

THUMBWOOD

by Davin Ireland

Some Notes on Undisclosed Phenomena Observed at  
Braxwell Heath, West Sussex, Aug. 2010

FOR THE SECRETARY OF STATE'S EYES ONLY

Main Report

---

**SCIENTIFIC & TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM - No. 173/9/010**

**THIS DOCUMENT IS THE PROPERTY OF HER BRITANNIC MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT**, and is issued for the information of such persons only as need to know its contents in the course of official duties. Any person finding this document should hand it to a Service Unit or Police Station for its safe return to the **MINISTRY OF DEFENCE, DEFENCE INTELLIGENCE STAFF, LONDON, SW1**, with particulars of how and where found.

**THE UNAUTHORISED RETENTION OF THIS DOCUMENT, OR ITS DESTRUCTION, IS AN OFFENCE UNDER THE OFFICIAL SECRETS ACT 1911-1989.** (When released to persons outside Government Service, this document is issued on a personal basis and the recipient to whom it is entrusted in confidence, within the provisions of the Official Secrets Acts 1911-1989, is personally responsible for its safe custody and for seeing that its contents are disclosed only to authorised persons).

**FORBIDDEN TO COPY OR REPRODUCE BY ANY MEANS**

The covert inspection described below occurred between 16:00 hours GMT and 17:45 hours GMT on August 15th, 2010, at and around the village of Braxwell Heath, W. Sussex, under the supervision of Lieutenant Colonel Alistair Hobkirk. No other official record of these events remains.

a) The property known as 'Thumbwood' stands approximately 2.72 miles (4.38 kilometres) north-west of the village of Braxwell Heath, West Sussex, in an area of woodland known locally as The Tangles. Built in 1901 by industrial philanthropist Thomas Wilmington Thurber, this spacious Victorian dwelling has since been renovated and extended several times without any record of planning permission being sought or granted. Viewed from the access road to the south, Thumbwood exhibits many of the unusual features described at various intervals by local residents (see Appendix A). Though lacking the rumoured moat, drawbridge and functioning portcullis, sightings not only confirm the existence of a feral mandrill roaming the crenellated battlements by day, but also verify its habit of pelting the unwitting visitor with faeces and rotten fruit. All four of the main turrets are ivy-clad, built to two-thirds scale, and bear staggered arrow slits in keeping with the faux mediaeval style. As previously indicated, the main entrance stands ajar, and has done so for several weeks. At present, the fate of the owner-occupant is in some doubt.

b) The ground floor reception area is bare save for a potted aspidistra sitting in the window and the roll of cracked linoleum stored directly beneath it. The linoleum

measures roughly fifteen feet on a side (4.65 metres), and lies flush with the skirting board. Other surfaces bear signs of extensive charring initially thought to be the result of a domestic fire. Residue particle analysis contradicts this view, however, suggesting the uniform carbonisation may be the result of prolonged exposure to an inordinately bright source of light. This observation is born out by the presence of several pale rectangular patches located on the walls. A previous inventory lists several framed oil paintings, all of which are currently unaccounted for. It should be noted that two of our operatives experienced severe emotional distress during this phase of the reconnaissance, with a third reporting feelings of extreme dread.

c) The kitchen is surprisingly modern given the setting, and contains many of the domestic appliances one might expect from an equivalent family home. Dishwasher, microwave, fridge-freezer and designer espresso machine, are all in evidence. In an alcove by the back door, Sisyphus struggles valiantly to push a large granite sphere up a craggy mountainside. Oblivious to our operative's presence, the former Corinthian king puffs and strains in order to achieve his goal, jaw clenched, diminutive biceps popping beneath the fabric of his flimsy cotton

tunic. The task is a thankless one. The mountain consists of several interlocking spurs of crystallised rock salt, and as the sphere grinds towards the summit, it crushes the fragile crystals to powder, thus causing the erstwhile monarch to lose his footing and crash back to the tiles. Here he lays grunting in the shadow of an adjacent pedal-bin. Some time later, the tiny homunculus regains his footing, puts his shoulder to the stone, and wordlessly resumes his labours\*. Stuck to the fridge by means of a novelty magnet is a handwritten shopping list that includes a 4-pack of strawberry yogurt, gardening twine, and a copy of *RadioTimes* magazine.

\* Intriguing as they may be, claims that the mountain may actually be the remains of Lot's wife are considered fairly wide of the mark.

d) The conservatory is airy and spacious, and doubles as a makeshift utility room. Flowering cacti and well-tended bonsai trees dot most available surfaces, including the worktop above the washer-dryer unit. Also present is a porcelain chamber pot dating to 1889. The pot is decorated with hand-painted scenes from *Alice in Wonderland*, and contains a dark blue liquid that smells faintly -- but not exclusively -- of detergent. Creatures

from mythology rise at intervals from the depths, beating their tails and tossing their shaggy heads before sinking beneath the water's preternaturally choppy surface.

Beside the chamber pot lies the desiccated corpse of the hydra, shrivelled lips peeled back from jaws set in a permanent snarl. A cursory dental inspection confirms earlier suspicions that several of the hydra's teeth are now missing. It is at this stage of the investigation that the mandrill spies our operative's presence through the glassed-in roof.

e) Directly to the south, the sequestered garden forms a study in neglect. Enclosed on three sides by high walls festooned with climbing vines, wisteria, and purple clematis, a bronze statue grown hoary with verdigris contemplates its solitary fate. Rose trees swoon drunkenly under the weight of dead and dying blooms. Bumble bees drone back and forth in dusty bars of sunlight. This quintessentially English summer idyll does not last. From beneath the eaves erupts a migrant flash of green and gold. The dragon -- no larger than a common house sparrow -- swoops down and snatches one of the bees in mid-flight. The aging mandrill hoots and stamps at the flawless interception, but does not venture from its place of safety. More green and gold shapes detach

themselves from the side of the house, a leathery swarm taking to the wing now that feeding time has commenced.

f) After the initial sweep of the ground floor is complete, updated mapping software confirms that the main entrance hall possesses a feature not marked on any floor plan. Equidistant between stairwell and well-populated hat-rack, a previously overlooked door -- similar to the exterior turrets in that it is finished to two-thirds scale -- boasts an ebony gloss finish, brushed-steel letter-box, and matching latchplate. An antique bow key protrudes invitingly from the lock. After a brief deliberation, the parameters of the investigation are widened and the order to proceed is issued remotely. Beyond the door, a tiled corridor recedes into infinity. The walls are studded with framed portraits of persons unknown. Breaking the monotony, a lone bust of Caesar stares blindly at the intruder, a necklace of dead peonies draped about its neck. Disorientated by the experience, our operative retreats, secures the entrance, and stows the key deep in the workings of the grandfather clock.

g) At this juncture, activity transfers to the first floor. Besides the library and master bedroom, both of which show signs of recent activity, the upper storey contains little of note. Room after empty room is assessed, logged, and dismissed. The main exception, the monolithic library, is studied at length from the refuge of the hallway. Previous assumptions of its status as an algorithmic maze are provisionally confirmed. The master bedroom offers no such deterrent. Painted delicate eggshell white, with matching oyster-grey carpet and curtains, it exudes an air of mediocrity our operatives - - in their naturally heightened state -- find oddly disconcerting. Piled on the nightstand are the gospels of the New Testament written in the original Greek, plus several of the Apocryphal Texts, a Gideon bible, and a well-thumbed copy of *Who Moved My Cheese?* The Gideon is extensively annotated, The Book of Exodus in particular bearing more than its fair share of cross-outs and carets. Of particular interest is Exodus 14:21, the passage that refers to Moses' parting of the Red Sea. The description is brusquely underlined and accompanied by a hastily-scribbled reference in the margin that reads '*Yam Suph, the Reed Sea. The Reed Sea! For pity's sake, can't you people get anything right?*' After relaying the text to base, the order is given to abort.

h) On vacating the premises, it is noted that the ground floor reception area (see section b)) has undergone a remarkable transformation. The centre of the floor is now occupied by a circular dining table upon which stands an orange-shaded lamp. The sixty-watt bulb burns brightly against the backdrop of the carbonised walls. Exactly nine coloured balloons orbit the lamp in the fashion of planets. They drift in tightly-orchestrated silence, never colliding or deviating from their respective courses. The feelings of dread and foreboding experienced on the part of certain operatives are soon replaced by an all-pervading sense of euphoria and well-being. A short reappraisal is sanctioned. The surface of each balloon, it is later agreed, displays various signs of atmospheric activity -- dust storms, migrating cumulus, even light precipitation. No moons, as far as anyone can see, are in evidence.

i) Mission ends. Team quarantined, debriefed and placed under observation for indeterminate period.

Main Report Ends

---

**SCIENTIFIC & TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM - No. 173/9/010 [Concluded]**

Supplementary timeline:

- Compulsory purchase order for property known as 'Thumbwood' -- including grounds, access road, and surrounding woodland -- fast-tracked to completion, 23 AUG 2010.
- Spurious anthrax scenario implemented, 25 AUG 2010.
- Braxwell Heath exclusion zone established, 25 AUG 2010.
- Work commences on Thumbwood containment area, 28 AUG 2010.
- Work on Thumbwood containment area concludes, 17 OCT 2010.
- Final member of investigative unit terminated, 17 OCT 2010.
- Thumbwood erased during severe thunderstorm by means of extraordinarily compacted, subterranean thermo-nuclear charge, 19 OCT 2010.

Case closed.

No further action required.