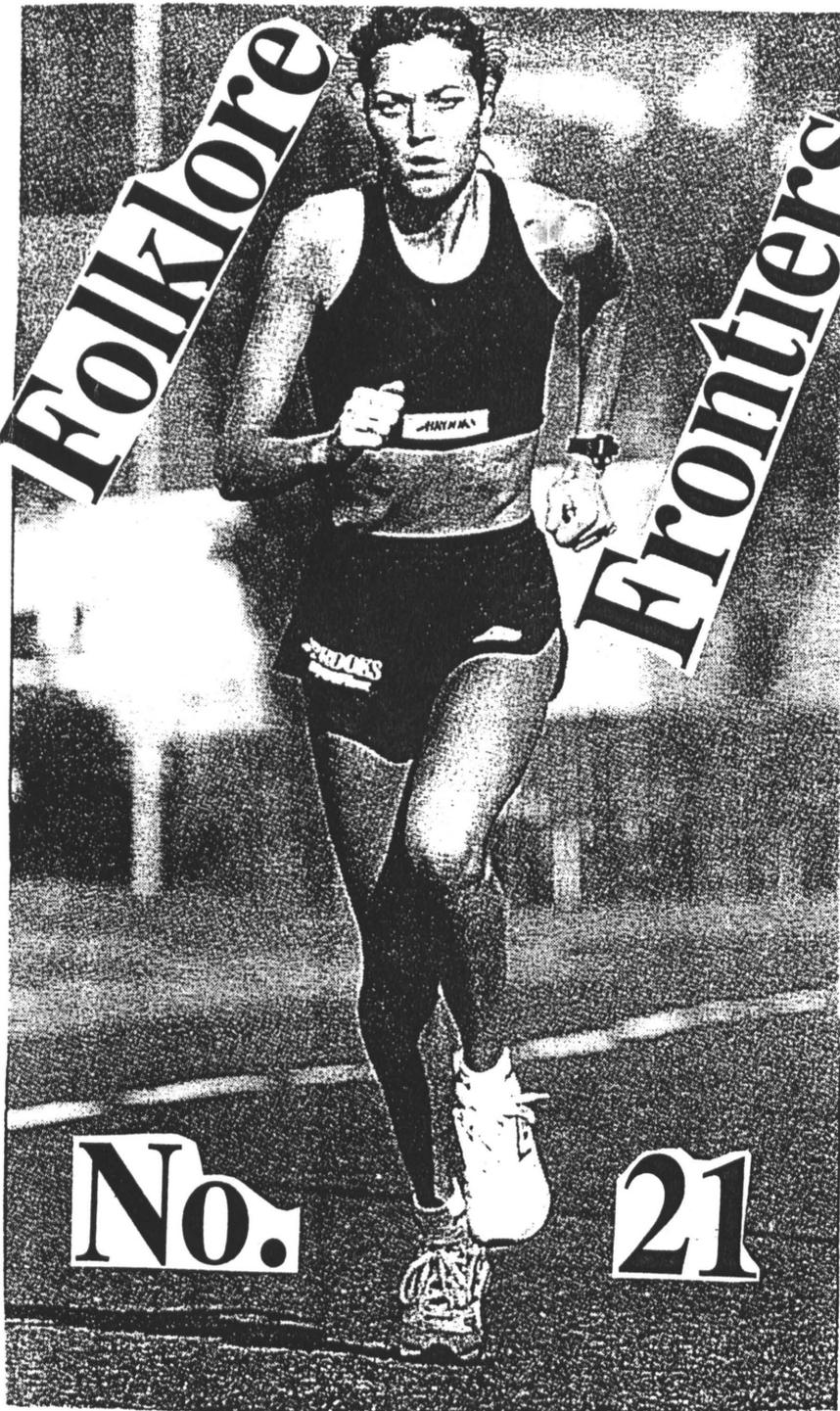


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The Diary

Hopefully you will be reading these notes just before Christmas and all being well there will be a couple of promised and surprise articles, bumper section of book reviews and the usual short sections of topics.

The major article on Peter McMahon will also appear in The Ley Hunter, one of whose contributors, Gordon Harris, challenged me to find the straight-walking tramp and interview him. TLH editor Paul Devereux recently drew attention to a link between gentlemen of the road and earth mysteries (in Symbolic Landscapes, Gothic Image, 1992). Though there is no indication that the articulate vagrant Philip O'Connor, author of Britain in the Sixties: Vagrancy (Penguin, 1963), ever consciously walked in straight lines, his prolonged periods of tramping created a deep mental rhythm and "the world will attach the inner light to outer phenomena ... The speed of transit between inner state and outer appearance is a feature of tramping." He found the mental effects of walking were akin to the effect of certain drugs and also definitely religious.

Other articles are on a blonde pop icon, the radio rustics The Archers and an American viewpoint (kindly clipped by Don Cyr). Also we have a folklife survey of sorts which readers are invited to update in a year's time if they wish.

Among topics this issue we look at Royalty. The snippet about Prince Charles' piece of toast reminds us of the theft of a token of the Gods (or extraterrestrials) which will become vauless. I suffered the same fate myself when I brought back from the Hebridean island of Berneray three potatoes - for my editor, his secretary and myself - planted by Charles and none grew for us.

At a slight tangent, a diary elsewhere claimed that since her marriage vows the Queen Mother had made only two significant comments. When Lady Mountbatten was buried at sea, the QM allegedly murmured, "She always liked to make a splash." And the time she interrupted a bitchy breakfast argument among her male servants with the words, "Don't you think it's time you got round to THIS old Queen?" (The Independent Magazine, 20/11/93).

Articles elsewhere

* Surviving the Unbelievable. By Elizabeth S Rose. Ms. Jan/Feb, 1993. The cover says it all: "BELIEVE IT! Cult Ritual Abuse Exists. One Woman's Story." Frighteningly one-sided fundamentalist acceptance of "survivor" fantasy. (Monitor: Lucy Fisher).

* Mayor of the Miracle. By Pilar Ortega. The Guardian, 16/11/93. Apparition of the Virgin Mary in a Madrid suburb. Also covers other favourite resorts for BVM spotters.

Peter McMahon: ley tramp

By Paul Screeton

I became fascinated with the subject of Peter McMahon in 1989.

He was Hereford's best-known tramp and in the footsteps of that city's most famous son, Alfred Watkins, he too was obsessed with travel in straight lines.

Over the years it became my aim to track him down.

I was alerted to his existence by a reference in the Telegraph Weekend Magazine, in which travel and historical writer Charles Nicholl reported that Herefordians seemed more concerned about Peter's welfare than that of the city's Mappa Mundi estoire.

According to Nicholl, "they say" Peter was a well-born man who suffered a tragedy in his youth. Early in 1989 he disappeared. Alan Williams, a chip shop manager, offered a £50 reward for information, posters were printed and letters published. A police patrol found him beside the A5, 200 miles away in Anglesey. All he would divulge was that he liked walking in straight lines.

Following this apparent clue, I surmised (The Ley Hunter, No. 115) that he could have been following Sarn Helen, the supposed ancient dead straight highway created by the king Macsen Wledig following a lucid dream or astral projection.

However, Nicholl seems to have confused Anglesey with Abergele, so that was a false trail.

The opportunity to visit Hereford finally presented itself and on the overcast afternoon of April 27 this year I alighted at Hereford railway station. I had been mentally preparing myself for a possible encounter with the gentleman of the road. Hopes high, I seated myself in the nearest taxi and asked the driver to take me to Alan Williams' chip shop on Commercial Road. The taxi driver laughed and told me to get out - my destination was a mere 100 yards away; the shop around the corner from the pub he pointed towards across the car park.

DRINKING FROM A MUG

I rounded the corner within less than a minute to see just beyond the hostelry a shabbily-dressed man drinking from a mug.

"Are you Peter McMahon?" I asked rather abruptly.

He acknowledged he was.

There followed the most unenlightening and tedious interview it has been my doubtful privilege to conduct, despite all my preparation. I asked many questions but got no real answers and when he did speak I could not understand what he was saying. I asked him about his past but more importantly about the legendary trek and supposed obsession with straight line travel.

The single fact I elicited was that the linear linkage was "rubbish." I returned to this aspect several times and each time the term

"rubbish" was emphasised. He also denied any knowledge of Herefordian Alfred Watkins and his Twenties discovery of the old straight track, or ley-lines as they are now more familiarly known.

Having got basically nowhere, or at least to my satisfaction, I asked if he would submit to being photographed. To my surprise there was no reluctance, but then disaster struck. The camera refused to function. (There was nothing paranormal about this: I had dropped it earlier in Newport and had put the battery back, wrong way around). I frantically tried to make the camera work but Peter became impatient, muttered and huffily headed off.

MEETING MR CHIPS

Demoralised, but at least having attempted to get my story, I walked a short distance and bought some chips and asked if proprietor Alan Williams was on the premises.

An affable man, he invited me into the back of the shop for a chat and to my relief rebutted Peter's disclaimer on his straight line fetish,

The 1989 marathon tramp had taken Peter not to Anglesey but to Abergele, on the North Wales caravan coast. When Mr Williams eventually found him, Peter had been sitting alone in a field for two days.

Police from Llangollen had apparently earlier picked him up and given him a meal and shelter.

They said they had never come across anyone before who would not give their name and he would only reveal that he liked walking in straight lines.

On his extraordinary odyssey "he covered tremendous mileage," according to Mr Williams.

He went missing while Mr Williams was on holiday and he spent three consecutive Sundays seeking him. Each time he followed reports but Peter got farther away. He placed an advertisement in a North Wales newspaper and received many reports from the public. In fact, the police also had a report that his appearance had frightened sheep and he was taken into custody.

AS FAR AS HE COULD GO

Mr Williams travelled to pick him up, but Peter was reluctant to discuss the walkabout.

"He had got as far as he could go. He'd reached the coast and just sat in a field in Abergele for two days. If I hadn't picked him up he would have just sat there and died," said Mr Williams.

This begs the question of why so reclusive a person should attract attention. The kindly Mr Williams is not alone in charitable affection for Peter. He feeds him, so does a cake shop and when I met him outside the jeweller's, they had given him a mug of tea. When I mentioned that I invited Peter for a drink in the pub next door, Mr Williams said that Peter does not drink alcohol. He does, however, smoke and signs on at the dole.

He lives in a bus shelter in Elston Street nowadays. Mr Williams got him into a night shelter for two years after the Welsh adventure, but Peter left and would not have anything to do with official forms or charities such as Age Concern.

A woman takes him to the local baths for a wash.

He has been in Hereford for almost 20 years and there are many theories about his presence and predicament. These range from his wife and family having been killed in a car accident, to his being a solicitor, solicitor's clerk, teacher and his wife leaving him.

Scruffy he might be, but it would be insulting and wrong to compare him with your average wino down-and-out.

MAPPA MUNDI

Why Peter should choose Hereford as home is problematic. It is a relatively small and unremarkable market town on the Welsh Marches. There is the expanding Bulmer cider company, several museums and the See of Hereford is one of the oldest in England, being substantially Norman with a 13th century lady chapel.

The crypt houses the unique Mappa Mundi together with an interpretive exhibition. It is quite expensive to view, but exhibitions officer Dominic Harbour explained this was because of the astronomical insurance premium.

The Mappa Mundi was drawn by Richard de Haldingham, a Lincolnshire man, in about 1290 and shows a flat, circular world with a sea all around it and Jerusalem at its centre. There are puns in the drawing; Noah's Ark is docked neatly at Mount Ararat.

In truth the Mappa Mundi is really not a map at all, but - in the maker's own word - an estoire.

Charles Nicholl writes: "It is a story, an effort to make sense of it all. You can call Jerusalem the centre of the world, or London, or you can walk in a straight line until you come to the edge. We are all busy piecing together our mental mappa mundi, and Herefordshire is as fine a place to do it as any."

I viewed the Mappa Mundi and then Mr Harbour took me the short distance to Harley Court, where Alfred Watkins had lived. I had made a pilgrimage to the house in 1971 and was disappointed there was no plaque to mark the former residency of the founder of ley hunting. Today there is a fitting memorial to his tenancy.

THE OLD STRAIGHT TRACK

Watkins was a brewer, photographic equipment inventor, councillor and magistrate. Late in his life, through a flash of inspiration, he concluded that prehistoric sites, pre-Reformation churches, crossroads, fords and other countryside features fell into straight lines. He surmised that early man used these lines as trade routes. Calling them leys, he argued his case persuasively, though met with rancour and opprobrium from the academic archaeological establishment.

That Peter should be drawn to the city of the ley man seemed to put a strain on coincidence. Also remember how Charles Nicholl wrote of walking in a straight line to the edge, in fact, just what Peter did upon leaving Hereford, the centre of his world and personal mappa mundi.

Before leaving Hereford, I called at 42 Commercial Road and talked to jeweller Robert Broadfoot and his wife Philippa.

I learned from them that Peter's 1989 walk to Abergele was not the first time he had gone missing.

"The first time he just went straight on," said Mr Broadfoot. He was found 40 to 50 miles away in Wales. The second time he said he was looking for something familiar."

"He has set procedures," said Mrs Broadfoot. "In places he will not walk on the other side of the road and he will make ninety degree turns."

To give an unequivocal answer to the linear riddle, Mr Broadfoot assured me: "He definitely walks in straight lines."

References:

Nicholl, Charles, The View From Here, Telegraph Weekend Magazine, 29/7/89.

Screeton, Paul, Keeping Straight, The Ley Hunter, No. 115, 1991.

Footnotes:

I sent copies of the article to the Broadfoots, Williams and Harbour. The later two rang to confirm its factual correctness and Robert Broadfoot wrote to the same effect.

Oddly enough, the day I posted copies of the article, I read the Sun (2/8/93) to find the following synchronus item:

"Fish and chip shop owner Alan Williams is giving his rivals a battering after following the lead of your price-busting 20p Sun.

"Alan, 38, has slashed the cost of a portion of chips from 55p to 20p at Mr Chips in Hereford.

"He said: 'The Sun's price reduction is a brilliant idea.

" 'It's the only way to beat the recession and it's inspired me to be a price-buster'."

Dominic Harbour dropped a note later to say one Friday evening / Saturday morning he was "fed with chips" by Mr Williams for 7p!

When the chips are down, Mr Chips rises to the occasion.



Auto eroticism/ Trash Aesthetic. Blonde Icons: Wendy O. Williams



(AS with the earlier pieces on Jayne Mansfield and Diana Dors, this is an extract from an extended Blonde Icons chapter of a work in progress/staleated entitled Paradise by the Dashboard Light or Autohenge, envisaged as looking at such key contemporary myths as the role of cars, sex and rock 'n' roll, all of which coalesce here. Even the name Plasmatics hints - or more - at the myths of alien energies and worlds, plus the corn circles conundrum and earth mysteries lore).



SUCH stunning stunts as exploding cars and televisions on stage and cutting up guitars with chainsaws have made New York band The Plasmatics outrageously infamous since their first gig at CBGB's on July 26, 1978 (w). They are led by the sexually sensational Wendy Orleans Williams, whose exhibitionistic exploits have provided an eye-popping, mouth-drooling, hard on focal point for audiences.

Blonde, busty, pretty in a soft/hard way, Mohican-haired, muscular and semi-naked. Sweet yet streetwise. A graduate from live sex shows to rock theatre.

Phil Sutcliffe was there at a concert where the modern era's prime symbol got its cumppance. Already Wendy had cleaved a couple of electric guitars with a chainsaw, "all the while vigorously rubbing her crotch as if she only wished she had a Black & Decker (x) sander so she could do the job properly."

Breasts bare apart from strategically-placed trademark strips of black sticky tape over nipples for modesty's sake, she teased smouldering fuses of "dynamite" sticks phallically over her breasts and crotch before lobbing them into a shining red Ford Mustang car. The last one blasted the bonnet off and sent a ball of fire billowing 50 feet into the air. She fired off a shotgun from the hip at the amps and as an encore the bass player pretended to hang himself.

"Blowing up the Cadillac - it' become like a religion with people to worship material objects and the Plasmatics are showing that these things are just things. By wrecking them," she said pragmatically. (*)

Guitarist Richie Stotts, who normally wears a corset, suspender belt, nylons and ballerina's tutu, pointed out to Richard Grabel that the vehicle they devastated was no old banger from a scrapyard - "That's a real car. The other day I was driving that car around. We didn't take anything out of it." (**)

As if all this was serious philosophy, they planned "a statement on American consumerism" for the benefit of several hundred spectators and two live television broadcasts. After a 30-minute performance, it was announced Wendy would drive a Cadillac without any brakes into a stage loaded with explosives. Would Wendy bail out in time? Whatever, the stunt alleged 20,000 dollars of automobile would go to the great junkyard in the sky. As it was, Wendy climbed into a car which headed across the now vacated stage at a sedate 15mph. She jumped out before the car trundled into the powder keg, which blew up dramatically. Debris plus car carried on into the Hudson River.

But does it really add up to some moralistic message on consumerism

via the trash aesthetic; stated conviction that softened stage pornography and destructive chaos is an expression of popular culture? Or is it just rock 'n' roll?

Sutcliffe quizzed Wendy about her previous involvement in sex shows. The rumour of intercourse on stage 1,700 times?

Despite being arrested more than 100 times, she argued: "It wasn't just a girl walking on stage and fucking." No, the appearances were choreographed - a Victorian number, a Western number, and, oh, animals - "girls dressed like gorillas or horses or dogs." When manager Rod Swenson commented that her speciality was in girl-to-girl numbers, she indignantly made plain that "I'm not a lesbian, I'm bisexual, I like girls just as much as I like guys."

Even for her erotic past she used an auto image. "Those shows were like the Cadillac of sex shows."

She certainly has exuded confidence, but almost to a man commentators and reviewers have come away nonplussed or disgusted. The Legendary Stud Brothers' Camden Palace gig review included the putdown: "She has built her whole career from her early days as a porn starlet through to the tasteless tricks with microphones in The Plasmatics, on seeming to be the roughest, easiest lay in the Northern Hemisphere. In fact, her back looks as if it may have been used to polish car-parks. The sad truth of the matter though is that Wendy is shocking only to those who have to steal underwear from washing lines."

Her 1987 album was "Maggots," all about killer creepy crawlies invading Los Angeles and penetrating nubile girls' bodies. Reviewer William Leith called it "an interesting cultural artefact ... but a crap record," having mused upon possible use of metaphor, been alerted by an urging to use condoms and pondered whether "maggots" are really "faggots"? At least she urged the use of condoms. (****)

Back in early 1985 she was dragging out a life-size dummy of Boy George and slicing it up with an electric power saw. (***)

Is this a mixture of prophecy anxiety or slimy opportunism?

References:

(w) Stiff: The Story of a Record Label, 1976 - 1982, by Bert Muirhead, Blandford Press, 1983.

(x) "Black & Decker" changed to "power" in Rock Bottom, by Muck Raker, Proteus Books, 1981.

(*) Sounds, 31/5/80.

(**) New Musical Express, 19/7/80.

(***) Sun, 23/1/85.

(****) New Musical Express, 14/3/87.

By Paul Screeton



WOODLAND'S WORLD

Cock and Bull stories from down your way

With LES WOODLAND



STOP me if you've heard this already, but there's this couple, see! A young couple, and they're driving back from the pub one night and they're quite late because they've been canoodling up some farm track when they see this bloke standing by the roadside. And he's hitching a lift.

Well, anyway, it's a cold night and it's pouring with rain and there's nobody else about, and they're feeling in a good mood so they stop and they pick this chap up. He's a bit odd, this bloke, and he doesn't say much, but they give him a lift to where he wants to go and he just sits in the back of the car with his wet raincoat on and doesn't say anything.

So they drop him off in town and, to be honest, they're quite glad to be rid of him because there's something a bit fishy about him, see!

Anyway, cut a long story short, they put the car in the garage, go inside for a good time, if you get my meaning, and they forget all about him.

Next morning, they're in an even better mood and the paper comes and there's this big headline across the front page - MAD AXEMAN LOOSE. And they don't think anything about it until they get back in the car and they see - because it's daylight now - they see... wait for it... they see a bloody axe on the back seat!

An' honest, I know it's true because it happened to a mate of mine and he swears on his life that it happened.

They're called Urban Myths. Like the man who steals a car and finds a dead granny in the boot.

Or the woman who takes a urine sample to the hospital in a whisky miniature and finds it's been pilfered from her bag... so this bloke goes home with his whisky, see, an' 'e doesn't know, 'cos it's the same colour, like...

Yeah, yeah, you've heard them all before. You pour the beer and you listen to the stories as if you'd never heard them before. Really, sir? Quite remarkable, sir. And happened round here, you say?

Well, try this. The Archers on Radio 4 'ave got this, pub, see! (Sorry, I must get out of this habit.) And every so often I ring Radio 4 to see if they'll tell me what's going to happen there, and

But sometimes they get things wrong. Inevitable, really - the story moves much faster than Coronation Street and, because the pictures don't hold up the action, the theme progresses at high speed on several levels.

So they get things wrong, see! (Sorry).

Now, it's popular belief that, if you ever spot a mistake in the Archers and you ring them up on 021-414 8888 and tell them, you'll have a character named after you. It'll probably only be one of the gypsies at the end of the field, or the man who gets

... (Morning Advertiser, 5/10/93).



Bat... eaten by cat

Mia-ow! Cat munches our rarest bat

WILDLIFE experts rushed to a sighting of Britain's rarest breed of bat - but a cat got there first and killed it.

The endangered Bechstein's bat was spotted by staff at Carisbrooke Castle, on the Isle of Wight.

By the time island ecology chief Dr Colin Pope arrived, Mouse the castle moggy had pounced.

Bat expert Colin said: "It's a pity because there is usually only one sighting a year. But I can't blame the cat - it's their nature to kill."

Sun, 15/6/93

punched on the nose at turning-out time because he's made a pass at Elizabeth Archer, but you'll have made your place in history.

How do I know this? I read it in the paper. I read a columnist who said he'd done just that. And, of course, I believe him. I don't believe him so implicitly that I'm going to ring 021-414 8888 and find out, because that might spoil the myth. Which is the whole point about myths.

But I'll tell you something, and you can take this as gospel.

The character who's emerged as the man most likely to buy the Bull and turf out Sid and Kathy has been revealed as a man called Les. I've had a character on the Archers named after me.

You can tell everyone you know it's true, because it happened to a mate of yours. Honest.

then I pass it on through the Morning Advertiser.

The Morning Advertiser, I'm told by the producers, shows more interest in the Bull at Ambridge than any of the other papers.

Now, you probably know that the Archers producers keep a huge card index of all the characters and their histories.

When a Penny Falls From Heaven, Can It Kill a Pedestrian?

* * *

Absolutely Not, Say Debunkers
Of Modern Urban Legends;
But Dillinger Lost an Organ

By JARED SANDBERG

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
NEW YORK — A penny tossed from the Empire State Building can crack the sidewalk, or a pedestrian's skull.

It won't bother the alligators, though; they are underground, stalking New York's sewer system.

Speaking of plumbing, try bathing in Rio. Water drains the opposite way than it does in the Northern Hemisphere.

Most people have heard such anecdotes, perhaps even passed them around. But are they urban fact or are they urban legend?

Figuring that out is the self-assigned task of people such as Charles Lasner, a computer consultant from Queens, New York. Combing through textbooks and old news clippings, they sift fact from fallacy and blast their findings over the best technology available — the Internet computer network — so others can confirm, refine or quibble with their verdict.

Go Ahead, Wreck My Day

More often than not, urban myths turn out to be just that; for instance, pennies falling through space don't gather enough speed to dent hard objects. But debunking such bunk and mocking believers is part of this sport's attraction. "Ruining people's day is fun," says Mr. Lasner, a self-confessed killjoy who works from a home office cluttered with computer carcasses and empty peanut cans.

Folklorists define urban legends as rumors or stories that are spread informally and widely accepted as truth. Often, such lore dwells on freakish disasters or ghoulish behavior. Take, for example, the

Baltimore lawyer who put a kitten in a microwave, or the New York car thief who stole a laboratory delivery of cadaver heads (both true). Or the tale that Mikey, the grumpy kid in the Life cereal commercial, spontaneously combusted after consuming too much Coke and Pop Rocks candy. Mikey — or rather, the actor who played him — is actually alive and well and living with his parents in Bronxville, N.Y.

"I don't think people are deliberately lying," says Jan Harold Brunvand, a professor at the University of Utah who has written several books on urban legends. "There's just a natural tendency to make a story appealing."



Charles Lasner

Perhaps there is also a natural instinct to pick myths apart and gore other people for their gullibility.

"We have a little evil fun," confesses Mr. Lasner, the Queens consultant, chuckling over his computer. At his home office, wedged between two graveyards, Mr. Lasner dials a number that links him to the Internet, then taps in the tag for the "news-group" he wants: "alt.folklore.urban," or AFU for short.

In effect, AFU is an electronic-bulletin board where readers "post" queries about urban legends. Chances are, someone else among AFU's 60,000-odd global readers will have a few answers to volley back.

"Hey, I was wondering," one reader taps in. "Anyone know why people claim there are alligators in sewers?"

Turns out, Terry Chan has checked it out. Citing several books, he traces the legend to a doubtful 1935 newspaper story about a boy who saw an alligator while shoveling slush down a Harlem manhole. Later, a city sewer official boasted that he had managed to eradicate all alligators.

"These two points then seem to form a pretty good basis for the enduring legend," Mr. Chan concludes.

If alligators ever did infest the city's sewers, they don't anymore, says Ian Michaels, a spokesman for New York

City's Department of Environmental Protection. But sewer workers have found "rats, cats and a 35-pound snapping turtle," he says. And "a swan was sucked 12 miles through the system."

Many other legends seem to stem from odd circumstances that have been embellished over time and embedded in folk imagination. Take, for instance, the ticklish matter of John Dillinger's remains. Legend has it that a jar containing the gunman's pickled genitals resides at the Smithsonian Institution. "Supposedly there's a freak section of the Smithsonian" where odd biological specimens are kept, Mr. Lasner says.

An AFU reader wrote to the museum and received a form-letter denial. "We don't have it and we never did and there would be no place for it," Katherine Neil Rldgley, a Smithsonian spokeswoman, confirms by telephone. "It doesn't fit with any of the collections we have."

However, another museum, once located nearby, did display human body parts. And Joe Pinkston, curator of the John Dillinger Historical Wax Museum in Nashville, Ind., offers another clue to the legend's origin. While Mr. Dillinger "was buried with his penis intact," the curator says, the gunman's brain went astray after being sent out for medical study.

AFU's global reach also helps with tales of strange goings-on in distant lands. When someone in Ohio asks whether Swedes really do eat fish that is rotten and cured in urine, Gunnar Davidson, a graduate of the Norwegian College of Fisheries Science, checks in. He says the country in question is Iceland, not Sweden, and the delicacy is Greenland Shark that is aged for months before being eaten (the shark's flesh is toxic when fresh). No urine goes into the recipe, though the shark's bodily fluids do contain urea.

Such arcane science often appears in AFU chatter, in part because the best legends rely on a sprig of plausibility. For instance, the notion that toilets or baths drain differently below the equator comes from a complex piece of physics, known as the Coriolis force, which causes bodies in

motion to deflect one way in the Northern Hemisphere and another way in the Southern. But in a toilet or bath, the effect is drowned out by other forces and becomes so faint as to be imperceptible.

Some AFU readers even perform a little home science to test urban lore. To answer the question "Does tapping a soda can keep it from overflowing?" one engineer produced a three-page controlled experiment with footnotes. His conclusion: Letting the can sit for a while, not tapping, prevents soda from bubbling over.

Of course, many legends can't be firmly proved or disproved. "It's not a formal science," says Mr. Lasner. Consensus debunkings are listed on an electronic scoreboard with an "f" for "false" — though often with a proviso. For instance, hair and nails don't grow after death, but it is true that they appear to do so as the corpse shrinks in size.

The wide margin of doubt about many myths leaves room for heated debates — or, as they are known to electronic-mail buffs, "flame wars" between readers. Mr. Lasner once cited his parents as sources in arguing that the 1940s radio personality Uncle Don really was fired for referring to his child audience, on air, as "little bastards." But David Mikkelson, like many

AFU readers, regards friends and families as unreliable. Citing other information on Uncle Don, he "flamed" Mr. Lasner for shoddy sourcing.

It seems Mr. Mikkelson is right. Mr. Brunvand, the Utah expert, says Uncle Don never slurred his audience on air, nor did Bozo the Clown, who has been tarred with the same tale. "It's clearly a broadcaster's legend," Mr. Brunvand says.

But AFU readers aren't always naysayers. For instance, certain combinations of tooth fillings can receive radio signals. It is also true that some airplane-engine manufacturers test their engines by firing chickens from special cannons (to see if the engines can digest birds). And for those with the need, a coconut can be sent through the mail, without packaging.

"Just address it correctly," says Mr. Lasner.

Newspaper fillers: a survey

Certain stories crop up time after time in the media, often as one-paragraph fillers. My interest in these is severalfold: particularly as a journalist, for their folklife presence and for their folkloric nuances.

That they are generally "true" should not deter folklorists from seeing them as interesting, for as I will demonstrate, all is not always as seems. There are major themes in urban legends frequently found here: coming to harm, transport, sex, crime, animal life, food, one's name, and so on.

Without attempting to place them in most frequent order, but generally in their basic popularity for news desks they are -- with some comment:

1. Name. JOBSWORTH. Fitting or ironic. Beloved of TV's That's Life.
2. Transport. LORRY SHEDS LOAD. Sticky/booze/food.
3. Communications. LONG POST DELAY. Why majority postcards? Are cases of surcharges legends?
4. Communications. QUICK POST. ten minutes or so after postmark it arrives. Sun, 23/7/93, ran one-paragraph pieces together on a five-year delay and 35 minutes after postmarking.
5. Sex. MULTIPLE TIPPLE. Pub regulars blaming drink/bar stool.
6. Sex. MULTIPLE MIDWIVES TALE. Irony of pregnant midwives.
7. Money. THE BILL. For 0p or 1p sent out.
8. Sex. unexpected baby. Stomach ache/appendicitis/wind.
9. Coming to harm (CTH). EMPLOYEE'S REVENGE. From glass slivers in food to rude prank.
10. Communications. DUBIOUS TRANSMISSIONS. Message picked up on teeth/church organ/PA system. Some quite definite urban legends here.
11. Animal life. PISSED AS A NEWT. Drunk or drugged wildlife. Fermented apples/lager to kill slugs/cannabis plants.



12. CTH. AUCTION EMBARRASSMENT. Of famous persons' possession fetching very little.
13. Name. CHILD NAMED STUPIDLY. After type of cat born in/favourite tittle/pub visited before conception ...

14. Sex. HONEYMOON SHARED. With neighbours/caders/club members/pub regulars.
15. Animal life. Soggy moggy. Cat soaked in tumble drier.
16. Animal life. AWAYDAY MOGGY. Cat travels long distance under vehicle. As above it's never a dog.
17. Animal life. LAYED OFF. Bird nests in postbox/traffic light/car bonnet. Superstition sometimes to disturb.
18. CTH/food. FOOD CONTAMINATION. Maggots/glass in food.
19. CTH/crime. CRIME CONTAMINATION. Stolen object is infected/useless/will maim.
20. Animal life/CTH/food. TROPICAL INSECTS IMPORTED. Bitten by spider in fruit.
21. CTH. HUNTER SHOT. By dog/prey.
22. Sex/transport. SEX DRIVE. Bonk leads to car rolling away.
23. CTH/cash. JUMBLE HORROR. Loss of valuable personal object at jumble sale.
24. Sex/animal life. HERB ALPERT. Music played to increase fertility in plants or herd. (One gardener talked to her herbs in sign language). (Also to deter -- Kylie Minogue played to scare pigeons).
25. Name. ADULT CHANGES NAME TO CRAZY ONE. Pop group/for electoral ballot ...
26. Animal life/CTH. REVIVALISM. Fireman's oxygen used on dog/rabbit/cockatiel.
27. Transport/crime. BABY CARJACK. Car stolen with child still inside.
28. Sex. HONEYMOONERS' RETURN SHOCK. Doors bricked/sand beach in garden/charred car.
29. CTH. COFFIN BOUT. Persons finds he/she alive in coffin. Fortean supposedly fond of this.
30. CTH. RUDE AWAKENING. Person in coma awakened by tapes of chums/pop stars ...
31. CTH. RICK O'SHEA. Bullet deflected by personal object.
32. Sport. HOLE IN ONE. Golf success.
33. CTH. GO TO BLAZES. Fireman finds own home ablaze.
34. Money. FORTUNE TELLER. Scruffy/quiet pensioner leaves fortune in will.
35. CTH. ICE FALL. Alleged urine block from aircraft. Fortean love arguing about these almost as much as "Saharan" sand and frog falls, fish falls, cats, dogs ...
36. sex. NOVEL MARRIAGE PROPOSAL. Soccer scoreboard/stage ...
37. Money. INCONVENIENCE. Rates demand sent to public convenience/cemetery ...



38. Crime. CHOOSY THIEVES. Steal from car but leave Des O'Connor/Jim Davidson record/tape.

39. CTH. HAPPY LANDINGS. Pilot has heart attack and novice lands safely.

40. Transport. MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE. Reply received.

A number of categories are deliberately excluded as I feel they have too wide ramifications, for instance alien big cats and bogus social workers. Others are missing through oversight, or their transiency: postbox snails, pets contests/blessings, thefts from police, etc.

There is a journalistic urban legend of sub-editors deliberately concocting one-paragraph fillers for when a column ran an inch short in hot metal days. Unscrupulous news agencies may well truly file made-up shortstoday.

What I intend doing is tot up during 1994 these 40 themes and see how many and in what order they will end up. Readers may send in items spotted (you can save them until the end of next year and send in one batch). I wonder if the list will be in something like the order it appears at the end of this year.

Oldies but Goodies

From newspaper accounts I've seen, it seems TV magazine this Morning presenters Richard Madeley and Judy Finnigan have had phone-in tales of a dubious, apocryphal nature. Worst example is of a stag night bridegroom who fell asleep drunk on his living room floor with a sausage hanging from his trouser flies. When his mother walked in the next morning she was so horrified to see the family cat nibbling the meat she fainted. Paulette from Kent claimed: "They had all been out for a meal and that's where the sausage came from. His mother saw the cat eating the sausage as he lay asleep. She collapsed and knocked herself unconscious by hitting her head on the way down." Stunned Judy, seemingly believing this tripe, commented: "There's a whole world of perversion out there." (D Sport, 12/10/93).

A Brazil nut will give a radioactive dose of 0.0003 millisieverts according to Nuclear Times, which tried the jolly jape on journalists. Columnist John Pool (Mail, Hartlepool, 13/11/93) hauled out a chestnut when mentioning this. A friend of his related a Yuletide tradition where one member of the family always bought the grandfather a large box of chocolate Brazil nuts. Another member of the family always received a bag of shint Brazil nuts from the grandfather. Unfortunately the nuts were one and the same. The old man had no teeth and just sucked the chocolate from his present and recycled them. Now that is one Brazil nut story which is guaranteed to turn you green!

Chance discovery of a rare car is a well-known oldie - here's three.

Firstly a rare 1958 Stdebaker was allegedly discovered at Nelson, New Zealand, where it had stood since the bride it was bought for called off her wedding in 1967 (D Star, 16/2/93).

Secondly a 1976 Reliant Robin with only 12 miles on the clock was found in a Lincoln garage (Sun, 24/5/91).

Thirdly Nick and Theresa Brown found a £15,000 rare 40-year-old Austin Atlantic A90 in an overgrown shed at a £47,000 house they had just bought in Hayling Island, Hants. They had to cut down a tree to get to it. Theresa, 38, said: "It's a really nice house-warming gift. We were totally amazed." You're not the only one (Sun, 18/6/93).

Now a pre-nuptial nasty. In many versions the architect involved commits suicide (and my have done so - or the builder - or owners - we've not seen a report of the outcome). Andrew Pinder and bride-to-be Elizabeth Frain snapped up a £65,000 detached house because it faced away from the road. However, officials from Harrogate council, North Yorkshire, say it may have to come down because plans submitted to them show it should be facing the road. They were marrying in September (Sun, 2/7/93).

This is quite a recent one everyone will recognise. A scuba diver died after being sucked out of the sea by a fire-fighting plane scooping up seawater. It then dropped him on a forest fire 50 miles away in the Parnas mountains, near Athens, according to a German report (D Sport, 11/5/93).

Update

GET STUFFED. In the wake of the Jurassic Park film we looked at animal rights idiocy (FF20:12). Here's more: Verbatim first - Animal lovers broke into a car in Whangarei, New Zealand, to rescue a dog locked in the back seat. It was a stuffed dog kept to deter thieves (D Teleg, 9/9/93). So far so good, but an angry crowd called an animal cruelty inspector when they spotted a corgi in a locked car near Auckland, New Zealand, on a scorching day. He had to break into the car to prove it was stuffed. The car's woman owner had pet Sash stuffed "to keep her forever." (Sun, 1/10/93). And lastly - for now - animal rights campaigners called off a demo over a "dancing bear" at a fair in Bromley, Kent, when they found it was a man in a furry suit (Sun, 23/9/93). Worth including here is the tale that a dozen customers tried to place orders when a pet shop in Coulsdon, Surrey, put up a spoor advertisement for baby tyrannosaurus rexes (D Star, 3/10/93).

BASIC FLASH. Sharon Stone's Basic Instinct to go knickerless continues to fascinate (survey in Forum magazine; D Sport, 2/9/93). However, people were so busy looking at her nether regions in that scene that they did n't see that her cigarette kept disappearing and reappearing again (Mail, Hartlepool, 29/9/93). And the girl with the numberplate No N1X attracted attention. University of Luton student Helen Andrews, 21, of Castle End, Warwickshire, had the numberplate bought for her by dad, Don. Does she not wear knickers when driving, asked Chris Borley (News of the World, 5/9/93). To which she allegedly answered: "That's 4 Me2NO." As for used knickers, these are sold in Japan for 3,000 yen, about £18, through coin machines. The fetish is called "buri-sera" (D Sport, 1/9/93) and everything you wanted to know about underwear was researched by Jackie Murphy for an article with no fewer than five topless girls to adorn it (D Sport, 4/8/93). We also looked at whether film stars made love for real in movies (FF20:7-9) and lately claims have been made that Kim Basinger and husband Alec Baldwin did so in The Getaway (Sun, 23/9/93; D Sport, 4/10/93).

SNUFFED OUT. A front page lead condemned both the Irish and Argentinians, claiming IRA godfathers are peddling snuff videos to raise funds. We looked at these (FF20:12) in other contexts. Here a pact is claimed between Provisionals and former members of the Argentinian military junta. Some of the footage seized has been described as "mind-numbing." The sick scenes supposedly show children and adults being tortured before being led away and executed by thugs from military death squads. The paper to print this dubious story has a stronger anti-IRA stance than any other national newspaper (D Star, 17/8/93). The story disappeared as quickly as it surfaced, we note.



NEW AGE NEWS TRAVELS. We had an article on New Age travellers as new folk devils (FF19:8-9) and these people were accused by wildlife lovers of slaughtering and eating swans after severed heads of a number of birds were found on the banks of the River Ure in North Devon (D Mirror, 13/2/93).

It's Grim up North

What's the connection between a dolphin, a tattooed girl and what Northern womanhood supposedly does best?

Remember Freddie the dolphin who made the headlines in a bestiality trial? A lengthy article quoting experts on these mammals claimed women allowed the dolphins to penetrate them and marine expert Bill Hancock described how he had seen a woman masturbating Freddie (D Sport, 26/8/93). Is he now dead or alive after leaving Amble, Northumberland? We were unable to compile a timetable of speculation through lengthy illness, but have found him pronounced dead (Northern Echo, 29/7/92); possibly still alive (Journal, Newcastle, 11/1/93); samples still awaiting analysis (Journal, Newcastle, 31/1/93); and we're sure somewhere a definite mid-1993 confirmation of life.

A dolphin found dead in Hartlepool marina in 1992 was being tested to see if it was Freddie. meanwhile, Hartlepool girl Karen Burgon, 21, proved her love for fake than pop star Mark Swan was more than skin deep by copying his trademark -- a blue dolphin tattoo below her navel (Mail, Hartlepool, 30/7/93).

For those who do not know who, or what, Fake That are, they are currently the UK's number one cause of bedwetting, inspiring devotion from those still warm from the delivery room to, ahem, 21-year-olds who will doubtless have to find some more prosaic reason for a blue dolphin leaping from the nether regions. Reviewing the last night of a hysterical tour at Wembley Arena, Simon Garfield (The Independent, 29/7/93) spotted placards with messages such as "Northern Girls Do It Better" and "Mark, I heart-snape U." One girl of about 15 had a too-the-point sign reading "Fuck Me Mark" and when flipped over it read equally solicitously "Fuck Me Robbie." Just as well they ditched their original member, Elind.

And to end, a crime tale which may be true and may not. It is said to have happened in Houghton-le-Spring, County Durham, when an officer, who remains nameless, went to deal with a disturbance outside a pub. Arriving, he was confronted by an aggressive gang, one of whom repeatedly yelled abuse. When he refused to calm down out came the cuffs and he was arrested. What he hadn't bargained for was the reaction of the arrested man's female friend, who dashed out of a fish shop and began hurling abuse at the officer. She angrily brought her food wrapped in newspaper down on his head. Grease and batter slowly trickled down him and he arrested her, too. Back at the station the sergeant in the custody suite asked the officer what she had done. "It's an assault charge, sarge," he said. "She hit me with a fish lot." To which the woman, still abusive, shouted: "You're wrong there, you cunt, it was a cowboy supper." I've never had a cowboy supper, but apparently it's chips, sausage and beans." Wild West Durham calling (Northern Echo, 31/8/93).



EMpathy

While tracking down Hereford tramp Peter McMahon for an abortive interview earlier this year, I paid a brief "pilgrimage" to the last home of Alfred Watkins, father of ley hunting.

What particularly pleased me was that the City of Hereford had seen fit to honour this famous son by placing a plaque on the wall of 5 Harley Court.

It reads ALFRED WATKINS 1855 - 1935 PIONEER PHOTOGRAPHER ANTIQUARIAN lived here 1920 - 1935.

This summer the Herefordians also honoured Watkins with a display at the Hereford City Museum, encapsulating the life and work of the eminent Victorian gentleman.

Mappa Mundi exhibitions officer Dominic Harbour sent me a photocopy of piece in the June issue of Hereford Clarion. Describing Watkins, it listed him as "inventor, miller, antiquarian, brewer, naturalist and fine photographer, Watkins was also the originator of the ley line theory."

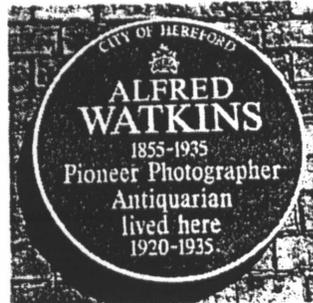
It went on :

His influence was felt in all areas of Hereford society, including the political and educational arenas. He was a leading member of the library committee and the Old House committee for many years, and it was through his efforts that the splendid collection can be seen today.

This display reflects his various interests. Bottles from the Watkins Imperial Brewery, inventions like the dough meter from his milling days, and the products of the Bee Meter Company which were

adjacent to the Imperial Flour Mills. These photographic light meters were sold all over the world, and were used on Scott's first Antarctic Expedition, with great success.

The display holds many surprises, including his ideas for a new currency system, but above all, his fine photographs of the county, recording a way of life long gone, stand as a memorial to the "landmark in Hereford life and history", as The Hereford Times emphatically stated in his obituary in 1935.



Disroyal

1992 may have been the Queen's annus horibilis, but 1993 saw some pictorial scandalising of the Royals. Viz published spoof coloured pictures of Royals as if on postage stamps and Nick Sanders put on 50 pictures of them in guises such as Di as a showgirl at an exhibition. We still like best the earlier Open Head picture of Chas and Di at their engagement.



Never mind a toe job - fans of this Royal fe-male pillar box red head will queue up to lick Fergie's lovely big arse.

Crummy

A PIECE of royal history has crumbled into dust.

The lost memento: A slice of toast from Prince Charles's last breakfast before his marriage in 1981.

It was pinched by a palace worker and was to have been sold... but when Nottingham auctioneers Neales opened the airtight plastic bag it was in, it just crumbled away.

On the myth level, the Royals got away lightly this year, though a bizarre claim appeared during the Queen's visit to Hungary, where an unnamed book was selling well. According to these "secret diaries", Her Majesty keeps half a dozen eggs in her handbag to hurl at protesters (Sun, 5/5/93).

(D Mirror, 25/11/87)

Folklore Sport

Drugs are as much an essential ingredient of sport as they are rock 'n' roll. The latest in the spotlight are Chinese female runners known as Ma Family Army after their trainer Ma Junren, who has angrily denied they take dope.

Recently Wang Junxia shattered the world record for 3,000 metres in Beijing and then demolished the 10,000 metres by an astonishing 42 seconds. Teammate Qu Yunxia also raced to a 1,500 metre record. Their trainer said the reason for their success was a tonic of fungus made from caterpillars and running the equivalent of a marathon every day.

But Lynn Jennings, three times world cross-country champion said: "It doesn't make sense. You train to progress and get better. There is no progression with the Chinese." (*D Sport*, 14/9/93).

Jill Hunter (pictured on cover), the Tyneside runner who holds the English 10,000 record (31mins 7.88secs) thought Wang's breaking through the 30-minute barrier was a hoax when she awoke to hear it at her US training base. "I might as well pack up and look for a proper job," said the 26-year-old, who stood fifth on the world all-time ranking list when she set her national record at the Europa Cup in Frankfurt two years ago. (*The Journal, Newcastle*, 9/9/93).

Doyen of sports journalists wrote the following: "in a statement of imbecilic deviousness the Chinese Olympic Committee triumphantly announced that the Misses Wang Junxia and Qu Yunxia ... were tested for drugs and found blameless. In the same breath they conceded that 11 other of its athletes at the same meeting were tested positive. And then it failed to name them." (*D Mail*, 9/10/93).

Before the San Sebastian marathon, Stephen Bierley wrote: "Ma has backtracked on the virtues of caterpillar fungus, describing that as a 'joke.' In fact it is thought the central authorities were not pleased by the stories of weird potions and decapitated turtles. Again they felt the world was laughing at them and they were losing face." (*Guardian*, 30/10/93).

Michael Calvin spoke to Ma Junren through an interpreter and learned: "People in the West tell us we are using drugs but they should look at themselves. they are sort. Lazy."

We laughed at their ping-pong players and it looks like the Long March to acceptance will continue. (*D Telegraph*, 30/9/93).

*** Back with Wooldridge (*D Mail*, 6/10/93), he posed the question: who are Britain's randiest sportspersons? He rated track athletes highly and also cricketers away from home. The "woodenspoonists in the libido stakes are ruggers players, who prefer beer and hitting one another." But top he places the horse set in all forms. He then relates a piece of familiar (at least to me) apocrypha about a young reporter -- and bravely adds "this story is God's truth and I can subpoena the man involved" -- who once made an innocent observation to one of Britain's most prominent lady cross-country riders. "Good heavens," he said, "your horse is sweating up a bit." To which the lady replied: "So would you be, dear boy, if you'd just spent the last half-hour between my thighs."

*** This sounds like a fisherman's tale! Pete Swinbourne was claiming a world record after landing a three-quarter pound bluebottle on the Bow River, Alberta, Canada, when his hook became embedded in the massive insect. (*Sunday Sport*, 10/10/93).



Books

LONDON UNDER GROUND

By Richard Trench and Ellis Hillman IT may be a new edition, but this reviewer can assure the authors that, despite their claim to the contrary, London does have underground myths, such as the one contemporary folklore calls "The Maniac on the Platform."

They write: "Every other major city - Paris, New York, Warsaw, Vienna - has its underworld and its myth: a living underworld serving present needs and a buried one encapsulating past needs. In each of these cities, the darkness and mystery of the underworld have caught the imagination of the world above Out of this imagination myths have grown up from the netherworld: the Phantom of the Opera fleeing through the catacombs of Paris, crocodiles slithering through its sewers; obese alligators living under New York; Resistance fighters hiding in Warsaw's sewers; the fingers of Harry Lime clawing at the Vienna pavement grille. Alas, though it is true that New York's alligators were once flushed down its lavatories, no alligators prowl the sewers of the city today. But the fertile imagination that gave them birth is still alive and well. The latest underground myth from New York concerns marijuana seeds. Flushed down the lavatory, too, they have been nurtured by rich nutrients of the city's sewers. Accordingly, a new, super-strong variety has grown up beneath the streets, called 'Subway Silver'. Unfortunately no one can get at it, because - you've guessed it - it's guarded by alligators." Nigel Pennick documented what he believed to be only "scratching the surface of tube lore" in FF 6:8-11.

If their other research is more sound, then we learn of Underground Tube trains, the pipes of the utilities and telecommunication networks, defensive measures and smothered waterways. Somehow, however, the book fails to grip the imagination or reassure the historian with its credentials.

Published by John Murray at £15.99.

CROP CIRCLES: A MYSTERY SOLVED

By Jenny Randles and Paul Fuller SURELY 1993 will mark the end of the cornographers' antics.

These authors suggested in 1990, when it was close to blasphemy, that the basic phenomenon was centuries old and there were eyewitness accounts, also that the modern explosion of pictograms in the fields was the product of a special intelligence - human and called hoaxing.

Sadly rationalism such as this and the present fast waning of interest in cerealogy is likely to make this fascinating and sensible book unfashionable.

Published by Robert Hale at £6.99.

THE PARANORMAL YEAR

By Jenny Randles ANNUAL updates in ufology doubtless led to this wider-based round-up of the full field of the paranormal. Randles has a thorough grasp of the topics within the supernatural spectrum and covers extra-terrestrials, ufos, parapsychology, ghosts, survival, psychic questing, earth mysteries, corn circles, zoological oddities and scientific anomalies.

This book ably reviews a single year's events worldwide, covering a wide range of strange phenomena. Plenty of solid research to back up latest theories.

I was particularly pleased to see the neglected hum-madruz (The Hum) phenomenon given proper attention and also a sensible approach to psychic questing.

Published by Robert Hale at £15.99.

THE ESSENTIAL BOOK OF HERBAL MEDICINE

By Simon Y Miles THE author begins by attempting to understand the herbal practitioner, from classic texts, anthropological accounts and personal clinical experience;

concentrating upon the most distilled products of traditional beliefs, those which have best stood the test of time.

Fro such pragmatism, Mills looks at physiology, pharmacy and remedies. There are also lengthy appendixes, including 40 pages on a clinical index.

It can be regarded as a standard work for practitioner and general reader alike.

Published by Penguin Arkana at £12.99.

VISIONS OF BOWMEN AND ANGELS

By Kevin McClure I first came across Arthur Machen's story *The Bowmen* in a sturdy anthology of his stories which I devoured eagerly during the Fifties along, I believe, with an introduction suggestive of Machen having some supernatural knowledge or premonition of St George and either angels or Agincourt bowmen at Mons in 1914. That's as maybe, and I have seen the subject discussed many times since.

The latest investigation has been by McClure and is and is certainly an impressive work. "Yet nothing in this investigation is simple and straightforward" and "it is not easy to work out a precise chronology." This on

top of there being 100,000 soldiers in the British Expeditionary Force and it occurring 80 years ago. hence McClure tells his tale and leaves the reader to draw his or her own conclusions.

From McClure. Address 42 Victoria Road, Mt Charles, St Austell, Cornwall, PL25 4QD. Price £2 inc p&p; £2.50 outside UK.

TIMPSON'S OTHER ENGLAND

By John Timpson WHEN you think you know just about everything important about topography and history, along comes a book full of fascinating data. Such as Faukd, Staffordshire, where in 1944 a careless munitions explosion caused a bang only second in impact to the atomic bombs, registered in Rome and Geneva, where it was thought to be an earth tremor. On a more mundane level, this lavishly-illustrated book covers odd stones, hill figures, mazes, bridges, tunnels, curious castles, tombs, churches, lock ups, memorials, pillar-boxes, and much more. It comes with maps of the locations mentioned and decent index.

Published by Jarrold Publishing at £16.95.

CELTIC BORDERS & DECORATION

By Courtney Davis THE illustrations here are superb and imaginative. The interweave of Celtic art is beautiful and difficult to understand alongside that society's head-hunting savagery. There are people in the designs here, but the volume concentrates on the decorative motifs and borders of the Celtic tradition. There is also Celtic real ink writing which reminded me of letters a former girlfriend sent me. She was taught the script at Middlesbrough College of Art by a tutor 30 years ago. Davis himself, perhaps?

Published by Blandford at £6.99. DISCOVER DOWSING

By Tom Graves AN earlier book by Graves led me to attempt dowsing - with moderate success over the years. This is a complete and simple step-by-step course to guide the beginner to high skills. As a manual on the subject it has probably no equal.

Published by Aquarian at £7.99. ARKTOS

By Joscelyn Godwin I became fascinated by notions of polar mysteries from Pauwels & Bergier's *The Dawn of Magic*, plus Admiral Byrd's flight over alleged North Pole land. Many may not be familiar with the polar myth encompassing a hollow earth, ufos, Nazi interest, axial tilt, and so on.

Godwin looks at this tradition of hidden wisdom in icebound lands through a scholarly eye and brings us up to date with current geological theories.

Published by Thames & Hudson at £10.95.

ANIMA LOCI

By Nigel Pennick THOSE who have been drawn to what Nigel notes to be the misleadingly termed "earth mysteries" will doubtless accept fully or at least sympathetically, the theme here. The argument being that an unconquered land is alive and that, as participants, we have a personal and collective cultural relationship with the landscape. Ley hunters know the term *genius loci* (spirit of place) but Nigel prefers *anima loci* (place soul).

Despite a somewhat hectoring tone, Pennick makes sense. If he's Mr Angry then it's better than being Mr Complacency. Having watched Japanese tourists jumoing up and down and being photographed on the stones at Castlerigg stone circle, I abhor "spectacle" and the demeaning of the sacred. He also makes a telling point in the general distinguishing between the "restorer" of a basically lost artifact and the criminal forger; both hoping the non-

expert will be deceived. We are also both agreed that the heritage industry" is a travesty. Vintage Pennick. **Published by Nideck. £1.65, inc p&p. Cheques to "Nigel Pennick." Address: 142 Pheasant Rise, Bar Hill, Cambridge, CB3 8SD.**

THE FACTS OF LIFE

By Richard Milton SUBTITLED *Shattering the Myths of Darwin*, this freelance journalist challenges the sickly and single-minded Darwin and those who regard Darwinism as a science rather than philosophy or act of faith. In fact, while applauding the presentation of evidence for contradictory evolution and serious difficulties in dating techniques, Milton might have gone further.

Neo-Darwinism led to Hitler's blond Aryan super race ideology and is at the root of all Western racism. It is also the bedrock of Western life sciences. It is a mystery the author failed to consult Francis Hitching's similar inquiry *The Giraffe's Neck*, the books of Elaine Morgan and her aquatic ape theory, Rupert Sheldrake's morphogenetic resonance theory or the pioneering work of the neglected maverick geologist C T Trechmann, who lived at Castle Eden.

Milton may not be in the creationist camp, but he seems to have researched too narrowly, been selective to an abstruse extent or simply arrogantly perverse.

Published by Corgi at £4.99.

SEEING AND BELIEVING: UFOs AND ALIENS IN FILM AND TV

By Nigel Watson WATSON begins with the premise that Fifties films can be regarded as the acting out in imaginative fashion of World War III with the action as a thinly-disguised Communist threat. The Sixties was

also a period of assault upon the righteous, with alien insemination paramount, culminating in 1979's classic *Alien*. Then came the "inner" rather than outer space phase, only for during the late Seventies the ufology theme of benevolent space brothers to reach its pinnacle in *Close Encounters* and *E.T.* By the Eighties we had comedies about aliens highlighting our ridiculous behaviour and with the Nineties we have the dramatised documentaries *Fire in the Sky*, *Communism* and *Intruders*.

What is certain is that be they metaphor or symbol, the saucers and ufo mythology articulate the concerns of humanity. Watson also delineates the two-way interaction between film, art and ufo observations, regretting that the two sides have tended not to appreciate the content of each

Those who are familiar with Watson's work will know how thoroughly he researches subjects. Having studied cinematography and with a long-standing interest in ufos (including personal investigations), no one could be better placed to produce such a study. Comprehensive and perceptive it is, but also with flashes of humour (such as when describing *The Man Who Fell To Earth* - "which sometimes seems as if it was directed by an alien") or the Thing in *Deepstar Six* looking "like a cross between a prawn and a car wash."

Thoroughly up to date with recent UK TV documentaries and a full analysis of *Fire in the Sky*, the only criticism is that this extended article appears unduly expensive for 32 A4-size pages.

Published by Valis Books, 52a Lascotts Road, Wood Green, London N22 4JN. Price £4.99.

AZTEC AND MAYA MYTHS

By Karl Taube CONCISE guide to Mesoamerican tradition which happily managed to survive the slaughtering Spanish conquest. Myths include creation, flood, gods, and so on. Easily understandable and well illustrated.

Published by British Museum Press at £5.95.

THE RED QUEEN: SEX AND THE EVOLUTION OF HUMAN NATURE

By Matt Ridley LEWIS Carroll's *Red Queen* ran but stayed in the same place. She has since 1973 given her name to a new evolutionary law - change there is, but not progress; we're on a treadmill, not a ladder. Change being how species adapt to combat an enemy or retain their niche.

Ridley concludes there is a universal human nature which does not differ between races, but that male and female nature are very different in most species, including mankind.

Much of the data may seem contentious, but the book is far from dull statistics and theories, particularly where historical and anthropological research is summoned to argue that surreptitious adultery has played a part in shaping the reproductive strategies of both sexes throughout human history.

Published by Viking Penguin at £17.99.

LEARNING HOW TO LEARN

By Idries Shah I would be wrong to assume Sufism is simply a study of the past. The Sufi classics of the Middle East were in their time highly original, so it should come as no sur-

prise that so high profile a Sufi follower as Shah can take the questions of the man or woman in the street and through traditional Sufi concepts use his common-sense and wisdom to resolve social, psychological and spiritual problems.

Published by Penguin Arkana at £6.99.

THE THEORY OF CELESTIAL INFLUENCE

By Rodney Collin By a student of Ouspensky, written in 1947, this work seeks to unravel problems of the external world and our inner selves. Despite considerable effort, I found it impenetrable, but can only assume it will have wide appeal to many students of both philosophy and astrology.

Published by Penguin Arkana at £8.99.

WHAT THE BEE KNOWS

By P L Travers THE title comes from "Ask the wild bee what the Druids knew" and this book of essays covers reflections on myth, symbol and story, ranging from thoughts on the great Irish mystic AE (George Russell), Celtic mythology, Australian aborigines, European fairytales to a stay on an American Indian reservation. A spiritual seeker and authority on myths and folklore, Travers also created *Mary Poppins!*

Published by Penguin Arkana at £7.99. MEGALITHIC ADVENTURES

THE ECLECTIC EPIGRAPHER

By Donald L Cyr Two anthologies of articles from *Stonehenge Viewpoint* magazine compiled by editor Cyr. The first relates Cyr's expeditions to prehistoric sites such as Stonehenge, Avebury, Malta, France, Sweden ... along with speculation and analy-

sis on astroarchaeology, sighting templates, ice crystals and leys. Altogether a good traveller's tales compilation. Seven dollars.



The other is on the challenging subject of rock art and ogam in America. Decide for yourself whether the marks suggest pre-Columbian visitors or are glacial scratches, tool grinding marks or forgeries. Nine dollars.



"They're even more fascinating down here, professor!"

Cheques payable to Stonehenge Viewpoint. Send order to L C Smith, UK agent, 16 Solstice Rise, Salisbury, Wilts., SP4 7NQ.

DICTIONARY OF SACRED MYTH

By Tom Chetwynd
WORKING with myths and symbols can be fulfilling, leading to

greater awareness of the human psyche or soul. This book is compiled from a range of works mainly concerned with the psychology of spiritual initiation, though in its often conflicting form this is normally associated with the pangs of midlife crisis and latter half of life.

Authoritative and wide-ranging, it is a book to be dipped into or consulted specifically for subjects.

Published by Aquarian at £5.99.

DAUGHTERS OF EVE

By Dolores Ashcroft-Nowickil rather expected this to be New age fashionable wimmin trash but reckon it will suit any reasonable woman with its rituals, pathworkings and meditations for those anywhere between menstruation, menopause and cronehood.

Wise and humorous; the piece on losing virginity is, for instance, non-preaching and the material on the kestos (a potential passion killer) was new to me, though the author becomes suddenly intemperate when following on to the versions introduced by the Crusaders in metal - "with their twisted minds."

Women's seasons and fascinating too for men.

Published by Aquarian at £7.99.

POWER WITHIN THE LAND

By R J Stewart
MORE folkloric tradition from Bob Stewart. This time the spiritual levels of the Underworld. However, its New Ageist slant and material from ex-human sources tried my tolerance.

Published by Element at £9.99.

CRISIS DREAMING

By Rosalind Cartwright & Lynne Lambert
WHILE undergoing psychiatric counselling

after a breakdown and depression, my regular doctor's reaction, when I told him a particular dream which seemed relevant, was that dreams were no longer taken seriously by his profession. More's the pity. Because I found a great deal of confirmatory material from serious studies here which have been helpful in self-analysis I have found more promising than professional soundings.

Self-help guides such as this vary in their worthiness - in fact some seem positively dangerous - but despite its American content, this seems a thoroughly positive, sensible and practical guide to using dreams to solve problems.

Published by Aquarian at £8.99.

ECSTASIES, DEIPHERING THE WITCHES' SABBATH

By Carlo Ginzburg
HAILED in hardback as one of the finest history books published in recent years, the Italian author (now working in California) makes Middle Ages life come to life (and has much fun with his others' academic criticisms).

Ginzburg distinguishes in the Sabbath two cultural currents, of diverse origin: the theme of a conspiracy plotted by a sect or hostile social group as elaborated by inquisitors and lay judges; secondly elements of shamanistic origin which were rooted in the folk culture, such as magic flight and animal metamorphosis.

Since its publication these elements have been interpreted in claims of satanic abuse and flying saucer abductions, giving this wide-ranging study over time and

space an even more credible and contemporary context.

Published by Penguin at £9.99.

THE BOOK OF MIRDAD

By Mikhail Naimy
UPON his death after the Deluge, Noah instructs his son San to build a sanctuary known as The Ark around a sacred altar and for there to always be Nine Companions. Alas the commandment is broken but eventually comes the mysterious stranger Mirdad.

Naimy's work here, according to the blurb, "counts indisputably among the great religious classics of the 20th century." Through dialogue and argument, paradoxes and dream interpretation, Naimy provides what claims to be a "lighthouse for troubled souls," weaving together mystical insights and practical ethics. Of interest from religious, mythological and philosophical angles.

Published by Penguin Arkana at £5.99.

THE PAGAN SOURCE-BOOK

By Nigel Pennick
SUBTITLED A guide to the festivals, traditions and symbols of the year, I was slightly amused at its correct though curious depiction as "non-fiction/stationery/Ancient Mysteries."

With public and media confused as to huge differences between Satanism and paganism, here is a wealth of information about traditional signs for each month, astrology, holy days, religious and customary festivals, gods and goddesses, leading to an introduction to each month with three days to a page, carrying illustrated material specifically relevant to it.

Historical name changes of the deities across countries and cultures make it an ideal reference work for

students of Celtic lore and festivals.

Published by Rider at £9.99.

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THE NEW NATURE OF THE CATASTROPHE

By Michael Moorcock
"On foot he made for Dubrovnik, through a world ruled by bad poets who spoke the rhetoric of tabloid apocrypha and schemed for the fruition of a dozen seedy apocalypses." Jerry "a modern myth - a new messiah" Cornelius anthropologised. Long before he plunged from his yacht in real life, Maxwell died aboard a yacht in fiction while the character Miss Brunner predicated Thatcher. In addition to Moorcock, many other talented young writers have taken up the Cornelius baton; particularly good

here is Simon Ings, with Cornelius as lavatory attendant and his wife Nikki a prostitute.

Published by Millennium at £10.99.



SHAMANISM AND THE MYSTERY LINES

All by Paul Devereux

AS editor of The Ley Hunter, in the Seventies I published an article by Dan Butcher which first linked leys and astral travel. Twenty years on the current incumbent of The Ley Hunter editorship has revived, expanded and promoted archaic alignments as lines of magical flight marked on the ground.

Shamanism is the latest fad for New Ageists and linking leys to it has been seen in some quarters as a cynical rebooting of a flagging earth mysteries, as just another fashion and even an emperor's new ritual costume. Only time will tell.

The folklorist of yore would recognise the spirit line context with fairylore, even witches; the grown hippie generation applaud the drug connection, man; urban beliefist the flying saucer references in earth lights guise; the psychosocial school a cross-fertilisation cultural tracking of leys and shamanism integrating to repopularise one another.

Paul Devereux has always been an eloquent advocate of whatever theory he has espoused and this controversial amalgam deserves serious consideration.

The book is more, however, providing a potted history of alignment research, larger linear structures, Amerindian examples, divine kingship, spirit lines, shamanism and the landscape or mindscape riddle.

Published by Quantum at £7.99.

SYMBOLIC LANDSCAPES

HERE Devereux proposes an "interworld" state of consciousness: symbolic landscapes resulting from an intermediary state where the mind builds a concept from outer, sensory data into inner, symbolic material. Divided into two essays: part one looks at several such landscapes worldwide; part two specifically examines the Avebury complex.

This "psychogeography" where perhaps the topography actually spoke to earlier peoples suggests ancient and traditional societies entered extended states of mind with some ease. Cultural belief systems filter any such concepts, but Devereux argues cogently that there can be a powerful experience, be it a neurological imprint or vision of another level of reality. It all makes sense to me, though can be baffling for those unable to enter an archaic mindset.

Published by Gothic Image at £14.95.

SECRETS OF THE ANCIENT AND SACRED PLACES

God help us if anyone could describe this sumptuous volume as simply a coffee table book. In splendid colour photographs and authoritative text, Devereux describes sites from the World Heritage List compiled by UNESCO: both human structures and also natural landscapes.

For this book, Devereux has selected sites which primarily reflect the archaeological elements in the list. These include Stonehenge, Avebury, West Penwith, Tower of London, Chartres Cathedral, Cuzco, Machu Picchu, Delphi, plus sites in China, Malta, Germany, Mexico, USA and so on. A truly worthwhile compendium with lucid introduction of sacred geography. A treasure trove.

Published by Blandford at £14.99.