



## STRANGE DAYS

# NORTHERN WEIRDNESS TO FULL

ROB GANDY reports from Weekend North 2019

The fourth Weird Weekend North took place on 6–7 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 shared their new research 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 died, suddenly and unexpectedly, while on holiday. Glen dedicated WWN 2019 to his memory.

Once again, yours truly opened proceedings (all part of my cunning plan, whereby I got my presentation out of the way first, enabling me to sit back and make notes on all the other speakers, in order to write this annual report!) I combined some articles that have already been published in *FT* with some that still are hiding on David Sutton's desk to describe a series of first- and second-hand fortaean experiences involving Merseyside and Merseysiders on their trips around the country – including the tale of 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 any 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 misidentified kangaroo? Naturally, BHMs varied across 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 least interesting continent for BHMs, unless you look at historical legends of wild men.

Glen Vaudrey then described the Risle Silver Man mystery (FT305:29). Risle is less than four miles from Rixton-with-Glazebrook, and was once home to top-secret nuclear facilities. Newspaper articles from 1978 described how Ken Edwards was driving nearby late at night and witnessed a seven-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



*It was hairy, with pricked-up ears, hunchbacked and malevolent...*

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 fortaean event, and he arrived at definitive and convincing conclusions. What was it? I am not saying, but he is currently writing this material up for a future *FT* article; so, watch this space(man)!

The afternoon saw Chris Josiffe and Chris Hill present a talk on Gef, the Talking

LEFT: James Newton tackles the Dogmen. FACING PAGE: Bob Fischer recalls his year travelling around the UK's SF convention circuit.

Mongoose (FT269:32–39), based on the former's book, *Gef! The Strange Tale of an Extra-Special Talking Mongoose*. 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 from the related Harry Price archive material, and provided a full history of the Irving family, back to their Liverpool roots, which provided important context. The various investigators of the case represented something of a paranormal Who's Who. Was it a fraud, or was some sort of psychological power involved? Were there parallels with the Cottingley Fairies, or with poltergeists? Forty years after the events, the daughter said that it wasn't a hoax but that she wished it had never happened.

James Newton talked about a range of creatures collectively named 'Dogmen' (FT286:32-37, 329:38-41) – 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

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the Lakes Killings' where the victims were torn apart by 'something'. James set out the influence of Native American lore, and described an array of troublesome, tricky canine-like entities. He finally explored the influence of imported traditions from France and the Nordic countries, which gave geographical distinctions for perceived areas for Bigfoot and Dogmen across North America.

Saturday closed with Richard Freeman describing his expedition to Tajikistan to investigate sightings of relic hominins known locally as *gul* (see FT373:38-43). 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; all witnesses (including a biology teacher) described weird thumbs, set well back on the hand. The *gul* were described as aggressive, throwing stones and attacking humans, and as seemingly having a sexual interest in humans. It was inferred that they 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 sighted as recently as a month before the visit, including females with cubs (FT379:55)

Andy Ross opened the second day, describing his long-time investigations into ABCs in his native County Durham. 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, which included more than 300 sightings over time; he concluded that there must be at least two creatures involved. Family members had personally witnessed ABCs: In the 1980s, Andy's grandfather and a friend had spotted one in the woods.



His uncle's pet dog cowered behind him when one was seen 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 (see FT167:33) was shown, and sightings in 2000 and 2003 described. But since then sightings had diminished, and Andy speculated as to 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 shared three personal 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 sound, which was NOT the ringtone (that was double-checked). Perhaps some interaction between the phone and whatever was present? In 2002, Withernsea Lighthouse Museum yielded an enormous shining orb on 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 demented 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 world.<sup>1</sup> 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, with 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 US Defense Department, some of which seem designed to divert interest away from important facts.

The WWN Quiz saw Team 2 the victors - winning highly desirable 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 seven-foot tall, amorphous black cloud with horns.)

The event concluded with FT's 'Haunted Generation' columnist, the always entertaining Bob Fischer, talking about his 2008 book *Wiffle Lever To Full!* 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 shows such as *Doctor Who*, *Blake's 7*, *Star Trek*, *The Hitch-Hikers Guide To The Galaxy*, *The Prisoner*, *Robin of Sherwood*, *Monty Python* and *Red Dwarf*. He gave readings from the 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 ever attended: a water-pistol fight between *Blake's 7* and *Hitch Hiker's Guide* fans, in Winspit Quarry in Dorset. He still bears the scars.

WVN goes from strength to strength and this year the total attendance was over 100 for the first time. The talks were complemented by an array of stalls featuring T-shirts, books, paintings, and herbal products, as well as Hunt Emerson drawing caricatures and selling his comic books.<sup>2</sup>

Glen Vaudrey should be applauded for all his hard work putting on the event. So, be warned: you might need to book early for WVN 2020, which is scheduled for 4-5 April 2020. Glen already has some great speakers lined up. You can check for updates on: [www.weirdweekendnorth.com/](http://www.weirdweekendnorth.com/)

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Details about the 'UFO Investigators Training Course in Aerial Phenomena' and 'Project Doorway' findings can be found at: [www.phenomenamagazine.co.uk/#/stellar-courses/4593361437](http://www.phenomenamagazine.co.uk/#/stellar-courses/4593361437)

<sup>2</sup> <http://largecow.com/>