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**ANOMALY:
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PARANORMAL**

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ANOMALY: VOLUME 51 EDITORIAL

Welcome to Anomaly! It has been over a year since the last issue, and for once the cause was not the COVID-19 pandemic. Rather, this time the delay was caused by the time it took to put together the many excellent articles that were submitted, in what I believe is the largest in terms of page count and the best in terms of quality volume I have so far edited.

Editing ANOMALY is a sometimes-fraught process: peer reviewers fail to get back to me, Editorial decisions can offend and the actual physical work of laying out the issue and designing it is something I am still learning as I go, and that is before I have to get it printed and distributed. However one of the genuine pleasures of the process is asking Wendy Milner for the cover, and once again she has excelled: this issue with a depiction of the Woman in Black, the Cheltenham Ghost. Or one of the Cheltenham Ghosts – I dedicated some space in this issue to a piece by myself on that very subject. As Editor that would be impertinent: fortunately this issue we are joined by Associate Editor Dr. David Sivier, and he has co-edited with me, along with the Editorial Board.

This year we hope to once again award the Michael Bentine Memorial Prize for the best case study published by ASSAP, so please do submit your cases for consideration. If academic writing is new to you we have plenty of members who will volunteer to help mentor and guide you through the process, and provide cheerful Encouragement. I look forward to hearing from you, and perhaps publishing your article in Issue 52!

The A39/Loxley Woods Apparition: A Desktop Study

Robert Moore.

Abstract

Over the past 5 decades there have been claimed observations of an “apparition” along a stretch of the A39 near the villages of Ashcott and Shapwick, Somerset. The majority of events have reputedly occurred adjacent and within the remnants of an ancient forest called **Loxley Woods**. Local tradition claims this is the ghost of a highwayman called **Thomas Pocock**. This study presents an overview of this situation, of what appears to be one of Somerset's most protracted roadside haunting.

Keywords: A39; Somerset; Loxley Woods; Apparitions; Pocock; Highwayman; Early Modern; Road Ghost.



Loxley Woods, Somerset.

Locus

The A39 is a subsidiary roadway running from Bath to Falmouth for a total length of 307.4 kilometres. The section relevant to this study is located in Somerset, commencing at the junction adjacent to the *Pipers Inn* public house at Ashcott, Somerset; one section of which branches in a South Westerly direction towards Ilchester, the other continuing roughly North West to Bawdrip and Bridgwater. The road has been in its present form (i.e., designated as the A39) from the mid 1930's and reportedly represents its oldest section (www.roads.org.uk 2021, Sabre 2021, Ordnance Survey 1983). The region from which the majority of A39 "highwayman" apparition claims originate is a roughly 4km stretch commencing from the villages of Ashcott and Shapwick and terminating at Moorlinch. While much of South West Somerset is flat, at this juncture the A39 is situated on an elevated zone termed the *Polden Ridge*, which has a geological composition of sedimentary rocks and clays (National Environmental Research Council (1988).



A39 through Loxley Woods.

The Woolavington-Glastonbury extent of the A39 (designated as *Bath Road*) is a two-lane roadway mostly with a 50-mph speed limit and predominantly edged by trees; most notably around *Loxley Woods* (approx., $51^{\circ}08'04''N$ $2^{\circ}51'11''W$). This ancient deciduous woodland - alluded to as far back as the medieval era – extends for around 2.1 km along either side of the road between Shapwick and Moorlinch. The roadside tree-growth gives the region a claustrophobic aspect, especially in summer and at night, and an eerie disposition in winter. This weald zone's name derives from the Old English words "Locc" and "leah" equating in modern English to "*woodland (near the) clearing*", describing its aspect even today (Gelling 1984). The height of the Polden Ridge at Loxley Woods is around 63 metres above Sea level (Ordnance Survey 1983).



Aerial view of Loxley Woods, Somerset (Google Earth 2021)

Either side of Loxley Woods the A39 overlooks fields and trees with some roadside houses and businesses. Its general course follows a Roman era road, which commenced in Ilchester and terminated around contemporary Bawdrip. It is thought this older road ended at **Crandon Bridge**, the site of a small Roman port uncovered during the construction of the M5 motorway in 1971 (Rippon 2008).



View of A39 as it passes through Loxley Woods, Western edge (Robert Moore 2018)



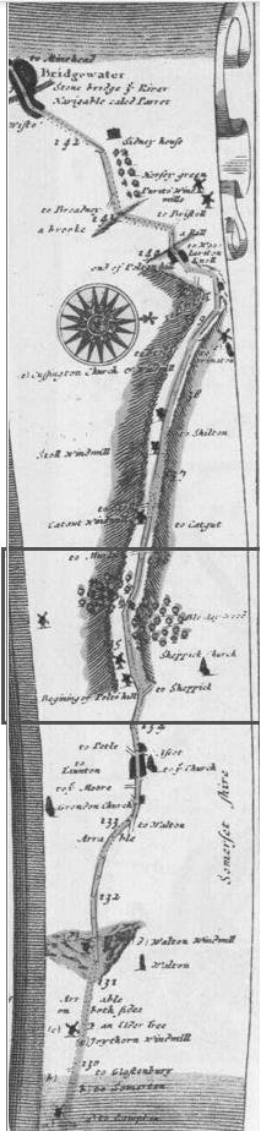
Interior of Loxley Woods, Western edge (Robert Moore 2018)

Among the 100 route maps drawn by the cartographer John Ogilvy for the 1675 book *Britannia* (intended as a geographical and historical overview of the British Isles) one illustration – the last section of *Plate 32* - depicted the road from Bridgwater to Compton as it then existed, which incidentally passed through Ashcott and Loxley Woods. This old route appears to roughly follow the course of the current A39 (Ogilvy 1675).



Stagecoaches were commercial enterprises. Travelling at an average speed of 5 mph, they were serviced by coaching inns spaced 10-15 miles apart, where carriages would acquire a fresh team of horses. They traditionally attracted Highwaymen. In England the stagecoach was mostly supplanted by the steam train by the 1850s (History Magazine 2016).

This seems to have been subsequently incorporated into a **turnpike** (a paved toll road) created around 1730, run by a trust located in the nearby town of Bridgwater (Turnpikes 2013). Prior to that date, English roads were notoriously poor quality, especially in winter. By 1821 this highway was part of the Exeter to London mail coach route. The *Swiftsure* coaching route travelled from Bridgwater to Glastonbury along an adjacent road now designated as the A361 (Garrard 2019).



Section of *Plate 34* of John Ogilby's *Britannia* depicting Bridgwater to Glastonbury road circa 1675.

Main study locus outlined.

(Ogilby, 1675, 1733)

Supposed attributes of the A39 apparition.

Local tradition claims this region is haunted by the apparition of a highwayman called *Thomas Pocock*. Reports generally allude to a man dressed in a cape and a distinctive hat (in one instance adorned with an elaborate feather) and often mounted on a large black horse. Out of the 6 reports recorded to date, 3 have happened in the early morning (i.e., 5.00am onwards), two involving night shift workers.

Recorded instances of the A39 apparition

Event 1: Late 1970s.

This event occurred to “WM”, the writer’s father, in the late 1970s. At the time he was working as a night shift worker at the Clarkes’ sheepskin factory at Street, Somerset. This would involve him driving to and from the writer’s old house at East Huntspill to Street - Monday to Friday - returning in the early hours of the morning. On arriving one morning he exclaimed to the family he had seen “the highwayman” at on the south-eastern edge of Loxley woods, just after the village of Ashcott, while on his way home. He later drew a picture of this figure, which depicted an individual in a cloak wearing a brimmed hat with a prominent feather sticking from it. While he maintained he saw this figure he later adopted the view it was someone in a costume. He also showed the writer the spot where the figure was seen when we drove through Loxley Woods shortly afterwards. Sadly, he is now deceased and the sketch is lost. If nothing else, this is evidence that the tradition of the “outlaw” ghost of Loxley Woods was a local tradition at least far back as the 1970s.

Event 2: late 1980s

A man ("CC"), driving from his place of work at Highbridge to Cothlestone at around 5.30am, saw (opposite the Pines café, Buncombe Hill, Spaxton) a figure on a huge horse wearing a "large leather poncho" located under some trees. While unnerved by this site he was not totally convinced it was an apparition. Here, it needs to be stated this event happened some 30 km from Loxley Woods and may well be unrelated to the other accounts (Somerset Live 2020c).

Event 3: 1999

Sometime during that year, a mother and daughter reportedly observed a "horseman" on the road in front of their car, seemingly "galloping on the spot" but never moving. While definitely reported, little else is (presently) known of this account, which has been removed from the Internet. The writers' attempts to locate it through other means being unsuccessful (Somerset Live 2017, 1999T).

Event 4: 2013

At around 6:30am sometime in 2013 "DD", a local woman, was walking her dogs at King's Lane, Ashcott. Her dogs suddenly froze in their tracks, after which a horse and rider suddenly appeared, galloping across the lane, access at this orientation blocked by fences and a metal wire post. When the figure vanished, her dogs refused to continue their walk and so she abandoned her outing and returned home (Somerset Live 2020b).

Event 5: December 2019

Around 03.05am in December 2019 "FF" and "FG", a man and his wife, were driving toward Bridgwater, past the "Albion" Public house, Ashcott and near the 1st or 2nd bend or second layby of the A39 at this juncture. Here, FG saw a large figure who *"looked like it was hunched up" ...*

"pointing and leaning over". The figure was wearing a (hat) "(that came) out here but it was going down"... (it was) big, bulky, it looked like it was too big". It was also reportedly wearing a "(possibly long) light brown sandy coloured coat. At the same FF (the driver) saw a "a bloody gurt black horse coming out onto the road". He also seems to have seen the pointing figure mounted on it as FF repeated the gesture to FG when asked if he had also seen it. She, however, "didn't see the horse... (but) I saw a man, high up". The figure only seems to have been observed for a few seconds before it suddenly vanished (Somerset Live 2020, The Poltergeist Files 2020).



Approximate locus of Dec 2019 account (entrance to Wood Lane, bearing North West, past the village of Ashcott) (from Google Earth; OS NGR: ST403376)

Event 6: April 2020

The Poltergeist Files (a YouTube channel) detailed the investigation of the A39 apparition, mainly based on the 2019 incident. Conducted in April 2020, this involved a short night-time visit, those involved parking near the

estimated 2019 event locus. This team of three individuals walked through Loxley Woods with a voice recorder, an EM metre and video camera. They commenced by playing 18th century chamber music and “calling out” to Pocock. Several apparent EVP samples, video and EM anomalies were recorded, along with a sense of presence (The Poltergeist Files 2020).

3.0: Folklore relating to Thomas Pocock.

As previously stated, the A39 ghost is reputedly the spectre of an individual called Thomas Pocock, who local tradition claim was a highwayman who lived either during the 18th or 17th century. He was reputedly a highwayman who operated mainly around Loxley Woods area; supposedly being a “Robin Hood” like figure who robbed from the rich and gave to the poor. The Pocock myth claims he lived in a cave hideout possessing three chambers, supposedly located near Chilton Polden. (Body 2016, *Gould 2020*).

A deep gully located near the Old Mill Pond in Bawdrip was supposedly used by Pocock to aid his robberies (Bawdrip History Group 2019). Regional folklore further claims he was unkempt, supposedly never trimming his hair or beard. Pocock supposedly fitted his large black horse (which one source claims was called “*Thunder*”) with back-to-front shoes in order to confuse pursuers (*Body 2014, Gould 2020, Edington and District History Group 2014*). Few other details of his life or career are recalled. A local early 19th century antiquarian (William Stradling) claims he was associated with Chilton Polden. He supposedly either died of his wounds in his cave or was captured and formally hanged. It is unknown when the belief of his spectral return began.

Tradition claims he is “often” seen slumped on his saddle, due to the gunshot wound that supposedly killed him

(Somerset Live 2017). However, other than (possibly) the 2019 account, no other reports cited in this study actually describes this; the figure actually perceived as sitting or standing upright with no obvious sign of distress. To date, the earliest reference to Pocock found by this writer dates from 1839, as incidentally recounted in the writings of the local antiquarian, Stradling.

There is also a poem written in an archaic style but of unknown provenance, entitled *The Rhyme of Thomas Pocock* (Body 2013, Gould 2020);

*“Rynne, mye bones, ryne the moon shines bright,
Pocock in his cave, his presence is lyte.
But when the night is mirky and darke
He’s off on his steed, blythe as a larke”*

Historical Backdrop

While roadside robbery has doubtless existed since the introduction of roads, the era of the traditional (folkloric?) English highwayman originates from the Early Modern era. Whether mythical or real, Pocock is one of many of such figures. Only those fortunate enough to have horses were termed “*highwaymen*”; unmounted path robbers being designated as “*footpads*”. Most highwaymen worked in groups to increase their chances of success; nonetheless, their careers were often short and usually ended at the gallows. In Somerset, from the period 1736 through to 1825 some 40 people were executed for *highway robbery* (although how many were highwaymen as we understand the term is unknown) (Gould 2020a).

Their ascendancy begins with the English Civil War (1642-1651); in particular with certain royalist cavalymen turning their hand to highway robbery. The most famous of these was James Hind, who committed robberies prior

to the outbreak of the Civil War. Due to his Royalist sympathies, he was hung, drawn and quartered in 1651, for treason rather than highway robbery (Johnson 1813). He was followed by Claude Du Vall and William Nevison (or “Swifticks”) who were active during the reign of Charles II (1660-1685). In all these instances’ ballads were created and pamphlets were all issued shortly after their executions (i.e., Bayers 1739).



Highwaymen were popularly depicted as heroic and romantic figures even during the historical period they were active. This trend continued, as indicated by this dramatic artistic impression of William Nevison -- “Swifticks” (Harper 1907)

In most instances they were depicted as “gentlemen outlaws” who were gallant, flamboyant and acted

honourably towards women. This reflects an older tradition typified by the early ballads of Robin Hood; which popularised the archetype of the “goodly” outlaw, who robbed from the rich and gave largess to the poor. Nonetheless a few were depicted as out and out rouses, such as the so-called “Golden Farmer”. Folk memory, however, regard the 18th century as the “heroic” age of highway robbery, and as such gives us the image of the tricorne-wearing mounted road-robber welding flintlock pistols. The most remembered from that time include Richard (Dick)Turpin, Tom King along with William (Will) Plunkett and James Maclaine (Johnson 1813).

Highwaymen continued to be depicted as romantic figures well into the 19th century and beyond. In popular culture much of this literary limelight is directed towards Dick Turpin. This process was initiated by a semi-factual booklet written by a Richard Bayers following Turpin’s execution in 1739. Among the most significant claims this writer made is that Turpin used a cave hideout located in Epping forest (Bayers 1739). This was followed in 1834 by *Rookwood*, a fictional book by William Ainsworth that presented an even more romanticised version. Rather than the violent and unsavoury burglar (who was only active as a highwayman for six months) here, Turpin is depicted as a gallant anti-hero. *Rookwood* also associated Turpin with the horse Black Bess and his legendary overnight ride from London to York – a total invention, but which inspired later Turpin legends, spectral and folkloric (Ainsworth 1834). This rosy tinted perspective continued into the 20th century, as represented by the 1980’s Children’s TV series *The Adventures of Dick Turpin*. Due to this, Turpin remains the best known (and most misremembered) of England’s highwaymen.



The still-prevalent cultural image of the highwayman as a tricorn-wearing rider wielding a flintlock pistol. This was likely established by works such as Ainsworth's 1834 *Rookwood*, from which this image is taken. This work is equally famous for popularising Dick Turpin and instigating the myth of his heroic demeanour. (Ainsworth 1834).

Tradition claims an earlier figure, Catherine Ferrers (who lived around the English Civil War era) was a highwaywoman termed the “wicked lady”; an outlaw supposedly active in Hertfordshire. While an elaborate legend exists recounting her supposed misdeeds, there is little actual evidence to link the historical Ferrers with them. While myth says she died of a gunshot wound, the historically-attested Catherine is recorded as dying in childbirth. Myth also has “the wicked lady” returning as a ghost - a common folkloric fate for English highwaymen (and women) (Barber, 2014).

The highwayman era ended sometime during the early 19th century, due to the introduction of Turnpikes and Enclosure; the latter fencing off open fields and commons, limiting a robber’s ability to escape. The last highwayman to be hung is officially believed to be James (aka Robert) Snooks in 1802, while the last English robbery of this nature is believed by academics to have occurred in 1831 (Jessel 2018,).

Associated historical factors

A distinctive house, called **Chilton Priory**, is situated adjacent to the A39, on the edge of Priory Road leading to the village of Chilton Polden. While having a gothic aspect it is actually a folly built circa 1839 by a local antiquarian called William Stradling. Despite its name, the building was never used as a priory. Stradling also built a grotto under this structure which he named “Pocock’s Cell”, seemingly inspired by the outlaw legend. Stradling claimed Pocock’s actual cave was located a “quarter of a mile away” from the grotto he created (Historic England 2021 & 2021a). The family name “Pocock” derives from a nickname equating to “The Peacock” or “The Proud”; it is Middle English in origin. One early local example is noted in a 1225 Somerset Assize Court Roll (surnameDB 2021).

Whatever the truth about Thomas Pocock, there are many examples of people with the surname “Pocock” living in or close to the zone associated with the A39 apparition. Genealogical pages on the Internet give examples of “Pococks” from Ashcott, Somerset from the 1760’s onwards (Geni 2021). Researcher Edward Wood also discovered a burial record for a “Thomas Pocock” from Somerset occurring in 1707 (National Burial Index For England & Wales 1707, 1708).

Unfortunately, there are no overt references to Pocock in the traditional literature relating to highwaymen (i.e., Johnson 1813). However, in Charles Harper’s 1908 work *Half-hours with The Highwaymen* (Vol 1) the following is cited in relation to the London based Highwaymen John and William Hawkins along with, Woldridge George Sympson, Lennard and others were active around Hounslow Heath, London, during the 1720s. After a career of around 2 years robbing stagecoaches and mail couriers they were arrested; Lennard and three others were arrested, but Hawkins and Woldridge were released.

The survivors formed a new gang, quickly dissolved when one member, “*a certain Pocock*”, had been arrested and informed on the others. Nothing more is said of this individual but the survivors formed another highly mobile gang which carried out raids on the Cirencester, Gloucester, Worcester, Oxford, and Bristol stage coaches. Harper states... “*The next day they would be speaking to the Colchester and Ipswich stages... the next would be again in some totally different direction*”. From this it seems 18th century Highwaymen could be highly mobile and have considerable range. Harper also states it was commonplace for aspirant highwaymen to start their careers on the outskirts of London due to the numerous opportunities for robbery (Harper 1907).

Feathers in caps became a notable aspect of men's fashion from the mid-16th century up to the mid-17th century, but continued to feature in military uniforms until modern times. One common form was the so-called "*cavalier hat*", consistent with the description given in the 1979 and 2019 events (Cambridge University 2021)



Example of a "Cavalier" hat, as shown in this artistic impression of William Nevison ("Swifticks") (Harper 1907)

The dusky coloured long coat described in the 2019 account resembles the buff coat commonly worn by soldiers during the English Civil War (Leeds Armouries 2021).

Associated local paranormal claims and folklore. While apparitional accounts associated with public houses are commonplace there are no known claims involving either the Pipers or Albion Inns. Hippisley-Coxe records a claim of poltergeist-like phenomena at the "Rumbling Tum" (now renamed *The Olive Mill*); other sources also

claim observations of apparitions (Hippisley-Coxe, 1982, Paranormal Database 2021). Shapwick is associated with a White Lady ghost, supposedly originating from 1685 and a consequence of the Monmouth rebellion (Burtle Parish 2015). It is notable that virtually no account of the A39 ghost appears in popular ghost literature prior to 2010, although the writer was aware of the legend during the 1970's.

At the SW edge of Loxley Woods are four stones designated as *Swayne's Jumps*. These reputedly mark the location where a John (or Jan) Swayne (or Swain), seized in the aftermath of the Monmouth rebellion, escaped his captors by performing a series of athletic leaps (*Shapwick Council 2018, Modern Antiquarian 2021, Athenaeum 1844*). It is interesting to note Swayne's Jumps are on the opposite side of the road to the likely location to the 2019 event.

Lastly, 2km north west of Loxley Woods, the A39 passes close to a feature called *Righton's grave*. Located near a crossroads, local tradition states it marks the grave of a suicide victim; whose date of demise and precise identity is unknown (Somerset County Herald 1939, Ordnance Survey 1983).

Conclusion.

The likelihood that Pocock was real and enjoyed a career as a highwayman is a distinct possibility. We have one or more families with that surname residing in this region of Somerset by at least the 18th century. A road roughly following the course of the current A39 also existed in that era, which in all likelihood have attracted highwaymen. The issue is how much any "real" Pocock differed from the folkloric one. Much of the reputed career of Pocock is uncertain and contradictory. Some aspects (the black horse, the secret cave hideout and largess to the poor)

could be later embellishments inspired by other outlaw accounts. Several of these elements are associated with more famous highwaymen such as Dick Turpin (Bayers 1739, Ainsworth 1834).

Some aspect, such as the claims Pocock never cut his hair or trimmed his beard and rode a big black horse, sounds folkloric. On the other hand - by definition - he would have required a horse to ply his trade, and giving money to the poor would endear him to locals, discouraging betrayal. Equally, the claim he hid in a cave and never cut his body hair might suggest he already was a fugitive from the authorities and he turned to highway robbery for sustenance. Had he fought on the losing side of the English Civil War or Monmouth Rebellion? Not having a firm date for Pocock's reputed existence hampers our assessment, rendering it almost impossible to rule out (or in) any historically verified individual.

Given most highwaymen had very short careers, combined with the rural aspect of the Loxley area during the Early Modern era, further complicates attempts to either verify or invalidate his existence. At present, we not only lack historical evidence of Pocock but also for any other highwayman at this locus, either. Surely, given this area was an established route for many centuries, some incidents of this nature would surely have occurred?

In regard to the apparition, it seems we have one media account every decade, namely from the 1970s through to the 2019s. In all instances the precise date of occurrence has been forgotten, weakening their value as evidence. And, indeed, while we do have several accounts, the plural of anecdotes isn't "evidence". Other than the 2020 claim all we have is eyewitness accounts often recounted sometime after the event. And in regard to the 2020 event

there is nothing specific that defines these effects as being instigated by Pocock's unquiet spirit.

Furthermore, In all instances, the participants all had prior knowledge that Loxley Woods is reputedly haunted. Media describing the various accounts imply there were sightings prior to 1999, that established the belief in the A39 apparition, followed by an event in 1999, a chronological gap until 2016 and then another in 2019. Several of the press accounts suggest other undisclosed events have occurred and that the legend of Pocock's ghost is a long-standing local tradition. The vast majority have occurred in the early morning and usually around the vicinity of Loxley Woods – despite the fact the Pocock legend is associated with areas outside this locus.

In regard to explanations there are two stances we can adopt;

The first is that these observations have a prosaic cause. The fact the majority occur in the dark, early morning (at least in two instances to shift workers) suggest these events could be induced by fatigue. It is notable that most events occur around Loxley Woods, which gives the A39 an oppressive aspect within that zone and could be conducive to such an effect. The 2019 event involved the fleeting perception (lasting only several seconds) gives some credence to this idea.

It is also possible that some could be staged pranks. There are numerous suppliers of English Civil war style clothing, a period made popular by re-enactment groups such as *The Sealed Knot*. Several English Civil War re-enactments have occurred locally (i.e., several in Bridgwater and one on Burnham-on-Sea beach during the early 2000's).

Several re-enactments of the 1685 Monmouth Rebellion have also been staged around Bridgwater over the past 5 decades. The A39's aspect could make this an attractive location to those inclined to such antics. Indeed, two of the witnesses cited above believed they could have observed an individual dressed in archaic attire.

The second option is that at least of these events represent authentic apparitional events (whatever they may be). Several instances involve multiple witnesses. The 1999 report, where a mounted figure seemed to gallop on the spot, while presently sketchy, seems difficult to account for in rational terms. The witness of the 2016 account reports the figure emerged from an inaccessible location, while the 2019 report has the apparition only being visible for several seconds.

It is notable the 1970s account and the 2019 incidents both describe the figure as wearing a "Cavalier" style floppy hat – furthermore, the 1970s account could not have been known to the 2019 witnesses as it has not been disclosed until the writing of this article. Based on this aspect, it suggests the "apparition" (if actual) likely has a mid-late 17th century origin rather than an 18th century one. But that all depends on where history will place Pocock (if anywhere) ... or if we discover a reenactor is responsible for at least some events.

Riding a horse in almost pitch darkness dressed in a historical costume would be a risky endeavour and could be taken as a criminal act by the police, having the potential to cause a road traffic accident. The fact the 2019 observation states the figure was only visible for a few seconds before vanishing also suggests a reenactor was unlikely to be involved in that instance. Also, the fact that the chronological extent of these observations spans

the 1970s through to the 2019s (i.e., some 50 years) suggests these events are unlikely to be the work of a single reenactor.

There is no easy solution to the A39 apparition, indeed the events could well have disparate causes. What is clear is that a tradition of some age associates the outlaw Pocock to Loxley Woods, and that some people to this day believe they observe his ghost. As such it represents an example of an active Somerset tradition linking this region's mythic, heroic past to the present.

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Revisiting a Haunted House: Gustav Holst and The Cheltenham Ghosts.

Christian Jensen-Romer

Abstract

In this paper the Swinhoe era of residence at St. Anne's House is discussed with reference to contemporary documents to provide the fullest account to date of the events that underlie the famous 'Cheltenham Ghost' of the 1880s. These include both a precursor 'ghost' at the property, and a drunken assault on the composer Gustav Holst while still a baby in his pram, as well as another haunting that originally bore the name "the Cheltenham Ghost" later attributed to the Morton/Despard case.

If it is possible for a ghost to achieve a certain celebrity, the ghost of St. Anne's House, Pittville Circus Road, Cheltenham has a better claim than most to 'A-list' status. She first came to the attention of psychical researchers via Frederick Myers, whose mother lived in the town and who was educated there at Cheltenham Boy's College, and who was a frequent visitor to the town in the years when he was engaged as the indefatigable Secretary of the Society for Psychical Research. The SPR was founded in 1882, and on May 1st, 1886 Myers came to hear about a haunted house in Cheltenham and began his enquiries. Those enquiries led to the publication in 1892 of an account of "The Morton Case", credited to one Rose Morton, in Volume VIII of the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*. The case has subsequently been much discussed, with Peter Underwood (1977) and Andrew Mackenzie (1982, 1987, 1988) writing on the case, as well as a book dealing with the haunting, *The Cheltenham*

Ghost by Abdy Collins (1948). As Hamilton (2009) said it is also a case which has proved controversial with rival schools of ghost-hunters championing different interpretations, most notably Underwood's attempt to dismiss the ghost as a disguised mistress.

The author has made some efforts to establish if any earlier records exist of the haunting phenomena in the newspapers of the period, and by careful research on the primary sources casts question on a number of minor factual errors that have entered the record and been passed from author to author. These in no way imperil the narrative of the haunting, but are simply corrected to ensure the background to the case is properly presented. During the research, several stories emerged that throw light upon the supposed supernatural phenomena that were occurring in Victorian Cheltenham, and upon the family life of the individual that is believed by many to be the original of the ghost, Imogen Swinhoe, as well as a brief but dangerous encounter between Mr. Swinhoe (Imogen's husband Henry) and the baby who would grow up to become the famous composer Gustav Holst. In this paper the author attempts to put forward the most complete examination of the background to the haunting case yet offered.

A Note of Caution

Let us start by setting aside pseudonyms; the true name of the "Morton" family was in fact Despard as revealed by Abdy Collins (1948). The Swinhoe family were the first residents of the house, and one of them, Imogen Swinhoe, has traditionally been ascribed the role of the ghost. These names were first revealed by Abdy Collins in the middle of the 20th century, and while the individuals concerned in our story have distinguished descendants, I do not believe

serious offence is likely to be caused by this discussion of details long revealed in print, and indeed the newspapers. The SPR quite rightly employed pseudonyms however, not least because of continuing concern about the ghost stories in the rental value of the 'haunted house'. Again, that house has now been known and its location published for three score and ten decades and is certainly known to the residents and indeed most locals; this author falls into the latter category.

So the house is St. Anne's House on Pittville Circus Road, Cheltenham, and is of course private property and has residents who will not appreciate anyone ringing the doorbell and asking about ghosts (just in case anyone was considering it – do not!). The ghost has not, as far as I can tell, be seen in decades, and if there was anything worth 'investigating' the author would have attempted it in the years he has lived close by. We shall use the real names not the SPR pseudonyms through this article.

The Woman in Black

In this article I shall focus on the period predating the haunting and the events said to give rise to the ghost. Although the case is a long-established classic in the annals of psychical research, it will doubtless be new to some readers: I therefore will briefly describe some of the later appearances of the famous 'woman in black' who haunted this property. Let us begin by quoting Morton (1892) on her first sighting of the ghost --

“My father took the house in March 1882, none of us having then heard of anything unusual about the house. We moved in towards the end of April, and it was not until the following June that I first saw the apparition.

I had gone up to my room, but was not yet in bed, when I heard someone at the door, and went to it, thinking it might be my mother. On opening the door, I saw no one; but on going a few steps along the passage, I saw the figure of a tall lady, dressed in black, standing at the head of the stairs. After a few moments she descended the stairs, and I followed for a short distance, feeling curious what it could be. I had only a small piece of candle, and it suddenly burnt itself out; and being unable to see more, I went back to my room.

The figure was that of a tall lady, dressed in black of a soft woollen material, judging from the slight sound in moving. The face was hidden in a handkerchief held in the right hand. This is all I noticed then; but on further occasions, when I was able to observe her more closely, I saw the upper part of the left side of the forehead, and a little of the hair above. Her left hand was nearly hidden by her sleeve and a fold of her dress. As she held it down a portion of a widow's cuff was visible on both wrists, so that the whole impression was that of a lady in widow's weeds. There was no cap on the head but a general effect of blackness suggests a bonnet, with long veil or a hood."

Some members of the family over the next six years repeatedly witnessed this apparition, both inside and outside of the house, as did reportedly servants and neighbours. As well as the apparition there were other phenomena less often discussed in association with the case --

"Other sounds were also heard in addition which seemed gradually to increase in intensity. They consisted of walking up and down on the second-

floor landing of bumps against the doors of the bedrooms, and of the handles of the doors turning. The bumps against the bedroom doors were so marked as to terrify a new servant..."

Interestingly all of these noises are directly associated with the figure itself: when Rosina goes outside to look on hearing the footsteps --

"These footsteps are very characteristic and are not at all like those of any of the people in the house; they are soft and rather slow, though decided and even. My sisters would not go out on the landing after hearing them pass, nor would the servants, but each time when I have gone out after hearing them, I have seen the figure there."

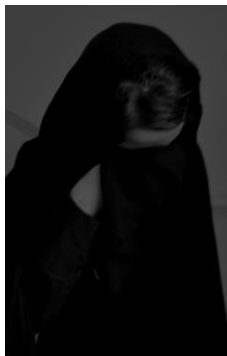
The sounds seem to increase with time, and she hints at possibly a second ghost --

"A second set of footsteps was also heard, heavy and irregular, constantly recurring, lasting a great part of the night, often 3 or 4 times a week. On the first floor the same noises are heard, especially in the front right-hand room, formerly used by Mr. and Mrs. S. Louder sounds were also heard in the summer of 1885, heavy thuds and bumpings, especially on the upper landing."

Generally though the most impressive phenomenon is the apparition, witnessed by many persons. There is one other phenomenon worth noting though --

"On one night in July 1886 (my father and I being away from home), my mother and her maid heard a loud noise in an unoccupied room over their heads. They went up, but seeing nothing and the noise ceasing, they went back to my mother's

room on the first storey. They then heard loud noises from the morning-room on the ground floor. They then went halfway downstairs when they saw a bright light in the hall beneath. Being alarmed, they went up to my sister E., who then came down, and they all three examined the doors, windows, &c., and found them all fastened as usual. My mother and her maid then went to bed. My sister E. went up to her room on the second storey, but as she passed the room where my two sisters L. and M. were sleeping, they opened their door to say that they had heard noises, and also seen what they described as the flame of a candle, without candle or hand visible, cross the room diagonally from corner to door. Two of the maids opened the doors of their two bedrooms, and said that they had also heard noises; they all 5 stood at their doors with their lighted candles for some little time. They all heard steps walking up. and down the landing between them; as they passed they felt a sensation which they described as "a cold wind," though their candles were not blown about. They saw nothing. The steps then descended the stairs, re-ascended, again descended, and did not return.





St. Anne's: photo by author, 'ghostified' by John Madden, 2016.

The House in Pittville Circus Road

Morton's 1892 account in *PSPR VIII* begins

“The house is a typical modern residence, square and commonplace in appearance. It is only separated from the road in front by railings with high gates and a short carriage-sweep. On one side, but completely detached, is another similar residence; on the other side runs a crossroad, shut out from the house by the small orchard, referred to in the account, and by the garden, which also extends some way at the rear...”

This is still true today: oddly enough a recent extension to the front left has taken up the footprint of the long-vanished servants' quarters and stables and restored the building to almost the same shape it possessed in the 1880s. At the time the house was built the property stood upon land that has previously served as market gardens, and careful investigation of maps by ASSAP member Hannah Wright during her time with the council discovered no previous structures on the plot.

Pittville had been developed as a "second town in the Chelt valley", designed to offer a more refined and genteel 'gated community' than Cheltenham itself. Given the new development was less than half a mile from the centre of Cheltenham it was inevitable that the two communities would merge. The transition was helped by the Reverend Frances Close a local Evangelical pastor and political opponent of the Pittville developers deliberately building a large area of working class (some might say 'slum') housing in the fields immediately adjacent. The idea was not entirely new; Cheltenham had a reputation for snobbery and as a luxury resort, and a previous attempt had been made to create a gated community at Battledown, on the hill overlooking the town. (Unlike Pittville where the ornate gates are the only sign of the former private nature of the streets, Battledown remains to this day an exclusive gated community).



St. Anne's, frontage 2016. Photograph by the author

Perhaps the most useful description of the house appeared in *The Cheltenham Examiner* on Wednesday October 18th, 1876 in the form of an Estate Agents advertisement. It reads --

Sale of an Important FREEHOLD FAMILY MANSION, with grounds of some two acres. Gardener's Cottage, Vinery, Conservatory, Coach Houses, Stables, &c., delightfully situate in the Pittville Circus Road, close to All Saints' Church and commanding uninterrupted Views of the Battledown and Leckhampton Hills.

ENGALL, SANDERS & CO.

Have to announce that they are favoured with instructions from the Will of the late H. Swinhoe, Esq,

TO SUBMIT TO THE PUBLIC COMPETITION

At the

CHELTENHAM AUCTION MART

No. 1, Promenade,

On THURSDAY, the 2nd day of NOVEMBER
1876

At Three for Four o'clock precisely

(subject to the Conditions of Sale to be then produced)

The commodious and admirably arranged FREEHOLD FAMILY RESIDENCE known as

GARDEN REACH

Pleasantly and most healthily situate on dry soil in the Pittville Circus Road, and close to All Saints' Church. It is approached by Carriage Drive (with double entrance) and by Flight of Stone Steps leading to the Portico and contains.

On the GROUND FLOOR – Spacious and Lofty Inner and Outer Halls and Passage leading to the Garden Entrance; Dining Room, 25ft by 18ft; Study 17ft 9in by 15ft; Double Drawing Room, forming an Elegant Saloon, 45ft 6in in length by 17ft 9in (and including Bay Window 22ft 6in)), these rooms are 13ft high; Lavatory and W.C.

FIRST FLOOR is reached by a Staircase of Easy Ascent, with handsome Mahogany Balustres, and contains Spacious Landing on to which Five excellent light and lofty Bed Rooms (one measuring 19ft 6in by 17ft; Two others 18ft by 15ft 9in) and Two Dressing Rooms and Store Closet; and one HALF SPACE – Landing and W.C.

On the SECOND FLOOR are Five excellent Bed Chambers and Two Dressing Rooms, Bath Room fitted for Hot and Cold Water, and Shower Bath and Store Closet.

There is a Second Staircase for Servants from Basement to Top of House.

The BASEMENT is unusually light and particularly well-arranged, comprising Kitchen 25ft by 22ft 9 in (including Bay Windows); Servants' Hall, 19ft 2" by 17ft 9"; Butler's Pantry, Scullery, Laundry, Wine, Beer and Coal Cellars, Store Closet, W.C., & c.

The STABLING, situate at a convenient distance from the House, and approached by folding gates from the back road, Two Stalls, Loose Box, Coach House and Saddle Room, with two Servant's Rooms and Hay Lofts over same, and nearby the Gardener's Cottage, and Enclosure for Poultry.

The GROUNDS comprise Croquet Lawn, gravelled Shrubbery Walks and tastefully disposed Flower Beds and Borders, which, with the very productive Fruit and Vegetable Gardens, Conservatory, Vinery, Cucumber and Melon Pits, are enclosed on three sides by lofty Brick Walls.

The Water Supply is excellent, and Gas is laid on to the Principal Apartments.

Henry Swinhoe

The first inhabitant of the house that was to become famous as haunted was Henry Swinhoe. It seems likely young Henry was born around 1829 and raised in West Bengal in Kolkata (then Calcutta) where the Swinhoes were a prosperous British family working as solicitors for the ruling East India Company. *The Gentleman's Quarterly* and *East India Register* records the births and deaths of Swinhoes parents and uncles, but I have omitted the details for reasons of brevity. However it seems likely that Henry served in the East Indian Company army, in the 30th Bengal Native Infantry Regiment having applied as a cadet in 1841.

In 1849 British plans to depose the Sikh ruler Duleep Singh led to a Sikh rising, and what became known as the Second Anglo-Sikh War. The first major engagement was the Battle of Chillianwala, where the British were badly

mauled, and several British correspondents wrote admirably of the courage and ferocity of the enemy Sikh troops who inflicted fearful losses. Among those wounded



All Saint's Church at the bottom of what was the garden of the house. Photograph by the author

was a young British lieutenant named Henry Swinhoe; it seems likely he is our man for reasons that will become clear later.

In 1851, two years after his brush with death, he married. The *Bombay Times & Journal* of 21st February 1851 reported “On Thursday, 6th February at St Paul's Cathedral by the Rev A. Garstin, Henry Swinhoe, Esquire Solicitor to Elizabeth Frances widow of the late G E Higgins, Esquire”. The bride was just 18 years old and was already a widow. She had first married aged 15 on January 12th, 1848 as “Elizabeth Frances Herd, daughter of the late Charles Herd.”; within two months her husband, George Edmund Higgins was dead.

Elizabeth and Henry Swinhoe might have remained happily in Kolkata, had it not been for the Indian Mutiny of 1857 and the chaos that ensued. Henry had given up the military life, probably after being wounded at the age of 20, and was now practising law. While his brother remained in the military, Henry was lucky to have left. In 1857 the native troops of the 30th joined the general revolt, and the sepoys turned on their officers, who were forced to flee although they escaped relatively unscathed. Following the horror of massacres and reprisals, Bengal probably appeared less appealing, and by 1861 Henry Swinhoe and his wife are back in England.

The Swinhoe Residence: Garden Reach

The house was constructed on land that had previously been market gardens after the Pittville area had become part of Cheltenham proper and the house was built for sale. The first owner was the solicitor, Henry Swinhoe, and his wife Elizabeth and they named the house “Garden

Reach”, after the fashionable district of Kolkata (then Calcutta), in West Bengal.

Earlier authors suggest the Swinhoes moved into the property immediately on its completion in 1860, but in fact the family were resident in Sidmouth, Devon until as late as May 1862 when they are listed in *Lethaby’s Sidmouth Journal & Directory*. They lived at Bedford House, a property overlooking the beach adjacent to the Bedford hotel, which still stands today. On the date of the 1861 census the young children were in Sidmouth, being looked after by friends whose names are listed in a hastily scrawled explanatory note by the census – perhaps Henry and Elizabeth were visiting Cheltenham to look for a new home?”. There appears to be some considerable error regarding when the Swinhoes moved in in the published works on the case; while most give the date as 1860 the excellent pitvillehistory.org.uk database gives it as 1865, and Henry Swinhoe’s absence from earlier street directories suggests that this may be the correct date.

Certainly in 1863 he was in Cheltenham, but then living at 17 Suffolk Square, as we can see from the baptism record of Rodway his youngest surviving son. On May 16th, 1865 *The Cheltenham Looker On* shows the Swinhoes had recently taken up residence, as the house is described as recently constructed in an article about whether or not the proposed new Water company was stifling the Cheltenham property market, which assertion the journalist refutes by listing all the substantial new homes built or sold in the period. Henry is stated as the first occupier of the house, something upon which there is general agreement, which suggests the property was built in 1864/5 after some other houses in the road were completed. This is a very minor point to labour over, but it

does show that earlier authors have often been reliant on word-of-mouth information. One assumes F.W. Myers quite rightly concentrated on the apparition, and one imagines he would be astonished anybody would search the newspapers and records for precise construction dates in the 21st century!

On November 15th, 1865 when they were visited by Mr C.A. Swinhoe of Her Majesties 40th Regiment who is noted as arriving to visit Cheltenham and staying there in *The Cheltenham Examiner* of that date, and a Mrs Penny of Blackheath, London also visits and is mentioned in the Arrivals & Departures Society columns. Presumably, these individuals were relatives of Henry and Elizabeth.



Garden Reach, today St. Anne's. Photo by author

A Literary Coincidence

As an aside – on December 10th, 1864, the Cheltenham & Gloucestershire Journal carried an advertisement for the new Christmas Number of *All the Year* round edited by Charles Dickens, but also price threepence the double Christmas special of rival *Chambers Journal*. The Journal extra issue was entitled –

“TENANTS AT WILL. Consisting of the following striking GHOST STORIES, the whole strong together by an amusing framework:

1. The Story of the House in Garden Reach.”

There follow five more short stories about haunted houses. The Garden Reach coincidence is interesting; in fact this is a ghost story set in India; but given the Swinhoe’s residence was named after the same, it is perhaps conceivable that children might have heard the title and jumped to incorrect assumptions? Growing up within 12 miles of the site of Borley Rectory, children had little idea of where it once was, and often imparted the name to any local sinister looking house seemingly unaware it had burned down forty years before! Is it possible this was the entirely mistaken beginning of the belief the house was haunted?

The Death of Elizabeth Swinhoe in Childbirth

The Swinhoes were a large family with five children: sadly, Henry’s wife Elizabeth Frances was to die in childbirth on August 11th, 1866, aged just 35, as did their stillborn son. The death was reportedly widely with formal notices in around a dozen newspapers, this left Henry a widower with a large family.

At that time, the other children were Henry G.B. Swinhoe aged 8, Francis Swinhoe a daughter aged 6, Charlotte

Elizabeth Swinhoe a daughter aged 5, Alice Swinhoe a daughter aged 4, and Rodway Charles John Swinhoe a son aged just 3. (One cannot help but wonder if constant pregnancy and childbirth was not damaging her health even before the final tragedy). Immediately following his wife's death Henry must have considered moving, for in the issue dated September 29th, 1866 and then again on November 17th, 1866 *The Cheltenham Looker-On* offers the house to let furnished or unfurnished, though sadly no sum is mentioned. It is conceivable that Henry and the children went away for a time, and let the house to others, for Cheltenham remained a very fashionable resort and it is easy to imagine a short term let of such an attractive residence, but this must remain speculation.

Grissell versus Herd

While the first wife of Henry Swinhoe has never excited much interest, Elizabeth does make her mark in the history books, albeit in the books of law. Grissell vs. Herd (Hemmings 1869, p.291) arose because her first husband G.E. Edmunds had signed a prenuptial agreement bequeathing in event of his death the sum of 23,500 rupees to provide an annual income for his wife. After his death his father held the money and made payment to Elizabeth even after she married Henry; not just a widow, but a rich widow! When Higgins senior also died half the estate went to Elizabeth, and half to his daughter, George's sister. The annual payments continued it seems but on her death her son claimed the Estate. Henry Swinhoe clearly felt this was an injustice, and after the death of Elizabeth (see below) he sued her nephew stating three quarters of the original sum should have now passed to Elizabeth and her children. Swinhoe was successful and

Grissell was forced to pay the monies G.E. Higgins had intended to go to his wife over.

Henry marries Imogen Hutchins.

Henry however must have chosen to remain or to return, for he was resident there when he remarried three years later, on February 16th, 1870 at St. Mary's Church, Cheltenham. The service was presided over by two vicars: one from St, Mary's the main parish church, and one from Holy Trinity, a fashionable "chapel of ease" (over-spill daughter church). The Reverends Lillington and Gantillon presided over the ceremony, and the bride is described as "Imogen Hutchins, youngest daughter of the late Major George Henry Hutchins, 36th Bengal Infantry, H.E.I.C.S"¹. (Once again, we discover what appears to be an error: Major Hutchins was in the 30th Bengal Native Infantry, as his tombstone attests, and that regiment was involved in fighting in both Afghanistan and the Second Anglo-Sikh War: and it was in the 30th that he would have met the young Henry Swinhoe, and where the young lieutenant was wounded in battle. Major Hutchins lived from 1792 to 1844 and died in Cheltenham, at 15 Pittville Villas.)

Imogen Hutchins, his new wife, was a 33-year-old spinster, and she joined a family with three daughters and two sons, the oldest only eleven. Henry himself was now 47. At this time there were two servants present in the house

¹ H.E.I.C.S stands for Honourable East India Company Service, and so the Major did not belong to the British army but to the private forces of that company which ruled until formally being subsumed into the British Army in 1858 by the Government of India Act, after the Indian Mutiny of 1857

according to the 1871 census, Ellen Sparrow aged 21, and Sarah McDougall aged 17. There is a minor mystery in that early authors state that Imogen was living in Clifton, Bristol at the time of her marriage; in fact, her address appears to have been 2 Blenheim Parade, Cheltenham, a long-vanished terrace of houses that stood across from Holy Trinity Church on what is at the time of writing North Place car park. (Her sister was resident in Clifton, but I could find no evidence she moved there until after her divorce from Henry.)

An Unhappy Marriage

Their life must have been difficult with Imogen becoming stepmother to such a large family; but they may well have been happy. Soon though Henry and Imogen's marriage was to be a deeply unhappy one. On the 17th June 1871 after only a year of marriage Henry Swinhoe drew up a Deed of Separation, and Imogen left Garden Reach: the reason being her "gross and continual habit of drunkenness" and the fact she used "violent and indecent language" against Henry in front of the children. Henry claimed so bad were Imogen's drunken rages that his health suffered badly. Yet on August 15th he ripped up the Deed of Separation and the couple reconciled, and she moved back into Garden Reach. (Swinhoe 1875)

The only incident to make the papers in this period is in the *Cheltenham Chronicle* of 29th August 1871. Eliza Blakemore *alias* Wiggley, servant, stole from Garden Reach "one pair of boots, one pound of tea, and one pound of coffee, the whole to the value of 12s, the property of Henry Swinhoe." He did not appear to press charges so the case was dismissed, but given the woman was in court to answer another theft charge she may have been guilty! Given the crime occurred on August 24th

Henry may have been happy at his then recent reconciliation with Imogen.

While the divorce papers I drew the preceding facts from were sealed until 1976, as early as Myer's ghost investigation local rumour attributed the issues between Swinhoe and his wife to alcoholism; the Hutchinson's asserting Henry drank, the Swinhoes blaming Imogen for her drinking. When later Imogen was established as the most likely candidate for the ghost, the scandal and gossip regarding alcohol abuse placed Myers in an enviable position: as editor of the SPR Proceedings, publishing potentially libellous claims even protected by pseudonyms must have given him pause; of course Henry was dead, but his family were socially prominent and remain so to the present era; and Cheltenham's polite society had doubtless enough knowledge of the alleged haunt to be able to conclude who was involved.

Imogen moved to Bristol after the couple separated a second time. *The Cheltenham Mercury* for Saturday 27th March 1875 gives the following notice repudiating his wife's debts and making public another separation --

I, HENRY SWINHOE, of Garden Reach, Pittville, Cheltenham, will Not be responsible for any Debt or Debts that Mrs IMOGEN or HENRY SWINHOE may contract in her or my name, nor will I pay any Debt or Debts that may have been contracted by MRS SWINHOE, and for which I am not legally responsible.

Garden Reach, Cheltenham

25th March 1875.

On 15th May 1875 Henry Swinhoe filed a petition for divorce against Imogen and I was able to access the Divorce Court petition from the National Archives. It describes Imogen as a violent drunk who used intemperate, indecent, and vulgar language in front of the children and the servants, and hurled furniture at her husband. In particular on the 22nd of December 1874 she threw a chair at him and assaulted him, striking him. Then on April 2nd, 1875 Imogen attacked Henry with a broom, and he was only saved by the quick intervention of Celia Dolphin, the cook. "On or about" April 5th, 1875 Imogen accused Henry of sleeping with Elisabeth Townsend, the housemaid, and of having had an illegitimate child with her. She claimed she had caught them in bed together the day before in front of the children and staff and assaulted Henry; Miss Townsend then brought a case for slander against the Swinhoes, for the attack on her reputation.

These are the causes of the separation according to Henry Swinhoe's sworn account. Morton (1892) – who was of course Rosina Despard -- gives a slightly different story in her account --

“The chief subjects of dispute were the management of the children (two girls, and either one or two boys, all quite young) of the first Mrs. S., and the possession of her jewellery, to preserve which for her children, Mr. S. had some of the boards in the small front sitting-room taken up by a local carpenter and the jewels inserted in the receptacle so formed.”

There were in reality two sons and three daughters alive at the time they were living in the house, and Henry lived in the house only eleven years, not sixteen as Rosina writes elsewhere in her report. Six years passed between the

Swinhoes departing the house and her moving in, and it is clear she is relying on local gossip, or at least the reports of neighbours. Should we take her seriously about the question of the jewellery? We will return to this question later. Why would a husband going to such extreme lengths to hide jewellery from his new wife allow anyone to know anyway? And is it just he could not bear to see her dressed as Elizabeth was? Or was there some other reason why the jewels might have been important? They were brought from India, could they have included valuable gemstones? In fact Rosina had a first-hand source

“We also now heard from a carpenter who had done jobs in the house in Mrs. S.'s time, that Mrs. S. had wished to possess herself of the first Mrs. S.'s jewels. Her husband had called him in to make a receptacle under the boards in the morning-room on the ground floor, in which receptacle he placed the jewels, and then had it nailed down and the carpet replaced. The carpenter showed us the place. My father made him take up the boards; the receptacle was there, but empty.

My father thought that there might be something hidden near the garden door, where the figure usually disappeared. The boards were taken up, and nothing was there but the original shavings and dust.”

The First “Ghost” of Garden Reach

Imogen left the house and went to Clifton, and Henry remained. And it was during this period, on November 5th, 1875 that the first masked ghost of the house made the papers – an incident that was reported in *The Cheltenham Examiner* of both November 16th and November 17th in the reporting from the Magistrates court under W. Skillicorne,

Esq. The case was brought by Charlotte Whittington, a servant to Garden Reach, against Frederick Crisp an errand boy working for Mr. Taylor, a draper on the High Street. Mr Stroud presented the case, and Mr Boodle the defence.

The facts presented were generally agreed; that on the night of November 5th, the servants at Garden Reach had let off fireworks "in honour of Guy Fawkes", and that the boy arrived to deliver a box as Miss Whittington was unlocking the gate for the cook Mrs. Wilson on the driveway. Charlotte approached the boy and took the box to take into the house but then followed him out of the gate with the cook as he turned to leave, at which point he turned and struck her violently four times on the head, causing her to bleed and making her flee to safety inside the house. After the first blow she asked him what he was doing, but he continued to strike till she ran off. The boy then ran to the cook as if for safety, and she told him who he had struck. He said "I am very sorry, I did not see who it was", and then ran home to his father terribly upset at all that had occurred.

This happened after dark somewhere between nine and ten o'clock after the fireworks had ended, and the boy was probably young. The gas light was enough to see by, but the hedges made the scene dark. Dr. Gooding testified to the severity of the wounding; a lot of blood in the hair, and a wound about the "size of a sixpence" indicating the boy used considerable violence with his stick, that was of the kind errand boys usually carried for their protection. The case against him was discharged, because he had struck Charlotte believing her to be a ghost – she was dressed "in light clothes and had a 'cloud' around her neck" -- as well as a mask on her face. The mask was small, "it only covered her nose and part of her face" – probably what is

called today a domino or highwayman's mask. So Charlotte was dressed in what we today would call fancy dress, as the poor boy was terrified by her "masked and ghastly garb". The magistrates dismissed the case, saying Charlotte's foolish behaviour had frightened the boy so badly his health was affected and was in danger of losing his job as he would no longer go out after dark. The boy's father Mr. Crisp had visited the house to apologise for his son's behaviour, and Mr. Swinhoe had threatened him with a summons, and at other times threatened to shoot the boy if he came to the house ever again. This rather casts doubt on the victim's claim that "there is no household conducted better than Garden-reach".

Why spend so long on this Bonfire night assault? It strikes the author as possible that this event, widely known through local gossip and the newspaper reports, might have served as a template for the later ghost. The similarities are: -

- A female apparition
- Seen outside the house (as well as inside in the later haunting)
- Wears a mask: the later ghost partially conceals its face with a handkerchief.
- Seen in the darkness, but physical.
- Wears all white; the later apparition is famously a woman in black.

Unfortunately, the author has been unable to ascertain what was meant by a 'cloud' around the neck, unless an embroidered high necked lace cloud collar which is part of some Chinese traditional clothing. However could word of mouth accounts of the 'ghostly' woman in white have reached the family in a garbled form, leading to the woman in black apparition by suggestion? Is there any

connection between this precursor to the real haunting, and later events in the Despard residence?

The Pram Incident

On Saturday November 20th, 1875 Henry Swinhoe himself was up before the magistrate, accused with assaulting Miss Alice Speechey on Winchcomb Street, Cheltenham on the 13th of November. The case opened with the prosecutor declaring “Mr Swinhoe is quite famous in Cheltenham, as much for his fondness for stimulants as his antipathy to perambulators”. The facts of the case were simple; Mrs van Holst went into town with her baby, named Gustav, in the pram pushed by Alice the nursemaid. As they approached the high street down Winchcomb Street she came across Mr and Mrs Swinhoe talking in the street and asked them if they might move over to allow her to pass. At this point Mrs van Holst said, “that is the man who hates prams—go slow!” but it was too late. “No I won’t: I will overturn it first” said Henry and placing his stick in the wheel of the pram he tried to tip the baby in to the road. Alice struggled to stop the baby falling out, and sprained her wrist, and Mrs. van Holst threatened Swinhoe with the police for trying to harm a baby. He replied “I don’t care. Tell who you like!”

A third person was now admitted as a witness, a Mr. Carter. He was talking to Mr & Mrs Swinhoe and claimed that the whole thing was a misunderstanding: the careless nursemaid had pushed the pram too close to Imogen, and Henry had put out his stick to defend her. Unfortunately, the stick had passed through the wheel of the pram, but that was the nursemaid’s fault, and “she had no right to be there.” Perambulators as horseless carriages on pavements were controversial it seems; it might still be an

offence to push one the wrong way up one way road, but that was not the case here.

Mr Van Holst stated a simple apology from Henry Swinhoe would have sufficed, but his letter demanding an apology was met with abuse leaving him regretfully with no choice but to press the case. Mr. Skinner, greengrocer of Winchcomb Street appeared, and stated that the thing was no accident but a deliberate assault, and that he had on several previous occasions heard Mr. Swinhoe “order nursemaids” out of his way. Despite him denying it he was well known for his hatred of prams. The nursemaid was blameless, and walking steadily, not “going at a random rate”.

Unsurprisingly the case was found against Henry Swinhoe: he was fined £2, and 6s/10d costs – a sum equal to £155 today (using the National Archives converter). The baby in the pram dropped the Van affectation, and followed his father into the music business, achieving fame as the famous composer of *The Planet Suite* and many more orchestral works. It is strange to think his life could have ended after an encounter with the woman in black and her violent drunken husband before she became a famous ghost! You can still visit the Holst birthplace museum in Cheltenham which is preserved as it was in his lifetime, and we have told the curator about the incident.

The Deaths of Henry and Imogen

On July 14th, 1876 Henry Swinhoe died in the Morning Room at the front of the house. Three days later his burial is recorded as occurring at St. Mary’s, the parish church in the town centre. (His first wife, Elizabeth Frances Swinhoe was buried at Cheltenham cemetery on August 16th, 1866,

not at St. Mary's. I checked in case they were buried together.)

Imogen survived him by two years, and on Monday 23rd, September 1878 Imogen succumbed to the effects of alcoholism (given as "dipsomania and gastritis" on her death certificate) at Clifton, Bristol and was returned to Cheltenham for burial in the crypt of Holy Trinity church, that was being remodelled at the time and was and remains highly fashionable. (Trinity was a chapel of ease built to accommodate the overflow of parishioners who could not fit in services at the parish church St. Mary's as the town's population expanded and the Rev. Frances Close attracted large crowds.) She lies there with four hundred other bodies interred in four rows of stone coffins beneath the church, interred on Thursday, September 26th, 1878 just three days after her death.

The tragic marriage and the description of the ghost led to it being identified with Imogen; and given that one of the witnesses was able to identify her from a photograph, and others had presumably seen Imogen in life, it seems entirely possible. So the first question must be, was Imogen dead? Yes, her death certificate and burial obviously preclude a mistake in this respect. She had been dead just under a decade when Myers arrived to make his first enquiries about the ghost.

A second question that arises is why given her deeply unhappy marriage to Henry Swinhoe was the Clifton resident Imogen returned to Cheltenham for burial? Were the stepchildren the reason? Some investigation quickly revealed the solution: she is buried with her parents in the vault of Holy Trinity, and they were Cheltenham residents. The memorial (Rawes 1978) reads --

“Thy will be done. To the beloved and lamented memory of Major GEORGE HENRY HUTCHINS of the Hon. East India Com’s 30th Bengal Native Infantry who died the 10th of March 1844 aged 51 years. Ever to be lamented by his afflicted widow and bereaved family. Also of CATHERINE widow of the above who died August 15th, 1871 aged 59 years. Her end was peace.

Also of IMOGEN SWINHOE daughter of the above named Major & CATHERINE HUTCHINS who died at Clifton / Sep. 23rd, 1878 aged 41.”

Imogen’s parents both predeceased her. (I was slightly puzzled by the phrase on her mother’s memorial “her end was peace” but this simply means she died contentedly perhaps after a painful illness and was a common epitaph of the time.) Imogen was at the time of her death living at 1 Clifton Hill, Clifton, Bristol, and her death was reported in the *Cheltenham Looker-On* newspaper for September 28th, 1876. She was living close to her sister Emma Dunn who lived with her husband Nicholas Dunn at 15, Victoria Square, Clifton, Bristol. Her sister was Executor of her estate.

The Secrets of the Will

I have long known the executors of Henry’s Will but had until recently not been able to find any details of the contents. While researching this piece I joined several genealogical websites, and researched the ancestors of Henry, Elizabeth, and Imogen. One of the most telling discoveries was when I looked at Imogen’s sister; unlike Imogen she married young, to the Deputy Lieutenant of Pembrokeshire, and went on to own a large house in Clifton and have several highly successful children. There is

a marked contrast between her life and that of poor Imogen, but then this whole story is rather sad.

I was pleased to note several other people had been engaged in the same research, and I have subsequently identified one of them as Cheltonian authoress Jacqueline Beard. She found the assault on poor Charlotte, but not the ghost element, and reported the pram incident, but did not make the Holst connection in her article (<https://jacquelinebeardwriter.com/>) and deserves full credit for her excellent work on the case. Another user goes by the name FenTiger on Ancestry.com but whom I was unable to identify (it may well be Jacqueline Beard), but I must acknowledge them too as they have clearly worked very hard on the documents surrounding the case. However, suddenly I was astonished to find in this user's notes a summary of Henry Swinhoe's Will: sadly lacking a reference to the source. This is such a valuable find that I desired to reproduce it here, and though I am unable to ascertain how they located it, and my messages appear to be going unanswered. I hope to be able to credit them properly by name in a future publication. Nonetheless I will not publish their finding, but briefly summarise them – Henry Swinhoe was in considerable debt, debt that the sale of Garden Reach some years later almost cancelled out, but not quite. The children's only inheritance came from £500 worth of silver plate and jewellery, that presumably could not be reached by the Henry's creditors any more than it could by Imogen. The Will holds other fascinating insights, and despite their notes being public it is not my place to share them, and I encourage the author of the note to contact this journal to publish in their own name their findings and receive credit for their research.

The important thing is that there probably were valuable jewels as the story claimed, and that they were used to provide for the children.

Why is the Ghost Identified as Imogen?

Morton (1892) gives us the best reasons for considering the identity of the apparition as being Imogen. She claims to have met an early witness to the ghost –

“I met a lady at a friend's house, who told me that, when living in the town 7 or 8 years before, she had frequently been told that the house and garden were haunted by Mrs. S. After the lapse of time she could not remember the names of any people who were reported to have seen anything, and we could not trace anyone.” (Morton 1892)

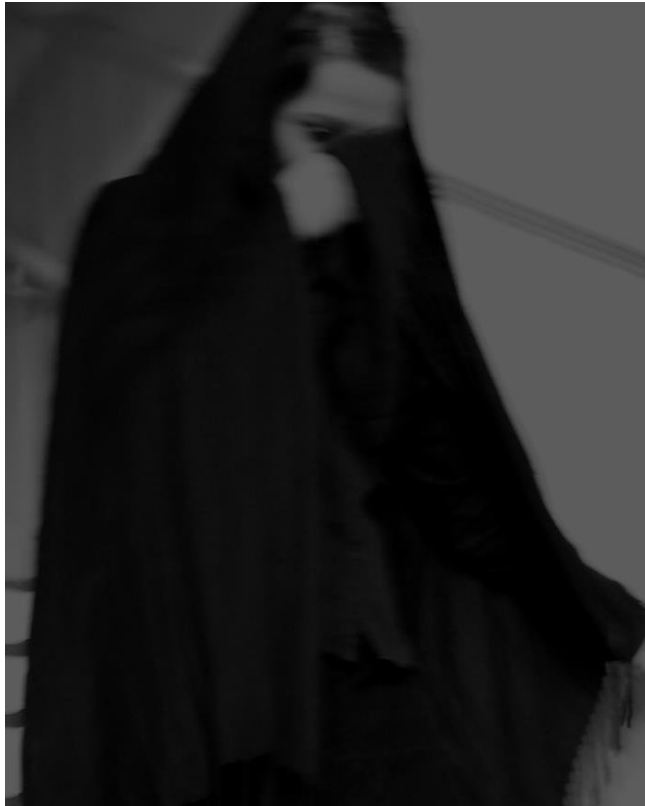
By this point Imogen seems to have been established as the identity of the ghost –

“My father went to Bristol, and there found the register of Mrs. S.'s death, which had taken place on September 23rd, 1878, from dipsomania and intervening sub-gastritis. He called on the doctor who had attended her and asked him if there had been any disfigurement of the face which would account for its persistent concealment. He remembered the case, and said that there had not been, though the face had become more full and round.” (Morton 1892)

Just to be clear she gives a selection of reasons for believing the ghost to be Imogen –

“The figure has been connected with the second Mrs. S.; the grounds for which are:

1. The complete history of the house is known, and if we are to connect the figure with any of the previous occupants, she is the only person who in any way resembled the figure.
2. The widow's garb excludes the first Mrs. S.



Zoe Bevan as the ghost on the stairs in one of our series of attempted reconstructions. Photo by author, 2013.

3. Although none of us had ever seen the second Mrs. S., several people who *had* known her identified her from our description. On being shown a photo-album containing a number of portraits, I picked out one of her sister as being most like that of the figure, and was afterwards told that the sisters were much alike.

4. Her stepdaughter and others told us that she especially used the front drawing-room in which she continually appeared, and that her habitual seat was on a couch placed in a similar position to ours.

5. The figure is undoubtedly connected with the house, none of the percipients having seen it anywhere else, nor had any other hallucination.” (Morton 1892)

Supernatural Cheltenham

The term “The Cheltenham Ghost” has become synonymous with the ghost of Imogen Swinhoe. Yet in fact it may not have done; the whole story, as the nature of these things possibly being rather more complex. In this paper I have made no attempt to explain the haunting, in the manner of Underwood or Lambert, but have instead focused on what the earliest sources can reveal about the events underlying the haunt.

To understand the true “Cheltenham Ghost” of Summer 1886 let us begin by assessing what the situation was at that point with the ‘Morton’ (actually the Despard family)

and how F.W. Myers came to become aware of the case. In this 'Prefatory Note' to Morton (1892) he writes

“The first intimation which *I* received of the series of phenomena described below was in a letter received in December, 1884, from Mr. J. W. Graham, now Principal of Dalton Hall, Manchester. Mr. Graham had heard an account from the gentleman mentioned below as Captain Morton; had written this account out from memory, and had got it revised by Captain and Miss Morton. This account, and Miss Morton's letters to Miss Campbell, which begin with the first appearance of the figure, are the earliest written records.

Captain Morton was for a time unwilling to give further accounts, lest the house, which belonged to a friend of his, should again become depreciated in value; as it appears from Miss Morton's record that it has previously been. But on May 1st, 1886, he permitted me to call upon him; and from that date onwards I visited him at intervals and took notes of what he told me. I also saw Miss Morton and Miss E. Morton, and I interviewed at their own homes Mrs. Twining, a charwoman, and Mrs. Brown, a former parlour maid. In this case it is observable that the phenomena as seen or heard by all the witnesses were very uniform in character even in the numerous instances where there had been no previous communication between the percipients. I have found no discrepancy in the independent testimonies, when collected, with the unimportant exception of General A.'s inability or unwillingness to recall one incident, which was already included in Mr. Graham's first account,

soon after its occurrence, and six years before General A., an old man, was asked to repeat it.

Captain Morton's reluctance to allow the evidence to be collected until the haunting had ceased through a reluctance based on consideration for the owner of the house has thus done less harm than might have been feared. It must be added that Captain M. and the members of his family in general, while feeling little scientific interest in the apparition, were unusually free from superstitious fears. Miss Morton, whose account is given below, is a lady of scientific training, now preparing to be a physician; and her narrative has received no accretions since I first heard it. The name Morton is substituted for the real family name. With that exception the names and initials are the true ones. F.W.H.M.]

If this seems of little interest, please bear with the author a short while: it may have more significance than one might expect. In the Summer of 1886 ghosts were very much in the mind of Cheltonians; in fact not only were ghosts drawing crowds night after night, but the newspapers make repeated references to special excursion trains laid on by the railway company to bring ghost hunters from first Gloucester, and later Bristol and Birmingham! (for example, *The Burnley Express* of 11th August 1886) Now throughout history supposedly haunted houses have often drawn crowds of idle sightseers, who stand outside watching at the hope of seeing something, and on occasion throw stones and vandalise the property. Something of this nature occurred near Cheltenham chapel off the Lower High Street in the 1820's, and the crowds that resulted were dispersed only by an explanation that the strange lights seen in the windows of

the empty building were just reflections of streetlights through imperfections in the glass. In the 1850s the visit of a pair of American mediums caused a large and disorderly crowd to gather outside their lodgings in Grosvenor Street, and they were removed only when the Borough decided to 'water the street', soaking the public and sending them home to dry.

Maskelyne's Ghost

By 1881 the tide of public opinion may have moved against ghosts; one of the great sceptics and debunkers of the 19th century, John Nevil Maskelyne (1839-1917), started his career exposing mediums here. John was a Cheltenham, England watchmaker who became interested in magic after watching a séance by the Davenport Brothers, purported American mediums. In 1865 he debunked the Davenport Brothers by recreating all they did and more, and soon after became a professional magician. Maskelyne clashed repeatedly with Spiritualists and joined the SPR participating in the 1895 sittings with Eusapia Palladino at Cambridge and revealing her clumsy fraud there. Maskelyne was a prime mover in the creation of the magician's society The Magic Circle in London in 1905, and 1914 also set up The Occult Committee, a group dedicated to exposing fake mediums. Strongly associated with The Egyptian Hall in London, Maskelyne and his sons after him led the British magic scene.

Maskelyne lived on Montpellier Street, but I am able to ascertain this is not the house he referred to in his talk at the Egyptian Hall on October 21st, 1881. Maskelyne talks about what we would term Crisis Apparitions in his family, his belief in thought transference (telepathy) and his contempt for Spiritualism. Then he gives a ghost story, though whether referring to his

childhood home on Swindon Road, or another house I cannot say. (His later home on Montpellier Street has no bay window). The account follows, as given in *The Cheltenham Mercury* for October 27th, 1881.

“Our family occupied a house that had that reputation. It stood, and I believe still stands, in the outskirts of the town of Cheltenham. A rich lady of miserly habits resided there for many years, and after her death strange stories were rife respecting it. Noises were heard within, and a spectre, with a green light, was often seen flitting about the empty rooms. The first night of our residence in the house we retired to bed shortly before midnight. I occupied a room at the top of the house, and two or three of my sisters an adjacent one. Scarcely had one candle been extinguished, than we were startled by a curious tapping noise, like someone walking upstairs, but came no nearer, though the tapping continued some minutes. I began to feel alarmed, and fancied I saw a shadow of a female flit across my room. I called out “Who’s there?”, and my sisters, who had been listening to the ghostly footsteps, uttered a scream of terror, and in a few moments the whole household was in a state of commotion. The tappings ceased, but fortunately they immediately commenced again, and after a few minutes search I discovered the ghost to be nothing more than a shower of rain, and from a leakage in the gutter over my window the water dropped upon the lead covering of a bay window beneath.”

The Editor of the *Cheltenham Mercury* seems to think Maskelyne made it all up to in his words “gammon the Cockneys”, but the story sounds entirely reasonable, and Maskelyne ideas of what Myers would soon term

telepathy sound sincere. He after all joined the Society for Psychical Research and the two men were probably on very good terms despite the class difference. Again though we have a female ghost, concerned with money, who makes a noise of footfall and is associated with a strange light. These features are found in Rose Morton's report, but also in "The Cheltenham Ghost" case of 1886.

If the house was indeed one in Swindon Road, then it would be intriguing to know which. In 1927 there was an outbreak of 'rapping' in a house on Swindon Road, in the Maud's Elm area of Cheltenham, and while that must await a future paper it will certainly be a connection worth investigating. Quite by chance as this paper was about to go to print Jan Bondeson has an article on the 'Legend of Maud's Elm' in the latest *Fortean Times* -- nothing on the poltergeist though!

["The Cheltenham Ghost"; August 1886.](#)

So what was it about the ghost case in Cheltenham in August 1886 that was sufficiently important to reach the newspapers in Toronto and all over the United Kingdom, yet it remain utterly absent from the narrative of F.W. Myers and Rose Morton/Rosina Despard? Unfortunately whereas modern newspaper journalists tend to be wildly enthusiastic and sensationalist in reporting every ludicrous ghost photo, the press of 1886 were made of sterner stuff, and tended to dismiss all such stories as utter nonsense. Given the previously noted association of haunted houses and public rowdiness and unrest perhaps that is understandable.

I have therefore tried to piece together events from a number of sources, some clearly exaggerated. An example of the latter is this piece that was widely reported in British newspapers, and even reached as far as the

Toronto papers! Here is the text from the *Burnley Express* for the 11th, September 1886.

“There is something quaintly weird in the idea of a special “ghost train”, but there is one now running to Cheltenham from a neighbouring town, and the tourists go with the idea of seeing the ghost of an old lady who wants to show where she buried £500 before she died. Of course there is some humbug in the business, but it is so impenetrable that the Cheltenham authorities have offered a reward of £50 to anyone who will expose the deception and lay the unquiet spirit. People have trouble enough to get money and keep it in this world; it is very hard if in the next world a poor ghost is to be in despair because the gold cannot be got rid of.”

Now while this is clearly exaggerated and unreliable, and it seems highly unlikely that Cheltenham, home to the famed magician and debunker John Maskelyne (his reputation was probably similar to that of James Randi) would need to offer money to find someone to debunk a ghost! Nonetheless we have a hidden treasure of £500 – the exact value of the hidden jewels – and a female ghost in Cheltenham. Now ghosts trying to reveal hidden treasure are a well-known folklore motif, but this seems rather a coincidence.

Where Was the Ghost?

So what was the truth? Some articles are satirical and mocking those who congregated to look for the ghost, but even they provide useful geographical information. Whereas Garden Reach/ St. Anne’s stands in the Pittville district of Cheltenham, the ghost excitement of 1886 was centred on the parish of Leckhampton. Now Leckhampton

is an ancient manor and covers a considerable area; Leckhampton village church is over a mile from the northern edge of the old parish, and references to still extant pubs in a jokey article where the narrator gets more and more inebriated before thinking he has seen a ghost and collapsing in a heap suggest the opposite Bath Road end, as otherwise our drunken hero would be weaving a very long way!

Another article mentions the Suffolks; the area around Suffolk Square that still bears that name today and includes F.W. Myer's family home on Lypiatt Road. Finally the author found a reference to Great Norwood Street, his home for many years, which lies on the edge of the Suffolks and Leckhampton. After careful research it seems that the location in question was a derelict wood yard with a workshop to the front on Suffolk Street (*Cheltenham News* August 27th, 1886), which is an area of smaller terraced house and scattered cottages just beyond the grander villas of Great Norwood Street, The Suffolks and The Park. The confusion of Suffolk Road and Suffolk Street as well as the other locations given in the local press suggest that the journalists did not trouble to visit the scene or went to some lengths to obfuscate it. The area having suffered somewhat in the Luftwaffe bombing raid of November 1940 the author consulted period maps to try and locate the wood yard. The 1884 OS map is particularly useful, though curiously it shows Suffolk Street backs on to St. Phillip's Street, and the alley between the two, often referred to as "have you seen my dog?" alley (from the ghost story set there) is well known as haunted (Cox & Meredith, 1982). That apparition seems to date from the Second World War, but years of new Student Parapsychology Society students from the nearby University of Gloucestershire would walk the alley and on

occasion report anomalous experiences. It is a curious coincidence that it appears to have been the site of a much earlier haunting.

The Ghost Appears

The *Cheltenham News* for the 27th of August 1886 gives the story as follows --

“For some evenings past the weak minded and superstitious of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood of Suffolk-Street have been growing agitated and scared by the appearance of what they termed to be a “spirit” from the unseen, returned to this world to claim some money left behind. Hundreds have congregated around an old workshop which the “ghost” has condescended to visit. The report originated by three boys observing an uncertain light in the workshop in question – now flashing, now flickering, and fading away. The mystery appears to be no more than the distorted light from the house on the side of the workshop, shining through the two glass panes of the workshop, which are probably constructed of common glass, thus causing the effect that has caused such a scare among the inhabitants. It does not say much for the enlightenment of the age of education that such a number of persons congregated in fear are of the impression that a reflected light is nothing less than an unearthly visitant from the other world.”

The article is typical of the period; the mystery is presented as being simply something superstitious people are prone to believing, and a simple explanation is given. Once again, the spirit is alleged to have a financial motive: this may tell us more about Victorian England than the desires of the dead!

The ghost did not last long. The mystery was apparently resolved in the Cheltenham Chronicle of 4th September 1886 --

“Solution of the Suffolk Street Ghost Mystery

To the Editors of THE CHELTENHAM
CHRONICLE

Sir, -- I am happy to be able to inform you that the occasion of the gathering together for more than a week past in this street of several hundreds of people, to the almost intolerable annoyance of the householders in this vicinity (barring the public houses), has by the ‘intelligent department’ of our police authorities, been altogether removed. It having been suggested that probably the appearance of lights in the building where the ‘ghost’ was supposed to frequent might be caused by ‘ignis fatuus’ either by exhalations from an old sewer, or from decayed wood on the premises. I ventured to mention on Monday last this theory to the Superintendent of the Police, Mr. McRae, and he arranged to meet me the same evening on the spot to enquire respecting the old sewer, &c. We soon, however, when there, discovered that the old disused sewer alluded to was a considerable distance from the timber yard, and that theory was at once discarded. Mr. McRae had made his own enquiries, and, at his invitation, I accompanied him to the *rear* of the building, in the front windows of which the mysterious lights nightly appeared.

We there found that the back windows of the ground floor and the upper part of the building been thickly whitened over to prevent any reflection through them to the front,

but there were numerous panes of glass throughout both rows of the back windows broken, leaving holes of different shaped and sizes. About fifteen yards distant from these windows in the rear is a row of small houses, and whenever the inhabitants of these had a lamp or other light in their bedroom windows, the light from them passed through and was reflected on to the front of the building here and there – (the ‘illusion’ therefore, coming from the rear of the building, and not from the front, as was stated in last Wednesday’s issue of the *Cheltenham Examiner*).

To make it evident this was the actual cause of the appearance of the lights in the front windows of the building, Mr. McRae later on, when there were, as usual, several hundreds of people in the road, took a small lamp and waved it in front of the cottage windows in the rear of the building, and immediately the people in the road, seeing the reflection of the lights in the front window, “boo-oed” and shouted “There she is again,” to my great astonishment, knowing what Mr. McRae was doing. The intelligent portion of the crowd, on the ‘modus operandi’ being explained to them, readily comprehended it, and soon left, but the ‘gamius’ and ‘gammers’ and girls, and those who did not wish to be ‘enlightened’, were not disposed of without strong threats from the police.

Living in the vicinity of the scene of action of these nightly visitations, I am sure the inhabitants of the neighbourhood will be grateful to Mr. McRae and his officers for solving the mystery of the ‘ghost’.

I am Sir, your obedient servant,

S.M. Cornelius”

The London *Globe*, The *Pall Mall Gazette* and many other papers chimed in on the ghost, and many of the articles are genuinely funny, and possibly reflect a wry amusement that Cheltenham, a fashionable and pretentious resort renowned for its schools and colleges had somehow become the centre for a ghost craze. Many of the articles were (presumably) wildly inaccurate: here as an example is the *Weekly Freeman's Journal's* account from Dublin on 18th September 1886.

Those who remember the ghost in Shieldfield will smile at the story which comes from Cheltenham. During the past week that pleasant watering place, beloved by King George III, has been terribly exercised by the presence of a spectre. It was first seen at the dead of night at the window of a cottage, and as the cottage had a gruesome history of crime and the mysterious disappearance of a large sum of money attached to it, a *raison d'etre* for the ghost was at once established. The multitude would seem to have believed in it and so far did the reputation of this unearthly visitor spread that people rushed to view it from Gloucester, Birmingham, and Bristol, special night ghost trains being put on by the railway company for their convenience. Moreover Cheltenham as a learned place boasting of great schools and colleges and not of the sort to tolerate the intrusion of an airy disembodiment vanishing ‘like a guilty thing’ at the crow of the matutinal chanticleer its Corporation offered £50 to anyone who could detect the fraud and put a stop to the farce. Yet it turned out to be neither one or the other but simply

an illusion. There was a lamp at the back of the cottage and the light reflected on the window of a room, in which shielded as she thought by darkness an old woman had undressed herself before going to bed. It seems rather hard on the Psychical Society that so splendid a chance should end in the prosaic fact of an ancient dame imprudently neglecting to pull down the window blinds.

Cheltenham was also a town deeply divided politically between the Tories (chiefly represented by the Agg family) and the Whigs (the party of the Berkeley family), and this deep divide may well explain the need of rival newspapers to provide their own explanations. The *Cheltenham Chronicle* catered to the Whigs; the *Cheltenham Mercury* to the Conservatives, and we might spy something of local politics in their attitudes to the police as presented here. While many of the national paper's articles are more literary, for reasons of space the author presents here only the rival *Cheltenham Mercury* article published on the same day as the *Cheltenham Chronicle* explanation, 4th September 1886.

The Leckhampton ghost has still continued to excite the attention of the public, notwithstanding the fact that the police have declared it all nonsense, and crowds of people have assembled night after night to watch a light occasionally sparkle upon the glass windows of the workshop. I do not mean to include among the superstitious one quarter of the highly respectable people who have swelled the ghost hunting throng; hundreds went simply to see what this wonderful manifestation really looked like, without having one thought of there being ought supernatural

attached thereto; but there were scores who really and truly believed that they were looking at something caused by no mortal hand, and some fevered imaginations went as far as to depict the figure of an elderly figure in the yard. In the face of this nonsense the sound and practical solution of this 'mystery' which Mr. Wethered has published will be read with interest, and I make no apology to my readers for producing it entire, Mr. Wethered says :--

“I was first informed of these curious lights on Thursday evening, and at 9.30 I set out for the locality in which they were reported to appear. On my way I overtook numbers of people all bent on the same errand, and not knowing the exact location and wishing to gather some details as to the phenomena, I got into conversation with a lad, whose belief in the reality of ghosts was as firm as a rock. He told me that it appeared about half-past nine in the evening, and gradually disappeared between two and three in the morning, and that the police had been in the building and could discern nothing, which fact my informant regarded as conclusive evidence of the reality of the apparition. He urged that if the police could discover nothing, why what else could it be but the ghost of a woman who had died in an adjoining house? Another gentleman of easy credence, gave me to understand that a woman with a child in her arms had been seen, while other people had been favoured with remarkable visions on the windows of the aforesaid premises.

Being thus duly primed with the ideas of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, I reached the scene – a workshop near Great Norwood -street –

and there I saw a crowd of some five hundred people, all straining their eyes at the windows of the building. Of course I did the same – but saw nothing. Where was the ghost? I demanded, and was told it had already been seen, but had now disappeared, probably to be soon visible again. Shortly after that I did distinctly see a luminous appearance in one of the windows; but when I moved to left or right I lost sight of it. Keeping my eye on the spot, I came to the conclusion there was a particular pane of glass that had different reflective properties to other panes in the window. Suddenly there was a murmur in the crowds that gradually developed into a cheer. The cause of this enthusiasm was the appearance of certain peculiar lights on one of the windows – and this was the ghost! I looked around to see whether there was any lights from the neighbouring houses to which the cause could be attributed, but, as it seemed to me, there was none. Then as the moon – where was she? She had not risen, but there were bright stars and there were clouds moving overhead. Could the light, I pondered, be due to the light of the moon when visible, and to the stars whose light struck the glass at certain angles, and was at times cut off by passing clouds?

I went home about eleven o' clock and at seven next morning went up to examine the workshop. I had marked the spot where I first observed the luminous appearance and now I discovered a pane of ribbed glass in the window. Further examination showed the windows be constructed of small panes of many kinds set up at various angles and many of them smeared with paint. The investigation supported my belief that the glass in the window had much to do with the “ghost”. I

now sought the assistance of Mr. Matthews, of the Science School, Cambrai, and it was arranged with the permission of the owner of the premises that we should meet the spectre in a friendly way at 9:15 that evening. At the appointed time we duly arrived at the scene, our investigation force strengthened by Mr. Rothery. The crowd outside was larger than ever, and it took the energies of several men to prevent the rougher element from doing considerable damage to the property; as it was the gate was broken in. It is bad enough certainly for the owner to know that his premises are supposed to be haunted without having damage done to them by the roughs.

We now preceded to look over the building, with the aid of lights. I should say the night was dark and not a star to be seen, and the ghost had only been dimly visible once or twice, not nearly so vividly as the night before. The windows were carefully examined and we all arrived at the opinion that considering the nature of the glass and the angles at which the panes were set the only wonder was that the light had not attracted notice long before. The lights were now put out and Mr Matthews, Mr Rothery and myself stationed ourselves in various parts of the building where the window panes were most likely to reflect light. Men were also placed in the yard at short distances so that word could quickly be passed when the ghost appeared. We were not in our posts long when a man in the crowd lit his pipe and strange to say but the light was reflected by the very pane of ribbed glass through which I was looking. Instantly up came word that the ghost had been dimly visible where I was standing. In that case clearly the ghost was produced by the man

lighting his pipe! The window of the workshop are made up of many different kinds of glass sets at various angles. On these panes lights from several houses are constantly reflected; the moon and star lights are also reflected, and this I believe to be the main cause of the supposed 'ghost'. The light strikes the panes of glass at different angles and passing clouds constantly intercept it first causing the appearance and disappearance of the apparition. I do hope that this will be the end of the ghost alarm and the people of the neighbourhood and the owner of the premises will not be further inconvenienced. I may also say that the lights on the window of the workshop are not of recent origin. A man who worked there eight years ago says he noticed them during that and never thought anything of them before. It seems that the thing was first noticed by the public about fortnight since when the moon was nearly full which facts supports the view I have taken."

After this explanation I hope to hear no more about any ghosts and trust that people will abstain from making themselves ridiculous in the eyes of the sober and thinking portion of the community by giving currency to such superstitious nonsense. The owner of the property must feel awfully annoyed at the proceedings which have taken place for stupid as they are, they must unquestionably have had a damaging effect which will require some time to efface.

With my usual contrariness the author suggests that explaining apparitions as reflections in glass may be about as culturally conditioned a response as say the development of Stone Tape Theory and the recording hypothesis in the 1960s and 70s when home tape

recording became popular. Pepper's Ghost was a popular stage show in Cheltenham throughout the 1860's, and the 'projection' of convincing spooks on to glass was an extremely obvious explanation, but not necessarily the correct one, for the mystery lights. We must be cautious when rival explanations are offered as here. What is clear however is that Cheltenham ghosts, like many Victorian Hauntings, were understood as superstition, ignorance, and a threat to public order; a cause of civic unrest. Rioting was not unknown in Cheltenham in preceding decades (though usually associated with the preaching of the Rev, Frances Close, the popular evangelical and strident demagogue pastor of St. Mary's) and ghosts are construed as a police matter. When a completely harmless story of a father seen appearing by his children at the door of a Cheltenham house a few days before his actual arrival in the form of what we would term a 'phantasm of the living' was repeated by a Scottish bishop, the reaction included some extremely sharp criticisms. 1880's Cheltenham was in that fortunate coinage of our age, a "hostile environment" for ghosts.

The Morton Ghost First Appearance?.

The following piece, published in the *Cheltenham Chronicle* on the 4th of September brings us full circle however, for in it we find what I believe to be the first allusion in print to the Morton/Despard case, and possibly an oblique hint of F.W.Myers and the Society for Psychical Research's involvement. If this does refer to this case, it is the earliest reference to such in print, but has seemingly not been noticed by earlier historians of the case. The article reads:--

Of all the silly stupidities which have ever become the theme of general conversation, we reckon the

so called ghost scare at Leckhampton to have been the most so. It has served as an excuse for the gathering of a band of rowdies, but otherwise the so-called appearance was hardly worth attention. This miserable sham of a miracle had not the merit of possessing a single one of the awe-inspiring qualities usually attributed to things of its kind. We could have excused the absence of the usual pomp and circumstance of spiritual life- the antecedent murder, the unrestful dead, the sheeted, gibbering ghost, its appearance and disappearance and the other concomitants of a visit from the other world if there had been one uncommon point in the affair; but this fraud of a miracle at Leckhampton possesses none of the usual features of the disembodied spirit. It is scarcely phenomenal, far less supernatural. Any small boy in the fourth standard of an elementary school might explain it in five minutes how it all arises. This being so, the best advice we can give is for the police to interfere very vigorously in the affair. They should take strong steps towards obviating the assembly of any more crowds in the neighbourhood. We are the more anxious to have this Leckhampton twopenny- halfpenny mystery settled in as much as a rumour is afloat that in another part of the town a highly-respectable family is troubled by a nightly visitor from the invisible regions. The latter case is one decidedly calling for attention of psychical research people. One feature about ghost- scares is that one always begets another. Now that the long nights are coming on there are plenty of ingenious young men who will devote their valuable attention to the production of ghosts. Last year their craze was for burglary this year is for spirits.

Conclusions

The term “The Cheltenham Ghost” originally referred to the strange lights seen at Suffolk Street off the Bath Road in the summer of 1886; at exactly the same time as this was being reported nationally and internationally, Myers whose family home was in Lypiatt Road close by became involved with the Morton/Despard case, that was to come to adopt the name in years to come. For some reason Myers never refers at any point to this earlier Cheltenham Ghost, but even before Rosina Despard and family moved to the house now known as Garden Reach in 1882 there was already a story involving a ghostly woman, a strange light and the sound of footsteps: the one described by Maskelyne in his public lecture on October 27th, 1881.

In fact ghostly women, strange lights, and a financial motive imparted to the spirit appear in all three of the stories. Was this some folkloric haunting well known in the area and simply ascribed to different houses by the gossip of servants? Why does Myers make no mention of the more famous Cheltenham ghost? When he went to visit the former servant who lived in Chapel Lane off Great Norwood Street that May he was just round the corner from where the crowds would gather to watch for the ghost in August. I am by no means imparting any dishonesty or wrongdoing to Myers – he may well have felt the other affair was a nonsense, easily explained away, and distracted from the more serious business occurring a mile to the north in Pittville. He may have been affected by the general spirit of hostility to ‘Cheltenham ghosts’; and indeed it was not until Abdy Collins (1948) that the house and its location in Cheltenham was finally revealed. Not least this may have been necessitated by the cases brought for slander of title against those who imputed a

haunted reputation to a house, where the courts often awarded substantial damages to the owner.

As we have seen on historical fact there are several minor errors in Morton (1892) but no more than one would expect given the limited information that Rosina Despard might be able to glean from neighbours and local gossip, and in the issue of the jewels it seems likely she was in fact correct. Henry Swinhoe's behaviour can be understood in terms of his attempting to save something of an inheritance for his children, and in terms of attempting to save money, leading him to pursue the Grissell's for Elizabeth's moiety, and try to curb Imogen's excessive spending. Yet clearly both sets of relatives were correct: both Henry and Imogen succumbed to alcoholism, and the bizarre incident with the baby Gustav Holst in the pram suggests that he was quite unhinged before his death, but still associating with Imogen despite the pending divorce! It is also notable that contrary to Lambert's (1958) underground water hypothesis the estate agent's advertisement specifically references the dry soil on which the house stands.

The "Woman in White" incident which cause the serious assault on the maidservant is also curious. Did this give rise to a story of the house being haunted, or did the cook and maid dress up as ghosts because of some pre-existing story of a haunting? If there was not already a ghost story somehow attached to the then very new house, why did the errand boy act in such a strange manner and attack the maid?

Clearly, we have some way to go before we understand the mystery of the Cheltenham ghost, and the next phase must discuss the Littlewoods and the Despard residence,

as well as the contested issue as to whether Inholmes, the Sussex preparatory school that relocated to the house was also troubled by the apparition. While this paper may raise more questions than it provides answers, I hope it has cast a little new light on this old ghost and might spark debate on this fascinating haunting.

CJ, May 2021.

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My thanks to Tess Beck who first suggested the van Holst baby might be Gustav; to Jacqueline Beard for her pioneering work on the genealogies and newspaper reports, and to the members of the Pittville Historical Society and all the others whose pioneering work I built upon.

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Humanoid Sightings in the North-East of France

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Abstract

Humans seemed to have encountered humanoids since the dawn of time. Over time, several anomalous explanations have been provided for them: religious (in the case of Virgin Mary sightings for example), fairy lore (elves, gnomes and so forth) and, more recently, aliens as part of the UFO lore. We compiled all the humanoid sightings we could find in the North-East of France (the area where the *Comité Nord-Est des Groupes Ufologiques*, our team, is active). We looked for sightings between 1900 to 2018 and collected them in our database. Instead of looking only for RR3, we searched for any humanoid sightings related to the UFO phenomenon or not, without preselection of any kind. We consulted paranormal and ufological books, investigations, but also newspaper articles, local urban legends, gendarmerie reports and so on. Our goal was to be as thorough as possible, but of course we cannot claim that this database is fully complete and that no case has escaped our search. We didn't look especially for fairy sightings, or religious figure sightings or alien sightings: our methodology was to search for any humanoid sightings, whatever the interpretation that was

proposed for it by the witness or the person who reported it (journalist, paranormal investigator and so on). In other words, we adopted an atheoretical posture to study humanoid sightings. We found 75 cases in total. Our team think that they found a plausible explanation for around 60 cases, which leaves 15 cases unexplained so far. We will present four specific cases that we find particularly interesting in more detail.

Introduction

Our team, the *Comité Nord-Est des Groupes Ufologiques*, investigated humanoid sightings in the North-End of France. We looked for sightings between 1900 to 2018 and collected them in our database. We define for this research “humanoid sightings” as an exceptional human experience that includes seeing aliens (RR3), religious figures (like the Virgin Mary) or fairies. It is different from haunting phenomena that do not necessarily include seeing a humanoid figure. Following Rhea White (Evrard, 2013), we prefer to use the expression “exceptional human experiences” to “anomalous experiences” in order to avoid the negative connotation of the word “anomalous”. The UFO lore has slowly replaced the fairy lore during the 20th century, while at the same time borrowing details and narratives. Like the Bigfoot seems to be the continuation of the ogre in traditional folklore, aliens from the UFO lore seems to be the continuation of the small people, especially Close Encounters of the Third Kind (Hynek, 1972) and abductions (RR4). Similarly, White Ladies are the new form taken by the female spirits like the Banshee in Irish mythology. This happened in parallel with the secularisation process in Western culture. If there are still fairy sightings today, UFO sightings are nowadays much more common. At the same time abductions have been

reinterpreted as the work of aliens, more legitimate in our techno-scientific cultures. RR4 have been studied a lot more than RR3. The current consensus in psychology is that those experiences are explained by a mix of false memories and suggestions (Clancy, 2005), even if obviously some researchers disagree with this reductionist interpretation (Appelle, S., Lynn, S. J., Newman, L., & Malaktaris, A., 2014).

The way we think nowadays about fairies is different from the past. We tend to imagine today something like Tinker Bell in *Peter Pan* by J. M. Barrie. What comes to mind is a little woman with butterfly wings. But during the Middle Age, the fairy lore resembled much more what we think of the UFO lore today: people would go into the woods and encounter a strange lady or they would be taken somewhere, in a strange place, where the small people would do weird stuff to them. The transition between the classical representation and the “woman with butterfly wings” happened progressively. A pivotal moment was with the William Shakespeare play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (published in 1600), in which elves and fairies present transitional characteristics. Even today when this play is presented in a theatre, those creatures are played by human beings and thus have human size. In his essay *On Fairy-Stories* (Tolkien, 1947), famous fantasy writer J. R. R. Tolkien wrote that he suspected the diminution in size of the small people to be the product of rationalisation. The small stature of elves, gnomes and fairies can explain their invisibility in modern time: they can easily hide in flowers and grass. Their supernatural ability is thus reduced to something mundane. J. R. R. Tolkien adds in that article that, according to him, the way we imagine fairies probably changed after humanity explored more thoroughly the Earth: they were simply no places left for the Small People to live. Of course, now, Fortean researchers found other places where fairies could exist:

space (extraterrestrial hypothesis) or other dimensions (paranormal hypothesis). Nevertheless, there are still classical fairy sightings today (Young, 2018): they did not completely disappear with the advance of modernity. The idea that the UFO phenomenon is the continuation of the fairy lore has been proposed most famously by French authors Jacques Vallée (1969) and Bertrand Méheust (1985). But how do we know if a case belongs to the fairy lore or the UFO lore? Are there some borderline cases that could belong to either of those?

Methods

We compiled all the humanoid sightings we could find in the North-East of France (the area where our group is active) during that time period. Instead of looking only for RR3, we looked for any humanoid sightings related to the UFO phenomenon or not, without preselection of any kind. We consulted paranormal and ufological books, investigations, but also newspaper articles, local urban legends, gendarmerie reports and so on. Our goal was to be as thorough as possible, but of course we cannot claim that this database is complete and that no case has escaped our search. We didn't look especially for fairy sightings, or religious figure sightings or alien sightings: our methodology was to search for any humanoid sightings, whatever the interpretation that was proposed for it by the witness or the person who reported it (journalist, paranormal investigator and so on). In other words, we adopted an atheoretical posture to study humanoid sightings.

Results

Chronological list of humanoid sightings in the North-East of France (1900-2018)

Categories:

U: Humanoid sighting with a UFO

NU: Humanoid sighting without a UFO

N°	Date	Place (Department number)	Category
01	1909	Bouxières-aux-Dames (54)	U
02	1931 or 1932	Montigny-les-Metz (57)	NU
03	Between 1936 and 1947	Bouxières-aux-Dames (54)	RV
04	April 1945	Renève (21)	U
05	May 1950	Vaux-en-Dieulet (08)	U
06	Fall 1951	Dugny-sur-Meuse (55)	RV
07	August 1954	Galfingue (68)	U
08	Fall 1954	Bourdons-sur-Rognon (52)	U
09	September 1954	Omont (08)	U
10	October 1954	Villers-le-Tilleul (08)	U
11	October 1954	Voillecomte (52)	U
12	October 1954	Pournoy-la-Chètive (57)	U
13	October 1954	Near the town of Metz (57)	U
14	October 1954	Vrigne-aux-Bois (08)	NU
15	October 1954	Neuilly-l'Évêque- Chalindrey (52)	U
16	October 1954	Montlandon (52)	U
17	October 20 th 1954	St Rémy (88)	U
18	October 23 rd 1954	Trondes (55)	NU
19	October 23 rd 1954	Boulay (57)	U
20	October 27 th 1954	Montabon (21)	NU
21	October 1954	Chambligny (21)	U
22	October 1954	Walscheid (57)	NU
23	October 1954	Metz (57)	NU
24	After October 15 th 1954	Hettange-Grande (57)	NU
25	October 1954	Dompaire (88)	U
26	October 1954	Vaubexy (88)	U
27	November 1954	Wittenheim (68)	NU
28	November 5 th 1954	La Roche en Brenil (21)	U
29	1954?	Fixin (21)	U
30	Summer 1956	Marsois (52)	NU
31	Summer 1963 or 1965	St Max (54)	NU
32	In the 1960?	Near Hannapes (08)	NU
33	August 14 th 1966	Clémery (54)	U
34	November 15 th 1969	Nancy (54)	U
35	November 1970?	Between Charleville and the Meuse valley (08)	U
36	June 19 th 1974	Pommard (21)	U
37	Summer 1974	Parfondeval (02)	U
38	August 15 th 1974	Bouxières-aux-Dames (54)	NU
39	February 2 nd 1975	Der lake (52)	U
39'	February 3 rd 1975	Der lake (52)	U
40	June 1975	Dugny-sur-Meuse (55)	RV
41	July 1975	St Dizier (52)	NU
42	November 6 th 1975	Merxheim (68)	U

43	November 8 th 1975	Vauchignon (21)	NU
44	One night in 1975	Nancy (54)	NU
45	January 26 th 1976	Bouze les Beaune (21)	U
46	April 18 th 1976	Near Beaune (21)	U
47	May 2 nd 1976	Pond at Le Banel (08)	U
48	Summer 1976	Weyersheim (67)	U
49	October 10 th 1976	Chamouilley (52)	NU
50	October 24 th 1976	Hestroff (57)	U
51	November 8 th 1976	In the area of Givet (08)	U
52	July 1 st 1977	Dolcourt (54)	U
53	October 2 nd 1977	Mertzen (68)	U
54	Winter 1977	Toul (54)	U
55	January 31 st 1978	Near Strasbourg (67)	U
56	October 12 th 1978	Bouxières-aux-Dames (54)	NU
56'	October 15 th 1978	Bouxières-aux-Dames (54)	NU
56''	October 17 th 1978	Bouxières-aux-Dames (54)	NU
57	Beginning of November 1978	Savigny-le-Sec (21)	U
58	November 21 1978	Champenoux (54)	U
59	1978	Yutz (57)	NU
60	July 31 st 1981	In the area of Montbard (21)	U
61	July 17 th 1983	Sommerécourt (52)	U
62	July 1984	Forêt-de-Haye (54)	NU
63	June 8 th 1986	Ancerville (55)	RV
64	October 6 th 1987	Tellecey (21)	U
65	November 8 th 1990	Holving (57)	RV
66	May 24 th 1992	Forêt-de-Haye (54)	NU
67	1992	Nancy area ? (54)	NU
68	January 2 nd 1994	Tronville (55)	U
69	July 15 th 2003	Méréville (54)	NU
70	October 23 rd 2006	Toul (54)	NU
71	September 6 th 2006	Nancy (54)	NU
72	End of August 2018	Sarreinsming (57)	U
73	End of August 2018	Sarreinsming (57)	RV
74	End of August 2018	Sarreinsming (57)	NU
75	October 26 th 2018	Sarreinsming (57)	NU

RV: Religious visions (Virgin Mary, White Lady or similar)

Total: 75 cases (with 3 cases that repeated themselves several times).

We think that there is a plausible explanation for around 60 cases, which leaves 15 cases unexplained so far. It should be noted that since some of those cases have not been investigated, there is sometimes not much to go on. We found lots of humanoid sightings in 1954: this is not surprising since it is the biggest UFO wave that happened in Europe, famous for having many RR3. It exploded at the time, but then faded away in the 1960s. Since then there is fewer cases popping here and there from time to time. Contrary to expectation, humanoid sightings do not happen only in remote, deserted area, but also in big cities like Nancy, St Dizier or Metz. It is worth noting that of all those cases, only one is about a Grey alien (case n°67). On top of that, all we know about this sighting is from a documentary made by French ufologist and science-fiction writer Jimmy Guieu (1994), in which he interviews the anonymous parents of a child witness. It should be noted that Jimmy Guieu is also one of the first writer to introduce the Grey alien Mythos with his fiction in France. His novel *Extraterrestrial Biological Entity: Alerte Rouge* (Guieu, 1990) even has two Grey aliens on the cover. Based on this observation, we can say that either Grey aliens are not active in France for the moment (extraterrestrial hypothesis) or that Grey alien is still an American folklore that has not yet been adopted by the French culture (psychosocial hypothesis). While we were working on this article, French ufologist Eric Zurcher (2018) published a book called *Les apparitions mondiales d'humanoïdes* discussing RR3 all over the world. The only case we have in common is n°50, Hestroff (57). In the book the UFO is represented in an illustration without any comment (2018, p. 307). We think that this case can be explained by a mistake with a farm tractor with two farmers working at night in a field, because of the description given by the witnesses and the fact that cops

found tire tracks in the morning. One of the witness, a child, even said that the alien had a beard "like his dad". We will now present four specific cases in more details.

Case 4

Late afternoon in April 1945, a priest was looking for mushrooms in the forest of Autrey, not too far from Renève (21). While he was looking at a bush near a path, he notices a presence on the road near him. It is a "small man" (15 to 17cm high) that hurries up with an expression of fear on his face. Perfectly human except for his size, the small man wears a uniform (mostly wine colour) on his entire body, except for the head. He has a kind of "spear" (cream colour) that appears behind his uniform, which stops the first idea of the priest: to try to pick up the humanoid. The small man looks intensely at the witness before disappearing in the bushes. The priest thinks at the time that he saw a human ancestor and even compares it to the Eohippus, a small ancestor of the horse. We speculate that, around that time, he may have read the books of Henri Breuil (1877-1961), who was a Catholic priest and a famous archaeologist. It is the ufological association GEPA that will first present this case as belonging to the UFO lore. An investigation by another group, called ADRUP, will propose the hypothesis of a mistake with a monkey, the mascot of an African regiment stationed in the region at the time. A picture of the monkey was even found by French investigator Patrice Vachon, send to him by a veteran. Even if it's blurry, you can see on it how it looked like the description of the witness. Patrice Vachon proposed that the "spear" was really the tail of the monkey.

This case predates the beginning of the UFO phenomenon with the Kenneth Arnold sighting in 1947. It is thus not surprising that the witness did not think right away about an alien. He doesn't think either of a fairy encounter, even though he is in front of a "small man" in the forest. As we

have seen, he gave a cryptozoological interpretation of his own sighting (the humanoid was a human ancestor). It's only much later that he contacted ufological association, the GEPA, in order to testify. Since the fairy hypothesis is perceived as less probable in our techno-scientific societies, the extraterrestrial hypothesis was preferred by the original investigators. This case is a perfect example of what is called "simple mistake" in the sociopsychological model (Abrassart, 2016). That model states that most UFO sightings are simple mistakes with mundane stimuli, for example the moon, helicopters, skytracers, sky lanterns and so on. They are the core of the UFO phenomena. In those cases, witnesses can describe reliably what they saw: they only fail to identify what the mundane stimulus they saw was. On the other hand, elaborate mistakes include subjective distortion of what was seen: the witness doesn't describe what they saw reliably. Based on available cultural narratives, those distortions can happen during the sighting itself (illusion), when the memory is remembered (confabulation) or during discussions with other people (suggestibility). In this case, the witness didn't see a UFO, but a humanoid. Nevertheless, we can see that the description he gave of the "small man" was accurate. He just failed to identify the stimulus because it was unexpected in that context.

Case 34

This RR3 happened in Nancy in 1969 (Robé & Abrassart, J.-M., 2017). Even if this case belongs to the UFO category, the size of the humanoids is more reminiscent of the fairy lore. One could legitimately ask if this case would count as a UFO sighting or a gnome encounter. Madame X's testimony is the following: on November 15th, 1969, around 5PM, she went to the window's apartment to feed pigeons, as she used to do every day. She saw at that moment something behind the chimney of the neighbour's house, close to rooftops. It was a small flying

saucer, around 60cm (the size of a car's tire), with a dome where 2 aliens were looking at her. The saucer had lights under it, akin to car's headlights. She made a drawing of it, writing on it that the extraterrestrials were "two smiling guys". There was also a strange smell, akin to acid's odour. The small flying saucer left toward the sky, in the direction of two other flying saucers looking exactly like the first one waiting for her. After the event, Madame X found out that her hands and forehead swelled. On top of that, she had a big bump on her forehead, which she described to be "as big as a pigeon egg". She also claimed that two other persons saw the flying saucer, but the first one died before 1976, so investigators were unable to talk to him to know his version of the events. As for the second one, he was according to the witness a cop, but Madame X did not know his name.

Our working hypothesis is as follow: what if the sighting did not cause the head injury, but instead it happened the other way around? Studies in the medical literature seem to indicate that a severe closed head injury can lead to declarative memory difficulties, amnesia, confabulation and false memories (Melo, Winocur, & Moscovitch, 1999; Demery, Hanlon, & Bauer, 2001; Ries & Marks, 2006). Thus, our explanation would be the following: Madame X hurt her head that day on the window she opened to feed pigeons. She experienced a moment of confusion and later started to create a false memory to explain it. On top of that, the closed head injury created a scar that was also incorporated into the narrative. It is also possible that she had a hallucination following her closed head injury, but we think that a false memory is more probable.

We also discovered during our investigation that an episode of the TV show *The Twilight Zone* tells a similar story than the Madame X sighting. It is the episode called *The Invaders* (season 2, episode 15) from 1960-1961. This popular TV show has been broadcast in France starting

in 1965. We confirmed that fact by consulting two journals of the time with TV programs in it, respectively *Telerama* (February 1965) and *Télé7jours* (January 23rd, 1965). In this episode, a woman alone sees a small flying saucer with a dome landing on a roof. There are two aliens and one of them shoots at her. She goes back in her kitchen and she notices that she has marks on her hands and neck. It is only possible to speculate this “false memory caused by a closed head injury” hypothesis since, short of a time machine, it’s not possible to confirm it. Nevertheless, it seems to us an interesting speculation to consider for this case.

Case 68:

During the night between Sunday the 2nd to Monday the 3rd 1994, the attention of a family (5 people) from Tronville-en-Barrois (55) is attracted by a bright white light around 12:05PM. They witness a UFO “parked” on a small dirt road around 100 meters from their pavilion. They hear the noise of an engine. It turns off and then the light disappears. The UFO is circular with a dome and two lights at the basis of it. The witnesses estimate the object at 5 meters long and 2 to 2.5 meters high. The object does not move. The light comes from within the dome. They can see some silhouettes wearing grey jumpsuits, with big heads. One of them is in front of a dashboard with luminous lights. Surprised, witnesses call their neighbour that comes out and look at the strange show with binoculars. He thinks it is a car and goes back to sleep. Everything goes dark, then red and green lights flashes and they can hear a door closing. One of the humanoids gets out with a lamp and looks around with it. Then he goes back into the spaceship. The sound of a door closing happens again. The inside gets bright again. The spaceship turns on itself and everything gets dark. Only two lights were still visible. With a “swooshing sound”, the UFO moves toward the left and his hidden by other houses.

This is the end of the sighting. The next day, they will find traces on the road.

CNEGU investigators Gilles Munsch and Christine Zwygart (1994, 1997) found that this case is a mistake with a car parked on a small dirt road. They found the precise car that was parked there thanks to a police investigation and the driver confessing that he was there at the time of the sighting. In fact, he was hiding there from the cops after a chase. At the time, the policemen lost him, but they arrested him later. As we have discussed elsewhere, people can mistake the moon for an alien spacecraft (Maillot, E., and al., 2018; Maillot, E., and al., 2019). Here we have a family mistaking a car for a UFO. The “argument from incredulity” is sometimes oppose to this kind of explanation. It is an informal logical fallacy that occurs when someone asserts that because something is so incredible or difficult to imagine, it must be wrong. In the case of the psychosocial model, this argument states something along those lines: “I can’t believe that someone will not recognize this mundane stimulus and mistake it for an alien spacecraft, thus this explanation must be false”. The roots of this informal logical fallacy are the belief that our perception and memory is mostly reliable, even if research in the human sciences shows that it is not the case. It is worth noting that even sceptics are not immune to use the argument of incredulity. For example, several authors (Lecllet, 2001; Nickell, 2006) have suggested the great horned owls hypothesis for the Kelly–Hopkinsville encounter but, confronted to this explanation, even sceptical-minded people (but who are not well-knowledgeable in the psychosocial model) tend to react with an argument of incredulity, stating something along the lines of: “a family of farmers could not mistake great horned owls for aliens”. To counter-argue that fallacy, one can only point out that this hypothesis explains many details of that case and that it should be accepted as long

as a better one (meaning one that explains even more details) is not proposed.

Case 69

Madame Y started to have exceptional experiences after a surgical intervention and, subsequently, they became more frequent after the loss of a baby in 2002. At the beginning she just saw shadows at the corner of her eyes. After that, she started to see something like the aura of plants and people. Her general practitioner advised her to do something artistic based on her exceptional experiences. She then started visiting places and taking pictures of places where fairies are supposed to live, based on the Vosges folklore. She had the impression that her camera zoom was sometimes moving by himself and she saw strange things in those pictures, that she interpreted as being the life force of the Small People living there. She first saw a luminous ball floating and then disappearing in her room. In the evening of July 15th2003, she heard a baby cooing nearby. Her zoom seemed to move by himself towards a patch of flowers. She started slowly seeing in the picture of flowers the face and the hand of a baby. She continued filming until the apparition disappears. She shows her movie to the *Société d'Études Psychiques* de Nancy that concludes that it is her deceased baby appearing to her. If it was not for the picture taken, this case could easily be put in the grief hallucination category (Baethge, 2002), but here the exceptional experience had an hallucination (hearing the baby cooing) and an illusion component (pareidolia). The ideomotor effect can probably account for the impression that the camera zoom moved by itself.

Discussion

Jacques Vallée (1969) and Bertrand Méheust (1985) do not advocate the psychosocial hypothesis. Instead they seem to reject the extraterrestrial hypothesis in favour of the paranormal one (Ouellet, 2015), postulating that there is a

kind of intentionality behind the UFO phenomenon. That was the hypothesis they both advocated during the concluding panel at the *Collecte et Analyse des Informations sur les Phénomènes Aérospatiaux Non-identifiés (CAIPAN)* in 2014 in Paris, a workshop organised by the French National Centre for Space Studies (CNES) that we attended. They were vague about what that “intentionality” could be. In the same line of thought, French ufologist Eric Zurcher (2018) states that, even if there are no hard proofs of alien visitation and if the testimonies are highly heterogeneous (the way the aliens look like and so on), they must be an intelligence behind the phenomenon. It is a strange intellectual move, since it seems to us that the lack of hard proof and the heterogeneity of descriptions should lead to the conclusion that the sociopsychological model is the best explanation for RR3.

Zurcher (2018) adopts furthermore the mimesis hypothesis in his recent book, *Les apparitions mondiales d'humanoïdes*. This view is quite popular for the moment, at least in the ufological French-speaking world. It states that even if it is possible to find a mundane explanation for a UFO case, it might still be alien in origin since alien spaceships could hide as mundane objects. Zurcher (2018, p. 310) states for example (our translation from French) “The UFO phenomenon can imitate anything, but the more spectacular cases are those about our own technological productions: airplanes, rockets, balloons, airships, trains, cars, bikes and so on.” If an alien spacecraft can appear to be a plane, it’s fair to assume that the phenomenon can also hide as fairies, religious figures, cryptids and so on. The epistemological issue with the mimesis hypothesis is that it is simply impossible to test. How are we supposed to study creatures that are clearly like gods amongst us, able to take any shape or form to fool us? For all we know, alien could be

everywhere hiding in plain sight. As for all irrefutable hypothesis, it might be true, but it is not really science. As the physicist Wolfgang Pauli famously said: "that is not only not right; it is not even wrong". It is more akin to a position of faith. In fact, in the past, that kind of hiding power was attributed to gods and supernatural creatures. Within the framework of the paranormal hypothesis, the "intentionality" or "intelligence" behind the UFO phenomenon seems indeed similar to the fairy lore. In a way, it is like the belief in fairies is surviving in modern time, just under another name.

We have tried to show that it is fruitful to study humanoid sightings from an atheoric perspective, and to not preselect cases based on the hypothesis the researcher affectionate (religious, fairy lore or UFO lore). We think it is best to consider them as a specific kind of exceptional experiences. We have presented several cases that could be seen as being relevant to the fairy lore as well as the UFO lore. From a methodological point of view, it seems problematic to project onto the folklore of the past (fairy lore) the current one (UFO lore). Strangely, writers that adopt that position usually thinks of fairies as aliens and not the other way around. But why not consider that the UFO phenomena could be explained by fairies pretending to be from other worlds, if only because the UFO lore is more compatible with the techno-society we live in today?

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Did an episode of Doctor Who play a previously unrecognised role in the Alan Godfrey UFO case?

Paul Garner

Abstract

Alan Godfrey's encounter with a UFO in Todmorden, West Yorkshire, on 29 November 1980 has become one of the most celebrated cases in British ufology. The exact nature of Godfrey's experience continues to be debated, however, with some investigators suggesting that Godfrey, in an altered state of consciousness, misperceived a more mundane object, such as a bus, or perhaps an anomalous atmospheric phenomenon, such as a plasma vortex. Also occasioning much discussion is the possible source of Godfrey's UFO imagery, with the leading candidate being a flying saucer-like prefabricated building that was located in Todmorden at the time. In this article I propose an alternative possibility, namely a spacecraft that appeared in a 1979 episode of Doctor Who, which bears an uncanny resemblance to the object described by Godfrey.

Alan Godfrey's Encounter.

More than forty years have passed since Police Constable Alan Godfrey, then aged 33, had his celebrated encounter, and the story will be familiar to anyone acquainted with British ufology.² At about 5:05am on Saturday 29

² The case is recounted in some detail in Randles (1983), McCue (2012, pp.255-258), as well as more recently in Godfrey's own book (Godfrey, 2017).

November 1980, Godfrey was on his way to look for some stray cows that had been reported wandering a housing estate in Todmorden, West Yorkshire. He had been out twice already and was returning in his panda car for one last look before his shift ended at 6:00am.

Just as he was about to make the right turn from Burnley Road into Ferney Lee Road, Godfrey spotted something on the road ahead of him and decided to investigate. At first, he thought the object might be a bus that had slewed sideways across the road, but as he approached it he says he realised it was not a bus.

Pulling up less than 100ft (30m) from the object,³ Godfrey was astonished at the sight that confronted him. Hovering 5ft (1.5m) above the road was a diamond-shaped object with a slightly flattened top, about 20ft (6m) wide and 14ft (4m) in height. The object was gunmetal grey and reflecting his headlights. There appeared to be a row of dark panels or windows across the upper third of the object. A fluorescent glow emanated from the dome on top, while the lower part was spinning slowly in an anti-clockwise direction.⁴

³ There is some disagreement about the exact distance. Randles (1983, p.124) says he got within 100ft (30m) of the object. Godfrey (2017, p.99) says he was 20yds (18m) away.

⁴ There seems to be some confusion about whether the whole object was spinning or only the lower part. In his 2017 book, Godfrey says that “the whole thing” was spinning (p.99). However, Randles (1983, p.124) wrote, “He noticed that the top seemed stationary whilst the bottom rotated (anti-clockwise if looked at from above).” Randles’ version tallies with the labels on the sketch Godfrey made at the time of his encounter and with

Perplexed by what he was seeing, Godfrey attempted to contact his local station using both his car radio and his personal radio, but without success. He made a quick sketch of the object on a pad in his car normally used to report road accidents. Then there was a bright flash and he found himself still in his car a hundred yards or so (90m) further along the road. The engine was still running but he couldn't recall how he had got there.

The object had gone, and so Godfrey drove back to the station, collected a colleague, and returned immediately to the location of his encounter. But apart from a patch of swirled leaves and dry ground – the rest of the road was still wet from earlier rainfall – there was nothing to see. Back at home, he discovered a deep split running across the sole of his left boot and a red, itchy mark on his left foot. Several months later, hypnosis sessions recovered apparent memories of being taken aboard a craft, where Godfrey encountered a tall, humanoid entity called Yosef, a large black dog, and eight small robots that subjected him to an examination that included removing his boots and socks.

Proposed Explanations.

The Alan Godfrey case is a fascinating one, made the more intriguing because of Godfrey's credibility as a witness and the fact that his account has remained consistent⁵ in the forty years since the incident occurred. However, the nature of Godfrey's experience has occasioned much

Godfrey's own statement under hypnosis, "It's spinning ... top isn't spinning" (Randles, 1983, p.151).

⁵ With only minor variations of detail, as noted by McCue (2012, p.256).

debate. Did he encounter an alien spacecraft, an unknown atmospheric phenomenon, or something else? Was he really abducted by alien beings or was his experience on board the craft a set of false memories – or perhaps a mixture of false and true memories – generated during the hypnotic regression?⁶

Ten years ago, Peter Brookesmith, David Clarke and Andy Roberts revisited the case in the pages of *Fortean Times* and proposed their own explanation for the encounter (Brookesmith et al., 2010, Brookesmith et al., 2011). They pointed out that Godfrey had had a history of unusual experiences, at least two involving hallucinatory states that were apparently induced by misperceptions of mundane objects. At the time of his UFO experience, Godfrey was nearing the end of a long night shift, weary, and perhaps suffering physically from a chronic injury incurred while on duty some months previously.

They suggested that in such circumstances Godfrey may have slipped into an altered state of consciousness, similar to those he had experienced before, during which he misperceived an ordinary object – perhaps a bus or other large vehicle – as a UFO. The authors even suggested a possible source of Godfrey’s UFO imagery, in the form of the Futuro house, a flying saucer-like prefabricated building that had been situated at various locations around Todmorden for the previous twelve years, and for part of that time just a few hundred yards from the police station (Figure 1).

⁶ To his credit, Godfrey has always been careful to distinguish between the things he consciously remembers, which he is more certain about, and the things he recollected under hypnosis, which he regards as more questionable (e.g. Godfrey, 2017, p.274).

Godfrey, however, is adamant that he did not misperceive a bus,⁷ and other researchers have proposed a more enigmatic trigger for his experience. Jenny Randles, drawing on the work of meteorologist Terence Meaden, has implicated a very rare atmospheric anomaly called a plasma vortex. Such vortices are said to produce stationary tornado-like effects with sufficient energy to disrupt electrical devices and induce physiological changes.⁸ They are associated with low-pressure weather systems such as the one that had passed over Todmorden just prior to Godfrey's encounter. Randles has drawn attention to eyewitness reports in which debris within such vortices has caused them to take on a surprisingly solid appearance, even displaying dark blotches that might be mistaken for panels or windows.⁹ In 2014, this theory received a boost when bus driver Bob Coates came forward to say that on 29 November 1980 he had been on the Burnley Road just minutes before Godfrey, and had witnessed a strange whirlwind in the road.¹⁰

⁷ When asked about this, Godfrey described the idea as “full of holes and laughable” (Randles, 2017, p.298).

⁸ Randles (2017, p.303). However, see footnote 1 in Brookesmith et al. (2011, p.49) for some problems with the plasma vortex theory.

⁹ One case involved a school headteacher at Marple, Cheshire, who at 12.45pm on 15 June 1988 was supervising a group of children when he witnessed clumps of hay rotating anti-clockwise in some kind of atmospheric vortex, forming a UFO-like mass about 20ft (6m) in diameter (Randles, 2017, pp.304-307). This and many similar cases are also described in Randles and Fuller (1991).

¹⁰ Coates put the time at about 4:55am. See Randles (2017, pp.294-298).

Godfrey's UFO imagery: a new proposal.

If we are willing to accept with Brookesmith et al. (2010, 2011) and Randles (2017)¹¹ that Godfrey's experience involved some kind of trance-like episode, there is clearly scope for disagreement about exactly what triggered it and why he visualized the UFO as he did. In the rest of this article, I want to focus on this last piece of the puzzle, because, in my opinion, the Futuro house is not an especially good match for Godfrey's UFO. Its oval shape and rounded outline is actually quite unlike the diamond-shaped object that Godfrey described. Moreover, I believe that I have found a plausible alternative source of the imagery that is a much better fit.

As well as having had an abiding interest in the Godfrey UFO case, I am also a lifelong *Doctor Who* fan,¹² and it was while watching a vintage *Doctor Who* story in 2018, shortly after reading Godfrey's recently-released book, that I made the discovery. The story I was watching was the four-part Tom Baker adventure entitled 'Destiny of the Daleks.' In episode one, a spacecraft belonging to a robotic race

¹¹ See Randles' statement (2017, p.292) that she has "no doubt that something physically real was present over the road and did render Alan temporarily 'out of it'."

¹² Oddly enough, it was my interest in *Doctor Who* that led me to hear about the Alan Godfrey case for the first time. I was about 15 years old in 1984 when I tuned in to BBC's *Breakfast Time* programme for an interview with the new *Doctor Who*, Colin Baker, and his co-star Nicola Bryant. Another guest that morning was Alan Godfrey, who gave a compelling account of his UFO experience to presenter Frank Bough. I have been fascinated by the case ever since. The BBC interview with Godfrey can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4PXYrflN-a4>

known as the Movellans lands on the Daleks' home planet of Skaro. The Doctor and his companion, Romana (played by Lalla Ward), watch the craft descend and bore its way into the ground, half burying itself. I had seen this story many times before, including on its original broadcast, but with Godfrey's book fresh in my mind I was struck by the remarkable resemblance of the Movellan craft to the object that Godfrey says he encountered in Todmorden.

Like Godfrey's UFO, the Movellan spacecraft is shaped like a diamond, with the top part flattened by comparison with the lower part. Moreover, there is a row of somewhat darker panels across its upper section.¹³ But perhaps the most significant point of similarity with Godfrey's UFO is that the lower part of the Movellan spacecraft is seen to rotate, though in a clockwise direction, as it reaches the ground and then bores its way into the planet's surface. Figure 2 shows a screenshot of the Movellan spacecraft and an original sketch by BBC designer Peter Logan, alongside Alan Godfrey's own drawing of the object he says he observed hovering above Burnley Road, Todmorden, in November 1980.

Mulling over this coincidence, I decided to check the broadcast dates for 'Destiny of the Daleks'. The four-part story was first shown on BBC1 on consecutive Saturdays between 1 and 22 September 1979, just over a year before Godfrey's encounter on 29 November 1980. It was repeated on four consecutive evenings on BBC1 from Tuesday to Friday, 5 to 8 August 1980, *only four months* before Godfrey's encounter.¹⁴ Not only is there an obvious resemblance between the Movellan spacecraft and

¹³ Or at least they appear darker because they are in shadow.

¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Destiny_of_the_Daleks

Godfrey's UFO, but the story featuring the fictional spacecraft had been broadcast *twice* on prime-time television in the 15 months before Godfrey's fateful encounter.

I began to wonder whether it was possible that Godfrey had seen the *Doctor Who* episode in question, and that the image of the spinning, diamond-shaped spacecraft had lodged in the back of his mind. If Brookesmith et al. (2010, 2011) are right that Godfrey had entered some kind of hallucinatory mental state, then perhaps whatever it was he encountered on the road in Todmorden – whether a mundane vehicle, an anomalous atmospheric phenomenon, or something else – had triggered that memory? Certainly, it is my opinion that the Movellan spacecraft bears a much closer resemblance to Godfrey's UFO than the somewhat elongated, egg-shaped design of the plastic prefab suggested as the source of the imagery by Brookesmith et al. (2010, 2011).

Of course, the Futuro house does have one obvious advantage over the *Doctor Who* episode as a possible source of Godfrey's UFO. Given the Futuro building's long presence in Todmorden, Godfrey would almost certainly have been familiar with it. By contrast, we do not know whether Godfrey ever saw the episode of 'Destiny of the Daleks' that featured the Movellan spaceship. Indeed, Jenny Randles indicated in *The Pennine UFO Mystery* (1983, p.122) that Godfrey "had not taken any interest in UFOs or science-fiction before late 1980." However, in a recent personal communication, she confirmed to me that "Alan had watched some TV, including *Doctor Who*."¹⁵ In fact, Randles herself has suggested that TV science-fiction programmes may have influenced Godfrey's recollections

¹⁵ Jenny Randles, personal communication, 23 May 2018.

under hypnosis.¹⁶ In 1983, she noted (p.156) that the noise Godfrey attributed to the small robots that examined him was reminiscent of the sound made by a somewhat similar robot in the ITV series *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century*, broadcast between 1979 and 1981.¹⁷ She also remarked (p.164) on the resemblance of the bracelets Godfrey described being attached to his wrist and leg to the teleport bracelets used by the crew of the *Liberator* in the BBC series *Blakes 7*, broadcast between 1978 and 1981.¹⁸ Given this context, I think we must at least consider the *possibility* that Godfrey had seen the *Doctor Who* episode in question.

In conclusion, I want to be clear that I am not suggesting that Alan Godfrey *knowingly* fabricated his UFO encounter based on a spacecraft that he had seen in an episode of *Doctor Who*. To the contrary, I find Godfrey's account of his experience compelling and his sincerity unimpeachable. I am personally persuaded that something genuinely mysterious happened to him on that road in Todmorden in November 1980, and that he is being completely truthful in recounting the event as he experienced it. Godfrey himself

¹⁶ Randles (2017, p.291) says, "There are hints from Alan's hypnosis that some detail and sounds he saw aboard the 'craft' may have been inspired subconsciously by popular TV shows such as *Dr Who* and *Buck Rogers*."

¹⁷ Although Randles tempered her remarks by adding (1983, p.156): "This may well be the source of the imagery; or then again it may not. Small metallic servants are common in such cases, even those which happened before the *Buck Rogers* series was made. And Alan's sound is not very similar; it is more of a warble."

¹⁸ Though again adding the following caveat: "They [*i.e. the Blakes 7 bracelets – PG*] are not worn on the legs ... and it may be true to say that 'bracelet' is the only reasonable word to use for such an implement." (p.164)

remains convinced that the UFO he saw was a solid object that would have gone ‘clang’ if he had thrown a brick at it,¹⁹ and that he did not misperceive a mundane object, such as a bus, as a UFO. But if serious investigators of unexplained phenomena understand anything, they understand the malleability of human perception.²⁰ And, with that in mind, we must always remember, as Jenny Randles (2017, p.287) has pointed out, that “UFO cases are far from a straight choice between doubting the sanity [*or, I might add, the truthfulness – PG*] of a witness, or proclaiming an invasion by visiting spaceships that hijack folks from a sleepy town.”

¹⁹ He makes a comment somewhat to this effect in his book (Godfrey, 2017, p.99). Later, he says (p.274), “I do know for an absolute fact that I saw that UFO above Burnley Road and it *was* a real object. It was in my headlights reflecting light and left tangible marks on the road beneath. That is about as real as you can get.”

²⁰ See, for example, the chapter on the psychosocial theory of UFOs and abduction accounts (‘Ufological wars: flying saucers of the mind’, pp.86-103) in Devereux and Brookesmith (1997).

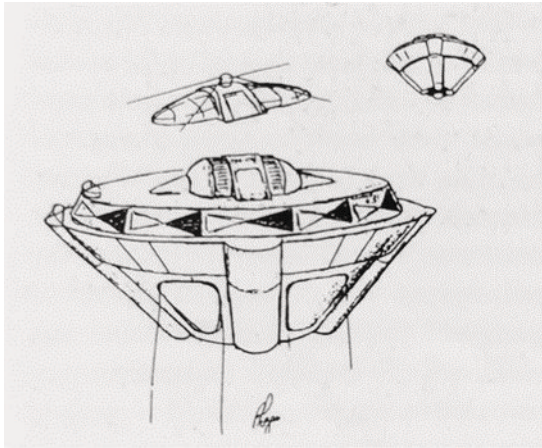
Figures



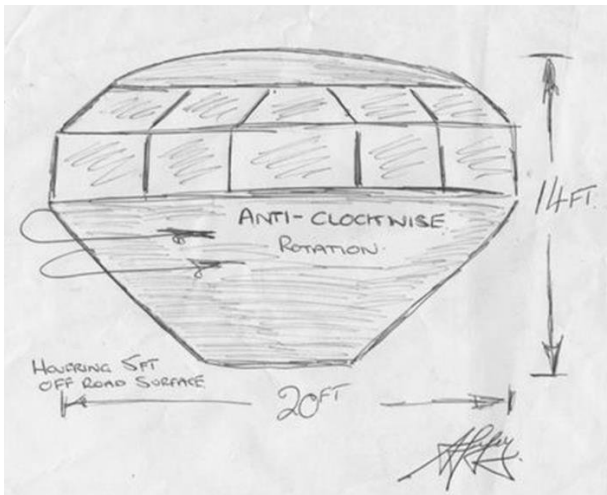
Figure 1. The Futuro house in Todmorden, West Yorkshire (1971).
Credit: Amy Holt/Roger Birch Collection,
<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/aug/22/back-to-the-futuro-house-flying-saucer-matti-suuronen>



Figure 2. (a) A screenshot of the Movellan spacecraft from the *Doctor Who* story, 'Destiny of the Daleks' (1979),
https://tardis.fandom.com/wiki/Movellan_ship.



(b) BBC designer Peter Logan's sketch of the Movellan spacecraft, https://twitter.com/who_fx/status/855129442653548544.



(c) Alan Godfrey's sketch of the object he witnessed in Todmorden on 29 November 1980. From Godfrey (2017, p.101).

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The Alleged Haunting of Sandwood Bay: Fact or Fiction?

Peter A. McCue

ABSTRACT

Over the years, the scenically impressive Sandwood Bay area in the far north-west of mainland Scotland has reportedly been the setting for ghostly events, principally involving the beach and a nearby cottage (now a ruin). However, many of the stories have a decidedly folkloric character. Witnesses often go unnamed, and many of the accounts are undated. Furthermore, some of the stories have undergone mutation. While accepting that it is possible that the bay and the cottage are, or once were, haunted, the author contends that the available evidence is rather thin.

INTRODUCTION

This is an expanded and revised version of an article of mine published some years ago in a magazine of the Society for Psychical Research (McCue, 2013). It concerns the Sandwood Bay area in the far north-west of mainland Scotland. The bay and a nearby isolated cottage (now a ruin) have allegedly been the setting for ghostly phenomena (see Reports 5-19). The cottage is south of the bay and to the west of Loch Sandwood (see Figure 1). The 1:50,000 Ordnance Survey map of the area simply calls it 'Sandwood', but I'll refer to it as 'Sandwood Cottage'.

In addition to stories about the bay and the cottage, I'll mention four other tales. Reports 1 and 2 relate to a disused, and possibly no longer existing, fisherman's hut at

Port Mòr, a small indentation in the coastline, a little over a mile south-west of the beach at Sandwood Bay. I regard the two stories about it as historically dubious, but I am including them for the sake of completeness. However, even if there is some truth in them, it does not necessarily follow that the manifestations there were linked, in a fundamental way, with the ghostly phenomena that have supposedly occurred at Sandwood Bay and Sandwood Cottage – we could be dealing with different hauntings. By the same token, if genuine phenomena have occurred at Sandwood Bay and Sandwood Cottage, it does not necessarily follow that they reflect just one haunting.

Report 3 concerns an unspecified location, and Report 4 (of which there is more than one version) relates to alleged phenomena at a flat in Edinburgh. However, in Report 3, there is a purported link with Sandwood Bay. And with all but one of the versions of Report 4, there's an alleged connection with Sandwood Cottage.

THE AREA

Sutherland is a beautiful county in the northern Scottish Highlands. It is a place of extensive moorland, eye-catching mountains, lochs and rugged coastlines. The remoteness and low population density have no doubt helped to protect the area from the excessive development that's increasingly eroding Britain's countryside.

Sandwood Bay is located on the Atlantic coast of Sutherland, about six miles south-south-west of Cape Wrath, the north-western tip of the British mainland. It can be reached, on foot, from the hamlet of Blairmore, a few

PRINCIPAL SOURCES

There is a relative dearth of reliable, first-hand testimony about the alleged phenomena, and there are different versions of some of the stories. Ronald Macdonald Robertson, who died in 1968, recounts several stories about the area in his book *Selected Highland Folktales*. The title page gives his name as “R. Macdonald Robertson”, but I don’t know whether “Macdonald” was correctly a part of his surname or whether he used a middle name, for reasons of affectation, to create a double-barrelled (and somewhat unwieldy) surname. But since that’s the way it appears in his book, I’ll refer to him as “Macdonald Robertson” rather than “Robertson”. I have drawn on the 1995 edition of his book. Some of the tales it cites are undated. But I presume they all go back decades, given that his book was first published in 1961. In the preface, Macdonald Robertson explains that the material he cites is mainly derived from oral sources (p. viii).

Jeremy Bruce-Watt, who compiled and edited Macdonald Robertson’s book, cautions that Macdonald Robertson was the first to concede that the stories he collected from the crofter fishermen of Sutherland and country people elsewhere were not to be regarded as a serious, scholarly contribution to Scottish lore and legend, but rather as entertainment. This should be borne in mind, because quite a few of the reports cited below come from Macdonald Robertson’s collection. And some of them have a decidedly folkloric character. As such, they may have little, or no, historical truth.

A man called Alexander (or Sandy) Gunn features in some of the stories that Macdonald Robertson cites. He was apparently a small landholder on the Kinlochbervie estate and worked as a shepherd. He died in December 1944. Macdonald Robertson (p. 53) states that Gunn was very intelligent, possessed second sight, and had an amazing gift of storytelling. But he was evidently a rather eccentric character since he reportedly boasted of never having had a bath! According to Macdonald Robertson, Gunn died at midnight in the humble croft that he occupied, and ghostly events coincided with his death (e.g. his alarm clock allegedly stopped at that very point). Furthermore, Gunn's apparition was said to haunt the cottage thereafter. Macdonald Robertson (p. 53) gives its location as Kinlochbervie; but on p. 71, he refers to Gunn as being "late of Balchrack", which is a hamlet a few miles north-west of Kinlochbervie. However, John Fraser (2010, p. 149) implies that Gunn lived in the hamlet of Oldshoremore, which is about halfway between Kinlochbervie and Balchrack.

In April 1988, Fraser made some local enquiries and spent a night on his own in the deserted cottage (see Report 17, below). He discusses the bay and the cottage in his 2010 book *Ghost Hunting: A Survivor's Guide* (pp. 9-10; p. 76; pp. 144-151; pp. 175-176). He alludes to Macdonald Robertson's book (mistakenly giving its title as *Scottish Highland Folktales*) and he indicates that he (Fraser) swapped notes with Peter Underwood (1923–2014), a long-time president of the Ghost Club and a prolific author of popular books on ghosts and related matters. During Fraser's 1988 visit to the area, he spoke to an elderly

woman whose next-door neighbour had been Gunn. She said that he was known as someone who did not lie. However, although Gunn may have been an honest man in his day-to-day dealings with other people, it's possible that he invented or embellished stories to entertain himself and/or his listeners. Maybe he did not expect the tales to be taken as serious historical accounts. Another possibility is that his stories included elements of fantasy that he mistook for historical fact.

Stories about the locality appear in Peter Underwood's book *Gazetteer of Scottish Ghosts* (Underwood, 1980, pp. 170-174). Unfortunately, it names none of the alleged witnesses and does not reference its sources. On p. 7, Underwood explains that he is not claiming that all the entries in the book "are factual accounts in the literal sense". In respect of the Sandwood Bay area, overlapping content and similarities in wording suggest that he drew on Macdonald Robertson for much of his material. He also discusses the locality in his books *Nights in Haunted Houses* (1994) and *Where the Ghosts Walk* (2013). Again, he is drawn, in part, on Macdonald Robertson.

The late Andrew Green (1974, p. 247) devoted five paragraphs to the area in his book *Our Haunted Kingdom*. But the alleged witnesses go unnamed, and the sources are not specified.

Nick Kyle, a former president of the Scottish Society for Psychological Research, has kindly provided me with information about a night that he spent in the cottage with his partner (now wife) and two friends some years ago (see Report 19, below).



Am Buachaille, Sandwood Bay



Sandwood Bay

REPORTS

I cannot claim that the following is a complete catalogue of the ghostly incidents that have occurred, or supposedly occurred, at the places mentioned. It's quite possible, for example, that experiences have gone unreported.

Report 1 (Port Mòr, near Sandwood Bay)

Without giving a date, Macdonald Robertson (1995, p. 84) relates a tale about a fisherman. He and 12 fellow crew members beached at Port Mòr (see Figure 1). The others walked home, while the man in question remained behind in a hut, in charge of their gear. While baking oatcakes, he supposedly heard footsteps outside. Shortly after, the tall, dark figure of a sailor came into the hut. After muttering in Gaelic, the figure allegedly attacked the fisherman. Their struggle lasted until dawn, whereupon the ghost vanished!

Underwood (1994, p. 211) briefly mentions this story, adding some details, and missing out a couple, including the implausible assertion that the fisherman and ghostly sailor were engaged in a fight that lasted until dawn. I wonder whether Underwood omitted that part to make the tale sound more credible.

Report 2 (Port Mòr, near Sandwood Bay)

According to Macdonald Robertson (*op. cit.*, p. 85), it's said that sometime after the above incident, another fisherman encountered the ghost while alone in the hut at night. However, when this alleged witness made the sign of the cross and "acknowledged himself to God", the apparition walked into the sea and vanished. The story was supposedly "vouched for" by an Alexander MacLeod of Sheigra (a local hamlet). But it is not clear from Macdonald

Robertson's book whether MacLeod was the alleged witness or was merely someone who'd heard the story from the witness.

Underwood (1994, p. 211) alludes to this tale, but he seems to make an exaggerated claim. He states that, writing in 1985, Macdonald Robertson said there were local folk who could vouch for the accuracy of these and other unexplained incidents in the vicinity of the haunted hut. But Macdonald Robertson died in 1968, and his book (at least, the 1995 edition) *does not* refer to multiple people who could vouch for these tales.

Report 3 (Unspecified location)

Green (1974, p. 247) refers to a story told by a shepherd, unnamed by Green. An Englishwoman had reportedly taken a piece of wood from an old wreck protruding from the sand at Sandwood Bay. After that, she regularly saw an old-fashioned sailor across the road from her home. The figure would pace up and down. Her conscience supposedly induced her to return the piece of wood, whereupon the sightings ceased. But Green does not name the witness, cite his source, or specify where the woman lived. And no dates are given.

Report 4 (Edinburgh)

Macdonald Robertson (1995, p. 43) refers to an Edinburgh woman, "of high integrity and not given to exaggeration", who had never visited Sandwood Cottage. She allegedly received a small piece of wood from its broken staircase. This had supposedly been posted to her as a souvenir from Scotland's most remote cottage.¹ But since she had never been there, it could hardly have been a souvenir from her

perspective! At the time of receiving it, she knew nothing about the alleged haunting of the cottage, but strange phenomena then reportedly occurred in her home (which Macdonald Robertson describes as both a “flat” and a “house”): crockery fell on to the floor; knocks and heavy footsteps were heard at night; and, on one occasion, she allegedly sensed a strong smell of alcohol and tobacco smoke, and saw the dim outline of a bearded sailor, who shook the curtains violently before disappearing. However, despite these manifestations, she reportedly kept the piece of wood, which seems a little unlikely if she believed that its presence was causing such disturbances. Macdonald Robertson gives no dates for these alleged events and does not name the woman.

Underwood (1980, p. 174) also mentions this story. But instead of saying that the apparition shook the curtains, he states that it turned and faced the woman before disappearing. There are also a couple of additions: Underwood reports that the piece of wood “now rattles and moves on occasions”, and that the woman experienced phenomena in both her London flat and her house in Edinburgh. However, Macdonald Robertson’s book makes no mention of her having a flat in London. It is likely that Underwood drew on Macdonald Robertson and was confused by (1) his use of both “flat” and “house” in respect of the woman’s home, and (2) by Macdonald Robertson’s reference to “her city flat”. From the context, it is evident that this relates to Edinburgh, although Underwood may have wrongly assumed that it referred to London. But this does not explain the other additional feature in Underwood’s version: the alleged rattling and

movement of the piece of wood. Underwood briefly outlines the tale on p. 213 of his 1994 book, *Nights in Haunted Houses*. On p. 338 of his 2013 book, *Where the Ghosts Walk*, we can see a further mutation of the story: instead of being *sent* a piece of wood from Sandwood Cottage, the woman is now said to have taken it home after a visit!

In his book *Scottish Spectres*, Dane Love (2003, pp. 87-8) depicts the events somewhat differently. He identifies the property concerned as a tenement at 5 Rothesay Place (which is in Edinburgh's West End) and the people concerned as the Van Horne family. He states that, in 1958, strange things started happening soon after the arrival of some second-hand furniture they'd bought. The furniture had previously belonged to a sailor, who'd recently died. There were unexplained noises (usually tapping sounds). Then, ornaments that had been placed on the recently acquired furniture were found elsewhere. In the July of that year, the Van Hornes reportedly began to smell tobacco smoke. On enquiry, it was discovered that the aforementioned sailor was known as a pipe smoker. There were then visual manifestations: a bright ball of light was spotted and seemed to go from room to room; and in September, a tiny male figure was seen. It was only about a foot tall and was dressed in a brown jacket and red trousers. The family named it "Gnomey". It was reportedly seen on a number of occasions, and was witnessed by various family members. Love explains that by the beginning of the 1960s, the phenomena ceased almost as suddenly as they had begun. There is no mention in this

version of a piece of wood being received from Sandwood Cottage.

Ron Halliday's book *Edinburgh after Dark* (2010, pp. 40-1) presents a hybrid version of what happened (since it includes both the purchase of furniture *and* the arrival of a piece of wood from northern Scotland). Like Dane Love, he identifies the site in Edinburgh as 5 Rothesay Place and the people involved as the Van Horne family. He states that the phenomena began in September 1958. As noted above, though, according to Dane Love's version, the manifestations began somewhat earlier than that in 1958. Halliday's description of the alleged phenomena is fairly similar to Love's, but there are some elements not mentioned by Love. For example, on several occasions, drawers of a dressing table were allegedly seen to open and close by themselves. According to Halliday, Mrs Van Horne² decided to burn the piece of wood sent to her from northern Scotland, and the next day neighbours downstairs said that they had been disturbed all night by knocking sounds from the area of the fireplace. Unlike Love, Halliday does not mention sightings of a tiny male figure. I contacted Ron Halliday, asking about his source(s) for the story. He believes that he read it in a newspaper report.

Report 5 (Sandwood Bay)

Macdonald Robertson (1995, pp. 41-42) relates an experience that allegedly befell the aforementioned Sandy Gunn. At the time in question, a moonlit night, Gunn was with two friends, George Mackay and William MacLeod, looking for a lost sheep on the beach at Sandwood Bay. As they approached two large rocks, they saw some driftwood

being brought in by the tide. Anxious to obtain some, Mackay suggested that Gunn should scramble over the more easterly rock to try to secure a good plank. Just as Gunn set off, they distinctly saw the outline of a man standing between the rocks. Mackay and MacLeod approached the figure, thinking it was a Donald Macdonald. (It's not clear from Robertson's wording whether Gunn also thought that it was Macdonald.) But then they realised that it was a stranger. Gunn jumped off the rock and rushed back to join his friends, the trio then being rooted to the spot with fear for a few minutes, since there was something unearthly about the huge, black-whiskered man they were seeing. The figure slowly walked behind a ledge of rock and vanished. Two weeks later, an Irish boat was allegedly wrecked off the bay, and the body of a crew member came ashore between the aforementioned rocks. The corpse was reportedly seen by Gunn, Mackay and MacLeod, with all three men recognising it as that of the figure they'd encountered a fortnight before!

Underwood (1994, p. 211-2) briefly mentions this alleged incident. He does so again in his 2013 book (pp. 335-6), but this time without referring to the supposedly wrecked Irish boat or the body that was allegedly washed ashore.

Fraser (2010, p. 146) mentions these alleged events, dating them back to the "early 1940s". However, since Macdonald Robertson's book isn't specific about when they supposedly occurred, that may be conjecture on Fraser's part, unless he's drawing on an unspecified source.

Report 6 (Sandwood Bay)

Macdonald Robertson (1995, pp. 40-1) refers to an occasion when a crofter and his son (unnamed) were gathering firewood from the beach. It was beginning to get dark and their pony suddenly became restless. Close beside them, the figure of a bearded man, dressed as a sailor, appeared from nowhere, loudly commanding them to leave his property alone. They reportedly dropped the wood and fled with the pony. This supposedly occurred in the summer, but Macdonald Robertson doesn't give the year. This alleged incident is also mentioned by Underwood (1980, pp. 170-1; 1994, p. 212; 2013, p. 336). In his 1994 book, he dates it back to the "the late 1940s". However, that may be conjecture, because, as I say, the report in Macdonald Robertson's book (which I presume was Underwood's source) doesn't give a date.

Report 7 (Sandwood Bay)

Without citing a source or giving a specific date, Underwood (1994, p. 212) refers to a farmer (unnamed) who was looking for stray sheep. He saw the outline of a tall man among some nearby rocks. Presuming it to be a local person, he called out and approached the figure. He noticed that it was a sailor and not someone he knew. But then the figure completely vanished. Underwood also mentions this incident in his 2013 book (pp. 336-7), dating it back to the 1940s.

Report 8 (Sandwood Bay)

Macdonald Robertson (1995, p. 41) relates that in the early afternoon of 8 August 1949, a gillie and members of a fishing party went round a sand dune and saw the figure of

a sailor. They then observed it through the gillie's stalking glass. The gillie went over to question the man, wondering whether he was a poacher. But the gillie found no one, and there were no footprints in the sand other than his own. This incident is also mentioned by Underwood (1980, p. 171; 1994, p. 212; 2013, p. 337).

According to Macdonald Robertson, the gillie was from the Garbet Hotel, Kinlochbervie, which I presume is a reference to what's now the Kinlochbervie Hotel. Given that a precise date is given for this account (8 August 1949) and that the gillie is said to have been linked with a particular hotel, this may be a more credible story than most of the others concerning Sandwood Bay. However, it's not clear to me why the gillie would have thought that a sailor seen on the beach could have been a poacher.

Report 9 (Sandwood Bay)

Macdonald Robertson (1995, p. 42) mentions an incident that allegedly occurred in July 1953. Three people from Edinburgh were having a picnic on the side of a sand dune, to the south-east of the bay, when they suddenly saw a large, bearded sailor looking down on them from the crest of a nearby hillock, the figure being in view for some three minutes. It took one or two steps backwards and vanished, leaving no footprints in the sand. The alleged witnesses aren't named. This incident is also mentioned by Underwood (1994, p. 212; 2013, p. 337).

Report 10 (Sandwood Bay)

Fraser (2010, p. 147) mentions that, in 1986, some fishermen encountered a huge man in a long, black coat. The figure reportedly disappeared in front of their eyes, in

the direction of the beach. Fraser doesn't give a specific reference for the story, although he indicates (p. 150) that it had been passed on to Peter Underwood. I wonder whether it's a variant of a tale, told by an Angus Morrison, and quoted in Macdonald Robertson's book (pp. 115-6) concerning an occasion when Morrison supposedly saw what he took to be the Devil, a few miles from Sandwood Bay.

Report 11 (Sandwood Bay)

Without citing a source, Green (1974, p. 247) refers to a party of 10 hikers who visited the bay in 1969, not having heard of its reputation for being haunted. From the top of a sand dune, one of them noticed that there was already someone on the sand. But by the time the rest of the party had reached the bay, it was deserted. The figure of 'an old sailor' (the single quotation marks are Green's – maybe he's quoting the witness) had vanished.

Green explains that once they were on the flat, the party of hikers wandered over to the wreck of a wooden ship, which was almost completely buried in the sand. He states that one of them noticed a set of bare footprints going from the water's edge to the wreck and then back to the sea. However, Green acknowledges that someone in a boat, or a skin-diver, could have stepped ashore, creating the prints.

Report 12 (Sandwood Bay)

There have supposedly been mermaid sightings at Sandwood Bay. But since the details are sketchy, I'll consider them under this single subheading.

According to Underwood (2013, p. 335-6), Sandy Gunn told Macdonald Robertson that, in January 1900, while checking his sheep, he saw a very beautiful mermaid marooned on a rock at Sandwood Bay. Gunn and his dog reportedly turned and fled. Without citing references, Underwood (*ibid.*, p. 336) states that two girls claimed to have seen a mermaid slipping from a rock at Sandwood Bay in the 1930s; that a woman fishing from a boat in 1939 claimed to have seen one; and that a local man admitted that a mermaid had at times been reported thereabouts. But Underwood (*ibid.*, p. 336) suggests that these reports were generated by a seal, or something similar, perhaps covered with seaweed.

Report 13 (Sandwood Cottage)

Without giving a date, Macdonald Robertson (1995, p. 42) refers to an incident involving Sandy Gunn, whom he quotes. After a day with his sheep, Gunn decided to sleep overnight at Sandwood Cottage. Before retiring to bed in the room above the kitchen, he made himself a cup of tea and then locked and bolted the front door. Just as he was about to fall asleep, he started hearing footsteps downstairs. He got out of bed and put his ear to the bedroom door, allegedly hearing the footsteps going from room to room below. After getting dressed and going downstairs, he found nothing, despite checking every room. He reportedly went back to bed and heard no more footsteps.

Underwood (1980, p. 172; 1994, pp. 212-3; 2013, 337-8) refers to the same incident. In his 1980 book, he quotes Gunn, without naming him. Part of the quotation is identical to that appearing in Macdonald Robertson's book,

but there are also some differences in the wording. According to Underwood, “the old shepherd” thought the footsteps were related to the spirit of a deceased, wealthy Australian – someone who had stayed at the cottage while fishing at Sandwood Loch. He had allegedly become enamoured of “the place” (I presume this refers to the area and not specifically to the cottage) and had returned to it whenever he could, year after year. However, there is no mention of this in Macdonald Robertson’s book (at least, not in the 1995 edition). Furthermore, the elderly woman whom Fraser spoke to during his 1988 trip had no recollection that Sandwood Cottage had ever been occupied by an Australian.



Sandwood Cottage

The notion that this remote and untenanted cottage provided the wherewithal for making tea strains my credulity slightly, although it's conceivable that Gunn had some tea with him when he arrived. He's quoted as saying that he took off his clothes before he "went to bed", which could be seen as implying that there were bed clothes there in addition to a bed. Again, that seems unlikely for a deserted cottage, although it's conceivable that the night was unusually warm and that Gunn was able to sleep naked. It's also possible that Gunn used the phrase "went to bed" without meaning to imply that he actually slept in, or on, a bed – he may have slept on the floor.

Report 14 (Sandwood Cottage)

Without giving a date or naming the alleged witness, Underwood (1980, pp. 172-3) refers to an occasion when an old fisherman, who had been helping to collect some sheep for a friend, decided to spend the night at the cottage. He was reportedly asleep in a room on the ground floor when, around midnight, he was awakened by the barking of his dog. He heard footsteps approaching the cottage and then heard a knock on the window-pane of the room he was in. In the moonlight, he saw the face of a bearded sailor looking into the cottage through the window. But when he opened the door to see who the visitor was, there was no sign of anyone. Despite carefully searching the whole cottage, inside and out, he found nothing to account for what he had seen. This story is also mentioned, with some slight differences, by Underwood (1994, p. 213; 2013, pp. 338-9).

Report 15 (Sandwood Cottage)

Underwood (1980, p. 173) mentions another occasion when the above-mentioned man spent a night, alone, in the cottage. Sleeping in the same ground floor room, he allegedly awoke with the feeling that a thick, heavy, black mass was pressing down on him. It was as if he were being suffocated. He resolved not to spend another night there.

Report 16 (Sandwood Cottage)

Without giving a date, Underwood (1980, pp. 173-4) relates that two very tired walkers from Surrey decided to spend a night in the cottage before continuing their journey. The unnamed duo allegedly fled at dawn and then told the first person they met, a local postmaster, about the ghastly time they had. They reportedly had been woken by a fearful noise, so loud that it seemed as though all the windows and doors were being smashed. The whole cottage vibrated. A noise then seemed to come from the room above them, like that of a horse stamping and pawing. The noise – it is not clear whether Underwood is referring to the whole sequence of strange sounds or just those suggestive of a horse – appeared to last four or five minutes, during which time every part of the cottage seemed to come apart and then close up again. The foundations appeared to rock and sway.

This tale is also mentioned in Underwood's 1994 book *Nights in Haunted Houses* (pp. 213-4) and in his 2013 book *Where the Ghosts Walk* (p. 339). In these books, he gives the date as September 1970. However, the story seems to be a mutated version of a dramatic, but undated, tale in Macdonald Robertson's book (pp. 71-2) concerning a completely different location – an allegedly haunted house

in Glen Urquhart, some 85 miles from Sandwood Cottage (as the crow flies). The supposed witness in the Glen Urquhart case was none other than the aforementioned Sandy Gunn! The description of the alleged phenomena at the Glen Urquhart site is very similar to that given by Underwood in respect of the walkers who supposedly spent a night at Sandwood Cottage. For example, both accounts mention sounds suggestive of windows and doors being smashed, and of sounds like those of a horse trampling above.³

Report 17 (Sandwood Cottage)

Although John Fraser did not experience any apparitional phenomena or ghostly sounds during his night in the cottage in April 1988, he found that the new batteries of his tape-recorder had mysteriously drained (Fraser, 2010, p. 148). He also alludes to one or more problems with his camera but doesn't elaborate (p. 150). However, given the absence of other manifestations that night, he suggests that these difficulties with his equipment were merely coincidental. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that equipment malfunctions have been reported in connection with the investigation of other supposedly haunted sites, and there's at least one other report of this happening at Sandwood Cottage (see below).

Report 18 (Sandwood Cottage)

According to Underwood (2013, p. 341), a Trevor Kenward led a party of four investigators on a visit to the area in August 1996. They visited the cottage, but it's not clear from Underwood's account whether they spent a night there. At any rate, they reportedly experienced some

difficulties with their equipment, although Underwood doesn't specify the details. A frame from video film taken by them showed what looked like a face. Another frame showed some strange lights; and they recorded some odd sounds. However, Underwood doesn't say whether any of these things were actually experienced by the investigators at the time. With one exception, "trigger objects" weren't moved – one appeared to have moved about an inch. (A "trigger object" is one placed in a particular spot, perhaps with a circle drawn around it, and then checked later to see whether it has been displaced by some paranormal force.)

Report 19 (Sandwood Cottage)

In or around 2002, Nick Kyle and his partner (later wife), and another couple, whom I'll refer to as Mary and Bob (not their real names), visited the area. They erected tents within the shell of Sandwood Cottage and spent the night there, during which Mary and Bob heard footsteps, just inches from their heads. In an e-mail to me in September 2020, Kyle explained:

...when [Mary and Bob] yelled, we immediately jumped from our adjacent tents, inside the cottage walls, with torches. There were no sheep or any animals close or running away from us in any direction. [Mary and Bob] both said that it was not animal steps that they heard. Based on my knowledge of them at that time (and since), they were not frightened. However, prior to this experience, much earlier in the evening, I did express mediumistic impressions that I had of an old couple who had lived in the cottage and who wanted us to leave, so perhaps [Mary and Bob]

were influenced by this. There's not much more evidential detail to add really, but since this might be of interest, I'll elaborate a little.

Shortly after I arrived at the cottage, when I was alone, I became aware of a thin old poorly-dressed lady at one end of the cottage, in a psychic sense (not able to be seen or heard by others). When I introduced myself, she asked in an irritated tone why I was there. I explained that we had heard that there were ghosts in and around the cottage and we intended to spend the night in the cottage. She said that she didn't want that and she left, saying that she was going to get her husband. Several minutes later, she returned with a gaunt man in rustic clothes that I presumed was her husband, who said that he had been told that we were there to find ghosts. He said grumpily, "We don't have no truck with that." I stated very respectfully that we still wanted to stay overnight and asked for their co-operation and they vanished. When I told the others of my experiences, I remember apologising for the expression "We don't have no truck with that" because I thought that this was a pejorative expression from my own vocabulary drawn from a later world of vehicles, but it turns out that this is a very old expression that could have been used over a century earlier.

Wearing my sceptical hat, there is a continuous roar from the waves on the beach that reverberates up the small glen and this could contribute background noise to confuse listeners who aren't

used to it. Ghost stories before bed, in an atmospheric location, with noises and giggles (neither of us had all of our tent pieces) – it wouldn't have taken much to imagine the rest.

DISCUSSION

A Dumbarton-born man called James McRory Smith (1925-1999) spent a lot of time living as a recluse in north-west Sutherland. According to a press report, he started living at Strathchailleach bothy, a former shepherd's cottage, in 1962.⁴ McRory Smith, as the article refers to him,⁵ was reportedly there for decades, although I don't know whether that was on a more or less continuous basis or whether he came and went (perhaps seasonally). The bothy is remote (even remoter than Sandwood Cottage), but McRory Smith would have been seen out and about when he walked into inhabited areas to collect his social security benefits and, later, his pension, and to buy provisions. Ill-health led him to leave Strathchailleach around 1996 and move into a caravan at Kinlochbervie harbour. Fraser (2010, p. 148) notes that McRory Smith's description well matched that of the ghostly sailor, and he discusses the possibility that sightings of the supposed ghost were generated by the flesh-and-blood McRory Smith. But, as he points out, some of the supposed sightings predate the time when McRory Smith was in the area, and not all of the reported incidents have featured a bearded sailor. A problem with attributing the sailor sightings to a flesh-and-blood person is that a couple of the accounts (Reports 8 and 9, above) mention an absence of footprints where the figure had been seen.

There is a common theme to some of the ghost stories about the Sandwood Bay area: that of a discarnate spirit being very proprietary about items associated with its former earthly life. In Report 3, for instance, the spirit of a sailor was seemingly upset by the fact that a woman had taken a bit of wood from a shipwrecked boat. And in Report 6, the ghost commanded a crofter and his son to leave his (the ghost's) property alone. To me, this smacks of dramatic storytelling, in a folkloric vein, rather than something historically true; and it makes the very traditional, but questionable, assumption that ghosts are spirits.

In his conclusions about the supposed haunting of the bay and the cottage, John Fraser (2010, p. 150) refers to "well-documented sightings at regular intervals", the majority of which remain "genuine anomalies". (For "sightings", we should read *incidents*, since not all of the reports entail visual phenomena.) But given that some of the reports are undated, I do not think we can assume that there's been any temporal regularity to the alleged manifestations. Furthermore, judging from the instances I have cited, *none* of the reports is well-documented, with most of the stories amounting to no more than unsubstantiated folklore. Maybe the bay and the cottage are, or once were, haunted, but the available evidence appears rather thin.

Investigators themselves may unwittingly instigate psi phenomena on occasions. It's conceivable that the loss of power from the batteries of Fraser's tape recorder (see Report 17) was an effect of that type. Similarly, regarding Report 18, some sort of psychokinetic effect may have

been unwittingly manifested by one or more of the investigators. In respect of Report 19, as Nick Kyle observes, the status of the footsteps heard by his friends Mary and Bob is uncertain.

Leaving aside the question of whether genuinely ghostly phenomena have occurred in the Sandwood Bay area, there is a degree of mystery concerning Peter Underwood's reporting of what has allegedly happened there. For instance, in respect of Report 16, I am puzzled about how a story (most likely fictitious) concerning Glen Urquhart has morphed and been presented as a factual incident concerning Sandwood Cottage.

The story concerning the flat at Rothesay Place in Edinburgh (Report 4) intrigues me, but since there are different versions, I am unsure about what precisely occurred there and whether there was any real connection with Sandwood Cottage.

NOTES

1. The assertion that Sandwood Cottage is the most remote in Scotland is incorrect.
2. Searching on the Internet, I discovered that a Miss E. M. Van Horne of 5 Rothesay Place, Edinburgh, became a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland in 1954. She may have been a daughter of the Mrs. Van Horne mentioned by Halliday.
3. Regarding the supposed Glen Urquhart haunting, Gunn claimed that the noises occurred every third night and that he endured the situation for six weeks with the Bible under his pillow (Macdonald Robertson, 1995, p. 72)! To me, this

sounds like a fictitious story or one that has been highly exaggerated.

4. ‘Family remember the Highland Hermit’,

<https://www.northern-times.co.uk/news/family-remember-the-highland-hermit-149780/>

NB: The article says that the bothy is north of Sandwood Bay, but it is actually about a mile and a half east of it.

5. The inclusion of ‘McRory’ as part of the surname (as opposed to its being considered a middle name) may be an affectation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Robert Brown for help in modifying Figure 1 (created for me by Stefan Lobuczek in 2012). I would like to thank Ron Halliday and Nick Kyle for providing me with information, and David T. Muir for proofreading this article.

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Experimental Research into the Possibility of the Psychological Detection of Remote Locations

William J Eyre, Oriol Blissett, Michael Blissett and Fiona Siddall

ABSTRACT

This experimental study was designed to ascertain whether there is evidence that a person physically removed from a random location, attended by one or more participants (ppts), can, by psychic means, elicit information about that location. The method is derived from those documented by Pedler (1981) and Wagner (2014). Whilst the results showed little evidence of such an ability, more positive results have been claimed by other researchers and it is hoped that this paper will demonstrate to other potential ASSAP researchers the practicality of carrying out such experiments.

BACKGROUND

Over the years, various researchers, including, most notably, Doctors Targ and Puthoff, have claimed that it is possible for someone with at least some limited psychic ability (located in the laboratory and known as the inbound participant) to be able to describe and/or draw the features of a remote location, when there is no normal means to obtain that information. Such research has sometimes been carried out in such a way that one or more persons (known as the outbound participants) are present during the experiment at the remote location and sometimes with no-one present at the remote location.

The present study utilises outbound ppts, thus giving two possible methods by which a successful result could be obtained, i.e. remote viewing (travelling clairvoyance) or

telepathy. In the event of a successful result, the current study does not aim to determine which psychic method has been used but merely to show whether such detection is possible by psychic means.

Having carried out two runs of one experiment, utilising a set of three outbound ppts, with no apparent success, the experimenters considered that the possible explanation for that lack of success might have been 'crossed wires' occurring telepathically between the outbound ppts and the inbound ppt. Therefore it was decided to carry out a further experiment, again consisting of two runs, with just one outbound ppt, to see whether that produced better results.

AIM AND HYPOTHESES

The aim of the study was to see whether it is possible for a person situated at one location to produce information by psychic means about randomly chosen locations that are physically remote from that person.

The original operationalised hypothesis was that

a ppt showing slight signs of psychic ability, situated at one location, with no access to normal means of communication, will be able to describe specific, randomly chosen remote locations whilst a set of other ppts is physically present at the remote locations.

Prior to the second experiment being carried out, the revised operationalised hypothesis was that

a ppt showing slight signs of psychic ability, situated at one location, with no access to normal means of communication, will be able to describe specific, randomly chosen remote locations with greater

accuracy whilst a single ppt is physically present at the remote locations than whilst multiple ppts are physically present at the remote locations.

METHOD

Design

Originally, a quasi-double-blind laboratory and field experiment was to be carried out. After the first experiment, the research took the form of a double-blind laboratory and field experiment using an independent measures design.

Participants

It was initially planned to utilise one inbound ppt who was a member of CPSG (Chesterfield Psychic Study Group) who was perceived to have at least some limited psychic sensitivity, together with an opportunity sample of three outbound ppts who were members of CPSG. For the second experiment, it was planned to utilise one inbound ppt and just one outbound ppt.

Apparatus

The apparatus required consisted of:

a camera

a car

paper and pencil

dice and shaker.

PROCEDURE

Prior to the day of the experiment:

Experimenter 4 (Siddall) selected, visited, photographed and made written notes of six remote sites, each of them being

no more than half an hour's drive from the base location. She put the written notes and photographs into separate, sealed envelopes. The front of the envelopes were numbered (on the outside) from 1 to 6 and the experimenter signed her name across the sealed part of the back of each envelope. She passed the envelopes to Experimenter 2 (O Blissett), who kept them in a safe location until the day of the experiment.

Two runs of the experiment were to take place. A start and end time for each run were decided upon, allowing for driving time from the base location to the most remote possible location and the driving / walking time between the two possible remote locations that were furthest apart.

On the day of the experiment:

Experimenters 2 and 3 (M Blissett) and all the ppts met at the base location. The sealed envelopes were made available for everyone present to see and everyone present was to check that the signatures on the back of the envelopes were still intact in relation to where the envelopes were sealed. Experimenter 2 shook a dice in view of everyone present, made a note of the number, selected the envelope with the corresponding number and passed it to Experimenter 3. The dice was again shaken until a number was thrown other than that of the first selected envelope. Again, the number was noted and the appropriate envelope was selected and passed to Experimenter 3. Experimenters 2 and 3 ensured that from this point in time until the end of the second run of the experiment no telephones were used either by them (except in the case of an emergency) or by the various ppts.

1. Experimenter 3 transferred to his car, along with the outbound ppts. Experimenter 3 opened the

sealed envelope with the lower of the two numbers selected. He drove with the outbound ppts to the identified remote location. Meanwhile, the inbound ppt relaxed, in preparation to undertake the experiment.

2. At the agreed start time of the experiment, Experimenter 2 instructed the inbound ppt to start concentrating on the remote location to which the outbound ppts had gone and to make drawings of and/or make notes of and/or say out loud a description of, that which he was mentally seeing (in the latter case, Experimenter 2 would have needed to write down the ppt's spoken words). The inbound ppt was asked to avoid analytical overlay and merely provide first impressions.
3. Also at that start time, Experimenter 3 instructed the outbound ppts to wander round the remote location, looking closely at the features of the area and trying to transmit those images (mentally) to the inbound ppt. Experimenter 3 ensured that the outbound ppts stayed within sight of him.
4. At the agreed end time (20 minutes after the start time), Experimenter 2 informed the inbound ppt that he could stop concentrating and deposited the ppt's drawings and/or notes and/or the experimenter's dictated notes in an envelope and sealed it, marking the outside of the envelope as 'first experiment'. At the same time, Experimenter 3 informed the outbound ppts that they could return to the car.

For the second run of the experiment, steps 1 to 4 were repeated, Experimenter 3 utilising the remaining sealed envelope in his possession and Experimenter 2 marking her

sealed envelope (containing the inbound ppt's impressions) as 'second experiment'.

Note – Experimenter 3 needed to use his judgement, upon opening the second envelope, as to whether it made more sense to drive to the second location or to walk with the outbound ppts to it, depending on the distance involved.

After the day of the experiment:

The sealed envelopes containing the inbound ppt's impressions, Experimenter 2's note of which numbered envelope corresponded to which run of the experiment and the envelopes containing Experimenter 4's photographs and notes were passed to Experimenter 1 (Eyre), who, at his leisure, carried out an impartial judgement as to whether there was a match between the mentally received images of the chosen remote locations and the actual details of the locations. To assist in this judgement, he visited each of the chosen locations to inspect them for himself.

Second experiment:

At a later date, an additional experiment was carried out, again consisting of two runs, this time utilising a different inbound ppt and a single, different outbound ppt. The procedure was exactly as above, selecting two random envelopes (photographs and notes) from the four unused envelopes used in the first experiment.

RESULTS

First Experiment, First Run

Two photographs of 'Curious Goods' (the New Age shop in Chesterfield) were supplied by experimenter 4, as shown in figure 1.



Figure 1: first experiment, first run photos.

The impressions produced by the inbound ppt were as shown in figure 2 (next page).

Although there was a stand with flowers just to one side of the location and hanging baskets to the other side, this was deemed to be a mismatch.

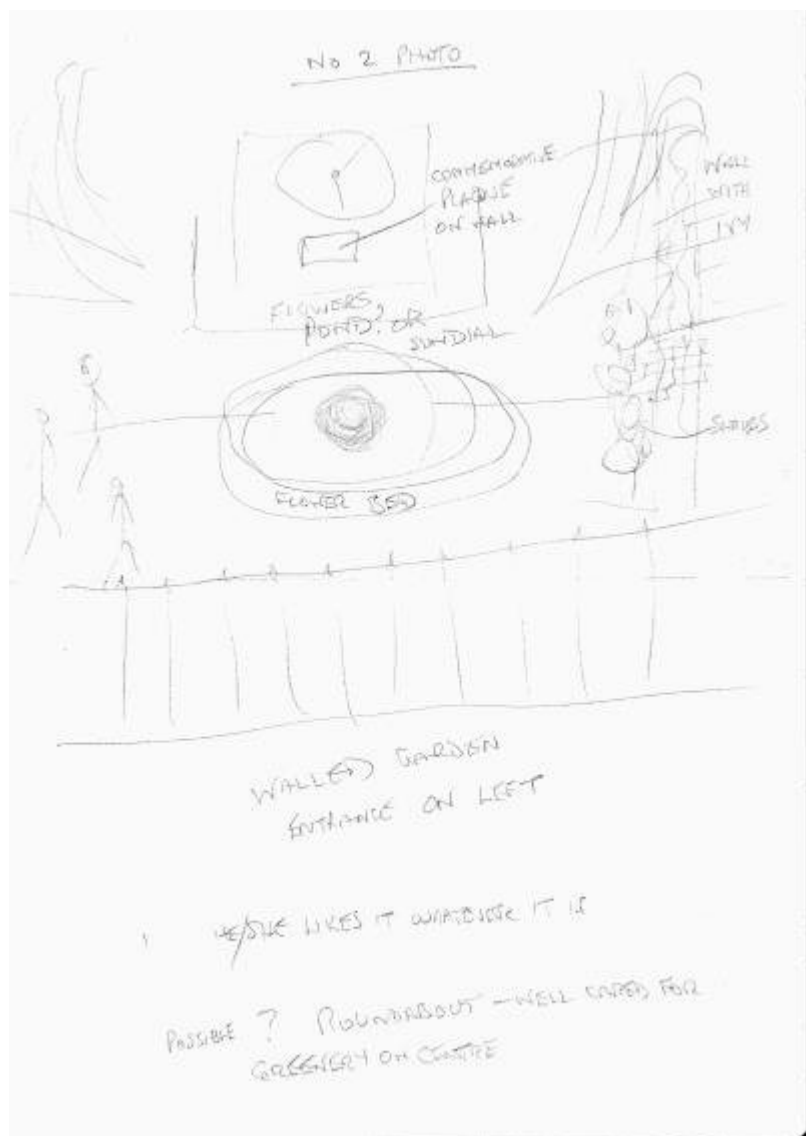


Figure 2: first experiment, first run results

First Experiment, Second Run

Two photographs of Falcon Yard, Chesterfield were supplied by experimenter 4, as shown in figure 3.



Figure 3: first experiment, second run photos.

The impressions produced by the inbound ppt were as shown in figure 4. See next page.

This was deemed to be a mismatch.

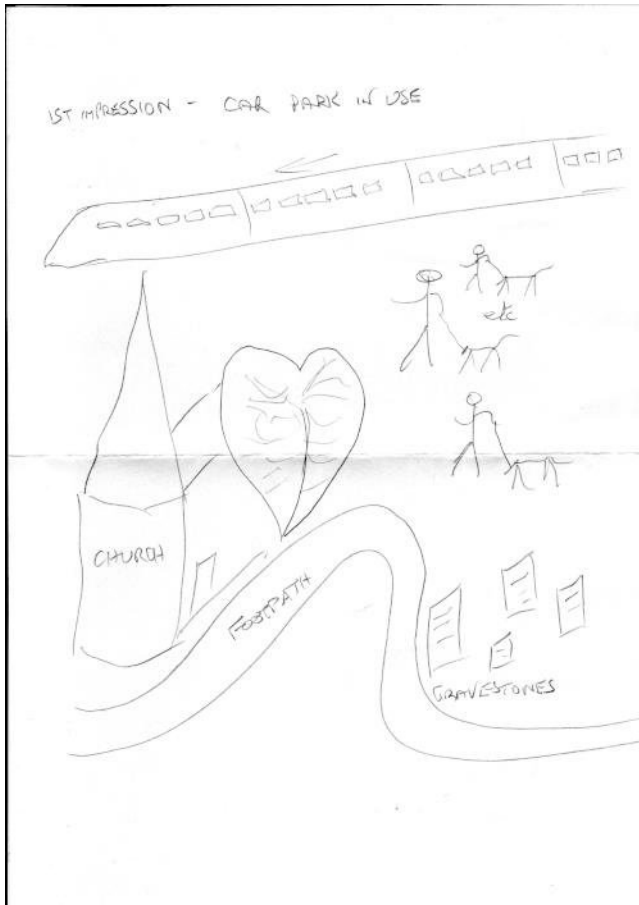


Figure 4: first experiment, second run results

Second Experiment, First Run

A photograph of Elder Yard Unitarian Chapel, Chesterfield, together with its frontage, were supplied by experimenter 4, as shown in figure 5.



Second experiment, first run photo.

The impressions produced by the inbound ppt were as follows:

IMPRESSION	RESULT
Like Barbara Hepworth Rosegarden sculpture – stone / rock donut type but not circular – perfect	Mismatch
Grass – fake grass?	Match
Wild birds	Match
Outside space	Match
Outdoor lamp stand?	Match
Something triangular?	Match (roof)
Wooden slatted bench?	Match
Black metal?	Match (railings, not visible in photo)
Townhall gardens?	Mismatch
Paving slabs?	Match
Tree(s)	Match
Flag? British	Mismatch
Plants – dying back for winter?	Match
Words / letters carved into brass plaque / into marble or stone?	Match
Dog?	Indeterminate
Empty drink round carton – straw in it? – on floor	Indeterminate
Rubbish bin? Orange peel?	Mismatch
Saltergate multi storey car park	Mismatch
Man with flat cap & full length dark coat? Pipe? String bag?	Mismatch

This was deemed to be a partial match.

Second Experiment, Second Run

Two photographs of Theatre Yard, Chesterfield, the main feature of which is a sculpture of a dog, were supplied by experimenter 4, as shown in figure 6.



Figure 6: second experiment, second run photos.

The impressions produced by the inbound ppt were as follows:

- Cars parked?
- Tudor style architecture?
- 2 steps?
- Leaded glass?
- Roads / pavements revised
- People; mobility scooter?
- Tree(s)?

- Travel agent?
- Christmas light(s)
- Bus stop / bus
- Stone columns?
- Stars?
- Crossing(s)
- High buildings / old buildings?
- Light oak thick wooden doors?
- Uneven paving slabs?
- Passage way?
- Outside table / chairs? Menu? Image of circular tables
- Shops

As only the last four items were actually present (although not shown on the photographs) and there was no mention of the dog sculpture, this was deemed to be a mismatch.

COMMENTARY: METHODS AND ISSUES

Whilst remote viewing without outbound ppts has some ecological validity in terms of, for example, the potential for psychics to use such an ability to locate missing persons or to describe the scenes of remote locations where a crime has taken place, it is acknowledged that the method used in this piece of research has only low ecological validity.

Whilst one criticism of this piece of research is the possible lack of foresight on the part of the experimenters in not having decided at the outset that it would be worthwhile carrying out the experiment twice, in order to compare the results of using multiple outbound ppts versus a single outbound ppt, in practice, this made little difference in the execution of the research, as it was possible to use the protocol for the first experiment again, simply by substituting a single outbound ppt.

One confound observed during the second experiment was the apparent difficulty of the outbound ppt to continue to concentrate on the features of the remote locations for the planned duration, with a temptation on his part to be distracted into conversing with experimenter 3. Possible solutions to this would be either to locate experimenter 3 further away from the ppt or to slightly shorten the duration of observation.

As it happens, experimenter 4 chose to photograph all six locations within Chesterfield Town Centre, with some scenes having little in the way of significant distinguishing features. Possibly the telepathic attempts and the judging would have been easier had more dramatically different scenes been used, e.g. a bridge, a park, a hill, although the choice of such locations may have been difficult, given that experimenter 4 knew that all locations, for practical purposes during the execution of the experiments, were to be within half an hour's drive of the base location.

Whilst the method used entailed a qualitative analysis by the impartial judge (experimenter 1) of the results versus the relevant supplied photograph(s), a possible improvement to the experiment, enabling a quantitative analysis, would be to show the inbound ppt a copy of all the available photographs, after he has finished making his own notes, requesting him to identify the scene most closely matching the image mentally picked up, as the probability of the ppt choosing a particular scene could then be compared with chance. This would be possible if two copies of each photograph were to be printed, i.e. one for use in the laboratory and one for use in the field. However, that method would potentially have its own difficulties, e.g. seeing all possible scenes at the end of run 1 could put ideas

into the inbound ppt's mind as to what the scene for run 2 would look like.

CONCLUSION

It was concluded that there was little evidence generally for a person situated at one location, with no access to normal means of communication, to be able to describe specific, randomly chosen remote locations but that such an ability may be slightly enhanced when there is one, and only one, ppt physically present at the remote locations.

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[Accessed 14th July 2014]

British UFOs & Ufology - George Adamski's long shadow.

Robert Moore.

ABSTRACT

Today, the term "UFO entity" evokes an image of the atypical "Grey" - a- small, foetus like humanoid with a large head and black wrap-round eyes. And in 2020 the term "UFO" is popularly associated as much with mystery black flying triangles as it does to a traditional "flying saucers".

But decades ago (but still within living memory) the popular conception of both was radically different. While there was a wide diversity of "UFO" shapes, in the British media during the 1950s and 60's their appearance one form dominated popular discourse and imagery. While, of course, to a large part this was media shorthand for a then novel concept it was also surprisingly reflected in actual British reports at the time. And the sobering thing of all in this that this conception was based on a probable hoax, relating to entities who claimed to originate from a place we now know to be a living version of hell. From the mid 1950s onward the popular conception of a UFO entity was (and it seems surprising to recount this now) a tall, blond-haired androgynous being in a one-piece outfit.

Anyone who has even just briefly read around the history of Ufology will recognise this as a description of a so-called "Adamski" type flying saucer (or "scout ship") and the

entities associated with it, who were reputedly from the planet Venus.

George Adamski was a Polish-American born in 1891 who served in the US army just prior to World War 1 and had a track record of involvement in bootlegging and pseudo religious cults; the latter, in fact, created to cover up his involvement with the former! Long before his involvement in the flying saucer scene he was notably involved in the Californian occult scene. In 1952 Adamski became the first so-called classic style *contactee*; one of many individuals (mostly American) who claimed contacts with human-like entities, usually from planets within our solar system. His reported alien congress occurred in the Mohave desert in November 1952, with a tall, long blond-haired androgynous being called *Orthon* (and his craft) who in this (and later) contacts stated came from Venus, the second planet of our solar system.

Unlike contemporary UFO abductions, this meeting was an aloof discussion - involving sign language and telepathy - of topics relating to their origin and concerns, which seemed focused on be humanity's development of atomic weapons. Throughout his alleged involvement with flying saucers Adamski reputedly took numerous photographs of the UFOs he observed (often through his reflector telescope).

The most famous of his images featured a so-called Venusian "*scout ship*"; which, as a consequence, was subsequently used in numerous media representation of UFOs up to the present day. This now iconic form of "flying saucer" is presented as being around 12 metres (40 feet) in size. It is depicted as having a "pill box" upper superstructure

with a rounded top and portholes running along its centre. Below this was a flared, skirt-like lower body with a distinctive under-section featuring (note this) an arrangement of three spheres oriented in a triangular configuration. This was also the craft supposed seen in association with “Orthon” during Adamski’s reputed first November 1952 contact. Less common were images of a supposed cigar shaped “mother ship” reputedly be used by the Scout ships as a base vessel. One of Adamski’s images purportedly shows such a vessel surrounded by smaller craft.

His initial claims were published a year later in a book co-authored with Desmond Leslie called *Flying Saucers have Landed* in 1953. While the book features Adamski’s contact on the cover his contact claim is actually featured in the second half of the book – the first section being an overview (written by Desmond Leslie) of historical UFOs. It also featured supposed photographs of Adamski’s Scout Ship”. This work catapulted Adamski into public notice.

As a consequence he went on numerous lecture tours (including several to the United Kingdom) where he met various celebrities and devotees. It was followed by two less popular sequels thereafter; *Inside the Spaceships* in 1955 and *Flying Saucers Farewell* in 1961. The former sequel features a claim Adamski saw lifeforms moving on the Moon’s surface, an allegation that was treated with scepticism even by his supporters.

While many UFO researchers were highly sceptical of his claims (more so of his claimed later contacts) he accumulated a small worldwide cabal of followers. On the

publication of his first book others (mostly in the USA and mostly from California) claimed similar contacts with entities from Mars, Venus and other worlds of our solar system, many publishing books, giving lectures and presenting similar looking pictorial imagery. The information imparted by these beings were heavy on spirituality but light on any verifiable scientific facts.

As previously mentioned, *Flying Saucers have Landed*, Adamski's book was initially published in England (by Messrs. Werner Laurie & Co) around September-October 1953. Prior to that date his claim was seemingly little known in the United Kingdom (*Flying Saucer News* Summer 1953).

Since Adamski's death on the 23rd April, 1965 his claims continue to intrigue sections of the UFO community, who while sceptical of some aspects of his contact claims, believe there was some real core experience underlying it. Books were written as late as the early 1980's (most notably by Timothy Good) defending his claims.

It is only doing a service to truth to note Adamski was at least a hustler and probably an outrageous conman. His track record includes setting up a religious organisation (the *Royal order of Tibet*) as a front for bootlegging and writing a science fiction novel suspiciously close in content to a later claimed contact with various interplanetary humanoids. And there is the issue of him being a self-styled professor and inferring an association with Mount Palomar - when in actuality he merely ran a hamburger store near the observatory! His contact tale seems to be a combination of

popular pulp science fiction combined with his questionable esoteric knowledge.

This presentation does not claim that Adamski invented the concept of the “domed disc” or “flying bell” type UFOs. While the first “flying saucers” were in the main featureless discs “10 times longer than their thickness” this is not exclusively so. As early as Aug 15 1947, there is an observation originating from Snake River Canyon, Idaho, describing an object resembling a hat with a smoke-emitting “jet” on one side, resembling the middle portion of Adamski’s Scout craft (less some features and more a few others...).

At Kerkrade, Holland, on the Aug (6,7 or 8) 1952 a UFO was reported, described as a flat disc with a rectangular featureless cabin with a spike on top. This class of “hat shaped” UFO continued to be reported into modern times, a notable example occurring near Jolliet, Illinois on May 8th, 1977 and deemed inexplicable by Allan Hendry (Hendry 1980).

Likewise, reports of tubular or “cigar” shaped UFOs also predate Adamski, among the first reported being seen over Montgomery Alabama event on the 13th July 1948. Similar shaped forms with what were perceived as a ancillary domed disc/ Saturn shaped “craft” were reported several times over Galiac & Oloron, France, during Oct 1952.

Even the suggestion that UFOs originate from Venus predates 1952 – Frank Scully’s 1950 work *Behind the Flying Saucers*” stating that reputed crashed saucers recovered from Aztec, New Mexico came from this planet.

Collectively, this suggests Adamski could have been aware of some existent concepts relating to “flying saucers” that he could have incorporated into his claimed UFO observations and contact narrative claims.

While the first known claimed British UFO observation made in June 1947 was fairly unspectacular (and likely attributable to a smoke ring from a nearby railway station) numerous reports allude to atypical flying disc observations from that date up to 1953. In the main they describe objects with few (if any) surface features. Their range of forms was comparable to other countries – cigar-like, discs, spheres and mystery lights. Nonetheless this seemed to change to some degree after the release of *Flying Saucers has landed* in the UK during September-October 1953...

In **Norwich**, on the **6th October 1953**, a Mr. F. Potter, a business owner and long-time amateur astronomer observed, on leaving his house at 7:15pm a strange yellow light in the South Western sky. Viewing this light through a 3 inch refracting telescope seeming resolved it into an elaborate form with a dark grey bell-like body and a flattened dome on top. This dome possessed a series of portholes with rays of light streaming from it. The UFO was viewed for around three and a half minutes. Several other observers also claimed to see the same object.

While the UFO has similarities to Adamski's UFO there are also notable differences. While a significant report it is also notable for its circumstantial factors. Firstly, Potter mostly observed the UFO through his telescope, as Adamski claimed to have observed (and photographed) his. Secondly, this event occurred shortly after the publication of *Flying*

Saucers had landed, a fact mentioned in newspaper discussions on the event. Desmond Leslie even gave a lecture on Adamski's book in the town on the 20th October. (Hanson and Holloway 2010, *Flying Saucer News* Autumn 1953).

At **Bexleyheath, greater London** between **12.30-1.00pm** on the 17th July 1955 there were numerous observations of a circa 25ft diameter bell-shaped UFO described as having a "greyish" or "beaten silver" surface and an under-surface with either "suckers", "three spheres" or "lights" underneath. It was stationary for a few minutes before shooting up rapidly into the sky. There are several accounts of this event that differ somewhat on various salient details (Hanson and Holloway 2010).

At **Ranton, Staffs 21st October 1954** witness became aware of a sound like water being poured on a fire. Looked up at sky and observed a "Sombrero" shaped object with two entities looking out of a window. These entities shared close comparison with Adamski's Venusians – with long blond hair and high foreheads (Hanson and Holloway 2010).

At **Coniston, Lake District**, at around 11am on the **15th February 1955**, two children (Steven Darbishire and Adrian Meyer) reputedly saw a "*strange silvery round object with a silvery, glassy appearance*". It was further described as a "*solid metal-like thing with a dome (with) portholes, and three humps or landing domes underneath*" It was reportedly seen at a low elevation, moved behind a feature and then came into view a few seconds later, it tipped upon its side and shot up into the air with a deep swishing sound.

Darbishire claimed to have taken several images of the UFO, which, while they came out blurred, had sufficient detail to make out its basic shape.

On examination of these pictures an engineer called Leonard Cramp concluded the “UFO” depicted had the same configuration as Adamski’s Scout Ship. The witness also came into contact with Desmond Leslie (the co-author of “flying saucers have landed” and subsequently met Adamski on one of his later visits to the UK. Today, these pictures are now mostly forgotten or remembered as hoaxes. Like other reputed British UFO images of this era (again, mostly taken by children) their originators later stated they were indeed hoaxes – but later retracted this confession, leaving these photographs in conceptual limbo. (Flying Saucer News, Spring 1954, Roberts & Clarke 2000a)

In this light it is both ironic (and telling) that the Spring 1954 has this to say of the Darbishire pictures

“... Let's not avoid the all-important issue any longer - If Stephen (Darbishire) is telling the truth so is Adamski - There is no two ways about it”. This effectively summarises the conundrum British ufology was faced with. So many British sighting accounts were describing flying saucers with Adamski scout ship features that they seemingly vindicated his wild claims (albeit indirectly).

At **Bentley, Crewe** at 7.30pm on the **15th August 1955** a post-master claimed to see in the north western sky a domed saucer hovering in the North Western sky. It was seemingly made of a glassy or reflective metal like material and seemed to be oriented on its side. The UFO remained stationary for a while, then started to move away, turning its underside

toward the observer before moving away rapidly. The illustration this phenomenon reproduced in *Flying Saucer News* shows a distinctly Adamski scout-ship like form, including three prominent spheres on its underside. (*Flying Saucer News*, Issue 11 Spring 1956).

At **Ryde**, Isle of Wight on **July 3rd 1961** at around 12:15 am two women from a sea-facing window in their house saw what they first believed was an illuminated hovercraft approaching them at low level. This form glowed with an orange light with (as with the Norwich case) light streaming out of out what the observers took to be “portholes”. The UFO then shot upwards at rapid speed, leaving a luminous ring that persisted for a few minutes. Leonard Cramp also interviewed the witnesses and acquired drawings from one of the witnesses of what was reputedly seen– which depicts an Adamski style “Scout ship” type flying saucer, minus the three “landing spheres” on the underside (Cramp 2001, LUFORO Bulletin Nov-Dec 1961)

In **Aston, Birmingham**, from the 18th November 1957 up to January 1958 an entity appeared in the front room of Cynthia Appleton. This being had long blond hair and a bright one piece outfit and claimed to be from “*Ghanasvarn*”, a continent on the planet Venus. During one contact the being showed Appleton an image of a domed disc with three half spheres on the underside. One of their claimed reasons for their presence on Earth was that they were looking for a substance called “Titium”. Their supposed dialog featured scientific matters that were beyond the understanding of the witness. The entity predicted the witness would give birth to a baby boy (Matthew) – which subsequently occurred some nine months later. The Appletons

subsequently vanished from public view thereafter and nothing more is mentioned or known of them.

On the 24th April 1965 at **Scoriton, Devon** an individual called Arthur Bryant claimed he boarded a landed UFO. In the craft he met two entities along with a more human and youthful-looking individual who said he was called "Yamski"... who, while in conversation with Bryant said "*Des-Les would understand...*". On their departure the aliens promised Bryant "proof of Mantell"; the UFO later reputedly returning and leaving various metal fragments (including portions of a British electro-mechanical computer)! Bryant subsequently died from a brain tumour in June 1967. "Yamski" was interpreted by some as being the reincarnation of George Adamski, given the supposed landing occurred the day after Adamski's death.

This contact claim was widely rejected even by Adamski's supporters (most notably Desmond Leslie). This event also marks the decline of Adamski's influence over British UFO narrative. Following his death new trends - such as UFO abductions - began to dominate the subject, both here and in the US. The results of space probes sent to Venus and Mars during the same epoch also dispelled notions that they could be an abode of intelligent life. Alleged encounters with UFO entities, historically more diverse than today, rarely featured blond haired entities after that date and none claimed to be from Venus; in fact, if any origin was cited it was from planets well beyond our solar system.

While claimed observations of UFOs resembling Adamski's scout ship began to decline from the early 1960s onwards, it is notable that UFOs resembling streamlined versions of this

reputed form continue to this day. These often feature a lower flanged disc with an upper oblong turret and a rounded base, but minus the elaborate underside spheres and under-section.

But even here possible lingering traces of Adamski's influence can be found. Sightings of modern "mystery triangles" describe their underside as possessing a configuration of three lights, often surrounding a central feature comparable to that possessed by the underside of his "scoutship").

So, what can be made of this?

To begin with, we know in 2020 that (unlike the 1950s and early 1960s) Venus cannot be host to androgynous angelic UFO entities or their craft.

While once termed "Earth's twin", and with early 20th century speculation envisaging it as possessing tropical jungles and saurian life forms, the truth about Venus is, alas much less romantic. Space probes launched from the 1960s onwards determined Venus to have an atmospheric pressure some 91 times greater than Earth, a mean temperatures of circa 464 c* (hot enough to melt lead), an atmosphere of carbon dioxide with clouds of sulphuric acid.

Hardly, then, a suitable abode for androgynous angelic beings and their flying discs...

So, could they have had an earthly origin in the form of a novel kind of aviation technology?

In recent decades there has been renewed interest in the idea that Nazi scientists may have created functional “flying discs” during World War Two – most notably by writers such as Nick Cook and several authors of earlier books that pioneered this idea.

It is worth noting that several claimed Nazi UFO designs have similarities to Adamski’s craft. Could these have been found and reused by the allies after the war, after all, the most concordant reports come from this time? Or, more sinisterly, could they have been used by surviving Nazis, misleading Adamski and others for purposes only known to themselves?

There are many rumours relating to Nazi flying discs but few facts. The various claims have either been dispelled as fabrications or exist oddly in isolation from other acknowledged cutting-edge technology such as Von Buran’s Vengeance rockets, various flying wings by the Horton Brothers and other similar efforts. Of all these, two are of special note here;

The *De Glocke* (or “The Bell”), was a supposed Nazi electromagnetically based craft tested in Poland late in World War 2. Original documentation on this craft was reportedly “found” in a filing cabinet in the mid-1990s but it is otherwise unknown to aviation historians, who deem the whole claim a fabrication. As its name infers it was a reputed bell-shaped craft comparable (but not identical) to Adamski’s saucer.

Then there is the infamous *Haunebu*– which first appeared in the book “*Close Encounters of the Foo Fighter kind*” by

Vladimir Terziski published in 1993 (and reprinted in 2017). It claims these craft were built in pre-Nazi Germany under the guidance of aliens and were used to travel to the Moon and Mars before and just after World War 2.

This claim was later expanded around 2000 by a website called "*Nordic Saucer review*", which also gave a timeline of its supposed development. The *Haunebu* supposedly resembled Adamski's "scout craft", albeit equipped with gun turrets and without the distinctive three small spheres on its underside.

While it IS tempting to suggest the various British sightings mentioned above were seeing a *Haunebu* there is not an iota of proof for its reality. There is no documentation of accepted historical providence that supports its actual existence, this craft existing only in the pages of the UFO books and websites promoting its existence. The fact they incorporate the genesis of *Haunebu* with an outlandish uncorrelated alternative history contrary fails to inspire confidence. Yet it has not stopped various manufacturers issuing model kits of this supposed device as if its existence was a proven fact!

There is, of course, another more prosaic solution; does the origins of Adamski's Scout Ship lie not with the Third Reich but with mass production consumer goods in American prior to and after World War 2...

In the early 2000's researcher the late Joel Carpenter noted similarities with the upper section of the "Venus saucer" with the tops of American gasoline lanterns produced by Sears and Roebuck and similar vendors.

As this slide shows, various models by several manufacturers were produced during the 1930s and 40's, with a similar shape and array of vent holes similar to that shown in Adamski's photographs.

Even more damning Carpenter noted slots on the "Venus Scout craft" in the same place where the handles would slot into the top of a gas lantern! It even has a similar surface sheen to these products, along with a distinctive pattern of ridges just below the gas lanterns upper section... again, matching those of the "Scout ship".

Other components of Adamski's "UFO" match other lantern parts, strongly indicating it a composite model made from one or more of these quite prosaic objects. Adamski would likely had had easy access to these items, given they are all of American manufacture and in circulation decades before his photographs were published.

But what then of the claimed British "Scout Ship" reports.

We can be charitable and assume some witnesses were prompted to perceive specific features in the "UFOs" they had observed via (then) prevailing cultural imagery. For example, the Norwich UFO had features similar but not identical to that of Adamski's Scout Ship but was placed in that category as the book was released approximately when the sighting occurred. It appears the Adamski stereotypes were superseded as new UFO tropes and shapes were introduced into public consciousness.

But this does not explain the elements that matched Adamski's experience – such as Potter seeing his UFO mostly

through his telescope (as Adamski reputedly did with some of his UFOs). Such factors (and the early date of this report) suggest that claimants had a limited “store” of UFO experience tropes to contextualise their experience. In other words Potter saw the flying bell through his telescope because Adamski had, and that’s how UFOs were thought to be experienced at that time. This suggests that such cases represent a Dawkins style meme, an idea to enable conception and perception. Of course, Potter may have mistaken a prosaic object that was distorted by the telescope he was using; Hendry reporting similar effects in his 1970s era UFO study.

In regard to the Bexleyheath, Coniston and Ryde observations we also have the possibility that observers were led into ascribing specific (Adamski) style features to their UFO by ideological agents, UFO enthusiasts hopeful that ancillary experiences would vindicate Adamski–Margaret Fry in regard to Bexleyheath and Leonard Cramp in regard to the Ryde case. One suspects this could have also been a factor in the 1955 Betley event as well.... how much did this UFO originally resemble Adamski’s Scout ship?

Indeed, Cramp states in one of his books (UFOs and Anti-Gravity)

“Whether George Adamski sceptics like it or not the logical development of a gravitationally powered space craft, purely from engineering considerations, would almost certainly take the form of the well-known 'scout ship”,

and devotes a whole chapter of this book defending the viability of this supposed class of flying saucer entitled *Vindication of a Scout Ship*.

This, in itself may have been a response to criticisms from sceptics regarding the wide range of UFO forms - which (to their minds) they inferred they were imaginary (Special Report 14 May 1955). NICAP's *The UFO Evidence (1962,1997)*, for example, stresses oval, sphere and cigar-shaped UFOs could be disc shaped forms seen from different angles. Researchers were hoping to find shared attributes in sighting accounts that would vindicate their objective reality.

We must, however, be much less charitable regarding Adamski style images in photographs. It seems likely that the reason the Coniston photographs so closely match is that they were indeed the same type of object – did Darbishire have access to the same gas lantern Adamski possessed?

We are then left with a series of entity experiences (Ranton, Aston and Scoriton). These are easier to account for – they may have been hallucinatory experiences whose context, again, was dictated by image of “Orthon” as promoted by Adamski.

Again, the range of UFO associated imagery was much more limited and so followed this archetype. It is significant that two of these events are single witness events (Scoriton and Aston), the other (Ranton) was mostly observed by one witness, with two other potential witnesses – her children – cowering under a table when this occurred. The brain tumour that resulted in Bryant's demise may also be significant. While Ranton involved a UFO totally unlike Adamski's Scout Ship, one of the Aston events describe Adamski Scout ships – which we know were pictures of gas

lanterns misleadingly represented as pictures of “flying saucers”.

CONCLUSIONS

Sadly, I cannot give you “Proof of Mantel” or Scout Ships from Ghanasvarn, this presentation – only “proof of Sears and Roebuck”. Sadly, there could have been no actual Adamski “scout ship” as it was clearly a model created from a gas lantern.

This is not to say UFOs do not exist – as I have shown basic archetypes for the domed disc and cigar UFO predated Adamski. He did not create the “flying saucer”, domed discs, “hat shape UFOs” or the “flying cigar”. But a distinctive form of UFO began to be reported in the UK once Adamski’s experiences became well known. Some likely “saw” Adamski-like features on their UFOs due to cultural expectation. Others because they were encouraged to do so by motivated UFO enthusiasts.

These accounts were prevalent from circa late 1953 through to 1961. This was the era where Adamski’s long shadow, cast all the way from California, influenced UFO reports.

Nonetheless, elements possessed by Adamski’s “UFO” continue to appear in UFO descriptions up to the present. His fame and notoriety lead to the British musician Adam Tinley adopting the name “*Adamski*” as his stage name in the early 1980s - and is probably the person who most people think of when this name is mentioned today....

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From Red Men to Grey Aliens: The Medieval Origins of the Abduction Myth

David Sivier

Abstract

*Since the works of John Keel and Jacques Vallée in the 1970s, it has become something of a commonplace among UFO researchers that reports of UFO encounters are remarkably similar to stories about the fairies. So much so, in fact, that Keel and Vallée believed that the two were the same phenomenon, which had simply taken different guises. As Europe changed from an agricultural to a modern industrial society, the fairies, or whatever was behind fairy encounters, also changed, taking on the guise of aliens and their spacecraft to fit with the expectations and anxieties of the new, scientific and technological age. This change could be seen in the early 20th century, when some believers in the fairies took the view that they were really extra-terrestrial in origin. Evan-Wentz in his classic study, *The Fairy Faith in the Celtic Countries*, records meeting an 'Irish mystic', who told him that the fairies were an old race, who came from the stars.*

One of the most alarming developments in UFO lore over the fifty years has been alien abductions, in which experiencers, as they prefer to be called, believe they have been physically abducted by aliens and subjected to physical examinations and rape by aliens. For many ufologists, the abduction narrative has its origins in Betty and Barney Hill's interrupted journey. The Hills were an

interracial couple returning from a holiday in Canada, who were captured by aliens and subjected to a physical examination, which included their genitalia. This was elaborated and popularised in the 1980s by horror writer Whitley Strieber in his book, *Communion*. This was accompanied by the emergence of conspiracy theories about the world's governments, especially that of the US, having made covert pacts with the same aliens. These have now established underground alien bases, and supply the US and other governments with alien technology in return for humans to be used as subjects for examination and dismemberment. Supposed witnesses and whistleblowers describe seeing vats of human body parts. This motif may have its origin in anxieties over animal vivisection and spare part surgery. In the Gerry Anderson 1970s SF series, *UFO*, Earth is under attack from aliens, who abduct people for their organs. But the theme of violent dismemberment is also found in one account of a supernatural encounter in medieval England recorded by Thomas of Walsingham in his *Historia Anglicarum*, collected and translated by G.G. Coulton in his *Life in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1910) I: 176-7 .

Walsingham states that in 1343, a youth who had been a member of the household of the baron of Graystock in the north of England, was travelling through the countryside when he noticed the rye rippling. A little red man raised his head above the corn, and began to increase in size. The red man then approached him, caught his horse's bridle, and led him into the field. He was taken to a woman of wondrous beauty, seated with other maidens like her. This woman then commanded them to take the young man from his horse and flay him alive. Then the woman herself

cut through the middle of his head and took out his brain before closing up the wound. The lad immediately became insane. He was saved from his madness, however, by a girl of a certain town he came to. She had also been a member of Baron Graystock's household and took him in and looked after him. Walsingham states that she took him to abroad to saints' shrines in the hope of a cure.

Disappointed, she returned to England, where the lad continued to be tormented by visions of the red man. After six years of madness he was finally cured at the shrine of St. John at Beverley. He fell into a deep sleep, in which the same lady, who had taken away his brain, now appeared and replaced it. The lad then married the woman, who had looked after him for so long, and the couple had fifteen sons. After her death he took holy orders and became the priest at Thorpe Bassett. The tale's a miracle story, whose moral is the celebration or promotion of the shrine as a place of genuine supernatural healing. Although the story, as told in Coulton, does not call them such, the red man and the beautiful women are almost certainly fairies and the seated lady their elf queen. But there are also similarities with the abduction narrative.

Among the various aliens encountered by UFO witnesses, contactees and abductees are the Venusians and Nordics. Unlike the short greys, these are tall, blonde humanoids. The Venusians had characteristically long hair and, although male, a feminine or androgynous appearance. One of the supposed proofs of this is a supposed photograph of a Venusian at a meeting with US government and military officials, but which has always struck me as of a particularly beautiful, but nevertheless entirely terrestrial woman. Commenting on their androgynous appearance and long, blonde hair like

terrestrial gay men, John Keel suggested that the Venusians may also have been gay. Some UFO experiencers have also reported that the Greys, who abducted them, appeared to be under the command of a tall, blonde Nordic. This is also similar to the red man, an initially diminutive being of a different colour, taking the unfortunate young hero of the tale to elf queen and her attendant ladies. The savage physical attacks on the lad also recall other supernatural assaults in medieval legends, such as those of the demons which attack and torment the luckless knight who makes the mistake of sleeping near the entrance of St. Patrick's Purgatory in Ireland. The attempts to flay the lad alive and the removal of his brain also obviously resemble the theme of physical experimentation and dismemberment in contemporary alien abductions.

Walsingham's tale therefore provides evidence that the UFO abduction experience does indeed have its origins in medieval fairy lore or that there is a common psychological mechanism behind both, just as the Old Hag and nightmare brought on by sleep paralysis may also be responsible for bedroom encounters with invading aliens and demons. Whereas in the Middle Ages this mechanism produced visions of fairies and demons, it now creates visions of aliens and spacecraft as space has taken over from the terrestrial underworld as the location of exotic intelligent creatures with terrible, unearthly powers.

Helen Duncan: The Enigma

William J Eyre

Lucya Szachnowski provided a fine overview of the probable conspiracy around the arrest and imprisonment of the physical medium Helen Duncan in issue 150 of 'Seriously Strange'. The present article aims to provide further detail of the mediumship of this enigmatic lady and to throw some light in particular on the issue of whether her mediumship was fraudulent or authentic.

Background

Victoria Helen McCrae Macfarlane was born in November 1897 into a large, working class family in the village of Callander in Perthshire. Her father Archie was a strict Presbyterian, who expected his family to adhere to his religious beliefs and practices. Even as a young girl, Helen began to show signs of being psychic, successfully identifying, for example, where the rescuers should look in order to find the missing and well-liked local doctor (Armour, 2000). Despite the incident saving the doctor's life, the misunderstanding of her father and the local villagers of her ability led, even at this age, to her being accused of being a witch and being given the nickname 'Hellish Nell'.



Helen Duncan

Having eventually left Callander for Dundee, Helen married Henry Duncan in 1916. As a result of Henry becoming medically incapacitated, Helen had to work really hard at manual tasks in order to bring in a living for them and their sizable family. Once Henry's health had improved, the couple were able, in their spare time, to develop Helen's physical mediumship in a home circle. This led to her being ostracised by most members of her family.

Despite this and despite her lowly financial situation, it became clear that Mrs Helen Duncan went out of her way to help other people, including those relations with whom she was still in touch.

Laboratory Investigations

Test séances of Duncan's mediumship were held in the early 1930s, first at the LPL (London Psychical Laboratory) and, subsequently, at the NLPR (National Laboratory of Psychical Research). During both sets of séances, ectoplasm was produced but no full-form materialisations. At the LPL, with the medium standing under red light in front of the cabinet, it was observed that upon opening her mouth, the ectoplasm gradually began to be formed on the tip of the tongue until it resembled a cherry (Gaunt, 2017b). It then swelled up, sometimes to the extent of covering the medium's body. When the ectoplasm retreated into the mouth, it diminished at the tip of the tongue into the likeness of a cherry, as it first appeared. None of the substance appeared at any time in the pharynx.

As a result of the test séances at the NLPR, the well-known psychical researcher Harry Price publicised his opinion that Duncan was fraudulent on the basis that he had taken a photograph of the ectoplasm produced by her which

showed a warp, weft and selvage, concluding that the material had been commercially manufactured, had been swallowed by the medium and had then been regurgitated.



Harry Price

Ectoplasm, when it materialises, assumes solid form. When it is thus solidified, as it would be for the purpose of being photographed, it has assumed material shape and form and so may well look like manufactured cloth. On various occasions, involving various mediums, spirits have materialised wearing the sort of clothes that they would have worn when on Earth.



Ectoplasm without materialisation

Over the years, various physical mediums have been accused of fraud by regurgitating artificial ectoplasm. In 1983, the medium Paul McElhoney was discovered by Gordon Higginson, at the time president of the SNU (Spiritualists' National Union), using fraud to produce apports. The fact that McElhoney disappeared from the Spiritualist scene as a result of this exposure implies that the production of ectoplasm from his mouth was also fraudulent.

The idea that Duncan concealed some artificial substance about her person, to subsequently produce as alleged ectoplasm, is one of the main accusations against the medium. However, it was standard practice for her to undergo an intimate body search just prior to her séances, to check that nothing was secreted in her orifices. Therefore, if she did possess a material within her body in a pretence to produce ectoplasm, it must have been concealed in her stomach and regurgitated during the séances. There seem to be contradictory reports regarding the use of X-ray to test this hypothesis. On the one hand, Armour (2000) states that she has in her possession a copy of a letter from a Dr Montague Rust, stating that an X-ray examination of Duncan arranged by him showed that her stomach was of normal size and functioning, causing him to conclude that she could not have been hiding cheesecloth inside herself. On the other hand, Hodgman (2018) claims that when it was suggested by Price that she be X-rayed immediately after a test séance, she threw a tantrum over the suggestion and ran outside, where, he suggested, she disposed of whatever she had swallowed.

Price's several investigations with Duncan failed to provide empirical evidence that she used fraudulent means to

produce the phenomena. For example, there were occasions in which the medium was asked to swallow methylene tablets, which dye the whole contents of the stomach blue. Despite this, she still produced clean, white ectoplasm. On another occasion, Price arranged for the medium to have her stomach pumped immediately prior to a séance, in the hope that cheesecloth would be extracted – but none was.

The Photographs

One of the pieces of evidence popularly shown as demonstrating fraud is a couple of photographs, as shown in Szachnowski (2016), which seem to show that the faces of the spirit images were actually masks and the bodies were cloth hanging from clothes hangers. There are two claims to counter this argument for fraudulent materialisation. First, Szachnowski states that the photographs were taken to merely give an impression of what tended to take place during Duncan's séances and were not taken during an actual séance – presumably to make up for the dearth of publicly available actual séance photographs. Secondly, Alan Crossley, who researched Duncan's mediumship, stated that this use of ectoplasm was in the early days of Duncan's development and that "these ectoplasmic formations do not represent deceased persons but are produced primarily as an exercise in manipulating and controlling the flow of ectoplasm from the medium", i.e. that this was early experimentation, prior to the materialisation of actual spirits (Gaunt, 2015). It is thought that it was Mrs Frances Brown, who assisted Duncan with the séance arrangements, who arranged for these photographs to be taken – possibly by Harvey Metcalfe in about 1930. If this was the case, clearly it was unwise for Brown to get so carried away with Duncan's mediumship that such photographs were taken, as it made the medium look foolish.

A few photographs were, however, taken of Duncan and the ectoplasm and/or materialised spirits during physical séances and one of these was taken using infrared photography. The photograph was taken by Mr S G Donaldson at Belfast Spiritualists' Alliance on the 5th June 1932 and was one of the first infrared photographs ever taken of a physical medium (Gaunt, 2017a). It is almost inconceivable that such a large volume of material could have been held in the stomach and regurgitated (as per Price's accusation); so unless the medium had secreted a sheet in the cabinet and was holding it in her mouth (unlikely as pre-séance searches should have found it), it would appear to show a large volume of ectoplasm emanating from her mouth.



Infrared photograph.

Financial Implications

It is well known within Spiritualism that it is unwise for a genuine physical medium to give more than two or three séances a week, as much energy is taken from the medium each time during that type of séance and the effect of over-sitting is likely to be injurious to the medium's health. Of course, if fraudulent mediumship were being demonstrated, it would not affect the medium's health.

Duncan was awarded the DSNU (Diploma of the Spiritualists' National Union) in 1931 and agreed to only give séances with the cognisance of John B McIndoe, SNU President. However, in addition to those and much to his disgust, she actually gave numerous séances during the 1930s that had not been agreed by McIndoe.

It was reported in the Spiritualist press that in 1942 Duncan was (a) charging excessive fees and (b) holding far too many séances for the good of her own health - specifically, that she was charging eight guineas per séance (the equivalent of £398 today) and holding up to two materialisation séances a day (Barbanell, 1942). Were a medium today to charge nearly £400 for a séance, it would certainly be considered excessive and raise suspicions that he / she was practising magical illusion, rather than bona fide mediumship, in order to make money.

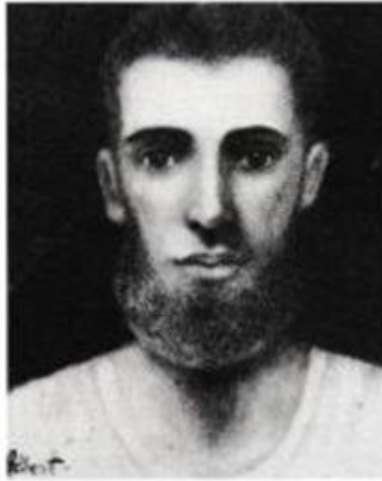
Given the limited frequency with which other physical mediums demonstrate their gifts and the excessive frequency with which Duncan claimed to be demonstrating her gifts, it is difficult to see how she could have had sufficient psychic energy to produce genuine effects every time and raises suspicion that she 'performed' so regularly simply to make more money.

The Portsmouth Séance and Resultant Court Case

As a result of revelations unknown to the public about the sinking of two Royal Navy ships during the Second World War and the probable consequent monitoring of Duncan by the security services, detailed by Szachnowski (2016), it was decided to plant observers / informants to the security services at several séances of Duncan's during January 1944. These included Naval Lieutenant Worth, Surgeon-Lieutenant Fowler and War Reserve Constable Cross. Worth and Fowler attended a materialisation séance at The Master's Temple, 301 Copnor Road, Portsmouth on the 14th January 1944. At the completion of the séance, Worth gave ambivalent views of what he thought about the séance to Brown. She in turn showed him some photographs of sitters taken during previous séances, in which apparent spirit extras appeared (Roberts, 1945; Barbanell 1945).

In a materialisation séance featuring Duncan, held on the 19th January 1944 at The Master's Temple, Worth and Cross were present. As usual, prior to the séance, the medium was searched by women who found nothing suspicious about the medium's person. The séance took place in a darkened room, with a dim red light on, so that the materialising spirits could be seen. The medium sat in a curtained off cabinet. Duncan went into trance and spirit guides Albert Stewart and Peggy appeared between the cabinet curtains and addressed the audience. This was followed by the materialisation of other spirits.

Worth and Cross had prearranged that when the former flashed a torch during the séance, the latter should jump forward and grab the medium, in an attempt to catch her out in fraud. Cross claimed to grab a 'white sheet' that



Albert Stewart

Duncan had been handling but that it was immediately pulled away from him. He proceeded to arrest Duncan. A whistle was blown by Worth, which was the signal for several other policemen and a policewoman, led by Detective-Inspector Ford, to break into the séance room. After the attack by Cross, Duncan said she needed a doctor but none was called.

The outcome of this was that Duncan was put on trial at Portsmouth Magistrates' Court, initially accused of contravening section 4 of the Vagrancy Act of 1824. This was followed by the introduction of a charge of conspiracy, alleging that the medium conspired with the organisers of a particular séance, viz. Mr Ernest Homer, Mrs Elizabeth Homer and Mrs Frances Brown, to defraud the séance sitters of their money, i.e. the admission charge, by falsely

pretending to hold communication with deceased persons and causing their spirits to materialise.



Mr. & Mrs. Homer

Despite the claim of the prosecution that a 'white sheet' or cheesecloth had been used to pretend that a spirit was materialising, no such sheet was found by the police.

After the initial hearings, the case was transferred to the Central Criminal Court at the Old Bailey and a charge under the Witchcraft Act of 1735 was added to the other charges. The hearing was overseen by the Recorder Sir Gerald Dodson and the proceedings produced a large amount of interest from the press and the general public. A book was first produced by Maurice Barbanell (1945), then editor of *Psychic News*, documenting the case, followed, belatedly, by a book edited by the barrister C E Bechhofer Roberts (1945), consisting of the transcript of the court case, together with a lengthy foreword by the editor. Roberts did not concur with Price's hypothesis that simulated ectoplasm was produced by the medium swallowing and

regurgitating cheesecloth but he did propose the hypothesis that a member of the audience passed a white sheet to the medium once she had entered the cabinet and that upon the conclusion of the séance, it was passed back to a member of the audience.

At the Old Bailey trial, Mr C E Loseby, a defence barrister, offered to let the jury see a test séance put on by the accused, so that they could judge whether she was genuine or fraudulent. In due course, the Recorder decided not to permit such a demonstration, even though it would presumably have proved the point one way or the other.

Numerous witnesses were cross-examined. Some prosecution witnesses suggested that what they saw could have been carried out by the medium acting fraudulently, i.e. pretending to be various spirits herself. Worth was such a witness. He stated that at the 14th January séance, a female figure materialised, alleged by Albert to be his sister. He had responded that his only sister was still living, to which Albert explained that it was a prematurely born (and presumably stillborn) sister. He phoned his mother, who said that there had been no prematurely born sister, but admitted that he had lied to Mrs Homer, to whom he had said at the 19th January séance that his mother had confirmed that she had had a prematurely born baby. This casts some doubt on the trustworthiness of this witness.

Alleged spirit extras

Copies of the photographs shown to Worth by Brown were produced in court (Roberts, 1945). These had been examined by Detective-Sergeant Taylor, who was in charge of the police photographic dept. When questioned about them, D.S. Taylor said that they could have been produced fraudulently, by first taking a photograph of the sitters, surrounded by a dark background, then taking a photograph of fake extras onto the original plate, in such a way that the extras would show up against the dark background. He went on to say that he had actually successfully tried this method of producing fake



photographs, to simulate those being shown in court.

Duncan herself did not give evidence, on the basis that she was in trance when séance proceedings took place and so was not able to witness what had been happening. However, 40 witnesses testified on oath that through

Duncan's psychic powers, they had received convincing evidence of survival. One of these, Mr Homer (one of the accused) stated that Albert's voice was that of a cultured Australian and that he (Albert) was six feet tall, with a thin bearded face, thus refuting a suggestion that his voice and appearance could have been impersonated by the medium, who had a broad Scottish accent and a plump face. He described how, prior to the incursion by the police, several spirits had materialised, each varying in height, age and appearance.

Wing-Commander Mackie described how various deceased members of his family had materialised at both the 19th January séance and previous Duncan séances, had been recognised by him and with whom he was able to have a brief conversation. William Colcher said that as a result of the scuffle, he saw a 'milky white substance' disappear through the floor, contradicting Cross's account that there was a white sheet which was pulled away from him towards the window. Nurse Mary Rust explained how at a previous séance of Duncan's, she had recognised the figure of her deceased husband and said that they had kissed. Walter Williams testified that at the séance of the 18th January, he had simultaneously seen both his mother's materialised spirit and Duncan within the cabinet, making it impossible that the medium was impersonating the spirit. Numerous other witnesses gave accounts of the séance at which Duncan was arrested and of previous séances to the effect that her mediumship could not have been demonstrated fraudulently.

One of the most outstanding witnesses was Hannen Swaffer, a well-known journalist and Spiritualist, who had attended countless physical séances, including a test

séance held after Duncan was arrested, held to try and prove the genuineness of Duncan's mediumship, although the Recorder decided not to allow the results of that séance to affect the outcome of the trial (Barbanell, 1945). Swaffer explained how at one séance he had taken four magicians with him, one of whom tied the medium up securely – yet phenomena were still produced. Prosecuting barrister Mr Henry Elam kept wafting a piece of butter muslin at the various witnesses, to try to get them to admit that that material could have been used to impersonate ectoplasm. However, as with the other witnesses, Swaffer dismissed the possibility.

During his summing up, defence counsel Loseby questioned the relevance of using the Witchcraft Act to prosecute Duncan, as it was couched in terms of “conjuring up spirits”, something which it was impossible for any medium to do. He pointed out to the jury that the characteristics of the materialised spirits, such as birthmarks, different heights and assorted voices, could not be accounted for by the use of the sheet that the prosecution said was used.

Throughout the trial, the judge threw in his own comments, biased in favour of Christianity. Despite the testimonies of the numerous defence witnesses and the fact that a further 300 or so witnesses were prepared to give similar testimony but were not called to give evidence, the jury found Duncan, Brown and the Homers guilty, with the result that Duncan was sentenced to nine months' imprisonment and Brown to four months' imprisonment.

An appeal hearing took place. This consisted mainly of wranglings about the meaning of the word 'conjuración', as the medium's guilt or otherwise depended largely upon

whether or not she had pretended “to exercise or use a kind of conjuration”, that being the wording of the offence in the Witchcraft Act (Psychic News, 1944). For two days, a seemingly endless supply of dictionaries and books, some very historic, were pored over by the lawyers and judges, with discourse taking place on the meaning of the word ‘conjuration’. Duncan, listening to all this in court, was of course flabbergasted that her fate depended upon the meaning of a concept which any intelligent person today would surely know was clearly impossible, as there are no mechanics whereby either she or any other medium can conjure up a spirit. Despite all this deliberation and Loseby pointing out that the prosecution had not explained how the medium could simulate a child, speak in foreign languages and produce the likenesses which caused people to recognise their relatives and friends, the judges nevertheless upheld the original court findings.

During Duncan’s incarceration at Holloway Prison, the governess was a Spiritualist, which seems to have slightly reduced the stress of her time there. For example, during air raids, Duncan was given the keys to the cells of the girls who were afraid of the bombing, so that they could be together. Duncan was also allowed to give séances during her time in prison. However, the shock caused to her by the irresponsible actions of the police, bearing in mind that she was already in poor health, seemed to damage her health further, causing her to spend some of her sentence in hospital.

The Testimonies

Many sitters at Duncan’s various séances have come forward over the years to testify to the genuineness of her mediumship, a number of these testimonies coming from

people that Mary Armour interviewed personally (2000). For example, Albert Best, the late well-known medium and former president of Berkeley Street Spiritualist Church, Glasgow, described a Duncan séance held at his church in which the séance began by Duncan and her materialised guide Albert standing arm in arm in front of the sitters. Whilst some sceptics claim that spirit materialisations are produced by the medium disguising himself / herself, which may well be true where some mediums are concerned, in this instance that would have clearly been impossible, as the medium and the spirit guide were visible simultaneously.

The NAS (Noah's Ark Society for Physical Mediumship) recorded a number of interviews with elderly citizens in order to permanently capture their experiences with physical mediums, thus forming an audible archive (Alexander, 2014). According to this archive, one venue at which Duncan gave many materialisation séances was the Gateway Centre, London. One of the last séances to be held there was attended by, amongst others, a Mrs Kathleen Allen and her friend Jim, who sat at the front of the room. As usual the cabinet had been searched prior to the séance. During the proceedings, a very tall spirit guide came out of the cabinet, wearing a turban, who was Jim's spirit guide, prompting Allen to comment "Cor - isn't he tall!". Jim was permitted to touch this materialised spirit: he found him to be solid and they proceeded to have a conversation. The spirit dematerialised in a mist in front of the cabinet, i.e. in view of the sitters. An evidential follow-up to this is that two and a half years later, at a large public clairvoyance demonstration, the medium Joseph Benjamin picked out Allen as being the recipient of a message and passed on to her, from the spirit of Duncan's guide, the fact

that she had encountered Duncan and that she had commented “Ooh – isn’t he tall!”.

At one of the Duncan séances at the Gateway Centre, attended by Mrs Joan Honor, president of the centre at the time, a friend sat next to her who had been married three times. From behind the cabinet curtain, Albert said that he had a lady there, who was carrying a bunch of flowers that had been flown over to her across the water. The friend said that it was her mother-in-law from her first marriage, as the latter appeared through the cabinet curtain, carrying a bunch of flowers. At the time of the friend’s first marriage, the mother-in-law had been very ill and therefore unable to attend the wedding. A bunch of flowers had been flown over to her in Paris. A conversation then proceeded between the friend, her third husband, who had accompanied her to the séance, and the materialised mother-in-law.

On another occasion, Honor’s sister-in-law materialised, was visibly recognised by her, was solid (as they were able to hold hands) and capable of holding a conversation with her. Honor testified that the spirit form started to dematerialise whilst they were still holding hands, with the form gradually sinking to floor level.

Duncan gave regular materialisation séances during the 1930s at the Edinburgh College of Parapsychology and less frequent séances up until 1950. One of the sitters there was a Laura Culme-Seymour, who reported that during a number of séances with Duncan, her daughter Marjorie visibly materialised and was recognised (Stemman, 2017). The College had no doubt that Duncan’s materialisations were a genuine phenomenon.

At a Duncan séance in North London, Will Goldston witnessed eight materialised forms, characterised by a mixture of ages, voices and sexes and was able to converse with the spirit of an eight year old girl called Violet, whose hand he felt (1932). He reported that despite being an experienced magician, he could not detect any form of trickery that could have accounted for his experience. Goldston later attended a test séance, towards the end of which he was permitted to secure the medium using handcuffs, sash cord and carpet thread. Albert asked Goldston what he would like him to do. Goldston requested that the medium be released from her bonds and, within three minutes, Duncan walked free from the cabinet.

Psychic News (1933) reported that an accusation had been made by five sitters who had attended a Duncan séance at the home of Miss Esson Maule in Edinburgh that the medium had used fraud. It was claimed that towards the end of the sitting one of the group grabbed Peggy, a child control of the medium. There was a struggle while Maule tried to hang onto the material that she thought was impersonating Peggy. The accusers claimed that a white stockinet vest was used to pretend to be a materialisation. They persuaded Duncan to undress at the conclusion of the séance and such a vest was found amongst the heap of clothes which lay on the floor. This incident resulted in her being found guilty at an Edinburgh court of obtaining money from sitters by false pretences. In the medium's defence, she said that other sitters had testified that they recognised other spirits who had materialised.

Arthur Winter of Preston recollected in the Spiritualist press that he had first attended a Duncan séance in 1942 during

a holiday in Fleetwood, where he visited the Spiritualist Church (Psychic News, 1962). During the séance his daughter, Gloria, materialised, saying “Do you remember, Daddy, when you took my photograph you told me to stand so?”. She then posed in exactly the position of a studio portrait taken by her father one year before her passing in 1941 at the age of 18. Winter explained how the appearance of the girl who had materialised was exactly that of his daughter down to the detail of her curly hair. Despite none of the church’s officials or the medium knowing his name, Albert addressed the sitter as “Mr Winter”.

During one séance at the Spiritualist Church at Holland Street, Govan, Glasgow, the materialised figure of Albert walked up to Jack Moonie, the vice-president of the church and asked him for a cigarette and a match (Psychic News, 1959). Having lit the cigarette, he returned to the cabinet, took Duncan by the hand and walked round the room with her, chatting as he smoked until the cigarette was finished.

The Nottingham Séance and Duncan’s Death

On the 28th October 1956 Duncan’s final séance took place at 47 Ella Road, Nottingham - the home of Mr and Mrs Joe Timmins.

WPC Kirkham had visited Mr Timmins in July and August of that year in order to obtain some healing for a foot problem, prior to her alleged impending marriage to a Mr Cutts. She asked whether she and her husband could attend a Helen Duncan séance on the 27th October and again, with two friends, on the 28th October and the wish was granted.

At the second of these séances, the four visitors (who all turned out to be police) took their seats on the second row, ready for the séance to begin at about 7.30 p.m. In the early part of the séance, both Duncan and the materialised Albert were seen standing together and several sitters recognised the forms of deceased people that they had known (Psychic News, 1957). In total, about a dozen spirit forms appeared.

At 7.50 p.m. there was a loud knocking at the front door and continuous ringing of the doorbell, which went on for about five minutes. This was clearly the signal for the police officers in the séance room to take several actions. First, the two policewomen and DC Birch pushed forward, causing sitters in the front row to be injured in the mayhem. Birch made a rush for the door, being stopped at first by two of the sitters but, despite this, forcing his way down to the front door to let in further police officers. Secondly, the two policewomen grabbed hold of Duncan, flashing their torches (which had white light) into her face. Thirdly, the second policeman in the room stood on his chair, took flash photographs and then switched on the ceiling light, despite protestations from Mrs Timmins. The policewomen made an intimate search of Duncan, who was still sitting, in trance, in the cabinet. The additional police officers who had entered the building made their way into the séance room, led by a Detective Inspector Smalley. Albert called out for a doctor to be immediately sent for and two burns were subsequently found on the medium's stomach (Gaunt, 2017c).

The doctor arrived, arranged for Duncan to be put to bed, examined her and declared that the medium might be about to die. The police searched for masks, beard, shroud,

etc., both in the séance room and on the stripped body of the medium but found none. They were clearly determined to find evidence of fraud in order to prosecute her under the Fraudulent Mediums Act of 1951. No search warrant was produced by the police. Assuming Duncan to be a genuine medium, the rough handling of her and the white light would have been very injurious to her and this was made clear to the police. Subsequently, DI Smalley admitted to Mr Timmins that the flash photos taken had revealed nothing incriminating.

By early November 1956, Duncan had been taken home to Edinburgh, to be looked after by her husband and her own doctor. Subsequently, she was taken to Edinburgh's Western General Hospital but there was no improvement in her serious condition. She returned home prior to her death on the 6th December. Although the doctor documented her death as being caused by diabetes and angina, it seems clear that in reality it was hastened by the unforgivable actions of the police. Had the police genuinely thought that fraud was being used, they could, of course, have turned up at the conclusion of a séance, shown a search warrant and searched rooms and/or persons for fraudulent materials before anyone left the building, with no harm being done to the medium. Loseby, when he heard about what had happened at the Nottingham Séance, said that any person who by "gross negligence accelerates the death of another is guilty of murder", concluding that he was satisfied that Helen Duncan had been murdered (by the police) (Gaunt, 2017c).

A few days after her passing, Spiritualists gathered at Edinburgh to hear first-hand recollections of witnesses to Duncan's mediumship (Psychic News, 1956). They spoke of

strong men trying unsuccessfully to prevent tables rising to the ceiling, of a small black boy materialising who had been recognised as being the servant of Prof McGibbon and of a boy killed in a motorcycle accident informing his mother where she could find a photograph of him.

Interestingly, all the police officers involved in the raid died within two years of it. In the circumstances, doubtless no tears were shed by Spiritualists.

Summary and Conclusion

It can be seen from the foregoing that there is an abundance of evidence from people who have actually attended materialisation séances of Helen Duncan that there are very many incidents of sitters recognising materialised relatives and acquaintances, i.e. of the appearances of the spirits matching those of the people they purport to have been when living on the Earth. On numerous occasions, information given by the materialised spirits or by the guide Albert was such that there is no way that the medium, by normal means, could have known that information. Indeed, the information about the sinking of the Royal Navy ships is evidence of this. There were also incidences of materialised spirits dematerialising prior to returning to the cabinet, in full view of the sitters.

Despite the verdict of the Old Bailey trial, the fact is that a very large number of witnesses either gave evidence of the authenticity of Duncan's mediumship or were prepared to, which is suggestive of most of her mediumship being genuine, the verdict presumably having been arrived at as a result of bias from the judge and prosecution barristers, arising from the conspiracy explained by Szachnowski (2016).

The fact that Duncan was harmed at the Portsmouth séance and severely injured at the Nottingham séance, leading to her early demise, is also indicative of the genuineness of her mediumship, as it has been long known in Spiritualism that if ectoplasm has been extracted from a medium to effect the phenomena, various irresponsible actions during the seance will cause the ectoplasm to rush back into the medium, causing an injury to him / her. These actions include the introduction of white light to the room, taking hold of the medium, a materialised spirit or a levitating object and entering or leaving the room. These are precisely the actions taken by the police during both the Portsmouth and Nottingham séances: at the former, a torch was put on, the medium grabbed and police officers entered the room and at the latter the policewomen grabbed hold of Duncan and shone a white light torch at her, DC Birch left the room, another policeman took a white flash photograph and switched on the white light and other police officers entered the room. Another instance of this danger of which the author has heard from a sitter known to him was the taking hold by a sitter of a trumpet which had been levitating at a Jack Webber séance at Walsall Spiritualist Church, causing the medium to vomit blood and to be hospitalised. Indeed, such dangers are almost certainly one of the reasons why physical mediumship is so rare these days. Were Duncan to have been using trickery, there is no reason why she should have been injured or why her death should have been hastened by the actions of the police, as magicians imitating psychic phenomena never suffer these problems.

On the other hand, there are suspicions of fraud arising from the high fees that Duncan sometimes charged, from the photographs featured in Szachnowski's article, from the

materials sometimes observed or found during or at the end of a séance, from the incident that led to her conviction in 1933 and from the excessive number of séances held.

As for the photographs allegedly showing spirit extras, D.S. Taylor's explanation and experiment indicate that the extras were almost certainly applied to the photographs fraudulently. They are of the same type as many that were produced between Victorian days and the 1930s and the general consensus of legitimate photographers is that most deliberate attempts to produce such spirit photographs were produced by normal, rather than paranormal, means. However, this observation does not justify any aspersions to be cast on the medium, as, despite the medium and Brown both believing the photographs to be genuine, they were not actually taken by the medium – they appear to have been taken and developed by Thomas Lynn, a Tyneside medium, many years earlier and handed to Brown for safekeeping. The only photograph that the author has personally examined which convincingly showed an identifiable spirit was obtained spontaneously on an official wedding photograph, i.e. it was not a deliberate attempt to add a spirit extra to a photograph.

On balance, it would appear that Duncan was a genuine medium and used her mediumistic ability most of the time but that on occasion, when her powers let her down, she probably resorted to trickery. The author has noticed himself that even some genuine mediums, given a chance, resort to a bit of cheating to fill up gaps in their demonstrations. A famous example of a physical medium who, when constrained, produced genuine phenomena but who, when unconstrained, used, by her own admission, fraudulent methods, was Eusapia Palladino.

From a meta-research perspective,

- Whilst Price's methods of investigation seem sound, his deduction from the results of his investigation seems irrational. In particular, he does not explain how regurgitated cheesecloth can form itself into numerous different, recognised faces, which sometimes talked. His hypothesis also contradicts the observations during the test séances at the LPL, at which it was observed that the ectoplasm gradually formed at the tip of the tongue, with none of the substance in the pharynx. He appears to have been intent on exposing Duncan as a fraud from the outset, regardless of his findings. Based on his involvement in this and certain other cases, one activity in which he did seem to excel was to promote his own ego.
- The NAS is to be congratulated on its foresight in recording oral evidence from elderly Spiritualists concerning their experiences with physical mediums of the past, such as Helen Duncan, as first-hand testimony is of far more value than second-hand stories.
- Whilst the main published texts of both Barbanell (1945) and Roberts (1945) are factually based on what was actually said during the Old Bailey trial, clearly there are biases expressed in favour of and against the medium's authenticity in their respective commentaries, e.g. an emphasis being placed by the latter on the number of other mediums having allegedly been found to practise fraud.

- Armour's research is sound, being based as it is on the testimonies of people who actually worked with or sat with Duncan, at least some of whom had been interviewed personally by her, together with the affidavits and private letters of sitters at the last fateful séance and the formal police and solicitors' letters.
- Gaunt, whilst taking cognisance of modern authors' works, bases his accounts of the mediums of the past on reports in periodicals produced at the time wherever possible.

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ASSAP National Belief and Experiences Survey.

Laurie-Emma Buckley

At Seriously Strange in September 2013, the conference of the Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena, **the National Belief and Experiences Survey (NBES)** was launched. This was based on professional polling conducted by professional pollsters YouGov. There was interest from the academic community and press following the results of the first NBES.

The purpose of the project is to track the paranormal beliefs and experiences of the British population over time. ASSAP aspires to commissioning the polling on an annual basis. This will allow the public belief in different anomalous phenomena to have ongoing monitoring, to see emerging trends and help direct investigations and research. Similarly assessing the types of phenomena people report experiencing will help to direct activities.

In October 2020 **the National Belief and Experiences Survey (NBES)** was conducted as in previous years. The same professional polling company, methodology and questions were used.

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2075 in 2020, and 2115 in 2019. Fieldwork was undertaken between 22-23rd October 2019 and 15-16th October 2020. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (ages 18+). The 2020 period

of polling occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic at a time when the pandemic was entering the 'second' wave.

Some headline findings include:

Belief in Ghosts

In answer to the question: *I believe some people have experienced ghosts (i.e. seen, heard, smelt or otherwise sensed the spirit of a deceased person or animal).*

- Belief in ghosts has decreased from 57% believe, 37% disbelieve, 7% not sure in 2019 to 52% believe, 34% disbelieve and 13% not sure in 2020.
- Much of the movement appears to be amongst women whose belief was 59% in 2019 compared with 69% in 2020.
- There was also movement in age groups as belief amongst 25–34-year-olds increased (33% in 2019 and 47% in 2020).
- When split by social grade CD2E stayed broadly stable (61% in 2019 and 60% in 2020), whilst ABC1 decreased from 53% in 2019 to 47% in 2020.
- Belief in ghosts rate are highest amongst women (69%), those aged 45-54 (58%), lower social grades (60%), those living in Wales (64%), working in a part-time job (57%), and those divorced or separated (62%).

Belief in UFOs

In answer to the question: *I believe some people have witnessed UFOs (Unidentified Flying Objects) that have an extra-terrestrial origin.*

- In 2019 the belief in UFOs was equal to disbelief, with 45% believing, 45% disbelieving and 12% unsure. Disbelief in UFOs has now overtaken belief. In 2020 38% believed, 44% disbelieved with 18% unsure.
- In 2019 belief in UFOs was more common amongst women (42% men believed, 45% women believed), this has now changed. In 2020 39% of men believe whilst 38% of women believe.
- There were several variations between age groups with a 14% increase amongst 18–24-year-olds, a 4% increase amongst 25–34-year-olds, a 9% decrease amongst 35–44-year-olds, a 3% decrease amongst 45–54 year olds and an 5% decrease amongst those 55 years and older.
- Belief in UFOs rates are highest marginally amongst men (39%), 45–54-year-olds (48%), lower social grades (43%), those living in Wales (49%), unemployed (46%), and those divorced or separated (45%).

Raw data is available at assap.ac.uk/polling

Anomaly: Guidance Notes & House Style

Submission Content:

Papers should be submitted in the English language and should directly relate to some area of psychical research.

Authors take responsibility for any views aired, and published articles do not reflect the views of ASSAP.

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Please note that word limits are flexible.

- Letters may relate to previous articles published and can be written in a personal style. Letters should not be more than 1500 words.
- Book reviews should not be greater than 1500 words.
- Articles and research notes should not be greater than 8,000 words. We encourage authors to write such articles in an impersonal style, but this is not mandatory.
- Diagrams and photos should be submitted in grayscale if possible with a dpi of 300, but do seek guidance if you are unsure.

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URL http://www.parapsych.org/mission_statement.html

Date accessed: 04 September 2006.

Thalbourne, M.A. (2005) 'The Pros and Cons of Being a Parapsychologist'. *Society for Psychical Research: Paranormal Review*, 36, 21-22

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