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Northern Weirdness To Full!

By Rob Gandy

The fourth Weird Weekend North took place on 6th & 7th April 2019 in what has become its regular venue, the Community Hall in Rixton-with-Glazebrook, Warrington. Glen Vaudrey had built on the success of previous years by including a number of returning speakers, who talked about their new researches and strange tales, to ensure an entertaining and diverse programme. As usual barmy Barry Tadcaster (aka Richard Freeman) and his cheeky Orang Pendek Ken Jeavons provided the off-the-wall introductions for each presentation. Yet the event began on a sad note as Glen announced that Lee Walker, one of the scheduled speakers, who had presented at the very first WWN in 2016, had very recently suddenly and unexpectedly died whilst on holiday. Glen dedicated WWN 2019 to his memory.

Again yours truly opened proceedings. This was part of my cunning plan whereby I got my presentation out of the way first, so I could sit back and make notes on all the other speakers, in order to write this annual report! I combined some articles that have been published in *Fortean Times*, and some that are hiding on David Sutton's desk, to describe a series of first- and second-hand fortean experiences involving the region of Merseyside and Merseysiders on their trips around the country, including a phantom Concorde! I started with a quick run-through of *Old Man of Halsall Moss* cases [FT328:32-39] to set the context for several new ones that I have since acquired, before setting out a miscellany of ghostly goings-on in various locations.

Next up, Nathan Jackson detailed Big Hairy Monsters across the globe. Taking each continent in turn, he discussed whether each of these fabled creatures might be biologically plausible, biologically absurd, or maybe even a zooform or supernatural being; challenging sources where necessary. In North America, there was the staple Bigfoot, with stories of their fighting prospectors and abducting humans; but what about the Skunk Ape and Fouke Monster from the Deep South, and was the Devil Monkey actually a misinterpreted kangaroo? Naturally BHM's varied in the wide expanses of Asia; did James Stewart really smuggle a Yeti's hand out of Tibet? Similarly Africa and South America featured the dangerous Mao and Maricoxi respectively, and the Yowie stalked parts of Australia. Arguably Europe is the most boring continent for BHM's, unless you look at historical legends of wild men.

Glen Vaudrey then described the Risley Silverman mystery. Risley is less than 4 miles from Rixton-with-Glazebrook, and used to host top secret nuclear facilities. Newspaper articles from 1978 described how Ken Edwards was driving nearby late at night and witnessed a 7-foot tall silver figure, which did not appear to have knee joints, walking stiffly down an embankment. It shone beams of light from its eyes at Ken, before walking through a fence and disappearing. Ken reckoned that he had 'lost an hour' of time. Had he seen an extraterrestrial from a UFO, or a ghost or even an inter-dimensional visitor? Glen's thorough investigation is an excellent example of how to approach such a fortean event, and he arrived at definitive and convincing conclusions. What was it? I am not saying, as I recommended Glen write it up for *FT*! David Sutton-willing, watch this space(man)!

The afternoon saw Chris Josiffe and Chris Hill present about Gef, the Talking Mongoose, based on the former's book¹. Barry Tadcaster's introduction had Ken Jeavons amazingly transform into an actual Talking Mongoose! Or was it a Talking Meerkat? We now know which comparison website

Richard uses! Chris and Chris gave a detailed and amusing description of this well-known but very strange tale, featuring Chris Josiffe's surreal high-pitched interpretation of how Gef might have talked. They quoted the related Harry Price archives, and provided a full history of the Irving family, back to their Liverpool roots, which set important context. The various investigators of the case represented something of a paranormal Who's Who. Was it a fraud or was some form of psychology involved? Were there parallels with the Cottingley Fairies or poltergeists? Forty years after the events, the daughter said that it wasn't a hoax, but she wished that it had never happened.

James Newton talked about a range of creatures collectively named 'Dogmen'; an image used by Hunt Emerson for the event logo. James referenced the books of Linda Godfrey and the 'Beast of Bray Road' in Wisconsin, and stressed it was no misinterpretation of a Bigfoot. It was hairy, had pricked-up ears, was hunchbacked and malevolent; and was physical rather than supernatural. Some descriptions gave it claws rather than hands, and glowing eyes. There was a link to the 1980s 'Land Between The Lakes Killings' where the victims were torn apart by something. James set out the influence of the lore of native North Americans, and was excellent in describing an array of troublesome, tricky canine-like entities. He finally explored the influence of imported traditions from France and Nordic countries which gave geographical distinctions for perceived areas for Bigfoot and Dogmen across North America.

Saturday closed with Richard Freeman inimitably describing his expedition to Tajikistan to investigate sightings of relic hominins known locally as 'gul'. He had expected them to be the same as the Russian almasty, but their description differed. They were smaller, with a primitive chimp-like hand structure, rather than the almasty's more human-like hand structure; all witnesses (including a biology teacher) described weird thumbs, well back on the hand. The gul were considered aggressive; throwing stones and attacking humans, and having a potential sexual interest in humans. It was inferred that the gul were more primitive than either the yeti or almasty. The expedition party also talked to people, including a park ranger, who claimed to have seen the supposedly extinct Caspian tiger. Some specimens had been seen as recently as a month before the visit, including females with cubs. (See **FT[379:55]**)

Andy Ross opened the second day describing his long-time investigations into ABCs in his native County Durham. In the 1980s his Granddad and a mate spotted one in woods. He described sightings in Shincliffe, Hamsterley Forest and on Binchester Moor. Local farmers became increasingly suspicious about how some of their animals had been killed. A Wildlife Officer was appointed to look into reports, with over 300 sightings over time; he concluded that there must be at least two creatures involved. Family members had personally witnessed ABCs: Andy's uncle's pet dog cowered behind him when one was spotted on a walk, and his Dad saw a sheep being stalked. Rumours that ABCs were escapees or released from Lambton Lion Park or Harperley Hotel Zoo were discounted. The famous 1992 photo of the 'Durham Puma' with a rabbit in its mouth was shown, and sightings in 2000 and 2003 described. But since then sightings had diminished, and Andy speculated whether this reflected changes in the countryside and fewer people visiting it, or whether the creatures had simply died. Hopefully not!

Pagan magistrate Steve Jones described three personal *It Happened To Me* experiences, plus the occasion he heard the distinct purring of a ghost cat! On an organised ghost tour of the South Tower of Tutbury Castle in 2008, 'something' was sensed nearby. Then a person's mobile phone went off

sounding like a surprised 'Aagh!' – Steve and two others heard this, which was NOT the ringtone, which was double-checked. Perhaps some interaction between the phone and whatever was present? In 2002 Withernsea Lighthouse Museum yielded an enormous shining orb on the one of the CCTV monitors. Steve is a definite sceptic about orbs, but could not deny this one. The room linked to the screen concerned was found to be where a lighthouse keeper had kept his dementing wife locked up! Finally in Bolling Hall (near Bradford) Steve entered a room and felt he was enveloped by 'cold jelly'. Terrified he left quickly. Had he walked into a ghost?....

After lunch Steve Mera discussed UFO portals and connections to the paranormal. 'Project Doorway' is an up-to-date scientific study of aerial phenomena, where specialised tests are conducted at key sites across the world². Work covers subjects deemed sensitive as well as 'classified'. Phenomena utilise Positive Magnetic Anomalies in certain locations; with some evading iron, producing gravitational wells, and utilising infrasound frequencies to aid activities. Sometimes phenomena can glamour eyewitnesses, with associated impacts to their bodies. There can also be conscious connection between phenomena and observers; the former seemingly capable of measuring the latter's intent. Specialised experiments were referenced, showing UFO links to: gravitational anomalies and differentials in time; gravitational effects on laser arcing; differentials in apportionment analysis; biochemical traumatology and stresses; and a South Atlantic anomaly relating to the decay and collapse of the magnetic field. Steve mentioned related goings-on with the U.S. Defence Department, some of which seem designed to divert interest away from important facts.

The WWN Quiz saw Team 2 the victors, winning Nazi Dildo Guns! The runners-up received yodelling pickles. Possibly the most challenging question was what form did the pig-strangling Runcorn Poltergeist take when it manifested? (Answer: A 7-foot tall, amorphous black cloud with horns)

The event concluded with the entertaining Bob Fischer talking about his book '*Wiffle Lever To Full!*'¹³ This described a year (2006) which he spent travelling around British cult TV and science-fiction conventions, and how this helped him reconnect with his childhood love of the shows; such as Doctor Who, Star Wars, Blake's 7, James Bond, Star Trek, The Hitch-Hikers Guide To The Galaxy, The Prisoner, Discworld, Robin of Sherwood, Monty Python and Red Dwarf. He gave readings from his book, including the traumatising effects of the final episode of Blake's 7 when all the main characters were killed off, just four days before Christmas! Bob also showed slides from the most surreal event he had ever attended: a water-pistol fight between Blake's 7 and Hitch Hiker's Guide fans, in Winspit Quarry in Dorset. He still has the scars!

WWN goes from strength to strength and this year the total attendance was over 100 for the first time! The presentations were complemented by an array of stalls selling t-shirts, books, paintings/pictures, and herbal products, with Hunt Emerson drawing caricatures and selling his comic books⁴. The LAPIS stall advertised its Autumn Conference in St Annes, Lancashire⁵. Glen Vaudrey must be applauded for all his hard work putting on the event. **So you might need to book early for WWN 2020 which is scheduled for 4th & 5th April 2020.** Glen already has some great speakers lined up. Keep checking for updates on: <https://www.weirdweekendnorth.com/>

1,752 words

References

- 1 <http://strangeattractor.co.uk/news/gef-strange-tale-extra-special-talking-mongoose/>
- 2 Details about the 'UFO Investigators Training Course in Aerial Phenomena' and 'Project Doorway' findings can be found at: <http://www.phenomenamagazine.co.uk/#/stellar-courses/4593361437>
- 3 <https://www.hodder.co.uk/books/detail.page?isbn=9781848943292>
- 4 <http://largecow.com/>
- 5 <https://www.lapisparanormal.com/lapis-conference-2019>