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BESTIAL GHOSTS
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Paranormal

SEPTEMBER 2008 • ISSUE 27

Exploring the world of the unexplained

The Exorcists

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EVIL DEEDS

at Cursing Wells

Voodoo

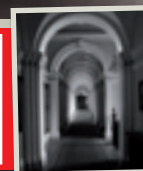
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Exploring the world of the unexplained

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Paranormal

Exploring the world of the unexplained



EDITORIAL

Welcome to Paranormal Magazine



*‘Those who have had any
dealings with the odd are
not interested in the disbelief
of those who have not.’*

So wrote one of the
great researchers into the
paranormal, T C Lethbridge.
Many of you reading this
will have had ‘dealings with
the odd’, or will know well

someone who has. Perhaps you have heard footsteps
in a room you knew to be empty. Maybe you have
seen a ghost or a UFO, or glimpsed a strange
creature out in the countryside near your home.
An extraordinary coincidence may have occurred
in your life or an incident you dreamed about one
night took place some time in the future precisely as
you had dreamt it.

In my childhood I became the focus of poltergeist
activity over the space of two years, so I, too,
know what it’s like to have strange and sometimes
frightening things happen in your life. I write about
these experiences later on in the magazine (pp 72-73).

Here at *Paranormal* we are keen to learn about
our readers’ experiences of the supernatural. You are
warmly invited to tell us your own stories, by letter
or email. Share them with us, and with the rest
of our readers. Perhaps others will follow up with
similar accounts or insights (contact details can be
found at the bottom of this page).

My poltergeist experiences, however, don’t even
begin to compare with those of Michael Hallowell, who
tells us what happened when he and fellow investigator
Darren Ritson tackled one of the most frightening in
recent history – the South Shields poltergeist.

We have been fortunate in securing an
exceptional roster of writers for this, the first of the
new-style *Paranormal* magazines.

Karl Shuker, for example, is one of the world’s
foremost authorities on cryptozoology, the study of
weird or unidentified creatures; I found his article on
the mysterious ‘globsters’ and the possibility of a giant
octopus lurking in the oceans absolutely fascinating.

Paul Devereux is at the forefront of research into
‘anomalous energies’ and his article on strange lights
at sacred sites hints at a previously unknown reason
why temples and ancient stone circles are placed
where they are.

Lionel Fanthorpe is best known for presenting the
Fortean TV series but he and his wife Patricia have
been writing on paranormal subjects for many years,
including their latest, on Voodoo and other mystery
religions, from which we take our illuminating extract.

On a personal level, I was delighted to invite
Janet Bord to contribute with her intriguing
article on cursing wells (black magic in the
heart of the British countryside!), because it
was books like *The Secret Country*, written with
her husband Colin, that first led me down this
obscure and twisty path in to the unknown.

Special mention must be made of our cover story,
an eye-opening and at times chilling exposé of the
practise of exorcism – or Deliverance, as they call it
now – by well-known mystery writer Phil Rickman.

All in all, there’s more than enough in this issue
of *Paranormal* to convince you that even if you have
had no ‘dealings with the odd’ yourself, you’re in
good company by recognising, like Hamlet, that
there is more in Heaven and Earth than is dreamt of
in most people’s philosophies.

Richard Holland, Editor

Tell the editor about your own experience with the paranormal.
Email info@paranormal-magazine.co.uk or write to **Richard Holland**, The Editor,
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NASA knows about aliens

Former astronaut says he was 'briefed' on UFO contacts and has spoken to NASA personnel who have met ETs

Invasion of the spammers

A MALICIOUS spam campaign has been claiming aliens have landed in New York. The dodgy emails invite net users to click on a video of the spurious invasion. Anyone foolish enough to do so, however, will end up downloading a 'Trojan horse' virus. Computer security experts Trend Micro tracked down the source of the spam to 'a specific location in Russia'. [SOURCE: Web User, Aug 1]

Apollo 14 astronaut Dr Edgar Mitchell has announced on live radio that he knows for a fact world governments have been in regular contact with extraterrestrials.

In an interview on heavy metal station Kerrang!, Dr Mitchell claimed aliens have made contact with humans several times but the information has been suppressed for decades.

Dr Mitchell, who enjoyed a long career at NASA, told Kerrang! presenter Nick Margerrison: 'I happen to have been privileged enough to be in on the fact that we've been visited on this planet and the UFO phenomenon is real. It's been well covered up by all our governments for the last 60 years or so, but slowly it's leaked out and some of us have been privileged to have been briefed on some of it.'

'I've been in military and intelligence circles who know that beneath the surface of what has been public knowledge, yes, we have been visited.'

Dr Mitchell, 77, has a BSc in aeronautical engineering and a PhD in Aeronautics and Astronautics. During the 1971 Apollo 14 mission, he became the sixth man to walk on the moon.

Dr Mitchell said he had spoken to sources at NASA who have met the aliens. Apparently, they follow the classic 'Grey' physiognomy of small frame, large head and large eyes. They were described to him as 'little people who look strange to us'.

Dr Mitchell also warned that alien technology was considerably in advance of our own.

'Had they been hostile,' he said, 'we would be gone by now'.

This is not the first time the former

astronaut has stated his belief in an extraterrestrial presence on Earth; in a 1999 interview with *UFO Magazine*, he hinted that 'there is a faction in our government – a "quasi-government" – that is well aware of the truth'. However, the claims made on the radio interview in July this year are unequivocal regarding alien contact and government cover-ups. He implied that times have changed.

'This is really starting to open up,' said Dr Mitchell. 'I think we're headed for real disclosure and some serious organisations are moving in that direction.'

The astonished Kerrang! team contacted NASA to learn their views on the matter. Needless to say, the space agency was keen to bring them back down to earth.

A spokesman replied: 'NASA is not involved in any sort of cover-up about alien life on this planet or anywhere in the universe. Dr Mitchell is a great American, but we do not share his opinions on this issue.'

[SOURCE: National press, including *The Daily Mail*, July 25; *www.kerrangradio.co.uk* July 24; *www.ufomag.com*, Aug 1.]



UFO hacker loses appeal

Arguably the most accomplished computer hacker ever, Gary McKinnon, faces spending the rest

of his life in an American prison after losing his appeal against extradition.

Mr McKinnon admits accessing 97 US military and NASA computers from his bedroom in Wood Green, North London, in the hope of uncovering secret files on UFOs. However, US prosecutors claim his activities also rendered inoperable 300 computers at a navy weapons station immediately after the

terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

The now unemployed systems analyst admits his actions were 'misguided' but denies damaging computer systems. On the contrary, he feels the US military should be grateful that he highlighted their security problems.

'I'm extremely sorry I did it, but I think the reaction is completely overstated,' he said on a recent interview with BBC Radio 5 Live. 'I should face a penalty in Britain and I'd gladly do my time here. To go from, you know, perhaps a year or two in a British jail to 60 years in an American prison is ridiculous.'

His solicitor said: 'Gary McKinnon is neither a terrorist, nor a terrorist sympathiser. His case could have been properly dealt with by our own prosecuting authorities. Instead, we believe that the British Government declined to prosecute him to enable the US Government to make an example of him. American officials involved in this case have stated that they want to see him "fry".'

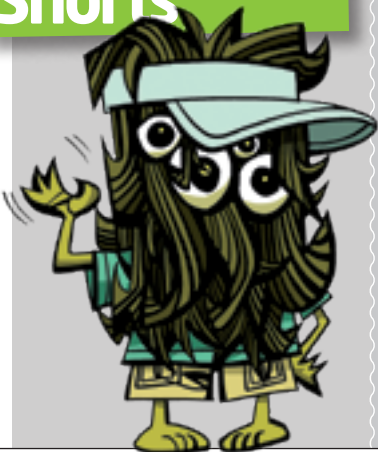
McKinnon lost his final appeal against extradition after law lords were told he rejected a plea bargain in which he was offered a shorter prison sentence of three or four years in return for pleading guilty. They dismissed his claim that threats made against him by US prosecutors amounted to an abuse of process.

McKinnon's only hope now is to persuade the European Court of Human Rights to put a 'stay' on proceedings, pending consideration of his case. However, this is unlikely to do more than put off the inevitable. As we went to press, we learnt 'interim relief' of two weeks (ie up to August 28) had been granted by the European Court, prior to hearing his application in the full chamber.

[SOURCE: National press, including *Times Online*, July 31; BBC Aug 12]

'The UFO phenomenon is real. It has been well covered up'

Paranormal Shorts



DARK KNIGHTMARE

Following our article on curses last month, it's interesting to see that a new media-created curse may be brewing.

The *Dark Knight*, the latest, and grimmest, Batman movie is the new target. Following the untimely death of Heath Ledger, a series of other unhappy incidents involving the film's stars have been linked.

First came allegations that Christian Bale had assaulted family members; then Morgan Freeman suffered a car crash; later it was announced Freeman and his wife of 24 years are to be divorced.

All together now: 'Holy coincidence!' But watch it run.

[SOURCE: Luchina Fisher on 6abc.com, Aug 11]

SCREAMING KIDS

THIRTY-FIVE children in Tanjung Lumpur school, Malaysia, are still suffering the effects of a mass hysteria which affected their school last May. Malaysian schools seem particularly prone to hysterical outbreaks, in which mainly girls scream uncontrollably and smash and throw things.

State education director Abdul Aziz Abdul Latif has offered parents and guardians of the affected students the choice of transferring them to another school, in the hope this will cure them. To help prevent further incidents, special religious recitals will be held and a bomoh (shaman) will 'cleansed' the school.

[SOURCE: <http://news.asiaone.com/> Aug 9]

GOBBLER BOGGLER

PENSIONERS are being victimized by a foul fowl in Nova Scotia.

The jet-black, 2ft-tall unidentified bird emerged from a wood and rushed at Myles Rafuse, 80, making a 'howling noise' with its wings partly outstretched. He had to fend it off with his jacket. The same bird swooped on Goldie Stewart, 73, barely missing her scalp. Ms Stewart said it was 'enormous' and made a crying-like sound.

Local wildlife expert Randy Milton has ruled out the suggested culprits of raven, goshawk or cormorant. He thinks it might be a turkey. But surely anyone would recognize a turkey?

[SOURCE: *The Chronicle Herald* (Nova Scotia) Aug 6]

BAFFIN BAFFLER

THREE unexplained big bangs rocked Canada on the same night.

At Kincardine, Ontario, on July 31, two mystery blasts shook houses and rattled windows and doors. The nearby Bruce nuclear power station denied responsibility. Some residents reported seeing 'meteors' during the disturbance.

A Canadian Ranger reported an explosion off the coast of Baffin Island on the same date. A huge plume of smoke was seen and several dead whales found on a beach. Early reports suggest no vessels were known to be operating in the area, nor any activity that could have been responsible.

[SOURCE: *Windsor/Toronto Star*, Aug 7]

CURRY'S UPSETS

A POLTERGEIST has been creating a few shocks for the staff of Curry's electrical store in Newbury, Berkshire. Liam Freemantle, aged 20, says the spook inhabits a stock room above the premises.

Mr Freemantle and colleagues claim to have had coins thrown at them and seen chairs and desks sliding unaided across the room.

The stock room forms part of a dilapidated flat, one room of which can only be accessed through two internal doors. One day, says Mr Freemantle, both these doors were found jammed shut – on the inside – by two long metal bars.

[SOURCE: *Newbury Today*, Aug 6]

STARTLING AND 'SAUNTERING' SEA MONSTERS

GRABBING headlines around the USA was a mobile phone photo of a hideous animal carcass found washed up on Montauk Island, New York.

The Montauk Monster looked like a fuzzy dead pig with a prominent beak. The photo gave no indication of its size and the corpse was found opposite an alleged animal research facility – cue media frenzy.

Alas, it appears to have been nothing more than a little dead raccoon, the mysterious 'beak' turning out to be merely part of its skull protruding from its rotting fur.

During the same month, in Alaska, a beached beast with a tail was being claimed as an Inuit lake monster and vague tales of aquatic

dinosaurs were emerging from Papua New Guinea.

And in South Wales, Carol Morgan caught sight of a living sea monster, 'the size of a small cow', at Pembroke Dock. Carol told *The Western Telegraph* that its face looked like that of a pot-bellied pig. After foraging on a slipway, 'it sauntered into the water,' said Carol.

It was suggested it was that it may have been a manatee, carried to Britain on the Gulf Stream currents, but if so it will be the first one ever recorded.

[SOURCE: *Gawker.com*, July 31; *Fox News* etc from then on, plus *sciencemag.com/tetrapodzoology*; *Seward Phoenix* (Alaska) Log, Aug 7; *The Western Telegraph*, Aug 9; *Cryptomundo.com*]

More Paranormal News →

Is this the year of the yeti?

With a claimed corpse of a Bigfoot wheeled out for the world's press at a conference in California, the DNA testing of two hairs claimed to belong to a hairy biped in India and new evidence brought back of a Russian man-beast, 2008 may be the year the Yeti and his kin become accepted by science.

Much to our frustration here at Paranormal Magazine, the Bigfoot body allegedly found in a forest in Georgia, USA, was due to be presented to the world the day after our deadline. At least we got to see the one picture released on the internet.

Famed American cryptozoologist Loren Coleman was the only official recipient of this picture initially. On his Cryptomundo.com website, Coleman was upbeat about the discovery: 'I feel in all honesty that this may indeed be the real deal, and I say this from visual information that has been shared with me.'

The official press release on the conference states that the corpse is of a male creature that 'looks like it is part human and part ape-like. [It] is seven feet seven inches tall, weighs over 500lbs, has reddish hair and blackish-grey eyes. The feet are similar to human feet [and] its footprint is sixteen and three quarters inches long. The creatures walk upright (several of them were sighted on the same day that the body was found.'

The body was allegedly found by Matthew Witton and Rick Dyer, who together run Bigfoot expeditions. Tom Bascardi, who has spent decades hunting the creature and who runs a company called Searching For Bigfoot, has seen the evidence and says he is convinced by it. Unfortunately, the all-important corpse will not be at the conference, but Witton and Dyer promise it will be examined by a range of scientists at a secret location. Time will tell.

Hope over hair tests

You don't need a whole corpse to identify an unknown species. Two hairs which might be from a Norther Indian relative of the yeti called the mande barung, or 'forest man', are currently undergoing scientific analysis.

Initial examinations have proved promising. Ape expert Ian Redmond says the hairs eluded microscopic identification as any species of mammal known to inhabit the region where they were found.

The hairs were given to the BBC by yeti enthusiast Dipu Marak, who collected them himself. He says the mande barung is a black and grey ape-like creature that stands about 3m (nearly 10ft) tall and weighs about 300kg (660lb).

'It's perfectly possible that there are pockets

of jungle there where a previously undiscovered primate could exist,' said Mr Redmond.

Fortunately, the two hairs each contain follicles, making DNA tests possible. Each hair will be tested by a different laboratory. The results of these tests could prove very exciting indeed.

Evidence for the Almasty

A team from the Centre for Fortean Zoology have returned from the Caucasus Mountains with evidence of the Russian version of the yeti, the almasty.

Cryptozoologist Richard Freeman said: 'We found hair, dung and skull shards that may be from an almasty. These are going to be analysed by geneticists in order to establish if the DNA points to an unknown species.'

Freeman and fellow explorer Adam Davis may have had a close encounter with an almasty while staking out an abandoned farm one night.

Freeman said: 'We were in a room in the farmhouse. The 7ft-high door was open a couple of inches and starlight was flooding through. We heard a deep, guttural vocalisation. A few seconds later something passed by the door, blocking out the starlight to a height of at least 7ft. We grabbed our cameras and rushed out into the night, but whatever it was had vanished.'

The expedition was partially sponsored by geneticist Bryan Sykes, of Wolfson College, Oxford University through his company Oxford Ancestors. His team's analysis of the samples' DNA is expected soon.

[SOURCE: Loren Coleman on Cryptomundo.com, Aug 12; Alastair Lawson, BBC Oxford and Andrew Ffrench in the Oxford Mail, both July 24; CFZ and North Devon Gazette, Aug 4.]

Monster tax bill threatens museum

Donations are being sought to save the International Cryptozoology Museum run by legendary chaser after legends Loren Coleman.

The museum, run from Coleman's home in Portland, Maine, got into trouble after an audit by the American taxation office, the IRS.

Says Coleman: 'What was being challenged initially was the reality of "cryptozoology" as an occupation. I had to educate the IRS on what



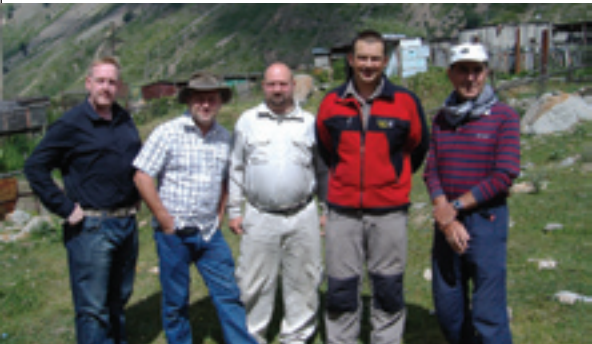
CREATURE DISCOMFORT: Loren Coleman with a life-size Bigfoot dummy at his museum, which is currently under duress thanks to an unkind tax audit. © International Cryptozoology Museum

cryptozoology is. I established proofs for them of how books, films, TV interviews and more were generated by what I did, delivering DVDs, books and comic books as physical evidence of cryptozoology at home and of expeditions, for example, to the swamps of the South or to Loch Ness.'

At length the taxmen were convinced Coleman's occupation really was a business, not just a hobby. But they remained adamant over the museum's place in Coleman's 'income stream', and they have landed him with a monster tax bill.

The International Cryptozoology Museum, which is stuffed to the gills with artifacts, photographs and replicas relating to mystery beasts worldwide, is now under threat. If you'd like to learn more about the museum or make a donation to help pay the bill and ensure the collection is maintained, visit:

www.cryptozoologymuseum.com



WILD MEN: The five-man team from the Centre of Fortean Zoology ready to seek out the Almasty, the legendary 'wild man' of the Caucasus Mountains. From left, Keith Townley, David Archer, Richard Freeman, Adam Davies and Dr Chris Clark.

Love me, love my ghost

A FORMER HOMICIDE INVESTIGATOR CLAIMS HE IS PLAGUED BY THE GHOST OF A PRIEST WHO HAS BEEN FOLLOWING HIM ABOUT FOR 30 YEARS.



Rick Bolling, 61, of Lockport, Louisiana, told his local paper The Daily Comet that he is now used to his phantom hanger-on but he has to be careful not to anger it. When roused, the spirit will retaliate by rearranging furniture or inducing him to vomit.

His partner, Pat Poche, said she became aware of the spirit's visits almost as soon

as she started going out with Mr Bolling. She has witnessed a spinning lampshade, a clock wandering off a bookshelf and doors which have been mysteriously unlocked, with the deadbolt broken.

One night, she said, they were lying in bed when liquid was poured all over them.

'I was soaking wet,' said Miss Poche. 'The clothes he was in, he took them off, and the next morning they were still wet. You could wring water out of them.'

Mr Bolling believes the spirit has been caught on film and has several photographs where, he says, it appears as a thick white mist.

[SOURCE: The Daily Comet (Louisiana), July 30]



EYES ON THE PRIZE: Dr Colin Ross is hoping to prove he can beam energy out of his eyes in order to claim \$1 million. © Colin A Ross Institute

Eyebeams spy out \$1m

LAST MONTH WE REPORTED that the \$1 Million Dollar Paranormal Challenge organised by arch-sceptic James Randi was about to be wound down. Now comes news that a fresh challenger has thrown down the paranormal gauntlet while the \$1 million prize is still available.

Randi's scheme serves as a challenge to anyone who can show, under proper observing conditions, evidence of any supernatural or occult power or event. The new applicant is a doctor no less, actually a psychiatrist – Dr Colin A. Ross, of Dallas, Texas.

Dr Ross claims he can transmit energy beams from his eyes that will make a tone sound out of a speaker. For more than 300 years, Western science has stated that no energy of any kind is emitted from the eyes. When you feel someone staring at you, for example, this is dismissed as coincidence.

Dr Ross will initially need to demonstrate the validity of his human eyebeam in preliminary tests, once the test protocol is agreed upon. To date, no one has passed the preliminary tests on the way to the \$1 million prize.

However, the rules of the challenge state that Randi is only interested in a demonstration of the claim; he does not require theories as to how the

paranormal power works. Dr Ross will not therefore need to explain how his human eyebeam works – only that it does work.

One suspects the challenger will nevertheless be unable to resist offering an explanation – he is about to publish a book entitled *Human Energy Fields*. Dr Ross, founder of the Colin A. Ross Institute, is the author of 18 books and over 135 scientific papers, many of them dealing with psychological trauma and multiple personality disorder. He has spoken to mental health professionals around the world, including several conference presentations on energy fields.

He said: 'Once this energy is identified and captured, as I have done, it can be studied and used for many applications in medicine and other fields.'

Dr Ross plans to use the \$1 million to develop scanning equipment for medical use and to carry out research on the therapeutic uses of these alleged human energy fields.

To learn more about Dr Ross visit the Colin A Ross Institute website: www.rossinst.com. To learn more about the James Randi Educational Foundation and the Paranormal Challenge visit: www.randi.org.

[SOURCE: Colin A Ross Institute press release, July 31]

'Ghost town' residents live in fear

When a town falls into disrepair and is abandoned by its populace it is often referred to as a ghost town. Mombasa's Old Town in Kenya, however, is fast becoming a ghost town in more ways than one.

Old Town is something of a tourist attraction, gifted with a unique architectural character showing influences from Africa, Asia and Europe. Many of the buildings retain their 19th century facades with beautiful carved doors, arched windows and elegantly styled timber balconies. Nevertheless, the narrow alleys of this historic town could soon be deserted thanks to a growing fear that its crumbling houses are becoming the haunts of evil spirits.

Abubakar Twalib is one resident in dread of the uncanny newcomers in Mombasa. The house next door to his, separated by a narrow alleyway, is crumbling into ruin.

'This abandoned house is OK during the day but is a habitat for unknown people at night,' says Twalib. He has forbidden his children to go anywhere near the house, in case they should hear unearthly voices calling their names.

'We fear that once somebody hears their name being called and replies, ghosts can capture their spirits and destroy them,' he says.

Another resident, Mr Zavery Fkrudin has to escort his children to the nearby mosque because they have to pass a haunted house on the way. He says people often hear the footsteps of invisible people when they pass the house.

'My children must be escorted,' says Fkrudin. 'If there is no one available, they will take a different route.'

The remaining residents want an end to these haunted houses and others like them which may attract evil spirits in the future. They have petitioned the National Museums of Kenya to demolish them. Because of the historic nature of Mombasa's Old Town, however, it is a conservation area: agreement has not been forthcoming.

The issue is complicated further by the surprising fact that not all of the properties believed to be haunted have been abandoned. For example, one houses the office of Jagani Auctioneers, which has been operating in the Old Town for the last 75 years. Ms Naaz Jagani told Kenya's East Standard newspaper: 'This building symbolises our sweat and blood. Although it has been abandoned upstairs, we are still here because of that attachment.'

They deny that evils spirits have taken over the building, as claimed



by their neighbours. She has pleaded with the owner of the building to repair it so that they can be allowed to operate without harassment and quash the rumours.

Mr Abdulswamad Ali, an engineering technologist with the National Museums of Kenya, admits that his office has received several complaints about ghosts but shrugs off claims of an invasion by evil spirits.

Ali says that since Old Town is a protected historical area, it should be renovated but they have run out of funds and a reconstruction project has stalled.

Unless funds are found, the danger is that this important heritage site will continue to crumble, its ruin precipitated by the moving away of its frightened remaining residents. In the end, Old Town may be left to its ghosts.

[SOURCE: Ngumbao Kithi in the East Standard (Nairobi), July 27]



Illustration © Elizabeth Robinson

THE BEAST OF BRYMBO

*Something devilish has been seen lurking round a village in North Wales. It took Paranormal editor **RICHARD HOLLAND** 15 years to track a rumour to its source. Now he has met two witnesses.*

Twenty years ago a friend, Wendi, told me a very strange story. The child of a young mum Wendi knew had come home in tears one afternoon after being frightened by what he described as 'a cow standing up like a person' and glaring at him and his little friend. On seeing this monster, the two children had run home in terror (as indeed would I).

Childish imagination? A trick played on two small children? Something like that, I thought – but the eerie image of this 'cow' on its hind legs stayed in my memory. There was something so medieval about it, so devilish.

Unfortunately, Wendi had lost touch with the young mum and because she had heard the story a year or two previously, she couldn't remember where exactly it was supposed to have taken place. All she could tell me was that it was 'somewhere near Wrexham [in North-East Wales] and that it was on a path that goes up a hill in the middle of the village and acts as a short cut'.

Come forward two decades and I happen to mention this odd anecdote to another friend, Jonathan, who told me: 'That sounds like Brymbo. The village is split into two levels, with a big sandstone outcrop dividing them. There's a path called the Red Path which goes up it.'

The town of Wrexham blurs and blends with numerous satellite towns and villages, of which Brymbo (pronounced 'Brumbo') is

one. An iron smelting works built here in the 18th century became one of the most important steelworks in the country and most of the population of Brymbo would have been employed here. The semi-industrial nature of the village didn't seem a suitable location for such a Gothic ghost, and Jonathan, who was brought up in Brymbo and knows the village well, had never heard of it being haunted by such a spectre. This didn't sound promising.

Jonathan mentioned the mystery to his mother, however – and she had heard something about it. Indeed, she recalled speaking to two women who had encountered something very similar.

And this is how I met sisters Gwyneth Jones and Rhian Speed. Their brush with 'The Beast of Brymbo' (as I can't resist calling it) took place one bright, moonlit night in December, 1985. Gwyneth and Rhian told me they had been walking home after a night out at the Miner's Arms and were perfectly happy to admit they had had a few drinks before their sighting. However, there was no doubting their conviction; indeed, S became a bit tearful when she remembered how frightened she had been. Personal experience has shown me that genuine encounters with the Very Strange can have that effect.

Gwyneth told the story, with occasional corrections or added

There it was, standing on the bank. It was cow-like, standing on its hind legs and at least 6ft tall.'



WITNESSES: Gwyneth and Rhian revisit the place where they saw the Beast of Brymbo glowering down on them.

'I've never forgotten it. Just talking about it now, I can feel my hairs pricking up.'

details from Rhian. This is a summary:

'We were walking up the Red Path at about midnight. When we got near the top, we paused for a breather, leaning on the railings. Just there, to the left, there is another set of very steep steps which you can take as a short cut. I suggested we use them, although I wasn't being serious because they're very overgrown and can be slippery. But because I did so, Rhian looked up in that direction.

'Rhian said: "What's that looking at us?"

'I looked up and there it was, standing on the bank. It was cow-like, standing on its hind legs and at least 6ft tall. It was a light brown colour and smooth haired. There were two little bumps where you might expect horns. We could see it clearly because it was illuminated by the moon and the streetlights.

'It just stood there, frowning down at us with its eyes wrinkled up. Its hooves were sort of dangling down in front of it. We ran up the Red Path but then realised it could easily cut us off at the top. When we got there, though, it had vanished.'

Rhian continued: 'I realised I had dropped my scarf on the path, so I had to go back for it. I was so frightened. The thing didn't appear again but I didn't dare use that path for a whole month'

That was the end of their adventure. There's no doubt in my mind that the two children saw the same thing, possibly in the same year. Gwyneth and Rhian are convinced it wasn't somebody in a costume: 'It was too realistic. The proportions were all wrong and the legs were too thin.'

It may have been some sort of dummy but someone must have been waiting there on that cold night for it to have vanished again so quickly. There is a flat area of grass at the top between the Red Path and the housing estates, backed by a sandstone cliff face.



Illustrations by Elizabeth Robinson

This is presumably an old quarry. On the site today there is a Millennium monument which includes a low wall in its design, but in the 1980s there was no obvious cover for a person to hide behind, let alone with a big, scary dummy for company.

There is another story I learned about which may have some connection with the Beast of Brymbo. Jonathan's brother-in-law Malcolm Jones told me that one night in the summer of 1971 he was walking home to Brymbo from the neighbouring village of Minera when he, too, saw something weird. The time was about 9 o'clock and it was twilight. As Malcolm walked up a lane which led into the village, the silhouette of 'a big thing' emerged from the hedge on his right-hand side.

'At first I thought it might be a cow,' said

Malcolm, 'but it wasn't. It was the wrong shape: too tall with long, thin legs. It had a similar silhouette to our lurcher dog when you see it running along the beach. But it was a bigger animal: not as big as a cow, perhaps, but certainly bigger than a dog. It had shaggy hair.

'It didn't make a sound, just stopped in the middle of the road and seemed to stare at me, although I couldn't see its eyes. Then it lost interest and carried on walking across the lane, where it disappeared into the vegetation on the other side.

'That's what made it so spooky. Apart from looking weird, it didn't behave like an ordinary animal: the way it looked at me, as if it was weighing me up. It wasn't fazed by a human presence and most animals are.

'I remember I just stood in the road for a fair while after it had gone, a little afraid to carry on walking. I'm not saying it was anything supernatural; I don't really believe in that sort of thing. But it was very strange. That's why I've never forgotten it. Just talking about it now, I can feel my hairs pricking up.'

In the daylight, Malcolm examined the scene and found no gates or openings in the hedges bordering the lane (I couldn't find any either, when I went to check). There is a steep bank on the side from which the animal emerged but Malcolm told me that, inexplicably, the creature stepped straight into the road, with no indication that it had walked down a slope – it was as if it had come straight out of the bank.

Malcolm's 'beast' resembles a type of apparition familiar to students of folklore: the Black Dogs. Black Dogs, as their name suggests, have black hair, which is often shaggy; they are commonly described as being 'the size of a calf'; and they are most often encountered in lonely lanes at twilight. In Wales the Black Dogs are known as Gwylgi (Dogs of the Twilight).

When I examined the bank, I came to the conclusion that, in keeping with Brymbo's history, it was of industrial origin. However, if it turned out to be much older, this would be significant, for Black Dogs are often reported as haunting prehistoric earthworks.

Malcolm's spook, of course, bears only a passing resemblance to the even more alarming one seen by J and S. It was walking on four legs, for one thing, and it had shaggy hair, rather than the smooth pelt described by the two women.

On more than one occasion in the 1920s, an archaeologist saw another Gwylgi patrolling a lane south of Haverfordwest, in Pembrokeshire, and it bore striking similarities to both apparitions. He described it as a 'large black creature', about the size of a St Bernard dog, 'but its head and forequarters were more like a goat's or a calf's and it had short horns'.

Was the Beast of Brymbo a rare variant of the Black Dogs – one that had learned to stand upright like a man? Your guess is as good as mine but one thing I feel sure about: we haven't heard the last of it.



NEXT MONTH we will be running a major feature on the Black Dog phenomenon in Britain.

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Threatening messages, robotic voices, pools of blood and urine, ripped flesh and hurled knives: the South Shields Poltergeist is one of the most frightening on record.

MICHAEL HALLOWELL recounts his first-hand experience of investigating this malignant entity.

What you are about to read is a true story of poltergeist infestation. The account has not been exaggerated, 'massaged' or made to sound more dramatic than it really was. It is, I believe, one of the most shocking cases of its kind in the annals of paranormal research.

In the summer of 2006, my fellow researcher, Darren Ritson, was told a strange story by one of his colleagues. Her friend's daughter believed she had a 'ghost' in her house. Would Darren be able to help? Darren is a seasoned investigator who has written two books on his ghost-hunting activities, and was intrigued by the challenge. He then telephoned me and asked if I'd be interested in researching the case with him. I took little persuading.

The family concerned consisted of Marianne, a woman in her twenties, her partner, Marc, slightly younger than herself, and Robert, her three-year-old son from a previous relationship. They lived in a quiet, terraced house in South Shields in the North East of England.

When Darren and I first visited their house we found it to be quite unremarkable. The building was a little over 20 years old and furnished in a modern style. There wasn't anything remotely creepy about the place; in fact, it was in essence no different to thousands of other residences throughout the country.

According to Marianne, the family's problems had begun the previous December around the time her new boyfriend moved in. Occasionally they'd hear the odd banging noise from upstairs, find that a set of keys had been moved or notice that a door they were sure they'd shut was now wide open. On each occasion they assumed there must have been a rational explanation; they just couldn't figure out what it was.

But then things got worse. Toys and other objects would be found at the top of the stairwell when no one was around to put them there, and strange noises would emanate from the baby monitor hooked up to Marianne's son's room. The couple began to feel disturbed. ●

'They assumed there must have been a rational explanation. But then things got worse.'

'The poltergeist seemed to like an audience, and would happily throw coins, pencils, ice cubes and other objects around in our presence.'

Then one day, Marianne's brother came to visit and asked to use the bathroom upstairs. What he found when he approached the upper landing stunned him. Hanging from the loft hatch by its reins was a heavy, wooden rocking horse that belonged to Marianne's son, Robert. This incident convinced them they needed help.

On our first visit to Marc and Marianne's home, Darren and I had an open mind. We sometimes get several cases a week offered to us for investigation, and only rarely will the resident entity, whatever its nature, put on a live performance. Most of the time we'll leave open-minded, not convinced one way or the other.

But this time it would be different. This poltergeist seemed to like an audience, and would happily throw coins, pencils, ice cubes and other objects around in our presence. From the first visit we were able to take pictures of these objects *in situ* and also record bizarre noises on tape.

At this point we weren't fazed by the poltergeist's antics, because they were typical of the sort of thing that most poltergeists do; the only difference was the entity's seeming willingness to carry out its mischief in front of anyone who cared to watch.

One of the most macabre incidents occurred when the 'polt' placed a toy rabbit and duck on a small plastic table with a carving knife that had previously been reported missing from the kitchen. The knife was theatrically held at the duck's throat by the rabbit.

Darren recalled: 'On one occasion, I saw two large, blue toy building blocks fall from Robert's room down past the patio doors that led into the garden. No one was upstairs at the time, and the blocks had been seen in the bedroom only a few moments earlier.'

On another occasion, out of the corner of his eye, Darren saw a toy car appear in the corner of the room near the ceiling and drop to the wooden floor with a clatter. Later, the poltergeist moved a lampshade in Robert's room. One moment it was hanging correctly from the ceiling, the next it was tilted at a bizarre angle. Shortly after we photographed it, it mysteriously returned to its normal position.

Darren and I asked Marianne to keep a diary of events, being careful to note what had transpired, the location and the exact time. Within days she had made pages of entries, each one detailing an increasingly bizarre list of strange phenomena. With hindsight, I admit we were a little naïve in the reassurances we gave to the family. ●



INVESTIGATORS: Darren Ritson, left, and Michael Hallowell personally experienced the malign antics of the South Shields Poltergeist.
© Darren Ritson & Michael Hallowell

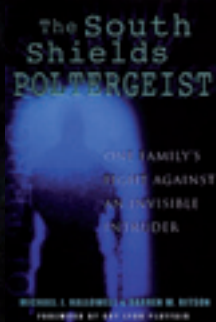


Above MACABRE: The poltergeist demonstrated a black sense of humour when it arranged this stuffed rabbit holding a kitchen knife to a toy duck's throat. © Darren Ritson & Michael Hallowell

Right LIGHT FANTASTIC: This light fitting was twisted to one side, then restored to its original position moments after the photo was taken. © Darren Ritson & Michael Hallowell



'Things took a decidedly sinister turn. Marianne began to receive disturbing text messages on her mobile phone.'



The South Shields Poltergeist by Michael J. Hallowell and Darren W. Ritson (with an introduction by Guy Lion Playfair) is published by Sutton and priced £16.99 (hardback). ISBN: 978-0-7509-4874-6

'It was incredible to watch. Within minutes his flesh went from being unmarked to looking like something that had been attacked with a butcher's knife.'

'Don't worry,' we said, 'these things are unsettling, but poltergeists normally have a very short shelf life. After a few weeks it should have died down.'

But things did not die down. In fact, they took a decidedly sinister turn. Marianne began to receive disturbing text messages on her mobile phone. Some merely said things like 'Hello', or 'I'm going now', but others were little short of terrifying, including a number of obscene death threats. They were sent from telephones that were disabled and not in working order.

The text messages were complemented by others left on her son's 'doodle-board' – a plastic frame with a writing surface that could be scribbled on with a stylus. In the doodle-board messages, the polt introduced himself as 'Sammy', and demonstrated violent mood swings. Sometimes he'd leave messages that were almost friendly in nature, only to leave others containing threats and foul epithets minutes later.

To get Sammy to leave a message on the doodle-board was unnervingly simple. The board, with its writing surface left blank, would be placed in the toy cupboard in Robert's room. Shortly afterwards a thump or a bang would be heard from the cupboard, which would then be opened. Hey presto, another message from the polt would be found. Darren and I photographed and filmed these dialogues taking place, and can state categorically that no trickery

was involved. Later, photographs of the messages would be examined by graphologists both in the UK and the USA, with intriguing and disturbing results.

Seemingly not satisfied with intimidation through words, Sammy racked up its tactics a few notches. It began to throw objects at the couple, sometimes bruising them. A ceramic money pot and a coffee mug were both smashed to smithereens. Pools of water started to appear in Robert's room; one pool was composed of urine.

Worse was to come.

One evening, just before midnight, I received a call from a clearly distraught Marianne. The polt had attacked Marc and they were both terrified. Within half an hour I arrived at their home, and found Marc's body covered in angry-looking welts and scratches. He told me he had felt a burning sensation on his body before the cuts appeared. I photographed them, and then explained to the couple that I was beginning to suspect that Marc was the focus. The couple were so frightened, they asked me if I would stay for the night.

Later that night, the polt threw a toy car at Marc, opened and shut wardrobe doors and threw coins. Marianne and I saw a shadowy form walk from the bathroom into the master bedroom. In the master bedroom, Marc then noticed the burning sensation start up on his torso again. I told him to lift his T-shirt. To my amazement, I saw that almost all of the earlier cuts had disappeared – but more cuts and weals were starting to form.



ATTACK: Michael filmed cuts and weal's appearing on Marc's body in one of the most shocking aspects of the case. © Darren Ritson & Michael Hallowell

Fortunately, I had the presence of mind to film them as, one by one, they manifested on Marc's back. It was incredible to watch. Within minutes his flesh went from being unmarked to looking like something that had been attacked with a butcher's knife. I have since watched the footage scores of times, but it never loses its ability to shock me.

We headed back downstairs. The family took refuge in the living room while I 'kept vigil' in the kitchen next-door. At first all was quiet, but then I noticed a bottle of mineral water on the table in front of me: balanced at a 45° angle, its base barely making contact with the table. I grabbed my camera and took four separate clips of film as the bottle wobbled on the table, defying the laws of physics. Eventually, I pushed it over with my finger, and it hit the table with a clatter.

When Darren and I reviewed the footage later, we realised we were in the middle of a case which possessed extraordinary potential. We were to witness Marc being severely cut by the poltergeist on three more occasions, and on each we were able to film it as it occurred.

Darren has commented that 'it was one of the most bewildering things' he'd seen in his life.

As the affair drew to its long-awaited climax, the poltergeist became more aggressive. One afternoon, I arrived to find Marianne running out of the patio doors at the rear of her house.

'Mike, it's trying to kill me!' she screamed. The polt had thrown knives at her.

I told Marianne and Marc to stay in the garden while I went inside. I was just in time to see a knife hurtle from the direction of the kitchen before landing several feet away on the floor.

By this stage, 'Sammy' had begun to speak through one of Robert's toys. Whenever this happened the voice was always chilling, robotic.

'Come to solve a mystery?' it would spew sarcastically, among other things.

'The polt had attacked Marc and they were both terrified. Marc's body was covered in angry-looking welts and scratches.'



DIALOGUE: Messages from 'Sammy', which appeared on a child's doodle-board, were less than friendly. © Darren Ritson & Michael Hallowell

It repeated the performance when Bob and Marrissee Whittaker from Orion TV arrived to interview Marianne.

A good number of people connected with the case, directly or indirectly, suffered from 'contagion' or 'spillage': that is, they started to experience symptoms of poltergeist activity themselves. They included me. On one occasion, a heavy book was thrown from a shelf onto the floor, and on another a disturbing image appeared on my computer screen.

I could go on forever, almost, listing the truly horrific events that occurred during the investigation. A toilet bowl being filled with blood, the letters 'RIP' being scratched into the wall of Robert's bedroom: the malign creativity of the South Shields Poltergeist seemed endless.

During the investigation, accumulating evidence from the infested house was not difficult; the polt certainly seemed happy to "play to the crowd", as they say. Understanding the nature of the phenomenon was a far harder task.

The South Shields Poltergeist – without doubt the most manipulative, violent and sadistic entity I have ever encountered – was eventually brought to its knees. After we applied a mixture of ancient spiritual rituals and modern science – suggested by

a university lecturer who helped us – the entity faded away. To our knowledge it has not resurfaced, but our confidence is muted. Recently there have been disturbing indications that it may once again be active – although, bizarrely, not in the same location.

Darren and I have learned many lessons from the investigation. We are now a lot less sceptical about the poltergeist phenomenon in general, and I'm far less tolerant of those who glibly dismiss the idea as nonsense.

At one time, if someone said to me, 'There are no such things as poltergeists – it's a load of baloney', I would respond politely and tell them that their point of view was interesting, although I reserved the right to disagree. Now? Now I tell them that unless they've been through our experiences – witnessed the things we've seen – they should just shut up. Believe me, seeing someone having their flesh cut to ribbons by invisible hands has a way of wonderfully strengthening one's convictions. ☺

MICHAEL HALLOWELL is a full-time freelance writer and paranormal investigator. He writes the UK's longest running paranormal column, Wraithscape, in the Shields Gazette.

Read about the Editor's own childhood experience of a poltergeist – thankfully less aggressive than the one in South Shields – on page 72.

Tunguska

*This summer marks the centenary of one of the most dramatic events in the history of UFO research – the destruction of a 50km-wide area of Russian forest by something that came down from the sky. **NICK REDFERN** reveals that the mystery has only deepened over the intervening years.*

Nick Redfern is the author of many books on UFOs, cryptozoology and the paranormal. His latest, *There's Something in the Woods*, is published by Anomalist Books. He can be contacted at his website: www.nickredfern.com



"The sky split in two and fire appeared high and wide over the forest. I became so hot that I couldn't bear it, as if my shirt was on fire."

Early on the morning of June 30, 1908, numerous people in the region of Tunguska, Russia, and specifically in the hills northwest of Lake Baikal, witnessed what was described as a large column of blue light moving deliberately across the dawn sky.

Approximately ten minutes later, the sighting was followed by the sound of a tremendous explosion that decimated the area, and caused damage hundreds of miles away from the presumed impact site of the unidentified intruder.

The event was captured on seismic equipment in Britain; while in the United States, both the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory and the Mount Wilson Observatory recorded significant atmospheric changes in the immediate wake of the event that lasted for a period of three months.

In the days that followed, Russian newspapers reported extensively on the mystery. The July 2, 1908, edition of the *Sibir* newspaper stated:

'In the N. Karelinski village the peasants saw to the North-West, rather high above the

A Russian Roswell

According to data revealed by Russia "UFO crash-retrieval" investigator Anton Anfalov, in the summer of 1947, during the rebuilding of the city of Kiev, which had been decimated by the Nazis during the Second World War, workers discovered buried underground a 'strange object' described as a 'silvery, streamlined cylinder' around six metres in length.

Reportedly, the device was 'excavated' and a team of 'military field engineers' was brought in to deal with the find. Anfalov's sources state that a determination was made to the effect that the object was very old - possibly even in the region of 5,000 years. Contained within it were 'two small chairs for two very small pilots'.

Studies of apparent alien technology found within the UFO by Soviet scientists allegedly aided the development of 'Soviet missile and space technology, including the design of metal alloys, instrumental design, control systems and some construction elements', says Anfalov.

Source:

Russian Crash Retrieval Report, www.virtuallystrange.net/ufo/updates/2003/dec/m07-029.shtml

DEVASTATION: Thousands of fully grown trees were flattened by the Tunguska event.



horizon, some strangely bright bluish-white heavenly body, which for ten minutes moved downwards. The body appeared as a “pipe”, i.e. a cylinder. The sky was cloudless; only a small dark cloud was observed in the general direction of the bright body. It was hot and dry. As the body neared the ground, the bright body seemed to smudge, and then turned into a giant billow of black smoke, and a loud knocking was heard, as if large stones were falling, or artillery was fired. All buildings shook. At the same time the cloud began emitting flames of uncertain shapes. All villagers were stricken with panic and took to the streets; women cried, thinking it was the end of the world.’

After the initial flurry of excitement, however, the story rapidly vanished into large-scale obscurity, and did not resurface to any great extent until 1921. In that year, Leonid Kulik, who was a Russian mineralogist, visited what is known as the Podkamennaya

“In 2004, investigators found “two strange black stones” that were cube-shaped and “manifestly not of natural origin”.”

Tunguska River basin on behalf of the Soviet Academy of Sciences.

At the time, Kulik concluded that the object that had caused such widespread destruction was a meteorite; and, as a result, a full-scale expedition began in 1927. Interestingly, the Soviet Government agreed to fund the expedition on the specific grounds that it was likely such a huge meteorite would have deposited a massive amount of iron in the area; and the recovery of the iron itself would both cover the cost of the expedition and prove to be a major boost to the Soviet economy.

On arriving at the scene of the presumed meteorite crash, however, Kulik’s team was

very surprised to find there was no impact crater at all. Instead, there was a huge, 50km-wide area of flattened and burnt trees. Over the course of the next decade, Kulik initiated no less than three expeditions to the area, in an attempt to determine what had really occurred at Tunguska back in 1908.

In 1930, Kulik recorded the following firsthand testimony from witness Semen Semenov: ‘At breakfast time I was sitting by the house at Vanavara Factory, facing north. I suddenly saw that directly to the north, over Onkoul’s Tunguska road, the sky split in two and fire appeared high and wide over the forest. The split in the sky grew larger, and the entire northern side was covered

“A rare mutation among the human natives of the region also arose.”

with fire. At that moment I became so hot that I couldn’t bear it, as if my shirt was on fire.

‘From the northern side, where the fire was, came strong heat. After that such noise came, as if rocks were falling or cannons were firing, the earth shook, and when I was on the ground, I pressed my head down, fearing rocks would smash it. When the sky opened up, hot wind raced between the houses, like from cannons, which left traces in the ground like pathways, and it damaged some crops. Later we saw that many windows were shattered, and in the barn a part of the iron lock snapped.’

Further experiments, undertaken in the mid-1960s by Russian scientists, demonstrated that, in all probability, the Tunguska ‘meteorite’ had approached the area at an angle of 30-degrees from the ground – which advanced the theory that the object responsible for the devastation had actually exploded in mid-air, rather than having slammed into the ground. This revelation ultimately led to other, more novel ideas to explain the event: such as an exploding comet, an asteroid, a black-hole, and even a form of anti-matter.

The most intriguing theory, however, suggests that nothing less than a UFO – an extraterrestrial spacecraft – exploded high in the skies over Tunguska on that fateful June day in 1908. Indeed, one Alexei Zolotov, an influential and noted Soviet scientist, postulated that a nuclear-powered alien spaceship had suffered a mid-air calamity over Tunguska – which resulted in the widespread devastation in question.

The possibility that a malfunctioning UFO was the root-cause of the Tunguska incident was also addressed in the book *The Fire Came By*, written by John Baxter and Thomas Atkins. The pair stated that there was evidence of changes in the earth’s magnetic field at the time of the event; and they also suggested that the pattern of destruction in the woods and forests around Tunguska was indicative of an atomic explosion having occurred.

Vladimir V. Rubtsov, Ph.D., a proponent of the theory that an alien spacecraft came to grief at Tunguska, has also commented on the atomic angle: ‘The work by the first postwar Tunguska expedition, organized in 1958 by the Committee on Meteorites of the USSR Academy of Sciences, compelled everyone involved in the discussion to agree: the Tunguska space body had in fact exploded in the air and therefore could hardly have been an ordinary meteorite.’

Rubtsov continued that: ‘A rare mutation among the human natives of the region also arose in the 1910s in one of the settlements near the epicentre. According to Dr. N. V. Vasilyev, examination of the state of health of the native inhabitants reveals population genetic effects similar to those observed in the regions affected by nuclear weapon tests. Maybe we are even dealing in this instance with a novel type of nuclear reaction.’

And bringing matters more up to date, in August 2004, Yuri Labvin, president of the Krasnoyarsk-based Tunguska

Spatial Phenomenon Foundation – which is comprised of geologists, chemists, physicists and mineralogists – announced that while on an expedition to the Podkamennaya Tunguska River in July of that same year, his team found ‘two strange black stones’ that were cube-shaped and ‘manifestly not of natural origin’.

Labvin, who believes that aliens crashed at Tunguska, added somewhat intriguingly that ‘their material recalls an alloy used to make space rockets, while at the beginning of the 20th century only planes made of plywood existed’. Not only that, Labvin also claimed to have discovered evidence that a comet had come down in the area, too.

His conclusion: that on June 30, 1908, the comet and the UFO catastrophically collided, and created the decimation that can still be seen to this day. To date, however, the world’s scientific community is still waiting to see the evidence found during the course of Labvin’s expedition.

A definitive answer to the question of what caused such devastation at Tunguska 100 years ago still eludes us, it seems.

The CIA and a Soviet Crash

One of the most intriguing reports of an object of undetermined origin crashing to earth in Russia can be found in the now-declassified UFO files of none other than the CIA.

An Agency document of November 22, 1989, refers to then-Soviet media reports on an ‘amazing event that took place on Hill 611 near the village of Dalnegorsk in Primorskiy Kray.’

The CIA documentation adds: ‘Many observers saw a flying sphere crash into one of the hill’s twin peaks, and physicists and other scientists from the USSR Academy of Sciences are still studying the “fine mesh”, “small spherical objects”, and “pieces of glass” that are considered to be small remnants left behind by the sphere. The alleged spacecraft was nearly obliterated in the crash, but there appears to be enough material at the site for the scientists – a mixture of UFO “enthusiasts” and sceptics – to eventually “penetrate this mystery”.’

To date, no further data on this intriguing event has been declassified by the CIA.

Source:

Central Intelligence Agency report, November 22, 1989, declassified under the terms of the United States’ Freedom of Information Act.

MYSTERY: No crater was found at the site of the explosion – indicating to researchers that the destruction was caused by something far stranger than a meteorite.



Sources:

Sibir, July 2, 1908. *The Fire Came By*, John Baxter & Thomas Atkins, Doubleday, 1976. *Cauldron of Hell*, Jack Stoneley, Simon & Schuster, 1977. *The Day the Sky Split Apart*, Roy A. Gallant, Atheneum, 1995. *The Unknown Tunguska*, Vladimir V. Rubtsov, *Fate*, May 2001. *Great 1908 Tunguska Explosion – UFO Meets Comet?*, AFP, August 23, 2004



beware of the blobs

*Zoologist **Karl Shuker** goes in search of giant octopuses, first taking a look at clues that are simply too big to ignore –*
the globsters.

Mystery beasts come in all sizes and shapes, but in the case of Globsters they are not only famous for their great size but also for their conspicuous lack of any well-defined shape.

Aptly named by American cryptozoologist Ivan T. Sanderson in the early 1960s, Globsters (also dubbed Blobsters or Blobs) are generally huge, amorphous masses of decomposing tissue, usually rubbery, covered in fibrous 'hair' and lacking any recognisable body parts or skeleton. They are regularly washed ashore on beaches around the world.

hairy lumps

The first Globster to attract international attention was discovered on the beach north of Tasmania's Interview River by three eyewitnesses in August 1960. Measuring about 6 m long, 5.5 m wide, and 1.2 m thick, with an estimated weight of 5-10 tonnes, it was composed of tendon-like threads attached to a fatty substance that did not readily decompose.

Despite its unusual appearance, it was left uninspected on the beach for over 18 months until some on-site tests were finally conducted on 7 March 1962 by Australia's CSIRO (Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation), which proved inconclusive. A second CSIRO analysis 10 days later revealed that proteins, in particular the connective tissue protein called collagen, were its primary constituents.

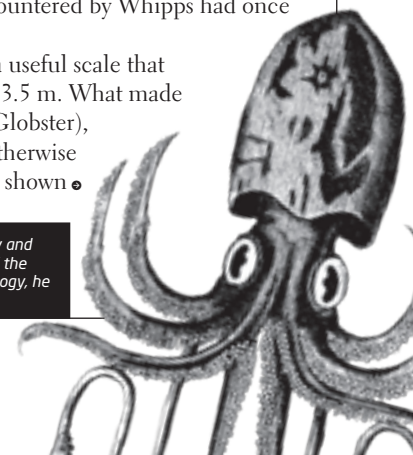
In 1965, another hairy Globster, 9 m long, was found on a New Zealand beach, and a smaller one, only 2.5 m long, turned up in November 1970 on a Tasmanian beach. More recently, Tasmania hosted yet another Globster stranding when in 1998 a 6m, 4-ton specimen drifted ashore on Four Mile Beach. What made this example particularly interesting was that it sported several sturdy projections resembling tentacles.

Another tentacled enigma was the stranded Globster spied by tourist Louise Whipps on Benbecula, a small, remote island in the Outer Hebrides. Until now, Benbecula's claim to cryptozoological fame had been the burying here more than 170 years earlier of a supposed mermaid, but whatever the putrefying entity encountered by Whipps had once been, it had definitely never been a mermaid.

A photo of Whipps sitting beside the Globster provided a useful scale that confirmed her estimation of its length - a relatively modest 3.5 m. What made the Benbecula specimen unexpectedly eye-catching (for a Globster), however, was the series of tentacular flaps that fringed its otherwise flat, elongate form. Staff at Newcastle's Hancock Museum, shown •



Karl P. N. Shuker PhD is a zoologist and an expert in cryptozoology, animal mythology and wildlife anomalies. A scientific fellow of the Zoological Society of London, a fellow of the Royal Entomological Society and a member of the International Society of Cryptozoology, he is the author of a dozen books on mysterious phenomena.





The St Augustine Globster was the largest ever found, and a tiny sliver of it still survives in a laboratory. Early tests suggested it was the remains of a gigantic octopus. © Fortean Picture Library

Whipps's photo, were unable to offer any positive identification of this Globster, and despite the photo later appearing in countless media reports worldwide, it remained unidentified.

Equally well publicised was the so-called Bermuda blob – a grey 2.5-m rubbery specimen discovered washed up on a beach in Mangrove Bay, Bermuda, by Teddy Tucker during May 1988. Waves subsequently washed it back out to sea, but not before Tucker had removed a chunk of its flesh and preserved it in formalin.

Whatever the putrefying entity had once been, it had definitely never been a mermaid!

Tissue samples were also obtained from a Globster cast up from the depths in August 2001 at St Bernard's, Fortune Bay, in Newfoundland, as well as from the most famous Globster of modern times – the enormous gelatinous specimen discovered washed ashore on 23 June 2003 by a crowd of perplexed coastal villagers from Los Muermos, southern Chile. Measuring a stupendous 12.5 m long, 5.6 m wide, 1 m high at its tallest point, and estimated to weigh over a tonne, it was wholly shapeless in form, leathery in texture, and grey and pink in colour, inspiring some news reports to liken it to a squashed elephant! With such a vast quantity of tissue available, it is heartening to learn that samples were indeed taken for scientific testing.

Clearly, there is no shortage of Globsters on record – but what exactly are they? Resembling no known species, they have been the subject of heated zoological and cryptozoological debate for decades – with identities ranging from some wholly unknown marine species or decomposed whales to rotting shark carcasses and, most intriguing of all, the putrefied remains of gargantuan octopuses, far bigger than any currently recognised by science.

monster - puses

The world's largest known species of octopus is *Enteroctopus dofleini*, with a maximum recorded tentacle (or, technically, arm) span of 7.1 m. Having said that, a freakishly large specimen of *Haliphron atlanticus* was dredged up by a fishing trawler off New Zealand's Chatham Islands in March 2002 that sported an estimated tentacle span of 10 m (it was an incomplete, badly-damaged individual). However, some truly gigantic octopuses that would put even the latter to shame have been reported from a number of disparate locations over the years, suggesting that science has far from confirmed the upper size limit of these

mighty eight-limbed monsters of the deep.

Hawaii has a longstanding history of giant octopuses, including two sightings in 1950. A greyish-brown monster said to be the size of a car, with suckers as big as dinner plates along each of its 9.3-m tentacles, was seen by diver Madison Rigdon about 200m off Oahu's Lahilahi Peninsula one Sunday morning. The octopus was being attacked by several sharks, but succeeded in warding them off, after which it released a huge quantity of black ink and swiftly sank out of sight.

An even bigger octopus was reported later that year, this time spotted by fisherman Val Ako as it rested 10m or so underwater on a reef off Hawaii's Kona Coast. Ako claimed that its tentacles were around 25m long, armed with suckers as big as car tyres, and stated that it was still there half an hour after he had first sighted it.

Gargantuan octopuses have sometimes been blamed for disturbing or raiding shellfish traps placed on the seabed. One such case featured Bermudan fisherman Sean Ingham, who lost two very sizeable prawn traps to an elusive underwater plunderer between 29 August and 3 September 1984, the second of which had been snapped from its cable at a depth of 560 m.



When laying some more traps 16 days later, however, he had a terrifyingly close encounter with his foe, when without warning something grabbed hold of his boat from below, and effortlessly dragged it along for more than half a kilometre before finally releasing it again. Moreover, the vessel's sonar equipment revealed that the mysterious underwater boatnapper had been 15.5m

high and pyramidal in shape, i.e. the typical shape of an octopus, but one of gigantic proportions.

On Christmas Eve 1989, a massive octopus – “as huge as an imported cow”, according to one eyewitness, Agapito Caballero – allegedly rose to the surface and attacked a motorised canoe transporting a number of people in waters off the southern Philippines. Twelve •

Multi-limbed monster

A truly bizarre sea monster was allegedly sighted between Antibes and Nice in 1562. Oval in shape, with a pig's head at one end and a trunked elephant-like head at the other, it boasted no less than eleven claw-bearing limbs. Is it possible that this weird entity, depicted in the *Paralipomena* (supplement) to the second edition of Conrad Gesner's *Historiae Animalium Liber IV: Piscium et Aquatiliu Animantium Natura* (1604), was a distorted description of a giant octopus?



Wobbly shark killer

In 1953, while testing a new type of deep-sea diving suit in the South Pacific, an Australian diver encountered a Lovecraftian horror from the ocean's unpenetrated depths, which I documented as follows in my book *From Flying Toads To Snakes With Wings* (1997):



"The diver had been following a shark, and was resting on the edge of a chasm leading down to much deeper depths, still watching the shark, when an immense, dull-brown, shapeless mass rose up out of the chasm, pulsating sluggishly, and flat in general outline with ragged edges.
"Despite appearing devoid of eyes or other instantly recognisable sensory organs, this malign presence evidently discerned the shark's presence somehow, because it floated upwards until its upper surface made direct contact. The shark instantly gave a convulsive shudder, and was then drawn without resistance into the hideous monster's body. After that, the creature sank back down into the chasm, leaving behind a very frightened diver to ponder what might have happened if that nightmarish, nameless entity had not been attracted towards the shark!"

In the past, a deep-sea octopus has been offered as a possible identity for this disturbing creature, but as I discussed in detail within my book, a far more satisfactory candidate is a deep-sea jellyfish. Whereas all octopuses have tentacles, some deep-sea jellyfishes do not. What they do have, however, are potent stinging cells called nematocysts on their bodies (and tentacles if they possess any), armed with venom that swiftly paralyses their prey. This would readily explain the immediate paralysis of the shark. Moreover, jellyfishes do not possess true eyes but they are equipped with sensory structures responsive to water movements. Consequently, the creature would have learnt of the shark's presence by detecting its movements in the water. How lucky, then, that the diver had remained stationary!
Interestingly, Chilean legends tell of a very similar beast called the hide, likened in shape and size to a cowhide stretched out flat, with countless eyes around its perimeter, and four larger ones in the centre. As it happens, jellyfishes possess peripheral sensory organs called rhopalia that incorporate simple light-sensitive eyespots or ocelli. Moreover, some jellyfishes also have four larger, deceptively eye-like organs visible at the centre of their bell, though in reality these organs are not eyes at all but are actually portions of their gut, and are known as gastric pouches.



survivors were rescued, clinging to their overturned canoe, by some fishermen on Christmas Day. The survivors claimed that once the octopus had capsized the canoe by grabbing its outriggers, it had simply sunk back beneath the waters, without attempting to harm any of their company.

The Roman naturalist Pliny the Elder (23-79 AD) claimed that a monstrous octopus with a barrel-sized head and tentacles 9m long would come ashore and raid fish ponds in Rocabillo, Spain (octopuses are indeed known to leave water and cross land if necessary to capture prey). And as far back as classical times, giant octopuses have been reported from the Mediterranean. Indeed, the mythical many-armed, hole-dwelling sea monster Scylla has been claimed by some researchers to have been inspired by sightings of huge octopuses in Italian waters.

During his own investigations of reputed giant octopuses, veteran marine biologist Dr Forrest Wood collected several reports from the Bahamian island of Andros, whose blue holes (vertical underwater caves) are claimed by locals to be frequented by a monster known as the *lusca*, equipped with "hairy hands" that drag down any unwary human divers or bathers. Certain octopuses, known as cirrate octopuses, are characterised by tentacles bearing hair-like projections (cirri). Consequently, some cryptozoologists have suggested that the *lusca* may be an unknown species of giant cirrate octopus.

Supporting a link between *lusca* and a giant octopus is a report given to Wood on Andros by an island inspector. He claimed that during a fishing trip off the island with his father, in waters approximately 180m deep, their line seemed to snag on the sea bottom. When they looked down through the transparent water, however, they were aghast to see that the line had hooked an enormous octopus, which abruptly released the line and gripped the bottom of their boat instead! Fortunately, however, it soon let go, and sank down far below until it vanished from view.

Clearly, then, there is ample circumstantial evidence on file to suggest the existence of mega-octopuses in various expanses of water around the world – but



what about Globsters? Do they genuinely constitute physical evidence for these creatures' existence?

globster tests

Thanks to the advances in DNA technology during the past two decades, science now has a reliable tool with which to investigate the identity of Globsters. Over the past few years this is precisely what has happened, with fascinating results.

The first notable Globster to be unmasked by DNA analysis was the Fortune Bay specimen from Newfoundland. In February 2002, a team of researchers led by molecular biologist Dr Steven M. Carr found that a DNA sequence corresponded with that of a sperm whale. Further studies by South Florida scientist Dr Sidney K. Pierce on several preserved Globster remains, including the Chilean Globster, came to the same conclusion. In a detailed *Biological Bulletin* paper of June 2004, co-authored by Carr and several other researchers, the team announced that 'the Chilean Blob is the

almost completely decomposed remains of the blubber of a sperm whale'.

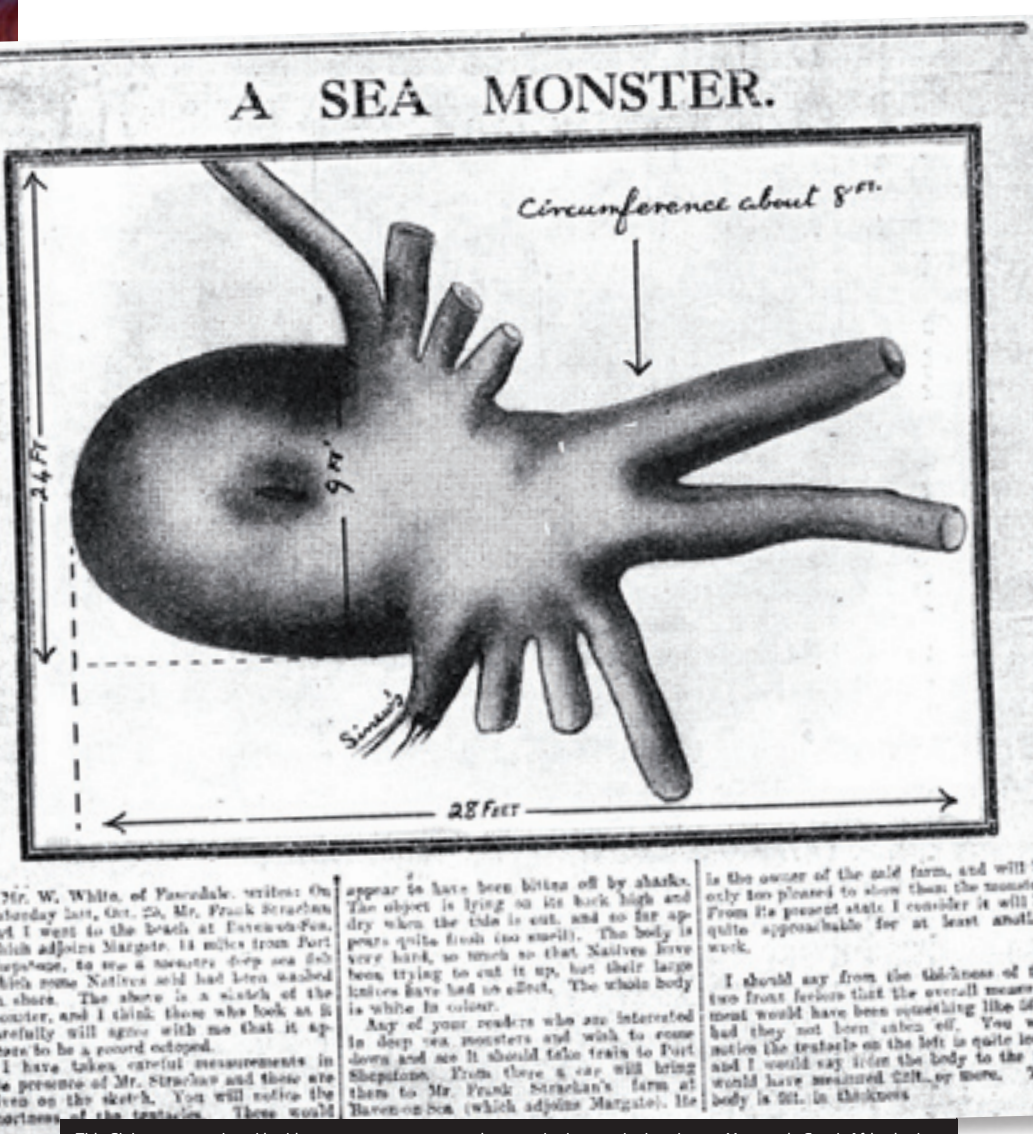
Yet how can a decomposed sperm whale transform in shape and texture so dramatically that it becomes a Globster, sometimes even equipped with apparent tentacles? I revealed the answer in my latest cryptozoological book, *Extraordinary Animals Revisited* (2007):

'As detailed by Drs Pierce, Carr, and Letelier, after a whale dies its body can float for months, decomposing, until eventually its heavy backbone and skull ... sink to the sea bottom, leaving behind a thick gelatinous matrix of collagen - the tough protein found in skin and connective tissue. It is this mass of collagen, still encased in its skin-sac, that washes ashore, as a globster. Furthermore, if a few of the whale's ribs remain within the collagen matrix, and any "fingers" of fibrous flesh are attached to them, these resemble tentacles.'

So does that mean that Globsters are a dead-end as far as providing evidence for the reality of giant octopuses is concerned? Not quite...

Octopus vs whale

The grand-daddy of all Globsters was washed ashore near St Augustine, Florida, on 30 November 1896. Its prodigious remains, pinkish-grey and pear-shaped, were over 6m long, 1.6m wide, and 1.3m high, and were



This Globster - reproduced in this contemporary news cutting - washed up on the beach near Margate in South Africa in the 1920s. The 'tentacles' clearly show how these decaying lumps of blubber can be mistaken for octopuses - an effect Karl Shuker calls 'the quasi-octopus effect'. From the editor's own collection

estimated to weigh 5 tons. What appeared to be the stumps of five massive tentacles were clearly visible in photographs taken of this monstrous carcass by local physician DeWitt Webb, and also what seemed to be a severed tentacle, measuring 8.7m long and 20 cm thick. Webb sent a sample of its

à greyish-brown monster the size of a car, with suckers as big as dinner plates along each of its 9.3-m tentacles!

tough flesh to Yale University cephalopod (squid and octopus) expert Prof. Addison E. Verrill, who announced that the carcass had been a giant octopus, which he formally christened *Octopus giganteus*. Later, however, Verrill recanted, claiming that it was merely the spermaceti organ of a sperm whale (the spermaceti organ is a large mass of oil-filled sacs, nasal passages and muscle that is unique to sperm whales and believed to help them adjust their buoyancy at great depths).

A second sample, sent to the Smithsonian Institution, has been tested on numerous occasions using several different techniques, and has yielded

differing results. Whereas Pierce's studies indicated that it was indeed of sperm whale origin, analyses by eminent Chicago University biochemist Dr Roy P. Mackal strongly supported an octopus identity.

However, the sample has been preserved for so long that it has probably

been contaminated and rendered useless for detailed study - which would explain the greatly diverging results - unless future advances in technology can overcome this obstacle.

If they can, then interested researchers should apply to the Institute of Creation Research (ICR) in El Cajon, California, for it is here that the only surviving sample of tissue from the St Augustine Globster can be found, donated by Mackal in 2003.

How ironic it would be if the existence or otherwise of what would be one of the largest marine creatures alive today – the elusive giant octopus – is ultimately determined by this tiny sliver of substance. ●

Deliverance

Exorcism in the UK today

There are now more exorcists working within the Church of England than ever before. Dealing with seriously disturbed individuals, ghosts and odd goings on at eerie ruins are all in a night's work for those tasked with bringing Deliverance, as PHIL RICKMAN discovered.

The remains of St Mary's church lie in a shallow grave of tangled woodland, enclosed by tall trees, embalmed by creepers.

Mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086, the church was decommissioned by the diocese in 1946... and if you're alone here at dusk, just be grateful for the silence.

The ghost stories have been circulating for at least 50 years. It's said that a church organ sometimes moans at close of day. That bells peel in the roofless tower. That a company of cowed monks still sings in the opened shell of the nave.

'No, I don't particularly like the place,' the Rev. Graham Sykes says carefully. 'It makes me feel uneasy.'

Graham, vicar of Bromyard in Herefordshire, is responsible for the former parish of Avenbury where this church was left to rot. It might be a thousand years old, but it was never an architectural treasure. Another local vicar has visited it just once and has no plans to return.

'It's a horrible place. It just *feels* horrible.

I've never been anywhere before where I've felt so much... badness.'

But it's not the ghostly monks that offend the local clergy, or the spooky soundtrack. It's the fact that St Mary's still seems to be a place of worship – only, as far as they're concerned, the wrong kind.

Like many medieval churches, it's believed to occupy a place of pre-Christian sanctity, and its absentee owner actually erected a sign identifying it as an 'ancient pagan site'. So

now, as its stonework crumbles, St Mary's has become fully available, day and night, for... well, for anything you fancy, basically.

Amongst the rubble below the tower's last remaining rafter, I found signs of a recent fire and the remains of candles burned on the broken graves of local families.

The suspicion, naturally, is of black magic rites or at least occult games involving teenagers attracted by the church's sinister reputation and its isolation.

'I do think places are affected by the things that happen in them,' Graham Sykes says. 'I think kids have been going out there, maybe at night, for a laugh.'

But when the laughter dies and they go home alone, perhaps wondering what they might have disturbed... that's often when the problems begin.

As recently as last year, a small outbreak of apparent poltergeist phenomena was reported at homes in the area – moving objects, footsteps heard overhead, cold spots. Several of these cases were said to have involved families known to be fascinated by the ruins of St Mary's Church. The talk was of ouija-board experiments, attempts to contact the unquiet dead of Avenbury.

As the building isn't theirs any more, there's nothing the Church can do about whatever goes on there. Besides, Paganism is an accepted faith and these days even Satanists are likely to claim their religious rights. Christian clergy can only address what they perceive to be the spiritual or psychological effects of what may or may not be happening.

'I think,' Graham Sykes says, 'that if people dabble with the occult then it affects them, disturbs their psyche. And it can manifest in psycho-kinetic energy. I think they're playing with fire.'

'Some places do need to be healed. But first, the *people* need to be healed.'

This is called Deliverance. It used to be known as exorcism. And it's a minefield.●



Phil Rickman lives in Herefordshire. Presenter of Radio Wales's book review programme Phil the Shelf and a leading light at the Hay Festival, Phil is currently completing his tenth book about the adventures of Deliverance advisor Merrily Watkins, a popular series of crime novels with a hint of the supernatural.

EERIE: The ruins of Avenbury Church lie buried in woodland in Herefordshire. Even clergymen admit to feeling an uncomfortable atmosphere here.
© Mark R Evans

"It's a horrible place. It just feels horrible. I've never been anywhere before where I've felt so much... badness."

'We are, in a way, getting more medieval with every year that passes.'



Which may be why deliverance ministers are usually hand-picked by their bishops, often reluctant to take on a role which involves dealing with both human delusion and – even worse – the

possibility that some of it *isn't* delusion

The priests, male or female, who actually volunteer for deliverance work, in the hope of a hand-to-hand scrap with the powers of evil, are the ones considered least suitable for the job, according to a retired exorcist in Gloucester who now runs Anglican deliverance training courses. What the Church is looking for, it seems, is a quality of restraint. And, when you need to separate the real from the imagined, a touch of scepticism is also helpful.

'Someone who says "I need to be exorcized" is usually someone looking for an easy answer,' he says.

And someone who should be handled with protective gloves... because this is how modern deliverance began.

In 1974, just a year after shocking scenes of demonic possession in the film *The Exorcist* had led to medical alerts in cinemas all over Britain, a 31-year-old unemployed handyman called Michael Taylor, from Ossett, near Barnsley, went to a local minister, claiming to be possessed by devils. Two priests subsequently embarked on an all-night exorcism, after which they told him they'd cast out an estimated 40 demons.

Taylor then went home and savagely murdered his wife, tearing out her eyes and her tongue.

Within the Church of England, this had repercussions at the highest level. The Archbishop of Canterbury at the time, Donald Coggan, said: 'We must get this business out of the mumbo-jumbo of

'Sometimes, it gets nasty - one apparent poltergeist in the Manchester area turned into something out of Hitchcock's Psycho.'

magic. I think there are many cases where the more rash exorcists have by-passed the work of psychiatrists.'

New rules and new guidelines for exorcists were introduced – followed, twelve years later, by the official casting-out of the term *exorcism*. Henceforth, each diocese would have a *Deliverance adviser*, whose own advisers should include a psychiatrist. The new watchword was *caution*, and it still is.

A former deliverance minister says. 'I always remember my predecessor saying to me, *This is a mucky world and you come across mucky things. It's not a very nice job. You get a sense of something a bit dark.*

'He was right. You do find strange circumstances and disturbed people. You can actually feel the hairs going up on the back of your neck even while you're looking for the rational explanations.'

Because of increasing demand and the need, these days, always to cover your back, one deliverance minister per diocese is often seen as insufficient.

Now it tends to be a team, whose main function is to offer advice and support to local priests faced with aspects of the unexplained in their parishes.

In a big diocese there could be 12 people involved, including psychiatrists. Which means there are now more trained exorcists working in the

UK than at any time in the history of the Church... and this in a so-called secular age.

'We are, in a way, getting more medieval with every year that passes,' I was told by Canon Michael Wadsworth, for some years a member of a deliverance team based at Ely in the Cambridgeshire Fens. 'There's a sense in which secular men and woman tend to believe a lot more – things their grandparents would have thought rubbish. And the difference now is that people want to do something about it.'

The two most commonly reported phenomena encountered by the Deliverance ministry are poltergeists and what have become known as 'bereavement apparitions', sightings, usually by close relatives, of the newly dead. It's been estimated that one in four bereaved relatives, or even work colleagues will catch occasional glimpses of the departed in familiar spots. A deliverance co-ordinator on the Welsh border says it can sometimes become contagious.

'While many will have some hazy experiences of seeing or hearing the person who has died – which will cease – for a few, these continue and become very vivid, especially if the death was unexpected or complicated. Other people close to the bereaved person may come to share these experiences and reinforce the problem of being unable to let go of the dead person.'

This might be treated by an explanatory chat over a cup of tea, and perhaps prayers or, in extreme cases, a Requiem Eucharist •

I've learned a lot about the procedures and the pitfalls of exorcism in the ten years since I began a series of novels about a woman vicar, Merrily Watkins, who is appointed Deliverance Consultant for the Diocese of Hereford.

They're essentially crime novels – mysteries with perhaps more than one level of mystery – and, from the start, I wanted them to be absolutely authentic. No gratuitous horror, no hint of fantasy... and a central character who is flawed, paranoid

and doesn't always get it right.

At first, the clergy I approached for background information were understandably suspicious. Then, after the second novel, a Deliverance minister – someone I didn't, at the time, know – emailed to say he thought the low-key approach and the balance between the real and the imagined were 'exactly right'.

As other approving emails filtered through from what's regarded as the coal-face of Christianity, I learned a lot... and realised

that Merrily, with her nicotine habit, her uncertainty and her occasional lapses into language not found in prayer books, wasn't exactly the maverick I'd initially had in mind. Closer, in fact, to the norm.

Deliverance is the Church's secret service, often regarded with suspicion within the C of E, in much the same way as the police mistrust the 'spooks' of Special Branch. Some image-conscious senior clerics see it as a potentially dangerous throwback to the days of the Witchfinder General.



FOCUS OF EVIL: Behind the crumbling walls of the unconsecrated church at Avenbury, ghosts are said to haunt and black magic rites are performed. © Mark R Evans

'Most deliverance ministers will tell you they've watched objects move or at least felt the intense cold, a cold you experience inside as a kind of frigid void.'

— in effect a second funeral service.

But what are we talking about here? Is it an actual ghost or what psychiatrists would call a psychological projection?

The current co-chairman of British exorcism's governing body, the Christian Deliverance Study Group, is the Bishop of Monmouth, Dominic Walker, perhaps Britain's most experienced exorcist.

Bishop Dominic, as he's known, comes across as urbane, laid-back and well practised in the art of understatement. He says he believes that 90% of all apparitions are mental projections, and it takes some

prompting to get him to talk about the time he believes he actually stood next to one.

A ghost, that is. A *real* ghost.

It happened when he was a rector in Surrey where a family had moved into a house to find that the upstairs was already occupied by a middle-aged woman with one leg who would appear and then vanish before their eyes. It emerged that a woman had, in fact, committed suicide there not long after having a leg amputated.

Dominic Walker decided to assemble the family for a Requiem Eucharist in the bedroom where the woman had died,

using a dressing table as an altar. Contrary to popular belief, ghosts are not actually exorcised in the *get thee hence* sense; the aim is to direct them towards eternal peace.

'And as we were celebrating the mass, she appeared,' the Bishop told me. 'It wasn't a frightening experience. It just looked as if we'd been joined by someone else, and that person had only one leg. I thought, Either this is *my* psychological projection or I've been set up. It was only at the end of the service that members of the family said to me, Do you know that when you were praying for her she appeared?'

The woman, he says, finally vanished, never to return.

But it isn't always so easy. Sometimes it takes repeated Requiems and aftercare. Sometimes it gets nasty — one apparent poltergeist in the Manchester area turned

into something out of Hitchcock's *Psycho*.



When a man was attacked in the shower and looked down to find blood issuing from a cut in his leg, a local woman vicar was called in.

'I told the couple I wanted to say prayers in the house and then blessed water and salt and blessed each room. Which was fine till I reached the landing between the bedroom and bathroom.

'The back of my neck was crawling, and I felt cold but there was no draught,

'I felt threatened, like something was trying to force me to stop. I was aware of an anger... I was actually quite scared of what would happen.'

and I realised how hard it was getting to say the prayer I wanted to say. I had to concentrate to get my mouth to make the words. It was like I could hear them in my head, but something was stopping me from forming them.

'And I felt threatened, like something was trying to force me to stop. I was actually quite scared of what would happen. I could feel something surrounding me. I guess it felt like it would attack if it could, but as long as I kept saying the words, it couldn't. But saying the words was so hard.

'With hindsight, I think that there was a fight-back on that landing. I was aware of an anger, rage even. Mostly I just get aware of whatever it is, but no real fight. The house is free of problems now, anyway.'

Canon Michael Wadsworth recalls going with another priest to help a colleague in Liverpool suffering psychic persecution in his own vicarage.

'Ornaments — some quite heavy — were moving, often in the middle of the night. He was distraught, at the end of his tether. There was definitely a malign influence, a troubled spirit.

'We conducted a Requiem Eucharist and since it was a fine summer's day we opened every window and every door. While we worked inside the house, he went outside and shouted at the top of his voice, "Do your bloody worst!"

Apparently, it worked.

What was perhaps Michael Wadsworth's most curious case involved a very old prayer book given as a legacy to his church. It had belonged to a priest and went into general use.

'It was interesting how, in at least two homes belonging to people who attended the church and used that particular prayer book, things started to happen — poltergeist

phenomena and voices. I didn't tell people, just ceased to use the prayer book and blessed it, privately. And it stopped.

'I'm probably being whimsical about it, but being in my job makes you like this. I've come away with the lifetime motto: there's no such thing as a gratuitous coincidence.

'Sometimes it seems as if we're trembling on the brink of the absurd. But religion is like that.'

If all this has made it seem relatively easy — a splash of holy water, a well-timed ritual and, even if there's a struggle, the good guys always win — it's important to point out that it *doesn't* always work. Most deliverance ministers have painful ongoing cases they can't discuss because the victims would be identified.

There are apparent presences which repeated Requiem Eucharists have failed to erase. There are cases where parish priests have suffered breakdowns or even quit the ministry. Most deliverance ministers will tell you they've watched objects move or at least felt the intense cold, a cold you experience inside as a kind of frigid void. The borderline between psychiatric illness and what one senior exorcist calls psychic or demonic *oppression* is continually blurred.

Avenbury Church is for sale again. Local people have ambitious plans to buy it and set up a local trust to conserve it, open it up to 'normal' visitors. A major task — it needs a lot of money make it even physically safe for people to wander around.

The Rev. Graham Sykes remains unconvinced by the old ghost stories at Avenbury, suggesting its bad atmosphere may have more to do with what's been happening there *since* it became known as a haunted ruin.

'I think,' he says, 'that the place has been spiritually damaged by people playing around... and *that's* why it's an uneasy place.' ●

THE + POWER + OF V + O + O + O + O + O + O +

LIONEL and PATRICIA FANTHORPE shine light onto a religion that for many of us conjures up nothing but sinister images – of drum-induced frenzy, bloody sacrifice and the eerie, unseeing eyes of the zombie.

Voodoo, Santeria, Obeah. These and other magical religions that are widely practised today are incredibly old: their roots go back to prehistoric Africa and perhaps beyond.

The magic associated with Voodoo and similar religions is a magician's attempt to control the environment and everything within it – including other human beings. The voodoo enchanter uses a wide range of spells, incantations, amulets, potions and charms.

Religion, as distinct from magic, is an appeal to mysterious, superhuman entities – the gods – to use their paranormal powers on the worshipper's behalf. A magician tries to give orders that may, or may not, be obeyed: a priest makes requests that may, or may not, be granted.

Some of the early evidence for these ancient African beliefs can be found in the awesome Olduvai Gorge, part of the Great Rift Valley in the Serengeti Planes in Northern Tanzania. Our earliest ancestors there were

eating mammoth meat two million years ago – and they were almost certainly practising a pioneering type of religion involving sympathetic magic.

Without the great barrier of the Sahara Desert, citizens of ancient Africa and ancient Egypt would have found it relatively easy to contact each other and to be mutually influenced by the magical and religious ideas in both cultures. Where the hot and hostile sands of the Sahara create formidable obstacles today, there was once a wide, hospitable and fertile zone. Its lakes and rivers teemed with aquatic life. Ancient African ideas reached Egypt and ancient Egyptian ideas reached sub-Saharan Africa.

Fearlessly imaginative researchers into the mysteries of these ancient magical and religious cultures dare to speculate that their true origins may be far older and infinitely more distant than is generally recognised. They speculate that secrets from ancient Atlantis or Lemuria found their way to Africa. They even wonder whether extra-terrestrial



Lionel Fanthorpe is a man of many parts. Following a career as a head teacher and a management consultant, he is a well-known lecturer, writer and broadcaster. He and his wife Patricia, who is also his agent, have co-authored many books and specialise in investigating unsolved mysteries. Their latest book, *Mysteries and Secrets of Voodoo, Santeria and Obeah*, is published by Dundurn, priced £14.99. (ISBN: 978-1-55002-784-6). Author photo © Nick Redfern

THE INVISIBLES

The word Voodoo comes from 'vodun', a word from West Africa meaning spirit or sacred object. Voodoo is a syncretised religion – that is, a religion with elements that have merged or been 'twinned' with aspects of another religion. When the Romans came to Britain, for example, they syncretised, or twinned, their gods with local Celtic deities.

The spiritual heartland of Voodoo today is Haiti, in the Caribbean. It is practised elsewhere, including New Orleans. The associated religions Obeah and Santeria are practised on neighbouring islands in the Caribbean, including Jamaica and Barbados, and also in parts of South America.

Central to all these religions are 'The Invisibles', spirits or gods who play an important part in everyday life and need to be cajoled, placated or won over through various rituals. In Voodoo these spirits are called Loas; in Santeria they are called Orishas. Ancestral spirits are also important.

These are magical, mystery religions sharing similar beliefs. Followers tend to be very superstitious. As one researcher puts it: 'From the start, children are brought up to be good by being made afraid of the supernatural, and this leaves an indelible imprint even on the minds of highly educated people.'

EDITOR

IMAGINATIVE RESEARCHERS WONDER WHETHER EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL VISITORS BROUGHT TECHNOLOGICAL MARVELS THAT OUR ANCESTORS REGARDED AS MAGIC.

visitors brought technological marvels that our ancestors regarded as magic. Did such visitors tell the wise Dogon people things about the star Sirius that they could not have known from any terrestrial source?

Another bold theory to account for the ‘gods’ of ancient Africa who also feature in Voodoo and Santeria argues that if the normal, natural range of living things goes from microbes and simple invertebrates all the way up to multicellular anthropoids like *Homo sapiens*, then perhaps a similar range exist *upwards* between humanity and an all-seeing, all-knowing God. This upper range has room for powerful, psychic beings such as genies, angels, saints and the powerful spirits of Voodoo belief, some of whom exercise delegated responsibility for earthquakes, volcanoes, lightning and thunder.

Clearly, strong traces of the ancient African religions are still discernible in today’s magical, mystery religions of the Caribbean. But how did they get here? They travelled via the triangular slave trade of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. Sugar and cotton crossed the Atlantic to customers in Europe. Merchants took manufactured goods to Africa and bought slaves there. Those slave ships sailed from Africa to the Caribbean and the Americas, and came away with sugar and cotton.

The one thing that many African slaves had to cling to in their abject misery was their religion. The proud and strong Yoruba peoples held on to their beliefs in their superhuman spirits, called Orishas. Slave owners rightly feared that people with a strong religious core to their culture would be hard to subdue. They tried to impose their own simplistic, traditional Christianity on their slaves. To be caught worshipping an African Orisha would bring down severe punishment – to be seen worshipping a Christian saint in a church would be encouraged. Intelligent slaves solved the problem by identifying their favourite Orishas with acceptable Christian saints.

For the pious Yoruba people, Olodumare, their Supreme God, simply became the Jewish-Christian Jehovah, or Yahweh. The messenger Orisha, who was worshipped as the “opener of the

SYMPATHETIC MAGIC

A concept common to many magical belief systems, including Voodoo, is that of sympathetic magic.

Sympathetic magic is based on two principles: that ‘like produces like’, ie an effect resembles its cause, and that two objects which have previously been in contact can continue to have an influence on each other even at a distance.

In medieval herbal medicine, plants which resembled parts of the human body (such as lungwort) were believed to have a beneficial effect on those organs. The Voodoo doll is a more striking example of this ‘law of similarity’ – sticking pins in the doll to cause pain in the person the doll has been named after.

Practitioners believe that if items which have been in close contact with the intended victim – such as strands of his hair or nail clippings – are included in the doll’s manufacture, it will be more effective, thanks to the so-called ‘law of contagion’.

EDITOR



STRANGE DESIGNS: These authentic Voodoo talismans were drawn up especially for the authors. © Lionel & Patricia Fanthorpe



way,” became St Peter or, occasionally, Saint Anthony of Padua. Oya, a female Orisha warrior was ‘syncretised’ (became associated) with Saint Catherine. Chango, the Orisha of thunder, became Saint Barbara. Ogun, the Orisha of metals, became Saint George and Orula, an Orisha of teaching and prophecy, became St John, writer of the fourth gospel.

Cocktail blending experts know that when two powerful ingredients are skilfully mixed in the right proportions, the result is often more potent than either component on its own. That added-strength principle also applies to Voodoo and the other syncretised religions.

What exactly goes on at Voodoo and Santerian meetings?

They are characterised by rhythmic singing and chanting, dancing and drumming. Worshippers believe that Orishas or Loas can actually enter and possess their bodies during these ceremonies, and that the possessed person actually *becomes* the Loa or Orisha during this possession. The spirit will usually prophesy or give other messages to the assembled worshippers.

Spells and enchantments form an integral part of Voodoo and the other mystery religions. They are mainly aimed at healing and attracting love, money, success or fame. The following example is typical. Its outline is old and authentic. According to some researchers it was used by ancient Egyptians, who had great faith in it – but no claims of any kind are made for its success in the 21st century!

To win and retain a person’s love, secretly obtain a few strands of his, or her, hair and entwine it with a few strands of your own hair. Stitch the entwined hair securely inside a piece of cloth, and hold it tightly in both hands. Face north and utter your wish that the person whose love you seek will become your loving partner forever. Finally, take the cloth containing your entwined hair and throw it into the sea. Concentrate your thoughts every day on winning the love of the person you seek as a partner and within thirty-three days he, or she, will come to you and remain with you.

Spectacular film representations of Voodoo often concentrate on the curses that are popularly associated with it – but which have little or no part in real Voodoo or Santeria. The most widely known are the so-called voodoo dolls or poppets, which follow the ancient principles of sympathetic magic. The doll is identified with the person towards whom the curse (but far more frequently

THE TOILING UNDEAD

Zombies are the most familiar superstition associated with Voodoo, thanks to numerous films, from *White Zombie* and *I Walked With a Zombie* in the 1930s through Wes Craven’s 1988 movie *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (based on an allegedly true story) to the gory horrors of George A Romero and his imitators. The typical zombie, says researcher Francis Huxley, ‘walks with a shambling gait and downcast eyes, speaks gibberish in a nasal voice if it speaks at all, does not answer when spoken to, and is bereft of all the usual marks of sanity’.

Huxley was convinced that zombies were merely unfortunate simpletons cruelly beaten into submission, a view shared by W B Seabrook, who spent many years in the 1920s on Haiti and met a group of supposed zombies working ‘like automatons’ in a field. In his book *The Magic Island* (1929), he relates:

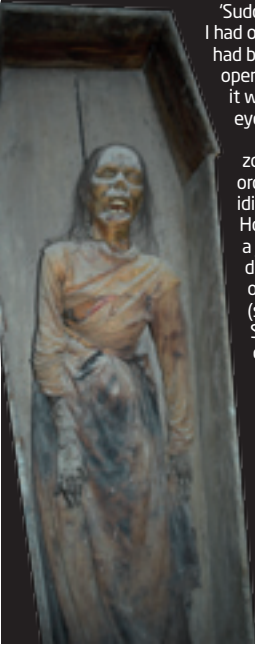
‘Obediently, like an animal, he slowly stood erect – and what I saw then, coupled with what I had heard previously, came as rather a sickening shock. The eyes were the worst. They were in truth like the eyes of a dead man, not blind, but staring, unfocused, unseeing. The whole face ... was vacant, as if there was nothing behind it. It seemed not only expressionless but incapable of expression.

‘Suddenly I remembered the face of a dog I had once seen [whose] entire front brain had been removed in an experimental operation weeks before: it moved about, it was alive, but its eyes were like the eyes I now saw staring.’

Seabrook then felt sure that ‘the zombies were nothing but poor ordinary demented human beings, idiots, forced to toil in the fields’. However, when he later spoke to a judge on the matter, another dimension was added: the possibility of drugs being used to create zombies (see main article). The judge showed Seabrook a paragraph in the Republic of Haiti penal code:

‘Article 249. Also shall be qualified as attempted murder the employment which may be made against any person of substances which, without causing actual death, produce a lethargic coma more or less prolonged. If, after the administering of such substances, the person has been buried, the act shall be considered murder no matter what result follows.’

EDITOR



TRADITIONALLY, THE ZOMBIE IS A RESURRECTED CORPSE WHICH HAS TO OBEY ITS BOKOR, THE VOODOO MAGICIAN WHO HAS RESTORED IT TO LIFE.

the blessing or healing) is being directed. The magical strength is thought to be reinforced by adding the target person’s hair or nail clippings to the doll.

Another aspect of Voodoo that almost invariably features prominently in film representations is zombification. Traditionally, the zombie is a resurrected corpse which has only very limited powers, and has to obey its *bokor*, the Voodoo magician who has restored it to life. A less widely known aspect of zombiism is a psychic version of it in which the bokor captures the dead person’s soul, or astral body, rather than re-animating a corpse. The bokor then uses the captured spirit to increase his, or her, own psychic powers.

Actual cases of supposed zombiism tend to be controversial, and the evidence offered in support of

them is frequently open to more than one interpretation. A well-documented case refers to a Haitian girl named Felicia Felix-Mentor. Researcher Zora Hurston was working in Haiti in 1937 when Felicia was reportedly seen wandering around in a dazed and bewildered state, unable to speak coherently, or to understand what was going on around her. The Mentor family claimed to recognise her as one of their daughters *who had died and been buried in 1907*. They loyally took care of her, and her physical health improved, although she never regained any memory of her previous life.

The rational, objective explanations of zombiism include drugs of the type that Father Lawrence used to induce a death-like state in Juliet in Shakespeare's tragedy. There are also suggestions that deep hypnosis may be used to create a zombie-like condition in the victim.

Whether it is a Voodoo spell, possession by a Loa or Orisha, dolls, charms or talismans ... research into Voodoo and Santeria suggests that these strange mystery religions can actually be effective in numerous cases. Statistically, Voodoo works more often than random chance would allow. This poses the question that fascinates all researchers into the paranormal: **when** Voodoo works, **how** does it work?

Spells, talismans, dolls, prophecy and the rest of the magical paraphernalia associated with the syncretised mystery religions have one thing in common. They can all act as focal points for the powers that lie dormant in every human mind. Scientific advances in neurology and psychology suggest that we use only a fraction of the power that the human mind possesses. Its potential is limitless – if only we can harness and direct it.

The real magic in Voodoo is its ability to release human mind-power.



RESEARCH INTO VODOO AND SANTERIA SUGGESTS THAT THESE STRANGE MYSTERY RELIGIONS CAN ACTUALLY BE EFFECTIVE. STATISTICALLY, VODOO WORKS MORE OFTEN THAN RANDOM CHANCE WOULD ALLOW.



FORGING A CURSE

Our own most memorable encounter with the strange mystery religions took place when we were in Barbados making a BBC documentary about the enigma of the moving coffins in the Chase Elliott vault at Christchurch near Oistins Bay. The heart of this persistent mystery was that for several years at the start of the 19th century, the coffins in the vault were seen to have been disturbed between each interment.

Finally, Lord Combermere, Governor of Barbados at that time, gave orders for the vault to be carefully examined and its entrance slab sealed in place. Despite every possible precaution, when the vault was re-opened in 1820 the coffins were again disarrayed, and one was half-way up the steps leading to the entrance. On Combermere's orders, the coffins were all reburied in separate graves in the Christ Church cemetery – and the vault has remained open and unused ever since.

Our BBC commissioner had especially asked us to interview a member of the Obeah mystery religion on Barbados and get his opinion of the vault and its secrets. Ironically, the Obeah man told us a bloodcurdling tale of a previous investigator who had taken a stone from the vault floor as a souvenir – and had experienced a series of disasters until he returned it.

All the time he was telling us his cautionary tale, I had a similar souvenir stone in the pocket of my jeans. It has resided safely and harmlessly in our china cabinet ever since!

Lionel and Patricia Fanthorpe outside the mysterious Chase Elliott vault on Barbados, where an Obeah priest warned them about a curse. © Lionel & Patricia Fanthorpe



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'The brothers did not escape the curse: they squabbled among themselves and the eldest ended up murdering the other three.'

Even holy men could pronounce a curse. When Henry II and his Archbishop, Thomas Becket, were at loggerheads, the men of Strood in Kent cut off the tail of the priest's horse to teach him a lesson. In response, Beckett pronounced that their children should all be born with tails, which, so legend has it, came to pass. In a similar story, when the 8th century Bishop of Worcester was jeered at after telling off the men of Alcester, in Warwickshire, for working on a Sunday, he cursed them – and tails immediately sprouted out of their backsides.

When King Henry VIII deprived the Church of a grand house, Marwell Hall in Gloucestershire, presenting it as a gift it to the Seymour family, the local priest cursed them, saying they would not hold Marwell long. Henry was furious and had the priest put to death. Nevertheless, his curse held: the Seymours only survived for two generations at the house. One of the victims of the curse was Jane Seymour, who died a year after marrying the king.

A horrible murder which took place at Lampeter in the 17th century was avenged by the curse of a bard. The important bigwigs of the town were the Lloyds of Maesyfelin. Elen, the only daughter of the family, became engaged to a Samuel Pritchard. Her four brothers did not wish her to be married, however, because they feared for their inheritance. They waylaid Samuel, tied him head downwards from a horse and sent it galloping all the way from Lampeter to Llandovery. In this way he was battered and flayed alive. His broken, bleeding body was thrown into the River Teifi by the four savages. Elen was driven mad by grief and died soon afterwards.

Samuel's distraught father, poet-priest Rhys Pritchard, put a curse on the house of

Maesyfelin. Within months it was destroyed by fire. Nor did the Lloyd brothers escape the curse: they squabbled among themselves and the eldest ended up murdering the other three. Then, in remorse, he hanged himself.

Curses often fell not only on the immediate target but also on his or her family and descendants. Unlike the story above, a traditional form of curses in Wales is that they would only take effect after the ninth generation. In an old story from Brecon, for example, two spirits were heard to pronounce the doom of a murderous husband and wife. They lived a long life, so long that at a great feast no less than nine generations of their family were gathered about them. In the midst of the festivities there was heard a crack of thunder and the whole lot of them, palace and all, plunged into an abyss.

Over in England, Lord Zouch of Rockingham Castle, in Northamptonshire, did not have such luxury. After he killed his own sister who, in disguise, he had mistaken for his wife's lover, a spirit appeared and warned him that his days were numbered and so were those of his wife and son. In fact, they were only given seven days: by the end of the week they were all dead.

Clearly it was a comforting thought to our ancestors that innocent victims should have some means of revenging themselves on their murderers, although it seems unfair that family members who had no part in the deed should also suffer.

Centuries ago, a Portuguese captain, whose sailing vessel ran aground in Cardigan Bay, was stabbed to death by a gang of local fishermen greedy for his ship's cargo. Before he died, he cursed the family of the man who struck the fatal blow: he and six others all subsequently perished at sea. The bay itself was also said to have been blasted by the curse, and considered 'demon haunted ground' (as an old book has it). The horrible shriek of the doomed captain echoed down the ages as a reminder of his murder.

In 1641, Thomas Barcroft of Barcroft Hall, Cumbria, imprisoned his elder brother William in the cellar and kept him there in secret, so that he would inherit the family estate after his brother's long, lingering death from starvation. During his agony, William put a curse on Thomas and his



The Pharaoh's curse

On November 26, 1923, archaeologist Howard Carter and his patron the Fifth Earl of Carnarvon, found the tomb of Tutankhamun in Egypt's Valley of the Kings. Just four months after his triumph, Lord Carnarvon was dead, aged only 53.

It was said that the lights mysteriously went out all over Cairo at the time of his death, and back in England his faithful dog howled, and then died. No wonder a rumour started of a Pharaoh's curse. Lord Carnarvon had died from an infected mosquito bite: but had the mosquito been directed by an ancient, vengeful spirit?

The press has always enjoyed building up a story with half-truths and untruths, even in the 1920s. One paper printed a curse they said was written in hieroglyphics on the tomb: 'They who enter this sacred tomb shall swift be visited by wings of death.' In fact, there was no curse: they'd made it up. This didn't stop other papers adding embellishments to the fake curse, however, as each sought to outdo the other.

The story grew. Lord Carnarvon's younger brother died five months after Carter – was he, too, a victim of the curse? One paper stated that out of 26 people present at the opening of Tutankhamun's tomb, six of them had died within a decade. Even Howard Carter's pet canary was dragged into the story, after it was swallowed by a snake.

If there was a curse, it was arbitrary – and not very thorough. Six may have died, but 20 had survived. And what of Carter himself, the man responsible for breaking into the tomb and removing all its treasures? He died 17 years after first entering the tomb, just before his 65th birthday.



CURSES

*The power to curse isn't limited to witches or magicians – anyone can do it, given extreme circumstances. At least, that's what many people once believed, as these old stories gathered together by **RICHARD HOLLAND** show.*

*'Through God we shall do valiantly,
For He it is that shall tread down our enemies.'*

So ends Psalm 108, the so-called 'cursing psalm'. Centuries ago it was believed that when read backwards, this Psalm – which calls upon God to vanquish a foe – would bring doom to one's enemy. However, one had to be careful. When a wicked woman, Quendrida of Mercia, attempted to use the cursing psalm in the

8th century, 'her eyes burst from her head, her blood drenched the psalter and she died in agony'.

Belief in the power to curse dates as far back as the belief in witchcraft – perhaps, therefore, for as long as mankind has existed. But it was not just witches who were believed to have the power to curse: ordinary people could do it too, in extreme circumstances. Stories are told throughout the British Isles of 'dooms' announced against wicked landowners or grasping relatives.



BEYOND THE GRAVE:
The Skulls of Calgarth returned to haunt a wicked JP who caused their owners to be wrongfully hanged.

'His victims did not lie easy in their graves. After the flesh had rotted from their bones, their skulls mysteriously appeared at Calgarth Hall.'

family. One by one, Thomas watched his children die. By the time of his own death in 1688, there were no members of the Barcroft family left alive, and it passed out of their possession.

A mermaid was the unlikely cause of the curse upon the family of Knockdolian Castle in Strathclyde. The lady of Knockdolian objected to the mermaid's singing from her favourite rock, on the shore below the castle, because it woke up her baby: she had the stone destroyed. The angry mermaid sang out:

'You may think on your cradle – I'll think on my stane;
And there'll never be an heir to Knockdolian again.'

The cradle was later found overturned and the baby dead beneath it. The family line died out. Elsewhere in Scotland, in Grampian, legendary hero Thomas the Rhymer caused the male succession to fail at Fyvie Castle, out of sheer petulance. He was cross because he found himself locked out one night. In Tayside, a kelpie – a kind of goblin who can appear as either a horse or an old man – pronounced a similar curse on the laird of Morphie Castle, who had enslaved him.

In 16th century Shropshire, it was a butler who cursed the family line. He was falsely accused of the murder of his master, Lord

The Ice Man jinx

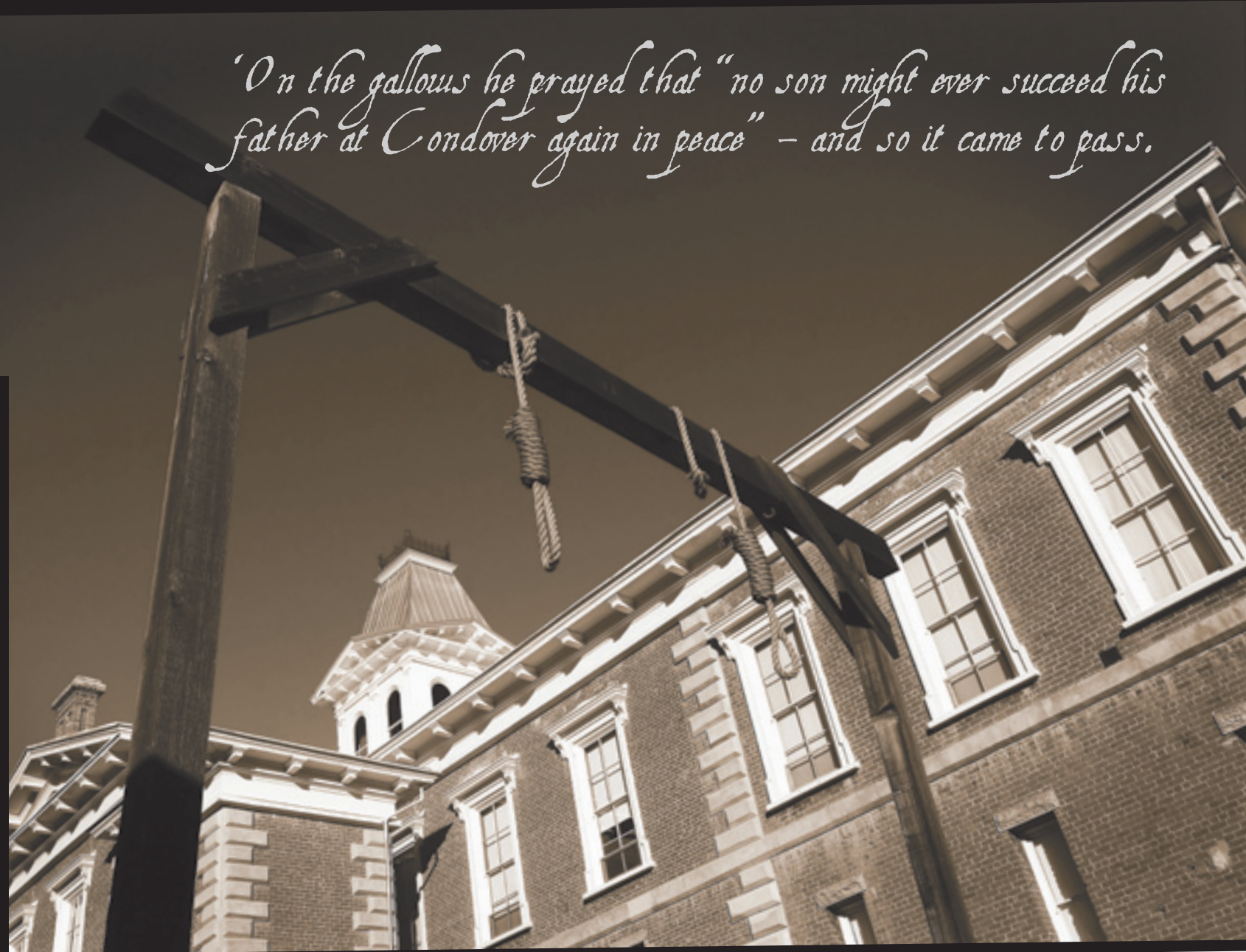
One of the most important archaeological discoveries of the past few years was the finding of 'Otzi', a 5,500-year-old stone age man wonderfully preserved in ice high in the Alps on the Austrian-Italian border.

Alas, like Tutankhamun before him, Otzi became the centre of a press-fuelled jinx story. Since 1991 when he was found, seven people in some way associated with the so-called 'Ice Man' has died – not always suddenly, nor mysteriously.

Of these seven, two were in their sixties and died of long-term illnesses, one definitely had no personal contact with the Ice Man, and another probably didn't (he was said to have guided a team to the site but it was subsequently stressed that all he did was arrange the helicopter flight).

It was the death of Helmut Simon, who, along with his wife, first found Otzi, that started the story of the curse. However, this took place 13 years after the discovery – an unlucky number perhaps, but sufficiently distant in time to discount any link, one would have thought. Helmut died in a fall walking high in his beloved Alps – he was 69-years old.

Like the supposed Tutankhamun curse, Otzi's jinx is unconvincing: of all the scientists, technicians, mountaineers and others who have come into contact with Otzi since 1991, only seven have been linked to a curse. His co-discoverer Mrs Simon suffered no misfortune, other than the loss of her husband.



'On the gallows he prayed that "no son might ever succeed his father at Condoover again in peace" – and so it came to pass.'

Knevett of Condoover Hall, by the true murderer, Lord Knevett's son. The servant was found guilty and hanged, but on the gallows he prayed that 'no son might ever succeed his father at Condoover again in peace' – and so it came to pass.

This brings us to one of the most famous stories of curses from Britain. The story of the skulls of Calgarth is another of victims of false testimony finding revenge from beyond the grave. Calgarth Hall is an ancient house standing above Windermere in the Lake District. In the 17th century it was the home of Myles Phillipson, the local JP. Phillipson was a greedy individual who had his eye on a small farm, owned by an elderly couple, which he felt would add nicely to his estate. He hatched a plot to acquire it.

Phillipson invited the farm owners to dinner, a fact which possibly surprised them. Imagine their horror when, after the meal was over and they were preparing to go home, their host 'discovered' a silver cup among their baggage. He accused them of theft and immediately had them put in custody. Since he was the JP, Phillipson presided over the couple's trial – and he sentenced

them to death. As she was being led to the gallows, the wife cursed Phillipson: she said he would never be rid of them and, moreover, he and his family would die in poverty.

Phillipson shrugged this off. After the execution, he appropriated the farm, satisfied with the success of his wicked plan. But his victims did not lie easy in their graves. After the flesh had rotted from their bones, their skulls mysteriously appeared at Calgarth Hall. As the old woman had prophesied, he would never be rid of them. Phillipson threw the skulls into the lake. They reappeared, dry as a bone. He burnt them to ashes. They reappeared, whole and undamaged. He crushed them, ground them to powder, and had their ashes dispersed in the wind – but back they came.

Remorse and supernatural dread broke Phillipson's spirit and then his health. His mini-empire collapsed and he and his family died in poverty. The family line died out by 1705. The curse had wrought its will.

The skulls remained at Calgarth Hall until a subsequent owner, a bishop, blessed them and, presumably, gave them a decent burial. Let us hope their previous owners now rest in peace.

Dark waters

A thriving cult formerly centred on wells and springs throughout the British Isles. Here rituals were carried out, as late as the 18th century, to bring misfortune to one's enemies. Janet Bord investigates.



Janet Bord lives in North Wales, where she and her husband Colin run the Fortean Picture Library, the premier collection of images of the weird and unexplained. Singly or with Colin, Janet has written more than 20 books on folklore and mysteries since their first successful joint venture, *Mysterious Britain*, in 1972.

Hundreds of holy wells still survive throughout Britain, many of them centuries old and survivals of medieval sacred landscapes. As well as being places where pilgrims would venerate the saints, the majority of holy wells were also believed to be able to cure all manner of ailments. For generations, people visited the wells in order to use the water for healing, and they would usually leave an offering in the form of a coin or a bent pin.

However, a few of the wells also had a darker purpose: to curse one's enemies.

The practice of using wells to curse

people goes back at least to Roman times. The evidence is in the form of inscribed lead or pewter tablets (in Latin: *defixiones*, showing the intention of binding or fixing) that were thrown into the water: more than 1,500 curse tablets are now known, and two-thirds were written in Greek, the rest in Latin. Half the latter were found in Britain, mostly in the Severn estuary area: at the spring of Sulis at Bath, in Somerset, and the temple of Mercury at Uley, Gloucestershire. Roman-era curse tablets are also recorded from other places in England, suggesting the practice was once widespread.

Roman curse tablets show four major motives for the curse: theft of goods owned by the curser (usually cursing the thief, and sometimes asking for the return of the goods – in which case the goods themselves are vowed to the deity); a desire for successful outcome of a lawsuit (cursing the opponent); success in love (cursing a rival); and cursing charioteers and their horses.

In addition to cursing being practised at ancient Roman well sites, one of the magical powers ascribed to some holy wells was the ability to bring about ill luck to anyone you might wish to curse. It was believed that curses could be whispered •

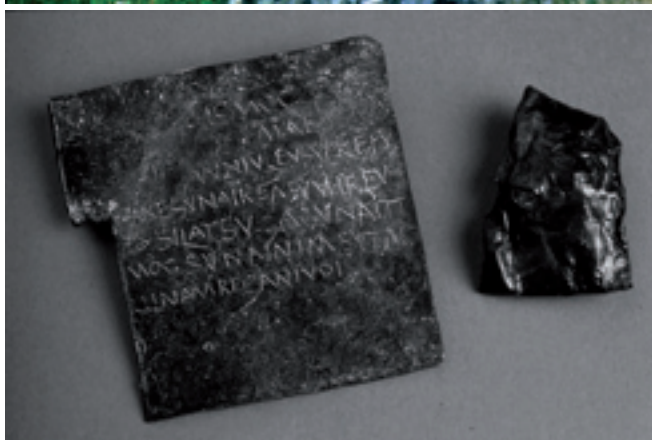
to the Devil's Whispering Well near Bishop's Lydeard church, in Somerset. At Ffynnon Eilian (St Eilian's Well) on the island of Anglesey in North Wales one method of cursing used was similar to that of the Roman curse tablets: a piece of slate (3 inches by 2 inches) found in the well had letters scratched on it and a wax figure pinned through its centre. At the same well, another cursing method was to impale a frog with a skewer, stick corks on the ends, and then float it on the well. So long as it remained alive, the cursed enemy would suffer. Another Anglesey cursing well was Ffynnon Gybi where the names of those being cursed were written on paper which was then hidden under one of the banks of the well.

Pins were also sometimes used in cursing rituals, bent pins being thrown into the water of the holy well close to Llanllawer churchyard, in Pembrokeshire, by people cursing their enemies, with straight pins used if the wishes were good. Pins were also offered by people cursing their enemies at Ffynnon y Gaer, in Gwynedd.

Perhaps the best-known cursing well in Britain was Ffynnon Eilian at Llanellian-yn-Rhos, Conwy. This well was so infamous that its presence may have been indirectly responsible for other North Wales wells, like those mentioned above, becoming used for cursing – as well as other wells in the area being used to counteract curses.

Ffynnon Eilian was originally a healing well, created according to legend by St Eilian who prayed for water when he became thirsty while travelling. He also prayed that whoever came to the well with faith would obtain his wish, but he certainly would not have intended the wishes to be evil ones. The naturalist and antiquary Edward Lhuyd first recorded the legend of St Eilian in about the year 1698, at which time the well was entirely beneficent. By Thomas Pennant's time in the late 18th century, the well was still principally curative, but cursing was also recorded. However, thereafter the well gained a powerful reputation as a cursing well, and by about 1810 (in Pugh's *Cambria Depicta*), it was noted only for cursing. The people who ran it found themselves in control of a lucrative business, and the most famous of these was Jac Ffynnon Eilian, who twice went to prison for his involvement in the cursing business in the early nineteenth century.

An involved ritual had to be performed when laying or lifting a curse at Ffynnon



Above CURSING SCENE: The dramatic clifftop location makes Ffynnon Eilian on Anglesey, North Wales, well worth the effort to visit. © Janet & Colin Bord/Fortean Picture Library

Left SEEKING REVENGE: Roman curse tablets found at Bath. The message was inscribed on a sheet of pewter and placed in the water either flat or rolled up, as shown here. The curse begins 'May he who has stolen VILBIA from me become as liquid as water...' © The Roman Baths Museum, Bath.

‘Another cursing method was to impale a frog with a skewer, stick corks on the ends, and then float it on the well.’



Eilian, but as noted below, the detail of the ritual might vary. To lay a curse, the victim's name was written in a book, and his/her initials scratched on a slate, or written on parchment which was folded in lead to which a piece of slate was tied, and then placed in the well while curses were uttered verbally. Alternatively a pin was thrown into the well while the victim was named.

The well-guardian read some passages from the Bible, then handed the curser a cup of water, some of which was drunk and the rest thrown over the curser's head. He/she spoke the curse which they wished for, while the ritual was repeated twice more. Sometimes a wax effigy with pins stuck into it was used, and the well-guardian would speak secret curses, the effigy being dipped three times and then left in the well. Wax effigies were a late addition to the ritual, a theme clearly borrowed from contemporary ritual magic.

It would seem that there was no hard and fast ritual which must always be followed. The well-guardian may have varied the ritual according to his or her whim, or according to what the curser was able to pay. Whatever form the ritual took, it seems to have impressed both cursers and cursees, or else neither would have paid the large sums that they did. To curse someone cost one shilling, and ten shillings was charged to lift a curse; in 1820 five shillings was charged for a curse, and fifteen shillings to lift it.

The rituals for lifting curses were equally involved, and were probably survivals of the earlier healing rituals, as they are familiar from descriptions of other wells. They included a reading of psalms and other Bible texts, walking three times round the well, and the emptying of the well by the guardian so that the lead and slate with his/her initials could be found and removed. Sometimes the slate was ground into dust, mixed with salt, and burned on the fire. The supposed victim also had to take some well water home and drink it while reading psalms.

Although we can see today that the whole performance of cursing was nothing but mumbo-jumbo, to the people who took part it was very serious indeed, and the use of biblical texts somehow set the

seal of authenticity on it. There are reliable records of the effect on the people who had been 'put in the well': they became ill, or began to behave in an irrational way. A woman from Dolanog, Powys, was bedridden for years after being cursed, only rising again when the person who cursed her was dead.

The Reverend Elias Owen, a well-known collector of North Wales folklore, met this lady, and also wrote of another victim whom he met in the early 1870s when holding a funeral service at Trefeglwys (also Powys). He was an old gentleman who had not left his home for years and years, after having been 'put in the well' as the result of a love affair when he was young. When he asked the well-guardian how the curse could be counteracted, he was told that it would not harm him so long as he remained within the bounds of his own property. Thus he lived, a bachelor all his life, and never left his home until he was carried a corpse to the churchyard.

In the late 19th century the use of Ffynnon Eilian as a cursing well finally ceased. The stone structure was demolished, and there is now no trace of any of the buildings that once made up the well complex. But its influence clearly spread far and wide while it was active, for the Powys victims cited above lived 50 miles away, which was a considerable distance 150 years ago.

The reaction of the victim to being 'put into' Ffynnon Eilian was likely to have been the same as that experienced in Roman times by those 'put into' the sacred spring at Bath, and the belief in the efficacy of the ritual likewise was the same. The practice continued at Bath for at least two centuries, so obviously someone believed that it worked. However, after the practice died out at Bath, there seems to be no evidence for cursing rituals at wells before the second half of the 18th century. Although the two sets of rituals, at Bath and Ffynnon Eilian, are not directly linked, the basic unchanging nature of the human psyche means that the two have common factors and similar outcomes, even though separated by 1,500 years.

Other Welsh examples, such as Ffynnon Eilian (Anglesey), did •



Right WEIRD ARTEFACT: A slate curse tablet found in Ffynnon Eilian on Anglesey in 1925 had a wax effigy pinned to it. The figure was missing its left arm, and it may have been intended to represent 'RF' whose initials appear on either side of it, RF being the curser's victim. The original tablet is now in the Gwynedd Museum and Art Gallery, Bangor. © Anthony Wallis/Foretan Picture Library

Above RITUAL SITE: The Altar of Cursing on the island of Inishmurray off the Sligo coast. Anyone wishing to place a curse had to circle the altar three or nine times, saying the right prayer, and turn a stone as he passed. If the person cursed were guilty, the curse would fall on him; but if he or she were not guilty, the curse would return and fall on the person who placed it. © Foretan Picture Library

not become cursing wells until after Ffynnon Eilian (Conwy) was destroyed, but it seems likely that those later Welsh examples were direct imitations of the proceedings at Ffynnon Eilian. That there was a need to curse is an interesting reflection on contemporary culture, when other more acceptable, and legal, methods of justice and retribution were largely unavailable to the poor and disadvantaged.

There were also specific wells whose role was to undo curses or purify

bewitched objects, such as Ffynnon Fair at Llanfairfechan, in Conwy, where bewitched or cursed articles would be bathed. On occasion cursing could be beneficial: there was a Welsh well that could cure cancer if the sufferer washed in the water, cursed the disease and dropped pins around the well. But the visitors were an annoyance to the farmer whose land it was on, and it had been drained by 1880.

The transformation of a holy well such as Ffynnon Eilian, initially used to cure illness but gradually becoming a cursing well until eventually that was its only use, could be a demonstration of

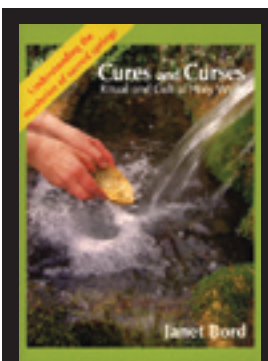


the progressive disintegration of the well cult observable throughout the 18th century. A similar pattern may be observed in Ireland, where prayer-stones gradually became cursing-stones and the general behaviour at so many of the ritual sites progressively declined, leading the clergy to suppress many of them in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Anyone wishing to visit a cursing well today does not have much choice since most of them no longer exist. The Roman baths at Bath can still be visited, of course, and there is a museum where the Roman curse tablets are kept. The only other accessible cursing well is Ffynnon Eilian, close to Llaneilian in the north-east of Anglesey, and the dramatic clifftop location makes this a place well worth the effort to visit. The well is marked on the Ordnance Survey map (map reference SH 466934), and is on the route of the Anglesey coast path, the quickest access being along a path from Llaneilian church. The well is to be found a short distance inland up a rocky inlet, but do

not expect to see a traditional well building; only scattered stones now survive.●

NEXT MONTH Janet Bord will show us the flip side of this fascinating subject by taking Paranormal on a tour of some of the most interesting and scenic healing wells in Britain.



This article was adapted from the entry on *Cursing Wells in Curses and Cures: Ritual and Cult at Holy Wells* by Janet Bord and published by Heart of Albion Press in 2006. Visit www.hoap.co.uk

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holy FIRES

MYSTERIOUS LIGHTS HAVE BEEN OBSERVED AT SACRED SITES ALL OVER THE WORLD, FROM ANCIENT STONE CIRCLES IN BRITAIN TO TEMPLES IN INDIA AND CHINA. WAS THE EXISTENCE OF THESE LIGHTS THE REASON THE SITES BECAME SACRED IN THE FIRST PLACE? PAUL DEVEREUX INVESTIGATES.



Paul Devereux is a founding co-editor of the peer-review publication, Time & Mind – The Journal of Archaeology, Consciousness and Culture (www.bergpublishers.com). Over a period of 30 years he has written or co-written some 26 books on subjects that include archaeology and anomalous energies. His website is: www.pauldevereux.co.uk. Picture © Nick Redfern

EERIE SIGHT: Hill-walkers were approached by a light they saw playing about the Castlerigg stones, in Cumbria. © Alan Green

FOCAL POINT: The world-famous monument of Stonehenge, in Wiltshire, is just one ancient stone circle known to be the focus of mysterious lights.

'A moon-like ball of light was seen to descend within the great stone circle and then dissolve.'

One Easter break during the years immediately before World War One, engineer Theobald Sington took a holiday in the English Lake District, where he teamed up with an acquaintance from his Keswick hotel to go hill-walking. One evening they were returning back to the hotel, taking a route that passed close to the Neolithic stone circle of Castlerigg. It was growing dark by the time they passed near the site.

"We all at once saw a rapidly moving light as bright as the acetylene lamp of a bicycle," Sington later reported, "and we instinctively stepped to the road boundary wall to make way for it, but nothing came."

The light was white and about 200 metres (150 yards) distant. They then perceived that it was actually moving at right angles to the lane they were on. It vanished. The two men started to move off again when they noticed several more lights a little further away, near what Sington called the "druidical circle".

"Whilst we were watching, a remarkable incident happened," Sington recalled. "One of the lights, and only one, came straight to the spot where we were standing."

As it approached them, the light grew brighter. Both men were by now becoming frightened but as it drew up to them the ball of light – two metres (7 ft) across and a similar height above the ground – stopped, quivered and gradually faded away. As they peered in amazement across the field containing Castlerigg, the two hill-walkers could see the other lights floating lazily back and forth next to the stone circle. The men decided to hurry off down into Keswick for a stiff drink in the reassuring surroundings of their hotel.

Castlerigg is not the only megalithic site where witnesses have reported mysterious light phenomena. For instance, the 5,000-year-old dolmen at Dyffryn Ardudwy, near Barmouth on the west coast of Wales, was at the centre of bizarre effects: luminous columns sprang up from the ground around it and startled witnesses could see small balls of light rising up within the columns. These events occurred in the midst of an outbreak of mystery light phenomena that took place in this part of Wales at the end of 1904 and the early part of 1905. During this period, all manner of strange lights were reported by dozens of local witnesses as well as journalists sent from London by the major newspapers.

Other examples of megaliths and lights include Avebury, Wiltshire, where a moon-like ball of light was seen to

GLOWING GLOBE: The magnificent stone circle of Avebury, in Wiltshire, has many legends attached to it and is believed to be haunted. A globe of light has also been seen descending into it. *Photo by the editor.*



MONUMENTAL: A spectacular series of vivid light phenomena, including glowing columns, were witnessed in the vicinity of this cromlech at Dyffryn Ardudwy, near Barmouth. *Photo by the editor.*

descend within the south-west quadrant of the great stone circle there and then dissolve; Stonehenge, where a small, brilliant light was seen to impact the ground next to the monument; and the great stone rows of Carnac in Brittany, where flame-like lights have been seen flickering on the tips of some of the stones. Stone circles in Yorkshire, Derbyshire, and on the Isle of Arran, Scotland, have also had lights seen at them.

FAIRY LIGHTS

In many cases, the knowledge of lights seen at such places was maintained in local folklore, usually under the guise of "fairies", probably originated from one or two direct observations in the past.

In one case, involving what is now the stump of a former standing stone in Shropshire known as the Fairy Stone, a direct experience occurred within living memory. A farmer on his way home one evening saw small lights shining steadily on the grass around the stone's stump. When he kicked at some of them they became attached to his trousers. Alarmed, the farmer rushed home, by which time he found that holes had appeared in his trousers where the lights had stuck to the fabric.

Similarly, on the sea cliffs near St Just-in-Penwith, Cornwall, the Stone Age structure known as Ballowell Barrow (or Carn Gluze to locals) was quite often seen to be glowing with small lights by tin miners returning from night shift.

'The farmer rushed home, by which time he found that holes had appeared in his trousers where the lights had stuck to the fabric.'

Ireland, of course, teems with fairy sightings. More often than not, they too are seen as lights. The Irish writer Dermot McManus reported that the prehistoric earthwork of Crillaun, County Mayo, was repeatedly seen to blaze with small lights, which were taken by locals to be fairies seen at a distance. No one dared to go near!

When musing about the nature of the lights he had seen at Castlerigg, Sington suggested that the builders of the stone circle may have seen the same kind of phenomena he had done – phenomena "caused by some local conditions at present unknown" – and had erected the stones out of awe and veneration of what they had interpreted as spirits or deities. He may not have been far off the mark, because we know this is precisely what happened in some other cultures. ●



CHURCH EVENT: People were drawn from far and wide to see the beautiful but inexplicable light show at Burton Dassett church in Warwickshire. © Eric Hardy



Haunted stones

In the 1960s a Miss JM Dunn was driving along the B-road that cuts right through the heart of the Avebury stone circle complex when she had what she described as 'a most uncanny feeling'. She saw, picked out in the bright moonlight, small figures moving among the stones.

Miss Dunn was convinced that she had somehow for an instant been transported back to the time of the Ancient Britons, when rituals were carried out here.

The ancient people were much smaller than modern man, which might explain the figures' size. 'Small figures' suggests fairies, too, and the fairies love ancient sites like this. What exactly had Miss Dunn seen?

EDITOR

TEMPLE LIGHTS

Two pilgrimage shrines dedicated to the Goddess Bhagbatti on the sacred Purnagiri Mountain of northern India were built because of local light phenomena. The lights are said to be votive lamps lit to the goddess by a holy man. In his *The Temple Tiger* (1934), Jim Cobbett describes his visit to the temples, which can only be accessed by a narrow, dangerous cliff-path, in which he witnessed three strange lights, each about 60 cm (2ft) in diameter, in a gorge. One light merged slowly with another, then more lights appeared. They glowed in front of a sheer rock face.

A highly respected, German-born Tibetan Buddhist scholar, Lama Anagarika Govinda, also saw lights in the mountains of India. While staying at Dilkusha, near Gangtok, he spied bright, fast-moving lights on distant mountainsides. He reported the sighting to the local Maharaja, who confirmed there were no roads on those slopes.

"They [the lights] move about over the most difficult ground with an ease and speed that

no human could attain, apparently floating in the air," he informed Govinda. "I have seen them moving right through the palace grounds towards the site where now the temple stands. This was always a sanctified place."

Interestingly, another European had independently reported seeing the lights some years before Govinda, while staying at Darjeeling, about 50 km (30 miles) from Gangtok. This witness became aware of a light moving down a pathway beneath his vantage point. As he and fellow witnesses watched, the light suddenly veered off over another part of the hillside they were on – a distance that would have taken anyone walking a good half hour to cover. He was told that local superstition identified such lights as lanterns carried by the *chota-admis*, the "little men".

Even more dramatic examples of temple lights have been reported in China. The sacred Chinese mountains of Wu Tai Shan and Omei Shan, for examples, apparently have, or at least had, large golden-orange lightballs frequent their peaks at night. These were interpreted as

"Bodhisattva Lights".

In his book, *The Wheel of Life*, traveller and adventurer John Blofeld described a visit in 1937 to Wu T'ai, where, at 2,500 m (8,000 ft) he found there was a tower on a temple constructed specifically to view the Bodhisattva Lights. The windows of the tower "overlooked miles and miles of empty space" Blofeld remarked. He and a group of companions were staying overnight at the temple, and just after midnight a monk rushed into their room and roused them, saying the Bodhisattva had appeared. Although it was bitterly cold, Blofeld and his friends climbed up into the tower. From it they saw "innumerable balls of fire" floating by, though because of the vast void of space in which they were suspended it proved impossible to judge their distance and therefore their size.

"Fluffy balls of orange-coloured fire, moving through space, unhurried and majestic – truly a fitting manifestation of divinity!" Blofeld exclaimed.

CHURCH LIGHTS

Strange lights have not only been reported at prehistoric sites and exotic temples in far lands, but also around ancient churches in Britain. A spectacular example is provided by the now isolated All Saints Church on the Burton Dassett hills, about 17 km (ten miles) from Warwick. The first reports of lights came in December 1922 from farmhand William Neale, who on several occasions saw lights moving around the churchyard and floating over the surrounding hills. His accounts aroused interest in the locals who formed small groups to go out at night to see the lights for themselves. The next written report we have is dated to

February 1923, when local man, George White, saw "a strong and dazzling light" that was "a perfectly lovely sight". It flitted about and passed through bushes and over fences at a great speed. White had binoculars with him and obtained a close-up view of the light.



'Many witnesses report that the lights seem to possess a rudimentary form of intelligence'

"It was a kind of reddy-blue mixed, but beautifully blended," was how he described it. It took on an orange tint when it was close to the church, he further commented. The light's fame quickly spread, and a reporter from the *Birmingham Post* came out to the hills to see what was going on. He was rewarded with a sighting on 16 February 1923.

"The light was steady and vivid," he wrote. Another newspaperman rushed out to Burton Dassett, this time from the *Birmingham Gazette*. He too witnessed the curious lightform, which he described as well-defined and spherical, and moving with a "peculiar switchback motion". Later he and other witnesses saw a pinpoint of light that grew in size until it looked like "a dull yellow eye". As the observers rushed in its direction, it skipped away and circled round behind them, as if playing a game with them. Sightings of the light continued for some months, then ceased for the rest of the year.

Another interesting example was provided by the Norman church at Linley Hall, an isolated hamlet about 15 km (9 miles) from

where such structures were located – another mystery in itself.)

Some of the other light phenomena may be due to atmospheric anomalies. For instance, the "poltergeist" events at Linley are almost identical to occurrences reported in the Outer Hebrides at the time of an exceptionally powerful aurora borealis. But if there are such geophysical explanations for the appearance of these lights, they only tell us how the lights find the energy sources that allow them to manifest: they do not explain the light phenomena themselves – they remain exotic.

Many witnesses even report that the lights seem to possess a rudimentary form of intelligence and an animal-like inquisitiveness. If this is so, they have a lot to teach our science.

Of course, there remains another explanation: the lights could indeed be spirits, or entities from some other dimension, just like ancient and traditional cultures have always believed them to be. Or, in fact, they could be entities using geophysical energy doorways into our world. ●

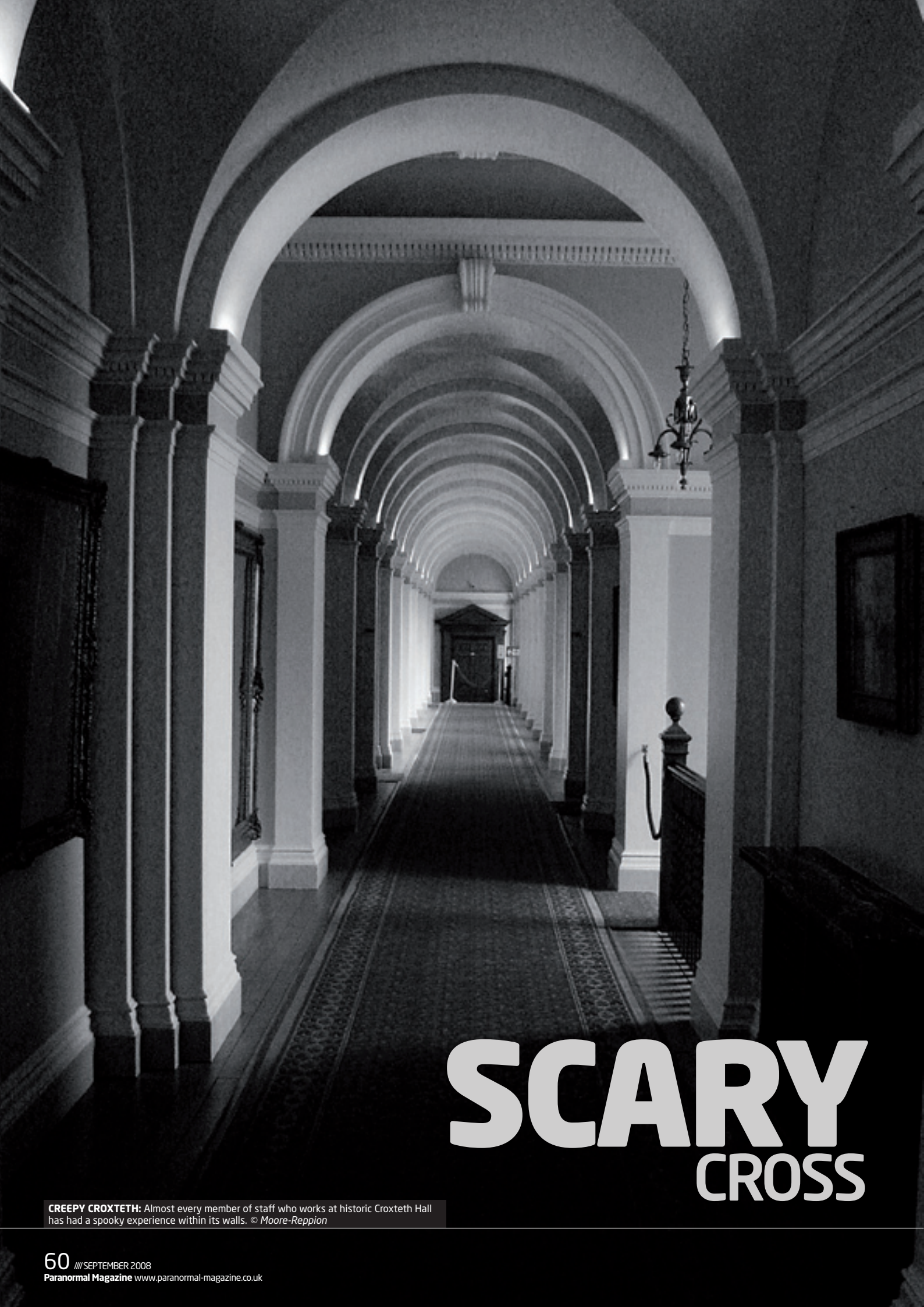


NORTHERN LIGHTS: This well-known phenomenon, here photographed in Norway, may have some bearing on some of the mysterious lights noted at sacred sights. They are caused by charged particles colliding in the upper atmosphere.

Telford in Shropshire. In 1913, fiery lights were seen to form on top of the church tower and roll down its sides. Balls of lights were also seen flitting around one of the nearby cottages and Linley Hall itself. Strange noises were also heard, including mid-air explosions from invisible sources. Vapour columns appeared out of the ground that were both light and dark in colour. At the same time, "poltergeist"-type events occurred: metal door latches would become stuck as if magnetised, while teacups, chairs and clothing were observed to move as if of their own accord. This outbreak of phenomena lasted for several weeks, then stopped as mysteriously as it had begun.

WHAT ARE THE LIGHTS?

The nature of such lights remains problematic. Some, at least, seem to be produced due to tectonic, geological forces, and is why this writer coined the term "earth lights" in 1980. The Dyffryn dolmen, for instance, sits directly on a fault line (the Mochras Fault), and all the light phenomena occurring during that Welsh outbreak were later found to emerge out of or next to major faulting in the region and close to the epicentre of an earthquake. The Burton Dassett light reappeared briefly in January 1924, on the same night as a major earthquake struck the adjacent county of Herefordshire. And the church sits on the Burton Dassett Fault. And, indeed, many of the light outbreak zones around the world are associated with faulting and tectonic events. (It could be that the lights seem to gravitate toward sacred sites only because that is



SCARY CROSS

CREEPY CROXTETH: Almost every member of staff who works at historic Croxteth Hall has had a spooky experience within its walls. © Moore-Reppion

Though today's Liverpool is very much a city looking towards its future, the settlement is blessed with a rich and complicated history. Officially founded by the notorious King John of England in 1204, Liverpool's roots actually stretch back to the 1st century Viking invasion of Britain, and beyond. As with many ancient settlements, Liverpool has more than its fair share of haunted locations and, with so many new visitors drawn to the city for the European Capital of Culture celebrations this year, there is an increasing demand for information about these paranormal places. The following are just a few of the city's many easily accessible sites which have supernatural stories attached to them.

SPEKE HALL is a half-timbered mansion on the south-east border of Liverpool currently open to the public under the management of the National

STRANGE GUEST: Ancient Speke hall is haunted by a Grey Lady who once joined in at a dinner party. © Moore-Reppion



THE PORT OF LIVERPOOL WAS ONCE ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT IN THE WORLD. MILLIONS OF PEOPLE FROM ALL OVER THE GLOBE HAVE Poured THROUGH IT, LIVED THEIR LIVES AND PASSED ON. IT WOULD BE A SURPRISE INDEED IF THIS VIBRANT CITY DIDN'T ALSO HAVE ITS SPOOKY SIDE. JOHN REPPION HAS PLUMBED 800 YEARS OF LIVERPOOL HISTORY TO BRING US THIS GHOULISH GUIDE TO SOME OF MERSEYSIDE'S MOST HAUNTED SITES.

THE MERSEY

'Heavy footsteps echoing inside as if someone were pacing impatiently within.'

Trust. The oldest surviving parts of the building date from the 15th century but the mansion has been re-modelled and added to many times during its existence. In fact, a hall was recorded on the exact same spot where the building now stands in the *Domesday Book* of 1086.

Speke Hall's resident spectre is known as The Grey Lady and is often said to be the spirit of a woman who lived in the house during the 18th century. The story goes that the woman cast her infant son out of one of the hall's high windows in a fit of despair having been given some terrible news. Unable to live with what she had done, the woman is supposed to have rushed down into the Great Hall and taken her own life.

According to Peter Underwood's *This Haunted Isle* (Javelin Books, 1984), Speke Hall's last private owner Miss Adeline Watt, who lived in the mansion until the 1940s, saw The Grey Lady on numerous occasions. The ghost reportedly even made an appearance at one of Miss Watt's dinner parties (held in the Great Hall) and spoke with guests before eventually disappearing through a wall. Sightings of the Lady have also been reported in the bedroom where the infanticide is reputed to have taken place. Now known as the Tapestry Room, the bedroom houses a wooden Victorian cradle, alleged to have been seen moving as if rocked by unseen hands.

THE ROYAL COURT THEATRE as it is today was constructed in 1938 on the site of another playhouse which burned to the ground. Standing on the corner of Roe Street, the art deco theatre is one of Liverpool city centre's many iconic buildings.

The Royal Court is reputed to be haunted by an ex-employee known simply as Old Les. Les is said to have been a caretaker and general handyman at the theatre who met his end on the building's roof one bitter winter's day after slipping on a patch of ice whilst carrying out his duties. For decades now, any unexplained movement of objects, sudden noises or general weirdness occurring within the building have always been attributed to Old Les.

As well as being a celebrated theatre, the Royal Court is also home to the Rawhide Comedy Club. In October 2006, club promoter Iain Christie and his colleague Mike Chapple gave the *Liverpool Echo* their account of a personal encounter with the spirit. Ian

'A mysterious man with slicked back hair and a moustache, thought by many to be the killer'

and Mike decided to check out the stories for themselves, so went into the disused part of the theatre where the caretaker's office used to be. They asked Les to open the office door if he was there and, sure enough, the door swung open. Not quite convinced, Iain then requested that the spirit close the door and Les apparently obliged. Chapple was reported as saying: "It was definitely scary. And no, it wasn't faked. There was no-one else around".

SAINT JAMES' PARK is in a disused sandstone quarry at the foot of Liverpool Anglican Cathedral. Formerly known as Saint James' Cemetery, the area was consecrated in 1829. The final burial at Saint James' took place in July 1936, after which close to sixty thousand people had been laid to rest in the cemetery. After lying neglected for decades, the graveyard was re-opened as a public park in 1972. Now a Grade I listed Conservation Area, Saint James' Park has been managed since 2001 in conjunction with the Friends of St. James', a group made up of local residents.

Mike Faulkner, who runs the website www.stjamescemetery.co.uk, recently informed me: "We have had paranormal groups visit the grounds on several occasions. Two groups felt the strong presence of a nun or matron not allowing them to go any further."

Though neither group seems to have made the connection, Mike wondered if the presence might be linked with the former cemetery's many orphanage graves in which scores of young children were buried; could their worldly protectors somehow still be watching over them all these years later?

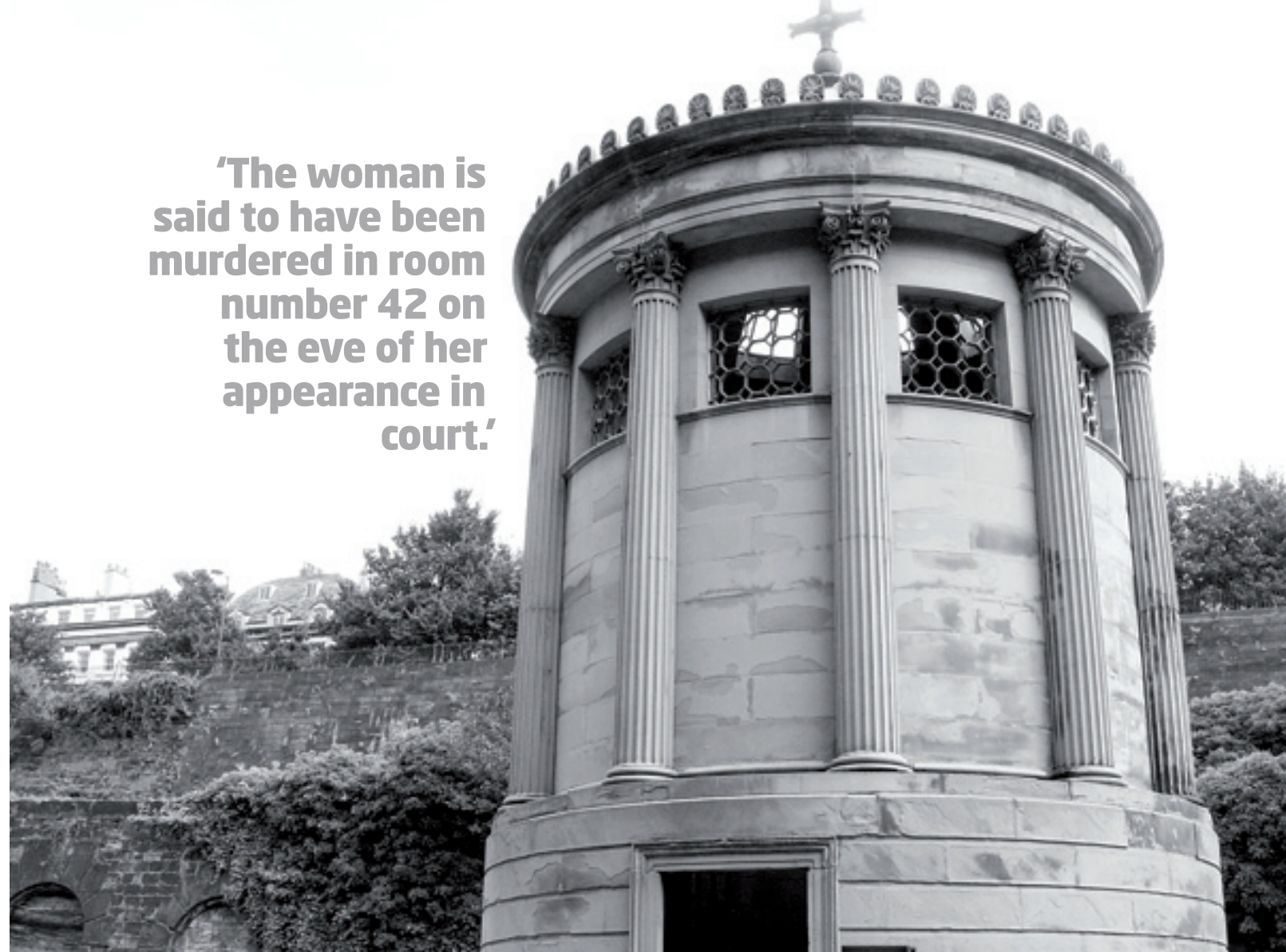
Saint James' is also home to The Huskisson Monument, a memorial dedicated to the memory of William Huskisson who suffered the world's first passenger railway fatality, having been killed in 1830 by George Stevenson's famous *Rocket* locomotive. The sound of heavy footsteps has reportedly been heard echoing inside the hollow monument as if someone were pacing impatiently within.

THE HANOVER HOTEL is one of several historic public houses in Liverpool offering spirits of a somewhat unconventional kind. The hotel has stood on the corner of



Top GRAVE FIGURE: Is the matronly figure glimpsed among the headstones in St James's Park still taking care of her charges buried in the orphanage graves? © Moore-Reppion. **Above LOOKING BACK:** This elegant mirror in Croxteth Hall sometimes reflects an image from the past. © Moore-Reppion. **Above Right VICTIM:** The first person to ever die in a railway accident has been heard pacing around the monument to the tragedy in St James's Park. © Moore-Reppion

'The woman is said to have been murdered in room number 42 on the eve of her appearance in court.'



Hanover Street for more than 130 years, prior to which the building housed a bank.

There is a story that during the 1960s the hotel was used as a temporary safehouse for a woman who was supposed to give testimony against a senior member of Liverpool's police force. The woman is said to have been murdered in room number 42 on the eve of her appearance in court and her ghost is reputed to haunt the hotel ever since. The story was dismissed as a mere urban legend by new owners who took over the very dilapidated pub in the 1990s; largely due to the fact that the room numbers only went up to 41. However, during the course of their restorations, workers are said to have uncovered a bricked up doorway leading to an extra bedroom at the end of a corridor. Rather than turn the hidden room back into a tiny bedroom, the current landlord had it converted into an en-suite bathroom instead.

A mysterious man with slicked back hair and a moustache, thought by many to be the killer of the woman in room 42, is also said to haunt the pub. One of the bar's current regulars told me he'd seen the moustached man sitting in an alcove one evening a few years back. The man was alone and glaring angrily at the patron, who eventually looked away, not wishing to cause an argument. When he glanced back, he saw that the glowering figure was now seated in a nearby but wholly separate niche which could only have been accessed by his walking past the witness's table. Realising that there was something odd going on, he asked his companion, who was sitting with her back to the moustached man, to turn around on the count of three. When she did so, there was no-one to be seen. Speaking to the landlady of the Hanover the next day, the witness learned of the story of the murder and was told that many others, including the landlady herself, had seen the figure.

CROXTETH HALL was originally built in 1575 but, like Speke Hall, was added to over the centuries. The hall as it stands today is mainly 18th century in its style and décor. Owned by Merseyside County Council, the mansion lies about six miles east of Liverpool city centre and is open to the public.

Most Merseysiders know that Croxteth Hall is reputedly haunted but it was not

until Fiona Campbell conducted a survey amongst its staff a few years ago that the sheer frequency and variety of strange events properly came to light. Almost every member of staff had a story to tell and, though many were mere glimpses, half-heard sounds and phantom smells, some were altogether more complicated and intriguing.

Some ten or twelve years ago, in one of the hall's elaborately furnished rooms, a member of staff glimpsed a curious reflection in a large mirror which hangs above the fireplace. He saw a woman standing in the corner of the room behind him. He described her as wearing a gray cowl and a long embroidered jacket. He told Ms. Campbell that the reflection was solid, "not spooky and see-through", but that he couldn't remember her having any sort of face. A similar faceless grey figure has reportedly been seen elsewhere in the building on several occasions.



John Reppion is a freelance writer based in Liverpool. He is the author of *800 Years of Haunted Liverpool* which is published by The History Press and available now for £9.99. Visit www.thehistorypress.co.uk



Unearthed

One of my passions is unearthing weird and creepy stories from the past: extraordinary cases of the paranormal that have long since been forgotten. *The Ghost of Leading Road* is one of the most dramatic in my collection, a tale of a perfectly ordinary house in Cleveland, Ohio, which became possessed of a horrible apparition resembling some kind of otherworldly bear.

The story comes from the June, 1913, edition of a long-defunct British magazine, *The Wide World* and we repeat it here verbatim, in the words of reporter *T J Thomas*, who personally interviewed the haunted family, and with the original striking illustrations by *F Patterson*. A photograph of the house in Leading Road is also included.

EDITOR

The Ghost of Leading Road

One expects to hear of ancient Granges and Historic Castles possessing spectres, but the idea of a modern American "frame" house being "haunted" somehow strikes one as incongruous. Here, however, is an account of such a dwelling and the weird manifestations which have taken place there - as remarkable a narrative, surely, as any in the annals of the supernatural. Mr Thomas writes: "I personally interviewed all parties involved in the case, and though I do not believe in ghosts I was greatly impressed by the strange stories told by those who have seen the spectre and heard the noises."

Mr August Schill, of Cleveland, Ohio, sat in his front room reading the paper, as he always did on Sunday evenings, while his wife cleared away the supper dishes and prepared the youngsters for bed.

As he glanced over the coloured comic pages he laughed, for the pictures were really funny. Suddenly, however, the laugh died from his lips and the paper slipped to the floor, for Schill felt a cold, clammy hand upon his cheek. He turned to see who had stolen in on him so quietly, for he had heard no sound, but to his surprise he saw that he was alone.

Schill raised his hand to his forehead, and found that it was covered with a cold perspiration. Rising, he went into the kitchen, where his wife was engaged in her work, while the children laughed and played. "Who was it came into the front room?" he asked. "Why, no one" answered his wife. "The children have not left the kitchen, and I certainly have not. Why?"

"Oh, nothing," said the mystified Mr Schill, and he returned to his paper, but he found himself unable to read. He kept thinking of that

clammy touch upon his cheek, and the more he thought of it the more convinced he became that he had dozed off and had been dreaming.

He said nothing to his wife of what had happened, however, and the family went to bed as usual. Nothing further happened until about two o'clock on the following morning, at a time when everyone was asleep and the house dark and still.

Suddenly the whole family was aroused by a heavy step on the stairs, as of a big man ascending, wearing heavy

boots. Schill, armed with a revolver, ran to the landing and looked down, but could see nothing. Filled with wonder, he turned to still the fears of the rest of the household, and even as he did so there came the sound of the front door banging. Bearing a lighted lamp in one hand and his revolver in the other, Schill rushed to the lower floor and tried the front door. It was locked, just as he had left it when retiring to rest. He went to the back door, but that, too was not only locked, but bolted. The windows



THE GHOST OF LEADING ROAD

were all closed and fastened, and there was no way by which a person could have either entered or left.

Thoroughly mystified, and half inclined to believe that they had all been dreaming, the various members of the family retired to their rooms, but not to sleep, for the mysterious visitant had by no means finished with them.

All through the night, until shortly before daybreak, the sound of someone stamping about the house continued. The children, covering their heads with the bed-clothes, trembled with fright, and the puzzled Schill, in order to reassure them as much as possible, remained outside their door with his revolver.

From below stairs there came sounds of someone moving about, and a cold draught seemed to run through the house causing the gas to flicker so violently that it often threatened to go out completely.

Finally, as though to properly finish the night's reign of terror, the mysterious visitant uttered a terrible shriek, which was followed by the shrill scream of a woman. The cry was that of a person in mortal agony, and continued for several moments, finally dying away in a dismal moan.

When dawn came Schill and the other members of the family made a tour of the whole house, but could find nothing that would serve to explain the strange noises of the night.

A few nights following this hair-raising experience Viola Lozynska, a young woman who boarded with the Schills at their home in Leading Road, Cleveland, sat in the parlour reading. She was suddenly aroused by someone knocking at the front door, and, rising, she went to answer the summons. What was her surprise, on opening the door, to find no one there. She heard a heavy step in the porch, however, and craned her head forward to see who it was. The porch was untenanted, and there was no sign of a footprint in the heavy blanket of snow which covered the boards.

Being alone in the house, the young woman was thoroughly alarmed, and, hastily retreating, she double-locked the door and hurried around to all the windows, to make sure that they, too, were fastened. Then she lit every gas-jet in the house and returned to the parlour to await the arrival of the rest of the household.

Unable to read any more, she just sat still and listened, too terrified to stir. Presently there reached her ears a low moaning sound, which appeared to come from the attic rooms above. Then it seemed to her that she heard a woman whispering, and later there came a terrible scream, followed by the thud of a heavy body upon the floor which made the whole house quiver. Hastily rising, the girl rushed to the door leading from the parlour to the dining-room and locked it. She even stood with her back braced against it, fearful that some terrible shape would force itself in upon her.

Meanwhile the shrieking and moaning had died away, only to be followed by the tramping of heavy feet, which seemed to wander about the upstairs rooms and then descend the stairs into the rear rooms.

Presently this sound, too, died away, and Viola, nerving herself, decided to open the door just a trifle and peep into the room beyond. She made to turn the key and open the door, but to her horror she found that the door was not locked at all! And yet she was positive that it had been locked, for she had taken the precaution to try it.

Carefully turning the knob, she opened the door a mere fraction of an inch and placed her eye to the opening.

The rooms beyond were dark! The lights had been turned out!

With a shriek the now thoroughly frightened young woman slammed-to the door and turned the key in the lock. As she recoiled in horror to the front of the room she distinctly heard the sound of mocking laughter in the room above her head.

When the other members of the household returned shortly after they found the unfortunate girl on the verge of fainting. Into their wondering ears she poured the story of her terrifying experience, and Schill, accompanied by his wife and two or three others, made a complete tour of the house, but could find nothing that would serve to explain away the mystery.

Every night thereafter, despite the careful watch kept by Schill and several of his friends, the ghostly visitations continued. The ghost, if



From a

The "haunted house" in Leading Road.

(Photograph.

such it chanced to be, seemed to have no regular hours for visiting its haunts. Sometimes its nightly visit commenced at eight o'clock; at other times it did not materialize until after midnight. On a couple of occasions it was heard as late as four o'clock in the morning.

Mrs. Anna Svoboda, Schill's mother-in-law, had perhaps the most terrifying experience all. The old lady had been accustomed to sleep in a room by herself, her apartment being on the second floor at the rear of the house.

Like other members of the family, she had scoffed at the idea of a ghost haunting the house, but she could not deny having heard the heavy footfalls and the unearthly screams and groans.

One night, about a week after the ghost made its first appearance, Mrs. Svoboda found that she could not sleep. Her nerves seemed to be on edge - due, no doubt, to the experience of the preceding week.

A light was burning dimly in the room and the entire house was as silent as the grave. Suddenly, without any apparent cause, the light spluttered and went out, just as it does in all properly-written ghost stories.

Mrs. Svoboda had no time to speculate, however, for next moment she felt a cold, rough hand pressing down upon her face. It closed relentlessly about the horrified woman's mouth, and she realized that she was slowly being smothered. She tried to free •

herself of the clammy clutch, but the hand was immovable and her struggles were in vain.

Next moment, however, the pressure on the woman's mouth was released, and for a moment she saw the hand poised above her face, surrounded by a strange, bluish light. Then the hand vanished completely, in a puff of vapour. No sooner had it vanished than Mrs. Svoboda heard the heavy thump of a foot on the floor. The sounds proceeded out into the hall and down the stairs, as though someone was walking away. When the noise had completely ceased Mrs. Svoboda sat up in bed and screamed at the top of her voice. In response the whole household came rushing to the door, which, strange to say, they found locked! The frightened woman had to open it herself to admit the others.

No more manifestations of the ghostly presence were heard that night, but again on the following night the spook showed up on scheduled time. This time the ghost contented itself with rattling all the windows and setting up such an unearthly shrieking and groaning that people living in adjacent houses were awakened from their sleep.

The house was shaken so severely that Mr. Steve Mondock, who lives next door to the Schill home, was aroused. Mondock stated that he had often heard strange sounds in the adjoining house, and other neighbours confirmed the story, declaring they had suspected the place was haunted long before the Schills moved in.

On occasions when the windows and doors were rattled by an invisible hand Schill would hurry about with his revolver, intent on shooting anything or anyone he saw prowling about. But never did he see anything to fire at.

One night Schill remained downstairs on guard while the rest of the household slept. Taking up his vigil in the kitchen, the master of the house waited, his finger toying with the trigger of his heavy revolver.

Shortly after midnight he felt a chill draught strike his face. Next moment he felt a hand upon his shoulder. Swinging around, he raised his revolver, but, as usual, there was nothing to shoot at. Before Schill had recovered from his surprise he heard a slight click, and, turning again, he saw the kitchen door, which had been locked, slowly open! It opened to a width of two feet or more, then slowly closed again, and as it clicked shut Schill heard a weird laugh just outside. Rushing to the door, the master of the house frantically tried to open it, but it was locked!

So unpleasant did the ghost make it for everybody concerned, especially in the upper part of the house, that all the furniture was removed to the lower floor, and the attic was turned over to the uncanny nocturnal visitor.

John Svoboda, a brother-in-law of Schill, heard the stories of the ghost, and, being a firm disbeliever in anything supernatural, he volunteered to come over one night and "lay" the ghost once and for ever.

"Take my word for it," said he, "there are no such things as ghosts. You people have been imagining things. How is a spirit going to come back and lock doors and bang windows? Answer me that."

Being vouchsafed no reply, John continued to ridicule the idea, and finally, when bedtime drew near, he advised everyone to go to bed, forget all about their troubles, and trust to him.

"I'm going upstairs," he said, "and I'm going to lay that ghost person by the heels."

And upstairs he went.

For ten minutes no sound came from the upper regions of the house. John had evidently cowed the ghost. Presently, however a terrible shriek was heard; then the rush of feet, which raced across the upper floor and tore down the stairs at a rapid rate.

Next moment John burst into the room, white-faced and trembling violently.

"I saw it!" he cried. "It's no joke; I saw it with my own eyes. No sooner had I gone into the back room and turned off the light when I saw something rise from the floor like a puff of smoke, and a black shape, like a giant football, rolled over and over towards me, as though some was kicking it.

"The strange vapour, which looked like smoke, smelt abominably. It got into my mouth and nose and eyes and almost choked me. I wouldn't go into that room again for a thousand dollars!"

On Christmas Eve the spectre appeared to the children as they were playing around their tree.

A number of the neighbours' children had gone to the Schill home to enjoy a party given by the youthful members of the household. Viola Lozynska, the young lady boarder, was helping the children to have a good time around the Christmas tree, which was hung with presents, sweets, and ornaments.

Little Isabelle Dodd, from a house a short distance away, suddenly paused in her play and turned her head towards the stairs. Next moment she uttered a frightened scream and ran breathless and gasping into another room.

"Take it away!" cried the child. "Oh, please take it away! Don't let it touch me!"

When she had been quieted the little girl said that when she turned her head she distinctly saw the white-gowned figure of a tiny baby standing in the semi-darkness on the stairs.

"It looked at me just a moment," said the girl, "and then it disappeared."

That night, after the Christmas Eve party had broken up, the ghost held forth in ghastly revelry. For an hour or more it laughed fiendishly in the upper part of the house, and once it seemed to be dropping heavy weights from a considerable height. It ran backwards and forwards along the floors, and ended its performance by emitting a terrifying shriek that could be heard throughout the neighbourhood.

Following the episode of Christmas Eve a more careful search than ever was made of the attic rooms of the "haunted house of Leading Road," as the place began to be called. The attic floor was gone over inch by inch, and when thus closely scrutinized it was noted that the floor was stained here and there with small dark spots, resembling blood. The search was even carried under the floor, and what was the surprise of Schill when, beneath the flooring, jammed in behind the clapboards, there was found a man's shirt, torn and bloodstained.

That same night, which was Friday, December 27th, the ghost came forth as usual to haunt his old home. This time the Schills and the other people living in the house were kept awake for over an hour by the steady, hair-raising "drip, drip, drip" of something on the attic floor. Presently this horrifying sound died away, and was followed by ten minutes of demoniac

laughter. Someone seemed to be approaching the head of the stairs with heavy tread. At the landing the sounds ceased, and then, to the terror of all who heard, there came the sound of water splashing down the stairs in a veritable cataract. On investigation, however, the stairs were found to be perfectly dry!

Needless to say, the story of the "haunted house" spread through the neighbourhood like wildfire, and by the following Monday the whole city was conversant with the weird affair.

Several men, firmly convinced there were no such things as ghosts, bravely volunteered to go into the house and put the spectre to flight.

They went singly and in pairs and threes, but no one party every paid more than one visit to the rendezvous of the awesome spook. One and all they fled precipitately, later telling tales of hearing awful whisperings, of hearing blood dripping on to the floor, and of seeing a large black, bear-like shape hurling itself at them from the corner of the attic room.

Among those who volunteered to spend the night in the haunted attic was a neighbour of the Schills, a man known to be most courageous in the face of ordinary danger. Armed with a revolver, he made his way into the attic, prepared to spend the night there. For two hours nothing happened and the Schills retired, confident that the ghost, for that night at least, was going to remain in seclusion.

Shortly after midnight the whole household was awakened by a loud scraping sound that came from above; then a woman's shriek echoed through the house, followed by a scurrying of feet and the fall of a heavy body. The sound of hurrying feet crossed the floor to the upper landing and raced down the stairs, to the foot of which Schill dashed, his intent being to intercept the ghost.

Instead of the spectre, however, it was the neighbour who came clattering down the stairs, his eyes starting from their sockets in horror and his face pale as death.

Nothing would induce him to spend another night in the house, nor would he ever say what it was that he had seen.

"I cannot believe it myself," was all he could be induced to say. "It was too horrible – too ghastly!"

Once, while a Mrs. Campfield lived in the house, she happened to mention to an Arabian woman who peddled goods in the neighbourhood that she had heard strange noises in the place. The Arabian woman nodded her head comprehendingly.

"Once," she said, "a man hurt his neck in the house. He bled – he die – he go away. But he come back sometimes, maybe."

The district soon became filled with strange rumours regarding the mystery of the haunted house. The most persistent rumour had it that a former tenant had been found in the attic with his throat cut, his head being almost severed from his body, and it was whispered that his ghost came back and tried to wash away the bloodstains on the attic floor.

Some who claim to have seen the

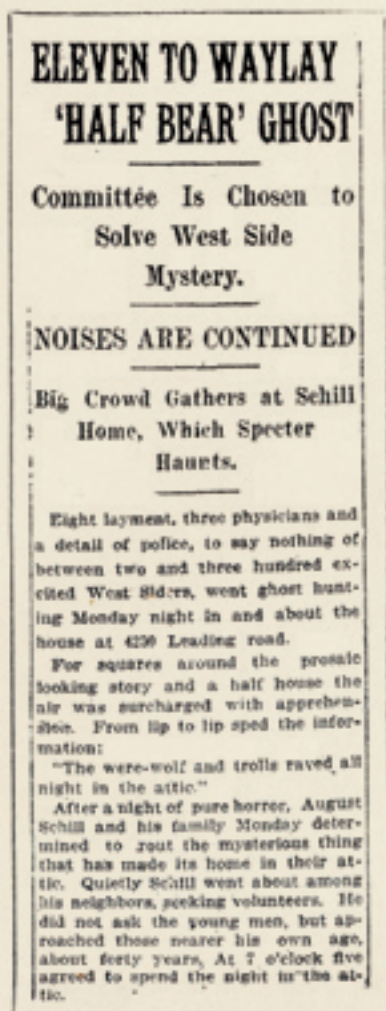
spectre declare it is that of a headless man. Others are positive it is a giant animal shape, horribly grotesque, with fierce, malignant eyes set in a massive head and with long, powerful legs at whose extremities there are lance-like claws of great length.

Perhaps the most remarkable story of all is that related to Mrs. Campfield, who formerly occupied the haunted house, and who moved after the death of her little boy in August 1912.

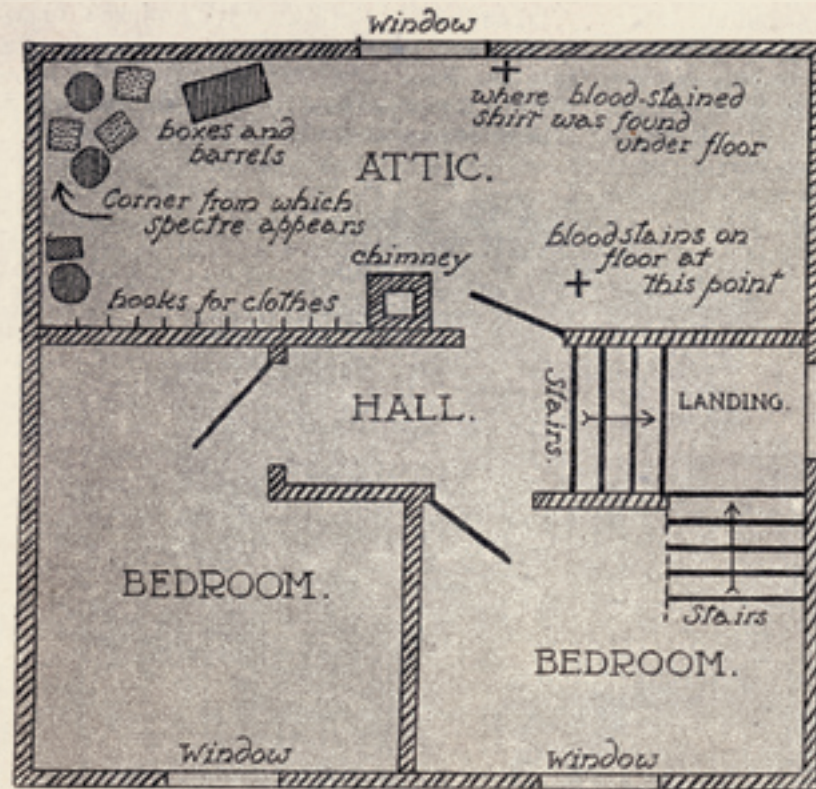
While she lived in the house Mrs. Campfield often heard strange, unaccountable noises at night, but at first she paid no particular



"She saw the hand poised above her face, surrounded by a strange, bluish light."



A newspaper cutting which refers to the attempt made by an investigating committee to lay the ghost.



Upper Floor Plan of
THE "HAUNTED" HOUSE.
Showing the attic from whence the
manifestations seem to originate.

attention to them. One night she was awakened from a sound sleep by what appeared to be the creaking of the boards in the attic floor. Then, as the frightened woman sat bolt upright in bed, listening, it seemed that someone was throwing a bucket of water down the hall. "There was one night that I shall never forget," said Mrs. Campfield. "I was bathing the baby, and sent my little boy Arthur upstairs for something or other. I had told him nothing of the previous noises, nor had the word 'ghost' ever been mentioned to him. I heard him drop the article I had sent him for and then he came downstairs screaming. I shall never forget the look of terror on his little face."

Mrs Campfield turned to her boy, who is a bright little fellow of eight years.

"Tell what you saw, Arthur," she said.

"I went up to the attic, and had just found what mamma sent me for," said the little chap, "when I heard a funny noise. Then I saw something big and black coming towards me. It looked like a bear a little, only it was bigger. I ran as fast as I could. It looked as if it had nothing but a head."

"I know children often imagine they see things," continued the mother, as the little fellow finished, "so, wishing to show him there was nothing to be afraid of, I ran upstairs – and there, coming across the floor towards me, was the hideous black thing. As Arthur says, it looked something like a great bear."

The strange part of it is that this was no wraith of the darkness, born of an overwrought imagination. A gas-jet was burning in the room and it was far from dark. Yet Mrs. Campfield saw the horrible, terrifying shape slowly advancing towards her, its eyes glinting menacingly and its lips working into a smile of inscrutable, inhuman malice.

In the light of the gas-jet she saw its huge feet moving, sloth-like, along the floor, and she could hear the paws shuffling on the boards like sandpaper.

"It looked all head and shoulders," resumed the woman, "and as it came to the head of the stairs I ran. Picking up the baby from the tub, I wrapped it in my cloak and fled with the children out the back way to the house next door. I am positive that the front door and screen were locked, but when my husband came we went back and found the front door wide open. I know that something went out. My husband laughed at me, but he has heard the noises too."

Mrs. Campfield paused, and her face paled a little.

"And – I don't like to tell this," she concluded, almost in a whisper. "I saw the same black thing the night before my baby died."

The baby, it seems, had been ill only a short time, and the mother was watching over it when she heard a strange sound on the stairs. Looking up, she was horrified at seeing the same terrible, bear-like shape amble down the steps, pause at the bottom to turn its horrible face her way, and then shuffle past, out into the night.

Next moment, from the upper regions of the house, came a soul-chilling groan, followed by an unearthly shriek that made the windows rattle.

On Monday night, December 30th, the Schill household was thrown into such a panic of fear that it was found necessary to send the children to the home of neighbour.

All night long the fearsome noises continued. Doors and windows were opened by an unseen hand, and chairs were moved slowly, but perceptibly, across the floors.

From above came a low moaning, followed by the shuffling sound of feet. This was succeeded by a thumping noise as of someone dropping weights from a height of several feet.

Presently these noises died away, and when all had grown quiet it seemed to Schill and his wife and the other adult people that they could hear the whispering voices of children. Suddenly the whisperings grew more pronounced, and ended in a soul-terrifying shrieking, which continued for several minutes, dying down at last into a dismal moan.

Another period of quiet followed, and then, with a suddenness that was startling, the shrieking commenced again, reaching such a pitch



The attic corner from which the ghost is said to appear.



"Mrs. Campfield saw the horrible, terrifying shape slowly advancing towards her."

that the sounds seemed to cut into the listeners' flesh.

Schill alone of the entire family kept his nerves together. He sat in the lower part of the house, listening to the awesome noises, while his wife, white-faced and trembling, tried to do her work.

Shortly before midnight a party of men, among whom were two doctors, called at the house by request, it having been decided that they should act as a jury to discover the cause of the strange manifestations.

At the time of their arrival the house was as silent as the grave, the ghost having apparently grown tired of groaning and shrieking.

The eleven men comprising the investigating committee made their way to the attic, where they were provided with a table and chairs and few packs of cards with which to pass away the time.

A light was placed on the table, and the eleven men sat about the board, playing cards, talking, and awaiting the appearance of the

ghost which had so long terrified those who lived in the house.

During the progress of the game the men were visibly nervous, but tried to cover it by jesting about the alleged spectre. Some laughingly suggested that it might be a hungry cat; another said it might be big rat; while one man had a shrewd idea that it was nothing at all.

Suddenly, while the party were still discussing the phenomenon, a chill blast seemed to circle the room. The light of the lamp flickered for a moment and then burned bright again. From the hall came the sound of scraping feet and then a groan, like that of a man dying in terrible agony. The shuffling sound stopped outside the door, and next moment, while all looked in breathless wonder, the door, which had been locked, slowly opened a mere fraction of an inch. Through the aperture there appeared a pungent, yellowish vapour, driving into the room for all the world like the breath of some large animal. ●

THE GHOST OF LEADING ROAD

The vapour carried with it an odour so abominable that the men were almost suffocated. Choking, they rose to their feet and made for the door.

Before anyone could reach it, however, the door slowly closed again, and when one of the men tried to open it he found, to the speechless astonishment of all, that it was locked!

Satisfied that someone was playing a joke on them, the jury returned to the table, but there was no talking or jesting now. Each of the eleven kept his eyes straight ahead and dared scarcely to breathe.

Ten minutes passed. No sound came to the ears of the anxious men. Another ten minutes went by, and still no sound was heard. Then, with a suddenness that caused all to turn deathly pale, came the horrible shrieking and groaning, and then the sound of a falling

body. And, most remarkable of all, the sound seemed to be in their very midst – right in the same room!

When the shrieking and groaning had subsided there ensued a low scratching sound in a far corner of the room. All eyes were turned in that direction, and next moment a yellowish puff of smoke appeared rising from the floor. It rose higher and higher, spreading out as it did so, and from the very centre of the cloud they saw an animal face protruding. The vapour gradually thinned out, and as it did so the body of the monster appeared. The men rushed towards it, but before any of them could touch it the strange apparition had vanished.

The committee of investigators thereupon adjourned, nor did they pause to offer any opinions on what they thought of the horrifying manifestations.

A number of neighbours who had determined to keep watch with Schill and his wife, together with other members of the family, lingered in the lower part of the house. To their surprise the manifestations continued, the upper windows shaking and rattling and the floors squeaking in a truly remarkable manner.

The following day the entire family reached the conclusion that they would not spend another night in the haunted house. They accordingly departed to the homes of the neighbours, leaving the furniture where it stood, and it seems that the ghost, having regained the freedom of the place, held high revelry on the Tuesday night, wandering about the unoccupied rooms, rattling windows, opening and shutting doors, and banging the furniture about at a great rate.

Viola Lozynska, one of the last to lose her nerve by reason of the ghost's capers in the attic and other parts of the house, finally admitted that she believed there was something supernatural about it. At first she had attributed the noises to the sighing of the wind, to draughts, and to her imagination. She changed this opinion, however, when a glass of water vanished before her eyes!

The attic, which appears to be the favourite haunt of the spectre, is a room measuring about twelve by thirty feet. The walls and ceiling are unplastered, and the rafters are bare. All about the apartment are hooks, on which articles of clothing are hung, while the floors are piled high with boxes and barrels.

A careful scrutiny of the room failed to reveal any opening through which either a man or even a small animal could squeeze its way. No marks appear on the window-sills to show that the sashes have been pried up or that anyone has climbed in. On the floor, however, there are a number of bloodstains, some apparently old, others fresh. One investigator, going to the place in broad daylight, searched the upper part of the house carefully for hidden strings, cords, or any other trappings by means of which a practical joker could work. He found nothing. Even the boxes and barrels were searched, without result.

The investigator had been smoking while he scrutinized the attic, and when ready to go below he thoughtlessly left his pipe on the window-sill. The window, it may be mentioned, was closed and fastened.

Having assured himself that there was no one in the upper part of the house, the man went downstairs, closing and locking the door behind him. No sooner had he reached the lower floor than he heard the same peculiar sounds that had startled members of the family for six weeks.

Hurrying upstairs, he unlocked the door leading into the attic and burst into the room. Everything was as he had left it, with the exception that his pipe, which he distinctly remembered having left on the window-sill, was now on a little shelf at the opposite side of the room!

The happenings at the "haunted house" developed into the sole topic of conversation of the inhabitants of that section of the city where it is located. Men known for their courage and disbelief in ghosts and other things uncanny have sought to solve the mystery by personal observation and investigation, but the mystery persists in remaining unsolved. ●

How does the story end? Is the house at 4250 Leading Road still standing? We'd be delighted to learn any fresh information on this extraordinary haunting. Please contact us at info@paranormal-magazine.co.uk

"From the very centre of the cloud they saw an animal face protruding."

Do you have a story to share? Here at Paranormal, we are always interested to hear of our readers' true life experiences of the supernatural. Email your story to: editor@paranormal-magazine.co.uk or write to The Editor, Paranormal Magazine, Jazz Publishing, The Old School, Higher Kinnerton, Chester CH4 9AJ.

My Poltergeist

The Editor recalls his own experience of the paranormal: as the focus of a poltergeist when he was a boy. The house where these incidents occurred is still the home of his elderly mother, so locations have been suppressed.

“ I can remember screaming. Screaming with the full force of my lungs and swearing, too.

I was lying in the intensive care ward of the Alder Hey Children's Hospital in Liverpool. The previous day I had undergone a five-hour operation. My ribs down my left-hand side had been cut through with an implement of cold metal, a saw or shears. Then my 11-year-old body had been prised open like an oyster and rubber-clad hands had forced their way inside me.

My stomach had become displaced during birth and was now situated too far up inside my thorax. There had been no noticeable effects of this deformity until my body began to grow at puberty. Then the increased pressure on my heart and lungs had made me very ill indeed. There was only one thing that could be done: my stomach had to be manoeuvred down to its correct position.

With broken ribs and manhandled guts, it's no wonder I was in agony for a long time afterwards. I cannot, of course, remember the pain itself – memory, though a miracle, spares us that ability – but I remember the result of it. I was on a morphine drip to kill the pain but the effect of the drug would dissipate an hour before the dose could be repeated. I had to endure several hours of agony every day.

On one occasion the nurses missed the dose. Perhaps I used to count every second as the pain kicked in, but somehow I knew the dose was late. I began to shout. As the pain got worse, I shouted louder. Eventually, I was like an infant bawling, without meaning or consciousness, just a storm of rage and pain. As nurses hurried past the end of my bed ignoring me, I yelled abuse. I think one nurse yelled abuse back.

My ordeal came to an end at last when a tired, drawn middle-aged woman ambled over, adjusted the drip and instantly transformed my life. I floated above the bed and lay back on a cloud of joy and tranquillity, as

FRIGHTENED: Richard Holland, aged 12, about the time a poltergeist invaded his parents' home.



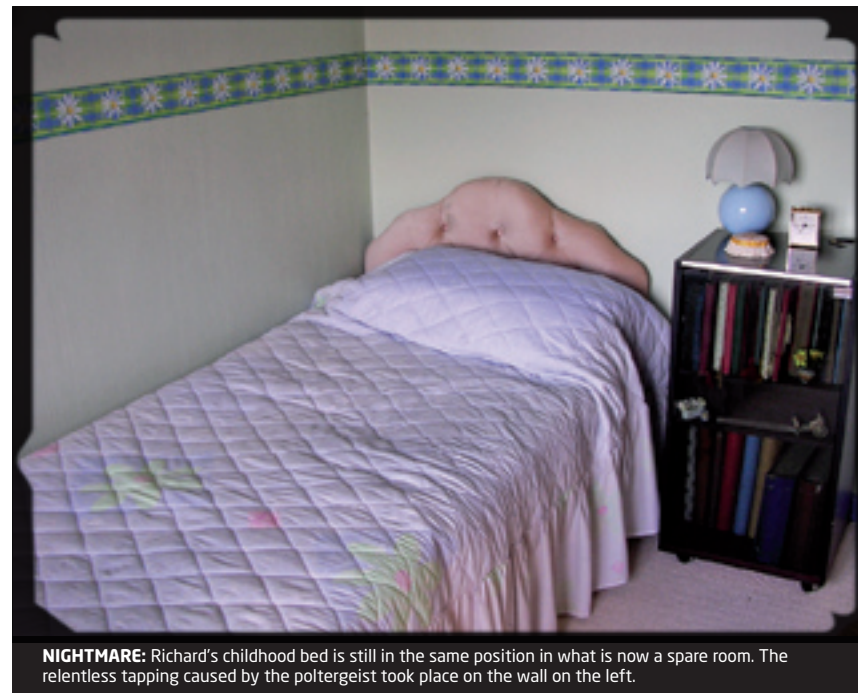
the child who had just died on the other side of the curtain beside my bed was discreetly wheeled away.

I was discharged from hospital three weeks later. There was the usual period of convalescence, but for a further month or so I was still too weak to spend more than a morning at school (and my friends made a great show of carrying my bags about while I was there). I spent the afternoons sleeping or reading or watching *Mr Benn* and *Crown Court*. Occasionally I'd put some languid effort into the homework my teachers set for me.

It was all very pleasant and indulgent. During the day. But my nights were filled with fear.

One odd side-effect of the trauma of the operation, and one which may have some relationship to the frightening phenomena which followed, is that during my first week or so back home I sleepwalked. I would wander about in an almost hallucinatory state, existing in a dream world yet also aware of my everyday surroundings. I can remember one of these incidents clearly. I strode into my parents' room and woke them up with imperious demands for a sword I could see hanging from their wardrobe. After some sleepy curses and mutterings, my father, no longer fazed by this sort of behaviour, reached up to where I was pointing and handed across the bed an invisible something. I grasped the air and stomped back to bed, where, presumably, I continued my dream, which now had me wielding the imagined sword.

Although I can remember many such incidents and impressions from this time, I am hazy as to chronology: what happened when and for what duration. I can't say for certain how soon after the sleepwalking it all began. Nor can I recall how I reacted the first



time it manifested. I can guess my response, however: I would have kept it to myself. My home felt no longer my home because of this secret. Almost every night, a stranger found a way into the house and then invaded my bedroom. While my younger brother slept in the next bed, the intruder tormented me.

It never physically abused me. It used instead a variant on the Chinese water torture. It would tap... tap... tap... on the wall a few inches above my head. The rhythm was so loose as to be almost random but I feel sure it conformed to some strange, endlessly looping pattern. Each tap was precise yet muffled, as if the bricks of

'ALMOST EVERY NIGHT, A STRANGER INVADED MY BEDROOM. WHILE MY YOUNGER BROTHER SLEPT IN THE NEXT BED, THE INTRUDER TORMENTED ME.'

the wall were being rapped beneath the wallpaper and plaster.

No human hand caused the tapping. Nothing visible ever appeared. I soon recognised the intruder for what it was and named it accordingly: 'the Poltergeist'.

Before the Poltergeist manifested, the atmosphere of the room would become charged and I would freeze with dread, lying rigid under the bedclothes, waiting and waiting for it to start. For the next few hours, I would lie, listening and listening to the tapping, aware I was being bullied by it, persecuted. My brother never heard it; the performance was intended for me alone. I felt as if that angry, staccato rhythm was somehow trying to get inside me.

It was *my* Poltergeist. I was *its* victim.

The tapping would go on for hours: fading-returning, fading-returning. Eventually, during one of the lulls, I would pluck up the courage to get away from it. I'd snatch up a book and my watch, always left to hand by my bedside, then bolt out of the room, across the short strip of landing to the bathroom. Here I would sit, with the door locked, reading and trembling until 3am. The Poltergeist was a creature of habit. By 3am I knew it would have run out of energy and I'd be free of it for the remainder of the night. Timidly, I'd leave my pine-scented refuge and creep back to bed.

This routine continued, off and on, for almost a year. Not once did my younger brother wake up, not once did my older brother or parents happen to want to use the loo and thereby discover me.

However, after a while, the Poltergeist began to extend its repertoire and my younger brother Stuart and two or three friends also experienced it.

One night, Stuart and I were alone in the house when we heard our older brother, Mike, run up the stairs. A shadow briefly blotted out the light in the crack in our bedroom door as if he had passed. A brief inspection soon confirmed the house was empty. On another occasion the Poltergeist mimicked the sound of my father walking around upstairs. A school friend became a believer in my 'spook' when it made an almighty crash against my bedroom wall as he sat there waiting for me to finish my tea. Downstairs we'd heard nothing. Most upsetting was the time when it groaned at me out of the darkness. The usual tapping had receded, and I was just rising to make my dash out of the bedroom, when it groaned twice: a human sound full of anger and despair.

On the whole it limited itself to these audio effects but there was one dramatic exception. One evening I was in the spare bedroom, kneeling before the bed on which I had laid out a board game. I heard what sounded like my younger brother running from our room and across the landing. As the footsteps reached the door, it swung open and they continued towards me. I just had time to register there was nobody there, when the footsteps reached me and I was thrown onto my back. Actually, 'thrown' isn't the right word: I was lowered to the floor, gently, although I felt nothing touch me. I picked myself up, grinning with horrified disbelief, and went downstairs. I sat

on the settee watching *Nationwide* with my family and said nothing about what had just happened to me. If I was shaking, no one noticed.

After several months, the Poltergeist ceased its activities but returned when I underwent a second operation required to repair damage caused during the first. This time I was able to talk about it with my brothers and a few of my friends. Eventually, Stuart and I told my mother about the Poltergeist (my father would have laughed us to scorn). She didn't believe there was such a thing but had the sense to see we believed there was. She assumed our over-active imaginations had combined to create it and her solution was to split us up. She turned the spare room into my room. Initially, the idea alarmed me: it would mean I'd be alone with the thing. However, the lure of my own room (I was now nearly 13) proved stronger than my fear of the Poltergeist. The clincher was the fact there was a light switch right beside my bed. No longer would I have to lie in the dark listening to the tapping. The Poltergeist didn't like the light. It had never followed me into the bathroom. Now, with one click, I could get rid of it.

I don't remember the Poltergeist troubling me again once I moved into the new room. Maybe the power of a 60-watt light bulb was enough to banish it. But I think it more likely this was a coincidence. It had been manifesting less and less often anyway and I believe it was beginning to fade away again. Now it was no longer a secret, I no longer felt isolated. Like all bullies, the Poltergeist lost its power as soon as its activities were brought into the open. I was free of it.





The day I traveled through time

Imagine the shock of getting home before you set off! Well it may not seem too shocking at first - in fact it might seem quite useful. But when you experience it first hand - and have so much proof that there can be no doubt - and furthermore, have experienced it on your own - the 'fear factor' kicks in. This happened to me during the late eighties, but it's something I remember very clearly.

It started as a regular day, during which time I was a Hull Telephone Engineer. Often I would use public transport to travel the eight miles home to the town of Beverley. And the journey home by bus would be pretty much routine. Same times and faces. For example; I would leave work at 4.30pm, and catch the 4.40pm bus to Beverley. Arriving at around 5pm, I would then walk home, usually walking into the house at around 5.10pm at the very earliest. The times were usually the same, give or take two or three minutes. The faces - bus driver, other passengers, and people at the destination station, were usually

recognizable at around the same times.

So just another journey home - same routine - same times - but one major surprise! This may at first not seem much of a surprise, but when I walked in to the house (my parents' home), my mother happened to comment: 'What are you doing home at this time?'

Glancing at the clock on the kitchen wall, I noticed it showed 4.45pm, and immediately assumed, and mentioned, that the clock must be wrong. As I walked into the living room, and saw the video digital display also showed the same time, I began to get a little concerned. With only my mother in the house, it seemed that if she was playing a trick, it was highly unlikely that she would be able to change the time on the video machine.

Being a telephone engineer, the next obvious thing to do was to telephone the 'Speaking Clock'. The automated response: 'Four-forty-seven and thirty seconds.' Somehow, I was at home, holding the telephone, at the same time I was just leaving

Hull by bus, approximately seven miles away. I had to sit down and think it through.

My first thought was, I have almost certainly traveled back in time as a result of some sort of rift, or temporal anomaly. My second thought was, 'Oh sh**', is it going to happen again?' Then my head was flooded with all kinds of thoughts: 'Was something going wrong with time simultaneously throughout the world - and about to finish in some kind of catastrophe? Or was it just me? Was I going to continue flipping back in time - but next time, how far back?' The 'not being in control' feeling was quite unnerving to say the least.

I did start to feel better when nothing obviously strange happened again. I was now able to analyze everything that had preceded this apparent time-slip. And over the next two days, as a result of speaking to work colleagues, bus passengers, the bus driver, and a few other individuals, I was able to confirm with little doubt that I had arrived in Beverley Bus Station at approximately 5pm. And yet nearly fifteen minutes earlier, I was telephoning the Speaking Clock from home - which was an experience that should have been happening nearly half an hour later - at approximately 5.10-5.15pm.

I have since pondered, what would have happened if I had walked back to the Bus Station? I would have been able to get there for 5pm when the bus was due to arrive - with me on board! I still often walk the same route, home from my local pub, so is it possible that somewhere along the 10-15 minute walk, another rift might occur? If at some time I suddenly go missing, you may have your answer.

If an impossible discovery is ever made of unearthing a human skeleton from the Jurassic era, then it might just have been me.

*Mark Andrew Elvidge
(Mark is the founder of The Mysteria! Organisation. www.mysteria!.co.uk)*

A child in distress

A few years ago I joined my future wife, Jo, and her family on holiday in Cornwall. They had rented an old, former tin miner's cottage in St Ives. Jo and I had an attic bedroom right at the top of the house. Also with us was my daughter by another relationship, who was then four or five years old.

From the very first night in that room, Jo and I had a weird time of it. It just felt odd and uncomfortable. At night I kept

'From the very first night in that room, Jo and I had a weird time of it.'

'It was about the size of a person but not human-shaped, just a vague oval'

getting this impression of a young girl, not exactly screaming, but in distress. When I've told people about it since I've said that I heard her but I'm not sure that's quite right. It was more of a feeling. It was strong enough, though, to keep me awake at night. I'd find it hard to sleep because as I was dozing off, I'd get this feeling of something wrong.

My own little girl wouldn't go into that room on her own. Whether she felt something or was just shy, I don't know, but since she was really excited about being on holiday and happy all the rest of the time, it was noticeable.

A couple of nights in to the holiday, something more tangible happened. I'd managed to doze off despite the atmosphere in the room when I felt Jo sit down on the bed beside me. I struggled awake to ask her if she was all right but there she was lying beside me, fast asleep. It wasn't Jo who'd sat on the bed - in fact, there was no one there at all. But there was a dent in the mattress!

I remember suddenly feeling cold all over and thinking, what the hell is going on? The mattress had definitely been depressed by something and tipped down as if it had been sat on. It was very creepy.

I enjoyed my holiday but I always got more tense as each day came to an end.

Daniel Johnson, Isfield, East Sussex

Shimmering apparition

I'm a technical stage manager for a theatre company. During a recent tour, we put on a show at Brecon Theatre, in South Wales. It was between 11.30pm and midnight. The audience had long gone, even the bar staff had gone home and half-a-dozen or so of the theatre crew and stage hands were enjoying a well-earned drink in the bar after a long evening. But none of us were drunk!

Suddenly, the stage manager at the theatre, whom I've worked with off an on for several years, said that her arm had suddenly been nudged. She told me that the theatre was haunted and that things like that happening weren't uncommon. The other guys who worked there confirmed it. It's quite a new theatre, only about ten years old I think, but they told me it was built on the site of an old gas works where, so the story goes, a man once died in an accident.

Then something caught my eye. It wasn't a flash of light - it wasn't as bright as that - but, I don't know, something jut drew my eye over to a flight of stairs which leads up from the bar to a gallery. There was a kind of shimmering on the stairs, like the heat haze you see on roads sometimes, or like the waviness you see when gas is coming out of a pipe - which may be significant when you consider the old use for the site. I was going to point it out to the others, but they'd already seen it.

'That's it, that's what you see!' said the stage manager. The shimmering area was about the size of a person but not human-shaped, just a vague oval. It looked like it was standing on the second step, with the blur continuing up to man height. The stairs have bright white strips on them, to make them more visible so people don't trip, and they made the ghost, if that's what it was, even more obvious: they were so clear where it wasn't standing but fuzzy and wobbly where it was.

It faded away and then came back - and this carried on for about half an hour. Just to make sure I was seeing what everyone else was seeing, I said I'd tell them when I next saw it fade away. Sure enough, when it vanished, everyone else saw it go at the same time. It wasn't imagination.

After about half an hour of this, the Brecon stage manager said: 'I think we better finish up our drinks and go now. I think it wants us to go. I've just felt a hand on my neck.'

It had also suddenly felt really cold. We didn't feel welcome at all. So we got out of there. It was a very weird experience but I believe that that night I saw my first ghost.

Andy Williams, Maidstone, Kent

My mysterious mirror

Okay, I do feel a tad daft writing this, but a few people have commented on this mirror now, so here goes.

It was a very warm Saturday, no wind at all to break up the humid air outside. In the sitting room, I had my patio door open, as the house was stifling. I decided, as it was a bank holiday weekend, I would change the downstairs of my house around, starting with the entrance hall.

I have a very old fashioned, huge by any standards, coat rack that was given to me way back in the early 1980s by my

Grandmother's friend which had been in her family since she was a child. I only kept it out of duty to my Nan, really.

It wasn't ugly at all as it is solid wood and the wood has patterns carved into it. It has a place for hats, umbrellas and hooks for coats and had a seat carved into it, which lifted up to reveal a huge compartment to hold, I presume, gloves, scarves etc. Anyway, I decided it had to go as I wanted my fish tank out of the sitting room and in the entrance hall.

As I was pulling the coat rack away from the wall, which I had done many times to dust behind it, I realised something big was wedged onto the back of it, something I had never noticed before. It had a chain attached to it. As I pulled this heavy wooden-looking thing by the chain, it came away and as I turned it around, I realised it was a very old fashioned mirror that had about a century of dust and dirt on it.

I sprayed a cloth with cleaner and with the first wipe of the mirror, a huge gust of wind blew through the hallway and disappeared into my sitting room. My daughter commented that it was odd and that this wind smelt musty. I just assumed a breeze had come in from the patio door, and where the mirror was so dusty and dirty, the wind had dislodged the smell from the mirror. I carried on cleaning the mirror, but had decided I was not going to keep it. I left it propped up against the radiator once cleaned.

As darkness fell, I had not put my hall light on. My daughter came down the stairs and said the mirror was lit up, so I went to have a look and noticed a light did seem to be emanating from this mirror. Also there were weird banging noises coming from upstairs, yet no one was here, not even my grandson, as he was with his other grandparents for the night.

There is a sense of something looking back at you when you look into this mirror and my neighbour commented on it today that it was a weird mirror and she would like it, but not until its been 'cleansed'!

I've put it in the downstairs loo out the way for now as it seems to freak everyone out that has come into the house. I find it comforting, though a bit odd because when you look into it, it feels as if you could go right into it.

Since being put in the cloakroom, the loo has tried to flush itself and when you open the door, there seems to be a rush of air that comes back at you.

Can a mirror really be haunted?

*Beatrice Harris, Croydon, Surrey
(Beatrice is forum administrator at the Mysteria! Organisation. www.mysteria!.co.uk)*

strange goings-on

Paranormal Magazine will be pleased to receive news via email from any society in the paranormal community. Please keep your reports brief and to the point (no more than 150 words). You may also attach a picture if it's particularly good. With any luck we'll find room for it. Please send your news to info@paranormal-magazine.co.uk

Clubs

Aspire Paranormal Investigations and Research (East Anglia/London)

Aspire Paranormal Investigations and Research is a group of friends with a common interest in the paranormal. Members meet once a month to discuss the running of the group and to share ideas and experiences. The group also undertakes paranormal investigations of all kinds of venues located in Suffolk, Norfolk, Essex, London and on occasions further field. Over the last month or so we have carried out a number of investigations with varying degrees of success. Our last investigation was at a small mission hall in Hertfordshire, where our mediums and sensitives picked up some really quite accurate information on a former gentleman who once lived close by. You can read more about our activities at www.aspireparanormal.co.uk

Mark Parker, Paranormal Investigator

Big Cats in Britain

Big Cats in Britain are searching for locations to set up webcams. These 24-hour cameras can be viewed by anyone at www.bigcatsinbritain.org. There will be a facility to take a still if anyone should spot anything unusual. These cameras will be the first set up solely for the aim of helping to solve the enigma of the British mystery felines. Partly funded by members, it is hoped that the cameras will be monitored by people from all over the globe, 24 hours a day. It is an exciting project and we hope that when the cameras are up and running, you will take part. We received more than 60 reports of 'big cats' in June from all over the British Isles and BCIB members are following these up; but as usual we need that hard evidence in the form of pictures, video footage etc. For more information email BCIB at bigcatsinbritain@btinternet.org

Mark Fraser, Founder

BSPRI (Bristol)

BSPRI are a non-profit paranormal research team that was founded back in October 2003 with more emphasis on the scientific side of investigating. The group quickly built up a vast array of members from the Bristol area who wanted to contribute to the group's success. The aim of the group is to encourage balanced debate and research of paranormal phenomena. The Society arranges investigations at allegedly haunted sites and at these events members hold vigils and gather data using a wide range of environmental sensors plus audio and video recording equipment. Reports on investigations are published on the Society's websites and members are encouraged to objectively analyse any audio or visual data collected. This year we have conducted investigations at Littledean Jail, Stag & Hounds, Dartmouth Castle, Bridewell police station, and Oxford Castle.

Coming up we have an investigation at Margam Castle which, if the history of its hauntings is anything to go by, should be a very interesting night.

Wendy Isaacs, Organiser

Cleveland Paranormal Investigators

Over the past month we have been meeting with local councils to set up a 'get children back into history' program through the paranormal. We now have dates set up in which we will be taking a school groups to the Captain Cook Birthplace Museum in Middlesbrough, carrying out workshops with them, and also taking them on a mini-investigation. At the end of the day they will receive a certificate as a reminder of their day. We also have set up several local investigations and several psychic fairs. You can read more about us at www.clevelandparanormalinvestigators.co.uk

Trevor Weller, Director

Connect 2 Paranormal Ulster

Connect 2 Paranormal Ulster is a small but well run psychic and spiritual investigation group based in Northern Ireland. Over the last months we have been extremely busy investigating no less than six different locations. One of our truly amazing investigations was carried out at the oldest pub in Ireland, Grace Neill's, which is situated in the seaside village of Donaghadee. Throughout the night we carried out various methods of communication, including circle work, seance and ouija board. We were amazed to contact the late former owner Grace Neill and also a sailor called Millar who used to frequent the bar. At one point in the circle work we had the seance table moving around the room in a 360% circle. You can view all this phenomena on our website: www.paranormalulster.com

Mike Hiron, Founder



Hampshire Ghost Club

Well it's been a busy month for us at Hampshire Ghost Club. We have just completed our 112th investigation, and what better way to achieve that than with a face-to-face encounter with a ghost for Investigating Team Leader Stuart James? It all happened at 22.20 on the 28th June. At this time investigator Stuart James went to change the tape on his camcorder. As he removed the tape, he noticed someone standing to his left at a distance of only 5.5ft. He turned and faced what he said was the spectral form of a ghostly miller. He was wearing grey trousers, a dirty white

shirt, a flat cap and was 5' 9" in height. Stuart said he was so startled that he started to back away and fumbled for his camera, which he could not get from his pocket in time. The ghostly miller had direct eye-to-eye contact with Stuart at all times and appeared to note Stuart's presence in the mill. As Stuart backed away, so did the miller before vanishing. Stuart noted that from the ghost's feet to his knees was transparent, with his torso appearing solid; the forehead of the ghost and above appeared transparent. What better way than to complete the club's 112th investigation than that! Find out more about the Hampshire Ghost Club at www.hampshireghostclub.net

David Scanlan, Founder

Northants Haunted

Northants Haunted was set up about three years ago and has carried out numerous paranormal investigations in Northamptonshire and neighbouring counties. We are an established and experienced group with a multitude of equipment and two very experienced mediums. We like to complement traditional techniques with science. Read about many of our visits at www.northantshaunted.co.uk

Rowley Adams, Team Leader

Paranormal Site Investigators (Wiltshire)

This month PSI has launched its annual recruitment for new investigators. PSI prides itself on its ethical and scientific standards of paranormal investigation, and the high quality of its trained team. Each year PSI runs an intense recruitment period to ensure they recruit those people showing the best potential to become a PSI investigator. The process consists of a compulsory induction night, after which candidates are invited to complete an application form. Successful candidates are invited to an interview with the PSI founders. For those making it through interview, a thorough training course is then delivered. After this, successful applicants are invited to attend peer-assessed fieldwork and providing no problems are identified, the applicants are then invited to join the team! If you think you have what it takes to join our team, please get in touch, via our website: www.p-s-i.org.uk

Dave Wood, Team Leader

Shadow Seekers (Tameside)

We are a non-profit making dedicated team based in the Greater Manchester area and between us we have all been involved in the paranormal for at least 10 years. Back in November 2007 our last group disbanded, so we decided to continue and with our own parapsychologist and medium. We offer guided overnight vigils with paranormal experiments to try to prove ghosts really do exist. We have achieved a good reputation along the way with our investigations, with

recognition from our local media coverage as well as articles in two of Leicestershire's own newspapers. We have also managed to acquire our own exclusive haunted venue for meetings. All this in just eight months - we feel that Shadow Seekers has placed its name on the UK's paranormal database. For details on our forthcoming investigations checkout our website at www.shadowseekers.co.uk

Susanne, Liaison Officer

Spirithelper Paranormal Investigators (Cornwall)

We are a family team based in Cornwall and we investigate anywhere that anyone has concerns with. We recently investigated a house and got photos and video footage of orbs and energy strands and also a few EVPs. After we carried out the above house investigation, I returned to do a house cleansing which took several hours to complete and was very energy draining, but the results were good and the clients could feel the difference almost immediately. We are always there to help anyone who believes they have a haunting. Anyone needing our help can contact us via our website: www.spirithelper.co.uk

Don, Founder

Spirit Quest UK (North Wales)

In June we held a public investigation at the Hand Hotel in Llangollen. The Hand Hotel is a 17th century coaching inn which in the past has had many famous guests, as diverse as Winston Churchill, Katherine Hepburn and Ella Fitzgerald. Ghosts reported in the hotel include a lady in grey, a man apparently working on a barrel in the cellar and a figure hanging round an old harmonium on show in a stairwell. We had 20 members of the public with us on this investigation and we split into two groups, each led by our guest mediums on the night, Carol and Lesley. In one room, in which many guest have spent an uncomfortable night, Lesley made contact with a man who had hanged himself there after finding his wife was pregnant with her lover's child. According to Carol, another room is haunted by a stable lad named Albert who died there suffering from TB. During the five-hour investigation the group heard strange voices, knocking on the walls in response to questions and several bright lights, all of which were caught on camera. A very successful night.

Howard Hughes, Director

Spirit Team UK (Midlands)

Spirit Team UK was set up by myself and Neil Machin in 2004 to

investigate paranormal phenomena in the UK. We have carried out investigations at over 40 venues, including the ancient Ram Inn, Woodchester Mansion and the Alexandra Theatre, Birmingham. We have 30 members and carry out approximately 10 investigations a year. We are trained by ASSAP and have our own investigator training program. We are currently making plans to produce a book regarding many haunted locations in Ashby de la Zouch, Leicestershire. We use state of the art equipment and provide clients with full reports and DVDs of investigations. We are always on the look-out for both new members and new locations to investigate. Although we mainly cover the East and West Midlands, we will travel anywhere in the UK to carry out an investigation. Among our members we have several mediums, a clairvoyant and a local historian. Our work has been recognised in the local press and in an international haunted locations book by Jeff Belanger. We are also currently negotiating with a major venue in Coventry to carry out our biggest investigation to date. Learn more about us at www.spiritteamuk.com

Alan Clifford, Team Manager

Events

If you're organising an event you believe will interest our readers, please let us know. Please keep your reports brief and to the point (no more than 150 words). You may also attach a picture (up to 10mb). Send your Events news to info@paranormal-magazine.co.uk

Fortean heaven in Devon

Three days of 'high strangeness, good food and great beer' are promised those attending this year's Centre for Fortean Zoology's Weird Weekend on August 15-17. Despite being held in a corner of the Devon countryside (the venue is Woolfardisworthy Community Centre), the Weird Weekend has been running successfully for seven years. Not only is the weekend a magnet for those interested in undiscovered animals, it's fun for their families, too. Speakers include four featured in the pages of this magazine: Jon Downes, Mike Hallowell, Nick Redfern and Karl Shuker. To learn more and to book tickets, visit www.cfz.org.uk and click on 'Weird Weekend'.

Hunt for Dorothy

A night of ghost hunting has been organized at one of Lancashire's most famous haunted houses, Salmsbury Hall, near Preston.

The event, in aid of The Anthony Nolan Trust, will take place on Friday, September 27, from 9pm to 4am. Heading a team of paranormal investigators is medium Ian Lawman, currently appearing on Living TV's *Living with the Dead* series. The medieval hall is believed to be haunted by Lady Dorothy Southworth, who lived there during the 17th century. Those wishing to join Ian and the investigators are asked to raise sponsorship of at least £125 for the charity, which carries out leukaemia research. For an entry form text 'FUN Preston' and your name and address to 60003, download it from www.anthonynolan.org.uk or call 0151 428 3992.



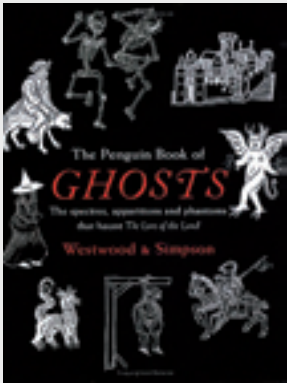
WORTHY CAUSE: Venerable Salmsbury Hall, near Preston, is the venue for a charity ghost night.





Paranormal Reviews

Books



The Penguin Book of Ghosts

Author: Jennifer Westwood and Jacqueline Simpson
Publisher: Allen Lane
Price: Hardback £14.99

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Not the usual Penguin book: this is a chunky hardback more than 400 pages thick. *The Penguin Book of Ghosts* consists of everything ghost-related from the two folklorists' magnum opus, *The Lore of the Land*, published a few years ago.

Forget your orbs and EVPs; this comprehensive collection of yarns and superstitions is kept strictly within the bounds of traditional ghost-lore, old stories of good old-fashioned ghosts from the length and breadth of England.

Arranged county by county, this scholarly but thoroughly readable guide to England's ghostlore will introduce you (or reintroduce you) to such charmers as Black Toby, Skulking Dudley, the Lumb Boggart, Old Cloggy and the 'Queen of Hell'. Although the stories are of some age, the authors have been careful to check for up-to-date sightings and other information on the ghosts.

Here are just a few extracts to whet your appetite: "The neighbourhood of this tree [at Hockley, Essex] was believed to be haunted, as being at, or near the spot, where a woman is said to have killed her child, and during the night noises were heard resembling "Oh mother, mother, don't kill me." People used to come from miles to listen to

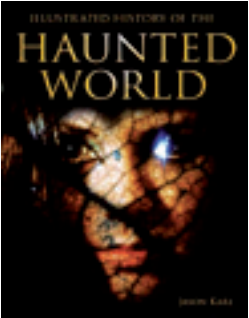
the "shrieking boy".'

'One farm worker in the 1960s claimed that he used to hear [the 'screaming skull' of Bettiscombe, Dorset] "screaming like a trapped rat in the attic". Some believe the skull sweats blood before national calamities.'

'As both were returning home drunk from the inn at Nether Stowey [Somerset], Walford strangled his idiot wife and hid her body in a ditch. The crime was soon discovered, and he was condemned to be hanged at the scene of his crime, and his body then gibbeted there. Some people still say they hear the gibbet's iron chains rattling on windy nights, or smell rotting flesh.'

The comprehensive index is a particular joy of *The Penguin Book of Ghosts*. Not only does it allow you to look up any location or named ghost, every type of manifestation imaginable seems to be listed: from Black Dogs and headless horsemen to such specifics as silk-clad ghosts, bicycling ghosts and claw marks.

It is only unfortunate that there was no room for Wales, Scotland and Ireland in this unrivalled compendium. Perhaps this was a plan for the future, defeated by the sad and untimely death of Jennifer Westwood earlier this year.



An Illustrated History of the Haunted World

Author: Jason Karl
Publisher: New Holland
Price: Hardback £19.99

In contrast to the in-depth treatment of Westwood's and Simpson's ghost book, Jason Karl's *Haunted World* is intended as no more than a bright, readable introduction to the world of spooks. As such, it succeeds perfectly well.

Haunted World provides a basic overview of ghosts, poltergeists and, rather surprisingly given the title, witchcraft. The many illustrations are well-chosen. The majority will be fairly familiar to long-term readers of the subject but I confess that one or two were new to me, including one I felt I ought to be more familiar with: the photograph of Lord Combermere's chair, with its ghostly occupant.

Karl also provides an interesting biography section of prominent ghost hunters and commentators. *An Illustrated History of the Haunted World* will be an attractive starting point for anyone first developing an interest in the supernatural. It would make a welcome gift for an inquiring youngster, for example.

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The Great Paranormal Clash

Author: Dr Ciarán and Billy Roberts
Publisher: Apex
Price: Hardback £9.99

The Great Paranormal Clash presents not only a series of essays by a practising medium and a parapsychologist but also dialogues between them.

Opinions between those convinced of a spirit world and those prepared to consider only a scientific model of the universe are not only polarised but often hostile. It is therefore refreshing to find two reasonable members of each community respecting each other's point of view.

Roberts impresses with his openness to the idea his gift may be telepathic rather than mediumistic and with his concern that mediums may do as much harm as they do good. O'Keefe, on the other hand, fails to tackle Roberts' insistence that some detailed communications can only be explained through contact with spirits.

But this is not O'Keefe's fault – rather the lack of a structured approach to important questions and their given answers, which would have made *Paranormal Clash* more useful read.

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Holy Wells in Britain: A Guide

Author: Janet Bord
Publisher: Heart of Albion
Price: Paperback £14.95

Holy Wells in Britain has been a real labour of love for Janet Bord and is the result of decades worth of exploring out-of-the-way corners of the British Isles in search of these often beautiful but always evocative sacred sites.

Since writing her first book on the subject, *Sacred Waters*, with husband Colin in 1985, Janet Bord has continued her research. This resulted in a book about the beliefs and rituals associated with wells, *Cures and Curses*, published last year by Heart of Albion, and now this up-to-date and comprehensive Guide.

In the 20-plus years since *Sacred Waters* was published, Janet has been delighted to find that holy wells have become more cherished: cleaned up and restored. *Holy Wells in Britain* provides a detailed and engaging, lavishly illustrated guide to hundreds worth visiting, all clearly arranged by county and with full instructions for finding them.

Many rewarding days out will begin with this book.

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Haunted Castles of Britain & Ireland

Author: Richard Jones
Publisher: New Holland
Price: Paperback £12.99

We're very lucky to live in such a beautiful and historic set of islands – and ones so wonderfully and fearfully haunted.

Richard Jones has added to a growing roster of books on the supernatural in Britain with perhaps his most attractive yet. A significant part of the appeal of *Haunted Castles* is John Mason's stylish photographs, in both colour and spookily manipulated black and white, which are a highlight of every page.

Castles are evocative enough in themselves without the added bonus of being haunted: this lavish guide should kindle a sense of Gothic romance into every ghost-hunter's heart.

Richard provides plenty of background information on the history of his chosen castles before embarking on the fascinating tales of the ghosts said to haunt them. Legends involving fairies, witches and dragons are also included.

Like *Holy Wells*, this is a book to keep in the car for days out and holidays.

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Lost Islands: Inventing Avalon, Destroying Eden

Author: Kevan Manwaring
Publisher: Heart of Albion
Price: Paperback £14.95

Bard, professional storyteller and keen island-hopper Kevan Manwaring has combined his passions in an evocative guide to the legendary islands of the world, exploring not only their mythic geography but also their true meaning in our collective psyche.

Atlantis, Avalon, Hi Brasil, the Western Isles: such utopias haunt the Western imagination. Some are not even islands, like the magical village of Brigadoon where time stands still, but all are grist to Manwaring's insightful mill.

In an era of climate change and global uncertainty, myths of lost islands are more poignant today than ever before. Manwaring charts the demise of islands such as the Isles of Scilly and Easter Island – 'lost' either by partial inundation of the sea or because of severe ecological changes.

If we don't learn from these myths and take note of what is happening in the real world – will 'this island Earth' of ours go the way of Atlantis?

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X-Files: Essentials

Certificate: 15
Starring: David Duchovny, Gillian Anderson, Mitch Pileggi, William B. Davis
Directed by: Various, 1993-1999
Reviewed by: Tom Leins
Price: £19.99



Chris Carter's seminal *X-Files* TV series may have been overtaken in the public's affections by new-fangled mystery shows like 'Lost', but the unexpected arrival of a long-rumoured new movie has definitely set tongues wagging and reignited interest in the long-dormant franchise. This two-disc package features eight episodes that have been handpicked by creator Carter and producer Frank Spotnitz.

Condensing the magic of a show like the *X-Files* into just eight episodes is a tough call for anyone. It kicks off with the dated but undeniably absorbing 'Pilot' episode, offering a



chance to trace the show right back to its roots when Scully first met 'spooky' Mulder. Next up is 'Beyond The Sea' (Series 1, Episode 13) which sees Scully tangle with Luther Lee Boggs, a death row inmate who claims that he is psychic. 'The Host' (Series 2,

"Condensing the magic of a show like the X-Files into just eight episodes is a tough call for anyone."

Episode 2) was penned by Carter himself and concerns a decomposing corpse inhabited by a deadly parasite! Disc one is rounded off with 'Clyde Bruckman's Final Repose' (Series 3, Episode 4) an Emmy-winning episode which 'TV Guide' proclaimed "the 10th greatest episode in TV history"!

The second batch of episodes begins with 'Memento Mori' (Season 4, Episode 14), which probes Scully's ailing health. Carter's black and white 'The Post-Modern Prometheus' (Series 5, Episode 5) retells the story of Frankenstein's monster in a small mid-western town, while 'Bad Blood' (Series 5, Episode 12) sees Mulder kill a Texan teenager whom he mistakes for a vampire. The final episode is 'Milagro' (Series 6, Episode 18), which concerns a writer who becomes the prime suspect in a grisly murder case. The arrival of *X-Files Essentials* offers a timely reminder of the show's remarkable gifts, and as such is well worth checking out.



The Orphanage

Certificate: 15
Directed By: Juan Antonio Bayona, 2007
Reviewed By: Lee Griffiths
Price: £19.99

Laura (Belen Rueda) returns to the orphanage where she grew up with the intention of restoring and reopening the long-abandoned building as a home for disabled children. However, as Laura and her husband prepare for a new life, their young son, Simon, disappears, and Laura is convinced there are supernatural forces at work. Despite merely serving as producer on the project, the stylistic hand of Guillermo Del Toro (*The Devil's Backbone*, *Pan's Labyrinth*) is certainly felt in *The Orphanage*, though with a fine balance of beautifully crafted storytelling and back to basics scares, J.A. Bayona delivers a far more enjoyable and affecting experience than anything Del Toro has so far managed.



Heroes - Season 2

Certificate: 15
Directed by: Various, 2007
Reviewed by: Jordan brown
Price: £34.99

You've got to feel sorry for creator Tim Kring and the rest of the gang behind hit superhero show *Heroes*. After wowing the world with a blinder of a fledgling season, the US writer's strike meant the second year was trimmed down by half to only 11. It's four months after the incident at Kirby Plaza and The Company rears its ugly head, threatening to unleash a virus that will suppress the heroes' extraordinary abilities. Even Kring himself has admitted the start of Season 2 isn't as good as Season 1, but at least the strike has given them time to regroup and hopefully come roaring back with Season 3. In short - prepare to be disappointed by Season 2.



EXTE:

Hair Extensions
Certificate: 15
Directed By: Sion Sono, 2007
Reviewed By: Jordan Brown
Price: £19.99

Never let it be said that the Japanese play it safe when it comes to cranking out horror flicks. Never a genre to shy away from unconventional themes, J-Horror takes another crazy turn with this tale of evil hair. *EXTE: Hair Extensions* tells the tale of trainee hairdresser Yuko. Applying hair extensions that have been harvested from the corpse of a dead girl, Yuko is surprised when they begin avenging the death of their previous owner by wreaking bloody havoc on their new owners. A crazy slice of follicular fear, *EXTE* unfortunately never manages to get the balance right between scaring the crap out of you and making you laugh.



Pushing Daisies -

Season 1
Certificate: 15
Directed By: Various, 2007
Reviewed By: Lee Griffiths
Price: £29.99

As a young boy, Ned discovered that he was able to bring people back to life with one touch, though if they're revived for more than a minute, someone dies in their place! Now, many years later, Ned has teamed up with a private investigator to tackle a series of seemingly unsolvable crimes. It was unfortunate that *Pushing Daisies* was doomed to a fate on ITV, where it was broadcast after 'Britain's Got Talent' and gradually lost viewers with each passing episode. Imagine *Amelie* being shoved through Warner Brother's TV grinder together with 'CSI' and you'll have an idea of the kind of show *Pushing Daisies* is. Great stuff.



Batman:

Gotham Knight
Certificate: 15
Directed By: Various, 2008
Reviewed By: Lee Griffiths
Price: £12.99

Batman: Gotham Knight brings together six Batman stories from the world's greatest animation visionaries and comic book talents, which sees the Dark Knight battling brand new foes and establishing his place as a vigilante hero in the hazardous city of Gotham. Doing for *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight* what *The Animatrix* did for *The Matrix* and it's sequels. While *Gotham Knight* hardly bridges any gaps at all between *Begins* and *The Dark Knight*, the half a dozen stories are diverse enough in their style and narrative to satisfy the Bat cravings of the avid fan, while casual passers-by can at least enjoy some wonderful animation from a few of Japan's top animation studios.



Terminator: The Sarah

Connor Chronicles - Season 1
Certificate: 15
Directed By: Various, 2008
Reviewed By: Jordan Brown
Price: £29.99

Having stopped the events of Judgement Day, Sarah and John Connor live an almost nomadic existence on the run from the government. Their cover is blown when they once again find themselves targets of a terminator assassination. Luckily, help arrives in the form of advanced female terminator named Cameron. *The Sarah Connor Chronicles* may not have the magic that made the first two *Terminator* films so timeless - namely James Cameron's flair for gung-ho action and Linda Hamilton in the title role - but while it isn't anything astounding, it is surprisingly watchable.



The Spiderwick

Chronicles
Certificate: PG
Directed by: Mark Water, 2008
Reviewed By: Tim Isaac
Price: £19.99

After moving into the rundown Spiderwick mansion, young Jared discovers a book called 'Spiderwick's Field Guide To Faeries', with a warning on it not to read it. Ignoring this advice, Jared opens the book and discovers how to access a how fantasy world humans can't normally see. While you do feel they could have gone a bit further with *The Spiderwick Chronicles*, it mostly works extremely well. Freddie Highmore does a pretty good American accent as twins Simon and Jared, and holds the film together pretty well. There are moments when the CG fantasy world gets a little too hectic for its own good, but largely *The Spiderwick Chronicles* is great fun.



Zombies

Certificate: 15
Directed By: J.S. Cardone, 2006
Reviewed By: Lee Griffiths
Price: £15.99

Following the recent death of her husband, Karen Tunny (Hearing) and her two children are forced to relocate to a remote mountain home in the woods of Addytown, Pennsylvania, where child zombies are rumoured to roam the woods at night. *Zombies*, otherwise known as *Wicked Little Things*, began life as a Tobe Hooper project before landing on the lap of *BMM 2* hack, J.S. Cardone, and the results are every bit as abysmal as you'd imagine. While riddled with horror clichés and a lack of originality, *Zombies* could have possibly gotten by on blood and gore alone, but with minimum violence, the film struggles to come up with a reason for existing.



Medium - Season 3

Certificate: 12
Starring: Patricia Arquette, Miguel Sandoval, Jake Weber
Director: Various, 2006-2007
Reviewed By: Tim Isaac
Price: £39.99



When *Medium* first started, it almost seemed as if the show's writers were trying to create the most annoying couple on television. Patricia Arquette, who plays initially in-denial psychic Allison Dubois, came across as a whining drip and her husband ridiculously needy and clingy. They were meant to be a woman struggling to accept her psychic gift after years of trying to ignore it and a husband adjusting to his wife's new and unusual life, while being slightly scared of it, but they didn't come across that way. Thankfully the producers seemed to realise the main characters needed a good slap and through Season 2 the show went from strength to strength, with the characters becoming more likeable and the stories cleverer. It's a hot streak that continues through Season 3.

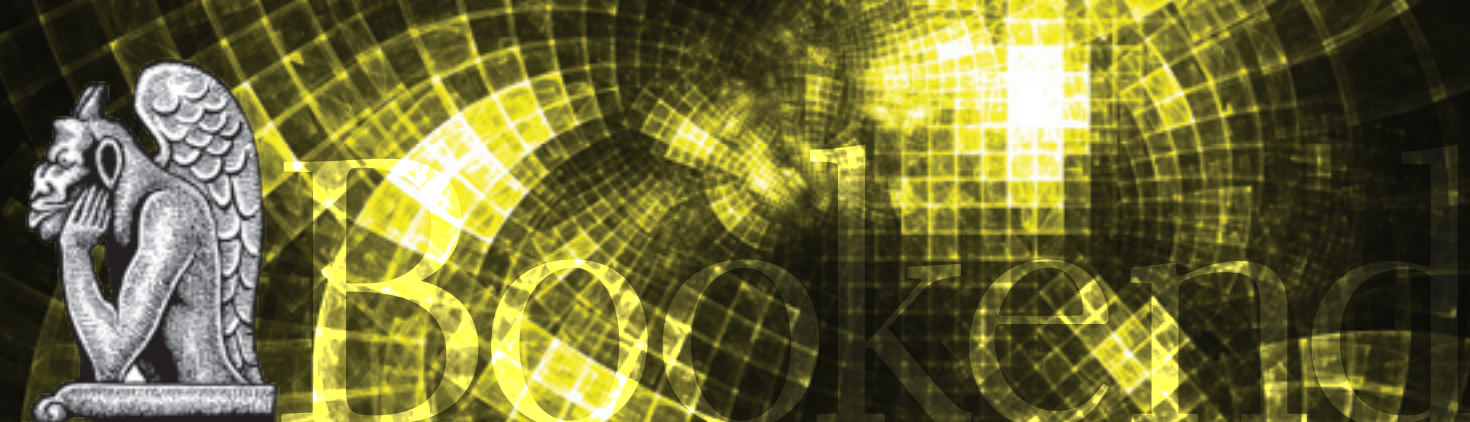
There are plenty more supernatural troubles for Allison to deal with, from a serial killer possessing people so he can murder more people, to a three-part season finale, which co-stars Neve Campbell as a possible murder victim who isn't what she appears to be. Whereas early episodes always seemed slightly flawed because of the repetitive nature of Alison misunderstanding what the dead were trying to tell her and the deceased seeming to be deliberately obtuse, Season 3 handles this much better, with a

far cleverer selection of psychic phenomena for Alison to deal with. Along with Neve Campbell, the *Scream* connection is kept alive with Patricia Arquette's brother David directing one of the episodes, and there's a featurette about his input to

"Patricia Arquette, who plays initially in-denial psychic Allison Dubois, came across as a whining drip and her husband ridiculously needy and clingy."

the show on the discs as well. That's just one part of a fairly decent feature package, which ensures *Medium - Season 3* is well worth a purchase. Just don't bother with Season 1, because it's rubbish.





it's a club you can never leave

by Jon Downes



It's my wife I feel sorry for.

Not only is she married to a manic-depressive writer who has a tendency to drink too much, and to fill her kitchen with tanks of revolting looking wriggly things from exotic locations, but she lives in a haunted house and finds herself playing hostess to an eccentric collection of paranormal researchers, ufologists and monster hunters who turn up, often unannounced, on our doorstep from all over the world.

I suppose it's my fault. Although I am a scientist, years ago I recognised the natural world cannot be explained purely in terms of Darwin, Mendel or Linnaeus and that a lot of the scientific laws that govern the universe simply haven't been discovered yet.

I have spent most of my adult life doing my best to push back the boundaries of human knowledge. For 18 years I have been director of the Centre for Fortean Zoology, the world's largest organisation dedicated to searching for unknown animals. Over the last 20 years I have hunted vampires on three continents, chased werewolves, investigated cattle mutilations, searched for de-evolved sub-humans, helped the police with their enquiries (in a good way) and got drunk with a star of Flash Gordon.

And knowing this, my poor darling wife still decided to marry me. We've only been together for 3½yrs, but in that time she has had parts of our house rearranged by a poltergeist, chased giant eels and big cats, and one night, whilst sitting under the stars with me (plus a leading UFOlogist and a famous UFO experimenter), she saw a flying triangle only 100ft above our garden. And the dear girl took it all in her stride.

The trouble is, as soon as you become a real researcher rather than someone with a scrapbook of press cuttings, you find high strangeness worms its way into every facet of your life, and, almost without knowing it, you become part of an international freemasonry of people who have decided to spend their lives delving into the unknown. And once you join that club you never leave.

It is a strange brotherhood of people from all over the world who find themselves co-operating – sometimes to a ludicrous extent – with total strangers. For example, a few years ago an Australian well-known for his lifetime's quest for the yowie (the Antipodean Bigfoot) came to spend the evening with us – and stayed for three and a half months. Next week, I am expecting a visit from a young Russian/American whom I have never met but whose research I have admired for some years, and only this morning another Australian researcher asked whether he could visit us for a few days.

The answer of course was yes, because not only does the CFZ have one of the English speaking world's largest archives of cryptozoological research material, which we have a commitment to share, but on a personal level I believe that as international tensions, racial intolerance, and sheer unfriendliness rise all around us, people like us have a duty to co-operate with each other and to try in our own little ways to make the world a better place.

Next weekend my poor long-suffering wife will be presiding over a barbecue for researchers from three continents, together with keepers from a local zoo helping us set up our new turtle exhibit, and my young nephews who think that this is all great fun.

I wonder if the flying triangle will return to pay us a visit?

Jon Downes is director of the Centre for Fortean Zoology, which is committed to the investigation of reports of mysterious creatures around the world. The CFZ is based in Devon, UK, and paid for by public subscription. To learn more visit www.cfz.org.uk

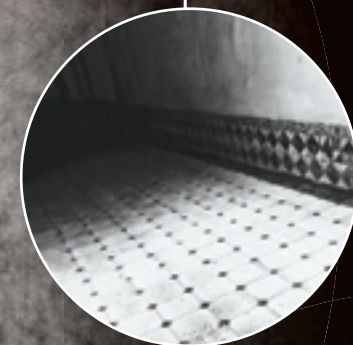


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Coming in the autumn a brand new series “The Screaming Banshees”. The head of a paranormal research organisation sends our trio of investigators (Yvette Fielding Cath Howe and Lesley Smith) on a spooky road trip across the country.

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