

FOLKLORE



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FOKLORE FRONTIERS is an independent non-profit-making magazine, published three times a year; a miscellany covering various aspects of folklore, ancient and modern traditions, particularly contemporary legends, rumour, fortune and modern culture and belief, mostly clipped from the press, and acts as an information exchange among fellow enthusiasts. Everyone is welcome to contribute. Short original articles on folklore matters particularly welcome, especially if on urban legend research. Clippings, too.

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WELCOME to **THE DIARY**
and another issue of *Folklore Frontiers*,
that unmissable cornucopia of
intelligent vulgarity.

LAST ISSUE I published 'The Methilhill Earthquake' email (FF55:8) and it can be compared with a 'revised' version which appeared in the wake of the May quake in Kent. It arrived in former *The Sun* editor Kelvin Mackenzie's inbox. Here it is in full:
AN earthquake – measuring 4.3 on the Richter scale – off the coast of Folkestone has decimated the area, causing more than £30-worth of damage. Several priceless collections of mementoes from Majorca and the Costa Blanca, not to mention at least one ceramic duck, have been destroyed. Three areas of historic burned-out cars were disturbed. Many locals were woken well before their gigs arrived. Lootings, muggings and car crimes did carry on as normal. Rescue workers found one girl in the rubble covered in blood: "Where are you bleeding from?" they asked. She replied: "Bleedin' Gravesend."
The British Red Cross have so far managed to ship 4,000 crates of Sunny Delight to the area to help the stricken locals. This appeal is to raise money for food and clothing for those caught up in the disaster. Clothing is most sought after.

Items needed include Fila or Burberry baseball caps. Tracksuit tops, white sports socks, Rockport boots will all be helpful. You should know that 22p buys a biro for filling in the compensation forms and a fiver will pay for a packet of cigarettes and a lighter to calm the nerves of those affected. Please do not send tents for shelter as the sight of upscale housing is unfair on the populations of neighbouring areas of Dover, Deal and Sandwich. (The Sun, 10/5/07)



CONGRATULATIONS to my good friend JOHN MICHELL upon his marriage to DENISE (DENNY) PRICE at St Benedict's Church, Glastonbury, at 2pm on Thursday, 26 April 2007. (Pictures can be found at http://s161.photobucket.com/albums/t202/Comfrey_mole/) (See front cover of this issue) By coincidence, when I found John's wedding on the internet, I was researching Keith Richards' rumours and came across this fascinating episode in John's life.

'When in London, Richards was omnipresent at the Chelsea apartment (Anita) Pallenberg shared with (Brian) Jones, and went along for the ride when Brian flew to Munich to watch Anita filming. With Mick and Marianne, he tagged along too when John Michell, author of 1967's *The Flying Saucer Mystery* (actually *The Flying Saucer Vision* – Ed.) and 1969's (*The View Over Atlantis*, indulged Brian's and Anita's interest in supersensory matters by conducting them to Woodhope Church, Hertfordshire, to investigate magnetic disturbances in ley lines. There was also a small hours outing to Primrose Hill in the Bentley Continental to peer vainly in the city sky for extraterrestrials of the kind Keith professed to have seen in the gardens at Redlands' (Alan Clayson, *Keith Richards*, Sanctuary Publishing, 2004) For someone who got both Michell titles wrong the 'About The Author' bullshit includes Q's claim that 'his knowledge of the period is unparalleled and he's always unerringly accurate'. Ho, hum.



I DIDN'T want to spoil an otherwise praiseworthy review here of Adam Stout's book (see review article). However, I wish to note that I spotted an error deserving correction. The popular 'Detective in ...' series of books on rural affairs were not written by Gavin Tarka the Otter Maxwell, but DONALD Maxwell. Well worth seeking out in second-hand bookshops or the internet. Oh, and the title of the article is Bob Dylanesque (if you read from the back page forwards and were wondering), just as his book title is.



(Continued in Page 7)

Strange Brew - London Publore

By Antony Clayton

No. 2 Buns and Horns: folk customs in pubs

On a sunny Good Friday in 2007, just before midday, the Butterworth Charity was distributed in the churchyard of St Bartholomew the Great in Smithfield EC1, one of London's oldest and most atmospheric churches. Joshua Butterworth, antiquarian and member of the famous firm of law publishers, bequeathed a small sum of money, in October 1887, to the Churchwardens in order to continue a custom whose original donor remains unknown – it was probably established by 1686. Every Good Friday, the sum of sixpence was to be given to each of 21 poor widows resident in the parish, with the remainder of the money being used to provide hot cross buns for local children. The custom has continued up to the present day. It is one of the few surviving examples of a graveside dole, where alms were once distributed at the site of a donor's tomb. In the pre-Reformation period this practice was enacted in the hope of encouraging paupers' prayers for the soul of the donor.

For the sake of convenience, the sixpences and buns used to be placed on a large flat tombstone - with no connection to the donors - close to the west wall of the church. By the twenty-first century it seems that six pence is too insignificant an amount to receive, as there were no coins on the slab, but some covered baskets had been placed nearby. Following a short service of about twenty minutes the distribution of the Butterworth Charity commenced. Today, the small resident population of the City of London could hardly be considered impoverished and the church's parish consists mainly of the hospital and meat market. It was hardly surprising, therefore, that the rector's perfunctory enquiry, "Are there any poor widows present?" was met with silence and the odd titter.

In the past the widows knelt at the tombstone to collect their money, then stepped over it to be given a hot cross bun and, in some years, an additional half crown. On this occasion, members of the congregation were invited to pick out a buttered hot cross bun from brimming baskets carried around the churchyard by the chaplain and his helpers. A collection for the charity was also taken, presumably as the original sum is insufficient to cover its intended use today. Sadly, the church itself also seems to be short of funds, as from 11th April an outrageous admission charge of £4.00 for adults was introduced. Afterwards, I visited some sites in the City with folkloric associations, such as the London Stone and St Martin-Within-Ludgate, before embarking on another bun-related mission.

My destination was The Widow's Son pub at 75 Devon's Road, Bromley-by-Bow E3 (020 7515 9072), but getting there was to prove problematic. Public holidays seem to have become a favourite time for major engineering works on railway and underground lines, with all the consequent disruption this entails, especially in the capital. Good Friday 2007 was no exception. Having found both Tower Gateway and Bank stations closed for Docklands Light Railway trains – the most direct way of reaching Devon's Road station situated right next to the pub – I took the District line to Bow Road and walked the rest of the way. Fortunately, the weather was gorgeous, as the surroundings MOST definitely were not. Passing a line of car repair workshops in the arches of a railway viaduct, one bearing the boldly hand-painted sign 'ENTRENC', I hurried through what is possibly the grimmest part of modern London - an area overshadowed by monochrome tower blocks and sprinkled with appallingly designed 'industrial units'.

Despite a singularly unattractive location on a busy road The Widow's Son was a welcome haven and a traditionally boisterous East End boozery. Fairly recent photographs show the exterior bearing the words "The Widow's Son On the Site known as The Bun House", but these must have been erased in subsequent repainting. Outside, in the car park, a party of immaculately uniformed sailors from HMS President, the Royal Naval Reserve, together with their Commanding Officer, stood talking and drinking, having their photos taken and looking decidedly incongruous compared with the casually-attired locals. A couple of people were dressed as pirates and a small group of what I presumed to be elderly folklorists huddled together for protection. Inside, a disco blared from a corner and a buffet was laid out for later, the large room was very busy and the atmosphere expectant. Just in front of the bar a couple of nets hung above head height containing, I suppose, around 30 or 40 hot cross buns, some with a distinctly unappetising black and mouldy appearance.

At 2.30pm precisely, everyone gathered inside to witness a bun being ceremonially borne into the bar by one of the sailors. He briefly held it aloft for the crowd's inspection and for photographs. I was surprised at its size, more like a small cake than a bun, perhaps because it was easier to photograph or possibly as a comment on the larger appetites of today's fat bastard Britain. (Old photographs of the custom do sometimes show a larger-than-average bun). Each quarter of the hot-cross bun held one of the numerals of the year – it had obviously been baked specially for the occasion. After a couple of minutes an attractive Wren was hoisted up by her fellow matelots before popping the bun into the net, to the accompaniment of numerous camera flashes, mine included. This annual Good Friday ceremony had been performed once more and the merriment could continue, but the historic reason behind the custom is much sadder than the contemporary celebration might suggest.

The Widow's Son Bun Ceremony is said to originate from the early nineteenth century, when the site of the pub was occupied by a humble cottage. Here lived a poor widow, together with her only son. The son went off to sea, possibly during the Napoleonic Wars, promising to return at Easter. On Good Friday, expecting his imminent arrival, the mother baked a hot cross bun. Sadly, her son failed to return but, having never received official notification of his demise, she continued to live in hope, baking and keeping a bun for him on every Good Friday until her own death. By that time the house had become famous for its melancholy collection. When a pub was built on the site of the mother's cottage in the 1840s it was decided to name it The Widow's Son and to continue the quaint custom. Subsequently, every year, on Good Friday, a sailor or Wren from the Royal Navy has been invited to place another bun in the net above the bar, for which he or she receives a pint of beer or similar drink in payment.

According to Jacqueline Simpson and Steve Roud's *Dictionary of English Folklore* (OUP, 2000) it was once a commonly held belief that bread and buns baked on Good Friday would never grow mouldy and that they had a marked medicinal value; it was also not unknown for them to be hung up in the house. They quote F. K. Robinson's *Glossary of Words Used in the Neighbourhood of Whitby* (1876) in which he wrote of seeing Good Friday biscuits with holes in the centre, hanging from the ceiling, and this, they suspect, "is likely to be the origin of the [widow's bun] custom, to explain which the story was later concocted" (pp389-390).

William Hone also noted in *The Every-Day Book* of 1827 that, "In the houses of some ignorant people, a Good Friday bun is still kept 'for luck', and sometimes there hangs from the ceiling a hard biscuit-like cake of open-cross work... to remain there till displaced on the next Good Friday by one of similar make... [I have] heard it affirmed that it preserves the house from fire." Pieces of bun, mixed with water, were used as a remedy for diarrhoea and whooping cough. It was also generally considered to bring good luck and in some coastal areas was believed to protect all members of the household from shipwreck. This could account for the link with sailors and the sea at The Widow's Son.

Slight variations in the tale have been recorded: that the son asked his mother to bake him a bun to enjoy on his return; that the widow's cottage was already a pub and that she was the publican, that neighbours hung up the accumulated buns in the house after her death, or that subsequent residents in her dwelling, by then famous as the "Bun House" or "Bun Cottage", faithfully kept up the custom until a pub was built on the site. It has also been claimed that after the widow's death her collection of buns was bought at auction by a local publican as a gimmick and added to every year thereafter.

Writing in 1943, the folklorist Christina Hole recorded that, "The collection, now totals one 173 buns which during air-raids are taken to a place of safety along with the other valuables of the house." (*English Custom and Usage* 2nd ed. B T Batsford p44) Many books state that the continuation of the custom is a condition of the pub's lease, although the present landlady is unaware of any such stipulation. She also confirmed that there are no older buns stored in the cellars and that the bunch hanging in the bar are the only surviving examples, following a fire in recent years.

There is one other strange custom still enacted in a London pub, albeit erratically. In order to witness it a journey back to Highgate was required.

As Highgate stands astride the ancient road into London from the north, many pubs have sprung up over the years to cater to the hordes of travellers and tradesmen passing through. These would, in earlier times, have included stagecoach passengers and the drovers of cattle, whose destination was ultimately Smithfield market. Whether originating in a northern drovers' custom, as a burlesque ceremony, or merely as an elaborate joke, the "Swearing on the Horns" was first recorded in the seventeenth century. Travellers who stopped at a local inn were persuaded to swear an oath on a pair of animal horns; by so doing they would be accepted as freemen of Highgate and entitled to certain privileges. At one time a number of pubs in the village kept a pair of horns, mounted on their walls, for use in the ceremony.

The antiquarian William Hone, in his *Every Day Book* of 1826, recorded nineteen pubs in Highgate equipped for the ceremony: there were stag's horns at the Angel, Bell, Bull, Crown, Duke of Wellington, Duke's Head, Gate House, Green Dragon, Lord Nelson, Mitre, Rose & Crown, and Wrestler; ram's horns at the Castle, Coach & Horses, Cooper's Arms, Flask, Fox & Crown, and Red Lion; the Red Lion & Sun had bullock's horns. Fellow antiquarians thought that the custom originated at The Gate House and gradually spread to the other inns, but whatever or wherever its origins, it certainly would have helped encourage trade in local pubs.

Robert Chambers' *Book of Days* (now available online) notes that, "In those old unthinking days of merry England, societies and corporations and groups of work-people, who were admitting a new member or associate, would come out in a body to High-gate to have him duly sworn upon the Horns and enjoy an afternoon's merrymaking at his expense". In addition, "the only historical fact which has been preserved regarding it, is that a song embodying the burlesque oath was introduced in a pantomime at the Haymarket Theatre in 1742."

Francis Grose in his entertaining *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*, published in 1785 and later revised by the great Eric Partridge (Routledge, 1963), describes it as, "a ridiculous custom formerly prevailed at the public houses in Highgate" which appears to indicate that it was already a thing of the past by the late eighteenth century, which was not the case. He says that to be "Sworn in at Highgate" meant that you were sharp and clever (p.186). Lord Byron also referred to the ceremony in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* Canto 1, stanza LXX:

Some o'er thy Thamis row the ribbon'd fair,
Others along the safer turnpike fly;
Some Richmond-hill ascend, some scud to Ware,
And many to the steep of Highgate hie;
Ask ye, Baeotian shades! the reason why?
'Tis to the worship of the solemn Horn,
Grasped in the holy hand of Mystery,
In whose dread name both men and maids are sworn,
And consecrate the oath with draught, and dance till morn.

Of Hone's inns and taverns that practised the "Swearing on the Horns" only the Angel, the Bull, the Duke's Head, the Flask, Gate House, Old Crown, Red Lion & Sun, Rose & Crown and Wrestlers remain. The light-hearted ceremony declined with the coming of the railways, but was revived early in the twentieth century at The Wrestlers, 98 North Road Highgate N6 (tel. 020 8340 4297). There, according to fairly recent accounts, twice yearly - usually in the evening of the Wednesday before the Spring Bank Holiday and the Wednesday nine days after Summer Bank Holiday - a wiggled and gowned figure administers a version of the oath. This 'judge' or 'magistrate' would once have been the landlord, with a waiter or ostler acting as a 'clerk'.

The Wrestlers was rebuilt in 1921, with an attractive wood-paneled interior and atmospheric lighting from metal chandeliers. The huge fireplace is believed to be older. Above it are displayed a pair of antlers and information about the "Swearing on the Horns" and versions of the oath. The pub also owns an apparently old and as yet undated picture, which is believed to depict the ceremony taking place at The Wrestlers over a century ago.

This is one version of the oath sworn in The Wrestlers:

**I SWEAR, by the Rules of sound Judgment that I will not eat Brown Bread when I can have WHITE, except I like the Brown better; that I will not Drink Small Beer when I can get STRONG, except I like the small Beer better; But I will kiss the Maid in preference to the Mistress, if I like the Maid better; but sooner than lose a good chance I will kiss them both.
SO HELP ME, Billy Bodkin**

The applicant then kisses the horns mounted on a stick presented by the 'judge' and so becomes a 'Freeman of Highgate'. Privileges include, if he or she wants to sleep in the village, "and you see a pig lying in a ditch, you are quite at liberty to kick her out and take her place, but if you see three lying together, you must only kick out the middle one and lie between the two." On payment of a fee the applicant is presented with a certificate, the money going not, as formerly, towards the judge's beer money, but to a local charity.

In March 2007 I contacted the pub's licensee, who told me that the ceremony has not been performed at The Wrestlers for about four years, although he was thinking of reviving it. Fortunately, however, the custom does still occasionally take place in a pub somewhere in Highgate.

On Saturday 14 April 2007 a "Swearing on the Horns" ceremony was performed in the large beer garden of The Flask as part of a Beating the Bounds walk around the borough of Camden led by the Mayor of Camden. Malcolm Holmes, formerly the borough's Senior Archivist (now retired), played the role of the 'judge' or 'magistrate' and the horns were provided by the nearby Highgate Literary and Scientific Institution.

On this occasion, an alternative version of the oath was declaimed by the 'judge' as he grasped the horns mounted on a stick:

"Upstanding and uncovered: Silence! Take notice what I now say to you for *that* is the first word of the oath, mind *that*. I must acknowledge you, my adopted son, if you do not call me father, you forfeit a bottle of wine; if I do not call you son, I forfeit the same. And now, my good son, if you are travelling through Highgate and you have no money in your pocket, you may call for a bottle of wine at any house you may think proper to enter and book it to your father's score...You must not eat brown bread while

you can get white unless you like brown bread best; nor must you drink small beer while you can get strong, unless you like small best; you must not kiss the maid while you can kiss the mistress unless you like the maid best, but sooner than miss a good chance, you may kiss both. And now, my good son, I wish you a safe journey through Highgate and this life. I charge you, my good son, if you know any in this company who have not taken the oath, you may cause them to take it or else forfeit a bottle of wine. So now kiss the horns, or a pretty girl if you see one here, which you like the best, and be free of Highgate.”



Flask Tavern, Highgate Village

Bemused drinkers were then invited to contribute some money to charity before receiving a certificate declaring them a 'Freeman of Highgate'; unfortunately, they were not required to swear the oath themselves, as in the past.

Finally, while researching this article, I came across this account of another peculiar London pub ceremony held at The Tiger Tavern opposite the entrance to the Tower of London. John Wittich in his slim volume *Discovering London's Inns and Taverns* (2nd ed. Shire, 1978) writes:

“Every ten years an interesting ceremony takes place here: the Lord Mayor of London, the Sheriffs, Aldermen and members of the Common Council come here, bringing with them their beer-taster to test the quality of the beer being sold. It is not by any modern scientific means that the test is made: some of the beer is poured on to a stool, provided by the inspectors, and the taster then sits on it. If the man's breeches are stuck to the seat all is well – and it always is! When the ceremony is completed a garland is placed round the neck of the landlord and a bouquet of laurel leaves is hung outside the door.” (pp21-22)

Eager to find out more I journeyed to the Tower. Alas, when I arrived at Tower Hill, instead of the Tiger Tavern I was greeted by the sight of a huge new steel and glass retail complex: Clinton Cards, Ben & Jerry, Subway and Wagamama, proof indeed of the rapid erosion of individuality and identity across our culture, a phenomenon I have christened *Blandland* (book forthcoming in 2008). The extinct Tiger was also the former home of one of the many mummified cats that once proliferated in London's pubs. My next mission was to discover if any of these desiccated creatures were still on public display.

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7. (continued from Page 2)

The only admirable thing about Vernon Kay is his choice of wife, Tess Daly – oh, no, two, he’s marginally less obnoxious than Peter Kay (his dad?). In *Vernon Kay’s Gameshow Marathon*, this tosser of a host resurrected *Mr & Mrs* and challenged celebs to answer questions about their partners’ habits, likes and dislikes. There is a popular urban legend about that show made originally in Carlisle for Border Television, which was subsequently networked nationally. All clean fun with decent folk, as I recall.

In the urban legend version, a friend of a friend was at a wedding reception which was truly memorable. At the reception after the ceremony they put on a *Mr & Mrs*-type question and answer quiz with the bride and bridegroom asking each in turn intimate questions about the other, who had his or her ears covered while this was going on. First off was the bridegroom, a proper cocky chap (like Vernon Kay). They asked him various questions about his new wife. Then came: “Where’s the most unusual place you’ve had sex?” The audience perked up. “Easy,” said the bridegroom, “on the kitchen sink.” That certainly got the laughs. So they brought the bride back. Being a shy girl, she was not enjoying the matrimonial inquisition at all. But it had all gone swimmingly until this question. The bride went as white as her dress and distraught, she looked over to her new husband, whispering, “I can’t, I can’t.” He was laughing his head off and said, “Don’t worry love, I’ve already said it. It’s okay.” Still unsure, the bride now went bright red, turned around and answered, “Up the bum.”

It appears in *Urban Myths* (Virgin Books, 1992), by Phil Healey and Rick Granvill, but they spoil it by changing ‘most unusual place’ from the bridegroom to ‘most embarrassing place’ for his spouse. Some can tell ‘em, some can’t tell ‘em. They claimed that one had been doing the rounds when they wrote the book and had heard at least five different versions. (I’d be interested hear of any variations known to readers – Editor)

What would comperere of the original, Derek Batey, make of all this?



Now pay attention. Where I have been using references to previous issues, such as FF53:12 (issue in question and page number), you may now find FF53:12 (4). Here the number in parentheses refers to the item’s order in sequence on the page for greater ease in referencing.



AT ONE TIME *FF* exchanged with U.S. periodical *Strange Magazine*, a cornucopia of fine forteana. It suddenly ceased to arrive; without warning or explanation. Editor Mark Chorvinsky had run a campaign of denigration against fellow magician Tony ‘Doc’ Shiels, a relatively frequent contributor to *FF*. Chorvinsky regarded Shiels as a charlatan and despite presenting evidence against his own cherished beliefs,

felt obliged to expose what he believed was fraud, even to the extent of alienating many readers in his dogged and to them tiresomely detailed pursuit of what he thought was the truth.

A typically bizarre piece of self-publicity (and self-flagellation and probably alcohol-fuelled) arrived at Folkty Towers entitled ‘The Killing of Doc Shiels’, by-lined Tony Shiels, and was subsequently published (FF19:10). An extract reads:

‘Should I regard Rockville, Maryland, as Dumbtown, USA? Not entirely, perhaps, but it has strange leanings. One of its eminent citizens – Mark Chorvinsky – has fallen for a few snippets of CSICOP-style gossip, concerning that unrepentant mountebank, Doc Shiels. Mark made the fateful mistake of maligning a wizard but, eventually, surely he will be forgiven.

In the role of ‘Doc’, I am used to being attacked – physically, intellectually, and spiritually – by all manner of upstart insects. It is a regular hazard of the thaumaturgic trade. On occasions, a repellent spell has to be employed. ‘Mister Nice Guy’ becomes faintly irritated and is forced to take appropriate measures. Michael McCormick will, in the fullness of time, be forgiven, too. It’s too late for the too late Bishop of Truro.’

This was the point at which the exchange of magazines ended abruptly in 1993. I hope Chorvinsky’s ‘mistake of maligning a wizard’, as Shiels put it, did not amount to a curse, transmitted via *FF*. Whatever, Chorvinsky, born Philadelphia, 4 March 1954, died from cancer on 16 July 2005, aged 51, in Rockville, Maryland.



Departing the Isaac Wilson pub (a fine J D Wetherspoon hostelry with Fosters and John Smith at £1.39 a pint) recently I popped into the nearby Ann Summers emporium (as one does). My wife Pauline had claimed it was company policy to ban men from Ann Summers parties. Sounded not only sexist but an urban myth to me. So, putting on my journalist/folklorist hat I entered and asked an assistant whether this was true. Her reply was: “If a man is present it’s classed as an orgy and it’s against the law. But you’re allowed in the shop.”

I asked via the Northern Earth Readers’ forum if any male readers (or female readers’ husbands) had been to an Ann Summers party so as to disprove this.

No one it seems – male or female - owned up to attending such a party.

However, there was one interesting reply. It came from Martin Cowen, who wrote: “Just a quick point of law chaps (and chapesses): the sales girl has been misinformed, it wouldn’t be an orgy unless sexual acts were taking place: selling tat in an atmosphere straining to be ‘naughty’ (Ho hum..) just doesn’t qualify’. Martin (a ‘boro cop, for my sins..)”

I don’t think I’m really much further forward. Any *FF* readers any ideas?



Newslines

OCCASIONALLY these days a story appears in the Press about migrant workers poaching fish for food. The latest piece is by Will Pavia: 'On the waterways of Kent, on the canals and docks of London, and the fens and rivers of East Anglia, there are persistent rumours that Eastern Europeans are eating all the fish. In the Kent village of Wye there is an even darker rumour that migrants are using stolen tennis nets to trawl for carp,' he wrote. 'It is almost the perfect crime: any evidence of the missing fish is quickly cooked and eaten. It is also not always illegal.' Eastern Europeans, unlike we Brits, have a culture of eating freshwater fish, such as carp, introduced into the U.K. in the 14th century, often reared as food by monks. Francis Francis, the Victorian angling writer, described eating carp thus: "*Imagine a stale, musty flock bed out of some old hospital dipped in strong sewage.*"

'The migrants have caused a culture clash on the riverbank. Beside the Stour in Wye, Jonathan Wright, 16, an angler, told The Times: "I see a lot of Romanians and Poles fishing. I see them walk off with fish in a bucket." The local tennis courts are not missing nets, however. North of Wye, the Stour winds through a series of lakes belonging to Mr Logsdon's Mid-Kent Fisheries. He keeps them stocked with carp and trout and charges anglers £400 a year to fish there. Now he says he is fighting to defend his fish from poachers. "They come lat at night and lay nets that they pull out again before dawn," he said. "A 30lb carp would cost me £3,000, and they might take five in one night. If I stole that much from the post office I'd be in jail." On Sunday he apprehended a group of Lithuanians. "We see Polish, Latvians and Romanians doing it." He has been physically threatened. Once, seeking to recapture several trout, he chased the poachers down the A28. "They were firing ball bearings at me as I chased them," he said. "Firing them with slings. These people live in caravans on local farms. They make virtually no money. They think it's all right to steal their food from us." (The Times, 7/4/07) Next they'll be imitating the urban legend about New Age travellers visiting a supermarket, peeing in the freezers and waiting out the back for the contents to be thrown away.

GRATUITOUS RUMOUR MONGERING. The Pendennis column, edited by Oliver Marre, was homophobically sniggering about a well-known couple's break-up: 'Sad to learn, during a conversation about Lord Browne's resignation from BP, that in recent months Peter Mandelson separated from long-time boyfriend Reinaldo da Silva. I reported an Christmas that all did not appear well between them, but there's surely no truth to Westminster rumours that da Silva id offering Browne a shoulder to cry on?' (The Observer, 6/5/07)

BELIEF DENIED. Another upmarket diary column reports: 'Despite providing the South Kensington nightclub Boujis with thousands of pounds worth of free publicity over recent years, Prince Harry, surprisingly, has to pay for his drinks. It has been widely reported that Harry and his brother visit the private members' club because they and their chums do not have to settle their bills. Matt Hermer, who owns the fashionable nightspot, tells Mandrake, that this just isn't true. "The princes always pay," he says. "Given that their grandmother is on one side of the notes, it would be pretty odd if they didn't have the money.'" (The Sunday Telegraph, 15/4/07)

AND NOW ... THE NEWS. A popular feature of *FF* over the years has been what I termed 'dubious transmissions'. Here's the latest: Shocked terrestrial TV viewers were shown sex orgies after a late night mix-up at a cable company. People settling down to watch cricket on BBC1 or a documentary on BBC2 were hit with scenes involving naked lesbians. The images were accidentally beamed into homes in Irvine, Ayrshire, as technicians at sex channel Climax 3 carried out maintenance. A spokesman for Smallworld Cable apologised. He said: This was a technical fault that happened as we carried out work to upgrade our systems. Some channels randomly scrambled and some of our customers received this adult channel instead of BBC One." (The Times, Daily Mirror, 7/4/07)

WHO'S SARI NOW. A British man is being worshipped as a goddess in India. Thousands of Hindus in Gujarat have been seeking blessings from Stephen Louis Cooper - 'Pena' meaning Lotus - who likes to wear a sari and be addressed as a woman. (Faith News, compiled by Greg Watts, The Times, 14/4/07)

MATERNAL FEELINGS. 'Motherhood's gone all mother-hoodie, with Jordan crowned Celebrity Mum of the Year. It sounds unlikely until you note that her rival finalists in the Grattan poll included Kate Moss, Jade Goody and Heather Mills. With maternal icons like that, we might well give up and rename tomorrow Motherfucking Sunday.' (The Times body&soul, 17/3/07)

MOBILE PHONE HOAX PANIC. Mobile phone operators in Pakistan were inundated with calls from panicking customers who had received a hoax message which said that they could die from a virus transmitted through phones. The hoaxer claimed that 20 people had already been killed. (Reuters, The Times, Daily Mirror, 14/4/07)

MAMMOTH TASK. After claiming the dinosaurs were wiped out by a comet impact, scientists now reckon another comet exploded over the Earth nearly 13,000 years ago and wiped out the mammoth. (The Observer, 20/5/07)

Proto-legends

THE SCARELINE PILOTS. This one dates back to 1997 and I'm surprised I've not come across it since. Allegedly, two prankster pilots terrified a stewardess by switching their plane to auto-pilot ... then hiding in a cupboard (!) The 24-year-old trolley-dolly found the cockpit deserted and assumed the airliner was out of control. "When she panicked and tried to radio for help, the two pilots rolled out of the cupboard in peals of laughter," an airline spokesman said. The Isra-Air plane, on an internal flight from Eliat to Tel Aviv, landed safely and the 60 passengers knew nothing of the scare. However, the pilots' licences were taken away. (The Mirror, 17/7/97)

NOT SO DUMB WAITER. I don't suppose tales about recovering alcoholics are funny – at least not to themselves. Dining with friends recently, *The Weakest Link* host Anne Robinson – 'a well-known teetotaler' – ordered a round of drinks, including a non-alcoholic tippie for herself. Imagine Robinson's surprise when the waiter placed a glass in front of her with the immortal words: "Yours is the weakest drink. Goodbye." (The Observer Media, 20/5/07)

RED (FACE)S UNDER THE BED. Delving under someone's bed is a dangerous thing to do, claimed a survey. I expected it to go on to say that's where you find your son's – or partner's – porn mags stash. But no, many women were embarrassed that they cleaned there so irregularly, often Hoovering only once a year. In one case: 'One man even admitted to discovering his wife's girlfriend there after investigating some strange rustlings'. Oh, really? 'A good reason to vacuum more often?' asked Kate Wighton. (The Times body&soul, 31/3/07)

FOWL PLAY, REF. Two chickens are so addicted to football that they have learnt to dribble, slide-tackle and do headers in their yard in China. (Daily Mirror, 12/5/07)

DEATH PENALTY. The May elections brought out a dodgy tale from Park Bencher, whom *FF* revealed as Councillor Dave Walsh (he off the glowing tribute to my book *Crossing the Line*). In his Albert Park column, he recalled a Labour pal who canvassed a lady who told him that she thought Tony Blair was wonderful and that she was praying for Labour to win, but she would vote Tory, because her husband would want her to. So she asked to talk to him, hoping she could persuade him to liberate his wife a little. No chance, she replied, "He's been dead for eight years." (Middlesbrough) Evening Gazette, 2/5/07)

ORANGE CRUSHED. This one sounds plausible, but also very apocryphal. Sinn Fein

leader Gerry Adams. A long-time critic of the Sellafield nuclear processing plant in Cumbria, was invited there the other day so officials could assure him personally that it is not spilling toxic waste into the Irish Sea. All was going well until Adams was asked, as with all visitors, to don a boiler suit. He recoiled in fury and refused to put it on because it was bright orange, a colour hated by Irish Roman Catholics because it is used by their Protestant rivals. Embarrassed officials eventually found a replacement suit for Adams – in a pleasing shade of Irish green. (The Sun, 17/4/07)

BARKING MAD. When *FF* had just started, Mick Goss wrote that he expected a proto-legend to start whereby police and Customs sniffer dogs would become canine junkies. There is something of an echo about that surmise here. Martin Newland recalled that in his old London haunts, stocky, pit-bull type dogs were towed along by their tracksuited scumbag owners as symbols of the street credibility. 'More often than not, the Peckham and Lewisham animals had Class A drug secreted under their collars where only the most foolhardy and desperate user, or the bravest police officer, would dare to look,' he wrote. A fellow dog-hater, I despair of the amount of canine excrement I see and the hounds who chase me on a bicycle. Newland is also correct in deploring the owners who trot out: "Don't worry, he's very friendly" as 'Fido thrusts his snout for the fifth time into your crotch. And does anyone else share my revulsion at the sight of an animal that spends large parts of the day with its face buried in its own and other dogs' nether regions licking the faces of children?' Hoorah! Exterminate all these four-legged shit machines. As the old joke goes: if Pedigree Chum tastes so good, why do dogs immediately lick their arses to get rid of the taste? (The Observer, 13/5/07)

NET LOSS. A house was stripped bare after a fake internet advert, posted on a U.S. classified website, told people to take anything they wanted. The property was emptied of everything, including the kitchen sink. Furious landlord Laurie Raye said in Tacoma, Washington: "This home used to be my mum's and now it's ruined." (Daily Mirror, 7/4/07)

ANOTHER DEADCAT STORY. The first rule of UBT collecting is 'never trust a dead cat story'. It's why some folklorists supposedly dub contemporary legends 'dead cat stories'. Here's a new contribution from Wendy Ide: 'There's an instructive tale about the making of the Australian indie legend Rolf de Heer's notorious cult movie *Bad Boy Bobby*. The script called for a cat to meet an unpleasant end. De Heer contacted an animal shelter requesting a live cat, then, for the later sequences, a cat that had to be put down or, preferably, died of natural causes. The crew became rather attached to the cat that was (continued in back page)

Update

THE CHEAP CAR (FF52:6-7) The tale of how in June 2005 the wife of DJ Tim Shaw sold his beloved Lotus Esprit on eBay at a 'Buy it now' price of 50p after hearing him flirting with model Jodie Marsh live on air was included in a selection of the strangest items sold. Also included was a lump of chewing gum masticated by pop star Britney Spears (FF39:3) sold for \$263. It had been scraped off the floor of a London hotel where she stayed and put up for sale online. Religious relics on eBay also featured here (FF54:7) and a ten-year-old cheese sandwich said to bear grill-marks with an uncanny resemblance to the Virgin Mary was sold on eBay for \$28,000. Seller Diane Druyser, said the toastie had never gone mouldy (as with the uncorrupted bodies of holy men and women saints) and had brought her luck, including a \$70,000 win at a Florida casino. On the subject of casinos and religious relics, a Volkswagen Golf previously owned by Pope Benedict XVI sold on eBay's German site for 188,938 euros. It was bought by online casino Golden Palace.com. (The Daily Telegraph Review, 28/4/07)

WOMANLY REVENGE (FF27:14-15) Columnist Jane Moore focussed on revenge with three old favourites: Lady Graham Moon distributing her husband's wine collection around the village after mutilating his suits, cress seeds sprinkled on a wet carpet and dialling long-distance and leaving his phone off the hook (first, 17-23 February 2007)

MANDELSON'S MUSHY PEAS (1) (FF36:3-8, passim) Reviewing Stuart Maconie's book *Pies and Prejudice: In Search of the North*, Ian McMillan trotted out the 'Peter Mandelson will always be mistaking mushy peas in a Hartlepool chip shop for guacamole' legend, while the piece was illustrated by a map upon which was a bowl of avocado mousse – or was it mushy peas? (The Times Books, 3/2/07)

PRONOUNCED DEAD (FF16:3) I met up with a trainspotting buddy of yore on April 25 at Eaglescliffe station and got reminiscing about fellow enthusiasts from when we went on weekend minibus trips all over the country. When the subject of Peter Powlowski came up, Dave (can't recall surname – no matter) recalled how he had met someone who saw them together and knew Peter as a schoolmate and by an English surname, which he reeled off. So how come the Polish moniker? According to Dave, Peter got so bladdered in Newcastle he was taken to hospital, pronounced dead, came to on the mortuary slab, scarpered and presumably took this false identity. True, or just platform end rumour? Oh, and by the way, Peter goes by the nickname 'Slither' and once urinated out of

the side of the minibus as we drove along a motorway. I slept in the bunk below him at a travel-lodge and had visions of a midnight golden shower, but thankfully he kept his bladder under control that night. If I hear more, I'll keep you posted.

GOLDFISH OUT OF WATER (FF16:17) California's doughty *Fresno Bee* newspaper has been deceived by a cruel hoax. After eagerly following up the miraculous story of an obese, blind 11-year-old goldfish found alive on a lawn a mile from its tank, it emerged that – perhaps not unexpectedly – it was a practical joke by two neighbours. (The Observer Media, 13/5/07)

BOGUS HEALTH WORKERS (FF12:4-9) John Michell wrote a lengthy analysis about bogus social workers and demonic would-be abductors back in 1990. His belief was that these sinister figures are 'thoughtforms' up to no good and should be resisted. It's a long time since a tale has surfaced, but one has recently in Yorkshire's West Riding: 'A fake nurse turned up at a new mum's house and tried to inject her baby. Dawn Emery, 27, called police after the uniformed woman showed an NHS card and said she was there to give baby Bethany her immunisations. But the child had her eight-week jabs last week so mum of two Dawn, of Holbeck, Leeds, refused. Staff at Thornton Medical Centre told her the woman did not work there. Dawn said: "it makes me feel sick thinking about it. She could have injected her with something or snatched her when my back was turned." Police warned mothers to check the ID of all visitors. (Daily Mirror, 28/4/07)

MISHEARD LYRICS (FF42:9-14) Sitting in Middlesbrough's Isaac Wilson pub on April 19 a loud, cocky man with a southern accent was winding up a German. He was claiming that Elvis Presley sings "slimy cunt, slimy cunt" during the song *Wooden Heart*, which is partly in the German language. Despite the German drinker's protestations, the boorish Englishman still claimed: "I'm right. I saw it. The lyrics were on a karaoke machine."

MANDELSON'S MUSHY PEAS (2) Celebrating Hartlepool Football Club being promoted, Mike Walters noted how local folk hanged (not 'hung' Mike) a monkey as a supposed French spy, elected club mascot H'angus the Monkey as town mayor (still there five years on) and repeated the classic former town M.P. tale: 'Peter Mandelson visited a fish-and-chip shop, pointed eagerly at the mushy peas and remarked how tasty the guacamole looked'. (Daily Mirror, 28/4/07)

EVOLUTION (FF52:3-5) I never expected to agree with any pontiff, but Pope Benedict XVI said correctly that the theory of evolution is 'not yet a complete scientifically verified theory'. (The Times, 14/4/07)

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BANKSY (FF55:3) Last issue I featured the removal in error of two stencils by subversive artist Banksy, wiped out by workmen as graffiti. Now Banksy's *Pulp Fiction* mural at London's Old Street - John Travolta and Samuel L Jackson being menacing with bananas - has been painted over by more workmen, unaware of its status as street art. Stephen Bayley adds: 'Gavin Turk had a similar problem when gallery attendants mistook a piece of his work for rubbish, a mistake previously only made by critics'. (The Observer, 22/4/07)

KEIRA KNIGHTLEY (FF47:5-7&18) The willowy actress has announced "I'd love to have tits". The 22-year-old, criticised for being super-slim. Told a GMTV interviewer: "I would love to have Monica Belucci's figure. I'm never going to get it. I'm naturally who I am." As for breast augmentation, the Hollywood star ruled out surgery. "It's far too frightening. I couldn't". (Daily Mirror, 19/5/07)

Keira's kit - are her cups half full or half empty?

GLOBAL WARMING (FF16:22; FF46:3) As a G.W. sceptic, I was pleased to see G.W. denier Jeremy Clarkson having a go again at this dodgy myth. Here's his rant:

Everyone wins from global warming.

Scientists like it because they get lots of juicy funding to come up with scare stories.

Newspapers like it because they can print terrifying maps of what Britain will look like if the sea levels rise by 600ft.

Business likes it because they can come up with new carbon neutral products that are bound to sell.

And the Government loves it because it can introduce new taxes "to save the environment".

Unfortunately all these people need the temperature to keep rising ... and it seems the Met Office is happy to oblige. They say May was warmer than usual – it bloody wasn't from where I was sitting – and that the summer will break records.

And how can they know that when they don't even seem to know what it'll be like this afternoon?

(The Sun, 9/6/07)

'BINGE FLYING' Barmy mother-of-two Penny Edwards, 52, from climate action group Plane Stupid, superglued herself to lastminute.com's offices in central London. Ms Eastwood, of Hebden Bridge, West Yorks., said the firm encouraged 'binge flying'. **SNAKES WARM TO U.K.** A Daily Mail reader with a satirical sense of humour, J W Kitson, of Folkestone, Kent, wrote: *I am pleased to inform you and the people of Scarborough that 1,500 'scientists' have concluded that the 18ft python (Mail) found in the village of Cloughton, near Scarborough, is a result of global warming. This was confirmed by another 1,500 global warming scientists and idiots. The Prime Minister also agreed with this finding. These scientists are investigating the likely route the snake took from Africa to Yorkshire and will keep us informed of their findings.* (Daily Mail, 16/4/07)

COUNTER-THESIS TO THE MISERABLISTS

Randall Hopkirk (feelfreetouseit.com), professor of applied thermodynamics at Kidder County University, North Dakota, has a sensible perspective. Based in Britain this term, he is mystified that we seem unhappy that our wet and windy little island getting better weather than average cause us concern. 'Lighten up,' he advocates, 'get the car out of the garage and head for the beach: life is short; the universe will be here long after you. There are so many misperceptions regarding global warming that it's hard to know where to begin. Clearly, the earth is warming up, and estimates that temperatures will rise by 3C this century may not be far wide of the mark. But the evidence for this change being manmade – the result of an increase in so-called greenhouse gases – is highly contentious. Sun spots, the prevalence of low-altitude clouds and star explosions across the Milky Way are much more likely suspects in the global whodunit. The central problem is that all manner of grand statements – such as Sir Nicholas Stern's prediction that we face a catastrophe "on a scale similar to those associated with the great wars" – are being based on the flimsiest of data. We have reliable weather statistics for only four centuries – far too short a period to make overarching judgments. We simply don't understand why the world is warming up, and should have the courage to admit it. Geological evidence shows there have been violent shifts in the Earth's temperature in the distant past, so man can't be held solely responsible for dramatic

changes in life. Scaremongers posit the ideal of a changeless world, but nothing stays the same.' And that's just half his response to the lemming-like embrace of an untested theory which is in direct contrast to the Seventies when a feared new Ice Age was on the predictive political agenda. (The Guardian, 14/4/07)

MISHEARD LYRICS (2) When I typed the earlier item about written karaoke lyrics for *Wooden Heart* I had not noticed this next item hiding in the files. It's a 'My Week' piece by Craig Murray, ambassador to Uzbekistan between 2002 and 2004 when he was an outspoken critic of the regime there. Let him tell it like it is:

Nadira, my girlfriend, is taking a postgraduate acting course at Drama Studio London. They have just broken up for Easter and I go along to their end-of-term karaoke party. Things I learn: there's a line in *La Isla Bonita* – or as it's styled on this karaoke machine, *La Isla Bontia* – that had always startled me. 'Last night I dreamt of some dago' had always seemed a strange thing to sing, even is less politically correct times. I now see on the machine it was 'San Pedro' with which Madonna fell in love, though I'm not sure yet whether it was a place or the holy old fisherman. I also discovered that the Abba line from *Super Trouper* is not the improbable 'When I called you last night from Tesco' but, rather 'from Glasgow'. Which is – if you'll forgive, Glaswegians – even less romantic. (The Observer, 8/4/07)

OCTOPUS INTELLIGENCE (FF15) Back in 1994, *FF* featured a 100ft-long octopus which allegedly rose up from the deep to grab two capsized people, righted their lifeboat and placed them in it. Now in 2007, Octi the octopus has become the star of New Zealand's National Aquarium, in Napier. She seizes bottles in her tank with two tentacles and uses her suction cups to open them.

Also back in 2006, a four-foot octopus took up residence in Hartlepool Marina on the freezing cold North-East coast. Several people reported seeing it scurrying across the water at night after having first been spotted clinging to a wall near to Garland's call centre. Marina managing director Allan Henderson said: "The marina is an ideal environment for an octopus to survive. These are very timid creatures who primarily live in darkish waters. But at night when it is quiet and the water's calm, anyone could quite easily see it." (Hartlepool Mail, 19/8/06; Towpath Talk, issue 9, 2006)

IN THE STARS Previously *FF* highlighted a misunderstanding regarding the difference between astronomy and astrology when a girl who sang about the size of the universe was said to have belonged to her school astrology club instead of astronomy society. Since then, readers of *The Times*' TheKnowledge TV listings complained; "Sir Patrick Moore has been popularising astronomy most of his life and, through *The Sky at Night*, for 50 years, which event will be celebrated this evening," wore Barry Linton. "How does *The Times* commemorate this magnificent achievement. By listing the programme as the '50th anniversary of the astrological series'. And we all know what Sir P thinks of astrology. (The Times, 7/4/07)

Newslines (2)

VISIBLE FROM OUTER SPACE. Following the obsession in *Dear Mr Thoms* and *Letters to Ambrose Merton* over what on Earth is visible from outer space (however that is estimated), *FF* now carries on the baton. Kentucky Fried Chicken has unveiled a giant version of a new Colonel Sanders logo in the top-secret Area 51 'Dreamland' region of Nevada, well-known to UFO conspiracists. Instead of the white suit, the Colonel now wears a red apron. The 87,500 sq. ft. image is allegedly visible from outer space. One assumes it is designed as an advert aimed at fowl-eating extraterrestrials. (Metro, 14/11/06; The Independent, 15/11/06; via Fortean Times, No. 222, 2007)

SILBURY HILL. English Heritage has given the go-ahead to a 3500,000 bid to unlock the secrets of this the greatest manmade prehistoric monument in Europe. I recall watching the televised dig in 1968 and resulting public disappointment. Local legend said a great king in golden armour had been buried astride a golden horse, but the archaeologists found almost nothing. The public felt duped, the BBC cut short its transmissions, examination of the few finds was never completed and the dig was never written-up. What a shambles, which does establishment archaeology no credit. Can they now exonerate themselves? (The Times, 12/5/07)

'FALKIRK TRIANGLE'. Gary McKinnon, 41, who hacked into U.S. military systems, faces extradition and 70 years in jail. He got caught because after hacking every day for three years he became sloppy – 'I'd have a six-peck and a few spliffs, and was borderline megalomaniacal. Stephen Emms asked what drove him? 'I believe in UFOs. They were my reason for hacking,' he reasoned. 'As a kid my stepdad would tell me stories of how he saw one in Bonnybridge, near Falkirk, the UFO capital for the world. I discovered names and ranks of non-terrestrial officers. They were all very human-like – although I can't remember the details as my hard drive was seized by the police'. (The Observer Magazine, 22/4/07)

Coincidentally, *The Times* published the previous day an obituary of forester Bob Taylor, who on the morning of November 9, 1979, was walking his dog in Dechmont Woods, West Lothian, when he claimed to have been confronted by a silent, grey spherical 20ft wide spacecraft. Two 3ft spheres launched themselves from the mothership, and armed with metal spikes rolled towards him and latched on to his trousers. After falling unconscious he came to 20 minutes later, grazed under his chin and trousers torn. The obituary continued: 'Sceptics suggest that those who claim to have survived alien abduction attempts may suffer from epilepsy or have been victims of a lightning strike. Cynics blame inebriation'. It went on: UFO enthusiasts like to point out that the incident occurred in the so-called "Falkirk Triangle", an area of Scotland that currently has the highest number of claimed UFO sightings in the world, at about 300 a year'. Robert Taylor died on March 14, 2007, aged 88. (The Times, 21/4/07)

MORE NECROLOG. Bobby 'Boris' Pickett has died aged 69. The singer who had a graveyard smash with *Monster Mash* died after a long battle against leukaemia. In 2005, as a protest against alleged global warming, Pickett released a new version. *Climate Mash*. (The Daily

Telegraph, 28/4/07) He kept on touring with his bus until last November, once breaking down outside Frankenstein, Missouri. (Daily Mirror, 28/4/07)

Also *FF* is sad to announce that the Sudanese man famously forced to marry a goat because he had sex with it back in 2004 now finds himself a widower. Rose died, sadly, after swallowing a plastic bag. Our deepest sympathies are extended to the families of Rose and Charles Tombe. (The Observer, 6/5/07)

MORAL PANICS. Bird-brained Royal Society of the Protection of Birds has banned the use of the word 'cock' for the male of the species – in case some people are offended. The RSPB allows the word 'tit' but uses four asterisks for 'cock' on its website. A spokesman said: "Some words have been hijacked for a different and more offensive meaning. It is better to be safe than sorry." A worker on the website claimed the word is replaced by asterisks thanks to the filter in their software and added: "Pretty much all internet forums use the same or similar filters." (The Sun, 2/6/07)

Meanwhile, Zac Burgess, 17, was fined £80 and spent eight hours in cells for wearing a 'Fuck the police' T-shirt in Hastings, East Sussex. (The Sun, 9/6/07)

HANGING FOOTWEAR. Acres of newsprint space have featured the murder of Paul Kelly, stabbed on New Year's Eve in front of 25 witnesses. No one admits seeing the slaying, but a poem naming the knifeman has been posted up all over Bath. So why will no one turn him in? Where's the justice? As a small point of folkloric interest 'above the spot where Kelly died, two pairs of white trainers hang over a telephone wire, a symbol used in the United States to denote a site for drug dealing'. (The Observer, 8/4/07)

BROADCAST IS MARRED. The fact that this item appears in *The Whip* column makes it dodgy, though it may have happened. Exploring the relationship between architecture and political power on Radio 4's *Start the Week*, presenter Andrew Marr considered the White House as an example. "The first thing George Bush did when he came in was start to redecorate to get rid of the stain of the Clinton years." After a brief pause, a flustered Marr said: "Not literally, I hasten to add." No doubt he had recalled Monica Lewinsky's antics and her infamous soiled dress. (The Sun, 24/4/07)

Jan Harold Brunvand, doyen of contemporary legend students, warned particularly of two types of story: dead cats and TV and radio broadcasts. So, doubting the former, I wonder at the truth of this tongue-twister. Radio 1 DJ Jo Wiley, 41, tried to say East Kent Cup but made a slip and said "East Cunt Cup". Listener Tony Griffiths, 23, from Folkestone said: "At first I couldn't believe my ears." Again the journo writes 'flustered' as Jo cut to a song and apologised when she came back on air. (again it's The Sun, again its 24/4/07)

MORE WEATHER. Jeremy Clarkson does not trust meteorologists, neither does one himself. Paul Simons, writing of the downpour in mid-June wrote: 'In fact, our monsoon is so predictable that records over a 30-year period show the phenomenon very clearly. But what drives it and its punctual behaviour is not clear at all. We have suffered June's outrageous rains before' (specifying Glastonbury Festival mud and rained-off Wimbledon) and asks: 'How this month earned its title of "flaming June" is a mystery'. (The Times, 16/6/07)

Did you miss?

SUN SIGNS. Researchers believe they have found links between the Sun and the time and location of a persons' birth and various traits and disorders, wrote **Roger Dobson**. The reasons are not fully understood, but it has been suggested that the amount of solar radiation we are exposed to in the womb is a key influence. Boffins at the University of Rostock, Germany, analysed data to see if the month in which you are born affects how long you will live, while a series of studies made at Maine Hospital, USA, on latitude influence creativity. Hence my being born in December means my chances of living beyond 100 are up to 16% higher than average, while another study from the University of Chicago found those born in December lived longer by about three years. December-born folk are bigger and brighter than those born in the summer, have a greater risk of developing heart disease and obesity, are prone to be thinkers, while unfortunately those born between December and February were more likely to be disagreeable than those born at other times of the year. Maine's Dr George Davis commented: "This is not astrology, this is basic science." And here's me thinking that astrology was about the date we were born and the influence of celestial bodies. Rather like the archaeologists who derided leys but endorsed 'straight terrain-oblivious lines.' (The Times body&soul, 30/12/06).

Amelia Hill discovered more parallel research. She also derided astrology: 'The time of the year we are born really does affect the people we become. But it's nothing to do with the position of the stars or movement of the planets, as horoscopes would have us believe. Instead, says a new study, it's down to how much sunshine a woman is exposed to during her pregnancy. 'We have linked a child's season of birth with levels of certain chemicals in the body which have powerful impacts on the way people behave,' said Prof Jayanti Chotai, a consultant psychiatrist at Umea University in Sweden. Scientists believe that strong natural light boosts levels of serotonin, the brain's natural 'happy drug' that seems to play a strong role in lifting moods. (The Observer, 22/4/07)

JODIE MARSH 'JAILED'. A jailed prisoner tells how he read to his gypsy cellmate, Michael, and taught him to read. He recalled a night-time reading of Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, when they both shared a remarkable epiphany. When an Irish traveller, John-Jerry, tells him that learning to read had been like receiving the gift of sight, he was close to tears. This being **Peter J.M. Wayne**, who has served 25 years in 30 prisons (he gives no explanation for constant reoffending or regular solitary confinement). He writes: 'The difference that a weekly visit to the

library makes cannot be underestimated'. (The Times Books, 24/3/07) This made me think of when I checked whether any of Stockton borough's branches shelved copies of slapper Jodie Marsh's autobiography. Yes, I could borrow from Central or Yarm; or were I banged up, Holme Farm or Kirklevington prisons. Perhaps the semi-nude photographs of Ms Marsh lead to self-abuse but save some wretches from anal-rape.

NATURALISED ARACHNIDS. Latest global warming scare story features the false widow spider – supposedly introduced from the Canary Islands in a bunch of bananas in 1870, claims **Jamie Pyatt** – a pea-sized nasty whose bite can cause swelling and severe pain. Stuart Hine, of London's Natural History Museum, reports that mild winters have led to an explosion in numbers and that: 'In a few years they will be in every garden in the south of England'. And for we Northerners 'more will be spotted higher up the country'. (The Sun, 3/5/07) Covering all the same ground, **John Roberts** had the indignity of his serious piece emblazoned with the misleading head-line **KILLER SPIDERS ON BRIT RAMPAGE** (Daily Sport, 3/5/07)

MAMMOTH STEW. The television is a 'virtual campfire', writes **Tom Boyle**. Quoting Martin Jones, a professor of archaeology, eating in front of the gogglebox is 'a natural consequence of human evolution,' over half a million years. Jones mused: 'I imagine a time will come when people will eat on the move while chatting to a friend in New York who is doing exactly the same thing. And everyone will be nostalgic for the TV dinner age.' But a spokesman for Sustain, a food campaigning group, sneered: 'I cannot see how eating in front of the TV is a positive development in human evolution. I am surprised the academic is so relaxed about advancing this theory.' (The Sunday Telegraph, 15/4/07) It's not evolution, it's called family harmony and being practical.

FREUDIAN ANALYSIS. Writing of his Aunt Anna, **Sir Clement Freud** recorded that at the time she celebrated her 80th birthday in County Cork, his grandfather Sigmund was with Carl Jung and other noteworthy psychiatrists in the US. He wrote; 'Every couple of hours the postmistress would arrive on her bicycle with a new batch of congratulatory telegrams. At one point Anna said: "In the last lot there was one which must have been a mistake; could you have another look?" "Would that be the one from Philadelphia; I thought it odd but there is no mistake; I checked." The message had read: "the rapists from Philadelphia send their congratulations and good wishes." There should not have been a gap between "the" and "rapists".' (The Times Books, 14/4/07)

DEAD SEA SCROLLS. To mark one of these documents going on show at the British Library for the first time, **Nick Webster** contributed a two-page spread which covered such old ground as the Roman Catholic conspiracy to hide the scrolls' contents from the faithful; John M. Allegro's

theory that Jesus Christ never existed, but was an allegory for the fly agaric mushroom; that Christianity was a political movement transformed by St Paul, a Roman spy trying to defuse a political revolution; or that they were written by a long-lost community of Chinese Jews (a new one to me). His source, Prof Timothy Lim, concludes that the scrolls have contributed much new material and that only the likes of American fundamentalists, who believe the Bible was holy writ and unalterable, would be disturbed by these 1947 discoveries. (Daily Mirror, 28/4/07)

FIRST DRAFT DODGERS. I always wondered what the line 'And Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot / Fighting in the captain's tower' on Bob Dylan's *Desolation Row* was all about. It is much clearer since reading an article by **John Sutherland** on literary first drafts. He wrote: 'A famously altered first draft of poetry is the *Phlebas the Phoenician* section of *The Waste Land*. As published in 1922, it's ten lines of free verse. But T. S. Eliot let drop that the section was originally ten times longer and composed in rhyming quatrains. Ezra Pound took his editorial chisel to it. When, in the 1960s, the first drafts of *The Waste Land* were rediscovered one could see that Pound was right. Not vandalism, sculpture.' (The Times Books, 5/5/07)

'STEPTOE' SCULPTOR. Reminiscent of the Sculptor's Blunder, where the artist finds an error and commits suicide, Ascot's statue of Frankie Dettori, commissioned to celebrate the jockey's 'Magnificent Seven' there 11 years ago, is back in pride of place at the track after a short return trip to its sculptor, David Roper-Curzon. Dettori was known to be less than impressed by the original effort and official at the course decided to send the sand-blasted bronze back for some 'tweaking' when racegoers kept referring to it as the 'Norman Wisdom statue'. Now returned, general consensus is that the likeness is much improved. However, that failed to prevent one report that some of the Ascot staff now refer to it as 'Albert Steptoe'. (The Observer Sport, 6/5/07)

BURIED TREASURE. Long ago, I went metal-detecting with an 'expert' on Seaton Carew beach. The article was balanced by venomous comments from archaeologists, who regarded treasure hunters as the spawn of the Devil ('Metal detectors bring past alive', The Mail (Hartlepool), 12/5/80). I now learn from another hack who joined in the hobby for a few hours, **Mark Bridge**, that the U.K. has around 8,000 dedicated 'detectorists' who reported 57,566 artefacts last year to the British Museum's Portable Antiquities Scheme. The hard core, whose early disappointments did not lead to the thousands of detectors languishing in cupboards, developed strong interests in archaeology and local history. A revealing sign of the sea change regarding metal detector users came in January when Culture Minister David Lammy called them 'unsung heroes of the U.K.'s heritage'. The article provided a beginners' guide and notes on top finds. (The Times Money, 24/3/07)

ALIEN DREAMLAND. One of the most bizarre tales of UFOs and alien contact featured a Hartlepool woman, Dianne Sudron, 45, who claims extraterrestrials gave her an operation on her forehead on one of their 100 or so visits. She also had similar experiences while living in Wolverhampton, even arriving in a silver car. On another occasion, while lodging with her fiancé, she heard a loud bang. "The aliens had bumped themselves down and fallen on top of each other," she told **Tracy Walker**. "They were laughing and giggling about it. It was so strange to see aliens on the floor thinking it was funny." She is writing a book about her experiences, which she will call *Alien Dreamland*. She sounds sincere enough but probably a fantasy-prone individual, but would that be doing her a disservice? (Hartlepool Mail, 9/5/07)

CHELSEA SAYS 'NO' TO GNOMES. Chelsea Flower Show has long banned garden gnomes on the ground that they are tacky and display poor taste. This year the Royal Horticultural Society was on its guard after a bare-bottomed gnome was spotted in an exhibitor's van and another was under investigation after bringing a statue of an Orc-like 'gnome hunter', complete with gnome heads dangling from its belt. Another was ordered to remove a statue of a bare-breasted warrior woman which the RHS described as 'pretty undesirable'. However, writes **Lewis Smith**, a statue of a reclining man with an 'in-your-face scrotum' was permitted. Bob Sweet, of the RHS, said the 'warrior with big boobs' was 'very tasteless, and would put people off', whereas the virtually naked male statue was deemed after inspection to be 'quite artistic'. (The Times, 19/5/07)

COMMANDMENTS ACCORDING TO KIDS. According to Holy Trinity Church Seaton Carew Parish Magazine Easter Edition; The following statements about the Bible were written by children and have not been retouched or corrected.
+ The Egyptians were all drowned in the dessert.
+ Solomon, one of David's sons, had 300 wives and 700 porcupines.
+ The people who followed the Lord were called the 12 decibels.
+ Noah built an Ark, which the animals come onto as pears.
+ The seventh commandment is thou shalt not admit adultery.
+ A cristian should have only one spouse. This is called monotony.
+ The epistles were the wives of the apostles.

The parish was also raising cash for a new car-parking surface behind the church. Quiz sheets were distributed at £1 each with 28 clues referring to body parts. Clues included 'currently trendy' (hip) and 'yellow or purple flower' (iris). For number 5, 'unpleasant person', my wife was not amused when I suggested the answer must be cunt! Or failing that, arsehole! The following issue of the parish mag listed heel as the correct answer. Politically, yes, I suppose. But then I wouldn't know much about political correctness.

The Mighty

Stout (Come all without, come all within, you'll not read nothing like the mighty Stout)

By PAUL SCREETON

What's Real, and What is Not: Reflections Upon Archaeology and Earth Mysteries in Britain by Adam Stout (Runetree Press, Box 210, 3 Edgar Buildings, George Street, Bath, BA1 2FJ, £6.00)

ALTHOUGH basically dating from 2000, this version of Adam Stout's undergraduate dissertation is still timely (and is an appetiser for a larger book on the same subject due shortly). Stout also refers to copies 'furtively circulating' and being quoted from. Having sent Adam a copy of my history of ley hunting, *Seekers of the Linear Vision*, he wrote: 'Seekers is excellent for many reasons, not least the historical dimension, and I only wish I'd read it before I wrote my archaeology "dissertation", of which I enclose a copy. Much appreciated it was then in 2000 – and now commercially available.

As most readers of *FF* will know I played a major role in fringe archaeology, particularly between 1969 and the mid-Eighties, as editor of *The Ley Hunter* and author of *Quicksilver Heritage*. A mixture of less opportunity to visit megalithic sites, increased interest in folklore and shamanism, plus a disillusion with denial of Watkinsian vision, acrimony over new concepts and witterings of cranks. Earth mysteries affords sanctuary to such as Gordon Harris: being a broad church is a positive feature; while academic discipline smacks of dictatorial smothering. This may be harsh stereotyping and Stout's thesis is here to afford balance and see the fuller spectrum of influences within post-modern archaeology. In this, Stout follows the commonsense approach adopted by Bob Trubshaw in *Sacred Places* (reviewed last issue).

Stout identifies essentially with the 'fringe', but is happiest on the boundary, despite having as he puts it been 'doctored' (presumably Phd'd rather than neutering). Like myself, he was attracted to archaeology through its social context; in my case the hippie-style era of John Michell, ley power, flying saucers, Alexander Thom, folklore and New Ager.

Back to today, Dr Stout divides his book into two parts: the personal relationship between fringe and mainstream personalities and deeper nature of the archaeological debate and likely future development.

Stout's narrative covers Katherine Maltwood's Glastonbury terrestrial zodiac, Tom Lethbridge's maverick notions, Tony Wedd's linkage of leys and UFO sightings, Michael Dames' reigniting Silbury and Avebury's numinosity, diffusionism rejected and astroarchaeology ascendant, John Michell's disgust at Glyn Daniel as published by me in the pages of *The*

Ley Hunter and my devastating critique in *The Shaman* of the duplicitous duo Tom Williamson and Liz Bellamy in their odious and error-strewn cesspit *Ley Lines in Question* (I was horrified upon surfing the net to find these spawn of Satan had married and begat the beginnings of a new generation – truly the Book of Revelation is come to pass). Paul Devereux also trashed the couple, but was himself to be derided by such anti-modernisers as Anthony Roberts and Jimmy Goddard. He relinquished *The Ley Hunter* editorship to Danny Sullivan, who promptly declared 'there is no such thing as a ley'. As for the situation with the professionals, Jeremy Harte is particularly literate here on the new intakes of academe being more open-minded. Also pop musician Julian Cope's lavish gazetteer received a two-page review in *Antiquity*.

The shorter, second section begins with a quote from Glyn Daniel. I'm old enough to remember the notorious edition of *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral?* where Dr D was mineralised himself, i.e. stoned, and also his book *The Hungry Archaeologist in France*, that ludicrously embarrassing work of gastro-archaeology, his being such an armchair (high table) archaeologist that the only dig he ever organised would be in his own back garden and his hatred of me personally, voiced in *Antiquity*. Stout clearly abhors this attitude and is positively fortan, even so far as stating categorically that 'archaeological truths and archaeological facts are provisional, of their own time, pending new interpretations ... ' and 'All pasts – like all presents – are partial ... ' That makes sense. Academic Colin Renfrew shows his barmy side by 'wishful thinking' that Salisbury Plain was ordered by polygons centred upon long barrows to delineate Neolithic chiefdoms, a concept which makes the most extreme examples of the 'lunatic fringe' seem indisputably sane.

As for the future, Stout notes that joint collaborative books do not so far exist, no fringe author has been published since 1991 in *Antiquity* (have any tried?), but also that mainstream archaeologists are generally ignorant of fringe publications' research. He is aware of how alternative archaeology is so anarchic and diffuse, but could have stressed how individuals can flourish within small magazine without peer censure and with all manner of unorthodox and competing theories and remain personal friends.

Ultimately, there will always be a divide, but it seems to have narrowed over the past 15 years. What really shines through here is an unequivocal fairness and a supreme intellect. Without being weighed down with any cultural baggage, Adam Stout has read the relevant literature from all sides; digested the arguments, biases and pet theories; and his distillation is a clear perception that past rivalries were more a cultural battle than an academic one, and that a golden age of co-operation could be fulfilled if there was the will on both sides. A must read for anyone interested in the past – and archaeology's future.

factories were seized, 100 individuals arrested, including Timothy Leary. By 1973, despite the Brotherhood's downfall in the U.S., it was business as usual, but from the U.K. The players had changed, but not the game.

When the shit finally came down on Solomon, there was a strange irony that he was engaged in writing a book on excreta with an occasional medical practitioner called Mark Tcharney, also involved in the U.K. 'Micro-Dot Gang' LSD operation. Falling out with a man called Gerry Thomas led to Solomon to unwittingly bring the whole house of cards down on himself and the dynamic duo of Richard Kemp and Christine Bott. More than 800 officers nationwide, using 320 vehicles, executed 70 warrants and arrested around 120 people on 25-26 March 1977. Solomon received a savage ten-year sentence and is now dead.

The authors are not sympathetic to these idealists, who just wanted people to be given the opportunity to change their consciousnesses if they wished. Yet full marks for a meticulously-researched and detailed rollercoaster of a ride this is. Essentially a crime thriller, it is made all the more riveting by being true: a record of a wild bunch of the counterculture's caring, sharing drugs desperadoes.



FOLK-LORE OF EAST ANGLIA AND ADJOINING COUNTIES by Nigel Pennick

(Spiritual Arts & Crafts Publishing, 25 Partridge Drive,
Bar Hill, Cambridge, CB3 8EN, £12.95 + £2 p&p)

PROLIFIC self-publisher since the early-Seventies, Nigel Pennick is back with a bang, marketing a solidly-researched traditional folk-lore (he explains the hyphen) study of his neck of the metaphorical woods. Yet Pennick being Nigel there is rant (more muted than in certain past times) at the close of the book regarding the politics of authenticity, continuity, revivalism and alleged fakery, plus deliberate discontinuity summed up in the term 'sociocide'. More than most commentators, Pennick underpins his work with a positive sense of tradition and local culture with an anarchistic bedrock.

Following a publishing tradition in itself, the book begins with calendar customs from January through the year followed by the moveable festivals related to days of the week. Pennick follows with local identity; traditions and beliefs, including phantom dogs, dowsing and ceremonial accoutrements; mascots and superstition; skills and craftsmen's marks; traditional building specialities; wild herb digging for medicinal purposes; landscape changes such as coastline depredation, wells, springs and holy thorns; troytowns; livestock and wildlife; sports and board games; food and drink, with a fine selection of recipes, including partridge stew and nettle beer, all augmented by a local nomenclature; and ancient metrology. Towards the book's close, Pennick gets political – as has always been his rightful wont – covering folk-lore collection and discussing the 'class condescension' and Marxist-Leninist correctness divisions. There's nothing wrong with polemicism and if you're not only the author but publisher good on you. Been there, done that, still doing that myself. This is the world of doubled authenticity where inverted commas rule. As Pennick notes: 'Continuity does not mean unchanging, fossilized continuance of its character and spirit. There will be changes over the years, movements of the observance from place to place, addition of new compatible elements

and loss of others, the recovery of techniques and practices and their re-manifestation, a dynamic continuance conducted by the living in remembrance of those who went before and those who will come when we are gone'.

Some of my favourite topics are considered, including 'horse whispering', the ability to stop a horse in its tracks by using evil-smelling aromatic oils and where cases of beast, wagon and driver are halted by a 'witch' has been transferred to other forms of supernatural vehicle interruption, including flying saucer stoppage extension lore (UFOs and ghosts are among topics excluded from this work); mummified cats – rats and even whippet – as foundation sacrifices, a particular favourite of Pennick's, along here with witch bottles; Canewdon's reputation for folk-magic, numbering among residents at one time or another Old Mother Redcap (more a title), Daddy Witch (actually another female) and the notorious George Pickingill; Watkinsian leys, Dutt's markstones, the Rudges' puddingstone track and Lethbridge's Gogmagog hillfigure are all given a sympathetic hearing, which leads naturally to coffin paths, crossroad burials and bridge chapels; and speculations over deneholes, which I had hoped would be more fulsome and recondite.

Like myself, Pennick is a transport buff. In my case modern railways, in his it is more a focus upon light rail, particularly tramways and how I wish I had visited the Wisbech and Upwell line with diesel shunters dressed in 'skirts' as made famous in books by the Rev W. Awdry.

Richly illustrated, in addition to transport history photographs, there are depictions of all aspects covered in this book, particularly evocative ones of customs and two nicely gruesome mummified moggies. It is also fully referenced with an extensive bibliography.

Despite being a regional study, this book will appeal equally to non-East Anglians for the themes are common to all regions (although with obvious local differences). The latter chapters are particularly relevant for anyone doubting the valuable work of folk-lore collectors, the enthusiasm of folk-lore participants and the mendacity of those who would prefer to see our traditions and heritage swept into the gutter of desecralisation.



PRIMAL SIGNS: TRADITIONAL GLYPHS AND SYMBOLS by Nigel Pennick (Spiritual Arts & Crafts Publishing, £10.95 + £2 p&p)

THE author has spent a lifetime researching the subjects in this his latest book, a distillation of years of study, with many of the topics previously published in specialist books and booklets, numbering almost 50. Just as legend and myth are generally used interchangeably, Pennick is at pains to explain the subtle difference between signs and symbols; also that the meaning of glyphs is 'notoriously fluid'. Also many glyphs are recycled, receiving many associations: the swastika in particular.

I was greatly amused by the I'M A MEMBER OF THE LUNATIC FRINGE badge Nigel created in response to Cambridge University archaeology professor Glyn Daniel's impenetrable ravings and which included myself.

Here are runes, alphabets, horseshoe, human heads, craft symbols and marks, omphalos, phoenix, serpent and death's head. There are weathercocks, but to my mortification no pub signs; surely of vast importance, as these were as essential for the illiterate to know where to get bevvied as a red and white pole signified where the hirsute could receive gentleman's grooming. Fully illustrated with more than 300 photographs, woodcuts, drawings and calligraphy, there is also a copious bibliography. A reading of this book will bring a trip down any high street into greater focus with the familiar landscape seen replete with subtle primal signs creating a subconscious interaction with commerce. An author who wears his erudition lightly and an invitation to look anew around us.

* More book reviews next issue plus magazines round-up