

FOLKLORE

FRONTIERS

No. 47



- * Knightley of the Round Table
- * Snakebite junkies
- * Usual features



King Arthur and the Ikea table

FOLKLORE FRONTIERS is an independent magazine covering various aspects of folklore, particularly urban belief tales, ancient and modern traditions and lore, plus contemporary culture. It is edited and published by Paul Screeton. Address is 5 Egton Drive, Seaton Carew, Hartlepool, TS25 2AT. Subscription for three issues is £6 payable to P. Screeton (NOT Folklore Frontiers) We can now be contacted at Pauline.screeton@ntlworld.co.uk If you subscription expires with this issue and "X" will appear on the line below.

THE DIARY THE DIARY THE DIARY

NO lover of sport whatsoever, nevertheless when Danny Baker wrote regularly for The Times on a Saturday, because he was always entertaining and an excellent writer. A piece last year warranted snipping for I was sure it would come in useful for reference some time in the future. Just as steam locomotives are invented when it is steam motive power time, so it is time for the cutting to function.

That preamble over, I move on to South Lakeland magistrates. In their wisdom, the Bench fined Frank Benson, 71, who still works as a plumber, £100 when he admitted not being in proper control of his van. The pensioner had taken both hands off his steering wheel to make V-signs at a speed camera as he drove past at 20mph in a 30mph zone. He had previously been fined £60 for driving at 44mph in a 40mph zone. Benson told his passenger on the latest occasion: "They can't catch us today." In mitigation, Benson, of Selside, Cumbria, said: "Without thinking I just whipped up two fingers at the camera." (D. Telegraph) This he claimed was a gesture which originated from the Battle of Agincourt. "When a bowman was captured by the French his two bow fingers were cut off. The V-sign is a defiant gesture by the bowmen saying, 'I have my two shooting fingers'." (D. Telegraph) "It is a sign of the defiance and mine was a defiant act. I am just an unfortunate victim. But I can't start squealing about it. It is a fair cop." (Sun) Benson, fined £100, was called Geoff throughout by the Daily Mirror and it is unclear which parts of the V-sign commentary were made in court or afterwards to the Press (various 19/6/04) In fact, newspapers were very arbitrary and confusing in reporting this case, with The Times ignoring it. Doubtless Danny Baker reads more widely than his previous employer's scribbles and will have chuckled at Mr Benson's myth re-enactment. For full Baker column see this issue's Page 4/1 (The Times, 4/1/03)

FROM the 100 Years War to another conflict during days of yore and sporting connection.

Briton John Burns has been crowned winner at the World Black Pudding Championship after beating 300 contestants from around the world. They had to hurl the northern speciality black pudding -- cooked pigs' blood encased in a length of intestine -- at a stack of Yorkshire puddings placed six metres in the air. The 33-year-old claimed the title after knocking the highest number of puddings, in this case seven, to the ground. It is the second year running a Briton has won the event, held in Ramsbottom, Greater Manchester, and ends a period of Australian dominance. Legend claims the practice stems from the Wars of the Roses when troops ran out of ammunition and threw food at each other instead. (Metro, 13/9/04)

Incidentally, my father forbade me from consuming this acquired taste, so immediately after his death I tried it a couple of times on Sunday lunchtimes from among the free bar snacks at my local, the Seaton Hotel.

IN the journalistic spirit of fair play, I'm giving the Prison Service's head honcho space to reply to an item on Page 10 of Folklore Frontiers No. 46 (see her Page 4/2). You'll recall I drew

attention to a leading article (Sunday Telegraph, 23/5/04) noting that footballer David Beckham's winged cross tattoo was "in a style preferred by football hooligans, prison warders and violent skinheads." The prisons supremo disapproved of his staff being associated with the other two groups, but says nothing of whether "screws" are illustrated men. (Sunday Telegraph, 20/6/04) The same newspaper returned to the nape tattoo in an unflattering profile. All typical build 'em up, knock 'em down stuff, natch. "Beckham's fondness for what he terms 'body art' has been largely indulged by a popular press that likes to keep in his good books, but the huge, winged motif that appeared on the back of his neck last month tested even the tabloids' patience," wrote the anonymous scribe. "The 'Daily Mirror' claimed that it made Beckham look like a hooligan, while 'The Sun' accused him of going 'From fab to yob'." Of course, The Sunday Telegraph (27/6/04) really couldn't comment. And while on the subject, rather than paraphrase Giles Smith (The Times, 12/6/04), also reproduced here on Page 4/3 is his review of Becks' artistic body gallery, including a penal reference no less.

WHO'S CRAZY, journo Jemima Lewis or diva Mariah Carey? In her column (Sunday Telegraph, 5/9/04), Lewis mused upon West African countries facing starvation and was reminded of a "mischievous rumour a few years ago" (actually Sunday Telegraph, 9/11/03). It went: "When(ever) I watch TV and see those poor, starving kids all over the world, I can't help but cry. I mean, I'd love to be skinny like that, but not with all those flies and death and stuff." Lewis comments: "The extraordinary thing was, everyone believed it." Adding: "To warped Western minds, it seemed plausible that a diva with a bit of weight to lose might envy the African waistline. We have so little to worry about that we consider our rolls of flab a 'crisis' -- an 'epidemic', even. How lucky we are, that our crises take such comfortable forms." May I remind Jemima there is numerous evidence to suggest that Mariah is several notes short of an octave. For instance she confused the late King Hussein of Jordan with the basketball player Michael Jordan, and when informed it was the former, she issued a press statement stating that her thoughts were with the people of Iraq at that difficult time. In addition to her empathy with the world's less fortunate (she has an estimated £150m fortune), she was recently treated for a nervous breakdown after slashing her wrists and admits one side of her brain is missing. At her lowest point she believed she was invisible and her piano could talk. So that "rumour" was in all likelihood a characteristic Carey truism.

THE CHEEK OF IT! You know the one about a woman who buys a cup of tea and a Kit-Kat at a cafe, the man opposite eats the chocolate bikkie, she reacts by grabbing and eating his cream cake, storms out, gets back home and finds her own Kit-Kat still in her coat pocket. It's called 'Take a Break' by Healey & Glanville ('The Return of Urban Myths', Virgin, 1993) and 'The Packet of Biscuits' by Jan Harold Brunvand ('The Choking Doberman', W W Norton, 1984), who notes its U.K. insularity. It recently had another mischievous airing (In your own words, Sunday Telegraph Magazine, 20/6/04) on the page for "non-fiction submissions of approximately 600 words."

A typical example of a non-folklorist believing he's creating an article on contemporary legends which actually aren't includes how others' supermarket queues always reaches the checkout first and how the site you're looking for on a road atlas is usually in the awkward bits along the edges or down the central crease. However, Robert Matthews, after dismissing the Procter & Gamble Satanic link, mentions a tale new to me: "Following its introduction in 1994, the Flavr-Savr tomato -- the first genetically-modified consumer product -- was widely claimed to be the result of an experiment in which mad scientists combined an ordinary tomato with a frost-protection gene taken from a fish. In fact, the Flavr-Savr was created by reversing a natural tomato gene. Even so, the 'Frankenstein food' story persisted, and helped kill off what little chance the Flavr-Savr tomato had of commercial success." (Sunday Telegraph, 1/8/04)

Archery explodes myth of two-digit salute ①

ARCHERY doesn't feature here half as much as I'd like, chiefly because I know absolutely nothing about it and nobody is really sure what else there is to it other than firing an arrow at a bull's-eye. However, I find even this most peripheral and distant of sports has the power to disappoint me. As a tremendous favour recently I volunteered to drop one of my younger nephews off at his archery class while I was on my way to a second-hand record shop in southern England that, somehow, I had not yet mapped and charted.

Seeing him safely inside, I found myself trying to decide whether the heavy leather palm-and-wrist glove/cuff affairs that the instructors were wearing were either cool like Robin Hood or silly like the lead singer in Saxon. One must have seen me staring because he came over.

"Not coming in then?" he said. "No," I cheerily countered and then, prone to gabble as I am, fell back on the one archery story that I, and I presume most other people, know that doesn't involve either Sherwood Forest or

King Harold. It's the one about why Brits give the two-finger salute to our foes as opposed to the more fashionable one-fingered US variety. You know it, of course, don't you?

How the French Army at Agincourt vowed to cut off the bow fingers from every English longbowman and that, after the battle, the defeated French were paraded in front of the English who promptly waved these two digits in defiance and derision. A terrific tale and one I'm sure that has brightened up many an otherwise draggy dinner party.

So I trotted this old reliable out to this Keeper of the Quivers and he rolled his eyes and, I'm pretty sure, gave a short snort too. "Is that tripe still getting repeated," he said, as though I'd just spouted some nutty theory on the Moon landings or something. Anyway I stood my ground and told him it was historical fact. "Oh yeah," he came back, "There's a simple way to explode that. See, you don't pull a bow with those fingers. You pull a bow like this."

And he mimed a perfect pull using his middle and ring finger and for the first time I realised what guff the legend was. Satisfied I was a spent force, he strode off with the kids. "Still," he said departing, "I don't suppose that'll stop it still being circulated by people who know absolutely nothing about bloody archery." And, seething, I silently made up my mind. Saxon be damned, matey, I said to myself: "You twerps look like Rob Halford from Judas Priest."

How dare you pair us with Beckham

I was dismayed to read your item about David Beckham's latest tattoo, in which you chose to band "prison warders" together with football hooligans and violent skinheads when suggesting the groups that would normally adopt this type of body art (Leading article, May 23).

This reference was gratuitous, puerile and wholly ill-informed. It was a slight on the professional reputation of the Prison Service and has caused a great deal of offence to many of my staff and colleagues. I fear the item, which carried the heading "Mark of an idiot" and was peppered with negative language like "thug" and "ugly", will serve to reinforce an outdated stereotype that bears absolutely no resemblance to the modern-day prison officer.

Phil Wheatley
Director General, HM Prison Service
London SW1



Is Beckham's body art now a bit tattoo much?

DAVID BECKHAM, who has a reliable sense of what's important, chose this week to premiere his latest tattoo — some kind of winged motif, franked high on his neck in the manner popular with heavyweight boxers and long-term inmates of high-security prisons. The definitive interpretation of the tattoo has yet to be handed down to us, although some heraldic scholars are clearly both premature and wide of the mark when they suggest that the design represents an American eagle with a Dutch PA rampant.

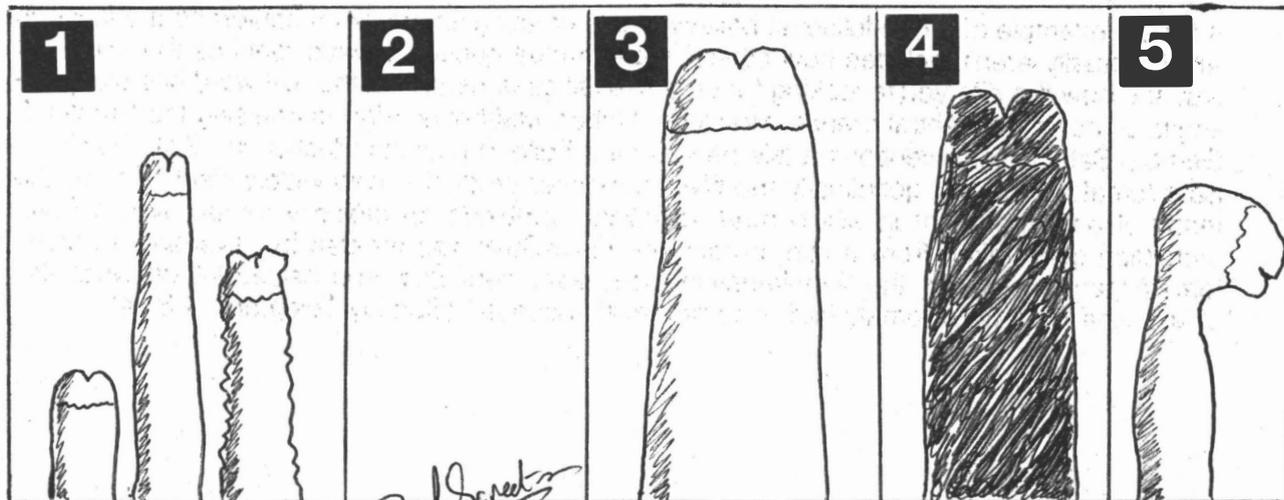
Whatever it is, it joins the sundry angels, numerals, mottoes in Latin and English ("Amare et Fovere", "Perfectio in Spiritu", "In The Face Of Adversity") and tributes, in various fonts and languages, to his close family that now pepper the England captain's much-adored skin.

Say what you like about self-labelling, it's an unusual hobby for a man who once declared that he "hates" reading. These days it must take Becks longer to read himself than it would take him to get through any of the novels on the Orange Prize shortlist.

●PUNTERS are going wild for a cocktail called Spunk Up, in Spain. The mixture of Bailey's and milk is supposed to reduce hangovers.



Which Shakespeare plays do these represent?



Answers on back page

Knightley of the Round Table

By PAUL SCREETON

LET'S not forget Arthur is foremost a mythical figure, though possibly historical. Whether the 2004 film 'King Arthur' produced by Jerry Bruckheimer is the "most historically accurate" version will be argued by academics and enthusiasts alike.

Arthurian purists tend to see Arthur anchored firmly to the battle of Badon around 500AD, being a Celtic chieftain organising life from his thatched hall. It was the French and German poets who placed him in a glamorised battlemented Richard Harrisian Camelot castle set in romantic mediaeval times. Thirdly Arthur could be a post-imperial hero hanging on to the stability imposed by the barbaric Romans.

Bruckheimer's angle is to merge the first and third scenarios in one plot framework. (1) Flicking through back numbers of the Arthurians' fanzine 'Pendragon', before a certain megalomaniac took over, I noted how a major debating point followed Eric Ratcliffe's 1981 thesis that Arthur lived in the 1st century A.D. At the time, one commentator saw Arthur drifting out of the majority of Arthurian supporters' grasp further back in time -- a sort of "Dr Who on horseback" as a television reporter noted.

Perhaps Bruckheimer and his posse of screenplay writers dug out well-thumbed 'Pendragons' to depict Arthur as leader of a band of Sarmatian mercenaries sent by the Roman government to restore order in Britain. So Arthur was not Scottish, Welsh, Cornish, Breton or as I have long championed a son of the Land of Prince Bishops, but from what is now southern Russia or Ukraine.

Michael Wood is a key figure in the Sarmatian theory that circa 150A.D. a Roman commander, Lucius Artorius Castus, applied to Marcus Aurelius (who became emperor in 161A.D.) for some 5,500 Sarmatians, who had been captured in Hungary, to accompany him to Britain. Castus, it seems, had been appointed to a command in northern Britain as part of the Hadrian's Wall garrison. These paid mercenaries (the equivalent of today's economic migrants) switched affections to Rome, with their own officers under a Roman commander, so impressed with the first that subsequent generals were known as 'The Artorius' -- a rank similar to that adopted for the early emperors, i.e. 'The Caesar'. This continued to the late 5th century. There are good grounds to doubt Wood, such as lack of mention in the written army list, such a large foreign contingent together being contrary to Roman policy, no such large cavalry being required at this location and the Artorius name unlikely and its retention so long even more implausible. (2) But let's remember my old friend Sam Wildman's book on Arthur's cavalry and how these mounted troops led to the widespread 'Black Horse' pub name, whose distribution indicated Arrhurian strongholds. Also the Sarmatians' descendants, the modern Ossetes, retain the original dialect and in their oral epics, a band of heroes, the Narts, are led by Batradz, whose death echoes Arthur's in every detail. There's nothing like experts arguing and the Arthurian historicity is itself one of the greatest battlefields scholarship has created. Enter the latest students of Arthuriana, the film critics.

Coming down from her ivory tower, one scholarly commentator denounces the story as resting on "a spindly platform of speculative history," abhors the stripping away of the "romance of the medieval legend", exaggeratedly and bitchily claims Guinevere to be "clad only in two leather breast-straps" (what, naked groin and legs?) "and woad applied as liberally as fake tan." (3) Another pro-Saxon reviewer finds Guinevere "as an earthy warrior, she does not convince" and the film's "sense of national unity simply does not ring true" plus the film-makers seem to be "banking on global ignorance." (4)

Another self-proclaimed Arthurian expert is 19-year-old Keira Knightley, aka Guinevere, who in the film's publicity overshadows her Arthur -- both in posters and interviews. Enthusiastic

Keira warmed to her role: "You should see my fight scenes. I fight in a bitch pack! It would be daft if someone my size took on this ten-foot Saxon. So we thought it would be a good idea if we had a lot of women, all around my size, who fight in a pack like wolves." (5)

Keira had to spend hours in the gym with hated strenuous workouts building up her muscles and super-toning her body, which proved worthwhile. On the film's debateable authenticity she conceded: "Historically, the Picts and the Scots fought in the nude, but there was no way I was going to do that. It would have been much too distracting." (6) Also: "In Arthur's day the people actually fought in the nude. I was lucky to get away with being only semi-naked. It's a Disney movie so I guess they didn't want to risk an X-rating!" (7) Researching the history of the queen's supposed tribe, the Picts, Keira found historians suggested that Pictish women had their left boobs cut off because they were a hindrance when were shooting arrows from longbows. "I couldn't believe it. It's horrific," she said. "I tracked down an archery historian and he thought it might be a myth." Keira insisted her breasts didn't stop her becoming deadly with the longbow, adding: "Even if you are bigger than me you're still not going to have problems." (8)

Noting Keira had been made the focus of the advertising campaign, true academic Ronald Hutton saw Guinevere as a Dark Ages Buffy the Vampire Slayer "dressed in a leather bikini" (1) while another commentator drooled at the "blue-painted, skimpily clad warrior queen." (9)

Costume designer Penny Rose commented, "We wanted Keira to be more naked," but she insisted her nipples had not to be seen. Penny added: "It was all very sturdy. There was no stick and glue and hope for the best." (10) Recalling 'Pirates' Keira commented: "No, my cleavage hasn't received any assistance this time. Although I show quite a bit of flesh in my costume, they're not enhancing anything." (11) In fact, in the posters for the film, Keira is made to look distinctly bustier thanks to computer wizardry, but reckons the flattering digital enhancement did not go sufficiently far, saying: "They could have given me a lott more on top." For her earlier swashbuckling success 'Pirates of the Caribbean' there were tight-fitting uplifting bodices and "having my cleavage painted in by my very own make-up artist" (12) and given a truly awesome cleavage on billboards. "I was very pleased with that poster," she says. "But there's not much touching up on the 'King Arthur' one. I'm a bit pissed off about it really as I liked the whole cleavage thing. Particularly as I don't have any." (13)

Breasts figure prominently in Keira's career and conversation, despite their diminutive size. Contemplating her flatness, she said: "I'd kill for a body like Scarlett Johansson's. To have tits. I don't have tits -- I have pecs. I'd be completely flattered to be compared to Scarlett. I don't think I'd come off particularly well, but I understand that. She's a sensational actress." As for surgical enhancement, she said: "I wouldn't go through all that pain. I hate needles." (14)

At the age of 16, she played bitch Frankie in the gripping British thriller 'The Hole', about four school pals who bunk off into a bunker, and bared her boobs in what 'Daily Sport' described as "the most sizzling sex scene a 16-year-old actress has ever performed." (15)

Keira enjoys getting her kit off, saying: "I don't mind sex scenes. They're a great way to break the ice.. In 'Dr Zhivago,' as Lara she stripped off for explicit love scenes with co-star Sam Neill. "Did I get my tits out with Sam (Neill)? Yes, I think I did, but then when you think about it, what is so offensive about a naked body anyway? People go topless, don't they?" (12)

She may have vetoed too explicit combat gear, but in 'King Arthur' there's a steamy love scene between Keira and Owen, in which she had to strip off and straddle the king. "It was part of the job," she said matter-of-factly. "There's no point in being embarrassed about it because that's the name of the game and I'm not someone who would do those scenes if I didn't think they were necessary. It was just another day at the office -- a very *nice* day at the office." (16)

Named Britain's most desirable woman by 'Tatler' magazine, it was her toned tum Bruckheimer went nuts over when he spotted Keira in a crop top and insisted she show it off in 'King Arthur'. Richard Curtis wanted her for 'Love Actually' after having spotted her midriff in

'Bend It Like Beckham', where she played tomboy Jules Paxton (and was even dubbed a lesbian (15)) with a pierced belly-button ("paid for entirely by my child benefit" (12)) .

She may have an immature chest still, but Keira's big in every other respect.

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Venomous Acts & Other Crazes

By Paul Screeton

NINE YEARS separate two supposed "new crazes" connecting wildlife and junkies.

Bruce Mackenzie revealed to fellow Langbaugh (Cleveland) councillors discussing speeding drivers on the North York Moors that the behaviour resulted from druggies tormenting adders until attacked. He said: "These kids have discovered the venom makes a powerful cocktail after smoking a cannabis reefer. They are catching snakes and keeping them caged to give them bites when they have been smoking. They are playing viper roulette. They say it gives them extra kicks, and then they race through villages at 70mph. It is quite disturbing." He seemingly won support and credibility from Nick Lindsay, curator of Whipsnade Wild Animal Park, who warned: "The drug will heighten the toxic effect of the poison. Any snake bite can kill a person if they are susceptible." (D. Sport, 22/9/95) However, Janet Jones, of the Drugs Advisory Service, thought of Mackenzie that "someone's winding him up." (D. Star, 20/9/95)

Perhaps. I've never come across the tale since, but a variant has just scuttled into view. Apparently inmates of Grafton maximum security prison in New South Wales, were caught breeding deadly redback spiders which they milk for venom to inject themselves for a high. Prison authorities suspect inmates found the four spiders -- which are common in Australia and can kill children and the elderly with a single bite -- in the prison garden. They bred them in jars and milked them of venom which they diluted with water before injecting it. (D. Sport, 8/9/04)

Three days after reading the above, I came across a reference to there being a thriving market for reptile venoms. These were required to develop antidotes for snake bites, but an American physician, John Eng, ordered gila monster (one of only two venomous lizards in the world and which is only found in the Arizona desert) venom out of a catalogue and found the holy grail for diabetes researchers. If a gila lizard bites it won't release its victim and the venom can cause extreme pain, swelling and vomiting. It became the unlikely star at the European

Association for the Study of Diabetes meeting in Munich, where it was announced that a significant therapy breakthrough could be on the way. A synthetic version of a hormone found in the gila monster venom has shown enormous potential in trials to control type 2 diabetes -- the type associated with overeating -- which is exploding in the Western world as a result of poor diet. (The Times, 11/9/04)

Back again in 1995, a dubious tale had youngsters placing bowls over fresh cow pats and breathing the methane gas through straws, resulting in a high leading to dizziness, blurred vision and death in extreme cases. Introduced to the U.S.A. from the Far East, physician Dr John Talberson, of Atlanta, Georgia, claimed that in some southern states towns up to 70% of high school students were hooked on sniffing dung. Cattle fed on clover were particularly potent. (D. Sport, 24/2/95)

Again fastforwarding to 2004, at St Andrews University, where Prince William was studying, a new craze involved taking Ritalin, designed for people suffering from attention deficit and hyperactive disorder. "Students are crushing tablets, which cost £2 each, and inhaling, snorting or injecting them," said student newspaper 'The Saint'. "Students take the drug prior to long study sessions and exams. It's readily available outside the library from the 'right people'." One student remarked: "A lot of my friends take it on the night before an exam. They take one of two tablets and work until 5am." (The Scurra column, D. Mirror, 4/6/04)

Next booze. It never ceases to smaze me how many ways of novel alcohol consumption can be concocted. Here's the latest:

a) Dominic Simler has sold 50 Alcohol without Liquid machines, an adaptation of an aromatherapy device where oxygen bubbles are passed over one's favourite tippie and alcohol is more quickly absorbed through the membranes of the nose and lungs rather than tiresome stomach and liver conversion. (D. Sport, 17/2/04; Sunday Telegraph, 22/2/04) Can rot nasal passages and cause brain damage.

b) Inspired by the cult Harry Enfield movie 'Kevin and Perry Go Large', young clubbers are pouring alcohol into their eyes because they believe it gets them drunk quicker and stays in their system longer. The main drink used for the 'eye-shots' is cinammon-flavoured Aftershock, which has a 40% alcohol content. (D. Sport, 9/8/04) Can lead to blindness.

Now sex. Inevitably several and the first two were regaled on the Oprah Winfrey Show.

(i) Tossing the Salad -- oral sex on the anus.

(ii) Rainbow Parties -- called so from different coloured lipsticks of girls giving men oral sex on the penis (both D. Sport, 24/3/04)

(iii) Toothing -- named after Bluetooth mobile phones, which allow users to send messages and phone numbers anonymously to other users over a range of about 30ft; used on trains, buses, in bars and even supermarkets. (The Times, 15/5/04)

(iv) Intexicated -- xmas party season one, being the condition where women decide to text a former lover which seems a good idea only after drinking excessive amounts of alcohol. Some also send 'guilt' texts to their boyfriend or husband who are at home because they feel bad that they are enjoying themselves at a party. Many are sent to the wrong person when drunk. Lucy Freebourne, 29, a public relations executive from London, sent a sexually-explicit text message to her father due to the similarity and close proximity of 'Dad' and 'Dan', the name of her boyfriend, on her mobile phone's address book. (D. Telegraph, 20/12/03)

(v) Lesbian French Kissing -- this classroom craze, inspired by the cheap publicity stunt to revive the ailing careers of Madonna and B. Spears at the MTV Video Music Awards, led to high school suspensions across the U.S.A.; a simple act of teen rebellion lading to a national debate on female sexuality and men's confusion and excitement. (The Times, 24/1/04)

(vi) Double Bungee Jumping -- in Australia couples leap together while having sex.

Next a miscellany from the past.

1). Alphabet Spaghetti as the sexiest campus game ever. Skint undergraduates (surely an oxymoron) were buying cheap tins of the kids' favourite, pouring them on plates and sitting their bare bums on the food. Then when they stood up, their chums had to make a humorous word from the pasta letters that stuck to their bum cheeks. Richard Whiteley start blushing now.

Andrew Park, from East London University, said: "Everyone is doing it. It's a great laugh and, more to the point, it's an excuse to see the girls without their knickers on!" (D. Sport, 17/10/00)

2). Primary schoolchildren in London were swapping prostitutes' calling cards in a variation on the Pokemon craze. The cards, many pornographic, litter the capital's telephone boxes. A spokeswoman for Westminster Council said: "We have received complaints about this problem from several schools, but we are not disclosing which. This appears to be a London-wide problem. (The Times, 8/7/00)

3). Trendy female clubbers were queuing up to have their naughty bits groomed to match the beards and faces of famous stars. Body artist Carlos Gomez started the craze by securing sponsorship from whiskey giants Bushmills, famous for its Black Bush nectar, for an exhibition of pubic grooming. He fashions the living sculptures out of a girls privates by shaping them in his own individual way. Some big names from the pop world, including one well-known girl-band member, were already said to have signed up for the treatment, which could cost up to £500 a session. Girls had been spotted showing off the kinky accessory underneath skimpy dresses at top nightclubs. (D. Sport, 27/7/99)

4). An oddball craze gripped the U.S.A. After the success of 'The Straight Story', starring Richard Farnsworth as an octogenarian crossing the country on a lawnmower, mower racing made a comeback. Although the machines are designed to go at only a gentle pace to tidy up the front law, racers souped them up to 60mph. The United States Lawn Mower Racing Association promoted the sport with the slogan "the mow the merrier". (The Times, 17/6/00)

5). Walkers enjoying the summer sunshine were suffering from a different kind of over-exposure -- thanks to naked ramblers. Nude men, wearing nothing but hats, boots and rucksacks, were startling visitors to the Yorkshire Dales National Park. One naked hiker who surprised a woman walking along a canal towpath politely wished her "good afternoon" before calmly strolling on. The craze, known as Boots-only Hiking was also becoming popular in the South and Lake District. (D. Sport, 5/8/03)

Crazes are by nature short-lived, so I close this article by looking at longer-lived -- and new -- traditions through the eyes of journalist John Naish, who reported: "My home town of Brighton invented a fascinating new tradition eight years ago: a ritual called the Burning of the Clocks. It signifies the throwing out of the old year, the old darkening life, and bringing in a new, brighter future. More than 600 people parade with paper lanterns shaped as clocks and lit by candles, headed by giant illuminated figures. Last year, 20,000 spectators followed the parade to a beachfront site where the clocks are ceremonially built into huge bonfires. Magic. I shall pass over the fact that it is sponsored this year by American Express." Naish added that as a Unitarian: "In response to growing disillusionment with modern Christmas we, along with Jane Barton, our minister, instead celebrate the solstice as our midwinter festival." Another sign that paganism is still very close to the surface in Britain's psyche, at the Iron Age Badbury Rings, near Wimbourne Minster in Dorset, local people left their beds early to greet the dawn at 7am, accompanied by a choir. Later they sat by a bonfire to be entertained by mummers (actors in traditional masked mime) and storytellers. The event has run for several years and last year's sold out three weeks in advance. (The Times, 20/12/03)

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ALIEN BIG CATS. With plenty of quotes from wildlife experts, Ron Toft urged those holidaying on waterways in quiet rural areas to watch out for exotic felids, particularly at dawn and dusk (Canal Boat and Inland Waterways, July 2004)

Meanwhile, several preserved railway lines have reported mystery big cats. Issue 59 of Heritage Railway recorded recent sightings of a black panther-like creature at Birstall on the Great Central Railway and other claims of big cats being seen along the Nene Valley Railway. The July 2004 issue (No. 63) spotlighted the Bluebell Railway where pumas have been seen alongside the line. Operations assistant Norman Blake spotted footprints by the tracks near Sheffield Park. Loco crews have seen them from the footplate.

There have been sightings of pumas all over Sussex. Big cat experts said that they follow railways lines because they are a wildlife haven which is relatively undisturbed for much of the day.



Rural round-up

THE ongoing files clearout has flushed out the following:

A sheep belonging to Peter Shepherd was run over on a village road in County Durham on Boxing Day by a car driven by Douglas Lamb. And when the accident was reported to Bishop Auckland police, the details were recorded by Sergeant Ledger. (D. Star, Sun, 28/12/84)

Security guard Shelley Bovington, 24, fled her home in Hove, East Sussex, when a snake popped out of her toaster. Experts were trying to identify the 9ft brown-and-red reptile. (Aberdeen Press & Journal, 14/8/92; cr. Dr A.S.L. Rae)

A desperate family in the Armenian capital of Yerevan were beating a crippling electricity shortage by lighting their flat with eight fluorescent eels in a bucket of water. (News of the World, 5/12/93)

Villagers were burying musical birthday cards near graves in Wookey, Somerset -- so the jingles would drive off moles plaguing the cemetery. (Sun, 14/7/92)

Golfer Richard Hughes sliced his ball into the rough outside Cape Town, South Africa, and hit a five-ton hippopotamus which was mating. The furious beast chased him for 60 meters before returning to finish bonking. (D. Sport, 29/10/02)

Two foxes escaping from hunt hounds stopped -- for nookie. Spectators following the chase through binoculars spotted the cheeky creatures which spent 25 minutes mating before giving the hounds the slip in woods near Esh Winning, County Durham. (Sun, 5/3/93)

Amazingly a giant creature "like something out of Jurassic Park" has been sighted several times south-west of Alaska. In the most recent case, a pilot and a full payload of passengers said the "raptor-bird" had a wingspan as big as a small plane. (D. Sport, 17/10/02)

A bat disrupted the dress rehearsal at the Swan Theatre, Worcester, of a play called 'Time to Kill' -- a story about Dracula. The bat was caught and freed. (The Sun, 20/9/85)

HAMSTER-SKIN coats have gone on sale in Scotland, but any reader thinking of investing in one should bear in mind this cautionary tale. A man who bought one as a birthday present for his wife then took her to Thorpe Park found he couldn't get her off the big wheel. (The Scurra column, D. Mirror, 3/3/04)



DID you hear about the hamster that died in his cage? The poor creature fell asleep at the wheel. *Darren Townsend, Haverigg Prison, Millom, Cumbria*



NEWSLINES

LOCAL OUTRAGE. A new category for FF and one which has been created from two ITV1 programmes which followed one another on September 2. Firstly episode one of 'Doc Martin' was titled 'Going Bodmin', an apparent Barking-like reference to mental illness. Programme makers apologised for the description, which supposedly outraged the Cornish town's residents. Mayor Lawrence Van der Wolfe said predictably: "It's nasty. It's certainly not good for the town." But a spokesman for ITV responded: "It's a comedy and our intention was to make people laugh." Then Bognor Regis was insulted in the new quiz show 'Bognor or Bust' where one contestant wins a tropical fortnight and another a b&b weekend break two miles from the sea at the South Coast resort. Presenter Angus Deayton said: "I've never actually been to Bognor, but I have been upstairs on a bus. I believe the adrenalin rush is roughly comparable." Here Mayor Sylvia Oliver said: "I think we should all pay £1 into a raffle and the winner gets to push Angus Deayton off the pier." (D. Sport, 3/9/04)

COFFEE BREAK: Elsewhere I denigrate columnist Bill Borrows, but this sounds true enough until "HAVE you ever wondered why the coffee they give you in car showrooms is too hot to drink? 'We're told to make it in the microwave,' an employee at a major dealership tells me. 'Otherwise they spend all day sitting around drinking it. It helps turnover.'" (D. Mirror, 14/8/04)

. until I recalled an article where Robin Young claimed that "an early foible was to serve soup and coffee so hot that passengers on station platforms stood no chance of finishing their cup before they had to reboard the train. That way vendors could return the unfinished refreshments to the cauldron to be reheated for the next trainload of customers." (The Times, 18/1/03)

RUSSIAN GRAPHITE. The following, I had come across in an article somewhere and printed as an actuality. When submitted by Miss Elspeth McVie, of Letham, Perth, as a joke in Billy Britain's Gagbag, I took a double-take. No wonder contemporary legends get past the most sophisticated cynics and folklorists' radar. Here it is: "When NASA first started sending up astronauts, they quickly discovered ballpoint pens would not work in zero gravity. So boffins spent a decade and £12billion -- a lot of time and money -- to develop a pen that would write in zero gravity, upside down, under water on almost any surface, including glass and at temperatures from below freezing to 300C. The Russians used a pencil." (D. Sport, 14/6/04)

BOSOM FROG (FF19:11-12). This tale usually involves subsequently giving birth to a serpent. However, a woman who went for a swim in a pool containing frogspawn has given birth to a frog, which popped out after she went through a bizarre labour with severe bleeding. She had not had a period for six months and medical tests showed she had a cyst in her abdomen. According to the Iranian newspaper 'Etemaad', medical experts are not sure how the amphibian developed inside her. However, they say the frog does have some human characteristics. "The similarities are in appearance, the shape of the fingers and the size and shape of the tongue," said clinical biology expert Dr Rasid Aminifard. It happened in the Iranian city of Iranashahr to an unnamed woman who has two normal children. (D. Sport, 29/6/04)

VIRGIN BIRTH? Housewife Rajja Bennett bought some free-range eggs so her broody hen Biscuit could pretend to incubate them, but three weeks later one of the eggs from Tesco, in Wilmslow, Cheshire, hatched. "The egg started chirping so we knew something was going to happen," said Mrs Bennett. "I couldn't believe it when I saw a chick pop out from under Biscuit the next morning." A spokesman for the British Free Range Egg Producers' Association said: "It's incredible." (D. Sport, 2/9/04)

HANKIE PANKY. Buddhists in Japan protested against the sale of a sweet called 'Snot from the nose of the Great Buddha.' Monks stopped the name being registered as a trademark, but have so far failed to prevent the sweet being sold to tourists visiting the famous temple in Nara, western Japan. (The Times, 22/5/04)

OLDIES BUT GOODIES

1. SURPRISE, SURPRISE. " Barely a fortnight away from their wedding a young couple offered to babysit the bride-to-be's younger brother while her parents spent the evening out having a well-earned break from the wedding preparations. Alone together, they fell to tender embraces that rapidly shifted up a gear to heavy petting, and before long they had retired to the girl's bedroom for more adventurous fun and games. Only when they were both naked and in bed did the girl remember her mother's final request, to put on a load of washing. Worried that leaving it in the basket might suggest that she had been up to no good, the girl ran downstairs starkers with her boyfriend in hot pursuit, playfully offering to help. As they made their way through the dark a voice called out 'Surprise, surprise!' -- and all the lights suddenly flashed on. The girl's parents had arranged a surprise pre-wedding party for friends and relations, with the vicar who was to marry them invited along as guest of honour.

2. HAPPY BIRTHDAY. "A boss who was expecting a quiet birthday with his family at home was taken completely by surprise when his highly-desirable secretary invited him back to her home for a drink after work. Hoping against hope that she was giving him the come-on at last, he readily accepted. Back at her place she offered him a large whisky and then said that she just had to slip into the bedroom to see to a few things. Well, how much more of an invitation does a man need than that? In an uncharacteristic burst of impetuosity, the boss tore off his clothes and was standing in his socks when the bedroom door opened and his wife, children, colleagues and several friends rushed into the room with a big birthday cake, all singing 'Happy Birthday to you ...'."

3. STUCK COUPLE. "A jogger out for his early morning run passed a lone car parked by the side of the road. its windows all steamed up. Returning the same way half-an-hour later the car was still there and this time there were faint signs of life inside accompanied by pathetic cries for help. Peering inside he found a half-naked couple locked together in the back seat. The man, who was on top, told him that his back had gone and he couldn't move. The jogger ran off to call the police. The police arrived, took one look and called the fire brigade. A fire crew arrived, took one look and summoned an ambulance. A quick consultation between these two agencies resulted in the top being cut off the car so that the injured man could be lifted free. 'I'm sorry about this lady,' said the senior fireman as the lady's lover was driven away to the casualty department, 'but at least he hasn't come to any more harm this way.' 'To hell with him,' she replied, 'how am I supposed to explain to my husband what's happened to his car?'

4. PILL SWAP. A 16-year-old girl who had been having regular sex with her boyfriend, began worrying that he might lost interest in her if he had to keep wearing a condom. What she really wanted was to go on the pill, but as her doctor was a close family friend, she couldn't face asking him. Then one day she found her mother's pills while tidying her bedroom and, not having a firm grasp of the principles of contraception, swapped these for aspirins. The girl and her boyfriend were delighted by the new arrangement and they continued their happy sex life until a few months later when the mother announced she was pregnant."

5. CANDID CAMERA. "'Sex kitten seeks sharp cat! Send candid pictures' ran the advertisement placed in a local contacts magazine by Ilsa Schmidt, tiring of her husband but frisky enough to look for kicks elsewhere. Klaus Schmidt evidently shared his wife's feelings -- his was one of the enthusiastic replies she received. Once Frau Schmidt had recovered her composure she filed for divorce, stating that this was the first time she had ever seen her husband naked. Whenever they made love he always insisted on doing it in the dark.

(1 - 5 all from The Encyclopaedia of Sexual Trivia by Dr Robin Smith, Robson Books, 1990)

TURNIP HEADS. Previously heard verbally from Arthur Pickering, then Mail sports editor, referring to Hartlepool Football Club manager Mick Docherty, son of Tommy 'The Doc' Docherty, and his team. In this version Margaret Thatcher sat down for dinner with her Cabinet. After serving her meat course, the foreign waiter asked, "And the vegetables?" Quick as a flash she replied: "They'll have the same." (The Scurra column, D. Mirror, 1/8/03)

AND MORE MEAT AND TWO VEG. A pervert who exposed himself to a "girl" on a London Underground train fled when his victim -- a transvestite -- flashed back. (D. Sport, 6/11/03)

SOMETHING FISHY. Art student Piet Goosen caused a big stink when he was evicted from his flat in Amsterdam for not paying the rent. Before leaving, he hid old smoked herrings around the flat. The smell drove out the next three tenants. Nobody could find the fish, but they did finally land Goosen when the landlord heard him boasting of what he'd done in a local bar and he was fined £500. (D. Sport, 28/10/03)

TIME-WARPED HUMOUR. Here's a case of going from proto-legend to an oldie. Earlier I wrote that "all clocks, electric or otherwise, will be referred to in the South Yorkshire Times as timepieces" claimed chat show host Michael Parkinson on an entry, still current, added to the paper's style book after he ended a report: "The groom presented the bride with an electric cock." In a similar vein, a paper in South Yorkshire "printed a photograph of a new bride with her array of presents, which were listed. One gift -- a large gilt clock -- was the victim of a very upsetting mistake. The 'l' in clock went missing -- forcing the editor to make a rule that all clocks would in future be referred to as 'timepieces'." (The Star, 19/12/late Eighties?) All very dodgy and well after the junior Parkinson was trawling Barnsley for scoops.

DOGGONE IT! I wish I had a £1 for every time I read about the trigger-happy canid. Lately a hunter near Bayonne, in France, was shot in the leg by his dog, which stepped on the trigger of a shotgun as it jumped into the back of the man's car. (Sunday Telegraph, 9/11/03, via D. Mail)

SAVED! Often this one involves a life-saving Bible, but Dr Hiroshu Osayama's life was saved by his wallet when a mentally-ill patient fired a gun point-blank at him in his surgery in Osaka, Japan. The bullet lodged in his wad of cash. Dr Osayama quipped: "It was a good job I was carrying so much money." (D. Sport, 19/11/03)

BOSOM SERPENT. Doreen Luckett, 11, had been complaining for two weeks of a tummy-ache. The small town doctor who visited the Mississippi delta village of Darrow couldn't make out the problem. An X-ray showed something very off. But what was it? Doctor Jim Edwards referred Doreen to the general hospital in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. But it was almost a week before her backwoodsman father Bob could take her. X-rays there showed some foreign object. Doreen told the doctors her pain had started a couple of days after she had swallowed a lot of water while swimming in the lake near her home. The doctors decided to operate. What they discovered startled them, for inside the girl's stomach was a snake -- and it was still alive! The harmless garter snake was about a quarter of an inch in diameter and nine inches long. Hospital staff killed it after the operation. A week after her operation Doreen was allowed to leave hospital. "We tried to keep the facts from her," said her father, "but unfortunately her brother Tad couldn't keep his mouth shut." (Sunday Express, 14/10/84) See also Newslines.

OUT OF HIS SKULL. For years photocopylore/e mail has circulated a reply from the curaror of antiquities at the U.S. Smithsonian Institute gently deflating an amateur paleoanthro-pologist that his T Rex-savaged early hominid skull was a actually a dog-chewed Barbie doll head. Sandy Hobbs reproduced in a magazine he edited this spoof, but whoever recently chose to pass it on concluded "the really weird thing about these letters is that this guy really exists and does this in his spare time!" (This Magazine, Hartlepool, No. 13, 2004)

FRIENDSHIPS. Paul Routledge trotted out a familiar political tale when upbraiding Charles Kennedy for having telephoned the David Frost show to disclaim plans to quit the Lib Dem leadership. However, the incident reminded him of the time Peter Mandelson asked Gordon Brown for 10p to phone a friend. "Here's 20p," he replied. "Ring them all." (D. Mirror, 30/4/04)

MASTER BEAN. A boy from a mountain village in Vrancea county was in hospital for a check-up when doctors found something odd -- even by Romanian standards. The 4-year-old had a bean plant growing in his nose without him noticing. Dr Nicolae Moise said: "As he didn't cry or tell his mother anything, it sprung into life and had small leaves when we found it." (Front, April, 2004)

SWIM PANIC. It's implausible that any manufacturer would knowingly produce see-through swimwear (though such claims have been made previously), so I reckon this tabloid fell for an agency story which has silly season and forced topicality written all over it. Swimsuits for a female British Olympic team supposedly had "modesty patches" fitted because they went see-through in the water. The change was made to spare blushes of our triathlon competitors in Athens. An official put the costumes through a "shower test" to ensure the modification worked. Seamstress Christing Spencer, of Lincoln, carried out the alterations, saying: "The fronts are made of skintight Lycra and you can see everything if you get water on them. Now I've sowed extra Lycra panels into the chests." So, never mind the groins? (The Sun, 12/8/04)

PLAIN POTTY. Police were called to a house in Bozeman, Montana, USA, by a man who said burglars were on the premises. They didn't find any intruders, but they arrested the occupant after finding marijuana plants in his bedroom. (D. Sport, 18/5/04)

HEN PARTY. Scientists at Rolls-Royce built a gun to launch dead chickens at the windshields of military jets, travelling at maximum velocity. The idea being to simulate the frequent incidents of collisions with airborne fowl, to test the strength of the windshields. American engineers were eager to put it to the test on their new high-speed trains. Arrangements were made and a gun sent to them. When fired, the Yanks stood shocked as the chicken shot out of the barrel, crashed into the shatterproof shield, smashed it to smithereens, blasted through the control console, snapped the engineer's (driver's -- UK) back rest in two and embedded itself in the back wall of the cabin (cab -- UK). The horrified Yanks sent Rolls-Royce the disastrous results along with the windshield designs and begged the British scientists for instructions. Rolls-Royce responded with a one-line memo: "Defrost the chicken." (Front, April, 2004)

PORN AGAIN. Sheryl Reeves was shocked after buying a "blank" video tape from a store in Cedar Lake, Indiana, USA, to find that it contained explicit porn scenes." (D. Sport, 18/5/04)

ZAPPED! Abdul Mahood Aki Balin, 55, lost his penis when he took a leak on a railway track in Egypt late at night, and the electrified current shot back up his pee, frying his manhood at twice the speed of a microwave oven before it dropped off. (D. Sport, 29/3/04)

FUTILE MODUS OPERANDI. A double helping of ineptitude. Burglars broke into a bank and spent hours drilling into a safe which led to a storage vault. After drilling through a steel door, they broke through a wall which they thought led to the main vault, but found themselves back out on the main street in Lexington, Kentucky, U.S.A. (D. Sport, ?, 2004). Sounds familiar as criminals in Cooperville, Ohio, USA, drilled their way through a safe door which led to a thick wall and drilling on they finally broke through on to the street. (D. Sport, 2/9/04)

CHECKMATE. The New York University chess team, a formidable assembly of academic minds, has been beaten in a correspondence match. Their opponents were patients from a Texas mental hospital for the criminally insane. (D. Sport, ?, 2004)

HOT BOT. A man roasted his anus when a portable loo exploded as he lit a cigarette while having a crap. It was caused by a build-up of methane inside the toilet in Blacksville, West Virginia, USA. (D. Sport, 16/7/04) Another cigarette lit by Tatsuo Onishi, 22, from Matsuyama, Japan, set his parents' house on fire as he tried to get rid of a mosquito followed by sparks from his lighter causing an explosion after igniting flammable particles in the air. Onishi suffered minor burns to his face and cops believe the mosquito was killed in the fire. (D. Sport, 30/8/04)

BREADWINNER. A man of 26 -- sent out for bread 14 years previously -- returned to his home in Turin, with a loaf after travelling through Italy with a circus. (D. Sport, 2/7/04)

REUNION OFF. The Order of Henpecked husbands called off a boozy reunion in Dallas, Texas, USA, as their wives would not let them go. (D. Sport, 1/9/04)

LIE STRAIN: Sneaky cops got Roger Willis, 23, to confess to a series of burglaries by putting a colander on his head and convincing him it was a lie detector in New York. (D. Sport, 17/8/04)

UPDATE

BRITNEY SPEARS (FF39:3). Britney has been on tour in the UK doing all that orgasmic writhing stuff with people touching her breasts, etc. "In her latest video she drowns herself in the bath and thus fulfils a particularly niche masturbatory fantasy in a bid to say, 'Hey, I'm all growed up and ready to do anything for you'. Well, anything but sing live, according to concert reports. The result? It's a no-shock shock. Grown-ups yawn while pubescent girls move on to their next teenybop peer hero." The antibody pocket pen portrait adds catilly: "While Spears is in the UK, we recommend that she takes a few tips from a child star who knows how to grow up with dignity. Hello, Charlotte Church." (The Times body&soul, 1/5/04)

LIQUORICE (FF19:12-13, passim). A woman of 56 who overdosed on liquorice after eating a packet of Pontefract cakes a day in an attempt to relieve constipation has had life-saving treatment. Like all liquorice products, the sweet contain glycyrrhizic acid, which is supposed to relieve the complaint. The woman, from Yorkshire, was not aware that too much of the chemical can cause high blood pressure. (Sunday Telegraph, 23/5/04)

DRINKING URINE (FF43:4-5). A woman who drank rat urine to increase her sex drive ended up in hospital with swollen breasts. Yang Qunying, 50, of Bishan, China, believed that the urine would nourish her kidneys and boost her urges. (D. Sport, 13/5/04)

BLOKE TREE (FF27: 10-11, passim). Two men -- one undergoing a sex change -- had a four-hour romp 50ft up a tree as crowds watched. The 32-year-old with breasts, and his lover, aged 17, only broke off to lob branches at cops trying to coax them down. They also shouted abuse at the crowd gathering below in New York's Central Park, but finally gave in and hugged before they were taken off to a psychiatric hospital. (The Sun, 24/4/04)

JOKER QUEEN. Somewhere I mentioned the Queen Mother only made two humorous remarks during her long life. Nigel Farndale suggests a third one: "I am sorry to hear that the architectural historian John Cornforth had died at the age of 66. He was a flamboyant character who spent most of his career in the company of aristocrats, ostensibly while writing about their country houses for 'Country Life.' There is a story about him, which I suspect is true. The Queen Mother was drawing up a list of guests for a dinner party when someone suggested Cornforth. 'Oh no,' she said, 'he's far too grand for us'." (Sunday Telegraph, 9/5/04)

DUBIOUS TRANSMISSIONS (FF18 and 22, passim). Rail commuters thought their prayers had been answered when they heard church services over the station address system. Sermons and hymns were broadcast until bosses at Ascot station in Berkshire pinpointed nearby All Souls church's new radio microphones. The Rev Sebastian Jones explained: "They were on the same frequency. I hope my words provided comfort to travellers!" (The Sun, 27/3/04)

HYGIENE (FF41:10; FF43:4-5). An office desk has 400 times more germs than a toilet seat according to Arizona University researchers. More people eating at their desks and a lack of cleaning mean the average workspace has 20,961 bugs a square inch while loos have 49. The dirtiest area is the phone, where there are 25,127 microbes per square inch. This is due to phones being shared in the office. It is followed by the desk surface, computer keyboard and mouse. (D. Sport, 17/3/04; The People, 20/3/04) Health experts in Athens, Greece, examined the beards and moustaches of ten average men and found each one contained an average 1,240 germs, bugs and parasites. (Zoo, May 7-13, 2004)

MANDELSON'S MUSHY PEAS (FF36:3-8, passim). Scraping the barrel, arguably the current worst columnist on a national newspaper, Bill Borrows dragged this Hartlepudlian's favourite old chestnut out. For boring Bill it goes like this: "Peter Mandelson in Europe. He may have resigned from the cabinet twice but his grasp of a brief is legendary. As M.P. for Hartlepool he once visited a local chippy for a photocall. It was going well enough until he pointed to the mushy peas and asked for some avocado mousse. Or so the story goes." (D. Mirror, 14/8/04)

BOOBS 'N' BOOZE (FF30:4-7). Drinkers at The George, in Upper Denby, near Huddersfield, West Yorks., are paying £1 a time to guess landlady Tracey Mallinson's chest size. To give pub punters a clue, 37-year-old Tracey has hung up one of her bras as part of the charity fundraising event, where the prize is a five-hour free boozing session. "I've always had a big chest," said Tracey. "It's been an issue ever since I started working in pubs." (D. Sport, 7/9/04)

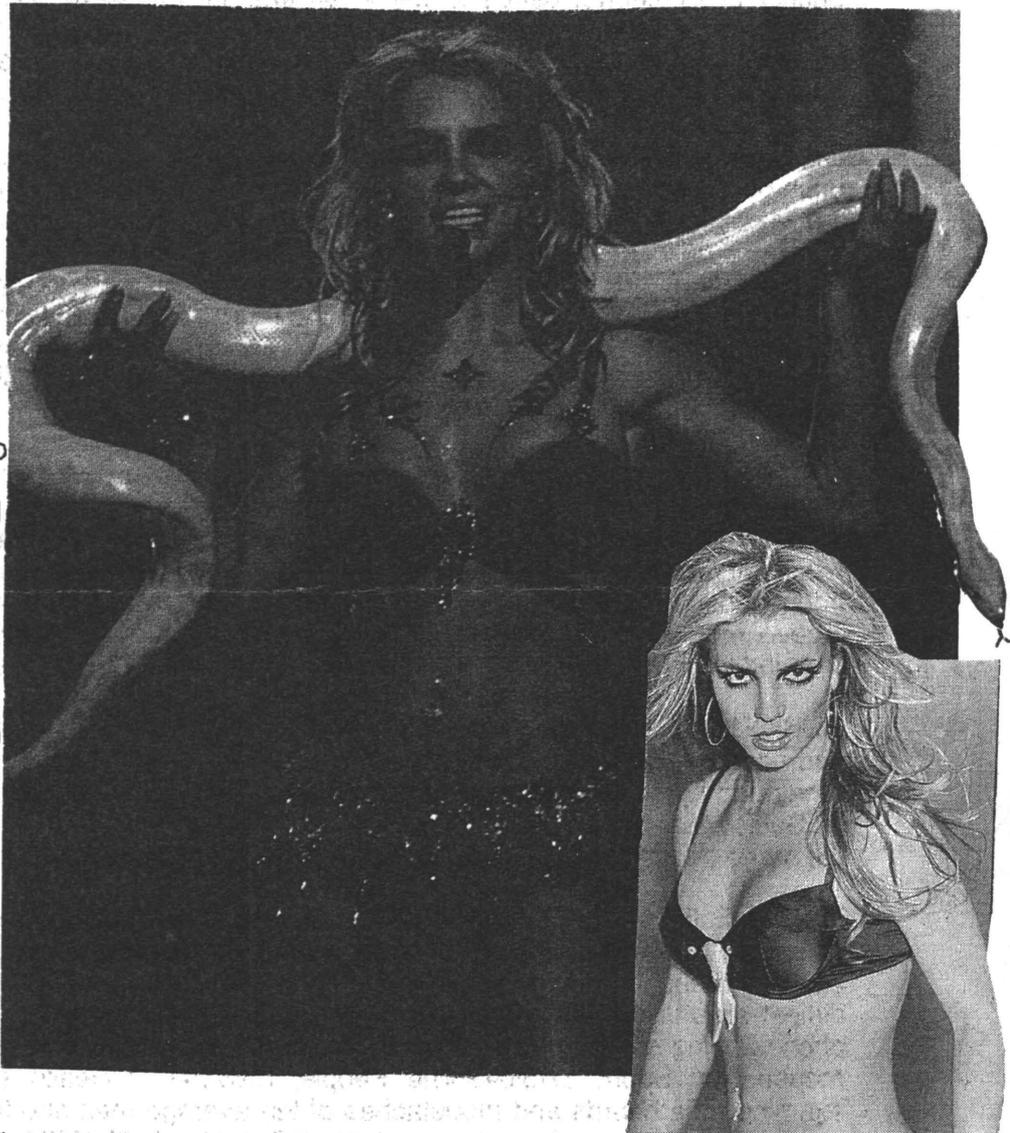
TATTOO BLUNDERS (FF33:15, passim). Just as Christopher Howse reminded us (D. Telegraph, 14/8/04) of Michelle Plummer, a mother of three from Merthyr Tydfil who got David Beckham's name tattooed in 1 1/2in letters on her back spelt BECKAM ("I went berserk. I feel I've been scarred for life" FF44:7), a woman in Tonbridge, Kent, had a large picture of the Olympic gold medallist Kelly Holmes indelibly tattooed on her back with the name spelt HOMES. "It still sounds like Holmes," she said philosophically. (D. Telegraph via Sunday Telegraph, 5/9/04) Pearl Harbor star Ben Affleck has got a tattoo of former lover Jennifer Lopez's name -- but only on the base of his foot. Actor pal Matt Damon explained: "It was easier in case he split with her." (Metro, 7/7/04)

As for ubiquitous Britney Spears, she has a Hebrew tattoo on the back of her neck, but what does it mean? Nothing apparently; the tattooist got the symbols the wrong way around. (Zoo, issue 26, 2004)

MASTURBATION (FF46:8) One columnist started this category (as relief from a hangover!) so here's a real wanker on Ms Spears: "Every man of a certain age -- that's to say between 13 and 76 -- remembers where he was and what he was doing the first time he saw the video for Baby One More Time. He might be more reticent when you ask him what he was doing the second time he watched it. But I bet he was on his own. (Bill Borrows, D. Mirror, 25/9/04)

666 (FF45:3). Roman Catholic priest Macus Ricardo was fined £60 in Cebu, Philippines, for refusing to display the registration number on his car because it contained the numerals 666, the Devil's number. (D. Sport, 11/3/04)

BESTIALITY (FF46:13). Angelina Jolie is set to play Catherine the Great in Love and Honour. The Russian empress who came to power in 1762 suffered horrific injuries when a horse bolted while she was strapped underneath its belly enjoying sexual congress. For non-historians, when Cath realised first husband Peter III couldn't get it up she decided to bonk her way through half the Russian army. When her fascination for men waned she turned her attention to the soldiers' stallions. Jolie said: "The more I've researched her the more I think that her story is very complicated and needs to be done correctly. I take it seriously." (D. Sport, 13/9/04)



MAGAZINES

FORTEAN TIMES. News-stand. £3.40. No. 185. Round-up of bullets deflected by such objects as buttons on flies and notepad, recalling "it was like the old Bible stopping the Indian arrow" to show the event's long history. Plus Sender Theory spoof; misinformation which aided Allies on D-Day; Thailand's tea plant which 'dances' to music and individual presence; Fort and the universe as cosmic joker (including "nominative determinism" -- or surname to suit job); TV mentalist illusionist Derren Brown will fool but not cheat you while despising debunkers as much as the New Age "lobotomised flower-fairy"; magic and the military. No. 186. Absorbing psychogeographical odysseys across the Haldon Hills of Devon's South Hams, featuring flying penises and Frank Muir's novel manoeuvre to thwart Nazi invasion; Rasputin's 11-inch penis; insights into 17th century imaginary voyages and current alien abduction scenarios; self-performed Caesarean section; remote viewing in 21st century. No. 187. Has the milieu surrounding West Virginia's Mothman spawned a death-dealing curse? Also dictionary definition of S.H.C.; gargoyle-like Glastonbury entity; beer belly myth; Big Bang as scientific creation myth; sizing up the Childe of Hale giant myth. No. 188. Paul Devereux reports from the front line of archaeoacoustics research; Colin Wilson's life and work discussed in an interview; Janet Bord looks at mankind's markings and interpretation of such simulacra in nature; truly earthly circular craft; Solar Temple cult and its disinformation legacy; bizarre "art"; ABCs as primaevial felids memory; diners' disgust. No. 189. U.S. presidential conspiracies; bedroom visitors; Andrew Green obituary; Oklahoma City bombing disturbing twist; America's first real vampire; goldfish memory span. **Regular strange days worldwide weirdness round-up, ufology, alien zoo, science, saints, strange deaths** and modern myths, plus letters, reviews and archive tales each issue.

AMSKAYA. Newsletter of the STAR Fellowship. £2 for 4. Cheques payable to J. Goddard at 25 Albert Road, Addlestone, Weybridge, Surrey, KT15 2PX. No. 59. Alex Birch of 1962 UFO formation photograph infamy now has a website claiming the picture as genuine, having previously retracted its veracity. Despite setting up a website to publicise the sighting, Birch warns -- "revel in your experience but tell no one." So why re-publicise it? Plus Howard Menger's motor and differences between contactees and abductees.

TOUCHSTONE. Mag of Surrey Earth Mysteries Group. Same address, price and frequency as Amskaya (see above). No. 65. Alignments around Windsor and Frogmore leading to claimed corroboration of the ley network and its phenomenon today of regeneration; Chilterns fieldtrip.

MAGONIA. Q. £7. Cheques payable to John Rimmer. Address: John Dee Cottage, 5 James Terrace, Mortlake Churchyard, London SW14 8HB. No. 84. Ponderous David Sivier on how Fortean phenomena was relegated around the 17th century to the intellectual margins by a combination of the rise of the experimental, rationalist science and an explicit class prejudice, and only really gained a new momentum with the countercultural seismic shift of the Sixties. Largely focussing on psychogeography (a hideous term loaded with sanity doubt -- why not geomancy or Hermetic topography?) he snipes at "the re-enchanted landscape of the hippy imagination," an expression ill-befitting a writer of some scholarship (although his accuracy and punctuation are frightful: Paul Devereux becomes Devereaux three times, Alfred Watkins is "Watkin's" and 1960s is 1960's, suggesting Sivier's day job is in traditionally-dyslexic greengrocery). No. 85. Hatchet job on a bizarre non-believer-in-reality called Colin Bennett, who has many split personalities, including Dr Patricia Farson, who believes the current Fortean Times "has as much to do with Charles Fort as the inside of her cunt." Charming! Some "New Cromwellian" contributors have taken over the monthly mag according to Bennett and his Alternative Fortean Times, paranoia and fertile imagination (calling Paul Devereux the Great Ley Hunting Shagbat of Chilworth). Also, though claiming to be willing to take seriously alien language specifics, Mark Newbrook seems to be unaware of the scope of the subject already undertaken, such as Jimmy Goddard's proselytising a universal extraterrestrial language called Solexmal and the work on the scroll inscriptions from North Yorkshire's Silpho Moor craft. Plus squirrel-napping.

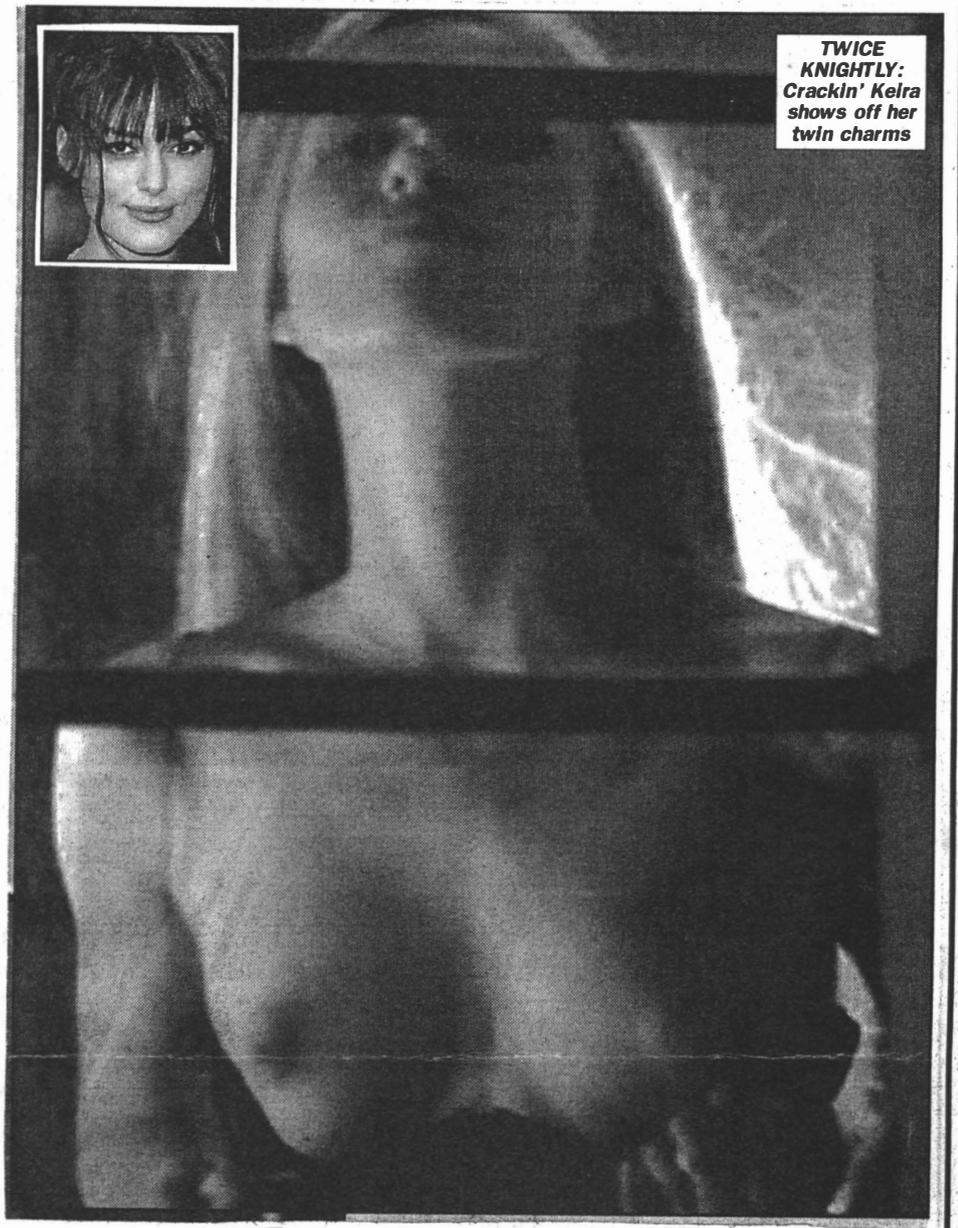
NORTHERN EARTH. Q. £6 for 4. Cheques payable to Northern Earth Group. From 10 Jubilee Street, Mytholmroyd, Hebden Bridge, West Yorks., HX7 5NP. No. 97. "I find a subject of delightful vagueness and most admirable confusion." F.J. Falding was writing of antiquarianism in 1884, but it could equally describe earth mysteries 120 years later; also without using the term "amateur", he enthuses as to how archaeology and history can be enriched by the inquisitive outsider. Plus the late Guy Ragland Phillips' (FF contributor) Howgill Fells figure; retribution upon those who harm ancient sites; a new shoe tree (see FF44). No. 98. Editor John Billingsley looks at misperception of what the term "earth mysteries" means, though I like better Bill Porter's "Hermetic topography" (it has a scholarly, antiquarian ring about it), but even so E.M. is a useful reference point and catch-all (just as Fortean gathers together such disparate subjects as lake monsters, fish falls, SHC, BVM visions, cryptids, fetishists, entombed toads, corn circles and so on. Other articles cover Roman tumuli in Cambs and archaeological finds in mid-South Pennines region. No. 99. Deadmanstone "coffin-resting" association; Billingsley on alignments as being created by desire -- desire to cross an area by the nearest and quickest straight route to what we desire leys to be for us; St Helen's Well, Almondbury; research tips; Sunday salmon spotting at Paythorne; Neolithic flamingo cave art; N.E.M.G. moot and Society of Ley Hunters convention reports.

STOP PRESS

IF Keira Knightley is so willing to discuss her boobs, FF feels duty bound to show here what everyone's interested in. Keira will next be seen naked in time-travel drama *The Jacket*. She said: "It's just part of the work. I went up to John, the director, and told him to just make me look good." She added that she would prefer to have "longer legs and bigger tits." while expanding on the cleavage of *Pirates of the Caribbean* she recalled: "It took 45 minutes every morning for the bloody make-up artist to paint it in." (D. Sport, 26/8/04)

Meanwhile, Brits Keira and Kelly Brook are among the most gorgeous girls in Hollywood, according to an Internet survey which quizzed almost 7,000 guys aged between 18 and 28. It put Keira at No. 4 and former Big Breakfast babe Kelly at No. 5.

ALSO here are another confectionery moral panic (D. Sport, 3/9/04) and the marksman maimed (Sunday Telegraph, 12/9/04)



TWICE KNIGHTLY: Crackin' Keira shows off her twin charms

© HARIBO

MAOAM

ZITRONE
MAOAM

SAUCY: The naughty sweet wrapper

Fruity sweets rapped

A GERMAN college has complained about new Haribo sweet wrappers which it claims portray fruit in sexual positions.

"We are shocked at the shameless presentation of sexual practices on the wrapping, which includes not only sexual intercourse but also fellatio and cunnilingus," wrote the St Blasien Jesuit College, near Bonn.

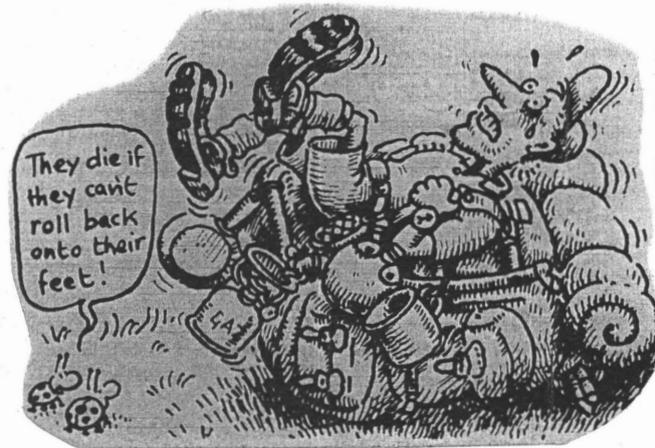
The letter, complaining about the new packaging of Haribo's Maoam fruit chews, added: "It's irresponsible, to expose children to pornographic representations."

A Spokesman for Haribo said: "The new wrapping is certainly fruitier than the old. But we have not had any other complaints. In fact until now the feedback has been positive."



Highland cattle have been introduced in a nature reserve near Amsterdam to deter amorous couples. An official said visitors got annoyed by people having sex in public, but "the presence of the cows puts them off." (Sunday Telegraph, 12/9/04)

A MAN shooting a litter of puppies in Florida had to be taken to hospital. One of his intended victims kicked the gun's trigger and shot him in the arm. - Daily Express



- Answers to Shakespeare's plays contest (from Page 4)
1. As You Like It;
 2. Much Ado About Nothing;
 3. A Midsummer Night's Dream;
 4. Othello;
 5. Twelfth Night.

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