



IT'S STILL WEIRD UP NORTH!

ROB GANDY reports on
Weird Weekend North 2017

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The second Weird Weekend North took place on 1-2 April 2017, once again in Rixton-with-Glazebrook, near Warrington. Glen Vaudrey had organised a varied and thought-provoking programme, which this year benefited from the surreal introductions of Barry Tadcaster (aka Richard Freeman) and Ken Jeavons, the Orang Pendek, who had teleported from CFZ Weird Weekend in Devon.

Saturday's first speaker, Tommy Skelton, dropped out at short notice, and so I stepped in to deliver his talk on "Photos of the phantom white rabbit of Crank". The photos showed that the phantom was... an April Fool. Yes, Glen and I had planned this for several months, using a genuine local legend, with a series of puzzling pictures leading to a fluffy white bunny holding an "April Fool" sign. The audience enjoyed the joke, and were taken through a presentation based on my article about forteana and April Fool hoaxes (FT352:28-33).

Steve Mera told us how his Phenomena Project television show (www.phenomenaproject.tv/) would stand out in a saturated market by conducting potentially groundbreaking experiments, and he showed some startling recordings of inexplicable audio and visual phenomena, some from "locked-off" cameras with motion detectors.

Alan Murdie tackled the controversial subject of ghosts and sexuality. While links between prepubescent girls and poltergeist activity are well-documented, there was increasing evidence that sometimes it is older women who were unhappy, and possibly sexually and/or emotionally frustrated, who were poltergeist agents. He quoted Nandor Fodor and referred to Freudian analysis, giving details of a number of illustrative cases.

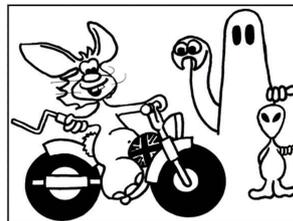
Rob Whitehead highlighted cases from across the world in which children had collectively witnessed UFOs at school, and challenged prevailing attitudes towards the testimonies of these children. He drew particularly on three cases: Westall, Melbourne, Australia, 1966; Broad Haven Primary School, Pembrokeshire,



1977; and Ariel School, Ruwa, Zimbabwe (1994; see FT347:24). Of particular interest were filmed interviews with some of the Westall children who were now adults but stuck firmly to their original testimonies.

Steve Jones's tour of ritual combat games began with the Haxey Hood, which takes place on 6 January, Old Christmas Day (see FT336:6-7, 349:38-41). The "hood" is actually a piece of rope bound in leather that is fought over by two local teams. Steve drew parallels between the 13 referees and Jesus and his apostles, with the Fool arguably representing Judas Iscariot. The tradition of "hanging the Fool" – symbolising Judas's suicide, with the Fool suspended over smouldering straw – was terminated in 1957 after the Fool caught fire. Other games included: the Jedburgh Ball Game (which allegedly began using an Englishman's head as a football); Hallaton's Bottle Kicking and Hare Pie Scramble on Easter Monday; the Pace Egg Play in Heptonstall on Good Friday; the Abbots Bromley Horn Dance (see FT336:26-33); and Hunting the Earl of Rone in Combe Martin. Steve concluded by describing Marsden's Cuckoo Festival and its biannual Imbolc Fire Festival, featuring a contest between larger-than-life figures of Jack Frost and the Green Man.

Jackie Tonks talked about Bigfoot in the Pacific North West, and described how she had moved from scepticism to being 90 per cent convinced of the creature's reality. Her change of mind was based on talks with native tribes, who considered it a real animal, lots of positive photographic



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evidence, and actually having a first-hand encounter with something that crossed her path.

Glen Vaudrey closed the day with a thought-provoking presentation about zoofoms – entities outwardly resembling animals, but supernatural rather than corporeal. He offered plausible explanations for some – including scary black bin bags – but described several bizarre examples that suggest there might be 'something' with the ability to appear in the forms that it *wants* us to see. He referred to people who had given presentations on zoofom phenomena and then (allegedly) been attacked by zoofom creatures; would he appear the following day we wondered...

Mick Walters opened Sunday's session with an eclectic tour of weirdness in Staffordshire, which encompassed UFOs, ghosts of German soldiers, chatty spectres in Burslem, faceless moorland phantoms, werewolves, and the fabled Pigman of Pye Green, before concluding with the story of a cursed Bronze Age sword.

Steve Mera next detailed UFOs through the ages, describing many religious connotations linked to the mystery and presenting lots of purported UFO images

in mediæval and Renaissance paintings. Nowadays, it is difficult to accept UFO photographs at face value because hoaxers have better software than those examining the images. Finally, he emphasised how often secret military aircraft have been mistaken for UFOs over the years.

The indefatigable Richard Freeman took the audience through his search for the Mongolian Death Worm (see FT211:40-44), gathering witness testimony that suggested there might be two types: a 2ft (60cm), reddish-brown, sausage-shaped creature and an 18ft (5.5m) grey, worm-like one. They are supposed to come out after rain, and are much feared, reputedly killing by spitting venom.

Following a fun fortean quiz (the winners received Death Worms (not real ones), the losers Cthulhu colouring books), I presented a selection of first- and second-hand accounts of motorbike-related phantom hitchhikers and road ghosts, starting at one end of the River Mersey in Stockport and ending at the other in Liverpool's Wallasey Tunnel, via Hatfield and Leicestershire.

Finally Bob Fischer talked about Hobmen (see FT330:58-59), primarily in his native North Yorkshire. Hobmen were hairy little house spirits attached to farms, who did menial tasks. They could be benevolent or malevolent, and were similar to fairy-type beings across Europe. There was widespread belief in them prior to the 19th century, but tales could go back over 1,000 years and may have been brought over with the Vikings.

As well as the talks there were stalls and activities: Glen Vaudrey's bookstall, FT's Hunt Emerson drawing caricatures and Megalithic Tours offering fortean-flavoured holidays; and I gathered "It Happened To Me" experiences from audience members (see pp*-* this issue).

WNN 2018 is scheduled for 8-9 April 2018, so put the date in your diary and look for updates at: <http://glenvaudrey.wix.com/weird-weekend-north>.