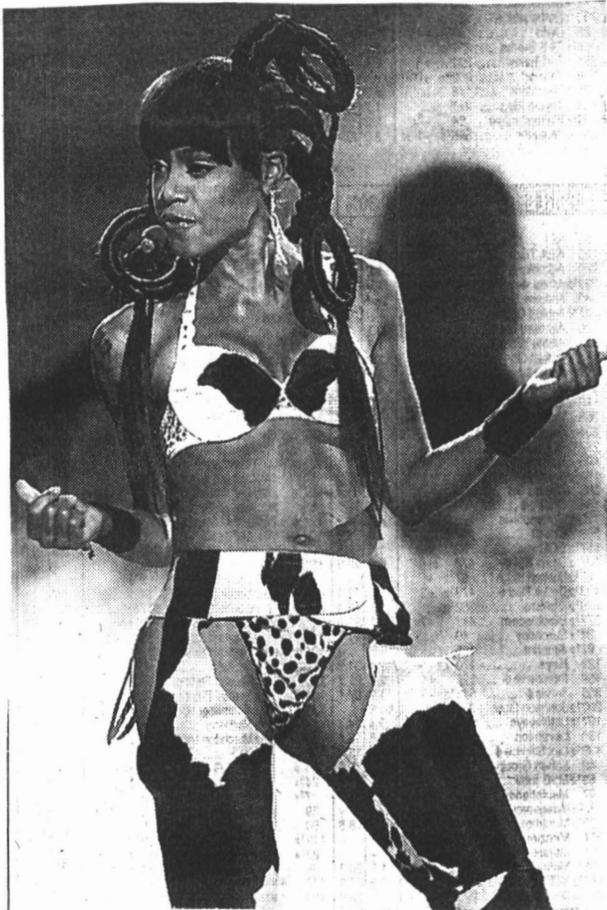


Folklore Frontiers



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THE DIARY

Lisa 'Left Eye' Lopes: What a nickname!

STRANGER than her death was the confusion over how singer Lisa 'Left Eye' Lopes (pictured on cover) came by her odd nickname.

Lisa, one of the chart-topping trio TLC, died while on holiday or on a charity mission -- take your pick -- in Jutiapa or La Ceiba, Honduras, Central America.

Thirty-year-old Lisa, who recorded the No. 1 single "Never Be The Same Again" with Mel 'Sporty Spice' Chisholm two years ago, was with five/six/eight other passengers who were only slightly/some seriously injured.

After massive hits with "Waterfalls", "No Scrubbs" and "Unpretty", the band was declared bankrupt, blaming flawed record contracts. They are still the highest-selling girl group in pop history.

But what of Lisa's optical nickname?

How people acquire nicknames is legitimate folklore; made more potent for pop stars when there is so much dispute over how many bands' names were created.

As for Lisa, here's the variants (all from April 27, 2002, sources).

* Daily Mail had alternatives: "The singer claimed to have got her nickname after a man told her that her left eye was more beautiful than her right. But friends said it was because she suffered a lazy eye as a child."

* The Sun stuck with the admirer: "Lisa got her bizarre nickname after a man who chatted her up told her that her left eye was more beautiful than her right eye."

* Daily Mirror had a sex angle: "Lisa was nicknamed Left Eye for sticking condoms under that eye to promote safe sex."

* The Times ran an obituary following the conrception angle: "Her nickname arose from her habit of replacing a spectacle lens with a condom."

* The Times expanded, no pun intended, on the theme in the news columns: "Lopes, whose nickname 'Left Eye' came from her habit of replacing one lens of her glasses with a condom during performances as part of a safe sex message."

* Daily Telegraph reported that in interviews, Lisa answered the question as to her nickname's origin, saying only: "Cause the eye is right."

I've also suffered a squinting lazy eye problem all my life, but my nicknames have ranged from 'Squeaker' and 'P'Nogg' to 'The Sponge' and 'Ginger Nuts.'

Series of Dreams

THERE was a piece in that day's (14/6/02) Daily Sport about men's nightmares, in which battle axe Christine Hamilton came No. 1 ahead of M.P. Ann Widdecombe, "Weakest Link" presenter Anne Robinson and "EastEnders" horror job Pat Butcher.

Previously not a dreamer of celebrities (except about 15 years ago Jenny Agutter), at 12.30am (15/6/02) I awoke after dreaming of Anne Robinson, seen almost in darkness, reviewing a stage play centred upon a tape recorder and when she commented that after sequences from the past, the characters in the present were not developed any further. A film of the play was available, she commented, adding that oddly it only filled half the film spool.

Later dreams that night followed the usual patterns of being back at the Hartlepool Mail after five years' retirement (often dead and living ex-colleagues appeared together), where my endeavours towards meeting a deadline were being hindered; another had my late parents and here I chose to ignore them (often such dreams involve some sort of row); a dream with my granddaughter (these usually involve my efforts at tidiness being thwarted to my chagrin) dog attack and its owner threatening me (I awoke in fright); lastly attending a Mail employee I didn't know's leaving do where I ordered from a barman while squeezed by two people I loathed (I awoke without receiving my pint).

But why synchronous Anne Robinson? Did the Daily Sport piece trigger this? I normally watch "Weakest Link" while having my tea, but tennis had replaced it that day. However, the last thing I read before turning in was a lengthy interview with writer Jilly Cooper, who mentioned that among her fellow Cotswoldian friends was Anne Robinson.

To put the nightmares article in perspective, Tesco carried out the survey of 1,000 men and women (or maybe just made it up, seeing it is so predictable) in a bid to discover the nation's sleeping habits.

For women, the No. 1 nightmare figure is ageing nightclub king Peter Stringfellow, while other females figure, including model Jordan and singers Kylie Minogue and Britney Spears. Men also dreamt of Cherie Blair, Jo Brand, Sarah Ferguson, Ruby Wax, Geri Halliwell and Vanessa Feltz. For women the selection was complete by Richard Branson, Marilyn Manson, Eamonn Holmes, Chris Evans and Richard Madeley.

Judith Robinson (anyration?), of Tesco Pharmacy, said: "Sleeplessness is the single greatest source of anxiety to our customers."

Big Jimmy

THE Legionnaires' outbreak in Barrow-in-Furness marked the first anniversary of the death from the disease of an acquaintance of mine.

Jimmy Harrison, 44, a shot-blaster and former sea-coal gatherer, died at the University Hospital of Hartlepool on Sunday, August 5 after almost a month on a life-support system.

That night I awakened suddenly from a nightmare in which I confronted a group of young shoplifters who attacked me. I awoke and sat bolt upright.

Ahead of me was a figure -- wide of girth, small of head, its back to me. The dark shape turned and headed for the door and vanished.

This was in the middle of the night, so was not hypnogogic or hypnopompic. Nor a Hufford "hag".

Three options crossed my mind before I regained slumber.

1) It was some after-image of the nasty dream.

2) I had been visited by the spirit of Big Jimmy. Ghostlore is rampant with alleged accounts of the departed making a visit to relations, loved ones or others upon death. Not that he and I were much more than nodding acquaintances in the pubs of Seaton Carew and Hartlepool, though we had a conversation about the pros and cons of the council's attitude to sea-coaling in the Marine Hotel, Seaton Carew, shortly before his demise.

3) Having written a booklet on the archaic "Celtic" heads found at Hexham, Northumberland, and having two eerie examples from there in the house (one of which my then young son said spoke to him -- in the manner of Bran's severed head which chatted to his mates as they feasted) could it have been a wulver (a mythical half-man half-beast creature encountered most recently in Celtic scholar Anne Ross's Southampton home)?

Monday lunchtime I went for a drink in the Marine and as I entered, a brickie I know only as Mattie put his hand on my shoulder.

"I've got bad news, Paul," he said sadly.

"It's Jimmy," I blurted. "What time?"

For my sins, I hoped he'd say "in the middle of the night", but Big Jimmy had passed away around noon the previous day. I was tempted to relate my dream, but shied away.

Now may be the time to air my experience. Make of it what you will. These are the unadorned facts.

AND HERE'S TO YOU MRS ROBINSON

POLICE from North Wales had a nice all-expenses-paid day out in London to interview BBC Director General Greg Dyke after the Beeb repeated that Room 101 show where Anne Robinson had a go at the Welsh (most media 1/8/02)

On the first occasion there were 427 complaints; figures for the repeat (not shown in Wales) are unknown to me.

Anyway, a caravan holiday at Ffrith (between Rhyl and Prestatyn) turned me off N. Wales. Trainspotting forays in S. Wales included being told to "fuck off" when I put my money on a pub pool table to play the winner in Newport-on-Usk. Charming!

Then last year I ventured into the Engineers Arms, nowadays Newport City. The bar had a sign on the door announcing it as THE ANNE ROBINSON SUITE. The locals seemed placid and as I quaffed my Hancock's in the spirit of friendliness I said to the landlord that his sign suggested he and his clientele had a sense of humour. Oh dear, one patron was not happy with Anne's insulting but surely frivolous comments and came out with some venomous language. At least the others were amused and friendly enough.

Even Tory Welsh Assembly spokesman Glyn Davies, who called for an official anti-Anne Robinson week, regarded the police move as "political correctness gone mad".

We middle-aged ginger whingers have a lot to answer for.

Sea-coaling: A Burning Issue

By Paul Screeton

As a lover of anecdotes, I here pass on a couple involving past Hartlepool Mail (for whom this was written but never published) employees.

Firstly, a member of that well-known Seatonian dynasty the Cowleys, Charles, was quite happy to regale colleagues with how one day he took his bike on to the beach and filled his sack to the brim. However, it was a humbler citizen who had to show him how to balance his booty on the bike.

He was then editor of the Northern Daily Mail and went on to become editor-in-chief of the Sunderland Echo, Hartlepool Mail and Express series.

Later on, Hartlepool Mail trainee photographer Graham Whitley was despatched in his first few days to snap some sea-coaling activity to accompany an article on the subject.

Approaching a lorry and its half-dozen or so co-opted gatherers, he was left askance as they ran in all directions, some even into the sea.

Perhaps it was the camera being trained upon them and they felt shy or unphotogenic.

Or maybe they recognised him from a few days previously still being employed by the Department of Health and Social Security.

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THE BURNING ISSUE of sea-coaling at Hartlepool has been well and truly raked over and a solution of some sorts could be on the cards.

Commonsense has prevailed in that banning the gathering of this beach harvest would be impractical and nigh on impossible to enforce.

However, the introduction of a licensing system proposed by Hartlepool councillors looks rather futile.

Members of the sea-coaling fraternity will not take kindly to form-filling, official scrutiny and regulatory measures.

They will guard jealously their independence and any form of prohibition will be fought or more likely scornfully ignored.

In an echo of domestic disputes, it seems the police want nothing to do with enforcing implausible council by-laws, and frankly they surely have more pressing duties.

Despite certain readers' letters claiming environmental damage, speeding and dangerous vehicles, plus the argument that what the tide deposits, the following tide will remove, it is more likely that sea-coalers are providing a free and valuable service.

If they were not there, someone else would have to clean the beaches: either employed council labourers or community service miscreants.

I don't suppose it's much fun to be awakened in the middle of the night by heavy lorries thundering past or their headlights shining in windows and stopping residents sleeping.

Unfortunately a 3am tide waiteth for no man, and it is when the tide is out that the sea-coalers work.

To do the job you have to be ultra-fit and I bet your average general practitioner with sea-coal collectors on his panel is not inundated with their sniffles or any minor complaint, or hospital beds packed with them.

Work? They know what graft is: in all weathers, at all hours.

But this article is not centrally an apology or endorsement of a breed I have the greatest respect for.

I want to examine the erroneous argument that nature will sort out the South-East Durham and Tees Bay sea-coal problem.

Fundamentally, is the sea-coal a finite resource?

When the waste tipped from such coastal collieries as Dawdon, Vane Tempest, Easington, Horden and Blackhall is gathered in, will that be the end of the problem?

The Northumberland and Durham coalfield is formed of an exposed area, where opencast workings still exist in production, to coal deep below a formation of magnesian limestone.

At Horden pit, for instance, the coal seam was 1,000 feet down and older readers will recall the National Coal Board drilling rig which bored to find where the concealed coalfield extended.

This offshore drilling proved that large reserves of coal exist, estimated in the early Seventies at more than 550 million tons and workable up to four miles out to sea.

Examining books such as the schools textbook "North East England", by J E Waltham and W D Homes, one is given the impression that underwater coal descends downwards the farther it extends out to sea.

Yet, is this true?

The argument for supporting the sea-coalers is boosted by a fellow investigator into mysterious events.

My colonial friend Dwight Whalen was looking through old copies of The Constitutional, a newspaper published in St Catherine's, Canada, and in the edition for January 9, 1898, found a news item headlined "Extraordinary Eruption of Coal."

Readers in the Dominion were told that the beach between West Hartlepool and Seaton Carew had been "metamorphosed to a great extent into a coalfield."

In the convoluted prose of the day, comparing this with the previous year's harvest of Spanish coins from a wreck, the correspondent stated: "The scene on Wednesday week was far more interesting, and the upheaving of such an amount of one of the most important necessities of life by the angry ocean will be productive of much more benefit and comfort to the poor of the neighbourhood."

It was reckoned there was 1,000 tons of coal and that this caused the throng on the beach to present "a most animated appearance." It seems almost every cart in the town was requisitioned to move the coal. On the banks adjoining the railway heaps were raised, some of them containing from ten to 15 tons.

The poorer inhabitants apparently had to make do with barrows, sacks and baskets.

We are talking about 1898 here, and it would seem impossible to associate this prodigious tidal feat upon spoil tipping up the coast.

For instance, work only began on shaft sinking at Horden in 1900.

There is another radical explanation which challenges the orthodox belief that the creation of coal, oil and gas is derived from the fossil remnants of living organisms from the Carboniferous era.

What if sea-coal is one of the products of constant upwelling of carbon-based compounds trapped deep underground since the formation of our planet 4.5 billion years ago?

Barmy?

The theory's proponent is not some crank, but Thomas Gold, of Cornell University, whose track record includes such astronomical developments as the Steady State theory of the universe and the discovery of pulsars.

Gold claims that carbon-based fuels like coal are far older than we think and such compounds as methane could well up and turn into coal and oil on the way.

His theory also implies fossil fuels are actually still being created beneath our feet.

Astute readers might object by citing fossil plants sometimes found in coal prove it biological origin.

On the contrary, if coal really is formed from the compression of stuff like plants, why should whole leaves occasionally survive intact? Indeed, finding leaf fossils in coal deposits is like finding a whole tomato in a tin of puree and insisting it proves the puree was made in a liquidiser.

According to Gold's theory these fossils are simply the remnants of plants that were caught up in upwelling carbon fluids.

Gold has drilled oil from granite: the equivalent of getting blood from a stone!

Perhaps our vision of coal-making-swamps is as out of touch as the antediluvian view that tides will solve the sea-coal problem.

From the literal to the metaphorical, surely the tide of opinion has changed and it is time to give sea-coalers the freedom of the beaches

(Continued from FF 40)

Rumours of Names

By PAUL SCREETON

Class 59/2. National Power's super-power 59s were all to be named after vales, but the theme fell short when the last delivered loco, 59206, was instead named "Pride of Ferrybridge" after its home depot. The three 'vale of ...' nameplates manufactured but never fitted to 59206 were then offered for sale by Lynnwood Collectables. Each purchaser would also receive free a full set of N.P. promotional items.

Class 60. Undoubtedly the most confusing and protracted series of namings and non-namings applies to the class 60s. By the second locomotive off the production line, 60002, a cardinal rule was already broken – proper Christian names, no nicknames, and no titles. So what did we get? The landscape gardener Lancelot Brown appeared as "Capability Brown", admittedly in the manner in which he's best known.

Originally Railfreight sought to establish a single theme and allocate names which would be fitted prior to delivery. A staff competition provided "Steadfast" for the class leader and it was envisaged the 60s would become known as the "Steadfast" class. No way!

To retain coherence, a group of seven managers were convened to formulate how the theme could best be forwarded. Firstly a number of categories were selected which expressed the broad aim, including scientists, inventors, innovators and social reformers, though some argued that a modern fleet should not be peppered with the names of long-deceased individuals.

There was certainly not a consensus.

Construction sector bosses, whose upgraded Hither Green depot was to receive 12 of the first 20 locos, were keen to revive military aircraft types. This would commemorate the Battle of Britain and restore a railway tradition previously expressed with names applied to Bulleid steam Light Pacifics. The list included earlier aircraft such as Meteor, Gladiator, Whirlwind and Typhoon, while modern examples were Tomado, Phantom, Buccaneer and Lightning. Guidelines calling for avoidance of warfare references shot this plan out of the sky.

Eventually, perhaps in exasperation and definitely not inspiration, a long list appeared of mountains and natural prominences, many not so high and plenty totally obscure. I suppose you need to be steadfast to tackle such peaks.

Early in the production run names were being allocated ahead of completion, with the first deviation from the directive being 60010 "Plynlimon" becoming bi-lingual with "Pumlimon" above "Plynlimon".

For 60032, the name "William Bramwell Booth" was allocated, but a sharp-eyed Brush (the builders at Loughborough) employee upon seeing the cast nameplates queried why the son of the Salvation Army founder was being honoured instead of the father. "William Booth" plates were hastily substituted.

Another substitution at this time -- in fact a sex change -- was the name "Elizabeth Fry" for 60024 instead of "Charles Babbage", whose plates went eventually to 60054, 60035 became the second female class 60, "Florence Nightingale", in place of "Snowdon" and 60037 failed to become "Blencathra", both peak names disappearing altogether from the list; doubtless the former as there already was a class 86/2 so named.

By July, 1990, name allocation had reached the end of the series at 60100, with the exceptions of 60050/64/65/85, where subsequently 60064 and 60065 were allocated "Sam Fay" and "Edward Watkin", both past railway company directors but short lived on the list. 60064 became "Black Tor", but at one time this name and "Black Tor" were allocated to it concurrently. There were also numerous swappings around of names, with deviations to the list concerning 60080/81/82/83/92/93/94/95/96/97/98/99/100.

During this confusing process the name "Pen-y-Fan" lost its hyphens to "Pen y Fan" and was eventually dropped, as were the names "The Old Man of Coniston", "Hay Tor", "Dovestone", "Elidr Fawr", "Tremadog" (actually a tiny village) and "Bleaklow Head" became "Bleaklow Hill."

When it came to the final locomotive of the class, British Rail chairman Sir Robert Reid (the one who saved the railways from Serpell's report) was asked if he would agree to it being named after him. Always modest, he declined.

As we have seen in practice, many names have disappeared under E.W.S. ownership and some businesses have been promoted by renamings. When 60038 was repainted into Loadhaul sector colours, it was speculated that it was likely to be named "Total Oil GB Ltd" but was not.

Class 73. Among the nameplates for which T D T Collectables was acting as E.W.S. agents was a red-backed "Mary Rose." Unaccountably this was once destined to adorn a class 73 electro-diesel, being named after King Henry VIII's restored flagship.

Class 86/2. At a time when a return to naming locomotives was gathering impetus, British Rail's London Midland Region plunged in with a list for A.C. electric locomotives 86204-86227, beginning with cities and ending with revivals of names carried by famous engines of the London and North Western, Liverpool and Manchester, and Bolton and Leigh Railways. The only hiccup was an early realisation that "Proud Preston" was not a city, so it became "Preston Guild" and 86227 never broke the surface as "Lady of the Lake."

In 1979, two more sets of name themes were made public. Those between 86231 and 86240 would be named after notable people and 86241 to 86250 would bear the names of Scottish clans. The Scottish family theme fell by the wayside, if it ever was a serious consideration.

Then when 86241 was named "Glenfiddich", after the world-renowned malt whisky, it was announced a further nine members would be named after glens (while in reality this was not to be, not even a Glenn Huddle among them).

A set of "Lord Stamp" nameplates were cast in 1984, but never used and the name was applied later to electric loco 90007, but with appalling "tin" nameplates. In 1999, a nameplate briefly carried by 86258, "Ben Nevis", sold for £385 in a Birmingham Railwayana Telephone Auction, and the fact that the plate was only carried for two weeks in 1981 no doubt accounted for its lower than usual price.

Worth a class footnote was the rumoured disrobing of "Clothes Show Live" nameplates in 1997 to have its original "Fury" name reapplied.

Class 90. Call me an old cynic, but 35 years in journalism left me distinctly jaundiced when great charmer and Virgin Railways boss, Richard Branson, straight-facedly claimed at 90002's renaming that the new name "Mission: Impossible" would be the first of a series to mark the links between railways and films. Branson announced at the unveiling of the new name that West Coast had the intention of renaming its loco fleet after feature films which had a railway connection. One commentator stated that at least six names were in the pipeline and "Mission: Impossible" was chosen at the last moment. Surely it would be realistic to assume "Mission: Impossible" was a deliberate one-off and reflected the challenge facing Virgin to turn around the fortunes of services on the West Coast Main Line and we won't see 90s named "Buster" or "Trainspotting."

The notion was floated in 1990 that Railfreight Distribution was to name its entire class 90 fleet beginning with the "Ben Line" plates removed from 47457: a false dawn.

Class 91. In addition to the themes listed earlier in this article, at the end of 1998 a "well-known personalities" addition was under consideration; presumably feisty contemporary celebrities rather than foisty historical characters. However, we've just got David Livigstone rather than David Beckham. When 91028 was named "Peterborough Cathedral", GNR announced other heritage sites, cities, counties and famous personalities would be commemorated and the list included "Bonnie Prince Charlie" -- not so far applied (and announced in GNER's own Livewire August/September freebie magazine).

Class 92. Named after notable Europeans, one of the class has never carried a name in service, although 92031 had the nomination "Schiller" applied inside the Brush factory.

Unknown. A single nameplate, "Tren y Dur", was offered by T D T Langdale Collectable.

Anyone any idea which E.W.S. constituent company had proposed this name?

Despite having attempted to make this list as comprehensive as possible, I'm sure a few missing examples will be noted by fanatically erudite enthusiasts. This information is as correct as possible at July 22, 2002.

Steam Era Winners and Losers

THE allocation of names never to see the light of day is not new to the modern traction era.

For instance, the London and North Eastern Railway naming committee, when proposing names of horses which won one or more of the classic races, obviously though better of some of their selection for what became the A3 class.

Ubsurprisingly "Common" was replaced by hardly better "Manna" while "April the Fifth", "Caligula" and "Bend Or" all fell, so to speak, at the first hurdle. "Rock Sand" was initially passed over for "St Simon" and in a later batch was discarded in favour of "Blenheim." "Robert le Diable" was Anglicised to "Robert the Devil."

The London Midland and Scottish Railway may or may not at one time have affixed "Queen's Edinburgh" nameplates to 5155, and in the preservation period another "Black 5", 44767, was rumoured to receive "Cecil J. Allen" plates, but in the eventuality became "George Stephenson."

The L.N.E.R. "unnamed streak", W1 class 60700, was I heard as a spotter during the Fifties to be named either "Sir Winston Churchill" or, being appropriately allocated to Doncaster, "Sir Gordon Richards."

Mis-spellings

AFTER all the selection process and cases where for one reason or another a name is never applied, another peril awaits the unwary sponsor -- mis-spelling.

Probably the earliest diesel era example of not checking the dictionary concerns Western class D1029. Between July 1964 and September 1967 it carried the name "Western Legionnaire" until changed to "Western Legionaire" -- shurely shome mishtake; well at least according to "The Complete BR Diesel & Electric Locomotive Directory", compiled by Coli J. Marsden. This is the man who in an article claimed all class 31s sported cab roof mounted headcode boxes, ignoring several which through a production shortage never carried them and were nicknamed "skinheads" as opposed to the majority "gargoyles". Seeing as the correct spelling is "Legionnaire", doubtless Marsden got it wrong, as elsewhere in his book.

Similarly dyslexic high-speed train power car 43092 had "Highland Chieftan" corrected to "Highland Chieftain."

A minor matter, perhaps, but before being renamed "Ashford", class 92 electric 92030 carried the name of a Spaniard, Manuel de Falla, with the name "De Falla" wrongly having a capital "D" instead of lower case "d".

There were several opportunities for mis-spelling class 60 names and lists issued did so. "Humphry Davy" had both words with an "e" before the "y" and "James Clerk-Maxwell" was just begging for error. Nevertheless, it was 60088 which received "Buachaille Etive More" plates in 1991 and two years later manufacturers David Newton was asked for replacement ones with the final "e" missing (couldn't someone have ground it off "more" easily?!).

Steam age mis-spellings are just too numerous to mention.



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ARTICLES ELSEWHERE

** THE article reproduced on pages 10/11 carried the headline -- "E-mails that changed the world . . . and some MAY even be true (News of the World, 10/2/02); the "petrol chump" reality (?) comes from The Sun of the previous day!

** For sheer thoroughness let's commend (The Times, 17/8/02) for even publishing in full the lengthy junk e-mail peddled unwittingly by Paul Toseland, Corby Business Anti-Crime Network Administrator. P.C. Toseland's e-mail, headed "Message from Northamptonshire Police", gave a warning of a woman who had been calling on homes claiming that her car had broken down and asking to call her husband. Her fictitious five-minute conversation costs the bill-payer £250. As David Rowan's excellent article points out: "Students of urban legends would have seen the warning signs: the lack of detail about the victims, little description for the woman, the combination of breathless anecdote and official police report." Also the highest tariff charged in Britain is £1.50 a minute, rather than £500.

** UNDER the headline "Freedom fighter Mary!" (D. Sport, 19/8/02) the late porn movie star Mary Millington is claimed to have had a kinky sex session with a P.M. "Author Simon Sheridan in 'The Life and Times of Mary Millington' claimed Harold Wilson paid for sex with Mary at Edinburgh's five-star North Briton Hotel. Sheridan claims: 'He insisted on binding her wrists and ankles and gagging her before taking her from behind. It was normally the kind of sex she enjoyed but he was the highest-profile client she had ever entertained.' Pals of Mary say she often entertained people after dinner with the intimate tale.' And here's me thinking all wily Wilson was was a Russian spy.



** THE book which kindled my interest in all things Fortean and essentially the remainder of my interests (apart from girls, tainspotting and psychology) was "The Dawn of Magic" by Louis Puwels and Jacques Bergier (Panther, 1967). One of its subjects was the discovery of miniature figures in tiny coffins on Edinburgh's Arthur's Seat in 1836. The coffins have now been suggested by curators to be burial substitutes for bodysnatchers' Burke and Hare's 17 victims, sold for dissection by anatomy lecturers. The remaining eight and pocket book made from Burke's skin were to form part of an exhibition of the dead (Scotland on Sunday, 2/7/02, cr.: Dr A S L Rae)

** I WONDER if the following is a report of the Glen Lyon figures. Columnist Crigie (Dundee Courier, 14/4/00, cr.: Dr A S L Rae) had a correspondent who claimed that garden gnomes are the successors to household gods and guardian spirits, while another reminded him of "a strange custom which may still be practised in a remote Breadalbane glen." He writes: "In his book 'Magic Mountains', Rennie McOwan describes visiting a miniature shieling just big enough to contain stones representing a man, his wife and five children. The people who used to come to the summer shielings always brought the stones out at the start of the season and put them away again in the autumn. Latterly the custom was kept up by a hill stalker. The stones were looked after very carefully because they were believed to bring good fortune to the people when they were living in the shielings. The father stone was called the Bodach (old man) and the mother was the Cailleach (old woman). They were an odd shape, having been taken apparently from a river bed. Rennie McOwan tells how he had great difficulty finding the site. It would be possible to pass it by and not notice it."

OLDIES BUT GOODIES

PRAWNOGRAPHY. Last issue (Home Revenges, p13) is back with: Mr Cadett also had a long-running feud with the then office manager, Mr Barker, and eventually unscrewed his telephone and inserted a prawn, before taking a long holiday. When Mr Cadett returned, there was a terrible decomposing stench, only solved when the telephone-cleaning lady arrived and said to Mr Barker: "Ah, Monsieur. Vous avez une crevette." (Kate Muircolumn, the times magazine, 16/2/02)

(Cont. Page 12)

THEY arrive in offices by e-mail and spread like wildfire — astonishing 'reports' that are soon regarded as fact because "so many people have heard about them they must be true".

Here are some of the most bizarre that have spread around the globe. They can't all be untrue, can they?

■ **"FORENSIC** scientists removed a row of seats from a London Tube train carriage for analysis. This is what was found on the fabric:

"Four types of hair sample (human, mouse, rat, dog); seven types of insect (mostly fleas, mostly alive); vomit from at least nine separate people; urine from at least four people; rodent excrement.

Wipe

"When the seats were taken apart, they found the remains of six mice, the remains of two large rats and one previously unidentified fungus.

"Smoking five cigarettes a day is estimated to be healthier than travelling for one hour a day on these seats. It is also marginally more hygienic to wipe your hand on the inside of a recently flushed toilet bowl before eating, than to wipe the fabric."

Sounds worryingly convincing? Try this horrifying warning letter that was circulated by e-mail...

■ **"Dear Friends.** I wish to warn you about a new crime ring targeting business travellers. The crime begins when a business traveller is offered a drink by a stranger. The traveller wakes in a hotel room bath tub, their body submerged in water. There is a note taped to the wall instructing them not to

EXCLUSIVE

BY RICKY SUTTON

move and to call 999. A phone is on a table within reach of the bath-tub. The victim calls 999. The operator, familiar with this crime, says, 'Move slowly. You'll feel a tube protruding from your lower back? Don't remove

it. The paramedics are on their way'. The operator knows that both of the traveller's kidneys have been harvested."

Then there's the e-mail about the frogman in the forest fire...

■ **"Authorities** in California found a corpse in a burnt-out section of forest. The deceased male was dressed in a full wetsuit with dive tank, flippers and face mask.

Scoop

"A post-mortem examination revealed the person died not from burns but from massive internal injuries.

"Investigators then set about determining how a fully-clad diver ended up in the middle of a forest fire.

"It was revealed that, on the day of the fire, the person went for a diving trip off the coast.

"Meanwhile, firefighters on land called in a fleet of helicopters with very large buckets. The buckets were dropped into the ocean for filling, then flown to the forest fire and emptied.

The diver was scooped up and dropped from 300m. Apparently, he extinguished 1.78m (5ft 10ins) of the fire.

■ **HAVE you received a scary—or hilarious—e-mail? Forward them to ricky.sutton@news-of-the-world.co.uk**



A CATTLEMAN in the US mid-West bought a pair of boots. On the way home, says an e-mail, he got out of his car to check a tyre. He was bitten below the knee by a rattlesnake and died.

Some days later his son, seeing dad's virtually unworn boots, tried them on. He died a few hours later. Because the boots were still almost new they passed to a cousin. He died too and a small scratch was noticed on his leg.

The rattlesnake's fang had lodged in the boot lining. After that e-mail thousands of Americans checked their shoes!

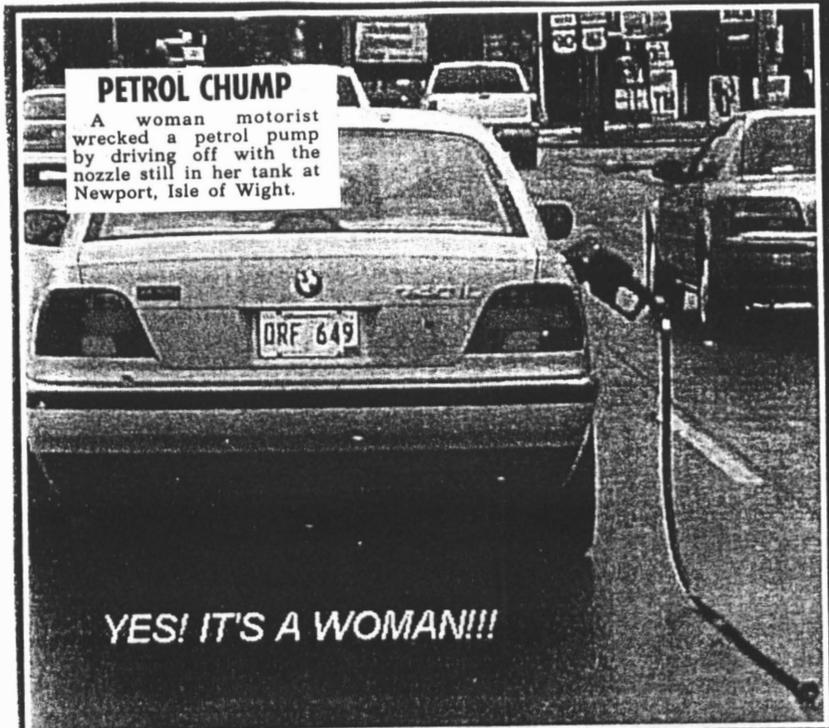


DAYS after the September 11 Twin Towers outrage a widely received e-mail stated: "My wife was in a shop this morning. In front of her was an Arabic-looking man who didn't have quite enough change for what he was buying.

"My wife was in a hurry, so she told the assistant, 'Don't worry, add it to my bill'.

"The man thanked her and left the shop but waited for her outside. 'You have done me a kindness', he told her. 'Now I will do one for you. Do not get on a plane tomorrow'."

Many cancelled their flights.



IT'S A MAN THING

Grossly unfair anti-women drivers' website has motorist apparently leaving filling station with part of it still attached



OSAMA BERT LADEN

Osama supporters march with a poster printed off the net, not realising it contains an image of Sesame Street's Bert

WHAT A GAS! hapless Robert Walshe, 47, changed his mind while trying to gas himself, lit a ciggie and blew up his house! A court in Calgary, Canada, fined him £250 for misusing gas. (D. Sport, 11/3/02)

BATTY! A husband tied up his naked wife for a sex game, put on a Batman costume -- and then knocked himself out on the ceiling as he bounced up and down on their bed in Los Angeles. (D. Sport, 28/3/02)

JUST REWARD. A mugger who snatched a handbag from an 86-year-old woman at Netley Abbey, Hants., ended up with a pooper-scoop and a plastic carrier bag full of dog dirt. (The Mirror, 23/2/02)

EVER OBEDIENT. A North Lynn couple they took a table and four chairs from outside a town centre cafe because there was a sign in the window saying 'Take away'. (Peterborough column, D. Telegraph, 27/4/02, from Lynn News)

JAIL'S A DEAD FLOSS. I recall this from way back and it may have appeared as a proto-legend. A prisoner sawed his way out of jail -- with a piece of dental floss. Scott Brimble, 30, used floss and abrasive toothpaste to weaken wire mesh at an exercise yard at Okanogan County Jail in Washington State, U.S. Brimble, who was jailed for failing to register as a sex offender, was allowed to use the yard after complaining of claustrophobia. (The Sun, 27/4/02)

MORE RUBBISH. Last issue (It sucks!, page 15) this tale moves on from Berlin to Melbourne where salesman Charlie Smith was beaten up by a furious housewife when he dumped a bag of dirt over her new carpet and the vacuum cleaner he was selling didn't work. (D. Sport, 8/5/02)

CANNONBALLS. The man who fires the 1pm cannon at Edinburgh Castle every day told The Scurra column about the curiosity of American tourists. Tam "The Gun" McKay, who has performed the ritual for 24 years, says: "When I told one that the castle dated back to the 11th century, she asked: 'Why did you build it so close to the railway line?'" (D. Mirror, 9/5/02). Last time I saw this the question asked by a Windsor Castle visitor was why was it built so close to Heathrow Airport.

FUTURISTIC. A meeting of members of the Clairvoyants' Association of Ireland was cancelled at the last moment -- "due to unforeseen circumstances". (D. Sport, 27/5/02)

FORGETTABLE. Usually, it's a male motorist whose wife goes for a pee and he leaves her behind at a motorway services station. A recent development on this theme is claimed as true (though it is dated April 1 in The Mirror). Judge for yourself whether a couple left their 12-year-old son behind at a motorway service station -- and drove 35 miles without noticing. The boy got out to play on his skateboard when they stopped and his parents, from Harrogate, Yorks., did not spot him chasing the car, waving and shouting as they left. Peter Croot, 17, who works at Rownhams services on the M27 in Hants., said: "After about 45 minutes the car pulled up again and the mother asked, 'Did we leave our son here?' She seemed a little embarrassed."

COOLIDGE EFFECT. This must surely be an "oldie" though I'd not come across it before. Apparently men's deire for sexual variety was named "the Coolidge effect" after the former U.S. President Calvin Coolidge. During a visit to a farm in 1976, the President and his wife were taken off on separate tours. When Mrs Coolidge passed the chicken pens, she allegedly asked if the rooster copulated more than once each day. "Dozens of times," was the answer. "Please tell that to the President," she requested. When the President passed the same pens and was told about the rooster, he asked: "Same hen every time?" "Oh no, Mr President, a different one each time," came the answer. The President nodded slowly. "Tell that to Mrs Coolidge." (D. Mirror, 30/5/02)

BROWNE OFF. This has graced this column previously, but as they say, the old ones are the best ones. "Even dear old George Brown, Harold Wilson's permanently pissed Foreign Secretary, was not such a bad thing for Britain. Yes, he often made an ass of himself. (How we all laughed at the story, probably apocryphal, of the time when he approached a figure in magnificent purple dress at a reception, and asked for a dance. 'There are three reasons why I will not dance with you,' came the reply. 'One, you are very drunk. Two, they are playing my national anthem. And three, I am the Cardinal Archbishop of Lima.')" (D. Telegraph, 20/7/02)

UPDATE

ANORAKNOPHOBIA (FF25:6-10 passim). THAT media cretin James Whale is never slow to insult, and the planespotter in Greece had him mounting his soapbox. "I've always thought planespotter, like trainspotter, was a bizarre pastime. I pass the occasional anorak standing at the station with his camera and tape recorder at the ready. And the thought that springs immediatly to my mind is that they should be locked up. But, you know, the Greeks decided to follow this through seriously -- as far as those rather sad planespotter were concerned - I couldn't believe it." (D. Sort, 1/5/02)

** REFERRING to the official naming ceremony of Virgin passenger loco 47847 receiving a plate inscribed Railway World Magazine, the editor of a fanzine (Forty Seven Forum, No. 25, 2001/02) commented: "Incidentally if you've seen Railway World recently you'll have been astonished to see some columns written by a man who thinks that people who actually like diesel locos such as 47847 ... are all mentally ill and go around doing Hitler salutes!" A condensed version of the article by Neil Howard, focussing on Asperger's syndrome, entitled "Inside the head of a trainspotter", appeared in a rail industry tabloid (RailStaff, May, 2002) where its "humour" included the advice to gricers: "Check your trousers for telltale marks of leakage and get them cleaned. 'I know who the real wanker is, you tosser Neil."

** REVIEWING "Broken Rails" -- which wrongly argues privatisation wrecked our railways -- Martin Vander Weyer says author Christian Wolmar "deserves to be saluted as Britain's top trainspotter", which doubtless made the (undeservedly) award-winning transport correspondent wince (D. Telegraph, 24/11/01)

** MEANWHILE "anorak" was the solution to the coffee-break quickie crossword clue "trainspotter's coat?" (The Mirror, 15/4/02)

** FOLLOWED the next day by "new" Cassandra column's: "The past. The days when so much was rotten, but at last the railway timetables wereworth the paper they were printed on ... We should not forget the past altogether now we're living in the future. But let's stop revering it so. Let's give up the useless trainspotterish, British habit of glorying in old timetables."

** IDIOT Cassandra was back with his irrational hatred of rail enthusiasts during a rant about the British National Party: "They thrive on being hated and feared. What they loathe what sends them sobbing to their box room to rip up their treasured Hitler pictures and rededicate their life to trainspotting is being laughed at." Great syntax, too! (Daily Mirror, 29/4/02)

** OR try: "It's absolutely nothing to do with bespectacled nerds in anoraks standing on station platforms, but "Trainspotting" (Film Four, 10pm) is unmissable ..." (D. Sport, 29/4/02)

** EVEN the upmarket play section (The Times, 13/4/02) is in on the act, reviewing Pina's L.P. "Quick Look" with "Woodstock generation trainspotter's will be overjoyed to note that Austrian-born Pina Kollars not only looks like Melanie"

DUBIOUS TRANSMISSIONS (FF22:6/7 passim). HOSPITAL patients were teated to an X-rated tonic when German porn popped up on their bedside TVs. A cock-up with the satellite receiver led to late-night viewers receiving the saucy show. A spokeswoman for Lister Hospital, Stevenage, Herts., said: "We were shocked to hear that adult material was received on patients' bedside television. The service is run by a franchise on behalf of the trust. We are assured that the German channel, which showed the adult material, was a test broadcast." (D. Sport, 8/2/02).

TATTOO COCK-UPS (FF33:1&15 passim). A subject gathering momentum since first spotted. For a good and seemingly true cock-up here's a pop music example.

* MELANIE BLATT might want to have a serious word with her tattooist. On her right arm she sports a tattoo of a musical staff with notes sitting on it. A staff has five horizontal lines with four spaces in between. Blatt's has six lines and five spaces. Oh well, you can't blame the former All Saint. Shaznay Lewis wrote most of their self-penned hits (The Mirror, 22/2/02)

** MORE embarrassing is the true tale of Lee Becks (18), who thought the dramatic Oriental characters he had done at the Tattoo Studio, Southend-on-Sea, Essex, spelled out the inspirational message "Love, Honour, Obey." But he became worried when his £90 skin art raised sniggers at the local chop suey takeaway. Now he's horrified -- after Oxford University scholar Shio-yun Kan confirmed the design actually means: "At the end of the day what an ugly man." He's now saving for £600 laser treatment to have the design removed. (D. Sport, 2002)

** MEANWHILE, at Manchester United they've been having a laugh about Daid Beckham's decision to have a number seven tattooed on his arm. "He's furious," says one wag. "He told the tattooist he wanted Sven ..." (The Scurra column, D. Mirror, 19/4/02)

** ROBBER Donald Green (28), had to show his belly in Cooperville, Kansas, to prove he was the man who robbed a restaurant with his shirt pulled up over his face. On his belly was a tattoo of Mickey Mouse doing something rude with a melon. (D. Sport, 26/2/02)

** DESPERATE Jose Mazeino (31), from Mexico City, cut off his left arm with a chainsaw after his lover threatened to leave if he didn't get rid of a tattoo of an ex-girlfriend's name (D. Sport, 27/2/02)



"I love tattoos on men like to read in bed."

** A TATTOOIST is planning a second attempt at the longest-ever tattoo session after a 21-hour visit proved too much for customer Paul Spier. Dave Banfield's record attempt was postponed when Paul, from Huddersfield, went into shock. The bid still managed to raise £1,200 for charity.

** RADIO host Russ Willcox had a stream of complaints after saying on Severn Sound FM's breakfast show that women with tattoos are tarts. One girl went to the station to show him her "tasteful" tattoo on her lower back (D. Sport, 3/4/02)

** MARMITE addict Russ Tuck (36), of Ulverston, Cumbria, has had the jar logo of the yeast treat tattooed on his arm (Daily Mirror, 3/6/02)

BOOZE 'N' BOOBS (FF30:4-7). Kalgoolie, in Australia, is regarded as a latterday Sodom/Gomorrah, a Wild West frontier town, full of booze, blokes and brothels. Sports girls -- who wear bikinis and full briefs -- earn around \$30 an hour while skimpiers are paid \$10 extra because they show more flesh, wearing a see-through sarong to beat a local by-law. Up until November, 2000, skimpiers could play a game called "heads and tails" where if a man flipped a coin and won girls would whip off their bras and go topless for ten minutes or so -- the skimpiers keeping the coins. When cops outlawed it, a toned-down version was organised where a jug is passed around the bar and, if they raise enough money, the girls will change into a sheer top which shows their nipples, albeit through a thin layer of material (The Mirror, 5/2/02)



** MEANWHILE, two girl cops were reprimanded after flashing their breasts to get free beer in a Florida bar (Sun, 2/4/02), while Mayor Koleen Brooks (37), was sacked for flashing her boobs in a bar in Georgetown, Colorado (Sun, 4/4/02)



"No, it's not a topless bar, I've just got nothing to wear."

** OBJECTS HUNG IN TREES (FF27). Latest case has Aborigines being reminded to have safe sex using free condoms hung on trees by health chiefs in the Fitzroy Valley, Western Australia (Sun, The Mirror, 22/3/02)

** PRETTY ORIGINAL I wrote about flamingoes (FF38:14/15), and they were in the news when bird experts used mirrors to encourage nine flamingoes to mate (D. Star, Sun, 12/3/02; D. Sport, 18/3/02) The birds are reluctant to have sex in small groups, so bosses at Flamingo Park, in Seaview, Isle of Wight, have installed mirrors to trick them into believing that they are in the security of a larger flock.

PROTO-LEGENDS

GREAT BALLS OF FIRE: Despite quoting surgeon Dr Jam Kristensen and naming Kjellerup Hospital, Denmark, the 30-year-old patient had anonymity when while having surgery to remove a mole from his bum, he farted and the gas ignited by a spark from a laser and other surgical equipment set fire to surgical spirit on his testicles. He was suing doctors because "when I woke up, my penis and scrotum were burning like hell." Adding: "Besides the pain, I can't have sex with my wife." (D. Sport, 16/4/02)

RED LIGHT DISTRICT: "Hundreds of sets of traffic lights at some of the capital's busiest junctions are being secretly altered to increase the time motorists have to wait," an Independent on Sunday report claimed. "The London body in charge of traffic lights has now admitted many have had their red phase increased and the green phase reduced." Motoring groups hinted it was an evil plot by Ken Livingstone to make his congestion charge scheme popular (The Times, 10/6/02)

ITCHY SUBJECT: Mexican Ernesto Carti, the owner of the world's biggest flea circus, was sucked dry of blood and killed by his performers. Dr Juan Padras said in Mexico City: "Friends said the fleas turned on him as he wasn't feeding them properly." (D. Sport, 27/5/02)

EXPERT ADVICE: In FF40, an efficiency expert suggested to make economies that he be sacked (as a joke) and was. The cartoon below seems to be a spin on this (D. Telegraph, 16/2/02)



WENT MENTAL: A bus driver in Zimbabwe taking 20 mental patients to a hospital stopped at a roadside bar for a drink -- and when he got back he found his passengers had disappeared. Panicking because he had lost them, he drove to the next stop and invited 20 people waiting to get on. He locked the doors, drove to the hospital and handed them over in place of the missing patients. He described them to staff as "very argumentative" -- and it took three days before police discovered the truth (D. Sport, 28/2/02)

NO LAUGHING MATTER: Car crash victim Karl Everecht won £250,000 damages in Cologne, Germany, because his brain was damaged, causing him to laugh almost continuously. Karl is an undertaker and relations of the dead don't like him laughing at funerals (D. Sport, 27/5/02)

NOT IN THE SCRIPT: Cops told a suspect in a Los Angeles line-up to repeat the phrase: "Give me your money or I'll shoot." He replied: "Hey, that's not what I said. I said 'Give me the dough or I'll blast your fucking head off.'" (D. Sport, 5/3/02)

ASHEN-FACED: Donna Bello, from Florida, who travelled the world honouring her mother's last wish by scattering her ashes at places she loved, including Bali and Hawaii, has found that due to a miske a funeral home gave her someone else's asheas (D. Sport, 6/2/02)

SCALLIES' DISAPPOINTMENT: More bungling burglars thought it a crying shame when they found nothing in an office safe in Liverpool -- they left a note saying "Boo hoo." (D. Sport, 8/5/02)

NO FLIES ON HIM: A court in Montevideo, Uruguay, fined Mario Tasca (33), for indecent exposure. He claimed that he exposed himself in a public place in front of women to shame his wife, who refused to sew buttons on his flies. Police told the court Tasca was not married (D. Sport, 27/5/02)

AURAL SEX: A male hospital barber has been suspended after shaving off the public (sic) hair of three youngwomen awaiting ear operations in Stuttgart, Germany (D. Sport 12/3/02)

BOG STANDARD: A woman flying first class to New York in a redesigned Boeing 747 complained to British Airways that the lavatory had a window. She demanded that it be covered by a blind (S. Telegraph, 7/4/02)

PLANE NUTS: An American airline hired two psychiatrists and told them to report any employee showing signs of mental instability. Within ten minutes of meeting, the shrinkshad reported each other (D. Sport, 30/4/02)

KARMA CHAMELEON: John Hayward, the U.K.'s only specialist pet detective has been asked to trace mostly parrots, but also pink flamingos, red squirrels and even a chameleon -- the regular police officer attached to the case memorably asked him "exactly what colour" the missing lizard was (S. Telegraph, 24/3/02)

WHACKO PADDIES: A gang broke into a Dublin electrical store intending to hep themselves to colour television sets. But they were left with three microwave ovens by mistake. They were arrested when one of the gang tried to exchange his microwave for a TV at the same store five days later (D. Sport, 18/4/02)

EARTH MYSTERIES

HARE'S A MYSTERY. In the early Seventies I visited the eerie Aberdeenshire recumbent stone circle of Sun Honey by Echt. Here I saw the largest hare in my life, which only lolloped away from us before turning to give me a strange look. I was tempted even to think the unthinkable -- that it may have been a shape-shifted human.

Ray Collier writes that he was called out to identify the tracks that were all around a huge slab of stone that formed part of a stone circle just north of Inverness. "Over an area of about an acre and, it appeared, with the slab at the centre point, were the tracks of many brown hares. You could not have marked out a six-inch square without including a track. Outside the area, tracks of single hares radiated outwards and inwards, indicating that the hares had come in from all directions. They were gone the next morning. It was difficult to estimate the number of hares, but judging by the single tracks there must have been dozens of them.

"Such large gatherings are rarely seen and their purpose is still a mystery, although one theory is that up to 40 hares will sit in a wide circle with one or two frolicking in the centre (possibly males displaying to females). As to the uneasy assembly at a stone circle with a huge slab at the centre point, this could have been sheer coincidence. The circle is on a raised area of ground that would have been seen from some distance in the strath before conifers were replanted, so perhaps it is a traditional site. An interesting point is that if there had not been snow on the ground the whole ceremony would have gone undetected. (The Scotsman, 25/11/00; cr: Dr A S L Rae)

STAR TEMPLE. A new terrestrial zodiac has been revealed in Cornwall. Sheila Jeffries had spent four years researching figures supposedly etched across the Lizard landscape by paths, field boundaries and stone monuments. Cygnus the swan flies south towards the sea, Aries the ram bestrides the community of Ruan Minor and the lion Leo has one of its paws in St Keverne, writes Brian Pedley. The zodiac is now conveniently visible to all as a 100 squaremetre mosaic at the Jeffries' Lizard Cider Barn in Predannack. (The Times, 8/7/00; www.dreamwater.com/biz/lizardcider)

ECHOES OF THE PAST. Dr David Keating and Aaron Watson revealed in the Journal of Antiquity that they believe that Easter Aquhorthies stone circle and Camster cairns may have been used as prehistoric "echo chambers", amplifying sound during religious ceremonies. They believe the recumbent stone at the former reflected an echo and audio equipment proved that the distribution of sound was somehow being controlled by the positioning of stone within the circle. Camster's chamber acted as a sound baffle. Similar weirdness has now been found at Stonehenge. (The Scotsman, 18/11/00; cr: Dr A S L Rae)

WELL-HEALED. Barbar Kennedy, on being shown a collection of stones at Killin Tourist Office, Perthshire, which had been consecrated and endowed with the power of healing, rubbed a specific one for joints on her troublesome knee. It removed the pain completely, writes columnist 'Craigie'. (The Scotsman, 15/2/00; cr: Dr A S L Rae)

SIMON BROADBENT. During my sojourn as editor of The Ley Hunter, there began a debate on alignments' statistical probability. As I sensed, most readers found this unhip/py, so I encouraged the participants to discuss the matter via a postal folio (does it still exist, I wonder?). Perhaps the keenest and most knowledgeable statistician was Simon Broadbent, who died on March 15, aged 74. His considerable obituary in The Times (3/4/02) focussed on his many achievements in the advertising industry, about which he wrote several books, but also mentioned his lifelong interest in megalithic monuments.

"His paper to the Royal Statistical Society, "In Search of the Ley Hunter", debunked extravagant claims made for the existence of ley lines, pointing out that the number of alleged lines was fewer than would be expected from random distribution of points between which lines could be drawn," wrote his obituarist. "As ever, he was using statistics to help to ascertain the truth lying behind a jumble of incomplete data. But the search for evidence was fun, too. Preparing the paper also gave him the chance to crawl about Greenwich Park testing the likely accuracy of Stone Age surveying devices, using instruments he made himself."

AUTOHENGES. Ten Cadillacacs, planted nose-down in a field at Amarillo, Texas, nearly 30 years ago, to form a spectacular monument are being repainted and fitted with new tyres in a bid to boost tourism. (D. Sport, 3/7/02)

SERIES OF DREAMS 2. The dream-monitoring programme co-ordinated by friend Paul Devereux made a national newspaper. James Bedding (Telegraph Travel, 9/3/02) was warned



by the tourist office woman: "If you do decide to hike up to Carningli make sure you don't fall asleep when you're at the top. Otherwise you'll wake up mad."

At his B & B in the Pembrokeshire village of Newport, just below the 1,000ft hill, his host was more specific. "When you're up there you might see a very tall man wearing extremely short shorts -- no matter what the weather. He camps up there, and conducts experiments. He observes volunteers as they fall asleep, and the minute he sees their eyelids fluttering, he wakes them and asks what they were dreaming. You see, he thinks that Carningli is the physical manifestation of the goddess Rhiannon. The summit is where her umbilical cord goes up to heaven, and you can see angels spiralling up and down it. One egg or two?"

MERLIN'S GRAVE. A popular site for mystics is in the forest of Broceliande in Brittany, where the Arthurian shaman Merlin is supposedly buried. He would appear, apparently, as a white-footed stag and one such has been seen here many times going back many years. Many other local sites supposedly fit into what we nationalistically refer to as The Matter of Britain. Merlinologist Marie said: "But he is here in France. This where his devotees come to receive his blessings. This Merlin's real home. (Financial Times Weekend, 23/2/02)



BATH TIME. The Bizarre Bath Comedy Tour is not for the pofaced, Christopher Middleton (Sunday Telegraph, 21/7/02) found. "We've followed him (tour guide 'JJ') past Bath Abbey as he attempts to locate subterranean ley lines despite being blindfolded and having balloons tied to his head ..."

ALIEN BIG CATS. Our redoubtable clipster Dr Alistair Rae sent several clippings where those who believe the mysterious big cats spotted in our countryside are pure phantoms or an extension-cum-shapeshift of the black dogs of older legend will have to contend with a Doris Moore, 52, being mauled. As she got into a car around 9pm at her remote stables near comedian Billy Connolly's Candacraig House in Strathdon, Aberdeenshire, a jet-black panther-like beast appeared at the door and began clawing at her trousers and sank its teeth into the top of her thigh. "I tried to break free by banging my keys down on its neck ... but it was hanging on and trying to drag me down. Its coat was rough fur but it was too muscular for a dog," she said. (News of the World, 20/1/02)

More readers' tales followed, including a photograph of a black cat shot by Jimmy McVeigh, who believes the mystery animals are crosses of wildcats and feral cats. He believes dozens of families exist throughout rural Scotland. (News of the World (27/1/02)

Separately a correspondent reported a great many sightings of ABCs in North Fife and welcomed readers reports (Courier and Advertiser, Dundee, date unknown)

Earlier, the "Beast of Boblainy" was spotted many times near Inverness, several by police officers (News of the World, 16/7/00) and an escaped leopard believed to have been raised by a couple living near Peterhead, Aberdeenshire, was on the loose. (News of the World, 6/1/01)

Then came the "Beast of Essex" which chewed a farmer's car and attacked his pet cats at Raydon Hamlet, near Harlow. (The Mirror, 6/1/01)

A black panther was stalking the Queen's Sandringham estate (Sun, 28/12/00) and despite the rumblings of a car engine and the tape of Jimi Hendrix's "The Star Spangled Banner" playing at ear-splitting volume, a cat the size of an Alsatian walked around a car in Cornwall. (Sunday Telegraph, 11/2/01)

While on my own patch, Hartlepool Radio Taxis boss Fred Howard had a huge cat jump out in front of his cab in Hart Village (Hartlepool Mail, 26/9/00; Hartlepool Star, 28/9/00) and bringing us up to date, Carolann Curran encountered a blunt-faced, larger than domestic, black cat at Ballumbie, Angus (The Courier and Advertiser, Dundee, 4/6/02; cr: Dr A S L Rae)



BOOKS

HAUNTED LAND by PAUL DEVEREUX (Piatkus Books, £17.99)

LET'S get it straight, most ghostlore books are shallow, anecdotal, lack seriousness, titillate, are consciousnesses' castaways.

Thankfully polymath Paul Devereux has provided an antidote. He urges, correctly, science should take apertions seriously and not disregard the phenomena as folklore and superstition. This universal experience is as real as car crashes and suicides. I've been there, seen that, and it's all not hallucination, madness or what have you to ignore. Rightly the author calls upon boffins of brain science, psychology and quantum physics to crack the divide between inner and outer realities.

Here the title's "haunted land" is not chosen for brevity or a catch-all for a nation or region's ubiquitous spook population, but specifically as an investigation into spirits in the landscape, rather than the usual compendium of alleged wraithsightings or an apprentice ghostbusters' manual.

The scale is peic, even without discussion of spiritualism or psychic research, but does cover consideration of hauntings' relationship within consciousness studies.

The narrative style of the book is brisk and a mixture of the matter-of-fact and reflection, while its content is breath-takingly revelatory -- though without the cigs and pints itinerary of an Andy Collins' work.

Pertinently in the first paragraph of the introduction, is described a motorist's collision with a road ghost where, despite finding no trace of the "victim" or blood, his car revealed slight damage. It begs the question of how a presumably insubstantial spectre could leave physical evidence of impact? Unless, of course, the car had been damaged earlier by some unwilling to leave a note under the windscreen wiper admitting carelessness with insurance details.

Reading this book a number of questions struck me: U.K. astronaut Helen Sharman's claim on TV of her linear sightings from outer space; no mention of Guy Ragland Phillips' claim of 50% of "leys" emanating from old churchyards with regard to funeral paths in his "The Unpolluted God" (and I must admit never being convinced about the death roads theory); and I still can't get my head around what Ginzburg calls "night battles" where shamans struggle in trance between one another as souls transformed into spirit animals; on page 108 stiles are mentioned and while walking in the countryside my wife saw herself crossing a stile before we reached it.

Paul decrees that we are the last generation which can garner old lore (elementals) direct from living oral tradition, but surely this can be extended if ordinary folk can be honest enough to tall of their own experiences (in my case a wood gnome at Carlisle and much more). Also Paul mentions spooks even in alleyways and my daughter witnessed a man in Cavalier guise waving a sword down one of York's snickleways who vanished into this air.

Here are tales of spectral blackdogs, alignments, phantom hitch-hikers, crossroads ghosts, earth lights, spirit trap labyrinths, fairy paths, the wild hunt, Glastonbury Tor, Camelot, Stonehenge, haunted corpse ways, vampire routes, geophysical effects, zones of disturbance and time slips.

Then there's "shamanic geography" and I would rate highly my garden pond and the bus stations at Durham City and the Algarve's Faro (note that trackster/fraudster Castaneda would meet don Juan at a bus station)

The book "really kicked in" for me from page 187, from where a real intellectual feast is served up.

THE SUMMER SOLSTICE by JOHN MATTHWS (Godsfield Press, £16.99)

TOWNIES like me too rarely get into the countryside. Even when opportunities arose, such as writing a weekly column on pubs, I'd spend the day getting sozzled in some beergarden, or when taking a holiday, I'd admire the view from the carriage, only to end up trainspotting at depots in London, Cardiff, Newport and Bristol.

The last time I really spent time in the rural world was when my editor sent me to the Outer Hebrides, where I under cover of darkness dug up potatoes planted by Prince Charles. This was on Bemera, where one magical evening as the sun set, I spent a couple of hours with two elderly women stacking the last of the harvest. My stook building seemed then and even more in retrospect an enchantment where I was invited to take part in an ancient custom. Paganism is barely buried even in our postmodern, consumer crazy world and I was a privileged unharmed John Barleycorn.

Matthews' book sets out to enlighten on this cycling turning year by celebrating the sun's journey from May Day to harvesting. Lavishly illustrated, it is divided into sections covering a six-month period (a companion volume, The Winter Solstice, describes harvest, through midwinter and on to early spring).

It is a global celebration of custom from May Day revels and the traditional maypole; the myths behind the Midsummer games and the faery folk; the ancient story of the death and resurrection of the corn goddesses and gods.

Beautifully presented with full-colour illustrations, each chapter includes a description of the period celebrated around the world; folktales from various lands of trackster gods and solar heroes; activities such as creating a midsummer shrine, village May queen (check out John Otway's song Josephine -- "the libertine that dwells within our Josephine"); fire leaping and making a corn doll (one sent 25 years ago and made by Jimmy Goddard still hangs in my study); meditation and recipes.

I really should get out more. When a water diviner invited me to meet him in a nearby village, we got talking to a farmer in his eighties. My new pal was astounded that the farmer had told me more of the local rustic mysteries in five minutes than he had told him in ten years. I inquired of deneholes and lo and behold the farmer's tractor two days later fell into what seems to be hitherto unmapped example, which I'm still researching.

None the worse for a New Age spirit and sourcebook format, The Summer Solstice will find fans in among folklorists, families and individuals who wish for a closer communion with nature.

ASPECTS OF TEESSIDE edited by MAUREEN ANDERSON (Wharcliffe Books, £9.99)

I CAN'T adequately or fairly review this book for the simple reason that I'm the contributor of two pieces: one on Hartlepool's notorious monkey-hanging legend and the 21st century phenomenon of the last of the mock mayors. Both my topics have been covered in FF and need no more explanation.

Other subjects in this local history collection from a go-ahead and ever-expanding publishing house include pieces by personal friends; boozing buddy Brian Arison on a printer's archives and military aircraft buff John Perrin on zeppeling listening posts.

My friend Maureen also brought together authors to contribute upon such diverse material as just what is Teesside (a controversial subject, indeed), a famous shipwreck, Cleveland's chemical industry, and histories of Wilton and Stockton castles.

Thirteen aspects of Teesside to entrance those who treasure their region.

IN BRIEF: Thorsons' Directions for Life series continues apace (in fact, all books in this section come from Thorsons). How to Develop Your Sixth Sense in which David Lawson offers techniques for awakening your inner wisdom, ways to develop latent powers of your mind and exercises to encourage your unique psychic abilities (£7.99). The NLP Workbook where NLP means neuro-linguistic programming, has all the appeal of a computer manual and NLP sounds fascistic. Author Joseph O'Connor even notes "you cannot pin NLP down to a single definition." It makes you feel unworthy of your achievements, think because it is complex and there's nothing that makes you -- or at least me -- want to turn the page, other than a reviewer's sense of duty (£7.99). Among the internet sites there are ones devoted to insects as food, virtual chocolate gifts, a bureau of missing socks, vomit receptacles from the world's airlines and even worse David Lcke. Or try <http://www.kama-sooty.co.uk> and see the glove puppet Sooty and his pals demonstrating the full range of sexual positions. More seriously, Mind Body Spirit Internet Guide, compiled by Gerry Thompson, is a user-friendly, simple A-Z from aromatherapy to zen, but the first half explains the internet and how you can best use it, being a useful tool for beginners like myself (£5.99).

Spiritual fitness trainer Caroline Reynolds has designed a progressive and comprehensive seven-week course to keep readers of Spiritual Fitness fit. It is full of practical techniques and written exercises which are meant to develop one's feelings of wholeness, clarity, courage, expansion, positivity, passion, inspiration, etc. (£8.99). Thorsons' Way of Crystal Healing by Ronald Bonowitz gives a clear explanation of the properties and qualities of crystals, how to use them for meditation, their healing power and aids to personal and psychic development (£7.99). We had a rabbit for around 13 years and when its guinea pig companion died, it seemed to know where I'd buried it and even rubbed its eyes as if feeling grief (though more likely it was a reaction to being unnaturally out in the snow). Straight from the Horse's Mouth by Amelia Kinkade, psychic and animal communicator, stretches credibility about telepathic links with pets, but is nevertheless a fascinating read if you're a devoted animal lover (£9.99). Despite being a regular contributor, Marian Green cut me off her Quest magazine mailing list so she gets no favours of a review of Natural Witchcraft (£9.99). The inside of David Lawson's book calls it Psychic Power, whereas the cover names it Psychic Powers, suggesting a breakdown in mental communication. Discusses psychic potential, auras, telepathy, clairvoyance, channeling and so on as a useful primer (£5.99).

MAGAZINES

LETTERS TO AMBROSE MERTON. Q. Folklore miscellany. £7.50 for 4. Payable to David Cornwell, Psychology Section, Dept. of Educational Studies, University of Strathclyde, Jordanhill Campus, 76 Southbrae Drive, Glasgow G13 1PP. No. 27. Paul Screeton on penguin and ostrich tales; Orson Welles and the phantom hitch-hiker motif; Captain Pugwash TV series characters; grateful terrorist; examination of Richard Dawkins' barmy meme" hypothesis; chain letter analysis; G-spot myth. No. 28. Last ever issue. Underground comics and photocopylore; indexes. R.I.P. Cuttings and reviews.

FORTEAN TIMES. Newsstand. £2.70. No. 156. Has 24 pages given over to reports on the background to the new movie "The Mothman Prophecies". Chpacabras; Nessie film rediscovered; fetishists. No. 157. Paul Screeton on Mandelson, the M.P. who can't tell mushy peas from avocado mousse; phantom hotch-hikers; spontaneous faces on concrete in Spain; occult Hollywood; ritual murder; Paracelsus; alien intelligence. No. 158. Long-distance moggies; cryptozoologists' obituaries; space contactee Unarius movement; Osama bin Laden linked to science fiction classics; phantom who built his own deity; alleged Venezuelan dinosaur-birds; Peruvian runes; and how come if Graham Hancock's 11,000-year-old submerged civilisation existed, didn't it have similar structures above the Ice Age level? No. 159. Dubious radio transmissions; Silbury Hill revelations; worldwide cyclops; meandering moggies; general theme of death with particularly good pieces on Welsh omens, OOBes and NDEs. No. 160. UnCon 2002 report; football's origins; damning indictment of UFO contactee George Adamski; human longevity; turning a blind eye to the evil eye (our house has a preventative blue bead from Turkey); eyeless sight. No. 161. Highly-interesting profile of sci-fi writer Philip K. Dick, his output and particularly important his 1974 visions; "Son of Sam" murders multiple gunmen conspiracy claims; feral children; ideas aimed at improving mankind's lot; royal skeletons in cupboards. Plus each issue: reviews, readers' letters and irreverent diaries.

NORTHERN EARTH. Q. £6.50 for 4. Cheques payable to Northern Earth Mysteries Group. From 10 Jubilee Street, Mytholmroyd, Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire. No. 88. Editor John Billingsley's recollections of three personal time-slippage events; ghostly tales of 200-acre yew forest; Dewsbury's Devil's Knell Xmas Eve bell-ringing ancestry challenged; dating riddle for bridge's "Celtic" head; Society of Ley Hunters' activities. No. 89. Author Alan Garner's role in saving and having Bronze Age shovel from Alderley Edge; human cultural links; cursed football grounds; Earthwatch projects. No. 90. Northern spring customs, including the loss of the Barwick-in-Elmet maypole climbing due to our transatlantic derived accident claims culture; extremely interesting Cheshire site I'd love to visit (even with directions to two local pubs -- good on ya!); Stonehenge nonsense; Harlech speculations; the author of the piece on Long Meg and her Daughters might be interested in learning that the term Mons Meg relates to the vagina as well as an Edinburgh Castle cannon. Regular features being archaeological round-up, book reviews, editor's musings, letters, events.

AMSKAYA. Newsletter of the STAR Fellowship. £2 for 4. Cheques payable to J. Goddard at 25 Albert Road, Addlestone, Weybridge, Surrey, KT15 2PX. No. 50. Philip Rodgers article of 1971 on his space voice recordings; reprint from a Tony Wedd book; review of an Adamski biography; George von Tassel Giant Rock conventions recalled.

TOUCHSTONE. Irregular newsletter of the Surrey Earth Mysteries Group. Same address and price as Amskaya (above). No. 57. Most of us are aware of Staines because of its most famous son, Ali G, aka Sacha Baron Cohen. I doubt if editor Jimmy Goddard was hoping his piece here on Staines' Negen Stones was inspired by the hype surrounding Ali G's new film featuring the Surrey town, and it's an interesting article on ley hunting of vintage class. Rien Noordhuis continues the Watkinsian theme from a Dutch angle. Brief but fascinating article on current Derbyshire well dressing. No. 58. If editor Jimmy Goddard has done nothing else for earth mysteries, his concept and term "subconscious sighting" will give him a worthy footnote. He recognised that certain modern buildings have been erected exactly where they should be, and as I get more sceptical, I feel this is still a truism. Writing here he brings the notion to the fore while discussing Sussexsites. Plus 1965 Sussex ley hunt.

MAGONIA. Q. £5. Cheques payable to John Rimmer. Address: John Dee Cottage, 5 James Terrace, Mortlake Churchyard, London SW14 8HB. No. 77. Conclusion of investigation into ufology's Grays and their history (though 1896/97 airship scare media hoaxes are taken at face value). No. 78. Case study into the interaction between believers and sceptics; an enigmatic U.S. "UFO" experience probed in depth; Internet search reveals 5,100 items under "Magonia." Regular features being back page diary, letters and reviews.

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