

THE *British* & *Irish* SKEPTIC

A Publication Dedicated to Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal

Volume I, Number 2

March/April 1987

IN THIS ISSUE

Hits & Misses

Lewis Jones: Brooke Bond's "Unexplained Mysteries"

Profile of a Small-Time Psychic

Frank Chambers: The Geller Bumph

Ian Ridpath: A Spanish Close Encounter Reexamined

Book Reviews: Sorry, You've Been Duped!

The Adventures of a Parapsychologist

Letters to the Editor

Psychic News Digest

PLUMMER TO VISIT UK AND IRELAND

CSICOP's Executive Director, Mark Plummer, will be visiting Britain and Ireland in May. British skeptics will be able to meet him and the British Committee on Friday, May 8, in London, at a location to be announced (we will send out details in mid-April; or you can phone the Editor in Dublin after 10 April). He will then go on to Ireland to address the first-ever public meeting of the Irish Skeptics on Tuesday, May 12, at 8 PM, at Buswell's Hotel, Molesworth Street, Dublin.

HELP!

The more articles, newspaper clippings, bits of insight, news, information, book reviews, TV or radio reviews (or even audio- or video-tapes), cartoons, and so on we get from you, the more varied and interesting this newsletter is going to be. Lots of you sent lots of stuff, and thank you. Please don't stop. And at the risk of driving your friends crazy--please remember to tell them about us.

THANK YOU

Burglars break into PN's offices

PN's offices were broken into last weekend . . . and it has left us with a headache. For a day's mail was stolen — and we have no idea what it contained.

The break-in was discovered by our cleaner at around 6am. The theft occurred either on January 17 or 18.

The cleaner waited for company secretary Steve Castro and editor Tony Ortzen to arrive, when the police were

immediately summoned.

"The place was in an awful mess," said Tony. "Because the door to Steve's office did not give, panelling was ripped off.

"As far as we can tell, every drawer in every desk was gone through."

On some floors papers, files and other items were replaced. Other staff had the contents of their drawers tipped all over

the floor.

"The thieves wrecked our bookshop's till, making off with a small float, but nothing else appears to have been stolen," said Tony.

"Apart from the sheer aggravation and annoyance, we escaped very lightly.

"But the big problem is we know from the Post Office that letters were delivered on Saturday, January 17. Obviously we

don't know what the post contained.

"If anyone paid an invoice or ordered a book in the few days previous to that, we may not have received their letter.

"So it is possible that churches and organisations who have paid bills will receive a reminder if their payment was in the stolen post. Please bear with us."

PN's burglary seems to be a

carbon copy of a similar incident at another publishing firm in Earham Street, which was broken into several weeks ago using the same means of entry.

Again, apart from the awful mess made by burglars, only a small amount of money was stolen.

Police are investigating the PN break-in. Fingerprints found on the till are now being checked out by detectives.

This item is reprinted in its entirety from Psychic News, 31 January, 1987.

EUROPEAN REPORT

BRITISH REPORT

At very short notice, the British Committee held a meeting in London on Wednesday, 11 March, which was attended by a mix of committee members and early respondents to the first newsletter. (If you weren't told about it, and wish you had been, don't despair; in future we hope to announce meetings further in advance and more generally; the occasion for this one was your editor's sudden urge to make a trip to London from Ireland.) Most of the meeting's discussion centered around the Committee's structure. CSICOP has requested the "International Committees" to reform as "National Groups"; the British Committee accordingly is discussing plans for the formation of a new Association. Those present voted that a discussion constitution be drawn up. This has been done, and the official British Committee will be meeting in April to consider the proposal.

BERGLAS VS. DION

According to Woman magazine, 14 March, David Berglas, the British Committee's Acting Chairman, and two anonymous contributors have challenged psychic performer Christian Dion to prove his powers are genuine. The prize is £30,000, £10,000 of which is David's own money. Woman Magazine has called for 100 volunteers to assist with the experiment, but no details are given in the article as to how this experiment will be run or what controls will be in effect. We will be watching eagerly for more information.

The first issue of the British & Irish Skeptic was sent to all European National Group Convenors, all European International Committee Secretaries, and all European Fellows of CSICOP. As this goes to print, their responses are just beginning to come in. Amardeo Sarma writes from Germany to say they have formed a group called ASUPO (Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Skeptiker fuer die Untersuchung von Pseudowissenschaften und Okkultem--Working Group to Investigate Pseudoscience and the Occult). ASUPO is planning to begin publishing a newsletter in May, and expect to form an officially registered group in about a year's time. In the meantime, ASUPO is keeping busy criticising a project to investigate dowsing which is being sponsored by Germany's Research Ministry, with funds of DM 400,000, with no skeptics involved in the preparations.

Swiss Convenor Conradin Beeli wrote to say that he will be one of the editors of their first newsletter, and sent a copy of a letter he is sending to other European Convenors about Swiss plans to find new members. As he points out, Switzerland has a particular problem in having four official languages.

From Nice, France, Dr. Henri Broch sent a copy of his book Le Paranormal, which I will do my best to read and review, and an information package on the service 'ZET' he has recently inaugurated on the French Minitel system. The aim is to provide interested people with sufficiently complete dossiers on particular phenomena to enable them to form their own opinions. ("Le but de ce service est de fournir, à toute personne intéressée par quelque phénomène inexplicé que ce soit, un ensemble d'informations rigoureuses afin que cette personne puisse se forger, en toute connaissance de cause, sa propre opinion.")

I hope to be able to publish a much more complete report on skepticism in Europe in the near future. (wg)

Hits & Misses (continued)

Brazilian magic offers some cold comfort

From Jan Roche
in Sao Paulo

A Brazilian spiritualist foundation which specialises in avoiding weather disasters has sent a telegram to Mrs Thatcher offering to put an end to the cold wave in Europe, free of charge.

"All we need to interfere in the atmospheric conditions and solve this climatic adversity," it says, "is that you send us with the maximum urgency the following items: three maps of

Europe with the affected countries coloured in red pencil, the Baltic Sea in green, and the Siberian plains in blue, plus the meteorological forecast for the next 72 hours in Europe. This material is to be telexed to headquarters in Sao Paulo."

The foundation's public relations officer, Mr Osmar Santos, said that once the material was received they could begin work to dissipate the cold waves.

"The low temperatures are

being caused by a low pressure system," he said. "To bring them back to normal we need to raise that pressure. The meteorological forecast will be fed into our computer system and then all the information we have gathered, including the maps, will be given to our medium, Adelaide Scritori.

"She will go in to a trance lasting four, five or six hours and communicate with the spirit of Cacique Cobra Coral (Chief Coral Snake) after which the organisation is named, who will then summon

other spirits to work on the low pressure area."

The foundation is a non-profit-making organisation run by volunteers, who all have normal employment, but who can be reached by bleeper if a weather emergency crops up.

Some Government departments take it seriously enough to have signed contracts. Santa Catarina, a farming state in the south, for example, has regularly called on its services to avoid floods and end drought.

According to Mr Santos, it was the timely intervention of the foundation that avoided the need to introduce electricity rationing in Brazil in December. A month of torrential rains replenished the hydro-electric system.

Even if Mrs Thatcher decides to turn down the foundation's offer, it says it will consider an appeal from any other public body in Europe as long as they all supply the maps and detailed meteorological forecast to telex number 35734 in Sao Paulo.

The above article appeared in the Guardian on 16 January, 1987. A copy was sent to CSICOP in Buffalo. In return, they sent us a copy of an article that appeared in a Brazilian newspaper on 20 January, along with the following outline translation.

WORK OF BRAZILIAN MEDIUM REDUCES EUROPEAN COLD

Recent, sudden temperature increases in Europe, especially in London, caused interest there in the work of the Fundacao Cacique Cobra Coral (FCCC), who guarantee alterations in weather. By request of Buckingham Palace, on the 14th of January, 1987, the medium Adelaide Scritori began "Operation Europe" to raise the temperature.

This is not the first time the FCCC's work coincided with changes in weather. Civil defense of the [Brazilian] state of Santa Catarina (CEDEC) yesterday closed the "Operation Concord", where the state governor had requested FCCC's help to alleviate a serious drought. As by the 14th, the situation was about normal.

Such cases have interested English papers, the BBC, and Buckingham Palace in the works of the FCCC resulting in a correspondent being sent to its headquarters in Sao Paulo. An alert of December 7, 1986, re polar masses moving over southern Brazil, which could provoke new floods on the river Itajai-Acu. Through the efforts of the medium Adelaide, the masses were sent to southeastern Santa Catarina, where rain fell, as related by Osmar Santos.

Through the medium, the FCCC complains of lack of action by state and federal governments to prevent droughts and floods. Since last year the foundation has requested maps from the Ministry of Mines and Energy of the drought areas.

NAME THIS NEWSLETTER CONTEST

We are getting loads of good suggestions. Some samples: The Balance (R. Lewis); Unscientific Briefs (C. Miller); R.I.P., for Research Into the Paranormal (I. Ridpath); The Rational Inquirer (L. Shepard); The Quizzicist (F. Chambers); The Investigating Searchlight (C. Maugé); Inner Ear (P. Quincey); Agnosis (T. Danson); Psignpost (D. Byford); Yes? (M. Mayer); Skepsis (S. Campbell); The Skeptical Monitor (A. Carothers); Psientific Islander (A. Flew); The Rational Trust (A. Symon); The New Psientist (F. Koval). There have been a couple of votes each for Occam's Razor and Heaven and Earth; there were even a few people who wrote and said they liked the name it's got now. The closing date for the contest will be August 15, 1987, and the prize two years' free subscription. Keep thinking!

MAGIC STONE CHALLENGED

Toby Howard writes from Manchester:

"I have been disturbed for some time about the numerous 'magic talisman' advertisements that promise 'instant success' and 'unlimited wealth' and so on. Recently I complained to the Advertising Standards Authority about a ridiculous advertisement for a 'Magic Stone', and the ASA have decided it is worth further investigation. They are currently asking the advertiser to substantiate his claim, and I will keep you informed how the case progresses. If it is successful and the advertiser is censured, I could envisage a lot more similar cases worth pursuing."

Toby also has subscriptions to Psychic News, Fortean Times, and the Spiritualist Gazette. He has kindly offered to prepare a summary of stories from these stories. The first of these summaries (which we expect to become a regular column) appears in this issue.

Hits & Misses (continued)

NEWSLETTER REPORT

As of this writing, we have about 50 paid subscriptions. The first issue of the newsletter was sent to all of the nearly 500 subscribers to the Skeptical Inquirer in Britain and Ireland. We hope to send out follow-up letters in the next month, reminding people of our existence, and also publicizing Mark Plummer's visit to Britain and Ireland. Lots of people wrote letters, sent articles, or simply noted "I want to help" on their subscription forms, and to all of you, thank you, and please keep in touch. I try to answer all letters the day I get them. If you don't get a prompt answer it means either 1) I am away or 2) your letter got lost in the post. If you write a letter and get no answer by the time you receive the next issue of the newsletter, it's probably been lost, either in the post or in the editor's chaotic memory.

Please be patient!

Also, careful readers may notice that almost nothing that was promised for this issue actually appears in this issue. Well...some people unexpectedly sent things in, and other people unexpectedly didn't, and all of a sudden I found I had a lot of stuff, all of it more timely than the article I had in mind about Doris Stokes, and...I'm obviously not possessed of the gift of precognition. Sorry.

NEWSWATCHERS WANTED

A subscriber to this newsletter commented recently on an article he'd seen in the Times, but hadn't sent in, on the assumption that I would already have received it. This was not the case, but it served to illustrate the need for organization. Clearly, there's no point in everyone sending in the same stuff. I myself read the Guardian most days when I'm in Britain or Ireland. However, there will be long periods this summer when I'm away and this will be impossible. So, would anyone like to volunteer to watch a particular newspaper or newspapers or magazine(s)? We're well covered on Psychic News and The New Scientist, but we could use people who are willing to clip articles from all of the major British and Irish daily and Sunday newspapers. (Anyone out there read the Sun?)

AREA CONTACTS WANTED

At the meeting, everyone agreed one of the hardest things about being a skeptic in this world is the sense of isolation, of being alone with no one to share your views. If you live in the same area as one of the people listed below, your troubles may be over, or at least significantly reduced. If there is no one listed near you, perhaps you would like to add your name to this list for the next issue. This is not a list of experts, just a list of people who would like to be in touch with other skeptics.

- Bucks: Bernard Marcus
13 Greenend Street
Aston Clinton, nr. Aylesbury
HP22 5JE
- Devon: Redge Lewis
Amblers
Ashprington
Totnes TQ9 7UL
- Gloucs: Ron Knight
Naight Cottage
Lansdowne
Bourton-on-the-Water GL54 2AR
- Northants: John Morton
19 Glebe Drive
Brackley, NN13 5BX
- London: Gerald Fleming
72-80 Upper Tooting Road
London SW17 7PB
- Lewis Jones
23 Woodbastwick Road
Sydenham, SE26 5LG
- Denys Parsons
21 Kingsley Place
London N6
- Ireland: Peter O'Hara
Primrose Hill
Tivoli Road
Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin

Brooke Bond launches psychic card series

by Deniz Huseyin and Tony Ortzen

A PICTURE card series on the "Unexplained mysteries of the world" is to be launched by Brooke Bond, it was announced last week.

The series is one of the first of its kind . . . and features several psychic photographs.

A spokesman for the company said it hopes that the cards — to be given with PG Tips tea — would be "informative, interesting and educational."

The notes on the back of the cards and the explanation in the album were written by Bob Rickard, an expert on paranormal and other strange phenomena.

"Brooke Bond believe the cards will appeal mostly to children," said Bob. "So the aim is to interest and educate children . . . and hopefully some adults as well."

"Perhaps we can encourage kids to develop an interest. They should not be afraid of these subjects."

"That is why we tried to present the information in a down-to-earth rather than sensational manner."

Bob was commissioned to write on 40 subjects: each had to be condensed to no more than 200 words.

The chosen topics include archeological enigmas; mirages of cities in the sky; lake monsters; levitation; the Cottingley fairies; mind-over-matter; firewalking and poltergeists to name but a few.

Bob was chosen to write the series by David Leon of "Project Marketing," Berkshire-based sales promotion consultancy.

"Unexplained phenomena have always been a subject of personal interest to me," said David. "I first presented the idea to Brooke Bond in 1981."

"At the time it was rejected, but in December 1984 I presented the idea again along with eight other alternative picture card themes."

He continued: "All these subjects, plus several other matters for picture cards, went into consumer research. One year later I was informed that 'Unexplained Mysteries' had come out tops."

David believes the series "breaks new ground in subject matter for picture cards."

"One reason, undoubtedly, has been the difficulty to portray elusive phenomena effectively," he said.

"It must be one of the few instances where the subject

matter outweighs picture quality. A 'genuine' photograph, even of poorish quality, is far more intriguing than any artist's impression." David concluded. "With Bob Rickard's valuable help, we have managed to produce a series of quality for Brooke Bond and with the right degree of seriousness."

Bob and David were responsible for choosing all the photos. "Because it was left to us we were able to make sure they were interesting and bona fide," said Bob.

A full-time writer who has authored or co-authored several books, Bob edits the international "Fortean Times" journal, which covers a wide range of topics connected with the supernatural and UFOs.

On levitation, Bob's album entry reads that "reliable records of humans who have levitated go back at least to St Joseph of Cupertino."

St Joseph — who passed in 1663 — "made several well witnessed flights over considerable distances." Then comes:

"Although one authority lists some 230 levitating saints the phenomenon is not exclusively Christian."

"Similar experiences have been claimed by tribal wizards, witches and spirit mediums among others."

The card accompanying this section shows medium Colin Evans levitating at a meeting in Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC London in 1938. It clearly shows Mr Evans high above sitters' heads.

He mentions that Russian psychic Nina Kulagina "could influence objects to move. Many of the powerful Spiritualist mediums of the past could levitate objects during seances."

One of the most unusual photographs is from Adelaide, South Australia, taken by Neville D'Cruz. He noticed after developing a "seriously innocent family snap" disembodied hands clutching his brother.

"The film," says Bob, "had not been double-exposed."

The card clearly shows Neville's brother sitting on a bench . . . with two hands clutching him from behind. Bob explains there was "no space between bench and wall



COLIN EVANS: He "remained in the air for some time" at a public demonstration of levitation.



BOB RICKARD: "The aim is to interest and educate children . . . and hopefully some adults as well."

for even a child to fit."

Also reproduced is the well known poltergeist picture concerning the Costa family in the French village of St Jean de Mauennec.

The accompanying snap shows a pot, its lid and scissors flying in mid-air.

During poltergeist activity, writes Bob, "objects levitate, appear and disappear; rattings and other strange noises are heard; even writings of mysterious origin appear."

Under the "Mischievous spirits" heading appears a short summary of the poltergeist activity which plagued Borley Rectory in Essex, once said to be the most haunted house in Britain.

Reproduced are 'messages found scrawled on walls.

Turn to page 6, column 1

Chimps in hot water over 'hoax' tea cards

THE chimps who promote Britain's favourite cuppa are in trouble with scientists for making monkeys out of schoolchildren.

The storm in a teacup is over a new picture card series called Unexplained Mysteries of the World, to be promoted by the mischievous chimps.

The cards, said by Brooke Bond to be educational, feature ghosts, levitation, UFOs, monsters and fairies.

But a US-based group of scientists last night demanded their withdrawal.

"It's garbage," said Michael Hutchinson, British secretary of Csicop, the Committee for the Scientific Investigations of Claims of the Paranormal.

"It's an insult to the intelligence of a chimpanzee."

"The only real mystery is why Brooke Bond should want to ruin young minds with junk science and pretend it's educational."

Inform

Brooke Bond, which says 60 million cups of PG Tips are drunk every day, are expecting 2.5 million people, most of them youngsters, to collect the cards.

Spokesman Ivan Robinson said: "The cards are intended to inform and educate. We've tried to get it right."

But Csicop challenges 30 of the 40 subjects covered. Their main complaints:

● The cards claim the curse of Tutankamun's tomb was followed by the mysterious deaths of most of the archaeologists involved. The scientists say they lived on average for another 20 years;

● A "Neanderthal man" said to have been preserved in ice was actually made of rubber;

● A picture of a "flying saucer" is a saucepan lid.

The scientists add that their offer of £200,000 for anyone who can prove that Uri Geller's powers really work still has no takers.

Scientists say card series is garbage

A new picture card series produced by the tea manufacturers, Brooke Bond, has been described as "garbage" by scientists.

The "educational" series, Unexplained Mysteries of the World, deals with subjects such as ghosts, levitation, UFOs, monsters and fairies.

Last night, an organization comprised of some of the West's leading scientists demanded its withdrawal. Mr Michael Hutchinson, British secretary of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, said: "This series perpetuates some of the world's greatest fallacies and hoaxes under the guise of being educational."

Mr Ivan Robinson, a spokesman for the company, said: "The cards are intended to inform and educate."

Three major press articles on Brooke Bond's new card series. Top, from *Psychic News*, 7 February, next, from *Today*, 16 February, and right, from the *Times*, also 16 February. See Lewis Jones' report on the cards on the next two pages. Readers who wish to complain should do so as follows: in UK, Mr PG Johnson, Director, Brooke Bond Oxo Ltd, Leon House, High Street, Croydon; in Ireland, Mr Murphy, Marketing Manager, Brooke Bond Oxo Ireland Ltd., Unit 28, Sandyford Industrial Estate, Sandyford, Co. Dublin. The cards have not yet been released in Ireland, and if there's enough fuss made in Britain, maybe they won't be.

If you are a tea-drinker who has recently bought a packet of Brooke Bond's PG Tips, you may have been surprised to find a little picture-card inside: one of a series of 40 "Unexplained Mysteries of the World." In case you have wondered where you could stick them, Brooke Bond will send you a little booklet in exchange for two 20p coins. This booklet contains some more pictures, with captions that elaborate on the misinformation on the back of the cards.

We meet once again the living toad found inside freshly quarried stone. "How," Brooke Bond ask in amazement, "could it survive millions of years without sustenance, or withstand the heat and terrible pressure necessary to create rocks?" How indeed. Geologists and zoologists will be sad to find that their disciplines have been wiped out at a stroke by these "well-documented cases."

Nessie is here of course, complete with the obligatory myth about records dating back to the year 565. This is obviously a reference to the legend of St Columba, who wrote about an entirely different beastie in a different place - the RIVER Ness. The "monster" in fact first surfaced from the printer's ink of the *Inverness Courier* in 1933. Read all about it in Ronald Binns' book "The Loch Ness Mystery Solved" (STAR, 1984).

Nor was the creature "detected by sonar and underwater cameras" in 1975. The *National Geographic* magazine would have nothing to do with the photographs. Neither would *Time* magazine. Brian Peterson, Harvard's Professor of Paleontology, said the thing in the photographs "could only be taken seriously if someone put a net over it." Dr John Sheals, Keeper of Zoology at the British Museum, said, "I don't believe these photographs prove a thing."

Brooke Bond's photograph of the "monster" was in fact taken by Punch-and-Judy man and "psychic entertainer" Anthony Shiels, who claimed, "I am sure Nessie appeared as a result of my psychic powers." For some reason, the world's top 40 mysteries don't extend to the inclusion of any other photographs from Shiels' curious collection, not even "Morgawr, the monster of Falmouth Bay."

The Dogon tribe of Africa use in some of their rituals a drawing of nine symbols surrounded by a rough ellipse: "the egg of the world." Brooke Bond have thrown out eight of the symbols as inconvenient, and claim that the remaining one represents the star Sirius, and that the ellipse is the orbit of a dense companion with a 50-year orbit. Astronomers didn't discover this until 1882. How were the Dogon able to incorporate it into their ancient myths? Because "god-like amphibious beings from Sirius visited this planet and told them."

Ian Ridpath, editor of the "Encyclopedia of Astronomy and Space" and author of "Worlds Beyond: a report on the search for Life in Space", has analysed the whole sorry affair of the Dogons and written it off as "riddled with contradictions." Try his book "Messages from the Stars" (FONTANA, 1978).

Brooke Bond believe that people can float in mid-air, and that one made "several well-witnessed flights over considerable distances." If YOU can do this, get in touch with CSICOP right away - a quarter-of-a-million pounds could be within your aerial grasp. But you would have to do better than the lady doing parlour tricks with a pair of "floating" scissors in the Brooke Bond picture, and the gentleman jumping off the chair at the seance.

Believe it or not, the Indian Rope Trick rides again, and we are offered a 1936 photograph of an Indian fakir (be careful how you pronounce it) suspended above the ground. The vertical support, amateurishly swathed in cloth, and making an all too solid-looking bridge between the showman and the ground, is perhaps one of those optical illusions that so often afflict skeptics.

Brooke Bond are still rooting for the Shroud of Turin of course, long after the scientific community has washed its hands of the whole sorry business. Pollens from the fibres are said to be of "Palestinian origin." Not according to micropaleontologist Steven Schafersman, they're not.

The image has been "scorched into the cloth." In fact scorching on linen would fluoresce strongly under ultra-violet radiation: the

shroud does not, even in trials with lasers.

"The wounds and blood-flow pattern corresponded correctly to Roman-style execution." Not so. New York pathologist Dr Michael Baden showed that the blood flow was not in the least realistic. And the stuff on the shroud is red: real blood, as anyone knows, turns black. The evidence has been examined by Dr Walter McCrone, who is the best-known forensic micro-analyst in the world. His conclusion - the entire image is of iron earth and vermilion pigments in a tempera medium, with a date in the mid-14th century. The vermilion was an artist's red pigment used in the Middle Ages and earlier. Sort it all out in Joe Nickell's "Inquest on the Shroud of Turin" (PROMETHEUS, 1983).

In Minnesota, the "fresh corpse" of a Neanderthal man (you thought they were before your time, didn't you?) has popped up in a block of ice in a travelling show (that well-known source of genuine anthropological finds). What you will not discover from the Brooke Bond cards is that this creature was made by Howard Ball, a top model-maker for Disneyland. His widow and son confirm the fact. (See SKEPTICAL INQUIRER, Winter 1981-82.)

It turns out that UFOs are "the greatest mystery of our age." In support, Brooke Bond dusts off a picture of the old McMinville UFO taken by farmer Paul Trent way back in 1950 - "one of the most convincing of UFO photographs."

Brooke Bond don't tell you that the Trents gave out contradictory stories. Or that they didn't bother to tell anyone about the UFO. Or that they just left the film in the camera until they could use up the unexposed frames at some later time. Or that a reporter who went round found the priceless negatives lying under the sofa - the children had been playing with them.

The Trents said the photographs were taken in the evening, just after sunset. Robert Scheaffer, a contributing writer to *Astronomy* and *Spaceflight*, analysed the photo and showed that it was taken at 7:30 in the morning.

Dr William K Hartmann, chief photoanalyst for the Condon report on UFOs, pointed out that the object is suspended directly beneath horizontal telephone wires, and appears to be a small model hanging on threads. Philip Klass of the Aviation/Space Writers Association agrees that the pictures are fakes. And Donald Menzel, astrophysicist and former director of the Harvard College Observatory, writes it off as a hoax "notorious in UFO annals."

Brooke Bond also supplies a picture of the Trindade UFO, but don't tell you that it was taken by a specialist in trick photography. They tell you it was taken from the deck of a ship. But they don't tell you that when newsmen interviewed the crew some weeks later, not a single sailor recalled seeing anything of the kind.

Welcome back to the Curse of the Pharaoh! After Tutenkhamen's tomb was opened, "more than 20 of the original archeological team died in a strange series of 'accidents'." In fact, James Randi has traced the records of most of those involved: their average age at death was 72. And Lady Evelyn Herbert, one of the three people actually present at the tomb's opening, survived another 57 years, and died in 1980.

The Bermuda Triangle "mysteries" are of course largely outright fabrications: ships not listed in any registry, planes for which there are no records to show they ever took to the air, and people with a nasty habit of turning up alive and well. The definitive book on the subject is "The Bermuda Triangle Mystery - Solved" by Lawrence D Kusche (NEW ENGLISH LIBRARY, 1975).

With the other Brooke Bond cards, you can soon be out of date on the subject of various other refugees from the folklore of the gullible: Nostradamus, statues that move, abominable snowmen and of course "Bigfoot", the Cottingley fairies (complete with fake photograph), ghosts, poltergeists, Noah's Ark on Ararat, the moving rocks of Death Valley, and of course Uri Geller bending metal purely by the power of his mind, entirely unaided by ten fingers and prepared spoons.

It is hard to believe that any commercial firm would seek to pin its reputation to texts full of howlers like these. But Brooke Bond has the courage of its credulity.

Maybe it will have to learn the hard way that the ridicule attaching to ill-researched claims like these can only redound on the company that is unfortunate enough to sponsor them.

How does it feel to know that the safety of the drink in your teacup is in the hands of people who believe in fairies?

--Lewis Jones. A copy of this report was sent to Brooke Bond Oxo.

Dowser narrows search for buried treasures

Newcastle University has uncovered a promising clue in its search for four large stone statues that are part of the history of the Medical School and have not been seen since 1850. A dowser believes he has located where they may be buried.

The eight feet high statues of Aesculapius and Hippocrates, which were erected in 1710, and of Galen and Paracelsus, put up two years later, stood in the grassed area in front of the Barber Surgeons' Hall. They were taken down when the hall was demolished 137 years ago to make way for a railway.

The only known record of what became of them is in a note made in 1876 by Dr Dennis Embleton, lecturer in anatomy. This said that they were buried in the grounds of the new hall in Rye Hill, Newcastle, which was provided by the railway company as compensation. They were buried after the hall was

finished, so were not put in the foundations, but why they were buried is a mystery.

The sole clue to the statues' whereabouts was forgotten until Dr Gordon Dale, senior lecturer in paediatric biochemistry, found the note when preparing for an address at the 150th anniversary celebrations of the Medical School in 1984.

A local dowser, Mr Dennis Briggs, recently searched the grounds of the 1851 hall, which is now a school. His findings are said to correspond to the shape and size of four statues lying horizontally in the soil. Permission to dig a trial trench is now to be sought.

If the statues are recovered and are in a suitable condition, Dr Dale and the Dean of Medicine, Professor David Shaw, hope to re-erect them at the new Medical School, which was opened by the Queen Mother three years ago.

*From the Times, 14 February, 1987.
Contributed by Toby Howard.*

British Committee Secretary Michael Hutchinson reports that he was asked to find a knowledgeable skeptic to participate in a debate on the subject of dowsing, to be transmitted by BBC Scotland on the Jimmy Mack show at 9:30 AM, Wednesday, 1 April, timed to coincide with next week's Dowsing Association Conference. Accordingly, Denys Parsons, a member of the British Committee, will be presenting the skeptical view. Also taking part will be a representative of the Dowsing Association.

A Liberal victory was in the stars

A PROFESSIONAL mind-reader forecast the exact result of the Truro by-election a month before Thursday's poll.

Stephen Wells, a Liberal county councillor in Cornwall, put his prediction in a safety deposit box.

It was opened on Friday in the studios of BBC Radio Cornwall, and the figures for the Liberal, Conservative and Labour candidates were all spot on.

Mr Wells whose stage name is Stephen Magus, said: 'I wasn't surprised. I've done far more difficult things just as accurately.' But he's making no predictions for the General Election.

This article appeared in the Mail on Sunday on 15 March. South Devon skeptic Redge Lewis promptly telephoned BBC Radio Cornwall for more information. The station's manager, Mr. Mike Hoskin, "was surprised that anyone would think that the event was anything other than the clever trick it was." Redge has written a letter of complaint, and has promised to keep us informed of any developments.

Almost as soon as the above was written, there were developments. The Managing Editor of the Mail on Sunday, Jim Anderson, responded to Redge's complaint as follows:

"...I have to tell you however that there are always two sides to every event such as this. The first report of Mr. Wells' exploit came from the national news agency, The Press Association. One of our reporters talked to both Mr. Wells and to the radio station. The latter told us: 'We were completely taken aback. The envelope was kept in a safety deposit box and the whole operation was watched closely. There was no possibility of any fiddling.'

"Mr. Wells, who we reported as being a professional mind-reader and we indicated that he performed on stage, told us: 'I just sit down and concentrate, I don't claim to have psychic powers, it is a technique that I have developed over the years.'

"Naturally, there were sceptics in the office who advised caution, but the general view was that the report we published was perfectly acceptable, given the checks that we had made ourselves.

"I have since spoken to Mr. Hoskins, who tells me that rather than saying to you he 'was surprised that anyone would think that the event was anything other than the clever trick it was', he said he personally felt it was more likely to be clever trick in that Mr. Wells had switched the envelopes at the time of opening the box...but, he added, although he was present and observed Mr. Wells all the time, he could not confirm that that had actually happened.

"I repeat that I am sorry you have been upset by our report, but add that we feel this was not a case of incorrect reporting, nor of misinforming people about important matters of fact."

We understand that Redge will be pursuing the matter further.

A SPANISH CLOSE ENCOUNTER RE-EXAMINED

Ian Ridpath

Every UFO researcher knows that the dazzling planet Venus is the single most common culprit in UFO sightings, yet it still catches out people who should know better. I found the following example in *The Encyclopedia of UFOs*, edited by Ronald Story, where it appears under the heading "Serena encounter" as an example of a genuine close encounter of the first kind, in which (according to the case investigators) the UFO seemed to exhibit intelligent control and produced electromagnetic and physiological effects.

In brief, Mr and Mrs Antonio Serena plus their three daughters were driving home one evening after visiting friends near Valencia, Spain, when they noticed an intense white light that chased their car along 40 km of road for an hour. After following them on the right as they drove southwards, the UFO then zig-zagged in front of them before it finally descended to an estimated height of 7 or 8 metres and extended landing gear. As the UFO came closer, the car's lights began to fail, the engine experienced ignition problems and one of the children became violently sick. After another car approached from the opposite direction the UFO moved away, and eventually disappeared.

This case was investigated by Willy Smith, then professor of physics at Lycoming College, Williamsport, Pennsylvania, in conjunction with two Spanish UFOlogists, Miguel Guasp and V.J. Ballester Olmos. The three researchers assign this case to the "high-strangeness" category. Their report takes up two and a half pages of *The Encyclopedia of UFOs*, more space than is devoted to celebrated cases such as the Travis Walton abduction and the Tunguska event. Clearly, the researchers rate it very highly indeed.

By chance, I discovered that they had previously written up the story in more detail in *UFO Phenomena* vol.3 no.1, an annual review of UFOlogy published in Italy which is presented in the style of a scientific journal. This earlier paper contains an important clue to the identity of the UFO that is not given in the *Encyclopedia* article. In this earlier paper the authors note that on the date of the sighting (February 22, 1977) the planet Venus was approaching its maximum brilliancy in the evening sky. Yet they reject Venus as an explanation on the grounds that Venus set at about 9.30 pm on that date, whereas the UFO sighting did not begin until about 9.30 and lasted until 10.30.

The setting time of Venus on that date was indeed about 9.30 pm, GMT. However Spain, in common with most of western Europe, keeps time one hour ahead of GMT. Therefore Venus would not have set until 10.30 pm local time. Venus was, after all, visible as the Serenas drove home, and its setting time of 10.30 matches the time at which the UFO vanished.

The "chase" of a car by a bright celestial object is a familiar theme in UFOlogy. A map of the event given by Smith, Guasp and Ballester Olmos shows that when the UFO seemed to descend in front of the car the Serenas were heading virtually due west, and hence were looking directly towards the direction of the setting Venus. The road was winding, which would cause Venus to appear to zig-zag, as they reported the UFO to do. The UFO stopped moving when Mr Serena pulled up the car for his teenage daughter Carmen to vomit by the roadside. A mixture of travel sickness on the winding road and excitement over the UFO seems a plausible explanation for Carmen's stomach upset.

There does seem to have been something genuinely wrong with the car's electrical system, for the following day Mr Serena found that his car battery was dry. Smith, Guasp and Ballester Olmos attribute this to the UFO, for they do not think that Mr Serena, who is a professional bus driver and upkeep his car conscientiously, would let his battery run dry. However, that is what must have happened - unless, of course, UFOs are now given to topping up their own batteries from passing cars.

In short, all the aspects of this "high strangeness" case can easily be attributed to prosaic causes. The original failure to solve the case stems from an elementary error in the setting time of Venus. It demonstrates that even the endorsement by a professor of physics of a close encounter involving electromagnetic and physiological effects is no guarantee that a genuine UFO is involved.

I would now add the following UFOlogical Principle to Phil Klass's famous list: The "strangeness" of a UFO case is directly related to the strangeness of the UFOlogist who investigated it.

Postscript: After seeing the above explanation when it was published in the British magazine *Magonia*, Willy Smith replied by "hinting" that Venus must have been conveniently hidden by a mountain while the Serena family were looking directly at it. However, his own photographs of the Serena encounter site, published with his original paper in *UFO Phenomena*, show that the horizon of the locality is very low and clear. I wrote and asked him if he had measured the altitude in degrees of the mountains as seen from the close encounter site, but he has not replied.

Ian Ridpath is a writer on astronomy and space and is a consultant to the British committee.

A bizarre display of transcendental meditation 'flying' really brought the roof down at Stourbridge Town Hall.

Two shop-keepers had to run from their soft furnishings store, when performers above in the Ambicote Room shook the ceiling so much that it began to fall in on them.

Mrs Nan Hill, of Drew Road, Wollescote and Mrs Gillian Ward, of Marine Crescent, Wordsley, were forced to dodge falling plaster in their Hammond and Hill shop.

Nan's husband, Patrick, of a neighbouring shop and a partner in the firm, ran to the demonstrators to tell them to stop.

Nan said: "Patrick has told Dudley Council about

the state of our roof and activities of this nature were not suitable for the Ambicote Room.

Levitate

"Normally only things like slimming clubs and sewing societies meet there."

But Mr David Hickman, in charge of Town Hall activities, said: "Activities which would weaken the Town Hall floor in this room no longer take place there. We have banned aerobics and disco dancing from the Ambicote Room."

"When we were approached with a transcendental meditation booking we agreed as we had no idea they would be jumping up and down in such a manner."

"I always understood TM to mean people sitting on the floor immobile and not doing very much. It was a complete revelation to me when they started to levitate and bounce across the room".

'Flying' display ruins ceiling

Reprinted from the *County Express*, Stourbridge, W. Midlands, 21 August, 1986.
Contributed by H. Bennett.

THE GELLER BUMPH

The writer has a BS degree and is a Member of the Magic Circle.

I see that Uri Geller has recently come out of cold storage, had a new book ghosted, and appeared with Terry Wogan and Gay Byrne, the major talk shows for Great Britain and Ireland respectively. As he states that he is now a multi-millionaire due to fees paid him to find oil, gold, and diamonds in the ten years we have not seen him, he obviously doesn't need the money. Ten years is a long time to be absent, but he apparently has developed nothing new in the way of paranormal phenomena in the interim, being still limited to bending spoons, starting watches, causing compasses to move, and all the other tricks of a decade ago. The public is very fickle and has a short memory. Perhaps he is hoping that they have forgotten the debunking he received then from members of the magic fraternity who objected to his fraudulent misuse of their entertainment techniques while claiming supernormal powers. Here he is again, though, charming, winsome, and very good at what he does. He plans to make his home in England, so magicians here are dusting off their wands and preparing to do battle.

Rereading "The Geller Papers", subtitled "Scientific Observations on the Paranormal Powers of Uri Geller", I was struck by two points. The first was the feeling that one gets that the authors of these "scientific papers" (only one actually appeared in a scientific journal) seem to be driven by an unseemly urge to get their names on record in connection with what might turn out to be a major scientific breakthrough. The second was the utter naivety disclosed by their descriptions of the precautions taken to prevent fraud. I shall describe the latter as it appears revealed in two of the papers, "Experiments on Psychokinetic Phenomena" by John B. Hasted et al, and "My Geller Notebooks" by Hasted.

Part of the first paper is given over to a discussion of how to keep Uri happy. It seems that it is difficult to get him to do what the experimenter wants. (Translation: The key which was not on the table in full view is the one which is found to be bent.) Again, all who participate should be in a relaxed state, as a feeling of tension, fear, or hostility on the part of any of those present generally communicates itself to the whole group. (Translation: anyone present who is hostile and not relaxed is likely to see Uri do the business.) "Indeed", the paper says, "we have sometimes found it useful at this stage to talk of, or think about, something not closely related to what is happening so as to decrease the tendency to excessive conscious concentration on the intended aim of the experiment. (Emphasis added.)

The authors follow this up with an exceedingly curious statement which I reproduce in full: "Many of the conditions described above are also required for fruitful research in the natural sciences. Thus, if any of those who participate in a physical experiment are tense or hostile, and do not really want the experiment to work, the chances of success are greatly diminished."

Further words of one syllable: "It should be possible to design experimental arrangements that are beyond any reasonable possibility of trickery, and that magicians will generally acknowledge to be so. In the first stage of our work we did, in fact, present Mr. Geller with several such arrangements, but these proved to be aesthetically unappealing to him." No translation is necessary. Further, "...we learned that Mr. Geller worked best when presented with many possible objects ...; at least one of these objects might appeal to him sufficiently to stimulate his energies." (Translation: the experimenter can't concentrate on what the performer is going to do next.)

I must now outline one of the "tests" for the reader to form his own judgement about what actually happened. It is labelled by the authors a "dematerialization event". A vanadium carbide disk described as about 2.0 mm in diameter and 0.4 mm thick with a central orifice (Translation: hole in the middle) surrounded by thinned sections was provided, in an unsealed plastic pharmaceutical capsule (pill case) about 1 cm long. (However the accompanying photograph is labelled to show that the disk is 3 mm in diameter.) There were two such tiny assemblies. An unspecified number of undescribed other metal objects "of various sizes", some in similar capsules, plus the two encapsulated disks were placed on a metal plate and after some mumbo jumbo it was determined that half of one of the disks had fractured off and "dematerialized". The missing half could not be found even after the entire lab was subsequently vacuum-cleaned. (Translation: Uri was not searched. No doubt the missing half will mysteriously "materialize" on Hasted's desk one day when Uri visits again.)

Consider the situation: there is a collection of very small objects on a metal plate so that the experimenters cannot be expected to keep account of each one. Some of the objects are in cellulose pill cases, unsealed. Such a case can easily be completely concealed between two fingers at the base. It is even conceivable that the case can be compressed between two fingernails or between the palm of the hand and the sharp edge of the steel plate which Uri is said to like so much, so that the contents are fractured while the flexible case remains unmarred. An unsealed pill case held hidden between the bases of two fingers can be opened by two fingers of the other hand in an unsuspecting gesture. Try it yourself.

Hasted appears to be intellectually not dishonest, just stupid: "I did not actually examine them (the capsules) closely when putting them out on the surface plate. ... There was a strong presumption that they were unchanged, but in view of what was to happen I now regret this oversight; it detracts from an otherwise perfect session." It is to be noted, however, that this qualification does not appear in the description of the same events given in the first article. For those of us who do not have samples about the house, vanadium carbide is described by the author as a brittle crystal, extremely springy, being under internal stress, having the appearance of metal, but harder than glass. The prosecution rests.

Hasted et al give the following irrationalization for why it is not necessary to have a skilled magician present in such tests:

"... we realize that conditions such as we have described ... are just those in which a conjuring trick may easily be carried out. We understand that we are not conjuring experts, so if there should be an intention to deceive, we may be as readily fooled as any person. Moreover, there has been a great deal of public criticism, in which the possibility of such tricks has been strongly suggested. For this reason it has often been proposed that a skilled magician should be present, to help see to it that there will be no possibility of deception.

It is in the nature of the case, however, that no such assurance can actually be given. For a skilled magician is able to exploit each new situation as it arises in a different and generally unpredictable way. ... A particular magician could therefore say at most that he knew of no tricks that could have brought about a given set of observed phenomena. ... magicians are often hostile to the whole purpose of this sort of investigation, so they tend to bring about an atmosphere of tension in which little or nothing can be done."

Hasted seems to ignore totally the high likelihood that the magician, knowing of possible techniques, would be able to catch the performer in fraud. As is well known, Geller was unable to produce any local phenomena on the Johnny Carson TV show when the props and conditions were carefully controlled under the supervision of a professional magician. (Carson was also a magician in his early days.)

"My Geller Notebooks" also includes the following damning comments:

"It was difficult for me to maintain controlled conditions ... (Geller) bent two latchkeys and my stainless steel paper knife, but not while sitting at the table. He walked into David Bohm's office and later held the latchkeys under a tap; so I did not see the bendings sufficiently clearly."

"Sufficiently clearly?" I surmise that he did not see these bendings at all. One of the best ways to bend a key if you have left your key bender at home or don't like to travel armed is to put the small end of the key in a bathroom tap and press the large end upward. Magicians have an "in" joke to the effect that Uri must have weak kidneys, as he spends so much time rushing off to the bathroom.

Watch this space for further shock horror developments!

Frank Chambers 2/87

PROFILE OF A SMALL-TIME PSYCHIC

Phil Jordan, of Candor, NY, is the local psychic performer for Ithaca, NY, my old home. During one of my visits back to the U.S., my old friend Bill Steele and I collected the material we presented in Buffalo in December (see below). Jordan is particularly interesting to us because he is a "small-time psychic", that is, someone who makes a living as a psychic performer doing dinner shows and private readings for moderate fees in his own restaurant in a small town. He's not doing badly, even without big-time radio and TV exposure. In the last year, Jordan has bought a funeral home, and has begun to do a bi-weekly TV show interviewing other psychic performers on Ithaca's local public access cable channel. Jordan claims to see auras, from which he says he can predict medical problems, travel plans, and the future of romantic entanglements. He also has a curious affinity for predicting problems with cars and home electrical appliances. James Randi, at his November, 1986, lecture at Cornell University (also in Ithaca), suggested that to test Jordan's aura-seeing ability, one should allow Jordan to choose a subject with a particularly strong aura extending some distance above the subject's head. The experimenter would then set up four numbered screens that would mask the subject completely. From a bucket filled with slips of paper numbered one to four, the subject would draw randomly. The number on the slip would determine which screen the subject stood behind; Jordan's task then would be to say, from his ability to see the subject's aura protruding above the screen, which screen the subject was standing behind. If Jordan can indeed see auras, even over a large number of trials, he should have no trouble with this. Jordan, however, does not seem to be willing to be tested by Randi.

The following article is reprinted from the January, 1987, Western New York Skeptics' Newsletter, and describes our presentation to their December 17 meeting.

WILLIAM STEELE AND WENDY GROSSMAN of Ithaca next told the group about their investigation of claimed psychic Philip Jordan, who first piqued their interest when the two freelance writers were commissioned by an Ithaca paper to write an article about him.

Steele and Grossman related the facts of an Ithaca case in which Jordan, whose background includes a keen interest in police work and a position as deputy sheriff, was given media credit for leading police to the bodies of two drowning victims.

Steele and Grossman showed how everything Jordan was credited with "seeing" was simply the repetition of information available to him beforehand. For example, Jordan had been invited into the case by a police lieutenant who described the scene and told him that a first and third shallow pool in the river had already been searched, and a fence set up at the exit of the third pool. Jordan then predicted that the bodies would be found in the second, deeper pool. They were. Psychic vision, or common sense? The media chose the former, and credited Jordan with the find.

A lively discussion began when a member of the audience told of a public "reading" at which Jordan picked her out by asking, "Are you an artist?" She shook her head. "I see you surrounded by paintings," he told her. "My God," she said, "I had just visited a major art gallery the week before!"

When the meeting was adjourned, the audience rushed to exchange viewpoints.

Book Reviews

Sorry, You've Been Duped! by Melvin Harris. Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1986. £9.95. 194pp. (American edition: Investigating the Unexplained, Prometheus Books, 1986.)

Reviewed by Lewis Jones.

PARROT CRY PROVES SURVIVAL: 'DEAD' ONE-LEGGED FATHER IS SPEEDILY RECOGNIZED.

"Honestly," says Melvin Harris, "I've not invented that headline." It's the appropriately loony lead-in to a *Psychic News* story about medium Doris Stokes, and it gives you the flavour of some of the material that falls under Harris's gleeful dissecting knife.

His work as a broadcaster and researcher for the BBC has led him to investigate some truly wondrous claims. Ghosts, demons, homing coffins, angels, a disappearing regiment, reincarnations, psychic detectives ... they're all here, just asking to be despatched by the application of a critical intelligence powered by sheer stick-to-it-iveness.

When George Lutz moved into his new Long Island home on 18 December 1975, he fled after 28 days, in the face of foul stench, irremovable black slime, plagues of flies, cloven-hoof tracks in the snow, and doors that were wrenched off their hinges by demonic forces.

The ensuing bestseller "The Amityville Horror" was claimed to be "more hideously frightening than *The Exorcist*, because it actually happened."

Alas, Dr Stephan Kaplan, director of the Parapsychology Institute of America, felt obliged to report: "After several months of extensive research and interviews ... we found no evidence to support any claim of a 'haunted house.' What we did find was a couple who had purchased a house that they economically could not afford."

Police denied that they had ever been called in. The priest denied that he was ever in the place. Repairmen denied that they had ever been asked to fix any damage. And attorney William Weber admitted: "We created this horror story over many bottles of wine that George was drinking."

The psychic sleuths are here in force. But so are the police, consistently denying that mediums had ever been any use to them. The Devon and Cornwall Constabulary in the case of the missing Dartmoor Air cadets: "[Mrs Dymond's] information fitted about forty locations on the moor, and was of no practical use whatsoever."

Don Crabb (now police superintendent at Newton Abbott) in the case of missing schoolgirl Genette Tate: "We listened to them all, but they didn't do anything to help our enquiry."

And chief of Field Operations of the Baltimore County Police, when Doris Stokes had claimed to help in the case of missing teenager Jamie Griffin: "Ms Stokes did not contribute any useful or informative information, nor did she supply any new information which could not have been given her by the Griffin family or by newspaper articles."

In fact there is only one case on record of a one hundred per cent psychic success in crime. When 9-year-old Steven Brown disappeared, Jackie Skeels psychically located the very spot where the body was buried on the bank of the San Joaquin river.

The shine is taken off the success story when you learn that Jackie Skeels (the girlfriend of the boy's father) was later found guilty of first-degree murder. She had drowned the boy.

Murder enquiries draw psychics out of the woodwork in their hundreds. And it is often the victim's family who are most plagued by offers of mystic help. Genette's father said, "We clutched at them desperately in the early days ... But the promises of the psychics were all lies."

They had a field day of course with the Yorkshire Ripper. Not least among them was the egregious Doris Stokes, never one to resist a ride on a bandwagon. The Ripper had a scar below below his left eye (WRONG). He was called Ronnie or Johnnie (WRONG). His surname began with M (WRONG). He lived in a street named Perwick or Bewick (WRONG). He was clean-shaven (WRONG). He had long, straight hair

(WRONG). He lived on Tyneside or Wearside (WRONG).

In fact five years of psychic roulette failed to turn up a single useful piece of information about the Ripper. If it had all been taken seriously, thousands of hours of police time would have been wasted.

In the end, Peter Sutcliffe caught the attention of the police by using false number plates on his car - something that was not divined by a single soothsayer.

Back in 1888, there were tales of the police receiving the same sort of "help" in their search for Jack the Ripper. The Victorian medium Robert Lees produced some astonishingly accurate forecasts of the times and places of murders that were to come. The *Daily Express* gained a huge circulation when it published the details in 1931. The real explanation of this astonishing success was ... But it's all in the book!

In the 1970s, the *Bloxham Tapes* allowed the British public to hear "the most staggering evidence for reincarnation ever recorded." In particular, a Welsh housewife, Jane Evans, gave lengthy and detailed accounts of life in York in the 3rd century B.C., and medieval France about 1450.

Harris has done a remarkable job of non-psychic sleuthing (always the hardest kind) in unravelling the real sources of the information. He pinpoints the historical novels that Evans had drawn from, even to the extent of introducing the fictional characters into her historical narrative.

The book is full of similar fascinations in the gentle art of tracking down the truth. But even as you read, some new psychic wonder is being dreamed up to canvas your belief.

In the meantime, as Melvin Harris says in his parting line, "have you heard the one about the man who got stuck in a treacle-mine?"

The Adventures of a Parapsychologist by Susan Blackmore. Prometheus Books, 1986. In UK, £15.95, available from Mike Hutchinson (see back cover). 242pp plus references.

Reviewed by Redge Lewis.

Dr. Susan Blackmore gained her Doctorate in parapsychology over ten years ago, since when she has conducted research into ESP, Occultism, Poltergeists, Tarot Cards, OBE's, et al. During all this time she failed to find convincing evidence of the existence of psi phenomena (or even one phenomenon), and her book relates her heart searchings and painstaking efforts to achieve experimental results which would justify her one-time wholehearted beliefs--rapidly eroding.

She convinced me that in the beginning she believed (without proof or knowing why she believed), and being filled with the desire to understand memory and consciousness, she was fired with enthusiasm to track down and understand what the paranormal was. She admits that parapsychology "has everything a hook needs. It is mysterious and alluring. It has just enough 'scientific' evidence to provide bait, while at the same time it is rejected by most orthodox scientists, and the inspiration for a crusading spirit to shout 'I'll show them'. And that is, I suppose, what I wanted to do." And she proceeds to tell us--with no holds barred--how she went about it.

If you like poltergeists, you will particularly enjoy pp195-207. The account of the "regression man" taking people by means of hypnotism way back beyond the moment of birth proves there are those who believe they were once Knights of the Round Table. I am only sorry that Dr. Blackmore didn't deal with ectoplasm (which Professor Arthur Ellison, DSc, one-time President of the Psychical Research Society, says smells foul), as this is one of the leaders in my personal menagerie of psychic betes noires.

But you can't have everything. This is an honest, interesting book, recommended as required reading for those who are hooked on the subject. Even those who may not yet be committed Sceptics--or even Skeptics.

Redge Lewis is a retired real estate agent and an ardent Skeptic.

Stories of note
from *Psychic News*, January 1987

Toby Howard

I'm sketching these stories without comment ¹.

Haunted caves to be probed

The Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena (ASSAP) is to conduct an investigation of the Chislehurst Caves complex in Kent. According to the official guide book, the caves were discovered by psychic means in the 1920s, when a medium suggested where to dig.
PN 10/1/87

Psychics "no use"

Police following up details provided by clairvoyants, in an effort to solve a February 1985 murder case, found their suggestions of no use at all.
PN 17/1/87

Psychic phonenumber to be set up

Liverpool medium Billy Roberts is to record a series of short telephone messages on psychic matters for the new *PsychicLine* service.
PN 17/1/87

Haunting reported at Police centre

Police Review reports the sighting of an apparition at a Harrogate Police training centre, which "defies logical explanation".
PN 17/1/87

Medical Encyclopædia to include faith healing

A new publication, *The Home Medical Encyclopædia*, to appear in the UK under the auspices of the BMA, is to include an article on the benefits of faith healing by Hertfordshire healer Shiela Macey.
PN 24/1/87

Spiritualist defence group formed

In an effort to defend spiritualism from bigoted attack, the *Spiritualist Media and Information Service* has been formed.
PN 24/1/87

Couple flee from haunted home

Unexplained noises and voices, the sound of trains, strange laughter, an icy atmosphere, shadowy figures surrounded by fog . . . , have all contributed to a young couple fleeing their council house in Dewsbury, West Yorkshire.
PN 24/1/87

Summaries of stories of note
from *Psychic News*, February 1987

Brooke-Bond launches psychic card series

Brooke-Bond have printed 600 million cards for their new series on "Unexplained Mysteries of the world".
PN 7/2/87

Clairvoyant seeks to have Vagrancy Act repealed

Alan Venamore, clairvoyant, is seeking the assistance of the Law Commission to have the Vagrancy Act repealed. This follows the action of Worthing's borough council, which invoked the act to refuse Mr Venamore's application to open a "Tarot Booth" on the resort's pier. Mr Venamore enlisted the help of MP Terence Higgins, who wrote on his behalf to the Home Secretary, who sympathised and agreed the law should be repealed.
PN 7/2/87

Cleric attacks psychic telephone

Liverpool's new dial-a-psychic service *PsychicLine* has been lambasted by a local vicar. The service, operated by medium Billy Roberts, features a number of three-minute messages encouraging people to visit his "Thought Workshop".
PN 7/2/87

"Police Review" examines psychics

An article in January's *Police Review* considered the rôle played by mediums in major police investigations. According to a survey among senior officers, most remain skeptical about the crime-busting abilities of mediums.
PN 7/2/87

"Ouija" social worker banned

A Lancashire child care worker, said to have taken part in ouija board sessions, has been banned from working with youngsters.
PN 7/2/87

Filipino "surgeons" still going

The Philippine medical Association is to consider whether psychic surgeons should practise in hospitals alongside conventional medicine.
PN 14/2/87

Medium joins The Sun

Leading clairvoyant Doris Collins has joined *The Sun* to answer readers' queries about the afterlife.
PN 21/2/87

¹which in most cases would be superfluous!

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

David Berman's article on the Knock apparitions is both lucid and sensible, and I would dispute neither his presentation of the facts nor the inferences he draws from them.

However, I question whether we have to limit the possible explanations to four - i.e. genuine appearance of the VM ; mass hallucination ; collusion/conspiracy ; or hoax. There is also, I suggest, the possibility of a psychological explanation, whereby a primary event (which we may well suppose to be of a hallucinatory nature) triggers a chain of secondary events occurring to people who are suitably suggestible.

Yet we have good grounds for believing that this is a relatively common feature of visionary events. For instance, at Lourdes in 1858, the claim of Bernadette Soubirous was only one of dozens made within the space of a few months. The Church has seen fit to validate Bernadette's experience as authentic, while rejecting the rest as pseudo-visionaries ; but in practice even a hard-headed commentator like Thurston offers no hard-and-fast criterion for accepting the one and dismissing the others.

My own belief is that the same process is occurring in both the 'primary' event and the 'secondary' ones, with the difference that whereas the latter are triggered by suggestion, we would have to look to deeper causes - to look in the personality and disposition of the witness - to explain the primary sighting.

In my books *Visions, apparitions, alien visitors* (1984) and *Gods, spirits, cosmic guardians* (1987) I propose a psychological model for visionary and encounter experiences, involving interaction between the individual need of the witness, his/her cultural background, and the immediate circumstances obtaining at the time. Given a person of suitable disposition (eg an impressionable teenager in the throes of the identity crisis known as adolescence) in an appropriate cultural environment (eg a pious peasant community in which one of the few things which relieve the unremitting poverty and boredom is religious folklore), all that is required is a suitable trigger (almost any anomalous incident will do) and all the ingredients for the primary vision are present. Thereafter, if the conditions are favorable, the initial experience will induce imitative experiences in people of weaker and more suggestible nature.

I confess to not having studied the Knock sightings closely ; but it seems to me that such a model could have been operating there as I believe it did in most other visionary encounters.

Yours sincerely,

Hilary Evans

Dear Editor,

In your revealing review of *Secret Cult* (No. 1, pp. 11-2) you wrote of "the end result of fanaticism: Guyana, or concentration camps, or Moonies wandering around like zombies...." Exercizing my ever ready scepticism, I have nevertheless to allow that you were all too right about both Guyana and about the concentration camps of National Socialist Germany; and you might well have added a word about the Soviet gulag, and its analogues in China, Cambodia, Vietnam and the other countries of Leninist socialism.

But just what, and how firm, is the evidence of "Moonies wandering around like zombies"? I have myself by now met dozens, mainly but not only through attending a series of academic conferences impeccably run by the International Cultural Foundation of the Unification Church, the outfit from whose founder's name the Moonies get their nickname. Of course to me, as a longtime atheist and present Vice-President of the Rationalist Press Association, their distinctive doctrines are perhaps marginally even more unbelievable than those of mainstream religious organizations. Yet, though there may well be such somewhere, it must in truth and justice be said that I have myself yet to meet even one Moonie who reminded me of cinematic representations of zombies in Horror films with a Haitian setting.

Yours Faithfully,

Antony Flew

Dr. Flew is, of course, absolutely right. I did an appalling thing, particularly in a newsletter of this kind: I spoke without thinking. My apologies to Dr. Flew, to our readers, and to the Moonies. --wg

THE BRITISH COMMITTEE

Acting Chairman: David Berglas; Secretary: Michael Hutchinson. Members: Alan Brien, Jeremy Cherfas, C. E. M. Hansel, Melvin Harris, Lewis Jones, David Marks, Denys Parsons, Karl Sabbagh, Chris Scott.

IRISH CONVENORS

Peter O'Hara, Wendy M. Grossman.

The Irish Skeptics
Peter O'Hara
Primrose Hill
Tivoli Road
Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin

The British Committee
Michael Hutchinson
10 Crescent View
Loughton, Essex IG10 4PZ
Telephone: 01 508 2989

THE ^{British} ^{& Irish} **SKEPTIC** is published bimonthly from 1 Queens Court, Queens Park, Monkstown, Co. Dublin, Ireland. Editor: Wendy M. Grossman, telephone Dublin area 806326. Opinions expressed in this newsletter are the opinions of the author, and are not necessarily those of the Editor, the Irish Skeptics, the British Committee, or the Committee for Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP). Articles, news, and comment may be reprinted only by permission of individual authors, however, permission to use in-house material (that with no by-line, or the editor's initials) is automatically extended to the publications of all national or regional groups affiliated with CSICOP, including those of CSICOP itself. Subscription rates: IR£10.00 or Sterling £9.50 per year (a year is defined as six issues); cheques or money orders are accepted in either currency, and should be made payable to "The Skeptic". Would-be subscribers outside the UK and Ireland should write to the editor for information. Any additional donations to the newsletter, to the British Committee, or to the Irish Skeptics will be gratefully accepted and directed to the appropriate destination.

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

(probably)

Profile of Doris Stokes

Skepticism in Europe

CSICOP's LA Conference

Book Review: The Transcendental Temptation (Paul Kurtz)

COPY DATE JUNE 1*, 1987

*The Editor's probable, bizarre schedule means that the next issue will go out a couple of weeks later than planned, hence the later copy date. We still expect to publish six issues this year.



This document has been digitized in order to share it with the public through AFU's project, running since 2010, to share files donated/deposited with the AFU foundation. Please consider making single or regular monetary donations to our work, or donations of your files for future preservation at our archival centre.

Archives for the Unexplained (AFU) · P O Box 11027 · 600 11 Norrköping, Sweden · www.afu.se

Paypal: afu@ufo.se

IBAN: SE59 9500 0099 6042 0490 7143

BIC: NDEASESS – Nordea/Plusgirot, Stockholm

Swish (Sweden only): 123 585 43 69