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Alien Ships in Our Skies

Sir John Scott

One of the perpetrators told the story behind the Grand Interplanetary Hoax of 1952 to the 1994 Skeptics' Conference.

Hoaxes have probably been a part of life for thousands of years, ranging in scope, intent and outcome. Some such as the Piltdown saga veer out of control and have unforeseen and potentially serious consequences.

When Denis Dutton first asked me to give a paper on the great UFO hoax of 1952, I was somewhat coy about the matter. Subsequently I was tempted to accept, and here we are.

During the early 1900s, mysterious airships were sighted in various parts of the world, and New Zealand was no exception. While various psychological explanations have been forthcoming for the airship episodes, no evidence has surfaced to my knowledge concerning any structured direction to that piece of mystery history, although I have always believed a hoax might have been the initiating event. H.G. Wells's haunting and sadly prophetic novel *The War of the Worlds* was available as a text-

book to feed the imagination of the susceptible and the gullible.

We need to remember also that the Christian religion has always emphasised the Second Coming. Such teachings reinforce in successive generations the concept that there will be cataclysmic events and visitations, hopefully in one's own lifetime. The factors which determine the life-cycle of these events are worthy of study. I have no doubt that many of them are the work of pranksters or elaborate hoaxsters, as is the case in the present episode.

Of more interest to people like me in describing something

that happened before many readers were born or living in New Zealand is a retrospective analysis of the various participants, the perpetrators, the reactors and the bystanders. In my acceptance letter for this exposure, I said that I would couch my text, "in terms of what this particular episode teaches about young people's attitude to pomposity in their elders and towards various aspects of the Establishment (in this instance represented by the *Otago Daily Times*)".

A serious skeptic must be a serious historian with healthy respect for the broad picture, the fine detail, and also for what Denis has referred to as the partnership between History herself and Lady Luck.

I do not need to stress to this audience the fact that mythology soon surrounds events such as the ⇒ p3

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Your New Editor

At the last conference I was elected editor of the *New Zealand Skeptic*. Some of you will have read my pieces in *Metro* magazine or in *NBR* over the years, or heard my "Soapboxes" on World Service Radio. If you have wondered about my recent absence from the media, it is because I have been preparing to launch my own magazine.

The New Zealand Skeptics first took our lead from our US parent organisation and focused our scepticism on the paranormal. Over the years I have seen the Skeptics extend their arena to include almost any area of pseudo-science, and finally to become critical of pseudo-science within science itself. I believe this is a healthy development. Criticism which excludes self-criticism carries little moral weight.

I hope to reflect these developments in the content of the magazine. Naturally I welcome contributions. But please remember, the magazine is read mainly by other Skeptics who do not need to be told and told, and told again that astrology is nonsense. We have made the base case — we are now looking for contemporary or local developments, novel challenges to conventional wisdom, or for pseudo-science where we least expect it.

Embarrassing Predictions

By now we are aware that those who try to make long term forecasts in the field of economics or weather forecasting are up against it because of the uncertainties inherent in such systems, which are governed by the laws of deterministic chaos.

We also need to be aware that our forecasting is no more reliable if we depend on predicting future knowledge — a point famously made by Sir Karl Popper in *The Poverty of Historicism*.

Physicists must have enjoyed watching the embarrassment of Treasury officials and weather forecasters alike over the last few

months. Tax forecasters underestimated the windfall in Wellington, while weather forecasters underestimated the rainfall in Auckland.

But do physicists do any better? I have taken a fresh look at Charles Panati's book called *Breakthroughs — astonishing advances coming in your lifetime, in medicine, science and technology*.

The inside cover tells us that Mr Panati "is a physicist, has taught at Columbia University, has been head physicist at RCA in space communications and for six years was a science editor for *Newsweek* magazine" and so on. The book of scientific predictions was published in 1980.

The back cover tells us we should expect the following:

By 1982: a chemical on the market will enable dieters to eat heartily and not gain an ounce

By 1984: a liquid will painlessly spray away tooth decay

By 1985: A biofeedback technique will cure atherosclerosis, and a synthetic product, SPE, will prevent cholesterol from causing heart disease

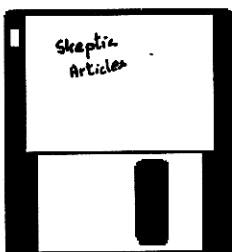
By 1986: magnetic fields will be a major new medical tool for healing fractured bones, diagnosing and curing diseases

By 1988: a vaccine will prevent pregnancy

By 1989: physicists will have harnessed fusion power, a clean and almost limitless energy source

By 1990: interferon, a substance naturally produced by our bodies, will be the most effective treatment for cancer

By 1994: hurricanes will be tamed and production of rainfall over arid lands will be commonplace



This is a floppy disc. If at all possible, please send articles on an **IBM-compatible disc** in ASCII text, Wordstar or Word Perfect formats, or **email** them (address at right). Discs will be returned if clearly labelled.

Please indicate publication and date of any clippings.

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"Grand Inter-planetary Hoax", as the Knox College prank is now known in some circles. That mythology is largely concerned both with how the episode arose and with who was involved. I have chosen to tackle this topic in a chronological sequence, introducing analysis of events as I proceed. Such a plan makes it easier to strip away some of the mythology concerning the events of 42 years ago.

Knox College

During the 1950s, Knox College was a male domain occupied by young men from all over New Zealand, of varying ages, studying for a variety of professions. Within the college community were a number of ex-servicemen, most of them studying for the Presbyterian ministry. Knox had not been shaken at that stage by the liberalism of Lloyd Geering, but there were clearly defined groups within the "Div" students, as they were called, ranging from the more fundamentalist to those with what some perceived to be dangerously liberal theological points of view.

Amongst the medical students there was a similar range of believers, with the more traditional rigid group belonging to the Evangelical Union and the more daring, and I would say open-minded, belonging to the Student Christian Movement of which I happened to be President for part of the period we are discussing. At that time the Student Christian Movement quite openly accepted agnostics and others who were exploring and developing their concepts of themselves and the world in general.

Social life in the College centred on the supper parties which moved from room to

room. Students became bored with swotting by about 9:00 or 9:30 and gathered together in various rooms and talked until midnight and beyond. The great strength of Knox College lay in those interchanges. These were much richer social gatherings than the somewhat rushed meals in the dining room. I remain very grateful to this phase of my student life, particularly for what I learned from people studying in the other faculties and from the ex-servicemen amongst us.

At times the students set out deliberately to antagonise Mr Moffat and his "smug band of journalists and leader writers".

It needs to be remembered that the early 1950s saw the beginnings of what ultimately resulted in student unrest in a number of other countries and in the revolt of tertiary students against a number of manifestations of the old order. In my opinion, the stirrings began as students realised that a great new order had failed to emerge from the ashes of the Second World War. Rather, a potentially destructive conflict was emerging between what could crudely be called capitalism and Marxism.

Student Idealism

Throughout history, students have been aware of injustice and abuse of power by successive forms of the Establishment. Students have, to some extent, tended to divide themselves into those who put down their heads and acquire a qualification, looking neither to right nor left, versus those who gain pleasure and seek self-fulfilment in genuine attempts to

improve, not only their own life, but that of others. While that may be jingoistic and simplistic it is highly relevant to the context.

During 1951 we had endured privation in the Otago winter during the waterfront and the coal miners' strike. We had shivered in unheated rooms and endured a pretty awful diet amidst a so-called land of plenty. Regardless of the rights or wrongs of the Holland Government's struggle with the wharfies and the miners, many of us in Otago became increasingly irritated by the sanctimonious attitude of the *Otago Daily Times*.

This is not mythology; the pompous simperings of the *ODT* were tackled regularly during capping week. At times the students set out deliberately to antagonise Mr Moffat and his "smug band of journalists and leader writers". The *Star* was a ho-hum paper which did not excite nearly as much reaction on the part of the students. Undoubtedly there was much young arrogance behind our own attitudes, but also youthful energy, mixed with mischief and an altruistic outlook.

The idea of launching a major attack on the *ODT* surfaced in the winter term of 1952. The pre-occupation of the *ODT* with flying saucers, and the trivialisation of major events which were happening worldwide, was adding fuel to the antagonism felt among a range of students. What I shall term the "idealistic alliance" between many medical, dental, arts and divinity students provided a fertile area for the gestation of the hoax. From the beginning it was critical that a sufficient group of men with the necessary confidence in one another

should come together if the venture was to succeed.

According to my records, the hoax idea was mooted vaguely for the first time in late September. Finally a group of five, at one particular supper party, concocted the crucial elements of the enterprise. One of the group had access to a secretary in the Medical School. She

group which was a key to the outstanding success of the episode. For many years I kept a copy of the map I used to draw up the original plan. It was very similar to that shown on this construction [*shown at left*] produced by Brian MacKrell of Palmerston North in 1978.

One document [*see page 5*] was central to the planning. The illustration confirms that at least some of the things I have said are not mythological. You will note that the single-page document starts off by defining the objective very clearly.

Designed to cure the ODT of Flying Saucerites and inoculate that worthy journal with a healthy degree of septicism [sic].

Spelling mistakes and the unconscious pun based on a spelling mistake, while not Freudian, are nevertheless interesting. We really only had one possibility of getting the typing done, and there was no proof-reading as far as I can recall. For "saucerites" read "sauceritis", and for "septicism" read "scepticism".

However, the point of the sentence is quite clear and an educationalist today would applaud the brevity and the irony inherent in that sentence.

As you will note, it is a double irony.

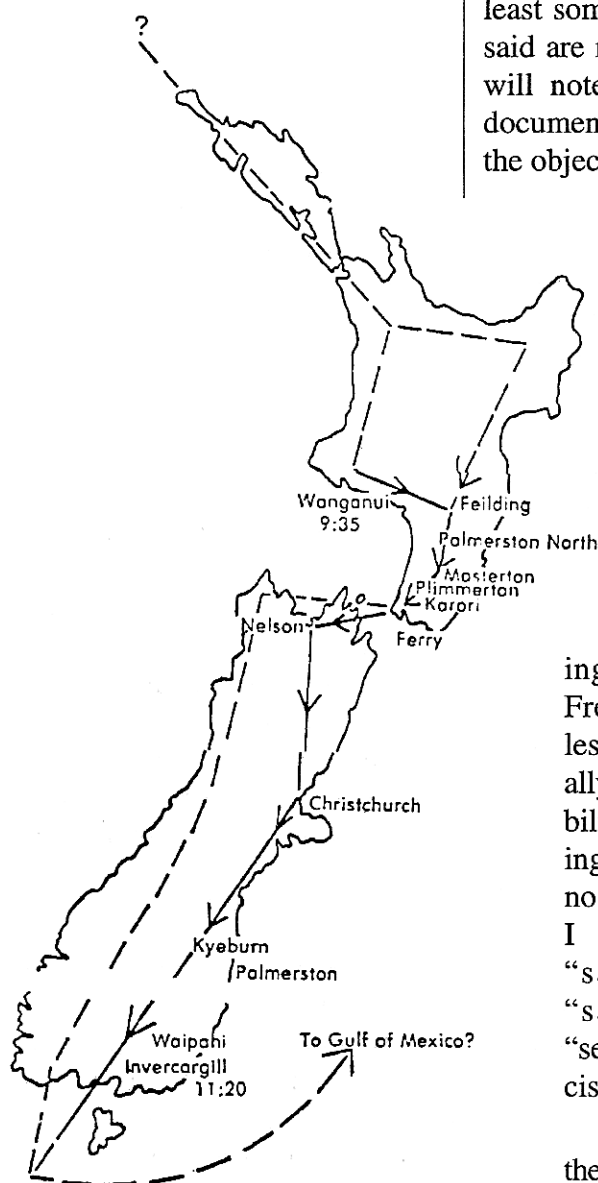
The reasoning behind the genesis of two saucers, with different colour codes for the two extra-terrestrial objects, was itself based upon consider-

able discussion and simplification. There was much complexity during early stages of the planning with a tendency to various forms of hyperbole. All this was strenuously censored for sound reasons.

The blue saucer was to "disappear over the horizon in ever decreasing circles". We did drag a few coat-tails!

The final paragraphs in the printed document are again an exemplary piece of the hoaxster's art. Buried within these instructions are the fruits of our own research analysis of reports plus our own rudimentary understanding of the accoutrements of supersonic flight.

Once the document was available, it was distributed throughout the College, through the supper-party networking system. At this point, differing philosophies and personalities within the College became evident in the decisions taken as to who would and who would not take part. Two divinity students, in particular, protested that this was a dishonest exercise with which they could not associate themselves. They believed that the College would be brought into disrepute. Moreover, they were extremely disapproving of other divinity students who were prepared to indulge in such dishonest joviality. They raised a point which was again evident at the 25 year initial revelation. If we were prepared to dissemble to this extent as students, what were we going to be like in later life; what grip would we have on honesty and integrity? Most of us ignored such qualms, and it was notable that a number of ex-servicemen among the divinity students particularly relished their participation.



The flight of the saucers.
Solid lines indicate reported flight paths,
dashed lines indicate theoretical ones.

was the one significant person from outside the Knox confederacy who participated and maintained her silence over the years.

Final planning, however, was undertaken by a very small

Saturday December 6th

1952

Designed to cure the O.D.T of flying saucerites and inoculate that worthy journal with a healthy degree of septicism.

Please read carefully:-

In brief: Two flying saucers are to appear over North Auckland, and follow a course such that everyone will have an opportunity of seeing them. They fly together for a while, then separate, one to each side of New Zealand, then reunite, and finally separate again before disappearing. For the sake of distinction one is blue, the other green.

When they are together, the blue is always flying just above the green.

The following is the course taken - please check on the exact time you see it, the direction of travel, and whether you see one or two.

Exactness about these details is essential.

The saucers will be travelling by night:

BLUE SAUCER			GREEN SAUCER		
Place	Time	Heading	Place	Time	Heading
Nth.Auckland	8.30	Sth together	Nth.Auckland	8.30	Sth. together
Auckland	8.40	hover then Sth.	Auckland	8.40	Hover, then St:
Just Nth. of Hamilton)	8.55	Easterly	Just Sth of Hamilton)	8.55	Sth.west.
Gisborne	9.15	Sth.West	New Plymouth	9.15	Sth.east.
Napier	9.25	Sth.west	Wanganui	9.30	Sth.east
Pal.North.	9.45	Nth to Sth) together)	Pal. North	9.45	Nth. to Sth) together)
Masterton	9.55	Sth. together	Masterton	9.55	Sth. together
Upper Hutt	10+	Sth.together	Upper Hutt	10+	Sth. together
Wellington	10.10	Circle at high speed, then Sth.	Wellington	10.10	Circles at hig speed, then Wes
Christchurch	10.50	South	Nelson	10.20	South
Ashburton	10.55	South	Westport	10.45	West
Timaru	11.00	South			out to sea
Oamaru	11.05	South			suddenly
Dunedin	11.10	South			disappears
Invercargill	11.20	South			

disappears on
horizon in ever
decreasing circles.

Having seen the saucer, please rush into print about it.

- Write to (1) your local paper
(2) The Editor O.D.T
(3) The Star (?)

Part of the cyclostyled sheet of instructions, showing the introduction and detailing the actions of the "saucers".

This was not the only major attack on the ODT by members of Knox College. A famous Resident Fellow, the late Don Anderson, who at one stage was on the staff at Massey University, found the ODT editorial policies particularly irritating and conducted an entirely fictitious correspondence during which he wrote letters for and

against bagpipes over a prolonged period. That particular private pillorying of the august journal has never been revealed in public to my knowledge, but I stand to be corrected on that point. As far as I can recall, Don did not take part in this particular exercise but we would not have expected him to do so because he was grossly

handicapped and easily identified. As a victim of cerebral palsy, his speech mannerisms were well known in Otago at that time.

There was one major risk involved in the planning which we had to accept. Everything had to be in place so that, as was the custom of those days,

we could complete the bulk of our year's study in the four to six weeks before the final examinations. This was the reason why the briefings and preparations of the instruction sheet occurred early in the third term. Also, various members of the College left at varying times over a total range of about six weeks. In turn the due date of December 6 was determined by the timing of the departure of the last students at the end of their examinations.

This lengthy delay between concluding the planning and the date of execution led to some awkward gaps in coverage of the country and to forgetfulness which I think was genuine on the part of some who had agreed to participate. Russell Cowie made strenuous and ingenious efforts to provide coverage from places in the South Island by preparing additional letters for the relevant areas. Some of the gaps were covered by correspondents stating that they had been travelling by car. This would account for a letter being posted at a distance from the alleged sighting.

To a perceptive reporter who took the trouble to collate the information, the fact that this was a spoof should have been obvious.

Pure Moonshine

One of my favourite pieces was the reporting of the sighting from Hokonui, the home of the famous southern moonshine whisky. The author of that letter had the sense not to sign himself McRae. I still find it incredible that the *ODT* did not pick up these trailings of the coat.

If I may be excused a modicum of parochialism I shall describe what happened in Auckland. I chose the *Herald* and rang

from a phone box as I came off overtime, on a clear lovely evening. Fortunately the sky was clear over pretty much the whole of New Zealand on the night; this was the first piece of Lady Luck's benevolence. Had Aotearoa lived up to its name, the whole scheme would have been strangled at birth.

The *Herald* reporter who received my telephone call was quite bland about it, asked for a name and address which I gave, having carefully selected a street in which the particular number did not exist (in accordance with the plan). I sent in a letter having said I would do so. Obviously no one ever checked up on that, or if they did they kept the observation to themselves.

"You cannot possibly ignore straightforward, intelligently written reports like these." He added, "I cannot give explanations off-hand."

A colleague from an adjacent wool-store was assigned the *Auckland Star*. This was a much tougher proposition. He gave a description which tallied with mine, as he walked home from a different wool-store and used a different telephone box. However, the *Star* reporter wanted a bit more than a name and address and John realised that this was a hazardous moment. However, he had a brilliant idea of saying, "If my wife knew I was out in this street at this time of night there would be all hell". "No problem sir," said the *Star* reporter and swallowed the whole thing hook, line and sinker. Another student used a similar device. Throughout the country people generally had no problems in having their stories accepted.

The Target Bites

The flood of reports obviously raised excitement. As predicted, the *ODT* gave quite unreasonable prominence to the reports while missing the whole point and not even correlating the North Island and South Island sightings. In its initial reporting it referred to South Island observations only, even though those in the North had been reported in the Northern press, with suitably modest prominence, and on radio.

At no stage did the biggest circulation newspaper of the country, the *New Zealand Herald*, or the *Auckland Star* give the story any undue prominence. The attitude of both the *Herald* and the *Star* implied that they thought there might be some trickery afoot. The *Auckland Star* ran a cartoon and a whimsical leader appeared in the *New Zealand Herald*. I should comment that the *New Zealand Herald* has always had a whimsical streak to it.

As many of you may know, there is a tradition on April 1 to publish very soberly written articles which are a send-up of this or that, perhaps the most famous one being of the description of the long-lost tunnel under Auckland Harbour excavated for military purposes in the 19th century. Huge numbers of citizens were taken in by that piece of writing. I am not sure whether Ted Reynolds was on the *Herald* staff in 1952 but the flying saucer leader incorporated the style of writing for which he was later to become notable, if anonymously.

We did have a problem in Auckland. A Canadian Pacific Airliner came over at the critical time and a group of cargo workers sighted something

which was not part of our scheme. This was a further piece of intervention by Lady Luck however, because it tended to confuse things in the northern part of the country and it ultimately was quite useful.

Further south much ingenuity was exercised, including a report from one student and his son, (who certainly did not exist at that stage) reporting that they had seen the two discs together. About three days after the event, some newspapers had correlated all the sightings. The Carter Observatory, which had been contacted by more than one newspaper, had officially stated the reports had contained "quite worthwhile information". The speed of the two objects had been calculated and tallied with our original computations.

"If only I had seen it" sighed Mr W.D. Anderson, a fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society who was consulted by the ODT. "You cannot possibly ignore straightforward, intelligently written reports like these." He added, "I cannot give explanations off-hand." Meanwhile, dedicated saucer watchers had concluded that these "fully authenticated reports from New Zealand", as they were described, indicated that "saucers were flying closer to the Earth's surface". This clearly heightened the interest and further raised excitement.

Front Page News

The ODT was in full cry, and 13 days after the event the front or main news page had a double-full-scale column headline entitled "Enigma of the Sky". It was not the only major reference on the front page during that week. The ODT had commissioned a Mr Anderson and a Mr McGeorge to undertake a survey of the reports. These two

worthy gentlemen concluded that:

Assuming that these reports of a swift-moving object in the sky on Saturday night are not the result of collaboration (and they appear to be genuine, independent observations) they constitute a surprising weight of evidence in favour of the proposition that some object of a bluish colour did pass down the South Island.

They went on to calculate size and height of the objects. They ended their report:

We are still looking forward to focusing a telescope on one of these mysterious objects. A telephone call ahead of the object would be helpful, and we suggest that any observer immediately telephone in reports to the nearest office to enable advice to send ahead in time.

What we did not know at the time was that we had calculated the speed of our objects such that they would have appeared at the right time over the Gulf of Mexico where a B29 crew saw a small, unidentified flying object.

A few late reports trickled in and this again was part of the original plan. These were heavily reinforced by Russell Cowie, which ensured that the ODT target was well and truly plastered. He wrote further letters to Southland and Wellington papers to ensure that the coordinated activities of the blue and green discs were recognised.

The excitement eventually died down. The *Weekly News* of July 12 1953 did feature an article entitled "Mysteries that Fly

Past in the Night", which was based on an interview with Mr H.A. Fulton, president of the Civilian Saucer Interrogation Society of New Zealand (CSINZ). He had been involved early by the ODT and other newspapers at the time of the hoax itself.

The Committee of the CSI had concluded that the most conclusive evidence of the existence of flying saucers was the series of reports received on December 6, 1952. He went on to state that the CSI was satisfied that all the natural and atmospheric explanation by scientists for the appearance of flying saucers did not promise a solution of the riddle.

"Time", Mr Fulton said, "would tell and the time was not very far away."

Unexpected Support

Lady Luck favoured us thrice. What we did not know at the time was that we had calculated the speed of our objects such that they would have appeared at the right time over the Gulf of Mexico where a B29 crew saw a small, unidentified flying object. In 1978 the report of that crew still remained on the US Air Force list of unexplained flying objects. The green disc which disappeared off Invercargill could have turned up along a great circle route to the Gulf of Mexico just in time to be observed by the American airmen in their B29. Others have carried out the same correlation which appears in one of the standard books on flying saucers. The New Zealand sighting of 1952 and the B29 report are frequently quoted as being the most convincing evidence to support the reality of UFOs.

In an account prepared in 1984 by Mason Stretch, then Secretary of the Knox College Students' Club, and presented at an annual meeting of the Knox College Old Boys' Association, the final two paragraphs ran:

Surely the ODT reporters, the main sub-editors even, must have purred when Mr Thompson of the Carter Observatory said to the ODT, "You have got times and you have got something which might give speeds...that appears to be worthwhile information."

The ODT had nobly striven to assemble data and report to the public information of world shaking importance — so important indeed that what at other times would be major international news was squeezed out of the headlines by two saucy wee disks [sic] that hissed while hoaxers howled in the back-ground.

I think we were all staggered by the success of the venture and were not quite sure what to do. There was a tacit agreement that nothing should be said. We had achieved our objective, felt satisfied and, quite frankly, the

ODT continued on in its ponderous manner. Capping came along next term and, predictably, the memory of the events receded into the background. As I have indicated there were some periodic reports of the 1952 excerpts in the press including the *Weekly News* article. Some who participated in the hoax did begin to feel a little uneasy that some people 10, 15 and 25 years later were still taking the thing far too seriously, just as the 1909 airship episode with slow moving dirigibles steam-powered from Dargaville to Invercargill towards subsequent sightings in Australia had never been explained. It seemed reasonable to leave things for a while, but not forever.

In the Christchurch *Press* of 4 March 1978, Brian MacKrell of Palmerston North published an article headlined "The Night of the Hissing Discs". He had earlier analysed the 1952 newspaper reports and his work produced the map referred to earlier. He said he was not a member of any organisation which believed in UFOs but he had collected newspaper reports of the sightings as a child. He had linked up the B29 bomber re-

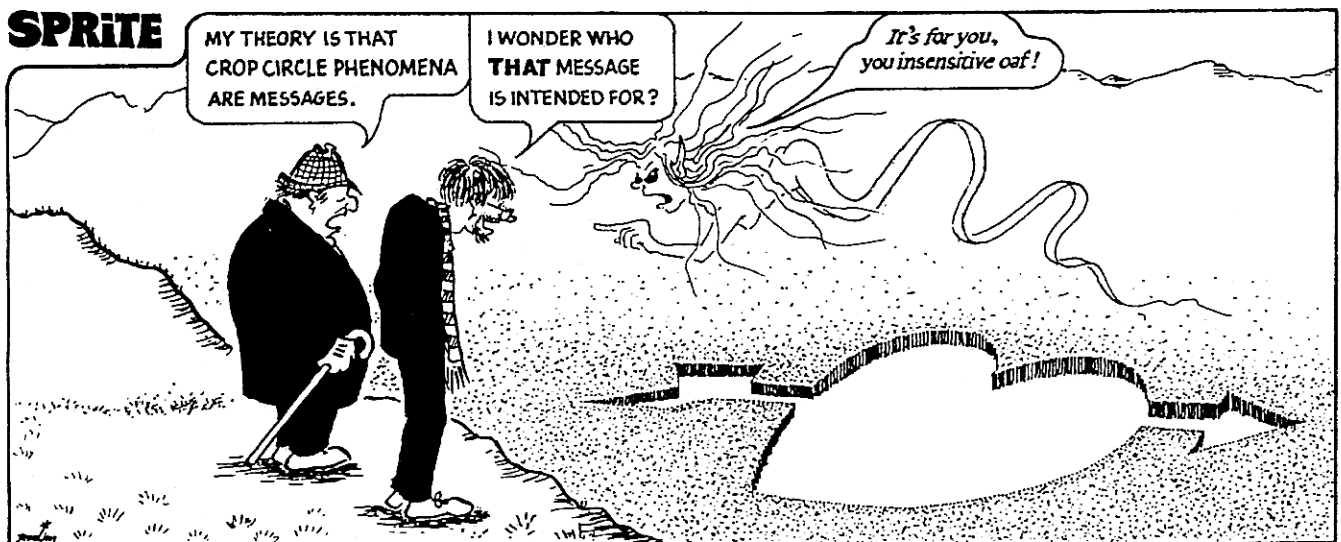
port from the Gulf of Mexico. He was aware of the 1909 airship reports.

With what appears to have been unconscious irony, the ODT republished the MacKrell article one week later. There is no indication that the ODT had any inkling of its role as the prime target in 1952.

Some of the group of now moderately old Knox men decided enough was enough, and Ken Nichol of Christchurch Teachers' College revealed to the *Press* a general outline of the hoax. As far as I can tell the ODT never published Ken's article.

As we expected, the reaction to the Ken Nichol revelation was mixed. Some letters refused to accept that the hoax was a hoax.

I believe it is clear from the editorial in the *New Zealand Herald* and the cartoon in the *Auckland Star* that the northern papers regarded the whole affair as entertaining and amusing. I suspect in retrospect that they might even have guessed that the ODT was the target. Certainly, when one looks at the *New Zealand Herald* over the relevant time, international news was not displaced off the front page in the Auckland



Donald Room, *Skeptic* (UK)

papers as it was in the *Otago Daily Times*.

In terms of its basic purpose, the hoax was designed to make the *ODT* look foolish, mainly in the eyes of those who perpetrated the hoax itself, and hopefully to others. The low standard of professionalism shown by the newspaper reporters and sub-editors in terms of their analysis of Press Association reports, their failure to undertake some simple correlations, and their failure to pick-up the clues deliberately pointing to this being a hoax, almost certainly had no impact within the paper itself and probably not amongst a majority of worthy readers in Otago.

Hoaxers Satisfied

To those of us who took part in the hoax, there was a buzz of excitement and gratification. Our suspicion that the Fourth Estate could be manipulated, even by amateurs, was confirmed as were our thoughts concerning what determined some major aspect of newspaper policy. In a city that had prided itself as the intellectual centre of the country, the toes and part of the fore-foot of the main newspaper were revealed to us as objects of clay.

While we were poking fun at one major pillar of the Otago establishment, we were also indulging in the freedom offered by that academic environment and by New Zealand generally. Like the Oxford students who dug up part of Oxford or Regent Street and got away with it for something like a week, we had risked creating a nuisance of ourselves at the same time as we had challenged pomposity and credulity. We were mounting what we believed to be a humorous but constructive protest against what we correctly

perceived to be the destructive nature of modern day superstition and witchcraft, and their handmaidens in some sections of the media.

We were mounting what we believed to be a humorous but constructive protest against what we correctly perceived to be the destructive nature of modern day superstition and witchcraft,

Ours was a one-off exercise unlike the much more elaborate campaign undertaken in the seventies and eighties by the crop circle hoaxers. Bower and Chorley were in their fifties when they concocted their crop circle hoax as a joke, once again based upon a flying saucer motive. They also were staggered at their success and instead of confessing to newspapers, they made use of the original scheme to spell out the words "we are not alone" in 1986, and "copycats" in 1990. Once again, however, the believers took over and the huge geometrical precision of the July 1990 hoax convinced UFO Research Groups and the United Believers in Intelligence, that intelligence beyond any earthbound being had created the nine circle Worcester-shire patterns.

Those particular episodes are much more complex than our own efforts, and just who is hoaxing whom remains unclear. At times it seems clear that the crop circle series may even have been maintained in the interest of some journalists, cynical or otherwise.

History does repeat itself in the arena of hoaxism and Lady Luck rides side-saddle e'en to the noo.

At least some who reacted to Ken Nichol's preliminary confession believed that the Knox College students had betrayed their academic standards and had displayed a shocking lack of integrity. How could we be trusted on any stage thereafter? The argument that young radicals later became conservatives did not hold much weight with these stern critics. I believe that such guardians of absolute truth failed to perceive that we were acting out of a very healthy intellectual approach to life in general.

Moreover, from what I know of the subsequent lives of a moderately large number of the group concerned, they have maintained a sense of proportion during their careers and they have neither become cynics nor carping critics. Maybe it is their sense of humour combined with their serious intent and a critical capacity to analyse complex issues which has maintained in them this balanced perspective which is a key element in professional success.

I feel there is ironic justice perceptible in the fact that Russell Cowie is an acknowledged expert in the area of the nature and use of historical evidence. I hope that young people continue to behave in the way we did, particularly if they maintain into later adult life a sense of fun, a sense of proportion and an approach to the Establishment which is responsible on the one hand, but skeptical and critical on the other.

And so I conclude and leave you to your own interpretations of one of the cataclysmic events which brought to an end anno domini 1952.

Professor Sir John Scott is a respected member of the medical fraternity in Auckland.

Group wants cash to fight ritual abuse

Star Times
15 Oct

By MATT CONWAY

A NEW group set up to counter ritual abuse and satanic worship has applied for almost \$40,000 from the Government and the Lottery Grants Board to set up an office and send members to a conference in the United States.

End Ritual Abuse (ERA) was started by a Christchurch woman whose son was found to have been molested by creche worker Peter Ellis. She cannot be named as a suppression order protects the boy's identity. We'll call her Alison.

Alison defines ritual abuse as organised physical, sexual and psychological assaults of child and adult victims, characterised by torture and mind control.

She alleges her son, then aged between 3 and 5, was splattered in blood and buried alive in a coffin during his time at the Christchurch Civic Childcare Centre.

His artwork now is dark and demonic and obsessed with death.

Alison claims also to have spoken to at least six adult survivors of ritual abuse from Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch.

"Ritual abuse is prevalent here in New Zealand and has been for some time," she told the *Sunday Star-Times*.

"It's a very new concept to the public, even though it's been happening for generations."

Asked to pinpoint the whereabouts of practising ritual abusers, Alison said: "I don't know (where) the cults are. I don't even know if the police know that."

ERA became an incorporated society on September 28 to enable the group to pitch for public money. The required 15 signatories include other parents who had

children cared for by Ellis at the Civic creche, two counsellors, a psychologist, a lecturer and a journalist.

A three-monthly ERA newsletter goes to 120 people, including 50 counsellors and some social workers.

ERA has asked for money from three sources:

- \$28,000 from the Lottery Grants Board, to establish an inner city office, buy a computer and facsimile, and pay a full-time ritual abuse worker \$150 a week.

- \$5000 from Healthlink South's child and family health division, to buy books, videos, audio tapes and print pamphlets for a ritual abuse resource library.

- \$6000 from an Internal Affairs discretionary fund, to send two ERA members to a ritual abuse conference in Illinois next year.

The long-term aim of the group is to see ritual abuse recognised in law. "We want acknowledgement in legislation that ritual abuse occurs and that it's a hideous crime," Alison said.

"I'm hoping and praying we'll get the funding. If we don't, I'll figure it's too soon."

But New Zealand Skeptics spokesman Dr Denis Dutton, a vocal critic of ritual abuse believers, slammed ERA's bid for public money.

"I'm sure the Lottery Grants Board would not be so foolish as to support something as whacky as ritual abuse theories. If they do, they can expect UFO abductees to be next in the queue for money. (ERA is) promoting something which has been thoroughly discredited."

A decision from the Lottery Grants Board is expected next month.

Therapy for 'devastating' NZ families

PALMERSTON NORTH — Repressed memory syndrome, a "fad" imported from overseas, is devastating hundreds of New Zealand families, says Skeptics' spokesman Denis Dutton.

"There are people going into a therapist's office as depression cases and coming out as sexual abuse victims," he told the annual conference of the Skeptics, held at the weekend at Massey University.

Repressed memory syndrome is where people attending therapy "recover" memories of childhood sexual abuse of which they had no previous knowledge.

Opponents label it "false memory syndrome" and claim therapists trigger the memories by asking leading questions and suggesting that the abuse did happen.

Dr Dutton, a lecturer at Canterbury University, labelled the syndrome a panic reaction to the high incidence of child abuse.

"People currently want to see sexual abuse punished, and rightly so," he said. "But we have to get away from the notion that anyone who is accused is automatically guilty."

He said a typical scenario was that of a woman in her 30s seeking therapy. Her symptoms might include mild depression, anxiety, headaches, an inability to lose weight, anorexia, arthritis, back problems, bulimia or a phobia.

The therapist, who had "succumbed to the latest fad," decided the symptoms were caused by repressed memories. The woman denied it initially. But at the thera-

pist's urging and if suggested, she began to ask leading questions. After years, images began to form in her mind and she began remembering past events.

ACC support is a therapy if a sexual abuse action can be established, said.

He gave the example of a New Zealand woman called Margaret. During therapy her mother being gay was covered the memory of an incident arranged for her. Margaret denies the accusation. The family was split by the accusation.

Dr Dutton estimated that about 30 families in New Zealand have been affected by false memories of sexual abuse arising from repressed memories.

He had been contacted about 30 families that had been affected, and an Auckland support group had been set up.

"The psychology community in denial, they don't want to face the existence of this," he said, "Just as 20 years ago sexual abuse was a subject that was not to be confronted."

"We've had therapy for years, but never been destructive."

He hoped New Zealanders would avoid the worst excesses of the repressed memory syndrome that had opened overseas, such as in the United States where thousands of families had been split up.

Traditional medicines to be registered training courses

By JUDE BARLOW

Maori and Chinese medical therapies are in the process of becoming registered courses with national academic standards.

A Natural Therapies Advisory Group — made up of representatives from 13 natural therapy colleges — is working with the Qualifications Authority to set standards and get courses registered with the authority.

This means students anywhere in the country will be able to study a registered alternative medicine course which will give them credit towards a qualification on the authority's framework of qualifications.

Other areas under consideration include aromatherapy and hypnotherapy.

"At the moment, there is no standard," Natural Therapies Advisory Group chairwoman Susanna Shelton said. "There is such a mix-match of what somebody in Christchurch is doing in comparison to what somebody in Auckland is doing. The whole thing is in a complete state of flux."

Placing natural therapies alongside paramedic services, coronary nursing and mental health care would bring the unconventional and the conventional together, Ms Shelton said.

She said some practitioners were resisting the change. But she believed that establishing high standards would provide benefits in the long run.

From those outside the field, there had been only positive feedback on natural therapies joining

the authority's qualification framework.

NZQA framework development manager Ruth Moorhouse said the authority did not decide what went into the framework. "It's up to the industry."

"The advisory group has responsibility for identifying the key outcomes for its industry and recommends these to the NZQA. As long as these are technically correct for our format they will be registered as standards. If the industry believes and validates the area as important enough, NZQA will register them on the framework."

Medical Association chief executive Peter Faulkner said: "If the natural therapies sector can convince the NZQA that their training is worthwhile then good for them."



Office of
THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION
Wellington, New Zealand

26 August 1994

Gordon Hewitt
30 Totara Street
EASTBOURNE

Dear Gordon Hewitt

Thank you for your letter of 11 August 1994 regarding the National Qualifications Framework.

Individuals have the right to select for themselves the type of treatment they prefer. It is the role of government to ensure that their choices can be made on the basis of accurate information. It is in this regard that the Government has passed such legislation as the Consumer Guarantees Act. The Government is also concerned that the training in any field is of high quality. It is not the role of the Qualifications Authority to make ethical or moral judgements on the academic credibility of such training. The Authority's function is to ensure that industry performance standards are specified clearly and that providers have the capacity to deliver to those standards. This will provide trainees and the public at large with the information they need to make their own judgements.

Yours sincerely

Lockwood Smith PhD
Minister of Education
Signed in the Minister's absence

Scientist sceptical of naturopathy degree

By SARAH CATHERALL
Education Reporter

A SCIENTIST is concerned a South Island polytechnic wants to offer an applied science degree in naturopathy, because he says the alternative health discipline is not a science.

Canterbury University scientist Neville Blampeid said he was happy for Timaru's Aoraki Polytechnic to teach naturopathy "even though I'd never spend my hard earned dollars on something so sceptical".

However, he was concerned the Qualifications Authority, which approves degrees, was considering accrediting the polytechnic to offer a bachelor of applied science in naturopathy.

Dr Blampeid said scientists had to carry out research and be rigorously assessed by their peers. If scientific research showed a certain practice did not work, then scientists abandoned that. However, alternative medicine practitioners based the success of naturopathy on "consumer

satisfaction" rather than vigorous assessment.

Therapeutic massage, which naturopaths practised, had some scientific merit but iridology (diagnosing illness through the eye) and homeopathy (natural treatment) were dubious.

"The idea that someone can diagnose what's wrong with you by peering in the eye is disputable ... how can the liver communicate with the eyeball that something's wrong?"

But Aoraki Polytechnic deputy chief executive Raewyn Holdsworth said yesterday the proposed degree was science and research based, and developed after work with naturopathic experts in universities in Australia, Canada and the United States. The polytechnic hoped to offer the degree next year.

Conversation with a rock

KRT

New York

Herewith some excerpts from an interview published in the *Journal of Emergence!* between Rosemary Brown Sanders, a psychic and channeller, and Rojo, representative of the Rock People of Sedona, a bunch of "conscious" rocks in Arizona.

Sanders: It's wonderful to see you.

Rojo: It seems like only yesterday that we were with each other, but as you know, rocks do not count time.

Sanders: When I was on Mt Shasta, I was very much drawn to one particular rock. Can you tell me why? ...

Rojo: Your rock is very, how would you say, intelligent ... It has a strong affinity with you. It has searched its way out of the earth in order to be in your presence ... It is very important that you always ask permission of rocks before you take them. And you will hear inside them something that says, "Yes, take me. Take me, please ..."

Sanders: Rojo, when a rock shatters, does it hurt?

Rojo: Yes, it hurts very much. It would be like taking a person and removing his arms ... It would be like putting you in a dryer. How would it feel? Very bruising.

Skeptic Gordon Hewitt wrote the Minister of Education about plans to unleash on the New Zealand public naturopaths with "applied science" degrees. The Minister's response to Gordon's misgivings about naturopathic treatments is reprinted above.

Rape acquittal sets 'memory' precedent

By ALAN SAMSON

THE acquittal in Auckland of a man charged with the rape of three of his daughters on the strength of their "memories" recalled under therapy is being hailed as an important legal precedent.

It is believed to be the first case in New Zealand in which the courts have acquitted a man accused solely on the basis of such memories, though, on at least two other occasions, hung and protracted proceedings have aborted trials.

Spoken to by *The Dominion* after the trial, the 59-year-old man said he was not bitter, just "incredibly relieved".

He had spent \$117,000 on his defence, had been treated like dirt

by investigating agencies and had been reviled and spat upon in his few hours in prison during the course of the trial.

And the lives of his daughters had been ruined.

"The police didn't want to hear my story. I was told, 'You can tell that to the judge'."

The man said he was speaking only because some trained psychologists had adopted "recovered" memory as gospel, and the Accident Rehabilitation and Compensation Insurance Corporation, Social Welfare Department and the police

□ Continued p3

Satanic claims win Bent Spoon

NZPA

Palmerston North

A TV3 documentary detailing claims of satanic sexual abuse in rural New Zealand has won the Bent Spoon Award at the annual Skeptic's conference, held in Palmerston North at the weekend.

The award, for journalistic gullibility, is named in honour of Uri Geller, the nightclub magician turned "psychic," who claimed to bend metal with his mind.

The *Inside New Zealand* documentary, funded by New Zealand On Air, followed a woman and her sons to various sites in the North Island where they described being sexually tortured and made to murder babies. The woman's parents, a Catholic priest and other residents were said to have been involved.

The 53-year-old woman, who recovered the memories after psychotherapy, claimed to have repeatedly been made pregnant in order to produce babies for satanic murders and cannibalism.

"If you can believe her, animals were tortured, babies eaten and an evil time had by all," said Skeptics spokesman Denis Dutton.

"Satanic ritual abuse has been investigated by the FBI in the United States and by a special government investigator in Britain. Both of these inquiries have shown allegations of satanic ritual abuse to be unfounded fantasies," he said.

"Yet TV3 presents these disturbed claims as though they were worth taking seriously . . . (and) New Zealand On Air is squandering public money by supporting such balderdash."

Such claims also trivialised authentic cases of sexual abuse, he said.

The Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (Skeptics) is a network of people dedicated to exposing pseudo-science and bogus paranormal claims.

were willing to accept abuse claims on the basis that people said it had happened. "They don't need a shred of evidence to take you to court."

Support group Casualties of Sexual Allegations head Felicity Goodyear-Smith called the jury's decision last Friday after a year of investigation and litigation "incredibly important".

"There is no scientific backing for recovered memories," she said. "The Crown was saying this was a real phenomenon, but there's no study yet that supports it."

Defence QC Peter Williams could not be reached yesterday, but is understood to be planning a book on the case.

During the trial, Frank Rawlinson, a psychiatrist called as an expert witness by the defence, told the jury the doctrine of recovered memory was no longer held valid by many leading international authorities.

In his closing address, crown prosecutor Kieran Rafferty said Dr Rawlinson was now expressing "totally contradictory" opinions to his views at an earlier trial in Wanganui. Dr Rawlinson described this as a "shift in degree", but the jury might see this as a rather inadequate explanation.

Justice Sir Ian Barker told the jury it had to have "very, very great caution" before it could return guilty verdicts.

Help group for those with alien experiences

By NICK SMITH

Scared by strange lights? Worried about things that go bump in the night? Abducted by aliens?

A group of Aucklanders wants to help.

The Extraterrestrial Awareness Group is holding a public meeting for people who believe they have seen alien spacecraft, had contact with visitors from space or been abducted by beings from another world.

The 25 people in this group say they have experienced one or all three of the above. They want to offer support and a forum for people who want "to get their questions answered," according to a spokesman, Mr Alan Bainbridge.

Mr Bainbridge, a hypnotist who helps people abducted by aliens to re-

cover memories of their ordeal, said some thought they were going mad after an encounter with strange lifeforms.

"We find that a lot of people who are interested don't know where to go," he said.

On Thursday October 20, at the Mt Roskill Memorial Hall, the group will offer video screenings of international alien encounters and people will talk about their experiences with the unknown.

Despite Mt Roskill's reputation as Auckland's Bible belt, Mr Bainbridge is confident the meeting will not ruffle feathers.

"It should not upset a thinking Christian," he said.

Mr Bainbridge claims that thousands of New Zealanders have been abducted by aliens.

Most, however, cannot remember the incident.

Hokum Locum

Dr John Welch

MSG Myth Laid to Rest

Another sacred cow from my medical school days has been laid to rest. A letter in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 1968 triggered a rash of anecdotal reports about facial flushing allegedly caused by monosodium glutamate (MSG) in Chinese food. "Chinese restaurant syndrome" had entered the popular medical mythology. Finally, 26 years later, two Australian scientists conducted a double-blind placebo controlled trial and found that some reaction to MSG was experienced by 15% of the subjects but the same reactions were also experienced by 14% of the placebo subjects. The scientists believe that the true cause of Chinese restaurant syndrome are histamine compounds found in fermented ingredients such as soy sauce, black bean sauce and shrimp paste.

New Scientist 15 Jan '94 p15

Poppycock

A US plastic surgeon found that the majority of his patients presenting for operative penile enlargement were motivated by anxiety over the size of their privy member rather than its performance. In fact one patient's partner reportedly phoned the surgeon before her husband's operation and told him she would rather have a fur coat! (*GP Weekly*) The procedure of penile enlargement was developed in China by the appropriately named Dr Long Daochou.

This absurd operation is not at all unusual in a culture where people also have silicon inserts into their muscles in order to look good at the beach. In fact,

Ken and Barbie dolls are good models for such people who prefer plastic moulding to the real thing. Speaking of which, Barbie now has her own spiritual "channeller" (Barbie: "I need respect"!) and a "Barbie Channelling Newsletter". Sadly, Barbie's cries for help were treated with derision by Mattel Corporation who threatened the channeller with a multi-million dollar lawsuit.

Sunday Star Times 5 June '94

Naturopathology?

I was absolutely stunned to read in the *Christchurch Press* (12/8/94) that the Aoraki Polytechnic in Timaru is planning to offer a three-year Bachelor of Applied Science in naturopathy. Incredibly, the Qualifications Authority (QA) will be visiting the polytechnic to assess the course. The list of "basic sciences" to be studied includes herbal medicine (Kentucky fried medicine) and homeopathy (dilutions of grandeur). Is there anyone out there with any influence on the QA? Should market forces be allowed to dictate what constitutes a "basic science"? These are serious questions.

Psychobabble?

Can anybody help me come to an understanding of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)? I know it is the new term for what used to be called "shell-shock" but can anyone tell me if the condition is seen in societies which do not have compensation available and are therefore not subject to Welch's law (see *NZ Skeptic* 32).

Three passengers on the cruise liner *Mikhail Lermontov*

were awarded a total of nearly \$300,000 compensation for PTSD and a further 18 plaintiffs are waiting for their pot of gold. In order for PTSD to have a valid aetiology there must be an equal incidence of cases in the NZ passengers.

I briefly mentioned similar cases related to military service (*NZ Skeptic* 32) and most people will have heard about "Agent Orange" and alleged links with ill-health in Vietnam vets. It proved cheaper for the manufacturer to settle out of court but this decision has now entered the popular mythology as proof of causation.

Gulf War veterans (something of a misnomer since very few saw any active service) are claiming that symptoms such as fatigue and memory loss constitute a syndrome for which they will no doubt be claiming compensation. (*NZ Skeptic* 31) I have been following this saga in the medical literature, and investigators are coming up with ever more fanciful theories to explain what is nothing more than mass hysteria.

Christchurch Press 14/6/94

Medical News

A therapist who became famous through treating Diana, the Princess of Wales, has been ejected from his Harley St consulting rooms because his claimed medical qualifications were found to be bogus. Presumably he must have had some success with his treatments but the real Harley St doctors were offended and he had to go. What about the opposite situation — real doctors who persist in offering bogus

which was not part of our scheme. This was a further piece of intervention by Lady Luck however, because it tended to confuse things in the northern part of the country and it ultimately was quite useful.

Further south much ingenuity was exercised, including a report from one student and his son, (who certainly did not exist at that stage) reporting that they had seen the two discs together. About three days after the event, some newspapers had correlated all the sightings. The Carter Observatory, which had been contacted by more than one newspaper, had officially stated the reports had contained "quite worthwhile information". The speed of the two objects had been calculated and tallied with our original computations.

"If only I had seen it" sighed Mr W.D. Anderson, a fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society who was consulted by the ODT. "You cannot possibly ignore straightforward, intelligently written reports like these." He added, "I cannot give explanations off-hand." Meanwhile, dedicated saucer watchers had concluded that these "fully authenticated reports from New Zealand", as they were described, indicated that "saucers were flying closer to the Earth's surface". This clearly heightened the interest and further raised excitement.

Front Page News

The ODT was in full cry, and 13 days after the event the front or main news page had a double-full-scale column headline entitled "Enigma of the Sky". It was not the only major reference on the front page during that week. The ODT had commissioned a Mr Anderson and a Mr McGeorge to undertake a survey of the reports. These two

worthy gentlemen concluded that:

Assuming that these reports of a swift-moving object in the sky on Saturday night are not the result of collaboration (and they appear to be genuine, independent observations) they constitute a surprising weight of evidence in favour of the proposition that some object of a bluish colour did pass down the South Island.

They went on to calculate size and height of the objects. They ended their report:

We are still looking forward to focusing a telescope on one of these mysterious objects. A telephone call ahead of the object would be helpful, and we suggest that any observer immediately telephone in reports to the nearest office to enable advice to send ahead in time.

What we did not know at the time was that we had calculated the speed of our objects such that they would have appeared at the right time over the Gulf of Mexico where a B29 crew saw a small, unidentified flying object.

A few late reports trickled in and this again was part of the original plan. These were heavily reinforced by Russell Cowie, which ensured that the ODT target was well and truly plastered. He wrote further letters to Southland and Wellington papers to ensure that the coordinated activities of the blue and green discs were recognised.

The excitement eventually died down. The *Weekly News* of July 12 1953 did feature an article entitled "Mysteries that Fly

Past in the Night", which was based on an interview with Mr H.A. Fulton, president of the Civilian Saucer Interrogation Society of New Zealand (CSINZ). He had been involved early by the ODT and other newspapers at the time of the hoax itself.

The Committee of the CSI had concluded that the most conclusive evidence of the existence of flying saucers was the series of reports received on December 6, 1952. He went on to state that the CSI was satisfied that all the natural and atmospheric explanation by scientists for the appearance of flying saucers did not promise a solution of the riddle.

"Time", Mr Fulton said, "would tell and the time was not very far away."

Unexpected Support

Lady Luck favoured us thrice. What we did not know at the time was that we had calculated the speed of our objects such that they would have appeared at the right time over the Gulf of Mexico where a B29 crew saw a small, unidentified flying object. In 1978 the report of that crew still remained on the US Air Force list of unexplained flying objects. The green disc which disappeared off Invercargill could have turned up along a great circle route to the Gulf of Mexico just in time to be observed by the American airmen in their B29. Others have carried out the same correlation which appears in one of the standard books on flying saucers. The New Zealand sighting of 1952 and the B29 report are frequently quoted as being the most convincing evidence to support the reality of UFOs.

On the other hand, if you are mainly worried about getting rid of heavy metals, look no further than a new Hungarian oat-bran extract guaranteed to soak up lead and radioactive strontium carried in the blood stream. The pill, Avenan, has been developed by Lajos Szakasi who needs few lessons in the marketing of quack remedies. Avenan will go on sale as a health supplement rather than a medication because "it can be approved after a simple registration procedure". To quote Lajos again "I believe the product will be successful because...people will always spend on their health."

More fantastic still is a report from Japan where Kazu Takeishi has been arrested for giving medical advice and medicines without being properly qualified. It all began with his "healthy" vegetable soup which can be mixed with urine to become a miracle medicine, particularly effective against AIDS and cancer. Kazu claimed to make his diagnoses by touching patients' knees and the palms of their hands. Like all good quacks Kazu is sure of his market and it's a good one — \$30,000 a day and a two-month waiting list (must have been getting behind on the urine supply). Cancer is a taboo subject in Japanese culture and doctors are even protected in law from informing patients about such a diagnosis.

Now, if I could get the recipe for this soup, I could mix it with urine and treat cancer patients for \$300 per consultation and there is nothing the medical council can do — because I'm a doctor!

Dr John Welch is a medical officer with the RNZAF.

Wellingtonians Roll Up

Cynthia Shakespeare, Tony Vignaux and I are proud to report that we held a remarkably successful winter lecture series in June. We had organised speakers for local Skeptics before, with attendances of 30 or so, but this time we decided to group three speakers a week or so apart at the same venue, and advertised them jointly. We did a broader-than-usual mailout of a nice professional-looking flyer that included a map. Door charges were \$2 to cover room hire and refreshments, but even at that low price we made a modest profit.

The first speaker was me, on "The Case Against Maori Science", an expanded version of the short paper presented at the 1993 Christchurch conference (see the last *Skeptic* for another version of it). The lecture theatre was packed out, with many standing at the back. A block from the Maori Studies department glowered all the way through, and at the end the lawyer Moana Jackson got up and gave a 15-minute prepared speech, essentially calling me, "with the greatest respect", a ignorant racist colonialist. Questions were animated and sometimes angry, and discussion could have easily continued for an hour. Thanks to some publicity in *City Voice* and in the university magazine, over 100 attended.

A fortnight later, Kim Sterelny from the Philosophy Department talked about creationism and the difference between science and pseudoscience, to an audience of 52. Quite demanding, but so well presented we could all follow it. Kim concluded that there is in fact no simple distinction between science and non-science, despite what Popper says. That doesn't mean there's no distinction at all, but possibly it's more profitable to talk about good and bad science instead. Creationism can then be shown to be absolutely rotten science. Kim used as his example the Victorian scientist Philip Gosse, who hypothesised that God was obliged to create the appearance of past history (e.g. fossils) just as he created Adam and Eve with navels. Questions were restrained, and the few creationists in the audience were polite.

A similar number attended the final talk, historian Peter Muntz on "Subjective and Objective Historical Knowledge". Peter pointed out that history is often constructed to prop up preconceived religious or political ideas, such as the belief by the 17th-century revolutionary English Puritans that wicked Catholicism was imported in the Norman invasion. He pointed out that while we might never be able to get a fully objective account of history, we should always strive to avoid subjectivity and be prepared to hold our beliefs up to rigorous testing. Peter also got some newspaper publicity before the talk, and we had to organise a larger lecture hall to cater for the unexpectedly large numbers that attended.

All in all, a most successful series of talks. I would encourage Skeptics in other cities to recruit speakers for their own lecture series, and not be afraid to make a noise to the media. The Wellington Skeptics are planning another series soon, with a stronger theme, perhaps satanic abuse and recovered memories. No doubt this will be even more popular.

Mike Dickison, Wellington

PS: Before we get too smug: two creationists came through town a week later. Charging \$6 a head, they filled a hall with 700 people (not a typo) for three nights in a row. So there's a little way to go yet.

A Small Step Towards Common Sense

Felicity Goodyear-Smith

In a landmark case on September 30, a 59-year-old man, Bill¹, was acquitted by a jury in the Auckland High Court on charges of sexually abusing three of his daughters about 20 years ago. The complainants alleged sodomy and rape, and indecent acts such as the insertion of a coat hanger in the vagina causing bleeding and loss of consciousness. The women claimed they had suppressed the memories which had only resurfaced in later life. All three daughters had attended therapy and made claims for damages from the ACC before they laid the criminal charges against their father. Two of the daughters reported memories of events happening in their cots when aged one year old or less. Bill was defended by Mr Peter Williams, QC, who dismissed evidence based on "recovered memories" as dangerous and fallacious.

The mother of the girls, Bill's former *de facto* wife, gave evidence (for the Crown) that she had never noticed any indication of such abuse taking place. She had never seen any signs on her girls of the violent trauma they now claimed to have suffered, nor had she ever encountered blood on their sheets and clothing.

Clinical psychologist Eileen Swan, expert witness for the Crown, supported the phenomenon of "memory retrieval". She told the jury that it was possible for people to block out memories of unpleasant events as a psychological mechanism if they were "too hard to deal with". These memories could return piece-

meal at a later date. Ms Swan claimed that there is a "paucity of knowledge on memory" but admitted that her life is so busy she has trouble keeping up with her education on the subject.

Dr Frank Rawlinson, a psychiatrist called for the defence, has read widely and deeply on the topic. He recently visited the US and consulted with some of the leading professionals in memory research, and returned with a large number of current books and articles, including Elizabeth Loftus and Katherine Ketcham's *The Myth of Repressed Memory: false memories and allegations of sexual abuse*².

Witch Hunting

Dr Rawlinson compared the use of recovered memory in sexual abuse cases to the 16th- and 17th-century witch-hunts in Europe. He said that whilst recovered memory theory (or any other theory) could never be disproved, there was no scientific evidence to date to substantiate such a belief. He explained that, on the other hand, it is very easy to create false memories. He disputed Ms Swan's claim that people repress memories of traumatic events as a psychological mechanism. He explained that adults have no memories of childhood under the age of three, and the alleged memories by two of the daughters at the age of one or younger were not possible.

In his summing up, Justice Sir Ian Barker told the jury they had to decide whether there was indeed repressed memory of sexual abuse which had been

retrieved, and whether that memory was reliable. The jury concluded that these were not accurate memories of real events.

Bill was found to be innocent. It cost him \$117,000 to defend himself. His three daughters were found to have made false allegations. Each had received at least \$10,000 "compensation" from ACC, which is not affected by the outcome of the trial.

This case brings up many issues. There are currently men in prison convicted solely on the basis of "recovered memories" (reconstructed visualisations) of incidents alleged to have occurred two or three decades ago. If Bill had not been able to afford the best in legal representation and psychiatric expertise, it is very likely he would have joined them. Possible future actions for those falsely accused through "memory retrieval" include applying for court costs from the Crown, and legal action against therapists who have implanted or supported the false memories. The anomaly of compensating those who make false accusations might also be addressed.

Already there has been a trend for people who recover memories in therapy to later change their testimony and declare that in fact they had always remembered the trauma. One of Bill's daughters did just this. Although her counsellor had "shredded the counselling notes" and hence had no records from which to refer, she testified that her client had always remembered her abuse. However, examination of the

daughter's initial police statement revealed that she had told the police that she had only discovered the abuse in the course of her therapy. Victims/survivors subsequently remembering that they had always remembered the abuse is not a course of action likely to occur in the US. This is because their Statute of Limitations allows law suits relating to alleged long ago events on the basis that the Statute starts from the time the "memory" was exhumed.

This is the first case in New Zealand where a jury has decided that "recovered memories" are not reliable evidence. Although a great step forward, there is still a long way to go. Many professionals believe that memories can be repressed and accurately retrieved, despite there being no scientific evidence to support this. A stream of US "experts" continue to teach that recovered memories are valid, and there is a reluctance within the sexual abuse industry to examine any evidence which challenges their beliefs. Critics who claim that some sexual allegations might be false are labelled as part of the "backlash" and accused of being "in denial" about sexual abuse.

1) Not his real name

2) St Martin's Press, New York, 1994, highly recommended

Felicity Goodyear-Smith (MB ChB DipObst MRNZCGP) is a General Practitioner who has specialised in the field of sexual abuse since 1982. Her book *First do no harm: the sexual abuse industry* was published in 1993.

She is also the founder of COSA (Casualties of Sexual Allegations). The contact address for this organisation is PO Box 35, Albany.

Scary Headlines, Dodgy Science

The *New Zealand Herald* of 5 September carried the headline "Ozone gap to lift skin cancer 7 per cent".

Then followed a report from Dr Richard McKenzie of the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research at Lauder. He said that ozone loss in the past 15 years had caused an increase of 8-10% in the amount of harmful ultraviolet rays reaching Otago and Southland, and that UV levels were expected to rise another 2-3%, reaching a peak in about five years.

So far so good. We have no reason to question the quality of the research and his findings that ozone depletion over the southern region has increased UV penetration over the South Island plains. But Dr McKenzie is then reported as saying that:

Cancers caused by past depletion were only now beginning to appear as the disease often developed some years after exposure to the rays.

And that:

Small changes in UV can have large effects on life. There will be extra skin cancers and earlier deaths will result.

Surely Dr McKenzie has moved beyond his field of expertise. The recent increase in skin cancer is almost entirely attributable to the craze for sun-bathing and sun-tans which began in the 1920s and reached a peak during the early '70s. Any impact of increased ultraviolet penetration is insignificant when compared to this "life-style" choice which encouraged young children to play at the beach all day, fully exposed to the sun, and teenagers to bask in full summer sun for hours on end in their quest for the perfect tan.

Furthermore, changes in the level of ultraviolet light reaching the ground are much more dependent on cloud cover, general atmospheric pollution, and geographic latitude than on any recorded or predicted variations within the ozone layer. A move from the Arctic to the equator increases annual exposure to UV by 4,000%. If Aucklanders are worried about a 10% increase in UV penetration they should move 200 km south to, say, Taupo.

I am prepared to bet \$1,000 to \$1 that there will be no increase in skin cancers attributable to increased UV over the next few years. The increases which occur will be attributable to the sun-burned baby-boomers growing up and contracting melanoma. This will peak and decline as a new generation of parents encourage their children to wear hats and use sun-blocks.

If Dr McKenzie can set up an experiment using a control population which stays where it is, in an atmosphere which remains as clear as it is today, and in which no-one reduces their exposure to intense sunlight or increases their use of sun protection, then that population might record the increase he forecasts. But such an experiment would be totally unethical, so the predicted outcome cannot happen. Hence my confidence in the bet.

In an interview Dr McKenzie conceded he was no expert in public health. Maybe he should have stuck to his field and let someone else draw the public-health conclusions. People have to deal with daily predictions of doom from all directions. There is no need to add a fear of UV-induced melanoma epidemics to the list. His forecast sounds unavoidable — and it's not.

Owen McShane

Contradictory Belief Systems

Russell Dear

A friend of mine once visited a faith-healer, one of the religious variety from the United States who periodically come to New Zealand to swell their bank balances. She attended the meeting because of a persistent pain in her elbow. Despite my suggestions that it was only tennis elbow, she was worried and thought perhaps the pain was serious. She had an aisle seat near the front and during the proceedings the "healer" approached her and asked about the pain in her arm. Apparently she hadn't told anyone why she was there. She was impressed.

"How did Pastor S. know that I had a pain in my elbow?" my friend asked. "I hadn't told him? He knew exactly what was wrong with me. He told me, well, all of us," she said, "that pain is caused by evil spirits moving around the bloodstream. When they stop, they

manifest themselves in the form of pain. Mine had stopped in my arm. He could tell. He had the gift."

"Oh, come on." I replied, "You used to teach biology. You know that pain is not caused by evil spirits. What about when you break a bone?"

(I should perhaps explain here that my friend had given up teaching biology because she felt the whole syllabus, including the classification of plants and animals, was based on evolutionary principles, and this contradicted her strong belief in creationism.)

"If you didn't have evil spirits inside you when you broke a bone," she responded curtly, "you would not feel the pain."

She was deaf to my suggestions that perhaps the spirits were not all bad, since without pain indicating that something was wrong we might not attend to our hurts.

"All pain is bad," she insisted.

"What else happened at the meeting?" I asked.

"I had to go and stand at the front, with other people who had pain or sickness. Pastor S. laid his hands on my arm and demanded, in the name of God, that the evil spirits leave my body. He drove them out." Her eyes shone as she brought back the memories.

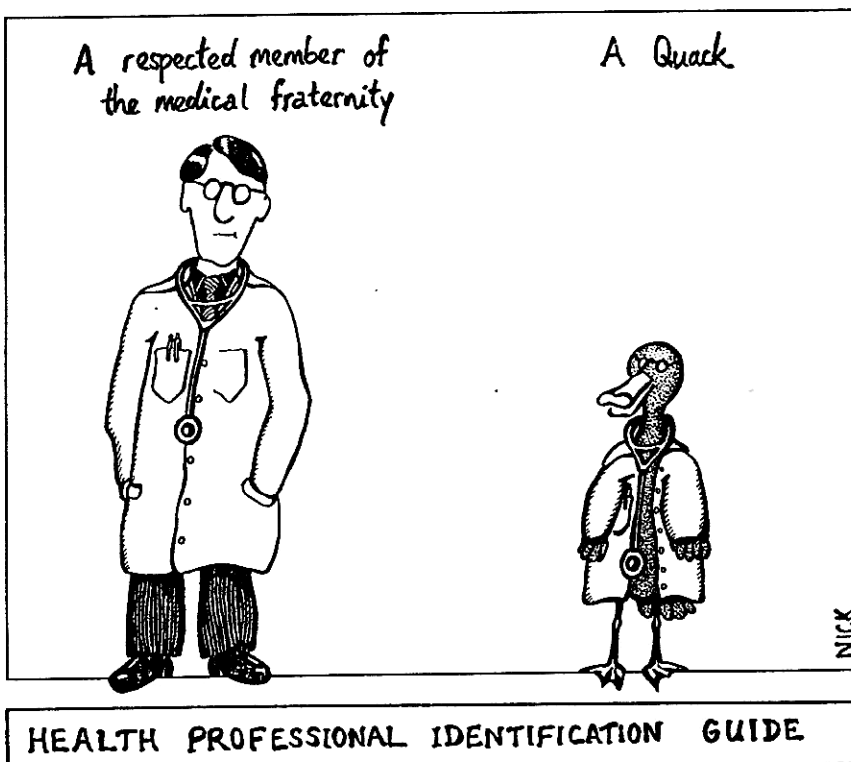
"How does the arm feel now?" I asked.

"Oh, much better, thanks," she smiled, "Pastor S. said the pain would go quickly now, but I could help by resting it."

Of course the pain did lessen. Tennis elbow is susceptible to rest. Despite my protestations, my friend insisted it was due to Pastor S., driving out evil spirits. The devastating part of the whole story for me is that though she has been scientifically trained, has a university degree in fact, she is content to go through life holding two mutually exclusive beliefs — one based on common sense and rational thought, where it applies to everyday events and can't possibly undermine long-held views, and another resting on superstition and religious arguments for its authority. All credit to her, though, that she finds it possible to remain friends with a "sinner" such as myself.

Science Teachers

Having taught for many years, in four schools and one university, I have met quite a number of science teachers. Being insatiably curious (many would say intrusive) I take



every appropriate opportunity to talk to them about their beliefs. Despite their education, the holding of two mutually exclusive belief systems by science teachers is common.

In an informal survey I considered some of the science teachers I have known well enough to discuss matters of belief over the last few years. There have been 21, whom I categorise as follows;

- ☐ 7 "Standard" Christians, who attend a mainstream church on a regular basis at least a few times a year. One in fact is an ordained Anglican minister
- ☐ 4 "Fundamentalist" Christians, who meet in religious gatherings at least once a week
- ☐ 5 Theists, who hang on to belief in a god but do not attend any religious meetings
- ☐ 1 New Ager, who, surprisingly, believes in such things as aromatherapy, homeopathy, and the like
- ☐ 1 into Transcendental Meditation
- ☐ 1 Anthroposophist
- ☐ 1 Theosophist
- ☐ 1 Atheist, with strongly-held views

At least 14 of these, I suggest, hold mutually exclusive belief systems. For example, the majority of them believe that miracles have occurred at some time or other, despite this contradicting scientific laws they promulgate every day in the classroom.

Most avoid providing explanations for miracles, but some believe that God has the ability to suspend scientific laws to accommodate them. More logically perhaps, some suggest that scientific knowledge at present is not profound enough

Forum

Desperately Seeking Psychic Photographer

I am writing in the hope that your readers may be able to help me in a little research I am doing, in my position of Publicity Officer for the Wairarapa Archive.

We have in our collection a pair of albums of local cartoons and photographs made by a local photographer, Edward Arthur Sanders Wyllie, in the 1880s. In following up the life of Wyllie, I stumbled onto his later career as a "psychic photographer".

It seems that when he left Masterton in 1886 he went to America and continued in his photography career, which ultimately proved to be a failure, so he moved into providing his "psychic" photographs.

He became one of the world's foremost exponents of this art, and is mentioned in all the modern works on the phenomenon. I have been unable, however, to locate any copies of his work, either in New Zealand or in the places one might expect them to be overseas — British and American Societies for Psychical Research, Mary Evans Library (UK), Californian State Library, etc.

I know there were copies of Wyllie's "work" in New Zealand as a man calling himself the "Rev S. Barnett" gave a lecture on Wyllie at the time of his death in 1911. This lecture, given in Masterton, was illustrated with glass slides of Wyllie's exposures. I assume this to be the same S. Barnett who was a prominent Spiritualist in New Zealand, and who authored a *Celestial Survey of New Zealand* which must surely rate as one of the most incredible books ever printed in New Zealand.

I am writing to you in the hope that either you, or one of your readers, may have an interest in skepticism in this area, and may know of the whereabouts of some of these "psychic" photos. I have some poor quality reproductions of some, from a photocopy of an old book.

Any help that you can afford me will be most appreciated.

Gareth Winter
Lansdowne Nursery
65 Te Ore Ore Road, Masterton

to provide adequate explanations for miracles. I have included under the heading of miracles, virgin birth and resurrection.

So, where does that leave us? All of us, I think, expect the natural laws of science and logic to apply to everyday events, but many of us subscribe to an additional belief

system that transcends common sense. This second system allows the unthinkable to happen. It can be important to us, especially when we are apprehensive about the future. In such cases we can "cross our fingers and hope for the best", even for a miracle to occur.

Russell Dear is a Skeptic and puzzle enthusiast from Invercargill

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Moving Around?

There may be psychics out there, but none of them help with the Skeptic. *If you change address, please tell us.* We want you to enjoy your magazine.

HOW can I straighten the bent aerial on my car without it snapping?

Take hold of the said aerial below the bend with the thumb and first two fingers of the right hand. With the same two fingers of the left hand take hold of the aerial above the bend. Think very hard about Uri Geller.

Source: *Guardian Weekly Notes and Queries*

New Zealand Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (Inc.)

NZCSICOP is a network of New Zealanders—including scientists, educators, health professionals and many others—dedicated to increasing public awareness of the dangers and inanities of pseudoscience and bogus paranormal claims. Through meetings and its regular periodical, The New Zealand Skeptic, the group encourages informed, critical examination of the claims of fringe and quack medicine, astrology, so-called creation science, supposed extraterrestrial visitations, psychic phenomena, and associated “New Age” gullibility.

Annual membership is \$25; students and unwaged \$10. For further information, write to:

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