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THE BALDOON MYSTERY

CANADA, 1829:
A SETTLER FAMILY
UNDER SIEGE
FROM THE
SUPERNATURAL

FORTEAN TIMES 315
THE BALDOON MYSTERY • THE NANDI BEAR • IGOR BOURITSEV INTERVIEWED • TALKING MONGOOSE SYMPOSIUM • SRI LANKAN FISH FALL • HAUNTED ISLAND
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camera
obscura:

the

walerian borowczyk

collection

the beast

immoral tales

blanche

goto, isle of love

theatre of mr and mrs kabal

the short films

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that very few other things do... ”

Terry Gilliam

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strange days

Sri Lankan fish fall; really odd allergies; the mysterious black ring of Leamington Spa; Peaches Geldof's ghostly hand; vampire conference; lucky escapes; coin hoard; wool-rollers; Gef the Talking Mongoose – and much more.

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EDITOR
 DAVID SUTTON
 (drsutton@forteanimes.com)

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

ART DIRECTOR
 ETIENNE GILFILLAN
 (etienne@forteanimes.com)

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

RESIDENT CARTOONIST
 HUNT EMERSON

SUBSCRIPTION ENQUIRIES AND BACK ISSUES
 www.subsinfo.co.uk
 ForteanTimes@servicehelpline.co.uk

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LICENSING & SYNDICATION
 FORTEAN TIMES IS AVAILABLE FOR INTERNATIONAL LICENSING AND SYNDICATION - CONTACT: Syndication Senior Manager
 ANJ DOSAJ-HALAI TEL: +44 (0) 20 7907 6132
Anj_Dosaj-Halai@dennis.co.uk
 Licensing Manager
 CARLOTTA SERANTONI TEL: +44 (0) 20 7907 6550
Carlotta_Serantoni@dennis.co.uk
 Licensing & Syndication Assistant
 NICOLE ADAMS TEL: +44 (0) 20 7907 6134
Nicole_Adams@dennis.co.uk

YOU CAN REACH FT ON THE INTERNET
www.forteanimes.com



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 30 Cleveland Street
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 Tel: 020 7907 6000

GROUP PUBLISHER
 PAUL RAYNER
 020 7907 6663
paul_rayner@dennis.co.uk

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

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

PRODUCTION EXECUTIVE
 SOPHIE VALENTINE
 020 7907 6057
sophie_valentine@dennis.co.uk

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

DEPUTY ADVERTISING MANAGER
 CIARAN SCARRY
 020 7907 6683
ciaran_scarry@dennis.co.uk

SALES EXECUTIVE
 ISABELLA COX
 020 7907 6717
isabella_cox@dennis.co.uk

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 GROUP FINANCE DIRECTOR
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 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
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IAN LEGGETT
 BRETT REYNOLDS
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editorial

Fortean Times needs you...

(AND YOUR SCANNER)

For some time now we've been mulling over the best way to index FT. We certainly need an index for the editorial team - and for anyone who wants to locate material in 300+ issues spanning 41 years (and counting). The goal is that the method should cope not only with those issues already published but be capable of dynamically indexing issues as they are published. We are currently favouring a system that will index directly from a PDF file of a scanned issue.

Here we hit a problem for which we need some help. We have kept archive copies of issues from the time - æons ago - when we composed them in WordStar (remember that?), but over four decades many discs have been lost in house and office moves; and those we have found turn out to be of pre-publication versions and not the more important final edit that went to the printer (a stage that was then beyond our control). Other scans (such as those by a commercial company which attempted to archive back issues on DVDs) were sometimes of poor quality.

For this project, therefore, it is much more efficient to start afresh with a consistently high standard of scanning - and for this we need a small number of volunteers who can devote a few hours a week to the tasks. We can supply issues, which the scanner can keep - so here is an opportunity to fill any holes in your collection. If we suppose we have 300 issues, it would take one person three years doing two a week over 50 weeks per year. Depending on dexterity and setup, it might take around an hour and a half to scan one issue, possibly less; so two a week could be improved upon. Six volunteers scanning 50 issues each could see this fairly boring task off inside a year.

Do you have an idle scanner? We need 600dpi output to a PDF file. Do you have the time? No great rush, as quality is more important than speed. And do you have the persistence to plod through a pile of old FTs? If you'd like to earn a place in FT indexing history and the undying gratitude of future forteans and scholars contact Bob Rickard at bobrickard@mail.com.

FT WRITERS NOMINATED FOR AWARD

We're proud of our writers; after all, without our columnists and contributors, both regular and occasional, there would be no Fortean Times. It's always nice, though, to see them gain recognition elsewhere, so we're especially proud to announce that Remco van Straten and Angeline

B Adams have been singled out for particular praise for their article "Robert E Howard: The Lost Celt", which appeared in FT296 in January 2013.

Their illuminating and sympathetic profile of the pulp great - creator of Conan the Barbarian, King Kull and Solomon Kane - has been nominated in this year's Robert E Howard Foundation Awards, in the 'Outstanding Achievement Print Essay'. Nominees were selected by the REHF's Legacy Circle members from all the Howard-related work published in 2013, and after an email ballot by the entire membership, the winners will be announced at a ceremony during the 2014 Robert E Howard Day celebration in Cross Plains, Texas, on 13 June. We'd like to congratulate Remco and Angeline; the competition looks tough, so we'll be keeping our fingers crossed for them over the coming weeks.

For more information on the awards, go to: www.rehfoundation.org/the-robert-e-howard-foundation-awards/

Meanwhile, in this issue, Remco and Angeline turn their attention to the Poe adaptations of Roger Corman; see pp56-57.

FORTEAN SMACKDOWN

We have long been amused by a complaint that breaks out regularly on the forteanimes.com message boards: namely, that not an issue goes by without a mention of Aleister Crowley, John Michell or both appearing. Despairing poster "McAvennie_" made our favourite suggestion so far for dealing with the situation:

"There should be some kind of smackdown between Crowley and John Michell. Only the winner is ever allowed to be mentioned again in FT."


 DAVID R SUTTON


 BOB RICKARD


 PAUL SIEVEKING



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

SEE PAGE 78

Why Not Be A Writer?

What our students say:



"So far, I have had **eighteen novels published!** The Writers Bureau helped make this possible for me. Within six months of enrolling on my course I was having work commissioned by editors and I still work regularly for magazines."
AWARD WINNING WRITER
Christina Jones, Oxfordshire



"I thought you'd like to know that seven years since doing my course at WB I've been published in more than **150 magazines** around the world. I've now got to the stage where I'm turning down all-inclusive exotic press trips!"
Cindy-Lou Dale, Kent



"Completing The Writers Bureau course has made it possible for me to attain my life-long ambition of becoming a published writer. The level of success I have achieved has far outweighed what I was hoping for when beginning the course. I have now had **seventeen books published with two more under publication** at the moment."
Michael Foley, Essex



"The amount of hours I have been able to work have been limited but I have earned approx **£3,500** from my writing this year. I now regularly sell articles and am working on a book proposal."
Jane Redfern-Jones.



"I've had **30 pieces** of work accepted by various publications since I started my Writers Bureau course – a mere 18 months ago.
"I contemplate that fact and I am amazed to have come so far in such a short time, especially when I consider the severe restrictions on the time I have available for writing. I usually manage about three hours per week, if I'm lucky."
Chris Green, Lincolnshire



"I have earned **£2,500** this past year, mainly from commissioned pieces. I am now regularly being published and am still only half way through the course."
Marie Barbieri.

Being a writer can offer you a second income, extra spending money or even be a full-time career. It's your choice. But whatever your writing ambitions we have a course that will help you to achieve them.

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strangedays

Snake snacks Down Under

Pythons with suspicious bulges turn out to have made short work of Australian pet dogs

An Australian woman was horrified to find her Chihuahua-Maltese cross had been eaten in its kennel by a python. On 13 March she went to the kennel in her back yard to let the dog run free but instead found the 8ft (2.4m) carpet python with a large bulge in its stomach and the dog's chain emerging from its mouth.

The owner, from Caniaba near Lismore in New South Wales, called experts from the Wildlife Information Rescue and Education Service (WIRES), who cut the chain and removed the python. They observed it for 24 hours to see if it would regurgitate the chain. When it didn't, it was taken to Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary. The python was thought to be about 50 years old and would have strangled the dog before swallowing it whole; the meal was likely to sustain it for about a month.

WIRES spokeswoman Sue Ulyatt said dogs typically beat local snakes in such confrontations. "It's only the second incident like this we've had in more than 10 years," she said. "Usually it's the other way round – the snakes come off second best." She said the owner should not have chained the dog up outside because it was too small to defeat the local wildlife.

Two days earlier on one of the Whitsunday Islands in North Queensland, another small dog had suffered the same fate. On 11 March, the morning their precious pooch Walter disappeared, Michelle Grigg and her family discovered an 11ft 6in (3.5m) python curled up on their veranda with a suspicious bulge in its midsection. "There was no doubt [the bulge] was Walter," said Ms Grigg. "It was exactly Walter-sized." The beloved Maltese-Shih Tzu cross belonged to her seven-year-old daughter Charley, who was naturally



PHOTOS: WIRES

ABOVE AND BELOW: The python, with chain emerging from its mouth, was rescued by wildlife experts.

left distraught.

The incident was the latest in a string of captivating encounters in March involving pythons devouring other animals in Australia. On 2 March, for instance, a 10ft (3m) water python swallowed a metre-long freshwater crocodile at Lake Moondarra, near Mount Isa in Queensland, following an epic duel. *Metro*, 4 Mar; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15-16 Mar; *Canberra Times*, *D.Telegraph*, 15 Mar; (*Queensland Sunday Mail*, 16 Mar 2014.





LUCKY ESCAPES

Surviving clifftop plunges and outback adventures

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GHOSTS ON CAMERA?

Peaches and the phantom hand, plus surprise baptism guest

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GEF AT THE LIBRARY

Everyone's favourite talking mongoose gets a conference

PAGE 18

Fishy windfall

Villagers enjoy surprise supper

During a storm on 5 May, villagers in the district of Chilaw in west Sri Lanka heard heavy thuds across the district and were surprised and delighted to find scores of small fish lying on roads, grass and roofs. They were 3in to 5in (5-8cm) long with a total weight of 50kg (110lb). Those that were still alive were put in buckets of water and later eaten.

The conventional explanation is that falls of fish and frogs occur when whirlwinds over relatively shallow water develop into waterspouts and suck up the creatures, which can then be carried long distances by buffeting clouds even when the waterspouts disperse – but as far as the Gang of Fort can recall, such a sequence of events has never been observed. Any meteorologist who can cite chapter and verse to refute this, please let us know.

Hundreds of fish rained down in Australia's Northern Territory on two successive days in February 2010 [FT262:24-25]. Falls of fish have been reported worldwide for centuries, but in Australia they are surprisingly frequent: more than 70 between 1879 to 1997 [FT106:35-36]. The USA has tens



of thousands more lakes and rivers than Australia, has many more tornadoes and is much more densely populated. If whirlwinds were the major cause of fishfalls, then for every one such fall reported in Australia there should be at least 100 in the US – which is not the case. What's more, one would not expect whirlwinds to be so selective; not only is there no associated debris dumped, but the fish are often only one size or species,

and in some cases deposited in very small well-defined areas. Many falls have occurred without a hint of accompanying wind, and fish have sometimes fallen on the same spot for such extended periods of time (up to 10 minutes) that constantly moving whirlwinds would seem to be ruled out.

In 2012, there was a rain of prawns in the south of Sri Lanka. For a wave of tadpole falls in Japan, see FT252:4-5.

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

'Badgers have moved the goalposts,' says Paterson

<i> 10 Oct 2013.

Children gutted as thieves strike

Worcester Standard, 11 Oct 2013.

CLOWNS SHOOT DRUG BARON

(Sydney) D.Telegraph, 21 Oct 2013.

Elephant ate my bridesmaid

(Sydney) D.Telegraph, 16 Oct 2013.

Let pets share care of elderly

Adelaide Advertiser, 24 Oct 2013.

Boozy, feral pig steals beer, gets drunk and starts fight with a cow

Irish Independent, 14 Sept 2013.

Bjorn Borg might drop underwear over North Korea

UPI News, – Oct 2013.

Burglar caught by a cucumber

D.Mail, 7 Oct 2013.

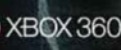
Nazi plan to breed giant rabbits in death camps

D.Mail, 27 Sept 2013.

MURDERED

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SIDELINES...

VOCAL CHICKEN

Residents of Makurdi, capital of Nigeria's Benue State, fled in panic after a chicken at Wadata Market began talking in Arabic. When the loquacious fowl was taken into custody, curious crowds descended on the police station and were dispersed with shots and tear gas. The bird was allegedly slaughtered. The Gang of Fort is reminded of Uganda's talking tortoise upsetting Idi Amin in 1978 [FT27:39]. *MX News (Sydney)*, 15 April; *yourjewishnews.com*, 16 April 2014.

YEAR OF LOOSE LIVING

As the Chinese New Year dawned, millions celebrated the Year of the Horse; but in a subtling mistake for the 2014 lunar year, the BBC announced: "Welcome to the Year of the Whores. People around the globe celebrate." We recall the BBC subtitles referring to the "Arch bitch of Canterbury" and calling for "a moment's violence" during the Queen Mother's funeral. *Sunday People*, 2 Feb 2014.

OLD BIRD PASSES ON

The world's oldest flamingo, aged 83, was put down on 31 January after keepers at Adelaide Zoo decided its quality of life had dramatically deteriorated due to old age. Called 'Greater', the bird (gender unknown) arrived at the zoo in 1933, but it was not known if it came from Cairo or Hamburg Zoo. (*Sydney*) *D.Telegraph*, 1 Feb 2014.



MARTIN ROSS

Odd allergy round-up

Bad reactions to water, cold and fleas complicate life...

- A stagehand at the Edinburgh Fringe was sent into anaphylactic shock and almost died after suffering an extreme allergic reaction to an audience member's perfume. Bryn Jones, 22, had been working on Harold Pinter's black comedy *The Dumb Waiter* at the New Town Theatre in August 2013. During a performance, his throat tightened and he struggled for breath. He needed a friend to bring him his medication, but managed to carry on the technical duties during the play. When his friend arrived, he was lying on the floor and his face had turned blue. "He grabbed me and gave me what I needed just as the show ended," said Mr Jones. *Independent*, 16 Aug 2013.

- Glynn Parry, 36, suffers from a rare condition that causes him to collapse if he comes into contact with certain triggers. "Some sufferers react to chocolate or cheese, but one of my strangest and strongest triggers is Chanel No 5," he said. "My wife wore it once and I immediately collapsed – I just went within a space of a few seconds. It was a very severe reaction." The former financial sector worker, from Coedpoeth, near Wrexham in Wales, suffers from familial hemiplegic migraines, a genetic condition affecting neurotransmitters. In an attack, one hemisphere of the brain temporarily shuts down, leading to paralysis.

Parry suffered his first attack when he was 14 and they have increased in severity over time. He has to avoid direct sunlight, temperature changes, chocolate, caffeine, alcohol and certain foods, while his wife Carrie, 33, has been obliged to avoid perfumes, deodorants and strong-smelling soaps. One of the most frustrating aspects of his affliction is that if he collapses people assume he is drunk. "If I'm lucky I get a warning and see blurred lights and then self-preservation kicks in," he said.



CATERERS NEWS AGENCY

ABOVE: Water brings Rachel Prince out in an itchy rash.

"I try to find a bench, a chair or a bed to land on and lie down on, because I'm about to collapse. It leaves me completely paralysed down my left side and the attack can be so bad I can't move a muscle. I can't even blink." *D.Mail*, 5 Nov 2013.

- Even a drop of water brings Rachel Prince out in an itchy rash that lasts for hours. The 26-year-old artist, from Ripley, Derbyshire, suffers from *aquagenic pruritus*, a condition thought to afflict only 35 people in the world. The cause is unknown and there is no known cure. She can't have a bath or kiss her fiancé Lee Warwick, 28 – because even the moisture in saliva sets off the painful condition. She has to take very short showers and dry herself off immediately to avoid developing the rash. A sip of cold water makes her throat swell up, though fortunately (and puzzlingly) she is fine with tea and fruit juice. She is even allergic to her own sweat, tears and blood when these are in contact with her skin. "The rash feels as though my skin's on fire," she said. At least she can duck the washing up. She was 12 when she first noticed the allergy, which worsened as she grew older. Such allergies usually affect the upper part of the body, with rashes

developing within 30 minutes of exposure to water. *D.Express*, *D.Star*, 20 Feb 2014.

- Tracy Kenny, 45, a former baker from Eccles, Greater Manchester, claims she has not been able to work for 24 years because she is allergic to wearing shoes: rubber, glue and metal leave her skin blistered and sore. She also has to wear gloves to protect her from metal in coins and cutlery. She spends her day barefoot and can only leave the house on her mobility scooter as she suffers from contact dermatitis – a type of eczema that causes red, itchy scaly skin. Her disability living allowance – £110 a week at the time of the report – was due to stop after officials ruled she was fit to work. She lost an appeal against the decision. *Metro*, 25 Oct 2013.

- Bernard Ward, from Derry in Northern Ireland, wears gloves to get a drink from the fridge as he battles an allergy to the cold. One snowflake could trigger potentially fatal anaphylactic shock. "In winter, I wear ridiculous amounts of clothes," he said. His was diagnosed with cold urticaria in 2012 after standing in temperatures of minus 10°C (14°F) at a bus stop in Scotland.



Hollie Davies, five, from Tamworth in Staffordshire, has the same problem and is banned from swimming, playing outside in cold weather or even eating ice cream. The condition causes shortness of breath, fatigue, and itchy, painful hives that can last for days. A sudden drop in temperature could send her into potentially fatal anaphylactic shock. The little girl has to take antihistamines twice a day; these allow her to tolerate temperatures below 4°C (39°F) for a few minutes. Without medication she cannot withstand air colder than 15°C (59°F). *Times, Metro, 26 Nov 2013; D.Mail, 3 Mar 2014.*

- Tanya Crawley, 38, runs a veterinary practice in Swindon called Companion Care Vets. She is allergic to animals – dogs, cats, rabbits, anything furry can trigger an attack, from sneezing and wheezing to painful hives – but she wouldn't swap her job for anything. "Being a vet is part of who I am," she said. "I have never even considered doing anything else." She was aware of her allergy to cats and dogs from childhood, and the rabbit allergy developed a couple of years ago. She takes antihistamines most days and has an inhaler handy at all times. "My allergies are constantly changing and evolving," she said. "I think

I've recently developed an allergy to fleas. It starts with an itch in my nose and I can tell as soon as a pet with fleas walks into the room." *Metro, 17 Feb 2014.*

- Michael Steer, 36, deputy head of Thornhill Community Academy in Dewsbury, West Yorkshire, is allergic to school. He wears gloves to avoid touching things like marker pens, rulers, glue sticks and smart boards. As well as eczema and dermatitis, he is sensitive to potassium dichromate – found in thousands of products from mobile phones to soap and paint. "When I come into contact with the chemical my hands will balloon or sores will flare up, and my knuckles will become stiff and tender to move," he said. *Sun, 30 Oct 2013.*

- Ross Dethick, 12, from Elgin, Moray, is allergic to almost everything around the house, including dust, paint, cleaning products, animal fur, nuts, fruit, dairy products, most vegetables – and even his teddy bear. His mother Liza has to ensure the house is totally dust-free, and keeps his teddy in the freezer. *D.Telegraph, Metro, 2 Dec 2013.*

- Three-year-old Finley Ranson, of Battlesbridge, Essex, has an extreme case of eosinophilic

enterocolitis, a condition that means his body fights food as if it were a virus, causing him to bleed internally. He has to get his nutrition in a liquid formula through a feeding tube in his stomach six times a day. His mother Rhys, 27, tried hundreds of foods before discovering he could eat 10 Fox's Glacier Mints a day. "Despite his allergy, he loves going out and says his favourite place is the pub," she said. *D.Mail, 19 Feb 2014.*

- Karen Johnson, 52, of Deptford, south-east London, gets a rash every time she watches television for more than a couple of hours, after becoming allergic to her sitting room. She reacts to the chemical methylisothiazolinone (MI or MIT) in the white B&Q emulsion paint used to redecorate the room seven months ago. The receptionist once became so ill she was rushed to hospital with severe breathing problems. MI is found in hundreds of beauty products, from anti-wrinkle creams to suntan lotion, as it helps prolong shelf life. Up to 13 per cent of patients at skin clinics had eczema and rashes caused by MI. European officials have called for a ban of MI in cosmetic products and doctors want it listed on paint labels. *Sun, 17 Mar; D.Mail, 18 Mar 2014.*

SIDELINES...

ARK TO THIS

The Vue cinema in Exeter was forced to close on 4 April due to flooding when an ice machine malfunctioned – on the day the film *Noah* was due to be screened for the first time. The venue was closed until 2pm, meaning the first showing at 12.15pm had to be cancelled. *Express & Echo (Exeter), Huffington Post, 7 April 2014.*

BROUGHT TO BOOK

A South Carolina man was arrested after hitting his girlfriend with an anger management book. Tyler Ford hit Sheelah Thompson with the tome before she slashed him with a box-cutter. *Sunday Mail, 30 Mar 2014.*

CHEEKY CHAPPIE

Antoine Deblay, 22, has made a fortune by selling 1,000 cans of fresh air at 10 euro (£8.30) each from his home in France. He calls it Air de Montcuq, often wrongly translated as "air of my backside", but actually named after his home town. "Fresh air of Montcuq is 100 per cent organic," he boasts. *Sun, 10 Dec 2013.*

THIRSTY SUNFLOWERS

Geraldine Durrant was in a restaurant in France when a vase of sunflowers toppled to the floor, taking a magnum of champagne with it. The explosion brought the fury of the owner down on a hapless waiter – until a second vase plunged to the floor 10 minutes later. Crammed into their vases, the sunflowers had taken up water until they reached toppling point. *D.Telegraph, 15 Oct 2013.*

NOT SO DEAD

A survey of fish markets in Kuwait City turned up 47 examples of the smooth-tooth blacktip shark, which scientists have long thought to be extinct: only one example had been identified in the past 110 years. All the Kuwait specimens were dead and had been prepared for eating. *MX News (Sydney), 6 Jan 2014.*



CATERERS NEWS AGENCY

ABOVE: Tanya Crawley, a vet in Swindon who is allergic to animals: "Being a vet is part of who I am".



SIDELINES...

SLEEP DRIVING

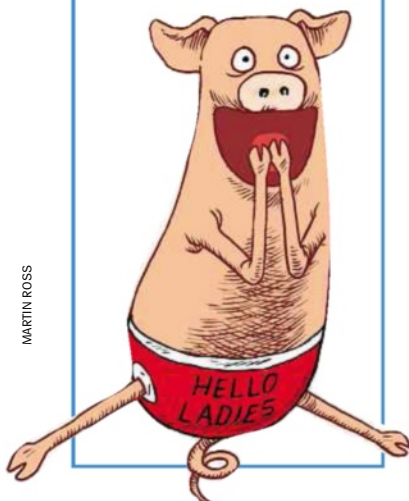
A man in Umeå, northern Sweden, convicted of drink-driving by the district court, was acquitted by the court of appeal. The court could not exclude the possibility that he had been not only drunk but also asleep while he was driving. This wouldn't have made his driving less dangerous, but sleep-driving is not a punishable offence. *Sydsvenskan (Sweden)*, 22 Feb 2014.

MAKING IT UP

A rigorous meta-analysis of 18 surveys conducted from 1986 to 2009 found that two per cent of scientists admitted to having "fabricated, falsified or altered" information in order to "improve the outcome" of a study. A much larger 34 per cent said they had committed crimes of omission – for example, "failing to present data that contradict one's own previous research" or "dropping observations or data points from analyses based on a gut feeling that they were inaccurate." *The Week*, 20 June 2009.

PIGGING OUT

A woman in the town of China in Maine called police after hearing screaming coming from a neighbour's house and thought it was a fight. When the police arrived, the neighbour explained she raised pigs and the screaming was coming from an overjoyed male pig that had been placed in a pen with five sows on heat. *Victoria (BC) Times Colonist*, 5 Feb 2014.



LUCKY ESCAPES

EXTREME COLD, PLUNGING OFF CLIFFS OR GETTING LOST IN THE WILDS OF OZ ARE SURVIVABLE – JUST

• Yahya Abdi, a 15-year-old Somali boy from Santa Clara, California, survived a five-hour flight to Hawaii stowed away in the nose wheel compartment of a passenger jet, and miraculously survived the ordeal without any injuries. Security camera footage showed him scaling the perimeter fence at San Jose airport on Sunday morning, 20 April, and walking towards a Hawaiian Airlines Boeing 767 that took off shortly afterwards for the island of Maui. An hour after the plane landed at Kahului airport, he was found dazed but otherwise unhurt wandering on the tarmac. He had flown halfway across the Pacific at a maximum altitude of 38,000ft (11,600m), where outside temperatures plunged as low as minus 80°C (minus 62°F). "He seemed OK physically," said Marvin Moniz, the airport manager. "The only thing he complained about was that his ears hurt. He said all the noise and the vibrations had given him a really bad ringing in the ears."

It transpired that he had run away from home after an argument with his father and stepmother and concealed himself on Flight 45 to Hawaii with only the clothes he was wearing and a pocket comb. He told investigators he wanted to go to Africa to see his mother, who lives in an Ethiopian refugee camp. "Kid's lucky to be alive," said Tom Simon, an FBI spokesman in Honolulu. "Doesn't even remember the flight." He was hospitalised with breathing trouble and was not charged with any offence. His father Abdilahi Abdi Yusuf, a Somali refugee and Santa Clara cab driver, flew to Hawaii on 21 April, but it was



ABOVE: Yahya Abdi, who survived sub-zero temperatures as a stowaway on a five-hour flight to Hawai'i

four survived [see FT297:29]. The actual numbers are probably higher, as some survivors may have escaped unnoticed, and bodies could fall into the ocean undetected.

There was a case of someone surviving a flight from Panama to Miami in 1986 that reached 39,000ft (11,900m). In 1996, Vijay Saini, 19, died after falling 2,000ft (600m) from a DC9 jet over Richmond, west London, as it approached Heathrow, but his brother Pardeep, 22, survived the 10-hour journey from Delhi in freezing

The vibration had given him a bad ringing in his ears

unclear when (or if) the Hawaii Department of Human Services would release Yahya into his care.

Peter Forman, a leading airline analyst, said: "The odds of a person surviving that long on a flight at that altitude are very remote, actually. I mean you are talking about altitudes that are well above the altitude of Mount Everest. A lot of people would only have useful consciousness for a minute or two at that altitude. For somebody to survive multiple hours with that lack of oxygen and that cold is just miraculous. I've never heard of anything like that before." However, the FAA says 105 stowaways have sneaked aboard 94 flights worldwide since 1947, and about one out of

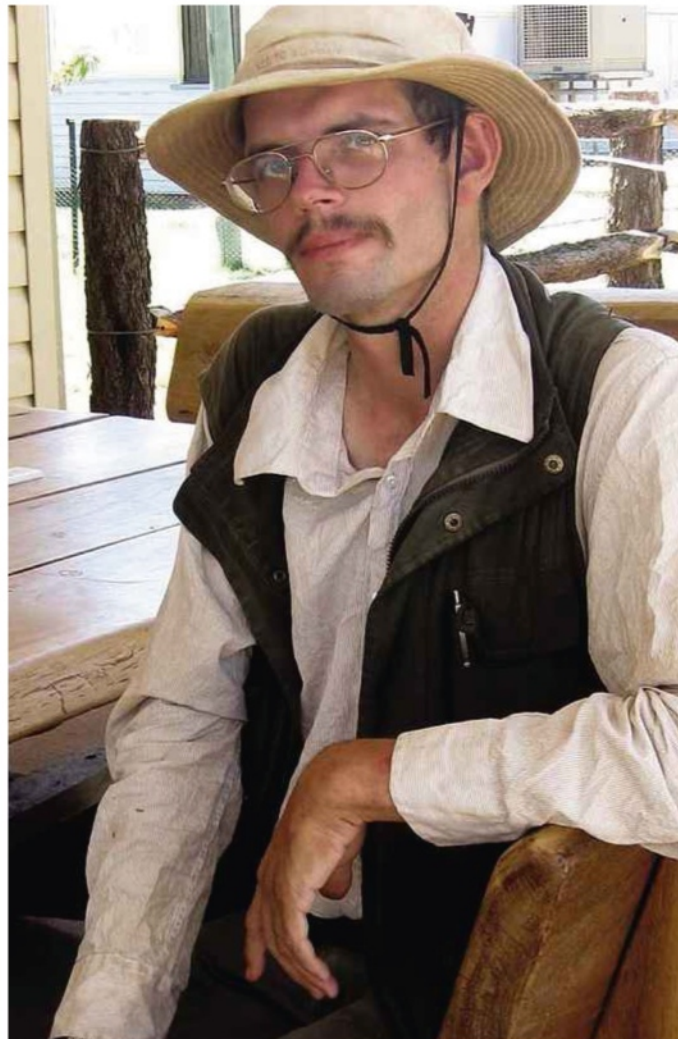
temperatures. Another aerial stowaway survivor was Andrei Cluea, 20, from Romania, who fell out of the landing gear of a Boeing 747 from Vienna as it touched down at Heathrow in 2010. Among the theories is that lack of oxygen and slow cooling of the body could send the central nervous system into a form of hibernation, with latent heat from the wheels and hydraulic lines keeping the body from freezing. *D.Telegraph*, *Metro*, 22 April; *dailymail.co.uk*, 23 April; *San Jose (CA) Mercury News*, 29 April; [R] 30 April 2014.

• At midnight on 12 April, Jay Blenkinsop, 33, careered off a cliff-top road in Roedean near Brighton, West Sussex, and plunged 80ft (24m) – or 100ft (30m) or 120ft (37m) (accounts differ) – after his Ford Focus had a tyre blowout. The car clipped netting on the way down, cleared the promenade at the base of the cliff, hit the top of a wall and landed in the shallow surf. The former banger racer, who had only owned his car for three

days, was able to exit the mangled wreck and pull himself to safety on the rocks. When rescuers arrived, he joked that he had taken off because he had drunk a can of Red Bull – making light of the energy drink’s slogan that it “gives you wings”. He escaped with a bruised lung and facial injuries. *D.Mail, Metro, 14 April; Sun, 14+15 April 2014. For other vertical car rides, see FT202:10.*

- A German backpacker who went missing for almost three weeks in Australia’s Outback told police he survived by eating protein-packed flies. Daniel Dudzisz, 26, was found on 7 March, 18 days after he went missing between Windorah and Jundah in western Queensland, as he headed towards Uluru. On 17 February, he became stranded on a small patch of grass between two flooded sections of the Barcoo River, but eventually managed to wade out of the water and was picked up by a motorist. His survival baffled the police, especially as he is an insulin-dependent diabetic who had set off with little food; he appeared to be well and refused medical treatment. After his supply of baked beans and cereal ran out, he turned to flies and bugs. Police Inspector Mark Henderson reckoned the chances of someone surviving in such conditions were virtually non-existent. “We are very amazed,” he said. “He is very, very gaunt, he has lost a considerable amount of weight and there is very little doubt he was not far off perishing.” Dudzisz planned to rest in Windorah for three days before continuing his trek to Uluru. (*Queensland Courier-Mail, <i>, D.Telegraph, 8 Mar 2014.*

- Stephen Currie, 40, went missing in bushland six miles (10km) outside the mining town of Chillagoe in northern Queensland on 28 December 2013, sparking an extensive air and land search in the rugged terrain including the area’s mineshafts and caves. The search was called off in early January, with the mercury peaking at 40°C most days, and he was generally assumed to be dead. Shoeless, shirtless and 15kg (33lb) lighter, Currie was



discovered after 31 days on 28 January, walking down a remote track. He had become disoriented on a walk from his caravan on the outskirts of town, but was saved by the Walsh River, surviving on freshwater mussels, wild fruit...

ABOVE: Daniel Dudzisz survived three weeks of eating flies in the Outback. LEFT: Steven Currie lived off mussels and butterflies.

and butterflies. “It’s pretty rocky country, even along the Walsh – not the sort of thing you’d tackle in thongs,” said a local landowner. “There’s not a lot of shade either; there’s trees, but it’s not like rainforest. A lot of the water is saturated with bacteria. We had no rain for weeks, the water in the creek went black and that stuff would kill you.” However, many locals were sceptical about Currie’s ordeal. They couldn’t understand why he failed to hear helicopters and search parties who went to find him, or use local landmarks like the smelter chimneys in Chillagoe to find his way back. (*Queensland Courier-Mail, 30 Jan; (Sydney) Morning Herald, 31 Jan 2014.*

SIDELINES...

DANGEROUS LAUNDRY

Firefighters were called to a cafe in Brighton, West Sussex, on 10 November 2013 to put out a fire in the basement started by spontaneously combusting tea towels. In October 2012, spontaneously combusting laundry in Terre à Terre, a vegetarian restaurant in the town, led to a devastating fire that gutted the kitchen. On the same day, a similar fire broke out at Brighton College. It is believed that chemicals or fats on the tea towels can cause the material to ignite when they are dried. *Brighton Argus, 11 Nov 2013.*

FISH DELIVERY

A seagull dropped a 2lb (907g) dogfish that crashed through a greenhouse roof and just missed Bruce Chandler, 74, in Hastings. *Sunday People, 6 April 2014.*

FRIDAY THE THIRTEENTH

An elderly French woman from the village of Saint Louis usually played “Super Loto”, France’s national lottery, every week without fail, using her regular “lucky numbers” (1-6-16-32-41-1). However, on Friday 13th December, she decided to switch to the Euromillions lottery game, where the week’s prize money was €43 million (rather than a mere €8 million – or £6.7 million). Her numbers won nothing, but turned out to be the winning combination for the “Super Loto”. *D.Telegraph, 20 Dec 2013.*

UNBOUGHED

A 10-ton 40ft (12m) fir tree in Sevenoaks, Kent, blown over in a December storm, righted itself in March. *Sun, 4 Mar 2014.*

PAPERCHASE

A 46-year-old company boss from Winsham in Somerset – whose husband accidentally threw out her tax returns, company accounts and notes for a new book – retrieved the paperwork after three hours’ sifting through tons of rubbish at the local dump. Her name? Lucy Binns. *Sun, 11 Oct 2013.*



SIDELINES...

HOW PRICKS GET A HEAD

Sandra Nabucco, 52, was walking her dog in Gavea, Brazil, when a porcupine landed on her head, leaving 272 spiky quills stuck in her scalp. The 10lb (4.5kg) creature is thought to have fallen from a lamppost – and survived. A surgeon removed the quills one by one with tweezers and Ms Nabucco was put on antibiotics to avoid infection. “The pain was enormous,” she said. *Sun, D.Mail, 25 Jan 2014.*

EAR EAR

An arm-wrestling challenge during Orthodox Christmas celebrations came to a bloody end on 7 January when two drunken men in the Gurev district of Siberia’s Kemerovo region decided that the loser would cut off his own ear. The man defeated in the first round demanded a rematch, which he won. After an argument, they called it a draw and each took a blade to his own left ear – one severing it completely, the other only partially. *D.Telegraph, <i></i>, 11 Jan 2014.*

CONDUCT UNBECOMING

A man who tried to have sex with a corpse after digging into the grave was arrested when he fell asleep in the coffin. Chin Chean, 47, a known drug user, was caught when villagers in Cambodia saw his foot sticking out of the grave and told the family of the 17-year-old girl buried there the day before. *MX News (Sydney) 25 Feb 2014.*



MARTIN ROSS

Ghosts on film?

Mysterious intruders in family snaps



INSTAGRAM / PEACHES GELDOF

ABOVE: A mysterious hand appears in this selfie taken by Peaches Geldof.

• In the months before her death on 7 April – probably from a heroin overdose, like that of her mother, Paula Yates, in 2000 – television presenter Peaches Geldof, 24, had become increasingly interested in the paranormal, and recently commented that reading books on the past lives of children had made her “believe in reincarnation”. In December 2013 she posted a ‘selfie’ on the Instagram website taken with her 20-month-old son, Astala, in the bathroom of her house in Wrotham, Kent – which she thought included a “ghost” hand at her shoulder. She believed the “discoloured and small” hand belongs to the “friendly” ghost of a woman who committed suicide in the bath. She said: “The house was built in the 1920s by a rich man and his pregnant wife. However, his wife had a stillborn baby and was so grief-stricken she went mad. She apparently drowned herself in the bath. The presence I feel isn’t malignant or angry, rather

maternal and friendly – the house has a lovely atmosphere. Maybe she’s making her presence known because she loves having babies around.” Besides Astala, Peaches had an eight-month-old son called Phaedra. Peaches and her husband, Tom Cohen, had bought

the house in Wrotham only two months earlier, in October, having moved from Whitechapel, east London. *Sun, 12 Dec 2013; Times, 9 April; D.Telegraph, 2 May 2014.*

• Heather Sewell, 50, a taxi driver from Petham, Kent, was at the christening of granddaughter Mia-Bella in Canterbury when the baby’s uncle, Jamie Sewell, took this photograph on his mobile. Later, when the family was in the pub looking at the day’s pictures on Facebook, Mrs Sewell saw the black and white face hovering over the font and was convinced it was her late husband Terry, a labourer who hanged himself 17 years ago, aged 41. “Terry had a long face and so does the ghost,” she said. “It has the same hairstyle and is the same height – about 5ft 8in [173cm]... I know there has been no photo trickery so it is all very spooky and perhaps not what you want to see at a christening.” *D.Mirror, 21 Dec 2012.*



ABOVE: A spectral face appearing at a christening at St Martin’s church, Canterbury.

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SERIOUSLY STAKED

DAVID V BARRETT REPORTS FROM ASSAP'S 'SERIOUSLY STAKED' VAMPIRE SYMPOSIUM, HELD AT GOLDSMITHS COLLEGE EARLIER THIS YEAR

A whole day of talks on vampires – 11 speakers in all – with surprisingly little overlap between them. And although by 7.30 some of the audience had slipped away and others were looking slightly faded, every talk had something to catch the attention. Seriously Staked was by turns light-hearted and serious, with attention to films and folklore, vampire fan culture and even the chemical composition of blood.

The scene was Goldsmiths College, London, the host was Prof Chris French of the Anomalistic Psychology Research Unit, and the organisers were ASSAP, the Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena.

Highlights began with the first speaker, Deborah Hyde, editor of *The Skeptic* magazine and creator of the Jourdemayne website, named after a 15th-century London witch. Her lively, unscripted talk covered almost everything you ever wanted to know about vampires, interspersed with a vampire quiz with prizes of gummy teeth for the first person to shout out the name of a film, character or actor on screen. Voltaire, she revealed, was perhaps the first to use the term “vampire” as a metaphor when he spoke of “stock-jobbers, brokers and men of business, who sucked the blood of the people in the broad daylight; but they are not dead, though corrupted. These true suckers lived not in cemeteries, but in very agreeable palaces.” No change there, then.

She suggested that folklore about vampires began in the early 1700s, when Habsburg Austrians were in conflict with Ottoman Turks – and that the elite reported on and misinterpreted what the peasants were doing and saying. Learned tracts from around the period seem to link the idea of vampires to conflict in the ninth century between believers in Slavic Paganism, Bogomilism and Orthodox Christianity.

Beliefs about vampires have a

variety of causes, from epidemics to a misunderstanding of what happens to bodies after they die – they don’t always decompose rapidly, and they can look as if they’re still livid with blood. Descriptions of exhumed bodies include growth of hair and nails, blood at the mouth and other orifices and the delightfully named “wild signs” – an erection.

Today’s vampires are very different from earlier folkloric ideas to do with death and pestilence, which were definitely not sexy, said Jessica Monteith-Chachuat in her talk, sub-titled “Why I want to date a dead guy”. Bela Lugosi brought in the piercing stare and the distinctive debonair look: well-dressed, well-spoken, well-manicured – a perfect country gentleman apart from the blood-sucking thing, she said. More recently *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* mixed girl-power with romance with vampires, while *Twilight* featured the charming, attractive 17-year-old-looking centenarian Edward. The idea of staying forever young has come a long way from mediæval pestilence.

Foretan folklorist Scott Wood focused not so much on vampires as on the undead of England. He told stories of widows being pestered by their putrefying husbands hanging around their bedrooms, sometimes lying on them, making it difficult to breathe – a combination

of grief, fear of death, fear of sex, lurid dreams and the phenomenon of sleep paralysis. He also mentioned the belief, as described by King James VI & I, that the body of a murder victim would bleed when touched by its murderer.

Dr Maria Mellins talked about the culture of the London vampire community, their romanticism of the past, their morbid fascination for dressing in Edwardian and Victorian clothing and their overlap with steampunk fans. A sombre note came with her mention of Sophie Lancaster, “kicked to death for looking different”; although she wasn’t part of the vampire scene she became a focal point for the campaign to widen the definition of hate crime to include appearance or sub-cultural interest.

The Ghost Club’s John Fraser talked about the confusion between fact and fiction. Apparently, according to a Romanian source, some 75 per cent of Americans think that Transylvania is a mythical place – and Castle Dracula Hotel in Romania has a real family graveyard next to it.

Dr Stacey Abbot looked at the presence of science in vampire folklore and literature, with explanations of vampirism as a sexually transmitted disease, a virus, an inherited disease, the result of genetic manipulation

or as a new variety of humanity. Richard Matheson’s 1954 novel *I am Legend* was an early treatment of vampirism as a pandemic, and later films have continued the theme, with powerful visual images of mankind threatened by a plague.

Jonathan Ferguson, curator of firearms at the Royal Armouries museum in Leeds, wrote about vampire killing kits in this magazine (FT288:32-39). Before getting on to them, he described a variety of means of “Slayage: tools of the vampire hunter”. Bodies were weighed down with stones to prevent them climbing out of the grave, or covered with a net, either to trap the emerging undead or to preoccupy him with counting the knots until the sun had risen. There were nails in the hands, feet, head, heart or stomach, stakes made of hawthorn, ash, oak or elder, depending where you were, and crossbows, a technological advance over stakes. If the head was cut off it had to be put somewhere else so it couldn’t be reunited with its body. A really determined defence against a potential vampire could include all of these, culminating in fire.

But three of the most familiar characteristics of vampires – their susceptibility to the cross and their lack of reflection in mirrors – are rarely found anywhere outside fiction. The first reference he found to silver bullets was by “the notoriously unreliable Montague Summers” in 1928 – and he tracked down the earliest reference to marking bullets with a cross to a 1965 issue of *Penthouse* magazine.

Of the hundred or so vampire killing kits in existence, 40 are owned by Ripley’s Believe It Or Not. The story attached to them is that they date to early Victorian times, “when people believed in vampires”, to protect travellers to eastern Europe. The reality is that, although the boxes and their contents of crucifix, pistol and so on may be 19th century, they almost certainly weren’t put



ABOVE: Professor Chris French of Goldsmiths College APRU introduces the talks.



ABOVE: Conference-goers make themselves comfortable in suitably blood-red seats.

together until the 1970s.

Dr Kathryn Harkup gave a detailed explanation of the composition of blood and the complexity of the way the body creates it, before exploring two possible medical explanations for vampirism, porphyria and rabies. Porphyria can cause nails and teeth to turn red, and the hair to go into a widow's peak. But it's a very rare condition, and only one of its eight variations includes light sensitivity. Although there was a major outbreak of rabies in Hungary in the 1720s, which might add to that theory, she reckoned that both rabies and porphyria are fine for explaining TV vampires, but not so good for explaining folkloric vampires.

The last speaker in corporeal form was Dr Hannah Gilbert, who explored how the image we have of Dracula has not remained static but has gone through many recontextualisations. In the first Dracula talkie, Bela Lugosi brought the distinctive look and the eastern European accent, while the first Dracula in colour, from Hammer and Christopher Lee, brought "More gore! And more cleavage!" In *Bram Stoker's Dracula* Francis Ford Coppola made him a romantic anti-hero. Social changes have also had their effect. She echoed Prof J Gordon Melton, at a recent London Fortean Society talk, in arguing that as western society has become more secular, so the Christian components of vampire culture have become more redundant and problematic. The treatment of women in vampire films – formerly

always vulnerable and weak – has also changed with changing social attitudes.

In passing, she mentioned the gory detail that in March 2007 Slobodan Milošević was staked through the heart by Serbian vampire hunters, to make absolutely sure that he couldn't come back from the grave.

The last two speakers came across the æther via Skype. Brent Myers referred to several scholarly studies, including Paul Barber's excellent *Vampires, Burial and Death: Folklore and Reality* (1988), to show that there was no mention of blood-drinking in Romanian folklore – so what were vampires? He tracked them back to the 10th or 11th century, proposing that vampires were actually heretics practising the Christian love feast *agape*, and that the word vampire meant "extreme feaster", gluttons with an insatiable appetite not for food or blood but for sex – in which case, today's sexy vampires have come full circle.

John Michaelson appeared on screen in a mask. He claimed to have discovered evidence that real vampires in London today are actually highly organised and well-connected people who are infected with a desire to kill, and are involved in people-trafficking; he would be releasing his exposé very soon. Whether he was serious, or whether this was just sick publicity for a forthcoming book, no one in the audience seemed to know, but it was a disquieting, and perhaps distasteful, end to an otherwise fascinating day.

I do love a good political sex scandal – but sex scandals ain't what they used to be. It's no longer enough that a senior politician be caught in bed with a younger woman not his wife. These days you need pædophilia; or even better, *Satanic pædophilia*. The *Daily Express* understands this. Sonia Poulton, a print and TV journalist,¹ had a piece in their columns under the headline 'Pædophile MPs are mocking British law'. Great headline, but disappointing story: in which, sadly, there are no pædophile MPs. Poulton's initial charge, in the age of Jimmy Savile *et al*, is: "However what we have failed to see... are any arrests pertaining to parliamentary pædophiles".

No arrests shock! And who are these parliamentary pædophiles? Ms Poulton may have no names but she has "heard stories of satanic ritual abuse... at the hands of household-name parliamentarians past and present"; and she has "listened to claims of acts so obscene, so grotesque, borne out by the physical as well as mental scars many of these survivors carry".

So there *is* evidence – "physical as well as mental scars" – but why is nothing done? It's a conspiracy: "One problem of a Parliament dogged with pædophiles and their sympathisers is that those MPs my interviewees have named are attempting to foist their warped ideology on our society".

Poulton summons an ally: "Andrea Davison, a former intelligence officer now on the run in South America following her whistleblowing on the arms-to-Iraq scandal of Tony Blair's Cabinet." (What a backstory! And we never heard of her!) Davison "was adamant that pædophiles are a staple of parliamentary life and have been for some decades. She claimed that MPs have been filmed abusing children and this footage is used to blackmail parliamentarians into acquiescing on issues of global importance".

But Ms Davison also has no names; not here, nor in her enormous statement to the *Macur Review*, which, while full of allegations about pædophilia, names not a single parliamentarian.²

Davison has her champions. David Icke endorses her story on his site³ and steers us to another piece about her on *Veterans Today*.⁴ This is by Peter Eyre, who calls himself a Middle East consultant but whose general orientation is that of what we can now call an 'old school' conspiracy theorist, in which everything from the Round Table to the Zionists are chucked into a rich conspiratorial stew.⁵ Eyre tells us that Davison's "knowledge could easily bring down not only the current Prime Minister and his government but also many of the past PMs and other senior MPs and members of the House of Lords" But, like Sonia Poulton and Icke, Eyre does not seem to have thought it necessary to check the veracity of Davison's claims, which do not withstand much scrutiny.⁶

David Icke also has a role in Sonia Poulton's life. In 2013, she was part of the team that launched Icke's Internet broadcasting company, The People's Voice, but fell out with them and quit over what she saw as sloppy and unprofessional behaviour.⁷

There used to be a clear line in the sand between the Internet conspiracy theorists and the mainstream print and broadcast media. If this little thicket of connections is anything to go by, that line is beginning to blur.

1 soniapoulton.co.uk

2 <http://macurstatement.blogspot.co.uk/>

3 www.davidicke.com/headlines/71176-the-silencing-and-persecution-of-andrea-davidson-in-fascist-britain/

4 www.veteranstoday.com/2012/08/01/uk-intel-andrea-davidson-dr-david-kelly-julian-assange-and-other-key-stories/

5 See for example his <http://galacticconnection.com/peter-eyre-investigative-reporter-on-the-new-world-order-part-2/>

6 On which, see <http://annaraccoon.com/2012/11/20/past-lives-and-present-misgivings-part-eight/>

7 soniapoulton.co.uk/page13.htms



ARCHAEOLOGY

PAUL SIEVEKING presents this issue's round-up of archaeological discoveries and curiosities



KAGIN'S, INC



ABOVE LEFT: Coin-filled cans from the Saddle Ridge Hoard. ABOVE RIGHT: Most of the cleaned and certified coins will be sold via the Kagin's, Inc website and Amazon.

GOLDEN WINDFALLS

SADDLE RIDGE HOARD

A Californian couple were out walking their dog on their property in February 2013 when the wife bent over to examine an old rusty can that erosion had caused to pop slightly out of the ground. They had stumbled across hundreds of gold coins buried in the shadow of an old tree beside a path they had walked along almost every day. Years earlier, they had noticed an empty, rusted can hanging from one of the tree's branches. "We thought the can might be a place for someone to put flowers in for a grave site," said the husband. It turned out to be a site marker alright – but not for a grave.

Nearly all of the 1,427 coins, dating from 1847 to 1894, are in uncirculated, mint condition. Although their face value amounts to about \$28,000, (£16,600) some of them are very rare and could fetch nearly \$1 million apiece – such as the 1866-S No Motto Double Eagle. The estimated value of the cache is \$10 million (£5,930,000). The coins, in \$5, \$10 and \$20 denominations, were stored more or less in chronological order in six (or eight) cans, with those from the 1840s and 1850s going into one can until it was filled, then new coins going into the next one and so on. The dates and the method indicated that whoever put them there was using the ground as their personal bank and that they probably weren't scooped up all at once in a robbery. Although most were minted in San Francisco, one \$5 gold piece came from Georgia.

The coins were located on a section of the property the unnamed couple nicknamed Saddle Ridge, and veteran numismatist Don Kagin, who is representing them, called the find the Saddle Ridge Hoard. He would say little about the couple other than that they

are a self-employed husband and wife in their 40s, and have lived for several years on the rural property in Gold Country, a sprawling, picturesque and still lightly populated section of north-central California that extends east of Sacramento to the Nevada state line, running through the hills and valleys of the Sierra Nevada mountain range. "It's like they found the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow," he said. The discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill, about 50 miles (80km) northeast of Sacramento, set off the California Gold Rush of 1848. The couple plan to put most of the coins up for sale through Amazon while holding onto a few keepsakes. They'll use the money to pay off bills and quietly donate to local charities that support the homeless and hungry.

Kagin believes the Saddle Ridge Hoard could be the largest such discovery in US history. One of the largest previous finds of gold coins was a million dollars' worth uncovered by construction workers in Jackson, Tennessee, in 1985. More than 400,000 silver dollars were found in the home of a Reno, Nevada, man who died in 1974 and were later sold for \$7.3 million (£4,330,000). Gold coins and ingots said to be worth as much as \$130 million (£77 million) were recovered in the 1980s from the wreck of the *SS Central America*; but historians knew roughly where that gold was because the ship went down off the coast of North Carolina during a hurricane in 1857. [AP] ABC News, 25 Feb; Independent, 27 Feb 2014.

FABERGÉ EGG

A scrap metal dealer from the Midwest of America who bought an ornament a decade ago from a bric-a-brac market for \$13,000 (£7,700) to be melted down for its gold has found it is a £20 million Fabergé egg. The

dealer (who wants to remain anonymous) struggled to sell the egg, so kept it in his kitchen for several years until he conducted a search online. He found an article from the *Daily Telegraph* with the headline: "Is this £20 million nest-egg on your mantelpiece?" The article reported the search for the Third Imperial Easter Egg, missing for 90 years, which in 1887 was given by Tsar Alexander III to his wife, Tsarina Maria Feodorovna. The dealer contacted the Fabergé expert named in the piece, Kieran McCarthy of the Mayfair jeweller Wartski, who verified it as a genuine Fabergé imperial egg, and last January bought it on behalf of a Fabergé collector. It contains a Vacheron Constant watch as the "surprise" inside. A brilliant cut diamond serves as the button to open up the egg, which sits on a gold stand with cabochon blue sapphires and rose diamonds.



ABOVE: The Third Imperial Easter Egg

CLASSICAL CORNER



FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

176: FLAMING NORA

Only 50 Fabergé Imperial eggs were made, and now the location of 43 of them is known. Six are presumed lost – melted down for their jewels and scrap metal value – but one, known as the Nécessaire Egg, was bought in 1952 from Wartski's for £1,250 cash by a man who did not leave his name. It has never been seen again; Kieran McCarthy is pretty sure it's still in the UK, somewhere... *D.Telegraph, Irish Independent, 19 Mar, 12 April 2014.*

GOLD FISH

Last March, Barry Shannon, 22, found a seventh century gold object resembling a fish on his aunt's farm near Downpatrick, Co Down, Northern Ireland. He had recently taken up metal detecting as a hobby and struck gold on his fourth attempt. "I'm a fisherman and it looked like a spinner you have on the end of a line, without a hook," he said. He showed it to his aunt, Jean McKee, who took it to Downpatrick Museum for further examination. It was officially declared a treasure at Belfast's Coroner's Court on 30 April. The fish is Anglo-Saxon, 6cm (2.4in) long, about 85 per cent gold, with a copper alloy core. It may have been part of a larger item, like a belt buckle. Nothing similar could be found in any museum in Ireland, but it was almost identical to another gold object found on an elaborate Anglo-Saxon gold and silver belt buckle in Crundale, Kent, now in the British Museum. How a similar object ended up in County Down remains a mystery, as there were no Anglo-Saxon settlements in Ireland. The item went to the British Museum for valuation and will probably end up in the Ulster Museum. *BBC News, 30 April 2014.*



Also in March, a treasure hunter unearthed the second biggest gold nugget ever found in Britain. Merlin Cadogan started digging after his metal detector – "Excalibur" – began beeping in shallow sea at Westward Ho! in Devon. The nugget weighed 37.7g – second only in size to a 50g find from the 19th century. Experts said the 18-carat nugget might be from a sunken pirate ship and could fetch £4,000. "Weirdly, it's the shape of England," said father-of-two Merlin, an escapologist and former semi-finalist in *Britain's Got Talent*. *Sun, 20 Mar 2014.*



I touched on spontaneous combustion in my inaugural Classical Corner (FT133:23) as adjunct to the grislier topic of autophagy.

My interest was recently (so to speak) re-kindled by a news item (*Spectator*, 1 Oct 2011, p13) reporting a Galway judge's verdict that a 76-year-old pensioner had auto-combusted (FT281:14-15). Fort (*Books*, p662) concluded that the data from his few examples of the phenomenon pointed to "things, or beings, that with a flaming process mostly pick out women."

Well, up to a point, Lord Copper. All but one of Fort's victims were female. But an online list of 14 apparently random cases comprises a near tie of eight women, six men.

Pliny (*Natural History*, bk2 ch111 para242) states: "It is recorded that sudden fires arise both in pools of water and in bodies, even human ones. Valerius Antias says the whole of Lake Trasimene was once on fire; that a flame flashed from the head of Servius Tullius when he was a boy; a similar flame burst on Lucius Marcus in Spain when he was exhorting the soldiers to avenge the Scipio's death. Later, we shall give more instances in more detail."

Alas, Pliny does not redeem this promise; unlike Fort's, his examples are male.

An especially famous case was that of Parisian Nicole Millet, found reduced to ashes on a largely undamaged straw mattress in 1725. Her innkeeper husband was accused of burning her body to conceal murder, but was acquitted by the Rumpollesque eloquence of the surgeon Nicholas le Cat, who persuaded the jury that the deceased had spontaneously gone up in flames.

Millet was a notorious toper. So was Grace Pett (FT35:6-9 etc), likewise found incinerated

in Ipswich, Suffolk, on 9 April 1744, her daughter describing the corpse as "like a log of wood consumed by fire, without apparent flame" – wrong part of the country, otherwise I'd assign this mystery to Barnaby in *Midsomer Murders*.

The Millet sensation in particular inspired one Jonas Dupont to publish in 1763 a large dossier of such cases in his treatise *De Incendiis Corporis Humani Spontaneis* – I need hardly translate.

In turn, novelists were encouraged to include a spontaneous combustion in their fictions. First off the starting blocks was Charles Brockden Brown, whose

Wieland (1798) was accompanied by a long footnote (to chapter two) detailing 18th-century examples Fort-style from (e.g.) the *Journal de Médecin* (February & May, 1783). Gogol used the device three times (e.g. in *Dead Souls*). Jules Verne got into the act in his *Dick Sand: A Captain at Fifteen* (1878). Most notoriously, Charles Dickens thus dispatched his splendidly named shopkeeper Mr Krook in *Bleak House* (1852), remaining unrepentant in the face of considerable critical ridicule.

And we mustn't forget the self-combusting drummer in *This is Spinal Tap*.

It may have been Dickens who goaded a certain AW Willis to declare in a terse note in *Notes & Queries* 183 (1855), p440, that spontaneous combustion was impossible, given the large amount of water in a human body.

Although non-flammable, I must end with the explosive death of early Christian heretic Arius one Saturday in a public lav at Constantinople, described thus by Socrates Scholasticus (*Ecclesiastical History*, bk1 ch38): "A faintness came over him, and along with his excretions his bowels stuck out, followed by a lot of blood and collapse of the smaller intestines, followed by the fragmenting eruption of his liver and spleen, and so he died."

Socrates adds that the loo where this happened became a popular tourist site – we can imagine the embellishments added by local dragomen for the benefit of gaping visitors and their own pockets...

Would have made a great snap for the South African photographers' Bang-Bang Club.



GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE reports on a symposium devoted to everyone's favourite talking mongoose

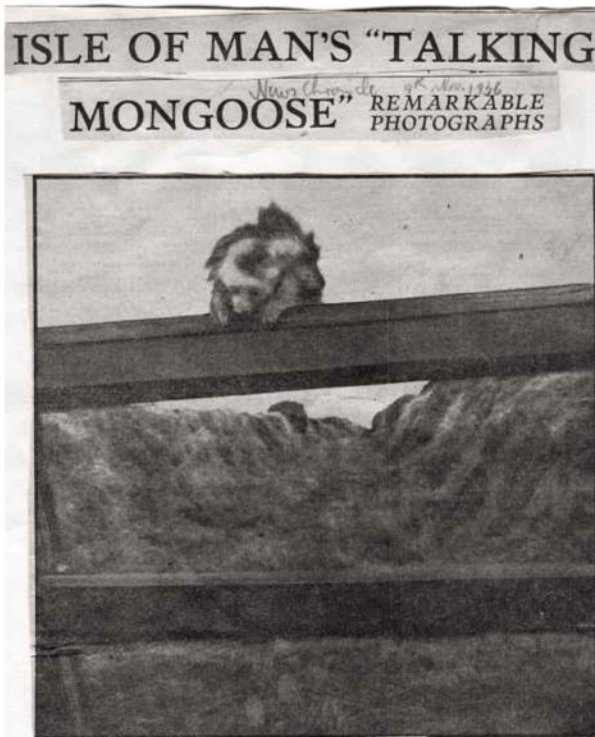
GEF AT THE LIBRARY

The eerie dirge of Manx hilltop winds echoed through the chambers of Senate House Library in London on 10 April, where some 40 people assembled for what was possibly the most unusual academic gathering of the year. Organised by Chris Josiffe and Dr Richard Epsley from Senate House Library, this was a symposium devoted to one of the strangest poltergeist stories on record, the bizarre case of 'Gef the Talking Mongoose' (also known as the 'Dalby Spook') which occurred on the Isle of Man in the 1930s [FT269:32-40]. The audience heard papers offering a variety of perspectives on a story that is, by turns, whimsical, disturbing, utterly preposterous and yet strangely compelling. The day culminated in a special screening of *Vanished!* a film inspired by the tale, parts of which were recorded on location at Doarlish Cashen or Cashen's Gap, the place where the mongoose first squeaked, whistled and chattered his way into public awareness over 80 years ago.

Appropriately, Chris Josiffe – who has been one of the key players in rescuing this case from oblivion – opened the symposium with his paper, "On the trail of the Dalby Spook: an archival and anecdotal quest". Being no mere armchair scholar, Josiffe has made his own pilgrimage to the site of the isolated Manx farm where James Irving, his wife, and their teenage daughter Voirrey (Manx for Mary) spent years in communication with the talking mongoose that had taken residence with them and went by the name 'Gef'.

Gef was a lively, boastful and deceitful creature with a perverse sense of humour. He mysteriously appeared and disappeared at will, creating poltergeist-like disturbances, and speaking in a piercing, squeaky voice delivering a stream of eccentric chatter. According to the Irvings, Gef had his virtues, providing rabbits to supplement the family diet (they lived in extremely straightened circumstances). He was also a source of information and entertainment in their gloomy, oil-lit house, but at other times he appeared spiteful, malicious and threatening, like a demonic entity. As with alleged messages from so many psychic communicators, his talk was packed full of nonsense, lies, riddles and contradictions, yet on occasion he also relayed strikingly accurate information, displaying apparent gifts of clairvoyance and telepathy.

Although the Irvings dwelt on a remote hillside, their story became an international press sensation. It attracted psychical researchers Harry Price and RS Lambert to the scene, along with many others, in the hope of encountering this extraordinary



LEFT: Gef makes the headlines in a 1936 newspaper.

symposium), but like so many material artefacts and fossils from anomaly research, they are scarcely convincing of anything, except perhaps a poorly executed hoax. But, in passing, it struck me that the case of Gef is in many ways better documented than certain classic patient studies from medical and psychiatric literature (including some of the iconic cases of Freudian psychoanalysis). Yet the whole idea of a talking mongoose, either as a physical creature or a spirit entity, seems patently absurd.

Nonetheless, the Irvings continued to insist Gef was real, and never once retracted their stories. So was it a case of simple fraud, a shared mental delusion, or a genuine paranormal episode?

Given how we had all gathered to discuss him, it could certainly be said that Gef existed on one level, as a potent symbol and an example of the power of the imagination.

AT OTHER TIMES GEF APPEARED SPITEFUL, MALICIOUS AND THREATENING, LIKE A DEMONIC ENTITY

marvel, seemingly lifted from a 17th century witch's confession of animal familiars. An extensive archive survives in Senate House Library, including correspondence, reports and what are claimed to be physical relics of Gef's existence.

Gef's utterances were meticulously logged by James Irving, who openly shared them with anyone expressing interest. This helps explain why so much archive material exists and how Price and Lambert could produce a whole book on the case. In their *The Haunting of Cashen's Gap* (1936), they dismissed Gef as "a voice and nothing else".

Unfortunately, virtually the only witnesses to Gef's speech and materialisations were the Irvings themselves. Whenever investigators and outsiders called, Gef was conspicuous by his absence; researchers experienced little more than whistles and other odd noises, and apparent stone-throwing. This suggested something strange was happening, but what?

Voirrey Irving eventually produced some dubious evidence in the form of blurry photographs and purported physical samples of hair and paw-prints (displayed at the

One symposium speaker choosing to explore Gef and the power of the mythic imagination was Robin Klarzynski. In a paper, 'Crossed Lines of the Dream Operators: a conversation concerning Gef, The Radiant Cat, and WS Burroughs' Third Mind', he postulated connections between Gef and the literary and artistic theories of the novelist William Burroughs, who was fascinated by the idea of cats as psychic familiars. Arguing that the talking mongoose story defied simple analysis, he suggested that all-or-nothing choices between Gef being exclusively either a psychic entity, a mental delusion or an out-and-out hoax were misguided, and that the boundaries between the inner world of the imagination and the external 'objective' world are far from fixed. Burroughs's idea of a 'third mind' involving another layer of reality that materialises as a result of an amalgam of two or more minds or cultural sources might thus provide an aid to understanding Gef. I was reminded of lines in Anton Chekhov's story of an apparition, *The Black Monk* (1894): "You can think as you like," said the monk, with a faint smile. 'I exist in your imagination, and your imagination is part of nature, so I exist in nature.'" Certainly, there is a underlying logic to the idea that whatever can be imagined takes on a meaningful reality; and within English law it is certainly recognised that "the state of a man's mind is as much a fact as the state of his digestion" (Lord Justice Bowen, in *Edgington v Fitzmaurice*, 1881-85, ER 856).

Klarzynski described experimenting with a collection of quotations ascribed to Gef and subjecting them to Burroughs's cut-up

technique of splicing texts, by submitting them to Google translation multiple times. Such an approach made me think of random divination techniques, but no definitive insights have yet been yielded by this unusual method.

Reports of peculiar animals appearing during poltergeist outbreaks were not unknown prior to Gef, an aspect raised in my own paper to the symposium; other cases have also featured talking spirits and even poltergeists called 'Jeffery' or 'Old Jeffrey'. The most famous of these was 'Jeffery' the Wesley family poltergeist which manifested at Epworth Rectory in the winter of 1716-17 and where a mysterious badger-like creature was also seen. However, as Harry Price remarked in *The Haunting of Cashen's Gap*, differences between Jeffery and Gef are much greater than the resemblances. In the famous 'Bell Witch of Tennessee' case in 1817 a black dog was reported; and the haunting of Willington Mill, Tyneside, in 1835 also featured a strange creature, whilst another black dog appeared in the Dagg Poltergeist outbreak in Canada in 1889. Frank Podmore, one of the few sceptical writers to undertake any lengthy critique of poltergeist cases, recorded a case in 1894 where noises and object movements surrounded a young girl named Annie. Podmore obtained testimony from a Miss MH Mason, a Local Government Board Inspector of Boarded-out Children, who reported that Annie was "examined by a doctor, who pronounced her of a markedly consumptive tendency, and apparently hysterical... Annie, during the earlier disturbances, saw a queer animal with a green head and green eyes, and a big bushy tail, sitting up and pulling her doll to pieces with its paws. Gertie, the younger girl, she added, saw the same apparition when Annie called to her."

I also considered the involvement of American researcher Nandor Fodor at Cashen's Gap. This occurred at a stage when Fodor was ceasing to believe in spirits, and increasingly adopting the notion that poltergeists were projections from the Freudian subconscious. Despite embracing Freud's theories, Fodor appeared blind to possible warning signs of an incestuous relationship taking place between Irving and his daughter, indications of which appeared in both contemporary accounts and in his own observations, some of which he published in 1953, by which time he was qualified as a full-blown Freudian analyst. Although seeing sexual symbolism and possible incest in other poltergeist cases, Fodor remained curiously attached to the idea of Gef being a real animal, a genuine freak of nature.



LEFT: A polt in the supermarket, in Nigel Kneale's Gef-inspired 'Special Offer'.

Modernity', Craig Wallace traced how the themes of witchcraft and poltergeists drifted through Kneale's writing over many decades. References to poltergeists and teenagers could be found in his short stories as early as 1949, and historic poltergeist hauntings and the appearances of imps and demons provided a framing device for the discovery of a Martian spaceship in his classic *Quatermass and the Pit* (1959). Most notably, supernatural and freakish animals featured in each of Kneale's plays that comprised the 1970s TV series *Beasts*. One episode in

particular, 'Special Offer', featured an animal poltergeist wreaking havoc in a supermarket; indeed, I recall seeing a prelude to its transmission by Anglia TV in October 1976, in which Kneale expressly mentioned the "nine-day wonder" of a talking mongoose on the Isle of Man "many years ago"; maybe this broadcast fragment survives somewhere?

Finally, the audience watched a special screening of the film of *Vanished!* – a dramatic re-telling of the Talking Mongoose story, introduced by the writers Brian Catling and Tony Grisoni. They detailed their extensive research behind the making of the film, and their attempts to contact Voirrey Irving. She refused to co-operate, but they did succeed in interviewing another elderly lady from the island who recalled a visit to Cashen's Gap and who suggested noises were being staged by Mrs Irving.

Vanished! is certainly an eerie piece of film making, beginning with the sound of the winds over the desolate hills, recorded at the site of the Irvings' home. Wisely, the film avoids showing Gef speak directly, but relays the details through the powerful conceit of summoning back the spirits of the Irvings to a séance at their old house, in order to tell their stories, each giving their individual version of events. Irving is keen to justify himself and declare the importance of Gef to the world, whilst the two women begrudge being summonsed back, and recall Gef with many regrets and negative feelings. Via their fictional treatment, Catling and Grisoni have – at least in art – restored some semblance of balance to the recital of the tale in letting the voices of the female characters in this weirdest of domestic dramas be heard.

Of course, short of summoning back the dead, we are never likely now to know the ultimate truth about Gef and the Irvings, but certainly interest in the talking mongoose and poltergeists in general is set to continue. Practically every week a new report of a poltergeist outbreak reaches the Society for Psychical Research from somewhere in the world – but will there ever be another Gef?

Further parallels between Gef and the 'Bell Witch' were drawn by Mark Bell (no relation) in his paper 'Gef: A Modern Sphinx as an Esoteric Lesson about Oneness' (read in his absence). Some marked similarities appear in the 'personalities' of both entities and in their pretentious and rambling speeches. But whereas the voice of the Bell Witch (which actually claimed to be four separate entities) was heard by numerous witnesses, only the Irvings heard Gef speak.

The question of an apparent clash between oral and literary cultures in the Irving household emerging from reactions to the utterances of Gef was explored in a fascinating paper by Dr Richard Espley 'Reading the Mongoose, and the Mongoose Reading'. In this he conducted a detailed analysis of the written sources, and suggests Gef manifested in a household that seemed rather hostile to books. This clash emerged when researchers such as Price and Lambert arrived from the mainland wanting to crystallise the claims and Gef's talk in writing. The two dominant speakers in the house at Doarlish Cashen were Gef and Irving, rather than his wife and Voirrey. Irving seems to have thrived on telling and re-telling the whole Gef story many times from the beginning. But what emerges from such re-tellings is not corroboration but rather the elevation of Irving in importance. In normal life, Irving was an unsuccessful commercial traveller and farmer, but after the arrival of Gef he became a minor celebrity, comparable to a court-holding figure from the bardic tradition, weaving fantastic sagas for his listeners and achieving status for himself via Gef. In reality, Price and Lambert seem to have found listening to Irving rather tedious, and their literary treatment of Gef diminished Irving's significance in the story. This paper raised an obvious question, was Gef simply a mouthpiece for Irving?

However, Gef's story, along with other Manx supernatural traditions, were a major influence upon science fiction and horror writer Nigel Kneale, born on the island in 1922. In his paper 'Gef on Television? Nigel Kneale's *Beasts* and the Desacralization of

HAUNTED ISLAND

A Venetian island has been sold at auction – but it comes complete with a history of hauntings and hellish horrors



ABOVE: The island of Poveglia, uninhabited for the last 46 years. BELOW: Beds remain in one of the dormitories in the psychiatric ward of the abandoned hospital.

The leasehold of a Venetian island was auctioned on 7 May to raise revenue for a cash-strapped Italy. Poveglia, an uninhabited island in the Venice lagoon minutes from St Mark's Square, is among five prime properties – including a 15th century castle in Gradisca d'Isonzo and a monastery in Taranto, Puglia – that went under the hammer in the on-line auction. The starting bid for Poveglia was £290,000. Information about bidders, the buyer and final sale price were not available at the time of going to press, and the winning bidder may wish to remain anonymous.

The 17-acre (7ha) island, upon which stand the ruins of a hospital, a church, and a crematorium, has attracted a reputation to rival any horror movie set. It was fought over by the Venetians and the Genoese in the 14th century, and still shows traces of being fortified, such as the octagonal battlement known as “the octagon”. The island later became a *lazaretto* (quarantine station) for ships arriving at Venice in the 18th century. After plague was discovered on two ships in 1793, the island was sealed off and used to house people with infectious diseases, leading to legends of terminally ill Venetians waiting to die before

“Nothing more than a cesspool of pure dread”

their ghosts returned to haunt the island. One account asserts that 100,000 plague victims, both

living and dead, were dumped on Poveglia to be buried, burnt or left to rot. Half the island's soil is said to be human ashes. The most famous spirit is a plague victim called Little Maria, who was separated from her parents during a plague outbreak and is said to stand crying, looking out across the lagoon to Malamocco, her home town. It was actually Venice that coined the word ‘quarantine’, which is derived from the duration travellers were obliged to stay at

a *lazaretto* before they could be issued with a clean bill of health and continue on their way – *quaranta giorni* (40 days).

A hospital for the elderly indigent, which opened in 1922 and operated until 1968, is rumoured to have carried out experiments on the mentally ill – including crude lobotomies, using hand drills, chisels and hammers – undertaken by a director who was allegedly driven mad by the ghosts of his victims before



MARCO SECCHI / GETTY IMAGES

A^Z ALIEN ZOO

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

jumping from the hospital's bell tower – or was he pushed by his enraged patients? The most fanciful version of the story relates that the unhinged psychiatrist survived the fall, but was “strangled by a mist that came up from the ground”. The bell tower is in fact the only remnant of a 12th century church, destroyed centuries ago.

A US television show, *Ghost Adventures*, labelled Poveglia “one of the world's darkest epicentres... nothing more than a cesspool of pure dread” after a 2009 episode in which one of its hosts claimed to have been possessed while clambering about at night in the ruins and hailing the spirits in bad Italian. The TV crew also experienced disembodied voices and footsteps, strange sounds and floating orbs – allegedly. Subsequently, Poveglia has been described as “the world's most haunted island”, “the island of madness”, and “like Hell, but in Italy”. It has been uninhabited for the last 46 years.

The Italian government was hoping for offers to transform the hospital into – or replace it with – a luxury hotel under a deal giving the buyer a 99-year lease, with Poveglia remaining the property of the state; but local Venetians clubbed together to bid for the island and prevent it falling into the hands of a property developer. An impromptu association, *Poveglia Per Tutti* (“Poveglia For All”), asked citizens to give 99 euros (£81) each to buy the island and create a park and allotment. The campaign was backed by the mayor of Venice, Giorgio Orsoni, and restaurant owner Andrea Barina, for whom the island was a childhood playground. “There was a wooden bridge from which we'd hold diving contests,” he recalled. “There'd be 30, 40 of us. And we'd go and steal the peaches from the trees, which were the best peaches in the whole region.” Were they ever spooked by the desolation of the island? “Absolutely not! It was our playground, our Disneyland.” *D.Telegraph*, 16+18 April; *India Today*, 17 April; *Guardian*, 23 April; *webpronews*, 8 May 2014.



THREE TIMES AS SNAPPY!

The alligator snapping turtle *Macrochelys temminckii* (pictured above) is North America's largest species of freshwater turtle, named both for the alligator-like rows of raised scales on its heavily armoured carapace and for its extremely formidable, ferocious bite. Native principally to the southeastern USA, it has long been thought to constitute just a single species – which in view of its extreme belligerence coupled with its notable size (it can weigh up to 200 lb/90kg) is more than enough in the opinion of many who have encountered it. They will not welcome some recent news: an extensive study of DNA and blood samples by researchers from Florida and Vermont University has revealed that the alligator snapping turtle is not one but three distinct species, which diverged at least three million years ago. However, the two newly delineated species have very restricted distributions. The Suwannee alligator snapping turtle is native to Florida and Georgia but is wholly confined to the Suwannee River (of Al Jolson fame), whereas the Apalachicola alligator snapping turtle inhabits Florida, Georgia, and Alabama, but is only found in and around the Apalachicola River. <http://phys.org/news/2014-04-alligator-snapping-turtle-dinosaur-world.html> 24 April 2014.

MONSTERS IN LAKE LABYNKYR

Since the 19th century, there have been rumours of huge aquatic monsters existing in Lake Labyntyk. This is a very remote, large body of freshwater up to 260ft (80m) deep in one section, and ensconced in far-eastern Russia's Yakutia (Sakha) Republic. In March 2014, a team of divers from the Russian Geographic Society and the Diving Sport Federation of Russia visited this lake with a three-fold aim – to take samples for scientific examination, to attempt the world's deepest under-ice dive, and to look out for the lake's fabled monsters. Happily, they accomplished their first two goals. As for finding any monsters: when she visited the lake back in 2009, Associate Professor of Biogeography Lyudmila Emel'yanova's echo-sounding equipment recorded a huge, homogeneous object in the water, below their boat but above the lake bottom, which she could not explain. Several similar readings were later recorded, convincing her that they were from more than one huge living object in the lake.

Conversely, the largest life forms that were

detected during the present visit – and photographed by team member Alexander Gubin – were fishes up to 4ft (1.2m) long that the team referred to as dogfishes. Yet whereas the term ‘dogfish’ is normally applied to various relatives of sharks, I was able to identify the fishes in Gubin's photos as something quite different: a cod-related freshwater species known as the burbot *Lota lota*. So perhaps ‘dogfish’ is a colloquial name used in Russia for the burbot? Carnivorous by nature, it is known to attain a total length of up to 4ft, but larger specimens might conceivably exist in this lake – whose icy conditions may induce exceptional growth in the same way that Antarctica's waters do with many fishes and invertebrates there. Undisturbed in their chilly seclusion, and largely untroubled by the threat of predation by other animals or persecution by humans, perhaps mega-burbots are the real monsters of Labyntyk.

<http://siberiantimes.com/other/others/features/meet-the-creature-found-by-divers-in-russias-loch-ness-famed-for-legends-of-monsters/> 21 April 2014.

DRIVEN QUACKERS BY WHALES

First detected about 50 years ago by submarines, a bizarre quacking sound nicknamed the bio-duck, which occurs during winter and spring each year in the Southern Ocean around Antarctica and Western Australia, has long perplexed oceanographic researchers. No one knew the origin of this repetitive, low frequency noise; proposed explanations included fish, ships, or some form of elusive, still-undiscovered sea beast.

Finally, however, the identity of the bio-duck's originator has been unmasked. It is the Antarctic or southern minke whale *Balaenoptera bonærens*, whose underwater chatter has been confirmed by acoustic recorders attached to two specimens in 2013 to be one and the same as the annual quacking sound. The team of researchers who made this discovery was led by Dr Denise Risch from the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Northeast Fisheries Science Center in Massachusetts, who announced that the sound is produced by the whales while close to the ocean surface, just prior to undergoing deep dives to feed. However, the precise reason why they make it is presently still unknown. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-27117669> 23 April 2014.

MYSTERY RINGS

Fireworks may account for some of these aerial phenomena, but military planes and Mount Etna are also implicated...



ABOVE: The mysterious black ring over Warwickshire. TOP RIGHT: Georgina Heap filmed the ring on her phone. ABOVE RIGHT: The Florida ring created during firework testing.

Georgina Heap, 16, was playing tennis with her mother Jo, 38, near Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, on 11 April when she was stunned by a mysterious black ring in the sky, which she filmed on her smartphone. The ring – which appeared to be close to Warwick Castle – remained in the sky for around three minutes before vanishing. It was also photographed above Warwick School's Bridge House Theatre around the same time by Nikki Child.

The Met Office denied it was a strange weather phenomenon. There was nothing unusual happening in the area that day, said a Met Office spokeswoman, who added that it was very rare that a cloud circle “that perfect” would remain for three minutes

without being blown away at that height. Some insects do gather in groups like this at certain times of year, and the fuzziness of the black outline almost looks like insects leaving and joining the circle. “They may be mating in that aggregation,” said an entomologist, but he added: “Usually mating is not done as high [or] in ring formation”. If not insects, then maybe birds? A strange black cloud over Leamington last year turned out to be a flock of starlings. Birds are known to fly in tight formations, so could this ring also have been starlings? The answer is no, says an RSPB advisor: “Starlings and waders can form fluid shapes. But they won’t form a shape like this.”

The most persuasive

explanation came on 15 April when a statement from Warwick Castle confirmed that fireworks had been tested. A castle spokesman said they had been trying out “fire effects” to go with the daily firing of the Trebuchet Fireball – the world’s largest catapult. “We’ve seen a number of different effects, including the vortex images that have been reported,” the spokesman said. “As yet we don’t know what causes the phenomenon but it’s certainly a spooky spectacle.” This explanation is supported by a similar event in Pinellas County, Florida, last October, when the same type of ring was created by a fireball of petrol and diesel fuel fired from a huge mortar during the testing of a fireworks display.

Strange circular clouds have been reported before, of course. In September 1814, a small white spherical cloud appeared in the sky near Agen, Aquitaine, southwestern France. It floated for a while before spinning and racing off to the south. On 22 March 1870, a ship off the west coast of Africa reported a light grey circular cloud. “It was much lower than the other clouds,” reported the captain. “It came up obliquely against the wind, and finally settled down right in the wind’s eye.” The cloud was visible to the ship’s crew for half an hour before they lost sight of it.

On 25 September 1986, a bright circular cloud was seen near Sedbergh, Cumbria, in an almost clear sky and moved slowly. At about the same

175. BACK TO SQUARE ONE



HUNT EMERSON

The myth

The phrase “Back to square one” – meaning having to start something over again, having lost all ground previously gained – was born in the early days of radio, when football commentators invited listeners to follow the action by means of a printed grid.

The “truth”

Pioneering BBC producer Lance Sieveking (father of *FT*'s own Paul Sieveking) was in charge of the first live radio commentaries on sporting events, beginning with a rugby match in January 1927. Required to invent a new kind of broadcasting from scratch, Sieveking came up with various wheezes to overcome the central problem – that the listeners could not see the action – including hiring a blind rugby fan to sit near the commentator, to act as a kind of test audience. He also persuaded *Radio Times* magazine to print diagrams in which soccer pitches were divided into eight numbered rectangles. While the commentator described the play, another man would call out the number of the square in which it was occurring. Many sources still give this as the origin of the phrase, but without evidence. Kick-offs and restarts took place nowhere near square one, which was next to one of the goals. A pass back to the keeper might equally take the ball to squares one, two, seven, or eight. The grids fell out of use in the 1930s, but the first written record of the phrase so far unearthed is dated 1952 – and that refers explicitly to the board game, snakes and ladders.

Sources

Airborne ed. Paul Sieveking (Strange Attractor Press, 2013); www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/back%20to%20square%20one.html; www.worldwidewords.org/qa/qa-bac1.htm

Disclaimer

“No-one currently knows” is the only accurate answer to the question “Where does this phrase come from?” If, as most experts believe, it's from either snakes and ladders or hopscotch, why doesn't it appear in print until so very late?

Mythchaser

We all know that the first rule of rock-climbing is “Don't look down”. But, outside of fiction, is it?



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ABOVE: Smoke rings belched out by Mount Etna in Nov 2013 and Feb 2014.

time, another circular cloud appeared west of Durham. Both reports were published with photographs in the Royal Meteorological Society's journal *Weather* (Dec 1987). A possible third ring was also seen near Darlington, Co Durham, and published in the *Northern Echo*. One explanation given was that there was only one circular cloud high above, seen at distance from the three locations. A clue to the origins of the cloud may have been military flights earlier in the day. An aircraft passing in a wide circle through a layer of cloud could have left a trail of ice crystals from its engine exhausts. The rest of the cloud was destabilised and evaporated, leaving behind a shiny ring of ice crystals. *BBC News*, *Times*, 15

April; *Leamington Observer*, 17 April; *Leamington Spa Courier*, 18 April; *Times*, 21 April 2014.

- Some smoke rings are emitted by volcanoes. Above is one puffed out by Mount Etna last year. The volcano fired perfect rings of steam and gas, measuring 100m (330ft) across, days before she erupted for the 16th time in 2013. Geologist Tom Pfeiffer, who runs tours up the Sicilian landmark, captured the rare sight on film, released on 18 November, and said it was a sign Etna was about to blow her top. The rings are coming from a crater that erupted 40 times since it was first formed in 2011 – indicating that Etna's vent geology is changing. *Metro*, 19 Nov 2013; *D.Mail*, 26 Feb 2014.

CATER'S NEWS AGENCY

TOM PFEIFFER / BARCROFT MEDIA



FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

Fake officials, earth-eaters, acquired savant syndrome, bird deaths and a tailed boy

BOGUS SOCIAL WORKERS [FT281:11]



The mystifying and faintly alarming bogeyman (or more commonly bogeywoman) known as the Bogus Social Worker (BSW)

has popped up again, along with the traditionally ludicrous police photofit. There was a wave of BSW sightings in 2000–2003, then a lull before resuming in 2010; FT's last report was in May 2011. As far as the Gang of Fort knows, no BSW has ever been apprehended.

At 2pm on 23 April 2014, a BSW visited a mother in Deerhurst Place in Quedgeley, Gloucestershire, and told her there were concerns for the welfare of her four-month-old son. She asked to carry out checks and listened to the boy's heartbeat with a stethoscope. The woman, who claimed to work for Gloucestershire social services, was carrying a false ID badge and a black zip-up folder. She was white with "slightly tanned skin", in her late 20s or early 30s, between 5ft 6in and 5ft 7in (1.68–1.70m) tall, with dark shoulder-length bobbed hair. She had freckles on the left side of her face and wore a black trouser suit with a cream V-neck blouse with frills at the front.

Detective Inspector Andy Dangerfield of Gloucestershire police said: "We have visited houses in the area to warn local people and would urge everyone to be vigilant." Anyone with useful information should call Gloucester



Police, quoting "Incident 256 of April 23". [PA] *theguardian.com*, 25 April; *Gloucester Citizen*, 26 April 2014. For a selection of further creepy BSW photofits, see **FT270:10–11**.

PICA BOO! [FT288:10–11]



Pakkirappa Hunagundi, 30, from Karnataka in south-west India, is addicted to eating bricks, gravel and mud, and can happily

chomp his way through 7lb (3kg) of rubble a day. He describes it as being better than "divine nectar" and says it is best served with a glass of water. He has been eating bricks and rocks for 20 years and prefers the taste to his mother's fried chicken. "It feels like a necessity to me," he said. "I can skip meals, but not bricks or mud. I have suffered no side-effects. My teeth are absolutely fine. I can bite into the hardest stone without a problem." His mother would try to dissuade him from eating away parts of the family house. A friend said: "When he comes to our field, he goes around eating mud. He relishes hot charcoal too like a snack."

The labourer's offbeat appetites have drawn people to his village to watch him eat, and he hopes to showcase his talent across India in an attempt to make ends meet. His unusual cravings are thought to be caused by a condition called pica, characterised by an appetite for substances without nutritional value. *Metro*, *MX News (Sydney)*, 3 April 2014. For other examples of pica, see **FT218:14–15**.

HITTING HIDDEN TALENTS [FT314:11]



Jason Padgett was a party-loving 31-year-old American college dropout who made his living working in his father's furniture shop when he was mugged in a karaoke bar near his home in Tacoma, Washington, in 2002. He was hit on the back of



ABOVE: Pakkirappa Hunagundi claims a tasty brick is "better than divine nectar".

the head and briefly knocked out, but was released from hospital the same day, unaware that he had suffered a profound brain injury. The next day he woke up and found that his vision had changed to include details he had never spotted before. Turning on the bathroom tap, he noticed "lines emanating out perpendicularly from the flow. It was so beautiful that I just stood in my slippers and stared," he said. Suddenly he could see fractals in everyday objects. He described his vision as "discrete picture frames with a line connecting them, but still at real speed. Everything has a pixilated look." If you think of vision as the brain taking pictures all the time and smoothing them into a video, it's as if Padgett sees the frames without smoothing. This led to an obsession with maths and physics; what's more, he was able to create the fractals by hand in extreme detail, despite having no previous artistic talent. Some took him months to create. Padgett dislikes the concept of infinity, because he sees every shape as a finite construction of smaller and smaller units that approach what physicists refer to as the Planck length, thought to be the smallest measurable length.

At first he was frightened by his new ability, which was accompanied by severe post-traumatic stress disorder. He stopped going to work and spent all his time at home, refusing visitors.

He became obsessed with germs and would wash his hands until they were red, and wouldn't even hug his own daughter until she had washed her hands as well. However, after seeing a documentary on savantism he contacted expert Dr Darold Treffert, who diagnosed him with the rare condition of "acquired savant syndrome". Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) and transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS) showed that the left side of Padgett's brain was more activated than the right, especially in the area used for mathematics. It seems that after his injury, neurotransmitters flooded the left side of his brain and changed its structure, making him hyper-specialised. Synaesthesia allows him to perceive mathematical formulæ as geometric figures. He has returned to college to study number theory and has written a book with Maureen Seaberg, *Struck By Genius* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014). "I believe I am living proof that these powers lie dormant in all of us," he writes. "If it could happen to me, it could happen to anyone." For another exceptional mathematical talent acquired after a bang on the head, see **FT292:8**.

There are some dramatic examples of acquired savant syndrome: after a head injury as a toddler, Alonso Clemons of Boulder, Colorado, now in his 50s, discovered an ability to sculpt animals to a remarkable lifelike

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degree just using his hands and fingernails. Orlando Serrell could tell the day of the week of any given date after being struck by a baseball at the age of 10 in 1979. Anthony Cioria, a 62-year-old orthopaedic surgeon from Oneonta, New York, could play the piano to concert standard following a lightning strike in 1994. *D.Mail*, 22 April; *D.Telegraph*, 23 April; *huffingtonpost.com*, 6 May 2014.

NOTE: Googling his name brings up some of Jason Padgett's amazing drawings

STARLINGS FALLING DEAD [FT261:4]



On 9 March, 30 starlings fell dead on a road in the village of Farnworth, near Bolton, Greater Manchester. One witness reported hearing a loud bang just

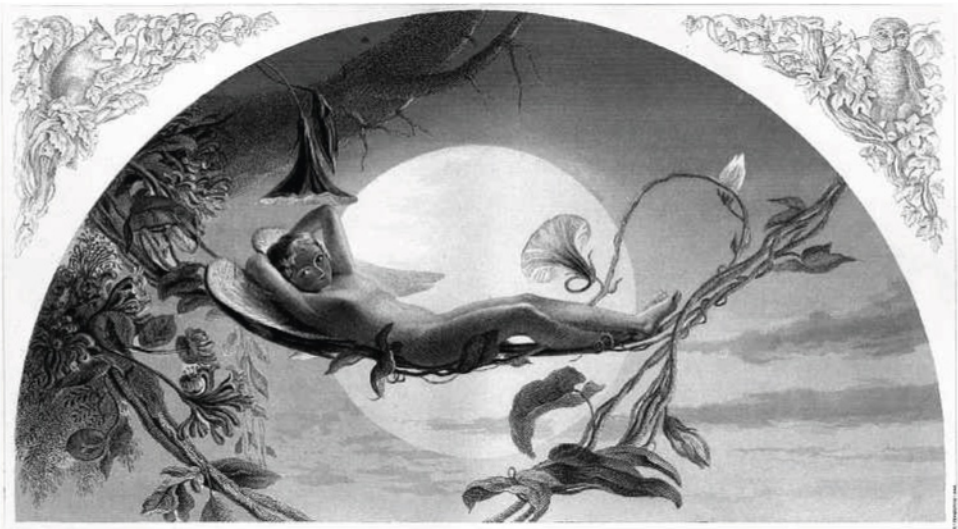
before the birds fell. Motorist Craig Clarkson was one of the first to come across the grisly scene. He said up to 100 birds fell to earth, but 70 of those flew off minutes later, leaving 30 corpses behind. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds said the starlings – which usually travel in a tight formation – might have flown into a lorry after becoming dazed. How they might have become “dazed” is not explained. Another suggestion was that the birds were caught in a trail of toxic air, but the RSPB said that was less likely. The last time *FT* noted such an occurrence – at Coxley in Somerset on 7 March 2010, with more than 100 dead starlings – a spokeswoman for the RSPB said: “We’ve certainly never come across anything similar.” *Metro*, 13 Mar 2014.

MAN AND HANUMAN [FT313:8]



A six-year-old boy is being worshipped in Nijmapur, a small village in Uttar Pradesh, India, after growing a 1ft (30cm) ‘tail’. Amar Singh, the youngest

of five siblings, has a patch of thick hair on the small of his back, which has grown to resemble a tail. His relatives and neighbours believe he is connected to the Hindu monkey god, Hanuman. His hairy tail was about an inch (2.5cm) long at birth and grew over the years. Medical science states it is caused by the birth defect spina bifida. *MX News (Sydney)*, 16 April 2014.



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

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

THE WOOL ROLLER

Over the years, many folklorists have attempted to get to grips with the study of the paranormal. In some periods the folklore establishment has been suspicious of those talking ABCs and ESP (and often with justification) – but contemporary folklorists are more open to the inexplicable and the downright strange.

For example, the webpage of *Folklore* (the world’s leading folklore journal) announces that it will welcome articles on “Folklore and Forteana (including visions; anomalous happenings; big cat sightings etc),” something that would have been unimaginable as recently as the 1980s. This approach has its risks, of course, but in some areas it offers dividends, or at least solace.

A possible instance of this is a British and Irish bogie that has recently come to my attention: the wool roller. The ‘wool roller’ (my name) has three features: he (she? it?) appears as a ball of wool; this ball rolls along; and it often appears after dark. So an early 19th-century Yorkshire poet describes something “like a sheet of wool, [that] come rolling close behind [night walkers]”. WB Yeats, at the end of the same century, describes, for Ireland, an entity that “takes the form of a fleece of wool, and at night rolls out into the surrounding fields, making a buzzing noise”. A report from early 20th-century Oxfordshire notes how George Andrews saw “a wool-pack, which went rolling over and over along the fields”

before diving into a fish pond; while the Dorset dialect poet William Barnes reported that he had, as a young man, seen “a fleece of wool... which rolled along mysteriously by itself till it got under the legs of his horse,” which was left permanently lame. What is fascinating is that the wool roller is unknown to science and

to folklore. Locals do not speak of ‘the wool roller’ (again my term): the Yorkshire poet called it a ‘boggart’, Yeats a ‘pooka’, Barnes a ‘ghost’... That would suggest that we are dealing with something that really *did* look like a rolling ball of fuzz and was then reduced to local folklore terms by bewildered witnesses.

As to how to explain the wool roller... ball lightning springs

to mind; and ball lightning is always a useful last resort for the desperate (certainly I’ve used it in my writing). But what about a report from the south west, around 1930, where a pisky becomes “a long, furry black roll, which gambolled about on the grass and then disappeared”? Or another account, perhaps a decade later, from Kent, when, in the middle of a picnic, a Mrs Mayo saw “a little brown, fluffy ball, about the size of a tennis-ball” rolling up a bank towards her. “When it reached her left side... it popped open, affording her a very brief glimpse of a gnome or pixie within”, before vanishing, as she tried to show it to a friend. Even ball lightning doesn’t seem to be a good fit for the shape-shifting pisky, let alone for Mrs Mayo’s brush with the bizarre.

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

“[IT] TAKES THE FORM OF A FLEECE OF WOOL AND ROLLS OUT INTO THE SURROUNDING FIELDS, MAKING A BUZZING NOISE”



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RENDLESHAM REBOOTED (AGAIN)

Former Ministry of Defence desk jockey Nick Pope has long wanted to write a definitive account of the British UFO legend that overshadows all others. Previous attempts by our own Jenny Randles and then Georgina Bruni to write definitive accounts of the 'unexplained lights' seen in the woods outside RAF Woodbridge, Suffolk, in December 1980, floundered due to the ever-changing testimony of the cast of American airmen witnesses. But in the 14 years that have elapsed since the release of Bruni's oddly-titled book *You Can't Tell the People*, the British government have released all their surviving files, with no 'smoking gun' (**FT238:28-29; 274:28**). Meanwhile the three key players – James Penniston, John Burroughs and Charles Halt – have become permanent fixtures on the UFO lecture circuit. But the more they re-tell their versions of the stories, the more elaborate and contradictory these have become. After falling out with Halt, Penniston and Burroughs decided to confide in Pope because of his MoD links. But a preview of their new book *Encounter in Rendlesham Forest* by the *Daily Mail's* Tony Rennell reveals that it fails to provide any new breakthroughs. Pope's attempt to reboot the franchise resurrects the same flawed 'evidence', including claims the UFOs damaged trees, left 'higher than usual radiation levels' in the forest and were tracked by radar (for a summary see **FT204:37-38**).

The only real change – Jim Penniston's decision to 'come out' as a contactee – is left to the end of the book, but the creatures who download messages via binary code into his head are not from Venus or Zeta Reticuli. In Jim's own words: "They are time travellers – they are us". Even Pope doesn't know what to make of the resultant New Age nonsense, admitting he has "no answers".

Where Britain's Roswell goes next is anyone's guess, but this is far from the definitive answer promised.

Daily Mail, 19 Apr 2014;

Encounter in Rendlesham Forest, by Nick Pope with John Burroughs and Jim Penniston was published by Thistle on 27 April. A review will appear in a future issue of *FT*.

LEFT: Nick Pope



ABOVE: A deer has an apparent close encounter and the striking 'UFO' spotted on a webcam in Guernsey.

CLINTON: NO SPACE INVADERS

On 3 April the former president of the USA, Bill Clinton, appeared on the *Jimmy Kimmel Live* show where he confirmed that during his tenure at the White House he enquired of his aides just what was known about UFOs. Their answer was that there was no evidence of ET visits. But Clinton refused to dismiss the idea, saying: "If we were visited someday I wouldn't be surprised." Following the release of the film *Independence Day* in 1996, Clinton took an interest in Nevada's Area 51 and wanted to know whether that secret facility housed UFOs, as modern legend had it: "I had people go look at the records on Area 51 to make sure there was no alien down there". And in anticipation of the anniversary of the 1947 Roswell event he said he knew there would be increased public interest: "...so I had all the Roswell papers reviewed, everything." But nothing was found. Aping the remark made by Ronald Reagan at the UN General Assembly in 1987, Clinton said the arrival of aliens might be "the only way to unite us in this incredibly divided" world. "If they're out there, we better think of how all the differences among people on Earth would seem small if we felt threatened by a space invader." Possibly, but it's equally likely that, as Stephen Hawking has warned, an alien race might see us as an inferior species and either wipe us out or just farm us for the tasty bits! We're sure that Kimmel missed a joke here about cigar-shaped craft and Monica Lewinsky, but we'll let you work that one out for yourselves. www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/bill-clinton-asked-aides-ufos-article-1.1745121#ixzz2zhWg0smI

SEEING SAUCERS EVERYWHERE

The phenomenon of *pareidolia* is familiar to many forteans. People have always seen faces in the Moon, or religious images in

vegetables and even burnt toast. Miraculous signs and wonders have been 'seen' in random patterns not only in photographs taken on Earth but on Mars and elsewhere (see Ted Harrison's summary in **FT297:54-55**). But where we once saw the wings of angels in photographs, people now perceive UFOs and aliens. Early one morning in March 2014, Denise Poole was gazing at a webcam of Elizabeth College on the island of Guernsey in the English Channel, when she saw what looked like a saucer-shaped object moving across the screen. The 'saucer' even appears to project an orange beam of light towards the ground. But a still published in the *Guernsey Press* reveals the 'UFO' is a lens flare caused by sunlight reflecting from the college building. Afterwards, a reader posted a series of similar images on the paper's Facebook site. These showed the 'UFO' appears frequently and is clearly an optical effect. But the desire to join-the-dots and 'see' UFO-like images in natural phenomena underlines how far the alien myth has penetrated the human mind. In April, the *Daily Mail* reported how two mysterious lights captured on an infrared camera had led to speculation about alien visits to a remote area on the border between Mississippi and Alabama. The bright lights can be seen floating eerily above the head of a deer captured by a wildlife trail camera on land belonging to Edith and Rainer Shattles, in Jackson County. The globes hover above the animals for 30 minutes before 'flying off'. But when the manufacturers of the motion-activated camera examined the footage they identified the 'lights' as reflections from the eyes of the deer: "The big clue is that the UFO is lined up symmetrically over the deer, where the eyes would be," company director Bart Stephens told NBC news. "It helps when you look at thousands of these things". *Guernsey Press*, 24 Mar; *Daily Mail Online*, 10 Apr 2014; <http://tinyurl.com/lmy7ecl>

DENISE POOLE / SWNS.COM

NICK POPE

REALITY BLINKS

A few years ago we had a cat. One day, I looked up, sure that I had just seen a spider on the wall next to me, and our cat was also staring intently at the same spot on the wall. Going to check the spider I discovered that it was just a black mark that must have been on the wall for ages.

Why were we both attracted towards something that we misidentified at the same moment – something that must have not changed in days or weeks – unless, of course, that spot really had *just* ‘emerged’ into our perception of reality?

This idea sounds absurd. After all, we see what is out there to be seen and, yes, some things move and change and might attract the attention of a person or a cat whilst doing so: but dirt marks on a wall are not among them. These just appear and stay there until you get the urge to wipe them away. You might notice them by chance after a while. But the chance that you *and* your cat would both do so at the same moment seems remote.

So I started to collect instances of what I call ‘Reality Blinks’ – moments in which it’s as if the very fabric of the real world blinks and changes in ways so imperceptible that we might often miss them. Writer Somerset Maugham described such an experience. On 20 April 1958 he was looking right at a painting when the head moved position and then stuck firm in that new pose. Reality, for him, had blinked – but nobody else seemed aware of any change. Maugham noted that if hauled up in front of a court then he would swear that he had seen the head move. But if asked whether it *really* had moved then, of course, he would have to reply “Certainly not!”

Another case came to me from my old colleagues Peter Warrington and his wife Rosalind, who both worked in scientific fields. They told me how, when touring western Scotland, they had stood in a car park at the Kyle of Lochalsh, eating fish and chips, when they turned to one another in amazement saying: “Did you just see that?” A car, parked unattended amidst others, had moved sideways – not by a great distance, but enough to be obvious. As Peter put it: “We sort of paused mid-chip and shrugged. Whilst we both saw it, cars don’t, of course, move sideways. So it was a case of. ‘Oh’, and on to the next chip.” There was no obvious cause for this event to have occurred, such as an earthquake, and, again, nobody else noticed the anomaly.

You might, quite reasonably, be wondering what all of this has got to do with UFOs. Potentially, a lot: because UFO sightings are pretty big ‘reality blinks’ where someone sees something that defies all logic. Indeed, the close encounter experience is characterised by a localised version of reality where those outside the focus appear to see the world go by unaltered.

One particularly extraordinary case from the Medway estuary in Kent involved a woman going to the local shops when she spotted a UFO. It had a Perspex dome on the front and two beings inside with long hair, olive skin



and blue eyes. They seemed upset that her presence had disturbed their activities. Just like Peter and Rosalind with their chips, this housewife shrugged and walked by; she went to the shop, discussed a wedding with the shopkeeper and forgot all about her close encounter! It had happened, but it could not have happened: the paradox that faces UFO witnesses and reality blinkers alike.

A few weeks later, the witness recalled the whole thing, like a dream returning into your conscious mind long after you have forgotten it. Reporting the matter to me, she was very confused, as the area around where her close encounter had taken place had now physically changed. A tree had moved, a bungalow shifted sideways – everything was subtly, yet obviously, different from how it had been at the moment that her encounter took place. Yet nobody else in the neighbourhood had any perception that this location had altered.

These cases appear to establish that reality blinks occur; hopefully *FT* readers will let us know of any examples that they have had. However, labelling a phenomenon does not determine whether it is some kind of perceptual illusion or a more profound insight into the nature of reality. In other words, does our experience of reality adapt because of psychological factors or does reality – literally – have a tendency to morph through hidden laws of physics?

In June 2013, the neuroscience unit at the Karolinska Institute in Sweden published an interesting study in *Current Biology* offering possible clues. They conducted a series of experiments under the guidance of doctoral researcher Christopher Berger that revealed how participants’ perception of reality could be altered, dependent upon stimuli applied to various senses. In one test, two passing objects crossing participants’ field of view did not collide – and that is how people reported the experience. If, however, a sound was added as the objects passed, then the

perception of the event changed in the minds of most participants. Now, they perceived it as an actual collision rather than a near miss.

Further tests added even more pointers. For instance, it proved possible to design an experiment where you could alter the words of what participants heard someone say just by either adding or not adding a sound into the background.

This implies that the psychology of perception of what is real can be fluid and is determined by a host of conscious and unconscious factors combined. Is this how reality blinks come into being? Or close encounters?

On the other hand, quantum physics has the famous ‘double slit’ experiment, revealing how elements of actual reality seem to switch from one form to another – in this case light being recorded as either particles or as waves – depending on how you measure the experiment. You can even decide after the event how to measure and appear to choose which version of reality emerges (or, perplexingly, *has already emerged*).

Appear, of course, is the key word here. Scientists are still debating how quantum physics works – whether consciousness or the process of observation of an experiment somehow acts as the catalyst that crystallises one version of reality or another, or if that is a misleading over-simplification of these experiments, as most physicists contend.

Either way, reality, to some extent, is not fixed or observed in the same way by one and all. Reality blinks might have a basis in the yet-to-be-unravelling matrix that underpins quantum physics.

Reality is a consequence of a complex mesh of atoms, senses, consciousness and perception and, I suspect, much of what we think of as fortan in nature somehow depends upon this. Synchronicity, for example, seems to be nature’s way of poking us in the ribs to edge us down the correct path.

I wrote this piece on 1 April 2014 after checking out ‘Physics Forum’ for their take on the debate. I was intrigued to find that Peter and Rosalind’s fish and chips case had been debated. There were some interesting ideas about what might have caused it, such as someone walking unnoticed past the parked car carrying a sheet of glass that ‘bent’ the image of the vehicle. Another discussion considered the option of a *folie à deux*, where one person hallucinated the motion and over time unconsciously persuaded the other that they did so, too.

I doubt both explanations. But while I was doing all this, the quiz show *Countdown* was on TV in the background and offered an anagram to guess. This was “Pure Fish” and the clue was “not pure fish but codswallop”. I had no idea what the answer was, but it turned out to be the Australian word “Furphies” – which means an improbable story that seems absurd and about which the truth is not certain. It was as if the Universe was playing its very own April Fool’s joke on this article.

BLASTS FROM THE PAST

FORTEAN TIMES BRINGS YOU THE NEWS THAT TIME FORGOT

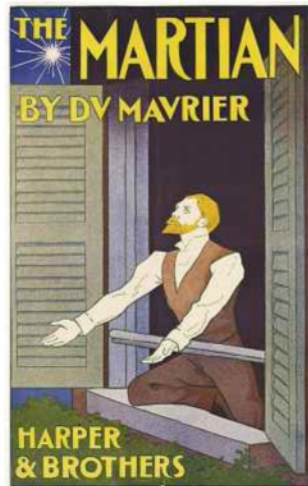
51 FROM PADDINGTON TO THE PLANET MARS

THEO PAIJMANS reveals the truth about life on the Red Planet - complete with vintage Martian photos!

In 1897, WT Stead (below), editor of the spiritualist periodical *Borderland*, mused in its October issue, in an article entitled 'News From Mars', on the immense interest concerning the inhabitants of that planet. Mars, as we would say these days, was trending.

Stead mentioned the enormous success of Du Maurier's *The Martian* (right), a novel he believed to be almost as great as that other work on the subject, HG Wells's famous *War of the Worlds*, at that time not yet published in book form but serialised in *Pearson's Magazine*. Elsewhere, too, Stead noted the upsurge in interest: "A still stranger list of monsters is given in the list of spirits of Mars in books dealing with Crystal Gazing. Old Moore's Almanac... predicts that a strange revelation concerning the life on the planet Mars is due next month..." And, as Stead noted, from as far away as Queensland, Australia, came the story of Mrs Burbank, an Australian psychic, whose invisible friends detailed to her the fauna of Mars, including winged horses.¹ Mrs Burbank painted a grim picture of the Planet of War. Having visited the planet in astral form in a single night, she was dismayed to find the Martians in a state of constant warfare with each other: "Its inhabitants have been decimated by an internecine struggle ever since 1891. The contending hosts, she reports, have given up burying their dead; the combatants lie where they have fallen, their bodies frozen by intense cold, or blown about as desert dust by icy winds. The cause of war is not reported... As to the canals, they are earthworks..."²

Two years after Stead's article, Theodore Flournoy's seminal *Des Indes à la Planète Mars* was published, in which he had recorded the trance-channelling of the medium Hélène Smith, who not only had visions of the planet Mars and its inhabitants,



but also auditory hallucinations, claiming to hear messages in the Martian language. An English translation of the book followed in 1900. Mars and its inhabitants had already been the subject of a number of novels, such as Percy Greg's *Across the Zodiac* (1880), and Kurt Lasswitz's *Auf Zwei Planeten* (1897). The 19th century had seen hundreds of proto-science fiction books, interplanetary romances and purported factual accounts of astral travel to other planets.³

But it was from Paddington, London, that the most startling revelations came. As Stead explained, everything else was thrown into the shade by the extraordinarily detailed narrative of life on the planet Mars relayed to him by a Mr Starling, who in turn had got the information from a trance medium in London. The multitude of other accounts of astral travel to Mars and the other planets in and before Stead's time tends, in hindsight, to diminish the uniqueness of the narrative, something even Stead admits.

And while there had already been many imaginative illustrations of what Martians or other extraterrestrial beings might look like, these revelations had something that the others had not: purportedly authentic photos of two Martian kings, arguably the first ever photos claiming to depict extraterrestrial beings.

Stead remained sceptical, though: "The fact that such communications have been received cannot even be doubted by the greatest sceptic, but when we ask as to the truth of their origin, we are confronted only by a blank wall. In publishing extracts from the voluminous Ms. with which Mr. Starling has favoured me, and illustrating it with the extraordinary photographs which he claims to have procured of two ancient monarchs of Mars, I need hardly say that I do it with all reserve."⁴

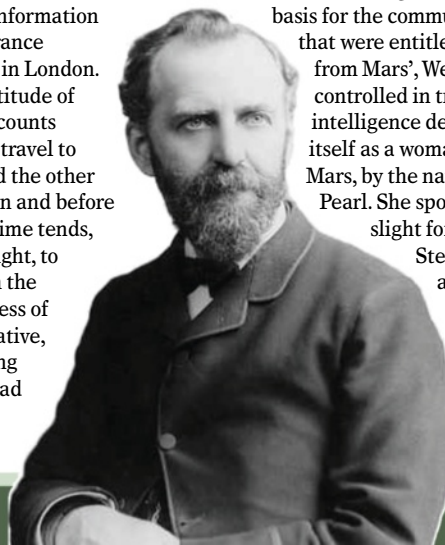
Starling got his information from a medium, a Mr West, of Shirland Road, Paddington, writes Stead: "Mr West is not a professional medium, but for the last 18 years he has been well-known as a Spiritualist in Paddington, and as a clairvoyant and Trance Medium. He is a clerk in a contractor's office; very abstemious, never drinks, never smokes, and is naturally devout, meditative, and unimaginative. He spends most of his spare time in practising music and photography." In a series of sittings that formed the basis for the communications that were entitled 'News from Mars', West was controlled in trance by an intelligence describing itself as a woman living on Mars, by the name of Silver Pearl. She spoke with a slight foreign accent,

Stead writes, and she gave many details concerning herself and her previous

existences since, as Silver Pearl explained, she had lived in many spheres and had sojourned in many material worlds before. "Nor did she confine her communications to information about Mars, but gossiped pleasantly and glibly concerning Saturn and Jupiter. But concerning her communications as to these other planets I say nothing", Stead writes.⁵

Starling had also provided Stead with a snippet of Martian language, consisting of a fragment of Silver Pearl's poem to the Sun, of which Stead published a quatrain: "Granquilana qui resocrath, Blei Suon oclas mi cry, Plan sath onam mion icee, O fras, mo kalonath." Silver Pearl also managed to secure the photographs of the two Martian monarchs. Starling explained that these images were not of flesh and blood persons taken before a camera in the usual manner. "They are photographs of portraits made by the spirits of the Martian spheres with the assistance of some spirits in the earth sphere." Stead mentions more images as well: "There were other photographs representing Silver Pearl's child, and a young lady companion to herself at a time when they were 14 years of age, but as they in no way differ from those of any two children that might be found in London today I do not reproduce them."⁶

According to Silver Pearl – or should we say Mr West? – Mars was much like our own planet but, not surprisingly, far more civilised, with its inhabitants having foresworn war, practising vegetarianism and living to the ripe old age of 150 years. Stead says that the manuscript he obtained was so voluminous that "if it were printed in full it would leave but little room for



TOP: George Du Maurier's *The Martian*, one of a number of proto-SF novels about the Red Planet. LEFT: Editor WT Stead.

anything else in this number”, so he selected a few items to give an impression of what Mars was like according to Silver Pearl.

Briefly, the planet had two satellites, one whose orbit was so fast that it created a stormy zone on Mars. “No one lives in this zone, and those who approach its borders take special precaution to avoid being swept away. Mars with its inner satellite forms a huge dynamo which charges its atmosphere with electricity, so densely as to give the planet when seen from outside its peculiar red colour. To the Martians the atmosphere is not red, but bright blue.” Mars had several volcanoes, one of which sputtered into activity from time to time, and two principal rivers. The Martians did not eat meat, but used mammoths as beasts of burden. There were horses too, “like our cobs”, but they were of a slate-violet colour. Cattle on Mars were small, with a single horn. The animals were killed only for their hides and “for the sake of gelatine”. “Flashes of electricity” consumed the carcasses of the animals. Very little bread was eaten, which was made of a grain like wheat, grown in rows like peas. The art of rainmaking was widely practised and, not surprisingly, the Martians were involved in “something resembling our Spiritualism” since “Spiritualism of the universe is the religion, and has been so for the last 2,000 years”. Clairvoyance is a natural ability of the Martians, and they have learned to fly, “although not for very long distances. They also glide over water as if it were dry land”.

Contrary to Mrs Burbank’s visions, West’s Mars was without war. Its governmental regime was a theocracy, and here West offers a brief glimpse of an intergalactic empire: “The planets are divided into 12 states, each ruled by a leader, who in return receives instructions from the angelic world. No Martian owns any personal property, nor is there any money in circulation... Cities and towns are known as families and brotherhoods... They have factories and manufactories, of which the motors are driven by the tides, of which there are very many more than on our planet.”

Everything on Mars was done by means of electricity, and Silver Pearl pointed out that “all Mr Edison’s discoveries are the result of impressions communicated to his brain



“Nor did Silver Pearl confine her communications to information about Mars, but gossiped pleasantly and glibly concerning Saturn and Jupiter”

by emissaries from Mars.” Pictures, she further told, are “telegraphed, colours and all, but it is rather tantalising to be told that the secret of the process could be divulged in a few words”, but Stead laments that “the communicating intelligence did not voluntarily say how it is to be done” and Starling did not ask. “They also said that some kind of stuff – a delightfully loose term – now thrown away, could, if treated electrically, be converted into a valuable building material”. Again, Starling did not press the matter. Fins propel ships on Mars. They have no masts and when a storm arises, these ships simply dive underwater.

Silver Pearl further states that all life, whether animal or human, is geared for extinction, both on Mars and on Earth. However, when that day occurs and the human race is extinct in its physical form, “it will continue to exist in spirit life upon one or other of the innumerable stars which are scattered about the universe space.”⁷

The *Borderland* article mentions many more details of life on Mars, and while peculiar and eccentric, they are fairly typical of the whole canon of astral travelogues and proto-science fiction stories. The two photos fit into the aesthetic of Blavatsky’s robed and bearded Mahatmas, such as Koot Hoomi, and obviously the finger can be pointed to Mr West’s creative licence rather than an alleged disincarnate being named Silver Pearl. After all, West was a photographer.

What was Stead’s opinion

- 1 WT Stead, ‘News From Mars’, *Borderland, A Quarterly Review and Index*, Vol. IV, 1897, page 407.
- 2 *Pall Mall Gazette*, 27 Feb 1897; ‘News From Mars’, *Portsmouth Evening News*, 4 Mar 1897; *Cornishman*, 4 Mar 1897; ‘Now We’ve Got It’, *Evening Telegraph*, Scotland, 6 Mar 1897.
- 3 See Robert Crossley, *Imagining Mars*,

- 4 *A Literary History*, Wesleyan University Press, 2001, chapter 7 and George Locke, *Voyages In Space, A Bibliography of Interplanetary Fiction 1801-1914*, Ferret Fantasy, 1975.
- 4 Stead, op cit, p406.
- 5 *Ibid*, p407.
- 6 *Ibid*, p408.
- 7 *Ibid*, p408.
- 8 Stead’s account was also published

- without the photos as ‘Messages From Mars. How They Live on that Planet’, *Hampshire Telegraph*, 11 Dec 1897, where the photos are described as “not at all unlike photographs of swarthy dwellers on our own planet”, and in slightly abbreviated form as ‘The Martians’, *Evening Telegraph*, Scotland, 16 Nov 1897.
- 9 Stead, op cit, p409.

LEFT: The first photographs of alleged alien beings – a pair of hiptster-bearded Martian mystics.

of the two photos of the Martian kings he published in *Borderland*? He was unimpressed: “Whether it is the fault of the photographer or of its subjects, it can hardly be said that the portraits of the Martians... tend to increase the desire to communicate with that planet. They resemble very much the other psychic pictures...”⁸

Mr West had plans to publish the account in book form. I am not aware that it was actually published; if not, possibly Stead’s critical comment had something to do with it, for he writes that the account is “a sample of the kind of communication not uncommon in spiritualistic circles,” further musing: “Of evidential value it has of course none, but what can we think of the agency which produces such detailed narrative? If it is the medium’s unconscious mind then it differs entirely from the mind of the medium, as it is known to himself and his friends. If it is an elemental, or, as Tennyson suggests, some Puck, what motive can such an intelligence have in weaving night after night such an elaborate story? Where is the profit of it? The apparent aimlessness of communications received in trances is one of the earliest things which confront the inquirer, and one of the latest things which puzzle him”.⁹

More than a century later, looking back on the affair that gave us the first alleged photos of extraterrestrials, we get a feeling that Mr West, living a quiet, modest and altogether unexciting life, retreated to an inner world where his creative imagination unleashed a universe of wonder, meaning and purpose, amending perhaps precisely the things he lacked in his day-to-day earthly existence.

THE BALDOON MYSTERY

Witch's curse, vengeful fairies or malicious poltergeist? **CHRISTOPHER LAURSEN** and **PAUL CROPPER** revisit one of Canada's most remarkable hauntings.

For 12 months from the middle of 1829, John McDonald and his family suffered through one of the most detailed early hauntings on record. The story, usually referred to as 'The Baldoon Mystery', has fascinated generations of journalists, historians, scholars and connoisseurs of strange phenomena.

While Baldoon is sometimes dismissed as mere folklore, striking similarities between the phenomena reported there and those documented in many other cases throughout the world suggest the family really was the focus of a particularly malicious and persistent poltergeist.

The episode occurred within a small farming community in southwestern Ontario, close to present-day Wallaceburg. John McDonald was just a boy in 1804 when he moved with his family from Scotland's Isle of Tiree in the Inner Hebrides to a new settlement founded by Lord Selkirk in Upper Canada – Baldoon (originally Belledoon). He married and built a small farmhouse beside the Chenal Ecarte, commonly known as the Snye River.

The scenic, deep blue Snye flows between the St Clair River and Lake St Clair in an area inhabited for thousands of years by indigenous peoples. In the



FACING PAGE: A visual interpretation of the Baldoon Mystery by artist Kristen Gallerneaux, from her Folklore Master's project at the University of Oregon. LEFT: The Baldoon Mystery; still making headlines over a century later.

19th century, it was the Anishinaabeg people – mainly the Ojibwe, Odawa and Potawatomi nations. To Selkirk, the shores of the Snye seemed an ideal place to settle, but these were wetlands. The settlers' crops initially failed; malaria claimed nearly two dozen lives in the first year. It was rough going, to say the least.¹

The primary source of the Baldoon narrative is *The Belledoon Mysteries – An O'er True Story*, written by John's eldest son, Neil T McDonald, and first

published in a local newspaper as early as 1871.² Born circa 1824, Neil was only about five years old at the start of the episode, so it's no surprise that there are none of his own observations in his booklet, which is divided into two sections: an outline of the entire story followed by an appendix containing the testimony of several eyewitnesses.

The tale commences in the summer of 1829.

PHENOMENA
SUGGEST A
PERSISTENT
POLTERGEIST



OLD MCDONALD HAD A (HAUNTED) FARM

One day, while the men were out farming, John McDonald's wife and a group of young women were weaving straw hats in the old family barn. As they talked and worked, a wooden pole from the loft dropped in their midst. No sooner had they recovered from their shock than a second and then a third fell. Startled, they rushed outside and ran to the main farmhouse.

Shortly thereafter a lead bullet smashed through a window and fell at their feet. At first they thought a careless hunter was responsible, but the projectile was soon followed by a shower of others through several windows. Strangely, although the bullets were flying at sufficient velocity to create round holes through the glass, they all dropped harmlessly to the floor. On his return, John McDonald boarded up the shattered windows.

Stranger manifestations followed. Along with the bullets, stones bombarded the house, dishes of water rose from the table, chairs and tables turned over, and an Indian knife was thrown so hard against a window frame that the blade stuck deep into the wood. A black dog mysteriously appeared and disappeared, once on the roof of the McDonalds' house. Even more bizarre, lead weights became detached from fishing nets and flew into the house. It seemed impossible that they could have been separated from the finely woven nets without breaking a single thread.

As if all that was not enough to test the nerves of the stalwart Scots-Canadians, the McDonalds repeatedly heard, as they lay in bed, the sound of heavy feet tramping around the kitchen. Pretty scary: but things were about to get a whole lot worse.

Small balls of fire began to float throughout the house, setting things aflame. Blazes broke out in bundles of clothes, in closets, and in cotton batting under clapboards. By staying



CHRISTOPHER LAURSEN

ABOVE: The Snye River today. In the early 19th century its shores had seemed an ideal place for a settlement.

alert day and night, the McDonalds managed, for a while, to cope with the terrifying situation, but ultimately the fiery persecution got the better of them and their house was burned to the ground. All they managed to save from the inferno were the clothes they wore.

When the homeless family went to live with John's brother-in-law, their invisible tormenter was relentless: the persecution continued. And when they moved for a second time, the fires and other strange phenomena again dogged their steps.

John's father Donald (named Daniel in Neil's account) finally agreed to take in the frightened family, and for a few weeks, all was peaceful. But then the creepy cycle started again: flying bullets, falling stones and nightly noises, along with a new calamity – the McDonalds' stock began to die. Oxen, hogs, horses and poultry sickened and expired.

CAPTAIN BENNETT'S BULLETS

Captain Lewis Bennett, a British Army officer, visited the family at this time and observed objects levitating and bullets being cast into the house. He placed some of the bullets into a shot belt slung over his shoulder. Minutes later, his belt was empty, and the bullets gradually re-entered the house, dripping with water as if they'd just emerged from the nearby Chenal Ecarte.

As news of the extraordinary episode spread far and wide, Toronto-based authorities attempted to put a stop to it. Their first step was to move the families out of the father's house while it was examined closely. Remarkably, however, when the McDonalds moved to a tent not far from their home beside Running Creek, the weird phenomena continued – and were observed by many people at *both* locations! The authorities departed, utterly mystified. Exhausted, the McDonalds returned to Donald's farm. With the Baldoon events the talk of the country, the site attracted an assortment of sightseers, sceptics and con men. Several arrived declaring they would solve the mystery, only to end up being struck by stones or simply baffled by events. Robert Barker, a Michigan schoolmaster, attempted to cleanse the residence by attaching letters to the wall containing commands to the spirits, but his efforts succeeded only in getting him convicted of witchcraft and thrown in jail. He was later pardoned. Then an "Indian Medicine Man" announced that he would lay the spirits. But on the appointed day, while 200 spectators turned up, the shaman did not.

THE GOOSE WITCH

Reverend McDorman, a Methodist Church elder, suggested a decidedly unorthodox tactic. He told John McDonald of a certain country doctor who lived on the shores of Lake Erie, later identified as John Troyer, deemed by historian EA Owen to be a "hopeless and confirmed believer in witchcraft". Troyer had a teenage "daughter" gifted with second sight, and McDorman persuaded McDonald to consult with the girl.

So after a fearsome two-day ride through swamps and woods, McDonald and the



ABOVE: Poles falling in the McDonald barn, from RS Lambert's 1955 book *Exploring the Supernatural*.

preacher arrived at Dr Troyer's house, and were introduced to this "striking" and "fragile" 15-year-old (claimed by historian Harry B Barrett to actually be a member of the local Fick family residing with Troyer, who had no daughter).³ The girl asked if anyone had desired to purchase a portion of McDonald's farm but been refused. John confirmed this was true. The girl then envisioned a "long, low, log-house" and accurately described the physical appearance of those who inhabited it. McDonald recognised them as the ones who had tried to buy his land.

After privately squizzing her moonstone for some hours, the girl returned to ask McDonald if he'd ever seen a stray goose on his property. He had. "Taking the shape of that bird is your enemy," she said. To end his family's terror, he needed to kill the goose with a silver bullet.

McDonald returned home, manufactured a silver musket ball, went hunting with neighbours in tow for the feathered fiend, and spied it upon the river. The bird had a dark head, almost black, and two long dark feathers on either wing. He took a shot and wounded it in a wing. Alone, McDonald walked to the "long, low, log house". There, he found an old woman sitting on the porch, cursing – and nursing a broken arm.

After that, wrote Neil McDonald, all the strange phenomena ceased and John's sorely tried family was left in peace.

TESTIMONIES OF TERROR

In comparison to the florid style employed by Neil McDonald in Part One of his booklet, the plain, unadorned testimony in the appendix reads almost like police interviews:

Peter B Appleton: *I saw the gun balls come in through the windows, making the hole the size of the ball. I took them up and put a private mark on them and threw them into the Channell Ecarte, it being about 35ft [11m] deep, and in a few minutes the same balls came back through the windows having the same mark I put on them.*



ABOVE: Jack Van Rootselaar's statue of the Baldoon black goose, dedicated in Wallaceburg in 2004.

CHRISTOPHER LAURSEN

SHE TOLD HIM TO KILL THE GOOSE WITH A SILVER BULLET

WMS Fleury: *I saw a child lying in a little cradle, when the cradle began to rock fearfully and no one was near it. They thought it would throw the child out, so two men undertook to stop it, but could not, still, a third took hold, but stop it they could not. Some of the party said,*

"Let's test this", so they put the Bible in the cradle and it stopped instantly.

George Myer: *I distinctly remember of seeing a fish seine [net] of Mr McDonald's hanging on the fence, having the lead on it, and in a few minutes this same lead came in through the window. On examining the lead we found not a scratch on it and it had the same shape as when on the seine. Not a thread of the seine was broken, and it was impossible to tell how the lead had been taken off.*

Of the 25 people quoted, 14 had personally witnessed the uncanny phenomena.

AWAY WITH THE FAIRIES

The only known contemporary source for the Baldoon case was recently uncovered by Christopher Laursen in the archives of the *Detroit Gazette* (see sidebar opposite for full text), which supports key elements of McDonald's book, including the strange fires and mysterious pelting of lead balls and slugs, and alludes to the involvement of local preachers. It also makes the interesting claim that despite the fact that individuals in the house were hit by the mystery missiles, no one was actually harmed.

Further support for Neil McDonald's account is contained in the writings of the Methodist minister Rev. Peter Jones, an Ojibwe chief who had converted to Christianity. In 1861, Jones outlined the events at Baldoon his *History of the Ojebway Indians*. His account confirms the broad details of McDonald's story, including the strange bombardments, displacement of objects and mysterious fires.

Jones visited the "enchanted" house while the events were taking place, but the "mischievous spirits" were quiet that day and he observed nothing out of the ordinary. A colleague, the Rev. Richard Phelps, was more



ABOVE: Dr John Troyer is said to have kept this bear trap next to his bed to protect him against witches.



fortunate, telling Jones that as he attempted to preach at the house, he'd been pelted with small stones and pieces of lead, one of which hit him.⁴ He showed Jones the offending missile.

Jones asked Walpole Island chief Pashegeeghegwaskum what he thought of the strange happenings. He replied that he knew all about it:

The place on which the white man's house now stands was the former residence of the Mamagwasewug, or fairies... When the white man came and pitched his wigwam on the spot where they lived, they removed back to the poplar grove, where they have been living for several years. Last spring this white man went and cleared and burnt this grove, and the fairies have again been obliged to remove; their patience and forbearance were now exhausted; they felt indignant at such treatment, and were venting their vengeance at the white man by destroying his property.⁵

In Jones's report there is no mention of the witch or goose from McDonald's tale. He seems to imply that after Dr Troyer was no longer involved in the case, the events at Baldoon simply ceased.

TOTAL RECALL

Neil McDonald didn't simply invent the eyewitness testimony he quoted. In 1894, a Toronto *Globe* journalist interviewed one of the witnesses, Mr L A McDougall of Wallaceburg, who confirmed many of the details in Neil's book. He told the *Globe* journalist:

We ran over to the house and, sir, it was just as they said. Big and little stones were lying on the floor, and the windows all broken. While we were looking more stones came crashing through, and we ran outside to see who was throwing them, but there was not as much as a bush in front to hide in, and nobody in sight.

Curiously, however, McDougall added that McDonald's book was largely invention: "Most of it was lies". As he'd just confirmed all the elements of his earlier testimony, it seems likely that what he considered "lies" were the fairy tale-like passages in the book featuring the psychic girl, the witch and the goose. Rather than the shooting of the goose bringing the frightening episode to an end, he said that after continuing for a year the phenomena "simply stopped themselves".⁶

NEIGHBOURHOOD RIVALRIES

What then fuelled Neil McDonald's dramatic spell-breaking conclusion? Given the witness testimonies were recorded some 40 years after the events, it seems that the witchcraft narrative was a long-standing explanation that reflected the beliefs and credulity of the Baldoon settlers and their descendants.⁷

Witchcraft aside, his narrative suggests a rivalry between the McDonalds and unnamed neighbours who had sought a piece of their property. Historic records show that Lord Selkirk had divvied up Baldoon land

TOP: Local re-enactor Dawne Mudford, dressed as the Baldoon Witch.

ABOVE: The Rev. Peter Jones, an Ojibwe Methodist minister who visited the McDonald house in 1829.

between the people, including John and Alex Buchanan, who had arrived on the sailing ship *Oughton* from Scotland in 1804. The McDonalds and Buchanans fought against each other in clan wars going back centuries in the Highlands. Some descendants of the original immigrants, including local historian Frank Mann and playwright James Reaney, thought the widow with the injured arm was a Buchanan.⁸

During his research, however, Frank Mann's son Alan interviewed McDonald descendent Betty Stewart who was adamant that the "Buchanans are not involved", so they were altogether left out of Alan's 1986 reprint of *The Baldoon Mystery*. But the idea still has legs. The Buchanans were depicted as the rivals in a short documentary film on the mystery produced by the Ontario Visual Heritage Project (2006).⁹ University of Western Ontario geographer Dr Rick Fehr, who grew up in Wallaceburg and is doing ongoing historical and ecological research on the area, adds that the Buchanans "don't pop up in any primary documents that I've found" on the Baldoon mystery.

Yet to this day the witch remains a central element in the mystery. Local historical re-enactor Dawne Mudford dresses up as the Baldoon Witch to retell the mystery in a way that colourfully shifts the narrative to the alleged antagonist's point of view. "Of course I have a lot of other theories about what went on", she says, but through her presentations, the Baldoon Witch maintains the popular narrative by Neil McDonald. Mudford points out it is quite plausible that the widowed Kath Buchanan, an original settler who would have been in her mid-50s at the time of the mystery, fits the bill as the grouchy "swamp witch" next door.

In addition to a feud between the McDonalds and unnamed neighbours pertaining to land titles, Alan Mann proposed – based on interviews with his father Frank – that the McDonalds had disturbed an indigenous burial site or a sacred medicine lodge on their land. He suggests that indigenous people may have taken "retaliatory measures in hopes of restoring the sacredness of the area".¹⁰

RECHANNELLING THE MYSTERY

The Anishinaabeg people are compelling characters in the Baldoon mystery who were increasingly ignored in historical narratives of the strange events. University of Alberta anthropologist Lisa Philips and University of Western Ontario political scientist Allan McDougall published their analysis of this in two anthologies, *Lines Drawn Across the Water* (2008) and *Phantom Past, Indigenous Presence* (2011). Every retelling of the Baldoon mystery, from Rev. Peter Jones in 1861 to Neil McDonald's booklet to the 2006 documentary by the Ontario Visual Heritage Project, "has been transformed over time to fit the contemporary social context", they write.¹¹ Consider how the narrative shifts in various tellings of the Baldoon mystery:

1829: ghost, or agent of the devil (*Detroit Gazette*; see sidebar)

1861: indigenous spiritual explanations (Peter Jones)

c. 1871-1915: "old country" witchcraft (Neil McDonald)

c. 1890s: haunting (updated witness testimony in *The Globe* by LA McDougall) with the potential for deception (in an 1899 novelisation by LeRoy Hooker)

1952: pure folklore (popular historian Victor Lauriston)¹²

1955: parapsychological agent (psychical researcher RS Lambert; see sidebar "In Search of Sweet Jane")

1976: psychoanalytical analysis (Reaney and Gervais's stage play)¹³

c. 2000s: scholars re-evaluate mystery in relation to indigenous presence

Even though the area was richly populated with Anishinaabeg people, their presence was all but excised from Canadian settler history. Scholars have been working to recover Canada's First Nations history, and the Baldoon mystery has become a vital tool in this project. Geographer Rick Fehr further analysed Anishinaabeg resistance in Neil McDonald's book. The settlers are "confronted with an environment that is entirely animate and acts of its own malevolent accord", Fehr writes, but the McDonalds never seek "to understand, let alone listen to what these forces might be articulating". They only follow what they know: imperialist, Judeo-Christian doctrine to overcome nature and its mysteries. They ignore possibilities that would have



ABOVE: Illustration from a mid-20th-century version of the 'The Baldoon Mystery', featuring the witch.

A CONTEMPORANEOUS ACCOUNT

In the 19 November 1829, edition of the *Detroit Gazette* appears the following account, for the first time republished courtesy of the Detroit Public Library:

A weird and malicious Ghost – A few days ago, the good people of a Scottish settlement on a little tributary of the river St Clair, called the Chenil Ecarte, were thrown into great consternation by the pranks of some invisible and mischievous visitor, whose gambols were repeated during several nights, and at the habitations of several farmers. One house in particular, appeared to be the signal object of the vengeance of the ghost, who set it on fire in several places, notwithstanding the strictest watch was kept, and all the exorcisms which a people who cannot be supposed unlearned in such lore could think of, were constantly repeated; yet, so fast as the fire could be extinguished in one place it broke out in another. At length the house was abandoned by the inmates, and in the morning following was burnt to the ground. In the neighbouring house, to which the people had retired, they were again

persecuted by the industrious demon, and were assailed with noises more dreadfully superhuman and discordant, than the caterwauling of a dozen couples of cats in a dark garret. Having retired into a room with the doors and windows closed the noises continued, the candles burnt blue, there were strange appearances in the embers, and every one distinctly perceived a slight smell of burning brimstone. What is still more extraordinary, the persons in the room were assailed with balls and slugs of lead, which struck them from every direction, though no noise like the report of fire arms was heard. The devil, however had some conscience left, for though he had committed arson, he hesitated at murder and these balls and slugs were as harmless as if thrown from the hands of a child. The people of the settlement could bear the annoyance of the infernal visitor no longer, and sent deputations in various directions to procure the attendance of a preacher, for the purpose of laying this impudent emissary of Old Nick, and driving him to the Red Sea or the Lake of the Woods, for one of which places he has no doubt [ere?] this taken up his line of march.

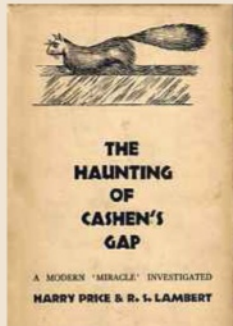
IN SEARCH OF SWEET JANE

RS Lambert, investigator of the Gef the Talking Mongoose case, was convinced an adolescent girl was at the centre of the Baldoon events – but, if so, who was she?

Most published narratives about Baldoon simply recapture elements of Neil McDonald's tale of haunting and witchcraft.¹ Of these, writer and broadcaster Richard Stanton Lambert's analysis of the case – *Exploring the Supernatural* (1955) – is the only one to overtly question this interpretation. He argued that a key component had been overlooked in the Baldoon mystery: an adolescent girl.

Two decades earlier, Lambert co-wrote *The Haunting of Cashen's Gap* with ghosthunter Harry Price about the investigation of Gef the talking mongoose on the Isle of Man in the early 1930s (FT269:32-40 and pp18-19 this issue). His involvement with Price made him a controversial figure in the British radio and film community where he worked full-time. He was editor for BBC's *The Listener* and a lifetime governor at the British Film Institute. Home Office advisor on film censorship Sir Cecil Levita attempted to induce the BBC to fire Lambert over his occult leanings, and Lambert successfully sued him for £7,500, a significant sum at the time. The "Mongoose case" as it was called inspired the Beeb to reform and liberalise its staff relations.²

Lambert left Britain in 1939 to work for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and wrote popular books on Canadian history up to his death in 1981, including *Exploring the Supernatural* for the major Toronto publisher McClelland and Stewart – popular enough to be reprinted in 1966. It stands as a rare parapsychological analysis of the Baldoon mystery. The book is extensively referenced and was lauded by physical researcher ARG



Owen in his 1975 book *Psychic Mysteries of Canada*; like Lambert, Owen was primarily interested in analysing polts from a parapsychological perspective.

Price's hypothesis that pubescent children were often at the centre of poltergeist cases – earlier popularised by Frank Podmore (1896) and Hereward Carrington (1930) – made a deep impression on Lambert. Lambert quotes Price: "There must be something, either psychological or physiological, in a young girl's organism that turns her into a girl-witch or poltergeist-attractor".³

Lambert was unsatisfied by the witchcraft explanation given by Neil McDonald. As Owen Davies reveals in greater depth in *America Bewitched* (FT306:55-56), Lambert wrote that "belief in witchcraft was almost universal among the Ontario farmers". John McDonald had become obsessed with finding the witch who cast a spell on his farm. Shooting and injuring the goose brought satisfactory closure for the superstitious farmer John. To Lambert, the settlers' theories "were far-fetched and even ridiculous", but relatively speaking their witchcraft beliefs occluded the possibility "that the trouble might be connected with adolescence in the home circle". While "No one at the time could account for what happened", Lambert felt that modern parapsychology could retrospectively provide clearer insights into the causation of the phenomena.

To find the adolescent poltergeist agent missing from the narrative, Lambert appropriated a brief reference by LA McDougall in Neil McDonald's book to "a young girl who had been brought up in the family named Jane McDonald" who was with McDougall when he discovered (as

he reiterated in the 1894 *Globe* interview) "all the furniture, bedding, stoves and everything, piled up in a window from one corner to another". For Lambert, Jane had the potential to take on the role of the "happy and light-hearted" but psychologically disturbed adolescent girl around whom the events centred. While Lambert admitted "All of this is simply surmise", he took creative license to suggest that Jane welcomed the manifestations, remaining "carefree and happy throughout these difficult times", even cheering up the McDonald family "in their misery". A brief separation from the family, Lambert argued, may have accounted for a lull in the poltergeist activities. "Everything points to the conclusion that Jane McDonald was in some way connected with the manifestations".⁴

Lambert's conjecture has no documented basis, but since he wrote it, Jane has subtly woven her way into the Baldoon mystery, receiving mention as the supernatural agent in at least one newspaper article, in conversation with the "Baldoon Witch" Dawne Mudford, and in the anthology *Haunted Canada 2* (2005) for young readers by Pat Hancock. She was renamed "Mary Ellen" in Alan Mann's republication of the mystery in 1986. Genealogical records held at the Wallaceburg & District Museum offer no further evidence as to the identity of Jane (or Mary Ellen) McDonald in relation to the Baldoon mystery.

NOTES

¹ For example, see William Renwick Riddell's *Old Province Tales: Upper Canada* (Toronto, 1920), John Robert Colombo's *Mysterious Canada* (Toronto, 1988) and *The Midnight Hour* (Toronto, 2004), and Terry Boyle's *Hidden Ontario* (Toronto, 2011).

² David Wilby, "Lambert v Levita 1936", BBC (2006).

³ For more on this topic, see FT293:16.

⁴ Lambert, *Exploring the Supernatural* (Toronto, 1955), quotes from pages pp68, 78, 84, 86-87.

enabled them to live in greater harmony with their environment and the Anishinaabeg.¹⁴ This isn't your typical grade school lesson on Canadian history.

ROMANCING THE MOONSTONE

Following the romanticised narrative have been attempts to find tangible traces of the mystery where no physical evidence remains. In the 1920s, the steamship *Thousand Islander* took Detroit area tourists on excursions through St Clair River country. As it passed a mysterious house with two chimneys on the Snye, deckhands would tell passengers of the eerie events that had taken place there a century earlier. "Disaster, mysterious and malicious, suddenly overtook the family who lived in this house upon the Snye", claimed

a 1921 Northern Navigation Grand Trunk tourist brochure, outlining details from Neil McDonald's book.

Telescope magazine editor Robert E Lee recalled the boat tour from his childhood.

*We heard the tale, every time we took the trip to Wallaceburg on the Thousand Islander from the lips of the lady who sold Dolly Varden candy on the boat, and maybe it was a wild tale dreamed up by an advertising man, but we believed!*¹⁵

The steamship itself sank in a November 1928 gale off Thunder Bay, Michigan, while being towed across Lake Huron to its winter harbour.

Local historians have since argued that

the house with two chimneys, famously depicted as the "Baldoon Haunted House" on historic postcards, was not the log home of Donald McDonald left standing after strange fires incinerated his son's home and barns. Rather, it was a home chosen by pleasure cruise officials to embody the mystery when the original homes were no longer there. "Nevertheless", Alan Mann wrote, "this reference, albeit likely incorrect, helped to promote the fascinating lore of the Baldoon Mystery".¹⁶ In 1930, this house too burned down, attributed to a tramp who had "carelessly dropped a match"; one newspaper account blamed the "Baldoon curse" for its incineration.¹⁷

Perhaps it is only human to create physical evidence for a local legend when it is absent.



BOTH PICTURES: COURTESY OF THE WALLACEBURG & DISTRICT MUSEUM, ALAN MANN COLLECTION

ABOVE: The Baldoon house as featured on two postcards from the early 1900s. Some historians dispute this identification, and more than one location has been mooted.

Rick Fehr recalls his father taking him to the foundation of an old house along the Snye in the early 1980s and telling him that it was the remains of the Baldoon mystery house. In hindsight, Fehr says it seems unlikely such a foundation would remain 150 years later. But it was not his only “Baldoon” house:

Where I grew up on the other side of town on the Sydenham River going a bit more toward Dresden, there was an abandoned house that the kids used to frequent all the time. That was my encounter with the “haunted house”. The windows were all smashed in. It sort of had that same evocative feel that the Baldoon mystery held in terms of the story. The physical presence of the house in the Baldoon mystery was no longer there, so we sort of supplanted it with this other house.

HE WAS TOLD THAT IT WAS THE REMAINS OF THE BALDOON HOUSE

Creating a material presence for the haunting is something that continues to this day. In Christopher Laursen’s correspondence with local residents and during his time in Wallaceburg, he has been told of black dog apparitions and other buildings that had a reputation for being haunted – some of them

on the McDonalds’ former land and others said to have been relocated from McDonald land to elsewhere. Such experiences were interpreted as an extension of the Baldoon mystery. The McDonald family plot itself has since disappeared under tilled fields, a point of contention among locals who recalled playing among the gravestones as children. Capturing the materiality of Baldoon even takes smaller forms. Dawne Mudford, for example, wears a moonstone pendant around her neck.

Given the lack of material evidence, Detroit-based curator Kristen Gallerneaux recreated it for her Master’s degree in Folklore at the University of Oregon in 2011. Raised in a Spiritualist farmhouse not far from Wallaceburg, she thinks Baldoon is the “quintessential forgotten Canadian poltergeist case”, often overshadowed by its more famous late-19th-century cousin, Nova Scotia’s *The Great Amherst Mystery* written by witness Walter Hubbell in 1879. To revive the Baldoon mystery, Gallerneaux created a variety of dramatic prints and photographs depicting the story. She collected objects that were transformed into physical evidence – all to generate a materiality that provides an otherwise missing connection to what happened.¹⁸

In the creation of the 1976 stage play *Baldoon*, Marty Gervais relates how the story resonates with his family’s own encounters with a poltergeist in Pointe-aux-Roches off the south shore of Lake St Clair. His mother told him how his great grandmother “promised at her death bed to return with a sign”, and:

She did return – in the form of mysterious objects flying about the farm kitchen and in



a haunting spirit among the corn cribs and sheds. The events took place over the winter months and my mother's family would assemble in the kitchen to say the rosary as dishes and pans flew about the room banging against the walls.

For Gervais, it was important to find material evidence related to the mystery. He found Dr Troyer's "witchtrap" and rifle at the Eva Brook Donly Museum in Simcoe, Ontario.¹⁹ In Port Lambton, he was shown "a platter which had been owned by Baldooners who inhabited the tormented house" – clues that were significant in showing "that something *did* happen".²⁰

PRESERVING THE GOOSE(BUMPS)

With or without physical evidence, the mystery continues. In 2004, the Baldoon bicentenary was celebrated at MacDonald Park, six and a half miles (10.5km) up the road from Wallaceburg, the approximate site of the original McDonald homes where the mystery unfolded. Two plaques stand in the park to inform visitors both of the settlement and the mystery, the latter of which highlights the narrative of the black goose and the witch.

At the bicentenary, the mystery was retold in a community play. Every year since, the Selkirk History Faire has celebrated the founding of the settlement and residents dress up as early 19th-century settlers. There, locals persistently asked Baldoon researcher Dawne Mudford about the mystery. "A lot of people didn't know the story around here", she said. From there, the Baldoon Witch was born as a way to freshen up Neil McDonald's narrative. "I decided, wouldn't it be more

interesting if the story came from the Baldoon Witch? I got myself an outfit and I decided to tell the story from the witch's perspective, which brightened it up! Same story, different attitude".

In addition to visiting schools and community events throughout the year, the Baldoon Witch camps out at the annual Selkirk History Faire, complete with a ragged tent situated among the bulrushes and a gang of charcoal-coloured critters, an homage to Baldoon's black dog and goose. As part of the bicentenary, the goose was dedicated as Wallaceburg's mascot in a streamlined statue near the Selkirk Bridge downtown. In 2012, the Black Goose Grill opened, offering a Baldoon burger on its menu.

In 1964, an Italian gondola named the Black Goose was built. The gondola hides in the reeds of a 2010 mural painted on the museum by Gale Steadman featuring the black goose



and the "Baldoon Haunted House". Inside the museum, there is a small room built in 2000; with the press of a button, black curtains are drawn, strobe lighting flashes, and the Baldoon mystery is summarised in a recorded narrative complete with animatronic rocking chair and cradle, and glowing red eyes in a painting of Lord Selkirk himself.

Reminiscent of the hardships in Baldoon, Wallaceburg has endured tough times over the past 15 years, starting with the closure of its main industries, including a century-old glass factory, in the late 1990s. Rick Fehr recollected discussing the economic decline of the town with a friend around this time. His friend's response: "It's the black goose".

THE WITCH IS DEAD?

The manifestations at Baldoon are straight out of the poltergeist handbook. Strange bombardments, stone falls and levitation of household objects have been common elements of polt episodes across the centuries. Apported bullets have been reported in Australia and spontaneous fires have occurred in Malaysian (FT281:40-44), Turkish (FT302:42-45) and Jamaican (FT308:40-41) cases.

Even the very weirdest details of the Baldoon tale have been documented during other poltergeist episodes. Take, for example, this report of marked stones being "returned" by a Jamaican poltergeist in the late 1890s:

*The next day poltergeist activity began: stones crashed against the house and broke windows and furniture, and when a priest called by her grandmother marked a stone and threw it out, it crashed right back into the house.*²¹



BOTH PHOTOS: CHRISTOPHER LAURSEN

TOP: A plaque in MacDonald Park, the approximate area in which the Baldoon mystery occurred, that blames the witch next door for the family's misfortunes. ABOVE: With a farmer's permission, Dawne Mudford practises witching, or dowsing.



ABOVE: A recreation of the McDonald farmhouse in the Wallaceburg Museum.

In the view of the authors, what Mr McDougall said about the conclusion of the Baldoon episode was probably closest to the truth: the events stopped as mysteriously as they began. From the eyewitness accounts and hearsay Neil McDonald collected 40 years after the event, it is clear that the witchcraft narrative had firmly superseded other possible causes. Historical accounts of Troyer's life exemplify the country doctor's obsession with witches, from setting a bear trap beside his bed to catch them in the night to being gleefully taunted by a local woman who he accused of being a witch. Alongside 19th-century settlers' general proclivity to believing in witches, Troyer's supposed talent for witch-finding seems to have been instrumental in cementing

the role of the "swamp witch" in the minds of Baldooners.

In Neil McDonald's account, his brave, stoic father, after many trials and tribulations, manages to face and defeat his supernatural persecutor. It's a far more appealing and dramatic conclusion than having the phenomenon, as McDougall states and Rev. Jones's account implies, simply "fade away". Most poltergeist episodes *do*, in fact, just fade away.

Maybe strange things still haunt the old McDonald land today. Standing there with Dawne Mudford one fine September afternoon, Christopher Laursen pointed out that there was a black dog barking at them across the road, much like the canine apparition in the

Baldoon mystery. No sooner did he say that than its owner came out to quiet the hound – his left arm in a black sling. Historical events may very well reinscribe themselves in the present. Perhaps the witch's curse prevails. **FT**

The authors give sincere thanks to all mentioned in the article, as well as to Wallaceburg & District Museum staff, John Polacsek of the Great Lakes Maritime Institute, Jayne Griffiths at Koerner Library at the University of British Columbia, Detroit Public Library, Detroit Historical Society senior curator Joel Stone, Kirk Dickinson at the Chatham Daily News, Samantha Craggs at CBC Hamilton and the people of Wallaceburg, Walpole Island, and Chatham who connected us to family histories, stories, personal experiences, and evidence. Special gratitude to Dawne Mudford and Henry VanHaren for being Christopher's bewitching guides in Wallaceburg, and to Tony Healy for input.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES



CHRISTOPHER LAURSEN is a PhD candidate at the University of British Columbia working on shifting interpretations of poltergeist phenomena in the mid-20th century. Previously, he worked in print and broadcast media and currently writes articles for the website *Extraordinary*.



PAUL CROPPER has investigated all manner of strange phenomena since the mid-1970s. With Tony Healy he co-authored *Out of the Shadows – Mystery Animals of Australia* (1994) and *The Yowie* (2006). Their next book, *Australian Poltergeist*, will be published later this year.

NOTES

1 For more on the founding of the Baldoon settlement, see AED MacKenzie, *Baldoon: Lord Selkirk's Settlement in Upper Canada* (London, Ontario, 1978) and on Lord Selkirk's exploits, *The Silver Chief: Lord Selkirk and the Scottish Pioneers of Belfast, Baldoon and Red River* by Wiltshire-based historian Lucille H Campey (Toronto, 2003).

2 Neil McDonald's narrative, at times attributed to his publisher Hugh Colwell, was serialised in Colwell's Wallaceburg paper in 1895. It was bound in a booklet in 1905, and was most recently republished in 1986, with notes by the late Wallaceburg historian Alan Mann.

3 Harry B Bennett, *Lore & Legends of Long Point* (Don Mills, Ontario, 1977), pp52-58. EA Owen's *Pioneer Sketches of Long Point Settlement* (Toronto, 1898) and James H Coyne's "David Ramsey and Long Point in Legend and

History" from *The Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, Series III, Vol. XIII* (Ottawa, 1920) are two other major published narratives of Troyer's life, which has further been depicted in live theatre by Hilda Mary Hooke (1942), James Reaney and CH Gervais (1976), and Long Point Eco-Adventures (2012).

4 Similar responses to religious intervention have been noted in many poltergeist cases; see Humpty Doo, *Australia*, 1998 (FT116:34-39) and Siirt, Turkey, 2013 (FT302:42-45).

5 Rev. Peter Jones (Kahkewaquonaby), *History of the Ojibway Indians; with Especial Reference to their Conversion to Christianity* (London, 1861), pp157-159.

6 "Unsolved Mystery: Haunted House of the Baldoon Settlement, a Tale of Forty Years Ago", simply undersigned "Malcolm", in *The Globe* (Toronto), 8 Sep 1894, p10.

7 Historian Owen Davies's latest book *America Bewitched: The Story of Witchcraft after Salem* (reviewed in FT306) delves into how witchcraft beliefs were popularly maintained in the United States and Canada into the 20th century.

8 From e-mail correspondence with Allan McDougall, Western University, references in MacKenzie's *Baldoon*, and Reaney in his "Author's Notes" in the book for the stage play *Baldoon* (Erin, Ontario, 1976), p118.

9 The documentary can be viewed online at www.visualheritage.ca/kent/baldoonmystery.htm.

10 Alan Mann, "A Modern Look at the Mystery" in *The Baldoon Mystery* (Wallaceburg, Ontario, 1986), pp63-64.

11 Lisa Philips & Allan McDougall, "The Baldoon Mysteries" in *Phantom Past, Indigenous Presence: Native Ghosts in North American*

Culture and History, edited by Colleen E Boyd and Coll Thrush (Lincoln, Nebraska 2011), p147.

12 Victor Lauriston, *Romantic Kent: The Story of a County, 1626-1952* (Chatham, Ontario, 1952), pp49-56, 464-470.

13 The psychoanalytical connection was aptly suggested by Windsor *Star* reviewer Bruce Blackadar, "Baldoon mystery: Shouting boo! at history" (22 Nov 1976), who likened the Dr Troyer character to a "shamanistic Freudian analyst who keeps digging" into the psyche of the family afflicted by the witch's spell.

14 Rick Fehr, "Settler Narrative and Indigenous Resistance in The Baldoon Mystery" in *The Nature of Empires and the Empires of Nature*, edited by Karl S Hele (Waterloo, Ontario, 2013), pp260, 262-63.

15 Robert E Lee, "Shh! We're Sailing Past the Haunted

House", *Telescope*, May/June 1975, p67.

16 Mann, pp64, 66.

17 "Century-Old House Plagued by Witch Destroyed by Fire", *The Globe*, 22 Dec 1930; "Haunted House Consumed by Fire; Curse of The Baldoon Held Responsible After Hundred Years of Impotence", *Lethbridge Herald*, 23 Dec 1930.

18 Kristen Gallerneaux's work is on her website, www.revenantarchives.com.

19 These objects are held, along with the door to Troyer's cabin and a painting of it, in the museum's permanent collection.

20 Marty Gervais in his "Author's Notes" in *Baldoon*, pp116-117.

21 Joseph J Williams, *Psychic Phenomena of Jamaica* (New York, 1934).

SOVIET SNOWMAN HUNTER

EDWARD CRABTREE journeys from Kazan to Moscow to meet veteran researcher Igor Bourtsev, one of the foremost experts on the Russian yeti, and looks back at half a century of searching for the snowman

I am in awe of the piece of plaster that I'm holding. I first saw a picture of it in *Arthur C Clarke's Mysterious World* a good 30 years ago. Now, here I am with it in my hands, worried that I might drop it. It is the cast of a footprint, but at 35cm (14in) long and 16cm (6in) wide it is far larger than that left by an ordinary human foot. It was found in the wilds of Tajikistan.

Man-like ape research in the Russian Federation often appears somewhat shadowy, in a way that can be daunting to the Western observer. Thankfully, there are three English-speaking guiding lights that can help to illuminate the way; three names that form a sort of Holy Triumvirate of Russian snowman research: Dmitri Bayanov, Valentin Sapunov and Igor Bourtsev.

Bayanov, now an octogenarian, is a founding member of the International Society of Cryptozoology and is perhaps best known for compiling the book *In the Footsteps of the Russian Snowman* (1996). Professor Sapunov is a St Petersburg-based organic chemist and can claim another life as an academic in that field.

Igor Bourtsev is the head of the International Centre of Hominology, set up in 2005. His is the talking head that so often acts as an ambassador for snowman research on the many breathless TV shows about the paranormal shown in Russia. Also, he is the host of a popular website called the 'International Society of the Forest People's Friends' that aims to protect the snowman. He is active on Facebook and seems more accessible than his fellows. I had first met him in the pages of a book: Myra

HE IS THE HOST OF A WEBSITE THAT AIMS TO PROTECT THE SNOWMAN

Shackley's unsurpassed study *Wildman: the Yeti, Sasquatch and Neanderthal Enigma* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1983). This had been, years ago, my entry into the subject.

In the event, Igor Bourtsev was not an easy man to track down. Pleading pressure of work, he would put forward any suggested meeting date to an endless Twelfth-of-Never. The fact that an article of mine in *FT* about the Tatar yeti (FT298:30-34) was accompanied by a piece expressing reservations about the

evidence for the Kemerovo snowman did not help matters.

Then came 9 May, which is Victory Day in Russia and always followed by another day off. In 2013, it also fell just ahead of the weekend. Here was the ideal window of opportunity to visit the man himself, and I pressed for it. At last, he agreed – provided, that is, that I met him in his natural habitat. This was an office in an obscure (at least to me) part of Moscow.

CRYPTO-LOGOS

So it is that I lie, from seven in the evening to seven the next morning, on a rattling bunk bed on a night-train from central Kazan to Moscow's Kazanka Station. On the way, there isn't much to see out of the window but sparsely populated woodland – just the kind of expanse where a shaggy ape-man might walk unseen.

Moscow, on the other hand, is a concrete cosmopolis, and I have to criss-cross my way beneath it on the metro until I reach the Slavyanski Bulvar stop. This opens up to the Fili-Davydkovo

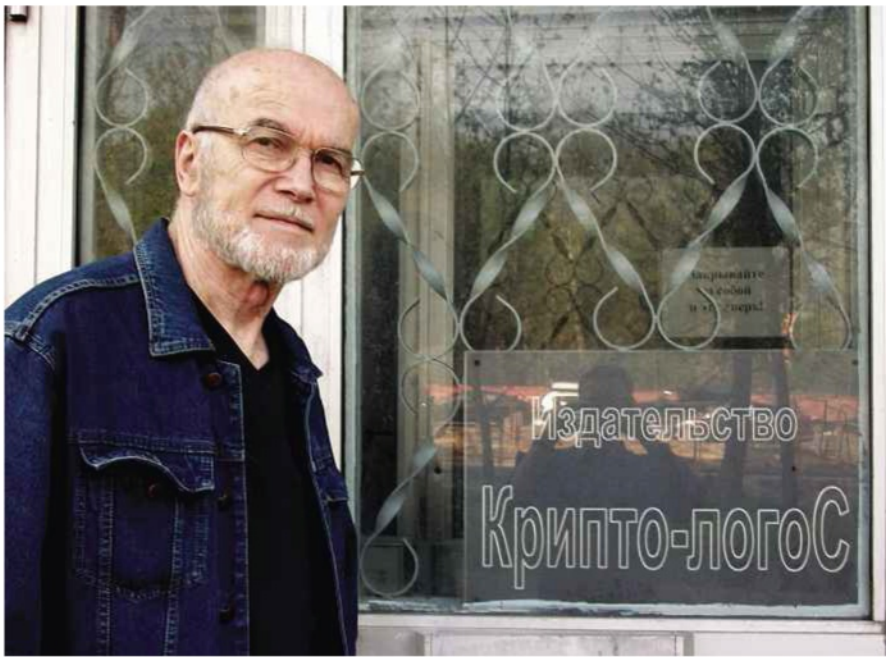
district, where Napoleon once stood on a hill and demanded the keys to the Kremlin. Here, a lean man with a square build and a slight hunch approaches me. Without fanfare he begins telling me of the best ticket to get as he guides me to the *marshutka*. This is Igor Bourtsev, and we are going to his office.

It's is called 'Crypto-Logos' and takes up half of the ground floor of a block

FACING PAGE: Igor Bourtsev points to signs of snowman activity in the wilds of Siberia. **LEFT:** Bourtsev's collection of footprint casts.







ABOVE: Igor Bourtsev stands outside his Crypto-Logos office in the Fili-Davydkovo district of Moscow.

of flats. With its five rooms, it's spacious by Russian standards. While not exactly a member of Russia's new middle class, Bourtsev is a survivor.

Sensing that I am woozy from the train ride, he takes me straight into the kitchen and there serves a repast of dark bread, *kolbasa*, dried apricots and nuts and raisins.

Bourtsev speaks in a measured drawl. I am the first Brit he has spoken to at length and at times I have to repeat myself as he can't always understand my accent. His English, which is excellent, is self-taught: no mean feat for a man of his generation. His manner is no-nonsense and unassuming; there is little about him of the nutty professor that his detractors might like to imagine. Over black tea, we chat about recent bombings in America and Russia. Bourtsev, like so many in his age group, acknowledges the tribulations of the Soviet period but, at the same time, feels some things were done better back then.

"In those days we were all Soviets – we didn't think to define ourselves as belonging to this or that race or ethnic group", he says.

Bourtsev, a divorced father of four who has recently marked his 73rd birthday, grew up in Samarkand in Uzbekistan, of Russian parentage, before moving to Moscow in 1957. He has been something of a globe-trotter ever since and has seen the Caucasus, Abkhazia, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and, of late, North America. He could also be described as something of a textbook 'silver surfer' and has a strong Internet presence.

His celebrity profile leads to him being collared in public places: a day or two before we met he'd been at a party in a park when a complete stranger pleaded with him to be allowed to join his next snowman search.

COMMUNIST TO CRYPTOZOOLOGIST

Bourtsev studied aeronautics in Moscow in the 1950s and 60s and then worked on automatic control systems for rockets for

"SHE SAW A RED-EYED SNOWMAN FACE-TO-FACE WITH HER"

three years. Active in the Young Communist League, he presided over the District Committee for the Kiev region of Moscow. In 1963, this took him to the Altai Mountains, where he helped to construct a new city called Cedar Town. It was here that he met a comrade who introduced him to the *outré* theories of Boris Porshnev.

Porshnev had fallen foul of the academic



ABOVE: One of the 180 printed copies of Boris Porshnev's 1963 book on the Russian relict hominids.

establishment following the failure of his Snowman Commission, set up in 1958, to find positive results. Nevertheless, the Academy of Sciences did sanction the printing of 180 copies of his book *The Present State of the Question of Relict Hominids* in 1963. (Last year it was republished in a glossy format by Algorithm, featuring a foreword by Nikolai Rostov – a sort of Russian Bill Oddie).

Reading Porshnev's book, Bourtsev was consumed with curiosity. Soon he was to find himself on a snowman expedition to the Caucasus with Doctor Marie-Jeanne Koffman, a half-French leading light in the field. Then, he made contact with his first eyewitness.

"Just a few days before, she had been on a river shore and saw a red-eyed snowman face-to-face with her. She was still in shock. Her words were detailed and from the heart. From then on I was a believer," he tells me.

In 1965, tuberculosis put him out of action for five years. He used the time to proselytise on behalf of snowman research among the Young Communist League branches. He was also much involved in the forensic examination of the Patterson-Gimlin Bigfoot film undertaken by Russian researchers (who still believe it's the real deal).

It was also Bourtsev who in 1971, 1973 and 1978 scabbled down among the rocks and soil of Abkhazia in expeditions to unearth the skeleton of Zana, the celebrated 'wild-woman' slave-girl who lived in the late 1890s and was long believed to be a relict hominid of some kind. He didn't find her, but he did find the skull of her son Khwit, which was declared by experts to exhibit some significant differences to that of an ordinary *Homo sapiens*. Recent DNA tests carried out by Professor Brian Sykes (see FT308:9) on samples obtained from living descendants of Zana suggest that rather than being a surviving Neanderthal or an Almasty the unfortunate woman was most likely a slave taken from sub-Saharan Africa.

Between 1970 and 1975, two summers spent in Azerbaijan led to one of his trademark contributions to studies of the snowman: he began to note and classify the mysterious braids and plaits found on horses' manes in unpopulated regions. He at first assumed that these were produced by some sort of natural phenomenon, but when a colleague claimed

GO EAST, YOUNG SNOWMAN

EDWARD CRABTREE LOOKS BACK AT THE PIONEERING SNOWMAN RESEARCH OF DMITRI BAYANOV AND HIS CIRCLE

If you have sometimes wondered what all the fuss is about the yeti, or the sasquatch, or the yowie or the snowman, then perhaps you should look East and look back 18 years. In *the Footsteps of the Russian Snowman* (1996) might just be the friendly slap in the chops that you need.

The compiler, Dmitri Bayanov, former Chairman of the Hominid Research Seminar based in Moscow, has been scrutinising the evidence for unknown hominids since 1964.

The 1996 publication date has historical significance. In Britain, the Nineties may have been all crop circles, Spice Girls and *Loaded* magazine, but in Russia after the collapse of the former Soviet Union it was a very difficult time in their history: I have met Russians who will not even speak of this period. It was this decade, nevertheless, which allowed snowman enthusiasts the means to bring publications such as this to light without the need for state sanction.

So, proudly styling itself “the world’s first English language book written by snowman researchers”, this is a primer on three decades of speculation about the snowman within Russia. It was produced by Crypto-Logos publishing house in central Moscow under the Director and Editor Igor Bourtsev.

The book is a compendium of writings, all in flawless English, by Doctor Marie-Jeanne Koffman, Igor Bourtsev, Maya Bykova, Nikolai Adevyev, Leonid Yershov, and (mostly) Bayanov himself, spanning the period from the early 1960s to its publication date, with most of the material being from the 1980s and the early 1990s.

The chapters are parcelled out by region, each with its own much-needed map. So we visit the Caucasus, through the Pamirs and on to the wastes of Siberia, into European Russia and finally ending up in the Russian Far East. In the midst of it all are also some news clippings from when the snowman hit the headlines.

It’s something of a journalistic patchwork, but the guiding commentary of Bayanov, intense



ABOVE: The founders of snowman research in Russia (left to right) Boris Porshnev, Alexander Mashkovtsev, Pyotr Smolin, Dmitri Bayanov, and Marie-Jeanne Koffman in a 1968 photograph.

but humane, ensures it is more entertaining than dry.

Koffman’s *Reflections on the Possible Survival of a Population of Relict Hominoids in the Caucasus* is worthy of particular note. Her report gathers eyewitness testimonies from the different peoples of this mountainous region. Detailed accounts are given by men and women who had not been saturated by North American TV and magazine bigfootery, yet also seem too matter-of-fact to be just local superstition.

Of equal weight is Bayanov’s re-assessment of manuscripts from times past which describe snowman-like creatures. It’s hard to dismiss, for instance, the inclusion of a diagram and descriptive inventory of a ‘Wildman of the mountains’ in an ancient *Anatomical Dictionary* found in Mongolia in 1959 which otherwise categorises known animals in the same way.

In this work you will also find the original sources of stories you may have come across second-hand. It’s a revelation to read the novelist Ivan Turgenev’s famous story (as told by Maupassant). He relates how he was terrified to be advanced on by a wild-woman as he was swimming as a child. This is often rationalised away as being nothing more than an encounter with a feral human being. Turgenev’s wording, however, leaves no doubt that this ‘female gorilla’ was no ordinary human.

Then we can read the full

Testimony of Lieutenant-Colonel Vazghen Karapetian, as published in the *Tekniki Molodyoshi (Technology for Young People)* magazine in 1966. While World War II raged around him, Karapetian observed a wild-man at close quarters. It had been captured in the Caucasus. Why would a person in his position, at that time, wish to fabricate such a story?

Granted, there are also some taller tales to be taken into consideration. Maya Bykova was in the habit of having liaisons with a snowman in undisclosed remote locations. She would also forget to take a camera with her. Bayanov believed her, but there are many who wouldn’t. Likewise there is a claim of one-that-got-away. This comes from a contingent of security guards entrusted to protect an apple orchard near Saratov on the Volga. They caught an intruder red-handed and, seeing as this was a snowman, wrestled it into the back of their Zhiguli car. You can guess that the story ends with the thing giving them the slip...

Bayanov introduces this mixed bag by telling us that the snowman investigator “is a bit like a Sherlock Holmes racking his brains... under the ever sceptical eye, in this case not of Scotland Yard, but of the scientific establishment” (p8). From this sense of his identity derives his sense of conviction – and it is infectious.

This conviction also runs

through *America’s Bigfoot: Fact, Not Fiction* (1997), written by Bayanov alone. Reading like a novel, this is an account of the Russian researchers’ ‘verification’ of the much-contested Patterson-Gimlin film of 1967 and their attempts to get the world to accept it. The main players are Porshnev, Bourtsev and Bayanov himself. They battle with indifference at home and stalling tactics from supposed friends in the States. Theirs is a world of waiting to see if visas are to be granted, of using their bathrooms as darkrooms and where one car has to serve seven people with different destinations. Their fortitude should serve as a lesson to us all.

René Dahinden, meanwhile, comes out as a bit of a villain of the piece. At first he was hailed as a ‘Father Christmas’ figure, appearing in Moscow with the film and some footprint casts in his hands. Later, however, he refused to co-operate with the Russian group. Bayanov concludes that this is because he had a vested interest in the film – to which he owned the rights – not being shown to be real, and thus remaining a usable commodity.

This is worth knowing, because the received wisdom in the West is now that the film was, after all, a mercenary prank. This or that person donned a modified gorilla costume and fooled some of the greatest minds of the world. People have come forward to make the claims – sometimes conflicting ones – that they were involved in the scam. Thus far, none has produced any hard evidence – and, let us not forget, it is such hard evidence that sceptics are the first to demand. The jury is still out then. If, at the very least, you want to gauge the seriousness of the pro-Patterson-Gimlin case, then this is the best place to begin.

Dmitri Bayanov, *In the Footsteps of the Russian Snowman* (Moscow, Crypto-Logos, 1996)

Dmitri Bayanov, *America’s Bigfoot: Fact, Not Fiction* (Moscow, Crypto-Logos, 1997)



ABOVE LEFT: Bourtsev holding found plants which he believes have been tampered with by the snowman. ABOVE RIGHT: A frame from the 2013 Siberian snowman video.

to have witnessed a snowman apparently making one, he became convinced that some were signs of snowman artistry. In 2005, he documented similar evidence in the US.

Then came the most important find. In September 1979, *Komsomolskaya Pravda* publicised the discovery of a large footprint in Tajikistan found by Bourtsev. He fixed this with lacquer and made a plaster cast of it.

It's this cast I'm holding now.

"No, it could not have been forged", he assures me. "There was no one there but us for many kilometres all around." He says this in the same casual way that one might say: "No, the milk can't be off, it has been in the fridge". My mind is taken back to Sir David Attenborough, live on BBC television in June 2009. Speaking of a similar print found in the mountains of Nepal he said: "Nobody goes up 19,000ft [6,000m] just to make a joke."

Bourtsev does not make wild claims about his contact with the snowman. Nevertheless, in his travels he has notched up some near-encounters with its American cousins.

"I was lying on a sofa in a house in Missouri. There was a glass door before me that looked out onto a terrace. All of a sudden, I saw a hairy light-brown hump moving past this. It had gone by the time I had stood up."

The other liaison, more eerie, occurred in Michigan: "Three of us were outside using night-vision goggles. We were watching a racoon feeding. Then, to our left we all saw a pair of glowing eyes in the bushes. These slid towards me until they were about 20ft [6m] away."

What actually is the snowman though? Boris Porshnev's cherished thesis, accepted by all those who followed after him, was that it is the surviving missing link between ape and man. Insofar as this chimed with Darwin's theory of evolution, it was acceptable to the official Marxism-Leninism and atheism of the Soviet period. This might account for the fact that Porshnev's Snowman commission received funding in 1958 and why, even for some time after that, his group was permitted to hold meetings in the State Darwin Museum.

Bourtsev has now deviated from this line.

His revisionist proposal is that the snowman is a hybrid-human. This hybridisation, with a species unknown, occurred, he believes, around 15,000 years ago in Europe. He has even concocted his own term for it: *Smyeshni chelovek* – meaning 'adjacent human'. This is a Russian pun. The phrase *Snyeshni chelovek* means snowman.

He is also bold enough to insist that the snowman demonstrates some parapsychological abilities, such as the capacity to somehow 'tweak' human consciousness. For many, these views would place Bourtsev in the fringe science/New Age camp. However, unlike some yeti advocates, he simply accepts what people describe in their snowman reports.

SNOWMEN AND SAMANTHA FOX

Now something of a Grand Old Man of snowman research, Bourtsev is being joined by a younger generation of enthusiasts in Russia. While not as popular as claims of extrasensory perception, prophecies and alien invasion threats, snowman items do get intermittent coverage in the popular Russian press. In the same week that I meet Bourtsev, the weekly paper *Anomalniye Novosti* ('Anomalous News') carries a feature on incidents in the Vologodskoi region of Russia.

Maybe it is this kind of publicity that has enticed an organisation called *Kosmopoisk* ('Space search') to branch out from UFOs to yeti hunting. Bourtsev skypes one of their number while I am there, though they are unable to talk due to heavy rain in the Urals.

The latest sensational video of a snowman was captured on 21 January 2013 in Leninsk-Kuznetski, Siberia. In the footage, three boys follow some large footprints in the snow. They then chance upon a silhouette in the nearby woodlands of something which then rears up on two legs. The boys get the hell out.

I have scrutinised this video a few times and all I can say is that, if it is a prank, these boys have a glittering career ahead of them as actors. Nevertheless, I feel duty bound to ask Bourtsev if this might be the case. As quick as thought, he skypes the grandmother of the boys, who looks after them. She assures him that no financial gain has been accrued

from the film.

Meanwhile, Bourtsev is engaged on something of a *magnum opus* – a 360-page tome called *Catching Up with the Kuzbass Bigfoot (Siberia) and Beyond*, with a Russian and English text, an introduction by Aman Tuleev, Governor of the Kemerovo region, and a wealth of pictures of wooden structures found in the forests, which Bourtsev believes to be proof of snowman habitation.

Before I leave to let him get back to meeting his deadline, I get one final scoop.

You heard it here first: Igor Bourtsev is a big Samantha Fox fan!

He first became aware of her while working in Afghanistan in the early 1980s, editing a magazine called *Afghanistan Today*. The former Page Three girl's fame had spread to that part of the world in the form of posters and cassettes. Who, indeed, can fail to cherish such golden pop moments as *Touch Me (I Want Your body)*?

We exchange gifts: I give him a model of Shurale, the Tatar wood goblin, and some English postcards. He gives me signed copies of *In the Footsteps of the Russian Snowman* and *America's Bigfoot: Fact Not fiction*.

As I make my way through the wide, dusty streets I realise who it is that Bourtsev puts me in mind of. It is Tim Dinsdale, the late British Loch Ness Monster advocate. He too was a dedicated hobbyist. He too had a background in aeronautics. He too was seen as a decent and honest man by all who knew him, even his opponents. And he too provided groundbreaking evidence for the phenomena that he championed. **FT**

For earlier Russian manimal sightings and hunts, see: FT26:6, 45:51-52, 53:22, 54:22-23, 62:8, 67:32-34, 240:28, 246:46-52, 282:9, 284:13, 298:30-35, 308:9.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



EDWARD CRABTREE has taught English for much of his adult life: from 2007-2009 in Nizhnevartovsk, West Siberia; from 2009-2013 in Kazan, Tatarstan, and currently in Moscow.

THE TRUTH ISN'T OUT THERE...

MAGBOOK

POPULAR MYTHS DEBUNKED AND DISPELLED

MYTH

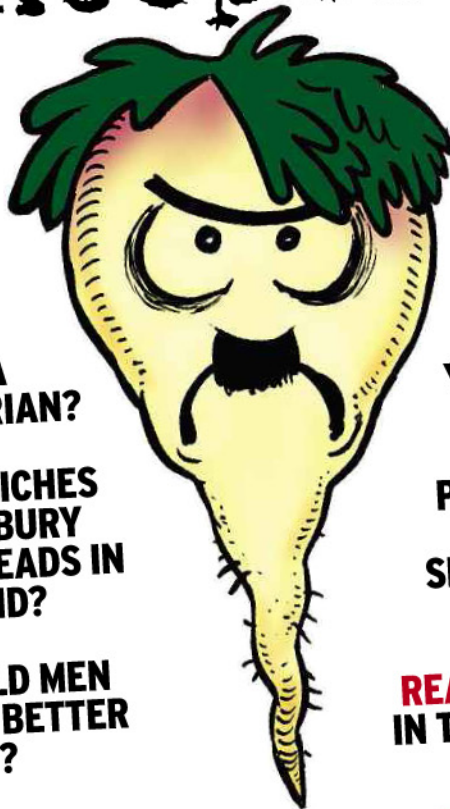
conceptions

FROM THE PAGES OF
ForteanTimes

WAS
HITLER
REALLY A
VEGETARIAN?

DO OSTRICHES
REALLY BURY
THEIR HEADS IN
THE SAND?

ARE BALD MEN
REALLY BETTER
LOVERS?



DOES COKE
REALLY
DISSOLVE
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AARDVARK



HONEY BADGER

ON THE TRACK OF

KARL SHUKER explores the cryptozoological conundrums raised by tales of a ferocious African mystery beast, and wonders whether a captive specimen was really once displayed in Britain...

One of the most formidable and ferocious mystery beasts on record, the Nandi bear of Kenya's Nandi forest region, was once widely reported, but nowadays it seems to have gone out of fashion – or even out of existence – because there do not appear to have been any documented sightings of it for many years.

As revealed by Dr Bernard Heuvelmans in *On the Track of Unknown Animals* (1958) and further assessed in my own book *In Search of Prehistoric Survivors* (1995), the Nandi bear seems to have been many things to many people, a composite creature 'created' from the erroneous lumping together of reports describing several taxonomically discrete animals. Some of these are already known to science, but others may not be, at least in the living state.

They include: old all-black ratels (honey badgers) *Mellivora capensis*; some form of extra-large baboon; erythristic (freakishly red-furred) spotted hyaenas *Crocuta crocuta* and/or a supposedly long-extinct lion-sized relative called the short-faced hyaena *Pachycrocuta brevirostris*; the armadillo *Orycteropus afer*; perhaps even a relict true bear related to (or synonymous with) the Atlas bear *Ursus arctos crowtheri*, which existed in North Africa until as recently as the 1870s; and,

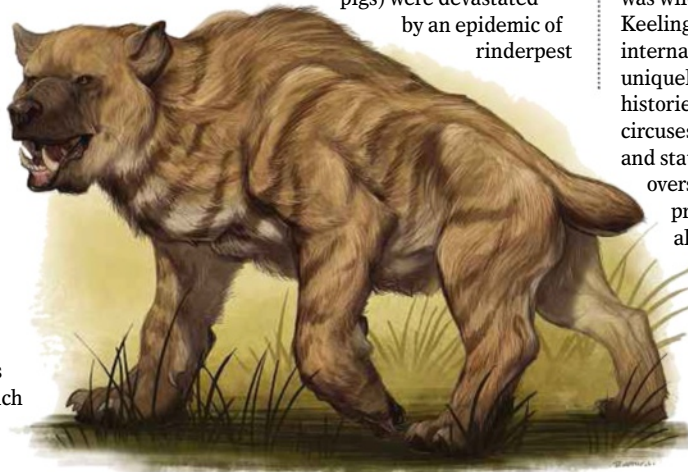
most fascinating of all, a putative surviving chalicothere. The latter constituted a taxonomic family of bizarre perissodactyl (odd-toed) ungulates that possessed claws instead of hooves, and which may have been somewhat hyaena-like in superficial appearance (due to their rearward-sloping back) but were much larger. According to the fossil record, chalicotheres lingered on until at least as recently as one million years ago in Africa, but died out earlier elsewhere.

The prospect of a modern-day species of chalicothere being responsible for certain Nandi bear reports has long held a particular fascination for me, because it alone could provide a reasonable explanation why the Nandi bear has seemingly vanished. Artiodactyls (even-toed ungulates, e.g. cattle, antelopes, giraffes, pigs) were devastated by an epidemic of rinderpest

(a morbillivirus) that swept across southern Africa during the late 19th century. In 1995, it was revealed that a distantly related morbillivirus was comparably deleterious to horses (which, like chalicotheres, are perissodactyls). So could a morbillivirus have wiped out a chalicotherian Nandi bear? None of the other Nandi bear identities would be affected by such a disease, so if only these identities were components of the Nandi bear composite (i.e. with no ungulate component ever involved), we would expect Nandi bear reports still to be surfacing, whereas no such reports have emerged for years.

KEELING'S CHALICOTHERES

Someone else who was very intrigued by the concept of a chalicotherian Nandi bear was wildlife educator and author Clinton Keeling, whose death in 2007 robbed the international zoological community of a uniquely knowledgeable expert on the histories and exhibits of zoological gardens, circuses, and menageries (travelling and stationary) throughout Britain and overseas. During the course of a long, productive life as a zoo curator and also travelling widely to schools with animals to entertain and educate generations of children concerning the wonders of wildlife, Clinton wrote and self-published over 30 books (all of



LEFT: An artist's impression of the Nandi bear by Brynn Metheny.



CHALICOTHERE



SPOTTED HYAENA

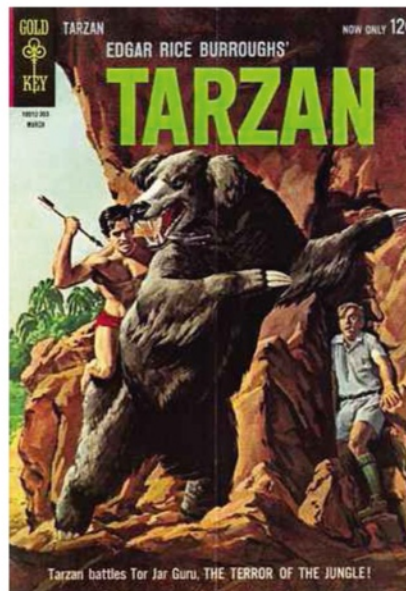
THE NANDI BEAR

which, tragically, are fiendishly difficult to track down nowadays) documenting wild animal husbandry and also the histories of demised and long-forgotten animal collections. These are a veritable treasure trove of extraordinary information and insights that are very unlikely to be found elsewhere, providing details of some truly remarkable and sometimes highly mysterious creatures that were at one time or another on display in Britain – and which in Clinton’s opinion may have included at least three living chalicotherian Nandi bears.

Frustratingly, however, I have never managed to obtain a copy of any of Clinton’s books. So after he published a summary of his Nandi bear accounts from two of them in the form of a short article appearing in the July 1995 issue of the Centre for Fortean Zoology’s periodical *Animals and Men* (published in June 1995), I wrote to him requesting further information. He kindly wrote me a very detailed reply on 3 July 1995, documenting all that he knew about this extremely exciting possibility and also regarding various other cryptozoological subjects. Its contents made enthralling, thought-provoking reading, but I have never published any portion of its Nandi bear section – until now. So here, for the very first time anywhere, is Clinton Keeling’s full and thoroughly fascinating account of that tantalising bygone trio of unidentified captive beasts in Britain that just may have been living Nandi bears:

Rest assured I shall be happy to assist you in any way possible concerning the ‘Nandi Bear’, of which I am convinced at least three specimens have been exhibited in this country – although their owners had no idea what they were...

I think it would be best if I were to quote directly from two of my books... in this way



SOME TRULY REMARKABLE CREATURES WERE ONCE ON DISPLAY

you’ll know as much as I do when you’ve finished reading. The following is from my book Where the Crane Danced, written in 1983; I’m dealing with the earliest travelling menageries:

“The first one I have been able to learn anything about must have been operating in the 1730s, and although not even its name

LEFT: The Lord of the Jungle fights off a savage Nandi bear in one of Gold Key’s *Tarzan* comics.

has been recorded I was absolutely thrilled to discover that it contained what might well have been proof that an animal that most people relegate to the Loch Ness Monster bin really did exist – and comparatively recently too. In a nutshell, I have always been interested in the mysterious creature usually referred to as the Nandi Bear, which might still exist on the Uashin Gishu Plateau in Kenya; some people swear it was/is a belated Chalicotherium, a primitive ungulate with claw-like hooves which officially became extinct long ago, while others pooh-poo the whole tale as an utter fabrication. Those who claim to have seen it, though, and they are many, all talk of a Hyena-like creature with the head of a Bear [some descriptions, however, offer the converse description, i.e. hyaena-headed and bear-bodied]. And please note this menagerie that might have shown one was operating getting on for two centuries before Kenya was opened up by Europeans, so in other words no-one had heard of it then. I first came upon this intriguing possibility when looking through some old numbers of the [long-defunct] *Animal and Zoo Magazine*... In the edition for Feb 1938 it stated that a reader in Yorkshire had found a bill ‘two hundred years old’ that read:

Posted at the sign of the Spread Eagle, Halifax. This is to give notice, to all Gentlemen, Ladies and others, that there is to be seen at the sign of the Coffee House, a curious collection of living creatures...

“It then went on to list its attractions, chiefly Monkeys and smallish carnivores, the last of which was:

A young HALF and HALF; the head of a Hyena, the hind part like a Frieseland [Polar?] Bear.

“Now it would certainly not have been a Hyena, or a Bear, as clearly whoever penned the advertisement apparently knew what they looked like, so one is left to ponder on this curiosity, which sounds so much like descriptions of that weird threshold-of-science creature which has so often been seen by sober people of high reputation as it has gone slinking through the long grass in the African night.”

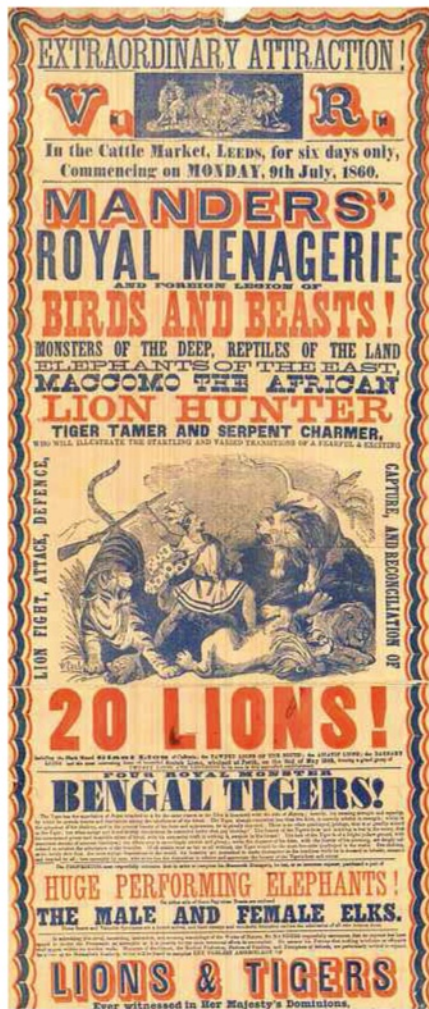
Nandi Bear Case #2 comes in my Where the Macaw Preened (1993), and its source is interesting. In Where the Crane Danced I dealt in some detail with Mander's Menagerie, a huge display second in size only to Bostock and Wombwell's, and which finally came off the road in 1875. As a result of this, I was contacted by a Mrs Rosanne Eccleston of Telford, Shropshire, who is a descendant of the Manders. She sent me a facsimile of an extremely lengthy advert, placed in a York newspaper in November 1869 which was, in effect, a stocklist of the show at that time (it included such unexpected items as Ligers); Mander was a very experienced animal-man, but sometimes he got his geographical area of distribution wrong, usually – and this could be significant – when he'd obtained a rare or obscure species... about which he knew little or nothing. Anyway, I quote directly from the end of the section on Mander's Menagerie in Where the Macaw Preened:

“I've deliberately left what I consider to have been the most remarkable exhibits until the last, so we can savour them for the marvels that I think they *could* have been. Oddly enough, they were one of the few species to be given what's clearly the wrong area of distribution.

“Listed as ‘Indian Prairie Fiends’ they were described as: *Most wonderful creatures. Head like the Hippopotamus. Body like a Bear. Claws similar to the Tiger, and ears similar to a Horse.*

“That's all, and forget the inference to North America, as there's nothing in that part of the world that has ever resembled anything like this, but, descriptions given by Africans apart, this is the best word-picture of the Chimiset or Nandi Bear I've ever happened upon.

“Many people, I know, relegate this astonishing creature to the same category as the Loch Ness Monster and other twilight beasts which might or might not exist, but here I feel they are being unjust as the question should really be ‘does it *still* exist?’, as of all the “mystery” animals this is the one scientific sceptics come nearest to accepting, as paleontologists have learned a great deal about the Chalicotherium – which is believed to be the origin of the Nandi Bear. In short, it resembled a nightmarish (no pun intended) Horse – in fact it was related to the Equines – which had huge claws and preyed upon other animals, in fact many Africans have stated how fierce it is, and how destructive to their livestock (‘Fiends’, I trust you've noticed; the only implication so far of viciousness – again, it fits). Readers of *Where the Crane Danced* will recall my suggestion that a menagerie touring northern England in the 1730s also boasted a young specimen – which is at least perfectly possible, as there now seems little doubt that a small relict population of Chalicotheriums (Chalicotheria?) hung out on the Uashin Gishu Plateau in East Africa until the very end of



the 19th Century, when it was wiped out by the great rinderpest epidemic of 1899. Remember, it was an ungulate, despite not having hooves and eating flesh. What a pity Mr Mander didn't think anyone would be interested to learn what he fed his specimens on!”

All of which brings up some fascinating points. For a start, on the face of it, it sticks out a mile that the two reports are of completely different animals, but whereas the “Halifax” creature was a classic description of the beast seen so often in Africa a century ago, the “York” one is a word-perfect reconstruction of modern assessments of what the chalicotherium must have looked like –

even to the Horse-like (Hippopotamus) head and massive claws. I agree it sounds paradoxical, but here are good descriptions of the creatures seen in the field by traveller and tribesman, and the armchair explorers' and scientists' word-picture of what it must have resembled. In other words, there's a strong case for each.

An extremely impressive brief can be made for Mander's animals, as it's the only species in his list with a “made-up” name; all others either have appellations still in use, or old but then perfectly acceptable ones, such as “Yaxtruss” for Yak and “Horned Horse” for Wildebeests: this one alone has an outlandish name. It's very highly significant, too, that again it's the only one to be described in detail – presumably on the assumption that most people would know what a Camel or a Zebra or a Kangaroo was. In other words Mander, who most certainly knew an extremely wide range of species, hadn't the slightest idea of what the Indian Prairie Fiends really were.

I cannot emphasise strongly enough that whatever these animals were, they would certainly have been on show, and more or less as described, as contrary to popular belief, the showmen of yesterday might have exaggerated the size or physical attributes of their exhibits, but they certainly didn't advertise what they hadn't got. They were not fools, and knew full well the measures a mob of 19th Century colliers, artisans, idlers and toughs would take if it thought it was being swindled or “conned”.

Most unfortunately it didn't enter the heads of these very materialistic travellers to keep Occurrences Books (other than places visited and money taken) so unfortunately we'll probably never know how these I.P.F.s [Indian Prairie Fiends] were obtained, how many there were, their diet, how long they lived, or – very important – what became of them. I mention this because there was often an arrangement with museums whereby unusual cadavers were eagerly purchased (in Weston Park Museum, Sheffield, for example, there are two hybrid big Cat cubs purchased long ago from a travelling show) so I suppose it's just possible, in some dusty storeroom, there could be a couple of interesting skulls or pelts.

ABOVE: A handbill advertising Manders' Menagerie and its varied line-up of birds and beasts.

BELOW: A brown hyaena, with its shaggy coat.



SHAGGY HYAENA STORIES

A fascinating and very thought-provoking communication. However, it contains certain assumptions that need to be addressed. First and foremost: contrary to Clinton's claims, the chalicotheres were not carnivorous, they were wholly herbivorous – a major conflict with the Nandi bear's bloodthirsty rapaciousness that Heuvelmans sought to explain by speculating that perhaps the occasional sight of so extraordinary a beast as a chalicothere, armed with its huge claws, was sufficient for a native observer to assume (wrongly) that they had spied a bona fide Nandi bear. In other words, even if there are any living chalicotheres, these perissodactyl ungulates are only Nandi bears by proxy. Having said that, however, certain other perissodactyls, notably the rhinoceroses, can be notoriously bellicose if confronted. If the same were true of chalicotheres, one of

these horse-sized creatures with formidable claws and an even more formidable, highly aggressive defensive stance would definitely make a veritable Nandi bear, even though it wouldn't devour its victim afterwards.

When referring to the Halifax mystery beast, Clinton wonders whether the "Frieseland [sic] bear" that it was likened to was a polar bear. In reality, however, the only bears native to Friesland, which is part of the present-day Netherlands, are brown bears *Ursus arctos*. Consequently, this suggests that the animal's hind parts resembled a brown bear's, not a polar bear's.

My greatest concern, however, is Clinton's determination to believe that the Halifax mystery beast and the York mystery beasts were the same species (even after stating that at least on first sight the two reports describe two totally different types of animal). Personally, I fail to see how a hyaena-headed creature can be one and the same as a hippo-headed creature – unless, perhaps, these were simply differing ways of emphasising that the creatures had big, noticeable teeth. Alternatively (or additionally?), describing an animal's head as hippo-like may imply that it had large, broad nostrils and/or mouth.

Clinton's statement that the hippo-headed York cryptids corresponded with a chalicothere's appearance cannot be countenanced, because chalicotheres' heads were horse-like (which hippos aren't), and chalicotheres didn't have big teeth. So even if the hippo-head comparison was an allusion to the size of the York cryptids' teeth, a chalicothere identity is still ruled out for them.

My own view is that if either of the two cryptid types documented here were a Nandi bear, it is more likely to have been the hyaena-headed, bear-bodied Halifax animal. Even so, this latter beast sounds very reminiscent of a scientifically recognised but publicly little-known species whose distinctive appearance would certainly have made it a most eye-catching exhibit. Today, three species of true hyaena exist, two of which – the striped hyaena



ABOVE: Ground sloths depicted in a mural by artist William Stout for the San Diego Natural History Museum.

Hyaena hyaena and the earlier-mentioned spotted hyaena – are familiar to zoologists and laymen alike. Conversely, the third, and rarest, is seldom seen in captivity and is elusive even in its native southern African homeland.

This reclusive species is the brown hyaena *H. brunnea*, which just so happens to combine a hyaena's head with a dark brown shaggy-furred body that is definitely ursine in superficial appearance, especially in the eyes of a zoologically untrained observer. So could the Halifax mystery beast have been a sub-adult brown hyaena, captured alive alongside various more common African species and then transported to Britain with them, where it was destined to be displayed to a wide-eyed public that had never before seen this exotic-looking species? It is certainly not beyond the realms of possibility, and is a more plausible identity than a Nandi bear.

A SLOTHFUL SURPRISE?

As for the York cryptids, an identity very different from that of a Nandi bear but equally cryptozoological in nature came to mind as soon as I first read Clinton's account of them.

Clinton discounted their 'Indian prairie fiend' name by accurately stating that nothing resembling them is known from North America. But what if they had come from South America instead? The 'Indian' reference could simply have been to whichever native Indian tribe(s) shared their specific distribution in South America. And could it be that 'prairie' was nothing more than an alternative name for 'pampas', perhaps substituted deliberately by Mander as he knew that 'prairie' would be a more familiar term than 'pampas' to his exhibition's visitors?

But does the South American pampas harbour a creature resembling those cryptids from York? Until at least as recently as the close of the Pleistocene epoch a mere 10,000 years or so ago, this vast region (encompassing southernmost Brazil, much of Uruguay, and part of Argentina) did indeed harbour large shaggy bear-like beasts with huge claws,

noticeable ears, plus sizeable nostrils and mouth. I refer of course to the ground sloths – those burly, predominantly terrestrial relatives of today's much smaller tree sloths. Moreover, the pampas has hosted several modern-day sightings of cryptids bearing more than a passing resemblance to ground sloths – and thence to the York mystery beasts.

Some species of ground sloth were truly gigantic, but others were of much more modest proportions, and there is no doubt that a medium-sized species of surviving ground sloth would solve a number of currently unresolved cryptozoological conundra, not least of which is the identity of the mystifying York beasts. Specimens of many other South American beasts were commonly transported from their sultry homelands and exhibited in Europe back in the days of travelling menageries here. Could these have included a couple of ground sloths? In addition, armed with such huge claws, a cornered ground sloth might well be more than sufficiently belligerent if threatened or attacked to warrant being dubbed a 'fiend'.

So, who knows – perhaps the hypothetical dusty museum storeroom postulated by Clinton as a repository for some mortal remains of the Nandi bear may contain some modern-day ground sloth cadavers instead. It certainly wouldn't be the first time that surprising and highly significant zoological discoveries have been made not in the field but in hitherto unstudied or overlooked collections of museum specimens. **FT**

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



DR KARL SHUKER is a Midlands-based zoologist, cryptozoologist and author. He has been a regular contributor to *FT* for many years. His latest book is *Mirabilis: A Carnival of Cryptozoology and Unnatural History* (Anomalist Books, 2013).

THE FIRST FORTEANS

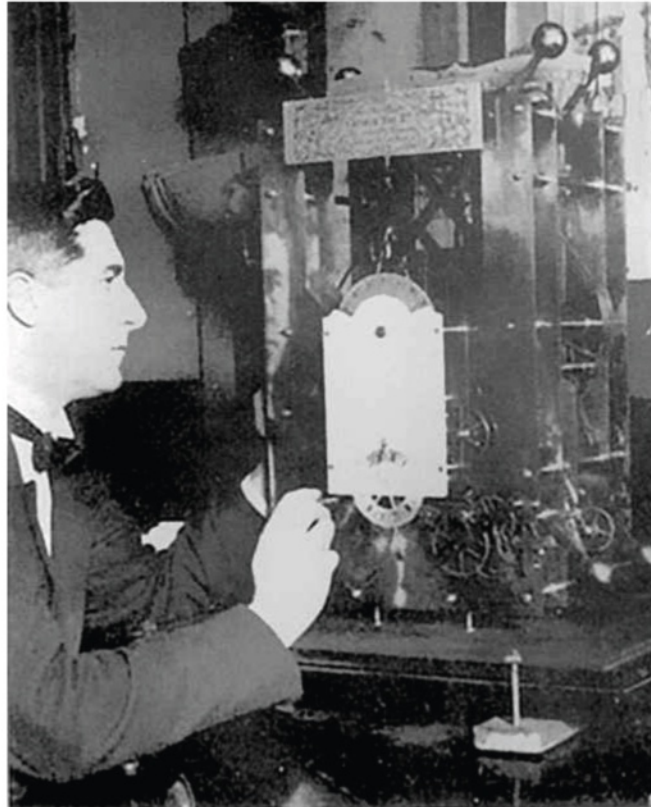
7. THE MAN WHO KNEW ALMOST EVERYTHING

Who were the First Forteans? British fortean lineage began in the early 1930s, when Charles Fort was still alive and his books quite rare in these isles. **BOB RICKARD** continues his rummage for our fortean roots.

Although he was not strictly a fortean – in that word’s sense of one who knows of, subscribes to, or promotes Charles Fort’s writings or philosophy – Rupert Thomas Gould (1890-1948), a polymath and acknowledged authority on maritime chronometers, naval history, cartography, and polar expeditions – had a long-lasting effect on latent forteans, both before WWII and since. Mike Dash, for example, cites Gould as a key influence on him since he “discovered a copy of [Gould’s *Oddities: A Book Of Unexplained Facts*] buried on the shelves of my aunt’s house when I was about 13”.¹ Ditto, Peter Rogerson, the *Northern Echoes* blogger and chief reviewer for *Magonia*, who recalls: “I encountered the two books of Rupert T Gould in Colwyn Bay library in my summer holiday in 1963, a time when I first became a voracious reader.”²

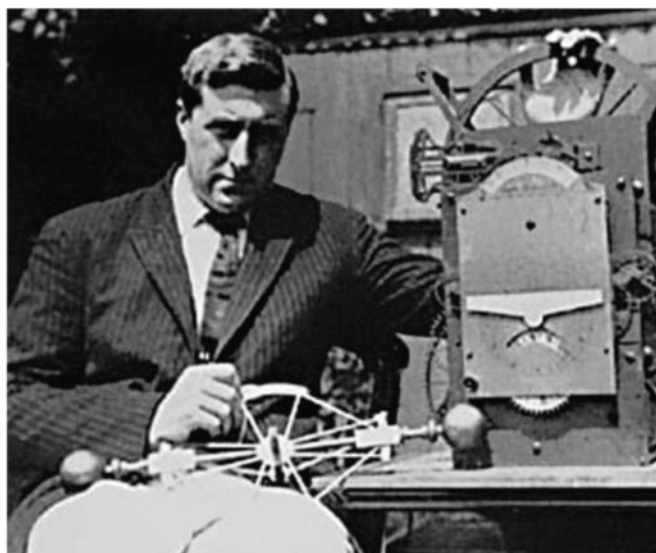
As befits “the man who knew (almost) everything” (as his epithet ran), Gould was blessed with a photographic memory – “I can visualise the actual page of a book where I read the information” – the benefit of which was demonstrated in his penchant for copious and detailed footnotes and a regular seat on *The Brains Trust*, a long-running BBC radio panel popular throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Nevertheless, Gould wrote on many topics that are now considered part of the fortean canon without, as far as I can tell, having read Fort’s books (see panel). If he had, then he didn’t reference them, which he certainly would have given his eidetic talents. It’s possible that he didn’t think Fort’s attitude or methods were rigorous, scholarly or detailed enough for his purposes – Gould was by nature meticulous and pedantic, more interested in the detailed examination of single cases than general commentary.

Those wanting to know more about Gould’s eccentric and



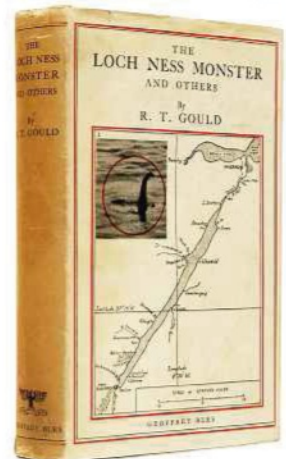
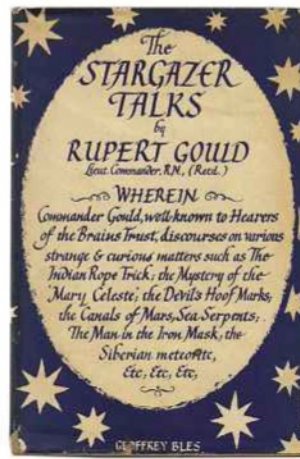
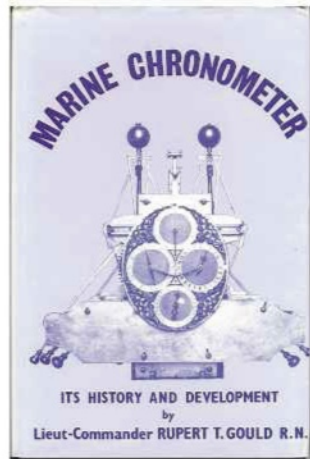
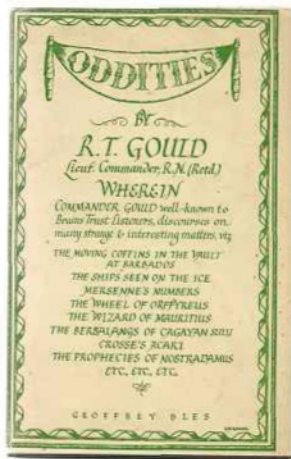
LEFT: Two photographs showing Gould with maritime chronometers, about which he wrote an authoritative book.

GOULD’S *ODDITIES* INCLUDED THE DEVIL’S HOOV-MARKS; THE MOVING COFFINS OF BARBADOS; PHANTOM SHIPS SEEN IN ARCTIC ICE AND THE PROPHECIES OF NOSTRADAMUS



troubled life are referred to *Time Restored* (2006), the well-researched and sympathetic biography by Jonathan Betts; for now, Mike Dash provides this excellent snapshot of the man. “[Gould] was prone throughout adulthood to mental illness. As Betts notes... he was confined, speechless, to bed for the best part of a year by his first breakdown, suffered three further severe outbreaks of depression thereafter, and could be prostrated by any one of several irrational fears, including those of being struck by lightning and getting caught up in a revolution. These frailties undoubtedly restricted his output, and so did a dubious talent for taking on far too many commitments. Among numerous projects, begun but never finished, were books titled *Nine Days’ Wonders* and *Mares’ Nests* — works fit to rank with Fort’s X and Y in the damned library of lost literature – and a proposed study of bisexuality, *The Third Sex*, which would certainly have seemed pretty radical had it been published, as planned, in 1947.”

After he retired as a lieutenant commander in the British Royal Navy, Gould became famous for his study of the science of timekeeping devices; in particular his 13-year-long restoration of the 18th century marine chronometers of John Harrison, completed in 1933.³ Retirement allowed him the opportunity to write two books about ‘unexplained facts’ – *Oddities* (1928) and *Enigmas* (1929) – probably the earliest modern books on forteana not written by Fort, both of which are still recommended as good examples of eclectic and eccentric scholarship. *Oddities* included the Devil’s hoof-marks; the moving coffins



ABOVE: Some of Gould's wide-ranging published works, including the forteen works *Oddities* (1929), *The Stargazer Talks* (1943) and *The Loch Ness Monster and Others* (1934).

of Barbados; phantom ships seen in Arctic ice; perpetual motion, mathematical puzzles; lost islands; far sight; the creation of microscopic life; and prophecies of Nostradamus; and sightings of the planet Vulcan. *Enigmas* included evidence of giants; Martian canals; really old age; the poltergeist at Great Bealings; the last trial by mortal combat; the landfall of Columbus; the last alchemist; the mysterious loss of the British flagship *Victoria*; and three different mystery sounds. Some of these cases were also in Fort's first two books (written in 1919 and 1928), and some were revisited, three decades later, by Eric Frank Russell (EFR) in his *Great World Mysteries* (1957).

What is interesting here is

the evidence of an early postal friendship between Gould and EFR, all the more curious as the pair were as different as chalk and cheese. EFR was known to admire Gould's books and was undoubtedly influenced by them. In *Great World Mysteries*, EFR describes Gould as "a shrewd if somewhat irascible author" – 'irascible', most likely, because Gould did not have the temperament to tolerate EFR's frivolity and lack of scholarship.⁴ EFR continues somewhat facetiously: "[Gould] devoted much of his time to analysing puzzles, collecting and overhauling ancient typewriters and – to judge from his many letters to me – gathering odd scraps of writing paper from heaven alone knows where."⁵

I don't know when, precisely, they first came into contact but it was, most probably, sometime between 1928, when *Oddities* was published, and 1939, when EFR's forteen novel, *Sinister Barrier*, came out. In 1928, Russell was aged 23, and most SF fans were only aware of each other through the letters pages of the professional magazines; it would be another two years before Walter Gillings organised the very first SF group in London. Far to the north, in Liverpool, we know that EFR saw Philip Cleator's letter – establishing the British Interplanetary Society – in 1933, and that he finally joined them in October 1935.⁶ This seems to be EFR's first social contact with fellow SF fans, any of whom could have alerted

him to Gould's books if he didn't already know of them.

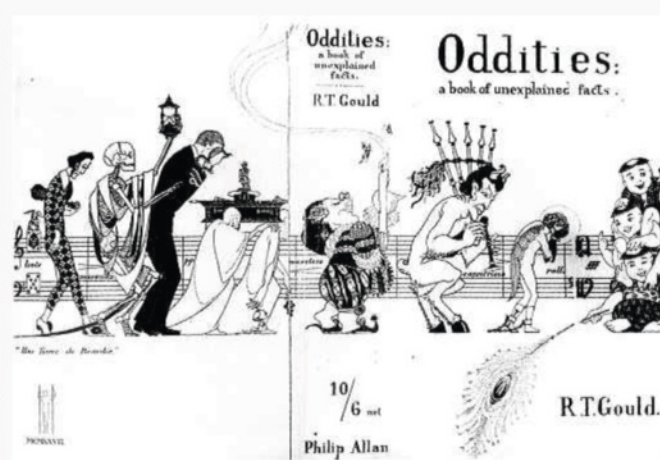
While Russell's first fiction appeared in 1937, he was, according to his biographer, John Ingham, working on *Sinister Barrier* early in 1939, as German forces were building up to the invasion of Poland. He had, says Ingham, "amassed a comparatively large collection of press clippings" and drew inspiration from Gould's books (among others).⁷ Ingham, however, goes on to suggest that *Sinister Barrier's* villains – the parasitic globes of energy that EFR called "Vitons" – could have come from Olaf Stapledon, the philosopher-novelist whom EFR and Leslie Johnson recruited to the BIS in 1935.

It seems to me, though, that this theory overlooks a more

WAS GOULD AWARE OF FORT'S WORK?

We have searched for any hint that Gould had read or knew of Fort's books. Despite being roughly contemporary, working in parallel on anomalous topics, we have unearthed only the following suggestion. In reviewing Jonathan Betts's biography, Peter Rogerson concluded that Gould had "clearly read Fort's books".⁹

What convinced him was the dust-jacket of the first edition of *Oddities*, which "features [Gould's] own illustration of Fort's 'Procession of the Damned'." This is an allusion, of course, to the opening lines of Fort's *Book of the Damned* (1919): "A procession of the damned. By the damned, I mean the excluded. We shall have a procession of data that science has excluded. Battalions of the accursed, captained by pallid



data that I have exhumed, will march. You'll read them – or they'll march. Some of them livid and some of them fiery and some of them rotten."

While Betts is impressed

by the revelation of this link between Gould and Fort, Mike Dash is unconvinced. "I suspect that the similarity between Fort's 'procession' and Gould's cover is no more than coincidence."

Dash thinks Betts's original supposition – that the queue of characters depicts a "dead march" (a funeral procession) – "is much more persuasive".¹⁰

I agree. In a style reminiscent of Aubrey Beardsley, it could be an imagining of his own funeral viewed from one of his depressions. The third figure from the left is Gould in his Royal Navy uniform, his cap on the coffin in front of him and Death at his back. The procession is led by a naked angel in chains, followed by Pan playing a dirge and a figure carrying a corpse candle.

Nothing, here, directly links to Fort. If anything it emphasises that, while he may have been a precursor to Fort, Gould's work was both original and independent of Fort.



ABOVE LEFT: A portrait of Gould with pipe from the 1940s. ABOVE RIGHT: Gould with his wife. BELOW: The 1934 film *The Secret of the Loch* was the first to feature a screen appearance by the newly-famous Loch Ness Monster; the creature was said to have “resembled an overgrown iguana”, which it clearly does in this still.

likely and direct inspiration that EFR could have taken from one of the shortest chapters of Gould’s *Oddities*, concerning the mysterious Berbalang people of Cagayan Sulu, a small island off the

Philippines, now called Mapun Island. Citing the only known account from the *Journal of Asiatic Studies* of 1896, Gould retells a story of gothic horror in which the cannibalistic Berbalangs hide their bodies,



then perceived as Viton-like luminous forms swarming “like dancing fire-flies” to feast, vampirically, on the entrails and vitality of sleeping humans.⁸

Gould also wrote two seminal cryptozoological studies – *The Case for the Sea Serpent* (1930), and *The Loch Ness Monster and Others* (1934) – subjects in which his biographer admitted to being out of his depth, so he was grateful for help from Mike Dash and Peter Costello. [9] The late Bernard Heuvelmans (1916-2001) ranked Gould’s work on the sea serpent as second only to the pioneering study by AC Oudemans (1858-1943). Gould’s detailed book on Nessie, notes Mike Dash, was “the first book ever written on the subject” and, coming just a year after the first modern sightings, did much to make the subject famous.

That same year, 1934, saw the release of the first movie featuring the loch’s monster,

The Secret of the Loch, starring Sir Seymour Hicks and with a young David Lean as its editor. Maurice Hanson’s fanzine *Novae Terrae* records that a group of fans went to see the film in 1938, remarking that Nessie “resembled an overgrown lizard”.

To close the circle, I note that the film’s opening credits thank the London Zoological Society for its help, but some Nessie-hunters think it was heavily influenced by Gould’s theory of the survival of a prehistoric reptile.

Another circle is closed here too, as one of the film’s scriptwriters, Charles Bennett, went on to adapt MR James’s story ‘Casting the Runes’ for the 1957 film *Night of the Demon* (one of my all-time favourites), in which the sinister occultist Dr Karswell is supposedly modelled upon Aleister Crowley, with whom EFR feuded (or imagined he did). **FT**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I could not have made this instalment without the help of the SF fan historians and archivists who went out of their way to preserve the correspondence, images, fanzines and reports of the day. Chief among those are: **Rob Hansen** for his two archives: *THEN: A History of UK Science Fiction Fandom (1930-1980)* - <http://www.ansible.co.uk/Then/> and *FIAWOL* - <http://www.fiawol.org.uk/FanStuff/index.htm>; **Dave Langford** for his Ansible archive - <http://news.ansible.co.uk/>; NB: For ease of reading, I omit many references here – but a fully referenced and linked version will follow (eventually) on my CFI blogsite: <http://blogs.forteana.org/bob>

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- 1 Mike Dash, ‘Some modern eccentrics #2. Rupert T Gould: scholar, broadcaster, officer and not-quite-gentleman’, (4 Oct 2009): <http://blogs.forteana.org/node/81>
- 2 Peter Rogerson on Gould and EFR, ‘The early British Fortean’s’: <http://pelicanist.blogspot.co.uk/2013/09/first-read-early-british-fortean.html>
- 3- Upon which Dava Sobel’s 1997 book *Longitude* was based (dramatised for TV in 2000 by Granada, with Jeremy Irons playing Gould).
- 4 A more explicit difference between Gould and EFR is that while the latter used vulgar language and yet could be prudish in other ways,

the former was painfully open about his “lifelong interest in bondage and, apparently, ritualised group sex activities”, as Mike Dash puts it. See note 1.

5 Russell, *Great World Mysteries* (1957) p36. Betts explains that EFR was referring to Gould’s “practice of trimming his letters to exact length, saving small pieces to be used for shorter notes. Shortage of money over the years led to a number of parsimonious little foibles such as this.” *Time Restored*, ch.11. Gould is again joined to Fort by such a practice, as Fort would cut or tear blank paper, salvaged from anywhere, into tiny squares before writing his notes on them in his personal shorthand.

6 see *The First Fortean’s #2: ‘The Rocket Boys’ FT309:50-51.*

7 John L Ingham, *Into Your Tent* (2010) pp135 and 287.

8 Gould underlines the horrific climax with a footnote referring to the mediaeval scholar, writer and provost MR James (1862-1936): “I can hear his voice now, reading [this] account to my brother and myself, after dinner, in the Provost’s Lodge at King’s 30 years and more ago.” *Oddities*, p86.

9 Comments, in Peter Rogerson, ‘Time and the Detective’: <http://mrobsr.blogspot.co.uk/2010/03/time-and-detective.html>

10 *Ibid.*

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The Crystal Palace skeletons

TOM BROWN investigates a rattling good legend about a London landmark, a lost railway and a coachload of Victorian skeletons



TOM BROWN lives in Crystal Palace and divides his time between a day job in market research and concocting genre-busting fiction in his spare time.

“Last summer after a bit of a row with my parents, I went to Crystal Palace and was going to stay the night there. I jumped over a wall and the ground caved in beneath me. I fell about 15ft [4.5m] and sprained my foot. I struck a match to see where I was and saw the train. There was a smell of death and it was damp. Then I saw the passengers. The women wore dresses with bustles and the men still wore their top hats. Some were in the seats and others were scattered around.”

So said 19-year-old Pamela Goodsell in September 1978, telling a local newspaper about her grisly encounter with a group of fully clothed Victorian skeletons, trapped in a buried railway carriage.

Goodsell's story is the most chilling version of the signature myth of Crystal Palace Park – the airy south London green space which, between 1854 and 1936, hosted Sir Joseph Paxton's mighty ‘people's palace’, and all its mind-expanding paraphernalia.

Among the most fascinating of those novelties was an 1864 railway experiment in the Palace grounds, which is widely agreed to be the only possible source of the ‘buried carriage’ legend.

Pioneered by the civil engineer Thomas Webster Rammell, the railway was an evolution of the failed ‘atmospheric’ lines of the 1840s and their wonderfully unlikely attempts to use depressurised air to suck trains to their destinations.

It was intended as a clean, safe and reliable alternative to steam, and Rammell became obsessed with promoting an elaborated ‘pneumatic’ version of the system to power London's first underground railways.

The Crystal Palace trial was his first full-scale prototype. It consisted of a station and 600-yard tunnel, through which a passenger carriage was blown downhill, then sucked back up, by a single

fan. Public and professional opinion was sufficiently encouraging for Rammell to start building a fully operational line between Waterloo and Whitehall, which ultimately (and unluckily) succumbed to the serious financial downturn of 1866.

But what became of the Crystal Palace carriage? Though Pamela Goodsell was arguably the first to allege the presence of former passengers, the notion that Rammell's carriage had been abandoned at the Palace existed for many years before her unsettling story surfaced.

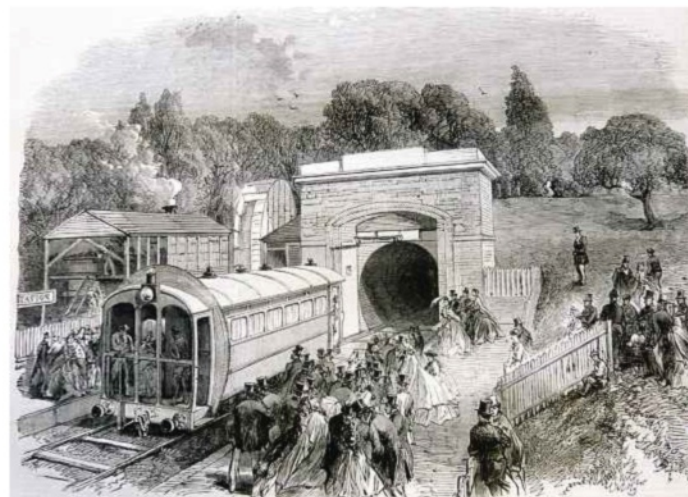
J E Connor, writing in January 2004's *London Railway Record*, cited a newspaper report from the 1960s which referred to a disused underground station “which still retained a train from the 1860s” – a date which could only refer to Rammell's Crystal Palace experiment – while others believe the story was around as early as the 1930s.

Naturally, several attempts have been made to uncover whatever remains of Rammell's railway. Divining rods, seismographic tests and helicopter observations have all been used to try to locate the line, while the most successful dig took place in 1989, when an enigmatic archaeologist named the ‘Marquis du St Empire’ claimed to have found part of the base



Tom Brown's *Strange Air*, a historical fantasy novel that merges the true histories of Rammell's pneumatic railways and the Crystal Palace via the myth of the skeletons in the carriage, is available now from Amazon.

BELOW: The Pneumatic Railway at Crystal Palace.



of Rammell's tunnel. Though the largely self-funded project ran out of money before excavations could be completed, the shallowness of the ruins all but eliminated the possibility of the carriage remaining hidden anywhere below ground.

As for Pamela Goodsell, the Chairman of the Crystal Palace Foundation, Melvyn Harrison, met her soon after her story emerged, asking to be shown the site of her terrifying encounter. Alas, not only had the hole into which she toppled completely vanished, but the area of the park in which the ordeal took place was far removed from that of Rammell's experiment.

“The only thing that is *theoretically* possible,” Harrison told me, “is that she went into the basement of the Palace and saw old stage sets – and they might have had skeletons on them.”

Although Goodsell didn't openly confess her dishonesty, Harrison says she soon became a “bit tongue-in-cheekish”, and is adamant that she was making it up. Furthermore, he endorses Connor's belief that the myth actually originates in a separate pneumatic railway demonstration that ran below New York from 1870 to 1873, the carriage from which *was* sensationally discovered – intact, but *sans* skeletal passengers – in 1912. Harrison argues that the news from New York got back to London and bled into accounts of the Crystal Palace line.

It's a persuasive suggestion, especially alongside the Marquis's dig, and begs the question of why the myth still does the rounds, all these years later.

For me, speaking as one who's written a novel inspired by Goodsell's story, the answer lies in the intoxicating melancholy of Crystal Palace Park – an enthralling jumble of faded ruins and fragments of forgotten dreams which sits, frozen in time, at the heart of a bustling London suburb.

Put simply, the place needs a good ghost story, and the ‘skeletons in the carriage’ myth works not because it is factual, but because it is fitting.

For that reason alone, I'm happy to perpetuate it. **FT**

When the Price is right...

REMCO VAN STRATEN and ANGELINE ADAMS spent a week locked in a decaying castle where they were forced to watch Roger Corman's series of Poe films.



ANGELINE B ADAMS & REMCO VAN STRATEN live and work in Belfast, where their lives are ruled by an Alien Burmese Cat. They have previously written on Robert E Howard (see this month's editorial) and Sinterklaas for *FT*.

Roger Corman announced a while back that he planned to remake the series of films for which he is best remembered – his 1960s Poe adaptations. One can't help being sceptical about such an enterprise; although, people were sceptical the first time around. The short stories and poems of Edgar Allan Poe, filmed by schlockmeister Roger Corman, starring horror ham Vincent Price? Critics of the time laughed off the idea as misguided pretentiousness – but time has proven kinder to Corman's Poe cycle.

Producer/director Corman indeed churned them out quick and dirty for financier/distributor American International Pictures (AIP) from the mid-1950s onwards; juvenile delinquent and sci-fi B-movies for a teen audience

“The works of Poe hadn't been done properly on the screen”

BELOW: A white-haired Vincent Price as Roderick Usher.

BOTTOM: A UK poster for *The Fall of the House of Usher*, a film partly inspired by the success of the British Hammer films.



in small cinemas and drive-ins. There was still an audience for these films, even as TV took over the living rooms and the big studios imploded, although even this market was saturated by other outfits jumping on the low-budget bandwagon.

Corman had greater ambitions, though, so he went to AIP's Samuel Z Arkoff and James H Nicholson and proposed to make Edgar Allan Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher* for them, with a slightly bigger budget, longer shooting schedule (but still only 15 days) and in colour. They okayed it: after all, Corman's pictures had consistently made a profit, and UK's Hammer Films had done good business with their recent *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* pictures.

A team of capable and reliable people was assembled, many of who would return for further Poe films, and shooting scheduled for January 1960. For the role of Roderick Usher only Vincent Price was ever considered. Price already had a distinguished career behind him as a character actor and in B-quickies, but was ready for a new challenge: "I wanted to take a gamble on projects I believed in, and I believed that the works of Edgar Allan Poe hadn't been done properly on the screen."

While his name would be a byword for horror from that point onwards, for Price "these were Gothic tales and not horror stories. Horror stories are the ones that deal with reality." From *Usher's* first shot it is indeed clear that we are not in Kansas anymore. A lone young man steers his horse through a forest of dead trees and bracken, ending up at the gates of a huge, crumbling, fog-enshrouded mansion. If nothing else, it resembles a tomb.

With this traveller, coming to rescue his beloved from the clutches of her insane brother, we find ourselves in a very particular and peculiar world, not knowing quite what to expect. This dark fairytale world draws us into a heightened, dreamlike state. And at its centre: Roderick Usher, long-limbed, blue eyes standing out against his blood-red robes and the red, brown and gold interiors. He's hypersensitive, but flinches only when opposed, paints his demented portraits in violent colours, and plucks his lute dismally.

It was Price's idea to give Usher white hair, befitting a man who claims a dark heritage and has had all vitality sucked out of him by his ancestral home – or so he believes. AIP believed a teenage audience would feel cheated without a monster, so Corman gave

Price some hastily written lines: “The house lives! The house breathes!”.

It can be argued, though, that the family’s curse exists only in Usher’s head. After all, it’s through his actions that his sister loses her sanity and the house eventually falls. Writer Richard Matheson found it challenging to rework the short story into a feature-length movie: “Poe’s story is very brooding and ruminating, and not too much plot, movement or dialogue, so I kind of faked the Poe touches.” Shades of Shakespeare flavour the dialogue and see Madeline, like Lady Macbeth, roaming the house with bloodied hands.

The script’s oppressive atmosphere is enhanced by the cluttered sets created by Daniel Heller – ornate fireplaces, curlicued furniture, oriental carpets and all the Victorian tat you could ever imagine. They are richly detailed and textured, in a luscious colour scheme, and delineated with light and shadow by Floyd Crosby’s camerawork.

Corman made what was still a small budget stretch through careful attention to detail, and the use of a veteran crew and actors who he knew could deliver within a few takes. He discussed the key roles in depth before shooting, as there would be no time for that once the cameras rolled. According to Price: “We worked hard, really hard – oh boy, he was a slavedriver! But it was wonderful fun, because he had it so carefully planned.”

AIP’s gamble and Corman’s hard work paid off, and *House of Usher* did gangbusters at the box office. Corman got the go-ahead for a whole series of Poe films, eight in total, ending with *Tomb of Ligeia* in 1965, all but one of them (*The Premature Burial*) with Price in a pivotal role. They’re not all strictly Poe, though: *The Raven* only uses Poe’s title, and *The Haunted Palace* is an HP Lovecraft story with the serial number filed off and a few lines of Poe grafted on.

The various films inherit many characteristics of Poe’s stories and poems – sexual obsession, inherited insanity and isolated places. Additional recurring elements include the motif of cleansing, the expressionist sets and the deranged artwork we find on castle and mansion walls. Corman engaged much of *Usher’s* core crew for further films, and props and sets too were recycled due to budget considerations.

The Pit and the Pendulum was the second feature to be made, requiring Matheson to fill in yet more backstory. Again it begins with an unwary traveller in weird and foreign climes, this time finding Price as the heartbroken



Nicholas Medina, rattling about in his Spanish mansion. Once more, a dark past catches up with the protagonists, in the shape of Medina’s unhinged, cuckolded father, also played by Price (with much relish).

Tales of Terror includes a black comedy to prevent the trilogy of tales feeling too samey. It’s the sandwich formula of the Grand Guignol, and as Price pointed out: “Comedy and terror are very closely allied”. *The Black Cat* (including a full “Cask of Amontillado”) gives him a plum role as the snobbish wine expert, but it’s veteran Peter Lorre who gives a layered portrayal as a mean drunk with some lingering remnants of charm and intelligence.

Lorre’s performance is unsettling: we laugh at his wit, then recoil as his mood flips and reveals the wife-beater he is. Such subtlety is absent in *The Raven*, a geriatric Looney Tunes with Price, Lorre and Boris Karloff in a burlesque of the previous movies. Much to Karloff’s dismay, Lorre kept ad-libbing, and Corman decided to roll with it. The lack of discipline is noticeable according to Price: “Yes, it was very annoying, it really was. Because no actor is funnier than a good writer.”

ABOVE: Three icons of Hollywood horror in Corman’s *The Raven*.

With *Tomb of Ligeia*, Corman was done with Poe, but the preceding *Masque of the Red Death* is arguably the best of them all, showing the full extent of his ambition. The film is unabashedly symbolic, beginning with an old lady in the now familiar forest, encountering a strange man in bright red monk’s robes. It was an homage to Death from Bergman’s *The Seventh Seal*, but Corman’s Death has a far bigger role to play, both as destroyer and as liberator. When plague hits the country and Prince Prospero gathers his friends in the safety of his castle, he takes the peasant Francesca with him. Price’s Prospero is a monster and a sadist, but also a philosopher, trying to subject her with reason instead of force. *Masque’s* script is highly literate and its philosophy appears sound. “If a god of love and life ever did exist, he is long dead,” Prospero argues, and you think: “He’s got a point there, girl!”

Masque is grander than the preceding films, enabling Nicholas Roeg’s camera to roam seductively through the multi-coloured rooms. The film’s final set piece impresses: Corman staged an eerie dance of death, a crowd scene for which he engaged the Royal Ballet. Eventually, only Price’s Prospero stands, with the spectre he mistakes for Satan’s herald. Price expertly conveys his terror and then disappointment. You can’t help but pity the potentate who earlier killed and tortured for sport.

Reviewing the whole run of Poe movies in sequence, one thing that becomes clear is just how versatile an actor Vincent Price is. He makes each of these Gothic anti-heroes real to us: slack-faced Verden Fell, neurotic Roderick Usher, Locke in *Morella* who appears unused to speaking aloud... with echoes of aesthetes like Byron, Wilde and Poe himself, they sit perfectly within these larger-than-life movies. Price later said that Corman’s intention had been to “express some of the psychology of Poe’s characters, and imbue our movie versions with the spirit of Poe.”

Despite the budgetary constraints, the director and actor team succeeded; the films are timeless, and as exciting now as they were half a century ago. **F**

QUOTATION SOURCES

Lucy Chase Williams, *The Complete Works of Vincent Price*, Carol Publishing Group, 1998
Victoria Price, *Vincent Price: a Daughter’s Biography*, St. Martin’s Press, 1999
Anthony Timpone, *Fangoria’s Best Horror Films*, Crescent Books 1994

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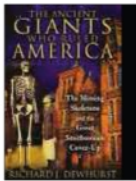
This month's books, films and games

reviews



The Old World's taller stories

The existence of a "mighty race" was common knowledge in 19th century America – until the Smithsonian got involved, claims the author of a study of these giants



The Ancient Giants who Ruled America

Richard J Dewhurst

Bear & Co 2014

Pb, 357pp, illus, bib, ind, \$20.00, ISBN 9781591431718

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £15.29

Before Columbus 'discovered' North America, before the Chinese or Vikings made their incursions, and before even the 'First Americans' trudged across the Bering land bridge from Siberia with their 'Clovis' flint-pointed spears, "this land was populated by very ancient peoples, some of whom were of enormous size". This is Dewhurst's fascinating thesis.

In the 1920s, a megalithic burial complex on Catalina Island, in use for 6,000 years, yielded 4,000 skeletons, "some more than nine feet [2.7m] tall". Who were the people who buried hundreds of red-haired mummies on the west coast of Florida 95,000 years ago, or the mummies in fine textiles in Spirit Cave, Nevada, 10,000 years ago? Who built the thousands of mounds in Minnesota, or the now-ruined giant cities dotting Arizona, Louisiana, Alabama and Oklahoma, capable of housing populations of 100,000? In 1927, a farmer in Illinois ploughed up some bones near ancient mounds, discovering a Neolithic burial site with an estimated 3,000 burials attracting around 75,000 visitors a year. In the 1990s, the site and any further investigations were

shut down under the newly-enacted Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act; today it is hardly visited and practically unknown.

Dewhurst excavated these and "several hundred" other news reports – telling of mounds yielding members of "a mighty race", "copper crowns and pearl robes" other fortean anomalies (including inscriptions and puzzling artefacts) – from the archives of regional American newspapers. They were "common knowledge" in the media of 19th century America. Many of these ancient monuments were included in *Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley*, the Smithsonian's first study, commissioned from Ephraim Squier, an experienced surveyor and archaeologist, and Edwin Davis, a doctor with local knowledge, and published in 1848.

"When carbon dating became available in the 20th century", Dewhurst writes, "earlier estimates of the age of the remains increased by many magnitudes; with ranges from five thousand to 14 thousand years". Why have we not heard more about these discoveries; and more importantly why have they not been thoroughly investigated, if only to rule them out as fakes or misidentifications etc? If only a fraction of them pan out, the pre-history of the Americas would have to be re-written.

Dewhurst – an award-winning TV documentary writer – constructs a theory as complex and intriguing as any conspiracy plot for a Hollywood movie; he blames the Smithsonian for actively suppressing discoveries that challenged its official line on the ancient past. He alleges

"A megalithic burial complex yielded 4,000 skeletons, 'some more than nine feet tall'"

that the Smithsonian – founded in 1829 with a half-million dollar grant from James Smithson, a British mineralogist – has been at the centre of a systematic "cover-up of America's true history since the 1880s". The cover-up began shortly after the American Civil War when, in 1879, Congress created the Bureau of American Ethnology and placed it under the auspices of the Smithsonian. Since then, the promising beginnings, demonstrated by Squier and Davis, have not been followed through.

In those days, according to Dewhurst, the Smithsonian "began to adopt a policy of excluding any evidence of direct foreign influence in the Americas prior to Columbus". Three possible reasons are given: an attempt to sooth regional and ethnic conflicts during the post-war period of "national rebuilding expansion"; the belief in the doctrine of 'manifest destiny' inherent in the expansionist policies of the post-war government, which resulted in a deliberate obscuring of the cultures "of the tribes being displaced or annihilated by westward expansion"; a "religious policy" that countered the Mormon assertion that the 'lost tribes of Israel' were located in America.

"All of these policies", says

Dewhurst, "can be directly traced to Major John Wesley Powell", the geologist and explorer who was appointed as first head of the Bureau of Ethnology. He was also a director of the US Geological Survey and retained both posts until his death in 1902; ample time and opportunity, says Dewhurst, for Powell to promulgate what today might be interpreted as racial prejudice and cultural suppression. Powell's writing frequently denigrates the cultures of the Native Americans as "savage and barbaric", generally lacking in intelligence and capable only of building or making crudely and without any significant art.

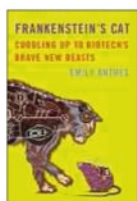
To make matters worse, argues Dewhurst, Charles Doolittle Walcott, chief executive of the Smithsonian between 1907 and 1927, made "the Powell doctrine" the organisation's official dogma. It is still in place, he says, and has resulted in the disappearance of hundreds of 'out of context' finds, "all submitted to the museum in naïve ignorance of the official policy of suppression". Also, because these policies were promulgated through universities, they have affected teaching and restricted research funding for unorthodox interpretations of American history.

Thus, the Bureau – established to be the national repository for records and artefacts relating to the Native Americans – was unfit for purpose from its inception. The bulk of *Ancient Giants* is a continuous parade of period news reports from the 1880s into the 20th century, patiently transcribed (sometimes showing an original news clipping or news photo of the remains of veritable giants

Continued on page 60

Science horror

Contemporary biotech-meets-Romero works better than glow-in-the-dark fish



Frankenstein's Cat Cuddling up to Biotech's Brave New Beasts

Emily Anthes

newworld 2013

Pb, 234pp, notes, £8.99, ISBN 9781851689682

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £8.54

How to Make a Zombie

Frank Swain

newworld 2013

Pb, 256pp, index, £8.99, ISBN 9781851689446

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £8.54

Science through the medium of horror...

These books hang their investigations of contemporary science on the hook of popular horror tropes; while this certainly makes them stand out on the bookshelves, it gives an impression of lurid scare story. This isn't entirely borne out by the contents, though, as both books take a fairly calm and even-handed look at the science within.

Anthes's book tackles what contemporary biotech allows humans to do with animals; Swain's considers the science of mind control, and is the rather more satisfying and coherent read. While acknowledging the popularity of the Romero-style reanimated rotting corpse zombie, Swain starts by exploring the science and folklore behind the original Haitian zombie, and the research into the drugs that are thought to have been used to render people compliant mindless slaves.

Swain balances the storytelling and the scientific narrative, and he keeps the tale moving along nicely without drifting off into

irrelevant anecdote or getting bogged down in the chemistry lab.

He then takes us through grisly scientific attempts at resurrection, involving blood infusions, severed dogs' heads and the grotesque death of Pope Innocent VIII, who was essentially drowned in the blood of three small boys, poured down his throat as a crude attempt at transfusion as he lay dying, and on through mind control experiments like MKULTRA, to mickey finns, rabies, lobotomies and brain parasites.

His narrative style is comfortable enough to sidetrack to things such as the discovery of the pigment Prussian blue and bizarre phone hoaxes without losing the reader. The only thing that jars a little is the occasional forced attempt to link these to the initial zombie theme.

Anthes is less successful. She attempts the Mary Roache first-person investigative narrative, but has neither Roache's flair, her sense of humour, nor her eye for a killer topic, so she comes across a little flat.

Her book starts with genetically modified glowing pet fish and encompasses the genetic resurrection of extinct species, prosthetic dolphin tails, cloned pets and the use of animals as robotic sensors, among other things. While the writing itself is not particularly sensationalised and her treatment of the science accurate and balanced, the combination of the title and the areas she investigates never quite shakes the impression of science scare story.

It's fine as a science book, and a perfectly pleasant read, but never quite takes off in the way *How to Make a Zombie* does.

Ian Simmons

Fortean Times Verdict

SWAIN: EVEN-HANDED, WIDE-RANGING AND A GOOD READ
ANTHES: OK, BUT DOESN'T REALLY TAKE OFF AS IT COULD HAVE DONE

8
6

Continued from page 59

from different locations across North America, many associated with the enigmatic Mound-builder culture). Too many of these end with a proud statement that the remains – bones (not stone or fakes like the Cardiff Giant) – were packed and shipped to the Smithsonian, never to be seen again or even recorded. Many puzzling finds of sophisticated carvings, inscribed stones, metal implements and so on, are either locked behind 'restricted access' notices or have vanished from the record of holdings.

Along the way, Dewhurst tackles many fortean topics head-on, including the legendary Thunderbird, apparently advanced or out-of-place artefacts, the European-like Mandan people and, of course, the puzzling copper mines that litter the Great Lakes area. Many of these latter date between 5,000 and 10,000 years old and, it is estimated, an incredible 1.5 billion pounds of copper was extracted... but where did it go? Dewhurst believes it was traded with Asia and Europe, which is disputed by orthodoxy, of course. He points to an odd coincidence: the copper-miners seem to have ceased trading around 1500 BC, about the time Santorini erupted, wiping out the Minoans and disabling the trading fleets of other sea-going Mediterranean nations.

Dewhurst is critical of Powell's pro-evolution stance, while being anti-evolution himself; but beyond this glaring bias, his densely packed data and roller-coaster writing make this heady read well worth the effort.

Bob Rickard

Fortean Times Verdict

INTRIGUING TALE OF LARGE PRE-COLUMBUS AMERICANS

9

Lucky Planet

David Waltham

Icon Books 2014

Hb, 224pp, £14.99, ISBN 9781848316560

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £13.49



There are billions of stars out there, and every year astronomers identify more 'Earth-like' planets. The

natural assumption is that the Universe must be teeming with alien civilisations, but in *Lucky Planet* David Waltham argues that only a very fortuitous combination of circumstances has allowed life to develop and flourish on this particular small blue dot. It is far from the first book exploring this idea, but it's a worthy and up-to-date addition.

Waltham's particular angle is the highly topical area of climate stability: the balance of changing solar output over the last billion years with the greenhouse effect and increased reflectivity, effects that could easily have turned a world into a boiling hell or a frozen snowball. He takes us through Earth's complex geological history, showing how volcanic activity, the surprising influence of the Moon, weathering and the oxygen and carbon-dioxide production of living things have combined to keep conditions within tolerable limits. Climate change has caused multiple mass extinctions, but overall the planet has remained habitable.

Waltham looks at the three theories which might account for this, which he calls God, Gaia (a self-regulating planetary ecosystem) and Goldilocks (sheer luck). The tour extends from the canals of Mars to the moons of Jupiter and takes in the geology of ancient mud, Waltham's specialist subject.

God gets predictably short shrift, but the consideration of the Gaia theory is thoughtful, and Waltham makes some good points on the issue of whether life can adjust the planet's climate to suit itself. He also gives due consideration to the anthropic principle, which states (approximately) that an observer should not be surprised to find that conditions around them are those necessary to produce an observer. It is not remarkable that we should find ourselves on a planet with a breathable atmosphere.

While the prospect of a galaxy in which we are the only intelligent beings might seem dull, part of Waltham's mission is to jolt us out of seeing Earth as being dull and mundane. Because we are so used to the

routine wonders that surround us, we think everywhere else must be the same; this underlies the so-called principle of mediocrity that informs much of the discussion on extraterrestrial life. Waltham makes a good case for seeing Earth afresh as “wonderful, unique and, dare I say it, miraculous.”

David Hambling

Fortean Times Verdict

SUBSTANTIAL AND READABLE GUIDE TO ASTROBIOLOGY

8

The Sick Rose

Or; Disease and the Art of Medical Illustration

Richard Barnett

Thames & Hudson 2014

Hb, 253pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, £19.95, ISBN 9780500517345

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £17.95



Cholera is not a good look, judging from the cover illustration of a glum woman with indigo lips.

Anatomical publishing took off in London in the early 19th century thanks partly to the relatively recent development of colour lithography, which was superseded by early (and less nuanced) medical photography. Colour enabled physicians to distinguish between, for instance, leprosy and tuberculosis. Medical images, as Barnett says, were a collaboration between anatomists and artists, and the century of magnificent images reproduced here document the move from Galen's humours to modern medicine. They are augmented by maps, case notes and a lucid and knowledgeable commentary on a period riven with epidemics.

My one grouse, and it's a major one: the design. Thames & Hudson has a well-deserved reputation for books of beauty. In this case, though, the text is small (and the notes even teenier) so that when it is set on a wide measure, reading is extremely unpleasant.

For a book whose writing is as vivid as the illustrations, this is regrettable.

May Darragh

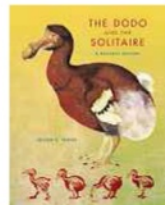
Fortean Times Verdict

GRIPPING – AND OCCASIONALLY A WEE BIT STOMACH-CHURNING

8

The compleat dodo

Everything you could possibly want to know about the flightless oddity and its destruction at the hands of Europeans



The Dodo and the Solitaire

A Natural History

Jolyon C Parish

Indiana University Press 2013

Hb, 407pp, illus, notes, refs, ind, £50.00, ISBN 9780253000996

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £50.00

The dodo *Raphus cucullatus* has inspired three equally iconic (not to mention authoritative and sumptuous) works, namely, *The Dodo and its Kindred* (1848, Strickland & Melville); *The Dodo and Kindred Birds* (1953, Hachisuka); and *Dodo* (2002, Fuller). Nor should we overlook *Lost Land of the Dodo: The Ecological History of Mauritius, Reunion and Rodrigues* (2007) by Anthony Cheke and Julian Hume. Jolyon C Parish's magnificent, comprehensive tome compares very favourably indeed with its illustrious predecessors.

The extinction on its native island of Mauritius of this large, flightless, and therefore vulnerable pigeon-related species in the late 17th century is well documented; and thanks to its slightly surreal appearance, the dodo has been immortalised in countless illustrations. However, Parish provides an original take on its tragic saga.

He reviews the historical accounts written by the people most closely associated with the dodo's discovery and description. These are followed by a survey of contemporary dodo illustrations; a review of secondary contemporary dodo sources and miscellanea; and a comprehensive documentation of anatomical evidence. (Before this evidence was uncovered, some

authorities discounted the dodo as mythical!) The book concludes with an account of its natural history – together with that of its closest and equally demised relative, the solitaire *Pezophaps solitaria* of nearby Rodrigues, historical accounts of which are covered separately.

For me, the unique way Parish's book compares, contrasts, and focuses upon the historical accounts (translated into English when the originals were in other languages) gives a vitality to the dodo's life story. It is as if the reader were witnessing at first-hand this hapless, helpless bird's fascinating but tragically brief existence – from detection to destruction in less than a century at the hands (and weapons) of Mauritius's European explorers.

Equally absorbing is the detailed history of each of the original and derivative illustrations. Many will be familiar to dodoophiles, but never before have their background stories been so meticulously documented and accessible.

Also unique to this volume is an overview of cryptozoological and other controversial dodos. The unmasking of the long-accepted but now radically reclassified solitaire of Reunion and the Mascarene Islands' even more contentious white dodo are fully examined. So too are remarkable claims of late-surviving and even elusive modern-day dodos. Hitherto obscure but fascinating reports of dodos or dodo-like birds allegedly existing in localities far beyond the species' Mauritius homeland

are also presented – dodos in Madagascar, the Seychelles, and Sri Lanka, anyone?

The exhaustive bibliography is preceded by several pages of supplementary notes and a painstakingly detailed index, a vital feature that even the best books sometimes fail to supply. The publisher has spared no expense on layout, illustrations or paper quality. This book is a thing of beauty in its own right that no ebook could compete with.

It is customary when writing a book review to find something to complain about. The only criticism I feel justified in making is that it would have been useful for the section title to have appeared on every spread so a reader opening the book at random knows immediately which section they have turned to, rather than having to check the page number against the list of contents. But this is such a minor matter that I feel a little churlish in referring to it.

This is a wonderful, definitive treatment of the dodo and solitaire.

Adding to its value by expanding certain sections and keeping its information current is Parish's companion website, 'The Dodologist's Miscellany' (<http://bit.ly/Rlg1QO>), an entertaining resource that will ensure that this fine work remains at the forefront of dodo scholarship for a very long time, and deservedly so.

Karl Shuker

Fortean Times Verdict

ALL YOU WILL EVER NEED TO KNOW ABOUT DODOS, PROBABLY

9

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Sci-fi and fantasy round-up

David V Barrett on a Norse trickster, some well realised alt Victoriana, an *Avengers* travesty, some 60s avant garde SF artworks and a Balkanised near-future Europe

The Gospel of Loki

Joanne Harris

Gollancz 2014
Hb, 320pp, £14.99, ISBN 9781473202351

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £13.49

Who Thinks Evil

Michael Kurland

Titan Books 2014
Pb, 293pp, £7.99, ISBN 9781783293346

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £7.59

A Natural History of Dragons

A Memoir by Lady Trent

Marie Brennan

Titan Books 2014
Pb, 351pp, £7.99, ISBN 9781783292394

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £7.59

Steed and Mrs Peel: Vol 1

Mark Waid, Caleb Monroe, Steve Bryant, Will Sliney

Titan Books 2013
Pb, 128pp, £10.99, ISBN 97811608863068

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £9.89

Eduardo Paolozzi at New Worlds

Science Fiction and Art in the Sixties

David Brittain

Savoy Books 2013
Pb, 181pp, £17.00, ISBN 9780861301287

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £17.00

Europe in Autumn

Dave Hutchinson

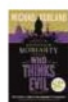
Solaris 2014
Pb, 317pp, £7.99, ISBN 9781781081952

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £7.59

With most of these new SF and fantasy books we go back in time, to the Sixties, an alternative 19th century and first, way back into Norse mythology.

Joanne M Harris, best known for *Chocolat*, has apparently been fascinated with Norse myths since the age of seven, and even learned to read ancient Icelandic to study them. *The Gospel of Loki* is a glorious retelling of the myths from the viewpoint of the god who is usually the villain. We know

from the beginning that Loki is born to be trouble, that he's out for what he can get for himself, that he will lie and cheat and cause mayhem, that he delights in pricking the pomposity of some of the other gods, and that he will always take revenge on those who have slighted him. Yet you can't help but love the streetwise trickster god. A fun read, and a nice new slant on the old tales.



We have two very British alternative Victorian novels by American writers. I discovered

Michael Kurland decades ago with his psychedelic Greenwich Village novel *The Unicorn Girl*. His latest, the Professor Moriarty novel *Who Thinks Evil*, couldn't be more different in subject, but Kurland's quirky humour and plot twists are still part of the mix. After a series of shockingly brutal murders in very high-class brothels, Prince Albert Victor, grandson of Queen Victoria, disappears. Moriarty (banged up for a crime that, for once, he didn't do) is called in to solve the murders and save the monarchy – with a little assistance from a certain Mr Holmes. Very nicely written and great fun.



I reviewed Marie Brennan's *Midnight Never Come* in FT240 – an excellent story of

the Fae Court in Elizabethan London. Her latest is *A Natural History of Dragons: A Memoir by Lady Trent*, and the title gives a fair impression of the book: very Victorian and proper in its manner. It's beautifully done; the voice only slips a couple of times.

Isabella, the future Lady Trent, was fascinated by dragons since childhood; at 16, in her marriage-hunting season, she meets a rare young gentleman who is, in her father's words, "willing to fund a library for his bookish wife". Even better, she's able to persuade her new husband not only to join a

small expedition to study dragons, but to take her along with them.

Slightly irritatingly, instead of it just being set in an alternative version of our world, all the countries have different names – Isabella grows up in Scirland, which is clearly England, and they go hunting dragons in an eastern-European sort of country called Drustanev, where a local lord is called Iosif Abramovich Khirzoff, so this makes no sense. But Isabella's account of her early encounters with dragons, which will lead to her becoming a respected scholar (this is the first of a series), is a great Victorian adventure story of danger and bravery – with illustrations from Isabella's sketchbook to delight any cryptozoologist.



And now to the Sixties.

First, if you loved *The Avengers*, avoid the comic book *Steed and Mrs Peel*.

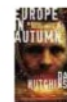
It's atrocious, in both the writing and the artwork. The characters bear little resemblance to the TV heroes of our youth in their behaviour or their speech, and half the time they don't even look much like them. As for the plots: like the characters, there's no subtlety and no wit. Whoever owns the concept of *The Avengers* should be ashamed of this travesty.



Under its maverick editor Michael Moorcock *New Worlds* magazine

was at the forefront of the New Wave in science fiction in the 1960s. *Eduardo Paolozzi at New Worlds: Science Fiction and Art in the Sixties* is a fascinating study by David Brittain of the intimate interaction between art and literature that was at the heart of the magazine – and at the heart of the Sixties. Paolozzi became its official artist in 1967, with his name on the masthead as 'Aeronautics Advisor'. His pop art was as avant-garde as much of the fiction in the

magazine, and this book – which follows an exhibition by David Brittain under the same title at Manchester Metropolitan University – contains examples of Paolozzi's technological art as well as rare images from *New Worlds*. It also includes interviews with Moorcock, SF critic John Clute, the late JG Ballard and others. The book, designed by John Coulthard, is a work of art in itself.



The only one of these books not set in the past, Dave Hutchinson's

Europe in Autumn, is a near-future novel of low-level espionage, of couriers with legends – false identities – who carry messages and packages across borders. But the borders are those of a fragmented Europe. Every country, especially in central and eastern Europe, is splitting into smaller and smaller autonomous units; some are small ethnic areas; some are basically city states; one is the narrow strip of a railway line that runs across the entire width of Europe from Portugal to Siberia; another is four apartment blocks in Berlin run by racist football hooligans.

Rudi is a young Estonian chef working in Kraków, Poland, when he's first sent on an errand across the border into Hindenberg, a small enclave state consisting of little more than the cities of Opole and Breslau. It's the beginning of a long apprenticeship which sees him criss-crossing Europe under a variety of names, becoming more and more caught up in the conflicts between states and also – borders being places of liminality – in increasingly complex ambiguity.

Europe in Autumn is a gritty, dystopian vision of a disturbingly real tomorrow; as I was reading it Ukraine began to fragment, and the Scottish independence debate became more hardline.

It's also beautifully written.

ALSO RECEIVED

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

The Big Book of West Virginia Ghost Stories

Rosemary Ellen Guiley

Stackpole Books 2014

Hb, 280pp, ISBN 9780811711159

It's always good to see collections of regional folklore such as this new series from Stackpole Books, which spotlights ghost stories, old and new, from American states. Last year we had *Ohio Ghost Stories* by James A Willis, and *Missouri Ghost Stories* by Troy Taylor. This year's offerings kick off with West Virginia's from Guiley, the prolific writer and broadcaster on paranormal topics and consulting editor to *Fate Magazine*.

The True History of Jack the Ripper

Guy Logan with Jan Bondeson

Amberley Books 2013

Pb, 224pp, illus, £16.99, ISBN 9781445613888

Guy Logan was a London journalist in the late 1880s who covered the latter part of the hunt for Jack the Ripper and wrote 'true crime' books into the 1930s. In 2011, while searching the archive of the *Illustrated Police News*, Dr Jan Bondeson discovered this serialised novel by Logan, recognising it as the earliest full-length English fiction on the topic. He publishes it here, for the first time in book form, topping it with a biography of Logan and tailing it with a thought-provoking essay on precisely what Logan knew or discovered about the notorious fiend. Every Ripperologist will want a copy for their library.

Contacts with the Gods from Space

George King with Richard Lawrence

Aetherius Press 2014

Pb, 173pp, illus, bib, ind, PRICE, ISBN 9780737249581

This is a new edition of George King's last book, published in 1996, refreshed by his disciple Richard Lawrence. King founded the Aetherius Society in the mid-1950s to advance spiritual consciousness guided by teachings from extraterrestrial intelligences who can manifest as UFOs. They believe that Jesus and Buddha are based on Venus, and Krishna on Saturn, and that an entity they call 'Mars Sector 6' sends satellites to Earth to boost our spiritual productivity. This is an account of King's original 'mental contacts' with the Cosmic Masters which led to his establishment of the UK's first UFO religion. You may think this is tosh, but it had some

influence in the 1960s on ley hunting, sky-watches and other New Age pursuits.

The High Magic of Talismans & Amulets

Claude Lecouteux

Inner Traditions 2014

Hb, 264pp, illus, bib, ind, \$24.95, ISBN 9781620552797

Lecouteux has collected a wide range of historical and geographical data on these paranormal prophylactics – drawn, worn or sworn – deemed essential by so many societies in different eras. Should you need it, this might be essential. First published in 2005.

Lost City of The Exodus

Ahmed Osman

Bear & Co 2014

Pb, 209pp, illus, bib, index, \$16.00, ISBN 9781591431893

Since the late 1800s, Egyptologists have argued about the identity and location of the 'city of the Exodus'. This acrimonious and, for the most part, erroneous debate – complicated by the machinations of Zahi Hawass, the deposed Egyptian Minister for Antiquities – is carefully reviewed from the perspective of Osman's own 25-year research. His conclusion settles upon ancient Zarw as "where the road to Canaan" began. Along the way he re-examines research on the Hebrew Pentateuch, the murals in Karnak's great hall, concluding that the Exodus happened, not in the reign of Rameses II but of his grandfather Rameses I. The location of Zarw, at Tell Hebouna, was confirmed in 2012, precisely where Osman predicted.

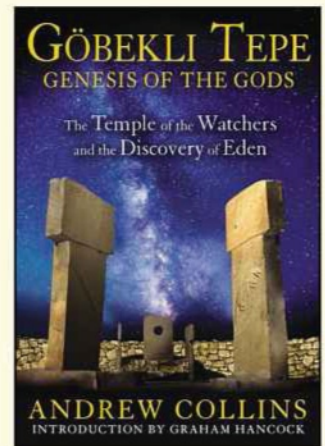
You are the Placebo

Joe Dispenza

Hay House 2014

Pb, 345pp, £14.99, ISBN 9781781802571

Dispenza, a neurologist, provides a useful history of the 'placebo' affect – how an innocuous medicine can produce positive results if the patient believes in its efficacy – and the fields of medical research in which trials have taken place, generally confirming the reality of such an effect. But this study offers more: being both an account of how Dispenza recovered from serious spinal injuries after a cycling accident; and, the main thrust as far as the publisher is concerned, a motivational thesis suggesting that a whole range of modern afflictions (including addictions, obesity, low self-esteem, etc) could respond to a sound method of tricking ourselves.



GÖBEKLI TEPE: GENESIS OF THE GODS

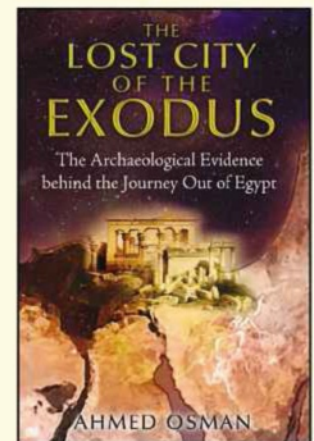
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Godzilla

Dir Gareth Edwards, US/Japan 2014
On UK release

“Godzilla!”

When Dr Ishiro Serizawa (Ken Watanabe) practically stares at you through the screen in 3D and intones the name you can't help but raise a smile. But unlike the last Hollywood incarnation of this famous screen beastie, there are few laughs in Gareth (*Monsters*) Edwards's remake of Toho Co. Ltd's 1950s monster franchise. There is an air of portentousness throughout this Hollywood blockbuster, shot in what can only be described as 'Gigantoscope', following on from and topping the likes of *Battleship* and *Pacific Rim* in its CGI recreation of a sense of vast scale. Measuring 335-virtual-feet-tall, Godzilla, according to the production notes, is the largest monster ever incarnated on the screen: “A bipedal, amphibious, radioactive leviathan”; which is another way of saying that for all its squat-necked CGI finery, it can still look a bit like a man hefting himself around a built-to-scale city set in a bulky lizard suit if you're not careful.

Edwards draws on Ishiro Honda's

1954 original. In contrast to the alien invasion B-movies coming out of Hollywood studios at the same time, often seen as allegories for the threat of Communist infiltration and attack, in Japan it was all about radiation – the very real terror of the atomic age less than a decade after Hiroshima and Nagasaki – and how nature has a way of biting mankind on its flabby backside when tampered with.

Which brings us back to the portentousness. “The arrogance of man is thinking nature is in our control, and not the other way round,” says the Doc. When a massive bat-like creature is awoken from the depths of the Earth thanks to mankind's penchant for nuclear power, the MUTO (aka Massive Unidentified Terrestrial Organism – the American military just love abbreviating everything) begins munching its way through nuclear plants across the world on a sort of radioactive pub crawl, the planet as we know it poised on the brink of destruction. MUTO also has a neat trick with EMP (Electro-Magnetic Pulse). Then cometh Godzilla (it takes a long time about it, by the way) – the alpha predator, top of the radioactive food chain, a

sort of reptilian Gort, scaly agent of Gaia, awoken to redress the natural order of things, to put everything, including mankind, back in its proper place. Mankind is indeed left staring helpless in the face of these behemoths as they lay waste to whole cities. There's also a female MUTO, down San Francisco way, which the male MUTO is desperate to mate with and in so doing spawn multiple little MUTOs. They suck on nuclear missiles as if they are seaside ice lollies, rendering even the might of the American military impotent. Dr Serizawa sees only one hope: “Let them fight,” he says.

There are some stunning set pieces in this *Godzilla*. Not least, the opening newsreel footage credits and the race against time in the underground nuclear complex early on. The HALO jump (High Altitude Low Opening) is a scene of breathtaking beauty; the soldiers' encounter with the MUTO on the train bridge crackles with tension and a sense of palpable threat. Elsewhere, any sense of human threat is dwarfed by the sheer size of things. Marines (Who are they? Who cares?) come and go in rapid succession while Godzilla

and MUTO engage in a pitched battle across continents. A tsunami in Hawaii is thrown in for good measure, too. The abandoned site of the Japanese nuclear facility with its lichen-draped skyscrapers is an awe-inspiring work of dystopian visual art. In the midst of such attention to detail, a film in which monsters mash up against each other from one metropolis to the next is curiously bereft of a satisfyingly climactic boss fight. We get two or three tantalising glimpses too many and, in a film with a budget over the \$100 million mark, the excess of protracted tantalisation is writ frustratingly large over the film's 123-minute running time. No sooner have Godzilla and MUTO got down to it than we are torn away from the screen to be involved in the 'very real human drama' below.

The human drama sees bomb disposal expert and naval officer Ford Brody (Aaron Taylor-Johnson) desperate to get back from Japan to San Francisco to be reunited with his nurse wife (Elizabeth Olsen) and little boy. He finds himself there to release his estranged father, former nuclear engineer, now professional conspiracy theo-

rist Joe Brody (Brian Cranston of *Breaking Bad*) from jail after he has attempted to infiltrate the forbidden zone of the Janjira nuclear site near Tokyo. Convinced that the tremors that destroyed the site in 1999 were not earthquake-related, Joe has devoted his life to uncovering the truth. When Cranston's character eventually steps aside in the script (Juliette Binoche as his wife steps aside even earlier), *Godzilla* becomes, with some measure of success, the film it is expected to be; and, with some measure of failure, one we care little about. The 'King of the Monsters' lets rip with his extraordinary roar, oblivious to pesky mankind as he battles to destroy other monsters; they leave apocalyptic devastation in their wake as they gnash and claw away at each other. Because his son is in another part of the world, Ford Brody manages to pick up a Japanese boy separated from his parents for a few minutes and promptly reunites him with them again. There's no point to this other than that Hollywood way of reducing everything to tokenism: child in danger, surrogate fatherhood – we all care, right?

Olsen, Binoche and Sally Hawkins get to do little except emote on the periphery in this 'human drama'. This is all about military men playing with monsters, too busy for full sentences, abbreviating everything – including moving human experiences – because that's what busy military men and Hollywood blockbuster do.

The notion of *Godzilla* as some sort of giant cuddly saviour of mankind, waddling away into the ocean when it's done its business, beloved of the kiddies, is something that has to be earned. No amount of budget and CGI can buy what the Toho franchise went on to possess. It is often difficult to tell in this 2014 *Godzilla* where homage ends and mass marketing an idea begins; perhaps it is when 'King of the Monsters' is flashed across a TV newscast. As an early summer blockbuster, *Godzilla* has the multiplexes virtually to itself, while its backers cheer on from their ringside seats, confident of a sure thing.

Nick Cirkovic

Fortean Times Verdict

BIG MONSTERS MEAN IT'S NOT ALL A NUCLEAR WASTE

6

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)

THEATRE OF BLOOD

Dir Douglas Hickox, UK 1973
Arrow Video, £18.99 (Blu-ray)

Art criticism is as old as art itself and is an inevitable part of the creative process. Some artists take bad notices on the chin, wiser ones avoid reading anything written about them but for some, getting bad reviews can drive a person to decapitation, impalement and electrocution. Such is the fate of Edward Lionheart, a painfully earnest Shakespearean actor (he refuses to play anything else) who has become joke and pun fodder for a bunch of pompous London critics. When they give the Critic's Choice Award to a young upstart instead of the seasoned pro, Lionheart has had enough. He sets about bumping each of them off, with MOs lifted straight out of the bard's back catalogue.

It's something of a proto-slasher movie, though filtered through the lens of high camp, British gothic. The murders themselves are what gives the film much of its notoriety, with a few signature kills that are simultane-

ously hilarious and unsettling. Michael J Lewis's score adds much to this vibe: slow and gentle decapitations to lift muzak shows British horror at its quirky, subversive best.

But it's Vincent Price who gives the film lasting impact in one of his most powerful roles. It was one of his personal favourites too, which is obvious from his performance. He's having a blast spouting Shakespeare, trying new accents and working his way through what looks like Lady Gaga's wardrobe. It's all so appropriately theatrical, and I can't think of any other horror movie icon who could have pulled this off so well. Yet for all its excess, *Theatre of Blood* is ultimately a touching tragedy. Lionheart makes a pleasant change from the usual movie serial killer in that he is just so talkative when he bumps people off. So we hear how he is feeling, the hurt he has inside and his desire for what ultimately we all want: to be liked and respected, especially by those whose opinions seem to 'matter'. His plunge into despair at



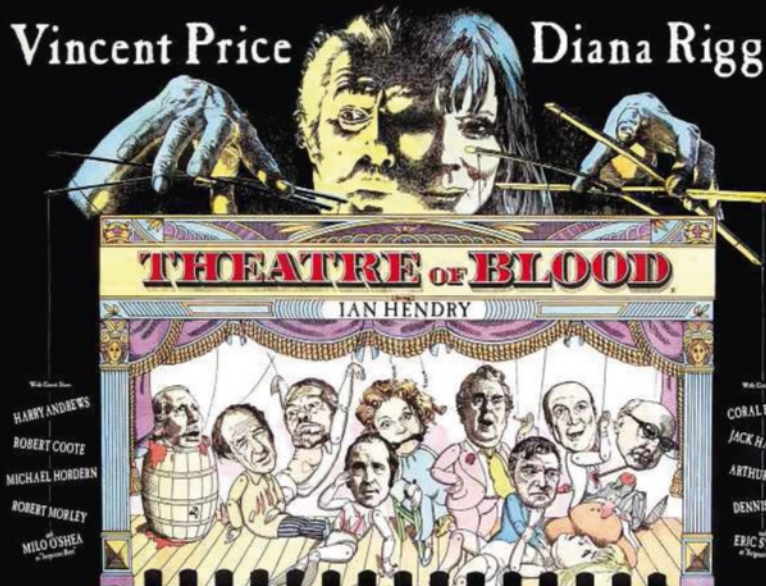
their lack of love for him is sort of heartbreaking to watch, as in the scene where Lionheart confronts the critics. It's one of Price's most moving moments.

Arrow's Blu ray release presents the film looking better than ever with a clutch of welcome if not definitive extras. (I'm a sucker for video visits to filming locations and vintage TV interviews and reviews – but I can imagine that sort of thing isn't easy to find, never mind clear). Still this release is a treat and proves once again that Arrow not only understand horror movies, they honour them.

Fortean Times Verdict

A HILARIOUS AND HEART-BREAKING PRICE CLASSIC

9



Cheap Thrills

Dir EL Katz, UK 2013

On UK release

How far would you go to keep a roof over your family's head? Would you harm a friend to earn a quick buck? These are only two of the questions you'll come out of *Cheap Thrills* asking yourself. Believe me, there'll be more.

Directed by EL Katz, this SXSW Audience Award-winning low budget (slightly) comic thriller is as pitch-black as a (slightly) comic thriller gets, and pleasingly thought-provoking. Craig (Pat Healy), husband and father of a young child, is down on his luck. An unsuccessful writer and just-fired mechanic, he runs into old buddy Vince (Ethan Embry) in a bar at the beginning of a night that rapidly turns into a surreal nightmare. The two are befriended by a rich, party animal couple, Colin and Violet (David Koechner and Sara Paxton), who persuade them to take part in a series of ever more sick and dangerous dares in exchange for increasing amounts of money.

No mistake about it, this is a violent film. And even though at times it's hard to take, it's in no way as shallow or preposterous as torture-porn flicks like *Hostel* or *Saw*. The progression from relatively harmless japes to a cruel game of goading and forced competitiveness that turns quickly to hatred is weirdly believable. The acting is excellent all round. Healy is thoroughly credible as a man struggling with some very difficult decisions; Embry is likeable as his friend/foe; Paxton, with very few lines, does a great job of being mysterious as Violet, and Koechner is a flamboyant but not too over-the-top aggressor.

Whether you read this movie as a witty commentary on capitalist society or a warning about the dangers of talking to strangers in the pub, whether you think it's the story of a man who's trying to do good by his family or just a jolly evening of blood, gore and bowel movements, *Cheap Thrills* will have you chatting in the bar afterwards. Just watch out for party animals bearing cash...

Julie McNamee

John Dies at the End

Dir Don Coscarelli, US 2012

Eureka!, £12.99 (Blu-ray), £9.99 (DVD)

Don Coscarelli's 1979 *Phantasm* – in which (as I once put it to the director) “a mortician from another dimension is digging up corpses, shrinking them into dwarfs and shipping them back to somewhere that looks like a 1970s Roger Dean album cover” – remains one of the few genuinely left-field offerings in the history of genre filmmaking, a collision of gothic imagery, sci-fi nuttiness and dreamlike terrors that remains (its sequels aside) pretty well unique in the annals of low-budget film-making. An oddball visionary like Don has never found much regular work in an industry that prefers the predictable and replicable to the *sui generis*, and his last feature – the endearing *Bubba Ho-Tep* – was over a decade ago.

Fans like myself, then, will welcome *John Dies at the End* with open arms. Adapted by Coscarelli from David Wong's cult novel, it's as bizarre as anything in the director's filmography: David (Chase Williamson) and John (Rob Mayes) are a pair of slackers who, after experimenting with a new drug called Soy Sauce, find that they have developed psychic powers and can move between times and dimensions. They also realise that the drug is alive, our reality is being invaded by demons from another dimension and that it's down to them (and a golden retriever called Charles Barklee) to save the world.

This is the story that David tells initially sceptical journalist Arnie Blondestone (the splendid Paul Giamatti, who also co-produced the film) in the film's framing segments, which give the whole rambling hallucinatory Gonzo enterprise some semblance of structure, as well as a first-person immediacy.

John Dies at the End won't be to everyone's taste, but it boasts excellent performances from its young leads and a refreshingly unpredictable approach to storytelling. It's quite different from anything else out there at the moment, and recommended.

David Sutton

SHORTS

GALLOWWALKERS

Signature Entertainment, £15.99 (DVD)



This is already being touted in hushed tones as The Worst Film Ever Made, but it's going to take more than tired hyperbole to impress this old cynic. Yes, it is very poor indeed, but that's not to say it doesn't have a few saving graces; and who wouldn't warm to a cannibal movie presented by the wonderfully named Mr Bowyer? But it's also a post-apocalyptic zombie movie set in the Old West, which must be original on some level. And it has dependable Wesley Snipes as a bad-ass bounty-hunter, although his delivery is more Arnie than Clint. With his contacts and sun-bleached dreads, Wes looks like a scary old Rasta – even more incongruous when considering the setting. *Blade* this most assuredly isn't, despite Wesley's almost audible pleading for decent dialogue. (Best line spoiler alert: “Forgive me Father, for I have skinned”.) So there are lots of stand-offs and meaningful eye-contacts and then blood-letting galore with even a lone trumpet for soundtrack. Throw in the Four Horseman of the Apocalypse, a foxy punk lesbian and elements of *Django* and you have one thoroughly derivative, confused and confusing film. About halfway in I decided that life (and probably death) was too short to warrant more than a cursory skim.

Tim Weinberg 4/10

STALLED

Matchbox Films, £14.99 (Blu-ray), £12.99 (DVD)



And the Zombie Apocalypse just keeps rolling on, steamrolling any half-decent ideas for new horror films beneath its clichéd wheels. From the off, *FT* readers should find this as repellent as its intended audience will find it titillating. A sleazy bloke is trapped in a women's lavatory stall while young and horny chicks “lez-up and rip each others' throats” (these are the film's words, not mine, I hasten to add) outside. This, perhaps, constitutes the ultimate *Nuts* reader's fantasy, and takes all of eight minutes in to transpire. We're then treated to a long zombie (the slow, groany kind) gorefest before a lengthy and irrelevant diatribe about Garfield yawns its way into Tarantino-esque postmodern pretention. As is often the case with films of this ilk, establishing its identity is one of key problems it fails to overcome. Happiest being a throw-away (or is that toss-off?) version of a Simon Pegg-style horror comedy, it flounders when venturing into more graphic *Evil Dead* territory (which it freely plagiarises). One wonders (or perhaps doesn't) what writer and star Dan Palmer will offer us next. **TW** 4/10

GASLIGHT

BFI, £19.99 (Dual Format Edition)



Not often seen and long overshadowed by the glossy Hollywood remake starring Ingrid Bergman and Charles Boyer – MGM had bought the rights and actually tried to have all the prints destroyed to head off competition – Thorold Dickinson's 1940 British version of Patrick Hamilton's Victorian-set thriller is well worth a look.

Diana Wynyard turns in a subtler performance than Bergman, Anton Walbrook – fresh from playing Prince Albert in Wilcox's Victorian dip-tych – plays the twisted villain with relish, and direction and cinematography conjure up a tense and sinister black and white world quite different from the visual opulence of the Cukor remake. **DS** 8/10

Fortean Times Verdict

VIOLENT, DARKLY COMIC AND THOUGHT-PROVOKING

8

Fortean Times Verdict

A WEIRD AND WONDERFUL BAD TRIP OF A MOVIE

8

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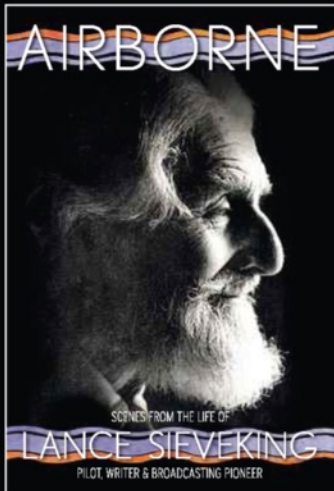
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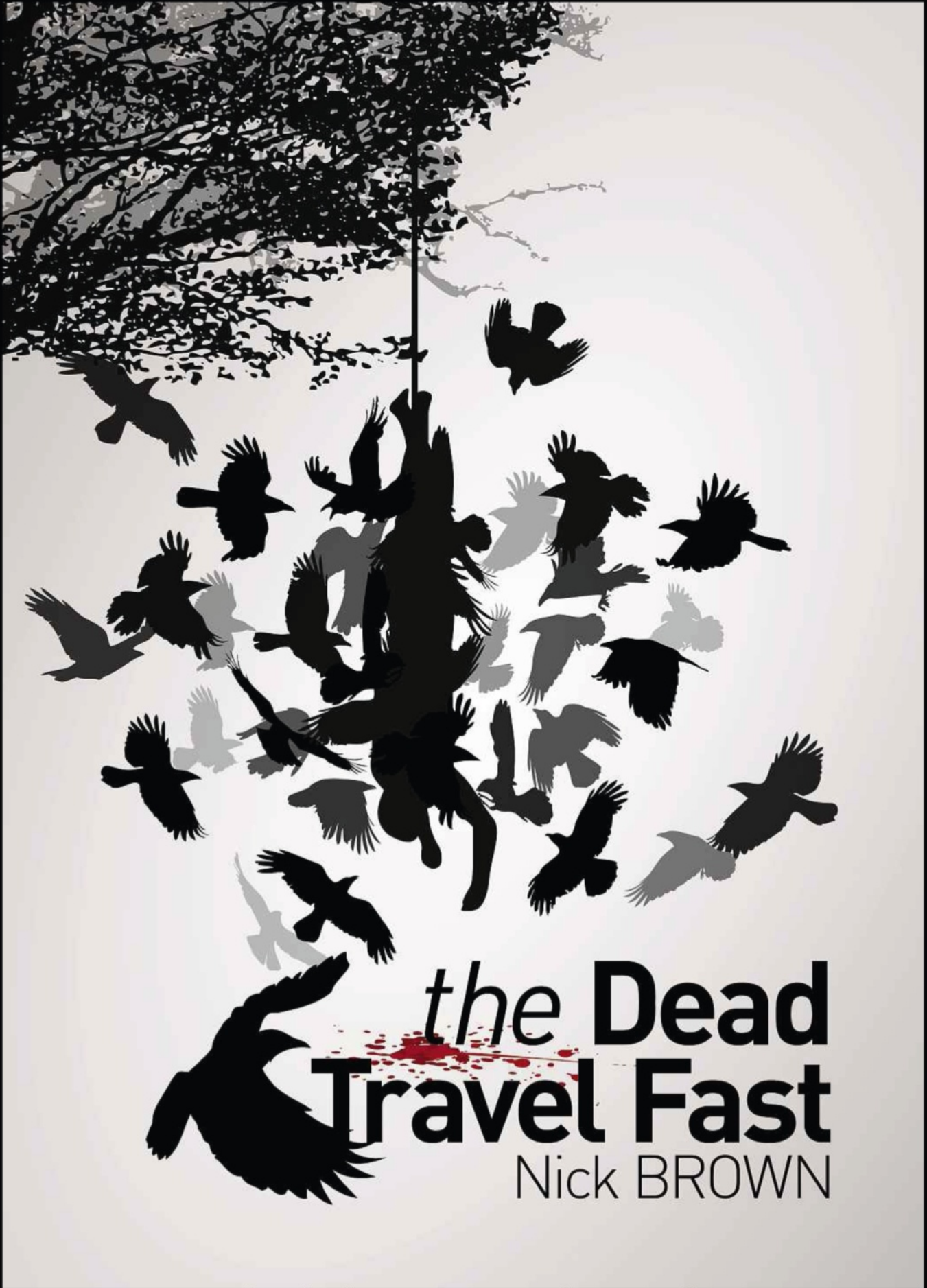
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Dear FT...

letters



Welcome news

I have never been so pleased to be wrong about something! I recently wrote to you [FT312:69] regarding the archives of fortean pioneer Harold Chibbett, whose investigations into the Wycliffe Road, Battersea, poltergeist provided much of the source material for my recent book *The Poltergeist Prince of London* (co-written with Shirley Hitchings and published by The History Press, 2013). I described how Shirley – the ‘focus’ of the Battersea poltergeist case – inherited some of Chibbett’s research papers after his death and how, when she went to collect them, she saw that many of his other archived papers were in the process of being destroyed.

However, in mid-April 2014 I was delighted to receive an email from John Edens – who told me that, while Chibbett had left instructions for certain material to be destroyed after his death (which is presumably what Shirley witnessed during her hurried visit), the remaining material actually passed to Mr Edens and that he still possesses it. (He said that it was his own family that was involved in another of Chibbett’s investigations – the case of ‘Charlie the Basingstoke Poltergeist’, mentioned briefly in the introduction to *The Poltergeist Prince*.)

As Mr Edens stated in his email, Chibbett “knew the importance of his work, and was a thorough and meticulous person”. These are definitely qualities that shine through in his research notes and so it should not have been surprising to learn that he took pains to ensure his legacy survived. It was, nevertheless, an absolute thrill to be told it has.

James Clark

By email

The Cortile affair

Anton Stuhlmann writes [FT313:71] of my alleged “participation in the whole Linda [Cortile] Napolitano affair with Budd Hopkins”. In prosaic fact, far from the “whole affair”, I played a very minor role in a tiny part of it, having been asked to attend a meeting at the late Budd Hopkins’s New York City apartment in which proponents and critics of the case

Simulacra corner



Paul Yarwood of Bristol sent us this “trio of alien greys” – in fact toothbrushes – from his bathroom. Aaaaah!!

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 – with your postal address.

had it out. I tried, without success and to my subsequent regret, to adjudicate the dispute. As I have stated repeatedly, again without success, I have no opinion on the case itself. As far as I can tell, neither side has an entirely persuasive argument. As a fortean I can live with uncertainty.

Once more, I’m struck at how John Keel’s apologists prefer to attack the messenger rather than defend Keel against quite specific criticisms. It’s not hard to imagine why.

Jerome Clark

Canby, Minnesota

Eric Frank Russell

I’m enjoying the “First Fortean’s” series, but have two (admittedly minor) corrections to part two of the Eric Frank Russell section [FT312:48-51]. Bob Rickard refers to the Gands as “the aliens in

[Russell’s] 1951 story ‘And Then There Were None.’ They were not aliens, but rather inhabitants of a (semi-) lost colony, descended from former Earthmen. He also says that Russell’s first novel, *Sinister Barrier*, was “serialised” in *Unknown*, “beginning” with the May 1939 issue. It was not serialised; the novel appeared complete within that issue (pulp magazines of that period could hold a lot of wordage).

Dennis Lien

Minneapolis, Minnesota

Martian legend

More than a decade ago, my boss, who knew that I was mildly interested in astronomy, asked me whether I was looking forward to observing Mars through my telescope when, soon, it would appear in the night sky “as large as the Moon.”

I said that I hadn’t heard anything about it and asked where he’d heard the story: he couldn’t recall. I told him that it seemed that such an event would destroy both planets. We shrugged it off, but later a few other people asked the same question. None of them regarded the event as an alarming situation; it wasn’t an end-of-the-world scenario. My boss asked me about it within a few years of a historically close approach by Mars, but I’ve been hearing the same description ever since – not often, but steadily and apparently unrelated to any astronomical event, most recently in late March 2014, when a Facebook friend put out a query about it. What I want to know is how widespread and popular this rumour is. Have any readers outside of the United States heard it?

Bryan White

By email



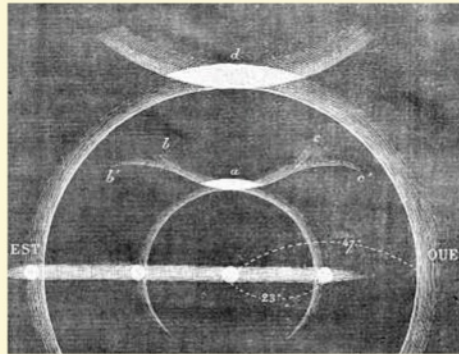
Sundog

Here is a photo taken from Blackpool's North Shore on 12 January 2013. It appears to show two suns (behind clouds) in the sky at the same time. I think it is the sun's light being refracted around the centre cloud but I'm not sure.

Antony Marriott

Hyde, Greater Manchester

Bob Rickard comments: *Mr Marriott has captured a parheliion or 'sundog'. Here is an explanatory diagram from Camille Flammarion's *L'atmosphère: météorologie populaire* (1888) of a parheliion seen at Fontainebleau on 28 January 1887. It shows the geometrical relationship of the possible 'sundog' locations around the central sun. The two either side of the innermost circle seem to correspond to the bright spots in Mr Marriott's photograph, which*



would be on either side of a sun obscured by clouds. The precise size, spacing and form of the 'sundogs' and arcs depend upon properties of ice crystals in the air, including their plane in relation to the observer.

Oddities televised

Back in 1952, when I was about three years old, my parents bought their first television set. One of the few programmes I can remember (apart from the potter's wheel) was called "Curiouser and Curiouser", or possibly "Stranger than Fiction" – I can't be sure at this distance in time. The introduction went along the lines of "Britain has more oddities to the square mile than Alice's Wonderland, and that, as you remember, got curiouser and curiouser the more you looked at it." The programme itself was made up of about half a dozen two- or three-minute items of a fortaean nature. One that sticks in

my mind concerned a hill where a car would apparently run uphill if the brakes were released. Does any FT reader recall this programme?

Steve Yates

Erdington, Birmingham

God help us

Re SD Tucker's *Going Caracas* [FT312:42-47]: it's easy to mock small countries and their grandiose leaders, but the prayers to Chavez are mere whispers when compared to the bellows of religious nuttery coming from mainstream politics in so-called developed nations. Take the USA, for example:

"Within the covers of the

Bible are the answers for all the problems men face." (Ronald Reagan)

"I don't know that atheists should be considered as citizens, nor should they be considered patriots. This is one nation under God." (George Bush Sr)

"I am driven with a mission from God. God would tell me, 'George go and fight these terrorists in Afghanistan'. And I did." (George Bush Jr.)

Frightening.

Phil McNally

Bolton, Greater Manchester

I know this is the *Daily Telegraph's* fault and not *FT's*, but I can't help commenting on the statement [Sidelines, FT313:11] that an

IQ of 141 is "higher than many US presidents". I would bet it is higher than *all* US presidents, and it's likely that an IQ of 100 is higher than many US presidents', since this is the average value, and US presidents are not selected on intelligence (as witness several recent incumbents).

Roger Musson

Edinburgh

Mired in medicine

Further to Barry Baldwin's fiesta of medical grotesqueries [FT312:32-37], humorous epigrams in antiquity portray doctors whose inadequacies assume fantastically exaggerated, sometimes supernatural, proportions. In the Greek of Nicarchus (1st century AD), Dion not only blinds his patient Olympicus but erases the eyes on his portrait (*Anth. Pal.*11.112). In Nicarchus's contemporary Lucillius the astrologer Diophantus dies after merely seeing Hermogenes in a dream (*Anth. Pal.*11.257): this is imitated by Martial (6.53). My favourite poem along these lines is by Callieter, a Greek poet of uncertain date (*Anth. Pal.*11.120):

Socles promised Diodorus

*he'd correct his spinal kink:
he piled three rocks, each four feet
square*

*on his misshapen back.
Although this squashed and killed him,
he's now straighter than a stick.*

Richard George

St Albans, Hertfordshire

Chiron the Centaur

In 'Hippocratic Oafs' Barry Baldwin states that Chiron the Centaur's name means, literally, the horse's mouth [FT312:32]. I've not been able to find a reference for this and am curious about his source (though with his seemingly encyclopædic knowledge of Greek mythology, I don't doubt its veracity). I like the idea of the expression "straight from the horse's mouth" originating with the wise, pedagogic Chiron rather than the popular view that it's from the world of horse racing. Thoughts? And, indeed, were horses ever considered symbols of wisdom and knowledge and, if so, why?

Sean Robinson

London

Barry Baldwin replies: *Thanks to Sean Robinson for his queries – always heartening to know someone reads the stuff. What I meant was not a straight etymology, but simply that the lessons were given by a half-equine creature. Full name of ‘Centaur’ was actually Hippocentaur (Hippus = Horse in classical Greek; in modern Greek, amusingly, the word is ‘Alogos’, meaning ‘stupid thing’ – case of horses for courses?)*

Chiron was supposedly sired by his father disguised as a horse when seducing the mother-to-be. Unlike other centaurs, he was considered immortal or (since in some versions he was killed) of semi-divine parentage. He had many famous pupils; a kind of horsey Aristotle before his time. The most commonly traced origin of “from the horse’s mouth” (title of a Joyce Cary novel) is to an American racing tipster in 1913 – one might have suspected dear old Prince Monolulu. A popular American 1950s TV sit-com, Mr Ed (a talking horse) may have re-enforced the notion of equine wisdom.

Meaningless pretence?

It pains me to take issue with something written by the estimable Barry Baldwin (‘Classical Corner’ being the first thing I eagerly seek out in FT), but his review of *New Dimensions of Doctor Who* [FT314:62] does seem rather unfair. His antipathy for ‘crit-lit shit’ is not shared by everyone, including those at whom the book is presumably targeted (unless its marketing is alarmingly misleading). As with other specialist areas of knowledge, academics working in the Humanities have their own technical language, the nuances and specificities of which are useful to others working in similar fields, and inaccessibility to the layperson does not automatically equate to meaningless pretence (not that I would suggest for a minute that it isn’t occasionally open to abuse). Baldwin clearly has an axe to grind, one demonstrated by his withering dismissal of the entire discipline of Cultural Studies in one sentence. With the

greatest respect, I’d suggest that his views on ‘academic Newspeak’ don’t make him an impartial reviewer.

James Machin
London

Editor’s note: By their very nature, are reviews ever impartial?

Localised hauntings

‘Ghostwatch’ routinely reports hauntings associated with particular locations – most recently, haunted hospitals [FT310:16-17, 311:16-17]. In attempting to characterise the phenomena, it is tempting to assume that the location itself has some physical significance, but there are obvious problems with this. For one thing, General Relativity would have it that there’s no such thing as a stationary point; rather, stationary points are defined only with respect to other points. The Earth orbits the Sun, the Sun orbits the galactic centre and the galaxy drifts with respect to all other galaxies. A haunting at a fixed location on Earth is therefore one that moves consistently with the Earth.

In a similar vein, tales of haunted ships and other vehicles are not consistent with the idea of a ghost being associated with a specific geographic coordinate. It may therefore be more meaningful to assume that hauntings are associated in all cases not with locations, but with physical objects.

In the case of the classic haunted house, the object in question may perhaps be a floorboard, or part of the wall. This would go some way to explaining why activity sometimes starts or stops in response to alterations to a building; maybe the haunted element ended up in landfill. Where specific objects have a reputation for being haunted, an interesting experiment would be to slice such objects up and separate their components. If one component continues to be associated with hauntings, this could be further divided, and so on, until the irreducible element with which the haunting was associated was identified.

This particular line of

speculation is in fact falsifiable, if any instance is known of a haunting which could not reasonably be associated with some matter that was consistently present. One possibility would be the deep ocean – the water doesn’t stay in one place for long and the seabed is probably too far down for any haunting associated with it to be encountered at the surface. I wonder then, if there are any known instances of specific coordinates on the ocean that are associated with hauntings.

On an unrelated matter, the feature on ‘Fortean Machines’ [FT311:50-53] features an interesting discussion of a supposed cold fusion device. The addition of hydrogen to nickel under pressure will likely result in formation of a certain amount of nickel hydride, possibly with a noticeable release of energy, depending on the enthalpy of the reaction. Obviously copper formation wouldn’t occur as a result of this and it’s pretty doubtful that the originators of the E-Cat could have made an honest mistake on that point. The Hierophant’s Apprentice is probably correct in asserting that the term ‘Low Energy Nuclear Reaction’ was coined because the phrase ‘Cold Fusion’ has become tainted, but it is not fair to compare it to the rebranding of creationism; LENR is still very much an ongoing area of research, though one that no longer attracts much fanfare.

Fusion reactions at low temperature are in fact fairly easy to achieve – bombarding a deuterated target with high energy electrons will do it. The energy produced by the fusion reaction under those circumstances is much less than the energy required to induce it. What remains controversial is whether any ‘cold’ fusion process can produce more energy than has to be put into it.

Dr Ian l’Anson, MRSC
By email

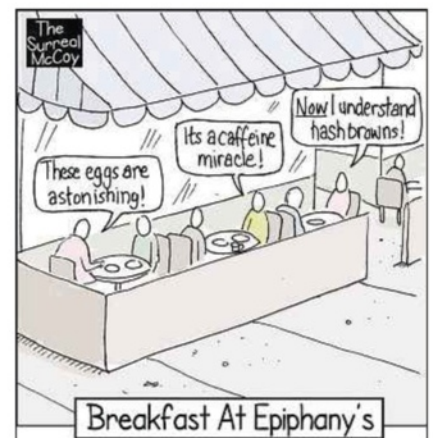
Noah’s Ark

Richard Seary’s article on Noah’s Ark [FT313:55]

fails to acknowledge several crucial arguments against the theory that it advances. The first is that it relies on two words in a narrative that occupies three chapters of Genesis. Seary fails to explain why that narrative uses phrases like “all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened,” or “the waters increased, and bore up the ark,” if it was not talking about a physical flood. Plus, “the waters were dried up from off the earth.” Those quotations are from chapter 7, verses 11 and 17 and chapter 8, verse 13. Interestingly, Seary does not cite chapter and verse for his quotations: which is why I cannot comment on his vague reference to tzahar.

Secondly, all previous translations (including the Septuagint and the Vulgate) have accepted that the Noah story is about a flood, not this mystical concept of Seary’s. Are we to suppose that translators working when ancient Hebrew was still a living language got it wrong and Seary spotted the error? Thirdly, a number of cultures around ancient Israel had a flood myth that is generally assumed to relate in some way to the story of Noah. Again, are we to assume that they misread a common tradition and the Bible somehow recorded a correct version that subsequent versions have garbled? Seary’s argument reminds me of the epigram attributed to Alexander Pope: that a dictionary-maker may know the meaning of a word, but not of two words put together.

Martin Jenkins
London



Birds and bling

As far as I know, magpies will pinch anything bright and shiny, given half a chance, though perhaps “collect” might be a kinder word [Mythchaser FT312:19]. Once, on holiday in Scotland, we watched a tame magpie at the B&B where we were staying doing its level best to remove a new pair of windscreen wipers from our car – presumably they had a nice bit of chromium attached – and photographed the evidence. It’s too long ago now to find the photo.

I have positive evidence regarding actual jewellery acquisition by another member of the crow family, the jackdaw. This also was a tame one – maybe they are cheekier – and used to visit our garden in Derby when I was a kid, though it actually lived with a family just up the road. It was obviously fond of children and used to keep me company in the days before I went to school. It collected beads, buttons, sequins, bits of glass and pottery, tinsel, dolls’ cutlery (of which I had quite a bit) and definitely the odd earring or two. These it kept in a shrine under two small conifer trees in our garden and would eagerly show to anyone, strutting up and down chattering and looking over its shoulder like some sort of avian Lassie to make sure you were following. There was an alternative shrine further down the garden in case that one got messed up, and no doubt there were hiding places in other gardens, too. It was also an enthusiastic botanist and collected flower petals, mainly red, purple or blue ones, which were carefully sorted into piles according to size, colour and type. When the piles got so big they fell over, they would be removed, and the whole thing started all over again. I think it was probably me who retrieved the glitz, but it usually found its way back into one shrine or another.

Around the time I started school, the family it lived with moved away, and as I don’t know what happened to the jackdaw I assumed it went with them. At the time, I thought collecting stuff was normal jackdaw behaviour, which

it probably was. I still have a soft spot for the crow family.

Brenda Ray
Derby

UFOs and Satan

French space engineer Jean-Jacques Velasco suggests in Leslie Kean’s 2010 bestseller, *UFOs: Generals, Pilots and Government Officials Go On The Record* that there is a connection between strategic nuclear power, the atomic bomb and UFOs, since association between sensitive strategic sites and overflights of ‘flying discs’ was proposed within the American Air Force during the Cold War. Fascinated by the possible correlation between nuclear activity, the location of nuclear weapon storage facilities and the presence of UFOs, Velasco concludes the UFO phenomenon is definitely related to something ‘intelligent’.

Christian evangelicals are now convinced UFOs and extraterrestrials are demonic entities. The New Age Movement – one of the false doctrines Jesus warned against in the Last Days – teaches the ‘Intergalactic Belief’ that extraterrestrials with superior intelligence will save mankind from the Apocalypse, but first a portion of the Earth’s population will be removed because their ‘vibes’ are not ‘in tune’ with the New Age. Evangelicals believe Satan launched his ‘Big Lie’ or ‘Great Deception’ beginning in 1947 with the Roswell crash and Kenneth Arnold’s ‘flying saucers’. The following year, Israel became a nation. This is the single most significant prophecy to be fulfilled pertaining to the return of Christ. Christians believe Jesus will remove His followers from Earth just before the onset of the Tribulation, when the Antichrist takes over the world.

Therefore, Velasco is correct in his hypothesis that the UFO phenomenon is related to something ‘intelligent’ – Satan!

Satan wants humankind to believe there is something greater than God out there and human beings are more apt to believe in something physical – such as a metal flying saucer – than

spiritual. Don Lloyd, assistant editor of *Flying Saucer Review*, joins certain evangelicals naming Satan as the moving force behind the UFO phenomenon.

Greg May
Orlando, Florida

The Old Crooked Track

Maybe it’s me, but there seems to be precious little stuff concerning leys in *FT* these days. Perhaps the time has come for a reappraisal of the whole field. Many British place names do in fact suggest that leys aren’t always the ‘old straight tracks’ they are supposed to be. There are at least 10 places called Bentley, at least two Waverleys and at least one Windley. There are also several Worm(s)leys and an Adderley, suggesting the sinuous motion of a snake. (It’s unclear if Wigglesworth belongs to the same pattern, but it must surely be significant that it is near Slitheroe.)

There is a Crookley Beck near the Lake District, and Wrigley must surely be a place name, even if I cannot find it on a map. All in all, there is an overwhelming – or at the very least, whelming – case for non-straight leys. If you plot the places called Bentley, Waverley etc on a map, you can draw a zig-zag line between them! What other proof do you need? Roll over, Alfred Watkins and John Michell. The question is, what is the significance of all this?

Crooked paths are suggestive of lightning; maybe currents of electric energy flowed along these lines. Then again, it could be something to do with ghosts – aren’t they supposed to be confused by winding paths? A rather more sinister aspect of the whole thing is the connection with the British car industry. British Leyland with its swastika-like logo is now defunct, but Bentley is still going strong. You also have EG Wrigley & Co, a maker of car parts and gearboxes. Could this be back-engineered alien technology? We surely have a right to know.

Wouldn’t this subject make a wonderful Phenomenomix piece? Kevin Jackson must be running out of dodgy characters soon, so Hunt should consider returning

to his old surrealist universe. With some careful editing he might – just – manage to keep Aleister C. out of it too.

PS: You are of course aware that 313 is a number of great significance for all worshippers of Donald Duck, being the licence number on his car (<http://disney.wikia.com/wiki/313>).

Nils Erik Grande
Norway

Monk and soldier

In 1999, my mother bought a 19th-century house in Ludlow, Shropshire, built over the old city walls. As soon as she moved in, she and my grandmother noticed strange things happening: objects that changed position, slamming doors, taps that turned on by themselves. They managed to ignore the phenomena, until my mum woke up one day and saw what appeared to be a mediæval monk in the corner of her room. At first, she thought she must still be dreaming, but the monk was still there after she blinked. He stared at her for a while, and then vanished. She tried to be rational about the experience, but couldn’t help finding it unsettling.

A few nights after her first encounter with the monk, she woke up again shivering in the middle of the night. The room was icy cold. When she opened her eyes, she saw a figure hovering over her in the attire of a World War I soldier. She was so terrified that she jumped out of bed and ran out of the house, still in her dressing gown. From then on, she refused to spend another night on her own in the house, and called in an exorcist. She was told that the house was haunted by two different entities: the monk was protecting her, but the soldier had malevolent intentions. As well as these two different entities, there were poltergeist-like phenomena apparently connected to some mortal remains buried under the back door – the most sinister spot of the house. These, at least according to the exorcist, were related to witchcraft ceremonies conducted outside the city walls. My mother ended up selling the house.

Toby R—
Bristol

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 2409, London NW5 4NP or to sieveking@forteantimes.com.

Anæsthetic vision

I am writing to tell you about something that has just happened to me.

Twelve days ago I had a very minor operation under general anæsthetic. I have had numerous anæsthetics before as a child but this is the first after an 11-year gap. In those 11 years I lost all four grandparents. I have never dreamt during any anæsthetic period.

This time I saw two figures looking at me. They were smoky vapour shaped like men and stood shoulder to shoulder. They were standing in front of a very bright spotlight, like actors on a stage but with the light behind. I knew the man on the right (as I looked at them) was my maternal grandfather – but in his prime, tall and strong, not the old man who died in his 80s. The other man I didn't know. He was taller than Grandad but not as broad across the shoulder. I felt strongly that Grandad was showing me to the other man, as if he was proud of me.

Today I told my mother (worried she might be upset). I described the other man as feeling like someone Grandad loved like a brother/father or uncle, but I felt he had been dead a lot longer than Grandad. He seemed an older thicker vapour.

My mother said instantly it was someone called 'Uncle Derek', her godfather and my grandfather's best friend from school. They fought in the war and both came home. Uncle Derek died in the early 1980s not long after I was born in America. He never got to meet me. Mother said Grandad was very proud of me and thought it very likely that he would want his best friend, the man he loved as a brother, to see me. I guess the general anæsthetic allowed them to look through. I'm a little creeped out, but mum is happy.

Richildis Tonks

Chase Terrace, Staffordshire

Plucking thorns

My wife of over 40 years, Annette, passed away in April 2009 after a short brave battle with cancer that was only diagnosed the previous January. She had been suffering from a sore throat since about July 2008 but was not sick and was working away despite the slight irritation of the sore throat.

On 2 November 2008, the 12th



anniversary of my mother's death, we were in a local hotel near our home in Tallaght, Dublin, attending a show in the company of friends, and while Annette was talking to them, a lady whom I had never seen before approached me and after some small talk about the show asked if I knew someone called Mary – to which I replied, "Everyone knows someone called Mary."

"She says there is something about a throat," said the lady.

I suddenly remembered what day it was and that my mother's name was Mary and she had died from cancer of the throat. I told the lady this.

"Yes I know that, and she is here and wants to help you," she replied.

She then told me that she was a medium and that she had been directed to me to give me a message. At that time I was a total sceptic about such things and listened with a sense of scepticism and toleration.

She continued to talk, and amongst the things she said was that my mother was holding and showing her a watch and that someone – I'm not sure who – was plucking thorns from a rose and that my mother had been there for me in the past in times of trouble would be there for me again.

At that point somebody called me and I turned away and when I turned back the lady was not to be seen anywhere in the lounge. I was totally bemused by the incident and related it to some of our friends and asked

if anyone had seen the lady I had been talking to and knew who she was. Nobody had noticed me talking to anyone, nor could recognise the description of the lady.

I forgot about the incident until Annette's throat problem got worse coming up to Christmas. By Christmas she was unable to eat solids and in January was diagnosed with cancer of the throat.

After Annette's funeral in April and before a headstone had been erected on her grave, when I visited the cemetery it was my custom to place a bunch of

flowers into a vase on the grave. In July the headstone was erected and the first time I visited the grave with flowers I dispensed with the vase I had been using and attempted to place the flowers, red roses, into the metal containers on the headstone. Because of the thorns on the stems, the roses would not go through the small openings in the containers so I began to remove the thorns. I had removed the thorns from three roses when suddenly I remembered what the lady had said in the hotel back in November.

Was it possible that my mother had been trying to prepare me for the impending tragedy that was soon to befall me and my family by indicating that time was running out for us by her showing a watch, and the plucking of thorns from a rose which came to pass after Annette's passing?

Andy Halpin

Dublin

Beautiful auburn hair

I was intrigued by the remarks made by Alan Murdie concerning the study by Dr Karlis Osis [FT311:16-17]. On 23 December 1990 my daughter and I visited my mother in hospital. She had been ill for some time and had degenerative heart disease. She was lying flat in bed and I held her left hand. She talked to us for some time, then it became obvious to me that she was dying. She

started to grow cold, shook her head violently from side to side and said repeatedly "No, no I'm not coming". She slowly recovered and eventually became warm again and was able to speak to me normally. She said that she had seen my father (who had died four years previously) and his mother (who had also died some years previously) standing on top of a green hill with beautiful clouds passing behind them. They had been beckoning to her and calling her by name. She said that she had seen her mother-in-law with "beautiful auburn hair".

I remembered my granny only as a white-haired old lady. My daughter was by this time in hysterics, as she did not understand what was going on. I had read some of the books about near-death experiences and realised what I had witnessed. My mother recovered enough to speak normally and her parting remark when we left her was to my daughter: "Don't you drive so fast", because at that time my daughter notoriously drove like a demon.

My mother died the next morning, Christmas Eve, before I reached the hospital. The experiences of the previous day greatly helped me with my grief. By a bizarre chance, I visited a distant relative to inform her of the news, and she told me, quite unprompted, that she remembered my grandmother as a woman who had the "most beautiful auburn hair".

I agree that more research on the subject of NDEs would be of value.

Ian Thorpe

By email

FOR MORE REAL LIFE TALES OF THE PARANORMAL PICK UP 'IT HAPPENED TO ME' VOLUME 6



POLICE

THE ILLUSTRATED
LAW COURTS AND WEEKLY

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

31. THE GREAT SPEKE MYSTERY

In early 1868, the Rev. Benjamin Speke had been the rector of Dowlish Wake, a quiet Somerset village, for 11 years. Since the wealthy Speke family was very powerful locally, his promotion to rector of a good parish at quite a young age may well have been the result of nepotism. He was the brother of the adventurous explorer Captain John Hanning Speke, who discovered the sources of the Nile, and died in a mysterious hunting accident in 1864. Benjamin Speke had never done anything interesting or newsworthy in his life. A confirmed bachelor, he looked after the spiritual welfare of his flock of just 400 souls and busied himself with the restoration of the church. He was quite popular among his parishioners, thanks to his kindness and generosity, and his heartfelt and traditional theological views. But this obscure West Country parson's humdrum life was just about to change.

On 8 January 1868, Rev. Speke wanted to attend the marriage of an old friend in London. He was driven to Chard station, where he bought a return ticket to Waterloo. The train was a few minutes late, arriving at about 4.45 in the afternoon. Speke hailed a cab and went to his brother-in-law's house in Eccleston Square. Arriving there five minutes later, he told a footman that he was going to Warwick Street to buy a new hat, and then to Westminster on business. Later the same day, he would be dining with a friend at seven, although he insisted that he would return to the house in time to change. Several witnesses attested that Benjamin Speke made it to the Warwick Street hatters, where he chose a top hat and ordered it to be delivered to his brother-in-law's house not later than 6.45, since it would be required the same evening. But after leaving the hatters, the Reverend disappeared into thin air.

Worried that Speke might have been murdered or kidnapped, his brother-in-law Mr Murdoch immediately contacted the police. It was initially hoped that it would be easy to track down a dog-collared Somerset clergyman in the busy London streets, but the only result of the hue and cry was that a workman reported to the police station, carrying a top hat. He had found it in Birdcage Walk at 7.30 the same evening Speke had disappeared, and originally planned to keep it for himself. But then he read about the missing clergyman in the newspapers, and saw that its lining was marked with 'Speke'. The police regarded the finding of the hat as a clear indication that Speke had not disappeared of his own free will. The clergyman's friends agreed: what reason could there be for this wealthy gentleman of high moral character and unchallenged integrity to 'go underground' and abscond from his previous life?

The lost country parson became headline news in all the London papers. Numerous amateur detectives brought forward the most extraordinary theories about how Speke might have been done away with. Had some criminal gang burgled the Eccleston Square house, murdered him, and hidden his dismembered remains underneath the floorboards? Or had the unfortunate clergyman been decoyed into a cab by a gang of foreign criminals, to be knocked out cold by a boxing glove fitted to a powerful spring, shot by a hidden air-gun, or rendered unconscious by chloroform pumped into the vehicle? Speculation was also rife as to whether these gangsters had murdered Speke and stolen the money in his wallet, or whether he actually might be held for ransom to extort a fortune from his wealthy family. There was even lewd speculation that Speke might be on his way, in a drugged or fettered condition, to some vile brothel in Tunis or Tangiers, cities where the most horrible and unnatural vices were current. Another set of obvious suspects was closer to home. Had the dastardly Fenians perhaps mistaken Speke for the Home Secretary Mr Gathorne Hardy, and kidnapped the clergyman by mistake? Unamused, the police objected that Mr Hardy was 20 years older than Speke, and not in the habit of wearing clerical attire.

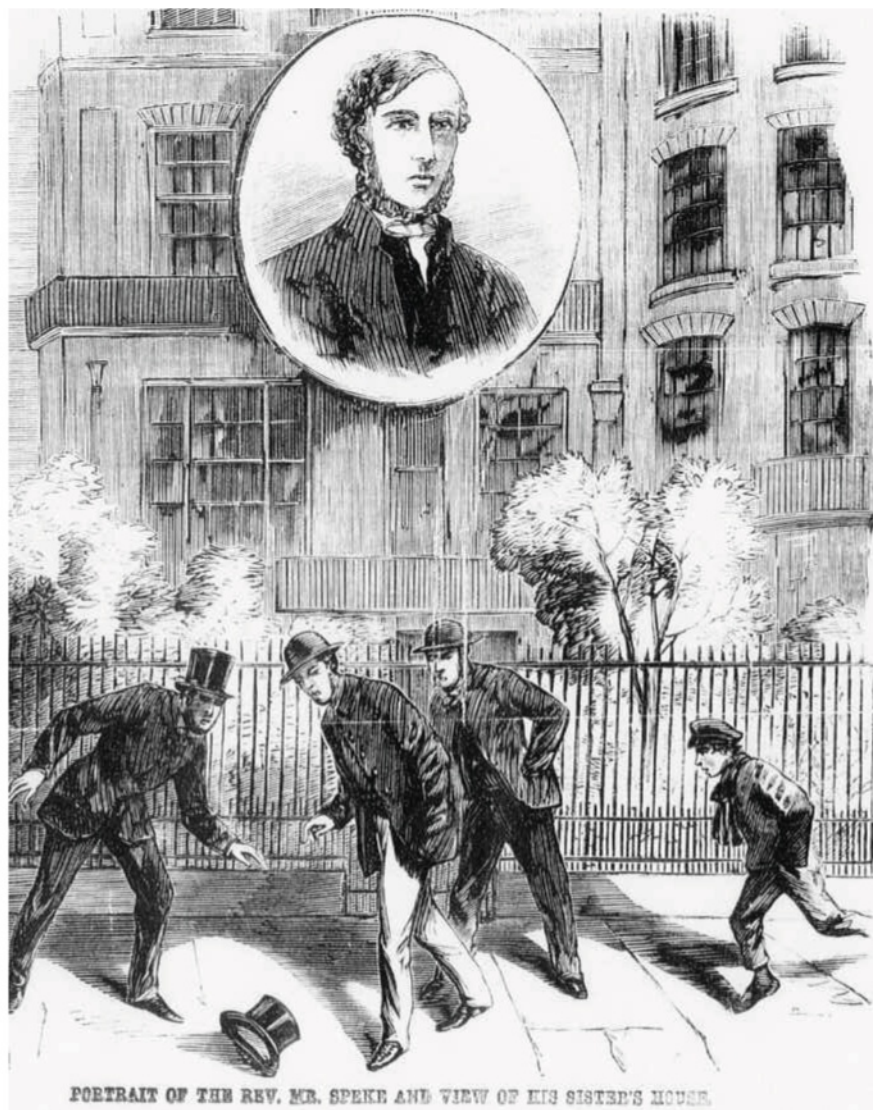
There was much scare-mongering about the Great Speke Mystery in the London newspapers. Many other people, clergymen prominent among them, claimed to have had disturbing experiences with foreign-looking ruffians trying to waylay or abduct them. Mr

White, Chaplain of the Savoy, claimed that they had tried to decoy him into a cab, saying that he was wanted to give evidence by the Chief Magistrate at Bow Street. The *Sunday Times* claimed that several other well-to-do Londoners had recently disappeared. Surely, there must be a well-organised gang of assassins at work in the Metropolis, with an ample supply of decoy hansom cabs equipped with air-guns and chloroform-pumps. Having plundered their victims, these villains dismembered their bodies and left the remains in the countryside, to be devoured by foxes and badgers. Another horror story involved the discovery of a chopping-block in a London slum dwelling. It could be opened by a spring mechanism, and underneath was an opening to a main sewer: was this where Speke and the dastardly gang's other victims had been dismembered and unceremoniously dumped? The *Times* exposed this particular story as a newspaper *canard*, however.

Originally, Benjamin Speke's friends had posted a reward of just £3 for the recovery of the missing clergyman, but as the moral panic about the Great Speke Mystery kept growing, so did the reward. Even an offer of £500 did not produce the desired result, however, and no trace of Speke was found, nor any worthwhile clue. The *Spectator* wrote that "Twenty or thirty thousand minds have been at work upon the case, including the whole body of Police, the entire Bar, and the whole body of Clubmen." By late February, the journalists entertained little hope that Speke would ever be seen again. Surely, no self-respecting kidnapper would 'sit on' his victim for more than a month and a half, before sending a demand for money to the wealthy Spekes, enclosing a blood-stained dog-collar. They concluded that the unfortunate clergyman had been the victim of one of London's criminal gangs.

On 24 February, Police Sergeant Soady, of the Cornwall Constabulary, saw a rum-looking cove trudge down the main street in Padstow. He was dressed like a cattle-drover, but seemed to have seen better days. Sergeant Soady thought he looked rather like a swindler named Ayre, who was wanted by the Hull police for stealing a large sum of money from his employers. When the tramp was arrested and searched, a large sum of money in banknotes was found in his pockets and wallet. Proud to have captured the Hull miscreant, the Cornish coppers communicated with the Chief Constable and the Superintendent of Police. But when these gentlemen had interviewed the suspect, they

STRATED
 WEEKLY RECORD
NEWS



PORTRAIT OF THE REV. MR. SPEKE AND VIEW OF HIS SISTER'S HOUSE.

ABOVE: Rev. Benjamin Speke – and the finding of his top hat – from the *Illustrated Police News*, 22 Feb 1868.

found nothing to suggest that he was the Hull swindler. Instead, the senior policemen looked through their files of other fugitives and missing people, and found the description of the Rev. Benjamin Speke; the Padstow mystery man fitted it perfectly.

When challenged with being the missing clergyman, the man became very agitated, before admitting that he was, in fact, the missing clergyman. He said that he had believed that all his friends and relatives were against him, and decided to 'disappear'. Leaving his tall hat in Birdcage Walk as a decoy, he left London in disguise and tramped around the West Country for many weeks,

visiting churches and monuments. He bought the newspapers every day, to read about himself. His original plan had been to start life afresh in the United States, he said, but he could not explain why, in that case, he had dallied so long in England.

Taken back to London, Speke was examined by a team of competent physicians, who diagnosed "a depressing form of hypochondriasis" which had been aggravated by certain quack medicines imbibed by the patient. Some waggish journalists disputed this diagnosis, however. The *Western Morning News* thought that Speke's excessive biblical study had led to religious monomania. A

Times correspondent had heard rumours that Speke had a morbid dread of marriage, and presumed that he had absconded to avoid an unwanted wedding arranged by his family. The *Spectator* wrote that "We never heard of Mr Speke in his life until Mr Murdoch published his first letter, and shall be delighted never to hear of him again, considering that he ought in common decency to have been murdered in a cab by foreigners."

The London correspondent of the *New York Times* had definitely had enough of the Rev. Benjamin Speke:

You will have heard all about Mr Speke by telegraph. He has had an immense success – been the talk of the town for nearly a month, and had as many leaders written about him as if he had conquered a world. No doubt you read some of the elaborate and ingenious theories which were put forward to account for his disappearance. I believe, however, that I may claim the credit of having sent to you, in a letter written nearly three weeks ago, the explanation which turned out to be the true one. I declared my conviction (founded on experience among 'bolters') that he had run away to escape marriage. That is now asserted to be the fact. Speke's friends are trying to make out that he is a little touched in the head, but there is no reason to believe that he has ever been anything else than a fool. He has now been playing a cruel and wicked part, and his friends in paying £500 for his recovery have given exactly £499 19s 11 3/4p more than he is worth. He pretends to have some peculiar religious ideas, and to be aiming for America – attracted thither, I suppose, by Mr Hepworth Dixon's indecent and imbecile books. Enough of him! He will now sink into sudden and general contempt.

And indeed, the Rev. Benjamin Speke returned to his flock in Dowlish Wake and well-deserved obscurity. In 1869, he became engaged to marry his first cousin Miss Fuller, the daughter of a Wiltshire squire. There was light-hearted newspaper banter about whether he would be absconding again, but this time he made it all the way to the altar. The couple went on to be fruitful and replenish the Earth, having no less than eight children. But tragedy struck in 1881: Mrs Speke died on 23 February, and her heartbroken husband drowned himself the following day, leaving his numerous brood of children orphans. The Rev. Benjamin Speke's obituary in the *Times* mostly deals with his escapade back in 1868, although it states that in spite of his rash actions, he was descended from a respectable old Somerset family.

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Why Fortean?



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

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

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

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

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

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

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

FT toes no party line.

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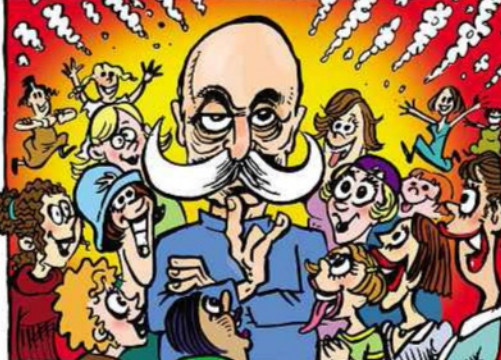
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IN THE 1930s, PL TRAVERS BECAME A KEEN FOLLOWER OF THE FAMOUS ARMENIAN MYSTIC AND GURU GURDJIEFF..

A SPOONFUL OF SUGAR HELPS THE MEDICINE GO DOWN...



THOUGH HE MAY HAVE BEEN A FRAUD, GURDJIEFF HAD REAL TALENTS! HE HAD ENORMOUS SEXUAL MAGNETISM...



... AND HE HAD AN AMAZING ABILITY TO FLEECE RICH DISCIPLES...




BY THIS TIME, PLT HAD BEGUN TO WRITE HER MARY POPPINS STORIES...




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A SPOONFUL OF SUGAR...




NATURALLY, ALL THIS WAS LOST WHEN WALT DISNEY FILMED THE BOOKS...

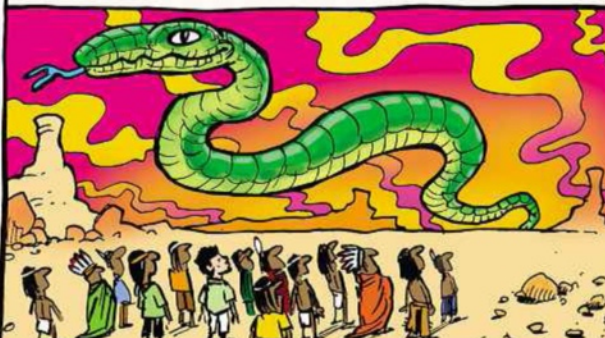
MAGIC KINGDOM




AND WHILE THE MOVIE WAS BEING MADE, PLT WAS STUDYING ZEN MEDITATION IN KYOTO...



IN LATER YEARS, NOW RICH, SHE TRAVELLED RESTLESSLY IN SEARCH OF ANCIENT WISDOM! SHE TOOK PART IN A NAVAHO RITE IN NEW MEXICO...




... AND SHE FOUND A NEW GURU IN THE HANDSOME KRISHNAMURTI...



IN HER OLD AGE, SHE LIVED OFF THE KING'S ROAD IN CHELSEA. SHE LIKED TALKING TO THE LOCAL PUNKS...

MY DEARS! YOU ALL LOOK SO LOVELY!

**!?!? OFF GRANNY!



HER FINAL BOOK WAS A STUDY OF MYTHOLOGY AND FOLKLORE - "WHAT THE BEE KNOWS"...

I KNOWS, BUT I AIN'T SAYIN' NUFFINK!



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SPOONFUL OF SUGAR?



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FORTEAN TIMES 316

ON SALE 26 JUNE 2014

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL



Marco Gusmini, a 21-year-old pilgrim, was crushed to death on 24 April when a 30m (100ft) curved crucifix collapsed and fell on him during a ceremony in the Italian Alpine village of Cevo. Another man was taken to hospital. The structure bore a 6m (20ft) statue of Jesus weighing 600kg (1,320lb). It had been erected in Brescia, Lombardy, to honour the visit of Pope John Paul II to the town in 1998, and was re-erected in Cevo in 2005. The accident could be seen as an ill omen for the Polish pontiff, who was canonised together with Pope John XXIII three days later, on Sunday 27 April. Those who opposed John Paul's canonisation pointed out that he turned a blind eye to reports of paedophile priests round the world, befriending one of the most notorious – the Mexican monster Marcial Maciel (1920-2008), founder of the Legion of Christ. Gusmini had been visiting Cevo with a church group from his hometown of Lovere, where – curiously – he lived with his parents on Via Papa Giovanni XXIII (Pope John XXIII Street). There had been a similar death in Italy in 2004, when a 72-year-old woman was crushed by a 7ft (2m) metal crucifix in the southern town of Sant'Onofrio in Calabria. dailymail.co.uk, telegraph.co.uk, 24 April; [ITV] 25 April 2014.

On 5 February 2014, Simbarashe Kamupondera, 31, a self-styled 'prophet' of the Nyeredzi Nhatu sect, drowned while conducting a 'cleansing' ceremony in the Ruwa River, at Epworth, in Zimbabwe. Witnesses blame mermaid spirits locally named as *njuzu*. According to online sources cited by Ulrich Magin's cryptozoological newsletter *Bilk* (#179, May 2014): "The prophet met his fate around midday as he was attending to a congregant at the river bank when he was swept away by a strong current. However the family believes that Simbarashe is still alive claiming he was abducted by *njuzu*."

"Simbarashe came to stay with us a month ago," said his sister-in-law Magma Mutingwende. "He was in the habit of baptising people in the river and was praying for a female congregant when he was swept away. We realised that he needed help when he started [calling out] but when we tried to swim to where he was he was [already] submerged. We believe he was taken by a mermaid and we are not going to mourn him because we know that he is coming back. We have not told his wife yet as we know he is coming back." Magma, husband Thomas and other members of the apostolic sect are now keeping a vigil on the banks of the Ruwa River.

Three men were swept out to sea by 7ft (2m) waves during a baptismal ceremony by the Jesus Christ Light of the Sky church in southern California on 30 March. Two managed to swim back to shore, but Benito Flores, 43, a cousin of the presiding pastor, Maurigro Cervantes, remained missing a day later, presumed drowned. The ceremony was held on the shore of the Rancho Guadalupe Dunes Preserve north of Santa Barbara. [R] BBC News, 31 Mar 2014.

Zheng Guoqiang, 55, a high-profile feng shui master, was buried alive by a mudslide in Zhaoqing, Guangdong province, moments after declaring a cemetery plot ideal for a client. The 55-year-old, described as the "go-to" specialist for celebrities, had been asked to find some "good land" for De Meng, 75, to be laid to rest after his recent death. Seconds before he was engulfed, he had been speaking of how the vibrations and location were perfect for a burial. Besides Mr Zheng, the dead included two of De Meng's relatives, a Taoist named Wu and three cemetery workers. Metro, [MX News \(Sydney\)](http://MX News (Sydney)), 3 April 2014.

A body was left hanging for years from a billboard in China, despite thousands of people driving past it every day. It was discovered by billboard repairers. Police think the body, now mummified, went unreported because drivers assumed it was part of an advertising stunt. Officers said it would be difficult to determine the cause of death or the identity of the victim, who may have been partly eaten by birds. [MX News \(Sydney\)](http://MX News (Sydney)), 2 April 2014.

A train arrived at a crowded platform in Mulhouse, eastern France, with the dead body of a cyclist stuck to its nose. The driver of the high-speed service was unaware he had struck the man and carried him 40km (25 miles) down the track. The train, travelling from Paris on 16 March, was passing through the village of Petit-Croix when it struck the 48-year-old man. Although such incidents are said to be "relatively rare", a TGV driver once hit a minivan without even noticing as the trains can reach speeds of 200mph (320km/h). "The Kinetic energy of a train is so great that a shunt could go unnoticed," said an SNCF spokesman. "If there isn't any debris left on the sides upon impact, you wouldn't be aware of it." Metro, 18 Mr 2014.

A photographer dressed in a plastic horse's head drowned trying to take underwater shots in a whirlpool. Jacob Cockle, 28, was wearing the prop while a friend filmed him from the bank of Carnsew Pool on the Hayle Estuary, Cornwall, when he was sucked into a sluice tunnel. Traces of ketamine were later found in his system. At an inquest into his death, his mother Carolyn Sheard, 60, said: "Jacob was a free spirit". D.Mirror, 18 Jan 2014.

A 21-year-old Spaniard was electrocuted after he and a friend clambered onto a train roof to take a selfie. He was thrown off the stationary cargo truck in Andujar, Andalusia, when he touched a live overhead cable. His friend also suffered a severe shock but survived. Metro, 18 Mar 2014.

THE FORTEAN TIMES BOOK OF STRANGE DEATHS VOL 2

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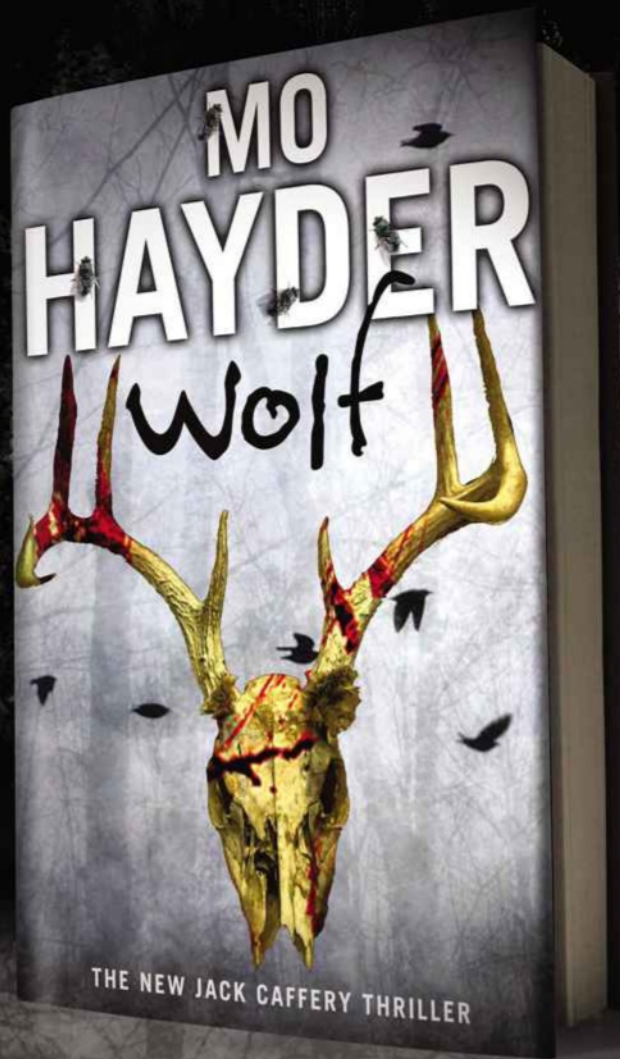
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