But she played her longest, strangest role as a corpse at the centre of two decades of mayhem and madness.

While she was alive, Evita's image had always been about love. As first lady, she described herself as the bridge of love between her husband, Juan Perón, and the mass of Argentine poor, the descamisados ("shirtless ones") who had swept him to power. She spent her days receiving long lines of the needy, embracing even the lice-ridden and syphilitic, and granting their requests for money or medicine. She dispensed millions of gifts and built hospitals, orphanages, and schools. She never rested, even when the doctors told her to. And when she died of uterine cancer at 33, her followers said she had sacrificed her life to the cause. Within days, the Vatican was flooded with letters begging for her canonisation. The Church wasn't interested, but that didn't prevent Argentina's poor from worshipping her at altars across the land. Meanwhile, Juan Perón - conscious of

the fact that he had lost both the beautiful face and beating heart of his movement - decided to have his wife preserved forever. Even before Evita died, Perón began holding secret meetings with an anatomy professor named Pedro Ara. Dr Ara preferred to think of himself as an artist rather than an embalmer, and carried the preserved head of an elderly peasant in his luggage to show off his skills. Evita was embalmed in two stages: once for a brief public viewing, and once for eternity. Ara got started on the first stage within an hour of Evita's death, and by the following morning, she had been made "completely and definitively incorruptible," as he put it. Dressed in a white shroud and draped with the national flag, she was placed in a glass-topped coffin and carried to the Ministry of Labour, where nearly two million people came to see her. The three-day viewing period was extended to two weeks, but then Dr Ara got nervous: if the president wanted Evita to last forever, Ara had to get to work. He never revealed the precise formula he used in the embalming, but others have said that he worked by replacing the blood with glycerine or preservatives, injecting parts of the body with wax, and covering it with a layer of transparent plastic. The entire project took a year and is said to have cost the government \$100,000. When it was done, Ara said the body still contained all its internal organs, and would last indefinitely. A visitor who saw it told biographers: "It was the size of a 12-yearold girl. Its skin was wax-like and artificial, its mouth had been rouged, and when you tapped it, it rang hollow, like a store-window mannequin. The embalmer, Ara, hovered over it as if it was something he loved."

Evita's body was supposed to become part of a massive funeral monument, something the first lady herself had been planning before she died; originally it was meant to pay tribute to the idealised Argentine worker, not to her. She wanted it to be over 400ft (120m) high, taller than the Statue of Liberty, topped with a statue of a muscle-



ABOVE: Dr Ara admires his handiwork: the newly embalmed body of Eva Perón as it appeared in 1952.

bound *descamisado*. But in September 1955, three years after her death, Juan Perón was deposed in a military coup. The construction of the monument had not gotten beyond a massive hole in the ground. Perón fled into exile, with little thought for his wife's corpse.

At first, the new regime left Ara alone in his offices at the General Confederation of Labour. The professor had set up his embalming lab there, and spent most of his time watching over his masterpiece, repairing real or imagined defects. But a few months later, curious officers started coming to see the body. In the beginning, they refused to believe it was real, even when Ara handed over X-rays. Finally the officers amputated part of a finger, and only then were they convinced they were dealing with an object that had once been a human. And not just any former human: the female half of the deposed regime. The new rulers were so adamantly anti-Perónist that they'd banned images of the former first couple from the country. Confronted with her corpse, the last thing they wanted was a burial site that might turn into a shrine. So the president and his men decided on a secret burial. The location they chose was the Chacarita Cemetery, and the man they entrusted with the job was Carlos Eugenio Moori Koenig, the head of military intelligence. One night in November 1955, Koenig appeared at the Confederation building to take the body away. Though he must have been concerned about the fate of his masterpiece. Ara had little choice but to help Koenig load the body into his truck. Afterward, Koenig was supposed to bring the body to the cemetery, but instead he went a little crazy. Or at least that was the judgment of his superiors. It started when he parked the truck carrying Evita's body in the courtyard of a marine regiment for the night, then awoke to find the vehicle surrounded with candles and flowers. He then loaded the body into a different, unmarked, truck

and drove it around the city, stopping in a different place each evening. But every morning brought the same thing: candles and flowers. Clearly someone always knew where the corpse was, no matter how hard he tried to keep it a secret. Spooked, Koenig hid the body in a box in the attic above his office. About a year later, he showed it to a friend, who let word get back to Aramburu. The president decided that Koening was suffering from a nervous breakdown, and dismissed him both from his duties as Evita's caretaker and from his job.

In 1957, the regime decided to try again. Under Operation Cadaver, the body was sent to Italy, where it was buried under the name of an Italian who had died in Argentina, Maria Maggi de Magistris. The operation was so sensitive that even President Aramburu didn't know the details. He entrusted a letter with the corpse's location to his lawyer, with the proviso that it should be delivered to his successor four weeks after Aramburu's death, whenever that might be. It was sooner than he hoped. In 1970, a group of militant Perónist guerrillas kidnapped Aramburu and put him on trial for his anti-Perónist activities. They interrogated him about the fate of Evita's corpse, but he couldn't tell them much, and he did not escape alive. After his murder, the guerrillas sent a communiqué to newspapers, refusing to give up his corpse until "the day

#### KOENIG WAS MEANT TO BRING THE BODY TO THE CEMETERY, BUT THEN HE WENT A LITTLE CRAZY



**ABOVE:** The bodies of Argentinian President Juan Perón and his first wife Eva Perón on display at the Presidential Residence in Buenos Aires in 1974 after Evita's corpse had returned from its travels to Italy and Spain.

the remains of our dear comrade Evita are returned to the people". Aramburu's body was soon discovered by the police. But the current Argentine government had already decided to make peace with Perón, who retained a powerful hold on his followers even in exile. Since Aramburu was now dead, his lawyer delivered the envelope with Evita's burial details to the current leader, General Alejandro Agustín Lanusse. Lanusse shared the contents of the letter with a colonel and a priest, whom he dispatched to find Evita's body.

The letter contained nothing more than the names of a cemetery in Milan and a priest who had since passed away. There was nothing for the colonel and the priest to do but comb through the cemetery's records for 1956, the year of Evita's clandestine reburial. After some work, they zeroed in on Maria Maggi de Magistris, an Italian widow who had died in Argentina but was buried in Milan five years after her death. The enterprising colonel grew a moustache and, with the help of fake papers, posed as the brother of the deceased in order to get permission to exhume the coffin. Sure enough, the body inside was Evita's. The corpse arrived at Perón's villa in Madrid in a bakery truck. Dr Ara, summoned from retirement, restored his work to its former glory, while Perón's new wife restyled the hair in Evita's signature chignon. According to dinner guests, the refurbished Evita then went on display in the Perón family dining room. Perón was elected for his third and final term in 1973, and everyone assumed he would return from Spain with Evita's body in tow. He didn't, and died after only a year in office. In 1974, his wife and successor, Isabel, finally brought Evita home, but only after guerrillas kidnapped Aramburu's corpse and again demanded Evita's in return. This time their plan worked and Isabel had the body flown from Spain to Buenos Aires by chartered plane.

Isabel exhibited Evita's corpse in Buenos Aires next to her husband's closed coffin, and planned to build them both a giant monument. But like Juan's efforts, her plans were cut short by yet another military coup. She was deposed in March 1976, and later that same year the new regime finally returned Evita's remains to her family. Soon afterward, Evita was buried in the fashionable Buenos Aires cemetery of Recoleta, near many members of the oligarchy she despised. Her embalmed corpse now rests 20ft (6m) below ground in a steel vault said to be able to withstand a nuclear bomb.

#### **RASPUTIN'S PENIS**

In 2004, a disturbing image began circulating on the Internet. A middle-aged Russian man, wearing a lab coat and a bemused expression, held aloft a fluid-filled jar with a long column of flesh floating inside. According to news articles accompanying the image, the flesh had once dangled between the legs of famous mystic Grigori Rasputin (1869-1916), "Russia's greatest love machine," if you believe



ABOVE: A visitor looks at what Igor Knyazkin claims is Rasputin's impressive 13-in (33cm) penis as it goes on display at the first Russian museum of erotica in St Petersburg, BELOW: Grigori Rasputin,

musical act Boney M. Like Einstein's brain and Shellev's heart, this relic symbolises its original owner's best-known attributes in this case, an enormous lust for women and power, both of which led to Rasputin's demise. Though often called the "mad monk," Rasputin had no formal affiliation with any religious order. He's perhaps best understood as a faith healer known for his seemingly miraculous cures, and for his most famous client, Russia's last tsarina. Though most of Russia didn't know it, Alexandra Romanova's only son, Alexei, suffered from hæmophilia, a disease in which any scrape can turn into a life-threatening hæmorrhage. Rasputin was the only person who was reliably able to heal Alexei, and the deeply religious Alexandra believed he had been sent to her by God.

The Russian public had a different idea about what was going on. After Rasputin arrived in St. Petersburg, his appetites for fish soup, Madeira wine, and women - became legendary, and there was no shortage of bored bourgeois wives in the capital willing to satisfy them. Soon Rasputin's power went to his head, and he grew increasingly drunk and lecherous in public. Once, at a posh Moscow nightclub in 1915. he smashed furniture, attacked his female companion, and unbuttoned his trousers, waving his penis around. He also shouted out that he'd slept with the tsarina - which by

that time is what most of St Petersburg thought anyway. The rumours of an affair were probably false, but the damage had been done. The Siberian mystic became a convenient scapegoat for the

unravelling imperial government, whose many failures were blamed on Rasputin's malevolent sway over the tsar and tsarina. It wasn't long before a band of patriotic nobles decided that getting rid of Rasputin was the only way to save Russia from ruin. One icy December evening in 1916, Prince Felix Yusupov lured Rasputin to the basement of his magnificent palace and urged Rasputin to partake of the pastries and wine laid out before them, neglecting to mention that they had been poisoned. According to Yusupov, Rasputin consumed several cakes and goblets of wine but remained utterly unaffected. After growing increasingly frantic, Yusupov pulled out his gun and shot Rasputin at close range, but even that didn't work. The prince watched in horror as Rasputin's eyes blinked open, and then he ran screaming as his would-be victim staggered out into the snow. Finally, another member of the murder party killed Rasputin with several more shots to his back, and the gang of murderous nobles dumped his body into the Neva River. Stories have long

> plunged into the frigid water, but more recent forensic analysis of the autopsy report shows it was a bullet in the forehead that got him. So how did his penis end up in the newspapers? According to Rasputin's daughter, Maria, Yusupov killed Rasputin because the mystic resisted his sexual advances. In revenge for turning him down, Yusupov first

persisted that Rasputin died only when

raped Rasputin, or so Maria says, and then he or one of his conspirators severed Rasputin's penis and flung it across the room.

The penis only came to public attention in the 1970s, when a writer named Patte Barham said she had seen it in the bedroom of a Russian émigré living in Paris. According to Barham, the émigré's sister had been married to a servant who worked at the Yusupov palace, and who found the penis while cleaning up after Rasputin's murder. Barham described it as resting in a polished wooden box, and looking like "a blackened, overripe banana, about a foot long, and resting on a velvet cloth." A coterie of Rasputin's former followers apparently gathered at the émigré's apartment weekly to worship Rasputin's, ahem, memory. When Rasputin's daughter discovered his penis was being kept in some strange woman's bedroom, she demanded it back. Her request was successful, but after her death, the item was sold alongside other effects to the London auction house Bonhams. The auctioneers were only too happy to receive Maria's manuscripts and photographs of her father, but they were a little more suspicious of the banana-shaped item. It turns out they had good reason: tests conducted at the Imperial College London showed it was actually a sea cucumber. For his part, Igor Knyazkin - the man in those photos from 2004 - says the penis he purchased was found in an abandoned house in a Parisian suburb in the late 1990s. Knyazkin purchased the item for his erotic museum in St Petersburg. Knyazkin says his prize possession is about 13in (33cm) long, and that he helped reconstruct it by steaming it and filling the inside with gel. That length would tally with Maria's description of her dear dad's member while he was alive - although one wonders how she would know. Today there's no way to examine Rasputin's body for evidence. After his autopsy, his corpse was buried beneath a church constructed by one his devotees. Three months later, he was exhumed on orders of Russia's new revolutionary regime, who feared his grave might become place for worshippers to spread monarchist propaganda. His body was driven to a nearby forest and burned. Eyewitnesses said that Rasputin sat up in the flames, giving the Russians one final scare. Perhaps his spirit wanted to be remembered - though who knows how he would feel about the idea that



Edited and extracted from Rest in Pieces: The Curious Fates of Famous Corpses by Bess Lovejoy, published by Simon & Schuster, RRP £15.00.

it was his penis that survived the grave.

#### **AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY**



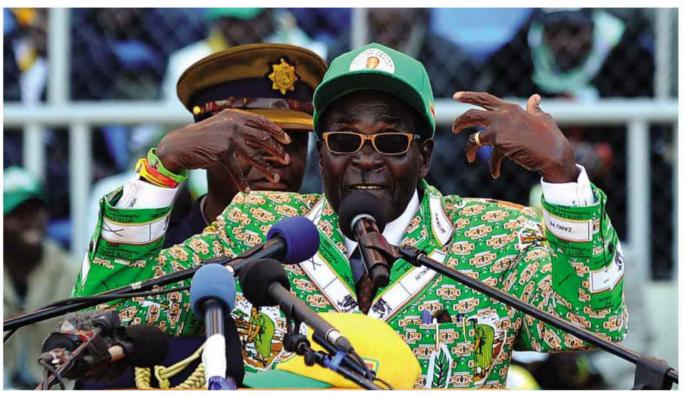
BESS LOVEJOY lives in Brooklyn, New York. She has written for the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal and many others and is a contributing editor for Smithsonian.com. She is a member of The Order of Good

Death and a founding member of Death Salon.



### MUGABE AND THE MAGIC BOULDER

The long presidency of Robert Mugabe has transformed Zimbabwe from Africa's bread-basket to its basket-case, says **SD TUCKER**. As a result, belief in magic and witchcraft is booming...



ABOVE: A nattily attired President Mugabe addresses the nation at an election rally in 2013. BELOW: It took a lot of people to carry the President's birthday cake this year.

n February 2015, Zimbabwean
President Robert Mugabe, Africa's
hardiest despot, celebrated 91 years
of buoyant health and nearly 36 years
of uninterrupted rule – and so did several
thousand others. They had to; he made them.
At most major public events, the ring of steel
thrown around their perimeter is intended
to keep people out. Not at Mugabe's annual
shindigs. There, the barbed-wire and police
are apparently intended to stop people from
leaving!

2014's massive celebrations cost £390,000, (this year's do was reportedly nearer £650,000), only a small proportion of which was spent on cake, fizzy pop and balloons.1 When you have as many revellers at your bash as Mugabe did, you absolutely need to hire out the massive Rudhaka Stadium in Marondera and fill it to the hilt with huge images of yourself and legions of schoolchildren belting out the haunting native hymn 'Happy Birthday, Presi-Daddy'. To do otherwise would be to risk terrible public disappointment. This is what us decadent Westerners just don't understand: being the leader of this sun-drenched paradise can be a truly terrible burden to bear. When you are anointed onstage by a Catholic priest and acclaimed



in front of cheering multitudes as being "the genuine conqueror of the British Empire", it's an exalted title for a man to live up to. Fortunately for his people, though, Robert Mugabe is no ordinary man.

Mugabe gained power in 1980 as leader of the Zanu-PF party, following the end of allwhite rule. Zanu-PF's early years in charge were marked by some economic growth, although by the 1990s this had stalled. However, following land reforms in 2000, in which farms were forcibly seized from white owners, the nation's economy began to collapse and disturbing scenes of hunger, poverty and social chaos became Zimbabwe's main export to the world rather than corn. Exploiting the anti-colonial mood of the times, though, Mugabe preferred to blame the country's former British overlords - and, specifically, Tony Blair and his government of "gay gangsters" - for supposedly sabotaging the economy. By 2009, the Zimbabwean dollar had become worthless even for the purpose of playing Monopoly. Trading in the notes was suspended and a switch was made to foreign currencies. Despite all this, Mugabe still clings leech-like to power. "I have beaten Christ," he told astonished reporters in 2012, boasting that he had returned from the dead far more often than that pathetic amateur Jesus of Nazareth ever had. "I have died and resurrected, and I don't know how many times I will die and resurrect," he added, also claiming that he had been appointed President directly by God. 4 Sadly, while things are now slightly improving, the

ALEXANDER JOE / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

Zimbabwean economy is yet to stage quite such a miraculous revival.

Economic misery, then, is Mugabe's true legacy to his people. His legacy to forteans, however, is rather different. Bizarre stories from the Land of Bob abound, and here are just a few...

In October 2011, a Zimbabwean man caught raping a donkey in his yard claimed before a courtroom that the animal was a human prostitute he had hired and who had magically gone all Dobbin on him when the police approached; no donkey-rides like that at Blackpool. Worse, in February 2012, a Zimbabwean rape suspect pulled down his trousers and exposed himself before a judge, claiming as his defence that he was suffering from a magical malady that had made his penis shrink down to a size where it was no longer possible even to achieve penetration. "His male member was indeed small," reported the Zimbabwe Herald, in an eerie foreshadowing of the recent Max Clifford trial. Perhaps more poignantly, in January 2014, a mentally disturbed man claiming to be Jesus (not Mugabe himself, sadly) had to be rescued from a violent mob by riot police in Bulawayo, the nation's second city. As 'proof' of his divinity, the man said he would transform a piece of cloth into a snake. Unimpressed, the crowd told him to make bags of money fall from the sky instead. When he failed to do so, the mob, wanting only to make a profit from the Prophet, attacked him. 5

But do such stories really have anything to do with Mugabe? One school of thought argues that they do. A 1999 Free Press report on what was called 'Zimbabwe's Season of the Witch', for example, featured the following quote from Gordon Chavakunda, the then-chairman of ZINATHA, the Zimbabwean National Traditional Healers Association, relating to the huge rise in business his fellow witchdoctors had begun experiencing recently: "It's obvious the cause is economic. The worse the economy gets, the more political tension there is in society, the more frustrated and frightened people get. They turn to witchcraft to gain riches or to hurt their enemies." 6 Maybe such reasoning holds water; hence 'Jesus' being assaulted for cash. This is hardly the whole story, though: economic collapse in the EuroZone has not yet led to any noticeable increase in reports of shapeshifting prostitutes on the loose in Greece, Cyprus or Portugal, for example. There must be more to the booming numbers of weird stories in Zimbabwe's

press than this; for instance, the fact that the nation's leaders clearly believe in magic themselves...

#### **BOULDER-DASH!**

In 2007, when the following story played itself out, Zimbabwe lay on the brink of ruin. There were food shortages, no foreign currency reserves, and an inflation rate pushing 4,500 per cent. It was impossible to import fuel, and a nationwide petrol-shortage led to vehicles being abandoned on the country's roads. It was in this atmosphere that Rotina Mavhunga, an alleged spirit-medium, saw her chance for fame and fortune. She proclaimed, to great interest, that she had been contacted by the Zimbabwean people's ancestors. Seeing the suffering of the nation, they had taken pity upon "their children" and decided to send them a miracle. Therefore, the ghosts of the dead had directed Mavhunga to a 'magical

#### "PEOPLE TURN TO WITCHCRAFT TO GAIN RICHES OR TO HURT THEIR ENEMIES"

rock' in the Chinhoyi Caves, a traditional native shrine. Going to this rock, Mavhunga had found to her delight that it was spewing out pure diesel (see FT228:25). This neverending supply of refined petrol was going to make Beverley Hillbillies of them all, she said.

Plenty of desperate people believed Mayhunga. She stuck a hosepipe into the rock and sprayed out diesel in front of cameras, enhancing her reputation as Zimbabwe's saviour. News of the miracle eventually reached Robert Mugabe's cabinet. Interviewed after the scandal had ended, Mugabe admitted that his ministers had been taken in by the charade. According to his own account: "Word had gone round all over that, for real, it was happening and we had experts who came to us as the government and asked why we were not taking an interest. There is diesel!' Where does it come from? Mountain? We said aah, let's send some people. Three ministers [the Defence Minister, Security Minister and Home Affairs Minister] and their teams then went. Haa, they didn't come back with a clear assessment: 'Aah, we only saw the pipe out of which oozed petrol'... In the end they said there was diesel. 'Aah, the diesel comes from a rock!' [I asked them] 'When you had seen that, why did you not pull out the pipe to see if there was diesel where it came from?' Then they said the diesel is all over, it is there for sure."

At Mavhunga's later trial for fraud, it was

described how Mugabe's goons had removed their shoes in the medium's presence to demonstrate their respect for her powers. They had even posed for some highly embarrassing photographs, in which they gathered around grinning like cretins whilst Mavhunga sprayed Regional Governor Nelson Samkange all over with petrol from her pipe (thankfully he wasn't a smoker). Wanting to know more, Mugabe sent out a second delegation. He chose the Minister of Energy, the Minister of Mines and the Science Minister, and issued them with some clear but firm instructions: "You must go onto the mountain and pluck out that pipe and see." If they did not have the guts to do this, he said, then it would be "at your own peril".

Perhaps sensibly, the Men from the Ministry decided that they feared Mugabe more than the witchdoctor, and pulled the pipe out



**LEFT:** Rotina Mavhunga reveals the real source of the diesel spewed forth by the magic boulder.

from the rock. It was totally dry. In reality, Mavhunga had discovered an abandoned fuel tank near the ancient shrine one day, attached the hosepipe to it and then drawn the hose around the rock somehow so that it looked, to the untrained eye, as if petrol was flowing from the boulder. Then, in response to secret signals, her hidden accomplice would turn on the tank's tap so it appeared that she could command the spirits to gush forth diesel at will. In this way, she had managed to trick five billion Zimbabwean dollars, two cows, three buffalos, a car and a piece of free land from government officials who had foolishly believed in her powers.

In a damage-limitation exercise, Mugabe later tried to laugh it all off as simply being down to Mavhunga's supposed attractiveness, which she had used to 'bewitch' his underlings in a different way. However, in reality there was further embarrassment ahead for Mugabe's government. Despite being ordered to arrest the woman, local police officers refused to do so, thinking that if they so much as laid a hand on her, they would instantly burst into flames (or "see fire", as they put it). Furthermore, whilst on the run, it transpired that Mavhunga had been sheltered and hidden by Tobaiwa Mudede, the country's Electoral Registrar General, who had also helped smuggle in 125 litres of diesel from neighbouring Zambia to prolong the con. Eventually, in 2009, Mavhunga was found guilty of fraud in absentia in a Harare courtroom. When finally captured in September 2010, she claimed not to have even known she was a wanted woman. "Some police officers would come to my shrine... to consult, but they never mentioned that I was wanted," she said - something which, if true, only served to heap more humiliation upon Mugabe's hapless state security apparatus.

As this sorry tale implies, Mugabe and his men appear to be strong believers in the occult. In 2001, for instance, it was reported that the President thought he was being haunted by the ghost of Tongogara, a former political ally whom it was rumoured Mugabe had had killed in a 'car accident' in 1980. Supposedly, Tongogara was appearing at Mugabe's dinner table – where he allegedly took to setting out a place for him – and criticising his running of the country



(FT152:26): a real-life equivalent of Banquo's ghost, perhaps? Recently, Mugabe also appears to have begun carrying a small black bag to various official appointments, leading to much domestic speculation that it is a ju-ju pouch intended to keep him safe from illness and his enemies. 8 No doubt taking their cue from Presi-Daddy, meanwhile, even government engineers now see nothing wrong with making ritual offerings of beer to ghosts in order to solve technical problems, while Zimbabwe's Water Resources Minister Samuel Nkomo openly admits that construction of new reservoirs has been delayed by the unavoidable presence of mermaids in the water - not even 1970s British Leyland dared try that one on. 9

#### **AMAZING GRACE**

The most recent such stories emerging from Zimbabwe, however, centre around the President's wife, 'Amazing' Grace Mugabe, who is apparently positioned to inherit power from her husband when his Christ-like powers

**LEFT:** Grace Mugabe, looking distinctly unamused in a 2012 photo.

of resurrection finally fail him. One of the previous favourites to take over from Mugabe was one Joice 'Spill Blood' Mujuru, who has now been accused of practising witchcraft against her fellow Zanu-PF members and sacked, apparently to make way for Mrs M. For one thing, in December 2014 an assassinationattempt was made upon Emmerson 'The Crocodile' Mnangagwa - who is not a WWE wrestler, but Mugabe's deputy - whose office was found sprinkled with a mysterious powder which hospitalised his secretary: a sign of witchcraft in Zimbabwean culture. Worse, during a Zanu-PF congress, Mugabe stood up and told delegates that Mujuru had consulted a witch who had given her two magical beetles, told her to name one after herself and one after him, then put them in a jar to fight. If Mugabe-Beetle lost, Mujuru would usurp him; evidently, he said, Mugabe-Beetle had won. Criticising Mujuru for witchcraft seems a little unfair, however, considering that at another political rally held in October last

year, Grace Mugabe claimed to have magical powers herself. When she heard of the death of the South African writer Heidi Holland, author of the critical 2008 book *Dinner with Mugabe*, who hanged herself in 2012, Grace claimed to have caused the tragedy with a curse: "I held the book and prayed to God to deal with her. She committed suicide a month later". Mrs Mugabe added that she dealt with all such reckless miscreants in a similar manner. <sup>10</sup> Here's hoping Grace is not an *FT* reader...

#### **AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY**



**SD TUCKER** is a Merseysidebased writer whose books are *Paranormal Merseyside*, *Terror of the Tokoloshe* and (forthcoming) *The Hidden Folk*. Currently at work on two books with the provisional titles *Great* 

*British Eccentrics* and *Forgotten Science*, he is a regular contributor to FT.

#### NOTES

1 Although maybe not; every year, giant novelty cakes are provided for Mugabe at amazing cost. Allegedly, his main one each birthday weighs 1kg for every year of his life, each kg of which supposedly represents £650 worth of expenditure. See www.theindependent. co.zw/2013/02/22/us89-000-splurge-on-mugabe-birthday-cake/; www.dailymail.

co.uk/news/article-2107926/ Mugabe-old-croc-Zimbabweanpresident-celebrates-88thbirthday-reptile-shaped-cake. html; www.dailymail.co.uk/ news/article-2108991/ Demented\_defiance\_despot. html; Guardian, 20 Feb 2015.

- 2 Wasn't that Idi Amin?
- **3** *The Scotsman*, 21+25 Feb 2014.
- 4 www.dailymail.co.uk/ news/article-2108991/

Demented\_defiance\_despot. html; www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-17110754; Mugabe has made many similarly bizarre public pronouncements over the years, including stating proudly that he is "still the Hitler of [our] time".

- 5 Sunday Times News Review supplement, 30 Oct 2011, 19 Feb 2012 & 19 Jan 2014.
- 6 http://tinyurl.com/6fya6vc

[link now dead]

- 7 Compiled from http://tinyurl. com/6hqbtb5; http://tinyurl. com/659nqdn; http://tinyurl. com/5u6epur; http://tinyurl. com/6i7lxaa.
- 8 Though a more prosaic explanation might be that the bag is simply used to contain Mugabe's medicine; allegedly, he has advanced prostate cancer, though this has never been officially confirmed.

See http://nehandararadio. com/2011/11/30/mugabe-%E2%80%98juju%E2%80%99bag-caught-on-camera/

- 9 Sunday Times News Review, 16 Dec 2012 & D.Mail, 7 Feb 2012.
- 10 Times, 20 Oct 2014, 12 Dec 2014; Sunday Times, 7 Dec 2014.

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## My big fat Neolithic wedding

STEVE MARSHALL wonders what the decline of a once popular tradition will mean for future archæologists



STEVE MARSHALL worked as a musician and composer for 30 years. These days, he writes on archæology and researches and photographs the Wiltshire landscape.

n the mid-1970s, I spent a winter working on the Greek island of Rhodes, where the band I was in played a three-month residency in a nightclub. It sounded idyllic, but Rhodes is freezing in the winter and our employer was a crook; we were lucky to escape home with all our equipment. Being in Greece for Christmas and New Year, I was able to experience an aspect of Greek culture that is now in danger of extinction: celebratory plate smashing on a grand scale.

It has been claimed that this tradition dates back millennia, to a time when pots were broken at funerals as an expression of grief. It then became common to break pots at weddings and other celebrations, as a crafty way of tricking the evil spirits who might otherwise spoil the happy occasion. Plate smashing is now considered barbaric by many Greeks and has been largely replaced by the throwing of flowers, except at the occasional wedding. It was made illegal in nightclubs, and in the few places where it is permitted a special license is required and plaster plates are used for safety. Greece was very different in the Seventies.

Our nightclub sold plates of fired clay that were made solely for breaking; as a nod to health and safety, they were not glazed. At first the club was fairly quiet, with just the occasional plate broken. However, as Christmas neared, all hell broke loose. By midnight, the place would resemble a Wild West saloon, littered with sherds as flying plates crashed all around. Those who were partying hard would buy 10 plates at a time and walk onto the concrete dance-floor to drop them or throw them into the air. A more macho technique was to kneel, with the plates perched on one thigh, and smash the whole pile

with a fist.

This was nothing to do with keeping away evil spirits - it was conspicuous consumption. One reveller strode to the centre of the dance-floor, holding out a litre bottle of Johnny Walker for all to see. Imported whisky was the most expensive drink in 1970s Greece: it then cost at least £20 a bottle, the equivalent of about £100 today. After looking around to ensure that all eyes were on him, he held the bottle high and let it drop. The bottle smashed to loud applause, which grew to a standing ovation when he produced a book of matches and set light to the mess. A Greek band we knew worked in a more upmarket club than ours. On New Year's Eve they had to dodge a fusillade of champagne bottles, many of which failed to break as they hit the stage. After years of practice, the musicians could recover intact bottles with their feet as they played, manoeuvring them behind a heavy stage-curtain in case they exploded later.

Sometimes, after finishing work at 2am, we were obliged out of politeness to join Greek friends for late-night



drinks at the rather dodgy *Black Cat* nightclub. At the close of one notable 4am session, our table was heavily laden with empty glasses and ouzo bottles. Mad George, our Rhodian bouzouki player, suddenly leaped to his feet, exclaiming, "We havin' a *very* good time!" He up-ended the table. When all the glass had crashed to the floor, a bored-looking waiter strolled over with a broom.

Sadly, 40 years on, these sorts of shenanigans are becoming but a distant memory. Plate-breaking has declined so rapidly in the past two decades that it may be forgotten entirely by the next century. If a custom such as this can die out so soon, what hope is there of understanding what really went on thousands of years ago, say, in prehistoric Britain?

Masses of broken pottery are found in archæological digs. At Windmill Hill, a 'ritual site' near Avebury, some 20,000 sherds were recovered from 1,600 pots, none of which was found whole. Since early Neolithic pottery was generally quite robust, it is likely that the destruction was deliberate. Some of the pottery had been imported from the Lizard, nearly 200 miles (320km) away, yet it may all have been deliberately broken. There is evidence of feasting that was also conspicuously wasteful, so perhaps Windmill Hill was used for Greek-style weddings. Why would pots brought all the way from Cornwall be deliberately smashed? Was it to ward off evil spirits, or simply to show off and have a laugh?

After nearly 6,000 years, we are unlikely ever to know what customs and beliefs were held by the Windmill Hill people. Will the more recent traditions of Greece also disappear from memory? When archæologists of the future excavate some 20th century Greek taverna, flattened by a sudden earthquake, what will they make of the layer of pottery sherds, embossed with the logo of the Acmeos Party Plate Company? Perhaps they will search the Classical literature and conclude that it was a 'ritual funerary site'.

## forum

## TE Lawrence's last ride

TOM HEYWOOD asks whether Lawrence of Arabia's 'accidental' death 80 years ago was in fact the result of a murderous conspiracy by the Establishment...



TOM HEYWOOD has written on a number of topics for Fortean Times, including the 'ghosts of Versailles' and the history of the JFK assassination. He lives in Hereford is often found walking in the Brecon Beacons

"The dreamers of the day are dangerous men" - TE Lawrence

n Sunday 19 May 1935, newspapers everywhere announced the premature death of TE Lawrence in a motorcycle accident at the age of 46. It was tragic, the Guardian noted, for "such a remarkable career to have been ended by a simple road accident". That Lawrence's career was remarkable is not in doubt: Winston Churchill described him as "one of the greatest beings alive in our time". But was his end really a "simple road accident"? There are those who believe that Lawrence was in fact killed by shadowy figures acting on behalf of the British Establishment. Eighty years after his death, is it possible to conclude that Lawrence of Arabia was murdered?

Lawrence was originally a historian and archæologist, but gained fame as a British Army officer who played a key role in the Sinai and Palestine campaign of WWI, as well as during the Arab uprising against the Ottoman Empire. His books, including The Seven Pillars of Wisdom, vividly recount his exploits in the Middle East - exploits brought boldly to life by David Lean in his classic 1962 film Lawrence of Arabia.

In 1935, Lawrence had finally left military service and was living at a small house called Clouds Hill, near Wareham in Dorset. On Monday 13 May, he was riding his Brough motorbike, heading home from the post office at the local military base, Bovington Camp. The road dipped in a couple of places and when Lawrence was exiting the second dip he suddenly came up behind two cyclists riding in single file, and seems to have had no time to swerve around them. In attempting an emergency stop, Lawrence's motorbike clipped the first cycle, sending his own motorbike skidding over the road and throwing him off. The cyclist, too, was flung into the air (but survived). Lawrence was taken to the



hospital at Bovington Camp, but died six days later of extensive head injuries. His memorial service was attended by the great and good, including Churchill and

In most accounts, that would be the end of the matter; but a conspiracy theory has developed over the years, germinating from the testimony of one of the inquest witnesses, Corporal Ernest Catchpole. Catchpole himself had been some 100 yards (90m) from the crash site, though due to the lie of the land had not seen the crash itself. He stated that he saw a black car coming from the opposite direction to Lawrence, and saw Lawrence and the car pass each other. He estimated Lawrence was travelling at up to 60mph (100km/h). Catchpole then said the motorbike began to swerve some 15-20ft (4.6-6m) after passing the car. The Daily Mail seems to have been the first newspaper to pick up on this, saying a "vanished motorist" was being

ABOVE: Lawrence the self-made legend in Arab garb.

sought, who had been in a car "travelling towards" Lawrence.

It's important to note that Catchpole was the only witness who reported the existence of the car. The two cyclists were both 14-vear-olds, Frank Fletcher and Albert Hargreaves. Fletcher testified there was no car in the vicinity; and he kept to this throughout his life, including in a new spaper interview in  $1985\,$ where he said: "There was definitely no black car". Paul Marriott and Yvonne Argent, authors of the definitive book on Lawrence's death, interviewed him in 1991 and he again emphasised he had not seen a car. Hargreaves, who was to spend nine days in hospital after the collision, also stated to the inquest that there was no car.

Why did Catchpole state that he had seen a car? It seems unlikely that he was paid by newspapers to tell his story. Was he mistaken, or could the two boys have been wrong? Catchpole was wrong about other things, such as Lawrence's speed: skid marks on the road indicated he was travelling at 30-35mph (48-56km/h), and not the 60 Catchpole suggested. However, the two cyclists also seemed to be confused about timings on that day. All of which demonstrates what we, as forteans, already know: that eyewitness testimony is rarely consistent or all objectively true. However even if we assume Catchpole's testimony was factually correct (and there's been no corroboration), we are still a long way from proving that Lawrence was murdered as part of some conspiracy.

Lawrence assassination theorists are not plentiful, but they are adamant in their views. An example is author Desmond Stewart who maintains that Bovington Camp's reaction on the day of the crash was unusually controlling, with various witnesses told to keep quiet and guards placed outside Lawrence's house. Stewart claims Catchpole was ordered not to mention the black car; however if this was the case (and I can't find evidence of it), Catchpole readily disobeved any such order and stated clearly and repeatedly his observation of the black car. Stewart also believes the driver of the car not coming forward is an indication of someone's deliberate involvement in the crash, noting how "easily a sudden swerve can be induced" by a car on a bike. Of course, if the car never existed in the first place, then the potential mechanics of the incident as murder are moot.

Rumours also spread that government secret agents had been searching Clouds Hill for secret papers. However, Lawrence's brother stated that a guard had been placed at Clouds Hill to protect





Lawrence's books and other valuables as a courtesy. Catchpole's subsequent death by his own hand is also seen by some as mysterious. One Internet site describes him as having died mysteriously "soon after" Lawrence's death, implying a connection. In fact, it was five years later: rather a long time to leave before silencing someone for what he supposedly knew. These are the usual sorts of rumours that often emerge when a famous person dies unexpectedly.

All of this leaves us little clearer on why a supposed conspiracy would be keen to dispose of Lawrence in the first place. The strongest theory seems to be linked to Lawrence's friendship with fellow soldier and author (of Tarka the Otter, among other works) Henry Williamson. Williamson travelled to Nazi Germany and seemed impressed with certain aspects of it. He also joined the British Union of Fascists, Oswald Mosley's party. Conspiracy theorists maintain Lawrence had agreed to join with Mosley in a peace campaign involving a meeting with Hitler, following a letter sent by Williamson to Lawrence on 10 May (three days before the crash). Fearing the publicity this would bring, so the story goes, secret forces within the British establishment had Lawrence killed.

There are major problems with this theory. First, Williamson's letter of 10 May appears to have been nothing more than a request that his friend review his latest book, which Williamson offered to bring down to Dorset in the coming days. We do know that Lawrence set off to Bovington Camp to send a telegram to Williamson in reply to the letter. It was on the trip back from Bovington

# Catchpole's death by his own hand is also seen as mysterious



that the crash occurred. However, far from being some sort of agreement to meet Hitler, the telegram was hardly controversial, the full text being: "Lunch Tuesday wet fine cottage one mile north Bovington Camp". That is, Lawrence was proposing they meet for lunch at his house the following day. Evidence that Lawrence had somehow agreed to be a facilitator of peace in a

ABOVE: Lawrence's cottage, Clouds Hill, in May 1935. It was from here that he set out on his ill-fated motorcycle journey.

**LEFT:** The stone memorial near the crash site.

meeting with Hitler seems nonexistent. Rather darkly, when looked at closely, many of the sources suggesting this conspiracy angle seem to be proposed by extreme right wing advocates. For them, linking Lawrence – to many a British hero – with Mosley and even Hitler no doubt makes their cause seem more attractive.

Let's also briefly examine the apparent assassination method. Surely if a shadowy force had wanted to dispose of Lawrence there were easier ways of doing so? He was often on his own in his house, for example. Tampering with his motorcycle would have been simple enough, although there was no sign of this. But to drive a car from the opposite direction in broad daylight in front of at least three potential witnesses seems an odd and unreliable method of assassination. And how would the conspirators know where and when Lawrence would be travelling? The scenario implied by the conspiracy theory seems technically risky and exceedingly unlikely.

Yet the myth persists, even in some fairly 'sensible' quarters: the Criminal Element website, for example, states that the two cyclists saw the black car – an untrue assertion. My own catalyst for writing this article was a recent French language graphic novel in which Lawrence's life provides an interesting backdrop and where, once again, the mysterious black car resurfaces as part of an assassination sponsored by rogue elements of MI5. At least that book is intentionally fictional.

So, we're not left with much. The dalliance with appeasement - or, indeed, fascism - seems very hard to prove. If we believe the two cyclists rather than Catchpole, then there never was a mysterious black car; and even if we believe Catchpole, we are left with both a clear lack of motive for a conspiracy and a remarkably hit-andmiss method of killing the intended victim. Near the crash site itself, a stone memorial and a tree planted in Lawrence's memory both stand. The fatal road was cleared and straightened out by US soldiers during World War II: maybe it's time to do the same to the conspiracy rumours clouding Lawrence's death. 1

#### **SELECTED SOURCES**

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Yves Sente and André Juillard, *Le* Serment des Cinq Lords (The Oath of the Five Lords), 2012.

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# reviews



## Alien visits and filmic clichés

Betty Andreasson was utterly sincere about her experiences with alien entities, but would she have been seen as a shaman in a more traditional society?



#### The Andreasson **Affair**

Raymond E Fowler

New Page Books 2015

Pb, 272pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, \$16.99, ISBN 9781601633460

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £13.99

In 1978, astronomer turned ufologist Dr J Allen Hynek addressed a gathering at the United Nations about UFOs, to which he applied the term 'high strangeness', defining this as "a phenomenon so strange and foreign to our daily terrestrial mode of thought that it is frequently met by ridicule and derision by persons and organisations unacquainted with the facts".

At that time, he was referring to the entire scope of ufology. After nearly 70 years' study of the subject (much of it explained away or otherwise inconclusive), the public could be forgiven for being jaded about the arguments; perhaps the only thing we can agree on is that it is a broad and complicated genre, with much of it not very strange at all. However, one corner of it still has a reputation for high strangeness: the contentious topic of 'abductions' and related phenomena.

One of the most puzzling of the handful of cases of extreme strangeness is that of Massachusetts housewife Betty Andreasson and her family. In the experience of Jerome Clark - see his masterly summary in

UFO Encyclopedia, 1988) - it is "so fantastic that even those who believe UFO abductions to be possible have a hard time crediting some aspects of it".

In August 1975, Betty wrote to Dr Hynek after reading a newspaper article about him and the work of the Center for UFO Studies, expressing her relief that "someone is finally studying UFOs. Now I can tell someone of [my] encounter in 1967 with UFO occupants."

In his introduction, Hynek confesses that he "had neither the spare hours nor [..] the inclination to follow it up." Months later, after re-reading her letter, he realised that "here was a sincere person asking assistance, not knowing where to turn" and forwarded it to MUFON's Humanoid Study Group, where a three-man team took it up. Together with a professional hypnotherapist, they began interviewing Betty and her family in January 1977. The unexpected complexity of the case and progressive revelations of further encounters resulted in books written by one of the team, Ray Fowler, in 1979, 1982, 1990 and 1995. Hynek and Fowler look back on their 38-year involvement in the investigation in this useful new edition of the first.

The aliens first appeared in 1967. Betty's husband was seriously ill and her parents moved into their small home to help look after her seven children. One evening, the house was enveloped in an unusual fog and the lights flickered in the eerie silence. Her father saw small figures "like Hallowe'en freaks" out in the back yard. He thought they had on "a funny kind of head-dress imitating

#### "Under hypnosis, Betty told of paralysis, 'as though time had stopped' for the family"

a moon man". To add to the strangeness they "jumped, one after the other, like grasshoppers. The one in front looked at me and I felt kind of queer. That's all I know." Betty recalled waking up the next morning feeling something odd had happened. Her children complained of bad dreams and had 'flashbacks' in the following months.

Under hypnosis, Betty told of paralysis, "as though time had stopped" for the family; and of five small beings - with big eyes, grey skin, slit-like mouths and three-fingered hands - who came into the room through the closed door, each wearing a bird-like emblem with outstretched wings. Betty, incongruously, took them to the kitchen, where she began to cook meat for them until they told her to stop. The leader whom the investigators named Quazgaa - said their food was "knowledge tried by fire", which prompted Betty to show them a Bible. Quazgaa picked it up, "waved his hand over it, and other Bibles appeared, thicker than the original". As the intruders each took one and flipped through the pages, Betty noticed the pages were a "luminous white". Betty's daughter Becky (aged 11 at the time) later, under hypnosis, recalled "grey men" giving her mother "a little blue book". Betty later said that it seemed

to contain images relating to her subsequent experiences.

Betty was taken out of the house, floating in a "swooping, suction-like" motion through the closed door. Outside, Quazgaa showed her their disc-shaped craft, which he somehow made transparent.

After a harrowing 'examination' with probes, Betty was taken on a journey, floating down dark tunnels, through a 'red world', where headless yet stalk-eyed creatures clambered over buildings, and then a 'green universe', past a city with pyramidal buildings and an "inexplicable" thing on tracks and through another city of crystal prisms. Here, Betty was confronted by what appeared to be a 15ft(4.6m)-high giant long-necked eagle, made more dramatic by the lights behind it, which sent out rays of "tiny gold specks". As the ambient temperature rose alarmingly, the avian entity was consumed by fire.

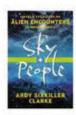
When she recovered from the blinding glare, Betty noticed that, among the embers, was a "big fat grey worm". Then, a booming voice from no apparent source said: "You have seen, and you have heard. Do you understand?" "No, I don't," she replied, "Are you my Lord Jesus?" The voice assured her that she was "chosen", that God loved her and the human race, and that more would be revealed to her.

In time, those revelations brought further strangeness as Betty and her second husband Bob Luca (she remarried in 1978) - and then Ray Fowler himself - recalled other close encounters going back to

Continued on p58

## Mesoamerican UFOs

Some native Central American accounts of alien encounters are enchanting, but it's best to dip in to avoid getting confused



#### Sky People

**Untold Stories of Alien Encounters in Mesoamerica** 

Ardy Sixkiller Clarke

New Page Books 2015

Pb, 319pp, bib, ind, \$17.99, ISBN 978-1-60163-347-7

Sky People is not to be confused with The Sky People, a 1960 entry by the late Brinsley le Poer Trench (later Lord Clancarty) into what in a decade would be called the "ancient astronauts" genre. That book consisted almost solely of a charmingly untethered alternative history ginned up inside the author's head, prominently featuring a Garden of Eden located, contrary to general understanding, on Mars. Sky People, the one without the definite article, is something else, the kind of book that only Ardy Sixkiller Clarke, an American Indian and retired academic from Montana, is writing, at least in English.

Dr Clarke is author of Encounters with Star People (FT305:63), to which the present volume is a sequel, or anyway it's a continuation of a theme: the UFO experiences of indigenous peoples of the Americas. Encounters chronicled sightings and encounters of tribal members in the Western United States. Sky People surveys reports, many though not all by the native Maya, from Belize (the former British Honduras), Honduras, Guatemala, and southern Mexico. She travelled, she writes, more than 20,000 miles (32,000km) through Mesoamerica collecting people's stories, usually soliciting them through translators.

She found her informants by accident or by referral from others. Clarke's own indigenous background opened doors, and her warm, open personality did the rest. UFO accounts by nonindigenous Mexicans and Central Americans are fairly well noted in the ufology literature: those from native witnesses not so much. Thus, Clarke provides a welcome fresh perspective.

As with her previous book, however, the stories tend not to be radically unlike ones an inquirer could hear just about anywhere. Clarke focuses on highstrangeness episodes, where the reader comes upon abductions. false or anomalous pregnancies, otherworldly journeys, assorted humanoid aliens, and UFOanimal interactions. If there are differences from encounters in North America, Europe or elsewhere, they're but a matter of degree. Oversized aliens are somewhat more prevalent and aliens appear a little more likely to arrive via shape-changing balls of light.

Most of the cases are more or less standard CE3s, though here and there contactee-like exchanges with benevolent spacefolk are told, usually by shamans. In several instances, distraught family members speak of abductions in which the victims allegedly did not return.

It is not fully clear why quotation marks surround informants' words. Clarke may be reconstructing them from notes or tapes, but most of the people she interviewed are speaking in Spanish, a language in which she is not proficient. Therefore what we're getting are not so much direct quotes as paraphrases of conversations filtered through Spanish-literate intermediaries. That's not necessarily fatal to the book's value, but it's something a reader ought to keep in mind.

If you've read enough UFO (or general anomalies) literature,

after a time even the most outlandish tales blur and start to lose their grip on the sense of wonder, not to mention the basic attention. Sky People doesn't numb the mind in quite the way a treatment of ghosts and haunted houses typically does, but if you want to keep the details distinct, perhaps it's best to dip into it one chapter at a time. Even so, a few enchanting novelties rise to amaze, such as a Belize alien that walks backwards and forwards via double-jointed knees and turns its head in any direction it pleases. In Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula an informant speaks of seeing a creature that "walked like a man. but would drop down on all four feet and run though the forest like a cat. It also [..] climbed trees like a monkey." Eventually, it retrieved a flying machine from under some trees, boarded it and sailed away.

Clarke believes her informants to be in earnest, and sometimes she seeks out supporting testimony from fellow witnesses or from friends and family members who say they learned of the incidents when they occurred. If none of this approaches proof in a scientific sense, it's plausible enough if one accepts the proposition that extraordinary experiences, whatever their nature and meaning, are ubiquitous in human perception. If such phenomena resist literalist readings and sceptical nostrums. they're there, however one defines "there," apparently some liminal zone where any fantastic thing is, if nothing else, vividly experienceable.

The author herself is disinclined to analyse or theorise. She just listens and records, and for a book of this kind, that's sufficient.

Jerome Clark

**Fortean Times Verdict** NO ANALYSIS, BUT FASCINATING TALES NONETHELESS

Continued from page 57

childhood. Betty's later ones dealt with the themes of alien interest in human reproduction and extracting fœtuses, partly to aid their own incarnations and partly to save the human race. Some UFO researchers later suggested that Betty might have been fabricating her tales for "credulous ufologists", or that she had consciously or unconsciously incorporated details from the abductionist literature put out by Whitley Streiber, Budd Hopkins and David Jacobs. Despite such criticism, it was obvious to the investigators that this was no ordinary close encounter and that the family were sincere. One social worker described Betty as "so pure of heart, so innocent and uncorruptible", and there was never a moment the team suspected imposture.

Throughout the investigation, Betty's family reported being the centre of phenomena including events resembling 'time-stops', apports, phantoms, poltergeists, levitations, teleportations, meaningful coincidences, mysterious communications and mystical experiences. Some of these, particularly where they seem to be corroborated by other people or by eternal references, are difficult to account for. Were they truly external, verifiable events, or do we have here a group folie, an unusually intense collective experience?

Folklorists and anthropologists interested in cultural imagery will note many details which could be 'flagged': the hopping insectoid aliens could have been out of Quatermass and the Pit; the aliens are three-fingered, a cartoon convention that dates at least back to Disney and Warner Brothers; the eyes on stalks, another cartoon alien convention; the mystical burning bird, an allusion to the phœnix and resurrection; the grey worm, an allusion to corporeal existence; and travel through tunnels (near-death type imagery). An intelligent bird-headed alien entity also appears in the last stories of the Rama series, by Arthur C Clarke and Gentry Lee, and in Lee's own Bright Messenger novels, in which his deeply

religious protagonist interprets the aliens as God's messengers, angels.

To anyone considering the CE4/abduction experience as a modern and socially disconnected form of spontaneous shamanism, there is Betty's extraordinarily rich journey through the Otherworld, complete with accompanying alien psychopomp, her contact with a numinous 'deity' and her experiences of ritual dismemberment (via probes, 'implants' and internal 'cleansing'), prophecy and return with a 'mission'.

She is abducted to attend alien fœtal extractions, surely a modern form of the classic folklore of women abducted by fairies to be midwife to a changeling.

After the first report, Fowler wondered "whether we had actually communicated with an alien or with Betty's subconscious mind"; but even if this were so, it does not explain much, nor would it invalidate our interest in this remarkable affair.

What makes Betty 'special', the aliens tell her, is her Christian beliefs, which underpin many of the encounters (e.g. when the disembodied 'voice' speaks of "my Son", Betty sobs uncontrollably). Understandably, this level of religious investment in a CE4 case creates serious problems for any hardcore theory of alien visitation.

My suggestions here are not an attempt to explain away what happened to the Andreassons; my impression is that this is a rare story that bridges fields of inquiry, from the mundane to the mystical, and illustrates a subtle continuity that links all of them. In a more traditional society, surely, Betty would have been valued as a shaman. And yet the chief investigation here has been conducted with the underlying presumption that these events originate from an extraterrestrial intervention into the lives of these (relatively) ordinary people.

Despite that narrow vision. Fowler and his colleagues are to be congratulated for sticking with this case and making available their reports, especially the transcriptions of the hypnosis sessions.

Given the extent to which the investigators seem to have 'bought into' the Andreasson's narrative. this allows us to draw our own conclusions.

**Bob Rickard** 

**Fortean Times Verdict** A CLASSIC CASE THAT DESERVES TO BE BETTER KNOWN

#### The John Michell Reader

Writings and Rants of a Radical **Traditionalist** 

Selected and introduced by Joscelyn Godwin

Inner Traditions 2015

Pb, 320pp, \$19.95, ISBN 9781620554159

#### FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £14.99



John Michell, like so many authors, produced some of his best work when inspired by the three muses of journalism:

Deadline, Wordcount and Fee. This sparkling collection of essays by a truly great writer was chosen from An Orthodox Voice, his monthly column for the Oldie magazine. The anthology, which appeared as a limited edition in 2005, makes a welcome return to print. Joscelyn Godwin, a fine writer himself, provides an introduction and has artfully selected 108 of Michell's pieces from the Oldie on a wide range of topics. Religion, William Blake, geometry, Stonehenge, royalty, drugs, Plato, Druids, crop circles and "the prophetic ex-goalkeeper, David Icke" all receive an airing. Throughout the collection runs a nostalgia, a yearning for a lost, golden England, where once "it was possible to meet any number of American ladies without hearing about their abduction experiences and extra-terrestrial brain implants."

In the Michellian world, all roads lead inevitably to Plato. Through all the wit and humour, John Michell's Platonist soul shines like a beacon, confirming him as a vital link in the Golden Chain.

Steve Marshall

**Fortean Times Verdict** 

LOVELY INTRODUCTION TO THE LATE, GREAT FORTEAN GENT

## Total Freedom

This pocket introduction to the Church of Scientology packs in a lot of information



#### Scientology

The Cult of Greed

Jon Atack

CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform 2015

Pb, 72pp, illus, notes, £6.39, ISBN 9781505490121; ebook

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £6.39

Jon Atack wrote one of the most important books on Scientology, A Piece of Blue Sky, back in 1990. Because of one short paragraph he was sued for libel - a process that destroyed nearly everything he had. He stepped aside from the fray for many years, returning just a couple of years ago with a new edition of the book.

Scientology: The Cult of Greed is based on a talk he gave at a conference in St Petersburg in September 2014. It's a slim volume, but it's a useful pocket introduction to the Church of Scientology: its founder, professional storyteller L Ron Hubbard, its beliefs and practices, its history, its controversies. It doesn't set out to be an evenhanded scholarly appraisal; it's written by a former member who is familiar with the teachings and training of Scientology ("the Tech") and who knows from bitter experience how the Church treats those who criticise it.

Many "alternative religions" have shady episodes in their past; most have moved on and become better-behaved. But Hubbard's paranoia, legendary short temper and sometimes cruelty still seem to characterise the Church of Scientology long after his death, as Atack's book makes clear.

Just three of the many details in this book of what many would say is the Church's deceptiveness. Hubbard made amazing health claims for "going Clear", but was a heavy user of barbiturates all his life. The Church says that its auditing and other training techniques have nothing to do with hypnosis, but Atack is able to show from Hubbard's own writings that they induce a light hypnotic trance. And for a religion that promises Total Freedom, the coercive treatment of its own senior members is one of the biggest contradictions of all.

The book is copiously illustrated, with photos of Hubbard and of Scientology places, procedures and documents; in the paperback they're monochrome, but in the e-book many of them are in colour. And it's thoroughly sourced, mainly from Scientology's own documents.

If you only buy one book on Scientology it should really be APiece of Blue Sky, but if you want something smaller, cheaper but still packed with information, you could do a lot worse than Scientology: the Cult of Greed. David V Barrett

**Fortean Times Verdict** 

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## **Gravity's rainbow**

You can ignore the equations in this look at attempts to control the known force of gravity: it's still fascinating



#### **Greenglow & The Search for Gravity** Control

Ronald Evans

Matador 2015

Pb, xxvi + 312 pp, illus, ind, £12.99, ISBN 9781784620233

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £11.69

For about 10 years, from the mid-1990s until 2005, Britain's largest defence contractor, BAE Systems, sponsored a research project into what might loosely be described as "antigravity" [FT163:28]. That's not quite the right term, because they were seeking ways to control the known force of gravity rather than to discover a new unknown force - but even so, what they were doing was fringe science by anyone's definition. For a highprofile blue-chip company to go out on a limb like that, openly and for such a long time, was an unprecedented act of corporate farsightedness.

Project Greenglow, as it became known, was the brainchild of Dr Ronald Evans. Having been interested in the possibility of gravity control since the 1980s, he eventually persuaded BAE Systems to fund a small-scale research project on the subject. Greenglow continued until his retirement in 2005, and this book - finally published after 10 years in gestation - is the ultimate outcome of it.

Despite the offbeat subject matter. Ron Evans is no crank - he was one of the most senior engineers in BAE's Military Aircraft division. I met him on several occasions in the late 1990s when we collaborated in other fields of research, and his views

were always well-respected and level-headed. The Greenglow research wasn't carried out by Ron himself (or by anyone else at BAE Systems, as far as I know): for the most part it was farmed out to various university departments around the UK. And you can't get more respectable than that.

If this book had taken the form of a historical narrative of Project Greenglow, focusing on Dr Evans's long struggles to get management and academia on his side, together with a simple, non-technical synopsis of the various research strands, then it might have ended up as a bestseller – at least as far as Fortean Times readers are concerned. But that's not how he chose to write it. In his own words, "I decided to write a book about the search for gravity control, describing the background leading to the research pathways, giving some details of the latest experimental results, suggesting new ideas for experiments and filling in with details from Project Greenglow, as appropriate."

The result is still a fascinating, well-written and visually attractive book, but one that may look too much like a traditional science textbook to appeal to a wide range of readers. The first half of the book really does focus on textbook physics, albeit presented in a novel way that emphasises the analogies between fluid dynamics, electromagnetism and gravity. Sometimes these analogies are illustrated with diagrams, which work well, but in other places with equations which are going to scare off many readers. This is a shame, because almost all the equations could have been omitted with no real loss to the author's argument.

Readers looking for specific information about Project Greenglow will find it buried in the broader narrative. For example, one of the biggest events in the field of "gravity

control" during the Greenglow years was the announcement by the Russian scientist Evgeny Podkletnov of a possible gravity shielding effect caused by rotating superconductors. This made mainstream headlines when the news first broke in 1996 [FT96:26], and an attempt to duplicate Podkletnov's experiment was one of the main strands of Project Greenglow itself. So I was surprised, when I looked down the book's table of contents, that there wasn't a chapter entitled 'Podkletnov and Gravity Shielding' or anything like that. Eventually I found it buried in the middle of chapter 13: "Twinned fields and some experimental ideas".

The book is primarily aimed at people who are already reasonably knowledgeable about physics, and who want some pointers to areas where future breakthroughs may be possible. But that shouldn't put off more general readers. If you're prepared to skip over some of the more detailed technical arguments - and the equations - you will find plenty of interest. There's Project Greenglow itself, as well as the loosely connected **Breakthrough Propulsion Physics** initiative which NASA ran at the same time.

You can read about mainstream topics like gravity waves and zero-point energy, and less mainstream ones like Biefeld-Brown electrogravitics, wormholes and Alcubierre's warp drive. And you can speculate about what happened next - was Greenglow cancelled because it wasn't producing results... or did it disappear into the world of black projects because it was?

Go on - with a cover price of just £12.99 you can afford to skip a few equations.

**Andrew May** 

**Fortean Times Verdict** FASCINATING AND WELL WRITTEN IF A LITTLE TOO TECHNICAL

#### **Haunted Ireland**

The Collins Press 2014

Hb, 256pp, illus, bib, £19.99, SBN 9781848892231

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £19.99



Having seen too many image-heavy books about haunted this, that and the other, I was expecting the

worst. However, Tarquin Blake relies on decent story-telling and research, and he scores brownie points for mentioning Tyrone cleric Thomas Meredith, whose attempt to shoot a lady in white (possibly the local saint, Trea) with a silver bullet ended badly. (The next day a devil turned up to mock, morphed into a Lough Neagh eel, wriggled into the bottle of whisky to get the last drop out and was trapped. True.)

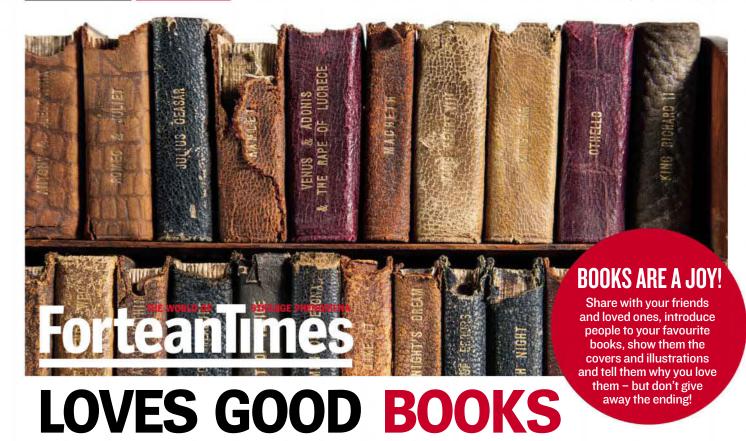
Staying in the North, we have Glenuilin, where Abhartach - a short vampiric warrior chieftain and black magician - was buried... upside down. It took a sword made of yew to kill him, and a covering of hawthorn to keep him down. A tree was also used to permanently imprison Red Mary, of Co Clare, who kept a staff of young men disguised as maidservants and chopped the breasts off her real maids.

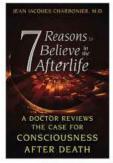
The tortured voices of former inmates have been heard in the derelict parts of the grim Cork District Lunatic Asylum, built in 1798 by William Saunders Hallaran, Ireland's first psychiatrist and the inventor of 'Hallaran's Chair', which spun his unfortunate patients at 100rpm.

Screams also emanate from the remains of a mediæval convent at Shanagolden, where the prioress terrified the locals with her use of the black arts and (unspecified) sexual practices. The Countess of Desmond was discovered to have been accidentally buried alive there - her finger bones were found to be ragged from clawing at her tomb...

It's a lovely collection of tales from all over Ireland. One whinge, though: can we please have a moratorium on infra-red photos? Val Stevenson

**Fortean Times Verdict** HANDSOME, RELAXED COLLECTION OF IRISH FOLK AND GHOST TALES







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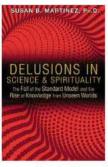
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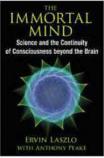
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#### **Avengers: Age of Ultron**

Dir Joss Whedon, US 2015

How do you follow one of the biggest and best-loved box office hits (\$1.5 billion) of all time? It's a question that must have given both writer/director Joss Whedon and Marvel Studios execs some sleepless nights over the past three years; one wonders whether any film has ever arrived in cinemas bearing such a burden of impossible expectations and hype as did Avengers: Age of Ultron.

The titular villain (played with snarky relish by James Spader) will be familiar to longtime readers of The Avengers, even though a retooled origin here sees him born as the lovechild of Tony Stark's (Robert Downey Jr) overweening scientific ambition, an Infinity Stone and some dodgy Hydra experiments: what was meant to be a global defence programme ends up as a vastly powerful AI monster with major daddy issues and the conviction that the only way to protect the Earth is to remove its inhabitants - starting with Stark and his superhero chums.

Cue a series of globe-trotting battles on an epic scale, leavened with some quieter character moments for the likes of Bruce Banner (Mark Ruffalo), the Black Widow (Scarlett Johannson) and, notably, Jeremy

Renner's Hawkeye, who after spending much of the first film brainwashed by Loki here becomes the still centre that holds everyone else together; it's nicely played and well deserved. The rest of the team get their moments in the spotlight, even if none can be said to have meaningful character arcs within this hyerperactive whole, filled as it is with guest appearances for everyone from War Machine to Agent Carter and foreshadowings of future films. The fresh faces fare better, with the newly introduced Maximoff twins ("He's fast, she's weird") Wanda (Elizabeth Olsen) and Pietro (Aaron Taylor-Johnson) making an impression, although it was the arrival of Paul Bettany's perfectly realised Vision that stole the show for me; like Ultron's, his origin is a new one, and includes a clever explanation as to why, in the 21st century, he still rocks an oldschool cape.

The film manages to feel both overstuffed and, even at nearly two and a half hours, much too short: it's obvious that a good deal has ended up on the cutting room floor, including some expository scenes without which AoU at times struggles to make sense of its own story; similarly, characters like Baron Strucker (Thomas Kretschmann) go for nothing in the relentless forward rush and competition for screen time. It all makes more sense - and feels more organic - on

a second viewing (in light ofwhich I've given it an extra point), but some breathing space would have been appreciated; here's hoping for a 'director's cut' some day.

The film's Ur-text is, of course, Mary Shelly's Frankenstein, on which Whedon plays a number of variations, as well as surrounding it with other pop culture references from King Kong to The Big Bang Theory. Swirling about in the film's undercurrents, beneath the tempestuous surface and the endless Whedon wisecracks, are some interesting themes: the nature of family, the dividing lines between the human and the monstrous, the impossibility of security and the suddenness with which extinction can be visited on the denizens of our vulnerable blue planet. None of them are articulated in a particularly coherent way, but they are there, adding some significance to the sound and the fury; it's certainly not a dumb movie, even it is a very big one, but it is at times unbalanced and messy.

What Whedon and co have delivered, though, is a film that's visually streets ahead of their first outing, creating real-time equivalents of comic book storytelling the likes of which just haven't been seen before, simply because they could not, until now, be done; these are things that sometimes achieve a poetry of their own, as well as an air-punching sense of validation

for old time comic fans (myself included) who never thought they'd live to see such a Brave New World.

Ultimately, AoU is a step down from the more wayward achievements Marvel Studios gave us last year with Winter Soldier and Guardians of the Galaxy; it's a massive tentpole movie, of course - a bit like those comic 'events' in which character development is necessarily sacrificed to plot and action - and as such clearly has to cast its net wider and provide something for everyone. Given the pressures, an unqualified success was unlikely, and *Ultron* doesn't deliver quite the adrenalin shot of pure joy that its predecessor did. But it's a spectacularly good romp that keeps most of its balls in the air and balances the needs of comic book fans and mainstream audiences rather well for its too-short 141 minutes. **David Sutton** 

Fortean Times Verdict FAR FROM PERFECT, BUT STILL A TREAT FOR COMIC FANS

#### **Electric Boogaloo: The** Wild Untold Story of **Cannon Films**

Dir Mick Hartley, Australia/US/Israel/UK 2014

On UK release from 5 June

The driving force behind the independent production company Cannon Films was a pair of Israeli cousins with an all-consuming passion for film: Menahem Golan (the director, producer and largerthan-life impresario) and Yoram Globus (the money man and salesman extraordinaire). They dreamed big, talked big and for well over a decade beat Hollywood studios at their own game by releasing/churning out (delete according to taste) dozens of low-budget action films, most of which turned a profit.

This documentary is a realistic but affectionate look at the rise and fall of Cannon, offering interviews with what seems like half of Hollywood - everyone, in fact, except the cousins themselves; a postscript notes that they declined to appear and instead rushed their own documentary into production, which is as neat a summary of their modus operandi as you could wish for. Their faults aren't glossed over; indeed they are the source of much of this film's humour - and it is very funny. There are tales of back-



of-a-fag-packet ideas and selling non-existent films on the basis of a solitary poster. Best of all though is the story of them negotiating directly with Clyde, the orang-utan star of Clint Eastwood's *Every Which Way* movies, for a role in a series of monkey pictures – a role that ultimately went to a midget in a monkey suit.

Cannon's priorities seemed to be first to make films, second to make a profit, and third to make good films. Menahem Golan at one point says: "I'd rather make thirty \$1m pictures than one \$30m picture". And boy did he mean it: in 1987 alone he produced a scarcely believable 26 movies. All told, Cannon produced almost 200 films, the majority of them in the 1980s. Most observers would agree that most were rubbish, but not Golan: he genuinely believed his films were great. Interviewees recall their amazement at Golan's prediction that the Brooke Shields vehicle Sahara would net Oscars for both Best Film and Best Actress.

Occasionally, and more by luck than judgement, a Cannon film would strike a chord at the box office and make big money. One such example was *Breakin'*, which in true exploitation style sought to cash in on the breakdancing craze. Naturally, Golan immediately rushed a sequel into production. In fact sequels were Cannon's stock in trade, with *Death Wish*, *Missing in Action*, *Cyborg* and *Ninja* follow-ups galore.

Few of the interviewees have anything really bad to say about Cannon, the main exception being Frank Yablans, who was briefly the chief executive of MGM. In the early 1980s, for reasons best known to himself, Yablans signed a major deal whereby Cannon would produce films specifically for MGM to distribute. Yablans, clearly still bitter, expresses his horror at the low quality of the films Cannon submitted, which included the aforementioned Sahara and Hercules, starring Lou Ferrigno. Quite what Yablans was expecting from a company that only the year before had released Private Popsicle and Hospital Massacre is anyone's guess.

What comes across from the documentary is the genuine love of films that Golan and Globus shared. Golan, as the creative one of the pair, was so excited by new projects that he was already

### 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)

#### **FREAKS**

Dir Todd Browning, US 1932 On UK release from 12 June

What's really disturbing about Todd Browning's career-derailing sideshow picture Freaks isn't the title or even the subject matter, but the way studios and audiences simply couldn't handle it. MGM disowned it, audiences called it sick (legend says one woman blamed her miscarriage on the shock) and it remained banned in the UK for 30 years, until it was rediscovered by the counterculture in the 1960s. Yet even then it was still given an X certificate. And what was so hideously repellent about it? It used - brace yourself - real-life disabled people to play - are you ready for this? - on-screen disabled people!

Part soap opera, part exploitation movie, *Freaks* is about a tuxedo-wearing midget called Hans who falls for the ablebodied trapeze artist Cleopatra. When she seems to start returning his love, he's shocked; but is she genuine in her affections, or does she just want his rumoured inheritance money?

This central plot – a disabled person being used and exploited for monetary gain – is, in some ways, a microcosm of much

of the controversy that Freaks stirred up on its release. People said the film, and indeed the whole sideshow industry, used these 'unfortunates' as figures of spectacle and profit and should therefore be outlawed. Even Lady Olga (who plays the bearded lady here) complained that the film failed to portray the characters with sufficient respect. Yet, the actors Browning gathered were real-life sideshow performers, many with long, successful careers. People like the Human Caterpillar, the Living Skeleton and Half-Boy might not have asked for their biological lot, but they were canny, brave and ambitious enough to turn a perceived weakness into a lucrative strength. By throwing these people on the screen with no apology and surprisingly little fanfare, it's amazing how quickly their 'freakishness' plays second fiddle to their personalities. Is it exploitative? Well, yeah; but it's strangely empowering too, for both viewers and performers.

Admittedly, Browning throws in a hive-mind plot device that is both strange and patently untrue: the notion that if one 'freak' is wronged, the whole community will seek revenge. In reality, these sideshow performers were as individualistic as



anybody else. But the idea of corporate revenge on the ablebodied world works well for the plot, and leads to a genuinely chilling rain-soaked climax.

Returning to cinema screens this June, Freaks is Browning's masterpiece, far better and more satisfying than his Lugosi version of Dracula (a patchy film that seems ill at ease with the new talkie technology). Freaks has a few sound issues here and there, but the director settles into the 'new' cinema with plenty of dialogue and, as a result, some deep, complex drama. Ironic and depressing, then, that this groundbreaking film cost him his career and flung him into his own permanent Hollywood freakdom.

#### **Fortean Times Verdict**

BROWNING'S MASTERPIECE STILL EMPOWERS AND DISTURBS

9





thinking two or three pictures down the line before the first one had wrapped. In the end, that's partly why Cannon collapsed: films were hurried into cinemas so quickly that there was little time to finesse them into polished product, and as a result Cannon developed a reputation as purveyors of lurid, lowquality films. But because Golan craved respect from the filmmaking community, Cannon started overreaching itself and straying from its successful business model. Aiming to join the seven major studios, they started to make big budget films (Superman IV, Over the Top, Masters of the Universe) that consequently had a lot more riding on them. When these movies flopped, the dream was finally over. With mountainous debts, Cannon was taken over, Golan and Globus split, and that was that.

Whatever you might think of the films Cannon produced, at least they actually got them made. As Golan says in a rare moment of self-awareness: "Hollywood is 90 per cent talk, 10 per cent making movies. Sometimes we make better films, sometimes we don't make such good films, but we do make films." In so doing, Golan provided work that would not otherwise have existed for literally hundreds if not thousands of actors, technicians and associated backroom staff. Golan and Globus may have lacked taste, and occasionally scruples, but their body of work contains some of the most memorable action pictures of the 1980s. Not only that, but they also provided funds for the likes of John Cassavetes, Jean-Luc Godard and Godfrey Reggio, so one shouldn't dismiss Cannon quite so lightly.

This is a terrific documentary that deals with its subjects in a humorous but even-handed and affectionate way. Having come so close to taking an independent production company into the realms of Warner Bros, Universal and Paramount only to fall at the final hurdle means that Cannon's story is tinged with sadness. But it is only a tinge, for this film is full of laughter, happy memories and tall tales; which one suspects is more than can be said of Merchant-Ivory. Sometimes, good taste isn't everything.

Golan died last year, aged 85, and his passing was marked by his inclusion in the 'In Memoriam' section of the 77th Academy Awards. One imagines he would have been truly

honoured to be finally recognised by the great and the good. Although he would probably have added: "Cut it faster! More explosions!" **Daniel King** 

**Fortean Times Verdict** TURNING TRASH INTO GOLD IN THE 1980S

#### The Tribe

Dir Miroslav Slaboshpytskiy, Ukraine/Netherlands 2014 On UK release from 15 May

The Tribe is a silent movie with a twist, and I can't deny I was initially sceptical: a film entirely in Ukrainian sign language, with no subtitles, about the trials and tribulations of a young man in a boarding school for deaf youths smelt a lot like a gimmick. I mean, how often do you watch a film in a foreign language without subtitles? Well, while I won't be giving up my STs any time soon, it's clear after the first 30 minutes that there's a lot more to The Tribe than meets the ears.

It was the director Miroslav Slaboshpytskiy's s intention to pay homage to silent movies in this, his first feature. As in a silent film, we follow the narrative in a black and white world full of exaggerated gestures and simple, intelligible actions. Not to say that these shenanigans are normal, though, as they include, but are not limited to, gang initiation, violence, sex, abortion and prostitution (and a bit of D&T). It's fair to say I didn't understand every scene in this unique school play: while the action is explicit, the film doesn't always explain why something is happening. And if actions do speak louder than words, why make the former so OTT? It's also difficult to figure out whether The Tribe wants us to take all its violence seriously. One minute Slaboshpytskiy gives us shocking brutality and the next choreographed play fights, reminiscent of a school musical; the mix is confusing. Overall, though, this is an interesting film that shines a light on a community and a culture alien to many of us. Subtitlers shouldn't be quaking at their keyboards, but we should never underestimate the power of the non-verbal in cinema. Fohnjang Ghebdinga

**Fortean Times Verdict** 

THE SOUND OF SILENCE

#### **SHORTS**

#### **BAD LAND: ROAD TO FURY**

Signature Entertainment, £12.99 (DVD), £13.99 (Blu-ray)



Here we have another dystopian sci-fi set in a world where water is precious and rare, controlled and piped away from the farmers in the dustbowl by Big Water. One of these farmers is a broody and magnetic Michael Shannon, an alcoholic, burdened by guilt and caring for his two children (Kodi Smit-McFee and a criminally underused Elle Fanning). The standout performance, though, comes from Nicholas Hoult,

and it's clear that this film's terrible subtitle is there because he's in the forthcoming Mad Max movie. He really is a star in the making and gives a subtle performance in what could easily have been a one-note role. I enjoyed this movie, derivative though it is, for its Western trappings and almost Tarantinoesque theatrical flourishes, and for a movie with (I assume) a very small budget, the effects are well realised and the near-future environment well thought out. Nevertheless, I couldn't help but think that it would have worked just as well as a straight Western, shorn of the robot mules and drones.

Richmond Clements 6/10

#### **HALO: NIGHTFALL**

Anchor Bay Entertainment, £7.99 (DVD), £9.99 (Blu-ray)



Essentially a promo for the next iteration of the highly successful Halo Xbox gaming franchise, this Ridley Scott-produced slice of live action military sci-fi will likely please neither gamers nor movie fans. It was originally released in smaller chunks on the Xbox gaming platform. The derivative plot sees a group of barely one-dimensional characters – many of them

military grunts – thrown into a battle for survival on the distant world of Sedra. As this is merely a prelude to the game, setting up a major character, it fails as a stand-alone movie and simply frustrates those who want to plunge into gameplay within the Halo universe. It's a shame, as alongside veteran Scott, the director Sergio Mimica-Gezzan worked on the revitalised Battlestar Galactica (which arguably succeeded in making unforgettable military-driven science fiction), and writer Paul Scheuring was behind the twisty television drama Prison Break. Brian J Robb 3/10

#### HARLOCK SPACE PIRATE

Manga Entertainment, £19.99 (DVD), £29.99 (Blu-ray)



This CG animated dramatic re-boot of a popular Japanese anime property dating back to the Star Wars heyday of the 1970s is ambitious, if nothing else. It looks great and moves at a rapid pace, but the technobabble and convoluted plotting might lose all but the most dedicated manga/anime aficionado. With his eye-patch and facial scars, his shoulderperched parrot sidekick Tori, and his starship Arcadia

flying the Jolly Roger, renegade Harlock is quite literally a 'space pirate'. He's a wanted man, having defied the tyrannical Federation, but he might also be the only one who can save the Earth via 'time reversal', a sort of universal re-set. Arguably, there's too much going on and too many characters to keep track of for any new viewers not already steeped in decades of Harlock lore. As the movie powers on towards a complicated climax, it begins to feel more like a video game someone else is playing rather than a movie in which you can engage with the characters or the plot. BJR 5/10



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# letters



#### Westminster not-so-weirdos

I began by quite enjoying the pre-election article that aimed at, albeit sometimes tenuously, outing weirdness within our political parties [FT326:42-47]. But the section that covered the Green Party almost turned the idea of fortean on its head and descended into an apparently uninformed 'dissing' of policies on the grounds that they stray from the mainstream and challenge commonly held beliefs about how things have to be. This narrow-minded approach, from the initial stereotyping of Green supporters (I'm not sure that all cœliacs vote Green) seemed to me the very opposite of fortean. I think it is more weird that the public commonly accept that stateprovided housing is modest for all citizens apart from one family who are showered with grandeur on the basis that we've done this for a long time and used to be told that they had a God-given right to it.

As for the Greens' wish to undermine the supposedly 1980s concept of money: it seems to me that the strangest thing about money is the fact that most of the public and most politicians don't know where it comes from! Over 90 per cent is created from thin air by the banks and disappears just as strangely into the void, whilst most of us believe it is created and controlled carefully by the Government or the Bank of England, still seemingly blind to the precarious con that is our monetary system. And as for the workers' objection to "meat-free Mondays", well isn't it odd that we are happily munching our way to potential self-destruction and that the suggestion that we might want to put the brakes on for one day a week causes outrage? In general the media make it hard for dissenting voices to be heard and are quick to brand them as loony. As a result we've lost a lot of important civil rights very recently with hardly a murmur.

Lisa Bovill

Hull. Humberside



Mark O'Brien and his wife happened upon this "unicorn in repose" while out cycling in Aberdeenshire on 15 March 2015.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous

forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them to the PO box above (with a stamped addressed envelope or international reply coupon) or to sieveking@forteantimes.com - and please tell us your postal address.

#### **Colour precedent**

Further to the discussion of the AMPOL colour demonstrations on black and white TV [FT325:73, 327:73-74]: the illusion of faint colours created by rapidly alternating black and white (known as the Fechner colour effect) has been recognised, if not fully understood, for some time. As early as 1895 English toymaker Charles Benham sold a top decorated with a black and white pattern that appeared to turn into coloured bands when the top was spun.

**Bill Polaski** Mineola, New York

#### Hope against hope

The Fortean Traveller article about Transylvania by Reverend Laws [FT326:74-77] was excellent, not simply descriptive but explanatory too. However, there seems to have been some errant influence at work: Anthony Hope Hawkins has merged with William Hope Hodgson. Carnacki would be confused to wake in The House on The Borderland in Strelsau to

grapple with Rupert of Hentzau, the well-known vampire! **Martin Winship** Bv email

#### **Porpoise bashing**

Grey seals killing porpoises in the North Sea ["Seals Behaving Badly", FT325:10] is a delphinic 'déjà vu' of when bottlenose dolphins were attacking and killing porpoises off the coast of the UK several years ago. It is sad – but interesting – that two different species of marine mammals are ganging up on the poor little porpoises, which never exceed 5ft (1.5m) in length. (The dolphin is a member of the whale family whose snout forms a beak; porpoises are smaller and have blunt snouts.)

**Greg May** Orlando, Florida

#### **Hot fanning**

Might I suggest a minor correction to Mythconceptions #184 [FT323:27]? All the energy consumed by the fan including that initially used to move the air around the room would be lost as heat. As Homer Simpson once put it, "In this household we obey the laws of thermodynamics".

Given that a desk fan consumes typically 40W, this is a negligible amount of energy in an uninsulated room with the window open (particularly compared with the 100W or so a normal human gives off). However, if the room were perfectly insulated with no air-leaks etc, given there is about 20kg of air in a typical room, the temperature would rise by 1K for every 20kJ of energy, meaning leaving a fan running for say eight hours would make the room uninhabitably hot.

I recall as an undergraduate conducting a very precise thermochemical analysis in an apparatus that was essentially like a giant Thermos flask. The heating effects of the impellor in the bottom of the vessel used to stir the reagents had to be taken into account in the calculations, as although they were relatively small they were still significant.

**Tim Greening-Jackson** 

Manchester

#### **Surviving crucifixion**

Re the discussion of crucifixion [FT326:38-41, 327:72]: crucifixions, on average, took two, three or even sometimes several days for the person to die. In the case of Jesus, he was on the cross for only a few hours, as he had to be taken down before Passover. Pilate was surprised that Jesus had died so quickly - but was he actually dead? There are recorded instances of crucifixion survivors. one being mentioned by the Jewish historian Josephus. In addition there is a record of a certain Mansur al-Hallaj, a Sufi of the ninth century AD, who was crucified for four whole days, after which he was pardoned and subsequently recovered from his ordeal. In 1953 classical scholar and mythologist Robert Graves, together with Hebrew scholar Joshua Podro, published The Nazarene Gospel Restored, a monumental and groundbreaking study of the life, sayings and actions of Jesus, which took them 10 years to write. In the book Graves relates how he himself was left for dead on the Western Front in World War I after being injured by a shell burst, only to be miraculously revived 24 hours later. The experienced medical officer had misdiagnosed complete anæsthesia for death. Graves considered his "temporary demise" to be not unlike that of Jesus, and that such cases are entirely natural.

**Eric Fitch** 

Hereford

#### Nicholas Roerich

I was delighted to read Gary Lachman's discussion of Roerich's interest in the 'wish-granting iewel' (cintamani) of Buddhism and its possible connection with the Grail [FT324:33]. I presented a detailed argument for the derivation of at least Wolfram von Eschenbach's version of the Grail from the wishgranting jewel in my article 'The Wish-Granting Jewel: Exploring the Buddhist Origins of the Holy Grail', published in Viator, 42. 2 (2011), 1-48. As cited there, in his book Shambhala (1930, p.22), Roerich recorded the following conversation held in 1928 with a Tibetan Lama:

"Do you in the West know something about the Great Stone in which magic powers are concentrated? And do you know from which planet came this stone? And who possessed this treasure?"

"Lama, about the Great Stone we have as many legends as you have images of Chintamani. From the old Druidic times many nations remember these legends of truth about the natural energies concealed in this strange visitor to our planet. Very often in such fallen stones are hidden diamonds, but these are nothing in comparison with some other unknown metals and energies which are found every day in the stones and in the numerous currents and rays. Lapis Exilis, thus is named the stone, which is mentioned by the old Meistersingers. ..."

Marinus **Anthony van** der Sluijs Philadelphia. Pennsylvania

Readers interested in Nicholas Roerich might like to know about a book that goes into the occult stream behind him in considerable depth - The East in the Light of the West by Sergei O Prokofieff (a grandson of the composer),



published by Temple Lodge in 2009. Part One deals with Roerich and was originally published separately.

**Margaret Jonas** 

East Grinstead, West Sussex

Nicholas Roerich is near and dear to my heart. I am a member of, and work for, the English Grand Lodge for the Americas of the Rosicrucian Order, AMORC, and Roerich was the Order's delegate to Central Asia. Years ago we used to fly the Roerich Peace Banner at Rosicrucian Park in San Jose, California. Whenever work or play take me to New York, I always make time to spend a few hours at the Roerich Museum there.

I also am delighted to see that the Jesuits, of which I was a member for 24 years - 13 as a Byzantine Catholic pastor in San Francisco (1987-2000) - are advertising in Fortean Times. The parish I served, Our Lady of Fatima Russian Byzantine Catholic Church on Lake Street, had had a former pastor who was an exorcist without permission. The parish, situated in a just post-1906 Quake era mansion, was set up as a spiritual fortress, with warrior saint icons and mirrors at every doorway, thanks to my predecessor. There were a few bumps in the night in the old mansion, which had seen a murder-suicide at the time of the Wall Street Crash in 1929. Anton LeVay's Church of Satan ("The Black House") was about four blocks away on California Street in the Richmond district, I had some older parishioners who would throw sanctified water at LeVay's place.

**Steven A Armstrong** 

San Francisco, California

#### Lemmings

I've never seen a lemming myself (shades of the elk here), but my mother told me many years ago that teasing lemmings was a favourite pastime of the children of her day. I suppose this only happened in lemming years, as they aren't really abundant at other times. Allegedly, a lemming will eventually die (from exhaustion or a heart attack) if you do this long enough. In childlore, lemmings would actually 'burst' or 'explode' from anger, but this must be apocryphal.

The lemming is embedded in Norwegian consciousness. To be 'angry as a lemming' (sint som et lemen) is a common phrase, indicating that one is as angry as it's possible to be, but also that the anger is rather futile. The phrase 'lemming year' (lemenîr) is also common, and is often used to negatively characterise situations where something is more abundant than usual. The UN designated 1975 as The International Women's Year. This is kvinneîr in Norwegian, and the similarity between lemenîr and kvinneîr was not lost on vulgar wits, who kept joking about it for the whole year and (as I remember) for years afterwards. The lemming was adopted as a mascot for many years by the Norwegian newspaper Dagbladet (the name means 'the daily newspaper'). This was probably consciously modelled on the Swedish tabloid Expressen, which has a wasp as a mascot.\* The intention was to promote Dagbladet as a fearless, ferocious news organisation. As they are widely regarded as a bunch of wankers, this wasn't entirely successful.

**Nils Erik Grande** 

Oslo, Norway

\*If you image-google expressen geting you'll probably see the Swedish mascot (geting is 'wasp' in Swedish). However, I was unable to dig up a single picture of the Dagbladet lemming mascot.

#### Rendlesham "myth"

Andy Roberts and David Clarke refer to "the enduring myth of alien visitation in Rendlesham forest" when reviewing the recently released, or about to be released, film of the incident [FT325:26]. It seems



PAUL TAYLOR

they have nailed their colours to the mast and adopted their own belief about the subject, and write with a barely suppressed derision; rather unfortean in my view.

**Mick Brown** 

Sheffield, South Yorkshire

#### Seafood strikes

Reading the Mythchaser [FT324:23] about the poor going on strike for being made to eat seafoods now considered luxuries. the story of Swedish farm labourers demanding not to be served salmon too often came mind. Apparently, the abundance of salmon in some Swedish rivers in the olden days made it a very affordable staple, and labourers would refuse to take on work if they weren't promised some salmon-free days per week. I actually thought this was a fun historical fact, and a quite wellknown one at that, but after some quick Internet 'research' it turned out to be just another myth. Bengt af Klintberg, a Swedish folklorist who has written extensively on urban legends, debunks the salmon myth in his book Glitterspray (Atlantis 2005). He says no food historian has ever been able to find actual proof of any restrictions on serving salmon. We can't know if there were occasional agreements between employer and employee, but there is no written record of this being a widespread practice. It seems it's only one more variation on the strange theme of poverty and seafood.

Carolina Holmqvist Tenala, Finland

Regarding the alleged strike for the right not to eat lobster, this was the subject of an article on Knowledgenuts.com (http://knowledgenuts.com/2013/11/05/lobsterwas-once-a-poor-mans-food/) by one Nolan Moore. The article also lists three sources:

www.psmag.com/business-economics/how-lobster-got-fancy-59440/ http://www.gma.org/lobsters/allaboutlobsters/ lobsterhistory.html http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2006/03/how-lobster-clawed-its-way.

Of course, this doesn't necessarily make the story true.

**Erwin Snelders** 

By email

#### **Pyramids on Mars**

Paul Cornell asks for any examples of pyramids associated with Mars before the 1975 Dr Who story The Pyramids of Mars [FT318:38]. Well, a row of pyramids stretching across a Martian desert features in Stanley Weinbaum's celebrated short story A Martian Odyssey (1934) 1, though they turn out to be the exhalations of a silicon-based organism and have no Egyptian connotations. That apart, I can offer not a pyramid but a sphinx, or at least a sphinx face. The article shown here appeared in the New York Herald for 30 Nov 1906. 2 It reports observations made at the Lowell Observatory in Arizona purporting to show evidence for an ancient Martian civilisation and its planet-girding network of irrigation canals. Alternatively, there is the novel Pharaoh's Broker by Ellsworth Douglass (1899), which features an expedition to Mars that finds there a civilisation that 'coincides in every important particular with that of the Ancient Egyptians'. 3

So, why should there be any connection between Mars and ancient Egypt? The late 19th and early 20th centuries saw a widespread 'canal craze'. Starting with the work of the Italian astronomer Giovanni Schiaparelli during the 1870s, telescopic observers of the Red Planet saw its surface crisscrossed with fine. straight lines, which were termed 'canals'. These lines were eventually shown to be optical illusions, but not before several explanations had been proposed for them, including that they were the planet-wide irrigation system of an ancient civilisation attempting to fend off extinction on an increasingly desert world. Most astronomers never accepted the artificial canal hypothesis, but a few strongly supported it, including Camille Flammarion in France and Percival Lowell in the United States. who founded the Lowell Observatory to study Mars. Moreover, the canal hypothesis was widely reported in newspapers and magazines and proved popular with the public.

I suspect that the connection with Egypt was by analogy. Both Egypt and Lowellian Mars were desert environments that were home to ancient civilisations. Both depended on a periodic water supply: the annual Nile



ABOVE: In this article from the *New York Herald* the sphinx face suggests a connection between the putative Martian civilisation and that of ancient Egypt.

inundation in Egypt and the seasonal melting of the polar ice caps on Mars. Both practised artificial control and distribution of the floodwater: extensive irrigation channels in Egypt and the planet-wide Martian canal network. Indeed, the Nile itself also featured in much the same role as the canals, though a natural rather than artificial waterway.

Modern Egyptology developed in the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th, overlapping with the canal craze, and popular interest in ancient Egypt blossomed during the same period. 4 Both the Egyptian and Martian civilisations seem to have the same exotic, romantic appeal to the imagination. Indeed, during this period Mars often served as a 'further orient' in a time when there were fewer empty spaces on the map. Spiritualism had its heyday during the same period, and it too had links to the canal craze that are even more bizarre. But that is a

story for another day. <sup>5</sup> **Clive Davenhall** *Edinburgh* 

#### REFERENCES

- 1 Stanley Weinbaum, 'A Martian Odyssey', Wonder Stories, July 1934 and subsequently widely anthologised. Full text available at www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/23731.
- 2 'Will the New Year Solve the Riddle of Mars?' New York Herald (Magazine Section), 30 Nov 1906. Reproduced in K Maria D Lane, Geographies of Mars (Univ. Chicago Press, 2011), p151 where it is credited to the Lowell Observatory Archives.
- 3 Ellsworth Douglass: *Pharaoh's Broker* (London: Pearson, 1899). Full text available at: www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/25295.
- 4 Two recent books discuss the cultural impact of ancient Egypt during the 19th and early 20th centuries: David Gange, *Dialogues with the Dead* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2013) and Bob Brier, *Egyptomania* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
- **5** But see: Theo Paijmans, 'From Paddington to the Planet Mars' [FT315:28-29]

Editor's note: For more on Mars and pyramids, see letters from Chris Browning and Dennis Lien [FT320:69].

## letters

#### More about Major Weir's house

Last year (FT311:30-36), I announced the rediscovery of Edinburgh's most haunted house, the sinister abode of the warlock Major Thomas Weir (1599-1670). The article briefly mentioned a newspaper report stating that a replica of the Major's house was on view at the Edinburgh International Exhibition of 1886; further research has made it possible to tell the full story about these matters.

For the International Exhibition of 1886, it was decided to construct an 'Old Edinburgh Street' exhibit, consisting of replicas of famous old buildings, like the Nether Bow Port, the Oratory of Mary of Guise, the French Ambassador's Chapel in the Cowgate, and the old Tolbooth and Mercat Cross. This project was considered a novel and praiseworthy enterprise, and a belated celebration of some of Edinburgh's lost historic buildings; the escalating cost was reported in the local newspapers. The architect Sydney Mitchell was in charge of the building project, which was organised with Caledonian efficiency. John Charles and Alison Hay Dunlop, two obscure siblings of antiquarian bent, were put in charge of writing the official guidebook, and the celebrated Marshall Wane was employed as the official photographer. There was even a Mistress of Ceremonies, who issued strict regula-

tions for the archaic attire
of the young ladies who
had volunteered to
attend the Old
Edinburgh Street:
under no account
should their dresses
be too extravagant, or
reveal their ankles, thus
arousing impure
thoughts in
the swains
attending the
Exhibition.
When it

opened in

Street exhibit was widely praised in the press. The buildings were historically correct, and the Nether Bow and the old Tolbooth were particularly impressive.

The Book of Old Edinburgh, the

guidebook written by the two Dunlops, contains a useful plan of the Old Edinburgh Street. It clearly shows what they call the gable of Major Weir's house being replicated to front one of the entries to the Old Edinburgh

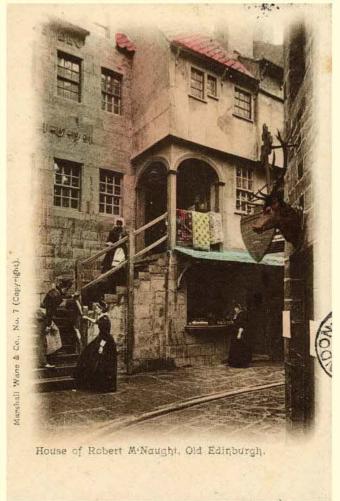
Street. This was obviously the front of Major Weir's Land facing West Bow, pulled down in 1878. As for the Major's house itself. it was rightly remarked that: "It stood in a small back court, which was entered by a narrow close from the West Bow". Had the Dunlops shown more enterprise, they could have discovered that the Major's house was still standing in 1886, although it had been incorporated into the Original Secession Chapel in 1866. It is still there to be seen today, by any visitor to Riddle's Court nearby, now used as the toilet block of the Quaker Meeting House.

Queen Victoria visited the International Exhibition in August 1886, passing through the Old Edinburgh Street and leaving it via Major Weir's Entry. The replica houses were all pulled down when the Exhibition was to close, and if it had not been for Marshall Wane's photographs, we would not even have known what they looked like. Wane published a book entitled Old Edinburgh, featuring 10 highquality reproductions of his photographs, and also a number of cabinet cards, but both book and cards are scarce today, and seldom commercially available. The postcard kingpin Raphael Tuck issued an 'Old Edinburgh' series in or around 1900, featuring various drawings of the Old Edinburgh Street. Marshall Wane, who belatedly realised that his old photos were worth serious money, decided to set up an 'Old Edinburgh' series of postcards himself. At least 12 of them were issued between 1902 and 1905, the deluxe cards being hand tinted by Wane's assistants. They provide a snapshot in time of a very curious old Edinburgh exhibition, which would have been a tourist attraction to rival Greyfriars Bobby. All that remains of the 1886 International Exhibition are some gateposts and other paraphernalia, and a whalebone arch that once formed part of the exhibit of the Shetland and Fair Isles Knitters.

**Dr Jan Bondeson** *Newport, Wales* 







GABLE OF WEIR'S HOUSE APOSTLES' NETHERBOW PORT TOLBOOTH ROYAL

FACING PAGE: Major Weir and his abode: two drawings by William Hole reproduced from JC & AH Dunlop, *The Book of Old Edinburgh* (Edinburgh 1886). TOP: Two famous houses in the 'Old Edinburgh Street' series of hand-tinted postcards [1903-1905] by Marshall Wane. ABOVE: A plan of the 'Old Edinburgh Street' exhibit that opened in April 1886 and was visited by Queen Victoria.

#### **Bullies' licence**

Back in 2000, the Annals of Improbable Research awarded the Ig Nobel Prize for Psychology to "David Dunning of Cornell University and Justin Kruger of the University of Illinois, for their modest report, 'Unskilled and Unaware of It: How Difficulties in Recognizing One's Own Incompetence Lead to Inflated Self-Assessments'.' The Dunning-Kruger Effect [FT324:12] strikes me as little more than a licence for intellectual bullies ("I'm right and you're wrong, but you're too stupid to recognise it"). **Andrew May** 

Crewkerne, Somerset

#### Snow on their boots

In a letter that appeared in the Illustrated Magazine (published by Odhams) dated 20 March 1954, a Thomas Hobson of Sale, Cheshire, claimed to have started the World War I rumour that Russian troops were transported to France through Britain in 1914. The letter

"I'll never forget the day I started a rumour which frightened the German General Staff. It was in the First World War and the British Army, fighting for its life in rearguard actions at Mons, was desperately waiting for the Russian 'steamroller' to come into action. I was then on the staff of the traffic manager at Manchester's London Road railway station, where we had a great deal to do with the movement of troops and war materiel.

"Because of the shortage of manpower - it was before conscription - we often had to arrange for ships' crews and naval ratings to be rushed from ships which docked at Liverpool, across country to ships waiting at the east or south coast ports. On this occasion I was on night shift and expecting a party of fifty Royal Marines from Liverpool, due to arrive at another Manchester station and march through the city to London Road.

"When they came they were wearing a rig I had never seen before outside naval ports: white canvas landing suits and peakless caps. I recalled pictures of



#### Joshua Tree UFO

On 25 March 2015 I visited Joshua Tree National Park in California with my friends Barbara and Bob Harris, who live nearby in Yucca Valley. Our first stop was the privately owned Joshua Tree and Southern Railroad Museum. We met the president of the museum association and then took off to explore the grounds, which include some retired train carriages. While I was taking pictures of Rob and Barb metaphorically pulling away in a dilapidated train car, something odd made an appearance in one shot - though I didn't notice it until several days later, when I was back in Los Angeles loading



photos into a Dropbox folder. Whatever it is, it's real in the sense that it isn't fake - there's no Photoshop, no pie pan on a monofilament line. The camera data are: F-stop f/4.5 and ISO 100; fully automatic, no flash; focal length 9.7mm. Subjectively, I saw a reflection/ flash in my viewfinder, but thought nothing of it at the time. There are plenty of metal and other reflective surfaces out there that could cause anomalous reflections in a lens, or in this case, the viewfinder.

The object is clearly a 'UFO', as it is flying and unidentified. Is it a military aircraft, possibly being tested, or maybe a small plane shot head-on so the perspective looks weird? Or a spacecraft of extraterrestrial origin? It resembles a classic Adamski flying saucer: George Adamski and George Van Tassel first popularised the California desert as a nexus of alien contact. Besides the painfully obvious question, "What is it?" I also wonder about its speed and altitude, and whether it is close to or far from the lens. (Editor's note: if close, might it be an insect or bird?) Jane Pojawa, By email

Russian soldiers that I had seen during the Russo-Turkish War and remarked to my inspector, 'They look like Russians.'

"That started the rumour which was eventually elaborated in ludicrous detail by people who claim to have seen snow on the boots of the 'Russians'. The train guard heard my remark and it passed down the line with the train. When the authorities learnt that the Germans were worried by the rumour, I believe they deliberately sent marines about the country in their white suits."

If the event described took place during the retreat from Mons, that would date it to around late August 1914; a period that Dr David Clarke has previously identified as the starting point of the circulation of the rumours in Britain. But, whether Hobson's remarks were the

actual trigger behind the wave of rumours, just one of many similar misidentifications that occurred around the same time all fuelling the same rumour, or perhaps simply a later 'false' backfill memory of something that never actually happened (the incident would have taken place 40 years before he wrote the letter) we will probably never know.

However, according to both Hobson's account and Dr Clarke's research, misidentification of British troops at railway stations seems to have been at the heart of the Russian rumour. Additionally, there were other activities that took place during WW1 that fuelled similar rumours resulting, presumably, in further confusion amongst German intelligence agencies. For example, the privately funded and rather eccentric Manchester Frontiersmen were active in WW1 but

were refused entry into the official British forces on the basis that they were too undisciplined and somewhat motley. However, a body of men made their way to France independently in late September 1914 and were subsequently allowed to join the ranks of the 3rd Belgian Lancers. Their dress consisted of full Stetson, breeches and riding boots, which gave them a distinctly 'Wild West' look, leading the Belgians initially to assume they were in fact Canadians. Word of this must have got back behind the German lines possibly leading to rumours that a Canadian (or even American) contingent was fighting alongside Belgian forces, before either country's troops had even landed in Europe (or, in the case of the Americans, entered the war).

**Alistair Moffatt** Halifax, West Yorkshire

#### STRANGE AND SENSATIONAL STORIES FROM



JfN BONDESON presents more stories from the "worst newspaper in England" – the *Illustrated Police News*.

#### 39. ELIZABETH LYSKA, THE RUSSIAN GIANTESS

Elisaveta Philipovna Luska, whose name was later anglicised to Elizabeth Lyska, was born on 16 September 1877, the daughter of poor peasants in the province of Kharkov in southwestern Russia. She was the fourth of seven children, all of them seemingly healthy and normal. But from the age of four, Elizabeth began growing at an alarming rate. The local doctors were completely nonplussed, predicting that she might become a veritable giantess.

After the death of Elizabeth's father, the Lyska family faced poverty. In 1888, they began exhibiting Elizabeth for money, first at local fairs and markets, but later at theatres in Berlin, Vienna and other major cities. In late 1889, when Elizabeth was taken to London for exhibition at the Westminster Aquarium, she was six feet eight inches (203cm) in height, and one of the tallest women in Europe. In spite of her size, she was still very childish, and delighted in playing with dolls and reading illustrated children's books in her own language. Although her uncle had been allowed to accompany her to London, she missed her mother very much.

When seen by an IPN journalist in November 1889, Elizabeth seemed in good health and spirits. Her uncle, a rotund Russian of ordinary height, produced a bundle of documents proving her age and parentage. In Vienna, she had been admired by the Emperor and Empress, and in Berlin she had been examined by the celebrated Professor Rudolf Virchow. The uncle took care to point out Elizabeth's enormous hands and feet, which were much larger than his own. He told a story of how she had once been teased by a boorish young peasant when exhibited in her native land; without warning, the giantess had struck him a mighty blow with her open hand, knocking him senseless.

The original deal between the showmen and the Lyska family had been that Elizabeth should return home after one year of touring, and there is reason to believe that this agreement was honoured. But in 1891, Elizabeth was back in Britain, touring the countryside. A journalist from Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly, who met her in Winchester, could report that the now 14-year-old Elizabeth was nearly seven feet (213cm) tall. In 1893, the Russian Giantess was back at the Westminster Aquarium, being exhibited together with the dwarf 'Princess Topaze'. She was now 7ft 6in (229cm) tall, strong and vigorous-looking. Her four years in showbusiness had not induced her to learn any onstage tricks, but she watched with interest when Princess Topaze danced and performed with her telepathic dog. After spending much of 1893 in London, Elizabeth



ABOVE: Elizabeth Lyska, the Russian Giantess, from the Illustrated Police News, 23 November 1889.

returned to the continent. In April 1896, she was performing in St Petersburg, and a visit to the United States ws planned for the summer. This never happened, however, since she fell dangerously ill; she died quietly back in her home village later in 1896.

The question of what was wrong with Elizabeth Lyska is easy to answer: she must have suffered from gigantism caused by a pituitary adenoma overproducing growth hormone. Individuals with pituitary gigantism usually have enormous hands and feet, as a result of overgrowth of the soft

tissue. It is only in the storybooks that giants are stupid: another historical example, the celebrated 'Swedish Giant' Daniel Cajanus, was an educated man who spoke at least three languages and became a published poet. Elizabeth Lyska did not share his linguistic ambitions, but this may well have been a result of the showmen keeping her isolated between shows, to facilitate her exploitation.

Apart from an article at the Internet TallestMan.com website, and various other online scraps, this article is the only memorial to this little-known giantess.

# FORTEAN TRAVELLER

100. Lycia, Turkey.

**ULRICH MAGIN** travels to a land of Greek gods and ancient heroes, where he also finds a mountain of everlasting fire and the birthplace of Santa Claus.

ycia is a land where gods, heroes and saints were born. And with some 100 ancient Lycian cities that can still be visited, some now below the surface of the turquoise Mediterranean (such as in the fjordland of Kekova), it's well worth a visit. Many of these ruins have very fortean associations, and the Lycians, relatives of the Hittites, are interesting in themselves. The ruins look like those of any Greek or Roman town, but with the added extra of inscriptions in Lycian (a mighty pillar with a long text in Lycian characters can still be seen at Xanthos) and the fantastic rock tombs, some resembling temples, others houses, which adorn many of the sheer cliffs of the region. Great examples can be seen at Myra, Tlos, and very spectacularly at Fethiye, the largest town of the area, with a wonderful oriental flavour.

We stayed in Ölüdeniz; a noisy tourist trap despite the breathtaking scenery, but it's easy to get away from the drunken crowds by using the excellent roads (one has to be careful, however, not to run over any tortoises).

Driving south, past endless fields and greenhouse after greenhouse, and a multitude of Turkish villages with shiny new mosques, their minarets pointing their glazed blue peaks to the powers above, we reached the ruins of the ancient city of Patara within barely an hour (and it was all well signposted).

I have seen quite a number of Greek and Roman cities, but Patara is the only one so large you that you have to visit it by car. You pass a tollbooth and then proceed along a road; isolated Roman buildings with lots of empty spaces in between loom two or three stories high on each side. After we passed a row of giant sarcophagi and the Roman city gate (c. AD100 and very large), we left the car for a short stroll to the baths, beyond which we found the palm grove of Leto. Here, a poster proudly explains,

place where Apollo, the son of Zeus and Leto, was born. While there may be a bit of chauvinism involved (there are places in Greece which claim the same honour), ancient tradition claims that this grove really was the site of the oracle of Apollo, God of light and wisdom, who was said to spend six

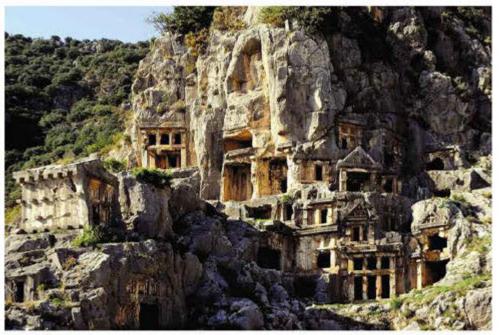
months of the year in Patara, and six months on the island of Delos.

is - or may have been - the

Certainly, Patara is old: the earliest finds date to the seventh century BC, and there is a consensus that the city of Patar, mentioned in Hittite sources, was the name of the city in Bronze Age times. The ruins one can see here today, however, practically all date to the Roman period. These Roman buildings are made of gigantic blocks of stone; some of multi-angled stone, so that you almost feel you are in some lost Inca town.









Passing the city gate, the palm grove, one of the many Roman baths and an early church, you reach a car park near the old theatre. Beside it - currently being reconstructed by archæologists - is the assembly hall of the Lycian league, a multi-city pact that withstood Roman and Greek pressure over a long period, and which, most of the time, managed to preserve some independence from the larger powers of the Mediterranean. Along a wall of truly gigantic masonry you reach the main avenue. The ancient pavement as well as the Roman sewage system is still intact, but the columns lining it have been re-erected in recent times. The street led to the old harbour, and the far end still vanishes beneath the water in a pool.

Here, St Paul probably walked (the city is mentioned in Acts 21:1–3, but with little detail), and St Nicolaos certainly did. The real figure behind Santa Claus was born in Patara, and nothing is more surreal than to imagine the now distinctly polar figure of Santa Claus in his thick fur coat, surrounded by reindeer, walking along the elegant street of Patara in the baking Mediterranean sun.

St Nicolaos, dated somewhere in the fourth century AD, later became bishop of nearby Myra (now Demre), where he was loved by all the citizens whom he saved from famine and starvation by a food miracle. He is most fondly remembered for sparing the three daughters of his neighbour from a life as prostitutes by throwing their dowry (a golden ball) into their garden; which is why pawnbrokers still use three golden balls as a sign of their trade, and why Christmas presents are associated with Santa Claus.

The large harbour – a Roman lighthouse closer to the modern coastline can still be visited – is now completely silted up and covered in shrubs; mighty bulls dwell there, walking slowly towards the pool in the ancient main street to drink in the midday sun.

## The ancients thought the mountain was a volcano

What could be more fortean than the birthplace of a Greek God and Father Christmas? Answer: a town that once had stables with winged horses. Some 15 miles (24km) to the north, the ancient city of Tlos perches on a mountaintop like some enchanted magician's castle. The builders seem to have had a special delight in selecting only the largest pieces of stone, so that the town resembles ancient Mycenæ in part, but partly also recalls the famous Inca walls of Peru and Bolivia. Founded in the second millennium BC under the name of Talava, the Roman city survived through Byzantine times and even into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, although only two inns are still inhabited today.

The monumental rock is crowned by an Ottoman castle and, like the more

**ABOVE:** The palm grove of Leto at Patara.

LEFT: The eternal flames of Mount Chimæra.

FACING PAGE, TOP: Patara's main street with its re-erected columns.

FACING PAGE, BOTTOM: Rock tombs at Myra, birthplace of St Nicolaos. famous Petra in Jordan, the steep cliffs here are honeycombed and decorated with temple and house facades, the entries to royal and noble tombs. Lycian and Roman sarcophagi line the streets and paths. Beside the ancient stadium are the remains of a very early Christian church oriented at a distant mountaintop.

But Tlos was also the place where the legendary Greek hero Bellerophon lived, and where he mounted his winged horse Pegasus to kill the Chimera, a dangerous "three-formed beast": a lion in front, a python in its hind parts, a goat in the middle. Interestingly, in his On Incredible Tales (an early kind of debunking book) Palaiphatos in the late fourth century BC explained that Bellerophon, far from being a monsterslayer, was a man from Corinth who sailed in the ship Pegasos to Xanthos, where he fought a dangerous lion and a serpent by burning down the forest on the mountain, thus creating the myth of the snake-tailed, goat-bodied chimera which spat fire. This tale is as about as convincing as many modern examples of debunking. The modern interpretation - and the one favoured in most books on Lycia - is that the fire-spitting snake is rather the representation of the flaming Mount Chimæra [see FT73:23] – modern Turkish Yanar or Yanartaş – at the far eastern border of Lycia, which has been burning for millennia due to a natural gas deposit having been ignited by lightning. The flames can still be seen, burning in an everlasting fire, and the ancients thought the mountain was a volcano like Mt Etna in Sicily - so we also have a volcano that wasn't, just to round out the region's forteana.

Back in Ölüdeniz, I was hard on the lookout for the last mystery of Lycia: the sighting of submarine lizards. According to an eyewitness report on the Tripadvisor Internet discussion board, the saltwater lagoon there houses miniature sea monsters. One poster from London wrote in August 2011: "I clearly saw what appeared to be a brightly coloured lizard running along the bottom of the Blue Lagoon in about 3ft [90cm] of water. It was about 18in [46cm] long and 9in [23cm] high. I have not heard anything about these in this area; does anyone know exactly what this would be? It was totally the wrong shape to be a turtle." There are no known marine lizards in the region, and although I saw literally thousands of fish and crabs, I did not observe a single large lizard in the sea. One day, however, I was lucky enough to spot a starfish with eight arms - perhaps that was my personal glimpse into the unknown...



**ULRICH MAGIN** is a longtime *FT* contributor and the author of *Investigating the Impossible* (Anomalist Books, 2011). He lives in

Germany.

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## Why Fortean?



**■ortean Times** is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874-1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in The Book of the Damned (1919), New Lands (1923), Lo! (1931), and Wild Talents (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data 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-asorganism 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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ONE OF DION FORTUNE'S BEST-KNOWN BOOKS is PSYCHIC SELF. DEFENCE, IT IS PARTLY AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY, ABOUT THE TIME SHE FELL ILL FOR THREE YEARS AS A RESULT OF OCCULT BULLYING ...



SHE RECOVERED AFTER AN INNER VOICE TOLD HER HOW TO FIGHT'EM OFF!



SHE WAS HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL, UNTIL ONE OF HER PATIENTS TURNED OUT TO BE A VAMPIRE!



SHE ALSO DISCOVERED, BY CHANCE, THAT SHE COULD READ MINDS ...



WHEN THE GREAT WAR BROKE OUT, SHE JOINED THE LAND ARMY ...



THEN SHE WAS PUT IN CHARGE OF A LAB, TESTING DECAYING FOOD AND BACTERIA ...



SHE WAS SO BORED THAT SHE BEGANTO EXPERIMENT WITH ASTRAL SIGHT! SHE TRAVELLED" TO THE HIMALAYAS, WHERE SHE MET VARIOUS SPIRIT FORMS, INCLUDING JESUS - WHO SEEMED A BIT GLUM IN A PURPLE ROBE!



SHE HAD VISION AFTER VISION OF HER PREVIOUS LIVES! IN EACH LIFE, SHE HAD BEEN A PRIESTESS ...



SHE MET A FELLOW MAGUS SHE REFERRED TO AS "DR TAVERNER", BUT WHOSE ACTUAL NAME WAS MORIARTY! NO, NOT THAT MORIARTY.



NEXT TIME: A PLAGUE OF VAMPIRES, NORSE WOLVES, AND THE TERRIBLE CAT CURSE !!!

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#### **WISCONSIN WEREWOLF**

LINDA GODFREY AND THE HUNT FOR THE BEAST OF BRAY ROAD



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## FORTEAN TIMES 329

**ON SALE 25 JUNE 2015** 

## STRANGEZ DEATHS

#### UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

A family of seven drowned in a reservoir on 5 April when their teenage daughter accidentally fell in. The Wu family was visiting a nearby grave when Wu Sung, 17, went down to the water's edge to wash her hands. She fell in and her younger siblings, a boy aged 15 and a girl of 13, her parents, aunt and uncle all tried in vain to save her. None could swim well and all were dead by the time rescuers arrived in Jinzao, Guangdong. *Metro*, *7 April 2015*.

Seven people died after a boy of 11 tried to retrieve a 3,000 riel coin (worth just 45p) from a 5m (16ft)-deep village well in the Siem Reap area of Cambodia. He succumbed to oxygen starvation and perished after he descended into the pit. Another six died as they went down one by one on a bamboo pole in a vain attempt to rescue him. Within an hour, they boy's two sisters, aged 13 and 15, two brothers from another family aged 12 and 20 and two rescuers aged 15 and 32 had all died. A man of 27 survived and was in hospital at the time of the report. The dead boy's older sister, Che Chhan, said their father had dropped the money when drawing water. MX News (Sydney), 2 June; D.Mail, 3 June 2014.

Seven members of a Polish pig farming family died on 17 July 2014 after falling into a septic tank. A tractor was reportedly driven onto the tank, on the farm in Karczowka, western Poland, and the cover collapsed. A 45-year-old woman, the sole survivor, was in a serious condition. *D.Telegraph*, 18 July 2014.

Rudi Zavesky, 26, was so high on crystal meth that he crawled through a field in Wunsiedel, Bavaria, grunting like a pig – and was shot dead by hunter Wimfried Pollak, 55, who mistook him for a boar. He had been on a drug run with friends to the Czech Republic when they booted him out of the car for sampling the product. *Metro, 28 Jan 2015.* 

A Turkish woman allegedly throttled her 10-yearold son because she thought his ears were too big. Nuray Sacan is said to have choked the boy with her scarf in a hospital lavatory in Ankara after being unhappy at the results of cosmetic surgery. She was caught after she crashed her car while fleeing. Sacan, 37, told police her son had suffered years of bullying because of his ears sticking out. "I was trying to protect him from a lifetime of pain," she said. However, surgeon Metin Yilmaz said the operation had been "a complete success" and the boy was due to go home. *Metro*, *17 Feb* 2015.

Paul Bennett, 45, who dropped his trousers in a shopping arcade and attempted sexual congress with a postbox, was found dead in an alleyway in Wigan, Greater Manchester, on 22 February, probably from a drug overdose. On 9 September 2014, he had exposed himself before mounting the postbox at the Scholes Precinct centre in Wigan. He groaned "wow" while grinding up and

down against it before swinging on a lamppost while looking at his reflection in a shop window. Shoppers phoned police and he became abusive when arrested. He was given a 12-month community order by Wigan magistrates. Sun, 17 Jan, 25 Feb 2015.

A shepherd dropped dead after having sex with a scarecrow he had dressed with a long-haired wig and lipstick to look like a woman. The rotting remains of Jose Alberto, 58, were discovered by police after neighbours reported a foul smell coming from his house. He was naked from the waist down and the scarecrow – to which was strapped a 6in (15cm) penis – was lying next to him in San José de Balcarce, eastern Argentina. Neighbour Joanne Pena Espino, 58, said: "He was a solitary man, not very talkative and we never saw him have any friends around." *D.Mirror, 4 April 2015.* 

In September 2014, two hoarders were burnt to death in their cluttered homes. Robert Crane, a 61-year-old musician, was heard screaming as the blaze took hold of his flat in a Bristol tower block. "There was rubbish everywhere in there," said a neighbour. "Amps and guitars were stacked up. The corridor was virtually blocked." The other victim was Phil Owen, 62, who lived in a semi-detached house in Neath, South Wales. He slept downstairs in a nest of his possessions and died when flames engulfed his sitting room. "He had piles of papers up at the door and windows, and suitcases and bottles," said a neighbour. "We knew something like this would happen." Sun, 9 Sept; Sunday People, 14 Sept 2014.

A chunk of ice from a glacier killed Italian tourist Alexander Hellweger, 28, as he posed for a photograph in Alaska. *Sun, 4 Mar 2015.* 

Margaret Sheridan, 68, was just leaving the Waterstones bookshop where she worked in Blackpool at 5.30pm on 12 January when a freak gust of wind blew off the shop's store frontage, crushing her to death. Ten people were needed to lift the sign, which spanned the entire length of the shop. *D.Express, Sun, 14 Jan 2015.* 

Muhammad Siddique became enraged on learning that his wife, Shabana Bibi, 25, had visited her sister without asking for his permission – so, with the help of his father, he set her on fire. Suffering burns to 80 per cent of her body, Mrs Bibi died of her injuries in a Pakistani hospital on 18 April. "Honour" was satisfied, but father and son were arrested. *D.Telegraph, 20 April 2015.* 

#### THE FORTEAN TIMES BOOK OF STRANGE DEATHS VOL 2

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## Write Your Way To A New Career!

## Writers Bureau Celebrates Twenty-six Years of Helping New Writers

#### by Nick Daws

When distance-learning pioneer Ernest Metcalfe founded The Writers Bureau in the late 1980s, he can hardly have dared hope that twenty-six years on it would be acknowledged as Britain's leading writing school. Yet so it proved, with thousands of Writers Bureau students seeing their work in print for the first time. And, for many of those who persevered with their writing, the dream of becoming a successful writer has turned into reality.

Students such as "My writing Tim Skelton. An career took off engineer by exponentially. profession, he had always harboured an ambition to write, and at the age of 40 signed up with The Writers Bureau. The decision changed his life: "My writing career took off exponentially. I started appearing regularly in lifestyle and in-flight magazines. The following year I was commissioned by Bradt Travel Guides to write a guidebook to Luxembourg.

I've appeared in The Times and The Independent, and updated guidebooks for Fodor's, Thomas Cook, and the AA."

Another student who benefited was Hazel McHaffie. Hazel wanted to make her academic work in Medical Ethics more accessible to people, and decided to write the themes into novels. Following her Writers Bureau course, Hazel has had five novels published, and appeared at the Edinburgh International Book Festival. She also has her own website at www.hazelmchaffie.com.

Sometimes studying with The Writers Bureau takes students down new and unexpected paths. Patricia Holness originally enrolled on The Writers Bureau's Writing for Children course. However, she soon realised that what she was learning applied to other types of writing as well.

She is now a full-time writer, regularly selling short stories for both

Hazel McHaffie



Tim Skelton

children and adults. She also has a monthly column in Devon Life.

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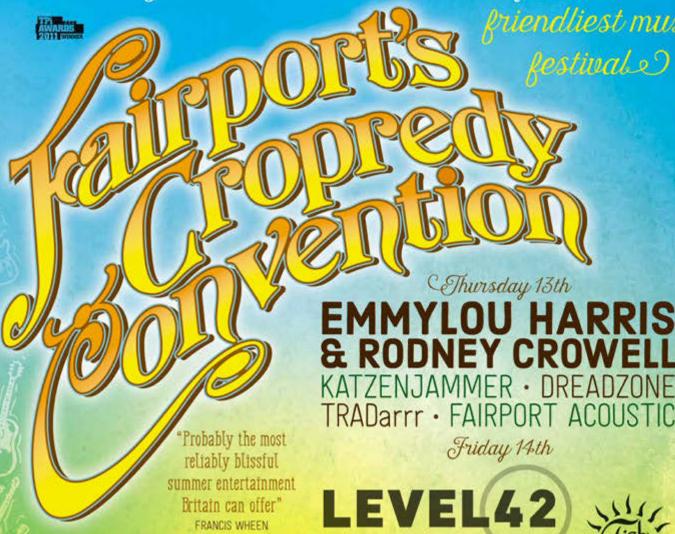
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Jane Isaac, Northamptonshire When I started the Writers Bureau course, I wanted to explore avenues for my writing and develop and strengthen my personal style. I had no idea that it would lead to me being a published writer of novels and short stories. I still pinch myself when I receive emails and messages

from readers who've enjoyed my work or when I give talks to book clubs and visit bookstores to do signings. These are magical moments that have changed my life – my dream has come true."

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