

THE BUMPS IN THE NIGHT

MYSTERIOUS BRITAIN.

By Janet and Colin Bond.

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Reviewer:

PETER RUSBRIDGE.

NEVER have I come across so many new words as I did when reading this book. Some of them, like "paraphysics", I couldn't find in the dictionary. Others, such as "gematria", "geomancy" and "psychometry" did appear.

Their cumulative effect was to create an atmosphere of suspicion rather than mystery, in which the authors appear to play a kind of confidence trick on the reader, using pseudo-scientific mumbo-jumbo in the process.

However, the use of these words is not sustained throughout the book. Instead, they subside into the background and, like rheumatism, only occasionally surface to annoy the reader.

This beautifully illustrated and attractive book abounds

and attractive book abounds with descriptions of prehistoric sites in Britain, some of them of immense size. Not only are the sites described, but also stories and legends connected with the sites are recounted, together with possible explanations of their origin

Some of the prehistoric phenomena, which I have known since childhood, and which until now I have regarded as commonplace, take on a new aspect after reading this book. Yet, although Britain can be a mysterious place, somehow, it can't be as mysterious as all that.

It is a common fault in human nature to ascribe to the supernatural anything for which an immediate rational explanation cannot be found. In earlier times, the minds of people were full of ghosties and banshees, and things that went bump in the night. Nowadays, we are more concerned with UFOs, Martians and frenetic arguments about whether or not God was an astronaut.

There are plenty of such examples in this book. A church, built in Ireland in the eighth century out of loose stones is shaped like an in-

stones, is shaped like an inverted catenary, presumably to stop the roof of loose stones from falling in. However, according to the authors, the curious shape may well have had the special purpose of attracting and concentrating the cosmic energies (whatever that may mean) along the roof ridge; thus enabling the said cosmic energies to disperse within the building to the spiritual and physical benefit of anyone engaged in religious activity inside.

Now, all this is a bit hard to take, especially as the authors go on to attack the science of archaeology as well

Archaeologists, they say, are a mistaken bunch of people, because they base their science on three unproven assumptions.

The first of these assumptions, alleged by the authors, is that civilisation can only exist where there is a high level of applied technology, such as we have at present. The second assumption, which grows out of the first, is that the earlier the remains, the more primitive the people who left them. The final assumption is that war has been the

tion is that war has been the great stimulator of civilisation

Now, you may draw your own conclusions about the validity of these alleged assumptions. However, the accusation that archaeology is based on these assumptions, or that it is based on any assumptions at all, is very difficult to believe. Surely, honest researchers would collect all the evidence first, and, only when their excavations were complete, would they then interpret and explain their findings.

To do otherwise is to adopt a very dangerous intellectual practice, to which, for example, the astronomer Tycho Brahe fell victim. He believed the Copernican theory of a heliocentric universe to be incorrect, and he spent a lifetime amassing observations, calculations and evidence to prove Copernicus wrong. However, he failed in his attempt, and it took a fresh mind in Johannes Kepler, his pupil, to re-evaluate the great mass of Brahe's work and, by starting with the evidence first, show quite simply that Copernicus was right after all.

It is hardly fair of the authors to accuse archaeologists of this error, when they come perilously close to making the same mistake

they come perilously close to making the same mistake themselves. They imply, amongst other things, that burial mounds, known as "long barrows", and normally found on hill tops, could be representations of space rockets, or else part of a world-wide system of planetary engineering, which "modified" and "directed" some subtle form of beneficial energy. There is, of course, no evidence to substantiate this theory. Quite obviously, they want to believe that the earth has been pre-

viously inhabited by people with a degree of civilisation at least equal to our own, and that study of prehistoric remains will yield the necessary proof

There is, however, one mystery described by the authors which really engrossed me. A straight line, drawn on a map of England between a point on the east coast near Lowestoft and St Michael's Mount in Cornwall, can be seen to pass through many ancient hilltop sites and churches dedicated to St Michael. There are far too many sites on the line for it to be a coincidence. They were placed there on purpose. Now, what could be the explanation of that?

THE EXPLANATION OF THAT

In fact, this line is by no means unique. There are thousands of these straight lines all over England and Scotland, linking sites of great antiquity. They have been called leys, and there has been much speculation as to their purpose; but nobody really knows. Of course, the authors suggest many fanciful solutions, none of which are half as intriguing and tantalising as the mystery itself.

On the banks of the River Wear in Durham live a family who can trace their line back to the twelfth century, but who are much older even than that. During the fourteenth century, the young heir to the title made a strange catch, while fishing in the river. It was a worm of repulsive appearance. He flung it into a nearby well and forgot about it. However, the creature continued to grow, eventually to immense size, and returned to live in the river, from whence it periodically went on excursions, terrorising the locals with its mounting appetite.

Our hero consulted a sybil about the problem. She advised him to wear armour with sharp blades fixed all

with sharp blades fixed all over it, so that when the creature coiled itself around him, it would get a nasty surprise. During the resulting battle, the "loathly worm" succumbed, and it was washed away in bits by the river. However, the sybil had offered a warning too — the young man had to kill the first living thing he saw after the fight.

He had arranged for a hound to be released for this purpose. Unfortunately he was so excited by his triumph that he forgot all about the sybil's warning, and the first person he saw after the fight was his own father, come to congratulate him. As he would not sacrifice his father, a curse fell on the family, and, for nine generations no holder of the title ever died in bed.

Nine generations is a long time, but although I cannot vouch for the authenticity of this legend, recounted by the authors, I have a feeling that the present holder of the title might well believe the curse to be still active. His name is Lord Lambton.