

CFI Newsletter

Spring 2005



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Welcome everyone to a long overdue reappearance of the Charles Fort Institute – we're back and we won't be going away.

I'd like to thank everyone for their patience over the past and I would invite you to watch this space for the things that are to come.

One of the first changes within CFI, as you will have already read, is our founder Bob Rickard has now stepped down from his role of heading the CFI. I was invited to take over this rather daunting position and obviously I accepted. But who am I? I am a life long

Fortean currently based in Edinburgh where I founded and still organise the Edinburgh Fortean Society. I am a regular contributor to both Fortean Times and to the UnConvention as well as to numerous books and magazine. Like many Forteans I have an extensive book collection and I am happy to announce that the CFI is listed as the recipient of this resource in my will (go on, do likewise, you know it makes sense). Another thing that the CFI will get upon my demise is my Fortean Cabinet of Curiosities – a constantly growing collection of the strange and the curious.

One of my particular interests is education and I think that ties in very nicely with the aims of the CFI – I wish to educate people about the ideas of Charles Fort and to equip them with the tools necessary to continue educating themselves.

I can't promise the road ahead will be smooth, I can't promise it will be easy but I can promise that whatever else it will be interesting and with your continued help and support we can make a lot of things happen. Watch this space...

Gordon Rutter

Bob Steps Down

At the end of September 2002, I was pretty exhausted from years of struggling to keep FT going and battling various managements. A new arrangement with IFG & Dennis Publishing meant that Paul and I were 'promoted sideways' to being consultants while an in-house editor (David Sutton) took over the actual running of FT, so this seemed an ideal moment to semi-retire. I decided that I'd like to take a break from official responsibilities for a while, to get myself together, recharge the old batteries and get to know the family again.

As a result, I'm happy to announce that Gordon Rutter accepted the challenge of galvanising CFI ... something I failed to do over the last couple of years as my own life got an increasingly complicated. The task ahead of him is to get CFI into a shape to begin rolling out campaigns for publicity, recruitment and funding. As with David Sutton at FT, I have every confidence in Gordon's enthusiasm and ability and I commend him to you.

I will continue working for the

goals of CFI but in a lower key for now. My main projects will be to reawaken my old publishing imprint (Fortean Tomes), to establish my own picture library (Digital Strangeness) as a complement to Janet and Colin Bord's Fortean Picture Library, to assess the possibilities for CFI publishing, and working with others in founding the *Encyclopedia Forteana* (working title, more on this later) which, I hope, will be one of CFI's core projects.

Bob Rickard

CHARLES FORT: The Hermit of the Bronx

This is the first in a short series of articles about Charles Fort that we will be publishing over the next few issues of the newsletter. In this article Bob Rickard looks at the life of Fort.

Charles Fort was born into a fairly prosperous family of Dutch immigrants who owned a wholesale grocery business in Albany, New York State. He was the eldest of three brothers - the others being Clarence, and the youngest,

Raymond. Their mother died within a few years of Clarence's birth and Fort's father married again during Fort's teens.

Beatings by his tyrannical father helped set him against authority and dogma, as he declares in the remaining fragments of his autobiography **Many Parts**. Escaping home at the age of 18, he worked as a reporter in New York City before hitch-hiking through Europe "to put some capital into the

bank of experience." In 1896, aged 22, he contracted malaria in South Africa and returned to New York where he married Anna Filan (or Filing), an English servant girl in his father's house.

Fort and Anna settled down to a life of dire poverty in a succession of tiny apartments in the Bronx and Hell's Kitchen quarters of New York City. He took odd jobs between

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CHARLES FORT: The Hermit of the Bronx



Charles Hoy Fort at 19

"Thayer, a young and ebullient novelist, often visited the Forts, talking into the night, lubricated by home-brewed beer..."



Above: Fort as a baby (middle).
Left: Charles Fort and his wife Anna pictured in a pass-port photo

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infrequent sales of his stories (most of which are now lost) to newspapers and magazines. At times things were so bad the Forts had to use their furniture for firewood.

Where Anna "knew all her neighbours' affairs", Fort himself had very few friends. He virtually lived as a hermit, chasing references at the library until it closed and writing up his notes at home, pottering over them into the night. Were it not for Anna's insistence that he accompany her to the movies most evenings and the visits from Thayer and Dreiser, he had no social life.

His books are full of little asides that shed light on his daily life; for example, in **Lo!** (Ch.18) he says has cut down on smoking and almost given up drinking his home brewed beer because it went flat so quickly. His concentration was quickly soured by doubt, which was rare but drastic when it occurred, plunging him into a depression. Twice, he

burned his collection of tens of thousands of notes because "They were not what I wanted." Undaunted, he would begin his exhaustive reading and note-taking all over again, but in a new direction.

In 1921, the Forts set sail for London, where he and Anna lived close to the British Museum (at 39A, Marchmont Street). For eight years, he undertook his 'grand tour' of the Museum's holdings several more times, at each pass widening his horizons to new subjects and new correlations. He began to think that space travel was inevitable, sending letters to the **New York Times** on the subject and even speaking on it at Hyde Park Corner.

Fort returned to New York in 1929, striking up an acquaintance with Tiffany Thayer, with whom he had corresponded. Thayer, a young and ebullient novelist, often visited the Forts, talking into the night, lubricated by home-brewed beer, surrounded by Fort's collection of mounted

specimens of giant spiders and objects said to have fallen from the sky and the great wall of shoe boxes where Fort's notes roosted.

Fort grew progressively blind. On 3rd of May 1932, he was admitted to hospital suffering from "unspecified weakness". He died within a few hours, apparently of leukemia. He took notes almost to the end - the last one said simply: "Difficulty shaving. Gaunt places in face." After Fort died, Anna lost her interest in living and survived him by only five years.

Several times in his books, Fort refers to poltergeist-like events in their apartments in the Bronx and in London; inexplicable noises would be heard and pictures fell off walls. Dreiser once interviewed Anna after Fort's death and asked her if she had had any further strange experiences. She told him of rapping sounds and voices and then said: "One afternoon [...] his aunt came over and she annoyed me terrible about this money. She said I had no right to it. I went to bed crying and in the night I thought he was sitting on a little bench or couch [...] He said: 'Hello, Momma,' and I was never so glad to see anybody in my whole life."

Charles Fort is buried in the family plot in a cemetery in Albany, New York.

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CFI meets AFU

On Friday 5th November 2004, Paul Sieveking and I met three of the members of the Swedish group Arbetsgruppen för Ufologi – Clas Svahn, Anders Persson and Mikael Sjöberg. Better known as AFU, it was founded in 1973 and dedicated to the work of acquiring collections of UFO-related material, properly cataloguing and preserving them and making them available to genuine researchers. Largely funded by its central team and their

supporters, they also seek donations of funds and have a pool of regular donors.

I have always admired the AFU team as they provide an excellent model for the kind of basic work CFI should be doing in our own field. To get a better picture of that, please take a look at their site - <http://www.afu.info/>

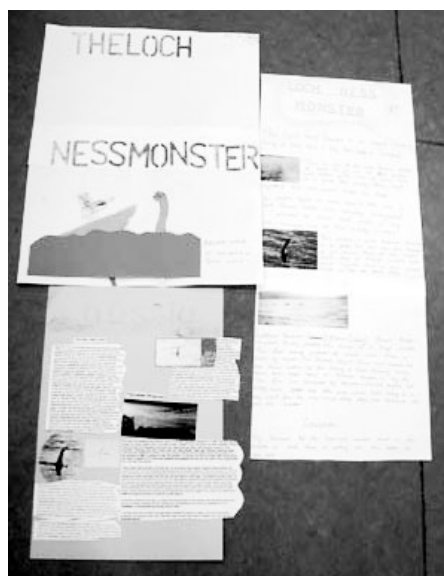
Several good points emerged from this informal meeting. Firstly,

that CFI and AFU should develop closer ties ... indeed there seems to be an initiative towards the formation of an association of specialist archives of this sort and it's my opinion that CFI should be fully involved in such a thing. Secondly, once we can begin cataloguing our own archives, AFU suggested that, at the very least, there could be mutually profitable exchanges of duplicate material.

Bob Rickard

Science Investigates... The Fortean

In my normal day job I'm a teacher and occasionally we can stray a little from the syllabus. Recently – after a quick check with the Head of Science I decided to stray in a Fortean direction. Two of my second year classes had some time in hand so I decided to offer them a chance to do some project work – an opportunity to practice both research and presentation skills. The project was the paranormal, the unusual, the unexplained – or, if you prefer, the Fortean.



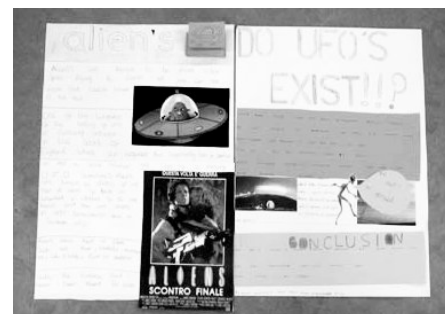
To start them off and give them some ideas I showed them a video on the A to Z of the Unexplained and then chatted a little about the whole

area. Next they were to choose the area they wanted to research and they could also choose how to display their results – posters, powerpoint presentations, booklets or any other method they wished.

Initial ideas included the Loch Ness Monster, Bigfoot, Elvis – alive or dead, Tupac Shakur – alive or dead, and quite a lot of ghosts and aliens. Next, a session on the Internet to provide information and diagrams. And then just to remind the students that there are other ways of finding data – a visit to the school library. Some people changed their ideas – claiming that they could not find enough data. Eventually information was piling up and ideas were taking form. And so they started to prepare how their data was to be presented. The theme was "science investigates..." and they had to include evidence for and against their topic and then come to some sort of conclusion based on the evidence they had collected.



Most opted to produce posters and most opted to go with ghost, aliens / ufos or Nessie. And some good ones there were as well – one poster was full of personal tales that had been collected from a local haunted pub, another was a look at ghost hunting equipment and a third included an interactive Nessie eating a lonely fisherman.



All told there was some good work and some good presentations and hopefully – a good introduction to the world of Fortean with some proto Forteans in the making.

Gordon Rutter



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***As a Fortean I
have no opinion***

We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.fortean.org

If you know of a society, event or online community which you think would be of interest to members of the CFI then please contact the editor with details.

- Edinburgh Fortean Society, General Fortean. Meets 2nd Thursday of every month at the Canon's Gait pub, Edinburgh, <http://edfort.cjb.net>
- SELFS: Fortean, Folklore & Paganism. Every 2nd Monday at The Mitre Tavern, Greenwich High Road, Greenwich, London, SE10. www.selfs.co.uk
- London Earth Mysteries Circle: Earth Mysteries / Paganism. Fortnightly on Tuesdays at The Diorama Centre, 34 Osnaburgh Street, London NW1 <http://www.lemc.ic24.net/>
- Magonia Readers Group: Magonia/Ufology gossip. Every first Sunday of the month at the Railway Tavern, Putney High Street, London SW15. <http://www.magonia.demon.co.uk/history.html>
- Skeptics in the Pub: Self-explanatory skeptical group. Once a month at The Old Kings Head, Kings Head Yard, 45 Borough High Street, London SE1 <http://www.skeptic.org.uk/pub/index.html>
- Strange Phenomena Investigations (SPI): Credophile Fortean. One Saturday a month at The Sols Arms Public House, 65 – 68 Hampstead Road, London, NW1 http://www.apra.org.uk/spi_london.htm
- Isle of Wight Fortean Society: Fortean. Meet at Ottakar's Bookshop, 118 High Street, Newport, Isle of Wight PO30 1TP <http://www.frogboy.freeuk.com/iwfs1.html>
- Dublin Fortean Society: General Fortean. Meets monthly at the Lord Edward Pub, 23, Christchurch Place Dublin 8. Check <http://www.blather.net/> for details or email dub_fort-subscribe@blather.net to subscribe to the mailing list.

End Notes: More Introductions

Greetings fellow forteans, my name is Stewart Smith and I have the honour of being the new editor of the CFI newsletter. I'm yet another Edinburgh fortean and have been attending and giving talks at the Edinburgh Fortean Society since it's beginning. I hope to help Gordon to keep this news-sheet appearing through your letterbox a lot more regularly but to do that we require material. Please help by sending articles, news and anything else you think might be of interest to one of the addresses above, preferably by email. Well, that's all from us for now, hopefully the next newsletter should be on it's way to you this summer but until then keep it unreal!

Stewart Smith