

No. 51

Folklore



Frontiers



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THE DIARY ... THE DIARY ...

As Xmas approaches, I'm reminded of the card sent to a grandmother in Tyne & Wear last year. Her granddaughter asked what the verse meant and read it aloud:

*A robin redbreast on my sill
Sang for a crust of bread
I slowly brought the window down
And smashed its fucking head*

Granny wrote to the Greeting Card Association asking, not unreasonably, whether this was really the sort of message to convey the essential meaning of Christmas. After the festive season, she received a reply to the effect that the verse was some 120 years old and was well known to card collectors.

As a regular at Wetherspoon's Thomas Sheraton pub, Stockton-on-Tees, I must admit its ale availability and low price suggested what was on offer was there specially just before it went off. Chairman Tim Martin has written: 'It has been with wry amusement that we have heard dark rumours over the years, emanating from competitors, that we achieve such pricing by buying beer which is near its sell-by date. But some of our managers tell me that a few misguided souls actually believe this nonsense. Sorry to spoil a good rumour, but our beer is the freshest in town, mainly because we sell it quickly after it arrives at each pub.' (Wetherspoon News, April/May 2005)

This mag's fascination with women's breasts has not been appreciated universally. However, the majority like to admire mammaries and that's official. *The Sun's* famous Page 3 has been declared a favourite British institution. Topless models, who first appeared in 1970, featured at No. 6 in a poll of which institution would people least like to lose. At No. 1 was Sunday roast, followed by regional dialects, pint glasses, black cabs and *Coronation Street*. (*The Sun*, 9/9/05)

Centrality is an aspect of geomancy which is of interest to me at least. There has been something of a row between Northern rivals over a 'win the heart of Britain' competition. The prize draw gives shoppers at Mohammed Fayed's Harrods London store the chance to own one square metre of farmland in Lancashire's Dunsop Bridge. But the offer has not gone down well in Haltwhistle, Northumberland, where signs proudly declare it to be the 'Centre of Britain', and David Taylor, who runs the Centre of Britain hotel, has asked Mr Fayed to reconsider the competition. Mr Taylor says that Ordnance Survey experts erred by using satellites to calculate Britain's centre. This only works in countries with a roughly symmetrical shape: with irregularly-shaped Britain, it would have been better to simply measure on a map. The O.S. admitted that its centre was not definitive: 'It would be easier if we were living on a flat, square plain, but we are on a three-dimensional shape on a spherical object - the Earth.' (*The Sunday Telegraph*, 16/10/05)

What they didn't mean. Firstly there was cosmologist Simon Singh, who objected to Katie Melua's 'guess' that the edge of the universe was '12 billion light years away.' The pedant rewrote the lyrics to give 13.7 billion as the correct figure and according to James Orr, Singh met Melua to re-record the song *Nine Million Bicycles* and reported: 'It was quite sweet because Melua had been a member of the astrology club when she was at school.' (*The Sunday Telegraph*) Astrology club? Surely astronomy? Meanwhile, the death of Simon Wiesenthal at 96 gave Uri Geller an opportunity to boast and claim that: 'In the early 1970s, I was shown pictures of various men that he was trying to track down and I doused on maps. I helped him to locate two Nazis, but I can't however, name them.' (*Mandrake column*, *The Sunday Telegraph*, 9/10/05) So he poured water over the maps? Or did columnist Tim Walker mean 'dowsed' - as in map dowsing?

TANGOED!

'The Hollinwell Incident' anniversary waltz

By Paul Screeton

As an avowed fortean, I love a ding-dong between warring explanationists. In a case whose 25th anniversary it is this year, the ranks of mass hysteria believers were put under pressure by crop-spraying adherents.

Yellowed cuttings tell the tale of Sunday, July 13, 1980, and what became in journalese 'The Hollinwell Incident.' In one of the most mysterious happenings in the East Midlands, almost 300 people, mostly children, were taken to hospital as a freak illness struck at a country show. Another 200 children were treated on the spot for fainting, running eyes and sore throats. Initial belief was that insecticide fumes had been stirred up by the children's marching bands at the Hollinwell Show, near Kirby-in-Ashfield, Nottinghamshire.

The facts are that halfway through a pageant of junior march bands, girls and boys aged between five and 15 began sweating, trembling and fainting. A fleet of ambulances and buses ferried 290 sufferers to hospital, with seven children detained overnight for observation.

Witness Christine Willetts said: 'Some of the kids were catching their friends as they fell and then were falling down themselves. No one could understand what was happening. It looked just like a battlefield, with bodies everywhere.'

A spokesman at Mansfield General Hospital said: 'It took a long time to bring some of the patients round.'

Det. Insp. Eric Hogden, heading the investigation, made two points which need to be remembered as my inquiry continues: # 'We have interviewed local landowners and officials at the nearby Nottinghamshire Golf Club and are unable to find anyone responsible for any crop spraying recently.'

Also: 'Food poisoning and mass hysteria have definitely been ruled out.'

Right, it's NOT mass hysteria or crop-spraying.

Det. Insp. Hogden tellingly added that a gymkhana went ahead on the field later with no problems.

On the medical front, a spokesman at Queen's Medical Centre, Nottingham, said the symptoms tallied with exposure to fumes of some kind, causing nausea, burning eyes and a metallic taste in the mouth. Some of the children discharged later returned to hospital when their symptoms reoccurred. None were said to be in danger. (1)

Another newspaper report added that 15 adults and two horses had also collapsed. It also referred to 'another report' that claimed a light plane had sprayed the field two days previously. However, the owner of the field said it had not been sprayed for years. (2)

Two days later Dr Malcolm Lewis, the head of Nottingham public health laboratory, said tests on blood and urine samples from nearly 300 children who were taken to hospital showed that other possible causes, such as pesticides, food poisoning and water pollution, could not have been responsible. Dr Lewis said tests were undertaken for chemicals like pesticides, but all proved negative. He added: 'Nor is the picture right for food poisoning; too many people were taken ill too quickly and there was no common food – most brought their own sandwiches.' He said that in his view the extraordinary scenes of fainting children were due to fatigue heightened by the excitement of the carnival competitions and the warmth and humidity of the weather. Describing what happened next as a 'domino effect', Dr Lewis said that when children saw others collapsing, obviously in distress, they began falling down, too.

In other words, pesticides were ruled out and mass hysteria the official explanation. (3)

After concluding tests, Stanley Beedham, chief executive to Ashfield District Council, said that chemical crop spray, weed killers and all kinds of insecticides and fungicides had definitely been ruled out, but the hysteria theory was still being investigated. 'We have finally dismissed any connection with an agricultural compound,' he said. (4)

Comprehensive coverage was given

by Bob Rickard in that superb organ of phenomenology *Fortean Times*. In addition to analysing the main explanations, *FT* considered and rapidly dismissed: high-frequency radio waves (gas board transmitter quickly eliminated); plastics factory fire fumes (six to 12 miles away, wrong wind direction); mystery bug (coxsackie virus epidemic in area discounted). (6)

Almost two weeks after the incident the tally was put at 414 taken to hospital, of which 236 were booked as casualties and 9 admitted. There were also claims of a cover-up, which angered doctors. Dr Alan Scott, of Queen's Medical Centre, told a Press conference: 'I find it distasteful that people who cannot even be bothered to come to the meeting can accuse us of a cover-up.' He was one of a panel of medical and environmental experts at the conference in Sutton-in-Ashfield which was told that poisoning, chemicals and insecticides had all been ruled out. Dr Scott said: 'Chemicals are non-selective agents – they affect everyone. There is no such thing as a jazz band bug.'

Dr Michael Lewis, quoted earlier but as Malcolm, said the experts were sticking to the mass hysteria theory. 'The children in the bands had stood to attention for inspection for longer than was usual on a hot day. An air of tension and emotion had built up. Some fainted and others who saw them in distress developed similar symptoms. But the symptoms were not faked. They were a genuine physical condition. It is something which has happened before and can happen again. The natural instinct of any young animal is to freeze in situations of fright. To some extent this was an exaggeration of that reaction. Suggestions will be made to the band organisers to ease tension at future contests.'

One local newspaper was very critical of the four judges and condemned the long period of standing to attention 'while the judges inspected the children behind the ears and checked each girl's knickers.' (8) If they tried that today they would be on the sex offenders' register. Was that normal then? Could that have upset the children? I know what I would have done if a stranger had done that to my daughter! So many ifs ...

Dr Lewis added: 'There has been no cover-up. We have looked at every conceivable possibility. We even sent an officer to investigate when someone reported that a flying saucer had landed in the next field.' (5)

What!?!

Fortean Times commented: 'They (the police) found no evidence for the landing, but it is interesting as an indication of the desperation or seriousness with which they were looking into every possibility.'

A reappraisal of seeming dubious merit was broadcast by BBC East Midlands on September 22, 2003. The Web account doubts the mass

hysteria verdict. It added that water companies were quick to check supplies were not contaminated and asked rhetorically if workers seen several weeks earlier near the site were responsible or if it could have been a gas leak, adding 'there was also talk of radio waves and even UFOs being responsible.'

Remember, in 1980 it was stated categorically that there was no crop-spraying and forensic tests ruled out pesticides.

Yet BBC East Midlands reported: 'We have discovered that the chemicals sprayed on the field which were thought to have been harmless at the time have since been banned by the Government – this being tridemorph, classified by the World Health Organisation as Class II – a 'moderately hazardous' pesticide, harmful if swallowed and irritating to eyes and skin. Did it also cause other side-effects such as fainting and malaise?'

Viewers and readers were invited to comment after the Web article: bizarrely the first two of five rambled on about alien big cats without mentioning Hollinwell. Perhaps the programme mentioned scary felids. Kelly Louise Randall, a band member on the day, asked how if it was mass hysteria could it affect babies and adults as well as children. Author David Haslam, who appeared on the programme, questioned the reliability of expert witnesses. If pesticides were the cause why didn't medical tests on victims show this and pondered if medical science failed to find a solution then, what might any long-term damage to those involved be? Contributions were then closed.

The documentary team claimed they had discovered a pesticide, Calixin, which contains tridemorph, was sprayed in the area during the week leading up to the event. What does 'area' mean anyway? How close to the showground? Remember again, officials had failed to locate any evidence of spraying at the time. The TV programme then played on viewers' fears by reporting that tridemorph had not been considered harmful at the time. Tridemorph, formula C₁₉H₃₉NO, is a fungicide that first gained commercial clearance in 1969. However, in 1995 it was listed as teratogenic, meaning it could be responsible for birth defects such as cleft palate. By 1999 it was banned by MAFF, yet given two years' grace to dispose of existing stocks in the supply chain. The Web – I looked – has dozens of sites worldwide advertising tridemorph for sale. False panic? British nanny state mentality?

Back on more solid ground, the documentary makers were told by Ashfield District Council that it had no plans to reopen the inquiry. It commented that the official explanation of 1980 remained mass hysteria (babies, horses, adults, etc., included), although other causes had been considered.

I personally recall learning from some source the suggestion that a large contingent of people, concentrated in a neighbouring county, transmitted their 'vibes' down a ley (ley-line, to younger readers) and zapped the juvenile jazz band girls, supporters, babies, horses, and sop on. These people were attending The Ley Hunter magazine's Moot '80 who congregated at Arbor Low henge monument in Derbyshire. As moot scribe Philip Heselton was to note: 'As more and more entered the circle, it was as if it was responding to our presence there – perhaps the largest gathering since it had been in regular use? The "interaction of the people within the site" was certainly happening.'

In my column in *The Ley Hunter*, I mentioned in passing: 'I understand there is now talk that because the great wave of juvenile bands' children collapsed at the same time as the 1980 The Ley Hunter Mootgoers were at Arbor Low, a rumoured cause and effect has been posited.' (9)

Posited from where, I cannot remember. This guided tour with energy dowsing was attended and greatly enjoyed by this writer. However, say for any wilder shores theorists it was just before midday that the Hollinwell Incident began in earnest, while the mootgoers congregated after lunch in Hartington. Nevertheless, it makes July 13 doubly special in its own way.

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 6. *Fortean Times*, No. 33, 1980
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 8. *The Mansfield and North Nottinghamshire Chronicle and Advertiser*, 17/7/80
 9. Paul Screeton, 'The Long Man of Wilmington column', *The Ley Hunter*, No. 91, 1981
 10. Jimmy Goddard, 'Moot at Buxton', *Touchstone*, No. 71, 2005
- ❖ Coincidence I would expect, but The Society of Ley Hunters' moot this year was again in Derbyshire and guess where moot-goers went on the Sunday? Yes, Arbor Low, and again John Barnatt was the guide. (10)

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Magazine reviews

MAGONIA. No. 89. Timely expose of the Findhorn Community and its UFO cult origins and sexual

shenanigans of five-times-married founder Peter Caddy; a past its present incumbents seek to forget, but Andy Roberts and Neil Oram remind us was true. Aztec crashed saucer story resurrected for umpteenth time; columnist 'The Pelican' exhorts readers to 'put ufological studies into their rightful place as a branch of modern folklore and **Make Ufology History.**'

NORTHERN EARTH. No. 103. £6.50 for 4. Cheques to Northern Earth Mysteries Group at 10 Jubilee Street, Mytholmroyd, Hebden Bridge, W. Yorks., HX7 5NP. Round-up of latest news on Carlisle's 'Cursing Stone'; John Billingsley and Mike Haigh conclude a two-part summary of the key developments in leys and alignments worldwide, dealing with the most recent conceptualisations; March 2006 lunar standstill pieces by Jill Smith and Mike Haigh; the expression 'cant see the wood for the trees' could have been tailor-made for Gordon Harris, whose maps have more lines than even Kate Moss could handle, yet his suggested nodes may prove worthwhile, just.

TOUCHSTONE. No. 71. Newsletter of the Surrey Earth Mysteries Group. £2 for 4. Cheques to J. Goddard. Address Fostercote Lodge, 192 Stroude Road, Egham, Surrey, TW20 9UT. Congratulations to earth mysteries' own 'Vicar of Dibley', Doris Goddard, upon becoming an assistant priest in the Blackdown Hills and moving to Churchinford with husband editor Jimmy, who writes about ley discoveries in that part of Somerset. Jimmy also reports on The Society of Ley Hunters' moot in Derbyshire (extraordinary crop formation I had not seen depicted previously), with field trip to Arbor Low (and Jimmy's previous discovery of two wide energy lines running through it. Guernsey leys and subconscious sitting. Book reviews, letters, notes and news.

AMSKAYA. Newsletter of STAR Fellowship. Same details as Touchstone. No. 64. Fuller commentary on crop formation mentioned in above, being from 2002n and Jimmy seems to challenge the 'hellish conditions' on near solar system planets (funny how experts cannot agree on this and every few months something appears to change views) and goes on to report Daniel Ross's belief that we could go to Venus, step out of the spaceship and breathe normally. Jimmy returns to Adamski's cosmology with regard to the discovery of a tenth planet. The late Tony Wedd on leys and orthotenes and also Ross Richards (from a Sixties article) on flying saucer routes.

FORTEAN TIMES. Newstand £3.60. No. 200. Special weird UK gazetteer and twice prints photos of 'pseudo-archaic heads' in my possession; Dr David Clarke reinvestigates the 1977 'Welsh Triangle' UFO flap; Tiffany Thayer; Black Death, Little Ice Age; bizarre breastfeeding. No. 201. Paul Devereux's assessment of the current state of parapsychological research is just the sort of in-depth article FT should be concentrating on; gifted record producer Joe Meek's adventures in spiritualism and the supernatural, ending in his killing his landlady and himself; Iceland's interdimensional 'Hidden People'; 7/7 strangeness and conspiracies; inflatable sex dolls – Nordic-style – for Nazi soldiers; drunk and disorderly Hartlepool woman called Patricia Sherry; Johnny-come-lately mythconceptions challenges the notion Christians were thrown to the lions in the (Continued in Page 16)

Impossible to pick up Raquel

By Paul Screeton

THE actress best remembered for playing a nubile cavegirl in a shrinking fur bikini, became known as the Stone Age stunna in an over-shoulder boulder-holder. Raquel Welch, in the film 'One Million Years B.C.' as Loanna, was memorably plucked airborne by a flying reptile. Spoilport Professor Neill Alexander, of the University of Leeds, an expert in biomechanics, claimed before the British Association in 1987, that calculations showed the pterosaur species called *quetzalcoatlus*, despite a wingspan of about 40-feet, would still not have been sufficiently strong to lift an adult human female. Won't that scientific pedanticism spoil any repeats for all of us?

Naturally with so perfect a body -- supposedly in her prime in 1967, 37DD-22-35 for Alexander and his statistician boffin mates -- there were rumours of surgical intervention. For connoisseurs' peace of mind, I can report that former husband Patrick Curtis dismissed all but the possibility of a nose-job, revealing: "People have said she has had her boobs made bigger, her ribs removed to make her waist so tiny and bits shaved off her thighs. Well, I've seen and kissed every inch of her, and it's all natural. There are no scars. You can't see the joins because there aren't any." Later, commenting in 1985, Curtis admitted he thought she had had her nose fixed: "In early pictures, Raquel has bumps on her nose, but her story is that an old boyfriend hit her and it was straightened out when she had it re-set in hospital."

Born Jo Raquel Tejada on September 5, 1940, in Chicago, Illinois, her father, Hector Tejada, was Bolivian, and mother Sarah Josephine Hall an American. Neither worked in showbusiness. Raquel's been married four times: James Welch (1959-64); Patrick Curtis (1967-72); Andre Weinfeld (1980-90); and Richard Palmer (1999-). In 2003 she was reported to have separated from Beverly Hills restaurant owner Palmer. She had two children with Welch: Tahnee and Damon, both off whom have dabbled in acting.

The 1966 film 'One Million Years B.C.' turned her into a legend, but her personal favourite is the made-for-television movie that she backed, 'The Legend of Walks Far Woman' (1979), about a Native American. 'The Three Musketeers' (1973) gained her a Golden Globe for Best Actress in a Musical/Comedy. Feuding with Mae West on the execrable 'Myra Breckinridge' (1970) was a distinct low point, but she went on to become the winner of one of the largest lawsuits taken by an actor against a studio, stashing £8million when MGM fired her from 'Cannery Row' in 1982 in favour of Debra Winger. She also showed plenty of her 5ft. 6in. chassis in the film 'Bedazzled', which was recently remade starring Liz Hurley, who has the benefit of three extra inches in height but deflates to a modest 32-24-30.

Yet, inevitably, the Welch image is stuck in the mid-Sixties dinothwoar saga. Having made an impression with Ursula Andress in Rider Haggard's 'She', Hammer Horror producers got only as far as still photographs of Raquel before deciding to cast her as the seductive heroine in 'One Million Years B.C.' Before the film was released, Svengali-like Curtis distributed pictures of that body in a fur bikini costume, and as Welch observed: "That one photo did it all. It was like a tidal wave." And unsurprisingly there's there's quite a story to the skimpy clothing -- longer than her onerous dialogue of "akita" (help!), "Tumak" (her co-star's on-screen name -- and who remembers his real name?) and "seron" (giant pterosaur). On the opening day of filming in the Canary Islands, her seriousness over the role led director Don Chaffey to brusquely dismiss her with: "You've been thinking about this scene. See that rock over there? You just start from that rock and run across to that other rock. That's all we want from you today." The miffed actress saw an opportunity to steal the show by using her womanly wiles and secretly snipped away at her chamois leather costume, which was to shrink even further with regular immersion in sea water. Upon seeing that iconic publicity photo, one wag observed it was "hardly big enough to wipe a car window." In one year she was on the cover of 95 magazines; the staid 'Time' even drooling "Raquel is raw, unconquerable antediluvian woman."

Curtis's grooming for stardom had included singing and dancing lessons, and at 46 Raquel embarked on a singing career best forgotten as her voice left a lot more to be desired than her frame. At the time she measured 38-23-36 and explained: "I was given a magnificent body -- I've looked after it." Today she lives in LA and doubtless is still fit as a butcher's dog.

(Extracted from Paul Screeton's abortive book CELEBRITY TITS OUT FOR THE LADS)

Newslines

RUMOUR, in its most dangerous form, has been seen during 2005. The piece I reproduce from *The Guardian* (6/9/05, monitored by Peter Christie), show how the lack of communication in flood-hit New Orleans led to widespread horror stories. In England the claim that a young girl of West Indian origin had been raped by up to 19 young men of Indian subcontinent blood, led to savage rioting and deaths in Birmingham. The latest city rumour is truly weird. Here's how one newspaper told the story: 'When Chinese whispers go wrong it is usually harmless. But yesterday it almost brought a city to its knees. When the rumour spread that a dead baby had been found in an alley, residents of Anfield, Liverpool, went into mourning. Within a few hours a makeshift shrine of teddy bears, cards and flowers sprang up. One card even read: 'RIP Little Baby. Safe in the arms of Jesus. From someone who is a loving mother.' But when police cordoned off the scene to investigate it was found to be no more than a chicken foetus. A police spokesman said: 'We cordoned off the area to investigate, as we would with any possible suspicious death, but it became apparent it was not a human foetus. We can assure people that the remains were not human. The flowers and cards are the result of local gossip.' (Metro, 25/10/05)

ACID REIGN. Here's a new tale with all the hallmarks of an urban legend. It has coming to harm, prostitution and a background moral panic dimension. According to a report, criminals who put prostitutes' calling cards in telephone boxes are using razors and acid to stop them being taken down. Police have launched a blitz on the cards in Kensington, London, but crooks are using desperate measures to ensure their cards are not removed. Allegedly, razor blades have been found hidden behind some and acid has been found in the putty used to fix the cards to the kiosk walls. Phone-box cleaners have been warned to be extra-vigilant. (D. Sport, 26/10/04)

NARROW VIEW. To fill this column with a wide variety of material, your editor scours as much reading matter as he can. My mate Alan is a canal buff so let's go messing about on the river. Christine Richardson wrote: 'A commemorative mug made by AJL Giftware of Stoke-on-Trent offers a new myth about James Brindley – and a new version of what the boats on inland waterways should be called. On one side of the mug is a picture of two boats; gaily painted, of course. On the other side is text which starts with: "Since 1776 when James Brindley invented

the long Narrow Boat ...' Four years after he died! The man was indeed a genius. I wonder who "invented" the short narrowboat?' (Waterways World, November 1998)

MONUMENTAL BLUNDERS. In an unusual publication under the Freedom of Information Act, Downing Street memos written when Tony Blair's staff were debating the offer to appear on *The Simpsons* reveal that Alistair Campbell rewrote the scrip for the episode. The discussions took place in 2003, during the build-up to the war in Iraq, when Campbell was director of communications. Campbell seems to think that the original script is not funny enough, so suggests a few jokes of his own. In a memo to Bonnie Pietila, casting director, Campbell makes a few script changes. He writes: 'I think we're getting there, but the sweets shop jars a bit. What about this? After white cliffs of Dover ...
PRIME MINISTER: Oh, I know how you Americans love castles. You should go to my birthplace, Edinburgh, there's a big castle there.
HOMER: We just saw the Queen's Windsor Castle out of the plane window. I can't believe she built a castle so close to Heathrow airport.
His joke was accepted by the scriptwriters. (The Times, D. Mail 18/6/05)

Earlier, I was listening to Roland Rivron interviewing a Scottish group on Radio 2, one of whom stated that Edinburgh Castle had been built close to Waverley station for rail-travelling tourists' benefit. Then Sandi Toksvig, discussing Stonehenge, asked 'why did they build such an important tourist attraction so far from the capital city?' She then got disgusting: 'In my short archaeological career I once dug up a rectangular square of moss, which an earnest academic told me was sanitary wear from long ago. When I asked if it was the medieval period, I was banished from the site.' (The Sunday Telegraph, 26/6/05)

GRAVE GOODS. Carrying on the tradition of human burials with goods to sustain the deceased in the afterlife, Aaron Howard, 17, killed in a car crash, was buried with his mobile phone for friends to send farewell messages. He was also kitted out by relations in his favourite trainers, jeans and cap and even had his hair gel in his coffin. His father, Steve, said: 'He's got everything – his sunglasses are also there and I've even put a bag of crisps in, because he was always eating crisps, and a couple of cans of his favourite Carling lager. There are messages, pictures and photos from his friends and family, and I have charged his mobile phone so that people can text him.' (Metro, 17/5/05) Meanwhile, ale lover Dermot Brophy, 88, had his ashes put in a beer can and buried in a Kent hop field by pub pals in Lingfield, Surrey, fulfilling his last wishes. (The Sun, 1/8/05)

Murder and rape – fact or fiction?

Gary Younge in Baton Rouge

There were two babies who had their throats slit. The seven-year-old girl who was raped and murdered in the Superdome. And the corpses laid out amid the excrement in the convention centre.

In a week filled with dreadful scenes of desperation and anger from New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina some stories stood out.

But as time goes on many remain unsubstantiated and may yet prove to be apocryphal.

New Orleans police have been unable to confirm the tale of the raped child, or indeed any of the reports of rapes, in the Superdome and convention centre.

And while many claim they happened, no witnesses, survivors or survivors' relatives have come forward.

Nor has the source for the story of the murdered babies, or indeed their bodies, been found. And while the floor of the convention centre toilets were indeed covered in excrement, the Guardian found no corpses.

During a week when communications were difficult, rumours have acquired a particular currency. They acquired through repetition the status of established facts.

One French journalist from the daily newspaper Libération was given precise information that 1,200 people had drowned at Marion Abramson school on 5552 Read Boulevard. Nobody at the Federal Emergency Management Agency or the New Orleans police force has been able to verify that.

But then Fema could not confirm there were thousands of people at the convention centre until they were told by the press for the simple reason that they did not know.

"Katrina's winds have left behind an information vacuum. And that vacuum has been filled by rumour.

"There is nothing to correct wild reports that armed gangs have taken over the convention cen-

tre," wrote Associated Press writer, Allen Breed.

"You can report them but you at least have to say they are unsubstantiated and not pass them off as fact," said one Baltimore-based journalist.

"But nobody is doing that."

Either way these rumours have had an effect.

Reports of the complete degradation and violent criminals running rampant in the Superdome suggested a crisis that both hastened the relief effort and demonised those who were stranded.

By the end of last week the media in Baton Rouge reported that evacuees from New Orleans were carjacking and that guns and knives were being seized in local shelters where riots were erupting.

The local mayor responded accordingly.

"We do not want to inherit the looting and all the other foolishness that went on in New Orleans," Kip Holden was told the Baton Rouge Advocate.

"We do not want to inherit that breed that seeks to prey on other people."

The trouble, wrote Howard Witt of the Chicago Tribune is that "scarcely any of it was true – the police confiscated a single knife from a refugee in one Baton Rouge shelter".

"There were no riots in Baton Rouge. There were no armed hordes."

Similarly when the first convoy of national guardsmen went into New Orleans approached the convention centre they were ordered to "lock and load".

But when they arrived they were confronted not by armed mobs but a nurse wearing a T-shirt that read "I love New Orleans".

"She ran down a broken escalator, then held her hands in the air when she saw the guns," wrote the LA Times.

"We have sick kids up here!" she shouted.

"We have dehydrated kids! One kid with sickle cell!"

Cow-tipping myth hasn't got a leg to stand on

THE TIMES SATURDAY NOVEMBER 5 2005

By Jack Malvern

IT IS the kind of story you hear from a friend of a friend — how, after a long night in a rural hostelry and at a loss for entertainment in the countryside, they head out into a nearby field.

There, according to the second-hand accounts, they sneak up on an unsuspecting cow and turn the poor animal hoof over udder.

But now, much to the relief of dairy herds, the sport of cow-tipping has been debunked as an urban, or perhaps rural, myth by scientists at a Canadian university.

Margo Lillie, a doctor of zoology at the University of British

Columbia, and her student Tracy Boechler have conducted a study on the physics of cow-tipping.

Ms Boechler, now a trainee forensics analyst for the Royal Canadian Mounted Corps, concluded in her initial report that a cow standing with its legs straight would require five people to exert the required force to bowl it over.

A cow of 1.45 metres in height pushed at an angle of 23.4 degrees relative to the ground would require 2,910 Newtons of force, equivalent to 4.43 people, she wrote.

Dr Lillie, Ms Boechler's supervisor, revised the calculations so that two people could exert the required amount of force to tip a static cow, but only if it did not react.

"The static physics of the issue say ... two people might be able to tip a cow," she said. "But the cow would have to be tipped quickly — the cow's centre of mass would have to be pushed over its hoof before the cow could react."

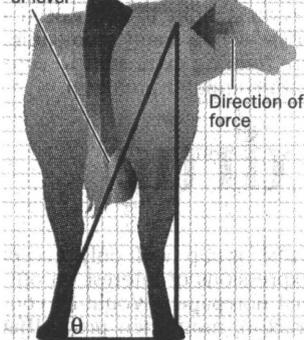
Newton's second law of motion, force equals mass multiplied by acceleration, shows that the high acceleration necessary to tip the cow would require a higher force. "Biology also complicates the issue here because the faster the [human] muscles have to contract, the lower the force they can produce. But I suspect that even if a dynamic physics model suggests cow tipping is possible, the biology ultimately gets in the way: a cow is simply not a rigid, unresponding body."

Another problem is that cows, unlike horses, do not sleep on their feet — they doze. Ms Boechler said that cows are easily disturbed. "I have personally heard of people trying but failing because they are either using too few people or being too loud.

"Most of these 'athletes' are intoxicated."

HAPPY TORQUE

The force required to tip the cow is 2,910 newtons
r: hypotenuse of lever



$$\tau = r \times F_u \times \sin \theta$$

r: is the hypotenuse of the triangle formed between the cow's feet and the corner of its rump

Fu: (force under the lever) is the downward force of the weight of the cow that will act against you pushing it. (This is a triangular section of the cow below the hypotenuse)

theta: the angle between the direction of force and the hypotenuse

$$r = 1.58\text{m}$$

$$F_u = 2007\text{N}$$

$$\theta = 66.6 \text{ degrees}$$

2,910 newtons of force requires 4.43 people to exert it. If you assume that each person weighs 67kg and can push his or her own bodyweight

Golden oldies

OLD ONES ARE THE BEST ONES. Julie Burchill, defender of Kate Moss, recalled how 'pathetic, brown-nosing chatshow hosts' would get George Best 'to tell that tired old "where did it all go wrong?" story.' She added that if she ever meets Moss she'll wheel out that old George joke one more time, with a twist. "Kate Moss, you earn millions of pounds a year, take loads of drugs and sleep with the most attractive people of your generation. Where did it all go wrong?!" (The Times, 8/10/05) (Right: Kate Moss)

DARK SATANIC MILLS. The Ashes series of cricket matches drew attention to the words of William Blake's Jerusalem and the meaning of 'dark satanic mills', so often taken literally. Blake never saw a textile mill and anyway the Industrial Revolution was yet to come. Readers suggested the reference to be aimed at churches, windmills and what have you. I always understood it to be a metaphor for universities and David H. Walton fingered the colleges of Oxford University. (The Times, 24/9/05)

COO! Why should Terry Wogan suddenly describe as 'news' pigeons' ability to 'distinguish between the works of Picasso and Monet' when I featured this long, long ago? (FF27:12, i.e. 1995!) He added, without contextualising, that this 'must inevitably lead to one of our feathered friends eventually pecking out the entire works of Shakespeare. A correspondent claims that when his pigeon sadly passed on, the bird proved to have been an impressionist. It tasted exactly like chicken.' How droll. (The Sunday Telegraph, 6/2/05)

DRUGS DOPE. Stephen King, 17, was arrested when he called cops to say thieves had stolen his marijuana in San Antonio, Texas. (The Sun, 27/7/05)

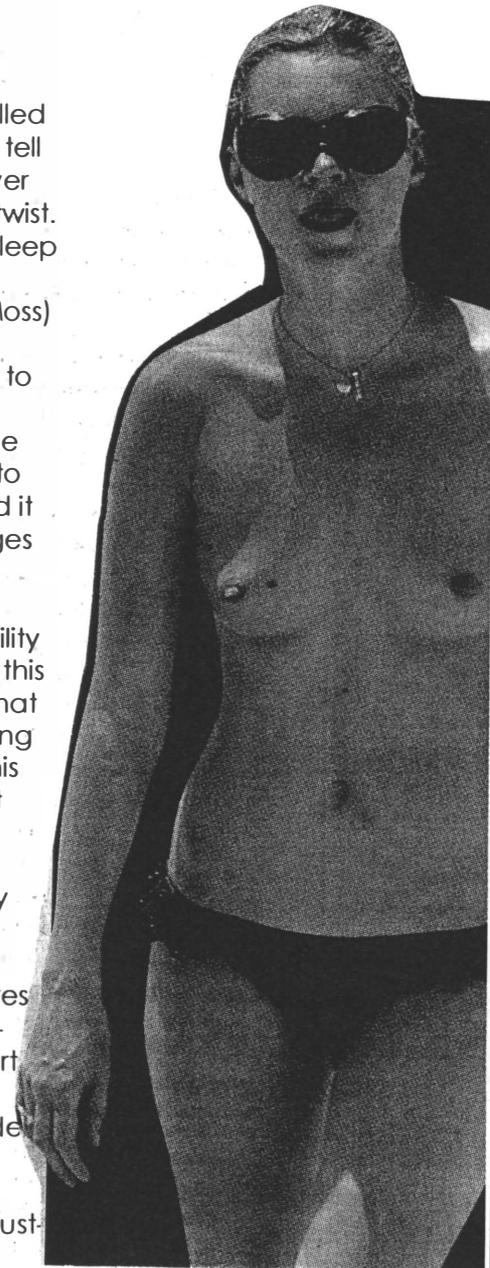
ORIGINALITY DOUBTS. In a column on modern morals, Joe Joseph reassures a correspondent whose plagiarism was bothering him. By using an out-of-date American joke book, Joseph points out that he had taken 'two smart precautions to avoid being exposed as a bubonic plagiarist (Jonathan Miller's quip, not mine)' Actually, I understood this jest to have been made originally by Peter Cook putting down David Frost. (The Times T2, 17/8/05)

BIN DRINKING. A boozer, 40, who passed out during a binge, woke in a dust-cart as he was about to be crushed in Perth, Australia. (The Sun, 30/9/05)

TOILET BREAK. My enforced narrow reading of newspapers these days still produced three versions of this hoan chestnut. It was best told by Sandi Toksvig: 'A Macedonian gentleman named Ljubomir Ivanov, who is only 35 and frankly has no excuse for being forgetful, took a driving holiday with his wife. He happily chugged across Europe until he got a phone call in Germany saying he'd left Mrs Ivanov at a petrol station in central Italy. Apparently, she usually sits in the back seat and he didn't see she wasn't there until six hours after filling up.' (The Sunday Telegraph, 14/8/05) Another version included a four-year-old daughter aboard and the distance driven before a mobile phone call alerted him as 210 miles. (The Weekly News, 10/9/05) A third telling gave the detail that the service station was near Pessaro. (The Times, 13/8/05)

HEXED. Jemima Rooper (below), who plays the lesbian ghost Thelma in the occult-themed drama Hex on Sky, was asked if she had ever had a supernatural experience herself: 'My best friend and I heard a rumour there's a ghost in the film Three Men And A Baby. It was supposed to be the ghost of a boy who died in the apartment they filmed in.

We found a copy of the video in our local pound store and we both got increasingly neurotic while we were watching it until, an hour into the film, my friend said 'This is the scene the ghost is in.' We both saw this little boy and we freaked. We gave these blood-curdling screams, my friend started crying, I phoned my mum - we were in a complete state. We eventually found out the explanation, though.' **Which is?** 'It's an optical illusion. Ted Danson plays an actor and he has a cardboard cut-out of himself wearing a top hat in the room. The cut-out is hidden by net curtains and the perspective makes it look like a little boy. We felt so stupid. I thought there were ghosts everywhere after first saw the scene. It was very bizarre.' (Metro, 8/9/05)



HAVE YOU CHECKED YOUR OIL?
AND THAT YOUR WIFE IS ON BOARD?



Inside the Arches

By Paul Screeton

ONCE upon a time a massive railway viaduct strode across a Teesside valley, but when it was blasted into rubble, an ancient legend surfaced.

When explosives expert Walt Parsons and his squad finally demolished the last remaining pillar of Thorpe Thewles viaduct, a team moved in to check for the remains of a horse and cart.

The local myth was that somewhere inside a 70-foot high column lay entombed the overworked horse where it collapsed and died during construction 102 years before.

Mr Parsons told a local newspaper at the time: "If they had left something like that in there it would have been a major structural fault and I just don't believe it. The engineers then were too skilled for that."

Demolition contractor Maurice Jackson commented: "We can find no trace of anything. It's just a heap of sandstone, brick and concrete. However, we'll keep looking. They might be in the two abutments at the start and finish which still have to come down."

Unfortunately nothing more was heard of this bizarre legend.

Moving north to Scotland, a similar tale was attached to the construction of the horseshoe curved Glenfinnan viaduct by pioneering engineer Robert McAlpine, affectionately known as "Concrete Bob."

This dramatic feat of building, still much photographed by railway enthusiasts when special trains cross it, lies along the scenic route between Fort William and Mallaig, in western Scotland. It opened on April 1, 1901.

Some years ago, engineers inspected the interiors of the piers, but there was no sign of horse or cart.

Later Ewen MacMillan, a 75-year-old who had lived in the area all his life, got into contact with the engineers. He insisted the tale was true -- only they were looking into the wrong viaduct.

He said: "My father and an old farmer who worked next to the viaduct told me the story about 70 years ago. I was fascinated and the story stuck in my head ever since."

Consequently attention shifted to the

eight-span Loch-nan-Uamh viaduct. Although the plans of its wide central pier show it to be hollow, test drilling proved it to be solid.

Finally, with the help of the latest radar techniques -- and a grant from Sir William McAlpine, whose great grandfather Robert McAlpine it was who built the line -- the legend has now been proved to be true.

A radar scan, taken through a concrete wall three-feet thick, reveals the remains of the cart with the horse above it.

Further details emerged when Professor Roland Paxton commented on the findings. The specialist in civil engineering at Edinburgh's Heriot-Watt University said: "Probably the cart was being backed-up to the edge of the hole to tip rubble, went too far and plummeted down, pulling the unfortunate horse with it."

"There is evidence that the horse's neck was broken. Iron-shod wheels about six feet in diameter, wood and individual bones have been identified."

Students of contemporary legend will doubtless point out that eventually every urban myth, at some point, emerges into reality. Of course, it could have been a foundation sacrifice, but why waste a good cart?

It's good also to see it was not a spoof connected with the founding April Fool's Day and that the story was verified on the centenary of the Mallaig line extension.

References: 1. Mail, Hartlepool, July 23, 1980; 2. Railnews, June, 2001

(This article was originally commissioned for the Forum section of Fortean Times during Bob Rickard's reign and it seemed a shame for it to vanish into oblivion.)

*** I trust readers will indulge my printing the article on Raquel Welch, which is also an 'orphan', having been resurrected from the ashes of a planned book entitled CELEBRITY TITS OUT FOR THE LADS.

Update

CATHERINE THE GREAT (FF47:16, passim) A recent TV documentary on the most powerful woman of her age had Simon Sebag Montefiore asking: 'And what about the sniggering schoolboy story that, as a result of her excesses, she eventually died in congress with a horse? ... The story of the horse, inevitably, is nothing more than a grotesque libel. ... She was an early victim of spin – and so successful was it that her legendary libido and the story of the horse are talked of even today.' (Daily Mail, 15/10/05)

GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY (FF48:8) Here we go again. Worst columnist in the world Bill Borrows rants on about the Great Train Robbery, Ronnie Biggs and train driver Jack Mills, who 'died years later of complications from the injuries he sustained.' Bollocks! Mills died in 1970 of leukemia and pneumonia. The coroner felt impelled to emphasise that his death had nothing to do with the coshing (most likely done by 'Buster' Edwards).

BRITNEY SPEARS (FF39:3, passim) During a documentary (Britney's Redneck Roots, C4, 16/8/05), the man who was married to Ms Spears for all of 55 hours did not appear particularly chatty. Asked, "how did it feel having Britney as your wife?", Jason Alexander gazed into the middle distance for some time before replying thoughtfully, "Didn't feel like shit to me." (The Sunday Telegraph, 21/8/05)

SQUAWK ON THE WILD SIDE (FF44:12, passim) Article on the 7,000 Indian red-necked parakeets at Esher rugby ground, Surrey, reckons there will be 100,000 'posh pigeons' in the U.K. by the end of the decade. Their breeding explosion is claimed to be 'the latest, and loudest, evidence of global warming.' It is written by Ben Macintyre, no stranger to writing fictional garbage as Nelson-ologists know. Macintyre goes on: 'No one is quite sure how the parakeets got here. One story holds that the ancestors of the flock escaped from Shepperton Studios in 1951 while filming of *The African Queen* with Humphrey Bogart and Kather-ine Hepburn. Other theories are that they escaped from an aviary during the storm of 1987 or that Jimi Hendrix brought them to Britain and released them to bring some psychedelic colour to London's sky-line, man. In fact, tiny populations have been spotted in Britain since 1855, but only in recent years have the numbers started to increase sharply.' (The Times, 10/9/05)

JAMES HEWITT (FF45:4, passim) It has been revealed that cad Hewitt owes the taxman £2.7m. His latest scam was to allow himself to be regressed (*James Hewitt: Under Hypnosis*, Five 22/9/05) and under hypnosis 'revealed' that his affair with Princess Diana had begun earlier than he had previously stated, commencing in 1982. not 1986. and therefore before

Harry was born. It is a claim that also appears as a 'revelation' in a newly-published biography of the publicist Max Clifford. Kathryn Knight added: 'Today, however, Hewitt, now 47, is unusually taciturn on the matter. "I really don't want to talk about what happened on the programme," he stutters. When pressed, however, it becomes clear that it is he, Hewitt, who feels he has been 'let down' by the show.' As Knight noted earlier in her article: 'The stunt would have been tasteless enough but timed as it was to coincide with the 21st birthday celebrations of Prince Harry, it showed an astonishing insensitivity, especially given the unfounded rumours about Harry's parentage – about which Hewitt is only too aware and which indeed, he has traded on relentlessly.' (Daily Mail, 15/10/05)

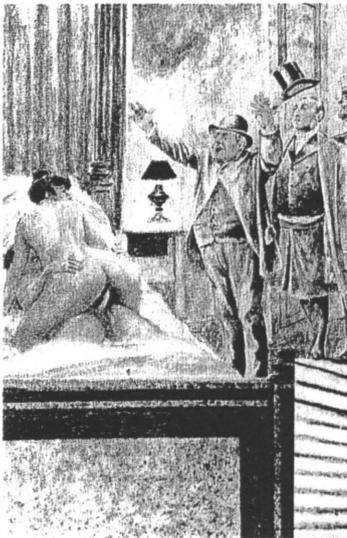
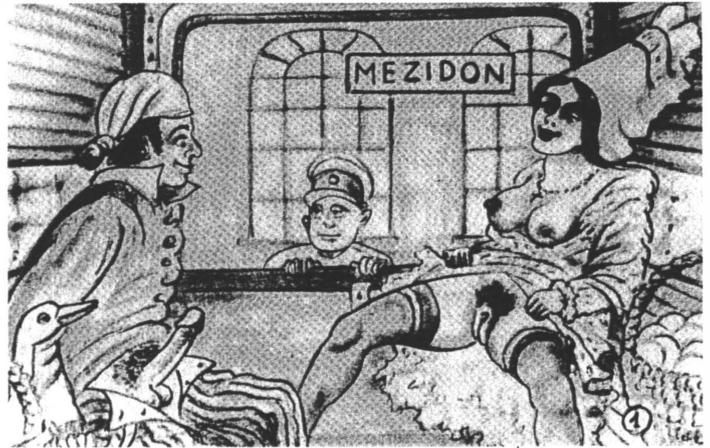
And there's more. 'Security surrounding Prince Harry at Sandhurst has been called into question after a *News of the World* reporter was able to reach his bedroom. The newspapers have now proved beyond reasonable doubt, on several occasions, that it would be easy to break into Sandhurst and do harm to Prince Harry. The thing that they've neglected to mention is the no one's interested, so why would you bother? The security is also lax around his father, but who's going to take James Hewitt hostage' Ouch!!!(Zoo, 26/8/05-1/9/05)

BOOBS 'N' BOOZE (FF30:4-7, passim) Euromyth time. This summer there were alarming reports that under a new EU ruling Bavaria's famously-buxom barmaids were going to be forced to cover up in order to protect themselves from the threat of sunburn. Christian Ude, the Mayor of Munich, was outraged: 'A waitress is no longer allowed to wander around a beer garden with a plunging neckline? I would not want to enter a beer garden under these conditions.' He need not have worried. The EU directive was not binding and visitors to Munich's Oktoberfest, an annual ritual that dates from 1810, found customs and costumes very much as normal. (The Daily Telegraph, 17/9/05)

BONO (FF48:9). As detailed previously, U2 singer Bono has been rattling on again about the song *Sometimes You Can't Make It On Your Own* and how the lyrics were inspired by his father, Bob Hewson, who died of cancer in 2001. Before playing it, Bono told a Dublin audience how the song shifts into a different voice halfway through – and said that the voice was that of his father. After the performance, *Uncut* asked Bono to elaborate. "I seem to have found this other voice," he said. "And I've had problems with my voice these last few years. It would come to me in concert, in the '80s. I had a very big voice but I didn't know how to use it really and I didn't have the sensitivity. I was sort of shouting. I learned to whisper towards the end of the '80s and '90s and now I feel like I've got my voice back with my big notes, and now I know what to do with it. I wondered where I got this voice and people around me, who I care about, asked me ... and the only thing I could think of, I like to think that when

SEX ON THE TRACKS (FF50:4-5) Sandi Toksvig ends up quoted in FF so often I now suspect she makes up most of her column each week. I doubt the veracity of this recollection to illustrate her poor eyesight, but it gives me an excuse to reproduce some rude – but relevant – pictures. Toxicsvig wrote: 'I was once on a Tube train late at night when a young man sitting opposite pointed to his crotch and demanded, "What do you think of that?" Thinking he might be showing me some interesting point in a book, I replied, "I'm sorry I can't see anything small without my specs." He fled at the next station and it was only when he got up that I realised he hadn't been carrying a book at all.' (The Sunday Telegraph, 230/10/05)

Humorous erotica – often vulgar in tone – became increasingly popular during the nineteenth century. Publishers were able to exploit the new printing technology by selling rude postcards and erotic prints to the railway tourists who flooded into Europe's capitals to visit the great exhibitions. Variable in the quality of art, printing – and humour – the mass market erotica of the Age of Travel is nevertheless a useful reminder of the lighter side of sexuality.



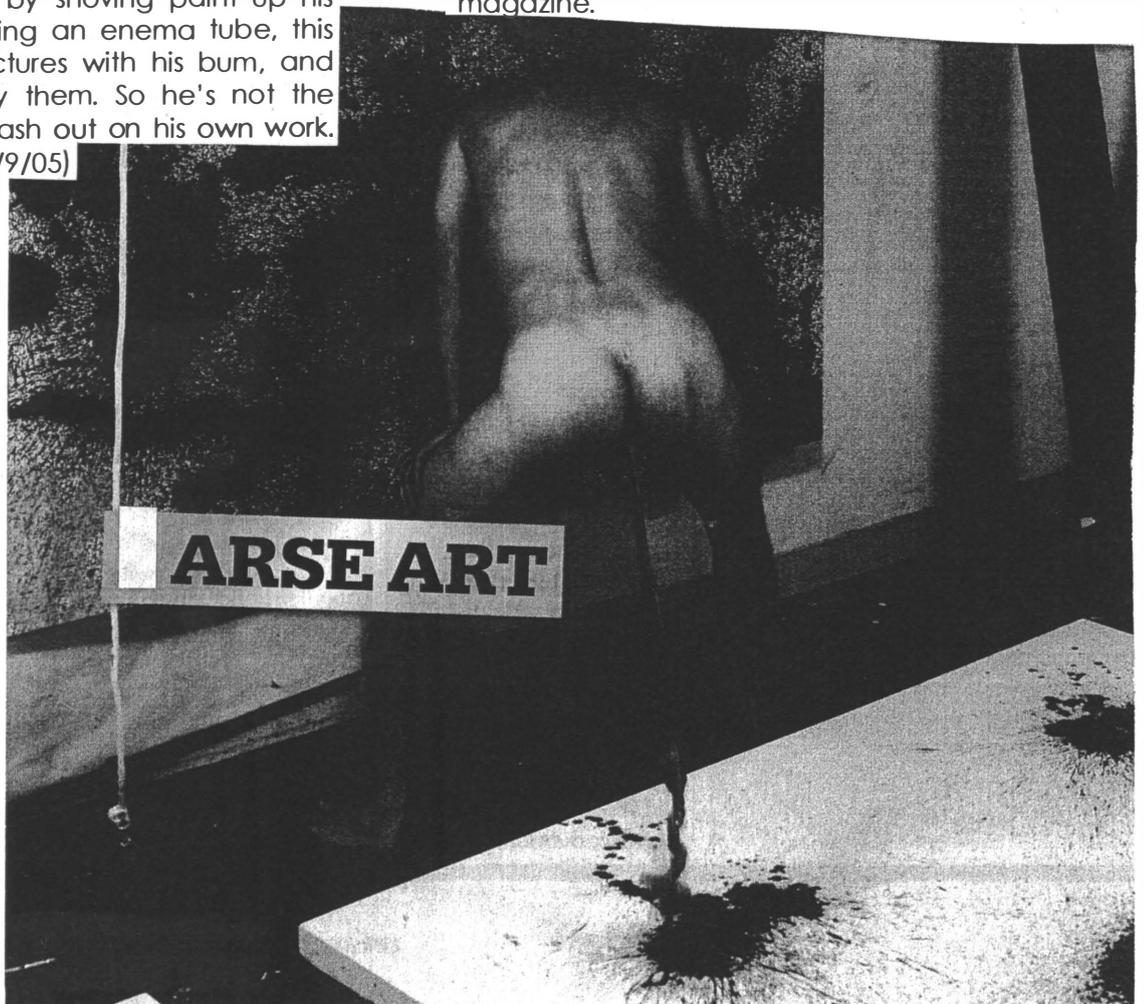
(Elizabeth Nash and Richard Fox, *The Pleasures of Love: an erotic guide to the senses*, Pavilion Books, 1995)

NEGATIVE EQUITY (FF41:11, passim) There is a cancer victims' only one side of the road 'cluster' near my home which I've mentioned on occasions. Mike Quinn, one of the authors of the Office of National Statists' new Cancer Atlas, comments: "Places do not get cancer, people do. The reason areas have high rates of cancer is that people in them are exposed to the relative risk factors." Sounds like a cancer place to me, be it a black stream, carcinogenic factory, nuclear dump, serendipity or whatever. (The Times, 9/7/05) But Robert Matthews cautions: 'Reading significance into each and every blip is clearly a mug's game. The same applies to more disturbing forms of clustering, from "cancer hot-spots" around factories to mysterious spates of suicides. One should never underestimate the power of randomness to create clusters or our desire to make sense of them.' (The Sunday Telegraph, 21/8/05)

ART PHILISTINE (FF48:4) A bottle of melted ice water that was a £42,500 exhibit at an art show in Totnes, Devon, was drunk by a thirsty thief. (The Sun, 27/7/05)

somebody you love leaves you and passes away, they give you a gift and not just in a will. My father was a tenor. A working-class guy grows up, outside toilet, the whole thing and he listened to opera, a tenor. He loved opera, he used to conduct the stereo with knitting needles, and he loved those voices. I feel like I've got my voice back in a funny way." Conducting with knitting needles? Must run in the family. (Uncut, January, 2005) This lunatic also said: 'I am God and I give my blessing to rockers who donate their services for good causes. The only imposition is that they have died at the cross when they reach 33 years of age.' (Daily Sport, 14/12/04)

PISS ARTISTS (FF45:5; FF49:2) Artists using urine have been featured previously, but by shoving paint up his rectum and using an enema tube, this artist paints pictures with his bum, and people still buy them. So he's not the only one to splash out on his own work. (Zoo, 26/8/05-1/9/05)



MARSBARIANNE FAITHFULL (Ff19:3-7, passim) The incomparable Nigel Farnsdale resurrected this classic. 'The actress Scarlett Johansson now regrets saying, as a joke, that she "apparently" had sex in a lift with a fellow actor at last year's Oscar ceremony. "I'll be answering that question for the rest of my life," she has complained in an interview. Well, only if she is lucky. She is barely 20, after all, and fame is fickle. Imagine how unsettled she will feel if one day she wakes up and realises that annoying journalists no longer want to ask her about the lift incident that never was. And anyway, it doesn't exactly hurt a celebrity's career to be mythologised in this way. However sordid the story, however obviously untrue, it only seems to add to their mystique. I can think of just three exceptions to this rule: Marc Almond and the dog sperm, Richard Gere and the gerbil and possibly, depending on how squeamish you are, Mick Jagger and the Mars Bar.' (The Sunday Telegraph, 28/8/05) As for the dog sperm, female stars' stomachs pumped to remove cum and the rumour traced back to the Fifties' prettiest cheerleaders swallowing the whole baseball team's ejaculations and being hospitalised, check out the Web; this is a family magazine.

HARTLEPOOL MONKEY HANGING (FF20:3-5, 24, passim) Apparently Reginald Hill, the literary creator of detective Andy Dalziel 'was born in 1936 in Hartlepool, "known for its monkey, and Peter Mandelson of course." The monkey is a reference to the legend of how during the Napoleonic Wars, the inhabitants of Hartlepool hanged a washed-up monkey, believing it to be a French spy. "I got some stick for that when I was young, naturally," he recalls cheerfully. "Nowadays I'm quite proud of it. It's a good story. Especially given the present state of Anglo-French relations." (The Daily Telegraph, 23/7/05)

HUNTING LEY MISUSES (FF49:1, passim) Third use of Watkinsian leys in a silly way to come my way. Richard Mabey writing of the journey made by John Clare, England's 'premier poet of place, when he escaped from an asylum, notes how Iain Sinclair's narrative in *Edge of the Orison* (Hamish Hamilton, 2005): 'grows the way that ice cracks, feeling its way to the warm spots. He divvies Shelley's watch, Clare's snuffboxes (that the poet used in some sassy double-entendres about the Queen), invents ley lines between Clare's pubs. Sometimes this seems gratuitous, the sound of a man muttering to himself, and registering, step by step, his foot-notes.' (The Times, 24/9/05)

In a review of a book on air guitar playing (true!), Tom Gatti pretends to have found the diaries of exponent Johnny Ether, who formed a band of fellow sounds of silence followers. 'I'm leaning towards the bold rock simplicity of AirWolf, and I suggested to the band that on stage, Annti could dress as a she-wolf. Buddy pointed out that nobody could tell the difference between a boy-wolf and a girl-wolf without examining their genitalia. I said that we could make the genitalia massive on the costume so that people could tell. Richey thought that this would be "sick". I said that a real wolf would probably prefer massive genitalia anyway, and that audiences won't be used to a silent band without any instruments, and will need some-thing familiar to focus on. Richey said that a wolf with massive female genitalia would not be "familiar". I told him to shut up and join the real world. He shut up.' In another diary entry, Ether record: 'I've been practising hard, stripped to the waist in front of my mirror. In a few strums, I cracked open a perfect rendition of *House of the Rising Sun*. I summoned the power-chords of *Smoke on the Water* like a Druid on a ley-line.' (The Times, 29/10/05)

HANGOVERS (?) For my birthday I would have liked the Hangover 1 gene. Scientists in the U.S.A. and Germany have found the gene that makes all the difference after studying a group of hard-drinking fruit flies. The tiny insects show the same symptoms from the effects of alcohol as humans; they stagger and fall over. The flies were exposed to ethanol vapours and tested to see how quickly they got drunk. They were tested again and researchers found that those with the special hangover gene took longer to get tipsy. Consequently, experts reckon people who get pissed on a half pint lack this Hangover 1 gene, which they believe raises the body's tolerance to alcohol. Scientists hope the gene will help pave the way for developing tests to identify people at risk of alcohol addiction – and to create effective drug treatments. (The Weekly News, 10/9/05)

RUMOURS OF NAMES (FF40:4-6, passim)

Committees select locomotive names; certainly not chief mechanical engineers. The London, North Easter Railway streamlined Pacifics began with four beginning 'Silver' (such as *SILVER LINK*) and next four 'Golden' (such as *GOLDEN SHUTTLE* and *GOILDEN FLEECE* for West Riding mill cities services). Plus *GOLDEN PLOVER* and *GOLDEN EAGLE*, so more bird names were a natural progression. An article by William Higgins claims the record-breaking *MALLARD*'s designer, Sir Nigel Gresley, 'thought of the name for the engine while feeding the ducks at his home at Salisbury Hall.' (livewire, Oct/Nov 2005) Total tosh! It would seem Wiggins paraphrases his information from *Mallard: How the "Blue Streak" Broke the World Speed Record* by Don Hale (Aurum Press). Presumably this is the former newspaper editor Don Hale whose involvement in the 'Bakewell Tart' murder case debacle left him with egg on his face.

BIZARRE SKINCARE (FF48:10, passim)

Judy Rumbold asks: 'Are you happy in your skin? I'm not. I'm hopping mad. My skin doesn't fit anymore, and is no longer a joy to wear. Whereas once it was as sparingly tailored as a suit made for me by Christian Dior himself, now it sags, and in sneaky ways – often round the back where it thinks I can't see. ... I am meant to be fearless, empowered and ready to fulfil new ambitions (I have embarked on one: I'm tackling those eye-bags with, of all things, haemorrhoid cream, alleged by make-up artists in Hollywood to transform sleep-deprived hags into flawless goddesses).' (stella – Sunday Telegraph – 6/11/05) While Hannah Betts' first few words caught my eye: 'There are a good many urban myths concerning the horrors contained in beauty products. Face creams made of sperm, placenta and that whit gloop that babies are born smothered in (vernix rather than cradle crap). Dyes rumoured to cause blindness and deodorants said to be ripe with carcinogens. All this before we have even begun to consider more savage monstrosities: Botox and fillers, lipo and silicone, nips, tucks, lifts and peels. ... English Heritage's director of education, Tracy Borman, has made it her business to investigate such idiosyncrasies, from cave dwellers using ochre to adorn their bodies some 900,000 years ago, through the Egyptian and Roman beauty industries, via 16th century leading to Victorian nose clamps. Her discoveries regarding the ancient Egyptians are particularly gruesome. Hair dye was made from everything from cows' blood and crushed tadpoles to sheeps' urine and goat fat.' (The Times Magazine, 6/8/05) So much for history's ongoing snake oil cosmetics industries exporations.

apparently BY MIKE BARFIELD	THE HOODIES: HOODED CRIMINALS & THEIR CRIMES		
	'PADDY THE BEAR'	'NICK THE SACK'	'READY JEDI'
	ILLEGAL ENTRY	HOUSE-BREAKING	BANNED WEAPON
	FRIAR TUCK	'DON'T LOOK NOW' DWARF	A.N. ORAK
OBSCENITY	IDENTITY FRAUD	TRAIN-SPOTTING	

(ABOVE: Private Eye, No. 1133, 2005; RIGHT: Private Eye, No. 826, 1993)

ANORAKNOPHOBIA (FF25:6, passim) "If 'railwayacs' was a term for enthusiasts in 1904 (August 2004), might it just be possible that it evolved into the term 'railway anoraks' at a later date? Just a thought! David Allison, Arnold, Nottingham.

@ Namecheck for Paul Sieveking, who should know better. Writing alien big cat sightings, "massive accumulations of such anecdotal evidence risk becoming tedious and trainspotterish." (Fortean Times, No. 197, 2005)

@ Previewing a TV drama about the planespotters locked up in Greece, Daphne Lockyer claimed: "The British are born to morris-dance, pigeon fancy, train and planespot." (The Eye, The Times, February 19-25, 2005)

@ Apparently comedians need a high IQ and a score of 130 or more puts the candidate in the top two per cent in the population. So Rob Deering, who scored 130, said that stand-up attracts geeks. "There is a trainspotterish aspect of stand-up. There are so many people on the circuit who collect stamps or beer mats or whatever. I like to think I'm a rock star, but I am a bit nerdy when it comes to film knowledge." (The Times, 27/8/05)



101 USES FOR A JOHN MAJOR (4)
 A TRAIN SPOTTER'S ANORAK

THE ZOO AND THE CHEF: (FF48:6-7). I noted that I was sure I had a reference to scientists eating mammoth meat. Still not found, but the Thomas Sheraton pub library angel (FF49) has obliged. "It is true that members of a scientific congress in St Petersburg in 1905 were more voracious than the Eskimos; at the final banquet they had the whim of eating frozen mammoth steak," wrote Norbert Casteret (Ten Years Under the Earth, Readers' Union, 1940). He also noted: "The mammoth's stomache habitually contained a stupendous quantity of fir shoots. The Eskimos, who often found the bodies of mammoths long before the scientific world grew excited over them, regarded such a find as a great windfall; they used the fat, aand fed the meat to their dogs. What palaeontological treasures have thus been lost to science."

@ An entirely new species of rodent has been discovered in South-East Asia -- roasted on a skewer in a food stall. The "rock rat", as it's now known, was spotted by biologists in the Khammouan region of Laos on a stall among a selection of vegetables. The creature is described as a cross between a large rat and a squirrel and is the first mammal species to be discovered since 1974. (At least that's what it says here) "I've never seen anything like it before," said one of the scientific team. (Nuts, June 39, 2005)



TATTOO BLUNDERS (FF33:1&15, passim)

Did you miss?

HISTORY LESSON. Tut, tut! Quoting from a song about George Stephenson –

**The first locomotive that he made
The Rocket she was ca'd** -

Keith Gregson fails to correct this error, for his first locomotive was Locomotion No. 1 and his son Robert designed the Rocket. He also mentions Ned Corvan (about whom he has written a book), but fails to refer to that songwriter's *Who Hung the Monkey?* about the railway rivalries in the Hartlepoons. This being doubly odd as the folksinger is a head of history and that at Brierton Comprehensive in Hartlepool, to boot! Actually I know Keith, having first met him when he was in lodgings with a colleague of mine and the three of us went boozing many moons ago. Keith also helped when I was researching my own *Who Hung The Monkey?* book. (Backtrack, June 2005)

PLAYGROUND RHYMES. Visiting a number of school playgrounds, David Rowan found creative play and imaginative verses alive and well. For instance he discovered an eight-year-old boy's playground rhyme in Bradford, west Yorkshire:

**I was walking down the lane,
sniffing cocaine.
Police went by and shouted my name.
I threw the tin out of the window
Shouting: 'The motherfucker.'
I legged it!**

Hardly Keats, or even Roger McGough, but topical. Most others being violent and/or sexual. (The Times Magazine, 21/5/05)

JIMMY RIDDLE (Or MEET THE FOCKE) Folkloric themes resound in the tantalising trail of clues which have led Gunther Focke, now a TV repairman in Corby, to believe he is the illegitimate son of Prince Philip. Focke being the result of a brief postwar affair between the Queen's consort and Marie-Karoline Focke. After the birth and while courting the young Princess Elizabeth, Philip visited with gifts and was known to the German villagers as Jimmy. Naturally Buckingham Palace refutes Focke's claims, although gossipy London society believed he fathered an illegitimate child before his marriage to the Queen. I recall *I'm Just A Baby* hitmaker Louise Cordet being in the frame. Also my father heard he was the naked 'Man in the Mask' at a salubrious party around the Keeler affair time. (D. Mail, 2/7/05)

THREE WISE MEN. Discussing Prince 'William the Wise' – in the words of one broadsheet – Jeremy Paxman wrote: 'And in the context of modern royalty, the epithet "The Wise" may be accurate.

After all, George V advertised his suspicion of highbrow activities by wondering what on earth eyebrows had to do with intellect. When the future Edward VIII's mistress gave him a copy of *Wuthering Heights*, he reportedly asked; "Who is this woman Bront?" And when Edward VII was told that a particular writer was an authority on Lamb, he wondered in a baffled voice "on lamb?" . (The Sunday Telegraph, 26/6/05)

LAST NAMES. Daniel Finkelstein's correspondent Jonathan Hulme wrote to inform him that he knows an Arthur Brain and a Miss P. Brain. Finko was reminded that he came across a T. Caddy. (The Times, 1/6/05) I neglected to note the source, but actress Tamsin Greig has a husband called Leaf, so she said it is embarrassing if she signs 'T. Leaf.'

SOMETHING TO POND-ER. Nature writer Simon Barnes pondered how newts appear from nowhere. 'You filled the pond up with a hose and added no newt: and yet there are newts in the pond, swimming and wriggling away. Where did they come from? It is as if they appeared by spontaneous generation.' (The Times, 28/5/05) My first pond creation was to sink a baby's bath into the ground, filled it with water, left it overnight, and lo and behold there was a solitary newt happily swimming in it. Fortean teleportation?

SUPPRESSED SCIENCE. As a 'global warming denier', I was heartened by a piece by Robert Matthews. Dr Naomi Oreskes, of the University of California, analysed almost 1,000 papers on the subject published since the early 1990s, and concluded that 75% either explicitly or implicitly backed the consensus view, while none directly dissented from it. However, when Dr Benny Peiser, a senior science faculty lecturer at Liverpool John Moores University, decided to conduct his own analysis of the same 1,000 documents he concluded that only one third backed the consensus view, with only 1% doing so explicitly. Dr Oreskes's study was published in *Science*, but when Peiser and other dissenting academics tried to have rebuttals published they were rebuffed, including Prof Dennis Bray's study showing that fewer than one in ten climate scientists believed that climate change is principally caused by human activity. (The Sunday Telegraph, 1/5/05)

MINER ARISTOCRAT. I have written at length in these pages previously (FF 32:2-5, 1998) about the subterranean activities of the eccentric 5th Duke of Portland. A frequently trotted out belief to explain architectural follies and oddities was resurrected by Damian Whitworth to explain the weird duke's tunnelling obsession: 'It has been suggested that the massive earthworks could even have been some sort of job creation scheme.' (The Times, 1/11/03)

Book review

THE TRAVELLER'S GUIDE TO SACRED ENGLAND BY JOHN MICHELL (GOTHIC IMAGE, £12.99)

HAVING had the pleasure of John Michell's company walking the byways of south-east Durham – when a mad farmer tried to divert us from his land – I can attest to his love of landscape and curiosity. My photographic album includes a picture of John rolling his own on a North Sea coast sand-dune and another striding down Glastonbury Tor.

On the former occasion I took him on journeys to the mysterious village of Hart (site of the mead-hall in *Beowulf*) and Durham to meet Tom Cole. This book fulfills the same *raison d'être* of introducing the traveller to new places. The secular is ignored as ancient and sacred edifices and vistas come under the author's perceptive gaze. This is an instructive and spellbinding trip for the 21st century pilgrim.

The scene is set through an alternative history lesson whereby the astronomer-priests who designed the megalithic stone circles were seen to become victims of an early reformation when the bardic Druids returned to simplified worship in more natural graves. Michell then relates how the original gnostic brand of Christianity introduced into Britain developed into the Celtic Church and how after the Synod of Whitby, Roman influence took the ascendancy. There are also Knights Templar and at Waltham 'paintings, done on canvas show the four elements and 12 signs of the zodiac, together with the activities – such as ploughing and weaving – appropriate to each of the signs. A notice by the entrance states emphatically that these images have nothing to do with occultism or any such non-Christian practice!'

It seems natural enough that the gazetteer section begins with London. I have argued on occasions with John that not every great development is made in a country's capital: railways were born in the North-East of England, being perhaps the most notable. Perambulating London, a couple of other of John's particular interests are touched upon: London Stone and not Piccadilly Circus as city centre; Darwin and Wallace in Westminster Abbey 'whose theory of evolution set up a rival creation myth to that of the Church'; and the gem that a deep well at the White Tower could have been used by the ancients for observing the stars by daylight. St Albans gives the author the opportunity to air another personal interest, the authorship of Shakespeare, while Stonehenge is shown as a model of

cosmological geometry and the Old Bedford Level recorded as where the peculiar notion of a flat earth was examined without agreement.

All manner of ancient sites are described, from Cornish and Cumbrian stone circles, via holy wells and hermitages to the great Gothic cathedrals. The gazetteer takes a clockwise journey around England, out of necessity ignoring the central counties and great swathes of land.

Among the many fascinating tales are 'stories of people who have gone (to Glastonbury) for brief visits and stayed on for the rest of their lives' and Katherine Maltwood's revelation in shadows moving across the landscape of the Glastonbury terrestrial zodiac; another map but actually an *estoire*, Hereford's *mappa mundi*, a remarkable object of Christian flat earth cosmology; likely sacrificial death and burial with arrow attached of William Rufus, while another king, George V, was found to be using the missing prehistoric gold Rillaton cup to store collar studs and sodomite Edward II put to death 'in a manner thought appropriate' by means of a red-hot poker; a 'forest of crutches' left by cripples miraculously cured at the shrine of Thomas a Becket; episcopal rivalry between Canterbury and York, plus the mysterious cloud, flash of lightning and post-Jenkins fire of 1984; and one with which I was unfamiliar, despite being a Carliseophile, where King Arthur had to find the answer to what do women most desire (i.e. to have their own way).

John Michell is always a delight too read. Unlike his previous books and columns this does not so much crackle with insights, but still looks at places often from a new angle. What greater encouragement could there be than to visit anew sacred places in John's company – if not in body, at least with this splendid literary companion.



Flags, Dragons & Wagons

This annotated bibliography of books, articles and journalism by Paul Screeton is a monograph compiled by me primarily for my own need to know what and where I have published; and to ease recovery of data. It will also be useful to my family genealogist daughter. The painstakingly detailed bibliographies in my history of ley hunting, *Seekers of the Linear Vision*, have apparently been invaluable to subsequent researchers as a key reference work. In the spirit of shared co-operation, I am offering a limited number of this 18-page A4 booklet for sale at £2, postage included.