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# Folklore Frontiers 29

February, 1997

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# THE DEVIL'S DRIVEN OFF IN A CAPRI

THE SPORT Monday, January 13, 1997 3

A WHITE witch has exorcised a car with the number plate ARK 666Y to rid it of its links with the Devil.

The purple Ford Capri's new owner called in witch Kevin Carlyon fearing that the plate could bring a run of bad luck and illness similar to that which the previous owner suffered.

Keith Tagliaferro snapped up the sinister plate despite its history and now believes it's worth £10,000. Keith, of Eastbourne, East Sussex, said: "an old man rang him saying he had a car with a strange number plate."

### Struggle

"He told me the car had brought him nothing but bad luck. It had made him ill and kept failing its MOT."

Witch Kevin said: "666 is a sign of the Devil and ARK relates to the Ark of the

covenant, so there was a struggle between good and evil. The car had a really bad feeling."

He sprinkled the car and plate with pagan holy water. And spookily, as Kevin drove off after the ceremony, HIS car broke down!

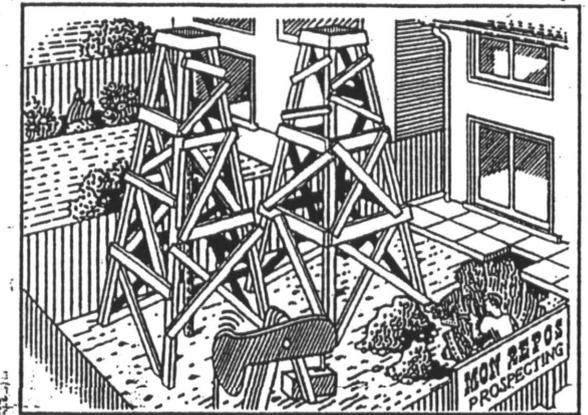
The DVLA stopped issuing plates with the number 666 in 1991.

By CARLA MOSS

Human interest stories are the lifeblood of newspapers, balancing the only too frequent doom and gloom of job losses, criminal activity and inadequacies of public services. PAUL SCRETON here salutes an anthology of such quality items culled from the nation's press.

# Offbeat tales gush from parish pump

The Parish Pump column's view of David Clark's garden.



Right: David Clark "prospecting" in his garden

OFFBEAT stories in newspaper create a counterpoint to the negative tales of crime and shortcomings of health and education provision.

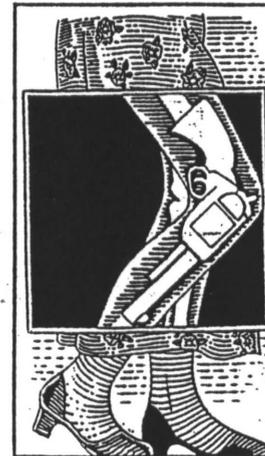
Rather than hear opinions of faceless bureaucrats, readers want to hear of real people in odd situations; often their friends or neighbours.

We all get into what a book just published calls "little local difficulties" and occasionally they reach the notice of a local newspaper reporter.

After publication the person involved has his or her 15 minutes of fame. If lucky — or unlucky in many cases — it reaches a national newspaper afterwards, becoming 30 minutes of Warholian celebrity status.

### Compilation

Several Hartlepudlians have achieved the dubious notoriety of being featured — through monitors gaining in the process £10 for their clippings — in the Parish Pump column in the



Left: how the Telegraph Illustrated Anne Draper's hip joint



(Continued in Page 12)

# BULLETS and BIBLES

I can't recall who said it, though if pushed I'd go for Mark Twain with maybe Charles Fort as first reserve. Regardless of who actually said it, what he said went like this: when somebody gets shot and his life is saved because the bullet is balked by a Bible he happens to be carrying in his breast pocket - we're bound to hear that story. When the tragedy-averting object in the shot-at party's pocket happens to be a deck of cards - we aren't and don't.

## FolkJokeOpus

In many ways, it doesn't matter who said it because I'm sure it isn't true. Whenever we hear of a life marvellously preserved by something in the protagonist's pocket - which is quite often - that preservative item is not inevitably a Bible. Not nowadays and judging from the popular press, which is the usual source of information on this subject. The inference is that there are any number of things you could be carrying on or about your person that will do the job just as well as the Good Book. But the bullet-stopping Bible remains the classic version. I am thinking of stories like:

### *"Bible Saves.*

*The small Bible which night watchman Robert Hanson carries in his shirt pocket saved his life on October 4, 1978, when an intruder shot him at close range. The .22 calibre bullet penetrated all but the last few pages and the leather back cover of the Bible, police reported.*

*Hanson, an employee of Greenley's Real Estate Company in Charleston, W. Va., was making his final rounds in the basement of Cox's Department Store when he surprised the intruder. The man fired and Hanson was knocked down. He said later the bullet struck his chest like a sledgehammer but he suffered only a bruise on his chest. The intruder fled."*

That story from Anthony A. Russo, Jr. appeared in Fate of May 1979. The editors must have liked it, since they let Corinne Pilbrow Adams repeat it in her "Point-Blank Bullets Stop Short" filler for their September 1980 issue. If you don't go for guns, here's another which they had published a little earlier (February 1977):

*Louie D. Hairston, a Washington, DC drugstore security guard, habitually reads the Bible every day and carries the book in his left breast pocket. In early 1975 his habit saved his life when a knife-wielding bandit attacked him. In the ensuing hand-to-hand struggle the bandit slashed at Hairston with a foot-long butcher knife ... Afterwards Hairston found the hard cover of his Bible had been cut in two, having absorbed a furious stab in the region of his heart."*

I found that and others like it in Harold Helfer's long-running "Fingers of Fate", which is one of the first places to look for articles of this kind. The title of the column occasionally transmutes into "Quirks of Fate" or "Strange To Say" and Harold Helfer may become Paul Steiner (though sometimes they occur side by side in the same issue). The nearest thing we have in this country is, unsurprisingly, Fortean Times (column title varies, but recently "Gun Ho!" has become favourite). The writers are heavily reliant for their material on the aforementioned popular press, where these brief, sparkling little reports appear in what Paul Screeton identifies as NIBS - "news in brief".

Are these stories "news" in the conventional sense of being reports of things that really happen and do we really care if they aren't? 'Here follows one of those prayer-book-stops-bullet tales which often get dismissed as "mere folklore"', wrote someone in Fortean Times 54 (Summer 1990) by way of introducing how Security Express guard Albert Howard survived being shot in the chest while struggling with raiders at the Midland Bank in Poole. The bullet duly passed through his diary and ricocheted off the prayer book he always carries in his shirt pocket. Mr Howard received powder burns and bruises; his attackers received a summons to appear at the Old Bailey on robbery and firearm charges.

FT objected that the account was:

*'... well upholstered with circumstantial detail. We are often annoyed by the dismissal as fiction of cracking yarns, just because they are cracking yarns; it seems such a killjoy attitude to life, the universe, etc.'*

I agree - I'm often annoyed for the same reason. But these stories are typically told in a way which invites them to be dismissed as "mere folklore". Much depends on the narrators' motives for telling or retelling stories like these. If we place the emphasis on the

miraculousness of the incident - the "crack" of every cracking yarn - we are not telling them purely because we believe them to be true. We are saying that life, the universe etc. are much stranger than sceptics allow. Moreover, in emphasizing that miraculous element we are playing for effect; we solicit a particular amazement in our audience. We are giving brief justifications of what the columnar title promises: these stories turn into illustrations of the Fingers or Quirks of Fate which govern our existence. We are saying these things because they are Strange To Say.

An issue of intention is bound up in every story. Albert Howard owed his life to a diary and to a prayer book, which represents an interesting combination of the secular and the religious. I am not going to rule which deserved the more credit, although my personal vote would go to the diary on the grounds it seemingly absorbed most of the bullet's initial impact. However, its presence fudges the moral overtones of the story somewhat.

Mark Twain (or whoever) suggested that the Bullet Stopped by Bible story got told because, unlike a Bullet/Deck of Cards version, it was a moral or moralizing narrative, one imbued with religiose intent. S/he might have been closer to the truth if the suggestion was that, at time of writing, people were *more likely* to hear stories where the thing in question was a Bible. For the Bible - the *Good Book* or even just *The Book* - automatically carries a significance unique to itself. The fact it is a *sacred* book necessarily imparts a religious message to the story. In practical terms, the outcome would have been much the same if the tome in Messrs Hanson or Harirston's pocket were a volume of Shakespearean sonnets, *The Observer's Book of Pond Life* or those famously pornographic memoirs, *My Secret Life*. But in other, more important terms, the outcome would *not* have been the same at all. Russo's choice of title - "Bible Saves" - invokes and reworks the old theme of the Bible is our salvation - in the spiritual sense that it saves souls. But the extt below shows the Holy Book as an instrument of salvation in a more direct, physical fashion; it saves Hanson's physical body, too. It saves because its sheer physical format - the thickness of its cover and pages - turns out to be a saving grace. We recognize this, but carry over the tacit message that it is

the contents of the Book - what is written in it - that really possesses the power to save. Plenty of other books may have the physical bulk to stop a bullet - at 4000 pages, that's certainly true of *My Secret Life* - but they cannot claim to save souls at the same time (and especially not *My Secret Life!*).

Yet the majority of stories in *Fate* and *Fortean Times* show that, for our modern times, the Book - any sort of Book - has been replaced by a motley assortment of items, many of them quite trivial and domestic and all of them devoid of obvious religious significance. Money, for example. Now, we have been taught that Money is the root of all Evil. Symbolically, then, it is a worldly power which stands in diametrical opposition to the Bible - but a substantial number of *Fate* or *FT* accounts present it as the heroic last-ditch defender that stands between an individual and Eternity.

The intervention may come in the modest form of a single penny (as it does in a story from *Fate* March 1988) or a small collection of them like the three pennies, nickel and dime, total value 18 cents, that saved a man hit by a stray shot during a quarrel at Wenatchee, Washington (according to the same source of August 1983). It could be an immodestly fat wad of bank-notes - 242,000 yen, for instance, which halted a bullet that a gunman fired into 64-year-old Osaka dentist Hiroshi Oyama for reasons never fully clarified (*FT* 64, August-September 1992, page 21 c/o an AP release dated 1 February 1992). I might have mentioned that the bullet-proof qualities of Mr Oyama's cash were enhanced by the fact it was doubled over in his wallet. But then, the two words signify the same thing; "wallet" stands metonymously for "money".

And still on wallets, see *Fate* November 1984 (page 69) where the happily-saved party might seem undeserving of any providential protection; he was a suspect who had just fired at a police officer and taken a slug in exchange, evidently. When discovered beneath a car and ordered to show some ID, he pulled out his wallet ... and the officers found their bullet lodged in it. And arrested him. Another time in Cleveland, Ohio, John M. Rainey was

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virtually unaware he had been shot until police found the bloody cheque-book in his pocket and embedded therein a small calibre bullet that it had restricted from inflicting more than surface damage to the skin beneath (*Fortean Times* 64 as above, from the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* 26 March 1992). Lastly and reflecting that many of us have given up carrying real money: mugging victim Herb Kravitz of North Brunswick, NJ owed his exemption from so much as a bruise to his plastic credit-card holder. (*FT* 70, August-September 1993, page 19, from *The People*).

It's tempting to see these anecdotes as secularizations of the Bible-focussed story; as an arguably accidental rather than a deliberate turning-away from the religiosity of narratives which imply the protection could *only* have come from the Holy Book. More simply, it could acknowledge that nowadays a person would be more likely to carry coins, wallet, cheque-book in his/her inside pocket than a Bible (or, put another way, that persons nowadays are *less* likely to carry pocket Bibles. Notice how *Fate's* May 1977 story anticipates this by saying the man in question 'habitually reads from the Bible every day', thus establishing that it was logical for him to be carrying one 'in his left breast pocket'). Whatever the motivation, modern stories take what was formerly and uniquely attributed to the saving grace of God and gifts that same effect to a random force (Luck) or perhaps a deity of more pagan kind (Fate).

And oh my, don't they choose some trivial things through which to work their protective magic! Gasp at the spectacle of killer bullets careening off combs, keys, whistles. Thrill to the screech (or alternatively, to whatever sound a bullet makes when its impact is deadened by a hidden solid object) as slug meets badge, nameplate or in one case a cop's gun which he had not made time to pull out. Moving past tales of effective deflective necklaces and tie-knots - pausing only as long as it takes to enjoy the story of a bullet that pierced a Vietnam lance-corporal's helmet only to fail as it met two letters and a valentine which this 'sentimental' soldier wore in it - we find the villains' aim getting lower and more personal, but no more lethal.

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Richard Long, an innocent bystander who took a wandering bullet during an incandescent street argument in Brooklyn, got off with minor wounds when the shot whacked into his belt buckle ... which, wouldn't you know, bore a fancy "Lucky Lady Liberty" motif (*Fate* March 1988 for that one). In a New York store, robbers fled when they saw their .357 Magnum bullet do no ostensible harm to Angel Santini - fled, one presumes, without knowing that its harmlessness was due to the unadvertized stopping-power of his trouser zipper (*FT* 56, Winter 1990, page 31 - taken from an AP report used by at least two American papers). For the more historically-inclined, *Fate* of August 1984 had M.M. Savoie's anecdote of the marauding Comanches at Linneville, Texas in August 1840 and how their arrows failed to penetrate a certain Mrs Watts. The title tells you how and why: Mrs Watts was "Saved By A Whalebone Corset". For sake of completeness, though, I must say that the most oft-cited protective device I have read about is usually found higher up on the human corpus or else at the owner's bedside. Dentures, I mean: no fewer than six separate reports credit false teeth for frustrating gunshots at the expense of comparatively trifling injuries. Obviously enough, the records suggest they are more use for that purpose when worn in the mouth rather than kept in a glass of Steradent.

"Bite on the bullet" had real meaning for Ezell Hodge, Jr. of Cedar Rapids, Iowa,' quipped Harold Helfer in one of his anecdotes. Which brings me to another point. When rendered in the narrator's original words, these anecdotes have a way of resembling illustrations of received wisdom found in popular phrases or sayings, not infrequently with a strong dash of the ironic enjoined. 'A penny saved is a penny earned, they say,' deliberated Harold Helfer (again!) in a "Quirks of Fate" piece from *Fate* March 1988. 'Canadian Mounted Policeman Thomas St Onge can also testify that a penny can save your life ...'. Or again (*Fate* July 1967): 'The key to life for Gerald Gude, a St Louis filling station operator was a key.' (More accurately, a ring of keys - which deflected a bullet during an attempted robbery). Even advertizing copy can become a source of popular dicta, as in:

'TV commercials tell you never to leave home without your travellers' checks - and no-one could be gladder he had heeded this advice than Raymond Meurin of Alberta ...'

(*Fate* May 1984, page 87. The allusion-maker was Harold Helfer, as you've already guessed. The story featured a life saved by the fact a bullet couldn't find a way through a healthy batch of travellers' cheques. You will have guessed that as well).

What we see here is a narrator taking contemporary proverbs or their equivalents and, by the shaping influence of his storytelling style, helping to show how they came literally true. Through these means it becomes possible to build a didactic purpose into these stories - some message, some point worthy of reflection - without resorting to the good old-fashioned Bible with its blatant moral luggage. The tendency to combine some such supra-narrative purpose with marvel-quotient and entertainment value is a trait which marks out the folktale. The purpose - what we want to convey or achieve when we tell a story - is, as I said before, more important than the issue of Truth or Non-Truth. These things *may* happen; personally speaking, I see no genuine reason for thinking that they *don't*. But that isn't why the papers print them, nor why we repeat them.

'There was things he stretched, but mainly he told the truth,' said Mark Twain, writing of himself under the guise of Huckleberry Finn. When telling bullet-and-bible stories we tell the truth, but mainly we stretch things - sometimes. Mick Goss writing as himself said that. — By Mick Goss

## MY NIPPLE STOPPED MUGGER'S BULLET!

By JULIAN DYER in MIAMI

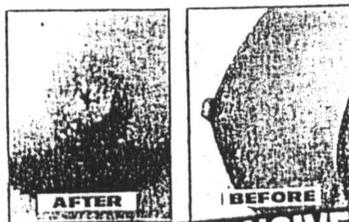
LUCKY housewife Helen Gavin miraculously escaped death when a mugger's bullet bounced off her BRA.

The busy 30-year-old was out shopping when a black teenager stepped out, grabbed her bag, and shot her at point-blank range.

Amazingly the bullet passed through her thick coat and struck the wire running through her uplift 36B cup. The only injury to the mother-of-two was a depressed NIPPLE.

Helen, who lives on the outskirts of Miami, Florida, said: "It was like being punched in the chest. It took my breath away."

"I didn't even realise I had been shot until I saw the hole in my coat. When I took it off the bullet just dropped to the floor. The doctor said that my nipple will regain its normal shape in a few weeks."



**PHOTO EXCLUSIVE**

Sunday Sport January 30, 1994 . 5

## Suicide bungle kills love rival

JILTED Edward Hand shot dead his lover's husband — while he was trying to kill HIMSELF.

The bullet shot through Edward's cheek as he fired into his mouth in front of his rival Ronald Ganley, 34, then clonched off his teeth and hit Ronald in the head.

Edward, 33, who had just heard his lover was leaving him and going back to Ronald, has been charged with murder.

Police in Bartow, Florida, said: "It took us months to work out what happened."

## BUNG OF A GUN

A bullet fired by a gangster in a shoot-out at Columbus, Ohio, stuck fast in the barrel of an FBI agent's gun.

▲ SUN 1/31/94

D. STAR 1/31/94 ▼

## LUCK OF THE DRAW

FBI agent Barry Carter cheated death in Columbus, Ohio, when a bullet shot straight at him stuck in his own gun barrel.

▲ D. STAR 20/1/95

## Yule sprig pulled from teen's lung

DOCTORS IN Stockton, California, found a 1in (2.5cm) sprig of Christmas tree in the right lung of Tracy McIntyre, 16. It had

been there for almost 15 years, but was as green as ever.

Since Christmas 1980, when 18-month-old Tracy suffered a choking fit near the tree, she's had breathing difficulties, coughing fits and bad breath. Finally her parents took her to hospital. (AP) 15 Dec 1995

# TAIT'S GALLERY

S'not True

You know the story, a woman takes her child to the hospital complaining of headaches, bad breath and general poor health. On further examination the doctors discover a pea which the child had forced up his nose some weeks ago. As the tale goes, the pea had germinated and sprouted into a plant of considerable length.

I was recently told a "true" variation of this nasal invasion FOAF by the doctor concerned in the tale. A lady brings her eighteen month old son for a consultation at the GP's surgery. The child was in general good health apart from a severe case of halitosis. Upon detailed examination, the doctor noticed a dark object apparently lodged up the child's nose. Tentatively he inserted a pair of tweezers up the nostril and carefully began to withdraw the alien body. Gradually a six inch strip of thick paper like material slick with a foul smelling grey ooze was withdrawn, "Like a silk handkerchief from a magician's sleeve!"

Once rinsed off the material turned out to be a strip of wallpaper bearing an unmistakable floral pattern which the mother recognised as the pattern which had adorned her sons room six months ago! Apparently the child had went through a phase of tearing strips of paper from around his cot and eating them. As the parents had redecorated the room after the habit had ceased, seeing the old wallpaper once more was a real, "Blast from the past!"

The Baled Boy

The following tale was told to me when I was at college studying agriculture by a visiting health and safety executive.

A farmer was baling a field of straw with his young son in the tractor cab with him. Not being designed for passengers, the interior of the tractor was an uncomfortable place for the child. With the fatherly concern to rival Fred West, the farmer allowed his son to sit on the baler itself, obviously right above the area of the straw entering the machine.

## Tonya saved by her bra

BUSTY Tonya Wentworth was saved by her bra when she was shot in a row with her husband, Blake.

The bullet bounced off a wire in her D-cup. A domestic dispute got out of hand when one of them grabbed an antique revolver which went off in the struggle.

But the lucky housewife, from Lake Luzerne, New York, escaped with only minor injuries.

D. STAR 31/1/94 ▲ D. STAR ▼

## Wonderbra

BUSTY Tonya Wentworth was saved by her BRA when she was shot in the chest during a row with her husband Blake. The bullet hit a metal wire. Tonya, of New York, was unharmed.

Continuing with the job in hand the farmer turned to wave at his son situated on his new, "Exciting" perch. As he did so the front wheel of the tractor hit a rut in the field causing the whole outfit to jerk, with the inevitable sorry result that the child gets to inspect the workings of the machine at rather closer quarters than was healthy! It was said that the farmer needed to carry on baling for a few yards to allow his son to pop out at the rear end - pulverised and sandwiched between segments of straw and tightly bound with two lengths of twine!

Over the years since leaving college I have discussed the story with other people who have also know it as happening, "to someone my Dad knew" etc. It would be interesting to compile a record of cautionary FOAF's from the contemporary workplace as statistically employment in such traditionally dangerous manual occupations is dwindling every year.

There's the camper -- and grannie?

This story is allegedly a true case being investigated by the police. Despite receiving it direct from an equine's gob, its just got to be good to be true, hasn't it?

A couple from Sunderland set off in their camper van for a holiday. Destination, South of France. Accompanying them is the wife's elderly mother. After quite a number hours on the motorway, excitement mounts as at last they begin to see signs for the Chunnel. Wisely deciding on a last minute check of essentials, the wife is horrified to discover that her mother has forgotten her passport. In order to avoid the long journey home to retrieve it, the couple decide to bung the old lady into the toilet of the van and smuggle her to the (in?)continent. All goes well and the three of them spend a marvellous fortnight sunning themselves. Come the day of their return home, they repeat the smuggling act with their geriatric contraband. Once again all goes well and they return to the shores of Old Blighty without incident. Until that is a few miles from the Chunnel exit when they stop at a service station to refuel and release the old dear from her WC confinement. It seems the thrill of it all had been too much for the old gal and she had croaked her last sitting there a stowaway on a chemical lav. The distraught couple decide to have a cup of tea at the services (well you would, wouldn't you?) to settle their nerves and gather their thoughts. So it was decided over styrofoam cups, they would come along and call in to the nearest police station and confess the whole sorry affair. Returning to the car park refreshed and resolved they were horrified to discover the camper van gone! And so it apparently still is (a period of ten days was mentioned), with no sign of it nor its stiff cargo. So if anyone offers you a cheap camper van, no questions asked. For Christ's sake - check the bog!

-- JOHN TAIT

(Continued from Page 3)

**Weekend Telegraph.**  
Now a "best of" compilation, edited by Tristan Davies, has been published under the title *Soundings from the Parish Pump*.  
Offbeat stories in this anthology include:  
• Less than amused Belfast councillors responsible for a crematorium, one of whose "customers" had enjoyed a drink, smoke and a flutter, disapproved of empty beer cans, cigarette butts and old bookies' dockets adorning the final resting place.  
• The Carlisle vicar who put a sign outside his church proclaiming: "If God had intended me to be gay, he'd have created Adam and Steve, not Adam and Eve."  
• Buckinghamshire County Council had to change the name of one of its departments for a

second time when its Land and Property Service Group was renamed Property Information and Surveying Services and a brochure revealed the unfortunate acronym.  
• A York couple, whose noisy lovemaking drew applause one evening from people returning home from the pub.  
• How Llanfairfechan, near Rhyl, has become a "pink village, attracting gays nationwide, with 20 lesbians in residence and the local barber becoming transvestite Stella on an evening.  
• Poopaman, the masked dog-mess avenger of Doocaster, who emptied a bag containing 75 separate items of dog turds on the floor of his local council in protest at the council's refusal to sponsor his one-man campaign to

clean up the streets.  
• Hertfordshire firefighters were called to a small blaze at a kitchen in Hatfield after an elderly lady put her hand in the oven, thinking it was her dinner.  
• Categories cover: the human cycle, bodily functions, the great outdoors, non-professional homes and homelessness, eccentricity, the emergency services, pets, officialdom, mistaken identities and sport.  
• As for the hatfield pool contributions, remember our front page story about Anne Draper? The grandmother who suffered from rheumatoid arthritis fell foul of Irish Customs officers who impounded a bitch artificial knee joint that had been made for her by technicians in the United States.

By some Irish logic, they assumed it was a weapon being smuggled in for the IRA.  
The book also has a less than serious approach to the activities of David Clark, of Wharton Terrace, as chronicled in the Mail for his gold and oil prospecting activities in his garden.  
The tenor of the write-up being that verification of his discoveries was dubious in the extreme.  
An absolutely admirable book. It begs the question as to why no one has thought of doing such local books on such a theme, rather than just yesteryear photographs of former communities, hauntings, bygone railways and pub walks.  
• Soundings from the Parish Pump is published by Robson Books, £11.95.

# Oldies but Goodies

DAILY SPORT Monday, June 24, 1996 '15

# CONDOM KING BLOWS IT! He brags to girl's dad

By SUZY BIRKDALE

**HUNKY** road mender Sammy Sandler bragged to the local chemist about his sexploits every time he called in for condoms.

As he pocketed his packets of three, Sammy told 46-year-old Arthur Parker about the hottest date he'd ever had - a pretty blonde schoolgirl who had the hots for him.

He revealed every horny detail of their sizzling sex session. But Sammy, 20, landed in hospital when sexy 18-year-old Lydia took him home to meet dad - and he

came face to face with Arthur! The furious father grabbed his baseball bat and gave the boasting boyfriend a hammering.

Bespectacled Arthur was taken to court for assault, but let off with a warning after beaks heard the reason for his attack.

### Nightmare

He told them: "I am afraid I just lost my cool. This braggart told me every graphic detail of what he was doing to my daughter, and what she was doing to him."

"What should have been a joyful family occasion meeting my daughter's first boyfriend turned into a nightmare."

"In my store he talked about her as if she were a little whore. I defy any father not to react in the way I did."

Sammy, of Denver, Colorado, who no longer sees Lydia, said: "I'll keep my mouth shut in future."

## Shot hunter roos the day

**HUNTSMAN** Arthur Crosbie was recovering last night after being shot... by a kangaroo.

He had felled the animal in Australia's Northern Territory and was holding it down with the butt of his rifle when it reached out and pulled the trigger with its paw.

DSTAR 7/19/96

22/10/96 The Star

SUN 21/11/96

SUN 21/11/96

**SALON** boss Jo Smith has thrown out a plastic orange chair after 11 hairdressers who used it fell pregnant in Loughborough, Leics.

SPOT

# Army secret orders came from takeaway

**THE** top-secret radio message baffled listening soldiers... two Big Macs and fries, please!

Instead of marching orders they got takeaway orders on their walkie-talkies.

Their frequencies were picking up messages from a nearby drive-in McDonald's.

Now staff at the takeaway have been forced to stop using radios for the orders because the signals keep interfering with the secret military channels.

**Plain-clothes men** from a Government agency swooped on the restaurant at Stanway, near Colchester garrison in Essex.

A McDonald's insider said: "It was quite a shock when these two mysterious chaps came in and



DAILY STAR, Thursday, November 21, 1996

### STEVE GRAVENOR

asked to speak to the manager. They flashed their ID cards and said the radio headsets we use for our drive-in orders were interfering with secret military channels.

### Code

"We were told to remove the fuse from the system and not replace it until urgent adjustments have been made."

"I'm just glad the launch code for a nuclear attack wasn't like Big Mac and Fries." A McDonald's

spokesman said: "It has been brought to our attention and we are grateful."

"We won't be using the system again until the problem has been rectified."

**Captain Pugwash:** Shot to cull status after a 1970s ray mag started nasty rumours about the characters' names. In fact Master Bates, Seaman Staines and Roger the Cabin Boy were a figment of his infantile imagination.

INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY 1/9/96

# GHOST RIDER

**COPS** are baffled by a hitch-hiker's disappearance from a van travelling at 60 miles an hour.

Good Samaritan Trevor Madelin gave the stranded biker a lift in pouring rain on a busy motorway.

But the 51-year-old was left shaking with fear when his passenger simply vanished into thin air as they drove along.

Now he thinks he may have been spooked by

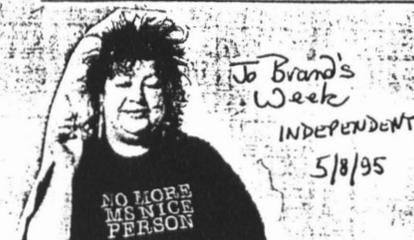
the ghost of a biker who died near Keels Services on the M6 in Staffordshire more than 20 years ago.

Trevor, of Chaddesden, Derby, said: "The van went icy cold and I turned to the passenger seat."

"It was empty - but the seatbelt was still fastened. I was scared stiff and went straight to the police."

A police spokesman said: "It's certainly an odd one for us."

THE SPORT Wednesday, October 23, 1996 3



One criticism of life today is that people behave very rudely in public. This is perfectly illustrated by a story involving a friend of my mum's recently. She was travelling home and had bought herself a cup of tea and a packet of three biscuits at the station. She sat down in the buffet, opposite a man reading a paper. Once settled in, she opened the packet of biscuits. Distracted for a moment, she then reached for a biscuit and noticed one had gone. She looked towards the man opposite, but he was hidden by his paper. Although a bit miffed, she did not say anything and munched away.

Having glanced at her own paper, she then decided to have the last biscuit, only to find that it, too, had disappeared. By this point, very angry, she stood up and, noticing that the man had a doughnut as well, she took a bite out of it, hissed, "So there!" at him, threw it back on his plate and went to get her train.

On the train, she reached into her handbag to get her purse... and found her packet of biscuits. The poor bloke must have thought she was bonkers.

DAILY SPORT Friday, February 2, 1996

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### Four die as joke turns to tragedy

A PROUD dad's joke about his baby's penis caused a blood-bath, it was revealed yesterday.

Wang Tianbao, of Henan province in China, was fined £230 after his wife had the boy in defiance of a "one child" population control policy.

Rural Chinese families would much rather have male offspring to inherit the family name.

Cuddling his son, Wang joked about the high cost of having a baby boy.

#### Sliced

"A 3000 yuan fine just for this little penis! We should just cut it off," he quipped to his little daughters.

But tragically, the six and seven-year-old girls thought he meant it. They sliced off the boy's penis with a knife, leaving their baby brother to bleed to death.

Wang was busy working in the fields, unaware of the horrific result of his joke.

#### Naked

When the dotting dad returned and discovered what had happened, he clubbed the girls to death with a shovel.

He then killed himself by drinking insecticide. Later his wife Li Lanhua saw her murdered family and became hysterical.

She ran screaming through the streets shrieking out the names of her dead husband and children.

SUNDAY SUN  
27/11/94

# A NUDE GROOM DROPS B\*LL\*CK

## He thought vicar was a hooker

By JANINE JOHNSON

HUBBY-TO-BE Jeff Hunter made a right balls-up when the vicar and his girlfriend's parents caught him NUDE on a bed waiting for a hooker.

The randy groom had been expecting the call girl to arrive at his flat after his pals told him they'd organised it as a stag-night present.

They told gullible Jeff

to go home strip off, leave the door off the latch and they'd send round a gorgeous call-girl in stockings and sussies for his final fling.

But Jeff wailed: "What my so-called mates really did was tell my fiancée's parents and the church minister that I was having

second thoughts and needed to see them urgently.

"When I heard the door go I leapt out, starkers, and shouted, 'I'm here!'"

#### Pervert

The mother of girl-friend Gayle Lane, 24, squealed: "Pervert!"

And her dad veiled at him: "You sick bastard.

You'll never marry my daughter."

Jeff added: "As you can guess, the wedding's off." Best man Todd Farrell, who set up the prank, said: "I told Gayle and her parents that Jeff was just waiting for a hooker."

But last night Jeff, 28, from Kansas, sobbed: "I've a feeling that's made matters worse."

## REVENGE IS SWEET

Here is a tale of all-American vengeance that takes the biscuit. A Dallas mother and daughter breaking a shopping trip for a light lunch in a department store decided to follow their statutory ladies' lunch salads with self-indulgent cookies. So good were the house cookies that mom thought she'd like to make them for the rest of the family and asked for the recipe.

In America recipe swapping is so integral to womanly culture that you can buy special note-pads personalised with legends like, 'This recipe comes to you from the kitchen of... Enjoy.' But that friendly custom is, it seems, no part of the store in question's customer-relations strategy, and the request was refused.

The customer enquired if she

might then buy the recipe. Yes, indeed, came the answer. Little frowns changed to big beams as the store waitress named a price of two fifty. Not until the arrival of the credit-card statement some 30 days later did our customer discover that her cookie recipe had cost not \$2.50 but \$250. And the store could be persuaded neither to take back the recipe nor refund any of its unexpectedly high cost.

Nibbling on her delicious fresh-baked, oatly-crunchy, sugar-slick biscuit, densely studded with chocolate chips, the alienated customer plotted her revenge. She rang the store to inform them that she intended to pass on her recipe

NEWS OF THE WORLD

17/11/96

WEIRD WORLD

A UNIQUE car feared to have been scrapped long ago - the 1948 Ford saloon - has turned up in the Hampshire barn of John Quone, who was looking after it for a friend.

to every cookie-lover she could find on the internet, and by every other means modern technology could put at her disposal - and absolutely free, since she had now assumed copyright - and recently it reached me by transatlantic fax from the wife of an English film director working in Los Angeles.

Here it is, ingredients scaled down to domestic proportions, all measures metrified (we might as well go pan-European on this) and

the recipe retested with our own Cadbury's milk chocolate substituting for the all-American Hershey bar in the original. It makes about 30 very sweet, chunky, slightly squidgy centred but crisp-round-the-edges biscuits. Enjoy! And watch out for the movie 'Revenge of the Cookie Maker'.

-By Rosemarystunk  
YOU (The Mail on Sunday) 10/3/96.

On Richard Gere's rumoured liking for small furry animals: "We're saddened by the split of Richard Gere and Cindy Crawford but more than interested by the messy haggling over custody of the family pets."

Bizarre column,  
SUN 6/12/94

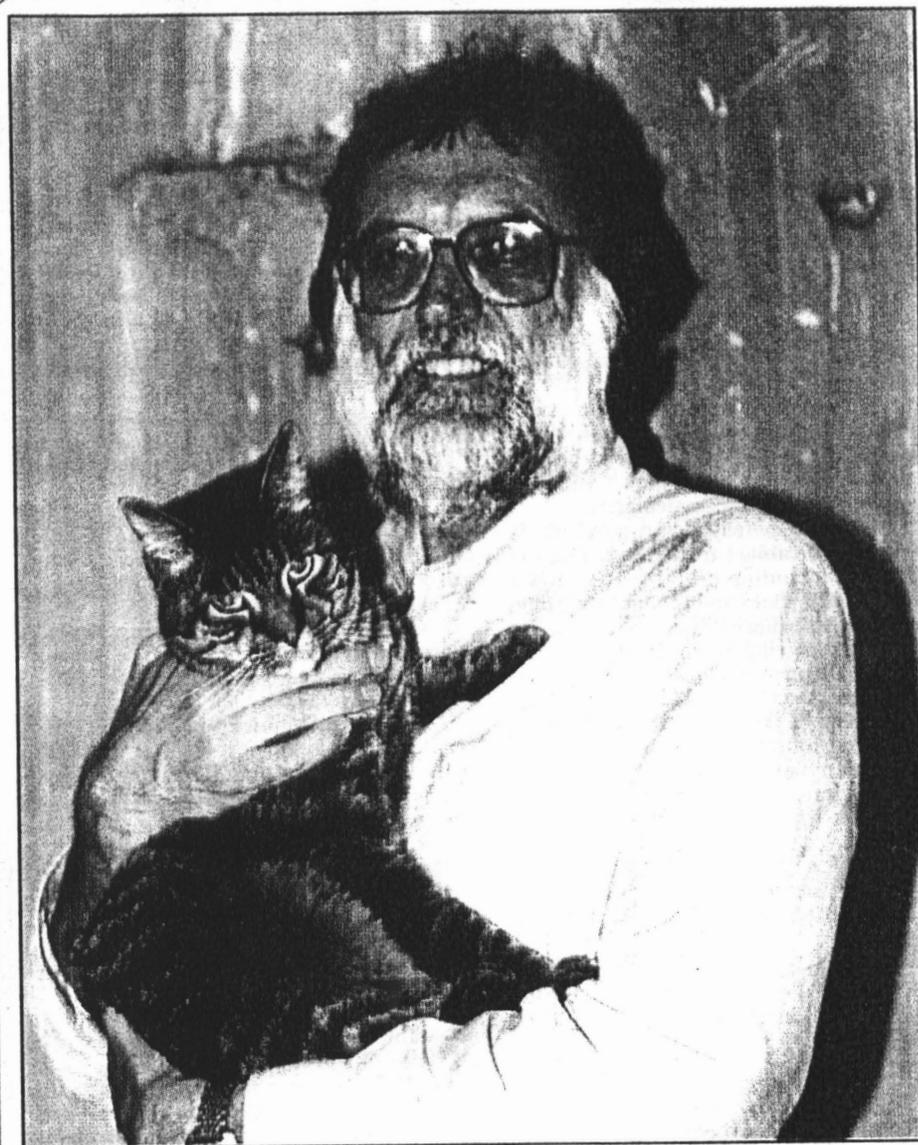
SUN BOXER Salvadori Valdez, 19, took off his robe in front of 2,500 fans at Cartagena, Spain - then realised he'd forgotten his shorts

SPOT

22/3/95

STAR BURST BOXER Salvadori Valdez, 19, took off his robe to gasps from 2,500 spectators in Cartagena, Spain - he had forgotten his shorts!

## Feature



SPOOKY: Josh Reid and Simpkins at the Chequers

# Shoes that hold strange

# powers at the Chequers

WHEN licensee Josh Reid moved into the Chequers in Chipping Norton he was very sceptical about the paranormal – five years on he is far more open minded.

Since Josh, and his wife Kay, took over the Fuller's outlet in February 1991 some unusual things have happened leaving them thinking maybe the supernatural isn't just hocus-pocus.

The couple moved to the Chequers after looking for a pub for several months.

Josh said: "We had seen quite a few pubs but none of them felt right. We had almost given up hope of finding somewhere until Fuller's offered us the Chequers.

"It had been closed and empty for more than nine months and even though it was cold and damp and quite eerie, when we viewed it, we knew there was something about it and said 'yes' immediately.

"We saw the potential and particularly liked a small cabinet in the corner full of old things including pipes, bottles and a pair of child's shoes and thought we would leave that just where it was."

But after moving in unexplained things started to happen and there were a number of minor accidents.

Josh said: "I don't remember all of the things that happened because we didn't take much notice of them at first.

"It was irritating things such as central heating not working, pipes breaking and I had a bad knee injury which caused me problems for about six months. We also thought it was odd that such a well positioned pub had been deserted for nine months.

"Soon after we opened many of the locals told us it was the small shoes in the cabinet that were the root of our problems and that if we didn't move them back to the chimney breast the bad luck would continue.

"They told me that it was an old custom to put shoes near the chimney breast as a sign of good luck but they should never be disturbed."

Josh admits he ignored the stories at first but after a few months of bad luck he decided they should be put back where they belonged.

"I thought it was a load of rubbish in the beginning. I have never believed in the

by KATE BRINTON

supernatural but as so many people began to tell us that we were mad to keep the shoes on display and the bad luck continued it seemed crazy to fly in the face of adversity.

"While the refurbishment was being carried out I asked the builders to put them back in the attic. I thought they would think I was crazy but they had been living at the pub for months and had also heard the tales so were happy to put them back."

Josh is not absolutely sure where the shoes are hidden but the couple say since the shoes went back they have been 'very fortunate and exceedingly lucky'.

However, it wasn't the shoes that made Josh less sceptical about the paranormal it was an incident 18 months ago.

He explained: "People who come in here often ask if we have seen the ghost so we knew there were stories but we never believed them until last year."

Josh was sitting in the living room, which is now a section of the bar, enjoying a morning coffee when he saw a figure walking down the corridor.

He said: "I thought it was the fruit and veg delivery man but I thought it was odd when the cat, Simpkins, went mad. He jumped up from the seat opposite with his eyes wide and ran into the corridor. A shiver ran down my spine but I thought nothing more of it until the man didn't walk back.

"I asked my wife where he had gone and she said he had never been. I went to the front door and saw it was locked and I suddenly realised what I had seen.

"I have always been sceptical but I have no doubt that I saw a ghost and the cat's reaction convinced me."

At first Josh was too embarrassed to mention it to anyone but Kay soon started telling people and it has become widely known in the town. There have been ghost stories relating to the pub for so long Josh says nobody was surprised.

He said: "I am sure some people think I'm mad. I don't ever try to convince sceptical people that I saw a ghost because I know how I would have reacted a couple of years ago!"



## DICTIONARY OF EARTH MYSTERIES

By Janet & Colin Bord

POTTED ENTRIES on all manner of earth mysteries aspects. The format has imposed brevity, but I rather feel some essential entries, such as for leys and earthlights, could have been extended at the expense of obscure prehistoric sites and their folkloric accoutrements.

Nevertheless, a handy guide for the novice and it conveniently offers much further reading to expand knowledge on various major aspects. Good to see I got a couple of name checks in the introduction.

Published by Thorsons, £6.99.

## A WHITE MERC WITH FINS

By James Hawes

RATTLING good first novel, it's a first-person yarn about robbing a bank. The prose is superb and plenty of bad language and sex. Excellently paced and a great ending. What more can I say – or you want?

On the UBT front, two doctors discuss objects removed from the anal area: usual hoover attachment, one-third lifesize bust of Beethoven and turnip ("Next time for Christ's sake leave some foliage foliage on so we can pull it out!")

Published by Jonathan Cape, £12.99.

## PAST LIVES, FUTURE LIVES

By Jenny Cockell

THIS is not a sequel to Yesterday's Children, the bestseller about a search to reunite a family triggered by the author's belief she was reincarnated from a woman who had died in Ireland in 1932.

She does, however, write about that woman's death here, recalling for the first time the similarity to near-death experiences.

## CULTS

By Michael Jordan

SUBTITLED Prophecies, Practices & Personalities, this lucid and well-illustrated book is timely as Millenium fever and End Times fears approach. Orthodox religion is losing appeal and crooked cultists are proliferating, prophetering and profiteering.

Jordan looks at the teachings, practices and rituals of controversial sects, from cults of ancient history through to breakaway religions and satanic worshippers.

He looks at the popularity of Nineties activists such as David Berg's Children of God, Sun Myung Moon's Moonies and the Rev Christopher Brain and his notoriously charismatic Nine O'Clock Service.

Published by Carlton Books, £12.99.

## GHOSTS & HAUNTED PLACES

By Peter Underwood

THE experienced parapsychologist explores a hugely diverse sequence of cases from around the world and discusses possible explanations for these strange events.

# A twisting worm tale



By PAUL SCREETON

OCCASIONALLY one comes across a book that is both fascinating but confusing.

Such is *The Legend of the Sockburn Worm - The Dragon of the Tees*.

Author Paul Teller seeks to unravel the multifarious strands of legend attached to this bizarre tale, but in the end seems to tie himself in knots.

Also I would challenge the author's claim that the Sockburn tale is "the most famous dragon legend in the North of England." Surely, the Lambton Worm can safely claim the accolade.

## Invention

Actually, as author of a book on Northern dragon legends published during the Seventies, and having embarked upon prodigious research for that project, I was surprised at some of the content of Teller's book. There is artistic licence, but some claims seem like conjecture or invention. My research gave no clues to the Sockburn Worm being black, having two feet, flying by way of bat-like wings or that it had been suggested it fell from the dark side of the moon!

Teller begins by telling the simple story of how local squire Sir John Conyers stayed the beast with his trusty falchion and the beast was buried in a pit covered by a limestone slab, the Greystone.

## Dragons with pinch of salt

He then speculates upon the origin of the story: was the worm a relict prehistoric dinosaur, taming of the Tees; inanimate sulphur well; human tyrant Bishop William Cumin; Viking long-boat; or Scandinavian berserker?

Next the text moves to the artefacts themselves: falchion, Greystone, Chapel of All Saints and perhaps hidden trough where the dragon drank, and Sir John Conyers' effigy.

## Dubious

Finally the author chooses to sum up his exploration with a dubious argument for the story to be an attempted political unity between Christian and pagan beliefs.

Despite some giggles about content, the book is excellently laid out and Linda Edwards' illustrations are superb. The book is available from J. T. Atkinson, Lower Church Street, Hartlepool, at £2.95.

Unfortunately, it becomes something of a mishmash, covering rather too much ground too thinly. The book is certainly enjoyable enough and no one would doubt the author's scholarship in the subject.

It is also written in a chatty style, but somehow it lacks authority for being somewhat unfocused. Published by Platkus Books, £14.99.

## GHOSTLY ENCOUNTERS

By Astrid St Aubyn with Zahra Hanbury TRUMPETED as the spectral experiences of more than 80 celebrities, you would be hard put to have heard of half of the people whose ghoully experiences are related here.

Nevertheless, it makes a change to hear of spooky happenings from the people who encountered them, rather than have them filtered and explained.

There are legends, animal tales, clairvoyance and coincidences, ecclesiastical happenings, evil spirits, your traditional things that go bump in the night and plenty of personal experiences of the likes of Jeremy Horne, Patrick Moore, Sandy Gall, onald Sinden, Barbara Cartland and Will Carling. Published by Robson Books, £12.95.

## MEDIAeval HOLIDAYS & FESTIVALS

By Madeleine Painer Cooman

IT is a shame that nowadays we neglect traditions and festive occasions. A wry snippet I read this week noted that a Smiths' bookshops branch had ousted a display of Bibles for one of Christmas books.

That would not have happened in medieval times, when Christian rituals were resplendent with candles, nativity plays and boar's head processions.

Month by month, such celebrations as St Valentine's day, April Fool's Day, May Day and Hallowe'en are described, plus information on decorations, delicious foods, costumes, music and dance which adorned these popular medieval feasts.

You, too, are invited to celebrate these popular festivals in the traditional medieval manner with practical instructions for making decorations, banners and costumes yourself, plus recipes for such culinary delights as peppermint nca, golden lemon and dandelion Swithin cream and a disgusting-sounding lamb's wool cider.

Published by Platkus Books, £7.99

## THE WRATH OF GRAPES

By Andy Toper

HANGOVERS, I've had a few. To be honest, rather too many. "Never again," has been a familiar phrase in our house, generally discarded around midday when the hair of the dog has proverbially revived an ailing soul (and other parts of the ravaged body).

This book, subtitled *The Hangover Companion*, lists degrees of hangovers but this reckless reviewer can assure the writer he is either naive or stupid, for there are levels beyond those this novice imbibor scribe describes where I have unfortunately been, and even I would describe myself as only a modest though ardent social rather than solitary steaming season alcoholic.

Sadly, it is a fact that - like the common cold - insufficient research has been taken into hangovers, possibly as the latter are self-inflicted.



A recent report suggests this is because the ingestion of excess alcohol and its congeners (the deadly additives to give it colour and taste) causes reactions so complex and diverse that it is impossible to find a morning after corrective.

Nevertheless, with all its anecdotal advice and witty style, I read this book with great interest (nursing a hangover in a hot bath, if you must know).

Some of its commentary is helpful, but if you want my opinion, try brisk exercise, fresh air and then a few beers. It might not really help, but it will put off retribution for a while.

Now, excuse me while I go to a darkened, quiet room for a good, long sleep.

Published by Souvenir Press, £7.99.

# Magazines

LETTERS TO AMBROSE MERTON, Q. Folklore miscellany. Sub £7.50 to Gillian Bennett, 28 Brownsville Road, Stockport, SK4 4PF.

No. 5. Lengthy article by Michael Goss on the whore as ballad heroine (it takes up 10 pages, which is why I was reluctant to publish it in FF, however worthy). Tendentious argument that a mediaeval Welsh tradition of a supernatural female as yellow plague echoes today's Welcome to the World of Aids. Wedding revenge tale revisited. Somehow I find the Fred West photocopylore unfunny, passing most days the home of victim Shirley Anne Robinson's mother Christa. Plus Andy Cole; Ayrshire satanic ritual non-abuse; redneck attitudes; updates on Good Tiines virus, bosom serpent (er, rat actually), vanishing hitch-hiker and changing a light-bulb (President Clinton's actually).

FORTEAN TIMES. News-stand.

No. 85. Of special interest to urban folklorists will be: Aussie crocodile "releases"; a round-up of rumours relating to clown abduction scares; cream of the crop of 1995's corn circles; out-of-place Wolverines in UK and panthers in Oz. Peter Brooksmith seems to have reached almost vendetta proportions in his attack on the alien abductions trinity of US believer authors in his baby farming onslaught. Guide to the first season of TV's X-Files. Strange Days section pot-pourri of worldwide weirdness; Forum

contributors cover Tim Leary and CIA connection, vampirism and death, myth of alien technology in US aircraft design and John Michell on a US Fortean gathering.

No. 86. Robert Irving puts a beady eye on the psychic detectives and is not too impressed. Central African dinosaur filmed? Bean growth and pyramids; prehistoric horses; Brazil; Knarborough. Forum contributors consider: David Langford's Victorian UFO abduction hoax of 1979 as it merrily rolls on; earth mysteries revised; millenarianism; cars hit by meteorites.

No. 87. Connection between runaway US 19th century nuns and tales of depravity and modern accounts of "survivors" of satanic abuse; psi spy tales; US hyena; Ugandan weirdness; a 16th century chamber of wonders; Rollright Stones. Forum contributors on Toronto Blessing, fairies and aliens, Roswell photography of 1947 and Fortean exhibition.

MAGONIA. Interpreting contemporary vision and belief. Q. UK £5; US \$13. Cheques to John Rimmer and US dollars only. Address: John Dee Cottage, 5 James Terrace, Mortlake Churchyard.

No. 55. "The suggestion is made by most abduction researchers that they are either conducting or facilitating therapy. How are these sordid accounts therapeutic? There is no more evidence for that contention than for the abductions themselves." And inevitably: "We don't spend our time in ufology to find out that

nothing exciting happens at all. Abductions are exciting. Never mind if they really happen or not," writes Kevin McClure, and so far so good, but what of the larger scenario of fairies' changelings for instance? Roger Sandell obituary. Michael Goss on suicide "cluster" sites. Letters defend veracity of Father Gill's Papua New Guinea sightings basically. Trenchant book reviews.

NORTHERN UFO NEWS. £7 for 6 (payable to Northern UFO News) from 11 Pike Court, Fleetwood, Lancs., FY7 8QF.

No. 172. Jenny Randless's persuasive editorial asks whether ufologists have lost control of the subject to PR companies and the mass media. Welsh sightings. Usual features such as news round-up, book reviews, major articles elsewhere; brief sightings.

No. 173. JR on her own TV programme. Mike Wootten puts up a credible defence to JR's last issue attack. Humdrum. Fireball meteor theory for Manchester mid-air case. Aerial contacts over Scotland. Did UFO rescue sinking ship?

No. 174. JR asks how BUFORA is spending

the UFO Call doh; calling for a two-tier ufology with a professional ufo research institute. She also justifies her April TV documentary.

AMSKAYA. Newsletter of the STAR Fellowship. (Sub same as TOUCHSTONE)

No. 36. Old-fashioned, contact with Space Brothers ethos. Mostly reprints from Fifties and Sixties, but interesting letter exposing Adamski's claims and item on ufologists at a recent

