



EVEN WEIRDER UP NORTH!

Rob Gandy reports back from Weird Weekend North 2018

The third Weird Weekend North took place on 7-8 April in Rixton-with-Glazebrook, Warrington. As always, Glen Vaudrey had organised a rich, diverse programme, with the surreal Barry Tadcaster (aka Richard Freeman) and Orang Pendek Ken Jeavons compering.

Yours truly opened the first day's proceedings with *Fortean Sport*, a compilation of three *FT* articles: King Richard III helping Leicester City win the Premier League [FT342:56-57], the curse of Aaron Ramsey [FT325:53-55] and weird Olympian Games [FT343:46-50]. Interestingly, Aaron's goals were still culling celebrities; two days earlier, his performance against CSKA Moscow led to the death of darts superstar Eric Bristow!

Richard Freeman described his search for the Almasty across various ex-Soviet regions and highlighted its differences to other hominids; its more 'human' features make it taboo to hunt. He summarised many good witness statements collected in 2008, but unequivocal hard evidence remained elusive.

Steve Mera entertainingly addressed the old conspiratorial chestnut of the faked Moon landings, highlighting and analysing the well-rehearsed arguments. He had no doubt the landings took place, but suspected NASA was not entirely forthcoming about the technologies and finances involved, all aimed at helping the USA gain strategic advantage over the USSR.

Ann Winsper presented research into electronic voice phenomena (EVP), examining whether auditory misperception was a major factor. She outlined the phenomenon's history, and investigated links between EVP interpretation, people's paranormal beliefs and their personalities, categorising people into three types: 'Non-EVPers'; 'Low-EVPers'; and 'High-EVPers'. She detailed potential influences, ranging from anomalous background sounds to the power of suggestion.



The Tokoloshe's large penis can open doors or act as a periscope

James Newton explained how Native American attitudes towards Bigfoot – with traditions going back hundreds if not thousands of years – were totally different to those held by people of European descent. Bigfoot were both 'real' and 'spirit', or perhaps just another tribe. Some Native Americans saw Bigfoot as devils, some as guardians and some as creatures of the woods. James had spent time in America with various tribes and was struck by how children were given matter-of-fact advice about what to do if they encountered a Bigfoot.

The first day closed with Ben Emlyn Jones's talk about the 'show trial' of materialisation medium Helen Duncan in March 1944. Adopting an unashamedly conspiratorial standpoint, he set out key facts, including her apparently receiving messages from dead sailors when *HMS Hood* and *HMS Barham* were both sunk in 1941, despite the ships' fates not being made public. Her trial involved the top judge of the day and a chief prosecutor who was in MI5. The chief defence lawyer wanted Duncan to prove herself as genuine by holding a séance in the courtroom; this, unsurprisingly, was refused

and the defence collapsed. She was sentenced to nine months in prison (but released in September 1944). Why was she arrested long after the ships were sunk? Ben believes the Government wanted to avoid any risk of the D-Day plans being (inadvertently) mentioned in one of Duncan's trance messages, which might be heard by a German spy.

The second day began with Nathan Jackson's well-received talk relating the nefarious doings of the sub-Saharan goblin known as the Tokoloshe. Short, fat and hairy, is it made of flesh and blood, or porridge? Women raise their beds with bricks to avoid its famously large and versatile penis, which can open doors or act as a periscope. Stories of the creature offer widely varying descriptions and can evolve into everything from Zimbabwean UFO pilots to 'pinky-pinky', an entity that terrorises girls in school toilets. It is an all-purpose entity to blame for any misfortune, and arguably a social metaphor in African areas where belief in witchcraft is strong.

Steve Mera's second talk was about mysterious ancient architecture found across the globe that showed high-precision stonework. He challenged prevailing explanations such as "the Incas built them", by highlighting examples where structures that Incas *did* build could be seen alongside and were clearly inferior. Also, many locations featured large amounts of geomagnetic energy and evidence of machine-cutting. But what happened to this technology and who used it?

Glen Vaudrey gave a short talk showing infra-red and ultra-violet photography of orbs that has led to conjecture that UFOs might be invisible living creatures that sometimes become visible. Problems include the lack of an effective way of judging scale and the fact that the *only* evidence involves photos taken using exotic lenses.

The inimitable Bob Fischer took us on a lively tour through

depictions of the Yeti in popular culture, admitting the creature was his personal childhood bogeyman. Stories dated back to the 19th century, but the 1920s first saw the (mistranslated) term 'Abominable Snowman' coined. Things escalated in the 1950s with Hilary and Tensing spotting a giant footprint on Everest, and everyone buying televisions for the Queen's Coronation. From Nigel Neale's *The Creature* (1955), films and television depicted protagonists as respectful of Yeti/Tibetan traditions, but by the 1960s Yeti portrayal increasingly focused on children, with sceptical adults and establishment figures appearing stupid in comparison, as in *Scooby-Doo*. Nowadays, Yeti portrayal has moved from the original shy, retiring creature to a beast that will "tear anything apart"!

Finally, Steve Jones described events in 1990s Leeds that featured Goths invoking spider gods (possibly causing a city-wide plague of real spiders), bizarre altars in cellars, voluptuous females, fake occult diaries freaking out evangelical Christians, exorcisms, and Richard Freeman with Robert Smith-style hair in a *Masque of the Red Death* outfit being mistaken for a pirate. The last image was the scariest!

The weekend also saw a quiz in which two teams, each made up of speakers and audience members, answered questions about monsters, ghosts and UFOs. It was won on a tie-break. There was also a truly bizarre lard-eating competition. Only two contestants volunteered, with the (eventual; it was not a fast-moving event) winner being a bearded gentleman with a shaven head, dressed in a leather kilt, who (finally) said: "I like it". Both men received well-deserved round of applause!

WWN 2019 will take place 6-7 April 2019 at the Rixton-with-Glazebrook Community Hall, with tickets already on sale. There is a new website at: www.weirdweekendnorth.com.