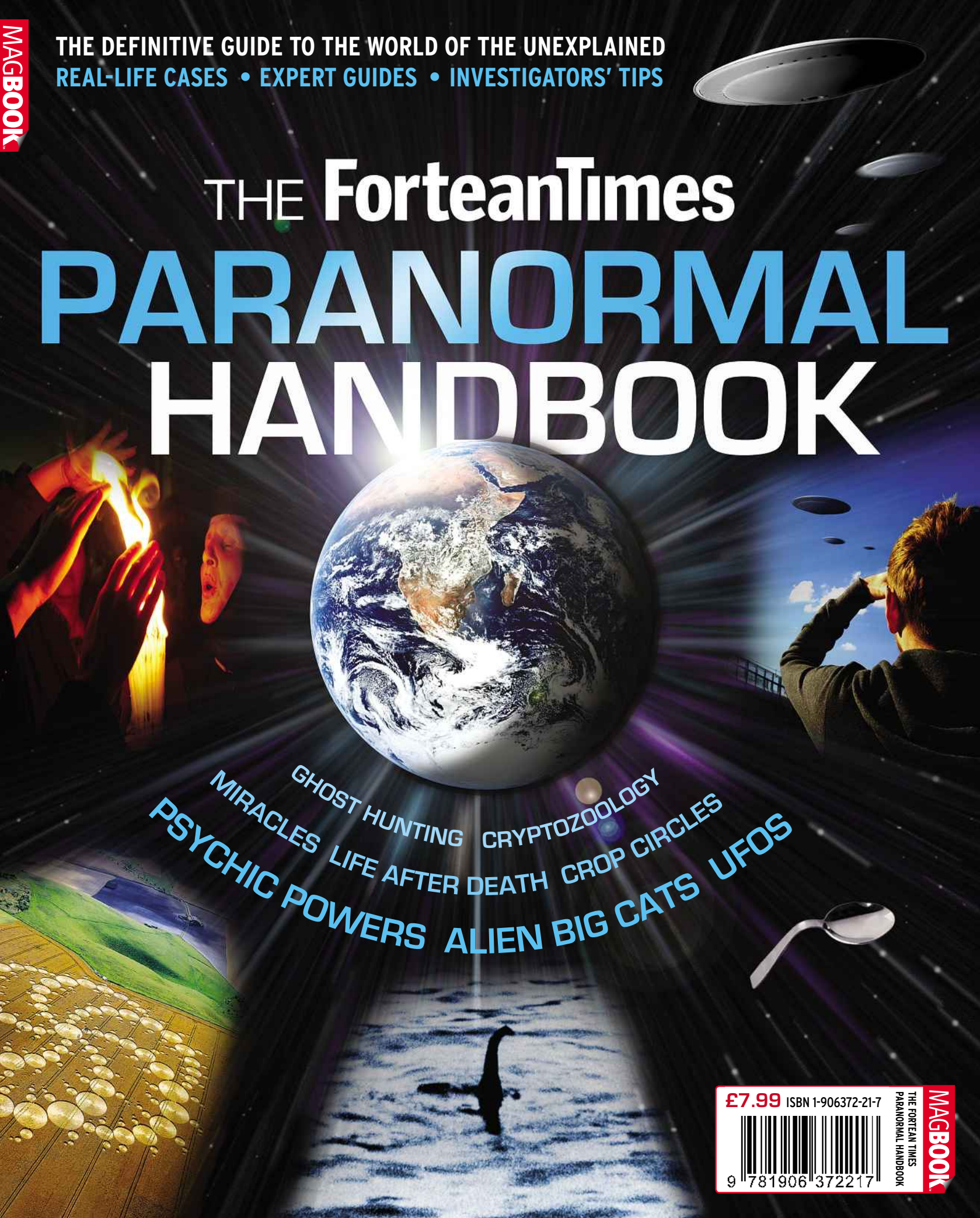
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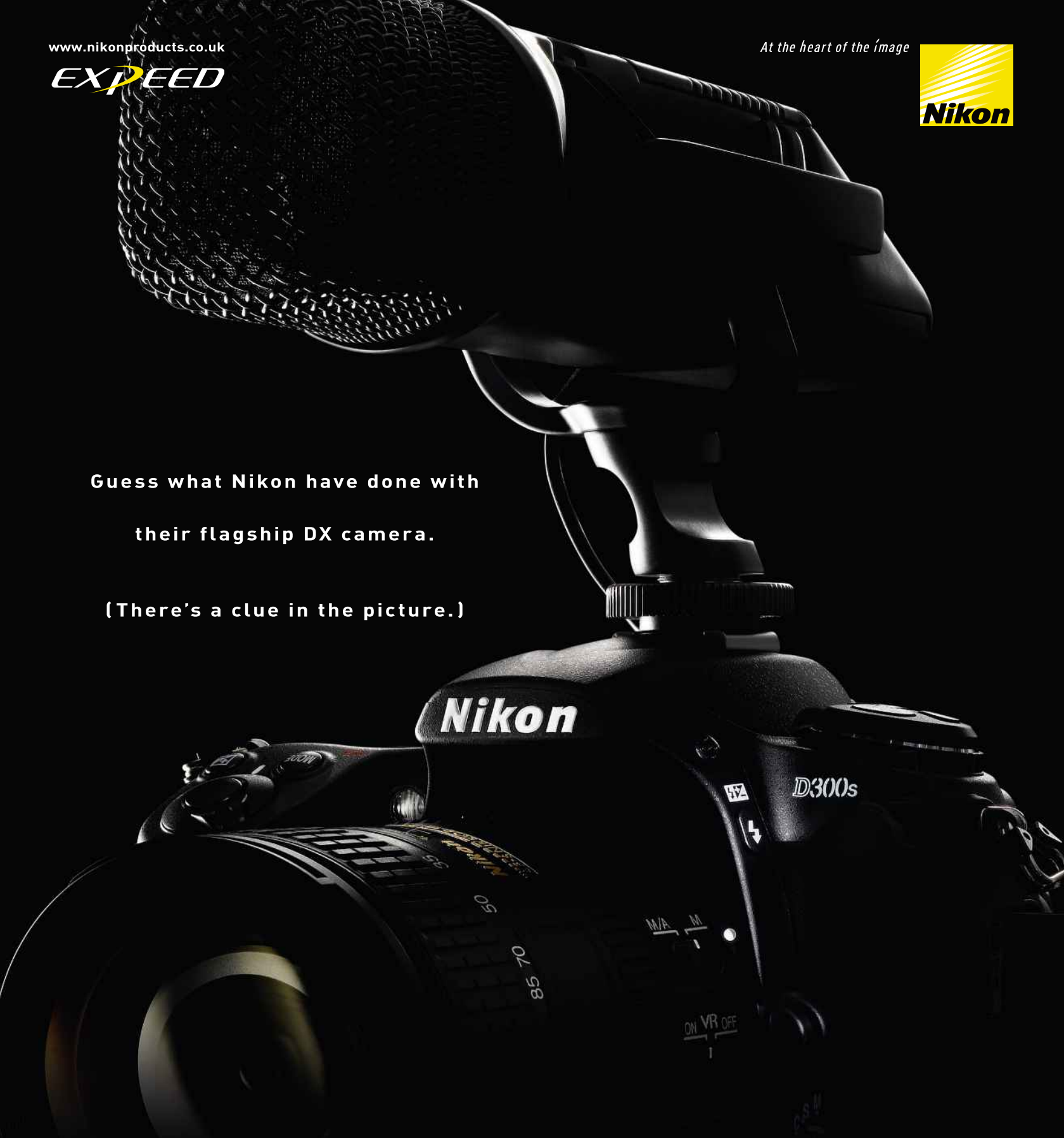
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THE PARANORMAL HANDBOOK

Introduction...

People have always tried to make sense of the unknown – studying the world around them or looking into themselves for the answers to difficult questions. Both science and religion have, usually in rather different ways, grappled with the enigmas of human existence and asked what, if anything, might lie beyond it. And often, they have reached quite different conclusions. But in the 19th century, a new kind of investigator began to emerge, using the tools and methods of science to probe areas previously seen as the realm of religious belief. Are there such things as ghosts and spirits? Does some part of us survive after the death of the body, and can it communicate with the living? Can certain people – mediums for example – channel these messages from the other side? And might they not possess other wonderful powers beyond the five senses, being able to predict the future or read minds?

OUR EXPERTS WILL HELP YOU SORT FACT FROM FICTION AND SENSE FROM NONSENSE

In a way, it's these gentleman-scientists of the Victorian and Edwardian era that we have to thank for the interest in the paranormal that has continued ever since, and that we take for granted today. Organisations like The Ghost Club and the Society for Psychical Research, which were founded in 19th-century Britain, now have equivalents all over the world. Ghost-hunter John Fraser tells us in his article about investigating ghosts that there are now 1,200 paranormal investigation groups in the UK alone!

Some of these organisations are still trying to establish the truth about phenomena that their 19th-century counterparts would recognise – survival after death or ESP for instance – while others are tackling mysteries of more recent origin. The second half of the 20th century saw an explosion in reports of UFOs from all over the world; brand new phenomena, like crop circles, made themselves known and attracted new teams of investigators. Established sciences developed arms dedicated to exploring what, for the sceptically-minded, didn't look like science at all: parapsychologists studied the possibilities of psi-power while cryptozoologists went in search of unknown and often outlandish animals like the Mokole Mbembe, the Sasquatch or the Loch Ness Monster.

There are fashions in strange phenomena, just like everything else. Today, thanks to television programmes such as *Most Haunted*, ghosts are enjoying a new heyday, with walks, vigils and investigations becoming a national hobby. And the arrival of the Internet has meant an explosion of websites, forums and online groups that have put strange phenomena within everyone's reach. But with such a profusion of possibilities, a bit of expert knowledge can be a big help.

In this handbook, we'll guide you through the world of mysteries both old and new – from the perennial search for evidence of life after death to the space-age enigmas of UFOs and crop circles, from the exotic monsters that might be lurking on the far side of the world to the closer-to-home puzzle of why Alien Big Cats are roaming Britain's countryside. Along the way, our experts will help you sort fact from fiction and sense from nonsense, provide tips on how to conduct your own investigations, and give you all the information you need to get involved with the world of the unexplained for yourself...



Fortean Times

THE PARANORM

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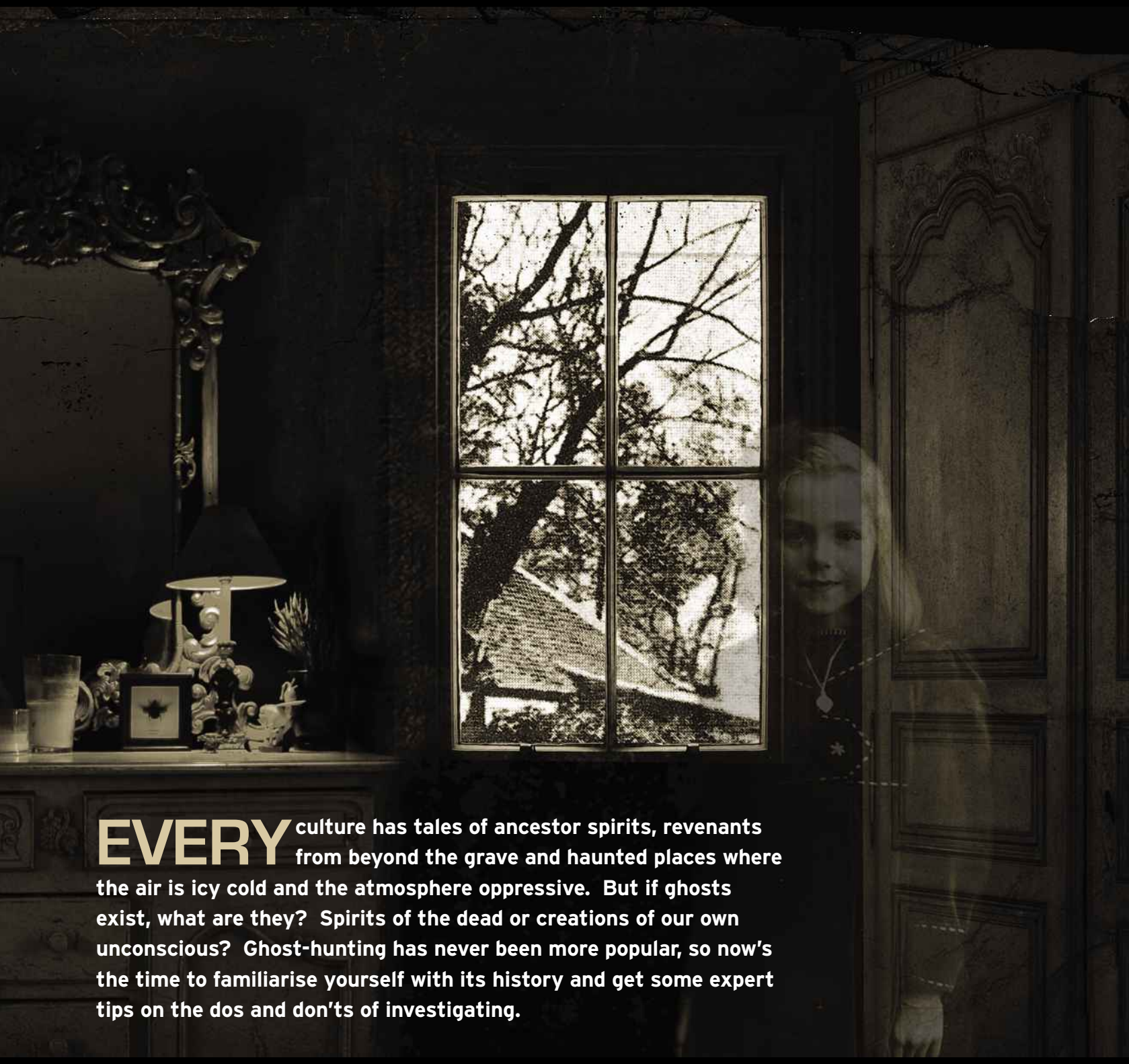
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The Fortean Times Guide

GHOST HUNTING





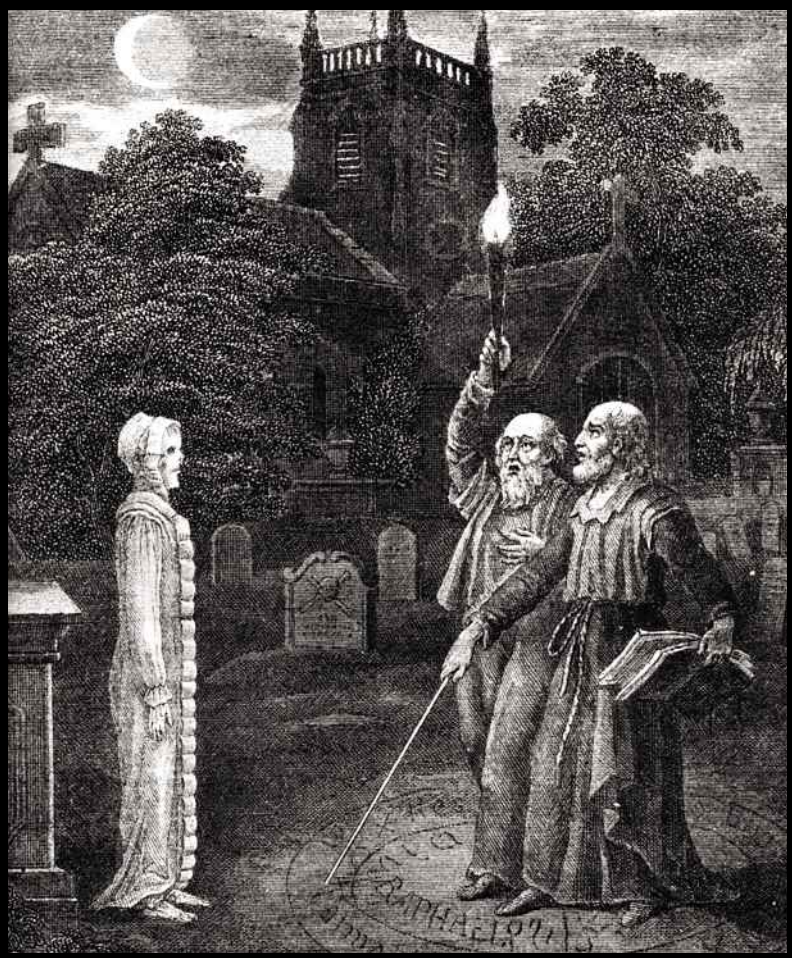
EVERY culture has tales of ancestor spirits, revenants from beyond the grave and haunted places where the air is icy cold and the atmosphere oppressive. But if ghosts exist, what are they? Spirits of the dead or creations of our own unconscious? Ghost-hunting has never been more popular, so now's the time to familiarise yourself with its history and get some expert tips on the dos and don'ts of investigating.

An introduction to...
GHOST HUNTING



OUR EXPERT ALAN MURDIE

The notion of deliberately exploring haunted places to seek the truth behind the rumours has never been more popular than it is today. Here we examine the background to this spooky pursuit.



ABOVE: Elizabethan occultists Dr John Dee and Edward Kelly attempt to raise the dead.

Beliefs about ghosts and the return of the dead are known from every recorded human society. Yet despite thousands of years of experiences, speculation and discussion, progress in understanding these phenomena has been slow. Anyone interested in the subject in the British Isles or in the rest of the English-speaking world will easily find one or more local books or websites detailing ghosts and reputedly haunted houses in the neighbourhood. But what the reader *won't* find is any conclusive explanation of what ghosts might really be.

That ghost experiences are commonplace may easily be established with any gathering of teenagers or adults with whom the topic is then discussed. Invariably, any such group contains one or more individuals who have personally experienced what is believed to be a ghost; alternatively, they will know of a reliable person who claims such an experience. It is this continuing pattern of personal experience which has sustained ghost beliefs, whereas many other varieties of supernatural belief from earlier centuries have virtually died out.

Complaints that science fails to take ghosts seriously have been in circulation since the publication of *The Night Side of Nature* (1848) by Mrs Catherine Crowe. Cultures across the world share the idea that ghosts are the spirits of those who died violent deaths or were denied proper burial rites, and have to be appeased by special rituals. The British Isles in particular had numerous traditions of haunted castles, stately homes, rectories and other sites. Collections of such tales grew up from the 16th century (they were also known on the European Continent), usually with a motive of establishing some religious or spiritual agenda. However, such ideas have been rejected by materialist scientists, who have advanced all manner of sceptical theories since the end of the 17th century. Many ghost reports may be explicable as misperceptions

of natural phenomena or psychological products originating solely in the witness. Varieties of hallucinations, fraud and eye disease have all been advanced as the explanation for ghosts, but belief remains undiminished.

APPARITIONS AND POLTERGEISTS

A fundamental problem for both mainstream science and psychical investigators alike is that effective study can only be made of witness reports, not of actual ghosts themselves, practical ghost-hunting being fraught with difficulties.

Prior to the 1860s, attempts at ghost-hunting were often linked with necromancy and spirit-raising for magical purposes, while analysis was shrouded in religious dogma and superstition. Occasionally, isolated investigators took a semi-scientific approach, such as Joseph Glanvil's studying reports of strange rapping sounds at Tedworth, Wiltshire, in 1661 (known as the Demon Drummer of Tedworth). Sustained efforts to study ghost experiences really only began during the last decades of the 19th century, with the formation of the Society for Psychical Research in 1882. Most practical investigation work into alleged spirits was conducted in the séance room, supposedly via the intercession of a medium. However, it was recognised that, as in traditional ghost stories, many such experiences came to individuals spontaneously, without any medium present. Data was gathered primarily by surveys and interviews. Numerous examples of what became known as crisis apparitions were gathered in a two-volume work *Phantasms of the Living* (1886), which detailed some 701 cases of what became termed 'crisis apparitions'. Typically, such accounts involved the apparition of a known person dying or suffering a trauma that would be seen or sensed by relatives or friends far away. Each incident only occurred once and investigators speculated that telepathy between living persons might lie behind the effect.

Reports of apparitions of the dead also accumulated; these might be seen on more than one occasion and tended to be limited to one place, in keeping with the idea of a haunting. However, few apparitions resembled the dramatic headless figures and phantom coaches celebrated in folklore and fiction. Most were life-like human figures, while a small percentage was made up of domestic animals or even inanimate objects. Occasionally, the human apparition was partially formed, such as just the legs or the face.

The vast majority of human apparitions made no attempt to communicate with witnesses. Rather, they seemed to be visual images repeating themselves, lacking in consciousness and comparable to pictures or film images. The phenomena appeared to be hallucinatory, leaving no physical traces or convincing photographic evidence, despite many attempts to capture apparitions on camera (many fakes, double



GHOST-HUNTING WAS LINKED TO NECROMANCY AND SPIRIT-RAISING FOR MAGICAL PURPOSES



ABOVE: The 'Demon Drummer of Tedworth' was a famous case from Wiltshire investigated by Joseph Glanvil in 1661.
TOP: The image of ghosts as disembodied visitors from the grave was a popular one in 19th-century photography.

TOP 10 HAUNTED PUBS

THE HIGHWAYMAN INN
SOURTON, DEVON

The eccentric Highwayman Inn is stuffed with curiosities – a dragon-shaped bit of wood; a stagecoach (now the porch); a wooden door from a whaler, Diana, which in the 1860s got trapped in Arctic pack ice and then ran aground in the Humber. The ghosts of her dead crew haunt The Highwayman, along with a man with a feather in his hat and a lewd, mop capped-woman.

THE GRENADIER
KNIGHTSBRIDGE, LONDON

Once a billet for the Duke of Wellington's officers, legend has it that The Grenadier is haunted by the spirit of an 18th-century guardsman who was caught cheating at cards. His incensed comrades flogged him savagely and threw him down into the cellar; he died at the bottom of the stairs.





ABOVE: The Enfield poltergeist case was one of the most exhaustively investigated of modern times.

exposures and marks caused by faulty processing have been claimed as evidence for ghosts, but few resemble the detailed forms described by witnesses). Apparitions seem closer to dreams or visions, but with the difference that they are experienced by more than one person at the same time; or on separate occasions by different observers, and even by mammals – dogs, cats and horses are all reported to react to haunting phenomena. The largest survey ever undertaken, the *Census of Hallucinations* in 1894 involving 17,000 questionnaires, confirmed that healthy, sober people experienced a range of ghostly phenomena, with visual experiences being the most common. Noises were also reported, including voices, footsteps and music, and more occasionally sensations of being touched, or of strange smells. The feelings of a presence and feelings of cold also featured. Survey evidence gathered in the 20th century by the Paraphysical Laboratory at Downton, Wiltshire, from 1967–74 and in *Ghosts of Today* (1980) by Andrew Green established the recurrence of these patterns in the 20th century, although there has been a marked decline in one-off crisis apparitions.

MOST RESEARCHERS TAKE THE VIEW THAT POLTERGEIST PHENOMENA ORIGINATE IN THE SUBCONSCIOUS MIND

Examination of reports of haunting in premises suggests that incidents tend to be repetitive, eventually declining, as though energy is running down. A typical example of a modern haunting comes from a court building at Monmouth, reported in March 2007. Tony Lambert, 61, has been caretaker at the Shire Hall for 10 years and is convinced it is haunted. Last year, he was on the top floor when he heard a door close on the landing below. He turned and saw the bottom of a black cloak and a man's legs disappearing behind a pillar. Visitors often feel as though they are being watched. Coldness on the stairs and the smell of perfume has been experienced, and doors are reported to close by themselves. A clairvoyant named Debbie Gilbert said she sensed a figure in black robes and a wig, a phantom judge and smelt a burning smell, although she allegedly did not know that an earlier building on the site had burned down.

A further category recognised since the 19th century is the poltergeist phenomenon, which involves unexplained noises (typically raps and bangs) and unexplained movement of objects, ranging from crockery and ornaments to pieces of furniture. Such events have been recorded since classical times and across the world. They are usually of short duration and often seemed to focus on an adolescent, and are thus often treated with suspicion. However, good evidence for such incidents was recorded in the 20th century, notably at Hannath Hall, near Kings Lynn, Norfolk in 1957, Sauchie in Scotland in 1960, Rosenheim in Germany in 1967 and at Enfield, North London between 1977 and 1978. Such phenomena seemed to centre primarily upon a living person undergoing stress, typically a teenager going through puberty, but in some cases an older person. Most researchers

take the view that poltergeist disturbances have their origins in the subconscious mind and are achieved by the release of psychokinetic force. Since the 1930s, evidence has been gathered by parapsychologists that that the living mind can influence matter to a small extent, but phenomena routinely reported in poltergeist cases exceed any effect recorded in the laboratory.

"THE MOST HAUNTED HOUSE IN ENGLAND"

Few haunted sites were subject to practical investigation by early psychical researchers; one exception was the so-called Cheltenham Ghost or Morton ghost in the 1880s and 1890s. This involved the apparition of a woman in dark clothing repeatedly seen at the home of the Morton family in Cheltenham over a period of years. The apparition was believed to be that of Imogen Swinhoe, the wife of a former occupant who had died in 1878 and was buried close to the house in Holy Trinity Church. Some 17 people were claimed to have seen the ghost, and 20 to have heard it. The ghost was mostly seen at night but never when people watched for it. However, popular writers and independent researchers claimed to be pursuing numerous ghosts *in situ*, such as Elliot O'Donnell (1873–1965). O'Donnell was an unreliable writer responsible for numerous books chronicling his adventures, and even the most committed believer would struggle to accept his lurid tale. Popular interest and scientific curiosity about ghosts were more effectively brought together by Harry Price (1881–1948). His most famous case was Borley Rectory in Essex, often called "the Most Haunted House in England". Between 1862 and the destruction of the rectory by fire in 1939, five rectors and their families reported a host of activity – apparitions of a nun and others, footsteps, strange smells, bell-ringing and poltergeist disturbances both in the building and at the nearby church where unexplained organ music was reported.

In 1937, Price rented Borley Rectory and commenced a year-long investigation. Using investigators recruited through an advertisement in *The Times*, he deployed teams of observers in shifts. However, his results remain controversial as the case has been damaged by allegations of trickery on the part of Price and others, together with the discovery of possible natural causes for some of the phenomena – for instance, a crypt prone to flooding was discovered under Borley Church in 1988, which might explain strange noises and sensations of cold reported in the building. Nonetheless, Price established a technique of deploying teams of observers at haunted premises which continues to be imitated today.

GHOST-HUNTING TODAY

Since the 1960s, researchers have routinely taken equipment such as tape recorders, video cameras and thermometers on investigations in haunted premises. It has become a truism that most alleged hauntings are attributable to natural causes, particularly noises (problems with plumbing, birds in the roof) and equipment can sometimes help eliminate these. Other supposed hauntings have been attributed to psychological causes within the mind of the witness, who may be subject to irrational fears or beliefs. As Tom Perrott, a long-serving chairman of the Ghost Club remarked: "In many cases,



ABOVE: The famous Raynham Hall ghost photograph taken in 1936.

THE RED LION
AVEBURY, WILTSHIRE

The Red Lion sits inside a prehistoric stone circle. It has several ghosts, including a phantom carriage which, if seen, is a sure portent of doom, and Florrie, who took a lover during the Civil War and was killed by her enraged husband. He threw her into an old well, from which her shade occasionally ventures, searching for a man with a beard.

THE MERMAID INN
RYE, EAST SUSSEX

Opened in 1420 and used as a base for notorious smugglers the Hawkhurst Gang, The Mermaid has acquired a motley assortment of ghostly residents over the course of its long history. The most unusual are a pair of duelling swordsmen; the winner of the phantom fight was seen dumping his fatally-injured foe in an oubliette in the corner of the room.

MISTLEY THORN HOTEL
MISTLEY, ESSEX

The Thorn, an old coaching inn, was one of the places Witchfinder General Matthew Hopkins imprisoned his accused. The cellars, where the unfortunate women were locked up, have an air of forlorn despair; guests staying in the room used for interrogations have been woken by a strange presence, and Hopkins himself has been seen sitting on a chair in the attic.

LLINDIR INN
HENLLAN, DENBIGHSHIRE

Sylvia was the wife of an 18th-century sailor who owned the Llindir Inn. With her husband frequently away at sea, she became pretty free with her affections. One day, he returned earlier than expected, and caught her romping with a local; he promptly murdered the pair of them. Sylvia's amorous spirit lingers still, and she'll climb into bed with any man who stays in the inn alone.

THE SKIRRID MOUNTAIN INN
LLANVIHANGEL CRUCORNEY, MONMOUTHSHIRE

For hundreds of years, the Skirrid Inn served a duel purpose: pub and courthouse. The condemned were hanged on the staircase, and their spirits still haunt the place of execution. Some visitors have even felt an invisible noose tighten round their necks...

KYTELER'S INN
KILKENNY, COUNTY KILKENNY

Dame Alice Kyteler, born around 1280, was a banker and, possibly, innkeeper. She was married and widowed three times, becoming richer with each marriage; her enemies accused her, and her lady-in-waiting Petronilla of witchcraft. She was sentenced to death but escaped, leaving Petronilla to burn alone. The unhappy servant's spirit drifts around what is now Kyteler's Inn.

THE COYLET INN
LOCH ECK, ARGYLL

This 17th-century coaching inn sits on the shores of Loch Eck and is haunted by the ghost of a young boy who sleepwalked into the freezing waters; this Blue Boy, can sometimes be seen walking through the inn looking for his mother, leaving a trail of wet footprints behind him.

YE OLDE TRIP TO JERUSALEM
NOTTINGHAM, NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

"The oldest inn in Britain" juts out of the rock under Nottingham Castle. Established in the 11th century, it provided refreshment for Crusaders off to the Holy Land. In 1330, Edward III walked through the pub into the caves under the castle on his way to arrest his mother Isabella's lover. Isabella can still be heard pleading for mercy.







TOP: Monmouth's Shire Hall is haunted according to its caretaker.

ABOVE: A ghostly figure captured on CCTV at Hampton Court Palace.

my ghost-hunting equipment consists of a note pad, a pencil and a sympathetic ear." However, a number of cases defy ready explanation, though with the exception of poltergeist incidents, relatively little hard evidence has been obtained. Researchers from the SPR developed an automated device with a built in video camera, thermometer and tape recorder which was deployed at some 100 separate locations over 20 years, but with no results.

While there seem to be some underlying patterns to these phenomena, a further handicap to research is the lack of any comprehensive, testable theory. The most advanced theories of apparitions were those proposed by GN Tyrell in Britain in 1943 and Professor Hornell Hart from the USA in 1956. These involved the operation of psi powers and the unconscious mind, but being subjective phenomena these are notoriously difficult to examine. A link between apparitional experiences and dreamlike states has also been noted. A study by researcher Andrew MacKenzie in 1982 suggests that about one third of apparitional experiences occur just before or after sleep, or when the percipient was in a state of relaxation. Similar results have been reported for other types of entity experience (aliens and angels, for instance).

Ghost reports also seem to exhibit a time-of-day pattern. Ghosts are seldom reported at breakfast time but the frequency of sightings increases throughout the day, reaching a peak between midnight and 4am. While fitting in with the traditional folklore of ghosts appearing at midnight and vanishing at cock-crow or dawn, this pattern suggests that brain chemistry at night may play a part in many experiences.

SPR founder Fredric Myers maintained that there was a clear separation between cases of object movements and apparitions. But since a computer analysis of 500 historic poltergeist reports undertaken by Dr Alan Gauld in 1979, the realisation has grown that the distinctions drawn by psychical researchers may not be as clear-cut as previously thought. Poltergeist phenomena can occur in the context of place-centred hauntings, with no obvious living focus and even changes in occupiers. A good example is the Seven Stars pub in Robertsbridge, Sussex. Poltergeist phenomena were

IT MAY BE THE CASE THAT PARANORMAL EFFECTS ARE BEING CREATED BY GHOST HUNTERS THEMSELVES

reported over a 32-year period between 1971 and 2003, notwithstanding 12 changes in residents. Similarly, a recent study of press reports of ghosts and haunting in the UK which I undertook for the first half of 2007 suggested that some 52 per cent of cases involving object movements also mention an apparition or a visual experience of some kind.

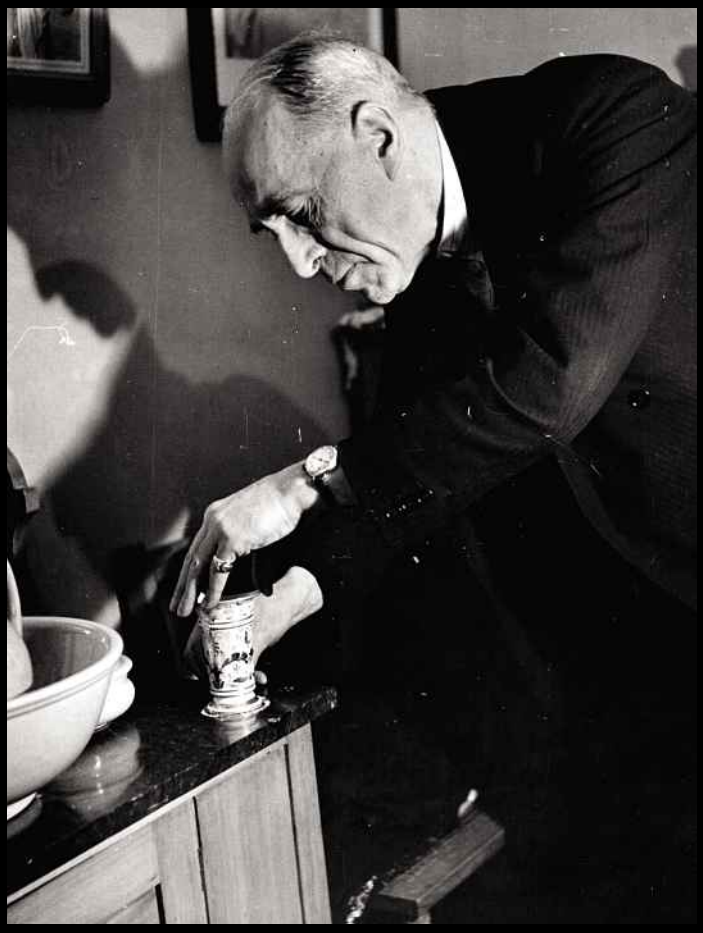
AN ENDURING MYSTERY

However, beyond these refinements, ghosts have remained traditional in at least one sense: the phenomena do not exhibit much evolution or change. The exception is the erratic functioning of apparatus and equipment (electrical current surges, the switching on and off of television sets, the breakdown of tape recorders, camera malfunction and film processing difficulties, telephone rings, light bulb failures, jammed doors and locks). These seem to occur so frequently that they have become recognised as a category of phenomena in their own right – and can be yet another hindrance to investigation! There are even suggestions that poltergeists might be able to interfere with mobile phones by creating frightening text messages, as alleged in a case in South Shields, Tyneside in 2006.

Andrew Green (1927–2004) who wrote the first popular book on scientific ghost-hunting in 1973, sought to explain ghosts in non-spiritual terms, but by citing the still controversial powers of telepathy and psychokinesis. If correct, a further difficulty may be that paranormal effects are being created by ghost hunters themselves, as suggested by group experiments conducted by the New Horizon Foundation in Toronto in 1976. They claimed success in creating an imaginary ghost (dubbed 'Philip') by re-creating 19th-century séance conditions – the result was that the group experienced rapping sounds, cool breezes and table levitations.

At present, no current theory adequately explains all reported





TOP: Borley Rectory, Essex – reputed to be the most haunted house in England.
ABOVE: Celebrated ghost-hunter Harry Price investigated the Borley case.

experiences, though most have something to offer the investigator. However, in the last 15 years, ghost-hunting has become a popular activity in the UK and USA, with a marked leaning back towards spiritualist beliefs. Increasing numbers of people on both sides of the Atlantic engage in ghost-hunting as a hobby, boosted by popular television shows made in the UK such as *Most Haunted*. Justly treated with scepticism and frequent ridicule by many critics, such programmes also regularly involve the use of self-proclaimed psychics and mediums, few of whom have been subject to any independent scrutiny or testing. Despite ever more sophisticated gadgetry being used, many investigations end up attempting to communicate with the dead rather than trying to discover the mechanics of the phenomenon.

At their core, ghost experiences touch on many mysteries concerning perception and the workings of living minds, quite apart from issues of post-mortem survival. Profound questions of science and philosophy are being raised – even if many sceptics and contemporary ghost hunters do not realise it.

CASEBOOK

PHANTOM SHIPS

OLD SEA DOG **ROY BAINTON** DONS HIS SOU'WESTER AND STEERS US ON A VOYAGE ACROSS HAUNTED OCEANS AND SPOOK-INFESTED SEAS – HERE YOU'LL FIND CURSED TRAMP STEAMERS, VANISHING VESSELS AND MARITIME GHOSTS APLENTY...



A FAVOURITE SPOT TO SEE THE DUTCHMAN IS AROUND THE CAPE OF GOOD HOPE

Between 1959 and 1966, I managed to cross most of the Seven Seas, and I learned to respect the ocean. Seven tenths of the Earth's surface is covered by water, and it's a sobering fact that we know far less about the briny than we do about the rest of our Solar System.

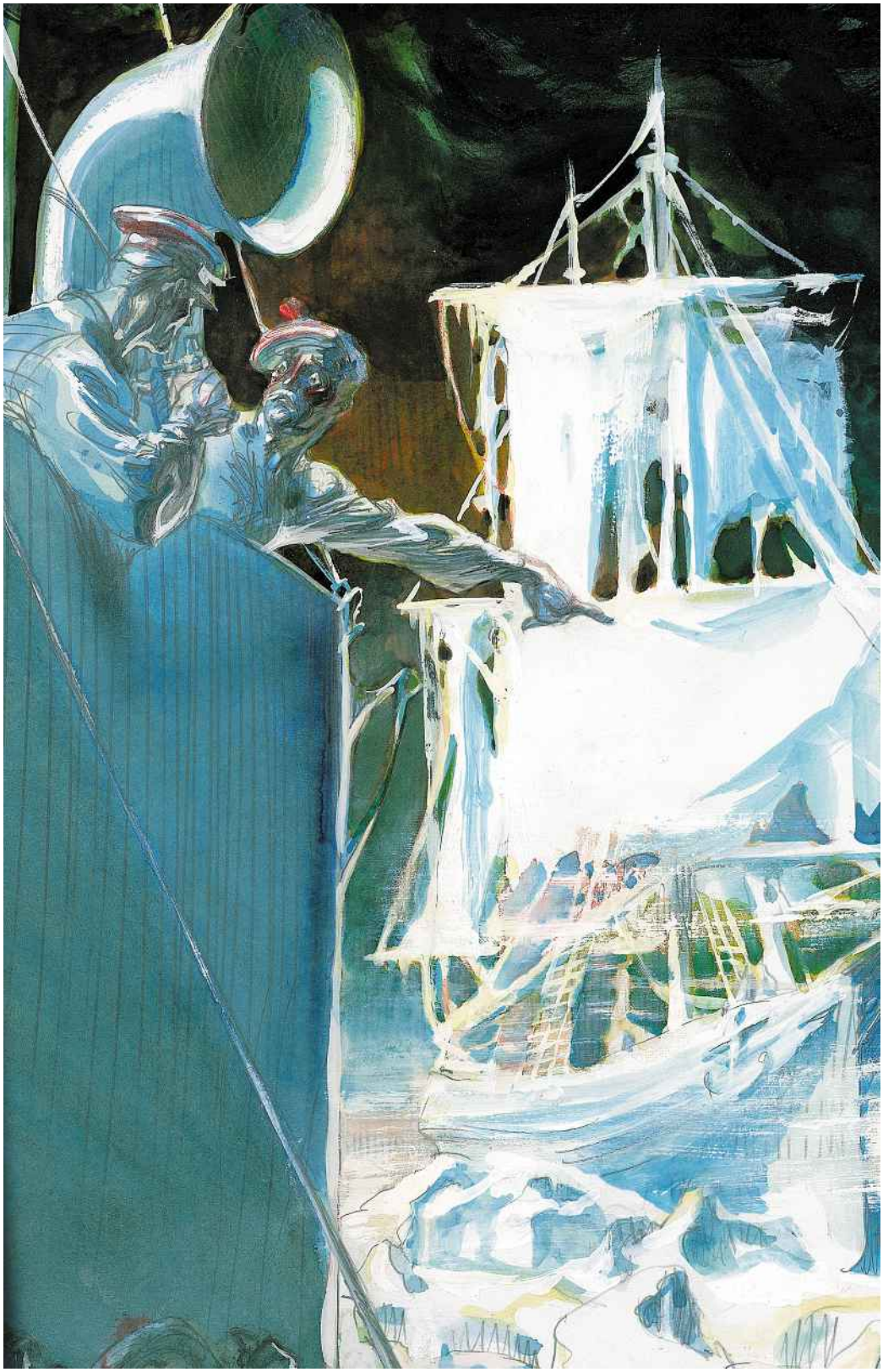
The ocean is certainly full of mysteries, and it's perhaps surprising to discover that when we look at the incidence of actual maritime 'ghosts', they don't clutter the seaways to anywhere near the extent that land-bound spirits haunt our habitations and roads.

Nevertheless, there is no shortage of timber-shivering sea stories to choose from; this is very much a personal selection of sea-faring yarns, not all of 'ghosts', but all decidedly phenomenal. So we'll forego

detailed discussion of some of Davy Jones's over-roasted old chestnuts – but let's get a couple of them out of the way at the outset.

First to slip anchor has to be the *Flying Dutchman*. It's the classic yarn: skipper has trouble on board, indulges in blasphemy, there's a big storm, everybody dies, and the Master is doomed to a spectral existence for eternity. The favourite spot to see the *Dutchman* is around the Cape of Good Hope in stormy weather, or the notorious Goodwin Sands, or... well, just about anywhere. The sightings usually involve a full-rigged ship of, possibly, 17th-century vintage in full sail, complete with lit-up cabins and the noise of a full-tilt party in progress – singing, women laughing... (Ah, the sailor's life: never mind the compass, crack open another bottle).

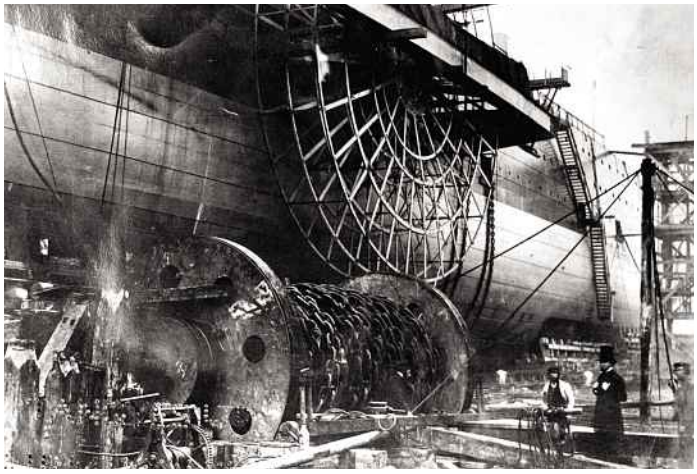
So, who was this libidinous, hapless skipper? The legend was certainly well known to Richard Wagner in 1843 when he wrote his opera *Der Fliegende Holländer*. Phantom ship stories had always been a fine way to pass time in the fo'c'sle, even when I was at sea. But if you invent a ghost, you can rest assured that before long people will start seeing it. Thus we get Captain Philip Marryat's highly entertaining book *The Phantom Ship* (1839), wherein we get the Dutchman's name as Philip Vanderdecken. Fiction over the years slowly slips into cod 'fact', as other writers throw their seaboots into the ring; the traditional Dutch legend names the Dutchman as Falkenburg, while Washington Irving's version has him as one Ramhout Van Dam (1855), and there is also confusion with the legend of another, and definitely real, 17th-century captain, Bernard Fokke, who was noted for the speed of his ship and thus suspected of doing a deal with the Devil in exchange for a fast voyage. Of course, when he vanished, it was



said that the devil had called the debt in. Sir Walter Scott got in on the act in *Rokeby* (1813), where the Dutchman is carrying gold and silver, the plague breaks out among the crew, no port will accept her and... well, we know the rest.

Next up on the horizon, and always worth a quick re-run, is the heavily barnacled brigantine *Mary Celeste*. She was found abandoned and adrift by the British brigantine *Dei Gratia* between Portugal and the Azores on 4 December 1872. Under command of her captain, Benjamin S Briggs, the *Mary Celeste* was bound from New York to Genoa with 1,700 barrels of alcohol. (What a deck party that could have been!) Although there was some damage to her sails and a few feet of water in her holds, her cargo was intact but for nine damaged barrels. There was plenty of food and drink on board, the crew's belongings were still there, but no sign of crew or captain. The ship's lifeboat was gone and no one was ever found. Enter Sir Arthur Conan Doyle with a work of fiction entitled *J Habakuk Jephson's Statement*, and before Sherlock could light up his pipe, the legend of the *Mary Celeste* (or, as Doyle had it, *Marie Celeste*) was born: warm food still on the table, eerie atmosphere, racial tension... and so on. Baloney.

What really happened will probably remain a mystery, but a small sailing vessel crossing the Atlantic could be prone to any number of disasters. An American researcher, Captain David Williams, has recently posited one potential solution. The Captain has established that on 5 November 1872, the seismological station in Zurich recorded a large earthquake with its epicentre in the Atlantic Ocean... exactly in the area where the *Mary Celeste* would have been. The actual vibrations this



ABOVE: The *Great Eastern* – cursed before she even set sail.

WHEN SHE FINALLY TOOK TO THE WATER, BRUNEL HAD A STROKE, FELL TO THE DECK AND DIED

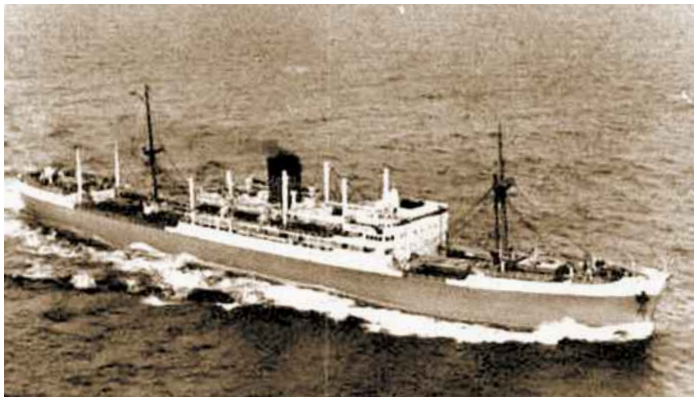
'seaquake' would have caused probably resulted in some of the damage to the ship – such as the dislodging of her cast-iron stove from its mountings. But despite every rational explanation, the *Mary Celeste*, with the *Flying Dutchman* just astern, will always be the flagship of the world's Phantom Fleet.

Moving on from such well-worn tales, here are one old salt's personal favourites from the world of nautical oddities.

THE *GREAT EASTERN* AND THE *HINEMOA*

Isambard Kingdom Brunel's 1859 triumph was, at 19,000 tons, the largest ship in the world, but the *Great Eastern* was as cursed as a vessel could be. At her launch, she got stuck on the runway for three months. During her building, a riveter and his apprentice simply vanished. And when she finally took to the water, Brunel had a stroke, fell to the deck and died. Five firemen died when a funnel exploded, another crewman was crushed in the paddle wheel. Her skipper perished in a small boat with a child passenger. Another sailor died in the paddle, yet another fell overboard and drowned. A two-day excursion off the US coast turned into a near-disaster when the ship drifted 100 miles (160km) into the Atlantic. Her fortunes seemed to have turned when she was hired to lay the trans-Atlantic cable – but the cable was lost and she returned in shame. By 1874, she was laid up to rot in Milford Haven, Wales. Fifteen years later, when she was broken up for scrap, they found the skeletons of the riveter and his apprentice in her double hull.

The *Hinemoa* was launched three years after Brunel's monster, and was also cursed. On her first five voyages, she had five different skippers. One committed suicide, another drank himself stupid, one died in his cabin, another went to prison and the fifth went mad. She overturned on her sixth voyage, and two sailors died on her seventh. In 1908, she was written off after going adrift in a storm.



ABOVE: The *Port Pirie* – protected by a benevolent sailor's ghost?

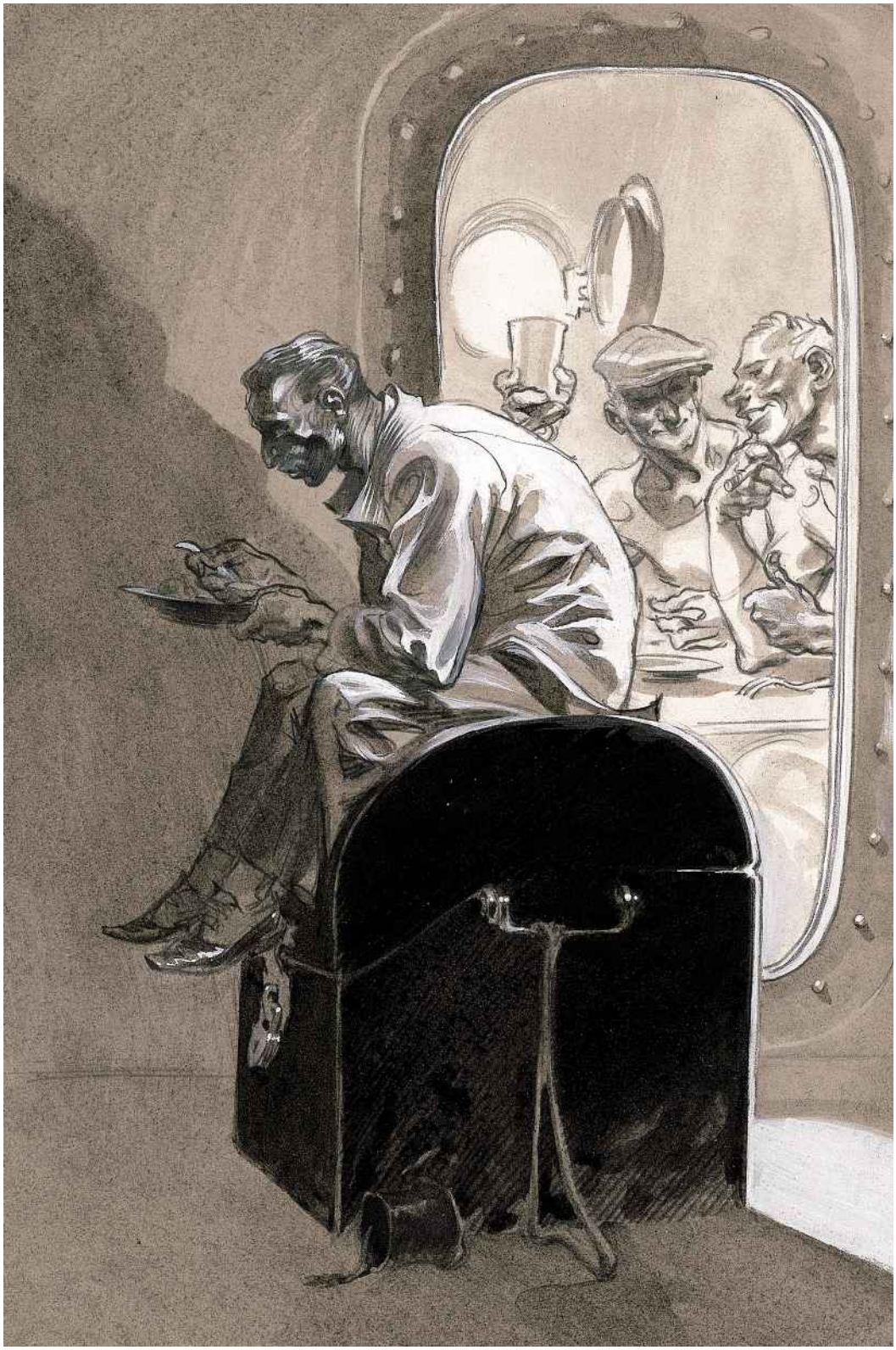
THE *PORT PIRIE*

This story was common currency in the old Port Line. Apparently, in 1948, on her Australian run, the *Pirie*'s boiler had run dry and exploded, killing a donkeyman. A year later, she was tied up in Sydney with engineer Peter Jones carrying out maintenance work alone in the engine room. The boiler's feed pump began to

make a violent knocking noise. Jones looked at the gauge but it read 'full'. To stop the noise, he turned the pump off, but minutes later the knocking began again. Jones was puzzled: it shouldn't make a noise when turned off. He inspected the gauge again: it still read 'full', but the pump continued knocking. Eventually, he made a careful examination of the gauge – and discovered it was faulty. In fact, the boiler was almost empty and could have exploded. Mentioning this to the old greasers in the mess room, he discovered that the deceased donkeyman had sworn in his death throes that no-one would die on the ship as he had. A mechanical fluke or a benevolent spirit – take your pick.

THE *HALIFAX*

An old rattler, the *Halifax* was a happy, ancient diesel-powered tramp. She'd seen Atlantic convoys, failed submarine attacks, the lot. She wasn't haunted, but sometimes an odd presence invades a vessel. I joined her in Rotterdam in June 1960. In need of a deck hand in Melbourne, we picked up a short, squat Egyptian whose name we couldn't pronounce, so naturally he became 'Pharaoh'. He brought on board with him such a tangible atmosphere of aggression that no-one could share a cabin with him. Eventually, the bosun opened up the sick bay and he enjoyed the luxury of a single berth. At nights, he would sit cross-legged on his bunk, chanting in Arabic. He had just one set of clothes, which he washed on his watch off, sitting around naked beneath the Pacific sun. His one closely-guarded possession was a polished black sea chest. He refused to eat with us, and after one blistering row with the Lamp-trimmer (yes, we still had such a rank on board in those days), he walked into the mess-room and told us he





had placed a curse on the ship. Two hours later, we sailed into a hurricane. The ensuing storm lasted for 24 terrifying hours, during which he would poke his head into the mess room, gesture at the sky and say "See? I curse you all!" A week later, in Panama, he vanished. Only his sea chest remained. Once into the Gulf of Mexico we opened it up; it was empty, apart from a dog-eared 1915 newspaper proclaiming the sinking of the *Lusitania*. No doubt he was a *bona fide* seaman with a discharge book, but we were glad to see 'The Pharaoh' go.

THE *SS BORODINO*

Built by the Ailsa Shipbuilding Company of Troon in 1950, this 3,206-ton passenger cargo vessel was, for 17 years, up until her scrapping in Ghent, the pride of Hull's Ellerman's Wilson Line. I joined her as a deck boy in June 1959. She carried 12 passengers on a regular 10-day run between Denmark and Hull.

She was a smart, luxurious ship, but with one weird legend on board – the story of Percy MacDonald. According to the engine room crew and the sailors in our mess, on one of her early voyages an engineer, the said Percy had suffered a terrible accident in the engine room that had cost him his legs.

Often, on the night before sailing from Hull, I would sleep on board in order to avoid having to catch an early bus to the docks. Apart from a night watchman on the gangway, out of a 30-plus crew, there would probably be only two or three of us on board. It was a November night; I'd settled down in my bunk with a mug of cocoa and the latest Hank Jansen book, when I heard a scream along the alleyway. I knew there was a junior steward on board, so I dashed to his cabin, where I found him naked and trembling in the open doorway. "He came – it was Percy… there was a knock on the door and…

he was just floating there... no legs... horrible...then he just vanished!"

The shattered youth packed his kit bag and left the ship. When we sailed the next day, the crew simply accepted the story – they seemed used to it all. Two more trips were enough for me. Although I never saw Percy myself, a ship's engine room never seemed quite the same after that.

THE *PRESIDENT*

The *President* was a fine combination of sail and paddle wheels and was expected to make the crossing from New York to Liverpool in 16 days. In 1841, this was an impressive feat of speed. Among her 121 passengers was the grandfather of one of the 20th century's greatest film stars – Tyrone Power. This 19th-century ancestor, also a famous thespian, bore the same name. In England, he was to meet up with his friend, Benjamin Webster, owner of the Haymarket Theatre in London. The *President* sailed out of New York on 11 March. During the early hours of 13 March, in Blackheath, London, Ben Webster's confused and somewhat disturbed butler awoke his master during a violent storm with the news that Mr Tyrone Power was knocking at the front door. Webster dashed downstairs, looked out into the darkness and saw nothing. The butler claimed that 'Power' had been shouting that he was 'drowned in the rain'. Presumably, several thousand miles away, Tyrone Power was drowned – because along with the *President*, he vanished without a trace, never arriving in Liverpool.

THE *OCTAVIUS*

Not a ghost story, but a chiller nonetheless. The crew of the whaler *Herald* were shivering their way along the Greenland coast in 1774 when they came across a drifting, ice-encrusted hulk bearing the name *Octavius*. They hailed her, but could see by her ragged sails she was devoid of life. Nevertheless, the Master of the *Herald*, Captain Warren, did his duty and organised a boarding party. It was not a pleasant mission.

After clearing snowdrifts on the *Octavius*'s deck, they wrenched open the fo'c'sle door and discovered inside 28 fully-clothed sailors, all frozen to death. In the captain's cabin the skipper still sat, frozen solid, his hands on the desk. In the adjoining cabin lay a woman, frozen in a calm posture. Her head rested on her elbow, eyes wide open, staring across the room at another icy corpse, a young man, sitting cross-legged, at his feet a pile of wood chippings. Under a nearby reefer jacket they found the brittle body of a small boy.

In their blind panic to get back to the *Herald*, the crew lost the centre section of the *Octavius*'s log book in the sea. The remaining pages showed she had left England in 1761 on a voyage to China but had become trapped in the ice of north Alaska – and yet here she was, 13 years later, adrift off Greenland on the opposite side of the continent. Had 13 years of drifting pushed her through a then-unknown North West passage?

I'D JUST SETTLED DOWN IN MY BUNK WHEN I HEARD A SCREAM FROM ALONG THE ALLEYWAY



ABOVE: The *Pamir* – a beautiful barque doomed to a tragic fate.

THE *PAMIR*

Hamburg's Blohm & Voss shipyards turned out two beautiful barques in 1905; the *Passat* and the *Pamir*. At 275ft (83m) in length, with enough sail to cover 45,000sq ft (4,180 square metres), these four-masted monsters were a wondrous sight.

By 1957, the *Pamir* had become a sail-training vessel for the German Merchant Service. In command was Captain Diebitsch with a 35-strong crew, augmented by 51 sea cadets aged between 16 and 18. She left Buenos Aires in August 1957 carrying 3,790 tons of barley. Five hundred miles (800km) from the Azores, on 20 September, she met up with Hurricane Carrie. Her final message was heard on the airwaves at 8pm on 21 September: 'Heavy hurricane – all sails lost – 45 degree list – danger of sinking – need help...' When the US freighter *Saxon* arrived at the *Pamir*'s last position, all they found was a lifeboat with five survivors. The next day, one more survivor was discovered, but 80 souls had gone to the bottom. The *Pamir*'s story should have ended with this tragedy... but did it?

Four years later, another sail-trainer, the *Esmereld*, from Chile, was battling a gale in the English Channel when she sighted another sailing vessel; it was identified as the *Pamir*. The *Esmereld*'s report was taken with a large pinch of salt until some months later, when the yachtsman Reed Byers reported seeing the *Pamir* off the Virgin Islands. Other sail training vessels – the German *Gorch Foch* and the Norwegian *Christian Radich* – also reported sighting the phantom ship, and the US Coastguard vessel, *Eagle*, crossed her path too.

As if this wasn't dramatic enough, some embroiderers report that each time she is sighted, the *Pamir*'s crew are seen lined up on deck... and with each sighting their number decreases. On her last materialisation, only 20 were visible.

As with the wrecks on the Goodwin sands, the tide of time rolls over these stories and denies us any ultimate clarity. There are 100 more of these salty tales and like the UFO enigma, it's not the 99 per cent that we can smugly debunk which fire our imaginations, it's that one per cent gap where the phantoms still sail and the hurricanes howl. As the bosun used to say: button up your oilskins – it's a stormy night up top.



Investigating... GHOSTS

A guide to setting up a ghost-hunting squad: how to choose your team-members, which 'haunted' locations are worthy of study and what equipment you will need to do the job properly.

In 1995, there were fewer than 100 paranormal investigation teams in the UK; now there are over 1,200. Do more ghost hunters mean greater skills? Do any of us really know what we are doing? Or is most ghost-hunting simply a form of thrill-seeking – about as scientific as bungee-jumping or a fairground big dipper? Ghost-hunters are mainly volunteers; if it wasn't in some way thrilling, people simply would not do it. There is, however, far more to ghost-hunting. I can still remember discovering, in my teens, how seriously some people took ghost investigations. The whole idea of this fascinated me, and from that moment I was hooked.

A wide selection of 'reality' ghost-hunting programmes are now shown on cable channels. Some treat the subject quite seriously, while others, in the name of entertainment, come close to parody. I have faith that most viewers can tell the difference. On the whole, this upturn in interest is a good thing. As interest in the subject has grown, however, so has the size of the average hunt. There have been recent investigations where 30 or 40 people have been in the same building, and every sound, rap and creak could potentially be coming from another member of the investigation team.

There tend to be two types of investigations, and each needs a very different approach. There is the type where a group of ghost-hunters politely asks the owners of a building with a haunted reputation (this can be a pub, a castle, a theatre) whether they can investigate. In such instances, the haunting is normally not causing any distress, and the ghost hunt could even be publicised with the owner's permission. The second type of investigation is very different. This is when a member of the public contacts a ghost-hunting group to ask for help, often in a state of some distress. Such investigations normally take place in the person's home. Here, the "client's" needs should take precedence, and any investigation should be done with care and tact, using a small, experienced team and ensuring that details of the client and location are not divulged in any report.

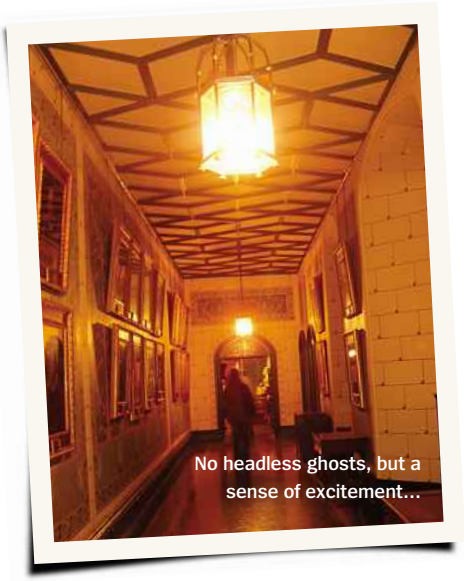
Any investigation should be tailored to the premises – there's nothing worse than a dozen ghost-hunters cramming into a haunted studio flat! Then again, such numbers can be justified for a stately home. Most typical ghost hunts would normally involve splitting a team into groups who would take it in turns to investigate various locations within the haunted premises. This is normally done by taking measurements with relevant devices and taking note of any unusual events. After perhaps 40 minutes, the full team regroups at a base room for a break before being sent to alternative locations. This ensures that at the end of the night the observations of each group can be compared for similarity. It also ensures that the process does not become monotonous for participants, and helps avoid 'sleepy investigator syndrome' as the investigation continues late into the night.

Ghost-hunting should not be a social occasion for meeting new people. An investigation leader who wants an exercise to succeed should first build a small team known to him or her, and with specific skills in the field. New talent can then be gradually added over time. Equipment should never normally be held in the hand. Whatever is being measured will naturally change when equipment moves. A change of the environment in a fixed spot is what is interesting, not the change that will happen



Ghost-hunters explore a reputedly haunted castle

IF GHOST HUNTING WASN'T IN SOME WAY THRILLING, PEOPLE SIMPLY WOULDN'T DO IT


No headless ghosts, but a sense of excitement...

as a ghost-hunter moves from room to room. Only use equipment whose use you understand, and never fall into the temptation of using too much of it. It can be very disconcerting trying to check 10 different thermometers every five minutes – particularly by 3am.

Some 21st-century ghost-hunters frown on the use of 'non-scientific' techniques. By this I mean such things as mediums, trigger objects (a random object circled in chalk – the spirit is then challenged to move it out of the chalk ring) and planchettes (a flat device on small castors which holds a pen and which can lead to automatic spirit writing when touched gently by one or more people).

Their argument is that, to be taken seriously, ghost-hunters need to follow the rules of science. That, though, is surely to miss the point: ghost-hunters are trying to see if the old laws of science are wrong. Experiments which test this should be allowed, so long as they are carried out objectively. Trigger objects, for example, can have a surprising rate of success at provoking phenomena: during one investigation I helped to run, a small wooden trigger object was witnessed by three people to jump 8ft out of its chalk-marked spot, landing on the floor.

Ghost-hunters have to stop pretending to be scientists, and stick to being explorers and detectives. Most are far better qualified for these tasks. This does not mean that ghost-hunting is pointless. To show whether such things do remain unexplained is important; and it leaves the door ajar for scientists when they finally feel the need to explore.

So, if the thought of investigating a haunted site still fills you with fascination, what should you do? There are actually courses available now in the subject. This includes one run by the respected parapsychologist Dr. Ciarán O'Keeffe (also known for being part of the *Most Haunted* TV show) whose online school of parapsychology (www.theschoolofparapsychology.org) covers many of the issues you are likely to encounter.

Ultimately though, you should join a ghost-hunting group – either a national body such as the Ghost Club or one that is local to you. When looking for a group, try to find one that seems to operate with no preset views. Nobody (at least in this life) yet knows the truth about ghosts. Those who claim they already do are far less likely to investigate with an open mind.

It is unlikely on a ghost hunt that a headless 'Grey Monk' or 'White Lady' will come and shake you by the hand. Most evidence I have found to date consists of unusual noises, temperature drops and, occasionally, objects moving without explanation. Some participants can be a little scared at first, which is only natural. What I tend to experience is more a sense of excitement, of being part of a search for one of the last hidden 'truths'.

JOHN FRASER *has been active in ghost-hunting fields for the last quarter century. He has organised and assisted on numerous investigations. In the 1990s, he was Vice Chair of the Ghost Club, possibly the world's longest-established ghost-hunting organisation. Currently, he is on the ruling council of the Society for Psychical Research, and active on their 'Spontaneous Cases Committee'.*

GHOST HUNTING EQUIPMENT

From the time of Harry Price right up to the mid-1990s, the standard equipment and style of ghost-hunting changed little. This would normally include a good quality camera, thermometer, tape recorder, perhaps a barometer (for measuring the change in air pressure rather than the weather itself). Perhaps also some cunning improvised devices – flour to coat the floor with and trap an intruder's footprints, or candles to detect air flows and identify natural reasons for cold spots.



From the mid-1990s, a new breed of high-tech ghost hunter emerged, as equipment changed overnight. Most of this equipment came without proper 'instructions' and with little in the way of agreed procedures as to how such items would assist in ghost hunting.

The arrival of the digital camera brought with it the newfound phenomena of ghostly 'orbs'. These were balls of light in the photograph that many claimed were the basic 'building blocks' with which an apparition was formed. The fact that they often appeared in photos of old, dark, dusty, haunted houses seemed to support this view. Gradually though, through experimentation and greater understanding of the digital process, many ghost hunters have accepted that, in all probability, 'orbs' are in fact no more than the camera flash reflecting from dust particles – hardly surprising, then, that they are commonly found in old buildings.

The other most talked-about device of the new high-tech ghost-hunter was the ElectroMagnetic Field (EMF) meter. I remember feeling very cutting edge when my hand-built imported version arrived from America. The theory behind these was basically that the presence of a ghost caused a change in the strength of the electromagnetic field. This theory led to it being regarded by some as virtually a 'ghost detector'. It soon became apparent, however, that what research *had* been done had been misunderstood. Parapsychologists such as W Rolls and A Nicolls studied the phenomenon, and came to the conclusion that high levels of *naturally occurring* electromagnetic fields can actually interact with the human mind and possibly cause a paranormal-type experience when no ghost is actually present.

The 21st-century ghost-hunter's other essential piece of kit is often a thermometer gun, which measures temperature using an infrared beam of light. This is a very satisfying piece of equipment to use, giving the investigator the feeling of taking aim and shooting for ghosts. Yet these instruments are made for recording the temperature of the *surface it hits*, rather than the general environmental temperature. It is the latter, surely, that would drop if a ghost were present.



DIRECTORY

SUGGESTED READING

The Borley Rectory Companion: The Complete Guide to 'The Most Haunted House in England'
Paul Adams, Eddie Brazil & Peter Underwood (The History Press, 2009)

Investigating the Paranormal
Tony Cornell (Parapsychology Foundation, 2002)

Haunted Land: An Investigation into Ancient Earth Mysteries and Modern-day Phenomena
Paul Devereux (Piatkus Books, 2002)

Seeing Ghosts: Experiences of the Paranormal
Hilary Evans (John Murray, 2002)

Poltergeists
Alan Gauld & Tony Cornell (Routledge, 1979)

Ghost Hunting: A Practical Guide
Andrew Green (Garnstone Press, 1973)

Ghosts of Today
Andrew Green (Kaye & Ward, 1980)

Apparitions
Celia Green & Charles McCreer (Hamish Hamilton, 1975)

Phantasms of the Living
Edmund Gurney, F W Myers & Frank Podmore (SPR, 1886)

Harry Price: The Psychic Detective
Richard Morris (Sutton Publishing, 2006)

This House is Haunted: The Investigation of the Enfield Poltergeist
Guy Lyon Playfair (The History Press, 2007)

The Encyclopedia of Ghosts and Spirits
John and Anne Spencer (Headline, 1992)

The Encyclopedia of Ghosts and Spirits Volume 2
John and Anne Spencer (Headline, 2001)

The A-Z of British Ghosts: An Illustrated Guide to 236 Haunted Sites
Peter Underwood (Chancellor Press, 1993)

Ghosts and How to See Them
Peter Underwood (Anaya, 1987)

ORGANISATIONS AND GROUPS

The Ghost Club
The longest-running paranormal organisation in the world, established in 1862, the Ghost Club has regular meetings in London, runs investigations and vigils and publishes a newsletter for members. Applications can be downloaded from the website and sent to the Membership Secretary at the PO Box below.
PO Box 160, St Leonards-On-Sea, TN38 8WA
Web: www.ghostclub.org.uk
Email: investigations@ghostclub.org.uk

South Wales Paranormal Research
SWPR is based in Wales, and undertakes the investigation of reports of apparitions, hauntings and other spontaneous paranormal phenomena in Wales and elsewhere, maintaining links with other groups in the UK.
Web: www.swpr.co.uk/moodle/
Tel: 07890 389 305
Email: SWPRInvestigations@hotmail.com

The Paranormal Database
The Paranormal Database is an ongoing project to quantitatively document as many locations of paranormal/cryptozoological interest as possible, region by region, in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. Sixty-five areas are currently covered in over 8,700 entries, with frequent additions and updates.
Web: www.paranormaldatabase.com/

Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena
A registered charity engaged in paranormal research and education, ASSAP offers members training as investigators, loans of equipment, a library and the chance to take part in ghost investigations and vigils. It publishes a newsletter (*ASSAP News*) and a journal (*Anomaly*).
Web: www.assap.org
Tel: 0845 652 1648
Email: assap@assap.org

Society for Psychical Research
The SPR was the first organisation established to examine allegedly paranormal phenomena using scientific principles. Its aim is to learn more about events and abilities commonly described as "psychic" or "paranormal" by supporting research, sharing information and encouraging debate. Members come from all over the world, and represent a variety of academic and professional interests, and the SPR welcomes both active researchers and people who simply want to know more about the subject. Through the SPR libraries, which include a comprehensive online library, members can gain access to the full content of SPR's publications from the very first issues to the present day, as well as a number of out-of-print classic books and materials. Access to online collections of other psychical research/parapsychology journals is also available to members at a discount. Publishes the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* and the quarterly magazine *Paranormal Review*.
49 Marloes Road, Kensington, London W8 6LA
Web: www.spr.ac.uk
Tel: 020 7937 8984

WEBSITES

Ghostwatch UK
Investigating ghosts in Britain since 1959
www.ghostwatchuk.org/

Road Ghosts
Ghosts on the roads of Kent and elsewhere
www.roadghosts.com/

Ghost Watch Live!
Live webcasts of investigations and vigils from some of the the most haunted locations in the United Kingdom and Ireland.
www.ghostwatchlive.com

Ghost Research International
Australian ghost hunting site with good selection of resources
ghostresearchinternational.com/index.html

The Ghost Hunters' Web Ring
Complete listing of groups
www.webring.com/hub?ring=ghosthuntr

The Shadowlands
US site devoted to ghosts and hauntings, with message board
theshadowlands.net/ghost/

Harry Price
Site devoted to the life and work of Britain's most famous ghost-hunter, Harry Price
www.harryprice.co.uk/

The Headless Horseman
Everything from haunted pubs to railway phantoms
www.headlesshorseman.co.uk/

ASUS recommends Windows Vista® Home Premium

Look for Intel Inside®



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With a perfect balance between form and function, the new ASUS UX50 Series are nothing short of picture perfect.

*Selected models only

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asus.co.uk

The Fortean Times Guide to...

CRYPTOZOOLOGY





THERE was a time when science said that there were no major new animals left to discover... and then along came the Komodo dragon and the mountain gorilla! The past century has seen countless new species uncovered by zoologists, with more coming to light all the time. But what about those creatures on the very borders of human knowledge, known only from witness accounts or folklore? Does Loch Ness really hold a monster? Could the Himalayan mountains be home to the Yeti? Will the search for unknown animals reveal the truth about these and a host of even stranger creatures?

An introduction to...

CRYPTOZOOLOGY



OUR EXPERT DR KARL SHUKER

This scientific field originated in the 19th century, and combines the classification of newly identified species with the hunt for semi-mythical beasts with more than a hint of the paranormal.



It was in 1812 that Baron Georges Cuvier, probably the most eminent zoologist in the world at that time, boldly stated that few if any large new land animals awaited scientific discovery. As far as he was concerned, our planet was far too well explored to conceal any major new zoological surprises. How wrong he was!

Just seven years after Cuvier had made this rash declaration, one of his own protégés, explorer-naturalist M Diard, provided him with conclusive evidence for the hitherto-unsuspected existence in Malaya of a dramatic new species of tapir – a long-snouted relative of horses and rhinoceroses – belonging to a family of mammals that until now had been thought of as exclusively American in distribution. Moreover, not only did this new Malayan tapir prove to be the biggest of all modern-day tapir species, it was also the most eye-catching; whereas all of the American tapirs are uniformly dark brown as adults, the Malayan tapir is instantly distinguished by virtue of a spectacular saddle of contrasting white colouration across its back and flanks. If such a zoologically noteworthy – and visually noticeable – creature as this could have evaded detection for so long, how many other sizeable animals

LEFT: Members of the Loch Ness Monster Investigation Team scan the waters for signs of Nessie.

might also still be out there, awaiting discovery?

A startling number, in fact – as major new animal after major new animal was unveiled to a stunned scientific community with embarrassing regularity during the next 100 years. The gorilla (the world's biggest ape), Grévy's zebra (another world's biggest), gerenuk or giraffe gazelle, Celebes black ape, lesser panda, giant panda, Roxellana's snub-nosed monkey, dibatag antelope, Grant's gazelle, pygmy hippopotamus, mountain tapir, Père David's deer, gelada baboon, Himalayan takin, Przewalski's wild horse, siamang, lesser kudu, Schomburgk's deer, and pacarana were just some of the significant zoological discoveries made in the years leading up to the close of the 19th century.

And it didn't end there. With the coming of the 20th century, a series of truly momentous new animals made their scientific debut, including, most famously, the okapi (that short-necked, zebra-haunched jungle-inhabiting cousin of the giraffe) in 1901, as well as Cotton's white rhinoceros (1900), mountain gorilla (1902), giant forest hog (1904), mountain nyala (1910), and largest of all lizards, the Komodo dragon (1912).



ABOVE: The famous 'Surgeon's photograph' of Nessie, later exposed as a hoax.

HOW MANY OTHER LARGE ANIMALS MIGHT BE OUT THERE, STILL WAITING TO BE DISCOVERED?



ABOVE: The Komodo Dragon, the world's largest lizard. It was only in 1912 that this real-life monster was discovered.

Strangely, however, by the end of World War I, and in spite of these recent finds, the zoological community had begun to re-embrace Cuvier's belief that there were no major animal species left to uncover, and not only on land either. Even the vast expanses of sea and freshwater were deemed unlikely to be harbouring any notable surprises. Suddenly, it seemed almost unfashionable to consider such a prospect – blithely ignoring the fact that there were still great swathes of unexplored jungles, unscaled mountains, unplumbed ocean depths, and uncharted lakes and rivers out there.

CURIOUS CRYPTIDS

It wasn't even as if there was any shortage of reports and sightings of mysterious and unknown creatures on file. On the contrary, Western explorers returning home to Europe and North America from previously untraversed areas of tropical Africa, Asia, South America, and Australasia continued to regale anyone willing to listen with fascinating accounts of 'unofficial' fauna.

Of course, many such tales are nothing more than folklore, superstition, or misidentification of known species. Nevertheless, in the past, explorers had paid particular attention to native testimony concerning strange animals that supposedly existed in often remote, inhospitable localities – and time after time their faith in such testimony had been justified. All of the animals mentioned earlier had been creatures that were already well known to local tribes – it was only Western science that had been unaware of them. Today's 'unknown' animals – i.e. known locally but not scientifically – are termed 'ethnoknown', and there are numerous examples on file.

These would include the yeti

TOP 10 CRYPTO CRITTERS

NESSIE

It's the most famous unknown animal in the world, and has been the subject of investigation, speculation and hoaxes for 75 years, since a pair of jokers stuck plastic wood to a toy submarine and took 'The Surgeon's Photograph' in 1934, creating the public belief that Jurassic Park exists in the Highlands of Scotland. While people generally don't believe that it is a surviving plesiosaur anymore, there is a burgeoning amount of evidence to suggest that the monster of Loch Ness is a giant eel.

TATZELWURM

This tiny dragon lurks undiscovered in the Alps. It is only a few feet long and has either a single pair of legs at the front of its body like some aquatic salamanders, or four small stubby ones. A highly dodgy photograph was taken by a Swiss photographer called Balkin in 1934, but most people reckon that the photo shows a crude wooden carving. Whether it is a lizard, a salamander, a lungfish or something far stranger, the sightings seem to have fizzled out in the early 1950s.









LEFT: Taken near Mt Everest in 1951, this photo seems to show a Yeti print. **TOP:** Baron Georges Cuvier. **ABOVE:** Bernard Heuvelmans.

or abominable snowman of the Himalayas, a dinosaur-lookalike from the Congolese swamplands called the Mokele-Mbembe, the toothy Queensland tiger or yarri, the giant worm-like minhocão of South America, the pterodactylesque kongamato of Tanzania, the formidable devil pig of New Guinea, Sumatra's shy mini-manbeast known as the orang pendek, and a veritable flotilla of sea serpents and lake monsters worldwide (yes, the Loch Ness Monster is just one of numerous controversial freshwater mystery beasts on record).

Moreover, in later years, a number of other mystery beasts – or 'cryptids', to use the official term for such animals – have claimed attention, such as North America's Bigfoot or sasquatch; the electrifying death worm of Mongolia's Gobi Desert; a winged monster from New Guinea called the ropen; and a virtual plague of Alien Big Cats (or ABCs for short) in Britain, mainland Europe, North America, and Australia. Then there are reports of surviving populations of the supposedly-extinct Tasmanian wolf or thylacine not just on Tasmania but also mainland Australia and even New Guinea, what may be a gargantuan bat known to the Javanese natives as the ahool, gargantuan anacondas in South America and bizarre crested snakes that crow like roosters in tropical Africa and the Caribbean, a grotesque cat-headed serpentine beast known as the tatzelwurm reported from the Alps in central Europe, and vulturine birds with colossal wingspans rivalling those of small aeroplanes sighted in the skies above the USA.

Frustrated by mainstream science's obstinate reluctance to countenance any possibility that unknown animals were real and in need of serious investigation, by the 1940s a number of more open-minded zoologists – heretics in the eyes of their conservative colleagues – had begun documenting such creatures in magazine articles, newspaper accounts and books. In the process, a major new zoological discipline was born. Its name? Cryptozoology.

THE BIRTH OF CRYPTOZOOLOGY

Cryptozoology is generally defined as the scientific study of animals whose existence or identity is currently undetermined. Two of the leading pioneers in this fledgling field were Belgian zoologist Dr Bernard Heuvelmans and American zoologist Ivan T Sanderson, and both claimed at one time or another to have coined the term 'cryptozoology', which translates as the study of hidden animals. What is certain, however, is that the first person to use this term in print was Lucien Blancou, Chief Game Inspector of the French Overseas Territories. Blancou had personally investigated reports of several different mystery beasts in Africa, and in 1959 he dedicated his book *Géographie Cynégétique du Monde* to "Bernard Heuvelmans, maître de la cryptozoologie".



ABOVE: A cœlacanth – thought to have been extinct for 65 million years – caught by Kenyan fishermen in April 2001.

By then, Heuvelmans had indeed become the pre-eminent authority on the subject, thanks to his own book, the two-volume masterpiece *Sur la Piste des Bêtes Ignorées* (1955), republished in English three years later as the single-volume *On the Track of Unknown Animals*, and comprising a veritable encyclopædia of mystery beasts worldwide – from man-beasts and mega-lemurs to the Nandi bear, New Zealand waitoreke, Kenyan spotted lion, living mammoths, and many of the cryptids named above. True, it was not the first cryptozoological book – that honour was claimed by *Von Neuen und Unentdeckten Tierarten* ("Of New and Undiscovered Animals"), penned by German zoologist Dr Ingo Krumbiegel and published in 1950.

However, Heuvelmans's book was distinguished from all other rival publications by the sheer depth of the research and analysis that it contained, citing hundreds of often-obscure publications and examining each cryptozoological case in such a forensic manner that he soon became known both as the Father of Cryptozoology and as the Sherlock Holmes of Zoology.

A GROTESQUE, CAT-HEADED, SERPENTINE BEAST KNOWN AS THE TATZELWURM IS REPORTED FROM THE ALPS

On the Track of Unknown Animals not only became an international best seller but also raised the public profile of cryptozoology very considerably. Of course, timing is everything – and it certainly didn't harm sales that only a few years previously, a rediscovery of immense zoological magnitude had taken place. In 1938, a bizarre two-metre-long armour-scaled fish with peculiar leg-like fins and a unique three-finned tail had been captured alive off South Africa. To the astonishment of scientists worldwide, it proved to be a modern-day species of cœlacanth – an ancient lineage of fishes hitherto believed to have become extinct alongside the dinosaurs over 60 million years ago!

Not surprisingly, the cœlacanth's co-discoverer, eminent South African ichthyologist Prof. JLB Smith, spared no expense in seeking further specimens of this anachronistic wonder; but for well over a decade, not a single additional cœlacanth specimen was procured – even though Smith learnt that the local people on the Comoro Islands, north of Madagascar, knew the cœlacanth so well, referring to it as the kombessa, that they habitually used its rough scales as sandpaper! In late 1952, however, a second cœlacanth was finally obtained, off the Comoros, since when many others have also come to light and the species has even been filmed alive in the seas off the islands. Moreover, during the late 1990s, a second cœlacanth



BIGFOOT

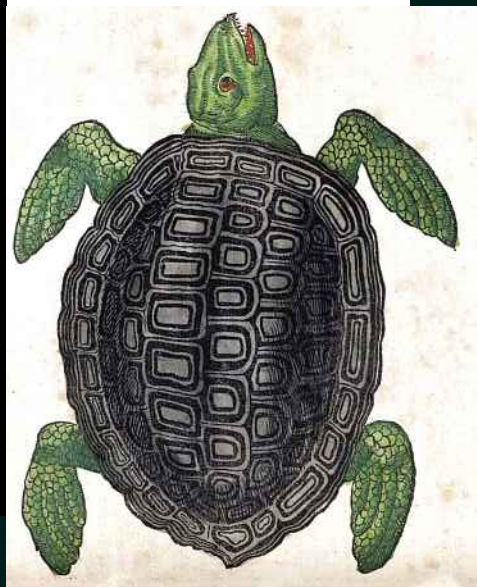
Despite a series of high-profile hoaxes, most recently by a pair of Georgia rednecks, many people still believe that there is a population of hulking sub-human manbeasts in the wilder parts of North America. Whether or not the 1967 Patterson/Gimlin footage is a man in a monkey suit or not, there is enough evidence in the form of footprints, casts, and eyewitness testimony to keep this enduring mystery in the public eye. Even a surprisingly large number of scientists believe in this one.

MOKOLE-MBEMBE

Nothing has inspired as much controversy as the hunt for living dinosaurs. The search for the creature of Lake Tele in the Congo has been seized upon by Creationists as proof that the world is only 6,000 years old, and by more conventional scientists as proof that cryptozoology is a big waste of time. The smart money says that it's not a dinosaur but an unknown species of enormous and aquatic monitor lizard.

GIANT TURTLE

Two species of snapping turtle are known to exist, and the larger *Macrochelys temminckii* can have a shell over 3ft in length. However, reports of much larger snapping turtles are regularly received from the swamps of Texas and Louisiana, and as far north as southern Canada. Could there be a third, much larger, species of snapping turtle awaiting discovery? If so, just how big does it get?





THYLACINE

Unlike other animals in the list, there is no doubt that the thylacine exists – at least in museums. The big question is, does this remarkable dog-like marsupial, whose iconic stature has made it the symbol of the Centre for Fortean Zoology, still thrive today? The last known specimen died in Hobart Zoo in 1936, but there have been reports from many parts of Tasmania, as well as the Australian mainland and even Irian Jaya intermittently ever since.

MONGOLIAN DEATH WORM

This is a great example of why cryptozoologists need to check source material for themselves. The first stories of this fearsome creature to reach the West said that it spat poison, or a corrosive acid, killed by massive electric shocks, and was deadly to Man. More recent expeditions such as that of the CFZ in 2005 have downsized this monster to an unknown sand boar or amphisbænian, two or three foot long, which lives a subterranean existence in parts of the Gobi Desert.







ABOVE: An artist's impression of the Mokole-Mbembe, a dinosaur-like beast said to inhabit Lake Tele in the Congo.

species was discovered, many thousands of kilometres to the east, off the Indonesian island of Sulawesi.

Yet even when confronted with this prehistoric survivor, many mainstream zoologists continued to dismiss the likelihood that other, similarly significant animals could still be awaiting disclosure. Nevertheless, the cœlacanth had excited the imagination of an entire generation of future cryptozoologists, and in the years that followed books and articles appeared and expeditions set out in search of the world's last unknown species.

And there were exciting discoveries, such as the huge megamouth shark, an entire community of bizarre new species (including gigantic tube-dwelling worms with fiery tentacles) living around hydrothermal vents on the sea bottom, a primitive species of wild cat on a tiny Japanese island, a number of new whales and monkeys, the world's longest toad and several archaic 'living fossil' invertebrates.

DISCOVERIES INCLUDED THE HUGE MEGAMOUTH SHARK AND ARCHAIC 'LIVING FOSSIL' INVERTEBRATES

A FUTURE OF DISCOVERY

By the early 1980s, cryptozoology had acquired sufficient respectability and credibility within the zoological community for the establishment of the world's first scientific society devoted to cryptozoology. Known as the International Society of Cryptozoology (ISC), its president was none other than Dr Bernard Heuvelmans; its officers included well-respected zoologists from scientific institutions all around the globe, and it published the first-ever peer-reviewed cryptozoological journal, *Cryptozoology*. Sadly, the ISC folded just over a decade later, but its existence had shown that cryptozoology had begun to be taken seriously by science.

Meanwhile, the discovery of major new animals and also the rediscovery of many supposedly long-extinct ones continued apace. In fact, so many had appeared or reappeared by the 1990s that in 1993 I published the first book devoted entirely to these species: *The Lost Ark: New and Rediscovered Animals of the 20th Century*, which documented such recent discoveries as the Vu Quang ox, giant muntjac, giant peccary, the gladiators (an entirely new order of large, dramatically different insects), the pygmy tapir and dwarf manatee, as well as several species of whale and dolphin, a phalanx of new and rediscovered birds, an almost embarrassing array of new South American monkeys and Madagascan lemurs, a



ABOVE: The giant squid, reported to grow up to 20m long. A living specimen was only filmed for the first time in 2002.

whistling panda-patterned tree kangaroo called the dingiso, and even an entirely new phylum of invertebrates. Moreover, all of these astonishing creatures were only uncovered during the past 15 years, and most were classic cryptozoological success stories – creatures well known to the native people sharing their habitat but unknown to science until Western investigators followed up the native reports.

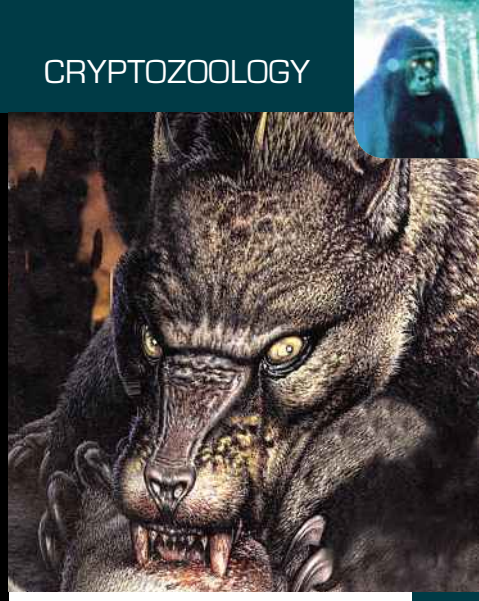
Clearly, to quote one of the section titles in Heuvelmans's *On the Track*, the great days of zoology are *not* done. Having said that, cryptozoological critics have been quick to point out that even though half a century has passed since the first publication of that seminal book, none of the major cryptids documented in it have been discovered. Conversely, they are less quick to point out that hardly any of these selfsame cryptids have been actively *sought* during that period, and even those very few that have been, most notably the orang pendek, Mokele-Mbembe, and yeti, are entities reported from some of the most inaccessible and inhospitable regions of the world.

Furthermore, those searches that have been undertaken have generally been short-term ventures, constrained by the demands of their participants' official work, financial restrictions, political bureaucracy, and the difficult nature of the terrain confronting them. The world's last undiscovered animals – if indeed they do exist – remain undiscovered precisely because of these factors. Had they lived in more readily accessible, amenable areas, they would have been found long ago.

Of course, it could be argued that these reclusive beasts should be left to enjoy their longstanding seclusion, away from the prying eyes of modern-day humanity. Ignore their scientific interest and significance, and simply let them be. Unfortunately, this idealistic viewpoint crumbles upon contact with the grim reality that as long as they remain officially non-existent, these creatures are exceedingly vulnerable – potentially under threat of annihilation both directly from native and Western hunters and indirectly from habitat destruction.

Without the formal stamp of recognition that a scientific description, name, and documentation would accord it, every cryptid faces the ironic, irreversible prospect of becoming extinct without ever having been shown to exist. Indeed, thanks to the continuing destruction of the world's rainforests, and pollution of its lakes, rivers, and seas, there is little doubt that this tragic fate has already befallen many species.

Consequently, in our increasingly green-aware world, cryptozoology should no longer be looked upon merely as an intriguing but ultimately insignificant field, but rather as a major tool in the safeguarding of our planet's zoological diversity – unveiling new life forms and in so doing rendering them eligible for receiving protection.



CHUPACABRA

Since the mid-1990s, the Canovenas plateau in central Puerto Rico has seen thousands of reports of a semi-bipedal creature 3–5ft high with spikes down its back. One wag dubbed it 'Sonic the Hedgehog on acid'. The anglicisation of its name is 'Goatsucker', alluding to the belief that *el chupacabra* eats livestock and is responsible for a swathe of death and destruction. Recent research suggests the killings are the work of feral mongooses, and that the chupacabra is something else entirely.

NANDI BEAR

No bears live in sub-Saharan Africa, but a bear-like creature is said to live in western Kenya, where it eats its victims' brains and inspires terror in the hearts of natives and settlers alike. It has been suggested that the legend of the Nandi bear is a result of sightings of a number of different creatures: giant hyenas, an unknown baboon, rogue ratels and possibly surviving chalicotheres – peculiar knuckle-walking ungulates supposedly extinct for 3.5 million years.

SEA SERPENT

Seafarers used to come back to land boasting of the terrifying creatures they had encountered on their voyages. While there are indeed sea snakes, the great sea serpent is nothing of the sort. Indeed there isn't one great sea serpent. At least eight huge, elongated marine creatures – mammals, fish, reptiles, and invertebrates – are believed by eminent scientists to exist in the wilder parts of the world's oceans, and sighting persist to the present day.

CASEBOOK

YOWIELAND

FOLLOWING A TRAIL THAT LEADS FROM ABORIGINAL MYTH TO MODERN-DAY ENCOUNTERS, **MICHAEL WILLIAMS** AND **RUBY LANG** SET OFF IN PURSUIT OF ONE OF AUSTRALIA'S MOST MYSTERIOUS INHABITANTS – THE TERRIFYING YOWIE.

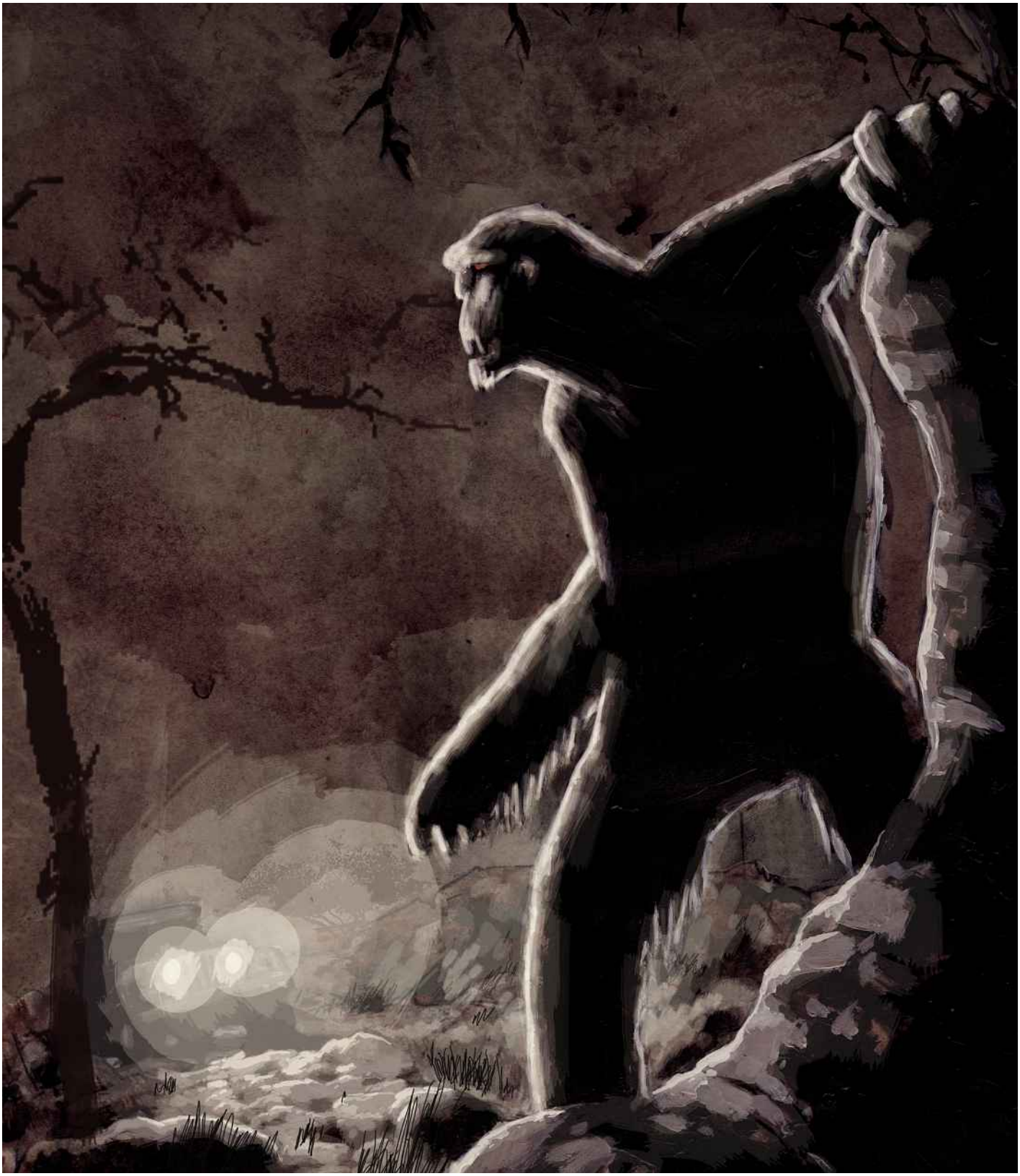


"I HELD UP MY TORCH AND SHONE IT IN FRONT OF ME, AND THIS THING JUST STOOD UP AND ROARED INTO MY FACE"

It was like an elephant on two legs wearing size 20 boots. That's how Blue Mountains resident Neil Frost would later describe the ape-like creature he encountered in thick bush near his backyard to local police.

It was February 1993. The schoolteacher and father of a newborn son was loath to wake up his youngest child with a midnight trip to the toilet. Instead, he chose to sneak out the back door and relieve himself in the bush-fringed yard.

It was just as he finished his business that a large shape loomed out of the shadows, surprising him



before itself taking flight.

"I'd just finished and taken one or two steps and this thing got up out of the bush and just took off," Neil recalls. It was unbelievable. It sounded big, like it weighed... I don't know... maybe 130kg [20st]. I didn't get a good look at it."

Somewhat shaken, Neil bolted next door to alert neighbour Ian 'Lizard' Price, a herpetologist and former bike gang member, who was surprised to find his normally "quiet and boring" neighbour banging on his bedroom window in the middle of the night.

"He was in a state of really extreme agitation," Ian remembers. So I said 'Let's do it'. After all, the most it could do was kill us!"

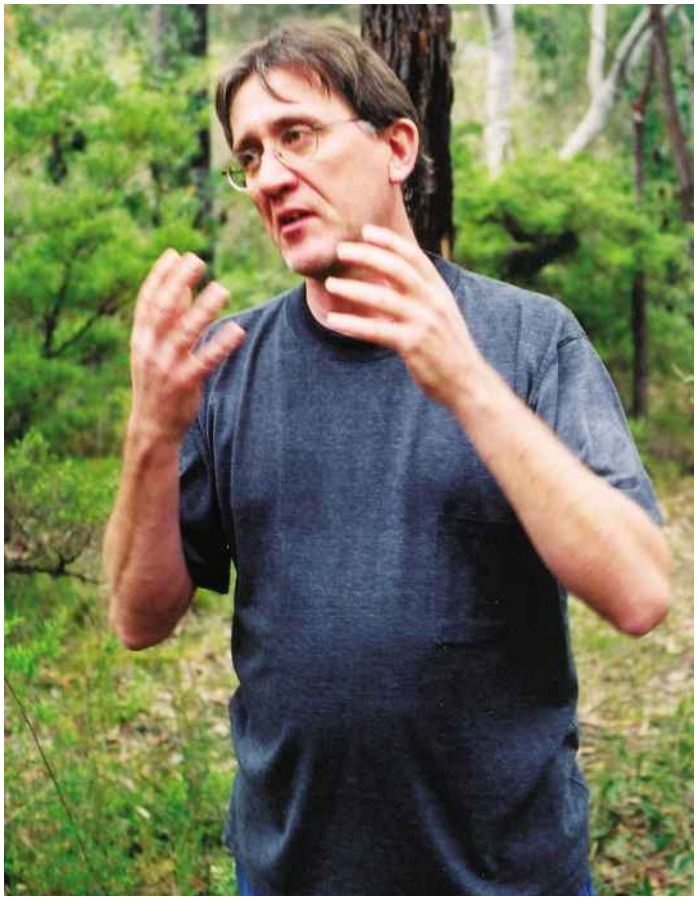
Together, the pair pursued the shape into the bush, but the creature eluded them – always just one step ahead – and began what was to become a bizarre, ongoing ritual of hide-and-seek.

Reporting the matter to local police proved a fruitless exercise; the two men later found out that local constables had carried out a door-to-door enquiry to find out if either of the pair was a known troublemaker or "doing drugs".

So, night after night, the two men would chase the creature – which would announce its presence by noisily thumping the ground – watching it flit between trees and across fire trails just beyond their reach.

In their search for the elusive man-ape, Neil and Ian also located what appeared to be full body imprints in a bed of reeds near their homes and numerous footprints, which they disregarded initially as some kind of hoax.

"I'm reasonably well versed in all of the indigenous wildlife in this country, to the extent I could identify any animal that you bring up, if not species at least genus," Ian says. "But this was strange. It was 7ft [2m] tall, two of me in build. I weigh 100kg [16st], so we're looking at a creature at least three times my body mass. It was big. It ran sort of like a person, but not quite. There was something odd in its gait. It had a testicle-tightening growl, creating a real predator-prey type reaction. People say you shit yourself when you're really scared, but you don't. Your bum sucks in. And it could out-run us, out-see us and avoid barbed wire fences. It was a big hairy beastie."



LEFT: Yowie witness Neil Frost at the scene of his terrifying encounter.

"PEOPLE SAY YOU SHIT YOURSELF WHEN YOU'RE SCARED, BUT YOU DON'T. YOUR BUM SUCKS IN"

Despite the frightening spectacle, Ian retained his sense of humour about the risks involved in chasing something so large and, presumably, dangerous. "I guess I'd be famous posthumously," he chuckles. "I said to Neil at the time: 'If it rips my arms off and stuffs them down a hole, name it after me.'"

On another occasion, Neil was lucky enough to get within a few feet of the creature after a visitor was adamant that "something had followed him down the driveway".

"I held up my torch and shone it in front of me, and this thing just stood up, leaned into me and roared into my face," Neil recalls. "Then it took off through the bush. It was pretty terrifying, but what I remember of it was that it had a large head and red eyes. It roared again, and there were dogs barking right across the valley. I remember people were coming out of their houses to tell their dogs to be quiet."

MONSTERS OF THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

The incidents in 1993 set the scene for multiple sightings of the creature around homes in the many Blue Mountains townships along the Great Western Highway. The road snakes its way through a massive World Heritage-listed wilderness area of some 1.03 million hectares (2.5 million acres), consisting mostly of forested landscape. It's an area that has acquired a reputation for 'high strangeness' among fortean researchers, due to a proliferation of UFO, Big Cat and Yowie encounters, not to mention the obligatory haunted houses dating back to the early days of colonial settlement.

"You've got all this land mass that's basically unexplored," Ian points out. Look at the Grose River Valley – no one goes there. Look at the Wollemi Pine. It's a 100ft [30m] tall tree! It can't run around and hide. If you've got a 7ft tall, 300kg creature that can hide..."

The Wollemi Pine (*Wollemia nobilis*), the so-called "dinosaur tree" thought to be long extinct, was rediscovered in 1994 by a park ranger exploring a deep, narrow canyon in the heart of the Blue Mountains.

At least 63 of Neil and Ian's neighbours have also heard or seen the bipedal creature near



their own homes or in the dense, largely unexplored bush that surrounds the townships, both before and since that day in 1993. One, a nine-year-old boy living two doors away from Neil, was playing with fire one day and ran through the bush with a burning stick in his hand.

"As you can imagine, that's not a very smart thing to be doing around here," says Neil, referring to the frequency of devastating bush fires in the area. "He ran smack-bang into him, literally into this creature – it looked down at him, he looked up at it, and they both ran in opposite directions, completely horrified.

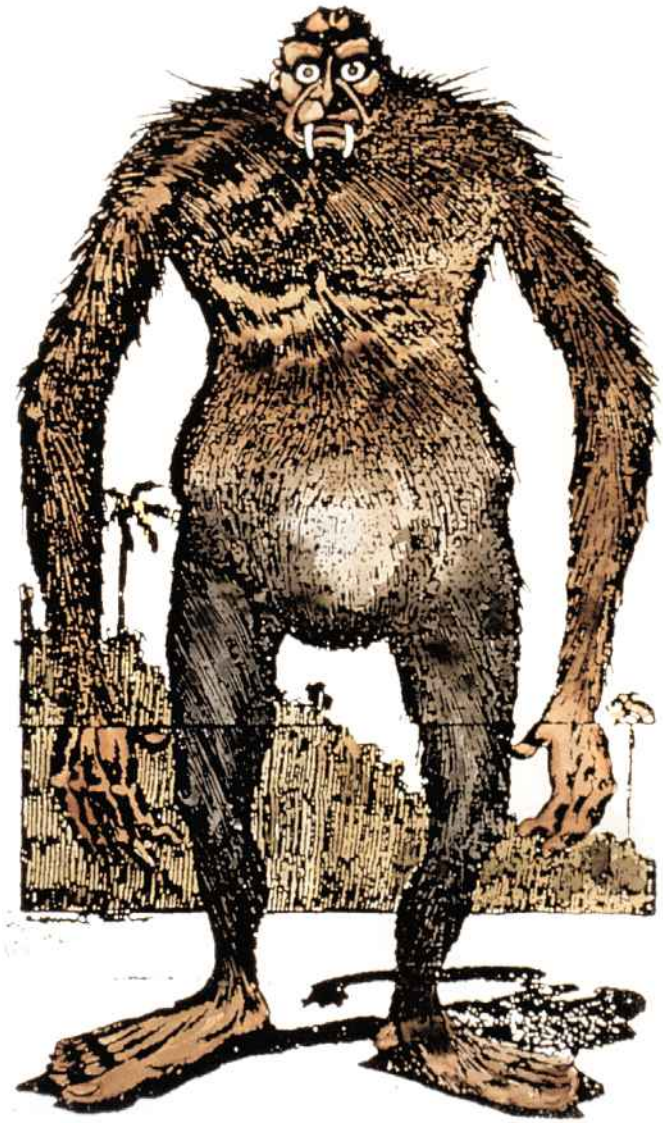
"He gave a beautiful description of the creature, describing the skin folds on its face as leathery and black, with thick hair on the outside – grey with white flashes through it."

On the surface, one would have thought monster-sized primates frequenting relatively heavily populated areas in the Australian bush would by now have been discovered, identified and named by science.

Unlike the United States, which has large mammals such as bears, Australia has no animal that could be mistaken for the 'Yowie' or 'Yahoo', the Aboriginal names given to the Bigfoot-like creature chased by Neil and Ian. Nor does Australia boast any non-human primate lines, such as monkeys or great apes.

While anecdotal reports are plentiful, there is a distinct lack of credible photographic, video or audio evidence of the creature. Not one whole or partial skeleton has ever been found. And Neil's own efforts to collect samples for DNA-testing have also led nowhere. However, he has vowed to continue his quest to prove something physical is out there.

Bizarre plaster casts and photos of Yowie footprints that have been taken in the area show giant two, three, four and sometimes five-toed footprints, and don't look as though they could sustain a large animal's locomotion, let alone stabilise the creature.



ABOVE: An artist's impression of a Yowie, drawn in 1912.

No known species displays the same gross morphological variation that these 'Yowie feet' would suggest. They don't even look remotely primate-like.

Neither man favours the other obvious explanation for a creature that does not feature in Australia's zoological profile, can elude capture, move with lightning speed and is often reported as having glowing red eyes – that it is a creature of paranormal origin.

TAPPING THE DREAMTIME

Struggling to find out more about his encounters, Neil eventually approached local Aborigines from the Burragorang tribe who were, initially, wary of discussing the Yowie with a white man. Eventually, after Neil shared his story, they told him what they knew of the creature from their own experiences and as it featured in their Dreamtime stories.

Described as tall, powerfully built and with arms that taper to claws, the Yowie was reputed to be a man-eater. It was also usually accompanied by an overpowering stench, an element that often crops up in many modern-day Yowie sightings. But for Neil, some of the Burragorang people's answers merely added to the enigma.

"The Aborigines told me that they live in the trees, but I think that's just an illusion that they have. In fact, what I think they meant is that they just stand behind trees," Neil says. There was also an Aboriginal story that Yowies have their feet on backwards. I don't believe that they do; I think what they meant, in my interpretation, is that they're just f***ing hard to track!"

The reference to backward feet is a common one in færie lore, and regularly crops up in Bigfoot/yeti stories from around the world. It also lends the creature a somewhat otherworldly air. But ask Neil his opinion of the phenomenon and he's adamant: "It's definitely a real creature. I don't buy into any of this paranormal stuff."

One researcher who does favour a possible paranormal explanation is veteran Australian 'monster hunter' Tony Healy. Healy, who along with colleague Paul Cropper is working on what will be the most comprehensive book ever written on the subject of the Yowie, believes some accounts point to the creature "being something other than an anthropological or zoological mystery – that is, something other than flesh and blood. If we reject everything about the Yowie that smacks of the paranormal, we'd have to sweep 20 per cent of the accumulated data under the carpet," Healy told the Sydney 2001 Myths and Monsters

cryptzoology conference.

"After 25 years on the trail, I really suspect that the American Indians, the Australian Aborigines and some of the whacked-out American researchers are right: that is, that we're dealing with shape-shifting phantoms here that will probably remain beyond human comprehension."

How else to explain the vanishing acts, glowing red eyes (in one encounter described as "the size of tennis balls"), superhuman feats of speed and the ability to invoke the so-called "nameless dread" – the inexplicable primal fear that "turns your guts to water" – experienced by so many witnesses?

"The dread", as some self-styled Yowie hunters refer to it, has stopped many individuals in their tracks and inspired a hasty retreat to the safety of cars and civilisation. It's not unlike the sort of temporary, terrifying paralysis that strikes the prey of Big Cats. What kind of creature could engender that kind of fear?

Two people who firmly believe that the Yowie has a paranormal origin are Jerry and Sue O'Connor, neighbours of Neil and Ian.

They favour the term "nature spirit", and given some of the paranormal attributes outlined thus far, they may yet be closest to the mark in truly describing the mysterious creature.

Their first encounter with the Yowie was in November 1999. Sue was out on the couple's back veranda late one night when the silence was broken by a spine-tingling scream.

"It was about midnight and I was just doing some painting, when suddenly there was this sound," she tells us. I don't know what it sounded like – like something out of this world, like a cross between a lion, a bear and a monkey. It sort of growled-roared. It freaked me out; it sent shivers up my spine. So I ran inside and called for Jerry."

Initially sceptical of his wife's claims, Jerry walked out to the back veranda, explaining to Sue as he went that the noise – it being springtime – was probably just wallabies or wombats making mating sounds.

"Then this thing absolutely roared," Jerry recalls. "It was alien, and it sounded like nothing I've ever heard in my life. We didn't have a torch so we couldn't really see anything. But the feeling that came from it was like a physical barrier, like I was a threat to it. This wall of fear hit me and the hair stood up on my arms and the back of my neck. I just dragged Sue inside and shut the door. There was nothing that I was taught about in the Aussie bush that sounded like this. I never wanted to hear anything like it again, it was that frightening."

The couple, both in ill health, had moved to the area two years prior "for a quieter life" following Jerry's discharge from the Navy. But that encounter shattered more than the peace and quiet of one evening – like a ripple effect in a pond, it was the start of something much bigger.

"IT SOUNDED LIKE SOMETHING OUT OF THIS WORLD – A CROSS BETWEEN A LION, A BEAR AND A MONKEY"

FROM MYTH TO REALITY

"I thought that Yowies were just something we had invented because the Americans had Bigfoot," says Jerry. "That incident was the first inkling we had that



RIGHT: Jim 'Lizard' Price and a cast taken from what might be a genuine Yowie print.

there was something bizarre living in the bush around here."

Like Neil and Ian's experience, the O'Connors' encounter set the scene for a number of bizarre incidents around their home, leading them to become reluctant witnesses to a creature they had once relegated to story-books.

Not knowing Neil at the time, the O'Connors got in touch with Queensland-based Dean Harrison, who runs Australian Hominid Research, a group dedicated to researching the Yowie phenomenon. Dean put the pair in touch with Ian and Neil, who lived just streets away, as well as passing on the story of a third man who had spotted something large, hairy and hominid on a road near the O'Connors' home – on the very same night they had experienced the spine-tingling roar.

"This bloke Brad Croft was driving along the road, which is about 500m [1,600ft] away from our house, when he saw this large, 8–9ft [2.4–2.7m] hairy man cross the road and go down into the gully," Jerry says. "He drove straight home and got Neil, who lived in the same street as him, and within 10 minutes they were back at the spot walking around. As they got down near the creek, they heard it crashing around and running up a track, which, as it turns out, led straight to our backyard."

On another occasion soon afterwards, Sue was sleeping on her bed with several of her six cats when she was woken up by the sound of their collective growling: "Their hackles were up. I looked up to see why they were growling, what they were looking at, and just caught a flash of a shape in the window, about 8ft tall."





ABOVE: Jerry and Sue O'Connor have encountered the Yowie on several occasions.
LEFT: A cast taken from a print left on the O'Connors' property.

Prior to that, the couple had regularly been woken up at night by the sound of their external fuse box cover being opened, and banging on the side of the house.

"The fuse box door would slam, but there were no kids living in the area at the time, and hardly any neighbours," Jerry recalls. "We thought that it might have been yobbos, but something was happening every week."

A short time later, Jerry too caught sight of their hairy visitor at the bedroom window, cementing his growing belief that something odd was afoot. "God knows how long this thing had been looking into our window," he says.

"I woke up one night and looked at the window and I saw this thing – it was like a silhouette of a human head, with a messed-up lump of hair and a nose like a human's – not like an ape with pushed-back nostrils.

"It had these massive bloody shoulders, like a gridiron player wearing shoulder pads. I was convinced then. I wasn't exactly a sceptic before, but this convinced me completely."

As the frequency of the sightings increased, the couple began to have bizarre dreams about the creature, often waking to catch sight of a hairy face peering through the window.

"I noticed we started having these nightmares. I would wake up and say to Sue, 'I've just had this frightening dream of a yowie,' and she would say: 'Really? So have I'."

Footprints were also found on the couple's property after some of these visitations, which Jerry photographed and cast. The couple, who regularly "bush walk", have also spotted strange footprints along the fire trails and tracks that criss-cross the area, leading down into gullies, waterfalls and caves.

Despite these physical traces, they remain convinced the creature is more færie-like than fierce physical beast. Aboriginal lore does support the existence of 'little people' (of a small, hairy variety) in Australia – the yuuri (pronounced 'yawri', not unlike Yowie) or 'brown jack', which fulfil a similar role to that of European elves and leprechauns, guarding certain places, granting favours and playing tricks on people.

A CONTINUING MYSTERY

While the ongoing experiences of the Frosts, Prices and O'Connors – which we have only touched on very briefly – are confined to the Blue Mountains region, there have been numerous Yowie sightings all over Australia, predominantly along the east coast in mountainous and forested areas.

But despite the prolific number of sightings, the occasional compelling plaster-cast of a footprint and a rich oral tradition that is thought to predate white settlement by millennia, there is as yet no concrete proof that a hitherto unknown species of man-ape walks the Australian continent.

The elusiveness of the creature, if indeed it is a flesh-and-blood being, continues to puzzle and frustrate those who have encountered it, and those like the authors who pursue proof of its existence. It may one day be shown that the paranormal and physical aspects of the mysterious yowie are different sides of the same coin. In the meantime, failing that, all we can do is flip it and see.



Investigating... CRYPTOZOOLOGY

JONATHAN DOWNES describes his own introduction to monster-hunting, and gives an insight into how a busy team of cryptozoologists operates while maintaining a full archive of its caseload.

I was brought up in Hong Kong during the last years of Empire, surrounded by a dazzling array of exotic animals. My mother encouraged my interests in natural history and the written word, and one day she got me out a library book that would literally change my life. It was called *Myth or Monster*, and introduced me to the concept that there were, indeed, monsters living in the world. This book introduced me to the Loch Ness Monster, to sea serpents, to the yeti and its North American cousin, Bigfoot, to the fearsome *Mngwa* – the brindled, grey, killer-cat of East Africa – and to the mystery beasts of the South American jungle.

This was heady stuff for an eight-year-old. I read the book in one sitting, had my tea, went to bed early and read it again. The next morning, I woke up, my head and heart filled with a new determination.

"I'm going to be a Monster Hunter when I grow up," I announced at breakfast. And I meant it. Any chance of me leading a normal life had gone completely out of the window.

One of the things that I love about this job is that there is no such thing as a 'typical investigation'. Whatever we are doing, the watchword is rigour: we try to approach each investigation with as high a standard of scientific rigour as possible. The reason for this is that in the past too many fortean investigations have relied purely on hearsay, and hearsay is totally subjective. We also film, photograph and record everything that we do, and keep all the filmed records of our activities in our voluminous and burgeoning archives. This means that should a starry-eyed researcher of two or three decades hence want to re-examine – for example – the Bolam Lake Big Hairy Monster case of 2003, they will have access to all our interviews, witness reconstructions, and general expedition notes.

We are hoping to expand the sum total of human knowledge. So we want digital film recordings of eyewitness statements, locations and biotopes, as well as physical evidence such as bones, scat, plaster casts of prints, hair, etc. But the most important thing – and the thing which I cannot stress highly enough – is that good record-keeping and publishing a truthful and accurate account of the investigation are paramount.

You can enter cryptozoology at any level, and your involvement in it can be tailored to fit your purse. For the more impecunious researcher, there is an enormous amount of 'grass roots' research that can be done in local libraries or the back rooms of museums. The more money one has, the more one can spend on video and photographic equipment, and specialised items like trail cameras or digiscopes.

My advice to someone new to cryptozoology would be to become involved with an established group like the British Columbia Scientific Cryptozoology Club, or the CFZ. Too many



ABOVE: CFZ members; not fishing, but staking out a reported cryptid.

CENTRE FOR FORTEAN ZOOLOGY

The Centre for Fortean Zoology (CFZ) was founded in 1992, and was initially meant to be a clearing house for information about cryptozoology from researchers across the globe. The idea was that this information would be disseminated through two house periodicals, the quarterly *Animals & Men* and the annual *CFZ Yearbook*.

In 2002, the CFZ became a field organisation as well as a publishing one, with a high-profile investigation into a series of sightings of a strange animal in a Lancashire Nature Reserve. This later turned out to be a wels catfish. In 2003, we went to Sumatra in search of the semi-legendary *orang pendek*, an upright walking ape. This was the first of our self-financed foreign expeditions, which have since included trips to Mongolia, Indonesia, Gambia, Guyana, Russia and various parts of the United States.

In 2004, we expanded our publishing activities and are now the biggest fortean zoological publishers in the world with nearly 50 titles to our credit. And in 2000, we started our annual convention, The Weird Weekend, which is now in its 10th year. In 2005, we relocated from suburban Exeter to rural North Devon, where we are building a visitor centre, museum and animal collection.



people try to start off their crypto careers by forming their own group, which almost invariably vanishes without trace after a few years. Any decent organisation will be pleased to welcome new, intelligent and enthusiastic blood. Be warned, however. There are some dreadful charlatans out there, as well as people who have a peculiar religious or political agenda that they are trying to use cryptozoology to prove.

The most scared I've ever been, as a cryptozoologist, was in January 1998 – I was in Mexico, interviewing a vet called Soledad de la Pena. Apparently, in July 1996 she had been called to a smallholding owned by a farmer called Dom Pedro. A mysterious predator had attacked three of his sheep, but – unusually for alleged chupacabra victims – at least one of them was still alive. By the time she arrived, it was at least 12 hours after the attacks had taken place and what she found was so shocking and disturbing that if it had not been for the fact that we saw actual video evidence of her examination of the hapless beasts we would most certainly not have believed her.

Even now I find this episode perhaps the most disturbing case that I have ever investigated, and certainly the most inexplicable, because I can come up with no biological explanation whatsoever for the evidence that she found.



TOP: The CFZ expedition to Sumatra
ABOVE: Dom Pedro and a protective cross to ward off the chupacabra.

The sheep that was the subject of the video had been completely drained of blood. The video shows Soledad putting her hand (encased in a white glove) through an enormous hole in the chest of the creature and apparently reaching into the thoracic cavity itself. As she withdrew her hand, the glove had no more than tiny traces of blood upon it. She told us, in a tremulous voice, that the animal had been entirely drained. Because of the total exsanguination, the sheep's heart was not beating, and the animal was not breathing – however, in defiance of all the rules of biological science, it was still alive.

She noted that there were two holes, one drilled completely through the bones of the rib cage, and that certain of the internal organs (here my lack of Spanish was a great disadvantage, because my interpreter was not up to asking complicated pathological questions) had vanished, including (as far as I could gather) the liver itself!

She then took us to the farmyard and it was both awe-inspiring and surprisingly unnerving to actually be in the location where the attacks had taken place. Probably the most important thing about our visit was the sight of the huge painted crucifixes, which, even two years after the event, were still daubed over the walls of the farmyard. Later we discovered that, although the attack at Dom Pedro's had been an isolated one, the whole community had been affected by the collective fear of such a horrific event and most of the other houses in the immediate vicinity were daubed with similar crosses. Even I could understand when told that the huge white crosses were "*por protectione de vampiros*".

THERE IS AN ENORMOUS AMOUNT OF RESEARCH THAT CAN BE DONE IN LOCAL LIBRARIES



DIRECTORY

SUGGESTED READING

Extraordinary Animals Revisted
Karl PN Shuker (CFZ Press, 2007)

Dragons: A Natural History
Karl PN Shuker
(Aurum Press, 1995)

In Search of Prehistoric Survivors: Do Giant 'Extinct' Creatures Still Exist?
Karl PN Shuker
(Blandford Press, 1995)

From Flying Toads to Snakes With Wings: In Search of Mysterious Beasts
Karl PN Shuker
(Llewellyn Worldwide, 1996)

The Beasts That Hide from Man: Seeking the World's Last Undiscovered Animals
Karl PN Shuker (Paraview, 2003)

The Evidence for Bigfoot and Other Man-Beasts
Janet & Colin Bord
(Aquarian, 1985)

Alien Animals
Janet & Colin Bord (Grafton, 1985)

The Chupacabras Diarie: An Unofficial guide to Puerto Rico's Paranormal Predator
Scott Corrales
(Samizdat Press, 1995)

The Leviathans
Tim Dinsdale (Futura, 1976)

Thunderbirds! The Living Legend of Giant Birds
Mark Hall, (MAHP, 1988)

Out of the Shadows: Mystery Animals of Australia
Tony Healy and Paul Cropper
(Pan Macmillan Australia, 1994)

On the Track of Unknown Animals
Bernard Heuvelmans (Rupert Hart-Davis, 1958)

In the Wake of the Sea Serpents
Bernard Heuvelmans
(Rupert Hart-Davis, 1968)

The Kraken and the Colossal Octopus
Bernard Heuvelmans
(Kegan Paul, 2003)

Big Bird! Modern Sightings of Flying Monsters
Ken Gerhard (CFZ Press, 2007)

A Dictionary of Cryptozoology
Ronan Coghlan (Xiphos Books, 2004)

The Field Guide to Lake Monsters, Sea Serpents: And Other Mystery Denizens of the Deep
Loren Coleman & Patrick Huyghe
(Tarcher, 2004)

The Field Guide to Bigfoot, Yeti and Other Mystery Primates Worldwide
Loren Coleman & Patrick Huyghe
(Avon books, 1999)

Bigfoot! The True Story of Apes in America
Loren Coleman
(Simon & Schuster, 2003)

Monster Hunter
Jonathan Downes
(CFZ Press, 2004)

Sea Serpents and Lake Monsters of the British Isles
Paul Harrison (Robert Hale, 2002)

In Search of Lake Monsters
Peter Costello (Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1974)

Searching for Hidden Animals
Roy P Mackal (Doubleday, 1980)

The Monsters of Loch Ness
Roy P Mackal (Macdonald, 1976)

The Loch Ness Monster: the Evidence
Steuart Campbell (Aquarian, 1986)

ORGANISATIONS AND GROUPS

Centre for Fortean Zoology (CFZ)
Founded in 1992, the CFZ is the headquarters of Britain's only full-time cryptozoologists, headed by the inimitable Jon Downes. The non-profit organisation is dedicated to cryptozoology and allied disciplines, carries out expeditions across the globe and holds an annual weekend conference called Weird Weekend in Devon. The CFZ publishes a journal, *Animals & Men*, as well as a growing range of books, and is in the process of building a visitors' centre complete with a museum and library.
Myrtle Cottage, Woolfardisworthy, Bideford, North Devon, EX39 5QR
Web: www.cfz.org.uk/
Tel: 01237 431 413
Email: info@cfz.org

Bigfoot Field Researchers Organisation
Founded in 1995, the BFRO is now the oldest and largest organisation of its kind – a virtual community of scientists, journalists, and specialists from diverse backgrounds. BFRO researchers are engaged in investigations and projects designed to address various aspects of the bigfoot phenomenon.
Web: www.bfro.net
Tel: +001 949 278 6403
Email: contact@bfro.net

The British Columbia Scientific Cryptozoology Club
Founded in 1989 by writer James A Clark, scientist Dr Paul LeBlond and journalist John Kirk, BCSCC comprises a broadly based membership of enthusiasts dedicated to the investigation of various animals as yet unidentified by science.
Web: www.bcscc.ca/
Email: bcscc@bcscc.ca

Australian Rare Fauna Research Association (ARFRA)
ARFRA is a voluntary, non-profit research organisation dedicated to recording and investigating sightings of unusual animals. Since its inception in 1984, ARFRA has collated and analysed over 10,000 reports of animals resembling pumas, panthers and Tasmanian Tigers, together with numerous reports of unidentified birds, reptiles and amphibians from all parts of Australia.
Web: www.arfra.org/

WEBSITES

The Cryptid Zoo
Jamie Hall's site is jam-packed with information on all kinds of cryptids as well as links and further reading
www.newanimal.org/index.htm

The Cryptozoologist
Website of Loren Coleman, one of the world's leading authorities on cryptozoology and author of many books on the subject
www.lorencoleman.com/

Cryptomundo
Major US-based blog for all crypto news, run by Loren Coleman and other prominent cryptozoological commentators.
www.cryptomundo.com

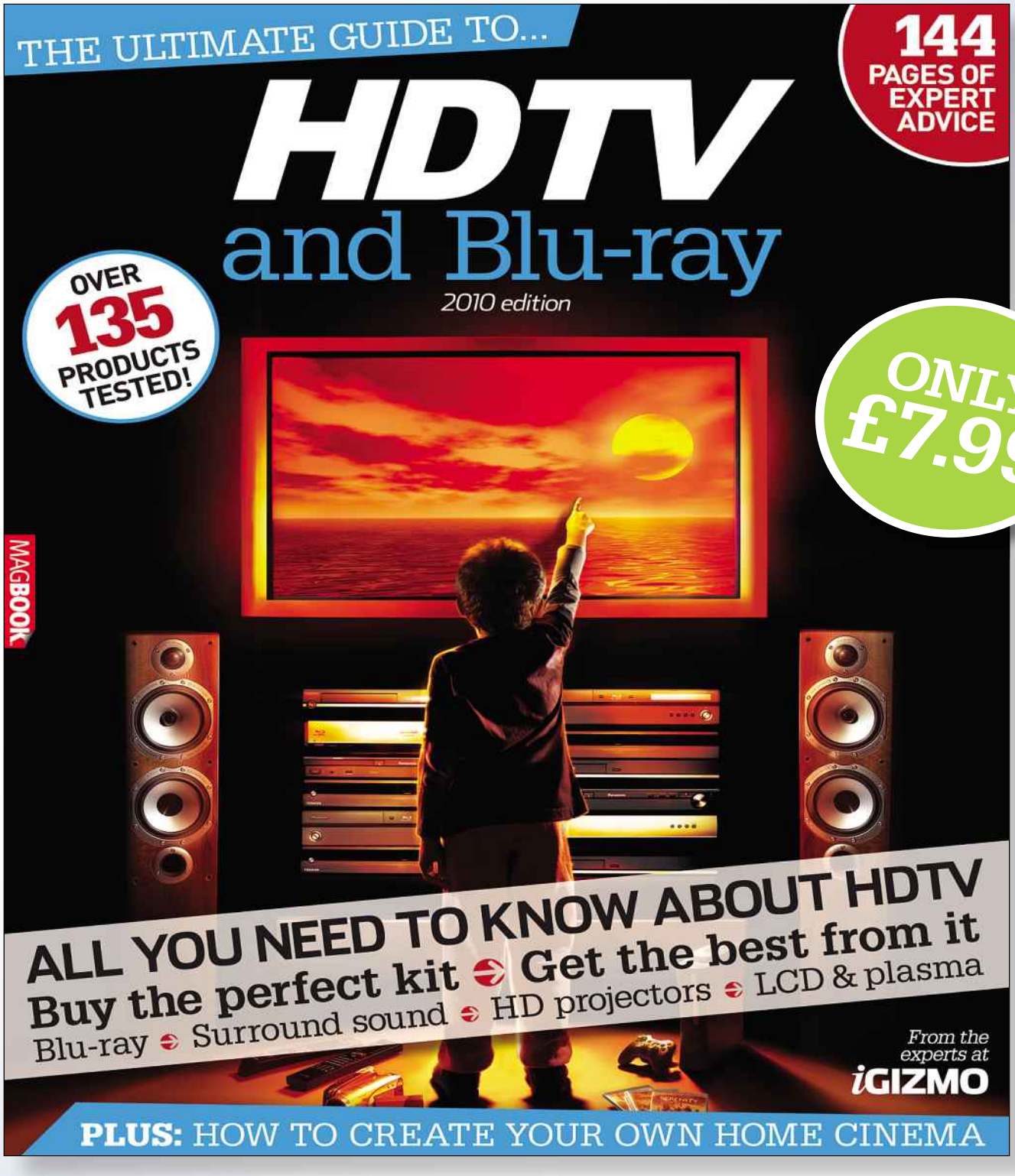
ShukerNature
Dr Karl Shuker's blog
www.karlshuker.blogspot.com
karlshuker@aol.com

Cryptozoology.com
News, articles forums, resources on cryptozoology in general
www.cryptozoology.com/

Cryptozoology Links
Massive collection of crypto-links from Philip R "Pib" Burns
www.pibburns.com/cryptozo.htm

Alamas
Russian site concerning the Alma or Almasty, Russia's own relic hominid or 'abominable snowman'
www.alamas.ru/

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The Fortean Times Guide to...
UFOs





FOR OVER 60 years now – ever since an American businessman saw 'flying saucers' over Washington State – our skies have been crowded with mysterious lights and unidentified flying objects, while our popular culture has been invaded by bug-eyed aliens and taken over by conspiracy theories.

But what are the UFOs? Alien spacecraft? Top-secret military hardware? Misunderstood natural phenomena? Are they dangerous? And what should you do if you see one?

An introduction to...

UFOs



OUR EXPERT JENNY RANDLES

Ever since 1947, when a lone pilot in a small plane saw a cluster of lights flying beside him, flying saucers have taken hold of our imaginations. Over 60 years later, what do we know about them?



The night of 23 January 1985 was cold and frosty. Snow covered the landscape around Burnley, Lancashire, and when a local school headmaster heard a sudden thud outside his home, he assumed that part of the heavy drift had fallen off the roof. He called his wife and three teenage daughters and they all scurried outside – where they watched for almost 15 minutes as a brightly glowing object flew above the schoolhouse. It was a large diamond-shape with black 'vanes' coming from a central red mass and sparkling blue lights outlining the edges, unlike any aircraft they had seen before. It was totally silent as it moved overhead and disappeared to the southeast.

There were other curious aspects – the area was unusually dark because the streetlights had gone out and an eerie silence hung in the air as if people, traffic and animals had all paused for breath.

The local UFO research group interviewed the witnesses and

LEFT: One of Billy Meier's spectacular UFO photos, now believed to be clever fakes.

sought an explanation, but without success. And that's what makes a good UFO encounter so fascinating – it can defy logic and defeat rational investigation.

The UFO enigma is often described as a riddle of the Space Age, but there have been sightings of unidentified flying objects for as long as humans have gazed at the heavens.

When early hominids saw a rainbow they would have no clue what they were witnessing. It was a glorious arc of colour that painted the atmosphere and seemed evidence of some æthereal presence beyond the mundane world.

As time passed and scientific knowledge grew, mankind spotted clues that pointed towards an explanation. These arcs of light appeared during rainstorms. Gradually, it dawned that a rainbow was a natural occurrence that could be predicted. Yet they still evoked legends about treasure at the rainbow's end, even as truth gained a foothold amidst the romance.

From such a viewpoint, a rainbow is a typical UFO – appearing in the sky, defying explanation and inspiring theories both scientific and mystical. With time, any strange phenomena may become part of accepted science. But they can remain a mystery for a very long time. The annals of ancient Greece and Rome or the mediæval transcripts of European monks are all dotted with things that were the UFOs of the time, in the sense of being unidentified sights.

Each culture has used its own terms to describe them – flying shields or sailing ships in the clouds – often revealing objects recognisable today as meteors or comets within the natural environs of the Earth.

However, knowledge never stands still, and some things still defeat the wit of modern Man. We call them UFOs, but perhaps they are simply our 21st-century versions of the rainbow.

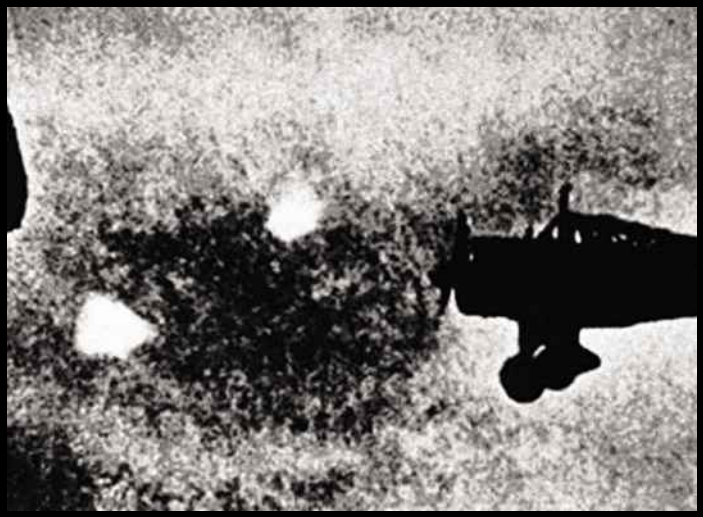
CULTURAL CONTEXTS

Many cases involving puzzling lights in the sky followed this pattern of what we call 'cultural tracking'. For instance, apparitions in the heavens during late Victorian times were described in topical parlance as fantastic airships and their origin often ascribed to secretive inventor geniuses.

Then came World War II, and our aircraft encountered more glowing balls of light. Over Europe, bomber crews called them 'Foo Fighters' and presumed them to be German secret weapons. The cultural context of military technology and secret investigation engendered by the times was to have a major effect on what happened later. For as the world entered a Cold War, fearing Armageddon via Soviet missiles, all eyes were on the skies, seeing our own aerial technology, from weather balloons to space rockets, as UFOs. These new sources of what are now IFOs (Identified Flying Objects) jostled with other strange phenomena that fill our natural environment. With so many different ways to be fooled, sorting UFOs from the IFOs



THERE HAVE BEEN UFO SIGHTINGS FOR AS LONG AS HUMANS HAVE GAZED AT THE HEAVENS



ABOVE: Many UFOs are man-made in origin; the Avrocar even looked like one.
TOP: UFOs dubbed 'Foo Fighters' were often spotted by pilots during WWII.

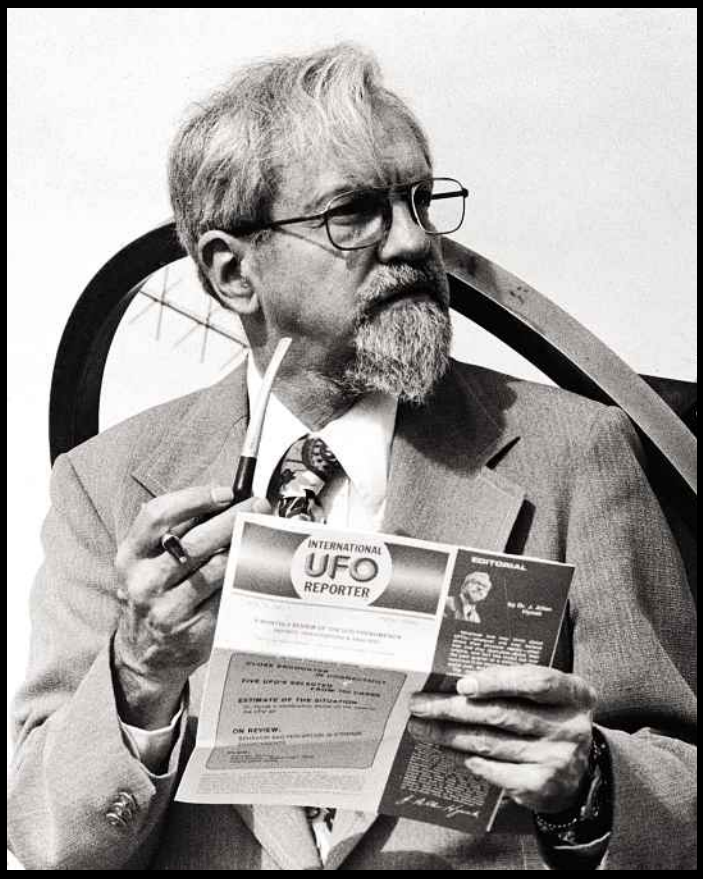
EIGHT UFO CASES

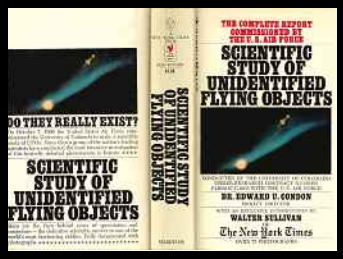
THE ARNOLD SIGHTING
WASHINGTON STATE, USA, 1947

Businessman Kenneth Arnold was flying over the Cascade Mountains, Washington State, on 24 June 1947 when he saw "a formation of very bright objects coming from the vicinity of Mount Baker, flying very close to the mountain tops and travelling at a tremendously high speed". When he later described the objects as flying "like a saucer would if you skipped it across the water" a new term – flying saucer – was coined by journalists and the modern UFO phenomenon was born. Since debunked as everything from military aircraft to a flock of pelicans, Arnold's sighting cemented the image of the UFO as an alien spacecraft.

RAF LAKENHEATH
SUFFOLK, UK, 1956

This classic case involved a complex series of anomalous radar 'sightings' both from the ground and the air over East Anglia on the night of 13–14 August 1956). After receiving numerous reports of bright lights darting across the sky, fighters from RAF Lakenheath spent more than seven hours trying to shoot down the objects, which were picked up on Army radar screens and tracked for more than 50 miles. One object was logged travelling at 4,000mph, a speed far beyond the technology of the era. Operators making these sightings didn't believe their equipment was malfunctioning, but explanations have been put forward blaming radar echoes, unsual weather conditions or a balloon, but many questions remain unanswered.







LEFT: UFO investigator J Allen Hynek
TOP: The 1967 *Condon Report*.
ABOVE: Kenneth Arnold's sketch of what he saw in his seminal sighting.
FACING PAGE: Major Jesse Marcel poses with the wreckage found north of Roswell, New Mexico, in 1947.

became ever harder.

The contemporary climate of fear assured that in summer 1947, when a wave of sightings struck the Western USA, the media made colourful reports of flying 'disks' or 'saucers' and forged a mystery that anyone could witness, anywhere and anytime. Inevitably, official investigation of these 'flying saucers' was put into the hands of the military, for fear that the enemy had gained a leading edge in aerial technology.

Fear bred secrecy; and secrecy spawned a contagion of conspiracy theories that persists to this day. While the reasons for discretion seem obvious, it is remarkable how much of popular UFO writing even now assumes a global cover-up that occurred 60 years ago and was successfully concealed – and this in a world where secret files are routinely left by error upon a train!

For instance, when a covert balloon project used to seek evidence of Soviet nuclear tests crashed to earth near Roswell, New Mexico, in July 1947, it was perceived as a UFO – and the paranoia this instilled amongst the military led them to blatantly attempt to deceive the public to protect national security. This misguided approach simply added to belief that the UFO mystery must concern something remarkable if the powers that be were so intent on hiding the facts.

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

By the early 1950s, most major nations had military or intelligence-gathering units collating UFO sightings, all compiling dossiers with conflicting opinion as to what was going on. Theories ranged from the sceptical (all sightings were probably just misperceptions) to the paranoid (the craft were flown by an unknown enemy).

In 1953, the CIA convened gatherings of top scientists, military and intelligence analysts to assess the best evidence, with few people in the loop about what was going on. These meetings formulated plans to make UFO sightings seem absurd using cartoons and comic strips or by promoting eccentric witnesses – all this was meant to reduce the growing public fascination and intense media coverage. The desire to discredit the UFO mystery was born out of fear that an invading country might deliberately trigger sightings and clog communication channels. So, UFO research and credible sightings were not viewed as a scientific challenge but a political hot potato to be ruthlessly manipulated by fiddling statistics and talking to sceptical reporters.

UFO investigation groups had been formed in the US and UK and attracted a trickle of interested scientists and eminent authors like Carl Jung. While the authorities were accurate in emphasising that over 90 per cent of sightings were misperceptions of aircraft lights, balloons and so on, the decision to hide the unresolved





cases and physical evidence inevitably inflamed the battle. UFO researchers and government agencies were at war with each other.

And a cottage industry of books, magazines, radio and TV shows kept this fight in the public eye. The ultimate irony was that both sides were correct – most UFO sightings *are* resolved, but a few hundred per year are baffling and these have different characteristics (as various top secret research studies found). Governments chose not to talk about these cases because unsolved UFOs were outside their remit, provided there was no clear evidence of a military threat. And by the late 1960s, there was no credible perception of that – leading to the closure in 1969 of the 22-year USAF UFO project. Of course, some UFO researchers widely presumed that such actions were proof positive of just the opposite.

Even as this phoney war was fought, science fiction dominated

OFFICIAL INVESTIGATION OF THESE 'FLYING SAUCERS' WAS PUT INTO THE HANDS OF THE US MILITARY

Hollywood with tales of alien invasion. More importantly, our real technology was reaching for the stars and inspiring a space race generation who saw UFOs as a way to live the dream. UFO literature began to proclaim that the source of these unsolved cases was beings from another world that were surveying Earth! Almost overnight, the word UFO – coined by the USAF to try to demystify emotive terms like 'flying saucer' – became intertwined with the concept of alien spacecraft. In the public perception, they have become interchangeable.

TAKEN AWAY

UFO researchers felt they had solid grounds to support the extraterrestrial hypothesis (or ETH). From 1954, a steady stream of reports described far more than lights in the sky. They included landed craft and humanoid entities observed nearby. The October 1954 encounter over Ranton, Staffordshire – when a British woman and her young children hid under a table as a UFO circled their farmhouse – was typical. They saw figures gazing down who were human yet strangely alien, with blond hair and a Scandinavian appearance. These so called 'Nordics' were seen all around Europe.

However, different cultures were reporting different entities.

THE FATHER GILL CASE
PAPUA NEW GUINEA, 1959

On 26 June 1959, the missionary Rev William Bruce Gill and his staff witnessed a "sparkling object" descend from the clouds toward the mission. The craft was circular, with legs protruding from the bottom, and shone a blue ray of light into the sky. Four figures appeared on an upper deck. After 10 minutes, it rose back into the clouds, though returning an hour later. On 27 June, a craft like the first one appeared, complete with mysterious crew, watched by over a dozen people. Gill and the others waved to the figures, who waved back. When Gill gestured that the craft should land, the figures went back inside; "a bit fed up", Gill went indoors to have his dinner! Attempts to explain the case away as misperceived planets or a lighted boat are unconvincing.

BETTY & BARNEY HILL
NEW HAMPSHIRE, USA, 1961

Just as seminal as Arnold's 'flying saucers', the alleged abduction of mixed-race couple Betty and Barney Hill in 1961 provided a template for all future accounts of alien abduction, and still fascinates ufologists. The pair reported being chased in their car by a UFO, which seemed to get closer and closer, hovering nearby when they stopped to look. Entities were visible within the craft; fleeing in terror, they then experienced an episode of 'missing time'. Both Betty and Barney developed various ailments, and under hypnosis recalled being taken aboard an alien spacecraft and subjected to medical procedures by aliens that prefigured the classic 'greys'.

TEHRAN JET CHASE
IRAN, 1976

In the early hours of 19 September 1976, residents of Tehran reported seeing UFOs, and at around 1.30am two Iranian Air Force F-4 Phantoms were scrambled from the base at Shahrokhi. Radar confirmation were reported and one of the F-4s saw flashing lights on the UFO as it closed; the UFO sped off, apparently releasing a smaller object which headed towards the jet fighter at high speed. The pilot tried to fire a missile, but his weapons panel and radio both malfunctioned at this point. When the aircraft gave up their pursuit and returned to base, a futher cylindrical UFO was observed by ground controllers.

THE LIVINGSTON CASE
EAST LOTHIAN, SCOTLAND, 1979

On the morning of 9 November 1979, forestry worker Bob Taylor took his red setter for a walk in Dechmont Woods, Livingston, East Lothian. Entering a clearing, he saw a strange metal sphere, some 20ft across, which looked "like a spaceship". As he approached, two smaller spheres with spikes "like naval mines" came towards him with a plopping sound and attached themselves to his trousers. Then, there was a hissing sound and an acrid smell – the next thing Mr Taylor knew was when he came to with a headache, unable to walk and with his trousers ripped, while his dog ran around barking furiously. When police later investigated, they found markings on the ground but confessed they were "completely baffled".



BELOW: Alien invaders were a powerful force in pop culture, and helped shape the UFO phenomenon.



In South America, hairy dwarves appeared, like gnomes out of folklore. In the USA, small, grey-skinned creatures with insect eyes were seen. It is often assumed that all UFO entities are these so called 'Greys', but they achieved domination via mass media reporting and movie depictions, plus the widespread adoption of the American-led use of hypnotic regression.

Regression was first used after the 1961 encounter of Betty and Barney Hill in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, when they lost track of time during a UFO encounter. Subsequent dreams of being examined inside the UFO by its occupants were stimulated by hypnosis, and thousands more people who had had close encounters were similarly regressed. Arguments rage over how much hypnosis stimulates fantasy or aids the release of hidden memories. But many identikit 'abductions' have followed, and this has firmly established an image in popular consciousness that Greys are kidnapping unsuspecting witnesses. Moreover, there has long been evidence that what people report materially influences what later witnesses describe, via a sort of collective unconscious fostered by our rapid communication age. UFO research is littered with examples where trends and fashions within reports seem to occur beyond the nature of the evidence itself.

Aided by popular culture responding to these stories with TV shows like *The X-Files*, a new generation of UFO enthusiasts evolved to hound the authorities, demanding 'disclosure'. They were often fed information by shady sources that claimed the top-secret existence of recovered spacecraft and alien bodies in covert locations such as the now-famous Area 51, a technology test bed near Las Vegas.

In UFO research, it is dangerous to take things at face value; there will usually be a mundane explanation for a seemingly strange event, and evidence must be collected without any assumptions.

Indeed, most serious researchers are now persuaded that there is no single answer to the many unsolved UFO cases – conservatively estimated at 10,000 worldwide in modern times. They are probably caused by a range of phenomena on the fringes of current scientific knowledge.

Some appear to be unidentified atmospheric phenomena, such as extreme forms of 'ball lightning' or natural plasmas. Others suspect that some cases originate from undefined areas of human consciousness, and might require deeper understanding of brain function to comprehend. Studies have looked into diverse concepts ranging from fantasy-proneness, sleep paralysis, epi-phenomena like migraine and epilepsy, and even birth trauma memories.

There are even those who see parallels between close encounters and seemingly unrelated paranormal phenomena such as NDEs (Near-Death

Experiences) or crisis apparitions. It may be that all of these things hold part of the answer.

RESEARCHING UFOS TODAY

UFO investigation has moved with the times. Quite recently, there were groups in most major towns and hundreds of magazines publishing the latest cases or theories. However, the rise of the Internet has almost wiped out this community. The net is awash with sites discussing the phenomenon, often heavily biased towards cover-ups and conspiracies.

Some of the old-style groups and magazines have published their data online – ranging from case files to electronic editions of magazines and books. The files of many of the official agencies that have investigated UFOs are also now available to download and can be studied at leisure, with minimal censorship revealing who did what and why.

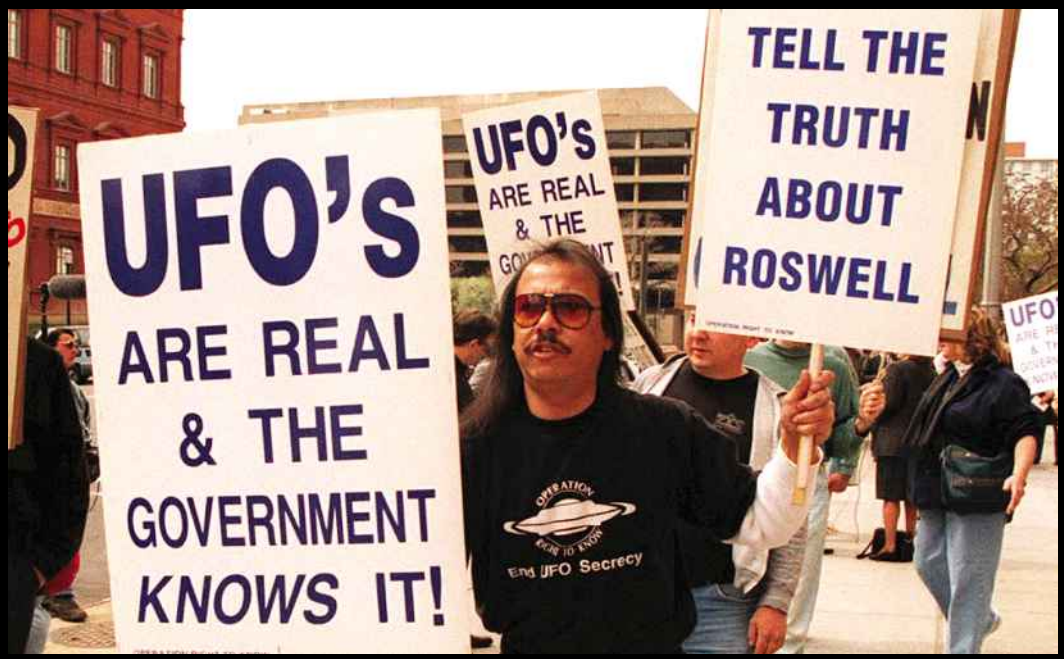
In addition, the raw elements for UFO investigation are now available via your computer: locations can be studied via satellite maps, weather data and witness contacts can be discovered with ease, and potential sources of misperception located and traced online. Correlation with other cases can be scanned via search engines and appeals for further information posted on local media sites. Even hard evidence such as photographs can now be analysed using tools freely available – though hoaxers have similar technology at their disposal.

Not so long ago, researching UFOs involved sitting on a windy hilltop with a camera, waiting in expectation of a sighting or visiting witnesses, notebook and tape recorder in hand, documenting what they claimed to have seen. Often this would be followed by long hours of foot slogging and phone calls tracking down any source that might assist. Today it can be done on the same day as the event without leaving your desk.

Tens of thousands of case files can be analysed, and any theory about UFO origins tested without the support of a research grant. Do UFOs occur more often at certain times of the day? Is there a link between sighting locations and power stations? Are men or women, young or old, more likely to report seeing alien entities? Every one of these questions and many more can be answered with sufficient effort from an individual in possession of a computer.

Where this will take UFO research remains to be seen, but this is the dawn of an exciting new era where power has shifted from military agencies to those with a desire to find the truth. The right questions still need to be identified and old expectations and illusions cast aside, but with a fair wind we might finally see UFO research turn from decades of myth-making into real scientific exploration. And any one of you could be its new Galileo.

MOST RESEARCHERS ARE NOW CONVINCED THERE IS NO SINGLE ANSWER TO MANY UNSOLVED UFO CASES



ABOVE: For many UFO believers, the idea that the world's governments are covering up what they know still persists.



THE RENDLESHAM CASE

SUFFOLK, UK, 1980

Between 25 and 29 December 1980, some very odd things were reported from the RAF/USAF Woodridge base in Suffolk: lights seen above the forest and investigated by a security team led by Deputy Base Commander Lt-Col Charles Halt; an encounter with a landed UFO in the woods, and increased background radiation and indentations in the ground where the UFO had supposedly landed. Such a multi-witness case, with what would be considered reliable witnesses and physical trace evidence, is both unusual and potentially important, but 'Britain's Roswell' has been mired in confusion, controversy and contradictory witness claims ever since it first emerged emerged.

CASH-LANDRUM CASE

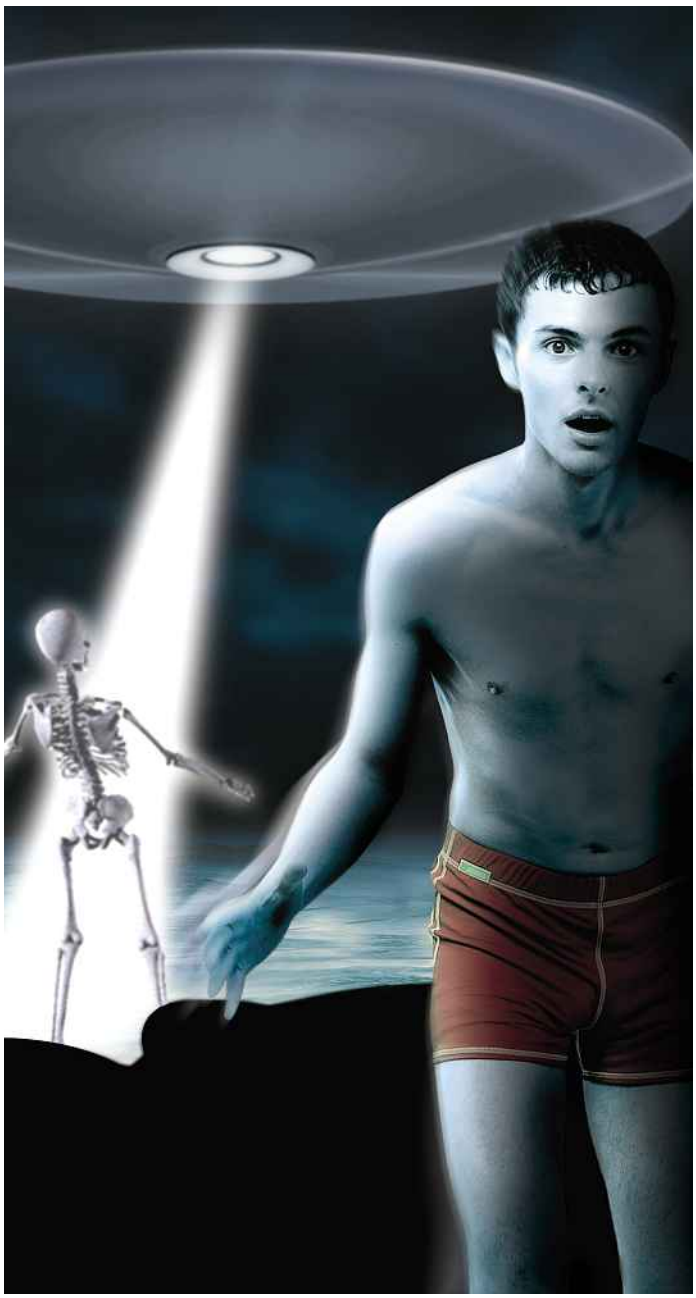
TEXAS, USA, 1980

On the evening of 29 December 1980. Betty Cash, Vickie Landrum and Landrum's grandson were driving home from dinner when at about 9pm they saw a large, diamond-shaped object hovering over the highway, spitting flames and making a whooshing noise. The engine went dead and they watched the thing for a quarter of an hour before it disappeared behind some pine trees pursued by up to 26 army helicopters, which seemed to be 'shepherding' the UFO away. All three had felt a tingling sensation during the sighting and afterwards suffered extremely painful physical effects, losing hair and fingernails. Betty – who had left the car for a closer look at the thing – was hospitalised for a month with painful blisters, severe headaches, intense nausea and extreme heat and light sensitivity.

CASEBOOK

DEATH BY UFO

ALMOST AS SOON AS THE UFO AGE BEGAN, THE PROSPECT OF BENIGN, HIPPY-LIKE SPACE BROTHERS GAVE WAY TO THE DEPRAVITY OF ALIEN THUGS AND PERVERTS. **NIGEL WATSON** TRIES TO UNDERSTAND THIS SHIFT BY REVIEWING SOME OF THE CASES THAT HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO A BELIEF THAT THE UFOS HAVE A SINISTER PURPOSE AND A FATAL NATURE.



From the earliest days of ufology, flying saucers were linked with suspicious illnesses, mysterious deaths and even sinister murders. Today, many believers regard them as responsible, either directly or indirectly, for the assassination of President Kennedy, the murder of celebrities such as Marilyn Monroe and John Lennon, the death of witnesses who have ventured too close to UFOs or ufologists who have got too near to the truth, and with the mass murder of people through AIDS and other diseases.

One of the most famous cases took place in 1948, barely six months after Kenneth Arnold christened the new phenomenon "flying saucers". Alerted by Kentucky State Police on 7 January, the tower operators and other witnesses at Godman Air Force Base, near Fort Knox, saw a high-flying, silvery, conical object, tipped with red. Four incoming P-51 aircraft were asked to investigate this object; one landed at Godman because it was low on fuel – but the others, led by USAF Captain Thomas Mantell, went in pursuit.

Climbing towards the UFO, Mantell reported: "It appears to be a metallic object or possibly the reflection of sun from a metallic object, and it is of tremendous size." Two other pilots could not see the UFO, and since none had any oxygen for high-altitude flight, they refused to fly any higher. Capt. Mantell continued to 22,000ft (6,700m), where his last message said he was taking a closer look. The mangled wreckage of his plane and his dead body were found an hour later.

The official explanation held that Captain Mantell had flown too high and had fainted through lack of oxygen. But what had he been chasing before he lost control? The USAF at first said he was chasing Venus; then, in the

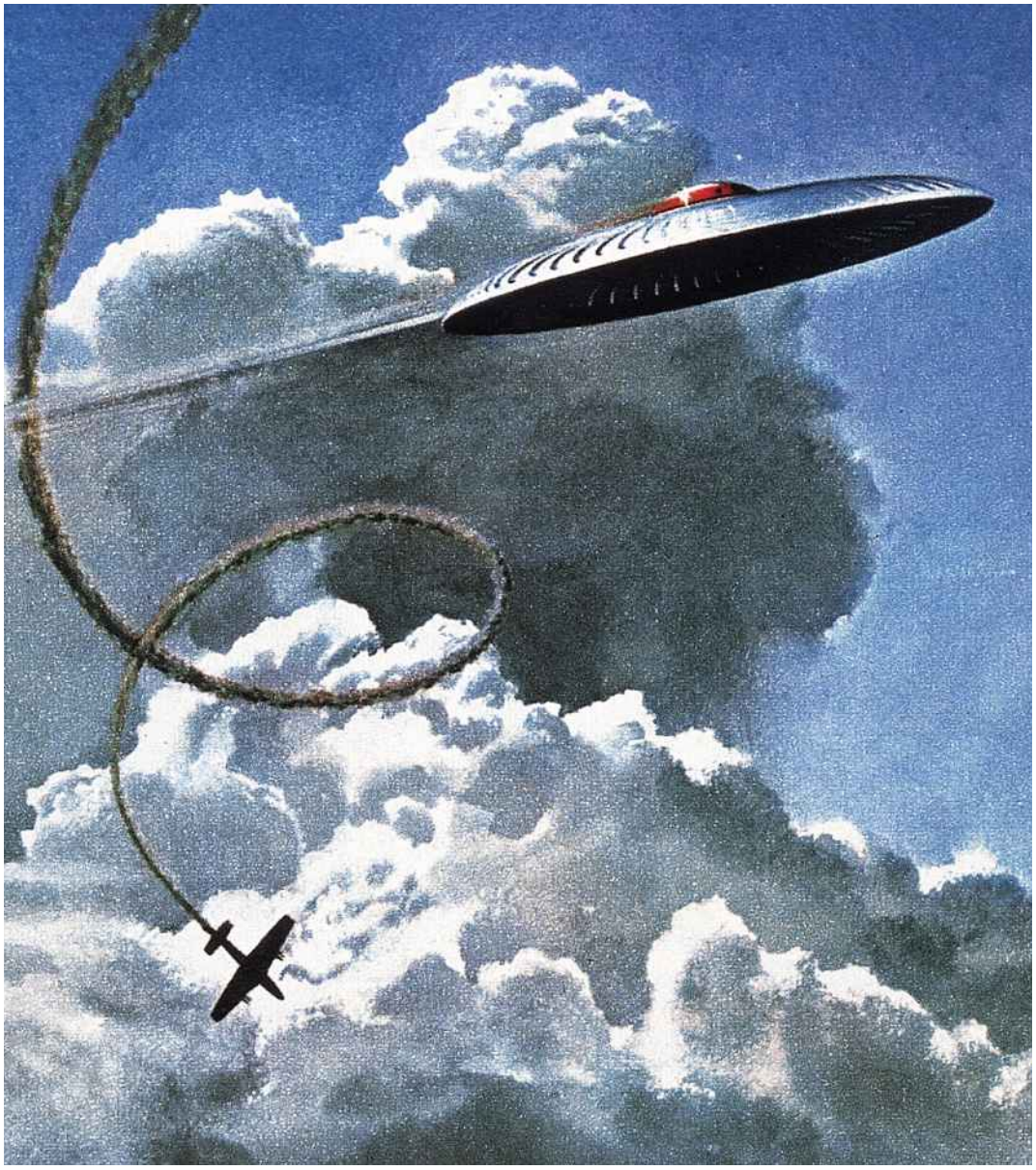
1950s, they claimed the object was a top-secret CIA-sponsored Skyhook balloon launched from Southern Ohio. The true believers, of course, staunchly maintained that Mantell had simply got too close to the electromagnetic field of a friendly UFO; for the less charitable, Mantell had been deliberately shot down.

No attempt was made to substantiate the Skyhook explanation until the late 1960s, when the USAF revealed that one had been launched on that fateful January day from Camp Ripley, Minnesota. Case closed? Or was this part of the cover-up to stop humanity panicking at the thought of murderous UFOs in our skies?

New York UFO researcher Jennifer Stevens discovered to her personal cost the deadly nature of UFO visitations. In February 1968, a teenage boy contacted her saying that he and a friend had seen a glowing fireball rise above the frozen Mohawk River. The friend also thought he saw a white-suited humanoid in the bushes from which the fireball emerged.

The morning after the sighting, the frozen body of a 16-year-old boy was found nearby. The dead boy had left a note with his grandparents at midnight to say he was going for a walk; the police said they were surprised to find him so deeply frozen after such a short period of time. The coroner's verdict was death from exposure, but Stevens was convinced that his death was connected to UFO activity in the area. She noted that the boy's tracks in the snow indicated he had been running at first, then it seemed as if something had dragged him from above. The zipper tag from his jacket was found 25ft from his body. Witnesses said the expression on his face was one of terror.

A few nights later, Stevens saw a glowing red object hovering over the river, and tried to signal to it with her torch. Her telephone regularly malfunctioned and her husband was accosted by a "saturnine-looking" man who told him: "People who look for UFOs should be very careful." Soon after this veiled threat, Stevens's husband died suddenly, and she gave up her UFO activities.



ABOVE: Artist's impression of the 1948 Mantell incident. Did Captain Thomas Mantell die chasing a UFO?

MANTELL REPORTED: "IT APPEARS TO BE A METALLIC OBJECT AND IT IS OF TREMENDOUS SIZE"

The previous year (1967), veteran UFO investigator John Keel, with other witnesses in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, saw a reddish UFO that he later associated with death. That night, a young man's body was found on a nearby highway. Although it had been freezing, the boy had thrown off his heavy overcoat and

run some distance before falling dead. Two autopsies failed to find any indication that he had been attacked or hit by a vehicle. Keel believed this death and many like it are UFO-related, acknowledging that there is insufficient data to make a positive and direct correlation.

BRAZILIAN BURNS

Another category of UFO encounters of the fatal kind concerns witnesses who are zapped by some kind of alien death ray. On 13 August 1967, in Brazil, Inacio de Souza and his wife were returning home when they saw three men wearing yellow skin-tight clothes. Behind them was a strange flying object shaped like an inverted wash-basin. As these strangers suddenly moved towards them, de Souza, on a reflex, shot at the nearest man with his rifle. The shot seemed to have no effect, but a green light stabbed at de Souza's head from the UFO. De Souza fell unconscious and for the next few days he suffered numbness, tingling and tremors in his head and hands. A doctor found circular burn marks on his skin, but thought de Souza had merely suffered a vivid hallucination. A few days later, he was diagnosed as having leukæmia and given 60 days to live. He seemed to be reduced to skin and bone by the disease very quickly and he died in great pain on 11 October 1967. While some ufologists think the encounter and de Souza's illness are simply a tragic coincidence, others prefer to believe that the green light from the UFO was an intense beam of deadly radiation.

Without doubt, the grisliest death by UFO happened to Joao Prestes Filho in Aracariguama, Brazil. Returning to his home on the evening of 5 March 1946, Prestes was frightened by a beam of light that shot towards his head, and he ran in panic to his sister Maria's house. At first, he showed no sign of being burnt, but then events took a horrifying turn. One witness said: "Prestes's flesh began to come away from the bones, falling in lumps from his jaws, his chest, his arms, his hands, his fingers, from the lower parts of his legs, and from his feet and toes. Some scraps of flesh remained hanging to the tendons... Soon every part of Prestes had reached a state of deterioration beyond imagination. His teeth and his bones now stood revealed, utterly bare of flesh."

Although his body was, quite literally, falling apart, Prestes did not seem to feel any pain. After his nose and ears fell to the ground, he was dispatched to hospital, but died before he got there. Adding to the horror, it was claimed that, right up to the end, he made desperate guttural sounds. Strange lights had been seen in the area before, but there seemed to be no direct link between aliens or UFOs and this disintegrating beam of light. Ball lightning was also considered as an explanation, but his death certificate simply states that he died from "generalised burns".



LEFT: The death-ray may be a staple of pulp science fiction – as in this classic example from *Fantastic Adventures* – but in certain cases from Brazil it seems to have become a horrifying reality.

"PRESTES'S FLESH BEGAN TO COME AWAY FROM HIS BONES, FALLING IN LUMPS FROM HIS BODY"

Brazil seems quite the place for deadly light beams, as on 23 April 1976, Luis Fernandes Barroso became another victim of one. It shot from a hovering UFO, and after it hit him his mind went blank. He began suffering from sickness, diarrhœa, nausea and headaches; his health deteriorated rapidly and within six months he had regressed to an infant-like state. Doctors diagnosed an untreatable brain lesion, which left him living in a twilight existence until his demise in 1993.

In 1979, 66 US Special Forces soldiers were apparently killed in a gunfight with alien forces while trying to rescue human workers in an underground alien base near Dulce, New Mexico. This extraordinary claim was posted on the Internet on 29 December 1987 by John Lear in a 4,000-word text now referred to as the 'Lear Document' and inspired by the conspiratorial ramblings of Paul Bennewitz.

Lear claimed that the trapped workers "had become aware of what was really going on" – that aliens were implanting devices in the brains of abductees, impregnating female abductees, conducting genetic experiments, and worse, they were terminating "some people so that they could function as living sources for biological material and substances," and assassinating "individuals who represent a threat to the continuation of their

THE MAURY ISLAND MYSTERY

On a sunny June afternoon in 1947, Harold A Dahl, his 15-year-old son Charles and two crewmen were in their tugboat off Maury Island, Washington, in the inland arm of Puget Sound between Seattle and Tacoma. They were cruising for logs to sell when they saw six large doughnut-shaped objects high above them, "shining" gold and silver. One seemed to be wobbling, like a craft in trouble. Thinking this 'balloon' was about to crash, they made for the shore but continued watching. At about 500 ft (150m), the strange craft (as they now believed it to be) released a large number of thin, white, metallic strips. Then followed a rain of heavier, black lumps of what looked like lava. They were hot and created steam where they hit the water. As the men ran for cover, a piece struck the boy's arm, burning it, and their dog was killed.

Dahl estimated that about 20 tons of debris fell – or had been dumped – before the six craft flew away westwards. Two days later, on 23 June – the day before Kenneth Arnold's sighting of nine UFOs made the term 'flying saucer' famous – Dahl's boss Fred Lee Crisman visited the scene to see the masses of debris for himself. When a UFO matching those described by Dahl appeared, he



LEFT: Legendary science fiction magazine publisher Ray Palmer.

grabbed samples of the debris and fled.

The morning after the 'hot rain' incident, Dahl encountered a classic Man in Black. At first, Dahl thought the dark-suited, tight-lipped man driving a black sedan was seeking to buy his salvaged timber, but, after they drove to a diner in Tacoma, it was clear that the MIB knew all about their strange encounter. Their meeting took a sinister turn when the MIB warned Dahl to keep silent. He had, said the stranger, seen things he should not have seen.

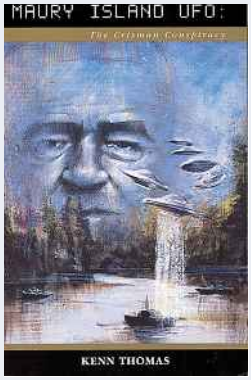
By the time Crisman contacted science-fiction magazine publisher, Ray Palmer about the case, Palmer was already in touch with Kenneth Arnold. Arnold had been searching for the wreckage of a military transport that had crashed in the Cascade Mountains with the loss of 32 Marines when he made his own famous sighting; and, as Mt Rainier overlooked Tacoma, where he also lived, Palmer asked him to investigate.

Puzzled by Dahl's encounters, Arnold asked, in turn, for help from Air Force Intelligence, and on 31 July 1947 Captain William Davidson and Lieutenant Frank M Brown were dispatched to Tacoma from Hamilton Air Force Base. They found no evidence that the boat had been subjected to a hail of molten metal, and they thought the sample fragments – which they took away in a Kellogg's cornflake box – were no more than slag from a smelting plant. The officers had to fly back to Hamilton, leaving no time to visit Maury Island. On the way, the port engine of their B-25 aircraft erupted in flames; two crewmen parachuted to safety but Davidson and Brown remained onboard and died when the aircraft crashed into a hillside.

Was this series of deaths in the vicinity of the first major UFO flap a tragic coincidence, or were darker forces at work? It is a matter of record that a mystery phone caller told the *Tacoma Times* all about Kenneth Arnold's meeting with the USAF investigators, implying that Arnold had been bugged. On 1 August 1947, the same (or another) mystery caller told a local newspaper that wreckage would be found on Mount Rainier of a plane that was shot down because the people onboard had information that "we" didn't want to be released. Wreckage was indeed found, but no bodies were discovered.

No one knows what became of the photographs Harold Dahl took of his UFOs or the strange debris recovered from Maury Island. Samples given to Palmer were stolen from his office; Arnold's were taken away by a 'military intelligence officer'; and those confiscated by the Hamilton investigators vanished in the fateful B-25 crash. To complicate matters, Dahl's son Charles was found hundreds of miles away with no memory of how or why he was so far from home; then Dahl and Crisman 'disappeared' from Tacoma, not to surface for years. To many, this all smacked of a military-Intelligence cover-up.

It gets worse! When, in October 1968, District Attorney Jim Garrison brought Clay Shaw to trial for his suspected involvement in the assassination of John F Kennedy, a Fred Lee Crisman was subpœnaed to attend. Garrison believed Shaw and Crisman were long-standing CIA employees involved in a range of dubious activities including the JFK killing. It was revealed that, between 1947 and 1968, Crisman had an unusual range of occupations: under the name Jon Gold he was a right-wing talk show host for KAYE radio in Puyallup, Washington; he was president of a car lot and several companies that had no offices; he worked in a government project to aid gypsies; he was a bishop in the CIA-linked Universal Life Church; and he gained employment with Boeing as an industrial psychologist.



The day after he was subpœnaed, he was arrested for carrying a concealed weapon and driving while drink; and shortly before he died on 10 December 1975 he was linked, by the FBI, to stock fraud.

There is another, more tenuous, link between Shaw and UFOs. In 1945, the German rocket scientist Wernher von Braun surrendered to Major Clay Shaw and, under Project Paperclip (designed to secure advanced Nazi technology), was brought to the USA. Some believe that the 'flying saucers' seen over Maury Island were creations of this alliance; and that this conspiracy went on to engineer the death of JFK, fake Moon landings and create bogus aliens.



activity."

To back up these claims, a witness came forward to say that he was one of the survivors of the 'firefight' at Dulce. Philip Schneider said he was involved in extending the underground military base at Dulce when the alien base was accidentally revealed. He managed to shoot two aliens before he was shot in the chest by an alien weapon. This emanated from a box attached to the chest of an alien and it gave him a dose of cancer-inducing cobalt radiation. Schneider was the only "talking survivor"; two others were under close guard. It was his contention that the Eisenhower administration signed a treaty with aliens in 1954, which gave them permission to abduct and implant US citizens. In return, the US government has been given new technologies that enable them to enslave and dupe the population. Thousands of 'black helicopters' and stealth aircraft are used to monitor our activities; and AIDS was invented in 1972 through the genetic engineering of human, animal and alien excretions.

In a similar manner, Milton William Cooper used the Lear Document to assert that aliens and a secret government are planning to establish colonies on other planets, and that they have introduced "deadly microbes to control or slow the growth of the Earth's population. AIDS is only ONE result of these plans."

TENTACLES OF CONSPIRACY

As Philip Schneider's stories became increasingly outlandish, he feared for his safety; "government vans" followed him and several attempts were made to run his car off the road. His worst fears were confirmed in January 1996. A friend broke into his apartment in Willsonville, Oregon, where his dead body had been rotting for several days. At

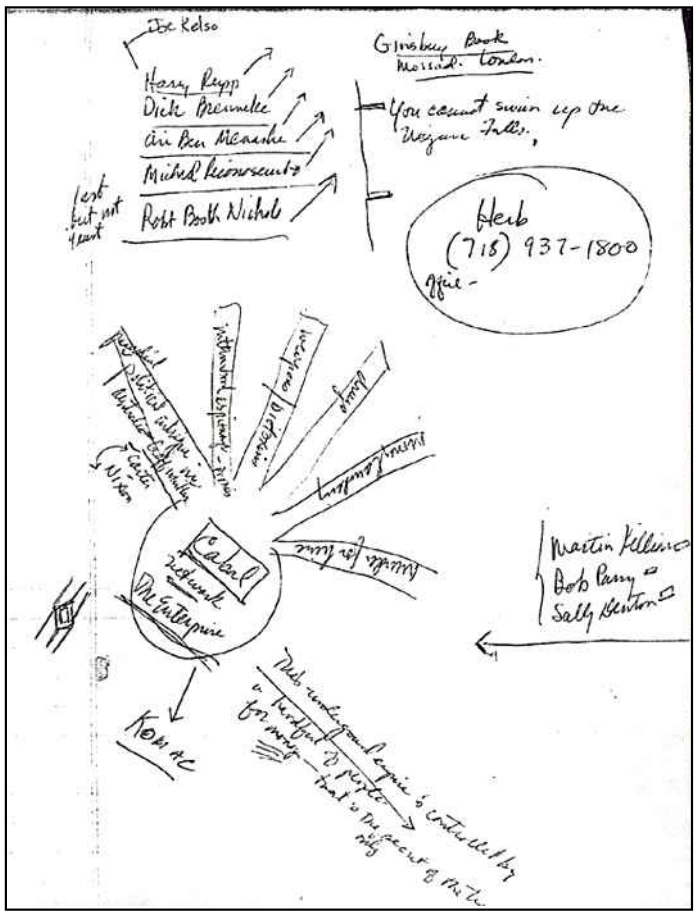
first it was thought he had died from a stroke, then an autopsy found that rubber tubing had been wrapped and knotted around his neck.

The official verdict was suicide, but his former wife, Cynthia, and several friends cannot accept this. He was found with his legs under his bed and his head resting on the seat of his wheelchair – an unusual position for a suicide – and there was blood nearby that did not seem to be Schneider's. His lecture material and UFO writings were missing from the apartment, yet valuables had gone untouched. Prior to his death, he had been seen with an unknown blonde woman and, not long after learning about this, Cynthia noticed a blonde woman sitting in a car with a pair of binoculars. She drove off before Cynthia could confront her.

Was Schneider murdered to cover up government and alien secrets? Or is this a simple case of suicide by a man whom Cynthia admitted was "part genius and part paranoid schizophrenic"? The latter is more probable, but it is a fact that a disturbingly large number of ufologists have died suddenly or committed suicide.

An earlier, similar case involved Joseph Daniel (Danny) Casolaro. His interest in conspiracy theories began when he discovered that a law enforcement computer program called Promis was stolen and used by the CIA to monitor foreign governments. He soon learned about Area 51 and the secret testing of sophisticated weapons and 'flying saucer' technology. He concluded that there was a huge central conspiracy that had tentacles reaching into all areas of national and international affairs; he called it the Octopus.

Casolaro might have been on to something but, on 10 August 1991, he was found in a West Virginia hotel room with his wrists slashed. As with the Schneider case, notes and



DANNY CASOLARO WAS FOUND IN A WEST VIRGINIA HOTEL ROOM, HIS WRISTS SLASHED





LEFT: Danny Casolaro believed he had uncovered a global conspiracy he called 'The Octopus', as his notebooks show. **BELOW:** Casolaro (left) and Zigmund Jan Adamski (right) both died in strange circumstances.

papers were missing and, just before his death, he had received threatening phone calls. Many thought he was murdered, as his wrists had been cut too deeply and savagely for a suicide... and conspiracy-mongers found it significant that he was about to meet someone with 'proof' of the existence of the Octopus.

When considering death by UFOs, we cannot ignore the case of Zigmund Jan Adamski, who left his home in Wakefield, Yorkshire, on 6 June 1980, never to return. Five days later, his body was found on a coal tip at Todmorden. He had burn marks on his shoulder, neck and head, and had been dumped in a highly visible location in daylight. The inquest recorded an open verdict, but many think he was murdered by aliens. Jenny Randles has written extensively about this case, but she is reticent to make such bold claims. The main link with ufology is that the victim had the same surname as the famous 1950s contactee George Adamski.

No one has yet produced a definitive survey of UFO-related deaths in the way, say, that Laurence Kusche systematically examined the claims about disappearing ships and planes in the Bermuda Triangle, nor has anyone tabulated the impression that an unusual number of ufologists have been struck down with cancer or other fatal illnesses. Over the years, stories about death by UFO have become more tenuous, convoluted and bizarre with no easy way to determine whether they are part of a huge conspiracy or general ufological paranoia. Whatever the reason, these grim stories are both potent and persistent, and no doubt some ufologists will continue to promote them.



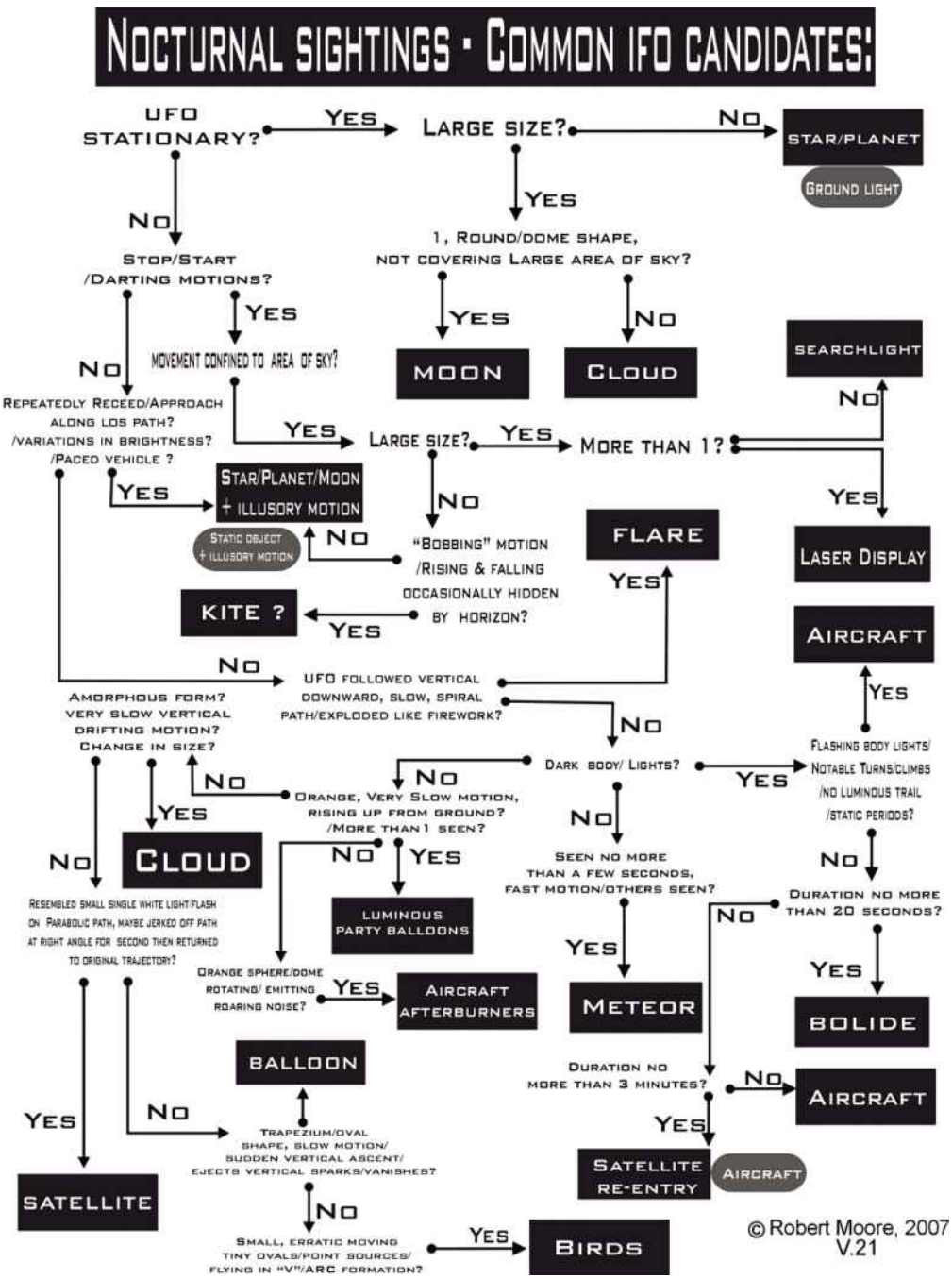
Investigating... UFOs

Co-author of *UFO Study* **ROBERT MOORE** explains the methods and some of the pitfalls of getting involved in the search for an explanation to those strange lights in the sky.

I became interested in UFOs during the late 1970s through various books – written in an uncritical and florid manner – which gave the impression that every light in the sky was a spaceship and flying saucers lurked behind every cloud! Fortunately, I then discovered the works of more critical writers such as Jenny Randles and, most significantly of all, Alan Hendry's *UFO Handbook*, which summarises his investigation of over 1,000 American UFO reports and describes how various Identified Flying Objects (IFOs) such as stars, planets, meteors, aircraft, satellites and balloons were being misreported as UFOs.

While reading UFO literature provides an introduction to important cases, issues and ufological concerns, most books sadly never provide the basic knowledge required to become a *good* UFO investigator. In recognition of this problem, Jenny Randles and I have produced a free PDF book entitled *UFO Study*, available on www.nufonews.co.uk. This contains most of the basic resources required for UFO investigation and elaborates on the topics mentioned here.

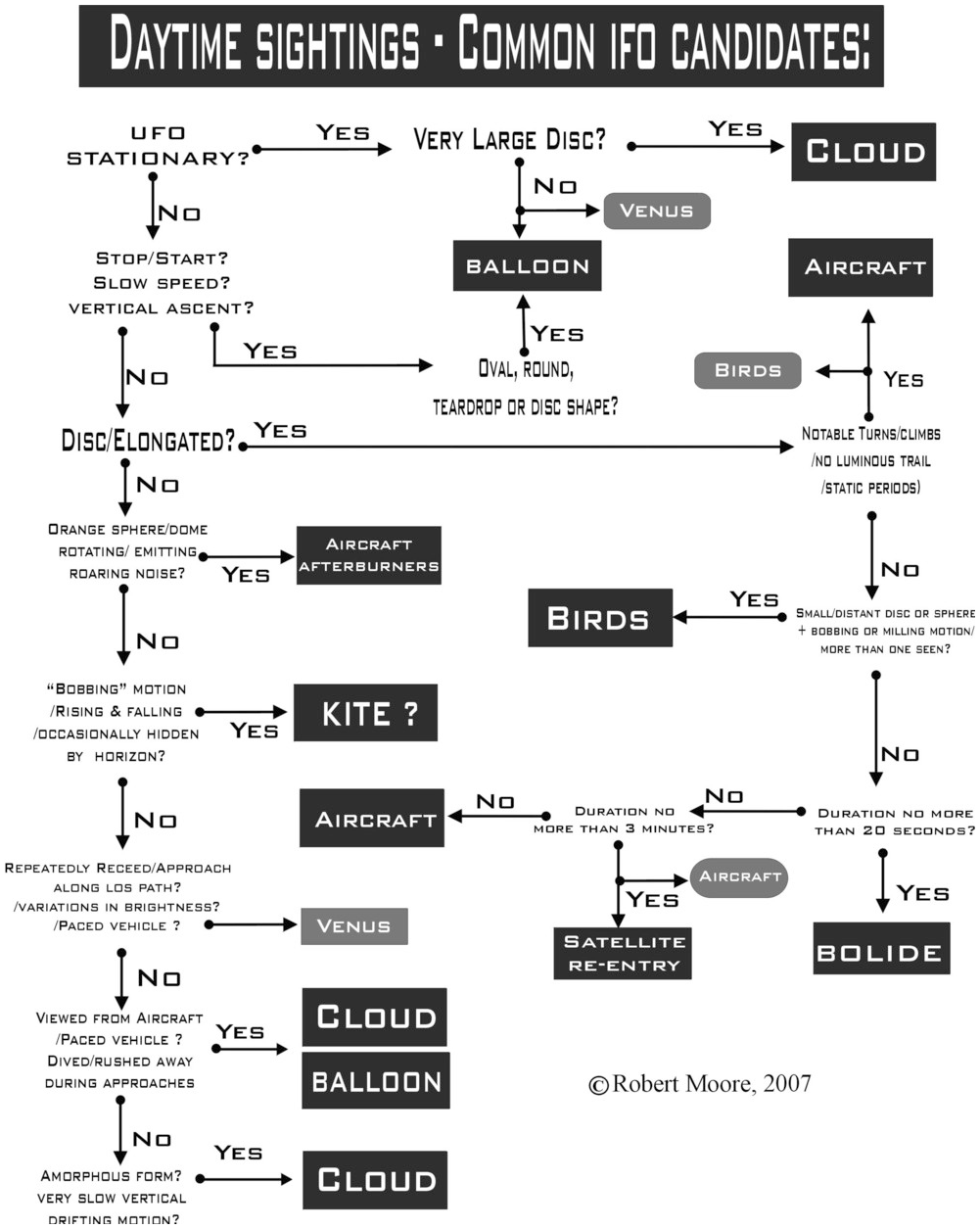
Learning the basic attributes of IFOs – not only *which* objects get mistaken for "UFOs" but also *why* – is an important first step for any ufological "acolyte", and *the* key to successfully investigating UFO reports. But IFO recognition isn't the only skill required. You will need to learn at least the rudiments of document research, report writing, map reading



and interviewing techniques. A good prospective investigator will also have done some basic background reading in astronomy, aviation, meteorology and psychology. A formidable list to be sure, but these skills will help you become a *good* UFO investigator; who wants to be a *bad* one?

Anyone starting out needs to decide whether to join an existing UFO group, start a new one or work as an independent researcher. While joining national and regional bodies theoretically provides a pool of experience and technical contacts, it also entails obligations and demands on your time, sometimes in tasks unrelated to UFO investigation. Group-based ufology is also associated with various subject-related rivalries. These negative factors result in many UFO researchers choosing to work independently – an easier option today than in the past, thanks to the Internet. Most importantly, you should conduct as much background reading as possible and adopt a critical – but not dismissive – approach towards each report you encounter.

Basic UFO investigation only requires everyday items such as stationery, a magnetic compass, a scientific calculator and an accurate waterproof timepiece with stopwatch capabilities. Other useful items include an interview checklist or UFO report form (see Appendices A–C of *UFO Study*), a good colour chart, 1:25,000 and 1:50,000 scale maps of the sighting area, a digital camera and a voice-recording device (make sure you get the witness's permission before photographing or recording them). These can be supplemented by other items, such as a handheld GPS, and a Perspex sheet and marker pen for the witness to hold at arm's length and draw the UFO's observed size. Experienced investigators would also include various hand tools, sampling bags and basic protective equipment for physical trace recovery work. Essential "back office" items include a computer with an Internet connection, a good astronomy computer program and an aircraft air corridor map.



The act of UFO investigation involves finding reports, then documenting said reports accurately and with sufficient technical detail to facilitate an objective assessment. If the case is complex or can't be explained through matching the sighting's described attributes to likely IFO candidates, a more complete investigation will be required. This often involves writing letters or emails to relevant agencies requesting data such as aircraft movements, or even making a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to a relevant government body. Unfortunately, some of this can be quite expensive, with most agencies now asking for substantial search fees to provide such data. Requesting specialist help such as photographic or soil trace analysis can be even more expensive. The key to avoiding this is finding qualified individuals interested in ufology willing to waive some or all of these costs.

So why should you do such a demanding, unpaid job in the first place? UFO investigators are looking for cases that advance our understanding of UFOs. This may involve something as prosaic as explaining an IFO event, which will then help solve other similar cases. But most UFO investigators seek cases that, despite undergoing thorough investigation, remain unexplained. A true understanding of ufology will only result from such events, and only well investigated reports will allow us to determine whether these unexplained cases involve extraterrestrial visitors, something else equally unusual, or more down-to-earth phenomena. And it could be *you* who makes such a breakthrough!

DIRECTORY

SUGGESTED READING

Flying Saucers Have Landed
George Adamski & Desmond Leslie (T Werner Laurie, 1953)

UFOs and Alien Contact: Two Centuries of Mystery
Robert E Bartholomew & George S Howard (Prometheus Books, 1998)

UFO: The Complete Sightings Catalogue
Peter Brookesmith (Blandford, 1995)

Encounter at Indian Head: The Betty and Barney Hill Abduction Revsited
Peter Brookesmith & Karl Pflock, eds (Anomalist Books, 2001)

The UFO Encyclopedia (3 vols)
Jerome Clark (Omnigraphics, 1990–96)

Earth Lights
Paul Devereux (Turnstone Press, 1982)

From Other Worlds
Hilary Evans (Carlton, 1998)

Visions, Apparitions, Alien Vistors
Hilary Evans (Aquarian, 1984)

Gods, Spirits, Cosmic Guardians
Hilary Evans (Aquarian, 1987)

UFOs 1947-1997
Hilary Evans & Dennis Stacey, eds (John Brown Publishing, 1997)

The Field Guide to Extraterrestrials
Patrick Huyghe (Avon Books, 1996)

The Hynek UFO Report
J Allen Hynek (Dell, 1977)

Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Skies
Carl Gustav Jung (Harcourt, Brace, 1959)

The Mothman Prophecies
John A Keel (Saturday Review Press, 1975)

Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens
John Mack (Pocket Books, 1995)

Men in Black: Investigating the Truth Behind the Phenomenon
Jenny Randles (Piatkus Books, 1997)

The Mammoth Encyclopedia of Extraterrestrial Encounters
Ronald D Story (Constable and Robinson, 2002)

ORGANISATIONS AND GROUPS

The J Allen Hynek Center for UFO Studies (CUFOS)
Founded in 1973, CUFOS publishes the quarterly *International UFO Reporter*, the annual, refereed, *Journal of UFO Studies*, and the occasional monograph and book. Friends of CUFOS, known as Associates, support CUFOS with their subscriptions to *IUFOR*.
2457 W Peterson, Chicago, IL 60659, USA
Web: www.cufos.org/
Tel: +001 773 271 3611
Email: Infocenter@cufos.org

Mutual UFO Network (MUFON)
Established in 1969, MUFON now has more than 3,000 members, field investigators and research consultants worldwide. It publishes the monthly *MUFON UFO Journal* (Dwight Connelly, ed.) and an annual collection of *Symposium Proceedings*. Membership dues of $45 per year ($55 outside US) include a subscription to the *Journal*.
155 E. Boardwalk Dr. Suite 300, Fort Collins, CO 80525, USA
Web: www.mufon.com/
Tel: +001 888 817 2220
Email: hq@mufon.com

Fund for UFO Research (FUFOR)
Established as a non-profit corporation in 1979, FUFOR is not a membership organisation *per se*. Instead, it raises and disperses research funds for proposals approved by a national board. Each year, the Fund also awards a cash prize, the Donald E Keyhoe Journalism Award, to both the print and electronic media journalist whose work about UFOs is judged the best among those submitted.
The Fund for UFO Research, Inc. PO Box 7501, Alexandria, VA 22307, USA
Web: www.fufor.com/
Email: fufor@fufor.com

British UFO Research Association (BUFORA)
BUFORA is a scientifically-oriented, organisation dedicated to the investigation and research of the UFO enigma and related anomalies. To gain greater understanding of the complexities of the UFO question, BUFORA employs the skills and services of field investigators, researchers and consultants, many working directly with witnesses to collate the necessary data.
BUFORA, c/o 41 Castlebar Road, Ealing, London W5 2DJ, UK
Web: www.bufora.org.uk
Tel: 020 8997 3496 (evenings & weekends only)
Email: enquiries@bufora.org.uk

UK-UFO.org Ufologyinuk Community Forum & Email List
The only mail-list focused exclusively on UK ufology. Contributors include some of the most active researchers and best-known authors from the UK.
Web: www.uk-ufo.org/ufologyinuk/

Archives For UFO Research
Founded in Sweden in 1973, the AFU archives is one of the most complete repositories for UFO data & UFO folklore with a massive collection of research materials
PO Box 11027, S-600 11 Norrkoping, Sweden
Web: www.afu.info/
Tel: +0046 703 68 32 21
Email: afu@ufo.se

WEBSITES

Project 1947
Resource on the birth of ufology
www.project1947.com/

UFOPop
Flying saucers in Popular Culture
www.ufopop.org/

UFO Updates Newsgroup
Subscription newsgroup
www.virtuallystrange.net/ufo/updates/

UK-UFO
UFO matters within the UK
www.uk-ufo.org/

UFO Mystic
Ufological/strangeness blog by Nick Redfern and Greg Bishop
www.ufomystic.com

Intruders Foundation
Bud Hopkins' Abduction Research Organisation
www.intrudersfoundation.org/

National UFO Reporting Center (USA)
Up-to-date database of UFO reports
www.nuforc.org/

National UFO Center: Filer's Research Institute
George Filer's weekly round-up of UFO reports from around the world
www.nationalufocenter.com/

UFO Evidence
Useful resource for news, articles, research and photos
www.ufoevidence.org/

www.nikon.co.uk/wheretobuy
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The Fortean Times guide to...
PSYCHIC POWERS

THERE are five accepted human senses: sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell. But could there be others beyond those – mental abilities that look like superpowers? Some people have always claimed a 'sixth sense', an uncanny ability to know what's about to happen or knowledge of an event halfway across the world. Then there are those who claim to be able to move objects without touching them, bend metal, read with their eyes covered up or even levitate.

How has science tried to investigate these seemingly impossible talents? Are certain types of people – such as identical twins – more likely to display them? And is there any evidence that these incredible powers are real?





An introduction to...

PSYCHIC POWERS



OUR EXPERT GUY LYON PLAYFAIR

From ancient myth and legend to the era of scientific research, people have told tales of prophecy, thought transference and other seemingly inexplicable abilities. Is there anything there?



What do we mean by psi, psychic or paranormal (that is, not yet scientifically explained) powers? Are they real? Can we explain them?

Only the first question has an easy answer. There are four abilities that come under the heading of extra-sensory perception (ESP), a term now generally replaced by the Greek letter *psi*. They are telepathy, or direct connection between minds; clairvoyance – 'clear seeing' or seeing by other than normal vision; precognition – obtaining information about something yet to happen, and psychokinesis (PK), popularly known as mind over matter, as for example bending spoons without the use of physical force of any known kind.

Reliably documented reports of the successful use of psi power date at least from 550 BC, when King Crœsus of Lydia decided to put the clairvoyant powers of various oracles, including the original one at Delphi, to the test. They were to tell him, via his messengers, what he would be doing at a certain time in the future. According to the historian Herodotus, the Delphi priestess scored a direct hit, describing the king doing something rather unusual – boiling a lamb and a tortoise in a brass cauldron. This was exactly what Crœsus was doing, and he was so impressed that he sent the priestess a

LEFT: Psi power was often relied on in the past, as with the predictions of the oracle of Delphi.

huge pile of gold bricks.

In biblical times, reports of the feats of dreamers, soothsayers, prophets and "consulters of familiar spirits", as Moses called what we now call mediums, were so common that he declared all such practitioners to be "an abomination unto the Lord" (Deuteronomy 18:12). Yet psi powers have continued to be practised to the present day in almost all corners of the world and show no sign of going away. Australian Aborigines, Native Americans and several African tribes accept them as a normal part of everyday life. In supposedly more enlightened societies such as ours, they tend to be readily accepted by some and roundly condemned by others. Which brings us to question two – are they real?

This was what the founders of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) wanted to know when they set out in 1882 to compile a huge database consisting of statements from members of the public on their psi experiences. They also began to do experiments in what was known as thought transference, which they renamed telepathy, from the Greek *tele* (distant) and *patheia* (feeling), and they studied several mediums such as the American Leonora Piper, who produced accurate information from the deceased; the Neapolitan Eusapia Palladino whose dramatic PK powers made tables leap into the air, and most baffling and controversial of all, the Frenchwoman Marthe Béraud, who was photographed producing that elusive substance known as ectoplasm.

The pioneers of psi research soon concluded that despite abundant evidence for fraud and deception, some psi powers were indeed real, and the evidence in their favour has piled up ever since. Highlights include:

● In 1928, the American novelist Upton Sinclair began a long series of experiments in his home with his wife Craig. He would go out of the room, draw something and attempt to transmit the image to her. She would then sketch what she was seeing clairvoyantly, getting it right or at least partially right again and again. Out of a total of 290 tests her hit rate was an impressive 76 per cent.



PSI POWERS HAVE BEEN PRACTISED TO THE PRESENT DAY IN ALL CORNERS OF THE WORLD

● In 1939, the Arctic explorer Sir Hubert Wilkins was asked to search for a Soviet aircraft that had vanished after flying over the North Pole. High sunspot activity in that year meant that radio communication would be unreliable, so he accepted the suggestion from a fellow member of his New York club, a writer named Harold Sherman, that they should try to stay in touch by telepathy or clairvoyance. So began one of the most thoroughly documented and witnessed experiments of its kind on record. Sherman would simply 'tune in' at an agreed time every evening, write down what he saw or sensed, and hand a copy of his notes to an independent



TOP: American author Upton Sinclair carried out a series of experiments with clairvoyant sketching in the 1920s.
ABOVE: French physical medium Marthe Béraud producing supposed 'ectoplasm'; note the face clearly visible within it.

TOP 8 PSYCHIC STARS



ABOVE: Arctic explorer Sir Hubert Wilkins remained in apparent telepathic contact with Howard Shernan for five months.

URI GELLER

Probably the most famous self-proclaimed psychic in the world, Uri Geller shot to fame in the 1970s, appearing on television bending spoons and other metal objects by what seemed to be psychokinesis. It would become his trademark, and his abilities have been tested in laboratory situations many times; results, though, have been mixed, and sceptics claim that apparent successes have been due to insufficiently rigorous testing. Geller claims to have performed other types of psychokinetic feats, such as stopping Big Ben and making Scotland miss a penalty against England in a football match. He also has a career as a dowser for oil and mineral companies.

DANIEL DUNGLAS HOME

A Scottish medium and magician who became the toast of late 19th-century society, performing astonishing feats in front of Europe's celebrities, from poets to royals; Home's repertoire consisted of most of the staples of physical



witness. The experiment lasted five months, Sherman repeatedly describing precisely what Wilkins was doing, like a modern-day Delphic oracle, even when it was something as unlikely for an Arctic explorer as attending a ball in evening dress. His success rate over more than 300 impressions was close to 100 per cent.

In 1971, a young Englishman named Malcolm Bessent took part in a series of experiments at the Maimonides Medical Center in New York in which he would go to sleep in their special dream laboratory, while an experimenter sat up all night and tried to project a picture into his dreams. When his rapid eye movements (REM) showed that he was having a dream, an assistant would wake him up and ask him to describe it for the tape recorder. Of the 16 dreams he described, 14 were judged as successes, some being direct hits, and by way of a bonus Bessent demonstrated not only telepathy but also precognition, as when he stated "I just have a feeling that the next target material will be about birds", as indeed it was, although the target was only selected after he had woken up in the morning.

In 1998, the ever-controversial Uri Geller surprised the Tyrrell pit staff at the British Grand Prix when, after he had done some of his traditional spoon and key-bending, a mechanic handed him an 18mm chrome vanadium spanner and asked if he could bend that as well. It took longer than usual, but Uri did it in front of a dozen witnesses including driver Ricardo Rosset. (A later test on a similar spanner bent in a strain gauge showed that a force equivalent to more than half a ton was needed to produce a similar bend.) Although the incident was reported by two motoring magazines, it attracted surprisingly little attention elsewhere.

Further evidence of a less spectacular kind has emerged from controlled experiments in all four of the main psi powers. The best known are those carried out from around 1930 at Duke University in Durham, NC in the laboratory set up by biologists JB Rhine and his wife Louisa, on the initiative of psychology professor William McDougall, who had witnessed some of the Sinclairs' experiments and had himself tested Craig. So psychical research became transformed into parapsychology, its professional body, the Parapsychological Association eventually being accepted by the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

For much of his early work, Rhine used the well-known Zener cards, packs of 25 consisting of five each of a square, a cross, a circle, a star and three wavy lines. The experimenter would look at the card and the subjects would write down what they thought it was. If they were just guessing, they would get five right on average, as many of them did. Yet it soon became clear that more than guesswork was sometimes involved – one star performer, Hubert Pearce, could even get all 25 right on occasions.

While all this was going on, Louisa was carrying on the work of the SPR founders by



ABOVE: Uri Geller continues to polarise opinion among psi-believers and sceptics; he continues to bend spoons, too.

collecting reports of spontaneous experiences from members of the public. She published many of these in her popular books, and the original reports now fill several boxes in what is now the Rhine Research Center in Durham, headed by the Rhines' daughter Sally Rhine Feather.

There was one problem with Zener card guessing – it quickly became really boring. So in the 1970s, three researchers, Adrian Parker in Edinburgh and William Braud and Charles Honorton in the USA, hit on the idea of using a more psi-friendly setting, known as the Ganzfeld (German for 'whole field') in which subjects would lie down, their eyes covered with halved ping-pong balls, and listen through earphones to the hiss of 'white noise' from a blank tape. The experimenter then looked at a picture or film clip for half an hour, in another room, and tried to transmit it to the subjects, who would describe their impressions, if any. An independent judge then matched these to each of four pictures, not knowing which was the one viewed.

AT SILVERSTONE, GELLER BENT A CHROME VANADIUM SPANNER IN FRONT OF A DOZEN WITNESSES

The Ganzfeld procedure was inspired by the dream work at Maimonides, which had become very tiring for all concerned since an experiment took all night, whereas Ganzfeld tests could be done in less than an hour. These have now been replicated in several laboratories, notably by the department of Edinburgh University funded by the bequest of the writer Arthur Koestler, who left his entire estate to finance the study of parapsychology. Results to date are hard to ignore. Of more than 2,500 published tests, the overall hit rate (picking the right target out of four) was 34 per cent. The probability of this being due to chance alone is something like one in a million billion.

Such statistics, you might think, are conclusive. Parapsychologist Dean Radin has even conducted a 'meta-analysis' – an analysis of every published psi experiment of any kind and come up with an unimaginably huge number of the chance-alone probability: 1.3 times 10 to the power of 104. Surely, that is that? If you were told you had less than two chances in that number of crossing a bridge safely, would you risk it?

For some, however, that is *not* that, which brings us to last question: can we explain psi phenomena? The short answer is 'not yet', which is enough reason for some sceptics to reject the entire field. Their reactions can be quite extreme; when the Nobel laureate physicist Brian Josephson announced in 2001 that recent developments in quantum theory could lead to an explanation for telepathy, he was greeted with howls of



mediumship – playing musical instruments locked in cages, producing noises at a distance, moving heavy objects without touching them – but his most notable ability was levitation. Most famously, in 1868 he was said to have floated out of one window of a London house and floated back in through another. Unlike most of his contemporaries, Home was never caught cheating.

EDGAR CAYCE

America's 'Sleeping Seer' was more than just a faith healer. Cayce didn't even need to meet his patients to diagnose and treat them; instead he would enter a trance after having been given their names and addresses, and then deliver his verdict. In later years, he would provide not just medical diagnoses, but also information about his clients' lives and spiritual wellbeing, and prophecies on everything from Atlantis to cataclysmic natural events. While his cures seem to have worked for many, sceptics say that there were as many misses, and that there is no proof that Cayce's abilities were psychic.

TED SERIOS

Photographs of supposedly anomalous phenomena – ghosts, lake monsters, UFOs – are one thing, but photographs created directly from the human mind are quite another. There were spiritualist claims of such feats in the 19th century, but the most famous practitioner of 'thoughtography', as it became known, was Chicago bellhop Ted Serios. Serios claimed that he could make (rather blurry) images spontaneously appear on Polaroid film just by thinking of them. He did have to make use of a small cardboard tube he called his 'gizmo' in transferring his mental pictures to film; sceptics have pointed out this looks suspiciously like cheating!

KUDA BUX

Bux was an Indian magician and mystic who made a splash when he brought his talents to the West. His most impressive feat was the apparent ability able to see, and even read, when his eyes were covered with tablets of dough and his head completely wrapped in cloth. Harry Price tested his fire-walking abilities in 1935, getting him to parade over a bed of burning coals with a surface temperature of 806ºF (the body of the pit was 2,552ºF). Bux impressed the assembled journalists, but Price concluded that no paranormal power were required to fire-walk – just intense belief and concentration.

NINA KULAGINA

That the Soviet Union was heavily involved in psi research is one of the stranger aspects of the Cold War. One of the star psychics from behind the Iron Curtain was Nina Kulagina, a Russian housewife and Red Army veteran who demonstrated a number of baffling and seemingly psycho-kinetic abilities. It is claimed that she could move small objects by using the power of her mind, and even once – in a particularly gruesome experiment – made a frog's heart slow down, speed up and stop. Like Edgar Cayce she could also diagnose illnesses just by looking at a person, as well as 'see' without using her eyes. Silent films of her performing psychokinesis were seen in the West, and their obvious propaganda value has led sceptics to suggest that Kulagina's powers were merely an elaborate bit of misinformation.





TO ACCEPT THAT PSI IS REAL, SOME FEEL, WOULD TAKE US BACK TO THE DARK AGES



TOP: Paranormal investigator Harry Price examines an example of spirit writing.
ABOVE: Price had one of the first fully equipped 'laboratories' for studying psi.

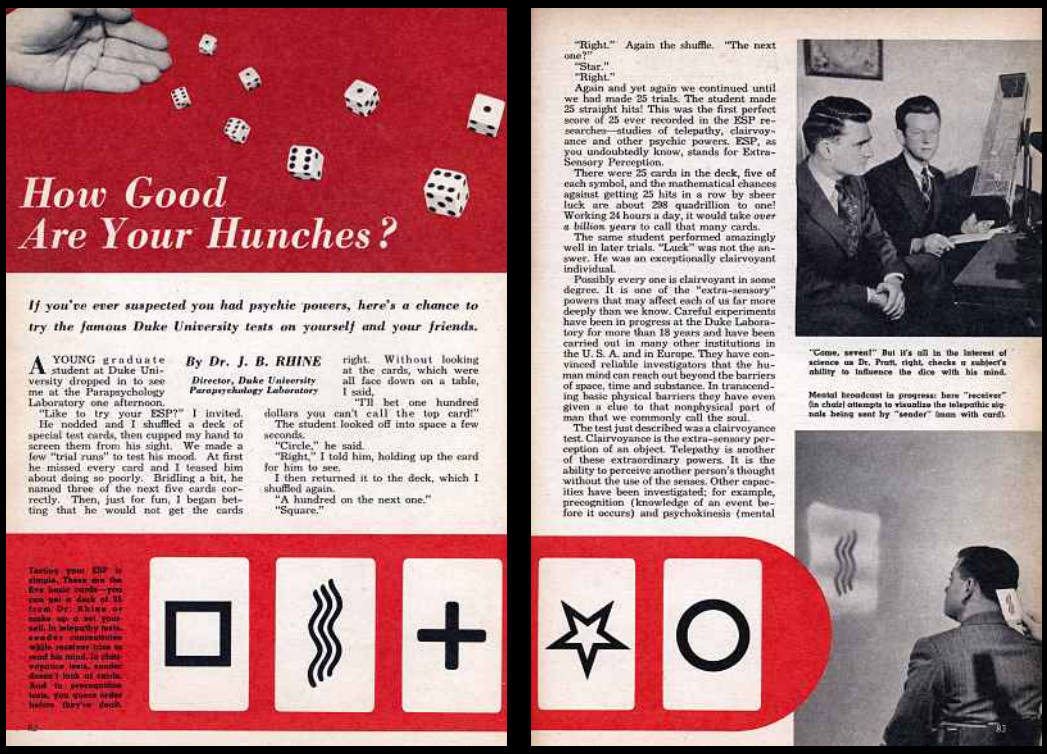
rage from fellow academics. Telepathy was "utter rubbish" according to Oxford physicist David Deutsch, (a believer in such things as parallel universes and time travel), while psychologist Nicholas Humphrey declared that "we haven't got any evidence" for it, an opinion somewhat at variance with the facts.

DISTRESS SIGNALS

Why such attitudes, you might wonder? One answer is that psi research has become taboo. To accept the reality of psi, some feel, would be to take us back to the dark ages of superstition and ignorance. Others are alarmed by the idea that a telepathist could invade their brains and read their secret thoughts. Yet these fears are groundless. Psi does not operate that way; it seems to operate when there is a need for it, and when there is a bond between sender and receiver, as for example between identical twins. These repeatedly pick up distress signals from their brothers and sisters, whether they are involved in a car crash, having a difficult and painful birth, falling downstairs or whatever.

Nearly a century ago, the American naturalist William J Long noted that "I have found something that very much resembles telepathy in frequent use throughout the animal kingdom." His own dog would always be at a certain spot overlooking the road when he was on his way home, even when he had given no advance notice of his return. British psi researcher and author Rupert Sheldrake has carried out some 200 experiments using video to record the moment a dog senses its owner's intention to come home.

Despite the quantity and consistency of the evidence for psi powers, we are still a long way from a full understanding of them. This may well change in the near future, as Josephson predicted. Quantum theory may not yet explain telepathy, yet there are intriguing analogies. Experiments have shown that pairs of particles, for instance, can remain 'entangled' even



How Good Are Your Hunches?

If you've ever suspected you had psychic powers, here's a chance to try the famous Duke University tests on yourself and your friends.

A YOUNG graduate student at Duke University dropped in to see me at the Parapsychology Laboratory one afternoon.

By Dr. J. B. RHINE
Director, Duke University Parapsychology Laboratory

"Like to try your ESP?" I invited.

He nodded and I shuffled a deck of special test cards, then cupped my hand to screen them from his sight. We made a few "trial runs" to test his mood. At first he missed every card and I teased him about doing so poorly. Bridling a bit, he named three of the next five cards correctly. Then, just for fun, I began betting that he would not get the cards right. Without looking at the cards, which were all face down on a table, I said,

"I'll bet one hundred dollars you can't call the top card!"

The student looked off into space a few seconds.

"Circle," he said.

"Right." I told him, holding up the card for him to see.

I then returned it to the deck, which I shuffled again.

"A hundred on the next one."

"Square."

"Right." Again the shuffle. "The next one?"

"Star."

"Right."

Again and yet again we continued until we had made 25 trials. The student made 25 straight hits! This was the first perfect score of 25 ever recorded in the ESP researches—studies of telepathy, clairvoyance and other psychic powers. ESP, as you undoubtedly know, stands for Extra-Sensory Perception.

There were 25 cards in the deck, five of each symbol, and the mathematical chances against getting 25 hits in a row by sheer luck are about 298 quadrillion to one! Working 24 hours a day, it would take over a billion years to call that many cards.

The same student performed amazingly well in later trials. "Luck" was not the answer. He was an exceptionally clairvoyant individual.

Possibly every one is clairvoyant in some degree. It is one of the "extra-sensory" powers that may affect each of us far more deeply than we know. Careful experiments have been in progress at the Duke Laboratory for more than 18 years and have been carried out in many other institutions in the U. S. A. and in Europe. They have convinced reliable investigators that the human mind can reach out beyond the barriers of space, time and substance. In transcending basic physical barriers they have even given a clue to that nonphysical part of man that we commonly call the soul.

The test just described was a clairvoyance test. Clairvoyance is the extra-sensory perception of an object. Telepathy is another of these extraordinary powers. It is the ability to perceive another person's thought without the use of the senses. Other capacities have been investigated; for example, precognition (knowledge of an event before it occurs) and psychokinesis (mental

"Come, seven!" But it's all in the interest of science as Dr. Pratt, right, checks a subject's ability to influence the dice with his mind.

Mental broadcast in progress: here "receiver" (in chair) attempts to visualize the telepathic signals being sent by "sender" (man with card).

ABOVE: Professor JB Rhine introduced his Zener Cards to test ESP. Results were highly enouraging, but guessing cards quickly became dull for the test subjects.

INGO SWANN

The American military's response to the 'psychic Cold War' was to plough large sums of money into Stargate, a 'Remote Viewing' or 'RV' programme. RV emerged from the experiments of Hal Puthoff and Russel Targ at the Stanford Research Institute in the early 1970s, where artist Ingo Swann used his apparent ability to 'see' distant locations and gather information about them. Swann described remote viewing as a type of psychic projection where some element of the mind would leave the body and travel to a location whose coordinates had been supplied. Swann even claimed to have visited Jupiter, discovering that it had rings like Saturn's before the Voyager probes revealed this to be the case.

JAYTEE

Pet owners often believe their charges have all sorts of remarkable abilities, so perhaps the fact that Pam Smart believes her terrier Jaytee is psychic should come as no surprise. Rupert Sheldrake, who has been researching the existence of animal psi, cited Jaytee as an example of an animal who knew when his owner was coming home. Experiments seemed to show that Jaytee would go to the porch for extended periods when Pam had started her journey back to the house; the results have been disputed by other parapsychologists, such as Richard Wiseman, who conducted his own experiments on Jaytee and found no evidence of psychic abilities, as well as 'professional' sceptics such as James Randi, who argues that the whole thing was a case of self-deception.

when miles apart. Twins have shown that they also can, as can such tightly bonded pairs as mothers and babies or dogs and their owners, or even people who just know each other well.

CONVINCING THE DOUBTERS

Such bonds have saved lives, which would seem to be a good reason to take the whole subject of psi powers more seriously. In 1955, an American welder named Jack Sullivan was buried alive when the trench he was in collapsed. Fearing he was going to die, his thoughts went to his wife and children, who could do nothing to save him, then to his workmate Tommy Whitaker, who could – and did, although he was on another site several miles away. For reasons he could never explain, he decided to leave work early and stop by Jack's site just to check that all was in order. He got there just in time.

Science is catching up with the psi researchers. Since 1994, there have been more than 20 published studies on what amounts to telepathy, though described by such scientifically acceptable terms as 'non-locally correlated EEGs' (electroencephalographs), 'neural energy transfer' or 'distant psychophysical interaction effects'. These have been examined by psi researcher Robert Charman, who emphasises that "extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence", and concludes: "The extraordinary claim arising from these studies is that direct communication can, and does, occur. This claim is supported by extraordinary evidence."

There are still those such as Professor Richard Dawkins who insist that, as he once put it, "The paranormal is bunk." The Sinclairs, the Rhines, Wilkins, Sherman, Bessent and Jack Sullivan (not forgetting King Crœsus) plus a sizeable percentage of the world's population, knew and still know otherwise.



ABOVE: The Ganzfeld procedure was another scientific attempt to test for ESP.



CASEBOOK

TWIN TELEPATHY

IS THERE A SPECIAL CONNECTION BETWEEN IDENTICAL TWINS? NO, SAY THE EXPERTS AND A GOOD MANY PARAPSYCHOLOGISTS. YES, BUT ONLY UNDER CERTAIN CONDITIONS, WRITES **GUY LYON PLAYFAIR**, WHO BELIEVES HE HAS PRODUCED THE BEST AND MOST CONVINCING EVIDENCE TO DATE.

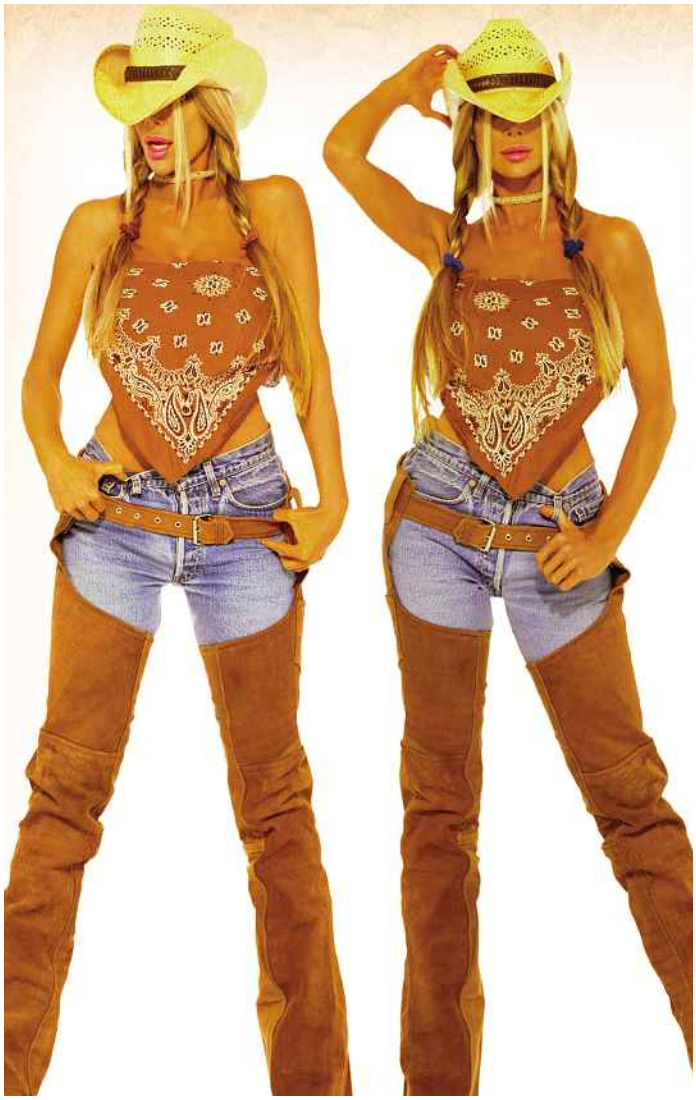
Is there a special connection between identical twins? Californian supermodels Sia and Shane Barbi certainly think so. "We have that twin thing going on," says Sia. "Wherever we are in the world, we kind of know what the other one's doing."

"That's right," says Shane. "It's instinctive. It's a twin thing."

Such an idea has been around for at least a century and a half. It turns up, for instance, in Dumas' 1844 novel *The Corsican Brothers*, in which the hero explains: "We had to be separated with a scalpel, which means that however far apart we are now we still have one and the same body, so that whatever impression, physical or mental, one of us perceives has its after-effect on the other."

That was 19th-century fiction. Fast-forwarding to 21st-century fact, we find Hussein Salih telling the *Evening Standard* (6 February 2003) how it feels to be one of a pair of conjoined, or 'Siamese', twins who were successfully separated. "If you ask me 'Are you separate people or a unit?' I will say 'Definitely we are a unit. Two in one.'" And yes, they can communicate at a distance. There was the time, for example, when Hussein decided to explore the large hotel in which his family was staying and managed to get his hand stuck in a piece of machinery on another floor. Hassan picked up the pain – "like stabs to the body" – and successfully guided his parents to his brother's rescue.

Back to Dumas: one of the twins was out riding in Corsica with a friend when "Suddenly, I received such a violent blow on my side that I passed out." When he came to, he said he thought he had been shot, pointing to



ABOVE: The supermodel Barbi Twins, Sia and Shane, claim a special link.



ABOVE: It's a twin thing: could instances of telepathic communication of thoughts or experiences between identical twins have a biological basis?

where he felt the pain – although, as his friend noted, there was no hole in his jacket. "In that case," was the reply, "it's my brother who has just been killed." As indeed it was... in a duel some 600 miles (970km) away.

In 1975, author and editor Norris McWhirter and his son Alasdair were standing in the drawing room of their home when Norris suddenly slumped into a chair, looking dazed. "I was terrified and thought he had suffered a heart attack," Alasdair told me. "A few minutes later he recovered. The phone rang and it was the police." They told him that his twin brother Ross, who lived 6 miles (9.5km) away, had been shot dead on his front doorstep.

Similar accounts have been published, broadcast or given to me personally of how one twin reacted, sometimes quite dramatically, when the other fell downstairs, broke an arm, a leg or a nose, had a painful injection, got stuck in railings, burned a hand with a clothes iron, had a premature baby or committed suicide. Twins not only send and receive messages by telepathy, as do many non-twins, they also transmit physical sensations, almost always painful or unpleasant ones which, with very rare exceptions, non-twins do not. This is what makes the twin connection a special one.

"WHEREVER WE ARE IN THE WORLD, WE KIND OF KNOW WHAT THE OTHER ONE IS DOING," SAYS SIA

A DAFT QUESTION

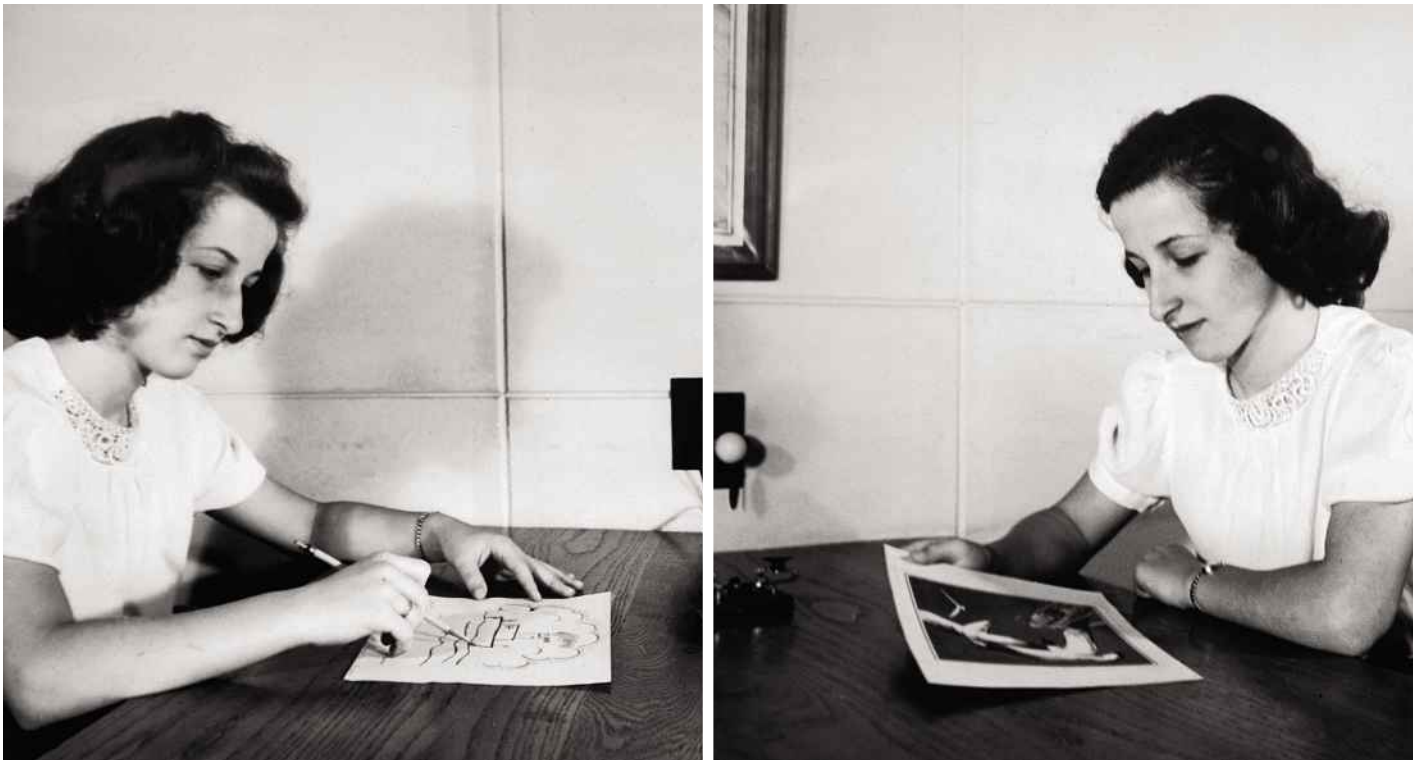
However, some twins and several experts think otherwise. Asked for her opinion of telepathy, one twin interviewed in Channel 4's *Cutting Edge* (1997) had this to say: "Oh get real! The possibilities of that are remote, what with all the big scientific stuff. If it was that possible a phenomenon, it would have been picked up by now, so why ask this daft question?"

Peter Watson, in his book *Twins* (1981), assures us that "there is no evidence whatsoever to support the idea that any form of parapsychological phenomena are involved in the twin bond." Nor is there, he adds, "the slightest scintilla of a suggestion that twins have some way of communicating with each other that brings on coincidence."

And what of the views of those who do the "big scientific stuff"? A leader in the field of twin studies is Dr Nancy Segal, formerly of the University of Minnesota, where for many years she and her colleagues had twins flown in from all over the world to be examined from head to toenail and asked more than 10,000 questions about everything under the Sun... except, as one of their twins has told me, telepathy.

Dr Segal devotes just 10 lines of her 432-page book *Entwined Lives* (1999) to the subject of extrasensory perception (ESP), including the statement: "I do not question the occurrence of twins' 'ESP-like' behaviours. I do wonder why some people endorse ESP in the face of more compelling data from twin studies."

Back in the Sixties, one of the first British twin researchers, Dr James Shields, used similar wording, stating rather patronisingly that: "Claims of telepathic-like experiences are so often made, and not only by the hysterically inclined, that one suspects there is more to it than simply the wish to be alike." He



ABOVE: One of the twin experiments conducted by JB Rhine at Duke University in the 1930s. One twin (left) tries to draw the picture the other (right) is looking at.

did not, however, inquire further into the matter, or consider the possibility that "telepathy-like" experiences might actually *be* experiences of telepathy.

TELEPATHY AND TABOO

So it seems that twins and the scientists are in head-on collision mode. Why should this be? One reason is that many scientists still equate telepathy with such things as alien abductees, Bigfoot and Nessie, and dump the lot in the bin marked "Paranormal. Do Not Touch".

Telepathy is taboo, as I found out when I approached the Twin Unit at St Thomas's Hospital, London, in the hope of getting access to their huge mailing list so that I could send out a questionnaire. I was asked what my research interest was, and gave my well-rehearsed reply, carefully avoiding the 'T' word: "Biological correlates of empathy."

This produced a blank stare. "What's that, then?"

I was cornered. "Oh, you know, what some people call, um, telepathy."

The effect of the word was dramatic. "Oh, we're not interested in spooky stuff." I made my excuses and left, clutching a press release about a ground-breaking survey the unit had just completed on whether both twins of a pair laugh at the same jokes.

THEY ONCE BOTH WROTE TO THE SAME MAGAZINE ON THE SAME DAY TO ASK THE SAME QUESTION

There are other reasons for such evident allergy to telepathy research. One is that there is a common belief – not entirely unjustified – that parapsychology (or psi) researchers have studied twin telepathy and found there isn't any. Another is that for much of the 20th century, the focus in twin research, in Minnesota and elsewhere, was on those who had been separated at birth and reunited later in life, sometimes much later. Such pairs offer unique opportunities for the study of the relative importance of what Sir Francis Galton, the pioneer of twin research, called nature and nurture, or as we say nowadays, genetics and environment.

They are equally important to the study of thought concordance (such as liking or disliking the same things), which is easy to mistake for telepathy, as is chance coincidence. When, for example, Barbara Herbert and Daphne Goodship were reunited 40 years after their birth and separation and taken to Minnesota, they found at least 30 close similarities in their tastes for food, drink, books and clothes. They even found they each had a mother-in-law called Maud who was born on the same day of the same year.

They once both wrote to the same magazine on the same day to ask the same question; and they both won £10 on the lottery in the same draw, and so on. Although telepathy was the one thing the twins were

never tested for or questioned about at Minnesota, they did give a demonstration of a strange affinity. Asked – separately – to write a short sentence so that their handwriting could be compared, each wrote: "The cas [*sic*] sat on the mat". Yet, as Barbara Herbert told me recently, they have had no experience of actual telepathic communication, even though they phone each other frequently and learn that both have just had a sardine sandwich and glass of cider or whatever.

Remarkable as these concordances are, they are not compelling evidence for telepathy. Indeed, this seems to be something never experienced by separated twins, which is hardly surprising. All the evidence points to the need for a close bond in order for telepathy to take place, and if separated twins do not even know of the other's existence, as has often been the case, how can they form a bond?

Telepathy may well not have existed at Minnesota, yet it is not reasonable to make sweeping statements about all twins, as Segal and Watson have done, solely on the basis of studies of the tiny minority of separated ones.

BIG SCIENTIFIC STUFF

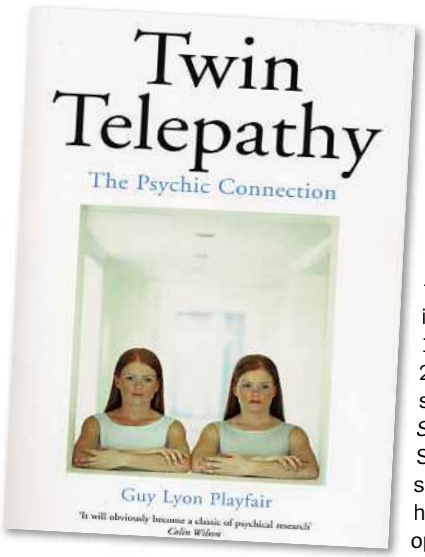
Psi researchers, one might have thought, would long ago have rushed in where 'straight' scientists feared to tread; yet, despite a promising start in the 1880s, this has not been the case. It is hard to disagree with Nancy Segal's opinion that the few studies of twin telepathy known to us have been "so poor that you can't even use them to make an informed judgment". Much of what little twin research has been done in the psi labs has been a complete waste of time, and the most serious consequence of this is the myth that psi researchers – and psychologists – have proved twin telepathy doesn't exist. They have not; this is because, as we shall see, they were looking for it in the wrong places.

As mentioned above, Galton was first off the mark with his 1875 survey, during which he came across "one of the most curious anecdotes that I have received". A man in Scotland bought a set of champagne glasses as a surprise present for his twin brother, only to find that his brother in turn had "bought a similar set of precisely the same pattern as a surprise" for him.

Twins are still demonstrating what I call the 'Casablanca Effect' ("Of all the gifts in all the gift shops in town, she buys the same as mine"). Last Christmas, for example, I know of a woman in London who sent her sister a purse only to receive an identical one from her, all the way from China.

It was not until 1882, with the founding of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), that the word telepathy came into the language and serious research into the subject began. Of the 700 spontaneous cases collected by the SPR from members of the public for its *Census of Hallucinations* (1886), five were clear examples of telepathy between twins (four identical, one fraternal); four of which involved an unexpected death and the fifth a potentially fatal accident. Yet almost as soon as twin telepathy research got started, it ground to a halt.

In the next 50 years, only a single paper on twin telepathy was published. Under the pretentious title 'An experimental investigation of the telepathy phenomenon in twins', it appeared in the first volume of JB Rhine's *Journal of Parapsychology* (1937). Only six pairs of twins were involved, of which just one was identical. They were made to guess those boring Zener cards and the only interesting

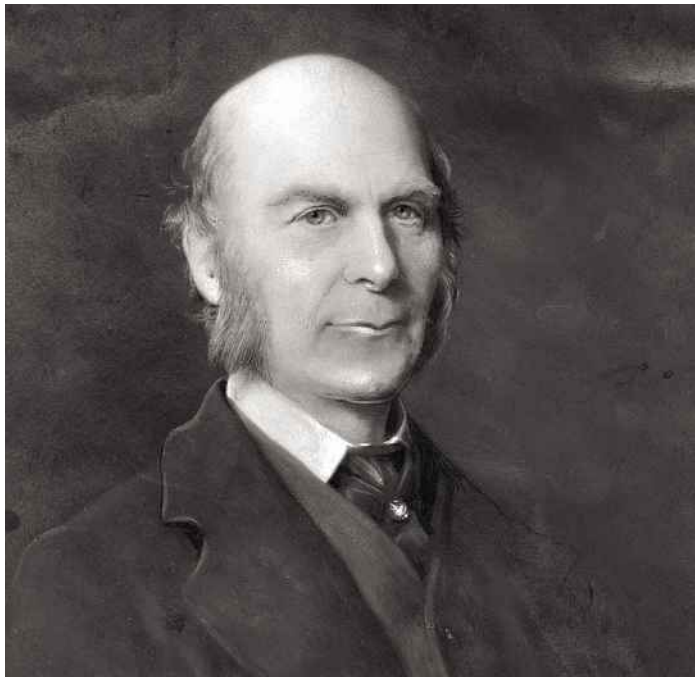


ABOVE: The current author's own book on the subject of twin telepathy.

part of the paper was the list of references – or rather the lack of one – which suggests that this attempt at investigation was the first of its kind.

In 1942, Chicago professor Horatio H Newman (himself a twin) published *Twins and Super-Twins*, in which he gave several intriguing examples of what looked very much like telepathy between twins he had personally questioned. He also made a public appeal to JB Rhine to look into the matter. This was without much success since only one other twin paper has found its way into his journal to date (in 1946). Another book appeared, 25 years later, with the strikingly original title *Twins and Supertwins*. Its author, Amram Scheinfeld, covered much the same ground as Newman, but he did manage to extract an opinion from Rhine. This was that "nothing outstanding has occurred in any single case of identical twins tested so far." He forgot to add that he had only looked at one such case.

It was not until 1965 that a pair of researchers – Drs Duane and Behrendt – had the bright idea of testing twins for transfer of sensation by observing alterations in one twin's brainwaves when the other's brain was artificially stimulated. It



ABOVE: Francis Galton was one of the first people to study identical twins.

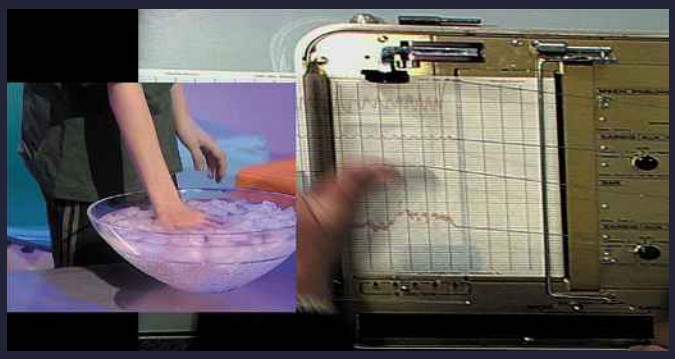
TELEPATHY CAUGHT ON CAMERA

Polygraphist Jeremy Barrett has now supervised nine experiments involving six sets of identical twins (three of them tested twice) in which one of the pair was connected to a four-channel polygraph while the other was submitted to assorted surprises and harmless shocks in a separate and soundproof room. These have included a variety of joke spiders and exploding pens, nasty tastes and smells, and plates being hurled to the floor.

"It has worked every time, to a greater or lesser degree," Barrett reports. "What we have done with the polygraph instrument is measure things happening which should not be happening. We are putting someone in a quiet and warm environment with no stimuli of any kind, where they are under no threat at all. Normally, the polygraph would simply be measuring their autonomic nervous reactions going on. There is nothing to make them nervous, nothing to create fear, panic, worry or anything like that. Yet, suddenly, their bodies are producing reactions based on what is happening to the other twin.

"When I've done this, it has always been under completely, rigorously secure conditions. I have not known at any time what was happening in the other room. I have Twin A with me in my quiet and secure environment. Twin B is somewhere else, and things are happening to Twin B. It transpires that things which cause fear, panic, fright or shock to Twin B cause reactions in Twin A."

The personalities of the twins seem to have a lot to do with it. Extroverts with artistic abilities are now thought to be the best subjects for any kind of telepathy experiment, and the strongest reaction Barrett has seen on his polygraph chart to date has been that produced by the twins on the Paul McKenna show, extrovert pop singers Elaine and Evelyn Dove.



ABOVE: While 'Twin A' is rigged to a polygraph, 'Twin B' plunges his hand into icy water. Twin A's reaction is recorded by the machine.

Another pair of his subjects was just the opposite. They were seven-year-olds, "very grave little people. Twin B hardly batted an eyelid when things went bang, so it's not surprising we didn't get a lot coming through to Twin A.

"There is absolutely no doubt at all in my mind that there is a communication taking place between these pairs of people which is beyond any explanation other than telepathy."

The polygraph can be a controversial machine, but in these twin experiments somebody filmed each twin in every pair, with time-codes on the tapes making it possible to establish an exact correlation between distant stimulus and visible reaction beyond any reasonable doubt.

Though popularly known as a "lie detector", the polygraph is simply a recording machine that picks up signals from a human body and puts them on paper. Detection is up to the operator, and the controversy sets in when the signals are interpreted to mean whatever the defence or prosecution want them to. In the twin tests, there is no need to interpret anything. If the signals are there, and they coincide again and again with something that is being done to one twin who is not wired up, then what is being recorded is beginning to look suspiciously like telepathy.

So, has telepathy been caught on camera? Possibly – if not, as yet, conclusively. At least it can now be said that there is a suggestion that an identical twin, given an appropriate stimulus, can communicate instantaneously at a distance with the other one. It can also be said that we now have a simple hypothesis that can easily be tested by anybody with access to a polygraph and a pair of twins:

Telepathy operates best between closely bonded pairs, and the closer the bond, the stronger the signal. The identical twin bond can be the strongest there is, so that is where to look for the strongest signals. These can be found, and recorded, when all the conditions are right – the right kind of twin (extrovert, artistic, open to the idea of telepathy); the right conditions (sender tense, receiver relaxed) and the right kind of signal (shock, surprise, alarm). This is what Duane and Behrendt were claiming nearly 40 years ago, and although their report was greeted with derision, they may have had the last laugh.

seemed to work, but in only two pairs out of 15 tested. Aristide Esser and colleagues were rather more successful in 1967, using a plethysmograph (which measures blood volume) to record responses in one twin to stimuli given to the other.

A PAIN IN SPAIN

In 1976, an enterprising group of Spanish doctors, psychologists and psychiatrists took this approach a stage further in one of the most imaginative experiments of its kind to date. Their subjects were four-year-olds Silvia and Marta Landa, who had made it into their local paper when Marta burned her hand on a clothes iron. Although Silvia was 10 miles (16km) away at the time, she developed a large red blister on her hand, just like her sister's.

The investigators gave Marta a standard medical check-up, which was filmed, as were Silvia's reactions in another room. When Marta's knees were tapped with a hammer, Silvia began to waggle her legs so vigorously that her father had to hold them down. Marta blinked rapidly when a light was shone into Silvia's eyes, and held her nose when her sister was given something pungent to smell. Nearly all the tests were successful and the team from Madrid planned a follow-up study in a laboratory.

They were unable to do this, and it was not until 1997 that anybody seems to have had the idea of trying anything like it again. The somebody in question, I am proud to say, was me. I had been asked by the producers of *The Paranormal World of Paul McKenna* (Carlton TV) to come up with some suggestions and top of my list was a live twin-telepathy test. In due course, a very lively teenager named Elaine Dove found herself facing a large pyramid put together for the occasion by the special effects crew while her sister Evelyn

was in another room, wired to a four-channel polygraph under the expert supervision of Jeremy Barrett.

When Elaine was nicely relaxed, Paul McKenna gave a signal and the pyramid exploded with a loud bang, emitting masses of sparks and coloured smoke, giving Elaine quite a turn. At the same time, the polygraph monitoring Evelyn's respiration, pulse rate and galvanic skin response went completely bananas. The interesting finding was that Evelyn had not felt anything consciously, though she certainly did unconsciously.

I was able to help do this again in January 2003 with the eight-year-old Powles twins Richard and Damien for Channel 4's *Richard and Judy* programme. Again, Jeremy Barrett operated the polygraph connected to Richard, who sat quietly beside it while Damien, in another room, was given an assortment of surprises. The most successful of these were a joke box which released a huge rubber snake when opened, and a bucket of ice-cold water into which he was asked to plunge his arm. These made him gasp, and the sharp blip on the line recording Damien's respiration was so unmistakable that Mr Barrett, who had no idea what was going on next door, pointed to it as it appeared. Like Evelyn Dove, Richard Powles had no conscious awareness of what his twin was doing, although like her, as Mr Barrett put it, he "certainly picked up something from somewhere". Once again, so did his polygraph. It looked very ESP-like to me.

QUANTUM SPOOKINESS

Einstein was uneasy with the idea of "spooky effects at a distance", the words he used to describe an imaginary experiment which, he hoped, would disprove the existence of such effects. In referring to what has become known as the 'EPA paradox',

IT WAS IN 1882 THAT THE WORD TELEPATHY CAME INTO THE LANGUAGE AND REAL RESEARCH BEGAN

physicist Danah Zohar writes, in *The Quantum Self* (1990), that this can be understood by imagining a hypothetical set of identical twins thousands of miles apart, one of whom is kicked downstairs and breaks a leg. If quantum theory is correct, she adds, "when the London twin is kicked, the Californian twin will suffer an identical fall at exactly the same moment and break his leg too, although no-one has kicked him."

Does this sound familiar? It should, since this is just what numerous twins have already experienced. I have at least three accounts of synchronised leg-breaking, and dozens of cases of simultaneous bruises, aches, pains, sudden bouts of depression – almost invariably bad news of some kind.

All of this makes psychologists uneasy, since it is not supposed to happen in a rational, mechanistic world. At the same time, physicists are becoming increasingly comfortable with the concept of correlated or entangled human pairs behaving much like those particles which, as Alain Aspect proved in a 1982 experiment, really do show "spooky effects at a distance".

In the words of a quantum specialist, physicist Amit Goswami: "Nonlocal mutual influence and communication between humans has been known for millennia in the domain of mental thought. It's called telepathy." This, he adds, seems to be "suggesting quantum nonlocality of thought between minds that are suitably correlated". Such minds include those of dogs and their owners, mothers and babies and, since theirs is the strongest and longest-lasting bond of all, identical twins.

This is where we would expect to find telepathy at full strength, as indeed we do. Not all twins experience it, perhaps no more than a third. To send or receive the psi message, they have to be the right type of twin, they have to be in the right states of mind and the message has to be a powerful one, preferably involving pain or shock of some kind (see panel opposite).

There is indeed a twin thing... and a very simple way of demonstrating it. There is also an explanation in sight. It is beginning to look very much like a quantum thing.



ABOVE: The Powles twins, along with Guy Lyon Playfair (at left), appear on Channel 4's *Richard and Judy* programme.

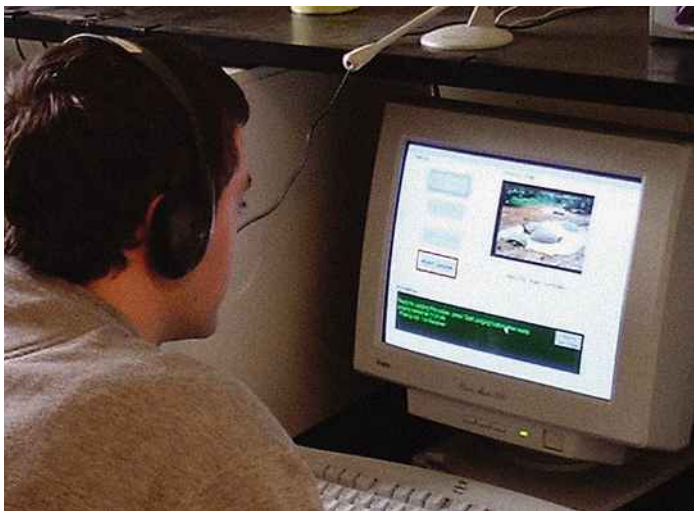


Investigating... PSYCHIC POWERS

DAVE WOOD of the Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena provides tips on how to get started studying unexplained events and powers, and how to get involved with other investigators.

Parapsychology is as diverse as the people who practise it. Academic parapsychological research often focuses on conducting experiments into extra-sensory perception (ESP), psychokinesis (PK) and other subjects that lend themselves to scientific testing. A wider range of psychical researchers are involved in everything from desk-based research to experimental research and fieldwork.

The holy grail of anomaly research is scientific evidence. Untold thousands of people research anomalous phenomena every single year – this level of activity should be producing huge advances in our understanding of the paranormal, like the advances in our understanding of the heavens when the amateur astronomer was king. Unfortunately, what could be the combined efforts of all these researchers moving the field on in leaps and bounds too often amounts to no more than lots of individuals taking photos of their own breath in spooky castles and waving around nonsense tools like EMF-meters in their local museum. Admittedly, good science can be tricky to achieve. Most researchers have been guilty of being over-enthusiastic and ultimately biased. It's easy to fall into the trap of making up nonsensical theories and introducing unintentional bias to find 'results' to back up our conclusions. Good science is about making small, solid incremental steps and working with independent, knowledgeable people at every stage. When researchers can make a concerted effort to do good science in examining psi claims – even in the examination of false positives – then the field of parapsychology will finally be cooking with gas.



ABOVE: A Ganzfeld ESP experiment during the judging phase.

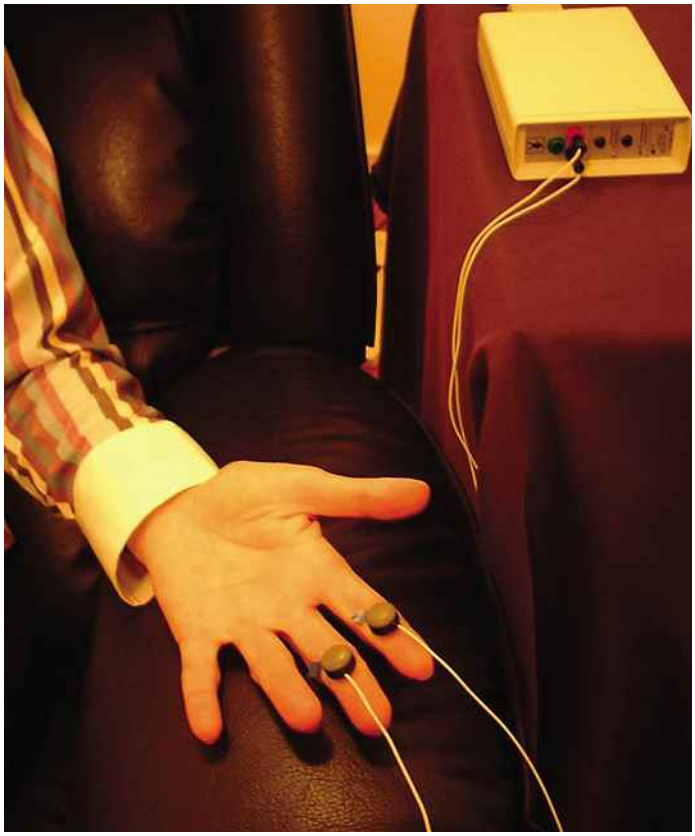
Anyone with a keen interest and a critical mind can get involved with psychical research. An easy way to get started is with desk-based research, examining claims of anomalous experiences – people who think they've seen ghosts, experienced odd coincidences, sighted UFOs or strange beasts. It is not recommended that you should go and actively investigate claims without training, but just researching possible causes of anomalous experiences in your local area can help the field in a small way. One of the keys is to share your work with the research community, for example by publishing in journals like *Anomaly*, or contributing to ASSAP's Project Albion, cataloguing strange experiences in your local area. Anyone can make a mark in this area by adopting a subject that is relatively rarely researched. Very few people conduct research into Earth mysteries, street light interference, vampires, stigmata and a whole range of other subjects. Delving deeper into these subjects and sharing results with other researchers is a very worthwhile pursuit.

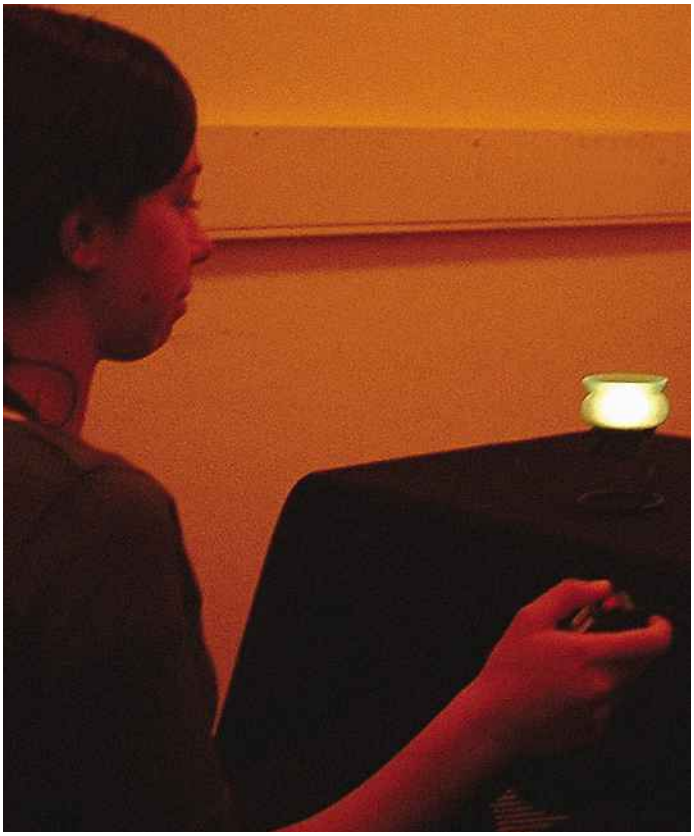
SCIENCE OR PSEUDO-SCIENCE?

Many of those who are starting out prefer to get out into the field, interview witnesses and conduct active group investigations into sightings of ghosts and the like. One approach is to find a reputable, scientific group to join. ASSAP has a network of around 20 affiliated groups all over the country, making it easy for anyone to get in touch with people serious about the subject. There are about the same number of serious groups outside of ASSAP, but amongst over a thousand non-scientific or pseudo-scientific groups these can be hard to find. If there are no groups in your area, you may want to consider becoming an individual investigator or starting your own group. To avoid making

ASSAP

The Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena (ASSAP) was formed in 1981 to investigate the weird seriously, and the seriously weird! It is perhaps the world's most diverse anomalous research organisation, having published detailed studies into everything from ghosts, UFOs and cryptozoology to stigmata, street light interference, time slips, numerology and hypnosis. ASSAP encourages, publishes and funds research into anomalous phenomena, as well as training a network of Approved Investigators who take on cases referred by the public – mainly hauntings, UFOs and cryptozoology.





ABOVE: Experiments designed to test what parapsychologists call 'Direct Mental Interaction with Living Systems', otherwise known as DMILS.

the mistakes many people do it's worth undertaking affordable, scientific training, such as the days and weekends provided by ASSAP. After attending training and submitting a report, individuals can become ASSAP Approved Investigators and can even get support and guidance in starting their own group.

Some novices go down the route of conducting experiments in an attempt to scientifically test hypotheses. This is attempted by a relatively small number of people outside academic institutions. The worst feeling is spending time researching and designing an experiment only to discover basic flaws that render results meaningless. ASSAP has relaunched the Merlin Matrix, a national framework of experimental research modules. Any budding researcher can select a project from a range demanding different levels of commitment and in different areas of research. ASSAP provides procedures to follow to make the process easier, as well as giving you the satisfaction of knowing that you are contributing to a national research effort that is producing meaningful results. If you have a different research idea you can even run it by the ASSAP Research Panel for expert guidance on your methods.

DELVING DEEPER INTO THESE SUBJECTS AND SHARING RESULTS IS A WORTHWHILE PURSUIT

Another thing you should do is read! Some great research has been conducted and written about in the last 20 years. If you know where to find the write-ups, and take the time to read them, you can avoid wasting time and money, and also making mistakes others have already made. It's always good to start with free resources, but be careful where you look for them. The *Journal of Investigative Psychical Research* is available to download free from the Paranormal Site Investigators' website www.psi.org.uk; the *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, while more general, has many back copies free to download. A membership of ASSAP can get you access to a mass of past research journals and newsletters online. For those with more money to spend, access to the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* can provide you with cutting-edge (if more academic) information.

The best advice is to learn from the mistakes of others. Most of us endure years of pseudo-scientific nonsense before realising it does not contribute to serious research. Find people to help and support you. Develop a network of expert contacts or join a group of people serious about the subject. Do not take a group's word for it that they are scientific or serious – get to grips with the subject before joining, so you can find out if they are interested in good science or plain nonsense. Do not model your research on television programs, or on anyone calling themself a "ghost hunter". The accumulated wisdom of decades of research by professionals and amateurs alike is, thanks to the Internet and the activities of charities, freely available to all if you know where to look. Your most important tool is a critical mind. Never do anything or accept anything without looking at the evidence.

DIRECTORY

SUGGESTED READING

Encyclopædia of Parapsychology and Psychical Research
Arthur S & Joyce Berger (Paragon House, 1991)

In Search of the Light: The Adventures of a Parapsychologist
Susan Blackmore (Prometheus Books, 1996)

The Search for Psychic Power: ESP and Parapsychology Revisited
CEM Hansel (Prometheus Books, 1990)

The Hidden Power: Science, Scepticism and Psi
Brian Inglis (Jonathan Cape, 1984)

An Introduction to Parapsychology
Harvey J Irwin & Caroline Watt (McFarland & Co, 2007)

Parapsychology: Research on Exceptional Experiences
Jane Henry (Routledge 2007)

Minds Without Boundaries
Stuart Holroyd (Aldus Books, 1976)

A Skeptic's Handbook of Parapsychology
Paul Kurtz, ed (Prometheus Books, 1985)

Servants of the Supernatural
Antonio Melechi (William Heinemann, 2008)

Psychic Sleuths: ESP and Sensational Cases
Joe Nickell (Prometheus Books, 1994)

Psychic Discoveries Behind the Iron Curtain
Sheila Ostrander & Lynn Schroeder (Prentice Hall, 1970)

Twin Telepathy
Guy Lyon Playfair (The History Press, 2008)

The Geller Effect
Guy Lyon Playfair (Cape, 1984)

Remote Viewers: The Secret History of America's Psychic Spies
Jim Schnabel (Dell, 1997)

Dogs That Know When Their Owners are Coming Home and Other unexplained Powers of Animals
Rupert Sheldrake (Arrow books, 2000)

Deception and Self-Deception: Investigating Psychics
Richard Wiseman (Prometheus Books, 1997)

Guidelines for Testing Psychic Claimants
Richard Wiseman & Robert L Morris (University of Hertfordshire Press, 1995)

ORGANISATIONS AND GROUPS

Society for Psychical Research (SPR)
See p24.
49 Marloes Road, Kensington, London W8 6LA
Web: www.spr.ac.uk
Tel: 020 7937 8984

Anomalistic Psychology Research Unit (APRU)
Headed by Prof. Chris French the unit provides a focus for research activity in the area of anomalistic psychology. Holds regular talks which are open to the public, and publishes magazine *The Sceptic*.
Department of Psychology, Goldsmiths, University of London, New Cross, London, SE14 6NW
Web: www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/apru
Tel: 020 7919 7871
Email: c.french@gold.ac.uk

Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena
A registered charity engaged in paranormal research and education, ASSAP offers members training as investigators, loans of equipment, a library and the chance to take part in vigils, investigations and experiments. It publishes a newsletter (*ASSAP News*) and a journal (*Anomaly*).
Web: www.assap.org
Tel: 0845 652 1648
Email: assap@assap.org

College of Psychic Studies
An educational charity offering regular classes, workshops, lectures and consultations in the field of mediumship and psychic ability. Founded 125 years ago by a group of eminent scholars and scientists, its purpose was to facilitate formal investigation into the psychic and mediumistic phenomena that were such a topic of debate in the Victorian era.
16 Queensberry Place, London SW7 2EB
Web: www.collegeofpsychicstudies.co.uk
Tel: 020 7589 2824
Email: admin@collegeofpsychicstudies.co.uk

Koestler Parapsychology Unit
A research group established in 1985, it consists of academic staff and postgraduate students, teaching and researching various aspects of parapsychology. As well as teaching undergraduates, it now offers an online course in parapsychology open to all members of the public.
School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences, University of Edinburgh, 7 George Square, Edinburgh EH8 9JZ
Web: www.koestler-parapsychology.psy.ed.ac.uk
Tel: 0131 650 3440
Email: Caroline.Watt@ed.ac.uk

Parapsychological Association
The international professional organisation of scientists and scholars engaged in the study of psi experiences, such as telepathy, clairvoyance, psychokinesis, psychic healing, and precognition.
PO Box 24173
Columbus, OH 43224, USA
Web: www.parapsych.org
Email: Business@parapsych.org

The Institute of Noetic Sciences
A nonprofit membership organisation located in California that conducts and sponsors leading-edge research into the potential and powers of consciousness. Offers workshops and educational activities and publishes a journal, *Shift*.
101 San Antonio Road
Petaluma, CA 94952, USA
Web: www.noetic.org/
Tel: +001 707 775 3500
Email: membership@noetic.org

Paranormal Site Investigators
PSI is an education and research charity in the UK, with over 1,400 associate members. It exists to educate the public about anomalous experiences, and to conduct scientific research.
Web: www.p-s-i.org.uk
Tel: 0845 652 1529
Email: team@p-s-i.org.uk

WEBSITES

Public Parapsychology
publicparapsychology.blogspot.com/

Society for Scientific Exploration
www.scientificexploration.org

Paranormalia
www.paranormalia.com/

Rupert Sheldrake
www.sheldrake.org/

Dean Radin's blog
deanradin.blogspot.com/

Uri Geller
site.uri-geller.com/

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The Fortean Times Guide to...
CROP CIRCLES



WHEN circular formations started appearing overnight in wheat fields in the West of England it was the start of the biggest and most tantalising mystery in years. Were they 'nests' made by landed flying saucers, or natural phenomena created by wind vortices? And when the formations began to grow ever larger and more mind-bogglingly complex, it raised a whole new set of questions: Was ET trying to tell us something through the power of mathematics? Or was Mother Earth sending out an environmental warning before it was too late? What is the truth behind the crop circle mystery – and how do you go about rolling your own?



An introduction to...

CROP CIRCLES



OUR EXPERT **MARK PILKINGTON**

Strange formations of bent stems have been appearing in fields for decades now, often intricate and obviously carefully designed. Could any non-human agency really be behind them all?



Drive through the hills and valleys of Wiltshire on any dry summer afternoon and, along with the sheep, cows and ramblers, you will inevitably find people gathered together inside a large geometric pattern impressed into a field, usually of wheat. Some will carry crystals, pendulums and dowsing rods, others might be meditating quietly alone, others still will be 'omming' and 'ahhing' in groups, hoping to raise their own vibrational energies, perhaps to summon UFOs or Earth Spirits. These are the croppies, and without them this verdant, beautiful part of the world would be all the poorer.

Since the late 1980s, crop circles – which now come in all shapes and sizes, as long as it's huge, so we should perhaps call them crop formations – have been as much a part of the English summer season as Wimbledon or Glastonbury Festival. Photographs of the formations regularly adorn Wiltshire tourist literature, alongside images of Stonehenge and Avebury stone circles, and coach-loads of tourists will usually take in a couple on their 'Mystical Wiltshire' tours.

LEFT: Many people believe that crop formations are sites of powerful energies.





ABOVE: The remarkable formation which appeared at Milk Hill, Wiltshire, in 2001 measured 900ft (275m) in diameter and contained 409 circles.

Explanations as to who or what is behind the enigmatic formations include the pragmatic – teams of crop artists working their magic in the fields at night; the hi-tech – laser-equipped military satellites or extraterrestrial spacecraft; the pseudo-scientific but (perhaps) sensible-sounding – unusual wind vortices, prancing deer or rutting hedgehogs; the mystical – nature spirits and Mother Earth herself; and just about everything in between.

THE HORNED ONE IS SHOWN WIELDING A SCYTHE AND CREATING A CIRCLE IN THE FIELD

Rather than indulge in the annual media game of whodunnit, I'll cut straight to the chase… and make a confession. People make crop circles, they have done since at least the mid-1970s and, for a number of years, I was one of them.

I'll explain how it's done later on, but first a little history.

BETTER THE DEVIL WHO MOWS

Our first reference to the circular arts dates back to 1678: a four-page pamphlet published on 22

TOP 10 CROP CIRCLES

STONEHENGE 1
WILTSHIRE. 07/07/1996 (WHEAT)

This circle appeared next door to the famous stone circle, Stonehenge. It measured 915ft (280m) along its spine and contained 151 individual circles. It was identified as a fractal design called the 'Julia Set'.

MILK HILL 1
WILTS 08/08/1997 (WHEAT)

Another fractal design, this time a variation of a 'Koch Snowflake'. Fractals are shapes that are derived from repeating mathematical formulæ over and over again and converting the results into graphical data. Although this branch of maths has been known for many years, it was not until the advent of the modern computer that the significance of fractals was finally discovered. Complex fractals are used to understand cloud formations and to accurately calculate coastline distances.

MILK HILL 2
WILTS 12/08/2001 (WHEAT)

One of the most famous crop circles of all time, and one of the largest. It measured 900ft (275m) in diameter and contained 409 circles, ranging in size from the largest at 70ft (21m) in diameter, to the smallest which was only a couple of feet wide. It



Crooked Soley, 2002





The Mowing-Devil:
Or, Strange NEWS out of
Hartford-shire.
Being a True Relation of a Farmer, who Bargaining with a Poor Mower, about the Cutting down Three Half Acres of Oats, upon the Mower's asking too much, the Farmer swore, That the Devil should Mow it, rather than He, And so it fell out, that that very Night, the Crop of Oats was mow'd as if it had been all of a Flame; but next Morning appear'd so nearly Mow'd by the Devil, or some Infernal Spirit, that no Mortal Man was able to do the like. Also, How the said Oats lyeth now in the Field, and the Owner has not Power to fetch them away.
Licensed, August 23th, 1678.

TOP: Tully "saucer nest", Queensland, in 1966, where, supposedly, a UFO had swirled the grass into a circle. **ABOVE:** A now-famous pamphlet from 1678, showing the "Mowing Devil".

IN AUSTRALIA, A UFO HAD LEFT A SWIRLED PATCH OF REEDS IN MARSHY SWAMPLAND

August that year describes an altercation between a rich farmer and a mower in Hertfordshire. When the mower asked too much money to cut down a field of oats, the outraged farmer retorted that he would rather the Devil himself mowed the field than pay the labourer his requested fee. Lo and behold, the following morning, the entire field had been mown in a circular pattern – much more work, and more neatly done, than an ordinary human could manage in a single night. This, suggests the pamphlet, could only mean one thing. Illustrating the tale is a woodcut of a devilish figure partway through creating what is more of an oval than a circle in the field. The horned one is shown wielding a scythe, a far more advanced tool than the 'stomper' used by contemporary circlemakers, but one far less suited to the task.

The 'Mowing Devil' pamphlet wasn't rediscovered until several years after the crop circle phenomenon had made the news, and has been touted as evidence that the mystery formations are as old as time. We should be very careful before making grand claims of this sort however – the story might be nothing more than a tall tale, or an allegorical account of class struggle of a sort commonly found in the fantasy-filled newsheets popular following England's Civil War.

Later that same century, we find references to circles and more complex shapes in *The Natural History of Staffordshire* (1686) by Robert Plot, the first Professor of Chemistry at Oxford University: "There are patterns not only in a single ring but sometimes in a double and treble circle, one within the other, patterns of semi-circles and quadrants and sextants of circles." These, Plot suggests, may be the result of lightning strikes, meteors, strange lights, or of wind on the ground. He also refers to a story from Holland, late the previous century, which describes people seen dancing in a circle one evening. The following day, a circle was found in the field; it appeared to have been flattened by cloven hooves. Another visit from the mowing devil? Or, perhaps, the rest of his family?

Leaping ahead to the 19th





TOP: Doug Bower returning in 2008 to one site where he and Dave Chorley had been active. **ABOVE:** Doug and Dave at work painting in their studio.

century, we find a letter by Guilford solicitor and gentleman scientist John Rand Capron, published in the prestigious journal *Nature* for July 1880. Capron describes circular patches found in fields following a series of storms: "...their heads arranged pretty evenly in a direction forming a circle round the centre, and outside these a circular wall of stalks which had not suffered".

Perhaps like today's formations, Capron's crop circles had a human origin. The diary of a Wiltshire lass born in 1871 describes how, during their courtship, her husband-to-be would use a tree branch with string attached to its ends to flatten circles into wheat fields where they could snatch a few moments alone.

Courting couples, cloven-hoofed prancers, whirlwinds, meteors and Devils. Will the real circlemakers please stand up...

"WHAT DO YOU THINK WOULD HAPPEN IF WE PUT ONE OVER THERE?"

These are the immortal words spoken by Doug Bower to his friend Dave Chorley one Friday evening in 1976, as they walked alongside wheatfields near Cheesefoot Head in Hampshire.

Doug, a picture-framer and artist, was talking about a 'saucer nest', a circular mark supposedly left behind by landed flying saucers. He'd first heard about these landing marks while living in Australia. In 1966, in Tully, Queensland, a UFO had left a swirled patch of reeds in marshy swampland; the mystery swirl had been photographed and the story had made the national papers. Back in England during the late 1960s and early 1970s, Doug had lapped up newspaper reports of mysterious lights and sounds heard at nearby Warminster, blamed on an unidentified something imaginatively known as 'The Thing'. Tales of 'The Thing' had made Warminster something of a UFO hotspot, and its main promoter, local reporter Arthur Shuttlewood, a minor celebrity.

It was time for Doug and Dave to make a saucer nest of their own. Using a heavy metal bar that usually bolted the back door to Doug's studio, they flattened a 30-foot circle into the wheat, an act that took half an hour and a considerable amount of huffing and puffing. Whether or not anybody actually saw their first circle is difficult to say. One Warminster UFO-hunter from the period recalls seeing lights in a field one night and finding a 30ft (9m) circle there the next morning, but he didn't write about it until many years later.

appeared fully formed overnight, leading inevitably to questions about how it was done.

PICKED HILL

WILTS 13/08/2000 (WHEAT)

This design incorporated the mathematical fraction for *pi*. The number of curves in the design can be fitted into the formula used for calculating a rough approximation of *pi*.

CROOKED SOLEY

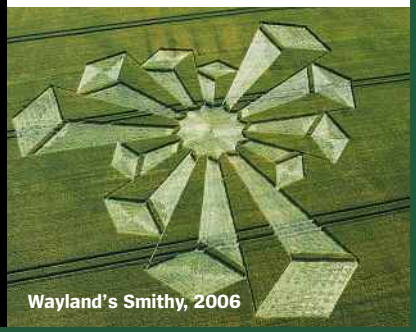
BERKS 28/08/2002 (WHEAT)

The beautiful Crooked Soley circle had two interesting components. First was a representation of the DNA helix around the outer ring. Second was the fact that, like many other crop circles, this formation incorporated the ancient conundrum of the 'Squaring of the Circle'. The problem was to draw a circle and a square whose perimeter (or area) were exactly the same – using only a compass and straight edge. Of course, to know the precise perimeter or area of a circle we have to use *pi*, but this is not exact, only an approximation. The whole exercise was about marrying Heaven and Earth – the circle represented the heavenly (not entirely knowable) and the square, the Earthly.

STONEHENGE 2

WILTS 04/07/2002 (WHEAT)

This was another huge crop circle, measuring approximately 750ft (230m) in diameter. What impressed many about this circle was the way it so very neatly fitted into the field and into the space allowed by several round barrows. The arms of the design brush various features of the fields. A few feet either way and this circle could not have been placed in this field without the design overrunning the field boundary or the round barrows.



Wayland's Smithy, 2006



Hailey Wood, 2007

WAYLAND'S SMITHY
OXON 08/07/2006 (WHEAT)

This amazing crop circle showed us one-point projection in circle design for the first time. Nicknamed 'The Towers', it seemed to show a bird's-eye view of a set of skyscrapers.

WEST KENNETT
WILTS 28/06/2007 (WHEAT)

This formation once again used one-point projection to create the illusion of a 3D space. Known as 'The Temple', this was one of the most pictorial circles ever seen: a temple with columns and a chequered floor, it resembled a Masonic temple.

HAILEY WOOD
OXON 16/07/07 (WHEAT)

This intricate and complex butterfly delighted all who saw it. Nine concentric rings create each wing number associated with birth and rebirth. In some cultures the butterfly signified the transformation from the physical to the spiritual.

BARBURY CASTLE
WILTS 01/06/08 (BARLEY)

This amazing circle encoded the number of *pi* in its design. Each turn of the ratchet gives the numbers. The tiny circle towards the centre of the pattern represents the decimal point. 3.14159 (etc) are the numbers inscribed by the pattern. Cut the circle into 10 equal parts to see how the design works.



Barbury Castle, 2008



ABOVE: Recently, crop circles have been used for PR, as in this ad for the Firefox web browser created by US students.

Regardless of whether anybody else ever saw their creations, Doug and Dave soldiered on for five more summers until, in August 1980, their work finally made the news. "Mystery Circles – Return of the Thing?" ran the headline in the *Wiltshire Times*, in response to a trio of circles near the Westbury White Horse. The outer pair were 25ft (7.6m) across, the middle circle a then-whopping 50ft (15m) across. Their plan was working perfectly – if a little later than intended.

Over the next few years, a bevy of ufologists and other self-professed experts descended on the fields of Wiltshire, jostling for attention with ever more complex batteries of meteorological anomalies, supernatural beings and UFOs. Not to be outdone, our dynamic duo gradually upped the ante, producing clusters of four and five circles in a bid to stay ahead of their imaginary rivals. But by the end of the 1980s, their artworks had taken on a life of their own. What had begun as a post-pub prank had become a national obsession, spawning

TODAY, THE FORMATIONS SEEM TO ACT AS FOCAL POINTS FOR MAGIC AND HIGH STRANGENESS

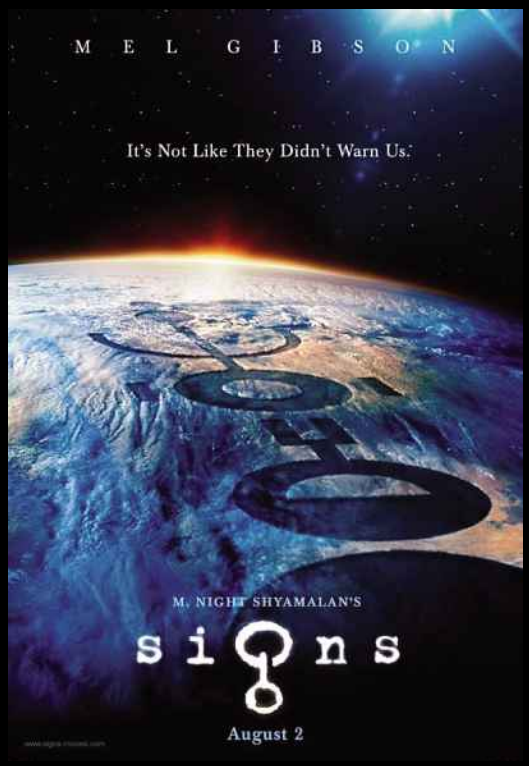
best-selling books, a dedicated journal and a new science of 'cereology', as well as making minor celebrities out of the leading croppies, as the people who investigated the crop circle mystery became known. And the number of circles appearing in the fields was growing. Doug and Dave were no longer alone.

In 1990, inspired by a 1915 surrealist painting, Doug and Dave decided to break the circular mould and flattened the first 'pictogram' – two circles connected by a straight line – into a wheat field near Cheesefoot Head, not far from the site of their first ever circle. Just days after Doug and Dave had unveiled their new direction, a colossal beast of a formation, a double pictogram about 200ft (60m) long, appeared in the East Field at Alton Barnes. Doug and Dave now had real competition. The press went wild. An aerial shot of the formation was even used on the cover of a Led Zeppelin compilation album. The age of innocence was over.

By the end of the following year's season, Doug and Dave had been exposed as the original circlemakers. After 15 years, the game was up, at least for them, though the crop circle phenomenon was far from over. Most of those involved in cereology refused to believe that Doug and Dave, both in their 60s by then, could have been responsible for all the circles.

They were right of course; and over the next few years new teams of circlemakers took







ABOVE LEFT: Even Hollywood got in on the act, with this 2002 Mel Gibson movie involving aliens and an isolated farm. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The Operation White Crow investigation team grapples with some circular evidence. **BELOW:** A typical circlemakers' design, in this case for a Mandelbrot Set formation.

the art form to new heights of complexity, and continue to do so.

THE ART OF MYSTERY

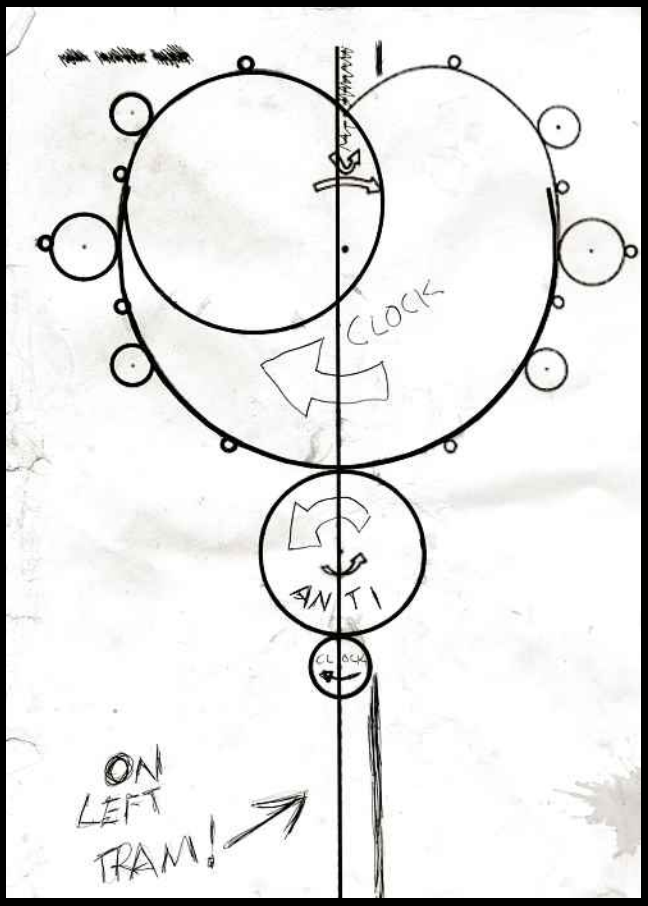
So, crop circles – all of them – are made by people. I'd concede that the occasional not-quite-round single circle might have been formed by wind, but it could as easily be due to trainee circlemakers. We all have to start somewhere. These malformations aren't often photographed, giving the illusion that whatever is behind the crop circles doesn't make mistakes. They *do*, even in their most spectacular creations – you just have to look carefully.

If we might not know exactly who is behind each individual formation – though in truth the small crop circle community is quite close-knit, and tends to know who is doing what – we do know what is behind them. It's human creativity and imagination, the same force that's behind any work of art. When we look at a beautiful painting or a complex diagram, we may well wonder how it was done, but we don't wonder what made it.

Perhaps it's the scale of the formations, perhaps it's the refusal of the circlemakers to explicitly 'sign' their work, perhaps it's something about the people who are drawn to them, but somehow, over three decades on, the circles still retain their power.

And genuine mysteries do remain. The formations seem to act as focal points for magic and high strangeness. Unusual floating balls of light have been seen in their vicinity, with even crop circlemakers claiming to have witnessed them. People have experienced mysterious physical and emotional sensations inside crop circles; technology has malfunctioned; wounds have been healed, ailments cured; one post-menopausal woman claims to have begun menstruating again after spending time inside a formation.

Like magical spells or sigils written across the landscape, the crop circles transform space, bend time and alter consciousness. But the mystery doesn't reside in the formations themselves – it lives within the people who view them, interact with them and respond to them. The real mystery is us.



CASEBOOK

ROLLING YOUR OWN

MARK PILKINGTON DESCRIBES THE PLANNING AND EFFORT NEEDED TO LEAD THE LIFE OF A CROP CIRCLE-MAKER, GIVING TIPS ON HOW AND WHERE TO CREATE YOUR MASTERPIECE, AND HOW TO AVOID GETTING INTO TROUBLE WITH ANGRY FARMERS OR THE LAW...



MAKING CROP CIRCLES CAN BE PHYSICALLY EXHAUSTING AND MENTALLY DEMANDING, BUT IT'S A LOT OF FUN – AND ILLEGAL

Don't let anyone tell you that making crop circles is easy. It's not. It can be physically exhausting and mentally demanding. It's also exciting, a lot of fun and, like many other rewarding activities, illegal. Never forget that you are trespassing on another person's land. If you are caught, you might be prosecuted. Only one person has so far been prosecuted for crop circle-making, and he owned up to it.

Crop circles are made in silence, without any illumination. While lights seen bobbing about in a field at night might well be mistaken for UFOs, they



could also lead an angry farmer, or worse, a crazed crop circle researcher, right to you. Use the natural light available. With even the tiniest glimmer of moonlight, your eyes will quickly adjust.

THE TOOLS OF THE TRADE ARE FAIRLY SIMPLE.

The first thing you'll need is a plan. Make sure that everyone in your team knows what they are doing. Improvisation may well play a part in the formation's creation, but ideally everybody will be armed with a diagram that serves as a guide to the finished pattern.

Next you need to identify a field, preferably before it gets dark. Your formation should be visible from the road and from the air, so a sloped field or one in a dip is often a good choice.

Ropes, tape measures and poles are essential for plotting out formations on the ground. One person marks the centre, then a rope is used to create the outer perimeter. This demarcates your canvas and creates a base of operations for you to leave your bags, and to take an occasional rest. But not a cigarette break – no lights, remember!

The actual flattening of the crop is done with a 'stomper' – a flat plank of wood with a loop of rope attached at either end. The circlemaker moves forwards with one foot placed in the middle of the board and pushes the stomper down ahead of them to flatten the crop. A flat plank about six inches wide and four feet across is will be an ideal stomper.

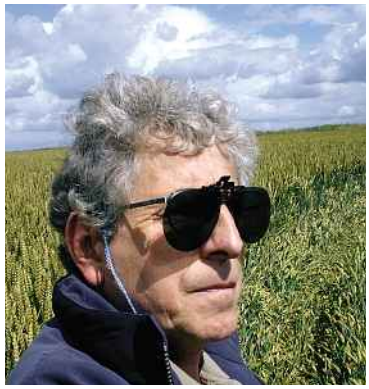
Make sure you get out of the area well before daybreak – the farming day usually begins at the crack of dawn – and make certain you haven't left anything behind. With any luck, your handiwork will be photographed from the air and appear on www.cropcircleconnector.com or one of the other websites dedicated to the art.

Congratulations: you are now part of the mystery.





FACING PAGE: Careful to preserve their identities, a masked pair of circle-makers make use of natural light.
TOP: Measuring out the plan. **ABOVE:** Consulting the computer-aided design on the trusty laptop.



Investigating... CROP CIRCLES

Electrical engineer **COLIN ANDREWS** describes his 25-year fascination with the crop circle phenomenon and provides some pointers on what to look for and how to proceed.





ABOVE LEFT: The Operation White Crow team examine a ring and circle. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Taking measurements at a crop circle near Stonehenge, Wiltshire.

In July 1983, I was driving on high ground near my hometown when I looked down into the valley below and saw five perfect circles, pressed into a wheat field. I stopped my vehicle, walked down into the field and made my way across to look closely at them. I'm an engineer, and what I saw impressed me. My tracks to the circles were the only ones there. There was no damage to the plants nor any evidence of footprints on the soil. My research began there on the spot. To date, it spans over a quarter of a century.

I have measured crop circles, spotted them worldwide on maps, and had the plants and soil analysed. I have undertaken radiation measurements, carried out magnetometer surveys and organised and coordinated sophisticated surveillance projects to try to capture, on video, a crop circle forming. Operation Blackbird in 1990, for example, when we camped out on a hillside in Wiltshire with lots of recording equipment, was the largest project of this kind ever undertaken and was assisted by the British Army.

THERE WAS NO DAMAGE TO THE PLANTS OR FOOT-PRINTS ON THE SOIL... MY RESEARCH BEGAN THERE

The majority of reports of crop circles still come from central southern England, near Avebury, Wiltshire. Other hot spots exist in Germany, the Netherlands and the United States.

I have moved beyond looking for evidence separating crop circles that are demonstrably manmade (approximately 80 per cent) from those that cannot be proven to be. I've travelled around the world and have seen evidence that simple circles appearing in many countries, including central southern England, cannot be simply explained away as manmade. I now seek to identify the force – human or other – that seems to understand and manipulate the minds of those who make the circles, and of the researchers who investigate them and interact with them. The evidence already exists that this is taking place, but how and why?

Anybody can get involved in this research, but success depends upon the ability to be truly open-minded and honest with oneself. Measurements and pure science are not what is going to crack this. A closed mind or a super-cynical one is simply wasteful.



AN UNCANNY EVENT

The most scared I've ever been was in the early hours of 18 June, 1989, at Cheesefoot Head, Hampshire – a natural amphitheatre where we had been finding crop circles for years. We were on Operation White Crow, the first attempt to film a crop circle being formed. We'd obtained a caravan to act as command central, and parked it at a lookout point over the field; about 30 of us took turns observing the field and keeping an eye on the monitoring equipment. On the last night of the project, six of us were assembled in the caravan, dispirited about having failed to film a crop circle being made and discussing an anonymous letter I had received the night before the start of the project (it contained a strange rhyme, beginning: "Ring a Ring o' Roses / A pocket full of posies / tishoo tishoo the CORN SAT DOWN). It was suggested that we walk up the hill to a pair of crop circles that had appeared prior to the project and attempt some kind of contact with the 'circle makers'.

The six of us sat in a circle on a blanket in the middle of the formation. Then Pat Delgado (a retired NASA engineer) sprang to his feet with his arms outstretched and announced: "A spirit person has arrived." There was a dramatic local drop in temperature and barometic pressure. Pat and Rita Gould, a materialisation medium, started shaking violently. Then I heard a piercing sound; after a few minutes, everyone admitted to being able to hear it.

It grew louder and approached the circle. For a few seconds, I thought I could make out a fuzzy ball of luminance on the surface of the crop; Rita saw a light-coloured head of a short being. Three other team members joined us, and said they'd heard the sound on their way to meet us. Rita was engaged in a dialogue with the sound, asking questions of it. The sound was moving in arc-like patterns around the group – it not only seemed to know we were there, it was intelligently interacting with our thoughts, words and actions. Pat began an involuntary scooping motion above the tops of the plants, as if filling his hands with something invisible which he then pushed towards me. Then he suddenly stopped and appeared to be physically pulled backwards at an impossible angle; Pat reports that he also levitated, although no one else witnessed this. He reached out towards me and called for help, and I pulled him free. He said: "We should get out of here".



ABOVE: Colin Andrews and fellow investigator the late Pat Delgado examine a circle in a ripe field of corn.

At around 3am, I, along with two others, decided to go back up to the field to listen for the sound, this time with a tape recorder and in the safety of my car. I managed to get a reasonable recording of the sound. Dawn arrived, and we were nearly ready to leave when a stranger stopped in his car to inform us of a new crop circle he'd just spotted – it was about 500 yards from where we'd experienced the sound event.

It's sensible and useful to be able to accurately recreate each design and its exact placement, so it's good to have a compass to show magnetic north with respect to the centre of the circle or design, and its position in relation to obvious features nearby – a church tower, say. The usual paper and pencil is essential (pencil, because when it's damp, pens don't work).

When investigating a crop circle, look for evidence of people having made it – tracks, pressure on the soil, damage to the plants. Look for the telltale signs of hoaxers' equipment, and also signs of stakes having been pushed into the ground at crucial points in the layout of the design. If possible, take elevated photos and look for banding that might indicate it was made with a plank. All the time, remember that the likelihood is that the crop circle was made by someone – your job is to look for the best evidence that it was not.

The most convincing proof I've uncovered that there are crop circles that are not man-made is cases with a total lack of damage and soil compression during periods of bad weather (heavy rain and so on), and where credible witnesses have seen circles forming (always simple circles – not the complex formations you see in books). I presented this evidence to the Society for Entertainment and Transformation (SEAT) at the United Nations in New York.

I almost always work with farmers and have had excellent cooperation. They want to know what is going on, just as I do. I did have just one problem, when I shortcut my usual policy of finding the farmer and asking permission to enter his field. On that occasion, he had already warned hundreds of tourists and researchers not to enter a crop circle on his land, near Devizes, Wiltshire. I was unaware of this, and took a small team with me into the field, after trying unsuccessfully to find the farmer. It was not long before he found us. He approached, screaming at the top of his voice and with what looked like a rifle in his hands. He was so furious he was unable to even hold a conversation and strongly gestured to us to get out immediately. Fortunately, the object was not a gun but a hefty stick – which I have no trouble imagining he would have used if we hadn't left without causing a scene ourselves.

***COLIN ANDREWS**, an electrical engineer by profession, has been researching crop circles since 1983, and has published and spoken widely on the subject. His research has led him to conclude that the intelligence behind the circles interacts with both researchers and hoaxers, and that the phenomenon indicates a future period of human chaos. This can be changed with human awareness. He believes the phenomenon is challenging people to a higher level of consciousness. www.ColinAndrews.net*



CROP CIRCLES DIRECTORY

SUGGESTED READING

Crop Circles: Signs, Wonders and Mysteries
Steve & Karen Alexander (Arcturus Publishing 2009)

Circular Evidence
Colin Andrews & Pat Delgado (Bloomsbury, 1989)

Crooked Soley: A Crop Circle Revelation
Allan Brown & John Michell (Roundhill Press, 2005)

The New Circlemakers: Insights Into the Crop Circle Mystery
Andrew Collins (ARE Press, 2009)

Crop Circles
Michael Glickman (Wooden Books, 2005)

The Field Guide: The Art, History & Philosophy of Crop Circle Making
Rob Irving and John Lundberg (Strange Attractor Press, 2008)

Circles from the Sky
Terence Meaden (Souvenir Press, 1991)

The Crop Circle Enigma
Ralph Noyes (Gateway books, 1990)

Crop Circles: A Mystery Solved
Jenny Randles & Paul Fuller (Robert Hale, 1990)

Round in Circles: Physicists, Poltergeists, Pranksters and the Secret History of the Crop Watchers
Jim Schnabel (Penguin, 1994)

GROUPS AND ORGANISATIONS

Canadian Crop Circle Research Network
The CCCRN, founded by researcher Paul Scott Anderson, has been investigating the crop circle phenomenon in the prairies and across the country since 1995.
Web: http://www.cccrn.ca/cccrn/blog/blog.html

BLT Research Team, Inc.
Composed of several hundred trained field-sampling personnel in the US, Canada and Europe who collect plant and soil samples at crop circle sites for analyses by a number of scientists.
Web: www.bltresearch.com/

WEBSITES

Circlemakers
The home of the UK's circlemakers since 1995. News, views and lots to explore here.
www.circlemakers.org

Crop Circle Connector
One of the first circles sites, and still going strong; organises conferences and meetings and has a comprehensive resource centre which offers membership packages for those who want to get more involved
www.cropcircleconnector.com

London Forum for the Study of Crop Circles and Other Mysteries
Offers regular meetings and talks, full-scale conferences and even trips to crop circle country for those based in London
www.londoncircles.net/

Crop Circle Research Dot Com
Searchable crop circle database website.
www.cropcircleresearch.com/

UK Crop Circles
Home of researchers Dan Vidler and Chris Riley, with a newsletter.
www.ukcropcircles.co.uk/

The Official Website of Colin Andrews
Home of the veteran circles researcher
www.colinandrews.net

Temporary Temples
Home of crop circle photographer extraordinaire Steve Alexander, writer Karen Alexander and researcher Michael Glickman, offering images of the latest UK formations, an online image library and shop.
www.temporarytemples.co.uk

Swirled News
News and views from researcher Andy Thomas
www.londoncircles.net/

Medway Crop Circle
The circles phenomenon in Kent
www.medwaycropcircle.co.uk/

Crop Circle Science
Germany's leading circles site, home of researchers Andreas Müller & Werner Anderhub
www.kornkreise-forschung.de/

CropFiles
Database of Italian formations
www.cropfiles.it

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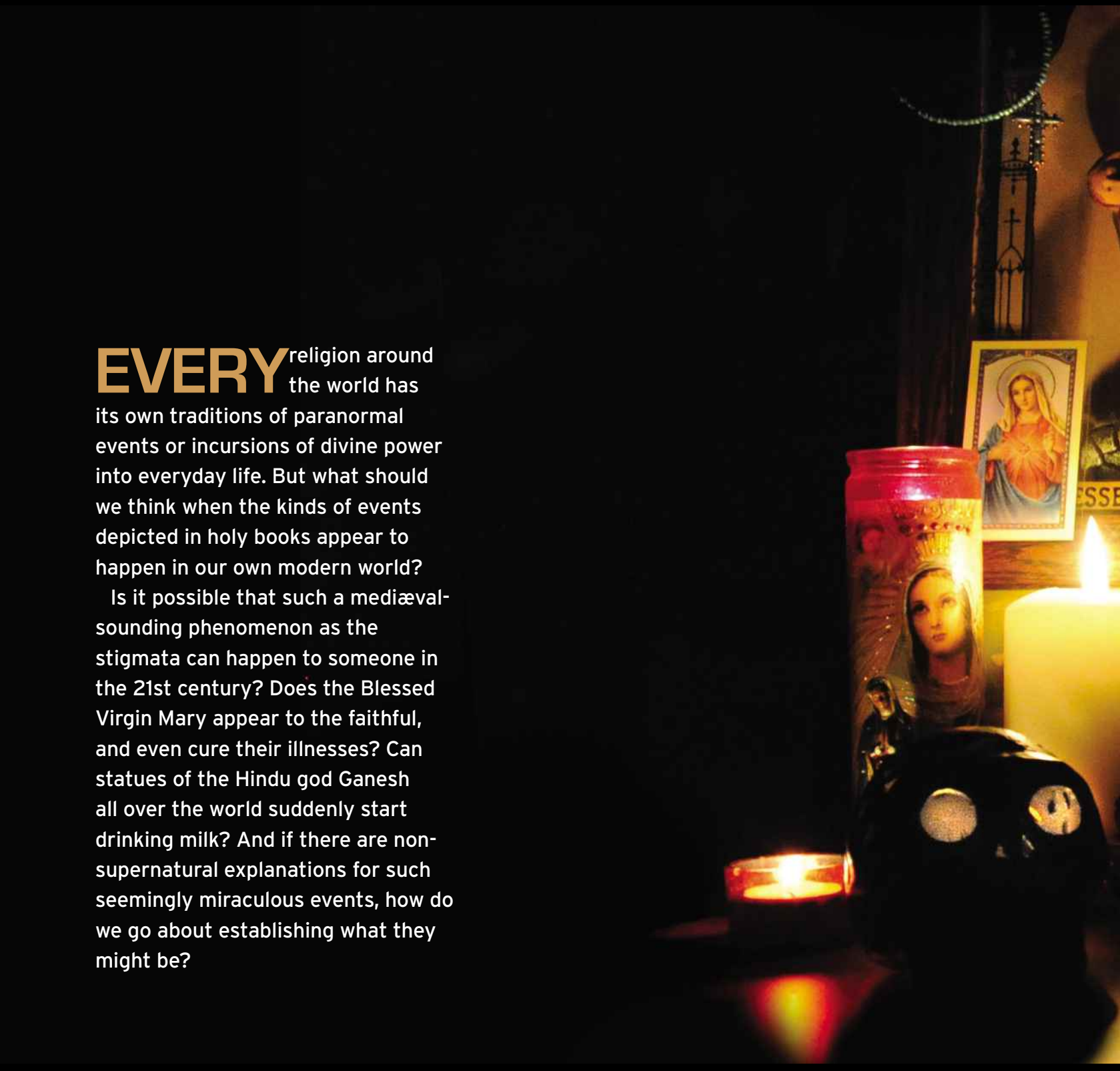
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The Fortean Times Guide to...
MIRACLES



EVERY religion around the world has its own traditions of paranormal events or incursions of divine power into everyday life. But what should we think when the kinds of events depicted in holy books appear to happen in our own modern world?

Is it possible that such a mediæval-sounding phenomenon as the stigmata can happen to someone in the 21st century? Does the Blessed Virgin Mary appear to the faithful, and even cure their illnesses? Can statues of the Hindu god Ganesh all over the world suddenly start drinking milk? And if there are non-supernatural explanations for such seemingly miraculous events, how do we go about establishing what they might be?


SED BE THY H

An introduction to...
MIRACLES



OUR EXPERT TED HARRISON

Most religions include apparently "impossible" events in the story of their foundation, or as evidence of their gods' enduring power. Are they real or are they only in the eyes of the faithful?



Almost all religions retell stories of supernatural happenings. Muslims believe that the words of their holy book, the Qu'ran or Koran, were miraculously revealed to the Prophet Mohammed by the Angel Gabriel; Jews are told how Moses divided the Red Sea to let the Children of Israel pass through unharmed; Christians learn that Jesus not only walked on water, but most important of all he rose from the dead on the third day following crucifixion.

What Muslims, Jews, Christians and followers of many other faiths readily believe is that miraculous events have occurred in history.

Yet from time to time in the modern world reports of extraordinary events emerge. When they do, they often spread like wildfire. Most commonly, contemporary stories relate to objects behaving oddly.

DRINKING AND MOVING STATUES

In September 1995, Hindus around the world heard rumours that statues of Lord Ganesh were drinking milk. Ganesh has the head of an elephant and it was said that when the trunk was put in contact with a spoonful of milk, the milk gradually disappeared. Statues in shrines from at least 30 locations reported the phenomenon. Modern telecommunications

LEFT: Moses parts the Red Sea, in one of the most famous miracles related in the Bible.



spread the news rapidly and Hindus from Canada to India to Australia reported their own versions of this odd occurrence.

Rationalists quickly explained that the statues were made from porous stone or plaster. The milk was being drawn up by capillary action, it was said. Yet if that is the explanation, came the response, why should it only be happening now – and simultaneously at so many shrines? Food is offered to statues every day and nothing like this has happened in modern Hindu history.

After a short while, the elephant God's appetite for milk diminished. The interest died away, and the queues which formed at Ganesh shrines gradually dwindled. While it was a short-lived miracle, it had made a profound impact, in particular because even when hard-nosed journalists offered the stone statues spoonfuls of milk, the milk disappeared as they watched. The phenomenon was repeated in 2006 and created a similar excitement.

In 1985, a story began circulating around the village of Ballinspittle in Ireland that an inanimate statue of the Virgin Mary in a wayside shrine had appeared to move. The village rapidly became a centre of curiosity. On the day I visited, hundreds of people were standing in a field opposite the shrine, praying the rosary and staring intently at the statue. There was something of a carnival atmosphere to the occasion, and the line of chip vans in the lane was doing brisk business.

Within weeks of the first report, there were at least 30 other sightings of moving statues in the country. The Roman Catholic Bishop of Cork and Ross, Michael Murphy, was careful not to give the epidemic of moving statues the stamp of Church approval. He simply said of Ballinspittle: "They are prayerful gatherings, very devotional and I know that the effect has been very good for quite a number of people."

When I was there, I heard many people shout out: "She's



HINDUS AROUND THE WORLD HEARD RUMOURS THAT STATUES OF LORD GANESH WERE DRINKING MILK



ABOVE: A statue of the Hindu god Ganesh drinking milk. **TOP:** The supposedly moving statue of the BVM at Ballinspittle.

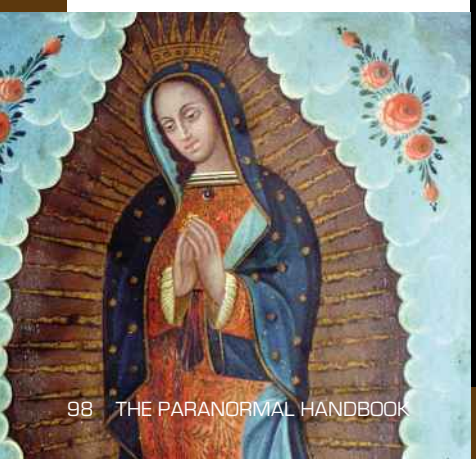
SEVEN MARIAN APPARITIONS

GUADALUPE
MEXICO, 1531

Early one morning in December 1531, a 57-year-old Indian named Juan Diego was on his way to Mass in a village five miles north of Mexico City. As he was passing the hill of Tepeyac – once a site sacred to the Aztec mother goddess – he heard a voice calling his name and saw what looked like a teenage Mexican girl surrounded by rays of golden light. She instructed him to build a chapel on the hill. When the local bishop was sceptical of Juan's story, the figure reappeared and promised Juan a sign – which was vouchsafed when an image of the Virgin was imprinted on his cloak; Our Lady of Guadalupe has been a symbol of the Catholic faith in Mexico ever since.

RUE DE BAC
PARIS, 1832

On the evening of 18 July 1830, Catherine Labouré , a 24-year-old member of the Sisters of Charity in Rue de Bac, Paris, visited the convent chapel. At midnight, the Virgin appeared to her and told she would have a mission to perform. On 27 November, the figure reappeared, this time as if in an oval frame containing the words "O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee". The Virgin then instructed Catherine that she





ABOVE: The annual miracle of the holy fire takes place every Easter at the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

moved! Our Lady's moving!" What I noticed from the shouts was that no two people in the crowd appeared to notice the movement at exactly the same time. The movement, I suspected was not of the statue, but existed in the eye of the beholder. In due course as I stared at the statue, I too noticed a wobble.

Researchers from University College, Cork, provided a plausible explanation. Try staring at a lamppost at dusk and in due course you should see it sway. It is an illusion created as the brain misinterprets information from the eye. As you stand and stare you sway just a little. But you are not aware of your almost imperceptible body movement and the brain concludes erroneously that it is not your body that is moving, but the object you are watching.

A variation on the same theme of objects behaving oddly is when a commonplace object is found carrying a religiously significant message. A devout Muslim family once showed me an aubergine which had been cut in half to reveal the seeds inside arranged in a pattern spelling out the name of Allah. I have seen a tile

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC HIERARCHY DAMPENS DOWN CLAIMS OF MIRACULOUS EVENTS

in a fireplace in Belfast which the householder noticed had an image of Christ imprinted in the glaze. When I arrived at the terraced house, shortly after the news broke, there was a line of neighbours outside waiting their turn to view the miracle. Both chance events, one might argue, with the significance being entirely in the minds of the beholders. Not so, believers would say – they are signs from God.

Sadly, I never got to see the famous cookie that looked like Mother Teresa.

REGULAR MIRACLES

Objects behaving oddly quickly attract explanatory theories. There are professional debunkers such as James Randi, who has offered a million-dollar reward to anyone who can prove the reality of a paranormal event and is convinced his money is safe. The Roman Catholic hierarchy invariably dampens down claims of miraculous events, reserving judgement until the event is safely consigned to history.

Commenting on Ballinspittle, Bishop Murphy said: "Direct divine intervention in the affairs of men is very rare." It was a time, he noted, of high unemployment, bad weather and anxiety. "People in general may be in need of some sign of reassurance."

There are some miracles which happen with complete predictability and have occurred on cue for centuries.

At Easter time every year, the site of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem is the scene of the annual miracle of holy fire. When the Eastern Orthodox Patriarch enters the place of Jesus's burial and resurrection, a strange blue flame emerges before his eyes from which he lights a candle.

The flame is then passed from candle to candle to light the whole church.

Orthodox Patriarch Diodor has performed the ceremony on many occasions. "Sometimes I may wait a few minutes, but normally the miracle happens immediately after I have said the prayers. From the core of the very stone on which Jesus lay, an indefinable light pours forth. It usually has a blue tint, but the colour may change and take many different hues. It cannot be described in human terms. The light rises out of the stone as mist may rise out of a lake – it almost looks as if the stone is covered by a moist cloud, but it is light."

Visitors to Naples Cathedral on the feast day of St Januarius in September will also be guaranteed a supernatural treat. A sealed phial of the saint's dried blood liquefies. It might take only a few minutes, sometimes it has taken much longer, but when it happens it is greeted as a miracle.

As the blood has never been subjected to modern scientific analysis – it might not be blood at all – there is no objective proof of a miraculous event. Similarly, the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem is too sacred a spot to be subjected to intrusive scientific investigation at Easter. It is not difficult to imagine ways of recreating the appearance of holy fire. Rational explanations are irrelevant to the crowds who gather to see the predictable miracles. What is important is the event itself, the spiritual high it induces and how it reinforces the shared cultural identity of the participants.

"For those who believe, an explanation is unnecessary. For those, who don't believe, an explanation is impossible," St Bernadette of Lourdes once said.

If tricks are involved, they are well-kept secrets. What should not be forgotten is that in many faiths from Shamanism to Hinduism to a Catholic High Mass with incense, processions and bells, a little showmanship never goes amiss and is often appreciated, even expected, by the congregation.

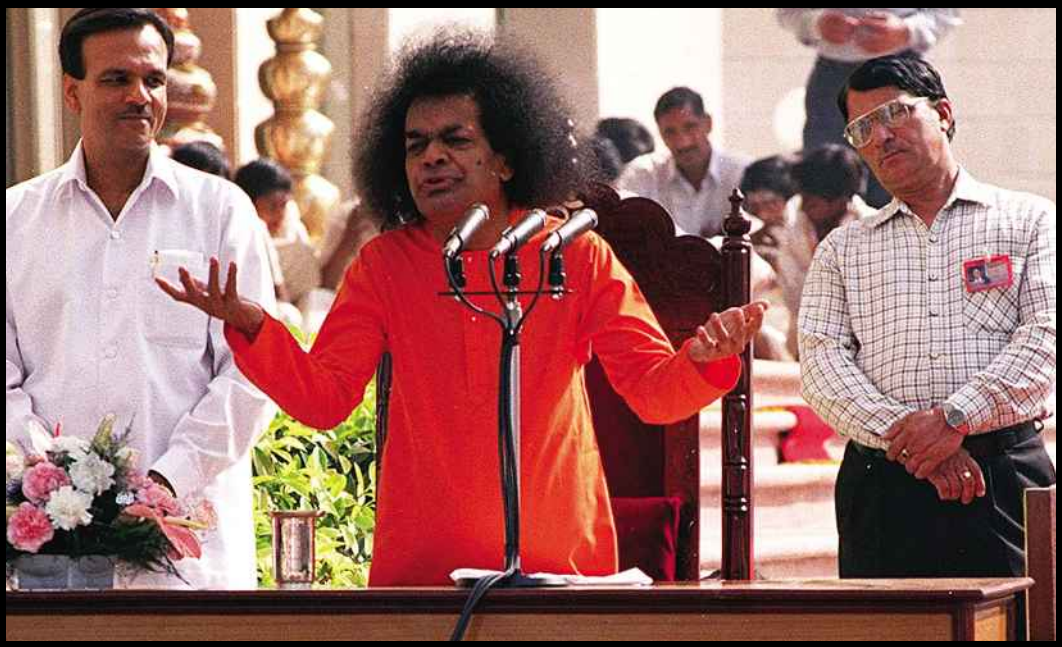
HOLY MEN AND WOMEN

A religious showman *par excellence* is the Indian *swami* Sai Baba. With his huge Afro-style hairdo and reputation for conjuring *vibhuti*, or holy ash, from thin air, he has attracted a massive following. Some critics see him as a manipulative fraud, but his disciples believe he is capable of prodigious paranormal feats. It is said that he can bilocate – appear in two places at the same time – and raise the dead.

He is the latest in a long line of Eastern holy men who have attracted dedicated followers. Attributing supernatural gifts to these holy men is part of the process of establishing their reputations as teachers. Claims are made of such powers as levitation, withstanding great heat or surviving for long periods of time with little or no food.

In 2008, *The Times* reported thousands of pilgrims flocking to a remote jungle in southeast Nepal after a 17-year-old boy, whom some believe to be a reincarnation of the Buddha, emerged after more than a year in the forest. Ram Bahadur Bamjan first grabbed world headlines in 2005 when tens of thousands of devotees travelled to see him as he sat cross-legged amid the roots of a tree for nearly ten months without, it was claimed, food or water.

A similar claim was made in mid-Victorian times when a 12-year-old girl, Sarah Jacob



ABOVE: Indian holy man Sai Baba has been dismissed as a fraud, but disciples believe he has paranormal powers.



should have a medallion made in this form, and that "Graces will abound for those who wear it". The rest of Catherine's life was devoted to getting the medals made while keeping her own identity secret. The first were struck in 1832, and became extremely popular, with many cures and conversions being attributed to them.

LLANTHONY

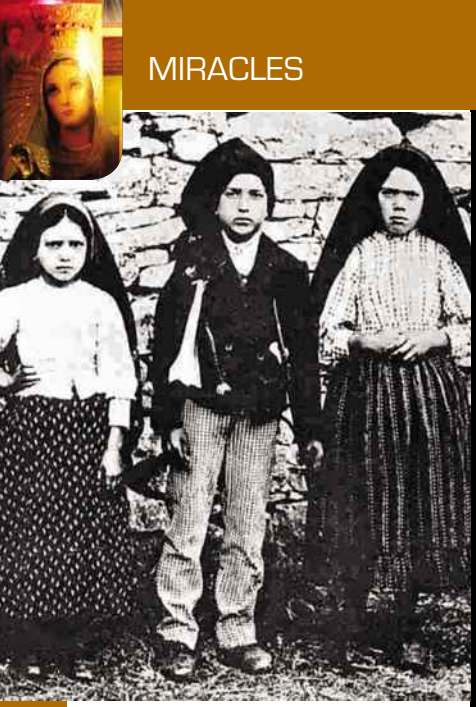
WALES, 1880

Appearances of the Virgin Mary have tended to be the domain of the Catholic Church, which makes this case from Wales unusual, as it took place within a religious establishment of the Church of England. Having said that, the Abbey at Llanthony was founded by one Father Ignatius, whose devotion to the Virgin was well known and whose purpose was to restore the monastic tradition within the C of E. He'd tried to buy the ruins of the old Llanthony Abbey, but then built his own new one up the road at remote Capel-y-ffin. Here, in August 1880, members of the small community saw a "bright, dazzling figure" appear in the meadow. The following month, there were further dramatic apparitions: in one, the figure appeared by an illuminated rhubarb bush, and in another the heavens lit up and the figure was of a gigantic size.

FÁTIMA

PORTUGAL, 1917

As at Lourdes, the witnesses to these celebrated apparitions, which began on 13 May 1917, were young and uneducated – a trio of children grazing family sheep in a meadow called the Cova da Iria. There was a

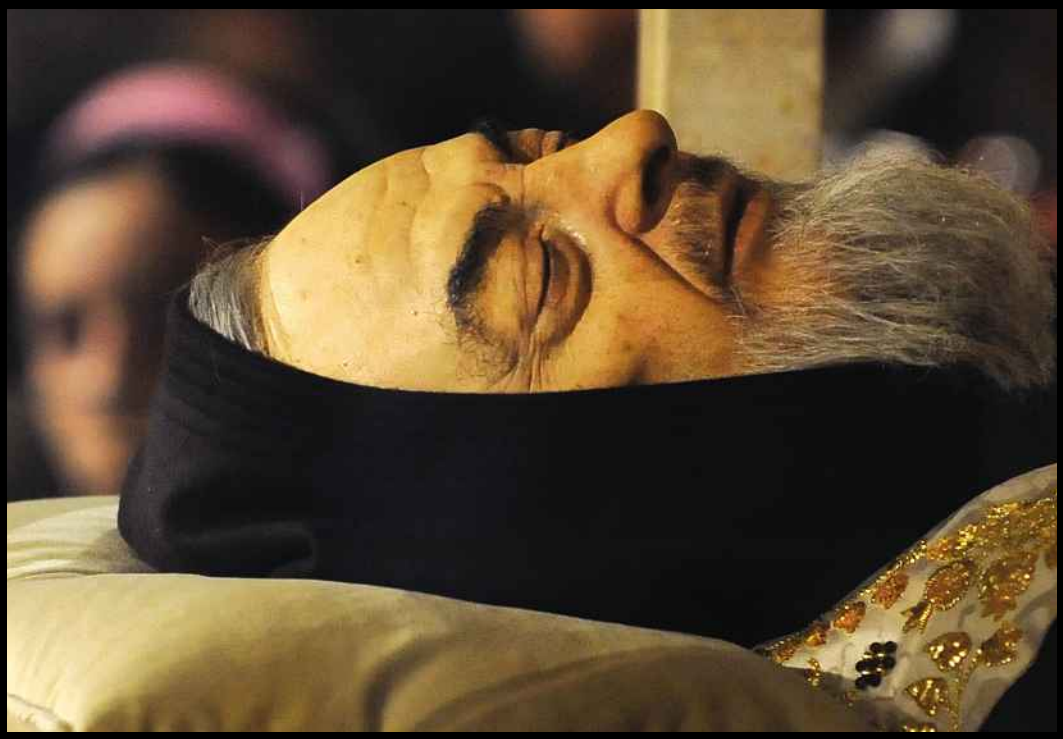


sudden flash of light and a beautiful lady appeared in the branches of a tree. The children returned on further occasions, attracting larger crowds each time, and received messages and prophecies – the 'secrets of Fátima'. At one point they were locked up by the authorities while thousands waited for the next vision. The climax came on 13 September, when 30,000 people gathered and many claimed to have witnessed the Sun spinning in the sky and other aerial phenomena. The Church recognised the events in 1930, and Pope John Paul II credited Our Lady of Fátima with saving his life following the assassination attempt on her feast day in 1981.He donated the bullet to the Fátima sanctuary.

GARABANDAL

SPAIN, 1961–65

The apparitions in the village of Garabandal, Spain, took place from 1961 to 1965, when both the Virgin and the Archangel St Michael were said to have appeared before four young schoolgirls. These visitations were notable for their frequency – there were about 2,000 – and for the large crowds which gathered to watch. The first appearance – by St Michael – was after three of the girls had been scrumping apples. Later, he was accompanied by the Virgin and another angel, and the girls began to experience ecstatic states and demonstrated 'miracles'. Despite popular support, Church authorities did not endorse the events, although neither did they suggest that the apparitions were a hoax.



ABOVE: The hugely popular Padre Pio has been placed on the fast-track to canonisation thanks to Pope John Paul II.

from rural Wales, lived for two years without food, sustained by her fervent protestant faith and her reading of the Bible. She received many visitors, who were encouraged by the family to give donations. She died when London doctors visited and instigated a round-the-clock watch to ensure her family was not surreptitiously feeding her. From her death it was deduced that, although her lack of will to eat was genuine, there must have been an element of fraud involved.

As the sad case of Sarah Jacob suggests, there need to be ethical boundaries when investigating such phenomena. The scope for scientific exploration is also limited by other factors. Any insensitive intrusion into someone's religion is inappropriate and rightly resented.

The most experienced investigators are to be found within the Roman Catholic Church. They take a great deal of convincing that something extraordinary might also be supernatural. Early investigations into Padre Pio painted a negative picture of the Italian friar and stigmatic. Thanks to the personal interest of Pope John Paul II, and by popular acclaim, Padre Pio has now been fast-tracked to canonisation; but initially Vatican scientific and medical reports were very dubious as to his supernatural credentials.

THERE NEED TO BE ETHICAL BOUNDARIES WHEN INVESTIGATING MIRACLES AND RELIGIOUS PHENOMENA

When his superiors placed restrictions on Padre Pio's public celebrations of mass at San Giovanni Rotondo, crowds continued to turn up to his masses even when they were held in the dark small hours of the morning.

Travelling to see mystics in person is a common activity across many faiths. Until her death in 2007 at the age of 23, pilgrims regularly visited the American suburban house in Worcester, Massachussetts, where Audrey Santo lived. With others, I was allowed to view her through a window as she lay silent and apparently comatose, attended by a nurse or her mother. She had been in this condition since an accident at the age of three.

It was claimed that she carried the stigmata (marks resembling those of Christ at the Crucifixion), that she could perform miracles and that statues in her home spontaneously dripped holy oil.

I also attended an open air mass in a football stadium to which Audrey was brought in an ambulance and put on display behind bulletproof glass in front of a crowd of 10,000 people.

VISIONS OF THE VIRGIN

Some time after her accident, while still a small child, Audrey Santo had been taken to Medjugorje, where the Virgin Mary is said to appear to a small



group of local visionaries. During one of the appearances, her mother believes that Mary asked Audrey to become a victim soul – someone who suffers for others – and Audrey agreed.

Since 1981, when the Medjugorje apparitions began, huge crowds gather regularly to witness them. Only the visionaries actually see the white figure of a lady, who relays to them messages for the world. Nevertheless, the witnesses claim spiritual renewal and sometimes physical healing simply by being present.

Reports of visions of the Virgin run through Roman Catholic popular devotions. She is famously said to have been seen in Lourdes, now a thriving centre of pilgrimage, as well as in Knock in Ireland and Fátima in Portugal. Normally ,visions of Mary occur to single observers or small groups.

Rarely are visions witnessed by large crowds, but reports of the events in Fátima buck the trend. Our Lady of Fátima appeared in 1917 to three local children. When they reported that on her sixth appearance, scheduled for 13 October that year, she would manifest a sign to the world, 70,000 people turned up to witness the event.

Suddenly, in the words of a journalist who was present, "...the silver Sun, enveloped in the same gauzy grey light, was seen to whirl and turn in the circle of broken clouds... The light turned a beautiful blue, as if it had come through the stained-glass windows of a cathedral, and spread itself over the people who knelt with outstretched hands... people wept and prayed with uncovered heads, in the presence of a miracle they had awaited."

THE HOW AND THE WHY

So what is the explanation? Certainly the crowd was ready and expecting something. Did a rare meteorological phenomenon produce the illusion? Has the story become embroidered with the telling and retelling?

There is no independent data to examine; there is no newsreel footage. As with a similar story from around the same period, that of the Angels of Mons, who were said to have appeared to and protected British troops during a World War I battle, the witnesses can no longer be questioned and the account has moved from reportage to myth.

Trying to understand contemporary accounts of supernatural religious events, however, goes beyond simply establishing facts and attributing plausible, rational explanations. Indeed, in Christian theology finding a natural explanation may simply confirm God's involvement. God can create wonders from his existing laws of nature, the argument goes; he does not have to over-ride them.

While "How does something happen?" is an important question, equally important is "Why?" and especially "Why *now*?" Are there social or cultural explanations? Is there an institution or individual with a vested interest in encouraging the reports? What commercial interests might be involved? Certainly, at places like Lourdes, Medjugorje, San Giovanni Rotondo and Knock, hundreds of jobs in the hotel and retail trade depend on a steady stream of believers coming to visit the sites of supposed miracles.



ABOVE: Pope John Paul II vists Fatima, Portugal, site of a mass vision of the Blessed Virgin Mary in 1917.

ZEITOUN

EGYPT, 1968-71

From 1968 to 1971, apparitions of the Virgin were reportedly seen by hundreds of thousands of people (including, apparently, President Nasser) in the Zeitoun suburb of Cairo, Egypt. Sightings of the glowing, luminous figure floating above the roof of the Coptic Orthodox Church of St Mary in Zeitoun were frequent, and lasted anywhere from minutes to hours. Sometimes, the figure – which never spoke – was accompanied by strange, luminous, bird-like shapes that some people likened to doves. Intriguing photographs exist, taken by newspapers and Egyptian TV stations, a number of cures are on record and the Coptic Church concluded that the visions were indeed of the BVM.

AKITA

JAPAN, 1973

Agnes Sasagawa had suffered ill health for years after an appendix operation; after a pilgrimage to Lourdes, she recovered, but then went completely deaf, before joining the community of nuns in Yuzawadi in Akita prefecture. In 1973, she claimed to have seen bright, luminous beings which guided her to the chapel where a statue of the Virgin was seen to weep and show stigmata; there were recurrences of these phenomena over the next six years, as well as messages warning of disaster for those who did not repent their sins. In 1982, Sister Agnes was reportedly cured of her deafness during mass, and in 1988 the Catholic Church deemed the events, and the messages, reliable.



CASEBOOK

THE DARK SIDE OF LOURDES

THE GROTTO OF LOURDES HAS BEEN A PLACE OF PILGRIMAGE EVER SINCE BERNADETTE SOUBIROUS HAD A VISION OF THE VIRGIN MARY THERE IN 1858. BUT, AS **THERESE TAYLOR** REVEALS, THE AREA ALSO HAS AN OLDER AND DARKER SUPERNATURAL TRADITION.

The town of Lourdes is known throughout the world as a place of Catholic pilgrimage. During the tourist season, tens of thousands of people flock every week to this shrine in the French Pyrenees. On the outskirts of the town is the Grotto, also called the Cave of Massabielle, famous as the site of the visions of Saint Bernadette. This visionary was a peasant girl who repeatedly beheld the Virgin Mary standing in a niche on the rocks. On the floor of the Grotto is a natural spring, which is revered as a source of holy water for the cure of the sick.

Despite its fame, the details of the Lourdes story are not well known. People are inclined to think that Bernadette must have lived in the Middle Ages, whereas she was a modern, 19th-century woman who was often photographed, and even travelled by railway train. Her visions took place in 1858. Even for Catholics who are able to place Bernadette in the correct era, the historical background to the visions is unfamiliar. Hagiographic accounts of Lourdes tend to cast the story in simplistic terms. They glorify Bernadette as a poor and simple shepherdess, and the Grotto as a rustic shrine, the perfect setting for a formulaic Madonna. Local elements are stripped away, and themes of fear, ambiguity and darkness are never associated with the "Grotto of Lourdes" as it appears in picture postcards.

But the history of Lourdes is more interesting, and far darker, than such bland accounts would suggest. Long before Bernadette put it on the map, the Grotto was a place of legend, a site where people confronted the supernatural in many forms.

Nowadays, the Grotto of Lourdes is overshadowed by a massive cathedral and has been cleared, excavated, and sparsely decorated with a statue of the Virgin and candles. Despite the gaudy style of Lourdes as a town, the Grotto has remained as an austere place of worship, with a paved marble floor and natural black granite walls. It





once stood in a wilderness, and is still part of a striking mountain range, which has a freezing wind shrieking through it during winter.

Anyone who has stayed in Lourdes for some time, and has spoken to local people, will hear some odd rumours about the Grotto. There always have been legends about Massabielle, even before the town became famous in 1858.

LOURDES BEFORE BERNADETTE

Prior to 1858, Lourdes was a large market town in an economically depressed border region of France. The mountain scenery was magnificent, and drew visitors who took the waters at local spas. There was a small middle class of teachers and state officials, but most of the local people spoke their own language and were still untouched by the outside world. The Middle Ages lasted a long time in the French Pyrenees; the last witch-burning in the area took place at the suprisingly late date of 1851, when some residents of a remote mountain hamlet decided that one of their neighbours, an elderly woman, had put a curse on them. Aside from witches, Pyrenean people feared visitations from werewolves, who could likewise lurk behind the façade of an ordinary person. History and legend combined in their religious beliefs. While the demonic figures of the past continued to frighten people, the Cathar heretics of the Middle Ages retained a measure of popular adulation and were transformed into figures of magical significance.

The heresies and superstitions of the Middle Ages were not even the oldest elements of Pyrenean legend, as pre-Christian sacred areas retained their appeal. Bernadette's 19th-century contemporaries had great respect for dolmens (standing stones), sacred groves and pagan votive altars, all of which retained an aura of the uncanny.

The Cave of Massabielle has an identifiable history prior to the apparitions of 1858. This rocky outcrop on the left bank of the Gave river, a short walk from the town of Lourdes, was part of a chain of grottos, some of which opened into deep caverns within the mountains. The grottos were sufficiently notable to feature in guidebooks to the region, although one's response to them was always dependent on class and social factors. To the educated, such natural formations were the occasion for scientific exploration and scenic appreciation; to the common people, they were sites of supernatural activity. As the 19th-century anthropologist André Lefèvre wrote: "There is hardly a single French province which does not have trees, grottoes or dolmens which are haunted by fairies. One hears of fairy pillars and rocks, fairy nooks, fairy wells, lakes, houses and chambers of fairies, wraiths and sorcerers."

Superstitions concerning Massabielle provide evidence of a reputation both sacred and demonic, of a place both haunted and holy.

When describing the area, local writer Lagrèze noted that "the belief in fairies and sorcerers is dear to our mountain people", but did not record exactly what stories the grottos inspired. The fairies (*fées* in French) were also known as 'white ladies', and they lived in caves, dolmens and groves. These nature spirits could be either well- or ill-disposed towards humans, and they could also be lustful, capricious, and powerful. They retained all the characteristics of pagan deities



ANYONE WHO STAYS IN LOURDES WILL HEAR SOME ODD RUMOURS ABOUT THE GROTTO



ABOVE: Pilgrims to the Basilica at Lourdes photographed in 1890.
TOP: Modern-day crowds gather for a Papal visit to the famous shrine.



ABOVE: The house in Lourdes in which the young Bernadette Soubirous lived at the time of her visions.

mingled with later Christian elements. The figure of a powerful or impressive Fairy Queen was often mixed up with that of the Virgin Mary, whose image she both shaped and mirrored.

The fairies around Lourdes were familiar to the people of the town, and were known to live at Massabielle. Even today, the Lourdes Grotto is known as a 'Fairy Cave' among local people. Lourdes tradition also linked the area of Massabielle to the Virgin Mary. It was claimed that in the 11th century Lourdes had been dedicated in feudal vassalage to Notre Dame de Puy, and that every year green herbs from the fields around Massabielle were gathered and offered to this ancient icon.

Before 1858, the interests of local scholars – and of tourists to the area – had led to the exploration of some of the grottos at Lourdes. In one deep cavern not far from Massabielle, the *grotte de Saint-Pé*, witnesses were astounded to come upon a wall of ancient appearance and human construction. When it was opened, water gushed out. In 1857, a provincial journal told its readers: "One could explore a subterranean cavern where, for centuries, no living being has penetrated." Rather gruesomely, bones were also found in the cave, some of which were of an unknown animal "of a huge species"; deeper caverns revealed the bones of humans. As one local historian wrote, these bones proved a great subject for hypothesis, both for those who were educated and those who were not. The stories of these grotto explorations would have circulated in Lourdes, and the macabre findings in the *grotte de Saint-Pé* may have contributed to the oral tradition that human sacrifices had once been offered in the grotto of Massabielle.

BERNADETTE LOOKED ABOUT HER AND SAW A WHITE FIGURE IN THE NICHE OF THE GROTTO

In June 1854, the local paper reported that there had been a series of suicides by tourists in the area. Several had drowned themselves in the lake at Lourdes, and one in the Gave river. Most probably, these deaths were of psychologically troubled people holidaying in the mountains on a doctor's advice – a common recommendation at that time – but to local people, the suicides were easily related to stories of mountain spirits luring people to their deaths in waterways or from cliffs. The ghosts of such suicides were expected to haunt the area indefinitely.

The Mayor of Lourdes commented in 1858 that Massabielle was a picturesque place where tourists were inclined to take walks. By contrast, local people described the appearance of the area in somewhat unfavourable terms. The local Forest Guard, who commented that he had never gone to the Grotto prior to the apparitions, described the area as "entirely wild and deserted". In later years, many local people claimed that they had always said that miraculous events would happen at Massabielle. Whether they were being wise after the event we will never know.

THE VISIONS

Massabielle became famous because of the events of 11 February 1858. It was a frosty winter's day, and three girls, aged between 12 and 14 years old, left their homes in the poor quarter of the town to gather wood in the forest. They were Bernadette Soubirous, her sister Toinette, and their friend Jeanne Abadie.

They walked out of the town, toward the grottos near the Gave. Bernadette became separated from her companions, who crossed a millstream ahead of her. While seated on the ground, uncertain as to whether to follow them, she heard a sound of rushing wind. She looked about her and saw a white figure in the niche of the Grotto. Bernadette's companions returned and were alarmed to find their friend kneeling in a trance, apparently oblivious to them. Suddenly, she seemed to recover her senses and rose to her feet. On the way home, Bernadette told Toinette that she had seen a white figure in the Grotto. "You tell me this to scare me," replied Toinette, "but I laugh at it, now that we are out on the road." However, the dark atmosphere of the forest lingered in her mind, and Bernadette seemed different, preoccupied. That evening, Toinette told their mother that Bernadette had seen 'something' in the forest.

The response of Louise Soubirous, an overworked and impoverished mother of six, was



to beat both girls with a cane. She told Bernadette that her eyes must have deceived her; but when Bernadette insisted, Louise was touched by fear. She said: "We must pray. It may be the soul of one of our relatives in Purgatory." Bernadette's father likewise wavered between blaming his daughter for disturbing the household with a ridiculous story and uneasily believing that the apparition in the Grotto might really be something from another world. Toinette recalled his reaction: "'Already! You have started on foolishness!' He thought that the Lady was something evil."

These reactions to Bernadette's story indicated that people were disquieted by the fact that she had apparently been frequenting Massabielle, that notorious place. As Bernarde Castérot, Bernadette's own aunt, exclaimed later that week: "What was the little one thinking of, to go to a place like that?" On the evening of the first vision, Louise forbade her daughter to ever return to Massabielle. This command was soon to be disobeyed, as the Soubirous parents were pestered first by schoolchildren, and then by adult neighbours, who wanted Bernadette to accompany them to the Grotto.

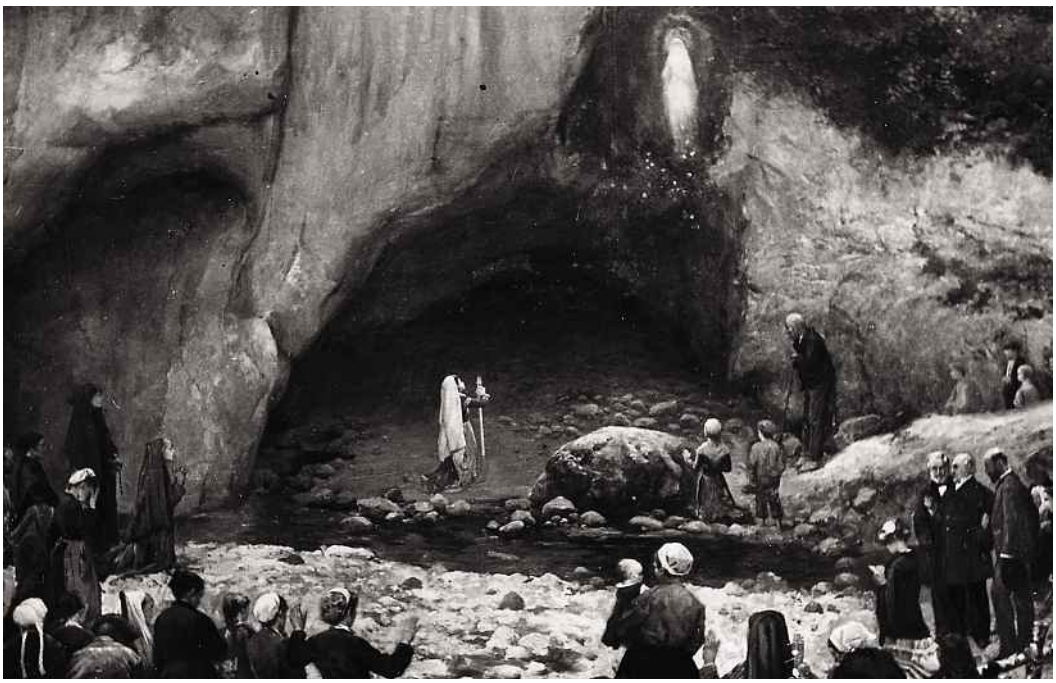
Almost every time Bernadette returned to the area, she fell into a trance and would later claim to have been in communication with a beautiful white lady. The initial return visits to the Grotto were a bit of a disaster. Bernadette's companions were girls of her own age, and these impressionable allies were terrified, and fled in hysterics when they could not rouse her from the trance. Townspeople got wind of this, and some said that Bernadette was bewitched; others thought she might be insane. However, two respectable ladies heard of the figure in the Grotto and thought they recognised the description.

Pyrenean folklore taught that messengers from the spirit world were often the unquiet dead, and the people of Lourdes soon wondered if the white figure in the Grotto might not be a ghost. There was certainly a candidate for the role. Elise Latapie, who died in 1857, had been the president of a local prayer group, the Children of Mary. Before her untimely death, she had been a young woman of notable social standing in the district, and the parish priest commented that her funeral cortège had been followed by many of the townspeople: "In the eyes of all, she was a saint."

Despite this picture of piety and respectability, there were a number of rumours about Elise that would have fuelled speculation about the possibility of her ghost returning. The priest recorded that while she was dying she had asked to be dressed as she would be after death, in the blue and white costume of her prayer group. Her request, effectively to be laid out before she was dead, was refused; unquiet spirits reiterating their unfulfilled conditions for burial is common material for ghost stories. There was also some indefinite gossip, which besmirched Elise Latapie's reputation and suggested that she might have died with an unquiet conscience.

Whatever the reason, as Antoinette Peyret later explained: "I had thought, when a Lady with a white robe and a blue girdle appeared, that it was our former superior of the Children of Mary… I have always had a devotion to the souls in purgatory." Accordingly, a visit to the Grotto was arranged with Bernadette. The visionary beheld her mysterious *Dame*, and Elise Latapie's friends plied her with questions, but the mysterious being failed to confirm her identity. The witnesses felt that it was unlikely to be their late religious leader after all, and left feeling rather dissatisfied. As Antoinette Peyret recalled: "I did not think that there was anything diabolical involved, but neither did I believe that it was the Blessed Virgin."

Despite the failure of the apparition to reveal itself as Elise Latapie, many people continued to suppose that it must be a ghost. Ghosts appeared often, usually in order to request prayers and masses. The historian Jean-François Soulet has uncovered a case from 1845, when a 10-year-old girl from Lourdes attracted great attention after she began communicating with the soul of her late aunt. Crowds of people had flocked to her house in order to learn if their late relatives wanted masses said for their souls. The figure in the Grotto might be another such spirit, but if it was neither a ghost, nor the Devil, nor the Blessed Virgin, then the *Dame* of the Grotto was most probably a fairy. The apparition was usually referred to as a "White Lady" – as mentioned above, the Pyrenean term for a nature spirit – and with her dwelling place in a cave, her association with a sacred spring, and her enchantment of the visionary Bernadette, the



ABOVE: As word of her visions spread, crowds would join Bernadette at Massabielle in the hope of seeing a miracle.

White Lady of Massabielle was consistent with Pyrenean folklore.

Bernadette's visions were the talk of the area, and soon extended beyond the common people who made up her first audience. Adelaide Monlaur, the daughter of a local schoolteacher, wrote to her cousin about these startling events. Her letter of 8 March 1858 mused on the history of the Grotto:

"Sometime before this extraordinary affair, a charcoal maker came from the forest carrying a faggot of wood; he was near the Grotto when he was caught in a shower of rain. He dropped his wood and went to shelter himself in the Grotto; a moment later, he heard plaintive cries and moans like a voice of someone suffering; he was so afraid that he had to leave, preferring, he said, to be soaked to the skin rather than to stay there.

"Another time, a shepherd was driving his flock nearby, when, like the other man, he was obliged to seek shelter from the rain; he wanted to make his flock enter, but he could not make them enter and they began to bleat in a strange way; he left them outside and went into the Grotto himself, there he also heard the sighs and moans; he came out quickly despite the rain, for he was afraid.

"All this was told to us by a religious man, a native of Lourdes, who is a teacher at Jarret; he took these two recitals from the charcoal burner and the shepherd themselves, each of whom told him in ignorance of the other. The father of that teacher has been dead for three years. Before dying, when he was on his deathbed, he said to those who were present: 'Before four years, you will see miracles in that Grotto.'

"It is also said that a year ago a fisherman saw a light in the Grotto, and that he was so frightened that he was obliged to flee."



THE CLERGY WAITED FOR THE CHURCH HIERARCHY TO RULE ON THE TRUTH OF THE STRANGE EVENTS

Bernadette's visions continued amid a flood of rumours and supernatural legends. As one resident explained: "The first story was known, and everyone interpreted it in their own manner; some saying that the Blessed Virgin was appearing on a rock, others believing that it was a soul from purgatory, asking for prayers." Gradually, the religious element came to predominate, and Bernadette's vision was accepted as the Virgin Mary in the popular mind.

WHITE LADIES

Bernadette's *Dame* did not simply lose her uncanny nature as soon as she was believed to be the Virgin Mary. During the early phase of the Lourdes cult, when the visions were taking place, devotions stayed in the hands of the common people. The clergy remained aloof, obliged to wait for the Church hierarchy to rule on the truth of the strange events.

Without the intervention of such learned interpretations, the *Dame* of the Grotto was characterised through the conventions of folklore, which granted great and arbitrary powers to the Virgin. She loved those who loved her, but punished those who disappointed her. In a region where infanticide was common and relationships with authority harsh, people maintained ruthless notions of maternal love. The *Dame* of the Grotto granted more than miracles of healing. She was reported to have dealt with a cynical gendarme by causing him to become frozen, unable to move his feet from the ground. She was no kinder to an individual who accidentally broke a plaster religious statue and who found that for the following day and night his face was twisted into a hideous grimace. Sharing the mentality of her *Lourdais* followers, and even their crude sense of humour, the Lady was capable of fitting punishment to the crime. As one woman of Lourdes testified: "Laborde, a loafer and a drunkard, went and emptied his bowels in the Grotto. The night after he suffered from diarrhœa all night. He had to make amends."

Aside from the unpredictable



nature of the *Dame*, there was the fact that she was not the only spirit who could cross from the other world. The daily dramas of Bernadette's visions had ceased after only two weeks and, except for three other occasions in 1858, the beautiful Lady showed herself to Bernadette no more. The Grotto itself became a fiercely contested area, and for months the authorities tried to erect barriers to prevent its use as an unauthorised place of worship. The people of Lourdes, though, strongly asserted their right to venerate their new shrine.

From the end of April 1858, people began to report that they had seen visions, either at the Grotto or other locations. Most were children, but they included women and men. A few replicated Bernadette's experiences but most elaborated different supernatural legends. The visionaries were always granted a hearing by their fellow citizens, and were usually believed. These later seers were to have their experiences dismissed by Catholic historians, who termed them 'false' visionaries.

Françoise Junca, who watched a group of children fall into trances at the Grotto, told how they "threw themselves on their knees, together like one man, then they would rise... weep, cry, lament, then they would suddenly fall to their knees again." Such eccentricity did not repulse her. She found the children too young and naïve to be capable of invention, "therefore for them there was a vision, and also for us, the spectators". The Grotto, however, was a gateway to the other world, and anything might come through it. Witnesses would be left with doubts as to what they had seen. In each case, they felt that there had been a genuine vision, but the question was "if it was divine".

Soon, many visionaries were showing signs that they were in communication with either nature spirits or devils. Local folklore preserved chilling stories of a beautiful white lady who appeared around Massabielle. Unlike Bernadette's *Dame*, she did not remain stationary but floated in the air and beckoned to the children who saw her, luring them towards precipices. The white lights, also, would fascinate the watchers and draw them towards the caverns. Several visionaries would have stepped over cliffs or into the rushing waters of the Gave had they not been restrained. The children at the Grotto sometimes exhibited signs that they were possessed.



FACING PAGE: Bernadette Soubirous. **ABOVE:** The faithful still flock to Lourdes in hope of a miraculous cure.

Such visionaries drew no approval from the educated supporters that the Grotto had since garnered. Their stories were to remain solely as a heritage of the Occitan-speaking Pyreneans. But despite their rejection by respectable people, not all the visions had a doubtful character. In the following decades, people continued to remember graces and miracles which had been obtained for them by the other visionaries. One of the early pilgrims to Lourdes recorded the surprising fact that people in the town had told him that Bernadette was "not the only one here to whom the Blessed Virgin deigned to manifest herself".

The heterodox nature of the early Lourdes visions was soon buried under a flood of religious explanation, much of which was nothing more than propaganda. The devotional literature of Lourdes was of the particularly narrow and over-determined type that flourished during the second half of the 19th century. This was an era when a trend of resurgent orthodoxy in the Church met the new forms of media, products of an industrialising age. The result was that the folklore of traditional shrines and their customary artefacts, such as handmade statues, were cast aside as crude and imperfect, and their place was taken by plaster-cast Madonnas, mass-printed texts of approved miracles, and banal stories of the saints' lives – with all the grotesque, alarming or interesting incidents taken out.

Yet the chocolate-box style of the present shrine is only part of the story. Lourdes has its own history, with strange, archaic features to enchant the human heart. The suppressed history of Virgin Mary folklore is at present only preserved in the archival sources and oral traditions – yet perhaps the shrine would benefit from recognition of the darker side of its origins. The authorised story of Lourdes, with its saintly visionary and saccharine Madonna, misses some of the truths known to the illiterate Pyreneans of the 19th century – including the fact that an encounter with the supernatural is neither a trite nor an unambiguous experience.



Investigating... MIRACLES

Radio journalist **TED HARRISON** found his interest in miracles, and specifically stigmata, stirred when a Liverpool woman appeared to exhibit the wounds associated with Jesus's crucifixion.



LEFT: Patricia Arquette displays her wounds in the 1999 film *Stigmata*.

SHE SAID LITTLE, BUT ON HER HANDS WERE SMALL MARKS LIKE THE WOUNDS OF THE CRUCIFIXION

My specialist area of investigation has been stigmata – bodily marks or wounds that seem to duplicate those of Christ on the cross and which mysteriously appear in the same locations on the bodies of modern-day sufferers, or stigmatics.

In 1980, I was working as a reporter for BBC Radio 4. A story appeared in a tabloid newspaper about a woman living near Liverpool who displayed the stigmata. I was despatched on Good Friday to find Ethel Chapman and, if possible, interview her. I had a background in reporting on religious affairs for the Radio 4 programme *Sunday*, a layperson's knowledge of the phenomena, a journalist's curiosity, and an open mind.

I saw nothing that day that appeared supernatural. With an introduction from her local vicar and spiritual adviser, I met a middle-aged woman in a small room in a Leonard Cheshire home. She was tired, as that day she had, I was told, re-enacted the passion of Jesus in her mind. She said little, but on her hands there were small, but clear, marks corresponding to the supposed wounds of crucifixion.

I stayed in touch with her vicar, and a few months later returned to Liverpool to record a longer interview with Ethel for a BBC Radio 4 documentary.

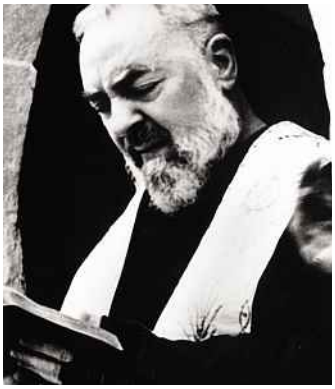
The interview turned into a book, for which I had to start my researches into the history of stigmata.

The interview, when broadcast, produced a letter from a listener telling me about a woman living in Derbyshire who had recently begun to display stigmata. This was how I came to know Jane Hunt, and a television documentary followed.

A little time afterwards, a GP in Scotland contacted me. He had a patient who wished to talk to me about his experiences. Consequently, I met George Hamilton, another stigmatic. One contact led to another. Over a 15-year period I met 10 stigmatics. I collected a huge amount of data and wrote a short popular book on the subject. It was, however, when I came to turn my accumulated research into a PhD thesis and subject my ideas to rigorous academic scrutiny that new and unexpected explanations began to emerge.

CLUSTERS OF CASES

The debate about stigmata had become bogged down in an unhelpful stand off between sceptics and believers. One group said it was all fraud, the other that, although fraud did exist, there were some cases which were undeniably of divine origin. The only area of agreement being that stigmata might be aided by psychosomatic factors. My observation was that, as the wounds differed in appearance in each individual case, they were unlikely to be produced





ABOVE: Liverpool stigmatic Ethel Chapman. **TOP LEFT:** Padre Pio displayed the signs of the stigmata throughout his life. **BELOW:** St Catherine of Siena, the celebrated mystic and alleged stigmatic who was canonised in 1461.

by any single mechanism. Experimental evidence suggested psychosomatic factors were occasionally relevant to the reopening of existing wounds, but not to the original formation of the wounds.

I noted that no contemporary or historic evidence exists of any independent witness being present when the wounds first appeared. I also noted certain correlations that suggested human rather than supernatural factors were involved. For instance, of stigmatics with wounds relating to the spear mark in the side, nine cases out of 10 were on the left side – a similar ratio to that of right to left-handed people in the population.

But this did not mean fraud had to be involved. Ethel Chapman received her wounds when a hospital patient and delirious from septicæmia. "The nurses noticed my hands were bleeding in the centre of the palms. My thoughts were that I had just clenched them in pain." As she spoke, she clenched her hand to show me, the nail of her middle finger digging into the palm.



A Roman Catholic doctor suggested to her that her marks might be stigmata. The thought gave her comfort. Having stigmata gave her a purpose, and for the final seven years of her life, despite her serious degenerative illness, she dedicated herself to praying for others.

In all my researches, I never found any evidence of stigmata defying the laws of nature. All wounds had a plausible natural explanation. What was crucial to their identification as stigmata was the context. Was there a priest confessor willing to authenticate the wounds? Was there a congregation involved, looking and hoping for a spiritual event to occur?

I noticed too, when examining the history, that of the 400-plus cases recorded, many came in chronological and geographic clusters. There have been noticeable clusters in Bavaria, Spain and most recently North America. I have also observed how over time the gender ratio has changed. Once it was a largely female experience. Up until the end of the 19th century, women outnumbered men by seven to one, and no priests had been reported to be stigmatics. That ratio has narrowed significantly to 5:4. Several priests have received the wounds, and of the recent American stigmatics, two were priests. There are social factors at work that may be to do with issues of authority.

BLURRED BOUNDARIES

Stigmata are often a kind of performance art, and through it individuals and congregations can challenge the authority of the Church hierarchy. It is as if the stigmatic is saying, I don't need to be told by the Church how and when I can have access to the mysteries of Jesus – I can experience them for myself through my own body.

It is interesting how in mediæval times the question of whether stigmata had been humanly or divinely made was largely irrelevant. The boundary was blurred. One revered stigmatic was explicitly described beating a finger into her hand to feel the pain of Jesus. No one suggested she was a fraud when she displayed the resulting wounds.

When investigating any claim of an extraordinary religious event, it is important to be a dispassionate and non-judgemental gatherer of facts. People can sincerely believe some very strange things. There can be wishful thinking. Memories can be faulty. Often the significance of an event is in its telling as a story. Build up the big picture, stand back and review the facts and ask not simply "how" does something happen, but also "why?" and "why *now*?" The answers to these questions may tell you a lot about whether a genuine miracle has taken place.



DIRECTORY

SUGGESTED READING

Moving Statue of Ballinspittle and Related Phenomena
Lionel Beer (Spacelink Books, 1986)

The Angel of Mons: Phantom Soldiers and Ghostly Guardians
David Clarke (John Wiley & Sons, 2005)

Gods, Spirits, Cosmic Guardians
Hilary Evans (Aquarian, 1987)

Holy Madness: The Shock Tactics and Radical Teachings of Crazy-Wise Adepts, Holy Fools and Rascal Gurus
Georg Feuerstein (Arkana, 1993)

Searching for Mary: An Exploration of Marian Apparitions Across the US
Mark Garvey (Plume, 1998)

Angels: An Endangered Species
Malcolm Godwin (New Leaf, 1990)

The Book of Miracles
Stuart Gordon (Headline, 1996)

Stigmata: A Modern Medieval Mystery
Ted Harrison (Fount, 1994)

Knock: The Virgin's Apparition in Nineteenth Century Ireland
Eugene Hynes (Cork University Press, 2008)

The Evidence for Visions of the Virgin Mary
Kevin McClure (Aquarian, 1993)

The Encyclopedia of Religious Phenomena
J Gordon Melton (Visible Ink Press, 2007)

Looking for a Miracle: Weeping Icons, Relics, Stigmata, Visions and Healing Cures
Joe Nickell (Prometheus, 1999)

Miracles
D Scott Rogo (Aquarian, 1991)

The Miracle Detective: An Investigation of Holy Visions
Randall Sullivan (Little Brown, 2004)

Bernadette of Lourdes: Her Life, Death and Visions
Therese Taylor (Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008)

Beauraing and Other Apparitions
Herbert Thurston (Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1934)

The Physical Phenomena of Mysticism
Herbert Thurston (Burns Oates, 1952)

Encountering Mary: From La Salette to Medjugorje
Sandra Zimdars-Swartz (Princeton University Press, 1990)

ORGANISATIONS AND GROUPS

Alister Hardy Society and Trust Religious Experience Research Centre
The Society aims to promote public awareness of the meaning and value of spiritual experience. It offers regular newsletters, lectures and seminars and use of the Trust's Library and book service. The Society supports and encourages discussion and the forming of local groups and holds an annual Open Day in November/December.
Department of Theology & Religious Studies, University of Wales, Lampeter, Ceredigion, SA48 7ED
Web: www.alisterhardyreligiousexperience.co.uk
Tel: 01570 424 821
Email: ahardytrust@lamp.ac.uk

Society for Psychical Research
See p24 for more information.
49 Marloes Road, Kensington, London W8 6LA
Web: www.spr.ac.uk
Tel: 020 7937 8984

Academy of Spirituality and Paranormal Studies, Inc.
An Academic Affiliate of Spiritual Frontiers Fellowship International designed to encourage dialogue, exchange of ideas and cooperation between clergy and academics of religion and philosophy and scientists, researchers and academics of all scientific and humanistic disciplines in the fields of psychical research and new disciplines as well as the historic sciences. Organises conferences and publishes *The Journal of Spirituality and Paranormal Studies* and a magazine, *The Searchlight*
PO Box 614, Bloomfield, Connecticut 06002-0614, USA
Web: www.aspsi.org
Tel: +001 860 242-4593
Email: admin@aspsi.org

The Marian Library/International Marian Research Institute
An international centre for study and research on the Blessed Virgin Mary, offering the world's largest collection of printed materials on the subject,
University of Dayton, Dayton, Ohio 45469-1390, USA
Web: campus.udayton.edu/mary/
Tel: +001 937 229 4214
Email: Johann.Roten@udayton.edu

WEBSITES

The Miracle Hunter
Site devoted to Marian apparitions and their history
www.miraclehunter.com/

Lourdes-France.org
Official Lourdes website, complete with live webcams!
www.lourdes-france.org/

Ecstatic Stigmatics and Holy Anorexics: Medieval and Contemporary
Essay on the psychology of stigmatics
primal-page.com/farber1.htm

The Catholic Encyclopedia
Useful online encyclopædia with material on saints, stigmata, Marian apparitions, miracles and other religious phenomena
www.newadvent.org/cathen/index.html

Religious Phenomena
Articles from the *Encyclopedia of the Unusual and Unexplained*
www.unexplainedstuff.com/Religious-Phenomena/index.html

The Miracles Page
News coverage and extensive archive on everything from weeping statues to crosses of light
www.mcn.org/1/Miracles/



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The Fortean Times Guide to...

LIFE AFTER DEATH



THE MOST fundamental mystery of all is what happens to us when we die. While most religious belief systems provide us with the notion of some sort of afterlife, from the late 19th century scientists have tried to find rational ways of discovering what happens on the 'other side', and whether there is some part of us that survives the death of our bodies. Have people succeeded in sending messages from beyond the grave? Do people who recall past lives offer proof of reincarnation? If Near-Death Experiences offer a glimpse beyond the body, what can they tell us about the nature of consciousness?



An introduction to...

LIFE AFTER DEATH



OUR EXPERT BOB RICKARD

Humans have always pondered the mystery of what happens when we die and the questions our mortality raises. Is there a possibility of our continued existence outside of the body? What is individual identity? And is there is such a thing as a 'soul'?



What happens when I die? Does any physical, mental or spiritual part of me continue an existence in some form after the death of my physical body? The question has been asked seriously in all ages and cultures. Plato reasoned for the existence of a soul from observing the circular rhythms of sleep/waking, winter/summer, and so on, arguing that life arises from death and vice versa. He was confident "that the souls of the dead are in existence [and] must be in some place out of which they come again".

It is fair to say that the question of life after death ranks as one of the most important questions facing modern science, as it affects every being that has ever lived – and their bereaved. Unfortunately, the funding to tackle the necessary serious research is simply not available. If the answer should be an unequivocal 'yes', the consequences for scientific understanding of our existence will be far reaching; if 'no', it won't matter much what fancy beliefs are invented to bring us spiritual comfort.

The story of modern research into the possibility of an Afterlife is one of wresting the subject away from religious notions of heaven and hell, eternal ecstasy for the good and torment for the iniquitous, and the whole superstitious panoply of celestial beings and malicious demons. In this brief survey I will avoid any theological discussions of life after death, as these are based on faith and not reason.

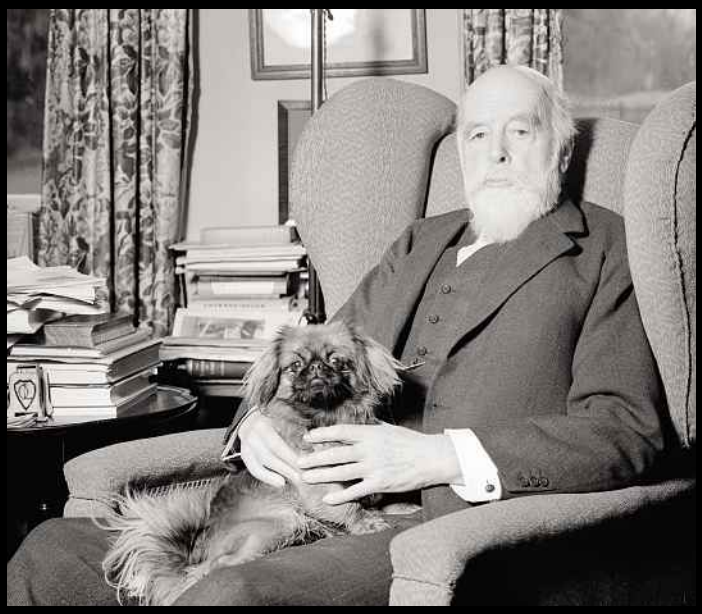
The stark facts are that we know a little about the brain, less about the mind, and practically nothing about how both work together to give rise to consciousness. Regarding souls, we probably know as much as our primitive ancestors did. However, new thinking holds out hope of a better understanding of the mind-body relationship and the answer to the life-after-death question may be quite different from what we expect.

DEAD MEN TELLING TALES

Death is probably the greatest focus of religion, magic and superstition; like no other symbol it represents the Great Unknown and also the frontier between this world and the next. Many superstitious practices and rituals surround the dead and the dying, mostly to protect the living from any malicious spirits, especially those who died from murder or accident, or with unfinished business.

The moments before and just after death are particularly associated with paranormal phenomena. Apparitions of the dying have been reported by distant friends; phantoms are seen around the deathbed and on occasion the dying seem to be conversing with long-dead friends; and sometimes there are portents of death and strange phenomena occurring at the moment of death (like a favourite watch stopping at the significant moment). It is, writes Leslie Shepherd in his great *Encyclopædia of Occultism*, as though the dying are living in two worlds simultaneously, the material and the spiritual. Some religions put great store in preparing the dying individual for the journey into the next world; others believe that if the rituals are not done properly or if the deceased is not aware they are dead they do not move on but stay to haunt the living.

Some of the world's eminent philosophers and scientists were convinced, after years of study (particularly of psychic phenomena and spiritual mediumship) that there must



SCIENTISTS WERE CONVINCED THAT THE HUMAN PERSONALITY CAN TRANSCEND DEATH



TOP: Sir Oliver Lodge, a prominent scientist and early psychical researcher.
ABOVE: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was fascinated by the subject of life after death.

be something to the belief that the human personality can transcend the death of its body. Among these were Emmanuel Swedenborg, Sir William Crookes, Sir Oliver Lodge, Sir William Barrett, Camille Flammarion, William James, Alfred Wallace, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Charles Richet, to name just a few. Some of them were instrumental in founding or corresponding with the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), one of whose greatest achievements was the first ever 'Census of Hallucinations' (1894) – a four-year survey in which 17,000 people were canvassed, generating 1,684 personal accounts of seeing phantoms, including 'ghosts' of people still living.

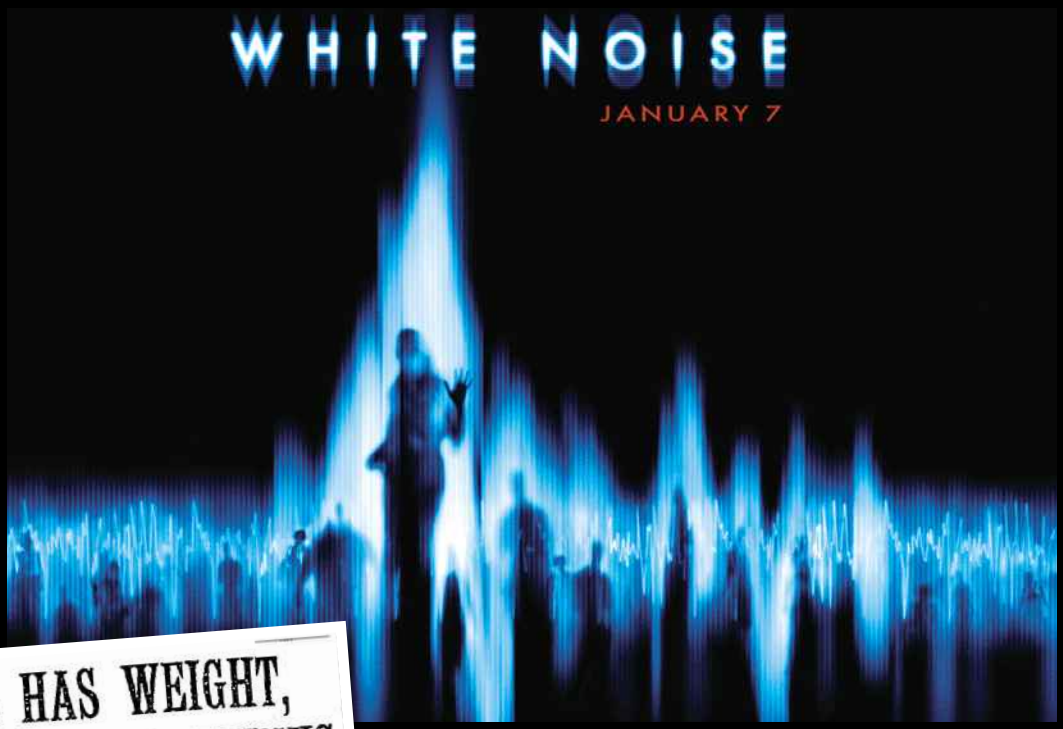
A group of SPR founders – Barratt, Edmund Gurney, Henry Sedgwick and Frederic Myers – also took part in a long-running experiment they hoped would provide proof of life after death. Called the 'Cross Correspondences' it was based on the observation that, from time to time, 'coincidences' of phrasing and mentions of people, places and things would occur simultaneously in the correspondence between mediums and their correspondents, including their investigators.

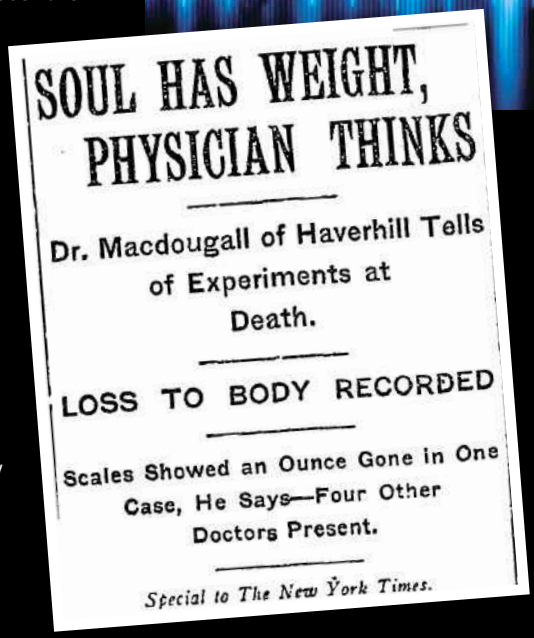
The forerunner of today's 'remote viewing' experiments, they independently devised ingenious codes, used foreign languages and hid obscure material away in diaries and sealed letters to await their 'telepathic' discovery by mediums sitting simultaneously elsewhere. In one famous instance, a maths problem and a sentence was started in London and two different mediums in New York and Niagara Falls each supplied half the solution to both. What makes this doubly interesting is that the investigation went on for so long that some of the investigators died and began sending coded fragments themselves. In all, 24 volumes containing 12,000 pages were compiled.

One of their striking successes

came after the death in 1912 of one of the principal investigators, Arthur Verrall, a professor of Greek. His 'transmissions' from beyond via mediums were found to correspond to a Greek mosaic called the 'Ear of Dionysus'. In another series, communications were received by four different mediums, many in Latin and Greek, apparently from Myers after his death in 1901. Oddly, neither deceased investigator made the most of their chance to describe their Afterlife.

A modern counterpart to the Cross Correspondences is the 'Electronic Voice Phenomenon' (EVP) procedure pioneered by parapsychologists Friedrich Jürgenson and Konstantin Raudive in the mid-1960s. Over 10 years they collected over 100,000 recordings of the static received on a radio tuned to no station. EVP enthusiasts claim they can discern various voices speaking in different languages (often in the same sentence). Unfortunately, their claim that these are communications from the Afterlife has to be heavily qualified, partly because their method is pseudo-scientific (it is said it still works when the microphone is disconnected), and partly because is too easy to read meaning into the flow of static.





SOUL HAS WEIGHT, PHYSICIAN THINKS

Dr. Macdougall of Haverhill Tells of Experiments at Death.

LOSS TO BODY RECORDED

Scales Showed an Ounce Gone in One Case, He Says—Four Other Doctors Present.

Special to The New York Times.

TOP: The film *White Noise* focused on the phenomenon of EVP.
ABOVE: Dr Duncan MacDougall believed he could weigh the soul.

THE SOUL

While most religions agree that some component of our being survives death, there is little agreement on the actual nature of the soul. The Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, teach that the physical body *is* the soul. Many other religions believe that we comprise three parts: a body and a non-material soul, both vehicles of our 'essential self' or spirit. Some occult systems describe up to five of these spiritual vehicles of different degrees of materiality, all of which are cast off in various stages of dying. In a successful death this process is orderly, but violent or untimely deaths can disrupt the process, resulting in hauntings and apparitions of various kinds.

The soul is usually accepted as a vehicle for consciousness and supposed to be present when we are born and persisting after death. This raises some important questions: are souls created at birth or at conception; if they are eternal, where do they come from; is there a fixed number of souls that endlessly reincarnate, and so on?

HE OBSERVED THE LAST MOMENTS OF PATIENTS DYING FROM DIFFERENT TERMINAL ILLNESSES

In many religions, the soul is judged after death to determine its fate. In Christian and Egyptian art this has been represented as being weighed on scales by a divine judge. In a famous series of experiments beginning in 1907, Duncan MacDougall, a doctor in Massachusetts reasoned that if the soul was made of physical matter that left the body at death he should be able to measure it in a similar fashion.

MacDougall constructed a bed on a large weighing platform and observed the last moments of six patients dying from different terminal illnesses. All six seemed to lose some weight; the amounts differed but an average is popularly expressed as 21 grams. MacDougall repeated the experiment with 15 dogs, but detected no loss of weight. When his results were published in the *New York Times* and the journal *American Medicine* in March 1907, the debate was furious. Today, MacDougall's research is regarded with suspicion; its methodology was flawed, its sample size too small, and the measurements imprecise. As far as we know, no one has replicated them.

REINCARNATION

Reincarnation is the belief that a soul can be reborn in a new body. For Hindus and the non-theistic Buddhists, each new incarnation is decided by reward or punishment for past conduct, until the soul becomes spiritually enlightened and ascends to a realm with no need of another

physical body. Spiritualists tend to tend to see reincarnation as a natural form of transmigration. The relatively new religion of Scientology is largely based on their belief that all humans are reincarnations of the souls of 'thetans' who were exterminated 76 million years ago.

In America, Prof. Ian Stevenson and Dr Jim Tucker have investigated several thousand cases in which children have recollected an earlier life and have made statements from which this other family can be traced and checked, with varying degrees of success. In most cases, the child begins talking about its other life around the age of three, but by age seven will have lost interest or forgotten the matter. Stevenson wrote: "My conclusion is that reincarnation is not the only explanation for these cases, but that it is the best explanation we have for the stronger cases."

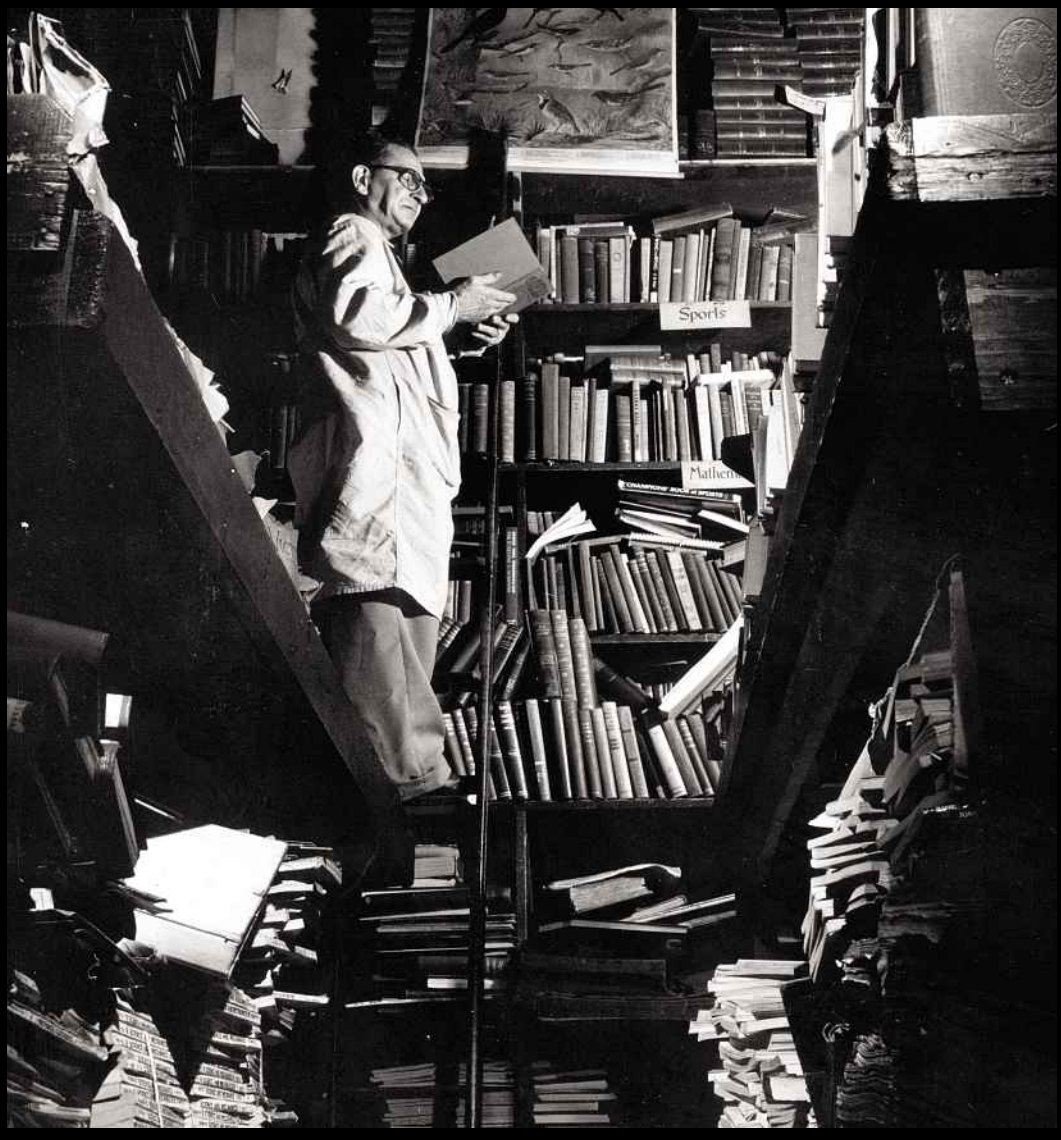
Stevenson also found some significant repetitions of birthmarks, birth defects or scars which a child is said to have brought from the previous incarnation, or carries now as a mark of the way its earlier body died or was injured. Since the two children have quite different genetic heritages, the problem of how they both can have very similar scars is a significant obstacle. The inference here is that serious trauma in a past life can be carried forward into a new body and manifested by some psychosomatic process, but this is a huge inference to draw from such vague data. Stevenson acknowledges this limitation.

In the mid-1990s, an English woman called Jenny Cockell (see interview following) wrote about having dreams since childhood that she had lived in Ireland as Mary Sutton in the recent past. Armed with her diaries, which included names and sketches of places, she eventually tracked down a Sutton family, the two elder males of which accepted her as the reincarnation of their mother. She has since written of other dreams of her future incarnation in Asia.

Perhaps the most famous case involving reincarnation is that of Bridey Murphy. In 1952, an amateur hypnotist in Colorado began hypnotising his wife, Virginia Tighe. Under the influence, Virginia would talk at length about her life in 19th-century Ireland, and so convincingly that the book account became a best seller. Investigators probed every detail and found that while many of her descriptions of people and places could be verified to some degree, many were wrong. Nor was there any record of the birth or death of a Bridey Murphy in the city of Cork in that period. Following a suggestion by psychologists with experience of hypnotic recall, Virginia's own childhood was investigated. It turned out that as a girl living in Chicago, she spent much time with a neighbour – called Bridey Murphy Corkell – an Irish immigrant who regaled Virginia with tales of her own early life in Cork.

In contrast, a well-publicised case of past-life memories recovered through hypnosis that turned out well involved the Hollywood actor Glenn Ford, who recalled five previous lives. In one, he appeared to be a French cavalryman in the time of Louis XIV. Ford admitted that his knowledge of French was very poor, but under hypnosis he recounted his experiences in fluent but odd French; it was later found to be a Parisian dialect from the 17th century.

As a philosophical concept, however, reincarnation raises a whole range of difficult eschatological questions. Are souls created when a baby is born or when it is conceived? This important question informs the Catholic debate about contraception by supposing the latter. As a consequence, the Catholic Church finds it cannot accept the idea of pre-existent souls; to them there is no reincarnation as each incarnation is new and unique. What happens if there are more



ABOVE: American bookseller Henry C Roberts believed he was the reincarnation of the French astrologer Nostradamus.

souls than physical bodies available, or vice versa? If the population is increasing, where are the new souls coming from? If we are here to learn lessons, why do we not remember past lives? If we can remember past incarnations, would that mean the end of morality in this life? (We could explore even the most evil choices as we go around, like the movie Groundhog Day, until we get it right.)

NEAR-DEATH AND OUT-OF-THE-BODY EXPERIENCES

In the modern mind, the phenomena of near-death experiences (NDEs) and out-of--body experience (OOBEs) have largely displaced rather old-fashioned ghosts. People who have come very close to death have sometimes, after recovery, told of being extraordinarily aware during the process. Typically, they feel themselves moving out of their bodies, of looking back and seeing their bodies on a bed or operating table, of moving rapidly through a dark tunnel towards a bright light, of being in the presence of benign beings, and of being 'sent back' because it was not their time to die.

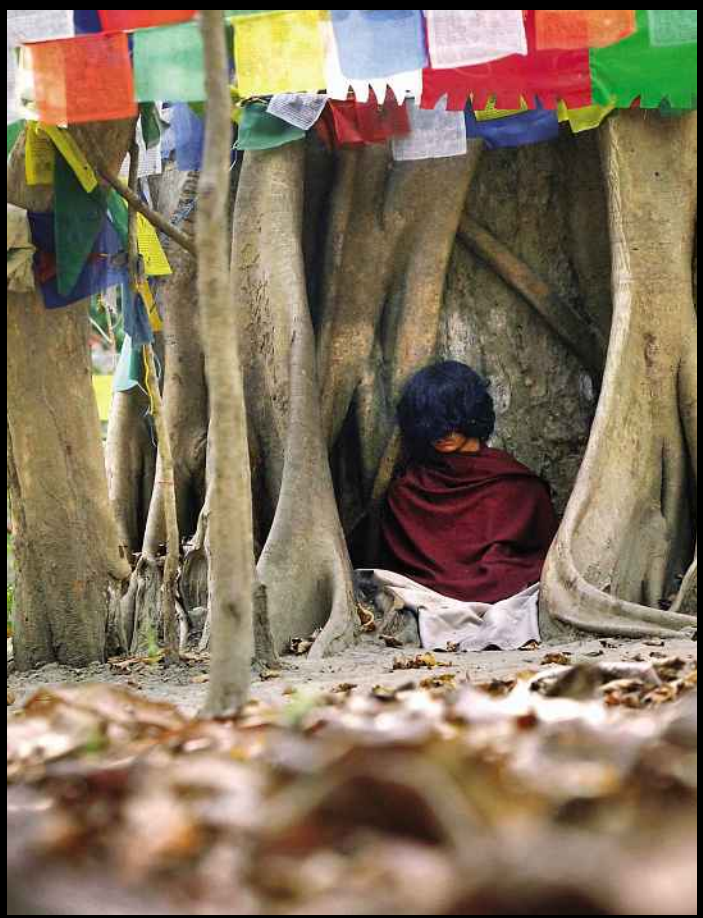
Most who report an NDE say the experience removed their fear of death, making them feel more positive and appreciative of their everyday existence. An OOBE, on the other hand, is very similar, except that it doesn't involve a near-fatal condition. There is a long history of controlled OBEs being induced by meditation, ascetic rituals, and drugs, which has lead modern researchers to suppose that OBEs form an early stage of the NDE itself.

NDEs seem to be the nearest we can get to the experience of dying without actually dying, and so personal accounts have attracted a great deal of research. The first serious collection of hundreds of 'survival' narratives was gathered by Robert Crookall, Sylvan Muldoon and Hereward Carrington. Lacking any modern theory, they called their OBEs 'astral projections' (a term derived from Theosophy) and saw them as





NDEs SEEM TO BE THE NEAREST WE CAN GET TO THE EXPERIENCE OF DYING WITHOUT ACTUALLY DYING



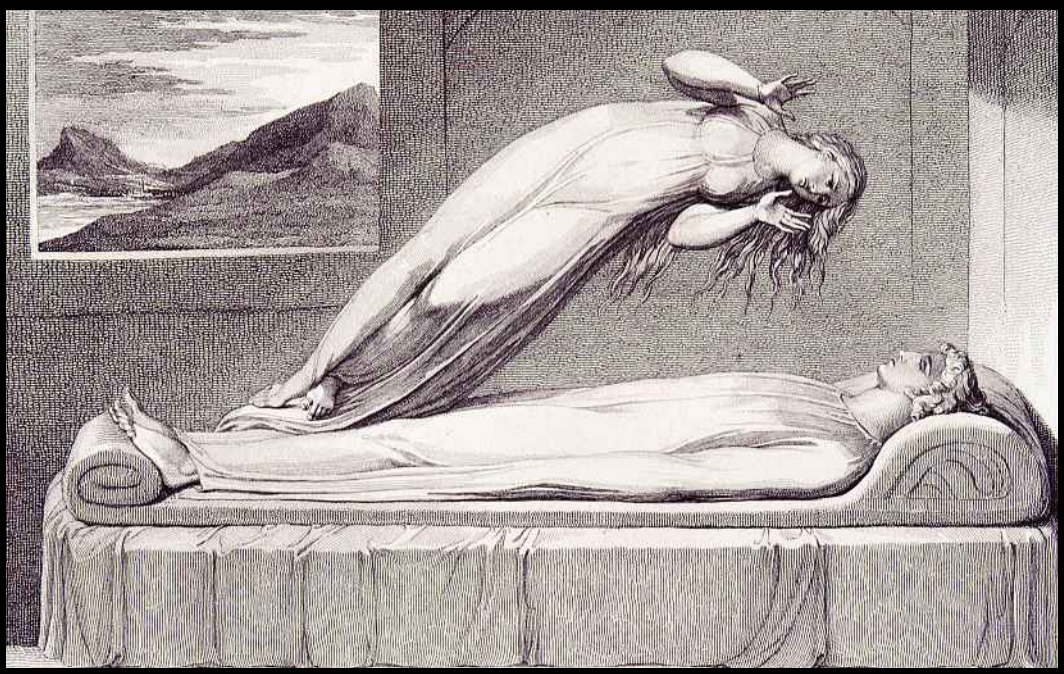
ABOVE: Nepalese youth Ram Bahadur Lama has been hailed as the reincarnation of the Buddha. **TOP:** Film star Glenn Ford had memories of numerous past lives, while Virginia Tighe's hypnotically recovered memories of her previous life as Irishwoman Bridey Murphy gave rise to a public sensation and even a film.

spiritualistic proof of the survival of death. Crookall, for example, a respected geologist, gathered reports of OBEs from illnesses, accidents and ecstasies, and compared them favourably to accounts of dying and of the Afterlife as described by mediums supposedly controlled by spirits of the deceased. Muldoon, a prolific 'projector' himself, was the great pioneer of teaching others how to experience OOBEs for themselves.

In recent years, the collection of accounts from NDE survivors has been undertaken by doctors in hospitals and surgeries, largely pioneered by Raymond Moody, whose 1977 book *Life after Death* was a best-seller. Moody followed up with more anthologies, encouraging other trained medics such as psychologist Kenneth Ring; cardiologists Michael Sabom and Maurice Rawlings; neurosurgeon Allen Hamilton; and terminal illness specialist Sam Parnia. The result has extended the range and quality of what is now a huge archive of comparative experience.

Over the years, a few more materialistic approaches to NDEs have emerged, especially around the question of what it means to be 'in a body'. The psychologist John Palmer has ventured that the OOBE is a psychological phenomenon, a response by the mind to deep and frightening changes in the body that threaten our sense of self, which invokes an archetypal OOBE in an attempt to restore 'normality'. As soon as the process succeeds, the OOBE ends; there is nothing paranormal involved, he says. Similarly, the sceptical psychologist Susan Blackmore has suggested that the OOBE is more productively seen as an altered state of consciousness which includes such experiences as lucid dreaming, autoscopy (the perception of one's own body as a double) and so-called 'travelling clairvoyance' or 'remote viewing'.

An opposing view is emerging from other psychologists. Both camps agree that OOBEs arise, somehow, from disruption of our accustomed sensation of



ABOVE: William Blake's illustration of "The Soul hovering above the Body regretfully parting with life". **BELOW:** In a painting by Bosch we see souls approaching a tunnel of light remarkably similar to those reported by NDE experiencers.

ourselves being 'in our bodies' based on data from our senses; yet the mind's sense of its own location is paradoxical, as no actual location can be defined. Significantly, most OOBE experiencers have great difficulty in describing their 'body'. Sociologist Dr Ornella Corazza's recent study of OOBEs concluded that consciousness cannot be localised to any neural correlate but seems to be a function of the whole organism; a view she says is gaining ground in neurology. She pointed out that: "25 years after the coining of the actual phrase 'near-death experience', it remains to be established beyond doubt that during such an experience anything leaves the body." This is the big clue.

Analyses by the philosopher Celia Green's team of lucid dreaming and its relationship to OOBEs and apparitions led her to conclude that these were altered states of consciousness in which one's normal field of perception is replaced by a hallucinatory one. Psychophysiologist Stephen LaBarge went further, warning against a literal interpretation of OOBEs as a separation of a 'soul' from a physical body (as spiritualists teach) as the experiences also indicate the "vast potential" of inner space.

What we experience during an OOBE, therefore, is a new state of consciousness characterised by non-locality of the self. This is understood, also, by oriental researchers who believe (as Corazza discovered) that the mind does not travel out of the body, because the mind is already omnipresent. Freed from the constraints of the physical world, might we not, these theorists ask, create an infinite variety of worlds during OOBEs, just as we do in dreams, "where the only limit is the imagination"? Therefore, proposes para-psychologist Michael Grosso, "the afterdeath state is conceivable as an extension of our imaginative or dream life."

WHERE WE ARE NOW

In Britain, there has been a long tradition of challenging religious dogma, and modern questioning of belief in a theological basis for any Afterlife can be said to have started with Sir William Crookes, the Edwardian scientist who became president of the Royal Society and one of the founders of the Society for Psychical Research. Beginning as a sceptic, he conducted many live experiments with prominent spiritualist mediums and, in 1874, published his personal conviction that the human personality continued after death



Both Crookes and his colleague Sir Oliver Lodge thought non-corporeal survival might have something to do with sub-atomic physics. Since then, the curious field of quantum physics has been developed and contemporary physicists are now exploring data suggesting that 'dying' (or transition of consciousness) has some connection with the paradoxical states of quantum energy.

The key breakthroughs are the realisation that OOBEs are strikingly similar in phenomenology to dreams, trances and ecstatic visions, in other words the result of creative imagination; and, as physicist Ron Pearson puts it, the possibility that "consciousness itself a sub-quantum phenomenon". To put it succinctly: OOBEs are virtual experiences created by the imagination acting upon the quantum realm.

Many of these exciting new notions are summarised in the books by Anthony Peake, to which he has annexed an extraordinary and equally promising discussion of the evidence for each of us having a dual consciousness; one he calls the Eidolon, which experiences life for the 'first' time and which locates itself in physical space; and the other he calls the Daemon, which has lived through the 'life' experience many times and which locates itself in quantum 'non-locality'. The analogy here is of a hologram, an image in which each part contains the whole. Further, Peake attempts to account for much of the phenomena experienced during NDEs as imperfect recollections of encounters between the two types of consciousness. If he is correct in suggesting that the Daemon is as much rooted in the quantum world as the Eidolon is in the physical world, we may indeed be on the way to an explanation of both the nature of consciousness and its independence from the physical body – indded, to a new theory of death and how it might be survived.

CASEBOOK

MARY'S CHILDREN

"I SEE LIFE AS A CONTINUING PROCESS. I DON'T HAVE A PROBLEM WITH THE CONCEPT OF ENERGY CONTINUING AFTER THE BODY WEARS OUT." **BOB RICKARD** TALKS TO **JENNY COCKELL**, WHO CLAIMS TO HAVE REUNITED THE CHILDREN OF HER PAST LIFE.

Mention reincarnation today and you are likely to be lumped with dotty spiritualists, dreamy New Agers or distant Indian peasants – yet there have always been people like Jenny Cockell whose claims to have lived before are based on direct personal experience. Since childhood, she has relived the life of Mary Sutton, an Irish woman who died in 1932, leaving her eight children to fend for themselves.

In 1994, when I met her, Jenny was a 39-year-old chiropodist, living happily in Northamptonshire with her husband Steve and their two children. She's the very model of sensibility – intelligent, articulate and thoughtful, and with no overt quirkiness – as she tells you, with impressive calm and care, that she has somehow transcended death to find Mary's children and reunite them.

The story of Jenny's quest for details of her past life – how she recalled dream scraps of information which were later verified; how she located Malahide, north of Dublin, as the village where Mary lived; and how she found Mary's scattered children (only five are still living) – is told in her book *Yesterday's Children* and was the subject of an episode of *Strange But True?*

It is a moving story that begins with Jenny's recurrent nightmare of Mary's death, alone in a room in Dublin's Rotunda Hospital, almost frantic with concern over the fate of her children. Their father was a soldier in World War I who made a precarious living as a scaffolder. He was moody, often drunk and absent, so the children were distributed among several orphanages. Once Jenny had located Malahide, and inquiries identified a Sutton family that fitted her recollections, it took several more years of patient research to discover the whereabouts of all but one child. She made her first contact in 1990, when Jeffrey, Mary's third child, answered an appeal in a Dublin newspaper. In 1991 and 1992, Jenny finally met the others in several family reunions.



ABOVE: Jenny Cockell contemplating the harbour at Malahide, north of Dublin.

AS A CHILD, I FELT SURE THAT IF I COULD LOOK AT A MAP I WOULD KNOW WHERE THE VILLAGE WAS



ABOVE: Jenny, who claims to have been Irish housewife Mary Sutton in a past life, takes a walk with Christy, one of Mary's chidlren.

BR: How did you come to feel that you had lived before?
JC: That's quite difficult, because the memories had always been there, in detail, right from the beginning. I have memories of three previous lives going back into the historical past. It didn't worry me at all – I took it that I'd lived before and assumed that it was perfectly normal. I thought everybody did.

It was not until I went to Sunday School for the first time, with my older brother, that I realised otherwise. They talked about issues that I thought were important, like what happens after you die, but they didn't mention previous lives. I was a bit confused by this, so I asked my mother and learned then that it was not normal to think this way.

It wasn't that I suddenly felt that I had lived before, but I did suddenly realise that other people couldn't remember.

BR: Your book describes your early past-life memories as nightmarish dream experiences. I have great difficulty remembering dreams, they tend to evaporate as the day progresses – so what made yours so memorable?
JC: There was only the one dream, really, and it was the same every time – a nightmare of dying and leaving my children behind. I had difficulty getting it out of my mind, in fact. It took tremendous effort to push it to one side, because the intensity of feeling was almost unbearable.

But there were also other memories... If you sit down now and try to remember a childhood memory of a day at the seaside, it just pops into the mind. My memories of Mary did the same. Like ordinary memories, too, they were quite fragmented – but then your childhood memories will have bits missing. I felt I was the same person, but in a different body. It was not a fleeting, one-off thing. I relived it regularly, I think, because it arose from a situation which was unresolved.

BR: How did you settle on Malahide as your former home?
JC: I had always felt the memories were connected to Ireland. One day, as a child, I felt sure that if I could look at a map of Ireland, I would know where the village was located, and match it up with the maps I had been drawing ever since I could hold a pencil. Many times, when I looked at my school atlas, I was drawn to the area north of Dublin and the village of Malahide.

BR: At what point did you decide to be hypnotised?
JC: It was long after I had verified that the town of Malahide corresponded to my own drawings. That was in 1980. It was one of those things I thought I might do one day to get some extra details. I had been fairly successful in pushing the memories to one side, but after my children were born, I found new motivation, as if having them reawakened old feelings. In late 1987, while I was saving up for a trip over to Ireland, a friend said I must come and see this chap – he was not a therapist but a researcher into past lives who used hypnosis to recover memories. I went to one of his talks and later volunteered, in 1988, to be one of his case-studies.

It all came back with such intensity – not just because I was seeing scenes during the hypnosis, but because I was thinking more about my past life. Memories were continually popping up between sessions... but this time I was an adult and able to do something about investigating them.

BR: What other kinds of psychic experiences have you had?
JC: Premonitions, mainly. I always knew when things happened to my younger brother. For example, the first I knew of the death of my older brother (in a gliding accident) was when my younger brother got the phone call. I was in a motorway service station at the time and nearly fell over with the shock.

Sometimes, when my mother and I were talking, I'd go and fetch something, then we'd realise she hadn't actually named the thing she wanted me to fetch. I'm quite good at psychometry – holding an

object belonging to someone and then being able to describe their feelings or other things about them. As a chiropodist holding people's feet I just have to turn off.

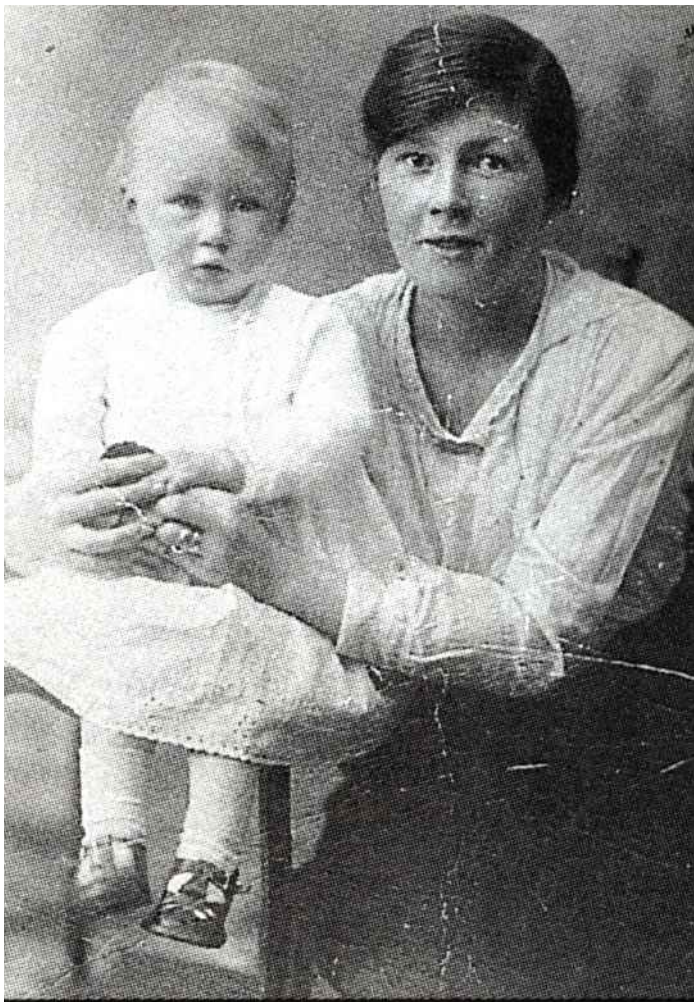
BR: When were you able to contact Mary's children, and how did they react to the strange story you had to tell them?

JC: I made my first visit to Malahide in 1989, and the first contact with one of the children was in 1990. It took me a long time to think about how best to approach them. I thought that explaining it gently would give me a certain amount of control, but I was caught off guard by a phone call from Mary's second son, Jeffrey. I'd placed an advert in a local newspaper – someone saw it and sent me his address.

Unfortunately, he was a little deaf, so part of our conversation went via his daughter. They realised that I was not a direct member of the family but they weren't quite sure what my interest in them was They gave me the addresses of two other sons. Then they asked me my connection, and I reeled back, wondering what I could say without upsetting them. In the end, I said it is very odd but I remember your family through dreams. They obviously weren't sure how to take this, but I later got back in touch with them and tried to explain again without actually saying "I was your mother." They didn't get in touch again.

It made me wonder whether I should have made contact another way, perhaps just finding out if they were all right. A month later, I managed to contact Sonny, the oldest son, who lived in England. I was very nervous when I phoned him, but he was brilliant.

He was very direct as a boy, so I knew I had to be direct to him. I told him I'd had dreams about the old home in Malahide and the people who lived there. He challenged me to name one of the nearby roads, but I confessed to him that I had been there recently and seen a map so this was no real test.



ABOVE: Mary Sutton in 1927, with Phyliss, then aged two years. Mary died in 1932, a month after the birth of her youngest daughter.

"WHENEVER I HAVE A PRE-MONITION, IT FEELS AS IF IT IS OF SOMETHING THAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED"

We would have met, but the researcher for the TV documentary suggested we should keep apart until more work had been done on the background and statements had been taken. It was a good idea, but incredibly frustrating. I didn't get to meet Sonny in person until about four months later.

BR: I believe that one of the girls, Phyllis, went to her priest after you contacted her, to get his opinion.

JC: Yes. He told her it couldn't be reincarnation, because the Church doesn't accept that. However, I've found the dogma on the subject to be very ambiguous. The priest suggested that it must have been the spirit of Mary acting through me to unite the family. There's an element of truth in that, and it has been accepted by the family, though some of them now see it as reincarnation.

BR: Once you had reunited the children, did you feel any release from your nightmare, any sense of 'mission accomplished'?

JC: Now that I had found them, and could look them in the eye and see they were happy and well-adjusted, it was a release. The fact that they were all together again made us all happy. I still hang on to them, keep contact, because they are important to me.

BR: When you met them in person, did you feel maternal, that they really were your children?

JG: Yes, I still feel like that, but one step removed, as it were. I stepped back almost too far, allowing them to get on with each other. The last time we met, I had made room for them to make up their own minds how they interpreted the phenomenon. I didn't want to be in the way. It hadn't occurred to me how far I had stepped back until two of them, quite independently, asked me if I was going to keep in contact with them. In the end, they needed me to be there, which was wonderful.

BR: How has this experience affected your own beliefs?

JC: I have always had what you might call religious feelings – a sense of being – but without being attracted by any particular religion. There are bits of most religions that I find interesting, and other bits that I couldn't agree with.

I have been stopped by people who say: "You are chosen, special." I certainly don't feel this has made me any better than anyone else – it just happened to me. I think it could happen to any of us. Maybe, in my case, I didn't finish very well. I had a strong maternal drive, and in my new life I couldn't forget the unfinished business.

I see life as a continuing process. I don't have any problem with the concept of energy continuing after a body wears out. I'm working on another book about my memories of other lives past and future – although that should be a premonition of a future life rather than a memory of it.

The sense of time between lives seems to be different – linear but somehow brief. I seem to have had another life in the 21 years between Mary's death and my birth – under hypnosis I had brief glimpses, and a memory of a street that later checked out.

BR: If we can have premonitions of future lives, this raises the thorny philosophical problem of free will. If you have a future life, have the elements of it already happened to your future self?

JC: That's the way I would have put it. Whenever I have a premonition, it feels as though it is of something that has already happened – but you don't see it until it happens or has just happened. Other people have premonitions of things apparently as they happen or seem to be happening. I think that somewhere along the line we'll have to change our concept of time.

FROM FANTASY TO REALITY

Several times, in the course of our chat, Jenny had referred to her personality type, which she characterised as "being an introvert with an active imagination". I wondered whether she fitted the profile of the kind of person who could invent a fantasy life for herself, inhabit it, and accept it as real. It was quickly apparent that the issue is not that simple.

Certainly, Jenny presents many of the noted characteristics: besides the psychic experiences she has referred to, she readily admits to having had a rich fantasy life "including imaginary friends"; she is extremely susceptible to hypnosis (at her second session, it only took a touch on the shoulder by the hypnotist to plunge her vividly into Mary's life); and she had the almost obligatory unhappy period in childhood, when her father's depressions and violence put tremendous stress on the home.

A number of recent studies have focused upon these kind of personality traits and the role they play in claims of, for example, abduction by UFOs, multiple personalities, or abuse by satanic covens, showing, in many instances, that the claimants have demonstrably invented a fantasy life for themselves. It might be argued that Jenny's early preoccupation with Mary's death amounted to an obsession; if so, it was one which Jenny tackled with precocious common sense.

When I asked Jenny how she knew her past-life memories were real and not simply imagined, she implied that they were significantly different in tone or quality.

"There was never any doubt in my mind that they were real and not fantasy," she said. "I have had no problem in influencing my ordinary dreams, controlling them almost at will. Again this was something I assumed that other people could do. I remember once trying to change the ending of my dying dream and I woke up in worse tears than usual. In trying to alter the ending, I was fantasising about it. It was no use because I knew that I died and left the children."



ABOVE: Jenny with Mary's children (l–r) Frank, Sonny, Betty, Phyliss and Christy in a bar in Malahide, near Dublin, Ireland.

Another misconception is that fantasisers only use the talent to escape from reality. But Jenny's experience was neither sought nor indulged in; in fact, she tried to push it away because of its overwhelming feelings of anguish and helplessness. She said: "Imagination or fantasising can be used just as well to reinforce experience. Opening up a new world can inspire you spiritually as well as imaginatively, and that also is a reward."

We are just waking up to the role of the therapist in the discovery and disclosure of fantastic personal experiences, and it is clear that, in a significant number of cases, extraordinary tales of possession, human sacrifice, alien experimentation or demonic assaults have been coaxed from patients by therapists who have a prior commitment to beliefs in such things, and who have then reinforced those beliefs in their unfortunate patients. It may be that the recovery of past-life memories using hypnotic regression is similarly confabulated by a therapist who already believes reincarnation is a fact, as Jenny's hypnotist did.

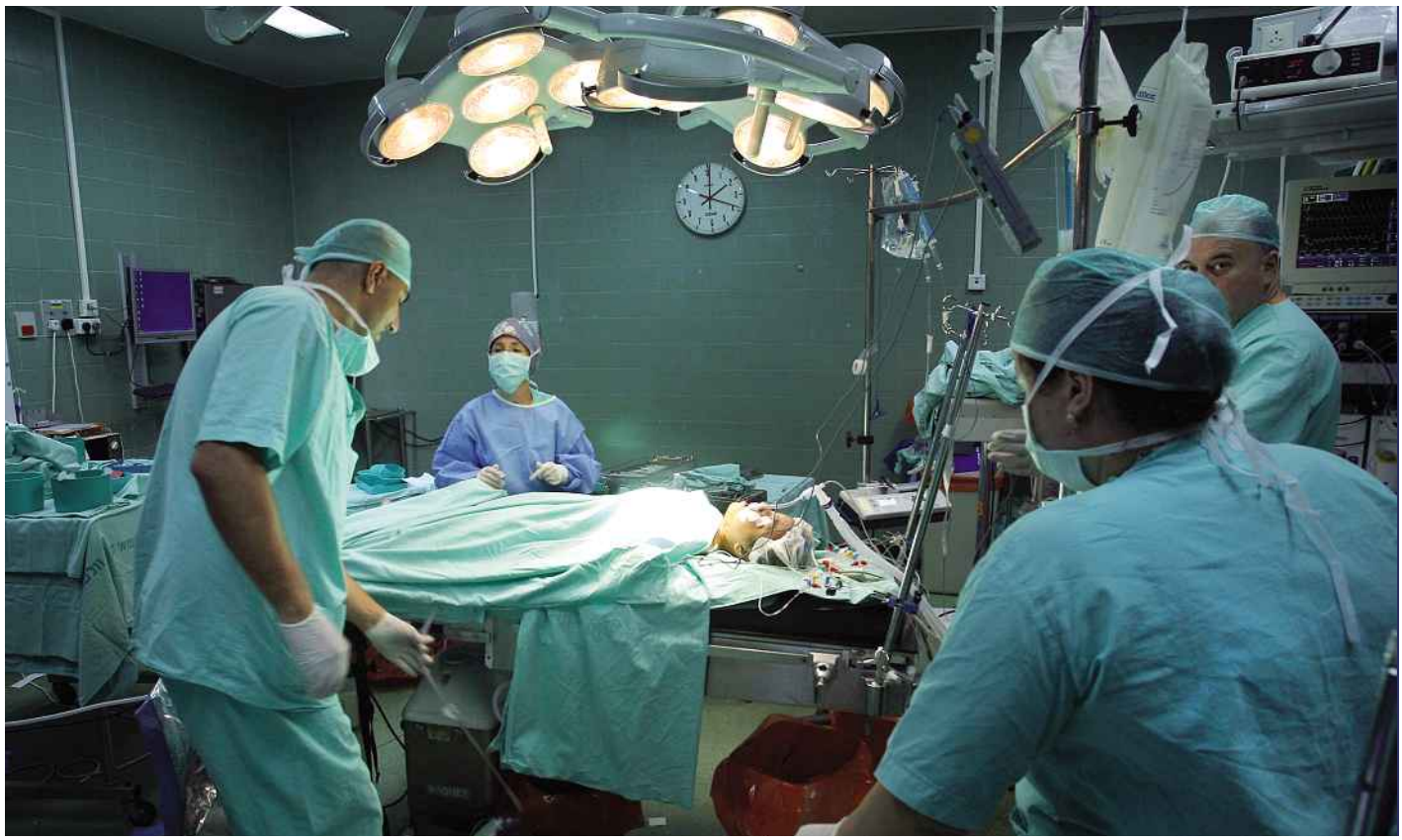
Where Jenny's story confounds this thesis is in the fact that the people in her life will confirm that she talked about this other life, drew maps and pictures, and began her search long before she was exposed to a hypnotist, and long before there was objective confirmation of the many tangible details she wrested from her memory and nightmare.

In the end, she did bring together six of the eight children who had lost touch, and they are glad she did so, even if they don't quite understand how she came to do it.



Investigating... LIFE AFTER DEATH

Many reports have been made by medical patients whose vital signs had failed, but who subsequently revived, of an out-of-body or Near-Death Experience. **Dr ORNELLA CORAZZA** has made this field her speciality.



ABOVE: Many people have reported Near Death Experiences (NDEs) from hospital operating theatres when undergoing critical surgery.

I've always been fascinated by the connection between the mind and the body. Just looking at my hand moving its fingers, I feel that our potential is much greater then we think. Who is the 'I' that moves the fingers? I don't have the first idea how my fingers can move! From this developed my interest in the amazing things that happen at the mind-body connection during things like Near-Death Experiences.

I've been studying NDEs since 2004. I was specialising in legal medicine at the University of Bochum in Germany, and someone told me about an anæsthetic called ketamine that could induce very profound near-death and out-of-the-body experiences. I found this very intriguing and wanted to learn more about it.

While I started out studying the experiences of those who claimed to have had an NDE after the administration of ketamine, I am now more interested in cross-cultural studies and on what we can learn from them about our human nature. I would like to find out more about NDEs, especially in non-Western countries, and contribute to a cultural comparison between NDEs in different countries.

I've done some research in Japan, where I met some extraordinary 'masters', such as Professors Yasuo Yuasa and Hiroshi Motoyama. We discussed healing powers, the nature of the Universe and NDE studies. They taught me to overcome our Western dualistic way of thinking, and helped me to develop a more integrated view of who we are.

While I was in Japan, I interviewed some Japanese people who had had NDEs. There are some marked cultural differences in their experience. For instance, many of my Japanese interviewees had a

vision of a river which divided the world of the living from that of the dead. For them, to cross that river meant accepting that they would die. We also know that an Indian, for example, is more likely to meet Yama the King of Death, or his messengers, the Yamdoots, than Christ, Mary or angels.

BEYOND FEAR OF DEATH

People who've had NDEs are usually less afraid of death. They seem to be absolutely sure that death does not exist and that we are immortal. But NDEs can be hellish too. One person I interviewed had a very bad NDE after an attempted suicide when he was only 18. He was sure he went to Hell and was trapped by three Sumi warriors who tortured him. Interestingly, several years later, he tried some ketamine while partying with friends and had a very positive experience. But he confirmed that NDE and ketamine experiences are similar. This rare situation of a person having had both experiences suggests that ketamine experiences are not more terrifying than other NDEs – bad NDEs are probably under-reported. The *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, for instance, is full of references to hellish moments. Why *should* the NDE always be a blissful and positive experience?

My work goes beyond reductionism and the attempt to locate the soul or consciousness in some part of the brain. My position here is informed by the seeming inadequacy of the so-called 'survivalist hypothesis' to account for those cases in which there is no suggestion of temporary, physical death, as for instance, in the ketamine study. The value of NDEs goes far beyond the question of scientific proof of an afterlife; it's more about our immediate experience of the here-and-now, about experiencing a sense of meaning and purpose in this life. Even more profoundly, I believe that NDEs can suggest to us that what we label 'I' is only a small part of a deeper intelligence that is immanent within all creation. NDEs invite us to recognise and





ABOVE: An Indian might meet Yama in a NDE. **LEFT:** Actress Sharon Stone explains the sensation of entering a white vortex during her Near-Death Experience following a brain hæmorrhage.

WE SHOULD THINK DIFFERENTLY ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MIND AND BODY

seek out this intelligence or power that seems to reach within and extend beyond the physical body.

I believe that my research shows that we should think differently about the relationship between mind and body, that we must overcome the dualism which is deeply embedded in our culture. (If we use the ocean as a metaphor, from a dualistic point of view the relationship between body and matter could be seen as like that between water and sand – they never become one. From a non-dualistic perspective, the relationship between mind and body is like that between water and salt – unlike sand, salt dissolves completely into the water.) Far from being mere philosophical speculation, this dualism has enormous consequences for our everyday life. The problem is that we tend to identify ourselves with our rational minds and think of our bodies as objects or machines. But we not only 'have' bodies, we 'are' our bodies.

I believe now in a more concrete form of spirituality, rather than in a spirituality that is divided from the body and from nature. My beliefs are well expressed in the lines by William Blake: "Man has no Body distinct from his Soul: for that called Body is a portion of Soul discerned by the five senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age." What he says is that the body is not separate from the soul, and the only way it can express itself, in this age, is through the senses. How do I know you, or how do you know me, unless there is a connection? The connection comes by speaking, seeing, hearing, being present in the moment. Everything comes through the senses, as though the soul is speaking out through the senses. We are not yet communicating with extrasensory perception. So how can we express the soul in this age, in this life, except through the body?

There are plenty of things people outside academia can do to learn more about NDEs. You can join organisations such as the Scientific and Medical Network (SMN), the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS) or the Anomalistic Psychology Research Unit run by Professor Chris French at Goldsmiths College, and attend their meetings, where you will not only learn more about NDEs and related phenomena, but also meet and share views with people with similar interests. You could also join the Alister Hardy Society and maybe attend one of their courses on spiritual experiences, which are held in the beautiful Welsh countryside on a quarterly basis, or attend a new series of lectures and workshops organised by Dr David Luke at the October Galleries in London. In addition, there are various online options such as blogs, forums and so on. I have even noticed an NDE page on Facebook! If you have a more general interest in consciousness and the mind and body connection, I strongly recommend following the activities organised by the Centre for Consciousness Study in Tucson, Arizona.

TAKING THE NEXT STEP

On a more personal level, learn to suspend judgment and be more open to listen to 'unusual' experiences. Most of the people I have interviewed told me that their NDE had been the most powerful experience in their life but that they had never shared it with others for fear of being ridiculed or seen as insane. It is very sad. In a way, it is like having among us someone who went for a trip to the Moon and came back – but hardly anybody knows about it. We should be listening to and learning from such amazing experiences!

Studying NDEs could be one of the most transformative experiences you'll have. If you are committed to your work, it will change your life. Be ready for the journey and have fun!

Dr ORNELLA CORAZZA *is a Research Fellow at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, where she has been studying NDEs. In 2004–5, she was a member of the 21st-Century Centre of Excellence Programme on the Construction of Death and Life Studies at the University of Tokyo, in the course of which she studied NDEs among the Japanese. She is the author of a number of publications.*

DIRECTORY

SUGGESTED READING

The Near-Death Experience: A Reader
Lee W Bailey & Jenny Yates (Routledge, 1996)

The Search for Bridey Murphy
Morey Bernstein (Doubleday, 1956)

Beyond the Body: An Investigation of Out-of-the-Body-Experiences
Susan Blackmore (William Heinemann, 1982)

Dying to Live: Near-Death Experiences
Susan Blackmore (Prometheus Books, 1993)

Ghost Hunters: The Victorians and the Hunt for Life After Death
Deborah Blum (Century, 2007)

Yesterday's Children: The Search for My Family from the Past
Jenny Cockell (Piatkus Books, 1993)

Near Death Experiences: Exploring the Mind-Body Connection
Ornella Corazza (Routledge, 2008)

Is There an Afterlife? A Comprehensive Overview of the Evidence
David Fontana (O Books, 2005)

Life After Life (25th Anniversary Edition)
Raymond A Moody (Rider 2001)

The Light Beyond
Raymond A Moody (Rider, 2005)

Is There Life After Death? The Extraordinary Science of What Happens When We Die
Anthony Peake (Arcturus, 2006)

Heading Toward Omega: In Search of the Meaning of the Near-Death Experience
Kenneth Ring (William Morrow, 1985)

Lessons from the Light: What We Can Learn from the Near-Death Experience
Kenneth Ring (Moment Point Press, 2006)

Old Souls: Scientific Evidence for Past Lives
Tom Shroder (Simon & Schuster, 2001)

Reincarnation: True Stories
Roy Stemman (Piatkus Books, 1996)

Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation
Ian Stevenson
(University of Virginia Press, 1988)

Children Who Remember Previous Lives: A Question of Reincarnation
Ian Stevenson (McFarland, 2001)

Life Before Life: Children's Memories of Past Lives
Jim B Tucker (St Martins, 2008)

Mind Out of Time
Ian Wilson (Gollancz, 1981)

ORGANISATIONS AND GROUPS

Centre for Consciousness Study, Arizona
Formed in 1998, this is a unique institution whose aim is to bring together the perspectives of philosophy, the cognitive sciences, neuroscience, the social sciences, medicine, and the physical sciences, the arts and humanities, to move toward an integrated understanding of human consciousness.
Web: www.consciousness.arizona.edu/
Tel: +001 520 621 9317
Email: center@email.arizona.edu

International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS)
IANDS was founded in 1978 as an organisation for studying and disseminating information on NDEs. Today, the association includes researchers, health care professionals, near-death experiencers and other interested people. One of its main goals is to promote responsible and multi-disciplinary investigation of near-death and similar experiences. IANDS also publishes the *Journal of Near Death Studies.*
Web: www.iands.org
Tel: 001 919 383 7940

Division of Perceptual Studies (DOPS)
Founded by the late Dr Ian Stevenson in 1967 The Division of Perceptual Studies (DOPS) is a unit of the Department of Psychiatric Medicine at the University of Virginia. Utilising scientific methods, the unit investigates apparent paranormal phenomena, especially:
Children Who Claim to Remember Previous Lives (reincarnation), NDEs, Out of Body Experiences, Apparitions and After-Death Communications and Deathbed Visions. **University of Virginia, PO Box 800152,**
Charlottesville, VA 22908, USA
Web: www.healthsystem.virginia.edu/internet/personalitystudies/
Tel: +001 434 924 2281
Email: DOPS@virginia.edu

Scientific and Medical Network
Founded in 1973, The Scientific and Medical Network is an interdisciplinary forum and educational charity exploring the interface of science, medicine and spirituality. It hosts conferences in the UK and continental Europe and has members in over 30 countries.
PO Box 11, Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucestershire, GL56 0ZF
Web: www.scimednet.org
Tel: 01608 652 000
Email: info@scimednet.org

Society for Psychical Research
See p24 for more information.
49 Marloes Road, Kensington, London W8 6LA
Web: www.spr.ac.uk
Tel: 020 7937 8984

WEBSITES

Near Death Experience Research Foundation
Dedicated to accounts of NDEs and research into them
www.nderf.org

Survival Research
Examining the scientific evidence for life after death
www.survival-research.net/

After-death Communication
A forum for sharing After-Death Communications (ADCs)
www.after-death.com/

Past Life Forum
A forum for past life experiencers
www.reincarnationforum.com/
Email: info@scimednet.org



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The Fortean Times Guide to...

ALIEN BIG CATS



EVER since 1962, when a massive police hunt for the 'Surrey Puma' hit the headlines, ordinary British people have been having encounters with the unknown in the most everyday situations: walking the dog, working in the countryside or driving home from work.

We all know that big cats aren't supposed to live in the British Isles, so why do reports of black panthers, lynxes and even lions and tigers seem to be on the increase all the time? The Alien Big Cats are here – but what are they?



An introduction to...

ALIEN BIG CATS



OUR EXPERT MERRILY HARPUR

Among the most mysterious fauna of Britain must be the appearance of Big Cats, normally seen only on other continents – yet there have been countless sightings over the last 45 years.



Mike P and his friend, both middle-aged deer-stalkers of long experience, were walking disconsolately back to their cars after a few hours spent watching for roe deer in a north Dorset wood, but without success. What happened then was so bizarre that Mike wrote a full account in his diary when he got home:

"As we approached my car, I noticed, rather oddly, a bulky item on the boot. Who had dumped a bag on my boot, and for what reason? When we had approached to about 100 yards of it, the 'bag' slowly unwound and languidly lowered its front feet to the ground – whilst the rear of the animal, for such it was, remained on the boot. A sizeable beast! I immediately chambered a round in my rifle, and looked at the apparition through my telescopic sights. By then it had all four feet on the ground, its eyes glinting with a faint yellowish tinge. It was hard to believe that such an animal was there right in front of us, but my co-stalker and I agreed it was a black Big Cat – a panther as far as we could judge. I was ready to shoot the beast if it approached us, but when we were 50 yards from it, it turned and walked away slowly up the hill alongside my car, silhouetted on the horizon and no longer a safe shot, and into the woodland, out of sight. There was no doubt in our minds about what we had seen."

Mike's report contains all the elements that make an encounter with an Alien (or Anomalous) Big Cat – an ABC – currently Britain's most intriguing yet best documented mystery. There were two witnesses, both countrymen and very familiar with native fauna; they approached to within 50 yards of the animal and watched it at leisure through the high magnification of their rifle sights – this was no fleeting glimpse. They also had a sure way of gauging its size – its hindquarters were still on the car boot while its front paws were on the ground. It would be difficult to find more convincing testimony – yet both were in agreement about the outlandish fact that they were looking at a black panther.

Stranger still is that hundreds of other people have a similar experience every year: farmers, shepherds, gamekeepers, policemen, dog-walkers, bird watchers... normal people expecting to see only the usual range of wildlife, and shocked to encounter what they assume is an escapee at large.

ANIMAL TALES

Other animals are often shocked too: Rosmary Wilson's pony gave her the first indication that something alarming was in the offing. As she was riding along a single-track road, near Hale in Westmorland it "suddenly stopped dead". She said: "I booted it on – but it was then that I caught sight of a large, black cat." She watched the animal walking in her direction for about 10 seconds before it disappeared into the hedge. "You read about things like that but you don't expect to see them," she said. A witness near Piddlehinton in Dorset watched a stag chase a puma-like ABC in a field: "When the stag charged the animal, I saw the full size of it... it was big, very big. It had a very long tail and it ran quickly in a leaping motion – not like a dog."

Dogs react oddly. Patch is an exceptionally friendly and extrovert Jack Russell and loves cats, but when he and his owner saw a black ABC in the lane ahead of them near Maiden Newton, Dorset in March 2009, he froze, crouched terrified on the verge and refused to go any further.

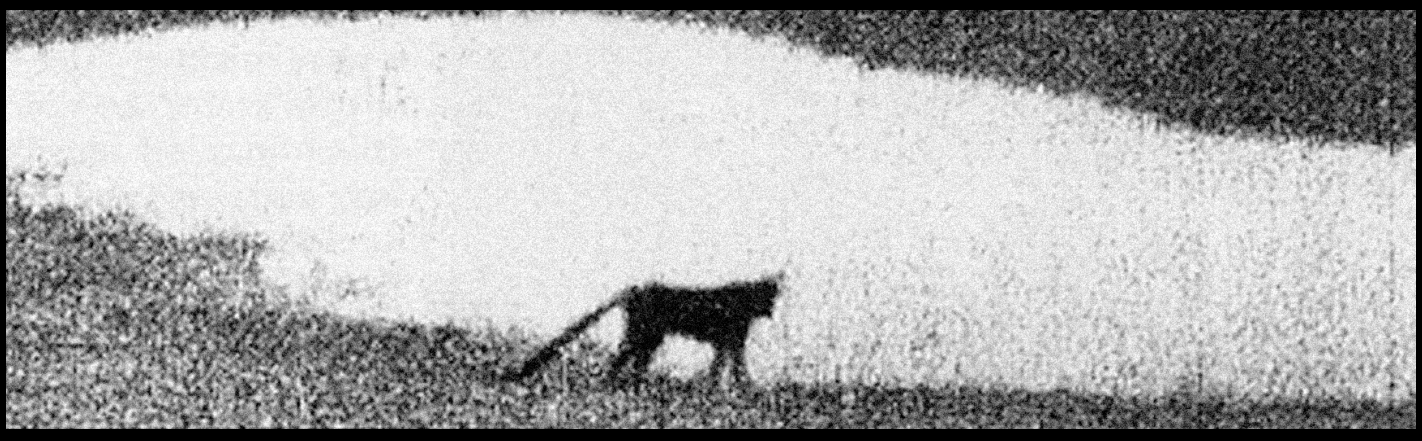


ABOVE: Mike returns to the spot where he had a close encounter with an ABC.

"IT WAS HARD TO BELIEVE THAT SUCH AN ANIMAL WAS THERE RIGHT IN FRONT OF US"

ABCS AMONGST US

Other circumstantial evidence confirms – almost – the presence of ABCs amongst us. Sheep have been found dismembered; carcasses have even occasionally been spotted up trees. Footprints most often excite public interest, but examination usually shows the claw marks diagnostic of a dog's paws – cats walk with their claws retracted. Yet a convincing paw-print cast was taken in August 1998 from soft clay at Ketton quarry, in Rutland, where staff had seen panther-like Big Cats over five years. Tight security at the quarry excluded the possibility of its being made by a dog, and the local zoo confirmed it was "from a big cat of puma or



ABOVE: Most ABC photos are problematic when considered as evidence – they tend to be blurry and without much to help give a sense of scale.

TOP 10 BIG CAT SIGHTINGS

SHOOTERS HILL CHEETAH

The first UK ABC sighting to hit the national headlines was in July 1963. David Back, driving at night through Shooters Hill in southeast London, encountered a giant cat that ran off into Oxleas Wood. Shortly afterwards, a "large golden animal" jumped over the bonnet of a police patrol car in the area. The subsequent hunt involved 126 policemen with 21 dogs, 30 soldiers, ambulance men and RSPCA officials. They found some footprints that supported the cheetah hypothesis.

THE SURREY PUMA

During the winter of 1962–63, cat-like beasts were seen repeatedly at Bushylease Farm in Surrey, accompanied by howling and a strong ammonia-like smell. A journalist coined the term 'Surrey Puma' and the public's imagination was gripped. In the next three years, there were scores of reported sightings of supposed 'pumas' across Britain, and ABCs have continued to prowl Surrey to the present day. Hair samples collected in August 1984 near Peaslake were identified as puma.





ABOVE: A 'Kellas cat' shot in the Scottish Highlands in 1983, probably a cross between a wildcat and a feral cat.

panther type".

Clearly, ABCs are living amongst us – but for how long, and where have they come from?

The history of ABCs is long, if sporadic. Charles Fort found a record of "a large, fierce yellow animal of unknown species" – one of three which appeared in 1927 and which were identified as lynxes. In the 1760s, the great radical writer William Cobbett described how, as a boy, he had seen a cat "as big as a middle-sized Spaniel dog" climb into a hollow elm tree in the grounds of the ruined Waverley Abbey near Farnham, Surrey. The first modern cat-flap – as a spate of sightings is called – also occurred in Surrey. Between 1964 and 1966, Godalming police logged 342 sightings of a range of felines collectively known as 'The Surrey Puma'. The reasonable conclusion they drew was that escaped Big Cats were managing to live wild – indeed thrive – in the well-wooded parts of rural England.

Subsequent decades revealed the ubiquity of the phenomenon – every county in Britain now boasts recurrent cat-flaps – which implied a population too vast to be accounted for simply by escapees. Besides which, evidence shows that fugitives usually come home for dinner by themselves: of the 16 Big Cats known to have escaped into the wild in the UK between 1977 and 1998, 14 were recaptured within 24 hours, and the remaining two were shot.

BLACK PANTHERS

Along with the increase in reported sightings, ideas about the provenance of ABCs began to proliferate. 1983 saw the publication of Di Francis's engaging book *Cat Country*, which drew on the 'hide out' theory, first articulated by cryptozoologist Bernard Heuvelmans, to suggest that Britain's ABCs were a relict prehistoric species somehow overlooked by science. Currently most popular is the theory that ABCs are the descendents of animals which were irresponsibly released from private collections when the Dangerous Wild Animals Act of 1976 made expensive licensing compulsory.

However, there is no evidence for this idea – on the contrary, there is much evidence against it. Despite the fact that it was not then illegal, only three people have ever claimed to have deliberately released big cats, whereas it would have had to have been done on a vast – even lunatic – scale for breeding populations to become established all over the country, including inaccessible islands like the Isle of Mull. Secondly, while about 10 per cent of ABCs have plain, sandy-brown fur similar to a puma's, 80 per cent of big cats reported are described as jet-black.

This is the central conundrum in ABC research – for the only big cat with a black variant is the leopard and its New World equivalent, the jaguar. Melanistic (black) leopards occasionally crop up among litters of conventionally spotted leopard cubs; such





RIGHT: Oddly, reports of 'black panthers' dominate sightings of ABCs, even though these melanistic leopards are extremely rare.

animals are popularly termed 'black panthers', and are valuable exhibits in zoos precisely because they are uncommon – in 1976 one cost £500, the price of a small car. A disreputable menagerie owner might release his normal spotted leopards, or common pumas, but he would obviously *sell* the black 'panther'. Yet the evidence suggest that he, and dozens of theoretical others like him, must have done exactly the opposite – for while the vast majority of ABC sightings are apparently of these rare, black leopards, no-one has ever reported seeing a normal spotted leopard.

PARANORMAL PUSSIES

Puzzling though this is, it is only one of several irreducible mysteries surrounding the ABC phenomenon. For alongside the cast-iron evidence of reliable witnesses and much solid circumstantial evidence, there are anomalies which take ABCs out of the arena of common sense and into the realm of the seemingly paranormal.

One is that there have been no bodies of black panthers found alive or dead, despite the efforts of gamekeepers, farmers and intensive police hunts – not to mention busy roads – over 45 years. ABCs are preternaturally elusive in other ways too – where we should now be treated to regular wildlife documentaries on these creatures, we have not even got so much as a decent photograph. There have been many black blobs photographed and filmed, many of them of apparently feline animals, but nothing remotely clear enough to prove the existence of a breeding population of black panthers.

Moreover, witnesses often describe a closely observed range of characteristics not typical of any Big Cat species. There are lynxes with tails, panthers with ear-tufts, pumas which roar; panthers the size of a sheep, a spaniel, a horse, a Labrador; creatures which are glossy black, grey, brindled, beige, brown and cream, ginger – and one of the most interesting bits of ABC footage, shot by Frank Speake in Lincolnshire, shows a pure white ABC, a colour unknown amongst the big cats.

THE VAST MAJORITY OF ABC SIGHTINGS IN THE UK ARE APPARENTLY OF THESE RARE BLACK LEOPARDS

FELICITY THE PUMA

In October 1980 farmer Ted Noble trapped a female puma, about six years old, in Cannich, near Inverness. The previous October, he had seen a 'lioness' stalking ponies at his farm. Dubbed Felicity, the puma appeared tame, although analysis of her droppings showed that she had been living in the wild. 'Puma' sightings and sheep depredations in the area continued after her capture. She died of old age in 1985 and her stuffed body was put on permanent display at the entrance to Inverness museum.

THE BEAST OF EXMOOR

In April 1983, 50 men, some mounted and most armed, supported by a police helicopter, scoured Exmoor (in Devon and Somerset) all day for the so-called 'Beast of Exmoor' without result. This was prompted by many ABC sightings and at least 30 sheep killings, typically with skulls crushed and bodies eviscerated. Sightings and depredations continued for months, though they tailed off (and/or the press lost interest). Hair gathered on Exmoor was identified as puma in 1987.

THE SUFFOLK LYNX

A Northern lynx (*Felis lynx*) was shot near Beccles, Suffolk, in 1991 after it killed about 15 sheep over a two-week period. The Home Office asked the farmer to destroy the body and any photos (why?). However, it was put into a freezer for a few days before being



sold, and a local collector now has it in his hall. It was almost 11 years before the story and photo surfaced.

THE BEAST OF BODMIN

Following scores of ABC reports and livestock depredations on Bodmin Moor in Cornwall in 1993–95, the Government conducted an official 'Beast of Bodmin' hunt. Between January and July 1995, officials spent 26 working days examining photographs, footprints and dead livestock. While they found "no verifiable evidence" for the presence of ABCs, they admitted that they "could not prove that a 'Big Cat' is not present". Sightings have continued, along with sheep kills.

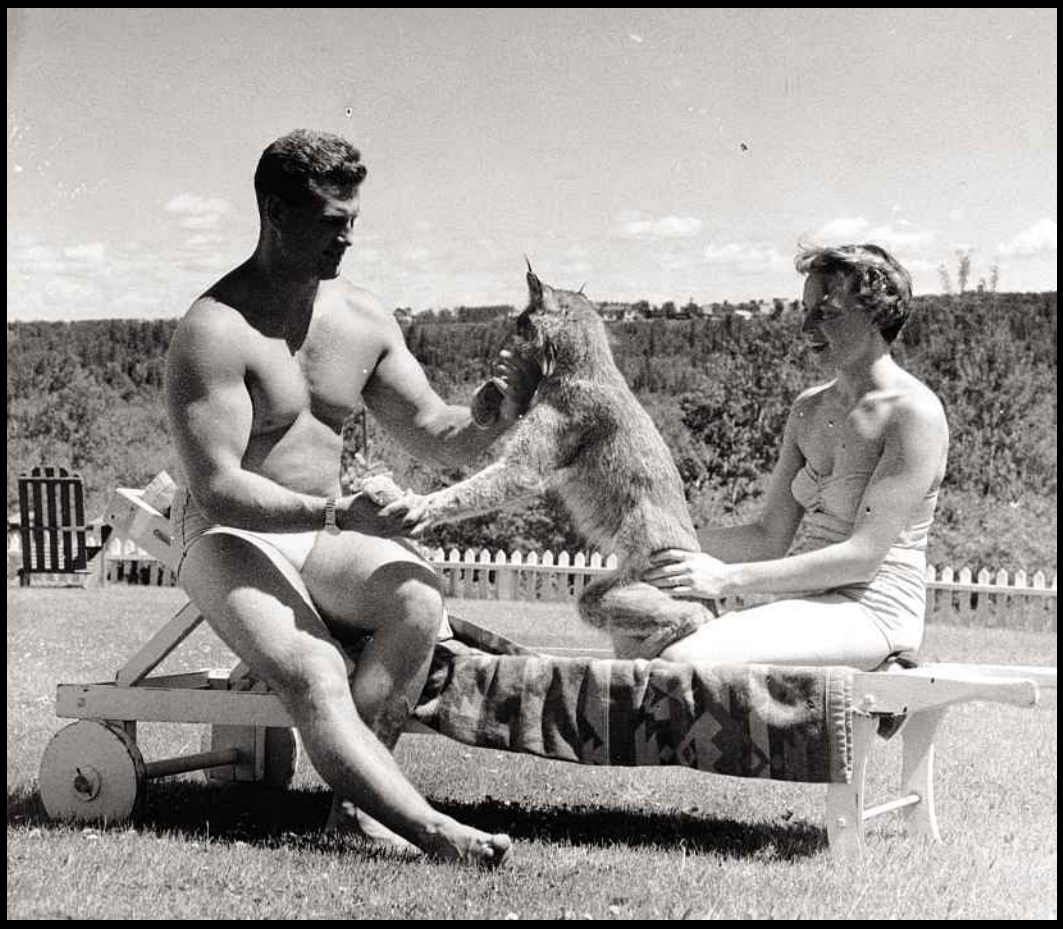
THE BEAST OF BONT

In January 1996, police marksmen combed Tywi Forest near Aberystwyth for the 'Beast of Bont'; about 50 sheep had been killed in the area in the previous three months. In April 1997, the local MP said there was "a fair consensus" that one or more pumas or black leopards was at large. Depredations continued: on a single November night in 1998, 40 sheep at Mynydd Epynt, near Brecon, were killed with a clean bite to the neck.

THE BEAST OF BARNET

A sandy-coloured ABC was seen twice on 25 September 1998 around South Mimms in Hertfordshire, There was the customary fruitless big game hunt. It was seen again in the neighbourhood the following day by two policemen and





ABOVE: It was once fashionable to keep big cats as pets, but could their release really account for all ABC reports?

The zoologist Dr Karl Shuker put it succinctly: "The British Big Cat would need to be nothing short of a shape-shifter to account for the immense variety of felids reported..."

Of course, shape-shifters have been common in the countryside from time immemorial – Katherine Briggs details hundreds of them in her *Dictionary of Fairies* – and some folklorists have suggested that ABCs are indeed a variant of the legendary 'Black Dogs' which haunt the West Country and East Anglia under various regional names such as 'Black Shuck' or 'The Barguest'. In fact, ABCs do have much in common with many of our traditional 'daimons', as the Ancient Greeks called them, such as these – intermediate beings, crossing the divide between our material world and the Otherworld, and uncategorisable by definition.

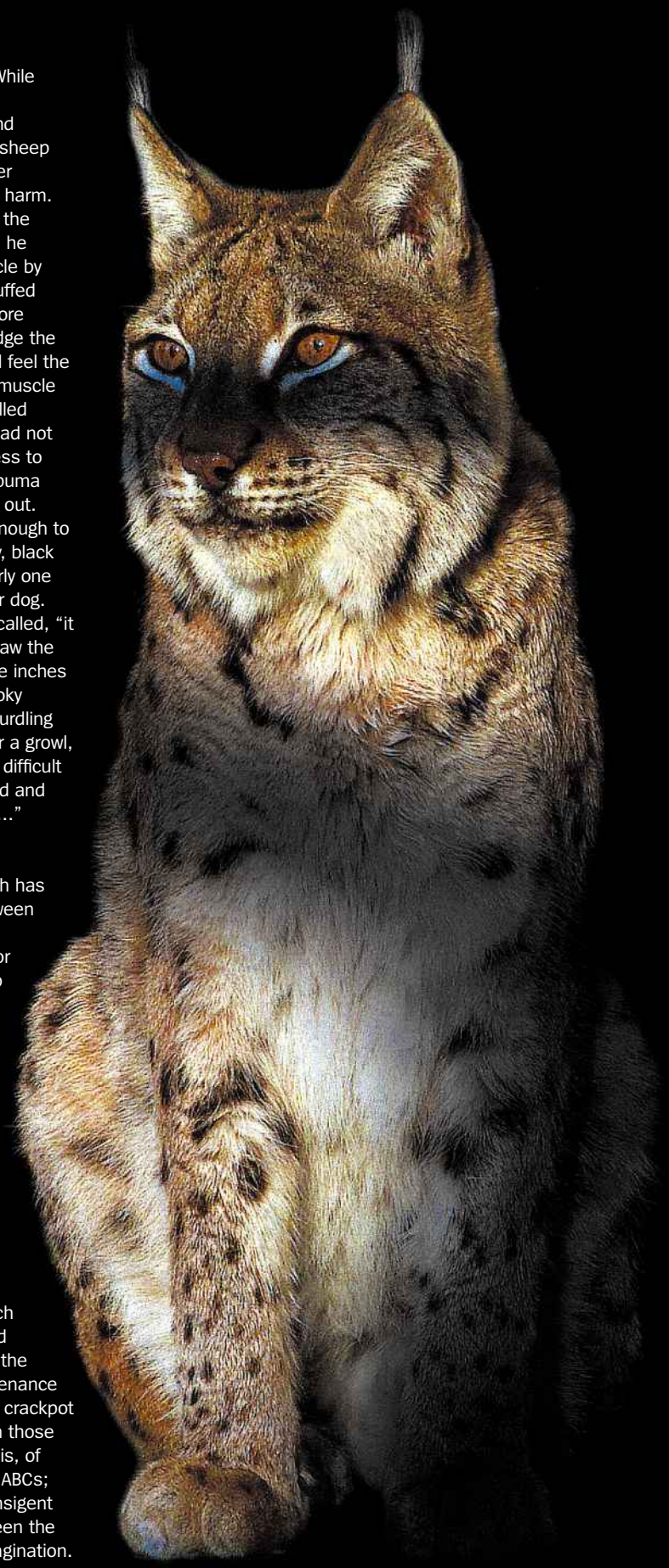
"IT BARED ITS TEETH AT ME... ITS EYES WERE A SMOKY AMBER... AND IT MADE A BLOOD-CURDLING NOISE"

Supporters of this idea can cite ABCs' behavioural oddities and wild talents. One is their ability to move at preternatural speed: "incredibly fast", "faster than any animal I have ever seen", and similar descriptions, are a mantra among ABC-spotters. Leopards are not fast or even habitual runners, preferring to ambush prey. Perhaps most disconcerting for literalists is an ABC's ability to disappear in the blink of an eye: "I backed away slowly," wrote a fisherman of his encounter with an ABC by the River Lugar in Scotland, "but then stumbled on a log and looked down for a second and when I looked up again it had gone." The Devon writer Trevor Beer noted the phenomenon too: "Many is the time I and others have watched such a cat crossing an open hillside when it has 'vanished' as if into thin air... At such moments the air feels charged with electricity as one's own hackles rise at the back of the neck."

CLOSE CAT ENCOUNTERS

Perhaps ABCs' most likeable idiosyncrasy is that unlike standard leopards they don't

seem to be dangerous. While they have been observed standing over road-kill, and often been implicated in sheep predation, they have never done a human any direct harm. Richard Percy had one of the closest encounters when he was knocked off his bicycle by a brown ABC. It merely cuffed him around the head before disappearing into the hedge the way it had come. "I could feel the soft fur on my face, and muscle beneath it – lovely", recalled Richard, who otherwise had not a scratch on him. Needless to say a normal leopard or puma would have had its claws out. Karen Rees was "close enough to have touched" the glossy, black ABC she encountered early one morning while walking her dog. "As it sprang up," she recalled, "it bared its teeth at me. I saw the canines were two to three inches long. Its eyes were a smoky amber. It made a blood-curdling noise – neither a hiss nor a growl, but a very gutteral noise, difficult to describe. It then turned and made off into the thicket..."



THE JOY OF ABCS

The world of ABC research has always been divided between those who find these anomalies fascinating – or irritating – and those who decide to conveniently ignore them. All await 'definite' proof of one kind or another – ideally the discovery of black panther bodies – but after 45 years this is becoming increasingly unrealistic.

In short there is – as yet – nothing definite about ABCs except the absolute reality of experiences such as those I have described above. Against these, all the explanations for the provenance of ABCs are more or less crackpot – and none more so than those which claim not to be. This, of course, is also the joy of ABCs; they are a superbly intransigent mystery, mediating between the worlds of reason and imagination.

several others. Large pawprints were found. The hunt resumed, backed up by helicopters with thermal-imaging cameras. In the next three days, there were at least 10 more reported sightings before the beast made the usual exit into limbo.

THE ARMTHORPE TIGER

Raymond Cibor was driving a fork-lift truck down a lane at Seven Yards Farm in Armthorpe, South Yorkshire, on 16 June 1999 when a mud-spattered tiger leapt from undergrowth, snarled and lashed out at the vehicle before running off into woodland. A police helicopter combed the area without result, but a week later a boy encountered a tiger while cycling in Auckley, three miles (5km) from Seven Yards Farm.

THE BEAST OF BLAGDON

On 17 August 2001, an ABC identified as a lioness was seen by dozens of people about 300 yards behind Rowberrow filling station on the A38 Bristol-to-Bridgwater road in Avon. Approached by two men, it ran off into woodland. A search failed to find any clues, although a mutilated sheep turned up on a farm in nearby Winford on the same day. The farmer had suffered three other sheep mutilations since the previous October.



CASEBOOK

BIG CATS ON THE BORDER

IN APRIL 2006, **CHRIS MOISER** TRAVELLED TO THE IRISH BORDERS WITH MARK FRASER OF THE BIG CATS IN BRITAIN RESEARCH GROUP. THEIR MISSION WAS TO SEARCH FOR ANY EVIDENCE OF ABC ACTIVITY IN AN AREA NOTED FOR SIGHTINGS.

Since 1994, there have been alleged sightings of Big Cats in the border areas between Northern Ireland and the Republic. Some of these animals were, almost certainly, specimens that had escaped from private collections. The more recent ones may have been deliberately released when it was announced that the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 was being extended to cover Northern Ireland.

Mark Fraser of Big Cats in Britain had visited the area before, in September 2005. This time, our invitation to spend a week in the border area examining any evidence of a Big Cat presence came from Charlie McGuinness, a local businessman based in Co. Monaghan. Charlie had seen a large black cat cross the field behind his home in 2004. He had additionally managed to film it, with the footage subsequently shown on Irish television.

After arriving at Belfast, we crossed the border into the South, meeting Charlie and his wife Helen in the market town of Monaghan. Here, we were joined by Izzy, a TV producer from True North Productions making a documentary about the trip, and John Nutley, a friend of Charlie's who had also seen a big black cat.



ABOVE: County Monaghan from the air – ideal habitat for ABCs.

Our first full day of investigations was a Sunday; it started with visits to a number of sites where Big Cat sightings had been made, and interviews with a number of witnesses. A local member of the legal profession recounted his recent sighting of a Big Cat in Rossmore Park to Izzy and Mark on camera, while Charlie, John and I examined scratches up to 6ft (1.8m) high on one of the (introduced) Giant Redwood trees in the Park. Nothing conclusive was learned from the scratches, and no claw fragments were recovered, but there was no other obvious explanation for them other than a large cat. Droppings confirmed the presence of mink in the park.

AERIAL SURVEY

A helicopter survey of the local area had been arranged for the afternoon. The weather was good and the pilot sympathetic to the mission, so we flew over all the areas in Co. Monaghan from which sightings had been reported. The overall impression we gained from the flight was that the majority of the fields were smaller than in England and Wales and that the field boundaries were mainly very dense hedges. Additionally, there were a great many areas of scrubland and woods, and a large number of lakes. In other words, this made an exceptionally good potential habitat for puma, leopard or lynx; because of the density of the cover, there was little chance of



ABOVE: John Nutley photographing our Big Cat trap after it was set up in its new location.

the animals being seen for much of the time, or from any great distance. Ground reconnaissance also revealed vast numbers of rabbits, a likely prey.

A further trek into the Rossmore Park woods in late afternoon led to the examination of a blocked tunnel and a deserted mausoleum for signs of animal dens. There was none, although we did meet a local woman known to Charlie who had witnessed a large black cat from a short distance while returning from church last year.

On Monday, we headed off to Dublin Zoo, where we interviewed head keeper Gerry Creighton. Gerry is a career Big Cat man, and was involved with the legal seizure in 1997 of a jaguar and serval from a private owner who kept them in his garage and walked the jaguar on a lead around a local housing estate at night. These animals were subsequently placed in English zoos.

A LOCAL BUTCHER GENEROUSLY SUPPLIED US WITH FATTY BEEF OFF-CUTS TO BAIT A LIVE TRAP

While Gerry is sceptical about the existence of Big Cats loose in the Irish Republic, he is aware that circuses may be importing exotic animals and selling them on. He also admits that the Irish borders would be well able to support leopard or puma if any were liberated there.

On the way back to our base in Monaghan, we went shopping. A local butcher generously supplied us with fatty beef off-cuts to bait a live trap, and a local haberdasher's was able to supply Velcro for hair traps.

Tuesday morning took us to a wildlife centre with a difference. Peadar Morgan is a retired wildlife officer who has developed his smallholding into a natural history centre. Years ago, following a successful investigation into deer-poaching, he seized a superb stag head, which, after the court case, he was allowed to have mounted for use as a teaching aid. He subsequently acquired lots of other mounted specimens, many of great antiquity, which he has now displayed in a series of impressive local habitat dioramas. He is hoping to develop a display of historic farm implements, some of which he is currently restoring.

When he heard we were in the area, Peadar asked us to drop in; perhaps we could help him determine what might have happened to some of his missing poultry. Although foxes or domestic livestock are normally the prime suspects, these attacks were different. In the first, five ducks went missing on one night, with no evidence of killing or even a struggle in the enclosure (an open-top structure with no apparent holes in any of the fencing).

MISSING BIRDS

The second incident was even more mysterious, with golden pheasants and other birds having been taken from a fully enclosed aviary. In this case, access was gained through two separate panels of nylon netting, about 1m (3.3ft) off the ground. The access, though, was indirect, with the predator having gone through an aviary containing three injured buzzards first. Again, multiple birds had been lost with little evidence of a struggle of any sort. The few feathers that were found were beneath the hole in the second panel of netting, where they most likely came from a bird being pulled through rather than as a result of injuries caused when it was attacked. The whole investigation proved inclusive, although mink, fox, pine marten and human were all considered as possible attackers. In neither of the attacks did we consider big cats likely to be involved.

After his 2004 sighting, Charlie had a large steel cage trap built, with a treadle-operated drop door. The local butcher had originally supplied Charlie with pig heart and lungs to use as bait. Although installed near where Charlie's had spotted his first Big Cat, the trap had never caught anything, so a decision was made to move it. Early in the evening, with Izzy filming, the heavy trap was lifted

onto a trailer (using two cross-bars to minimise the human odours left on it) and driven some 12 miles (19km) from Monaghan. The new trap site was a wood close to three places where sightings had recently occurred. It was finally in place, baited and set just before dark. The farmer who owned the land agreed to check it daily, and either Charlie or John planned to go there every couple of days.

The original bait had not been successful, so it was decided to change to a beef extract; and to help make any cat in the area aware of the availability of this meat, a preparation of beef fat was made which would vaporise slowly from the trap. It was also hoped that the smell might help to mask any human odours around the trap.

On Wednesday morning, we interviewed a witness fairly close to where the trap had been placed. He knew of a number of sightings in the area that we weren't aware of, and which hadn't been reported to the media. As at least one of these was fairly recent, and since an animal had been seen in the Co. Leitrim area at about the same time, it suggested there were at least two black cat-like animals currently south of the border.

In the afternoon, we looked again at Charlie's video footage from 2004. Using a Big Cat silhouette, the same video camera, relative positions and a long steel tape, we recalculated the size of the animal. The result was a length of 860mm (34in) from nose to base of tail; such a size made the animal too large for a domestic cat but a little small to be the minimum stated size of an adult leopard. When factoring in a possible error of ±10 per cent in the estimations from which the calculations were made, the result would then be within small adult leopard size range if we added 10 per cent, but still too large to be a domestic cat when we deducted it.

Later that afternoon, through the good offices of the television company press office, we were able to ascertain that the body of the "African Lynx" shot at Fintona, Northern Ireland, in 1997 had now been passed from the Royal Ulster Constabulary to the Ulster Museum in Belfast. They were happy to let us see it the following day.

FURTHER SIGHTINGS

That evening, as we were enjoying some Irish hospitality in a local restaurant, we were introduced to two women who had, some months previously, together witnessed a large "white cat". They had seen it in good light, in the middle of the day, and for two to three minutes; both were of the opinion that it was the height of a sheep, but definitely feline.

A further surprise was in store when a man known only as "Dennis" told us of having shot about 12 cats, some 10–15 years previously. These he described as being like domestic cats, only a bit bigger, and with wide faces, a bit like those of tigers. They had been shot because they were attacking farm livestock. It was a tantalising thought that these might have been wildcats, (*Felis sylvestris*), rather than domestic cats gone feral.

The wildcat did once exist in Ireland, but is believed now to be extinct. This is questionable, though, because of sightings of similar animals in recent times. However, the usual explanation for such sightings is that they are feral cats. The situation is further confused because it has been suggested that domestic cats imported from Scotland may be carrying wildcat genes through hybridisation between the two species there. The concept of a few wildcats having survived until the present day in Ireland is not *too* unbelievable when the low (human) population densities of some areas in the country are considered, together with the ease with which the species could be misidentified as feral domestic cat when seen.

TWO WOMEN HAD SEEN A LARGE WHITE CAT IN GOOD LIGHT AND IN THE MIDDLE OF THE DAY



ABOVE: Two days after the trap was set, this is what had been left in it!

In Belfast the following day, we were shown the body of the Fintona 'African Lynx' in the museum freezer. It was immediately apparent that it was not a caracal or African Lynx, but a European Lynx. The museum staff concurred, at a loss to understand how the animal had originally been identified as an 'African Lynx'. As the animal had been frozen for almost 10 years in a semi-curled position, it was impossible to sex it. Apparently, a set of X-rays had been taken of the body shortly after death, although for what reason was not clear. Information we have received from a reliable source, who wished not to be identified, was that this animal was one of two that had escaped from a private collector not far from Fintona.

On returning from Belfast, we heard that the trap had lost its bait and some droppings had been left in the corner, and set off to examine it. Sadly, we found that the fatty bait had been licked off the trigger mechanism without activating the door. However, the droppings were remarkably doglike, and the farmer's dog that had accompanied us across the fields to look at the trap didn't bother to sniff them, leaving us with our suspicions as to their origins.

Later that evening, we held a public information evening at the Four Seasons hotel in Monaghan. The idea was that interested persons, amateurs, professionals, witnesses and the media could come along and hear a number of statements. Several eyewitnesses attended, keen to discuss their sightings. One group from Co. Leitrim had travelled over 60

miles (100km) to be there, and informed us of another sighting from their area that had not been reported in the media.

On Friday, we crossed the border again, this time to see Stephen Philpott at the headquarters of the Ulster Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. We sat by a large pond on a warm late April day discussing the Big Cat situation in Ireland generally. Stephen has strong views on the issue and has been involved in the rescue/seizure of a number of large carnivores in the past.

At present, the USPCA provides homes for six tigers, a pair of lions, a leopard and three wolves that have all been acquired from private owners. In the past, they have had black leopards and bears as well. Stephen believes that there are currently two melanistic leopards and three pumas in the wild in Northern Ireland. One of the pumas is fairly well settled in the Antrim area, but it is quite possible that some of the other animals could cross regularly into the Republic. He believes that he knows when these animals were released, and has records of 67 eyewitnesses who saw the animals in the two weeks after that date, before they became adapted to the wild. Since then, he has gathered another 120 or so eyewitness reports that he believes to be genuine.

Stephen is of the opinion that the animal dealers who work with quasi-legal exotic animals in Northern Ireland now believe that Big Cats attract too much attention and will no longer supply them, concentrating instead on reptiles. He also confirmed something that we had heard previously: that certain ex-paramilitaries, impressed by an American film in which a gangster possesses an exotic cat, may have desired to own such creatures themselves.

Another fascinating titbit was that Stephen had received a telephone call from a man claiming to be an ex-member of the British armed forces who had taken part in covert activities on the border during 'the Troubles'. He claimed to have seen a Big Cat while taking part in a secret observation operation, but because it would have compromised the mission, had been unable to report it at the time.



ABOVE: Izzy films Charlie measuring the scratches on a redwood tree.

This trip taught us a number of things; possibly the most important was that a large proportion of the population of Ireland is not yet willing to accept that there may be large exotic cats living in the countryside. Those who did report sightings were likely to be disbelieved by their friends and neighbours – just as witnesses who reported sightings in England, Wales and Scotland in the 1960s and 1970s were. Hence, many witnesses were happy to talk privately as long as their anonymity was respected. Some were clearly relieved to be talking about what they had seen without fear of ridicule.

Despite the general view, there are many people in the Irish Republic who do accept that there may be a few Big Cats living in the wild, and believe that they were probably released in the North and then crossed the border to the South. Seizures of smuggled animals in the South do indicate that there may be something of a black market in exotic pets there too. Circuses may form a legal conduit to import a few otherwise illegal animals, some of which may be transferred to private owners.

CATS CROSSING

Since the peace agreement, the border has been effectively open; certainly when driving across it, Mark and I were not sure exactly where we crossed it. In view of the length of the border and the type of countryside that it passes through, there would be no hindrance for animals crossing and re-crossing the border as it suited them.

From the evidence available, we believe that there may be at least three large exotic cats alive (or recently alive) in the Republic. We come to this conclusion on the basis of the position of credible sightings, geographical boundaries, such as rivers and lakes, and the proximity of time and long distance involved between two particular sightings.

These animals may be some of those released in the North, but it is also possible that they may be escapees from private ownership in Eire. It seems unlikely at present that these animals are breeding. No one is really sure of the sexes, and even if there were a pair, the chances of them meeting to breed would be limited. If, though, further animals are released, either when the legislation in the North is brought into force, or for any other reason, this situation might change.



Investigating... ALIEN BIG CATS

MARK FRASER explains the workings of his Big Cats in Britain organisation – who reports Big Cat sightings, how these are dealt with and what is needed to get to the bottom of the mystery.

I have had an interest in mysteries as long as I can remember – I grew up in a haunted house and had several 'paranormal experiences'. As a teenager in the 1970s, I would spend all my money on second-hand books covering subjects such as cryptozoology, ghosts, UFOS and ancient mysteries. It was the books by Di Francis that actually encouraged me to take up the Big Cat quest myself in 1985. Here was a mystery on my doorstep, a mystery I could get my teeth into. In those early days, I travelled around the East Riding of Yorkshire (still a Big Cat hot spot) on my Harley Davidson talking to witnesses and scouring the countryside where sightings had taken place. I met a lot of witnesses, made a lot of mistakes, but also made a lot of friends in those early days – the experience were invaluable. Alas, I discovered girls and nights out, and Big Cats were put on the back burner for a little while.

We receive four or five reports a week from the British Isles and Ireland. We do not follow every case up – that would be pointless – although we do try to acknowledge every person who contacts us.

Most sightings are but the briefest of glances of the cat running across the road or a field, an encounter that nevertheless leaves a lasting impression on the witness. Many reports do turn out to be mistakes – the number of domestic cat pictures that BCIB receives shows this – but this leaves those cases that cannot be easily explained away. Prints left by cats are quite rare in this country, but from time to time among the dog, fox and even rabbit prints, that of a large cat does turn up. If there is an incident where damage has been caused, livestock killed – even a photograph – a more comprehensive follow-up is undertaken by the BCIB rep with a visit to the scene and an on-site investigation.

BCIB have several infrared cameras which we leave out in various locations for several months at a time. We have captured several odd pictures which may make a paranormal researcher look twice, but, alas, as yet no British Big Cat.

Field researchers scour the countryside in their own 'patches.' There are several people across the UK who do this: most are naturalists and would be out there anyway, and are a great asset to the BCIB. They've had some pretty impressive results in evidence-gathering so far. It is these people who are most likely in the end to come up with the hard evidence.

BIG CATS IN BRITAIN
www.bigcatsinbritain.org

Big Cats in Britain (BCIB) is an investigative group made up of a network of researchers across the country. We gather evidence and information with the aim of discovering exactly which species of Big Cats are roaming the British countryside and how they came to be here. For our purpose, the term 'Big Cats' denotes any feline not indigenous to the British Isles or any unknown indigenous Big Cat. We offer – and are continuing to expand – the biggest online archive of information on British Big Cats.

BCIB is unique in the British Big Cat field, as we have members in most areas – when a sighting comes, in the details are passed to the relevant people who look into the report a little further. We also have many experts in various fields to call upon when the need arises.

Our main social event is our annual conference. We are also about to go on the road with a double-decker bus – the first BCIB road show!

LOOKING FOR EVIDENCE

Many people call BCIB in after they have had several sightings or have suffered livestock kills – these include factory sites, landowners, even the MoD. Usually the main concern of these people is the safety of their workers. We will work (for free) honestly and as quietly as possible – many of these people don't want any publicity and certainly don't want any press involvement. We won't make a mystery where there isn't one simply to gain cheap publicity, but if we find evidence to suggest that an indigenous animal was not responsible for the events we will have no hesitation in saying so – sometimes that doesn't make us popular!

We look for hard evidence in the form of prints, hairs, scat, video footage and photographs. Today, we are concentrating mainly on road kills – we have





ABOVE: Mark Fraser staking out ABCs on a vigil in Ayrshire. **ABOVE RIGHT:** A big cat captured on film in Ayrshire, Scotland. Real, or a cardboard cut-out?

many reports but are usually too late getting to the area to discover what was killed. The animals are usually whisked away pretty damn fast! Of course, some of these reports are hoaxes and mistakes. Many a time we have rushed to the scene of a tyre shred from an articulated lorry that the witness was adamant was the body of a big black cat; plastic bin liners and even teddies placed in strategic places have had us rushing around the country in the hope that this time, it will be 'the one'. But then there are cases where roads are shut off, and witnesses swear they hit a Big Cat and that it was taken away by the authorities never to be heard of again. We have even had a police officer admit to having been present when a large cat he described as "a hybrid" was taken away after the road was closed (official confirmation of this was not forthcoming).

I really doubt that there is anything that can prove conclusively that large cats are living and breeding in the UK. Everything, including a body, can be put down to a one-off animal. What we really need is a documentary-maker in a hide for five or six months with cameras ready. This is done in countries all over the world, but no one has thought yet to do it here. It is only a concentrated effort like this that is likely to produce any positive results. Unfortunately, we do not have the money for such an undertaking (but are open to sponsorship!).

Anyone can take up the quest – you don't need special equipment or fancy gadgets. There are many ways, all equally important, of researching these cats. Don't be put off joining BCIB because you cannot get out into the field; we need people who will scour the archives and trawl the Internet gathering information for reference. Besides, you can spend a lot of money chasing evidence up and down the British countryside.



ABOVE: Cast taken from a leopard print found at a location in Scotland.

WE LOOK FOR HARD EVIDENCE IN THE FORM OF PRINTS, HAIRS, VIDEO FOOTAGE AND PHOTOS

Recently, Argyll representative Shaun Stevens conducted the first ever Freedom of Information search of every British police force and county council. He gathered information such as how many exotic animals are kept legally in the country, and where. Most police forces were very helpful, and Shaun's work has brought many new cases to light, as well as revealing that DEFRA (the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs**)** *are* interested in collating reports, however much they deny this publicly.

For anyone who is starting out in this game, I think the best thing is to learn the history of the UK Big Cat saga – there are many books out there. Also, compile a list of sightings in your area and map them. Visit as many local witnesses as you can, and visit the areas of sightings. Learn the land and the cats' territory. It is also very important that you learn what signs and damage indigenous animals can do – a lot of normal British countryside animal activity is put down to Big Cats, when in fact nothing could be further from the truth.

Always treat your witnesses with respect – if they state that they don't want any personal details made public, adhere to this. And don't take newspaper reports at face value. While there is a lot of excellent reporting out there, beware of the false quotes and misleading headlines. Go beyond the papers – the media only carry a fraction of reported cases.

Some researchers say that they don't see the point in holding a vigil to look for Big Cats; this is a statement I still can't get my head around. In all these years, I have only seen three of these animals, and on each of these occasions it was on a vigil. Quite simply. if I wasn't out there, I wouldn't have seen them.

Today the question is not "Do ABCs exist?" but "What are they"?

DIRECTORY

SUGGESTED READING

The Beast of Exmoor: Fact or Legend?
Trevor Beer (Countryside Productions, 1983)

Alien Animals
Janet and Colin Bord (Panther Books, 1985)

Modern Mysteries of Britain
Janet and Colin Bord (Grafton, 1988)

Cat Country
Di Francis (David and Charles, 1983)

The Beast of Exmoor and Other Mystery Predators of Britain
Di Francis (Jonathan Cape, 1993)

Mystery Big Cats
Merrily Harpur (Heart of Albion, 2006)

Roaring Dorset: Encounters with Big Cats
Merrily Harpur (Roving Press, 2008)

Daimonic Reality: A Field Guide to the Otherworld
Patrick Harpur (Penguin, 1995)

On the Track of Unknown Animals
Bernard Heuvelmans (Kegan Paul International, 1995)

Mystery Big Cats of Devon and Cornwall
Chris Moiser (Bossiney books, 2001)

Big Cat Mysteries of Somerset
Chris Moiser (Bossiney books, 2005)

Mystery Big Cats of Dorset
Chris Moiser (Inspiring Places Publishing, 2007)

Cat Flaps! Northern Mystery Cats
Andy Roberts (CFZ Press, 2007)

Mystery Cats Of The World
Karl PN Shuker (Robert Hale, 1989)

For all the year's exciting recent cat-flaps and informed comment, ***BCIB Yearbooks 2006–2009*** (edited by Mark Fraser) are indispensible – available from www.bigcatsinbritain.org

ORGANISATIONS, GROUPS & WEBSITES

Big Cats In Britain (BCIB)
The Big Cats In Britain (BCIB) group is the national network of researchers orchestrated by the indefatigable Mark Fraser, and offers the only comprehensive national archive of sightings at www.bigcatsinbritain.org. This is freely accessible to members, who are in turn expected to share their own information. The group is very active, runs a conference in different parts of the country each year, and publishes an annual *Yearbook*. BCIB has just launched its own magazine, *The Crypto-Felid,* available via the website.
Web: www.bigcatsinbritain.org
Tel: 0776 641 6211
Email: bigcatsinbritain@btinternet.com

Rutland and Leicestershire Panther Watch
One of the first ABC groups in the UK; still keeping an eye on ABCs in the area
Web: www.bigcats.org uk
Email: bigcat-reports@fsmr.org.uk

Dorset Big Cats Register
Merrily Harpur's site, covering big cats in Dorset and on its borders, has sightings by area, photographic evidence and advice on what to do if you spot an ABC
Web: www.dorsetbigcats.org/
Tel: 01300 320 064
Email: research@dorsetbigcats.org

The Messy Beast
All things feline, with an essential section for those tempted by a 'hybrid' explanation for ABCs
Web: www.messybeast.com

PICTURE CREDITS

COVER

Clockwise from top right: UFOS: Alex Tomlinson; skywatcher: Etienne Gilfillan; spoon: David Newton; Nessie: Getty Images; crop circle: Steve Alexander; holy fire: Getty Images

GHOST HUNTING

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p11, top: London Stereoscopic Company/Getty Images
p12, top: Graham Morris
p14, top: Bill Moore
p14, bottom: Mark Hillary/cc
p15, bottom: Kurt Hutton/Picture Post/Getty Images
p16: Alex Severin
p17: Alex Severin
p18, top: Hulton Archive/Getty Images
p19: Alex Severin
p20: Alex Severin
p22: David Sutton
p23, left: David Sutton

CRYPTOZOOLOGY

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p35: Xavier Lemmens
p36: Michael Williams and Ruby Lang
p37: Fortean Picture Library
p38, both pics: Michael Williams and Ruby Lang
p39, both pics: Michael Williams and Ruby Lang
p40, both pics: CFZ
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UFOS

p44–45: Etienne Gilfillan
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PSYCHIC POWERS

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p70: Courtesy of Shane and Sia Barbi via Getty Images
p71: Courtesy Shane Barbi/Newsmakers
p72, both pics: Mary Evans Picture Library/SPR
p73, bottom: Hulton Archive/Getty Images
p74: Channel 4/Cactus TV
p75: Channel 4/Cactus TV
p76, middle: Koestler Parapsychology Unit
p77, both pics: Koestler Parapsychology Unit

CROP CIRCLES

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