

FOLKLORE FRONTIERS



**DURHAM PUMA HUNT
FOXES' RELEASE
SAMANTHA FOX
CRASHED UFOs**

News and reviews

No. 4 January, 1987

** FOLKLORE FRONTIERS is an independent non-profit making magazine devoted to folklore, particularly what is generally known as urban belief tales. ** It is published and edited by Paul Screeton. ** Address 5, Egton Drive, Seaton Carew, Hartlepool, Cleveland, TS25 2AT. ** Subscription rates: U.K. £3 for 4 issues; U.S. 8 dollars. Please make all cheques/POs out to P. SCRETON only. Dollar notes pre-ferred from U.S. ** Back numbers available 75p inc. p&p.

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An American Foaf?

From Clive Harper & Dobra Murray, of Hertfordshire

We have recently been told a story which bears many of the hallmarks of a FOAF tale. The story concerned two air stewardesses who checked into a hotel room late one night. There was an awful smell in the room and so they asked to be moved. The manager told them that the hotel was completely full and he could only offer them the one room. Being very tired and not wanting to look for another hotel, they agreed to stay in the room. In the morning one of the women had reason to look under bed and found a dead body, which was the cause of the awful smell.

The story was told to us in all seriousness by an American woman who has just retired as a stewardess with United Airlines. A further detail, that the stewardess worked for American Airlines, was appended to the tale in such a way as to "prove" the veracity of the story.

Drunken ducks recalled

From Mary V. Bonney, Berkshire.

The item about the chicken on the "Newslines" page reminded me of something told by my late mother, who was born in 1892 at Didcot, which apparently took place in the neighbouring village of Harwell, Berks., then famous for its cherry orchards, when she was a child.

A woman of Harwell kept fine ducks. One year there was a glut of cherries, so she made her surplus fruit into wine. The stones, skin, and so on, were eventually dumped in her garden. That afternoon she was horrified to find her

six ducks lying apparently dead. However, she was not a wasteful person, and set to plucking them all, ready for sale.

Suddenly, as she completed the job, the birds began to come to life, noisily — they had only made themselves blind drunk on the remains of the cherry-mash. Their owner then set to again, this time with her "old red flannel potticoat" and made a sort of jacket for each bird. Until their feathers grew again these scarlet-jacketed ducks were one of the sights of Harwell.

I do not know when this all happened. It may be a legend handed down in the area. The only sure things are that Harwell cherries are renowned; and that well-made cherry wine, like all "innocent old maids' drinks", has to be treated with respect, in the glass.

TV Capers and and medial secrecy

From Peter Rogerson, of Manchester

Thanks for the latest F.F. — a great improvement. I can just remember two rather vague foaf stories.

1. THE DISOBEDIENT TV. This friend of my father (years ago when TV was just coming in) had a TV set wouldn't switch off. All that would happen was that it would dim down. Sometimes it would come on by itself. It appeared he lived near power lines and static electricity charged up the valves.

2. THE SECRET WARD. This friend of my father's had a little boy who was taken seriously ill and had to be admitted to one of Manchester's leading hospitals. This guy, of course, went to visit his son. One night he got rather lost and found himself in a strange ward. There he saw a baby with two faces on one head, another all head and no body, another with great masses of flesh from its cheeks, etc. A nurse explained that he shouldn't have been in there and that the ward should have been kept locked.

TALLY HO!

By Paul Screeton

The barbaric practice of fox hunting exists partially because of folklore and fairytales. Or so some would say. The myth of the cunning fox with its devious craftiness has been nurtured in generations of children by authors and publishers who should know better. Fables have meaningful messages, but they can unwittingly cause pain, misery and perpetuate deaths. Despite "The Sly Fox and Little Red Hen". Today fewer than 5% of foxes ever taste poultry (though this can largely be "thanked" upon the concentration camp battery farming method). Our

picture shows a fox which lives under a hen-house on the Taylors' farm in Cleveland. The pair of foxes never harm the poultry but have caused a dramatic fall in the rat population since taking up residence. (1)

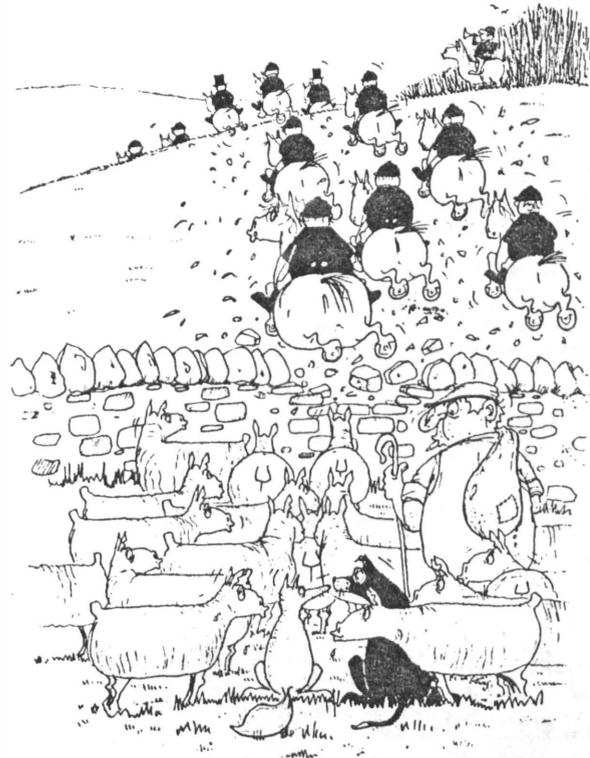


Other foxes have artificial earths built by hunts so they can be easily reared for the hunting season. Is this what they mean by "conservation"? The double standards hypocrisy, which is what it amounts to, has cubs encouraged to use the homes and then when the educational process of teaching young hounds how to kill as a pack arrives, earths are barred by a grille or stones and they become "verminous pests" to give young dogs a taste of blood. (2)

The blood-sports lobby cranks out some weird-wonderful propaganda to justify its gory activities. Some even claim the fox enjoys the hunt!

One anti-field sports journalist relates how a huntsman attempted to claim the fox will sometimes give the hounds the slip and then watch laughing from behind a wall, amused that its pursuers were going the





wrong way. Anthropomorphically he absurdly added that: "You'll never hear a fox scream, they know when their time is up." Does it hurt? Only when I laugh, sir." (3)

Then we look with loathing upon badger baiting and dog pit fights. The irony here is that if you ill treat a dog it is illegal, if you harray a fox to exhaustion and kill it, it is not. I wonder, just maybe it has something to do with the classes of people involved.

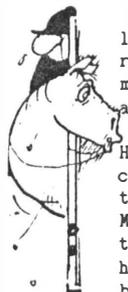
But, of course, most of us are animal lovers. Maybe there are ignorant, sentimental types rounding up foxes in towns and driving them out to mid-Wales in vans and releasing them into the wild where

they belong. Do-gooders unaware that their charity means these urban foxes will snap up every lamb, hen, duck, pheasant chick or pet cat in sight. At least that's the scenario painted by the Welsh Farmers' Union to explain the plague of foxes in the Berwyn mountains.

W.F.U. president Huw Hughes demanded police and R.S.P.C.A. action, calling the practice "extremely irresponsible."

Vice-president Gwilyn Jones had "evidence that a person saw a van letting foxes out on an unfenced mountain road near Bala. And: "There is reason to believe they are breaking the Wildlife and Countryside Act by moving creatures from one habitat to another. We have enough foxes already without more being dumped here."

Had Mr Jones seen the van? No. But others had. And there was circumstantial evidence - foxes had begun coming near mid-Wales houses to scavenge in dustbins. Jones the Gullible thought his neighbour Mr Morris might know more. "It wasn't me who saw the van" but "I'm convinced the story is true." Can a chauffeur be a believable authority figure? "I heard a chauffeur who drives for a shoot at Llanarman Dyffryn-Ceirog has been talking about it."



So to that unpronounceable place and its West Arms pub. Mick Matthews Jnr. an estate gamekeeper, says: "I have not seen anyone myself, but I have heard a lot of rumours about it. I think there must be some truth in it. There certainly are a lot more foxes around."

Reporter John Ezard hunting along what he called "the spoor of anecdote" and suspecting "the story could be no more than a folktale," was told by Matthews he had heard a van full of foxes had refuelled at the Brynteg Garage, Glyndyfrdwy, and been noticed by the owner. At the garage Ian Rodgers answered the phone: "You're calling about the foxes aren't you? I had a bloke from what I think he said was the British Field Sports Society asking the same question earlier. No, it's not true. Nobody like that stopped here. My wife or I are on all the time, so we'd know." (4)

Local police and R.S.P.C.A. knew nothing of the alleged fox dumping. So does this leave us with a new meaning for the acronym foaf? Friend Of A Fox?

References:

- (1) Bryant, John, "The Sly Fox & the Little Red Hen...", Wildlife Guardian, No. 3, 1986.
- (2) McMahon, John, "Artificial Fox Earths 'Hypocritical'", Wildlife Guardian, No. 3, 1986.
- (3) Wood, Sean, "Country Matters", Today, Oct. 17, 1986.
- (4) Ezard, John, "On the twisting trail of a fox folk tale", The Guardian, Feb. 1, 1986. (credit: Chris Lovegrove)

URBAN SAM FOX

We knew a Samantha Fox tale would emerge. But firstly an Australian magazine has issued a warning on the dangers of high-flying ladies with silicon-implemented bosoms. "In certain circumstances," it claims, "they can explode." (Peter Tory column, Star, 22/10/86).

Columnist Grovel in Private Eye, No. 646, claimed this boob by pneumatic Sam, which I reproduce without further comment: "I attend the Zanzibar Club, a sleazy joint in Great Queen Street. Much to my delight I find myself at the table of Bruce Matthews the Managing Director of News International. He is discussing the evolution of the silicon chip with his society dentist when Samantha Fox joins us. Overhearing the conversation and completely misunderstanding the context in which silicon was mentioned Ms Fox threatens Matthews with her lawyer (sic) who is drinking somewhere else in the club."



Surgeons operate on . . .

THE MAN WHO ATE A DOMINO

DOMINO player Howard Young's on-the-spot joke landed him in the operating theatre.

For he had to be cut open by surgeons three months after swallowing one of the pieces.

The domino drama began when 29-year-old Howard was playing a game in the Horden Hotel.

Jobless Howard, of Rosedale Terrace, Horden, popped the piece in his mouth as a party trick.

But the joke went wrong when the domino remained stuck inside him.

Speaking briefly to the Mail, the practical joker said he began to feel unwell when the piece refused to pass through his system.

by **Peter French**

"I swallowed it in May, but after a while I began to feel terrible," said Howard.

"It was making me ill so I went to hospital," he added.

Staff at Hartlepool General Hospital gave Howard a series of X-rays when he turned up complaining of stomach pains.

Last month he was admitted to the hospital and had the domino surgically removed.

Howard's mother Margaret said the domino — which her son now carries about with him — came out partially digested.

"He was very lucky," said his mother.

The landlord of the Horden Hotel refused to comment to the Mail.

But another village pub licensee said it was not the first time Howard had performed his domino-eating stunt.

Nimmos landlady Julie Wilkinson said: "This is the third domino he has swallowed."

"The others just pass through his system, but apparently this one became lodged near his pancreas," she added.

Officials at Hartlepool General Hospital were staying tight-lipped about the incident.

Hospital General Manager Nigel Curtis would only say: "A man was admitted to the hospital and had his abdomen opened up and a domino removed."

MAIL, HARTLEPOOL.
19/9/86.

CONTRIBUTORS

ANDY ROBERTS is editor of UFO Brigantia, a lively West Yorkshire-based flying saucer journal, and author of "Cat Flaps!" reviewed in this issue. In his article he looks at the dubious but perennial subject of crashed UFOs.

PAUL SCREETON is your editor and author of several books on folklore and earth mysteries. He is deputy chief sub-editor of the Mail, Hartlepool, and in a good position to professionally round up the media response to the "Durham Puma." He also casts his eye over the strange tale of urban foxes being released in Wales.

PETER FRENCH is deputy chief reporter of the Mail, Hartlepool, and reported on "The Man Who Ate A Domino." We include this report not just because it is funny and an example of mankind's ability to create weird events. Oh, no, there's more. The aspect I'm about to relate did not appear in the Mail report but was what really instigated the story. So let's just call it a rumour. I mean, who would really accept that professional nursing staff would actually organize a sweepstake to guess what the dots were on the domino which a patient in their care had swallowed?

SAUCERFUL OF SECRETS

By Andy Roberts

Crashed saucer or retrieval stories are now 'officially' folklore. Jan Harold Brunvand in 'The Choking Doberman', his latest book on modern folktales, refers to the crashed saucer/ retrieval motif, and puts it in the category of a suppressed government truth story, going on to give an outline of such a tale. It might be a just a folktale to Brunvand, but there are thousands of UFO buffs all over the world who know for a fact that various governments have possession of crashed saucers, and as a result stories and rumour abound to substantiate the myth. Official documents, affidavits and death bed confessions also exist from people who claim to have had direct experience of them, so it must be true. Mustn't it?

The basic story line around which all the variants are based, goes like this. An unknown aerial craft is either seen to crash or is found, invariably in a remote spot deep in the country and usually in the USA. If civilians are involved they are quickly hushed up by the 'government' and the object, usually a disc, is taken away by the military to a top-secret airbase where it is kept in a high security area. No more is then heard of the disc other than the rumours which spread in the wake of it's alleged capture. All retrieval tales have all or part of this basic story in their make up. Additions and spin offs to the basic story are common and include, amongst other things, the retrieval of alien bodies, photographs of same, Presidential and other authority figure acknowledgement and involvement, and more arcane phenomena such as the mysterious Men in Black.

There are two main aspects to the folklore of crashed saucers and they are inextricably linked. Firstly, is it true, do we really have crashed saucers on earth and secondly, how and why are the tales and rumours, leading to the eventual creation of the crashed saucer myth, created and spread?

Since the explosion of the idea of extraterrestrial UFO's in the years following 1947, the ultimate proof of aliens visiting earth, would be actual physical contact between mankind and extraterrestrials (ET's). The thousands of UFO buffs who believe in ET's would dearly love this to happen, as would the media and both parties actively spread any rumours which alledge this to have happened. Contact has not been proven though, but neither has belief in extraterrestrials vanished, and so the latest assumption, and one which brings the possibility of alien contact just within our grasp, is that the governments, the military etc have obtained crashed alien craft and in the best tradition of governments everywhere are keeping it secret from us. This rumour is actively accepted by the people who thrive on mystery and cover ups and is easily assimilated into the UFO literature and from there into the press and public consciousness. These rumours accepted as facts, it then lies on the UFO organisations to prove to the rest of humanity that we have been duped in this way and are being prevented from learning the truth, presumably to prevent the collapse of civilisation as we know it. UFO organisations thrive on rumour and secrecy and from this base a myth has been created which is in turn fed by the media, the UFO literature itself, the military and back to the UFO organisations. Wait a minute, did I say the military, is this a note of paranoia creeping in? Yes I did, and no it isn't. There is a good deal of evidence, and reasons, to suggest that the military, and by military I mean any branch of a government's armed forces or space projects, have a vested interest in keeping this myth going, but more of that later.

The history of retrievals is riddled with hoax and mis-information, making it lots of fun for folklorists and sociologists wishing to see how the stories develop and spread, but very hard to discern where truth begins and ends. The subject is a vast one and the best way to look at it for our purposes is to briefly look at a few of the main cases on which all the others could well be based and the reasons for their existence in the first place.

The first report of a crashed object comes from the USA Airship wave of 1897, when one such airship was reported to have crashed in the small Texas town of Aurora. The airship crashed after exploding, a popular feature of contemporary retrieval tales, scattering wreckage over a wide area. The pilot was recovered, and although badly burned, it was discernable that he was 'not from this world'. The airship itself was said to have been made from an unknown metal resembling aluminium and some reports stated that 'unknown heiroglyphics' had been found on some papers. Many reports like the above were circulating in the 1896/7 Airship wave, and they differed little in

essence from each other and from the modern crashed saucer tales, with the exception that some of the artefacts allegedly found resembled things which *would* be found in an airship, which was the most advanced aerial form imaginable in those days, just as the 'flying saucer' is to us. These included pieces of propellor wheel, wire and electrical apparatus. Unsurprisingly, none of these artefacts are around today.

The pilot in the Aurora crash was buried in the local cemetery and the tale later passed into international UFO folklore as a 'true' occurrence. All, as usual was not as it seemed, and diligent investigation work by various critical UFO investigators proved that no crash ever actually took place, and that the story had been a fabrication, either by wireless telegraph operators or by a Dallas reporter hoping to attract tourists to the town. The story he created could well have been the genesis for all future crashed saucer tales. The basics of crashed object/dead pilot/unknown metal like aluminium, have remained constant in all retrieval tales since.

By the time of the first post 1947 crash the objects found had become discs. Two retrieval tales stand out as being the true forerunners of the crashed saucer myth of the last thirty years. Firstly the retrieval at Aztec in New Mexico.

The Aztec crash was popularised by newspaper columnist Frank Scully in his book 'Behind The Flying Saucers', and he stated that a 99 foot diameter crashed saucer had been found on a plateau in the above state with sixteen dead aliens inside. At last, real proof of a Crashed Saucer. Well not really. Researcher William Moore who has looked into retrieval stories in some depth unearthed the fact that Scully had received all his information on the Aztec case from two gentlemen, Silas M Newton and the mysterious 'Mr Gee', who were convicted confidence tricksters, both having spent years creating complicated scenarios to help people part with their money. According to Moore's book on the subject (Crashed UFO's), Newton and Gee had carefully prepared Scully over several years with tales of crashed saucers and dead aliens, but without ever producing any solid evidence. The plot thins. A significant development in this story however, and one which has implications for the veracity of all other retrieval tales is Newton & Scully's involvement with the biggest rumour and story mill in the world, Hollywood.

In 1948/49 an actor by the name of Mike Conrad, decided to make a film based on the idea that UFO's were operating out of Alaska, and in order to create prior interest in the film, began circulating rumours in Hollywood that his film would contain close ups of real UFO's. This story, spread via the media, prompted Scully to announce to the public, via his newspaper column, the story he had been told by Newton and Gee, with the addition of the aliens home as being the planet Venus. Conrad's little scam also involved the hiring of a man who posed for the media as an FBI agent, acknowledging that the FBI had possession of film of said craft, which was safely locked away. Conrad later admitted the hoax, but it was too late. By then, Newton, who had no knowledge that Conrad's tale was a hoax, was by then telling the Aztec tale, well blended with the Conrad hoax, to anyone who would listen, in and around Hollywood. Furthermore, according to W. Moore, the tales differed vastly in content according to who he was trying to impress and for what he was trying to con them out of. Many tens of people must have heard variations of the tale from Newton in late 1949, which must have been spread and altered, and will doubtless have formed the basis of or addition to many a retrieval tale since. One of the tales, involving a crashed saucer, found it's way to the FBI who sent a memo based on it to J. Edgar Hoover. This memo has been seen as proof by many that retrievals by the government have taken place, but the story can be traced back to Silas M. Newton and his money making schemes.

The Aztec case is one of the first retrieval stories definitely proved to have been a hoax and one which has spread rumour variations throughout the UFO community ever since. The second case, and the one in which the military involvement with these tales becomes apparent, is the infamous Roswell Incident.

Investigation proper into the Roswell did not begin until 1978 but since then over ninety individuals have been located who have some first hand knowledge of the case. Briefly, in July 1947 during a storm over Roswell, New Mexico an explosion was heard, a bright object was seen in the sky and later a large amount of debris was found by a local farmer. The first two events may or may not be connected to the

source of the wreckage. The wreckage was immediately recovered by the USAAF who flew it to Wright Patterson airbase, and the farmer who had discovered the object was mysteriously held by the USAAF for a week whilst the area was cleared of debris. A statement issued to the press said that a weather balloon had been recovered (one Major Marcel did say though, that "it was nothing made on this earth"), and the arguments have raged ever since as to whether the craft was a UFO or something else.

From various interviews with witnesses to the debris, the description of the wreckage seemed to be very similar to that allegedly found at the Aurora crash site, a thin aluminium like substance and some small rods covered with hieroglyphic type characters. Wire was also found as was 'electrical' equipment.

The evidence that something did crash at Roswell and was retrieved by the USAAF is overwhelming and indisputable. It happened, but it may well not have been a UFO, at least not in the extraterrestrial sense which was retrieved, which is where the military involvement may well come in.

The desert area around Roswell and indeed many areas in the west and south of the USA are used by various agencies of the US military to test new and unconventional military and space craft. Supporters of the ETH will immediately say that this is why so many UFO's are seen in these areas, they are keeping an eye on the military activity. Most of the well witnessed and documented retrieval cases also come from areas near these secret testing grounds, as do many so called extraterrestrial landing cases such as the Socorro case. Perhaps 'they' are keeping watch over us, but a more prosaic source of the stories and reason for at least part of the retrieval myth must be considered.

There is a strong case for some of the retrieval stories having some factual basis, but what is actually being retrieved is some kind of secret test craft. This would account for the high military involvement in the cases and the initial attributions to mundane causes such as weather balloons etc. The US military is well aware of the high interest and media involvement in the UFO myth, whatever it's origin, and it would be a simple and very convenient job to later, if it was thought necessary, to manipulate witnesses and the media into thinking that an extraterrestrial UFO had crashed and been retrieved. This type of manipulation is not new, and military forces all over the world have used the prevailing beliefs of people for their own ends, albeit on a lesser scale, notably in the Congo and Vietnam. If this is occurring it serves two purposes, the government get what they want, which is secrecy, and furthermore an already existing myth is spread and fed which will serve to cover up further crashes of this kind. After all, who is going to believe the rantings of the UFO magazines?

Conspiracy theories involving governments and other secret agencies have been on the go for thousands of years, retrievals merely provide a new one. In latter years this mis-information, feeding on an existant myth, has been used to good effect in the Rendlesham Forest case in which it was alleged that something very strange and unconventional had been flying around and landing at a USAAF base in Norfolk. When it became apparent to the USAAF that UFO researchers were not going to give up easily on the case the USAAF themselves put out information suggesting that a UFO had landed and even that aliens had been conferred with. This effectively de-bunked the case in the eyes of the British public and media. In reality it was almost certain to have been a military (possible space re-entry or 'stealth' craft) test. Even though this is apparent the Rendlesham case has created many rumours in Britain and abroad, notably about the knowledge possessed by the military in Britain about UFO's, you know, secret houses in the country where UFO's are being studied etc, and many people still believe that an extraterrestrial craft really did land. Just to confuse things further, UFO authority Jenny Randles was told by a former British government official that a crashed saucer was kept in a south Wales military base. No doubt retrieval rumours will soon start spreading in this country. A recent occurrence in the US in which a 'stealth' bomber crashed in a National Park adds some weight to the above theory. These craft are secret, and when this one crashed the entire area was sealed off and will apparently remain so for years to come. With it taking place in a public area the truth came out easily. Had it crashed in a remote desert or mountain area the story behind it may have turned into yet another ET retrieval story.

Whilst the Aztec and Roswell cases are the two best known and documented, many other retrieval tales exist, quite a few of which are certainly variants on these two. UFO's have, according to veteran researcher Leonard Stringfield, been retrieved from many other countries as well. Stringfield who reputedly holds vast amounts of data on retrievals is reluctant to name names and exact locations for many of these cases and so the rumours continue.

The possibility that genuine retrievals have taken place has given rise to spin-off tales connected with them. For instance it has been suggested that alien bodies are stored in military establishments all over the world, sometimes on ice, sometimes pickled. Affidavits have been signed to this effect and Senator Barry Goldwater was allegedly refused admittance to part of a base in which these aliens were kept. One of Stringfield's alien tales tells of a Presbyterian minister who as a child was taken on a tour of a museum in Chicago by his father. They got lost and by mistake wandered into a room in which small humanoid bodies were seen in a glass case. They were instantly seized by officials, and only released when the boy's father signed some papers. Others tell of between four and twelve alien bodies being held in a fridge at Wright Patterson Airbase.

Photographs have been circulated along with these retrieval tales, purporting to conclusively back them up, and even though they have all been proved to have been hoaxed, they still keep popping up in books attempting to prove the existence of crashed saucers. In Berlitz and Moores book 'The Roswell Incident' there appears a photo of an alien supposedly retrieved from a saucer in Germany in the early 50's. It was easily found to have been an April Fools joke by a German newspaper. Not all these tales are very old either, the most recent report I can find of a retrieval story, and one with a new twist, come from the German newspaper Bild of 14/7/83, in which they reported that the Russians had found a baby (presumably alien) in a crashed saucer and had kept it alive for seven weeks (it died from an earth virus. aaaah). This finding of aliens alive, is I think a new addition to the tale so watch out for it in future. Rumour of captured aliens, dead or alive and photographs, whether proved to be faked or not, keep the retrieval myth going by adding more (spurious) evidence.

Most folktales have parallels somewhere in other stories and crashed saucers are no exception. Similarities can be found in other 'discovery' tales such as the stories involving people who know where underground shelters in the UK hold old steam locomotives or the stories in which people stumble onto blocked up tunnels in the tube system, finding whole carriages full of corpses in Victorian clothes. Incidentally this obsession with locating things underground is continued in UFO lore, the UFO's allegedly having underground bases everywhere from the Dales to the Arctic. A more recent (1964) crashed saucer incident from Mexico where the object came down on a mountain top, has the local tribe refusing official access to the saucer because it is a gift from God, a frequent folklore theme, whether the gift is from God, the fairies or whoever.

Essentially the retrieval tales are a conspiracy theory, with some basis in truth, well mixed with elements from mainstream UFO lore. The stories will continue and grow, as until, and if ever, a crashed saucer is produced by the authorities, the myth can never be resolved. The assumption by UFO buffs that these retrievals are in the safe secure hands of the governments (why don't they ever crash in Bradford?) takes it out of the hands of ET believers to prove that we are being visited by aliens, they *know* we are, and turns it into a glorified Man From Uncle scenario in which stern and serious UFO investigators are constantly announcing the 'breakthrough' whereby they force the government to hand over the details of the crashed saucers. UFO magazines have been announcing these breakthroughs for a good ten years now and none have actually come about. Ufology generally is a rich field for folklorists and retrieval stories provide a specialised field which deserves serious study.

REVIEW SECTION

BOOKS

THE CHOKING DOBERMAN AND OTHER "NEW" URBAN LEGENDS by JAN HAROLD BRUNVAND (240pp; 1986; W.W. Norton & Co.; £12-40).

A work colleague swears the Choking Doberman tale in more or less pure form happened to a couple of friends of his. Would reading this book convince him otherwise? He certainly found it incredible that I cast grave doubts on the veracity of his tale.

As Brunvand says, this book carries his research forwards to other and different urban legends. He thought he had written the definitive work on American urban belief tales for some time, but realised new versions and stories were rapidly emerging. He even worried that "The Vanishing Hitch-Hiker" had "contaminated" oral tradition and begun the process of making some urban legends become extinct. A bit pompous...! However, legends are made of sturdier and I'm sure even such a celebrity academic cannot really believe he alone can change a nation's conscientiousness and gullibility.

While on the subject of the credulous, I was surprised at the number of American columnists who took in good faith so many hoary chestnuts. In Britain, of course, the doyen of the naive is Peter Tory. That is unless I do him an injustice and he is deliberately mimicking transatlantic journalism.

As Brunvand notes, many of today's tales have worthy antecedents going back many centuries. We have old wine in new bottles. The "new" in the book's title, Brunvand translates as "The New Fabrication of Some Excellent Truths." The Choking Doberman he manages to trace back to a very old Welsh legend.

I am sure, in fact, all major urban belief tales are capable of being back-tracked to ancient myths of one or many cultures. They also invariably become real happenings at one or several points.

The sweep of Brunvand's net this time takes in the ubiquity of the car in modern folklore, pets' ordeals, food fears, sex scandals including the multifarious Stuck Couple favourite, business dirty tricks departments and "brand new" ones which for me in several cases were anything but.

There is plenty of meaty back-up explanation, which takes the book leagues ahead of such collections as Gyles Brandreth's "The Bedside Book of Great Sexual Disasters." Brandreth is in my opinion the least funny man on TV and I assume he thinks his book quoted -- and his others -- has readers in stitches of laughter. I laughed a few times while reading his, but only twice during Brunvand's (wino steals urine sample and check-out mix-up over Tampax and thumbtacks). But this is a lesson I learned very early in my study of urban tales. They sound great when told orally in company, but just do not transfer well to the printed page.

But the audiences for Brandreth and Brundvand are, I imagine, poles apart. I want some intellectual stimulation with my humour, and this is singularly lacking in the former and wittingly and academically provided in the latter.

Brunvand has undoubtedly produced the most stimulating book on the subject so far.

The Choking Doberman And Other "New" Urban Legends: by Jan Harold Brunvand. Published by Norton & Co.

This is Brunvand's follow up to the popular "Vanishing Hitchiker", and a step further into the jungle of contemporary urban legends. Since the publication of the 'Vanishing Hitchiker' the urban legend has been enlarged greatly in the public mind. Popular urban legend books such as Paul Smith's "Book of Nasty Legends" have appeared, newspapers, especially the Peter Tory column in the Daily Star are full of (intentional) urban legends, and the popular paranormal magazines have had several articles on the subject by Folklore Frontiers contributor Mike Goss. So, has Brunvand come up with the goods to satisfy the apparent need? Well, yes. I can't really fault this book, only in that it is too short. The first quarter of the book is devoted to an excellent and detailed study of the actual Choking Doberman tale, it's ancestors and variants, chasing the tale right back to the old Welsh story of Gellert. This is followed by a somewhat short collection of automobile stories (surely in an automobile age there must be hundreds of car legends?) and the rest of the book is made up of a miscellany of both new and old legends. Contaminations, abductions, corporate and business legends, sex scandals, captured UFO's, they are all in this book. Most of the motifs are looked at in closer detail than in 'Hitchiker' and benefit from this, appearing now as a more serious study rather than as just a collection of "funny" stories. In trying to be right up to the minute, Brunvand covers drug legends, although not in enough depth considering the scope there is for this, and other 'newies' such as 'The Mystery Glitch' whereby a computer has been programmed to plague the unsuspecting operator (version 2 of this appeared in a Sci-fi story by Robert Anton Wilson some years ago), refusing to comply unless, for instance, the operator gives it a cookie. As I said, it's just not long enough. The only real cavil is that, although he has used a few British tales and sources, the book is still too American in orientation. What we need now is a book of this calibre written specifically about British Urban Legends. -- Andy Roberts.

"CAT FLAPS:" by ANDY ROBERTS. (Brigantia Books, 84 Elland Road, Brighouse, West Yorkshire, HD6 2QR. £2, inc. p&p).

As I write this review, there is still continuing the long-running saga of the Durham Puma. This has been a "flap" in the real sense of the word, with many sightings, police warnings and searching, a lorry driver scared out of his wits and the beast seemingly stalking children.

Andy Roberts includes this case along with other instances from the North, including the Harrogate and Rossendale Panthers; Nottingham, Thorganby and Chester Lions; Whitby Lynx; Skegness Cougar; and Ilkeston Puma. There is also my own Northumberland sighting.

It was only when reading Roberts' book that I realised how only my own and the Durham case involved vehicles. Look how that perhaps similar phenomenon, the UFO, is so inextricably associated with vehicles. UFOs are connected here with the Rossendale happenings and Roberts also draws attention to a witch's shape-shifting claims. But Roberts is in error in claiming shape-shifting does not occur with regard to mystery cat sightings except in this dubious instance; whether physically occurring or as part of anxiety-creating propaganda, it was certainly central to the Mau Mau campaign for self-government in Kenya.

His cases are described initially in terms of eyewitness accounts, official reaction and media treatment at the time. The latter aspect shows how woefully inadequate local newspapers are in handling a major story handed to them on a plate, so to say, on their own doorsteps.

Roberts discusses the types of cats, the relationship -- or lack of it -- to black dog legends, and the various theories. It is a well-presented 48-page, A5 size booklet with illustrations, cartoons, map, notes and references.

Oh, yes, has he the answer? Roberts favours the wildcat or wildcat cross hypothesis. "At least the author didn't take too seriously one lady he spoke to, who told him: "They all come from Knaresborough Zoo, you know."

THE BITE & OTHER APOCRYPHAL TALES by FRANCIS GRIEG (Jonathan Cape, 1981).

There are few enough books available on the subject of urban legends, foaf stories, and so on. "The Bite etc." is one such book, but it is a book with a difference. The difference being that all the tales are written as fiction; a short story collection in which Grieg attempts to recreate each tale as if it were happening in reality for the first time, and is the event on which all subsequent variations are based. The author is fully aware of the relevance these tales and others like them have in terms of modern folklore, and points this out in the introduction, mentioning the "friend of a friend" connection and the fact that society needs tales like this to externalise basic fears.

The 21 tales cover all aspects of the urban legend from well-known ones such as "The £10 Car", "The Phantom Hitch-Hiker" and the "Spider in the Spot" to less well-known ones, including "The Street Cries of Old London", a cautionary tale about the perils of the otherwise innocent pleasure of penny-for-the-guy, and "Last Fling", about the adventures of a bride on the eve of her wedding and the subsequent denouement. Some of the stories are obviously made up, "Recollections", in which a man is buried alive, and "Predictions", a type of prophetic hitch-hiker story in which the driver is later killed, are basically variations on ghost or horror stories, but show the line is very thin in some urban legend areas between the real and the paranormal.

The stories sometimes get a little tedious once the punchline is guessed, but all in all worthwhile if not essential reading for any urban folklorist. I picked my copy up for £1 so it is very likely the book has been remaindered and shouldn't be too hard to find. -- Andy Roberts.

LONDON WALKABOUT by ANDREW COLLINS (£1-10 inc. p&p from Earthquest Books, 19 St David's Way, Wickford, Essex, SS11 8EX.).

Rushing around rail termini every time I go to London, the nearest I get to earth mysteries is arriving and leaving from Kings Cross, under one of whose platforms Boadicea is supposedly buried. Andy Collins has produced a fine booklet with maps, pictures and descriptions of special sites. It is a remarkable condensation of history with emphasis on such aspects as ancient religion, ghosts, London's omphalos, leys, prophecy, giants, Templars and psychic work. A splendid look beyond the hustle and bustle. A historical guide for the true questor, covering an easy walkabout which can take you to ten key sites in five hours.

"THE ALL SAINTS' LEY HUNT" by IAN TAYLOR (Northern Lights, 11A Victoria Road, Pocklington, York, YO4 2BZ. £3-95 + 66p postage).

Everyone has now come across the term "ley" with regard to ancient aligned sites, but to those outside the burgeoning earth mysteries fraternity, what it all entails is mostly a mystery itself. While concentrating on a ley complex in East Yorkshire, Ian Taylor also explains just what ley hunting is all about. It is a very personal book; the descriptions of individual alignments leavened by folkloric accounts and philosophic asides.

The author walked 1,000 miles, studying 50 or so leys and has written it up in a chunky book with photographs, diagrams and line drawings by Edna Whelan. It is also a D.I.Y. book, photocopied and bound by the author. No author who feels really committed should now feel he cannot do it him/herself.

Work has been done in the field -- trespass warnings and barbed wire allowing -- and also archives and conversation with older residents to save remnants of lore from being lost forever.

Sceptics may like to consider: the enormous amount of alignments; the subtle and precise nature of ley point intervisibility (shown by map sections); why all 13 Pocklington ley complex churches are all on alignments (showing that medieval builders knew the secret); the present good state of preservation (showing an intensive geomantic and mystical activity in the area until relatively recently); solar, lunar and stellar orientation; two distinct and different types of alignment and possibly two eras of creation.

For though many sites have gone from the Wold Top, alignments can still be found to the few which remain -- "this must surely and finally put the skids under those who invoke the law of chance in their savage retreat before the rising tide of ley hunting devotees." He is scornful of the archaeological fraternity's outright dismissal of leys, but produces mathematical statistics checked on a computer by Michael Behrend to satisfy the materialistically-minded.

On a more folkloristic note, he writes of encountering baffling problems with his photography, a "negativity" aspect noted often in Fortean contexts. Also of great fascination is his touching on esoteric burial customs, such as the practice of burying nobility in lead coffins still continuing today. Anyone any thoughts? And could it be that the Vessel-Cuppers dancing men, active before World War I were the last remnant of an ancient Celtic magical tradition -- the last of the Parisi or Brigantian shamans!?

It is not too late to transform ourselves into better, more self-aware individuals. There are many paths, but clearly one which is easily accessible is the walking of the ley complexes near our own homes. As Taylor writes in his concluding section:

"Fieldwork and related research in the local landscapes of rural Britain is the surest foundation for lasting changes, because it is intimate, specific and natural. This book is a call to local people to find what can be found and to save what can be saved of the timeless riches of Village England -- so that the transformation of our lives and society may be begun from a secure foundation."

So off you go and get your boots muddy.

MAGAZINES

THE LEY HUNTER

The Magazine of Earth Mysteries Annual sub, three issues plus supplement £5; 15 dollars. P.O. Box 5, Brecon, Powys, Wales. No. 100. Splendid Land-

mark issue. Your F.F. editor was T.L.H. supremo from 1969 to 1976 and in "My Back Pages" I review that period and what I got up to afterwards. Of course, it's a different world today and the Devereuxs have opened their Centre for Earth Mysteries Studies and two pages are given over to its beginning. John Michell provides a concise and moving tribute to Alexander Thom. Tony Roberts discusses fairy origins, Brian Larkman the magnificent City of York ley, Paul Devereux radiation at megalithic sites and Mary Caine argues the Glastonbury Zodiac case. Devereux also revisits the "holy hill" concept -- I've walked the Guisborough ley with him and recently a hitherto unsuspected crypt was found in the priory. Plus Alfred Watkins archive portraits and his dropping the term "ley"; Watkins on mark-stones as direction indicators; Newton's thinking; Battle of Camlan site; anti-ley talk at archaeological conference; Appalachian earthlights; book and mag reviews. As for the columnists, Nigel Pennick and Prudence Jones are absolutely right, Mrs Thatcher is the pits; Sig Lonegren, as he admits, should have told Symes to bog off. The issue closes with four T.L.H. editors contributing a forum of views on where E.M. has gone and could be going. Congratulations.

No. 101. Haggis issue! Scotland to the fore with account of C. for E.M.S. tour write-up; ley hunting on Bodmin Moor; remarkable piece on insects "created" by man; convincing U.S. earthlight; Dragon Project update; moonwatch project; 1986 Moot; megalithic measurement; seminar on Stonehenge; Gaia intelligence not-iceboard. It comes with the Supplement edited by Brian Larkman -- an illustrated portfolio, including cartoons I drew or traced from early issues under my editorship; a startling 19th. century illustration of the sun shining through a mountain hole on to a church in Switzerland; Dod; drawings of megaliths, crosses, wells, mazes and more.

EARTH GIANT. Journal of the South-Western Antiquarian Society. £3 sub entitles members to 4 publications of the society. No. 5. "Ley-Lines in Question" savaged by editor Jeremy Harte; "Female Glastonbury" controversy; John Aubrey's life and work; gates and the Glastonbury Zodiac; dice rolling; book and journal reviews; miscellany.



UFO BRIGANTIA. Journal of the West Yorkshire UFO Research Group. Six issues £5-50. Payable to WYUFG, 84 Elland Road, Brighouse, West Yorks., HD6 2QR. No. 18. Seductivity of extraterrestrial hypothesis; Saltfleet, part 2 (cont. 20); classic case is Lonnie Zamora's Socorro encounter; Jenny Randles' update on the Sunderland family; interview with Dr Bruce Maccabe. No. 19. Original paste-up lost in post -- into the void. No. 20. Nigel Mortimer's Cracoe Fell "UFO photo" doubts and inter-group liaison comments; revolving light sphere; classic case is Father Gill's New Guinea sighting. No. 21. "Historical" issue with articles on a strange 1926 entity case from West Yorkshire; an 1897 balloon/airship "panic"; an 1868 possible early secret experiment in military man-lifting near Wakefield; Jenny Randles on classic West Yorks., cases from the mid-Seventies; Paul Screeton on ancient astronaut ideas; a 1913 phantom airship; Welsh Revival of 1905; competition and mag reviews. No. 22. Earth lights figure prominently, in a scene-setter and research update by Paul Devereux (cont. 23); spooky spots researched by David Clarke; majority of Pudsey sightings (with other Yorks. cases); plus Andy Roberts' "Venusian PHH" from F.F.3; and UFO "coincidences" (cont. 23). No. 23. Paul Screeton on the cereal circles saga with a research project idea; new light on Cracoe Fell debacle; Sheffield area ghostly manifestations.

TALKING FOLKLORE. Q. Published by British Folk Studies Forum, c/o 45 Linden Gardens, London W2 4HQ. U.K. £6; overseas £8. Vol. 1, No. 1. A new mag for formal and informal writing about folklore, via articles in non-academic style, ongoing debates and info exchange. It seems to be attempting to do with traditional folk studies what F.F. has been designed to do with urban tales. Aims to break isolationism with a forum using an accessible format and few production hurdles. A debate is begun into "Folklore as Science", most interesting so far, and I would place myself firmly as a hermeneutic, but deeply suspicious of critical-hermeneutic analysis, particularly Jack Zipes. Other articles are potted biography and assessment of the indefatigable early folklorist Charlotte Sophia Burne; postwar childhood games; and funny fieldwork incidents. Interestingly it is A5, like F.F., and the cover title is in capitals and an almost identical typeface (out of thousands to choose from) to the one chose for F.F. 1. A compliment or coincidence?

STONEHENGE VIEWPOINT. California-based mag of archaeology, astronomy, geology and related arts and sciences. U.K. agent: L.C. Smith, 16 Solstice Rise, Amesbury, Wiltshire, SP4 7NQ. Sub rate for 8 issues 10 dollars U.S.; 15 elsewhere. No. 71. Lengthy explanation by editor Donald L. Cyr of the Vaillian canopy and halo thesis, plus piece on it by the late Isaac N. Vail (cont. 72); tartan ogam; Bob Forrest's guide to Velikovsky's sources (cont. 72,73); Aubrey Burl trashed. Postal book service. No. 72. Cyr asks whether the alleged skeptics are themselves believable in the context of the mammoth extinction mystery. How would modern man have gone about tackling the "mammoth task" of freezing these jumbo-size beasts? This in itself includes a peculiar item of folklore. In early times the Chinese called frozen mammoths "thien-shu", which meant field-mouse or mole. The legendary animal, the size of an elephant, was believed to lead a subterranean existence. Siberian peasants called them "mamantuu" or "ground-dweller", believing them to be gigantic moles. None had been seen alive but there were plenty of bones, consequently it must live underground and perish if it saw the light! A theory will always be constructed where there is an unexplained fact.



"Don't hang about them. Bung it in the glacier."

SOURCE. Journal of the Holy Wells Research & Preservation Group. Sub £2-70 (3 issues); single copy £1; cheques/POs payable to M. Valentine, 35 Grafton Way, New Duston, Northampton, NN5 6NG. No. 4. More Yorkshire wells (cont. 5), where one had its water piped away as it was being used for washing cars -- "A sad desecration of a sacred site, and typical of the car-worship of modern times." Other shortish articles on individual wells. Alan Cleaver fascinatingly associates holy wells with people's disappearances (into another reality?). No. 5. Cornish healing cavern and county's Madron well; holy wells in West Wales, Dorset, Shropshire and South Yorks.; plug for Cwm Dale Spring water; plus each issue notes and queries miscellany.

NNIDMID: SURREALITY. Three times annually. £2 per issue; £6 p.a. Cheques/P.O.s to M.C.F. Shiels, 3 Vale View, Ponsanoc-truro, Cornwall. No. 1. A veritable cornucopia of nnidmidomorphic surreality edited by Tony 'Doc' Shiels and Gareth Shiels. Begins with a portfolio of Doc's pictures over the years (pity there's not an example of the strip he used to do for I.T.!) and scribbles on an unmisspent youth. He also relates in words and pictures his monster-raising exploits, of special interest to Forteanes. Robert Anton Wilson in fine "Illuminatus" flow, though I'm sure Americans will appreciate the anxieties better than we Britons. Plus "strange" fiction, poetry and reviews. I think it is worth underlining the fact that surrealism and urban tales are very much linked, particularly as they share a basic region of anxiety. Surrealism challenges us to see new perspectives and externalise fears. This splendidly produced and edited mag is essential reading, but not for rationalists and definitely NOT for Whitehouseholders.

(Above right -- NNIDMID editorial meeting in progress).



BEYOND SCIENCE! Glossy newstand magazine. Vol. 1, Nos. 2 and 4. The publishers kindly sent copies, presumably for review. Nice pictures, shame about the content. Apart from Vard Rutherford, the writers were unknown to me -- pseudonyms or hacks? The Aetherius Society plugs itself. They make fun of lucky charm and Cornish pixie adverts while encouraging a £7 offer for a mountain air ioniser! they have done an article on ley lines (sic) but why not send that issue for me to review? Paul Devereux and Jenny Randles, perhaps others, have expressed grave reservations about this mag. I endorse their comments. Yet I'm envious at the costly and lavish production.

FORTEAN TIMES. Foremost journal of strange phenomena. Sub for 4 issues £6; U.S. 12 dollars; back issues £1-50. From 96 Mansfield Road, London, NW3 2HX. No. 46. Special lake monsters issue with those of continental Europe, Nessie and how can several quite distinct monsters be seen in Canadian lakes? Articles focus on photographic (un)reliability. Plenty on S.H.C., Chinese superstitions crackdown, Exmoor beast, Crying Boy, monstrous fish, lost and found cities, and much more.

BUTTERFLY NEWS. Bi-monthly. Annual sub £3. The Butterfly Farm, Lodmore Country Park, Weymouth, Dorset, DT4 8BR. No. 7. Editorial sympathetic to hippies and splendidly anti-farmer ("Dorset farmers may well have joined Hitler") and police, whose "overbearing presence was largely unnecessary, and was instigated completely by the farmers, I think the N.F.U. should foot the bill." Also 400-year-old legend of annual butterfly invasion of The Dog Inn, Norwich. Lively writing on all aspects of entomology. No. 9. Farming chief's reply and Labour man's jumping on bandwagon. Running naked through bluebells apocrypha.

NORTHERN EARTH MYSTERIES. Journal of the Northern Earth Mysteries Group. Q. 4 issues £2-50. Payable to P. Heselton, 170 Victoria Road Avenue, Hull, HU5 3DY. No. 30. John Billingsley sadly notes the threat to Celtic survivals by curio seekers or vandals (P.S. My book is not "The Strange Case of the Hexham Heads" but "Tales of the Hexham Heads", but if the fee's right I would be delighted to do the TV programme the "new" title suggests). Ian Taylor brings to life the custom of the Burning of Owd Bartle and Phil reader ponders the mystery of will o' the wisps. Plus Jimmy Goddard and Rob Wilson on the group's 1985 Sheffield Moot and meeting in Pocklington. No. 31. Joint issue with EARTHLINES, No. 5, with articles on Repton hermitage; holy wells; Wolds "rock outcrop" with growing stones legend; Mitchell's Fold stone circle; dowsing; and strange stones.

ANOMALY. Journal of record for Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena (ASSAP). Two issues p.a.; sub £3 to members; £3-60 non-members. Payable ASSAP, 65 Amersham Road, High Wycombe, Bucks., HP13 5AA. No. 2. Issue's theme being premonitions, with an exceptionally complex yet lucid theory on how precognition is caused by an incarnate spirit, which is well argued and persuasive, and recent personal happenings seem to award it credence. There's an interesting East Enders poltergeist investigation; strange happenings to research group on Brinklow Hill; Jungian ufology; modern physics and psi; survival evidence claims; a mediumistic experience which stretched my credulity. My only grouse is that the UFO reports give pseudonyms (wrongly), yet there operates the double standard of no anonymous letters (rightly).

ASSAP NEWS. Newsletter of above group. Membership details from 130b Southwood Road, New Eltham, London, SE9 3QN. No. 25. Alan Cleaver writes up the meeting between top French ufologist Jacques Vallee and pretty young psychic UFO contactee Gaynor Sunderland. Case reports; esp experiment; and Biblical and psychical concepts of survival. plus news on publications and meetings.

MAGONIA. Independent, psycho-sociological UFO mag. Q. 4 issues £2-50; five dollars. Payable to J. Rimmer, John Dee Cottage, 5 James Terrace, Mortlake Churchyard, London, SW14 8HB. No. 22. That ubiquitous UBT the phantom hitch-hiker gets a lift from Michael Goss, who focusses upon its use of public transport; Nazi occultism; Ian Ridpath suggests a Spanish encounter was Venus and Hilary Evans posits a marmoset for a strange entity case. No. 23. Was the Cedric Allingham who wrote "Flying Saucers From Mars" really Patrick Moore? Lively letters and book reviews.

DIARY OF A CAT FLAP

By Paul Screeton

ALIEN BIG CATS form the largest category of out-of-place beasts occasionally reported in Britain. In the Seventies there was the Surrey Puma and in the early Eighties the Exmoor Beast, but there is probably not a county where a weird huge cat has not been reported.

Certainly what cannot be disputed is that a great many people are convinced they have seen a large and distinctive cat-like animal which is not an obvious native to these shores.

As for their physicality, take for instance the opinion of Richard O'Grady, director of Calderpark Zoo, Glasgow, who was impressed by "the quality of these observations ... some by well-known naturalists, not just by people making wild statements."

There are some corpses, tracks and droppings, photographs too.

Yet there is an intriguing alternative hypothesis. That the majority of cats are technically physically insubstantial. That they share the same domain as ghosts and other special manifestations. That they require study by paranormalists rather than naturalists.

Far-fetched? Perhaps. But remember that the Exmoor Beast's adversaries, the farmers who suffered large losses were nevertheless left with the impression of an unstoppable, uncatchable, elusively unearthly predator exhibiting alarming skill and intelligence. Not only that. The Devon moorlands have a strong tradition of ethereal "black dogs" well-known to folklorists. Also Conan Doyle did not invent but merely publicize the local devil-hound of the Baskervilles.

Farmers are a down-to-earth breed, but who can blame the old gentleman with the suspicion that the beast was more than natural - "it sucks blood, yo see. You tell me what other animal does that."

But if they are real, where do they come from?

There is a certain logicity in the view, widely held by the Press and police, that such animals could have been set loose deliberately. That they had been freed by owners fearing the consequences of the 1978 Dangerous Animals Act. This required registration and placed heavy liabilities on owners whose pets cause problems. An escape could cost hundreds in fines plus recovery costs. Yet if this explained the many mystery felines running around in 1979 and 1980, why have numbers sighted risen rather than fallen? Unless, of course, the big kitties have easily found one another and bred like rabbits.

As for the possibility they could have escaped from a zoo or safari park, any breakout however small is generally well publicized and reported to the authorities, who issue warnings. After mystery sightings, police would be expected to contact known zoos and collectors to ascertain they had full complements.

Others believe that the felines are as much a part of our native fauna as foxes, badgers and hedgehogs. They are just bigger and more secretive.

It is a fact that reports cover the whole spectrum of big cats, from lions through to leopards, pumas and smaller species (but rarely tigers). A theory which attempts in part to unify the sightings and is quite persuasive argues that the "black panther" is in reality a female lion. Loren Coleman suggests that the giant American lion of the last ice age, *Panthera leo atrox*, is reflected in North American sightings. Both its known larger brain size to body would give an intellectual breadth and tendency to melanism on the fringe of the lions' range could be effectively used by females as genetic adaptation. Put simply, large maned lions do what males do (sleep, mate, walk about regally) and aggressive black cats do what females do (hunt, kill, raise young).

Author Di Francis certainly subscribes to the belief the cats are very real. She believes them to be a widespread and undiscovered species of native wild cat, despite great differences in description.

"We can now appreciate a new and beautiful animal that inhabits our woods and forests and together we can help protect them as a species, thus ensuring they remain to delight us for another thousand years," writes Di.

If this were widely believed, I suspect there would have been a nationwide panic, questions in the House and posses of trigger-happy hunters claiming to protect the community.

Of course, there could be cases of misidentification. People could be seeing Alsatians, lurchers or wolfhounds for lions or pumas and Dobermanns for "black panthers." Folklore Frontiers contributor Michael Goss, who has a keen interest in the topic, suspected a woman witness was describing a Dobermann instead of a big cat. She was adamant she was not; she should know, she kept them.

Michael Goss also has a telling point to make as his research into the 19th. century -- so-called "heyday of natural history" -- is negative regarding alien big cats. Then thousands of amateur and professional zoologists were making observations of wildlife, but cat references seem obviously Scottish wildcats, ferals or hybrids of both.

Prior to the Durham sightings, 1983 was the last vintage year for phantom felines. Mid-January had seen the publication of "Cat Country" by Di Francis. Then on February 8, that everyday story of countryfolk "The Archers contained references to a "mystery big cat" and "puma" and ewes found killed on farms around Ambridge.

By spring there was almost a carnival atmosphere as the Exmoor Beast hogged the headlines. It was a media circus event as soldiers stalked the animal and one tabloid offered £1,000 for a genuine photograph, to the alarm of police who had at first supported the public's involvement in tracking down the menace.

Around this time I made a personal sighting. It was May 8, a damp, foggy inhospitable day. I was front seat passenger with friend John Watson alone in the car on an expedition to visit megalithic sites in Northumberland. We were driving from Rosden when an all-black cat of panther form crossed the road 100 or so yards ahead of us from right to left and disappeared into the undergrowth. It appeared as tall as an adult Dobermann pinscher, twice the length and lower slung, moving with a powerful, quick feline gait. Afterwards, John felt it moved slower and was greyish. Why I blurted out after the sighting, 'Was that a deer?' is a mystery as it in no way resembled such an animal.

Also, despite the high strangeness, John neither braked nor stopped. I had a loaded camera in my pocket but it never crossed my mind to attempt a photograph. In fact, our whole lack of real coordination and inability to have a common perception of the event is surely strange? John cannot understand now why he did not stop. As someone with 25 years' interest and involvement in such matters it was embarrassing for me. As a Northern UFO Investigations Network officer John might equally have been expected to react positively to such a strange stimulus.

So what did we see? Was it "real?" It looked solid enough.

It is, perhaps, not widely recognised that the "black panther" (*panthera pardus*) is nothing but a melanistic leopard. As stated earlier, melanism is found in some species of wild cats, where individuals have uniformly dark hair. Hence the so-called black panther. or it could have been a female lion of a relict ice age species, perhaps.

Yet it suddenly vanished. It did appear from a spot where there was a gateway. For some this has paranormal significance. It occurred at NU 084204 on the map below Harehope Hill (hares often being associated with lycanthropy...). Ley hunters may find some significance in the location.

Well anyway, my sighting was no friend-of-a-friend tale. But that does not disclude many similar stories being dodgy. Shortly afterwards I began having savage dogs replaced by sinister big cats in my anxiety dreams, as if the subject may have symbolic or personal relevance. I also made what I wondered was a lioness sighting at Greattham railway station, but upon making inquiries immediately afterwards was able to

establish I had seen an old Alsatian so docile as to be allowed to wander unattended. Having been once bitten by an Airedale, I hate dogs and they sense my fear. I have increasingly developed an unease about "wilderness" and become jumpy when alone away from urban confines.

Mike Goss comments: "If folklore is supplying us with meaningful experiences, it could be that the source of these 'visions' is the prominent urban legend motif of 'Escaped Dangerous Wild Animals' and that it draws power from the current green issues like ecology. But this sort of thing is hard to prove or disprove."

So are such creatures as Di Francis argues a true physical but shy species or "creatures on the outer edge" moving in and out of our temporal reality and dimension at will? Whichever explanation is favoured, just remember there is ample evidence that very large cats of unknown origin are out there.

So let's focus on one particular contemporary "cat flap." That of the Durham "puma." I know the area where it (or they) has been sighted repeatedly this year, have some extra unpublished material and a personal connection. It is also an impressive "rumour" for the longevity rarely recorded in such cases and in-depth and generally sensible media coverage.

AUG 2. Regional newspapers made Bowburn, on the outskirts of Durham City, the latest markpoint on the mystery moggy map. Here a big black feline with white paws, a face like a cheetah, a long tail about 2½ feet long and body the size of a Labrador was spotted by a young couple near their home. "I know some people must think I must be mad, but my wife and I both saw the animal quite clearly," said garage fitter Stewart Wilson of his early hours sighting. "At first I was convinced it was a dog, but it padded along like one of the giant cats." Durham City Police then as subsequently took the report seriously. A spokesman was sufficiently well versed in such matters as to say that large wild cats were becoming more common in certain parts of Britain. It was their only report but the public was warned that anyone seeing such animals in future should stay well clear of them.

AUG 4. Motor-cyclist David Hart found a puma-like cat lying in the road in the Forest of Dean. After a minute it sprang over a hedge. Sighting followed several similar reports from the area last November. (D. Teleg).

SEPT 9. Puma-like animal was prowling the outskirts of a large Inverness housing estate. A site agent says he had seen it on at least three occasions and was convinced the gold-coloured beast was not a wild cat. (Aberdeen Press & Journal).

SEPT 15. Durham cat now thought by police to be a black puma. Spotted with a smaller cat by a motorist on the A167. Animals seen to run into fields at the rear of the Thinford Bridge Inn. This happensto be a favourite train-spotting haunt of mine on the east coast main line. I can also recommend the pub, its ale and it has a beer garden. (D. Teleg, 16th).

SEPT 24. The day before this, Brian Rothery spotted "this black thing and at first I thought it was a small horse. Then I realised it was too long to be a horse. It was standing with its head down towards the grass." He believed it could have been stalking children playing in old colliery buildings at Dean and Chapter, Ferryhill. The youngsters saw it, started shouting and beat a retreat. Mr Rothery, incidentally, was walking his Dobermann at the time and the cat "was two or three times the size of that." (Also D. Exp, Sun, 25th). One report said it had also been spotted at Fishburn cokeworks.

SEPT 26. Then former Windsor Wildlife Safari Park warden for four years Charles Charlton poured scorn on the black puma theory and said it was more likely a dog or large wild cat.

OCT 4. Enter P.C. Eddie Bell, wildlife enthusiast, and Dr Nigel Dunston of Durham University zoology department, who planned to stalk the beast after now six supposed sightings (latest back at Bowburn). Pawprints measuring 3-inch across having been found. (No report of any trip then has been located).

OCT 5. In a resume piece of five sightings, including a case of the beast seen with a rabbit in its jaws, a huge panther-like creature sprang on to the bonnet of lorry driver Clive Dawkins' vehicle parked in a lay-by near Ferryhill. He grabbed his CB radio but his cries for help were almost incoherent. Only when a motorist pulled in minutes later did the creature flee. But Mr Dawkins' experience can be filed around SEPT 21. R.S.P.C.A. inspector Bill Chrisp said its lair was roughly known and it was being watched through infra-red binoculars. (Sun. Exp).

OCT 30. Then pensioner Florence Watson, of Deaf Hill, was hanging out her washing and saw the animal 30 yards away. After a few seconds it fled towards a nearby quarry. "It was quite a bit bigger than an Alsatian, with a cat-like appearance, and was dark brown with a straight neck and pointed ears."



PC Bell with the cast of the footprint

However, this report led a journalist colleague -- who hardly deserves anonymity -- to relate how two/three weeks previously he had seen the beast cross the road ahead of him. He stopped to investigate and after looking around for a few minutes realised that it was laid about two feet away in a ditch. "The most evil-looking dog I've ever seen." The fearless Fortean fled.



IT WENT THAT WAY . . . Florence Watson shows where she saw the mystery animal near her Deaf Hill home. -- (M3659).

OCT 31. P.C. Bell was devoting ten days' holiday to the hunt accompanied apparently by Bill Chrisp. The beast was being blamed for the slaughter of four sheep at Bowburn several days before -- one particularly savagely attacked.

NOV 5. "Where's my puma?" was the plaintive headline regarding "puma patrolman" Eddie Bell and the beast "spotted a dozen times" now.

NOV 6. It was curled in short grass behind Wingate Auction Salerooms and spotted by wildlife enthusiast Arthur Hardy and Stephen Dodsworth. "It was bigger than an Alsatian, jet black in colour with pointed ears on the top of its head and a very long tail," said Arthur. The same day the Beast of Exmoor was allegedly identified by Devon animal expert Nigel Brierly as a brown lynx from hairs on sheep it killed. (Sun).

NOV 7. Came another daylight sighting in Wingate by a man walking his Alsatian, which would not go near the large black cat, bigger than his dog which bounded out of bushes by a stream. Was this NOV 6, when at 2 a.m. coach driver Raymond Richardson, from Bowburn (!), reported a large cat run from the direction of a disused cemetery near Metal Bridge (i.e. Thinford) towards Hett. Because...

NOV 8. The same day the cat was in Wingate, North Yorkshire Police logged a "black panther" at Croft-on-Tees at 8 p.m. on NOV 6, around 16 miles away, sited by an unnamed woman motorist on the road to Middleton Tyas. P.C. Bell reckoned there must be two separate cats. The Evening Gazette added there had been two (!) sightings earlier in the day near Ferryhill and then Wingate.

NOV 12. A "huge jet black cat with a long tail" was picked out by the lights of newspaper printer Tom Robertson at about 4 a.m. on the B9119 road to Tarland. "I saw its eyes first. It came off the field, looked at me and crossed the road." (Press & Journal, Aberdeen).

NOV 13. Supt. Barry Purdy, commander of Durham sub-division, appealed for regular walkers -- including poachers -- to report any facts which might lead to the beast's lair. Meanwhile an animal, described as black, the size of a Labrador and with a long curly tail had been spotted in Gipsy Lane, between Bradbury and Ferryhill Station. P.C. Bell investigated and when he approached the animal it bit him on the hand, requiring a tetanus jab. He thought it to be a mongrel dog which had been dumped.

NOV 15. P.C. Bell was impressed with a sighting by Shildon man Kenneth Robinson -- "very accurate, whereas other witnesses have been vague. He says he has seen a puma before, and that is what he claims he saw." However, the sighting was in April, spotted from a train. Unfortunately the Northern Echo report is vague in that it does not say where the train was at the time.

NOV 18. P.C. Bell appealed that people make sure what they were seeing was not just a big dog, saying if it was a stray it would be dangerous, and if the big cat "it will be as dangerous as anything else if threatened." A report had been made of a possible cat running behind the police station -- of all places -- at Newton Hall, but "it would have had to have had to cross Durham to get there and somebody would have seen it."

NOV 23. My wife claims she saw 100 yards down the road from our suburban estate home in Seaton Carew a big black cat the size of a grown Labrador with sleek hair moving in a feline way. Pauline was, however, surprised that passing motorists seemed to ignore its Sunday presence. Having seen the real thing once and having been mistaken on another occasion, I favoured not venturing an opinion.

NOV 26. Close to where my wife saw the strange animal and, in fact, outside where she works part-time, I saw another shop assistant beside an elderly yet still frisky black Labrador jumping like a senile lamb and holding its chain lead in its mouth. Case of cat flap and my involvement causing a psychological misidentification the Sunday previously?

DEC 3. Reading my daughter's pop magazine about Elkie Brooks living in North Devon, it stated: "She has seen the dreaded 'Beast of Exmoor'!! (i.e. a veryhorrible spook-creature that's a cross between a wild-cat and a domestic cat which jumps on sheep and scoffs them.). But she wasn't scared because she had her three dogs with her!!" (Smash Hits).

DEC 5. The same scene as farmers around Barnstaple were recording night-time noises in a bid to identify the beast which has killed dozens of sheep, (Sun).

Storm over pet panther

WORRIED officials are up in arms over animal lover Suyen Tolken-Sinclair's new pet—a baby panther.

Suyen, 28, keeps the three-month-old cub in her garden shed at Tintagel, Cornwall, and it plays with her dog.

But the parish council say the big black cat is too dangerous to be a pet. They are opposing Suyen's application for a licence to keep it.

(Sun, Dec 12)

Completing this article in mid-December, it seems the flap has petered out. Summing up, we seem no wiser as to what has gone on. Cat or dog; puma or panther; real or misidentifications; corporeal or ethereal? Confused? You bet!

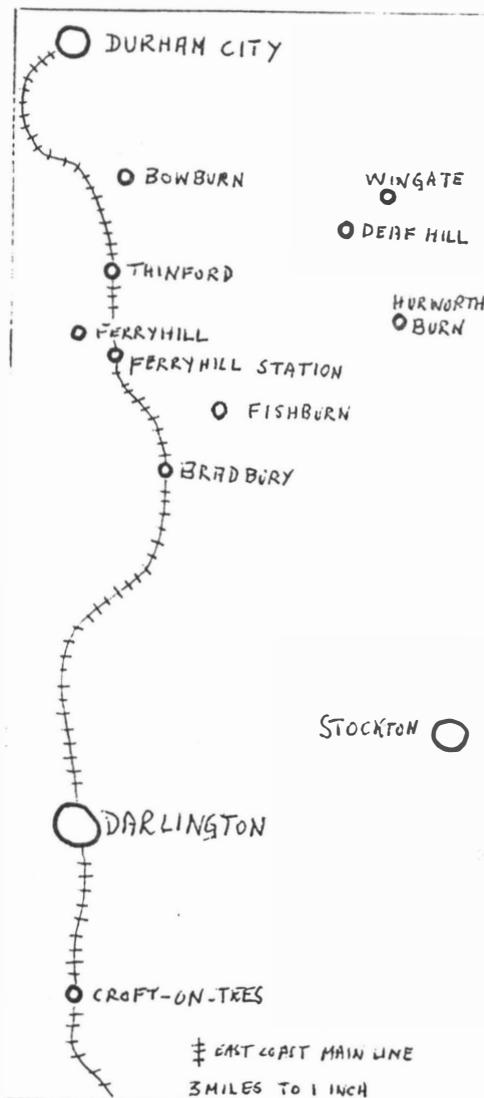
References:

- Coleman, Loren, "An Answer from the Pleistocene," Fortean Times, No. 32, 1980.
- Francis, Di, "Not so Mysterious Cats," Fortean Times, No. 39, 1983.
- Rickard, Bob, "The Exmoor Beast and Others," Fortean Times, No. 40, 1983.
- Screeton, Paul, "Wild in the Country (Northumberland Deliverance)," Northern Earth Mysteries, No. 24, 1983.
- Screeton Paul, "A Personal Black Panther Sighting in Northumberland, 1983," The Shaman, No. 10, 1985.



ELKIE

See also story of black panther around Thirsk, North Yorks. (Sun. Express, June 8 this year).



Screeton, Paul, "Riddle of Britain's big mystery cats," Mail, Hartlepool, Aug. 7, 1986.

Specific "Durham Puma" regional newspaper reports:

NORTHERN ECHO: Aug 2; Oct 4, 31; Nov 5, 7, 8, 13, 15, 17.

MAIL, HARTLEPOOL: Aug 4; Sept 15, 24, 26; Oct 30; Nov 7, 13. (Several of these reports only appeared in the County edition, circulating in South-East Durham).

ECHO, SUNDERLAND: The Mail shares a Durham City office with this sister newspaper, which would have carried similar reports.



THE MAGIC PEASANT by HENRY BREWIS (Farming Press Ltd., Wharfedale Road, Ipswich, IP1 4LG, £2-99).

This is a rreal rib-tickling collection of humorous farming cartoons which look like a mixture of Giles and Thelwell. I laughed with, rather than at, farmer Sep. It is rare indeed that I have praise for a farmer but an illustrator who deplores the activities of the fox hunting fraternity as much as Brewis obviously must be a good chap. There are also short essays and poems. The fox illustrations used in this magazine come from the book. It's a real treat.

REVIEWS OF OTHER EXCHANGE MAGAZINES WILL APPEAR IN F.F. 5.

NEWSLINES AND UPDATE

ROTHERHAM TRIANGLE. After dubbing the area enclosed by lines drawn between Doncaster, Sheffield and Barnsley as the Rotherham Triangle, we were vindicated by the headline "Rapist stalks triangle of fear." Nine rapes had occurred in a triangle of towns in South Yorkshire, including Rotherham. (Star, 7/8/86) ... Officials in Rotherham have decided future houses will be 12A instead of 13 and existing estates be renumbered ... Then black barman Carlton Ebanks, sleeping on the premises with his girlfriend, woke at Sheffield's Muff Inn (absolutely no comment!) with white strands falling from his jet-black Afro curls, with three spirits present all dressed like TV puppet show "Terrahawks" witch Zelda. (Sun, 13/11/86).

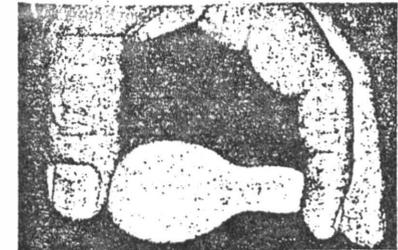
REINCARNATION. Residents of a west Java town believe a female monkey wearing a gold necklace and earrings to be the reincarnation of a 16-year-old girl. Her parents have offered a reward for the monkey's capture and for it to be turned back into their daughter. The parents say she died and became a monkey after donning the family's "magic robe" without permission. (D. Teleg, 8/8/86). ... Meanwhile is reincarnation involved in the story of a parakeet belonging to a family in a Soviet village which recites poetry in English and gives descriptions of London? (S. Exp, 28/10/86).

No. 666. A paper which should know better had a paragraph on the well-known Mark of the Beast Social Security Prophecy, The Athens correspondent claims the Greek Orthodox Church has forced the government to change its coding for a new series of identity cards, which were to begin with the number 666, on the grounds it symbolised the Antichrist. (D. Teleg, 4/12/86).

AIDS. F.F.3 focussed on AIDS and since then the media has had field days with news and propaganda, but little folklore. In South Africa witchdoctors were blaming the epidemic on "wizards who are not happy when they see progress." Either that or "animals, mosquitos or drinking water." (D. Teleg, 6/12/86). Scientists in Johannesburg suggest bedbugs could pass on AIDS to malnourished black children. (Sun, 7/7/86). In Zambia, AIDS victims are spreading the disease because they believe the way to cure it is to make love to new partners. (Sun, 13/10/86). The notion the virus is a man-made bug which escaped from a laboratory ("probably evolved during cancer research") rolls on merrily. (Sun, 27/10/86).

GEOMANTIC BLUSHES. Andy Roberts wrote that on Aug. 27 the Radio 1 "City to City" programme was about Liverpool and had two musicians talking -- from Echo & the Bunnymen, he thinks -- about Liverpool Town Hall. "The gist of the conversation was that it was built the wrong way around, as the plans the architect had drawn had no north or south marked, thus the steps were built on the wrong side. A bit of a mixed-up tale but a classic 'building the wrong way around' one." Then days later came another case, this time of a new mosque in Rome maybe having to be demolished and rebuilt because the architect designed it to face Israel instead of Mecca. there was a mistake of five degrees. (D. Mirror, 30/9/86).

HALLEY'S COMET. Remember in F.F. 3 we featured Thames Valley Eggs' comet egg competition. The one chosen as being most like Halley's Comet from the 400 entrants won £10,000 -- half for the winner and the same amount for the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. It was being displayed in 20 Tesco stores nationwide. Thames Valley hoped to present it to the National History Museum once the tour was over. As monitor Jacqueline Simpson comments: "I think you'll agree that it deserves it!" (Worthing & District Advertiser, 19/3/86).



YES, IT'S GENUINE -- the odd-shaped egg that won the Halley's Comet contest.

MAIL, HARTLEPOOL, Friday, October 31, 1986 - 17



IT'S A MYSTERY... Mr Jack Locke with the piece of metal. - (M. 5678)

Things that go bump on the roof...

A MYSTERY object came down to earth with a bump in a Hartlepool granddad's backyard.

Puzzled pensioner Jack Locke discovered the lump of metal after it hit his roof and bounced on to the ground.

And when wife Janet picked it up she found the weighty piece was still warm.

Now Jack (82), of Thornton Street, is trying to find out where the lump - which he thinks is made of iron - came from.

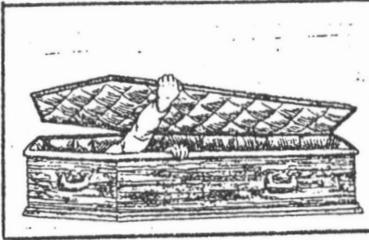
"All I can think of is that it came from a plane," he said.

Mr and Mrs Locke were sipping coffee yesterday when they heard a loud bang on the roof.

"We thought it was children throwing things at first but when we went out there was no-one around," said Mr Locke.

"Then I found this in the backyard. My wife picked it up and it was still hot."

Mr Locke now plans to ask the Civil Aviation Authority's help in tracing where the metal piece came from.



"I'M beginning to have my doubts about death" said Mr Musyoka Mututa, a 60 year old estate agent from Titu, shortly after sitting up in his coffin and saking for a glass of water.

To the amazement of assembled friends and relatives, Mr Mututa was brought back to life at the last minute by the sound of earth falling on the coffin lid.

The man himself, however, was not greatly put out by the experience, this being his third unsuccessful funeral.

PLATFORM END RUMOUR. Speed record breaking A4 Pacific Mallard's return to revenue-earning service between York and Scarborough has rattled a few rumourers and tall tales into the open. Knowing my railway enthusiasm, a neighbour extolled the streamliner's virtues. "Last time I saw her was in 1959," reminisced Derek. "She came on at York and reached Darlington in 31 minutes." She didn't. That's the time today's Inter-City 125s take. "She ended her career as station pilot at Doncaster." She didn't. She never was.

But back to York, on August 1, 1985, a fellow trainspotter told me on good authority that Mallard would haul the last of that season's Scarborough Spa Expresses. She didn't. She was nowhere ready for such.

Ironically the chairman of the Friends of the National Railway Museum, which launched Mallard's return to steam appeal is Bill Reynolds. As Executive Director, Systems and Operations, British Railways Board, he argued in Transport Studies, June 1971, how steam locomotives could never, ever, be allowed to run ever again on British Rail's tracks. God's surely a steam buff, for as they say, there is more joy in Heaven over one sinner that repenteth.....



SEAGULL DROPS CATCH

IT WAS a wet wicket and rain was still falling. But it was not the weather that brought a sudden halt to Old Cliftonian's innings in their home match at Bristol against Stowe Templars of Leicestershire.

Cliftonians No 4, Simon Hazlitt, was facing up to his next delivery — the bowler had just started his run up — when his concentration was broken by a loud crash behind him.

Not knowing what was happening, he covered and covered his head with his hands. But when he turned around and discovered the cause of the bold-up, he burst out laughing.

There, lying near the stumps, was a dead mackerel.

"We all thought it was hilarious," said team-mate Steve Scott. "I saw two seagulls flying overhead, about 50ft up, and one of them must have been carrying the fish and dropped it."

"I have heard of some pretty odd things stopping play — but never a mackerel. Our captain, Martin Lockyer, walked on to the pitch, scooped up the mackerel with his bat and carried it to the boundary and left it there."

Jim Andrews, the Clifton College professional, said: "It was the oddest way of stopping play I know. I know it was a wet wicket, but not that wet."

Several people promised articles but have yet to deliver the goods as we go to the printer. This is not a literary guiltogram! I hope to write up foundation sacrifices (including criminals in concrete) for the next issue; also the Stuck Couple. Articles, letters, cuttings, comments always gladly received.



"Mike Goss just isn't going to believe this..."