

LANTERN WINTER 1981

LANTERN is a quarterly magazine of East Anglian mysteries and curiosities, comprising of NEWS, NOTES, ARTICLES, and REVIEWS. It is published by the BORDERLINE SCIENCE INVESTIGATION GROUP, a non-profit organisation devoted to the investigation of unexplained phenomena in East Anglia.

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* INTRODUCTION

It seems to be almost a tradition now for editors of small magazines to defer their apologies for the late appearance of their charges from time to time. True to tradition it is my turn to apologise for the late appearance of this edition of LANTERN; production of which was held up by the Christmas holidays and unforeseen family circumstances - still we finally made it!

As you will see from the front cover we are now into our 10th year of publication - it only seems like five minutes ago since the young and enthusiastic members of the B.S.I.G. were sitting down and entering into a long debate as to what the Group's new magazine would be called - as you know LANTERN won the day, and LANTERN it remains (although I know that from time to time, especially when the going has been a bit rough, it has been called many other names!).

Where LANTERN (or any of us) will be in another ten years I wouldn't like to guess; but of one thing I'm sure, LANTERN will continue for the foreseeable future. The new "mini" format was very well received and so it will continue; with, hopefully, more emphasis put onto illustrations and graphics. As far as the contents of LANTERN are concerned, these will continue very much as at present - in that subjects covered will depend entirely on material submitted - talking of which, we are running short of contributions so if any readers feel that they have something which would be of interest - be it a full length article, press-cutting or simply a piece for our 'Notes & Queries' section, please send it in. The only thing we ask is that it has East Anglian connections.

Which brings us to this issue, we offer no apologies for bringing to you the continuing saga of the 'Old Man of Hopton' which (or should I say who?) is the most interesting thing to have happened around here for many a long day - if readers have

any comments or observations to make on this phenomena send 'em in please.

One of the most frequent comments made on LANTERN regarding its new format is that because of its size (or lack of it) lengthy articles should be split up to cover two or three issues; and that the resulting space should be used up with smaller articles which will appeal to the general reader. To this end we start in this issue a series entitled 'East Anglian Haunts' which will, from quarter to quarter, cover some of the lesser known East

Anglian ghost stories and legends; there will also be an occasional series by our old friend Mike Burgess, entitled 'Stonepix'. All the usual stuff will also be found, plus a few "odds and sods".

Well, that's about it for this issue, thanks for all your support during the past 12 months, its much appreciated, here's wishing you all a rather belated 'Happy New Year'.

Ivan Bunn



THE OLD MAN OF HOPTON

by
IVAN BUNN

IN THE SECOND PART OF THIS ARTICLE WE TAKE AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT THE DEATH OF WILLIAM BALLS, AND ASK, 'COULD HE POSSIBLY BE THE PERSON WHOSE GHOST HAS BEEN SEEN AT HOPTON?'

The death of William Balls, the Hopton rural postman (which happened on Monday, January 2, 1899) was first reported in the local press under the headline 'DIED ON HIS ROUNDS-POSTMAN'S SAD FATE NEAR YARMOUTH' on January 3(6). The next day the local press followed it up with a full-length report of Balls' death and the resulting inquest under the heading, 'MARTYR TO DUTY AND XMAS WORK: MELANCHOLY INQUEST STORY'(7). A very similar story was published later in the Lowestoft Journal under the head-

ing: 'THE HOPTON POSTMAN'S LAST ROUND - MORE PLUCK THAN STRENGTH'(8).

From these reports we can build-up a picture of the events that led up to Balls' sudden death at Hopton. He was in fact a Hopton man and his father at this time still lived at White House Farm in the parish (the house still stands and is marked '4' on the map in LANTERN 35). Balls was 40 at the time of his death and lived at nearby Gorleston with his wife and family.

Apparently he was not a strong man and some 18 months before his death he had contracted 'flu, which had developed into pneumonia, leaving him with a slowly developing cavity in his left lung. The Saturday before his death he had visited his doctor at Gorleston, complaining of a bad cough and pains in his left side. His doctor had advised him to have a rest or he would undoubtedly die; to which Balls reportedly replied, "What am I to do? I must do my duty." Adding that his work had been so heavy over the Christmas period that he had been unable to rest. Apparently Balls left the doctor refusing to take his advice; which caused the doctor to tell the inquest that Balls was one of those men who had more pluck than strength and would not give up.

The Sub-Postmaster of Gorleston told the inquest that it seemed as if Balls' work had been too much for him of late. Especially during the last 3 years when deliveries at Hopton had been increased to two per day, during which time Balls seemed to be getting increasingly weaker and less able to tackle the round.

Official records showed that Balls' round was about 16 miles (the maximum allowed was 18). He commenced work at 6am and worked until 9.30am; then began again at 4.20pm and finished at 6.30pm. The maximum weight of mail he was allowed to carry was 35lbs, but according to the Post-master his load was never this big. Despite this, Balls' father said that during the Christmas deliveries of 1898 there had been more work for his son to do than ever before. Some mornings the weight had been more than he could carry, "...the sweat poured off him sometimes and he could hardly stand under the weight of his load, and seemed to be right done up" However, on the morning of his son's death his load did not seem so heavy as usual.

A fellow postman of Balls said that on the morning of his death, in the Gorleston Sub Post Office, Balls had reported for work as usual at 6am and appeared to be in his usual health but very quiet and somewhat touchy; adding that it was his impression that Balls was feeling "very queer" even then.

This postman was one of the last people to see William Balls alive; for at approximately 10am that morning the Sub-Post Master at Gorleston received a complaint from Hopton that the mail had not been delivered and a search was arranged. In the meantime however, at about 10.30am a local farm worker named Robert Hales, who was ploughing a field in Hopton, saw something laying nearby. He went to the spot and found Postman Balls laying face downwards on a footpath in a pool of blood - his letter bag was still securely strapped to his back. Ironically the field in which the body was found belonged to Balls' father and was about 10 minutes walk from White House Farm. The father was immediately sent for and he removed his son's body to his house.

Unfortunately, the inquest report does not state exactly where the body was found - so it is impossible to say how closely the place ties in with the locations where the 'ghost' has been seen.

At the end of the inquest (which was held at White House Farm) the coroner summed up, telling the Jury that although it was probable that the death of William Balls had been accelerated by his extra work that Christmas; the doctor could not state categorically that this was so, and so they should return a verdict in accordance with the medical evidence in that Balls had died from "the rupture of a blood vessel. This the Jury did.

William Balls left behind a pregnant wife and a family. He was buried at Hopton in the churchyard of the old ruined church (marked '5' on the map).

Having examined the nature of Ball's death and his connections with Hopton, it is now necessary to compare what is known about his life and death with the information we have on the 'ghost' seen on the A12. However, before doing so, I will reiterate what I said in the first part of this article, that what follows is an attempt, accepting certain criteria, to show that William Balls might possibly be the 'Old man of Hopton - I do not claim for a moment that he definitely is!

It is widely accepted (but not proven) by many psychical researchers that 'ghosts' are often seen over and over again in one particular area for two main reasons:

A: Because they have had (during life) a long and close association with that area. And:

B: Because they were (during life) involved in a traumatic incident in that area.

Now, if we accept these two premisses then in the case of the apparition in question, William Balls fits the bill quite well. His family lived in Hopton and he had spent a great deal of his younger life there. When he grew up he married and eventually settled in nearby Gorleston, but his close associations with Hopton continued; not only through his family connections but, and perhaps more importantly, he had walked its roads and footpaths for 22 years as the rural postman. There can be little doubt that during his 40 years of life he got to know every nook and cranny of Hopton (and the surrounding area). Whether this close association made him love or hate Hopton we shall never know.

Another reason often put forward to account for an apparition being seen over and over again in any particular guise, is that it is reliving something which it did very frequently (and often with great devotion or dedication) during life. Here again, if we accept this premiss as well, then here again Balls fits in nicely. It is obvious that he was not a very robust man; but despite this he had a great dedication to his job. This seems to have been even more so during the last 3 years of his life when, despite his failing health and increased workload, he doggedly continued to deliver his mail, sometimes under very difficult conditions. His attitude to his job is

nicely summed-up in the remark that he made to his doctor only a day or so before his death in that he felt that he had to "do his duty" and could not rest. There can be little doubt that Balls' insistence on "doing his duty" eventually led to his sudden death.

Having looked at the reasons why the apparition seen at Hopton COULD have been Balls'; it is fitting now to compare the witnesses descriptions of the 'old man of Hopton' with what is known of the appearance of Balls.

Unfortunately I have been unable to find a contemporary description of him or even a photograph. Consequently it is impossible to say whether or not he did in fact share any of the physical characteristics ascribed to the 'old man'.

Regarding the mode of dress of the 'old man' witnesses are fairly consistent on this (with the exception of a hat). Excluding the incident further south in the parish of Corton, 2 witnesses say that he was wearing a hat and 2 say that he wasn't. From the other 4 witnesses the details are not known. However all 66 the witnesses, with the exception of the latest one, (see p.9) who says the 'old man' was wearing a full cape, describe a long voluminous overcoat. Another common feature are the 'big boots' which most of the witnesses describe.

On the assumption (rightly or wrongly) that the 'old man' is in fact Balls, I have tried to establish what a rural postman would wear during the winter in the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

COMMENT.....

FROM: MICHAEL W. BURGESS:

Thanks, Jim, for your kind words (LANTERN 35) on my 'NORFOLK GIANT' paper. It's far from complete though, and the more research that I do, the more confusing it all becomes!

As our Editor remarked last issue, new info has caused me to have something of a rethink. I now find an almost exact parallel of the 'local strong man/hero v. evil ogre' tale exists in Cornwall, with only the names changed 'to protect the innocent'. Also, it turns out that my deductions re the stone coffin at Tilney deserve further thought. All may not be quite as it seems!

As for Lethbridge being 'crazy' - well, it all rests on personal feelings really, doesn't it? I for one find most of the logic displayed in many of his books to be suspect at least, and I remain entirely unconvinced as to the validity of his 'discoveries' at Wandlebury. His invention of the name 'Hiccafrith' (not that, of all the many variants of Tom's name that I have traced, this is virtually the only possibility that does NOT occur) is simply a mild indication of his peculiar frame of mind. As a matter of fact, there is not a single surviving place-name in the whole of East Anglia that can reliably be classed as a survival of the tribal name 'Iceni'. Even the Icknield Way is probably unrelated. By all the laws of etymology, the '(H)ick-' stem should have developed into '(H)itch-' or 'Etch-', but even where these occur in this region, they have totally different meanings.

FROM: IAN NICHOL, LOWESTOFT;

The mysterious object which flew over Lowestoft on Saturday, 3rd October, 1981, was not what many people thought it was.....

It was between 8 and 9pm and the sky outside was clear. A 'mysterious' light was seen coming from the east and it looked like a bright yellow ball about the size of a ½ pence piece. As it got nearer we still could not hear any noise from the engine, but two more yellow lights appeared below the first one. As it came overhead a faint noise could be heard and a fourth light could now be seen....

Actually it was a Fairchild Republic A10 Thunderbolt (night/adverse) from the U.S. airbases of Bentwaters or Woodbridge in Suffolk where a squadron are stationed at each base.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

These aircraft, because of their odd shape, slow speed, strange light configuration and lack of noise, have given rise to more 'UFO' reports than anything else in this area over the passed two years. It's good to know that at least one person can recognise them for what they are!

Exchange Magazines

SKYWATCH: Informal journal of UFO discussion. Enquiries to D.Rees, 92 Hillcrest Road Offerton, Stockport, Cheshire. SK2 5SE.

THE LEY HUNTER: UK's leading journal of earth mysteries. UK Sub.£3.60; Europe £4.50; Overseas Airmail \$12.50. From P.O.Box 13, Welshpool, Powys, Wales.

ZETETIC SCHOLAR: Independent scientific review of claims of anomalies and the paranormal. Published twice yearly, sub. \$11.50, From Dept., of Sociology, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197, USA.

FORTEAN TIMES: Quarterly journal of notes news, reviews and references on current & historical strange phenomena, related subjects & philosophies. Edited by RJM Rickard. annual sub £4.00/\$10.00. From BM-Fortean Times, London, WC1N 3XX.

LINCOLNSHIRE DRAGON: Quarterly magazine of earth mysteries, folklore, strange phenomena etc. Annual sub £2.00 (single copy 65p) from 16 Packhorse Lane, Swineshead, Boston, Lincs PE20 3JE.

EARTHLINK: Quarterly publication of U.F.O.s and related phenomena. Single copy 70p, annual sub £2.75(UK), £4.00(overseas). From; 16 Raydons Road, Dagenham, Essex.

MAGONIA: Open-minded and alternative approach to UFO research and investigation. Annual UK sub £2.00; US \$5.00; elsewhere £2.50 or equivalent (4 issues), from John Rimmer, 64 Alric Avenue, New Malden, Surrey. KT3 4JW.

SANGREAL: The quarterly journal of the mysteries of Britain; evokes the spirit of Merlin's Isle thru magic and legend, crafts and undying traditions. Single issue 75p post free. Annual sub., £2.75 (Overseas \$8.00 by surface mail). From BM Sangreal, London WC1V 6XX, England.

WOOD & WATER: a radical, ecopagan, anarcho-feminist magazine dedicated to sacred places and the ways of the Goddess & the God. Single copy 65p incl. P&P or £2.50 for 4 issues. From 142 Bedford hill, Balham, London SW 12.

ESSEX LANDSCAPE MYSTERIES: A quarterly magazine of antiquities, folklore & paraphenomena in the county of Essex. Single copy 50p, annual sub. £2.00, Edited by Jim Kinnis; from, Box Cottage, 14 East Mill, Halstead, Essex.

QUICKSILVER MESSENGER: Earth mysteries, folklore, strange phenomena etc in the S.E. of England. 4 Issue sub. UK £3.20; Europe £4.50; Elsewhere \$15.00. from Garden Flat, 46 Vere Road, Brighton, Sussex.

(More on page 11)

Notes and Queries



No.87: Stones: Regarding the 'Witches Stones' in Belle Vue Park, Lowestoft, which were mentioned in this column in the last issue of Lantern. Reproduced below is part of an old engraving of Lowestoft lighthouse (Circa 1800), and on the extreme right of the picture (immediately behind the coach) can be seen a distinct pile of rocks which can only be the 'Witches Stones'. This, so far, is the oldest picture of these stones so far discovered. The earliest reference to them as the 'Witches stones' so far found is in the 'Lowestoft Journal' in 1880.



No.88: Fortean: Miss Dora Watkinson, a maid at Westley Hall, Bury St. Edmunds, a few days ago drew from between 2 of her lower teeth half an inch of broken needle, stated to be part of a darning needle that entered her foot a year ago and broke off. Her foot was x-rayed at the time, and she appeared to feel no ill-effects. She discovered the fragment in her lower jaw through her tongue being scratched. Daily News; 29 July, 1927.

No.89: Fannel: According to a local resident, a 'secret tunnel' is said to go from Oxnead Hall, Norfolk, to the Parish church.

Radio Norfolk(BBC): January 3, 1982



East Anglian HAUNTS

1: THURNE, NORFOLK

ST. EDMUND'S CHURCH at Thurne, Norfolk, stands tall and lonely on the very edge of the uplands overlooking the bleak and windswept marshes, on the

edge of the River Thurne. According to James Wentworth Day, in his book Marshland Adventure (Harrap & Co., London, 1950), a local man told him of a ghostly light which is seen at the top of the church tower; "...the old men say that a light shines from the top window...on dark nights. When the monks were about over there in St. Benet's and there was illness in Thurne village, or at Oby, or Clippesby...they used to light a torch in the top room of the church tower. That light shined across the waters to the Abbey. And then the monks knew there was sickness and need of a doctor. So they'd come rowing in their little boat, a mile and a half across the fens to tend whoever needed them..."

There is a sequel to this tale, for at the foot of the tower of Thurne church, 6 feet or so from the ground, is a circular hole right thru the thick wall. Sighting thru this hole from inside the church can be seen, about a mile and a half away in direct line with the church, the ruined gatehouse of St. Benet's Abbey. The exact purpose of this hole is not known, but is conjectured that it was used to signal through to the Abbey in times of need.

So the old tale of the 'ghostly light' might in fact be the vague memory of this 'signal hole' in use.

St. Benet's Abbey, or at least the ruins of it, has a number of interesting ghost stories and legends, and in the next issue of LANTERN we will take a look at some of them.

'Theodore'



THE OLD MAN OF HOPTON (Cont. from p.4)

1890s. Despite enquiries at Great Yarmouth GPO and the Post Office Archives, I have not been able to resolve this point fully. It seems that rural postmen (or 'Letter-carriers' as they were then called) were first issued with uniforms back in 1872, part of which was a 'great-coat' and a 'Cape', together with a 'shako' like hat. Footwear was not issued, and it seems likely that rural postmen, especially in winter, were allowed to supplement their issue clothing with protective clothing of their own. () In the light of all this there is no real reason why the 'old man' is not wearing the garb of a rural postman. Conversely, the dress of the figure could be worn by the usands of men who have tramped the Main road at Hopton during the passed 500 years or so!

One of the more consistent descriptions of the 'old man', which could well point to it being William Balls (who was a sick man), lies in his attitude and be-

aring:- Mr.Colby described him as being 'hunched' over, as did the latest witness. Mr. Colby also said that the apparition appeared to 'plod' slowly (dare I say wearily?) across the road. Mrs.Rose, the nurse, was particularly struck by his "ashen face and cold look". If all the physical attributes of the various sightings of the 'old man' are compounded (if that is allowed!) then the overall picture could well be that of a sick, weary William Balls, trudging wearily around Hopton, still seeking the rest which his devotion to Duty would not permit him....

It is even possible that the locations where the apparition has been seen point to it being Balls. Although it must be borne in mind that as he walked the whole Parish every day almost any location could be associated with him! However we will still take a look at them:

Mrs.Rose saw the 'old man' on the old main road close to the junction with a lane (the ONLY lane) which leads direc-

tly to White House Farm a few hundred yards away. Incidentally, Hopton Post Office also stands on this junction

Mr.Colby saw the 'old man' on the new by-pass, which only a year or two ago had been fields. However, the place where he saw the apparition is almost exactly where a track used to run from the old A12 to Home Farm, Hopton - the only access road to the farm in fact.

All the other witnesses have seen the 'old man' on the A12 road just on or south of the Hopton parish boundary. Close to this point there is a footpath which leads due east across the fields from the A12 to the cliff road and back into the village. Now, could this in fact be the footpath on which William Balls' body was found? There is a distinct lack of footpaths in Hopton, only two others now exist both of which are in the western part of the parish about a mile from the A12. The Lowestoft Journal report of Balls' death says that the footpath was "...within the boundaries of Hopton..."; the footpath close to where the 'old man' has been seen the most is part of the Hopton Parish boundary but is just inside the boundary, it is, as mentioned in the newspaper report, about 10 minutes walk from the house of Balls' father. However, to be fair, the report in the EDP says that the footpath was in Hopton "...just beyond Gorleston." If this refers to the location of the path (Gorleston being the adjoining parish to the north) then it puts the location of Balls' death a long way from where the apparition has been seen. However, as the EDP was circulated all over Norfolk and Suffolk, it's possible that "...just beyond Gorleston..." refers to the location of Hopton for the benefit of readers not familiar with the area!

I think it's time I brought all this speculation to a close. There are still many unanswered questions; why, if the 'old man' is the apparition of a postman, has no one reported seeing a letter-bag?

Why, if all the apparitions seen are of the same man, does the 'ghost' sometimes appear with a hat and at other times without one?

If the 'Old man' and William Balls are one and the same person, why isn't the 'ghost' seen in other parts of the parish?

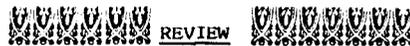
Is it just coincidence that the 'old man' appears in the winter months, more often than not close to Christmas, the time when William Balls refused to give up and continued to "do his duty"?

The speculation is never-ending and it has certainly made my head spin. Still I can't decide; have I, by sheer luck, come up the the real identity of the 'Old Man of Hopton' at the first try; or is it all pure coincidence and wishful thinking?

Is this apparition really that of a rural postman who can't stop doing his duty? Or is all this really - dare I say it? - a lot of Balls?

REFERENCES:

- (1): Lantern 32, p 11/12
- (2): LOWESTOFT Journal, 24/12/1980.
- (3): Sunday Express, 28/12/1980.
- (4): Lantern
- (5): Lowestoft Journal, 2/1/1981.
- (6): Eastern Daily Press, 3/1/1899.
- (7): ditto 4/1/1899.
- (8): Lowestoft Journal, 7/1/1899.
- (9): I am particularly indebted to the Departmental Records Officer of the Post Office Archives, London, for being so helpful in supplying details of post office uniforms in the 19th century.



New publications in the field of the paranormal and related subjects are few and far between these days; so if it is good to be able to welcome THE SUPERNATURALIST, which is produced on a casual basis by Andy Collins.

Issue No.1 (produced in A5/litho) is a real bumper bundle; a hefty 64 pages long it covers the whole range of paranormal subjects from a study of the work of Donald Maxwell (Essex' first ley hunter) to 'Ghosts - The Not so romantic truth'. Other material includes a fascinating in-depth study Aveley U.F.O. 'abduction' in 1974, plus much much more - all of which is liberally illustrated with photos and line drawings.

There are no subscription rates, each issue is sold as a one-off, the price of issue No.1 is £1.50, which is pretty good value when one considers all the obvious hard work that has gone into it.

THE SUPERNATURALIST is available from Andy Collins, 19 St.Davids Way, Wickford, Essex. SS11 8EX

UFO NEWS



Over the last few months there have been no local UFO reports; neither has there been any more developments in the Woodbridge CE111 case reported in the last two issues of LANTERN. The local television gave this report some coverage in the Autumn ('Look East' - BBC TV) in which yours truly was interviewed about the case. Despite this, no new witnesses have been found.

I understand that Jenny Randles (who seems to have the nickname JR) is now running the Investigation side of BUFORA.

Jenny has a wide knowledge of UFOs and UFO investigation. She has two books on the subject published (with, I understand, a third in the pipeline), and has contributed articles to many magazines and publications, including the current part-work 'The Unexplained'.

As a BUFORA investigator myself, I hope that Jenny will be willing to help and share her knowledge, especially in the cases where Investigators run into problems.

I recently had a very nice letter from the Editor of that excellent UFO magazine 'Earthlink' - and he will be doing an article on the Woodbridge case in the not too distant future.

Can anyone help. I am anxious to add to my collection of world-wide press cuttings on UFOs. If anyone is willing to help me - I will exchange on a regular basis with copies of my cuttings.

Dot Street.

FOOTNOTE: I know for a fact that Dot has a quantity of UFO 'T' shirts and badges for sale (she's too shy to mention them herself!). The shirts are £2.50 each (adults), and £1.75 each (childrens) excluding postage & packing. They are available in yellow, white or blue bearing the motive of an 'Adamski-type' UFO on which is superimposed 'UFO UK - INVASION 1982'. The badges (ith same motif) are 30p each (excluding p & p). Please contact Dot direct at 15 Blackberry Way, Oulton Broad, Lowestoft. Tel. Lt84606. If we do get invaded in 1982 then these are sure to become collectors' items!! (EDITOR).

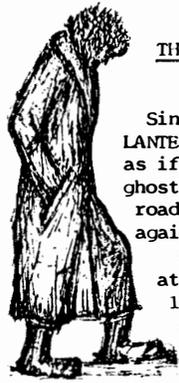
ALLEGED WITCHCRAFT AT LOWESTOFT

Charlotte Cook...was summoned by Hannah Larham...for using threats to her, at Lowestoft on the 26th April. P.C. Cutting proved serving the Summons on the Defendant, who said she would attend court. She made a long rambling statement that the complainant had made 2 or 3 fires over her head and made it very hot for her. The complainant said that she lived at No.8, Almshouses, Dove Street, and her room was over defendants. On the 28 April, defendant attacked her on the stairs, pulled her hair and threatened she would do for her. Defendant said that she had burned brimstone and tortured her. She (complainant), however, had done nothing of the kind...The defendant said complainant poured paraffin through the ceiling and ran things through the wall. She also charged complainant with witchcraft. The magistrate informed complainant that they would take steps to protect her as early as possible.

After the case had been disposed of, the Releiving Officer, Mr.Cornish, entered the Court and told the bench that he believed that both parties were not in their right minds...The disturbance commenced about two years ago, the defendant said that Hannah Larham circulated a rumour as to the defendant, who is 72 years of age, being immorally connected with an old man, also about the same age. Whereupon the old man, in order to clear his character, procured a bell and 'cried down' the complainant. In consequence of the complainant's reflections on defendant's moral character Miss Reeve had discontinued allowing defendant 6d per week and a blanket at Christmas, and this had annoyed the defendant....

from: The Lowestoft Journal 21/5/1891





HE'S STILL ABOUT!
THE 'OLD MAN OF HOPTON'
SEEN AGAIN

Since the last edition of LANTERN was published, almost as if to prove a point, the ghostly figure on the A12 road at Hopton has been seen again.

On Monday, November 2nd at approximately 7.30pm., 19 year old Andrew Cutajar of 17 Steven Street, Lowestoft was driving his Hillman Avenger along the northbound carriageway of the A12 on his way to Great Yarmouth to play pool.

It was a wet, dismal night and as Mr. Cutajar drove towards the new Hopton bypass, approximately 500 yards south of the junction with 'Jay Lane', he saw a "grey mist" motionless in the middle, of the carriageway. At first he couldn't make out what it was but as he got closer the mist resolved itself into the form of a man. Mr. Cutajar described the figure as "...tall, and dressed in a long coat or cape, coming well past his knees. He had on old fashioned heavy, lace-up boots, and had long, straggly grey hair."

The witness estimated the age of the man to be about 60. The figure was standing quite still and staring directly at the on-coming car, and as Mr. Cutajar got closer he could see more detail of the clothing the 'man' was wearing. The long coat was unlike any normal coat; it was full like a cape and had many folds. The large boots appeared to be wrapped in some sort of material and tied round with string; in the words of the witness: "...just like the Saxons...".

The long, unkempt hair looked very windswept and the figure had his shoulders "hunched over".

Realising that the figure was not going to move, Mr. Cutajar braked hard, but in doing so his car started to skid on the wet road, and he tried to correct the skid by applying the hand-break. The figure still made no effort to move and the witness, realising that there was no way he would avoid the man, involuntarily closed his eyes for a second or two

in anticipation of the impact. When he opened his eyes again he was conscious of the car going straight thru the figure; "...just like going through a cloud..." At this point he completely lost control of the car which slewed right round and came to rest on the grass verge, facing in the direction it had just come.

Fortunately, Mr. Cutajar was not injured but the rear axle of the car was damaged. As soon as he had regained his wits he got out of the car but there was no sign of the 'old man'. His initial reaction to the incident was one of anger, but later, when he arrived at his destination and thought about what had happened he was somewhat un-nerved.

He reported the accident to the Lowestoft police - and the following day was interviewed at the scene of the incident by Ivan Bunn; followed closely by the local press and Radio Norfolk - the latter gave the matter a fair amount of air time on Wednesday, November 4th.

Following the report on Radio Norfolk and the subsequent coverage in the local and national press; more reports of sightings of the Hopton 'old man' came to light.

66 year old Mr. J. Ling of Great Yarmouth wrote to say that he had seen the ghost of a man on this same stretch of road in late summer, 1937. At about 2am he was cycling home from Lowestoft and was approaching the stretch of the A12 close to where Mr. Cutajar saw the 'ghost'. Said Mr. Ling: "...I could see this figure in the middle of the road crouching and waving its arms so it seemed to me. It stood out against the night sky. My hair seemed to stand on end and I just pushed a little harder on the pedals and went passed, and looking back there was nothing there..."

After the Radio programme a person named Mr. Barnard phoned in to say that too had seen the 'ghost' only a short while before Mr. Cutajar. Unfortunately we have been unable to find out who this Mr. Barnard is. So, if you're reading this sir, drop us a line!

Intelligence has also reached us that a young lady and her boyfriend both saw the apparition last summer whilst riding to Lowestoft on a motor-bike. We are currently following up this report.

NATURAL EXPLANATIONS?

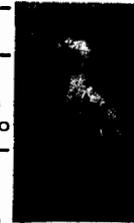
As well as those who claim to have seen the 'old man of Hopton', others have come forward to offer explanations as to what might be causing the 'ghost'. It has been suggested that the figure



CONTINUED FROM FACING PAGE:

which has been seen is in fact the shadow throw by some mis-shapen bushes growing at the roadside here; the shadow being cast by the lights of vehicles on the coast road at Hopton. This could well be the case had the figure been seen over and over again at one particular spot instead of over a stretch of road more than a mile long.

Another, more tangible, explanation for the 'old man' is a Heron, affectionately nicknamed 'Charlie Farnsbarns' (pictured right) who has been raiding fishponds belonging to inhabitants of Hopton and Corton for the past 3 years. He apparently gave a local lady quite a fright recently when he wandered across the A12 at Hopton one evening in front of her car (Lowestoft Journal, 20/11/81). This lady is now convinced that it is Charlie who has been frightening motorists and that he is the 'Old man of Hopton' - Well, it's a thought.



Other explanations have included the perennial 'columns of mist' rising in the adjoining fields and drifting across the road...

To date, no real explanation has been forthcoming and so we await events.

* ONE THAT DIDN'T GET AWAY! *
* Police investigating a motorist's report of an apparition in the middle of the road at Chedgrave, near Norwich, discovered a large snowman. *
* The Sun 23/12/1981 *

'STONEPIX'

NO.1: THE HARLESTON STONE

Grid Ref: TM(156)246834 - this black, three feet square boulder stands in the centre of Harleston, Norfolk, in an alleyway between the town's two main streets. For some reason the Romans are alleged to have placed it there, although its other traditions are concerned with later ages. The name of the town means 'The Tun of Herewulf', but some early antiquaries corrupted this into 'Herolf's Stone', Hereolf supposedly being a Danish chieftain who came over at the time of the great invasions in the 9th century AD. From this idea comes the tale that Herolf once stood upon the stone and granted to the local guilds ownership of the 'Stone Tenements' in nearby Middle Row (an area which survived until altered by a Local Government Act of March 1885).

Another fragmentary tale states that upon this massive block a herald stood, to proclaim the imminent arrival of "the enemy" (the Danes?) and around it the townsfolk gathered to defend their homes. Thus we are given the alternative name of the 'Heraldstone'.

And then again, King Harold (of Hastings fame, and once Earl of East Anglia) is said to have climbed onto the stone to issue orders for the billeting of his army. He is also alleged to have mounted his horse from the stone, and a shallow, circular depression in its top is the imprint of his booted foot. Hence, some call it 'Harold's Stone'.

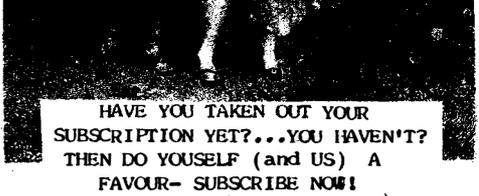
M.W. Burgess.

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ful effects of the same. Many other things of less weight, being more secret and
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