



**OL' BLUE EYES IS BACK**

IS FRANK SINATRA  
HAUNTING LAS VEGAS?

**OUT OF THE ASHES** PALINGENESIS AND ALCHEMICAL RESURRECTION

**MAD MASTERSTROKES** RICHARD DADD AND THE ART OF BEDLAM

**THE ETERNAL YEW** IN SEARCH OF BRITAIN'S MOST ANCIENT TREES

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# editorial

## Shocks to the system

### BOLTS FROM THE BLUE

We've got used to life imitating forteana, but it was still a shock (sorry) to see deadly lightning in the news just days before this issue was due to go to press.

On Sunday 5 July, four people were struck by lightning in two separate incidents in the Brecon Beacons in Wales. Three walkers were struck and injured in one incident near Pen y Fan mountain, one of whom subsequently died in hospital, while another man was killed in a separate strike. Of the two survivors, one suffered from temporary paralysis before being discharged, the other was still recovering from burns. One of the two fatalities may have died, newspapers speculated, because he was carrying a 'selfie stick', which presumably attracted the lightning to him. *Wales Online*, 7 July; *D.Telegraph*, *Guardian*, 6+7 July 2015.

Getting struck by lightning isn't, it seems, the only hazard associated with the ubiquitous selfie: on 7 July newspapers reported that the Russian Interior Ministry had launched a campaign warning people of the many dangers associated with this modern form of self portraiture following a string of bizarre accidents and deaths. In May, a 21-year-old Moscow woman shot herself in the head while taking a selfie posing with a pistol. She survived, unlike the two men in the Urals who perished taking a selfie while holding a hand grenade with the pin removed (!), or the teen who electrocuted himself climbing on a railway bridge to get a good shot ("a selfie on the railway tracks is a bad idea if you value your life," warns the Ministry's information leaflet). *Guardian*, 7 July 2015.

Should you survive a lightning strike - if not a selfie - might you be transformed in the process? In this issue (pp30-35), Louis Proud looks at the stories of strike survivors and finds that what doesn't kill you makes you stronger: those who walk away from one strike appear to gain a mysterious attraction - and an immunity - to lightning, being struck again, sometimes repeatedly, but suffering little in the way of physical injury. Some find that their experience seems to have made them affect electronic equipment or turned them into SLIders who interfere with street lights, while others claim to have recovered from existing medical conditions or even to have developed psychic powers as a result of the shocks to their system. Clearly, there is a wealth of fortean material to be explored in the interactions between lightning - and other forms of electrical energy - and the human mind and body.

### NIGHT OF THE LIVING FOX

While lions and tigers (not to mention hippos) roamed the streets of Tbilisi after the city's zoo was destroyed by flash floods, killing one man and scaring the rest of the population (p10), here in the UK we witnessed similiar scenes of terror caused by... a fox.

Urban foxes have generated plenty of horror stories in recent years. Our favourite remains the 'Giant Fox of Whitstable' or 'Beast of the Bubble' (FT263:02, 301:39), which gave birth to the memorable headline "Super Gran fights off giant fox with shovel". Now, a new contender for Britain's most fearsome fox has emerged, slinking out of the shadows to terrorise the good people of Alconbury. "Vicious fox

traps eight people in Cambridgeshire sports club" screams the headline of the BBC news report, which goes on to describe what sounds like a vulpine version of Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*, with eight terrified people barricaded inside the building during a three-hour siege. The *Cambridge News* adds further chilling details: One heroic woman tried to distract the fox with food so others could escape and was bitten on the hand; another man fell off his bicycle and lost his glasses; and Mr Staines,

Chairman of the Alconbury Sports and Social Club, "tweaked his groin" trying to get away from the rampaging creature, which was later killed by a pest controller. A spokesman for the local Wildlife Trust was mystified by the unfortunate animal's "incredibly unusual behaviour"; we're left wondering whether someone had spiked the club's tea urn. Meanwhile, conspiracy-minded hunt saboteurs suggested that the whole thing was a smear perpetrated by the pro-hunting lobby. *BBC News*, *Cambridge News*, 2 July 2015.



*David Sutton*  
 DAVID R SUTTON

*Bob Rickard*  
 BOB RICKARD

*Paul Sieveking*  
 PAUL SIEVEKING



## Why fortean?

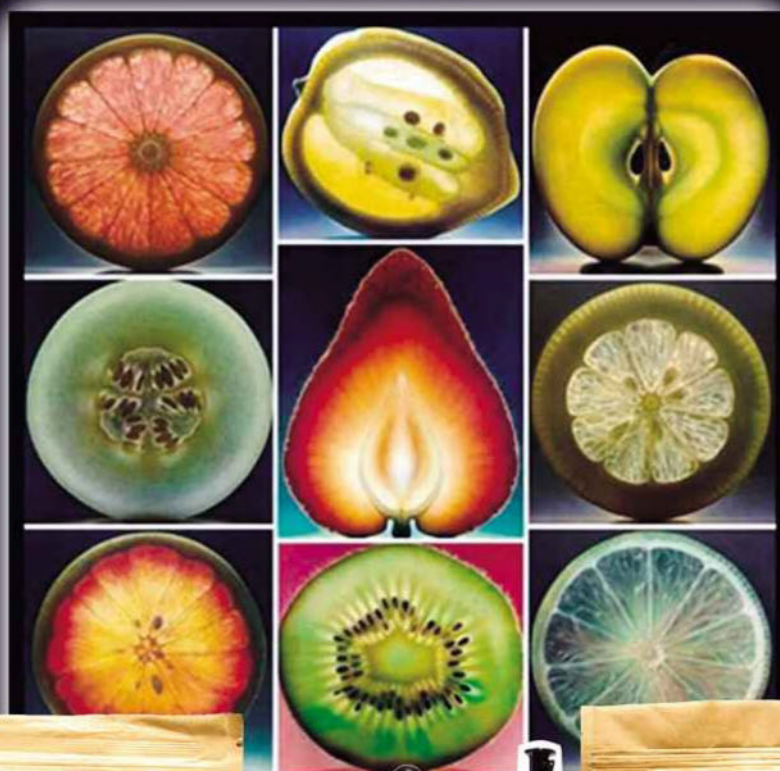
Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!

**SEE PAGE 78**

# Ancient Purity

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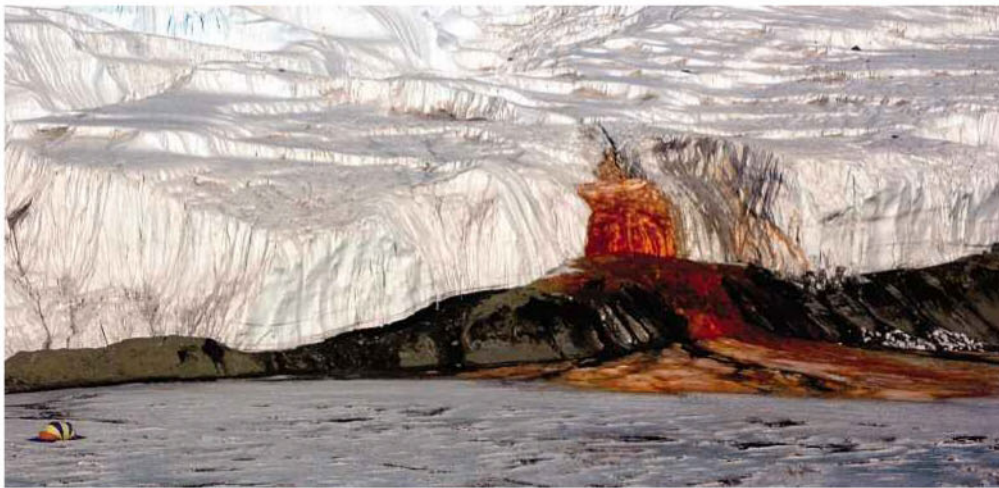
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# strangedays

## Underworld revelations

New discoveries from Blood Falls, plus fiery hellholes ablaze in the East



### BENEATH BLOOD FALLS

New data shows that beneath McMurdo Dry Valleys in Antarctica, Earth's coldest and driest place, lies brine (salt solution) that may support previously unknown ecosystems. This region is best known for the eerie Blood Falls, an outflow of rust-red saltwater nearly five storeys high, discovered in 1911 by the Australian explorer and geologist Griffith Taylor. The Falls seep through a crack in what's now called Taylor Glacier, which flows into Lake Bonney.

Scientists previously thought that red algae gave this bloody ooze its dramatic colour, but recently it was proven to be due to iron oxides. Scientists have now discovered that brines form extensive aquifers hundreds of metres below glaciers, lakes and within permanently frozen soil. These brines were sealed off 1.5 to 2 million years ago and form a kind of 'time capsule'. Blood Falls' waters contain almost no oxygen and host a community of at least 17 different types of microorganisms. According to the National Science Foundation

**“These unfrozen materials are relics of past ecosystems”**

(NSF), the brines may play a major role in modern biological processes in the Dry Valleys, named so because of their extremely low humidity as well as lack of snow or ice cover.

“These unfrozen materials appear to be relics of past surface ecosystems and our findings provide compelling evidence that they now provide deep subsurface habitats for microbial life despite extreme environmental conditions,” said the study's lead author, Jill Mikucki, an assistant professor of microbiology at the University of Tennessee. The new data may also hint at how life could appear on other worlds, including Mars, which has an environment similar to that of the Dry Valleys, and some of the

ABOVE: The eerie Blood Falls; a tent to the left gives a sense of scale.

frozen moons of Jupiter, which may contain subsurface liquid water. “The subsurface is actually pretty attractive when you think about life on other planets,” said Mikucki. “It's cold and dark and has all these strikes against it, but it's protected from the harsh environment on the surface.”

How can the microbes that colour Blood Falls survive underground, with no light or oxygen? There are three main clues. First, a genetic analysis of the microbes showed that they were closely related to other microorganisms that use sulphate instead of oxygen for respiration. Second, isotopic analysis of sulphate's oxygen molecules revealed that the microbes were modifying sulphate in some form but not using it directly for respiration. Third, the water was enriched with soluble ferrous iron, which would happen only if the organisms had converted ferric iron, which is insoluble, to the soluble ferrous form. The best explanation is that

the organisms use sulphate as a catalyst to 'breathe' with ferric iron and metabolise the limited amounts of organic matter trapped with them years ago. Lab experiments had suggested this might be possible, but it had never before been observed in a natural environment. *Nature Communications*, 28 April; *Earth, Science Wire*, 18 May 2015.

### GATEWAYS TO HELL

A sinkhole filled with fire, which has opened up in Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang in north-western China, has geologists and mining experts flocking to the site. Local people keep their distance, dubbing it the “Gateway to Hell”. Geologist Hu Tan, who is leading the investigation, said: “The air blasting out of the hole is so hot, that if you hold a branch near to it bursts into flames.” A temperature of around 792C (1,458F) has been recorded. The most likely explanation is a spontaneous combustion of coal. [allnewspipeline.com](http://allnewspipeline.com), 13 April 2015.

Another “Gateway to Hell” is the Darvasa Crater, a pit in Turkmenistan, 225ft (68m) wide and 99ft (30m) deep, that has been burning for more than 40 years. It remains unclear how it came into being. One rumour is that Soviet scientists were looking for natural gas in 1971 and managed to crack through the Earth's crust, creating a pit that then burst into flames. Last summer, the Canadian explorer George Kourounis became the first person to enter Darvasa Crater. He descended to the very bottom, held by a series of ropes and encased in a heat-reflective suit, using self-contained breathing apparatus and a custom-made climbing harness that wouldn't melt. He collected soil samples to investigate whether life can survive in such extreme conditions – and similar conditions on other planets. [independent.co.uk](http://independent.co.uk), 23 July 2014. For more on subterranean fires, see FT73:23, 196:12-13.



## CUNNING CANINES

Do-gooding dogs save the lives of their grateful owners

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## OL' BLUE EYES IS BACK

Is the ghost of Frank Sinatra really haunting Las Vegas?

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## CRITTER MYSTERIES

Texas worms plus lampreys rain from Alaskan skies

PAGE 22

# The Conspirasphere

Is it possible to distinguish between thought systems in conspiracy theory? NOEL ROONEY examines the hermeneutics of the conspirasphere...

When commentators – sceptics, academics or supporters – attempt to define conspiracy theory, they struggle: first in describing the phenomenon in the broadest terms; and secondly, in deciding who should be included under the umbrella term of conspiracy theorists. One could see the second problem as simply taxonomic; but I suspect that working towards resolving it may be the best way to eventually solve the first.

I think there are two main systems that might properly be termed conspiracy theories. The two overlap, both with each other and with other systems of thought, and individuals can subscribe comfortably to both positions, but they can be distinguished in principle. The first I think of as hermeneutic conspiracy theory; the second, as automatic dissidence.

Hermeneutic conspiracy theory is a grand narrative. Its proponents see history as their central field of



enquiry. They understand orthodox history as a false construction, designed to hide the true narrative; a narrative of control and manipulation by a small but virtually omnipotent elite, which can be discerned throughout the course of recorded history – and assumed, in the view of some, to pre-exist it.

Automatic dissidence takes a slightly different view of history, one of process rather than personnel. It assumes that *whoever* is in power is corrupt, and that *all* systems of government lie and manipulate as a matter of course. As a result, its focus is more often on the present than the past, attempting to expose the current regime's machinations. Its enemy is power itself.

The key term of hermeneutic conspiracy is bloodlines. The Illuminati, the Thirteen Families, the world's remaining monarchies, shape-shifting reptilians from the planet Nibiru; these are the typical

protagonists of this narrative scheme. They have always been our hidden masters, the scheming spiders weaving the 'real' of history. Specific events are merely more evidence of their eternal presence and power.

For the automatic dissident, the Next Big Event is the 'real' of history. It may just turn out to be the smoking gun, the tipping point that finally exposes the deep state and reveals the exoteric political

process as a charade. The players are interchangeable and expendable; the process is key, and events are its trigger and its shibboleth.

The recent shootings in a Charleston church brought the automatic dissidents out in force. Within hours of the news, the Internet was rife with false flag theories; most of these were incoherent at best, working on the initial reports and grasping at incidental details (the shooter couldn't have been racist because

he cultivated a few black friends; the racist manifesto was obviously a plant because it was too well written; the first pictures of the shooter – in police custody – showed him in a Kevlar vest). But they were consistent in one major respect: the establishment story was false and the event was a set-up, probably designed to cover the rollout of some unwelcome initiative or another.

The hermeneutics were not quite as excited by the tragedy. They seemed to assume the event was a sideshow, and continued instead to map the ancient networks of the people who really run the world.

<http://beforeitsnews.com/bloggng-citizen-journalism/2015/06/the-13-bloodlines-of-the-illuminati-serpent-seed-2513556.html>; [www.prisonplanet.com/charleston-shooting-what-theyre-not-telling-you.html](http://www.prisonplanet.com/charleston-shooting-what-theyre-not-telling-you.html)

## EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Green grannies take on fracking monster's plans

Morning Star, 18 Aug 2014.

Huge testicular tumour helps identify subject of 19th century portrait

Guardian, 24 May 2011.

I am alive, insists French patient

D.Telegraph, 23 Aug 2014.

Dead set to get cash back

MX News (Sydney), 18 Aug 2014.

Panda did not fake a pregnancy, says expert

Guardian, 29 Aug 2014.

Protests fail to stop parish pig wrestling

Catholic Herald, 15 Aug 2014.

Could your crisp bag be spying on you?

Irish Times, 14 Aug 2014.

## SIDELINES...

### SNOWMOBILE POSSESSED?

A driverless snowmobile raced along a highway near Deer Lake in Newfoundland for more than 12km (7.5 miles) before launching off a snow bank and skidding to a halt. A motorist saw it travelling about 60km/h (37mph) along the Trans-Canada Highway. Amazingly, no one was injured. *MX News (Sydney), 11 Mar 2015.*

### DODGY COPPERS

A crackdown on fare dodgers travelling between the neighbouring Indian states of Agra and Mathura exposed 40 police officers hiding in the lavatories of two trains so that they could avoid paying for tickets. *Metro, 20 Mar 2015.*

### FIRST TIME VISITOR

A young 25ft (7.6m) bowhead whale has been sighted at Par beach off the Isle of Scilly in Cornwall. The species, normally found in the Arctic, has never previously been spotted in European waters. *Times, 28 Feb 2015.*

### SAUDI DJINN SCARE

When nine students at Al-Shalail village girls' school in southern Madinah, western Saudi Arabia, fainted and experienced spasms at the beginning of term, many parents believed djinn were present at the school, which led to 181 elementary and middle school students refusing to attend classes on 13 and 14 May. The local Department of Education sent a team to investigate. *arabnews.com, 16 May 2015.*

# Clever canine capers

## Dogs save owners, escape from burglars and phone police

- Yorkshire terrier Alfie (pictured at right) was rescued last April after he flagged down an RSPCA van. A scan of his microchip revealed he was missing. Alfie, seven, and terrier pal Lillie, were taken in a burglary in Wednesbury, West Midlands, in March. RSPCA inspector Stephanie Law found him more than 100 miles (160km) away in Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire. "Alfie jumped out and started barking as if he were trying to get my attention," she said. "I opened the door and he jumped right in. It was as if he recognised my uniform." His owner Kirsty Mitton, 23, was thrilled to have him back. *Metro, Sun, 9 April 2015.*



- A tiny dog spent four hours walking more than two miles to a hospital in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, to find her ill owner. Miniature Schnauzer Sissy, 11, was left pining while Nancy Franck, 64, was being treated for ovarian cancer. After two weeks Sissy escaped from home and found her way to Mercy Medical Center, 15 to 20 blocks away. Her entrance through the automatic doors was caught on security camera; staff checked her tag and phoned her home. Nancy's daughter Sarah went to pick up the pet, and was allowed to take Sissy to see Nancy in bed. The family can't figure out how Sissy knew where to go, as they had never taken the dog to the hospital. *KCRG-TV9, 11 Feb; Sun, 14 Feb 2015.*

- Police who raced to a house after hearing desperate heavy breathing during an emergency call found a dog had rung 999 while strangling himself with the telephone wire. George, a two-year-old Basset Hound, had knocked the phone to the floor

and got entangled in the wire, which wound round his neck. It was an old-fashioned phone with a dialling disc, not press-buttons. Somehow George managed to ring 999 as he pawed at the phone, trying to free himself. Police dashed to Steve Brown's empty house in South Hiendley, West Yorkshire, on 24 March 2012. They were preparing to smash the door down when a neighbour rushed out with a key to let them in. George was found with the phone lead wound tightly round his neck. *thesun.co.uk, 28 Mar 2012.*

- Rachel Hayes was left gasping for air after a sweet went down the wrong way and lodged in her throat. Sensing she was in trouble, her five-year-old Springer spaniel Mollypops jumped on her back to perform her own Heimlich manoeuvre, and bashed away with her paws until the fruit pastille popped out. "If it had not been for her, I would have died," said Ms Hayes, 40, who lives alone with Mollypops in Drefach Felindre, Carmarthenshire, South Wales. *D.Express, 17 Mar 2014.*

- Alan Spencer, 67, a retired club singer who lives alone in Withernsea, East Yorkshire, almost choked to death on a pickled onion and collapsed in his hallway while trying to seek help. His life was saved by Lexi, his

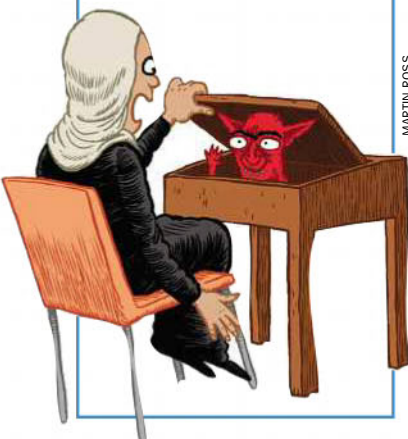
18-month-old Labrador, who weighs 88lb (40kg). "My head was pounding and I started having convulsions," said Mr Spencer. "I had been maybe three or four minutes without a breath. I hit the floor face down. I knew that was it and I was blacking out. I was absolutely petrified. Then out of the blue I felt this almighty crash on my back and it was Lexi. She had jumped

up and landed right in the middle of my back on all four paws. The onion shot out of my mouth and I could breathe again." *Times, D.Mirror, Sun, 2 April 2015.*

- Labrador-spaniel cross Judy saved the life of her owner, Sharon Brookes, 61, who was choking on a piece of toast and beginning to lose consciousness at her home in Little Hereford, Shropshire, in April 2014. Judy gave her a hefty thump on the back, knocking the piece of toast clear. Judy was also there to raise the alarm when Sharon fell into a diabetic coma in 2010. The seven-year-old pet ran to another room and barked at a visitor, who revived Sharon with chocolate. *D.Mirror, Sun, 25 April 2014.*

- Jet, a black Labrador that had been a guide dog for five years, saved the life of a baby after she broke free from her owner and pushed a pram out of a path of a car that had careered out of control in Leigh, Lancashire. Jet managed to wrench her harness free from the grip of Jessica Cowley, 28, who is registered blind, as the car headed for the pram, carrying Mrs Cowley's one-year-old, Jacob. Mrs Cowley was knocked to the ground and suffered extensive bruising. The pram toppled over, but Jacob escaped with a cut lip. *D.Telegraph, 21 Sept 2013.*

MARTIN ROSS





# Nigeria's floating city

## Huge aerial anomaly is witnessed by hundreds of villagers

Saidu Meshai Dulali, 40 (pictured right), a tea brewer in the village of Dulali in Nigeria, had just finished his morning prayer at the local mosque and was stoking up the stove for his day's work in March 2011 when he was enveloped in an extremely bright light. Looking up, he saw something extraordinary. "A large mass of something that looked like a cloud appeared from nowhere and flew slowly over the village just at the height of an average tree," he said. "The cloud was transparent and I saw beautiful tall buildings inside it, with tarred roads and cars. It was like a flying city. And from it I could hear the sound of machines making a noise just as you would hear at the Ashaka cement factory."

According to the journalists Greg Odogwu and Mukhtar Lawal Suleiman who visited the village, the flying city was witnessed by almost all the villagers in the neighbourhood, hundreds of them. Children and adults corroborated Saidu's story. Local farmer Dauda Mohammed, saw the floating city from a field. He was very surprised but not scared and didn't feel threatened. He described the colour of the buildings inside what initially appeared to be a massive cloud. Ibrahim, aged about 10, pointed to the top of a tree and said that a "UFO moved into the trees and came out of the other side but the trees were not pushed down at all." Sightings of unexplained aerial objects are quite rare in this part of the world.

The general consensus seemed to be that the strange phenomena were an Act of God. According to Yau Kaugama, a local political leader, "We believe it is a sign that something great will come out of that small village, something like a great invention, that will affect the life of mankind." Someone quoted Revelation 21:2: "And



I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

Mallam Shehu Liman, imam of the only mosque in Dulali, confirmed the general consensus of what had occurred. "We believe that maybe Allah used those sightings to open our eyes to see how djinn live in their own world," he said. "Allah is great, and there is nothing He cannot do on Earth. Exactly two weeks after appearing in our village, that flying object visited again at exactly the same time, and stayed in the sky roving around the village for almost an hour before it went away. We are happy because it shows we are a special village; other towns around were not given that privilege." The imam added that his community did not see the necessity of reporting this event, as the flying object neither harmed nor injured anyone, and they were all convinced it was a positive visitation.

Djinn appear in the Qur'an and are interpreted in a multitude of different ways [see FT324:20-21]. According to www.thejinn.net: "There are unseen creatures that we share this Earth with. They do not come from other planets. They have been called many names: Aliens, Spirits, Etherians, Ultraterrestrials, and more. In the Koran they are called the Jinn. Information about Jinn reads like a textbook description of UFOs and other paranormal phenomena. The Jinn are beings with free will, living on Earth in a world parallel

to mankind. The Arabic word means 'to conceal'. They appear to include juvenile pranksters as well as powerful superior beings with an agenda we do not understand. They have influenced mankind's religious and cultural beliefs from antiquity to the present. Jinn can create UFOs, hallucinations,

psychokinetic effects, cattle mutilations, crop circles, apparitions and other paranormal phenomena." In other words, djinn seem to serve as a catch-all explanation for fortune and the Muslim world.

Dulali is in Lanzai South Ward, Darazo Local Government Area, in Nigeria's Bauchi State. The Hon. Sabo Bako Sade, Chairman of Darazo Local Government Area at the time of the floating city sightings, said: "When I heard the news I first thought it was a practical joke, or a wild rumour circulated by people, because at that time we were under attack by hoodlums whom we could not ascertain were Boko Haram or just armed robbers. We were under immense pressure. But the supernatural sighting in Dulali was a special one, a once-in-a-lifetime experience, even for me as a politician. I planned to set up a thorough investigative committee on the incident but my hands were tied at that time." *People's Daily Time (Nigeria), 19 April 2012; (U.I.P) UFO International Project, inquisitr.com, 8 June 2015.*

Dulali might have some readers in mind of *doolally*, 19th century British military slang for 'mad'. The term was originally *doolally tap*, meaning 'to lose one's mind'. This was derived from the boredom felt at the British Army transit camp and sanatorium at Deolali, about 100 miles from Mumbai in India. *Tap* is Urdu for 'fever'. *Fortean Times* founder Bob Rickard was born in Deolali.

## SIDELINES...

### FUNCTION IN MOTIONS

To make use of the dung from his 2,500 cows, Italian dairy farmer Gianantonio Locatelli created a "Museum of Shit". The attraction in the province of Piacenza documents the history of excrement, how it is being used in buildings and its recycling benefits. "Shit has a rich cultural history," he said. *Metro, 30 April 2015.*

### MONEY TO BURN

Firefighters discovered £90,000 under a bed just before setting a house alight as part of a training exercise. They had been carrying out a final search of the derelict bungalow in a former elderly-care complex in Christchurch, Dorset, when they found the bundles of bank notes. *Times, 30 Mar 2015.*

### COSTLY BLADE

Staff at a Godmanchester, Cambridgeshire, rescue centre spent almost £2,000 on an operation for Pixie, a cat they thought had a deadly tumour in her nose. It turned out to be a 1.5in (38mm) blade of grass that tissue had grown over. *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 18 Feb 2015.*

### STINKY BLOOM

A rare disorder makes people smell of rotting fish [FT329:8]; now a tiny orange flower (*Thismia megalongensis*) that also smells of rotting fish has been found in Australia's Blue Mountains. It belongs to a plant group known as fairy lanterns. *Sydney Morning Herald, 27 Jan 2015.*





## SIDELINES...

### GONAD SNACK

Audrey Ranch, 62, of West Virginia, bit the testicles off her son's pet pitbull after a dispute over food. She "bit Pedro's acorns clean off, right there in the front yard," said her son. Realising the police would take 45 minutes to get to her house, she cut off a length of garden hose, dug a hole and had her son bury her. Police arrived, unburied and then arrested her. *MX News (Sydney)*, 28 May 2015.

### TO WOMB IT CONCERNS

A UK businessman fearing he had cancer after finding blood in his urine was told he was menstruating and had a fully functioning womb. Doctors said the 37-year-old had been having periods since his teens, has experienced PMT, and might even be able to conceive. He was due to have a hysterectomy. *MX News (Sydney)*, 10 Feb 2015.

### FOXY SABOTEURS

Motorists in Crawley, West Sussex, called for a cull on foxes after their car brake cables were chewed through by animals said to be addicted to drinking the fluid inside. Some drivers resorted to wrapping chicken wire around the base of their cars to protect the cables after a spate of up to 50 incidents. Foxes are known to like the sweet taste of brake fluid and can become hooked on chewing rubber as cubs when their parents steal Wellington boots for them to chew on. *Times*, 29 Jan 2015.

### SMART PARROTS

Firefighters arriving at a burning house in Middleton, Idaho, at 9.30pm on 19 April heard calls of "Help!" and "Fire!" and used thermal image cameras to look for what they thought was an elderly female. No humans were home, but they eventually found two parrots sitting on a table. After treatment with oxygen masks, one of the parrots began to imitate the sound of the sirens. *Public Safety Reporter (online)*, 19 April; [AP] 20 April 2015.

## DREADFUL DIETS

A REGIME OF RICE CRISPIES, BAKED BEANS AND TOILET ROLL JUST CAN'T BE GOOD FOR YOU...



- Jade Sylvester, 25, from Gainsborough, Lincolnshire, started consuming lavatory paper while pregnant and eats a whole roll every day, 15 months after the birth of her son Jaxon. "Two months into my fifth pregnancy, I started craving toilet roll. I still don't know why," she said. "My favourite types are the supermarket own brands, rather than the more expensive products, like Andrex. I like the feeling of the texture in my mouth, rather than the taste. I like the dryness. But it can't be doing my insides any good." She suffers from pica, a condition characterised by an anomalous craving for inedible objects, and often ascribed to an iron deficiency. *Pica* is Latin for magpie, a bird notorious for eating almost anything. *dailymail.co.uk*, 11 Dec 2014.

- A 23-year-old woman called Andrea, from Marietta in Georgia, is so addicted to Sellotape that she nibbles her way through 6,000ft (1,830m) of the sticky stuff every month. "If I see tape in front of me I will pick it up and just start chewing," she said. "I have to have it." Her addiction began in 2003 and has progressively worsened. At the time of this report, she was eating an average of three rolls

### She was eating an average of three rolls of Sellotape a day

every day. *dailymail.co.uk*, 11 Sept 2012.

- Nicholas Woodcraft, 10, has never eaten solid food and survives on a diet of banana Nesquick. He drinks out of a baby beaker and gets through £30 worth of powdered flavouring and £20 of milk a week. He has never been ill but has bad teeth and is easily tired. His mother, Rosanne, 45, of Portishead, near Bristol, began to puree his meals when he refused to eat as a toddler. He went Nesquick-only after starting school. "I got him to eat a yogurt once, but it took six months of trying," said his mother. "His jaw doesn't know how to chew." *Metro*, Sun, 24 June 2015.

- Four-year-old Emilie-Lea Hayward has refused to eat anything other than raspberry or strawberry Petits Filous fromage frais since she was weaned off milk. She gets through 30 pots

every day – that's almost 11,000 a year at a cost of £2,000. Each one contains the equivalent of 1.6 teaspoons of sugar, so she is consuming more than twice the recommended dose for an adult. She bursts into tears if given any other brand of yogurt and becomes hysterical if offered solid food. Her mother Naomi Hayward, 32, of Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire, has two younger children who eat normally. Doctors who have examined Emilie-Lea say her diet – which is not supplemented by any vitamins – is so far not affecting her health; but dieticians warn that she risks becoming "dangerously anæmic". *D.Mail*, 31 Mar 2015.

- Sandra Heap, 46, from Southport, Merseyside, drinks 10 pints of milk a day, and prefers it to alcohol on a night out. It must be full-fat and at least a week before its sell-by date. "I really crave milk after 10pm at night," she said. "I would love to get hypnotised. It's become so bad, I don't even like the taste of water." *D.Express*, 1 Jan 2015.

- Jennifer Radigan, 17, from Galston, East Ayrshire, is so repulsed by the thought of eating meat and vegetables that her diet has been mainly chips and cheese for the past five years. The 5ft (1.5m) college student's weight has plummeted to 94lb (43kg) and she regularly faints in public. She is said to suffer from Selective Eating Disorder (SED), which causes anxiety or nausea when presented with new or feared food. "I used to live off mostly chicken," she said, "but now the smell makes me sick... It's a never-ending cycle of hell." *Metro*, 21 Jan 2015.

- Another victim of SED was Hanna Little, 20, from Truro, Cornwall, who would have anxiety attacks and feel sick at the thought of eating anything apart from dry toast and chips. She was forced to quite her factory job when she kept passing out, but after just one session with a hypnotherapist,



she was able to eat pizza, her first proper meal in 15 years. "Refusing foods started when I developed colic as a baby," she said. "Now I can eat whatever I like. I have so much more energy and I feel much happier." *D.Mail, Metro, 16 April 2014.*

- Sophie Ray, 19, an art student from Wrexham, has survived on cheese and tomato pizzas for eight years. They have to be piping hot and have no toppings. She developed SED after a bout of gastroenteritis at the age of two. "I began eating cheesy pasta or chips, then I moved on to lemon curd sandwiches, which I ate every day for four years," she said. "I plucked up the courage to try pizza when I was 11 and I've eaten it every day since. The thought of trying other foods makes me very anxious. I feel sick and I really clam up." *D.Mirror, Metro, 30 Mar 2012.*

- Natalie Swindells, 26, from Macclesfield, lives on almost nothing but Kellogg's Rice Krispies – four bowls a day with milk – and a slice of bread and butter for lunch. She stopped eating most other foods from the age of two and hasn't tasted a vegetable for 18 years. She will occasionally eat milk chocolate, ready salted crisps and chips. The bank worker has never taken a day off sick and believes overeating causes more health problems than having a very restricted diet like her own. *D.Mail, 18 April 2015.*

- Leah Frost, 17, from Leeds, refuses to eat anything apart from tinned spaghetti. The only other foods she has been persuaded to eat are chips, bread, cheese and sponge cake – but only specific brands and varieties: Heinz spaghetti, Warburton's bread and Lancashire cheese from the supermarket Morrisons. Her mother Yvonne arranged a year of cognitive behavioural therapy, but it didn't work. Despite her high fat, sugar and carbohydrate laden diet Leah remains a svelte size eight, but she suffers chronic fatigue and her iron count is low. *D.Mail, 18 Mar 2014.*

- For as long as he can remember, Gary Wilkinson, 25, from Huddersfield, has eaten nothing but baked beans on toast – three plates every day. "My mother used to give me plates of other food for me to try and I would just throw it on the floor," he said. "I would only eat beans. I used to have Heinz with ketchup, but now I will only eat Branston. If someone gave me beans that were just Tesco Value, I couldn't eat it." If he goes abroad and can't find the right beans, he subsists on chips. Amazingly, after a recent visit to the doctors, he was given a clean bill of health. *Metro, telegraph.co.uk, 21 May 2015.*

- Faye Campbell, 21, from Stowmarket, Suffolk, hasn't touched fruit and vegetables for

16 years, but had survived on cheeseburgers, pizza, chips, and fizzy drinks. Until she was 15, she would eat only potatoes, serves as waffles or chips. Despite her junk food diet,



the careworker, who is 5ft 8in (1.7m) tall, weighs just 138lb (63kg). As a child, she was diagnosed with the digestive disorder gastroesophageal reflux, causing chronic indigestion and heartburn after eating, which led to lachanophobia – an extremely rare anxiety triggered by eating vegetables. *D.Mail, 7 Nov 2013.*

- Another victim of lachanophobia is Dee Vyas, 34, from Harrow, northwest London, who hasn't touched anything healthy or green for 22 years. "Tomatoes make me shudder and bananas make me cringe," she said. She also baulks at the smell and taste of meat, leaving her reliant on a diet of crisps, chocolate, and plain pasta. "There is a history of diabetes in my family," she said, "and I know my diet puts me at a higher risk, which scares me." *Metro, 11 Oct 2013.*

- Nothing is more frightening to museum worker Kieran Gould-Downen, 23, than a packet of crisps – though he doesn't mind chips or fresh potatoes. He leaves pubs when he hears the rustle of a crisp packet. *Metro, 27 Feb 2015.*

- Anna Bondesson, 33, a business analyst from Bara, Sweden, has such a fear of cheese that the sight of the "yellow, smelly hell" can reduce her to tears. "The smell is the worst part," she said. "I don't understand how anyone can eat something that smells like vomit." She once dumped an unwitting boyfriend who came into the room with a plateful, and can be left terrified by talk about cheese on the radio. She remains sanguine. "People find it quite amusing," she said. *Metro, 13 Mar 2015.*

For other odd diets, see **FT190:24, 288:10-11.**

## SIDELINES...

### AVIAN WITNESS

Peaches, a 21-year-old Moluccan cockatoo, is now cared for by a nurse and a pastor in North Carolina, happily married for 41 years. Peaches had belonged to a couple that went through a bitter divorce, and every morning she re-enacts a raucous two-minute argument, turning from side to side as if acting out opposing points of view. *Times, 11 Feb 2015.*

### DOWN THE HATCH

An agoraphobic woman ventured out of her house in Crawley, West Sussex, for only the third time in 10 years – and plunged down a manhole. Janet Faal (pronounced "fall"), 57, went out with a friend on 17 April and was helping her reverse out of a car park when she moved a wooden pallet and fell into the concealed hole, breaking her nose and a leg. "I was getting better," she said, "but now I'm not so sure." *Sun, Metro, 21 April 2015.*

### TIGER FANCIERS

A wealthy Chinese real estate developer surnamed Xu has been jailed for 13 years and fined £160,000 for eating three tigers and making alcohol from their blood. In 2014, Xu organised three trips to Leizhou in the southern province of Guangdong for himself and 14 others, where they bought tigers for a "huge amount of money" that were killed and dismembered as they watched. Police seized tiger remains from Xu's home in Guangxi, along with 16 geckos and a cobra. *abc.net.au, Sun, 1 Jan 2015.*



PHOTOS: ETIENNE GILFILLAN

MARTIN ROSS



## SIDELINES...

### THE NUMPTY OF THE BEAST

Nikko Jenkins, 28, on Death Row in Omaha, Nebraska, for killing four people in 2013, tried to carve '666' on his forehead while looking in a mirror, forgetting that the image he was seeing was reversed. He ended up with three upside-down nines. He claims to act under the command of a serpent god, but psychiatrists are split on whether he is schizophrenic. *Sunday Sun, Sunday Mirror, 19 April 2015.*

### PINE MARTEN RETURNS

A pine marten has been spotted in southern England for the first time in more than 50 years. Using a night vision camera near his home in Bude, Cornwall, Jack Merritt, 18, caught a young female on film as it scuttled through the undergrowth. Once Britain's second most common carnivore, the pine marten – cat-sized but slender with brown fur – was hunted for its fur and almost wiped out in the 19th century. Today, it is common only in the Scottish Highlands. *D.Mail, 18 Mar 2015.*

### CHARM OF RELICS

A deckchair recovered from the *Titanic* when it sank in 1912 fetched nearly £100,000 at auction in Devizes, Wiltshire, on 18 April. The wooden chair from the first class promenade area was found bobbing in the sea by a boat sent to recover victims' bodies. *Sunday Sun, 19 April 2015.*

### MATRIMONIAL CHAMPIONS

Karam Chand, 109, and his wife Kartari, 102, are the world's oldest married couple. They celebrated a joint birthday with four generations of family in Bradford last November. They were married 89 years ago, on 11 December 1925, after meeting in India as teenagers. Karam, a retired mill worker, smokes one cigarette a day and drinks a tot of whisky or brandy three or four times a week. *Metro Herald (Dublin), 25 Nov 2014.*

# Zoo's homeless hippo

## Animals take to Tbilisi streets after floods destroy enclosures



In a surreal scene, a lonely hippopotamus was filmed walking through the streets of Tbilisi. Tigers, lions, jaguars, bears and wolves escaped from their zoo enclosures in the Georgian capital following flash floods on 13 June. Residents reported hearing "roaring in the streets" as armed police tried to find the missing predators. A white tiger attacked Otar Tsukhishvili,

40, on 17 June as he entered a warehouse near Heroes' Square where it had been hiding. Soon after, the tiger was shot by police marksmen. Tsukhishvili suffered damage to his carotid artery and died of a heart attack in hospital. Some of the other animals were recaptured, others were shot, and at least half of the zoo's 600 inhabitants were drowned. The hippo was one of the lucky ones,

being cornered and subdued with a tranquilliser gun as it chewed on a tree, as was an African penguin that floated downriver and was found 25 miles (40km) away near the border with Azerbaijan. At least 19 people drowned in the floods. (See *Strange Deaths*, p80 for more fatalities caused by animals.) *D.Telegraph, 15+17 Jun; Guardian 17+18+19 June 2015.*

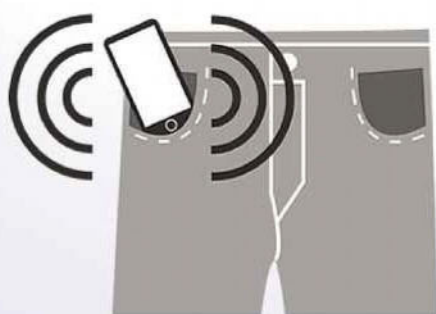
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## THE ALCHEMICAL RESURRECTION

Most of the alchemists' transmutations can be written off as misinterpretations of scientific phenomena, wishful thinking or rumour. Is the same true of palingenesis, which Paracelsus claimed as a success? **DAVID HAMBLING** investigates...

Seen from the 21<sup>st</sup> century, alchemy looks absurd, and any apparent successes must be explained away. Some chemical reactions produce yellowish substances which an optimistic experimenter might mistake for gold, and alchemy was infested with quacks, cheats and frauds who found better ways of getting gold than transmutation. However, it may be harder to explain the apparent successes of the necromantic process of palingenesis.

Formed from the Greek words for 'birth' and 'again', palingenesis was used to describe everything from the continual re-creation of the Universe to an oak producing an acorn which gives rise to another oak. But to alchemists, palingenesis came to have a very specific meaning: the recreation of a living thing from its powdered ashes.

The technique appears to have been pioneered by Paracelsus, Renaissance physician, ur-scientist and this column's favourite alchemist. He reported that through a "difficult and arduous" process it was possible to reduce wood to ash and then by fermentation restore it to a better condition than before.

Augustin Calmet, Abbot of Senones, described palingenesis in his wonderful titled 1759 opus *Dissertations upon the Apparitions of Angels, Daemons, Ghosts and concerning the vampires of Hungary, Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia*. A plant is reduced to ashes, ground and mixed with other compounds:

"From this dust, when agitated by a gentle heat, there arises gradually a stalk, leaves, and then a flower; in short, there is seen the apparition of a plant rising out of the ashes. When the heat ceases, the whole show disappears, and the dust falls into its former chaos at the bottom of the vessel."

Calmet claims the process can be carried out repeatedly, the 'vegetable phoenix' rising whenever heat is applied. However, Calmet was reporting results claimed by others, in



### IT WAS THE RECREATION OF A LIVING THING FROM ITS ASHES

particular the German Jesuit scholar Athanasius Kircher and Englishman Kenelm Digby. Kircher collected recipes for palingenesis and claimed to have tested them successfully, giving a demonstration to Queen Christina of Sweden in 1657.

There were other forms of palingenesis. The French chemist Joseph Duchesne reported experiments in which a nettle was burned to ashes and the ground remains mixed with water. When left outside on a cold night, the ice revealed the image of the complete nettle including the roots, stem and leaves.

According to Michael Martin in his study "Love's Alchemist", Kenelm Digby demonstrated icy palingenesis in 1660 to an audience at Gresham College, one of the precursors of the Royal Society. Digby also used a similar technique to resurrect a crayfish. The powdered crayfish ash was mixed with sand and water and placed in a sealed vessel; after some days, a new crayfish

appeared.

Fellow alchemist Martin Kerger credits Digby with raising a bird in his 1663 work on *Physico-fermentation and the inseparability of life and of the forms of material things*: "I am assured that this Reproduction has been effected, not only upon plants but also upon animals. They speak of a little Sparrow, that was made to appear in that manner, in a vial where its Ashes were kept..."

It was supposed that palingenesis might explain the presence of ghosts in graveyards. Under the right conditions the dust of

the deceased might give rise to their phantom image – though it might be harder to explain how their clothes might be resurrected in the process. It was rumoured that the Royal Society had looked into restoring a human being, but I have not been able to find any records of this. Perhaps such a potentially blasphemous project was kept under wraps; more likely, rumour outran reality.

After Digby there seems to have been little experimental success. As the principles of science became better established, alchemy with its mystic overtones was superseded by chemistry. Like transmutation, palingenesis was reduced to a convenient metaphor. Longfellow's 1864 poem 'Palingenesis' mourns lost love and the fantasy of "cunning alchemists" of recreating a rose from embers. The process was used (although not named) in HP Lovecraft's 1927 novella *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* to bring back an 18th-century sorcerer from the dead, who in turn recalls others from their grave-dust.

As a science, palingenesis lingered in the fringes. WB Yeats encouraged the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society to investigate it in 1890: "If you burnt a flower to ashes and put the ashes under, I think, the

receiver of an air pump, and stood the receiver in the moonlight for so many nights, the ghost of the flower would appear hovering over its ashes. I got together a committee which performed this experiment without results." (Quoted in Neil Mann, *WB Yeats and the Vegetable Phoenix*).

That seems to have brought the science of palingenesis to a full stop.

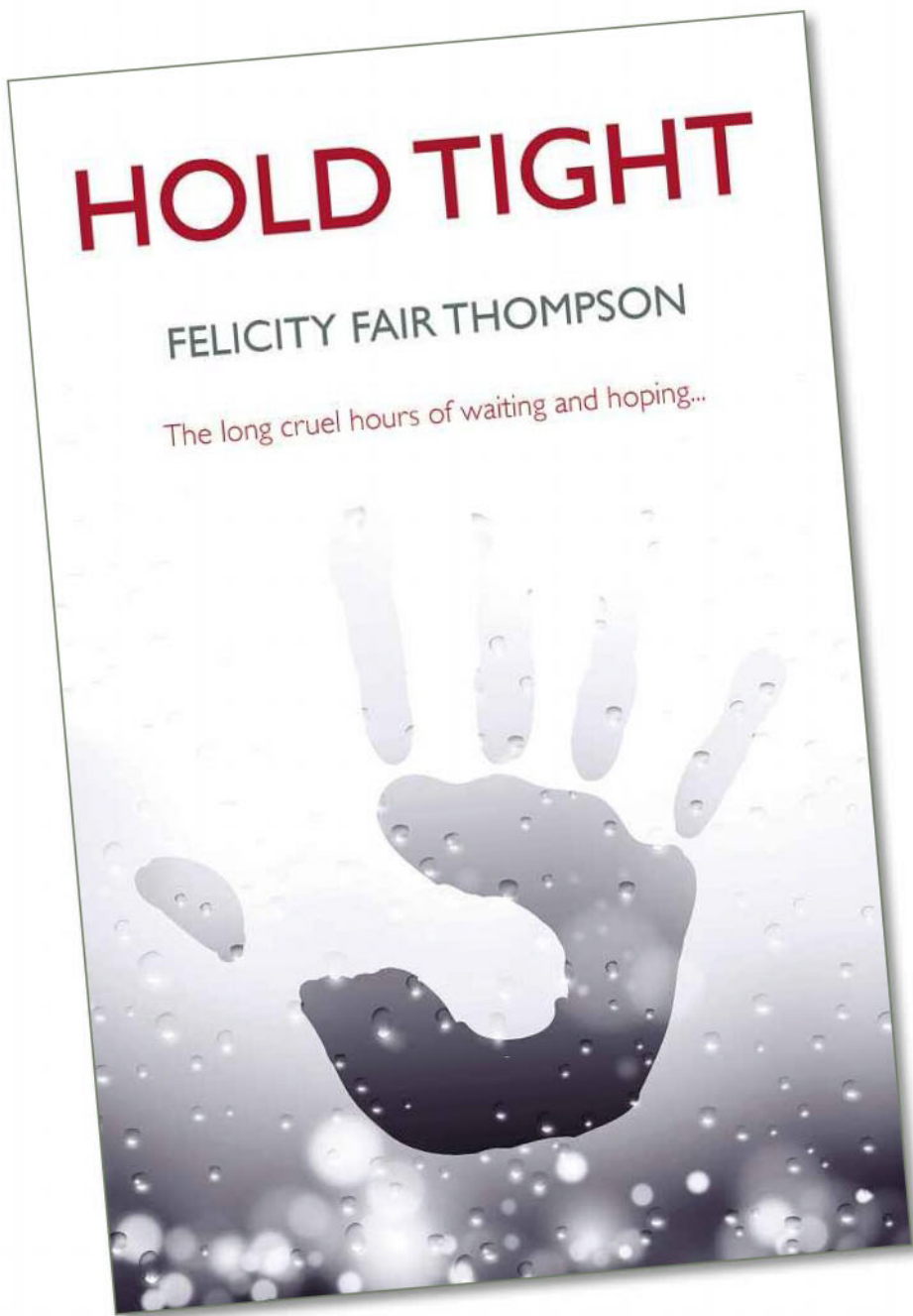
The early positive results might be put down as illusory. The frond-like ice patterns produced naturally by Jack Frost might well look like a plant. In much the same way the alchemical "Tree of Diana", studied by Newton and others, was believed to be a semi-living thing created from inanimate matter. These days it is known to be simply a formation of silver crystals growing from nitrate.

Similarly, plant-like crystal growths can appear in some mixtures when heat is applied. This is especially true of the 'storm glass', an alchemical invention that responds to temperature changes and supposedly predicts storms. **[FT310:14]** The more impressive results reported second-hand or from rumour can be dismissed. Michael Martin suggests that Digby's crayfish came from eggs in the sand mixed with the crayfish ashes.

Paracelsus's original account is harder to explain: "This is really wood, and is called resuscitated, renewed, and restored wood... from that nothingness it is made something." Paracelsus proved to be centuries ahead of his time in the treatment of diseases, the care of wounds and the nature of mental illness. He invented chemotherapy and the first effective painkiller, laudanum. He favoured remedies that actually worked and scorned classical theory. He may simply have been lying about palingenesis. Or there may be areas where modern science might still learn from alchemy.

For more on palingenesis, read David Hambling's new Lovecraftian novella *Broken Meats*, a sequel to *The Elder Ice*, available now as an ebook from Amazon.

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## GRAVE POSTPONEMENTS

The very last people born in the 19th century are finally taking their leave. **PAUL SIEVEKING** celebrates their tenacity and passes on their advice. Those marked with an asterisk have had their longevity claims accepted by the Gerontology Research Group in Los Angeles and Guinness World Records. The oldest person whose age is beyond doubt is the Frenchwoman Jeanne Calment, who died in 1997 aged 122 years and 164 days.

### ANAMI, 140+

This Indonesian great-grandmother from Purwakarta in West Java says she is waiting on "DNA tests" to verify her claim to be 140 as part of the World's Oldest Woman contest in Russia, the winner of which will receive 13 billion Indonesian rupiah – that's £630,000. (An estimate of a person's age can be obtained from a test based on the rearrangement of T cell receptor genes – but it has a margin of error of ± 8.9 years.) Anami lives in a small house in Kampung Bungur Sarang village with some of her 12 children, 26 grandchildren and 36 great-grandchildren. She is still able to perform daily chores on smallholdings and help to make meals. She says the secret to a long life is always being happy, helping others and praying five times a day. *dailymail.co.uk*, 18 May 2015.

### TUTI YUSUPOVA 134YRS 270 DAYS

This Uzbek woman died on 28 March 2015. According to documents held by her family, she was born on 1 July 1880. Baxadir Yangibaev, chairman of the council of ministers of the Republic of Karakalpakstan in northwestern Uzbekistan where Yusupova lived, claimed that the country had 8,700



ABOVE: Filomena Taipei Mendoza tucks into some healthy food.

BELOW: Anami, whose longevity is down to being happy, helping others and praying.

centenarians in a population of 30 million. It's Uzbek tradition to name each new year, and 2015 was declared "The Year of Care for the Elderly". Yusupova, who became a subject of study for the World Health Organisation, worked on the family farm since she was nine, married in 1897 or 1898 and had two children by her husband, who died in 1940. She said the secret of her longevity was "to do lots of work in the fields and to live an honest life." *BBC News*, 16 April; *Independent*, 17 April 2015.

### ALMIHAN SEYITI, 128+

This woman [pictured FT308:11], from China's Xinjiang region, lives in a village near the city of Kashgar. A member of the Uighur Turkic minority, she is vigorous, and enjoys singing, playing a musical instrument called the dutar and occasionally helping out on the farm. Birth records in the outlying regions of the Chinese empire in the 19th century are

sparse and unreliable, especially for the ethnic minorities, and China has reported Uighurs living into their 120s before without any solid evidence. *BBC News*, 27 June 2014.

### LEANDRA BECERRA LUMBRERAS, 127 YRS, 200 DAYS

This retired seamstress was born in Tamaulipas, Mexico, allegedly on 31 August 1887, but she lost her birth certificate in a house move in 1974. She claimed to have fought from 1910 to 1917 as a leader of the Adelitas – women who went to the battlefield in the Mexican Revolution. The "love of her life" was Margarito Maldonado, a revolutionary leader, who gave her an old rifle that she still owned when she died in Zapopan, western Mexico, on 19 March 2015. She had outlived her five children and several of her 20 grandchildren, and had 73 great-grandchildren and 55 great-great-grandchildren. Her family said the secret of her long life was eating chocolate, sleeping for days on end and never getting married. *Sunday Sun*, 31 Aug; *D.Mail*, 1 Sept 2014; *Yucatan Times*, 20 Mar 2015.

### JOSE AGUINELO DOS SANTOS, 126+

Jose Aguiuelo dos Santos, a son of slaves who worked on a coffee

plantation, was born in Pedra Branca, Ceara state, northeast Brazil, allegedly on 7 July 1888 (two months after slavery was abolished in Brazil). If this date is accepted, he turned 126 in July 2014, despite smoking a pack of cigarettes a day for the previous 50 years. Experts arrived at his birth year after asking him about his earliest memories. He has been living at an old age home in Bauru, São Paulo, since 1973, when he turned up with no identification at the supposed age of 85. He likes to joke and sing, and never misses his daily plate of rice and beans. He never married, has no children, and walks without a stick. The care home wished to prove his age and hoped to raise the funds for "advanced carbon tests". (While the amount of radioactive carbon present in tooth enamel is a remarkably accurate indicator of when someone was born as a result of nuclear bomb testing, this would not provide any data for someone aged over 70 – that is, born before the first nuclear explosion.) We have heard no news of Señor Aguiuelo since last year.

Carmelo Flores Laura (pictured FT308:10), a Brazilian herdsman with a baptism certificate dated 16 July 1890, died on 9 June 2014, at the unverified age of 123 years and 329 days. Sakari Momoi from Japan, the oldest man alive in the world whose age was beyond doubt, died on 5 July 2015 aged 112. *MX News (Sydney)*, *D.Mail*, 16 July 2014; *BBC News*, 7 July 2015.

### JUANA CHOX YAC, 120+

Juana Yac is an indigenous Kaqchikel Maya, who was born in the Guatemalan village of Santa Lucia Utatlan on 29 November 1893 – according to her official ID card. She married at 15 and has a family of 75 spread across four generations. *Washington Post*, *D.Telegraph*, 29 May 2014.

### FILomena TAipe MENDOZA, 117 YRS, 106 DAYS

This widowed mother of nine hardly ever left her tiny Andean village in Peru and died on 5 April 2015. Her ID card states she was born on 20 December 1897. She put her long life down to a





diet of potatoes, goat meat, beans and sheep's milk. *Canberra Times*, 4 May; *D.Mail*, 6 May 2014.

### **EKATERINA KOZAK, 117 YRS, 27 DAYS**

According to her passport, Kozak was born on 14 February 1897 at Khotymyr in the Ivano-Frankivsk region of Ukraine, but this appears not to be backed up by other documentation. She died on 13 March 2014. She never went to school but worked at a local farm, never married and never had a serious illness. She prayed every day and her favourite food was potato soup. *Express Gazeta (Russia)*, 21 Jan 2014, *ukrainebusiness.com.ua*, 29 Feb 2014.

### **\*MISAO OKAWA, 117 YRS, 26 DAYS**

This daughter of a kimono maker in the western Japanese city of Osaka (FT305:10) was born on 5 March 1898 and died of heart failure in the same city on 1 April 2015, officially the world's oldest person since the death of Jiroemon Kimura, a Japanese man, on 12 June 2013, aged 116 years and 54 days. Kimura is the oldest man ever, whose age is beyond dispute. Misao married her husband, Yukio, in 1919, and they had two daughters and a son. Yukio died in 1931. She is survived by two of her children, four grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. She credited her longevity to "eating delicious things" and sleeping at least eight hours every night. She once remarked how short her life seemed. There were said to be 54,397 centenarians in Japan in September 2013, 282 of whom were super-centenarians (more than 110 years old). *Sunday Telegraph*, 2 Mar 2014; *rte.ie/news*, 1 April; *Guardian*, 2 April 2015.

### **\*GERTRUDE WEAVER, 116 YRS, 276 DAYS**

The daughter of African American sharecroppers, Gertrude Weaver was born in Arkansas on 4 July 1898 and worked as a domestic helper. The mother of four became 'officially' the world's oldest person on the death of Misao Okawa on 1 April 2015, but died in Camden,



ABOVE: Jose Aguielo dos Santos. BELOW: Leandra Becerra Lumberas.

Arkansas, five days later. The key to her longevity, she said, was being kind to everyone and eating home-cooked food. *Dundee Courier*, 7 April; *D.Mail*, *Metro*, 8 April 2015.

### **\*JERALEAN TALLEY, 116 YRS, 25 DAYS**

Following the death of Gertrude Weaver on 6 April 2015, Jeralean Talley was recognised as the oldest living person. She was born Jeralean Kurtz in Montrose, Georgia, on 23 May 1899 – one of 12 children – and spent her early years as a farm hand. She moved to Inkster, Michigan, in 1935, where she lived until her death on 17 June 2015. In 1936 she married Alfred Talley (1893-1988) and they had a daughter, Thelma. Jeralean had three grandchildren, 10 great-grandchildren and four great-great-grandchildren. She bowled until she was 104 and went on annual fishing trips with her godson Tyler Kinloch, 21. She lived by the golden rule, "Do as you would be done by". [*R, AP*] *New Straits Times*, 24 May; *dailymail.co.uk*, 18 June 2015; *Wikipedia*.

### **EMMA MORANO, 115+**

One of eight children, Emma Martina Luigia Morano was born on 29 November 1899 in Civiasco, Piedmont, Italy. Her sister Angela (1908-2011) lived to be 102. Emma spent much of her life in Verbania on Lake Maggiore, where she worked in a factory making jute sacks. Her elixir for longevity consists of raw eggs,



which she has been eating – three a day – since her teens when a doctor recommended them to counter anaemia. She also drinks a glass of homemade brandy every day and is convinced that being single for most of her life, after an unhappy marriage that ended in 1938 following the death of an infant son, has kept her kicking. She still lives alone, in a two-room apartment. She is thought to be the oldest living person in Europe following the death of Jeralean Talley on 17 June. *Int. New York Times*, 16 Feb 2015.

### **SUSANNAH MUSHATT JONES, 116+**

Along with Emma Morano, this woman is the last living person on Earth who was incontrovertibly born in the 19th century (not counting the year 1900). One of 11 children of African American sharecroppers in Lowndes County, Alabama, Susannah Mushatt first saw light on 6 July 1899. She married Henry Jones in 1928 but divorced him five years later. She worked as a child carer and used some of her

salary to establish the Calhoun Club, a college scholarship fund for African American students. She has never smoked or drunk, partied, or wore makeup. She is blind, partially deaf, cannot say much and uses a wheelchair. *Time*, 18 June; *independent.co.uk*, 29 June 2015.

### **\*ETHEL LANG, 114 YRS, 233 DAYS**

Ethel Lancaster, a miner's daughter, was born in the Worsbrough area of Barnsley, South Yorkshire, on 27 May 1900 and lived there all her life. In 2005, she moved into a nursing home, where she died on 15 January 2015. She became the UK's oldest person after Londoner Grace Jones died aged 113 years and 342 days on 14 November 2013. Ethel left school at 13 to work in a shirt factory. In 1922 she married a plumber, William Lang, who died in 1988. Their daughter Margaret, 91, said her mother went blind at the age of 85 but still enjoyed listening to snooker on the wireless. "She loved all kinds of dancing and was doing it until she was 98, when she broke her hip," said Margaret. "She wasn't into modern food like pizza. She cooked with lard." She made her own bread, never smoked and rarely touched alcohol. *BBC News*, 16 Jan; *D.Telegraph*, *D.Mail*, *Sun*, 17 Jan 2015.

### **\*GRACE JONES, 113 YRS, 342 DAYS**

The last known British person born in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Grace Adelaide Jones was born in Bermondsey, south London, on 7 December 1899 and lived alone in her council flat until a few weeks before her death on 14 November 2013. She was engaged during WWI, but her fiancé was killed in action and she never married. She worked as a seamstress and civil servant. Her memory and intellect were undimmed until the end. *D.Telegraph*, 15 Nov; *Independent*, 19 Nov 2013.

*For the obituary of Alexander Imich, who briefly held the title of the world's oldest validated male supercentenarian and died aged 111, see Necrolog, p24.*



# ARCHAEOLOGY

**PAUL SIEVEKING** presents our round-up of archaeological discoveries, including a Celtic prince's treasure trove beside a French roundabout, the first stone circle found on Dartmoor for a century and the oldest brain in Britain.

## PRINCELY TOMB FOUND

In October 2014, archaeologists in eastern France made an "exceptional" discovery of what they believe is a Celtic prince buried in his chariot alongside exquisite ancient Greek ornaments. Experts say the discovery of the prince, who died in the fifth century BC in Lavau, near Troyes, is the most remarkable of the period since they unearthed the Lady of Vix in northern Burgundy in 1953. A wealth of treasures has been uncovered from a 430ft<sup>2</sup> (40m<sup>2</sup>) burial mound and 150ft<sup>2</sup> (14m<sup>2</sup>) burial chamber, found beside a roundabout in a nondescript industrial zone near Troyes, in the Champagne region.

Chief among them was a huge, finely wrought bronze cauldron, probably Etruscan or Greek made, around 3ft (90cm) in diameter with four handles depicting the bearded and horned head of the Greek god Achelous, the chief river deity. Everything on the site was laid out as if the deceased royal were about to begin a great banquet. The star artefact is a black ceramic Greek wine pitcher with gold metalwork, depicting Dionysius at a banquet lying down under a vine opposite a female figure, and described as "without equivalent". There was also a gold and silver sieved spoon for separating wine from herbs and spices. "Even in the rich Greek tombs you don't find such objects," said Dominique Garcia, head of Inrap, France's national archaeological dig institute.

The prince's tomb dates from the early Iron Age, known as the Hallstatt era. It is part of a 75,000ft<sup>2</sup> (7,000m<sup>2</sup>) necropolis with tombs from the Bronze Age and Gallo-Roman period. The fact that the objects were Greek "customised for barbarians" was proof of the extent of "exchanges between the Mediterranean and the Celts," said Mr Garcia. Traders travelled from Marseille in search of slaves, metals and precious materials, such as amber, entering in contact with continental Celts who were masters of the waterways. "These objects were like diplomatic gifts," he said. *telegraph.co.uk, 5 Mar 2015.*



INRAP

## HIGH TIMES ON DARTMOOR

The highest stone circle in southern England has been found on moorland in Devon, after undergrowth was removed in a controlled burn of the area, a practice known as 'swaling'. Situated 1,722ft (525m) above sea level and the first to be found on Dartmoor for more than a century, it is the second largest on the moor and was probably part of a "sacred arc" of circles around the north-eastern edge. Its discovery adds weight to the theory that there was cooperation between the communities living on Dartmoor in the late Neolithic/early Bronze Age 4,000 to 5,000 years ago.

"The discovery is providing an opportunity for investigation using the very latest

archaeological scientific methods to provide long-awaited insights into the chronology, construction and the purpose of these most elusive and iconic of Dartmoor's prehistoric monuments," said Jane Marchand, senior archaeologist at Dartmoor National Park. "Some preliminary radiocarbon dating has already taken place on soil samples taken from directly beneath two of the stones. These are the first radiocarbon determinations from a Dartmoor stone circle. The dates have produced very similar results and calibrate to the end of the third millennium BC. This indicates the date by which the stones had fallen."

With a diameter of 112ft (34m), the circle consists of 30 recumbent stones, plus one more lying in a gap just outside the circle and now incorporated into an unfinished enclosure wall. The stones probably came from the nearby Sittaford Tor itself and are of a fairly uniform size, suggesting they were carefully chosen. Packing stones visible around the bases of some of these indicate that they were originally upright. When upright, the circle would have been very impressive, dominating the surrounding landscape and resembling in appearance the Grey Wethers

double stone circle, which lies close to Fernworthy forest about half a mile (800m) away. The first stones were identified by the Dartmoor expert and stained glass artist Alan Endacott in 2007 and the initial stage of the archaeological exploration has just been completed. Preliminary results have revealed a wide straight ditch just outside the eastern side of the circle. *Guardian, dailymail.co.uk, 12 May 2015.*

## SAY IT WITH FLOWERS

Placing flowers on the graves of loved ones seems to be a very ancient impulse. Remains of fossilised pollen – probably from small, yellowish flowers – were found on the decorative tomb of a Stone Age woman known as the Red Lady located in the El Mirón cave in Cantabria, northern Spain. She was aged 35 to 40; her remains, painted with sparkling red ochre, are from the Magdalenian period and are about 18,700 years old. María José Iriarte of the University of the Basque Country said: "The most plausible hypothesis is that complete flowers were placed on the tomb. It has not been possible to say whether the aim of placing these plants was to give the dead woman a ritual offering, or whether they fulfilled a simpler purpose linked, for example, to hygiene or cleansing." *New Scientist, 18 Mar; dailymail.co.uk, 1 April; D.Telegraph, 11 May 2015.*



ABOVE: The newly discovered stone circle on Dartmoor.

DARTMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

# CLASSICAL CORNER



FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

## 190: NOT QUITE THE ARCHERS

“I think the answer lies in the soil” – Arthur Fallowfield, *Beyond Our Ken*

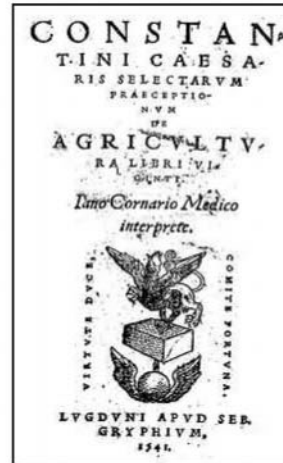
The *Geoponika* is an anthology of agricultural writings prefaced by a fawning dedication to the Byzantine Emperor Constantine VII (AD 944-59) ‘Porphyrogenitus’, this last indicating he was born in the special palace purple chamber, something all their rulers should have been but rarely were.

There is a superbly annotated translation by Andrew Dalby (Prospect Books, Totnes, 2011),

whose book and chapter numberings I here follow. The anonymous author draws his materials from a wide variety of sources, all scrupulously acknowledged by name. His collection ranges from (we have to say) down-to-earth practicalities to the exotic and the downright laughable.

This is par for the course in ancient didactic farming manuals. Hesiod’s poem *Works & Days*, the earliest DIY tract for wannabe Greek sodbusters, runs the gamut from serious agriculture to advice on how, where, and when to pee in public, also counselling against “shitting by your own fireside, something best not done” – Who needed to be told that? Plus his recommendation to avoid women in July since then they are most randy – who wanted to be told that? Still, as Dalby says, “The nonsense is part of the history of farming [coming from Lincolnshire, I can endorse that –BB]. And occasionally what has appeared to be nonsense contains a grain of truth.” Here are some largely random nuggets of (mis) information that would have made even dear old Walter Gabriel (of hallowed *Archers*’ memory) blink.

14: “If a menstruating woman displays her private parts to the hail, she will ward it off; wild animals also recoil from this sight” – we can at least believe the second claim. Subsidiary suggestion: “Burying a maiden’s first sanitary towel in the field will save your crops” – not the most environmentally friendly way of recycling



used Tampax.

16: “Burying a hippopotamus skin in the field wards off thunderbolts.” These and sundry other outlandish prescriptions are credited to Sextus Julius Africanus (third-century AD), a specialist in ancient forteana, evidenced in his *Kestoi* (‘Adornments’), of which some extracts remain.

Another Africanus recipe (7. 14) is to keep wine potable by putting in an apple inscribed “Taste and know that the Lord is good,” an obvious bit of Christian

propaganda. Contrariwise (9. 1), an olive-leaf inscribed with Athene’s name will alleviate headaches – these divine brand-name rivalries would be of little use to the many illiterate peasants.

9: Africanus’s rigmarole on how to make citrons resemble faces – lemon-aid?

2: “Virgins have the gift of prophecy.” Perhaps aimed at milkmaids? Can your girlfriend pick the 3.30 at Chepstow winner?

17: “If you want to drink a lot and stay sober, eat raw cabbage beforehand” – handy tip for binge-drinkers. The *Geoponika* has many recipes for preventing and curing intoxication, lending support to modern notions that the Byzantines had problems with alcoholism; cf. E. Jeanselme, ‘L’alcoolisme à Byzance,’ *Bulletin de la Société Française d’Histoire de la Médecine* 18 (1924), 289-95.

23: “They say actors should eat celery to sweeten their breath.” Who are “They”? Useful for intimate scenes on stage or screen.

13: Assafoetida blended with honey will blind hens.” Maybe so, but who would want to do this, except those who mass-produce eggs? – Memo to Jamie Oliver.

33 provides the following handy check-list for sobering-up drunks: “Eating cabbage leaves; eating honey-soaked pastries; good swig of vinegar; encircle the head with laurel leaves; hold questions and discussions on ancient history” – So a Classics degree is indispensable for bobbies on weekend High Streets....



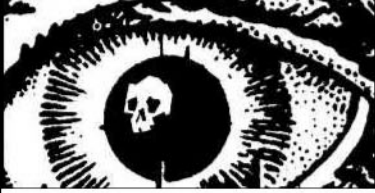
### BRITAIN’S OLDEST BRAIN

During the 2009 excavation of an Iron-age landscape in Heslington, York, a skull with the jaw and two vertebrae still attached was discovered face down in a muddy pit, with no sign of the rest of the body. While cleaning the skull, Rachel Cubitt, collection projects officer with York Archaeological Trust, discovered something loose inside. “I peered though the hole at the base of the skull to investigate (as pictured below), and to my surprise saw a quantity of bright yellow spongy material,” she said. “It was unlike anything I had seen before.” It was an astonishingly well-preserved brain. Since the discovery, a team of 34 specialists have been working on this brain to study and conserve it as much as possible. Carbon dating the jawbone determined that this person – a man aged between 26 and 45 – probably lived in the sixth century BC.

An examination of the vertebrae indicates that he was first hit hard on the neck, and then the neck was severed with a small sharp knife. The evidence suggests that the head was cut from the body very quickly after the person was killed. It was then immediately buried in a pit in wet, clay-rich ground, providing a sealed, oxygen-free burial environment. Over time the skin, hair and flesh of the skull underwent chemical breakdown and gradually disappeared, but the fats and proteins of the brain tissue linked together to form a mass of large complex molecules. This resulted in the brain shrinking, but it also preserved its shape and many microscopic features only found in brain tissue. As there was no new oxygen in the brain, and no movement, it was protected and preserved. A very rare occurrence indeed, the oldest recorded find of this type in the UK and one of the earliest worldwide. [yorkarchaeology.co.uk](http://yorkarchaeology.co.uk), 21 Jan 2015.



UNIVERSITY OF BRADFORD



# GHOSTWATCH

**ALAN MURDIE** investigates reports that the spirit of Frank Sinatra is haunting Las Vegas

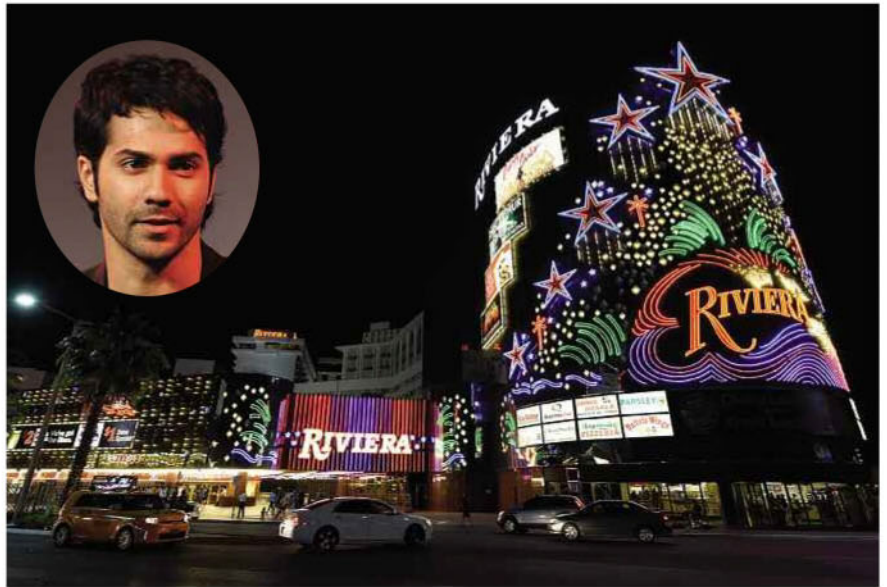
## OL' BLUE EYES IS BACK

The Bollywood actor Varun Dhawan believes he may have encountered the ghost of legendary singer Frank Sinatra, although published online accounts of his experiences while filming in Las Vegas are somewhat garbled. His strange experiences in May 2015, reportedly occurring as he stayed in the Frank Sinatra suite at a hotel in the city, are the latest in a crop of paranormal stories featuring the iconic singer and actor in spectral form following his death from a heart attack in May 1998 after suffering pneumonia and bladder cancer.

Some online versions state that Dhawan began experiencing strange things on his first night in the hotel, whilst others state they arose after fellow dancers and film crew members had teased him about his room being haunted. Reportedly, he heard strange noises, a door creaking, and witnessed a door opened by itself. Several sources quote him also saying "at night I would hear someone singing"; neither song nor singer is specified, though the implication is that the latter was Sinatra himself. Unfortunately, there is even doubt about the identity of the haunted hotel, with some sources claiming it was the Riviera Hotel in Vegas, while others assert manifestations disturbed a suite in the Mirage Hotel, which displays some Sinatra memorabilia. ('Did Frank Sinatra's ghost haunt Varun Dhawan?' [www.masala.com](http://www.masala.com), 12 May; [indianexpress.com](http://indianexpress.com), 13 May 2015 and many others.)

If it was the Riviera Hotel, it may be noted that stories of a haunting at the Sinatra suite surfaced three years ago, leading the *Las Vegas Sun* to ask if Frank was coming back. The newspaper detailed the filming of a breathlessly exciting episode of *Ghost Adventures*, an American TV series in the style of *Most Haunted*, then already in its sixth season. Ghost hunters Aaron Goodwin and Nick Groff and producer Zak Bagans had chosen Frank Sinatra's "one-time Strip penthouse suite at the Riviera" for filming through the night, bringing Frank Westcott, Sinatra's former pianist, to participate together with a gentleman named Vince whose key qualification for involvement appeared to be that he was "about to open a strip club in Las Vegas" – presumably a sufficient grounding in basic materialism.

Locking themselves into the ninth floor of the building, the group claimed their efforts were duly rewarded with the "return of dead guests", their belief boosted by readings on a monitor wielded in the presence of Jade Kelsall, then the reigning "Miss Nevada USA" and initially



ABOVE: Vegas's Riviera Hotel, where Sinatra (below) was said to be haunting a suite. INSET: Varun Dhawan.

a non-believer in ghosts. However, her scepticism evaporated when the beauty queen experienced a frisson of excitement comparable to a skeleton hand playing the scales down her back, with her stating: "I got crazy scared. At first, it was a dream come true to sit in with the investigation team because I love the show, but I got my heels scared off. This was no joke. My face was a picture of scared."

Their collective sense of scientific detachment was further expressed and emphasised by Zac, who declared: "It was \*\$&@\*@ nuts." He went on: "It was about 3am. An energy that I can't explain made contact with Vince and myself. The energy answered my questions exactly. That severely affected us both emotionally." Vince was similarly overcome by the excitement of the occasion: "It was insane – real crazy stuff... I never expected it to be that overwhelming. After what went down, everybody in the group now believes in ghosts."

As always, it would be informative to learn the provenance and patent of the "electromagnetic device that detects the energy of a spirit" that the group claim provided such proof. ("Is Frank Sinatra haunting the Riviera?" *Las Vegas Sun*, 6 Mar 2012; <http://lasvegassun.com/vegassdeluxe/2012/mar/06/zak-bagans-we-had-guests-dead-guests-sinatra-s/>).

Reading accounts of such antics, it is ironically appropriate that Sinatra was actually credited with inspiring the name 'Scooby-Doo' in 1969,

for the eponymous ghost hunting cartoon dog. Allegedly, Sinatra's song *Strangers in the Night* was heard by Fred Silverman, the head of CBS children's programming, when en route by plane to a development meeting concerning the cartoon show, then at the planning stage. Near the end of his song, Sinatra started improvising, singing nonsense phrases like "dooby-doo-doo" and in a flash of revelation, Silverman suddenly realised the dog's name should not be 'Too Much' as proposed by writers but Scooby-Doo, and that he should be made the animated star of the show. The rest is cartoon history.

Such a connection may not have been lost upon those who gathered at a ghost hunting conference convened at Cal Neva Lodge at Lake Tahoe in 2008. The lodge was owned by Sinatra between 1960 and 1963, and is supposedly haunted by him – and for good measure by Marilyn Monroe, who has also been the subject of various claims of phantom returns ever since her death in 1962 (the first noted in 1965 by Dennis Bardens in his book *Ghosts and Hauntings*). Sinatra is said to have given up ownership of the complex because of connections with a mobster. Sinatra's ghost was blamed for moving a TV remote control in the presence of Janet Oberding, author of *Ghosts and Legends of the Lake Tahoe Area* and other witnesses, though a later challenge to Sinatra to manifest in front of journalist Brad Bynum received no response in 2008.

On the anniversary of Sinatra's death in 2011, a public séance was held at the Frank Sinatra celebrity showroom at the Cal Neva, attracting around 40 people. By then, the venue had been reporting knocking sounds and electrical anomalies, but nothing that could be undeniably attributed to the dead star. The stories of phenomena at Cal Neva



resemble the low-level variety once claimed at the former Dunes Hotel & Casino of Las Vegas, now replaced by Bellagio Casino Hotel. The Dunes was once famed for appearances by Sinatra and a wide range of top Vegas stars, and in its twilight years its casino was supposedly haunted by cold spots and disembodied voices, while a bluish radiance could be seen hovering in the same area of the lounge, always in the late evening. However, it should be noted that these all occurred before the singer died, with the Dunes being totally demolished in 1993-94, so they cannot be blamed upon him, unless it was a case of a ghost of the living. (*Ghosts and Legends of the Lake Tahoe Area*, 2004, by Janet Oberding; 'Frank Sinatra and Marilyn Monroe may haunt the Cal Neva Lodge at Lake Tahoe' *Reno News and Review*, 9 Oct 2008.)

Certainly, from the perspective of traditional spirit lore, a personality such as Sinatra with his combined enjoyment of the high life, his heroic drinking, lavish spending, four marriages, general adoration of the fair sex and connections with the Mafia would be precisely the sort of personality that would cling to the material plane after death and remain earthbound. His song 'My Way' – one of the most popular secular songs for funerals in Australia – has been variously condemned as a celebration of egotistical living and by some religious fundamentalists as a potentially evil and satanic anthem. "And now the end is near/And so I face the final curtain" all too often comes true. Karaoke renditions of *My Way* have frequently sparked murders in the Philippines; for instances from 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2007, see **FT262:27**. Sinatra was reputedly not keen on the song himself. (*Two Worlds*, Nov 2010; 'Sinatra song often strikes a deadly chord'; *New York Times*, 6 Feb 2010.)

However, as none of these alleged manifestations can be demonstrably linked with the actual presence of Sinatra, I rather think this is an example of what I term 'Brighton Pavilion Syndrome', the process

where any vague ghostly manifestation or report of a sighting is at once linked with the most historic personage known to have frequented a building in its past. Rather like Vegas, Brighton was established as a resort for the wealthy with huge sums being lavished on its Pavilion and Dome. Over the years, a number of people have claimed encounters with ghosts inside the building, linking them either with Martha Gunn, promoter of sea bathing, the Prince Regent, later George IV, who built the edifice, or his mistress Mrs Maria Fitzherbert. As Joan Foreman observed in *Haunted Royal Homes* (1987), one figure in Regency costume can be much like another.

Similar caution must be extended to claims of posthumous communications from Sinatra channelled by mediums and others. The claim by singer Robbie Williams to have channelled Sinatra is obviously suspect in light of his admissions of having suffered from depression, insecurity and drug and alcohol abuse in the past. More fundamentally they are incapable of independent verification, but then so are many other post-mortem Sinatra contacts claimed by a number of mediums and psychics. These include various psychics in the USA and in the UK, Derek Acorah in 2011 and most recently Paula O'Brien of Hull, who has received invitations to participate in a reality television show in the United States following claims she has contacted both Sinatra and Elvis Presley. Whose reality, we might be tempted to ask? ([www.femalefirst.co.uk/celebrity/Robbie+Williams-15545.html](http://www.femalefirst.co.uk/celebrity/Robbie+Williams-15545.html) 15 May 2007; *South Wales Evening Post*, 28 Oct 2011; 'Psychic medium Paula O'Brien to star in US reality TV show after channelling Frank Sinatra and Elvis Presley' *Hull Daily Mail*, 3 Nov 2014.)

Leaving aside the question of the wholly subjective nature of these experiences, reliable voice identification with the living is subject to a number of variables, and can be fraught with problems, including the gap in time between the listener hearing the known voice and his attempt to recognise the disputed voice, and the nature and duration

of the voice. Obviously, some voices are more distinctive than others and the longer the sample of speech the better the prospect of identification. Sinatra had a deeply distinctive voice but research shows that a confident recognition by a lay listener of a familiar voice may nevertheless be wrong, and one should not forget the case of a stray broadcast and recording of DJ Kid Jensen being solemnly identified as a communication from beyond the grave in early EVP experiments during the 1970s (recalled by David Ellis in the *Journal of the SPR*, v.69, 2005, 44-45). The whole area is a complex one (see e.g. 'Sounding Out Expert Voice Identification' by Professor David Ormerod, *Criminal Law Review*, Oct 2002).

Even for those promoting a spiritualist hypothesis, it does not seem to have occurred to many mediums and channellers that the celebrity identities claimed by alleged discarnate communicators may be untrue. Such purported identities may be wholly false, arising from either the agency of lying and mischievous spirits and devils or, alternatively, from the subconscious minds of the medium and sitters. A good example of the problem arose with the writer Victor Hugo who began experimenting with séances in a family circle as an after-dinner recreation, following his exile to Jersey in the British Channel Islands in 1858. Not only did Hugo believe he had contacted spirits of the dead but also intellectual abstractions such as "the Spirit of Criticism" and legendary creatures such as Androcles the Lion. The messages were an inspiration to Hugo and his literary output during his time of exile (few today in the audience of *Les Misérables* will know that its title was purportedly revealed by a discarnate spirit), but it is difficult to escape the conclusion that it was anything other than the great author's own subconscious which was being tapped at key points, although some events going on in his home made the family believe there was an objective psychic presence at work. (See *Victor Hugo: A Biography*, 1999, by Graham Robb).

Communicators may also change as the culture of the time expects. In classical Greece it was the pagan gods and goddesses or the souls of mythological heroes who spoke through the oracles; in the Middle Ages there were epidemics where individuals fell into trance and were possessed by angels or devils, whilst the history of spiritualism is full of examples of entities who failed to establish their bona fides when a scintilla of proof or corroboration was demanded.

Perhaps more pertinently, as the researcher SG Soal stated in 1922: "Nothing is more remarkable than the way in which subconscious mental phenomena accommodate themselves not only to the beliefs of the immediate entourage of the individual subject but also to the general beliefs of the age in which they appear." Certainly, it would be a great spiritual irony if all these channelled Frank Sinatra(s) just turned out to be merely impersonators and tribute acts manifesting on the other side!



ABOVE: The Cal Neva Lodge, briefly owned by Sinatra in the early 1960s, now one of his post-mortem haunts.

# THE ART OF BEDLAM: RICHARD DADD

DAVID V BARRETT visits a small but perfectly formed exhibition devoted to works painted by Richard Dadd during his years as an inmate of Bethlem Hospital.

**T**hat fine dividing line between genius and madness may be a cliché, but it's difficult to find a better example of the reality of it than Richard Dadd.

Born in Kent in 1817, Dadd trained at the Royal Academy. Many of his early works were inspired by a long tour of the Middle East. They were representational – colourfully dressed portraits and groups – but were an early indication of Dadd's fascination with the unusual, the alien or, from the viewpoint of 19th-century Britain, the bizarre.

Dadd began to suffer from mental illness, probably a form of schizophrenia, in his 20s. He stabbed his father to death in 1843, believing this was demanded by the gods, and was committed to Bethlem Hospital



in Lambeth, London in 1844.

There, according to the *Quarterly Review* of 1857, “the artist... is obliged to weave his fine fancies on the canvas amidst the most revolting conversation and the most brutal behaviour”. In 1864, he was transferred to the newly-opened Broadmoor hospital for the criminally insane, near Reading, where he remained until his death in 1886.

And in both institutions Richard Dadd painted – astonishingly complex, beautiful, imaginative paintings illustrating fantastical characters and scenes from Shakespeare.

The Art of Bedlam exhibition at the somewhat out-of-the-way Watts Gallery near Guildford is small, but true to its title it concentrates mainly on Dadd's time at Bethlem. There are photographs and plans of the hospital, a letter Dadd wrote to an old friend, and case notes on patients.

From the mid-19th century asylums took photographs of their inmates, a valuable resource

## LONDON'S BETHLEM

Bethlem was the end point for Tom Rakewell in Hogarth's series of paintings *A Rake's Progress*.

The hospital, originally called Bethlehem, has been on only four sites since it was founded in 1247 on Bishopsgate, London, on a corner of what is now Liverpool Street Station. It specialised in the mentally ill from around 1400; its name, of course, became corrupted to Bedlam. In 1676 it moved to Moorfields, just outside Moorgate.

The third hospital, where Dadd was incarcerated, was on St George's Fields, Lambeth; it was opened in 1815 following a competition for its design. One of those submitting plans for the new building was Bethlem resident James Tilly Matthews, well known to *Fortean Times* readers as the creator of the Air Loom machine (see **FT170:40-42**). This was finally built from his plans in 2002 by artist Rod Dickinson<sup>1</sup> and written about by Mike Jay.<sup>2</sup> Although Matthews's design for the new hospital didn't win, some of its features were incorporated in the final building, and the governors of Bethlem were so impressed by his designs that they paid him £50 (over £3,000 today).



When Bethlem moved again in 1930, to a site between Croydon and Bromley, south of London, its main building in Lambeth became the home of the Imperial War Museum.

Another artist who spent time in Bethlem in the 1920s was Louis Wain, who drew and painted anthropomorphic cats. Like Dadd, he continued as an artist while in hospital. His artwork has been used (some say abused) to show how his artistic style changed as his

mental health deteriorated.

The architect Augustus Pugin, interior designer of the Palace of Westminster, spent some time at Bethlem in his final years. Hannah Snell, who disguised herself as a man and served as a soldier in India in the 18th century, spent the last few months of her life there. Bethlem has also housed several potential royal assassins and at least a couple of religious visionaries, the 7ft 6in (229 cm)-tall Daniel, a porter to Cromwell [pictured **FT46:51**], who forecast the Plague and the Great Fire of London, and Bannister Truelock, a shoemaker who prophesied the Second Coming (the Messiah would issue out of Truelock's mouth) before conspiring to kill George III. And then there was the cross-dressing pickpocket and pimp Moll Cutpurse (Mary Frith), so notorious that three plays were written about her in her lifetime; she was released from Bethlem in 1644 having been “cured of insanity”. One shudders to imagine how.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> [www.rod dickinson.net/pages/airloom/project-synopsis.php](http://www.rod dickinson.net/pages/airloom/project-synopsis.php)

<sup>2</sup> Mike Jay, *The Influencing Machine*, Strange Attractor, 2012.



OPPOSITE PAGE: *Bacchanalian Scene*, 1862. ABOVE: *The Artist's Halt in the Desert*, c.1845. BELOW: *The Fairy Feller's Masterstroke* (detail), c.1855-64.

today to both art historians and historians of medicine. Most touching is a photograph (facing page) of Dadd sitting at his easel, painting his masterpiece *Contradiction: Oberon and Titania*, his beard already greying, his deep eyes drawing the viewer in. It was taken by Henry Hering around 1857, when Dadd had already been an inmate for over a dozen years; the pathos is in our knowing what he could only have guessed, that he would be both patient and prisoner for nearly 30 years more.

Dadd's fascination with fairies began when he was young. Indeed, a writer in *Art-Union* wrote of him in 1843, the year before he went to Bethlem: "No living artist possessed a more vivid or delicate imagination." Most of his early Shakespearean fairy paintings are missing from the exhibition; it's a shame not to see the exquisite *Titania Sleeping*, the unusual *A Fairy – Sunset* or the partly-naked dancers of *Come Unto These Yellow Sands*, all from 1841-2, pre-Bethlem. But from that period we have a baby Puck sitting on what might be a mushroom or a chalice, surrounded by naked dancers in a



fairy ring.

Two of Dadd's most famous paintings are here, *Contradiction: Oberon and Titania* (1854-8) and *The Fairy Feller's Masterstroke* (c. 1855-64), which has inspired creative artists as disparate as Siegfried Sassoon and Freddie Mercury. Its central scene is of a man raising an axe to split open a hazelnut, from which to make a new carriage for Mab, queen of the fairies. *Contradiction* illustrates a disagreement between the king and queen of

the fairies, which causes upset swirling through the fairy world. Both are simply amazing in their wealth of tiny, intricate detail. The gallery has provided video scan enlargements of both paintings, but it would be worth taking a magnifying glass to examine the pictures themselves.

Very different in style, *Halt in the Desert* (c. 1845) is a scene from Dadd's travels in the East before his illness, patricide and incarceration. Wonderfully moody, it shows a group of travellers

sitting around a campfire at night on the shores of the Dead Sea, under a clouded but star-speckled sky. It's a magical scene, made even more so by the Moon apparently being pierced, or supported by, the long lance held by a figure in the foreground.

Dadd is known almost exclusively for his fairy paintings, but he was also a fine portrait artist, of both conventional and unconventional figures. The exhibition includes seven of 32 watercolours he did of *Sketches to Illustrate the Passions*, illustrating negative or harmful emotions or characteristics that might lead someone to become unhappy or mentally ill; they include *Hatred*, *Agony – Raving Madness*, *Insignificance or Self-Contempt* and *Grief or Sorrow*. The painting *Patriotism* shows two soldiers poring over a map covered in tiny writing – again, a magnifying glass would be useful. One of the places on the map is labelled "Lunatic Asylum called Lostwithal" – and out of that asylum came works of wonder.

**The Art of Bedlam: Richard Dadd**, Watts Gallery, Guildford, until 1 Nov 2015.

## FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

The latest updates on everything from raining lampreys to Britain's alien town councillor



ABOVE LEFT: One of the lampreys that fell from the sky in Fairbanks, Alaska, in June. ABOVE RIGHT: One of the worm clumps in the middle of a road in Eisenhower State Park.

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

EISENHOWER STATE PARK

### WORMS FROM THE SKIES [FT328:22]



Worms fell across southern Norway in April. Then, after heavy rains on 29 May, Texas park rangers were astonished

to come across more than 30 weird spaghetti-like clumps of worms in the middle of a road in Eisenhower State Park, Denison. The worms stayed for two days before heading into the soil and leaving their droppings behind. "We're still puzzled why they decided to line up in the middle of the road," said Park Superintendent Ben Herman. "Even our biologist doesn't know why they're spaced so well and in a line." Rangers had two theories on the worms' odd behaviour – one, that the heavy rain forced them on to dry land, and two, that the raindrops sounded like predators, prompting the worms to herd together to escape. In this instance, no one has suggested that the worms fell from the sky. [ITN] *Guardian, Sky News, 4 June 2015.*

However, in early June, four adult Arctic lampreys fell from the sky in Fairbanks, Alaska. "That's unusual for a fish that's seldom seen in the water up here," said the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. A live one was spotted at the Value Village on Airport Way and saved in a bucket, and another was found on someone's lawn. The

discoveries gave rise to tongue-in-cheek claims of 'vampire fish' and 'fish monsters' raining down, but the line marks on the skin of one lamprey was evidence that it had been squeezed between the bills of a gull. The Fish and Game Department speculates that gulls are fishing the lampreys out of the nearby Chena River but are losing their grip on the "squirming critters" while in flight.

Arctic lampreys have a round mouth filled with nightmarish sharp teeth but no jaws. Roughly a foot long, they have an anadromous lifecycle like salmon. They're born along muddy riverbanks, travel to the ocean and return to fresh water to spawn. The juvenile fish look like worms and are easy to find in riverbanks. In the Lower Yukon River subsistence fishermen harvest adult lampreys returning up the river in November.

*Newsminter.com (the voice of interior Alaska), 4 June; CBC News, 5 June 2015.*

### 'VIRGIN-BORN' CRITTERS [FT329:24]



Seven sawfish in Florida have become the first virgin-born animals ever found in the wild from a sexually reproducing

species. The discovery suggests that parthenogenesis may be a natural response to dwindling numbers, rather than a freak occurrence largely seen in

captivity. It was made by ecologists studying genetic diversity in a critically endangered species of ray. Numbers of this species have plummeted to less than five per cent of what they were a century ago. The findings appear in the journal *Current Biology*.

There are many species, particularly invertebrates, that naturally reproduce alone, while some types of whiptail lizard are bizarrely all-female; but for an animal that normally reproduces by mating, a virgin birth is an oddity. A number of captive animals have produced virgin births: sharks, snakes, Komodo dragons and turkeys; but the smalltooth sawfish, a strange-looking beast that grows up to 13ft (4m) long, is the first sexually reproducing species whose virgin-born babies have been found roaming free and healthy in their native habitat.

Andrew Fields, a PhD student at Stony Brook University in New York and the study's first author, said the find was entirely unexpected. Of the 190 individual sawfish surveyed, seven had DNA that indicated they only had one parent. Specifically, these seven historic fish – all of them female, five of them sisters – had identical copies of at least 14 of the 16 genes examined; if they had arisen from normal sexual reproduction, the chance of the animals being homozygous for all those genes was less than one in 100 billion. Because virgin-birth offspring have much less genetic

diversity than normal sexual offspring, their chances of survival are usually thought to be very low; but the seven fish in this study were up to one year old, normal in size and apparently getting on fine – although it is too early to know whether they are themselves fertile. The researchers say that births of this kind may be more common than previously thought. *BBC News, 1 June 2015.*

### ANIMAL QUAKE DETECTORS [FT304:9]



Though reports of odd animal behaviour before earthquakes date back at least as far as ancient Greece, the data are mostly anecdotal. They are also subject to vagaries of the human psyche: 'confirmation bias' ensures that strange behaviour not followed by earthquakes gets forgotten, and 'flashbulb memory' can, should an earthquake strike, imbue quotidian animal antics with great import after the fact. The US Geological Survey undertook studies in the 1970s to find out if animals really did predict them, but came up empty-handed.

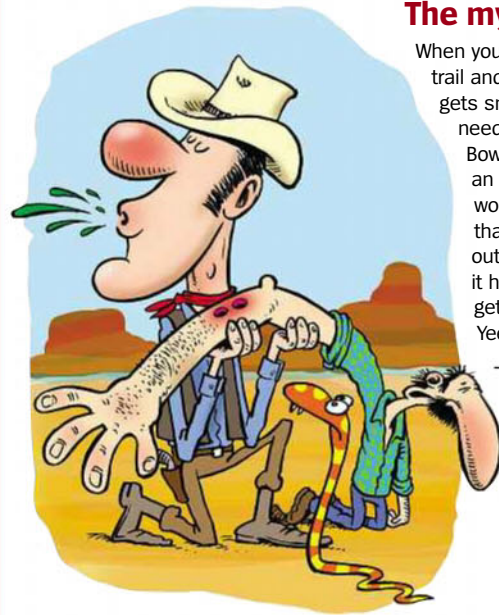
However, in 2009 a colony of breeding toads was observed to desert a pond in central Italy three days before a quake [FT265:22]; and Peruvian data published this year in *Physics and Chemistry of the Earth* are not just anecdotal. Friedmann Freund of San Jose (CA) State University



## 91: SUCKING OUT THE POISON

### The myth

When you're riding the trail and your pardner gets snake-bit, you need to whip out your Bowie knife, make an incision in the wound, and suck that venom the hell out of there before it has a chance to get into his system. Yee-hah!



### The "truth"

I know it's hard to believe that cowboy films are not infallible sources of first aid advice, but there you go – that's the kind of crazy world we're living in. The fact is that no human can suck hard enough or fast enough to do any good; once injected into the body by the bite, the venom will enter the blood stream almost immediately. And it's not even as if sucking comes into the category of useless-but-harmless. Any attempt at poison-sucking is quite likely to introduce germs into the wound (human mouths being much more dangerous in this respect than snake mouths), and may even cause physical damage to it, thus making the patient's situation worse than it already was. Which is quite an achievement when he's just been bitten by a snake. Tourniquets and cutting are also undesirable: studies show no benefit, along with a significant risk of causing further harm. Current advice on what to do about snakebites essentially boils down to "get medical help".

### Sources

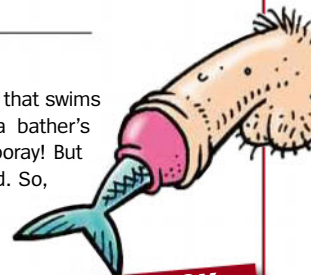
[www.piedmontwebdev.org/piedmontbraintumorcenter/?p=537](http://www.piedmontwebdev.org/piedmontbraintumorcenter/?p=537); [www.sciencebasedmedicine.org/snake-oil-for-snakebites-and-other-bad-ideas/](http://www.sciencebasedmedicine.org/snake-oil-for-snakebites-and-other-bad-ideas/); [www.bbc.com/future/story/20120209-can-peeing-help-heal-a-snakebite](http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20120209-can-peeing-help-heal-a-snakebite).

### Disclaimer

It's estimated that, worldwide, about 2.5 per cent of venomous snakebites prove fatal, so accuracy is of some importance here. If we've got it wrong, please sink your fangs into our errors on the letters page.

### Mythchaser

The story of the candiru – the Amazonian fish that swims up a stream of urine and lodge itself in a bather's urethra – has been thoroughly debunked. Hooray! But wait: the debunking has itself been debunked. So, ichthyologists, where do we stand on this wince-inducing subject? Is the Willy Fish a real and present danger, or not?



and his colleagues considered the Contamana earthquake of magnitude seven that hit north-eastern Peru in August 2011. They found that, by coincidence, the nearby Yanachaga National Park had in the month running up to the quake been using nine motion-triggered cameras. Well ahead of the tremor, these recorded up to 18 animals a day, but that number began to drop off steeply, starting 23 days before the quake. Rodents seemed to be particularly sensitive and disappeared completely eight days before the quake. In the five days immediately before it, the traps snapped just three animals. The park's fauna, it seems, had stopped moving around.

Dr Freund believes that what animals sense before seismic events is airborne electric charge caused by the subterranean grinding of stressed rock (the piezoelectric effect long noted by Fort and others). The charge flows to the ground surface, where it ionises molecules in the air. Airborne positive ions lead to unpleasant side effects

in animals, such as 'serotonin syndrome'. This is caused by an increase in the serotonin levels in the bloodstream, and can lead to restlessness, agitation, hyperactivity and confusion.

The team studied data from two very low frequency (VLF) receiving stations in Peru, looking for perturbations of the signals above the area surrounding the quake's epicentre.

Sure enough, large disturbances occurred in the two weeks prior to the quake. A particularly large fluctuation was recorded eight days prior to the quake, coinciding with the second significant decrease in animal activity observed in the pre-earthquake period.

Of course, the correlation of these several facts is no guarantee of causation, but at least researchers now have undeniable data to work with. It may well yet turn out that for millennia, furry and feathery forecasters really were trying to tell human beings something. *D.Mail, 24 Mar; Economist, 28 Mar 2015. See also FT140:24.*

### TOWN COUNCILLOR ALIEN [FT288:4]



Simon Parkes, town councillor for Stakesby Ward on Whitby Town Council since 2012, resigned on 14 April, citing increasing work commitments. He became famous after 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. Earlier this year he attracted media attention once again when he claimed a race of aliens called "the Nordics" were to blame for the current crisis in Ukraine as they were advising Vladimir Putin on foreign policy. Speaking in February, he told the *Whitby Gazette*: "The Nordics advising Russia is not a big deal, this sort of thing happens all the time." *Whitby Gazette, 17 April 2015.*



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## NECROLOG

This issue, we bid farewell to a paranormal researcher who became the world's oldest man, a female geometer in a male-dominated world, and the last of the devadasis

### ALEXANDER IMICH

Imich was born into a well-to-do secular Jewish family in Częstochowa in southern Poland, a city known for its famous painting of the Black Madonna. His father built an airstrip for the early aviators. Young Alexander was fascinated by the supernatural by age 13, investigating table-turning and Ouija boards. After fighting in the 1919-1921 Polish-Soviet war, he tried to become a captain in the Polish navy, but was told this was impossible for a Jew. He earned a PhD in zoology, but he was unable to find work in that field, so he shifted his focus to chemistry.

In the early 1930s, he began researching a Polish medium known as Matylda S. for the Polish Society for Psychical Research. She was renowned for séances that reportedly called up the dead. She made rings move from the fingers of one person to another, and summoned ghosts at will, as Imich recounted: "I will never forget the kiss of a phantom. An invisible face, whose breath I could distinctly hear and feel on my face, kissed mine. It was a strong and pleasant sensation." He detailed the encounters in a German scholarly journal, *Zeitschrift für Parapsychologie*, in 1932 and an anthology he edited, *Incredible Tales of the Paranormal*, published in the US by Bramble Books in 1995, when he was 92.

When the Nazis invaded Poland, he and his wife Wela fled to Soviet-occupied Bialystok in the north, whence they were sent to a Soviet labour camp near the White Sea for refusing to accept Soviet nationality. Freed in 1942, they moved to Samarkand, Uzbekistan, until 1947 and then back to Poland, where they found many family members had died in the Holocaust. In 1951 they immigrated to Waterbury, Connecticut.

Imich resumed his work as a chemist, but once Wela made a career for herself as a psychologist in 1965, he turned to parapsychology. He focused more on this field after his wife's death in 1986, and began researching the paranormal full-time after he



retired. In 1999 he founded the Anomalous Phenomena Research Center in New York City, trying to find a way to produce 'The Crucial Demonstration', the goal of which is to demonstrate the reality of paranormal phenomena to mainstream scientists and the general public. He would latch onto new mediums, whose displays he described enthusiastically in articles, including Joseph Nuzum, a magic shop owner and illusionist who appeared to levitate and move through the air. Imich was fascinated by the supposed spoon-bending talents of Uri Geller and believed that extraterrestrial craft are visiting Earth. He kept a photograph on his desk of friends he claimed were abducted by aliens.

He attributed his longevity to calorie restriction, good genes, and not having children. He also exercised, gorged on vitamin supplements and never drank alcohol. He became the world's oldest validated male supercentenarian on the death of Arturo Licata of Italy on 24 April 2014, aged 111 years and 357 days. Four days before his death, Imich became highly agitated, speaking Polish and Russian to spirits he felt were around him – but he was treated with medication and died peacefully. *Alexander Imich, chemist and paranormal investigator, born Częstochowa, Poland 4 Feb 1903; died New York 8 June 2014, aged 111 years and 124 days.*

### SASHIMANI DEVI

This woman was the last Mahari devadasi (ritual dancer) of the 12th century Jagannath Temple in Puri, in the eastern Indian state of Orissa; her death brings

to an end a tradition that has lasted nearly a millennium – or even longer: a retired official in Orissa's Department of Culture said Sashimani was the last to perform a dance that had been performed in the temple for 5,000 years. To its earliest European witnesses the main festival of the cult of Jagannath, an avatar of the Hindu god Vishnu, was simply a bloodbath. On a huge cart with 16 wheels the black-faced god, a mere stump of wood with round, staring eyes, was rolled through the main avenue while fanatical devotees cast themselves before it, hoping to free themselves from the cycle of rebirth by being crushed alive. From this scene came the English word juggernaut, an implacable and monstrous machine that, once set in motion, cannot be stopped.

Devadasis were girls who were given to the temple by their families during childhood to be the mortal wives of the god. After their marriage to Jagannath, their duties included performing ritual baths and private songs and dances at the god's bedtime, dressed in special jewellery and

bedecked with flowers. During and after the colonial era, the devadasi system fell into disrepute, owing to the corruption of the practice in other parts of India, where devadasis became, in effect, prostitutes for upper caste temple patrons. By contrast the devadasis of the Jagannath Temple, also known as Maharis, never practised prostitution, and were expected to remain celibate. In 1988, however, the practice of dedicating young girls to Hindu temples was outlawed on human rights grounds. A census carried out in 1955 found 30 devadasis attached to the Jagannath Temple in Puri. Before her death Sashimani Devi was the only one left.

Sashimani Devi was brought to the temple when she was three, so young that she could not recall her parents' faces or their names. She was married to Lord Jagannath at the age of seven or eight. Traditionally devadasis drew income from land allotted to them by the temple, but after the state government took over the administration of the temple from the royal family of Orissa in 1955, the temple lands were confiscated and in later life Sashimani Devi struggled to get by on a meagre pension. Yet she remained proud of her status. She continued to dance into her fifties and sang well into her eighties, until her legs were broken by a rampaging bull and she could no longer make her way to the temple.

*Sashimani Devi, Indian temple dancer, born c. 1922; died 19 Mar 2015, aged about 92.*

### JOAN MOORE

Joan Moore, independent and original geometer, was a long-time friend of John Michell. For decades, the two shared a close understanding based on their mutual love of geometry and their fascination with its mysteries. As a lone woman in the male-dominated world of sacred geometry and ancient metrology, Joan could hold her own in a debate and considered that she must work all the harder to make her ideas heard. Her independence extended to all



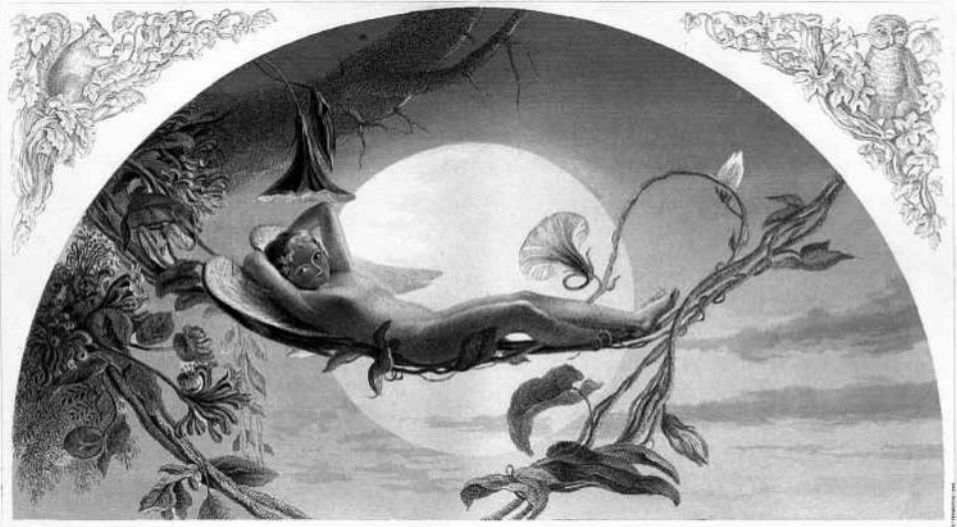
she did; instead of relying on a publisher to disseminate her work, she printed her own books, obtained ISBN numbers and deposited them in libraries around the world. Joan appreciated that few people could truly understand what she did, but was confident that eventually, her books would be discovered by someone capable of taking the work further.

Golden ratio geometry and the geometry of Stonehenge were themes that Joan explored in great detail; her geometrical analysis of the Abbot's Kitchen in Glastonbury Abbey was particularly fine. With her great affinity with the series of prime numbers and square roots, Joan had the uncanny ability to recall them instantly, from memory. She revealed two series of Pythagorean triangles that can be extrapolated to infinity; unknown in modern times, they were apparently recognised in prehistory, as they appear in the proportions of ancient structures and landscapes. When this work was featured and duly credited in *How the World is Made*, John Michell's posthumous work on sacred geometry, Joan was thrilled beyond belief. She finally had the recognition she deserved. She continued to probe the mysteries of geometry and number, conferring with metrologist John Neal. Only days before her death, the two were engrossed in deep discussion as they tapped away at their calculators.

Tiny Joan, with her owl-like spectacles, was an endearing character, who lived most of her life in Weston-super-Mare, but never lost her brummie accent. She will be greatly missed, particularly in Glastonbury, where she and her son Anthony Hampton (pictured together below) were regular visitors to the Megalithomania conference.

Joan Moore born Birmingham, 18 Feb 1935; died Weston-super-Mare, 1 July 2015, aged 80.

Steve Marshall



## FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

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

### NOT ON YOUR NELLIE

Enys Tregarthen (1851-1923) is one of those Victorian and Edwardian collectors who saved what little we have of British folklore from the maws of time. This was particularly impressive in her case because Tregarthen – real name Nellie Sloggett – was confined, from her late teens, with some form of spinal paralysis, in a bedroom just off the south quay in Padstow (North Cornwall). Nellie's great interest was the piskeys (Cornish pixies) and she wrote some quarter of a million words about them and their cousins (including the spriggans, the night riders and the little grey men). She was particularly fascinated by individuals who had seen piskeys, those who were, as she would have said, 'piskey-eyed'. Until recently no one would have suspected that Nellie was a fairy seer. However, there is a tiny sliver of proof that she may have been. Marjorie Johnson, the one-time secretary of the Fairy Investigation Society (see FT321:30-37), received, in the 1950s, a letter from one of Nellie's friends, claiming that Nellie had been able to see the fey: "Often, when I visited [Nellie], she saw fairies on my shoulders" (the letter is published in Johnson's *Seeing Fairies*). If the writer, one Agnes Taylor, was telling the truth, then it gives us a valuable insight into Nellie's development. Nellie had come of

age in a strong non-conformist family: non-conformism and fairies do not particularly get on, as the Welsh fairies (or those few that survive) will tell you. She then apparently switched to the established Church in her 50s, perhaps because of a mystical bent, and

she may have become, in her 60s, a Catholic. Just possibly, this switch to more traditional forms of Christianity marked a greater openness to the unseen: paralleling the shift from the brutally Anglo-Saxon 'Nellie Sloggett' to the ethereal and Celtic 'Enys Tregarthen'?

But it is also worth noting that those who study and write about fairies often have unorthodox experiences with the supernatural. That very

fine Welsh scholar Robin Gwyndaff has described childhood games with (imaginary?) *tylwyth teg*: and Andrew Lang, who had a really first-class mind, was a frank believer in 'elementals'. If Nellie did see fairies it allows us an exciting new glimpse into her character, but it is not perhaps, in the great scheme of things, shocking. I am, incidentally, presently working on a biography of Nellie, a neglected figure. If anyone has any letters, or other Nellie ephemera I'd love to hear more: Nellie had no direct descendants, but her cousins, with whom she lived, the Rawles, a family full of Cornish inventiveness and drive, bred like rabbits and dug their burrows through much of the south-west.

Simon Young writes on folklore and history and runs [www.fairyist.com](http://www.fairyist.com)



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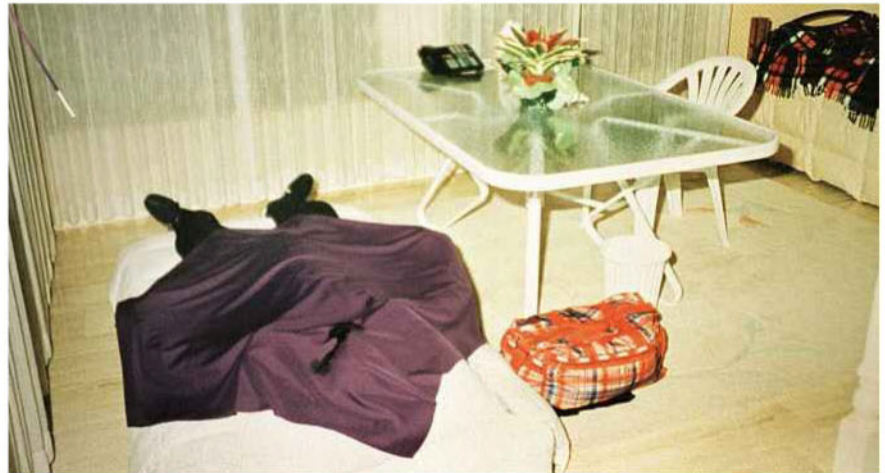
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## FLYINGSAUCERY

ANDY ROBERTS & DR DAVID CLARKE PRESENT THEIR REGULAR SURVEY OF THE LATEST FADS AND FLAPS FROM THE WORLD OF UFOLOGY

### APOCALYPSE NOW! THE MET FILES

The Metropolitan Police kept files on the potential danger posed by the spread of UFO-related apocalyptic cults in the aftermath of the Heaven's Gate suicides in 1997 (pictured at right; see **FT99:32, 100:35-43, 103:45, 104:57**). We obtained copies of two intriguing dossiers produced by Special Branch officers using a series of Freedom of Information Act requests. One 'briefing note' titled 'New Religious Movements (UFO NRMs and the Millennium)' assesses the "the risk posed by UFO NRMs [and] alleged governmental conspiracy theories" whilst the second outlines the events of the mass suicide in San Diego that preceded the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of flying saucers and the Roswell incident. The two-page memo on UFO NRMs says that such beliefs draw inspiration from sources not usually associated with religious devotion such as "rock music, television drama and feature films". It notes that during the 1990s there had been an increase in a wide range of conspiracy theories from "UFO sightings, alien abductions, political assassinations, the Vietnam war, aeronautical and computer technology". Those interested in such ideas range from those with "idle curiosity, to absolute, unquestioning belief". Some were part of groups whilst others believed in isolation, but both "appear to embrace a general orthodoxy... that governments of the leading nations are conspiring to keep the truth from the general public." Whilst the more extreme elements such as Heaven's Gate were categorised as "an American phenomenon" the police were worried that "it is being imported into the UK." In May, the tabloids seized on the Met's concern, noted in the documents, that groups and individuals were obsessed with television series such as *The X-Files*, *Millennium*, *Dark Skies* and *Star Trek* mostly produced in America, "that draw together the various strands of religion, UFOs, conspiracies and mystic events." The author/s also included magazines such as the defunct *UFO Reality* as citing "large-scale conspiracies and cover-ups as being 'factual' [and] the problem is that growing numbers are not treating this as entertainment, and finding it impossible to divorce fantasy from reality." As it is impossible to prove a negative "more attempts to do so simply adds fuel to the fire" and the "devotion certain groups and individuals ascribe to the contents of these programmes" was deemed a potential future risk. Special Branch said there



was "justifiable concern that the millennium... could precipitate an act of extreme violence". The undated document concludes by noting that it is "easy to dismiss those who adhere to these beliefs as being mentally deranged, and therefore of no consequence. [But] recent events, most notably the mass suicides in California (who were ardent followers of *The X-Files* and *Star Trek*)... indicates that their views can, and do, influence others. In essence it does not matter that we do not believe, what really matters is, they do". *S.Express*, 17 May; *Times*, 18 May 2015; scans of the documents are available at [www.drdaavidclarke.co.uk](http://www.drdaavidclarke.co.uk)

### LOCH UP YOUR THOUGHTERS!

We at Flying Saucery love any UFO story connected to Loch Ness. We believe the Loch Ness Monster mystery – which is radical misperception driven by folklore and the media – is, basically, ufology in a pond. All the elements of ufology (and especially those of ufological 'flap' areas) are present at Loch Ness. But whereas the subject of ufology covers the entire globe, Loch Ness is just one body of water. And despite there being no physical evidence, with photograph after photograph of the monster falling to the keen blade of science and revealing its subject to be just another mundane object or event being perceptually re-framed as the monster, belief in the Loch Ness Monster thrives. This conundrum should give the thoughtful reader an insight into why UFOs have been with us so long and show no sign of diminishing as a major cultural signifier. And it should therefore come as no surprise that the media were keenly interested in a 'UFO' photograph taken

at the belief-haunted loch in April 2015.

Anna Betts didn't notice anything unusual when she took a landscape photograph, but she and her husband Allan were in "shock" when they viewed the snap on a PC screen. Alan said: "I can't offer any logical explanation, I am probably one of the most sceptical people you could find about things like this but I just can't explain what it is. I know what it looks like though." In ufological parlance, "he knew what he saw"; and what he saw was a UFO.

Prosaic explanations of the two identical discs caught on film, such as light reflections and dust in the camera, were dismissed by the couple; as was the fact that Anna had failed to see the objects at the time in her viewfinder – deftly rationalised as "they were flying into the lake at a very high speed, invisible to a human eye". Alan also added to the 'evidence', recalling their dog had been unsettled during the previous night. You can see the dots being inexorably but innocuously joined to make another picture entirely! But spoilsport Mick West of [Metabunk.org](http://Metabunk.org) challenged the Betts's version of events, claiming that although Anna stated she took the photograph outside, he has located the cottage the Betts stayed in and avers that the photograph was taken from inside the cottage and the 'UFOs', rather than bringing supplies for Nessie, were nothing more than the reflection of lamplight.

As ever, we leave it to the reader to make their own mind up as to what actually took place and what relevance it has. *Cavete inspectors!*

[www.openminds.tv/ufo-photo-captured-over-loch-ness/33985](http://www.openminds.tv/ufo-photo-captured-over-loch-ness/33985); [www.metabunk.org/debunked-ufo-over-loch-ness-reflection-in-dual-pane-window.t6373/](http://www.metabunk.org/debunked-ufo-over-loch-ness-reflection-in-dual-pane-window.t6373/)

GETTY IMAGES

## THE MISSING HOURS

Lena has contacted me to resolve a mystery that has baffled her family for years. It is an intriguing case and readers might have better solutions to offer than I did – although I could reassure her that she was not alone.

During the last week of July 2001, Lena, her husband and two sons (8 and 11) were on a two-week holiday on the Greek island of Rhodes. They were to dine at the hotel restaurant located beneath their bedroom. They had a long night planned, and so Lena asked her children to rest for an hour and recharge their batteries before getting ready for the meal. She and her husband also relaxed. But nobody intended to fall into a deep sleep.

The very next memory any of them have is of the youngest son calling out from the window that they were closing the restaurant below. Disbelieving, they joined him to look but it was true. It was also now dark.

Looking at his watch, Lena's husband, said with confusion that it was 8pm – yet the restaurant closed at 9. Lena's watch also showed just after 8pm, as did their eldest son's. So Lena marched downstairs to complain that this early closure had spoiled their plans, but the puzzled receptionist insisted they had closed at nine – pointing to the wall clock, which revealed it was 9.10pm. Their watches were all about an hour slow.

They have long wanted to know what happened to that missing hour and why they experienced such unconsciousness that nobody recalled anything about it. Lena told me firmly that the boys did not sleep well in the afternoon and "never for that long".

My initial thought – and possibly yours, given that it *was* about an hour's time difference – was the clock change between UK and Greek time. However, Lena pointed out that they had been on the island for a week and had long since adjusted their watches to local time – which in July 2001 was two hours ahead of the UK. Rhodes did nothing unusual to its clocks that summer so the discrepancy was real.

Moreover, if the clock in the reception had been wrongly set an hour ahead, then that discrepancy would quickly have become obvious because they set their watches to this new time and would have been an hour out for the last week of the holiday had it not been correct – which they were not.

I asked Lena how they felt on 'waking' and she says: "I do not think we were abducted by aliens or anything" (some have suggested this to her) and the episode has become "a very strange family experience".

In the first moments before spotting the time jump Lena experienced a very peculiar sensation: "It went from daylight to dark suddenly for us all and I recall this eerie feeling that the four of us were now all alone in the world."

I searched local data with any bearing on this incident. The weather was very hot and still. There was little in the way of wind or rain between 9 July and the end of the month and temperatures had reached up to



## There's at least the possibility that a timeslip was involved

35°C at midnight. Electrical storms formed above the mountains from the heat. Trees were even catching fire. Such weather would be exhausting and might induce abnormal tiredness.

As for the clock anomaly, I have no easy answer. But I can show that this experience is not unique – suggesting at least the possibility that a real time slip was involved – and that some of these other cases involve UFOs.

Possibly the closest comparison is a case from Glassboro, New Jersey, just before Christmas 1999. A young couple reported (to George Filer) doing the evening shop at 5.30pm at a store, purchasing ice cream last to stop it melting. But as they put it on the counter it *had* melted. They headed quickly home but were astonished to find that when they arrived a "few minutes later" it was 11pm. They had no idea what happened during the unremembered period. Their clocks at home were correct and they even asked the store to look at security video to try to resolve the mystery. This showed them entering the store at 5.30 and leaving five hours later after a trolley dash that by all common sense took minutes. Note the

five-hour period in this case which (by coincidence?) matches Lena's account.

Interestingly, it features again in a case that I investigated in which a British Christian Aid worker and two American Plymouth Brethren were driving across the Isle of Mull on 8 October 1981. They were driving over the Salen Forest just after noon when a sudden mist descended onto their hire car and swirled around them. Next thing they knew, they were slewed across the road with an eerie silence around them. They felt as if they were "all alone in the world" – much the same sensation that Lena reported.

Puzzled, they struggled to get the car started then drove back to Tobermory, which on a small island took only minutes. They noticed that the Sun had moved well down and shops were closing. It was now 5pm, and five hours had gone in a blink. Dawn's watch, an old-fashioned wind-up model, was correct. The two Americans with more modern battery-operated ones and the electric clock in the car had all stopped "hours earlier"

at the time of the encounter. The car clock never worked again, but the battery watches did when reset by a jeweller with a new power source.

One last case involves a less dramatic time jump but an undoubted UFO. It was extensively investigated by experienced and sceptical US researcher Allan Hendry and well documented as it involved an on-duty police officer who made recorded radio messages.

At 1.40am on 27 August 1979 between Stephen and Warren, Minnesota, deputy sheriff Val Johnson drove off to investigate a bright light hovering nearby. As he closed in it headed towards him at incredible speed, engulfing the car in a blinding light as Johnson lost awareness. He recovered with his patrol car sideways across the road. Johnson was confused but radioed for help – the call was timed at 2.19am. Another officer went to assist and called an ambulance so that Johnson was checked into hospital. Doctors bandaged his sore eyes, noting mild welding burns presumably due to the UFO glare. This cleared quickly.

The patrol car had minor damage, such as a small dent in the hood. But the oddest part concerned both the clock in the car and the sheriff's wristwatch. Both were working but ran 14 minutes slow. They had been set just before the incident at the start of shift and timings of recorded radio calls during that period prove they were correct up to the encounter: then they somehow lost 14 minutes.

So what is the reason for these missing hours? Literally dozens of people a year report similar things, so something interesting is going on here.

# BLASTS FROM THE PAST

FORTEAN TIMES BRINGS YOU THE NEWS THAT TIME FORGOT

## 58 THE PHANTOM ANÆSTHETISTS, PART TWO

THEO PAIJMANS sets off in pursuit of chloroform fiends, ghostly gassers and chemical burglars

Phantom anæsthetist scares, like the Mad Gasser of Mattoon, are by no means such a fortean rarity as has usually been thought. Instead, there is an extensive tradition of them, stretching back to the time when chloroform was invented. Chloroform was widely used by criminals to render their victims unconscious, and this was already known to the British public as early as 1851, as a cartoon in *Punch* that year bears witness.<sup>1</sup> The first two chloroform attacks took place in 1850, one in London where a man tried to render a young woman unconscious. The other in the town of Kendal where a thief, who had hid under the bed in the hotel room, tried to incapacitate an elderly clergyman with a towel soaked in chloroform. The clergyman fought valiantly and the culprit was caught.<sup>2</sup>

Although it is nearly impossible to incapacitate an unwilling victim with chloroform – it takes at least five minutes of inhaling a soaked rag – and though the medical journal *The Lancet* stated this in 1865, the widespread belief persisted that robbers, thieves and rapists could render their victims instantaneously insensible by the mere shaking of a handkerchief doused with chloroform.<sup>3</sup>

A madman injecting a gas-like substance inside houses to anæsthetise women and even whole families in Mattoon was ultimately born out of these older fears of burglars who used chloroform and gas. These phantomlike prowlers drugged women, girls, whole families, houses and even towns into an unnatural sleep, and such incidents were regularly reported in the contemporary newspapers.

Roanoke County, Virginia, was visited by a phantom anæsthetist in February 1934; but earlier, in 1905, another



The first two chloroform attacks took place in 1850, one in London where a man tried to render a young woman unconscious, the other in Kendal.

haircutting, chloroforming attacker had struck twice: “Last night the home of JP Giddings of Rocky Mount, was again entered by some miscreant, presumably the same person who on the night previous cut off the hair of Miss Maud Giddings. This time he chloroformed both her and her younger sister and cut off the hair of the other girl and scattered it all over the porch. All the doors and windows were locked, and it is supposed the party who committed the act concealed himself in the house while the family was eating

supper.”<sup>4</sup>

A ‘chloroform fiend’ also visited the city of Crawfordsville, made famous by Charles Fort on account of the alleged sighting of a strange object in the sky in 1891. The scoundrel visited the city the same week the object was seen: “The chloroform fiend is on the warpath again... It was 2 o’clock that Mrs Marsh was awakened... she scented a peculiar odour which she instantly recognised as chloroform... Next morning Mrs Marsh found a bunch of cotton, wrapped and tied around

a rock, and about the size of a baseball. Lying in the front room, it having been thrown in the open transom...”<sup>5</sup>

But what troubled John Vaughn and his wife in their cottage in Talmadge Street, Poughkeepsie, New York, in 1892? They were certain that “ether and other deadly gases are being blown into their home by the children of the neighbourhood and that at night people pump the gases into their house with invisible pumps.” The newspaper stated that the couple suffered from a “singular case of domestic affliction... a hallucination”, and observed that they had closed the doors and windows tightly. “The woman is splendidly educated and nearly 50 years of age. The husband fancies the same thing and they say they are hiding from what seems to be universal determination to poison them both.”<sup>6</sup>

The Vaughns, though, may have had genuine reason to worry, as burglars and other unsavoury characters used not only chloroform but also gas, sometimes with lethal consequences. In 1907, a burglar was shot and killed trying to escape, having made two unsuccessful attempts at asphyxiating an entire family of seven by opening the gas jets in the kitchen.<sup>7</sup> A “mysterious bandit with novel methods” appeared in Philadelphia in 1921 and ransacked houses after having turned on the gas. Sadly, it resulted in a number of deaths after which the “gas bandit”, as the local newspaper named him, fled.<sup>8</sup>

Truly surreal were the alleged occurrences at a house in Greece, New York. A mother, her son – and her daughter who had recently joined them – occupied the house. That’s when the weirdness began, according to the daughter: “The first thing I noticed... was that some peculiar substance was being rubbed on my hands every night

and I would have a sweet taste in my mouth when I woke up in the morning. My hands would be very numb for a while and feel very sticky. One night last fall I woke up and saw a form crawling out from under my bed. It looked like a slim young woman wearing light clothes. I don't remember anymore about it because I was overcome by sleep immediately afterward, as if I had been drugged." Then her mother saw a "tall, thin and dark complexioned" intruder peering into her bedroom and she too suffered the same sensation of being drugged. "We cannot explain these things unless some one has been blowing poisoned fumes through the keyhole of the front door while we are sleeping." At times, the daughter complained, the house seemed "full of electricity", adding that: "Every once in a while I get a shock like electricity going through my body. Sometimes we smell a strong odour of gas in the house at night. We don't use gas at all, so it could not come from within..."<sup>9</sup>

In 1926, the family of recently deceased Canton publisher Don Mellet found themselves the victims of what the press named "a mysterious gas attack". They became ill from "an obnoxious gas" that enveloped the front porch of the Mellet home. No evidence of a bomb or container that might have been broken was found. "The Mellets could not recall having seen an automobile pass the house before the gas swept across the porch where the women and children were. They discounted a theory that the vapour might have been released from a gas gun, such as police raiding squads use..."<sup>10</sup>

Nor were such occurrences limited to the United States. Between 1928 and 1931, the community of Braidwood, Australia, suffered the misdeeds of a very disturbed mind: "A human fiend playing deadly gas

from a hose over the face of a sleeping child was chased off as she dropped into a death sleep. Two other girls in another house, waking in their beds, found a nozzle playing the same fumes in the room. In these two different cases in Waverley houses in the dawn hours of yesterday a tragedy as incredibly cruel as it was mysterious was narrowly averted. For the past three years now during the first week in January similar dastardly attempts have been made on the lives of sleeping girls in eastern suburbs homes."<sup>11</sup>

In 1929, a Sydney woman and her two children were the victims of a similar fate: "Mrs Kathleen Donoghue... was awakened about 2am by a sound, and immediately detected a strong odour of gas. She quickly carried her two children out of the room. The police subsequently discovered that a garden hose had been connected to the gas meter and through the hose a strong flow of gas was being forced into Mrs Donoghue's bedroom. The woman said that as she left the house she saw a man with his hat drawn well over his face departing by the front gate at a run. She could not understand the motive for the murderous attack on her own and the lives of her children."<sup>12</sup>

Often the events at Botetourt County in 1933-1934 are cited as the only ones similar to the Mattoon case. Truth is, there were many more instances. In 1935 Los Angeles was besieged by what the California newspapers dubbed the "Chloroform Maniac" or the "Chloroform Madman". Los Angeles police were searching for a "tall, thin man, who uses chloroform on his woman victims". A California newspaper related how a Mrs Livingston claimed to have been awakened when the man "shot a spray of chloroform into her face through the bedroom

window. Her screams frightened him away." Perhaps driven by an irresistible impulse, the prowler turned up at the bedroom of 14-year-old Ann Parrot who, "aroused by the smell of chloroform and the touch of a hand on her face... screamed. The man crawled from under her bed and dived headfirst out of the window."<sup>13</sup> 17-year-old Helen June Porter was more fortunate. She was the fourth female victim to have been assaulted within a week. She told police how an unidentified man entered her bedroom and tried to overcome her with chloroform, but was frightened away by a barking dog.<sup>14</sup>

Meanwhile, Scotland Yard officers were combing London in search for a motorist who chloroformed and attacked 10-year-old Esme Muir of Fordingham Road, Muswell Hill. Her neighbour, a Mr Edward Banes Reed, found the girl at about eight o'clock in the evening, dishevelled and unconscious in the gateway to the garage of her house. Scotland Yard concentrated on "tracing a saloon car of which a description had been given".<sup>15</sup> The same year the little town of Eustis, Florida, was visited by a very unusual burglar who, according to a local newspaper, anaesthetised his victims with a spray gun: "The bold bad bandit who for the past five months has been driving the police authorities of Lake county gradually daffy, is using a spray gun - not loaded with mosquito dope - filled with a very potent fluid which lulls his victims into even sounder sleep."<sup>16</sup>

Over in LaCrosse, Indiana, police were investigating a series of attempted robberies of five homes, where at least at one place "apparently gas of some kind" was used "to prevent their victims from being awakened". A Mr and Mrs TW Marquardt and Mrs Angie Hyatte were the victims

of the mysterious gassing. "All awakened with headaches, nausea and aware of the smell of gas in the house".<sup>17</sup> In 1936, what the press dubbed "ether burglars" pumped several cans of ether into Lyle White's home in Shadyside, Ohio, to overcome the occupants. "The ether failed and White jumped through a closed window, obtained aid and captured the two 'scientists' as they started to empty another can of ether into a rubber hose."<sup>18</sup>

The Mattoon Mad Gasser scare may be based solely on hysteria, but it arises out of a long tradition apparently based on many factual events. Sadly, a dark thread of bitter misogyny runs through many of these cases, and women and girls were most often the victims. Nor did this type of misdeed stop after the Mattoon scare. In 1946, two girls suffered a chloroform attack while in their houses, and a year later a woman was attacked in a hotel in Perth, Australia, by someone using chloroform.<sup>19</sup>

The most sickening and recent example is that of the Ghost Rapes of Bolivia. In 2009, in a small, isolated Mennonite settlement called Manitoba Colony, it came to light that a group of men had been systematically raping the women of the village since 2005. Writes Jean Friedman-Rudovsky: "To incapacitate their victims and any possible witnesses, the men used a spray created by a veterinarian from a neighbouring Mennonite community that he had adapted from a chemical used to anaesthetise cows. According to their initial confessions (which they later recanted), the rapists admitted to - sometimes in groups, sometimes alone - hiding outside bedroom windows at night, spraying the substance through the screens to drug entire families, and then crawling inside..."<sup>20</sup>

#### NOTES

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# HUMAN LIGHTNING RODS

For most people, being struck by lightning is not a pleasant experience, and often a fatal one. Yet some men and women have suffered repeated strikes with only minor injuries, while others claim to be healed or transformed in the process. **LOUIS PROUD** looks at some survivors' stories.

**L**isted in the Guinness World Records is a man by the name of Roy Cleveland Sullivan. Born in Greene County, Virginia, on 7 February 1912, and a ranger in Shenandoah National Park for 36 years, he is recognised as having been struck by lightning more times than any other human being. Incredibly, throughout his 71-year life, Sullivan sustained a total of seven lightning strikes – all without being seriously harmed (see FT1:16, 2:18, 27:33, 42:5). It's almost as if lightning was drawn to him.

In 1942, he lost a big toenail to lightning; in 1969, his eyebrows were blown off; his left shoulder was seared in 1970, and his hair set on fire in 1972, after which he always carried a few gallons of water in a can in his car. In 1973 he was out driving when a lightning bolt came out of a small, low-lying cloud and struck him through his hat, setting his hair alight again. In 1974, what appeared to be another “heat-seeking” storm cloud left him with an injured ankle. The seventh and final strike occurred in 1977, while Sullivan was fishing in a freshwater pool. After striking the top of his head and singeing his hair, the lightning travelled down his right side, leaving him with burns on his chest and stomach. While stumbling back to his vehicle, Sullivan found himself face-to-face with a bear, which tried to steal trout from his fishing line. But the beast was no match for the hardened outdoorsman; he managed to scare it away by clobbering it with a branch.

Sullivan was nicknamed the “Human



**A LIGHTNING BOLT  
CAME OUT OF A,  
LOW-LYING CLOUD  
AND STRUCK HIM  
THROUGH HIS HAT**

Lightning Rod”, a title unlikely to have amused this unfortunate man, whose apparent ability to attract lightning had a detrimental effect on his social life and marriage. One well-known photograph of Sullivan shows a figure similar in appearance to the actor Gene Hackman, broad-faced, short-haired, and solidly built. He is dressed in his park ranger uniform, displaying a lightning-damaged hat. There is a slight hint of sadness in his eyes. There is a tragic conclusion to the story of Roy Cleveland Sullivan: the ‘Spark Ranger’ died at the age of 71 on 28 September 1983 from an apparently self-inflicted gunshot wound.

#### WHAT ARE THE ODDS?

Sullivan's case is intriguing because it presents a challenge to orthodox science. How is it possible for a human being to be struck by lightning so many times? Australian scientist Dr Karl Kruszelnicki gives the odds of being struck by lightning in the United States, over an 80-year lifespan, as around one in 3,000. Other sources, such as the National Weather Service's Lightning Safety website, list the odds at around one in 10,000.

A statistics professor at George Washington University once calculated that the odds of a person being struck by lightning seven times is 4.15 in 100,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000.

Even when we consider that Sullivan's job as a Park Ranger placed him at greater risk of being struck by lightning than the average person since it involved spending a great deal of time outdoors, we still have a mystery on our hands. Kruszelnicki attempts to solve it as follows: “[I]f the local geography of a landscape funnels thunderstorms down a



particular pathway, and you happen to work in that pathway (say, as a park ranger), then you are more likely to be hit by lightning, which is what happened to... Sullivan.”<sup>1</sup>

Kruszelnicki is probably right to suggest that Sullivan worked in a pathway for thunderstorm activity. However, he seems to have overlooked the fact that many people work in such pathways yet have never been struck by lightning, while not all of Sullivan’s lightning strikes were sustained while inside the Shenandoah National Park. On one occasion he was standing in his own backyard when lightning struck him.

Although Sullivan holds the record for the greatest number of lightning strikes sustained by a human being, there are many cases where people have been struck multiple times. It appears that when a person has been struck once their chance of being struck again increases exponentially, the experience having transformed them into a “human lightning rod.”

## LINDA AND THE LIGHTNING

Linda Cooper, a computer lab supervisor in her 60s from Spartanburg, South Carolina, is famous for having been struck by lightning a total of four times. The first time she was struck was on 15 September 1983, in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. She had just stepped out of her car and was about to enter the Coral Ridge post office to mail a package. Although overcast, there didn’t appear to be a thunderstorm in the vicinity. Cooper was the victim of a side flash, whereby lightning strikes a tall object close to the victim – in Cooper’s case a flagpole outside the post office – and then jumps from that object to the victim.

The bolt struck Cooper in the head and threw her to the ground. She got up and entered the post office with her package, but “couldn’t remember what I was doing there, and the others in line kept asking if I was okay.” The following day, Cooper was bruised from the fall she’d sustained, while her “arms were tingling and had a great deal of pain.”<sup>2</sup>

Tiny burn marks covered her body. She felt extremely tired and ended up spending six days in hospital. For an entire year she felt “like I had the flu and a headache that would not go away.”<sup>3</sup> The accident left her with permanent cognitive difficulties that included poor short-term memory and the inability to do simple maths.

Strike number two occurred on 27 May 1993, in Hillsboro Beach, Florida. Cooper was at home talking on the phone when, even though the sky was clear, lightning travelled down the phone line and hit the left side of her face. For months afterward, she experienced nausea and what felt like the flu.

When lightning struck Cooper the third time, on 11 July 1994, she and her husband had moved to South Carolina. As in the case of the previous strike, she was inside her home when the incident occurred. This time the lightning reached her not through the phone line but via the plumbing outside and then up through the taps at the kitchen sink. She had one hand on each tap when the lightning struck, and she felt it travel up her arms. “It felt,” she



ABOVE: “Spark Ranger” Roy Cleveland Sullivan, who held the world record for being struck by lightning – seven times between 1942 and 1977. He holds the hat through which he was struck by a lightning bolt in 1973.

recalls, “like somebody took a match and lit both my arms. I felt like I was on fire.” During strike number four, on 22 August 2003, she was seated in a car with her friend, Susan Cooper (presumably no relation), in the parking lot of the Hillcrest Mall in Spartanburg. The pair had decided to wait in the car for a storm to pass. Although neither woman was in contact with the metal parts of the vehicle and although the windows were closed, both were harmed by the strike. At the exact moment the lightning hit, Susan was handing Linda a cellphone. The charge travelled through Susan’s body; it then made its way through the phone, destroying it in the process, and into Linda’s thumb. Whereas Susan sustained minor injuries, Linda was left with only a small burn on her hand.

That Cooper has been struck by lightning four times is incredible. She deserves to be placed with Roy Sullivan in the “human lightning rod” category. Her affinity for lightning extends to the fact that her “car has been struck twice by lightning, her garage door a couple of times, and she has lost telephone service in her house to lightning at least three or four times.”<sup>4</sup>

Since the “coincidence” explanation falls miserably short, the only logical conclusion to draw is that there is something physiologically unique about multiple lightning strike victims that attracts lightning to them; or, as with a lightning rod, makes them a more attractive target for lightning than surrounding objects.

Presumably this “something” involves electromagnetism, given that lightning itself is a form of EM energy. This explanation is in agreement with Cooper’s belief that “the magnetic force of my body pulls lightning toward me.” She elaborates: “I may be totally wrong, but you know when you magnetise something it remains magnetised until you demagnetise it. Well, guess what? I’m not demagnetised. Every time I go through an airport security device, I set it off.”

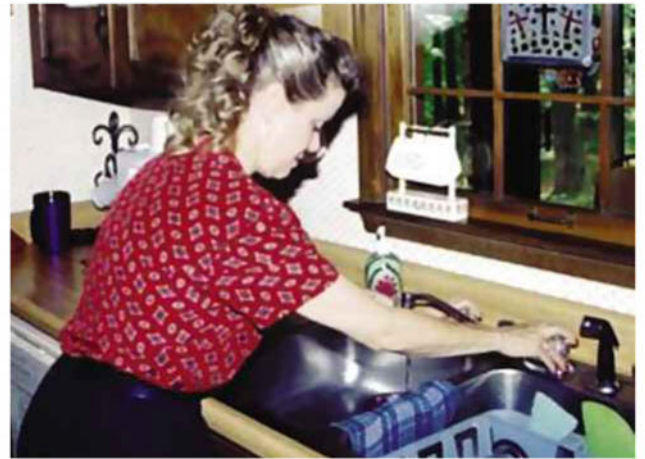
How does a person become a human lightning rod? Is it a quality they’re born with, like left-handedness, or one they acquire? The

latter seems more logical. There is a theory among lightning strike survivors that once a person has been struck they have a far higher chance of getting struck again. Presumably, the property of being a human lightning rod is due to some change in the body brought about by lightning injury.

Oddly, I have yet to come across a case where a human being who was struck by lightning once either died or was seriously injured upon being struck again. It seems to be a rule that when someone is struck by lightning and survives they acquire a kind of immunity, so that, if struck again, they not only survive but are only mildly injured.

## ROY’S RIVAL?

Carl Mize is an Oklahoma utility employee in his early 50s who, according to the latest count, has been struck by lightning six times. The first time was in 1978, while at a rodeo in Claremont, Oklahoma. A muscular, solid man, Mize was there to participate in a bull-riding competition. The rodeo had to be cancelled when a storm appeared overhead. Mize was about to climb into his truck to avoid the rough weather when, at the moment his hand made contact with the truck door handle, “lightning struck and knocked me on my rear end.”<sup>5</sup> At first he appeared to be more or less unhurt. Later, at work, he developed a high fever and ended up in hospital. He was forced to take a month off work to recover his health. Strike number two occurred in 1985 or 1986; number three in 1996; number four in 1999; number five in 2005; and the most recent – number six – in 2006. Additionally, Mize lost his house some two decades ago due to fire caused by an electric short, and has been electrocuted by mains electricity on a number of occasions. Once he was in a duck pond fixing a fountain. Although the electrician had assured him that the electricity to the pond lights was turned off, Mize cut a wire under water and was instantly electrocuted. The jolt he received was “enough to kill someone”; yet strangely, as with the other electric shocks he has endured,



ABOVE LEFT: Carl Mize, struck by lightning six times since 1978. ABOVE RIGHT: Linda Cooper, survivor of four strikes. BELOW: Betty Galvano – healed by lightning?

he wasn't hurt.

It would appear that Mize is not only immune to lightning but to electricity in general. Such immunity is baffling and warrants scientific investigation. Just as baffling is the fact he's been struck by lightning six times. To the best of my knowledge, no other person alive today has been struck so many times; and given that he's only in his early 50s, it wouldn't be surprising if he ends up matching, or even surpassing, Roy Sullivan's record.

### POSITIVE EFFECTS OF LIGHTNING

It's difficult to see anything positive about being struck by lightning. Generally, those unfortunate enough to be struck either die more or less instantly, usually from cardiac arrest, or, more likely, survive yet sustain much damage to their bodies. Most strike survivors battle with depression. Partly as a result of the changes in personality experienced by many lightning strike survivors – which can include becoming grouchy, short-tempered, and irritable – it's not uncommon for marriages to break down and for survivors to end up living in isolation. Yet it's not all doom and gloom. Cases exist where people have been healed of medical conditions after being struck by lightning. Then there are cases where survivors have found God or developed alleged psychic abilities. Some survivors insist they are better for the experience and even grateful they were struck.

One survivor who views his ordeal in a remarkably positive light is Harold Deal, a former maintenance electrician in his 70s from Greenwood, Missouri. After being struck by lightning on 26 July 1969 while standing in the driveway of his home, Deal developed severe memory problems, whereby occasionally he could no longer recall how to talk, walk, and perform other simple tasks. Strangely, he also lost his sense of smell and the ability to experience pain and cold. Because he doesn't "notice the cold like most people," some of his fellow townsfolk call him "Weird Harold". He explains: "They call me this because I never wear a coat or long-sleeve shirt no matter what the weather is outside... I have worked outside in 26 degrees below zero, plus I have worked in weather with a wind chill as low as 56 degrees below zero... I have also worked in

## SOME INSIST THEY ARE BETTER FOR THE EXPERIENCE AND EVEN GRATEFUL THEY WERE STRUCK

23 degrees below zero for up to seven hours at a time. A T-shirt and overalls is what I always wear... whether it is summer or winter." Today a dedicated Christian and charity worker, Deal feels that, looking back on the accident, it made his life "so much richer and so much fuller."<sup>6</sup>

Betty Galvano of Sebring, Florida, a former high-fashion model and widow of the late celebrity golfer Phil Galvano, is a remarkable example of someone who's been healed by lightning. In 1993, Galvano fell off a seawall and broke her right leg. The accident necessitated an operation in which two 14in (36cm) steel bars were permanently inserted in her leg. Although the operation enabled her to walk again, it left her in pain and unable to use her leg to the extent she could before the accident. She explains: "[I] couldn't jump or raise my leg. I couldn't stand on one leg. I couldn't walk without dipping. My leg always felt like a sandbag."<sup>7</sup>

On the afternoon of 11 June 1994, while cutting up broccoli in her son's kitchen with the window open, Galvano heard "the most unbelievable tremendous blast of thunder." The next thing she knew, she was slumped over the counter, the knife and broccoli having flown from her hands. The bolt of lightning that struck Galvano had entered via the open window. Her husband, who'd been sitting 4ft (1.2m) away from her when the incident occurred, helped her to the couch. While lying down, Galvano experienced a strange sensation in her crippled right leg, as though "a thousand

needles had entered the toes and foot". All of a sudden her leg felt "full of vitality". She recalls: "I stood up and everything was fine. I could walk normally." The pain had also vanished. Galvano claims that not only did the lightning strike "miraculously heal" her leg, but that she didn't suffer any ill effects from it, not even the slightest amount of memory loss. The day after the incident she paid a visit to her doctor, who confirmed that her leg had indeed been healed.

Although the effects of being struck by lightning vary from one individual to another, no one is ever the same as before they were struck. Some survivors undergo a kind of "spiritual awakening," or at the very least acquire a deeper interest in spiritual matters. Something of this nature happened to Galvano. At the moment she was struck by lightning she saw "gold particles everywhere" and experienced "a beautiful, peaceful feeling that God loves us [and] that the only thing that's worth anything is love."

She adds: "Lightning was a spiritual experience for me. It energised me, it made me feel better." It also left her feeling "totally immersed in God," so that now "He is with me all the time."<sup>8</sup>

According to Galvano, her unique relationship with lightning dates back to when she was a newborn in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1935. She claims that a tremendous thunderstorm occurred on the day her mother brought her home from the hospital. The storm caused an electrical cable outside the house to break, which then produced an electrical short inside the house and much electrical arcing. Later, when she was three months old, she developed blue baby syndrome and fell into a coma. There was a high chance she might die. As the infant Galvano lay ill in hospital, a raging thunderstorm took place outside. "My mother looked out the window, and on the lawn she saw a ball of lightning. It floated up, came through the window, and rested on top of me. At that moment a nurse came into the room and watched with her mouth wide open as I came out of the coma."<sup>9</sup>



As tempting as it is to dismiss Galvano's ball lightning story as the product of an overactive imagination, it's not unheard of for ball lightning to approach individuals and brush against their bodies without causing any harm. Whether the object healed her, though, is another matter entirely.

### THE WOMAN IN BLACK

The case I'm about to describe is hardly an example of someone being healed by lightning, though it involved a healing of sorts. In June 1980, Robert Davidson, then aged 38, was riding his motorbike down Interstate 74 on his way to Indianapolis when suddenly it started to rain. Seated behind him on the motorbike was his wife. The two decided to pull off the road to put on their wet weather gear. Davidson's wife dismounted first. Just as Davidson was dismounting, with his left foot on the ground and his right leg still on the seat, he was struck on the shoulder by a bolt of lightning. Davidson was sent flying through the air and landed on the ground without a pulse. A physician who happened to be driving by pulled over to assist Davidson, giving him CPR and calling an ambulance.

Both the physician and the team of ambulance paramedics desperately tried to restore Davidson's heartbeat, but with no luck. As their attempts continued without success, it began to look inevitable that Davidson wouldn't make it. What happened next sounds like something out of a Stephen King novel. A woman carrying a Bible and wearing an old-fashioned black dress suddenly arrived at the scene. "Let me touch him," she yelled out, as she made her way toward Davidson. Given the hopeless nature of Davidson's condition, the paramedics decided they had nothing to lose by letting the woman approach him. "She knelt down beside me," Davidson said, "and placed the Bible and one hand on my chest and the other hand on the ground. She proceeded to lift the Bible to the sky and muttered something that no one understood." The woman – who came to be known as the "woman in black" – then got up and walked away, and was never seen again. Moments later Davidson had a pulse.

The identity of the woman in black remains a mystery to this day. Although some of the witnesses and paramedics at the scene say they didn't see the woman, others are adamant they saw her and that she indeed saved Davidson's life. Paramedic Marylou Shafer belongs in the latter group. "There is no doubt in my mind," she commented. "She was there." Davidson was taken immediately to the hospital, where he remained in a comatose state for seven weeks, then spent several

additional weeks relearning how to walk. The lightning strike damaged his vocal cords, and it was two years before he was able to talk again and nine years before he was well enough to return to his job at General Motors.<sup>10</sup>

### PECULIAR AFTER-EFFECTS

Davidson claims that for many years following the accident he was unable to wear a wristwatch without it malfunctioning within a matter of days. The only watch he could wear that didn't malfunction (and in fact continued to keep perfect time) was the one he had on his wrist at the time of the accident. Actually, many lightning strike and electric shock survivors claim they exert an odd effect on wristwatches. Furthermore, the claims don't apply exclusively to wristwatches but involve all manner of electrical gadgets, from computers to garage doors to streetlamps.

In June 1989, former storm chaser Steve Melvin of Ohio, now in his early 50s, happened to get struck by lightning at the precise

moment he was taking a photo. The camera was partly melted by the lightning, yet the film inside was undamaged. Remarkably, the photo he took at the moment he was struck shows the ghostly outline of a human surrounded by lightning, even though neither he nor anyone else was situated in front of the lens at the time. Melvin commented: "Some say it was me having an out-of-body experience. Some say it was my grandmother coming down from Heaven to push me out of the way of the lightning. Some say it was a glimpse of an entirely different dimension. I'll never know." Ever since the incident, Melvin has had to replace on a frequent basis the batteries inside the pager he carries on his person; they go flat within days yet are supposed to last for months.<sup>11</sup>

Could there be a mundane reason why the batteries in Melvin's pager appear to mysteriously go flat? Perhaps the device is damaged in such a way that it uses more power than it should. Or perhaps, due to brain damage sustained during the accident, Melvin has difficulty remembering when he last put batteries in the device. The only reliable way to get to the bottom of the matter would be to carry out a series of experiments involving Melvin and his pager. This aside, the fact that many lightning strike and electric shock survivors make claims similar to Melvin's means we're faced with a genuine mystery.

In a 2009 *USA Today* article titled "Florida Lightning Survivors Share Stories," one of the stories featured is that of Ralph Weidner of Bonita Springs. Since being struck by lightning in 1968 during a camping trip in Colorado, Weidner has had "difficulty using electronic devices." He elaborates: "Battery-operated watches last only a few months and cellphones are a problem as well. I have had my cellphone keypad fail to work, but when I hand it to someone else, it works just fine."<sup>12</sup>



TOP: Robert Davidson, whose recovery after being hit by lightning involved a mysterious 'woman in black' carrying a Bible.  
ABOVE: Ball lightning and its sometimes intelligent-seeming behaviour features in some survivors' tales, like that of Betty Galvano.

Another case is that of Nina Lazzeroni, a dental assistant and part-time motorcycle safety instructor in her late 50s from Dover, Delaware. On the afternoon of 8 April 1995, Lazzeroni was struck by lightning while standing in a parking lot in Troy, Ohio, in front of a number of students to whom she was delivering a lesson on motorcycle safety. Her students witnessed the entire event. She said: “They told me I flew up like a rag doll and landed on my head.”<sup>13</sup> Lazzeroni spent a week in hospital. The accident left her with a shattered left eardrum (which later healed but developed into tinnitus), an abnormal heart rhythm, permanent numbness in parts of both feet, memory issues, personality alterations, and difficulty reading and talking. Fortunately, Lazzeroni has made a dramatic recovery and now finds it much easier to read and talk. Of those symptoms that remain from the accident, one is extremely peculiar: Lights of all kinds, particularly ones in public places like streetlamps and billboard lights, have a tendency to switch off in her presence, though at unpredictable moments. She explains: “They come back on after I leave the area and turn off again if I return. It’s not uncommon to have three or four go out while I’m driving somewhere at night. I feel no electricity or any other sensation – I just find myself in the dark periodically.”<sup>14</sup> The phenomenon described by Lazzeroni falls into the category of streetlamp interference or SLI (see FT273:52-55).

Kurt Oppelt, who with Sissy Schwarz won a gold medal at the 1956 Winter Olympics in the pairs figure skating event, was struck by lightning in 1989 while standing in his bathroom. Doctors he consulted the following day could find nothing wrong with him. And yet, explains Oppelt: “Audio receivers, cash registers, and computers broke when I touched them... A friend of mine gave me a laptop, but I can’t use it. I told my cardiologist that my ‘electrical system’ was disturbed, but the doctors say they have no scientific proof. I told another doctor what happens when I touch electrical gadgets, and he said, ‘So don’t touch them.’”<sup>15</sup>

### LIGHTNING STRIKE PSYCHICS

The alleged development of psychic abilities is not an uncommon feature among cases where people have survived a lightning strike. While looking through the many lightning strike “survivor stories” posted on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) website, I came across two claims of psychic ability. The first concerns a woman named Missy. Missy was struck by lightning through a landline telephone while ordering pizza during a thunderstorm. At the moment the strike occurred, she heard a “loud explosion” and noticed at her feet “a bright white light... which was football shaped and had spikes.” (This is a perfect description of ball lightning, which can indeed emerge from telephone handsets and assume a “spiky”



LEFT: Champion skater Kurt Oppelt (seen here with Sissy Schwarz in 1956) found he had a strange effect on electronic devices after being struck in 1969. BELOW: Greta Alexander attributed her supposed psychic abilities to a strike and subsequent electric shock.



appearance.)

The explosion knocked Missy backward, and for a moment she remained on the floor in an unconscious state. She then experienced a strange “numbing feeling” work its way up one side of her body. She was taken to the hospital emergency room, where doctors confirmed she’d been struck by lightning. After the accident, according to Missy, she developed as a “side effect” (her term) extrasensory perception (ESP). She explains: “There have been times where I speak someone’s name, someone that I haven’t heard from or seen in many years and all of a sudden they walk in the door... I’ve had eerie feelings about things just before they actually happen. Most people that know me are amazed. And so am I. This periodic thing only started after my lightning incident.”<sup>16</sup>

The second claim concerns a nurse in Nashville, Tennessee, named Thais. Thais was struck by lightning on two separate occasions. The first time, in May 1985, she had been standing next to an open window drawing blood from a patient seated on a chair when lightning entered the building through the window and struck both her and the patient. The event was witnessed by the patient’s wife, who described the bolt of lightning as orange in colour and added that it appeared to go around as well as pass through the bodies of

both Thais and the patient.

Thais’s encounter with lightning left her with few, if any, injuries. A couple of months after the incident, however, she noticed two strange after-effects. First, she could no longer wear a watch without it “losing 10 to 20 minutes and becoming unreliable.” The second strange after-effect is that her psychic abilities became heightened. She comments: “This [heightened psychic abilities] is not something I previously had interest in and definitely not something I was looking for. I have always been a very private person and didn’t want to know things about other people, but I found myself somehow knowing things about folks I didn’t know well.”

The second time Thais was struck by lightning was while talking on the telephone during a Thanksgiving weekend some six to eight years after the first strike. Since then, she says, the well pump at her home has been struck by lightning twice.<sup>17</sup>

Greta Alexander (1932–1998) of Delevan, Illinois, was a famous psychic whose expertise included palmistry, numerology, “medical intuition”, and assisting police with missing persons cases. Born on a farm in Manito, Illinois, she spent the first part of her adult life as a mother and housewife. One night in April 1961, while pregnant with her fifth child, she was lying in bed watching a thunderstorm out the window when “a white light came at me through the window, and the next thing I knew the Venetian blinds were wrapped around me and there was a fire burning a hole in the bed.”<sup>18</sup> Although the bolt of lightning damaged her bedroom window, knocked down the chimney, and set fire to her bed, it didn’t harm her or her unborn child in any apparent way.

Shortly afterward, she suffered an electric shock while plugging a second-hand refrigerator into a faulty electrical outlet. It was soon after the lightning strike and subsequent electric shock that Alexander’s psychic abilities were “awakened”. She found herself answering the telephone moments before it rang, and noticed she was able to “read” the minds of others. She eventually established herself as a professional psychic, being paid by clients to perform palm readings and the like.

Her work assisting police with missing persons cases (for which she received no payment) began in 1974. Perhaps the best known case in which her psychic talents proved useful was the 1983 murder of Mary Cousett by her boyfriend Stanley Edward Holliday Jr. At the time Alexander was asked to assist in the case, Holliday had already been charged with Cousett’s murder, yet the whereabouts of Cousett’s body remained



ABOVE: A drawing by Lakota Sioux chief Black Hawk representing a horned thunder being, c.1880.

BELOW: Black Elk, a Lakota holy man who became a 'thunder dreamer' after being visited by such a being.

unknown. Thanks in part to Alexander's help, the police located Cousett's body on 29 October 1983. "She told us a lot of things that turned out to be true – 20-some points that fit," commented Lt Donald Sandidge, "like that the head and foot would be separated from the [victim's] body, [and] that a man with a crippled hand would find her."<sup>19</sup> (The man who found her body, an auxiliary officer by the name of Stephen M Trew, had a deformed left hand due to an injury he'd sustained in the past.)

Whether or not Alexander was a genuine psychic is not the point: the reason she deserves mention here is her belief that both lightning strike and electric shock played an important role in the "awakening" or attainment of apparent psychic abilities.

### LIGHTNING SHAMANS

Had Alexander lived in a society where shamanism is practised, it's likely she would have been considered a shaman as opposed to a mere psychic. According to German ethnologist and psychologist Holger Kalweit, in shamanic traditions the world over, being struck by lightning is one of the ways by which people are initiated into shamanism. "The Greeks believed a person struck by lightning was in possession of magical powers," he explains, "and in tribal cultures throughout the world lightning shamans are often venerated and feared as the mightiest of shamans."<sup>20</sup> To be initiated into shamanism is to take up the shamanic path. Apparently, this happens not by personal choice but under the will of a higher power. During shamanic initiation, the initiate symbolically dies (undergoes dismemberment) and is reborn (put back together). They acquire as a result of this challenging and traumatic process mediumistic and other psychic abilities.

There is a belief among the North American tribes known collectively as the Sioux that when a person is struck by lightning or has visions featuring Wakinyah ("thunderbirds" or



"thunder beings") it can indicate they've been chosen to become a special type of medicine man called a Heyoka ("thunder dreamer"). A Heyoka differs from a conventional medicine man in that he does everything in a contrary fashion. He is a sacred fool, whose clownish antics are a source of amusement to others. The powers with which Heyokas are gifted derive from the thunderbirds. A thunderbird is a spirit of lightning and thunder in the form of a huge Eagle-like bird. They produce lightning from their beaks and thunder through the beating of their wings. They are also responsible for the production of rain.

The famous Sioux warrior and holy man Black Elk (1863–1950) followed the path of Heyoka. At the age of nine he was taken deathly ill and confined to bed for approximately 12 days. During this period of illness, he experienced a great vision in which he was visited by the thunder beings and taken to see the "grandfathers". The grandfathers taught him important lessons

that contributed to his eventually becoming a shaman. "Only those who have had visions of the thunder beings of the west can act as Heyokas," he explains. "They have sacred power, and they share some of this with all the people, but they do it through funny actions."<sup>21</sup> These "funny actions" can include running around naked in the middle of winter and shivering and complaining of the "cold" in the middle of summer; one is reminded of Harold Deal's inability to feel the cold.

Since, in spiritual terms, lightning is sacred and powerful because it originates from heaven, to be struck by lightning and survive is to be rendered powerful and sacred. **FT**

Extracted and adapted from *Strange Electromagnetic Dimensions* by Louis Proud, published by New Page Books, 2015.

For more on lightning strike survivors and unusual after-effects of lightning, see FT173:20, 176:13, 210:18, 214:4-5, 217:13, 254:10-11.

### AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



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# THE TIMMO

Yews are among our oldest and most remarkable trees, regenerating themselves over centuries and living for millennia. But just how old are Britain's ancient yews, and do they predate the churchyards in which they stand? **STEVE MARSHALL** attempts to find some answers...

**T**his year sees the 800th anniversary of *Magna Carta*; King John was forced, by a group of rebel barons, to affix his seal to the document on 15 June 1215. Though widely regarded as a bill of rights for the common man, *Magna Carta* was nothing of the kind, since it applied only to 'free men', not serfs. Not surprisingly, the charter mainly benefitted the barons who had drafted it. As Marriott Edgar so eloquently expressed it, in a poem made famous by Stanley Holloway:

*And it's through that there Magna Charter,  
As were signed by the Barons of old,  
That in England to-day we can do what we  
like,  
So long as we do what we're told.*<sup>1</sup>

*Magna Carta* was sealed by the River Thames at Runnymede, Surrey, about 20 miles (32km) west of London. The recorded location – "in the meadow that is called Runnymede" – identifies an area on the southwest side of the Thames that is still a meadow today. Nonetheless, some believe that the charter was sealed on the other side of the river, beneath the *Ankerwycke*, an enormous ancient yew tree (see panel on p38). The tree measures 31ft (9.4m) round its girth, making it one of the largest yews in Britain.

A glorious history has been invented for the *Ankerwycke*. "At least 2,500 years old", the tree is claimed as a long-established pagan holy place, where English kings were traditionally crowned until the Norman Invasion. The *Ankerwycke* was purportedly the *axis mundi* of England;

utilising homespun etymology, 'Runnymede' becomes 'the place of the runes', and so on. There is no actual evidence for any of this, yet many believe it to be true. They *want* it to be true. The past few decades have seen an increasing awareness of the yew and its ability to live for thousands of years. Since its 'rediscovery', the tree's status is being restored to what it might possibly have been throughout human history: a focus for admiration, respect and veneration.

#### A REMARKABLE TREE

The English, or European, yew is a remarkable tree. Its flowers are tiny, yet they release vast clouds of pollen in the early spring, launching an untimely assault on hay-fever sufferers. Although classed as a conifer, the female tree produces not cones but scarlet, berry-like *arils*. Known



# REAL YEW

as ‘snotty dogs’ in some parts of Britain, yew arils are soft, gelatinous and extremely sweet, with a perfumed, fruity flavour. Though the flesh of the aril is edible and delicious, it is the only part of the tree that is not poisonous; the dark, shiny seed inside the aril is poisonous and must not be swallowed. The yew’s Linnæan name *Taxus baccata* indicates this: *baccata* means ‘berry-bearing’ and *Taxus* is from the same root as ‘toxic’. Birds are fond of yew arils and the seeds they disperse may become new trees.

Uniquely, the yew has the ability to regenerate itself, with the capacity to live forever. The complex process that makes this possible was not understood until quite recently<sup>2</sup>. From a slow-growing seedling, the juvenile tree grows quickly until, after many centuries, it reaches its maximum size. Now in its prime, the tree continues to grow at a slower rate and its core begins to rot, through the action of a symbiotic fungus. Though trunk and crown may appear unchanged for many more centuries, the load-bearing heartwood is eventually eaten away; this stresses the outer trunk, which is not capable of supporting the tree’s

## THE ANKERWYCKE IS CLAIMED AS A LONG-ESTABLISHED PAGAN HOLY PLACE,

weight. The yew now begins secondary growth to reinforce those areas under stress, and its rate of growth, most significantly of the girth, increases again.

As the walls of the trunk grow increasingly thinner, they are strengthened by a new layer of secondary wood, growing over the old. What are known as adventitious shoots can grow anywhere on the tree; they tend to appear low on the trunk and grow down into the ground, reinforcing the trunk and further increasing its girth. Also, as the trunk becomes increasingly hollow, interior roots can grow within it; they typically appear a couple of metres above ground and grow down to regenerate the tree from the inside.

Branch-layering is sometimes seen in British yews, which tend to put out long, low branches that droop to the ground. In time, these branches will put down roots and begin to grow into trees. Their roots may stay connected to the parent tree for a long time; if they eventually separate, the new trees will be clones of the original, with identical DNA. Expanding outwards in a radial pattern, the clone trees may eventually grow to become a yew grove, where what appears to be a forest of separate trees are all parts of the same parent. Branch-layering is rarely seen in churchyard yews, since low, sprawling branches are invariably removed for tidiness or supposed safety reasons. Similarly, interior roots are often prevented from growing into the ground, as hollow yew trunks are commonly used to hide the church’s wheelbarrow, compost heap, or even its tank of heating oil.

A hollow yew will continue to increase in girth, but eventually it can no longer support the weight of a full crown. At this stage the tree collapses, often losing much of its upper growth. In the final phase of

# MAGNA CARTA AND THE ANKERWYCKE YEW

Didn't King John seal the Magna Carta under the the ancient Ankerwycke?

**JEREMY HARTE** whispers the truth about Runnymede, 1215 and all that...

**H**ow old is the Ankerwycke yew? Some say one thing, and some another. It's 2,500 years old to Allen Meredith, 3,000 years to Janis Fry, 1,400 years to Robert Bevan-Jones. Think of a number, any number! Like many veteran yews, it seems to have achieved a sort of stability in old age; when first measured 200 years ago, it was within a foot or so of its present girth of 30ft (9m), and sketches of that time show it looking much the same as it does today. The tree grows on soil that is well watered, fertile, and evidently good for yews, because there are several flourishing younger trees in the hedges nearby. The Thames, which seems as if it will threaten the tree with flooding, spills its waters instead over the meadow of Runnymede on the opposite, southern bank. All things going well, the Ankerwycke yew looks set to last another millennium or two.

Except that in a crowded country like England, old trees can't survive on their own; they have to be looked after. If this yew is still with us after so many years, it is because it has been in the care of Ankerwycke Priory, a small establishment of half a dozen nuns founded by Gilbert de Mountfitchet between c.1160 and c.1180. Fragments of the church and monastery buildings survive a little way north of the yew.

The name gives a clue. When the priory was founded, its site was already called *Ankerwic*, from the Old English words *ancra*, which is 'hermit' and *wīc*, which is something like 'farm': a dependent outlying farm. A *wīc* was usually set up to supply the main estate with some specialised product such as cheese, calves, charcoal or honey. It's a place-name element that is not normally found until quite late in the Anglo-Saxon period, nor is the word *ancra*. And hermits, by the nature of the job, are individuals, so that the most plausible chronology would begin with one original hermit who set up a smallholding by the Thames in the 11th century and left behind a holy reputation inspiring the pious Gilbert to found a nunnery in the same place two or three generations afterwards. Suppose that the Ankerwycke yew was already standing then, and that the *ancra* settled under its branches c.1000. If the hermit was the first person to begin looking after the tree, that gives an outline date for it, since yews don't normally survive unprotected in the countryside for more than three or four hundred years. Bevan-Jones's estimate of 1,400 years sounds about right.

But wait a moment! Wasn't the



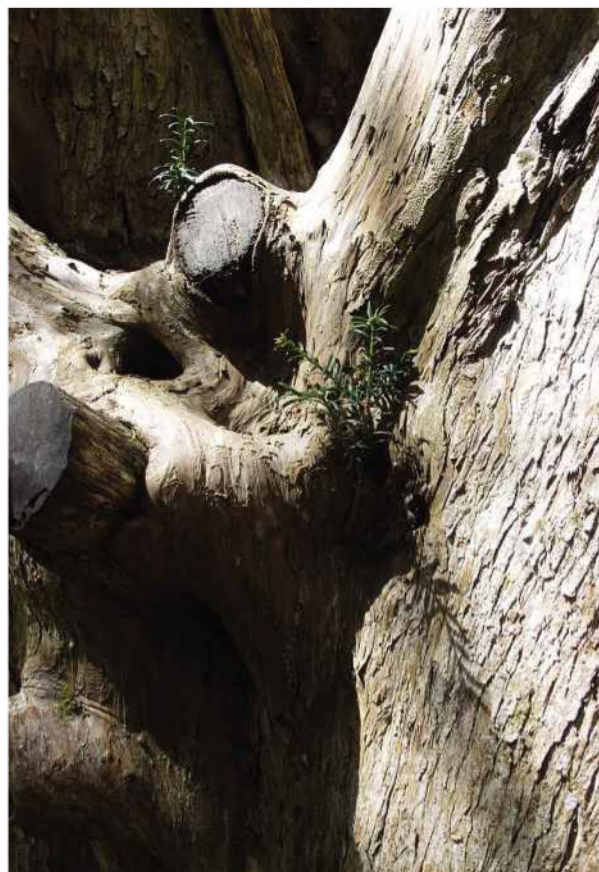
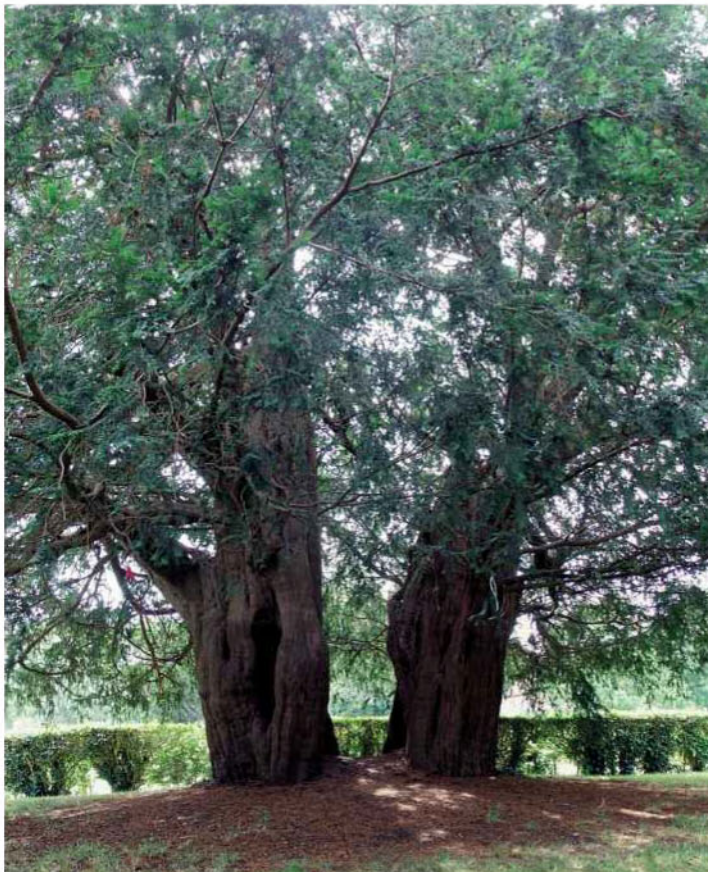
Ankerwycke yew already broodingly old in 1215? Didn't Anglo-Saxon elders hold their councils beneath its branches, and wasn't King John dragged by the barons to seal Magna Carta in its numinous presence? Well, actually, no. The charter was sealed "in the meadow that is called Runnymede, between Windsor and Staines", and this name Runnymede continued to be used for the rest of the Middle Ages to describe the same low flat field which now belongs to the National Trust and used to be in the Surrey manor of Egham, owned by Chertsey Abbey. In prehistoric times, the Thames may have slipped around its floodplain like a garden hose, but under the stewardship of the Abbey its main channel was defined on its present course – the line which defines the county, parish and manor boundary. Ankerwycke is not in Runnymede

**ABOVE:** The venerable Ankerwycke yew at Runnymede; it's old, but just how old is debateable. **LEFT:** King John of England signs (rather than seals) the Magna Carta at Runnymede in June 1215 in a typical early 19th-century imagining of the scene.

and there was no reason for King John to visit its grounds. He was there for politics, not dendrotourism.

The Anglo-Saxon elders are probably mythical, too, though they're a very old myth. Already in the 13th century, when Magna Carta was becoming an icon of Englishness, the name Runnymede was explained as 'the field of counsel', from the word *rūn* (or rather its later adjective form, *runing*). There's no other evidence for meetings there, though a lot of stuff was written by Victorians of an imaginative bent about ancient gatherings of the Saxon witan. Outdoor courts for the local administrative district, or hundred, were held not in Runnymede but at Godley, miles away on what is now Sunningdale Golf Course. Furthermore, we know a lot more now about the names that were used for open-air assembly places. Hundreds of these describe isolated landmarks, and hundreds more involve words corresponding to modern English 'meeting' or 'speech'. None of them contain the element *rūn*. This is hardly surprising, because *rūn* never refers to public speech or announcements; it means 'whisper', and by extension 'suggestion, quiet bit of advice'. Suppose that King John had leaned over to his most trusted companion and muttered "Let's just seal this damned thing, get out of here and raise an army" – well, that would have been a *rūn*. But if so, he said it so quietly that no one else heard him.





**ABOVE LEFT:** The Alton Yew in the Vale of Pewsey, Wiltshire, sited on the south side of All Saints Church. It has a hollowed trunk that has divided into two pieces. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Shoots can grow from anywhere on the yew tree's bark, making it extremely adaptable and assisting its longevity. **BELOW:** Although classed as a conifer, the female tree produces not cones but scarlet, berry-like arils, the flesh of which is the only part of the tree that is not poisonous (the seeds inside the arils are).

the yew's life cycle, the original trunk may be reduced to a number of standing semicircular portions of its old shell. Still the tree continues to grow: the surviving pieces of trunk may individually develop to resemble new trees, though they are still connected to the old root system. Secondary wood may grow over them, and even if they expire, new shoots will grow up to replace them. By this time, a new trunk may already have risen from inside the shell of the original, and so the cycle repeats, perhaps indefinitely.

This all makes it extraordinarily difficult, if not impossible, to accurately date yew trees. A gnarled, hollow, forest yew may appear to be 800 years old, but how can we be sure this is its first hollowing? The tree's cycle of growth may already have repeated, perhaps many times. In spite of this, dendrologists are regularly called upon to provide absolute dates, preferably prehistoric ones, for Britain's sizable population of venerable yews.

#### THE MAN WHOM THE TREES LOVED

Current awareness of the yew has grown from the pioneering work of Allen Meredith, as reported in Anand Chetan and Diana Brueton's 1994 book *The Sacred Yew*. Unfortunately, several misconceptions grew from the same source. In the 1970s Meredith received a mystical calling from Britain's yews; information about their great age, and their endangered state, was imparted to him in a series of dreams. Until the 1940s Britain had a thousand or so ancient yews, but by

## ALLEN MEREDITH EMBARKED ON A ONE-MAN MISSION TO SAVE BRITAIN'S REMAINING YEWS



the 1970s half of them were lost forever. Due to errors made at the beginning of the 20th century, the dating of yews was deeply flawed and none were thought to be more than a couple of centuries old. Meredith embarked on a one-man mission to save the remaining yews, and to convince the dendrological establishment that the yew can live for thousands of years.

Touring the length of Britain by bicycle, Meredith produced a gazetteer of more than 400 ancient yew sites that included the trees' measured girths. Teaching himself, he became conversant in botany. He researched historical accounts of the trees; some were measured centuries ago, so their sizes could be compared. He began calculating the age of yews, based on the size of their girth. Combining science with intuition, he returned astonishingly early dates. All the trees examined were over 1,000 years old, and most churchyard yews were between 1,500 and 2,500 years. The oldest yew in Britain, at Fortingall, Scotland, was declared to be 5,000 years old.

Meredith was taken seriously, to varying degrees. David Bellamy and Robert Hardy were early converts. As well-known figures from TV, they were able to mobilise the BBC and other media into disseminating Meredith's findings. The idea that a living tree could be "older than Stonehenge" captured the public imagination; the wave of interest and awareness generated by all the publicity probably saved more than a few yews from the chainsaw. Dating living yews to

## THE POISON TREE



The yew is extremely poisonous, despite its long history of use in folk medicine. Today *Taxol*, a drug derived from the yew tree, is used effectively in chemotherapy, particularly in the treatment of breast cancer. The leaves, the most toxic part of the tree, are more poisonous in winter than summer. Fifty to 100 grams of yew leaves are enough to kill an adult, and far smaller doses will prove fatal to children and dogs; the alkaloid responsible is *taxine B*, which kills mainly by acting on the cardiac muscles, causing heart failure.<sup>1</sup> In Britain, there have been at least four reported suicides by yew poisoning in the past decade.

The yew has claimed psychoactive properties, which, from the few accounts that exist, do not sound like fun; it seems that the yew produces a low, rather than a high. Few psychonauts are willing to risk death by experimenting, but one young man has described smoking yew needles on his website. It sounds awful. The effects were, “not the most pleasant (disorientation, fatigue, feeling of numbness but also relaxation and an ignorant, indifferent mood)”.<sup>2</sup>

Several historical accounts warn that sitting beneath a yew may cause harm; there is a suspicion that on hot days the yew exudes a vapour, or gas, that can produce altered states. Dr A Kukowka, a retired medical professor, reported a strange experience in 1970. After gardening beneath four yews for a couple of hours, he became dizzy, nauseous and disoriented; losing his sense of time, he began to hallucinate. This was at first terrifying, with visions of snakes and vampires; he then became happy and euphoric, lulled by heavenly music and images of paradise.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Fred Hageneder, *Yew: A History*, The History Press, 2007, p 47

<sup>2</sup> <http://psychotropicon.info/en/taxus-spp-eine-psychoaktive-gattung-2/>

the Bronze Age led to much speculation about the pagan origin of Christian sites. If Meredith was correct, then many churchyard yews were twice the age of their churches, suggesting that the yews, after countless centuries of pagan reverence, had been appropriated by Christianity. *The Sacred Yew*, with its uncritical and rather New Agey style, makes much of this.

Many dendrologists, whilst conceding that yews were indeed far older than previously thought, took a more conservative stance. That yews may live for 1,000 years or more was no longer in dispute, but there was wariness of the older dates. Meredith’s wider claims, many of them intuited, earned a mixed reception. He dreamed up, literally, the Ankerwycke’s Magna Carta and coronation stories, and surprisingly, some respected historians endorsed his ideas. No one could doubt Meredith’s sincerity – he honestly believed that the yews were communicating information directly to him. It seems that he went through some kind of transformative, even shamanic experience, living alone in the forest for long periods and receiving knowledge from the trees. Many readers will understand this: yew trees have a profound presence, and it can seem that they have a deep, dark intelligence. Simply being near the Fortingall yew – its sign proclaiming it “5,000 years old – the oldest living thing in Europe” – moves me almost to tears on every visit. Is this

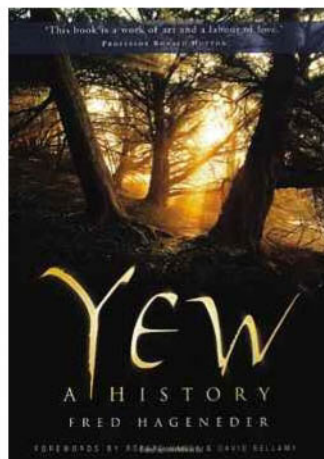
## HE WENT THROUGH SOME KIND OF TRANSFORMATIVE, EVEN SHAMANIC EXPERIENCE

just a consequence of reading Tolkien at an impressionable age?

Time has moved on, and a new understanding of the yew’s complex life cycle

has taken research to a new level. Fred Hageneder’s detailed and beautiful *Yew: A History* has become the standard work. Sensibly, Hageneder avoids the absolute dating of individual trees, stressing the near-impossibility of the task. Examination of the growth rings of felled trees has shown that the yew’s rate of growth may vary enormously, and some annual growth rings may be only one cell layer thick.<sup>3</sup> In periods of drought, the tree can stop growing altogether. There are marked disparities in growth rate between individual

trees: groups of yews known to have been planted simultaneously can show substantial variation in size. It is now clear that the yew’s rate of growth relative to time cannot be



ABOVE: The Alton Yew was estimated by Allen Meredith to be 1,700 years old, yet it is elegantly positioned next to the 800-year-old All Saints Church, suggesting that tree and church may be contemporary.



ABOVE: The impressive ancient yew tree at Tandridge, Surrey. It has been claimed that it predates the church near which it stands – from 2,500 years old to ‘prehistoric’ – but the evidence makes this most unlikely. BELOW: An old yew thrives in the cloistered courtyard of Muckross Friary in Ireland’s Killarney National Park.

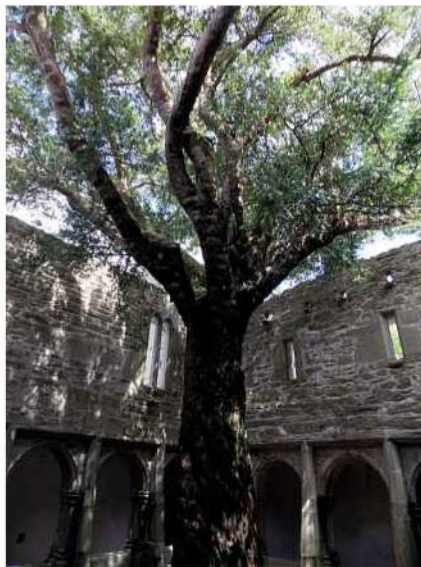
plotted as a straight line; the exponential curve used by Meredith for calculating the age of larger trees is also regarded as inaccurate.

Meredith’s contribution to the yew tree’s cause has been enormous, but the ages of ancient yews are now generally considered to be about half of those he calculated. The “5,000-year-old” Fortingall Yew has been reassessed at about 3,000 years, though its sign has not been changed. There is considerable reluctance from the public to accept these more recent dates; although still undoubtedly ancient, Britain’s yews are no longer as ancient as they *could* be.

#### YEWES AND RELIGION

There is scant evidence for a connection between yews and prehistoric monuments, but it is hard to believe that the immortal yew was not revered in prehistory. Yews can thrive on, or near underground springs, and the importance of water to the siting of monuments is becoming more and more apparent.<sup>4</sup> Inconveniently for archaeologists, prehistoric religious activity at springs or trees is unlikely to have left any trace.

One of Meredith’s more tantalising revelations is that the form of stone and timber circles was inspired by the radial expansion of a yew tree as it evolves into a grove. Made of multiple concentric rings, timber circles could feasibly represent the yew’s habit. Woodhenge, The Sanctuary and Stanton Drew might well have been inspired



by the yew; they might even be memorials to actual yews that died. Could the maze of posts inside a timber circle symbolise a yew grove?

The yew tree is intimately connected with the early Christian Church of the sixth and seventh centuries. The Celtic saints had a particular fondness for yews. St Columba is said to have preached beneath a great yew on the Hebridean island of Bernera; he also established a monastery on the mystic Iona, “island of yew trees”. There are no yews on Iona today (I have looked) so

perhaps Columba had brought his own? St Patrick and St Kevin were enthusiastic yew-planters, and it is claimed that they planted several notable trees as they travelled the British Isles on their missions of evangelism. Several Irish and Welsh saints actually occupied hollow yews, living inside them and preaching from the trees; sometimes a church or monastery would later grow up on the site.<sup>5</sup>

The popular belief that all old British churches are built on pre-Christian sacred sites is rarely supported by evidence. There are undeniably a few churches built next to Bronze Age burial mounds; standing stones have occasionally been absorbed into the fabric of churches, and there is All Saints in Rudston, East Yorkshire, which suffers the indignity of sharing its hallowed ground with a 25ft (7.6m) high Neolithic stone phallus. Examples like these are rare though, and the misconception is largely based on the erroneous dating of churchyard yews, to what is likely about twice their true age. More than 130 certificates hang in British churches, assigning pre-Christian dates to their yew trees; some claim a date from the Bronze Age or even earlier. Disappointingly for many yew-lovers, the vast majority of churchyard yews are probably mediæval.

Because yews are living things, it is natural to attempt to assess their age by size; however, they can be considered just like any other archaeological feature.

## THE WORLD TREE

Known as 'The tree of God' in Japan, the yew was also revered by Indo-European cultures across Europe. Fred Hageneder has found yew references in the records of the Hittites, dating from the 18th century BC; there are traces in the myths and legends of ancient Greece, pre-Christian Ireland and Imperial Rome. [1] The funerary customs of the Phrygians, Saxons, Merovingians, Germanic tribes, Egyptians, Alaskans and others, all featured the yew. [2] It seems that, like springs and marshes, the yew was regarded as *liminal*, occupying an intangible space between the two worlds of the living and the dead.

As well as being a gateway to the Otherworld, the yew may also have been seen as the 'World Tree' that is found in cultures the world over. In northern Europe, the World Tree was known as *Yggdrasil*. Immense and holy, *Yggdrasil* connected the mysterious 'nine worlds'. Its roots watered by springs, wells and sometimes a



lake, the great tree reached to the heavens and was the centre of the world – the *axis mundi*. This belief probably originated from shamanic religions, since the shaman may sometimes

use a tree as a ladder to ascend to the heavens. From *Yggdrasil*'s branches, the Rainbow Bridge also connects to other worlds; *Yggdrasil* itself is sometimes described as a

"column of light".

Because of the difficulties of translating old Icelandic, *Yggdrasil* was long thought to be an ash tree, since texts describe it as the "needle ash". Since it is also described as the "wintergreenest tree" and "the glossy one", this rules out the common ash, which has no needles and is not evergreen. The yew, with its glossy foliage, is a far more likely *Yggdrasil*. The western European scholars who pondered this mystery in past centuries were unfamiliar with tall, straight yews reaching up to heaven, since their local population had long since been decimated; they thought the yew to be a low, spreading and often convoluted tree. However, majestic *Yggdrasil*-like yews still thrive in the forests of Croatia, and in other parts of eastern and central Europe. [3]

### NOTES

- 1 *Yew*, Fred Hageneder, Reaktion Books, 2013, p140.
- 2 *Yew: A History*, Fred Hageneder, The History Press, 2007, x p153
- 3 *Ibid.*, p 218

Jeremy Harte has shown that there are veteran yews growing on Anglo-Saxon boundaries and hedgebanks. The trees cannot be older than the earthworks they are rooted in, yet they have girths of 20 to 30ft (6 to 9m). Meredith has dated some at 2,000 years old, but the archaeological evidence indicates an age of around half that. There are similarly majestic yews growing on mediæval earthworks.

The authors of *The Sacred Yew* claim the unusually tall churchyard yew at Tandridge, Surrey, as prehistoric. With a girth of 35ft (10.6m), its age was declared by Meredith to be "in excess of 2,500 years". Unusually, there appears to be some archaeological evidence. The yew, claim the writers, "is around 25 ft from the church, which has Saxon foundations." In the crypt, "it is clearly visible that the Saxon builders constructed stone vaulting over the tree's roots", indicating that the yew was already fully grown by 1,000 years ago.<sup>6</sup> This would be compelling evidence indeed, if it were true.

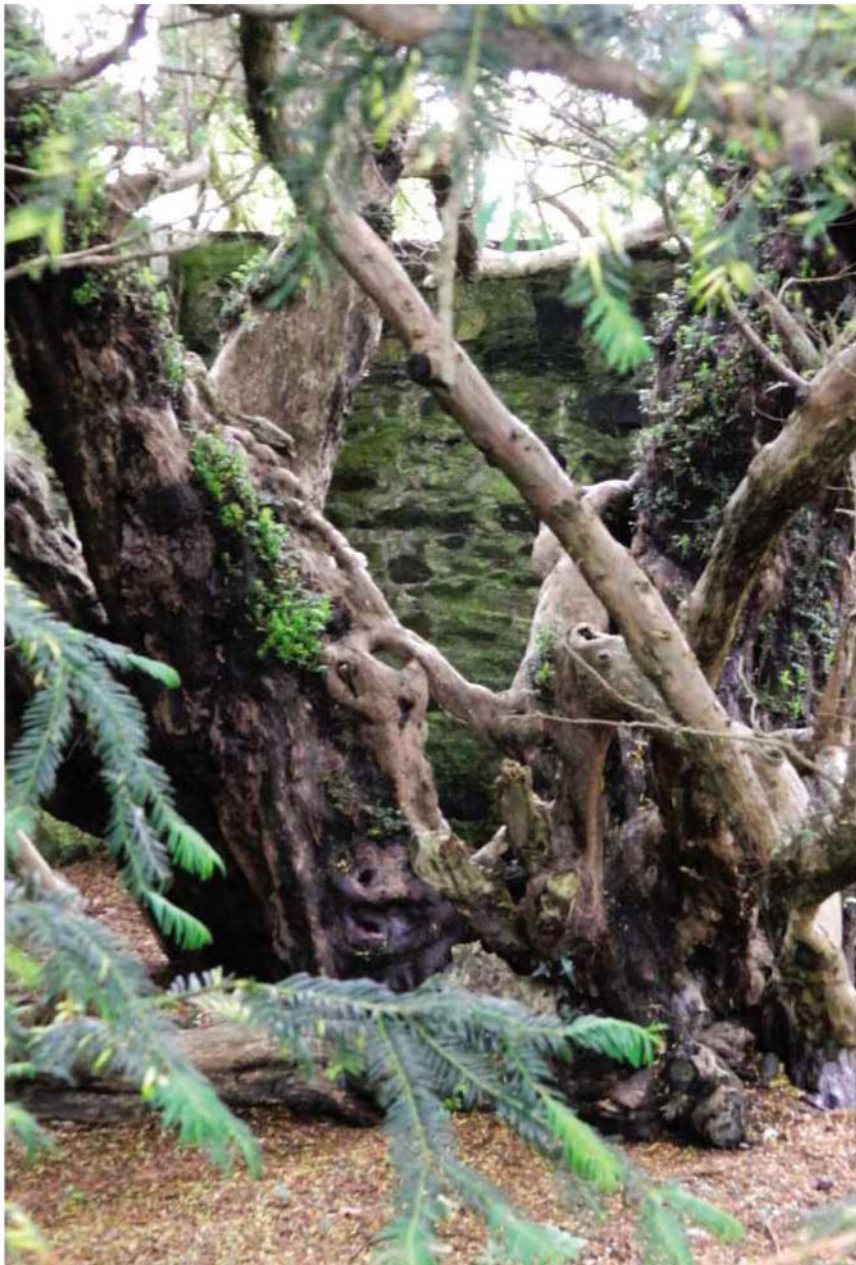
On investigation, Jeremy Harte found the church to be mediæval, with no Saxon phase and no crypt.<sup>7</sup>

Harte observes that, "almost every old yew can be seen to harmonise with the plan of the church for which it was planted." The yew is commonly sited on the south side of the church, opposite the porch; sometimes the porch is on the north side, and so is the

yew. There may be two yews, one by a minor entrance and one by the main funeral path. Can so many British churches, with all their additions and alterations, really have been built to align with ancient, pagan yews that already occupied the site? The churches are themselves aligned broadly to east, and sited relative to boundaries, settlements and topography, on ground that will not flood.



ABOVE: This beautiful Welsh yew in a churchyard at Defynnog was said to be 5,000 years old in 2014, a claim since refuted.



STEVE MARSHALL

LEFT: Britain's oldest tree, the Fortingall Yew in Perthshire, is claimed to be 5,000 years old, though experts now suggest an age of 2,000-3,000. It's original trunk has hollowed, then rotted away entirely. Although still one tree, it now resembles several small yews.

To satisfy all these requirements *and* have an ancient yew already growing opposite where the church porch would best be placed, is asking a lot. It seems rather more likely that the churches were laid out first, and the trees planted beside them.

#### THE NEW OLDEST TREE IN BRITAIN?

In 2014, the media trumpeted the claim that a Welsh yew in Defynnog was found to be older than Fortingall, and was now “the oldest tree in Britain” (see FT318:18). The story went around the world and visitors

flocked to Defynnog; some were suspected of damaging the tree by removing pieces as souvenirs. There was concern that hordes of tourists would compact the soil, endangering the tree's root system and possibly killing all four yews in the churchyard. A similar situation was seen at Fortingall, where in 1785 a wall had to be built around the yew, to prevent souvenir-hunters from destroying it entirely.

The Defynnog claim originated from *The God Tree*, a 2012 book by Janis Fry. Advised by Allen Meredith, she declared

the tree to be “more than 5,000 years old”. There are two ancient yews at Defynnog, spaced 17ft (5 m) apart; they have identical DNA and according to Fry, they are the last fragments of one great original trunk. The Fortingall yew also became two trees, but they are known for certain to be fragments of one trunk: it was still just about complete in the late 18th century, when drawings were made. There is no documentary evidence for a single, large tree at Defynnog.

The *Ancient Yew Group* (AYG), inundated by inquiries, investigated and refuted the Defynnog claim. Toby Hindson explained in detail why Fry's dating is wrong<sup>8</sup>. If the two trees really were remnants of one rotted trunk, its girth would be over 100ft (30m), almost twice that of the largest yew ever recorded.<sup>9</sup> A yew of such a size would surely have been noted: the celebrated Fortingall yew measures 56ft (17m).

The dating method was shown to be inconsistent. Meredith had already recorded the largest single Defynnog yew at 40ft girth (12m) and 3,500 years old, although it actually measures 33ft (10m). As two fragments of the same tree, it grew to a notional 100ft girth, yet was now claimed to be over 5,000 years old. The two trees share the same DNA, probably because the smaller tree is a clone of the larger tree, produced by planting a cutting or by branch layering. Finally, the Defynnog yew's age was determined as “quite possibly over 2,000 years old, but very unlikely to be as much as 3,000.” As the oldest tree in Britain, Fortingall reigns still. **FT**

#### AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



#### STEVE MARSHALL

is a former circus xylophonist, stunt pilot and cranial osteopath. He spent 2014 as artist-in-residence on the International Space Station. Dividing his

time between his ranch in Montana and a tiny yurt on Salisbury Plain, Steve is the best-selling author of *Lying for Business* and *Lie to Win!*

#### NOTES

**1** “The Magna Charta” by Marriott Edgar, 1930s.

**2** The ‘seven life stages of *Taxus baccata*’ were first identified by Toby Hindson in 2000. The yew's process of regeneration is explored in great detail by Fred Hageneder

in his *Yew: A History*, The History Press, 2007.

**3** *Yew: A History*, p85.

**4** “Silbury Springs”, Steve Marshall, *British Archaeology* No 131, July/August 2013.

**5** *Yew*, Fred Hageneder, 2013,

Reaktion Books, 2013, p152.

**6** *The Sacred Yew*, Anand Chetan & Diana Brueton, Penguin Arkana, 1994, p47.

**7** “How old is that yew?”, Jeremy Harte, [www.indigogroup.co.uk/edge/oldyews.htm](http://www.indigogroup.co.uk/edge/oldyews.htm). Originally published in *The Edge* No 4, 1996.

**8** “Addressing the claim that the Defynnog yews in Powys may be 5,000 years old”, Toby Hindson, AYG, 2014.

**9** Largest yew: Brabourne, Kent 58ft 6in.

# THE GHOST AND THE POET

What happened when a hard-drinking *fin de siècle* poet found himself the victim of an apparent haunting? **JAN BONDESON** throws new light on the 'Egham Case'.

**T**he Poet was the celebrated Stephen Phillips, one of the literary lions of the 1890s. In his heyday, he hobnobbed with Aubrey Beardsley and drank with Lionel Johnson, and his poems and plays were compared with those of Milton and Shakespeare. The Ghost was a nondescript, malignant entity, intent on evicting Phillips and his family from its sinister abode. The setting for the haunting was a detached redbrick 1890s villa known as 'Hillside', situated on Egham Hill; poetic imagination had not played any part in its construction, nor could this humdrum late Victorian house be described as a suitable residence for any self-respecting ghost. But nevertheless, the 'Egham Case' gained considerable notoriety in early Edwardian times, raising novel questions about the reporting of haunted houses in the daily press.

Stephen Phillips was born in 1864, the first son of the theology student of the same name. An obnoxious boy, he was expelled from several schools for being vicious and unmanageable. Although he never attended university, he managed to obtain an excellent grasp of Latin and Greek, and an impressive knowledge of classical history. After spending some time as a travelling actor, he married in 1892 and moved to London to start a literary career. At first, he met with hardship and setbacks, and had to

live with his parents-in-law and work as a schoolmaster. It did not help matters that he drank more than was good for him, and that he was incapable of saving money. But he had genuine literary talent, and eventually poetic success came his way: his books *Christ in Hades* and *Marpessa* were admired by Oscar Wilde and won generous reviews in the press. Poetic drama was fashionable at the time, and Phillips's plays *Herod* and *Paolo and Francesca* won him many admirers on the London stage. Over-hyped by his admiring contemporaries, Phillips was compared to Sophocles and Dante, and his future looked very bright indeed.

In early 1900, Phillips decided to use his recent affluence to find more attractive living accommodation. He rented the detached villa 'Hillside', situated at the bottom of Egham Hill, for £70 per annum.

## PHILLIPS BLAMED LOCAL PEOPLE FOR NOT WARNING HIM THAT THE HOUSE WAS HAUNTED

What attracted him to this rather plain, recently built house is not immediately clear; it certainly had nothing poetic about it and faced a major road. Nor is it obvious why a leading playwright, who was filling the London theatres to capacity, would choose to settle in a small Surrey village, with a lengthy commute required to reach his haunts in the Metropolis. But Stephen seems to have been genuinely pleased to have a proper house at last, and to end his previous nomadic existence. After installing his wife May and his little son at Hillside, he went to join his friend Herbert Beerbohm Tree for a summer holiday in Germany.

When Phillips returned to Egham in August 1900, his wife had some very bad news for him. Hillside already had a sitting tenant of the spectral kind, and the Ghost did not approve of the Phillips family invading its territory. There had been ghostly footsteps at night, and strange unworldly cries. Phillips tried to calm his wife, and the equally frightened domestics. But after the Ghost had again made itself known, all the servants fled, and with such expedition that they left their tin trunks behind. The Poet himself also received his fair share of the Ghost's attention. He was tormented by ghostly footsteps, knockings, scratchings and rappings. The door to his study opened and shut without human intervention. He was kept awake at night by strange outcries and doors slamming.



"HILLSIDE," EGHAM

ABOVE LEFT: Stephen Phillips photographed at Egham in 1903. Reproduced by permission of Mr Richard Whittington-Egan. ABOVE RIGHT: An original drawing of 'Hillside' from CG Harper's *Haunted Houses* (London, 1907). Note the many 'To Let' signs in the garden! OPPOSITE TOP: 'Hillside' as it stands today.

Once, the theatrical Ghost exclaimed “Ha! Ha! Ha!” just when poor Stephen had finally been able to go to sleep. When his daughter said that she had seen an ugly, dwarfish old man in the garden, the Poet had had enough: he and his family left Hillside for good.

In a newspaper interview, the shaken Poet blamed the local Egham people for not warning him that the house was haunted. There was local rumour that a child had been murdered by an old farmer 50 years earlier, he said, although this hardly explained why the ghosts of one or both of them had taken up residence at Hillside. There was a fair bit of newspaper interest in the Egham Ghost and its activities. The *World* discussed it in April 1901, and the *Daily Express* took up the story in 1904. The latter article was read, with a mixture of surprise and dismay, by Mr Charles Arthur Barrett, the owner of Hillside. He lost no time in instructing his solicitor to start an action for slander of title. Mr Barrett stated that his house had been built in 1888 and that he had owned it since 1890; a string of tenants had found it perfectly inhabitable before Stephen Phillips appeared on the scene. As a result of the *Express* article, no person would live in the haunted house, and he was unable to find a tenant for it. When the craven *Express* settled the case out of court, Mr Barrett was awarded £200 damages. The ghost story refused to die, however: it was repeated in the spiritualist journal *Light*, and later in the *Daily Mail*. Mr Barrett again instructed his solicitor, but this time the newspaper showed more bottle, and the case went to court in March 1907. Although there were jocular remarks in court that the Ghost was in fact quite profitable to Mr Barrett, and a first class tenant, the *Mail* ended up paying £90 damages.

There was much newspaper interest in the Egham Case, on both sides of the Atlantic. “English Papers Afraid to Print Tales of Spooks!” exclaimed the headline of the *Atlanta Constitution*. The journalist had visited the ghost house and found “nothing about it remotely suggestive of a residence in which any self-respecting spook would be likely to take up his abode, for having to pay no rent these eerie folk generally choose some ancient and costly castle or mansion for their lodgings.” Stephen Phillips was ridiculed by the transatlantic joker: although Phillips had once played the Ghost in ‘Hamlet’, he had not even tried to interview the Egham spook in order to improve his performance on the stage! The court decision meant that even if the Egham Ghost raised the roof off the house, its activities would remain unchronicled: it was a dead ghost, as far as the public was concerned, and other ghosts would find it hard to get in print unless their addresses



were omitted. But in the end, the *Daily Mail* took the Egham Case to the Court of Appeal, claiming that there had been no malice or special damage, and the decision was overturned, to the dismay of Mr Barrett.

The fortunes of Stephen Phillips were reversed, in a dramatic manner, after his expulsion from the Egham ghost house. After the great success with *Paolo and Francesca*, he was living on poetic credit, since his later plays and poems were of an inferior quality. He spent recklessly, and remained incapable of saving money. He went bankrupt in 1908, and deserted his wife the same year. In 1909, the literary chronicler Hesketh Pearson saw a dirty, big-bellied vagabond drinking whisky in a Brighton pub. It was the once-famous Phillips, reduced to a wreck of a man. The ailing Poet died from cirrhosis of the liver on 9 December 1915, living in miserable lodgings in Deal; we do not know if there was, in faraway Egham, a gloating outcry of “Ha! Ha! Ha!” as the Ghost exulted in finally settling the score with its old adversary. We know, however, that there were painful scenes when the Poet’s estranged wife demanded that his coffin should be opened, since she suspected that he had faked his death to avoid paying her maintenance. In the end, she inherited his estate, the gross value of which proved to be just £5.

There have been several attempts at explaining the Egham Case. Firstly, Phillips was a hard drinker already in 1900. Might he have suffered from hallucinosis? But Mrs May Phillips, and several other people, also found the house quite eerie, and the ghost craze was already ongoing when Stephen returned from Germany. Mystery has surrounded the Poet’s remark, in a newspaper interview, that his daughter had seen a ghostly old man in the garden, since his only legitimate daughter had died in infancy several years earlier. It turns out, however, that Mr Richard Whittington-Egan, the biographer of Phillips, was informed of strong local rumour that the philandering Poet had an illegitimate daughter with his wife’s sister. And indeed, in an 1926 interview, May Phillips declared that both she and her niece had seen the Ghost: an

old man in dark, threadbare garments, his shoulders round and stooping, and his face quite ghastly, with long and hanging jaws.

The police constable who served as caretaker at Hillside for 16 months, after the Phillips family had been put to flight, declared that there was nothing wrong with the house, except that it was home to a great many rats and mice, and that the cellar was infested with frogs that croaked incessantly. In 1926, a plumber made the news when he declared that when working at ‘Hillside’, he had found a reel of cotton outside a mouse-hole; clearly, the enterprising rodent

had pulled the string when it wanted more material for its nest, causing the rattling noise that had once confounded Stephen Phillips! ‘Ghost Laid by a Plumber!’ exclaimed the *Sunday Post*, but when interviewed in the *Daily Herald*, Mrs May Phillips pooh-poohed this silly story, since she had herself seen the Ghost.

Does the Egham ghost house still stand today? Yes, it certainly does! From directions given by Richard Whittington-Egan, it was not difficult to discern, for an experienced murder house detective, that a large house called Hillside is still in existence at Egham Hill. It has been subdivided into flats, some of them ‘student lets’, and faces a main road with four lanes of busy traffic. One of the students expressed surprise that this very ordinary house had once gained newspaper notoriety for being haunted; it is today not only without a resident ghost, but also untroubled by rodent and amphibian intruders. It is the sole reminder of a curious and long-forgotten haunting in the near-vicinity of London, and also a sad memorial to Stephen Phillips, the Poet who haunted himself. **FT**

#### SOURCES

The standard biography of Stephen Phillips is *Stephen Phillips: A Biography* by Richard Whittington-Egan (High Wycombe 2006), an excellent and meticulously researched book that is available through Amazon Marketplace or from Rivendale Press. Newspaper sources on the Egham Case include *D. Express*, 22+30 July 1904; *D. Mail*, 7+8 Mar, 2 Jul 1907; *Essex Newsmen*, 9 Mar 1907; *Atlanta Constitution*, 31 Mar 1907, *Sunday Post*, 26 Dec 1926; *D. Herald*, 30 Dec 1926.

#### AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



JAN BONDESON is a senior lecturer at Cardiff University, a regular contributor to *Fortean Times* and the author of numerous books, including *Queen Victoria’s Stalker* (2010), *Amazing Dogs* (2011) and *Murder Houses of London* (2014).

# Saving Private Forteana

A safe home is urgently needed for the archive materials that forteans have built up over the last five decades or their devoted labours will have been in vain. **BOB RICKARD** explains how he found a solution in Sweden's Archive for the Unexplained (AFU).

A depressing tale of the loss of the original archives of the UK's pioneering *Flying Saucer Review* (FSR) – from its founding in 1955 to 1964 – was told by Charles Bowen, the journal's second editor, to Jacques Vallée, the elder philosopher of ufology. "At the death of Waveney Girvan, our first editor," Bowen said tearfully to Vallée, "there was nothing left of the *Flying Saucer Review*. The archives, the files, even the collection had disappeared. Girvan's wife disposed of them. She hated the whole subject... Just like my wife."

The meeting between Bowen and Vallée in 1970 was brought to my attention by one of the founders of the AFU project, the Swedish ufologist Håkan Blomquist, who cited it from the second volume of Vallée's diaries, *Forbidden Science* (vol.2., 2009)

Thanks to AFU the bulk of FSR's files have now been rescued but – like many of you, I hope – I share Blomquist's concern with the preservation of our field's archives because, as he recently blogged: "Without archives we have no history, only anecdotes and hazy memories". Too many unique collections have been sold off or otherwise dissipated on a researcher's death, either because they'd had no one to leave them to

"Without archives we have only anecdotes"

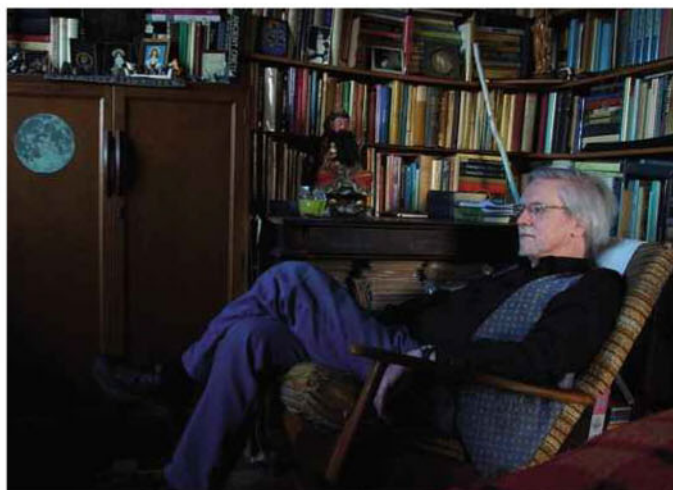
or had left no instructions or no provisions in a will.

I feel this with some urgency because, as one of the executors of the will of our late colleague and ascended master Steve Moore, I have to decide the fate of his huge and unique library. The product of a lifetime's acquisition of material that reflected his personal interests, it falls into several distinct sections – shamanism, moral and martial philosophy, systems of magic and divination, cultural history, music, mythology, folklore, and of course anomalous phenomena, relating chiefly to the antiquity of China, Japan, Tibet, Greece and Rome, with several centuries' worth of Western variants thrown in. Add to this an extensive collection of Chinese and Japanese (mainly martial arts) movies; and,

of course, material relating to his career writing and publishing comics.

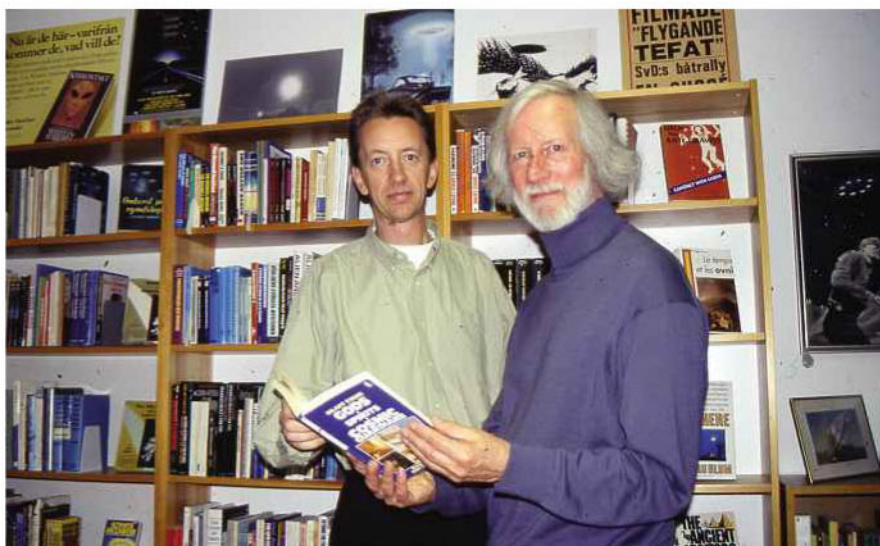
Over the years, we often discussed this matter and agreed that whatever of these collections – not just our own – deemed useful to future fortean scholars should be rescued and pooled, wherever possible. We dreamed of a physical repository where books, periodicals, recording media, ephemera and objects can be safely stored, properly catalogued and even digitised, with space enough for future expansion as we gathered more or received bequests. Additional funding, we realised, would be needed to pay running costs (mainly equipment, council tax, utilities, communications, insurance, and maintenance bills). The right location and proximity to transport links would also be important. The essential priorities would rely heavily on good will and volunteers for the actual running. Over the years, we have had no shortage of offers from qualified librarians and others, but could not take them up or accommodate them.

We believed that the cultural, historical and philosophical value of our subject matter has a deep and unexplored significance which has influenced dreams, ideas and beliefs, art and entertainment



ABOVE: The chaotic FSR files – now safely in Sweden and awaiting cataloguing. ABOVE: The late Steve Moore in his book-lined bedroom, in early 2014.



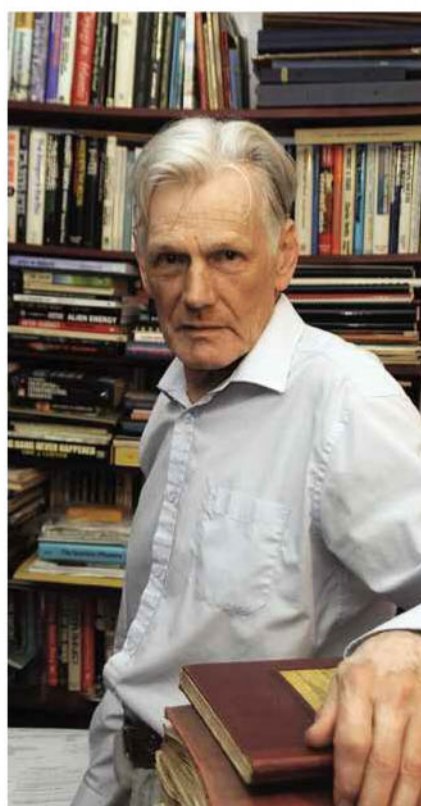


LEFT: AFU director Håkan Blomqvist with a visiting Hilary Evans in October 1996. Before he died, Hilary donated his extensive library to the AFU.

throughout human history; and perhaps, on occasion, benefitted science and technology. As our genre is largely neglected in the collections of serious institutions, it falls to us to curate our own material.

Our founding collection comprises much of the material accumulated by *FT* through gifts, donations and bequests, and through the acquisition of such private libraries and collections as become available. Fortean have told me that they would gladly write similar gifts into their wills (some have already), so that their beloved collections will continue to be used by other forteans in the future (important where a donor's family has no interest in continuing their work).

Given that chance plays a significant role alongside systematic searches in the gathering of data by individual researchers, their collections are often unique and contain rare or personally collected data. Information tends to be volatile unless recorded – now, more than ever, with the Internet, the transience of digital documents, and the lag in digitising older material. Without a central repository that can accumulate our individual experience and resources, researchers are often condemned to ‘reinvent the wheel’, sometimes even unaware of prior

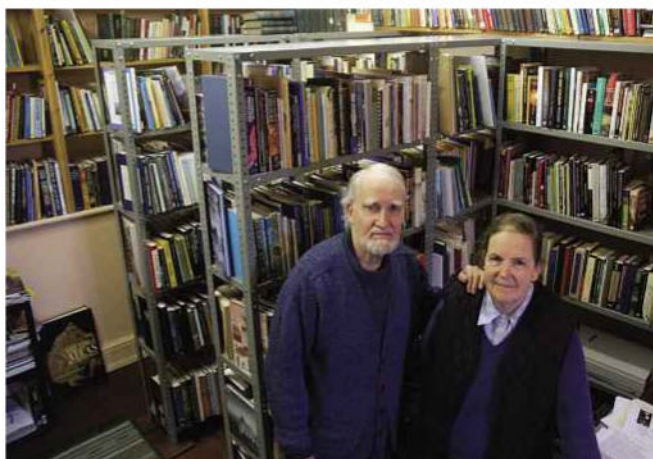


groundwork. The remedy is something a small band of us, under the banner ‘The Charles Fort Institute’, have tried to keep alive as a goal.

The archiving of specialist periodicals in our field is woefully patchy. Specialist libraries in the care of larger institutions are not immune from changes in official interest or priorities, and often owe no special allegiance to the aims of the original collectors. In recent years, for example, the specialist collections of ASSAP, BUFORA and pioneer psychical researcher Harry Price were imperilled by the possibility of eviction. If only we had had the resources, we could have offered them an appropriate and safe haven.

Besides the physical collection, our ambition was to build an Internet-based library, accessible from anywhere. Apart from scientific periodicals and those titles mandated for deposit to the national libraries, many of the small publications published privately by enthusiasts are not archived at all. Where else, for example, could a researcher consult historical runs of *Psychic News*, *Pursuit*, Mr X's *Res Bureaux Bulletin*, the *INFO Journal*, Ulrich Magin's *Bilk*, the *Paranormal Australian*, the *Newsletter* of the British False Memory Society, Rip Hepple's *Ness Information Service*, or Dr Meaden's *Journal of Meteorology* to name just a few? We could offer a central digital archiving facility to small publishers and groups who simply wouldn't have the time, space or resources on their own.

As it is, thanks to Gordon Rutter's brother, we were able to rescue the collection of W Raymond Drake (author of such early classics as *Gods and Spacemen in the Ancient East*) from a local library which needed to reclaim the shelf-space. We are temporarily housing the late Dr Justin Schove's extensive archive of historical records on anomalous and extreme meteorology. We have received donations of news-clipping scrapbooks and periodicals from many others... and a



ABOVE: Among AFU's prominent UK archive donors are (clockwise from top): Lionel Beer, a Founder Member of BUFORA and UFO bookseller for 45 years; *Magonia's* reviews editor Peter Rogerson; Janet and Colin Bord of the Fortean Picture Library.



SIGNS & WONDERS

**ABOVE:** A typical year's archive rescue operation. AFU director and chief rescuer Clas Svahn, with the second batch of 300+ boxes outside Bob Rickard's London home in 2013, awaiting shipping to Sweden. **BELOW LEFT:** When the boxes arrive in Norrköping, AFU director and head librarian Anders Liljegren has to unpack and organise their cataloguing. **BELOW RIGHT:** One of the cataloguing stations in the AFU main office (© AFU).

splendid clutch of early editions of books by Tiffany Thayer from David Edelberg.

Twenty years ago, Mike Dash wrote about the \$8 million fund raised by CSICOP (now re-branded as the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry) to build a combined HQ, research centre and library in Amherst, NY. "A London-based British equivalent," Mike added, "combining an archive centre, electronic access to international databases, an exhibition gallery and resources for investigators would... prove a popular attraction and an immensely worthwhile contribution to the knowledge of mankind." Agreed; but after years of trying, I have come to the conclusion that the current climate in the UK makes it unlikely that we will ever find the funds to acquire a suitable property, never mind the annually renewable funding needed to run the place, or pay for any professional staff.

I was almost ready to abandon the whole idea when I learned of the group in Sweden doing exactly what we wanted. Known originally as *Archives for Ufology* (AFU), they started out running local UFO groups and have evolved into a truly astonishing enterprise. One of their directors, Clas Svahn, has for years conducted a vigorous

## A solution was needed and AFU offered us a lifeline

campaign to collect the research files (and other official documents) from many small or defunct UFO groups across Europe and the UK, thereby rescuing material of inestimable value; these include major collections from Hilary Evans, Gordon Creighton, Lionel Beer, Peter Rogerson, Mike Hutchinson, Omar Fowler, Janet and Colin Bord, Jenny Randles, John Rimmer, Lord Clancarty and Timothy Good, just to name a few Brits.

AFU's archiving initiative began in earnest in 1980, and has steadily expanded to the point where it is a serious international repository. Based in Sweden's southern city of Norrköping, it houses a reference library of 30,000 titles; this is 10,000 more than the number of titles

held by the independent London Library when it moved to its present premises in St James's Square in 1848. AFU also has 50,000 periodicals and over half a million news-clippings – a large chunk of which are our own – on 2.2 kilometres of shelving spread over several rented offices. Currently, they have broadened their remit to include *forteana*, cryptozoology and psychical research and the scientific and philosophic discussion of anomalous phenomena generally – hence their change of name to *Archives for the Unexplained*. The archive is partly funded by donations and by some official employment grants. You can learn more about their success and their plans here: [www.afu.se/afu2/](http://www.afu.se/afu2/).

In the US, we have also seen MUFON's ambitious *Pandora Project*, but not much is public knowledge except that they are scanning case files as a priority over periodicals. Also, as mentioned in FT324:54-55 ("Charles Fort's notes liberated at last"), Dr John Reed's World Institute for Scientific Exploration (WISE) – following their digitisation of the entire run of SITU's *Pursuit* magazine – successfully made a last-minute rescue of Fort's own database. Apart from two mainly academic organisations



BOTH PHOTOS: AFU



**ABOVE LEFT:** On his visit to AFU in Nov 2014, Bob Rickard surveys some of the many *FT* files neatly shelved (© S&W); **ABOVE RIGHT:** Leif Åstrand, AFU's head of scanning, who has, single-handedly, digitised tens of thousands of *FT* newspaper clippings. (©AFU). **LEFT:** The late Hilary Evans in his vast attic library; its contents have now been safely rehomed at AFU.



– the above-mentioned Committee for Skeptical Inquiry ([www.csicop.org/](http://www.csicop.org/)) and the Society for Scientific Exploration ([www.scientificexploration.org/](http://www.scientificexploration.org/)) – the custodians of anomalous archives are mainly small, private groups or individual specialists. The UK is, pretty much, in the same state, although the library of the Society for Psychical Research, with more resources than most, has an online presence ([www.spr.ac.uk/](http://www.spr.ac.uk/)); and on the Continent, the cryptozoological archive of Bernard Heuvelmans went to the Swiss Zoological Museum, at Lausanne.

The UK has the largest fortean community outside the USA – another reason why we need a Fortean Archive – and these few examples give us an idea of what we can aspire to. Around the core of a working reference library, archive and museum, I can envision the growth of additional departments or services: conservation and preservation; a priority digitising programme and other services for researchers; special publications (such as a revival of *Fortean Studies* as a monograph series); lectures, exhibitions and educative programmes for schools. AFU has already made great strides in some of these areas, including digitising official records of ‘Ghost

Rockets’ in Sweden and an expedition to find ‘UFO’ remains in a remote lake.

Until three years ago, our treasures were stored in my cellar; it is roomy enough but unfortunately, it has a compacted earth floor so there is an ever-present risk of damp damage. I have a dehumidifier there running 24/7, yielding about three litres of water a day. A better solution was desperately needed and AFU offered us a lifeline. I had no alternative but to begin shipping our embryonic archive to Sweden for safekeeping. The relevant parts of Steve Moore’s library will follow, once they have been sorted.

As AFU is the only show on the European side of the Atlantic, and as they are already further down the road of establishing an archive, overcoming the stumbling blocks that paralysed our own venture – and as I am not getting younger – I want to put my efforts behind AFU. It’s not inconceivable that CFI could function as a fortean ‘think-tank’ under the aegis of AFU.

To researchers concerned about the legacy of their libraries, I say it is not too late to make a will and consider leaving it to AFU. To those who want an appreciative home for their collection, I ask you to contact

me to discuss arrangements. To those who have no collections but want to help in the most positive way, I say consider donating to AFU (see the donors’ page at the AFU address above) or, again, making a provision in your will. Or consider sponsoring specific projects, such as a much needed book digitising camera.

One big concern of book donors is that they might want, someday, to consult a tome or file they had consigned to Sweden. I have been assured that research requests from donors would always be given priority, their material scanned and sent back promptly. To facilitate more detailed research, AFU are already considering an arrangement with hotels in Norrköping to put up visiting researchers at reduced rates. Other ideas are always welcome; remember, the more forteans who join or support AFU, the more successful it will become, and the more influence forteans will have on its future.

Don’t let our fortean treasures slip away through neglect or leaving it too late. If you have any questions or want to discuss a related matter privately, do contact me in confidence at: [bobrickard@mail.com](mailto:bobrickard@mail.com). Before he died, Steve and I warmly discussed this plan to establish a useful legacy, and I’m sure he’ll send a celestial cheer if we can make it work. **T**

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



**BOB RICKARD** started *Fortean Times* in 1973 and was its co-editor for 30 years. He is the author of numerous books on fortean subjects and a founder of the Charles Fort Institute. He can now see the floor of his basement for the first time in decades.

# BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

## 1. MANY A QUAIN AND CURIOUS VOLUME

Here beginneth a critical guide to building a core fortean library. Bushy-tailed reviewers of the nose-tapping variety often like to say that they've read a book so that you don't have to, and there'll be a few such volumes featured in this series – stuff you can safely leave lying about for the dog to eat, should you even bother to buy it. Of course, you *should* read such dross, because you are a fortean, and it is your duty to consider all points of view. Besides, such reading will help broaden your mind, hone your critical faculties, and with luck give you a good laugh. In keeping with fortean impartiality, then, we will concentrate on the essential texts, but not without mentioning related accounts that contradict or qualify them or are just too dotty to resist (whether sceptical, credulous or otherwise).

Naturally the opinions we express will not please everyone, nor are they particularly intended to. We justify the magisterial 'we' here not only because we have sought the counsel of the learned and the wise in embarking on this exercise; this column is also hereby declared interactive. In other words, you are invited to propose your own essential fortean texts for inclusion in the series (email FT, with 'Fortean Library' as the subject). The appearance of your favourite(s) does not guarantee approval, or even ensure you will see your name in print. But even after enduring decades of close enough acquaintance with this field to have been accused of knowing too much about it, we are still capable of having missed something, be it rare, or obscure yet indispensable, or plain brainless, or just plain obvious.

Where, then, to start? We'll assume you've read the works of Charles Fort, or at least have read enough of or about them to know if you want or need to make your way through the entire *oeuvre*. Some, and not unreasonably, say Fort's style is something of an acquired taste, and even then his prose is not always penetrable. Others have difficulty with his habit of refusing to adopt any particular position about just about everything – including his own usefulness. Our own view is that Fort's waywardness is part of the entertainment, and he is very funny indeed when he wants to be. But the most important thing for our purpose here is that Fort inspired this journal into existence, and one way or another the books recommended here are intended to provide a larger, wider, sometimes more provocative, handle on the kind of thing you read about here from lunar month to lunar month. Perhaps one should stress *kind* of thing: there's not much point in suggesting that you all rush to bid for complete sets of the *Police Gazette* at Christie's, when Jan Bondeson is doing such a fine job of unearthing its gems (in a rare positive example of someone reading

the stuff for you, so you don't have to).

It's also worth repeating that this is a critical undertaking. Not just in the treatment of the works, but in the belief that to make what one will of (say) the existence or otherwise of lake monsters, it helps to have a bit more in the intellectual armoury than the ability to say "Gosh!" That means knowing a bit about biology and ecosystems, something about mirages, and somewhat about the operations of folklore, human perception, and the motives of hoaxers. Among other things. The proper study of most fortean fields calls for putting together jigsaws like this, assembled from accounts of phenomena in the first place but informed (or assessed) with knowledge and sometimes wisdom from many other realms of enquiry. Such jigsaws are rarely complete, and it's not always clear what the final picture ought to look like. Or even if there is any 'ought' about the picture at all. We will tend to commend volumes that recognise this

fuzziness of the fortean enterprise.

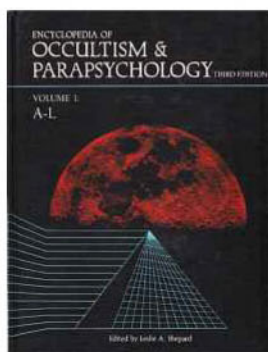
But it does help to have a *few* facts at one's disposal when pondering the paranormal, the supernatural, and the anomalous. It's a cliché often heard, but less often recorded, that all fortean phenomena are somehow connected. Among our parting words in the *Random Dictionary of the Damned* was the suggestion that the fundamental connection between matters as heterogeneous as a lake monster and spontaneous human combustion – or Roswell's crashed UFO and Daniel Dunglas Home – is tricksterism, which was characterised as an inevitable, and necessary, cultural construct in an era such as ours.

On a less abstract level, there is the common intuition that all such phenomena have a collective, quasi-physical cause, which according to one's taste in conjecture may be anything from the tulipoid tendencies of the collective unconscious to the machinations of time travellers – or perhaps capricious ripples and wrinkles in the fabric of the Universe, which in turn may just be God taking His eye off the ball occasionally. David Christie-Murray – classicist, ordained cleric, and paranormalist – would remark that he had often wondered if we were

*meant* to know the answers to such speculations, and he suspected we weren't. But one of the better ways to pose such questions and make, or test, such connections, and to get a picture of the scope of the field, is to absorb a reliable encyclopædia of fortean subjects. You can make any connection or none, while getting an objective handle on what's involved in (say) deciding whether or not Eusapia Palladino was

a fraud. No less usefully, you can remind yourself in due course of who Ms Palladino was, and why she levitated eyebrows as well as items of kitchenware.

Search the Internet for J Gordon Melton's fifth edition of the *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology (EOP)*, and you'll find the whole enormous, A-Z work is available as an ebook that totals nearly



2,000 pages. It was first published in 1995, but that's no bar to its worth, since most of its material is, inevitably, historical. *EOP* is also rather more inclusive of *forteana* than its title suggests. A page from the Js, opened at random, has these headwords (the first sentence of the entry follows – bold type cross-refers to a separate entry):

**J Allen Hynek Center for UFO Studies**

Foremost organization investigating unidentified flying objects.

**Jachin and Boaz** The names of two symbolical pillars of King Solomon's Kabalistic temple.

**Jachowski, Jan (1891- ?)** Polish publisher who experimented with the **divining rod** and **pendulum** and also studied in the field of **astrology**.

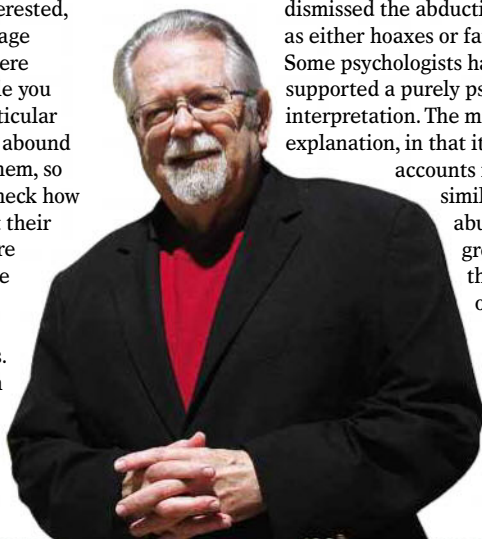
**Jacinth** A gemstone, a variety of zircon that was believed to protect the wearer from plague and from lightning, to strengthen the heart, and to bring wealth, honor, prudence, and wisdom.

**Jacks, L(awrence) P(earsall) (1860–1955)** British author and professor of philosophy who investigated psychical phenomena.

How many of those had you *not* already heard of? Nor us neither. Nor had we heard (another random landing) of George Scribbs (1850–1912). We should have, for his materialisation of 'phantoms' – on occasion, three at a time – puts that naughty duo Florence Cook and Katie King to shame, if without the allure of possible hanky-panky (although that apparently didn't stop Scribbs's neighbours complaining). So you can learn something new every day just from casual browsing here.

Melton's encyclopædia is scrupulously neutral – which doesn't mean it runs away squeaking and quaking from opinions, so much as it has the good grace to say why it concludes what it does, and is always objective. In these volumes this means something much more urbane than, say, the BBC's idea of 'balance' – two talking heads shouting at each other. What you get is impartial, disinterested, and uncommitted: a stage more detached than mere even-handedness. While you may disagree with particular judgments, references abound – no entry is without them, so you can, if you want, check how contributors arrived at their conclusions. When there is occasional bias, there is usually enough information for one to read between the lines. The style is more often deadpan. Discussing the occasion in 1874 when mediums

J GORDON MELTON



LEFT: J Gordon Melton, looking justifiably pleased with himself.

BOOKS ARE  
A POOR  
SUBSTITUTE  
FOR FEMALE  
COMPANIONSHIP,  
BUT THEY ARE  
EASIER TO  
FIND.  
*Patrick Rothfuss*

Mary Showers and Florence Cook put on a double act, when their 'spirit materialisations' Florence Maple and Katie King both appeared together and "walked around the room linked arm in arm, laughing and talking like real human beings", the conclusion is simply: "The possibility of two materialization mediums demonstrating the phenomenon jointly at the same séance severely strains credulity." And the problematic nature of the evidence for and against the pair (mostly against, in the case of Showers) is carefully laid out.

But we get ahead of ourselves. Just as one has found that, when patronising an Indian restaurant for the first time, the best guide to the quality of the rest of the menu is how well they do the *rogan ghosh* and the *niramish*, so with compendia of this kind we'll tend first to check their treatment of alien abductions, and then see how they fare with spontaneous human combustion – which for us is an old rib-tickling roasted chestnut, and *you* are paying for the drinks if you want us to listen to you propounding how it really, really happens. *EOP* demonstrates its breadth and range in having an entry on the latter.

This is how the article on abductions closes:

"Some UFO debunkers, led by critic Philip Klass, have dismissed the abduction stories as either hoaxes or fantasies. Some psychologists have supported a purely psychological interpretation. The most appealing explanation, in that it also accounts for the very similar Satanic abuse stories, grows out of the definition of the

forgotten memory syndrome. This theory suggests that the abductee has experienced a real trauma, usually sexual abuse during his/her childhood, but during attempts to recover the memory, a story is constructed that both confirms the trauma but also disguises it either in a Satanic cult or spaceship. [...]

One cannot speak of a consensus in the consideration of abductions, though through the 1990s, ufologists lost some of their focus upon the accounts, possibly due to the lack of new information. Research appeared to have reached somewhat of a dead end. Like other areas of UFO research, they have not led to hard physical evidence of extraterrestrials – a spaceship, alien materials, or an alien."

That's indeed how things stood to most uncommitted observers in the early-to-mid 1990s. By the end of the decade, things had become a little livelier. Melton's "most appealing explanation" would come to seem simplistic as it became clear that there was never going to be a single over-arching explanation for these accounts, that 'forgotten memory syndrome' was an iatrogenic artefact (*false* memory syndrome), and that myth and folklore were at work on both sides of the argument. And the abductologists had come up with ever more baroque cases, bizarre predictions, and eccentric defences of their 'findings'. But you get the flavour of Melton's measured tone and dispassionate approach. Likewise with the conclusion of the entry on spontaneous human combustion:

"Spontaneous human combustion remains a rare phenomenon, and even among those most prone to adopt occult interpretations, few have followed that lead. Several *forteans* have suggested that, like the Bermuda Triangle, it may be a constructed problem that brings together cases that are only superficially related. Most have accepted the more telling incidents as unexplained, but view it as a natural mystery whose solving has been delayed due to the paucity of cases, the high level of diversity among cases studied, and the limitations imposed on experimenting on human subjects."

Does one detect, in that last phrase, just a hint of a twinkle at the whole thing?

Next time: Another encyclopedic treatment, and perhaps a revelation or two. Read on, Macduff! **FT**

**J Gordon Melton (Ed), Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology, Gale, 2001, 5th edition.**



# POLITICAL ANIMALS

**SD TUCKER** comes out of his shell and examines some very strange tales of electioneering beasts in the 1970s Uganda of Milton Obote and Idi Amin.

**W**hen it comes to the difficult task of passing judgement upon a nation's leaders then, as the old saying has it, "Vox populi, vox Dei" – or, as fans of Classical Corner will probably know, "The voice of the people is the voice of God." But what about the voice of rebellious magical tortoises? How much weight should the opinions of that particular demographic minority carry at the ballot-box? So far, only one nation has ever tried to find out; the East African Republic of Uganda.

One of *FT*'s weirdest ever news items was printed in 1978 (*FT*27:39), and concerned wild rumours about a talking tortoise wandering through the country and prophesying the downfall of its brutal dictator Idi Amin. Supposedly, it walked into a village police station and demanded to be taken to see high-ranking officials near the capital, Kampala, to impart a private message. Eventually the Ugandan Government itself issued a statement claiming that the tortoise had been arrested and was safely under lock and key in a local jail; Amin's own eccentric idea of putting an end to the gossip, it would seem. Eager to know more, in 2011 I wrote an open

letter to the *Daily Mail* asking if any of its many readers could fill in the gaps in this tale. The responses printed in reply were fascinating, and reveal at last the truth about the whole dream-like episode. However, in order to understand all this fully, a little background is necessary.

Uganda gained its independence from the British Empire in 1962, its first Prime Minister (later President) being Milton Obote. A corrupt despot, Obote ruled with many cronies, including a prominent army officer named Idi Amin, formerly of the King's African Rifles and, like many of the world's best tin-pot tyrants, a man who had received

## HE COULD HAVE STEPPED OFF THE STAGE AT THE CABARET VOLTAIRE

much of his military training in England. Whilst Obote was in Singapore attending a Commonwealth Summit in January 1971, though, his apparent ally Amin betrayed him and took over the nation himself. Sick of the brutalities of Obote's secret police, the streets of Kampala were reported to have been filled with cheering crowds when news of the coup came through. This cheering was soon to stop. Amin – or, to give him his full, self-created title, 'His Excellency, President for Life, Field Marshal Al Hadji Doctor Idi Amin Dada, VC, DSO, MC, Lord of All the Beasts of the Earth and Fishes of the Seas and Conqueror of the British Empire (in Africa in General and Uganda in Particular)' – was a truly world-class nutter. That 'Dada' part of his name was apt indeed; he could have stepped straight off the stage at the Cabaret Voltaire, or out of Alfred Jarry's play *Ubu Roi*. Nobody knows how many died during his reign – perhaps 500,000 – but it was not the fact that he killed so many people that made Amin so extraordinary, so much as the way he went about it. Despite once hilariously being described by British officials as being "a splendid man by any standards",<sup>1</sup> once in a position of absolute power Amin proved to be anything but the old colonial ideal of a 'good chap'.

If Milton Obote's preferred manual of statecraft was Machiavelli's *The Prince*, then Idi Amin's was probably *Heart of Darkness*. Like Colonel Kurtz, Amin spent much of his time lurking in his sinister jungle-palace, slowly growing madder and madder with each day. The tales are now legendary. He allegedly engaged in acts of cannibalism and, when not feeling quite so peckish, preferred to throw his victims to lions and crocodiles to be eaten alive. Supposedly, Uganda's rivers became so filled with the bloated corpses of his victims that they interfered with the working of hydroelectric dams, causing blackouts in the nation's cities. At other times, he locked dozens of rivals inside prison cells together with stacks of lit dynamite. His fridge was famously kept fully-stocked with the severed heads of his opponents, which he reputedly used as makeshift bowling-balls. Finding it amusing to mock his former colonial masters, when Britain was suffering from an economic crisis in the 1970s he offered to send over a boatload of fruit to feed the 'starving millions' of England. He even sent a telegram to the Queen proposing sex: "Dear Liz, if you want



**ABOVE:** In 1978, Idi Amin scoffs a piece of roast chicken (one of his more conventional snacks if the legends are to be believed) at Koboko, Uganda, while watching a parade on the 7th anniversary of his military coup.

KEYSTONE / GETTY IMAGES

to see a real man come to Kampala,” it is said to have read. Being fond of his old Scottish commanding officers in the King’s African Rifles, however, he began wearing a kilt and claiming to be the rightful King of Scotland, offering, like some African Alex Salmond, to help the Scots break away from totalitarian rule by London. He even fantasised about forming a personal bodyguard made up entirely of six-foot Scotsmen equipped with bagpipes. Thinking that he was subject to visions from God, his overnight decision to expel 80,000 Asians from Uganda in 1972 came to him, he said, in a dream sent from Heaven. Heaven, however, was surely the last place Amin himself had his origins.<sup>2</sup>

This, at least, is the story as it is usually told. Quite how much of it is myth and how much true is a matter for some debate. Prior to the release of *The Last King of Scotland*, a 2006 film about Amin’s rule, for example, one of the Great Dictator’s many sons (he may have had as many as 60 children), Jaffar Amin, gave a long interview complaining that his ‘Big Daddy’ was a “complex man” and a “good father” who had been consistently misrepresented in the Western news media. Sadly, he then rather undermined this assessment by recounting charming childhood tales of how Amin had given all his kids Commando training and organised competitions between them to see who could strip down AK-47 assault rifles the quickest (Jaffar’s record was nine seconds). He also discussed Amin’s “playful and mischievous” sense of humour around the home, recalling the harmless pranks he liked to play – such as repeatedly throwing spears at visitors and driving his (in fact amphibious) car into a lake to scare his screaming passengers



ABOVE: Lieutenant Colonel Amin, commanding officer of the Ugandan Rifles (left), talking to officers of the British and Kenyan armies during his visit to Britain.

into thinking they were going to die. “This,” Jaffar said, “tickled my father,” if not his guests.<sup>3</sup> Some have suggested, though, that Amin deliberately exaggerated his madness, hoping to cultivate the comic figure of a big, burly buffoon in the West, rightly realising that most people would find his antics more amusing than anything else, thereby enabling him to escape the condemnation for his crimes that he actually deserved.<sup>4</sup> However, secret British and Israeli intelligence documents reputedly made claims that Amin

– a prolific frequenter of brothels in his youth – was in fact suffering from the advanced stages of syphilis, a disease which had apparently caused him severe brain damage.<sup>5</sup>

## EXIT, PURSUED BY A TORTOISE

Amin’s image abroad did not impress his fellow African leaders, though, who thought that his guise of a ‘cartoon cannibal’ played up to long-standing colonial stereotypes. Indeed, it was Julius Nyerere, the President of neighbouring Tanzania, who eventually caused Amin’s downfall in 1979 by sending tanks and troops into Uganda to depose him (Amin had proposed they settle their differences in a boxing match refereed by Mohamed Ali, but Nyerere failed to accept the challenge). By 1980, Milton Obote was back in power and busily killing his countrymen in an altogether more rational manner, a period of comparative bliss which finally ended in 1985. In 1986, the country’s current President, Yoweri Museveni, rose to prominence, and no doubt the length of his time in office is down purely to the fact that his people love and revere him – or, at least, that is what he would have us believe. As for Amin himself, Saudi Arabia, concerned that the ‘devout’ Muslim Amin was becoming a walking embarrassment to Islam, offered him asylum and a lifetime pension of \$30,000 a month in return for lying low, an offer he greedily accepted. Until his death in 2003, Amin apparently spent his life living in a 15-room mansion, whiling away his days by playing the accordion and filling up his trolley with things he didn’t even need in the nearest branch of Safeway (an image the supermarket has unaccountably failed to exploit in its subsequent advertising campaigns).<sup>6</sup>



ABOVE: An African leopard tortoise – the possible identity of Amin’s talking nemesis, or just a metaphor?

DOUGLAS MILLER / GETTY IMAGES

Amin's Uganda, then, was a giant asylum being run by its most dangerous inmate, and it was in such a febrile atmosphere that the famous talking tortoise (or 'Enfudu' to his friends<sup>7</sup>) began making his rounds. Or did he? Sadly, it would appear that the truth of the matter is much more prosaic than any of us would desire. Enfudu, you see, was just a metaphor. Information about him is extremely hard to come by outside Uganda, but one person who very kindly replied to my *Daily Mail* query proved to be a veritable walking Wikipedia upon the subject. I do not know if 'S Solomon of Kettering' ever lived in Uganda him or herself, but he or she certainly knows a thing or two about that nation's more loquacious forms of fauna. According to the wisdom of Solomon, Enfudu was by no means the first or only talking animal on the loose in Uganda. During Milton Obote's initial reign of terror, for instance, Solomon says that stories were "rife" about a large, poisonous talking lizard named 'Embalasasa' going around and viciously slaying anyone who crossed its path. This Embalasasa, though, was merely a kind of living symbol of Obote's own poisonous rule, and a way of safely talking about it without falling foul of the President's secret police. If you said that Obote was a killer, then he might well take great pleasure in turning you into a corpse yourself. If you were overheard talking about a giant talking lizard being on the loose, though, then any hidden spies might just assume that you were a superstitious idiot.<sup>8</sup>

Once Obote had been toppled, of course, Embalasasa retreated from Uganda and back to his rightful place in the realm of



myth. However, once it became clear that the nation's new warlord was an even bigger and more bloodthirsty reptile, another magic animal was needed through which the Ugandan people could express their contempt and fear. And so Enfudu came waddling out of the jungle, to reassure people that Big Daddy's rule would not last forever. Just as Embalasasa's poison and sharp teeth were symbolic of Obote's ruthless nature, so the hard shell and leathery hide of Enfudu were, most likely, intended as metaphors for Amin's military might and presumed invincibility. The fact that Enfudu was predicting Amin's imminent demise, though, perhaps showed that even the hardest shell of armour could eventually be pierced. It was ultimately pierced, of course, and Milton Obote returned. This time, though, Obote had a new nemesis; a talking cat who was taking it upon himself to campaign for Uganda's future President, Yoweri Museveni. Probably, there is a fictional talking cow or monkey walking the dusty roads and by-ways of Uganda as we speak, imploring people to remove the

LEFT: A Kampala street vendor shows the headline reporting the death of the former dictator on 17 August 2003. BELOW: The leopard tortoise featured on a Ugandan stamp in 2012.

nation's current seemingly immovable autocrat.<sup>9</sup>

However, at first sight there appears to be a flaw in this theory. Wouldn't Obote's and Amin's men eventually have twigged that the words 'lizard' and 'tortoise' were merely code, or doubted that any sane person could believe in the existence of talking animals, thus rendering it obvious that those discussing such things were potential dissidents? Not necessarily. In

Uganda – as in much of sub-Saharan Africa – a real tradition exists that animals can occasionally turn quite chatty. Another reply to my letter, for instance, came from an Alice Montague of Mablethorpe, who said that, whilst working in Uganda in 1992, she had heard radio reports that a goat had suddenly announced that Africa's AIDS epidemic was God's punishment for Ugandans disobeying the Ten Commandments. Having imparted this information, the reports said, the goat promptly dropped dead (see FT66:9).<sup>10</sup> As for Enfudu himself; well, presumably he's still lying there rotting in some obscure Ugandan jail, the world's weirdest ever prisoner of conscience. When he finally gets out, we hope he'll sell his side of the story to FT. **FT**

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



**SD TUCKER** is a Merseyside-based writer whose books are *Paranormal Merseyside*, *Terror of the Tokoloshe* and (forthcoming) *The Hidden Folk*. Currently at work on two books, he is a regular contributor to FT.

## NOTES

- 1 [http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Ldi\\_Amin](http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Ldi_Amin)
- 2 Forteaners may also be interested to know that in 1973 Amin claimed to have seen a UFO – “a spectacular object, covered with something like smoke” – falling into Lake Victoria. After a few minutes the spaceship shot back out of the water and flew up into the atmosphere, he said, its trail looking like “the tail of a big snake.” Amin thought it to be a “sign of good luck” for Uganda. It wasn't. See *The Toledo Blade*, 7 Mar 1973
- 3 [www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-428628/Mad-Ugandan-dictators-son-reveals-Big-Daddy.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-428628/Mad-Ugandan-dictators-son-reveals-Big-Daddy.html); Jaffar apparently now makes a living providing voice-overs for TV adverts; but for which products, I wonder?
- 4 Indeed, Amin proved to be manna from Heaven for

comedians. The humorist Alan Coren, for example, wrote a regular supply of fake Amin speeches for *Punch* magazine. A book-length collection of these was later found lying on Amin's bedside table after his overthrow. Did Amin ever deliberately try to imitate his own fictional parody in some of his later public pronouncements? ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan\\_Coren](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan_Coren))

- 5 [www.theguardian.com/news/2003/aug/18/guardianobituaries](http://www.theguardian.com/news/2003/aug/18/guardianobituaries)
- 6 Whilst in Saudi Arabia, Amin reportedly also became a 'fruitarian' – a kind of extreme vegetarian sect whose most committed members refuse to eat any fruit unless it has fallen naturally from a tree, the act of plucking it down from branches being mere murder. Apparently, Amin became so abnormally obsessed with

oranges during his exile that friends began calling him 'Dr Jaffa'. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fruitarianism>) He also supposedly planned to run away from his Saudi home to Disneyland and pursue a new life as a 10-pin bowling champion ([www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1439131/Ldi-Amin.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1439131/Ldi-Amin.html)).

- 7 'Enfudu' would appear to be both the everyday Ugandan word for an ordinary tortoise and the name of a specific tortoise-character in some old African folk-tales. Perhaps the closest European equivalent would be us referring to a fox as 'Reynard'. For another strange Ugandan tortoise tale, see **FT317:4**.
- 8 According to S Solomon, the fable of Embalasasa later developed into an elaborate folk-tale which could be told by traditional native story-tellers through

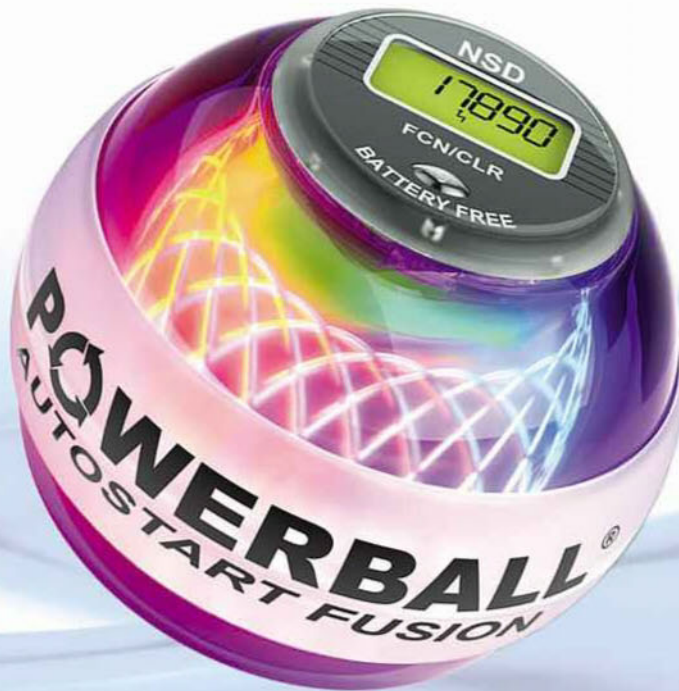
the medium of song and dance, though I have been unable to unearth any details about it. There is, though, a 2006 album by the New York-based Ugandan musician Samite, called 'Embalasasa'. In PR material, Samite says that an 'embalasaasa' is a native term for a real breed of multi-coloured Ugandan lizard which is beautiful, but poisonous to the touch. In his songs, Samite uses this lizard as a metaphor for attractive women infected with AIDS.

- 9 Letter from S Solomon in *Daily Mail*, 27 Aug 2011. I must express my thanks to this person (and Alice Montague) for taking the trouble to reply to my plea for such strange information. An interesting online editorial from the Ugandan newspaper the *Monitor*, meanwhile, speaks of numerous Ugandan rebels supposedly shape-shifting into talking dogs,

lizards, cows and cats, these anthropomorphic figures representing here not the various Ugandan regimes themselves, but their slippery and uncatchable opponents. One tale mentioned, for instance, is of a Ugandan insurgent who transformed into a rat and then slipped into the Bank of Uganda in order to steal cash to fund his rebellion. This column also states that Obote's security forces really did try and arrest the talking lizard Embalasasa, and that he appeared again during Amin's day, attracting a similar response ([www.monitor.co.ug/OpEd/OpEdColumnists/CharlesOnyangoObbo/No-rebels-in-Uganda-It-s-just-an-old-lizard-doing-its-thing/-/878504/1731064/-/s5de2wz/-/index.html](http://www.monitor.co.ug/OpEd/OpEdColumnists/CharlesOnyangoObbo/No-rebels-in-Uganda-It-s-just-an-old-lizard-doing-its-thing/-/878504/1731064/-/s5de2wz/-/index.html)).
- 10 Letter from Alice Montague, *Daily Mail*, 3 Sept 2011.



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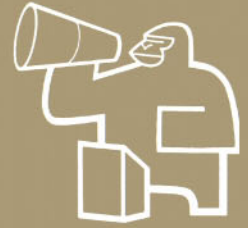
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# forum



## One of our sea gods is missing!

JOANNA BRANIFF relates how the strange disappearance of an Irish deity turned him into a social media star



**JOANNA BRANIFF** lives with her husband Andrew and two dogs in Co Antrim. She has been a journalist and copywriter for over 20 years and has a lifelong interest in all things fortean.

On 22 January 2015, Northern Ireland awoke to the shocking news that Irish sea god Manannán Mac Lir was missing.

Or so proclaimed the headlines in all the local daily newspapers. By way of explanation, the missing mythical deity was actually a statue – part of a sculpture trail across the Roe Valley, near Limavady – and had been stolen by persons unknown, who had used an angle grinder to remove it from its base.

Most people assumed that an art lover, a Celtic mythology devotee or even a scrap metal dealer had pinched it, but the story took a decidedly fortean twist when it was announced that the authorities believed Christian fundamentalists were responsible for the god's disappearance. The reason for this deduction was the fact that a 5ft (1.5m) cross, emblazoned with "You Shall Have No Other Gods Before Me", was left at the scene of the crime. Suddenly, things got serious. The story went from being the audacious theft of a large artwork from the top of a mountain – presumably for reasons of earthly enjoyment or gain – to a theological drama.

As is the modern way, within hours of the theft a Facebook site dedicated to the safe return of Manannán Mac Lir had attracted hundreds of followers expressing diverse and colourful opinions, religious and otherwise. By 28 January, a Pagan priest was calling on the police to investigate the theft of the sea god as a 'hate crime' against Pagans; traditional Celtic shaman Patrick Carberry argued that if a clearly provocative incident of religious symbol swapping had occurred in any other context, it would be rightly investigated as such. Local police responded by putting out a missing person report for the statue on its Facebook page with a

non-emergency telephone number to call.

The statue's newfound fame allowed the people of Northern Ireland to get reacquainted with a powerful, if relatively obscure and largely forgotten, figure from Celtic legend as they pondered his fate. Manannán Mac Lir was a sea deity in Irish mythology and is also said to have been the first ruler of the Isle of Man. Manand is the old Irish name for the Isle of Man and, as his surname suggests, Manannán was the son of Lir, meaning the sea.

Ironically, the Christian fundamentalist thieves had unintentionally catapulted a long-forgotten Pagan deity onto everyone's agenda as the story was splashed in every newspaper. His story provoked a thoroughly modern debate about religious expression and tolerance. Through media reports, we learned the 6ft (1.8m) tall sculpture had become a popular tourist attraction since its installation a year earlier. Duly, anyone who had taken a photo of the statue posted it to the dedicated Facebook page – and of course tagged themselves; the story went global.

The Internet lit up further when it was revealed the sculpture was the work of John Sutton, a talented sculptor who has worked on the award-winning cult series *Game*

**BELOW:** Manannán Mac Lir, seen in his original pre-theft glory and in the rather undignified pose in which he was eventually discovered.



of *Thrones*, which uses a number of areas in Northern Ireland for its location shooting. The fires of public outrage about the theft of the statue were stoked daily by radio phone-ins, sensational newspaper headlines and, of course, social media. The once obscure pagan god was now a modern media star.

By 10 February, after receiving expressions of concern from across the world, the local council had agreed to replace the statue with a new one and restore it to its rightful remote spot on top of Binevenagh Mountain. A defiant motion to replace it with a giant 20ft (6m) version of the original was rejected, though, and Traditional Unionist Voice Councillor Boyd Douglas offered a dissenting view, letting it be known that he was "never enthusiastic" about the statue in the first place, as it was "paganistic" and "not very Christian".

And that seemed to be the end of the matter. Manannán Mac Lir was to be re-installed and restored to his former glory, and the people were happy.

But, as with all good Celtic epics, there was to be one last unexpected twist in the tale: the strange resurrection of the original statue.

On 21 February, news broke that Manannán had been found safe and (relatively) well. Ramblers in Binevenagh Forest discovered the statue in the undergrowth, not far from where it had disappeared. They alerted troops from the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Irish Regiment, who fortuitously were on a weekend training exercise in the area. The soldiers recovered the statue, which will now be repaired and returned to its original site.

Who stole the statue, and why, remains a mystery; no arrests have been made and the police seem to want to put the affair behind them rather than further stir up the bubbling cauldron of contested religion and identity that is Northern Ireland; issues of freedom of religious conscience, the imposition of religious belief and our ability as a society to accept and tolerate the views of others without feeling threatened are hot topics. Maybe the lesson is to let sleeping gods lie... **FT**

# Hobnobbing with the hobs

**BOB FISCHER** wonders whether, after more than a century of neglect, North Yorkshire is falling back in love with its mystical, moorland hobs...



**BOB FISCHER** is a freelance writer and a radio presenter for BBC Tees, and his 2014 folklore documentary *Worms, Witches and Boggarts* completely failed to sate his ongoing 'hobsession'. He tweets as @bob\_fischer.

I've spent pretty much my entire life wandering idly around the rugged North Yorkshire Moors, but had never heard of the legends of the local hobs until 2010. Which seems odd, as they'd been around for a long time by then – possibly, as we'll discover, for over 1,000 years. And, to boot, I was brought up in the 1970s, when it seemed almost compulsory for primary-school age children to be steeped in all manner of rustic oddness as part of their daily education. So how did I manage to read *The Hobbit* at the age of eight without anyone telling me that my favourite moorland walks were filled with their own breed of dwarf-like, mischievous, hairy-footed men with a tendency to lurk around simple farming communities?

It took the chance discovery of a distinctive marker stone on windswept Gisborough Moor (OS Ref NZ 646 124, if you're that way inclined) to bring these enigmatic creatures to my attention. Carved into the stone is the legend "Hob On The Hill" and, on the other side, the date 1798. It was the beginning of my ongoing fascination with these mercurial beasts. Many of whom, as documented in Jennifer Westwood and Jacqueline Simpson's folklore bible *The Lore of the Land*, were as domesticated as their literary near-namesakes:

*In Yorkshire, notable hob territory, they included spirits who "lived in" and did household chores... and some who, like the hobman of Marske-on-Sea, lived outside human society and safeguarded the community.*<sup>1</sup>

Tales abound of hobs attaching themselves to remote Yorkshire farms, merrily threshing corn in barns overnight for no reward other than a bowl of milk, and becoming mortally offended – usually never returning – if farmers attempted to repay their efforts with labourers' clothing to cover their customary nakedness. However, other



## Widespread belief in the hobs persisted for a millennium

hobs were more mischievous in their intent; indeed, one tale – referred to widely as the "Ay, we're flitting" story – describes a household hob so disruptive that the family attempted to move house in order to escape him. It's a story that Ryedale Folk Museum, an idyllic miniature village of pre-industrial Yorkshire nestling in a nook of Farndale, has now claimed as its own, applying it to the dale's resident hob, Elphi. The story is told in a pamphlet available in the museum:

*The hens stopped laying. The milk turned sour. The butter wouldn't churn no matter how long the wife*

*turned it... the family decided they would have to leave and try their luck on another farm. They made all the arrangements and loaded their furniture and belongings onto the cart ready to go to their new home. By the gate, a neighbour passed and asked "Now then, is tha flitting?" Before the farmer could answer, a voice came from the depths of the cart. "Aye, we're flitting". They looked in horror, there was Elphi, the hob, going with them.*<sup>2</sup>

So when did these tales begin to circulate? Clearly by 1798, belief in hobs was widespread enough for the stone on Gisborough Moor to bear their name. But it seems that their influence had been deeply felt in the region for many centuries before that. In his evocative 1891 book *Forty Years in a Moorland Parish: Reminiscences and Researches in Danby in Cleveland*, the Rev JC Atkinson recalls his visit to an elderly, female parishioner who regaled him with the couplet:

*Gin Hob mun hoe nowght but a hardin' hamp  
He'll come nae mair, nowther to berry nor stamp.*

Baffled? Don't worry, so was Canon Atkinson, because – despite appearances – not all of this archaic dialect belongs to North Yorkshire folk-speech. It's essentially another warning not to offend your resident hob by leaving him work clothes, but the words 'berry' (meaning to thresh) and 'hamp' (a peasant's smock), reports Canon Atkinson, "had no actual meaning to the old dame who repeated the rhyme to me", concluding that "the word [hamp] seems to be clearly Old Danish in form and origin".

He was left in no doubt that his older parishioners, even on the cusp of the 20th century, firmly believed in the veracity of stories whose telling, he implies, had been equally relished by Scandinavian invaders over 1,000 years earlier. "It was impossible to doubt for a moment her perfect good faith," he writes. "She told all with the most utter simplicity, and the most evident conviction that what she was telling was a matter of faith, and not at all the flimsy structure of fancy or of fable".<sup>3</sup>

In March 2015, Tees Archaeology's Pete Rowe met me in his Hartlepool office, and cited the descriptive nature of names like Hob on the Hill as further evidence of a Danish influence. "The Anglo-Saxons, and the Scandinavians after them, were very keen on

**ABOVE:** The 'Hob on the Hill' marker stone on Commondale Moor, dated 1798 (on the other side).

**OPPOSITE, TOP RIGHT:** 'Elphi's House' at Ryedale Folk Museum, with a roof constructed from the Rev Atkinson's best-known literary work.

**OPPOSITE:** Teesside children's drawings of hobs from AJ Garrett and Rebecca Little's 'Mop Top Hob Shop'.



ALL PHOTOS: BOB FISCHER

descriptive place names,” he told me, “and you pick that up in a lot of local places. So Hob on the Hill is a hill, and it’s associated with the folklore of hobgoblins. There’s nowhere that you’ll see this written down in the history books, as these places weren’t really connected with settlements and nobody was taxing them, but I would say there’s a good chance that the hob place names are Anglo Scandinavian or Anglo Saxon. So we’re talking around AD 600-900.”

If Peter and the good Canon Atkinson are correct, it appears that widespread belief in the North Yorkshire hobs persisted for *at least* a millennium. So when did their influence begin to wane? The turn of the 20th century, it seems, was something of a hob watershed, and by 1905, even the once-legendary Elphi was firmly residing in the where-are-they-now file. That year saw the publication of Gordon Home’s *The Evolution of an English Town* (the town in question being Pickering), which reported – after discussions with local folklorist Richard Blakeborough, who’d done the legwork – that “after most careful enquiry during the last two years throughout the greater part of Farndale, only one person has been met with who remembered hearing of this once widely known dwarf”.<sup>4</sup> Hardly surprising, therefore, that by the time I’d started exploring the moors 70 years later, stories of the humble hob had ceased to be seen as factual local history and had drifted into the fantasy realms of Tolkien and his ilk.

But are they making a comeback? I sense a whiff of a hob revival in the air. In 2010, two Teesside artists, AJ Garrett and Rebecca Little,<sup>5</sup> became so fascinated by these relatively obscure nuggets of folklore that they ran a ‘Mop Top Hob Shop’ in an empty shop unit in Stockton-on-Tees, encouraging



local children to draw their own impressions of the local beasts. “We couldn’t find anything about them on the Internet,” Rebecca told me, “so we went to Middlesbrough Reference Library, and searched through books for hours.”

“Kids take to it,” chipped in AJ. “They say ‘So there are these little creatures in the middle of the countryside, and some of them are good and some of them are evil... OK!’ and they just go for it”. AJ and Rebecca still have many of the pictures drawn that day, showing an ingenious variety of hobs sporting horns, fangs, pointed ears and – in one impressive application of artistic licence – what appears to be a Stetson.

Then there’s the small matter of Elphi’s second wind. Ryedale Folk Museum now plays host to ‘Elphi’s Trail’, a treasure hunt of hob-related artefacts designed to gently guide younger visitors around the attraction’s exhibits. The museum’s director, Jennifer Smith, followed the

## NOTES

1 Jennifer Westwood and Jacqueline Simpson *The Lore of the Land: A Guide To England’s Legends from Spring-Heeled Jack to the Witches of Warboys*, Penguin, 2005, pp828-829.

2 *Elphi, The Farndale Hob*, pamphlet provided onsite at Ryedale Folk Museum, [www.ryedalefolkmuseum.co.uk](http://www.ryedalefolkmuseum.co.uk).

3 Rev JC Atkinson, *Forty Years in a Moorland Parish: Reminiscences and Researches in Danby in Cleveland*, MacMillan and Co, 1891, pp55-57.

4 Gordon Home, *The Evolution of an English Town*, JM Dent and Co., 1905, p206.

5 Find them at [pegpowler.blogspot.co.uk](http://pegpowler.blogspot.co.uk).

6 She’s at [www.whitbystoryteller.co.uk](http://www.whitbystoryteller.co.uk).

7 Westwood and Simpson, *op. cit.*, p827.

trail with me, and I couldn’t help but notice that one of the stopping points, ‘Elphi’s House’, was a tiny cottage whose roof had been constructed from an old hardback edition of *Forty Years in a Moorland Parish*. It seems Elphi, at least, remains as mischievous as his reputation suggests.

“It’s a really lovely way to get children to engage with the museum’s collection and the area’s history,” Jennifer told me. “I think museums have got more astute in realising that people are interested in things that you can’t see or touch, so they’re doing more about that intangible heritage, and sharing these stories in all manner of different ways. There is absolutely a resurgence of interest”.

Meanwhile, over on the North Yorkshire coast, professional storyteller Rose Rylands<sup>6</sup> finds that the guests on her regular folklore walks are equally fascinated by tales of the coastal hobs dwelling in the region’s various caves and coves. I met Rose on the windswept beach of Runswick Bay, where a benevolent hob with the power to cure whooping cough lurks in a darkened recess of the cliff face.<sup>7</sup> We spent an idle afternoon wandering slowly up the coast to Boggle Hole, another renowned hob hotspot.

“Rather strangely,” Rose insisted, “I had an e-mail last spring from a gentleman who swore to me that, when he was a child, he was walking down this very stairwell when he saw a man-cum-creature... and he described, exactly, a hob. It ran across the path in front of him. It was there, and it was gone. I have to confess that I haven’t followed up this particular enquiry, but sometimes it’s good to leave a mystery right where it is”.

“Aye, we’re flitting?”

Don’t you believe it. **FT**

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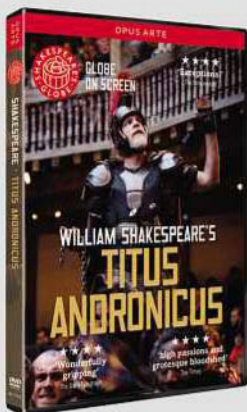
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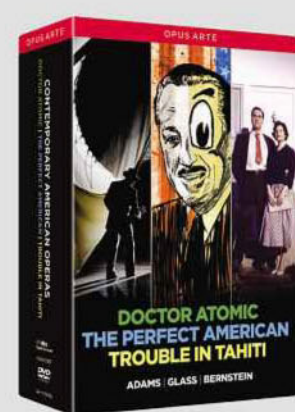
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# reviews



## Beware the Jabberwock...

Many cultures have a tradition of giant magical snakes, as this survey of wyverns, basilisks, lindworms and the rest attests – but few were bothered by weasel wee



### Dragons in Zoology, Cryptozoology, and Culture

Dr Karl PN Shuker

Coachwhip Publications 2013

Hb, 220pp, illus, bib, ind, £19.95, ISBN 9781616462154

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £19.95

What's striking about *Dragons in Zoology* is that there's at least one illustration on every spread (sometimes two or three), most of them in colour. *Dragons* is a thing of great beauty, its format recalling those hardback "picture books" from the olden days, sumptuously illustrated but also generous with the meatiness of their text. Many illustrations are from Shuker's extensive collection of painted dragon carvings from Asia and other *dracabilia* gathered or photographed on his travels.

*Dragons in Zoology* opens with 17th-century Jesuit scholar Athanasius Kircher, who wrote that dragons were real, citing as evidence numerous bones – now known to be dinosaur and other animal fossils – along with an abundance of flying dragon sightings by "so many and such reliable witnesses." Conrad Gesner, writing a century earlier in his *Historæ Animalium*, declared dragons as "indisputable fact" and listed among the animal kingdom dragons, wyverns (two-legged dragons), flying snakes and combed and crested serpents. He detailed how these serpentine dragons were "distinguished from

the common sort of serpents." The evidence for dragons starts to look convincing, until Shuker reminds us that it was not long before scientists realised there was no such thing after all.

There's detail on the various sub-divisions of dragon, the 'basal' limbless venomous serpentine dragons or 'lower dragons' such as the Scandinavian *lindworms* and the British 'worms' or *orms*, whose heads were often combed, bearded or horned, and from whose mouths noxious clouds issued. Shuker suggests that some of these may have been inspired by encounters with truly enormous, now extinct, prehistoric snakes. He reminds us that today's pythons and boas take their names from mythical serpentine dragon-like monsters from Classical mythology.

Practically every culture, however isolated from other peoples, has or had a tradition of a giant magical snake. The topography of bits of the Hebrides and of Roxburghshire in the Scottish border, and Bignor Hill in West Sussex, was said to have been formed by gargantuan 'worms' in their death throes, while the Aztecs believed that the gods formed the entire world from the carcass of Cipactli, an impossibly huge marine mega-dragon resembling a crocodile with fins of *Discworld* proportions.

Included in *Dragons in Zoology* is the 'basilisk' (literally "little king") that over the years morphed from being a fairly short, boring-looking crowned snake with an upright posture to the bizarre bat-winged snake-tailed bird-thing that was the cockatrice. The bizarre alleged origins of the basilisk/cockatrice are convincingly dealt with in a

### "The origins of the cockatrice are dealt with in a digression on intersex chickens and parasitic worms"

digression on intersex chickens and parasitic worms infesting hens' eggs. There were reports of a cockatrice infesting a house in Renwick, Cumbria, as late as 1733. I never knew that the cockatrice gets four mentions in the Old Testament, as Tsepha/Tsiphon, apparently translated in later European editions as the less spectacular 'viper' or 'adder'.

Included among the illustrations from natural history books are striking engravings of a double-headed *amphisbæna* and a cockatrice, depicted as serious animals, by Wenceslaus Hollar – best known for his panorama of the 17th century London. His cockatrice comes complete with a cockatrice-bothering weasel – like the basilisk, cockatrices were vulnerable to weasels (or weasel wee). Shuker suggests they may have been a garbled account of mongooses attacking cobras.

After an extensive look at the 'Classical' four-legged winged dragons, including the small, flightless cat-headed dragons of Belekinge, Sweden, comes St George and the Dragon. The story, it seems, is just a rebranding of tales of ancient Greek heroes such as Perseus fighting various ancient dragony monsters.

Also dealt with is the early 1800s infestation of small, shimmering green-scaled dragons in Glamorgan, South Wales. I'd

heard of a similar, contemporary outbreak in the Vale of Clwyd, to the north, but not of the Glamorgan dragons. While many dismiss these Welsh dragons of the 1800s as misidentified and recently-introduced pheasants, Shuker points out pheasants had been in Britain since Roman times, an 'elongate' pheasant like the dragons described would have been noted by the field sports community, and unlike whatever it was in Glamorgan, pheasants don't normally attack chickens.

Jenny Hanivers and 'gaffs' (fake dragons) get a look in, among them the dragon of Rhodes (a crocodile skull, it turned out, but a rather big one) and the 'lindworm' of Brno, Slovakia, suspended from a ceiling near the city's town hall since 1608, which is a rather obvious stuffed crocodile. Also discussed – and illustrated – is a hoax hydra exposed by Carl Linnæus.

After dealing with dragons when they were still regarded as legitimate zoology, a chapter on the 'Unnatural History of Dragons' examines reports of dragon-like animals from the 20th century – the *tatzelwurm* of the Bavarian, Swiss and Austrian Alps, from the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy, and from across modern Africa, with dinosaur-like creatures like the Congolese *mokele-mbembe* water dragon and alleged living Zambian pterosaurs among them. There's also the "living tree trunk", supposedly a limbless dragon over 30ft (9m) long, from secluded valleys in Nepal – and a round up of lake monsters and sea serpent sightings.

Much of the book is taken up by 'Dragons in Culture'.

Continued on page 62

# Paranoia in academe

Academics have begun to regard conspiracy theories – and their debunkers – as part of the modern intellectual discourse



## Modern Conspiracy

The Importance of Being Paranoid

Emma A Jane & Chris Fleming

Bloomsbury 2015

172pp, ind, bib, mp £16.99, isbn 9781623560911

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £15.29

Conspiracy theory has caught the attention of academia in recent years, and in a new way. Whereas almost all the books written on the subject in the 20th and early 21st centuries were effectively polemics, explaining why we should fear and hate (or at best pity) conspiracy theorists, there is now a tendency among some academics to regard conspiracy theory as an interesting mode of thought in its own right.

This tendency extends to placing conspiracy theory in its historical context, as a facet of Post-Enlightenment thought; some of its central characteristics, such as doubt as a default position and the notion that the individual is entitled – if not obliged – to think for herself, can be seen as part of the legacy of the Enlightenment. It no longer belongs to the intellectual ‘dregs’ of modern culture, as Daniel Pipes claimed in 1999, but can, with reservations, be seen as a mode of thought in its own right.

Emma Jane and Chris Fleming belong to this school of thought. They see conspiracy theory as part of a broader pattern of doubt in modern intellectual discourse; inhabiting its more exotic and flakier edges perhaps, but still a part of an intellectual spectrum that includes ‘respectable’ thinkers (think Peter Dale Scott and his explorations of the deep state).

What marks this book as different is the way Jane and Fleming treat conspiracy theorists and their debunkers as part of the same system of discourse. They point to similarities in approach between the two camps; for instance, the apocalyptic nature of their discourse – CT thinkers often talk about the end of civilisation as we know it, and so do their detractors, but for different reasons. There is a school of CT thought that sees the world as on the edge of destruction, waiting to be tipped over by the coming pivotal event; debunkers often talk of CT as if it is the tipping point that will plunge the world into terminal chaos.

The authors explain this polemic similitude as an example of ‘mimetic antagonism’, or ‘mimetic doubling’. This idea, first put forward by René Girard in 1961, suggest that polemical antagonists come to resemble each other in their discourse. A brief read of Francis Wheen (surely the Lynn Truss of political/cultural debate) or Daniel Pipes neatly proves the point.

And what of CT itself? Jane and Fleming make some helpful suggestions towards defining it. While CT, at least as far as its detractors are concerned, “is figured as the marginal activity of young, hairy men running around playing soldiers in privately-owned militia camps in Oklahoma”, the authors suggest it “is much closer to what, in other contexts, we might simply call ‘political rhetoric’”. It relies on plausibility and unfalsifiability as its rhetorical engines.

It is fixated on truth (the truth) and knowledge “to the point of unhealthy obsession”, in a culture where ultimately, truth and knowledge-seeking are tantamount to impossible. It is rational in principle, simply because conspiracies happen and are, by their nature, secret (though, as the authors point

out, ‘genuine’ conspiracies are usually marked by their tendency to failure, unlike the infallible enemy of the arch-conspiracist).

Its proponents (or perhaps its adherents; many of its proponents seem to this reviewer to resemble snake-oil showmen more than ‘true believers’) are likely to suffer from ‘agency panic’ – the idea that one is impotent before the forces of politics/history/evil – but simultaneously to see themselves as one of the few who have pierced the veil and understood; that is to say, cultural heroes – a reasonable compensation for impotence perhaps.

The Internet has provided a wonderful forum for all sorts of interests, at the same time as underpinning our perception of an unknowable world, or an unknowable truth; CT has flourished, as has its sceptical foe. Jane and Fleming acknowledge the effect technology has had on both the premises and the proliferation of CT, but point out that this is a movement of degree rather than kind; the tools for conspiratorial thinking were available long before websites contributed to the ease of ‘research’ (a key term for the gullible on both sides of the parallax polemic).

Finally, this book is funny. I laughed out loud regularly, not something I expect to do when reading an academic treatise. The authors treat their subjects with a respect underpinned by a comic distance and sensibility which makes the book a real pleasure to read. It may not answer the core question of what conspiracy theory actually is, but it goes an enjoyably long way towards a better, and more appropriately humane, way of understanding it.

Noel Rooney

## Fortean Times Verdict

HUMANE & HUMOROUS LOOK AT CONSPIRACY THEORISTS

8

Continued from page 61

Beautifully rendered illustrations show dragons in everything from alchemy, astronomy, tattoos, the interpretation of dreams, the visual arts, film (*Godzilla* gets a look-in), literature, music, kites, dragon boat races, and dragons as an inspiration for ‘mega-statues’.

It’s accessible enough to appeal to the general reader, while having plenty that’s new and of interest to cryptozoology specialists.

Matt Salusbury

## Fortean Times Verdict

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE – DESTINED TO BECOME A CLASSIC

9

## First Light

The Origins of Newgrange

Robert Hensey

Oxbow Books 2015

Pb, 167pp, ind, £15.99, ISBN 9781782979517

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £14.39



This work provides enough insight into Ireland’s ancient monuments to enable one to gain an understanding

of one of the most spectacular achievements of its Neolithic peoples, the 5,000-year-old Newgrange in County Meath. Books about the Neolithic, usually written by archaeologists, often get wrapped up in their own specialism, raking over the history of excavations of a particular site, or burying the reader in technical details, with nods to everyone’s ideas. Hensey is a PhD specialist who balances academic rigour and depth of knowledge with looser, more personal passages carried off with great style, as when he conveys the experience of seeing the Sun’s light entering Newgrange’s inner chamber during the winter solstice – going there yourself could well be the next best thing to winning the lottery! Ireland’s early farmers’ preoccupation with the Sun probably started around 3600 BC when the climate took a wetter, more pestilent turn that lasted several centuries. Monuments with corbelled roofs started to be built, some with solar orientations which possibly “allowed them to placate the Sun or a solar deity



perceived to be in decline". The importance of the lifecycles of salmon, shellfish and whales are considered in relation to the Brú na Bóinne complex where Newgrange is located. The art of Newgrange and sister sites such as Knowth is outlined, and shown in black and white and colour images. Despite kowtowing to the 'entopic' theory of cave art (why does this absurd model still dominate academia?), the megalithic art, applied in relation to the possible religious and social structure of their people, provides a plausible conjecture of why and how Newgrange was built. And it's written in punchy chapters.

Jerry Glover

### Fortean Times Verdict

A SATISFYING VOYAGE INTO NEOLITHIC IRELAND

8

## Danny Chaucer and the Flying Saucer

Peter Christopher

Albury Books 2015

Pb, 126pp, £4.99, ISBN 9781910571309

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £6.64



This story is about a boy called Danny and he thinks every day is always boring. When he saw a flashing light he was amazed and thought, 'What could it be?' As you might guess from the front cover, it turns out to be a flying saucer called Bob owned by a unusual lady called Captain Frost.

They have lots of adventures that might interest you. You'd like this book if you like action, sports and imagination. If you are a girl don't be put off as there are five girls in it but you'll probably like Nat the most. She's brave, a fast runner and very caring. Don't fret boys - you'll really like the main character Danny.

There was lots of beautiful description at the beginning, lots of exciting bits but I thought there could be more description at the end. Just saying. Have fun reading. I'd give it 4 stars.

Ujali Lowe (age eight)

### Fortean Times Verdict

A BOOK FOR JUNIOR UFOLOGISTS, WITH LOTS OF ADVENTURE

8

## Martians, Morlocks and Moon Landings

How British Science Fiction Conquered The World

Jamie Austin

Bennion Keamy 2014

Pb, 236pp, notes, £10.99, ISBN 9781909125759

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £10.99



Jamie Austin goes back to the beginning with Shelley's *Frankenstein*, but gets into his stride in the second chapter, arguing that Wells "provide[s] the backbone of the genre."

No disagreement from me. Moving broadly chronologically, Austin brings in writers such as Wyndham, Orwell and Neale.

He makes the case that from the earliest days, British SF has been influential in domesticating the fantastic, and shows how this approach is still carried forward by writers such as Gaiman. And, of course, The Doctor makes more than one appearance.

Austin covers a lot of ground in a short space, and there's little that SF fans will be unfamiliar with. He provides a concise, rapid, and fairly thorough overview.

There are problems. He discusses the inspiration for Orwell's *1984* in context of World War II, yet makes no reference to Orwell's experiences in the Spanish Civil War, which coloured his view of Soviet Communism, and could be argued to be the source of both *Animal Farm* and *1984*, particularly the idea of Big Brother as Stalin. However, that is open for discussion, and the book is not a discussion of Orwell's political influences.

Austin's statement that Darth Vader in the original *Star Wars* was voiced by Samuel L Jackson may come as a surprise to James Earl Jones. The typo 'mantra ray' made me laugh, but reflects a lack of proof-reading.

*Martians, Morlocks and Moon Landings* is a thorough overview of the British influence on SF, with HG Wells as a golden thread running through, but it's weakened by careless errors.

Steve Toase

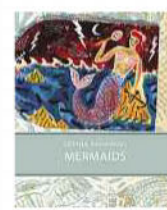
### Fortean Times Verdict

CONCISE SURVEY OF BRITISH SF, BUT WITH A FEW HOWLERS

6

# Siren songs

Mermaids' long history as seducers – and violent criminals – beautifully revealed



## Mermaids

Sophie Kingsmill

Little Toller Monographs 2015

Hb, 148pp, illus, refs, bib, ind, £15.00, ISBN 97819082134266

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £15.00

Sophie Kinghill's *Mermaids* is a treasure from start (a contemporary example sprayed on a Madrid wall with the tag "abajo la patriarcado") to finish (sirens in the *Odyssey*), and more beautiful than anything describing itself as a monograph has any right to be. It rips along, scattering witticisms.

Young Adult Fish Lit achieved brief popularity in 2012, but failed to oust vampires from the bestseller lists because, basically, mermaids are seen as a bit girlie (think of the pastel-hued heroine the original, sadistic legend), despite the collective noun 'mermaid' generally including chaps with tails. 'Merman' gets vanishingly few mentions in Google compared with 'mermaid', and quite a few of those are devoted to the foghorn-voiced Ethel.

Earlier manifestations of mermaids were violent and often cannibalistic. Homer's sirens are surrounded by human bones; and their Indian sisters suffocated Alexander the Great's soldiers after sex. Paracelsus maintained

they had no soul but could foretell the future. (Augustine, on the other hand, suggested they could be descended from Adam – as was Ambia, Cain's daughter – and therefore could be redeemed.)

By the 19th century, though, mermaids had become safely erotic, naked from the waist up (though decent because of flowing locks), and with the same lack of genitalia below it as a Ken doll. They appeared as characters in operas and ballets, with the Slavic tradition represented by *Rusalka*; Wagner's Rhine Maidens are thought to be Swedish in origin – Wayland the Smith's granny was a mermaid. They also appeared in popular literature and, of course, art.

The illustrations in *Mermaids* are perfectly chosen and often hilarious – the sirens will have to try a lot harder to attract Ulysses's chaps in Otto Greiner's camp classic. (Sadly, there is no pic of the equally camp classic Bette Midler in her mermaid costume.) Early Christians would have recognised the mermaid's mirror and comb which appear in so many images as symbols of women's sexuality and unsanctified desire; indeed, the mermaid became a symbol of vice – Isidore of Seville described them as no better than harlots.

I cannot recommend this brief and beautifully written book highly enough.

Val Stevenson

### Fortean Times Verdict

BEAUTIFUL AND HIGHLY READABLE LOOK AT THE SEDUCTIVE SIREN

9

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## “Thrice-accursed Greeks”

A celebrated classicist takes aim at a very contemporary issue – the economy – and draws out many striking parallels between then and the current state of play



### The Rise and Fall of Classical Greece

Josiah Ober

Princeton University Press 2015

Hb, 416pp, illus, maps, bib, ind, \$24.95, ISBN 9780691140919

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £22.45

“Those thrice-accursed Greeks” – Fort, *Books*, p396

Justly celebrated for his work on Athenian democracy, Ober here expands his horizons down to what he dubs contemporary Greek ‘immiseration’. Goals and methods are clarified in a YouTube lecture and conversation, where his inspiration is half-seriously credited to a colleague’s quip: “The puzzle is not why the Greek world fell; it is why it lasted more than 20 minutes.”

The economic focus and current Greek concerns doubtless explains why Ober scored a review by ancient historian James Romm in the *Wall Street Journal*, not an organ normally devoted to classical pursuits (22 May 2015).

Romm rightly deploras the textual ubiquity of ‘efflorescence’, Ober’s buzzword, albeit borrowed from a 2002 Jack Goldstone article, though I don’t share his puzzlement over (for instance) ‘conurbation’ – hardly exotic, having been around since 1915 – and ‘endogeneity’, these being a welcome break from Ober’s stodgy prose, and such lapses into jargon as ‘normative preference’ and ‘noisy data’, albeit these are alleviated by one good theatrical joke and an illustrative use of Eisenstein’s *Alexander Nevsky* – pity he missed the chance to observe that one of Athens’s 139 *demes* (districts) was

called Koprias (‘Shitville’).

Ober’s economic focus divides between (to my taste) an excess of theory – old economist joke: It may be all right in practice but will it work in theory? – and a superbly compressed historical narrative from Bronze Age to Roman conquest, buttressed by equally brilliant distillation of climate and geography as stimuli to economic progress and regress.

Much (notably culture) is left out. Ober rightly concentrates on Athens, Sparta, and Syracuse (watch here for Richard Evans’s forthcoming book); Corinth and Alexandria deserved more.

Though unindexed, a prime Ober target (along with an ubiquitous Hobbes) is MI Finley’s *The Ancient Economy* (1973), which argues there was actually no such thing. Both point to the lack of any ancient treatise thereon; the nearest thing is Xenophon’s *Œconomicus* (whence our word), which ranges far beyond its ostensible subject of domestic management.

Some things have been said before, from Thucydides to the moderns. But his final chapters on fourth-century Greek/Hellenistic prosperity – generally thought a period of decline – are masterpieces of revolutionary re-evaluation.

Most lament Greek failure to create a unified nation. Ober dissentingly views this as providing fruitful competition between individual city-states (cf Hong Kong and Singapore). Yet it is saddening that out of 1,035, only 31 resisted the Persian invasion. (Rider: When Athens attacked Syracuse, it refuted Ronald Reagan’s claim that no free country has ever made war on another.)

Ober well poses an apparent paradox: Athens lost the Peloponnesian War but recovered spectacularly; Sparta won, but quickly fell into defeat and irrelevance. Plenty more scope

for ancient-modern parallels.

Athens vs Sparta (a society as weird as Hoxha’s Albania) suggests USA vs USSR. Sparta’s claim to ‘liberate’ Greece is as bad a joke as Soviet pretensions in post-War Europe. Athens helping Sparta against *helot* revolt was as daft as giving food to North Korea. Post-war exile of Themistocles echoes Churchill’s 1945 electoral annihilation. Demoting the Areopagus smacks of attempts to curb the House of Lords and Canadian Senate. Mass Syracusan population displacements prefigure 18th-century English transportations – not teleportations! I could go on.

Another favourite Oberism is ‘counterfactually’. This might profitably have led him into wider alternative history. What If Persia had won the wars (Arnold Toynbee notoriously regretted they didn’t)? What If Alexander had lived to (as he intended) invade Italy and eliminate Rome? Later Romans (see Livy) endlessly debated this scenario. The Greeks, of course, were lucky that Romans surprisingly turned out to be such ardent philhellenes.

Some questions are needlessly belaboured. Herodotus explicitly attributes Persian defeat to military inferiority. Ober rhapsodises over Philip’s patented Sarissa (extra-long spear), though apparently it was not decisive at Chæronea (338 BC) and was no match for Roman legions at Pydna (167 BC).

There is no mystery as to why Philip appointed Aristotle to tutor young Alexander. His dad had been court physician to Macedonian king Amyntas, he was (Peter Green’s term) link-man between tyrant Hermias (his father-in-law) and Pella, also unpopular in Athens for his Macedonian connection – another foreshadowing of modern Balkan controversies.

Chapter Two, comparing ‘Greek

social ecology’ with that of ants, is the most entertaining (and least relevant) segment. It stems from Socrates’s description (Plato, *Phædo*) of Greeks as squatting around the Mediterranean “like ants or frogs around a pond.” Frogeity doesn’t get a look in, though surely more pond-erous; cf. Constanze Güthenke’s unmentioned online essay.

There are no egregious errors. I had 30 pages of notes, and I can’t think of a higher compliment.

I don’t agree Socrates was “famously uninterested in politics,” or that Athenians ate fish more than “occasionally”. Herodotus and Thucydides hint at Ober’s desired evidence for ideological ‘Ionicism’. Petalism (Syracusan version of Ostracism – something we should revive, along with their condign punishments for corrupt politicians) surely owed its quick demise to the difficulty of writing Greek names on olive leaves, a daft idea in the first place.

Ober’s buttresses: 36 pages of 540 terse end-notes; 33 for Bibliography (giving himself more than one); c.30 graphs and tables. Index is lacunose, e.g. no Marx, despite discussion at p331. An appendix (with Barry Weingast) devises a three-player board game (C = City State, E = Elite member of same, K = King) to encapsulate the book’s key themes and conclusions – intriguing, but it won’t replace Monopoly.

Ober ends as he began, with Byron’s lament for lost Greek glory, a threnody reconnecting with current desperation – Solon’s *Seisachtheia* (Debt Cancellation) must surely appeal to Syriza. Should ‘Grexit’ happen, Ober’s difficult but healthily eyebrow-raising study would justify an ‘I Told You So!’

Barry Baldwin

Fortean Times Verdict

REQUIRED READING FOR MERKEL AND TSIPIRAS

9

## ALSO RECEIVED

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

### The Future of the Mind

Michio Kaku

Penguin 2015

Pb, 377pp, notes, index, £9.99. ISBN 9780141975870

These essays by Kaku, one of today's leading science popularisers, gives his opinion on questions such as 'Can we download a mind into a computer?', 'Can we record memories and dreams?', 'Can we enhance intelligence?', and on the fortean topics of alien contact, mind control, lucid dreaming, telepathy, telekinesis and teleportation. He writes with one foot firmly in the camp of current science orthodoxy. His tack is more of a statement about how our current scientific understanding of any given problem has been derived historically; how it might tackle the problems, relevant experiments and discoveries; and how it might interpret the results. Kaku writes with clarity and erudition. This is good mulch for budding scientists or anyone wanting to know the current state of cosmology, genomics or psycho-neurology etc., but there is nothing here about the meaningfulness of it all.

### The Age of Earthquakes

Shumon Basar, Douglas Coupland,  
Hans Ulrich Obrist

Penguin 2015

Pb, 256pp, illus, £9.99. ISBN 9780141979564

A rather self-conscious rebooting of Marshall McLuhan's influential analysis of the social impact of technology – *The Medium is the Message* of 50 years ago – here re-worked to celebrate the pervasive influence of the Internet. Claimed in the blurb to be "a culturally-prescient, all-knowing email to the reader", the authors assert that there are five distinct characteristics of the "extreme present": technology-plus-us, the-brain-outsourced, Me-vs-Them, Internet-geology, and a-faster-future. "Humanity has never been so neurologically homogenised" they say, and furthermore: "the Internet has changed the structure of our brains". Clever and loud graphics ready-made art substitutes for 'fast-cut-editing'; and the earthquakes alluded to are not just the 'ground-shaking' changes in the way we think, speak and behave but also the environmental effects of millions of people doing the same thing. The digital economy has gone from zero 20 years ago, to using 10 per cent of the world's electricity today, the same amount used to light the entire planet in 1985. It's a page-turner and probably read in 10 minutes ... but on the Internet it would be

gone in no time. "You are the last generation that will die." We wouldn't bet on it!

### Operation Gladio

Paul L. Williams

Prometheus Books 2015

Hb, 304pp, notes, index, \$24.00. ISBN 9781616149741

Like some old vampire, conspiracy theories are put down only to rise and rise again. This book by an ex-FBI consultant and journalist who doggedly pursues these spectres lays out his dossier on a secret alliance he claims was forged, at the end of WWII, between the CIA, Sicilian and US mafias and the Vatican to combat a Communist take-over of Europe. Funded by recovered Nazi morphine and fake currency forged in concentration camps, "thousands" of covert units went underground all over Europe. In time, Williams argues, these groups were involved in toppling governments, genocide, death squads, financial and narcotic crimes, and the formation of the mujahedeen. A major focus in the book is an examination of the career of the South American Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio – now Pope Francis – and what the Church knew of the fate of the countless Disappeared in that continent's 'Dirty War', including the "confiscation" of babies from female abductees. Disturbing if true.

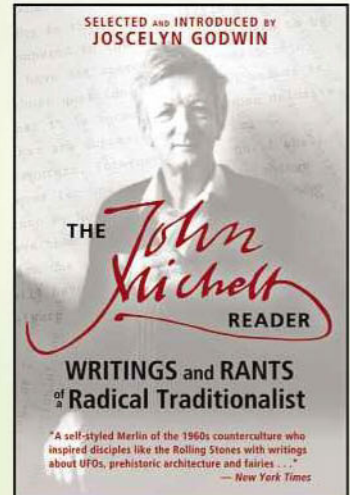
### The Immortal Mind

Ervin Lazlo with Anthony Peake

Inner Traditions 2014

Pb, 169pp, \$16.95. ISBN 9781620553039

Given his ground-breaking re-assessments of the evidence for and theories about NDEs, it was to be expected that Anthony Peake would turn to the ontological nature of consciousness. He and Ervin Lazlo sift the latest consciousness research for evidence that the mind is not located in or confined to the brain but extends beyond the body, concluding that it persists throughout space in a holographic way, every part being in direct contact with every other part. This is not panpsychism – the idea that the whole universe is an organism that possesses a mind – but a theory that the whole universe or entirety of existence is a property of mind or arises out of mind (whatever mind may be). Peake and Lazlo attempt a rationalisation of such topics as NDEs, death, reincarnation and consciousness and our experiences of something greater than mundane life. A brave assault upon difficult terrain that deserves an intelligent critique.



## THE JOHN MICHELL READER

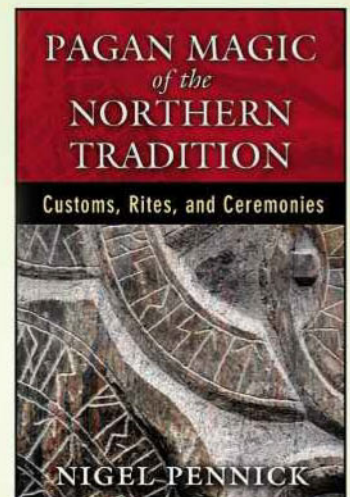
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### Ant-Man

Dir Peyton Reed, US 2015  
On UK release from 17 July

A C-list character, a troubled production history – including the departure of original director Edgar Wright – and the oddly apologetic tone of the early trailers seemed to bode ill for the screen debut of Marvel’s incredible shrinking hero; that the end result is so assured and enjoyable is perhaps the biggest of *Ant-Man*’s surprises.

To the casual cinemagoer, a superhero who can reduce to the size of, and communicate with, ants might seem a little daft; which, I suppose it is, but this is a comic book movie, not Ken Loach, so best just go with it. Scott Lang (Paul Rudd) is a down-on-his-luck, divorced ex-con fresh out of San Quentin and desperate to win the respect of his young daughter; tough when you have no job and no visiting rights. Against his better judgement, he gets involved in a break-in that yields nothing more than a seemingly worthless suit; in fact, he’s been set up by a retired scientist named Hank Pym (Michael Douglas), who plans to co-opt Scott’s burglarising skills for a bit of high-stakes industrial espionage. Soon, our reluctant hero finds himself embroiled in a dysfunctional family drama played out between Pym and his daughter Hope (Evangeline Lilly) while

trying to get a handle on the powers bestowed by Pym’s prototype Ant-Man suit. This unlikely team – which now also includes Scott’s trio of amusingly hapless criminal buddies – has to plan and execute an elaborate heist in order to keep Pym’s potentially deadly tech out of the hands of his crazed business partner. Rudd is perfect as the likeable loser and amateur-hour superhero; his accidental run-in with a more experienced super-powered character only makes you warm to him all the more, and – of course – he ultimately rises (or should that be descends?) to the challenge of becoming Pym’s mite-sized successor.

The film takes us on a special effects journey that follows in the tradition of the seminal *Incredible Shrinking Man* (an obvious influence on Lee and Kirby’s original *Ant-Man* series from 1962) and *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*, but really does up the ant-e (sorry) in terms of realising its macro-vision world of bath-tub tidal waves and giant train sets in some astonishing and joyous set-pieces; unlike most movies, the use of 3D here feels completely organic and adds an appropriately discombobulating dimension to the whole experience. And the ants are pretty damn cool too.

Genre-wise, then, it’s a truly unlikely mash-up of heist movie, comedy and SF adventure. The top-notch actors (even the smaller

roles are nicely cast) ensure that it also works as an ensemble piece – even when Michael Peña, as Scott’s Hispanic ex-cellmate, frequently threatens to steal the show with his hilariously digressive bits of exposition.

The fact that the stakes – as well as the hero – are smaller than those of the epic *Age of Ultron* turns out to be a boon here: that the film’s climactic battle is played out not in the skies over San Francisco but in the bedroom of a little girl makes for both a human scale and some wonderful opportunities for visual invention – you’ll never look at Thomas the Tank Engine in the same way, I can guarantee. Links with the wider Marvel Cinematic Universe are present – and range from knowingly geeky nods and historical references to surprise cameos – but *Ant-Man* works perfectly well as a stand-alone film needing no prior knowledge. It’s clear that many elements of Wright’s original script remain in place, but eleventh-hour replacement director Peyton Reed deserves major credit for steering what must have felt like a sinking ship safely, and snappily, into port. In short (ahem), *Ant-Man* is charming, funny, inventive and a hoot. **David Sutton**

### Maggie

Dir Henry Hobson, US 2015  
On UK release from 24 July

This week’s zombie movie is remarkable for two reasons: firstly, it isn’t really a zombie movie at all; and secondly, it’s an Arnold Schwarzenegger film, minus the punch-ups and heavy weaponry. In fact the film is being promoted (well, almost) as ‘Arnie acts!’ He plays Wade, the father of the titular Maggie (Abigail Breslin, from *Little Miss Sunshine* and, ahem, *Zombieland*) who is in the advanced stages of an infection that will see her turn into a zombie. This “necroambulatory disease” is a global epidemic that has decimated the population although, curiously, government, police force and hospitals still appear to be functioning okay.

Ignoring the rules that say those who have been infected for a certain period must be quarantined, Arnie resolves to care for his daughter at home, without much thought as to what he’ll do ‘when the time comes’. His girlfriend (Joely Richardson) is extremely uneasy and Maggie’s two siblings are packed off to stay with relatives. So Wade’s life becomes a routine of medical appointments and trying to keep the local police from forcefully dragging his daughter off to be dealt with by the authorities.

Wade does not, however, spend much time warding off hordes of

### Fortean Times Verdict

A CHARMINGLY SMALL SCALE,  
IN EVERY SENSE, MARVEL

9

zombies, which, it has to be said, are incredibly thin on the ground; and this is at the core of the film's problems. Past zombie films have demonstrated that it is possible to get away with negligible flesh-munching action and still be effective – Bruce McDonald's *Pontypool* (2008) is a fine example – but *Maggie* has so few zombies as to make you question whether this epidemic is really that serious. Indeed, the characters seem more concerned about cooking and cleaning than they do about the dead rising from their graves.

So with the zombie element largely absent, this becomes just another 'disease of the week' film, the stuff of innumerable maudlin TV movies over the years. Even so, it could have worked; but so much syrupy, heartfelt chat and far too many lyrical shots of cornfields and sunsets render the whole thing overly sentimental. Arnie has proved before that when he isn't blowing things up he loves some schmaltz and family values, as evinced by the execrable *Kindergarten Cop*, *Jingle All the Way* and *Junior*. While *Maggie* is a better film than these, it's not much better.

The drama is also undermined by Arnie himself. Quite why he was cast in a role that doesn't require any muscle (which we know he can do) but does require him to 'really act' (which we know he can't) is anyone's guess. He still can't emote worth a damn and still delivers his lines in the same familiar, heavily-accented monotone.

None of this would matter so much if the film was packed with incident, but here, once again, it falls short. This may be down to the writer's desire to draw attention away from the zombies and toward the human story – so the film is called *Maggie*, as opposed to something like *Daughter of the Dead* – but then why make it about zombies at all?

It's not a truly bad film: Arnie aside, it's competently performed, technically accomplished and has decent production values. In the end, though, it's scuppered by its sheer ordinariness and lack of bite – if you'll pardon the expression – and that's a strange thing to have to say about a zombie film.

Daniel King

**Fortean Times Verdict**

MAGGIE MAY. OR MAY NOT

**5**

## 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](http://www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com); @revpeterlaws)

### IT FOLLOWS

Dir David Robert Mitchell, US 2014  
Icon, £12.99 (Blu-ray), £9.99 (DVD)

### CONTAMINATION

Dir Luigi Cozzi, Italy 1980  
Arrow Video, £19.99 (Dual Format)

When 19-year-old Jay's dream date takes a frightening left turn, she's plunged into paranoia and has to face a relentless parade of slow-walking pursuers that others can't see. She's given this chilling caveat too: "It'll look like anyone, but there'll only be one of it". The great thing about indie sleeper hit *It Follows* is that it does exactly that: follows you home. It creeps into your brain and turns any subsequent trip to the shops into a potential supernatural deathtrap. All you need is a person walking towards you and – boom! – you're living the movie. It's a horn blast for the power of simple ideas – an art-house *Drag me to Hell* with an abstract slasher twist.

You'd think a film of people 'walking toward the camera' would get dull pretty quickly, but debut writer/director Mitchell pumps the film with an almost constant state of nery tension. There's stacks of slow, voyeur-

istic zooms filtered through a *Virgin Suicides* aesthetic, but these stylistic choices aren't just there to look nice, or please critics; they actually add to the horror. Take the props and set design: in the entire movie there's only one mobile phone and one e-reader, while all the TV's are from the 1960s and the houses look straight out of 1978 Haddonfield in Carpenter's *Halloween*. Then there's the superb 8-bit score by Disasterpiece, which sounds like something straight out of an obscure Mario Brothers cave level.

All this left me wondering exactly when and where the film is meant to be set. Answer: An off-kilter dreamland which is all the more creepy for this lack of specificity. This floaty vibe let's you forgive the occasional slips in logic too, like 'why don't they just run the thing down with their car?' If you haven't seen this yet, then you need to seek it out, even if Icon's Blu-ray is a little light on extras. The second half might not be as strong as the first, and it's not quite as thematically solid as last year's other horror hit *The Babadook*, but this buzz-making indie movie



strikes three often elusive horror chords: it's unique, it's arty, and it's pretty damn scary.

While *It Follows* hinges on the idea of infection through bodily contact, it opts for subtlety. *Contamination*, however, cranks the schlock up to the max. Here, the toxic danger isn't an abstract curse, rather it spurts from the gloopy green Martian eggs glowing and pulsating aboard a mysterious ship that floats into New York. (Everyone in the movie insists the ship's deserted; but I clearly spotted two guys chatting on the deck; ah, the wonders of HD). Once the eggs start ejaculating on the humans, people's stomachs explode in slow motion, right into the camera. Even a lab rat pops like a red balloon when the scientists pump it full of the alien yolk (and yes, I did rewind that bit).

Where *It Follows* is a slow-zoom art piece; *Contamination* plays like a Boys Own Adventure comic book with guns, astronauts, aliens and high-jinks in South America. *Survivors* icon Ian McCulloch is a hoot, giving us his usual "I am so pissed off right now" look, and Arrow's edition oozes great extras, a bad-ass Goblin soundtrack and sweet, shiny cover art.

**Fortean Times Verdict**

CURSE AND CONTAGION IN TWO VERY DIFFERENT HORRORS

**8**



### Cub

Dir Jonas Govaerts, Belgium 2014  
On UK release from 31 July

*Cub* (or *Welp*, to give it its original title) is a Belgian horror film that heralds what may be a new sub-genre: Scoutsplotation. That it has taken this long to arrive is surprising when you think about it, given that so many Scout activities are genre staples: camping in the woods; juvenile behaviour; bladed implements; bonfires; whittling. All these and more can be found in *Cub*, which follows a group of scouts as they embark on an expedition into forest country (shot on location in the Ardennes) led by Akela Kris (Titus de Voogdt) and Baloo (Stef Aerts), who takes his bull terrier Zoltan along for the ride. The dog's name gives you a clue that the film is not to be taken entirely seriously; yes, it's a nod to the fondly remembered but actually rather rubbish 1970s horror flick *Hound of Dracula*. Similarly, one character has a mobile phone the ringtone of which is the theme to Argento's *Suspiria*. The film wears its influences proudly and throws them all into the cauldron to create a potent brew. I can imagine the pitch went something like: "It's *Lord of the Flies* meets *Southern Comfort* meets *Predator*. In Belgium".

So, familiar ground then; the one innovation, at least in terms of horror films, is to have 10-year-old boys in the lead parts. It's certainly refreshing to come across a film with a less than reverential attitude toward children. There are exceptions, of course, but all too often children are shown to be the repository of good and innocence, and, while the adults are being bumped off left, right and centre, the kids tend to come out pretty much unscathed. Whether it's bad taste on the part of director Jonas Govaerts or a mischievous desire to break a taboo, only he will know, but it does make a nice change to realise the kids are just as likely to cop it as anyone else.

However, the tone of the film is uneven: while a vein of very black humour runs through it, this is often in sharp contrast to an almost gleeful sadism. There's one particular sequence that is very hard to watch, and several others stray too far towards torture porn for my liking. It's a tricky balance to strike: there are genuine laugh-out-loud moments

but they are cut so close to scenes of violence and distress that the overall effect is uncomfortable. It's also fair to say that Govaerts has a pretty unreconstructed attitude towards women. There is only one female in the film – the camp cook Jasmijn (Evelien Bosmans) – who, when she's not providing the obligatory extraneous nude shower scene is a run-of-the-mill screaming victim.

*Cub* is at heart a slasher film, and as such doesn't set out to frighten you so much as make you jump: a technical exercise rather than an effect of mood. This neatly sums up the film's *raison d'être*: it exists as a vehicle to provide a series of shocks with little regard to the story. Nothing wrong with that, in itself – the aforementioned Argento made a career out of purely visual storytelling – but what that approach absolutely requires is a sustained atmosphere of dread, in which the audience's anticipation of what they think is coming can be manipulated. This is Govaerts's first feature film and as yet he hasn't mastered that particular art, but there's no denying his visual flair and eye for detail.

Some of these shock moments are ingenious, as the kids and various adults fail to avoid a number of lethal booby traps laid for them in the forest; but the downside is that questions such as why these traps are there and who laid them simply aren't dealt with. Not that anyone goes to see a slasher, Belgian or otherwise, for narrative coherence and internal logic, but I was left with the impression of only having seen half a film: some very good ideas around which a flimsy story has been thrown.

*Cub* really delivers the goods in terms of blood and guts, chucks in a few genre references to please horror buffs like me, and sails right past anything which resembles a taste barrier; continuing the Argento theme, it also has a terrific, pounding, Goblin-style soundtrack. Strong stuff, then, and if Govaerts had toned down the humour, or conversely toned down the violence, he would have been on to a winner; as it stands it's an uneasy mix of the two and not for the faint hearted. You have been warned...

Daniel King

### Fortean Times Verdict

A FULL-ON SLASHER THAT WON'T BE FOR EVERYONE

7

## THE REV'S SCARY SHORTS

### THE SLEEPING ROOM

Second Sight, £9.99 (DVD)



When a Brighton call girl meets a charming new client she starts falling for him; but the old Victorian brothel he's renovating has a murky, snuff-movie past, and a supernatural force is about to be unleashed. Running a meagre 78 minutes, there's some decent ideas and atmosphere in this film, but the ambition of its makers is constantly undermined by a visibly low budget. There are clichéd characters and some

clunky acting, but it's a reasonably spooky pot boiler. **Rev PL 5/10**

### THE FOUR WARRIORS

Metrodome, £9.99 (DVD)



Three weary soldiers and their Saracen captive returning home from the Crusades chance upon a mysterious village. They quickly discover that a mysterious force is besieging the settlement, and is taking the men and children... *The Magnificent Seven*, by way of *Beowulf* and *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, this movie wears its influences very much on its sleeve but uses them in a fun way. As with most low budget

action/adventure movies, the lack of money can sabotage ambition: it would have been better to keep the 'monsters' permanently in shadow or out of focus, for example, because we get to see them, they're really not all that. Nevertheless, there are some great moments of tension when the film hints at dark things in the forest.

Richmond Clements **6/10**

### HORNS

Lionsgate, £9.99 (DVD), £12.99 (Blu-ray)



Daniel Radcliffe stars in this unsatisfactory film adaptation of Joe Hill's novel *Horns*. He's Ig Perrish, a young man hounded by the media and his fellow townsfolk who blame him for the murder of his girlfriend Merrin (Juno Temple). Tormented by their accusations, Ig wakes up to discover he's sprouted a fine pair of devilish horns on his head. Apart from getting in the way of his array of hoodies, there are other

side-effects, such as those around him being compelled to tell the truth and his new found ability to see the past when touching people. All this helps in his quest to discover the real story behind Merrin's murder. The main problem with *Horns* is one of tone. Alexandre Aja's movie seems unsure whether it is a satirical parable or a full-on fantasy. The unsuccessful attempt to be both results in an overlong overwrought film that swerves from great black comedy moments – as when the news crews are induced to fight each other or the gay cop partners to come out – to the never-ending special effects-driven climax in which Radcliffe goes 'full devil' on us. Flashbacks to Ig and Merrin's idyllic romance and their circle of childhood friends leads to an elimination game as to which of them is responsible for the killing. Unfortunately, Radcliffe does little of note with the central role, and the character veers in the blink of an eye from self-righteous, wrongly accused victim to supernaturally-powered avenger with no moral conscience. The conceit of the unwanted horns is rather quickly forgotten in pursuit of solving the murder mystery. Black comedy, moral parable or special effects-driven horror; they're all part of *Horns*, but the elements don't blend terribly well.

Brian J Robb **5/10**

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*Horror in Culture & Entertainment*

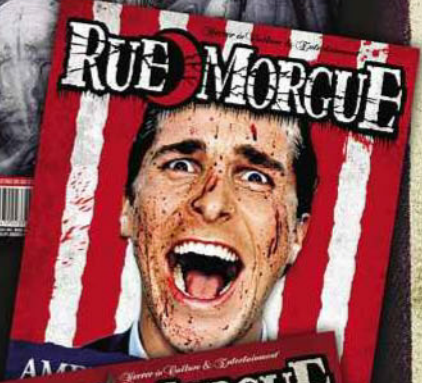
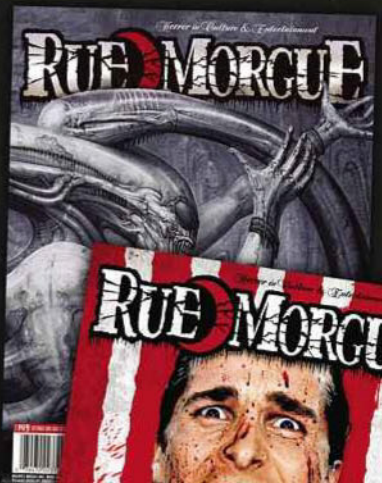
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Dear FT...

# letters



## Hurly burly

Regarding Simon Young's report on fairy hurlers [FT327:27]: in myth and legend hurling is a very violent game, especially those matches between the fair folk. One legend explaining why the Romans never invaded Ireland is that a scouting expedition witnessed two Irish tribes playing hurly and reported back to their masters that Hibernia was inhabited by extremely violent savages. However, the modern game is a highly skilled and fast sport with very little violence. After watching the excellent *Fire in Babylon*, I can safely say cricket can be more violent.

**Paul Whyte**  
Dublin, Ireland

## Snow on their boots

The origin of the 'Russians are coming' WW1 story [FT328:74] is confidently claimed for my native Ross-shire. Troops were hurried south by train from Dingwall and arrived in London shaking the snow off. When they were asked where they came from, they gruffly replied 'Ross-shire', which in local pronunciation sounds more like 'Roshshur'.

**Ewan McVicar**  
Linthgow, Lothian

BH Liddell Hart once suggested in a book that a statue should be erected to the unknown railway porter who influenced the battle of the Marne by misunderstanding the answer "Ross-shire" to his query as to where strange looking troops had come from...

**Phil Barker**  
Selly Park, Birmingham

## Posh soot

Re Mythconceptions #185, FT324:23 (Washing in hot water): I spent most of my working life in the tyre industry and one of the ingredients of tyre rubber is carbon black. This is really just posh soot, but it has a very small particle size. We were told that should we ever come into contact



## Simulacra corner

Sue Mattson noticed these pinecones in Hampton, Georgia, which she thinks resemble a bigfoot sitting on a branch.

*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](mailto:sieveking@forteanimes.com) – and please tell us your postal address.*

with this, we were to wash it off in cold water, as hot water would cause the skin pores to enlarge, and so trap the tiny carbon particles. I have no idea if there is any scientific basis for this, or whether it was a bit of industrial folklore, but I was always very careful to keep away from the "Black 'Ole" where this stuff was delivered.

**Steve Yates**  
Erdington, Birmingham

## Tod Browning

In his otherwise fine review of the MGM horror film *Freaks*, [FT328:63], Rev Peter Laws repeats the myth that this movie ended the career of the director, Tod Browning (incidentally, it's Tod, not Todd). The film's failure – it was a flop with audiences as well as worrying the studio – did Browning no good, of course, but it didn't "cost him his career" let alone "fling him into... permanent Hollywood freakdom". Browning continued working for

MGM until 1939, making more horror films, including *Mark of the Vampire* and *Devil Doll*, and then retired on his considerable savings and investments.

It is more accurate, though less dramatic, to say that Browning's career slowly fizzled out during the 1930s, following the death of his favourite star and collaborator, Lon Chaney, and the coming of sound. As the Reverend points out, Browning wasn't very confi-

dent with sound technology and *Dracula* (a project intended for Chaney) is more interesting visually than it is dramatically. It is better to view *Freaks* as the final flourish of the silent era's greatest horror director who never quite got to grips with the talkies.

**Marcus Latham**  
Kent

## Refined torture

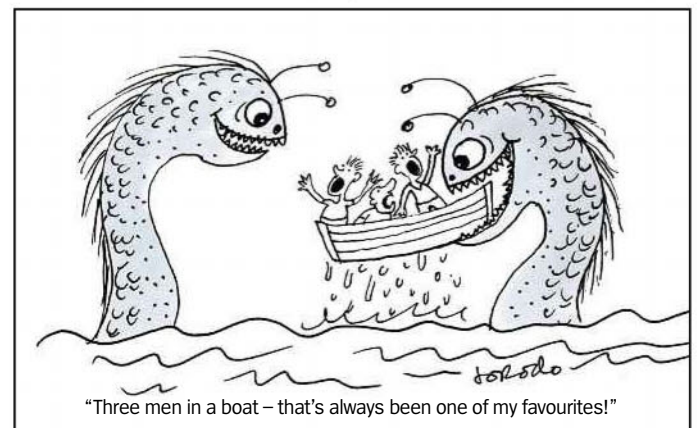
The point of crucifixion [FT326:38-41, 327:72] was not to kill the condemned quickly but to show others what they would suffer for their crimes. A hypododium was on the cross so that the condemned could support himself for days. (Later art shows a large spike through the feet.) When it was time for the criminal to die, his legs were broken.

**David O'Neil**  
Greenacres, Florida

## Heat rays

I see there was another putative case of spontaneous human combustion a year ago [FT326:8]. What surprises me is that more research isn't being done into this, since if it could be induced from a distance we'd have a version of the heat ray used by HG Wells's Martians, ready to apply either to large attacking (or resting) forces or maybe to pick off individuals sniper fashion. Why hasn't somebody thought of this?

**D Morrow**  
Corpus Christi, Texas



"Three men in a boat – that's always been one of my favourites!"

JOHN ROBERT DOCHERTY

## Culture shock

Ed Dutton's article *Going Native* [FT289:44-49] opens up an interesting subject for debate. However, I feel somewhat ambivalent about his relating the theory of culture shock and high levels of stress to those anthropologists who experience the paranormal. With regard to the theory of culture shock, Professor Paul Pendersen admits, in his "The Five Stages of Culture Shock" (*Contributions in Psychology*, no 25, 1995), that the topic is a very subjective one and that those exposed to it feel that the experience becomes a profoundly personal encounter. The culture shock 'process' is understood to affect people as they enter a new environment, not when they've already become aculturalised. One would expect 'paranormal' experiences to occur soon after arrival, but the anthropologists Dutton discusses had been engaged in fieldwork for some years. I find it difficult to see how this theory accounts for such experiences, especially as there are plenty of expatriates who are at times exposed to high levels of stress within the business sector but have yet to report anything unusual.

The added assertion is that high stress levels linked with temporal lobe stimulation are triggers that could generate anomalous experiences. This idea just doesn't seem to add up. Can we also include postgraduate students when they're going about their fieldwork? I have yet to hear of any accounts of them encountering the paranormal there. I wonder how many of these students would consider themselves neurotic? It's a little insulting for anyone who possesses both creativity and intelligence.

So when is the culture shock trigger meant to kick in? Perhaps it doesn't have anything to do with professionals placing themselves in a stressful situation. Anthropology is, after all, a subjective science, which demonstrates that perhaps the real trigger for an experience relates to something more universally human. Perhaps there are other types of data that Dutton needs to consider.

Readers may already be aware of some conclusions drawn from important UFO witness studies; for example, the British Anamnesis Project, which was created by the late Ken Phillips and Dr Alex Keul in the 1980s. (For further details see K Phillips, "The Psycho-Sociology of Ufology", in D Barclay & TM Barclay, (eds.) *UFOs The Final Answer: UFOlogy for the 21st Century*, Blandford Press, 1994, pp40-64.) This focused on the life profiles of UFO close encounter witnesses, and I hold firm to the view that UFO experiences have much in common with other 'paranormal' experiences, such as apparitions and ESP.

For the sake of objectivity, and for the provision of comparative data, Phillips and Keul also included in their study a group of people who had experienced other paranormal phenomena (ESP) and a control group. They found evidence to suggest that there are certain people who experience exotic anomalies because they are, quite simply, different from the rest of us.

I believe that there are people who are naturally prone to experiencing the paranormal, partly due to their creative nature but also to a deeper level of meaning associated with the experience. There are other relevant factors, including status inconsistency and agencies of change, which I don't have the space to elaborate on here.

Whilst Dutton is correct about an individual's creativity playing a role, I must stress that it is not the only trigger. When anthropologists encounter the paranormal they have no way of critically analysing it unless they have their own personal belief system. If the experience takes place within an indigenous context, then the anthropologist is likely to make sense of it from a local perspective; having been aculturalised, (s)he is able to absorb cultural ideas and beliefs. Today, anthropologists are encouraged to conduct something called participant observation in which they throw themselves into the indigenous way of life – a method Malinowski himself embraced and encouraged others to use. Although not objective, this method enables

the anthropologist to gain a deep insight into social functionality.

"Anthropologists have often dealt with phenomena for which classical scientific methods were clearly inappropriate. Trying to understand the symbolism and meaning of a myth or a ritual is not like predicting who will win an election or testing experimentally how a rat learns or how a psychology student can be tricked." (RM Keesing and AJ Strathern, *Cultural Anthropology: A Contemporary Perspective*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed, Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 1998, p7.)

So what about the paranormal? This subject doesn't appear to fit into a Western framework, and certainly not into what we would regard as consensus reality.

For many non-Western peoples, paranormal events are interpreted as being caused by agencies of the invisible world or the world of the ancestors/spirits. Indigenous people have names for spirits and understand how these agencies manifest and work. All of this is belief-driven and none of it is accepted by Western rationalism. If anthropologists adopt the tenets of hard science, then the paranormal is something they shouldn't experience outside of an indigenous context. In other words, if they have an experience outside an indigenous setting, then how would they account for it? How would they rationalise it? They probably wouldn't be able to, because we in the West don't have a framework for such experiences except to label them as belonging to superstition and fringe beliefs.

In 1883, Everard Im Thurn (pictured below), the explorer and curator of the British Guiana



Museum, had an interesting experience while living with the Macusi in Guyana. He was once being treated by a *peaiman* (shaman healer) for a headache and a fever. He understood the non-magical nature of the shamanic trance and on this occasion he actually felt the effects of it while in a darkened room with the *peaiman*, where he was exposed to the spirit world of the *kenaima*. He commented: "It was a clever piece of ventriloquism and acting... the effect of all this upon me was very strange... incapable of voluntary motion, I seemed to be suspended somewhere in a ceaselessly surging din... I woke to half consciousness. But always as he came back, and the noise grew again, I once more gradually fell into a state of stupor." He reported no paranormal experiences, as he rationalised the whole thing. But someone else in his place might have interpreted this experience quite differently.

Dutton I believe is correct in stating that subjectivity will likely lead to exposure to paranormal experiences; but I know a good number of anthropologists who are romantic individuals with a love of art, some being accomplished painters or carvers themselves, none of whom have reported any unusual experiences.

I'd like to include a couple of examples from anthropologists who have told me of their own paranormal experiences. The first tale comes from the late British ethnographer and anthropologist Keith Nicklin, who spent a good number of years conducting fieldwork in Nigeria. We met when I worked in the ethnology section at the World Museum, Liverpool, and one evening in a local pub he told about his experiences. He later wrote to me, a year before his unfortunate death in 2002, to confirm and elaborate on them.

In the 1970s, Keith had been employed by the Nigerian Department of Antiquities, in part to rehabilitate the Oron Museum near Calabar, which had been destroyed during the Biafran War of 1967-70. One day, he was planning his regular trip from Lagos to Calabar, a journey he always made by road. The trip was a favourite of his and one of the important stops was at Ijebu-Ode where he could enjoy a dish of antelope or grass-cutter

(cane rat) with rice and chat to the people he encountered there.

On this particular occasion, Keith felt something was wrong about doing the trip by road and requested a plane ticket for the journey. The museum administrator knew that this was an unusual request but offered no comment. Keith's driver, a man by the name of Ufot Isip, would still make the trip by Land Rover. Because the museum administrator was unable to purchase a ticket to Calabar he had instead found a flight to Port Harcourt, which is 92 miles (148km) away from Calabar and about 60 miles (97km) from Uyo where Keith resided.

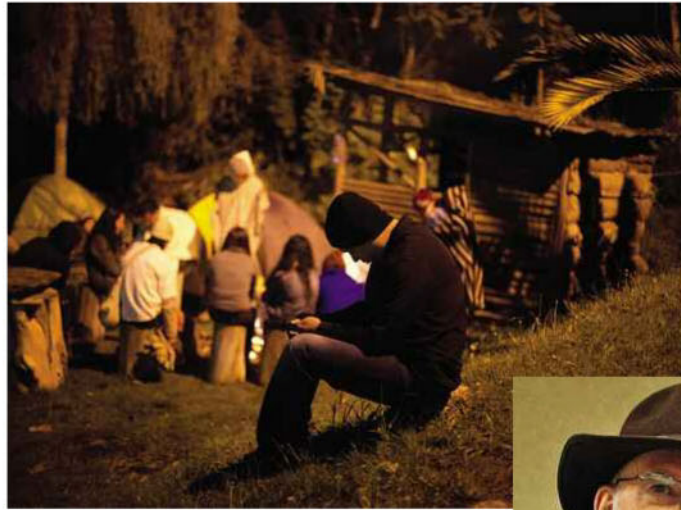
From the airport, Keith's mode of transport was a taxi in the form of a Peugeot 404 estate. In those days, according to Keith, the 404 was the standard car for the Nigerian taxi driver, who drove very fast. They were often nicknamed 'flying coffins' by passengers due to the frequency with which they crashed. There were very few alternative modes of transport for long road trips.

Keith shared the front seat with another passenger; drivers would squeeze people and animals into the vehicle. Once on the open road, the driver put his foot down and Keith couldn't believe his eyes: the car was going 90mph (145 km/h) and more. He recalled his decision not to travel by Land Rover because he thought he would have an accident; now he believed he was going to be killed in this Peugeot. Very frightened, he tried to get the driver to slow down, but was ignored. However, he made it to Uyo unharmed and recounted the story to his wife Jill.

The next morning there was a knock on the door. It was the curator from Oron Museum who had come to pick him up. Keith suddenly asked: "How is he?" The curator was surprised and replied that Keith's driver Ufot had been involved in a serious collision and was recovering in Anua Hospital.

"Who told you he had been hurt?" asked the curator. Keith just explained that nobody had told him, he just instinctively knew, and that was the reason why he hadn't wanted to travel by Land Rover in the first place.

Some time later, at the scene



LEFT: Tourists take part in a traditional ayahuasca ceremony in Colombia.

BELOW: Anthropologist Michael Harner.

touch and smell; it had an incredibly powerful effect on him. He had even felt convinced that he was going to die and that the visions were being presented to him because it was now considered safe to receive such revelations, secrets reserved only for the dead. He also glimpsed visions of Earth from eons ago and encountered

shiny black pterodactyl-like creatures who informed him that they had been fleeing from something that existed in the depths of space.

What he was experiencing would be best described as a shamanic journey where a person experiences death and is then reborn. I found a number of interesting parallels between

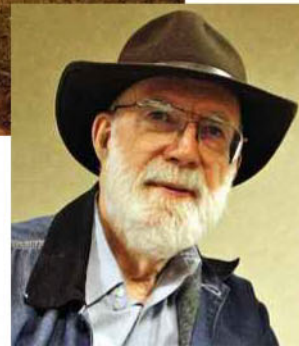
what he was telling me and the narratives of people labelled as alien abductees. I asked him if he thought his experiences were created by his own cultural conditioning or through what he had absorbed culturally from his time in the Peruvian and Ecuadorian rainforests. Neither, he said: for him his encounters in the spirit world were very real, and the profound nature of this experience led him to develop his interest in shamanism.

He also told me that he had read no UFO-related literature. From my conversation with him I felt that his personality did not tally in any way with Dutton's description of people who have such experiences.

Ed Dutton, I believe, has touched upon a truth, but his reductionist reading reveals just one small part of it. By continuing our study of people, not just academics (a study of UFO researchers would prove fascinating), we should continue to find other more significant factors that enable us to explain why certain people experience the paranormal.

**Tony Eccles**

*Curator of Ethnography, Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter*



of the crash site, Keith saw the Land Rover in situ, upside down with a shattered windscreen and the roof all battered in. Then he saw a stout concrete post that had penetrated the bottom of the passenger seat. This was where he would have been sitting had he travelled by car instead of going by plane. He believed that on that day invisible forces had somehow protected him.

Reflecting on this account, any one of us could interpret this story as a set of coincidences, or perhaps the work of a super-survival instinct kicking in. We might refer to it as just good luck. But here we have a classic example of an anthropologist who has studied and sometimes engaged in various Nigerian traditions but, when it came to having his own experience, didn't use anthropology or any other scientific discipline to analyse it. In fact, his experience doesn't reflect an indigenous viewpoint. If anything, it reflects a *personal* belief in the other world. Keith was an outstanding social scientist and a wonderful, creative human being. His personality didn't at all tally with Dutton's idea about the sort of personality traits that attract the paranormal.

Another example was described to me by anthropologist and former Smithsonian curator Michael Harner, author of the iconic 1972 work *The Jivaro*. This book includes a fascinating chapter on the beliefs of the peoples who continue to inhabit the eastern forests of Ecuador and Peru

today. He recalled an incident that had taken place around 1960-61 when he was living with the Conibo people in a little village off a tributary of the Rio Ucayali. This experience is also recounted in his 1980 book *The Way of the Shaman*.

Here, he clearly recalls his drinking of the Little Death or *ayahuasca* (also locally called *Natemä*, this is made from the *Banisteriopsis vine*). Shamans prefer to use *ayahuasca* rather than *maikua* (*Datura arborea*) for going into trance states; the latter would prevent the shaman from singing and interacting with those around him. *Maikua*, on the other hand, is useful if someone is searching for *arutam* (a personal quest to encounter a soul).

Michael's own experience was extremely profound. Despite being aware that he had imbibed a hallucinogen, he interpreted his experience as being very real. His trance journey included, for example, seeing large, strange sailing boats floating through the air toward him, which had been accompanied by the sound of beautiful singing that he described as high-pitched and ethereal. He called these vessels "soul boats". As they approached, he could see that they were occupied by large numbers of bird-headed people. The trance journey had affected all of his senses, from sight to

## Errant gecko

On 9 April 2015, a resident of the Douglas Drive area of Shepton Mallet in Somerset caught this small lizard in the road outside his home. He was fairly sure that it was a gecko, but wasn't aware of any neighbours who kept reptiles. Worried for the animal's safety, he called Secret World at Highbridge, who in turn suggested that he called Tropiquaria Zoo in Watchet. Typically, geckos brought to Tropiquaria are either Moorish Geckos or Turkish Geckos, both of which occur around the Mediterranean coast, and are very common on many top holiday destinations. Although the Shepton Mallet



creature initially looked like an immature Turkish Gecko, the toes were wrong.

After a bit of research, I was able to identify it as belonging to the Genus *Cyrtodactylus*, a group

of geckos with about 195 species currently known and more to be identified. These are primarily Asian, with possibly only one species spreading into the eastern-most part of Europe. Although we do not know which species it is, we do know that it isn't that one, for a number of reasons. Although many small reptiles are imported for the private keeper market, this is one that would not feature greatly in trade as it is a fairly plain species. We would love to know the background to this animal, and ideally its full identity.

**Chris Moiser**

*Zoological Director Tropiquaria, Watchet, Somerset*

## Transylvania still strange

The Reverend Peter Laws's article about Transylvania [FT326:74-77] was very interesting. I went there about two and a half years ago. We went walking in the Carpathian Mountains, after catching a cable car to the Brucegi Plateau. Although Dracula-related things were very much in evidence, our two guides didn't seem to like talking about it, not because of superstition or anything. I got the impression they found it annoying that Dracula was the only thing people knew about Transylvania – even though it does create tourist revenue.

They were, however, very interested in forteana. The stories

about the mountains that we were walking in included: a cave being found containing (by normal standards) super tall, ancient human skeletons that the authorities immediately closed; strange, booming noises heard around the mountains (some of which happened every afternoon at the same time, although not when we were there) for which there was no known explanation; and odd lights seen in the sky. We also saw a rock formation that looked a bit like the Egyptian Sphinx, one legend being that the people who built the Sphinx passed this way and the rock formation gave them the idea [FT304:71]. We spent the night at a mountain lodge, next to a meteorological station, on Omu Peak. One of the tour guides pointed out an area [pictured

below] that some people claim is what might be called a “window area”. So although, as the Reverend Laws says, belief in the old traditions might be gradually dying out, contemporary forteana seems to be thriving.

**Gary Stocker**

*By email*

## Great Whites off UK?

It is no surprise that the best accounts of new or unknown animals come from sailors, divers and fishermen. The bravest of these men were those who fished near Great Blasket Island off the Irish coast of Kerry in the last century. Blasket was finally evacuated in 1954, but the island left us some rich local accounts, written in Irish but translated: Thomas O'Crohan's *The Islandman*, Peig Sayers's *An Old Woman's Reflections*, Maurice O'Sullivan's *Twenty Years A-Growing* and others. All are still available in English from Oxford University Press. My edition of *The Islandman* is translated by Robin Flower (OUP 1979). On page 230 of that paperback edition he writes of an incident that took place off Blasket in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century:

“A shark passed under the boat, swimming backwards and forwards without leaving it, and he couldn't be driven away. One of us was lying along the thwart... his legs were stretching over the gunwale. I was in the stern... and what should I see but the shark

his jaws wide open, making belly upwards, toward the feet. I shouted to the man to draw in his legs. The shark reared up half out of the water, and he nearly sank us with the rush of it... he followed us so long as he had two fathoms of water. We were no good for the rest of that day, and didn't get our courage back for a week.”

I've thought that Crohan's Irish word for this particularly species of shark might be a clue. Somehow, this description doesn't describe the habits of the more expected porbeagle or blue shark; this aggression is more typical of a female great white. It took a lot to spook O'Crohan and his Blasket contemporaries but it kept them ashore for a week. Would the abundance of breeding seals in the Blasket Islands be part of the mystery?

Perhaps there is an Irish scholar who can shed some light on this. I do know that O'Crohan left a very comprehensive list of the Irish names of animals and fishes for the Norwegian scholar Carl Marstrand who studied the life and lore of the Blaskets and its Irish names for local animals.

Canada and Massachusetts have seen some big great whites over the decades in their similarly cold northern waters. Why not the same creature in the Gulf Stream currents around the British Isles where there are abundant seals as a proven food source?

**Tom Bryan**

*Kelso, Scotland*



First-hand accounts from *Fortean Times* readers and posters at [forum.forteanimes.com](http://forum.forteanimes.com)

## Reluctant to depart

Alan Murdie's "Ghostwatch" [FT311:16] made interesting reading in the light of experiences in my own family, where dead relatives have appeared to members of my family in hospital. In 1991, my maternal grandmother passed away in hospital. On one of the last visits my mother made, my grandmother was adamant that her sister-in-law Lily had been in to see her. As my grandmother's mind was wandering, my mother chose not to upset her, so didn't remind her that Lily had died six years earlier. In 1992 Auntie Winnie (Lily's sister) passed away. On the last visit my mother made to see her in hospital, Winnie, whose mind wasn't wandering at all, expressed her surprise that my grandmother, who had died the year before, had paid her a visit. By this point, my mother and I accepted that this was clearly a "family thing" – considering that Winnie and Lily had had an aunt who "saw things moving about that no one else could", it seemed to us that we perhaps have some sort of in-built ability to commune with the dead (it was at about this time I experienced a poltergeist in my friend's house, but that's another story).

Following my grandmother's death, my mother and I regularly saw her – I spotted her walking through Colchester on the afternoon she died (at the time I thought nothing strange about seeing her in the street, though I knew she was in hospital and had been ill some time), and I later saw her standing in a car park in the rain; my mother often saw her walking up and down the high street of the town she lives in, and on more than one occasion has seen her in the passenger seat of other cars. Maybe there just happens to be someone else who looks a lot like her, or perhaps, bearing in mind her fondness for shopping, her spirit continues to parade the retail outlets of Essex.

In May 2000, my grandfather died, but there were no stories from him about otherworldly visitors in hospital, which, I must admit, was a disappointment (especially from the man who entertained me through childhood with ghost stories). That said, something rather strange happened while my mother typed up the order of service for his funeral (he seemed to have worked out how to edit Word documents from *The Other Side*), and on various occasions it's felt as if he's been around – a sensation also experienced by my aunt, who lives in Australia. But we haven't had any further deathbed visits.

However, in 2010 I had an operation that required an overnight stay in hospital. The first strange thing to happen was that, as I came round from the anaesthetic, I was standing at the opening of a tunnel, as I imagine people see in NDEs, and walking away from me were two women and a man, who looked as if they had stepped out of a Jane Austen adaptation. As the hospital is in a spa town, I'm willing to accept it was a dream and the town's history merely influenced



their appearance, but are NDE-style tunnels a usual feature following general anaesthetic? At some point in the night – I haven't a clue what time it was, but it was pitch black and there wasn't a sound from outside, no traffic or people – I woke up. I was convinced someone had come into my room, and I looked over at the wardrobe, where I could see a shape. It was too dark to see anything clearly, but there was the outline of a tall man standing there, and I realised it was my granddad, who had died 10 years before.

It could well be that the super-strength painkillers I had been dosed up on, or the EMFs from the hospital equipment, had some influence over this apparition, but distressed and alone as I was, the presence of my much-loved and much-missed grandfather watching over me was enormously comforting. But whether it was actually his spirit, or my brain tapping into what you might call our "spiritual family narrative", I don't know.

**Helen Barrell**  
*Birmingham*

## Three odd episodes

I would share a few strange experiences. The first one happened in my apartment. My family moved into my grandfather's old apartment when he moved to a retirement home. I was about a year old and have lived here ever since. When my grandfather passed away, strange things started happening. I was about 11 or 12 years old and was starting to be open to the paranormal. Things started to disappear and reappear, lights went on and off, the water tap was turned on, etc.

One of the scariest things that happened was

when I was sleeping in my room. My wardrobe is built in the wall, and it has no handle, just a key in a keyhole. I remember being woken up in the middle of the night by a very loud noise coming from the wardrobe. Then I realised that it sounded as if someone was furiously pulling or shaking the door. It went on for a couple of seconds, stopped, and then continued. It went on and on, and I was completely terrified. My heart was pounding, and I was too afraid to move. After a couple of minutes the door shaking took a longer break. I ran to my parents' room hysterically crying and tried to explain to my mum what had happened. She didn't quite understand, but she let me sleep next to her the rest of the night. I was still very shaky, and I remember I heard that the wardrobe door continued to shake until I finally went to sleep a couple of hours later. This happened twice, and it woke me up, so it couldn't have been a dream.

Another thing happened in the apartment some years later. I remember passing my parents' bedroom, looking into it only from the corner of my eye. What I saw was very bizarre. On my mother's side of the bed I saw a seated black figure, holding his head in his hands as you do when you feel really troubled. I dared not turn to look at the being head-on, because I didn't want to believe what I saw. I think I might have seen the same black figure once or twice after that, but only from the corner of an eye and in different places. I don't know who this is; all I know is that this house is over a century old, and that my family is the third or fourth to live here.

The third strange thing that happened to me was during an early morning walk with my dog. It was October or November and very dark outside. I believe it was around six o'clock in the morning and I was almost the only one out and about at that hour. I usually went for the same walk every morning, around a patch of green in Stockholm called Gärdet. People come here to walk their dogs; it's almost like a big park, with fields and a patch of woods. I walked on one path on the field, and it was almost pitch black. I could barely see what was around me. Suddenly I saw a person walking in the opposite direction to my right, maybe 20-30m (65-100ft) from me. The strange thing was that, though he was moving very fast, his legs were not; it was as if he were hovering above the ground. It didn't occur to me how strange this was, until I realised that he was completely white. I only saw him for a second or two, but if he had been a real person, I wouldn't have been able to see him at all because it was so dark. I wasn't scared – just stunned and amazed. When I had walked a bit further, I decided to go home, because I had begun to feel a little uncomfortable. I know now that Gärdet has been used as a military exercise field since the 17th century. Maybe the figure I saw had some connection with that.

**Helena Engström**  
*Stockholm, Sweden*

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# Why Fortean?



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

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

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-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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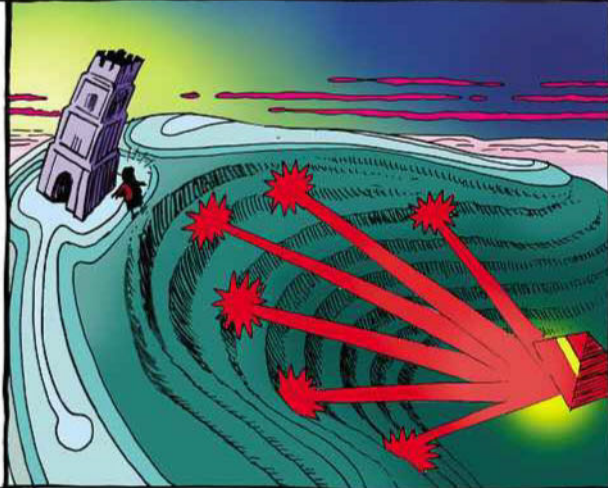
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DION FORTUNE'S VISIONS BECAME MORE ASTONISHING AS SHE GREW OLDER! IN 1924 SHE STOOD ON GLASTONBURY TOR, AND SAW INTO THE BOWELS OF THE EARTH - IT WAS A GIANT UNDERGROUND AMPHITHEATRE LIT WITH RED FLASHES...



AND SHE MET THREE SPIRITS - THE "SECRET CHIEFS" WHO WATCH OVER "ALBION" IN TIMES OF DANGER...



IT TURNS OUT THEY WERE SOCRATES, SAINT THOMAS MOORE, AND A SOLDIER...

FOR THE REST OF HER LIFE SHE RETURNED TO GLASTONBURY AGAIN AND AGAIN, EACH TIME SEEING WONDERFUL NEW THINGS - SHE ONCE HAD A VISION OF WHIRLING DERVISHES...



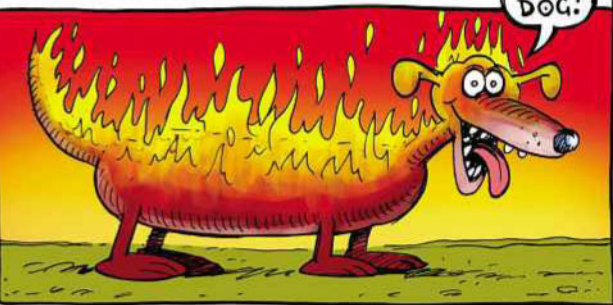
WHILE STAYING IN A WOODEN HUT NEAR THE TOR, SHE BROKE A LAMP AND STARTED A FIRE!



IMMEDIATELY SHE CAST AN ANTI-FIRE SPELL



IT WORKED! THE FLAMES DISAPPEARED, LEAVING NO DAMAGE... INSTEAD, THERE WAS A FIRE SPIRIT - A SALAMANDER, WHICH SHE DESCRIBED AS BEING SIMILAR TO A DACHSHUND...



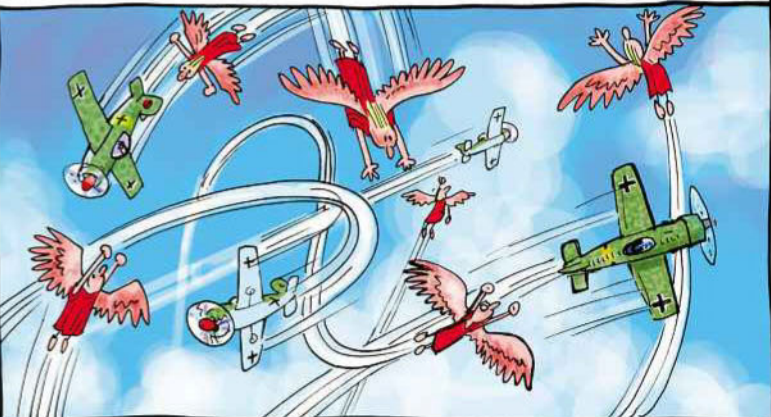
IT BECAME HER PET, AND LEARNED HOW TO WALK UPRIGHT!



WHEN WORLD WAR TWO CAME, DION FORTUNE THREW HERSELF INTO THE MAGICAL DEFENCE OF THE ISLANDS - SHE TRAVELLED ON THE ASTRAL PLANE TO THE CAVE WHERE KING ARTHUR AND HIS KNIGHTS ARE SLEEPING, AND TRIED TO WAKE THEM...



AND SHE EVOKED A SQUADRON OF RED-ROBED ANGELS TO FIGHT THE LUFTWAFFE...



SHE BELIEVED THAT HITLER HAD FOUND OUT ABOUT THIS, AND HAD SET ONE OF HIS BLACK MAGICIANS TO ATTACK HER...



PERHAPS HE HAD! SHE DEVELOPED LEUKAEMIA, AND DIED SHORTLY AFTER THE ALLIES' VICTORY. BUT SHE CONTINUED TO RUN HER MAGICAL LODGE FOR SEVERAL YEARS AFTER HER DEATH, UNTIL POLITELY ASKED TO LEAVE BY AN EXORCIST!



THE END

# COMING NEXT MONTH



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# FORTEAN TIMES 331

ON SALE 20 AUG 2015

# STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL



A white tiger mauled a man to death at a New Delhi zoo in September 2014 as staff and visitors looked on helplessly. The man – Maqsood, aged 20 or 22 – was believed to be under the influence of alcohol. He jumped a low barrier before scaling the enclosure's safety wall to take photographs on his mobile phone or throw stones at the tiger. He then fell or jumped 18ft (5.4m) into a dry moat, where the tiger grabbed him by the neck. *D.Mail, D.Telegraph, 24 Sept 2014.*

Katherine Chappell, 29, was mauled to death by a lioness she was photographing while on a drive through Gauteng Lion Park, near Johannesburg, South Africa, on 1 June. The animal bit her through the passenger window, which she had just opened, flouting cautionary advice to visitors. The American had worked as a film editor on an episode of *Game of Thrones*, along with such films as *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* and *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*. Her tour guide, Pierre Potgieter, 66, suffered a heart attack trying to fend off the lioness, and recovered in hospital. Park staff rushed to chase the big cat away from the stricken woman, but they were too late to save her life. The park covers about 20 acres (8ha) and has 12 lions. There are 200,000 visitors every year. *D.Telegraph, 2 June; D.Mail, Metro, 4 June; D.Mirror, 6 June 2015.*

Every year, more people are killed by cows than sharks. In the US, it is estimated that about 22 people are killed by cows per annum, and of those cow attacks, 75 per cent were known to be deliberate. One third of the killings were committed by cows that had previously displayed aggressive behaviour. In five cases, people were killed by several cows in group attacks; these can be surprisingly well coordinated. When they feel threatened, cows will gather in a circle facing outwards, lowering their heads and stamping the ground. Then the more dominant animals will lead a charge. One man, who was attacked while walking his dog, reported: "I fell forwards and rolled into a ball and every time I tried to get up they jumped on me; they were rolling me along the hill with their legs trying to get me to open up. There were seven or eight cows. There were a couple of leaders."

Cows don't have to intend anyone's death in order to kill them. In July 2013, Joao Maria de Souza, 45, sustained a broken leg when a 3,000lb (1,360kg) cow fell through the roof of his bedroom in Caratinga, southeast Brazil, while he was sleeping. He had no other obvious injuries, but died in hospital from internal bleeding while still waiting to be seen by doctors, according to his family. "I didn't bring up my son to be killed by a falling cow," insisted his grieving mother. "There's no justice in the world." *[FT307:23] io9.com, 18 Mar 2015.*

A herd of Austrian cows charged a German hiker on 28 July 2014 and trampled her to death in a Tyrolean valley. She was hiking with her dog in the Tyrol's Stubaital valley and made the mistake of entering a fenced enclosure containing about 20 cows and calves. The animals became agitated

and charged her and her dog. Attempts by rescuers to resuscitate her failed and she died on the spot. It was the second bovine death in Austria that week after a 43-year-old man was gored to death by a bull in Steiermark. *Irish Times, 1 Aug 2014.*

A farmer was killed last February when he was kicked by one of his heifers. Keith Preece, 62, had been loading a herd onto a trailer with his brother David when three "got spooked" and ran back down the ramp. A Red Limousin heifer kicked out as it went past Keith and caught him in the neck and chest at the farm near Bridgnorth, Shropshire, splitting a main artery. He died later in hospital. On 6 March, Patricia Wishart, 62, was crushed to death by a cow while helping it to give birth in Bixter, Shetland. *Sun, 14 Feb, 31 May; [PA] 10 Mar 2015. For more death by cows, see FT304:27.*

On 29 May, Randy Llanes, 47, a captain in Hawaii's charter fishing business, saw a broadbilled swordfish in Honokohau Harbour and jumped into the water to catch it. He speared the fish but it struck him in the chest with its spear-shaped bill. Onlookers pulled Llanes out of the water and performed CPR until paramedics took him to hospital where he was pronounced dead. KITV showed an image of the fish, which measured 3ft (90cm) long with a bill that extended another 3ft, lying dead at the water's edge. *[R] Japan Times, 31 May; KITV, 1 June 2015.*

The co-founder of a charity that cares for retired circus elephants was killed when one of the animals stepped on him. Police found vet James Laureta, 56, in the barn at the Hope Elephants foundation in Maine. He appeared to have fallen over and struck his head on the cement floor before one of the foundation's two elephants stepped on him, causing multiple chest fractures. Tending the elephants was part of his daily routine at the facility he founded with his brother Tom in 2011. "The elephant was not aggressive in any way," said a medical spokesman. "It was clearly an accident." *D.Mail, 11 Sept 2014.*

A man taking his regular morning stroll in southwest Germany was attacked and killed by an elephant that had escaped from a circus. The man, 65, was walking in woods near the town of Buchen when he encountered the 34-year-old female African elephant, called Baby. She was later captured and returned to the circus. "Either someone forgot to shut the enclosure, or the elephant was released intentionally," said Heidelberg police spokeswoman Yvonne Schmierer. *BBC News, 13 June 2015.*

A cyclist found dead in a South African game reserve was probably killed by a giraffe. Braam Bosse, 45, was reported missing by his family near Bel-Bela in Limpopo province after failing to return from a bike ride on 26 April. His body was discovered in an area densely populated by giraffes. A post mortem examination showed he had been trampled. *D.Telegraph, 29 April 2015.*

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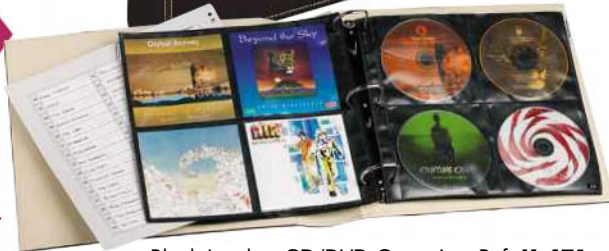
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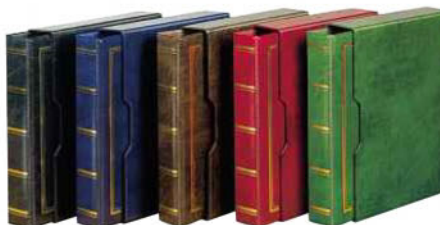
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