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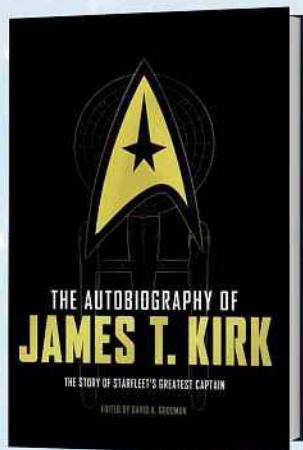
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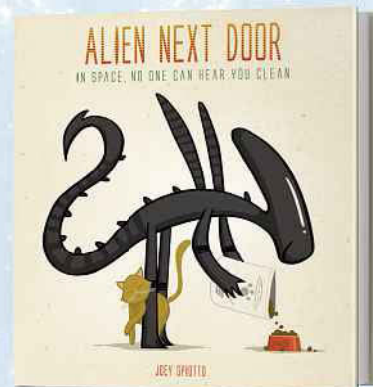


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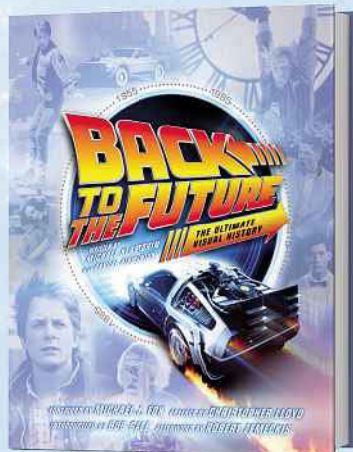


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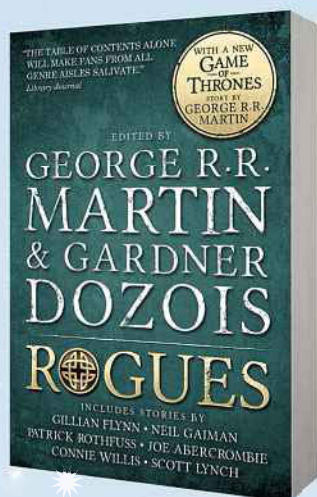


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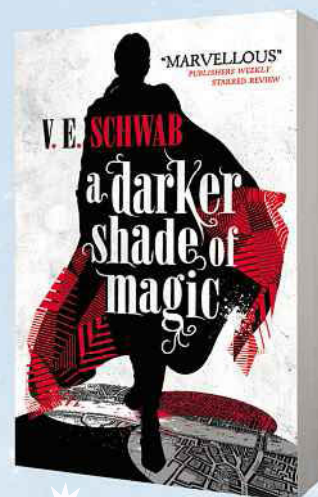


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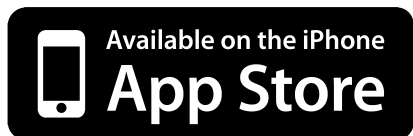
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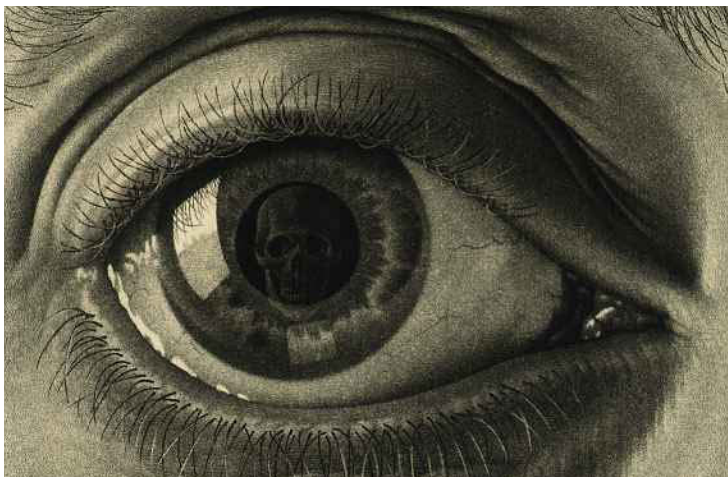
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FORTEAN TIMES is produced for Dennis Publishing by Wild Talents Ltd. Postal address: Fortean Times, PO BOX 71602, London E17 0QD.

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PUBLISHED BY DENNIS PUBLISHING,
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 London W1T 4JD, UK
 Tel: 020 7907 6000

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PRINTED BY POLESTAR BICESTER

DISTRIBUTION
 Distributed in UK, Ireland and worldwide by Seymour Distribution Ltd.
 2 East Poultry Avenue, London EC1A 9PT
 Tel: 020 7429 4000 / Fax: 020 7429 4001
 Queries on overseas availability should be emailed to info@seymour.co.uk

Speciality store distribution by Worldwide Magazine Distribution Ltd, Tel: 0121 788 3112 Fax: 0121 788 1272

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

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

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

Periodical postage paid at Jamaica, NY 11431, USA.

US Postmaster: Send address changes to: Fortean Times, 3330 Pacific Avenue, Suite 500, Virginia Beach, VA, 23451-2983, USA.

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

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GROUP FINANCE DIRECTOR
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 FELIX DENNIS

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

Printed in the UK. ISSN: 0308 5899
 © Fortean Times: DECEMBER 2015

editorial

Bookshop ghosts and library angels

THE HAUNTING SEASON

For our Christmas issue this year we bring you, as is traditional, ghosts. In his regular column (p18), Alan Murdie takes a look at the latest examples of phantoms appearing in photos – two impressive examples from Norwich, a city whose spooks are perhaps not as celebrated as they might be – and wonders whether suggestions of plague victims and deceased bishops are convincing identities for these seemingly supernatural snaps.

We also re-examine two classic London hauntings: Roger Clarke revisits the case of the Cock Lane ghost (pp36-41), an 18th century sensation that was satirised by Hogarth and that drew luminaries such as the Duke of York and Horace Walpole to the cramped London backstreet where ‘Scratching Fanny’ was supposedly communicating with the dead. It was, Roger notes, “a bit like Prince Charles and Gore Vidal visiting a famous haunted Enfield council house in 1977 and sitting on the bed of Janet Hodgson.” There are further similarities between the two cases – such as the accusations of hoaxing, pretty undeniable in Cock Lane – but what’s particularly fascinating in this instance is the rich background of sex and scandal underlying the 18th century events: the ghost was in some senses a particular, supernatural manifestation of a culture expressed in the Bartholomew Fairs, gay romps and numerous drinking dens that gave the area its carnivalesque character.

Across town, in upmarket Mayfair, ghost stories of a better class have long circulated concerning the elegant Georgian townhouse at 50 Berkeley Square, which, according to its Wikipedia entry, remains “the most haunted house in London”. Jan Bondeson traces the evolution of this famous haunting (pp28-35) and finds that there’s somewhat less to it than meets the eye: more a case of literary myth-making – much of it courtesy of celebrated author and ghost hunter Elliot O’Donnell in a series of books – growing out of local gossip when the house stood empty for a lengthy period.

Since 1939, the five-storey house, once the residence of Britain’s shortest-serving Prime Minister, George Canning, has been home to the antiquarian booksellers Maggs Bros, founded by Uriah Maggs in 1853 and still going strong. For years, Ed Maggs and his staff have had to deal with a steady stream of would-be ghost hunters turning up on their doorstep in search of spooks. Now, the venerable firm has upped sticks and relocated to new premises round the corner at 46 Curzon Street. We were fortunate to get a tour of no 50 just before the move – thanks to Ed

and Alice Rowell, who shared their memories with us (p34). We have to report, with heavy hearts, that no manifestations took place during our evening visit – although we did manage to capture the atmospheric image that adorns our cover this month: the actual window of a genuine fake “haunted house”.

We wish Maggs Bros all the best in their new home – it would, of course, be pleasingly ironic if this one turned out to be *really* haunted...



"JUST STICK WITH THE MYRRH"

Maggs Bros new premises at 46 Curzon Street, W1J 7UH, are now open Monday to Friday 10am-7pm and Saturday 10am-5pm.

BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

If there’s someone out there looking to start an instant Fortean Times collection, then we may be able to help. London-based reader John Rowe is offering – for free, no less – an almost complete run of issues from 63 to 301, but you must be able to collect them in person.

Another public-spirited offer comes from Laurence Stockdale of Kidlington, Oxfordshire, who writes: “I found the article regarding building a fortean library particularly interesting (FT331:48-49) as I have a complete set of *The Unexplained* languishing in a storage cupboard. The issues still have their covers, so the readers’ letters are there to read, but I did not get around to buying the folders. They all seem to be in good condition so if anyone would like them they are welcome to them. They gave me many hours of pleasure and I would like someone else to have that opportunity rather than consign them to the local recycling centre. I also have 20 or 30 issues of *Omni* magazine from April 1979 till November 1983.”

If you are interested in taking John or Laurence up on their generous offers, please email us at drsutton@forteanimes.com and we’ll put you in touch.

David Sutton
 DAVID R. SUTTON

Bob Rickard
 BOB RICKARD

Paul Sieveking
 PAUL SIEVEKING



Why fortean?

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

SEE PAGE 78

**CECIL
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Folk sounds best at Cecil Sharp House

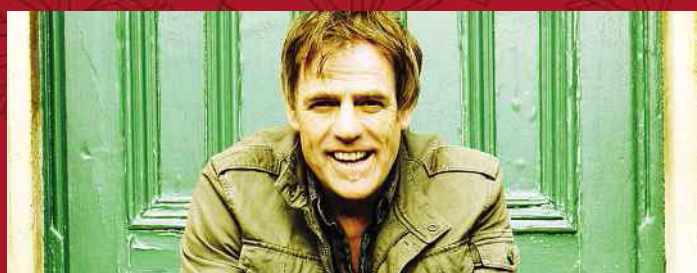
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A tomb fit for a queen?

Is British Egyptologist on the verge of uncovering Nefertiti's burial chamber?



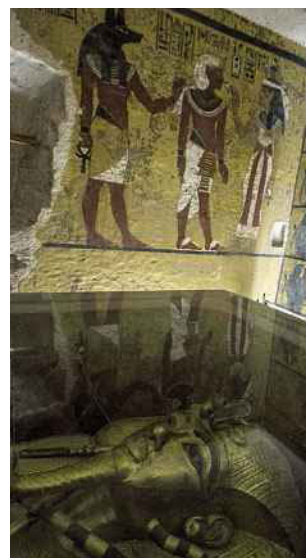
PHOTOS: KHALED DESOUKI / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

Nicholas Reeves, a British Egyptologist at the University of Arizona who co-discovered an undisturbed Egyptian tomb in 2000, might be on the verge of the greatest find ever made in the Nile valley. His evidence is photographs by Factum Arte, a specialist in art replication that recently created a life-sized facsimile of Tutankhamun's tomb, intended for tourists to visit without endangering the original. What Reeves found in these ultra-high-resolution images, which reveal the texture of walls beneath layers of paint, were fissures and cracks that suggest the presence of two passages blocked and plastered to conceal their existence. One of these probably leads to a storeroom – its position and small size mirror that of an already-uncovered storeroom inside the tomb. The other,

ABOVE: Egyptologist Nicholas Reeves stands before the gold, ochre and white frescos of Tutankhamun's tomb (right), while telling the assembled press about his theory that Nefertiti is buried in a secret chamber.

bigger possible doorway in the north wall of Tutankhamun's burial chamber suggests something much more exciting.

Tutankhamun died in about 1323 BC aged 19. There are several oddities about his tomb in Luxor's Valley of the Kings: it is small compared with others; the funerary objects found on 26 November 1922 were indeed "wonderful" as Howard Carter said, but were haphazardly strewn around as if in a junk shop and were largely second-hand; and even the boy-king's gilded funerary mask sports the strangely unmanly feature of



pierced ears. The tomb's main axis is angled to the right of the entrance shaft, an arrangement typical of Egyptian queens

rather than kings.

Noting that the bigger of the two supposed doorways aligns perfectly with both sides of the tomb's entrance chamber, Reeves thinks it could conceal a corridor continuing along the same axis, in the scale and shape of other nearby royal tombs. All this, as well as evidence that the tomb's decoration and construction were executed at different stages, suggests that the corridor leads to the burial chamber of a queen, or perhaps several princesses. Among the tombs and mummies from Tutankhamun's dynasty (the 18th) identified so far, there remains the gaping absence of Nefertiti, the wife of Tutankhamun's father Akhenaten, who served as co-regent and possibly also as pharaoh in her own right after Akhenaten's death, meaning that Nefertiti's tomb and its contents might well outshine her stepson's. Indeed, if Reeves is right, what Tutankhamun got were her leftovers; even his facemask might originally have been intended for a queen.

In early November, Egypt's antiquities minister Mamdouh al-Damaty announced that a survey of the tomb's walls using infrared thermography had shown "differences in the temperatures registered on different parts of the northern wall", raising hopes of a hidden chamber or chambers. Rather than Nefertiti, the minister thinks it more likely that Kia, thought to be Tutankhamun's biological mother, lies within. *Economist*, 8 Aug; *D.Mail*, 12 Aug; *Sciencealert.com*, 30 Sept; *Guardian online*, 8 Nov 2015.

(Incidentally, the world famous bust of Nefertiti, allegedly discovered in 1912 and now on show in Berlin, may be a 20th century fake. It is reminiscent of those fresco reconstructions at Knossos in Crete that, according to Evelyn Waugh, look like illustrations for *Vogue*. See FT263:9.)



PLUTO THE PRANKSTER

New Horizons probe reveals new oddities of the ninth planet

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CARRY ON UP THE CONGO

New expedition planned in search of mysterious Mokele-Mbembe

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THE LITTLE BLUE MAN

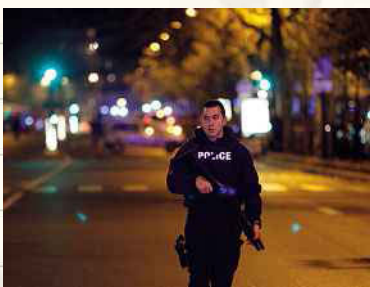
Is this the best extraterrestrial contact hoax of all time?

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The Conspirasphere

It didn't take long for 'false flag' conspiracy accusations to appear in the wake of the Paris attacks. **NOEL ROONEY** ticks the pre-prepared boxes.

The horrible events in Paris on 13 November provoked the expected response from the conspiracy community: this was not a terrorist attack, but a false flag operation, carried out by (a) the French, to justify deeper involvement in Syria; (b) the Americans, to



(either because they lack the creativity, or because they are contemptuous of public scepticism at such flagrantly mechanical and inept methods of deception), and which succeeds every time. This inference presumes that all terrorist organisations

goad the French into deeper involvement in Syria; (c) any name from a droplist of European powers, to stem the flow of immigrants from countries such as Syria, or more mundanely to steal the media thunder from Russia in Syria.

The false flag operation meme is beginning to display a set of standard characteristics. The state security apparatus of the country attacked was holding an exercise designed to simulate a terrorist attack on the day of the actual attack. The ID of at least one of the attackers is found close to the scene, and alerts security to the identity of the terrorists involved. The media are on the scene too quickly, and give the official account of the event without questioning their source or asking pertinent, investigative questions.

Some theorists go further. The alleged victims include actors pretending to be injured. The attackers have strong connections to state security, or are actually working for state security. The initial images of the event are doctored, and amateur footage discloses anomalies, or inconsistencies in the official narrative. There is a compulsory Jewish element to the backstory (in this case, the Jewish owner of the concert hall had sold it two months before the attack, an apparently obvious sign of guilt).

A disinterested observer might draw one of two conclusions from this. First, the deep state is working from a standard menu, a menu from which no one deviates

are actually part of the deep state, or closely allied to it, and are happy to stage their attacks at a convenient time for the relevant government. How plausible is the Identikit theory of terror? I'd argue, not very.

The second inference that might be drawn is that the conspiracy theory of state terror and false flag attacks is itself beginning to solidify into a codified response. The conspiracy observer is the one with the prepared droplist: security exercise, check; passport found nearby, check; media Johnny-on-the-spot, check; and so on. This seems to me rather more plausible; I suspect it is evidence that the originally reactive and pattern-seeking theorising is morphing over time into a grand narrative of deep state terror.

This is not to say that there is no such thing as deep state terror; there is some pretty good (that is to say, pretty damning) evidence for false flag attacks (Gladio, the Grey Wolves etc) and for governments indulging in nefarious activities that do not have the best interests of their citizens in mind. People have every right to be sceptical of official narratives, even when those narratives are about events as tragic as the Paris attacks. But it would be a curious (and implausibly orderly) world in which all terrorist incidents were in fact lethal hoaxes played out of the same textbook.

<http://beforeitsnews.com/eu/2015/11/the-paris-false-flag-latest-news-you-wont-believe-it-2593410.html>; www.

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

SNAKE TRIES TO DRAG WOMAN DOWN TOILET

New Zealand Times — Nov 2014.

Morans to pick up Red Cow from Dalata

Irish Times, 11 Nov 2014

'Married' Jesus found in British Library

Sunday Times, 9 Nov 2014.

The secret plan to use psychopaths to restore order after nuclear war

D.Telegraph, 31 Oct 2014.

Fewer ghosts, more savings

Economist, 25 Oct 2014.

NORWEGIAN HUNTER MISSES MOOSE, SHOOTS MAN ON TOILET

MSN News, —Oct 2014.

Gardener killed by brush with devil's helmet

D.Telegraph, 7 Nov 2014.

MAN ESCAPES ALIMONY AFTER WIFE ADMITS SHE'S A GENIE

Newser.com, —Oct 2014.

SPECIAL REPORT

THE AMAZING WORLD OF MC ESCHER

DAVID V BARRETT navigates a new exhibition charting the career of an artist who expanded the minds of science fiction fans and students the world over with his ‘impossible’ creations

How many of us discovered the weird and wonderful creations of MC Escher when we were students, and someone had a print of one on their wall? He was eye-twisting and mind-expanding; he took our imaginations to places we knew reality couldn’t reach. He drew impossibilities, and made us want to visit them.

MC Escher (1898-1972) was born in the Netherlands, but spent 10 years in Rome (1925-35), then a few years in Switzerland and Belgium before moving back to the Netherlands in 1941. He left Rome because he didn’t want his children to wear Fascist uniforms to school, and he didn’t like Switzerland because the snow blurred all the lines.

Escher had a problem throughout his career: the art establishment saw him as a graphic artist, not as a “real” artist; there’s only one piece of his work on display in the whole of Britain. But he was loved by print makers, by mathematicians, by musicians, by students – and by science fiction writers. A 1982 *Doctor Who* story, *Castrovalva*, used both the title of one of his lithographs of a vertiginous Italian landscape, and the concept of the recursive architecture of *Ascending and Descending* to trap the groggy new Doctor (Peter Davison) and his companions in the city. Christopher Hodder-Williams used *Bond of Union* (1956), Escher and his wife’s heads in one interwoven bandage, for the cover of his 1976 novel about the meeting of schizophrenia and metaphysics, *The Prayer Machine*.

Escher is impossible to pigeonhole. His work is surreal, but he wasn’t a surrealist; he refused to join or identify with



ABOVE: *Reptiles*, 1943. FACING PAGE, TOP: *Relativity*, 1953. FACING PAGE, BOTTOM: *Bond of Union*, 1956.

any art movements. He was a master of unusual and extreme perspective, especially in his early landscapes, and of tessellation – repeated geometric patterns, especially where the patterns gradually turn into fish or birds, or angels and demons fold into each other. His woodcuts and lithographs play with the deepest of concepts, with movement, with reality and illusion, with the eternity of time and the infinity of space.

A hand holding a pencil draws a hand holding a pencil, which is drawing the first hand. The hands appear to stand out above the paper they’re drawing on.

Two British mathematicians, intrigued by Escher’s work, sent him drawings – displayed in the exhibition – which provided him with inspiration. HSM Coxeter sent him a copy of a 1957 lecture

Escher was a master of unusual perspective

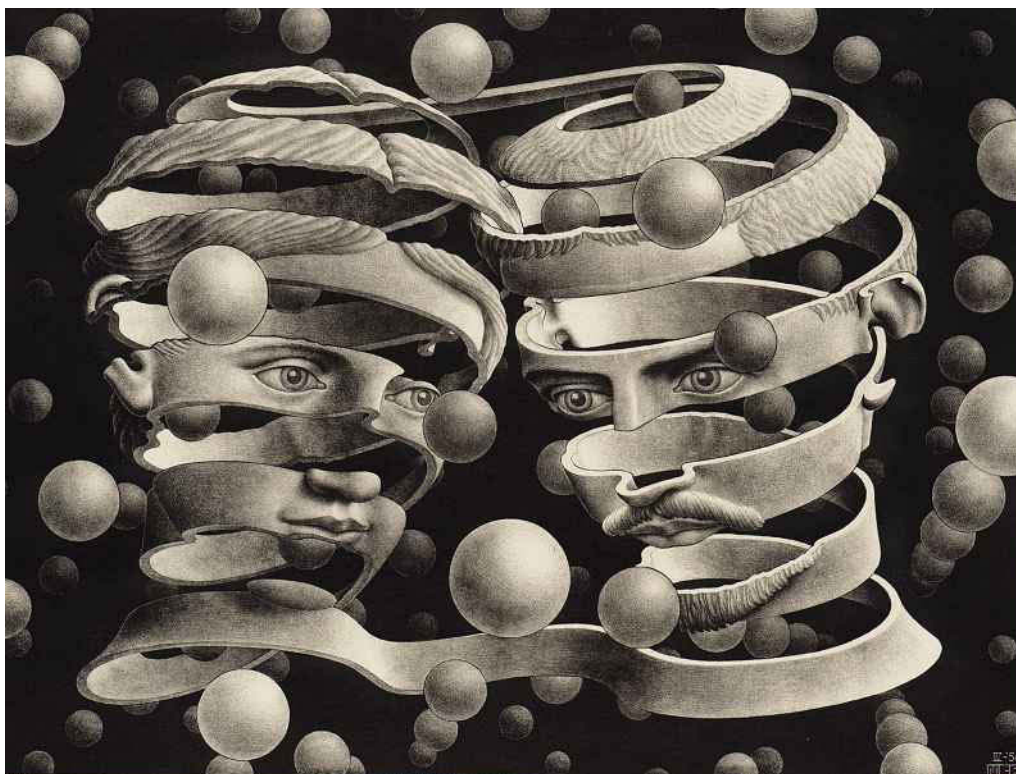
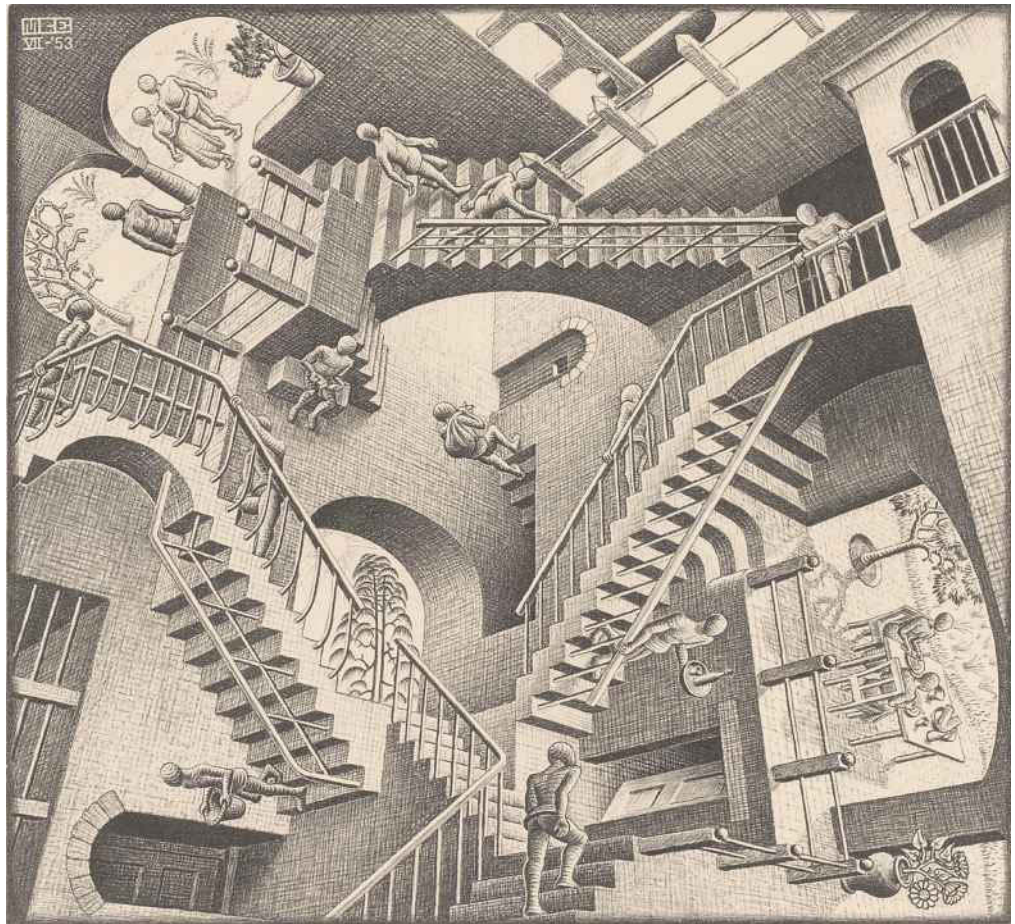
that included a circular diagram with a repeated pattern getting smaller and smaller towards the circumference. This inspired Escher’s *Circle Limit* series of woodcuts (1958-60) with amazingly intricate patterns. Roger Penrose wrote a paper that included an image of a “tri-bar”, a three-dimensional triangle which looks logical until you try following its sides, when you realise it’s impossible. Escher sent him a copy of *Belvedere* (1958), with its interlocking columns and a ladder

going up from inside to outside; sitting on a bench is a man holding a framework of a cube similar to Penrose’s tri-bar. Penrose and his father also sent Escher a photo of a model they had made of a continuous flight of steps, which inspired Escher to create his classic lithograph *Ascending and Descending* (1960) – hooded figures endlessly walking up or down four flights of steps around the top of a building.

Escher printed individual copies of his work himself, painstakingly pressing the paper onto the inked original plate with an egg spoon. It was such a time-consuming process that he became annoyed when people wanted more copies, so put his prices up to discourage potential buyers – at which point, ironically, the art world finally began to notice him – and to demand more.

This exhibition, which comes to London from the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, contains archive material never seen before and covers Escher's career chronologically. As well as his most iconic work – the perpetual motion waterwheel of *Waterfall* (1961), the triangle of upside-down staircases of *Relativity* (1953), the confusing ladders and pillars of *Belvedere* (1958), the hooded men tramping on the stairs in *Ascending and Descending* (1960) – it includes a lot of his early work, including portraits in his versions of Art Nouveau and Cubist styles. He began experimenting with tessellations as early as 1920, and became enthused with them, partly through seeing Moorish art at the Alhambra in southern Spain and partly through his half-brother giving him articles on crystallography.

But it's his landscapes which are perhaps the greatest revelation – from the early stark towers of *San Gimignano* (1923) seen from ground level to the *Tower of Babel* (1928) seen from a bird's eye view, to the Corsican town of *Bonifacio* (1928) perched on rocks above the sea to *Castrovalva* (1930) above a steep mountainside with



another village far below. The unusual use of perspective in these early works led him into the tricks of perspective in his later work, perhaps most especially in *Other World* (1947), three views of a strange bird-man perched in an archway, beyond which is the cratered surface of a planet – looking straight at it in the centre of the picture, or from below at the bottom, or from above at the top, each view rendering the other two impossible. In *Still Life and Street* (1937) a tabletop with a pack of cards, a pipe in an ashtray and piled books blend seamlessly into a street scene; the foreground and the background are equally clear, equally real, but you can only focus your attention on one or the other.

This astonishing exhibition is a must-see for anyone who has ever had their mind wonderfully confused by an Escher print.

**The Amazing World of MC Escher,
Dulwich Picture Gallery until 17
January 2016**

SIDELINES...

ALL-PURPOSE PROTEST

Kay Bishop glued her bottom to the window of a Debenhams store in Croydon, south London. She was wearing next to nothing – besides a sash saying “World’s grumpiest old woman”. Before being moved on by police, she said she was protesting because she was “fed up with everything”. (Sydney) *D.Telegraph*, 26 Sept 2015.

HOLY FRACAS

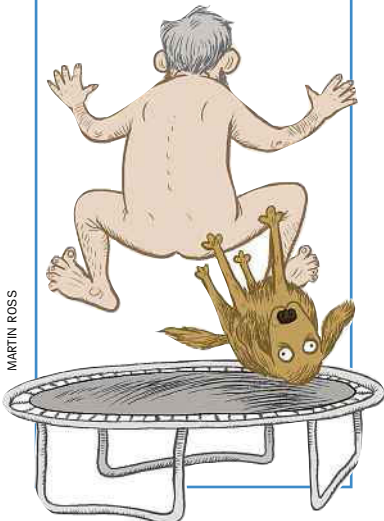
Jesus faced court in Sydney on 9 July charged with attempted murder of an Angel. Steven Jay Jesus, 40, repeatedly stabbed Christopher John Angel, 38, in a boarding house, leaving him with critical injuries and on life support. *Adelaide Advertiser*, 10 July 2015.

PARIS MARSUPIALS

Up to 150 Bennett’s wallabies have been found roaming Rambouillet woods near Paris, the descendants of a handful that escaped from a park near Emancé some 40 years ago through holes in the fencing caused by vandalism or storms. The animals can live for 15 years. *D.Telegraph*, 27 July 2015.

BOUNCING BACK

Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams enjoys trampolining naked, he told the radio station Newstalk. “Yeah, I do it naked,” he said. “The dog does it with me. It saves me taking him for a walk.” <i>16 Feb 2015.



Fainting in the aisles

More outbreaks of mass psychogenic illness in schools



A RIPPLE IN RIPON

Around 40 pupils simultaneously fell ill at a Remembrance Day service on 11 November. The 11am assembly was interrupted at Outwood Academy in Ripon, North Yorkshire, as about a dozen children began to feel faint and sick during the two-minute silence. Firemen, hazardous materials specialist officers and paramedics were sent to the school amid initial fears that a gas leak or hazardous substance had triggered the illness, but following an investigation fire brigade officer Dave Winspear declared the incident was caused by pupils “overheating”. He said: “We are of the view that the children just fainted and there was a ripple effect throughout the school. More children felt anxiety and started to feel concerned and the thing has escalated.”

One pupil said: “When the first boy was sick we thought it was a one-off, but then there was a big slap on the floor and someone had fainted. After that it was a bit of a domino effect, another three or four collapsed and then

“After someone fainted, it was a bit of a domino effect”

people started leaving the hall to get fresh air. One of the boys who fell was a bit concussed and had a big lump on his head. After that they ushered us out quickly and a couple of girls had panic attacks.” The pupil said lessons went ahead as normal during the afternoon, but more students complained of headaches and nausea. Five ambulances remained parked outside as well as at least four fire engines with their blue lights flashing. Outwood Academy has 635 students, aged from 11 to 18. *BBC News*, *dailymail.co.uk*, 11 Nov; *D.Telegraph*, 12 Nov 2015.

TALIBAN TOXINS

In the last week of August and the first week of September this year, about 600 students from different

ABOVE: Outwood Academy, Ripon, where 40 students fell ill in a probable example of mass psychogenic illness.

schools in Afghanistan were taken to hospital complaining of nausea, pain and shortness of breath. The cause was undetermined; officials believed the girls might have inhaled a toxic gas, but no evidence of this was found. As with the Yorkshire children, the incident appears to be an example of mass psychogenic illness (“mass hysteria”). None of the students died, with most being sent home after check-ups and hospital treatment. No group claimed to be behind the incidents. Because of their opposition to women’s education, Taliban jihadists were blamed for several suspected poisonings at girls’ schools in 2009-2010 [FT266:24, 268:23], but they consistently denied responsibility. *BBC News*, 8 Sept 2015. (For a general feature on mass psychogenic illness, see “Dazed and Confused” by Robert Bartholomew and Bob Rickard, FT316:36-40.)

Squirrels go nuts...

Riotous rodents run amok in booze-fuelled rampages

• An “aggressive” squirrel was arrested in July after a woman complained it was stalking her. Police in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany, received the bizarre emergency call on 16 July from a woman who claimed the rodent was chasing her through a park. Officers said it was suffering from exhaustion. It subsequently became an Internet hit after they posted a video of them feeding it. (*London*) *D.Telegraph*, 17 July; (*Sydney*) *D.Telegraph*, 18 July 2015.



• The Gang of Fort has long taken note of aggressive squirrels. In 1991, an elderly woman was bitten on the knee by one that ran up her skirt in Edinburgh’s Princes Street Gardens [FT60:19]. In October 1996, a woman and her two children were attacked by a horde of squirrels, which bombarded them with horse chestnuts in Chingford, north-east London [FT100:55]. In July 1997 a squirrel ran amok in Hampstead, north London, requiring several of its victims to seek hospital treatment [FT104:11]. Later that year, a colony of 15 squirrels conducted a reign of terror on a high-rise housing estate in Wapping, east London – scratching people, stealing from shopping bags and infiltrating bedrooms [FT111:7].

• Squirrels are chomping their way through floral tributes at Earlham Crematorium in Norwich. The munching mammals have become such a problem that bosses at Dignity, which runs the crematorium, put up signs warning mourners about the problem. They said that squirrels were particularly partial to eating fresh spray carnations and chrysanthemums because of their high sugar content, adding that a harmless repellent spray was available. George Barrett, 67, has

repeatedly filmed the animals dining on flower heads. “I’ve been going in [the crematorium] for 12 years and I have never seen the squirrels eating the funeral flowers until this year,” he said. “I’ve seen tributes put down on the Friday morning and by the Friday afternoon they are in pieces because of the squirrels.” *Eastern Daily Press*, 8 Aug 2015.

• When Sam Boulter, 62, opened up the bar at the Honeybourne Railway Club near Evesham, Worcestershire, he was confronted by a scene of chaos. “It was absolutely ransacked,” said Mr Boulter, the branch secretary of the private members’ club. “At first I thought we’d been burgled but I realised it was all still locked up and that’s when we saw the squirrel [which emerged from a box of crisps]. I’d never seen anything like it before – he had run around the shelves and across the bar. There were bottles and money scattered around, and he had obviously run across the bar’s pumps and managed to turn on the Caffrey’s [ale] tap. He must have flung himself on the handle and drunk some as he was staggering

around all over the place and moving a bit slowly. I’ve never seen a drunk squirrel before. He looked a bit worse for wear. We managed to corner him in the toilets after we chased him around for an hour. I used the waste paper bin to trap him and then I flung him out of the window. I think we lost about £300 worth of stock but it was just one of those once in a lifetime things – I hope.” *Western Daily Press*, *D.Mail*, 17 July 2015.

• In 1983 a drunken squirrel named Scruppy kept its owner barricaded in his bedroom for two hours after consuming cider. Steve Wroot was finally forced to jump from his bedroom window [FT43:44]. In 1998, squirrels at the Moors Valley Country Park in Dorset appeared to have become addicted to tobacco from discarded cigarette ends; they were seen ripping the weed from old butts [FT116:21].

• Back in 2005, several UK dailies carried news of crack-addicted squirrels terrorising Brixton, south London [FT207:10, 208:57]. The rodents were allegedly digging up stashes buried in gardens by dealers following a police crackdown (ha ha). The whole story stemmed from a single unnamed witness, reported in the *South London Press*, a small local paper, and a joke made on a Brixton-based website. However, Fox News carried the story across the pond, adding: “So-called ‘crack squirrels’ are already acknowledged as a problem in American cities such as Washington, DC, and New York.” Actually, the topic of crack-crazed squirrels attacking people in New York’s Central Park had appeared in the *International Herald Tribune* and the *Guardian* way back in 1991 [FT60:19].

SIDELINES...

JUST NOT HIS DAY

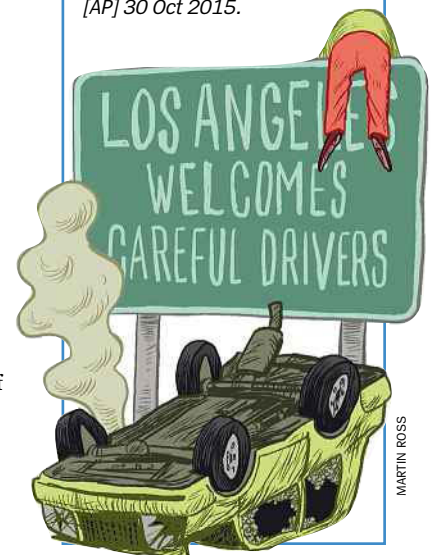
Brock Leach, 13, slipped on some lichen and fell 100ft (30m) down a cliff at Trebarwith Strand near Tintagel, Cornwall, on 19 July, bouncing off outcroppings. His brother Josh, 16, scrambled down the cliff and found him on a ledge. The tide was coming in so Josh helped him climb to a higher ledge – where he was bitten by an adder, Britain’s only venomous snake. Brock was hospitalised with a broken pelvis, severe bruising – and snake bite. *D.Telegraph*, *D.Mail*, 23 July 2015.

THUNDERBIRD?

A man called Stephen from Kentucky called *Coast To Coast AM Radio* on 9 July. “I was hog hunting a few weeks back out in California, when I saw a very large bird-like creature,” he said. “It swooped down and picked up a piglet. From the distance I was at, I couldn’t give you a definitive wingspan, but it had to be at least 15 to 20 feet [4.6-6m]. It didn’t have many feathers, it almost looked reptilian.” *Jamie Brian blogspot*, 3 Oct 2015.

FAR FLUNG

A driver whose car rolled over several times on a Los Angeles freeway was thrown so far that his body landed on a road sign at least 20ft (6m) above the ground. The unnamed victim was a 20-year-old man. The car came to rest under the sign. [AP] 30 Oct 2015.



SIDELINES...

GOOD STORY MATERIAL

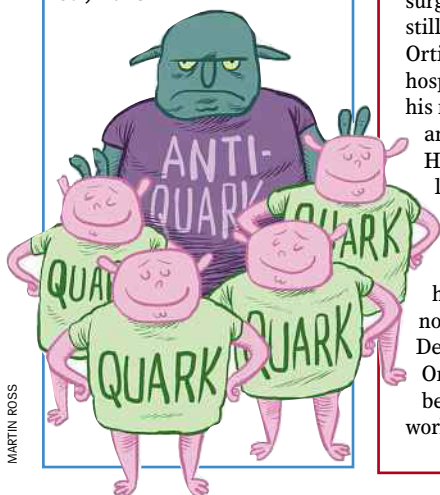
Lizzie Valverde, 35, and Katy Olson, 34, enrolled on a creative writing course at Columbia University in New York in January 2013. On the first day of class, Olson realised Valverde could be her sister – as indeed she was. They had been born in Florida to Leslie Parker, a troubled mother who gave them up for adoption. *D.Telegraph, 19 May 2015.*

BIG FEAR

Amy Carson, 33, a photographer from Liverpool, suffers from megalophobia – a terror of oversized objects. She risks fainting at the sight of ships, planes, and even clouds. If she stares at them too long, they appear to have faces. “My phobia makes me feel they could chase me,” she said. Her condition compels her to torment herself by looking at images of what she fears. Her boyfriend often catches her late at night browsing the web for pictures of cruise ships. *D.Mail, Sun, 25 July 2015.*

NEW PARTICLE

Scientists at the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) have announced the discovery of a new particle – actually a new form of matter – called the pentaquark, first predicted to exist in the 1960s. It consists of four quarks and an anti-quark. The LHC powered up again in April following a two-year shutdown for repairs and upgrades. *BBC News, 14 July 2015.*



MARTIN ROSS

MEDICAL BAG

Tapeworm in the brain, unborn twin fathers child and the mystery of the missing teeth



LEFT: Luis Ortiz thought he was suffering from a bad headache, but turned out to have a tapeworm larva living deep in his brain.

PA PHOTOS

SOMETHING ON HIS MIND

Last September, Luis Ortiz sought medical treatment for a terrible headache and nausea. He slipped into a coma and when he woke up he was told a tapeworm larva was living deep in his brain. (For the case of a British man with the same problem, see FT324:8-9.) Ortiz, 26, from Napa, California, said doctors told him he needed immediate surgery. Once extracted, it was still wiggling and moving around. Ortiz, who was released from hospital before Hallowe'en, said his recovery had been a difficult and long-drawn-out process. He had suffered some memory loss and been forced to stop attending Sacramento State University, where he was a student, and move back home with his parents. For now, he can't drive or work. Despite the ongoing ordeal, Ortiz said he's just grateful to be alive. “My memory is like a work in progress,” he said.

The tapeworm larva was still wiggling and moving around

His neurosurgeon, Dr Soren Singel, said he was lucky he arrived at the hospital when he did. The worm was forming in a cyst that was blocking the flow of water to chambers in his brain; another 30 minutes and “he would have been dead,” Singel said. “It was a close call.” Tapeworm eggs had probably entered Ortiz's intestine from something he ate and eventually the single larva made it into his brain. The condition of larval cysts in the brain is called neurocysticercosis. *[AP] BBC News, 5 Nov; Huffington Post, 6 Nov 2015.*

A Chinese toddler needed

major surgery after accidentally ramming a chopstick so far up his nose that it got stuck 7.5cm (2.8in) into his brain. Huang Zichang, two, spent four hours on the operating table. Surgeons managed to remove the stick and the boy was expected to make a full recovery. *MX News (Sydney), 24 Sept 2015.*

HUMAN CHIMÆRAS

When a 34-year-old man from Washington failed a paternity test, doctors discovered that his dead twin, whose DNA the man absorbed in the womb, was the genetic father of his child. This (we are told) is the first ever reported case of a paternity test being fooled by a human chimæra, someone with extra genes absorbed from a twin lost in early pregnancy. Around one in eight single childbirths are thought to start as multiple pregnancies and cells from the miscarried siblings are sometimes absorbed in the womb by a

surviving twin. The Washington couple took a paternity test after their son's blood type didn't match that of either parent. After having a child with the help of fertility clinic procedures, they feared that sperm donors might have been mixed up. After the initial failed fertility test, they took a genetic ancestry test, which suggested that the man was actually his son's uncle. The father's sperm was found to have 10 per cent of a genetic match to the infant. The genes in his sperm were different from that in his saliva, indicating that the father of the boy is effectively the man's own unborn twin.

There are precedents. One chimæra case was written up in the *British Medical Journal* in 1953 and another in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 2002. The latter was about Karen Keegan from Boston, who found that her blood cells had one set of genes and her ovaries held distinctly different ones. Those ovaries had produced the eggs that led to two of her three sons holding genes different from her own. The true genetic mother was a twin sister that she had unknowingly absorbed. (See **FT188:30** and **FT254:18**, where Keegan is known as "Jane").

In 2002, Lydia Fairchild was denied public assistance in Washington State when DNA evidence showed that she was not related to her children. She even risked having her children taken away from her, but thankfully her lawyers were alerted to the report on the Keegan case and were able to show that Fairchild was also a chimæra with two sets of DNA.

There are only about 30 documented cases of chimærisms worldwide. (The Chimæra in Greek mythology was a monstrous fire-breathing creature, comprising parts of different animals. It was conventionally depicted as a lion with a goat's head arising from its back and a tail ending in a snake's head.) Searches for human chimæras are incredibly complicated as the genes only feature in detectable amounts in very few organs. As more people turn to fertility clinics to help them have children,

chimærisms may become more common, as fertility treatments are more likely to lead to multiple births. *ABC News*, 15 Aug 2006; *independent.co.uk*, 25 Oct 2015.

GOING DENTAL

Clare Jones, 47, from Clayton, Staffordshire, came round from a hysterectomy operation at Royal Stoke University Hospital on 15 July to find two of her front teeth missing. She realised what had happened when she tried to replace her denture, which was held in place by a bracket supported by the two teeth. She had to remove the denture for the operation. The hospital could not explain what had happened and the mother of two (who is herself a nurse) was told an investigation could take two months. "I've completely lost my confidence because I can't smile," she said. "Nobody seems to have any recollection of the teeth being taken out. It's just unbelievable." *D.Telegraph, Sun, Metro*, 31 July 2015.

UNDER A CLOUD

We are all surrounded by our own 'germ cloud' as unique as a fingerprint. Each of us gives off

millions of bacteria into the air around us, and that cloud can be traced back to us via laboratory tests. This discovery, published in the journal *PeerJ*, may help explain the mechanisms involved in the spread of infectious diseases in buildings and also enable forensic scientists to identify or determine where a person has been. "We expected that we would be able to detect the human microbiome in the air around a person," said Dr James Meadow of the University of Oregon, "but we were surprised to find that we could identify most of the occupants [of a room] just by sampling their microbial cloud."

The individual clouds were dominated by several groups of bacteria ubiquitous on and in humans, such as *streptococcus*, commonly found in the mouth, and *propionibacterium* and *corynebacterium*, both common skin residents. Different combinations of these were the key to identifying individuals. The findings emerged from two studies and more than 14 million sequences representing thousands of different types of bacteria found in the 312 samples from air and dust in the experimental chamber. *D.Telegraph*, 23 Sept 2015.



ABOVE: Clare Jones shows off the gaps where her teeth used to be.

SIDELINES...

SLEEP DIP

Marie Lord, 39, got out of bed at 1.30am and sleep-walked half a mile to the beach in Weston-super-Mare, Somerset. After waking with the taste of salt and grit in her mouth as waves crashed around her, she managed to crawl up the beach and cry for help as she attempted to scale rocks. Lee Searle, a night porter at a nearby hotel, ran to her rescue. *D.Telegraph, D.Mail*, 4 July 2015.

ARMADILLO HAZARD

When a Georgia man fired at an armadillo in April, the bullet ricocheted off the shell, hit a fence, went through the back door of his mother-in-law's mobile home, through a recliner she was sitting in, and into her back. The armadillo was killed. An unnamed man from Marietta, East Texas, went outside his home at around 3am on 30 July and took three shots at an armadillo. One bullet ricocheted off the shell and hit him in the jaw, which was then wired shut at a nearby hospital. "We didn't find the armadillo," said the local sheriff. *[R]* 31 July 2015. *BBC News*, 1 Aug 2015.

SERIAL POOPER

Someone has been defecating in the holes of Norway's Stavanger Golf Club since 2005. He leaves behind toilet paper and bicycle tracks in the dew, and has disabled spotlights installed to catch him. "He has a couple of favourite holes," said greenskeeper Kenneth Tennfjord, "and we know it is a man because the poos are too massive to be from a woman." The stools are only deposited on weekdays. The club has been denied a permit to install surveillance videos. *The Local (Norway)*, 23 July; *Sun*, 28 July 2015.

SECRET SERVICE

Last summer, someone in Iowa was stealing dirty dogs and returning them to their owners washed and clipped. *Sun*, 10 July 2015.



SIDELINES...

MOUNTAIN ENCOUNTER

Brothers James and Alex Robbie spent a week on 4,409ft (1,344m) Ben Nevis in Scotland to raise money for charity. They were camping near the ruined observatory at the summit on 7 August when a stranger appeared and turned over a stone that seemed to be a headstone with the words "Wilson 1810". He then disappeared into the fog. "It was by far the most spooky element of our stay," said the brothers. *Dundee Courier and Advertiser*, 22 Aug 2015.

IT'S IN THE NAMES

In 2008, Fred Cragg, a 60-year-old fertiliser salesman, placed 50p on an accumulator bet on eight different horse races, collecting £1 million in winnings when they all came in. Two of the horses he picked were named 'A Dream Come True' and 'Isn't That Lucky'. *D.Telegraph*, 29 Aug 2015.

PARROT POTPOURRI

Alec Guinness had a parrot called Percy, who used to recite: "O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I" from *Hamlet*; Stalin killed his pet parrot when it started copying his pipe-sucking noises; and in order to suck up to Napoleon III, Baron Rothschild disguised his parrots as pheasants so that when each bird was shot it would fall to the ground crying "Vive L'Empereur!" *Craig Brown* in *D.Mail*, 8 Sept 2015.

INTO THIN AIR

At about 12.40pm on 16 June 1990, Trevaline Evans, 52, left her shop, Attic Antiques, in Llangollen, north-east Wales, leaving a note saying she would be back in two minutes. The last confirmed sighting was near her home at 2.30pm.

Two years later, the policeman heading the investigation said: "How a happily married woman could vanish without trace on a sunny Saturday in a busy town centre is totally baffling." The case remains open. *D.Telegraph*, 18 June 2015.

The church sign of Guilderland, New York



Like so many small New England towns, Guilderland, New York, has endless rows of affluent wooden houses, each painted a uniform white, with a closely trimmed front lawn, a motorhome and a boat. Unremarkable in almost every way, Guilderland has all but become a suburb of the city of Albany; its only unique feature is the wonderfully eccentric sign outside the Helderberg Reformed Church. Church signs are so ubiquitous in the USA that they have become almost

invisible. Mostly used to advertise rather dull-sounding events, the signs rarely carry religious or philosophical messages; humour is even rarer. The people of Guilderland are fortunate indeed.

Whilst living for a few snowbound months in a rural part of upstate New York, my weekly shopping trip to Albany involved driving past the Helderberg Reformed Church's sign. It brightened my winter. Almost every Tuesday the delightfully wonky sign would display a

new message. Some were disappointingly prosaic, but when they were good they were very, very good and the sign became the main focus of the trip. The excitement would mount as, camera at the ready, we drove through Guilderland towards the sign. Would it have changed? What would it say this week? I only regret that my camera was not to hand when the sign read: "PUT DOWN THE FACEBOOK AND PICK UP THE FAITH BOOK".

STEVE MARSHALL

PHOTOS: STEVE MARSHALL



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PLUTO, PLANET OF MYSTERY

It's always been the joker of the Solar System, and now, as **DAVID HAMBLING** explains, NASA's New Horizons probe is revealing new forms of weirdness on the ninth planet.

Pluto is the furthest planet in the Solar System – or minor, or dwarf planet for the pedantic – and the most mysterious. While Mars is close enough to map with telescopes and invade with a stream of robot explorers, Pluto is remote and enigmatic. Gratifyingly, after the recent fly-past by the New Horizons probe, the little planet is baffling the scientists with new unexplained phenomena.

Pluto has always been something of a joker. It was not discovered by chance but by science, after astronomer Percival Lowell calculated that the orbits of Neptune and Uranus were disturbed by a ninth, unknown planet. When discovered, Pluto was a surprise. Astronomers expected a gas giant like the other four outer planets, but they found a tiny, rocky world like the inner worlds, barely a third the size of our Moon. It did not appear to have enough mass to affect the other planets. This anomaly was only resolved decades later when Pluto was found to have a collection of moons making up the missing mass. The main moon, Charon, is so large that Pluto and Charon orbit their combined centre of mass, so it is technically a double planet.

Pluto's orbit also turned out to be eccentric. It follows an elliptical path, between 30 and 50 times as far from the Sun as the Earth, taking it inside the orbit of Neptune – so you might say Pluto alternates between being eighth and ninth planet. Astronomers believe that Pluto was formed by the collision of two smaller objects, which accounts for the unusual orbit, though this is speculation.

Until a few years ago the best telescopes could only produce blocky, indistinct images of Pluto. The whole planet was about 10 pixels across with the best resolution available. In 2010 Hubble revealed, still rather blurrily, a world of huge light and dark patches that proved to be changing over time. There was one very bright spot close to the equator. A century



ABOVE AND RIGHT: Pluto and Charon, as pictured using New Horizons data.

on from similar observations of patterns on Mars (which turned out to be seasonal dust storms) nobody was suggesting lichen forests or Plutonian agriculture. The colour changes were tentatively assumed to be caused by Pluto's atmosphere condensing into brown stains and then evaporating again, but this was not based on anything very substantial. "It's baffling," dwarf planet expert Mike Brown of Caltech told NASA news. "For now, we can only guess."

Brown's great hope was the New Horizons probe, which would map Pluto in far greater detail. The fly-by went as planned earlier this year, and New Horizons is gradually sending back data. At this distance, the communication speed is about a thousand bits per second – the speed of a 1980s modem, about 500 times too slow to be legally described as broadband – so the images emerge painfully slowly.

You might expect that any planet so far from the Sun would be completely inert, as astronomically boring as our own unchanging Moon. But Pluto turns out to have been designed by an exuberant cosmic Hollywood director with the latest special



effects. The ever-changing light and dark patches are there, as the entire atmosphere solidifies at intervals, but there is more. For a start there are what appear to be volcanoes made of ice. "Whatever they are, they are definitely weird," New Horizons team member Oliver White told a meeting of the American Astronomical Society in November. "Volcanoes are probably the least weird explanation at the moment."

Like volcanoes on Earth, Picard Mons and Wright Mons are cone-shaped mountains with a pit at the top. They resemble the shield volcanoes of Hawaii built up by layers of magma being ejected over time; the difference is that the 'magma' is a slurry of water ice and nitrogen which freezes after it emerges. One big question is how the slurry is being heated in the first place, as scientists had no idea that Pluto had a hot, tectonically active core.

There are plenty of other mountains on Pluto, floating ones. On the western edge of the Sputnik Plain there are jumbled chains of mountainous terrain composed of blocks. Some of these are 25 miles (40km) across and three miles (4.8km) high. They appear to be comparatively recent, perhaps 10 million years old, again suggesting that the planet is geologically active. Researchers suspect the mountains are not anchored in bedrock but are actually made of ice and are floating on a hidden sea of denser nitrogen slush, making them less mountains than icebergs.

High above, Pluto's four main moons are moving in mysterious ways.

"This system is not just chaos, but pandemonium," Mark Showalter of the New Horizons team told the American Astronomical Society. "We honestly have not seen anything like this before, and we still don't know what to make of it."

Elsewhere in the Solar System, moons tend to be in stable orbits around their parent planets, locked so that – like Earth's Moon – they always show the same face. Pluto's moons are spinning, some of them rapidly. If Hydra spun any faster, objects would be flung off the surface, while Nix is spinning backwards.

Of course, it is in NASA's interests to play up the wondrous nature of the discoveries. It is refreshing though to see scientists intrigued and excited by strange new phenomena rather than seeking to dismiss them as artefacts or misinterpretations. This is how real science starts, with the attempt to understand the unexplained. And New Horizons has revealed much about Pluto that is unexplained at present.

"Pluto and its system of moons have really outsmarted us," says New Horizons team leader Alan Stern. "It's sort of a graduate course in planetary science."

It looks like being an interesting course – and it also ought to be a highly instructive one. Once the New Horizons data have all finally been beamed back, decoded and analysed, and theories formulated to explain all the new observations, scientists still won't have all the answers about Pluto. In fact, they literally haven't begun to scratch the surface.

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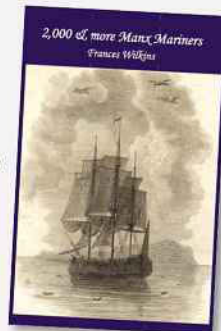
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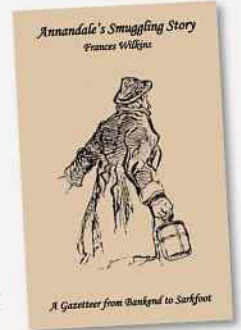


Annandale's Smuggling Story

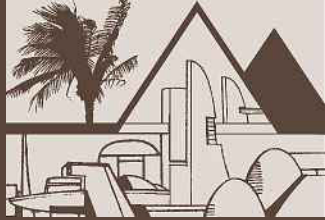
If one looked at the coast of south-west Scotland, the obvious locations for good smuggling stories should be where there are cliffs and coves. These are absent along the Annandale shore. Yet the smuggling history of this area is full of rich detail and dramatic events. Basically a Gazetteer of smuggling locations between Bankend and Sarkfoot, the book includes information about Annandale's smuggling history. There are eight appendices.

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ARCHAEOLOGY

PAUL SIEVEKING presents our round-up of archaeological discoveries, including new NASA photos of Kazakhstan's giant geometric geoglyphs and proof that Carthage was not the most child-friendly of places.

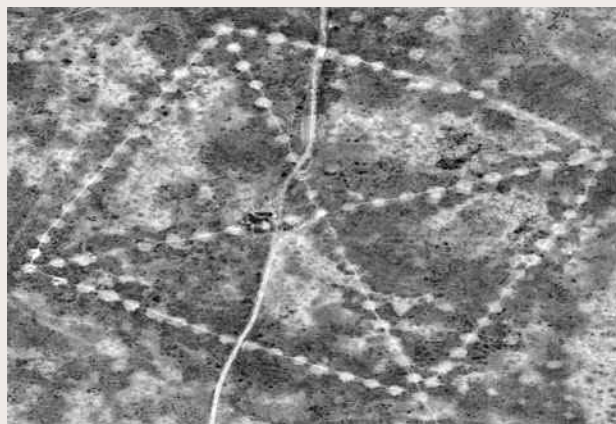
STEPPE GEOGLYPHS

Gigantic geometric figures have been discovered in the remote and treeless Turgai region of northern Kazakhstan – geometric figures of squares, crosses, lines and rings the size of several football fields, recognisable only from the air. The largest, near a Neolithic settlement, is a giant square of 101 raised mounds, more than 900ft (275m) across, its opposite corners connected by a diagonal cross, covering more terrain than the Great Pyramid of Cheops. It is now called the Ushtogaysky (or Ushtogay) Square. Another is a triradial (three-limbed) swastika, about 300ft (90m) in diameter, its arms ending in zigzags bent counter-clockwise. (This isn't the oldest swastika symbol found; the earliest known object with swastika-motifs is a bird made from mammoth tusk from the Palaeolithic settlement of Mezine, Ukraine, dated to 10,000 BC.) The Turgai earthworks now number at least 260 – mounds, trenches and ramparts – arrayed in five basic shapes. These include some odd mounds with two drooping lines dubbed “whiskers” or “moustaches”.

Spotted on Google Earth in 2007 by Dmitriy Dey, a Kazakh economist and archaeology enthusiast, the so-called Steppe

Geoglyphs were largely unknown to the outside world until mid-October, when NASA released clear satellite photographs of some of the figures from about 430 miles (690km) up, showing details as small as 30x30cm (one square foot). “I don't think they were meant to be seen from the air,” Mr Dey, 44, said in an interview from his hometown, Kostanay, dismissing speculations involving aliens. He thinks that the figures built along straight lines on elevations were “horizontal observatories to track the movements of the rising Sun.” This, of course, is one theory about the purpose of Stonehenge and other megalithic structures.

In the Cretaceous period 100 million years ago, Turgai was bisected by a strait from what is now the Mediterranean to the Arctic Ocean. The rich lands of the steppe were good Stone Age hunting grounds, and Mr Dey's research suggests that the Mahandzhar culture, which flourished there from 7,000 BC to 5,000 BC, could be linked to the older figures. However, orthodox opinion has resisted the notion that a nomadic population could have stayed put for the time required to lay ramparts and dig out lake bed sediments to construct the huge mounds – which were originally



ABOVE AND BELOW: The Ushtogaysky Square and the triradial swastika.

ONE COVERS MORE TERRAIN THAN THE GREAT PYRAMID

6ft to 10ft (1.8-3m) high and now 3ft (90cm) high and nearly 40ft (12m) across. However, the figures and similar ones in Peru and Chile are changing views about early nomads.

“The idea that foragers could amass the numbers of people necessary to undertake large-scale projects — like creating the Kazakhstan geoglyphs — has caused archaeologists to deeply rethink the nature and timing of sophisticated large-scale human organisation as one that predates settled and civilised societies,” said Persis B Clarkson, an archaeologist at the University of Winnipeg. With no genetic material to analyse (neither of the two mounds that have been dug into is a burial site), Giedre Motuzaitė Matuzevičiūtė, an archaeologist from Cambridge University and a lecturer at Vilnius University in Lithuania, used optically stimulated luminescence, a method of measuring doses from ionizing radiation, to date one of the mounds to around 800 BC. Mr Dey cited a separate scholarly report linking artefacts from the Mahandzhar culture to other figures, suggesting a date as early as 6,000 BC for the oldest.

Time is an enemy, said Mr Dey. One figure, called the Koga Cross, was substantially destroyed by road builders this year. And that, he said, “was after we notified officials”. The main glyphs are large enough to be easily visible on Google Earth. The Ushtogaysky Square is at 50.832933°N 65.326276°E, and the swastika at 50.102778°N 65.360833°E, only about half a mile from the town of Urpek. *nytimes.com*, 30 Oct; *Times*, 2 Nov 2015

CHILD-KILLING CARTHAGINIANS

A study has concluded that the Carthaginians ritually sacrificed their own children, just as ancient Greek and Roman propagandists claimed. The infants were killed and buried with animals and ritual inscriptions in special cemeteries to give thanks for favours from the gods. “When you put together all the evidence – archaeological, epigraphic and literary – it is overwhelming,” said Josephine Quinn, a lecturer in ancient history at Oxford and one of those behind the study. The argument on the subject has raged since the early 20th century, when cemeteries known as topsets were excavated on the outskirts of Carthage in modern Tunisia. Some suggested the finds proved accounts of child sacrifice while others insisted they showed respect for children who died before or soon after death. *Guardian*, 22 Jan 2014.



CLASSICAL CORNER



FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

194: DAVE SPART-ACUS?



“Everything that is of slavery, ancient and modern, is a phenomenon of usefulness” – Fort, Books, p981

Paul Screeon in his commendably provocative article [FT332:58-9] asks these two questions: Whence came Kubrick’s film cry “I am Spartacus”? And whence came the finale’s mass crucifixions? Both can easily be answered.

The film documentary (2007) *Trumbo* says “I am Spartacus” symbolised the solidarity of writers and other victims of McCarthy’s persecutions; cf. Jon Solomon, *The Ancient World in Cinema* (2nd ed., 2001, p53), also David Hughes, *The Complete Kubrick* (2000, p802). The crucifixions are recorded by Appian, *Civil Wars*, bk1 ch120. These were not entirely Roman sadism at work, being partly in revenge for Spartacus’s sacrifice of 300 prisoners at the funeral of his fellow-leader Crixus; cf. Ramsay Macmillan, ‘Judicial Savagery at Rome,’ *Chiron* 16 (1986), 147-66.

Screeon mentions Howard Fast’s novel (1951), on which Trumbo and Kubrick drew; also Koestler’s very different *The Gladiators* (1939). There were many other literary treatments, for easy instance Bertolt Brecht’s play (1920), said by him to have been written “simply for the money”, and Scotsman Lewis Grassick Gibbon’s 1933 novel, published under his real name of James Leslie Mitchell.

Also, the name Spartacus has been appropriated both for left-wing political groups and in European communist countries for football teams.

“I am Spartacus” has frequently been parodied, most notably in this exchange of dialogue in *Lolita*:

“Are you Quilty?” (James Mason to Peter Sellers)

“No, I’m Spartacus. Have you come to free the slaves or something?”

And in *Life of Brian*:

“I’m Brian, and so is my wife.”

Howard Fast was a member of the American Communist Party, gaoled during the witch-hunts, subsequently leaving the Party in disagreement over policies and because of the antipathy shown towards him by Party boss Earl Browder. The full story is spelled out in his two memoirs, *The Naked God: The Writer and the Communist Party* (1957) and *Being Red* (1990).

When *Spartacus* was released, Hedda Hopper, one of Hollywood’s two most notorious muckraking gossip columnists – Louella Parsons was the other – advised her readers thus: “This is a book written by a commie and a screen script written by a commie – Don’t Go See It.”

I long ago narrated the actual events in ‘Two Aspects of the Spartacus Slave Revolt,’ *Classical Journal* 62 (1967), 289-94, reprinted in my *Studies on Greek and Roman History and Literature* (1985), also accessible on-line in CJ’s electronic archive. For permission to cannibalise it here, I am very grateful to myself.

Important to remember that, apart from an epitome (95) of Livy and brief mention in the

historian Velleius Paterculus (bk2 ch30), our sources are Plutarch’s biography of Crassus (Laurence Olivier in the picture), Appian’s *Civil Wars*, and Epitomes by Florus (b2 ch8) and Eutropius (bk6 ch2), all written centuries later.

The revolt began in 73 BC when Spartacus, along with Crixus and Oenomaus, broke out with 78 men of a gladiatorial training camp at Capua. It looks like a sudden irruption rather than premeditated, perhaps provoked by the punishment of a gladiator or some such grievance.

The sources agree that Spartacus was from Thrace (roughly = Bulgaria), Crixus being German, Oenomaus, too shadowy to pin down, killed in an early battle. It has, though, been thought that ‘Thracian’ refers to the particular style of gladiator he was.

Plutarch credits him with great physical strength and being “more intelligent and humane than normal with men of his nationality”. Appian says he was sold for arena fodder after desertion from auxiliary service in the legions and recapture; Florus, contemptuous as always, dismisses him as “just a brigand”.

One fortean detail. Plutarch says he was accompanied by a wife or mistress much given to prophetic frenzy, foretelling a glorious future for him as a result of a snake coiled round his head as he slept. Plutarch does not name the woman: in the film, she is Varinia, played by Jean Simmons, a sad fate.

Marxist Howard Fast naturally seized on Appian’s claim that Spartacus tried to ensure that all loot was divided equally, and that he prohibited the use of gold and silver by his followers.

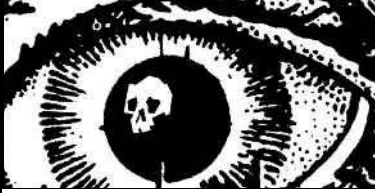
Anti-communist (*Darkness at Noon*, 1940) Arthur Koestler preferred to concentrate on the increasing fractiousness between Spartacus and Crixus over what to do – Crixus wanted to settle down to an outlaw’s life in Italy, Spartacus and his men probably just wanted to go home, despite conflicting claims about a possible march on Rome (something Hannibal had refused to do) and attempting to create a slave-free world – Australian Marxist-novelist Jack Lindsay took Fast’s tack in his novel *Rome for Sale* (1934) about Roman revolutionary Catiline, crushed by Cicero as he afterwards never ceased to remind his audiences.

As Peter Green observes (*Past & Present* 20, 1961, 10-29) on the First Sicilian Slave War – Spartacus’s uprising was the last of many, not the first; rebels did not like being slaves themselves but had no objection to the institution.

My original article provides the full military story. Spartacus gave crack generals Crassus and Pompey a run for their money before trying to escape Italy with pirate help (Herbert Lom in the film). Foolishly, he paid in advance; they never turned up.

How Spartacus ended up remains a mystery; he did not die on the cross, as in the picture. Appian, Florus, and Plutarch all say he fought fiercely in the last battle, even after a serious thigh wound; Appian specifies that his corpse was never found – RIP

As Jean Simmons passes under Kirk Douglas’s cross, he says “Consummatum est” (It Is Finished) – so is this column.



GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE wonders whether spooky snaps show deceased bishops and plague victims...

NORWICH GHOST PHOTOS

Ghosts in the historic city of Norwich have usually kept a low profile across the years. It's that sort of ancient place. Whilst it is true that Norwich – like many other towns and cities – can claim its own ghost walk and a small volume devoted exclusively to local tales, its phantoms have not received a fraction of the attention lavished upon those of London, York, Cambridge, Lincoln or Edinburgh – or even smaller places like Farnborough, Prestbury or Rye. As the writer Bernard Dorman put it four decades ago, “The charm of Norwich lies in the city enclosed by the mediæval walls, and its treasures have to be looked for, for it is part of the temperament not to advertise.” (*In Norfolk*, 1972). Although the Norwich-based publishing company Jarrolds issued many books about UK ghosts over the years, few of its titles made any mention of hauntings within a skull's throw of their offices. Though various monarchs visited the city over the centuries, no regal phantoms are recalled within its boundaries. Norwich Castle, an impressive stone building dating from around 1160, seems relatively ghost-free as British castles go. It served as a prison and execution site from 1290 until 1887, two years after the incompetent hangman Berry spectacularly decapitated murderer Robert Goodale during a botched execution in November 1885. Nonetheless, reliable reports of apparitions remain hard to come by; claims of Goodale's spectral head floating around the keep being local nonsense, a scarcely needed puff for what is now a fine provincial museum.

Altogether, shades of deceased Norwich folk haunting other ancient buildings seem to have “kept the noiseless tenor of their way” (to quote Gray's *Elegy*), avoiding exposing themselves to outside attention. Interestingly, this urban spectral reticence is

in marked contrast to the particularly noisy phantoms of rural Norfolk, like the screaming lady of the Shrieking Pits at Aylmerton, near Cromer, that led Eric Maple to declare in *Supernatural England* (1977): “Norfolk ghosts are an admittedly noisy species” – but oddly, not in Norwich.

Yet this restrained and low-key approach concerning manifestations in the city recently suffered a rude assault with a battery of national attention on the publication of two separate ghost photographs taken in historic parts in July 2015. The first was claimed to show the “eerie figure of a man”, obtained on the night of 18 July, inside an old community hall by a member of a paranormal research group. The second image was identified on a picture snapped by a visitor to Norwich Cathedral, with the photographer suggesting it was the apparition of a bishop.

The image from the community hall – its precise location is not being revealed – was taken by a Ms Jodie Carman during the course of an overnight investigation by the group Norfolk Ghost Hunters. Ms Carman stated: “We knew there was something there with us that night; we could hear it moving around the hall around us.” After a series of bumps and noises in the darkness, Ms Carman took her photograph, although there was nothing unusual visible at the time. The resulting image shows what has been readily and understandably interpreted as the head and shoulders of a man, appearing above seats a few rows in front of where Ms Carman was positioned. Not surprisingly, it made an immediate impact on the rest of the group.

“When everyone saw it they were at first stunned into silence, as everyone had seen me take the picture and knew there was no one in front of me,” she said. “Once people calmed down they were just amazed and

everyone started treating the hunt a lot more seriously as they realised we had caught some very clear evidence. There are lots of pictures that appear of ghosts, many of debatable quality, but I think a photo like this is exceptionally rare, to get a clear shot, with nobody near it, completely untampered with.”

In contrast to many claimed ghost photographs, this one is interesting for being taken in circumstances when the photographer actually believed that something paranormal was occurring at the time, rather than it being an image only identified at a later time in what was expected to be a routine photograph (often at a location not known for any haunting).

A fellow member of Norfolk Ghost Hunters, Chris Hudson, a poultry farmer by day, endorsed the picture, averring that the building is “situated on a mass grave where they dumped bodies of plague victims and bones have been known to surface when it rains”. Though the exact location remains confidential, from detail in the various reports it is described as “a former place of worship”, narrowing it down to one of 32 mediæval churches and two non-conformist chapels in central Norwich, a number of which have been converted to secular use since the Reformation. The existence of a plague pit is certainly a possibility, if it dates from the Black Death of 1348-49 when the city suffered as much as many other places. Much rebuilding of Norwich churches took place afterwards during the 15th century, so there is a noticeable lack of Early English and Decorated churches in the city.

The reason for the Norfolk Ghost Hunters being ‘sworn to secrecy’ is because the location is now used for children's events and “the owner fears if word gets out about a ‘ghost’ then it will scare away young families”, though the thought of human remains emerging during wet weather – if correct – would certainly be more off-putting than most phantoms. (*Sunday Express*, *D.Mail*, 4 Aug 2015, and many others.)

Could a plague pit generate apparitions? Usually churchyards and burial grounds in Britain are largely spectre-free zones (in contrast to the United States) with a few exceptions such as Highgate Cemetery, so there is no reason to presume any other mass grave site would necessarily be haunted. However, a tantalising case reportedly occurred in London in the late 1970s where residents of a house awoke during the night and saw figures in antique costumes carrying wrapped bundles passing through their bedroom. Terrified, they fled the house and dialed 999. The police duly arrived and, thinking the account of figures carrying bundles involved burglars on the premises, immediately attempted to apprehend the perpetrators. A young police constable entered the property and emerged whey-



ABOVE: The photograph taken by Jodie Carman during an overnight investigation in a Norwich community hall.

faced after seeing the apparitions for himself. A police dog was then deployed, but the dog refused all commands and coaxing and eventually turned and bit its handler. On entering the property in force, the police found no evidence of any intruders. The terrified family eventually re-entered their home and all was quiet. Baffled, the police withdrew, advising they contacted the Church for help.

Still troubled, the family duly brought their experience to the attention of the Church of England Deliverance Study Group (the term deliverance ministry is often used in preference to 'exorcism' these days). On enquiry, members of the group learned that three weeks before their experience the family in question had suffered a cot death. The house was also identified as standing on a plague burial site. It was speculated that the grief and trauma of the family had served as a catalyst, reviving place memories derived from centuries-old trauma on the same site, which then manifested as apparitions. The bundles carried by the apparitional figures were dead infants wrapped in cloth being carried to the communal grave. The house was blessed and the family received bereavement counselling. Frustratingly, the records of this incident have been lost. (Sources: *Deliverance: Psychic Disturbance and Occult Involvement*, 1996, edited by Michael Perry, 2nd edition; lecture to the Ghost Club 14 July 1996 by Revd Dominic Walker).

There are scattered stories of plague victims returning as ghosts, most famously at the underground structures at Mary King's Close in Edinburgh where fears of 17th century plague escaping persisted for many years (See *Haunted Edinburgh*, 2007, by Alan Murdie). I have also heard contemporary folklore of cadaverous plague victims haunting buildings at Eyam in Derbyshire (famous for putting itself in a sacrificial quarantine in 1665) and at Mortlake in London, supposedly giving rise to the name of the original area 'mort' meaning 'dead' in Latin. But on the whole it seems plague victims do not return; modern hospitals tend to generate far more reports than mass burial sites of any kind.

Less than two weeks after Ms Carman's photo was reported, a second ghost image obtained in Norwich made headlines. Also taken in July, it was picked up on a mobile phone camera carried by a visitor from Manchester. Kerry Launders was on her first visit to the cathedral with her partner Simon Tobb and her young children, and set about taking a large number of photographs inside the mediæval building. On returning home, Kerry reviewed her pictures and was amazed to see a "shadowy figure in one of the images, staring down from an upper floor" beneath an archway. Kerry believes the form is the ghost of a mitred bishop in trailing robes, stating "It looks like a bishop – and there are a lot of those buried there – with the long clothing and the tall hat" (though the headgear looks more like a pointed capirote of a mediæval



ABOVE: Kerry Launders captured this striking image of what looks like a phantom bishop in Norwich Cathedral.

penitent from Spain and other Mediterranean countries – not to be confused with the hoods worn by the Klu Klux Klan) She told the *Mirror*: "I wasn't scared when I saw it though, because I believe in this sort of stuff."

Mediæval bishops are buried inside, including Herbert de Losinga (d. 1119), responsible for beginning the building of the Cathedral dedicated to the Holy and Undivided Trinity in 1096, within an area of the city known appropriately as 'Tombland'. The *Mirror* claimed that "builders working on surrounding building sites have reported objects moving on their own." (This appears to be a reference to incidents in a solicitor's office near the cathedral in 1997) and that "visitors to the cathedral have also reported seeing ghostly figures", but further details were not given. (*D.Mirror*, 13 Aug; *Huffington Post*, 14 Aug 2015.)

Neither photograph should be considered as proof of an afterlife, but merely as interesting examples of instances where cameras might have recorded some image unseen by the camera operator at the time. Regrettably, none of the newspapers or media reproducing these pictures has been prepared to invest in more detailed analysis of the images before racing to publish. With the image obtained by Kerry Launders, one wonders if the same cause was at work as proposed to explain a strange image at Hampton Court in February 2015 [see FT326:16-18], a panoramic shot in low light where the camera takes a sequence of photos and then stitches them together into a single image. I was also reminded of the famous photograph taken at the Queen's House in 1966 by a Canadian clergyman, the Revd. Hardy. He maintained there was no one visible on a spiral stair at the time he took his photograph, but the resulting picture seemed to show two hooded and monk-like figures ascending it. However, the striking picture was explained by the official photographer to

the Queen's House, who found a very similar image was obtainable by a person walking up the stairs with a camera set on a short time-exposure. (See *Gazetteer of British Ghosts*, 1971, by Peter Underwood; *In Search of Ghosts*, 1995, by Ian Wilson).

Aside from mediæval Catholic ghost stories, there are a few cases of phantom bishops recorded, almost always with an identity given to them. Bishop Edward Bonner (d.1569) is said to walk the grounds of Fulham Palace in London according to the *Fulham Chronicle* of 16 February 1968. Archbishop Simon of Sudbury (d.1381) haunts St Gregory's Church in Sudbury, which holds his skull, as well as at Canterbury Cathedral, which houses the rest of him (see *Haunted Britain* by Anthony Hippesley Coxe). Bishop Lacy (d.1455) returns to the Bishop Lacy pub at Chudleigh in Devon and Bishop Morley (d.1684) haunts the Fox Tower at Farnham Castle (see *The Haunted Inns of England*, 1972, by Jack Hallam; *The Ghost Hunter's Guide*, 1984, by Peter Underwood).

Personally, I think it far more likely that in Norwich the deceased bishops, clerics and plague victims all sleep peacefully, especially so if there are people out there trying to snap pictures of them. As the great Norwich scholar, antiquarian and divine Sir Thomas Browne (1605-1682) declared in his classic treatise on mortality and funeral customs, *Hydriotaphia, Urn Burial, or, a Discourse of the Sepulchral Urns lately found in Norfolk* (1658): "To be gnawed out of our graves, to have our skulls made drinking-bowls, and our bones turned into pipes to delight and sport our enemies, are tragic abominations". If Sir Thomas's marvellous prose reflects local philosophy and antique sensitivities about one's treatment after death, spirits of the dead in Norwich would doubtless view being captured on camera and publicised in our popular newspapers as a post-mortem fate to be similarly avoided at all costs.

THE CIRCLE GAME

Father-and-son team come clean about their circlemaking, plus fisticuffs in the fields and a warning from the aliens

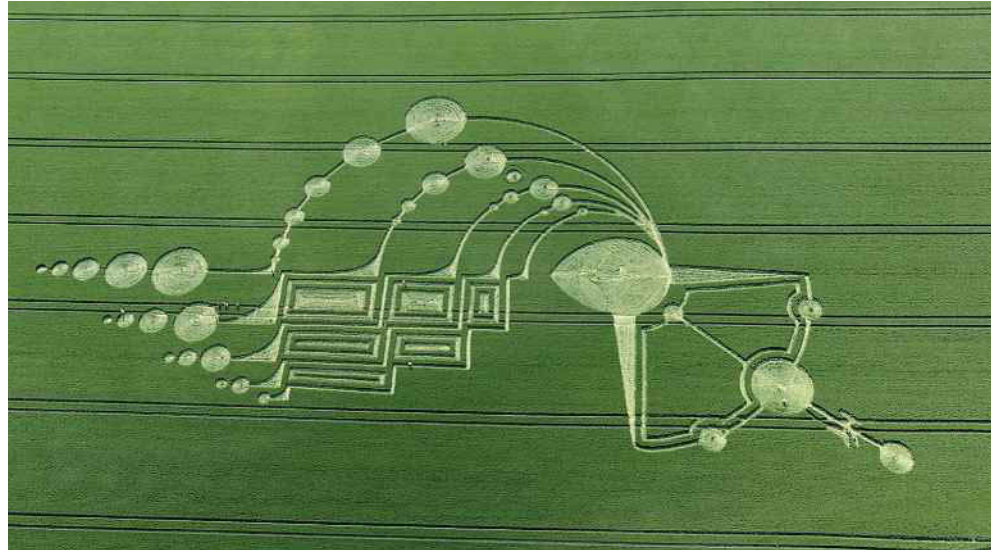
CROP ARTISTS

Father and son Terry (46) and Jack (20) from Salisbury are the Doug Bower and Dave Chorley [FT69:38] de nos jours: they claim to have spent the last 15 years making crop glyphs overnight. They first draw their designs before briefing a team of enthusiasts and heading out into the fields. They use surveyors' tape measures, markers and boards, spending up to five hours on each design. The two men (who declined to give their surname) have made more than 20 crop circles across Wiltshire, with designs ranging from 250ft (75m) to 1,600ft (500m) in size. "I have never copied or used computers to construct my ideas as it would not be at all fulfilling or meaningful," said Terry. "I definitely feel as though there is some kind of channelling which is important." Jack added: "I do the physical work mostly. Some nights there is a lot of energy that doesn't feel normal. Usually at the end of a circle there is a definite presence that seems to entangle inside of you. It's very electric." They're evidently both mystics.

Terry had long been interested in crop glyphs, but only started making them himself after suffering a brain haemorrhage in 2000. He explained: "In the first few months [after the haemorrhage] a friend at the time turned up at my door and insisted on taking me out to create our first crop circle. That was the beginning of my journey as a circle maker." Jack was only five when Terry began designing formations but did not actively participate until he was 11. He said the process was exciting but exhausting. "I usually feel done by the time I've walked into the field, but once you get a couple of hours in you start to feel the adrenaline pumping," he said. *D.Mail online, 4 Sept 2015.*

USELESS WARNING

A huge crop glyph that appeared in a wheat field in Malabrigo, Santa Fe, Argentina, on 7



ABOVE: One of the formations created by father-and-son team Terry and Jack: this one is from Alton Barnes, Wiltshire, 2015. BELOW: A diagram showing that the crop glyph found in Argentina is actually a warning about a meteor impact.

November is actually a diagram warning about a meteor impact, according to Scott C Waring of ufosightingsdaily.com. This "writer, teacher, UFOlogist", unfettered by evidence (or spelling), comments: "Crop circle [sic] have been around for thousands of years, recorded in ancient literature, paintings and walls. Its [sic] been long believed that the circles are messages sent from the heavens to humans. Today we believe they are messages from the aliens. Not all crop formations are real, only about 10-15% are real. This one looks real and seems to contain a message. To me, it looks like a warning about a meteor impact coming. Its [sic] showing an orbit around Earth, and then it shows the location where it will hit in the north western hemisphere... but no date." *Metro online, 18 Nov 2015.*

DRONE RAGE

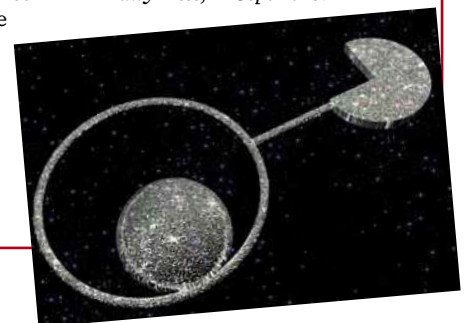
Two of the most prominent figures in Wiltshire's "crop circle community" came to blows on 4 August in the first known case of drone rage. The fracas began when Gary King, 49, took exception to Matthew Williams's use of a drone to photograph

him sitting in a crop glyph at Monument Hill near Devizes in Wiltshire. Williams, 44, claimed he was just recording the crop patterns. King stood up and hurled a wellington boot at the drone – an action caught on the drone's camera. The wellie missed its target and Williams flew his expensive equipment away from the scene.

The two men later had a violent confrontation in a nearby car park. Williams filmed the altercation on his phone and can be heard telling King: "You throw boots at people's quadcopters. You are a tantrummy little b——." King, a martial arts expert from London now living in Bradford-on-Avon, then lost his temper and repeatedly kicked and punched Williams, whom he accused of endangering him and another croppie by flying the drone only five feet (1.5m) above their heads, a claim strongly denied by Williams. "I felt we were being intimidated," said King. "I kicked him in the nuts and chinned him and chinned him again. I knew exactly what I was doing and was prepared to take the consequences." The

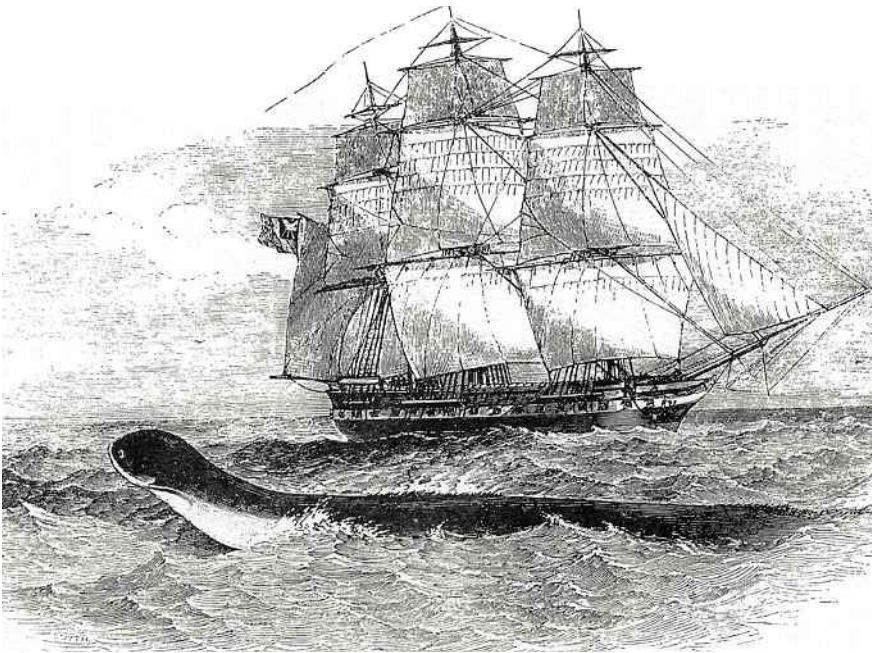
police were called and arrested King for common assault. He received a formal caution. The pair then continued their argument in a series of tit-for-tat video statements on YouTube.

In November 2000, Williams, who lives in Devizes, became the first man in Britain to be convicted of making crop glyphs. He was fined £100 after admitting damaging a farmer's crops near Marlborough to make a seven-pointed star. He later gave up flattening crops because of his hay fever, but still posts YouTube videos on the subject. King shot to prominence after witnessing and filming what appeared to be the instant formation of a crop glyph in the celebrated East Field in Alton Barnes in July 2007. Croppies held a press conference and presented his evidence to the media. *BBC News, 8 Oct 2002; D.Telegraph, 10 Sept; Western Daily Press, 11 Sept 2015.*



A^Z ALIEN ZOO

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



DAEDALUS SEA SERPENT DENOUEMENT?

One of the most famous sea serpents on record is the mystifying marine beast observed swimming alongside the British frigate *HMS Daedalus* for a while on 6 August 1848 by several members of this vessel's crew, including Captain P McQuhae (who later provided a written account), while they were journeying between the Cape of Good Hope and the island of St Helena. The huge sea serpent was seen with its head reputedly out of the water and also with a visible back fin. The head was described as being "long, pointed, and flattened at the top, perhaps ten feet [3m] in length, the upper jaw projecting considerably". McQuhae was convinced that the creature was an enormous snake. However, in his sea serpent classification system published during the 1960s, veteran cryptozoologist Dr Bernard Heuvelmans categorised it as a giant seal.

Now, after studying the case in detail, evolutionary biologist Dr Gary J Galbreath has proposed a new identification: namely, a sei whale *Balaenoptera borealis* (a baleen species up to 64ft/20m long). This, he suggests, was seen feeding in the traditional manner for its species – with its long, flattened, pointed head and upper jaw extending upwards above the water surface while the lower jaw remains entirely hidden below the surface, thus enabling the whale to skim small surface-dwelling organisms inside its capacious mouth. There is no doubt that a sei whale behaving in this manner does provide a close visual correspondence with the mystery beast as described by the *Daedalus* observers. My concern with it as a conclusive explanation, however, is that as the latter persons were experienced seamen, surely they would have witnessed this activity before, and would have recognised it for what

it was – so why did none of them do so on this particular occasion?

http://www.csicop.org/news/press_releases/show/mystery_of_the_daedalus_sea_serpent_solved_in_skeptical_inquirer 28 Aug 2015.

NEW MOKELE-MBEMBE EXPEDITION

French explorer Michel Ballot has conducted several expeditions to Cameroon in search of this country's morphological counterpart to the Congo's famous dinosaur-like aquatic cryptid known as the mokele-mbembe, and on one occasion he purchased a very striking locally made wooden statue depicting a mysterious horned quadrupedal beast with a long heavy tail that seems to be Cameroon's equivalent to a second Congolese cryptid, the emela-ntouka. He has now announced that in mid-January 2016 he plans to return to Cameroon, accompanied by fellow explorer Serge Martin, once again seeking its mokele-mbembe cryptid. They will be searching for it in the Nki Falls area and the Lobéké National Park, and will be spending a fortnight there after having first met up on site in extreme southern Cameroon with the local team of helpers and guides that they will be using. <http://mokelembembeexpeditions.blogspot.co.uk/2015/10/nki-mokele-mbembe-expedition-janvier.html> 21 Oct 2015.



LEFT: The HMS Daedalus sea serpent encounter.

BELOW: The name of the new giant tortoise subspecies honours Galapagos National Park ranger Fausto Llerina Sánchez, who devoted 43 years of his life to the care of endangered tortoises in captivity there. BOTTOM: The statue of a mystery animal purchased by explorer Michel Ballot in Cameroon.



A GIANT GALAPAGOS SURPRISE

The Galapagos Islands are famous for their giant tortoises, with at least 11 of the islands each formerly having its very own subspecies – which some authors elevate to species in their own right. Tragically, however, some of them are now extinct after having been killed for their tasty meat in earlier ages or dying out when their habitat was destroyed by introduced species. Consequently, it came as a great surprise recently when scientists revealed that a hitherto unknown subspecies of Galapagos giant tortoise had been hiding in plain sight. It has long been known that the Galapagos island of Santa Cruz has giant tortoises living on its eastern side in a locality called Cerro Fatal, and on its western side in a region known as La Reserva. Yet although the two groups display minor morphological differences from one another, they have traditionally been categorised as one and the same subspecies, *Chelonoidis (nigra) porteri*. Following DNA analyses and comparisons of samples taken from eastern and western specimens, however, a scientific team led by Yale University evolutionary research biologist Dr Adalgisa Caccone has now announced that the eastern specimens are sufficiently distinct genetically from their western brethren to require classification as a subspecies in their own right. Indeed, they are actually genetically closer to the giant tortoises on other Galapagos islands than they are to the western Santa Cruz giant tortoises. Consequently, the eastern Santa Cruz giant tortoise has now been formally separated from the latter taxonomically, and has been dubbed *C. (n.) donfaustoi* in honour of Fausto Llerina Sanchez's 43 years of work in Galapagos giant tortoise conservation. www.livescience.com/52545-new-species-galapagos-tortoise.html 21 Oct 2015.

FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

Ex-Labour councillor saves the world from Large Hadron Collider, plus more weird news updates

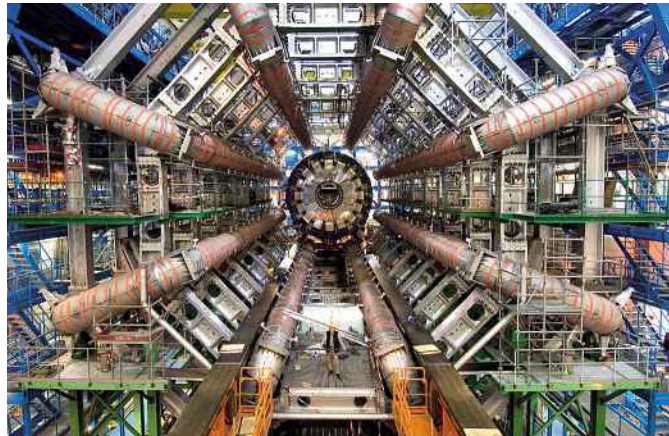
SIMON SAYS [FT288:4, 330:23]



Simon Parkes, who resigned as Labour town councillor for Whitley in North Yorkshire last April, has entertained us by claiming his mother was a 9ft (2.7m) alien and that he had experienced numerous extraterrestrial encounters, including one in which he lost his virginity to an alien when he was five. He had also met “shadow-beings” and other creatures taking the form of cats, owls, circus clowns and policemen.

Parkes, who has lectured at the Natural History Museum, was recently a key speaker at a conference organised by the UFO Academy at High Elms Manor in Watford, Hertfordshire. Before an enraptured audience of hundreds, he related how he had stopped the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) in Switzerland opening a portal to another dimension that would have destroyed mankind. Parkes explained that the Illuminati (who run the world from behind the scenes) were hell-bent on using the huge atom colliding machine to open a vortex that would allow them complete control over all of us. According to *inquisitr.com* and *prophecy.news*, the plan was even more dastardly: “To destroy all life on Earth and possibly in the Universe” by opening the gates of Hell. (Presumably, “life on Earth” doesn’t include the Illuminati themselves, unless this was a suicide mission.) Parkes explained that the LHC was developed by Illuminati scientists using alien technology from another planet to “interfere with time, open portals to other dimensions and sever the link between good humans and the spiritual plane and divine consciousness.”

A month after the announcement that the LHC had discovered a new particle known



as a pentaquark, the New World Order baddies were poised to strike. “I have not said the LHC can break the divine link between all good humans on this plane and divine consciousness,” said Parkes, “but that was their plan.” Parkes had sources who told him what was about to unfold, so he set about arranging a global “mind warp” to defeat the plan. “We couldn’t just do nothing. There is much you could do without sticking your head above the parapet. I created a global meditation group connecting consciousness and most countries now have two or three people. Places like the US and UK have got hundreds. We really can affect matters with our mind.”

Parkes planned to get everyone to take part in a “combined meditation” at lunchtime on 15 August, but the Illuminati became aware of this and decided to switch the LHC on at 3am that day to outwit him. But Parkes was on the ball: “A number of people who associate with me made me aware that someone had activated it in the early hours and placed Satanic black magicians, who were remotely viewing the installation on the inside.” The good guys sent a telepathic wave of “positive energy” which stopped the portal from completely opening and damaged the LHC. In a statement that should be enshrined in the annals of jurisprudence, Parkes pointed out that “it is not illegal to psychically damage government

equipment because the law courts do not believe it is possible.”

The LHC came back on, but was again thwarted. “All over the globe good people started to meditate for five to six minutes. After the meditation it failed again, but we did take some damage. One person lost hearing in an ear for three weeks and others had ringing in the ears because there was an attack by those psychically protecting it.” The mass meditation caused a thunderstorm over Switzerland, forcing the LHC onto a back-up power system that only gave a third of its full capacity. “Gaia came to our rescue and a thunderstorm took out the power,” said Parkes. “With just a third of the power it created a 0.8mm hole between the third and fourth frequency, but that was not enough to bring anything through.” So we can breathe a sigh of relief. *express.co.uk*, 24 Oct 2015.

BOGUS SOCIAL WORKERS [FT315:24]



At the end of September, a teenager was charged with attempted baby kidnap following reports of a young woman impersonating a social worker. The Gang of Fort believes this is the first time one of these elusive BSWs (bogus social workers) has been caught. The 17-year-old from Evesham

in Worcestershire was accused of attempting to take the infant from a home in Derby on 21 September. She knocked on the door of a 19-year-old mother and asked to hold her baby before later handing the child back (not a very determined kidnap, then). Another 17-year-old woman, from Wolverhampton, was arrested in connection with the incident.

Now here’s a variant – BPOs (bogus police officers). In the small hours (1.15am) of 17 September, two BPOs, a man and a woman, knocked on a woman’s door in Claypiece Road, Withywood, Bristol, and tried to persuade her to go with them in a car. A genuine police spokesperson said: “They told her that she needed to come with them because a family member had been in an accident. When she refused, they left and got into a car described as a new-shape blue Ford Fiesta.” The male BPO was white, in his 40s, clean-shaven, about 6ft (183cm) tall, and “very slim”. The female BPO was white, between 5ft 1in and 5ft 6in (155-168cm) tall and of “medium to heavy build”, with long blonde hair in a ponytail. She was wearing hooped earrings, a nose stud and dark eye make-up. Both spoke with local accents. *Western Daily Press*, 19+30 Sept 2015.

VEXING HEXES [FT279:22]



Tourists who took relics from Pompeii have been returning them to the ruined Roman city, claiming they are cursed. Massimo

Osanna, Pompeii’s archaeological superintendent, said he had received up to 100 packages from across the world in recent years containing items from the site – amphora fragments, pieces of fresco, small statues and so on – often accompanied by letters explaining the relics had brought them bad luck. One man wrote from Latin America saying that he and his entire family had experienced “trauma after trauma” after he purloined a

95: ARISE, SIR FORTEAN!

The myth

When you get your knighthood, for Services to Reading the *Fortean Times*, the Queen will say to you "Arise, Sir Insert-Name-Here", and that is the point at which you are officially named, or "dubbed", a knight.



The "truth"

Of course, not everybody wants a knighthood. Every year, a large number of men and women turn down all manner of gongs, and for all sorts of reasons – the best of which surely must be that of the physicist Paul Dirac, who supposedly declined a knighthood because he couldn't abide being addressed by his first name. But if you're unfashionable enough to accept your Sir, you may be disappointed to discover that there is no "Arise" moment. You will be required to kneel before the monarch on a special "knighting-stool" while she lays the blade of her sword on first your right, and then your left, shoulder; that's the "dubbing". You stand up, and Herself presents you with the insignia or badge of the order of knighthood to which you have been appointed. Perhaps she will then chat to you for a few moments about the weather, or the football, or how you were nearly late because of roadworks on the A303, but the "Arise, Sir" bit is purely mythical. Incidentally, the reason why posthumously disgraced knights can't be formally stripped of their Sirs is because a knighthood automatically expires with the knight; technically, there are no dead knights.

Sources

<http://www.royal.gov.uk/MonarchUK/Honours/Knighthoods.aspx>; www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1240909/The-extraordinary-love-affair-British-scientist-Paul-Dirac-chatterbox-divorcee.html; www.theguardian.com/media/2012/oct/09/jimmy-savile-knighthood

Disclaimer

All FT staff are descended from the ruling clans of Venus, so we know little of your Earth customs. Please send corrections of our errors, by royal herald, to the letters page.

Mythchaser

A Tweeting reader has brought a lovely bit of odd to our attention; apparently, some real ale pubs refuse to have vinegar on the premises in case it somehow spoils their prized brews. Can anyone uncover the origins of this pickle-ular prohibition?



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piece of stone. A Canadian woman who had taken away a decorative terracotta tile while on her honeymoon during the Seventies wrote asking for forgiveness for "an error I made in my youth". Another parcel contained a beautiful piece of fresco from the Casa del Frutteto, which had been discovered missing during its reconstruction in Germany.

The "curse of Pompeii" is an old story that says the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79 was punishment inflicted by the gods after legionaries destroyed holy buildings. "At a certain point, people started believing in this story again," said Osanna. "Even proper thieves have returned things to us." In one instance, five packages were sent to Pompeii containing stolen items, including a bronze statue that had disappeared in 1987. The accompanying letter was sent from Spain and the writer complained the statue had brought a "curse on my entire family". Osanna is considering setting up an exhibition of all the letters he has received, calling it "What I brought back from Pompeii". *D.Telegraph, 15 Oct 2015*. For other 'cursed' stones and relics returned, see *FT28:42, 70:17, 76:57, 106:120, 121:9, 219:44-48, 230:22, 256:10-11*.

SHROUDED IN MYSTERY [FT324:24, ETC]



The Turin shroud, believed by many to be the actual burial cloth of Jesus, has long been the subject of intense controversy. Scientists

have now conducted a DNA analysis on particles of dust and pollen collected from its surface in an attempt to determine its travels over the last two millennia. The results suggested that it had been on a world tour. "Among the plant species of the New World, black locust, a tree of the family Fabaceae native to Appalachia in the Eastern United States, is notable," said Dr Gianni Barcaccia. "In addition, we identified crop species largely grown by farmers and common in many agriculture systems of the Old World, including chicory, common

hop, cucumber and grapevine." The researchers believe that the shroud may have been originally produced in India before making its way to several countries including Italy, Turkey and even the Americas. It is also possible that the samples of pollen found on it may have come from visitors who had travelled long distances to view the relic in person. Carbon dating of fibres taken from the shroud in 1988 gave a date of AD 1260 to 1390, but several scholars have contended that the dating samples may not have been representative of the whole relic [*FT301:6*].

Citing work by a 19th century French historian, Antonio Lombatti of the Università Popolare in Parma has pointed out that the shroud was only one of at least 40 "burial cloths of Jesus" circulating in Christendom in the Middle Ages. "Most of them were destroyed during the French Revolution," he said. "Some had images, others had blood-like stains, and others were completely white." He believes that the Turin shroud itself was probably given to Geoffroy de Charney as a memento from a crusade to Smyrna in 1346. *D.Mail, 11 June 2012; [AP] 21 Oct 2015*.

CROWS BEARING GIFTS [FT329:22-23]



Eight-year-old Gabi Mann from Seattle, famous for feeding a murder of crows and collecting small objects they brought to her as gifts, was

sued last August for \$200,000 (£130,500) for causing a nuisance. Two neighbours in Seattle's posh Portage Bay neighbourhood said she drew in dozens of birds to her backyard. "Birds swarm in daily, leaving behind dirt, feathers and urine on surrounding properties" claimed the lawsuit. It also alleged that the peanut shells and other food left over after the birds had finished eating was drawing rats and other vermin, a claim denied by Gaby's parents, Lisa and Gary. The case is scheduled to go to trial in August 2016, unless the parties reach an out-of-court settlement beforehand. *Metro, 14 Aug; D.Mail online, 20 Oct 2015*.



NECROLOG

The “Jesus Man” of Bradford meets his maker, the palaeontologist who argued for the survival of the luckiest goes extinct, and a quantum physicist peers beyond the veil...



GEOFFREY BRINDLEY

In 1960 Geoffrey Brindley, 33, walked out of his job in Bradford as a machinist at the International Harvester tractor factory, announcing that God had told him the world was about to end. He retreated to a nearby cave in the Yorkshire Dales, where he meditated for 12 days, after which he returned to Bradford wearing a dark robe and sandals, an outfit he wore for the next half-century as he walked the city streets in all weathers with a satchel round his neck, spreading good cheer with a wave and a warm smile. He appeared to possess nothing but the clothes he stood up in. A “gentle and spiritual man”, he became known as the “Jesus Man” of Bradford. There were rumours of a wife and children abandoned long ago or lost in some unspecified tragedy.

In his early days he was a bit of a Christian hothead. He was arrested for causing a breach of the peace outside a bingo club and preaching about the evils of gambling. He also spent a brief spell in custody during the early 1960s for protesting against a Beatles gig at the Alhambra Theatre. He had many friends around the city and regular addresses where he would be welcomed and given a cooked meal. His friend George Armstrong offered him free

accommodation in his house in Baildon, a Bradford suburb, after he found him sleeping in a hostel 25 years ago. He said: “[Geoffrey] lived very modestly. He didn’t have any money. He used to go into shops and pick things off the shelf and then look at the shopkeeper or cashier who would give him the nod and tell him to go on and take it for free.”

In 2012 an online campaign calling for Brindley to become an Olympic torch-bearer was supported by 23,000 people, but he declined. Regarding his daily routine, he was once asked: “Why do you do it?” – to which he replied: “I just like walking.” Asked what he did when it rained, he said: “I get wet.” To others he would explain he was “looking for an answer”. Brindley died in hospital 11 days after suffering a stroke at home in Baildon. Within hours, the Internet was flooded with hundreds of tributes and personal anecdotes and campaigns launched for a statue to be erected and £2,000 raised to give him a fitting funeral in the cathedral. Local rapper Leejay Roberts composed a special musical tribute. Michael Fryer said: “More than anyone else [Brindley] united Bradfordians through the simplicity of his life.”

Geoffrey Brindley, Christian ascetic, born Buston, Derbyshire 1927; died Baildon, West Yorkshire 24 Aug 2015, aged 88.

DAVID RAUP

Classical Darwinism implies that species go extinct because they cannot compete with more successful species, or because conditions change and they are then less fitted for survival. In the 1980s, however, this was challenged by scientists including Stephen Jay Gould of Harvard and David Raup of the University of Chicago.

Though Raup seldom got his hands dirty digging for fossils, Gould once described him as “the world’s most brilliant palaeontologist”. In books such as *Extinction: Bad Genes or Bad Luck* (1991) Raup argued that the history of life on Earth has been

marked by arbitrary catastrophic events (volcanic eruptions, comet strikes, magnetic field reversals etc), in which whole species have been wiped out on an unimaginable scale. He calculated that over 3.5 billion years of organic life, Earth had been home to perhaps five to 50 billion species of which, at the most, only 5 to 50 million are living now – a 99.9 per cent failure rate. This “truly lousy survival record”, he argued, has little to do with evolutionary “fitness”. The rate of extinction is so overwhelming that the causes must be almost random – survival of the luckiest, not necessarily the fittest. He claimed that 60 per cent of all extinctions had been caused by random “outside” events rather than Darwinian evolutionary forces.

In 1983, while doing a computer analysis of 27,000 marine species that died off during the past 250 million years, Raup and a colleague identified a cycle of catastrophic mass extinctions occurring every 26 million years. At a lower level they found that pulses of extinction had occurred on average every million years. Extinction periodicity, as it became known, provoked the wrath of Darwinists, but Raup observed that “Darwin is like Scripture, you can find anything you want in it”, and he was unfazed by the prospect that one day his theories might be proved wrong.

His 26-million-year extinction cycle fitted in with the controversial theory that the dinosaurs died after a “death star” known as Nemesis knocked comets out of their paths 65 million years ago and sent them crashing to Earth. In his book *The Nemesis Affair: A Story of the Death of Dinosaurs and the Ways of Science* (1986), Raup admitted that the Nemesis theory was “a matter of fairly abstruse statistical inference with rather messy data” which could turn out to be “a major step forward in our understanding of the natural world or an embarrassing period of near-insanity in scholarship”. The book showed how, time after time, scientists’ belief systems impair their ability to evaluate and

test new ideas dispassionately, and he did not regard himself as an exception to the rule. His other publications include *Principles of Palaeontology* (1971, with Stephen Stanley), which has become a standard textbook.

David Malcolm Raup, statistical palaeontologist, born Boston, Massachusetts 24 April 1933; died Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin 9 July 2015, aged 82.

BERNARD D’ESPAGNAT

In 2009, this French physicist and philosopher of science won the £1 million Templeton Prize, awarded annually to individuals who “affirm life’s spiritual dimension”, for his work on the philosophical implications of quantum mechanics. Unlike the cause-and-effect of our everyday physical world, subatomic particles behave in ways that appear to defy the traditional laws of physics, undermining materialist accounts of the nature of reality. Photons, for example, spin in many ways, such as ‘up’ and ‘down’, at the same time. Ever more mysteriously, it is only when they are observed that they fix into particular states of spin. Quantum theory also predicts ‘entanglement’, whereby tiny particles such as electrons, which have interacted in the past then moved apart, possibly billions of miles apart, will change their polarisation simultaneously when the property of one of the pair is measured, implying some form of communication between them

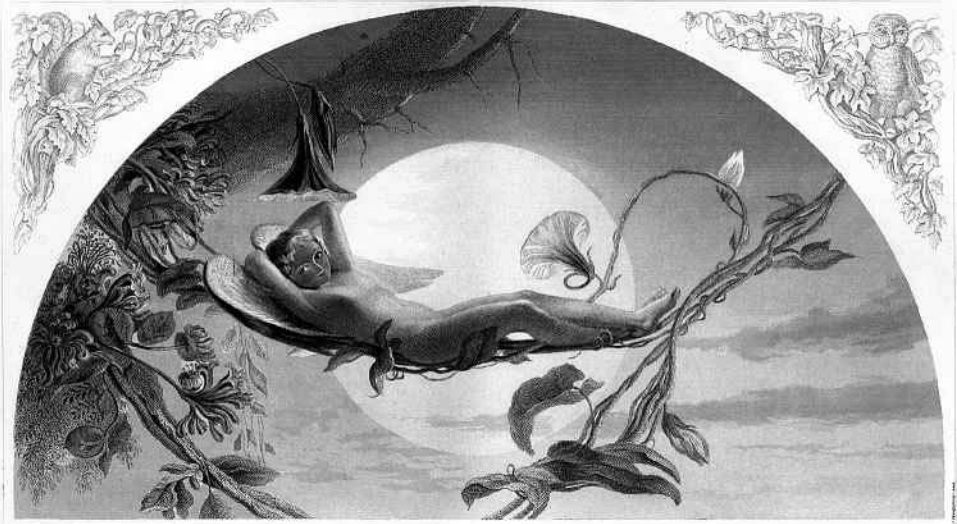


faster than the speed of light.

Einstein dismissed entanglement as “spooky actions at a distance” and argued that if quantum theory predicted such nonsense, conflicting with the accepted laws of physics, then the theory itself had to be questioned. In 1964, however, by which time quantum theory was proving its validity across a range of practical applications, CERN physicist John Stewart Bell showed that the theory *required* entanglement, and experimental proof of its existence was provided in the early 1970s by John Clauser and Stuart Freedman, and confirmed in the 1980s by Alain Aspect and others. D’Espagnat, a professor at the University of Paris-Sud who had met Clauser and Freeman during a sabbatical in the United States, was the first to point out the philosophical issues underlying the phenomenon of entanglement. In a series of papers and in “The Quantum Theory of Reality”, a widely read 1979 article in *Scientific American*, d’Espagnat argued that materialist doctrines which claim that the world is made up of objects whose existence is independent of human consciousness, and that objects widely separated in space cannot effect each other simultaneously, is not only in conflict with the predictions of quantum mechanics, but with facts established by experiment.

D’Espagnat’s magnum opus, *Conceptual Foundations of Quantum Mechanics* (1976), went into three editions. His ideas led to a resurgence of interest in quantum theory and a new field of quantum information science, which has spurred the development of quantum cryptography and quantum computers as well as deeper speculations about the nature of space-time. He coined the term “veiled reality” to describe an elusive world beyond what is visible or detectable, which science can only glimpse through study of quantum behaviour and which, he argued, could be compatible with “higher forms of spirituality” glimpsed in ordinary life through such experiences as listening to Mozart. Since science cannot reveal anything certain about the nature of being, he concluded, it cannot tell us with certainty what it is *not*.

Bernard d’Espagnat, apostle for quantum mysteries, born Fourmagnac, southern France 22 Aug 1921; died Paris 1 Aug 2015, aged 93.



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

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

TRIPPING WITCHES

Since scientific writing on European witchcraft began in the late 19th century there has been a suspicion that witches did drugs. As far back as 1889, EB Tylor suggested that witches ‘flew’ to the sabbat and enjoyed orgies there after having taken hallucinogens: the witch would apply an ointment, fall asleep and travel mentally rather than physically. As the years have gone by, this explanation has become increasingly popular – to the point now where we have the silly meme (silly because it is not evidence-based) that witches used their broomsticks as drug-coated dildos.

Yet though the existence of a flying ointment is accepted by scholars – a flying ointment is frequently mentioned in witch sources – there is still an argument over whether this was just a nonsensical concoction (blood of bat etc) or a potent pharmacopeia.

There are four sources that suggest that there really was a witch intoxicant: all four describe a woman being ‘anointed’ with a flying cream. The first of these comes from early 15th-century Spain, where Alfonso Tostato described a woman putting on ointment and falling into a trance. In 1437 or 1438 Johannes Nider wrote, in Germany, about a Dominican being invited to watch a woman put on flying ointment: inviting a

Dominican to see a witch fly seems something like opening a Bar Mitzvah to the Gestapo, but anyway... Then, a century later, in 1558, Giambattista della Porta wrote of his similar experiences in Italy. Of these three accounts, only Della Porta was an actual eyewitness, but the similarities are fascinating. In all

three, the woman entered a trance and in two cases the woman proved completely insensible to pain; in the third, the sleeper only woke up when she fell from a tub in which she had placed herself, banging her head. In all three cases the women described, upon waking, their flight to a sabbat (though of course the women are unlikely to have thought of their trip in these terms):

in two cases the women were sure they had been there physically. The most interesting experiment of all, though, was that of Andrés Laguna who in 1545, while resident in Metz, got his hands on some flying ointment. He took a woman who suffered from chronic insomnia. He covered her from head to toe in the ointment – sorry to be all ‘Blue Peter’ but *please* don’t try this at home – and she fell into an open-eyed trance for 36 hours. When she was finally beaten awake she was furious because she had been snatched away from wonderful visions *and* a phantom lover.

On the basis of evidence like this, the best question is surely not ‘Did witches use drugs?’ but ‘What drugs did witches use to fly?’

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

HE COVERED THE
WOMAN FROM HEAD TO
TOE IN THE OINTMENT
AND SHE FELL INTO AN
OPEN-EYED TRANCE FOR
36 HOURS



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FLYING SAUCERY

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IT'S A BONNY DAY FOR UFOS!

The town of Bonnybridge in Scotland (above) has been declared the best place to spot a UFO in Britain, according to the travel magazine *Wanderlust*. Despite attempts to revive the fortunes of Warminster in Wiltshire, that celebrated its 50th anniversary as the country's first UFO hotspot (see **FT331:40-47**) with a skywatch at the August bank holiday, it was beaten into fourth place by the sheer number of reports emanating from the so-called Falkirk Triangle. Bonnybridge, Midlothian, first came to the attention of the national media in 1992 and since that time claims have been made that more than 300 sightings are logged each year. Since that time, local councillor and UFO believer Billy Buchanan has written to three prime ministers, including David Cameron, asking the Ministry of Defence to investigate. But each time he has been told that the usual explanations for UFOs apply. *Wanderlust* note there is no obvious explanation why this area should be so attractive for the space people, "although police have suggested alcohol may be a contributing factor". Number two on the magazine's list is the Broad Haven triangle in mid-Wales, which was the focus of a UFO flap in 1977-78, with stories of tall humanoids in silver suits stalking remote farms. Rendlesham is pushed into third place, so we conclude that the UFO public are as fickle as any other, and that precisely what constitutes 'Britain's Roswell' is a moveable feast. *Wanderlust*, 18 September 2015: <http://tinyurl.com/pctt5x5>

THE CRACKS ARE SHOWING

The Internet may be the world's greatest invention, but it's also the world's greatest Rorschach blot test, a digital scrying mirror into which the hopeful peer for clues. One such was Russian UFO enthusiast Valentín Degterev who, for reasons unknown, was

scanning Antarctica using Google Earth when he noticed a "dark area". He zoomed in, and to his amazement saw something he believed was a crashed flying saucer. "I think there is very large disc-shaped flying machine among the frozen ice," mused Degterev, basing his assumption on the fact that what he had seen showed the "classic flying saucer shape". That the "classic flying saucer shape" is based on hoaxes such as Adamski's Venusian scout-ship has clearly not penetrated the tatters of the Iron Curtain. But this didn't deter Degterev, who gave the media the exact coordinates of his find and invited people to look. Enter the experts. The British Antarctic Survey fielded Andrew Fleming, who downgraded Degterev's find from cosmic Holy Grail to mundane ice crevasse. Degterev wasn't impressed and fought back: "It seems this is a man-made object from the distant cosmos". Flying Saucery isn't quite sure where the 'distant cosmos' is located exactly but understands how easy it is for the devoted saucer fancier to fall into the trap of radical misperception. Sometimes a crevasse is just a crevasse! *Daily Mail online* 16 June 2015: <http://tinyurl.com/q27b8kk>

SHEER LUNACY?

Edgar Mitchell (below) became the sixth man to walk on the Moon in 1971 and, on his return, became 'the mystic astronaut' who embraced all sorts of New Age ideas, including UFOs. Now 84, the Apollo 14 veteran is making headlines of a different kind. In May he was one of the big names touted by Jaime Maussan as a speaker at the Roswell Slides circus in Mexico City (**FT329:26-27**). In August, he was quoted by the *Daily Mirror* as claiming that aliens had intervened to prevent atomic war between Russia and the USA. Mitchell said UFOs seen over Mexico's White Sands nuclear testing grounds in 1945 were evidence that ET is interested in the US atomic weapons programme, adding: "My own experience talking to people has made it clear the ETs had been attempting to keep us from going to war and help create peace on Earth". So: stories he's been told by other people who believe something none of them can actually prove. As it turned out, even this item of hearsay proved worthless. When *Huffington Post's* Lee Spiegel followed up the story, Mitchell told him: "None of those



quotes were originated from me". Yet these are the same questionable stories spread by Robert Hastings and his group of former USAF contacts who claim aliens have interfered with nuclear missiles (**FT270:30**). Mitchell is an exemplar of the 'credible expert'. By this term we mean someone people tend to believe because of their status, qualifications, experience or other skills and qualities. Mitchell may know his onions when it comes to manning a spaceship, but when it comes to determining whether aliens have been intervening in global politics we're less convinced... to put it mildly. *Mirror online*, 11 August: <http://tinyurl.com/pofdl69>; *Huffington Post*, 27 August: <http://tinyurl.com/ok6e33b>

IT'S THE LITTLE BLUE MAN!



In October, a contributor to the Boing Boing website nominated a little known alien scare from 1958 as "best extraterrestrial hoax ever" (although we suspect there might be

quite a few other contenders). Early in that year, motorists in Michigan began reporting a weird glowing figure, which resembled a spaceman from a science fiction movie and that appeared and disappeared on roads across the state. As the mystery grew so did the fabulous nature of the descriptions that reached the press. Some observers said the alien was 10ft (3m) tall, others that he was just two feet (660cm) in height, while another claimed he could run "faster than any human". Eventually, the police were called in and three young men confessed. UFO stories in the newspapers gave them the idea for a prank and they created a 'spaceman' costume (pictured right) from long underwear, gloves, combat boots and a football helmet to which they attached blinking lights. The costume was spray-painted with luminous blue paint, inspired by a popular song on the radio at the time: *The Little Blue Man*, by Betty Johnson. <http://boingboing.net/2015/10/01/best-alien-hoax-ever.html>.



TIME AND A WORD (OR TWO)

I have long been interested in time travel, in terms of human experience and scientific possibility, and have written several books on this theme. We are living in the very year to which the celebrated 1985 movie *Back to the Future* travelled – and find it sadly bereft of hoverboards – so it seems appropriate to look at how time is an unexpected key to the UFO mystery, and how it weaves seemingly diverse phenomena together in a very fortean way.

My immediate inspiration came when a sceptical academic discovered a time anomaly case that he suggested I might like to investigate. It involved a young woman and her brother in an old building in a small Polish town who both experienced the scene shifting from its modern appearance to a much older one as they looked on. These shifts were profound and seemed dependent on their exact location – something reported in previous cases. The woman was clearly shaken by seeing the world shift from one reality to another in front of her eyes: of course, this is what happens in many UFO sightings.

British Time slip researcher Joan Forman recognised some key facts in the 1970s when she recorded what witnesses had told her of their temporal excursions. Their words are very interesting when we compare them with comments from people who have experienced other, supposedly quite different, paranormal events. One timeslip witness in Cornwall told Forman: “*I passed over a threshold into a world of utter silence surrounded by a sort of silvery light*”. Others spoke of the passage of time being “*non-existent*” when experiencing their time slip and of the “*absence of noise*” or “*noticeable quietness*”.

Readers of my previous columns will recognise how closely these comments resemble those of UFO close encounter witnesses. They also describe the timelessness and unearthly quiet – symptoms that I call the Oz Factor – while being immersed in silvery light, which is almost integral to many UFO sightings. Another common denominator in timeslips is reference to an unusual heaviness of the atmosphere or presence of electrical charge during the event. One case involved two touring British families staying in a hotel in the South of France with quaint old features that disappeared on their return journey as if displaced in time. A thundery atmosphere was reported that strange night.

As readers will know, I have my reservations about the origin of the famous image of a ‘spaceman’ that appeared on a photo taken in the Cumbrian Burgh marshes in May 1964 by fireman Jim Templeton (see **FT196:29, 286:28-9, 305:28**). But after meeting his family I was persuaded that he was sincere, and his account of how he took the photo shares that same spontaneous reference to a heavy, electrically charged atmosphere that caused local cows to behave oddly. Again, in



He was floating above his bed and could see his body below

my recent columns about the November 1980 Alan Godfrey ‘UFO abduction’ in Todmorden, West Yorkshire, you will recall that a heavy weather pressure system was passing through at the time. Curiously, there were also reports of several cows wandering agitatedly in the area that night, leading to the policeman being in the right place to see his UFO. Their erratic behaviour resulted in these animals being subsequently discovered in a muddy field across a river and main road with no indication of how they had made this unexpected journey.

So we can see how time anomalies and UFO encounters mirror one another with innocuous side effects that may actually be a key to our understanding. Look back at my Christmas story (**FT322:22-23**) in which one house experienced a catalogue of UFO sightings, time slips (past events seemingly replayed on an audio/video loop) and numerous Oz Factor states described by the occupant. Again, there were various electrical anomalies that hit the old building and left the power company scratching their heads as to what was happening.

This pattern seems significant. Time anomalies and UFO phenomena share quite surprising features in both ambient conditions and the way witnesses feel during their experiences. Instead of treating them as separate mysteries with their own unique explanations, perhaps it would be better – and more fortean – to instead seek reasons for this coherence.

But this pattern can be seen within other surprising areas of fortean research too.

A man in his 50s was being treated in

hospital in Birkenhead for a thrombosis, but he reacted badly to an injection of heparin and one lung became blocked. At that point, he had been left alone, as he showed no immediate symptoms. He found himself floating in mid-air above his bed where he could see his struggling body about five feet (1.5m) below. Up there, he was in a very different state of consciousness and said: “There was no sense of time passing and no fear or pain. In front of me was a shimmering haze of silvery light”. He watched as the man in the next bed scrambled out and brought medical staff to urgently seek to revive him. As they did so this man returned to life and immediately told staff what had just happened. The man in the next bed confirmed these events and the attending nurse who reported this case to me told me similar things happened on her ward several times a year.

This story has no obvious connection with a UFO event – it is what we would call an OBE (out-of-body experience) or NDE (near-death experience). Similar cases have mirrored alien abductions sufficiently closely that several researchers, such as Dr Ken Ring, have in the past suspected some link could exist.

Cases of this nature reveal the same witness perceptions of time losing its meaning and a silvery light or glow; and it should be no real surprise that they turn up in yet another, seemingly quite different kind of experience – encounters with fairies. Here, the ‘enchanted state’ that witnesses describe on meeting these beings seems very reminiscent of the Oz Factor; it’s a form of temporal detachment that has even given rise to a phrase in common parlance today. When someone seems to have lost touch with reality and lost the passage of time we say they are “away with the fairies”, because that is what was really claimed to explain such a state in past centuries. In my research on the Isle of Man (see **FT213:28-29**), where fairy lore remains strong, I even found examples where such sensations accompanied sightings of glowing lights or in atmospheres full of humidity and electricity.

So what does this all mean? It certainly suggests that we ought not to be so focused on our desire to separate one mystery from another or assume that they all have independent explanations. If various, apparently different, phenomena reported across hundreds of years actually involve the same atmospheric forces that can instil some consistent state of consciousness in witnesses nearby, what does it tell us? Why is the flow of time so vividly disrupted? Are the same effects caused by a time slip, or UFO, or NDE, or fairy? How and why might that be the case? Perhaps we need to look at things the other way around and ask if some undefined phenomenon is occurring that creates a state of consciousness that in turn might be open to interpretation in a variety of different ways depending on circumstance or personal belief. If so, then maybe the one common denominator in all of this is time itself.

THE MOST HAUNTED HOUSE IN LONDON

According to its Wikipedia entry, it is the most haunted property in London - but have the garbled tales of ghost-hunters and the advent of the Internet added too many layers of legend to the real story?

JAN BONDESON goes in search of the truth about the Berkeley Square ghost house...

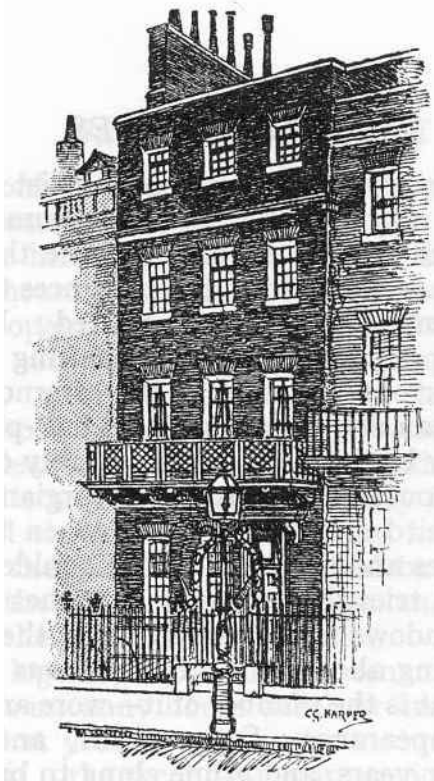
"First, there was a house with a room in which a series of people insisted on passing a night; and each of them in the morning was found kneeling in a corner, and had just about time to say 'I've seen it,' and died."

"Wasn't that the house in Berkeley Square?"
MR James, *A School Story*.

Berkeley Square is one of the most historic garden squares in the City of Westminster. It was named after the Berkeley family of Gloucestershire, whose London house once stood nearby. Berkeley Square was laid out in the mid-18th century by the architect William Kent: the building of the tall, high quality terraced houses continued apace, and Berkeley Square soon became one of the most sought-after residential squares in London. Admiral Byng, Robert Clive and Horace Walpole all lived here. The eastern and southern sides have suffered badly from developers, with unsightly modern blocks and hotels dominating the square, but a number of original Georgian houses remain in the southern part of the western terrace.

THE GHOST HOUSE

In 1879, there was a sensational article in *Mayfair* magazine concerning one of London's most notorious haunted houses - which was situated in Berkeley Square.¹ Long-abandoned due to the persistent haunting, the house presented a woeful appearance to the world: it had not seen a lick of paint for decades, and the area was full of rubbish and thrown-away handbills. The *Mayfair* journalist claimed that a girl had once stayed in the 'ghost room' of the haunted house: the following morning,



THE GHOST HOUSE AT
50 BERKELEY SQUARE
WAS OF A NEGLECTED
AND DILAPIDATED
APPEARANCE

LEFT: The haunted house at Berkeley Square, from Charles G Harper's *Haunted Houses*.

she was found stark raving mad and never recovered. A gentleman, who was a disbeliever in ghosts, demanded to stay the night in the haunted room; he was found dead in the middle of the floor, after having frantically but vainly rung the bell for rescue from some supernatural menace.

There was much interest in London's spectral world in the 1870s, and the story of this extraordinary haunted house spread far and wide in the newspapers. It was no secret in the neighbourhood that the ghost house was 50 Berkeley Square, situated near the southern extreme of the western terrace, since the place was of a very neglected and dilapidated appearance. The correspondents to *Notes & Queries*, a weekly magazine devoted to antiquarian and scholarly pursuits, took an immediate interest in this singular Mayfair ghost story. The sceptics sneered, saying that they would not believe in the Ghost of Berkeley Square until the lunacy documents for the girl, and the police investigation into the death of the gentleman, had been made public. The pro-ghost lobby soon made headway in the debate, however, by pointing out that the house's reputation for being haunted had been established at least as early as 1872 - seven years before the *Mayfair* article.²

As the *Notes & Queries* correspondents pondered the history of 50 Berkeley Square, they found that from 1770 until 1827 the house had been home to Prime Minister George Canning. It was later purchased by Lord Curzon, and inhabited by his daughter, the Hon. Miss Elizabeth Curzon, who died in the house in 1859. During her residence,



the house appears to have been free of ghosts. Her former manservant George Vincent, who had since become Head Porter at Brasenose College, Oxford, wrote to inform the *Notes & Queries* correspondents that: "I entered the house, 50 Berkeley Square, London, on March 20, 1851, in the service of the late Miss Curzon, who died in May, 1859. During the nine years I was in the house, and I have been in it at all hours alone, I saw no greater ghost than myself."³

The *Notes & Queries* ghost hunters found that not long after the death of Miss Curzon, the lease had been purchased by a certain Mr Myers, who was supposed to be very eccentric. There was a story that he was once engaged to be married, only to be jilted at the very last minute. This dismal experience made him into a recluse, who never left the house, or maintained it in any way. According to Lord de la Zouche, the nephew of Miss Curzon, the house was reputed to be haunted as early as 1863 or 1864. A correspondent to *Notes & Queries* stated that during the years the 'eccentric gentleman' lived there, soap, paint or whitewash was never used. He was occasionally visited by a sister, and had two resident maidservants in the house. By degree began the ghost stories: 'insanity', 'murder', 'walls saturated with electric horror', and so on. After the 'eccentric gentleman' died, his sister sent in an estate agent to see whether it would be worthwhile to put the property in order for the remainder of the lease. He found the house in hideous disrepair, and asked the maidservants if they had ever seen any ghosts; the answer was "We never seed any!"⁴

In December 1880, another correspondent to *Notes & Queries* could report that 50 Berkeley Square had just been repainted and

made ready for another tenant.⁵ This tenant may well have been a certain Major Du Pré, who was later stated to have lived there with his wife, albeit not for very long. In June 1884, it was reported that Lord Selkirk had just taken the house; in 1915, the *Daily Mirror* stated that Lady Selkirk was still living there in peace and comfort; according to a 1924 account, the elderly noblewoman had died in the house, undisturbed by any ghost. In 1928, the haunted house was inhabited by Sir Philip Grey-Egerton, Bart.⁶ Since 1938, 50 Berkeley Square has been the headquarters of Maggs Bros, antiquarian booksellers, who have reported that there were no indications that the house was haunted during their tenure; I visited this elegant upmarket bookshop back in 1999 to purchase an old French book about premature burials, having a good look at the house but not seeing any trace of a ghost.

ENTER THE GHOST-HUNTER

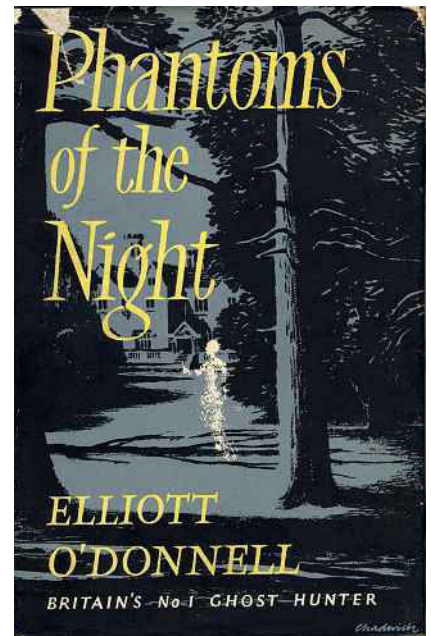
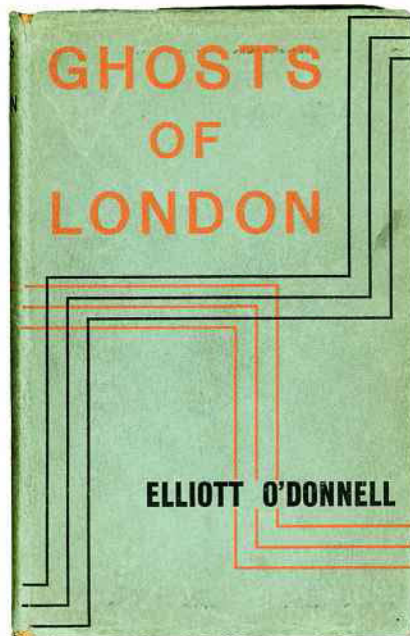
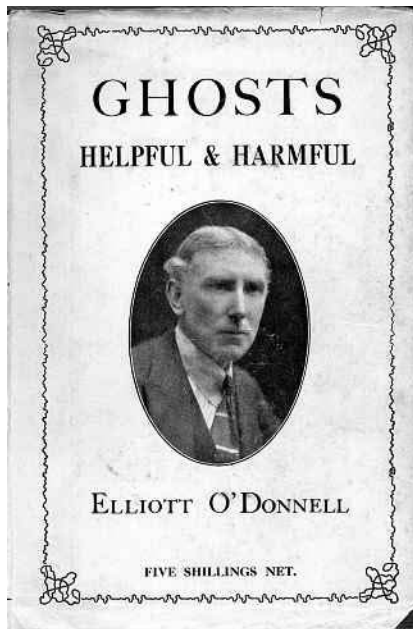
Elliott O'Donnell was a celebrated ghost-hunter of the 1920s and 1930s, who wrote copiously on various aspects of the supernatural. A highly-strung, nervous Irishman, he literally saw ghosts everywhere, even when they were none. O'Donnell could not, of course, stay away from the Ghost of Berkeley Square; the two were clearly made for one another, and O'Donnell many times discussed the celebrated London spook. In a 1908 lecture, he mentioned two versions of the haunting, leaving it to the audience to decide which one to believe. According to one story, every person who stayed in a certain room of No 50 at a certain time died of fright. In about the year 1880, a reckless major, who cared little for ghosts, decided to spend the night in the haunted room. In the dead of night, a

gunshot was heard from the room. The major was found in bed, stone dead from fright and clutching a smoking revolver. According to the second version, two sailors took refuge in the haunted house one night. There was a dull thud at the door, through which came a shapeless creature of so horrifying an aspect that one sailor died from fright on the spot; the other was found wandering about the basement, a raving lunatic.⁷

In his 1923 book *Ghosts Helpful and Harmful*, O'Donnell put the malignant Berkeley Square spook firmly in the 'Harmful' category. He quoted the original *Mayfair* magazine article, which he misdated to 1872, about the girl who went mad and the gentleman found dead in the house after vainly ringing for help. Although it was fashionable among his rationalist contemporaries to scoff at London's historic ghost stories, O'Donnell declared himself a firm believer in the Ghost of Berkeley Square. A lady had told him that a certain 'Captain B' had once come to stay at No 50, where his fiancée and her family lived. Rather recklessly, considering the fearsome reputation of the haunted room, he decided to spend the night there. At 12 o'clock, and on each succeeding hour, he would ring the bell once if all was well, and twice if he needed assistance. The fiancée and her family would be sitting in the hall to reply to his signals. At midnight, and again at one, the bell sounded only once, but at two o'clock, it rang twice. The fiancée and her family ran up the stairs; as they gained the landing, a solitary shot was heard. As they burst open the door to the haunted room, they discovered Captain B sitting bolt upright in the bed, holding a still smoking revolver. Like the reckless Major of the earlier version, he was stone dead, and the



ABOVE: A postcard stamped and posted in 1905, showing the south-western corner of Berkeley Square; No 50 is the second house from the left.



ABOVE: The haunting of 50 Berkeley Square featured in a number of books by ghost-hunter Elliott O'Donnell; the details would vary from one telling to another.

expression on his face was so terrible that no person could look at it twice.

As some light relief after these horrors, Elliott O'Donnell then told the story of the two cockney sailors Bert and Charlie, who decided to enter the empty house at 50 Berkeley Square after being stranded in Mayfair without a penny. But the Ghost did not approve of these two uninvited guests, and decided to give them a proper fright. In the middle of the night, the two sailors heard muffled footsteps walking up the stairs, and the door slowly opened. Outside stood a tall, shadowy spectre that resembled nothing human or animal. The terrified Bert ran to the window and slid down the water-pipe, but Charlie was found the following day, wandering round Berkeley Square in an insane condition. Bert eventually managed to tell the tale, and it was reported to Elliott O'Donnell's aunt, the wife of Colonel John Vise O'Donnell, a very truthful lady who had first-hand authority for it. The ghost was clearly an elemental spirit, O'Donnell pontificated, possibly attracted to the house by a crime or series of crimes committed on the spot, or else by a pool of stagnant water that once stood on the site.⁸

In his 1933 book *Ghosts of London*, Elliott O'Donnell wrote that when he had visited the city as a schoolboy in the early 1890s, he soon made his way to 50 Berkeley Square to admire London's most haunted house. Although the late Lord Curzon of Kedleston had told him that the house was in fact not haunted, O'Donnell remained unconvinced. He retold the *Mayfair* story, which he this time dated correctly to 1879, and then gave a lengthy account, with much invented cockney dialogue, of the two sailors (here called Bill and Mick) who entered the empty house. After hearing the ghostly footsteps approaching, and seeing the intensely horrible shape in the doorway, Mick jumped headlong from a rear window into the back yard and broke his neck, but Bill ran away and told a police constable about the haunting.⁹

OUTSIDE THE DOOR STOOD A SHADOWY SPECTRE THAT RESEMBLED NOTHING HUMAN OR ANIMAL

As late as 1956, O'Donnell retold the Berkeley Square ghost story in his book *Phantoms of the Night*. Various attempts had been made to discount the haunting, by claiming that the story had been invented by a caretaker who did not want the house to be rented out. Another story was that the house had once been inhabited by an eccentric recluse and misogynist who used only one room and allowed the rest to go to wrack and ruin. He used to wander the house at night, with a lighted candle in his hand, and this led to the report that the house was haunted. Elliott O'Donnell remained a firm believer in the Berkeley Square ghost, however, and he again quoted the story of the sailors stranded in central London at some time in the 1870s. This time, the ending is that after encountering the Ghost of Berkeley Square, Mick leapt headlong from a front window and broke his neck, whereas Bill was found on the pavement in a swoon.¹⁰

There is no question, for a close student of O'Donnell's Edinburgh ghost stories, that this once-famous ghost-hunter made many of his spooky tales up. A study of his writings on the Ghost of Berkeley Square does not change that impression in the slightest. Neither the foolhardy major turned captain, nor the pair of protean, house-invading sailors, have any part to play in the original records of the haunted house, and it must be suspected that O'Donnell invented these yarns to make his

ghost stories more interesting. The damage done by his many rehashes of the Berkeley Square ghost story has been permanent, since a number of Internet plagiarists have swallowed his yarns hook, line and sinker. The military officer may well have died from fright in O'Donnell's yarn, and one of the sailors may well have leapt headlong through a window, but both are alive and well on the Internet, in a multitude of versions.

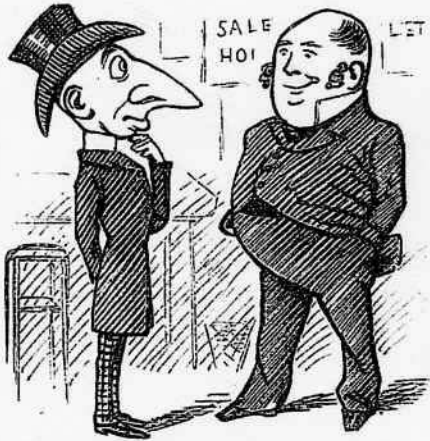
THE NAMELESS HORROR

In 1907, the ghost hunter Charles Harper wrote that, according to his friend Mr Stuart Wortley, the secret of the house in Berkeley Square was that Mr Du Pré of Wilton Park had shut his insane brother in one of the rooms; the lunatic's strange groans and cries had given the house its sinister reputation. In 1928, a correspondent to the *Daily Mirror* corroborated this yarn, which has since been 'improved' further on the Internet: it was an unnamed young man who was kept prisoner in the house, fed through a hole in the door, until he went mad and died.¹¹ The *Grey Ghost Book* added that according to Mr Ralph Nevill, a relation of the elusive Mr Myers, the haunting dated back to the 18th century; the house was also haunted by a child who had been tortured to death in the nursery, and by a man who had gone mad waiting for ghostly messages to appear on the walls.¹² The celebrated ghost hunter Harry Price discussed the 'Electric Horror' of Berkeley Square at length, hoping that if the poltergeists on the premises were up to any further mischief, Maggs Bros would send for him to investigate.¹³

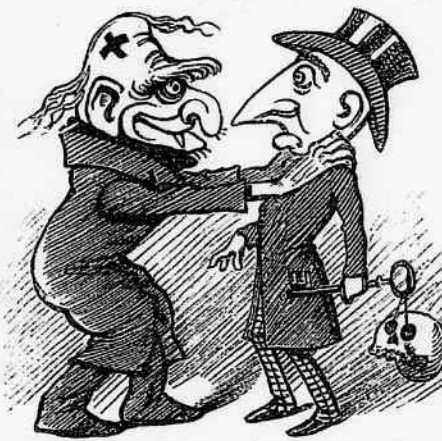
R Thurston Hopkins, another authority on the spectral world, quoted Elliott O'Donnell's story of the two sailors at length, and added a ghost of his own: when a certain Mr Bentley had inhabited the house, his eldest daughter's boyfriend had been frightened to death in the haunted room after first taking a shot at the 'Nameless Horror' of Berkeley Square with his army pistol.¹⁴ In 1985, Richard

JUDY'S LUNATIC CONTRIBUTOR AND THE BERKELEY SQUARE GHOST.

It was mentioned in *Truth* the other day that Captain MIDDLETON, Lord BEREHAVEN, and Mr. HENRY BULLER wanted to take the famous Haunted House in Berkeley Square, and to investigate the mysteries,



On hearing, dear Madam, of the intentions of Lord BEREHAVEN, Captain MIDDLETON, and Mr. HENRY BULLER to investigate the mysteries of the Haunted House in Berkeley Square, I resolved in the interests of your inimitable journal to forestall these gentlemen, and, should I survive, report to you thereon; so with that intention I called at the house agent's for the key. "What, my dear sir," cried he, "I keep the key! Ha, ha! not if I know it!"



But he directed me where to go for it. "I was to a weird old man living in a tumbledown house at the back of Mount Street. He handed me the instrument; and then, placing his long skinny hands on my shoulders, cried, with a shrill laugh that went to my very marrow, "He, he! Let me have a good look at you for the last time! He, he! Mark ye—FOR THE LAST TIME!"



I thought after this it would be as well if I took a little something with me into the house as a steady; besides, the bottle might come in handy as a weapon of defence, if necessary, for I was entirely unarmed. What a different scene—the bright chattering of the tavern, made more so by the beaming smiles of the lady who served me—to that to which in a short time I was doomed. But I anticipate.



I need not dwell on how I gained Berkeley Square, turned the key in the rusty lock of the door of the Haunted House, entered, shut it after me, lit my candle, and made myself comfortable in one of the dusty old corners; but will come to midnight, when slowly the door, which I need hardly say I had previously securely locked, opened, and there entered the ghost! I found him quite a sociable old person. He said he found it rather dull at times, and that he remembered what whisky was, but that it was not the fashionable drink in his time. He further remarked that he didn't mind if he did.



In fact, he "did" several times. Whether it was the mixing of the spirits I can't say, but by degrees the venerable party began to be quite jolly, not to say boisterous; volunteered a song, sentimental, but sung with a smile; and said if I'd whistle he'd show me how they danced in his days. This I agreed to do, and at it he went, capering about in the most quaint style, and as airily as *ÆNEA* herself.



It was while performing a rather difficult movement that he fell lightly (heavily to a befitting) musing, "Olorowqueerfeel," commenced to snore, not loudly, just the ghost of a snore. now I felt my mission ended, for I had done best successfully to lay the ghost; so, after a candlestick of the phantom's mouth, which invitingly open, I toddled home to bed. If a man who keeps the key wants it, he will no find it somewhere about.

ABOVE: A not particularly amusing take on the Ghost of Berkeley Square, from *Judy* magazine, 10 January 1883.

Whittington-Egan again discussed the Ghost of Berkeley Square, quoting O'Donnell's yarns but maintain a healthily sceptical attitude.¹⁵ The same cannot be said for the present-day Internet chroniclers of London's ghosts, who regurgitate garbled versions of Elliott O'Donnell's tales from Berkeley Square with enthusiasm: another room in this house of horrors was haunted by the ghost of a little girl who had been murdered by a sadistic servant, and yet another by the spirit of a young woman who had thrown herself from a top floor window after being abused by her wicked uncle; a large number of people had died from fright after encountering this formidable army of ghosts, from the time of George Canning until the present era.

Clearly, the time has come to shed some new light on this extraordinary property – the most haunted in London according to its Wikipedia entry.

ACCORDING TO ITS WIKIPEDIA ENTRY, 50 BERKELEY SQUARE IS THE MOST HAUNTED PROPERTY IN LONDON

THE INHABITANTS OF NO 50

It is curious that in 1876, before the debate on the Ghost of Berkeley Square, there was a newspaper story claiming that the spectre was the ghost of the daughter of the celebrated murderess Sarah Metyard, active in the 1750s. Sarah Metyard was a Mayfair harridan who kept a small knitting factory in Bruton Street,

not far from Berkeley Square, staffed with half-starved parish apprentice girls. She beat and flogged the girls for every misdemeanour, and one of them, Anne Naylor, died after being on the receiving end of a brutal beating. Sarah Metyard and her daughter dismembered the corpse and burnt some body parts, throwing the remainder of the body into an open sewer. When Anne Naylor's sister suspected that her sibling had been done away with, the two Metyards murdered her as well, and got rid of the body in the same manner. Four years went by, with the Bruton Street murderess flourishing, but then Sally the daughter informed on her mother after she had been mistreated herself. Both mother and daughter were hanged and then dissected at Surgeon's Hall. The 1876 newspaper story has Sally Metyard going into service in the house at Berkeley Square, and then haunting the premises after having perished on the

HOUSEHOLDERS OF NO. 50 BERKELEY SQUARE, 1842-2015

TIME	NAME	REPUTED TO BE HAUNTED?
1842-1859	Hon. Miss Curzon	No
1861-1881	not listed	Yes
1882	unoccupied	Yes
1883-1884	Miss Myers	?
1885-1886	Earl of Selkirk	No
1887-1920	Countess of Selkirk	No
1921-1937	Sir Philip Grey-Egerton Bart.	No
1938-2015	Maggs Bros.	No



scaffold, but in real life, she was living in sin with an admirer at the time she informed on her mother.¹⁶

Making use of the relevant Post Office directories, it was not difficult to make a list of the inhabitants of 50 Berkeley Square. The earliest directory is that of 1842, and we see that after the death of the Hon. Miss Curzon in 1859, the house was not listed until 1882, when it is described as unoccupied. Clearly, at a time when most householders in salubrious parts of London felt proud to be listed in the directories, the elusive Mr Myers

preferred anonymity. After the haunted years, there was a brief interregnum when Miss Myers was listed as the householder, before the Earl and Countess of Selkirk helped 50 Berkeley Square back to respectability during their lengthy residence. No Mr Bentley is ever listed as the householder, so the tale of R Thurston Hopkins must be a falsification. Nor is Major Du Pré on the list of householders, casting doubt upon his involvement with the haunted house; we also know that the house was reputed to be haunted long before

his alleged tenure some time in the early 1880s. Moreover, although Colonel William Baring Du Pré had two brothers, both Major Francis James Du Pré and Captain Charles Hinton Du Pré were fully sane, showing no predilection for chewing the carpets and foaming at the mouth in a locked garret in Berkeley Square.

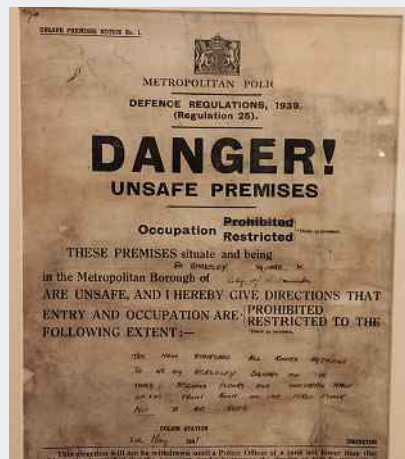
The next mystery to address is that of the 'eccentric gentleman', Mr Myers. In her *Reminiscences*, Lady Dorothy Nevill claims that a certain Mr Myers married her kinswoman Lady Mary Nevill, and that their offspring were the key players in the Berkeley Square mystery.¹⁷ Some research shows that this statement is nothing but the truth: on 2 January 1802, the East India Company clerk Thomas Myers married Lady Mary Catherine Nevill, the daughter of the second Earl of Abergavenny. Thomas Myers was born in 1764, the son of the Rev. Thomas Myers and his wife Anne Wordsworth. He was a clever, industrious man, who sought patrimony to enter the House of Commons, but the Earl of Abergavenny did not like him; the snobbish nobleman thought his daughter had married beneath her, and wanted nothing to do with Myers and his family. Before the premature death of Lady Mary in 1807, aged just 24, she had given birth to two children, Thomas and Mary Myers. Thomas Myers Sr served as MP for Yarmouth from 1810 until 1812, before sinking back into obscurity. He died in 1835, leaving a handsome fortune to his two children. Mary Myers became an old maid: a quaint old-world figure, of a very retiring disposition, she was well-known to Lady Dorothy Nevill, and told the memoir-writing noblewoman many stories about the haunted house at 50 Berkeley Square.

Miss Myers used to say that her brother, Thomas Jr, was very eccentric, to a degree that bordered upon lunacy. He had taken the house with the intention of living there together with his wife, for, at the time, he was engaged to be married. He furnished the house, and made every preparation to receive his bride there, but a few days before the wedding she jilted him for another man. Poor Mr Myers became even more deranged after this incident: he entrenched himself at 50 Berkeley Square and never left the house. He kept two live-in domestics, but



ABOVE: The Berkeley Square haunting as pictured in the *Illustrated Police News*, 23 December 1874.

INSIDE 50 BERKELEY SQUARE TODAY



ABOVE LEFT: 50 Berkeley Square today. TOP RIGHT: The Defence Regulations warning about the top two floors of the building, rendered unsafe by wartime bombing rather than paranormal activity. ABOVE RIGHT: The door to what is, according to legend, the most haunted room in London's "most haunted house".

Since 1938, 50 Berkeley Square has been home to Maggs Bros Ltd, established in 1853 by Uriah Maggs and today one of the world's largest antiquarian booksellers. The fame of the supposedly haunted house, though, has meant that, as well as collectors and bibliophiles, a steady stream of tourists, curiosity seekers and ghost hunters makes its way to the door of no 50.

Maggs's Alice Rowell told *FT* about the frustrations of dealing with these persistent visitors: "No matter how much evidence we produce to the contrary, ghost hunters have a very fixed view – that the ghost exists – and no logical conversation, in our experience, is likely to sway them. Ed [Maggs, the firm's managing director] likes to make them an offer: if they can produce a single first-hand account of one of the numerous haunting stories, we will let them bring their psychical research equipment and set up overnight – even on Halloween if they like – and have free reign over the place. Of course, they can't produce any evidence and to date this offer has only met with rather blank looks."

On rare occasions, though, Alice does allow a ghost hunter to explore the premises. "I did recently give in and show a young boy and his family around. He had done a school report on the building and proudly professed to know everything about it and the ghost. I tried to explain that the ghost stories had no basis in fact – that they had likely grown up around the fact the house had been empty for a period – but his faith was unwavering. Given that he was so passionate about the subject I relented and took him and his family to the attic, thinking how disappointed he would be to see how benign-looking that part of the building is – it's where the photography and accounts departments are.

"When I showed him the supposedly haunted room, however, his aunt knocked a book off the side with her backpack and the boy was so terrified he burst into tears and couldn't move for fear. He left believing in the ghost more than ever, and I went back to work bemused by the ghost hunter's deafness to reason and willingness to see the supernatural in the everyday."

Ed Maggs finds the unwavering faith of the ghost hunters a testament to the human imagination and its myth-making faculty as much as anything else.

Pointing to a photo of a wartime Air Raid warning advising the firm not to use the building's top two floors because of bomb damage to the house next door, he recalls "a unique moment, where I was privileged to see the birth of another layer of myth. Two young American women came in, asking about the ghost, and I gave them my normal polite rigmarole. One stiffened when she saw the sign and excitedly pointed it out to her friend. This became the 'even today the top two floors of the building are forbidden to the staff on account of its danger' story."

In the end, such prosaic explanations for ghostly legends cut little ice with the ghost hunters. "One of the things that baffles me about them," Ed adds, "is that they don't seem to see the absence of evidence as any hindrance at all. Especially with the Internet, people are terribly happy just to accept un-evidenced nonsense."

he made no exertions to keep the place in order, and it soon became very dilapidated. There is nothing to suggest that Thomas Myers Jr ever left 50 Berkeley Square: he remained at the house until the end, staying in his bedroom during daylight hours, but sometime taking a stroll through the empty rooms at night. In 1873, he was prosecuted at the Marlborough Street Police Court for neglecting to pay taxes that were due, and a warrant was issued against him.¹⁸ His death certificate says “30th November 1874, 50 Berkeley Square, Thomas Myers, Male, 71 Years, Gentleman, Paralysis agitans, Diseased heart certified, Jane Long present at the Death.” ‘Paralysis agitans’ is an archaic term for Parkinson’s disease, and it is understandable that an individual afflicted with this disagreeable, and at the time quite untreatable, disorder, would be inclined to stay indoors. Thomas Myers Jr was clearly a ‘gentleman’ without professional occupation, probably as a result of a substantial inheritance from his father. Jane Long, the witness on his death certificate, may well have been one of his maidservants.



LEFT: Lady Dorothy Nevill, the society memoir writer who had a few things to say about the Ghost of Berkeley Square.

Temple Bar magazine for February 1868; this story is virtually identical to that of the Berkeley Square house, except that the insane housemaid is taken to the doctor’s home instead of to the hospital.²⁰ When a correspondent to *Notes & Queries* wrote to Rhoda Broughton, asking if she had based her story on the Berkeley Square haunting, her reply was that she had in fact heard it from informants in the country.²¹ Thus it would seem as if life imitated art rather than the other way around: the wagging tongues of Mayfair transposed the elements of Rhoda Broughton’s ghost story to the dilapidated house inhabited by the ailing recluse Thomas Myers, in Berkeley Square.

The story of the Ghost of Berkeley Square is really a cautionary tale about Internet historiography: the online repositories are full of imaginative disinformation about the spectres of No 50, with various charlatans ‘improving on’ the bogus ghost stories of Elliott O’Donnell. The sad tale of a hermitical outcast from society, crippled by Parkinson’s disease, has conjured up a dozen formidable spectres, flitting round the dilapidated rooms of 50 Berkeley Square, ready for any mischief. Credulous people once tended to believe whatever they read in a book; today, they are lured into gullibility by various online fantasies, based upon decades of piling untruth upon exaggeration. In the ghostly Internet gloom, no nightingale sings in Berkeley Square – but the malevolent ghosts of No 50 have attained online immortality and are clearly looking forward to a long and eventful existence on the margins of London history. **FT**

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



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THE WHOLE TRUTH

To my mind, there is no doubt that the legend of the haunting of 50 Berkeley Square is linked to the very untidy and dilapidated look of the house during the residence of Thomas Myers. In elegant Berkeley Square, the property stood out like a sore thumb, and this set the tongues wagging: although the ailing Myers was still living there, there were rumours that the house had been deserted due to the persistent haunting. It is not uncommon that people believe badly neglected houses to be shunned because a notorious murder took place there, but not a single house in Berkeley Square is included among the Murder Houses of London. Alternatively, the dilapidated look of the house might inspire a ‘Miss Havisham’ or ‘Dirty Dick’ legend about some tragic recluse who had once been crossed in love. One example is Nathaniel Bentley’s old house in Leadenhall Street, another

a similarly neglected house at 19 Queen’s Gate, Kensington. Richard Whittington-Egan once investigated a Liverpool legend about a badly maintained house at 1 Mulgrave Street, reputed to have been the home of a ‘Miss Havisham’ character; the truth turned out to be that it had been deserted for many years after its owner had died in 1906, since his maiden sister thought it harboured too many painful memories.¹⁹

What is the source of the original Berkeley Square ghost story? According to an account in *Notes & Queries*, there was suspicious resemblance between the Berkeley Square ghost story and a spooky tale published in a collection called *Twilight Stories*, or perhaps *Tales for Christmas Eve*. It turns out that this anthology is the work of the once-famous literary lady Rhoda Broughton, and that it contains a ghost story entitled ‘The Truth, the Whole Truth, and Nothing but the Truth’, originally published in

FOOTNOTES

1 *Mayfair*, 10 May 1879. On Berkeley Square, see M Cathcart Borer, *A History of Berkeley Square*, London, 1977.

2 WE Howlett, *Notes and Queries* 5s. 12, 1879, pp87-8; T Westwood, *Notes and Queries* 6s. 2, 1880, p417; *Notes and Queries* 6s. 2, 1880, pp452, 471-2 and 514-6.

3 G Vincent, *Notes and Queries* 6s. 3, 1881, p30; see also CFS Warren, *Notes and Queries* 6s. 3, 1881,

pp151-2.

4 *Notes and Queries* 6s. 2, 1880, p435.

5 *Notes and Queries* 6s. 2, 1880, p516.

6 *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 25 June 1884; *Daily Mirror*, 29 July 1915; *Dundee Courier* 28 Apr 1924. According to JA Middleton, *The Grey Ghost Book*, 1912, pp16-50, Lady Selkirk never believed that there was any ghost on the premises.

7 *Cornishman*, 28 May 1908.

8 Elliott O’Donnell, *Ghosts Helpful and Harmful*, London, 1924, pp182-81.

9 Elliott O’Donnell, *Ghosts of London*, New York, 1933, pp26-33.

10 Elliott O’Donnell, *Phantoms of the Night*, London, 1956, pp 98-101.

11 CG Harper, *Haunted Houses*, London, 1907, pp106-9; *Daily Mirror*, 29 Sept 1928.

12 JA Middleton, *The Grey Ghost Book*, London, 1912, pp16-50.

13 Harry Price, *Poltergeist over England*, London, 1945, pp192-203.

14 R Thurston Hopkins, *Cavalcade of Ghosts*, London, 1956, pp21-7.

15 R Whittington-Egan, *Weekend Book of Ghosts No 5*, London, 1985, pp29-36.

16 *North Wales Chronicle*, 2 Dec 1876, *Illustrated Police News*, 23 Dec 1874; GT Crook (Ed.), *The Complete Newgate Calendar*, London, 1925, Vol. 4, pp59-63.

17 R Nevill (Ed.), *The Reminiscences of Lady*

Dorothy Nevill, London, 1906, pp301-5.

18 *Morning Post*, 29 Apr 1873.

19 Jan Bondeson, *Murder Houses of South London*, Leicester, 2015, pp303-5; R Whittington-Egan, *Liverpool Ghosts and Ghouls*, Liverpool, 1986, pp54-6.

20 R Broughton, *Temple Bar* 22, 1867-88, pp340-8.

21 CFS Warren, *Notes and Queries* 6s. 3, 1881, pp151-2.

A HAUNTING ON SCANDAL STREET THE COCK LANE GHOST REVISITED

ROGER CLARKE delves into the background of a notorious 18th-century haunting and finds that with its emphasis on sex, the supernatural and the seamy side of London life, the story of the Cock Lane ghost was in many ways a precursor to every tabloid sensation since...

In a Smithfield back alley in Georgian London the spirit of a dead woman is accusing her lover of murder. It's said the ghost of poor Fanny Lynes is demanding justice in the public séances which have now become the city's hottest ticket: in a cramped and malodorous children's bedroom a ghost raps out answers to questions spoken aloud. The man Fanny is accusing comes to one of these public séances with a priest and a lawyer – he's going to need them both. Welcome to the Cock Lane ghost. Welcome to the ghost of Scandal Street.

The case involves a number of firsts: the first story about a working-class family that became part of a 24-hour rolling news cycle; the first use of ante-tabloid chequebook journalism to poach writers and secure exclusives. It's a very early example of a ghost-seeking flash mob before they became established the following century, and features for the first time a senior royal *publically* putting himself into a 'haunted room', without simply, as in earlier times, sending over courtiers or trusted confidants to report back. It also introduces a distinct and peculiar novelty: the notion of the living *actually questioning spirits of the dead* in a domestic situation, over an extended period, and expecting answers that weren't chiefly of a religious nature, but rather tended towards the sensational and the melodramatic. It was the black, gin-soaked kernel of what was to become the full-blown Victorian table-tipping, underwear disturbing, trumpet-toting séance.

When I was about 11 years old I remember sitting in my English class, a cold room on the Sussex coast, listening as the famous opening lines of Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* were being read aloud to the boys. "Even the Cock-lane ghost,"



THERE WAS A GAY
SEX SCANDAL IN
ANOTHER PUB A FEW
DOORS DOWN FROM
THE HAUNTED ONE

Dickens had written, in his preamble on the causes of the French Revolution, "had been laid only a round dozen of years, after rapping out its messages..."

The young teacher paused his reading

and looked over at me; and since my interest in ghosts was a well-known thing at the school, especially after lights-out, he asked me about the Cock Lane ghost. Could I shed any light on it? To my annoyance I could not.

Thirty-five years later, when I came to write a sample chapter for my book *A Natural History of Ghosts* for Penguin, the subject I chose was the Cock Lane ghost. I once wrote that this ghost stands chiefly as a "pub joke gone wrong" and largely I stand by that analysis. What I didn't expect to uncover, while researching Cock Lane again recently for a documentary, was a gay sex scandal in another pub, just a few doors down from the haunted one, about eight months earlier.

A RIGHT ROYAL CIRCUS

It's late January 1762. A media circus – the first one. For weeks, rival newspapers have been fighting over access to the 'Cock Lane Ghost'. A dozen reputations hang in the balance. Who will win? The Parish Clerk of St Sepulchre's and his supporters, including some powerful men in the Methodist Church and the writer Samuel Johnson, or the man he has libelled with the accusation of a murder, William Kent, and his backers, including the Lord Mayor of London?

London is spinning like a weather vane, and on the wind is also news of England's latest war with Spain. A tempest, the worst in 20 years, is roaring across the city. Boats on the Thames are smashed to smithereens; roofs lift from walls and rain drives down the narrow and steep gully of a street behind St Sepulchre's on Snow Hill. For hundreds of years, this street has had an

LEFT: 'Scratching Fanny' and John Wilkes depicted in a satirical print by Hogarth. OPPOSITE PAGE: Cock Lane in a print from the 19th century.



GARTER & SONS
— ANOAT —
NEWCASTLE

WHIT BR

HOT S

insalubrious, guilt-wracked reputation. In the 14th century it was the London red light district, sited just outside the western city walls, and during the St Bartholomew Fair held every summer in the district, it still hosts courtesans who advertise their services with the sign 'soiled doves'.

The name is Cock. Cock Lane. Some commentators, aghast at the slatternly slash of it, the porno moniker, preferred to call it 'Cooke's Lane'.

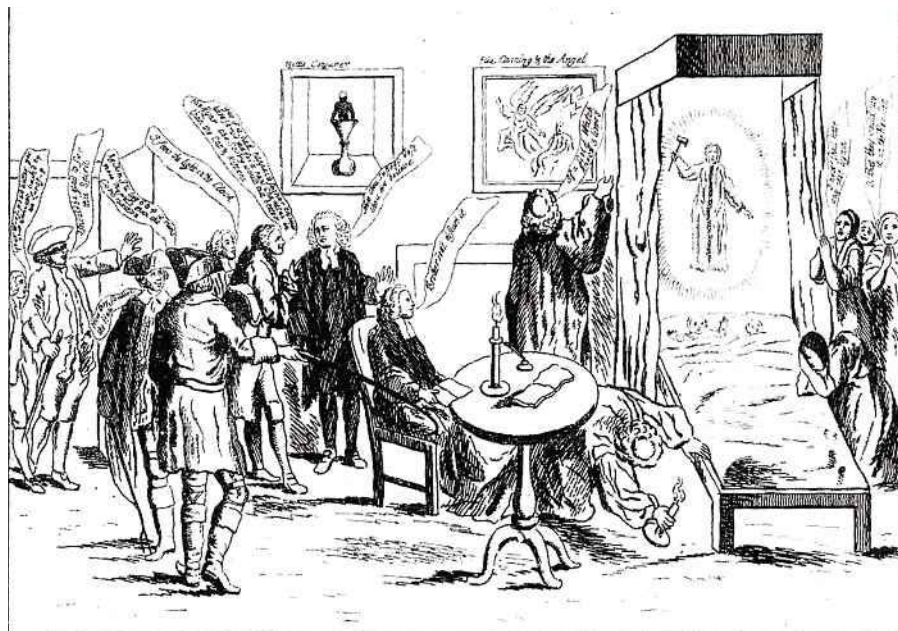
Drunken crowds bumpered with gin, their feet spattered with dung, spume and a morbid flux of warm animal grease from the Smithfield abattoirs have occupied this tight little street, gathering, most probably, late in the afternoon and certainly staying until the small hours. The second floor window of one house, number 20, has their fixed attention. A single tallow candle burns. Inside, a child is talking to the dead. It's important talk. She's giving evidence that a former lodger in this building has murdered his wife, and that this same lodger, a gentleman from Norfolk, so the line of thinking goes, has consequently defrauded her family out of a small fortune.

It's late, before midnight, and the rubbernecking crowds only reluctantly part to allow through a hackney carriage that has just driven up from Charing Cross. Inside is the brother of the King himself, the Duke of York, who has come to judge the "reigning fashion", egged on, it seems, by that homosexual aesthete and creator of the 'gothick', Horace Walpole. It's worth pointing out that up until August that year, Edward Duke of York was the 'heir presumptive' to the British throne.

It would have been – to make a modern analogy – a bit like Prince Charles and Gore Vidal visiting a famous haunted Enfield council house in 1977 and sitting on the bed of Janet Hodgson. Here though, instead of the David Soul posters, Walpole is disgusted to see washing lines above the beds of the girls, which reminds him of the strings used to manipulate puppets, or even a kind of noose, since he describes the fate of the little girl Betty at the centre of the ghost-mania, "whom they are murdering there by inches



ABOVE: The Duke of York (left) and Horace Walpole (right) paid a visit to Cock Lane in January 1762.



ABOVE: 'English Credulity, Or the Invisible Ghost', a contemporary view of the media circus around Cock Lane, depicted a crowd of sensation-seeking visitors to the 'haunted' house.

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN LIKE PRINCE CHARLES VISITING A FAMOUS HAUNTED COUNCIL HOUSE

in such insufferable heat and stench". The royal party leaves at 1.30am on Sunday morning.

Walpole, writing two days later to his childhood friend George Montagu, was under no illusions that the whole affair was a hoax. He was also well aware of the historic susceptibility of the royal family to the subject of the supernatural, once

recording that George II had "implicit faith in the German notion of vampires". One can imagine the Duke of York thinking on the superstitious fears of his grandfather during the excursion. As to what he had witnessed in Cock Lane, Walpole thought it was a "pantomime" which "a drunken parish clerk set... on foot out of revenge". He also thought the Methodist church was behind it, and this newly formed and rapidly expanding religion had in its earliest days a keen interest in the supernatural thanks to the childhood experiences of its founder John Wesley in Epworth Rectory. "The Methodists," Walpole observes tartly, "have promised them contributions". The Anglican Church, in one of its cyclical declines with dwindling congregations, had every reason to fear this popular and rapidly growing evangelical movement within and without its own churches.

Perhaps Walpole had a secondary reason to go to Cock Lane on that stormy night, and, as the hackney cab turned on Pye Corner from Giltspur St into Cock Lane, he gazed quickly at the public house that stood on the corner. Mere months earlier, the landlord of the Fortune of War (with some deliciousness formerly known as "The Naked Boy") had been convicted of sodomy and sentenced to death, a sentence quickly revoked, with a royal pardon given by the Duke of York's brother George III. Horace Walpole, a discreet gay man, well aware of the dangers of his core identity, would have known all about the trial and the sentence. Perhaps it was even discussed in the carriage as flashes of light danced off the small golden statue of a naked boy that stood also on the corner, a memorial set up to mark the furthest limits of the 1666 fire of London.

"Look," says the Duke, pointing at the pub. "My brother has recently pardoned that pitiful sodomite." "Scratching Fanny makes theatre only four doors down," responds

Walpole, changing the subject, as the crowd parts to let the carriage through.

SCRATCHING FANNY

“Scratching Fanny”, or “Miss Fanny’s New Theatre”, as the Cock Lane Ghost was known at the time, has its origins in a clandestine relationship. In October 1759, Richard Parsons, the clerk of St Sepulchre’s, the church that almost backs onto Cock Lane, showed a genteel couple to their pew for an early morning service. For some reason we shall never know, the man, William Kent, took a shine to this church official, and incorrectly assuming he was respectable, asked him for advice on lodgings. The house is long gone, but Parsons showed the couple to his own house in Cock Lane. Parsons had two daughters, and one, Elizabeth or Betty, was then aged 10. It was a modest three-storey house in an area just entering into a period of decline, but William Kent, whose wife was expecting a baby, and whose own house a few hundred yards away was not yet habitable, was keen to come to terms, and the deal was done.

The almost comedic element to this – and there is a comedic element running through the whole story – is that both tenant and lodger each thought the other party respectable: neither was. Despite his job at the church, Parsons was an alcoholic who was feeling the pinch; the government had recently hiked the tax on his favourite tippale and he could now no longer really afford the amount of booze he was used to drinking daily. He was beginning to indulge in supplemental scams alongside his drunken

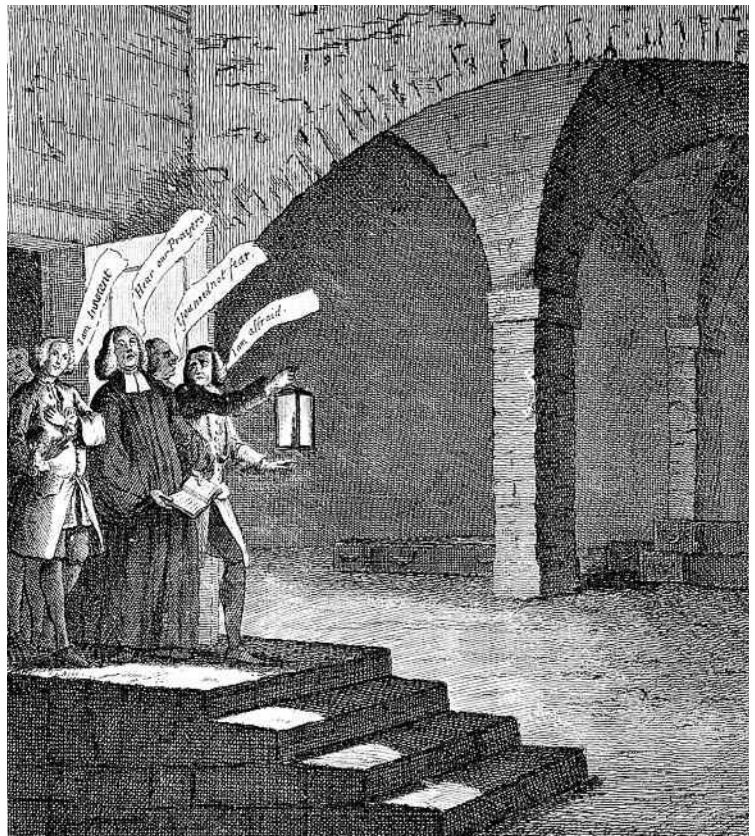
behaviour. He was also a gossip, a tattletale, a bit of a bad apple. He had, for example, been obscurely involved in a ‘malicious and ill-minded’ hate mail campaign only three years earlier, involving the death of someone just off Cock Lane.

William Kent on the other hand was not even married to his ‘wife’ Fanny Lynes, and had escaped from Norfolk to conceal an illegal relationship with his sister-in-law from their respective families. He’d buried his baby son and first wife Elizabeth and then run off with her sister Frances. On the down-low, caught out by an obscure quirk in canon law of the time which prohibited

marriage to a sister-in-law under certain conditions, Kent was about to become implicit in the dispatch of two siblings and so set up the endlessly reverberating wrath of the Lynes family.

Kent foolishly leant Parsons 12 guineas within days of moving in. At first everything seemed fine. Kent was often away on business, leaving his pregnant wife in the care of the Parsons family; Fanny often shared a room with the little Parsons girl for company, and it is said that one night she complained of the most violent noises wracking the room. Was this a later legend that got added on, or was it really a poltergeist precursor to the subsequent imposture? Is it possible there was genuine poltergeist activity at some point in the whole sorry saga? Fanny was frightened and disturbed by it. By all accounts little Betty and Fanny Lynes were fond of each other, and it seems unlikely the girl wanted to alarm the mother-to-be in her delicate state. It was only later that Betty was caught red-handedly faking it; to remorseless modern eyes, with the one-strike-and-you’re-out rule of judging mediums, that is usually enough to damn her (though I believe that this notion is currently under review in parapsychological circles).

The formerly cordial relationship between William Kent and Richard Parsons began to deteriorate. In January, Fanny fell gravely ill with smallpox in the sixth month of her pregnancy, and it was agreed that she should be moved for her comfort to Bartlett’s Court, not far from Cock Lane, off what is now Britton Street. Kent had bought the house



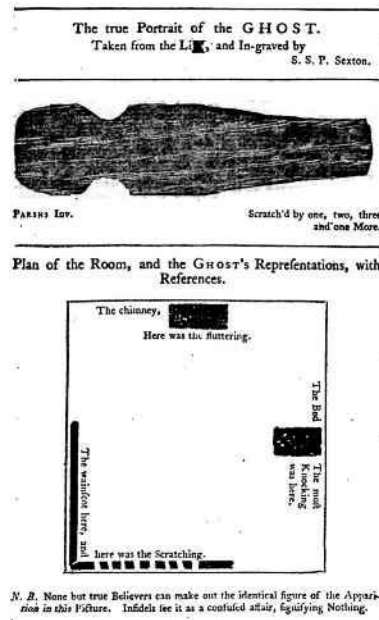
ABOVE LEFT: The ‘haunted’ house at 20 Cock Lane in a 19th century illustration. ABOVE RIGHT: The 1762 engraving ‘The Cock Lane Uproar’ took a cynical view of the story of the ghost. TOP: The Bell Man at St Sepulchre’s Church, just off Cock Lane, speaking admonitory words to prisoners on their way to execution in an engraving of 1785.

earlier, but delays in the restoration of the building are what had forced him into the Cock Lane lodgings.

PHASMOPHOBIA

Just before Fanny's death, Parsons refused to begin paying back the loan. He'd worked out, or had been told by Kent, that Fanny was not legally his wife. He felt safe to defy him. Kent impulsively put the matter in the hands of a solicitor. In late January 1760, as Fanny lay dying elsewhere, the Cock Lane poltergeist seemed to unfold itself again like a spider from a ball; the noises it was making were so loud that the neighbours began to complain, including a man who is crucial to this story – the publican of the next-door drinking house known as the Wheat Sheaf. His name was James Franzen, and he had a very interesting affliction: a pathological and disabling fear of the supernatural. It's called 'phasmophobia', and Franzen is interesting in this regard, as he's one of the first people we come across in modern England with this clear psychological condition. Even later, during the court case, after the affair seemed taken quite clearly to be a fraud, Franzen was almost paralysed with fear in the witness box and could hardly be heard as he whispered his account through pale lips. It may seem ludicrous to us now that someone could die from a fear of seeing ghosts, but there are actually historical cases of this happening. In 1857, a farm servant called John Percival spent three months in prison after impersonating a ghost and frightening a 15-year-old to death. Percival was acquitted in part because the law could not decide if posing as a ghost was actually a criminal offence.

One night, Parsons lured Franzen next door and staged a fake apparition for the poor man to see, claiming it was a ghost related to William Kent – in fact his *first* wife, Elizabeth Lynes (Fanny was not yet dead). Having put a sheet over his head and scared the poor man out of his wits, Parsons, sheetless but three-sheets-to-the-wind, pursued the landlord back to his pub, demanding entry and, most



PARSONS PUT A SHEET OVER HIS HEAD AND SCARED THE POOR MAN OUT OF HIS WITS

crucially, the largest brandy that the publican could provide.

Between January 1760 and December 1761, the world of 20 Cock Lane drifts somewhat out of focus from the records. There's no evidence of this, but it's a safe assumption that Richard Parsons was happy to let this situation continue – who knows how many free glasses of brandy he managed to scam off Franzen, who must have been living in a state of perpetual fear. But in

the middle of this 'dead period' there was another eruption in Cock Lane. The Fortune of War used to stand on the corner of Cock Lane. The landlord was Thomas Andrews. On Saturday 18 April 1761, a friend of his sister's, one John Finnimore, a man we know almost nothing about, begged shelter for the night, and Finnimore obliged after remembering that his wife was out of town and said they could share his marital bed (a practice not uncommon at the time). Finnimore was already drunk when he arrived that evening, and carried on drinking at the Fortune. They both went to bed. Some hours later, Finnimore was awoken from his stupor by a sharp pain – "and found Andrew's yard in his body". Finnimore later claimed he woke, objected, was unable to leave since the door was locked, and was finally persuaded by Andrews to come back to bed. No sooner had he dozed off than Andrews tried to bugger him again. This time, Finnimore insisted on being let out of the room and then the building. On Monday, Andrews received a visit from the constable, and was arrested and detained. The matter went to trial and Andrews was condemned to death, but had his sentence commuted by George III and was later pardoned entirely.

Parsons would have known both Andrews and Finnimore, who had stayed at Mrs Meade's house in Cock Lane, possibly as a servant. Mrs Meade is of interest to historians because she's the mother-in-law of John Wilkes, who stayed in her house in Red Court, Cock Lane, until his marriage broke down in 1756. Wilkes was a libertine, a member of the Hellfire Club and a magnificent anti-establishment figure. As an MP at the time, and knowing Finnimore, it seems possible that he made a representation to the King over the case, which is important for being one of the earliest instances in which a gay man was shown clemency by a previously pitiless executive.

How does this affect the Cock Lane ghost? Well, it provides a further sense of Cock Lane as an interzone, a great furnace of the Saturnalian, a place of misrule and exception where regular laws were somehow suspended. This is an area where the cries of slaughtered animals and the patients in Barts Hospital never left the soundscape, belled onwards by St Sepulchre, which tolled a tocsin every time a Newgate prisoner was prepared for execution. This is the place where the four-week August revelries of the Bartholomew Fair was the Burning Man of its day – all clowning, drinking and eating, full of pantomimes and mad animal shows; indeed, it was considered so libidinous and bawdy that it seems to have caused the death of Baptist preacher John Bunyan, who expired at the bottom of Cock Lane in 1688 when the fair was being celebrated.

The Fortune of War scandal began to fade. The summer 1761 fair passed by. On 31 August we find William Kent married for a second time to one Bathsheba Bowers; he didn't waste much time, and it didn't look very good. He must have been aware that the Lynes family were preparing to move against him in the courts, outraged that the will of Fanny had so favoured him. And so it proved.



TOP: The wooden board used by Betty to create the supposedly supernatural raps.

ABOVE: The room on the second floor of 20 Cock Lane where the drama played out.



TOP: The Golden Boy above the Fortune of War pub at Pye Corner, the junction of Giltspur Street and Cock Lane.

A Bill of Complaint was submitted to the Lord Chancellor on 31 October by Fanny's brother. Hallowe'en was about to come calling.

We get to December. After a visit from an investigator, Parsons finally learns of the Lynes family lawsuit against William Kent, against whom he still nurses a keen sense of grievance. Parsons used this knowledge to put more pressure on his phasmophobic landlord friend James Franzen, inviting him round for what turns out to be the first Cock Lane séance. Franzen was seated upstairs when he heard scratching and knocking sounds. "The ghost has returned," said Mrs Parsons solemnly. "Elizabeth Lynes?"

"This time we think it is Fanny Lynes who comes to revenge her murder".

Franzen fled the house in his usual abject panic, probably failing to hear the laughter behind him.

TESTING BETTY

Intriguingly, the first Methodist foray into the world of the Cock Lane ghost, an immensely damaging one that the Church would live to regret, involved two African students at the Charity School, which stood opposite 20 Cock Lane. These two young men, part of a tiny African elite being educated in London, had approached Reverend John Moore about the ghostly noises from across the street, and after enquiries Moore realised that this house belonged to the officiating clerk of St Sepulchre's, where Moore had preached.

The Methodists of this era were ghost-believers, something that has since rather fallen off the Church's agenda. Its founder John Wesley had the famous Epworth poltergeist bother his family in his youth, though he wasn't at home in Lincolnshire when it took place. Wesley made no secret of his belief. Like the Neo-Platonist, ghost-hunting vicar Joseph Glanville, he believed that ghosts might be proof of supernatural power, and thus proof of God – minor proof, of an inferior light-show variety, but still proof.

In January 1762, Parsons organised a séance for Moore at Cock Lane. Moore quickly became convinced of the reality of the haunting, and that it really was the ghost of Fanny Lynes. This had incredible theological implications, and if somehow the Methodist church could be at the forefront of proving it, they would gain an authority and a power that would leave the Anglicans in the dust. It was a high-stakes gamble. By the time he left the house at midnight there were a dozen or so people standing outside to hear the knocking noises that the ghost was making. It had begun.

At another séance, bigger and bolder than before, on 5 January, the knocks explicitly accused Kent of murder. The *Public Ledger* began fielding the story. Kent read it and decided to approach Reverend Moore. Kent agreed to attend a séance on 12 January. At one point Parsons cried out: "Kent! Ask the ghost if you are to be hanged!"

On 18 January, Kent returned once again to Cock Lane, and this time he brought allies, including a lawyer, his own clergyman, Reverend Stephen Aldrich, and Fanny's apothecary.

"Are you Fanny Lynes?"

One knock for yes.

The next day, Moore was summoned to the Lord Mayor's office, where he boldly asked for the arrest of William Kent. That evening there was another séance. Kent again attended. Further accusations were hurled, but the 'ghost' was beginning to make mistakes. These two séances really gave the story legs – the *Public Ledger* began to vie for coverage with the *Daily Gazetteer*. By 21 January, nearly all the London papers were running the story: the *St James Chronicle*, the *London Chronicle* and *Lloyd's Evening Post*. On 23 January, Reverend Aldridge published a takedown of the Moore/Parsons position.

Such was the growing public disorder in the locality that Betty was taken out of 20 Cock Lane and moved round some neighbouring houses, where the séances

continued. At the Lord Mayor's insistence, Aldrich moved decisively to get Betty removed from Cock Lane and tested elsewhere, with a committee including Lord Dartmouth (who was incidentally connected by family to the Hinton Ampner haunting; see FT309:28-32) and Dr Johnson, to decide on her truthfulness. Walpole and York then visited on 31 January. The next day, Monday 1 February, members of this committee found themselves in a church crypt where the ghost of Fanny Lynes had promised to knock on her own coffin lid. On 7 February, Aldrich began his testing of Betty, first in nearby Hosier Lane and then in Covent Garden, where she was eventually unmasked, having smuggled a wooden board into her bed on which to knock.

In July 1762, Moore and Parsons were two of the five people put on trial and convicted. Parsons was put in the stocks at the bottom of Cock Lane, where he was treated kindly by his neighbours. Moore died only six years later, aged only 35. The haunted house survived until the 1980s, when it was demolished.

Cock Lane is a small, forgotten street these days, for several years not important enough for Google Earth even to cover. It's dingy and dark, sprawling with ugly 1980s developments. It's surprising to see how much of it was still standing in 1965 when Douglas Grant wrote his book on the story: he photographed it emerging like a white skull with dirty teeth from a fog, with 'Peter's Refreshments' beside it, the lineal descendent of The Wheaf Sheaf (which records seem to indicate was never formally a public house). The Fortune of War is long gone too, though in later years achieved new notoriety for being a Resurrectionist's haunt, also an official morgue for bodies of the drowned north of the Thames. It was demolished in 1910. But the Golden Boy still stands on the corner, offering a warning from the upper floor – for it was on the upper floors of Cock Lane where all the trouble started, and in the streets below where it was all played out. **F**

FURTHER READING

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The Cock-Lane ghost; being an authentic account of that extraordinary affair, which happened in the beginning of the year 1762, to the great terror and surprise of all London, printed by J Dean... for J Ker; sold also by Champante and Whitrow... and others, c. 1805.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



ROGER CLARKE is a former writer and film critic at the *Independent*. His book *A Natural History of Ghosts* is widely available from Penguin and has recently been published in Germany and Spain.

NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS

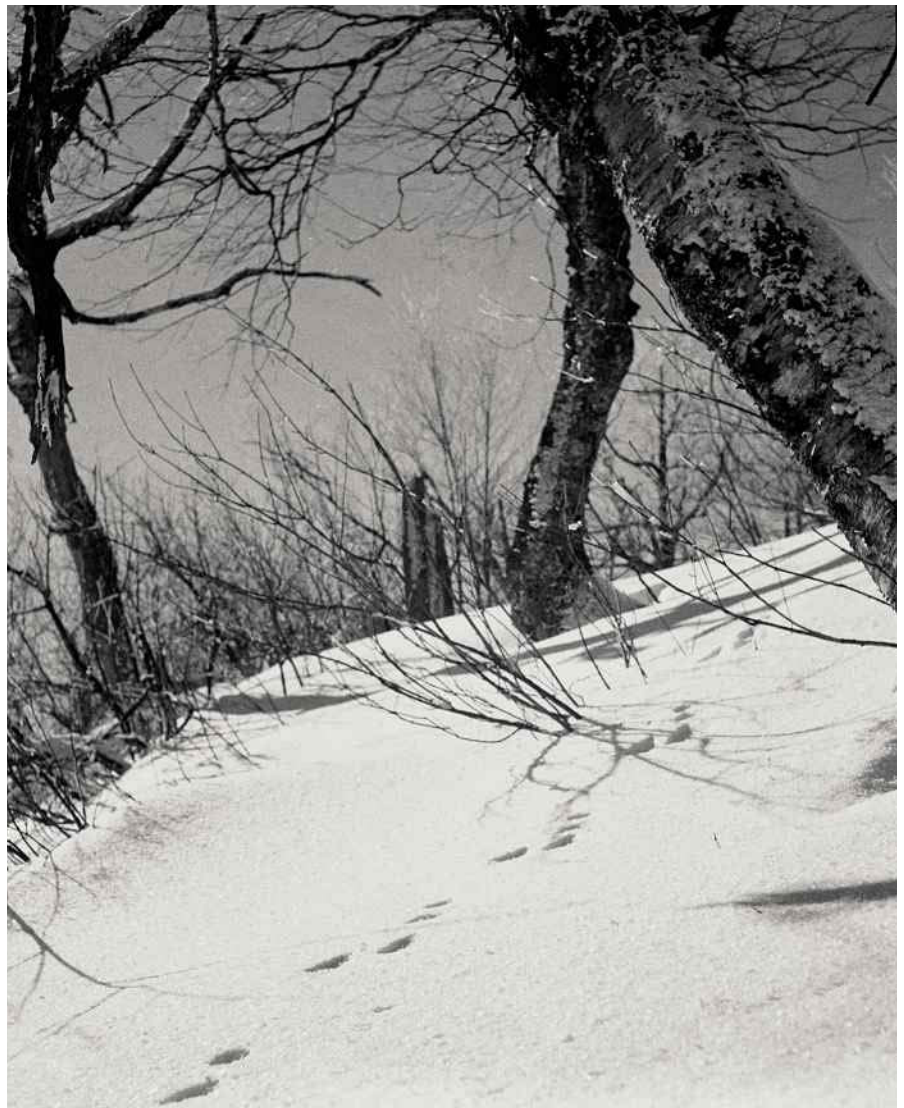
THE STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE OF OLIVER LERCH

On Christmas Eve 1889, young Oliver Lerch went out to fetch some water from the well and was never seen again, his cries of terror echoing in the night skies over Indiana...

THEO PAIJMANS and **CHRIS AUBECK** turn literary detectives and attempt to trace this enduring weird tale back to its ultimate source.

Of all the stories of mysterious vanishings, none strikes a greater chord than that of the disappearance of Oliver Morton Lerch. On Christmas Eve 1889, a party of well-to-do farmers and their families were gathered in the Lerch house near South Bend, Indiana. At about 11.30pm, 20-year-old Oliver Lerch was asked by his father to fetch water from a well some 75 yards to the rear of the house. Snow had been falling all evening, but the night was clear with a full moon. Braving the cold, he picked up the bucket and went outside. Five minutes later, the guests heard him shout for help. Led by the boy's father, they all rushed through the door, where they found his tracks in the snow. Strangely, the young man's footprints stopped short of the well, as if he had disappeared suddenly. The guests swore they heard a faint voice, far up in the pitch-black night sky, exclaiming: "Help, it has got me!" Oliver Lerch was never seen again.

Over the years, this story has been retold in countless books and articles, to the point that even today a Google search for it produces thousands of results in several languages. There is something universally disturbing about tales of missing children, especially when their ultimate fate remains a mystery. But what exactly *is* the story of Lerch? Was it fiction, folklore or a genuine incident? Judging by its continuing popularity, we could say it has gained the status of a folk legend, kept alive through the decades by newspapers, magazines and eventually, compilations of strange and fortean tales.¹ Tracing the story through countless incarnations in the press, we met with a few interesting variations: a writer of fortean potboilers in the 1960s, for



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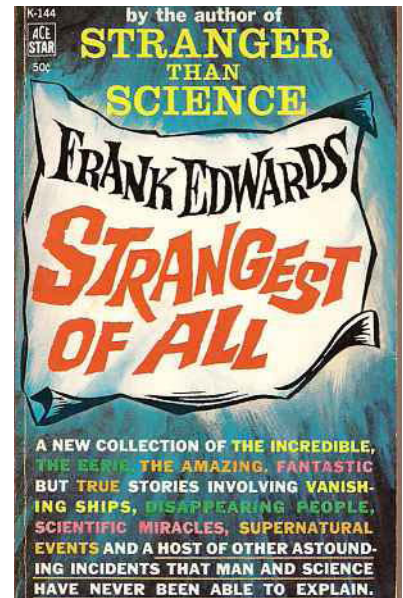
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Published at intervals of six weeks by CLARK PUBLISHING COMPANY, 1144 Ashland Avenue, Evanston, Illinois.
Registered as second-class matter September 14, 1949 at Post Office, Evanston, Ill., under No. 407 of March 22, 1975, as provided by the Act of June 11, 1954, additional entry at Council, New Hampshire. We do not accept responsibility for the return of unsolicited manuscripts, photographs or artwork.
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ABOVE: The story of Oliver Lerch's disappearance was told in *FATE* magazine of September 1950 and again by Frank Edwards in his 1956 book *Strangest of All*.

instance, simply switched the story to Wales, renaming the boy “Oliver Thomas.”² Going further back, we found even more confusing versions, and possibly the answer to the riddle at the heart of the story.

THE FATE VERSION

For a long time, it was assumed the Lerch story originated in the pages of *FATE*, an American magazine devoted to UFOs and the paranormal, with the publication of “What Happened to Oliver Lerch?” in September 1950.

It appeared to be a full account, with details such as the time and date of the event and several named witnesses among the 20 guests: Tom Lerch, head of the family; Oliver’s unnamed mother and elder brother Jim, aged 23; Oliver’s pretty girlfriend, Lillian Hirsch; and Methodist minister Reverend Samuel Mallalieu. Its writer, Joseph Rosenberger, threw in some theories for good measure. Did the grapnel of a passing balloon drag off Oliver? Did an eagle carry him away? Did one of the guests, jealous of the attentions of Lillian, murder the lad and stash his body somewhere?

Rosenberger’s article was influential among early fortean and UFO writers, who were quick to suggest yet another theory: Lerch had been one of the first UFO abductees.³

It was taken seriously enough to be mentioned in a list of mysterious disappearances compiled by the then Vice-President of the Pennsylvania Folklore Society who located the event in Indiana County.⁴ However, when Rosenberger was asked years later whether the tale was true at all, he confessed: “There is not a single bit of truth to the Oliver Lerch tale. Every single bit is fiction. I wrote the damn piece way back when, during the lean days...”⁵

This would have been the end of the line for Oliver Lerch if, a few years ago, we had not come across evidence that the story was much older.

THE GUESTS HEARD A FAINT VOICE FAR UP IN THE NIGHT SKY EXCLAIMING: “HELP, IT HAS GOT ME!”

GOING BACK IN TIME

As historians of forteana, our search for tales of the weird and uncanny takes us down many obscure byways, to books and articles published at the turn of the 19th century and beyond. This is necessary since iconic fortean tales were often born in the pages of long forgotten turn-of-the-century publications. These stories caused ripple effects. They were picked up, embellished and distributed further by yet other newspapers and magazines, until the public wearied of reading them and they were finally allowed to die. But then, after any number of years, they could just as easily spring back to life at the hands of another writer who might stumble across them in a library and claim they were “exclusive scoops”. In our research we have observed this process countless times, and it turns out that the story of Oliver Lerch was no different: Rosenberger lied!

Before 1950, the Oliver Lerch story had already gained the attention of the international press. In 1947, an Australian newspaper published the story a few days before Christmas as “a weird, true Christmas story”,⁶ and the trail did not stop there. The *LA Times* repeated the tale in 1939,⁷ and in 1937 the English newspaper *Lancashire Evening Post* retold the story as the second in what it advertised as “a new series of real-life puzzles with solutions offered by famous authors”. J. Jefferson

Farjeon was asked to crack the Lerch riddle; his ingenious solution involved murder most foul and an act of ventriloquism.⁸ We searched deeper still and found that Lerch’s story was repeated even further back in time, in 1921,⁹ in 1914,¹⁰ in an Australian newspaper in 1913,¹¹ in several American and New Zealand newspapers in 1907,¹² and in a number of American, Australian and New Zealand newspapers in December 1906.¹³ It seemed that the harder we looked, the older the story became. We felt like geologists, peeling back dusty strata in our search for the elusive original source. The story and its reach had evidently been far greater than anyone thought. Rather than a fringe topic that had spread from the pages of *FATE* to a niche audience interested in the paranormal, it had captivated the imagination of generations of readers on a global scale. We still had to find out who wrote it, however.

THE SCRAP BOOK

The first breakthrough came when we came across an article published in the New York magazine *The Scrap Book* in November 1906, entitled “Stories of Strange Disappearances”. It was an unremarkable compilation of people who had gone missing, except for the last account, titled “Vanished Into Space”.¹⁴ This was the Oliver Lerch story, over 40 years before Rosenberger sold it – almost word for word – to *FATE*. It was advertised as an “original article written for the Scrap Book”, but unfortunately the author was anonymous and there was not a single source or reference. Before we could determine whether anything truly happened that frightful Christmas Eve, we needed to be sure of the details.

Taking a second look at the clippings we had collected, we noticed a small and puzzling reference among the newspapers recounting the Lerch story in 1907. The *Elkhart Review*, a small newspaper

THE MAN WHO DISAPPEARED

BY IRVING LEWIS.



Many of the Farmers Ran Back into the House.

Young Lerch Left a Christmas Eve Gathering, Walked in the Snow for a Few Paces and Then Vanished, Leaving Only Some Footprints and a Still Small Voice to Guide His Mystified Friends

and children, filled the Lerch home, which was a good-sized house standing on a small hill with its side to the old road running from Elkhart to Chicago. The Lerch family consisted of Mr. Lerch, his wife and five children. One of the latter was Oliver Morton Lerch, 20 years old, who was named after the Hoosier State's war governor, a distant relative of young Lerch's mother. Among the guests was the Rev. Samuel Asbury Mallieau, a Methodist minister, who was born and "raised" in Richmond, Ind., and was a descendant of one of the old Huguenot families which settled that section. The Rev. Mr. Mallieau had retired from the pulpit two years previous to the incident now being related because of ill health, and was living on a rented farm near the Lerch homestead. Mr. Mallieau is a man of high character and was for the truth of the story of the disappearance of young Lerch.

The Rev. Mr. Mallieau is now living on Harrison street in Elkhart, Ind., where he recently talked about the Lerch mystery.

Another man who attended the Christmas Eve party at the Lerch home was William H. H. Noakes, whose father was elected governor of the Hoosier State the year that Gen. William Henry Harrison was chosen President. Mr. Noakes, now well advanced in years, is a practicing lawyer, with an office in the Mansfield Building, Chicago, and asserts the truth of the Lerch affair. Still a third witness is Mrs. Henry Cabell, whose husband was a Kevotokian. This woman, now a widow, is living with her son, Clay D. Cabell, in Gosden, Elkhart County, Ind., where the son is prominent in politics, having held the office of county clerk for many years, and having served as a Presidential elector on the McKinley ticket in 1896.

Oliver Lerch at 10:30 o'clock the evening of the party was told by his father to take a bucket and fill it at a well about seventy-five yards from the house, down the slope and to the rear. A heavy snow had been falling all the evening, and it had cleared off, the moon was out and the night was nearly as light as day.

About five minutes after Lerch had started for the well the persons in the parlor heard him cry for help. The men and some of the women ran out to the rear of the house, but could see nothing of Oliver Lerch. They heard him cry several times for help, and a feeling of fear came over them when it was discovered that the voice of the young man sounded as if in the air. The older Lerch shouted: "Oliver's

voice, apparently about one hundred feet up in the air, cried: 'It's got me. Help me.' Some of the witnesses declared that the young man cried, 'They've got me.'

The disappearance, the voice in the air, the unheard, uncanny nature of the whole thing, caused a panic among the farmers, and many of them ran back into the house. Mr. Lerch and three of the bolder ones, including the Rev. Mr. Mallieau, stood their ground. A few of the others returned and for an hour they shouted to Oliver, and heard him reply. The young man's replies were each time given in a fainter voice. Not the voice of one who was growing weaker, but the voice of a person who was gradually being taken farther away from the earth.

He was ended at 11:35 o'clock, and from that moment up to the present time nothing has ever been heard or seen of him. He vanished utterly from the earth. It was as if he never had existed. Apparently he was taken by some invisible force out into space, never to return again.

Scientists and curious investigators, including half a hundred newspaper men, went to the scene of the disappearance, but nothing was ever learned or found that could throw light on this strangest of all mysteries. Lerch's footprints in the clean snow ended about 75 feet from his house, and there was no other track in the snow. The bucket he was carrying was in the snow at the point where his footprints ended.

Many efforts were made and theories advanced to account for his taking away. Some thought that some great flying monster of the air had carried him off. Others thought that a dozen strong captives may have combined and swooped down on Lerch at the same time and taken him away. A small number of learned men advanced the idea that the neck of a balloon had caught Lerch, but there was no evidence to show that a balloon had made an ascension anywhere in America on the day he disappeared.

It must be confessed that a majority of persons who discussed the story did not believe it. At the request of relatives this statement was issued:

"SOUTH BEND, Ind., Jan. 9, 1905.
"We, the undersigned, solemnly affirm that the following is true: A man of the name of Bradley J. Lerch, residing at the home of Bradley J. Lerch, near South Bend, Ind., on Christmas Eve, 1889, disappeared, leaving only some footprints and a still small voice to guide his mystified friends."



Mr. Lerch and Three of the Bolder Ones Stood Their Ground

10:30 o'clock Oliver M. Lerch took a bucket and went to fill it with water. Shortly after he had left the house we heard him call for help, a went outside. His voice came from up in the air. His footprints stopped suddenly about seventy-five feet from the house. (Signed.)

- "SAMUEL ASBURY MALLIEAU
- "WILLIAM H. H. NOAKES,
- "A. HUNSCHEBER,
- "OWEN B. HECKES,
- "MRS. LUCY GOODE CABELL,
- "FREDERICK AVELEY,
- "JOHNSTONE WILLIAMS,
- "CHANNING HANFORD,
- "ANDERSON M'KENZIE,
- "GOTTLIEB GUTH."

THE death of Bradley J. Lerch, a farmer living four miles southeast of South Bend, Ind., on December 9, recalls to mind a story that fifteen years ago stirred the whole country with amazement. Lerch was the father of 'The Man Who Disappeared.' In the neighborhood of the Lerch homestead the story of the younger Lerch's disappearance was generally believed, but in the country at large few were found who did not declare the story to be a hoax. And yet, incredible as was the narrative of the taking off of young Lerch, its truth was touched for by half a score of persons.

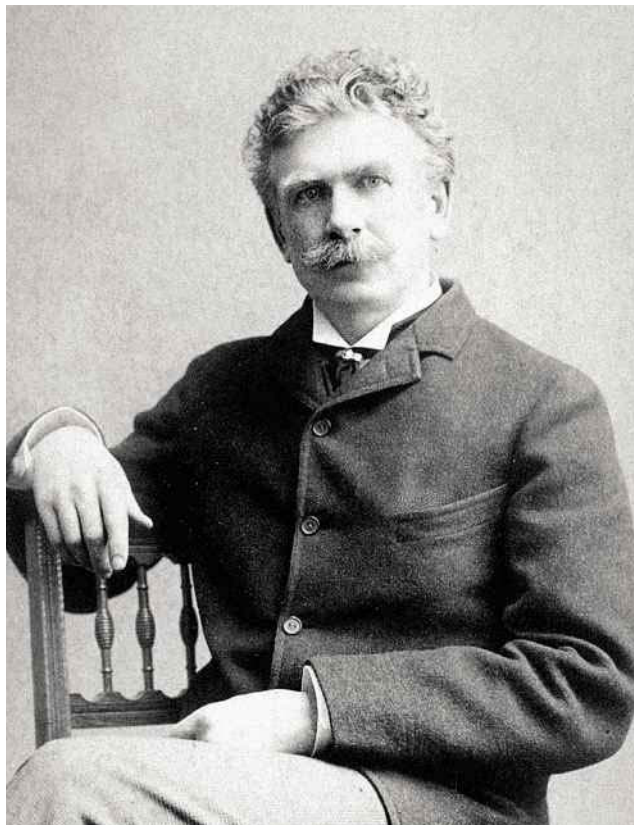
The man actually and literally was removed from the face of the earth fifteen years ago, and from that time to this never has been seen and nothing has been heard of him or his possible whereabouts.

Nothing quite so uncanny or mysterious had ever been reported. On the night of December 24, 1889, a party gathered at the home of Bradley J. Lerch, near South Bend, Ind., on Christmas Eve, 1889.

TOP: The earliest version of the Lerch story, by Irving Lewis, published on Christmas Day 1904. BELOW: Writer Ambrose Bierce - Lewis's inspiration for the tale?

published in Elkhart, Indiana, mentioned how a "Mishawaka correspondent" had provided a story about the apparition of a slain woman seen in the house where she was brutally murdered. It continued: "The same correspondent is the one who gave the hair-raising story of the 'transcension' of Oliver Lerch, near Mishawaka, on Christmas night, 1889".¹⁵ Mishawaka is a city on the St Joseph River, in the South Bend-Mishawaka Metropolitan area, but what really piqued our interest was the implication that the identity of the author of the Oliver Lerch story was known.

Focusing on this particular newspaper, we found an even earlier source. In early January 1905, the *Elkhart Review* commented that: "A telegraph liar who seems to be the grandfather of them all has sent a story from Mishawaka..." Following this, the Lerch story was repeated in full.¹⁶ It felt as though, at last, we were getting close to the ultimate source, and we burrowed through countless online and offline newspaper archives with renewed vigour. It still took us several more years to crack the case, but crack it we did: not only did we find the very first publication of the Oliver Lerch story, but we also discovered who wrote it.



THE MAN WHO DISAPPEARED
On 25 December 1904, almost two years before the story was printed in the *Scrap Book*, it appeared in the New York *Sunday Telegraph*. The Lerch story occupied the

entire upper half of the page. It was wonderfully illustrated, signed by its author and contained enough information to enable us to assess whether the tale was truthful or a yarn.

The article was entitled 'The Man Who Disappeared' and written by Irving Lewis. This version, we can now confirm, is the earliest telling of the story: Irving Lewis brought Oliver Lerch into the world on Christmas Day, 1904.

This original account differs little from later retellings, but it contains details found nowhere else. Irving writes that he was prompted to discuss the tragedy by the recent death of Bradley J Lerch, Oliver's father. The event took place on Christmas Eve 1889 at the Lerch home, a house on a hill four miles from South Bend, Indiana, near the old Elkhart to Chicago road. The family consisted of Mr and Mrs Lerch and their five children, including Oliver Morton Lerch, who was named after the Hoosier State's war governor, a distant relative. The disappearance occurred at 10.30pm. After Lerch vanished, his voice could be heard in the air, fainter and fainter, as if he were being carried away.

Scientists, investigators and 50 journalists visited the scene, but nothing was ever seen of the young man again.

The most important addition in this

version is not the date or the details concerning the house, but the inclusion of a sworn statement at the end of the story signed by 10 individual witnesses to the incident. We immediately recognised that this was crucial to our investigation. If the witnesses turned out to be fictional, the story could finally be laid to rest.

The first name on the list was Reverend Samuel Asbury Mallalieu. Mallalieu, it said, was a retired, somewhat ill Methodist minister born and raised in Richmond, Indiana, “a descendant of the old Huguenot families which settled in that section”. Census records show that no man of this name lived in the 19th or 20th centuries. There were, however, two clergymen named Mallalieu alive at the time, one in Pennsylvania named Richard Mallalieu (as per the 1900 census), and Willard Francis Mallalieu (1828-1911), an American Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church. This second man was undoubtedly the inspiration for the character in the story. According to a reliable biography, he was “descended from French Huguenot stock.”¹⁷

Mallalieu, therefore, was a disappointment. Our hopes were raised momentarily by name two on the list, William HH Noakes. This man actually existed, and was indeed a farmer in Indiana. Unfortunately, census records give his date of death as 25 December 1878. By 1889 his mortal remains had lain in Iola Cemetery, Allen County, Kansas, for 11 years. The next witness, Mrs Lucy Goode Cabell, wife of Henry, is a mystery. There was no Lucy Cabell in Elkhart or anywhere else, and the only Henry Cabell alive in 1889 was a 15-year-old African American cook living in Marion, Indiana. We next sought the farmer, A Hunsicker, who turned out to be Indiana resident Alva R Hunsicker, born in 1878. We got the distinct impression that Lewis had based his characters on people from Indiana that he had met, perhaps as an in-joke at Christmas time. This would be the case with another man in the list, Gottlieb Orth. Orth lived in Lafayette, Indiana, according to the City Directory of 1903, but the Naturalisation Records Index stated he arrived in the United States from Switzerland in 1892, aged four.

We soon found the remaining people in the list simply did not exist: Owen B Hicks, Johnstone Williams, Channing Ramford, Anderson McKenzie. By this point we began to imagine Oliver’s eerie call of “Help me! They’ve got me!” was intended for us.

CHARLES ASHMORE’S TRAIL

In its modern rendition, the boy’s father was called Thomas Lerch. In the *Sunday Telegraph*’s version, he is named Bradley. Genealogical records prove that neither of these men existed. The true father of Oliver Lerch was the tale’s author, Irving Lewis, who was immediately traceable.

Irving J Lewis is listed in the New York City Directory of 1897 as a resident at 483 9th Street, Brooklyn, with the occupation of editor. He appears in later editions at other

addresses.¹⁸ According to census records, he was born in March 1860 in Concord, Ohio. He and his three brothers originally studied to become lawyers, to the point where they put up a sign in Cleveland, Ohio, that read “Lewis, Lewis, Lewis & Co”, but the firm never made any money. They all ended up becoming journalists at the *Chicago Times*, where Irving was an “all-round man”.¹⁹ He would later become the managing and dramatic editor at the *Telegraph*, where his brother WE Lewis was already the general editor.

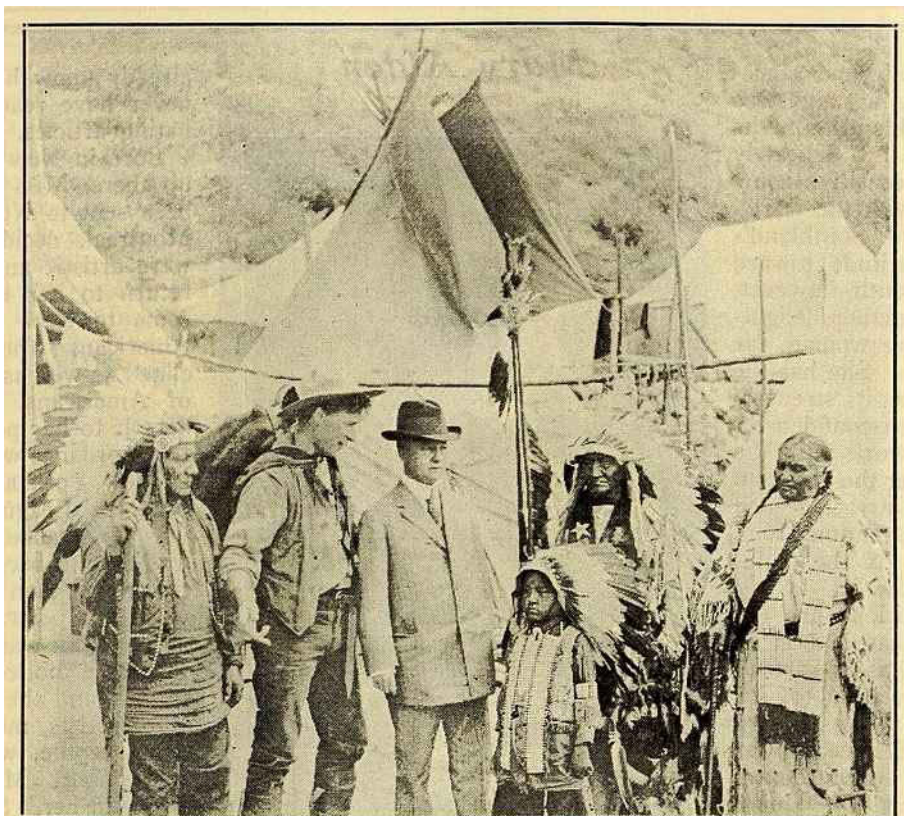
Lewis was not known for writing fantastic fiction. Either the Lerch story was a one-off or he habitually used a *nom de plume* for any other work in the genre. From where did he get his inspiration? The answer is surprisingly simple: he adapted it from a story by Ambrose Bierce, a man who, as it happens, also disappeared in strange circumstances (see FT194:43-44, 269:30-31).

BIERCE GATHERED THREE STORIES ABOUT PEOPLE WHO VANISHED FROM THE FACE OF THE EARTH

Ambrose Gwinnett Bierce (1842–1914) was an American journalist and short story writer, best known perhaps for his satirical lexicon *The Devil’s Dictionary*. Some regard him as a proto-fortean for his interest in ghosts and supernatural occurrences.²⁰ In 1888, he composed an article for the *San Francisco Examiner* titled “Whither? Some Strange Instances of Mysterious Disappearance”.²¹ Here he gathered three short tales about people who had inexplicably vanished from the face of the Earth: Mr Williamson, who disappeared suddenly while crossing an open pasture; James Worson, who stumbled and fell on the road before witnesses yet “vanished before touching it”; and Charles Ashmore.

This latter tale, the longest of the three, concerned a family of five who lived in Troy, New York, until they moved to Richmond, Indiana, and thence to a farm in Quincy, Illinois. Bierce’s story begins on the evening of 9 November 1878 at a farmhouse near Quincy. At about nine o’clock, young Charles Ashmore walks out of his family’s farmhouse with a bucket to get water from a spring a short distance away. He doesn’t return, and his family becomes uneasy and starts a search. Charles’s father Christian and his sister Martha are able to follow his trail of footsteps in the snow for about 75 yards... when the trail abruptly ends.

Charles has vanished into thin air – but there’s an even stranger epilogue to Bierce’s captivating tale: that four days later, his



Irving J. Lewis, Managing Editor of the “Morning Telegraph,” a Visitor at the New York Motion Picture Corporation’s Indian Village

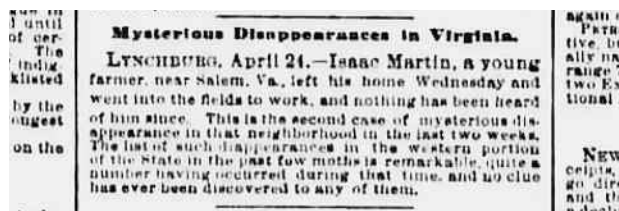
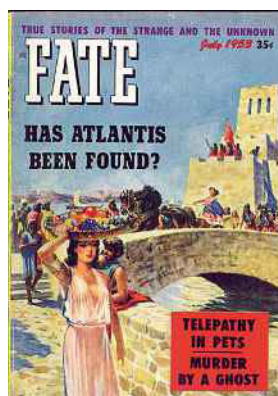
ABOVE: Writer and editor Irving Lewis, photographed in 1915, 11 years after his story “The Man who Disappeared” was printed in the New York *Sunday Telegraph*.

VANISHING IN PLAIN SIGHT

PAUL SIEVEKING considers the notoriously slippery subject of mysterious disappearances

Regarding the book *Phenomena* (Thames and Hudson 1977), which he had just written with John Michell, Bob Rickard commented: "Several people have expressed their surprise that we should include one of the more notorious disappearance stories, that of the boy Oliver Thomas in 1909, on the authority of Brad Steiger [*Strange Disappearances*, 1972]... Our interest in the story was in the way it contained all the elements of 'phenomenal reality' that make a story meaningful in a mythological and psychological sense – and it is for this reason that we wish to keep it in the book. We point out that we did indeed qualify this inclusion by saying that there are no references to original sources. We know that, as fact, the Oliver Thomas story was suspect, but until recently we didn't know just how much. Informally we've heard that Steiger probably got the story from one of John Macklin's books – which gives it the kiss of death as Macklin is notorious for fictionalising events and rarely giving sources.

"Kevin Randle, writing in the *APRO Bulletin* 25:3, Sept 1976, identifies the story as a re-written version of the disappearance of Oliver Lerch mentioned by John Keel, Otto Binder and Morris Jessup, who in turn got the story from *FATE* Sept 1950. Loren Gross (*APRO Bulletin* Nov 1976) shows that Harold T Wilkins tried to investigate the story in 1932 but could discover nothing to substantiate it. Randle summarises the story elements (most of them contradictory) like this: "Oliver Lerch/Larch/Thomas, aged either 11 or 20, disappeared from either South Bend, Indiana, or Rhayader, Wales, on either Christmas Eve 1889, Christmas Day 1889, Christmas Eve 1890 or 1909. He got either 50ft, 76ft or 225ft before 'They got him'." Wilkins dates the South Bend incident as Christmas Eve 1900... Our conclusion is that factually the story is as bogus as the David Lang non-event, and its *only* value is its mythical content, which seems to involve the



ABOVE: The story of the vanishing of David Lang was told in *Fate* in July 1953 and retold in December 1956, while that of Isaac Martin appears in the *New York Sun* of 25 April 1885.

basic elements seen in, for example, the kidnappings in the fairy tradition." [FT24:39ff, Winter 1977].

The story of David Lang vanishing in September 1880 in Gallatin, Tennessee, in full view of his wife and children, was allegedly cooked up by a travelling salesman named Joe McHatten trapped in a Gallatin hotel in 1889 during a snowstorm with nothing to do except drink and concoct a tall story. McHatten had a reputation for taking part in 'liars' contests'. Though nothing in the story can be confirmed in contemporary news reports, it was retold uncritically by Nandor Fodor in *FATE* (Dec 1956), by Harold T Wilkins in *Strange Mysteries of Time and Space* (1958), and by Frank Edwards in *Stranger Than Science* (1959). Fodor in turn got it from 'How lost was my Father', an article by Stuart Palmer in an earlier *FATE* (July 1953). It was later proved that Palmer had forged documents in support of his account ["Fortean corrigenda" FT18:6-7, Oct 1976; 'Vanishing Vanishings' by T Peter Park, *Anomalist* #7, 1998; *Chambers Dictionary of the Unexplained*, 2007, p.167].

Many of these stories of mysterious disappearance – including Orion Williamson,

Charles Ashmore, Charlotte Ashton and James Settles – can be traced back to Ambrose Bierce, whose compelling tales were recycled by hacks and early fortean anthologists as genuine occurrences. The wonderful irony, of course, is that Bierce himself disappeared. In 1913, at the age of 71, he allegedly joined Pancho Villa's revolutionary army in Mexico as an observer, witnessed the Battle of Tierra Blanca, and accompanied Villa's army as far as Chihuahua. His last known communication was said to be a letter he wrote there to Blanche Partington dated 26 December 1913, which ended: "As to me, I leave here tomorrow for an unknown destination." Sceptical researcher Joe Nickell states that the letter has never been found; all that exists is a notebook belonging to his secretary and companion, Carrie Christiansen, containing a rough summary of a purported letter and her statement that the originals had been destroyed.

Some suspect that Bierce was killed at the siege of Ojinega on 11 January 1914; Gordon Stein (*Encyclopedia of Hoaxes*) suggests he faked his disappearance in Mexico to cover up his intention of committing suicide in the

Colorado River gorge. Or was he seen alive in the 1930s as the king of an Amazonian tribe? Or did he re-surface as the reclusive novelist B Traven, author of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*? As with Col. Percy Fawcett (who vanished in Brazil in 1925), the possibilities are legion and speculation open-ended. In truth, there is no hard evidence that Bierce ever went to Mexico – or that he didn't. On 2 December 1919, five years after he disappeared, a rich businessman who owned the Toronto Opera House – one Ambrose Small – also vanished mysteriously, prompting Charles Fort to ask: "Was somebody collecting Ambroses?" [*Books*, p.847]

In *Lo!* (1931), Fort wrote: "A field, somewhere near Salem, Va., in the year 1885—and that in this field there was a suction. In the *New York Sun*, April 25, 1885, it is said that Isaac Martin, a young farmer, living near Salem, Va., had gone into a field, to work, and that he had disappeared. It is said that in this region there had been other mysterious disappearances." [*Books*, p. 687]. Tantalisingly, the Sage of Albany offers no more detail. Michael T Shoemaker investigated and found a telegraphic dispatch from Lynchburg, published in the *Richmond (VA) Dispatch* on the same day as the *New York Sun* report. This said that Martin "left his home" on 22 April 1885 "and went into the fields to work, and nothing had been heard of him since." He was simply a missing person. Huge numbers of people had been emigrating from West Virginia following a terrible drought and harsh winter. The most likely explanation is that Isaac Martin had abandoned his farm and headed west in the 'exodus fever' [FT49:52].

For more on this subject, see *Among the Missing* by Jay Robert Nash (Simon and Schuster, 1978); *Into Thin Air* by Paul Begg (Sphere 1979), chap.4, 'They vanished in front of witnesses', pp.29-38; and 'The Disappearance of Benjamin Bathurst' by Mike Dash [FT44:40-44], 1990.

grief-stricken mother goes to the spring for water where she hears her son calling to her. For months afterward, the voice is heard “at irregular intervals of several days... by various members of the family and by others”. Although they are able to identify the voice as that of Charles Ashmore, they neither can make out words nor are able to discern where it comes from, only that it sounds as if it is coming from a great distance. “The intervals of silence grew longer and longer, the voice fainter, and by midsummer it was heard no more,” writes Bierce.

This is the classic Lerch story, and it even ends with the boy’s disembodied voice lingering in the sky. “If anybody knows the fate of Charles Ashmore it is probably his mother,” writes Bierce. “She is dead.”

“Whither?” contained no indication as to the veracity of the three tales.²² Needless to say, Bierce made them up himself. He did this so convincingly that his fictional tales quickly began to be republished as factual accounts, as they are even to this day. This started just a year later when William S Walsh wrote a long article in the *Philadelphia Times* entitled “Stories Of The Missing”, ended with a retelling of Charles Ashmore’s tale, which he regarded as “apparently well-authenticated”.²³ Other newspapers would follow, introducing the Ashmore story as “new to all spoken to, but may be remembered by those living in the neighbourhood” and again vouching for its veracity.²⁴

In 1901, several American newspapers

took the two Bierce disappearance stories of Williamson and Ashmore, presented these as factual accounts, but tagged other locations onto them – in both cases, obscure towns in England.²⁵ Why this occurred is anyone’s guess, other than that one of Bierce’s disappearance stories, but not those of Williamson or Ashmore, is situated in England. The republication in various newspapers of Ashmore’s disappearance, but with the locale switched to England, lasted well into 1904.²⁶ There is no doubt Irving Lewis’s ‘remake’ that same year drew from Bierce’s original, although Lewis may never even have been aware of its original author.

THE DISAPPEARING DISAPPEARANCE

Many people wondered over the years what happened to Oliver Lerch. Not a few delved into the matter, wrote letters, ransacked newspaper archives and libraries, but came up empty-handed. There was even a wealthy farmer from New Zealand willing to spend a fortune in trying to find him. He wrote to the *South Bend News* in 1914, and the paper published an account on its front page, stating: “A world-wide quest has been begun to find Oliver Milton Lerch, a South Bend boy, said to have mysteriously disappeared from his home here in 1889, by Richard Norman, a wealthy New Zealand farmer and merchant who has a fortune laid aside for the boy, and South Bend police have been requested to send details that will lead to finding him”. The wealthy farmer, the newspaper continued, after rehashing

the Lerch story, was, according to a letter to the South Bend chief of police, one Richard Norman: “a bachelor, 58 years old, with large farms in New Zealand and stores in Milton, a city of 15,000. Efforts to find the missing lad have been under way for several years. No information as to whether he was a relative of the missing lad was given, although he intimated that part of his fortune will go to the lad if he is found. He declares in his letter that he will spend a large part of it to unravel the mystery.”²⁷

We do not know if the farmer did spend his fortune on searching for a man who wasn’t there in the first place. And, as the nursery rhyme goes, he wasn’t there again today, and, with this investigation concluded we wish he’d go away.

Finally, the story of Oliver Lerch can be laid to rest. We now know who wrote it, what his source of inspiration was, and where this tale first appeared.²⁸ One of the world’s most puzzling mystery disappearances, a story that has spooked countless of readers over more than a century, is no more. **[1]**

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



CHRIS AUBECK founded the Magonia Exchange project and has co-authored three forteen books to date in English and Spanish, his latest

being *Return To Magonia*. **THEO PAIJMANS** contributes regularly to *Fortean Times* and other publications. His book *Free Energy Pioneer* was recently published in Japan.

NOTES

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7. Ursus Major, “Odds And Ends Of Life”, *LA Times*, 5 Mar 1939.
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Suggested by J Jefferson Farjeon. *The Man Who Vanished*”, *Lancashire Evening Post*, 30 July 1937.

9. *Dallas Morning News*, 7 May 1921, mentions the publication of the Lerch story in *The Sunday Magazine*.
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11. “A Weird Disappearance. The Case Of Oliver Morton Lerch”, *Northern Star*, Lismore, NSW, Australia, 30 Sept 1913.
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14. “Stories of Strange

Disappearances”, *The Scrap Book*, Nov 1906, pp361-367, where the Lerch story appears on the last two pages.

15. “Seeing Things”, *Elkhart Daily Review*, Indiana, 2 + 5 Jan 1907.
16. “Neighborhood News”, *Elkhart Daily Review*, Indiana, 9 Jan 1905; “Neighborhood News”, *Elkhart Weekly Review*, 11 Jan 1905.
17. *Minutes of the 57th Annual Conference of the Central Illinois Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, Sept 1911. We assume Lewis added ‘Asbury’ in honour of Francis Asbury (1745–1816), the founding bishop of American Methodism.
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19. “These Men Deal in Scoops”, *Los Angeles Herald*, 29 Jan 1894.
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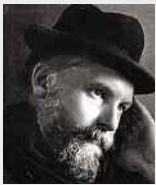
The Missing. A Brief Chapter of Mysterious Disappearances. Lost To Mortal Eye. Famous Cases of the Past Recalled. Poe and the Mystery of Mary Rogers”, *The Times*, Philadelphia, 17 Nov 1889. Walsh had been editor of Lippincott’s *Magazine* and the president of the Journalists’ Club. He cofounded *American Notes and Queries* in 1888.

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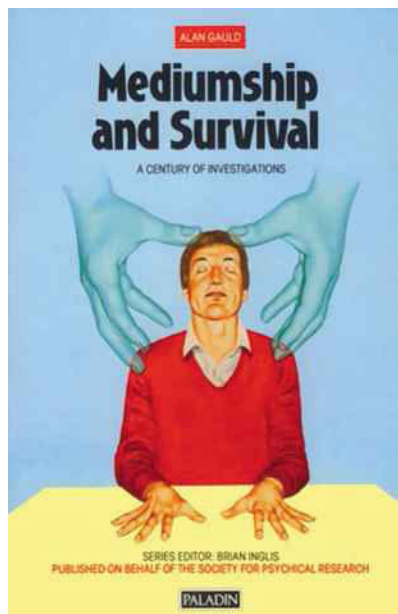
6. DYING TO KNOW MORE



Frederic WH Meyers (1843–1901) – one of the founders of the Society for Psychical Research – made one of his most celebrated remarks not while alive, but some time after his death: “Oh, if I could only leave you the proof that I continue. Yet another attempt to run the blockade – to strive to get a message through. How can I make your hand docile enough – how can I convince them? I am trying, amid unspeakable difficulties. It is impossible for me to know how much of what I send reaches you. I feel as if I had presented my credentials – reiterated the proofs of my identity in a wearisomely repetitive manner. The nearest simile I can find to express the difficulty of sending a message is that I appear to be standing behind a sheet of frosted glass, which blurs sight and deadens sound, dictating feebly to a reluctant and somewhat obtuse secretary. A feeling of terrible impotence burdens me. Oh it is a dark road.”

This was one of the communications among the ‘cross correspondences’, an elaborate jigsaw puzzle of messages received through automatic writing by various mediums over some three decades from the early 1900s. Despite Myers’s frustration, many have taken them to be a more-or-less definitive indication that, in some form, we survive death. That anyone might want to maintain some kind of existence after physical death is hardly surprising. The consensus among religions seems to be that earthly ills and afflictions will be no more, at least for the best-behaved in this life, and rewards allegedly range from the challenge of having to learn to play the harp to the company of six dozen (presumably compliant) virgins. The wicked may expect among other misfortunes to burn, freeze, or be reincarnated as a (presumably, and most aggravatingly, conscious) doorpost – this last being one of the many hells envisaged by Buddhists. But one would still be ‘alive’. Better that, one supposes, than nothing.

And that is really the nub of it. One suspects that the wish to survive death, come what may, is really a pragmatic response to the sheer impossibility of imagining absolute *nothingness*. Even our pre-existent past has some structure to it: we hear the memories of parents and grandparents of wars, eclipses, good times and bad. We can read history, biographies of ancestors, listen to Churchill’s and Kennedy’s speeches, watch video of the



Challenger disaster, the fall of the Berlin Wall – and on and on. We weren’t about at the time, or the younger among us weren’t, but we interiorise something of what went before we emerged from warmth and darkness into the chill bright perplexity of earthly existence. But if we’re not in thrall to a particular religious iconography, and we’re honest, we know absolutely nothing about what comes after that. That is what makes death fearsome, for many. Indeed Harold Bloom opined (in *The American Religion*) that religion was at bottom a reaction to the inescapable fact

of our mortality.

In 1882, Frederic Myers, Henry Sidgwick, Edmund Gurney and other academic luminaries founded the Society for Psychical Research (SPR). Myers described their motives: “[I]t seemed that no adequate attempt had yet been made even to determine whether anything could be learnt as to the unseen world or no; for that if anything were knowable about such a world in such fashion that Science could adopt and maintain that knowledge, it must be discovered by no analysis of tradition, and by no manipulation of metaphysics, but simply by experiment and observation – simply by the application to phenomena within us and around us of precisely the same methods of deliberate, dispassionate exact inquiry which have built up our actual knowledge of the world which we can touch and see.” In other words, neither religion nor materialism had provided satisfactory answers to their intellectual puzzlement. And, inevitably, one of the first tasks the infant SPR set itself was to investigate what it called “that large group of debatable phenomena designated by such terms as mesmeric, psychical, and Spiritualistic” – the last being periphrasis for the possibility of surviving death.

If you read but one book on this question, then find a copy of Alan Gauld’s *Mediumship and Survival*. Published in 1982 as part of a series marking the SPR’s centenary, it has hardly dated as an overall assessment of the logical, philosophical and theoretical problems that beset research into the possibility of survival. It’s also copiously studded with case histories, and refreshingly sane analyses of them, plus a reassuring 174 references. It’s a fairly dense read, but not a long book. And Gauld is not without dry humour. And there are other surprises.

Received wisdom is that Spiritualism, or the survivalist movement as we know it, had its origins in the sensation created by the Fox sisters and their mysterious, er, raps and knockings in their cottage in Hydesville, New York State, in the late 1840s. Gauld gives us the back-story you’ll find in few other sources.

The vocation (or profession) of 'psychic medium' evolved from the 18th-century mesmeric movement – which is why Mesmerism is conflated with Spiritualism in the SPR's brief list of "debatable phenomena". Gauld explains: "First of all there were certain alleged findings that had increasingly caught public attention in the wake of the mesmeric movement of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The facts (or supposed facts) of Mesmerism (or 'animal magnetism') were at first sight themselves sufficiently surprising – striking cures of cases given over by orthodox medicine, the 'rapport' between mesmeric operator and his subjects, the induction in good subjects of a trance state in which subjects might 'perceive' the nature of their own ailments, predict their course and give prescriptions for them. Out of happenings of the last kind, further peculiar phenomena developed... Now if the 'clairvoyant' vision of these ladies could reach inside people, or reach distant people, or predict the course of diseases, why should it not reach inside other kinds of closed containers, e.g. sealed boxes, or reach distant or even future scenes and events? Before long, entranced clairvoyantes were purportedly giving demonstrations of just these abilities. Some, indeed, believed that their vision extended beyond this world altogether, and regaled admiring wonder-seekers with visions of heaven, angels, other planets, guardian spirits, and the souls of deceased human beings."

All this was hardly a secret by 1848, when the Fox sisters came into the public eye; by the early 1850s, thanks in large part to the Foxes' road show, the Spiritualist movement had a quite wide following throughout the eastern United States. "But," writes Gauld, "the mesmeric movement also had its own press and its own supporters, its own operators and its own clairvoyantes. These were very readily transferred to or absorbed by the growing Spiritualist movement. Mesmeric clairvoyantes, or the type of person who would previously have become such, now emerged as the first 'mental mediums' – mediums whose contact with the spirits was through 'interior' vision or hearing, or through the spirits 'taking over' and controlling their bodies or parts thereof, especially, of course, the parts required for speech and writing." How many of us knew that? A parallel evolution, from the Foxes' knocks and raps, was the development of 'physical' mediumship, whose high point by the 1870s was the purported full physical materialisation of the departed besides other (often literally) bells and whistles, drums and trumpets.

Gauld wisely sidesteps the quagmire of fraud, claim and counter-claim associated with this aspect of mediumship, although "I omit it with regret, for much entertainment is to be derived from studying the methods of psychic

TIME MACHINES,
MAGIC PORTALS,
TRANSPORTERS,
WORM HOLES,
FLYING CARPETS,
RELOCATION
CHARMS—
SUCH THINGS DO
EXIST.
THEY'RE CALLED
BOOKS.

Richelle E Goodrich

photographers and fraudulent physical mediums." Like many another intellectual, he defines his case negatively, by taking on the arguments of those he disagrees with, making his argument for survival of death more implicit than explicit. In particular he takes on parapsychologists' proposition that mediums get their information from their sitters, via telepathy. Sometimes, though, mediums do produce bits of information of which the sitters were previously unaware, and this is explained by their ability to tap into 'super-ESP'. Which, as Gauld shows, means either medium or sitter is somehow (and in his view, implausibly) able to sift, unconsciously, through all manner of knowledge, recorded in all manner of ways, by all manner of people. The essential problem is that to appeal to a hypothetical 'super-ESP' is to explain one unknown with another. The obvious problem (as he shows time and again by analysing cases) is the convolutions required to elicit the information by ESP, 'super' or otherwise.

By way of illustration, Gauld relates the case of Misses Moore and Quilty who, staying in a Lincolnshire farmhouse in 1871, both saw "a little, ruddy-faced old lady, with a frilled white cap on her head, a white handkerchief folded round her neck, and a white apron, as if she was sitting with her hands folded in her lap." Was this an hallucination, mediated by ESP? Gauld expounds how this would work: "One of the two (or more) percipients picks up by means of ESP the information that is to be externalised in the form of the hallucination. Let us say (using the specimen case given above) that she telepathically obtains from the farmer's mind a picture of his late mother, or that she clairvoyantly perceives a photograph of her, shut within the massive covers of the family album. Then the second percipient picks up all this information telepathically from the first

percipient; or else she too, marvellous to relate, happens to scan by ESP the mind of the farmer of the photograph of the farmer's mother at just the moment when the first percipient did the same thing. Finally the (unconscious) minds of the two percipients have somehow to make contact with each other to ensure that when, as a result of all this ESP, they each construct a hallucination, the two hallucinations are reciprocally adjusted to allow for differences of perspective, etc., whilst the main details of both are kept constant.

"To say that this is a tall order is a great understatement."

And this is one of the least complex cases Gauld dissects. At the same time, in other instances, he has no problem with the likelihood that information has passed telepathically from sitter to medium, so he doesn't heave the baby out with the bathwater. Not that he's po-faced about it: "For instance, Hodgson had one day been reading with great interest Lockhart's *Life of Scott*. Next day a ludicrous Sir Walter Scott turned up at a Piper sitting, and gave a guided tour of the Solar System, stating that there are monkeys in the Sun." He makes clear that whether one favours the ESP or the survivalist case, ESP of some kind is at work. But it has its limitations: "If, indeed, the supposed telepathic agent were a deceased cat... I have no idea what sort of information one might glean. I suspect a lot of it would have to do with the smell of food in the kitchen."

This commendation of *Mediumship and Survival* has hardly scratched its surface. There is so much more we could have said about it. Gauld makes penetrating observations on shamanism, spirit controls, 'drop-in' communicators, xenoglossy, obsession and possession, reincarnation, OBEs and NDEs, apparitions, and (especially) memory. This last is perhaps the only chapter that might need updating, in light of what we now know about reconstructive and false memory. What marks the book out as exemplary is its relentless honesty. Gauld, who clearly favours the idea of life after death, says: "If the survivalist theory were tenable it would immensely simplify things. The trouble with the survivalist theory is not exactly messiness, but rather conflict with other areas of our knowledge, and an underlying vagueness upon certain crucial issues." And: "Each time I tie up, with fumbling fingers, a couple of loose ends, a third one slips free again." Charles Fort might have said that, in one of his more solemn moments. F

Mediumship and Survival: A Century of Investigations,
Alan Gauld
Heinneman, 1982

Also online at: www.esalen.org/ctr-archive/mediumship.html

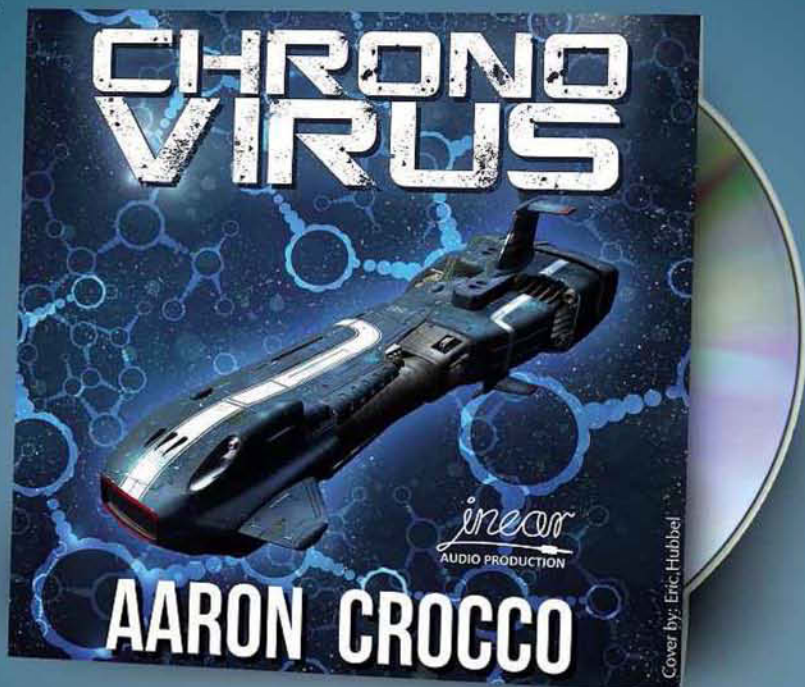
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Well, they would, wouldn't they?

STU NEVILLE ponders the no-win situation of the Establishment when it comes to conspiracy theories



STU NEVILLE is a teacher and administrator of the FT online forum. He believes/ doesn't believe in a whole range of things, depending on how tired he is.

Whistelblower Edward Snowden's recent reappearance and the Met's downscaling of the Assange vigil have briefly revived interest in the ever waxing-and-waning fortunes of that most durable of Fort-ish subjects, the Grand Conspiracy Theory. Every small nugget of anything vaguely deemed to be 'on good authority' is latched onto and applied to whatever the favoured shady deal *de jour* may be. Of course, speaking rationally, the problem with disclosed intelligence in particular is that the ramifications of any leakage can be appalling. What seems an innocent, throwaway remark can in fact screw up an entire ongoing operation, of which the discloser is unaware owing to compartmentalisation. Hence the furore a quarter-century ago about Peter Wright's *Spycatcher*: in reality it was an extended and quite tedious whinge about his pension rights, but there was nonetheless a genuine risk that he could have jeopardised the lives of those still working in the field.

Ditto David Shayler – or Delores, or whatever he's called today: he/she/they may well have thought that they were doing the right thing, and equally their moral compass may have been pointing roughly the right way, too, but they should have been aware that there were quite likely operations underway, the mechanics of which they had no knowledge. Disclosure of a seemingly irrelevant piece of information can have serious consequences in other parts of the service. And if the failure of such operations then results in a successful terrorist campaign, of the sort it's fairly safe to assume actually do exist (depending somewhat on how heavily you believe the media to be controlled by them), who gets the blame?

The *Establishment* – that's who. When you start on conspiracy theories,

the Establishment cannot possibly win: because they *obviously* have all the facts, they are therefore *equally obviously* obliged to deny everything. So, any information they do disclose must be misdirection or spin, and any denial clear proof that they're covering something up. In some respects, Mandy Rice-Davies cast the first stone when, having been told that Lord Astor denied having even met her (for those who don't know, she was a call-girl, Astor a cabinet minister), she stated: "Well he would, wouldn't he?" This has become the mantra of the conspiracy theorist. *Of course* the Establishment deny it: they have to maintain the illusion. What illusion, you ask? Ha! See? That's how good an illusion it is – you don't even *know* it's an illusion.

However, the conspiracy theorists *do* know it's an illusion, and waste no time pointing this out. Can they show us the trapdoor, the mirror and the smoke machine? Well, by and large no, they can't – but they can cite someone else who can. The very fact that this source is regarded as a nutcase by most people is testament to the effectiveness of the smear campaign designed by the Establishment to discredit said source; better yet, if the Establishment deigns to notice and actively dismiss their claims, that's proof that they take them seriously enough to issue a denial.

Now, no one with more than one brain-cell denies that governments (otherwise known as "the Establishment") do naughty or morally questionable things from time to time, or indeed more often than that. The problem with conspiracy theorists is that they take this agreed premise and use it to underlay the entire fabric of their theories: because the Establishment *can* do this, then clearly they *must* be doing it, and constantly. Therefore there must be something for



ABOVE: Mandy Rice-Davies shows what she thinks of the British establishment.

the theorists to find. And lo and behold – there's a cornucopia of theories out there, any proof of which will perforce be at best sketchy (because it's a cover-up), and at worst non-existent (because it's a *very good* cover-up).

And conspiracies are addictive. Like the late Erik Beckjord and his Bigfoot photos, once a theorist has spotted one conspiracy, they soon find another. And another. And yet more, until they start to overlap; at which point you get to the next level of conspiracy theories.

This mezzanine level is where things have clearly transcended the machinations of domestic

governments and have moved onto the puppet-masters that control them: the Illuminati, (aka "the Establishment", again.) They might be Masons, Jews, Templars, Opus Dei, little anally-fixated grey bastards from Zeta Reticuli, the G8 leaders, Bilderbergers, the Carlisle group... well, the list is endless. Except it isn't, because they are *all* part of the Illuminati/Establishment. So, when a conspiracy theory appears to be on the ropes, if an individual government somehow manages to furnish reasonable proof of its non-involvement in whatever dodgy dealing, that's when theorists play the Illuminati card. Because, in such a case, the individual government needn't be party to it at all – they were as duped as we were. And so on...

Perhaps uniquely among fortean topics of interest, the less tangible evidence of conspiracies there is, the more advocates of conspiracy theories become convinced of their existence. One day, the conspiracy of silence will attain its own Nirvana: its own total absence will confirm its own omnipresent existence. QED, the conspiracy theorists will say, and hard cheese to the sheeple – that's you and me, folks. Pass the tinfoil. **FT**

Visions of the inner eye

TED HARRISON explores the seemingly oxymoronic world of blind visual artists



TED HARRISON is a former BBC religious affairs correspondent, regular FT contributor and author of books on end-time prophecies, Elvis and the cult of Princess Di.

Sargy Mann was a British artist and teacher who was fascinated by the power of light and colour. But in his 50s, at the height of his career, he went blind. On his return home from hospital, having completely lost his vision and wondering what life had ahead of him, he went to his studio. He had a picture mapped out in his head and wondered if he could, without sight, somehow put it on canvas.

What happened next astonished him. As he placed a brush of ultramarine paint on the canvas he saw the canvas turn blue in his mind's eye. Next he tried a magenta, and watched the canvas turn a violet red. Seeing the colour was only a brief sensation, he reported, but it was of sufficient duration for him to work.

"That's beautiful," his daughter said on seeing his first attempt, and from that moment Sargy Mann knew he would have a creative life after suffering complete blindness. He developed a way of working using bluetack stuck on the canvas to give him points of reference and co-ordinates. He could never see a finished painting, but he 'knew' what he was doing at the moment he did it. His pictures were regularly exhibited and fetched prices of up to £50,000.

Mann, who died earlier this year, was not alone in being a blind painter. There are, and have been, several examples, some of whom, unlike Sargy, did not even have a memory of vision. The Turkish artist Esref Armagan was born without sight and has developed a way of drawing by feel and then applying oil paint with his fingers. He builds up his pictures slowly, as he has to wait for one colour to dry completely before applying another. Yet his works have visual integrity and perspective and are not simply haphazard layers of colour. He starts by creating a picture in his mind. He restricts his palette to five colours, plus black and white, and works methodically and without help to realise the picture in his imagination.

Psychologist John Kennedy, professor of perception and cognition at Toronto University, has described Armagan as an important figure in the history of picture making, and in the history of knowledge. "His work is remarkable. I was struck by the drawings he has made as much as by his work with paint."

Portrait painter Arthur Ellis from Kent went blind nine years ago after contracting meningitis. However, instead of entering a world of darkness, he found himself 'seeing' the most extraordinary visions and hallucinations. He encountered terrifying apparitions and saw weird shapes and began to wonder if he was losing his sanity. Eventually, it was found that he did not have a mental

health problem, but that damage to his optic nerve had left him with a condition known as Charles Bonnet syndrome. Bonnet was an 18th century Swiss philosopher and writer who described his grandfather's experiences after he lost his sight to cataracts and began having 'visions'. He reported seeing patterns, people, birds and buildings, which were not really there (see **FT98:19, 125:14, 184:46-49, 321:54-55**).

Ellis's art now consists of creating, entirely by feel, impressions of the strange shapes and patterns he 'sees' in his mind. He uses such implements as stencils and bendy rulers laid out on paper on a drawing board in shaping his work.

One of the most celebrated blind artists of history was Italian sculptor Giovanni Gonnelli who lived in the first half of the 17th century. As a young man he was apprenticed to a studio in Florence and showed great promise. But when his sight began to fail, he was dismissed and returned to his home village of Gambassi. There he retrained himself as a sculptor. He had memories of shapes and he found he could use clay to fashion figurative sculptures. He also created portrait sculptures from life, feeling the features of his subjects with his hands before shaping them in clay. If his sitter was someone it would have been inappropriate to manhandle he worked from a wax mold. Patrons included dignitaries from Rome, and even the Pope was sculpted by the celebrated blind artist of Gambassi.

Sergej Popolsin, a Russian now living in Austria, lost his sight completely in 1990 as a result of head injury. He has devised a way of painting in a world of total darkness, working entirely by touch. He marks areas on his painting surface with needles to orientate

BELOW LEFT: Sargy Mann at work in his studio

BELOW RIGHT: *From the Rooftop*, oil on canvas, by Sargy Mann.



himself and creates shapes by cutting out cardboard which he then paints around. He marks the caps of his paint tubes with small knife cuts so that he can identify their colour by feeling the patterns of the notches. Some of his work is abstract, but he also creates realistic images and optical illusions.

One British blind artist, Terry Hopwood Jackson, has set up a website to encourage other blind people to take up art. [1] He describes how he draws using coloured plasticine so that he can feel the shapes he is creating.

While some blind artists are practising artists who lost their sight, others only took up art after having gone blind. Lisa Fittipaldi, who lives in Panama, started painting in 1995, two years after she lost her sight. In addition to writing, Lisa began to explore the visual arts as a way of rediscovering purpose in a life that had, for her, radically changed. Through her painting she not only relived her visual memories, but also learned a new way of understanding space and how best to navigate through a world she could no longer see.

The website dedicated to her work says that her paintings give the viewer “the visual experience of colour and energy that she sees in her mind’s eye. It is her way of validating the reality of her inner vision. She entertains herself by trying new textures, by mixing media, by setting out new artistic and technical problems to solve. Her wide-ranging choice of subjects and locales are culled from memories of her own past experience and travels.” [2]

Texan John Bramblitt, who went blind in 2001, also took up painting to re-orientate his life and senses. “Art reshaped my life,” he has said. He discovered how to identify paints of different colours through their texture. He guides his application of paint using raised lines on the painting surface and visualises what he creates through haptic vision – the ability to interpret tactile shapes into visual images in his mind’s eye. He can paint lifelike portraits of people he has never seen in a conventional way.

That a composer like Delius or a poet like Milton can be blind and yet still create visions of a world beyond themselves is comprehensible. To talk of a blind visual artist seems an oxymoron. Common sense suggests that it must be impossible for someone to create art that can only be appreciated through the eyes, if they themselves have no means of seeing. And yet it is done.

It is more readily understood that a person who is partially sighted can paint



He can paint portraits of people he has never seen



using spectacles and lenses. There have been several famous artists who have continued to create art despite fading eyesight. Claude Monet is thought to have painted his famous water lily pictures at a time that his eyes were failing. Some art critics theorise that El Greco’s elongated shapes were the result of astigmatism and that Botticelli and Titian might too have had this defect that distorts shapes in the eye of the beholder. While astigmatism and even colour-blindness, from which Van Gogh might have suffered, are not impediments to painting and might possibly help create innovative and distinctive images, how can someone who is totally blind make visual art?

In 2008, Amir Amedi and Alvaro Pascual-Leone from the Department of Neurology at Harvard Medical School examined Esref Armagan in the course of research into the way the optical nerve responded and adapted to blindness. They monitored his brain activity as he was drawing and were surprised to discover that his visual cortex responded in a very similar

manner to that of a sighted person. Looking at scans of brain activity it seemed as if he was actually seeing things as he drew. His brain’s visual cortex, normally inactive in the visually impaired, lit up when Esref touched an object and began drawing.

“Regions of the brain normally associated with the processing of visual information undergo remarkable dynamic change in response to blindness,” the researchers reported in a scientific paper. “These neuroplastic changes implicate not only processing carried out by the remaining senses but also higher cognitive functions such as language and memory.” [3]

Being blind from birth, Esref had no use, in the normal way, for those parts of the brain that transmit and process visual images. However, the brain adapted itself and found new ways of employing those redundant areas. For artists who go blind in late life, those brain adaptations can be dramatic, as Arthur Ellis discovered.

The Royal National Institute for the Blind offers advice to those suffering from Charles Bonnet Syndrome. The visions encountered should be understood “as a reaction by the brain to loss of sight,” the NIB website explains. “Current research seems to suggest that, when you are seeing real things around you, the information received from your eyes actually stops the brain from creating its own pictures. When you lose your sight, however, your brain is not receiving as much information from your eyes as it used to. Your brain can sometimes fill in these gaps by releasing new fantasy pictures, patterns or old pictures that it has stored. When this occurs, you experience these images stored in your brain as hallucinations.” [4] In Sargy Mann’s case the ‘hallucinations’ were confined to him briefly seeing colours on his canvas.

The very existence of blind artists raises questions about what it is the sighted actually see. Indeed, what is visual reality? Does vision provide a true representation of the world around us? Does the brain only see what it wants or expects to see? Does the brain fill in gaps and enable people to see what isn’t there? Might this be an explanation for ghosts, UFOs or phantom animals?

“Paintings are visual metaphors for my experience of reality,” Sargy Mann once said. And for as long as he continued to have experiences in life, he continued to paint – despite never being able to see his paintings hanging on a gallery wall. **FT**

ABOVE: ‘Stroll in the Rain’ by John Bramblitt.

LEFT: Texan artist John Bramblitt took up painting after he lost his sight in 2001.

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- [2] lisafittipaldi.com
- [3] Current Directions in Psychological Science, 2005.
- [4] RNIB

They came from the shadows...

NICK PARKINS explores the growing number of reported encounters with terrifying, featureless bogeymen that lurk in the darkness and asks who these shadowy entities might be...



NICK PARKINS holds a master's degree in philosophy of the mind and likes to live outside the box. If you have a strange or unexplained experience that you would like to share visit www.nickparkins.co.uk

Shadow beings define cultures. To the Native American Choctaw, the shadow person would take form as the *Impa Shilup*, or "soul eater", that feasted on the souls of evil or depressed people. They were also thought to represent the *shilombish* (the outer shadow) and *shilup* (the inner shadow). After death, while the *shilup* passed on to the Happy Land, the restless outer-self would remain Earthbound, attending to unfinished business.

Seen from the land of the living, shadow beings often appear to glide and vanish into thin air. In 2005, paranormal researcher Rosemary Ellen Guiley set out to collate, and find patterns in, shadow encounters. Witness interviews left her in little doubt that these fleeting voyeurs were in vogue: "I receive a large number of emails, all detailing the same or similar experiences of sinister figures that appear in bedrooms in the depths of the night."

Many reports describe a bipedal, pitch-black abyss that absorbs the night. "These blacker-than-black human-like forms stand out against the relative darkness of the room," says Guiley. Lingering looks from tall dark strangers are often reported like phantom flashers in trench coats (minus the tackle). In a personal encounter, author Jeff Bennington described a figure made of midnight and as eerily quiet as the morning a man with a hollow, featureless face that hung over Bennington before vanishing. The childhood encounter left the young writer frozen, shivering; in his own words, as if he had been dumped in a vat of ice.

The most terrifying, and most snappily dressed, shadow being is Hat Man, who often wears a fedora and puts other shadows – content to slouch around in hooded robes – to shame. Do different species of shadow exist? Many entities appear to look and behave quite differently from one another.

"Some shadows seem shocked when humans notice them," notes Jason Offutt, "and still others behave much like a residual ghost." According to Offutt, author of *Darkness Walks*, many shadows take no notice of people around them. Others feed off the fear they instill in humans. These shadows often possess glowing eyes, piercing red lights that punch holes in the night. They rarely communicate; when they do, it's to telepathically convey terrifying messages, often vocalised in growling undertones.

Despite credible accounts, sceptics don't believe that shadows have form, but that it's all a question of interpretation. They offer the psychological diagnosis of apophenia, a common condition in which a person draws familiar shapes from random features, as with the subjective tendency to see faces in clouds and draw order from chaos.

Not everyone sees the same thing. Ufologists might interpret a menacing shadow as an off-world or inter-dimensional traveller, while a spiritualist might encounter a sentient

soul or demon. Certainly, ETs and demons top the list of contemporary bogeymen with which we populate and make sense of the dark. In fact, how a person 'chooses' to interpret such an experience might not be down to choice at all, but rather to how they are wired, their cultural conditioning, their subconscious baggage. This level of the experience is instinctive; it also feels very real. Offutt agrees: "I've interviewed hundreds of people that have encountered shadow beings and their opinion on what they saw is completely based on their world view," he says. "They won't budge".

Offutt has interviewed experts in Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and American Indian shamanism. "Shadow beings are present in all these religions," he says. So is our interpretation based solely on expectation? In part, perhaps; but even if we buy this assumption there remains a stubborn core of consistency to shadow encounters.

In fact, both Guiley and Offutt refer to the remarkable similarities of particular groups. "Tall shadows, 6-8ft (1.8-2.4m), usually appear solo or paired, while shorter ones, 3-5ft (90cm-150cm), appear in groups," says Guiley. "The short ones almost always have red eyes, and seem more dangerous than the tall ones." Offutt agrees: "The scariest have blazing red eyes. In all categories, the Hat Man behaves as do other Hat Men, the red eyes behave as other red eyes, and so on." Can our culture, then, prime us to parrot back, en masse, such intricate and apparently consistent details?

Offutt believes there is more to it. "I spoke to people from every continent (save Antarctica) who have seen shadow people – the similarities were astounding." Aside from the possible, as yet unproven, existence of shadow penguins, it would seem that the intrinsic nature of an encounter remains consistent and cannot be distinguished on the basis of culture or place. "The appearance and behaviour of a shadow being seen by an American Cherokee is the same as that witnessed by a Catholic from Portugal," says Offutt. When you throw into the mix multiple witness sightings and daylight



encounters, a substance begins to take shape.

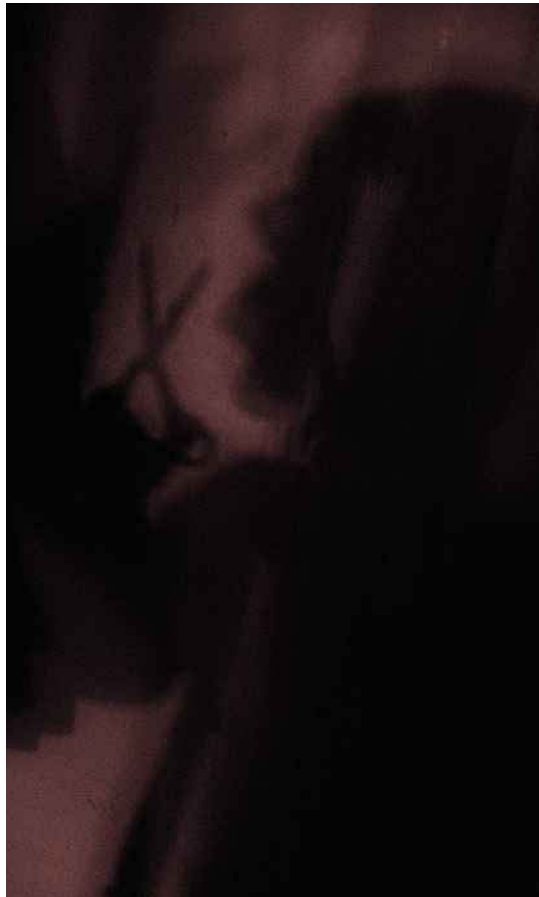
However, this is unlikely to convince the sceptics or, for that matter, help believers sleep soundly at night. Perhaps it is apt that the most paralysing encounters take place under cover of darkness.

One school of thought links such nocturnal encounters to night terrors, in which sufferers experience all manner of grotesque supernatural deviants hags, incubi and shadowy intruders – that climb on and crush the bed-ridden victim with their suffocating weight. Sleep paralysis, psychologists say, may result in hallucinations that bleed through into a semi-conscious state from sleep, a result of muscle atonia (a form of paralysis) that prevents a person from acting out their dreams. Alien abduction scenarios are further evidence, they say, that cultural priming decides the content of these experiences.

Guiley, however, offers an unnerving theory that may yet explain the true identity behind these shadow attacks, and their disturbing ensemble cast. In her book *The Djinn Connection*, she suggests that shadow beings are in fact one of many forms taken by a race of powerful hidden beings – masterful shape-shifters who exist in an unseen world – in a dimension parallel and invisible to our own (see FT291:16-17, 138:17, 147:30-33, 281:40-44, 291:16-17, 324:20-21).

Djinn hide in plain sight in traditional Islamic religion and Arabic folklore, popularised in *The One Thousand and One Nights* as the djinni, or wish-granting genie. In Islamic scripture, they are sandwiched between angels and man; and like us, we are told, they are a sentient species created by God. Born from smokeless fire, not all djinn are evil. However they share a potential Achilles heel with man: free will. In the Qur'an it was chief djinn Iblis who first lost his footing, consumed by envy and pride and cast from heaven for refusing to bow before Adam. The Judeo-Christian concept of the Devil and his demons may refer to Iblis, says Guiley, who with his minions chose to rebel and take up horns as the eponymous Shaytan (Satan). The consequent duping of Adam by Satan, which led to the Fall of Man and expulsion from the Garden of Eden, was a warning that, rooted in mischievous deeds, the schemes of djinn are not to be trusted. They are more than capable of manipulating and misleading us.

Similarly, according to Zecharia



Encounters with shadow people represent our darkest fears

Sitchin and others, Sumerian tablets describe an off-world race known as the Annunaki that deceived and enslaved mankind; elsewhere, they were known by other names: in Central America, they are Flyers, and in Africa, the Chitauri. In his *Timæus*, Plato's dialogue describes a demiurge or false creator god that presides over the material realm. In Gnostic tradition, the Archons are its ally in this reality, and subvert souls seeking ascension from it.

Some go so far as to believe that this cross-cultural cohort has infiltrated, and continues to influence, secret enclaves, governments and elite institutions. Aptly, it works from the shadows to direct, control and sustain a world of suffering, injustice and fear upon

which it thrives. Those in the shadows may achieve this by taking direct possession of people or as masterful shape-shifters, manipulating the human subconscious and how we decode reality. They often masquerade in human form, or as shadow beings, snakes and black dogs, even ghosts, fairies or extraterrestrials. Indeed while some may prefer to stay hidden, others show themselves deliberately to feed, like vampires, off low-vibrational negativity and the fear that they instill in their victims.

Djinn may account for many shadow encounters, but perhaps not all. "The behaviour of certain types is wildly different," says Offutt. "I'm convinced there are a number of different entities that simply look the same, be they ghosts, djinn, or other inter-dimensional beings." The apparent rise, says Offutt, could be down to a social phenomenon that reflects an encouraging shift in mood. "The Internet has connected the entire world and when someone sees a post on shadow people they're no longer afraid of discussing their own encounter. Before the Internet, people didn't talk about their experience for fear of ridicule".

Whatever their true nature, and despite their rejection by the sceptical mainstream, encounters with shadow people have come to represent our darkest mortal fears, representing demons, or worse, souls trapped in eternal purgatory. As yet, the very idea that millions of people across culture and place share a common delusion is not extraordinarily sufficient to shake the sceptical mantra that extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence. Meanwhile, hundreds of people are changed by profound experiences they cannot explain; and as long as Internet forums are the only places to discuss the phenomenon, the lessons these encounters teach will remain in the shadows. **FT**

FURTHER READING

Jason Offutt, *Darkness Walks: The Shadow People Among Us*, Anomalist Books, 2009.

Rosemary E Guiley, *The Djinn Connection: The Hidden Links Between Djinn, Shadow People, ETs, Nephilim, Archons, Reptilians and Other Entities*, Visionary Living, Inc., 2013.

For firsthand accounts of encounters with shadow people from FT readers, see pp72-73 of this issue.

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Mining the Internet archives

Fortean and UFO phenomena have existed since long before 1947, as a meticulously researched study kicking off in the mid-17th century demonstrates



Return to Magonia

Investigating UFOs in History

Chris Aubeck & Martin Shough

Anomalist Books 2015

Pb, 367pp, illus, ind, \$24.95, ISBN 9781938398544

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £16.99

In an oddly ill-tempered foreword, Jacques Vallee praises *Return to Magonia* as a repudiation of everyone's favourite bugaboo, 'American ufology', and a triumph of 'European ufology'. This book is something more significant: the first 21st-century UFO book. That achievement owes little if anything to geographical happenstance.

Chris Aubeck and Martin Shough, who reside along Europe's Western edge, are hardly the only patient, persistent, scientifically sophisticated ufologists to bless our world. Some smart investigators and analysts, not least Vallee himself, even have American addresses. The authors do, however, call to mind a wisecrack the late Dave Van Ronk offered up on hearing his fellow Greenwich Village folk singers boast that, with the right connections, they could be as acclaimed as Bob Dylan. "Yeah, sure you could," he retorted. "All you have to do is write 'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall' – for the first time." What will give *Return to Magonia* its special place is that it would not have been possible without that miraculous invention known as the Internet.

Since the early years of the

century, a small but steadily expanding band of inquirers, some active on Aubeck's history-focused e-forum Magonia Exchange, have taken advantage of the Internet to delve into previously undetected data (in runs of thousands of newspapers, among other sources) detailing pre-1947 accounts of UFO and fortean phenomena.

Aubeck realised the Internet's potential before other UFO researchers. The initial result was *Wonders in the Sky: Unexplained Aerial Objects from Antiquity to Modern Times* (2009), which he wrote with Vallee. It is an important work, but *Return*, ostensibly a sequel, takes matters considerably farther down the road.

The book opens with a discussion of the anonymously compiled *Mirabilis Annus* (1661–1662), an encyclopaedic treatment of marvels. Some are prosaic; others "with the same circumstantial character" (the authors' phrase) apparently defy explanation. Aubeck and Shough came to one or another conclusion by an excruciatingly thorough probe into surviving records, most now available online, examining each arguably ordinary explanation – astronomical, meteorological, electrical, biographical, fictional or other. One consequence of this is that *Return* reads like a scientific monograph. Some of it, frankly, makes for slow reading, however compelling the subject may be.

The book moves chronologically until it reaches February 1947 and sightings of five flying egg-shaped objects over South Australia. After a typically meticulous examination and rejection

"Return to Magonia is a model of how to conduct productive historical UFO and anomalies studies"

of alternative explanations (meteors, most prominently), *Return* concludes: "Simply put, this is a modern UFO [case]," one described and published five months before Kenneth Arnold's 24 June spotting of similar objects brought flying saucers into popular awareness.

Unlike polemical debunking literature, the judgements on sightings are offered in a fashion that does not insult readers' or witnesses' intelligence. Chapter 9, about a January 1845 sighting over the Sea of Sicily from the brig *Victoria*, deduces that three glowing objects were probably "plumes of glowing gas released into the air by a submarine volcano." How Aubeck and Shough get to that identification makes for an engaging scientific detective story.

Those who have experience of old newspaper accounts of ostensible UFOs and anomalies – I started hunting for them on microfilms of Midwestern newspapers in the mid-1960s – learned early on that some 'news' stories were bogus. On occasion, the persons said to have made the report did not exist. *Return's* authors take care to establish the earthly presence of the alleged observers. Even better, they dig up as much as they can uncover about who they were, what jobs and positions they held, what

their local reputations were. Some deeply weird reports survive this sort of scrutiny.

My favourite concerns an alleged 1873 landing (a relating of which was committed to print not long after) in rural Zanesville, Ohio. A lantern-carrying man in black stepped out of the object, to board a peculiar horseless buggy which promptly zipped out of sight. The named witnesses, it turns out, lived and breathed as serious, respected members of their community. After eliminating likely counter-explanations, the authors remark mildly on the story's apparent credibility, "fascinating because of clear similarities between this case and modern UFO encounters."

Though they are hesitant to theorise (and given their manifest intelligence that is not always a virtue), Aubeck and Shough take issue with the widely held belief that UFOs as currently understood were not described prior to the mid-20th century. They were, and they included disc shapes – in other words, classic flying saucers. The implications of this, for instance to a modified version of the extraterrestrial hypothesis, are not explored, but the evidence should spur a round of substantive discussion among thoughtful readers.

Return to Magonia is a model of how to conduct productive historical UFO and anomalies studies. Other writers will come along with comparable efforts, but this is an instant classic and likely to remain an enduring one. Jerome Clark

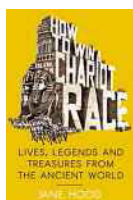
Fortean Times Verdict

AN INSTANT CLASSIC AND THE FIRST 21ST CENTURY UFO BOOK

8

A classical miscellany

Strange deaths – plus chariot racing and a bit of sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll from the ancient world – make for a lively guide



How to Win a Roman Chariot Race

Lives, Legends and Treasures from the Ancient World

Jane Hood

Icon Books 2015

Pb, 224pp, illus, bib, £8.99, ISBN 9781848319462

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £8.

Initially feared (cue the just-deceased Yogi Berra) *déjà lu* all over again, following JC MacKeown's two classical compendia (FT268:58, 269:59), plus Philip Matyszak's (2009).

Hood's farrago ranges from titular chariot-racing to Sex, Drugs, and Rock and Roll, coyly introduced (p199) as "At last we reach what everyone really cares about," though her content is more 12A than R18: "This is a miscellany. It includes things that I find funny, terrible, entertaining or important."

And why not? Hood also takes some unusual – and welcome – tacks, incorporating lengthy extracts from classical literature and detailed considerations of modern scholars, notably Liddell & Scott of *Greek Lexicon* fame (Thomas Hardy's poem on its completion appended), along with Liddell's daughter Alice – yes, THAT Alice!

Likewise, papyrus-hunters Grenfell & Hunt, latterly immortalised by Classicist-poet Tony Harrison's musical (which deserved a mention), the Vindolanda letters partly found in a lavatory – sheer loo-nacy – near Hadrian's Wall (including the first-ever woman-written text),

and the Anglo-French Rosetta Stone decipherers, Young and Champollion. Welcome, too, is Hood's treatment of Lord Elgin, more sympathetic than customary tirades from the Return Them! mob.

Full marks also for her insistence (p9), unshared by many band-waggoning academics, that we learn equally from ancient-modern differences as similarities, something I always stress to students.

Subsidiary compliments to her recognition (p173) that Atlantis is allegory, not history (cf. FT163:23), and for many unfamiliar nuggets, e.g. Augustine as patron saint of beer (p111), the Macedonian-leaning DNA of Afghanistan's Kalash tribe (p32), and the possibility (p83) that Salem's witch hysteria was caused by ergot poisoning, a line of enquiry begun with Mary Matossian's *Poisons of the Past*, one that might profitably be extended to (e.g.) the ancient Abderite mass hysteria described by Lucian and Eunapius, involving mobs endlessly quoting from Euripides's *Andromeda*.

Organisation is not always Hood's strong point. Her opening gallimaufry glides disconnectedly through chariot racing, cosmetics (no mention of Cleopatra's beauty book), Londinium, concrete, codes, food, Alexander the Great, oil lamps (Lucian's *Lamp City* deserved a word), and the mysterious Antikthera Mechanism (as many, Hood rather romantically sees it as a proto-computer – I'm regretfully not so sure). Subsequent sections, though, are more homogeneous, including an FT-style roundup of strange deaths.

Nit-pickings: the Red racing fan's suicide is misdated (p8: source, Pliny's *Natural History* 6. 176); the reference to Trimalchio and Fortunata (p68) is imaginary; Caracalla (p39) hardly deserves to be dismissed as "just another crazy emperor"; Crassus was

killed in battle, not by forced drinking of molten gold – a better story retailed by Dio Cassius 46. 23. 3; emperor Titus's death – a retreat of Nimrod's – from nose-invading mosquito is merely a Babylonian-Islamic fantasy, and Hood (p118) misses the lurid detail of its picking at the royal brain for seven years; Aristophanes's theory of human origins (p200) is from Plato's *Symposium*, not one of his own comic plays; Boudicca's/Boadicea's last battle was probably not near King's Cross (p16), a pity since her supposed burial under Platform 9 or 10 can be further romanticised by a link with the secret one used by the Hogwarts Express.

Hood's style is a bit breathy (quite Angela Brazilian Jolly Hockey Sticks), but blessedly free from academic Newspeak. It is also laced with nice flashes of wit, my favourite being her description of Augustine's ractety youth as "Really no different to many students away from home today."

Sometimes quasi-fortean. Her elliptical line (p156) on the Big Bang Theory, "But what need could there possibly be in what-is-not?" is worthy of our master himself.

The book is accurately printed, regularly adorned by highlighted definitions from *Johnson's Dictionary* (kudos for these), some desultory illustrations, interspersed with a few rather pointless quiz-lets (answers supplied), more suitable for the kiddies, a haphazard Further Reading List (I fancy Alan Cameron's two superlative books on chariot racing would be more congenial to her intended audience than Autenreith's *Homeric Dictionary*), and – preposterously – No Index. Barry Baldwin

Fortean Times Verdict

CLASSICAL STRANGE DEATHS? HUG THIS HOOD-IE TODAY

9

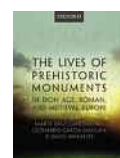
The Lives of Prehistoric Monuments in Iron Age, Roman, and Medieval Europe

Eds: Marta Díaz-Guardamino & Leonardo García Sanjuán

Oxford University Press 2015

Hb, 356pp, illus, ind, £85.00, ISBN 9780198724605

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £76.50



Unscrambling the post-completion history of ancient monuments is challenging. Studies tend to ignore their

later history, when earthworks, megalithic stone circles, statues and monoliths were reused – and sometimes abused. So finding a volume that "transcends traditional period and place constraints" bodes well.

Orwell's "Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past" sets the tone for the theme of appropriation of prehistoric monuments by political and religious elites. Part II comprises case studies, starting with the Christian formalisation of the Viking Jelling monuments in Denmark, and then deeper into the megalithic past. Gabriel Clooney examines the subtle differences implied by the various remakings of Ireland's iconic megalithic tombs, contrasting the Roman and early Mediæval offerings and burials in the Brú na Bóinne complex of Knowth and Newgrange, for which he validates a 4,000-year oral tradition that survived a language change, and at Tara where the symbolic power of the monument made it a nexus for the consolidation of a royal power alluded to by the legendary Tuath Dé.

Howard Williams examines the 'straitjacket' Victorian idea that the Dragon's Mound in *Beowulf* could have been inspired by a Neolithic chambered tomb and proposes an alternative from Roman architecture and Saxon church crypts built closer in time to the poem's writing. This idea is at odds with David Wheatley's recognition of the "wealth of evidence for Anglo-Saxon use and understanding of prehistoric

mounds and barrows”, for which he cites Wayland’s Smithy and the curious material gap at Avebury between the late Bronze Age and the Anglo-Saxon era, when a ‘social taboo’ affecting the site apparently lapsed. (This absence could hint at a massive caesura in the sociopolitical order at the close of the early Bronze Age.)

Neolithic and Iron Age statue menhirs and stele in the Channel Islands and Brittany, and the recycling of figures and standing stones into tombs and alignments are discussed in three papers. Excellent maps illustrate the complexity of the situation in Brittany, while the text tidily encapsulates the major trends brought to bear on the landscapes there by Iron Age attitudes, addressing the question of the degree of convergence with their megalithic forbears.

Mara Vejby discusses the Romans’ keenness to use Breton megalithic tombs, yet how much they were doing this to “control and subjugate a conquered population” is left open. By leaving devotional items and not razing the monuments, were the Romans honoring local religions? They had already assimilated so much Greek mythology and religion; why not also those of the Celtic Bretons, less ardently and on a more local scale? At what time do such customs become political connivances, devotions become expediencies? The reticence in getting to grip with these questions culminates in no fewer than 13 scholars explaining that in the Eastern Maghreb, where the Romans and Numidians built hundreds of tombs, very little is known about these monuments.

The range of subjects and the high cost of purchase may well put off researchers in specific periods, but those interested in the *longue durée*, the political use of monuments, and the transitions between eras should definitely get down the library for this one.

Jerry Glover

Fortean Times Verdict

ACADEMIC YET ACCESSIBLE
STUDY OF ANCIENT MYSTERIES

8

Wolfman scholarship

It may not be for newbies and its price is off-putting, but this series of essays on lycanthropy is wide-ranging and fascinating



Werewolf Histories

Willem de Blécourt

Palgrave Macmillan 2015

Hb, 326Opp, illus, ind, bib, £63.00, ISBN 978113752635

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £56.70

Although not as ubiquitous as vampires, werewolves are one of Hollywood’s stock monsters and the core elements of their legend are well known: the full moon, the silver bullet and the struggle between human and bestial natures. But this Hollywood werewolf has little connection to the werewolf – or, more accurately, werewolves – of European folklore, demonology and legend. As de Blécourt points out, “there is no werewolf history. At the most there are histories of werewolves, and these are fragmented and discontinuous.” In different places and at different times, the figure of the werewolf appears in a wide range of different roles.

Werewolf Histories isn’t an overview of all those roles; it’s a collection of scholarly papers on different aspects of the werewolf. Readers looking for a one-volume introduction to werewolf lore will be disappointed – de Blécourt argues that popular texts on werewolves include false information and leave out many aspects of the subject; the definitive scholarly work has yet to be written. This means that there are some areas where a newcomer to the topic will need to do additional reading; for example, several papers mention the 16th-century case of Peter Stumpp, the ‘Werewolf of Bedburg’, but none of them describe it in more than passing detail.

The papers in this volume cover

a wide range of different aspects of werewolf. Some examine the werewolf beliefs of a particular region. For example, Matteo Duni discusses werewolves or shapeshifting witches in 16th-century Italy, while Rolf Schulte covers Germany, Merili Metsvahi talks about Estonia, Michèle Simonsen discusses werewolf stories from 19th-century Denmark and Maja Pasari explores south Slavic werewolf folklore. Others deal with related elements of folklore and mythology – so, for example, although humans who change into wolves in Greek legend aren’t werewolves *per se*, they’re close enough for a paper by Richard Gordon. Likewise, Christa Agnes Tuczay deals with human-wolf transformation and hybrids in Old Norse sagas and poetry, while Aleks Pluskowski discusses mixtures of human and animal identities across mediæval north-western Europe. Others focus on particular types of source, such as Johannes Dillinger’s paper on werewolves in demonological literature or Rita Volmer’s paper on learned understandings of shape-shifting.

The range of papers underlines the vast divergence in beliefs about werewolves or human-wolf transformation. In some periods and places, werewolves were diabolical monsters, identical to or allied with witches; in others, they were more ambiguous creatures, cursed humans or even almost-beneficial parts of the supernatural landscape. A set of interviews cited by de Blécourt even portrays the werewolf

as an irritating but basically-harmless sort of bogeyman. The academic perspectives in *Werewolf Histories* are diverse, ranging from intellectual history to folklore studies to archaeology. The papers cite sources ranging from demonological texts to ethnographic interviews and even slander suits – a surprising number of people in early modern Germany insulted their neighbours by calling them werewolves.

Werewolf Histories is a fascinating look at the diversity of beliefs about werewolves, and a valuable reminder of the different contexts in which these beliefs occur. Even if you’re only interested in one of the periods or subjects included, the other papers are dense and thought-provoking.

That’s not to say the book is perfect. It’s not an introductory text, and some background in history or folklore will be helpful. It also carries a high price tag – like most academic texts, it’s intended to be something you pester your librarian to get. Lastly, it could have used another pass from the copy editor.

Overall, *Werewolf Histories* is packed with fascinating analysis of an under-examined piece of folklore. It’s particularly compelling because of the way in which it looks at the phenomenon of werewolf belief from several different scholarly perspectives. James Holloway

Fortean Times Verdict

SOMETHING FOR PHILOSOPHERS
TO CHEW ON, PERHAPS

6

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Erewhon 2.0

Useful and very elegant guide to far away places of which we know little



An Atlas of Countries that Don't Exist

A Compendium of Fifty Unrecognised and Largely Unnoticed States

Nick Middleton

Macmillan 2015

Hb, 232pp, maps, £20.00, ISBN 9781447295273

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £18.00

As Nick Middleton's introduction notes, the political map of the world is not static. The pretty-in-pink British territories of elderly maps have changed colour – and often name – with independence. The collapse of the Soviet Union alone led to 15 new states. He acknowledges the difficulty of selecting which countries to include, largely because of the difficulty of defining 'country': "as soon as you set out to find a clear definition you start running into discrepancies, exceptions and anomalies".

Some of the countries he includes are familiar (West Papua); others – such as Murrawarri, an ancient Aborigine homeland and one of the great inter-tribal meeting places of Eastern Australia, and the Principality of Hutt River, also in Australia (population two, following the 2013 death of Princess Shirley – less so. However, the 50 countries Middleton has selected represent a good spread of fluid (and sometimes barking mad) political geography.

The people of Murawari gave Queen Elizabeth II four weeks to prove her right to govern their country, but answer came there none, so they took it as read that

they were independent. Closer to home was Forvik, a Shetland island statelet founded by English yachtsman Stuart Hill, whom the UK media dubbed Captain Calamity after coastguards had to rescue him eight times in four months. He, too, asked for the basis of British authority over his supposedly Norse outcrop and was ignored until he was sued for debt. His independence arguments failed to convince the genial local Sheriff and he was declared bankrupt.

A less genial Sheriff rules the roost in Transnistria, a separatist region of Moldova. Order is maintained in this "Stalinist backwater and criminal Ruritania" by "a shadowy public body known only as 'the Sheriff'", which owns petrol stations, supermarkets and the country's premier football club, FC Sheriff Tiraspol. As the country's website boasts, the Sheriff is "Always with you". A comfort, obviously.

Of course, 50 hardly scrapes the surface of unrecognised countries: the utopian Kingdom of Enclava adjoins the Free Republic of Liberland, a Jeffersonian democracy which aims to promote happiness, on the Croatian-Serbian border – it moved when its original proposed location turned out to belong to Slovenia. The Kingdom of Araucania and Patagonia has a long-running and bitter battle for succession but no land. The Gay and Lesbian Kingdom of the Coral Sea Islands (ruler: Emperor Dale I) is omitted. However, the book is handsome, with a cover reminiscent of the *Saturday Book* annuals of the 1940s, good typography and clean looking maps. Oh, and it's properly edited, which is a pleasant novelty, and nicely written. What's not to like? Val Stevenson

Fortean Times Verdict

YES, GEOGRAPHY IS FUN WHEN IT ESCAPES THE CLASSROOM

9

Animal, Vegetable, Mineral?

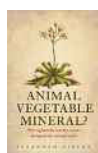
How Eighteenth-Century Science Disrupted the Natural Order

Susannah Gibson

Oxford University Press 2015

Hb, 215pp illus, ind, bib, £16.99, ISBN 9780 198705130

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £15.29



In a parallel universe, where I'm a commissioning editor for BBC4, I'd snap up the rights to Gibson's new book. *Animal,*

vegetable, mineral? has all the elements that a popular science documentary needs. Exotic experiments. Characters. History. And a 'big theme'. Indeed, themes don't come much bigger or more important than 'what is life'?

Gibson includes numerous telling vignettes – such as "somersaulting polyps", frogs "smartly trousered" to prevent copulation and "blossoming corals" – to illustrate the transformation of natural history during the 18th century. Indeed, biology – though the term wasn't coined until the turn of the 19th century – was at the heart of the century's scientific, philosophical and religious discourse.

Gibson shows just how rational the ideas were at the time, based on the evidence natural historians had. After all, 18th century natural historians couldn't rely on the plethora of high-tech techniques – such as electron microscopy, genetic 'fingerprinting' and immunochemistry – that are now routine in biology labs. As she notes, our current approach to, for example, biological systematics "only makes sense if we trust the theories of invisible atoms and molecules more than we trust our own senses".

Gibson neatly shows how natural historians' philosophical and religious perspectives influenced how they viewed the same experimental evidence. Some natural historians felt that investigations into the differences between living and inert, between plant and animal, and between species meant that "God was far less involved in the regulation of nature than previously believed". But some natural historians were

conservative Christians and found ways to integrate their belief with the experimental evidence.

Animal, vegetable, mineral? is replete with relevance for today. After all, from genetically modified food, to debates about environmental policy, to medical advances, biology remains central to many scientific, political and popular controversies. To take one example, as in the 18th century, Gibson notes, "a philosophical standpoint or religious belief can still colour the study of reproduction today" – as illustrated by the regular rows over, for example, embryological stem cells or innovative assisted reproductive technologies.

We're also still uncovering the remarkable diversity of the web of life – which is more extensive than the 18th century natural historians could have dreamed. Increasingly, animals that look similar resolve into different species based on genetic analysis. A recent study, for example, split the Plain Wren (*Cantorchilus modestus*), a central American bird, into "multiple biological species" based in part on "deep genetic divergences in mitochondrial DNA" (*Auk* 2015;132:795–807). (Mitochondria, the cells' powerhouse, have DNA distinct from that in the nucleus.)

And the big question remains unresolved. Just how do we explain the "vitality unique to living organisms"? As I noted a few years ago (*EMBO Reports* 2008;9:1067–9) the precise boundary between complex chemistry and life remains uncertain. But mapping this boundary and defining life – and multicellular life in particular – is of more than 'academic' interest. The definition could have important implications for numerous legislative and ethical debates. *Animal, vegetable, mineral?* is an excellent, valuable and engaging introduction to the intellectual trends that helped shape the modern scientific world, and demonstrates how history can inform debates facing us today.

Mark Greener

Fortean Times Verdict

PERFECT READING FOR BRONTITALL (IF YOU GET THAT, GET OUT MORE!)

9

Sci-fi and fantasy round-up

David V Barrett on a near-future Europe, trouble with fallen angels, supernatural steampunk, all-new Cthulhu, a PKD kids' story, a mistake and two Tolkien art books

Europe at Midnight

Dave Hutchinson

Solaris 2015

Pb, 304pp, £7.99, ISBN 9781781083987

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £7.59



the focus is more on the pocket Universe somehow created in Victorian times, which overlays parts of Europe.

There are points where you can cross between the two, and when a young university professor escapes from his world into ours, a complex train of events is set in motion...

The story unfolds in a series of almost novellas set in both worlds, with different viewpoint characters – Hutchinson makes the reader work, but it's worth every moment. *Europe in Autumn* was shortlisted for three major SF awards; *Europe at Midnight* should win at least one. It's possibly the most believable SF novel I've ever read, and quite unputdownable.

The House of Shattered Wings

Aliette de Bodard

Gollancz 2015

Pb, 400pp, £14.99, ISBN 9781473212558

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £13.49



Aliette de Bodard's *The House of Shattered Wings* is startlingly unusual.

It's set in a partly ruined Paris after the Great War – but it's the Great Magicians' War, not the one familiar to us. Competing magical houses live in a very uneasy truce in Paris, most of them led by Fallen Angels – and the one of the title was founded by Morningstar, who we soon realise was Lucifer. Morningstar vanished some years ago and is presumed dead – but he still seems to have a powerful influence.

His successor as leader of the house is one of four viewpoints, between them mortals, immortals, alchemists and fallen angels, each with their own complex character and background, in this novel of intrigue, treachery and out-of-the-ordinary magic. And it's beautifully written.

The Martian Falcon

Alan K Baker

Snowbooks 2015

Pb, 275pp, £7.99, ISBN 9781909679481

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £7.59

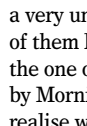
The Dulwich Horror & Others

David Hambling

PS Publishing 2015

Hb, 337pp, £20.00, ISBN 9781848639058

AVAILABLE VIA WWW.PSPUBLISHING.CO.UK/



If you're a Lovecraft devotee, *The Dulwich Horror & Others* is a collection of stories by *FT* regular David Hambling. Most are set, from 1927 to 2013, in south London – Dulwich, Norwood and perhaps my favourite, 'The Monsters in the Park', at Crystal Palace, with its underlying political message that Fascists are as much monsters as anything darkly supernatural. Wonderfully disturbing, and each is written in a suitable style, from 'The Dulwich Horror of 1927' (a tribute to Lovecraft's 'The Dunwich Horror') to 'The Thing in the Vault', set in gangster-ridden Chicago of the same year. There are links between some of the stories, suggesting that Hambling is developing a whole new branch of the Cthulhu mythos.

Nick and the Glimmung

Phillip K Dick

Gollancz 2015 (1988)

Pb, 121pp, £9.99, ISBN 9780575132993

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £9.99

The Seventh Miss Hatfield

Anna Caltabiano

Gollancz 2015

Pb, 293pp, £8.99, ISBN 9781473200418

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £8.54

The Art of the Lord of the Rings

JRR Tolkien, Wayne G Hammond, Christina Scull

HarperCollins 2015

Hb, 240pp, £25.00, ISBN 9780008105754

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £22.50

The Art of Stephen Hickman

Titan 2015

Hb, 144pp, £24.99, ISBN 9781783298457

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £22.49

In Dave Hutchinson's *Europe in Autumn*, we encountered a near-future Europe fragmented into tiny nations; in *Europe at Midnight*,



Supernatural steampunk noir – as close as you'll get to a category for Alan K Baker's *The Martian Falcon*. It's set in 1920s

America where a. we've had a manned expedition to Mars, b. zombies, poltergeists, shapeshifters and the rest of the dark panoply

exist, c. Al Capone is largely mechanical and d. HP Lovecraft joins Charles Fort's private investigator agency – which means that e. we get some very powerful and dangerous Great Old Ones. You might think that's at least one too many elements of oddness, but everything comes together into a gripping tale.



exciting and brave and funny and a bit scary.



The Seventh Miss Hatfield begins in the 1950s with 11-year-old Cynthia being drugged and turned into an immortal by the sixth Miss Hatfield; this has been going on for some centuries. When Cynthia wakes up the next morning she's a full-grown young woman – and she just accepts this, after a few minutes' confusion. Miss H sends her to steal a painting from a wealthy elderly man half a century earlier – and, disguised as his niece, she falls in love with his son. What could have been an interesting story about serial immortality and time travel becomes a period love story, with almost no plot, and poorly written besides. The fact that the author is 17 is no excuse for Gollancz publishing something so weak, and I'd imagine in five years' time an embarrassed Ms Caltabiano will wish they hadn't. Avoid, unless you're a Mills & Boon fan.



Let's finish with two art books.

The Art of the Lord of the Rings is a large-format slip-cased hardback of Tolkien's artwork. With the exception of his designs for the jackets of the three books, and one or two others, most of these are just rough sketches, some from his manuscript pages, or draft maps or inscriptions, and never intended for publication. The few finished pieces, like Old Man Willow and Rivendell, have long been available elsewhere. For completists only. *The Art of Stephen Hickman* is much more fun. Hickman is a Tolkien illustrator, but has also done covers for a wide range of SF and fantasy artists. There's a plethora of dragons – some of them gorgeously coloured – and of well-endowed ladies, from mermaids to princesses and warriors. Beautiful stuff!

SEND REVIEW COPIES OF DVDS, BLU-RAYS AND GAMES TO:
FORTEAN TIMES, PO BOX 71602, LONDON E17 0QD.



Future Shock! The Story of 2000AD

Dir Paul Goodwin, UK 2015

Metrodome, £9.99 (DVD + limited cinema release from 4 Dec)

First, I must declare a bit of bias, in that I crop up in this film a couple of times.

When I was asked to be in it, I was excited. I grew up with DR and Quinch as role models, and Halo Jones as my super-cool, well-travelled big sister. The artwork of Dave Gibbons, Kevin O'Neill and Brian Bolland was as familiar to me as the Paddington Bear curtains that hung in my childhood bedroom.

Future Shock! isn't a fan film, though, nor just a behind-the-scenes documentary for discerning comic readers. It is an even-handed look at the people and forces that shaped not just *2000AD* itself but the whole comics industry as we know it today, the careers and ideas of the creators who brought so much life to it and whose lives were in turn affected by its success.

Watching Pat Mills and John Wagner talk about what went into creating Judge Dredd or Rogue Trooper or Nemesis the Warlock, you really see the motivations behind the magazine: they weren't simply creating stories they wanted to tell, those stories were

deeply rooted in a desire to push back against the two children's comics of the 1960s and create something that reflected the times they lived in. Watching a newly elected Tory government crush the power to protest in both industry and politics, *2000AD* gave them a place to vent their dissatisfaction under the cover of a supposedly ***** genre.

One of the glories of this film is that the interviewees, while pulling no punches and being completely candid, all clearly have a huge affection for the title and its characters that goes beyond their own personal experiences. Even those creators who left under a cloud are still enthused when they are talking about the stories they loved.

The film leads you from the golden age of Alan Grant, John Wagner and Pat Mills to the heady heights of 1980s popularity, when careers, friendships and partnerships were forged that would stand the test of time. It also continues the story beyond the boom years and into the doldrums, the mistakes and tough calls, the decisions that cost *2000AD* dearly.

It ought to get dull at some point – like eavesdropping on a works reunion you find yourself stuck next to in the pub – but it doesn't. The fortunes of *2000AD*, its characters and creators, are so intrinsi-

cally tied to the fortunes of comics as an industry and a medium that watching the film becomes a journey into the very belly of the beast.

When you hear from the creators that they were forced to sign away their rights at the moment they cashed their pay cheques, and that Kevin O'Neill was employed to erase signatures from artwork, and then you hear the huge numbers that 'Prog 1' sold in its first week, it all paints a pretty grim picture of the British comics establishment of the time.

The world the creators lived in fired their rebellious side, and challenged them to shake things up. They clearly revelled in being able to comment on the politics of the day or create absurd characters that could represent a whole state or country. The science fiction angle meant the artists could run riot with the visuals of the characters and the worlds they inhabited, and the final product was done with so much imagination and wit, it could not help but succeed. The film shows us how the magazine grew exponentially, with the contributor list being a who's-who of comics. *2000AD* was clearly a victim of its own success, and the ensuing stampede towards American publishers was inevitable given the gulf between the working conditions on offer and the promise of

unheard-of rewards. Royalties and repeat fees, the foundation of the book and record industries, were unheard of in comics.

I have always known that many see my dad (Alan Moore – I know, more bias!) as a grumpy upstart, marching off at the first sign of something he doesn't approve of. Many a comment thread paints him as a bitter old crank shaking his fist at Hollywood and publishers alike, a loon with insanely naive expectations of how he should be treated. This film shows that not only was it not just him, but that he was reacting to an ideology shared across the board and born out of the very fabric of British comics itself.

British comics professionals were unimpressed with their working conditions and the way their employers treated their art (Dave Gibbons talking about full-colour painted art pages being used as cutting mats is enough to make you cry). Much as they loved their medium, and their work, they did not feel valued as creators. The shift to the US was not just about money; it was about self-respect.

Future Shock! argues that the anarchy, innovation and dark humour that was the lifeblood of *2000AD* went on to populate first the Vertigo imprint, and then the whole comics industry. So 1970s Britain begat *2000AD*, which begat 1980s Vertigo, which coloured the medium thereafter, raising the bar for what a comic could and should be. British comics creators also raised the bar for how writers and artists in the industry were remunerated, their contracts, their integrity, and their self-esteem. Clearly, the industry still has some way to go, even now, but the film provides us with the context of the attitude and behaviour of that first wave of talent that was head-hunted and whisked off to America, and thus much of the resulting fallout and controversy of the last 30 years.

Future Shock! is not to be missed. A glowing encomium and a searing indictment, a comprehensive history of the medium and a glorious celebration of one of Britain's most wonderful exports, its imagination, and its punk rock spirit.

Leah Moore

Fortean Times Verdict

CELEBRATING A VERY BRITISH COMICS REVOLUTION

9

A Traveller in Time

Dir Dorothea Brooking, UK 1978
Simply Media, £19.99 (DVD)

Alison Uttley's novel *A Traveller in Time* was published in 1939, and has been a favourite of young fantasy readers ever since. The BBC dramatised it in 1978, but it's not been available on DVD until now.

Recovering from pneumonia, teenager Penelope Taberner (Sophie Thompson) goes to stay with her Aunt Tissie (Elizabeth Bradley – Maud Grimes in *Coronation Street*) and Uncle Barnabas (veteran character actor Gerald James) on their farm in Derbyshire, and finds herself slipping back in time to the same house in the 16th century. Her ancestor Cicely Taberner (also played by Bradley) is the cook/housekeeper for the Babington family, who are hatching a plot to release Mary Queen of Scots, imprisoned in a nearby manor house. Penelope fits into her (on-off) new life as a servant very quickly, and becomes friends with Francis, younger brother of Anthony Babington, later executed for plotting against Queen Elizabeth. But she makes an enemy in a jealous visiting cousin who accuses her of being a spy, because she carelessly mentions that she knows that Mary Queen of Scots will die.

Although the basic story is the same as the original novel, the BBC version has some differences, all of which work well. Penelope comes to the farmhouse on her own rather than with her siblings (who are irrelevant to the story anyway), and the present day of the story is sensibly brought up to the present day of the 1970s: Uncle Barnabas drives a Land Rover rather than a horse and cart. This was the first TV role, and very assured at the age of 15, for Sophie Thompson (sister of Emma and daughter of Eric Thompson and Phyllida Law), who would go on to play in *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, *Gosford Park*, a Harry Potter film and *Eastenders*. It always adds to TV reissues when they have interviews with the actors; unfortunately this has no extras at all.

David V Barrett

Fortean Times Verdict

EXCELLENT ADAPTATION OF A CLASSIC TIMESLIP STORY

7

THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

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

DR TERROR'S HOUSE OF HORRORS

Dir Freddie Francis, UK 1965
Odeon Entertainment, £14.99 (Blu-ray)

THE SKULL

Dir Freddie Francis, UK 1965
Eureka Entertainment, £12.99 (Blu-ray)

THE MAN WHO COULD CHEAT DEATH

Dir Terence Fisher, UK 1959
Eureka Entertainment, £12.99 (Blu-ray)

Millions of young movie fans don't even realise Christopher Lee played Dracula: for them, he was the evil hippy Lord Saruman in *Lord of the Rings*, or the precision-bearded Count Dukula – sorry Dooku – in *Star Wars*. Actors don't often crack the longevity problem, but Lee did. He didn't do it by selling out either, or by becoming a parody of himself. He even looked dignified in white, wrap-around shades for his part in *Howling II: Your Sister is a Werewolf*. Lee lasted because of something simple: he kept getting parts – which doesn't happen through charity. It's about presence and quality. Knowing just how long his career would last makes watching his earlier work that much more enjoyable. Lee might not be the star of these three early-ish

films, yet they are roles that showcase the strong, camera-grabbing, mature performances he later became known for.

In *Dr Terror's House of Horrors* (1965), he's a snooty art critic who can dish out the insults but can't take them. Stalked by an artist's severed hand, it's a rare chance to watch Lee play the screaming, gibbering victim (turns out, he gibbers really well). The rest of the film's a Daddy-O-1960s treat, with bright young fellas like Donald Sutherland and Roy Castle hearing their creepy fates from a Tarot-dealing Peter Cushing. Amicus wound up being famous for their anthology movies, and while not their best, this was their first. It's got a good number of stories too. I like five tales in portmanteau horror – it means there's always a new tale round the corner, if the current one isn't up to snuff. *Cough – "Creeping Vine" – *Cough.

From the same year we get *The Skull* (1965), in which Lee and Cushing get haunted and hypnotised by the Marquis de Sade's cranium. It's got a handy float function too! Some critics say this film sucks, but maybe they need their skulls examined. It's surreal and spooky and I likes it. The story, by Robert Bloch, might



be a little slim, but it's gripping and tense. Lee's on top haunted form as an antiques collector buying demonic statues at the silent behest of the Skull. Yet it's Cushing playing Russian Roulette in a bizarre Kafka-esque sequence that lingers in the memory.

Finally, we've got a lesser known Hammer film: *The Man Who Could Cheat Death* (1959). Anton Diffring would become the movie Nazi in the following decade; here though, he's a doctor desperate for eternal life. He guzzles from Jekyll-style beakers and tries to organise gland transplants to keep him looking 35, even though he's 104. It's very talky, almost like a stage play, and sometimes tedious too. Yet its fusion of Dorian Gray and Mr Hyde still makes for some interesting philosophising from the cast. Lee plays a surgeon, reluctant to help, and while his performance is solid, he feels wasted. If this had been made a decade later, he'd have bagged the lead. He may already have played Dracula, but his stardom wouldn't really explode until its sequel, *Dracula: Prince of Darkness*, in 1966. From then on, Christopher Lee would shine until the day he died. And then some.



Fortean Times Verdict

THREE EARLY TREASURES FROM THE CAREER OF CRISTOPHER LEE

7

Midwinter of the Spirit

Dir Richard Clark, UK 2015

ITV Studios Home Entertainment, £12.99 (DVD)

I once found myself in Hereford bus station as a strange-looking single-decker hove into view. Instead of the usual destination blind, it carried a raggedy piece of cardboard fastened with string and bearing the legend "Much Marcle" – birthplace of serial killer, rapist and torturer Fred West – the characters becoming increasingly crabbed as they neared the arbitrary cut-off point where the cardboard placard had clearly been torn from a larger sheet. It was amusing and slightly unnerving, conjuring up images of a sort of local Lovecraftian hinterland – Herefordshire's equivalent of Arkham County – where unspeakable things went on between closely related people living in remote villages and farms.

Phil Rickman's novels have put this liminal border region between England and Wales, so rich in landscape, lore and legend, on the literary map, mixing ancient supernatural forces with the modern murder mystery to compelling effect. The only surprise is that his Merrily Watkins series has taken this long to reach our TV screens, as the genre-bending proposition of a rural vicar solving bizarre crimes and fighting the forces of evil in a world as immediately recognisable as Morse's Oxford seems a no-brainer for the medium.

This three-part adaptation, courtesy of *Ghostwatch* scribe and sometime *FT* contributor Steven Volk, introduces our heroine as she returns to her rural parish after undergoing training in what's nowadays known as 'Deliverance Ministry' but which most people would understand as exorcism. Straight away, she's called on to investigate a crucifixion in some nearby woods and attend a dying child molester in the hospital – two strands of supernatural and worldly evil that turn out to be linked in numerous ways as the plot inevitably thickens: we get pagan rites, church desecrations, a fake psychic, an unhinged Canon and rum goings-on at Hereford Cathedral.

It's all highly entertaining, and often quite spooky, if a bit rushed at times. One can't help but feel that an extra episode would have allowed for a bit more light and shade, a bit more background. I'd have liked to have seen more of Merrily's day-to-day vicaring – presumably she's not

always chasing Satanists – to get a better sense of the challenges she faces as a widowed, single-mum, inner-city female priest parachuted into a weird rural parish. And perhaps a bit more humour wouldn't have gone amiss (when a vicar friend was preparing for her first go at deliverance ministry, her husband helpfully whistled 'Tubular Bells' in the background to get her in the mood). It's a well-wrought piece of telly, though, with an effective script, atmospheric locations and a solid cast. I wasn't quite convinced by Anna Maxwell Martin's central performance: while she's good at showing the all-too-human side of a woman of God in a man's world (smoking fags and getting a bit swear-y), her slightly one-note performance didn't really get across the faith or the compassion that go with the territory.

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict

A DAMN SIGHT SCARIER THAN THE VICAR OF DIBLEY

7

Iceman

Dir Wing-cheong Law, China 2014

Kaleidoscope, £12.99 (DVD), £15.99 (3D blu-ray)

Possibly the only film you'll see this year which features a man urinating like a firehose, an exploding toilet and a fossilised penis, *Iceman* is a typically barking Hong Kong action-comedy. The largely incomprehensible plot has something to do with Ming dynasty warriors frozen in time and thawed out in the 21st century. They're all looking for the aforementioned appendage, which is apparently the key to unlocking a time machine. Our hero He Ying (veteran martial artist/actor Donnie Yen) flops around like a fish out of water until ditsy May (Eva Huang) is roped in to help him figure out how to use modern stuff like iPads and the Internet. Not much of it works and even less makes sense. I watched in increasing bewilderment as the film lurched from gun battles to pratfalls to gross sentimentality to *Matrix*-style set pieces. No doubt it's more entertaining in 3D, which is the only possible explanation for the innumerable shots of breaking glass.

Daniel King

Fortean Times Verdict

MUCH LESS FUN THAN IT SOUNDS, SADLY...

4

SHORTS

MR HOLMES

Entertainment One, £12.99 (DVD), £14.99 (Blu-ray)



I'd been eagerly anticipating the long-awaited biopic of breakfast TV presenter Eamonn, so was disappointed to discover this is in fact a drama about Sherlock (Ian McKellen), now in his 90s and living out his retirement in a cottage on the south coast. Attended to by his housekeeper (Laura Linney) and her young son Roger (Milo Parker), Sherlock does little more than look after his apiary, beset as he is by creeping senility. He struggles to recall the incident that led to his retirement, although the feelings of guilt it provoked remain. From the moment the film opens with a shot of a steam train belting through the majestic countryside it's clear you're watching a British heritage production – the cinematic equivalent of visiting a National Trust property. Everything is achingly beautiful, nothing ugly is allowed to ruin the effect, and it all harks back to an idealised vision of some past England. Events unfold at a glacial pace, with McKellen drawing out his lines like Gandalf at half speed. To pep things up, there are flashbacks to Sherlock's last case and these are the best parts of the film. It's not bad, just offensively bland and with BBC Sunday night drama written all over it. **DK 5/10**

JONATHAN STRANGE & MR NORELL

RLJ Entertainment, £14.99 (DVD), £19.99 (Blu-ray)



There's nothing intrinsically wrong with the BBC television adaptation of Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* – much of it is quite impressive – but somehow the magic has sadly gone missing en route to the screen. Certainly, the BBC deserves praise for placing this alt-history costume drama in the Sunday night 'heritage' slot; however, the slow start and uncertain finale may have done TV fantasy more harm than good, with viewing figures halved by the climax. The middle instalments of this seven-episode mini-series are where it springs into life, especially in the Napoleonic wars where magic is used as both a defensive and offensive weapon. Elsewhere, things are rather slow and somewhat dull for a drama dealing in magic. Bertie Carvel is great as naturally talented magician Jonathan Strange, while a slightly miscast Eddie Marsan gets the short end of the stick as the government-approved magician who wants to keep the secrets of the unexpected magical revival to himself. The warring pair is surrounded by a colourful supporting cast, featuring such notables as Marc Warren, Paul Kaye, and Sam West. *Wallander* writer Peter Harness faced a tough task in adapting the sprawling source novel that had already defeated attempts at a film version, while *Sherlock* and *Doctor Who* director Toby Haynes was a safe pair of hands. Even so, the material has resisted being brought to truly magical life on screen. **Brian J Robb 6/10**

A CHRISTMAS HORROR STORY

Entertainment One, £9.99 (DVD)



This seasonal portmanteau horror film from Canada runs its four different stories in tandem rather than separately, but that's about its only departure from predictable generic norms. Krampus, a haunted high school, a changeling child and a zombie outbreak in Santa's elven workshop each offer good moments but swiftly run out of steam. William Shatner is the radio host in the film's framing sequence; he's clearly only there as a loyal Canadian. **DS 4/10**



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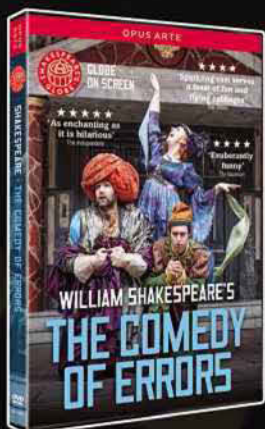


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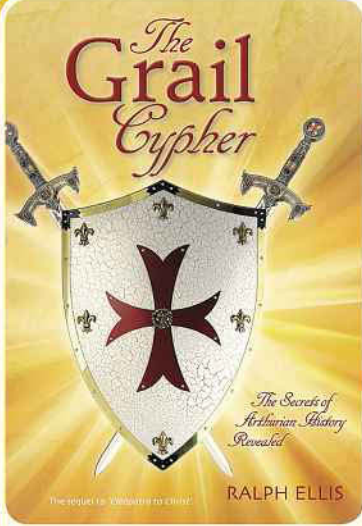


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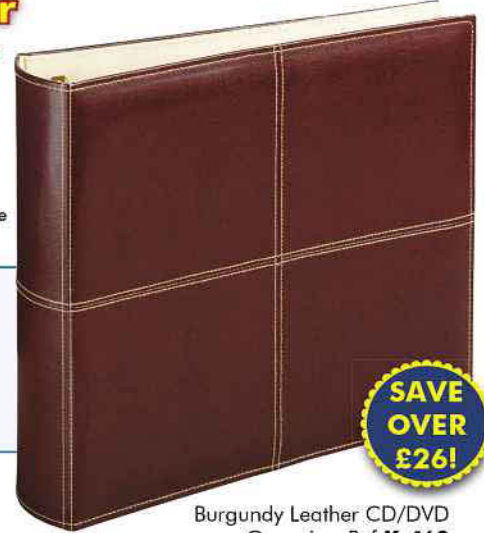
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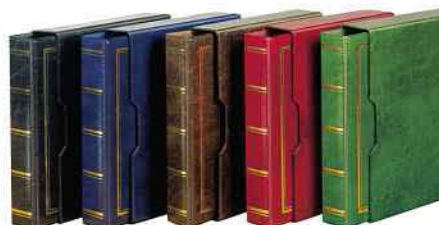
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Dear FT...

letters



Rapid cooling

With reference to Malcolm Christopher's letter reporting coots and moorhens entombed in a sheet of ice, and SD Tucker's response to it [FT331:73, 333:67], I am reminded of one of the articles in a *New Scientist* Daedalus column from many years ago, in which it was suggested that the excellent preservation of frozen mammoths might be due to a freak naturally occurring 'maser cooling' effect. These columns were written by Dr David EH Jones and were often deliberately mischievous and fanciful. I think the most plausible mechanism for trapping these unfortunate animals in ice is 'Night Radiative Cooling' (neat summary available here: <http://www.asterism.org/tutorials/tut37%20Radiative%20Cooling.pdf>). The 'cold sky' is a direct view of deep space, which is at a few degrees above absolute zero. Heat can in principle be rapidly sapped from an object near room temperature by radiative cooling in this way – if atmospheric conditions permit. Clear skies, low humidity and no wind can potentially allow a rapid drop in temperature of several degrees if conditions are right.

Ian l'Anson
By email

The 'ersatz' Universe

I recently concluded that we are all now living in the 'ersatz' universe. Let me explain. The most noticeable symptom of this is in the entertainment industry, where we now have re-makes of films and television programmes. To put it another way, we have (that dreaded word) 're-imaginings', most of which are inferior to the original. Is this the case of the entertainment industry simply running out of ideas, or a case of 'What goes around, comes around'?

It is as if we are all living in a laboratory where some clones have escaped. They may look the same, but they're not. Have we crossed over from our own universe into a parallel one? For example, are we now in the uni-

Simulacra corner



Paul Vought noticed this patch of condensation looking like a cherubic face, which appeared on a window for three mornings in a row. *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@forteanimes.com – and please tell us your address.*

verse where Arnold Schwarzenegger was never in the film *Total Recall* but Colin Farrell was? If you crossed over from one parallel universe into another, how would you know? My theory is that the changes would be so subtle you would hardly notice them. It could possibly take hundreds or thousands of alternative universes before you would notice that things were dramatically different.

Leslie W Hurn
Norwich, Norfolk

Michigan panther

I enjoyed the report about the painting featuring a black panther [FT333:19]. In my home state of Michigan there is a long history of black panther sightings. Arkansas folk-rock duo Trout Fishing in America memorialised the Michigan panther in "There's a Panther in Michigan" on their 1994 album *Who Are These People?*

Sample verse, from the point of view of a sheriff investigating a panther sighting: "When a farmer in Manchester called I was there in minutes / Following the trail of feathers / Through the high grass when he screamed / Thirty-four years in law enforcement, I've never been so scared / I could see

where he was going by the way the grass was moving."

Mark Willis
Los Angeles, California

Self-mummification

Your report on the fascinating self-mummified Buddhist monk discovered inside a Chinese statue [FT331:12] says that he is probably an example of Sokushinbutsu. The process in mainland Asia may have been similar, but Sokushinbutsu is Japanese in origin. I have been to see two such Sokushinbutsu, in Sakata city, Yamagata prefecture, northern Japan, where it was mainly practised. While many over the years attempted self-mummification, these are the only two to have "survived" the process at the temple. They both sit, their legs crossed in the Zazen position for meditation, dressed in fine kimono (which, I was told, are changed regularly – very carefully, I'd imagine). To the temple, the two priests are still alive, having achieved Buddhahood.

Richard Eccleston
Maruoka, Japan

Minnie Pearl

David Thrusell wrote an intriguing article on recordings related to the JFK assassination [FT333:42-46]. I was surprised to find that the infamous and error-riddled Lincoln-Kennedy list of supposed coincidences and connections began as a record, "penned, recited and recorded" by Buddy Starcher. However, when looking for more information about the record, I found several references to a certain Minnie Pearl being the author or co-author of the text. Is that true? Her real name was Sarah Cannon (1912-96), and she was a very popular comedian playing on her southern background. I don't know if writing the text in question would have been out of character for her, but it ought to have been unusual enough to be worth at least some newspaper coverage. So far, I've found nothing.

Peter Olausson
Gothenburg, Sweden

Editor's note: The list of Kennedy-Lincoln coincidences first appeared in 1964, only months after JFK's assassination. Wikipedia thinks it is "American folklore of unknown origin". Minnie Pearl is credited as co-writer of 'History Repeats Itself'. It does seem an unusual collaboration for this comedy song specialist and doyenne of the Grand Ole Opry, but is perhaps explained by the fact that she was a labelmate of Buddy Starcher's at Tennessee-based Starday Records.



THE SURREAL MCCOY

Forteana and imagination

Having made the choices she did throughout her lifetime, and having written *The English Eccentrics* (1933), Edith Sitwell certainly set herself up for an article like ‘The Strangest Family in England’ [FT333:36-41], but SD Tucker’s article was only a gloss on some unusual personal habits (and perhaps personal limitations).

I wish the article had questioned and explored what the role of being an artist might have had on the choices of the Sitwell siblings, especially since even a cursory study of the lives of many creative individuals will reveal an equally odd set of choices, actions and personal styles, from Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Baudelaire, Nathaniel Hawthorne and August Strindberg to WB Yeats, Carl Jung, Lytton Strachey, Djuna Barnes, Isak Dinesen, Hilda Doolittle, TS Eliot, Anna Kavan, Jean Cocteau, Zora Neale Hurston, Paul Bowles and his wife Jane Bowles, James Merrill, Denton Welch, Yukio Mishima and Muriel Spark. And that’s a very short list of writers, excluding painters, actors and musicians (though Cocteau was also a filmmaker and Paul Bowles a composer).

Most of these artists also took forteana as their subject matter at least on occasion, and many had one or more brushes of some kind with what we think of as the paranormal. Many experienced severe mental breakdowns or some kind of apparent mental illness throughout their adult lives. Early in her career, Muriel Spark stated that one of her goals was, to paraphrase, “to show that the supernatural is the natural”. Yeats reported on his own experiences as a young man with fairies near Ben Buben, a fact many of his academic biographers like to ignore or brush aside; while living in London during World War II, Doolittle held extensive séances and believed she had contacted the spirits of airmen killed during the Battle of Britain; James Merrill transcribed a 640-page poem, ‘The Changing Light at Sandover,’ which he ‘received’ via years of sessions on a Ouija board; and Yeats’s experiences with ‘au-



WAYLEN THE ALIEN

On a visit to Leek in the Staffordshire Moorlands, I noticed this little grey alien on the forecourt of a garage on the Ashbourne Road advertising MOTs. If I heard the mechanic right, he’s nicknamed “Waylen the Alien”. **Mike Fryer, Colchester, Essex**

tomatic writing’ – and the book that resulted, *A Vision* (1925) – are fairly well known. Jane Bowles found herself on the wrong end of North African magical practices before her early death at 56, and Jung’s long psychic ‘conversations’ with his ‘personal daimon’ Philemon are familiar to most forteans. Like Edith Sitwell, Isak Dinesen adopted an elaborate gothic style of dress in later life, presenting herself to the world not so much as an elderly woman, but as an archetypal figure, an “abbess of the nightingales”; and Eliot wore “green face paint” to Bloomsbury parties.

I believe there’s a crossroads where the private-personal and the fortean intersect in many lives, so that one’s literal and figurative passions, perspective of the moment, and character may play a significant role in what one experiences of an unusual nature. As it relates to creative individuals, this is a vein of forteana rarely explored by forteans, and one that I believe can bear a lot of

fruit. Gary Lachman has written extensively on Jung and a number of 19th century writers, but those of the 20th century have been largely ignored thus far. Kenneth Macpherson, Iris Murdoch, Kenneth Anger, Nico, Marianne Faithfull... There’s a lot of questions out there just waiting to be asked. Even the stoic, plainspoken American painter Grandma Moses reported seeing the ghost of what she called ‘a sea captain’ in her biography, *My Life’s History* (1952).

Joseph Barnes
By email

Anger’s curse

A complement to Kenneth Anger’s cursing of Led Zeppelin guitarist Jimmy Page is presented in singer/actress Marianne Faithfull’s 2007 collection of memoirs, *Memories, Dreams & Reflections* (Fourth Estate, London). In a chapter entitled, appropriately enough, ‘Looking Back At Anger’, Faithfull relates in detail the

unpleasant experience of being cursed by the filmmaker/magus. As a member of the London rock aristocracy in the 1960s and 1970s, Faithfull developed a substantial relationship with Anger, culminating in her starring role as the demon goddess Lilith in Anger’s magical epic *Lucifer Rising* (1972). However, having penned a purportedly unflattering portrayal of the filmmaker in her 1994 autobiography *Faithfull*, a miffed Anger retaliated by sending her a rather literal ‘poison-pen letter’ (the precise date of this incident was not provided).

Faithfull’s description of the curse is that “visually it was an astonishing item. Very graphic and ghastly at the same time, and as maliciously conceived as only a true Satanist and twisted individual could conjure up. It was this huge piece of paper with threats inscribed in blood – Max Factor blood, I’m sure, completely fake – but as an artefact it looked incredible. It was a big, malign, poisonous curse – maybe a bit too wordy, maybe he raged on a bit too much. I mean, does the Devil rant you to death?” While being initially amused by the theatricality of the artefact, and Anger’s anti-Semitic railings against her Jewish ancestry – “You Jew! You Jew, like Kirk Douglas, like DANNY KAYE!” – Faithfull quickly becomes freaked out by “all the really vile stuff [that] started to spew out: ‘DIE OF LUNG CANCER!’ and all that generic malice right out of *The Common Book of Beastly Spells*”.

Guided by her spiritual intuition to do something to counteract the curse, Faithfull consults some esoterically inclined friends, who advise her to “take it to the crossroads where there was a Lady Chapel and burn it with salt, rosemary and rue”. Having dispelled the hex through this act of white magic, Faithfull then proceeds to formally rebuke Anger via “a stiff letter” in which she reminds him of her long-term support for his work and person, and admonishes him for throwing “a queenie fit about the book”. A placated Anger replies in turn, only to end his response with the caveat “unfortunately, I can’t take the curse back”.

Faithfull's explanation of why she refrained from mentioning her purification ritual to Anger reveals a considerable knowledge of magic (her esoteric chops also evident in the fact that this collection of memoirs shares its title with Jung's posthumous autobiography), along with admirable taste in classic horror films: "I, of course, did not tell Kenneth what I'd done – burning his letter at some wayside shrine – because in some Harry Potterish way he could have made a counter curse to that, too. It's quite complicated, this whole business. And you have to be very careful. What I didn't want to do – which in fact you can do – was to send the curse back to Kenneth so that it would land on him. Within the occult scheme of things, if you send out that much hatred against someone and the recipient has enough power to hurl it back at you psychically, it can rebound – like the piece of paper with the spell on it that Dana Andrews slips into the magician's pocket at the end of *Curse of the Demon*. I'm not an expert, needless to say, but it's a wearying and aggravating business".

With the benefit of hindsight, Faithfull muses on the event as a consequence of her youthful dabbling in the occult under Anger's tutelage: "What is quite certain is that demons will fasten on you when you are at your weakest point and by toying with them, even in a film, you give them power." (All quotes from pp.49-54).

On a more trivial note, 'Kenneth Anger' is also the title of a classic 1985 indie-rock number by New Zealand group The Exploding Budgies, although the song's engagement with Anger is on the level of emotional metaphor – "Just like Kenneth Anger" is the refrain of the chorus – rather than direct homage, as in Ozzy Osbourne's priceless pæan to Anger's mentor, 'Mr Crowley'.

Dean Ballinger
Hamilton, New Zealand

I think a little delve into rock history is required to balance Chris Saunders's article regarding Kenneth Anger's supposed cursing of Jimmy Page [FT333:51]. By the mid 1970s, Page was not alone in running out of creative

steam. Most of his contemporaries had too. Deep Purple's Richie Blackmore hit the buffers around *Machine Head* (1972) and The Who never again reached the heights of *Quadrophenia* (1973). The same happened to the prog rock of Rick Wakeman and Keith Emerson. Unless the mercurial Anger managed to tag all these rockers into his curse I would suggest Page reduced output was more to do with changing times / musical tastes. More contentiously, it could be argued that apart from a few crowd pleasers on *Physical Graffiti* (1975), his best work was more or less completed by *Led Zeppelin IV* in 1971 – way before the curse!

On the other hand, while I was listening to a film talk at the BFI by Anger many years ago, a strange, large, cockroach-looking creature seemed to crawl over the stage. Maybe it was poor pest control at the theatre or something more sinister sent by the Magus?

James Briggs
Canterbury, Kent

Adamski unmasked

Well, that's a body blow and no mistake! Marc Hallett's 'Appraisal of George Adamski' [FT333:49] has at a stroke demolished what was once, for me, the foundation of all knowledge. My purchase of *Flying Saucers Have Landed* at the impressionable age of 13, back in 1953, was the start of an exciting wild goose chase that was to last for years and set me firmly on the forteran road. *Flying Saucers Have Landed*, *Inside the Spaceships*, and JH Williamson's *Other Tongues*, *Other Flesh* moulded my perception of life, the Universe, and everything for well over a decade, aided and abetted by innumerable other saucer publications from the likes of Neville Spearman and Amherst Press, Wisconsin. I lived and breathed Adamskian beliefs, certain of their absolute truth in spite of others' scepticism and ridicule. However, the steady unfolding of astronomical knowledge, and the failure of the various authors' predictions, caused me niggling doubts that grew steadily with time. When Adamski and Williamson fell out and began denounc-

ing each other's Cosmic Truths, the veil lifted and I realised, regretfully, that I'd been led up the garden path!

Yet I've always suspected that there was something to Adamski's story, even if not literally, physically true. He had experienced something on some level, I thought, and his account was honest, if mistaken. Now, suddenly, not only Adamski but also a whole host of other interconnected personages and reputed occurrences, taken at face value by a naive youngster, have been swept away by a tide of

revelation, leaving those fanciful early dreams in tatters. The glory has departed, replaced by stern Realism.

Fair enough, though: truth is preferable to fantasy, and it's good to keep ones feet firmly on the ground. Just as long as we retain our capacity for wonder, and a realisation that all is not yet scientifically cut and dried. Much mystery remains, and it's my sincere hope we'll still be scratching our heads for centuries to come!

Roger Wyld, (very) long time reader

By email



It's behind you!

Last May, my family and I went for a camping trip at Aberford, near Leeds, West Yorkshire. Before leaving we went for a walk and I took lots of photographs. On 24 May at about 2pm we walked through the Dark Arch, a 295ft (90m) tunnel built in 1813-14 to shield the inhabitants of Parlington Hall from traffic passing along Parlington Lane. The tunnel felt strange at the time, and on getting home I went through the pictures to pop some on Facebook and found the one reproduced here – one of five I took in the tunnel. I was the last one in the Dark Arch, or so I thought! **Russell Brooks, Norton, Cleveland**

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

The hide

It was the school summer holidays in 1984, and I was 12 at the time. The weather was clear and bright and it was mid-afternoon.

A friend and I had constructed a "hide" on a disused railway line in the village of Cullingworth, West Yorkshire. The embankment had all but a few traces of the railway removed and a footpath made its way through overgrown willow trees and the odd bog. It made an excellent place to hang out during our school holidays.

We were in our "hide" when a man carrying a small girl on his shoulders went past within a couple of feet without noticing our presence. We watched them move down the path until they were out of sight and were about to speak to each other when a figure dropped down from the trees directly in front of the hide.

The figure landed half-crouched, facing the direction the man and child had gone. It was completely black, like a strong shadow rather than a solid object, matt black with no reflected light or shadow of its own. I don't recall any sound when the figure landed. It started to rise from the half crouched position to standing and at the same time turned towards us. I remember that as it rose it appeared to be shorter than the man that had passed: I guess around 5ft (1.5m) tall and definitely humanoid in form. At this point we simultaneously turned and ran and didn't look back or speak until we were home. I remember the events so clearly as I was deeply spooked by the encounter.

P Dale

Haworth, W Yorkshire

Churchyard shadow-man

I was recently taking my 14-month-old daughter for a stroll in her buggy through a rather nice, peaceful country graveyard near where I live. It was a bright, sunny afternoon with only a light breeze blowing. I was rounding the chapel of rest at the end of the graveyard when I became aware of a black figure to my left and slightly behind me, apparently following me. It was what looked like a two-dimensional 'shadow-man' against the chapel wall, with a crooked hat and long, fluttering cloak or coat. It was very dense black, and resembled a silhouette or a cutout. I paused, as it was creepy, and tried to see if it was me making the shadow on the wall – although as it was a warm day I wasn't wearing a hat or coat. The shadow man 'skipped' out of my vision when I did this. Coincidence or not, a blast of cold, strong wind appeared out of nowhere.

I continued walking, a bit spooked but more curious as to what was making me 'see' the shadow 'following' me. I only got a bit more scared when I left the chapel and carried on walking away; I 'felt' that it was still following me



There was a trilby-style hat on his head and it looked as if he had on some kind of long overcoat

down the path and out of the churchyard, treading just behind me in a malicious way. I was reminded of those stories about the mischievous Puck character who used to play with his unsuspecting victims to scare them when alone. I paused once more to look back, but again just seemed to glimpse a tall black figure, and just as quickly as it was gone again. I certainly walked out faster than I came in!

Elvira

Fortean Times Message Board

Mr Nobody

I must have been about seven or eight years old when I was walking with my mother near our home one day. I became aware of a man walking parallel to us on our right, and keeping pace with us. The thing was, it wasn't a man, it was a silhouette of a man. There was a trilby-style hat

on his head and it looked as if he had on some kind of long overcoat. The silhouette had the appearance of the images you see if you close your eyes and apply pressure to your eyeballs, but quite dark. I told my mother about him (she didn't see anything) and after that I used to call him 'Mister Nobody'. I never saw anything like this again, but what stuck in my mind was that this was a strangely two-dimensional figure.

Caroline –

FTMB

Harold and the hat man

I have a close friend named Harold. We have known each other for about 30 years. He and I, at one point, had some very strange encounters with the Ouija board; although the following experience had nothing to do with our Ouija experiences, I mention it as being illustrative of the fact that Harold and I have had more than one shared paranormal experience. When we were first introduced by a mutual friend, it was as though we had known each for years. We have always been very close. The paranormal encounter that I consider the most frightening of my life was also simultaneously experienced by Harold, in slightly different form, but with the major elements of the experience coinciding.

About 25 years ago, while I was living at my parents' house, I awoke one morning to see my bedroom door opening. Immediately, I thought, with distinct clarity, "My father is coming in to empty the trash can." As the door opened more widely, and I didn't see my father enter the room, I realised that something else was going on, and I began to panic, thinking someone had broken into the house. I believed myself to be fully awake, not dreaming.

As I became increasingly aware that someone dangerous was about to enter the room, I also realised that I was lying on my back and could not move. I then saw a black two-dimensional, shadowed outline of a man in what appeared to be a pointy-looking trench coat and pointy, rimmed hat enter the room.

I have never been more frightened in my life. I somehow knew, as the figure made its way towards me in the bed, that it was going to do something to my neck and kill me. Along with the paralysis, this thought was excruciatingly horrific. As the figure, the most malevolent-feeling thing I have ever experienced, got to the side of my bed, near my neck, I 'woke up'. The room, as I looked around, was just as it had looked moments before during the 'dream', with shadows and early morning light exactly as I had 'seen' them moments before. As bad as the experience was, I filed it under 'nightmares beyond all nightmares' and pretty much forgot about it.

About a week later, I went to visit Harold, who had had a string of bad things to endure. His father had died during the previous year, his mother had run over his cat, and he had been fired from his job. His older brother, going through a divorce, had moved in with Harold and his mother. During my visit, Harold mentioned that he'd recently had a horrible dream. He said that one morning he'd woken up and thought his brother was coming into his room "to borrow some socks". But he soon realised that it was not his brother opening the door, but some malevolent entity determined to kill him. I said, "Stop, Harold. Was it a shadow type thing with a pointy, trench coat-shaped body?"

"Yes," said Harold, "With a pointy kind of hat on." Harold had also been unable to move as the thing came around to the side of the bed, and he had also felt it would do something to his neck.

During the discussion, we both remarked how the ideas about my father emptying trash and his brother borrowing socks just kind of came into our heads as complete thoughts that were almost too placating, especially since my father never came into my room to empty my trashcan and Harold's brother never entered his room unbidden, let alone to borrow some socks.

We both agreed that it was terrifying. We've never talked to anyone else with a similar experience although, since then, I've come across references to the Scandinavian myth of 'the Hag', a succubus-type creature that somewhat mirrors the paralysis and fear elements of our experiences.

Name and address on file

By email

Me and my shadow

About 10 years ago I had a friend staying for a short time. One night he was on the phone to his girlfriend while I was sitting in a chair facing the door to the hall. I saw a 6ft (1.8m) -tall, jet black figure walk past the door. It looked as if someone had cut a person out of black paper, although it walked like a real person. I thought it must be my then husband going to the bathroom. I got up and looked, but he was still asleep in bed and no one was in the loo.

About four years later, something similar happened. It was about 11pm on a hot, humid night when I couldn't sleep and so was doing odd chores to tire myself out. As I was about to go into the hall I saw what I can only describe as a figure which appeared to be an outline made up of a white line – as if someone had been outlined in tape! It was walking towards the bedroom and my first thought was that someone had got into the flat. I searched the place, but there was no one there. To say it freaked me out would be an understatement.

Yesterday, I couldn't sleep and was sitting at the computer. It was about 2am and I was wide awake. Out of the corner of my eye I became aware of a dark figure standing in the hallway. It didn't have a clear edge to it, and I was convinced that I was just seeing things – but I could *feel* that there was someone there and kept looking up into the hall. After about 10 minutes, the figure

seemed to have moved right next to me and was generating coldness. I was still convinced I was seeing things, but it didn't go away even when I turned my head to look at 'it'. After a short period it moved behind me and cast a shadow over the area where I was sitting, as if someone was standing over me, between the main light and myself. I kept turning around to look, but it would have been impossible for someone to get past me without me seeing them. After 10 minutes or so it lifted, and the shadow just vanished. I was spooked, but not freaked out.

WH

Dartford, Kent

Glastonbury Shadow

Several years ago I used to live on Chilkwell Street in Glastonbury in a very old house. One day I walked upstairs to the bedroom. The door was open, and as I reached the top of the stairs I saw appear from the corner of the room, as if from nowhere, a person-shaped shadow. It looked exactly like a human being but it had no features, as it was as black as the ace of spades. It seemed to be aware that it had been seen and disappeared right in front of my eyes. I saw it again two weeks later, but this time there was a red tint where its eyes would have been. I've done some checking on shadow people and I know that others have seen them as well. Some think they are ghosts, aliens or demons. I'm not sure.

Martin Gidlow

FTMB

Warping shadow

Years ago, I was living in a two-bedroom ground floor flat with a friend. One afternoon when my mate was out working, I picked up a copy of the *Tao Te Ching*, sat on the large windowsill in the lounge and began browsing through the book. After a few minutes, I suddenly saw something out of the corner of my eye and looked up to see a tall (and very broad), approximately 7ft (2m), dark, shadowy and roughly human shape form entering through the lounge doorway from the hall. While the entity had no visible features, I had the distinct impression that it was a male form.

As I looked at this thing straight on, it warped and stretched backwards out of sight; it didn't turn around or move, it just stretched backwards. I immediately searched the flat to see if there was anyone else but me there... and of course there wasn't.

John Hope

Southbourne, Dorset

Screaming at shadows

This took place in a flat during a period of my life many years ago when I had a ridiculous amount of weirdness going on. I was in the bedroom, the door of which opened straight into the sitting room. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a very tall shadow man walk straight past. I got the impression it came through the wall, past the doorway, and then straight through the other wall and into the neighbouring property as if it was

striding purposefully along some kind of roadway that paid no attention at all to walls or houses (the flat was part of a Victorian terrace).

It was a little different from the usual shadowman description in that it wasn't all black, but brownish and black, like a dark, sepia tone image. I could make out the outline of face, thick dark hair, a three-quarter-length coat, possibly a cape, and knee boots. He was about 7ft (2m) tall and big and solid, not thin, angular or transparent.

I immediately 'knew' that he was aware I had seen him, but he didn't look around or move his head at all. There was a real sense of consciousness, even intelligence to this thing: he was aware of me, and aware of me because I had seen him. I did not feel a sense of 'evil', but definitely not good either: neutral, but probably not very nice.

I also felt that whatever it was it was NOT human. It was not a ghost, a discarnate entity, a soul imprint, or projection. Don't ask me why I thought this, it was just my immediate gut reaction as I stood there. No logic, no analysis.

The following night, I had not long got into bed – a minute at most – and just closed my eyes; there was no chance of my being asleep and I was still settling. I opened my eyes and this thing was standing over me, leaning over, lowering his face towards me.

Now, I am not a screamer – I've had a fair few odd experiences in my life, including seeing some really weird stuff, and I've never even been close to screaming. But I leapt onto my then partner and literally screamed the house down. God knows what I would have done if I'd been on my own. It is the only time in my life that I have completely lost it – I was hysterical.

Another odd thing was my cynical sceptic ex said when the shrieking started to subside: "There was someone standing by the bed wasn't there?"

I'm pretty sure I asked then, but maybe the next morning, if he'd actually seen anything, and he said no; but he knew something was there. I felt the thing had come back to check me out because he knew I could see him and there was a sense of curiosity... but possibly it was just to try and scare the shit out of me on purpose. It succeeded.

My belief about these shadow forms is that they are 'thought forms', focused human emotion and that if concentrated enough are able to take the form of a conscious entity that lives just beyond our normal perceptions. They are perhaps also responsible for the atmosphere certain places have, particularly those that have been inhabited for a long time, or have had really intense or traumatic things happen in them (or a history of prayer at religious sites). They're probably the same things that have been labelled as 'demons', and possibly 'angels' in the case of the positive ones, throughout history.

Eve11

FTMB

For more letters about shadow people, see **FT274:76**; see also Nick Parkins, "They came from the shadows", pp54-55 this issue.

FORTEAN TRAVELLER

105. A death road in Kyoto

JOHN BILLINGSLEY follows a Japanese route trodden by both pilgrims and corpse-bearers – a passageway between this world and the next...

One of the side-effects of an interest in neo-antiquarian issues is that any act of leisure travel inevitably becomes a kind of unscripted research trip. Apart from the type of sites we visit – generally a familiar mix of stones, mounds, shrines and suchlike – there's always an invisible antenna scanning about for curiosities and fragments of culture that don't seem to be on mainstream antiquarian agendas back home.

So that's how I found myself listening up when a young woman in Kyoto, Japan, began telling me about Matsubara-dori, the current name of a narrow street a little south of the shopping thoroughfare of Shijo St, and adjoining the famous *geisha* quarter of Gion. Across the main road from Matsubara district is the shop-lined approach to the equally famous Kiyomizu Temple. Tourists from all over the world traipse to Shijo and Gion and Kiyomizu in vast numbers throughout the year, but few venture into Matsubara.

It's not altogether surprising. Matsubara's not much to look at now: narrow, with too much traffic, demanding that pedestrians stop and step aside. Without an informant you'd never guess you were walking the border between this world and the next.

Yet traditionally, that is Matsubara's role. It slopes slightly upwards from the River Kamogawa, kinking slightly as it climbs in a roughly west-east direction until it gets to the main road of Higashioji Street, usually, like so much of modern Kyoto, crammed with traffic. Then, an extension of Matsubara on the other side of Higashioji rises towards an area on the foothills of the mountains to the old burial ground of Toribeno (which may have extended as far as this area itself).¹ Any corpse destined for Toribeno was carried along the track now known as Matsubara-

dori. Which of course makes it a death road,² a route of passage from this world to the next, and along the way are various markers of its status: from the river, which was identified, as in other traditions around the world, as a crucial threshold that spirits must cross *en route* to the underworld – or the cemetery.

To retrace the journey of the soul in this part of Kyoto, then, one should begin at the bridge over the Kamogawa River, the local representative of the Styx-like mythological River Sanzu; from here one begins the ascent out of the everyday world, while simultaneously being within it.

After a short distance, one reaches the small and cluttered temple of Saifuku-ji, founded in the ninth century, on the right. On the corner outside the temple is an inscribed stone post, about a metre tall. It reads "Rokudo-no-tsuji" (Rokudo Corner, or Crossroads), reminding passers-by that by being in this neighbourhood they are treading a boundary of the six (*roku*) Buddhist realms (*do*) and



are very close to the Underworld. For a taste of what awaits, pop into the little temple...

The dark confines of Saifuku-ji house several statues of Jizo, a protective deity or *bodhisattva* with a special interest in travellers and the souls of children. Like that other god of travellers, Hermes, Jizo is known also as a psychopomp, consoling and conducting souls travelling on their final journey to the otherworld. Mandalas within the temple include images of the six realms, and the 10 kings of the underworld. Saifuku-ji is one of the venues for *shoro-mukae* (*shoro* meaning 'travelling spirits', or in another sense 'ancestors', and *mukae* meaning 'welcoming') at the start of O-Bon in August (see below), and here one is confronted not only by Jizo, but, especially between August 7-10, by graphic pictures of the torments of Hell. Now you know where you might be headed, you could do worse than ask Jizo's blessing. Splash a little water over the statue, light a candle, and pass on, hopefully reassured that sometime in the past, a man called Genko dreamed that all those who paid respects at Saifuku-ji – in this life, presumably – may go home safe and sound.³

The six realms permeate Matsubara. The corpseway goes straight on, but turning right at Saifuku-ji brings you within 100 yards to another temple, less cramped but no less attentive to underworld concerns. Rokuharamitsu-ji specialises in offering solace to the souls of those who die bereft of support (which could include warriors in Japan's numerous pre-modern wars). *Rokuhara* means six fields, or plains – again, a reference to the six Buddhist realms. Souls with no one to turn to could take refuge in this temple as their body was carried up Matsubara-dori.

Returning to Rokudo-no-tsuji, this is no simple crossroads, but is three-dimensional, maybe more; for while being a crossroads in this world, it is also a crossroads between this realm and others, as denoted by these two temples, as well as by a traditional sweet shop, Minato-ya, opposite Saifuku-ji. It sells a honey confection that has its place in the liminal narrative of Matsubara; but more of that later.

Walking on, don't be distracted by the entrance to an underground parking area, much as it resembles the gates of Hell! The principal denoter of the liminal status of this route is soon to come, on the left-hand side of Matsubara-dori: the temple of Rokudochinno-ji (also spelt Rokudochinko-ji). The temple was, and still is, considered to be a portal to the Underworld, and is a unique site, steeped, like the whole of this route, in Japanese funerary culture stretching

BELOW: The bridge over the River Kamogawa to Matsubara.





back centuries, even millennia; perhaps that is why, perhaps thankfully, it is almost completely absent from tourist guidebooks.⁴

That does not mean it is empty, however, especially during the Festival of O-Bon (7-16 August), when the souls of the ancestors return to visit this world and mingle with the living. All over Japan, dances are held to entertain them, family doors are left symbolically open for them to enter, and at the end of the period dances and celebrations are held to send them off. Kyoto itself has the Daimonji Gozan Okuribi festival, when five great images of fire are lit on mountainsides around Kyoto to thank the souls for their attendance.

During O-Bon, stalls are set up along Matsubara to service the thousands of pilgrims that come to perform Rokudo-mairi. *Mairi* is a visit to a temple for the purpose of prayer; Rokudo-mairi refers specifically to visiting a temple to call one's ancestors (locally known as *o-shorai-san*, equivalent to Saifuku-ji's *o-shoro*) back from the dead for the Bon festival, and Rokudo-chinno-ji is the main one of two temples in Kyoto where this is carried out. An old tradition held that if one were to stand in the road here, beating a gong and calling out the name of someone deceased, the sound and voice would guide them back from the Underworld to their former home.

Entering through the gates and walking up the approach path, the first building you come to, on the right, is the Emma-do. Except during the Rokudo-mairi, the doors are closed and you have to squint through a hole to see the statues inside. There are two main figures, with their attendants. On the left is Emma (also known in Buddhist cultures as Yama), the fearsome lord of the realms of the dead; to pass into the world of the dead, you have to receive his judgement, and his appearance is not conducive to tranquillity in the

The temple is thought to be a portal to the Underworld



minds of those who know their own misdeeds. On the right of the Emma-do is a less forbidding statue, though closely attended by a little demon. This represents Ono no Takamura, a ninth-century poet and statesman honoured for his wisdom and perception. So honoured was he, in fact, that after finishing his day's work at court, he journeyed to the Underworld to sit beside Emma and assist as secretary in the judgement of the souls; no doubt his knowledge of people's doings in the upper world was a useful resource. Multi-tasking is certainly not a uniquely contemporary phenomenon. On occasion, in return for his services, Emma would let Takamura take some souls back with him to the upper world. The doors closing these statues to public view are opened at O-Bon, and pilgrims make offerings to

ABOVE: The main hall of the Rokudo-chinno-ji temple.

LEFT: The bell house – its peals can be heard in the Underworld.

these figures before passing on to the next building, a bell house immediately beyond the Emma-do.

The bell house is unusual, not only in that the bell is enclosed from sight within the structure, but in the way it is rung. Japanese temple bells are usually struck by swinging a hammer on a rope, with an action away from the body; here, a rope protrudes from a hole in the side of the structure, and pilgrims pull on it to sound the bell. This is a symbolic gesture, for this bell can be heard in the Underworld, and calls, even pulls, the ancestor soul (*o-shorai-san* in Kyoto dialect) back to this world.⁵ Hence, the bell is called *Mukae-gane* or 'Welcoming Bell'.

Rokudo, as we know, refers to the six realms. The full complement comprises *jigoku* (Hell), *gaki* (hungry spirits), *chikusho* (animals), *ningen* (the human world), *shura* (*asuras*, or ambivalent demi-gods) and *tenjo* (Heaven). Rokudo-chinno-ji sits right amongst them, and in its grounds is, according to legend and belief, a portal to the otherworld that Ono no Takamura himself used. As you face the main hall of the temple, to the right a short set of steps leads to a small window in a door. Through this window, you can look into the garden, and at the far end you will see a square, stone-lined well, topped with a bamboo cover. This was the route by which Takamura descended, with a sprig of yew (an unusual occurrence in Japanese folklore, and the precise *genus* is uncertain) as passport or conveyance across the threshold between the worlds; yew twigs are still sold here in the August festival, and the garden is open for entry on certain days each month, displayed on a notice beside the door.

However the soul was judged, from the temple the body was carried on up the slope to the Toribeno funerary area. Matsubara-dori crosses the main road and climbs; here, it has become the approach road to the very popular World Heritage Site of Kiyomizu Temple (founded AD 798) and is thronged throughout the year with people whose thoughts are far away from the Underworld. But take care – on the left you will come to an equally thronged steep path, mostly a stairway, about 150 yards in length; this is Sannen-zaka ('Three-year slope'), and it is part of Matsubara's circular pilgrim course, the Rokudo-mairi, to be traversed while meditating on ancestors. However, perhaps few of those who climb or descend it are aware of the implications of the name: that should you stumble and fall on this slope, you will die within three years. Or so they say, outside the guide books of course.

And somewhere in this vicinity the corpse-bearer would have arrived at the burial ground, the precise extent of which is uncertain. It is a little misleading to call Toribeno a burial

ground, though, as it seems that here bodies were left to the elements, rather than buried – this spot on the edge of ancient Kyoto was really an excarnation mortuary. This practice, in which bodies were left for birds or beasts to pick off the flesh, was once relatively widespread across the world, giving us customs such as the ‘sky burials’ of Tibetan or North American culture or the Towers of Silence of Zoroastrian tradition [FT153:27]; the place name may give us a clue: *tori* means ‘bird’ or ‘taken away’, *be* ‘place’, *no* ‘field’.⁶ It largely died out in Japan after the importation of Buddhism in the sixth century; the new religion preferred cremation and after it was adopted as the *de facto* State faith in the early seventh century, burial customs began to follow Buddhist prescription (even today, funerary customs in Japan are conditioned by Buddhism, while birth, festivals and other life-affirming events fall under the remit of the indigenous ritual system of Shinto). It is likely, however, that the old practices lingered on for a while, even after the introduction of cremation,⁷ and it was in 811 that the Buddhist saint Kobo Daishi persuaded Kyoto locals to forego excarnation for cremation.⁷ By that time, the place had already established its funerary identity. It is not known where the boundaries of the Toribeno mortuary lay, but at least part of the old ground today is occupied by the massive necropolis of the Nishi-Otani Mausoleum.

Could it be, however, that Kiyō-Mizu Temple, founded less than 15 years before Kobo Daishi’s injunction, was built upon the main part of the old excarnation area as part of a Buddhist purification and sanctification of ground used for the old rites? To one side of the mound on which the temple sits, a bank of small stone statues – mostly small Jizo figures offered to the souls of small children, but also containing some *dosojin* or couple images – may imply a concentration of traditional ‘soul power’ at this spot.

Covering this ground, then, we have trodden the path of countless souls, still remembered in religious sites and folklore, but there is more to tell. There is a fine tale centred on a candy shop in Matsubara-dori, and it is a classic example of what you might expect in such a liminal area.

The proprietor of the shop had a surprise customer near midnight one night. A distraught and dishevelled young woman rushed into his shop, pleading for some honeyed candy because her child was crying, and left quickly. An occasional customer of this sort might be expected in any live-in shop, but this lady came every night at about the same time, in the same state of anxiety, and rushed off. After a week of this, the shopkeeper decided to follow her, keeping a discreet distance as she hurried up the street. Suddenly,



however, he found he’d lost her, just as the road reached the edge of the cemetery. He stood there, baffled, and then he heard the sound of a baby crying. He followed the sound, and it came from within a tomb. He quickly alerted cemetery officials, and they opened the vault. It was the last resting place of a young woman who had died – or was thought to have died – while pregnant. She was certainly dead now, but her child, born in the tomb, was alive and hungry beside her. Her distraught spirit had hit on a strange but effective way to save her child. The original sweet shop has gone, but Minatoya opposite Saifuku-ji still sells the candy the mother asked for – now

TOP: Toribeno cemetery today, with Kiyō-Mizu Temple in the background.

CENTRE: Jizo figures in Kiyō-Mizu-Dera.

ABOVE: The sloping street of Sannen-zaka, part of Matsubara’s circular pilgrim course.

known as *yureiko-sodate* (ghost-child-rearing) candy.⁹

There are other hints along the road of Matsubara-dori’s link with underworld concepts – shops selling domestic shrines and memorial incense, and even a specialist butcher selling beef from Omi province may hint at a time when contact with butchery, undertaking and human corpses was *kegare* (spiritual defilement), and the preserve of Japan’s outcaste group, the *burakumin*.

So here we have in Kyoto the classic elements of a haunted death road, from otherworld folklore to real-world sites: a Stygian river, a corpseway, temples of warning and judgment, an underworld portal, with the yew as its passport, a fatalistic saying and a ghost story. As I dodged another van, another moped, rushing past me in the narrow and noisy street, the real world suddenly became more incongruous than the liminal.

With thanks to Richard Thornhill for helpful comments and *kanji* assistance.

NOTES

- 1 John H & Phyllis G Martin, *Kyoto: A Cultural Guide*, Tuttle, 2002, p85.
- 2 Our current understanding of death or spirit roads owes much to the work of John Palmer in articles for *The Ley Hunter* and Paul Devereux’s books; see especially his *Haunted Land* (Piatkus, 2001), pp58-72, and *Fairy Paths & Spirit Roads* (Vega, 2003), pp25-36.
- 3 Saifuku-ji Guidebook (English) also contains colour reproductions of the paintings.
- 4 Another reason may be that death customs are not generally thought to be viable tourist attractions, or that this area, where many residents’ occupations would inevitably have been connected with death rites, was once stigmatised in the old Japanese caste system. Contact with death in Japanese traditions is strong *kegare*, a severe religious and social pollution. Suzanne Marie Gay, *The Moneylenders of Late Medieval Kyoto*, University of Hawaii, 1999, p30.
- 5 John Hart Benson, Jr., “Kyoto welcomes back the dear departed”, *Japan Times*, 9 Aug 2000.
- 6 The 12th-century *Gaki Zoshi* (‘Scroll of the Hungry Ghosts’, in Tokyo’s National Museum) illustrates, complete with demons and dogs, excarnation practice in Japan.
- 7 There was possibly an issue of economic status in the choice of disposal, in that official Buddhist cremation rites would seem likely to confer ‘value-added’ expense, while excarnation may have been a kind of communal fly-tipping option.
- 8 <http://darumamuseumgallery.blogspot.com/2008/01/toribeno-grounds.html>. Karen M Gerhart, *The Material Culture of Death in Medieval Japan*, University of Hawaii Press, 2009.
- 9 A Chinese tale thought to date from the Song Dynasty (960-1279), which overlapped with Japan’s Heian period (794-1185) to which much of this article relates, is a close correlate of this story. Judith T Zeitlin, *The Phantom Heroine*, University of Hawaii Press, 2007, p36.



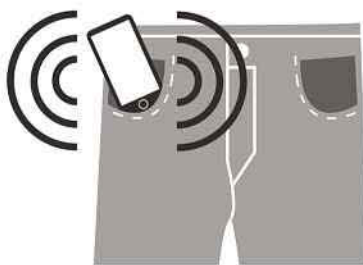
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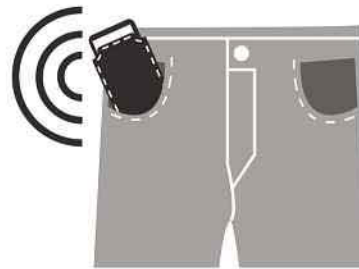


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Why Fortean?



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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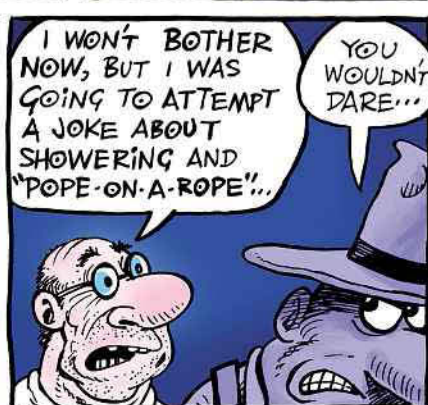
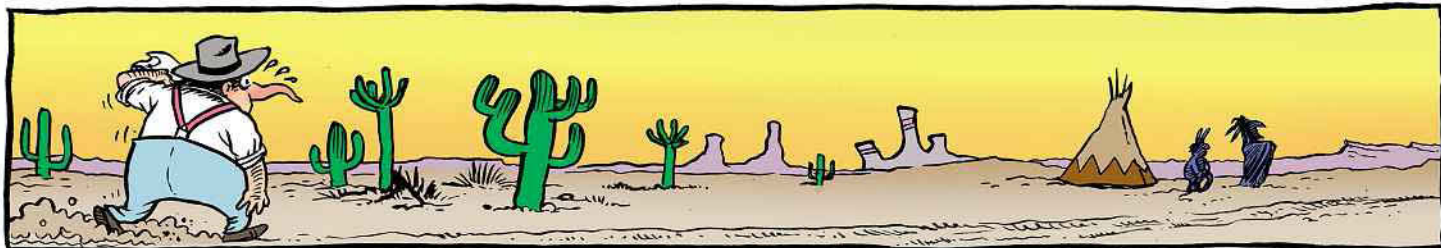
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FORTEAN TIMES 336

ON SALE 7 JAN 2016

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL



The bodies of Voncile Smith, 77, and her two sons, Richard, 49, and John, 47, were discovered in their Florida home – 4605 Deerfield Drive, Pensacola – on 31 July when one of the sons' employers realised he hadn't shown up for work. Voncile and John both died of blunt force trauma from hammer blows and had their throats cut. Richard was shot in the ear as he came into the house, and also had his throat cut. No evidence of a forcible entry was found and, while police had spoken with a person of interest in the case, no arrests were made. "It appears that this might be connected to some type of Wiccan ritual killing and possibly tied to the blue moon," said Sgt Andrew Hobbes from Escambia County Sheriff's Office. (A so-called 'blue' moon occurs when there are two full moons in the same calendar month.) They had reached this conclusion, he said, because of "the injuries to the victims, the positions of the bodies – and our person of interest has some ties to a faith or religion that is indicative of that." The deaths had occurred three days earlier, on 28 July. *[NBC] 4 Aug; Irish Independent, 7 Aug 2015.*

A Zimbabwean Christian trying to fast for 40 days and 40 nights in imitation of Jesus died a month into his attempt. Khulu Reinfirst Manyuka, 73, left his home and went into the wilderness to pray, echoing Jesus's actions in Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13. Manyuka was known by his family and local community as "a very spiritual person whose faith could move mountains". A family member said that he had no history of illness: "He was a healthy and religious old man who did not even look his age." His body was found by a stranger who notified the police. Christian scholars are divided over whether Jesus's fast was for a literal 40 days or whether this was a symbolic number, and on whether it involved a total abstinence from all food and water. *christiantoday.com, 14 Aug 2015.*

A teenage gamer died after playing online for 22 days in a row. The 17-year-old, known only as Rustem, collapsed at his keyboard in Uchaly, Russia, as his in-game persona died. He began the mammoth stint after breaking his leg on 8 August, stopping only to eat and sleep for a few hours at a time. He was taken to hospital, but pronounced dead on arrival. It is thought he died of a blood clot on his leg similar to those suffered on long-haul flights. Police said that, in the last 18 months, Rustem had spent 2,000 hours online – equal to 83 days – playing the Warcraft game Defence of the Ancients. *Sun, 4 Sept 2015.*

Lacey Spears, 27, of Scottsville, Kentucky, has been jailed for 20 years for killing her five-year-old son by poisoning him with salt to gain attention online. She fed Garnett-Paul Spears salt through a breathing tube from infancy while writing about his mysterious illness on a personal blog – as well as on Facebook, Twitter and MySpace – from her apartment in Chestnut Ridge, New York. The wretched infant died on 23 January 2014. Assistant District Attorney Patricia Murphy suggested that Spears eventually killed

him because she feared he would start telling people she was making him ill. Her actions were "nothing short of torture," she said. Although there was no mention of it in the courtroom, this was probably a case of Munchausen's Syndrome by proxy, officially recognised in the US in 2013 as "factitious disorder imposed on another" (*FDIA* or *FDIoA*). In the UK, it is known as "fabricated or induced illness by carers" (*FII*). *[AP] 2 Mar; (Queensland) Courier-Mail, 10 April 2015.*

A 77-year-old woman from Lander in Wyoming died on 3 October after contracting what is believed to be the state's first confirmed human rabies case. She had contracted the disease in August after being bitten by a bat, and began showing symptoms a few weeks later. A state health official said there were only one or two human rabies cases in the US each year. *[AP] 7 Oct 2015.*

Shortly after a death-by-elephant in Germany [**FT330:80**], Margarita Metallinou, 29, was also killed by an elephant. The American researcher was working in the Kafue National Park in Zambia with two male colleagues when the accident happened. Dr Metallinou's screams alerted her colleagues, who managed to run away. Though the circumstances were unclear, bull elephants are particularly aggressive when in *musth* – a condition where levels of reproductive hormones rise dramatically. *D.Telegraph, 7 July 2015.*

Two suicide bombers died in Pakistan's Punjab province after getting into a fight with each other and triggering one of the explosive devices they were wearing. *MX News (Sydney), 11 June 2015.*

James Rogers, 72, from Port Arthur, Texas, died of heat exhaustion on 8 June inside his 2007 Chevrolet Corvette, along with his shih-tzu dog Leia, after a battery cable had come loose and he couldn't open the doors and windows – or sound the horn. The accident is not uncommon for some Corvette models, but there is a manual release on the driver's side that allows occupants to bypass the battery, according to owners' manuals. Rogers evidently didn't know about that. The army veteran and grandfather of five had just stopped in at a Waffle House, where he was a regular. As he got in his luxury car to leave, the doors and windows locked in the 92°F (33°C) heat. He had accidentally left his phone inside the restaurant, so he was unable to call for help. Another regular customer and employees tried to rescue him but couldn't get the doors open. A firefighter eventually broke a window, but Rogers and his dog were already dead. *New York Daily News, 11 June; Sun, 12 June 2015.*

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"My tutor was lovely, encouraging and offered me great constructive criticism."

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Martin Read



Louise Kennedy



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asked to join the team, and now she and her husband get expenses paid trips all over the world in exchange for reviews!

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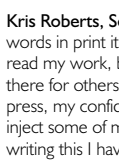
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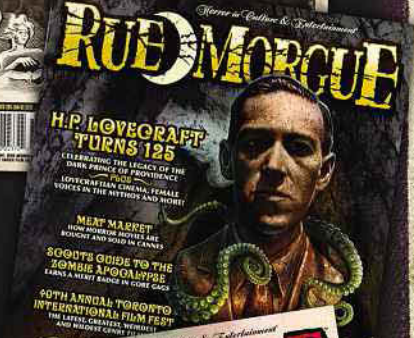
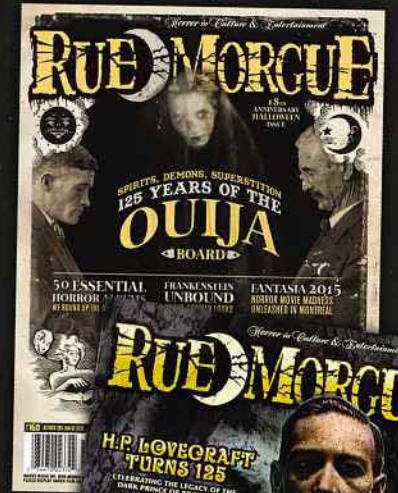
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