

# seriously strange magazine



## The magical retirement of the Beast and the Earl

### Also inside:

- Where have all the serious investigators gone?
- The mother of ghosts
- Paranormal memory tampering
- In search of snakes

A pair of hands, one above and one below, are shown holding a glowing white orb. The orb is the central focus, containing text. The background is dark and textured, possibly a draped fabric. The lighting is warm and focused on the hands and the orb.

# Seriously PSYCHIC

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# Welcome to the latest issue!

COVID-19 has been a real concern for us all, and I hope this finds you in good health. It has unfortunately led to the cancellation of our 2020 conference in Bath, though 2021 is already booked and fingers crossed will go ahead!

ASSAP is adapting to the new situation, and we have launched a very successful series of online webinars that run every Thursday 7pm to 8pm for members. For more information turn to page 6.

Another question we frequently get is "what is our members area log in?". The new website will be online soon, but for now the username is **assapmember** and the password is **ectoplasm**.

One last piece of news: Dave and I have swapped jobs, so I get the chance to finally be Chair of ASSAP till November at least.

Hope to see you all at the next webinar

CJ x

The Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena was formed in 1981 to research and educate about a wide range of anomalous phenomena.

These fall into the broad categories of psychic phenomena, earth mysteries, ufology and Fortean phenomena. ASSAP holds no corporate views and the views expressed by individual authors are their own. ASSAP is a registered charity (327422) and a company limited by guarantee (2075226).

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# Membership and Groups

Welcome to new members, you'll find details below for access to the members area on [www.assap.ac.uk](http://www.assap.ac.uk)

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## Don't miss our monthly e-newsletter

The best way to get ASSAP updates throughout the year is to sign up to our e-newsletter if you're not already receiving it. Email [publications@assap.ac.uk](mailto:publications@assap.ac.uk) to subscribe.

## Affiliate Groups

Groups provide incidental support for ASSAP's charitable objects by acting as forums for research. Should you wish to affiliate or start a group please contact [assap@assap.ac.uk](mailto:assap@assap.ac.uk)

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# The Mystery of Boudicca

Warrior Queen of the Iceni

President and First Lady's Piece by  
Lionel and Patricia Fanthorpe

Being Norfolk born and bred, in what was Iceni territory 2,000 years ago, we take a natural pride in our formidable Warrior Queen Boudicca, and have recently written a book about her.

Conventional, traditional history describes her as the daughter of Diras and Locrina, wife of the Iceni King Prasutagus and mother of two daughters: Heanua and Lannosea. Following the death of Prasutagus, Boudicca, her daughters and her Iceni people were brutally ill-treated and abused by the occupying Roman forces. In dauntless retaliation she led her troops against the Romans and achieved two amazing victories, before losing the third and final battle. Allegedly, she was either killed in that battle or she and her daughters took poison when it was clear that the fight was lost. But there are alternative theories leading to a mystery of ASSAP proportions.

Boudicca was born in 30 CE and married King Prasutagus when she was eighteen in 48 CE. However, there is a theory that prior to her marriage she met and fell in love with a young Roman Legionary named Marcus who had been part of the Roman forces in 43 CE, under the command of Aulus Plautius. As the years passed, Marcus, who was an outstanding soldier and a gifted military tactician, was promoted to the rank of Legatus Legionis. Boudicca remained deeply in love with Marcus after her marriage to Prasutagus and continued to see her Roman lover in secrecy as often as she could; some versions of this theory suggest that Marcus may have been the father of Heanua and Lannosea.

After the death of Prasutagus, and the three ensuing battles with the occupying Roman forces, Marcus finds Boudicca lying unconscious beside her overturned war chariot. Heanua and Lannosea are kneeling beside her

trying to help her. Marcus and his totally loyal charioteer ascertain that she is still alive and lift her into his chariot. He puts Boudicca's crown and royal shoulder cloak on a dead Iceni woman warrior lying a few yards away. Then he rides away from the battle, accompanied by Heanua and Lannosea. He leaves them and Boudicca, who is now showing the first signs of recovery, at the home of her parents Locrina and Diras.

Aulus Plautius, overjoyed with the victory in which Marcus had played a major part, accepts his resignation, and gives him a generous reward. As Boudicca makes a complete recovery, she and Marcus – accompanied by her parents and daughters – journey away to the southwest where they buy a vineyard and live out their lives in peace and great happiness.

We love a happy ending. Is it remotely possible that this is what really happened?



# ASSAP

## WEBINARS

Join in every Thursday evening at 7.00pm via Zoom

Member's of ASSAP should receive an email inviting you to take part. Do check your email and any spam folders for your weekly invites.

If you can't find it but would like to come then please email the secretary at [secretary@assap.ac.uk](mailto:secretary@assap.ac.uk)

Email or physical address changed? Don't worry, drop an email to [treasurer@assap.ac.uk](mailto:treasurer@assap.ac.uk) and Becky will update.

For those who wish to join, membership starts at £5.00 per annum via our website [www.assap.ac.uk](http://www.assap.ac.uk)

## Speakers past and present:

### **Steve Parsons**

**Alan Murdie** – *'Powers of evil? Negative aspects of psi revisited'*

### **Dr Ciaran O'Keeffe**

### **Dr Ann Winsper** – *Time Slips*

*Whilst time slips seem to occur anywhere at random, there is a particular street in Liverpool where there have been multiple reports of time slips over the years*

### **Dr Jack Hunter** – *Greening the Paranormal*

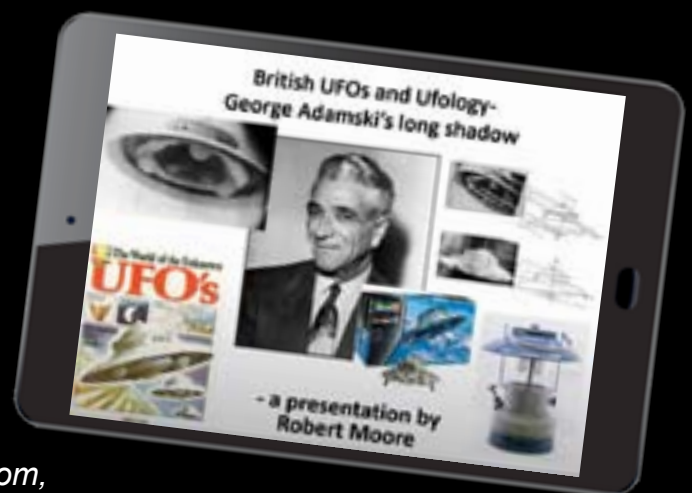
*Jack will explore parallels between anomalistics (the study of the paranormal in all its guises), and ecology (the study of interconnected living systems).*

### **Dr Peter McCue** – *Communication with the dead: Fact or comforting delusion?*

*Peter will address this issue, along with others related to supposed evidence of communication between the living and the dead.*

### **Jackie Tonks** – *Seeking and finding Bigfoot in the Pacific-Northwest.*

*Exploration of possible scientific explanations behind some of the stranger phenomena associated with Bigfoot and planned future research.*



**Richard Freeman – *On The Track of Unknown Animals***

*Here Richard will talk about some of his research and expeditions in search of creatures such as the yeti, the Tasmanian wolf, the giant anaconda, the orang-pondok, The Mongolian deathworm, the almasty and the Caspian tiger.*

**Robert Moore – *Adamski and the British UFO movement***

*This webinar discusses the backdrop, brief case studies as well as the possible solutions to this paradox.*

**Dylan Jones – *Paranormal Media and the Modern Ghost Hunter***

**Kristian Lander**

**CJ Romer – *Theory of Ghosts***

**Dr Hannah Gilbert**

**Beth Darlington – *Demonology vs Exorcism - what's the difference?***

**Keith Linder – *Bothell Hell House***

**Amethyst Gray – *The Real Cloudbuster - Wilhelm Reich***



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**SPEAKERS INCLUDE:**  
Lionel Fanthorpe  
Beth Darlington  
Alan Murdie  
Kristian Lander  
CJ Romer  
Robert Moore

Free to our members. If you would like to join in, and you are not a member, please visit our website at [www.assap.ac.uk](http://www.assap.ac.uk), membership for one year starts at £5.00



# Where have all the Serious Investigators Gone?

By Mark Davey

So you are a paranormal enthusiast. Your interest has, over the years, been galvanised by the TV shows that you have watched, by the plethora of magazines and websites that offer advice and anecdotal evidence of the existence of otherworldly phenomena. You may be of the opinion that what you see on the TV is just that, TV. You may well recognise the flaws, the assumptions and the lack of investigative know how that the on screen investigators demonstrate. You want to get out in the field yourself and find evidence about the existence of the afterlife, hauntings, aliens or strange creatures, but you want to do it properly without the contamination of all that is portrayed on the box. So where do you start?

Well I guess it depends on how serious you are about it, how objective you want to be and whether you have already made up your mind about what is out there. The academic world, in particular parapsychology departments at Universities provide excellent insight into research methods, but interest in the field of haunting phenomena compared to psychic ability is but a fraction of the research carried out yearly by these institutions and your education will come at a hefty price and may not achieve your objectives anyway. For most of us, the cost is prohibitive and will not fulfil our short-term needs. You may wish to embark upon self study and there are books and online courses out there to help. But how do you know which ones are any good? Zak Bagins' Ghost Hunting for Dummies is not a place that I would start with personally.

Over the last hundred years, serious and respected paranormal investigators have attempted to compile handbooks to guide the new investigator through the minefield of technical knowledge and investigative techniques from a 'tried and tested' stand point based on their personal knowledge and experience. In 1937, Harry Price produced his famous 'blue book', The Alleged Haunting of B----y Rectory (Borley), Guidance Notes for Observers. This may have been the first 'how to' guide for investigators. In 1965, The Society of Psychical Research's (SPR) Tony Cornell and Alan Gauld produced a guide book entitled Notes for Investigators of Spontaneous Cases, based on their extensive experience, as an attempt to

provide a short handbook to assist investigators in the field. In 1973 Andrew Green produced Ghost Hunting: A Practical Guide. This was based on 30 years of research in the field and was recently brought up-to-date in an edition produced by Alan Murdie of The Ghost Club. In 1986 Peter Underwood published The Ghost Hunter's Guide. In 1999, Maurice Townsend and Valerie Hope of the Association of the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena (ASSAP) produced The Paranormal Investigators Handbook. This was an amalgamation of the collective knowledge of the current investigators of the day in a number of fields of research, providing practical techniques and analysis. All of these authors had years of practical experience to call upon in producing these guide books.

In recent years, perhaps the most relevant guidance has been produced by respected investigator Steve Parsons. In 2015, Parsons published Ghostology: The Art of the Ghost Hunter. It provides an up-to-date discussion of many of the methods and techniques helpful to anyone interested in the subject. In 2018, Parsons was asked by SPR to provide a new edition of Guidance Notes for Investigators of Spontaneous Cases. This revised edition represents the best concise handbook for any would be investigator to start with, providing a model for investigation which has a logical, ethical approach.



Together with a handful of other professional investigators with a scientific background, including Joe Nickell of the Centre for Inquiry, Parsons represents the modern day expert in the field of ghost hunting. Not the type of ghost hunting that you see now on reality TV, but the painstaking evidence gathering version using science to guide the would-be investigator. Theirs is not the world of ratings and entertainment, but of putting in the hours to establish the facts of a particular phenomena, ruling out the explainable and being left with the unexplained, which usually requires further examination. Effective investigation is not glamorous. It takes time and effort to get to the truth. It requires an open unbiased mind, hours of observation and analysis using appropriate techniques, which will test hypothesis, gather data and probably produce more questions than answers. Guidance Notes for Investigators suggests clear aims and objectives for every investigation:

- Establish the nature of the reported phenomena
- Determine if the phenomena could have some natural cause
- Determine if the phenomena could be due to fraud
- When the phenomena have no obvious natural cause and no fraud apparent, then try to learn more about the nature of the phenomena. (Parsons 2018)

It's good to determine some aims and objectives at the start of each investigation. This helps you focus on what you want to achieve, but most of all your investigation should be PLANE. That is Proportionate, Legal, Auditable, Necessary and Ethical. Proportionate in response, for example, no more than two investigators involved in the investigation of a private dwelling where the phenomena is centred on individuals. Legal, in that informed consent must be given in writing for the investigation to take place and access to be gained to a property. Auditable, in that, proper records should be maintained of witness accounts, investigation methodology and data obtained during investigation. These will form the basis of a report to be shared with the client. Necessary, relates to the fact that after initial analysis of the facts it may not warrant further investigation, particularly where there are obvious explanations for reported phenomena or the client has a set belief system and the expected conclusion may not be acceptable to them, or where the findings or a lack of explanation may cause more harm to the client than good. Finally, ethical considerations should be at the heart of every investigation and no investigation should be undertaken where there are vulnerable people involved or there is a possibility that the investigation would cause some form of harm to an individual, psychological or physical. Two of these key terms are what is wrong with aspects of some modern investigations depicted on television. There is no record keeping bar the video and audio produced. There is no unbiased examination of the data and the ethics of the investigation seem to have been left in the small print when unsuspecting members of the public agree to these investigations taking place.

Anyone who has been investigating for some time will tell you that there are some vulnerable people out there that are seriously affected by their experiences and to

have someone come in and tell them that there is a demon in their basement is not necessarily in the best interests of the client. 'Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence' a very clever person once said (Laplace's principle used by Carl Sagan). Television evidence lacks the test of scrutiny or of peer review, is open to numerous interpretations and is produced in a non-controlled environment. The 'reveal' is just an opinion of audio or visual product or the 'psychic' ability of the celebrity guest. It is largely worthless in delivering a credible examination of phenomena.

Bias is another issue. Confirmation bias is perhaps the largest problem in this area of research. You will read it in some of the handbooks and literature, you will see it on the TV. Fundamentally, the approach is flawed when the starting point is that ghosts exist, UFOs are alien visitors, the Yeti is a real creature. You are then looking for evidence which supports this view and disregarding evidence which does not support it. Now you may say that the best TV programs just show you the evidence and allow you to make the decision. It is how they present the evidence that is flawed, making judgements about what to show you and whether it is good TV. I'm not saying that ghosts, aliens and Yetis don't exist. I am saying that the evidence for their existence is not irrefutable compared to the evidence that they do not exist. We don't work within a system where we decide on the balance of probabilities whether something is paranormal or not, as we do in civil law. Evidence has to be irrefutable and testable to be a factual. At this time there is no irrefutable evidence available, so the propositions remain theories. Yes there is evidence that something needs investigating further, but where is the proof? The standard of proof needs to be high for it to be credible. Evidence needs to be gathered in an unbiased manner which looks at evidence in support and to the contrary.

Investigations today, have a tendency to be the standalone experiences of the investigators and not an examination of the facts derived from a witness' experience. They are based on anecdotal information and historical accounts, putting the investigator at the centre of the investigation. You will see this on mainstream TV and on platforms such as YouTube. Serious investigators like Peter Underwood, Andrew Green, Joe Nickell and others would put the witness at the centre of the investigation. Most cases are spontaneous in their nature and difficult to replicate, so you have to examine the account of the witness in detail to gather as much information as possible. You then need to examine the location before deciding whether an investigation is necessary. Many accounts and experiences have a natural cause. All require an elimination of extraneous factors. These are naturally occurring processes that lead someone to think that they are paranormal in origin. Such as, the expansion and contraction of wood or metal with temperature changes causing sounds, high levels of electromagnetic radiation causing hallucination or nausea, vibration caused by machinery or just plain vermin! Extraneous factors surveys may take time. It requires the investigator to get to know the environment, often over a number of visits.

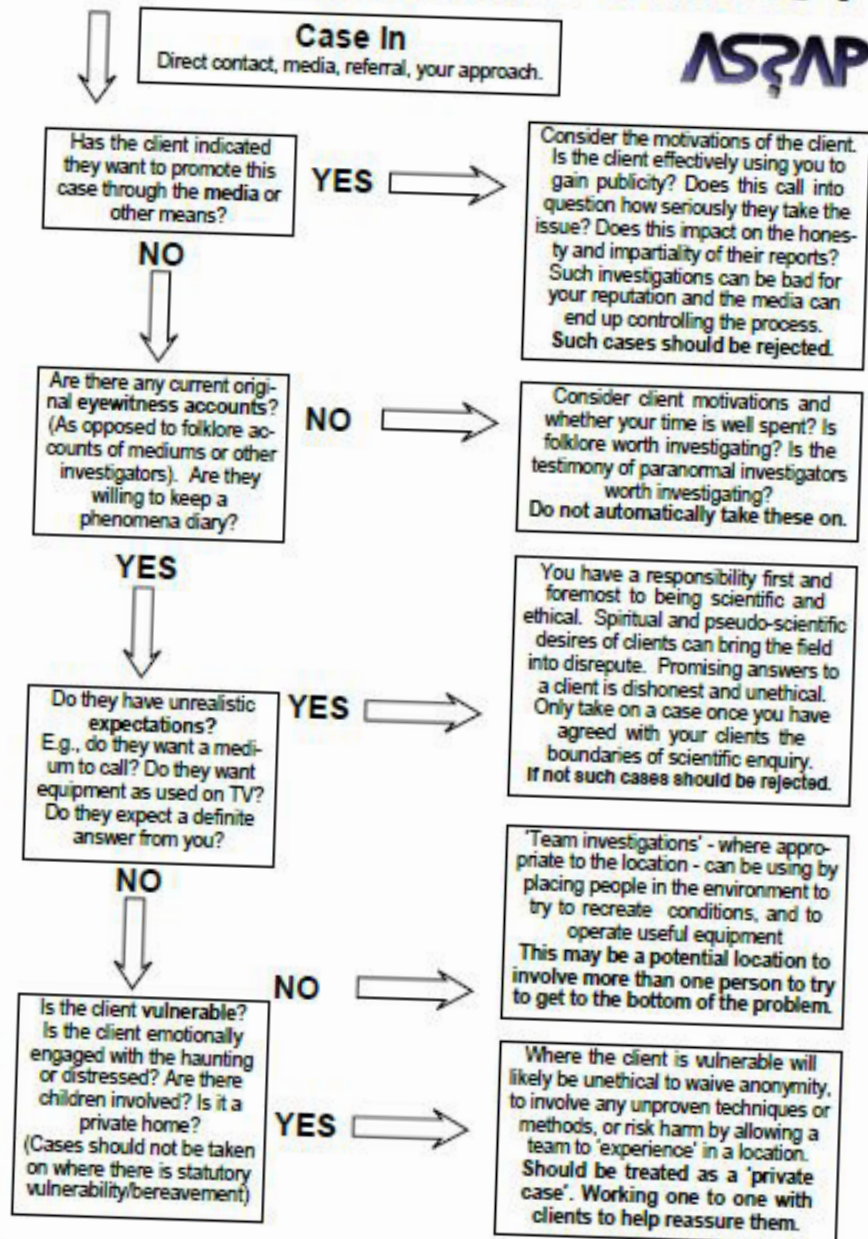
So what about research? Historical research about how a building was designed and constructed and how environmental factors have impacted on the location may be valid. But to identify that Henry VIII once stayed at the property or Judge Jefferies held court there have no place in providing factual links to the phenomena reported, they are merely another form of confirmation bias and untestable.

If we want to produce positive research outcomes that establish factual data and help to move the research forward we must adopt good method. Fortunately, that is what ASSAP offer with their training. A model to approach any investigation, from the initial contact with the client, the preliminary visit, to the investigation and finally recording the evidence within a report.

Approaching the investigation scientifically does not mean using lots of equipment, it means eliminating bias, being open-minded, and approaching the investigation in a logical and methodical way. The good investigator will eliminate the normal, providing explanation based on observation and data before concluded that something is still unexplained. This does not mean that the outcome is 'paranormal', but that it is just that, unexplained. If you are going to conclude that something is paranormal you must define exactly what you mean and have evidence to back up your assertion. This is why the scientific approach differs from the mainstream contemporary approach to paranormal investigation.

So where have all the serious investigators gone? Well they are still out there. They may not have their own TV shows or be celebrities but they are still painstakingly gathering evidence. They may be involved in parapsychology research, they may be unpaid enthusiasts and they may be writers. We see them every year at the ASSAP conferences and the conferences of SPR and The Ghost Club. People like John Frazer, Richard Freeman, Ann Winsper, Cal Cooper and Hannah Gilbert, to name a few. They may not have the notoriety of Price, Green and Townsend with the press and media, but their approach to the subject is based on following good science and they

# How to Handle Cases?



are well respected as investigators in their own field of interest. Like Steve Parsons, some of them are published authors, providing an array of fact based analysis literature for the enthusiast to get their heads into. But to be progressive, the field needs more like-minded serious investigators to follow in their footsteps. Could that be you?



## About the author:

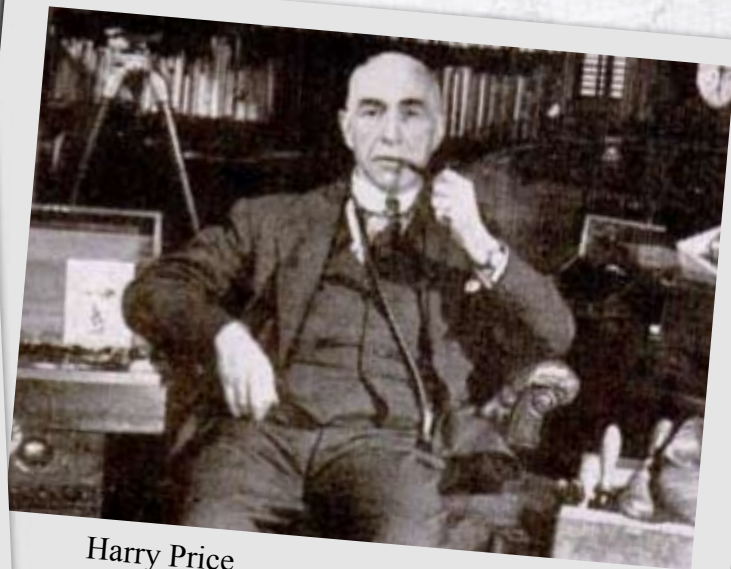
Mark Davey is a former police detective and now an Investigative Trainer for the police. His interest in the paranormal goes back to his childhood and later as a cop a desire to find and investigate his own X Files. An active member and trainer for ASSAP he runs the Groups and NRPI sections.

# When Britain's most famous ghost hunter investigated the Mother of Ghosts

By Dave Salter



Helen Duncan



Harry Price

Helen Duncan was one of the most notorious and divisive figures in the chequered history of Spiritualism. A reputation helped in part by her prosecution in 1944 under the archaic Witchcraft Act of 1735 for pretending to conjure spirits of the dead for financial gain.

Born Victoria Helen McFarlane in the picturesque town of Callander in Scotland in 1897 she had a reputation as a child for seeing the deceased as if they were alive, making off-the-wall prophesies and reacting ferociously when challenged. All of which earned her the nickname 'Hellish Nell'. She also had an impossible relationship with her parents after getting pregnant at sixteen. Unmarried and with a child she was kicked out, winding up in the industrial town of Dundee where she found employment in the Royal Infirmary. It was here that she came into contact with Henry Duncan, an invalided veteran of the Great War and committed Spiritualist, who was sympathetic to her aptitude for mediumship. They married and he helped fashion her talents into a viable vocation.

The interest in Spiritualism was at a peak during and directly after the War, stimulated by the incredible loss of life and the allure of connecting with loved ones who had passed on. With Henry's guidance, Helen's routine went beyond that of a medium communing with the dead: while in a trance state, a diaphanous white substance called 'ectoplasm' would secrete from her mouth and coalesce into a partially or fully formed figure within a 'cabinet' (a makeshift cubicle with a curtain) and then show itself for the benefit of the expectant audience sat in a dimly lit room. The manifestations could, according to witnesses, interact with people verbally and even physically before withdrawing into the cabinet and back into the medium. These séances became extremely popular; so popular that Helen attracted a significant following including an historian of Shakespeare, a well-known theatre critic and a wing commander of the Royal Air Force. Many of her sitters claimed to be astonished by what they saw and heard.



Photograph of Helen Duncan taken by Harry Price with Cheesecloth and a cut out face from a magazine

## Harry Price

Harry Price, a pioneer of paranormal investigation, a ghost hunter, innovator, conjurer and no stranger to controversy himself, was born in Holborn, London in 1881 but seems to have preferred suggesting that he hailed from Shrewsbury in Shropshire as Holborn was not then the affluent district it is now. He learned sleight-of-hand magic when he was young and eventually joined the Magic Circle. His interest in the art of conjuring coupled with a curiosity in psychic phenomena made him a natural investigator of paranormal matters.

Some of the most effective investigators of the paranormal were not scientists testing subjects under strict laboratory conditions but conjurers and stage magicians with a sharp eye for chicanery who were more familiar with methods of deception. Price took quite a scalp when he cleverly caught a famous so-called spirit photographer called William Hope substituting blank plates with ones he'd prepared earlier that were already exposed with 'phantom' images. This coup helped raised Price's profile as a paranormal investigator.

After differences of opinion with the Society of Psychical Research (SPR) as to the validity of Spiritualism (Price defended it), he broke affiliation with the organisation in 1925 and established the National Laboratory of Psychical Research (NLPR) at 13 Roland Gardens, London; the stated aim of which was "to investigate in a dispassionate manner and by purely scientific means every phase of psychic or alleged psychic phenomena." As something of a maverick and talented self-publicist, it was typical of Price to go his own way and raise the necessary resources to finance his work. He'd also married into money which helped cushion him from the vagaries of his vocation.



Photographs of Helen Duncan taken by Harvey Metcalfe in 1928 during a séance at Duncan's house

## Between the wars

In May 1931 Henry organised for his wife's mediumship to be tested by the LSA (London Spiritualist Alliance) in return for a healthy fee—they concluded that the ectoplasm she produced was in fact cheesecloth swallowed prior to a sitting and regurgitated during the séance. Henry then made a miscalculated attempt to salvage a somewhat tarnished reputation by taking a punt with Harry Price (who shared the laboratory with the LSA). Price had up until then been snubbed and denied access to any séances and admitted in due course that the wonder in the way Helen Duncan's séances were received by the faithful, and also by a friend of his, gave him cause for much irritation. This evident frustration dealing with what Price took to be a cult-like attitude and the size of the sum demanded by Henry Duncan (several thousand pounds in today's money) may not have made for the most "dispassionate" investigative approach as promised by the newfound National Laboratory of Psychical Research.

The LSA had suggested during their tests that Helen ingest a harmless dye prior to a séance to determine the source of the "teleplasm" (ectoplasm). She refused. Price, obviously thinking along the same lines, requested at the conclusion of one test that Helen submit to an X-ray to determine if there were any foreign objects in her stomach, as a thorough and intimate search before the séance had yielded nothing. However, rather than complying like her husband suggested, she punched Henry in the face, lunged at a doctor present, ran into the street and clung to a rail screaming. Price also noted that Henry refused to empty his pockets after mollifying his wife in the street, compromising the test conditions. Price concluded, like the LSA, that the medium was swallowing yards of cheesecloth and regurgitating it, along with other materials with which to create her phantoms such as safety pins, rubber gloves, magazine cut-out faces and a ghastly concoction of his own that he made to approximate a previously taken sample of teleplasm that consisted of the "white of a new-laid egg, ferric chloride, phosphoric acid and stale urine mixed with gelatine and hot margaric acid from olive oil".

“Alfred Dodd recounted his experience at a Helen Duncan séance: “[T]he curtains opened once more, and I saw before me the living form—the living form!—of a young lady aged twenty-one ... and she was the first sweetheart that I had ever had, and therefore I knew her absolutely.”

Helen submitted to one fifth and final séance and a sample of teleplasm was taken having the apparent texture and appearance of “sodden paper” (later tested and confirmed), causing her to scream, and what was left “disappeared down her throat”.

It only got worse when a maid of the Duncan’s contacted Price claiming that she had bought the muslin cloth that Helen had produced in various séances and swore to the fact in writing. Price publically denounced the medium as a “fat crook” and dismissed her supporters as overcredulous “cheese-cloth worshippers”. He never lost interest in her career or his frustration with her devotees who seemed impervious to reason.

When Helen produced one of her familiar spirits or “controls”, a small child called “Peggy”, in a séance in Edinburgh in January 1933, an intrepid sitter broke strict séance protocol and grabbed it—a tug-of-war ensued that the medium seems to have won. The police were called and Helen was found to have a torn undervest in her possession which appears to have formed the basis of her “Peggy”. She was duly prosecuted for this deception by the local magistrates and fined £10. Witnesses tended to be strongly divided between those who were convinced of her authenticity and those equally adamant she was a fraud.

## World War II

In 1944, she fell afoul of the authorities again, down in Portsmouth this time, which led to the infamous witch trial held at the Old Bailey in London. On this occasion the police raided the séance midway through and a constable who was tasked with seizing the ‘teleplasmic’ material from the medium as evidence of fraud didn’t manage to retain it and it was never recovered, making an already bizarre legal hearing trickier than it ought to have been.

It was also complicated by the somewhat conspicuous involvement of wartime authorities who were keen to shut her activities down before D-Day: Helen had already come to their attention when she disclosed the sinking of the battleship HMS Barham in a séance back in 1941 before the news was officially released to the public. A spirit of one of the drowned sailors called ‘Syd’ ‘came through’ wearing a cap bearing the ship’s name (the names of the ships were not actually displayed on naval headwear during wartime).

Helen Duncan was found guilty by a jury and sentenced to nine months in Holloway Prison, notwithstanding the lack of material evidence and the procession of respectable witnesses lining up to take the stand and willing to swear to her genuineness. Alfred Dodd, a scholar of Shakespeare and Francis Bacon, recounted his experience at a Helen Duncan séance: “[T]he curtains opened once more, and I saw before me the living form—the living form!—of a young lady aged twenty-one ... and she was the first sweetheart that I had ever had, and therefore I knew her absolutely.” The jury took a more common-sense position and agreed with a key prosecution witness (a Royal Naval Voluntary Reserve lieutenant called Stanley Worth) who thought that Helen Duncan’s pretence was laughable and told the court so.

After release from prison, Helen Duncan gradually resumed her activities and was raided again for the last time in October 1956 at a séance held in the Nottingham area. She died some weeks later before a prosecution for fraud could be brought against her. By then the Witchcraft Act of 1735 had been repealed and replaced by the Fraudulent Mediums Act of 1951.

Ironically, Harry Price also became the focus of intense scepticism when his most famous and protracted investigation into the paranormal goings-on at Borley Rectory (“the most haunted house in England”) came under the scrutiny of the SPR who claimed along with a Daily Mail journalist that Price had faked some of the paranormal phenomena purported to be taking place, surreptitiously tossing pebbles about and such like. This inevitably split opinion as to his integrity and cast a long shadow over his colourful legacy.

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### About the author:



Dave Salter has a degree in Literature & Philosophy and writes regular content for a variety of websites on subjects ranging from yachting and travel blogs, to the paranormal and legal profession. Having completed a 6000 word in-depth paper on the Bitcoin phenomenon Dave has more recently finished a 40,000 word study of a contemporary witchcraft trial.

# Paranormal memory tampering

By Peter A. McCue

I used to work as a clinical psychologist. Years ago, I met a patient with an intriguing story that vividly illustrates how malleable memory can be. I'll refer to her as Sue. Given the passage of time, I can't guarantee that my recollections of the case are perfect. Hopefully, the following outline is broadly accurate. In terms of present-day psychiatric terminology, this would probably be classed as a case of dissociative amnesia (Spiegel, 2019) – that is, amnesia arising from psychological factors rather than from something physical.

## SUE'S STORY

Sue's fiancé, whom I'll refer to as Bob, was fatally injured in a road traffic accident. It seems that Sue went into 'denial', wanting to think that he'd survived the accident and was slowly recovering in a city hospital, where – she believed – she was visiting him regularly. We might surmise that, unconsciously, she'd been 'editing' her memories to avoid acknowledging that he'd died. I imagine that she attended his funeral. If so, she presumably managed to suppress any recollection of it.

It seemed that over the course of months (if not longer), Sue really had been in the habit of leaving her home and making car journeys – to visit Bob at the hospital, as she thought. It may be that she drove there, but without actually entering the premises, perhaps spending some time sitting in her car or wandering around in a 'dissociated' state. Alternatively, it may be that, for the same purpose, she drove around elsewhere, taking time, and accumulating mileage, to sustain her belief that she'd been visiting Bob. For each supposed visit, she presumably managed to block recall of what had really transpired, substituting a false memory of meeting Bob in the hospital.

Eventually, Sue mentioned her supposedly live fiancé to someone who knew the facts. He exclaimed that Bob was dead. Naturally, that was a shock for Sue, since it challenged her mistaken belief that Bob was still alive, and it highlighted the fact that her memory had been malfunctioning.

By the time that I met her, Sue accepted that Bob was dead. But looking back to when she'd supposedly been visiting him in hospital, she still couldn't recall where she'd actually been going. I tried to elucidate that via hypnosis, but Sue didn't seem to be a very responsive hypnotic subject.

## ANOMALOUS PERCEPTION V. EDITED MEMORIES

As I say, in the above case, the suppression of memories and their replacement with false memories may have been done, unconsciously, by Sue herself. Accordingly, there may have been nothing paranormal going on. But could it be that a deceptive external intelligence sometimes edits people's memories? If so, we should perhaps reassess what might be behind reports of ghostly manifestations of a supposedly sensory nature (e.g. seeing a phantom figure, hearing ghostly footsteps, or sensing a presence). Such experiences are typically reported after the event. It's essentially a three-stage process: (1) there's a presumed sensory event (e.g. 'seeing' a ghost), (2) the informant remembers the presumed event, and (3) the presumed event is reported, on the basis of the informant's memory of it. Theories concerning these matters generally take it for granted that some sort of sensory event occurred (see, for example, Tyrrell, 1973). However, views differ on how it should be conceptualized. For example, a hard-line sceptic might suggest that the witness simply misinterpreted something (e.g. a patch of mist) as a phantom figure,

whereas someone more accepting of paranormal explanations might suggest that the ghost was a transient materialization or a hallucination triggered by telepathy.

The Blue Bell Hill area of north Kent has reportedly been the setting for multiple ghostly sightings (see, for example, Tudor, 2017). To illustrate how the memory tampering hypothesis can be applied to such phenomena, I'll cite a couple of well-known cases from that area, although it's not hard to find similar reports from other localities (McCue, 2018).

A little before midnight on 8 November 1992, 54-year-old Ian Sharpe was driving down Blue Bell Hill on the southbound carriageway of the A229 when he saw a young woman some distance ahead in the road. She ran in front of his car from the right, her face turned towards him. His vehicle seemed to hit her on her left side, and she disappeared beneath the car. But when Sharpe got out and checked, there was nothing to be seen.

On 22 November 1992, two weeks after Sharpe's encounter, 19-year-old Christopher Dawkins experienced something very similar while driving home to Maidstone. The incident occurred at 10.55 p.m. as he was passing the Robin Hood Lane junction in Blue Bell Hill village. He saw a woman run in front of his car. She stopped and looked at him with an expressionless face. Then, his Toyota car seemed to hit her. But as in the Sharpe case, there was no evidence of a body or of damage to the vehicle.

Now, of course, the testimony of these witnesses was based on their recall of what happened. But what if false memories had somehow been instilled? Imagine, for instance, that just before his supposed collision with a female figure, Ian Sharpe had been thinking about a forthcoming holiday, and that a false – but very compelling – memory of having collided with a female pedestrian had then been projected into his consciousness. Believing, on the basis of this very vivid false memory, that he'd just run over someone, it would have been appropriate for him to stop and look for the victim, which he did. His recollection of that part of the proceedings may well have been completely accurate.

In other words, I'm suggesting that in cases that seemingly involve sensory manifestations (apparitions, ghostly sounds, etc.), the reports could reflect editing of memory rather than something that was actually perceived. If, unbeknown to an informant, his or her memory has been tampered with, there may have been no preceding ghostly experience. That's not to say that nothing paranormal would have occurred. The memory tampering itself (which, in some cases, might involve more than one person) could be regarded as paranormal. This approach simply shifts the focus from perception to memory – it doesn't deny a paranormal aspect!

## APPLYING THE MEMORY TAMPERING HYPOTHESIS TO REPORTS OF ALIEN ABDUCTION

After close-encounter UFO sightings, witnesses may be unable to account for periods of time, and they may be haunted by vague feelings, flashbacks, and partial recollections. Over time, or with the aid of hypnotic regression, they might recall abduction scenarios involving otherworldly entities. Accounts often feature medical examinations and reproductive procedures. Indeed, it's been suggested that aliens are systematically engaged in creating human-alien hybrids and using human female abductees as incubators. For some, abduction (whether real or imagined) seems to be a recurrent experience and is often a source of considerable distress. Furthermore, there are cases in which different generations within a family have seemingly been targeted. Thus, a woman with a history of abduction experiences might be dismayed to discover that her daughter is going through a similar ordeal.

Of course, there are differing views on how such reports should be interpreted. Hard-line sceptics might dismiss them in terms of mischievous story-telling or the influence of science fiction on people who are excessively fantasy-prone. Believers in the notion that we're being visited, or colonized, by extraterrestrial or 'interdimensional' beings might regard such reports as evidence that people are indeed being physically abducted by aliens.



However, another possibility is that reports of alien abduction arise from false memories instilled in the victims by a tricksterish higher intelligence. If so, this intelligence may have always been with us, lurking in the background, capriciously intruding into our lives at times of its choosing, and it might be a mistake to think of it as 'alien'.

## APPLYING THE MEMORY TAMPERING HYPOTHESIS TO 'TIME-SLIPS'

There are accounts of people temporarily experiencing their surroundings as if they'd gone back in time. Parapsychologists might describe this phenomenon as 'retrocognition', but such incidents are more popularly known as 'time-slips'. Take, for example, something that befell a couple in the summer of 1939. One of them informed me that she and her future husband had been in the habit of going for evening walks through the Camperdown Estate near Dundee. On the occasion in question, they entered a clearing in a wooded area and saw a summer-house made of logs, with a paved path leading up to it. The next evening, they went the same way. But much to their dismay, they couldn't find the summer-house. My informant wrote: "Search as we did do, we never, ever found [it]. For ages after that we looked and looked [...]. But never did we find it."

Was the summer-house there all the time, in a woodland clearing that the couple repeatedly failed to find? Or could their experience have been a shared hallucination? If so, what produced it, and did the hallucination represent a scene that actually existed at some point in the past? Or did the couple literally go back in time for a short period? The memory tampering hypothesis offers another possible explanation, which is arguably more credible than time travel: the couple's recollection of encountering the summer-house may have been a compelling false memory, instilled in them by a deceptive higher intelligence.

## THE TRICKSTER'S TOOLBOX

I'm not suggesting that memory tampering lies behind all reports of apparitions or other seemingly paranormal sensory manifestations. Indeed, it may be that in the majority of cases, there is a real sensory component (e.g. witnessing a materialization or experiencing a hallucination).

However, given that 'missing time' is frequently reported in connection with close-encounter UFO experiences, investigators should maybe bear in mind that paranormal memory tampering could also be occurring in cases without an explicit UFO theme.

There's often a theatrical flavour to paranormal and UFO phenomena, and many cases feature manifestations belonging to more than one traditional category. For instance, there are reports of bigfoot sightings occurring in conjunction with UFO activity (see, for example, Gordon, 2010),<sup>1</sup> and of UFO witnesses experiencing poltergeist-type phenomena. Reports suggest that certain sites, such as the 'Skinwalker Ranch' in the USA, have been the setting for multiple types of strange manifestation (McCue, 2019). A resourceful and tricksterish higher intelligence could be behind these displays. It may have a range of 'tools' at its disposal, memory tampering being just one of them.

## Acknowledgements

- I'm grateful to Sean Tudor for permitting me to use his photograph of the site of Ian Sharpe's experience. And I'd like to thank David T. Muir for proofreading this article.

## Note

1. Since the word 'bigfoot' is used as a common noun, I prefer to render it with a lower-case 'b'.

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About the author:



Based in Scotland, Dr Peter McCue is a retired clinical psychologist with a longstanding interest in anomalous phenomena. He's the author of numerous articles and three books with a paranormal theme. Peter is a member of ASSAP and the SPR.

# The problems of evidence

By Tony Sandy

When it comes to what constitutes evidence, we must understand firstly that experience of a phenomena is not the same thing as external theories about the cause, after the event (belief, that is imagination as opposed to fact i.e. memory). Trauma disrupts perception as James Burke's experiment showed, when some men burst into the studio during a live TV transmission of one of his shows. Afterwards witnesses were asked to give details of what they could remember of the incident and all the accounts varied.

What makes good perception? Silence, so that you can hear precisely all sounds, all words and stillness, so that motion blur doesn't distort what you see. A passive witness will remember more than an active participant, in other words, if your emotions get the better of you, you will be moved by what happens (disturbed by events). Hypnosis can elicit memories in witnesses because it calms the mind of the witness and while it can leave them open to manipulation, the Socratic method should dispel this because you are asking them what they saw, not making suggestions about what might have been there or how to interpret what they perceived.

You may have to move through several possible solutions before you find one that actually works. Several plausible ideas may suggest themselves to you but only the right one will open the door, through a process of elimination. For instance the workshop door, by coincidence, in the new house we moved into. I found the bolt difficult to close it and put it down to several possibilities (swollen wood, bolt in wrong position), until I found the real cause – the stop for the door was too close to the edge of the frame.

We must also remember that plausibility doesn't necessarily reflect truth. In the courtroom liars can concoct a defence without a word of truth in it, when a clever lawyer gets hold of witness testimony. I remember at least one case on the news of somebody who admitted an offence then retracted it under advice from his defence team.

Words and diagrams are not truth about something, somebody else experienced but an attempt to make sense of the event based on prior knowledge of something similar that may in fact be the same thing but doubt has to remain as the only scientific attitude to avoid mistakes (checking and checking again, instead of jumping to conclusions). Experts can demystify events, through known answers to known events (hoaxes, misidentifications etc) just as mystery enthral us through change and motion (uncertainty).

As my wife used to say, paper accepts anything. In other words any theory can be stated but that doesn't make it truth as witness conspiracy theories where several different ideas are considered God's honest truth but contradict each other because they are incomplete concepts based on partial evidence and strong emotion – that is the urge to believe something is true, rather than knowledge one way or the other of its veracity. This is where belief and bias comes in. Do you believe in something, that is are you gullible or disbelieve it because you are prejudiced against it, despite evidence to the contrary? Believers believe because they want to as sceptics disbelieve because they don't want to believe. That is their choice. Evidence is separate from this altogether as sensed, not made sense of, effects.

Again, the problem with witness testimony is those admitting guilt as a well known phenomena in criminal cases, by those with deep psychological problems. In other words admission of guilt is not proof of being the causation agent and other evidence is needed as corroboration. This is why science requires reproduction of effect as proof of cause, in the courtroom or the lab. Even then it can only be a possible indicator that might be open to interpretation: some effects can have more than one cause e.g. poltergeists and puddles, old incontinent dogs, young children and leaky plumbing. The causer knows how an effect was achieved but external witnesses after the fact, can only guess.

On top of this we have the Observer Effect in psychic research, which in police investigation comes across as the dangers of cross contamination, hence the suited and booted approach to gathering evidence for the courts nowadays. I know from personal experience, that heavy handed action can destroy how something works\* and in the case of the paranormal that means acting like bird watchers and disguising yourself through camouflaging your clothing and ensconcing yourself in a hide, plus being quiet and still as much as possible, in order not to disturb what you are studying..

So is it better to be open minded or closed minded? Personally I take the Inspector Clouseau approach of believing everything and believing nothing. Until you know for sure (have overwhelming evidence to back up a theory), you need to be open enough to take on board all possibilities for assessment. To say you know for sure is to shut the door on further investigation and gathering more facts / exploring more effects, to reach a possible conclusion (doubt allows room for discovery, where certainty doesn't – laziness leads to the latter, where diligence creates the former).

\*I once unknowingly destroyed a gas mantel, not knowing its purpose and the effect it was supposed to create.

**“Admission of guilt is not proof of being the causation agent and other evidence is needed as corroboration.”**

# Symbolism in dreams

By Tony Sandy

When we moved up to The Highlands in September last year, we stayed with a friend until we found a place of our own. I noticed within a short while that I was having two recurrent dream themes that weren't typical of my normal sleep fodder. One involved people being hacked to death and the other double incontinence. Several weeks later our friend was talking about another friend she knew that often visited the house. In general conversation she mentioned that this was doubly incontinent. Then after we moved into our new house, again in general conversation this friend mentioned that her other friend was also obsessed with serial killers. I often visit my cousin and sleep over at her house, when back in Norfolk. Never in all that time have I had these kind of violent nightmares despite the fact that she too is obsessed with murderers.

Coincidence or was I picking up something unconsciously, when I was in the relaxed dream state? I believe the latter because I think consciousness is actually a defence and the unconscious; when we have a nightmare what we do? We instinctively wake up. I believe I am not alone in this, once reading a quote by somebody online who said much the same thing but alas I cannot give a reference for this as it was a while back on social media.

Even more recently I dreamed of pursuing an old girlfriend, whose back was always towards me as I disappeared. At first I thought this was about her, then I realised it was symbolic of love and my old dog, who twice in one day, just before that I had lost contact with it and it had lost contact with me. A couple of days after that it disappeared again on a walk and I found it behind the hedge where I had been walking, sitting on its backside and contemplating the scenery in front of it. There was my answer, picked up subconsciously in the dream.

I have had a series of dreams involving the unknown. The first of these super real and terrifying dreams, involved being chased by a Greyhound bus on a motorway. I ran down the embankment and hid but like the horror film 'The Car' starring James Brolin, it drove down the slope, headlights beaming (I awoke, screaming).

In a later one, I was in a U shaped building, that is two wings joined by a corridor. I was in one and my wife was in the other and we were waving to each other, when the door into my section slowly crept open, to reveal nothing (I woke screaming again). I recounted this latter one to John Mack, the Harvard professor of psychology, at the Leeds UFO conference.

Sometime later this was followed by being in my childhood home with one of my dogs at the front door, when something drew my attention to the back door. Both me and Holly ran to the back door, when it crept open, to reveal nothing (yes I woke up screaming in the predictable pattern, previously noted).

I have had a series of dreams about a haunted house as well. In it I was told not to go into the upper part of the house / attic because it was haunted but when I did venture up there, you could feel something but never saw anything. Then recently, I dreamed of another haunted house and saw on the landing an indistinct black, humanoid shape, across from me. When I tried to communicate with it, all that came out was a frightened gibberish of sounds, at which point I woke up. It should be noted that the hauntings in the attics and the U shaped building were all at the top of the structures as may be significant.

In Preston Dennett's third volume of 'Not From Here,' chapter seven 'Is Jesus An Alien?,' he mentions the case of a man, his wife and thirteen year old son on a camping trip to Mount Rainier National Park (page 106 onward), who encountered a UFO. This case I believe is very important as it might explain why witness statements sometimes differ. For instance the father had a very different story from his son possibly because he was in an altered state of consciousness.

His son saw the giant figure in real life and Douglas interpreted what he saw in a dream state. He thought he was on all fours but his mind told him that because the figure was huge, compared to him. The importance of this cannot be overstated. This is also why some investigators get confused about witness statements and believe UFOs aren't nuts and bolts as other investigators think experiencers are lying or fantasists.

I for instance I have two common dream themes. One is where I am looking for a toilet but can't find one and that wakes me up because I need to use one. The second is where I am at university (your celestial college) because I am in reality continually searching for knowledge.


In relation to this I had an interesting insight today. My wife and I both noticed that in our dreams, we recognised certain people and places but they are in a different guise to their everyday forms. When waking this morning I remembered the actual appearance of a girl I knew from childhood and that I saw in a dream the night before as someone else. Therefore in sleep I realised we see symbolised reality but when fully awake, we remember the actual truth of every day reality, rather than imagined form.

Symbolism is visual communication in the dream state as Freud and Jung realised and this shows it, just as sound is in the waking state. In waking life sound communication rules because it gets us moving as with music and dance or it arouses emotion in us, which moves our viewpoints on issues. Vision is stillness and silence - its complete opposite (trance immobility as opposed to dance mobility).



## About the author:

Tony Sandy is a writer of fiction, Observations on Life, a series of books deconstructing English and posts on social media about paranormal, ufological and consciousness matters. He also takes photos of odd and natural images, creating montage and coloured pencil artworks along with filling alien eggs with found material. Tony lives in Scotland with his wife and last remaining old dog.



# The magical retirement of the Beast and the Earl

By Gayle Fidler

Edward Alexander Crowley, born 1875 called “The Beast” by his mother and the “Wickedest Man in the World”, by the press. He was also voted number 73 out of 100 in a poll of the greatest Britons (BBC, 2002).

70 years after his death, Mr Crowley manages to maintain his reputation as a drug taking, libertine sex fiend with a penchant for practising black magic. Crowley’s presence can be found in places as obscure as the reputation of the man himself. He is depicted on the cover of The Beatle’s “Sergeant Pepper” album and his character influenced the creation of James Bond villains.

There have been many articles and books published about Crowley over the years, including his own. If you look past the media sensationalism, there are depths to Crowley that are remain unknown to the average member of Joe public .A renowned mountain climber, a yoga devotee ,he also worked for the intelligence agencies during both world wars, these are just a few lesser known facts.

In 2018, Mr Crowley popped up in the most unexpected of places. On my holiday, at Chillingham Castle in rural Northumberland.

When I say “popped up” he didn’t literally appear, that would be some amazing feat even for the Great Beast himself. But Crowley does have connections with Chillingham and like all good ghost tourist hotspots it is being used to advantage.

Briefly, for anyone that hasn’t visited (and I can highly recommend you do, if you haven’t). Chillingham Castle is a 13th Century, Grade 1 stronghold. The castle has been turned into a unique tourist attraction by its current owner, Sir Humphrey Wakefield. Wakefield has spent decades lovingly restoring the building, after it fell into ruin. One of the main attractions the estate is noted for, is its sinister reputation as Britain’s most haunted castle and ghost tours take place regularly throughout the year.

I first came across the notion of Crowley’s presence at the castle on a social media group which discussed the experiences of people attending ghost tours at Chillingham. After reading quotes from people stating that they had felt his presence during vigils, I decided to investigate further. What I found was a fabulous tale worthy of a film plot. The story follows two British eccentrics taking a great retirement across the globe to battle witchcraft. What more could a Hollywood production want? Let’s start at the beginning.

In the book “Chillingham: It’s Cattle, Castle and Church” Wakefield tells us that “The 7th Earl was a friend of renowned occultist Aleister Crowley. The two men famously practised black magic in the northeast corner of the castle courtyard” (Bahn et al, 2016).

The 7th Earl of Tankerville, George Montagu Bennet and he certainly had a colourful reputation. Described as a “Sailor, Soldier, Cowpuncher and Evangelist” (New York Times, 1931). Tankerville was highly regarded for his fine tenor voice, he was known by many as “the singing earl”. He had extensively toured America, working as a circus clown amongst other things when he met his wife Leonora.

Leonora went on to become the Countess of Tankerville and later wrote a pamphlet entitled “The Ghosts of Chillingham Castle” (Tankerville, 1925). This account details some of the ghostly experiences she had at Chillingham and is still available to buy in the castle shop.

Tankerville inherited the family seat at Chillingham in 1899, following the death of his father. During a trip to London in 1907, Tankerville was introduced to Crowley by the infamous chemist E.P Whineray who was later arrested for the supply of illegal drugs. The chemist’s shop on Stafford Street, near Piccadilly Circus appears to have been a regular supplier of many different substances to anyone that was able to afford them.



Chillingham Castle



George Montagu Bennet,  
7th Earl of Tankerville



Aleister Crowley

During their first meeting Tankerville confessed that he required magical help from Crowley to rid him of witches that were plotting to kill him. This included his own mother, who Tankerville was convinced wanted him dead. The pair met for dinner to discuss the problem, and when they did it became apparent that the issue was greater than witchcraft.

Crowley describes these early conversations with Tankerville (who he affectionately referred to as “Tanky” and less affectionately “The Earl of coke and crankum”) as delusional. Crowley blamed these delusions, not on witchcraft, but was convinced that Tankerville was suffering from psychosis attributed to cocaine and alcohol addiction.

Tankerville was convinced that only magic could rid him of the witches. He offered to pay Crowley for magical guidance. Crowley took the money and set about to put him through his own method of rehab. The pair planned a trip abroad, a great retirement. Crowley had his concerns over the trip, writing “Good God” in his diary after they had agreed on a date. Crowley consoled himself with a week playing golf prior to leaving. On the 27th June 1907, the pair set sail.

Part of this trip was to help Tankerville develop his own magical skills away from the distractions of home. Crowley also hoped that the change of scenery would help cure his addictions. They set off through Paris, Marseilles, Gibraltar and ended up in Tangiers. Crowley tutored Tankerville, he encouraged him to use astral projection in a bid to fight the witches. He also taught him the lesser banishing ritual of the pentagram, which is a magical practice to remove negative elements from a space. Crowley encouraged the use of these practices, whenever Tankerville’s paranoia took over him.

It is clear from Crowley’s diaries that Tankerville was beginning to irritate him as the trip went on. Crowley was using the experience as a great adventure and an opportunity to study the culture of different countries. He hoped that this would cleanse Tankerville of his addictions and as such cure his psychosis. Tankerville had other thoughts, he wouldn’t engage in the local customs, he got sunstroke and became ill from the local food. Tankerville had no interest in the travelling lifestyle. He blamed it on homesickness, missing his wife and England. Crowley blamed it on missing cocaine.

The relationship between the pair, became strained. Crowley who had been using the time to develop his own spiritual awareness wrote “I don’t know about the power of samadhi (a divine state which can be reached through meditation) but I can tolerate Tankerville and I want a new grade especially for that”.

Tankerville’s paranoia became fixated on Crowley. He began to accuse him of being in league with the same coven of witches as his mother. Crowley had become tired of him and Tankerville decided to head for home. Crowley tried to convince him to walk back to England from Gibraltar as it would be good for his spiritual health. Tankerville disagreed and the great magical retirement sadly came to an end.

#### About the author:



Gayle Fidler lives in the North East of England, and has a lifelong interest in the paranormal and the occult. She also writes fiction, usually with a dark twist. Gayle is a guest writer for the Spooky Isles website and a member of Otherworld North East paranormal research and investigation team.

Besides writing and researching mysterious things. Gayle also collects bad taxidermy. Is a SFX make-up artist with a special interest in zombies and is also training to be a Viking blacksmith.

# In search of giant snakes

By Richard Freeman



Constricting snakes - the boas and pythons - are the largest snakes alive, Charles Gould, the Victorian naturalist, in his magnum opus *Mythical Monsters*, tells us of his belief that constricting snakes once grew far beyond their modern dimensions:

“I fancy that at the present day the numbers, magnitude, and terrifying nature of serpents but feebly represents the power which they asserted in the early days of man’s existence, or the terror which they then inspired.”

These snakes kill by suffocating - not crushing - victims in their muscular coils, and make good analogues for the ‘wyrm’ type dragon. This is even more so, when one considers the amazing lengths reported for some specimens. These lengths far exceed the accepted maximums given above. Our search for giant snakes will take us all around the tropics, but we will start in the cradle of mankind - Africa.

A monster snake was photographed by the passenger of a Belgian military helicopter-pilot in the Katanga region of Zaire in 1959. The reptile is pictured so clearly that even the scales on its hide are visible. The photographer was one Colonel Remy van Lierde, a decorated WWII pilot. During the war he had shot down six enemy fighter planes and forty-four V1-flying bombs. He gained the rank of Squadron Leader in the RAF and after the war was made Deputy Chief of Staff to the Minister of Defence in 1954. He was working as a charter pilot at the time. His chopper crossed a hollow in a jungle clearing and Van Lierde saw a vast snake emerging from a hole.

The huge serpent was dark green with a lighter coloured underside. Van Lierde, who was adept at estimating size put the creature at fifty feet long. He made several passes allowing his passenger to shoot a picture. The snake reared up fully ten feet as if to strike at the helicopter. Van Lierde estimated the head of the snake to be three feet long by two feet wide and compared it to the head of a gigantic horse.

An African rock python of thirty-two feet was supposedly shot near Bingerville, in the Ivory Coast. Though unconfirmed, it beats the official record by seven feet. The Ivory Coast seems a haven for large pythons, because another of the same species, that was twenty-four feet long was killed in Adiopodoume.

In August 2000, an oil-worker from Egbema-Ogba, Nigeria, was swallowed by a twenty five foot rock python. George Otoh, (33), was relieving himself in bushes when the massive snake attacked. His body was later discovered inside the reptile.

One remarkable woman who had experience with giant snakes in Africa was Mary Kingsley - niece of author Charles Kingsley. She had led a sheltered life until the age of thirty, then suddenly decided that she wanted to explore Africa, and study its religions and superstitions. In a time where women were meant to stay at home, she explored the then truly wild areas of west and central Africa collecting specimens for the British Museum. She recorded her remarkable adventures in a book *Travels in West Africa*. Therein she tells of outsized specimens of several species:

*“The largest crocodile I ever measured was twenty-two feet three inches, the largest gorilla five feet seven inches. I am assured by the missionaries at Calabar that there was a python brought into Creek Town in the Rev. Mr Goldie’s time that extended the whole length of the Creek Town mission-house veranda and to spare. The python must have been over forty feet. I have not a shadow of doubt it was. Stay-at-home people will always discredit great measurements, but experienced bushmen do not, and after all, if it amuses stay-at-homes to do so, by all means let them; they will have dull lives of it and it don’t hurt you, for you know how exceedingly difficult it is to preserve really big things to bring home, and how, half the time, they fall into the hands of people who would not bother their heads to preserve them in a rotting climate like West Africa. The largest python skin I ever measured was a damaged one, which was twenty-six feet.”*



Modern day experts would do well to take a leaf from Miss Kingsley's book. Time and again, armchair zoologists will proclaim that 'this' or 'that' cannot exist, without ever leaving the ivory-towers of their lecture halls.

Asia too has its tales of giant serpents. Infact it is here in Asia, on the island of Celebes, (now Sulawesi), that the official longest snake in the world was captured a thirty-three foot reticulated python taken in 1912. Of course, larger specimens have been reported. 18th century explorer, Francis Legaut, claimed to have encountered one fifty feet long on Java. A brute of similar size was reported in The North China Daily News of November 10th 1880. The story tells of a western hunter (whose name is never revealed), who came across a remote hut in the dense jungle between Buddoh and Sirangoon on the Malay peninsula. Upon the roof was the skin of a gigantic python. Inquiring as to its origin with the hut's owner he was told this story:

*"The Malay was awakened one night by his wife's screams. Investigating he found to his horror an immense snake that had drawn the poor woman's whole arm into its maw and was in the processes of swallowing her. The plucky fellow seized two bags and stuffed them into the corners of the giant reptile's mouth thus forcing them to open wider. The snake released the woman and turned upon the man whipping its coils about him. Fortunately for the Malay his arms were free, and he grabbed his parang and hacked at the vasty serpent. The snake unwound and slithered through an opening beneath the hut. Both the man and the hut were covered in blood.*

*Come morning he followed the python's trail to a patch of plantain palms. In its death throws the beast had smashed the trees and uprooted them. In the midst of the destruction lay the offending creature, dead. He had been offered 60 dollars from some Chinese who had travelled long distances to buy pieces of the monster's flesh due to its medicinal properties. They also offered him 6 dollars for the skin, this he kept however, as a trophy of the ordeal. The skin was between 7 and 8 fathoms (50-56 feet) long."*

Unfortunately, skins can be stretched when removed from the corpse of a snake - giving an unnaturally long appearance. Even so, this snake - if the estimates were right - must have been a colossal animal. So big in fact that one doubts that it could have been killed anything like as easily as it is claimed.

An even more dramatic story is recounted in the Victorian natural history tome Pictorial Museum of Animated Nature:

*"The captain of a country ship, while passing the Sunderbunds, sent a boat into one of the creeks to obtain some fresh fruits, which are cultivated by the few miserable inhabitants of this inhospitable region. Having reached the shore, the crew moored the boat under a bank, and left one of their party to take care of her.*

*During their absence, the lascar who remained in charge of the boat, overcome by the heat, lay down under the seats and fell asleep. Whilst he was in this happy state of unconsciousness an enormous boa (python) emerged from the jungle, reached the boat and had already coiled it's huge body round the sleeper, and was in the very act*



*of crushing him to death, when his companions fortunately returned at this auspicious moment, and attacking the monster severed a portion of its tail, which so disabled it that it no longer retained the power of doing any mischief. The snake was then easily dispatched, and was found to measure, as stated 62 feet and some inches in length."*

If this event actually occurred, then the creature would have been an outsized reticulated python, not a boa. Once again, the ease of its death raises suspicion.

The official record for the reticulated python stands at thirty-three- feet for a specimen killed near a mining camp in the Celebes. Animal dealer Henry Trefflich is said to have obtained a thirty-two- foot specimen from an unspecified source but this has never been proven. Other claimed giants include a thirty-three- footer killed on Java and a thirty- foot python killed near Penang, Malaysia in 1844.

One verified titan was "Colossus" - a 28.5 feet reticulated python held at Pittsburgh's Highland Zoo. At the time of her death (from old age) in 1966 he was estimated to weigh 300lbs.

The now defunct Knaresborough Zoo in Yorkshire once held a 27- foot -four- inch reticulated python called 'Cassius' who weighed in at 220lbs.

**"The mother of all down-under giants was reported back in 1822, by two men in front of a bench of magistrates in Liverpool near Sydney. The men told them that just four km outside of town, they had come across a snake forty-seven feet long. and three times as thick as a human."**

Australia unsurprisingly has also produced giant snake stories. Charles Gould was told by his acquaintance, G. R. Moffat, that the aborigines on the Lower Murray river between Swan Hill and the Darling junction, knew of a giant black serpent that lived in the Mallee scrub. It was forty feet long, of huge girth, but very swift. Fortunately, it produced a vile stench that warned of its approach. A white man - the son of Mr Peter Beveridge of Swan Hill - station had seen the beast. This was around 1857.

Mr Henry Liddell, a resident on the Darling River, was told identical stories by stock-riders and ration-carriers. The ebony monsters were considered not uncommon between Wentworth and Pooncaria in the 1870s.

The mother of all down-under giants was reported back in 1822, by two men in front of a bench of magistrates in Liverpool near Sydney. The men told them that just four km outside of town, they had come across a snake forty-seven feet long. and three times as thick as a human. Thinking it was dead, one of the pair unwisely threw a rock at it. To their horror, it was very much still alive, and rose five- feet off the ground. The magistrates seemed to believe them, as a posse of armed townsfolk ventured to the location of the encounter but found only a large track bearing the impression of scales.

The longest snake actually measured in Australia was a twenty-eight foot amethystine python killed at Greenhill near Cairns in 1948.

It is in South America that we meet with the most numerous reports of outsized ophidians. This is unsurprising, as the neo-tropics is the lair of the giant snake el supremo - the anaconda. In terms of bulk, this snake is by far the largest in the world. Its girth is far greater than that of the reticulated python. Ever since the white man first ventured tentatively into the 'green hell, he has brought back tales that are the very stuff of nightmares - snakes whose size defies belief.

The earliest man to return with such bone chilling yarns was one Charles Waterton (1782-1865) - better known as Squire Waterton - a great British eccentric and adventurer. A Yorkshireman from a wealthy Roman Catholic family, the Squire insisted on sleeping on bare-boards with a block of wood as his pillow. Almost unique in his age, he was a teetotaler and violently opposed to hunting for sport. He was a passionate naturalist, and collector of animals, and with true intrepid Yorkshire spirit, he made four expeditions to South America between 1812 and 1824 - travelling in Brazil, Venezuela, and Guiana.

In typical Waterton style, he exposed as much of his skin as he could in the jungle at night, hoping to be bitten by a vampire bat. He was most disappointed when he was not bitten, but one of his companions was. The ungrateful man ran and hid in a latrine. Waterton's books are full of such shenanigans, and it is obvious he enjoyed himself immensely. The Squire lived to the ripe old age of 83, a miracle when one reads of some of the risks he took!

Of the anaconda he writes, *"The camoudi snake (as it was called in British Guiana) has been killed from thirty to forty feet long; though not venomous, his size renders him destructive to the passing animals. The Spaniards in the Oroonoque positively affirm that he grows to the length of seventy or eighty feet and that he will destroy the strongest and largest bull. His name seems to confirm this; there he is called "matatoro" which means literally "bull killer". Thus, he must be ranked among the deadly snakes, for it comes to the same thing in the end whether the victim dies by poison from the fangs, which corrupts his blood and makes it stink horribly, or whether his body be crushed to a mummy and swallowed by this hideous beast."*

Of course, the anaconda kills by constriction, not venom.

A missionary Father de Vernazza wrote in the 19th century surely what is the most fatuous description of the anaconda:

*"The sight alone of this monster confounds, intimidates and infuses respect into the heart of the boldest man. He never seeks or follows the victim upon whom he feeds, but so great is the force of his inspiration, that he draws in with his breath whatever quadruped or bird may pass him within twenty to fifty yards of distance, according to its size. That which I killed from my canoe upon the Pastaza (with five shots from a fowling piece) had two yards of thickness and fifteen yards of lengths; but the Indians have assured me there are animals of this kind here of three or four yards in diameter, and from thirty to forty long. These swallow entire hogs, stags, tigers, and men, with the greatest facility."*

The good father was confusing diameter with circumference methinks, else his snakes would be extremely stout. Alternatively, it may have shot one that had just eaten a large prey-item such as a tapir. The super snake suction he speaks of is total fantasy, but the supposed mystic effects of anaconda breath is a stubborn myth - as we shall see in a moment. The 'tiger' referred to is actually the jaguar (*Panthera onca*).

In 1944 another large specimen was encountered in Columbia by a team of prospecting geologists led by Roberto Lamon. The men shot the snake and measured it at 37 feet 6 inches. The group left the creature to eat their lunch, intending to come back and photograph their trophy and skin it. Upon their return they were amazed to find it gone. The bullets had merely stunned the animal which had recovered and absconded in their absence.

Fredrico Medem - a Columbian herpetologist - saw an anaconda that he estimated to be between thirty-forty feet and obtained a report of another thirty-four feet long.

General Candido Mariano de Silva Rondon - who lent his name to the Rondonia area of Brazil - saw a specimen killed by Indians, some thirty-eight feet long. There are several records of snakes in this size bracket that cannot easily be dismissed, as some have involved reputable scientists. A thirty-four foot anaconda was shot by Vincent Roth, director of The National Museum, in British Guiana (now Guyana). Mr R. Mole - a naturalist who made many important contributions to the knowledge of the wildlife of Trinidad - reported a thirty-three foot example there in 1924. Dr F. Medem of the Colombia University, saw a 33 foot 8 inch snake killed on the Guaviare River.

**"In 1944 another large specimen was encountered in Columbia by a team of prospecting geologists led by Roberto Lamon. The men shot the snake and measured it at 37 feet 6 inches."**

In 1909, war was on the verge of exploding in South America. A "rubber rush" to rival the gold-rushes of the old-west was happening, and a dispute was occurring in the Rio Abuna rubber plantations on the western borders of Brazil. Peru and Bolivia also meet at this point, and a bitter wrangle between the three countries over the valuable resource was growing to dangerous levels. Into this drama, The Royal Geographical Society sent a mediator to defuse the situation. Major Percy Fawcett - a 39 -year- old artillery officer - was to make the first intensive study of the area.

It was whilst engaged in this task that he initially heard of giant snakes. The manager of a remote hamlet called Yorongas, told him that he had killed a fifty-eight- foot anaconda in the lower Amazon. Fawcett disregarded the story at first, but subsequently claimed to have shot an even bigger specimen.

Several months after the conversation at Yorongas he was on the Rio Abuna, upstream from its junction with the Rio Rapiirao when:

*"...almost under the bow of the igarite there appeared a triangular head and several feet of undulating body. It was a giant anaconda. I sprang for my rifle as the creature began to make it's way up the bank, and hardly waiting to aim smashed a .44 soft-nosed bullet into its spine 10 feet below the wicked head. At once there was a flurry of foam, and several heavy thumps against the boat's keel, shaking us as though we had run on a snag. With great difficulty I persuaded the Indian crew to turn in shoreward. They were so frightened that the whites showed all round their popping eyes, and in the moment of firing I had heard their terrified voices begging me not to shoot lest the monster destroy the boat and kill everyone on board, for not only do these creatures attack boats when injured, but there is also a great danger from their mates.*

*We stepped ashore and approached the reptile with caution. It was out of action, but shivers ran up and down the body like puffs of wind on a mountain tarn. As far as it was possible to measure, a length of 45 feet lay out of the water, and 17 feet in it, making a total length of 62 feet. Its body was not thick for such a colossal length-not more than 12 inches in diameter- but it had probably been long without food. I tried to cut a piece out of the skin, but the beast was by no means dead and it's sudden upheavals rather scared us. A penetrating foetid odour emanated from the snake, probably its breath, which is believed to have a stupefying effect, first attracting then paralysing it's prey. Everything about this snake was repulsive.*

**“It seems that a thirteen metre (forty-three foot) anaconda was captured by a farmer after it had eaten a cow. He apparently incited it with a pig on a rope. Subsequently he tried to sell his story, unsuccessfully, to the press. The creature is now said to be residing in a pond on a farm in north west Brazil.”**

*Such large specimens as this may not be common, but trails in the swamps reach a width of 6 feet and support the statements of Indians and rubber pickers that the anaconda sometimes reaches an incredible size, altogether dwarfing that shot by me. The Brazilian Boundary Commission told me of one killed in the Rio Paraguay exceeding 80 feet in length.”*

This is the most celebrated and oft repeated encounter with a giant anaconda, but it is often one of the most questionable.

- Firstly, the width given for this snake is absurdly small. The anaconda is a massively built snake. A specimen half this length would have a width twice as wide or more. Fawcett's snake would have had to be an emaciated near-skeleton!
- Secondly his assertion that “there is a great danger from their mates”, implies that anacondas mate for life and their partners will seek revenge for the killing of a mate. This is nonsense, no snakes are life-maters, and anacondas breed in huge “mating balls”. These consist of dozens of males competing to mate with one larger female.
- Finally, no snakes have “stupefying breath”. The breath of a giant anaconda may well be foul but it possesses none of these attributes.

For these reasons, I am inclined to reject Fawcett's story as a traveller's tale. The man himself disappeared several years later whilst looking for a lost city in the jungle.

There are other accounts however, which are not so easily dismissed, and the anaconda has one huge advantage over the python that may well allow it to attain a greater size. All pythons are oviparous - that is they lay eggs. This must be done on land. Anacondas are ovo-viviparous - they retain the eggs inside their bodies until the young hatch, then give birth to them live. This means they do not have to leave the water - their final link with the land is broken. Living in water almost all of the time, means anacondas are buoyed up - they do not have to support their own body weight on land very often, and hence can grow to a very large size.

The Marquis de Wavrin was another explorer of South America and was active in the years before the Second World War. He told the great Belgian cryptozoologist Bernard Heuvelmans, that he had seen anacondas over thirty feet long, and that the natives told of far larger ones. He once shot a twenty-six foot, individual that had been coiled around a branch. When he expressed a desire to retrieve the cadaver, his canoe-men told him that it was a waste of powder to shoot such a small snake and a waste of time picking it up.

They went on to say, “On the Rio Guaviare, during floods, chiefly in certain lagoons in the neighbourhood, and even near the confluence of this stream, we often see snakes that are more than double the size of the one you have just shot. They are often thicker than our canoe.

F.W. Up de Graff - an explorer of seven year's experience - spotted a giant anaconda as it lay in shallow water under his canoe. He said:

It measured fifty feet for certain, and probably nearer sixty. I know this from the position in which it lay. Our canoe was a twenty-four-footer; the snake's head was ten or twelve feet beyond the bow; its tail a good four feet beyond the stern; its body was looped into a huge ‘S’, whose length was the length of our dugout and whose breadth was a good five feet.

When witnesses are cross examined - face- to- face - by a renowned zoologist, we have to give them a little credence. One of the witnesses of the next case was interviewed over several days by no less an authority than Heuvelmans himself.

It was in 1947, when many wild and sometimes fierce tribes were still commonplace in the South America. A particularly warlike group were the Chavantes - who had recently killed a number of Brazilian officials. Francisco Meirelles of the Service for the Protection of the Indians, organised an expedition to try to establish peaceful relations with this tribe. The five-month endeavour included in its twenty-man line up, Serge Bonacase - a French painter whom Heuvelmans later interviewed.

By the second month, the company had reached a large island between the two branches of the Araguaya River and made base-camp there. The men spent several days in preparation for the big push into the wilderness (or the sertao as the ‘green hell’ was known). They spent long reconnaissance and hunting trips away from the island. On one such trip, eight of them were hunting capybaras in a swamp between the Rio Manso, (charmingly known as the Rio das Mortes - ‘The River of Death’, as the Chavantes butchered anyone who dared to cross it), and the Rio Cristalino. The Chavantes did not put in an appearance, but the group encountered something far more frightening:

*“The guide pointed out an anaconda on a rise in the ground half hidden among the grass. We approached to within 20 metres of it and fired our rifles at it several times. It tried to make off, all in convolutions, but we caught up with it after 20 or 30 metres and finished it off. Only then did we realise how enormous it was; when we walked the along the whole length of it's body it seemed as if it would never end. What struck me most was it's enormous head.*

*As we had no measuring instruments, one of us took a piece of string and held it between the ends of the fingers of one hand and the other shoulder to mark of a length of one metre. Actually it could have been a little less. We measured the snake several times with this piece and always made it 24 or 25 times as long as the string. The reptile must therefore have been nearly 23 metres long."*

Unfortunately, none of the men were zoologists, and none realised the importance of the find. Bonacase himself had heard so many stories of giant anacondas he believed them to be commonplace. The carcass, and even the skin, would have weighed the men down too much for them to have brought it back. So, sadly, this invaluable specimen was left to the jungle scavengers. (This seems to be the bane of cryptozoologists. Specimens always seem to fall into the hands of those who do not know their importance, and hence seldom find their way to civilisation.)

The late 1950s brought perhaps the most dramatic encounter with an anaconda. The political climate, with its resurgence in communism in Latin America, was such that the U.S government placed C.I.A agents in sensitive areas. One agent - called "Lee" - was told by a cattle-rancher of a giant-snake lairing in a cave in Bolivia. The reptile was said to be over thirty-three feet long. It was said to have eaten ten Indians and many cattle over the years. Every three months, or so the serpent emerged, seized a steer, dragged it into the river, killed it, then ate it. Then it would return to its cave.

The rancher wanted Lee to capture the animal and take it to a zoo as it was "probably the largest snake in the world". The problem was discussed at the embassy many times until someone came up with an audacious plot to catch it. The plan was to flush the monster from its lair with tear-gas whilst a long sack (complete with zip fasteners), was held over the caves mouth. There would be two "zip-men" - one at each end of the sack - to hasten the operation. For added security Lee carried (ironically) a .357 python pistol.

It was just as well Lee was "packing heat"; as things did go spectacularly wrong. The tear-gas was shot into the cave, and the anaconda - thrashing madly - shot out of the cave, and into the sack. Once its entire length was inside, both ends were zipped up. The agents had not reckoned with the snake's vast strength however. Its violent writhing split the sack - end to end - and the brute was free.

The livid animal came rushing at Lee who whipped out his pistol and managed to put a bullet in its head. The snake threw itself into a huge loop, smashing into a small hardwood tree about as big as a telephone pole. The tree was shattered like matchwood and the snake fell back into the jungle. Lee pumped another two bullets into its head. When it had expired, they measured its length

proved to be thirty-four feet three inches. Lee skinned the snake and took the hide back to the United States where he kept it in his garage. Its current whereabouts are unknown. As noted earlier, this size would seem very small for a snake which was able to swallow such large livestock.

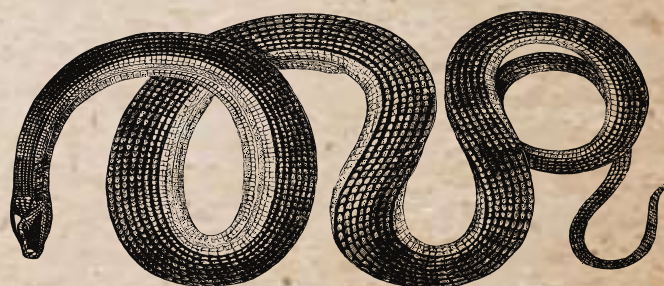
Lee's colleague David Atlee Phillips understandably doubted his friend's outlandish story. Sometime later he was attending a party at Washington, and mentioned the saga to Darwin Bell, then Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Labor Affairs. Bell claimed not only to have known Lee but to have taken part in the capture attempt.

I was the tail zipper man, he told an amazed Phillips.

More recently, a giant anaconda was reported near Sao Paulo, Brazil. Farmer-come-hunter Joao Menezes was fishing with his three-year-old son Daniel, and turned his back on the boy to store some fish in a wooden shack. Suddenly his son's screams rent the air, and the horrified Menezes, turned to see a forty-five foot anaconda had risen from the waters and sized his boy by the neck. He tried in vain to pry the snake's jaws apart then ran home for his rifle. By the time he got back, however, the boy had been crushed and was in the process of being swallowed.

More recently still, Colonel John Blashford-Snell was told a most intriguing story whilst travelling across the Andes by river from Bolivia to Buenos Aires. It seems that a thirteen metre (forty-three foot) anaconda was captured by a farmer after it had eaten a cow. He apparently incited it with a pig on a rope. Subsequently he tried to sell his story, unsuccessfully, to the press. The creature is now said to be residing in a pond on a farm in north west Brazil. This occurred in late 1999.

Reptiles keep growing throughout their lives although the rate does slow down as they age. We have seen that some reptiles such as crocodiles can reach advanced ages. Giant tortoises can live to spectacular ages as well. An Aldabran giant tortoise (*Aldabrachelys gigantea hololissa*) living on the Island of Saint Helena is 186 years old. Another of the same species that was kept at Calcutta Zoo was thought to be 255 at the time of its death. If, under unusual conditions, constricting snakes could reach great ages, they too could reach great sizes and maybe they do, in deep jungles of the tropics.



#### About the author:



Richard Freeman is a cryptozoologist, explorer and the zoological director of the Centre for Fortean Zoology. A former zoo keeper he has worked with over 400 species.

Richard has hunted cryptids (unknown animals) all over the world including the Tasmanian wolf, the giant anaconda and the Mongolian death worm.



# A Pyramid by many other Names

By Amethyst Gray

## The Great Pyramid of Giza

Pyramids have always held a great fascination for me. I had often seen pictures of the Great Pyramid of Giza. As a child, I had wrongly believed that there were only pyramids in Egypt. But then I heard about the stepped pyramids in Mexico and South America. The Temple of the Feathered Serpent at Teotihuacan in Mexico is truly spectacular. And indeed, there are also the more pointed Nubian pyramids in Sudan. I have never visited Egypt, Sudan, nor Mexico, but I have been to places that have reminded me of those sites.

The concept of a standard feature such as the pyramid that might open up the possibility of a widespread ancient world civilisation or lend credibility to Atlantis or Lemuria has always been a tetchy subject with historians and archaeologists, especially Egyptologists who rely upon the sanctity of the current model of civilisation. Even the discovery of Göbekli Tepe (Potbelly Hill in Turkish) some years ago with its high-status carvings and carbon dating to some 12,000 years ago did not seem to worry those who kept control of the historical agenda. Its proximity to the biblical garden of Eden and the Fertile Crescent in the Middle East did not make it a threat. Earlier finds in the Americas or Asia did rather upset it, as the fertile crescent has always underpinned the rather European colonial view of history that nothing of real significance elsewhere in the world predated the development of agriculture in the Near East.

The recent discovery of a pyramid structure under what was thought of as a natural mountain at Gunung Padang

(mountain of light) in Indonesia with biological cores dating back 28000 years has been particularly troublesome for them to explain away. However, current progress at the site has been highly hindered by the authorities since the very early dating was announced.

Pyramids appear to have been a standard feature across the globe - but they go by many other names. Even the word 'pyramid' was derived from a Greek word, 'pyramis' describing the shape of the Egyptian pyramids. The Egyptian name was actually 'Mer'. The capstone of a pyramid was called 'ben-ben', as was the tip of the obelisks such as 'Cleopatra's Needle' now found in London. The term 'ben-ben' related to the sacred benben stone found in the Temple of the Sun at Heliopolis. Ben Ben is most strongly associated with the primordial pyramidal mound of creation from Egyptian creation myths. But its origins may well go back further before the association between the annual floods of the Nile River in Egypt and the new life that sprang from the inundation of the waters from that great river. Perhaps a great worldwide flood catastrophe that receded to leave a mountain peak exposed. Maybe even the alledged crooked peak of the fabled island of Atlantis.

We don't even know where the name 'Mer' originated. In Proto-Indo-European languages, 'Mer' means 'to rub away harm' or possibly ward away harm. Taking the concept one further, if the Egyptian pyramids were initially decorated with symbols and knowledge, then one symbol could easily have been the 'Eye of Ra' which included an eye. In many cultures surrounding Egypt and the Mediterranean, the eye is used as a talisman to ward off evil or ward off harm.



### Wat Chedi Luang, Chiang Mai, Thailand

At one ruined Temple in Chiang Mai in Thailand, I saw a large temple tower, called a 'chedi' or 'stupa', where the relics of Buddha were kept. It resembled a stepped pyramid. This Temple was called Wat Chedi Luang. It meant Temple of the colossal stupa.

### Naga, Wat Chedi Luang, Chiang Mai, Thailand

On my recent trip to Thailand, I spotted features on ancient temples that matched pyramids elsewhere. The serpents or 'Nagas' on Buddhist temples are very similar to the snakes on the pyramids in Mexico. Yet perceived wisdom is that there has been no contact between these races in ancient times.



### Pagoda in Chonburi, Thailand

Other Buddhist and Hindu temples in Thailand, Cambodia and India hold a resemblance to pyramids. Even the pagoda structures in China were often tall towers that started fuller at their base and gradually narrowed further up, ending up with a triangular section roof on the top.



In Biblical texts, the 'Tower of Babel' is thought to have been a ziggurat as found in various sites around Babylon and Syria. Ziggurats are often wholly ruined. But those that remain look like a cross between a large tower and a stepped pyramid.

There is a hill in Bosnia where a maverick archaeologist named Osmanica announced to the world a few short years after the Balkan wars ended that he had discovered a giant pyramid under the hillside. The hill in question looks just like a pyramid, and many finds in the vicinity or underneath the mountain are certainly intriguing.

## Silbury Hill, near Marlborough, Wiltshire

In the south-west of England that is more famous for its ancient stone circles of Stonehenge and Avebury, there is a conical man-made hill that is comparable to the pyramids. It is credited as the largest man-made hill in Europe. Recent digs on other mounds used to be believed to have been built by the Normans as part of their castles have been identified as potential ancient druidic mounds dating back much earlier than the 11th century AD. Merlin's mound in Marlborough is one such now re-dated. Perhaps others at Mere, Carisbrooke castle or even Windsor may have had druidic origins. The Normans were good at reusing pre-existing land features for defensive positions or as power statements over their subjects.

So what is the essence of a pyramid? Is it not to be an imposing monument large enough to appear like a hill or a mountain?

In areas where rock was in short supply, it makes sense that real hills were shaped into more suitable shapes. Where no existing hills existed local building materials would be utilised—chalk in Wiltshire and southern England, volcanic basalt in Indonesia. Notably, chalk is primarily made of calcium, an ionic crystal, and the original Egyptian pyramids were made of granite and limestone that are also ionic crystals with electromagnetic properties. They are all capable of holding and releasing a piezoelectric charge.

Interestingly, orgonite, as described by Wilhelm Reich, displays a piezoelectric aspect and in contemporary manufacture is often shaped into cones or pyramids and is said to aid healing and fertility.

I can think of no better way to commemorate the creation of the world than to build a dominant monument that aids healing and fertility - by whatever name.



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Thailand and Silbury Hill images by the author © 2020

## About the author:



Amethyst Gray was born on the Isle of Wight where her proximity to Carisbrooke Castle, Arthur C. Clarke's Mysterious World and fossils on the beach plus crystals gave her a keen interest in history, hidden history and how everything came about. She was always good at Mathematics so ended up taking a Physics degree at Queen Mary College, University of London. That led to a career in IT before rediscovering her interest in crystals, alternative history and energy healing after moving to the Pewsey Vale of Wiltshire in the early 2010's.

Now as well as being an accomplished IT Consultant at Blue Chip Companies, Amethyst teaches Angelic Reiki, practices Future Life Progression and Past-Life Regression in the vicinity of Avebury stone circle.

She has (briefly) lectured on Atlantis at Edinburgh Fortean Society and is in the process of publishing her Diana Garry book trilogy partly triggered by an interpretation of one of her past-life experiences. 'The Huntress' will be published in 2019, 'The Priestess', based upon a past life in Atlantis will be published in 2020/21. 'The Heiress' will complete the trilogy in the 2020's with insights into survivors of the Titanic disaster.





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