

**The Mysterious Case of David Bennett**

***A message from author and investigator Stanley Carter, author of 'The Unexplainable', 'Strange Fates', and 'Cosmic Encounters'.***

An English boy, David Bennett, aged 11, apparently 'disappeared' on Wednesday August 27<sup>th</sup>, 1997. He later then 'reappeared', apparently none the worse for wear. However, subsequent events and behaviours have led some to speculate that this David was not the same one as before. There was something different about him. Internet sites and conspiracy theorists in the UK have suggested that he was replaced with a convincing lookalike, to all intents the same person but, in reality (the concept of which is, I believe, always elastic) actually not the same David as before.

The more I have looked into the events surrounding this case - and similar 'disappearances' - the more difficult it has become to uncover a definitive record. It reminded me, somewhat uncomfortably, of an incident from way back in my childhood. When I first attended Bellflower High School and had just taken up surfing, there was a quiet kid in the year above me who I'd see most days on the beach and who, like me, was struggling to learn how to ride a wave. One day he wasn't on the beach anymore and I heard he'd gone missing, hiking in the Santa Barbara Mountains. Several weeks later he just turned up again, as if nothing had happened. Never said a word about it. As if he'd never been away. He looked the same, talked the same (that is, not much), surfed with the same clumsiness. But, you know, there was something a little different about him. I could never quite put my finger on it, then or now.

All I know is that the information contained here was undoubtedly suppressed at the time by authorities unknown. According to one source, the original diary was one of a number of documents 'lost' by law enforcement authorities while moving offices; another source tells us that it was 'destroyed in a blaze' at the Oldbury police station. Typescripts have circulated for some years on various web sites; however the source of this particular version must remain 'classified' in the current climate of misinformation and spin which exists within government departments on both sides of the Atlantic. It seems this is not a unique occurrence. Our research has led us to believe that that large sections of the teenage population have been replaced for purposes yet to be determined.

Another chilling fact: July 1<sup>st</sup> 2004 became the first day of mandatory internet filtering for all Public Libraries in the United States – if, that is, your library chooses to accept federal telecommunications funds. That, along with the Patriot Act and other government interventions in the 'Free West' means that information in the public arena is being ever more closely monitored and controlled. The truth is out there but today it is more difficult than ever to determine exactly where it might be.

Stanley Carter, Denver, August 2004.

Web Editor's Note:

It is with some pleasure and sadness that I bring this tale to light from our archives. It is not my place to comment either on the literary merit or the motivation of such a young diarist.

My duty as editor has simply been to pass on a series of extracts which are relevant to the case. I have, of course, changed names in this version to protect innocent parties.

The original diaries cannot be traced – apparently lost or destroyed - but these transcripts are believed to have been copied from the originals in September 1997 by a Miss Edna Burbage, a civilian clerk who, at that time, was on duty at Piddock Road Police Station. An official statement to this effect can be found on record.

**Missing Persons Report to West Bromwich Police**

Filed September 15th 1997. Ref:25/G/171

David Bennett, aged 11, disappeared from his home, 311, Richmond Road, Oldbury, Warley, West Midlands, on Wednesday August 27th. His last known whereabouts, established by the West Midlands Police Constabulary were as follows.

He left home at approximately 10.30 am. He told his father, Stephen Bennett, that he was going to play with his friend Simon Gascoigne at 49 Landsdown Road, two streets away. When he failed to return home later in the day, police were contacted at 6.20 pm. In a statement made to P.C Jenkins of Piddock Road Police Station, his father said: "I asked him if he'd be back for lunch and he said he probably would have tea there as well and that he'd phone me later. When he didn't phone I rang Simon's house and there was no reply. I went round to their house and found there was no-one in."

It was later confirmed that the Gascoigne Family had, in fact, gone to Waterworld in Stoke-on-Trent for the day and no arrangements had been made with David to visit.

Subsequent investigations, fully detailed in the document Ref:132/Ge/21, revealed that David Bennett was believed to have travelled on a West Midlands Passenger Transport vehicle to Birmingham City Centre. It is understood that, unaccompanied, in the early afternoon, he boarded a train at New Street station destined for West Wales (evidence item reference 34/6789/WS/217). He was wearing a blue fashion anorak, navy blue tracksuit bottoms, white Nike trainers, and carrying a red rucksack believed to contain part of an old duvet which the boy had kept as a comfort item since early childhood. Two independent witnesses on the train correctly identified the boy from a photograph.

Six days later, on Tuesday September 2nd, a hand written diary was found at a remote spot in West Wales, in the ruins of Garreg Wen Priory, by a Danish Student on a backpacking holiday. Though considerably damaged by exposure to the elements, the journal was confirmed to belong to David Bennett. The Danish Student, Lars Sveng, was held for questioning but later released.

A witness, Mrs Dyfedd, who worked in the local post office, confirmed seeing the boy on Friday August 29th as she left work. She stated: "He was just hanging about, like the other kids do. I thought he was just on holiday. I didn't think anything of it at the time." He was known to have purchased several Mars bars and packets of crisps at Lane Stores on the following day, Saturday afternoon, but this was the last sighting.

Despite an exhaustive search in the area over September 3rd, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> September, involving two hundred police officers, and over 1000 interviews conducted with local residents and holidaymakers in the subsequent week, there have been no further sightings and no other traces of the missing boy have been found to date.

While diary entries give some indication that the boy had planned to run away from home, and was apparently obsessed with a local superstition, one can only speculate on his real motivations or whereabouts.

D.C Sam Spittle  
Chief Investigating Officer,  
West Bromwich Police Station

Dated September 15th 1997

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Extracts from the diary of David Bennett, found by Danish Student,  
Lars Sveng on September 2<sup>nd</sup> 1997, in the ruins of Garreg Wen Priory.

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## **FILM COMPANY ACCOUNTS BOOK**

**EB/23/11/97 Transcribers Note: a page from another source has been glued onto front cover of the diary.**

That is not true.

This is not a film company accounts book. It really says "the weather is sunny". You have been hypnotised into believing it says 'Film Company Accounts Book'. (Well, it is a reason for the words 'Film Company Accounts Book'.)

Note:

All events and all persons involved in this journal are real life characters. All I have written about them is true, especially my brother, although they may not agree me.

**EB/23/11/97 Transcribers Note: this text can be found on the inside cover of the diary, followed by two pages of scribbles before the dated diary entries begin.**

**January 1st, 1997**

Another year has ended, another begins. What adventures will be in store for me? My dodo is a little worn. I've cut it in two, so I can leave one half at my Mom's house and one half at my Dad's house. They split up years ago, and I suppose it was only a matter of time before I had to split my dodo too. I should explain. My dodo is a duvet I had when I was a really tiny baby. I can't get to sleep without it, so I take it anywhere I might be staying the night. I like to wrap it round my shoulders and sometimes my head. It has a nice smell, but it looks a bit ratty, like a tattered dirty grey white cloak about my shoulders or an unwrapped turban. A Sikh man came into school once and showed us how to wrap and unwrap turbans - they're very long and Sikhs have a lot of long hair twirled into those top knots. It was very interesting.

**January 2nd, 1997**

My Dad has a job with Dudley Council. He goes to meetings and writes reports and then goes to more meetings about what he has written. What is good is that he has a computer to write reports on and it has a CD ROM drive, so I can get to play games on it. But after the meetings then he has to write reports all over again, time I could be playing games with the latest video and graphics. You can even hire them at the video shop now.

My Mom has a computer at her house, but it is smaller and black and has no CD ROM drive. Her car is a bit smaller than my Dad's but then he is taller. I have to think carefully about which friends I invite out in the car when I'm either at my Moms or Dads. Mom has a bigger garden. Much bigger. Good for playing cricket or running the 100 metres three legged race. She has a pond. I am a bit worried that if she gets drunk she will fall into it. Maybe I will get drunk and fall into it when I get a bit older and like to drink wine as much as she and her friends do.

**January 6th, 1997**

There are questions I don't have answers to - like why do pigeons fly away when you walk towards them? I suppose this is what a diary is good for. Writing down questions that you might otherwise forget.

**February 6th, 1997**

Miss said that this was an easy topic, that it could all be done in school time, but I'm taking no chances and taking it home to do some work on. The topic is about DOGS - "Canines" actually. I'm thinking of doing a paragraph on famous dogs. Lassie, for instance. Or Scooby Doo. Or Scabby Did, Scooby's cousin. My Dad says there's Rin Tin Tin, whoever that may be. He says Rin Tin Tin was an alsation dog who used to have adventures with the U.S. Cavalry in the Wild West. I'm not sure whether to include Rin Tin Tin. My Dad's memory, I have found, is quite unreliable. I've noted that when parents get older they forget a lot of things. I expect that's why he has to keep rewriting reports, because he forgot to include some important fact or date.

Anyway, famous dogs. Rin Tin Tin, that reminds me. There's Snowy, who's Tin Tin's dog. Then there's the St. Bernard "Beethoven", from the film of the same name. Toto in "The Wizard of Oz". Huckleberry Hound from the old cartoon. White Fang in the James London book.

The dogs in "Homeward Bound". The dog in "Tom & Jerry". Muttley from "Wacky Races". The one in "Toy Story". 101 Dalmations... Well, I don't know all their names!

I wonder what the Queen calls her dogs? She's looks really old so maybe she just calls them Dog One, Dog Two, Dog Three, Dog Four etcetera to save on memory.

Topics I've covered in my life include:

Egyptians  
Romans  
Gerbils  
Greeks  
Hamsters  
Pirates  
The Rainforest

Vampires would have been a good one - but I don't think Miss would allow that. Come to think of it, how come she's letting Roger Smith do Ghouls & Ghosts? I should have had that one. Now that is one topic I know inside out and back to front!

I could put a werewolf in "Canines" I suppose. I think this will be my best ever topic. This will be as good as "English Castles". If I have my way, it's the last one I'll ever have to hand in. Go out with a bang.... or a bark.

#### **February 14th, 1997**

End of school for half-term. We should count ourselves lucky. It was nearly Friday the 13th! On the other hand, it's Valentine's Day, which is unlucky for some.

#### **February 23rd, 1997**

I had a dream last night which I can recall clearly - an adventure dream. It was the story of these creatures who came from some weird place and they were invading Sandwell and Dudley. They had long pointy blue faces and glowing blue bodies covered in what looked like a cloak of tinsel. They apparently could only materialise where there was a water supply. For instance, one or two could materialise by a one stream and so on. (I like the word materialise. I must try to include it in school work so Miss gives me extra marks.) I'm not really sure if they were aliens or not - some of them looked a bit like the road protesters called Dongos who paint their bodies with woad like the Ancient Britons.

The main alien invading force hid in the reservoir on top of the hill by Warley Woods, but some of them took over Dudley Castle, which is also on high ground and has the advantage of caverns underneath for hiding ray guns and general alien activity they don't want anyone to know about. They set up these giant water pistol looking cannons and started to spray water everywhere. (I think there are also some wells under the castle too.) From what I can remember, it started off by some laboratory on Rood End Road behind the chemists and we were running down with this flood of water being pumped by these creatures along the road so they could transport themselves along it. We ran down Victoria Road and into West Smethwick Park which, of course, has a lake where, naturally, more blue creatures materialised.

If the water touched you, you slowed down and that way one of my friends got caught. Billy and I got away, Billy by faking death and me by climbing over a fence into somebody's garden. While we were hiding, the creatures flooded most of Smethwick. Mom got away cos she was at work, but they got Janice my old childminder and her curly perm was turned blue and the whole house was flooded like a giant fishtank with the children trapped inside trying desperately to swim. It was horrible.

It's strange how dreams are so realistic. Perhaps there is another dimension that exists and this is where we go when we're dreaming. It would be good if your brain could go there whenever you want, rather than when you're just asleep. I think it's quite possible. Who knows?

#### **March 1st, 1997**

I feel great. We had football and I played like I was David Beckham in Manchester United, rather than anyone I can name in West Bromwich Albion. I had two superb shots hit the post after (mainly to determination) beating five men. The match ended in a draw.

#### **March 4th, 1997**

My Mom has been collecting me from school. As I climb into the car, there is present a feeling of apprehension and possibly even foreboding in me. Am I to be abruptly plunged into an early grave? Or will there be no cause for concern? It's nearly the Millennium. Will the planet survive road pollution? Time alone will tell. I shut the door. It seems as if the last link with civilisation has been severed. Now there is only me, the car in all its ruthlessness and - my Mother at the wheel!

#### **March 5th, 1997**

Spring is supposed to be here but I can't find it anywhere. It's not under the bed, it's not outside and it certainly isn't hidden in my pocket. It's freezing cold. I read the other day about the changes in latitude. Scientists believe that every 220,000 years the earth's latitude zones change. It was thought or rather it has been proved that a million years ago the British Isles were in the Tropics. It has been 770,000 years since a change in latitudes so one is due and I think we are heading north to the polar regions.

#### **March 8th, 1997**

My friend Phillip is going to on a one week residential to Ingestre Hall from his school. I have been to visit, but never been with my school. It is a creepy old Victorian Mansion in the countryside near Stafford where they do drama and arts. I wouldn't want to sleep over there. Phillip says it is haunted by the ghost of the Blue Lady. She appears at the top of the stairs. I expect she was pushed down them. Laura swears her friend who stayed there saw this ghost.

#### **March 12th, 1997**

Watched a great video about these boys who did this computer course and used the computers to plan a perfect robbery. The ringleader persuaded his Dad, who was the Managing Director of this firm of chemists, to let the school have a trip round the processing factory. When they did, one boy hid in the ventilating system and stole this special antibiotic formula from a computer.

They ransomed the formula for £100,000 and after they got the boy out and the money they gave the formula back. It was an ingenious plan. They had lots of alternatives if anything went wrong. I'd love to do something like that. I don't mean a perfect robbery, just something ingenious that's not harmful to anyone else. I really mean something like climbing out of my bedroom window at midnight and heading towards a point X. I'm just a natural adventurer who hasn't found a good adventure yet.

**March 14th, 1997**

Went out for the day with Dad. Drove through not particularly beautiful countryside.

**March 18th, 1997**

It's amazing how, when you think of it, the simple things in life are best. Take the still full moon tonight in the deep blue sky and a few layers of cloud. So what, you might think? But I think it's a comforting sight. I like the nights in general. All is silent, asleep, the sound of motorway traffic is nearly gone. The air is still. Night is a good time for a long walk in the country. Dangerous, you might think, but it all adds adventure to life.

**26th March, 1997**

There is a lot on the news now about a comet called Hale-Bopp, which has appeared in the skies of the Northern Hemisphere. Comets are supposed to be harbingers of doom.

PS. If you are reading my diary, James, harbinger is a word you don't know. It means it a sort of sign, like Dad getting a red bill from the phone company telling him to pay up or else.

**28th March, 1997**

Last day of the Spring Term. I am standing here outside in the back garden in the dark while I am writing this. You may think this is strange. There is no moonlight because it's all cloudy, yet I can write this. I feel just great, out here in the darkness, breathing in the fresh air and thinking a lot. There's a bit of rain, and the pages are getting wet, so I better take cover.

OOPS!!! My heart just missed a beat then. A dark form leaped onto the fence at the bottom of the garden. It was only a cat. (I hope.) My train of thought has just been interrupted by Dad, who has been looking for me. He thought I had gone to bed. I told him I was looking for the comet. I suppose he thinks I'm a little bit mad to be standing out in the rain. Anyway, he made me a cup of hot chocolate and I went out again feeling considerably cheerful.

I've just thought how ridiculous the dark is. Outside I'm not scared of anything. There's more light in the darkness outside than in my room with all the curtains shut. There's a different atmosphere. I suppose fear of the dark is only natural. Human nature is naturally averse to something of which it is uncertain, something it cannot see, something which is not there and yet is. I suppose imagination plays a big part. I will not be scared. Except of serial killers.

Oh, I've forgot to mention a little something. All this time I have been singing and humming a little old song to myself. The

song? Why it's "By the Light - da ra ra ta ta da - of the Silvery Moon - bum da rum tum dum." But there is no moon!

#### **28th March, 1997**

This week 39 members of a cult in California called Heaven's Gate killed themselves in a mass suicide so their souls could join a spaceship in the tail of the Hale-Bopp comet. The spaceship is going to heaven. The brother of Lt. Uhuru from 'Star Trek' was one of the people. They killed themselves by mixing apple sauce and pudding with drugs and alcohol. Dad says all Americans are insane and it's normal behaviour. I'd rather be a vampire and be immortal. Drinking blood is probably only like drinking cherry cola mixed with raspberry juice.

#### **29th March, 1997**

Morning: as I re-entered the world of consciousness after spending several hours in the realms of fantasy, I realised that it was the weekend. I had an interesting dream during the night. I dreamt about a spooky old house where the children looked after the adults, and the adults did all the things children do. The children cooked the meals and told the adults what time their bedtime is etcetera. We controlled the adults by just staring at them, a bit like the powers Dracula has.

#### **30th March, 1997**

Easter Sunday. British Summer Time begins. Dad forget to put the clocks forward again, so we were early for everything today. I don't have much of a taste for chocolate eggs this year. I must be getting old.

#### **April 1st, 1997**

The Hale-Bopp comet is now at its closest to the Sun, 137 million kilometres miles away, (85 million miles) moving at a speed of 44 kilometres per second. It can be seen clearly now there isn't so much moonlight. It is a splendid sight and very strange to think that it won't be back again for hundreds and thousands of years. In 1999, NASA in America are going to send a spaceship called "Stardust" to capture samples of comet dust from the comet Wild 2 in the year 2004. Then it will return to Earth in 2006. The spaceship will have a special bumper shield to protect it which will have several curtains made of the same stuff that is in bullet proof vests! I will probably need curtains like that in my flat in New York when I am famous.

#### **7th April, 1997**

Today we go camping with Laura's Dad in Wales. Everyone thinks he's a bit mad (it might be because he has been to America several times) but he knows some good ghost stories. He once told one about when he was a student and how he found a pub which was haunted. It was called "The Green Hand" and it was in Devon. He stayed there one night and when he went back the next day it was all in ruins and a local person told him it had burnt down exactly one hundred years ago! He let me watch "Aliens 2" once when I was younger which was full of gore. Him and Laura bought me some goal-keeping gloves for Xmas. Excellent! David Seaman is my favourite goalkeeper in the Premiere Division even though he doesn't play for Man Utd. (Amazing Fact! Laura's Dad knows someone in Bloxwich who has a season ticket for Man Utd!)

Laura plays a Famous Five tape in the car until we get to a castle where we have our picnic lunch. After lunch she puts it on again. I'm sick of the Famous Five by the time we get to our campsite in the mountains. The campsite is on a farm and there was no-one there. We looked around and found all the farmers family in a big shed with the sheep. It's lambing time and there's lots of little lambs just learning to get up on their feet. They walk along all shaky. While Laura's Dad put up the tents we went and took some photos of the lambs in the field. They kept falling over. It was like someone invisible kept pushing them over.

One tent was for us to sleep in and one to play in and store our things. The ground was a bit hard, so the farmer brought us a bit of carpet to put under our tent. It was exactly the same carpet that Laura has in her room!

We collected some wood which was not hard as there was lots lying around and we made a real campfire. We wrapped up some potatoes in silver foil and put them underneath to cook. Laura didn't believe they would cook at all. They took a long time so meanwhile we had some chicken soup for tea cooked on a little gas stove and crisps. The potatoes were a bit burnt but tasted nice. Then we toasted some marshmallows on sticks and Laura got one stuck in my hair.

Then we walked up the main road to find a phone box. We had a race on the way. We phoned Dad to tell him what we were doing but he didn't seem very interested. He was probably writing another report. Then we walked down a road to a big lake which is a water reservoir, past a big old looking tower. Laura wanted to go back up there after it got dark with torches so we did. There were a lot of bats and we walked down to the waters edge. The water was so clear we nearly walked into the lake. In the water, at the edge were loads of frogs - but they might have been toads. There was a big plopping sound out in the water that made us jump and we shone our torches out on the surface to see ripples moving towards us. Laura said there were dead drowned children who lived in the lake, but I think it was her Dad chucking stones in while we weren't looking. Anyway, if it's a reservoir the water must get drained out and sent down pipes to Birmingham and any bodies in the lake would be found.

When we switched out torches off it was so dark. We could see the Hale-Bopp comet so clear here in the mountains, as bright as the very brightest of stars, even though the moon is starting to come back. You can really see how the comet has a long fuzzy tail, like icing dust sprinkled on the sky.

When we went back to our tent, it took us a long time to get to sleep. You could hear all sorts of noises, and I don't mean farting ones.

Just as you we were about to go to sleep, Laura kept saying, What was that? I can hear growls out there. I can hear growls in here, I said, Your tummy! Go to sleep, said Laura's Dad, Or you really will be hearing growls in here.

**8th April, 1997**

Today we explored the valley of waterfalls. There was no-one about except at the top of the valley, where there is a cave entrance and there were some potholers. Down the valley you'd be walking along and you could hear their voices coming up from under the rocks. It was creepy.

We had to climb over fallen trees and rocks and ford the river in different places. The water was freezing cold even though the sun was hot. It was like an Indiana Jones adventure. We carried our lunch with us which we got from an Asda - strawberries, tangerines, croissants, chicken legs and lots of juice but no Mars bars. Some of the waterfalls were almost dry and you could climb down the rocks like a set of stairs if you were careful. We went paddling in one of the rock pools - for about 10 seconds it was so cold. Laura's Dad dived into one deep rock pool and came out quickly. He was shaking and shivering. Laura wouldn't go in but I dared myself to jump in. The water was sparkling and clean and deeper than the deep end of a swimming baths. I sank to the bottom and I wondered if I would ever get back to the surface again, but it was like I was bouncing on a trampoline. I suddenly shot back out of the water and with two strokes I was back on the rock shelf again. Tha-aa-tt wa-aa-ss co-old-er thaaa-an a gi-aant iiicc-e cuu-ube, I said. My toes had turned really blue and my teeth chattered, but after a bit the sun soon warmed me up again.

Then we waded across the river again, and got our clothes wet this time. Laura was crying and moaning that the water was too cold. She sometimes is a bit of a Drama-Queen, as my Mom and probably her Mom too would say. We hung up our wet clothes to dry on tree branches and lay down and rested for a while. We were too tired to go any further down the valley so we went back up a different way, which took us over a narrow high path - so high my brother wouldn't have been able to go along it cos he's scared of heights. Of course, I'm not.

We thought this was good place to live if you were a fairy. The first fairy story written down in a book was about this valley, said Laura's Dad. He reads a lot of books instead of watching television and I'm sure he writes down all the interesting facts he finds out in a notebook so he can memorize them. He doesn't know what's going on this week in "Eastenders" though - proof that adults suffer from something horrible called selective memory. Anyway, in the 12th century, the son of a Norman Baron and a Welsh princess went on a tour of Wales with an Archbishop doing some preaching and wrote an account of his travels. He recounted meeting an old priest who, as a young boy, was beaten with a rod by his angry teacher for not doing enough work and ran away one day and hid in the valley under hollows in the riverbank and met the fairies, who took him down a tunnel to their magic world. He played there lots of times but one day he stole some gold from them and so he got banished.

All around the valley by the riverbank are deep hollows and trees roots you could climb into like a maze. Laura called them "Fairy Hatches" - the door to another world. We looked for them for a bit and you could see in the distance places that did look like a bit like doors. When you got close, it turned to shadow, and there was rock with lichen growing on it like a straggly old

man's beard. There were hollow whorls in the base of a tree, and I reckoned that's where the fairy eyes spy on you from, watching carefully, before disappearing as your footsteps get loud in their ears, giving the command to close the Fairy Hatch as you approach.

Wouldn't it be fantastic to disappear, just completely disappear? Down a hatch to another world.

### **9th April, 1997**

Today we got up and packed away the tent and drove to the coast to stay at a bed and breakfast. On the way we took a detour to visit the Dan-yr-Ogof Showcaves, which were wet and cold inside, and if a fairy hatch led down under the ground to a place like this they must all have flu all the time. There was a Dinosaur Park there, with lifesize models of dinosaurs. There was a good one where you could see inside the dinosaurs belly like it had been bitten open. I bought a magic stone in the souvenir shop.

From the Caves, it took a few hours to get to our Bed and Breakfast. Mr and Mrs Churchill own the bed and breakfast and they are very friendly. There is an American man staying here as well, who was a pilot in the Second World War and he has come back to visit friends. He seemed normal. Mr Churchill said his job in the War was to help fly Wellington bomber planes across the Atlantic from Canada, where they were built, to England.

The bed and breakfast looked out over some cliffs and the sea. It was up a small road which came to a dead end, and there weren't many houses. At the start of the road, there was a little shop and a post office. Further away was a golf course on one of the headlands, and a few more houses. There was one road that went along the coast but to get to the beaches and coves you had to walk quite a bit. There are wild horses who live around here. We saw some by the National Trust car park.

After a rest, we went for a walk in the evening and found the ruins of a medieval church. Mr Churchill said that there used to be a whole medieval village over there but it was now buried under the sands. On the cliffs there were the ruins of an old Norman watchtower. There are other ruins but they're a bit further away to walk. There must have been a lot of people living here in olden days, even more than everyone in West Bromwich, but they all disappeared somewhere.

To get us to sleep, we told ghost stories. Laura asked her Dad to tell a real one about the Old Hag, who haunts the headland near here, by the ruins of the Priory. She sounds horrible - she has long straggly hair down to her feet and blackened hollows for eyes and skinny strong arms and a tattered cloak. She also has long sharp fingernails and pointy yellow animal teeth, and her cloak blows back to reveal a bird like body. A College Professor from Oxford was walking on the headland at night a long time ago in the 1930's when my Granddad was probably at school and he was attacked and he said that her chest was like the huge rotting breast of a pigeon. He was found unconscious the next day and his hair had turned white, and the Doctor said from the marks on his body that he had been attacked by a wild animal like a wolf. But the police said there were no wolves around in Wales anymore.

**10th April, 1997**

Had a lovely sleep and a big cooked breakfast. We went to the beach early today and made a gigantic sandcastle, the biggest ever. It took us at least five hours. There was only one other family there and that was later in the day and when they walked past the little girl said, Daddy, build me one like that, and the Dad looked annoyed because he would need to hire a building firm to make one as big as ours. We took photos to prove it.

We went in the water and had a mud fight. The water was too cold to swim, even though it was a very hot day. We found some dead starfish.

Later, we walked up past the old Priory, which is a ruin covered in ivy. You can't see it very well until you get near. It's hidden in a dip in the land. This is where the Old Hag haunts people. It does look spooky. It's great.

We found out later it is called Garreg Wen Priory and was built in the 13th century on the site of a Norman church burnt to the ground by the invading forces of Edward I. Inside the walls, all is quiet and cool and the ground is very rough and broken up. We climbed up on some of the wall and you could see over the headland, part of which is a golf course, to the village. On one side of the golf course, where there were more ruins, there was an old water tower.

Laura's Dad said, That's where the Old Hag probably sleeps in the day, when she sleeps at all and if you can call it sleep, face down in the water, with her hair all spread out.

There was a path back through the middle of the golf course, which was empty except for half a dozen horses. We went a little too close to that water tower for my liking. You could see the rusted metal legs. There was ladder hanging half way down and there were black thorn bushes all around the foot of the tower. Nearby was an empty bungalow with the roof fallen in like a tree had collapsed on it or something. It had a garden like a jungle. I thought it would be good in a horror story by Stephen King.

As I looked at the tower, a peculiar thought popped in my head: I'd like to meet the Old Hag! I must have just said it out loud cos Laura said, Why? I don't know, I just do, I said, It would be good to be dead and scare people. There's a lot of people you could get your own back on, plus you'd be immortal.

At bedtime we talked more about the Old Hag. I didn't think she really would sleep floating face down in the old water tower. Why would she need to sleep at all? It was a good talk so I wrote it all down to practice my memory.

You know, she probably sleeps in the bungalow, I said. If she's dead, why does she need sleep? said Laura. I didn't know so I said, Why has she got a pigeon breast? She could be an animal in a human body, a body part turned scavenger bird, said Laura's Dad. Well, what if she was an adventurous old lady who climbed to the top of the water tank and fell in and drowned? said Laura. Or was pushed in, I said. Then I added, By a ghost! The Old Hag then got her revenge by eating the ghost! said Laura. I pulled a

face then Laura's Dad had a very serious face and said, Ghosts are very particular. They don't haunt one house and then pop next door to haunt the neighbours. They're bound to particular places, like a bus sticks to a certain route. They haunt somewhere because they got killed there, and something horrible happened. Or just because they feel like it? said Laura. (I think she was a bit fed up with adults especially her Dad giving her long explanations all the time.) Why do you want to meet the Old Hag? she then said. I just do, I said back. She might kill you, she said. I don't care, I said, I want to see what she's like. I don't think you'll see her, said Laura, When she sees you she'll kill you before you know it and you won't see her.

I think we went to sleep then.

#### **14th April 1997**

Back to school. One word. Boring.

#### **May 1st, 1997**

Dad stays up all night to see the General Election Results. He looks tired but happy, the sort of happy look you see when adults have a bit to drink. Tony Blair and Labour won.

#### **26th May, 1997**

Half-term

We go out with Laura's Dad for a drive in the country. We drove down the motorway in a rainstorm and when we got off the motorway the rain stopped. We drove down country lanes for a bit and up a steep road. We parked the car by the side of the road and climbed up through some woods on the side of a steep hill. The woods were full of bluebells. There was an Iron Age fort on the top made from earthworks and you can see for miles. In the distance there's another big rainstorm and you can feel the wind blowing it this way. It's hard to walk in the wind. There's a cave in the side of a hill which is called the Giant's cave, but I don't think a giant could fit in there. It smells bad as well.

In the distance on another hill is a big stick like thing which Laura's Dad says is an obelisk. He doesn't know what it's doing there, in the middle of nowhere. That's in the direction of Wales, and you can see the mountains all misty.

It's probably for witches, said Laura. Where exactly are we now? I asked. In Herefordshire, though the border of Worcestershire starts just over there, said Laura's Dad, This is the highest point, the Herefordshire Beacon.

My Gran lived in Herefordshire, I said, In an old windmill by the beach. Laura's Dad said, No, I think she lived in East Anglia, there isn't a beach in Herefordshire, it's landlocked, there's the River Severn that way, but no sea.

I think he'd got that wrong, but he insisted she lived far away in East Anglia. Well, she used to, cos she's actually dead at the moment. Laura said, If she lived in East Anglia that's near Russia. What do they teach you at school? said Laura's Dad. Nothing, she said.

My point exactly!

We went for a drive in an old quarry later on. When I say we I do mean we. I had a go first, sitting on his lap while he worked the gear pedal and I worked the accelerator and the brake sometimes and moved the steering wheel about. We went in a circle, and did some reversing. Laura had a go then. I have never driven a car before. It was pretty easy. I was better at it than Laura and not just cos I'm a bit older than her.

#### **26th May, 1997**

I've been worrying all day. What if the Council knock the water tower down cos it's dangerous? Then the Old Hag might go down a hollow tree leg to a secret cave, and get in the water pipes and into people's water tanks. She has to be stopped!

#### **June 9th, 1997**

Everywhere I've seen people standing staring and pointing at the sky. I don't know what at. I can't see what they're looking at. No airplanes. No spaceships. No balloons. No birds even. I looked up, near sunset, and saw a cross in the sky. My Dad said it was caused by the engines of airplanes, but I didn't see any airplanes at all. All that was there was a huge creepy cross. There was a man outside Savacentre with a sign saying The World Is Going To End. He said it would be soon but he didn't know the exact date.

#### **Monday June 11th, 1997**

I went to big brother's school for a day. We had a Music lesson, and then we could wander round the school and we had to find different people and ask them questions about their jobs and subjects. The Geography teacher looked exactly like the man outside Savacentre with the sign. One of my friends had a lesson in History instead of Music. I hate History at school, especially all the Tudors, unless it involves Orcs and Goblins. That's why I like the Warhammer game - a lot of games are futuristic, but Warhammer is more oldy worldy with dungeons, cross bows, siege machines and stuff like that.

Dad's at the computer again. He says he has a new Feasibility Study to write - that's when you have to do a Report telling you whether you can do something properly or not and the type of forms you have to fill in that will allow you to even start doing it in the first place. He writes a lot of these for the Council and he does reports for the National Lottery as well. His work room is piled high with papers like a Sim City come to real life. They would make a great home for my Russian hamsters, who are overpopulating their cage, with babies being born all the time. When we got them we thought they were all male.

The reports take him forever. I guess they're like all the homework James complains about having to do. It's a depressing thought, always having to do homework all your life. Is this what Perryfields High School has in store for me? Is this what life is about? The strange thing is, no matter how many reports Dad does, he never seems to get any quicker at writing them. Perhaps when you're grown up you get to a point where you just can't get better at anything. Maybe that's why Eric Cantona is leaving Manchester United and quitting football all together! No matter how many times he kicks a ball it will always be the same!

**June 17th, 1997**

Dad asked me what I've been writing about in my diary. I said, Oh this and that and then I said, Actually about the Old Hag who haunts people. He didn't say anything, just raised his eyebrows and carried on cooking pasta, his speciality.

**June 25th, 1997**

Haven't had time to write in my diary for a very simple reason - I have had no time whatsoever. Catching up on schoolwork and practicing football and constructing some towers out of cardboard for my Warhammer figures. I have asked Dad if I can use some of his piles of reports for a papier mache castle but he just grunted. Mom probably has some reports from work that she won't have time to read and I can use those.

**June 28th, 1997**

I am dreaming about the Old Hag all the time. James says he dreams about the girls in FHM magazine with no clothes on and that I'm a little pervert and should seek psychiatric help. Although she seems hideous, I'm not scared of her. In the dream I can hear tapping on the window, and I get up and pull the curtains open, but all that is there is the end of a long branch from the tree in the front being blown in the wind. I turn round to go back to bed but I trip over something and fall on my face and I look up and I've tripped over the root of a tree and I'm outside in a dark forest. There's a figure standing in the trees looking in my direction. No, not standing, hovering off the ground. Just a dark shadow against a dark background. As I look the figure changes and looks all misshapen, a bit like James's face. It's hard to see. So dark and blurry. The figure lifts an arm. I can see a hand clearly, pointing at me. As I look it shivers and changes to a sharp-nailed claw. That's all. I wake up and the tree branch is really tapping on the window. In case it isn't I don't get up. I pull my dodo closer around me and try to go back to sleep and I feel OK. I think even my brother would be scared. Maybe my dodo is like some kind of magic talisman? I wonder where it came from? My Mom says it probably came from Savacentre as she likes to shop there.

**June 29th, 1997**

James woke me up this morning and told me he'd had a horrible nightmare. He was playing golf in the British Open and winning and there were some FHM girls on the fairway cheering him on, but he missed the last putt. He said there was a horrible looking old woman in the crowd who gave him a funny look and it distracted him. I wonder who that could be? James called her a Stupid Old Hag. He usually says Cow but this time he said Hag.

**July 1st, 1997**

Laura came round and played in the garden after school. I think she really wanted to go to Toys'R'Us and spend her pocket money. James was scooping weeds out of the pond and found loads of frogs. Laura had taken her shoes off and I noticed her toe nails were very long. The longest was on the little toe.

Why don't you cut it? I said. No! she said loudly. I don't mean now, I said, I mean when you have a bath and it's softened. No, she said, I want to grow it till it's that long. That, by the calculation of her arms, was at least two feet long. (Actually,

I thought she was exaggerating a bit). She's a funny girl. You'll look like an old Chinese wizard, I said.

### **July 3rd, 1997**

The Mars Pathfinder Mission is nearly there. It took off in December and is now hurtling at 12,000 miles an hour to the Red Planet. It will use a robot to explore the surface of Mars, looking for past evidence of life. I once saw a TV series about Mars where the human colonists were haunted by the ghosts of dead Martians. That was a good story. There aren't any astronauts on the Mars Mission and I'm not sure if robots can be haunted. Must read more Science. I would like to find out what it would be like to have a food fight in space. Imagine what would happen if you were spitting in space?

### **July 4th, 1997**

Nothing much happened today. Pathfinder has landed on Mars.

### **July 5th, 1997**

The Pathfinder is still on Mars, but they had some problems with the balloons that it landed on top of, so the exploration vehicle hasn't done any exploring yet.

I went to the local branch library and looked for a good book. They didn't have any. So I got out

"FROM EARTH TO MOON  
AND A TRIP ROUND IT  
DIRECT  
IN 97 HOURS 10 MINUTES"

by

JULES VERNE

AUTHOR OF

"AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 DAYS," "CLIPPER OF THE CLOUDS"

"TWENTY THOUSAND LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA" ETC.

It was too hard to read, except where the heroes of the adventure kept crying "Hurrah! Bravo! Hip! Hip! Hurrah!" My Mom said I might as well try to read a book in Latin. My brother said he'd read it a long time ago and it took him 96 hours and five minutes. Because he does drama at the Midlands Arts Centre he thinks he's a comedian. He was good as a thug in "Guys & Dolls" though. I don't think Jules Verne is as good as Blake Savage, another old writer, who wrote "STANDBY FOR MARS - A Tom Corbett Space Cadet Story". Dad says that James Wyndham is much better writer and did some stories about killer plants and also one about a world paralysed by genetic mutation but I've never heard of him. (And I thought the only book my Dad has ever read is one called Tristram Shandy, which is probably about drinking.)

### **July 7th, 1997**

No reports of ghosts from Mars Pathfinder yet.

The scientists believe that the canyon that Pathfinder has landed in was an ancient water channel that a long time ago carried a 1000 times more water than the whole of the river Amazon!

My Dad has put on a tape some rubbish group called The Eagles while he is cooking. I told him it's really rubbish but he said it's useless to make comparisons because you don't know other

people's values or hidden virtues. That's a good point. You just can't compare the music of the Smurfs with The Eagles. In other words - the Smurfs are obviously much better.

#### **July 8th, 1997**

All James does is sit like a big fat lump in the chair and watch the tennis at Wimbledon on the TV. He says all I ever do is sit in the chair like a big fat lump and paint my Warhammer figures. Actually, I sit in the chair not like a big fat lump and paint the figures very VERY carefully. OK, I used to be a bit overweight but I went on a diet and he would torment me talking to me about deep fried Mars bars that he'd eaten in Edinburgh on a drama trip. I like the Orcs more than James, but if the Old Hag was a Warhammer figure I bet she would have more magic and points than even....

What's that about an Old Hag? my Mom said, coming up behind me, I hope you're not talking about me.

I must have been daydreaming and talking out loud. I must be careful.

James was still slumped in the chair. Superstitions rule some people's lives, but so do the TV schedules. He didn't hear anything. He's alright when he's not slumped like an old man in the chair, but I really hope all the boys at secondary school aren't all like him. He plays golf and thinks it's exciting. I'd rather cut down trees or smash windows.

#### **July 12th, 1997**

Laura's teacher is always off sick. I wish my class teacher would be off sick - permanently.

The new teacher is never as good, Laura says, except for the last one, she's Scottish and she married a Portuguese man and her name in English would be Mrs Cruz, but instead she's Mrs Da Cruz. Everyone in Portugal has Da before their surname, she said. Portuguese Footballers don't, I said, You don't hear the commentators calling Luis Figo, Luis Da Figo, do you? Well, they do if they're married, she said.

#### **July 16th, 1997**

I dreamt of walking down a path with white markers. I could hear someone coming and I didn't want to be seen. I ran off to hide in some thick bushes. It was the old days and villagers were coming along the path to offer a sacrifice to the Old Hag. From my hiding place, I could see a pile of dead animal carcasses piled onto a handcart, some lambs and birds that might have been partridges, freshly slaughtered, dripping blood still. The villagers were nervous, looking about them, quickly hauling their cart to the end of the path, as near the old ruins as they dare go. They left the offering and hurried quickly back along the path in silence, each stone like a bleached skull as twilight gathered. I sneaked closer to the old ruins. The wind suddenly starting blowing up the cliff from the sea and there was a funny smell and I started shaking uncontrollably. I felt swept up from my feet as if grabbed by a huge hand, the rush of air in my lungs almost suffocating. Everything went black and that was all I could remember of the dream, but I woke up with my bones and muscles aching as if I had been playing football all night long.

**August 1st, 1997**

A few weeks have passed since I wrote anything in here. I have been having more horrid dreams. Well, they feel horrid. When I wake up all sweaty, they disappear but I know I am left feeling odd.

**August 3rd, 1997**

My birthday at last. Went to see "Men in Black" with Dad. I'd like to see it again. Perhaps I could go on out on my own or with a friend. Dad said he thought I'm old enough to catch a bus on my own as long as I get a lift back. I asked him if I was old enough to order a pizza delivery with his credit card. I love pizza. He said no to that. Oh well. But I feel I have grown up and can make my own decisions. Time to go.

**Web Editor's Note:**

There were no more entries in the main body of the diary from this date. However, the following notes, according to Burbage's comments, were found on scraps of paper in a plastic bag near the site of the disappearance, along with a drawing of The Old Hag purportedly made by David Bennett. Interestingly, the existence of these items is not mentioned in the police report of September 15th, 1997, Ref: 25/G/171. Subsequent investigations have been unable to trace the whereabouts of the named author of this report, D.C Sam Spittle.

**EB/23/11/97 Transcribers Note: Due to damage caused to the paper by exposure to the environment some sections are indecipherable. The handwriting differs from the main body of the diary but tests have revealed that the ink used is from the same pen.**

**August 29th, 1997**

In the day she's a human, I think. Maybe the woman who works at the pharmacy who drives that red Ford Fiesta, who reverses out into the street without looking. She glares at me. I nodded to her, knowing that look. She has different faces to confuse people. Like the woman who drives up and down on the old cart track in her old mini, her curly perm bouncing when the car hits a pothole, who looks a little hamster-like peering over the steering wheel. Or the woman jogging up and down with dyed her hair a brighter colour than her sparkly tracksuit.

The soft earth is churned up here with a thousand hoof marks. The wild horses who live on the headlands, she catches them by their manes and rides them, whipping them into a frenzy. Feel her claws scratching you, feel her sharp teeth pecking at you like a tasty morsel left for the gulls.

There ---(indecipherable)--- tower encrusted on its six legs. She sleeps, floating face down in the old water tower. I think ---(indecipherable)---

**August 30th, 1997**

There is a path of white stones laid out as markers. --- (indecipherable)--- stray from the path. As you approach one marker stone, you can just see the next ahead, guiding you along a hidden path down between a cleft in the hills. I can ---

(indcipherable)--- students camping here. They have set up their tent in the ruins. They don't know. I do know. The Old Hag, pigeon breasted, with dark matted hair flying out behind her, smelling of wood smoke and damp air, caw cawing like a crow. --- (indcipherable)--- in the tent see her and their hair will turn white. They will go back to university and fresh students will think, who are these two really old students with the long white hair and straggly white beard? --- (indcipherable)--- Hag --- (indcipherable)--- whisper of a draft forming from the rising mist along the river valley, swirling around like smoke from a green wood fire. --- (indcipherable)---

There is nothing here. NO. NO. NO. --- (indcipherable)---

**August 31st, 1997**

No wind but I think it is the calm before the storm. The sun sets gleaming on the sea, a big orange glow that makes me feel a little sad. There is a pool of moving shadows in amongst the ruins. Twilight. Rain. Mist. Waiting. I'm waiting. I am cold and hungry. In the distance I can hear the sea. Darkness falls around me. I am scared. I don't know why. My hand is shivering. I can hardly write. I can hear everything around me as if I have super-hearing. There are sounds I have never heard before. The wind is rushing sounding like words I can't tell what they are. Horrible smells. She is coming!

**EB/23/11/97 Transcribers Note: the attached drawing was found among these papers.**

