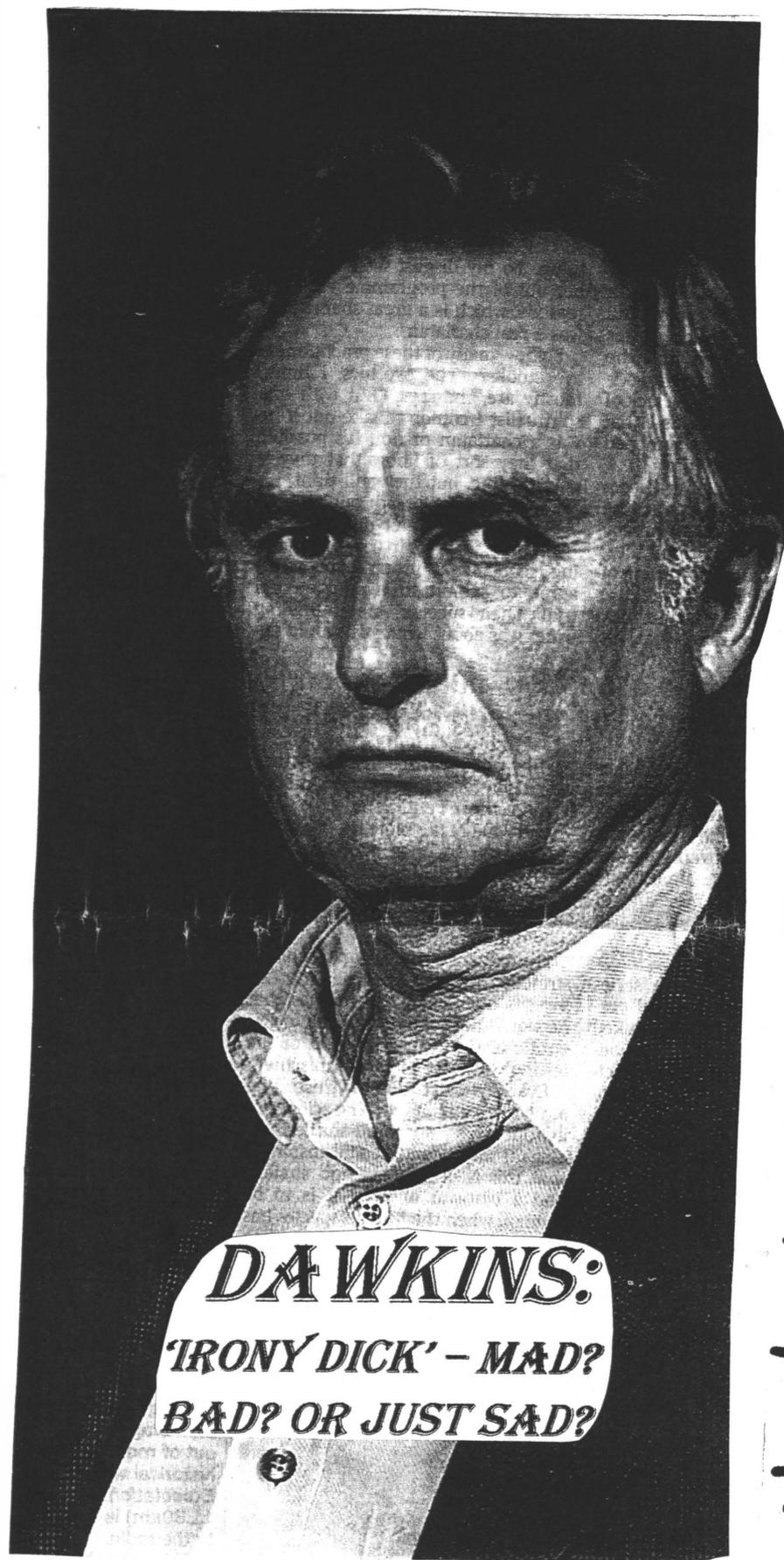
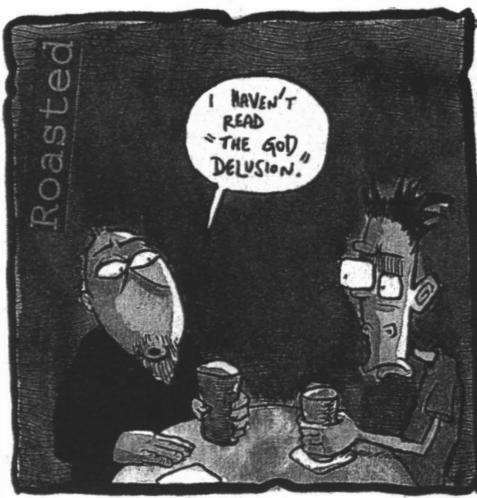


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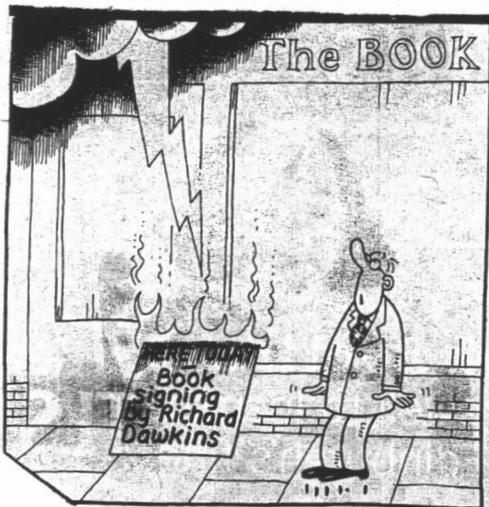
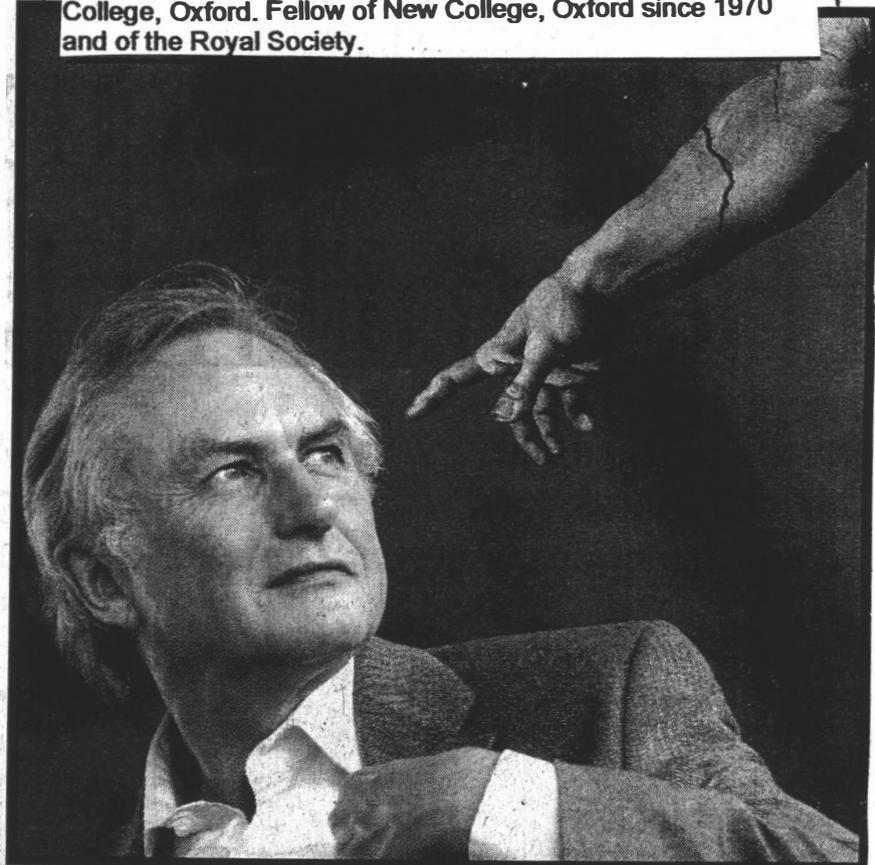
GULLIBLE'S TRAVELS:

Richard Dawkins, God, evolution and Galapagos

THERE are so many ironies surrounding evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins that we could call him 'Irony Dick'.

As Charles Simonyi Professor for the Public Understanding of Science at New College, Oxford, he warns the masses away from quantum mechanics and the uncertainty principle with its pedigree stretching back to the very same post-Copernican

The Life Born 1941, Nairobi, Kenya, Clinton Richard Dawkins to farmer and soldier of aristocratic descent. Married three times, since 1992 to actress Lalla Ward. Educated at Balliol College, Oxford. Fellow of New College, Oxford since 1970 and of the Royal Society.



Enlightenment he professes to represent; his fanatical intolerance of religion makes his atheism a fundamentalist belief; and his monetarist media earnings on the back of those he derides and despises makes him as much a snake-oil salesman as the alleged fraudsters whom he maligns.

Self, self, self

DAWKINS made a name for himself with *The Selfish Gene*; the notion that evolutionary natural selection equates to the survival of the fittest, while failing to take into account that co-operation is often a necessity for survival. His ideology of worshipping at the altar of competitive-ness shows a mind taking Thatcherite economics and applying it to evolution: just as appalling as those who took the crudest ideas of early evolutionists and applied them racially, creating pernicious social Darwinism.

Dawkins says that natural selection is the only source of natural selection while even Charles Darwin himself said there were other sources. But here's the rub. Despite another nickname, 'Darwin's rottweiler', Dawkins obviously views himself as Darwin's superior, even arguing flamboyantly that "we can consciously, deliberately and intelligently opt out of Darwinism." (1)

Militant atheism

DAWKINS explicitly says that there can be only atheism and creationism – both highly-eccentric positions in themselves – while ignoring the highly-attractive and reasonable third way option of Intelligent Design (ID). Most of his dire polemic *The God Delusion* is arraigned at U.S. fundamentalist Christianity, which as Professor W. Richard Bowen, of the University of Wales Swansea, notes is "somewhat like writing a book about gastronomy but focusing on the McDonald's 'restaurant'. Dawkins' emphasis on what might be termed 'McTheology' greatly limits the scope of his analysis." (2)

As many commentators have noted, Dawkins dishonestly packs all religious belief and practice into one crude bag labelled fanaticism. Also denying personal religious experience and serious theology reveals narrow-mindedness and intellectual cowardice.

He makes himself look even more absurd when he says belief in God makes mankind perpetrate appalling acts. Well, so does communism, fascism, monetarism, social Darwinism, dogmatism and more isms.

Dawkins also gets apoplectic with anyone who says there are mysteries we cannot solve. In actuality, the more scientists learn, the more they should humbly realise the less they know. It's been pejoratively called 'the God of the gaps.' As a Fortean, I have a sceptical view of science's empiricism and see those gaps forever widening and deepening my faith in ID. Science will never answer many mysteries

Enigmatic variation

AMIDST all this, journalist and novelist Cristina Odone, a staunch Roman Catholic, found herself seated beside Dawkins at a country weekend and was berated for her 'belief in the specialness of humanity for its soul.' But she believes there is hope for Dawkins' soul. 'In a recent interview (source not specified), Dawkins describes a gigantic intelligence which designs the universe,' she revealed. 'He acknowledges that there may be an awe-inspiring and uplifting force out there and that he is prepared to encounter it.' Odone commented: 'It sounds suspiciously like God under another name.' (4) Or, I might add, more like ID. Years ago Dawkins had a metaphor for a blind watchmaker. Is he consistent? Is he a sinner repenting? Then there's the old adage about there being no atheists in the trenches.

Enemy of reason

DAWKINS certainly doesn't have any love for the paranormal. Using the platform of the 1996 Dimpleby lecture to attack what he assumed to be a constant triumph of the irrational over the logical in *The X Files*, he made the bizarre comparison of "Imagine a crime series in which, every week the black one turns out to have done it." Apart from the curious inability to distinguish between imaginative fiction and perceived racism, *The X-Files* was excellently counterpointed by having a believer and a sceptic, or to bring the debate down to a level Dawkins might understand: good cop, nasty cop. (3)

Then in August, 2007, Channel 4 broadcast *The Enemies of Reason*, in which Dawkins attacked all manner of 'New Age' beliefs. One victim was Neil Spencer, *The Observer's* astrologer, who was given a page to respond. Mischievously nicknaming his detractor 'The Dawk', Spencer further took the piss by asking that if Dawkins regards anything pre-Enlightenment as 'primitive', does that include Gothic cathedrals and Plato's texts; if homeopathy is merely a placebo effect, how come animals respond to it; and that the world's having 'soul and purpose, that humanity and cosmos are linked, is it to be found not, as he and others claim, in the dogma of religion, but in art and in the depth psychology of Freud and Jung that Dawkins holds in contempt.' (5)

Dawkins' dogmatism is awesome, dismissing every shade of the paranormal as pseudoscientific mumbo-jumbo; doubting I even guess that all scientific knowledge is by nature provisional; which leads naturally to Forteanism, which equally has a provisionality clause, but whose stance between belief and scepticism he would never comprehend; and as for urban legends, would his position...

and he has one, oh yes he has... but we'll leave that until last.

What this all means is that however much academic prestige you hold and how high your I.Q., this does not automatically protect you from appearing as credulous, contrary, and confused a buffoon as your targets. Or, reviewing the programme, heeding the advice of Kathryn Flett: 'Intellectual arrogance is a terribly unattractive quality in a man, particularly one allegedly clever enough to know better.' (6)

Eyeless in Galapagos

EARLIER this year Dawkins visited the Galapagos Islands, swimming with marine iguanas, walking among flightless cormorants and watching pelicans and boobies rain down like arrows into the water. In a *My week* feature Dawkins recorded: 'Our impressive Ecuadorian guides told us that boobies eventually go blind, the consequence of years of repeated high-velocity impacts of their eyes on the water. As Darwin would have realised (*The Origin of Species* is rich in such economic insights), this accords with natural selection. Eventually death by blinding is the price paid for successful reproduction earlier in life – successful passing on of the genes that laid down this ultimately suicidal behaviour.' (7)

The only trouble with this is that it is a contemporary legend.

Hoist by his own uncritical petard, Dawkins will have been embarrassed by a letter published subsequently, while I cannot help but find the word *schadenfreud* coming to mind.

Bryan Nelson corrects Dawkins with: 'More than 40 years ago I spent some time in Oxford University's annex in Bevington Road, where Richard Dawkins (*My week*) was fittingly distorting spectacles on to day-old chicks in order to study their pecking responses to food particles. At that time I was in the Firth of Forth working on gannets. I extended this to include the blue-footed booby of the Galapagos. The myth that gannets go blind as a consequence of plunge-diving has obviously been extended to boobies and Richard passes it on, though not as a myth. I have concrete evidence from marked individuals that gannets can survive more than 30 years with perfect eyesight. The blindness myth probably arose because gannets and boobies have an opaque 'third eyelid' which they can draw across the eye to protect it from the impact of diving.' Bryan Nelson, Auchencairn, Dumfries & Galloway

(Continued Page 12)

Strange Brew - London Publore - No. 3

By Antony Clayton

Best cellars: Nell's tunnels of love and other subterranea

Stories of 'secret tunnels' never fail to excite the imagination. These subterranean passageways are a frequent means of access and escape in countless mystery novels and films. The history of many an ancient house includes the legend of a secret passage leading to a nearby church or inn. Any monasteries and nunneries that happened to have been in fairly close proximity were believed to have been linked by tunnels hewn by sex-starved monks. Smugglers seem to have spent most of their time constructing unfeasibly large subterranean networks connecting pub cellars with rivers or coastal caves. While some secret hiding places and tunnels undoubtedly once existed or still survive, the vast majority of these intriguing stories clearly belong in the realm of folklore or are fanciful misinterpretations of drainage tunnels, underground conduits or cellars. Not surprisingly, a fair number of London's pubs are reputed to include a secret passage or passages connecting via the cellars to a local landmark, the river Thames, or to another pub. Some were said to have been navigated by such familiar historical figures as Elizabeth I, Charles II and Nell Gwyn.

The Hoop and Grapes at 47 Aldgate High Street EC3 (tel. 020 7265 5171) may well be one of the most ancient surviving licensed houses in London. Sitting on foundations that are thought to date back to the thirteenth century, the present building, with its picturesque overhanging upper storeys, was probably built in the late seventeenth century. Staff could communicate with the pub's warren of cellars, passages and storerooms through a primitive speaking tube that can still be seen in one of the bars. In his book *Discovering London's Inns and Taverns* [Shire Publications, Princes Risborough, 1978, 2nd ed. 1986 p14] John Wittich writes that further passages running from the extensive cellarage area are, "said to have linked the house with the Tower of London, or perhaps with the docks where smugglers and river pirates held sway." During a million pound refurbishment programme in the 1980s, that included the underpinning of the pub and the strengthening of the structure with a new steel skeleton, no discoveries were made to confirm this enticing piece of local lore.

The Tower of London seems to have been a popular destination for secret tunnels, particularly those emanating from pubs. In Stanley Jackson Coleman's *Treasury of Folklore: London* [Folklore Academy, 1954] we find a reference to a now-vanished hostelry: The Crooked Billet at 340 Cable Street, "an inn since the days of Henry VIII". "An underground passage - not so long ago bricked up" he continues, "afforded direct communication with the Tower", before adding intriguingly, "Most of the rooms are wainscoted in oak and many were provided in bygone days with secret hiding-places."

The Tiger Tavern on Tower Hill (see also *Folklore Frontiers* No.56) opened in the sixteenth century and was re-housed in an unattractive concrete building after the Second World War. Given its location, it is not surprising to learn that a tunnel once ran from the Tiger to the Tower, although it would have had to pass under the formidable moat. Alan Reeve-Jones, writing in 1962, claimed that, "About nine feet of the passage exists now" [*London Pubs Research and spirited enquiry* by Betty James (B.T. Batsford Ltd, London, 1962) p9] while the most recent edition of *The London Encyclopaedia* [rev. ed. 1995 p889] concludes, "There is still a tunnel from the house to the Tower, although this has now been blocked off." If this passageway did once exist, stories of the young Princess Elizabeth using it to visit the pub, when she was imprisoned in the Tower's royal lodgings in 1554, have to be added to the body of folklore around the Virgin Queen. The entire corner of Tower Hill where the Tiger was located has now been covered by an ostentatious 'retail experience'.

The popular nineteenth century writer Harrison Ainsworth was not only responsible in his novel *Rookwood* for creating the misleading heroic image of Dick Turpin that still endures in the public mind, but also, in *The Tower of London: A Historical Romance*, published in 1840, helped fuel fantasies of mysterious dungeons and passages in the bowels of the Tower, the most grisly example being a subterranean chamber containing horrific instruments of torture together with the, "open volume in which were taken down the confessions of the sufferers". Such romantic inventions have no doubt added to the legend of the Tower as the centre of a labyrinth of tunnels and passages in the eastern part of the City and former dock area.

Standing in a quiet side street near the northern approach to London Bridge in Martin Lane, EC4 The Olde Wine Shades (tel. 020 7626 6876) claims to be the oldest wine house in the City, dating back to 1663, the date found on a lead cistern in the garret. Despite its location - in close proximity to the baker's shop in Pudding Lane where the Great Fire of London broke out on 2nd September 1666 - enough of the building seems to have survived the terrible conflagration for it to have been rebuilt on its original foundations; the present charming wooden frontage dates from the early Victorian period. 'The Shades' was a popular name, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for drinking places located underground or sheltered from the sun by an arcade. Today it is a branch of the famous El Vino's wine bar in Fleet Street. A passageway was discovered in the cellars of the Olde Wine Shades in the course of rebuilding work at some unspecified date. This tunnel, "now blocked, led down to the river", John Wittich notes, before assuming that it, "must surely be a relic of the smuggling that went on here."

The Old Queen's Head at 44 Essex Road N1 (tel. 020 7354 9993 www.theoldqueenshead.com) was, if local legend is to be believed, either built and licensed by Sir Walter Raleigh, or constructed on the orders of Elizabeth I so that she could enjoy clandestine meetings, by means of a subterranean passageway, with the Earl of Essex at Canonbury Tower in Canonbury Place. The original sixteenth-century fireplace and chimneypiece were retained during rebuilding in 1829; the pub is said to be haunted today by the ghosts of an old lady and a young girl. Not only is Canonbury Tower one of Islington's most ancient buildings, it is also of geomantic interest as, "according to some sources, 24 ley-lines passed through the site of its unusually large square newel [*London Encyclopaedia* p123]

Nell Gwyn (her surname has had many different renderings), who seems to have become a figure more of folklore than of history, has two pubs named after her in London's West End: the Nell Gwynne Tavern in Bull Inn Court (tel. 020 7240 5579) just off the Strand and Nell of Old Drury at 29 Catherine Street, WC2 (tel. 0207 836 5328). The latter was the site of an inn before 1660 and known as the Lamb for three hundred years. The present building is thought to be Victorian. The name was later changed to the Sir John Falstaff until 1966 when it was decided to commemorate the saucy wench who had made her stage debut in Dryden's *Indian Queen* in 1665 at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane, directly opposite. A plaque on the outside of the tavern informs us that, "Charles II used a secret passage beneath the road which connected pub and theatre when he wished to meet Nell Gwynn". Recently the landlord informed me, in no uncertain terms, that this passage has been bricked up and that there is nothing to see.

I had more luck at the Red Lion at 23 Crown Passage SW1 (tel. 020 7930 4141), a narrow thoroughfare leading from King Street to Pall Mall. From February 1671 Nell Gwyn was installed in number 79, a grand house on the south side of the then-fashionable Pall Mall. To make their liaisons more discreet legend says that Nell would stroll along a secret tunnel from her house to the Red Lion where she would meet her royal lover. A visit to the cellars of this ancient tavern in May 2007, courtesy of the helpful landlady, confirmed that, certainly below ground, the pub is probably as old as the four hundred years that are claimed. More intriguingly, there are two doorways - one bricked up, the other covered over - of apparently considerable age, that face directly south and could conceivably be the entrance to tunnels that run to nearby Pall Mall. Another legend says that the tunnels also connected with St James's Palace and were constructed for the benefit of Henry VIII. As there are a number of Masonic temples nearby, this pub is very popular with Freemasons. They are very easy to spot amongst the pub's normal clientele thanks to the slim briefcases containing the Masonic regalia that they invariably carry. Amongst the widely scattered host of London pubs claiming to have been popular drinking holes for Charles II and Nell Gwyn are the Hand and Racquet in Whitcomb Street WC2, the Orange Tree at Friern Barnet and the beguiling Dove, nestling beside the Thames at 19 Upper Mall, Hammersmith.

Nell is also supposed to have entertained the King at Bagnigge Wells, a pleasure garden that became a popular spa in the 1750s. The former banqueting hall of Bagnigge House was converted into a long room with a distorting mirror at one end and an organ at the other. The gardens were closed in 1841 and the site built on soon afterwards; only a stone plaque built into the façade of later houses in bustling King's Cross Road, reminds us of the former presence of this relaxing attraction. In 1878, when the Pindar of Wakefield pub in Gray's Inn Road was being rebuilt, a subterranean passage, which led in the direction of the demolished Bagnigge House, was alleged to have been discovered. George à Green, the Pindar of Wakefield, features in ballads and plays on the life of Robin Hood. The name has in recent years been changed to the more prosaic 'Water Rats' (today at No. 328).

Through research for these articles I have discovered that the pub in which I experienced my first furtive underage pint - the Old Swan, by the riverside in Battersea - also kept a subterranean secret. According to J A Brooks's book *Ghosts of London* (Jarrold, Norwich, 1991 p272), "the Old Swan pub was rebuilt in 1969 though the smuggler's tunnels which lead from its cellars to the neighbouring parish church survive." St Mary's church, in which William Blake was married, is still there, but the pub - in the mid-seventies an attractive white-weatherboard-clad modernist building with a distinctly nautical flavour - later went rapidly downhill, became a skinhead local and perished in an arson attack in

in 1986. [See <http://www.milsom.info/Battersea/Pubs/battersea%20pubs.htm>]

An archaeological investigation undertaken in 1993 revealed the foundations of the early pub but the smugglers' tunnels seem to have eluded the diggers. The site is now occupied by the inevitable 'luxury riverside apartments'.

* **The account of my quest for London's mummified pub cats will appear later next year.**

* **Coming next: Behind bars: pubs as prisons and the road to Tyburn Tree**

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Newslines

WET T-SHIRTS. Health and safety chiefs have all but banned one of the greatest traditions in our popular culture – the wet T-shirt contest. Officials fear girls could catch a chill after having water sloshed over their chests and claim pubs could be hit by that other recent popular culture – compensation culture. But the Health and Safety Executive was unrepentant. A spokesman insisted drily: "I know it might sound disappointing but this is a sensible decision. There are a lot of risks involved with amount of water used." Managing director of Yesteryear Pub Company Tony Callaghan said: "We've been advised that people who get wet could sue if they got pneumonia. Others could hurt themselves on slippery surfaces – and some of the better-endowed participants may cause blokes to drop their drinks!" Wet T-shirt regular Paige May, 19, from Brighton, Sussex, said: "This is too silly. They might as well ban us from going out in the rain" (News of the World, 4/11/07)

STAG WEEKEND KILT BAN. Scots revellers are being warned not to wear kilts on stag weekends to Eastern Europe – because of widespread bans. Budget flights and cheap beer mean cities in Poland, Latvia, Hungary and the Czech Republic have become a magnet for boozy stag parties. But the custom for drunken kilties to expose themselves means they're no longer welcome in top nightspots. In the Latvian capital Riga, traditional Highland dress is banned in several pubs and almost every nightclub. Also officials in Wroclaw, Poland, called for a blanket ban on kilts after local people complained about drunken Scots

baring their privates. Dr Nick Fiddes, author of *Kilts And Tartans Made Easy* and governor of the Scottish Tartans Authority, has sympathy for the eastern European pub and club owners. "The Scots, and the Tartan Army in particular, have a reputation for having a good time, but at the same time being warm and inoffensive," he said. "It's a great shame this hard-won image is being ruined by a minority of drunken idiots. Their behaviour is likely to tarnish the entire nation." (The Sunday Post, 14/10/07) Liz Hunt commented elsewhere: "The horrors that mittel-Europe is being forced to witness in its cobbled streets and mediaeval squares must, at times, rival the worst that communism ever inflicted." (The Daily Telegraph, 9/6/07)

RALEIGH GOOD! The first completely new potato to be introduced into Britain for 400 years went on sale in supermarkets this November. Developed by scientists at the Scottish Crop Research Institute in Invergowrie, Mayan Gold has been bred directly from primitive tubers that have been growing in the Peruvian Andes for 7,000 years. Unlike modern varieties in shops, this means it hasn't been tampered with by centuries of plant breeding this country. Steven Bowron then spoils and accuracy by writing: "It is reckoned to be nearest to the very first tattie that Sir Walter Raleigh brought back from South America for Queen Elizabeth I of England in 1597." I recall the double legend of Raleigh and imported potatoes and tobacco being trashed in the 'Mythconceptions' columns of *Fortean Times* some time ago. (The Sunday Post, 14/10/07)

CAMOUFLAGE. On the subject of *Fortean Times*, it has had a long history of a fetish for fillers about hunters shooting one another in error. This 'Need to Know?' column would delight its editors. 'Claim Camouflage makes you harder to see. What you should know Researchers from Southern California College of Optometry have carried out extensive studies to see if hunters were less likely to shoot each other by mistake if they wore bright orange jackets as opposed to camouflage jackets. And amazingly, they found they were. Verdict Can't see the point of this at all.' (The Times body&soul, 21/5/07)

MOBILE PHONES HAZARD. After publishing a review combining the results of 16 previous studies, Prof Lennart Handell, an oncologist at the University Hospital of Orebro, Sweden, said: "It has been shown pretty consistently in studies that there is an increased risk of brain tumours for people using mobile phones for at least ten years. We should be adopting the precautionary principle.

Cars should be fitted with external antennas, people should use hands-free kits and children should only make calls in emergencies." (The Daily Telegraph, 8/9/07)

PULPIT PUNS. An award for Britain's best 'wayside pulpit' has been launched by an insurance company. Notorious for laborious puns and facetious wordplay, the writers behind the signs outside churches and chapels are to get their chance to compete for a donation to funds. The birthplace of slogans such as 'Come in for a free faith lift' or 'Fight truth decay', the billboards are reckoned to hide a wealth of talent. Margaret Slater, of Congregational & General Insurance, the church property specialists which has organised the scheme, said: "It never fails to amaze us how many interesting posters there are. Some of the puns really make you smile. There are unsung heroes out there, so we'd like to reward their creativity." (The Guardian, 16/3/07; monitored by John Billingsley) As the entries rolled in, funny examples included: 'The Ultimate F-word is Forgiveness' and 'Forget Big Brother, Speak to Our Father'. Another slogan, posted alongside a busy road, said: 'In a Jam? God Preserve Us'. (The Observer, 8/7/07)

INVIZIKIDS. Singer Sophie Ellis-Bextor has trouble keeping her friends, even her imaginary ones, in check. The pop singer, 28, said of her ethereal childhood companions Charlotte and Emily: "They weren't very nice to me. They'd just say horrible things." (The Times body&soul, 8/7/07)

WIKIGATE. The CIA has been caught redhanded tweaking entries to Wikipedia, the online encyclopaedia, regarding Ronal Reagan and Richard Nixon, and more obscurely Buffy the Vampire Slayer. A Syrian state computer added to the entry of JFK: "By the way, the prime suspect involved in the assassination was Mossad". Also somebody at the BBC allegedly replaced the 'I' in George Bush's middle name, 'Walker', with an 'n'. (The Times, 7/9/07)

BRANCHES OUT. Park wardens have been forced to smear trees with grease to stop cruel pitbull owners hanging their dogs from branches by using their jaws. Thugs use the technique to toughen up their dangerous dogs for illegal fights or to be used by gangsters. But the pitbulls' powerful jaws are shredding branches and leaving a trail of damage at parks in Peckham and Elephant and Castle, South-East London. A council spokesman said: "We have also seen damage to playground equipment which has been used for the same purpose of training dogs." (The Sun, 20/7/07)

Did you miss?

BINGE DRINK PANIC. Nothing new, we here at *FF* say. We recall – not literally, it was 300 years ago – the moral panic when the ‘gin craze’ hit the streets. Professor Peter Borsary – whose work is being published on the *History & Policy* website – said: ‘At first glance, the parallels between the 18th century gin craze and contemporary drinking appear striking. I don’t think it’s the drinking that merits the comparison, but the moral panics that characterised both periods. These were fuelled by pressure groups, the media and a common perception of government complacency’. He noted that it was interesting that even in the 18th century the downfall of women was associated with drinking. ‘If you look at the images we see today, the focus is often on young women’. (Jo Revill, ‘Binge drink panic mirrors Hogarth’s “gin craze”’, *The Observer*, 9/9/07)

HAMILTON ACADEMIC. Merlin was born in 540AD in the Cadzow area of central Scotland, now part of Hamilton. He possessed no magical powers but was a politician and scholar. According to amateur historian Adam Ardrey, between 600 and 618 Merlin and his wife Gwendolin lived in Ardery Street – a tenemented area of Glasgow where comedian (?) Billy Connolly grew up (?) – but was then open countryside. Also Ardrey claims in his book *Finding Merlin: The Truth Behind the Legend* that Merlin was assassinated in 618 on his way to Dunipace, Stirlingshire. (*The Northern Echo*, 28/8/07)

WART A WAY TO GO. For as long as she could remember Liz Hunt had two small crusty warts on the inside of her right wrist: barely visible and not bothersome. Vaguely listening to Radio 4’s *Today* programme, up came the subject of toads and their role in curing human warts (presumably through the doctrine of signatures, toads themselves having a warty-type skin). She went on: ‘Folklore has it that the toad absorbs the wart or something like that. Presumably there was a toad in the studio because at one point the presenter invited any warty listeners to point the afflicted part in the direction of the radio. Carelessly I stuck out my wrist while I continued blasting my hair with hot air, and then I went off to work. Two days elapsed before I noticed the warts had vanished, leaving unblemished skin. I was delighted. Of course I know the toad didn’t cure me of my warts. The virus had probably run its course and they were due to drop off anyway. It was no more than an intriguing coincidence.’ (*The Sunday Telegraph*, 7/10/07) Oh, ye of little faith! When I had a wart on my left hand, I read somewhere that if a wart were to be rubbed with a potato peeling and the curative spud residue be buried, as the peeling rotted the wart would disappear. Believe me, dear reader, it worked for me.

TOAD IQ. Simon Barnes claims ‘toads also have a reputation for their intelligence, unexpectedly high for an amphibian’. Oh, so that’s why – unlike frogs which seek a clear pond – they will simply leave their strings of spawn in any old cart track after a shower and by the time they’ve shuffled 100 yards the sun will have come out and evaporated the water. Barnes also says ‘the story about the skin secreting poisons is true’ and they can pass on a wide range of irritants, also substances akin to the heart stimulant, digitalin, and even a hallucinogenic called bufotenine’. (*The Times*, 29/9/07)

DESTINY’S SNAPPER. A strange tale by Dave Lord tells of how an unnamed photographer was called out in the middle of the night to snap the ‘true’ Stone of Destiny being moved between locations has emerged. A small band of Scots Nationalists were moving it between sites in Perthshire. The photographer told how in 1996 he was told generations of Scots have been charged with keeping the ‘real’ stone safe and that only seven people know its current whereabouts. The Knights Templars are also



Hogarth's Gin Lane associated drink with the ruin of women.

involved, insisting the stone is hidden ‘in the Aberfeldy area’, claiming it is the one stolen from Westminster Abbey on Christmas Day, 1950, and the stone returned south of the border a year later was a fake. A spokeswoman for the Scottish Executive insists this stone, now on display in Edinburgh Castle is the genuine one and which was taken to Westminster Abbey by Edward I in 1296. (*The Sunday Post*, 19/8/07)

PIERS’ PISSTAKE. I don’t usually have much time for Piers Morgan, but laughed out loud at this: ‘Tonight, for example, it was the inaugural National Movie Awards in London. And the red carpet was so long Paula Radcliffe would have been crouching by the side before she reached the end’. (Live – *The Mail on Sunday* mag – 7/10/07)

SINEAD O’IGNORANCE. The person I would least like to interview is probably the barmpot Sinead O’Connor. Here’s a sample from an interview with Gavin Martin: ‘The story of how she ended up having four children by four different fathers is a tale in itself. For instance, she got pregnant with her first child after going out with her partner for only a month. “A girl I knew said the 14th day was the only safe day to have sex,” she explains. “In fact, it was the only unsafe day.”’ (*Daily Mirror*, 8/6/07)

BATMAGEDDON. The ghastly Robin McKie and his almost as offensive sidekick Juliette Jowitt are wrong to believe areas being redeveloped ‘to provide brightly lit, busy homes and cafes: great for humans but bad for flying mammals’. I assume their habitat has been destroyed, but bats were once common in my brightly-lit street and my wife and I used to sit outside a bar run by an English couple in Montegordo, on Portugal’s Algarve and watch bats flitting deliberately around a very strong light opposite illuminating the whole square, assuming the glow attracted bats and insects upon which the bats were feasting. (*The Observer*, 15/7/07)

LOCH NESS SCEPTICISM. Nessie tourism brings in an estimated £6m. annually for the economy of the Scottish Highlands. But it seems this is at risk from fewer sightings and less self-appointed monster hunters. By the end of September there had been only two reported sightings and three last year. “It’s becoming a potential crisis,” said Mikko Takala, who runs four webcams on the loch’s northern shore and is a founder member of the Official Loch Ness Monster Fan Club. David Lister wrote that a ‘strange sanity is now prevailing’ and ‘in any other circumstances such an outbreak of level-headedness would be applauded’. (*The Times*, 29/9/07)



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Update

GLOBAL WARMING (FF16:22, passim) Evidence of big shifts of climate long before industrialisation put a lie to the current hysterical global Armageddon myth. Roger Highfield writes: 'Fossilised midges have helped scientists at the University of Liverpool identify two episodes of abrupt climate change which suggest that the fickle British climate is even less stable than previously thought.'



The find resulted from a study in Hawes Water, in northern Lancashire, which discovered that the first shift detected occurred around 9,000 years ago and the second around 8,000 years ago. Evidence suggests that these shifts were due to changes in the Gulf

Stream, which normally keeps our climate warm and wet. During each shift the North-West climate cooled, with an average summer temperature fall of 1.6 degrees – approximately three times the amount of temperature change currently attributed to global warming, said Professor Jim Marshall, one of the authors of the study, which was published in the journal *Geology*. (The Daily Telegraph, 24/7/07)

Meanwhile, Paul Simons, whose *Weather Eye* column is an oasis of sanity and always fair when discussing bizarre weather occurrences, writes thus: 'This has been the wettest June and July on record, and many people are blaming global warming. A study published last week in *Nature* shows that we can expect more extreme downpours in the U.K. with climate change, although it does not necessarily explain the recent rains. However, Britain had very wet summers long before global warming. (The Times, 28/7/07)

FRENCH MAID (FF55: 14 (1) The French accuse the English of burning Joan of Arc as I detailed earlier. Reader Peter Crooks, of Lydd, Kent, commented on a less well known 'fact.' 'In my experience,' he wrote



Illustration of Joan of Arc at the stake, with the French firewood piled high

'the French have no reply when it is pointed out to them that while the burning is true, it is also true that the French supplied the faggots for the fire – and were paid for them.' (The Sunday Telegraph, 16/9/07)

For a fascinating romp through conspiracy theories regarding the Maid of Orleans, seek out Peter Wade's article (Fortean Times 127:46)

DUBIOUS TRANSMISSIONS (FF18:7-8, passim) Pop band Air Traffic took their name from the fact that their amps picked up traffic control signals from nearby Hurn Airport, Bournemouth (Zoo, 6.7/07)

DRUG CRAZE (FF1:4-7, passim) Difficult to tell how true this one is. Here's how Javier Espinoza wrote it up under the headline *This week we want to know all about...*

Rubbish Sniffing 'It sounds like rubbish, but this is the new way of getting high, apparently. Steal a wheelie bin, set fire to it, immerse your head in the thick black smoke, then inhale. Hard to believe as the craze seems, teenagers' penchant for "bin parties" is being taken seriously by health watchdogs. Charities have warned that inhaling the lethal fumes, which contain chemical toxins, could be more dangerous than sniffing glue or petrol, as it carries the risk of death from either fire, smoke inhalation or the toxic fumes. Teenage gangs in Barnsley, South Yorkshire, reportedly started robbing off-licences and rolling away with stolen alcohol in the bins, according to local reports. Earlier this year 100 bins were stolen over two weeks. Police have warned local people of the dangers of bin-sniffing gangs, prompting laughter from some residents.' (The Observer, 30/9/07) Laughter, yeah, yet another moral panic! Meanwhile, and also suspiciously centred upon Barnsley Council, is a bid to ban sweets that

look like drug addicts' syringes. Supposedly, kids push down the plunger – like a junkie injecting heroin – to release liquid candy. The council was contacting Trading Standards in a bid to remove the *Rocket Shots, made in China, from shop shelves*. Member Margaret Bruff said: "They glamorise drug addiction." (The Sun, 13.10/07)

PILATE SCHEME Covered in *FF* at some time. A reader (The Sunday Post, 9/9/07) asked if there was any truth in the claim that Pontius Pilate was born in Scotland? The answer being: "Legend has it that Pontius Pilate was born in Fortingall, in Perthshire, the son of a Roman and a local girl, but there's no evidence to back it up. There are similar myths in Spain and Germany which claim he was born there." (The Sunday Post, 9/9/07)

EMPLOYEES' REVENGE

(FF12:21/23, passim)

Gardeners said it with flowers when they were laid off – by planting blooms spelling **BOLLOCKS** in a Barnet, north London, park. (The Sun, Daily Sport, 4/5/94)

In 1971, a publication entitled *Industrial Sabotage* mentioned a Blackpool rock manufacturer who had to scrap more than a mile of the product after a sacked employee had, prior to leaving, altered the lettering to **FUCK OFF**. (Weekend Telegraph, 4/3/95)

A zoo worker got the hump after being sacked. So he sought revenge and broke into the animal pens at the zoo in Argentina under cover of night and painted two elephants, a rhino and a hippo bright red. (The Sport, 27/5/98)

An electronic road sign which repeatedly flashed **FUCK YOU** at startled motorists in Fairfield, Connecticut, was the work of a disgruntled ex-employee, according to officials. (Daily Sport, 14/10/98) %%% Finally, two sub-genre examples of technological prankery:

A company boss had to apologise to hundreds of customers after his answering machine swore at them. Shocked callers were told: "Fuck off, you cunt" after a hi-tech hacker used a common BT code to swap electric contractor Graham Lyall's message. It was on for a week before 39-year-old Graham realised. He said: "If it was a prank then it was a pretty sick one that will have cost my business a fortune. I only found out when somebody rang back when I was in to complain." Graham, a partner in G.A. Helmore, of Dundee, added "I found out from BT that you can change the message from anywhere in the world. All you

need is to key in a single digit."

(The Sport, 22/4/98)

A fed-up employee hacked into his company's computer and sent out fake redundancy letters – and cheques for thousands of pounds – to the entire workforce. Frantic bosses at London-based Healthcare Services had to contact 100 hospital laundry workers to tell them it was a hoax and not to cash the cheques.

Spokesman Keith Nichols said the prankster was no longer an employee and added: "He may have thought it was amusing, but it certainly wasn't funny for colleagues who received the letter." Daily Star, Mail (Hartlepool), first and second editions, 31/5/95)

CONDOMS (FF15:11, passim)

John Lennon sang into a condom-covered microphone to protect himself from electric shocks while trying to achieve an underwater sound for The Beatles' *Yellow Submarine*, but the recording was never used. (Zoo, 6/7/07)

PAUL IS DEAD (1) (FF31:7-8)

A four-page special to mark the 40th anniversary of the release of The Beatles' *Sergeant Pepper* album, included a miscellany by Ben Schott. If it's a 'tiresome hoax' Ben, why revive it? Anyway, here goes for *FF* Beatleophiles: **'PAUL IS DEAD – the tiresome hoax that Paul McCartney died in a car crash in 1966, to be replaced by a soundalike clone, seems to date to a phone call made to the Detroit radio station WKNR-FM in 1969. The caller claimed that if *Revolution 9* was played backwards the words *Turn me on, dead man* could be heard. Inevitably, a wealthy unlikely 'evidence' has been produced by conspiracy-hungry fans – not least the cover of *Abbey Road* in which Ringo (in black) is supposedly the undertaker, George (in jeans) the gravedigger, John (in white) the preacher, and Paul (barefoot) the corpse. McCartney called his 1993 in-concert album *Paul is Live*.** (The Times, 2/6/07)

RUTH KELLY (FF55:14 (5))

Ben Schott, again, and Matthew Parris revived the 19th century tradition of 'tabular estimates' of leading members of the Houses of Commons and Lords. For Transport Minister Ruth Kelly they chose: limited (resources); clumsy (judgment); deficient (logic), contralto, growling (voice); unshowy (language); boyish (punchitude)' graceless (demeanour); unimpressive, insistent (power and impression); flat (temperament); moral (character). I think Rhona Cameron would concur. (The Times, 30/6/07)

DID/DIDN'T (FF20:7-9, passim) In *FF55:11* the film *Don't Look Now* was quoted as one of six where the sex was probably not simulated. Whenever there is an article on Julie Christie expect a reference to her *explicit acting in the film*. Interviewer Tim Adams did not disappoint: "I suggest that she perhaps got more intrusiveness because she always seemed so exposed on film. She cemented this reputation most famously, of course, in her great love scene with Donald Sutherland in *Don't Look Now*. "Well," she suggests, "I wanted always to get to that place as an actress where there are no borders or boundaries." (The Observer Review, 1/4/07)

HARDENED CRIMINALS

(FF5:21-22, passim) Latest gangland figure supposedly incarcerated in concrete is Gilbert Wynter. The enforcer for the notorious Adams crime family, which was suspected of helping to launder the money from the Brink's-Mat raid, disappeared in 1998. Underworld rumours suggest that he is part of the foundations of the O2 Dome at Greenwich. This former part of a lengthy piece of journalism based on information from retired detectives who had pieced together various mystery aspects to what they refer to as the 'Brink's-Mat curse'. (The Times, 4/8/07)

BEOWULF (FF27:3-7)

Mick Goss and yours truly wrote about this early hero some time ago. Lately Simon Barnes extolled Beowulf's prowess, comparing him to Ian Botham (I don't recall long wals and broken bed shenanigans in the poem), David Beckham (no skinny singing housewife) and Andrew Flintoff (though there was a huge meadhall, maybe even a pedalo on The Slake harbour inlet). Oh, and Tim Henman (mound, perhaps, but no fan club). Barnes recalls Beowulf killing Grendel and Grendel's mother. (The Times, 25/8/07) As for Grendel's mother, in the Hollywood movie of *Beowulf* currently being filmed, Angelina Jolie takes her role, donning gold paint. Surely Shirley Eaton (FF36:9) would be more the mother's age? (The Observer, 9/9/07)

EVOLUTION (FF52:3-5)

Figure this one out, Darwin. Chilean scientists say their local black widow's venom not only gives a Viagra-style penile boost, it also contains a human spermicidal contraceptive that's better than any gel on the market. All we need now is a spider that brings flowers as well. (The Times body&soul, 9/6/07)



COURTNEY LOVE (FF22:17-18) Proudly bonkers Love (above) now claims that she can alter her DNA by aggressive Buddhist chanting. "You chant for stuff you want!" she exclaims. "It's wonderful! I'm chanting for the perfect house, the perfect husband, and (the welfare of) Lindsay Lohan, Kate Moss, horses, cats and dogs." Off drugs but apparently to be still on them because of the effects of medication, she admits this is "because I have mad episode - and that's because I'm a bit mad. I mean, *sure*. It's not like I see people - but I *am* a little nuts." (TheKnowledge, The Times, 23/9/07)

MARSBARIANNE FAITHFULL

(FF19:3-7, passim) The increasingly tedious Jasper Gerard predictably found Keith Richards' support of a hospital demo amusing, writing rather pitifully: 'Indeed, it was at his nearby house (Redlands) in West Wittering deep in the Mars Bar belt, that he, Marianne Faithfull and Mick Jagger were busted for drugs.' Actually she wasn't busted, but searched, even though naked except for THAT rug - and I believe her when she denies the confect-ionery tale. (The Observer, 28/10/07)

MUSHY PEAS (FF36:3-8, passim) My other all-time favourite has made its umpteenth reappearance. A two-page round-up of political gaffes, collected by Matthew Parris and Phil Mason and extracted from their now book, *Mission Accomplished - Things Politicians Wish They Hadn't Said* (JR Books, 2007), has:

"Can I have a pot of that nice avocado mousse?"

'Peter Mandelson, reported remarks in a fish and chip shop in his Hartlepool constituency, pointing to the mushy peas. He insists that the story is apocryphal.' (The Times, 27/10/07)

BOOBS 'N' BOOZE (FF30:4-7) A barmaid was left deflated after being told her 34B boobs were too small. The woman, who did not wish to be named, said she was given a job at the Gentleman's Turf bikini bar in Crawley, West Sussex, but was told not to come back when bosses saw her dressed in the skimpy uniform provided. The 23-year-old said: "They told me I couldn't work there because my breasts were too small." Manager Gee Evans said: "She made claims on her application form that she had the figure to fill the role, but this turned out to be rubbish." (The Sun, 23/10/07)

* I was also amused to hear of the barmaid fined for crushing beer cans between her bare breasts. The woman pleaded guilty to twice exposing her bosom to patrons at the Premier Hotel in Pinjarra, Western Australia. The 31-year-old and her boss were fined £430 while an off-duty colleague was handed a £216 fine for helping her to hang spoons from the woman's nipples. (Metro, 25/10/07)

TOILET PAPER. Somewhere in the annals of *Folklore Frontiers* we recalled my pal Mike Amoa writing of a Northern League pie vendor mishearing a customer and handing him sheets of 'bog roll' instead of 'Bovril'. Miles Kingston wrote in a similar fashion: '... I can also remember jokes older than that, because they were told to me by my father from his school days. Old colonel goes into a shop and asks for pepper. "Certainly, sir," says the man. "Black pepper or white pepper?" "No, damn your eyes!" says the colonel. "Lavatory pepper!" (The Independent, 11/6/07)

EARTHQUAKE APPEAL (FF55:8; FF56:2) Ulster-born Roman Catholic Denis Patrick Lusby, editor of a 56-page monthly parishes magazine in Cornwall has resigned after a council official claimed it was racist. Ginny Harrison - white, Cornwall County Council equality and diversity boss claimed the mag was racist and ridiculed the Irish traveller communities with whom she works through its Murphy and Paddy jokes. She asked headmasters to boycott the mag in case it polluted the attitudes of pupils. Mr Lusby commented: "The only time I have spoken to her was after we ran a joke about an Essex earthquake appeal, which was full of Essex Girl jokes. She rang up and said her neighbours came from Essex and was concerned they would be offended. I told her that all humour was subjective." He added that the jokes weren't even his, but sent in by readers. (Daily Mail, 13/9/07)

SKINCARE (FF51:12, passim) Actress Joan Collins giving advice on skincare: "Never drink tap water. I have an aversion to drinking recycled urine and hormones." (The Times body&soul, 30/6/07) Meanwhile, the latest beauty curative is a hair treatment which contains bull sperm, one of the most protein-packed substances in nature and when used in conjunction with katera (a Japanese plant root), it helps repair weak hair and deliver incredible bounce and shine. (The Tatler, June, 2007; The Observer, 13/5/07)

666 Council bosses in Kent were caught in a devil of a row over whether a No. 666 bus route should be renamed (or more correctly, surely, renumbered). A passenger complained that the service between Faversham and Ashford was satanic - it displayed a devil's face next to the number - but in response a group of drivers on the route started a petition to save the route number. (The Daily Telegraph, 23/6/07)

BADGER CULLING (FF53:10, passim) Sensibly, proposals for a widespread cull of badgers to limit the spread of bovine tuberculosis have been ruled out by the government's Independent Scientific Group, which argues that culling cannot make any meaningful contribution. (The Observer, 17/6/07)

Oldies but Goodies

UNPLUGGED. Here's how it appeared in print: 'Anyone who's had trouble sleeping on a noisy hospital ward may feel a nanosecond's sympathy for 17-year-old Frederik Moelner, of southern Germany, who was in intensive care after a car crash. Finding his night's rest ruined by a loud life-support machine attached to an elderly man in the next bed, Moelner switched it off. Luckily medical staff noticed what had happened and plugged the pensioner back in. Moelner is helping Lanshute police with their inquiries.' (The Times body& soul, 23/6/07)

However, online discussion suggests there is a failsafe system which would not allow this to happen. It reminds me of the legend about the mystery of why each week the patient on life-support in a particular bed would be found dead on a certain day. That was until they realised the cleaner used the same plug for her vacuum cleaner.

BITTER BLOW. If something's stolen, just claim it's contaminated to spoil the thieves' day. As in 'Thieves who stole a faulty barrel of beer from The Old Ship, in Lee-on-the-Solent, Hampshire., will be ill if they drink it, say police.' (Daily Mirror, 14/7/07) Somewhat similar is the tale of a family which offered a reward for the return of their pet rabbit which is allergic to – of all things – lettuce and carrots. Gizmo vanished from the garden in Rickleton, Washington, Tyne & Wear, and could become seriously ill if someone tries to feed it traditional rabbit fayre. (The Daily Telegraph, 11/10/07)';

HEAVY METAL. Comedian Bill Bailey, discussing cult film *This is Spinal Tap*, wrote: 'Then there are the apocryphal stories about the film, such as Ozzy Osbourne thinking it was just an ordinary documentary.' ('The best comic films of all time' introduced by Philip French, The Observer Review, 17/6/07)

ZOO DUNNIT? 'Zoo keepers are being probed by cops after animals were slaughtered and their meat sold in Erfurt, Germany. (The Sun, 20/7/07)

DOG SHIT SNATCH. A Chinese woman, a Mrs Chen, of Laohekou city, told how robbers snatched a parcel of dog poo wrapped in newspaper out of her hand outside a bank. "While I was waiting in the queue, my dog had a poo. So I asked for several pieces of newspaper to

wrap the poo," she said. After wrapping it, she left the bank and was waiting to cross the street to throw the parcel into a rubbish bin when the robber struck. "A motorcycle stopped swiftly before me, the man on the rear seat seized the package from me, and they sped away," she said. Police are investigating the case while 'laughing at the stupidity of the robbers', according to Chuan City Papers. (Ananova, 15/8/07)

FINDUSGATE REVISITED.

American comedienne Ruby Wax, asked to recall her schooldays, submitted: "My first high-school memory was putting sardines underneath the lights above us. Nobody could figure out where the smell was coming from, so they had to close the school." (The Daily Telegraph, 4/9/07)

COLEMANBALLS.

Musing upon the 2008 Beijing Olympics, Sandi Toksvig recalled: 'I'm sure I'll be watching competitions in bemusement, heartened by the linguistic gymnastics of commentators. Who can forget Pat Glenn, the weightlifting expert, who said: "This is Gregoriava from Bulgaria. I saw her snatch this morning and it was amazing!" She went on: 'Of course it was more fun in the days when the Soviet Union and other nations tried to make men join the women's teams. Dora Ratjen, who, in 1936, competed for Germany in the women's high jump, declared 20 years later that she was really a man called Hermann. How galling for him that he came fourth against a bunch of girls.'

BIN RESCUE.

Here's the familiar filler of dustmen rescuing a man from the jaws of their lorry after hearing his cries for help. An anonymous 50-year-old homeless man somewhere in Austria had spent the night in a rubbish container. (The Daily Telegraph, 23/8/07)

SEWER RAT.

Panellist Jane Macdonald read out a reader's phonecall off a card on *Loose Women*. It was about a couple in Spain who befriended a homeless dog. They washed it and even allowed it to sleep on their bed. When their fortnight's holiday was coming to an end they took it to a vet – who asked where they had acquired a sewer rat? (*Loose Women*, ITV1, 4/10/07)

CAMPBELL'S SCOOP.

This one usually features the all-lines railway timetable. Here *The Whip* column told of Fiona Millar, partner of spindoctor Alistair Campbell, going into Wise Owl Bookshop in Camden, North London, and asking for the book of his diaries. The Whip was told she was furious when she

couldn't find the tome prominently displayed in the politics section. It was there, she discovered, but some wag had taken the display copy and moved it into the fiction section. (The Sun, 10/9/07) Which leads nicely to a friend of the actress Imogen Stubbs – one of this year's Booker judges – who was going to join her for a few days' holiday and thought that he should prepare himself for the poolside conversation by mugging up on the shortlisted books. According to Mark Sanderson's *Literary Life* column, he strolled into a reputable bookshop in London and went up to the nearest assistant. "Good morning," he greeted, "I'd like the Booker list, please." "Remind me," said the salesperson, "who's it by? Are you sure you don't mean *Schindler's List*?" (Seven – The Sunday Telegraph mag – 23/9/07)

LOVE STORY.

As chief political commentator Andrew Rawnsley puts it: 'There's an amusing – though not wholly fresh – anecdote about Brown getting stuck in a lavatory and Blair saying he won't let him out unless he agrees to give him the leadership.' So this is the quality of former alcoholic and former political editor Alastair Campbell's diaries: rumour, trivia, tantrums and personality clashes. (THE BLAIR YEARS: Extracts from THE ALASTAIR CAMPBELL DIARIES, Hutchinson, 2007) When he angrily blames the P.M. for mishandling the Bernie Ecclestone Affair, Blair simpers: "You love me really though." The air of homoeroticism is continued in the last two lines where Blair promises to ring Campbell every day, leading Adrian Mole, aka Sue Townsend, to comment: 'it is a tragic love story between two men.' The self-obsessed Campbell, who records being 'chronically' and then 'clinically' depressed, hilariously believed Princess Diana had a crush on him. As for Peter Mandelson, when Mandy threw a punch at Campbell, Blair had to separate them (it was only over whether the P.M. should make a speech wearing an open-necked shirt. When Mando asks: "Do you like anyone?" Campbell says he likes his children "and Fiona (his partner) when she's not disagreeing with me. The rest can fuck off." Journalist Andrew Gilligan best summed up Campbell ('odious, manure-mouthed bully') and the Blair era ('serves to remind us what an extraordinary collection of psychologically-challenged people ruled over us for so long'). Of course, the greatest irony is that Campbell was an unselected civil servant yet, perhaps, the country's real leader. (The Observer Review, 15/7/07)

Proto-legends

WASN'T it Henry Ford who said 'all history is bunk'? Ian Crofton claims to have filleted the past to leave only the juiciest morsels in *History Without the Morning Bits* (Quercus Books, 2007). As we all know, a great deal of history is bunk and eminent historians often have humdinger dust-ups.

From extracts published in the media, I have done my own selection: these being 'facts' I find dubious and have assigned them to this section for readers to decide their truth or plausibility.

1780 THE ORIGIN OF QUIZ

Around this date, Mr Daly, manager of a Dublin theatre, proposed a wager by which he would introduce a new word into the language and have everybody using it within 24 hours. Accordingly, he and his associates scrawled the word 'QUIZ' on walls all over the city, and in no time at all the citizens of Dublin were asking what these letters meant. The wager was won. Sadly, some of our lexicographers doubt the veracity of this tale.

1940 RUN, RABBIT, RUN 16 March – after an air raid on the British naval base at Scapa Flow, Orkney, the Germans claimed to have caused massive casualties. In fact, the only fatality was a rabbit, and it was to this that Flanagan and Allen referred when they sang *Run, Rabbit, Run* (the song itself dates from the previous year) to wartime audiences, apparently accompanied by the creature's corpse.

1944 PUBLISHER REJECTS

ANIMAL STORY The American publisher Dial Press rejected George Orwell's political allegory *Animal Farm* on the grounds that it was 'impossible to sell animal stories in the USA'.

1946 NAZILEGACY

The Bournemouth Evening Echo carried the following story: Mrs Irene Graham of Thorpe Avenue, Boscombe, delighted the audience with her reminiscence of the German prisoner of war who was sent each week to do her garden. He was repatriated at the end of 1945, she recalled. 'He'd always seemed a nice friendly chap, but when the crocuses came up in the middle of our lawn in February 1946, they spelt out "Heil Hitler".'

1969 BLOODY DELIA! The cake on the cover of Rolling Stones' album *Let It Bleed* is created by a then unknown Delia Smith. (The Independent, 25/9/07; Daily Mirror, 19/9/07)

INDISCIPLINE. Reviewing David Stafford's book *Endgame 1945: Victory, retribution, Liberation*, Allan Mallinson warns: 'Some of what Stafford recounts, however, needs careful assessment indeed. For example, he quotes one of the many lurid tales of indiscipline in Sean

Longden's *To the Victor the Spoils*, published last year. A Royal Marine casually shoots a German general because he insists on surrendering to an officer, not a lance-corporal. The NCO is not disciplined, but merely told to dig the grave. Now, I do not say that this didn't, or couldn't happen: it used to be the standing order for a young officer, and only half tongue-in-cheek, to 'go find out what the soldiers are doing, and stop them'. But the account, in the casualness of the act, and its impunity, does not quite ring true. The full story would have been much more revealing, although not with the same 'tabloid' impact'. (The Times Books, 18/8/07) This was followed up in the letters column: 'Allan Mallinson, in his review of David Stafford's *Endgame 1945* is right to doubt the tale of the shooting of a German general by a Royal Marine. The account is almost certainly an elaboration of an incident near the end of the war. A Marine came across a German field-marshal, who demanded an officer to accept his surrender. The Marine took him a bayonet-point to his colonel, who asked about the Belsen concentration camp, which was within the German's area command. "I know nothing whatever about it," he replied. The colonel broke the field-marshal's long baton over its owner's heads, declaring: "Then you bloody well ought to have known!" My story is accurate and at first hand'. – The Rev Geoffrey K. Johnson, Norwich (The Times Books, 8/9/07) Then came: 'With regard to the Revd Geoffrey Johnson's letter last week, a plausible identification of the German field-marshal beaten with his own baton is the Luftwaffe officer Erhard Milch, whose testament is described by David Irving in *The Rise and Fall of the Luftwaffe* (1974). Whatever may be urged against Milch's personal character, his treatment of his Anglo-American captors was not in the better traditions of military conduct. – Professor Gerald Bonner, Durham. (The Times Books, 15/9/07)

PRANK. This sounds like a cross between The Death Car and prawns hidden to rot in a curtain rail. Rebecca Hodgkiss, rugby league Wigan Warriors' physiotherapist, mentioned that players and staff often played pranks on each other. At Widnes one of the coaching staff got a mouldy pasty stuck under their car bonnet and after a few weeks it stank the whole car out,' she said. (The Observer Sport, 12/8/07)

MAPLIN'S. The theatre is a focus for many alleged legends. Learning that Jude Law is to play Hamlet at Wyndham's Theatre next year, the *Ephraim Hardcastle* column hoped he'd fare better than the late Simon Cadell, best known for his role as Jeffrey Fairbrother in the TV holiday camp comedy *Hi-de-Hi*. Simon played the moody Dane at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in 1993. When he got to the famous line: "To be or not to be, that is the question", a joker in the gallery shouted out: "Hi-de-Hi!" From

the stalls rose the answering chorus: "Ho-de-ho!" A clash of real and popular culture – of course, if it ever happened. (Daily Mail, 13/9/07)

EGGSTRA. Always worth checking for dubious tales is Terry Wogan's column. Here a listener to his radio show recounts ... 'a "Senior Citizen Special breakfast": Two eggs, bacon hash browns and toast for £1.99. "Sounds good to me," his wife said, "but I don't want the eggs." The waitress bridled. "Then I'll have to charge you £2.49: you're ordering a la carte." The lady reared back, stunned. "You mean I'd have to pay for NOT taking the eggs?" "Yes," came the stern reply. "Right. I'll take the Special." "And how do you want your eggs, madam?" "Raw, and in the shell," was the terse order. "And she took the two eggs home," reports her proud spouse.' (The Sunday Telegraph, 7/10/07)

ALTER EGOS. According to Jasper Gerard's column: 'A German therapist stands accused of taking advantage of a female patient with a split personality – by using one alter ego for sex, another to clean and a third to give him money. Worse, when she confronted him, he refused to talk about it, claiming a duty of confidentiality to her other personalities'. With due caution, Gerard continued: 'If true, the therapist is a disgrace who should be barred from practising. Yet men are repugnant creatures and a few will be musing: "Hmmm... a woman with a multiple personality disorder. Just what I'm looking for..."' (The Observer, 8/7/07)

PINNOCHIO SYNDROME. Plastic surgeons at Azad Medical University, Iran, say in *Otolaryngology – Head & Neck Surgery* people seeking nose jobs are far more likely to be habitual liars. (The Times body&soul, 7/7/07)

SWALLOWS OR SPITS. From *The Browser* column comes news that Marcus Sedgwick's brilliant novelisation of Arthur Ransome's racy Russian revolutionary career, *Snow White, Blood Red*, has run into publicity problems. Shunning Ransome's boy-scout image, the clever hire experts at publisher Orion resolved to hire a Lenin lookalike for the launch party and placed appropriate calls with the usual lookalike agencies. The result was a helpful inquiry: "Is that his *Help* period or his *Yoko* period?" (The Observer, 15/7/07)

NEW (BAD) LIGHT ON... "You mentioned Sheffield's industrial smog in last week's *Then & Now*. It's true, the smog sometimes did hinder cricket at Bramall Lane, but some of this was supposed to be deliberately generated by Yorkshire supporters. If, on the final day the visiting county looked like winning, then the order went out to the factory boilermen to stoke up, and hope that bad light stopped play."

– Roger Bowling, Macclesfield.

Books

CLASSICAL MYTHOLOGY: A VERY SHORT INTRODUCTION by Helen Morales
(Oxford University Press, £6.99)

I was introduced to much classical mythology through that sexy, swords and sorcery TV adventure *Xena: Warrior Princess*. Morales' premise is that Greek and Roman myths were of significance in the societies that first produced them and goes on to recount how they are still making an impact today. This brief but concise condensing of a complex study is a marvellous antidote to a decade of Celtic/Arthurian emphasis. It shows that however relevant the Matter of Britain is to New Agers and such, there is a place for classical mythology. It usefully utilises modern events to echo the power of the classical age, not least by pointing to the eerie death of Princess Diana in circumstances which echo her mythological namesake.

In essence, in these myths, both Greek and Roman assimilation (there are many major differences), the most important factors are the gods' interactions with each other, and with mortals, that gave them meaning. Their resonance from the classical era for us today is not simply that the gods could be as unfaithful, vengeful and petty as we mere mortals, but that the tales have a psychological core. Or as the author puts it: 'without classical mythology, there would be no psychoanalysis.' For Freud myth was largely a diagnostic tool; for Jung therapeutic.

I particularly enjoyed passages where modern culture is compared with the classical. The 'queering sexuality' section sees the male side of the coin of an older man loving a boy as more child abuse than typical homosexuality, whereas female same-sex desire is a lesser theme, but as detailed here was used as a powerful subtext in the brilliantly-successful *Xena* TV series, allowing Xena and sidekick Gabrielle to kiss and bathe together, where Morales notes: 'It is an example of how viewer-power helped create a lesbian icon and wrote Xena into television history – and into classical mythology'. Never a truer word was said!

On a personal level the author says there is 'the myth of John Lennon', but not 'the myth of John Major'. Well, Major bedded Edwina Currie, still something of a sex fantasy figure for me, whereas the thought of Yoko Ono would jam the brakes on premature ejaculation.

Other chapters cover the conflict between myth and philosophy, allegory, the sheer amount of rape being staggering, suggesting perniciously that women enjoy such subjection; feminist rewriters of myth; Great Goddess and New Age.

A fabulously sensual review of a subject which should bring classical mythology back into fashion with its unique juxtaposition of ancient and modern. Ten out of ten!

PHANTOM BLACK DOGS IN LATIN AMERICA by Simon Burchell (Heart of Albion Press, £5.95 + 80p postage)

Burchell's short book can be seen as an adjunct to the same publisher's *Explore Black Dogs*, edited by Bob Trubshaw (reviewed FF50:16/18). Here it is demonstrated that the Black Dog familiar to British folklorists had a closely-related Latin American cousin. The author has certainly done his material proud, detailing differences throughout the Americas and those specifically referring to a localised legend. Urban mythologists will not be surprised to find a tale told by a Guatemala City school inspector in 1967 which has transferred to numerous Central American websites and often becoming extended to the 'it happened to me' brand of ostension.

The tales may well have a European origin, probably arriving with the Spanish Conquistadors, being popularised by the Roman Catholic Church, which used the legend and similar ones as moralising tales. Thus the Black Dog is often associated with protecting drunks or licking alcoholics and speeding their demise. The Conquistadors would also throw their captives to be eaten alive by dogs, which would certainly have reinforced any previous superstition between dogs and harm.

The book does not neglect the *chupacabras*, or 'goat-sucker', beloved of *Fortean Times* and subject of an *X-Files* episode. The book closes with reference to continuing sightings of Black Dogs and a comparison with elements of Black Dogs in the British Isles. Lively, erudite and stimulating.

SPIRIT ROADS: AN EXPLORATION OF OTHERWORLDLY ROUTES by Paul Devereux
(Collins & Brown, £8.99)

Don't be fooled into picking this off the bookshop shelf and thinking it is new: it's a reprint of Paul's *Fairy Paths & Spirit Roads*. (I was once conned into buying a 'new' Colin Wilson novel entitled *The Sex Diary of Gerard Sorme* when it was a more titilatingly-titled reprint of *Man Without A Shadow*).

In fact, anyone buying by mistake, won't be the only one none too happy, for Paul told me it had been republished without his knowledge and he regarded the quality as little better than being printed on toilet paper.

I would recommend readers, however, to look up my original review (FF46:17-18), but can applaud Paul's customary diligence in following up post Watkinsian ley developments. Here we have the cognitively-connected American ritual roads, European death ways, Australian songlines and Irish fairy paths. This is basically a sampler of otherworldly routes.

EXPLORE VAMPIRES by Bob Curran
(Heart of Albion Press, £12.95)

Frankly, I found this book did not come alive (so to speak). For such a romantic and strange subject it is deadly dull. We all have the potent image of the vampire as the returning dead, a blood-sucking reanimation, which occurs in many cultures, ancient and modern. This ancient belief is the author's springboard to questing for the vampire throughout history and many lands. The narrative is enlivened somewhat by personal experiences of tellers of strange tales, but the portraits of Sawney Beane, modern-day monsters and Vlad the Impaler lack any real lasciviousness or life.

The book is also written in a less than elegant style and, I suspect, editor Bob Trubshaw found it too personal and perverse to correct.

A voracious reader as a teenager, I bought a cheap paperback on vampirism by Ornella Volta, which I still cherish, and it is immeasurably superior to this work (not even being cited here). The Helen Morales book reviewed above is a model of how this subject should have been approached with Hammer horror film material included. Also preferably written by wise and humorous Dr Gail-Nina Anderson.

OXFORD GUIDE TO ARTHURIAN LITERATURE AND LEGEND by Alan Lupack (Oxford University Press, £11.99)

Although grounded in the medieval versions of the Matter of Britain, the richness and depth of Arthuriana is realised here by chronicling the influence of Geoffrey of Monmouth, Sir Thomas Malory and Chretien de Troyes upon later literature, culture and history. That modern adaptations of questing knights, grail seeking, chivalry, and so on, have been so successful points to the universality of Arthurian themes.

The scope is vast and contents include all the main characters, spread of the legends, historical novels and drama, romantic tradition, holy grail, prophecies and much more. By selecting a certain chapter, the reader may follow a theme from its origins to the present. A complete index makes access to information required an easy task. This is a splendid, quick reference work for the scholar and lay reader alike.

Magazines

NORTHERN EARTH. Q. £7.50 for 4. Cheques to Northern Earth Mysteries Group at 10 Jubilee Street, Mytholmroyd, Hebden Bridge, W. Yorks., HX7 5NP. No. 109. Gordon Harris still peddling his nodes and alignments (I've seen his Three Stone Burn stone circle map and it makes a spider's web look simple) where so many trackways could

GULLIBLE'S TRAVELS

(Continued from Page 4)

DAWKINS boasted of having been invited to New York just for a post dinner to celebrate *Time* magazine's '100 Most Influential People of the Year' and built this diversion into his route to Galapagos. The trip in Darwin's footsteps was something of a 'freebie', whereby Dawkins had to give three lectures to the other cruisers, who had paid handsomely for this dubious privilege. More of that irony here, too, as his host was the Centre for Inquiry, an American charity devoted to secular humanism and, er, critical thinking.

Next time you see 'Irony Dick' – or, if you prefer, 'The Dawk' – pontificating, just think of the booby boob.

References:

- (1) The Times, 31/8/96
- (2) Letters, The Independent, 19/9/02
- (3) For more background on Dawkins' multitudinous intolerances to a sane world see Richard Whittaker, 'What the Dawkins?', *Fortean Times*, No. 105, 1997.
- (4) Cristina Odone, 'Let us pray for the soul of Richard Dawkins', *The Observer*, 13/5/07
- (5) Neil Spencer, 'The Dawkins Delusion: Science is good, the rest bad', *The Observer*, 12/8/07
- (6) Kathryn Flett, *The Observer*, 19/8/07
- (7) Richard Dawkins, 'My week', *The Observer*, 27/5/07
- (8) Bryan Nelson, Letters, *The Observer*, 10/6/07

Crossing the Line ⁺(cont. from Page 14)

SOUTER'S BLUNDER. Stagecoach's retention of the lucrative South West Trains franchise caused to surface a story on the origin of the bus and rail company's name. It was set up by Brian Souter and his sister Ann Gloag in 1980. 'Their brother came up with the name Stagecoach, allegedly after Mr Souter's suggestion of Blunderbus was rejected'. (Tosin Sulaiman, *Business big shot*, *The Times*, 23/9/06)

McKIE'S BLUNDER. The ghostly, deluded Robert McKie caused his boss to apologise over his global warming scaremongering article error. 'In *God's Railway under threat* (News, last week), we said that Isambard Kingdom Brunel originally built an "atmospheric railway" in south Devon "with carriages pushed by jets of air from a pipe below the track". An atmospheric railway works on a vacuum principle, with carriages being "sucked" (propelled by atmospheric pressure), rather than pushed by jets of air.' That's the science editor's knuckles rapped.

RAIL GAG. Two Essex girls were walking along when they came across some tracks. One said: "They look like deer tracks." "No," said the other, "they look fox tracks." They were still arguing when the train hit them.

Magazines (continued)

could never be tenable. The late Jim Kimmis contemplates the benefits of walking and communing with landscapes; Orkney dowsing. No. 110. Interstitiality/simulacra at Callanish; novel thoughts on the hummadruz, shock from megaliths and bees; enigmatic erratic/outcrop known as Hitching Stone, near Keighley, whose mysteries are aired. No. 111. Curious, purist interpretation of shamanism which is as shallow as the more usual catch-all New Age nonsense, but Gail-Nina Anderson's binge drinking odyssey in outer Chesterfield makes up for the po-faced Alby Stone lecture; Lundy egg-shaped stone circle; editor John Billingsley's caving experience; Brittany; and an un-PC piss-take of the Irish off the Internet and as I pointed out on the fine NEReaders forum, its not the Apennines between France and Spain, but the Pyrennes. Book reviews, archaeology notes and worldwide EM round-up each issue.

MAGONIA. Interpreting contemporary vision and belief. Winding down to reappear in less-ufological guise. No. 95. Very lucid history of ufology by Peter Rogerson, charting reasons for its peaks and troughs, concluding that the Grey 'were us all along'. Editor John Rimmer on the Warminster 'flap' and its very Britishness; multiple embarrassments in the wacky world of 'ufology'. No. 96. David Sivier on the opponents of traditional Christianity from the ancient Gnostics, through the Jesuits to anti-feminist Catholicism and Dan Brown. Nigel Watson analyses some YouTube and Google footage: UFO, unarmed aerial vehicle or hoax? Plus Betty and Barney Hill's abduction revisited.

TOUCHSTONE. Last bastion of old-fashioned Watkinsian and dowsing ley hunting and none the worse for that. Magazine of the Surrey Earth Mysteries

Group. Q. £2 for 4. Cheques to J. Goddard at Fostercourt Lodge, 192 Stroude Road, Egham, Surrey, TW20 9UT. No. 77.. Here we have Jimmy's account of the Society of Ley Hunters' moot on Lundy with a resume of Robin Heath's talk on metrology; modern stone circle near the M25 at Gatton Park; Kent leys. No. 78. Interesting conjecture by Bob Shave linking the posited E-line (a major ley) as it passes through Dorset with pioneer fossil hunter Mary Anning and John Fowles masterful novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. Report of talk by Paul Broadhurst on earth energies, saints, green men and dragons. Cornish UFOs. No. 79. Derbyshire leys and dragons. Lundy moot précis peieces on islan's stone circle, Wiltshire stone circles (Swindon-born megalithomaniac Diana Dors visited one of two at Coate!), ancient stones in Essex and Herts., and modern ('not fakes') stone circles. Gordon Millington obituary.

AMSKAYA. Magazine of the STAR Fellowship. Same address and price at *Touchstone*. No. 70. In line with its policy of supporting the old-fashioned, pre-abduction era contactess, there is a 1950s case of two U.S. sisters supposedly meeting Space People and one of them being taken for a trip in outer space. A reprint of a *Daily Express* article concerning Prince Philip and ufology has my friend and co-author of *Flying Sauceres – a Social History of Ufology*, Dr David Clarke here as 'Sir' David Clarke (a transcription error by *Amskaya* or had I missed Dave's knighthood?). No. 71. My old friend the Aert de Gelder UFO painting of 1710, *The Baptism of Christ*, from Cambridge's Fitzwilliam Museum, appears with many other depictions of flying saucers in art through the ages (see my piece co-written with Chris Castle, *Aert de Gelder's 'UFO' Painting*, *Journal of Geomancy* Vol. 2 No. 2, 1978; *Fortean Times*, No. 25, 1978). Also 1942 Los Angeles scare with gunfire at aerial object and Stratford-upon-Avon strange sighting.

FORTEAN TIMES. Newsstand. £3.99. No. 222. New cosmological oscillation theory to challenge the popular 'Big Bang' (anyway I lean to the anthropomorphic); Bob Rickard's stories from *FT*'s past deals with the urban legends of a cow falling from an aircraft and sinking a boat (1990 and 1997 versions); new doubts cast upon 1950s contactee George Adamski's veracity; did Egyptians trade with and have small colonies in Australia 1,000BC?; new doubts on Betty Andreasson abduction; Princeton 'microPK' lab closes; U.S. 'gravity anomaly' (or optical illusion) to close and have road cover it; Stevens' report into Princess Di death; Lourdes cult and what went before; Paul Screeton letter on Veil of Veronica and kidnap victim Stephanie Slater. No. 223. Editor David Sutton's film interest to the fore in a horror-fest themed issue. Main article on Hammer Films marginally fortan, but there is an inquiry into the truth about 'Countess Dracula' Elisabeth Bathory. Disappointing analysis of conspiracy theories; weird Victoriana. No. 224. The infamous urban legend that billion-dollar company Procter & Gamble gave a percentage of profits to 'the Church of Satan' led to a 12-year legal battle which has ended with the defendants ordered to pay £9.7m. As a panther sighter myself, I see this melanistic leopard is now officially with other fauna to look for along the Castle Eden Walkway and ABCs are lurking elsewhere in tourist literature: plus massive 2003-2006 round-up. Conspiracies aplenty: JFK, Princess Di and strong likelihood Dr Davie Kelly was murdered, with former Foreign Secretary Robin Cook's heart attack post-mortem considered suspicious by the M.P. for Lewes; after cold fusion we have 'bubble fusion' as cheap energy; Arthur Koestler Chair piece has Guy Lyon Playfair sailing close to libelling three famous sceptics (see letters subsequently); magically-inspired art of Rosaleen Norton. No. 225. Retrospective of 60 years of UFOs, with Jerome Clark the most perceptive of 16 commentators; UFOs and philately; New Mexico folklore reconsidered in the light of ufological research; argument that human evolution is ongoing, that hundreds of genes are still changing and within our race are Indigos; wedding of John Michell and Denise Price. No. 226. Mat Coward, of Mythconceptions authorship, makes a gross slur upon my profession by stating that 'a journalist who checks facts is proverbially as common as a donkey with 14 legs' which is a myth applicable to only a tiny amount of hacks and warrants an apology. Fine analysis of fear of clowns (often associated with child abduction); fascinating connection between Rennes-le-Chateau, Girona, Kabbalism and earth energy centring upon author Patrice Chaplin; man who stayed awake in Penzance for 266 hours reported 'giggling pixies and elves' on his computer screen, much as after post-dental treatment sleep deprivation demands and I recall hallucinating a small blue entity (tooth fairy?); conspiracy paranoia post 7/7; Silbury latest; proto urban legend suggested for accounts of two giantesses washed upon the shore of 10th Iceland and medieval Korea – the latter 73ft long with a 3ft vagina, the former with a six-foot nose. No. 227. Asia special with spooky Thailand and weird Bangkok radio show; alien delusions (modern demonic possession; Hollywood, UFOs and the 1980s; photo anomalies discredited, including that legend of the 'ghost boy' life-sized cardboard cutout of Ted Danson in *Three Men and a Baby*. No. 228. Victims of gang-stalking techniques called 'Tis' (targeted individuals) have become a mind-control genre of conspiracy. Also apprentices' 1967 hoax of six equidistant 'UFOs' along a straight line, which proved the U.K. had no contingency plan in place should they have been genuine; Andy Roberts on John Michell and hippie subculture's role in promoting a spiritual role to the UFO. Obituaries of David Solomon and Norman Cohn; tourism deceptions; animal hybrids; full moon effects; ABC flaps; phantom helicopter flap of 1974 a rumour-fuelled panic and 'visual epidemic'; Mothman legends from 1967 resonate in 2007.