



**Focus
on
AIDS**

FOLK LORE FRONTIERS

**JAN HAROLD BRUNVAND
MICHAEL GOSS
PAUL SCREETON**



**"If there's one thing Rico can't stand it's
compulsive nail biters"**

FOLKLORE FRONTIERS No. 5

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NEWS LINES AND UPDATE

SNIFFER DOGS: IN F.F. 3
 Mike Goss wrote of the
 canine junkies legend.
 As one might expect, this
 rumour has now arrived in
 national cartoon form.

CAT FLAP. F.F. 4 documented the Durham Puma alert and only on report has been noted since then. The Northern Echo of Jan. 8 reported the police officer investigating sightings was called the previous day to West Cornforth. A process worker with Steetley Minerals, Malcolm Conolly, saw what he believed was a big cat which left tracks in the snow. However, P.C. Eddie Bell thought they were left by a dog, possibly a rottweiler.

FOXED. F.F. 4 also documented the fears of Welsh sheep farmers that foxes captured in towns and cities were being deliberately released into the countryside. A new claim had been made by members of the Brecon & Radnor branch of the National Farmers' Union, whose executive said there was outrage at reports that the RSPCA was responsible. While admitting no one had seen such releases, an executive spokesman said rural areas were rife with such rumours which had been strong enough to convince farmers. A spokeswoman at its headquarters in Horsham stated: "The RSPCA has never releases foxes into the country. To say so is complete nonsense. We just do not do it." (Liverpool Daily Post, 18/2/87; credit J. & C. Bord).

AIDS. Mike Goss has excellently elsewhere this issue come to grips with AIDS rumour. There's AIDS stories each day in most newspapers and some have a legend context. Just as during the miners' strike there were claims of soldiers masquerading as police on picket lines, one suspects Shadow Social Secretary Michael Meacher was similarly reacting, and the Minister responsible, Norman Fowler, had to deny that any children were being detained in secure accommodation because they have the AIDS virus.

How long before "The Stolen Specimen" tale will switch from urine sample stolen by a meths tramp to AIDS testee as victim? Also I've warned of the dubiousness of anything supposedly relating to Johannesburg, so the tale of the bogus doctor there getting homosexualsacked by telling their bosses they have AIDS is doubtful (Sun, 23/2/87). We can't move on without a Peter Tory item (Star, 2/4/87), alleging a U.S. gay newspaper is offering the chance to purchase Greg, a 6ft. lifelike "play guy." This "Greek cowboy" vinyl blow-up with optional extras has the assurance; "He is SAFE and never says no."

URBAN LEGENDS

(An introduction)

By Jan
 Harold
 Brunvand

Last August 8 Chicagoans reading Mike Royko's popular column in the Chicago Tribune were treated to an urban legend disguised as a fish story. Royko relayed a whopper told by a Chicago broadcasting executive who heard it firsthand from an avid fisherman.

In this thrice-told tale the fisherman said he invited friends of his to dine on a Lake Michigan salmon. But the cat got to the fish first, nibbling on it. The host flopped the cooked fish over and served it anyway. Later the cat was found dead, so the guests rushed to a hospital to have their stomachs pumped. The next day the fisherman learned that his cat had died in a car accident, not from food poisoning.

Royko was unable to substantiate anything in the story beyond that the alleged source IS a fisherman. "Never mind," he concluded, "it's a fine yarn."

One week later - bombarded with variant versions of the dead cat story by readers - Royko admitted that "what we obviously have here is an example of what the scholars call 'urban folklore'." He learned that his source had heard the story from a pal in Colorado.

The poisoned pet has the hallmarks of an urban legend - its origin is a "FOAF" (friend-of-a-friend); the plot is bizarre, but believable; the alleged facts are unverifiable; and, most important, the basic story has been traditional for decades.

Other urban legends describe a batter-fried rat, a hookman terrorising a lovers' lane, a stolen urine sample mistaken for liquor, and a new car filled with cement by a jealous (but mistaken) husband. I have catalogued nearly 300 such pieces of contemporary folklore and written three books about them.

The title of my first urban legend book refers to a classic American ghost story with a specific Chicago variation. This is "The Vanishing Hitchhiker," in which a ghost-girl disappears from a moving car. She's called "Resurrection Mary" in these parts, because of her supposed destination back to a grave in Resurrection Cemetery on South Archer Road.

Vanishing hitchhiker stories, popular since the turn of the century in the U.S., are exceptions to the rule that most urban legends are plausible and deal with circumstances of daily life. plots centre on things like shopping malls, microwave ovens, work, vacations, crime, and celebrities.

The specifically "urban" nature of these stories is not always strong. Perhaps "suburban" or just "modern" would be better terms, since the stories centre not so much on city life as such but on traits of human nature.

One definitely urban theme in these legends is suspicion about neighbours from different ethnic backgrounds. Lately the influx of South-East Asian refugees into American cities spurred a revival of

stories about immigrants eating our dogs and cats. Rumours are rampant in many cities about mass pet disappearances, their remains found in garbage cans, and social workers discovering immigrants cooking pets.

Since urban legends deal with so many things that COULD happen - even if they probably DIDN'T - and since they are told by credible friends of ours about believable FOAFs, they are easy to trust when we hear them, and they are tempting to retell.

People who seldom attempt to perform jokes will freely chat about the latest new "true" story they've heard, about the attempted abduction of a small child from a shopping mall, or the outrageous price supposedly charged by a big cookie company for its special recipe.

In my urban studies I collect such stories and observe their variations. Then by comparing the texts, observing their storytelling contexts, and isolating the consistent versus the variable themes, I want to learn how and why such stories continue to be told.

One obvious factor is people's continuin love of a good story. Beyond the simple appeal of a suspenseful plot, is the typical warning function of urban legends. They imply, "This is the way things are," or "This shows something you ought to be doing."

From the sensible advice to "Always check the back seat of your car," to the paranoid "Don't buy this product manufactured by Satanists," the urban legends we love to tell serve as modern fables.

When I debunk urban legends, some readers claim that I spoil all their fun. What this indicates is that many people tell them as much to be the centre of attention for a while as for their supposed literal truth.

Almost everyone has heard urban legends and finds them fascinating. As a result, besides having invitations to speak at academic conventions or on university campuses, I have been interviewed on national radio and TV shows, including four times on "Late Night with David Letterman." Twice Letterman deviated from the planned topics to tell me a story remembered from his boyhood in Indiana.

Besides reviews in the scholarly jornals, my books were discussed in the New York Times, Time, U.S. News and World Report, People, Whole Earth Review, and even Penthouse. The reader response has varied, depending on the nature of the periodical involved. Some people write to me in amazement that stories they have heard are untrue; others are non-plussed that anyone could possibly believe such nonsense.

Lately, with my books reissued abroad, mail has increased from Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. While the structures and basic plot elements of foreign urban legends remain constant, specific details vary.

The future of urban legends seems to be limitless. Just recently, I have heard new ones about a lover taking revenge on her ex-roommate by dialing Tokyo time service on his phone and leaving it off the hook for days; a man about to be arrested for driving drunk who takes advantage

CAPTAIN EASY



BY CROOKS & LAWRENCE



of the officer's distraction and drives home, but in the cop's car rather than his own; and a small pet carried off by a large bird (an owl in New Mexico, a pelican in Australia, and a pergrine falcon in downtown Salt Lake City).

Even computer bulletin boards reached via personal modems are used to disseminate urban legends. Whatever the means of circulation, these appealing but utterly fictional "true" stories fill our needs for commentaries on or warning about the modern world in the form of storylore.

Why should a college professor study urban legends? I maintain, it is simply because they're there, as the second most popular form of modern oral narrative. Urban legends are right behind dirty jokes in popularity. If these stories are so common in modern urban culture, I think it behoves us to ask "Why?"

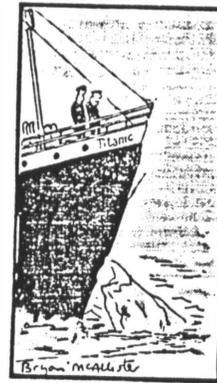
Incidentally, I approve of academic attention to dirty jokes too, but I'll leave that to other urban folklorists.

AIDS:

Condom boy sent home

A BOY who wore a condom on a necklace was sent home from school yesterday. Anthony Mella, 18, of Wednesbury, West Midlands, said: "It says on TV you should always carry a condom. I did it for a laugh." Charles King, headmaster of Woodgreen High School, said Anthony had been disciplined for being rude to a teacher.

STAG 14/11/87



"We appear to have hit an Aids commercial."

Heaven-sent

folk lore

By Michael Goss

'One Richard Parsons of Chalford in Gloucestershire, in playing at cards, wished his flesh might rot, and his eyes never shut, if he lost the next game. At night, in going to bed, he observed a black spot upon his leg, from which a mortification soon ensued, and he died in a few days in a very miserable condition'.

Well, of course he did. Served him right, too. Most readers contemporary with this sobre little 18thC. item from the Gloucester Journal¹ would have expected nothing else; had Richard Parsons' rash blasphemy gone unpunished, something would have been very wrong with the universe. You simply couldn't tempt Providence like that and get away with it. And how satisfying that the punishment should fit the crime so literally; Parsons received no more than he'd wished upon himself and being an obviously rotten individual inwardly (spiritually) it was mete that divine justice should make his rottenness externally visible. Which, needless to say, ought to stand as a dire warning to others. There's a suspicion that 18thC readers would have felt somewhat let down if the story had ended any other way.

Times and the people occupying them have changed. On the surface we are too sophisticated - too cynical - to expect or to need cautionary tales like this. It comes as a shock to realize that the integral relationship between moral and physical corruption, between spiritual sickness and the material kind, is believed in just as strongly today - at least, on a folklore level. For this (and for not much else) we have to thank AIDS.



"Back off, chum, they still haven't found a cure for it, you know!"



"I think I'm going to start a rumour that you can catch Aids by talking endlessly about it at dinner parties."



The Government's warnings about the dangers of Aids seem at least to be getting through to schoolchildren. According to this week's New Scientist, youngsters playing tag in at least one Billington primary school no longer call the catcher "it". Instead, the children flee the unfortunate victim crying "he's got Aids".

Daily Telegraph 19/1/87

Maybe the surprise is misplaced. How could AIDS fail to attract to itself a body of folklore, particularly of the urban belief tale or rumour-legend kind? Inside a space of much, much less than a decade AIDS has arisen from being an obscure disease to something posing as an all-conquering, rampant symbol of Pandemic, striding the world with scythe brandished aloft. It is the kind of grotesque image we have seldom seen since the Middle Ages, yet apparently bang up to date: the Grim Reaper a-go-go. If this didn't generate its own folklore, something would be very wrong with the universe.

Contemporary folklore is meant to reflect current fears, uncertainties and moral dilemmas and few aspects of modern living are so replete with fear, uncertainty and moralistic implications than the AIDS issue. Orally or in print, legends and rumours convey these things, often pushing some cautionary "message" by means of exaggeration or fantasy. However, the morals and values upheld in these stories are not confined to the AIDS business, but belong to a much broader cultural subset. In fact, AIDS-lore is just the latest mode of carrying warnings which support certain societal standards that can be identified in urban legends as a whole. And if these values should appear racist, sexist or any other kind of "-ist", we oughtn't be too shocked at that, either. Here again the material can be used so that individual tale-types act as "evidence" corroborating the bias in question, typifying perceived dangers from alien ethnic groups invading our culture or perhaps from subgroups and minorities already inside it.

Inasmuch as it seems to promote a strangely archaic vision where divinely inflicted disease is dealt out as a punishment for human laxity, AIDS-lore has a didactic kind of role. The gods are just and of our pleasant vices make instruments to plague us; we've had the message before and often, but it doesn't hurt to get a reminder. But AIDS isn't merely a punishment on the active sinners amongst us; in that all or most are equally vulnerable to the virus, we are prone to receive punishment for not punishing those sinners. Conceivably part of the backlash against the permissive life-style of the 'Sixties - a useful scapegoat of an era upon which virtually anything can be blamed, from unemployment and economic depression to falling gates at soccer matches - there have been cries that moral reform is long overdue and AIDS fits the bill to a nicety. Several journalists claim to have detected a barely masked smugness, a "told-you-so" kind of gloating, when the Whitehouses and Andertons of this world are asked to give an opinion on AIDS. To be fair, the smugness may have been in the eye of the beholder; the journalists may have caught a glimpse of what they anticipated they would see and maybe even wanted to see. But if present it was, AIDS is an ambiguous ally in any moralistic debate. As Venetia Newall said in her Presidential Address to the Folklore Society on 15 August 1985: 'Church people who thunder about the wrath of God - a folkloric subject if there ever was one - would do well to remember that AIDS has reached epidemic proportions in Central and East Africa, where it affects missionaries, nuns and other pious people'.^②

Ambiguous or not, AIDS-lore functions rather like a behaviour control system, a series of correctives to perceived moral and social dangers. Urban legends frequently appear to support established beliefs and values: moderation in conduct, the superiority of old ways and beliefs over new ones and so forth. Here behaviour condemned as antisocial or aberrant - which may have proven stubbornly resistant to other forms of restraint - is put in its place by fear of AIDS. John Lydon (former Johnny Rotten) has gobbled his last: the ace-spitter is now reportedly shunning London venues lest fans raised in the punkish traditions of expressing approval which he himself helped to popularise will spit over him. ③ Children are no longer warned off Red-Indian style blood-brother rituals by threats of blood poisoning, but through invocation of the AIDS threat. ④ So to sexual licence, which by vague consensus has "gone too far": AIDS-lore is the cure for that.

On a relatively innocent level, Kissogram girls are said to be only part-earning their fees; they'll willingly pose as provocatively-clad parodies of Salvation Army females, but..they avoid mouth contact, which strikes me as a little like a contradiction in terms, if not a contravention of the Trades Description Act. ⑤ And nothing could better illustrate the power of modern rumour than the "Sailors Beware" warning aimed at a class of men whose sexual voracity is the very stuff of legend. ⑥ With the imminent return of thousands of matelots in the Global '86 Fleet - men whom, it was feared, might not appreciate the extent and severity of Britain's AIDS problem- an official warning was posted in warships and naval bases to the effect that a Plymouth prostitute had been diagnosed as having the disease - much to the annoyance of Plymouth health officers, who criticized it as 'codswallop'. And in short order the naval authorities admitted they were wrong. No such diagnosis had been made; they had been thrown into panic by rumours picked up by seamen at pubs and clubs in Union Street, 'Plymouth's notorious red light district', one version of which specified only that two prostitutes were living with a male AIDS carrier. The rumour was just that - an unsubstantiated statement - but like most rumours it was horribly believable. And even useful, too, as the defence offered by a Navy press spokesman made clear: "Maybe we over-reacted, but it was felt in the best interests of the men to warn them of the dangers rather than take no action". Except that there was no genuine danger which they required to be warned about...

Where logic and rational argument fail to curb human inclinations,

rumour legend may go part-way towards succeeding. Sexual licence is habitually viewed as no less of a danger for its being human, as it carries with it a hint of moral contagion: the more so when the practitioners can be seen as somehow aberrant or deviant. Homosexuals are especially vulnerable to this kind of attack. While they represent only a minority, that minority is numerically large enough to command attention; their new-found outspokenness and refusal to remain as punch-bags for popular condemnation makes it all the more possible to depict them as some kind of subversive threat.

Consequently they are on the receiving end of a folk-process which attempts to override their reasoned arguments and appeals for toleration and which advocates a return to the strict old belief that homosexuality is basically abnormal and thence a punishable perversion of the natural order. It's no accident that among the hardest tasks facing health authorities has been the need to educate people away from the idea that AIDS is a specifically homosexual disease. Derogated as disseminators if not the originators of the virus, homosexuals have taken on the unenviable role played by Jews at the time of the Black Death: blamed for having it and suspected of wantonly spreading it to others outside their sect and birthright. Happily, the analogue isn't perfect. Across Europe Jews were sometimes made to pay for their rumored role with their lives. ⑦

Much AIDS-lore acts as a reinforcement of the "unnaturalness" of homosexuality; herpes is a love story, AIDS is a fairy-tale. In the paper mentioned a little while ago Venetia Newall cites examples from what could be an endless store of jokes based on the assumption (or pretence) that AIDS is a uniquely homosexual ailment: as satirised in a radio comedy broadcast which reported that a direct link had been found between AIDS and going to see the plays of Oscar Wilde, or as immodest two-liners like:

"What do you call a group of gay musicians?" - Answer: Band-AIDS.
 "What do you call a couple of gay lawyers?" - Answer: Legal AIDS

And so on, ad nauseum.

At the same time, there is an emerging complement of full-blown AIDS legends such as "Putting the bite of fear on you". FF readers won't be too amazed to find it appeared in that seminal source of printed urban belief tale material, The Star. ⑧ 'A young man of our acquaintance has ...suffered the most nightmarish of attacks outside a seamy Edinburgh

nightclub known to be frequented by all manner of persons of a homosexual inclination,' opened the article, its oddly-elaborate diction throwing out the strongest clue that what followed would have a highly "literary" flavour. A 'bearded and extremely agitated drunk' emerged from the club and, seizing the unfortunate's hand, asked: "'Have you got AIDS, dearie?'" On being told that the answer was, "No", the hirsute urban terror immediately sank his teeth into the victim's arm and ran off shouting, "'Well, you have now!'" The writer's informant claimed to have seen the teeth-marks. 'The awful thing about this disturbing story..is that the wretched young man, whose name we know but prefer not to publish, may not learn for years whether the incident was just some dreadful joke..Or..otherwise'.

Well, this might be the kind of up-front piece of news reportage that it poses for being, but personally I have my doubts. The story has the gloriously apocryphal tone of out-and-out legend where anonymity is de rigueur; translated back from the writer to his correspondent/informant who attributes it to 'a young man of our acquaintance', you have yet another friend-of-a-friend. The thing is put beyond criticism by the narrator's assurance that he could name the 'wretched young man' if he chose, but of course he doesn't and won't. Finally, it meets prior expectation and group beliefs on how stereotype gays talk (the victim is addressed as "dearie") and their evil motives (deliberately infecting the innocent straight community).

AIDS-lore supports the status quo: the old, secure moral order which applied before the free-thinkers came along and complicated everything. Spiritually, also, it harkens back to a more conservative way of thinking where cautionary tales are told to correct dangerous, widespread fallacies. Science from Darwin onwards threatened to replace God, but now God has reasserted himself; Science is pathetically helpless to defend us from this new plague. And of course, plagues are sent not only to punish but to remind us of our vulnerability. Like the inhabitants of London. in 1665 we can only chalk on our doors the plea, "Lord Have Mercy Upon Us"..and pray.

But additionally there comes the suggestion that Science has drawn down this curse by more direct means. Through its irreligious pride and its attempts to take over God's role - reference the creation of test-tube life - Science has created Death. This is the rationale behind one of the most prevalent forms of AIDS-lore, whereby the virus is said to

(continued in Page 23)

BOOK REVIEWS

"THE MEXICAN PET" by JAN HAROLD BRUNVAND (V.V. Norton & Company, £11-95).

It's funny how when someone else identifies a "new" urban legend, it triggers one's own memory of hearing the same tale -- and not at the same time realising its apocryphal content. Half-asleep on an overnight train to London I was regaled by a woman from Stevenage about how she had assiduously collected the ring-pulls from cans for some charity effort only to find later the whole can was made of the same aluminium. Her anger was not that she had been hoaxed -- she had yet to face up to this -- by the widespread legend, but she would in future be keeping whole cans for this spurious Samaritanism.

Brunvand's third collection of modern myths has several new tales to me and others where believed information is questioned. Another case

'Uncle Mac' dies

The children's favourite

being the children's radio show where the presenter makes a crass remark when he thought he was off air. In my childhood it was Uncle Mac on Saturday mornings and I (blush) failed to keep the cutting on how he was supposed to have referred to his junior listeners in derogatory terms and it was inadvertently broadcast. ABOVE RIGHT: Media boob! A compositor fails to rule off Uncle Mac's death from a picture of the late Brian Jones, of the Rolling Stones.



But what of that phenomenon of rumour becoming truth?



Brunvand excels with his coverage of "The Dolly Parton Diet." The journalistic odyssey of one reporter shows the stamina we hacks have, but I must remind readers of the Bai Lin tea claims in Britain as extolled by equally well-endowed models Sam Fox and Maria Whittaker, who claim it loses them pounds in weight and is supposedly genuine.



While on the subject of sexual titillation, I was very amused by "The Surprise." Here a campus prank goes embarrassingly wrong when a student returns from the shower thinking only his roommate will be in the room. Unaware his girlfriend and her parents have paid a surprise visit, he swings wide the door, drops his towel and with hand gripping his penis screams, "Bang, bang, you're dead!"

The condom-embarrassment tale here, I read of recently attributed by Gyles Brandreth to having really happened to humorist Tim Brooke-Taylor. Similarly here a Mrs Celler claims primacy to facts in the widespread story of sex and green stamps. Others would have kept quiet.

As for "The Bothered Bride", a colleague heard aversion of this allegedly happening to someone from my hometown of Hartlepool. In precis, at the reception the newly-wed husband got up and thanked various people as is etiquette and then turned to his best man, accused him of sleeping with his bride recently and stormed out announcing he was taking a solitary honeymoon. The reporter engaged for two days on this matrimonial sleuthing scoop finally rang the manager of Newcastle's Gosforth Park Hotel, and asked if it had really happened there. "No," he replied, "I've heard that story. I thought it happened at your town's Grand Hotel." It didn't. Well, it didn't, did it?

What we have here is a splendidly written-up set of more "new" legends. Also some "old favourites" from Brunvand's previous books are aired again. I found this rather irritating. Perhaps they were for the benefit of newcomers to the genre and I hope it was not a padding-out exercise. Major categories are covered: animals, cars, horrors/anxieties, contaminations, sex, crime, and ethnic issues and personalities (them and us). There is a fine flow in "The Mexican Pet," but I hope with a fourth book the author will not be tempted to punctuate it with backrackings. The store of urban legend goodies is still far from exhausted.

"THE BOOK OF NASTIER LEGENDS" by PAUL SMITH (Routledge & Kegan Paul, £4-95)

In F.F. 1 we reviewed Dr Smith's earlier volume of apocryphal anecdotes, "The Book of Masty Legends." Now he's back with a new selection. It is to his credit as both collector and compiler, that as an assiduous listener and clipster for a decade, I still managed to be unacquainted with no fewer than 18 of the tales. In fact, the one about the girl trying to relieve herself on the piste made me for the first time since hearing it 20 years ago doubt a colleague's "true" story.

A fellow journalist reminisced of covering a minor league soccer match. The ground did not have such facilities as a Press box so the sports reporters had to sit on the terraces. One in particular had to file a detailed report at half-time and knew he would not have time to both phone his copy and visit the toilet. The gallon or so consumed pre-match weighed heavy on his bladder. At a colleague's insistence that no one would notice, he cautiously unzipped his fly below a lengthy coat and proceeded to urinate. What he had not bargained for was the extreme cold of the day and ground. Billowing clouds of steam rose up around him as he was unable to stem the tide of second-hand ale and his neighbours uproarious guffaws.

But was it true? It has always been well appreciated when I've told the tale and no one has so far challenged its veracity. But I wonder...

Another colleague swore blind the huge worm being starved and encouraged out of the human body happened to a friend, or friend of a friend. Only in this version the sufferer neither ate nor drank for

several days and then swallowed a large glass or neat whiskey. The shock for the worm was sufficient for it to jump out of the man's mouth as a way of escape -- and it was several feet long! I have even seen an article which argued that some dragon legends, such as that of the Lambton Worm, have their antecedents in tapeworms infesting humans.

It's a while since I heard the castration by ethnic minority tale, but it made a page lead in Darlington's Northern Echo when a gypsy was so dealt with for raping his sister. The police wasted many man hours checking campsites to see if there was any truth in the story.

But sometimes a tale does come true. Perhaps because its perpetrators are aware of the legend. A real-life happening very similar to "The Double Theft" was reported very fully in 1980 when professional burglars invited York travel writer David Yeadon out for a meal -- and then raided his luxury home. While kicking his heels 30 miles away, expecting to sell the dormobile he had advertised to someone who had phoned showing interest, his home was being ransacked. "It was a very clever idea to get me out of the house," he said. The free tickets ruse was used in the plot of an episode of the TV soap "Neighbours" this March.

Also in an "odds and ends" section in "A Mathematician's Miscellany," by the late Prof. J. E. Littlewood (C.U.P., 2nd. ed. 1986; spotted by Michael Behrend) appears the one Smith calls "My Mistake." --- "Chicago: A professor, detained until after dark at the University in the winter, had to go home across the snow-covered Midway Plaisance. The way was by a couple of planks, and you had to wriggle past anyone going the opposite way, the professor brushed past someone, and happened at once to notice that his watch was missing. Summoning up all his courage and bravado he rushed at the man: 'Give me that watch.' To his intense relief the watch was meekly handed over. When he got home his wife said: 'You know, dear, you went out without your watch.'"

While on the subject of "criminal activity," I'm sure all F.F. readers will have come across newspaper accounts of missing garden gnomes which supposedly send postcards from abroad. When I worked in Hull in the late Sixties, it was discovered that undergraduates had a bet on as to who could steal the most of these dubious objects. A student was stopped because one of his car lights was malfunctioning, and the policeman then saw a row of plastic elementals on the back seat along with boards stuck to stakes bearing such mottoes as "I SAY GNO TO GNOMES," which replaced the abductees.

As for moon walks, right-thinking people know this to be a fabrication. Challenger proved it. Anyway, it's just a modern version of all those tales of who was there first: Columbus. Vikings, Irish monks, Phoenixians? In the version I read, anyway, the survey on moon trip belief was carried out on disbelieving Mexicans. Makes you wonder.....

I have made the observation many times that urban legends which can be tear-wateringly hilarious in the pub do not travel so well in print. It is obviously economical sense to market this book on the cover as "Humour," but why not "Humour/Folklore"? The illustrations by David Austin are inventive and do add a humorous dimension. For the record, I did have a really good chuckle at the tales on page 30 (on the piste), 76 (irreverent airline pilot) and 81 (penis self-mutilation).

Keep abreast of the latest tales with this book.

"REPRODUCTION IS FUN: A BOOK OF PHOTOCOPY JOKE SHEETS" by PAUL SMITH (Routledge & Kegan Paul, £4-95)

Human humour and ingenuity, alongside the trusty (and frequently untrusty) photocopier, keeps abreast of the times. A funny recent example

circulating at my workplace was a crudely drawn picture of the Duke and Duchess of York waving to the crowds after their wedding, but when the fold was deftly changed revealed them in less flattering pose. Another drawing of a demure lady using a powder puff to her neck, when folded in half and turned through 180 degrees revealed her about to dab a more private area of anatomy.

Many of the pages of Dr Smith's new collection from his files are similar cartoons illustrating working practices, embarrassing situations and lavatorial and sexual scenes. The mock letters, tall tales, vituperativeverse and spoof memos are often very funny and frequently grossly coarse.

Such material brings many a smile on a grey Monday morning and helps us get a laugh out of mundane jobs. Every workplace, be it office or factory, has a fair share of rules and regulations where reproduced memoranda poke fun at authority, offend the boos from the anonymity of the noticeboard or slipped into his in-tray. Many make fun of life in general and our anxieties in particular, dating here from a 19th. century set of rules for hen-pecked husbands to a set of verses lampooning Mrs Thatcher, but which were an adaptation of lines previously used to relate to various other post-war P.M.s.

Dr Smith relates in an informative and witty introduction to this sub-species of folklore how modern photocopiers can now even reproduce the actions of the human body. He had heard of the bizarre photocopying of a couple making love. A recent issue of -- I believe -- Fiesta, also circulating at my workplace, showed a nubile girl lying across such a machine and then holding a coloured reproduction of her pubic area as if it was as innocent as an X-ray. Yes, reproduction is fun.

"STRANGE OXFORD" edited by CHRIS MORGAN (Oxford Golden Dawn Publishing, P.O. Box 250, Oxford, OX1 1AP. £1-95 plus 24p p&p, cheques payable to Golden Dawn).

"STRANGE BERKSHIRE" edited by AMANDA & CHRIS COWLEY & ALAN CLEAVER (Strange Publications, 65 Amersham Road, High Wycombe, Bucks., HP13 5AA. £1-95 plus 24p p&p; cheques payable to Slough Mobile Screening Appeal.

It has been enormously heartening that an upsurge in grassroots interest in folklore has taken place recently. No small praise must go to Alan Cleaver, of High Wycombe's Strange Folklore Society, for this renaissance. "Strange Oxford" commends his "inspiration and practical support" and he is co-editor of "Strange Berkshire."

Both booklets are handysized A5 publications with large typeface and plenty of illustrations. Thus they will appeal to a wider public than squeezed specialist publications where the afficianado does not worry too much about peril to one's eyesight.

"Strange Oxford" looks at the city's legends and sacred sites, more locations of sanctity in the county, folklore and the notable characters. We learn of St Frideswide's holiness and her well at Binsey (also associated with Lewis Carroll's "treacle well" -- a whole article could be written on supposed Dodgson reference sites); effigies of the Shotover giant and Uffington dragon (or white horse as the book prefers); an Oxfordshire ley; Rollright and the Dragon Project; Somerton turf maze; sheil-na-gig; mumming; Satanism and a particularly piece on Montague Summers; Roger Bacon, W.B. Yeats & Dr John Dee.

The only drawback is the proofreading - Alfred Watkins, Paul Debreux, Ian Thompson, Don Robbins, "Circles of Science" and so on -- but it is succinct and really whets the appetite.

As for "Strange Berkshire," this has been put together lovingly with specially excellent illustrations, many old-fashioned and quaintly humorous. Topics covered include the mysterious Herne the Hunter, national figure of crisis times and popularized in the "Robin of Sherwood" TV programme; Slough, Windsor and Thames Valley ghosts; an extraordinary dreaming which led to riches; holy wells; The Montem, procession and poets; the Stab Monk custom and its various possible origins; a sensational witch trial; a warlock's death as recently as the 1960s; a murderer caught by telegraph; and Datchet's beating of the bounds with plans for 1987's event.

Proceeds go to a mobile screening appeal, so it must be one of the strangest yet ways of raising money for charity.

"LANDSCAPE LINES, LEYS AND LIMITS IN OLD ENGLAND" by NIGEL PENNICK (£1-35, inc. p&p, Runestaff - Old England, 3 Pheasant Rise, Bar Hill, Cambridge)

This booklet seeks by its evidence and ideas to bring researchers closer to an understanding of the phenomenon of alignments. Geographical alignments in most persons' minds means leys. Much has been written of Alfred Watkins' old straight track with plenty of criticism. But as Pennick shows, this is just one of the theories connected with alignments. He rightly calls for the examination of the overall historic and topographic characteristics of an area. Local documentation can be researched by everyone in the hopes of adding to an indisputable corpus of data.

That Roman roads, Offa's dike and the Cambridgeshire dike were intended as straight he sees as self-evident, and that they had a degree of accuracy which was commendable yet not totally perfect.

I'm sorry if people still reading my book "Quicksilver Heritage" are perpetuating the myth that ley point knowledge was expunged by the Reformation. Since the early-70s we have come a long way. As Pennick observes, also, religious site appropriation goes on, nowadays English churches are being converted into mosques, gurdwaras and Hindu temples.

The main sections cover the sacred history and alignments of Cambridge, famous for its seven-church ley, and primarily London (the devout paganism of whose citizens cause the southern archbishopric to be located at Canterbury) with a great many impressive ecclesiastical alignments and the Strand Ley described in detail, including dwelling on the practice of impaling victims' heads on spikes and a licentious phallic maypole depiction on the tiles of a gents' lavatory. There is also relevant reference to the Peruvian pagan alignments and their appropriation and continuation by Roman Catholic Jesuits. In more modern times, June 17, 1715, to be exact, the new city of Karlsruhe was founded, and founded upon geomantic principles having a deliberate mystical significance plus solar orientation. Similar cosmological practices were at work in Britain in this period, particularly in Bath.

Of importance to ley hunters and their problems of accuracy and wish to have the blessing of the Establishment, Pennick shows how top archaeologist Sir Cyril Fox's incontrovertible work on Offa's Dike shows "long alignments were carried out 1200 years ago, and the limits of deviation from a bullet-straight alignment acceptable to archaeologists. "It's a pity that doyen of the old guard, Glyn Daniel, who died last December, was not so aware. Indeed, Pennick's book shows how Daniel's "lunatic fringe" has become recognised as an "alternative academy."

THE EDITOR APOLOGISES TO THOSE AUTHORS AND PUBLISHERS WHOSE BOOKS AND BOOKLETS WE WERE NOT ABLE TO REVIEW THIS ISSUE. REST ASSURED THEY WILL BE COVERED AND WE HOPE TO CATCH UP WITH THE BACKLOG NEXT ISSUE.

MAGAZINE REVIEWS

The funny item on the right appeared in The West Sussex Gazette for December 31, 1986. Seems from the cartoons, Excalibur is enjoying popularity.

PENDRAGON. 4 issues inc. Pendragon Society membership £4-50; 10 dollars. From 42 Burghley Road, St Andrews, Bristol, BS6 5BN.

No. 68. Almost totally a book reviews issue with six pages of an irate Richard Coon condemning R.A. Gilbert's review (referring to my own review in THE SHAMAN he writes "such scholars as Geoffrey Ashe and Paul Screeton have expressed their gratitude to me for my list of 'would-be' immortals," when what I actually wrote was: "He gives a fascinating list of a few historical and legendary figures who have attained physical immortality or are associated with it. However, I would suggest caution be exercised here, as so many such tales fit perfectly within sub-types of the 'vanishing hitch-hiker' motif." Gratitude? No. 69. Articles on early Christianity in Britain; fresh speculation on pre-historic cultures; on mazes lost for words; first day covers. No. 70. (combined with 69). Reviews and readers' comments on past issues.



FLS NEWS. Newsletter of the Folklore Society. Biannual. £1 p.a. to non-members. c/o University College London, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT. No. 3. Brief, informal round-up of events such as conferences, lectures, publications, research pleas and pub-lore survey initiated.

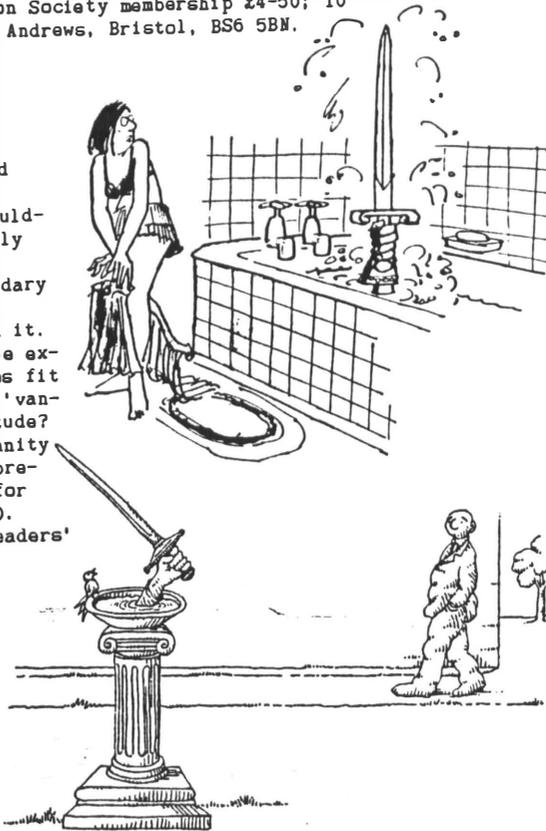
Comic comrades red 'herring'?

Pranksters planted a fake Soviet sub in a quiet pond near Selsey, West Sussex, with a Yuletide message to passers-by — "From Russia with Love".

They chose the pond near Sidlesham aqueduct as port for their submarine — and on the bank left a man-high replica of a Cockburn's port bottle bearing their festive message.

Last year Excalibur, gripped by an unseen hand, rose out of the murky depths of the pond, known by locals as The Ferry.

The year before, Nessie reared her monstrous head from the waters.



TOUCHSTONE. Mag of Surrey Earth Mysteries Group. Q. 4 issues £2. Cheques payable to J. Goddard, 25 Albert Road, Addlestone, Weybridge, Surrey, KT15 2PX. No. 9. Disappointment at leys on TV; articles on free energy and microwaves, also in AMSKAYA No. 2 (same address and price) along with Tony Wedd thought communication piece introduced by Philip Heselton. TOUCHSTONE No. 10. Alignments in Oxfordshire and Lancashire customs. No. 11. The Goddards visit Avebury; Chris Hall reports on T.L.H. Moot 86; folklore of Mother Ludlam's Hole grotto. No. 12. Fuller piece on Mother Ludlam legends by Chris Hall. AMSKAYA No. 3. STAR Rally disappointments; Wedd article reprint (cont. 4); Martian mysteries; Mary Long reminiscences of Wedd era. No. 4. Call for taking initiative with Space People, book reviews, letter and notes.

QUEST. Western Mystery Tradition. Q. Payments to "Quest", BCM -- SVCL, London, WC1 3XX. Single copy £1-20; sub. £4-50; U.S. 10 dollar bills airmail. No. 66. A rune for gamblers; angels; publicising witchcraft and the occult and making contacts. No. 67. Articles on spiritual evolution, politics, ritual, runes and Grail. No. 68. Reincarnation; seeking solo; astrology and investment; Russian forest spirit; runes and flower augury; from sword to stick fighting. No. 69. More runic; Tibetan retreat in Dumfriesshire; magical technology beyond scientific and belief systems. Plus publications, meetings and reviews.

UFO BRIGANTIA. Journal of the West Yorkshire UFO Research Group. Six issues £5-50. Payable to "WYUFORC", 84 Elland Road, Brighouse, West Yorkshire, HD6 2QR. No. 24. Includes what must be the final word on the Cracoe Fell debacle, including colour photograph showing the phenomenon to be reflected light. Phantom helicopters over the Pennines retrospective; Stealth F-19 suppoer secret aircraft; local investigations; reviews and cartoons.

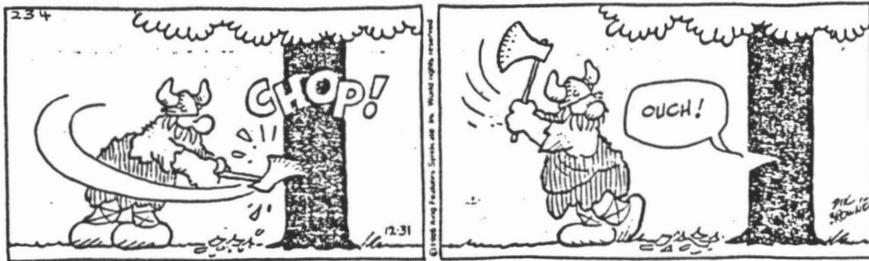
NORTHERN EARTH MYSTERIES. Journal of the Northern Earth Mysteries Group. Holds meetings and annual moot. New address 103 Derbyshire Lane, Norton Lees, Sheffield, S8 9EN. Three issues a year. Sub. £2-50. Cheques to "Northern Earth Mysteries." No. 32. Founder editor Philip Heselton bows out after seven years. Philip brought both enthusiasm and much commonsense to the magazine -- a hard act for the new editors to follow. Dialectical materialism debate in full flow. Jimmy Goddard writes of leys and other earth mysteries aspects of his Midlands holiday and also on the 1986 Northern Moot, while Helen Woodley at the Stoke Garden Festival found positive and negative aspects, and Rob Wilson notes the Haxey Hood Game custom he details now visits a wine bar. Paul Bennett describes a will o' the wisp experience.

MAGONIA. Independent journal examining anomalous phenomena and their interaction with society and the individual. Q. U.K. £2-50 for four issues; U.S. 5 dollars. Cheques to be made payable to John Rimmer. Address: John Dee Cottage, 5 James Terrace, Mortlake Churchyard, London, SW14 8HB. No. 24. Emphasis on earthlights/fireball phenomena. Mike Goss puts mystery luminescence back into traditional folklore supernatural motifs and spirit survival; David Clarke finds in his spotlights in tradition and folklore piece a 1919 article associating the phenomenon with Castlerigg stone circle. More articles and book reviews.

WEARA JOURNAL. Mag of the New England Antiquities Research Association. Essential reading for all earth mysteries researchers with plenty of associations between British sites and U.S. ones. Membership and details from 172 Robin Hill Road, Chelmsford, MA., 01824, U.S.A. No. 73. David Guynes presents a readable and erudite account of English rocking stones with many old illustrations. Jon Woodson's insightful essay on H.P. Lovecraft's interest in American megaliths is also a joy (not entirely shared by a contributor in 76). Plus map reading and site locating; site report; newly-located inscription and translation

speculation; reviews and NEARA chapter's news each issue. No. 74. Apparently ancient rock structures and alignments in a Massachusetts forest. Vermont stone chambers and more of the Mystery Hill site riddle. No. 75. Devoted to Mystery Hill debate. No. 76. Massachusetts perched stones; runestone translation; pre-Columbian contacts.

FORTEAN TIMES. The foremost journal of strange phenomena. Q. Single issue £1-50; 4 issues £6; U.S. 12 dollars. From 96 Mansfield Road, London, NW3 2HX. No. 47. Articles on SHC inquest, several on Halley's Comet, corn circles, unsuspected pregnancies and unconscious births, elephants, strange eggs, odd trees, including screaming ones;



centenarians; digests of worldwide Fortean events, book reviews and letters.

NORTHERN UFO NEWS. Publication of Northern UFO Research North. Sub 1986 £5-40 for 6 issues. Payable "NUFON" from 8 Whitethroat Walk, Birchwood, Warrington, Cheshire, WA3 6PQ. No. 118. Editor Jenny Randles rounds on Sunday Mirror journalists for their coverage of "UFOs" plus other media interest in UFOs; notes on articles elsewhere; book notes; brief cases but plenty of them. No. 119. Usual features plus obituary on ufology father figure J. Allen Hynek. Cover illustration shows how a UFO shedding a beam of light resembles a magic mushroom -- that's worth thinking about. No. 120. Randles on cereal circles again -- no Virginia, they are not caused by mini-whirlwinds. Extraordinary Sussex visiting entities case. No. 121. Randles plausibly speculates that some "UFO" sightings were of the U.S.A.F. "stealth" F-19 secret aircraft. Interesting background to a dubious Cumbrian encounter case and subsequent investigations. Cracoe skulduggery. No. 122. Editorial on Cracoe debacle (as too 123). No. 123. Bedroom visitors.

THE LEY HUNTER. Senior magazine of earth mysteries. Sub. three issues + supplement, £5; U.S. surface 15 dollars. P.O. Box 5, Brecon, Powys, Wales. No. 102. Chunky read with plenty of reviews and letters. Various round-ups of news, goings-on, Moonwatch and meetings. Articles on mining lights, household energies, Findhorn and megalithic sites radiation, plus columns including editor Paul Devereux on straight walking, Paul Screeton on Ian Taylor's splendid fieldwork and Nigel Pennick on Watkins' criteria. (What a pleasure to read informed E.M. comment. Just browsing through the April issue of EXPLORING THE SUPERNATURAL I found amidst Rodney Castleden's article on stone circles a depiction of Castlerigg but captioned Long Meg and Her Daughters!)

RILKO NEWSLETTER. Bi-annual mag of Research into Lost Knowledge Organization. Membership sub £4-50 (London £5-50). From 10 Kedleston Drive, Orpington, Kent, BR5 2DR. No. 28. Intriguing alleged terrestrial figures delineated by roads in Wilts.; John Alleyne's psychic Glastonbury pictures; cycles of time; hand-reading; crystals specifically and also separately with regard to Brittany megaliths; book reviews and letters.

Hoax letter has Jean in a flush

HOUSEWIFE Jean Taylor flushed with embarrassment when she was accused of using the loo too much.

And the "official" Northumbria Water Authority letter which arrived at her Blackhall home this morning told her a meter would be fitted to the toilet to control the future water supply and charges.

The first 65 flushes of the loo would be free, but then a "sliding scale" of water rate charges would be imposed to regulate her excessive use.

But Jean, of Meadow Avenue, discovered the letter was a hoax when she realised it supposedly came from the Authority's "Time and Motion Department", which has its head office in Strain Hard Street, London W.C.1.

"When I started to read the letter I believed it because there was talk a while ago of water meters being fitted in homes," she said.

"Then, as I read it to the end, I realised it was a joke. While I can have a laugh about it, if an old person received one they may believe every word and think it is official."

The typewritten official-looking letter was pushed through Jean's door in a plain, brown, unaddressed envelope.

It said she was using an excessive amount of water



Mrs Jean Taylor, of Meadow Avenue, Blackhall Rocks, ponders the tax on her toilet. Picture: Dirk van der Werff.

and a survey had shown this was "due to over-use of the W.C. facilities."

From November 15 she would be required to pay for this extra water supply and a meter would be fitted to the toilet to "register the number of times the W.C. is flushed."

It went on: "As your district is the first to come under this scheme you have been allowed 65 free flushes of the W.C. after the meter has been installed."

Mrs Taylor was invited to contact the department

with any queries "at your convenience."

But the lavatory humour brought no smiles at Northumbria Water Authority, who say this is the first letter of its kind reported.

"Thank goodness this lady has a sense of humour, but this is not the kind of humour we appreciate," said a spokesman today.

"We deplore this kind of thing and urge anyone who receives a letter like this to ignore it. It has definitely not come from us."

READERS' LETTERS

HOOK, LINE AND SINKER

THE distinguished chairman of a leading newspaper group, enjoying a secret affair with his secretary, once took her to the Centre Court at Wimbledon.

The couple sat directly under the scoreboard. Not only did the gentleman's wife have a regular view of the happy pair—sitting as she was at home watching the television—but so did hundreds of employees on the journal in question.

A London publisher has just suffered a similar embarrassment. Last summer he took his mistress on a holiday to Normandy. They had an idyllic stay in a

fishng village and were happy in the certain knowledge that the good wife at home thought her man was doing business in Brussels.

Some months later the publisher took his wife to a travel agent in order to arrange a winter holiday. The first brochure she picked up from the counter showed a happy couple, arms about each other, leaning against the railing of a Normandy harbour.

It was the startled lady's husband and his fancy woman, snapped unawares by the French Tourist Board.

From MICHAEL GOSS, of Grays Thurrock, Essex.

BACK-TO-FRONT BUILDINGS -- so they're telling that one in Liverpool now, are they? The type of motif in full runs just as Andy Roberts heard it, but with an essential appendix: the architect, maddened by frustration and shame at what has become of his masterwork, should ideally commit suicide. Anything less is a departure from all civilized notions of good form.

The best-known example (and the one I heard from a walker in a pub off the West Highland Way several years back) accuses the Kelvingrove Museum & Art Gallery in Glasgow. Admittedly, it looks wrong; the entrance is arguably less impressive than the back way in, but in fact it was always meant to come over like that. Which hasn't stopped generations of Glaswegians from believing the story and its corollary about the architect's suicide. Actually, Kelvingrove had two architects and neither were moved to self-destruction, but who cares?

How do I know? Well, back in the Scots Magazine for September, 1983, Gordon McCulloch showed that Kelvingrove was only one of a number of falsely-accused, supposedly-reversed buildings to be seen across Scotland...and for that matter across Europe. Let's congratulate Andy on capturing another blinding "new" example of the motif, which in itself may be classed under a much wider heading of Urban Architecture Lore. (Some of these have been welded together by me in an Article for The Unknown-entitled - wait for it - "The Architect's Blunder." I'm kicking myself for not waiting until F.F. 4 appeared; then I could have thrown that one in as well). Also under this head there are the tales of walls build around slums to hide them from visiting VIPs (ref. Nigel Pennick in Fortean Times 37), stories of Queen Victoria's lavatories, assorted Christopher Wren legends and much else besides. It can have its own variants on these themes.

Maybe the legend arose when a common speciously-explanatory folk-motif was invoked to make intelligible why a particular building "looked wrong." Also, there's a hint of conspiracy theory and the timeless delight that come from seeing an expert make an inescapably-blatant pig's ear of something that we ourselves can't do. The blunder is there for all to see; we can laugh at the civic dignitaries who allowed it to happen. And so forth.

Oh, and by the way, it isn't true that St John's Church in Westminster was designed to look like Queen Anne's footstool. But again, does anyone really care?

From GUY SALLIS, of Bargoed, Mid-Glamorgan.

I notice that your first issue contains myths arising from the miners' strike. Two which circulated in this part of the world were:

- 1) "They have a complete ward in Neville Hall Hospital, Abergavenny, full of miners who received head injuries from the police at Orgreave."
- 2) "A man living near us has a son serving with BAOR in Germany, but when he went to Orgreave he saw him in the police ranks wearing police uniform. When his father said 'hello,' the son told him to keep quiet about it, as it was supposed to be secret."

From JOHN MICHELL, in London.

Much enjoyed your big cats round-up. You comment on lack of 19th century reports. What about the phantom "black dogs"? They seem in many ways similar. I heard from a friend who sighted a wild boar in Glos., recently.

UNDERNEATH THE ARCHES

A radio joke led to police alarm at inquiries from journalists that a police van containing six prisoners had crashed. According to the North Yorkshire Police magazine, Police Box, the story had apparently been broadcast by B.B.C. Radio Cleveland. The airwaves jape went: "A police van containing six prisoners has collided with a ready-mixed concrete lorry. The prisoners have escaped and the police are now looking for six hardened criminals." The diarist at the Northern Echo crowed: "Well, at least no one on the Echo fell for it." (29/6/79).

That same issue, that newspaper had another story headlined "Blast explodes horror myth." This tale of a legendary horse and cart buried in the foundations of a railway viaduct being demolished failed to recognise the implications of foundation sacrifice ritual practice. But this is not the place to dig up tales of dogs, cats, nubile virgins, skulls or bell jars buried with the "intention of providing ceremonial prophylaxis against harm," as Nigel Pennick observes in his brief but excellent publication on this massive subject, "Skulls, Cats and Witch Bottles." (Nigel Pennick Editions, 1986). Or how massive concrete caps will seal 125 tons of Challenger space shuttle debris (Today, 6/1/87), a man who died from AIDS has been entombed in concrete (various dailies, 25/11/86), an air raid shelter during the Blitz was so badly bombed the bodies were allegedly left and it cemented over (personal letter, Mike Collier), or the bizarre Yorkshireman who when he dies will be buried by a system of wheels and pulleys encasing him in concrete, leaving just two fingers exposed to the world in a gesture of scorn for authority (S. Express, 11/1/87).

A story popular for many years is that various villains have had "concrete overcoats" fitted by rival gangsters. I have come across several variations of how people were murdered and their bodies supposedly embedded in the wet concrete of motorway constructions. These have included the Kray twins dumping a body in the Westway extension concrete foundations during construction, then putting bodies in a M4 flyover and that Jack "The Hat" McVitie is shoring up the Bow flyover. McVitie's body and that of Frank "The Mad Axeman" Mitchell have never been found. Ronnie and Reggie's brother Charles is said to have claimed McVitie "is swaying at the bottom of the English Channel on an anchor of heavy duty chain." (The Star, 19/11/86, Peter Tory column). This article says a new book by Ronnie's driver, John "Scotch Jack" Dickson, theorises that the twins simply had the hoods who crossed them cremated.

Transatlantically, author Rodney Dale heard an account in which the Boulder Dam, a massive project, was full of the bodies of men who had crossed the Mafia. ("The Tumour in the Whale," Universal, 1978).

Another author, P. Bowler, has suggested American mobster Tony Bender, who left his home in 1962, never to be seen again, now helps support a Manhattan apartment block. ("What A Way To Go," 1982).

Folklorist Dr Paul Smith recalls, when as a student working on a building site, a fellow labourer telling him a story about Birmingham's multi-storey Rotunda in the Bull Ring complex. When work fell behind, the builder hired a time and efficiency expert. Such types with stop-watches and data sheets usually provoke an adverse reaction. In this case tempers flared and the workers gave him a push into the concrete footings and followed with a load of ready-mixed concrete on top of him. ("The Book of Nastier Legends," Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986).



But could a luckless workman accidentally fall into concrete? Plausibility was reinforced by the embellishment of the claim that sophisticated X-ray equipment had been used allegedly to locate bodies -- to no avail. Yet truth can follow rumour and a body was once recovered from a 100-ton block of cement on October 17, 1972, after a bridge collapsed in Pasadena, California.

Whether facetious or true, a gruesome statement was made at the Old Bailey in 1980 when during the "Contract Killings" trial, a pretty blonde spoke of an amazing comment about the murder of nursing home chief Frederick Sherwood. Miss Patricia Bosley said her lover, Paul Morton-Thurtle, the accused, told her Mr Sherwood "could have been melted down at Ford's and be going round in the front end of a Ford Escort." The court had heard the claim that the accused had put a £4,000 contract on Mr Sherwood.

That rumour can again become reality is testified from another case, this time the "Handless Corpse" trial at Lancaster in 1981. The jury heard that a defendant made a concrete mix of blood and sand while cleaning up after a murder. Keith William Kirby, the police alleged, had said that about two pints of blood spilled when Martin Johnstone's hands were cut off, had dried and he made a concrete mix and took it away.

From civil crime to war crimes comes a claim included in a reappraisal of the only Nazi concentration camp on British sovereign territory during the last war, the notorious Sylt Camp, on Alderney. One of the island's shopkeepers, Mr Ralph Duplain (78), said atrocities occurred and: "I saw photographs after the war of the heads sticking out of a wall of cement. Whether they were alive or dead I do not know but let's not beat around the bush, these things did happen." (D. Express, 29/5/81).

Lastly Holger Hiller, leader of a band of musicians called Palais Schaumberg, tells journalist Julie Ashcroft of a German Peter Sutcliffe. "With a twinkle in his eye (he) tells me that the bar we are in was the hangout of the famous German murderer Herr Honka. 'He used to meet old prostitutes here, take them up to his apartment above the bar, kill them, and then put their bodies in the wall!'" (New Musical Express, 14/11/81).



So much for stories with or without foundation.

By Paul Screeton



(continued from Page 10)

have been manufactured in a laboratory - perhaps by the traditionally amoral "mad scientist", by accident or to further the perennial Mad Scientist's dream of ruling the world. The Sun of 13 December 1985 designated the villain as somebody experimenting with a lethal sheep virus, but unfortunately didn't explain why..let alone where or when. ⁹

But just suppose the mad scientist was not working on his own behalf or out of some private monomania. By far the most commonly-heard variant on this theme indicates that AIDS is not a "natural" virus but something produced as an offshoot of government research into germ warfare. Typifying this improvisation on the crypto-conspiracy theme (which lends itself so conveniently to radical souls at odds with the Establishment as a matter of principle) is an article forwarded to me by Andy Roberts, who recovered it from Today of 9 January 1987. The contents relayed the beliefs of a certain Zappa (Frank? how many people named "Zappa" could there be?) that a subtle cover-up was in progress via a programme of disinformation which was calculated to disguise AIDS' sinister and governmental origins. And Zappa's source was said to be articles 'by a reputable scientist' who alleged that the virus had been produced at Fort Detrick, Maryland ('now America's foremost biological warfare dump') using data taken from a Japanese POW camp where prisoners had been subjected to fiendish germ warfare experiments. Bad news, indeed, and it was just as well that Zappa could point to a reputable scientist as an authority figure lest his warning be dismissed as sheer sci-fantasy. But there was worse to come: the virus could have been unleashed 'to test its effectiveness as a weapon which doesn't damage property'

Seen against the current background of suspicion about what the military are getting up to, the rumour-legend has a measure of plausibility. Many Americans could have believed it; believing the worst of the cryptocracy is not difficult and may even be common sense. The trend towards suspecting government boffins had already surfaced in the British press some months before and was apparently expressed as a fact in a panellist's reply on the BBC Radio programme, "Any Questions?". It was refuted just as decisively by Anthony Pinching, a clinical immunologist at St Mary's Hospital, London and senior adviser to the British government on AIDS, who wrote to the BBC pointing out that the panellist had confused theory with fact in a most unforgivable way. More specifically, the theory itself conflicted with known historical fact: AIDS could not have been manufactured by military (nor any other kind of) scientists because it was now known to have existed long before

the techniques of genetic engineering necessary to create such a virus did. Emory University School of Medicine (Atlanta) researchers had detected AIDS antibody traces in a frozen blood-sample from a man living in Zaire which dated back to 1959 - or 11 years before the way to produce viruses of the family to which AIDS belongs had been discovered.⁽¹⁰⁾

But, the conspiracy-buffs would reply, of course such an Establishment figure would say something like that. Hiding the guilt of fellow-scientists, contributing to the grand cover-up..what else could he have said? And where was the proof that the genetic discoveries he spoke of hadn't been made years before the official announcement? AIDS is a perfect theme for this kind of rumour legend process: it voices a prevalent anti-establishment process in a fashion that guarantees it cannot be silenced by reference to historical fact. The real Truth is hidden - what we are told is the Truth isn't.

Variations on the crypto-conspiracy/germ warfare theme shade over into racism: the allegation that a culture - our culture - is being undermined by members of another, either as part of a covert take-over bid or as the outcome of irremediable differences in standards of hygiene and behaviour between Us and Them. Urban legends often encapsulate suspicion or forthright condemnation of aliens who appear set to invade and ruin our way of life. Therefore the idea of AIDS as a weapon for such an invading force is a fairly predictable folk-statement.

That AIDS should be named as the latest Russian secret weapon - as it seemingly was by Warren J. Hammerman of the Executive Intelligence Review - was simply inevitable.⁽¹¹⁾ Not that this line of thinking was confined to the hawks of the Pentagon; around the same time demonstrators outside the Nobel Prize Ceremony in Oslo hoisted placards claiming that AIDS had been invented by Russian scientists and spread (surprise, surprise!) by the KGB to undermine the West.⁽¹²⁾ Just as inevitably, the Swedish press noted that the Russians were fingering the CIA. Commenting on Moscow Radio reports that attributed the virus to activities of "Americans overseas," Harley Street venereologist Dr John Seale replied that you might as well levy the same accusation against the British..the Australians..the Canadians.⁽¹³⁾ No doubt someone somewhere did.

So it goes on. One letter to the Swedish newspaper Sydsvenska Dagbladet

accused white racists of fabricating or using AIDS to decimate the blacks; elsewhere the blacks are supposed to have "evolved" the virus and promiscuously spread it to the whites. It takes next to no acumen to read into this the ancient censorship against sexual liaisons between races. The moral, if it deserves to be called that, is simple: they're not the same as us - they have different standards - never the twain should meet and if they do there'll be hell to pay.

East and West aren't supposed to meet, either, and it isn't really curious to find that so racially-conscious a people as the Japanese call AIDS the "White Man's Disease". As yet (and going by the number of known cases when compared with those of Europe or the USA) that country has only a minimal AIDS problem, but quite enough of one to cause a panic which, reported Lisa Martineau earlier this year, was 'giving full reign to Japan's most virulent disease - xenophobia'.⁽¹⁴⁾

It began with reports that a prostitute had just become the country's first female (and first heterosexual) fatality from the virus. AIDS hotlines were opened in many Japanese cities and in Tokyo alone 150,000 calls were logged in a span of 24-48 hours. For all its deeprooted sense of racial difference, Japan seems to have reacted in much the same way to the threat as cultures everywhere else; the eye of suspicion fell at once on the gaijin - the foreigners. Despite evidence that the woman was thought to have consorted with about 100 different men - despite a commensurate lack of evidence that any one of these infected her - authorities singled out a Greek seaman as the cause of the trouble. The prostitute was alleged to have had a preference for non-Japanese males; she had been seen with Caucasians, had lived for a time in Greece and reputedly wished to emigrate abroad, any or all of which could be taken as an offence against her native culture. Her death, said one newspaper, 'marked the tragic end of an infatuation with Europe'.

Switching the focus to other suspect components of society, it was also remarked that most of Japan's 26 reported AIDS victims (18 of whom had died) were said to have been homosexuals who went with foreigners; gay bars and bath-houses were now turning gaijin away. Hence not one but two dangerous and "unpatriotic" forms of sexual laxity - miscegany and homosexuality - could be hammered at the same time.

Bookshops seem uncertain how urban legend titles should be displayed

to best advantage. Usually they end up shelving them in the "Wit & Humour" section alongside the Perishers and the latest toilet-joke volume; an unlucky if natural choice in many ways, since it encourages the idea that modern folklore is just good fun - if not always good clean fun - and nothing that needs to be taken too seriously. The often-disturbing messages contained in AIDS-lore - its tacit racism especially - argues versus this cosy picture of "harmless" folklore. At the very least, awareness of the deeper meanings which such material contains should make us look carefully at contemporary lore and the ways in which it is being used or abused.

We could be seeing only the start of AIDS-lore. Each emerging phase will match (if in distorted form) fears arising from the latest information-cum-speculation on the topic and it seems safe to predict that print media are likely to be as active a source for the dissemination of legends/rumours as conventional oral ones. This is an inescapable conclusion, seeing how the press are presently unable to leave the thing alone. 'Everybody seems to be on the look-out these paranoid days for new and strange diseases,' said Peter Hillmore, writing under his Pendennis persona for The Observer. ⁽¹⁵⁾ I myself have noticed an alarming outbreak of something called Aids Articles; there seems to be no cure - The Times has instructed its medical staff to write at least one Aids story a day - and some experts predict that innocent newspapers all over the country could soon be covered with them'. Come to think of it, aren't they already?

AIDS is a multipurpose motif for these times as well as for The Times. It is expressing concerns and preconceptions that we ought to know about; with the Government exhorting us not to die of ignorance about AIDS, we may do well to spare some time for considering what these things mean.

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CONTRIBUTORS

JAN HAROLD BRUNVAND. Author of three books on modern legends, Professor Brunvand teaches in the Department of English at the University of Utah. He is currently working on a master outline of urban legend plots and themes to make tracing and comparison more convenient and scientific. His article is a general piece about his approach to studying modern myths, which previously appeared in a small newsletter published in Chicago called Expressions.

MICHAEL GOSS. Mike apologised for the length of this article and although I would prefer contributors to write at no more than half this length, I could not cut it and it deserves your fullest attention. He's a well-known contributor to such magazines as Common Ground, Magonia and The Unknown.

PAUL SCREETON. Is an author, senior journalist and has been editing magazines non-stop since 1969. "Underneath the Arches" focuses on a small area of foundation sacrifice lore. Whether the Underworld does cement relationships is dubious, but its popularity as a cartoon subject -- as depicted -- reveals urban jungle belief in it is alive and well. A lengthy article expanding into foundation sacrifice was published by the writer in the Mail, Hartlepool.

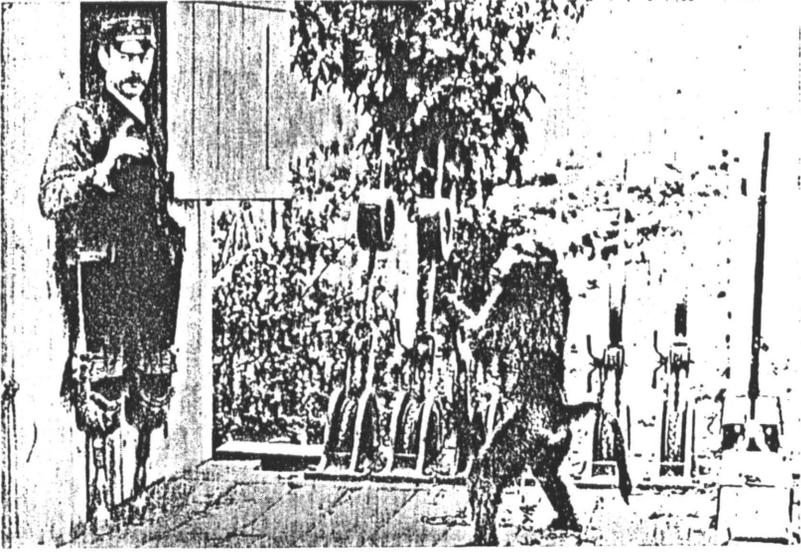
SHEILA ELGEY. For it was she who wrote the hoax letter story. The version reproduced was on the front page of the Mail, Hartlepool, on November 18, 1985, town edition. It led the county edition. I have used it because it illustrates Dr Smith's "reproduction is fun" theory.

Out of the bag

A LONDON friend, whose beloved cat died quietly from old age just before Christmas, tells me that she was not only deeply distressed by the loss of her pet but also in difficulty as to how to lay the chap to rest.

In the end she agreed with her brother that he would take the body to the country and bury it in the garden of their parents' home. So she took the cat, wrapped in newspaper in a white carrier bag, by bus to her brother's flat on the other side of town.

On the way my friend burst into tears and was comforted by a sympathetic fellow passenger who was already sitting on the bus, surrounded by shopping. When the brother got down to the country, had dug the grave and looked into the bag, he found a 5lb leg of New Zealand lamb.



The postcard reproduced here appeared in RAILWAY WORLD, March, 1976, and had been sent by a correspondent. It was bought during a visit to South Africa, and according to the shop where it was sold the scene was a small way side station just outside Port Elizabeth. The railwayman in the picture had both legs badly crushed in an accident. Being unable to operate the platform lever frame himself, he caught a baboon on a nearby mountain and trained it to pull the levers for him under his supervision -- an unusual example of remote supervisory control. Hmm! But what was a man with false legs doing on a mountain and spectacularly able to apprehend an agile ape? Or am I a spoilsport?

MAD MATRIARCHS SHOCK HORROR

An unintentionally hilarious article, "Antifeminist Troublemakers at Glastonbury", has appeared in THE PIPES OF P.A.N., No. 24. It is largely a personal attack on Tony Roberts but I also come in for a swipe. It is written by someone called Valerie Remy, who I've never even heard of to my recollection. For my own part, I would just like to say here for anyone who believes I expressed to QUICKSILVER MESSENGER my "sympathy for antifeminism" that what I actually did was acknowledge I was an unashamed male chauvinist. That is not quite the same. My wife, female colleagues and other women who know me will vouch for my not being antifeminist.