

Folklore Frontiers



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FOLKLORE FRONTIERS is an independent magazine covering various aspects of folklore, particularly contemporary legends (urban myths), ancient and modern traditions and 21st century culture.

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THE DIARY

YEAR 2002 got off to a crushing start when my former employers terminated my modestly lucrative freelancing activities. As local Seaton Carew correspondent I was expanding my repertoire and the pubs column (they say write about what you know best) was hardly a chore. Editorial cash cutbacks were demanded, so my services were sacrificed in Temple of Mammon. As sacked journo always comment unrealistically, clichedly and disguisedly vengefully: "I'll now have more time to spend with my family and on other projects." At least you've got FF 40 earlier than I'd anticipated and should be getting back to a more regular and prompter pattern.

OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO

A former colleague, in the manner of the Ancient Mariner, would interrupt your work with the fateful words, "At the risk of boring you" and then a tedious tale would follow.

I'm publishing over the next few issues an article commissioned by Traction magazine, but never published. At the risk of boring you, it's about modern rail traction and names allocated to locomotives never subsequently carried. I hope the attempted wittiness will override any anoraknophobic qualms.

I also hope the new less anarchic layout will meet with approval.

OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO

A story which tickled me and could be true or more probab;y a thespian legend concerns John Hurt, veteran actor for more than 30 years. As profiled (Sunday Telegraph, 29/4/01), he shows he doesn't take his profession too seriously ("Why let it get to you?" he says. "It's ONLY fucking acting.") The piece continues: "After making the science-fiction movie, 'Alien', in which a slime-dripping monster exploded from his stomach, Hurt was questioned, at tedious length, by an American journalist about the extent of his preparations for the part. The actor coolly unbuttoned his shirt, pointed to a vivid appendectomy scar and whispered: "Listen, if de Nero can put on 15lbs . . ."

Sport - 1st half

* MY HERO Pete Waterman (more for his rail enthusiasm than his music) is quoted thus: "Since I'm a fan, and want to ~~stay~~ a fan, I'm not interested in buying a club. Even so, before one Walsall game there was this false rumour going round that I'd bought them. Then, in the second half, it was 1-1, and I shouted to Jan Sorensen, our manager at the time: "For Christ's sake, put Wracky (Darren Wrack) o," and he immediately put him on, and Waracky scored within 30 seconds. After that everyone in the crowd was convinced I was buying the club." (The Times Football Handbook, January 2002)

* SUPERSTITIOUS soccer players who urinated on the pitch to ensure themselves victory have been banned for life by the Football Association in the Congo Reublic. The players said they were following a witch doctor's advice. They lost 11-0. (D Sport, 21/6/00)

* PLAYERS of relegation-hit Spanish side Bejar Industrial decided to wear their wives' and girlfriends' panties under their shorts to bring them luck. Four slipped on white panties as Bejar shocked Zamora 1-0. On Sunday, the whole squad slipped on frillies against Endesa. But they lost 2-1. (D Sport, 20/4/99)

* Subbuteo table football enthusiasts are being offered streakers by Tom Taylor, a shopkeeper in Lichfield, Staffordshire.

Have you heard? Internet rumours are costing big business millions

BY ROGER DOBSON

False rumours spread via the internet are costing firms hundreds of millions of pounds each year.

Products from beefburgers to tampons, from bananas, via Teletubbies to Harry Potter, are the targets of no fewer than 1,000 urban legends circulating on the web, say researchers.

Unsubstantiated claims about dangers in brand-name products are hitting sales, with one rumour about "flesh-eating Klingerman virus" in bananas costing that industry alone more than £20m.

Whole ranges of goods can be affected and many of the claims are downright incredible. They include a false rumour about a Teletubbies file distributed on the internet through email attachments that infects hard drives with a virus if you download the file. And another that tampons contain dioxin and asbestos designed to make women bleed more



Kentucky Fried Chicken Is wrongly alleged to have changed its name to KFC because the company cannot legally say that something is chicken when that is not what it is serving.



Harry Potter books False claim that underlying messages in the text caused children to turn to Satanism and started an epidemic of children behaving as witches and warlocks.



Taco Bell Girl is said to develop swollen jaw after eating taco and is discovered to be incubating cockroach eggs. She is suing Taco Bell after having part of her mouth removed. All complete fantasy.

Rumours of Names

By Paul Sreeton

HOW wonderfully pleasing it has been to see a new mass naming of locomotives.

Commonsense has prevailed, and Great North Eastern Railway has embarked upon a new era of honouring its fleet of class 91 locomotives and H.S.T. power cars.

Its previous policy of denaming prestige motive power has taken a u-turn for the better and a new era dawned upon the historic East Coast Main Line.

Initially, 45 names were drawn from four themes: cities and counties, churches and cathedrals, heritage sites and famous historical individuals.

Immediately, following historical precedents, enthusiast scepticism set in and doubtless bets were placed as to how many of the 45 would become reality. It did not take many weeks before the list was amended: "Perth" replaced "City of" choices as the town has no cathedral, the two former boundary zones of "Highland Region" and "Central Region" being abolished in 1996 became "The Highlands" and "Forth Valley" and then none of these has been carried anyway, while "Royal and Ancient Course, St Andrews" was added

As already demonstrated, what is or was promised or speculated is not necessarily what becomes reality. The history of locomotive naming is strewn with discarded and simply rumoured selections.

Perhaps the most outrageous selection being that the North British Locomotive Company expected a sixth locomotive to follow the initial "Warship" order. The correspondent airing this rumour admitted implausible elements, but had heard D605 was to be named "Eagle" and before the completely different D833 onwards order was confirmed, certain parts had been fabricated. Some of this was salvaged, making D833 half a ton heavier than subsequent classmates.

So here is your class by class guide to what was named, but never applied.

08. Res named its 08919 after one of the small islands in the Bristol Channel, "Steep Holm". When T D T Langdale Collectables was appointed agent for the sale of loco nameplates by English, Wales and Scottish Railway, the existence of a "Lundy" plate and two for "Flat Holm", one on a presentation wooden background, was made public. One wonders why mail train operator Res stopped at only affixing "Steep Holm"; doubtless the selection of obscure islands could only be to hopefully instill pride in the shunter operators.

Class 20/3. Apparently, Direct Rail Services considered naming its newly-purchased class 20/3s after well-known local Cumbrian landmarks.

Class 20/9. When D.R.S. bought its first seven redundant weed-killing (or as the politically-correct called them, "vegetation control") "Choppers", six were named after female members of staff, but 20209 was declared a spares donor, never received newnumber 20907 or name "Tracey".

Class 33. Enthusiasts cheerfully endorsed the naming of many of the Eastleigh-based "Dutch"-liveried Cromptons following a competition where staff of the departmental depot submitted a selection of names. Those most suitable were a unanimous choice of names on an aeronautical theme associated with R J Mitchell, famed designer of the Spitfire.

The Hampshire town was strongly associated with the aircraft which won the Battle of Britain and were built at the nearby works; unsurprisingly the depot's plaque affixed to locos featured a Spitfire

Ten names were agreed by the Director of Civil Engineering, with 33047 being first as "Spitfire." Other locos nominated to receive names were recently-outshopped 33002/9/26/57/65, with the remaining names being applied to other members of the class as they passed through works.

In the event, the nominated locos received names from the original list of ten, but two of the names were rejected, designer "R. J. Mitchell" and "Supermarine." That of "Merlin" was substituted, leaving nine newly-named.

Earlier, in 1988, one of the three Railfreight 33s allocated to ferry traffic at Dover was rumoured to be named "Dunkerque" and to be carried across to the French port for naming.

3.

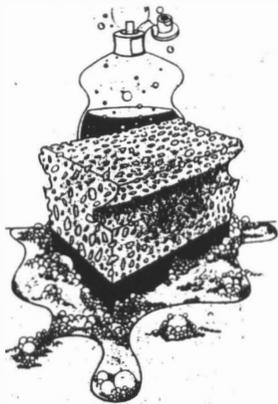
during menstruation and therefore use more feminine hygiene products.

Some are just silly. One says that instant noodles have an edible layer of wax inside their containers and some of this wax coats the stomach and causes liver problems. People are claimed to have died having surgery to remove the layer of wax. Other claims include suggestions that children's crayons are toxic and that washing-up sponges contain Agent Orange.

One, about a software virus infesting Motorola and Nokia cellular phones, plays on already existing fears about radiation emissions from the phones.

Some companies are being hit by fake "free" offers. One rumour that a baby-food maker was giving £350 to every baby born between 1985 and 1997 led to the firm being swamped with a million letters and 80,000 telephone calls a day.

According to Professor John Llewellyn, who led the research at Wake Forest University in the US, most companies aren't dealing with the problem correctly - few, if any, have a strategy.



Procter & Gamble Unsubstantiated claim that yellow sponges contain a form of Agent Orange that will kill you slowly as you wash your dishes. Calls for boycott of the manufacturer.

"This research is ground-breaking in many ways," he said. "The damage that an internet myth can cause a company has been proven, yet most companies don't do anything to communicate the truth to the customer. Consumers are making decisions about whether they will avoid this company for the rest of their lives. If their questions don't get answered, they will make their own decision."

University researchers contacted 40 large companies that were the target of rumours, but only two replied.

"These companies spend large amounts of money on advertising yet at the same time this negative stuff is going out. We call it the acid rain effect. One drop doesn't do too much damage, but when it keeps raining, there's a big problem," said Professor Llewellyn. "It is difficult to cost. We know that the flesh-eating rumours affected banana sales by around \$30m (£21m). I do not think it is unreasonable to estimate that the total cost is more than £300m a year."



Underarm deodorants Supposed ingredients in anti-perspirants "increase the risk of cancer" due to proximity of application to lymph nodes. Greater risk for women because they shave this area.

Class 37/0. Sufficient proof exists that three 37/0s ran with East Anglian regiment names publically visible, so we can swiftly move on to a nationalist blunder made by one magazine when announcing the names "William Cookworthy" and "County of Dyfed" had been selected for two class 37s "based in the West of England." Funny, I thought Dyfed was a region of Wales.

Class 37/4. When 37401's naming ceremony in August, 1985, was postponed due to industrial action affecting Strathclyde services, several names for the class were advised. 37401 later that year received its allotted "Mary Queen of Scots" plates and from the list 37402 became "Oor Wullie", in honour of the popular cartoon character in the Sunday Post newspaper. However, the remaining three selected names published failed to materialise; these being "Bonnie Prince Charlie", "King Robert the Bruce" and "Sir William Wallace."

Last year EWS confirmed it was investigating the practicality of returning "Loch" names to its unnamed West Highland 37s. It later allocated the "Loch Awe" name (previously carried by 37026 and 37409) to 37428, deemed appropriate as the "Royal Scotsman" train stand-by loco, in whose livery it is painted, passes the loch on its frequent trips to Taynuilt. "Loch Lomond" (ex-37412), "Loch Long" (ex-37407) and new "Loch Trieg" nameplates could be refitted to West Highland pool 37405/415/421/427, joining 37408 "Loch Rannoch", and also possible reuse of the "Mary Queen of Scots" nameplate removed from 37401 when it was renamed for its new role.

Class 37/7. Railfreight Metals had been receiving refurbished 37s at Cardiff and in 1988 chose to name seven, each name beginning "British Steel", followed by "Ebbw Vale", "Orb", "Velindre", "Port Talbot", "Shotton", "Llanwern" and "Trostre". Eventually the latter two names were to be affixed to class 37/9 and 56 locos. Meanwhile, in late 1988 37711 and 37712 were adorned with Associated Steel and Wire company names, while British Steel remained unhonoured. Instead of simply its Welsh name "Glo Cymru", 37800 had been expected to share the honours with the English title "Welsh Coal."

Class 40. The gap in the batch of class 40s named after ocean-going liners has about it a Bermuda Triangle type mystery. If there ever was a name, where did it go? Record producer and loco collector Pete Waterman has a nameplate for "Media", which it is claimed was attached to D226 for around three weeks before Cunard Lines objected as the ship it honoured

Class 42/43 (Warship). Having named the class precursor D800 after the chairman of the British Transport Commission, "Sir Brian Robertson", the remainder settled down to carrying the allotted names to honour Royal Navy fighting ships. That was until convention was torpedoed by D812 becoming "The Royal Naval Reserve 1859-1959". The forecast choice of "Despatch" was scuppered and the nameplates, which had been cast, became cast aside themselves, laying about Swindon Works well into the Sixties. Anyone know if they survived? Also, I note from an early Sixties ABC Comined Volume that D864 and D865 were respectively to be named "Zealous" and "Zenith" while class 42 tail-enders D866-D870 had not been allocated names. History tells us D864 became "Zambesi" and D865 "Zealous". The "Zenith" plates found their way to D867.

Class 43 (HST). Following the naming of an High-Speed Train power car, 43155, as "City of Aberdeen", on June 5, 1998, it was advised the same name was nominated in 1984.

Also at one point it was mooted that a an HST loco would bear the name "Land of the Prince Bishops", which would have publicised the name used by tourism chiefs in County Durham.

Class 44. During its sojourn on the Strathspey Railway after preservation, there was a notion to rename 44008 "Penyghent" to "Schiehallion", after that prominent local Scottish peak.

Class 45/1. Loco 45105 carries the bolts for nameplates never carried. For some reason the name "Robin Hood" entered the equation, but the configuration of bolts suggests a crest was also involved, making it likely for an aborted regimental naming.

Class 47/0. When 47186 was fitted with a computerised monitoring and fault prediction system and named "Catcliffe Demon", a Tinsley depot stablemate was also expected to receive the equipment and be named "Brinsworth Demon."

Class 47/3. When 47319 was painted into the new Railfreight corporate colours it was allegedly planned to be named "Stockton Haulage" (a name subsequently carried by a 37/5) on February 24, 1988, but instead became "Norsk Hydro" on March 3, 1988 (and if my memory serves, this fertiliser company changed its name the day after the ceremony!).

Class 47/4 (Eastern). When, in addition to a 198 colourful repaint with white roof, red buffer beams and elaborately-painted pipework, Stratford's 47460 appeared carrying "Great Eastern" nameplates, platform end rumour went into overdrive. An unofficial ceremony was supposed to have taken place at the East London depot on April 1 (any significance?) and to have made its first public appearance with nameplates three days later on the 11.42 to Norwich from Liverpool Street. The nameplates displayed chrome letters on a black backing plate and Eastern Region authorities confirmed the temporary nameplates were fitted "to test public reaction" and were removed after a few days.

The Railway Magazine reported that it was rumoured that further Stratford-based 47s would be named "East Anglian", "Norfolkman" and "Broadman". They never were. Railway World entered the naming game by stating that the names "Eastern Counties" and "Eastern Union" were being considered for other class 47/4s. None such appeared. However, the Lord Mayor of London set the seal of approval on the choice of name "Great Eastern" when he unveiled official British Rail nameplates on 47169.

According to enthusiasts' "duffzine" Forty Seven Forum, 47576 was intended to be named Sir Cecil Parkes (as in Parkeston Quay), but the nameplates were never fitted.

More redolent of enthusiast gossip was the speculation that a Thornaby class 47 was to be painted in London and North Eastern Railway Apple Green and named "Sir Vincent Raven". Plausibility pointed to forthcoming Darlington Centenary Celebrations on June 29, 1987. In the event, such a darker green scheme was applied during October that year to 47522, but with the name "Doncaster Enterprise".

Class 47/4 (Western Region). In May, 1981, a traction round-up predicted with 25% accuracy the reported selection for W.R. class 47s to become 47556 "County of Devon", 47558 "City of Plymouth", 47559 "County of Cornwall" and 47560 "Tamar". Its confidently revised list for the December issue was still 25% adrift, with 47556 again wrongly propose as "Duke of Cornwall".

Class 47/4 (Scottish Region). Even before the initial 12 class 47/4s (to be reclassified 47/7) to be allocated to the Edinburgh - Glasgow push-pull services had been chosen, their names had been selected. All went well for 47701 to 47710, but 47711 and 47712 with the names "William Wallace" and "Prince Charles Edward" respectively were not to be so.

Class 47/7 (Res). During 1997, T D T Collectables announced the sale of nameplates cast but not fitted to members of the Rail express systems 47/4 and 47/7 fleet. Those for 47531 were to have been "Research" and the agents averted them as "never fitted, still in manufacturer's wrapping". I put the apostrophe correctly there; the copywriter's (or printer's) grasp of English being perfunctory to say the least, as in two separate adverts, presumably the same plates were spelled "Resized" and "Reseized". Another of offer was "Resyled". Before moving on, I recall one well-known rail press journalist in a spoof almanac suggesting Res should name an engine "Reservoir Dogs". Other names, beginning "Res", with no chance of being applied would include "Resale" (with E.W.S.R. so reluctant to part with redundant locos) or "Residence Permit" (after EWS has so much trouble getting freight trains to Europe because of Sangatte illegal immigrants).

Class 47/7 (Waterman Railways). Another piece of misinformation was the announcement in the premier steam enthusiasts' magazine that on June 28, 1994, the Lord Mayor would unveil "City of Coventry" nameplates on 47710.

Class 55. One strand of opinion claims Deltic (a class named after either top racehorses or regiments) D9019 should have been named "Cameron Highlander" while, surely, "Alycidon" (D9009), having never won a classic race, may well have "a history".

Class 56. First-of-class 56001 was proposed to honour a pit in South Yorkshire, "Silverwood Colliery", and in 1984 "South Sider" (!?), for neither to be fulfilled.

Class 57. This class of locomotives uses the shell and bogies from class 47s with a reconditioned American engine. Eye-catching class pioneer 57601 has been doing sterling work between the West Country and London, and naming is supposedly on the cards. The Railway Magazine says one of the prime candidates is "Silver Falcon".

Class 58. There already were "Coventry Colliery" nameplates on 58048, but in its first ever nameplate sale, T D T Langdale Collectables advertised a light blueygreen background with lettering in dark blue for "Coventry Colliery" and below it "Coal Investments plc". One wonders why EWS aborted this rebranding.

(To be continued)

ARTICLES ELSEWHERE

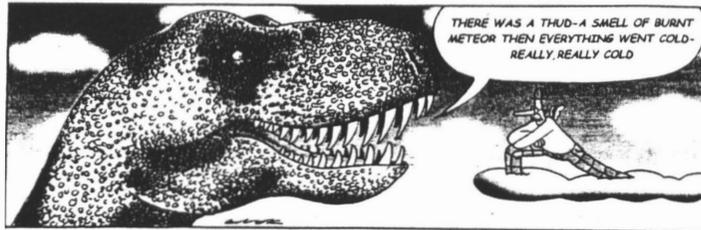
NOT AS IT SEEMS. I heard a rumour a few years ago that a single factory in North-East England specifically makes smaller furniture for show houses. Now the top ten ruses that developes use to make these seem bigger and better than they are have been revealed by oss Clark. These include furniture that is three-quarters normal siz, doors removed to give a show house greater sense of space, mirrors and wallpapers to make rooms look bigger, closed windows to hide outside noise and onesfacing south or with large corner plots. (Sunday Telegraph, 4/3/01)

BEYOND THE PAIL. The conundrum of Jack and Jill going up rather than down the hill for water may, I suggest, go back to Neolithic times when dew ponds were artificially created on high ground. However, an officialwell does lie on Kilmersdon Hill, Somerset, supposed scene of the nursery rhyme enactment. Catherine Milner write that Jack and Jill, according to local legend, were married couple living in the time of Henry VIII. Village children still roll down the hill in a reconstruction of Jack's demise. My gypsy shaman friend Tom Cole claimed all nursery rhymes were coded information on the movement of planetary bodies, so perhaps earth mysticians could check whether on a significant date the sun or moon can be seen to "roll" down the side of this hill, as has been observed elsewhere. Incidentally, Little Jack Homer supposedly lived in the nearby village of Mells. (Sunday Telegraph, 21/3/99)

Amon Cohen found Homer was a treacherous steward of the Abbot of Glastonbury in Henry VIII's time and that the 14th century Ring O' Roses Inn, just outside Holcombe, was moved "after the Black Death apocryphally wiped out all but one resident from its original settlement a mile away." (The Times Weekend, 20/5/00)

PHANTOM GASSERS. I've covered this previously with relation to thefts on continental trains, where the victims heard or saw nothing and police suspected thieves sprayed a gas under the compartment door before robbing the occupants. However, in the latest story (The Times, 8/4/01) a spokesman for Motorail said: "The Transport Police state categorically that there is no evidence to support the claim that gas or any other substance was used during either of the thefts."

Similarly, Inigo Gilmore wrote of a knockout drug produced from burning dried hyenas' tails, this being the latest weapon employed by criminal gangs in Durban, where a recent wave of unusual house-breakins has struck fear into the coastal city's wealthy white suburbs. The criminals use a concoction produced from the animals' tails to smoke out their vicims' houses before ransacking them as the occupants lie unconscious. The gangs are obtaining the tails from unscrupulous witchdoctors who demand high prices for thedried-out hyena body parts. The anaesthetic powers of the animals' body parts, the so-called "secret of the hyena", is a taboo subject among many traditional healers and is shunned by those who follow a strict code of ethics. According to one healer, the hyenas' tail was used during the 19th century Zulu Wars to anaesthetise warriors injured during battles with the British. (Sunday Telegraph, 30/7/00)



NO SING IN FRONT. Prof Lawrence Witmer, of Ohio University, has found dinosaur nostrils have been lowered to just above the mouth, writes Roger Highfield. Unexpectedly there was no furore to his findings from his peers, but museums, artists and film-makers will need to note that many dinosaurs look dramatically different. (D Telegraph, 3/8/01)

SOW SCATTER BRAIN: Harvest festival is not a pagan development but a Victorian innovation, wrote Damian Thompson. It was more or less conjured out of the Cornish air by the poet-parson Robert Stephen Hawker, vicar of Morwenstow from 1834 to 1875. Biographiesof him have been written by the Rev Sabine Baring-Gould and more recently a delightful study by John Michell. (The Times, 23/9/00).

NEWSLINES

PENGUIN TALE FALLS DOWN. It cost £25,000, involved 17 helicopter flights and left 700 king penguins distinctly bemused, but scientists have finally shown that penguins do not topple over while watching low-flying aircraft. Navy pilots in the Falklands had reported the dizzy birds crane their necks so far back that they lose balance and topple over. Wildlife experts, fearing that hundreds of penguins might need to be ppp-picked up, sent a team to the remote South Atlantic island of South Georgia. But after five weeks of criss-crossing king penguin colonies in Lynx choppers, they found the metre-tall birds stayed upright. Richard Stone, of the British Antarctic Survey team, said: "It was just a myth that came out of the Falklands War. Not one penguin fell over, although they did go quiet and some birds walked away form the noise." He added that flights over 1,000ft had "only minor and transitory ecological effects."

The report follows fears that increasing air traffic could be distressing Antarctic wildlife. The team now plans a second studyusing fixed-wing aircraft.

An ex-Navy pilot who served in the Falklands said: "A low-level Harrier jet roaring overhead at 750mph is very different. Penguins just topple over in lines." Pilots were aid to tease birds by flying from side to side, forcing flocks to swivel their heads like ennis spectators. Then, as the planes are flown overhead, the penguins' heads crane backwards and the birds fall over. (The Mirror, 2/2/01; Sun, D Telegraph, 3/2/01)

The following "true" story with similarities predates the penguin teaser and features ostriches. "I work as an air traffic controller for the RAF, and we occasionally get people ringing up to complain about low-flying jets 'going under my washing line' or 'in between my hedges'. One night at work the switchboard lit up with people complaining about nine Tomadoes flying incredibly low. One call in particular has kept the entire fast jet community in stitches for months. A local ostrich farmer called to say the jets were playing havoc with his birds. It's a known fact that ostriches bury their heads in the sand when they sense danger, and they'd been so scared by the jets they's instinctively tried to bury their bonces. Sadly, the flock were standing on concrete at the time, and five had rendered themselves unconscious trying to hide." -- Keith Campbell, RAF Brize Norton (FHM: The Best of Bar Room Jokes and True Stories -- with June 1999 edition)



COLD NIGHT. Far from being the chivalrous hero of popular legend, King Arthur was really a nomadic tribesman from Russia. According to Howard Reid, the story of an Anglo-Saxon warrior who pulled a sword from a stone actually sprang from the histories of the Sarmatians, a barbaric band of soldiers from the Steppes. Mr Reidsaid these skilled cavalrymen fought under the banner of the dragon and worshipped a war god depicted as a naked sword set u right in the ground (Metro North-East, 12/2/01)



IT'S NAVY BLUE. A navy's main computer was sunk -- by thousands of porfilms downloaded by sailors. So much blue material was stored in the electronic command system that it "crashed" and went blank. Contact was lost with the entire fleet of Dutch warships out at sea. Experts had to be called to clear the computer at naval headquarters in Den Helder, on the North Sea coast. Crewmen have been threatened with the boot if they do it again. (The Sun, 25/11/00)

CALL OF THE MOON. New research shows alink between the number of households making telephone calls and the phases of the moon. British Telecom's BTexact research team identified a 29-day cycle in call patters, with a peak in the days before full moon. (The Times, 16/12/00)

'LACED' CIGS. Tobacco companies put chemicals into cigarettes to make them more addictive, campaigners claim. Clive Bates, director of ASH, said: "We have uncovered a scandal." Public Health Minister Tessa Jowell promised a crackdown.

SEX CHANGE! The name of a town called Sexmoan, in the Philippines is being changed -- because local people are fed-up with saucy jokes. (Sun, 15/12/90)

UPDATE

ANIMAL RIGHTS BLUNDERS (FF20: 10-12, FF33:3-5, passim). Stagehands made four lifelike models of horses for a production of Cinderella and leaflets said the carriage to take her to the ball would be pulled by four ponies. A jobsworth health official in Stockport, Greater Manchester, rang the town's Plaza Theatre to check that the nags were being properly fed and stabled. He even asked if the organisers had an animal permit. Panto director Bob Howarth said: "I waited until he had got to the end and told him to look at the leaflet, where it says they are 'magic' ponies. Then he realised." (D Sport, D Telegraph, 30/11/00; Sunday Telegraph, 3/12/00). Meanwhile, TV presenter and columnist Johnny Vaughan's friends at the Washington-based Worldwatch Institute rather doubtfully in my opinion had asked him to clear up a small confusion. In their report, State of the World 2001, they suggested that frogs, toads and newts were a "barometer" of the state of the environment and asked that it be made clear that they were only speaking figuratively. Apparently a number of environmentally-minded readers took them literally and glued amphibians to pieces of mahogany and hung them by their front doors. Needless to say, this has not impressed the RSPCA, nor the poor little blighters who have had to put up with having their tummies flicked every time someone's about to leave the house (Sunday Mirror, 14/1/01). And Customs officers in Melbourne, Australia, quarantined a piece of computer equipment called a TigerCat Dongle -- because they thought it was a tiger's penis (D. Sport, 23/3/01).

LOBSTER'S REVENGE: (FF38:19). Chef Dan Barnes decided to cook lobster thremidor for his sweetheart Vicki Burnettafter she complained he only dished up takeaways. He bought a lobster from a fish market and assumed it was dead, but it clamped his thumb in its claws and sent blood across the kitchen. "I was about to drop the thing in a big pot when it reared into life, snapping its pincers like hedge-cutters," said Dan. He planned on releasing it (Sun, 18/12/00).

SOGGY MOGGIE: (passim). Regrded by some as a bona fide urban legend, but obviously invariably a true event, cats to go for an unintended spin in a washing machine include Harry, of Chester-le-Street, Co Durham. "I could just see his little face behind the door and he was screaming to get out," said Pamela Bulleno. "I tried so hard to open the door but the handle broke." Firemen unscrewed the top of the machine to release the cat (Sunday People, 31/12/00). Meanwhile, a lucky black cat used up a life after being frazzled for half-an-hour in a dryer. Eddie sneaked into the tumble dryer before unsuspecting owner Tina Leary timed it on to the "hot" setting. "He's okay now. I hope this stops his fascination with the tumble dryer," said Tina of Hereford (News of the World, 18/2/01). Eddie also got coverage later when it was reported he curled up on a quilt in Alistair and Tina's dryer and has only a kink in his tail after his ordeal (Sun, 3/3/01).

PELICAN BRIEF: (FF38: 14-15). I had just sent off issue 38 to the printer when I came across a well-illustrated piece about a pelican, nicknamed Pedro, who had taken residence on a garden pond in Barcombe, East Sussex, and upset the resident flock of Canada geese by keeping them off the water. He's also been eating his way through an expensive collection of koi carp. As per usual, he is thought to have escaped from a zoo or collection (D Mirror, 10/11/00).

666 (passim). This is a belter regarding the number 666, the "mark of the Devil". John McKee, headmaster of Charity Church of England School in Faversham, Kent, had apologised to the mother of a 10-year-old boy who was expelled from the school for allegedly disruptive behaviour. As the Western Daily Press noted, the apology came after the boy's mother saw that a photograph of her son appeared to have been defaced with the numbers "666" scrawled across the boy's forehead. The headmaster said staff had not noticed the satanic graffiti until the mother pointed it out. Odd: the photo was pinned up on the wall of the school staffroom (Parish Pump column in Weekend Telegraph, 4/1/97). * Terrified Marcus Vanza, 41, was fined £80 in the Philippines for refusing to display his car's registration number -- because it had the Devil's number, 666 (D Sport, 27/3/01). * Meanwhile, ghostbusters Jane Brackley, 33, and Nick Rivet, 37, consummated their marriage in a cursed car to drive out evil spirits. They married in a pagan wedding in Eastbourne and wanted to round off their day with a spirited performance. So when they heard about Keith Tagliaferro's supernatural Ford Capri, they decided to have their nuptials on the back seat. Keith is convinced the motor, with the number plate ARK 666Y is possessed by an evil spirit. Images of a woman with burning eyes appear in the rear view mirror, his pet goldfish died when a picture of the car was left next to its bowl and when he talked about selling it he was hit by lightning. Medium Jane, of Swanley, Kent, said: "I deal with the spirit world on a daily basis and hopefully we can lighten its mood a bit." (The Sport, 28/8/98)

MARSBARIANNE FAITHFULL (FF19: 3-7, passim). Mars was launching miniature bars as guilt-free snacks for chocoholic women. They have just 38 calories and 1.4g of fat each. This size probably would have fallen out of the office so obviously not used at Redlands during the police bust (The Mirror, 1/11/00).

Our issuely round-up of sex and confectionery reports has elicited:

1) "Most of us are familiar with the tale of Marianne Faithfull putting a Mars Bar to unconventional use while servicing certain members of the Rolling Stones. Less well known is John F. Kennedy's fondness for having his bell-end dipped in beef gravy before being gobbled by a famous blonde actress." (loaded food supplement with April 1995 issue.

2) "This was also the raid which spawned the rumour of Marianne doing interesting things with a Mars bar. Sales rocketed and inspired many a youthful fantasy involving Marianne and a Mars a day helping you work, rest and play. What they lacked in evidence the police made up with juicy detail guaranteed to make Sussex matrons' eyes water." (Richard Stott column, Sunday People, 20/8/00).

3) During a digest of the year 2000's most memorable events, a picture was shown of Anthea Turner and Grant Bovey's nuptial advertising of a new chocolate bar, to which host Angus Deayton made some remark about famous confectionery moments in history and alluded to Ms Faithfull (Goodbye 2000, BBC1, 31/12/00).

4) Previewing the play "Faithfull", whose Glasgow adaptation found Marianne played by Amanda Hurwitz stepping through the blonde icon's back pages, Neil Cooper mused: "But whether we will discover the truth about the drugs bust that allegedly involved a coat and a Mars Bar is another thing" (play, 27/1/01).

5) Same Times mag with Phil Jupitus discussing his cultural life, he referred to Marianne's appearance with him on the TV pop quiz show "Never Mind the Buzzcocks": "... she was lovely, just like my mum. I didn't know anything about her other than an unsubstantiated confectionery-based rumour, but a week later I saw a documentary about her life and was blown away" (play, 6/10/01).

CONDOMANIA (FF17:16-17). Scientist Dr Ron Kekwic, of Birmingham University, has been given almost £50,000 by Durex bosses to develop a new condom to help the thousands who are allergic to rubber. He hopes to create a non-latex johnny with the same properties as the standard version (D Sport, 4/1/01). * A crafty condom manufacturer doubled sales after putting signs in stores in Washington saying "EXTRA LARGE" and "JUMBO" -- even though they come in a standard size in the United States (The Sport, 5/5/98). * Condoms are getting bigger, from 16 to 17cm, because the average size of men's todgers is growing (The Sport, 2/6/98). * Hated sex offenders have taken revenge on fellow convicts at top security Whitemoor jail by dropping a used condom in their custard. The "nonces" who are the only inmates allowed in the kitchens have also urinated, spat and performed sex acts in the food. "Normal" prisoners were refusing to eat prison food (D Star, 3/3/95). * Still on food, veggie lovers welcomed the first cruelty-free condom. The Vegan Society -- which even shuns dairy products -- has given its approval to the first noddies manufactured using no animal derivatives. Traditionally the processing of latex -- used to make condoms -- has involved milk protein (D Sport, 16/4/99).

A jealous wife put pepper into her husband's condom when she found out he had a mistress. Massimo Bacchetti, 27, was rushed to hospital in agony, saying his manhood felt like it had been "stung by a swarm of angry bees." Wife Geni, 24, said: "I found the condom in his pocket. It was obvious he had a bit on the side because I'm on th pill. I decided to teach him a lesson. I put the pepper in and waited for him to get the

hots for his girlfriend." Fisherman Massimo of Pescara, Italy said: "The doctor said it'll be weeks before it heals." (D Star, 11/9/95). * Cruise passenger Naomi Cartegan survived more than 72 hours after falling from a ship in the Caribbean -- by blowing up six condoms and using them as floats. Naomi, 34, from Chicago, was picked up off the British Virgin Islands ... still clinging to the rubbers (The Sort, 7/5/98). * A mystery bidder paid £480 for three 18th century sheep-gut condoms at auction in Oxford. There were several bidders for the condoms which were found in some 18th century documents (D Sport, 16/4/99)

GRAIL QUEST. Colin Grant claimed an exclusive about the mystery of Alisdair Rosslyn Sinclair, whose heart had been mysteriously removed after he allegedly hanged himself while in Israel police custody. The conspiracy-laden piece brought in a power struggle over ancient temples, visits to Rosslyn chapel, Knights Templar, body transplants black market and a holy bloodline (Sunday Post, 14/1/01)



PLAYING SAFE ... 34-24-34 curts Keesley Sedgwick, from Sheffield, has an inflated opinion of condoms

ANORAKNOPHOBIA. (FF25:6-10)

1) Clever arse "The Weakest Link" contestant Chris, an arrogant, know-it-all (got every question right), was asked by Anne Robinson who he disliked. Nerds," he snored, adding "gricers, they're trainspotters." Travelling rail enthusiasts paid part of his wages, him being a former train driver. It was gleeful retribution rather than rough justice, that the two other remaining contestants voted clever clogs off (Channel 2, 24/9/01).

2) Mark Cocker, author of "Birders: Tales of a Tribe" (Jonathan Cape), claims technology is narrowing the margin of error for twitchers. "If we finally achieve what amounts to a guarantee of success, then we will have reduced this wonderful pastime to the mechanistic timetable drudgery of the ultimate anoraks' pursuit -- trainspotting." Reviewing the book, Nicholas Bagnall comments: "One understands his worry about the trainspotting parallel. Birders are given to filling their notebooks with numbers, and the most admired twitcher seems to be the one whose fame rests on having spotted more species in Britain, say, than anyone else." (Sunday Telegraph, 5/8/01)

3) Meanwhile, as the standfirst puts it, "Alan Jackson tracks down the Great Anoraked Twitcher". "The average Joe or Josephine might well reach for the name of another, not unrelated garment -- the anorak -- if seeking to define those who indulge in a hobby which, though fast growing popularity, is still widely thought to be as pointless and unsexy as the spotting of trains. And if not using the a****k word, those non-practitioners who think they know a bit about the subject will offer one other derisive moniker: "Twitchers!" writes prat Jackson (the times magazine, 16/6/01)

4) On his pantheon of paragons, cliched snob Hugh Massingberd writes: "Naturally, I like to believe that my own heroes pictured here or listed overleaf in true 'trainspotter' fashion -- belong to an infinitely more rarefied species than your run-of-the-mill tabloid and telly trash 'celebs' famous for being famous for 15 minutes." (Daily Telegraph weekend, 11/10/01).

5) From the virtuous to villainous. Matthew Williams is an oik and the only person in the U.K. to have been prosecuted for creating a corn circle and was rightfully fined £100 for damaging farmland. He boasts badly: "I'm not saying the aliens don't exist and they haven't made any of the circles -- but I've done a few, with a little help of course. But it's not just trainspotters with anoraks who are fooled -- there's quite a celebrity following too." (Sunday Magazine - News of the World - 4/11/01).

6) Reviewing the album "Compost One Hundred", the 100th release from the German Compost label, Ray Douglas states: These eggheads at Compost cultivate tracks with a trainspotter's attention to detail, creating songs that are as at home in the dining room as in the disco." (play, 30/6/01).

7) Predictably the fate of the planespotters arrested abroad saw the media heap opprobrium on them and unnecessarily rail enthusiasts.

According to Daily Sport, the Deano's World writer crates "the nation's most outspoken column." So, here's what the fearless pundit had to say: "Twelve British plane-spotters have been arrested in Greece and accused of spying. What an absolute bloody disgrace! Now train spotters, that's another thing. Get them sinister fuckers locked up quick-sharp!" (22/11/01).

A milder and more measured response came from Jenny McCartney and Jenny Booth in The Sunday Telegraph: "Spotters hold a peculiar place in the British psyche. From the better-known trainspotter to the rarer planespotter, they attract both ridicule and fascination. What strange force propels them out of the door on icy mornings to jot down numbers from bleak railway platforms and windswept runways? The pastime, once casually derided as the sport of nerds, suddenly felt as British as foot ball or fish and chips." (16/12/01)

8) To accompany a picture of comedian Vic Reeves and blonde girlfriend Nancy Sorrell, creatively imaginative Keith Perry described Vic as "looking more like a nerdy trainspotter than a TV celebrity", adding that "Vic trundled dutifully along with a suitcase and shoulder bag -- presumably containing his Thermos." (Sunday Express, 16/12/01)

9) According to The Scura column in The Mirror, "in the hierarchy of sad pursuits, being a radio ham ranks just below trainspotting. Tottenham Hotspurs' £11m Ukrainian striker Sergei Rebrov revealed he built himself a £10,000VHF transmitter to chat to family and friends back home (22/1/02). Reader John Barker chastised the columnist with the caustic: "To say radio amateurs rank below trainspotters shows that you are either upper crust or lacking in intelligence. To be an amateur, you have to have at least a City and Guilds certificate, which trainspotters don't need.2 (24/1/02). Shor ave not VHF would be needed anyway (30/1/02).

10) In a piece comparing Bob Dylan and Keats, Hannah Betts (The Times, 19/5/01) writes: "With Christopher Ricks as the distinguished exception, too much of the 'Dylan the master poet' school relies upon the establishment of an entirely meaningless system of analogy -- a trainspotter's critique in which this bit of Bob is related to that bit of Eng. Lit., and the entire song is found to be artfully reminiscent of some minor aesthetic moment."

MUSHY PEAS (FF36:3-8; FF38:24). Bumped into my mate Malcolm Foster in Seaton Carew Sportsand Social Club. The Hartlepool Mail had been running stories on Peter Mandelson's visits to wet fish and fish and chips shops in the town. Malcolm took over a number of chippies from his dad Tom. Malcolm told me: "Mandelson went into the Oxford Road shop during his election campaign and my dad recognised him. He mentioned a Daily Telegraph piece about the avocado mousse and mushy peas tale. He took it in good spirit. When he recently came in and ordered a round of nine fish and chips suppers, the girl didn't know who he was and when he preferred a £20 note she put it under the scanner to see if it was counterfeit. I could have died." Malcolm also claimed that the question of which prominent M.P. confused mushy peas with guacamole dip was asked on both television shows Fifteen to One and University Challenge.

His eating habits brought up the avocado dip story again in The Hartlepool Mail, where Mandy was spotted in the local Tesco buying kettle chips. The lass on the till couldn't understand the need for his security men. "It's not like anyone's going to try to stab him in Tesco's is it?" she mused (23/5/01).

Profiling columnist Richard Littlejohn, of the Sun, on the occasion of his first published novel, Nigel Farndale writes: "Today is Tuesday, the day the Sun flies Ronnie Biggs home to Britain, and in his column Littlejohn has written a pungent satire about the return of the 'bandit' Mandelson: 'The notorious prisoner of Rio had been at large and now just wanted to walk into a chip shop in Hartlepool and order a pint of traditional avocado dip.' Bandit? Bandit? Oh, I get it. ARSE bandit. Subtle stuff, Richard. 'Look. You'd call a woman an old slapper. I refuse to be bound by the constraints of the politically correct. I don't recognise their grammar. If it's funny, it's funny. Mandelson is a huge figure of fun. He would like everyone to think he's Machiavelli but actually he's Iago played by Kenneth Williams.'" (Sunday Telegraph Magazine, 27/5/01)

NEWKY BROWN & TEGESTOLOGY: (FF5:3) The A-word was removed from Newcastle Brown Ale as Millenium makeover madness took a distinctly dodgy direction. People resent (image) changes, but there again we North-Easterners call it "Newky Brown" or by other such nicknames as "Dog" ("just taking the dog for a walk", i.e. calling in the pub), "Journey into Space" or "Lunatic's Broth."

Newcastle Brown, Britain's biggest-selling bottled beer was going on draught for the first time in the U.K. (D Sport, 20/9/00), but only in Newcastle upon Tyne, though the draught version has been available overseas for several years. However, I remember it being tried experimentally in The Telstar, Billingham, Teesside, in the mid-Sixties. As a junior reporter there, I recall a lunchtime office outing of investigative proportions to determine its potency and popularity (Pub Spy, Hartlepool Mail, 30/9/00).

My mate Mike Amos, writer in residence, was sent a 1974 set of Scottish & Newcastle dipratts of Larry cartoons advertising Newky Brown (Northern Echo, 5/11/94).



■ Toe-curling beer mats from S&N

Sport - 2nd half

* SAUCY soccer fan Sam Elsey is Portsmouth F.C.'s secret weapon because every time she shags her bloke in the stadium they win. The 18-year-old sturra hassupported her hometown team since she was a toddler, but didn't realise her magic powers until her fella suggested they have a quickie at the start of the season. Sam told the Daily Sport (21/9/00) when she entered its Topless Challenge: "It was 10 minutes before kick-off and my boyfriend suggested we sneak into the loos for a lucky bonk. I took my knickers off and we did it doggie-style. It was really horny knowing there were people stood just feet away and I made a lot of noise. When we walked out all the fans clapped."

Sam added: "We weren't expected to win that day but Portsmouth ended up beating Tranmere two-nil. And what's really spooky is we didn't have sex for the next four matches and we lost them all, but when we did it again -- in the same loo -- we beat Wolves three-one."

OLDIES BUT GOODIES

QUEEN'S BLOW-JOBS. A succinct version of this familiar story goes like this: Bride-to-be Rita Ros promised boyfriend Kurt Fiel to dance only with him at a fancy dress ball in Berlin. He as dressed as Batman -- as were nine other men. Rita danced with seven and had sex with three, thinking they were Kurt (D Sport, 14/8/01)

Doyen of folklorists Jan Harold Brunvand gives it four pages in "Curses! Broiled Again!" (W W Norton, 1989). He called it "Mistaken Identities" and also noted it is often claimed to be real. On the following page is just such a claim (D Sport, 2/1/02). Also on the page is the familiar elvied electric shock tale claimed as true (The Best of Bar Room Tales and True Stories, froo with June 1999 FHM)

STRADDLED. Reviewing Hugh Massingberd's book "Daydream Believer", Peregrine Worstome says in Hugh's hands even old chestnuts sizzle. "After a manic trip to Ireland to interview Lady Cusack-Smith, the doyenne of the Galway Blazers, I felt overcome by tiredness and depression. Not even the gamey old bawd's confirmation, over four dozen oysters, of the story of her celebrated exchange with her groom ('The old horse is sweating up a bit, Lady Mollie'; 'So would you be, my man, if you'd been between my legs for six hours') could cheer me up." (Mail on Sunday, 9/12/01)

HOME REVENGES. Another oldie attaches to former Daily Express editor Rosie Boycott regarding her previous home in Bayswater "which became rather smelly after a writer she had sacked hid fish fingers behind her bath panelling" (Mandrake column, Sunday Telegraph, 17/6/01). Jilted girlfriend Janet Mason, 25, entered her ex's flat in New York when he was on holiday and scattered cress and mustard seeds over carpets, upholstery and bedding. Then she watered the place and when the owner returned he found his flat looking like a spring meadow (D Sport, 12/12/01). For this one see also FF:27).

BOFFINS' BLUNDER. Experts spent three months and \$1m studying a "dinosaur egg" in New Mexico -- and then discovered it was cow's gallstone (D Sport, 19/6/01)

OH, SHIT! A thief had a nasty shock when he tried to siphon fuel from a mobile home in Kappel, Denmark. He stuck a hose into what he thought was the petrol tank, sucked, and found he had tapped into the sewage tank by mistake (D Sport, 6/9/01)

FINGER LICKIN' RODENT. Richard Stainton, reviewing his local Kentucky Fried Chicken branch, recalled: Back in my schooldays there was a common urban myth about the Kentucky Fried Rat. Like most urban myths it had usually happened to the best friend's cousin of the person telling it, and was obviously a complete pack of lies. According to this myth, some insane rodent had managed to coat itself completely in breadcrumbs before jumping into a deep fat fryer, ready to be served to the unsuspecting brother's best friend's aunt's sister. For added effect the uncle's girlfriend's postman's vicar's second cousin twice removed would only realise that they were eating a rat when the lights suddenly came on at the cinema. The reason I mention this rubbish is because some people still seem to have a very negative view of KFC's finger lickin' poultry products. They say Kentucky is greasy, tacky, overpriced, and worst of all American." (Hartlepool Mail, 17/3/01)

KNOCKOUT VIEW. New York boxer John Murray, 20, was disqualified after he took off his robe in the ring -- and then found out he'd forgotten his shorts (D Sport, 8/1/01)

DODGY TRANSMISSIONS. A TV controller in Minnesota, USA, hit the wrong switch and treated viewers of a religious channel to six minutes of hardcore porn. Only three viewers complained -- two of whom said the movie wasn't long enough (D Sport, 11/4/01). Instead of seeing a video about dinosaurs, children at a school in Wisconsin got an eyeful of naked couples having sex when the machine was turned on. After watching a porn movie during his break, the caretaker had neglected to replace it with the right programme (D Sport, 2/5/01)

JEALOUS GUY. A killer who busted out of jail in Barcelona, Spain, rang a radio station threatening to murder his wife's lover. Within an hour 15 men had walked into police HQ seeking protection (D Sport, 7/12/01)

MARATHON SURVILLANCE. Cops arrested two girls for nude sunbathing on a beach at Apollo Bay, Australia. A sergeant and two constables told a court, which fined the girls 50 each, that they had watched the girls through binoculars for six days to make sure they were breaking the law (D Sport, 15/3/01)

A WIFE dressed as Queen Elizabeth I gave blow-jobs to five blokes dressed as Satan at a fancy dress party.

Rita Shepherd was so drunk

that she sucked off four strangers before she got to hubby Eric -- who's now divorced her.

Rita, 31, and 33-year-old Eric planned to slip out of the party into the garden so she could give him his favourite sexual treat.

But things started to go wrong when Eric went straight from work dressed to kill as the Devil -- which meant that Rita did not see him donning his costume.

Unfortunately, there were seven other men at the party dressed as Satan, complete with mask and cloak.

Rita, who had been enjoying the booze, could not distinguish between them, and took four out into the garden to give them blow-jobs before she finally got to hubby Eric.

Judge

In a divorce court in Sydney, Australia, Judge Antony Mitchell asked: "Surely you realised the men were not your husband before you started having sex with them?"

Rita shook her head. "No, my lord," she replied.

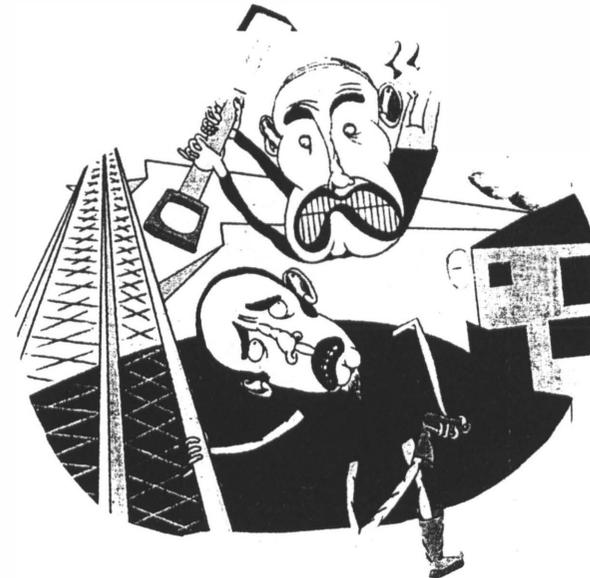
"It was not until they spoke to thank me for giving them oral."

"You were married for six years," responded the judge. "Could you not tell your own husband's genitals by touch in the darkness?"

"I did think it was somewhat smaller than usual, my lord," exclaimed Rita.

"My husband is very well-endowed."

★ A MAN in Daytona, Florida, has changed his phone number from 54321 because people keep ringing him up and shouting: "Blast off!" when he answers and says his number.



BROWN SAUCE. Mark Edmonds looked at the golden days of champagne socialism, "Labour isn't drinking", and ended with this anecdote those of my generation will recall about Foreign Secretary George Brown, stories of whom used to circulate Whitehall widely, and the euphemism "tired and emotional" was dreamed up by the BBC especially for him, claimed Edmonds, although I'm sure the phrase was coined by someone at Private Eye. Edmonds' favourite revolves around a diplomatic function in London. Brown had probably enjoyed one too many glasses of champers when he spotted a well-upholstered figure dressed in purple on the other side of the room. He made abeline for her, waling slightly unsteadily across the room. At that point, the band started up again. "May I have this waltz?" "Certainly not," was the reply. "Why?" demanded the Foreign Secretary. "Because," came the answer, "you are drunk. This is a foxtrot. And I am the Cardinal Archbishop of Lima." (D Telegraph, 2/6/01)

IT SUCKS! Door-to-door salesman Hans Friel had his nose broken by a furious housewife after dumping a huge bag of dirt over her carpet in Berlin to demonstrate a vacuum cleaner -- only to discover it wouldn't work (D Sport, 11/4/01)

WHAT A WAY TO GO. Charles Morris died of a heart attack at his 103rd birthday party in Dallas when the stripper he requested took off her knickers (D Sport, 11/4/01)

PG SICK. Pierre Berton, 33, hid in a bush grunting like a pig for a joke during a wild boar hunt near Limoges, France. Then his brother shot him (D Sport, 12/4/01)

COCK UP. A surgeon is suing a patient for the return of a seven-inch mechanical penis after the man refused to pay for it. He claimed the device operated every time his neighbours in Recife, Brazil, used their TV remote control (16/1/02)

CHER'S EASY. I've seen this before regarding Lulu without it registering as a media myth. An Australian newspaper asked readers to name a picture of a top American female singer -- and to send their entries to the CHER Competition (D Sport, 23/11/01)

MICE TREAT. Eluigi Carly, 66, who hates banks and stored his money in an old mattress in his cellar, went to check on his life savings in Teramo, Italy, and discovered that mice had scooped the lot (D Sport, 28/6/01)

VICE SHOCK. Businessman Stanislaw Kania went to a brothel in Dresden, Germany, to find that the woman he was offered was his wife Gretchen (D Sport, 6/9/01)

WAKE-UP CALL. Dozy Ken Barger, 47, shot himself dead when he mistook his Smith and Wesson revolver for the phone as he put it to his ear to answer an early morning call at his house in Newton, North Carolina (Sun, D Mirror, D Sport, 8/7/93)

FALLING IN LOVE. A couple making love in a car parked near a clifftop plunged to their death in Genoa, Italy -- because he left the handbrake off (Sun, 4/8/93)



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COUNTRY MATTERS In addition to a Leicestershire Panther Watch co-ordinator claiming "we are on the verge of getting urban panthers," Paul Harris covered other exotic releases/escapees. Peter Heathcote, chief executive of the Reptil Trust, was quoted as saying: "There is a plague of iguanas in the UK. In Tyne & Wear, at Lamesley one was spotted basking in a tree and in nearby Berton one startled residents by walking down a street of terraced houses. In St Austell, Cornwall, 4ft-long Spike did a runner and his escape was cause for concern by police as he was believed to have an unusually aggressive reaction to menstruating women, whose hormones he could detect. (The Observer, 3/9/00; credit Dr A S L Rae)

PROTO-LEGENDS

COMBAT Z Z Z ZONE. My proto-legends choices, of necessity really, are as modern as they come. However, I'm including a dubious tale from the days of the gory Roman empire. This comes from "Gladiators" by Micheal Grant (Penguin): "The emperors' staffs were active in the commercial traffic of buying and selling gladiators, and Caligula, who personally conducted auctions of properties fallen vacant through executions or other causes, made very profitable sales. Some of the people obliged to attend these auctions were forced by the irresistible pressures of imperial salesmanship into bankruptcy or suicide. A less catastrophic but still inconvenient shock awaited Aponius Satuminus, who on one such occasion fell asleep. Caligula 'warned the auctioneer to keep an eye on the senator who kept nodding his head. Before the bidding ended, Aponius had unwittingly bought 13 gladiators for a total of 90,000 gold pieces."

CIGS CYNICISM. Columnist Nigel Farndale, musing on New Year resolutions, recounted someone telling him that tobacco companies allocate 45% of their annual marketing budgets to advertising in the month of February. "Surely this is an urban myth. Can they really be that cruel and calculating?" he asks (Sunday Telegraph Magazine, 13/1/02)

PEER RAGE. Richard Stainton's TV column (Hartlepool Mail, 23/3/01) began: Four years ago, at a newspaper I used to work for, there was an article about an exhibition by aristocratic photographer Lord Lichfield. A slightly less aristocratic photographer from the newspaper took a few ordinary pictures of him, but then had the bright idea of asking him to pose with a red nose, as it was that Comic Relief time of year. Being game for a laugh, Lord Lichfield said yes. The next day, the news editor saw this picture and thought it was so great that he immediately told a reporter to write a story around the red nose angle. The reporter duly obliged and wrote a story beginning: "Good Lord what a red nose you have!" Unfortunately these words went in the paper alongside a picture of Lord Lichfield without the plastic nose, which was tantamount in calling him a sad old drunk. The editor must have had a fit.

CORRIGENDA: A diarist (Sunday Telegraph, 7/1/01) sets the record straight like this: Some weeks ago, I recounted the story of Pte Henry Tandey VC, who in 1940, claimed that he had spared the life of an injured German corporal -- only to discover years later that the corporal was Adolf Hitler. I am grateful to Lt-Col Neil McIntosh MBE, of the Green Howards, who has thoroughly investigated the story, for pointing out that it has no basis in reality. Tandey apparently made his claim after having his Coventry home destroyed by the Luftwaffe.

LIFTING THE SPIRIT. Pretty Joan Dawkin, 23, walks naked around her late uncle's home to give his ghost a thrill. Barry Green left her the house in Cooperville, Kansas, on condition she strips once a week and parades around naked for an hour. (D Sport, 8/3/01)

J.D. RECLUSIVE. Miramax's can-do boss Harvey Weinstein, hankering after film rights to The Catcher in the Rye, eventually roars at a subordinate: "just you get me in a room with this Salinger guy and I'll talk him round." (flyleaf column, D Telegraph, 31/3/01)

CUFF LINKS. A bondage sex session backfired when a vice girl could not find the keys to her handcuffs. She called the Fire Department in Cooperville, Kansas, and firemen fell about laughing when they saw her naked client handcuffed to a bed. He was their off-duty fire chief (D Sport, 30/4/01)

WAVE GOODBYE. An armed robber fled from a bar in Connecticut when he heard the bell on a microwave and thought it was a security alarm (D Sport, 11/4/01)

OLD SPICE. Judith Mitchell, 70, was told to buy a Spice Girls Christmas gift for her grandchild in Sevenoaks, Kent -- but got a cookery book called Spicy Grills (Sun, 28/12/96)

WHAT AN ASS. A woman who wanted to bathe in ass's milk like Cleopatra stole a donkey from a field in Laristra, Greece. It was not until she got it home and tried to milk it that she found it was a male (D Sport, 7/2/01)

EXPERT ADVICE. Asked to find the best way of saving money for his city council in Mannheim, Germany, £2,000-a-month efficiency expert Hans Kubler, 41, replied as a joke "Sack me." They did! (D Sport, 25/9/00)

DOES MY BUM LOOK ... ? Colombian drug-traffickers are allegedly smuggling cocaine in breast and buttock implants. One gang blew the near perfect crime when they overloaded a female accomplice's posterior. A police spokesman said the woman was apprehended "after officers noticed her unusually large buttocks." (The Times, 14/7/01). Strange, I thought big arses were a South American speciality -- as with The Mirror apologising for describing Jennifer Lopez's posterior as pert (I think they were joking, actually).

NO INCENTIVE. A computer company offered holidays in America to sales staff who achieved 93% of their selling target. And if they got 100% they could take their wives, too. But the German firm had to switch the offer because too many employees were deliberately stopping at the 93% mark (D Sport, 5/1/01)

DEAD END JOB. A proof-reader at a New York publishing firm sat dead at his desk in an open-plan office for five days. The company said: "He was always absorbed in his work, the first in and the last to leave, so no-one noticed anything unusual." (Sunday Telegraph, 14/1/01)

BLACKBACKS. An unemployed printer was quickly caught for forging dollar bills in San Francisco because he used black ink instead of green. Cops discovered he was colour-blind (D Sport, 1/6/01)

ARAKNOPHOBIA. Remember David Bowie's creation Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars? Actually, I'm not sure this qualifies here or is simply plain daft. Apparently a 23-year-old woman claims aliens entered her home in Rio de Janeiro but fled when they spotted a spider in her bedroom (D Sport, 20/7/01)

CRYSTAL BALLOCKS. Psychic Paula Hoseford lost her special powers when a plank of wood fell on her head in a DIY store in Austin, Texas. She sued for substantial damages, claiming she had been robbed of her livelihood by the negligence of the store, but bosses denied responsibility, saying that Hoseford as a psychic, should have foreseen that a plank was going to hit her on the head. The judge agreed with them -- and dismissed the case (D Sport, 12/1/01)

VERY CHRISTIAN. Motorist Richard Scruby jumped out of his car at traffic lights in Cooperville, Kansas, and hit a woman's car several times with a baseball bat -- after she blew her horn at him repeatedly for six miles because his bumper sticker said: "Honk If You Love Jesus." (D Sport, 5/9/01). Is it just coincidence that the earlier bondage item occurred in the same place or is Cooperville inserted as an in-joke, perhaps?

HOLD THE FRONT PAGE! On the subject of newspapers, the one in the sleepy town of Imogene, Iowa, published a headline reading IMOGENE ZOO CLOSES. Underneath was a three-word story: The chicken died (D Sport, 4/9/01)

SIZE MATTERS. The Midgets Society of Stockholm held a protest in the city centre -- demanding girlie magazines be put on lower shelves in shops (D Sport, 8/10/01)

HEADBANGER. A demolition worker in Detroit, who tried to commit suicide by swallowing nitroglycerine tablets, was treated in hospital for bruises to his head and body after he repeatedly hurled himself against a wall in an unsuccessful bid to ignite the explosives (D Sport, 13/4/01)

BOOKS

WE BORROW THE EARTH: An intimate portrait of the Gypsy Shamanic Tradition and Culture by Patrick Jasper Lee (Thorsons, £9.99).

I can identify with and believe the author, having spent much time in the company of an English gypsy shaman during the Seventies.

Tom Cole sought me out after discovering a terrestrial zodiac through the omen of a ligh. Another blinding zapping while sheltering in a wartime bunker on a Channel Islands beach seems to have given him his extraordinary powers. Driving down from his home in N.W. Durham to Seaton Carew, he and I and our wives witnessed an earthlight which followed us and on another occasion we stopped at a powerful earth energy stone in Hart where he initiated me.

Lee claims gypsies are the living practitioners of Britain's own shamanic tradition, the inheritors of a deeply enriching and healing craft which combines power, passion, light-heartedness and strong elements of magic and sorcery. This craft is always practised in accordance with our ancient natural laws and the Earth's natural cycles.

This book reveals the inner Romani shamanic path through the experiences and knowledge of one of the few remaining chovihanos (gypsy shaman) still practising in Britain. Drawing on his personal experience and the story of his lineage, Patrick Lee explores the history and culture of his people and their knowledge of ancient arts of healing prophecy.

Actually, Tom did an astrological chart for me and predicted I would die aged 53 abroad. I'm now 55, but during my 53rd year I forgone my annual holiday in Portugal, just in case.

Lee goes in great depth into gypsy ways such as fusiness over food and healthy diet, which made me recall Tom's excitement that a company for the first time was marketing packages of muesli -- of which he approved as it saved so much time from creating it himself. Similarly the author relates the convenience of evaporated milk his mother swore by. Visiting Yarm fair I watched gypsies baking a hedgehog in clay -- a great delicacy.

As for the gypsy respect for plants, Tom's wife Sharon collected herbs and there were large bottles of these on shelves. Similarly Tom made wine and on visits we would drink the wine of the astrological month.

Folk medicine was also important, and Lee gives accounts. My experience is a reminder of an evening Tom arrived unexpectedly when I was ill and he had sensed this and came especially to see me and assure me I would be cured immediately -- I was.

Many pages are given over to the importance of trees and of two articles he wrote for my The Ley Hunter magazine, the second was on gypsy language and the tree alphabet. He also planted saplings on a site and claimed to have halted plans for an industrial development.

Lee also discusses the role of ancestors and the pros and cons of whether shamanism can be modernised.

The book claims to be the first account by a Romany to write about his race's inner traditions. Written to preserve the ancient customs and lift the curse on his family for settling into non-gypsy ways. He runs a healing retreat centre in Devon.

* Paul Screeton's "The Wizard of Stanley" appeared in his The Shaman magazine, issues 8 and 9, 1984.

NEW COSMIC CRYSTALS by R. A. Bonewitz & Lilian Verner-Bowds (Thorsons, £12.99)

Arguably the saddest bastard on this planet is Darwinist supporter Richard Dawkins, whose "missing chapter" on alleged crystal fantasists from On Weaving the Rainbow: Science, Delusion and the Appetite for Wonder (Penguin) has been published. Actually "missing chapter" as The Sunday Telegraph (18/10/98) sub-editor puts it is skewed as the author says that this is what it would have been like if he had thought of it in time. Perhaps with more thought he would have had the nous to use a dictionary of spellcheck and not written "homeopathy" rather than the correct spelling "homoeopathy". Never trust a person who is dyslexic. He might appear clever on the surface, but in reality he's a complete nurdish pompous cunt.

Sady the folk he berates are pretty much usually in the same category, which says a lot for his beloved evolution theory. Most New Agers I would call cranks, but the use of crystal by the megalith builders and the modern Damanhurians' building a temple in a mountain and cutting into mylonite is not fantasy.

This book by is one on a subject for which I've had reservations. He's blunt and practical: "So, how do crystals 'heal'? The answer is simple: They don't". This follows a castigation of Charles Darwin whose "survival of the fittest" farce is answered by the reality that species survive by co-operation, which is much more common.

Bonewitz also states that 90% of channelled information is garbage and also emphasises the importance of realising the geometry of crystals. O. K. it's a self-discovery book and readers will know I'm generally sceptical about such fare. I reckon Bonewitz is too, and near the end he advises readers who aren't happy with past life regression to shut the book at that point. I did, but the rest is sensible in a world where the likes of damnable dozy Dawkins exist.

THE QUEST FOR THE GREEN MAN by John Matthews (Godsfield, £17.99)

I don't pretend to know much about the mysterious green man figure; only that it seems a contentious issue whenever it raises its foliage-intwined head.

Being ignorant of the opposing arguments - pagan? or Christian? and so on -- I can only offer an opinion of this book on what I see.

Basically the author claims the green man as our main archetype of the male connection to nature, who appears in many guises in many cultures, though I'm not so sure he is, as claimed here, powerfully connected to our supposedly deepening concerns over the environment.

If you can strip away the New Age aspects of the book, there is a wealth of interesting material and excellent illustrations.

MAGAZINES

LETTERS TO AMBROSE MERTON. Q. Folklore miscellany. £7.50 for 4. Payable to David Comwell, Psychology Section, Dept. of Educational Studies, University of Strathclyde, Jordanhill Campus, 76 Southbrae Drive, Glasgow G13 1PP. No. 25. Twenty-two pages devoted to Indian Anglophone urban, culturally hybrid, orally-transmitted folk material including someone mistakenly eating potato chips which are a Bombay baby's leprosy scabs. Also photographic soccer copyright; Nessie; text messaging; business malpractice; baby's sex not linked to mother's shape. No. 26. Chain letter variations; Paul Screeton on moral indignation cases of snowmen, Bob the Builder and public embarrassment, plus separately a recycled battered beer mat tabloids saga; George Bush-isms; mix-up of B F Skinner's devices; execution myths; Nike sweatshops; fate of coolies. Cuttings and reviews.

FORTEAN TIMES. Newsstand. £2.70. No. 147. Temporal lobe epilepsy, Philip K Dick and "outsider" writers and artists; Nigel Watson on fatal UFO encounters; extra-dimensional derizens; Edinburgh ghost hunt; the life of Jean Rhys; cautionary tale about a self-styled paranormal investigator; Ian Sinclair interview. No. 148. True-believers to debunkers with all shades between (concludes 149); penis-stealing panics; narco-hypnotic manipulation of U.S. pin-up Candy Jones; ex-U.S.S.R. odious religio-political extremists; U.S. ufology; alchemy; Utah conspiracy; Antarctica mapped without ice (challenged 149). No. 149. UBTs on knock-out perfumes, drugged mammaries and HIV-infected needles; unconvincing Pokemon panic as mass hysteria; conspiracy theorists; UFOs. No. 150. Scratching Fanny (titter ye not, it's a serious poltergeist case in, er, Cock Lane); occult writer's descent into madness and suicide; primitive artist from janitor and his encrypted script; mimic octopus with 15 disguises (pity Chas Darwin isn't around to comment on this); spooky Aussie site; psychologists and the paranormal; new Nessie photos; anthropologists fall out. No. 151. Belief and disbelief which allows for transient anomalies such as yeti and UFOs; the Peruvian Ica or Cabrera stones allegedly showing dinosaurs and man pre-existing revisited (pity there was no reference to England's similar Great Wyrley carved stones mystery; U.S. Noetic Institute; Mary Celeste; extraordinary gluttons; firewalking; ghost hunt; worthy but dull Irish mariner monks' adventures; Baalbek. No. 152. Satanic ritual abuse exposed; Peak District 'UFOs'; barmy Holy Land archaeology; crop circles; Sept. 11; Rendlesham furor was a tractor?; bizarre but believable piece on electronic voice phenomena. No. 153. Paul Devereuxon haunted highways; sonic warfare weapons sounded out; hollow earth believers of the 18th century; Vietnam fantasists. No. 154. Papua New Guinea pteranodon prehistoric reptile reports; Norwegian Nessie; Darwinists in ideological tussle; sandstorm panics; Grand Canyon "lost" underground city (reminiscent of today's Damanhurians' formerly secret hidden subterranean home; Minorca megaliths; Japanese cults. No. 155. 2001 weirdness index; Jack the Ripper prime suspects; seal people (see also FF31:3/4; conspiracies; shape-shifters; "displaced" cryptids; fat felids. Plus each issue: reviews, readers' letters and irreverent diarist.

MAGONIA. Q. £5. Cheques payable to John Rimmer. Address: John Dee Cottage, 5 James Terrace, Mortlake Churchyard, London SW14 8HB. No. 75. David Clarke & Andy Roberts, after personal interviews, conclude the famous Darbshire and Birch UFO photos were both faked; hoaxing at Warminster 30 years ago; author Ann Drueffel defends herself against columnist. No. 76. Over the years I've published several articles by Tony 'Doc' Shiels and here Gareth Medway does, on the surface a good job of torpedoing Shiels' veracity as a monster raiser, but there's more to Doc than he can appreciate, though the demolition job on vampire hunter Sean Manchester is probably on sounder ground and deserved; myth of blond aliens living on Friendship Island, southern Chile; touching innocence of late Sixties ufology (his name was Dunkin -- not Duncan -- Wedd and his tree was not larch but Scots pine). Regular features being back page diary, letters and reviews.

NORTHERN UFO NEWS. 5 issues for £5. Payable to 'NUFON'. Address: 1 Hallsteads Close, Dove Holes, Buxton, Derbyshire, SK17 8BS. No. 186. Editor Jenny Randles on the state of U.K. UFO groups; how age affects passage of time perception. Far more than usual UFO reports. Regular book reviews and articles elsewhere.

THE REGIONALIST. A journal for European regional diversity, radical traditionalism and authentic renovation. Sporadic publication of The Library of the European Tradition. Price unknown. From N. C. Pennick, P.O. Box 238, Cambridge, CB3 8WD. No. 1. Nigel begins with an introduction to the tenets of regionalism and radical traditionalism. Acts as a catalogue of publications. Plus short reviews.

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