

# FOLKLORE

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FRONTIERS

# Folklore Frontiers

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FOLKLORE FRONTIERS is a privately-published, non-profit making a magazine covering various aspects of folklore, particularly contemporary legend, ancient and modern traditions, plus modern culture and *forteana*. It is edited and published by PAUL SCREETON. Address is 5 Egton Drive, Seaton Carew, Hartlepool, TS25 2AT. Subscription for three issues is £6. Cheques to P. SCREETON (NOT Folklore Frontiers). I can also be contacted at [screeonpaul@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:screeonpaul@yahoo.co.uk). If your subscription expires with this issue a 'X' will appear on the line below.

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## THE DIARY

WHAT should I offer as an excuse for such a glorious cover this issue? It was either this or the mummified Sudbury Cat. Non-PC totty is better than a dead cat surely? Previously a topless model (FF38:2-3) illustrated the fraudulent research which claimed men can live longer by ogling women's breasts. Note this is recorded as 'false' by [snopes.com](http://snopes.com). The topic refuses to lie down and the latest site, from November 1 last year, seeking opinions is [www.u2ask.com](http://www.u2ask.com). Pure satirismus – which is a new category/column introduced this issue. Meanwhile, the Daily Star offered reasons to think positive, such as, well, demand for mega bras in G, H, and J cup sizes is expected to boom on the high street in 2009. The average boob size will jump from 34C to a more curvaceous 36D. Here at FF Towers we salute our cover girl, then 17-year-old Linda Dawn Saunders' 40 inches. (*Mayfair*, Vol. 8 No. 4 of 1973 and for collectors such as Aidan Moffat, the famous Falkirk songsmith and recording star who is unemmbarrassed by collecting Seventies soft porn mags, (*Observer Music Monthly*, November 2008), a copy of this issue was up for only £5.50 on the internet). So this is not really gratuitous! The same *Daily Star* article by Tom Hutchison claimed 'the mercury is going to be burning hotter than ever before in 2009. Forecasters reckon we're going to see record temperatures, thanks to global warming.' (*Daily Star*, 1/1/09) Of course, if June to August is a washout and cold, the climate change cranks will simply blame severe weather upon manmade emissions. Sceptics like me are in a no win situation.

DURING your editor's tavernology expeditions, while staying on a farm in South Devon, he was taken to the village of Scoriton for a drink. I had read Eileen Buckle's book *The Scorriton (sic) Mystery*, featuring Arthur Bryant, one of ufology's most puzzling contactee claimants. The village was again in the news when four drinking pals saved the pub, the Tradesman's Arms, by buying it to run themselves. When the 150-year-old inn closed, they raised £230,000 to reopen it. (*Daily Mirror* 15/11/08) And while on the subject of pubs, Pam Lelliott, 31 – motto "I drink therefore I am" – has started a philosophy discussion group at her local in Brighton. (*The Sun*, 31/5/08)

LOVE has cooled in global warming fanatic George Monbiot's home. The Stowe-educated 45-year-old climate change activist had taken TV producer wife Angharad and two-year-old daughter Hannah from dreamy Oxford to dreary mid-Wales. However, he is now alone at the 100-year-old house in Machynlleth, having been dumped even before he could make the home an eco-paradise. (Ephraim Hardcastle column, *Daily Mail*, 12/8/08)

BEST-SELLING novelist Magnus Mills chose for a heroes and villains series 1066's King Harold Goodwinson. His wife (or mistress) was Edith Swanneck and after the battle, Harold's face was so badly mutilated that she was called to identify his body by other means. (*The Independent Magazine*, 7/3/08) Wikipedia states this was 'some private mark known only to herself', whereas I've somewhere seen it as lovebites!

NO SOONER was the ink dry on the last issue with its puffin tale (FF59:2(2)) than along came more puffin magic. Chef Gordon Ramsay's Icelandic 'sky fising' guru bagged four of these cute little seabirds in a big net and the two of them ripped out their hearts and ate them raw. Such antics attracted internet attention and 42 complaints to watchdog Ofcom. Responding to the moral outrage, Ofcom ruled that the puffins were caught and killed humanely in a country where they are plentiful and a popular part of the national diet. (*The Guardian* g2, 17/9/08) Another Northern moral panic featured a potent Orcadian beer called Skull Splitter, which could be withdrawn from sale following claims its Viking-branded bottles have too aggressive a theme. The Orkney Brewery, which has produced the award-winning 8.5% proof ale for two decades, said it was 'stunned' by the threat, which follows a report commissioned by the alcohol watchdog The Portman Group. The brewery says the beer is named after Thorfinn 'Hausakluif' Einarsson, the seventh Viking Earl of Orkney (947-977). He was nicknamed Skull-splitter (Hausakluif in Norse), a common Viking soubriquet. (*The Observer*, 21/9/08)

(Continued on Back Page)

Bush Breakfast when they unveiled another. Their latest two-year-old, Bollywood Style, finished second in his debut in a Lingfield seller. Tattenham Corner column learned that the 'Bollywood' style is to have the pubic area shaved and covered with a henna tattoo. (11)"

After that, I had better put in a serious, sociological paragraph for balance. In her book *Bodies of Inscription: A Cultural History of the Modern Tattoo Community*, Margo DeMello remarks that while the middle class regard working-class tattoos as formulaic and ugly, they regard their own as 'art': exclusive, unique and of intrinsic merit. (2)

Ho, hum. But what if you want rid of the tatt? You could try copying Pharrell Williams. After covering most of his body in tattoos he wants a change, so he's planning on spending a small fortune at a North Carolina clinic that grows new skin in the lab, which will be stitched over his old tats. After that, Williams wants to have a new set done. (12)

**References:** 1. Anne Campbell, 'Brad's marked out as a mummy's boy', *Metro*, 30/8/07; 2. Janice Turner, 'Tattoo obsession: the body as a home page', *The Times*, 13/9/08; 3. *Daily Mirror*, 6/12/08; 4. Marcus Barnes, 'Tatt's awful! - 'Don't get tattoos done abroad when you're drunk'', *Sunday Sport*, 3/6/07 (other examples were depicted); 5. Amber Cowan, 'Big sister's all grown up', *The Times body&soul*, 23/6/07; 6. Victoria Newton, 'Tatt's messy, Jesse', *The Sun*, 30/8/07;

7. Marie O'Riordan, 'Ah, Romeo and Juliet. Max and, er Peaches', *The Observer*, 17/8/08. 8. Rachel Cooke, 'Big Brother, Day 2,935', *The Observer Magazine*, 27/7/08. 9. John Troup, 'Tatt's my boy', *The Sun*, 2/8/08. 10. *Hartlepool Mail*, 11/3/08. 11. *The Observer Sport*, 12/8/07. 12. John Naish, 'Get your tats out', *The Times body&soul*, 26/7/08



**AT 13, Linsey Dawn McKenzie had a tattoo on her right shoulder that read 'MUM' but had it modified to an astrological design when her mother disapproved of her decision to move into hardcore porn. Also a certain Sunday newspaper regaled readers with tales of her and stepsister Alyson embarking in 'high-class' prostitution. Pictured here, she vowed to get that tatt tattered by laser. (Nick Cracknell, *Sunday Sport*, 'Happy 16<sup>th</sup> bare-thday!', 14/8/94)**



### TAT'S GOTTA GO

LOVELY Linsey has revealed that she sneaked out of home when she was 16 — to have a tattoo! She said she tricked her doting 41-year-old mum Lesley into lending her £10 for the cinema. But she confessed: "I went to a tattoo parlour instead and asked the guy to write the word "Mum" on my arm. When I got home she went mad and now I regret having it done. I am going to have it removed by laser."

By Antony Clayton

# The search for London's mummified pub cats

We English love our cats. As well as providing us with companionship these elegant creatures have also played a significant role in our folklore. Black cats are generally considered lucky, although in some English counties it is thought to be unlucky if a black cat crosses your path, especially on the way to work, or if it sits with its back to you. A cat's perfectly normal routine of washing itself or scratching the ground in a particular way was interpreted in the past as foretelling the day's weather. [Iona Opie and Moira Tatem *A Dictionary of Superstitions* (Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York 1996) pp.57-63. For a general account see Katherine M. Briggs *Nine Lives: Cats in Folklore* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1980)

Black cats in particular could be of medicinal value, as described in the *Dictionary of English Folklore*:

Various cures involving the death and mutilation of a black cat are recorded in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: its head, burnt to a powder, was supposed good for eyeache, and blood from its cut-off tail or ears for shingles and erysipelas; the whole tail, buried under the threshold kept sickness away. Styes were healed by stroking them seven or nine times with a black cat's tail – hopefully still attached to its owner. [Jacqueline Simpson and Steve Roud *A Dictionary of English Folklore* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000) pp.49-50. Erysipelas is a skin disease also known as St. Anthony's Fire.]

Life was far more hazardous for cats prowling the streets of London in the Tudor period. During the Reformation a group of Londoners shaved a cat, dressed it in mock Catholic priest's vestments and hanged it on a gallows in Cheapside. [Nigel Pennick *Skulls, Cats and Witch Bottles* ((Fenris Wolf, Cambridge, 1986) p.8] In 1677, as part of the celebrations for Queen Elizabeth's Day, a wickerwork effigy of the Pope filled with live cats was carried through the streets; it was finally incinerated on a bonfire. [The anniversary of Elizabeth I's accession to the throne on 17 November 1558 was for many years an important Protestant festival. See David Cressy *Bonfires and Bells: National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1989) p. Their identification as the feline familiars of witches can be found in writings and trial reports from the sixteenth century. [See for example James Sharpe *Instruments of Darkness, Witchcraft in England 1550-1750* (Hamish Hamilton, London, 1996) pp.71-74 and Emma Wilby 'The Witch's Familiar and the Fairy in Early Modern England and Scotland' *Folklore* 111 (2000) pp.283-305. For hares in folklore see George Ewart Evans and David Thomson *The Leaping Hare* (Faber & Faber, London, 1972)] Witches were often thought to transform themselves into cats, although hares are mentioned more often in contemporary accounts.

It is not surprising, perhaps, that cats were used to ward off evil and witchcraft in less enlightened times. Their desiccated bodies have been found in old houses, sometimes posed as if on the prowl and accompanied by a dead rat or mouse, so that their interment may have been intended to scare away vermin; dead rats and mice were often nailed to barn doors for similar deterrent effect. Folklore collector John Philipps Emslie remembered seeing seven moles "nailed upon a barn" at Perivale in the late nineteenth century. "The moles, as well as other vermin," he reported "are nailed up to keep others away: dozens are sometimes nailed up, and, when they rot, others are put in their places: this is done in accordance with a tradition handed down from generation to generation." [Francis Celoria ed. 'Folklore collected around 1860-93 in London and Middlesex by John Philipps Emslie' *London Studies* No.1 (1974) pp.38-86 p.44]

Live burial may also have been a form of apotropaic magic: the body of an animal secreted somewhere in the house would repel an attack by any malign entity attempting to enter in the guise of that creature. In many instances it was an unfortunate cat that was trussed up and left to die under a floor or roof, or in the cavity between walls. It was believed that their mummified bodies would act as a guardian against an attack by a local witch. Examples have been discovered around the country; a schedule of these relics was first drawn up when large numbers of rural houses began to be renovated. [Margaret M. Howard 'Dried Cats' *Man* No.61 November 1951 pp.149-151. See also Ralph Merrifield *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic* (Batsford, London, 1987) pp.129-31 and Nigel Pennick *op. cit.* pp.8-15]

Jeremy Harte, in his study of these sacrifices, has commented: "The twisted bodies of these sacrifices always arouse mixed feelings when builders come across them. A blow of the hammer breaks open the little hollow where they have been concealed for two or three hundred years; people discuss it as part of their ownership of the past (so curious, these rural superstitions) but they soon go quiet on the subject and have them circumspectly walled up again. Then the cats can continue their work as magical guardians, whereas when they were laid out on the kitchen table, they looked too much like the remains of abused living creatures." [Jeremy Harte 'Pussycat, pussycat, where have you been?' Available online at <http://www.indigogroup.co.uk/edge/pussycat.htm>]

Attempts to move the animal's body can result in catastrophe. The removal of the so-called 'Sudbury Cat', discovered during the renovation of an old watermill in Sudbury, Suffolk in 1971 was reported to have caused so much misfortune to those involved that its shrivelled carcass was re-interred in its original resting place by the local vicar. [Pennick *op. cit.* pp.11-13]

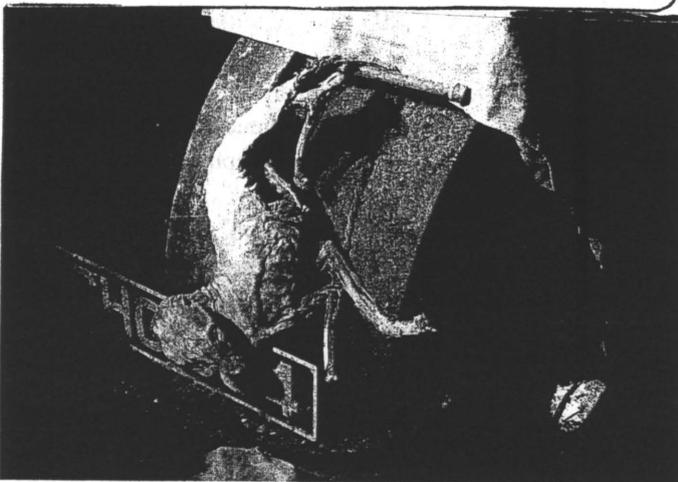
Ever since I first saw them a few years ago, I have been intrigued by the gruesome black and mummified remains of a pair of cats and rats on view in the bar of one of my occasional watering holes: The Stag in All Saints Street, Hastings. The card below their display case claims that the cats once belonged to a local witch named Hannah. They perished, together with their owner as they lay sleeping in the pub's chimney when a fire was lit below. Fired by a mixture of distaste and intrigue I decided to embark on a quest to discover if there were any mummified cats left in London's hostels.

I remembered having read that one such sorry creature could be found at the Tiger Tavern opposite the main public entrance to the Tower of London. "In the upper bar", according to John Wittich in his slim book on London pubs, "can be seen, by pressing a light switch on the wall, a mummified cat said to have been stroked by the young Princess Elizabeth when she was imprisoned in the Tower." [John Wittich *Discovering London's Inns and Taverns* (Shire Publications, Princes Risborough, 1978, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1986) p.21] I decided to begin my search there. Alas, when I arrived at Tower Hill, instead of the Tiger Tavern and its fabled feline I was greeted by the sight of a huge new office and retail complex.

Coincidentally, I had read of a superstitious custom associated with a cat at London's superior Savoy Hotel. At meetings of the Other Club – founded in 1911 by Winston Churchill and the future Lord Birkenhead – it is considered unlucky for a party of thirteen to dine in their favoured location of the Pinafore Room. Whenever such a situation arises 'Kaspar' the cat is called upon to make the numbers up to the less unlucky fourteen. 'Kaspar' is a beautiful three-foot-high wooden cat (crafted by Basil Ionides in the 1920s), who is given his own place at the table, complete with napkin, cutlery, and wine glass or bowl of milk. Despite the closure of the Savoy late in 2007 for a total refurbishment and the sale of much of the hotel's contents, 'Kaspar' has been archived, awaiting the re-opening of the Savoy in 2009. [Stanley Jackson *The Savoy, The Romance of a Great Hotel* (Frederick Muller Ltd. London, 1979) pp.84-85, 177-179. Personal communication with the Savoy Hotel.]

Fuller's Griffin Brewery, close to Hogarth's House in Chiswick, claims to be haunted by the mewing sound of a cat that fell into a sugar-dissolving vessel in the 1950s. The church of All Hallows-by-the-Tower was said to have been haunted by the ghost of a white Persian cat, which had once belonged to the church's female organist. So devoted was she to the welfare of animals that every winter she would personally put sand down on the roads near the Tower leading down to the Thames and the docks to prevent horses from slipping on snow and ice. She brought her beloved cat along with her to services and, when it died, requested that it be buried in the church. In spite of the fact that her request was refused, she may nevertheless have interred the pet clandestinely within the walls, as the ghost of a white cat was spotted on a number of occasions in the vicinity of the organ loft. Following the destruction of the loft in the Blitz and a major reconstruction of the church, no further sightings of the feline phantom have been reported. [J. A. Brooks *Ghosts of London* (Jarrod, Norwich, 1991) p.65] St James Garlickhythe, more famous for the supposed spirit of its mummified occupant, is also reported to be home to a spectral cat. It would certainly be more appropriate if this ghost were to haunt the church of St Michael Paternoster Royal in College Hill, a few yards to the east, as this is the place where Dick Whittington chose to be buried.

The search will continue in the next instalment: 'Dicks and Pussies'



'Arnold' the mummified fox was a macabre warning to anyone attempting to tamper with the Wallis roller, which was his last resting place!

FOXY ROLLER. Friends pass on all manner of mags and papers for me to scour. Even I was surprised to be snipping from a mag devoted to traction engines. The lead story involved a collection of six vehicles and host of other vintage kit made by the father of Henry Lillywhite, who was disposing the items from their mothballed garage. What caught my eye was a mummified fox attached to a Wallis & Steevens (sic) 'Advance' roller No. 8104 of 1936. Sadly the text did not go into detail about the fox's provenance. (Old Glory, No. 218, April 2008). For more mummified cats see FF45:9(1) Also an article about *Most Haunted* TV series presenter Yvette Fielding's house noted that 'outside the bathroom is a 400-year-old mummified cat that is supposed to ward off evil spirits. It comes in useful since Yvette, 40, is convinced the house is haunted. (Fabulous, News of the World mag, ? 2008

# Newslines

**WEB OF LIES.** The inventor of the world wide web has called for a new labeling system to help people distinguish fact from fiction when browsing the internet. David Derbyshire wrote: 'Sir Tim Berners-Lee said he was increasingly worried at the way his creation is being used to spread lies, hoaxes and urban myths.' Sir Tim's comments came at the unveiling of a foundation designed to vet websites and flag up those that are trustworthy and reliable. He invented the web while working at the Cern particle physics laboratory in Switzerland 20 years ago and devised the system of organizing and linking pages on the net used today and created the first website only as long ago as 1991. But while the net has become the world's definitive source of information, its 100 million websites are rife with errors and misinformation.

Derbyshire's article also recorded five current internet myths, one of which coincidentally concerned Cern itself and whether the Large Hadron Collider there would create a black hole.

There was also Nostradamus predicting the Twin Towers attack. A four-line verse apparently written in 1654 warning that 'two brothers' would be torn apart by chaos. It was a fake.

Sarah Palin's fifth child – born with Down's syndrome – was really her unmarried daughter's. Untrue. A spark from a mobile phone can blow up a petrol station.

Scientists having shown this oldie to have no truth whatsoever.

And actress Jamie Lee Curtis is a hermaphrodite, whereby emails and chatrooms have spread this 'upsetting claim'. (Daily Mail, 16/9/08)

**WHO PUT THE CUNT IN ...** Council staff in Scunthorpe have been blocked from getting on their own website because the name of the town contains the 'c' word. Several workers have been refused access to the town council's website after a new dirty-word filter was fitted to a handful of staff's computers as a trial.

Unfortunately the super-sensitive filth filter was blocking them from going on it because it was picking up the four-letter word. I'd seen this claimed previously, so it all may be fiction, but council employee Tom Hanson was quoted as saying: "It's not the first time people here have had this kind of problem. A similar problem occurred last year when people were trying to Google the town to find out information on it." He then added cheekily: "I wonder if the residents of Lightwater have the same problem?" (Sunday Sport, 7/9/08)

**THE 6.6 DEGREES.** Still on the subject of computing, after checking 30 billion electronic messages, Microsoft researchers say the theory of six degrees of separation linking us by chains of acquaintances stands up. In fact,

with 6.6 billion people worldwide, researchers say we are distanced by precisely 6.6 degrees of separation. David Smith commented: 'The news will come as no surprise to film buffs who for years have been playing the parlour game Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon, in which they link other actors to Bacon in six films or fewer.' Researcher Eric Horvitz was quoted as revealing: "To me, it was shocking. What we are seeing suggests there may be a social connectivity constant for humanity. People have had this suspicion that we are really close. But we are showing on a very large scale that this idea goes beyond folklore." (The Observer, 3/8/08)

**THE ROBSTER ZAP'd!** Singer Robbie Williams has bought a £7m. mansion in Compton Bassett, Wiltshire, whose large estate 'is crossed by so-called "ley lines", which some New Age devotees believe have mystical powers and UFO connections.' Nigel Pauley continued by claiming Williams chose the location to spot UFOs and crop circles. (Daily Star, 13/12/08) Earlier Williams was reported to be quitting music to be a full-time investigator, having seen several UFOs since childhood and a 'big strip of black light' (! – actually some of the piece is quite revelatory unless he was, well ... ) appear in a recording studio. (3am column, Daily Mirror, 8/3/08)

**LEUKAEMIA LINK?** From ley lines to electric power lines. A leaked Government-commissioned report has raised fresh fears of a link between power lines and cancer. The Stakeholder Advisory Group on Extremely Low Frequency Electromagnetic Radiation says a ban on building homes and schools close to overhead power cables is the 'best available option', pointing out that some countries have 'corridors' for high voltage power lines where development is not allowed. A 2002 California Department of Health Services paper suggested electromagnetic fields are 'possibly carcinogenic' in terms of childhood leukaemia. (The Daily Telegraph, 21/4/07)

**NOMINATIVE DETERMINISM.** A 62-year-old millionaire housewife threw herself in front of the 5.50am Waterloo to Reading train on March 31, 2008, after starting to go deaf in one ear, an inquest heard. Her name: Melodie Hart. (The Daily Telegraph, 4/10/08)

**BARN CAR.** Tales of vintage and valuable vehicles appearing in barns continue and the latest is a 1937 Bugatti Type 57S Atlantic – one of only 17 ever made – worth £6m. The family asked auctioneers Bonhams to protect their identities, but one nephew said: "We can't bloody well believe this fantastic car was in there. It was a bit of local folklore that he might have had a Bugatti but nobody was certain. It's incredible, he (the late Dr Harold Carr – more nominative determinism) hasn't used it for nearly 50 years. He just left it parked up." (The Observer, 4/1/09; Daily Star, 2/1/09)

**HILL FIGURES** (FF28:3-4, passim). The Marquess of Bath, 76, famed for his eccentric attire and bevy of wifelets whom he has no intention of marrying, tells friends the Cerne Abbas Giant in Dorset is responsible for his existence. Alexander's father, Henry – after the death of his first heir, Thomas, in 1930 – took his wife Daphne to the site after hearing that having sexual intercourse on the hill figure's chalk-based genitalia was said to guarantee pregnancy. The diarist's source reported: "Daphne had been told she might never be able to have more children. So Daphne and Henry spent a pretty uncomfortable night out in the open trying everything. Thankfully it worked." Good. The aristocracy needs oddballs. (Ephraim Hardcastle column, Daily Mail, 17/9/08) Meanwhile, cheeky A-level students drew a 30ft penis on a playing field to celebrate leaving the grammar school in Brixham, Devon. (Daily Star, 7/8/08)

**BRITNEY** (FF39:3). How nasty can some people get? Troubled Ms Spears has been more troubled by a hacker who has got his teeth into the urban myth about vagina dentate – a topic normally airbrushed these days. The *Daily Sport* recorded: "The pertlet has a page on Twitter which is a website just like Facebook. Some bloke hacked into her page and posted a message pretending to be her. He wrote: "Hi y'all Brit here. Just wanted to update y'all on the size of my vagina. It's about four feet wide with razor sharp teeth." Imagine if that were true.... You probably still would, wouldn't you?" (James Crisp column, Daily Sport, 8/1/09; Daily Star, 12/1/09; Twitter.com.

**ANIMAL RIGHTS WRONGED** (FF20:10-12, passim). A reversal of sorts where humans – not animals – were wronged. See previous for examples. Here green campaigners called in police after discovering an illegal logging site a nature reserve at Subkowy, in northern Poland – only to find it was the work of beavers. (Northern Echo, 10/12/08)

**SIGNS OF THE TIMES**. Your article on pub signs reminded me of a wonderful example of changing names. A posh local village, Petham in Kent, had a pub called the Duke of Wellington. The brewery sold the pub to a private owner who replaced the sign with one depicting the jazz musician Duke Ellington on one side and John Wayne on the other. Sadly, his humour was not appreciated by the upper-crust locals, whose boycott eventually led to the Duke's closure. Jim Martin, Canterbury, Kent. (The Observer, 28/9/08)

**From Nick Brown, York.**

Just looking at the 'railwaysleeper.com' website, and there's a mention of an urban myth, that if I'm correct I don't think was in your book. It centres around the perception that both the RAF and the Luftwaffe in the war used to use the tracks for flying practice. To this day there is a reluctance in using machinery to cut through railway sleepers for fear of damaging blades due to embedded bullets. (Editor: It's not in the book, never heard of it and what an obscure source! Kilgraney Railway Sleepers, Notts.

**From Desmond Coakham, Ballymoney.**

May I refer to your FF 55? The Edwina paragraph put me in mind of John Major. He carried out the buggeration of BR (British Rail), and while his throwing the leg, as we say here, with Ms Currie is his own affair, I admit to once fancying Mrs Major.

No, it reminds me of a silly press attack on JM – his propensity for wearing his shirt tucked into his underpants was fairly scoffed at. (Editor: This is satirismus. Described once as his only scoop and maliciously manufactured at that by Alastair Campbell when political editor at the *Daily Mirror* and since oft-repeated and believed) Probably before your time, but when most of us wore braces, underpants had two loops on the waistband through which one passed said braces to button them on to the trousers. I fancy Major was taught to do this when young and got into the habit. Elastic used to lose its properties quite easily and U/Ps would otherwise end up around your crutch.

Regarding your ley history, I never knew John Michell was an old Etonian! Did I see something about him resurrecting his St Michael Line? This exciting idea made me get the unfolded O.S. and find it was rubbish.

**From Norman Darwen, Bolton, Lancs.**

In an article lamenting the decline of chain store Woolworths (*Manchester Evening News*, 24/11/08) columnist Ray King mentions a story 'recently retold in the obituary of ... Ike Turner'. The story, which I heard certainly heard before the rhythm and blues musician's death (12/12/07) is that a record executive, observing the gaudiness of Ike's furniture, commented: "Hey, so you can spend \$70,000 dollars at Woolworths" – though I am fairly sure when I first heard it the store was Wal Mart or something similar.

# Proto-legends

**PRISCILLA, QUEEN OF THE PANTO.** Don't know how true this one is, but it appeared in response to singer Cilla Black doing her last ever pantomime at Liverpool's Empire Theatre this season. She supposedly once asked the audience how she should kill the baddie in *Aladdin*, and a boy shouted back; "Sing to him, Cilla!" (The Whip column, The Sun, 22/10/08) Of course, this is similar to another tale – rescues from our **Those oldies** section – whereby Kathryn Flett was reviewing *The Diary of Anne Frank* (BBC1). Kathryn wrote: 'Little chance here of a repeat of the famous reaction to a Broadway adaptation of the diary starring Pia Zadora in which an audience member shouted at the Nazis, "She's in the attic!" (Sadly, though famous, it's also famously apocryphal. Tragically, there was no such production.)' (The Observer Review, 11/1/09)

**HOLE TRUTH.** 'A Japanese bikini model says her big breasts have helped overturn a court conviction for criminal damage. Serena Kozakura was accused of kiciking in her boyfriend's door and crawling inside, apparently because he was with another woman. In her appeal, her lawyer held up a plate showing the size of the hole and said that she could not squeeze through with her 43in bust.' (Hartlepool Mail, 7/3/08) I'm a little suspicious because Oriental women are generally small breasted, but then again her name is half Western.

**NO ROOM AT THE SHOWER.** Many are the apocryphal tales of the famous not being recognized with embarrassing or hilarious consequences. The ubiquitous TV presenter and columnist Ben Fogle recalled: 'On my own pharology expedition several years ago, I visited Muck in the Inner Hebrides, where I was told of a visit by two "yachties" who approached the laird of the island, Lawrence MacEwan, to ask if they could use a shower. He gruffly declined the couple's request. It was only once the pair had set off that MacEwan learnt he had just turned away Princess Anne and her husband.' (The Sunday Telegraph, 20/7/08) Earlier Fogle claimed that in 2005 a pack of black squirrels attacked and killed a dog in a Russian park. (The Sunday Telegraph, 25/5/08)

**RAGWORT ALERT.** Another country diarist, Robin Page, wrote dubiously: 'A few years ag I wrote in this column about a farmer in Somerset who was selling ragwort to gullible tourists as bunches of "Summer Gold"; I wish he would increase his picking. The fact is that it can be illegal to have ragwort on your land and this applies to local authorities and Government departments.' The self-styled rustic rebel this time added that he would never buy Scottish honey in case it was produced, not from heather, but from the nectar and pollen of ragwort. Why? Ragwort

toxicity attacks the liver. (The Daily Telegraph Weekend, 30/8/08)

**BANKER!** Nice one from credit crunch land. Matt Roper found the UK's smallest bank, the 131-year-old Stafford Railway Building Society, whose chief executive, Mike Heenan, told 'of one lady who deposited £500 with the Stafford in its early days. Months later she withdrew £200, examined the cash, then complained that they were not the same notes.' (Daily Mirror, 6/12/08)

**DRINKER!** Over the years *Police*, the mag of the Police Federation of England and Wales, has produced marvelous apocrypha. Recently, a drunken man was taken into a South Yorkshire police station, where the custody sergeant asked him how much he'd had to drink. The man replied: "Seventeen pints." The sergeant, based in Rawmarsh, then asked: "on a scale of one to ten, one being completely sober and ten being as drunk as you can be, where would you say you were?2 The man replied: "Rawmarsh, I think." (monitored by The Whip column, The Sun, 28/10/08) Meanwhile, which pop star allegedly shamed herself at a dinner party by getting the wrong end of the stick when the host asked for her car keys? After two bottles of wine, she took the sensible host's attempts to stop her drink-driving to mean it was a swingers' party and lunged for his flies. (Metro, 1/8/08)

**PRIZE PREZZA QUOTE.** Andrew Pierce claims Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott, while in charge of urban development, declared in 1998: "The Green Belt is a Labour achievement and we intend to build on it." (The Daily Telegraph, 23/8/08)

**ARNIE BARGY!** Parents called police after seeing a man in a shop window in Whitehorse, Canada, staring at their children only to find out it was a cardboard cut-out of Arnold Schwarzenegger. (Daily Sport, 7/1/09) Similar to the Ted Danson cut-out 'ghost' in *Three Men and a Baby* myth.

**TURNING A DEAF EAR.** Paramedics and police forced their way into a pensioner's home in Wimbledon, London, after neighbours said he was not answering the door; his hearing-aid battery was found to be flat. (The Observer, 15/6/08)

**PHONE SCAM.** 'A white van man with an "Am I Driving Safely?" sticker on his bumper. The number is his own premium-rate line. So he cuts you up, you ring to complain ... and he collects a fat profit from each call.' (The Snitch column, News of the World, 29/8/08)

**SATAN CAT CULL.** Satanists are stealing dozens of black cats daily to kill them to ward off bad luck, an animal charity claims in Italy. (The Sun, 9/8/08)

# Those oldies

**DEAD PARROT.** As the anonymous compiler of the 'good/bad week for...' column commented: 'Which just goes to show that the oldies really are often the best.' He – or she – was referring to 'how we laughed to discover that the *Monty Python* "dead parrot" joke in fact dates – unbeknown to the Pythons, naturally – from 4<sup>th</sup> century AD Greece. The same joke, only told about a dead slave rather than a parrot, has been uncovered by William Berg, a classics professor.' (The Observer, 16/11/08)

**P-P-P-PILFERED.** Almost as old!, teachers found pupils had smuggled a penguin out of a zoo on to their bus in Cologne, Germany. (The Sun, 13/5/08)

**BEDZZZ...** And almost as ubiquitous. The bed in a Slumberland store being tried out by Gertrude Muller, 72, was so comfy she fell asleep – and was locked in by staff who went home failing to notice her. Emergency services were called to rescue her in Luebz, eastern Germany. (Daily Mirror, 15/3/08)

**OPEN SOME HOURS.** Seen this one recently somewhere, too. Comes from the spoof column Dr Copperfield: Inside the mind of a GP – 'Like the bloke who rang to complain that he'd been ringing the number on our practice leaflet, 0800-1830, and all he got was "number unobtainable". "Sir, they're our opening hours... "' (The Times body&soul, 15/11/08)

**FANNIES AND TITS.** Popular TV quiz *The Weakest Link* had a range of chefs and asked the name of the couple where the male hoped viewers' "doughnuts would turn out like Fannie's." Answer: Cradock. Host Anne Robinson earlier during the show said something like: "According to urban legend, the man who invented the bra was Otto Titling." (BBC1, 6/9/08)

**RIOTOUS BEHAVIOUR.** I had not realized this item of history had been fabricated, but when the Julian and Gregorian calendars finally were sorted in England in 1752, 'a satirical print by Hogarth created the myth that the change prompted riots by clueless mobs demanding the reinstatement of 11 days' lost wages.' Graham Stewart then conceded: 'But as late as the 1880s. some Somerset labourers were still celebrating the old Christmas Day on what had become January 6.' (The Times, 3/1/09)

**CHURCHILL.** Vic Oliver was the first castaway on radio's long-running programme *Desert Island Discs*.

Apparently he was a radio actor and comedian who married Winston Churchill's daughter Sarah in 1936, divorcing in 1945. Loathed by his father-in-law, according to a possible apocryphal anecdote, Oliver asked Churchill who was the most impressive figure during the war. Churchill answered, "Mussolini," and when asked why, he replied, "Because he had the courage to have his son-in-law shot." (QI column, The Daily Telegraph Weekend, 11/10/08)

**CREDIT CRUNCH.** This is Nick Cohen: 'In *Devil Take the Hindmost*, his essential history of financial manias, Edward Chancellor (what nominative determinism – P.S.) says that accounts of mass suicides in the bourses are urban myths ... Several prominent financiers took their lives after the Wall Street Crash, but they killed themselves years later, when all hope of restoring their fortunes had gone. The stories about investors jumping from skyscrapers do not come from police reports, but from Eddie Cantor, the most popular Broadway comedian of the day. He joked about hotel receptionists asking guests if they were there "to sleep or to jump" because he had lost a million dollars in the markets, and developed an understandable taste for black humour.' Which became an item of satirism. (The Observer, 9/11/08)

**CONS' CAKE.** Previously known from home economics pupils baking for teachers, now 'four jail guards ended up in hospital after eating a cake baked by inmates and laced with drugs in Nyborg, Denmark.' (Daily Mirror, 15/3/08)

**CUCKOO!** Satirists are generally unfunny and I never found Alan Coren amusing. *Chocolate and Cuckoo Clocks: The Essential Alan Coren* being a compilation of the late columnist and broadcaster's alleged wit. It takes its title from the first of Coren's *bons mots* to appear in *The Penguin Book of Quotations*: 'Since both (Switzerland's) national products, snow and chocolate, melt, the cuckoo clock was invented solely to give tourists something solid to remember it by.' (The Observer Review, 7/12/08) Actually it was a German invention.

**DIANE'S STAKE.** Here's cheery M.P. Diane Abbot on possible coming electricity blackouts: 'Urban myth has it that, nine months after the 1977 New York blackout, the birth rate rose by 35 per cent. Time to buy shares in Mothercare.' (The Observer, 28/9/08) And news the next month: 'The birth rate soared 50 per cent nine months after a two-week blackout in Maasdriel, Netherlands. (The Sun, 31/10/08)

**UP THE DUFFY.** This must be the most recent and quickest story to become an oldie. Writing of the *Rockferry* singer, Gordon Smart noted that Duffy, real name Aimee Duffy: 'But Duffy has found herself explaining in most of her interviews that she is not Tom Jones' daughter, as rumour has it Stateside. She joked: "I'd like to clear up now that he's not my dad. That is nonsense – unless there's something my mum wants to confess to. I suppose because we're from the same country people team us up. (The Sun, 31/10/08)

**GONE FOR A BURTON.** This phrase was examined by Victoria Coren on the admirable TV series *Balderdash and Piffle*, where if I recall aright, it was believed to refer to getting a demob suit from the tailors Burton. It has been aired more recently through Dr James LeFanu's medical column, beginning by suggesting that 'during the Second World War, RAF pilots would account for a comrade lost in action by suggesting he had merely popped out to the pub for a pint of Burton Ale. (The Sunday Telegraph, 29/6/08) The following week, LeFanu's correspondent Peter Curwen wrote: "My father, an RAF pilot during the last war, told me it came from a branch of Burtons the tailors on the Promenade in Blackpool." The rooms above the shop were taken over as a training centre for wireless operators who, along with air gunners, were at particularly high risk of being killed in action. Thus the flight crews who failed to return from a bombing mission were said to have 'gone for a Burton'. By 13/7/08 reader John Moynihan insisted the phrase came from Burton's Court in Chelsea, the major burial ground for those dying during the great plague of 1665. Thus to 'go for a Burton' was to have your corpse dumped in the pit along with other victims. "The saying was well known but its origins had become obscure," he wrote, "hence the need for RAF pilots to come up with some other explanation."

**A BUM NOTE.** Here's Philip Howard recycling a historical oldie in his etiket (as nowadays spelled) column. If I were to inadvertently break silent but noisome wind in a lift should I own up to the infelicity? – Robert Randell, London. I applaud your honesty, but do not see how it can work. You cannot say: "By the way, I am responsible for that fart. Sorreee." The best way to treat such awful situations is with what a former foreign secretary happily described as 'total ignoral'. We should control our eating and bodily functions so that this does not happen. If only we could live up to our desires. The Earl of Oxford (Edward de Vere), making his low obeisance to Queen Elizabeth I, happened to let out a fart at which he was so abashed that he went to travel abroad for seven years. At his return, the Queen welcomed him home and said: "My Lord, I had quite forgot the fart." To fart in a crowded lift is rank bad manners and anti-social.' (The Times, 1/3/08)

**WOR JACKIE.** This keeps cropping up in Blairlore and the Portcullis column apologized to the great man's office thus: 'So let's set the record straight: there is no proof of our claim that the former PM ever claimed to have sat behind the goal to watch his "hero" Jackie Milburn play for Newcastle United – at a time when Mr Blair would have been four or younger. Here's hoping that Mr Blair's staff are now free to return to more important matters.' (The Sunday Telegraph, 13/7/08)

**BEE IN HIS BONNET.** The following concern has been quoted widely and credited to Albert Einstein in newspapers and thousands of blogs. Vince Cable, Lib Dem Treasury spokesman, gives it as such (there are minor variations). 'We need bees. Einstein was said to have calculated: "If bees disappeared off the surface of the globe then Man would have only four years of life left. No more bees, no more pollination, no more animals, no more life".' (The Mail on Sunday, 1/6/08) Many are still searching through his texts, trying to discover if the quote is correct and from which lecture or publication it has been taken. 'But he didn't say it. It's just a rumour.' (John Baker's Blog, 'Einstein's Bees', 18/4/07)

**BURNING BRAS.** In a special report on feminism and what it has achieved, there was a picture of a girl with one arm across her breasts and the other holding her bra. It was designed to illustrate 'the 1970s, decade of bra burning.' (The Observer Review, 7/12/08) But as most *FF* readers will be aware no such stunts took place. Various internet sites dismiss this myth. For instance, Jone Johnson Lewis comments: 'As far as any serious scholar has been able to determine, NO EARLY FEMINIST DEMONSTRATION BURNED BRAS! The best guess is that image of draft card burning and images of women tossing bras into trash cans merged in many minds, and thus was created a vivid memory that just wasn't so.' (womenshistory.about.com) But false memory syndrome marches on regardless.

**CUPBOARD LOVE.** 'A homeless woman has been arrested after living undetected for almost a year in a man's cupboard. Tatsuko Horikawa, 58, was found by police searching the home of the man, who thought he lived alone in Fukuoka, Japan. The man, who has not been named, suspected he was being burgled after he noticed food going missing from his fridge. He decided to install security cameras linked to his mobile phone and caught images of a woman walking around the house while he was out.' Actually Kasuya, near Fukuoka. (Hartlepool Mail, 3/6/08' also The Times, The Sun, Daily Mirror, 31/5/08)

# Mars Bar & Mushy Peas +

AS with my previous book, *Crossing the Line*, I am providing an after-sales service, on the presumption that many FP readers will have a copy of my latest opus.

**MARS BAR** (pp7-12). This showbiz item came as a surprise to yours truly. 'Judging by her xylophone-like frame, we're fairly sure Keira Knightly, 23, doesn't know her way around a Mars bar quite as intimately as Marianne Faithful (sic), 62. But that didn't stop the world's most famous groupie from cornering Keira at Paris Fashion Week and offering her the lead role in a biopic she's working on. The alleged erotic confectionary (sic) -dipper wants to put her life as the plaything of stars including Mick Jagger, 65, on the big screen – and thinks Keira would be perfect for the part' (Goss column, Daily Star, 29/1/09) Our choice for the role would be Lady Ga Ga. Anyway, the *Daily Star* had a free Mars bar offer the next day. Honestly. Collected one myself. Slumming it, guest team leader Stephen Fry, on *Never Mind The Buzzcocks*, observed: "It is possible we all know about Mars bars and Marianne Faithfull. There is a history in popular music of recto-vaginal insertion." Host presenter Simon Ansell also closed with a reference to Fry's remark. (BBC2, 9/10/08, repeated 11/10/08)

**MUSHY PEAS** (pp38-49). In 2008, Peter Mandelson again became the comeback kid with a double-barrelled peerage of Hartlepool and Foy – the latter reportedly where he got the idea that New Labour's symbol should be a red rose. (The Observer Review, 21/12/08). In a four-page analysis of the Prince of Darkness' return there was the inevitable with his career in quotes including: "I'll have some of that guacamole" – Neil Kinnock famously claimed Mandelson mistook mushy peas for guacamole in (a) Hartlepool fish and chip shop. Mandelson has always denied the remark ' Also Gordon Brown, in a speech to a Tribune rally in 1996: "Peter asked me for 10p to phone a friend the other day. I said: 'Here, take 20p and ring them all.' When people ask me if I have a close relationship with Mandelson, I answer: 'How would I know? I haven't spoken to hi for 18 months'." (The Daily Telegraph, 4/10/08). The peas legend made several more appearances at this juncture: The Daily Telegraph twice (3/10/08); Adam Boulton on Sky News (3/10/08) and copied on the blog by Tom Harris M.P.; The (Glasgow) Herald (5/10/08); online comments at The Scotsman. Then came the scandal over Mandelson's contacts with the wealthy, to which Giles Whittell began his commentary: 'It is not true that Lord Mandelson once mistook mushy peas for guacamole. But the story certainly had a ring of authenticity about it, for which he has few to blame beside himself. (The Times, 25/10/08) Another recentish reference was a hilarious comparison of French president Nicolas Sarkozy and our then Trade Commissioner. The article included comparisons including Mandelson's: 'Limits unfavourable coverage by exerting pressure on editors, proprietors, etc (Ask H Blackwood, former editor of the Hartlepool Mail).' There is also the inevitable mushy peas reference: 'Don't mention: Mortgages; passports; the Dome; Reinaldo; guacamole.' (The Independent, 3/7/08)

**HARRY BLACKWOOD** ( p50) Who said this? "If you have something to contribute opportunities will open up for you and, equally, if you receive a setback, and you travel down the snake, it is because you made a mistake, or somewhere back in your life you did something to deserve it." It was Mandelson, but applies equally to Harry Blackwood, whose sacking for serious misconduct he blames on the former Hartlepool M.P. Latest 'snake' in Blackwood's life has been the non-renewal of his contract at Wellfield Comprehensive in a minor administrative post. Applying for a part-time job in the press office at Hartlepool Borough Council, he did not even receive a reply. The rest of the self-penned pathetic article is one long winge, followed by some uncomplimentary comments online. (The Mail on Sunday, 16/11/08)

**BATH/WANK** (pp64-65). From one wanker, to ... Good to see a sitcom episode plot revolve around an urban myth. In fact, Lee Mack's character called it just such such to his best friend as they pondered whether his 'Sherman tank' in his landlady's bath could have caused her pregnancy. I laughed out loud a dozen times and it was so good I didn't notice the canned laughter. (Not Going Out, BBC1, 30/1/09)

**DIANA DORS** (pp31-32). Historian Dominic Sandbrook, reviewing *Our Times: 1953-2008* (Hutchinson), castigates its author, A. N. Wilson, thus: 'It is hard, for example, to imagine many academics repeating the funny (if well-worn) story about Dina Dors, nee Fluck, being introduced at a church fete by a Swindon vicar as 'Diana Clunt', and then giving the reference as 'Wikipedia.' (The Observer Review, 7/9/08)

- Next issue we look at Keith Richards, George Best and other celebs from my bestselling book. If you haven't already got a copy, buy now.

# Books

Egotrip, whatever. Here's two pages of reviews. Actually the commentators also say plenty about my book's substance which may give *FF* readers food for thought. I've been generally pleased about the response. I had not intended to respond individually, but just might. Thanks to Mike Amos, of *The Northern Echo*, pity you went into print before we could share a pint or three; *Hartlepool Mail's* old colleague Chris Cordner, who got confused in his fine piece; Mike Hallowell in sister paper *Shields Gazette* for splendid presentation with colour picture of yours truly; plus other reviewers here and the *monomyth supplement* reviewer who wrote: 'The best chapter for me, given a great coherency of theme and personal interest, was the one dealing with the cult of global warming in which Paul dissects the claims and shows how they are not only not grounded in good science but are the perfect exemplar of modern mythmaking. Perhaps he will expand this into an entire book as it deserves?' Who would dare offer? Who would want to know the truth?

## Mars Bar and Mushy Peas

Urban Legend and the Cult of Celebrity

Paul Screeton

Heart of Albion Press

Pb, 184pp, illus, notes, ind, £14.95, ISBN 9781905646111

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £14.95



*FT* readers know Paul Screeton from magazines such as *The Ley Hunter* and *Folklore Frontiers*.

Here, he looks at

contemporary legends.

Screeton delights in following the trail of the legend of the 1967 episode involving a police raid on the home of Keith Richards, Marianne Faithful and a Mars Bar. Legends associated with 'celebs' including Arthur Scargill, James Hewitt, Diana Dors and Debbie McGee (and her dog), and Peter Mandelson's apparent mistaking of mushy peas for *guacamole* are followed by an entire chapter on penises.

Screeton discusses traditional urban legends coming to life, such as the wronged wife's revenge, now featuring Jodie Marsh. He takes a detour through stories ostensibly about ostension, where celebs and others act out an urban legend for real. He even manages a typology of ostensions...

Folklorismus and its close relation 'tourismus' – and the 'industries' that use them – are dissected. Church-goers may be surprised by the recent invention of the 'Harvest Festival' and the association of Gelert, the faithful dog of Prince Llewellyn, with the village of Beddgelert.

Screeton follows an interesting discussion about forteana with a chapter on the claim that "global warming is caused by human activity" is a hoax, backing up his case by citing celebrities. Finally, a chapter on satire which is taken literally suggests that the global warming chapter may be a trap for the unwary.

Readers will be familiar with some stories, but there will be others they hadn't heard of.  
Richard Alexander

## Fortean Times Verdict

AMUSING AND INTERESTING,  
THOUGH SOME WILL BE FAMILIAR

7

Fortean Times, No. 242, 2008

MARS BAR & MUSHY PEAS  
Urban Legend & the Cult of Celebrity  
Paul Screeton

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I'm not of the opinion that celebrities deserve paparazzi, but they're fair game for tales so ludicrous as to be scarcely believable. Screeton is no paparazzi, but he is a journalist, and his enjoyment of collecting the bizarre and scurrilous is apparent.

But in today's extreme and post-modern world, is anything scarcely credible any more? Has the scarcely credible become the all too credible in a world of modern myth-making and are the celebrities of contemporary legend actually characters in a parallel universe created by the media with the willing connivance of its devotees? If so, does that mean that we can indeed believe – and invent – whatever we like about these off-world characters? After all, their status as obscenely rich or embarrassingly crass has already conferred on them an air of unreality when compared to, say, low-paid public service workers limited to 2% wage rises. Why do we suffer them, and are these tales our way of striking back at these paper gods?

Screeton doesn't really answer this question, but revels in the folklore itself, as well as in some decidedly non-PC opinions – and that's just the attitude you need to write a book like this. [JB]

Northern Earth, No. 116, 2008

**W**HEN the elegantly named Ms Fiona Hamilton rather inelegantly lost her pregnant pet white mouse between the pub and the Chinese takeaway she may never have expected a) it to become wedged up the exhaust of a police car b) it to end up in the local magistrates court – Ms Hamilton and two over-excited lady friends, not the wretched rodent – and c) it further to be recounted in a book out this week.

What might be termed an outbreak of mouse hysteria happened 11 years ago outside Cockerton police station in Darlington.

A night shift officer, it was said, had spent five hours vainly trying to lure the somewhat twitchy critter with a piece of cheese. Next morning they summoned reinforcements, in the expert form of Sergeant Eddie Bell, Durham Constabulary's animal liaison officer.

Sgt Bell tapped the exhaust pipe with a truncheon, an effect akin to the clock striking one. "Mice are not renowned for their facial expressions, but I swear this one looked extremely shocked," he told the *Echo* at the time.

The case was reported on December 23, 1997. The following day, Christmas Eve, we published the happy ending. Sgt Bell had adopted the mouse, named it Mini – as in Cooper, presumably – and, labour of love,

## Of mice, Mars bars and mushy peas

Northern Echo, 18/9/08, also 27/8/08

supervised the birth of eight mittens.

All were said to be doing well on a diet of sunflower seeds, dog biscuits and – since it was Christmas – fruit. The old sarge was critical, however, of the polliw with the piece of cheese.

"I think he's been watching too much Tom and Jerry," he said.

**CALLED Mars Bar and Mushy Peas, Paul Screeton's new book (Heart of Albion, £14.95) is sub-titled 'Urban legend and the cult of celebrity'.**

Cockerton's urban enough these days, but since Ms Hamilton's moment of fame may most kindly be described



**AUTHOR:** Paul Screeton

as fleeting and the story undoubtedly as true, it's inclusion may be a little surprising.

Paul's a Seaton Carew lad and retired Hartlepool Mail journalist, an expert on what the layman might term the weird and wonderful, or simply the unexplained.

The Mars bar refers to Ms Marianne Faithfull, a sweetie of the 60s and 70s, the mushy peas to Mr Peter Mandelson, another Hartlepool lad of temporary adoption.

Did he really ever enter a fish shop, point to the mushy peas and ask for a portion of the delicious-looking avocado mousse? Long on the scent around Screeton Carew, Paul very greatly doubts it.

Other familiar names include Arthur Scargill, Ian Paisley, the boulder Hewitt and Captain Pugwash, though it's a brave man who walks that litigiously treacherous plank.

Inevitably, too, there are further Hartlepuclain anecdotes, though the Reverend Stephen Taylor might be as surprised to find his harvest festival included, as might the boys of the Technical Day School and their target practice with rich tea biscuits.

Still it's all amiable, easy and enjoyable reading from a lad clearly not out to take it all too seriously. He could be a legend yet.

SO that was part of the holiday reading. The other was a seriously enjoyable, effortlessly diverting and hugely cleverly crafted first novel called *The Accidental Time Traveller*.

It's years since I read a novel. This one (Avon, £6.99 and now available in Asda) has on the back cover a little array of tick-box symbols to summarise the content.

The "sex" symbol, very happily, is blank. The strongest word is a very occasional "bugger" and that's no longer a swear-word, anyway. Besides, there are enough sex symbols round here already.

The story concerns Rosie Harford, a provincial journalist who inexplicably finds herself transported back to a 1950s richly redolent of ration books, emerging emotions and big green bars of soap.

The author sounds a very pleasant sort, too. She's a Welsh lass called Sharon Griffiths, but she's very definitely spoken for.

# MARS BARS & MUSHY PEAS

urban legend & the cult of celebrity

by Paul Screeeton

*When Apollo astronaut Neil Armstrong re-entered his landing craft after his legendary moonwalk, he was heard to utter the puzzling words, "Good luck, Mr Gorsky." He only revealed what he was referring to years later, after the mysterious Mr Gorsky's death. As a child he was playing baseball with his brother in their backyard when a badly directed ball landed below their neighbours', the Gorskys', bedroom window. As the young Neil bent down to pick up the ball he heard Mrs Gorsky shouting at her husband: "Oral sex? Oral sex? You'll get oral sex when the kid next door walks on the Moon!"*

The title of urban anthropologist Paul Screeeton's latest work refers to the purported intimate use Marianne Faithfull and Mick Jagger made of a Mars bar in 1967 and the apocryphal gaffe of Peter Mandelson in the 1980s in referring to mushy peas as avocado mousse.

When gossip columnists get a whiff of such incidents involving celebrities which, rightly or wrongly, they are sure their readers will find titivating, they report them and expand on them with childish, malicious glee, and no sector of the media, however highbrow, is immune to their influence or can afford to ignore them.

However, like the celebrities themselves, most of the "stories" will eventually fade away to become mere historical curiosities. That is why there is every reason to dip into Paul Screeeton's entertaining book *now*, while the victims still have some celebrity! For what it's worth, Screeeton notes that the Mars bar legend has been disseminated, to date, by at least nine books, seventeen newspapers, twenty magazines and three TV programmes, and there are over 98,600 mentions of it on websites. That must reveal something of the pathetic depths of the British public's tireless fascination with the trivial minutiae of celebrities' private lives.

The subtitle of the book is "Urban legend and the cult of celebrity", and for storytelling comics who like to weave scurrilous tales around people in the news, living or late, the work provides a real treasure chest of characters and their alleged faux-pas and titter-worthy antics. Like the best taxonomic sociologists, Screeeton structures and classifies his vast quantity of material in a highly readable, original way, dividing it into manageable, comprehensible chapters, and coining helpful terms of his own to light the reader's way. This is not the place to discuss categorisations, but one thing the work does is show how blurred the dividing lines are. Folklore or fakelore? Folktale or foaftale (ie one transmitted by a friend of a friend)? For the storyteller, such distinctions may not be so relevant, for every telling is unique, and only the telling act itself is a fact.

On the model of the German "folklorismus" (intentional fabrication by tourist agencies), Screeeton coins "tourismus" for regional branding and "satirismus" for the spreading of manufactured news or wanton inaccuracy. But he

is talking about newsmakers, not storytellers, for whom factual accuracy is not a relevant parameter.

Screeeton makes his own beliefs clear. For example, he is an admirer of Charles Fort and is sceptical of the theories of evolution and global warming ("the secular religion of the twenty-first century"). The reader may not share his views, and may deplore the inclusion of so many infantile anecdotes, but these reactions need not detract from his or her enjoyment of the book as a whole. What it did for me was both deepen my distrust of the media (if that were possible!) and furnish me with some new themes and motifs for stories. Existentially and professionally, I could hardly ask for more from a book of this type.

Chapter 6 may be of greatest interest to storytellers. It includes discussion of customs and festivals, nursery rhymes, well-known stories such as

that of Llewellyn and Gelert and cryptozoological phenomena such as the Loch Ness Monster.

However, there is much here one could dispute. Take the case of nursery rhymes. It is true that certain places have commercially exploited their pseudo-literary or folkloric associations – often based on the flimsiest of grounds – and as such are examples of tourism. But the author doesn't question the generally held theories as to the historical origins of these rhymes or account for their survival. Many were conceived as pure bawdy, like the modern limerick, and do not refer to actual events. This omission appears all the stranger when there is a whole chapter devoted to the penis and penislore, including a section on masturbation! Screeeton, like his innocent sources, doesn't realise that Little Jack Horner's best friend is John Thomas and Jill's pail is destined for Jack's tail. [See further my review of two new collections of nursery rhymes in a forthcoming F&F.]

All nine chapters of this book contain some fascinating ideas, though no doubt every reader will be irritated by some of the points, and not a few of the legends presented are, frankly, quite dull.

However, the subject is limitless, and the author has done well to amass, organise and analyse such a wide selection of material – and in a way that makes it fairly easy for a storyteller to assess its potential.

The list of references at the back will enable the curious reader to check and go further. The index, however, is something of a disappointment, as it is far from comprehensive. A book such as this is one to dip into and look things up in, and to those ends a full index is indispensable. Perhaps a second edition will put this right.

Incidentally, Gorsky does not appear in the index, though Armstrong does. The anecdote above (from page 68) is one of Screeeton's "all-time favourites" – and has now become one of mine.

*review by Martin Murrell, writer and storyteller*  
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Facts & Fiction, ?, 2008

# Magazines

**AMSKAYA.** Newsletter of the STAR Fellowship. £2 for 4. Cheques to J. Goddard, 1 St Paul's Terrace, Easton, Wells, Somerset, BA5 1DX. **Issues 72-77.** Perhaps the only mag in the world dealing with UFO-contactee material and for those interested in the obvious folkloric nuances indispensable. Obviously not what The Folklore Society members want to know about! **Issue 72** is devoted to Norman Oliver's analysis of a person called Louise who claims many meetings with spacepeople and a visit to their home in the Pleiades (he reveals an unknown fact to me that he introduced to one another my good friends the married couple now known as Colin and Janet Bord), but although all this is implausible, there are synchronicities and fortean aspects well worthy of some thought before dismissal. The suburban smances lives, even if confused and deluded, and the aged acolyte shambles to make meaning of the crone's consciousness. Also Dr David Clarke chronicles his efforts to gain access to the UK's 'X-files' (No. 74) orthoteny? (No. 75); heather on Mars (No. 75); US male taken into spacecraft where occupants spoke English in a German accent – make of it what you will (No. 77).

**MAGONIA.** From 5 James Terrace, Mortlake Churchyard, London SW14 8HB. No. 97. Gareth Medway examines how UFO investigators and writers filter their own biases with regard to high-strangeness reports, i.e. while believing officialdom is concealing evidence, they themselves are suppressing aspects which appear so bizarre as to undermine their own case. Analysis of Apollo 19 and 20 missions to photograph and examine crashed mothership and ruined city on dark side of the Moon. A Peter Rogerson piece reprinted from 1973 is reprinted and reminded me of my time editing *The Ley Hunter* and personalities from that era I was in contact with, but more importantly reflects less a historical relevance than a reminder of how the core cultism of ufology has remained static. No. 98. £2 for this issue – No. 99 will end the mag's run. Roger Sandell discusses the conspiracist tradition and its frequent anti-Semitic basis – an article reprinted from 1980, which is just as pertinent today; Dr David Clarke reveals The National Archives' UFO files.

**NORTHERN EARTH.** £7.50 for 4. Cheques to Northern Earth Mysateries Group, 10 Jubilee Street, Mytholmroyd, Hebden Bridge, W. Yorks., HX7 5NP. No. 112. Academic archaeologist John Hill finds that the new technology of global positioning systems partially exonerates Alfred Watkins on leys and urges geomants to embrace hi-tech and not ditch OS maps in a two-parter. No. 113. My wife-to-be Pauline was once on a bus passing Leeds' Armley Jail when a small child piped up "My daddy's in there." His mother then clarified to laughing passengers that his father was a warder. There's a story here about doves suggesting that a hanged man was innocent, being in the same category of Portugal's famous Cock of Barcelos folktale (letter on this by Paul Screeton in 114). Christine Rhone reviews book on interest to EM fans by Adam Stout (115) and Stout himself on EM's past plus *FF* favourite tattoo artist Otzi the Iceman (116).

**FORTEAN TIMES.** News-stand now £4.25. Quite a backlog. No. 233. Lost in post? Paul Sieveking and Owen Whiteoak kindly supplied a replacement copy. Editorial on clowns being scary; extraordinary story of how two young Italians 'hacked' into the Soviet and US early space programmes and how they may have recorded the demise of cosmonauts lost in space; George Orwell as collector of scientific-sounding superstitions; a parapsychologist burlesque performer and how 'knocking shop' derives from post-Victorian séances; possible carnivorous trees in India; mass hysteria in schools; fertility seats; bestiality, incest and buggery in the classical world. No. 235. Those who were with me in my mag incarnations previous to *FF* will recall the self-publicising Erik Beckjord, here claiming Bigfoot comes from a parallel universe (though he claims to have a photo of its penis). The 'window areas' theory for UFOs and other anomalies being so locally concentrated requires thorough examination and Peter McCue deserves admiration for such an attempt, but seems to have only partial access to the literature, particularly as there is no mention of the essential Persinger & LaFreniere's *Space-Time Transients and Unusual Events*. After 42 years, Alex Birch presents another UFO photo for analysis. No. 236. Thoroughgoing analysis of Bridgend suicide cluster, including other such

spots, rumour legend associated with music, historical and cultural antecedents, including *Gloomy Sunday*. Cases of cellular memory phenomenon regarding transplant recipients, such as a 29-year-old lesbian fast-food junkie who became a heterosexual vegetarian after receiving the heart of a teenage girl and a woman who attributes changes to having a kidney from Princess Diana; white hart folklore; Jack Womack's fortean novels. No. 237. Special issue on crystal skulls to tie in with latest Indiana Jones film. The estimable Gordon Rutter provides an excellent fulsome account of this most fortean subject – many skulls rated regarding likely authenticity or otherwise and brilliantly illustrated, even if Colin Bennett will hate the skeptical aspects! As someone who has had personal experiences of what is here termed flicker vertigo (a cousin of or alternate term for temporal lobe epilepsy see also my book *Crossing the Line*), I found David Hambling's material totally fascinating – and it even draws in Princes Di conspiracy. Extract from a new bio of Charles Fort revealed to me for the first time evidence that Chaz was a neo-gnostic, not surprisingly as he preferred orthogenesis to Darwinism, while Dawkins is dissed in the letters. Obituary of Arthur C Clarke does not mention the scurrilous and widely-held belief that he moved to Sri Lanka, not as given here for scuba diving, but to molest young boys with impunity and that he dared not be knighted in the UK for fear of being arrested as a paedophile. Much, much more of interest, but particularly for *FF* readers, tales of workers dying unnoticed at their desks, which are acknowledged as possible urban myths; forgotten armed uprising in Kent in 1838 where folklorically the followers of a rustic mystic social reformer believed they were immune to bullets.

## Diary (continued from Page 2)

THE legendary status of Seaton Carew canoe man John Darwin continues to grow. Tourists still have their photos taken with a backdrop of the dishonest Darwins' 'The Liar, the Witch and the Wardrobe' home. Now they can buy a £2.80 canoe ice-cream from Seaton Gift and Rock Shop, along with £1.50 stickers and fridge magnets that read 'I have been to Seaton Canoe, twinned with Panama.' (Actually it should be Panama City). John Darwin was jailed for 6 years 3 months and wife Anne for 6 years 6 months for their part in a £250,000 insurance scam in the wake of his faked death. (Hartlepool Mail, 26/7/08)

**COLUMNIST Antony Clayton will be talking on *Strange Brew: The Folklore of London pubs* at a one-day event on London Lore at Bishopsgate Institute on Saturday, 25 April 2009. He is also the author of the recent book *The Folklore of London* (Historical Publications). Unfortunately *FF* has not received a copy for review.**

THE THEFT of birds' eggs by fanatical collectors – the secret subculture of 'eggers' – is no laughing matter. When the police and RSPB raided the Liverpool home of Carlton D'Cruze they found him kneeling in the bathroom, attempting to crush his collection and flush it into the lavatory; they also found correspondence between collectors who were represented by numbers. Mark Thomas, the RSPB inspector involved, said: "They would write@ 'From No 2 to No 5.' They would sign off saying: 'Destroy this after reading'." According to Will Pavia, Mr Thomas rolled his eyes as he added: "The letters were in a file marked 'Top Secret,'" (The Times, 5/4/08)