

FOLKLORE

Lyme Regis conger-cuddling and London trout slapping, turbulent Van Gogh, Freddie Mercury's exotic parties, pirate Keith Richards, Cate the Great and stallion, Marianne Faithfull and Mars bar, drinking urine, dark satanic Heather Mills, Paul McCartney is 'dead', apology for Slough,

FRONTIERS

swearing telephone toy, misheard lyrics, saints' relics sold on eBay, pretentious audience, superstitious enginemen, erectile dysfunction, mountain epiphanies, 'tramp stamps', suicidal canids, string theory

No 54

Plus books – Gnosticism, Philip K. Dick's mind, wells and springs, marathon boozing, St Augustine – and magazines reviewed

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.....
I'M pleased to report that my latest book is selling well. In fact, better than publisher Bob Trubshaw anticipated. Here's how one commentator described it:

'I TOOK a leisurely railway ride down to darkest West Yorkshire the other day and got to musing on some of the odd things about our railway system.

So many questions, so few answers...

Why for instance was it on the train I was on that all the stickers carrying instructions for the train crew were written in English, French, German and what looked like Mandarin Chinese?

Were Northern Rail having to recruit from the four corners of the earth?

And another question – when does an overbridge become a tunnel? I ask, as, at one point, we went under a bridge which would have been stretched if it had to accommodate my terrace house and yard in it but which boasted a Network Rail plaque naming it as such and such tunnel.

Luckily for this area, we have a man who is begging to answer such silly questions. And to prove it, he's written an entire book about the more surreal aspect of the Iron Road. Paul Screepton has just hot print with his magnum opus "Crossing the Line – Trespassing on Railway Weirdness" and for a price of just £14.95 it's as good value as an open ended supersaver ticket.

A lot of his anecdotes are local. Did you know, for instance, that the classic 1970s Michael Caine movie was allegedly based on a train journey to Newcastle by the Kray Twins in order to sort out someone who was going to give court evidence against an old chum?

And, did you know that a humble Class 37 diesel engine christened Thornaby in honour of the depot at which it was stabled, was reputed by railwaymen to be Britain's most haunted locomotive, spooked as it was by the ghost of a driver killed back in the 1960s?

Some of his other stories retell the urban myths that stalk the permanent way. One, which recounts the story of a pooch strangled when its owner, in an absent-minded moment, tied its lead to the arm of a level crossing lifting gate, which... yes... lifted.

Sex also features in the book. Paul Screepton retells the story of how the famous airline "£mile high" club where amorous couples enjoy a journey some 380 feet below the sea bed through the Chunnel of Love on the Eurostar.

No wonder they call the train the Transport of Delights.

- Park Bencher

The **Park Bencher** rang me to ask if I minded his publicising my book. Weird bloke. When it appeared in print and online (Evening Gazette, Middlesbrough, 4/10/06), he sent a copy of the original to show what had been spiked or altered. Not surprisingly the last paragraph of the public family newspaper version replaced **Park Bencher's**: 'And they talk about going like a train...' I was also somewhat amused by the identity of **Park Bencher**, his being David Walsh, Labour leader of Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council and a figure of some girth regularly gracing local news broadcast.

The book was also reviewed by the editors themselves of *Magonia* and *Northern Earth*. It also got a mention in the top regional newspaper *The Northern Echo*; Mike Amos commenting on his presence on the cover of *FF 53*, a copy of which I sent him.



THE next item sounds apocryphal and resonates with some other similar tale I read concerning an overheard conversation in a taxi, misunderstood terror threat and arrest at airport. Various prominent music biz figures were asked to comment on songs by The Clash. Carl Barat, of the Dirty Pretty Things and erstwhile collaborator in The Libertines with Pete Doherty, ended his discussion of *Tommy Gun* saying: "A mate told me a funny story about the ad lib near the end where Strummer sings: *OK, so let's agree about the price, and make it one jet airliner for ten prisoners*. Apparently, he texted it to a mate who couldn't figure out what the lyrics were about and the next morning some heavies from MI5 turned up on his doorstep! That alone proves *Tommy Gun* is as relevant now as it was back then. (The Observer Review, 29/10/06)



WTF! our extended book reviews and to make these more relevant pre-Christmas. *FF* will now publish November, March and July.



THE Westbury white horse, which has been dubbed the old grey mare because it gets so dirty, has been given a permanent whitewash with a special paint that prevents the growth of algae and lichens. The chalk horse, one of several dug into hillsides around Wiltshire, and at one time and by some people regarded as navigation aids for extraterrestrial tourists, has had to be steam-cleaned and repainted frequently by English Heritage. Builders spent nine weeks hanging from ropes painting the landmark, 180ft high, which dates back to 1742, at a cost of £30,000. Incidentally, my last UFO sighting was a daylight disc at Westbury. (The Times, 4/11/06)



HAVING achieved fame in *FF* for having a huge 'guy' of herself burned (*FF 48:3*), I feel *FF* should be more positive about Jordan, aka Katie Price. She has just written her debut novel, *Angel*, about a glamorous model from Brighton who becomes famous after having a boob job. But she insists: "It's not about me at all. It's not based on anyone I know or me." Really! *Angel* includes a saucy threesome, but asked where she got her inspiration, she told *New! Magazine*: "You'll have to use your imagination." Asked if she and husband Peter Andre would be up for a threesome, she replied: "Who says we haven't?" (Daily Star, 4/7/06)



Hoping Yule all have a merry festive season -- Paul

How and why Gnosticism *LOST* out

By PAUL SCREETON

LOST CHRISTIANITIES: THE BATTLES FOR SCRIPTURE AND THE FAITHS WE NEVER KNEW
by BART D. EHRMAN
(Oxford University Press, £8.99)

ARRIVING at an inn late at night, the apostle John is dismayed to find his mattress infested with bedbugs. He orders the loathsome insects remove themselves. The following morning, to his companions' amusement and amazement, the unwanted bedmates are found obediently gathered together in the doorway, patiently awaiting permission to reoccupy their home in the straw. John awakens, grants permission for their return and he and his chums go on their merry way. Such are saints' paranormal abilities and kindness.

This book is full of fascinating tales of supernatural intervention, miraculous resurrection, attempted necrophilia, ascetism, liberation for Christian women (until proto-orthodox misogyny snuff it out until modern times), but is essentially an overview of the prevailing social, political and religious milieu of the time.

But what are these 'lost Christianities'? Simply the practices and beliefs of those who called themselves Christians during the first three centuries CE. Not so simply they were even more varied than the differences between 21st century Christian groups. More controversially these 'lost' Christianities came to be reformed or expunged, their texts proscribed, marginalised, destroyed, forgotten, claimed as forgeries – i.e. 'lost'. Those forgeries were from the early period, but the term merely applies to their being attributed to some other well-known person; some or all of the New Testament are equally suspect. We're not talking Hitler's fake diaries or Jordan's novel. Forgery here being usually a form of tribute or in some cases financial motive. Apparently most readers would not have been fooled anyway. It was the message not the medium which mattered in this pre-McLuhan era. Lost, yes, but now as in *Amazing Grace*, lost but now found. Found either by trained archaeologists seeking them or from chance discovery by wandering Bedouin.

As a professed Gnostic of many years standing, I applaud Ehrman's conclusion that this is 'arguably the most significant and certainly one of the most fascinating forms of Christianity that came to be 'lost'.

One of those fascinating brands is the Carpocratians, a sect following a peculiar doctrine of reincarnation, where the trapped soul must experience everything bodily possible, so in order to speed up the process they not only indulged in wife-swapping but every type of profligate activity to ensure quick release. It is a pity the *News of the World* wasn't around then to publicise their wild licentious orgies under the name of religion. This led to a dodgy, and possibly modern 'real' forgery by an academic, a Secret Gospel of Mark, a Carpocratian corruption, with distinctly homoerotic overtones involving Jesus and a young man, stressing

his having nothing but a linen cloth over his naked body, both spending the night together. As in the world of *fortean*, the relevant document's whereabouts are now unknown, and it is a super detective tale involving warring so-called experts taking up opposing positions in an unsavoury scholarly ding-dong.

Whether real or imagined as a 'dirty tricks' campaign against another Gnostic sect, the Phibionites, they were charged by their proto-orthodox enemies as wife-swappers, where the male would withdraw before climax, gather the semen and share it as 'the body of Christ'; consume menstrual liquid as 'the blood of Christ'; if a foetus occurred it would be manually aborted, covered with honey and spices, and cannibalistically devoured as a Eucharist meal; for those who had achieved perfection they would indulge in homosexual relations; plus sacred, private masturbation.

On the subject of polemical warfare and falsification, Ehrman goes to great lengths to explain the several factors which have long perplexed scholars as to how, with an early Christianity so diverse, the side which is generally identified as proto-orthodox established itself as dominant. It is likely that the diversity of doctrine within the Gnostics themselves played into the hands of their opponents. For instance Basilides (highly regarded by SF writer Philip K Dick) claims Jesus transformed himself to look like the carrier of his cross, Simon of Cyrene, and vice versa, leading to the wrong man being crucified and laughing at his subterfuge. Ehrman remarks drily: 'Simon, presumably, did not find it so funny'.

Those who enjoy theological speculation can debate whether Didymus Judas Thomas was Jesus's identical twin; after the Virgin Mary gives birth, a midwife called Salome gives her a postpartum inspection, but as she inserts her finger to see if her patient is still intact, her hand begins to burn as if on fire; call for chastity even within marriage; docetism, where the divine Christ descended from heaven in the form of a dove at Jesus's baptism (see *Aert de Gelder's "URO" Painting by Paul Screepton with Chris Castle Journal of Geomancy, Vol. 2 No. 2 1978; Fortean Times, No. 25 1978*)

Regarding folklore previously discussed in *Folklore Frontiers*, we have Pontius Pilate said to have converted to Christianity after Jesus's resurrection – 'This is all stuff of legend, of course, borne out by no non-Christian source'. Probably being American, Ehrman does not discuss the perennial belief that Pilate was born in Scotland at Forthinghall.

Then there is the Apocalypse of Peter in which the eponymous hero is given a guided tour of heaven and hell: similar and possibly more touristically engaging than the 1950s contactees' tours of the solar system's inner planets, but probably a similar psychological scenario. Also we learn, at least to my surprise, the Dead Sea Scrolls never mention John the Baptist, Jesus or any of his followers; not even anything Christian. Neither had I realised that the phrase 'sweat blood' comes from the Gospel of Luke. But I'm getting further from the core ...

On the book's minus side, it is massively repetitive. Perhaps this is simply to hammer home his points – '(Recall: *gnosis* is ... ' – and possibly sensing many readers are newcomers (via *The Da Vinci Code* and the *Matrix* films) who need to be reminded of the arguments. Gnosticism he describes as a 'strange, even inviting, set of religious practices and beliefs', but I somehow doubt it is his chosen faith. I even suspect he

is agnostic. He considers, too briefly, an alternative history for Western civilisation had proto-orthodox Christianity not won the day (but then he did not write *The Man in the High Castle*). What the author fails to acknowledge or realise is that Gnosticism's influence is probably at its greatest since those ancient desert days. There again, this has only become possible through the Nag Hammadi discoveries and Sixties onwards religious revivalism, shared all over as in those olden days.

However, as can be guessed from the main thrust of the review, it has enthused me and should grab any reader willing to absorb a fascinating subject presented cogently and with gentle humour. Already aware of the basics of Gnosticism, Ehrman has opened my eyes wider to its actual roots and early beginnings and trials. It is erudite and intelligible, that is if Gnosticism ever can be; blazingly illuminating regarding a dark and mysterious religious environment of almost lost beliefs. A true *tour de force*.

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Town told to drop the dead fish contest

By WILL PAVIA

THERE was outrage and sadness in a Dorset fishing town as locals mourned the death of a cherished tradition, killed off after complaints from animal rights activists.

Since time immemorial, or at least since 1974, the denizens of Lyme Regis have gathered on the harbour to indulge in the traditional sport of the conger: a game of skill and balance involving a dead eel.

In the annual finale to the town's Lifeboat Week, nine players or 'conger cuddlers', would mount wooden blocks arrayed in a triangular formation. An opposing team of nine would take turns to swing a dead conger, suspended from a rope, and try to knock their opponents from their perches as if they were human skittles, the crowd assisting with carefully-aimed buckets of sea water. It was, by common consent, the most fun one could have with a dead fish.

Last night (28/7/06) the finest conger cuddlers in the world should have been gathering at the quayside to compete before a crowd of thousands. Teams of firemen, powerboat racers, fishermen – all were preparing to take their chances against the swinging eel in a tournament that raises about £3,000 for the RNLI. This year, however, an anonymous animal rights activist has scuppered the event after writing to the RNLI, complaining that the event was 'disrespectful' to dead animals and threatening to film it and use the footage for a nationwide campaign against conger cuddling.

Rob Michael, chairman of the Lyme Regis Lifeboat Guild was advised by the RNLI to abandon the conger cuddling. "The RNLI is not prepared to be involved in an event that may be seen by some as a barbaric throwback," he said.

Ken Whetlor, the Mayor of Lyme Regis, pointed out that the conger eels used were caught accidentally in fishermen's nets and frozen for the event. "The writer of that letter is a gutless troublemaker with nothing better to do than stop people enjoying an innocent event that helps to raise money to save lives," he said.

For Richard Fox, 66, a retired publican, local historian and former world champion town crier, the demise of the sport he helped to found is little short of tragic. "One person creates a fuss over a dead fish and destroys the enjoyment of a large amount of people who do this every year," he said.

Mr Fox bestowed the game on a grateful town when he arrived from Somerset, where farmhands play a game called mangle dangling – a similar time-honoured sport involving a mangle-wurzle, a large root vegetable. He sought to translate that tradition into Dorset fishing culture. He told *The Times*: "The conger is an extremely slippery fish. The chaps try to grab hold of it to try to stay on their stand."

Hence the cuddle, although, should you try this at home, he advises that one should crouch as the fish strikes, maintaining a low centre of gravity.

Mr Fox has little hope that the sport might flourish in secret. "The problem is that you need a big space," he said. "It's not like street fighting."

So Lyme Regis is left to cast for a new ritual.

"In Bermuda, our twin town, they still practise ducking. That's far worse," Mr Fox said, before adding thoughtfully: "Though there a few women round here I could think of for that." (*The Times*, 29/7/06)

POSTSCRIPT: Wikipedia notes that the conger cuddling did go ahead on July 28, but that the dead eel had been replaced by a buoy, and that there are talks of a replacement plastic eel being made for 2007.

Maybe this was the catalyst for Londoner Ben Fillmore, 24, to sell the chance to be slapped around the face with a fish on internet auction site eBay to raise money for the Stroke Association UK. Student Lucy Berry of Islington, north London, bid £210 (hang on, students claim they're penurious...) and slapped Fillmore (oh, maybe he was an ex-boyfriend...) with two Scottish rainbow trout. (*The Sun*, 15/8/06; *The Observer*, 20/8/06)

IS IT A THYLACINE? IS IT A FOX?

A mystery surrounds several fox road kills on the island of Tasmania. Scientists are puzzled as to whether the foxes were released in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and succeeded without recognition until now. The decline in a predator, the Tasmanian devil, 80% of whose population has been wiped out by mouth and jaw cancer, may explain a sudden rise in fox numbers. So, too, would recent curbs on pest poisons. With a £22m budget to eradicate the vermin, the Fox Task Force's gravest problem is public scepticism. Tasmanians have long been conditioned to mythical reports of sightings of the one animal the island has lost since European colonisation – the Tasmanian tiger. According to Nick Mooney, a Tasmanian wildlife biologist and fox expert, the reluctance of many to report fox sightings may be because they fear the same ridicule that those who say they have seen a tiger are subjected to, writes Bernard Logan in Sydney. (*The Times*, 18/11/06)



The Ballad of Gram Parsons and George Van Tassel

BY PAUL SCREETON

FROM rock 'n' roll to Giant Rock. A country music fan and a flying saucer fanatic. Perhaps, not such an unlikely combination. I have no evidence that genius musician Gram Parsons ever met enigmatic aviator George Van Tassel, but they were both at the same site in the Californian desert and would surely have had much in common. This article celebrates an episode in both flying saucer contactee lore and the life of a country-rock music legend. This is the story of a putative movie involving junkie-alcoholic Gram Parsons and UFO-contactee George Van Tassel.

GEORGE VAN TASSEL (March 12, 1910 – February 9, 1978) was one of many people who became known in UFO literature as contactees: persons who claimed to have met extraterrestrials, and in many cases travelled in spacecraft, visited other planets and been communicated pearls of cosmic wisdom. Totally out of favour today with ufologists at large and ignored by cosmologists, I suspect that they are due a revival as the scientific community squabbles over any and every new theory regarding the origins and development of the universe.

Born in Jefferson, Ohio, in 1910, after leaving high school, George became an airline mechanic with flight test experience for 16 years with Douglas Aircraft, Howard Hughes and Lockheed. He had the idea of running a small airport and café with his second wife Dorris at Giant Rock, in the California desert. Eventually the venue became a focus for many UFO conventions. The first of these took place in 1954. The who's who of contactees speaking included Orfeo Angelucci, Daniel Fry, Truman Bethurum and George Hunt Williamson, giving informal lectures during the day and channelling sessions after dark. George Adamski addressed the 1955 gathering, before his subsequent notoriety and playing Rasputin at the Dutch royal palace. Spiritual messages from blond Nordic humanoids were seen as amusing, annoying, anti-semitic or downright dangerous to serious UFO research. Van Tassel wrote two books on the subject: *I Rode A Flying Saucer* and *This World And Out Again*. Giant Rock was the scene of a retro event earlier this year and was branded a historical site in 2005.

GRAM PARSONS (November 5, 1946 – September 19, 1973) never had a hit record, but his country-rock fusion started a revolution. Posthumously, his star has burned bright. Born in Waycross, Georgia, a rich kid who lived hard, his life literally burned out in the southern California desert when a friend tipped his corpse out of the casket and set it alight.

What Parsons shared with Van Tassel was an interest in UFOs. In a masterly biography, Ben Fong-Torres tells how Parsons was attracted to the Joshua Tree national monument in the Mojave desert, outside Hollywood. He went there with Byrds and Flying Burrito Brothers' band member Chris Hillman and later Keith Richards of the Rolling Stones, where 'they'd stay up all night, zonked out of their minds, looking for, and sometimes spotting, flying saucers.'

He also went there to make a movie with Michelle Phillips, willowy blonde songstress with the Mamas and Papas.

THE LOCATION for the film was Giant Rock, a huge boulder with a cave or room carved at ground level. Visitors claimed it felt very powerful and here Van Tassel carried out thought communication sessions with space people; an early example of what New Agers would term channelling.

The film in question was being made by Tony Foutz, who had created special effects for Stanley Kubrick's '2001', and he planned to make his UFO movie, 'Saturation 70', in the Joshua Tree area. Foutz and Parsons had shared a suite and the filmmaker made Gram one of the main characters.

Fong-Torres wrote: 'Few participants could recall a plotline, if, in fact, there was one. Ann Marshall, a friend of Michelle's, thought Tony's film was based on his knowledge of George Van Tassel, author of *I Rode a Flying Saucer* and proprietor of the College of Universal Wisdom, better known as the Giant Rock Airport ... Van Tassel had built a domed structure he called the "Integratron", which he described as a "generator of bioelectrical energies" that had regenerative powers and made its operator capable of time travel. It looked like a Hollywood prop from *Flash Gordon*, and it worked about as well. As Tom Wilkes, the A&M Records art director who was with the crew to shoot still photos, pointed out "It was supposed to rejuvenate people, but it didn't work for George; he died of old age".' (Aged 68 in 1978; but Van Tassel estimated it to be only 82% complete).

Skywatch participants of yesteryear will emote with Ann Marshall: "The sky is very clear, very high in the desert, and there is no light pollution. You can see more of the sky than you can see from the cities. These people with Airstream trailers and other recreational vehicles met every year at Joshua Tree because they felt they had definitely seen unidentified flying objects. They were very normal people, not hippies at all. Family people who would just take their vacations going into the wilderness."

Another first-time actress, photographer Andee Cohen, believed Foutz's notion was, to quote Fong-Torres: 'to use one of George's annual UFO Sighters Conventions in Joshua Tree as a real-life back-drop for a story about "four cosmic kittens who were banished in outer space and came here to clean up the planet."' All Michelle Phillips knew was that she was asked to make a little movie. She piled into a Winnebago with Gram and several others and took off to Joshua Tree. The cast and crew stayed at a simple roadside motel that Gram had come to know: the Joshua Tree Inn. Once in the Mojave, Michelle recalled Foutz giving such directions as: "Now you're going to be creeping along the side here." Spotting Linda Lawrence's (Gram's latest girlfriend) son Julian (father Brian Jones of the Rolling Stones) on set, Foutz first saw him as an alien, but changed his mind and cast him as the movie's star. This casual, contradictory approach annoyed the producer (as did a scene shot in Los Angeles involving a dead Vietnamese man at a meat counter); it also scared the backers and sadly the film was all for nothing. Tantalisingly, had it been completed, my thoughts are that today it would be a cult classic. It would have featured the legendary Gram Parsons in his only feature movie role and a UFO connection like no other. Any footage still extant? Contactee revival anyone? **(Continued Page 12)**



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Gram Parsons

Earthlings extol Landers rejuvenation machine

BY SARA MUNRO

Tuesday, May 3, 2005 11:42 PM PDT

LANDERS - Cars lined both sides of the road outside the Integratron, which was blazing a brilliant white in the morning sun this weekend. About 400 Clampers, members of the fraternal organization E. Clampus Vitus, clad in red T-shirts and black hats, mingled and drank beer. They gathered, in all their finery, for the dedication of the Integratron as a Morongo Basin historical site on Sunday.

It's safe to say that aside from their function assigning historical landmarks in the West, this group of spirited individuals likes to get together with the fraternal order for a good party. It's been said that it's unclear whether they're a historical drinking society or a drinking historical society.

The Billy Holcombe Chapter 1069 of the Ancient and Honorable Order of E. Clampus Vitus, in cooperation with the Morongo Basin Historical Society, recognized both the Integratron and its builder, George Van Tassel, part mad scientist, part influential member of the 1950s UFO contactee movement, for their unique and unusual history.

The plaque reads, "The Integratron is the creation of George Van Tassel and is based on the design of Moses' Tabernacle, the writings of Nikola Tesla, and telepathic directions from extraterrestrials."

Historical tidbits refer to the Giant Rock airport opened by Van Tassel in 1947, his alleged contact with extraterrestrials initiated in 1953 and 17 spacecraft conventions he held for UFO enthusiasts.

After the comedy of the Clampers, Integratron owner Nancy Karl said following the event, "What's real is that a historic dedication by E. Clampus Vitus honoring the Integratron and George Van Tassel's work means so much to (co-owner) Joanne and me."

Construction of the Integratron began in 1957, but was not completed by the time of Van Tassel's death in 1978. It was designed to concentrate and amplify the energy required for cell rejuvenation.

Bob Green, the Billy Holcombe chapter's "Noble Grand Humbug," explained that it is the role of the Humbug to identify the historical site to be dedicated convince the "Grey Beards," all previous Noble Grand Humbugs, of the proposed site's historical value.

Green was 12 when he met Van Tassel in 1968, and he also participated in early space conventions, where he met Bob Short, who claims to have been a contactee in 1952. Short also spoke at the ceremony.

Established in 1969, the Billy Holcombe chapter has erected 116 monuments and plaques across Southern California.

The E. Clampus Vitus chapter is also a lifelong member of the Morongo Basin Historical Society. The Clampers conveniently "clamped out" just down the road from the Integratron at the Homestead Valley Park and Recreation campground.



Phil Kaufman

Newslines

ONE of my favourite reading materials, *The Times body&soul* section, featured *Medical Hypotheses*, possibly unique in scientific literature, where authors are actually encouraged to think the unthinkable and be published for the trouble. Roger Dobson goes on: 'Unlike almost any other medical journal, its researchers are urged to conceive ideas beyond the confines and restrictions of everyday life in the laboratory. "I think something has a right to be published as a hypothesis and then the process of science will knock down the ones that don't work and allow the others to survive," says the editor, Dr Bruce Charlton, a reader in evolutionary psychiatry at Newcastle University. "David Horrobin, the founding editor, was a man who regarded science as sometimes being overcautious and blocking speculative ideas. That is correct, but it does not mean their publication should be blocked." The result is that *Medical Hypotheses* is filled with a catholic, often stimulating, sometimes bizarre but never dull, mix of theories, cures and explanations.' How extraordinarily refreshing. Some of the more interesting theories are: mountain epiphanies may be due to lack of oxygen; breast cancer can result from a virus or bacteria passed from cancerous female dogs; beards lower cancer risk' longevity is fixed by the sun; light at night results in cancer; erectile dysfunction stops old men fertilising nubile; high intelligence, poor sight. (*The Times body&soul*, 28/10/06)

COMPILED by Bess Twiston Davies, Faith News reported that a Roman Catholic group opposed to the sale of relics on eBay boycotted the website on the feast of All Saints recetly. Tom Serafin, founder of the International Crusade for Holy Relics, said: "Our saints should be enjoying their eternal reward in peace, not having their body parts sold like cheap trinkets." (The Times, 4/11/06)

IT'S a long time since I reported a child's gift causing upset. Maxine Wilson told how a toy phone taught her daughter to swear. She was appalled when she heard daughter Ebony, six, sing: "I'm a Barbie girl in the fucking world." The £1.50 pink toy plays the line along with other tunes when buttons are pressed. It was bought at a market near their Middlesbrough home. Maxine, 39, said: "it's disgusting." Trading standards said they would examine the phone. (*The Sun*, 2/9/06)

DID you know chav haters call women's tattoos 'tramp stamps'? Father of 20 Mike Holpin, 47, has had his family tree tattooed on his back in New Tredegar, South Wales (*The Sun*, 8/9/06) and golfer Stuart Morley, 52, has had 14th and a flag tattooed on his arm to mark his first hole in one after 26 years of trying at Exeter, Devon. (*The Sun*, 23/10/06)

DAVID JENKINS, former Bishop of Durham, who some believe to have caused York Minster to be struck by lightning by displeasing God, is still as controversial in retirement. Now it's people in Romaldekirk, County Durham, where he now sometimes preaches, who are angry. According to

the parish magazine, his sermons are 'laced with anger and misplaced bad language'. The area dean says Jenkins got 'very, very angry and didn't moderate his language very much'. For a period he was not allowed to preach at all. Now, he's sometimes allowed back. Jenkins describes it as 'one of those silly things'. (Pendennis column, *The Observer*, 27/8/06)

Oldies

SUICIDAL SCULPTORS. There is a tale that after a statue of the 3rd Marquess of Londonderry on horseback was unveiled in Durham City market-place a blind beggar climbed all over it and then asked to be taken to its sculptor, Raffaello Monti. Monti had sworn that it was perfect but the penniless drifter pointed out the beast had no tongue. It is said Monti was so distraught he took his perfection oath so seriously that he committed suicide. (Martin Dufferwel, *Durham – A thousand years of history and legend* (Mainstream Publishing, 1996)

In a similar vein, a *Daily Mail* reader asked: 'Is it true that the lion on top of the war memorial in The Forbury Gardens, Reading, has no tongue? As a child evacuee from Canterbury in 1940, I was shown the lion and told the sculptor had taken his own life when he realised the mistake.'

Brendan Carr, of Reading Museums Service, replied: 'The myth that sculptor George Simonds (1844-1929) took his own life was circulating not much more than a decade after his death. In fact Simonds died naturally 40 years after the Maiwand Lion was unveiled in 1888. It commemorates the 328 soldiers of the Berkshire Regiment killed on July 27, 1880, during fighting at the Afghan village of Maiwand. As a child, I was told that the lion's legs were incorrectly arranged and that was why the sculptor killed himself when it was pointed out. In fact a colleague at the Natural History Museum confirmed the stance is consistent with a rampant lion. The story of a missing tongue is a new one to me, but it is known that generations of schoolchildren have had fun aiming snowballs at the lion's mouth. Though it is impossible to judge from ground level, the photographs taken during a recent restoration clearly show that the lion does have a tongue. ... Despite having the distinction of being the first Master of the Art Workers Guild and the work he did in pioneering lost wax casting, Simonds remains rather overlooked in the annals of 19th century sculpture. Nonetheless, in a recent poll conducted by Reading Library, he was voted the most popular character in Reading's history. (*Daily Mail*, 31/10/06)

HARD LUCK. Botched penis implant stories are always somewhat suspect, especially where the recipient is anonymous. So should we pity the alleged American handyman whose £200,000 compensation for a failed implant has been blocked by an appeal judge? The unnamed North Providence, U.S.A., man has had a permanent erection for ten years after the faulty device got stuck in 'Mr Happy' mode. "It's like having a constant headache," he says. But now the unfortunate 68-year-old has been told by the judge that his complaint simply won't stand up in court. (*The Times body&soul*, 30/9/06)

Did you miss?

SUICIDAL CANIDS. Bizarre TV programme entitled *The Dog Suicide Bridge* reported how more than 50 pooches had perished at Overtoun Bridge, near Dumbarton in Scotland. They only jumped over one side and only on clear days. The expert brought in to solve the mystery concluded that all the dogs jumped because they could smell mink, which they could not have seen as the wall was too high. Actually, I smell a rat. (Five, 18/10/06)

ALIEN WILDLIFE. Predictably global warming is blamed, in part, for invading fatal foreign fauna. Latest immigrants wiping out the natives are zebra mussels, Asian clams and next a shrimp, nicknamed the 'pink peril', which is poised to invade our waters from Holland and attack and kill all small creatures it comes across. Also, recently discovered in swimming pools in Ireland, is the African redworm, believed to have reached us on decorative plants, and which can cause digestive problems if swallowed when swimming. Obviously ostension from the notorious 'bosom serpent' unsuspecting swallowing legend. (The Observer, 22/10/06) Meanwhile, the Environment Agency has issued a top 10 most wanted list of foreign arrivals. Invasive species which are oversized, oversexed and over here are topped by Japanese knotweed, along with giant hogweed, the American mink, Chinese mitten crab, American signal crayfish, topmouth gudgeon. (Towpath Talk, issue 9, 2006)

CLIMATE CHANGE CAN WAIT. So ran the headline to Bjorn Lomborg's article setting out the results of the Copenhagen Consensus, which he organised, to determine how money could be best spent to aid the world. The global 'to do' list went as follows: tackle HIV/AIDS, feed the poor, promote free trade, conquer malaria and improve water supplies. Lomborg, a global warming sceptic, pointed out that the panel found all proposals relating to climate change fared badly. (The Observer, 2/7/06)

STRING THEORY. According to science editor Robert McKie, critics of string theory – stated crudely, matter is made up of strings which vibrate – reckon it is a cul de sac at best and the scientific equivalent of the emperor's new clothes at best. An unprovable theory of unseeable parallel universes and ten-dimensional space. 'Quasi-theology' and 'post-modern' being polite insults, 'bogus' and 'nonsense' more to the point. Yet Professor Michael Green, of Cambridge University, defends it: "There is no alternative to string theory. It is the only show in town – and the universe." (The Observer, 8/10/06)

DIG THIS. I can't quite see Jeremy Clarkson joining a search party on the Makgadikgadi salt pans in Botswana, but was mildly amused by his comment that 'archeology (sic), as we all know, is simply a tool that enables very stupid people to get into university. Fuse it with media studies, and you end up with Tony Robinson.' (The Sunday Times, 10/9/06)

ART & SCIENCE. Despite a failure to differentiate between general epilepsy and temporal lobe dissociation, it is an interesting theory that three of Vincent Van Gogh's paintings are uncannily

accurate pictures of the complex mathematics of atmospheric turbulence. Jose Luis Aragon, a physicist at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, believes the artist's bouts, which Van Gogh described as "the storm within", led to the creation of *A Starry Night*, *Road with Cypress and Star* and *Wheat Field with Crows*. Senor Aragon, aided by physicists and mathematicians from Mexico, Spain and Oxford, discovered that the patterns of dark and light in Van Gogh's paintings follow Kolmogorov scaling, the model of turbulent flow described in 1941 by the Russian scientist Andrei Kolmogorov's formula. 'Periods of prolonged psychotic agitation captured the essence of turbulence,' said Senor Aragon. An accompanying panel suggested Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* 'was inspired by temporal lobe seizures' and other epilepsy sufferers from history being Ezekiel, St Paul, Julius Caesar and Fyodor Dostoevsky. (The Times, 15/7/06)

REINCARNATED? Visiting Keith Richards for dinner, actor Johnny Depp found the inspiration for *Pirates of the Caribbean's* Captain Jack Sparrow in a portrait of the Rolling Stone commissioned by his wife Patti for his birthday in 1999. The painting is by Paul Karlake, Ronnie Wood's brother-in-law. 'She said: "Do him how you see him";' Karlake told Nancy Durrant, 'and I see him as a pirate.' Before beginning the painting, Karlake researched the notorious maritime buccaneer Captain John Morgan. 'The similarities between Keith's life and Morgan's were astounding. Morgan's father was a Welsh sheep farmer; Keith's father was Welsh. In the 1960s, when the Rolling Stones had their first success, Keith bought land in Jamaica at a place called Point of View, which is where John Morgan used to moor his ship. And Morgan's ship was called The Satisfaction. Keith is Captain John Morgan reincarnated.' (The Knowledge, The Times, Oct. 28 – Nov. 3, 2006)

TITLE TATTLE. Our favourite gossip topic is family and friends, followed by workplace intrigue, with celebrity activity third. Only 5% of what we say is malicious. Or so says a survey of 2,000 Britons undertaken by cake-makers Mr Kipling, written up by Antonia Hoyle and Julie McCaffrey. The piece I'm quoting from also recalls past whispers, such as when in 1963 graphic pictures of the 11th Duke of Astor's (Argyll?) wife, Margaret, wearing nothing but a pearl necklace and giving oral sex to a naked man, made the front pages of every newspaper. The so-called 'headless man' was never identified although gossip had it as Cabinet minister Duncan Sandys or Hollywood actor Douglas Fairbanks Jr. My father heard that it was Prince Philip. So there! (Daily Mirror, 21/3/06)

GENERATION GAME. I must admit that I do not share my daughter's enthusiasm for digging up our family roots. Bloody ancestor worship. A piece by John Naish should put others off and he suggests the Latin motto of genealogists should translate as 'beware of what you seek.' Kathryn has already found an uncle of mine who married illegally. What next? Naish notes: 'Maurice Kellner reports how he helped a woman in Tasmania seeking facts about her family connection to Wappenham, near Towcester. He found that one of her ancestors had been sentenced to be transported to Australia for committing unnatural acts with a cow. "I'm not sure if she was grateful or not," he said. (The Times body&soul, 4/11/06)

Update

RUDE AWAKENING. A couple of days after mailing FF53, with a proto-legend of a returning air passenger awakening back where he boarded, came a report of Maria Ilieva, 17, falling asleep on a flight home to Bulgaria. She awoke to find that she was back in Malta because the Air Malta crew had failed to notice that she was still on the aircraft and had to pay 200 euros (£134) to get back home. (Reuters; The Times 2/9/06; The Sun 2/9/06)

INBREEDING (FF46:10) Possible prevention of this appeared in an article asking whether absent fathers could be a cause of girls reaching puberty earlier over recent decades? A study in the *American Journal of Human Biology* claims that biological fathers send out chemical signals that inhibit their daughters' sexual maturity. Researchers at Penn State University studied 1,900 college students' records and found that those with absent fathers reached menarche on average three months earlier. The earlier the fathers went AWOL, the earlier the girls' first periods. The researchers think that the pheromone signals are part of an ancient strategy to prevent inbreeding. (The Times body&soul, 16/9/06)

FREDDIE MERCURY (FF15:6-10) An item of synchronicity appears in a comment made to journalist Tim Teeman by Roger Cooke, husband of Freddie Mercury's sister Kashmira: "He didn't tell anybody in the family. We gradually became aware he had an illness but we had no idea what it was or how serious it was. Then in August 1990. Kash and I saw a mark on his foot. It was Kaposi's sarcoma (a malignant tumour of the connective tissue often associated with Aids). Kash asked what it was, whether it was getting better. Freddie said: 'You have to understand that what I have is terminal. I'm going to die.' That was it. He didn't say it was Aids. It didn't register immediately. We were driving home and I put a cassette on, and of all things it was him singing *Who Wants to Live Forever*? That suddenly brought home the significance of what he said." Freddie was Parsee and changed his name to Mercury after his ruling astrological planet. Teeman adds that he held exotic parties 'featuring so one exotic rumour goes, dwarves serving cocaine.' (The Knowledge, The Times, Sept. 2 - 8, 2006) This was expanded by Cosmo Landesman to: 'Would he have thrown one of his infamous parties featuring (or so legend has it) leather-clad dwarves serving trays of cocaine ...' (The Sunday Times News Review, 10/9/06)

CATHERINE THE GREAT (FF47:16, passim) Yet another book has appeared about the Russian empress, *Catherine the Great: Love, Sex & Power* by Virginia Rounding (Hutchinson). An anonymous reviewer comments: 'But despite her many achievements, it's the salacious rumours which are remembered throughout history - particularly the well-known myth featuring a stallion.' (Hartlepool Mail, 1/4/06)

LEY MISUSES (FF49:2, passim) Asked about the 'Glastonbury spirit', farmer and festival organiser Michael Eavis responded: 'Maybe it's something to do with all the Arthurian and Christian legends about Glastonbury - that might be in the back of people's

minds but it's certainly not evident here. We had a man in a Russian hat knock on the door the other day, asking where the ley line was. People believe anything but it's all good fun. I had to laugh, though.' (Metro, 20/4/06) Rosslyn Chapel needs no introduction and Adam Edwards, in an article about how clergy may condemn *The Da Vinci Code* but are themselves raking cash in from bandwagon jumping, says Dan Brown claims it was built on the site of an ancient temple. This 'stands on a "north-south meridian" that runs through Glastonbury on a Rose Line - a sort of ley-line - from which the chapel gets its name. (Its name actually comes from Ross, meaning headland, and Lynn, meaning pool).' (The Daily Telegraph, 16/5/06) Introducing an energy which has spawned new kinds of evil and a new kind of exorcist called David Devereux, reviewer Mark Stafford begins: 'I blame *Buffy*. And *The Matrix*. And *Most Haunted*. Somewhere around the well-trodden crossroads where cabled ley-lines meet, a peculiar kind of energy has been building.' Certainly not the energy of creative reviewing faculties, that's certain. (The Times Books, 27/5/06)

MISHEARD LYRICS (FF42:9-14) Billy Bragg chose ten busking tunes, and discussing Kris Kristofferson's *Me and Bobbie McGee* comments that it 'contains the frequently misheard lyric "Somewhere miscellaneous Lord, I let her slip away ..."' (The Rough Guide Book of Playlists, 2005). Of course, it should be, "Somewhere near Salinas Lord ..."

DRINKING URINE (FF43:4-5, passim) Evangeline Lilly, Kate in *Lost*, drank a male friend's pee in error. He had relieved himself into a bottle in her car. Days later she picked it up, thinking it was a bottle of water. Hold the front page! (Daily Mirror, 20/5/06)

DARK SATANIC MILLS (FF51:9) When William Blake wrote of 'dark satanic mills' he meant universities, generally or specifically referring to Oxford's seats of learning. Too many who should no better perpetuate taking the phrase literally. The latest being Richard Morrison when discussing the landscape L.S. Lowry painted: 'Matchstick figures plodding about their tasks ... chimney belching smoke. Dark satanic mills towering oppressively over the dank streets ...' (The Knowledge, The Times, July 8 - 14, 2006) My having spent 30 years as a sub-editor, my wife was not surprised that whenever Heather Mills McCartney appeared on television, I would chirp, 'look, it's Dark Satanic Heather Mills', so I was surprised it took so long for this insult to reach a newspaper headline. Finally the layout for GMTV's Fiona Phillips' column proclaimed **Macca's dark satanic Mills**. (Daily Mirror, 21/10/06)

PAUL IS DEAD (FF31:7-8) According to Tom Templeton's *Minutiae* column Paul McCartney's response to Montreal DJ Marc-Antoine Audette's offer (as Canadian P.M. Jean Chretien) of the Canadian Order of Merit: "Oh yeah? Ha ha. Well, I'm telling you, we're going to sue your ass off. No, ha ha ha." I assume this was a trick to find out if the current 'Macca' really is the Canadian doppelganger who replaced the deceased bass player in The Beatles. Or did the imposter just not fall for his fellow Canuck's trick? (The Observer Magazine, 24/9/06)

EVOLUTON DEBATE (FF52:3-5) Once more a scientist claims to have found the 'missing link' between ape and man, this time pointing to an alleged six-million-year continuity at a site in Ethiopia. Scientists say the latest discovery bridges the gap between the two. (Metro, 13/4/06)

In a contradictory and garbled account of supposed intelligent behaviour by orang-utans at Suaq Balimbing, Sumatra, Robin McKie writes that 'crucially orang-utans at neighbouring sites do not display such skills.' And such an account does not explain why humanity's ancestors, alone among the great apes, evolved extreme intelligence' yet the Suaq beasts make 'the gap between ourselves and the great apes seem less profound'. (The Observer, 9/4/06)

Just as a meteor is believed to have led to the extinction of the dinosaurs 65 million years ago, scientists now believe another such strike led to their creation. A massive crater under the Antarctic ice, 300 miles wide and dated to 250 million years ago, may signal a catastrophe which paved the way for archosaurs, the immediate ancestors of dinosaurs, to dominate the emptied land. (The Times, 3/6/06)

Of course, social Darwinism denigrated our ancestors and races other than white Europeans. The latest indication of ancient technical and mental ability is revealed in the Stonehenge-style grouping of granite blocks discovered on a Brazilian hilltop. Archaeologists believe it may be the remains of a 2,000-year-old astronomical observatory, indicating that rainforest dwellers were more sophisticated than previously thought. (The Northern Echo, 29/6/06)

Also, our ancestors were painting their bodies as early as 300,000 years ago, Lawrence Barham, of the University of Liverpool, told the BA Festival of Science in Norwich. Traces of mineral pigments found at the Two Rivers cave complex in Zambia indicate that the early human beings that lived there may have mixed paints to create a kind of art. This suggests that symbolic thought originated at least 100,000 years before the earliest accepted date. (The Times, 9/9/06)

For a final thought on the subject, I leave you with comedian Vic Reeves: 'I'm too much of a Darwinist to believe in God. I believe that we're just exactly the same as a weed. We thrive and then disappear.' (The Observer Magazine, 4/6/06)

LOCAL OURAGE. Almost 70 years after Sir John Betjeman invited 'friendly bombs' to 'fall on Slough', the much-ridiculed Berkshire town has received an apology from its tormentor's family. The late Poet Laureate was said to have regretted ever writing the words. The news has been welcomed by the town's champions, who hope that it will redeem the damaged image which inspired gibes from TV programmes including *The Office* and *Making Slough Happy*.

JAMES HEWITT (FF45:4, passim) Barbara Ellen, discussing how Chelsy Davy celebrated her 21st birthday by dragging Prince Harry into the lavatory at her party, went on: 'Nor are we certain that it was she who was doing the dragging. However, there are greater issues at stake here. The question being, not isn't Harry looking more like his dad every day? ...' (The Observer Magazine, 22/10/06)

MARSBARIANNE FAITHFULL (FF19:3-7, passim) Since covering this myth at great length across five pages, it continues to do the rounds. Latest mention came in the wake of her being diagnosed with breast cancer. Journalist Wendy Leigh, two years ago backstage to seek an interview, recalled that when various hangers-on departed the dressing-room at the Geary Theatre, San Francisco, where Marianne Faithfull was starring in an obscure German play, *The Dark Rider*, as the Devil, 'she peeled off her top and undid what was probably an H-cup bra to reveal the perfect breasts which had once inspired the Rolling Stones' manager, Andrew Loog Oldham – who discovered her in 1964 when she was only 17 – to dub her "an angel with big tits". Then she put on another bra and a black chiffon blouse with nary a glance in my direction and stalked out, every inch the star, imperious and disdainful. Remembering that moment, that night, the extraordinary body of which Marianne is so palpably proud, the news of her cancer diagnosis is horrifying in the extreme.' Yes, breast cancer, big breasts, aren't you jealous that little me, a woman joumo has seen those fabulous, firm ... yes, Wendy, we get the picture. Go on now, surprise us with THAT tale about the lower reproductive organs. 'However, that angelic façade didn't last long. It was shattered when, in 1967, police raided Keith Richards' home in Sussex where – as rock lore has it – Marianne was discovered naked, wrapped in a fur rug with a strategically placed Mars bar.' Shock, horror! (Sunday Express, 16/9/06)

GLOBAL WARMING (FF46:3) Fewer sunspots signal lower temperatures on Earth. A group led by solar boffin Leif Svalgaard of ETK – a consulting firm based in Houston, Texas – has predicted that in the next few years solar activity is set to drop to its weakest level in more than a century, with sunspot numbers declining by about 40 per cent over the next decade. Such boom/bust activity has led to mini-iceages during the historic period. Expect to see people skating across a frozen Thames in 2012: But as science editor Robin McKie notes: 'However, not every expert on solar radiation agrees with the idea that sunspot numbers are set to decline. Other scientists – using the same data – have come to a different conclusion. They predict that numbers will increase over the next decade.' (The Observer, 24/9/06) Meanwhile researchers from the U.S. and Russia have suggested methane – a highly-potent greenhouse gas - released by peat bogs caused global warming that ended the last ice age. (The Times, 14/10/06)

SATIRE WARNING (FF52:2) Having pointed out the peril of printed satire being taken at face value, I think this fits the category perfectly: 'The word "mother" confused her.' A friend of Paris Hilton explains the hotel heiress's request to meet Mother Teresa's children in preparation for playing the nun in a new film. (The Observer, 16/4/06)

CAT'S EYES (FF53:5) More reflected glory for Percy Shaw on TV as Stephen Fry commented: "The man who invented cat's eyes did so after seeing a cat's eyes reflected in his car headlights. If the cat had been going the other way, he would have invented the pencil sharpener." How droll! (Q.L., 6/10/06)

Crossing the Line+

AS promised/threatened last issue, here is a section devoted to extending upon themes and items published in my latest book, *Crossing the Line: trespassing on railway weirdness*, and newly-discovered folkloric or fortean rail-associated material. I trust FF readers will have a copy by now. However, the column is written so it can be enjoyed without recourse to cross-checking. Subscriber Norman Darwen wrote to mention a few points, including this one: **'On page 131, you mention late-night sex sessions (no, carry on reading...) on the Brighton train, as reported by *The Sun*. However, it is stated that the couple concerned had third-class tickets, which were out of use before *The Sun* existed. Is it a mistake, or is it a very old story?'** Having just discarded all my source material, I cannot check back, but my opinion is that it simply proves how apocryphal the story actually was (or, perhaps, *The Sun* journalists have not used railways for decades). Mr Darwen kindly called *Crossing the Line* 'a wonderful book!' Thanks Norman.

TOILET HUMOUR. A more plausible version of a tale I recount appeared in a magazine I had not read when writing *Crossing the Line*. It goes like this: **'Before boarding a train one day, Beeching is said to have made use of the station lavatory and been con-fronted by a statement written on the wall: "Beeching is a prat." Beneath it in someone else's writing was "No I'm not." Apparently he relished that.'** (Keith Hill, *Beeching: Hero or Villain?*, *The Railway Magazine*, September, 2001) The version I give had the great man himself supposedly writing the rejoinder 'No, I'm not'. (CtL, p118)

TRAVEL AND SEX BRYSON. Talking of prats, Bill Bryson's take on trainspotters got my ire (CtL, p175), and a 'red top' reports that the travel writer gave the best ever answer to a question at a literature festival, according to former BBC newsreader Michael Buerk. At the Hay on Wye Festival, Buerk recalled how Bryson was asked what he would like people to be saying about him in 100 years' time. Bryson replied: "Isn't it amazing that he's still sexually active?!" How utterly hilarious! (*Daily Mirror*, 5/6/06)

GRANDFATHER'S AXE. I touched briefly upon how the word 'rebuild' in railway terms was often used to appease and flummox accounts (CtL, p118). Here another writer looks at variations on a useful adage: **'The concept of "rebuilding" a steam locomotive (and much else besides) covers a wide range of activities from the heavy overhaul of a machine, perhaps replacing a few parts, to almost constructing a new one, embodying little if anything of the original – like the Irishman's proverbial firearm "new lock, stock and barrel, but the same gun", a neat existential problem. Much touched upon in the literature of railway history, the concept still awaits its in-depth treatment.. A search for the full extent of its meaning, taxonomy and economics leads into virtually unexplored territory. Long before the steam age, for example, naval and civil architects knew well that repairs and rebuilding would often wrest funds from prudent purse-holders more effectively than new works, to some degree a consequence of the logic of accounting.'** (R.A.S. Hennessey, *The Irishman's Gun*, Backtrack, ?)

As I mentioned (CtL p118), probably none of iconic loco *Flying Scotsman* is the original. Currently undergoing rebuilding at York, I read that: **'The right-hand cylinder from No. 60041 *Salmon Trout*, which will replace that from *Flying Scotsman*, will be**

prepared by machining the mounted face and redimensioning it to suit the frames.' (*The Railway Magazine*, August, 2006)

ARTHURIAN LEGEND. The Southern Railway, in a bid to gain a better Press, appointed journalist John Elliot (later knighted and the last general manager) as public relations assistant. Elliot suggested naming the 'N15' 4-6-0 loco class after characters from the legends of King Arthur, which became popular with the public and reminded people that Cornwall could be reached from Waterloo as well as Paddington. Commenting on this publicity coup, Michael Rutherford included an item of likely apocrypha: **'The older Urie (-designed) engines were also given "Arthur" names but you can't always please everyone and following the naming of No. 741 *Joyous Gard* (Bamburgh Castle to us – P.S.), that representative of the aristocracy of labour the ASLEF official rang the company to demand "What about the bleedin' driver?''** (*Provocations* column, *Back Track*, February, 1996; from Sir John Elliot, *On and Off the Rails*, 1982)

MONKEY BUSINESS. Having featured monkeys acting as railway signalmen (CtL p82), I hear that a monkey has been employed by the Delhi Metro to stop other monkeys from boarding trains and frightening passengers. The langur monkey, trained since the age of three months, has been patrolling monkey-prone stations on a leash. In June, a monkey boarded a train at underground Charvri Bazaar station and reportedly scared commuters by scowling at them for three stops. It then alighted. The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation said it hopes the new employee will avert a repeat of the episode. "It started working about a month ago and since then we've not had a single incident," said spokesman Anuj Dayal. The langur's keeper – or langurwallah – is being paid £80 a month. Langur monkeys are similarly employed around the grounds of parliament and some government buildings in New Delhi. (ITN, 2/8/06)

'RAILWAY SPINE'. Discussing an outbreak in the U.S. of a mystery epidemic known as Morgellons, mainly dismissed as a form of delusional parasitosis, a paranoid fear that creatures are living inside you, the commentator adds: **'But humankind has a history of odd psychosomatic epidemics, especially at times of social stress. The Industrial revolution brought us "railway spine" (CtL, pp64/65), a set of unverifiable pain symptoms and in the Middle Ages we had the "dancing plagues", where whole villages danced themselves into delirium. Could Morgellons have more to do with global terror?'** (John Naish, *The Times* body&soul, 12/8/06)

EACH CtL+ column will end with a rail-themed joke.

In a train compartment, there are three men and a ravishing woman. The four passengers join in conversation, which very quickly turns erotic. Then the girl proposes, "If each of you will give me £1, I will show you my legs." The men all pull a quid out of their pockets. The girl pulls up her dress to show her legs. Then she says, "If each of you will give me £10, I'll show you my thighs." Excitedly, all the men pull out a tenner. The girl pulls her dress up all the way to reveal her thighs. Then the young girl says, "If you will give me £100 each, I will show you where I was operated upon for appendicitis." All three fork over the money, lustfully. The girl then turns to the train window and points outside at a building they are passing. "There. At St Vincent's Hospital."

Book reviews

I AM ALIVE AND YOU ARE DEAD: A JOURNEY INSIDE THE MIND OF PHILIP K DICK

by EMMANUEL CARRERE
(Bloomsbury Paperbacks, £8.99)

PHILIP KINDRED DICK is arguably the greatest ever writer of speculative fiction: *VALIS* being my favourite among his works. However, his achievements did not come easily and strangely his literary dream of fame from 'serious' or mainstream fiction eluded him. One day he received 17 rejection letters. Today he is regarded as an SF colossus, with many of his works turned recently into films, and he is better known and appreciated in Britain and mainland Europe than in his native United States.

Emmanuel Carrere deftly traces the unconventional life of this artistic visionary genius through his bohemian druggie California years of sexual exploits, multiple marriages, lifelong hypochondria, never ending visits to psychiatrists from the age of 14, obsession with his dead twin sister and rollercoaster writing career. But most of all this is a psychological thriller. A biography yes, but centrally it is the subject's mind under scrutiny. People, even Phil himself, are extras, walk-on parts. Partakers of perpetual paranoia.

Carrere is also a confirmed Dickhead, as P K D fans cheerfully like to call themselves. However, his analyses of his hero's work are not hagiographies. As if to underline the fact, several times he emphasises how Dick had enormous problems ending his stories – often simply closing them without a conclusion. To achieve this unconventional biography, the author draws on many interviews, published and unpublished sources, acknowledging his great debt to Lawrence Sutin's *Divine Invasions: The Life of Philip K Dick*, which I heartily recommend to readers as it is indispensable to filling in gaps neglected by Carrere, and a somewhat deeper analysis of Dick's novels and genius.

So this is essentially about Dick's psyche. It deals extensively with real and/or imagined paranoia on a grand scale and which was always present, even to the extent of continually throwing the *I Ching* to learn who might be plotting his demise, and his myriad theories as to who and why blew up his fire-proof filing cabinet; the speed freak dependency on amphetamines and other drugs which had turned his body into 'a chemical cocktail shaker' and left him vulnerable when prescriptions ran out to street dealers whose products were so variable they played havoc with his artistry.

The book also takes Dick's religious beliefs seriously, beginning with his childhood, when little Phil spent a whole winter's afternoons playing at being one of the early Christians hiding in the catacombs, a disturbing prelude to adult religiosity. It was the charismatic James A. Pike, the Episcopal bishop of California, who gave Phil what amounted to a course study in Gnosticism (there is analysis of Dick's fictional novel about Pike, *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer*, which became Dick's last novel). This Gnosticism affected his writing in various ways, not least that had his Christianity been conventional, doubtless light would always have triumphed over darkness. In his strange world of thought and belief – including compiling an 8,000-word Exegesis no one has yet had the stamina to complete reading – he even identified Richard Nixon with the Demiurge and believed he had personally brought about the President's downfall.

Dick was also something of a prophet. He foresaw what we now know as reality TV and before Dolly the Sheep was created, he was writing about cloning.

As for Carrere's own writing, aspects of Dick's life may be known only sketchily, but Carrere fills them in with broad and subtle strokes; the portrait taking on a life of its own – much of the description must surely be part fiction (and anyway Phil would have been too addle-brained to know what was true and what make-believe), and we endorse Carrere's illusory narrative. On not one, but two occasions, aware of his approach, the biographer writes 'Were I writing a novel ...' which is almost what he's doing (and has published three acclaimed novels). Maybe this explains a lack of index.

As for myself, I find Dick a 'Kindred' spirit in that I, too, believe this world to be an illusion and also share his Gnostic sensibility. The book's odd title derives from the illusory nature of our reality. Dick believed the real world lies not on this side of a hypothetical mirror but on the other.

Just who is alive and who is dead depends on one's looking glass viewpoint. It's all in the (Dickian) mind. Or is it as one of his characters characters in *Ubik*, Joe hip, and his companions believed they were alive and Glen Runciter was not.

To sum up. Carrere has pulled off an absolutely dazzling biography and psychological study which does Dick proud. His life story flows flawlessly and if I must criticise, it would be to point out that the literary analysis is somewhat lacking (but others have tackled this aspect). Ultimately this is a skilled, thoughtful, wide-ranging portrait of a major talent. A true psychological thriller.

CURES AND CURSES: RITUAL AND CULT AT HOLY WELLS by JANET BORD (Heart of Albion Press, £14.95. Post free if ordered direct from Heart of Albion, 2 Cross Hill Close, Wymeswold, Loughborough, LE12 6UJ)

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE suggests that it is not uncommon to find small change in men's toilets – both single cubicle and communal trough – and if have often pondered whether this practice of votive offerings is simply accidental or some bizarre prayer for intercession to whatsoever god may be invoked, be it that of bladder relief or plumbing ingenuity. Most likely drunken carelessness. According to Janet it began with the Romans and was found throughout the whole of north-west Europe. Is it just the type of Teesside pubs I visit, or do readers elsewhere find this practice in their locals? I'd really like to know.

I'm sure when writing this latest well/shrine book my friend Janet (we go back to her pre-nuptials days) had lavatories far from her mind, but if not cures I'm sure the 'nettie' as it used to be called Oop North heard many curses.

On a less bodily functional note and one regarding cures, skeptics keep reminding us that the nuclear age has failed to rid the general populace of belief in 'mumbo-jumbo', pseudoscience and faith. Janet reminds us that the offering of 'clouties', pieces of clothing torn by the pilgrim and tied close to the well, has increased during the past two decades; the original belief that its deterioration would match recovery from an illness, doubtless replaced by the more modern, perhaps 'New Age' link between visitor and 'spirit of place'.

Back with those depositions, there is evidence supportive of such practices dating at least back to the later Mesolithic period (8,500-4,000BC). In fact, the book is particularly strong on history and putting springs, wells and shrines into social context.

Having berated Janet and husband Colin for associating the legendary Lambton Worm with Penshaw Hill (*The Enchanted Land*), I am pleased to see the North-East's most famous dragon correctly encircling Worm Hill at Fatfield (been there, climbed that, even found a firebrand).

There is a wealth of such folklore within these pages; the format chosen being to treat the subject matter alphabetically and relate the topics within brief essays. Cross-referencing makes this appear a sensible approach and also denotes how so many tales and sites have multiple aspects. Among the categories are healing, guardians, saints, pilgrimage, well-dressing, 'Celtic' heads, skulls, petrification (having volunteered to drink water at Mother Shipton's cave, Knaresborough, the guide then told me and those others gathered that it purportedly causes diarrhoea – thankfully it didn't), ghosts, incubation, prophecy, visions, goddesses (what, no gods!), rejuvenation, wishing and treasure.

This is followed by a gazetteer of 25 special English and Welsh holy wells and fulsome bibliography. The text is informative and easy reading, while photographs and line illustrations create an excellent visual accompaniment. Evocative, enchanting and enlightening. Pun intended, well done Janet.

JESUS: THE UNAUTHORISED VERSION

Edited and introduced by MIAN RIDGE

(Profile Books, £5.99)

THIS book covers the same ground as Bart D. Ehrman's *Lost Christianities* (see Pages 3/4) and the Nag Hammadi Library. It is also simpler, clearer, non-repetitive, not 'forgery' obsessed and from the wording 'The sensational revelations at the heart of *The Da Vinci Code* aimed squarely at readers wishing to dig deeper into Gnosticism.

The format of Ms Ridge's book follows a linear narrative with each section having an introduction followed by extracts from the unauthorised gospels.

Regarding Jesus's childhood, Ehrman mentions this only very briefly, suggesting his supernatural abilities should have made him a treasured playmate, but points out some treacherous acts upon others. Of course, as Ridge notes, his childhood is mentioned only once in the Bible, where he is found aged 12 teaching in the temple. To fill the vacuum of facts up to his thirties, what are known as the 'infancy gospels' fill in the 'missing years' with scary stories. Similarly, Ridge turns to the non-canonical gospels to flesh out the person of Jesus, for nowhere in the Bible is even his appearance described; also making clear how in the Gnostic books Mary Magdalene is one of the disciples and how she almost dominates many conversations between Jesus and his spiritual cohorts.

Ridge points out how *The Da Vinci Code* has generated fresh interest in Mary Magdalene's relationship with Jesus and how the Gospel of Philip hints at a sexual relationship between the two. There is a lengthy chapter on Jesus's parents with a book, *The History of Joseph the Carpenter*, as if narrated by Jesus, ending with a long-winded description of Joseph's death at the age of 111 with all his teeth, and another chapter on Jesus's birth. The section on Jesus's teachings stresses the great differences between canonical and non-canonical texts. Particularly, Christian Gnostics believe Jesus did not bring salvation through his death and resurrection, but by guiding his followers – and us – to the knowledge (gnosis) that has the power to redeem. Consequently Gnostic scribes were less interested in the events of Jesus's life. Among the various accounts of the crucifixion and resurrection is the Gospel of Nicodemus and its Stations of the Cross mention of Veronica and later the 'harrowing of hell' and Jesus overpowering Satan.

Whereas Ehrman deals at length with how and why Gnosticism lost out, Ridge deals with this in one paragraph, tantalisingly showing how Valentinus narrowly missed the top job in Rome and thus Gnosticism missed the opportunity of being enshrined as the orthodox Christianity.

Being published so recently, Ridge is able to assess the Gospel of Judas, which was only published in April this year. Here Judas is Jesus's most faithful friend and the only disciple who fully understands the itinerant preacher. He betrays Jesus because the Christ asks him to.

Whereas the four gospels of the Bible left huge gaps in Jesus's life, utilising the Christian apocrypha, Ms Ridge fills in these omissions by creating an 'unauthorised biography' of Jesus. Accessible yet profound; wondrous and wise. Highly enjoyable. Hugely recommended.

THE LONGEST CRAWL by IAN MARCHANT

(Bloomsbury, £12.99)

THREE SHEETS TO THE WIND: ONE MAN'S QUEST FOR THE MEANING OF BEER

by PETE BROWN (Macmillan, £10.99)

THE BEER GURU'S GUIDE:

ENLIGHTENMENT FOR THOSE WHO THIRST FOR KNOWLEDGE by CHRIS STREET

(Souvenir Press, £10)

AS the writer of 200 *Pub Spy* columns in the Hartlepool Mail, a conviction for drunkenly pulling the communication cord on a train and a spell in hospital with alcoholic jaundice, I feel well qualified to review these three boozy tomes.

UTILISING an easy, rambling, conversational style, Ian Marchant decided to 'map the British landscape in drink'. *The Longest Crawl* is very much a book about the essential importance of (intoxicated) topography. Anathema to Watkinsian ley hunters and their emphasis on straightness, Marchant is in agreement with G. K. Chesterton, who believed in the old winding track or as he versified it: *The rolling English drunkard made the rolling English road*. Drunkenness is built into the landscape. Drink gave the author the idea of travelling from Scilly to Shetland, taking with him his pal for 30 years Perry Venus, a photographer and counsellor for people with alcohol problems. Travelling in a most circuitous fashion, following the whims of psycho-geography. They even appropriately began their oenophilic odyssey mythologically from a Troy Town maze created by an 18th century bored lighthouse keeper, allegedly.

I rather imagined myself as an invisible companion on this marathon pub crawl and perhaps the only time Marchant and I would have fallen out is over my liking for and seeking out Wetherspoon hostelries and his condemnation of them as the pub equivalent of Little Chef. Harsh and wrongheaded. Although pubs have been hugely important during my adult life, of those mentioned here I've only been to the Pack Horse and Whitelocks, both in Leeds, and the Railway Hotel, Crewe, where I was threatened by a burly oaf and learned that I could retreat walking backwards rapidly when in mortal danger.

Among the other pubs they visited was one at Smithfield Market to start drinking at 7.30am; plus several breweries; a dropout's beer hooch still in woodland; whisky distillery; a cooperage; a gin distillery (warning that flashbulb could ignite 100% alcohol "angel's share" in air and cause conflagration); Anne Darwin's grave, favourite (bad parenting) child of Charles, whose resting place was the only one to have flowers growing on it; the home of Scots tramps' tippie Buckfast Tonic Wine; hop gardens; pork scratchings factory; a beer festival in a malthouse in Newton Abbot (which has England's only cider-only pub and after being led astray by the landlord getting me to sample every one of his wares shat myself horrendously, a venue which they sadly missed); and village cider-makers.

Along the way we learn a great deal of alcohol science (and alchemy); that isinglass finings make most beers a no-go for true vegetarians; crate loads of historical trivia, including licensing laws; playing 'pub cricket' (from a vehicle, not the recent version of seeing how many girls' breasts you can touch 'accidentally' – I found out about this Googling for the more harmless former pursuit); discover there arte very few Jewish alcoholics; how alcohol is a Christian duty; the Temperance movement; where my wife's maiden name Brewster come from; there is a transitional zone between flat southern beer and northern with a proper head; pool, darts and quiz nights. There's even a dissertation on pub rock and a lecturer preaching Saint Augustine on abstinence.

Along the way also are various dodgy legends, including island folk supposedly descended from sailors (sometimes 'turks') shipwrecked from the Spanish Armada; was there ever a pub named The Last Visible Dog?; Malvern water was drunk as an aid to fertility; circus elephant buried locally.

Errors? The only one I spotted was that Carlisle's family-friendly State Management Scheme pubs were built not by Harry but Josiah Redfern. For so much alcohol consumed in 40 days a mere quibble.

Normally any travel book leaves me cold, but Marchant's pub crawl is splendid. Cosy as a snug, as companionable as a busy bar, as solicitous as a saloon, as laid-back as a lounge, as filling as a buffet, as fresh as a beer garden. Ale and hearty. Cheers!

On page 9, Ian Marchant asks mate Perry what books he's packing. One of the three is Pete Brown's *Man Walks into Pub* (FF45:14), which leads neatly to Brown's sequel, *Three Sheets to the Wind*. This is another pub crawl, one which makes Marchant and Venus's seem positively parochial. This is a 45,000-mile pub crawl across four continents, taking in 400 bars in 27 towns and cities in 13 different countries.

This international odyssey begins at a symposium in Barcelona on the antiquity of ale; the origins of brewing backdated as far as 5400BC. Brown then moves on to Madrid, a city with 100,000 bars. My son runs a bar in L'Estartit on the Costa Brava. After picking up children from school, the womenfolk meet in a café bar and are joined by their menfolk when they finish work. Actually I prefer the Algarve, the trainspotting at Faro and large glasses of Superbock at an English-owned bar in Montegordo.

In common with *The Longest Crawl*, Brown adopts the mantle of geography or history or science master easily, frequently and not necessarily naturally, for he admits from the start he has never been a Traveller in the upper case sense. This does not make his book any less interesting and entertaining; he sets out to ensure he adopts the right attitude to make the place subservient to him, letting the location know who is master, just as you would treat a dog.

Brown's global peregrinations take him to Belgium (a pal and I drank in Ostend in a 24-hour bar and watched the dawn before catching a plane home); Oregon, known as 'Beervana' because of its hospitality, craft beers and beerpubs; China, where more beer is drunk than in any other country; Prague's new Pilsner brewery, and how since the fall of communism and modernisation Czech beer has been vastly improved, despite protestations to the contrary from the CEO of CAMRA; Dublin for St Patrick's Day; Munich Oktoberfest cock-up.

We learn about different free salty snacks the world over; what foods are available in bars; U.S. prohibition between 1920 and 1933; the anthropology of lock-ins and qualities of barmen. There are many cultural differences. For instance it is a blot on a Spaniard's honour to get into a state of drunkenness, whereas Britons regard it as a matter of necessity to get bladdered on a weekend, violence a bonus and a curry an essential ritual.

Along the way we learn the U.S. has 3,400 different beers on sale (mostly imitation Pilsners) popular Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke once held the world record for speed-drinking (2 and ½ pints in 11 seconds); Irish pubs are the best in the world; Australia's frankest beer brand is called Piss; in Japan you can pay £15 for all you can drink at department store roof gardens, and this from a nation which also gave us hostess and karaoke bars).

As for folklore, tales believable or not include: Ireland's most important female saint, St Brigid, was appropriately a brewer and her abbey included a leper colony, and when the beer ran out she blessed the lepers' bath water and transformed it into delicious ale; or the poet Patrick Cavanagh had Guinness spilled over the verse he was composing, looked up and told the perpetrator – "You may not be much of a barman, son, but you're a feekin' brilliant judge of poetry!"

So, having made Marco Polo look like a hermit, Brown closes with a look at British drinking culture through fresh eyes. He goes back to his birthplace: Barnsley. Naturally it's all anti-climax, even for a town oversupplied with pubs and bars. He should have ended with a visit to Hartlepool, where to kickstart a fight, outsiders mock locals as 'monkey-hangers' and fists fly. There's so many bars now in the centre of Hartlepool that it's been dubbed Hartlepud. Brown would be in his element even if the Cosmopolitan is a Headland pub and not a cultural description.

THE big question is: how much – if any – of *The Beer Guru's Guide* to take seriously. Basically, if I have understood it rightly, this is a satire of those who take themselves too preciously. It takes the proverbial piss out of the New Age: ley hunters, dowsers, channellers, spirit guides, astral travel, higher planes, reincarnation, karmic debt, extra-sensory perception and tantric Sting theory sex magic.

Street is best known for his psychgeographical book *EarthStars* so unsurprisingly there's a chapter on leys, sacred sites and beer lines. Street imagines the Red Lion at the centre of Avebury henge as having beer leys radiating outwards in anything but straight connections between pubs. Forget Alfred Watkins and *The Old Straight Track*; follow Wilfrid Atkins's *The Wobbly Wobbly Way*. Now do you get the picture?

Pertinent points of the Beer Guru's wisdom, which as a Higher Beer Master myself I endorse are: "If god is omnipresent he is in your beer", "the capacity of beer to induce an altered state of consciousness make it a powerful aid to spiritual development", "the quality of life is in direct proportion to the quality of your beer", "a monster hangover is a perfect example of karma, the spiritual law of cause and effect", "supermarket slop and cheap fizzy lager are not the gateway to higher realms" (particularly Lambrini and alcopops), do not make beer from magic mushrooms, and if you drink too much you have a near-death experience where you expect to die and swear to god that if you survive you will never drink again (until tomorrow).

I particularly like the idea of making dowsing rods from metal coat-hangers and using this tool in a supermarket to divine the best beverage without the bother of reading labels. I once met two elderly spinsters who would dowse over jars of marmalade or soup tins to decide which one to eat. Truth can be stranger than fiction.

Whether you find a book such as this hilarious, mildly amusing, dull or downright childish will doubtless depend on your character, sense of humour, state of enlightenment or even level of sobriety. Have a quick flick first to see if you think it's a jolly jape or an unfunny juvenile pastiche.

Magazines

FORTEAN TIMES. Newsstand. Monthly. £3.80. No. 208. A bonanza if you're a mystery fauna fan, with articles on lake monsters, dragons and interstitial man-apes; although a founder of the nowadays infamous blinkered CSICOP, Marcello Truzzi, Paul Sieveking points to the man being actually open-minded; yet more very odd conspiracy twists over JFK's assassination and growing consensus that the official 9/11 report was a crude whitewash, the World Trade Centre buildings being brought down not by hijacked planes but controlled demolition, discuss; people claiming x-ray vision (as I remember from watching Natasha Demkina on *Richard & Judy*, Dr Chris Steele was found following her diagnosis to have been accurate, at least partially, in opposition to what is presented here). No. 209. Three pages of lacklustre claims of US personnel on an exchange visit to ET visitors' planet may add a foot-note in UFO mythology but struck me as a waste of space; cosmetic surgery on goldfish; late 19th century Darwinian 'missing link' claims for people with excessive hair exhibited to public; Patrick Harpur on teleportations and reappearances. No. 210. Yet again I dispute one of Mat Coward's 'Myth-conceptions' of Queen Victoria and lesbianism first recorded in 1977, for circa 1964 my pal Richard Wilson was told at night school that government ministers deleted women from a legal amendment on homosexuality as Queen Victoria could not believe that women could commit such acts and they were reluctant to explain graphically how they certainly could and did. Detailed overview of many theories to account for the wartime disappearance of US band-leader Glenn Miller; Gospel of Judas; supernatural narratives from WWI trenches, Boer War and phantom armies separately; that alien autopsy saga rolls on; Loch Ness Monster. No. 211. An improperly understood, blatantly anti-Intelligent Design article by Ian Simmons provides a spectacular 'own goal' for a magazine which is steadily facing criticism from within its own ranks (with 215 having three letters pointing to Simmons' inadequacies, while his reply shows him digging himself deeper into the hole he's dug). Fuller assessment of the Condign Report (as exclusively reported in 210), which takes seriously Paul Devereux (earthlights) and Michael Persinger (neuroscience), and we'd all love to know just who so fully understood these researchers as to so endorse them, but from personal UFO/UAP sightings at Redmire, West Hartlepool, Tiverton Junction and Westbury I can definitely say far more bizarre phenomena exists in our skies. Dr David Clarke on the period (Seventies) when a demonological interpretation was powerful within ufology and remains popular today. Plus expedition diary of hunt for Mongolian death worm; possible 800-year-old stegosaur carving on Cambodian temple; latest penis-snatching panics. No. 212. *The Da Vinci Code* special, looking at such aspects of the 'hidden traditions mythos' as a musical encoding at Rosslyn Chapel; did Rudolf Hess visit Rosslyn Chapel?; the 'real' Priory of Sion; Priory as hoax, involving Cocteau, Picasso and Satie in a surrealist/occult cabal; Turin Shroud revelation. Plus hallucinogenic fish poisoning, jinxes and curses; the sqrat, a rat/squirrel hybrid of US legend, becomes a re-emergence from fossil record rodent in S.E. Asia; Greek pagan ban lifted; new ghostwatch column. No. 213. Patrick Harpur applies his daemonic reality thesis to guardian angels, from the mundane to C.G. Jung's Philemon; Patrick's sister Merrily Harpur joined the megalithomaniacs to listen to the state of play research into the megalithic culture and some vitriolic anti-scientism propaganda; sinister drugs in military use; East Anglian Lakenheath UFO case re-examined (and buried?); Tesco poltergeist (price not stated) and other ghostly happenings; forteam mysteries of Australia's Nullarbor Plain. No. 214. Excellent though its presentation I could not get excited by the major piece on castrati. Merrily Harpur provides an absorbing account of humans threatened by stoat packs and how stoats remove their dead - 'appearing soon after one of their kind has been shot to drag the corpse into a hiding place (see also Paul Screeton's *Do hedgehogs bury their dead: Aubrey Burl on the road of life*, *The Shaman*, No. 2, 1983); the many explanations to account for lycanthropy; foxes and liminality; Irish ABCs; ice-falls now have scientific name, 'megacryometeors', so can we finally bury the aircraft toilet particularly enjoyed (give me *X-Files* any day), but it did give us the immortal theory?; cargo cults; Marx mysteries; stigmata. No. 215. Issue celebrating 40 years of *Star Trek*, a programme which I never urban myth phrase 'Beam me up, Scotty', which allegedly never appeared in the original TV series. The articles should prove genuinely fascinating to non-Trekkies like me. Hlq!! Also exposing photographic phantoms; 9/11 videos taking conspiracy to a new dimension; bizarre court case centred upon red mercury; respected parapsychologist John Beloff obituary; UFOs are folklore - official; new-found species available on eBay. No. 216. Jonathan Downes reckons the classic Mad Gasser of Mattoon event was not mass hysteria, but the spiteful actions of mentally-ill resident Farley

Llewellyn; head-hunting megalith builders who disrupted the Japs during WWII; two takes on mystical music; possession and deliverance; C.G. Jung's synchronicity given a rough ride despite the forteam reality that 'weird shit happens'; and what justification is there for spreading David Lynch across four pages on only his promotion of dodgy Transcendental Meditation and what forteam purpose was served in telling us how the villagers of Tyneham, Dorset, were evacuated in 1943 for military occupation and war gaming? Surely there are truly good proper forteam articles crying out to be published. No. 217. With the wealth of writing available, Mark Pilkington produces a somewhat disappointing portrait of Nikola Tesla (I'm sure readers will rush to point out important omissions such as his supposed role in the Tunguska event and errors such as that Silverlink names not an engine - i.e. locomotive - but electric multiple unit after him in 2001); sensible overview which dismisses conspiracies regarding the death of martial arts superstar Bruce Lee; top seismologist says 1974 Berywn Mountain, North Wales, event was earthquake and not UFO crash; lightning connection to abduction scenario!?

NORTHERN EARTH. Q. £7.50 for 4 issues. Cheques to Northern Earth Mysteries Group. Address: 10 Jubilee Street, Mytholmroyd, Hebden Bridge, W. Yorks., HX7 5NP. No. 106. Maybe it's just me, but I could not understand what Robert W.E. Farrah was on about in his reappraisal of Alexander Thom's work and lunar standstills, particularly when he seemed to endorse Clive Ruggles; conclusion 'that there appears to be no evidence for the accurate lunar lines'. William Glyn-Jones, also on lunar standstill phenomena, suggests that the builders of Stonehenge understood that Earth has an axial tilt and represented this in their construction. Plus Australian aboriginal petroglyphs. No. 107. Bob Trubshaw attacks a book on the ground its editor and key contributors use pseudo-scholarship; South Pennines standing stones; John Michell calls upon archaeologists to ditch the metre and return to the cosmologically-correct foot; gods' names and perises.

MAGONIA.

No. 93. Mike Hallowell considers whether childhood imaginary friends have an objective reality while Peter Rogerson ponders, via an academic thesis, whether witches' familiars might have played a similar role; the exopolitics of whether President Eisenhower net extraterrestrials and examined their craft are discussed in detail; and a filler about a Chicagoan's encounter with a micrometeorological 'debris devil' which spooked an alleycat.

MAGONIA SUPPLEMENT.

Available online at www.users.waitrose.com/~magonia Printed copies for 'the favoured few' only! No. 61. John Harney criticises those ufologists who want to be taken seriously and who believe the cumulative number of sightings must point to an extraterrestrial solution; Martin Kottmeyer concludes that increased reports of sightings at key dates during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina confirms a 'flap' associated with shame/paranoia trigger theory; Nigel Watson on Frankie Howard's 16-day wonder on stage in the musical *Mr Venus*, separately Watson decries but comprehends the 'pseudological fantastica' or bogus life histories people attach to their CVs and suggests some contactees or abductees may fit this description, plus a sour reflection on Andrew Collins' book of 1992 *The Seventh Sword*. No. 62. Rather unenlightening essay on 'minisaucer' experiences; John Rimmer's what I did in St Annes account of taking part in a forteam conference. Book reviews.

AMSKAYA. Newsletter of the STAR Fellowship. Q. £2 for 4. Cheques payable to J. Goddard. Address: Fostercourt Lodge, 192 Stroude Road, Egham, Surrey, TW20 9UT. No. 66. Editor Jimmy Goddard shows his pictures of the total eclipse of the Sun this March in Turkey with an object visible and showing distinct movement, which Jimmy suggests as being similar to UFOs seen in the total eclipse in Mexico in 1991 (cont. 67). Internet tale of veteran US newscaster Walter Cronkite observing a UFO during Pacific missile test. No. 67. Strong possibility that Apollo 11 astronauts observed bell-shaped UFO. No. 68. Paul Screeton on Gram Parsons and George Van Tassel (slightly amended here in FF 54); a contactee I had not previously heard of, Kelvin Rowe, also a visitor to Van Tassel's first Space Craft Convention at Giant Rock.

TOUCHSTONE. Magazine of Surrey Earth Mysteries Group. Q. Price and address same as Amskaya. No. 73. Editor Jimmy Goddard's solar eclipse trip to Turkey. Field trip to E-line, a wide and powerful national ley discovered in 1990. No. 74. E-line traced through East Surrey and E-line mapping; Teddington tumulus. No. 75. Detailed report of the Society of Ley Hunters' moot; E-line geography and geology; Jimmy discovers three major leys meet where he now lives, Fostercourt Lodge, originally owned by a Baron de Worms and lived in by his butler (the baron's, not Jimmy's).