

A Three-Fold Yarn

A Three-Fold Yarn is a parlour game. Players would spend long evenings rooting through the bookshelf for stories and pictures to combine in a contest that’s rather like an elaborate version of Consequences.

The rules are this: each player takes turns to select a passage or picture that links with the last, continuing a theme, however unlikely the connection. However, a connection too tenuous breaks the chain and a new round is begun by the previous player. This is repeated until three strands have been thread. The winner is the player who can weave the strands into a yarn by identifying what connects all three, and so the yarn as a whole makes a peculiar kind of story.

This project is an ‘outward bound’ version of A Three-Fold Yarn. We have played among the book-stacks, archive boxes and photographic files of East Sussex Record Office in Lewes, Folkestone Museum & Library and West Sussex County Library in Worthing. The three collections are rich in extraordinary, hidden and often intimate fragments from the past. Along the way we discovered ancient knowledge, unlikely stories, intriguing images and other cultural artefacts that speak of unknowable pasts. There were many other items that fascinated or repelled us, but we have only included those that fit the yarn.

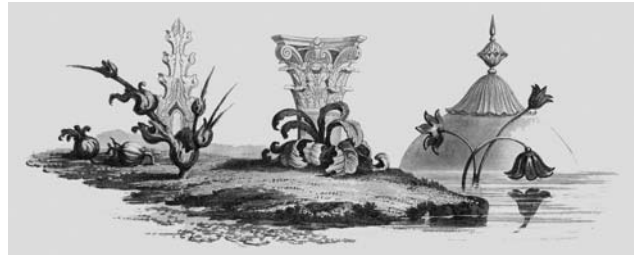
The themes we chose for our three strands are illusion and delusion, fashion and ornament, and trickery, fakery and disguise. We found that they cross over in so many ways – follow the undercurrents, crossovers and coincidences for yourself. The yarn we’ve strung winds through things that are uncertain or hidden, that aren’t what they seem. We leave it to the reader to join the game and make their own tales from our three-fold yarn.



Adapted from Caulfield’s *Memoirs of Remarkable Persons*, 1794

In works of art we can only use the FORMS of nature, not the EXACTNESS. Thus in FURNITURE, if we introduce the head or foot of an animal, it may be graceful; but if we cover it with hair or feathers, it becomes ridiculous. And in the parts taken from the vegetable kingdom, to enrich the ornaments of Architecture, imitation goes no farther than the general forms, since we scarcely know the individual plant; although some writers have mentioned the Reed, the Acanthus, and the Lotus.

It is a curious circumstance, that the general forms of Enrichments may be thus classed: The GOTHIC are derived from the BUD or GERM, the GECIAN [sic] from the LEAF, and the INDIAN from the Flower; a singular coincidence, which seems to mark that these three styles are, and ought to be, kept perfectly distinct.



H. Repton, *Designs for Pavilion at Brighton*, 1806

Cynthia Payne hit the headlines in 1978 when the police raided her home in a pleasant tree-lined avenue in suburban Streatham to find a sex party in full swing. Queues of middle-aged and elderly men waited to exchange their ‘luncheon vouchers’ for food, drink and friendly chat, striptease shows, and a trip upstairs with the girl of their choice. Vicars, MPs and lawyers were among those who considered her to be the best hostess in London.

When the case came to court in 1980 she was sent to prison for 18 months for the biggest disorderly house in history, but on appeal, this was reduced to six months and a hefty fine for running a brothel.

After her release from prison, and convinced she was doing no wrong since she no longer ran a brothel, she continued to have the occasional swinging party, and it was the ‘end of filming’ party for “Personal Services” which the police chose to raid in 1986. The resulting court case in January 1987 stole the headlines and kept the nation amused for three weeks with its stories of sex, slaves, transvestites and undercover policemen in disguise. Cynthia won a resounding victory and was found not guilty on ten charges of controlling prostitutes.

Cynthia Payne was born on Christmas Eve [in] Bognor Regis [where] her father ran a successful barbers shop ... Two films were made about her life: “Wish You Were Here”, a film about her teenage life in Bognor and which made the young Emily Lloyd an overnight star; and “Personal Services”, which starred Julie Walters.

Cynthia was determined to change Britain’s archaic sex law, and stood for parliament as a candidate for the Payne and Pleasure Party in the Kensington by-election in July 1988 and in her own area of Streatham in the general election of 1992. She was not elected, but the world’s media took notice.

Tony Hudson, *The Dark Side of Sussex*, 2000

[In the 1480s] a class of men sprang up in Europe who made it the sole business of their lives to discover and burn witches. Sprenger, in Germany, was the most celebrated of these national scourges. In his notorious work, the *Malleus Maleficarum*, he laid down the regular form of trial, and appointed a course of examination by which inquisitors in other countries might best discover the guilty. The questions, which were always enforced by torture, were of the most absurd and disgusting nature. The inquisitors were required to ask the suspected whether they had midnight meetings with the devil? whether they attended the witches sabbath on the Brocken? whether they had their familiar spirits? whether they could raise whirlwinds and call down the lightning? and whether they had sexual intercourse with Satan?

Among the ill-weeds which flourished amid the long dissensions of the [English] civil war, Matthew Hopkins, the witch-finder, stands eminent in his sphere ... [It is reported that Hopkins in his assumed title of] “Witch-finder General” used to take the suspected witch and place her in the middle of a room, upon a stool or table, cross-legged, or in some other uneasy posture. If she refused to sit in this manner she was bound with strong cords. Hopkins then placed persons to watch her for four-and-twenty hours, during which time she was to be kept without meat or drink. It was supposed that one of her imps would come during that interval and suck her blood. As the imp might come in the shape of a wasp, a moth, a fly or other insect, a hole was made in the door or window to let it enter. The watchers were ordered to keep a close look-out, and endeavour to kill any insect that appeared in the room. If any fly escaped, and they could not kill it, the woman was guilty; the fly was her imp, and she was sentenced to be burned, and twenty shillings went into the pockets of Master Hopkins. In this manner he made one old woman [confess], because four flies had appeared in the room, that she was attended by four imps, named “Ilemazar,” “Pye-wackett,” “Peck-in-the-crown,” and “Grizel-Greedigutt.”

Charles Mackay, *Memoirs of Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*, 1856

The famous declaration of St Paul, “that long hair was a shame unto man,” has been made the pretext for many singular enactments, both of civil and ecclesiastical governments.

... At the time of the invasion of England by William the Conqueror, the Normans wore their hair very short ... The fashion among the English was to wear the hair long upon the head and upper lip, but to shave the chin. When the haughty victors had divided the broad lands of the Saxon thanes and franklins among them, when tyranny of every kind was employed to make the English feel that they were indeed a subdued and broken nation, the latter encouraged the growth of their hair. That they might resemble as little as possible their cropped and shaven masters.

... [A]mong all the instances of the interferences of governments with men’s hair, the most extraordinary ... is that of Peter the Great, in 1705. By this time fashion had condemned the beard in every country in Europe, and with a voice more potent than popes or emperors, had banished it from civilised society. But this only made the Russians cling more fondly to their ancient ornament, as a mark to distinguish them from foreigners, whom they hated. Peter, however, resolved that they should be shaven ... A certain time was given, that people might get over the first throes of their repugnance, after which every man who chose to retain his beard was to pay a tax of one hundred roubles ... The collectors gave in receipt for its payment a small copper coin, struck expressly for the purpose, and called the “borodaváia,” or “the bearded.” [It] bore the figure of a nose, mouth, and moustaches, with a long bushy beard, surmounted by the words, “Deuyee Yveatec,” “money received;” the whole encircled by a wreath, and stamped with the black eagle of Russia ... Every man who chose to wear a beard was obliged to produce this receipt on his entry into a town. Those who were refractory, and refused to pay the tax, were thrown into prison.

Charles Mackay, *Memoirs of Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*, 1856



Taken from nurse Dorothy Earnshaw’s keepsake scrapbook 1915–17, Manor House Hospital

The following extract is from the transcript of the trial of Susanna Swapper of Sussex accused of witch craft in 1607. Her friend Mrs Taylor was called as a witness and accused of collaborating with her to entertain evil spirits. Swapper was eventually sentenced to death but reprieved on a plea of pregnancy.

Questions to be demanded of Mrs Tayler upon her seconde examinacon ...

13. Whether have not you heard the Spirittes talkinge together one to one other in Swapper howse And whether have not youe heard a noyse there or a stampinge in the Chamber or lofte there and when and howe ofie have you hearde it

14. Whether have not youe seene any faieries or other spiritres and howe manie of them have you seene together and where sawe youe them or whether did you not tell Swappers wife that youe hadd seene some or many or 80 or 100 of such fayeries or spiritres ...

16. Whether have not youe made Noysgaies and given them to the said Swappers wife and whether did not youe budd her give the same to the spiritres or lay them for the spiritres or to such effecte ...

18. Whether did you see the Picture of Mr Hammon deceased in the glasse window and whether was it in his sicknes or before or after his deathe And whether did not you saie to Swappers wife or some other after Mr Hamons sicknes that he should or would nevr escape yt and what reason had you to saie soe

19. Whether did not you kill a Turkey and eate it in yor howse at dynner the saie after Mr Hamon dies and whether did not youe saie to Swappers wife that if he dyed you would kill and eate the saide Turkey and for what cause did you saie or doe soe

‘Articles for Mrs Taylor’s 2nd ex.’ From *The Trial of Susanna Swapper and Anne Taylor for Witchcraft: Rye 1607-9*



Old Man’s Beard, from Jocelyn Brooke, *The Flower In Season*, 1952. Illustrated by Charles W. Stewart

[Walter Dew] was a chief inspector when Mrs Crippen, who was also known by her stage name, Belle Elmore, went missing from her three-bedroom semi in Hilldrop Crescent, Camden Town, London, on January 31, 1910. Dr [Hawley Harvey] Crippen, a bespectacled man with a moustache, initially insisted he had no idea what had happened to his wife.

But eyebrows were raised when a young typist, Miss Ethel Le Neve, moved in with him several months later.

By June, Scotland Yard detectives led by Dew were starting to take a keen interest in Cora’s disappearance, which prompted Dr Crippen to claim that his wife had run off with a former lover to America.

He said he had kept it quiet to avoid embarrassment but the following day when Dew called at the house Dr Crippen and Miss Le Neve had gone.

Police discovered Cora’s headless, filleted remains buried under the coal cellar floor of the house, sparking a massive man hunt ...

The breakthrough came when the captain of the Canada-bound SS Montrose saw a newspaper report about the fugitives and became suspicious of two passengers, supposedly father and son, who had boarded at Antwerp.

He sent a message via the Marconi telegraph which read: “Have strong suspicion that Crippen London Cellar murderer and accomplice are amongst passengers. Moustache shaved off, growing a beard. Accomplish dressed as a boy, voice manner and build undoubtedly a girl.”

This historic broadcast marked the first time that wireless telegraphy had been used to catch a criminal ...

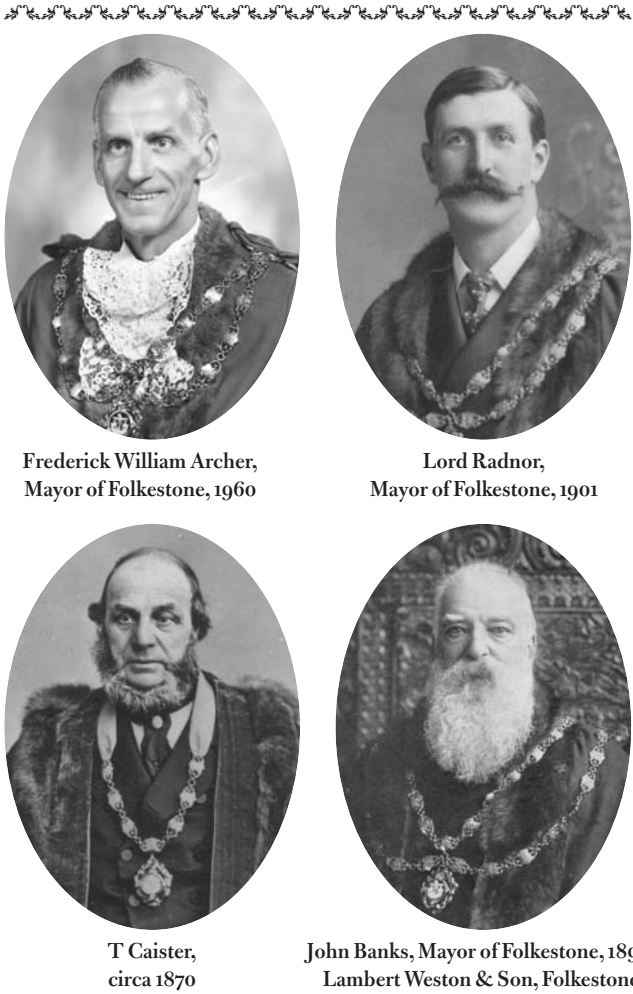
Twenty-eight years later, in 1938, Dew recalled: “... Old Crippen took it quite well. He always was a bit of a philosopher, though he could not have helped being astounded to see me on board the boat. He was quite a likeable chap in his way.”

‘Atlantic Dash to capture killer Crippen’, *The Argus*, Thursday, December 27, 2001



Koringa, from Bertram Mills Circus Programme September 1939

fakir n 1. a muslim religious mendicant. 2. a Hindu ascetic or religious mendicant, especially one who performs feats of magic or endurance.



Frederick William Archer, Mayor of Folkestone, 1960

Lord Radnor, Mayor of Folkestone, 1901

T Caister, circa 1870

John Banks, Mayor of Folkestone, 1892, Lambert Weston & Son, Folkestone

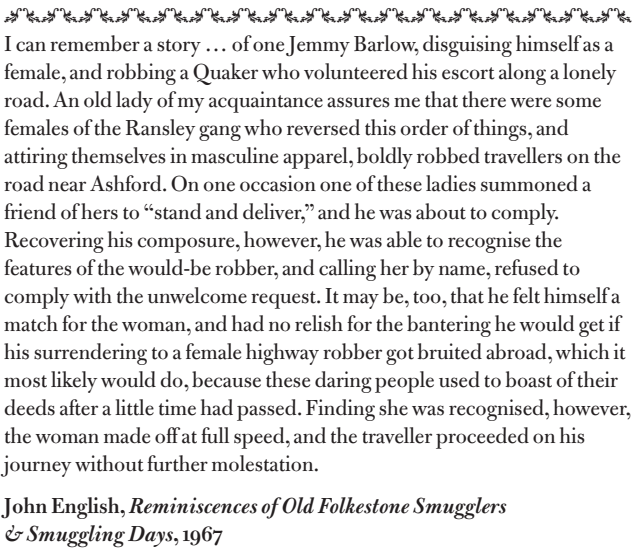
I can remember a story ... of one [Walter Dew] disguising himself as a female, and robbing a Quaker who volunteered his escort along a lonely road. An old lady of my acquaintance assures me that there were some females of the Ransley gang who reversed this order of things, and attiring themselves in masculine apparel, boldly robbed travellers on the road near Ashford. On one occasion one of these ladies summoned a friend of hers to “stand and deliver,” and he was about to comply. Recovering his composure, however, he was able to recognise the features of the would-be robber, and calling her by name, refused to comply with the unwelcome request. It may be, too, that he felt himself a match for the woman, and had no relish for the bantering he would get if his surrendering to a female highway robber got bruited abroad, which it most likely would do, because these daring people used to boast of their deeds after a little time had passed. Finding she was recognised, however, the woman made off at full speed, and the traveller proceeded on his journey without further molestation.

John English, *Reminiscences of Old Folkestone Smugglers & Smuggling Days*, 1967

R O B B E R Y

In an earlier edition of the Sussex Weekly Advertiser (12 Nov. 1792) [Edward Howell] is quoted as having confessed ... ‘to belong to a gang of “coiners” – producers of counterfeit money – whose seat of action was London. He boasted that “they make guineas faster than the greatest prodigal in the metropolis can spend them.” On his way to Horsham after his arrest, he observed that “he should go to jail on horseback, to the gallows in a cart ... and to the devil in a wheelbarrow.” He also hoped that he should be “jibbed high enough to command a view of the Prince’s cricket ground at Brighton”!’

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John Binstead [was] a Chichester flower painter and drawing master exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1809, 1815 and 1814. [His] talent predicted a promising future. Unfortunately this was not to be the case for he was condemned to death at the Old Bailey for using his artistic abilities to forge five pound notes.

Despite a recommendation for mercy by the prosecutor, the jury and the Chichester Bankers, he was hanged at Newgate Prison on 5th December 1815.

Tony Hudson, *The Dark Side of Sussex*, 2000

In the convent of the Holy Child Jesus at Mayfield in Sussex is a pair of tongs which tradition claims was the property of the great Saxon churchman St Dunstan. It was widely rumoured that he had occult powers, and even dabbled in black magic. According to the best-known story about him, he worked for a time as a blacksmith in Mayfield, while spreading the message of the gospels. One day, the Devil became so enraged that he disguised himself as a beautiful young woman, and set about seducing him. Dunstan did not even look up, but kept up his work as the Devil mimed about the room, until his skirts rode up and revealed his hooves. Calmly, St Dunstan took a pair of red-hot tongs from the blazing forge (the same tongs that are now in the monastery) and clamped them on to the Devil’s nose.

The Devil’s screams as he flew out of the forge could be heard up to 3 miles away; and as he raced across the sky, he saw the springs of Tunbridge Wells, swooped down on them and submerged his nose in the water. To this day the water from the springs is still red and tastes of sulphur.

Tony Hudson, *The Dark Side of Sussex*, 2000

Lavender Marriage is a term used to describe a ‘cover’ marriage entered into in which one or both parties are deliberately seeking to hide their homosexuality by having a heterosexual marriage partner. Sometimes a heterosexual ‘partner’ of a homosexual, who willingly helps their partner give the impression that they too are heterosexual, is called a ‘beard’.

www.fact-index.com

P U R P L E H U E

Unreal City

Under the brown fog of a winter noon

Mr Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant

Unshaven, with a pocket full of currants

C.i.f. London: documents at sight,

Asked me in demotic French

To luncheon at the Cannon Street Hotel

Followed by a weekend at the Metropole’.

At the violet hour, when the eyes and back

Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits

Like a taxi throbbing waiting,

I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,

Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see

At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives

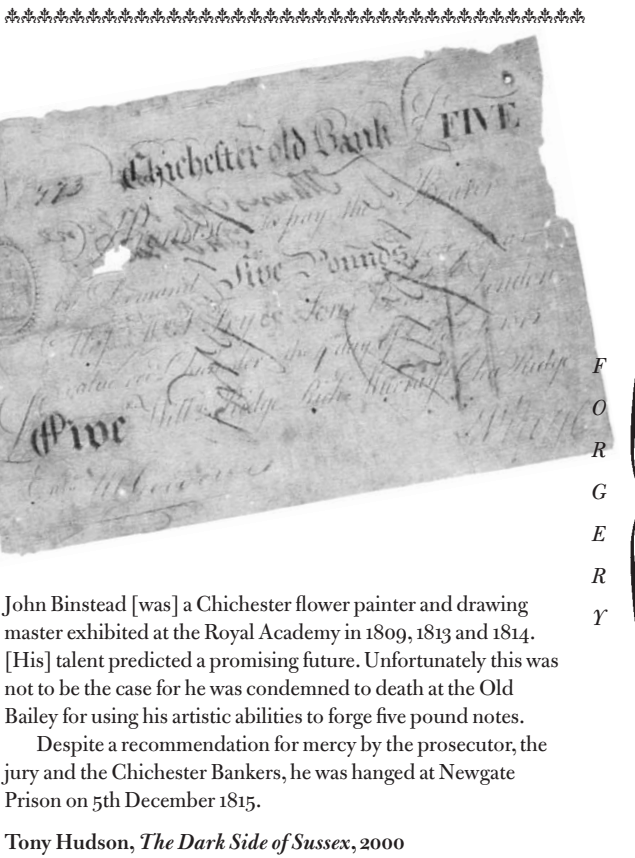
Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea,

The typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast, lights

Her stove, and lays out food in tins.

T. S. Eliot, *The Wasteland*, 1922

\* believed to be the Metropole Hotel, Folkestone



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Smelling a ghostly smell is quite a different experience from seeing a ghost which might possibly be explained away as a trick of the light, a vivid imagination or a waking dream. But having the nostrils assailed by a smell which should not be there cannot easily be dismissed ...

The well-known actor Norman Wisdom never smelled the ghostly smell at this home, Laker's Farm, Pulborough. But his mother certainly did. When he was interviewed in September 1975 he told the story of how his mother had been in bed one night when she suddenly noticed a strong scent of apple blossom. She said the scent pervaded the whole room but she had no idea that it might be supernatural. Later she felt very hot and pushed back the bedclothes. Then she felt as though someone were leaning over her and gently blowing in her face. It was not a frightening experience because the presence seemed quite benign and even laughed softly. It turned out that she had experienced the same manifestations which had been witnessed down the years by other people ...

A complete contrast to these innocuous scents is the smell of sulphur which has always been regarded as linked with evil, in fact one of the Devil's trademarks ... In 1977 Mrs. Dubeau was unsettled to find that her council house was visited on occasions by a cloud of sulphur. It made her 14-month old daughter Joanne sob with fear and the couple had to move the baby into their own bedroom to soothe her. Mrs. Dubeau felt that something dreadful must have happened in the house and that the evil lingered on. The Dubeau family were not the only ones affected by the smell of sulphur and a previous tenant Isobel Roper and her daughter Vicky confirmed the story. In fact she had invited a priest to bless the house and for a time the sulphurous smell ceased.

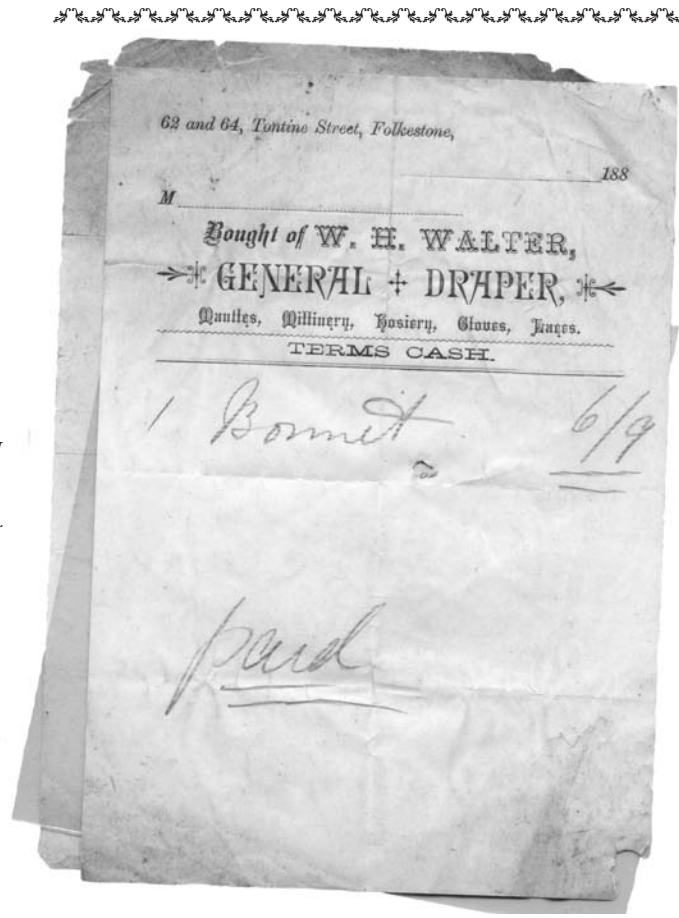
Judy Middleton, *Ghosts of Sussex*, 1998



Moncrieff Fashion Show, Queen's Hotel, November 1961, from the Moncrieff Albums Vol 1

We are a materialist generation, and the great force beyond appeals to us through material things. But they were not meant to stop there; their object is to arrest our thoughts and make us go forward. If you heard a telephone bell ring you would not sit still and ask who rang the bell. The thing we are meant to do is to take down the receiver as the wise spiritualists have done and receive the message. That being so, would you like to know what the message is? These messages have come from all parts of the world, from America, from France and Great Britain, but wherever they have come from they have been practically the same message.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Lecture on Spiritualism*, delivered at the Connaught Hall, Worthing, on Friday 11 July, 1919



Receipt for 1 bonnet, W.H. Walter, General Draper

John Taylor  
*Progress of Case 1903 May 11*  
Is suffering from Chronic Mania with some dementia. He is threatening and excitable at times. He hears voices & thinks there are telephones all about him. Memory defective.

Robert Farley  
*Progress of Case 1903 May 10*  
Is suffering from Chronic Mania. He says he is much annoyed by voices of black & white men who call him names at night. He has visual hallucinations also.

James Stanwick  
*Progress of Case 1903 May 10*  
Is suffering from Secondary Dementia. He is slow in his speech & movements & laughs without cause, does not know his age & constantly contradicts himself. Hears voices which he says are telephones.

William Baldwin  
*Report from Haywards Heath*  
Dementia. Delicate. Wat. Delus. Blue Devils. Sleep Dorm.  
Progress of Case 1903 May 10  
Is suffering from Delusional Insanity. He thinks people pass currents of air through him and when pressed on the subject, becomes incoherent.

John Farthing  
*Progress of Case 1903 May 10*  
Is very Imbecile & Impish. Has delusions of electrical torture.

Henry Chapel  
*Progress of Case 1903 May 9*  
Is suffering from Chronic Mania. He is exalted, excited & incoherent. Says he was sent to Exeter to protect them from the rebel forces. Hears voices & says there are electrical forces always at work.

From the records of XXXXXXXXXX. Names and dates have been changed, along with other minor adaptations.

Midwinter rituals in which men disguise themselves as horses and horned animals are widespread in Britain and many other parts of Europe. The church, although anxious to absorb as many aspects of paganism as were compatible with Christianity, was decidedly uneasy about anything to do with animal worship. As recently as the 1950s, Bert Lloyd was told of a case in the Balkans where a young man was warned by his priest that if he died whilst dressed up as a horse his soul would be forfeit.

... [T]here is a Hooden Horse tradition in Kent which relates to the isle of Thanet and to Walmer and Deal. Thanet was the earliest Anglo-Saxon settlement in Kent and according to early chronicles was given by the British King Vortigern to his Saxon Federati led by Hengist and Horsa (whose names mean 'stallion' and 'mare' and may therefore be indicative of a Horse Cult).

... As with other horse disguise customs, a man covered in a cloth of sacking took the part of the horse, stooping to make a back, clapping the pole attached to the head and opening and closing the horse's mouth by means of a string. A 'Waggoner' was in charge of the horse and a 'Jockey' attempted to ride him (these two roles were sometimes combined in other customs). There were attendant musicians and, in common with the Mari Lwyd custom, a man disguised as a woman with blackened face and besom broom (the 'Mollie'), often attended the horse as well. The Sweeper figure is frequently found at solistical celebrations. In Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream, Puck sweeps his broom at the end of the play while the marriages are being consummated at the solstice as part of a ritual to bless the progeny of the unions and to ensure they are born free from deformity.

Geoff and Fran Doel, *Mumming, Howling and Hoodening: Midwinter Rituals in Sussex, Kent and Surrey*, 1992

As the new doctrine of magnetism spread, it was found that wounds inflicted with any metallic substance could be cured by the magnet. In the process of time, the delusion so increased, that it was deemed sufficient to magnetise a sword, to cure any hurt which that sword might have inflicted!

... It was also believed that a sympathetic alphabet could be made on the flesh, by means of which persons could correspond with each other, and communicate all their ideas with the rapidity of volition, although thousands of miles apart. From the arms of two persons a piece of flesh was cut, and mutually transplanted, while still warm and bleeding. The piece so severed grew to the new arm on which it was placed; but still retained so close a sympathy that its old possessor was always sensible to any injury done to it. Upon these transplanted pieces were tattooed the letters of the alphabet; so that when a communication was to be made, either of the persons, though the wide Atlantic rolled between them, only had to prick his arm with a magnetic needle, and straightway his friend received intimation that the telegraph was at work. Whatever letter he pricked on his own arm pained the same letter on the arm of his correspondent.

... Mesmer ... maintained [that] magnetic matter, or fluid, pervaded all the universe - that every human body contained it, and could communicate the superabundance of it to another by an exertion of the will. Writing to a friend from Vienna, he said, "I have observed that the magnetic is almost the same thing as the electric fluid, and that it may be propagated in the same manner, by means of intermediate bodies. Steel is not the only substance adapted to this purpose. I have rendered paper, bread, wool, silk, stones, leather, glass, wood, men, and dogs - in short, every thing I touched, magnetic to such a degree, that these substances produced the same effects as the loadstone on diseased persons."

Charles Mackay, *Memoirs of Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*, 1856

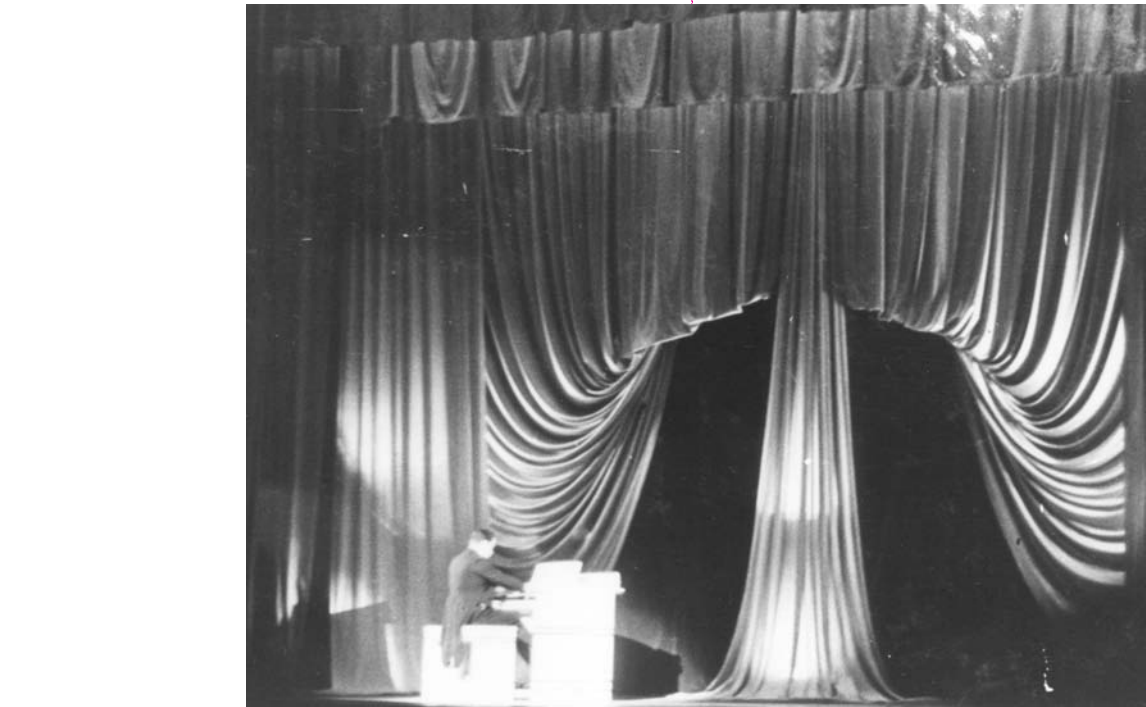


Hooden Horse, date unknown, Folkestone Museum

Since the advent of the electric telegraph, carrier-pigeon post is all but dead and buried. And yet it was thanks to the use of the carrier-pigeon service that the Rothschild brothers amassed the immense fortune which they now possess. In 1815, carrier-pigeons brought to the houses of Rothschild in Paris and London the tidings of Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo. For three days, the fortunate brothers had time to buy at their leisure, and at the lowest conceivable price, a vast quantity of shares on the London Stock Exchange, until the moment when the outcome of the battle became known to the Government itself.

In addition, the intelligence was also transmitted by the British optical telegraphs, but it was interrupted by fog after the two words 'Wellington defeated' ... which originally gave the impression that the English had been defeated by Napoleon, thus causing a sharp drop in the prices of Government securities. In fact, the full message ran as follows: 'Wellington defeated the French at Waterloo' - a piece of information which was held exclusively by the house of Rothschild for three days.

Leonard De Vries, 'Microscopic Dispatches by Carrier Pigeon', *Victorian Inventions*, 1971



Organist Reginald Stone at the Astoria Cinema, Sandgate Road, Folkestone

"I did think actually, as I walked out, 'The world is really a very stupid place, and I am probably one of its most stupid inhabitants,'" Myatt recalls.

Yet along with a partner who would turn out to be a career con man, John Drewe, Myatt took part in a sophisticated seven-year scheme that swindled many of the art world's swankiest specialists in the booming art market of the 1980s and 1990s — and brought in millions of pounds.

Working in household emulsion paint — a substance that hadn't even been invented when many of the paintings he mimicked were first done — Myatt replicated more than 200 works by masters like Picasso, Matisse, Chagall, Dubuffet, and Giacometti.

... But Drewe reportedly "aged" the paintings with vacuum dust and garden soil, then falsified documents outlining the works' ownership history so he could pass them off as authentic works by great artists of the 20th century.

... [Myatt] says he fell into forgery because of poverty ... he placed an ad in a London satirical magazine, offering "Genuine Fakes for £250." He started painting classics on commission, often adding a client's face into the original masterpiece.

One of his clients was Drewe, who ordered a "Matisse" for his wife's birthday, then several other works, regularly meeting Myatt to exchange canvases for cash at a train station pub.

... Weeks later, Drewe called Myatt to tell him that one of the top auction houses had valued his "Gleizes" at more than £25,000 — and to offer him his cut: £12,500 in a brown paper envelope.

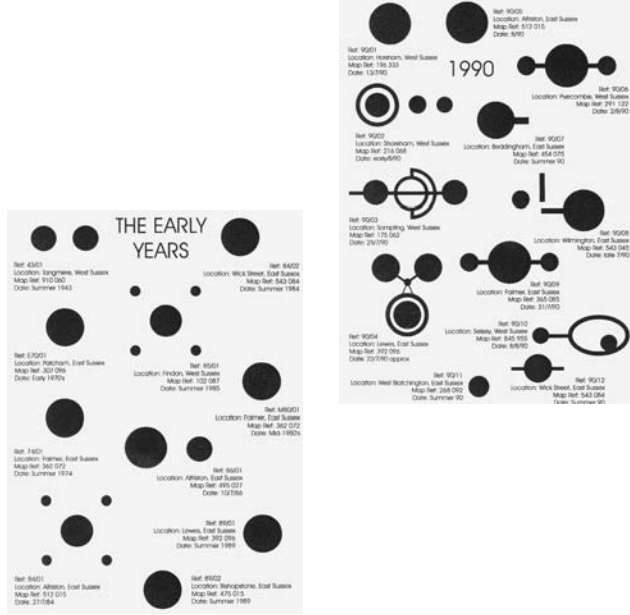
... At trial, Drewe apparently became unstable, firing his lawyer and defending himself. He was convicted in February 1999 and sentenced to six years in prison, although he served only two. Myatt served four months of a one-year sentence at London's Brixton prison, where he painted portraits of fellow prisoners, who paid him in phonecards.

Theresa Bradley, 'Painting Fakes', abcnews.go.com

Even before I or anybody else supposed that I could act or sing or do anything of the kind, I displayed imitative powers, and nothing delighted my young friends more than to get me to imitate a drunken man, which it was considered I did with wonderful verisimilitude. We were none of us saints or teetotallers, and frequently they would induce me to enter a public-house with them, I pretending to be in an advanced state of intoxication, when the landlord or barman would firmly decline to serve me while readily supplying the requirements of the others. But when the man had gone from our part of the bar, I would immediately assume my ordinary appearance and on his return he would find me standing in quiet conversation with one or other of the boys. I have many times seen the bar-tender looking between, behind and almost through us to see what had become of the incapable 'drunk' they had brought with them.

Charles Coborn, *The Man Who Broke the Bank: memories of the stage and music hall*, 1924

So what constitutes a hoax and how does one tell the difference? The constant struggle to find a reliable litmus test has challenged researchers from the earliest days ... yet the very idea of a hoaxed circle implies that there must be such a thing as a genuine one. Technically a hoax is only a hoax when masquerading as something known to be the real thing, and only a few formations have ever had their source indisputably proved (eye-witness accounts of circles forming out of nowhere, or those known beyond any doubt to be man-made). Therefore, in this view, have there ever been any hoaxes?



Andy Thomas, *Fields of Mystery: The Crop Circle Phenomenon in Sussex*, SB Publications, 1996

It was in the mid 1950s that two eminent ornithologists, Edward Nicholson and James Ferguson-Lees, paid a visit to a museum in Hull and were surprised at the number of rare bird exhibits which emanated from Hastings and its environs. Surprise grew to suspicion when further investigations showed them that all the rather sorrowful collection frozen in lifelike poses had passed through [George] Bristow's hands. 'An elaborate hoax', they cried, and put forward the theory that the small time businessman had been having birds specially brought in from Europe by returning sailors, weaving his magic with the stuffing and glass eyes and then passing them off as indigenous specie[s].

Their scepticism gathered momentum and in an unprecedented move in 1962 a complete edition of the august ornithological journal British Birds was taken up with analysis of the evidence. This in turn found its way into the newspapers and the rarities scandal made headlines across the world. As a result some twenty species were struck from the List of British Birds and doubt was cast on scores of others – the result of almost forty years of work by Bristow.

Rupert Taylor, *Sussex Scandals*, 1987

Piltdown. Even today the name sends a shiver down the collective spine of the scientific community, for this was the most dramatic and daring fraud ever perpetrated upon the world of science and academia and the fallout from it continues to affect us to this day. The basics of the story are simple enough: between 1908 and 1912, a series of amazing discoveries relating to what appeared to be the earliest human were made close to the little village of Piltdown in Sussex. These remains belonged to the developmental 'missing link' between man and ape. The basic principles of evolution, first pronounced by Charles Darwin in his thesis *On the Origin of Species* some fifty years before, now appeared as indisputable fact.

... It has been fifty years since the full nature of the Piltdown 'discovery' was exposed and since then there have been many variations on the central question of 'who originally designed and perpetrated the fraud?' It is a question that seems no closer to resolution. Conspiracy and counter-conspiracy theories abound.

... One name that continues to surface within any discussion of the hoax, however, is that of its finder, Charles Dawson FGS, FSA. Dawson was a solicitor and amateur antiquarian and palaeontologist of some repute during the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth. To him are credited a variety of finds, discoveries, theories and surveys which helped shape and mould an understanding of the earliest years of Sussex, the county in which he lived and worked. Some of Dawson's discoveries have, however, recently come under intense scrutiny and some archaeologists, anthropologists and researchers have openly accused him of a lifetime of deception if not downright fraud.

Miles Russell, *Piltdown Man: The Secret Life of Charles Dawson and the World's Greatest Archaeological Hoax*, 2003

## A Three-Fold Yarn

Leonard De Vries, 'Microscopic Dispatches by Carrier Pigeon', *Victorian Inventions*, 1971

*A Three-Fold Yarn* is by Cathy Haynes and Sally O'Reilly  
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