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***SKEPTIC***

A publication dedicated to the scientific investigation of claims of the paranormal

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# Hits and Misses

Steve Donnelly

## A Matter of Gravity

If you are an inventor of an antigravity machine based on spinning discs or rings (aren't they all?) then a paper published in the highly respected physics journal, *Physical Review Letters* (*PRL*) on 18 December 1989 will provide scientific support for your claims. The paper, entitled 'Anomalous Weight Reduction on a Gyroscope's Right Rotations around the Vertical Axis on the Earth' by Japanese scientists Hideo Hayasaka and Sakae Tacheuchi reported that measurements on a spinning gyroscope revealed that it became lighter when spinning in a clockwise sense (viewed from above) than when static or spinning in an anticlockwise sense.

VOLUME 63, NUMBER 25 PHYSICAL REVIEW LETTERS 18 DECEMBER 1989

### Anomalous Weight Reduction on a Gyroscope's Right Rotations around the Vertical Axis on the Earth

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(Received 7 March 1988; revised manuscript received 9 August 1989)

The weight change of each of three spinning mechanical gyroscopes whose rotor's masses are 140, 175, and 176 g has been measured during inertial rotations, without systematic errors. The experiments show that the weight changes for rotations around the vertical axis are completely asymmetrical. The right rotations (spin vector pointing downward) cause weight decreases of the order of milligrams (weight), proportional to the frequency of rotation at 3000–11 000 rpm. However, the left rotations do not cause any change in weight.

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To confirm the reflection symmetry relating to the rotational motion of objects in the gravitational field of the Earth, the weight of each of three spinning mechanical gyroscopes has been measured during left (spin vector pointing upward) and right (spin vector pointing downward) inertial rotations around the vertical axis by means of a chemical balance. The experimental apparatus and method are as follows.

Each gyroscope is composed of the stator, rotor, and rigid frame. Rotors of 139.863, 174.882, and 175.504 g are used, and their diameters are 5.2, 5.8, and 5.8 cm, respectively. The materials of the rotors are brass, aluminum, and silicon-steel. The dynamic balance, which is the criterion of the maximum deviation of the center of a rotor's mass associated with rotations, and the fluctuation of the rotational frequency of each gyroscope are 0.1 mm/s and  $\pm 0.2\%$ , respectively, for both rotations. This means that the dynamic characteristic, i.e., the synthetic criterion of the stabilities of spinning and precession of each gyroscope, is the same for the two rotations. An oscillator capable of switching polarities and a voltage amplifier are used to change the frequency of rotation of the rotor and to supply the driving power to the gyroscope. The directions of the left and right rotations are determined by the polarity. A photoachometer is used to measure the frequency of rotation of the rotor. The chemical balance is made of nonmagnetic materials, and the measurable range is 0 to 500 g with an accuracy  $\pm 0.3$  mg. To exclude fluid effects of air on the rotating gyroscope, a vacuum container made of glass is used. An overview of the experimental apparatus is shown in Fig. 1.

The first experiment was carried out in the environment magnetic field of 0.35 G that is nearly totally due to the geomagnetism. The degree of vacuum in the container containing the gyroscope is kept between  $1.3 \times 10^{-3}$  and  $1.3 \times 10^{-4}$  Pa. The electric power is supplied to the gyroscope through superfine wires. The rotational frequency of the rotor is brought to the desired value by increasing the supply voltage and the frequency of the oscillator under the same driving condition for all the

measurements. After the desired value of the rotational frequency is attained, the electrical circuit is opened. Then the weight of the rotating gyroscope is measured under inertial rotation. The weight measurements are repeatedly carried out 10 times for a given frequency of rotation.

As shown in Fig. 2, the right rotations of each gyroscope always cause weight decreases of the order of milligrams, proportional to the frequency of rotation. The weight reduction occurs for both normal and reverse attitudes. Here, reverse attitude of a gyroscope means merely its upside-down attitude without change of the states of the other equipments and the environment considered. Right rotations mean the spin vector pointing downward for both the normal and the upside-down attitudes. On the other hand, the left rotations of each gyroscope yield zero weight change for all frequencies of rotation and both attitudes, within the accuracy of the chemical balance. The weight changes for both rotations

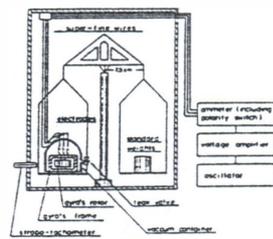


FIG. 1. Overview of the experimental apparatus including the chemical balance.

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Although the weight reduction, measured on three different gyroscopes, was only a few milligrams (corresponding to about one ten thousandth of the total weight) it is a much greater change than any current physical theory predicts. The experiments consisted of simply weighing the gyroscopes using an ordinary chemical balance whilst they were spinning at different rates and in different senses. To avoid any aerodynamic effects, the gyroscopes rotated inside a small vessel from which the air had been evacuated. The original manuscript had been received by *PRL* in March 1988 indicating that the journal, which prides itself on its prompt publication, did not take the decision to publish the paper lightly.

Unlike the Benveniste homeopathy publication in *Nature*, however, the gyroscope paper was published without any comment from the editors of the journal.

The authors obviously anticipated a critical response from fellow scientists as they devoted almost a page of their short article to listing and dismissing possible sources of error which could have given the same result. They concluded that 'the experimental result is independent of the Earth's spinning' and that 'the weight reduction cannot be explained by the usual theories'. If these results can be replicated by other laboratories and no mundane explanation of them can be found, then their effects on research into gravitation will be as profound as the effects of a successful demonstration of cold fusion would have been on energy research programmes. *New Scientist* on 17 February, however, reported that other researchers feel that electromagnetic interactions between different components of the experiment or the effects of the transfer of angular momentum to the balance could explain the results. They report also that American researchers at a major U.S. government laboratory have repeated the experiments and failed to detect the effect. Perhaps it only works in Japan and presumably also Melbourne, Australia where Sandy Kidd, the Scots inventor whose anti-gravity machine based on gyroscopes was widely reported in the tabloids last year, is now living and developing his technology. A belated prediction for 1990 is that as a result of the Japanese research, Mr Kidd will rise again in the British media (if not in the air atop a spinning gyroscope).

## Marilyn and Elvis

I have reason to believe that the claim in the *Sunday Sport* in June 1988 that 'Marilyn Monroe is Alive and Working as a Nanny in Heaven' may not be true. Unless, of course, she simply takes her vacations in an apartment in Portadown, Northern Ireland. What makes me so skeptical of the *Sunday Sport*, I hear you ask? Well, it is simply that another reliable newspaper, the *Sunday World*, reported on 10 December that a certain Vernon Bell, when playing his piano was visited by a strange female presence whom he thought at first was his landlord. When he checked with the former inhabitants of his Portadown flat he discovered that this presence was, in fact Marilyn Monroe who had haunted the property since the cinema across the road closed down after a final showing of 'Some Like It Hot'.

Meanwhile, the King of Rock and Roll, Elvis Presley, is not living in Portadown but is 'alive and well and living in heaven' (although it is not clear whether he is working as a nanny) according to a recent report in the *Sun*. At an exclusive séance which American medium Kenny Kingston held for the *Sun*, Elvis appeared wearing a Roman toga. According to Mr Kingston 'Elvis greeted us all and said that the next time we saw him he would be a doctor'. He said that 'on the other



side he had been studying medicine intensively and that he was absorbed in self-healing' (—a bit late, in my view). Confusingly, Elvis went on to scoff at stories which claim he is really alive and stated categorically 'Believe me, I died'. Death apparently suits him as he appeared fit and relaxed—perhaps giving credence to the old adage that 'death is nature's way of telling you to slow down'.

## Dead Wrong

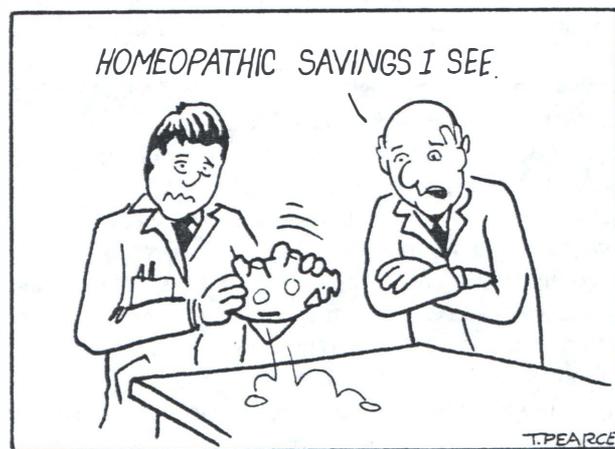
Not all mediums are as successful in their séances as Kenny Kingston. For instance, Lee Everett the psychic ex-wife of TV personality Kenny Everett, was contacted by her old school pal Michelle Anderson from beyond the grave. According to the *News of the World* on 4 February, Lee Everett described her deceased friend as a drunken, dope-taking nymphomaniac who died of a drugs overdose in Blackpool and published this description in her autobiography. This description did not appeal much to Michelle Anderson (now Mrs Robinson), who is actually alive and well and living (no not in heaven) but in Blackpool. Ms Everett also claimed that her dead pal had had a 43 inch bust, something which Mrs Robinson denies . . .

## Murdoch's Stars

. . . And whilst on the subject of 43 inch busts, an item published in the *Melbourne Age* on 15 November indicates that the nude photographs on page 3 which are the hallmark of Rupert Murdoch's (British) *Sun* newspaper may have come about because of Murdoch's belief in astrology. Sir Larry Lamb, who was the *Sun*'s first editor, is quoted as saying that he had a vague feeling of regret about the topless pictures because there was an element of exploitation in making them an institution. Unbelievably, Sir Larry is not referring to the exploitation of women but of Rupert Murdoch. Murdoch apparently had reservations about the idea of running pictures of naked women in his newspaper but he also had 'a thing about the stars'. And so the features editor of the *Sun* 'massaged' Mr Murdoch's forecast, urging him to be open and generous at all times—the implication being that Murdoch gave in on the issue of page 3 after reading his horoscope.

## Nothing Acts Faster than Homeopathy

In the true spirit of Margaret Thatcher's Britain, homeopaths are suggesting a change to the National Health Service which, if implemented would save £69 million pounds per annum. According to the *Sunday Times* on 17 December, Dr Jeremy Swayne, co-ordinator of a homeopathy data research unit in Bristol, monitored the costs of prescribing homeopathic medicines and compared this with the costs of prescribing conventional remedies. The average expenditure per patient for homeopathic remedies was 92p compared with £4.61 in conventional practice. In Dr Swayne's view the integration of homeopathy into the NHS 'could have therapeutic and economic benefits. Patients would have access to either form of medicine and the NHS could benefit from a substantial reduction in doctors' drug costs'. Swayne is also urging medical schools to introduce modules on complementary medicine on undergraduate courses. The *British & Irish Skeptic* would like to suggest that this principle be extended to other areas. For instance, engineering departments could introduce undergraduate courses on practical and theoretical telepathy with a view to having telepathy adopted by British Telecom for use along with the more boring electrical and optical systems they usually employ. The cost savings could be enormous and who can say whether it would give rise to a more efficient service?



## Abominable Hoaxer

Although the myth of hidden hordes of hairy hominoids may be indigenous to many cultures, the yeti or abominable snowmen of the Himalayas have undoubtedly attracted more media attention than any other similar creatures since their 'discovery' by mountaineer Eric Shipton in 1951. In a dispatch to *The Times* in November of that year Shipton described how he had discovered the yeti's tracks on a glacier beginning at an altitude of 18 000 feet and descending for more than a mile. He described the tracks as 'oval impressions, slightly longer and a good deal broader than those made by our large mountain boots'. A month or so later *The Times* published three photographs taken by Shipton which showed a line of indistinct oval prints stretching across the snow and a dramatic close up of a well-formed print, com-

plete with impressions of toes. The yeti have been regularly in the news since this time with, in recent years, the mountaineer Chris Bonington being their most ardent supporter. Arguably, the sightings of similar creatures in other parts of the world, such as the Bigfoot or sasquatch in the USA may have been inspired by the Himalayan yeti. The original photographs by Shipton have remained an enigmatic inspiration for subsequent generations of explorers, but an article on Shipton in the *Sunday Times* magazine on 10 December casts considerable doubts on their authenticity. The article, by Peter Gillman, cites incidents in which Shipton had been known to be economical with the truth in the interests of telling a good yarn and also quotes Sir Edmund Hillary as saying of Shipton 'He definitely liked to take the mickey out of people' and further that he may have faked or at least 'tidied up' the well-formed print before photographing it. Although somewhat extreme, perhaps there is some merit in the suggestion made by another *Sunday Times* writer Stephen Pile in an article on the yeti in July 1988. He suggested that yeti hunters should be 'placed in cork buckets and left as floodlit whale irritants'.

## Is Geller Bent?

In the Letters page of this issue, David Hawkins asks why there is such a hostile feeling towards Uri Geller especially from magicians. Perhaps I can provide an answer. In a recent television appearance on the BBC morning programme *Open Air* with gullible presenter Eamonn Holmes, Geller demonstrated clearly why magicians, conjurers and honest people everywhere should be hostile towards him. At no stage in the interview did Geller describe himself as an entertainer or a conjurer although he did admit that the controversy which surrounds him has been a great fillip to his career. In response to a viewer's (mildly skeptical) question about his recent claims to have stopped Big Ben and his reasons for not announcing his intentions in this regard in advance he replied 'I actually got a faxed letter from New York, from Connecticut to be exact, asking me to stop Big Ben on the 14th . . . . . On the 15th in the morning I looked at an old postcard, went into a small gazebo in my garden and said 'Big Ben, stop, stop, stop!. . . . . To be honest with you, I really think I stopped it'. There are three possible conclusions to be drawn

from this statement. (i) Geller stopped Big Ben paranormally (ii) Geller described his actions truthfully and actually believes that he stopped Big Ben although really he didn't or (iii) Geller told outright lies about his actions and his belief in his paranormal powers in order to exploit the gullibility of viewers and further enhance his career for monetary gain. In view of his recent tendency to bring lawsuits for libel it would be foolish of me to state which of these I favour so I leave you to draw your own conclusions. Geller may have made a recent appearance with David Berglas at a magicians' conference, he may be a charming man and a fine entertainer but until he stops making unsubstantiated claims to have paranormal powers I suspect that magicians and many other people will retain their hostility towards him.

## Video Nasties

One doesn't normally read about new ailments (except for computer viruses) in computing magazines, but the December issue of *Personal Computer World* proved that there is a first time for everything by publishing an article by Duncan Campbell on VODS. 'VODS that?' I hear you asking. Well, it stands for Video Operators' Distress Syndrome and, according to the article, VODS can result in blurred vision, headaches, allergies, asthma, moodiness and increased incidence of colds. The alarm bells about this new epidemic were sounded by Mountain Breeze, a manufacturer of ionizers based in Skelmersdale, Lancashire who (surprise, surprise) suggest that the product they manufacture can protect you from the syndrome. Ionizers (or at least those that work) produce negative ions which are believed by some people to have beneficial effects on health and feelings of well-being.

The scientific evidence for ionizers is at best equivocal, and although offices containing video display units (VDUs) may well contain higher concentrations of (unhealthy?) positive ions, the article correctly points out that studies have shown no clear link between VDUs and health. Campbell also discusses other products designed to protect us from the damaging effects of VDU radiations and singles out the NoRad Corporation of California who advertise a screen which 'will shield the VDU user from the entire spectrum of EMR (electromagnetic radiation) emissions'. As pointed out in the article this could pose some minor problems for the user as the light used to read the screen is of course an EMR emission.

The effect of electro-magnetic fields on health also featured in the US Report section of the *Journal of Alternative & Complementary Medicine* in September 1989 where Roger Coghill expounded his theory that many illnesses (and, in particular, sudden infant death syndrome) are caused by electromagnetic fields in the environment of the patient. He also took the opportunity to mention some British (private) research which showed that, in 39 cases out of 65, children who were suffering from childhood leukaemia lived at the end of cul-de-sacs or near water hydrants. To quote Coghill, 'A curious and puzzling statistic'.

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Steve Donnelly is a physicist, a lecturer in electronics, a committee member of the Manchester Skeptics and the UK Skeptics and co-editor of the *British & Irish Skeptic*.

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# UFOs Over Russia

Tom Ruffles

## *Are alien visitors taking advantage of glasnost?*

There have been numerous reports recently concerning sightings of UFOs in the Soviet Union. The most dramatic have involved aliens perambulating in parks, or even dumping (presumably) unwanted debris from their craft. The bulk of these articles have originated from the official news agency, TASS, which one usually associates with announcements of industrial achievements, or synopses of leadership speeches. As well as fulfilling this prosaic function, it has become a kind of Russian *Guardian*, chronicling the adventures of aliens, psychic healers and abominable snowmen. This article will examine the Russian UFO stories which have been circulating in recent months.

On 23 June of last year, TASS reported that, according to local newspapers, schoolchildren in the Central European region of Vologda had sighted UFOs on several evenings. On 6 June some children were outside the village of Konantsevo when they saw 'a fast increasing luminous dot in the sky, which soon turned into a shining sphere'. The object landed in a meadow and rolled to a nearby river, the children standing no more than half a kilometre away. The sphere split and there appeared 'something resembling a headless person in dark garb', its 'hands' hanging lower than its 'knees'. The craft melted into the air, and the creature headed off to the village. We are not told what became of it. Later, three more spheres touched down in the same meadow, two inhabited. These, like the first sphere, quickly became invisible.

On 11 June, a fiery ball had been seen by one individual above Vologda which 'showed' over the city for seventeen minutes but did not attempt to land. Another UFO was spotted by a school pupil the following night. The same TASS report mentions an incident which occurred on 24 April. 'An enigmatic object allegedly thrice as large as an aircraft flew over the city of Cherepovetsk', according to a local inhabitant, coasting noiselessly at an altitude of 300 metres, and leaving a 'large radiant trail'. It carried blinking red lights.

A remarkable TASS story appeared on 9 July. It referred to an incident the year before when a UFO dumped about 60 kilos of detritus ('gauzes, balls and glassy pieces') on a hill near Dalnegorsk in the Soviet Far East. This debris had unusual properties supposedly beyond the capabilities of science on Earth. For example, a gauze heated to 900 degrees centigrade in the open air disappeared, whereas a piece refused to melt in a vacuum even at 2,800 degrees. The material would not conduct electricity when cool, but would when heated. There were other marvels, vaguely reminiscent of the science fiction novel *Roadside Picnic*, but the UFO proponents did not have it all their own way. There was a dissenting school which claimed that the material was the result of a 'plasmoid—a plasma product naturally produced

by geophysical fields in response to agitation caused by technical experiments or solar-terrestrial physical factors.' One would have thought that such an important event would have been reported more widely, but there seems to have been no follow up. The story was picked up from the newspaper *Socialist Industry*. This paper has been one of the main feeds for the TASS UFO stories, which would appear to be an unlikely role for an official organ of the Communist Party's central committee, mainly covering the Soviet economy.

*Socialist Industry* is, however, not the only source for TASS's UFO watch. On 2 August, *Trud* reported a mysterious burnt spot, eight metres in diameter, despite being oval, which had mysteriously appeared on a lawn near Moscow at the end of July. Theories proposed by A. Kuzovkin, chairman of the 'Ecology of Unknown' seminar of the *Vokrug Sveta* magazine, ranged from a UFO landing spot to the site of a lightning strike, although the latter possibility was felt to be shaky due to the fact that the interior of the spot was still green. How this characteristic was consonant with a UFO landing was not made clear. Further happenings were suggestive. A man who took soil samples felt his finger tips burning, and they turned red for several hours. Another fell ill on returning home, and rundown batteries placed on the spot somehow recharged themselves. However, Kuzovkin stressed that although the site could be characterised as that of a UFO landing, 'that UFO was not a spacecraft with aliens, as many think, but a power plasmoid . . .'

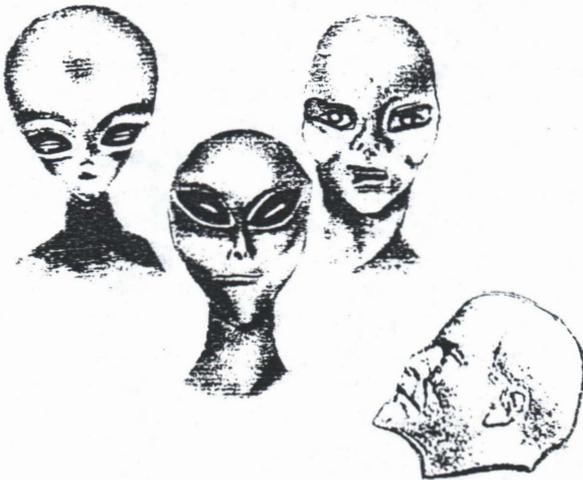
The following day, TASS quoted *Trud*'s more mundane suggestion, taken from an interview with the local fire chief, as to how the spot had appeared. Out went power plasmoids, in came a burning haystack, set fire to as a prank (the middle of the spot was unscorched because the fire had been burning from the perimeter and had not had time to reach the inside). The Vologda and Moscow incidents were reported in the *Financial Times* on 5 August, although the possible solution to the latter was not mentioned.

TASS put out another item on 7 August reiterating the view that the spot was caused by normal means, but using it as a peg on which to hang the views of Vladimir Surdin of Moscow's Astronautics Institute. He pointed out a few of the human made and natural objects with which UFOs can be confused, and went on to argue that although there might be alien life forms somewhere in the universe, it is odd that no proper contact has been made. 'It is evident that such a hide-and-seek game is meaningless and does not accord with the wisdom of a civilisation, which must be at a higher level of development than our own'.

These reports have been picked up by the US press with great enthusiasm. On 10 August *Associated Press* carried an

article which included a note, gleaned from *Socialist Industry*, on the experience of a milkmaid in Perm who had been confronted with an alien at 4.30 am. She saw what appeared to be a dark figure riding a motorcycle. When she looked more closely, she realised that there was no bike, instead 'something resembling a man, but taller than average with short legs.' It did not possess a proper head, but rather sported a small knob. It became fluorescent and disappeared. A beekeeper saw a pair of fluorescent objects shaped like eggs and as big as aircraft, which hovered at a height of 200-300 metres. In mid-July more aliens with no heads were seen by unnamed witnesses.

After a three week gap, TASS carried a short item on 1 September concerning a sighting which occurred over the Mangyshlak peninsula in the Caspian sea. Again *Socialist Industry* was the source. The report stated that residents had seen a UFO shaped like a cigar but several times bigger than a passenger aircraft, which flew silently over the city until it vanished in clouds above the sea. This one too had tail lights, and these remained in view for a considerable period.



TASS does not have a monopoly in promulgating these stories. On 25 September the British newspaper *Today* quoted an article from the Soviet Military Review which put forward the view that the US Strategic Defence Initiative should be scrapped because of the possibility of shooting down a UFO by accident: '... lack of information on the characteristics and influence of UFOs increases the threat of incorrect identification', it said. The only way that the danger, with the attendant risk of an alien backlash, could be averted, would be increased international cooperation. An unnamed US Embassy official was asked to respond: 'It is a novel argument. I am sure the White House will take it on board in future negotiations.'

But the most famous Soviet UFO incident has to be that which allegedly occurred at Voronezh, 300 miles southeast of Moscow, in October. It received widespread coverage in the western media and highlighted the seeming obsession that the Russians entertain for alien encounters. The story broke in TASS on 9 October, when it announced that a landing in a Voronezh park had been confirmed by scientists. At least three visits had been made, according to eyewitnesses. On one occasion 'a large shining ball or disk was seen hovering above the park, it then landed, a hatch opened and

1, 2, or 3 creatures similar to humans and a small robot came out.' It was claimed that the aliens were three or four metres tall, but with very small heads, as in the Perm encounters. They strolled about near the craft and then went back inside. The experience caused those watching to be filled with fear lasting for some days.

Genrikh Silanov, head of the Voronezh Geophysical Laboratory, was quoted as saying that he had identified the landing site by means of biolocation, discovering a circle twenty metres in diameter, plus two mysterious pieces of rock. These did look like sandstone, but upon analysis it was discovered that they could not have originated on earth, although Silanov did concede that further analysis was needed. Biolocation was also used to track the route taken by the aliens, and it was found that the scientists' and onlookers' descriptions coincided. The report ends by saying that there had also been sightings of 'a banana-shaped object in the sky and a characteristic illuminated sign, as described in the US *Saga* magazine'. It is unlikely that residents of Voronezh could have read the magazine.' Alas we are given no more information about either the object or the sign, but numerous journalists misread this throwaway ending, and assumed that the aliens who landed did so in a flying banana.

The *Associated Press* weighed in with a crib of the TASS item on the same day, throwing in references to the Perm milkmaid and Moscow haystack for good measure. Not to be outdone, TASS issued another release on 10 October saying that the reports had been confirmed in the current issue of *Soviet Culture*. More details, including names of several children who witnessed the events, were given. The aliens had landed on 27 September in a park crowded with people, with several dozen people waiting at a bus stop nearby. At 6.30 'they saw a pink shining (sic) in the sky and then spotted a ball of a deep-red colour about ten metres in diameter.' This ball circled the park, disappeared, reappeared and then hovered. A crowd which rushed across to it saw a hatch open in the lower half of the craft, with a humanoid standing in it. The figure was about three metres high, had three eyes, and was wearing a silver suit with a disc on its chest and bronze boots. The alien seemed to look the place over, the hatch closed and the sphere descended. After it had landed, the hatch reopened and two creatures, one of which seemed to be a robot, came out.

The first one spoke, at which point a triangle, about 30 by 50 centimetres, appeared on the ground. It suddenly disappeared. The alien touched the 'robot' and this began moving in a mechanical fashion. One boy screamed but was quelled by a look from the alien, which paralysed him. The alien's eyes were shining, and the crowd screamed. After a while, both the ball and the creatures disappeared, but we are not told in what manner. In about five minutes, though, they were back, the alien carrying what looked like a gun, a tube about 50cm long, by its side. This was directed at a sixteen year old boy, presumably the one who had been paralysed, and he vanished. The alien went inside the ball, it ascended, and the boy reappeared at the same time.

Later, militia officers and reporters interviewed the witnesses, and found their stories to be consistent. Residents of Putilin Street also took the opportunity to mention the fact

that they had seen UFOs between 23 and 29 September, presumably the other two contacts mentioned the previous day. The children at the park were still afraid, the report continued, and the affair was to be investigated by scientists, physicists and biologists. The same day the story circulated widely in the world's press. The *Washington Post* used the TASS material, but fleshed out with an interview with a Moscow scientist. After mentioning that the aliens had arrived in a 'banana-shaped object', the paper mentioned that the Communist Party's youth newspaper had published two photographs on its back page, one of a 'derby-like object' and the other 'a bizarre ovoid flying over the flats of the Far East.' The scientist stated that hitherto the study of UFOs had been seen as an occupation of bourgeois scientists, but recently it had achieved much more popularity, with an increase in the number of sightings. Silanov's observations were quoted, and the *Post* journalist added drily, 'Silanov could not be reached for any further incomprehensible comment.' An *Associated Press* release the same day quoted a TASS duty officer as saying 'it is not April Fool's today'. It transpired, though, that *Soviet Culture* had been the only major national daily in the Soviet Union to publish the story that day.

The *Guardian* recounted the TASS story but added information on another incident gleaned from Anatoly Listratov of the department studying anomalous phenomena at the All-Union Geodesical Society. He reported a sighting of a UFO by two pilots. One had been blinded, the other later died of cancer. Listratov added that officers engaged on space and missile work had reported a number of sightings. The following day, 11 October, *Today* provided a profile of The Aetherius Society which mentioned the Voronezh episode, although devoting more space to a South African encounter in which a UFO had been shot down and its two occupants captured alive. Yes, we were being invaded, according to the Aetherius Society, but the aliens were friendly. This was known because the Aetherians' founder president Sir George King was receiving messages from them by telepathy. Spokesperson Chrissie Aubry called on Britain's Ministry of Defence to open its UFO files. 'TASS never jokes and if they take it seriously so should the authorities here', she said.

Also on 11 October, *Associated Press* reported how a drawing by a child who had witnessed the events at Voronezh had been seen by millions on television. The drawing took the form of a 'glowing two-legged sphere with a smiling stick figure inside.' Film of the landing site was also broadcast. An eyewitness gave further details of the main alien. It merely had a hump, not a head and shoulders. This it could not turn, but could only swivel its middle eye. It also had two holes rather than a proper nose. An aviation engineer from the area said that he and his colleagues had found intense magnetic activity at the landing site. A list of items detracting from the credibility of the story was also presented in the TV programme. No adult witnesses had appeared, although an apartment block overlooked the park; the story spread only after an article appeared in a local newspaper a week after the event was supposed to have occurred (uncharacteristically TASS had not quoted a source in its 9 October release); and Silanov's rocks turned out to be terrestrial after all. The TV reporter concluded that more research was needed,



distinguishing between experts and 'Voronezh enthusiasts'. TASS hit back with a release the same day on the US reaction to Voronezh, listing the TV shows which had mentioned it. One critic had been dismissive, saying that glasnost had gone too far, and asking what the Academy of Science thought of it all. Others admitted that the TASS involvement had given the story credibility. There were also questions about biolocation. A NASA representative said that they did not have enough information with which to form an opinion, but pointed out that the Russians had not been in touch with them to discuss the case. The conclusion seemed to be that the story was not taken particularly seriously. It was a very candid release, not at all defensive, considering how much prestige TASS had invested in the story.

The *Washington Post* the same day rehearsed the main events, and after the banana joke, wondered what had happened to all the people who were supposed to have been waiting for a bus when the UFO landed. It also quoted the Yugoslav news agency *Tanjung*, which appeared as po-faced as TASS was supposed to be. 'If the Soviet press and TASS news agency are to be trusted, aliens have carried out a real invasion in the Soviet Union over the past few days'. In view of this, it wondered, where was a reaction from the Defence Ministry? After this the story seemed to slip from sight.

So from apparently sketchy articles in local newspapers, these alien stories spread until they reached international prominence, and just as suddenly disappeared. Commentators outside explained the UFO fever in the Soviet Union variously as the effects of glasnost or to a deep need in the Russian psyche for mystery. Whatever the reason, it is true that Russian UFOs are part of a much livelier paranormal movement than exists in the West. Despite being the homeland of dialectical materialism, these phenomena have always been taken seriously. The difference is that now we can hear about it more easily. The episode still leaves one wondering about TASS, though. During the Voronezh incident especially, people seemed inclined to give the agency the benefit of the doubt, simply because it was TASS. Later, however, an *Associated Press* article carried a quotation which casts this view into question. Complaining that he had been misquoted, Silanov said: 'Don't believe all you hear from TASS'.

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**Tom Ruffles** is a commercial analyst, but finds parapsychology rather more interesting.

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# The Moses Barrier

Lewis Jones

*The paranormal takes over where religion left off*

T. H. Huxley once said that in every branch of science he had explored, at some stage or other he came across a barrier labelled: 'No thoroughfare. Moses' In Huxley's day, the parsonry saw science as a camp full of subversives, who needed to be constantly watched. A wall was put up around it—not to keep people from getting in, but to make sure that no one got out and wandered into forbidden areas. The paths that led into areas unconnected with physics and chemistry were blocked by Moses barriers. I wonder how surprised Huxley would have been to learn that in the 20th century, Moses barriers had moved inside the camp wall, and were trying to rope off sizeable areas within science itself. The barrier-guards no longer find it prudent to openly ally themselves with gods or religious sects. These days, their badge of office bears one of the most ominous of four-letter words: PARA. Their areas of expertise are said to be para-physics, parapsychology, the paranormal. So far as one can tell, the prefix para- seems to mean 'sort of'. They insist that their areas of study are scientific, but they will point out to inquirers that the PARA badge carries a special dispensation: their work begs to be excused from the rigors of objective testing. We are talking about the para-thinkers. You know you've stumbled into a Moses barrier when a practitioner of alternative medicine tells you that a control group is not an 'appropriate' way of checking out their particular claim. ('No thoroughfare'.) You can still hear claims that there are areas where science simply cannot go. As it was once expressed by Sir Oliver Lodge: 'To explain the psychical in terms of physics and chemistry is impossible'. It is also impossible to explain it in terms of plumbing, though why this should be held against plumbing it difficult to say. The paras are still living in the days when scientists were expected to know their place, and that place was well away from the human mind and body. Paras of time past would tell you that liverwort cured diseases of the liver, because the leaf was liver-shaped; and that the celandine flower cured jaundice (the juice is yellow, you see). This was the doctrine of signatures. Obviously, the Almighty had set his sign upon certain objects, and given us a heavy hint as to which was which by providing the object with a similar shape or colour to the ailment.

Homeopaths may not speak quite so often of the Almighty these days, but the Law of Similars is still alive and well under their tender care. The most effective medicine known to the older theology was holy water—a liquid whose purity was such that it was thought to be as highly diluted as any homeopathic draught. Even so, some ritual gestures were considered necessary to clinch matters. In those times, some

reverential hand-waving did the trick. Today the agitation is performed with the container actually in the hand until succussion is complete. In the mid-19th century, some young women in the French village of Morzine claimed to be possessed by the devil—speaking in tongues, and reading the secret thoughts of people around them. A certain Dr Tissot arrived from the medical faculty at Dijon, and invited the women to dine with him. Unknown to them, he added large amounts of holy water to their food and wine. The women went right on being possessed, and some of them went into convulsions for his benefit. When Tissot published the results of his simple test with control group, the clerics told him that this only showed how cunning the devil was, by hiding the effects of the sudden arrival of the holy liquid. As the result of the test was not to their liking, they dismissed it. In this as in many other matters, the clerics' role has now been taken over by the paras. Modern faith healing of course is no more than the divine touch, with the religious trademark still showing under the new label. Henry the Eighth and Queen Elizabeth the First were dab hands at this sort of thing. Charles the Second (described by Andrew D. White as 'the most thoroughly cynical debauchee who ever sat on the English throne before the advent of George the Fourth') laid his healing hands on almost a hundred-thousand folk. In no other reign were so many people touched for scrofula ('the king's evil'), and in no other reign were so many cures vouched for. But the bills of mortality offer a sad reflection on the para-thinking of the time, because in no other reign did so many people die of the disease. Not many members of royalty gave a patient the blessing that William the Third is said to have offered: 'God give you better health and more sense'. Nevertheless, at the end of the Black Death, a huge proportion of the property of every European country was in the hands of the Church. In fact the whole evolution of modern history may have been largely affected by this transfer of wealth to the para-thinkers of the 14th century.

It explains the remark of the ecclesiastic who said, 'Pestilences are the harvests of the ministers of God'. People just insisted on pouring money into the coffers of the agencies that made the loudest claims of the paranormal. Does this have a familiar ring? No one who wishes to be taken seriously uses the term miracles any more. Out of sight perhaps, but not out of mind. The trick is to switch in a para- label, and hope that no one will notice the difference. Because in the field of the paranormal, scientific laws are still claimed to fail in association with particular people. The parallels with religion are too many and too various to be entirely coincidental.



Often, the only changes are the labels. The evil eye is no longer with us, but hostile vibes are still available to account for demonstrations that don't work. One label that has survived the crossover is the term 'believer'. Paranormalists and the religious both refer to themselves in this way. But the atheist's label has been exchanged for skeptic. An agnostic is an atheist without the courage of his convictions. He has never had a satisfactory answer to the question: 'What are you agnostical about?' In matters paranormal, his place has been taken by the sympathiser with the permanently 'open mind'. To the question 'What would disprove your belief?' both the 19th century divine and the modern paranormalist have the same response: silence. I sometimes think that the paras would like to be able to speak of 'converting' people. They would certainly not seem out of place knocking on doors in the wake of Jehovah's Witnesses. But no. They have learned the trick of science-talk. (I have a fantasy of a paranormalist ringing my doorbell and asking, 'Don't you think it's time for a paradigm shift?') The religious-minded operate in two worlds, with one set of responses for ritual occasions, and a different set for dealing with the real world. In religious contexts, they pray to a listening divinity, but when real things need to be achieved, they get on with the job like the rest of us, just as if the gods had all broken their hearing aids. Even the most religious-minded architect does not include in his contracts a clause saying that owing to the possibility of divine intervention, he cannot be held responsible for the finished work. In like manner, the paranormalist forgets his faith as soon as something practical needs to be done.

You will have noticed that the telepathist has only one surefire way of communicating at a distance: he uses the telephone. And out here in the real world, clairvoyants achieve some of their greatest successes in keeping their names off the lists of lottery-winners. The paranormal apes religion even in the matter of duplicating its failures. Religion is not an independent source of knowledge: by definition, no system of dogma can ever light upon new information of any kind. The paranormal is sometimes characterised as producing genuine information, even to the extent of being usable against an enemy in wartime. Dr S.G. Soal once asked his star subject Basil Shackleton to mark the card-guesses that he felt especially confident about. The upshot was that in spite of Shackleton's high scores, he hadn't the faintest idea when he was guessing right or wrong. If Shackleton had been respon-

sible for directing missiles at radar targets that he identified as 'friendly' or 'hostile', his decisions would have been catastrophic - about as useful as having a group of clergymen praying to the Almighty for information on the enemy's gyroscopic systems. Religion has laboured for centuries under the delusion that the mind is a thing, and that the soul is one of its aliases. Not to be outdone, the para has taken over the notion, and claims to have put the mind to work, even sending it over long distances to contact other minds. It sometimes seems as if the parastill sees the mind as vaguely hanging around the brain like a medieval halo. It is as though, when you stopped your car, you expected to see the aura of its speed hovering over the hood. (Otherwise, where did the speed go?) The spiritualist takes the notion even more literally and claims to be in touch with with the bodiless mind. (But why only the mind? Where did the indigestion go?) Outside of church communities of course the soul has long been booted out the front door. But it has re-entered by the window, in a teeshirt that bears the word SPIRIT. In fact investigation of the spirit's survival after death was the motive for establishing J.B. Rhine's laboratory at Duke University. The Society for Psychical Research was set up to demonstrate the survival of the soul empirically. Its first president, the Cambridge philosopher Henry Sidgwick, claimed that there was plenty of evidence 'to establish the independence of soul and spirit'. Indeed, Frederick Myers said in his presidential address that the very aim of the Society was to supply a 'preamble to all religions'. And he claimed, 'Thus we demonstrate that a spiritual world exists'.

In more recent times, parapsychologist Charles Tart has gone on record as saying that parapsychology fits in with 'spiritual views of the universe'. Religion has long snatched at any morsel of evidence that seemed to be in its favor, and poo-pooed any data that refutes. It is no longer alone. When Margaret Fox produced unaccountable thumps, this was hailed as sure proof of the existence of a spirit world. But when she pointed out (and indeed demonstrated) that her big toe was the true fountainhead of spiritualism, her evidence was dismissed out of hand. In short, the paranormal has taken over from religion the claim that its subject matter is nonphysical—on the basis of no evidence whatever. The result (and the intention?) is simply to remove it beyond all hope of experimental investigation. It might well have been a parapsychologist who said that if there are phenomena 'which cannot be made to fit into the framework of Naturalism, Naturalism as a philosophy is overthrown'. In fact they are the words of Dean Inge, the Christian mystic who was dean of St Paul's Cathedral until 1934. And he was wrong. The words need to be changed to read: 'If any phenomenon contradicts Naturalism, then Naturalism fails.' If the paras ever wish to be taken seriously, they are going to have to cut free of the religious habit of beginning their inquiries from an assumption of dogma. Every serious investigation begins with 'I don't know'. Bertrand Russell made the point long ago: 'The method of 'postulating' what we want has many advantages; they are the same as the advantages of theft over honest toil'.

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Lewis Jones is a writer and editor living in London and a frequent contributor to the *British & Irish Skeptic*.

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# On Coincidences

Clive Hunt

## *Chance can be a fine thing*

Observers of the paranormal will frequently find themselves challenged by arguments along the lines of: 'Such a coincidence could never have happened by chance—there must be some other explanation' applied to surprising happenings of one sort or another.

In this article I will bring out two principles, both of which lead people greatly to underestimate the likelihood of 'coincidences'. An understanding of these principles is indispensable in any attempt to examine the weight to be given to arguments of the above type.

The discussion is from a statistical point of view, but should be accessible to non-statisticians.

**PRINCIPLE no.1:** *People generally underestimate the chance of a coincidence, even in straightforward situations.* The principle is nicely illustrated by a familiar (to first year statistics students) puzzle usually referred to as 'The Birthday Problem'. The BP concerns itself with the probability of getting coincidences of birthdays amongst a randomly selected group of people. This is a straightforward probability calculation about which there is no mystery, except that the answer is found to be surprising. Test your intuition on the following question:

The Birthday Problem: How large a random group of people do you need to take in order to have a 50% chance that there will be at least one coincidence of birthdays in the group? Don't read further—stop and guess how big the group should be. Obviously a group of size 366 would give certainty of a coincidence, because there are only 365 possible birthdays (ignoring 29 Feb). By contrast, a group of size 2 only gives you a chance of 1 in 365 that the two have the same birthday. So somewhere between 2 and 366 is the correct answer.

The surprise is that the answer is 23. This is probably a smaller number than you guessed. Most people guess higher than 40 or sometimes higher than 100. For completeness here are some figures:

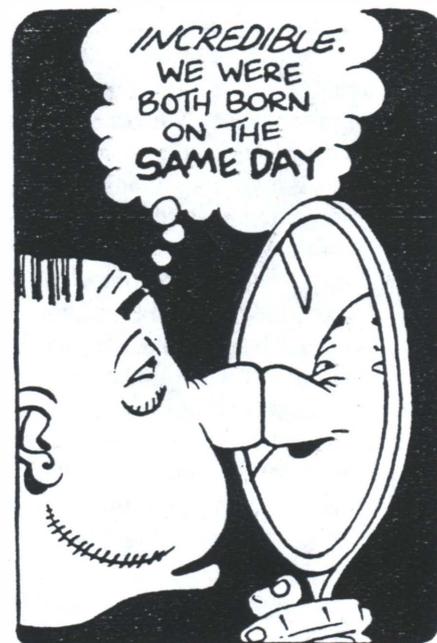
Size of Group	Probability (%) of coincidence
23	51
30	71
40	89
50	97
60	99.4
70	99.9
80	99.99
90	99.9994
100	99.99997

So you can see that with 50 people there is only a 3% chance that you *don't* find a coincidence, and with 100 people there is a chance of only 3 in 10 million of no coincidence (i.e. all have different birthdays).

The point is that most people greatly underestimate the probability of a simple coincidence.

The above reasoning is generally true—there is nothing special about birthdays—they just happen to be convenient examples of uniform random quantities. Similar arithmetic applies if you randomly generate numbers, for example on a roulette wheel, or observe other random quantities.

People sometimes ask how the answer (23) can be correct. The arithmetic is certainly correct, but perhaps the following way of thinking will help explain how it comes to be:



consider the converse—i.e. birthdays all being different. Imagine you have a calendar on the wall with all the days in succession (e.g. by throwing darts blindfolded). What odds would you be prepared to lay that he would hit 23 different days? For the first few you might feel safe, but you would start becoming aware of the mounting odds of a coincidence as each successive dart would have a larger number of already selected days that it might hit. Fair odds would be about 50%.

Try the experiment yourself next time you have 22 or so random (?) people in the room with you.

**PRINCIPLE no 2:** *The mind is a much better a posteriori pattern recogniser than we realise.* In principle no 1 we

talked about the probability of some *a priori* (from beforehand) specified event. In this principle we turn our mind to 'coincidences' that we weren't thinking about *a priori*, but looking back from afterwards (*a posteriori*) we notice have happened.

Whenever I give a talk about the Birthday Problem, I also announce that some surprising coincidence (which I am careful not to specify) will emerge when we do an actual birthday test on the audience. These are some of the things that have happened on different occasions:

- Identical twins were in the audience
- It was someone's birthday that day
- The first birthday called out hit a match
- The two people with the same birthday were sitting next to each other
- The matching birthday found was also the date of the Windhoek air disaster. (According to a third member of the audience)

Here are some of the things that haven't occurred (yet):

- The first birthday called out is 1 January
- Some sort of sequence e.g. 7, 8, 9 February or 1 January, 1 February, 1 March
- Somebody doesn't know their true birthday
- Somebody has two birthdays (registration error)

I hope these examples give you the idea: there are a huge number of events that we don't ever consciously think about until after they have happened; then we suddenly think of them *a posteriori* as having been very unlikely. 'What is the probability that when you do a birthday test you find twins in the audience?' —well, admittedly this is small, but the question is misleading. It should have been 'What is the probability of twins or some other more or less similarly surprising event?'. Now, the answer is 'pretty high'. I can't be more specific because the list of 'similarly surprising' events is rather long and vague, as the examples above have probably conveyed.

The lesson is that the mind can find patterns in randomness, thereby misleading one's subjective assessment of how surprising (and therefore inexplicable) some event is. The mind automatically picks up the occurrences of coincidences but never accounts the non-occurrences (from the long, vague list of these) thus giving a biased picture. Everyone has a favourite story about some 'incredible' coincidence that happened to them, but would be hard pressed to list all the incredible coincidences that *didn't* happen. After all, 1 in a million chances do occur - about once every million times. Because your mind so effortlessly notices a surprising pattern, you never get to notice the 999,999 non-occurrences of other patterns.

I hope these two principles (there are more!) will forearm you in the critical appraisal of the evidence lent by 'coincidences'.

Clive Hunt is a statistician living in Johannesburg. This article originally appeared in ARIP, the newsletter of the South African Skeptics, and is reprinted with permission.

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# Gullibility and the Appliance of Science

Gerald Haigh

It seems to be generally accepted that the most urgent reason for making a fuss about science education is that of ensuring the future of the scientific establishment. This is a familiar neurosis. Since about 1850 our successive governments have marvelled at German battleships, American hosiery, Russian sputniks, Japanese cameras and French super-trains, and have felt again and again that resurgence of panic which, over the years, has given us board schools, grammar schools, technical schools, colleges of advanced technology and, ultimately, science and national curriculum core subjects.

Surely, though, this is all a gigantic red herring. Scientific or engineering geniuses are not discovered and nurtured by institutions and curricula; rather are they constrained by them, so that they end up inventing crop-spraying attachments for tractors rather than the giant silver rocket-ships which leap and strain within their minds. When I was 17 I designed the world's first gas turbine wristwatch. All that my science lessons did was to teach me that it could never be made, whereas had I done no science the rich of the world would now be wearing large, white-hot, whistling watches, and I would be adopting a patronizing attitude to Richard Branson.



No, the reason why we need good science teaching—and we do need it, most urgently—has nothing to do with content, facts and practicalities. The most pressing imperative is that we somehow reduce the level of gullibility among the population at large. That a very large number of people accept, without question, any old codswallop that someone cares to tell them is one of the great social problems of our time.

Take all those advertising claims. A skin care product claims to be 'absorbed' by the skin. How does this actually work? Can we see a diagram? A diet claims to slim some body bits more than others. How does it do this exactly? Can

we see the test data? A disinfectant kills harmful germs in the lavatory. Exactly what harmful germs? Who exactly is known to have been harmed by them? What does a phrase like 'lifts out dirt' actually mean? Can we see some reports on people who have had dental plaque all their lives? What exactly is the composition of that steak-shaped object?

That we fail to ask these elementary questions—that we even feel it somehow discourteous to pursue them—is a sad indictment of our basic scientific literacy. Time and time again we see people leaping straight to the least likely explanation for anything unusual—so that a spiritualist medium is not a mediocre con-artist preying for money on bereaved and lonely people, but is actually in touch with the dead. Or that a disturbed teenage girl is not throwing furniture around herself, but is some sort of focus for a supernatural being that is doing the throwing.

Thus it is that, in the twilight years of the century which our Victorian ancestors hailed as certain to bring the apotheosis of scientific thought, we find astrologers thriving; spiritualist meetings packed to the doors; famous film stars proclaiming their reincarnation; occult book sales steeply rising and the search for the Loch Ness monster still going on. And this is before we get to the unquestioning acceptance of the claims of advertisers which have led us to believe, for example, that no place or person is acceptably clean unless they are emitting a strong, artificially induced, smell.

The great contribution of science—the whole point of science, in a way—lies not so much in advances and discoveries but in the method of thinking and working that lies behind them. 'Thinking scientifically' means postulating, testing, replicating, questioning—always, lest it be thought otherwise, with bags of input from the imagination. If we are to survive the importunings of modern life we all need to think this way, all the time.

The national curriculum at least holds out hope. Straight away, at level 1, there are such attainment targets as, 'Pupils should ask questions and suggest ideas of the "how", "why" and "what will happen if" variety.' Another, still at level 1, says, '... Distinguish between a "fair" and an "unfair" test'. So do we need good science teaching? You bet. If we fail to get it, the year 2000 will see us governed by telekinetic psychic water-divining naturopath astrologers with copper bracelets, and there will be a national holiday for Joan the Wad, the Lucky Cornish Piskey.

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**Gerald Haigh** writes for the *Times Education Supplement*, from which this article is reprinted with permission.

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# Circular Arguments and Straw Men

David J. Fisher

*A critical look at three recent books about crop circles*

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*Circular Evidence*, P. Delgado & C. Andrews, (Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd, 1989. £14.95)

*The Circles Effect and its Mysteries*, G. T. Meaden, (Artetech Pub. Co. 1989. £11.95)

*Controversy of the Circles*, P. Fuller & J. Randles, (Bufora, 1989. £3.95)

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*'The facts, if not true, were well invented: the arguments, if not logical, were seductive.'*

Anthony Trollope

So-called crop circles (most would be better described as discs) attracted increasing media attention during the 1980's and, in 1989, this interest reached a crescendo with the publication of the above books and the frequent appearance of Colin Andrews (in particular) in the media. The circles even made it into news bulletins (and not merely as 'the funny bit at the end').

These three works are a rich distillate of the available evidence. The most intriguing aspect for a skeptic is that the various authors, faced with exactly the same evidence, come to entirely different conclusions ('mystical' or 'scientific') concerning the cause of the circles.

*Circular Evidence* is a beautifully produced book, with many large colour plates, an attractive typeface, and professional layout. Mr Delgado is a design engineer who once worked at Woomera and Mr Andrews is an electrical engineer. Delgado & Andrews (D&A) hold the view that the circles are caused by 'unknown' forces of one sort or another; or possibly by known forces (e.g. magnetism) acting in entirely unprecedented ways. The suggestions that hoaxing or wind effects are responsible are disposed of within a few paragraphs. They are more sympathetic to the idea of UFO activity.

*The Circles Effect and its Mysteries* is also neatly produced, but lacks colour plates and has the slightly daunting air of a scientific textbook. Dr Meaden is the author of a widely-quoted monograph on the electrical resistance of metals, and was a specialist in low-temperature physics until he suddenly switched to studying the weather; founding both the Tornado and Storm Research Organisation (TORRO) in 1974 and refounding the *Journal of Meteorology* in 1976. Meaden unsurprisingly holds the view that the circles are caused by an unusual type of atmospheric vortex. Other

possible causes are subjected to a cool scientific appraisal and are found wanting; but he ventures to suggest that his proposed 'plasma vortex' might explain UFO sightings.

*Controversy of the Circles* is a thick pamphlet rather than a book, is somewhat amateurish in layout and production, contains a number of misspellings, and suffers from a rather meandering and heckling text. (Although it has to be acknowledged that the authors do not have the resources of a large publisher behind them these defects could render the book disappointing to mail-order buyers). Paul Fuller and Jenny Randles are stalwarts of the 'new wave' of ufologists who, officially at least, are loath to espouse the cause of 'little green men'. Consequently, Fuller & Randles (F&R) also support Meaden's theory. The authors mount a determined attack on both UFO and hoax explanations for the circles.

The current circle-situation recalls the one which existed when Uri Geller was at the height of his spoon-bending fame. That is, some experts talked of a new phenomenon (the mystical approach) and some suggested that chemical agents might produce the (Rehbinder?) effect; the scientific approach. In order to highlight the arguments which are advanced in the present books, the author will apply Occam's razor and vigorously champion the 'null option' (fraud) which proved to be so pertinent to the Geller case.

So why can the circles not be hoaxes? Fuller and Randles list (p52) ten reasons why they cannot, but many of these objections are of essentially the same type. The cut-down list then becomes:

(A) Hoax circles do not exhibit the layering, banding, detailed plant damage, and well-developed spiral or double-spiral patterns which are exhibited by real ones. Hoaxed versions are perfectly circular, tend to have a hole at the centre, and display many footmarks. Genuine versions are usually elliptical and lack such suspicious spoor.

(B) Hoaxed circles usually appear during the day while the genuine ones usually appear overnight.

(C) Hoaxed circles attract publicity whereas most genuine ones are not reported.

To these objections, one can also add some others which are pointed out in the various books:

(D) The occurrence of the circles can be traced back to distant times and to foreign lands. What conceivable group or individual could possibly want, or be able, to pursue a hoax on such a grand scale? There is a reference, to a possible crop circle, which dates from 1678!

(E) Eye-witnesses have seen circles being formed by vortices.

(F) The scale of some of the complex patterns is enormous.

(G) The frequency of occurrence of the circles is increasing at an exponential rate.

In the face of all these objections, things look pretty bad for the hoax theory. The average reader will doubtless be forced to discount it and settle (according to his tastes) for the mystical or scientific option.

It is to be hoped that skeptics are made of sterner stuff.

To begin with, and at the risk of appearing merely to adopt an ad hominem stance, it is interesting to see what other 'hats' are worn by the authors. The uncompromising tone of each book suggests that these might possibly be relevant.

Delgado and Andrews, for instance, are UFO enthusiasts and this must tend to instruct their approach to the circles. But Andrews goes further, 'we are now looking way beyond helicopters, whirlwinds, and UFOs for the answer to this global mystery' [1]. On the other hand, Delgado seems to be especially desperate to have an 'effect' named after himself. In 1978, according to F&R, he discovered that cupping his hands around a freely pivoted dome caused it to rotate. He tried, by means of a series of articles [2], to persuade everyone to call this the 'Delgado Effect'. That he apparently failed to do so may owe something, the author suspects, to the fact that this spurious 'effect' was included in Martin Gardner's celebrated 1975 April Fool article [3], had been gullibly described elsewhere in 1973 [4], and can be traced back at least as far as a 1923 edition of Hugo Gernsback's dubious *Science and Invention* magazine [5].

This example also throws some light on the apparent skepticism of F&R. They think it 'wise to reserve judgement' on the cause of the above effect (whereas there is no good reason to propose any phenomenon more exotic than convection) and then immediately associate it with the theories, of a professor of electrical engineering, concerning the 'Kirlian aura'. They do not mention that this professor, A. J. Ellison, is a vice-president of the Society for Psychical Research who claims once to have possessed a sample of ectoplasm. It rapidly became evident to the author that F&R are really obscurantists; they adopt an open-minded stance the better to make even conventionally explainable phenomena seem mysterious. [6].

The various authors (except perhaps Meaden) are also inveterate name-droppers. They refer to circle-related work having been done at this or that University. Such a shameless journalistic ploy only serves (for example) to bolster the authority of Andrews, 'in charge of 35 scientists and engineers from . . . Sussex University' [7], vis à vis the general public. When the author telephoned Sussex University, an Information Officer told him that she had spent day after day in trying to find out who was taking their name in vain. The '35 scientists and engineers' eventually shrank to one laboratory technician (working in his own time).

As an example of a bona fide scientist who is interested in the circles, D&A include the transcript of an interview with Professor Archie Roy, an astronomer at Glasgow University, Professor Roy also has an undeclared sympathy for mysterious circles. Some 25 years ago, when the study of 'Megalithic computers' was very fashionable, he was busy proving

that apparent circles, laid out circa 2000BC, were actually ellipses [8]. Note: it is strange that modern hoaxers are thought to be incapable of doing what Megalithic man could do (see point A).

Meaden's other 'hats' are obviously his editorship of *Journal of Meteorology* (J of M) and his directorship of TORRO. This should also cause some misgivings among skeptics, for Meaden seems to be as singlemindedly intent on finding a meteorological explanation as D&A are in seeking a mysterious one. At times, this seems to impair his objectivity. It must also be noted that the J of M is somewhat of a fringe publication and, during its post-1976 existence, papers from it (often written by non-meteorologists such as Colin Andrews and Stuart Campbell) have been quoted less than a dozen times by its peers [9]. This implies that few, if any, of the 'circle-oriented' articles in J of M have ever stirred up any interest among other meteorologists.

To be fair, the author should perhaps declare his own ulterior motives (apart from congenial skepticism). Regular readers will know that he has defended the vortex theory in the pages of *B&IS* [10,11], and also once misguidedly defended the objectivity of Colin Andrews [10]. He has also conducted a rather fruitless literature search for historical mentions of crop circles, and has had largely unanswered appeals for such information published in some 40 British, South African, and Australasian farming or local-history magazines.

But what of the books themselves? In the case of D&A's work, those in search of hard data can confidently skip all of the text which deals with dowsing, strange events, and ancient monuments, or views of conventional science which seem to owe a lot to the 'Flash Gordon' book of knowledge. Thus, 'light is also without mass and without charge or energy', p169. One wonders how they explain sun-burn.

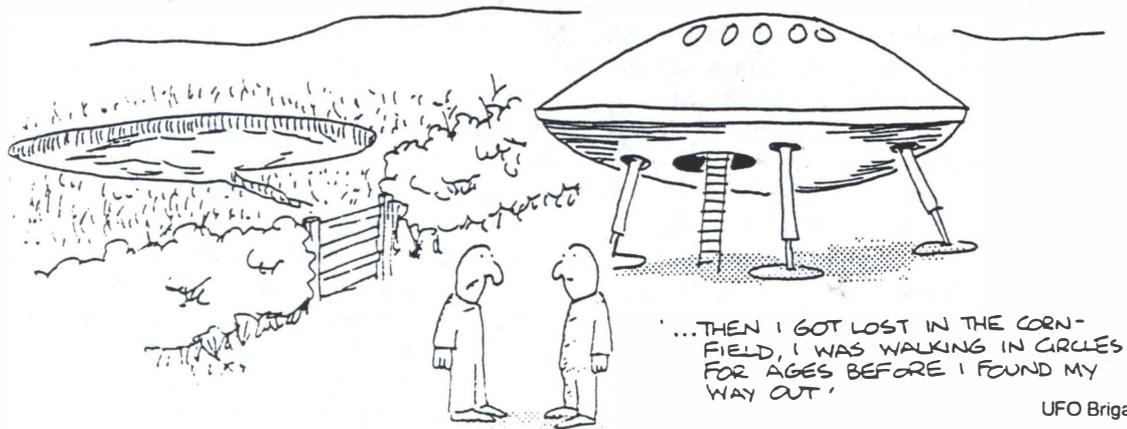
Equally, one can discount the information which D&A have obtained from psychics, as well as the suggestion of 'intelligent forces' (although it is reassuring to think that at least one of the entities operating out in the fields might be possessed of intelligence).

That is not to say that one should pre-judge the propriety of such notions as dowsing and psychical phenomena but, not being themselves proved, they cannot rationally be used to prop up other concepts.

In the case of Meaden's book, one can skip all the anecdotal evidence: strange lights, strange noises, and eye-witness reports of circle formation. It is especially hard to forego the latter, as it is very tempting to accept anything which seems half-way sensible. Unfortunately, one cannot accept something simply because it agrees with one's preconceptions; they might be misconceptions.

There is also a lot of hard scientific data, in Meaden's book, on whirlwinds (and some less convincing data on ball lightning; a disputed phenomenon which Meaden would like to build into his vortex theory).

The F&R book also contains much anecdotal material that can be discounted a priori, but there remains a percentage of scientific data on the capabilities of vortices. In view of their sometimes surprising antics, it would be unwise entirely to rule vortices out as being the cause of the simpler circles. The quincunxes, etc., are another matter.



UFO Brigantia

Concentrating now on the real meat of the books, and returning to points A and G above, the key question is whether the remaining 'hard' data rule out the hoax option. The author does not believe that they do. A major difficulty is that a logical flaw—a circular argument (sorry)—lies at the very heart of point A. That is, since the circle researchers do not have (as it were) a God-given prototype, they can only define 'genuine' circles in a negative fashion. To paraphrase Sherlock Holmes, 'after eliminating the fakes, those that remain must be genuine'. The 'genuine' ones, chosen in this dubious fashion, are then further used to decide which new ones are fakes. There is no proof that any of the circles is genuine. To pursue an analogy which is used in one of the books: how would one distinguish a genuine foreign coin from a selection of counterfeits if one was not also supplied with a guaranteed mint sample?

Moreover, the fact that one human being cannot envisage how a complex pattern could possibly be man-made does not prove anything. For example, ask yourself how on earth tubes of plastic netting can be made continuously without performing innumerable welds or cutting innumerable holes. Unless you already know the answer, or are an expert at 'lateral thinking', it will remain a mystery.

Rather than thinking laterally, D&A are adept at setting up straw men (sorry), e.g. tenth-rate circle-faking techniques, and then easily knocking them down (p154). Everyone is content to eliminate helicopter down-draught as being a cause of the circles; but what about the helicopter's skids, or a suspended load of some type?

There is a further refinement in that those in the field (sorry) are rapidly painting themselves into a corner. Each time that they explain how they identify 'genuine' circles, they tell attentive hoaxers how to improve their product. Nor does one have to be a forensic genius to imagine ways of avoiding the leaving of foot-prints, holes, etc. Careful courting couples, or the SAS, could probably teach the researchers a lot about the surreptitious traversing of crops. Colin Andrews' assurance that he cannot achieve the latter (p155) has to be weighed against the information that he designs alarm systems but that, when his own intricate burglar alarm misfunctions, he seeks explanations from psychical researchers and astronomers (p44) rather than

testing the system from top to bottom. One strongly suspects that he wishes to preserve, even protect, the mystery.

But, above all, point A is entirely demolished by the proven inability of the experts to distinguish 'real' from fake. Last summer, *Wales on Sunday* published an article about 98 circles which had been found cut into heather at 'a secret mid-Wales location' [7]. Andrews was quoted as saying that this discovery was the 'most significant anywhere in the world'. He noted that 'heather, which is much tougher and fibrous, has been snapped at the stem'. He was sure that 'because of the scale of the formations . . . there is no human involvement'. He concluded that 'in many respects, they resemble the Nasca lines in Peru and are very peculiar'.

It is known that the circles were made by man—for the convenience of game birds. When the author telephoned Sir Andrew Duff-Cooper's residence at Hay-on-Wye, he was told by a farm-worker that such circles had been cut annually for most of the 1980's and that they were easily made by turning tractor's steering wheel to the maximum lock and dragging a suitable farm implement around. Upon trying to obtain a photograph of the Welsh circles, the author was directed to the 'Information and News Services' agency. According to an INS spokesman, Colin Andrews had supplied them with photographs which INS then lent to *Wales on Sunday*. The newspaper lost them, and Andrews was said to have been very annoyed at the time. One suspects that he is now grateful that they have gone missing.

Point B is also a circular argument, and does not even seem to be agreed upon by the various authors.

Point C is yet another circular argument. It also builds up a straw man (i.e. a hoaxer with little cunning) and additionally presupposes that all fakes are made with the express aim of attracting publicity. The Welsh ones certainly were not. One also recalls artist Richard Long's remark that, in his opinion, a valid sculpture might well consist of 'a walk in the desert that no-one else sees'. Perhaps there are Long-inspired sculptors out there making crop circles that nobody is supposed to see.

The part of the UK where most circle activity occurs can be said to be its 'California' (a case of everything loose slipping to the bottom, rather than sliding to the left, perhaps?). It has a concentration of strange groups: from

Scientologists in East Grinstead, to Raelians in Bristol, and ufologists in Warminster and Swindon. It also has anachronistic hippies and more than its fair share of 'mystical places'. One can imagine numerous indirect ways in which untrumpeted fakes could be beneficial to various vested interests in the area. Incidentally, why does this widespread circle activity stop dead at the English Channel?

Point D is the real facer for a skeptic. But can the occurrence of the circles really be traced to former times and distant lands? Delgado & Andrews (and sometimes Meaden) are not averse to suggesting that scorched or shrivelled corps, triangular markings, and circles in bare earth or trees are somehow proof of the antiquity and ubiquity of crop circles. All of the world-wide supporting data of D&A come from UFO magazines or from books by such luminaries as Arthur Shuttlewood and Gary Kinder. Shuttlewood, writing in 1971 [12], reported that, 'Grass, where some [flying] saucers have landed, is whirled around as if a spiralling force had been applied to it'. The author suggests that a 'swirl fashion' in the faking of UFO activity was established long ago, and that circle enthusiasts are now profiting from it.

This blind acceptance of UFO reports leads, in one case, to an almost comical situation. Delgado & Andrews (p187) and Meaden (pp20, 54) cite the case of a 2.8m diameter circular depression in bare earth, found at Charlton (Wiltshire) in 1963. The bare earth is the best datum that D&A or Meaden can glean from the event. Patrick Moore visited the site (besieged by dowsers, astrologers, telepaths, and ufologists), and his contemporary description of the disturbed earth tallies more or less with D&A's. However, Moore's report [13] goes on, 'In adjoining wheatfields were other features, taking the form of circular or elliptical areas . . . There was evidence of spiral flattening'. So D&A and Meaden obviously do not look very carefully at reported events, and it is left to a skeptical author to extract more relevant data. One might even say that they 'cannot see the flattened crops for the bare earth'.

The depression also had a 2 inch diameter (Moore), 1 metre deep (D&A), hole at its centre. Therefore, by the experts' very own rules (point A), this must have been a hoax. Patrick Moore concluded that, 'the suggestion of a hoax has been made but seems, to me, to be wildly improbable'. On the other hand, in 1954 a certain Cedric Allingham (now strongly suspected to be Patrick Moore [14])—then of East Grinstead and now of Selsey; both California UK) wrote one of the first 'close encounter of the third kind' books. Also, public interest in the Charlton circle was inflamed by a telephone call from a Dr Robert J Randall of Woomera. He could not be traced, although his report on the Charlton affair mysteriously surfaced later and also mentioned that he had once met an Uranian [15].

The question of what organisation would want to do all of this world-wide and decades-old hoaxing is just another straw man. Nobody would seriously suggest such a thing although, in recent years, all of the publicity may well have established a common focus and style for jokers (remember 'chads'?). Incidentally, an analogous 'wrong question' ('how did birds all over the UK suddenly learn to pierce milk bottle tops') is used by Rupert Sheldrake to make the postulation of

'morphic resonance' seem sensible. One might even make anti-gravity seem reasonable by asking 'what keeps the Moon up?'. The correct question is, 'what keeps the Moon down?'

One can quite reasonably suggest that crop circles may have been created by many unconnected people for diverse reasons. A circle would be the easiest shape to construct, and the most obvious techniques would lead naturally to a spiral pattern (as demonstrated by several TV programmes).

The authors are simply playing the old 'conspiracy game' of picking out any report which fits the description of 'strange marks—preferably circular and swirled'. This author thought it strange that some of the key early (1918, 1936) reports of circles, in Meaden's book, had no stated source. An exchange of correspondence elicited the response that these reports were 'good anecdotes'. Skeptics should have the same sympathy for good anecdotes that cowboys had for dead Indians.

The case of the 1678 circle (which is not in the current edition of Meaden's book, but will probably be the next one—March 1990) is somewhat 'forced'. The pattern found was circular, but did it bear any other similarity to modern-day circles? The contemporary pamphlet (*Strange News out of Hartford-Shire*, British Library) refers to 'the mowing-devil'; so the corps were cut rather than flattened. The report says that, 'he [the Devil] cut them [the oats] in round circles and plac'd every straw with that exactness that it would have taken up above an age'. However, the sketch suggests that the pattern consisted of concentric circles made up of radially arranged stalks. No spiral. The details of the sketch even suggest that some of the stalks were gathered into sheaves.

There is a further complication with reported, but unphotographed or unsketched, circles. Nobody doubts that animals or wind can form neat circles [16]. Indeed, D&A include some excellent examples. On page 145 is a neat circle which they attribute to crow damage. On page 166 is an amazing line of 8 circles which they freely attribute to wind damage. They do not count these as crop circles because they are not neatly swirled and have not fine structure. Thus, a complicating factor is that old published reports of circles in crops, even assuming them to be genuine reports, may simply be describing animal- or wind-damage circles rather than 'mysterious' ones. Verbal reports might even refer to 'swirling'; but this could describe local eddy effects as much as an overall spiral pattern.

Point E. Eye-witness accounts would clinch the matter for non-skeptics. Meaden's book even has a section (2.1) devoted to the value of eye-witnesses; but a skeptic knows that this value is zilch. Even if one plays by Meaden's rules, there seem to be gaps. In his book, there is no unbroken link between the observed vortex and a resultant circle having the required fine structure (see previous point). There seems to be no case where someone saw a vortex in the process of flattening crops and then walked straight over and photographed the result. The vortex may well have been making one of the unquestioned wind-damage circles.

Perhaps there is a more conclusive case but, if so, such key evidence is certainly not adequately presented by Meaden. Incidentally, the author thought it to be rather remiss of New

Scientist to report (under 'Science') what amounted to no more than a baseless theoretical model inspired by an anecdote [17]. This was almost as remiss as allowing Derek Elsom to review Meaden's book. Elsom, like Meaden, is a leading member of TORRO.

Point F. Too large to be man-made? The Nasca patterns are large, but even their construction did not require the use of tractors (as at Hay-on-Wye).

Point G. Are the circles becoming more frequent? Fuller and Randles (with TORRO) are to be congratulated for conducting a fairly extensive poll of farmers in an effort to gauge the true scale of circle 'evolution'. The conclusion drawn is that apparent increases in circle incidence are, as for certain crimes, merely an artefact of increased reporting.

On the other hand, the annual incidence of tornadoes in the USA increased by more than 6 times during the 4 decades up to 1973 [18]. Surely, any related vortex phenomena would follow the same trend. Surely TORRO, with its finger on the pulse of such matters, would have checked to see whether a similar increase had occurred in the UK. Surely Meaden, as a scientist, would have mentioned even a negative finding.

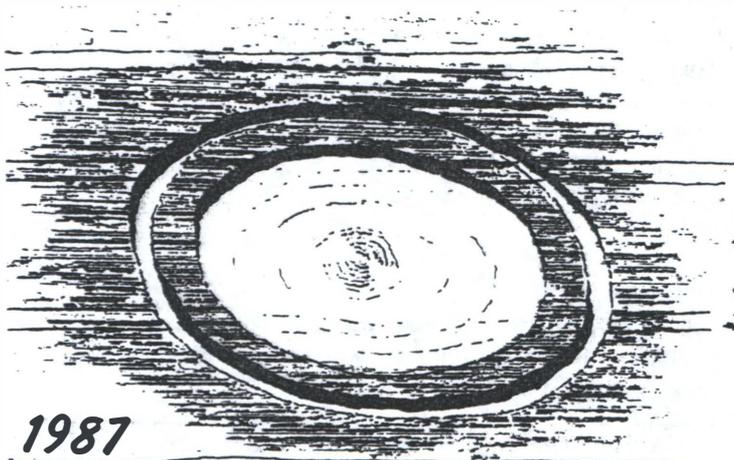
Moreover, although there is some discussion of crop vortices possible being generated by aircraft, the present authors fail to mention road traffic. In 1975, scientists at the Foundation for Ocean Research in California attributed the increased US tornado activity to increased motorway flow. For various technical reasons, the proposed global effect of traffic was very silly. Nevertheless, traffic-generated eddies might well have a short-range ability to initiate vortex phenomena. This information is again probably irrelevant, but the author would like to believe that the present authors were aware of it.

The only conclusion which the author can draw from these books is that the hoax theory is still alive and kicking. The experts cannot tell which are genuine circles, have made at least one ludicrous gaffe, and could well be comparing fake with fake. There is no convicting proof of any world-wide or long-term occurrence of the circles. The authors are merely trying to extend circle history backwards (to before post-war

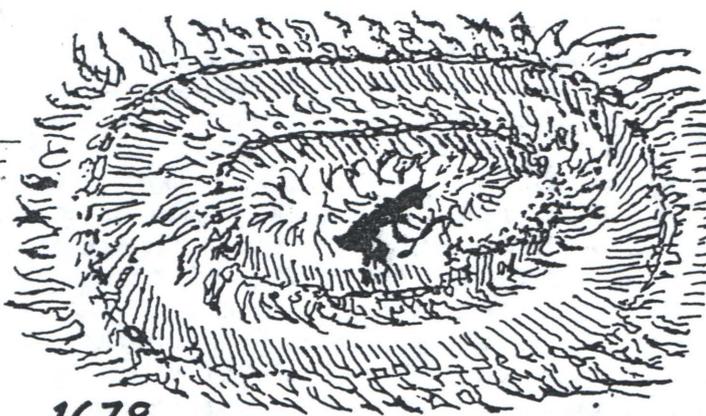
enthusiasm) back to the Old Testament. Their examination of both the crank and scientific literature shows signs of sloppiness. Their best anti-hoax defence is to ask, 'who would bother to make the circles'; hardly an adequate one in view of the millennia of human history that go to prove that some human beings are capable of concocting anything and others are always capable of swallowing it. Question: what would happen to a composer whose best-known work involved putting stones on 2 organ pedals and leaving a resultant perfect-fifth chord to blare out for a solid week? Answer: He (La Monte Young) would acquire cult status [19].

The author is willing to accept a paranormal explanation (of sorts). It is that circle-making might be a superstitious activity. This is not as far-fetched as it sounds. In *The Golden Bough* [20], that wonderful antidote to any residual sympathy for magical thinking, J. G. Frazer reveals [pages 399-462] that there was (is?) an amazingly widespread belief that the sometimes odd swaying of crops in the wind was caused by 'spirit animals'. At harvest time, the spirit animal was thought to hide in the very last sheaf gathered; with all sorts of resultant dangers for he who gathered it in. Even in ultra-sensible Switzerland, the author has noted eerie pagan effigies at the corners of fields. Perhaps circles are also supposed to propitiate the spirits. In another context, Frazer notes (p137) that 'In some parts of Russia, the priest himself is rolled by women over the sprouting crop' in order to ensure a good harvest. Not the best method for making circles; but a viable one.

In view of the Hay-on-Wye experience, it is interesting to pose the question of whether the machines which run along the tramlines might be used to make some of the larger patterns. Signs of the machines' eagerness to make circles can be seen in the slightly overshoot tramline turns which are visible on the cover of *Circular Evidence*. A suspiciously large percentage of the circles osculate (are tangential to) the tramlines (see D&A, p88). A driver who steadied his steering wheel slightly off-centre would be confident of describing a neat circle and arriving back where he started. A slight anisotropy of the heavily cultivated ground might make the



1987



1678

path become elliptical. A minor adjustment might be needed just before rejoining the tramlines, and such fumbling is indeed suggested by some of the photographs. The centre could then be 'filled in' at leisure. It is an amusing exercise to look at a photographed circle and try to imagine how a tramline machine might produce it. It is also suspiciously easy to succeed.

The author put his speculations to the Machinery Editor of *Farmers Weekly*. The latter agreed that versatile machines which can carry booms with a span of over 100 ft, might be capable of a multitude of sins. On the other hand, he had some objections. For instance, the machine would obviously not leave footprints, but one would imagine that any wheel-marks found within the circles would raise questions. Moreover, the machine might have difficulty in swirling to the very centre, due to a limited turning-circle.

On the other hand, the presence of wheel-marks was apparently not noted at Hay-on-Wye—and the centre was reached. Failure in swirl to the centre would leave central tufts. In the new edition of his book, Meaden describes (p111) so-called 'pyramids' that were found at circle centres.

A serendipitous piece of information, which came to light when talking to the editor, was that spray booms are often equipped with devices which deposit blobs of persistent foam. These blobs serve to remind the operator of which parts have already been sprayed. Could such a blob explain the mysterious substance which Colin Andrews once found in the fields?

With what is the swirling done? Fuller and Randles say (p42) that the spirals look as if a giant comb was used. The author can do no better than suggest that a giant comb-like farm implement could be used. Of course, one would have to be careful not to drop the implement when outside of the circle. Could such accidents have led to observed 'spurs' (Meaden, p23)? Spur-like projections were exhibited by the spurious Hay-on-Wye circles.

Circles which are not on tramlines? Obviously done using other methods. Extra touches to machine-made circles could also be added 'by hand' on (straw-wrapped) foot in order to 'ice the cake'.

Why is it done? Well, why are people drawn to make patterns in sand or snow? Could not an underpaid farm-worker do it out of boredom or resentment? There would be little danger of detection; a low-lying mist would provide excellent concealment, and just one circle remote from tramlines would deflect suspicion. Even if a guilty driver came forward now, nobody would believe him. It is too late. Crop circles are the UFOs of the coming millennium.

Of course, the above is just a silly ad hoc theory. The authors will tell the author that he has not visited the circles and cannot possibly comprehend the fine detail and subtle arguments. Very true; but the author was hoping that the books would decrease his ignorance. They have not done so. If the authors have convincing evidence, why did they leave it out? As it is, the reviewer's theory is as valid as theirs and has the added virtue of satisfying Occam's razor. That is, until definitely proved otherwise, it is better to believe in human peculiarity (an established fact) than to upset part (Meaden, F&R) or all (D&A) of current physics.

Assuming that the *B&IS* reader is at all interested in the circles, he should definitely buy the two more expensive books. The best strategy is then to look at *Circular Evidence* (with its big colour plates) and read *The Circles Effect . . .* (with its index and more concrete references). The low price of the third book cannot compensate for its defects.

What will the coming season bring? The author still has a soft spot for the vortex theory. It is to be hoped that Dr Meaden will have the scientific integrity to prove it true and pursue it, or find it false and drop it. As the vortex theory is based mainly upon accepted physical principles, it is to be hoped that simulation (of the wind-tunnel or computer variety) will be possible.

Fuller and Randles will probably continue to explore their new-found limbo between obscurantism and rationality.

Colin Andrews will probably renew his 1989 campaign of egregious publicity-seeking; telling us (at the height of listeria/salmonella worries) that swirled crops were toxic and telling us (after the success of the 'Greens') that crop circles were in the same public-enemy class as ozone holes and the greenhouse effect.

Finally, one can be fairly sure that (whatever their cause) the complexity and frequency of 1990 circles will attain new heights. As Delgado & Andrews say (p151) of those who watch their activities, 'They could not be blamed for thinking a new religion had come upon them'.

#### Notes

[1] *Kindred Spirit*, Vol.1, No.5, 1988, p28; [2] *The Unknown*, March, April, May, 1987; [3] *Scientific American*, April 1975, p126; [4] S Ostrander, L Schroeder, 'Psychic Discoveries Behind the Iron Curtain', Abacus, 1973, p368 et seq.; [5] *Science & Invention*, November 1923, p651; [6] J Randles, P Hough, 'Death by Supernatural Causes?', *Grafton*, 1988; [7] *Wales on Sunday*, 30th July 1989; [8] A Thom, *New Scientist*, 12th March 1964, p690; [9] *Science Citation index*, 1976-1988, Institute for Scientific Information; [10] *British & Irish Skeptic*, Vol.2, No.6, 1988, p27; [11] *ibid.*, Vol.3, No.2, 1989, p29; [12] A Shuttlewood, 'UFOs - Key to the New Age', Regency Press, 1971, p82; [13] *New Scientist*, 8th August 1963, p304; [14] R Sheaffer, *The Skeptical Inquirer*, Vol.11, No.3, 1987, p240; [15] P Moore, 'Do you Speak Venusian?', David & Charles, 1972; [16] For a description of concentric circles made by roe deer, see H B Salter, *The Countryman*, Autumn 1974, p89; [17] *New Scientist*, 2nd September 1989, p30; [18] *Climatological Data National Summary*, Vol.24, No.13, 1973, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, USA; [19] *The Independent*, 22nd June 1989; [20] J G Frazer, 'The Golden Bough', Papermac, 1987.

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**Dr David Fisher** is a scientific editor and writer, convenor of the nascent *Wales & West Skeptics* and secretary of the *UK Skeptics*.

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# Skeptic at Large

Wendy M. Grossman

*A farewell look at Irish beliefs*

Well, moving day (February 20) approaches. After six years in Ireland, London and Britain beckon. Those of you out there who still write to the Queens Court, Monkstown, or PO Box 20, Blackrock, addresses should tear them up and throw them away; write instead to the B&IS Manchester PO Box address. Reactions here are mixed, sort of. Everyone's perfectly willing to see me go, they just question the destination. Londoners, please note: a lot of people over here think you're (*we're*) all nuts. I am, however, eagerly looking forward to creating havoc in Britain. You have all been warned.

It seems appropriate, therefore, to say a few words about Ireland, where science is sometimes still subject to the whims of religion. Last year a major Dublin hospital cancelled a conference about Parkinson's Disease: the nuns objected to discussion of the use of fetal cells. 1975 anti-contraception material claims the 'contraceptive mentality' leads to many evils: teenage pregnancy, promiscuity, AIDS, homosexuality, divorce, abortion, the break-up of the family, VD. Can they prove all this? Well . . . introduce condoms and watch the rates of all the other things soar. See? Must be connected. Well, prove it isn't. Contraception is legal now, but condoms are still more restricted than either alcohol or cigarettes, even though condoms are medically inert. But there are still some campaigners out there lobbying against it. They remind me of Karl Sabbagh's 'ratchet effect', which he detailed at CSI-COP's 1985 London Conference. Their minds work like ratchet screwdrivers: they only turn one way. Of course, I've been accused of that myself.

My idea in saying all this is not to offend the Irish subscribers to this magazine, but to lead into talking about why there seems to be so much less paranormal activity here than in the UK. A number of people have said to me that the main reason is the continuing dominance of the church: if there's going to be a miracle, it's most likely to be a religious one, like Ballinspittle or Knock. I don't think that's enough by itself: you must take into account economic factors.

For one thing, it's not that profitable for the international psychic stars to tour here. When Uri Geller came to Ireland, he appeared on Gay Byrne's *The Late Late Show*, Ireland's premier TV talk show (as of last year there are two—the other hosted by Pat Kenny). Byrne got what seemed to be the usual number of phone calls reporting bent spoons and fixed watches, and the *Irish Times* ran a picture the next day of Geller with a bent spoon. Quite a few people seemed impressed by all this. Similarly, friends have told me how impressed they were by the appearance on Byrne's show of the late Doris Stokes. But did they buy the book? Geller was here to promote *The Geller Effect*, which ultimately did not sell well in Ireland.



D.R.G. Mitchell

The really established non-church paranormal effects seem to be local: dowsing and faith healing. Almost everyone seems to know a dowser who has astonishing success at finding water (question: is there anywhere in Ireland you can dig where there *isn't* water?). In the same way, there are lots of local faith healers. Irish Skeptics committee member Johanne Powell told us about one who diagnoses and treats skin cancer. He accepts donations . . .

Last year, the government announced a crackdown on health food stores selling vitamin and other preparations without the licensing requirements that apply to drugs at chemists' shops. This has not, however, stopped the delivery of the free newspaper, *Blueprint for Living*, which always includes anecdotal evidence of the wonders of kigong therapy and various pills. Against this, there is Lourdes, which of course is relatively big business. Some travel agents specialize in pilgrimage bookings, and charities collect to send people there. At Knock Airport, business is booming. And Ballinspittle, of course, set the imaginations of thousands of people alight. It just goes to show what you can do with miracles when you have the tacit backing of one of the world's biggest multinational corporations. I suspect, though, that economics play a larger part than people here think. Aside from American insecurity after the sixties cast doubt on our national religion (i.e., the belief that America is God), Americans have enough money and leisure time to pursue paranormal beliefs. Ireland combines low wages with the second-highest tax rates in Europe. People just can't afford the time or money to service new beliefs.

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Wendy Grossman is the founder of the *B&IS*, a member of the UK Skeptics and a writer and folksinger.

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# Enquiring Minds?

Marc Moran

Did you know . . . that Nostradamus was an Extra-Terrestrial? . . . that an Ancient Egyptian “Ring of Re” has mysterious powers, and will grant good luck to all who wear it? . . . that USA President George Bush and Vice President Dan Quayle are guaranteed to make a great team (the lines on their palms say so)? . . . or that singer Michael Jackson believes the world will end in 1998? (I’m not making this up, honestly!)

The source of the above, and of many other equally fascinating facts, is an issue of the *National Enquirer*, an American journal of popular enlightenment, dated January 3rd, 1989 (*not* 1998!)—just over a year ago, in fact—which also features a series of predictions for 1989 made, according to the article, by ‘10 Leading Psychics’. We shall consider their amazing success rate in a little while, after a slight detour via the Land of the Pyramids.

**RING OF RE:** ‘Are you out of luck? Are you out of sorts? Do you have emotional or financial problems? If so, do not despair; you need the legendary Ring of Re, a lucky charm purportedly worn by the Pharaohs of Ancient Egypt. It will help you, as it has helped many others in the past, to find health, wealth, happiness, career success, and general fulfilment.’ Such is the overall message of a prominent advertisement in the magazine. If you feel you could well do with the services of such a magical talisman (and who doesn’t?), all you have to do is send a (postdated) cheque for 20 dollars to receive the Ring of Re for a month’s free trial; if your luck does not improve in that time, you can return the ring and receive your cheque back, uncashed! You can’t lose!

Now, my PSI (= Personal Skeptical Intuition) informs me, rather cynically, that even the most spiritually-minded of entrepreneurs do not offer this sort of service to a suffering humanity entirely out of the goodness of their hearts. In other words, there must be an occurrence of that famous Western Mantra, ‘Oh, Money, Pad me Wallet!’

So, how do they satisfy their customers? Any customers at all? Three possibilities suggest themselves, namely: (i) The ring actually works. (ii) The ring has no special efficacy, but people are so impressed by its implied magical powers that they attribute any good fortune that comes their way to its influence. (iii) The ring has a psychological, rather than psychic, effect on people—believing that they are now protected and guaranteed good luck, they have the confidence to make a success of their lives.

Thus, whatever happens, if even a few customers are satisfied with the ring, they will cheerfully pay the small purchase price involved, while the others will return the ring and get their money back; in this way, the vendors will see some profit for doing absolutely nothing! They cannot lose! Clearly, the Ring de Re does bring good luck and prosperity—to the people selling it, at any rate!

**UNFORESEEN CIRCUMSTANCES?** We now turn to the psychics and their amazing predictions for the year just ended (how do they do it?). According to the list in the *National*

*Enquirer*, 1989 was to have seen some startling events, among them the following:

**DEATH** (1) Oil drillers in Greenland discover the frozen body of an ancient Viking—and modern scientists revive him! (No doubt with a pint of a certain horribly good lager!) (2) Elvis fanatics try to dig up his coffin, to check if he is really dead. (3) Prince Charles suffers a nervous breakdown after a close friend dies. (4) Fidel Castro dies during a Havana hurricane. (No exploding cigar jokes, please!) (5) TV sleuth Angela Lansbury (of ‘Murder She Wrote’ fame) witnesses and helps solve a real-life Hollywood murder.

**SOCIAL DISASTERS** (6) Sewer workers in Miami are attacked by vicious, flesh-eating piranhas previously flushed down toilets by their owners. (Honestly! That’s what it says!) (7) An Italian airliner crashes into the Vatican, killing hundreds, and destroying priceless art treasures; the Pope is fortunately away from Rome, and so survives. (8) Monstrous baseball-sized hailstones batter Europe and Russia cutting a 100-mile swathe of death and destruction.

**LOVE** (9) Singer Madonna has a baby. (Madonna and child?) (10) Ted Kennedy falls for and plans to marry Donna Rice, formerly involved with Gary Hart. (No ‘lonely Harts’ jokes!) (11) Actress Brooke Shields marries a rich Arab, and they set up house (or tent?) in the Nevada Desert.

**ART** (12) Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Starr reunite for a worldwide concert tour. (13) Woody Allen stars in a remake of the classic film ‘High Noon’.

(14) Sylvester Stallone is kidnapped at gunpoint by a crazed female fan, but escapes unharmed. (More’s the pity!) (15) Jane Fonda, tired of dieting and aerobics, goes on a mammoth eating binge. (I know the feeling!)

**POLITICS** (16) Nancy Reagan helps Russia’s alcoholism problem—her message is: ‘Just Say Nyet to Vodka’. (Shome mishtake shurely?) (17) Charles Manson escapes from prison, but fails in attempt to assassinate the President. (18) All the American hostages in the Lebanon are released.

You will of course notice the complete absence of any references at all to such major events as the crumbling Berlin Wall, or the political upheavals in Panama and Romania. In fact, the only genuine hit among all these predictions would seem to be the following: (19) A UFO will crash in Kansas during a tornado, and astonished National Guardsmen will take three dazed space aliens into custody. Now, that *does* seem to be a remarkably prescient forecast, doesn’t it—oh dear! I forgot! I wasn’t supposed to mention *that* one—

*(We regret that the above article remains unfinished, as the author has now mysteriously disappeared, following the strange visit to his home of three Men in Black—Eds.)*

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**Marc Moran** was a freelance writer and a reader of the *British & Irish Skeptic* before his strange disappearance.

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# Psychic Diary

Toby Howard

## Is there any future in divination?

Hmm . . . *Spirited Holme* or *Artful Abbot*? What would you do, stuck for a winner in the 1 o'clock 'Steel Plate and Sections Young Chasers' qualifier' at Chepstow? Toss a coin? Consult the *I Ching*? Or the tea leaves? The stars? These are very hit-and-miss methods. What I needed was a surefire system of divination—an obliging oracle to make my mind up for me. But I had a worse choice to make: which method of prophecy should I go for?

I could march out a circle in my front lawn (it's frightingly overgrown; I think there's a lawnmower still in there somewhere), and divide the circumference into 26 positions—one for each of A to Z—and place little piles of wheat on each letter and watch a cockerel peck the letters of my revelation and . . . but you know how it is—there's never a cockerel around when you want one. So, alectryomancy was out.

Ceromancy! I could drop melted wax onto water and tell the future from the patterns it formed as it cooled. No, too messy. Or perhaps the winner's name was lurking in the shapes of the clouds (nimbomancy)? Or on earth: I could try a spot of gyromancy—walking around in a circle until I fell down and then noting my orientation. No, if I was comatose too long I'd miss the race. Theriomancy, truth from the movement of animals? Sycomancy, from figs and fig leaves? Lecanomancy, the appearance of water in a basin. The burning of incense (knissomancy). Smoke (capnomancy), fire (pyromancy), ashes (spodomancy)? Where did I put that heated axe-head (axinomancy), the playing cards (carto-

mancy), my pet crystal (crystallomancy—and heal half the neighbourhood in the process), my magic stones (lithomancy), my logarithm tables (logarithmancy). Dice! (astragalomancy). The coagulation of cheese! (tyromancy).

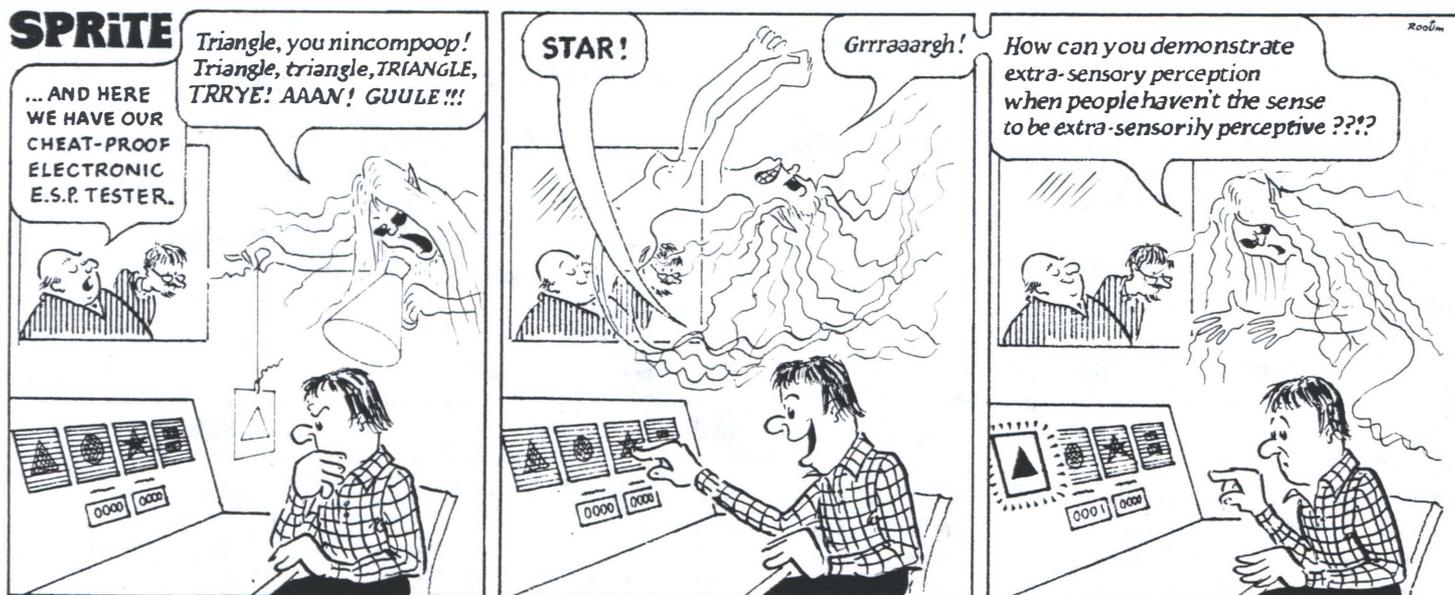
On second thoughts, perhaps I should be seeking the answer within myself: my shoulder blades (scapulimancy), my breast bone (sternomancy), the sound of my belly or marks on it (gastromancy), the shape of my head (cephalomancy), my name (onomancy), my fingernails (onychomancy), my palms (chiromancy), my dreams (onieromancy). Anthropomancy—my entrails—hang on a minute. . .

This was starting (starting?) to get silly, and time was running out. By now I was thinking seriously about oenomancy: don't you feel that the appearance of poured wine—the sediment, the streaks of gelatin—means *something*. Anyway, after three or four glasses . . . I went for *Spirited Holme*.

It wasn't. The winner was *Generally Right*. Unlike divination!

(OK, it's a fair cop. I made one of these potty divination methods up. Can you spot the impostor? A £5 book token for the first correct answer out of the hat. Entries by 1 May to B&IS (Comp.), P.O. Box 475, Manchester M60 2TH.)

Toby Howard is a lecturer in computer graphics, and co-editor of the *British & Irish Skeptic*.



# Heaven and Earth

Michael Hutchinson

## Tabloid Mass ESP Tests

When it comes to 'mass-telepathy' experiments, journalists are notorious for failing to take the necessary time and care to research a claim and set up a proper experiment. But do the 'psychics' ever get the rough end of the foul-up? Let's have a quick look at several of these 'experiments' and see.

Matthew Manning was a fairly well known psychic in the mid-seventies, and was the "psychic" involved in a 'mass telepathy' test carried out by the *Sunday Mirror* in the summer of 1977.

Readers were told that the psychic would be transmitting his thoughts at a prearranged time and were asked to guess which colour, three figure number, and drawing Manning was concentrating on. These turned out to be green, 123, and a house.

The *Sunday Mirror* declared the experiment a success because from 2355 replies; 541 readers got the colour right instead of 471 expected by chance; 44 got the number correct against two or three expected by chance; 84 were right about the house. The *Sunday Mirror* apparently had the support of statistician Michael Haslam who said that readers had 'hit the jackpot'.

Before knowing details of the replies to the *Sunday Mirror*/Manning experiment, James Randi wrote to the newspaper from New Jersey outlining the result which population stereotypes suggest. The totals later revealed to us by the newspaper showed that Randi's figures were very close:

Colour	Randi	Actual
Red	29%	28.5%
Yellow	10%	3.25%
Green	23%	24.41%
Blue	22%	17.9%
Others	16%	16.55%

When I contacted statistician Michael Haslam I learned that he wasn't consulted until after the experiment when he had been given twenty minutes to produce some figures and make some comments. He had told the *Sunday Mirror* that '123' hadn't been a good number to choose and they had subsequently taken his 'readers hit the jackpot' statement out of context. He was right about the choice of number being a bad one.

A random number generator may choose '123' only three times in 2355, but human beings do not choose numbers randomly. I do not have population stereotypes for three digit numbers, but the list for two digit numbers in Kamman and Marks's excellent *The Psychology of the Psychic* shows a wide variation with a preponderance falling between 10 and 39. Numbers 21 to 24 for example had 18, 45, 34, and 9 respectively out of 350. Numbers 89 to 94 all had zero.

Even the *Sunday Mirror* wasn't very impressed with the

84 successes for the house drawing which is far below Kamman and Marks figures which suggest that 315 people should have got that right.

In November 1978, the *Daily Mirror* conducted 'The great Geller experiment' claiming that one out of 28 readers correctly guessed that Geller had transmitted a drawing of a tree. To bolster their results they quoted physicist John Hasted (famous for his metal bending experiments with Geller and others) who told them that the chances of guessing a sealed drawing correctly by pure luck is 1 in 150.

The *Daily Mirror*'s headline for the article giving the results of this experiment said 'Tree-mendous!'. And so it was; but not due—as they claim—to Geller's success, but for his failure. The population stereotype list suggests that one in 18 people should have been right. As for John Hasted's figure of one in 150, this is only true where the 'receiver' has a choice from 150 known drawings.

The next mass ESP experiment in my files comes from April 1984 when The *Sun* conducted an experiment with Doris Stokes in which she 'transmitted' three diagrams. These were: the sun, a house in silhouette and three wavy lines. According to The *Sun* the result showed that 'Doris proves a point' and that their readers were 'Super Psychics'. They didn't release the total number of replies, mentioning just 'a huge response' out of which 'nearly one-third of those taking part picked up at least one of Doris's drawings'. Paul Harris, Chief Statistician at National Opinion Polls is quoted as saying 'Statistically the results are amazing'.

The *Sun* revealed so little about this experiment that I wrote to Paul Harris asking him some pertinent questions. In his reply he informed me that he had spoken with a reporter for about five minutes, expressing doubts about the claimed results. He was in no doubt however that he had been 'totally misquoted by the report appearing in the newspaper' and was recommending to the Professional Affairs Committee of the Institute of Statisticians (of which he was a member) that no help be given by the Institute to The *Sun* in the future. Without knowing what The *Sun* considered a hit it is impossible to analyze their figures.

The *Sun* returned to the parapsychology game in September 1987 claiming more success for Uri Geller, when 1 in 11 of the entries had correctly guessed that Geller had drawn a sailboat. Population stereotypes listed in *The Psychology of the Psychic* indicate that just under 1 in 18 people are likely to draw a boat. So, if The *Sun* is to be believed, Geller did much better than chance in that instance. But, excuse me if I doubt The *Sun*'s figures; it's now part of my nature.

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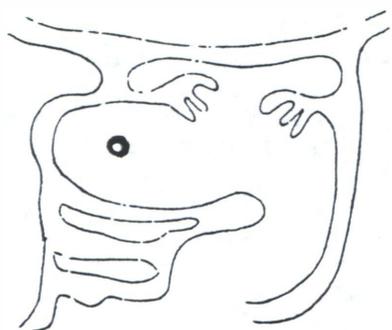
Michael Hutchinson is a member of the UK Skeptics and British distributor for Prometheus Books.

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# Reviews

## Acupuncture Meets Gaia

Stephen Skinner *The Living Earth Manual of Feng-Shui* (Arkana, 1989, £6.99).



仙掌撫琴格

Imagine, if you will, some deluded individual who discovers (so he thinks) that it is unlucky to throw salt over your right shoulder, because lurking behind said shoulder is a guardian angel who objects to having things chucked in his face. Our subject then concocts an elaborate theory detailing how the reaction of the Angel depends on the type of salt used, the angle and speed of throw, the latitude, the position of various planets in the sky at the time of throwing, the height of the thrower above sea level, his/her age, sex, birthsign, and so on, ad nauseam. He also invents a taxonomy of angels; their names, dispositions, spheres of activity, favourite bedtime reading, and so forth. Suppose he then writes a book about this, filling page after page with consummately uninteresting details of his system, interspersed (rather rarely) with somewhat half-hearted and pretty-much worthless attempts to motivate belief in this vast edifice.

Such a book would be a boring one and, with little attempt made to adduce evidence in support of the claims, an immensely frustrating one for those of a skeptical frame of mind. And this is exactly how I felt when wading through Skinner's book.

To be fair to Skinner, he is not to be held personally responsible for inventing the deranged ideas that populate his book; no, he is simply guilty of attempting to adorn them in respectable dress and sell them to you and I. Their original provenance is much more erudite, and indeed *The Living Earth Manual of Feng-Shui* represents a classic example of the New Age tendency to ascribe profound significance to a system of belief simply because it is Old and Chinese. Feng-Shui (pronounced Foong-Shway, which I found to be one of the more interesting things in the book) is an ancient oriental doctrine which, at a practical level, is supposed to enable people to construct dwelling places—from individual domiciles to sprawling cities—in such a way that they harmonise with nature, guaranteeing peace, prosperity and happiness for the occupants. The mediator between environment and man is *ch'i*—a mysterious 'energy' that drenches the Earth, shooting along well-defined lines in much the same way that acupuncturists inform us it shoots along the meridians of our bodies. When building a residence, one must attempt to

maximise the inflow of *ch'i* and to trap it in one's vicinity. The inflow of *ch'i*'s sinister brother energy, the darkly named *sh'a*, must be minimised, or it will undo all the good work done in creating a *ch'i*-sink.

That, basically, is it. The book is essentially a technical manual, and is replete with immensely tedious minutiae informing the avid interior designer or city architect how he can discharge his responsibilities in a manner most likely to reap a Feng-Shui harvest. He must account for the positions (and shapes) of trees, rocks, rivers, mountain ranges (where dragons live—*allegorically*, of course), etc., check the soil quality and atmospheric conditions, etc., all of which interact with and affect the flow of *ch'i* (etc.). The house must face a certain direction, and certain rooms must be allocated to certain family members. A knowledge of astrology is indispensable, as the most appropriate time for construction (amongst other things) is written in the stars. He can even build himself a Lo'pan, a fancy compass, to divine the flow of *ch'i* and help him in his travails. Don't laugh—this is serious stuff. Feng-Shui even tells you how best to inter your dead relatives to prevent them from getting up in the night and waking the household with some anti-social moaning.

Frankly, I don't have the time or the stomach to go into further detail about this vast and dubious system. Feng-Shui strikes me as little more than pure superstition, an edifice of sympathetic magic that has survived for much the same reasons that astrology has survived, and one that should be promptly dumped along with its ancient sister. The book itself is not particularly badly written, in a stylistic sense, but one might have expected more from an author who, according to the publisher's blurb, brings 'the logical techniques of the geographer' to his work. These techniques evidently allow for the liberal use of non-sequiturs, as in Skinner's main attempt to convince us to take Feng-Shui seriously ('... who can deny that the adjustment of the environment, by methods no more esoteric than the addition of parklands to a city or the decoration and refurbishing of a room, reflect on the lives of the inhabitants?'—therefore, Feng-Shui is true), or the related rejection of more parsimonious and credible physical or psychological explanations '... if the site is completely hemmed in so that the air does not circulate... the ground literally gives off damp and stinking exhalations (*sha*), rendering the place unfit for... living inhabitants, for very obvious *as well as* Feng-Shui reasons'—my italics), and seem to favour the adoption of rather pathetic anecdotes as an acceptable form of proof. Coupled with the occasional glaring omission of detail (e.g. Skinner's account of a city that was in a state of unrest and financial penury, leading to its re-designing according to Feng-Shui principles; an account which omits to name the city or describe the outcome of its re-arranging) and with at least one horrendous demonstration of scientific ignorance—namely, Skinner's ascription of the North-seeking nature of certain organisms to the *magnetic* effect of the Earth's *gravitational* field—we are left with a distinctly poor impression of geographers. This particular geographer, it goes without saying, is also prone to be no happier than when he is sniping at The West, chastising us for our ignorant mechanistic approach to life and architecture. Not so the inhabitants of the East, who were and are most enlightened.

That people and their environment interact in subtle ways is undeniable; I for one wouldn't like to live in a high rise block in a grimy city when I could live in a mansion in the countryside. And yes, rearranging one's bedroom occasionally can feel beneficial. And further, yes, I am sometimes inclined to agree with Charlie when he vents his spleen at the odd architect; but why on Earth we need a mish-mash of ancient oriental superstition to explain these phenomena is beyond me. I suppose I should let Skinner almost have the last word. On page 126, we find advice, in the form of a quotation from another author, as to the best way to ensure your house comes up to scratch:

"by far the best and most effective means is to engage a geomancer, to do what he says, and to pay him well" – a counsel of perfection in the West!

So that's what Feng-Shui really is—a rip-off.

—Robin Allen

## Astro-archaeology revisited

John Michell, *A Little History of Astro-Archaeology*, updated & enlarged edition (Thames and Hudson, 1989, £4.95).

The question, whether alignment of ancient archaeological sites with astronomical points is meaningful, and if so, what is the meaning, is not one to set pulses racing; rather, it lends itself to academic controversy of a delightfully disengaged kind. As a history of that controversy, John Michell's book could hardly be bettered. As always, he writes intelligently and intelligibly: as if charting one of the trackways which figure in his pages, he perceptively identifies the crucial stages along the path which has led to a grudging recognition of the facts by a reluctant archaeological establishment.

However, the very lucidity which enables him to point out to us the landmarks also serves to alert us to the pitfalls. On page 88 he writes: 'Astro-archaeology is a romantic subject because it opens a window onto the landscape of an heroic age' but this admission (which was included in his original 1977 edition) he now amplifies with an account of later developments, showing that astro-archaeology has opened not just a window but a floodgate onto the fantasy landscape of the 'New' Age, in which all manner of speculations find a slippery foothold in the as yet imperfectly explored terrain.

Speculation isn't necessarily a bad thing. Premature though they may be, the 'earth mysteries' hypotheses do at least represent an attempt to impose some degree of order on what Michell himself admits are anomalous and often contradictory findings (e.g. the seeming meaninglessness of the Nazca lines, which fit into no logical pattern).

What is worrying is when the soft ground of speculation is taken to be the hard rock of fact. Michell himself comes close to succumbing to this temptation in the section he has added for his updated edition: 'Astro-archaeology, if pursued where it inevitably leads, takes its followers back down to earth and into the realm of spirits and earth energies' (p.112). Some of us would question that 'inevitably' and wonder if the author has himself been lured down one of the tempting side-tracks which he chronicles in his history. Later (p.117) he writes of 'springs of energy' as of a natural phenomenon

whose nature has been demonstrated beyond question, whereas in point of fact they remain—in his own words—'anomalous natural energies', whose relevance to astro-archaeology has yet to be established.

Such reservation apart, this is nonetheless an excellent book, and merits study even by those who remain—as does this reviewer—skeptical as to some of the extrapolations drawn from findings which are as yet ambiguous and enigmatic.

—Hilary Evans

## Unexplained sightings in Bath

A visit to a photographic exhibition, *The Unexplained* (9 December 1989 to 25 February 1990), and to an associated illustrated talk, *Crashing the Boggle Barrier* (Lynn Picknett, 19.30, 12 December 1989), at the Royal Photographic Society Centre of Photography, Milsom Street, Bath.

### The Exhibition

I think the subject of the exhibition, which is cleverly classified and well displayed, is patently absurd. Its title is 'The Unexplained—Mysteries of Space Mind and Time'. There's absolutely nothing inexplicable about it except why on earth such a collection of fiddled nonsense is ever put on display for an ignorant and gullible public to gawp at.

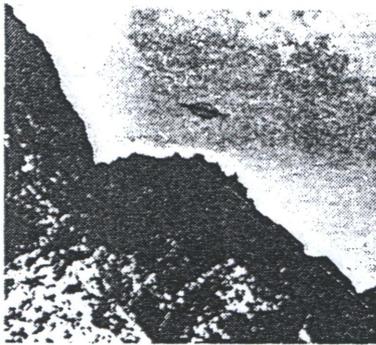
There are in addition to the enlarged prints displayed, printed explanations. I won't bore you with comments on every item but here are some selected highlights from the items listed in the pamphlet which accompanies the exhibition.

**CROP CIRCLES** After a preliminary description of what they look like, the commentary goes on to say '... most significantly perhaps, two circles appeared after a magical ceremony at the summer solstice in 1989 below Silbury Hill, an ancient sacred site believed still to possess enormous power.' I object to this wording which infers that there *are* such things as 'magical ceremonies', and the phrase 'believed still to possess enormous power' suggests that occult powers really *do* exist. I don't say that we should chop off the heads of people who believe in such baloney, but I do believe that the people who believe that the perpetuation of such stupid attitudes is to be deplored and is harmful to the well being and progress of humanity.

**GHOSTS** 'How can you be sure that everyone you see is real?' Need one say more? Lots of pictures of all of which it can be asked, is this truly a picture of an ignis fatuus or is it a fake?

**POLTERGEISTS** My occult pet. Quote from the handout—'Perhaps some kind of physical imbalance is necessary to cause a wide spectrum of paranormal events?' How true. I didn't say this—the exhibitors did!

**UFO's** Another of my favourite things. I suppose it would be too much to ask for a poltergeist in a UFO. But it would make me ecstatically happy. Possibly delirious. They exhibit and explain the Alex Birch photographs—a confessed hoax. Strange. They then go on to discuss the Trinidad Island photographs and comment. 'Very few photographs of apparently structured objects have passed the test of computer enhancement to remain unexplained. The



Trinidad Island photographs have done so and many UFOlogists consider them to be authentic evidence for a rare (but probably natural) scientific phenomenon. In the 15th June 1989 issue of the *British Journal of Photography* experienced UFO skeptic Stuart

Campbell accepts that these photographs *are* genuine but concludes that they show an unusually rare daylight 'optical mirage' of the planet Jupiter. He hasn't won much support for this provocative concept. No mention is made of the fact that the photographer was known to be a specialist in trick photography (See *The UFO Verdict*, Robert Sheaffer, Prometheus, 1980).

**THE TURIN SHROUD** A wonderful life sized transparency is on view—better by far than the public showing of the genuine article which I witnessed on the last occasion of its display in Turin. This exhibition does state that its origin between 1260 and 1390 AD 'seems' (only seems mark you) to be corroborated by the recent carbon dating tests—but the comment goes on to criticise the accuracy of the testing procedures and carries the area of controversy into *how* the image was formed on the cloth, which as I see it isn't the point at all. **LEVITATION** I am sorry if I have innocently misled you by hinting that Poltergeists were my favourite things. Please substitute Levitation. Ever since I was a little lad and was taken to Maskelyne and Devant's fabulous entertainment I've been enthralled—nay, captivated—by the sight of men, women, tables, chairs, eggs, glasses of water etc. hovering without visible means of support. In the case of beautiful women who remain supine four feet above the ground, shining metal hoops are passed around her rigid body to demonstrate that there are no wires or supports, so I *know* these ladies can only be held in position by occult means. I can therefore truly be said to be hooked on levitation and my very dearest wish is to be levitated or to be able to levitate something—anything—a pencil would do. I've read and re-read Upton Sinclair's book *Mental Radio*, does it work and how and I know about D.D. Home and I've seen David Berglass make tables rise from the floor. I think it's terrific. Here in this exhibition you can see, actually *see*, photographs of various gifted characters doing their stuff and you are told that no less a dignitary than Pope Urban VIII only about 350 years ago witnessed St Joseph of Copertino flying. Saint Teresa of Avila used to rise when in a state of religious rapture. In Victorian times D.D. Home 'often' floated to the ceiling and was believed to have floated out of one third storey window in a London house and into the next... There is a photo here showing a man rising several feet from his chair and terrified he looks too—what a pity we can't see how it was done. But I don't suppose they'd let you see it in a photo would they? I rest on terra firma.

**MIND OVER METAL** Yes—lively pickshers of beautiful Uri staring cross eyed at a key, a watch, a pile of junk. That guy certainly has got something. The printed matter on display

tells... 'Despite a decline in popularity, metal bending is still, however, an important part of psychical research, for the truly paranormally bent (or broken) metal is seen to have distinctly different molecular structure from metal that has been mechanically or manually bent. And bent or broken metal is often a feature of poltergeist cases, where it happens spontaneously. Interestingly, poltergeist foci, or "victims", have often proved to be talented metal benders themselves.' **KIRLIAN PHOTOGRAPHY** It had to be here, dinnit? Lots of pictures of blobs and outlines of hands with furry fuzzy auras around the finger tips. Quote: 'Has Kirlian captured the "aura" that clairvoyants and mystics have long claimed surrounded the human body?' Has he summertime. And then 'This research has a clever relevance to psychical researchers, for it has long been known that poltergeist disturbances often begin with the malfunctioning of electrical equipment. And poltergeist victims are often highly allergic people.'

Lynn Picknett, curator of this exhibition, stated to be a leading authority on the paranormal with a weekly slot on LBC, says she has researched a delightfully spine chilling exhibition of paranormal and 'impossible' photographs. She sympathises with Elsie Wright and Frances Griffiths who fabricated the famous Cottingly Fairies photographs of 1918. These photos are shown in the exhibition. La Picknett goes on to say 'They were fed up (Wright and Griffiths) with trying to take pictures of the fairies they say, so they resorted to faking it. But when they admitted the hoax in 1983, various newspapers only picked up on the confession and ignored the reason why. You see, people don't *want* to believe in the paranormal.' 'It is important' says Picknett 'to keep an open mind'. Presumably so long as it supports all the mystic beliefs that create a shield against reality.

We live in a truly wonderful—and mysterious—world, where the *facts* of the Human Mind, Physics, Astronomy, Biology, Medicine, Science and Philosophy generally, as well as the search for *truth* are more fascinating than all the childish beliefs in 'The Unexplained' can ever be. If you were thinking of attending this exhibition perhaps a better idea would be to spend an afternoon in your local museum, planetarium or library pondering the real wonders of the universe.

## The Lecture

The illustrated talk was given by Lynn Picknett, a dark-haired Victoria Wood lookalike, who has a weekly paranormal slot on LBC. She also has a disarming approach to presenting the paranormal and has obviously designed her talk so as to neutralise skeptics as far as possible. She started by quoting Lewis Carol's line about believing 6 impossible things before breakfast. She then went on, surprisingly, to rubbish most of the photographs which she showed. Thus, the Cottingly fairies were definitely fakes (and wasn't it silly of skeptics to have to call in NASA in order to try to prove it). On the other hand, the latest news was that one rambling old sister had said that they faked them only because the real ones did not come out on film. Photographs of Florence Cook's 'spirit companion' were ridiculed and the affair with Professor Crookes sarcastically detailed. The rather silly photograph of watchers who might have been watching anything (but were said to be watching the miracle at Fatima) also came in for scorn.

Rather more respect was reserved for photographs of prints (*sic*) of airborne saints or D.D. Home levitating. After warming to the sceptical tone of the talk, I was astonished to hear Ms Picknett conclude by saying that the only choice was to believe in the paranormal. As soon as questions were invited, I introduced myself as a skeptic (in order to attract the attention of fellow skeptics and possible recruits in the audience) and asked why on earth we (an average—I thought—audience) should believe anything on the basis of faked photographs and anecdotes. It was a question which I would have asked anyway, but I really was quite taken aback by the inconsistent conclusion. I was even more taken aback by the reaction. One would normally expect a fairly unconvincing but polite response from the speaker, while the audience listens attentively. Instead, Ms Picknett made no attempt to answer the question and snapped, 'what did you come here for?'. Not only that, but most of the audience also seemed to be shouting similar questions at me. A woman right in front of me leaned over the back of her seat and almost spat some silly query. One persistent gentleman wanted to know if I believed in electrons even though I could not see them (I wondered how he explained away his TV picture). It was clear that every person there, except myself, had crash-landed well beyond the boggle barrier. Undeterred, I pointed out some factual errors in the talk (e.g. bodies do not inevitably decompose—they do so only within a relatively narrow temperature range—and certain poisons can preserve them; something which even Shakespeare knew) while fending off counter-questions about electrons and negative skeptics.

No attempt was made to respond thoughtfully to any of my questions, and Ms Picknett then told me that I had had quite enough time. Very true, but I was expected to do all of the answering! I spent some time wondering whether I was at the correct address. The voicing of my reasonable doubt might well have deserved such a response from a spiritualist church congregation, but surely not from an audience which included a significant proportion of members of the RPS.

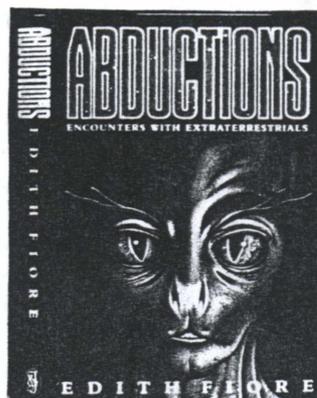
Someone else followed up my first question; but only to say that, 'wasn't it funny that scientists proved that Von Daniken's books were baseless and yet the books continued to sell in large numbers year after year'. He obviously meant funny ha-ha rather than funny peculiar. During the rest of the hectic question time, there was much sotto voce talk of freedom of expression, and why were skeptics trying to suppress it? I regard such a suggestion to be breath-taking in its cheek. I think that skeptics would be delighted to receive just 0.001% of the attention given to the paranormalists and, after a frustrating evening at the RPS, I was pretty sure who was really being suppressed.

One is used to bookshops and public libraries which are crammed with the same old paranormal drivel, but now one finds that a presumably staid and neutral organisation like the Royal Photographic Society will be pushing the paranormal for almost three solid months. I am going to ask the RPS to exhibit just one small poster which will advertise the skeptical point of view. Readers who visit the exhibition may like to look out for it, and ask the organisers where it is (if for some strange reason it cannot be found).

—William Haynes

## Alienation?

Edith Fiore, *Abductions* (Sidgwick & Jackson, £13.95).



Feeling worried, moody, irritable? You've probably been abducted by aliens but can't remember it, according to this book. Edith Fiore, the author, is a psychotherapist who regresses people under hypnosis to uncover their abduction experiences. She learned about hypnosis, she tells us, in one weekend at the Esalen Institute and started using it on her patients the following Monday.

If you are still in doubt as to her scientific circumspection she confesses she became convinced that we are being visited by aliens by reading Donald Keyhoe's book *Flying Saucers Are Real*. Subsequently she joined a UFO study group and dreamed of being shown around a UFO, a dream that she now thinks was really the suppressed memory of her own abduction. She found that many of her hypnotized patients 'remembered' abductions and the bulk of this self-important book is made up of transcripts of those hypnosis sessions.

From the testimony of her patients, it seems that alien spacecraft are little more than travelling operating theatres. The chapter titles will give you a flavour of the contents. Chapter 2: 'They Put Something in My Rectum'. Chapter 5: 'They Said I Had Cancer!'. Chapter 9: 'Oh My God! They Already Know How To Incorporate.' The patients are prompted by Dr Fiore's eager questioning. 'What did they do with the needles?'. 'How did they do the vaginal and rectal exams?'. 'Did they explain to you why they put the wire in your penis?' You get the idea.

What makes all this so depressing, apart from its sheer repetitiveness, is that Dr Fiore believes in the reality of these abductions with a religious certainty that does not allow her to consider any rational alternatives. For those wondering whether you, too, have been contacted or abducted she ends with a self-help guide: 'In the privacy of your own home, you can use a pendulum to tap into your subconscious memories,' she writes. Why look for a real cause for your problems when you can blame the aliens?

—Ian Ridpath

## The Myth of Alternative Health

Rosalind Coward, *The Whole Truth* (Faber & Faber, £12.99)..

A dangerous modern fallacy is that what is 'natural' is fundamentally safer and better than that which is 'synthetic'. This fiction has a lighter side, such as the invariable availability of decaffeinated coffee in 'natural food' shops, but the muddle includes far more serious matters. At its core is marketing—meaningless words promoting worthless lotions and potions. The myth to which ad-writers appeal is that of a natural order, something deep and mysterious in Nature with which we tinker at our peril. One result is better sales of oatmeal facepacks. Another is liver failure in victims of

untested herbal medicines. Instead of truly holistic solutions, people are conned into buying poisons. The new pill pushers are but one aspect of a complex phenomenon.

In *The Whole Truth*, Rosalind Coward surveys the whole range of thoughts and beliefs which make up the myth of alternative health—a set of beliefs about the body, its mind and spirit, its surroundings, and its health. She studies not just dubious therapies, but the realm in which they flourish. The result is a powerful and convincing explication of the incoherence and dishonesty of much that is on offer. Coward does not concern herself with the efficacy of alternative therapies, but instead focuses on the inconsistencies and consequences which surround them. Her approach is gradually to tease apart the meanings which cluster around the alternative health movement.

One of the most important themes of the book is the shift towards an ever greater emphasis on personal responsibility for health. This merges almost imperceptibly with an important part of the 'return to Victorian values'. Disease (or being poor? or homeless?) is once more seen as a consequence of some inner failure—which would have once been called sin. Well-being or wholeness (or riches) are not just matters of good fortune in the alternative world. They are there for all, to be won through hard work and discipline. As Coward points out, when traditional religious and moral ideas seem to be at their lowest ebb of influence, they have regrouped around health. She also draws out the subtle racism of the alternative health scene. Pills and potions are promoted as being from Africa, India and China—which, of course, guarantees their naturalness. This marketing approach is profoundly ethno-centric. African, Indian and Chinese people are not 'closer to nature' than the worried-well of Europe. Closer to nature once meant lower down the evolutionary ladder. Perhaps, as the subtle conservatism of the alternative health movement asserts itself, it will again. People have tried to define a new science before. The last time the Nazis wanted to rid science of the 'Jewish influence,' and latterly the search for a Muslim science has surfaced. Such mixtures of science and religion are dangerous. Science is safest when there is a clear separation between fact and myth.

Women occupy a special place in the contemporary obsession with natural life styles. Coward exposes nonsense here too. Tiresome troupes of witchy, tree-hugging 'feminists', keening at each other in their menstrual jackets, are juxtaposed with tales of truly natural childbirth. She chronicles rampant fevers, ruptured uteruses, wombs inverted and dangling between legs, urine and faeces flowing freely and interchangeably through various orifices—natural consequences of childbirth.

Coward repeats a few pseudo-radical myths herself, such as 'no-one could deny the way in which conventional medicine overlooks personal and emotional factors which are likely to produce or foster illness . . .', or 'it is harsh to draw these links [with Middle Ages humoral medicine] with homeopathy which is based on long standing research...' These are minor complaints, and barely detract from the overall impact of the work. *The Whole Truth* is an important cultural scrapbook, gathering damning images of the careless, the dotty, the entrepreneurial and the poisonous. It is highly recommended.

—Nick Beard

## On medium wavelengths

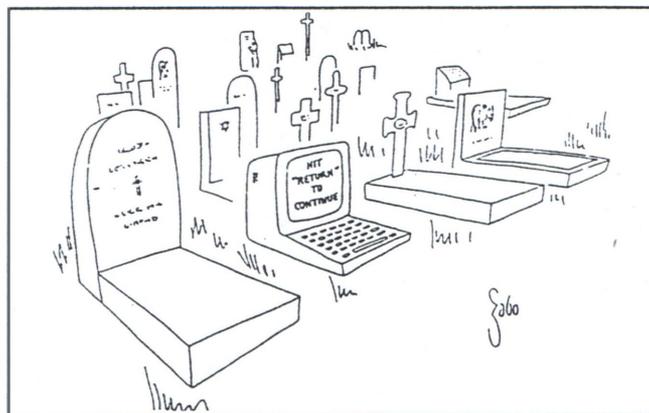
Betty Shine, *Mind to Mind*. (Corgi, £3.50).

Recently, I was able to interview Mrs Betty Shine for this journal when she was in Manchester to promote the paperback edition of her book *Mind to Mind*. She is a remarkable woman, whose good-humoured account of life as a medium and psychic healer deserves a sympathetic reading. Interestingly enough, like many others in the field, she fell on her head at an early age—perhaps such a blow activates the psychic abilities ('opens the third eye'), or at any rate stimulates a visionary side of the mind. Since then, she has regularly experienced vivid personal imagery—a garden, a pool, a wise advisor—which has helped her through times of stress; Jungians will be familiar with the similar effects of 'active imagination'. In fact, she has always been a keen student of Jung's ideas—*Man and his Symbols* has been a special favourite—and she feels a great kinship with his approach to the human mind via the imagery of the Unconscious, although she does not look especially for the standard Archetypes in her own work, preferring to let everyone find their own appropriate imagery.

In later life, having suffered considerable illness, she was advised by a medium to work as a (psychic) healer, in which vocation she practised 'laying on of hands' and also 'channeling' the powers of a (spirit) doctor. Her regular approach involves balancing and replenishing sick people's energy bodies (known in the various metaphysical traditions as auras, subtle or astral bodies, mana, prana, or chi); all this is very familiar in the context of both Eastern mysticism and New Age thought generally, and raises the question whether there is in fact a common spiritual reality involved.

Betty has always had an interest in Yoga, which her daughter, too, has practised from childhood—for the last 14 years Janet has been a Wheel of Yoga teacher, giving radio classes in Mantra Yoga in the South of England. Many of Betty's ideas on the role of the energy body and suggestion in healing follow the lines familiar to students of Theosophy and the works of Yogi Ramacharaka. She believes that about 85% of illnesses are treatable by psychic means; doctors now think that around this percentage of all diseases are basically psychosomatic, caused by stress or other psychological factors, and can be helped or cured by relaxation, autosuggestion, counselling and other therapies based on psychological, rather than psychic, approaches.

In Betty's practice, which largely involves absent healing, she receives letters from people to whom she projects



healing energy, and also sends leaflets and cassettes (on healing, mediumship, relaxation, visualisation and other topics).

So, do sick people actually recover, or even feel better, as a result of Mrs Shine's efforts? And, if so, is this due to paranormal forces, or the (possibly ill-understood) powers of the human mind in a purely psychological sense? On a cautionary note, the foreword of the book describes a young woman who was treated psychically for cancer; her suffering was eased, but she died of the cancer nevertheless.

It would be interesting to see a collaboration between the author and the medical establishment to investigate the nature and extent of her abilities; unfortunately, neither she nor her clients seem particularly interested in such a scientific appraisal. While I can understand this attitude—after all, if psychic healing helps people, why should they question it?—it does mean that a verdict of 'not proven' seems the only possible (sceptical) choice at present.

—Mike Rutter

## New Writers

The *British & Irish Skeptic* is always searching for new contributors.

If you have some interesting, lively, or unusual thoughts on pseudoscience and the paranormal which you would like to communicate to fellow skeptics then why not put pen to paper (or better still, fingers to word-processor keyboard) and write us an article?

Your article does not have to be academic in nature (although it could be) as our aim is to entertain as well as inform.

Although we can't guarantee publication all manuscripts will be carefully considered.

## IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

We have always felt that the name *The British & Irish Skeptic* was not exactly the world's snappiest magazine title, and have, since the inception of the magazine, been searching for a better title.

So from issue IV.3

**The British & Irish  
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Readers of the *British & Irish Skeptic* are entitled to buy the 2-volume set of Philip Ward's **Dictionary of Common Fallacies** (hardback £20) at £15 post free if prepaid to:

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*This offer is not available in North America*

## Psi and the Sceptic

The Society for Psychological Research is holding a Study Day entitled 'Psi and the Sceptic' at St. Mary Abbot's Church Hall on Saturday 21 April 1990 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Psychical research has often encountered scepticism, so it is important to understand the reason for this. Why do some people have a strong belief in the paranormal whilst others have such a strong disbelief? Are believers merely gullible or have disbelievers not studied the evidence sufficiently? There is also the question of how psychical researchers should react to scepticism. Is confrontation with the disbeliever unproductive or is it necessary in order to gain academic respectability?

In this Study Day these questions will be addressed by four speakers with a variety of views. The occasion should provide an opportunity to discuss the issues from all sides without being too confrontational. It will end with a discussion in which the audience will be invited to participate.

St. Mary Abbot's Church Hall can be found by walking up Church Street (which is off Kensington High Street) and continuing to walk straight up Vicarage Gate as Church Street bears left. Then take the first turning on the right, also called Vicarage Gate, and the Church Hall stands on its own grounds at the end. Parking spaces near the Church Hall are not available to those attending as they are all allocated to residents. There is a car park under the Kensington Central Library in Campden Hill Road.

### PROGRAMME

10.00—11.00	<i>Evidence for the Paranormal</i>	Prof Archie Roy
11.00—11.30	COFFEE	
11.30—12.00	<i>Lack of Evidence for the Paranormal</i>	Dr Steve Donnelly
12.30—13.45	LUNCH	
13.45—14.45	<i>The Problem of Extreme Conviction</i>	Dr Deborah Delaney
14.45—15.45	<i>A Sociological Perspective</i>	Dr Trevor Pinch
15.45—16.15	TEA	
16.15—17.00	<i>General Discussion</i>	

The study day is open to the general public and will cost £12 to non-SPR members with reductions (on demand) for students, senior citizens and UB 40. Please send your fee, as soon as possible, marking the envelope *SPR Study Day* to: The Secretary, Society for Psychological Research, 1 Adam & Eve Mews, Kensington, LONDON W8 6UG

# Letters

## Uri Geller

As a recent subscriber to the *British & Irish Skeptic*, I must congratulate you on a very interesting and informative publication. However I am very surprised that after so long there is still such a hostile feeling towards Uri Geller, especially from magicians.

As a performing magician myself I must admit a certain fascination with the feats Mr Geller performs, but I fail to see why so many magicians wish to play the role of skeptic and doubter. A magician is supposed to create wonder and enchantment, not destroy it.

You may be unaware that Mr Geller made a surprise appearance at a magicians' conference in Brighton in 1988 and impressed everyone with his warmth and sincerity. Another surprise was his great friendship with David Berglas, President of the Magic Circle. So often the press has portrayed them as bitter enemies.

Psychic or not, Uri Geller is a superb entertainer, and a very successful one at that. Long may he continue.

**David Hawkins**  
Reading

(See *Hits & Misses* for a reply to David Hawkins's letter)

## Roy Jenkins' Dream

In the January/February issue, Dr John Beloff recounts an incident which occurred to Roy Jenkins at the time of the death of Anthony Crosland. To recapitulate briefly, Jenkins awoke in the early hours of the morning of Saturday 19 February, after a vivid dream in which he heard his colleague's voice saying that he was dying. An hour and a half later, he was telephoned to be told that Crosland had died. Dr Beloff calls this a 'telling' case, and suggests that it will stand comparison with any evidence 'which can hold up in a court of law on the basis of human testimony and survive cross-examination'. The whole point of the story (in paranormal terms) is that Crosland

died unexpectedly—indeed, Beloff actually emphasizes that very word in his discussion. If Crosland's death were no surprise, then clearly Jenkins' dream is of no special paranormal interest. What are the facts? Did Roy Jenkins have no reason to expect the death of Anthony Crosland? The Index to *The Times* for 1977 (vol.1, p.319) tells us all we need to know. On the 14th February, the paper reported (on page one) that he had been admitted to hospital for examination and observation. The following day, he was 'dangerously ill following signs of a stroke'. On the 16th, there was concern as his condition deteriorated, although on the day after, it had stabilized. On the 18th, he was still 'critical'. All these stories made the front page. I cannot see anything here that points to the conclusion that Dr Beloff is urging on us. There was every reason for Roy Jenkins having a dream about a colleague whom he knew to be at death's door.

**Jon Lord**  
Surrey

## John Beloff Replies

Mea Culpa. Jon Lord is quite right to point out that Anthony Crosland was dangerously ill by the time Roy Jenkins had his strange dream in the early hours of Saturday 19 February 1977. On the other hand, there was no reason for Jenkins to expect his imminent demise. He had met Denis Healey on the previous Monday and it was from him he had learned that Crosland had been taken ill the previous day. In his entry for that day he writes 'Denis and I contemplated, not I think his death, but the possibility that he might be out of action as chairman of the Council of Ministers for some time to come'. What impressed Jenkins, in the event, was not that he should have dreamt about his friend dying but that his dream should have coincided, as near as he could reckon (he mentions the time difference more . . . between London and Rome) with his death. It also im-

pressed Crosland's widow, Susan, to whom Jenkins related the incident. John Lord is entitled to regard the timing of the two events as just another coincidence. Spontaneous cases of this kind cannot prove anything and, if one rejects the possibility of ESP, there is no option but to regard them as coincidences. If, on the other hand, one accepts the concept of ESP, the case is simply one more example of what may be found in abundance in the literature of psychical research.

**John Beloff**  
Edinburgh

## A Lore Unto Himself

I'm rather worried by the direction Toby Howard's latest columns are taking in turning the spotlight on folk customs. Where will it all end? If skepticism of such things is encouraged, next time I pass my Morris Man's hat round with promises of 'fertility for you, your children, your beasts and your crops' the proceeds may be greatly reduced (even if I'm not in the city centre at the time!).

**Simon Wikins**  
Oxford

## Bent Spoon Award

In *B&IS 4.1*, the first annual UK Skeptics Bent Spoon Award was announced following the American tradition begun, I believe, by James Randi.

Whilst accepting that the award may be a good idea in that it highlights a major idiocy and can perhaps be used to gain (deserved) media attention for the skeptical movement in this country, I feel that the choice of name is unfortunate. For most people in Britain the words 'Bent Spoon' are synonymous with Uri Geller which means that at every award, Geller receives free publicity.

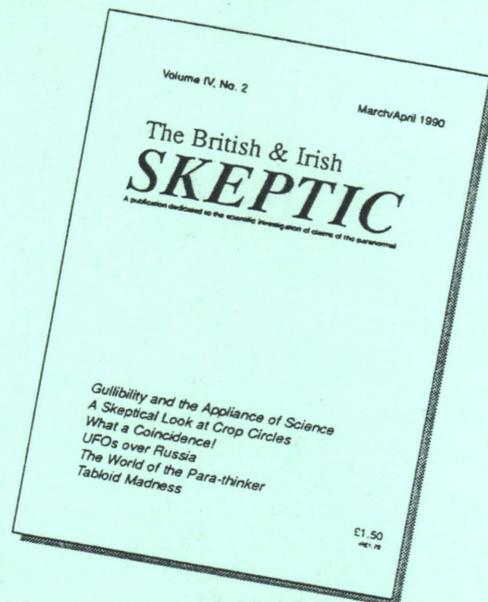
Why not change the name to something like Cracked Crystal Ball Award?

**Phil Newman**  
London

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If this is the first time you've seen the B&IS, here are just a few of the feature articles you've missed!



## Volume I (1987)

Nos. 1-4 Out of print.

**No. 5** Abductions in perspective (Hilary Evans); Geller in Reading (Michael Hutchinson); Magicians, Mediums and Psychics-1 (David Alexander); Carl Sagan's Universe (William Steele); Science vs. Pseudoscience-1 (Peter O'Hara); I Saw a Dupe (Karl Sabbagh);

**No. 6** Creationism in Australia (Martin Bridgstock); Noah's Ark Founders on the Facts (Stephen Moreton); Nessie Hunt (Steuart Campbell); Magicians, Mediums and Psychics-2 (David Alexander); Science vs. Pseudoscience-2 (Peter O'Hara); The Royal Nonesuch of Parapsychology (H.B. Gibson); Skeptics' predictions for 1988;

## Volume II (1988)

**No. 1** Geller's Sailboat (Frank Koval); Magicians, Mediums and Psychics-3 (David Alexander); Knock: Some new evidence (David Berman); Predictions 1988; Nelson's Emporium (Frank Chambers); Telepathy: a Mechanism? (Gordon Gray); The 'Alternative' in Alternative Medicine (Michael Heap);

**No. 2** Doris Collins and the Sun (Wendy Grossman); Paul Kurtz Interview-1 (Wendy Grossman); State of the Art (Frank Chambers); S.G. Soal: Master of Deception (Chris Scott);

**No. 3** Findhorn (Steuart Campbell), Paul Kurtz Interview-2 (Wendy Grossman), The Case Against ESP (Anthony Garrett), Telepathy: a mechanism? No! (Steve Donnelly), Recognizing Pseudoscience (Sven Ove Hansson),

**No. 4** A Thorn in Geller's Side (Michael Hutchinson); Sprite; Skeptic at Large (Wendy Grossman); UFO days (Steve Donnelly); Comparative Astrology; Dreams and Visions of Survival (Antony Flew);

**No. 5** Is There Antibody There? (Richard Kay); Dowsing in the Country (Denys Parsons); The Saints and Martyrs of Parapsychology (H.B. Gibson); UFO Hunt (Marcel Hulspas);

**No. 6** Bristol Psychic fair (Hocus Pocus); The Incredible Mr Newman (Frank Chambers); Skeptical Predictions for 1989 (Marjorie Mackintosh); Joe Nickell on the Shroud of Turin;

## Volume III (1989)

**No. 1** Firewalking in Indonesia (Chris Wright); Randi in Manchester (Frank Koval); Complacently Irrational or Irrationally Complacent? (David Fisher); Alternative medicine and the question of evidence (Nick Beard); Psychic Diary; Skeptic at Large; Heaven and Earth; Reviews: Special report: the paranormal on radio.

**No. 2** Perpetuum Mobile (Anthony Garrett); Joseph Newman followup (Frank Chambers); My Psychic Odyssey (Mike Rutter); Cosmic Crystal Crankery (Stephen Moreton); Some Rational and Irrational Feedback (David Fisher); Skeptic at Large; Heaven and Earth; Reviews: Hollywood Channelling; Skeptics Under Attack; Physics and Psychics; Two Casebooks; Ghost Train.

**No. 3** The Committee Against Health Fraud (Nick Beard); Pyramids, pyramyths and pyramidiotis (Barry Williams); Near-death experiences (Sue Blackmore); Twitching sticks (Anthony Garrett); European skeptics conference (John Lord); Skeptic at Large; Heaven and Earth; Reviews: Nicholas Witchell's Nessie, The Psychic Tea Room, Klimo's Channelling, The Electric Shock Book.

**No. 4** Remembering Richard Feynman (Al Seckel); Two unpublished Feynman stories; The world of weird HiFi (David Fisher); The lessons of 'cold fusion' (Dave Love); A new test of religion? (Anthony Garrett); Eye-to-eye with Iridology (Hocus Pocus); Having faith in skepticism (Nick Beard);

**No. 5** Elementary, My Dear Mystic (Medawc Williams); Science vs Religion (Barend Vlaardingbroek); The Cultist's Defence (Anthony Garrett); Scepticism: Universal Or Occasional? (Antony Flew); The Nullarbor UFO Mystery—Solved (A.T. Brunt); The Cards Can't Lie? (Mike Rutter);

## Volume IV (1990)

**No. 1** Hypnosis and the Occult (H.B. Gibson); Hypnosis: Fact or Fiction? (Lewis Jones); The Myth of Leylines (Medawc Williams); Romancing the Stone (Tom Ruffles); Debate: The Case for PSI (John Beloff); The Case against PSI (John Maddox); Skeptical predictions for 1990; Skeptical Quiz; First Annual 'Bent Spoon' Award.



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