

F O L K L O R E

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FOLKLORE FRONTIERS is an independent magazine covering various aspects of folklore, particularly contemporary legends (urban belief tales, if you prefer), 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.

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COMMENTS AND THE DIARY..... COMMENTS AND THE DIARY

THE CONTENTS of this issue unclude:

* Are the tales of old rocker Rod Stewart preferring to enjoy his model train sets more than sex true? Maybe his lust, drinking and leisure pursuit should be seen in mythological terms as an amalgam of Priapus, Bacchus and Frank Hornby meets the Sirens, Amazons, the ex-wives' sister fraternity akin to the Witches in Macbeth, and being currently caught between Scylla and Charybdis.

* A celebration of The Railway Children by Edith Nesbitt, whose life was far from being as wholesome as the trainspotting trio -- unless, of course, you share the notion that it's all Freudian or menstrual.

* Dolly Parton is the latest occasional blonde icon. Breast fetishists get ready to drool.

* This issue should arrive for St George's Day. An undated Daily Sport editorial, which FF endorses, calls for a day off work on April 23. Having taken early retirement that's no good to me, so I suggest politicians make it a free-beer-all-day day.

* Back with breast fetishism, just how seriously should we take the claim of an actress having her tits worshipped by a remote African tribe?

* Doc Shiels wrote here about Guinness in glowing terms (FF2:3-4) so there's some of that to mark the recent St Patrick's Day.

* In the Did You Miss? section there's three pieces on lightning strikes. A Times columnist reported: A few weeks ago ... I mentioned a factoid on the Institute of Physics website: men are six times more likely than women to be struck by lightning. A couple of curious readers asked why and I asked the I.O.P. It came back this week with a simple answer:

men get out more.

* Plus employees' mischief; Harvey Nicks and an in-store birth rumour; 50 names for condoms; dinosaur droppings.

Front cover: Alas, I hoped to forget conceptual art, but the laughter from my grandchildren at the picture of Helen Chadwick's husband urinating in the snow caused me to decide upon publicising her notorious *Piss Flowers* (top: creation in progress. lower: finished product) shown at the Pump House Gallery in Battersea, south London, between December last year and February this, in the White Station exhibition. True piss artists! (The Times, 4/12/04)

HUNTING LEY MISUSES. As former editor of The Ley Hunter magazine (1969-1976), it struck me that just as lazy journalists target trainspotters for a cheap laugh, ley-lines (an inaccuracy for 'ley' anyway, but now the general term) are now dropped into articles to denote the dippy. Here's a starter and let's see how many more imagin-ary leys are to be hunted down. "My mum rings with important news: did I see that Alan Titchmarsh geology programme the other week? I confess that I assumed he would not dig that deep. 'Well, he says that the Ice Age stopped precisely at Finchley Road station.' Now that is worth knowing, and confirms a growing hunch that the Finchley Road is not merely the centre of the my universe, but yours too. Perhaps strange ley lines meet under the cacophonous junction at Swiss Cottage, just down the road from Argos." (Kate Muir column, The Times Magazine, 6/11/04)

Please don't shop until you drop

THE TIMES SATURDAY MARCH 26 2005

By Stefanle Marsh

THE department store Harvey Nichols is experiencing an unusual phenomenon: heavily pregnant women loitering for hours on the shop floor.

They are not at its Edinburgh branch for a burst of last-minute shopping before the baby pops out. They are there because they have heard that if they go into labour on the premises they will be awarded £500 in gift vouchers.

It is a rumour thought to

have spread in antenatal classes. So potent is it that women have even found time to stop off at Harvey Nichols on the way to the maternity ward. One called the store from her car on the way to hospital.

Fiona Kinnaird, the sales manager at the Edinburgh store, said that many staff had been approached by pregnant women asking them if the rumour was true.

She said: "Just before Christmas I watched an expectant mother loiter around the store

to the point where I thought she was going to shoplift.

"She came up to me and asked if the rumour was true. I wasn't sure so I told her to call head office. Since then I have noticed other heavily pregnant mothers-to-be hanging around the store."

Although staff have repeatedly tried to scotch the rumour, the surge of women skulking about the shop waiting for their waters to break has become a problem.

It is now feared that a

woman will end up giving birth in the store.

A Harvey Nichols spokesman said that staff were worried because although they had trained first-aiders, no one knew how to deliver a child.

"We do have first-aiders on site but they aren't trained in childbirth so we're concerned about this rumour," he said.

"We have even had a bizarre phone call from one woman as she was lying in the back of a car on the way to hospital asking about the vouchers."

The spokesman said that Harvey Nichols did not reject the possibility of giving out vouchers, but only if it were not the woman's sole aim for being in the store.

He said: "If a woman does go into labour we would consider giving her some vouchers if her intentions were not for it to deliberately happen in our store."

Sandra Getty, 34, from Glasgow, who is expecting her first child on April 7, said that she was tempted to make the trip to Harvey Nichols.

She said: "I've heard you get a present at Marks & Spencer and also Mothercare. Imagine what you could buy with £500 of Harvey Nichols vouchers."

"I think it is a great idea and really fun and I would seriously consider going along around the time when I'm due."

Mothercare, where a woman has actually given birth, and Marks & Spencer said that they did not have a policy on gifts but it was up to the discretion of the store manager.

THE TIMES SATURDAY APRIL 2 2005

Birth in store

From Mr Barry Hyman

Sir, You report (March 26) that expectant mothers are hoping to claim gifts by having a baby in the Harvey Nichols store.

Marks & Spencer had a pre-opening shopping evening for cardholders at the new out-of-town store in Cheshunt. As PR manager for the company during the 1980s I was present, together it seemed with half the population

of Hertfordshire, when a woman went into labour. I was hoping desperately that, with the ambulance taking an age to arrive because of traffic congestion, twin boys would be delivered on site and that they would be named Mark and Spencer.

Happily for the mother, she was safely dispatched to maternity in time.

Yours faithfully,
BARRY HYMAN,
4 Priory View, Bushey Heath,
Hertfordshire WD23 4GN.
March 26.

TOP 50 NICKNAMES

HERE are our top 50 terms for condoms:

- 1 Spunk spittoon
- 2 Pump sump
- 3 Jism prison
- 4 Wanger hangar
- 5 DNA lounge
- 6 C*mbrella
- 7 Rascal wrapper
- 8 Great barrier sheath
- 9 Foetus filter
- 10 Lamb gut nut hut
- 11 Plastic surge-in
- 12 Hard again cardigan
- 13 Schlong shed
- 14 Sperminal terminal
- 15 C*m dumpster
- 16 Turkey neck tourniquet
- 17 Felcher squelcher
- 18 Muff buffer
- 19 She squealed shield
- 20 Flesh flute boot
- 21 Spunk trunk
- 22 C*m catcher
- 24 C*m cup
- 25 C*m crypt
- 26 Muff moat
- 27 Prick pouch
- 28 Juice jar
- 29 Bone bonnet
- 30 Spunk mug
- 31 Probe robe
- 32 Stopcock
- 33 Stiffie stocking
- 34 Jump suit
- 35 Clam dam
- 36 Dong depot
- 37 Dick bra
- 38 Peanut shell
- 39 Clap trap
- 40 Pud pod
- 41 Chromosome dome
- 42 Cock frock
- 43 Man quart thwart
- 44 Jiz dam
- 45 Squirt shirt
- 46 Glad bag
- 47 Runt stunter
- 48 Knob swab
- 49 Scrote coat
- 50 Cock cap

Whipping up a stink, the £10,000 poo

March 24, 2005 METRO

BY STEPHEN HULL

THOSE with only a passing knowledge of the Jurassic period could be forgiven for thinking they are cannonballs.

But the learned among us will recognise them immediately – they are, of course, dinosaur stools (well, bronze ones).

The £10,000 artwork is causing a stink in the polite Cambridgeshire village of Bassingbourn after it was mounted on a 2m plinth on the main green.

Parish councillors were criticised by villagers at a packed village meeting.

'This is ridiculous. There are a lot more important issues that should be tackled before a stinking statue,' said Ian Heppenstall, who lives downwind of the green.

A student added: 'Why waste money when there are kids sitting in the recreation ground drinking and doing drugs?'

'These sort of issues need to be covered before we get into arts schemes.'

The bronze was designed by teacher David Billings who won a competition to



Alluring: A sign of village idyll

Pictures: Grant Norman

create a sculpture that celebrated the village's heritage. For his inspiration, he turned to the 19th century when fossilised dinosaur dung, or coprolites, were mined in the area for use as fertiliser.

Some thought the bronze was a fitting monument. 'Coprolite mining made this village,' said villager Hazel Lord. 'There should be a tribute to the ordinary workers, some of whom gave their lives.'

Councillors insisted the sculpture would be 'popular with children' and help generate a tourist trade.

FAITH NEWS

THE TIMES APRIL 2 2005

■ The Royal Mail has been criticised for including a stamp of a glamour model in a set featuring eminent British Jews. Jordan, whose real name is Katie Price, is to appear on a set of First Day Covers in August which also features Jonathan Sacks, Lord Robert Winston, Maureen Lipman and Lord Granville Janner. Leonard Riskin, President of the Jewish Philatelic Association, said "Jordan hardly epitomises the values we wish to encourage in our own community. This is supposed to be the Royal Mail, not the red-blooded Male." A spokesman for the Post Office said: "The idea is to include someone from all walks of life. Jonathan Sacks represents religion, Lord Winston is science, Lord Janner is politics and Maureen is entertainment. But we needed someone a bit younger and a bit more lowbrow, whom kids could relate to. Katie was ideal." The stamp collection will commemorate the bicentenary of the Post Office, which was founded in 1805 by a Jew, Baron Herschel Montefiore.

Compiled by Bess Twiston Davies

Waving at trains: A Life of the swinger Edith Nesbit

By Paul Screeton

HERE'S an extraordinary and true 'library angel' story. Researching *The Railway Children*, my local library shelves had neither anything on the book, author, films or even Jenny Agutter. Okay, at that stage I didn't have time to look on the Internet, because I had planned an afternoon trip. Having observed the locomotives outside Thornaby traction maintenance depot and standing in Tees Yard, I headed for a pint. The Thomas Sheraton (named after the furniture designer who was born and learned his trade locally) in Stockton is a typical J D Wetherspoon affair: cosmopolitan clientele, surly bar staff, cheap beer. It also has a mock library of old books the chain probably buys at £10 per 1,000. Without, I assume, any conscious thoughts of *The Railway Children*, I idly selected a volume at random. It was John O' London's *Anthology* (Darwen Finlayson, 1961). It opened itself at page 31. The topic 'From Nesbit to Now,' the writer James Reeves. Wow! Thanks Library Angel. From the article title I expected great things; analysis of E. Nesbit's oeuvre and comparison with mid-20th century juvenile literature. The opening was promising: 'Have children's books improved since the palmy days of Lrs Molesworth, E. Nesbit and other favourites of our grandparents?' The remainder less promising; in fact, sodden useless. That was the first and last mention of E. Nesbit, discounting the come hither title.

Question: does the Library Angel deal in perverse irony or what?

Answer: lunchtime next day I selected arbitrarily a book to skim while eating a salad. I casually opened it where author Michael Moorcock discusses the perfect working environment including 'offspring combining the decency and virtue of Little Woman's Jo and Beth with the resourcefulness of *The Railway Children*.' (Casablanca, Victor Gollancz, 1989) Helpful, or what?

Edith -- most of her work was published under the gender-concealing signature of 'E. Nesbit' -- Nesbit was a prolific writer who is credited with inventing the children's adventure story; turning away from the fantasy of Lewis Carroll and Kenneth Grahame to use

modern themes previously the province of adult fiction, utilising encounters with real situations and characters facing tough truths. She also wrote eight mainstream novels in collaboration with her first husband and was an accomplished poet. This prodigious output allowed her to support a large, sprawling family and as breadwinner and to reflect her status as an 'advanced woman,' the comparative wealth and new-found radicalism led eventually to her cutting off her hair, wearing less feminine dress and taking up smoking on an heroic scale.

Born on August 19, 1858, at the age of 19 she met a young, charismatic bank clerk, Hubert Bland, and in 1879 discovered she was pregnant. The baby was born two months after their marriage on April 22, 1880. However, Bland was simultaneously involved with another woman, who would remain his mistress throughout the following decade. In 1885, Edith bore Bland the last of their three children and named him Fabian, after their new enthusiasm. Alice Hoatson, the assistant-secretary of the Fabian Society, moved in with the Blands; Alice giving birth in 1899 to Hubert's baby, Rosamund, which Edith accepted and brought up as her own child. Edith also adopted other children that Hubert fathered to his previous mistress.

Famous for the parties she gave at their home, the dilapidated Well Hall in Eltham, Edith and Hubert enjoyed an open marriage. Always surrounded by young male admirers, Edith had affairs with the like of George Bernard Shaw. She was a very tall woman, built on a grand scale,' recalled Ada Elizabeth Jones Chesterton, 'with a long full throat and dark, luxuriant hair, smoothly parted.'

Hubert died in 1914 and Edith remarried. Thomas 'the Skipper' Tucker was a kindly engineer, but his lower-class background was not to her family or friends' approbation. She continued to write children's books and had published 44 novels by her death on May 4, 1924, of lung cancer, doubtless the result of her heavy smoking.

Fast forward to 1970 and actor Lionel Jeffries film *The Railway Children*, starring



*'Model of a fucking useless J15,'
observed the fireman. 'Total fucking
useless cunts,' agreed the driver,
adding apologetically, 'excuse my
French, miss.'*

sex symbol Jenny Agutter, who had already played Roberta in the television series (and went on as a serial Railway Child to play the mother in a remake).

Previewing a repeat on Channel 4, Anne Billson wrote: 'A naughtier person than I might be tempted to read something Freudian into all this train imagery and, indeed, the fantasies of an entire generation of adolescent males were probably fuelled by the vision of Jenny Agutter using her red flannel petticoat as a stop sign.'

Caitlin Moran was also psychologically tempted and suggested men rather than teenagers lusted after the stunning Agutter nubility.

'For men of a certain age, *The Railway Children* exerts a very particular hold, not unrelated to Agutter being incredibly strong and sweet and beautiful throughout the film, and then waving her red flannel petticoats (Freudian translation -- vagina) at a train coming out of a tunnel (Freudian translation -- penis). Indeed, so potent is *The Railway Children's* magic over the minds of bookish Freudians that it inspired one of the loveliest songs of the 1980s: the Lilac Time's *Girl Who Waves at Trains*, which rather wistfully compares Agutter to a "shotgun in a field of crows".' (Why I'm mad about . . . *The Railway Children*, *The Eye* (The Times), December 13-19, 2003)

When I read the book for the purpose of this piece, I was looking for the Freudian; it's not there. I expected some echo of Edith's decadent behaviour; alas, I found none.

Disappointingly, it is as Agutter told Chris Bond this year: 'It's a story that everyone knows, it's about innocence and it's one of those things you want to remember.' (Yorkshire Post, March ?, 2005)

Coda: This being a folklore magazine, I couldn't ignore a fascinating moment in the book. Neither film includes the children's saving a baby aboard a blazing barge. Before the fire there's a conversation between the barge-master's wife and the children which seems to refer to a blason populaire (one community mocking another). Here in Hartlepool it's 'Who hung the Monkey?' In the book the narrative goes: ' "You mustn't take no notice of my Bill," said the woman; " 'is bark's worse'n 'is bite. Some of the kids down Farley way is fair terrors. It was them put 'is back up calling out about who ate the puppy-pie under Marlowe bridge." '

I also liked 'Bill came up later talking in a language with which the children were wholly unfamiliar.'

Lastly, the mother's dialogue at one point is pure Vicky Pollard out of the brilliant *Little Britain*. 'Poor dear head,' said Bobbie, 'does it ache?'

'No -- yes -- not much,' said Mother.

To think Edith Nesbit created the prototype under-class single mother chav 100 years in advance!

Dolly Parton's big rumours

By Paul Screeton

'A lot of rumours attach themselves to my name' - Dolly Parton

DOLLY is an all-American icon; the reigning Queen of White Trash Trailer Park America, and as one commentator put it, "every ageing trucker's wet dream."

Now in her late fifties (58 last year), and one of the natural/unnatural wonders of the world, she's been through almost the full catalogue of makeovers.

"Plastic surgery? Sure I've had plastic surgery, but that sounds so bizarre," she says. "It's really cosmetic, there's very little plastic to it. It's more nips and tucks, things like getting rid of bags under your eyes." Eyes, lips, chin, neck: all have been targets of medical intervention. Her bust has been subjected, it is claimed, to at least three silicone implant operations, but is now somewhat reduced. That extraordinary hourglass figure with a waist like a slim 16-year-old is due to liposuction. Only her Barbie-like legs seem to have escaped medical attention.

But let's concentrate on that monumental bosom.

"I had my boobs lifted when they started dragging on the floor. Who'd want to look at them if they were like that? I've had implants too, but only years after I'd lost all the weight and had surgery done for the tissue that was left behind. At that stage, in order for them to stand up like little soldiers, you put something in there to help them." At this point she cupped the little soldiers to bring them to full attention, as it were, in front of interviewer Gavin Martin. "So what else do you want to know?" she chuckled, her laugh rudely suggestive. "No, before you ask, I didn't have a penis implant as well."

How much silicone? Secret of the bosom's buoyancy? Pressed for specifics, she replied: "Look, I'm in showbusiness. I look at my boobs like they're showhorses or showdogs. You've got to keep 'em groomed."

Asked whether she would follow Janet Jackson in baring abreast on stage, she responded: "I would wipe out the first three rows. We can't turn these loose on anybody."

And she has defiantly refused to pose topless, having said: "I might consider it when I'm 100 years old."

Strangely, reading cuttings on Dolly -- mostly by male journalists -- it is she rather than her interviewers who nudge the subject back to her breasts again and again.

Such as: "I do have big tits. Always had 'em -- pushed 'em up, whacked 'em around. Why not make fun of 'em? I've made a fortune with 'em. If I hadn't had 'em, I would have had some made

Or: "Ah just wanted to take the Smoky Mountains wherever Ah went -- and Ah did." Dolly really only does one joke, but she explores it thoroughly: "If Ah see something baggin', saggin' or draggin', Ah'll go have it fixed" -- adding details of a milk bath "up to my boobs."

Or conversely and dubiously, a snippet claimed she hates being quizzed about her breast implants so much so that she's started ending conversations with: "I just use a bicycle pump!"

The fourth child of 12, she admits her family and friends were horrified when she became famous and admitted modelling herself on a local prostitute who stood out from the rest of the drably dressed, careworn women in the community. "This whore had bleached hair, red lipstick, red fingernails and huge heels made of plexiglass with goldfish moving around inside them. I thought she was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen, My mother told me she was nothing but a tramp and I decided there and then that I wanted to be a tramp when I grew up." (1) "It takes a lot of money to look this cheap," is one of Dolly's favourite Dollyisms, along with, "If I hadn't been a woman I'd have been a drag queen," and "I've always looked like a drag queen's Christmas tree."

When she wrote songs about miscarriages -- 'Down From Dover' -- or appeared on the cover of Playboy, the folks back home hung their heads in shame. But when the millions started rolling in her Dollywood theme park, one of the biggest attractions in the U.S.A., began to provide work for her many relations and the shame became easier to live with.

However, on a cautionary note, her most famous assets could break her back, a doctor

warned. The weight of her 40DD boobs is causing severe spinal strain which is likely to result in crippling pain and even paralysis, said Dr Russell Windsor, of New York's Orthopaedic Hospital for Special Surgery, who urged her to have her breasts reduced.

He said: "The day will come when Dolly's back will give out. She's been carrying around as many as 10 pounds on her chest for 30 years. Did she really expect her tiny frame to handle that kind of stress for so long? The one thing she's got going for her is her flat stomach. If she were overweight ((she's 7½ stone and 5ft 1in tall)) like she used to be the situation would be worse." Even a slight reduction to a D cup would work wonders, he added.

Beyond the bosom, she's a great singer-songwriter (I Will Always Love You, Love is Like a Butterfly, 9 to 5, and so on) and accomplished actress. Her take on this aspect being: "My image is a double-edged sword. I have a big, colourful personality, I like to laugh, and the artificiality of how I look suits and complements that. But at heart, I'm a very real person, and someone who's serious about her music. And I know that the tits and the wigs and the make-up and all stop some people from seeing through that."

Generous, too, she donated a bra for auction in New York and 37-year-old cabbie Rodger Dale paid £650 and planned to use the 36GG cups to ripen melons.

Journalist Jon Wilde told Dolly he's read that she makes her own leather mini-skirts by trapping and skinning voles and racoons. Was it true?

"I'd love to say that's true. But it can't be true because I can't sew to save my life. A lot of rumours attach themselves to my name."

Had she slept with both Burt Lancaster and James Woods?

"See, I don't admit or deny anything. If I ain't done something, I'm probably capable of doing it. But I never admit to certain things unless I'm caught red-handed. Now those men you mentioned, if I didn't sleep with them, I probably wanted to. If you believe the newspapers, I've slept with every man I've ever worked with. I've taken up more room in the tabloids than a sumo wrestler."

Back with the tits, I'd seen somewhere Dolly's breasts were insured for £390,000. Wilde asked if it was true they were insured for \$1m? -- "That's a crock of shit ... I once said as a joke that I was going to insure my boobs like Betty Grable insured her legs.

More recently, it's been reported that I'm having breast reduction surgery. That's a crock, too."



"I don't feel like a freak. I might look like one, but I don't feel like one."

Still with those two. Was it true she kept herself vertical by wearing counterweights on her back developed by NASA? -- "That's a great rumour but, again, not true. The truth is that my boobies are not as big as people think. They're quite big but they look huge because the rest of me is so tiny. It's like the old line 'Does Dolly Parton sleep on her back?' Sometimes I do and sometimes I don't." (1)

However, she's quite recently been telling friends, "my boobs are killing me" (2) and told Jon Wilde, "I hope I die on stage ... falling over my guitar with both my boobs dangling over the stage. That's how I'd like to go." (1)

References: 1) The Jon Wilde Interview : Dolly Parton, Uncut, January, 2005 2) Chris Branden, Dolly's partin' with her pert 'uns, D. Sport, Aug. 4, 2004 * Other references are lost to posterity as this is part-adapted from a work-in-progress whose audience would not know a bibliography from Onan's porn stash.

Rod the Mod (el railway fanatic)

By Paul Screeton

ROD STEWART'S model railway has an enduring fascination for journalists of a certain timbre. You can see how their minds work. Why play with a toy train set when a 34C woman who 'goes like a train' is in the bedroom below? Previously hacks of a bewildered nature philosophised in print as to why Terry Bailey preferred to spend time getting drunk in the pub with oafs of the calibre of Paul Gascoigne rather than stay at home and score with Linda Lusardi.

When married to New Zealander Amazonian 6ft 1in peachy-skinned super-model Rachel Hunter, she objected to the amount of time pseudo-Jacobite Highgate-born wrinkly-skinned singing superstar Rod spent watching football on television, sipping beer and playing with a model train set. Putting toy and toygirl into perspective, an anonymous (Lynn Barber?) profiler pointed to a clipping of an interview where Rod defended his prioritisations: 'The model railway's my main hobby. Apart from shagging the missus. Obviously, it comes second to that,' Rachel will have been consoled. (1)

It was Rachel, 34, who walked out on Rod, now a venerable 60, after ten years of marriage and two children, Renee, 13, and Liam, 11, and is currently dating Canadian ice-hockey player Sean Avery, 24. After just separating from Rod she described sex as 'a tornado in your pants.' Mmm. She reflected: 'Those were the days when I had just separated and didn't have a head on my shoulders. It's since come back to haunt me. (2) In 2004 she posed naked for Playboy magazine for £1m and was seen in a saucy video for American rock band Fountains Of Wayne in which she donned a raunchy outfit, gyrated on a kitchen worktop and stripped off for a nude massage. Her most outrageous revelation, however, being a 48-hour marathon on sex session with former lover Kip Winger.

Rod is currently romancing Penny Lancaster, also 34, also 6ft 1in, also (but unnatural) blonde, likewise leggy similarly scantily dressed, and flashing an engagement ring after Rod went down on one knee at the top of the Eiffel tower.

Betrothed Rod may be, but there's the small matter of getting a divorce first. After devoting her life to her young family for six

years, Rachel upped and left, preferring to party wildly rather than carry beer cans up to the Clapham Junction in the loft.

An unnamed (doubtless manufactured) pal revealed: 'Rod used to pride himself on his sex appeal, but after he got the train set, he became more Hornby than horny. The whole thing left Rachel cold.' (3) Another journalist visited clippings library: 'The joke was that at their £12m mansion in Beverly Hills, California, Stewart's obsession with his model railway in the attic made him "more Hornby than horny".' (4)

So what set Rod off about trains? 'I was born in Highgate and I used to look out and see the railway from my bedroom window.' He was then three. On his 14th birthday he was given a guitar when what he really wanted was a station to go with his train set. (5)

So what's so special about this train set? First, it's not mythical. Secondly, there's two.

Set No. 1 is an elaborate layout under the eaves of his £1.5m mansion in Epping, Essex, where he also has a Wembley-size football pitch. That unnamed pal said: 'He spent a fortune on the layout with a huge collection of trains, track and model buildings.' (3)

Set No. 2 is . . . oh, he can describe it best: 'I don't really like to talk about the trains, but it is a fabulous hobby. I gotta tell you, it's three-dimensional. I am building the New York Grand Central around the wartime period in my attic in Beverly Hills. It's all computerised, all the locomotives have chips in them ... oh, it's a long story. It's a long story, but I get so obsessed. I get the kids to school and I think I will just go up there for a couple of hours and all of a sudden it's five o'clock in the afternoon.' (5)

And

'A clue to what makes him tick is the giant model railway hidden in the attic of his LA home. Picture the former Spandex-clad rocker standing over the replica of New York's Grand Central station and you see a 60-year-old man who is still, at heart, a spoilt child wanting to be humoured.' (6)

Hornby or horny? Triang or triangle of Venus?



Rod Stewart

References:

- (1) Anon, Excess of exes, The Sunday Telegraph, March 20, 2005
- (2) Seb Mackenzie-Wilson, Not just anybody: supermodel Rachel Hunter, The Times body&soul, August 14, 2004
- (3) Dominic Mohan & Nick Parker, It's not over yet, Sun, January 9, 1998
- (4) David Edwards, ?, ?, 2004
- (5) Rebecca Tyrrel, 'Ello darlin!, The Sunday Telegraph Magazine, February 4, 2001
- (6) Barbara Davies, Penny has made to win Rod, Daily Mirror, March 19, 2005



Frank Hornby Private toil



MUMMY 'S BOY: Rod's mother Elsie

Employees' mischief

(For earlier examples see FF12:21/23; FF19:21)

"WHAT can you believe? Marketing magazine reports that a mailing shot, offering an American Express credit card for the super-wealthy, fell victim to a disgruntled computer operator. Out went the mailing, addressed in each case to 'Dear Rich Fat Bastard . . .' Humph, says Amex. 'It's one of those urban myths.' Right. Does anybody, please, have more of these modern urban folk legends? Examples warmly received." (Guardian, 30/8/91, cr. Peter Christie) Seemingly none were received, but FF has plenty more.

Here's as good a place as any to start the round-up. A young stud, sacked from a sperm bank, started a stampede by swapping semen samples from a prize bull. Sam Cranley, 21, saw red after he was told he was surplus to requirements at the fertilisation clinic. So he broke into the lab, tipped 20 test tubes of human semen down the sink and refilled them with sperm from his dad's stud bull. Women patients were panicking that they could give birth to half-human/half-cow freaks. Cranley was pulled in by shocked cops after bragging about his horny revenge to boozing pals in Fort Worth, Texas. He admitted: "We regularly 'milk' our bull to collect his sperm so when I was sacked I did the quick swap." Docs at the £500-a-day clinic appealed to women to keep calm. One said: "You won't be having calves, but there could be a risk of other infections." (The Sport, 27/8/96)

A postman who sent pornographic pictures and articles to people whose dogs barked at him was jailed for nine months. Alan Fenney, 33, also targeted dignitaries including an air vice marshal and a major general because he was against the honours system. They received letters through the post which contained graphic pictures and stories cut from the postman's collection of pornographic magazines. (Northern Echo; Newcastle Journal, 16/7/94)

Sacked sales rep Michael Mosheema, 42, from Ohio, got revenge on his boss by

mailing him 300 gays magazines in clear bags. (D. Sport, 17/9/03)

Author Bill Bryson noted: "Just before Christmas last year, an American computer games company called Maxis Inc. released an adventure game called Slim-Copter in which players had to fly helicopters on rescue missions. When they successfully completed the tenth and final level, according to the New York Times, the winning players were supposed to be rewarded with some audio-visual hoopla involving 'a crowd, fireworks and a brass band.' Instead, to their presumed surprise, the winners found images of men in swimming suits kissing each other. The rogue images, it turned out, were the work of a mischievous 33-year-old programmer named Jacques Servin. When contacted by the Times, Mr Servin said he created the smooching fellows 'to call attention to the lack of gay characters in computer games.' The company hastily recalled 78,000 games, and invited Mr Servin to find employment elsewhere." (Night & Day, 10/8/97; earlier D. Telegraph, 7/12/96)

Spot the similarities. Bosses at an underwear factory had to recall 870,000 pairs of knickers when they discovered a fed-up employee had put itching powder into them in Barcelona, Spain. (D. Sport, 30/12/95) Bosses at a Barcelona underwear factory had to recall 378,000 men's Y-fronts when a fed-up lesbian employee put itching powder in them. (D. Sport, 7/6/99) Meanwhile, thousands of toilet rolls had to be destroyed after a disgruntled factory worker in Sao Paulo, Brazil, impregnated them with chili powder. Customers complained of burning backside and police said: "It was very painful, like having a curry in reverse." (Sunday Sport, 4/7/93)

A mystery girl factory worker blamed bosses in England for closing a plant so stamped "Fuck The English" on piccalilli jar lids. Supermarket chain Gateway had so far found the foulmouth message on 20 bottles of Crofters Mustard Piccalilli. (D. Star, 20/1/94)

*** More next issue.

BOOZING

Fifteen arms went round her waist.
(And then men ask: Are Barmaids chaste?)

John Masefield,
The Everlasting Mercy

Guinness

There's something magical, too, in the black depths of the swirling Guinness pint. Its gas bubbles break scientific law by mysteriously travelling downwards instead of up. Urban myth states that a pint of the stuff has a nutritional value equal to that of a whole meal, lamb chops an' all, yet has just 198 calories. You burn more calories waiting for them to pour the damn thing.



As the black stout's celebrated advertising campaign claims, "Good things come to those who wait," for it famously takes 119.5 whole seconds to pour the perfect pint of Guinness. The process normally goes something like this: barmaid fills the pint two thirds full, stops and lights a fag (30 seconds); she forgets all about it as it 'settles' (50 seconds); she takes your cash and continues to potter about with other more important projects (60 seconds); finally the rest of the glass is filled and, with tip of tongue poking out of lips, barmaid attempts to draw a shamrock in the froth (50.5 seconds later she's managed a blob that more resembles a cock and balls than any kind of flora). Perfect.

(Loaded April 2005)

2 DESCRIBE GUINNESS...

A) It has the taste of a melted car tyre mixed with lukewarm double cream and has a calorific content roughly equivalent to four cans of a vanilla crème meal replacement shake, deep fried in lard.

B) It's more delicate than the scent of a young virgin's knickers and, simultaneously, packs more punch than a merciless beating on a cell floor from a pack of enraged RUC officers.

A man looking for a wife gave two women £1,000 each to see who was the more prudent with money. The first woman spent £800 on shoes and saved £200. The second woman saved £800 and spent £200 on food. So he married the one with the bigger breasts.



"Of course, Eric only buys it for the superb articles on cars and motorbikes!"

BOOBS

Praise to Salma's funbags

A REMOTE African tribe that worships Salma Hayek's breasts has built a 37ft statue of the actress's impressive assets. The Mandinka tribe of Gambia is so impressed by the Once Upon A Time In Mexico star's 36C bust they have put up a huge replica in rare black obsidian stone with gold nipples. Villagers have even composed a special chant, which starts: "Oh glorious funbags of Salma. Fertilise our fields... And it includes the line: "Suckle us with your magical orbs. Squeeze our faces between those luscious flesh mounds."



Where are we?



DID YOU MISS?

URBAN FOX MYTH. -- Wheelie bins are responsible for hungry foxes forming packs and attacking cats and dogs, suggests Roya Nikkhah. Janet McPhail, 57, a nurse from Edinburgh, claimed to have been woken in the night by screams coming from her garden. "We found a pack of six foxes attacking our cat, Clover. We managed to chase the foxes away, but she was badly mauled and had one eye missing, so we were forced to put her down," she said. Mike Hall, a veterinary surgeon where Clover was put down, said that he was dealing with a growing number of cats with fox-related injuries. "We have been seeing more examples of cats with fox bites recently, whereas 10 years ago it was unheard of," he said. "I had one client who woke early one morning to find a fox chasing her cat around the dining-room, having got in through the catflap. Foxes are becoming braver in what they look for as prey." Out of a total U.K. fox population of 240,000 approximately 35,000 animals are urban. Stephen Harris, a professor of environmental science at Bristol University, said, however, that increasing fox attacks on domestic cats was an "urban myth." He said: "I have studied the behaviour of urban foxes for more than 35 years and have yet to see one attack a cat. Foxes are solitary by nature, so anybody claiming to have seen a pack of foxes attacking their cat is simply talking rubbish." (The Sunday Telegraph, 6/2/05)

SITTING TENANTS. -- Unless the property is centuries old and the spooks likewise, any seller or estate agent is not going to tell you a home is haunted. "The price and saleability of a house are certainly not increased by having a deceased resident," one agent told Gareth Rubin. Behind a property for sale, Magdalene Chapel, Arrat, near Montrose, a ghostly horseman has been seen galloping down an old track. One for ley hunters to investigate. Rent-a-sceptic Dr Richard Wiseman, of Hertfordshire University, suggests a better investment than exorcism would be draft excluders and halogen lights. But then he has the advantage of not believing in ghosts. (The Daily Telegraph, 30/10/04)

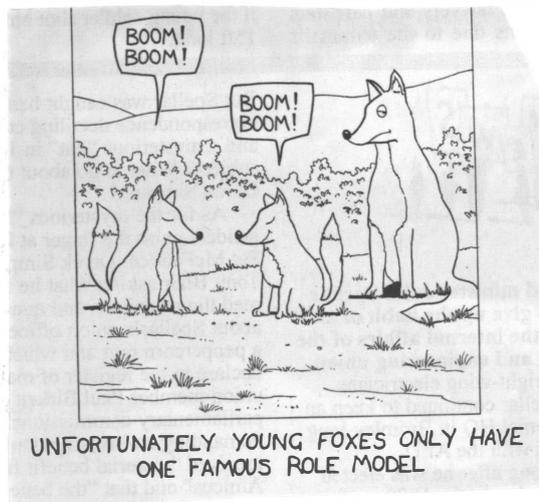
RAIDERS BEWARE. -- According to legend the biblical Ark of the Covenant -- allegedly in

a sanctuary at Axum, Ethiopia -- threw out bolts of fire killing anyone standing nearby. Science writer Robert Matthews, who seems something of a closet fortune teller, believes this may be in accord with technology. "The Book of Exodus describes the Ark as made of acacia wood and lined inside and out with gold, with two gold cherubim on its lid," he writes. "It occurs to me that this would make it an excellent store of electric charge -- in other words, a capacitor. Once charged, the Ark would certainly pose a threat to anyone getting too close to it, its pent-up electrical energy bursting out as, well, bolts of fire. As to how the Ark became charged up, one possibility is so-called triboelectricity, in which fast-moving mineral dust acquires a charge via friction." As in whirling desert sand. (The Sunday Telegraph, 13/3/05)

THE HUM. -- Robert Matthews pines on scientists' cognitive dissonance over The Hum, or as we folklorists know it, hummadruz. Picking up on baffling reports of people being able to hear the shimmering display of the aurora borealis, or Northern Lights, as a hiss or crackle in the night. "These findings prompted me to wonder about a connection between The Hum and the phenomenon of synaesthesia, in which stimulation of one of the senses triggers a response in another. For example some 'synaesthetes' experience tastes as a colour, while others sense sounds as scents," writes Matthews. "Is it possible that those who hear The Hum are exhibiting a similar sensory mix-up in their response to some other stimulus: low-frequency vibration, say, or some sort of light or scent? Intriguingly, women are more prone to synaesthesia, which may explain why they account for most reports of The Hum. On the other hand, synaesthesia is thought to affect only about one in 500 people, far fewer than those who claim to hear The Hum. One cannot but wonder, however, that perhaps the deafness of scientists to reports of The Hum has made them blind to its true cause." (The Sunday Telegraph, 20/2/05)

FINGER WAG. -- In an appreciation of Dave Allen's humour, Paul Hoggart revealed: "The top of his index finger was missing and he would make a joke of picking his nose with the stump. He wove the (continued page 13)

accident into a cringe-making cautionary tale where his father made him put his finger on a log as a punishment, threatening to cut it off with an axe. He brought the blade down, believing Dave would pull his finger away but he left it there. Ouch. Last month a former schoolmate claimed that this was just another story. Allen had been playing in a burnt-out mill with friends and the end of his finger had been crushed by a turning cog." He added: "It was never clear where his acerbic observational humour ended and fantasy began. Michael Parkinson once said that his tales were 'so tall they had ice on top'." (The Times, 12/3/05)



THE BORROWERS. -- A profile of the London Library, by Tom Stoppard, began with what fortune tellers know as "library angel" story. It goes like this: "John Wells of blessed memory once told me a story which gives the nub of the thing, the thing about the London Library. Arthur Koestler, John said, had been commissioned to report the Fischer-Spassky chess match for the world championship in Reykjavik. To prepare, Koestler went to the London Library to borrow books on chess and on Iceland. In the entrance hall he hesitated. Chess first or Iceland first? Chess was nearer. On the Chess shelf the first book that caught Koestler's eye was Chess in Iceland. Two of the possible reactions to this story are: a) "Er, is that it?" and b) the bibliophilic version of thrusting one fist in the air and shouting "Yessss!" ... Look here is Koestler's book back on the shelf. Its full title is Chess in Iceland and in Icelandic Literature by Williard Friske, published in Florence in 1905." (The Daily Telegraph arts+books, 15/1/05)

FLIGHT OF THE BUMBLE-BEE. -- Roger Highfield demystifies bees: "Flies and other flying insects have plagued the worlds of science and engineering ever since the first calculation of bumble-bee aeronautics was attempted at Gottingen University in the 1930s. Conventional aerodynamics seemed to suggest that the insect should not generate enough lift to fly. The bees stayed resolutely airborne and the sums caused consternation. Part of the problem was treating a fly wing as if it was fixed, like in an aeroplane. Thanks to efforts over the past decade, including the construction of robotic bees and flies, this 'bumble-bee paradox' has been solved: extra lift comes when insect wings slice through the air at a high angle of attack, creating a large swirling vortex at their leading edge." (The Sunday Telegraph, 6/2/05)

ABSOLUTELY MENTAL. -- A frightening possibility is that, as in Philip K. Dick's recently-filmed sci-fi story *The Minority Report*, we could be locked up for crimes we MIGHT commit. Vivienne Parry writes: "Evil is a fretful subject for mind doctors, given that it is not a diagnosis but a judgement based on morality and theology. Greater insight into evil has been provided by the body of evidence linking neurological abnormality with extreme criminality. But, as the psychiatrist Dr Sean Spence outlined in his lecture *Cruel and Unusual* at the Royal Institution this week, it also complicates matters no end. For if evil crimes are associated with specific faults in brain structure, should those who possess them, but who have not yet committed a crime, be detained just in case? The new Mental Health Bill suggests they should. But a recent analysis concludes that to prevent one violent act over a year, six potential perpetrators would need to be incarcerated. In trying to prevent evil like this, society imposes evil, and probably with no great social benefit." (The Times body&soul, 19/2/05)

LIGHTNING STRIKES. -- The star of *The Passion of the Christ*, Jim Caviezel's proselytizing zeal for his Roman Catholic faith is legendary, as too is his refusals to do love scenes in *The Count of Monte Christo* and *High Crimes*, along with telling Jennifer Lopez to cover her breasts in *Angel Eyes*. The saintly Caviezel found *The Passion* hard work, suffering hypothermia from the Crucifixion, a permanent scar when protection fell as he was whipped and he was struck by lightning. He told *Newsweek*: "We were shooting the Sermon on the Mount. About for seconds before it happened, it was quiet, and then it was like someone had slapped my ears. I had even or eight seconds of, like, a pink, fuzzy colour, and people started

screaming. They said I had fire on the left side of my head and light around my body. All I can tell you is that I looked like I went to see Don King's hairstylist. (Telegraph Magazine, 26/6/04) Meanwhile, gamblers were dicing with death while sitting under trees playing mahjong during a storm in China's Zhejiang province, for bolts of lightning killed at least 15 of them. (D. Mirror, 28/6/04) Horn player Franza Egger, 49, was killed by lightning in his bath as he tried to turn on the hot water with his big toe. A bolt shot through his loo window in Bolzano, Italy, and struck the tap. (D. Sport, 8/12/04)

GLOBAL WARMING. -- A paper in the journal Quaternary Science Review suggests a new ice age has been fended off because mankind has been "interfering" with Mother Nature over the past few thousand years with ancient agriculture, deforestation and biomass burning, i.e. "greenhouse gases" have cancelled out the cooling which should have occurred through Earth's changed orbit and orientation in space. As Robert Matthews observes that "it does at least explode the myth that mankind only makes things worse." He applauds the Scientific Alliance, a group of academics trying to counteract the alarmism of the current spate of eco-scares. (The Sunday Telegraph, 30/1/05)

ROMAN BESTIALITY. -- There is no genuine record of any Christian being martyred in Rome's Colosseum; more likely sheep, cows and goats, rather than lions and tigers, met their end in the arena; instead of hundreds of gladiators being butchered, combat would be between pairs, and being costly to train, most would live to fight another day; nor did they greet the emperor with "Hail Caesar, we who are about to die salute you." All this is part of our own "myth of the Romans" as Mary Beard exposed. The extent of the slaughter and Christian versus lions "are in fact a bowdlerised version of what seems to have gone on", yet there was a horrific sadism, from a sow giving birth to her litter through a gaping wound which killed her, to a female prisoner being put to death in full view by being forced to have sex with a bull -- impersonating the wife of the mythical King Minos, who gave birth to the half man/half bull, Minotaur. (The Times, 26/2/05)

OLDIES

but GOODIES

First two are from (Best British stand-up gags ever, Zoo, March 4-10, 2005) with

a) Ricky Gervais: "My mate's brother was going for a job interview and he had to change trains. He was on the platform at Crewe and he shat himself, as you do. He looked around and saw Millets. So he squelched his way over and said, 'Quick, Levis, size 36.' So he got them, got the train and went to the toilet. He took his pants and trusers off, poked them out the window, cleaned himself up and flushed it away. Opens the bag - it was a jacket."

b) Dave Spikey: "I was at the hospital for a blood test and I was stopped dead in my tracks by a sign which said, 'Family Planning Advice. Use the Back Entrance'." (see also FF48:11,col. 1,item 4)

GERMANY: A student gave his teachers a high when he baked a cake laced with cannabis. The youngster left the chocolate cake, with a note saying "Thanks for everything, bon appetit", in the school staff-room. Ten teachers were taken to hospital where tests soon revealed what was causing their "nausea and light-headedness." The former pupil, now 20, was fined £350 after admitting the prank at the school in Luneburg. (Metro, 4/3/05)

"In contrast with the Gorbals and Sauchiehall Street and its people were pussycats, although there was an anxious moment when Colin Catley -- how apt -- observed he was warned that chicken-and-chips, our takeaway de jour contained rabbit or even the odd feline according to some southern myth. Anyway, we were ravenous and would only have taken issue if the chicken/rabbit/cat were underdone! The street did not run with vomit and the people were smiling and very friendly." (Paul Longhurst, An 'old' boy reminisces, Steam World, April, 2005)

"A gym teacher in Glasgow was amused when a pupil handed her a note from his mother. It read: 'My son is not feeling well and should not take P.E. today. Please execute him.' Like all teachers, she sometimes despairs of her charges -- but not that much." (The Sunday Post, 20/5/05)

ST. GEORGE'S DAY SHOULD BE A NATIONAL HOLIDAY

FLYING THE FLAG: Adorable Adele Stephens honours St George

TODAY is St George's Day, England's national day — which the *Daily Sport* believes should be a Bank Holiday.

But thanks to Tony Blair and his cronies, that's not going to happen. Instead, they want to celebrate Trafalgar Day. So while the Scots, Welsh and Irish enjoy holidays on their respective "patron saint" days, we have to make do with a gloomy, dismal, run-of-the-mill Monday.

And as if that wasn't bad enough, we are actively discouraged from even celebrating St George's Day.

New Labour's modernisers would have us believe that celebrating St George is racist. Take headteacher David Hughes, who has refused to fly the English flag because it might offend his multi-cultural mix of pupils.

He insists St George's Day will be treated like any other at his Southport school where there are Chinese, Egyptian and Indian kids.

This country is slowly but surely going MAD!

The people of England are being brain washed into shying away from pride in their nationality.

An American would be appalled to miss the Fourth of July celebrations.

A Frenchman would riot if prevented from marking Bastille Day. And could you

By MARTIN FRICKER

imagine an Irishman passing up on his St Patrick's Day revels?

The Welsh are not embarrassed by St David's Day and proudly wear daffodils. The Scots look forward to St Andrew's Day brightening up a gloomy November.

That's the sort of national pride that the English should have.

But our schoolkids are not allowed to learn about England's great military triumphs or historical achievements.

Indeed, quite the opposite. Instead of teaching kids that England was a leading light in ending the slave trade, we are portrayed as villains of the piece.

Proud

Rather than an institution that brought law and good order to the world, the British Empire is slandered as tyranny.

Taxi drivers are banned from hanging St George's flags in their cabs. Magistrates refuse to allow pubs extensions.

It's time we were allowed to be proud of our Englishness and allowed to celebrate our heritage. Let's start by making St George's Day a Bank Holiday.

20 THINGS YOU NEVER KNEW ABOUT ST GEORGE

- 1 He's also the patron saint of Portugal and GERMANY!
- 2 As well as England, he's the patron saint of syphilis sufferers, leprosy and the plague.
- 3 He wasn't English — he was an Egyptian of noble birth who lived during the 3rd century.
- 4 In Rome, he tried to convert the king to Christianity, only to find himself jailed for his troubles.
- 5 With the help of St Michael, he escaped from prison and converted the queen but was eventually beheaded by the furious king.
- 6 In 1993, the Russians adopted him as a symbol on their new national flag.
- 7 Riding St George — bonking with the woman on top — was once believed to be a foolproof method of siring a bishop!
- 8 The earliest association of St George and a dragon is in the 12th century. A font in a Yorkshire church of that period depicts him in action with his sword.
- 9 The myth claims that he rescued a princess from a dragon, before slaying the creature.
- 10 He was first associated with England in the 14th century when Edward III founded the Order of the Garter and named George its patron saint.
- 11 Under Henry V, St George's Day was one of

- 12 The Cross of St George was the standard of the Resurrection.
- 13 Henry VI, Edward IV, Henry VII and Henry VIII all had stained glass windows made portraying themselves in his company.
- 14 St George's Day lost its importance during the Reformation.
- 15 The Roman Catholic Church no longer recognises him. The Vatican has declared that he never existed.
- 16 The Church of England upgraded him in 1996, once again granting him full religious status.
- 17 In 1989, the burghers of Birmingham agreed to "celebrate" St George's Day a week early so that it did not clash with a visit to the city by South Africa's Archbishop Desmond Tutu.
- 18 In Gibbon's *Decline And Fall Of The Roman Empire*, he is portrayed as a brigand dealing in black market bacon.
- 19 For the past four years, it has been possible to buy St George's Day cards.
- 20 There are 365 pubs in Britain called The George, 21 called The St George and 26 called The George & Dragon.

Paddy power

It was St Patrick's Day last week and again, as has become the tradition whatever your nationality, we celebrated the Saints day of the country with the highest per capita rate of alcoholism in Europe with a massive booze-up.

UPDATE

JORDAN (FF ;FF49:12). Faith News back again: The item in last week's Faith News about the Royal Mail issuing a set of stamps featuring eminent British Jews was untrue.

The story had first been published on the website totallyjewish.com as a Purim shpiel or joke to mark the Jewish festival of Purim. Charles Golding, editor-in-chief of totallyjewish.com and The Jewish News, says the item "was signed by Bubba Meiser -- which is Yiddish for 'old wies tales'." The Royal Mail points out that the only living people celebrated on stamps are members of the Royal Family. Our apologies for the confusion.

(Editor: Well, what can I say? Firstly my wife read it and proclaimed she was sure Jordan was a gentile and Jodie Marsh would have been a more appropriate choice. Secondly upon seeing the retraction, my daughter pointed out that the living Torvill & Dean had been on U.K. stamps. In fact, I recall someone pointing out that in the background of a stamp Roger Taylor was shown, but being in Queen, did that count? Any readers care to share their thoughts?) (The Times, 9/4/05)

MASTURBATION (FF46:8) Paul Martin's 'The Ultimate' cartoon strip in the Daily Sport memorably depicted Rodney smacking the pony with gusto under the bedclothes while long-suffering wife Sandra commented caustically: "That's not what the doctor meant when he told you to get more exercise." Sadly for Sandra, that's what the doctor might now prescribe, as medics have devised a new keep-fit regime -- tossaerobics. Instead of pumping iron, men can lose up to 3lb in a week by bashing the bishop at least five times a day, says Japanese Dr Hideo Yamanaka. Tossaerobics for the Olympics? This country could surely produce an award-winning team of tossers. Again, readers' comments would we welcome. (D. Sport, 11/6/04)

SQUAWK ON THE WILDSIDE (FF44:12) Leafy suburban gardens have begun to feel more like the Amazon rainforest. A series of mild winters and a lack of natural predators have allowed the escaped Asian and South American pets to flourish in South-East England. There are about 20,000 parakeets and their number are rising at a rate of 30% a year. There could be up to 100,000 by the end of the decade, states an Oxford University study. Five species, including the green ring-

necked and orange-winged parakeets, have been seen in London, the Home Counties and as far north as Glasgow. But while the birds may seem an exotic treat, there are fears they will oust indigenous species from nesting areas and damage fruit crops. (Metro, 7/7/04)

BOSOM CREATURE. Usually a serpent, but is this ostension, i.e. myth becomes reality? A hiker who washed her face in a stream needed surgery two weeks later to remove a leech from her left nostril, the Hong Kong Medical Journal reported. The two-inch leech had to be anaesthetised to loosen its grip. (The Times, 9/4/05)

BRITNEY SPEARS (FF39:3) The singer spent two hours at an exclusive Beverly Hills sugery, fuelling rumours that she is pregnant. (D. Express, 19/3/05). Meanwhile, her privatest anatomy was alluded to by ex-Spice Girl Melanie Chisholm, who asked: "Have you seen her latest video? Her shorts are so tight you can practically see her whatsit. Put it away, love." But would a heterosexual woman be looking there? Any female readers care to comment? (D. Mirror, 26/3/05)

666. Moscow's St Nicholas Church has refused to be registered as 666th -- in an official list of the city's religious places. (D. Mirror, 26/3/05)

WEIRD WOKSOP: (FF32:3-5). A study by Dr Malcolm Haydon-Baillie at Worksop in 1983 found that patients had cold symptoms eased by bonking. They reported that stuffy, blocked-up feelings disappeared and they could breathe normally, with a clear head, for several hours after sex sessions. He said: "Proprietary cold medicines are expensive, while loving is free. And I'm sure it's much better for you." (Graham & Lynne Jones, I Love Sex I Hate Sex, New English Library, 1989)

MARSBARIANNE FATHFULL (FF19:3-7). "Original 860s rock chick. Straight out of girls' public school and into bed with Mick Jagger before dumping him for Keef. Legendarily had sex with a Mars bar and wore tight-fit leather catsuit unzipped for movie Girl on a Motorcycle. Has nurtured a voice that sounds like she swallowed sand, bourbon and smoked a crate of Capstan full strength. (loaded, March, 1996)

See you in No. 50 folks