

HUNTING THE MONSTER WITH IRON TEETH

Sandy Hobbs and David Cornwell

...behold, a fourth beast, terrible and dreadful and exceedingly strong; and it had great iron teeth.

Daniel 7.7

Introduction

In 1954, hundreds of children in the Gorbals district of Glasgow were reported to have stormed a local cemetery, hunting for a 'vampire with iron teeth'. According to press reports at the time, they said that the vampire had 'killed and eaten two wee boys'. This incident was initially linked to 'horror films' showing locally. However, it was soon reinterpreted as being due to 'horror comics' against which a campaign was being organized at the time. A recent study of that campaign states that the incident 'passed into legend' as a symbol of the mental and moral influence of the comics.¹

In 1978, one of us² tentatively suggested that the event might be accounted for in part as arising from a local legend of a 'monster with iron teeth'. This argument had limited plausibility because it was based on a single reference to that legend. In this paper we re-examine the events in the light of further evidence, both documentary and oral. Two particular strands of argument are stressed:

- (a) legendary 'bogeymen', including 'Jenny wi' the airn teeth', used to frighten children;
- (b) children's responses to the frightening.

The Hunt and the Reaction

The hunting of the vampire with iron teeth was first reported in the now

defunct Glasgow morning paper, *The Bulletin*. It has been possible to trace how the event became a news story through interviews with the original reporter and the policeman who was his main source.³ Malcolm Nicolson, a crime reporter, regularly rang round police stations to check for stories. On the evening of 23 September 1954 when he rang Lawmoor Street station he was at first told there was nothing newsworthy. He heard laughter in the background and someone saying that he should be told about the vampire. This led him to visit the police station, talk to Constable Deeprose and write up the story that evening, in time to make later editions of next morning's paper. The account (Figure 1), is quite brief but it did appear on the front page accompanied by a picture of Deeprose. A number of decisions by different people led to the story appearing as it did. There was the usual decision-making about the newsworthiness of the story; there was the police decision to pass it on and, moving further back in time, the police involvement was itself due to a decision by someone who saw the 'hunt'. Nicolson's account is almost entirely descriptive. It reports the children's behaviour and observer reactions. Later in this paper we shall distinguish between two aspects of the event: the notion of children *hunting* something out of the ordinary, and the notion of the *thing hunted*. The report contains no reference to injuries or damage or arrests; no later report we have seen differs from the original in that respect. There is a single exception to the overall descriptive character of the writing: the final sentence, set apart, which implicitly suggests a possible explanation or influence, a horror film. One must naturally treat newspaper reporting with caution, but no serious doubts have since been cast on the general correctness in this case, and we have taken the original report to be broadly a correct account of the 'vampire hunt'.

Only *The Bulletin* carried the story that morning—it was that paper's scoop. The following day, a Saturday, *The Bulletin* reported a repetition of these events the next night. Its third and final story exclusively devoted to the vampire was on the Monday, when local children were reported as laughing at the idea of a vampire, a neat rounding-off of the story. The reactions of other papers were rather different. In particular, another Glasgow morning paper, the *Daily Record*, took it up and linked the incident clearly with a campaign against so-called horror comics.⁴ In Figure 2, we summarize the contrasting ways in which *The Bulletin* and *Daily Record* handled the Gorbals vampire in the week after the story first appeared.

Figure 1

Police Had To Clear "Vampire" Hunters

HOUSEHOLDERS in Caledonia Road, Glasgow, phoned the police last night to complain of the clamour raised by hundreds of children swarming into the Southern Necropolis to track down and slay a "vampire with iron teeth."

The "vampire," according to the children, was credited with killing and eating "two wee boys." They came from all over Hutchesontown. Some were so young they could scarcely walk, but most were armed with sticks or stones prepared to do battle with the menace.

Shouts, Screams

The hunt began shortly after school hours, when grown-ups first noticed a steady trek towards the cemetery. The children climbed the walls and scoured the grounds in the search for the "vampire."

Then their excited shouts and screams became so loud that normal conversation was impossible.

Phone calls of protest were made to Lawnmoor Street police office.

Constable Alex. Deeprose said afterwards:—"When I appeared I felt like the Pied Piper of Hamelin.

"All shapes and sizes of children streamed after me, all talking at once and telling me of the 'vampire' with the iron teeth.

"This I could handle, but when grown-ups approached me and asked earnestly, 'Is there anything in this vampire story?' it made me think."

As darkness fell the hunt tapered off and was finally called off by the rain.

Note.—An "H" film appeared at a local cinema this week.

Figure 2

(G.V. = Gorbals Vampire)

The Bulletin

Friday 24 Sept, page 1 (G.V. central)

POLICE HAD TO CLEAR 'VAMPIRE' HUNTERS

Comics link: nil

Film link: An 'H' film appeared at a local cinema this week.

Saturday 25 Sept, page 1 (G.V. central)

VAMPIRE HUNTERS OUT AGAIN

Comics link: . . . local mothers blame 'horror comics' . . .

Film link: nil

Monday 27 Sept, page 3 (G.V. central)

VAMPIRE DOESN'T SCARE ANY MORE

Comics link: . . . councillors . . . have made strong condemnations of 'horror' comics and films which were blamed for . . .

Film link: see above

Friday 1 Oct, page 4 (G.V. incidental)
BE CAREFUL HOW WE BAN THE 'COMICS'

Comics link: . . . perhaps the recent case where Glasgow children . . . focused national attention on them . . .

Film link: nil

Daily Record

Saturday 25 Sept, page 1 (G.V. central)
HORROR FILM BLAMED FOR THE VAMPIRE

Comics link: A horror film . . . plus . . . American comics were two of the reasons given . . .

Film link: see above

Monday 27 Sept, page 8 (G.V. incidental)
IS THIS THE KIND OF COMIC YOUR CHILD IS READING?

Comics link: Do not laugh off Glasgow's 'vampire scare' . . .

Film link: nil

Tuesday 28 Sept, page 8 (G.V. incidental)
SO EASY TO GET THE 'HORRORS'

Comics link 'If American comics are responsible for this sort of thing' said . . .

Film link: nil

Tuesday 28 Sept, page 8 (G.V. incidental)
PARENTS! YOU MUST STOP THIS SEDUCTION

Comics link: We all smiled indulgently . . .
'The Seduction of the Innocents' should wipe the complacent smile off our faces.

Film link: nil

Wednesday 29 Sept, page 7 (G.V. incidental)
AND THE BAILIES SHUDDER

Comics link: The comics were brought . . . by Bailie John Mains. He represents Hutchesontown where . . .

Film link: nil

In Figures 1 and 2, a substantial move can be observed from the one-sentence coda mentioning a horror *film* to an emphasis on horror *comics*: the Gorbals Vampire became an adjunct to the comics campaign. In his interview with us Nicolson refers to his story going round the world. That it did so seems to a large extent due to the link made with the anti-horror-comics campaign which was already underway. The phrasing of statements linking the Gorbals Vampire to comics shifts rapidly from various forms of tentative, qualified, attributed claims through tacit assumption to unequivocal assertion. The *Daily Record* items we cite nowhere say 'comics caused the vampire hunt' but the reference to the incident in the course of articles primarily about horror comics clearly implies a link. The first unqualified assertion we have found is in the *Catholic Observer*, 1 October 1954, where the front-page lead story says:

Two Glasgow catholics . . . have launched an attack against lurid sensational American comics of the type which this week threw children of the Hutchesontown area into a panic of fear of a vampire with iron teeth that killed two boys.

A few weeks later, Norman Buchan in the *Scottish Educational Journal* made the same assumption when writing of the danger of horror comics:⁵

despite such striking examples as the vampire scare in the Gorbals . . . an attitude still tends to persist among teachers and others that their danger has been exaggerated.

References to the vampire hunt as inspired by comics multiplied. Perhaps the most telling example is to be found in an exchange in the House of Commons during the second reading of the Children and Young Persons (Harmful Publications) Bill.⁶ Arguing for the Bill's withdrawal, Roy Jenkins MP said:

We should be mindful of how little we really know about the direct causal relationship between horror comics or anything else people may read and people's actions, whether undesirable or not . . . We should not jump too quickly to the conclusion that, because two things happen, one necessarily happens as a result of the other.

Later, John Rankin, a supporter of the Bill, referred to Jenkins's argument: 'Generally that is true . . . Nevertheless one can give many examples . . .' However, he actually gave one example, the Gorbals vampire hunt. He concluded:

We can see how the children . . . had their minds gripped by this idea, and how easily the idea spread and their impulses were directed to a particular end. The police found exceeding difficulty in controlling these children which is an added reason why I hope that this Bill will receive unanimous support in the House.

Here, as elsewhere during the campaign, the Gorbals vampire is cited because it seems to be good evidence. At the time there was very little dissent.⁷ Yet, the case hardly stands up to investigation. Nobody seems to have tried to identify any children taking part, to investigate their reading habits or to interview them. Nobody identified a comic with relevant content. One comic was specifically mentioned by Bailie John Mains, *Startling Terror Tales* No. 1.⁸ However, it contains no vampire, no hunt, no iron teeth. Perhaps he meant only that this was an example of the *type* of comic which might have had an influence. A strong tendency for campaigners to prefer the general to the specific is one aspect of the campaign stressed by Barker.⁹

When first reported, the Gorbals Vampire Hunt was not linked to horror comics. A week later, the link was widely assumed and stated. That shift did not take place as the result of the emergence of evidence. In effect, all that happened was that more and more people were presenting statements about the comics and statements about the hunt side by side. We do not wish to suggest that comics were *not* implicated at all. That would be a very difficult case to demonstrate. What we *do* claim is that it is appropriate to look at the Gorbals vampire in a wider context. Were the children who took part subject to other influences which might be relevant? How unusual was this incident? Are there other cases of 'hunting'? Are there other cases of children being frightened by monsters with iron teeth? There are.

Social Setting

In looking at influences other than the horror comics we shall be stressing mass media, popular culture and folk beliefs. However, the socio-economic context is also worth noting. 'Gorbals' and 'Hutchesontown' were the names of adjacent wards within the City of Glasgow, but 'Gorbals' was often used as a generic term for a rather wider area, including both wards. Hence both terms were used in describing the hunt. People we interviewed during our investigations said that, though living in Hutchesontown, they thought of themselves as 'in the Gorbals'. The word 'Gorbals' became

almost proverbial for inner-city slums and deprivation, with some justification. Statistically, Hutchesontown ward, at the closest relevant census (1951) was the worst in the city in terms of housing and overcrowding.¹⁰ Gorbals ward was not far behind. Census figures show that the number of persons per room was much higher in Hutchesontown than in the city generally. Houses were, in addition, almost exclusively closely packed tenements, giving a person per acre rate of well over 500 compared with 163 for residential Glasgow overall, itself a fairly high figure. It is hardly surprising then that children in the area spent much time out of doors, even though there were few special play areas.¹¹

Reading

The assumption was made during the comics campaign that reading could substantially influence a child's behaviour. This is not unreasonable. What *is* unreasonable is to assume without evidence that one particular source had exerted the influence in this case. We are not aware of any study of what Gorbals children read at the time but there is no reason to believe they did not read the nationally popular British comics, as distinct from the American imports and reprints under attack. Popular newspapers also flourished at the time and might have been read by some children. We have considered some of these sources, not in order to find a single alternative 'cause' of the hunt, but to see if there are any items or themes which might plausibly be linked to it. The most phenomenally successful British comic, *The Beano*, was at the time building up towards its peak sales.¹² This development was associated with the work of new young artists who had recently joined it, in particular Leo Baxendale. His very popular characters, the Bash Street Kids, had first appeared in February 1954 in a strip then called 'When the Bell Rings'. It normally featured a large scene of children playing together in broadly mischievous ways after school. If the readers, who were beginning to send a substantial volume of fan mail, formed strong identifications with the Bash Street Kids, it might be that this would have encouraged comparable communal mischief, for which a fairly strong tradition was probably already present in the area in any case.

The popular Glasgow press provides numerous items in news and features which could have helped create an atmosphere of anxiety and curiosity in young readers. This includes both those papers which featured the vampire story and those which did not. *The Evening Citizen* (28

August 1954) had an episode of Ripley's 'Believe it or not' on Gilles de Rais, whom it credited with murdering one hundred children. Two days later, the same paper had a feature, 'The Monster of Glamis', concerning the first-born of a noble family who was a vampire and kept out of sight in a mysterious room in Glamis Castle in Angus. The *Daily Record* and its companion paper *Sunday Mail* were running features on child molesting and homosexuality (between which they did not trouble to distinguish very clearly). There appear to have been two reasons for this coverage of macabre crime, one national, one local.

Nationally, the Wolfenden Committee had just started to take evidence.¹³ In Glasgow itself, there was a sensational murder of a welfare worker who was also a part-time actor on a popular radio programme.¹⁴ The suspect, later convicted, had fled to the continent. The homosexual element in the case, made clear later at the trial, could be as yet barely hinted at. Feature articles on homosexuality were a substitute. The *Daily Record* (16 September 1954) carried an article about 'The Ballet Dancer' who brings 'fear . . . terror . . . shame . . . humiliation'. The article is *not* specific as to what this child molester actually does but it does stress that everyone should be vigilant. The police will accept a hundred false alarms, it says, provided one leads to his arrest. Of course, we are *not* suggesting that this article or others like it¹⁵ 'caused' the Vampire Hunt. We do suggest, however, that in so far as the hunt may have arisen from general feelings of anxiety amongst local children, such an article could have contributed to childrens' rumours more directly than any horror comic so far identified.

Films

The possible influence of a horror film on the hunt did not survive beyond the Monday papers (see Figure 2). In his interview with us, Nicolson could not recall any details of the 'H-film' he mentioned at the end of his article.¹⁶ Cinema-going was particularly popular in Glasgow in the 1950s. There were around one hundred cinemas in Glasgow, eight of them in the Gorbals-Hutchesontown area.¹⁷ We have been able to establish through press advertisements many, but not all, of the films showing locally in the weeks preceding the hunt. Very few seem to have the type of content to link them to the Vampire hunt. The 'X' certificate had been introduced into British film censorship in 1951, superseding the 'H' category used by Nicolson. Few horror films were being released at the time.¹⁸ Films with 'X' certificates, in theory, were not seen by children, though some cinemas

may have been lax in applying the regulations. However, a film would not necessarily have to be seen to have an effect. Children might be influenced by advertizing, and by word-of-mouth accounts which could magnify the horrors. Newspapers could also play such a part. In the week of the incident, *Them!* was showing at a first-run cinema in the Gorbals.¹⁹ The *Evening Times* preview (18 September 1954) carried the headline 'Monsters on the Loose in a Big City' and said: 'There is definitely no admittance for children, perhaps because they might dress up and scare the wits out of their elders after seeing what happens in the film'. This was five days before the vampire hunt. The monsters in *Them!* were not vampires, however, but giant ants.

One sort of horror film which children could see was the comedy horror. Two such films featuring the Bowery Boys were on show in the Gorbals around that time.²⁰ One case was a one-day-only revival of *Spooks Run Wild* from the early 1940s; the other was a new release, *The Bowery Boys Meet the Monsters*, one of their most commercially successful films. The film was 'replete with . . . horror house clichés' including vampirism. Although the actors were no longer teenagers (the characters first appeared in 1937) their films still portrayed a teenage style of gang with which young audiences might identify, particularly in such a gang-orientated culture as the Gorbals.

Folk Tradition

We turn now to the possibility that the Gorbals vampire can be interpreted as part of folk tradition. One of us put this notion forward tentatively some years ago,²¹ but on the basis of admittedly flimsy evidence. The evidence accumulated by our recent investigations seems rather stronger. The initial premise of the previously stated case remains firm; no comic or film has emerged where a frightening figure with iron teeth appears. In contrast, a legendary monster with iron teeth is said to have been a belief amongst children not far from Hutchesontown in the nineteenth century.²² Hugh Macintosh writing in 1902, but referring to a period about a hundred years earlier, describes a belief amongst the youngsters of the East End of Glasgow that an ogre existed in the garden of a house near Glasgow Green. This house stood near the River Clyde and only a few hundred yards from the Southern Necropolis. Macintosh explains the earlier belief thus. Local children made frequent raids from a public path through Glasgow Green into the garden of the house which was occupied by two spinster ladies named Allan. One of them had

rather prominent teeth, which had been operated upon by a clumsy dentist, who had left the metallic fixings quite too apparent; and in the course of her expostulations with the raiders an addition to her molars was spotted at once by the belligerents, who dubbed her 'Jenny with the iron teeth'.

This name became exaggerated as time went on.

When the speculative link between the Gorbals Vampire and Jenny with the iron teeth was mentioned in a radio interview,²³ a number of listeners drew our attention to Alexander Anderson's poem (Figure 3) which had appeared in his *Ballads and Sonnets* (1879).²⁴ Two aspects of the poem seem particularly noteworthy. First, a mother uses the figure with the iron teeth to frighten a child into good behaviour at bedtime. So Jenny, in the poem at least, is a parents' 'bogey'.²⁵ Did Anderson invent this concept or did he draw on a tradition? We suspect the latter, but before elaborating on that, let us note the second noteworthy aspect of the poem, the fact that it has been included in anthologies, some for use with children in schools.²⁶ Thus the monster's iron teeth *may* have reached the children not through the much-criticized horror comics but from their mothers or their teachers!

Figure 3

JENNY WI THE AIRN TEETH

What a plague is this o mine, winna steek his ee,
 Though I hap him owre the head as cosie as can be?
 Sleep! an let me to my wark, a they claes to airn:
 Jenny wi the airn teeth, com an tak the bairn!

Tak him to your ain den, where the bogey bides,
 But first put baith your big teeth in his wee plump sides
 Gie your auld grey pow a shake, rive him frae my grup—
 Tak him where nae kiss is gaun when he waukens up!

Whatna noise is that I hear comin doon the street?
 Weel I ken the dump-dump o her beetle feet.
 Mercy me, she's at the door, hear her lift the sneck;
 Whist! an cuddle mammy noo, closer roun the neck!

Jenny wi the airn teeth, the bairn has aff his claes,
 Sleepin safe an soun, I think—dinna touch his taes;

Sleepin weans are no for you; ye may turn aboot
An tak awa wee Tam next door—I hear him screichin
oot!

Dump, dump! awa she gangs back the road she cam;
I hear her at the ither door, speirin after Tam.
He's a crabbit, greetin thing, the warst in a the toun;
Little like my ain wee man—Losh! he's sleepin soun!

Mithers hae an awfu wark wi their bairns at nicht—
Chappin on the chair wi tangs to gie the rogues a fricht.
Aulder weans are fleyed wi less, weel aneuch, we ken—
Bigger bogeys, bigger Jennies, frichten muckle men.

ALEXANDER ANDERSON

The question arises of how old the phrase 'Jenny with the iron teeth' is. Macintosh's account implies its existence in the early nineteenth century. One correspondent²⁷ directed us to an item in a book of early nineteenth-century notes and cuttings which she had consulted in Paisley Public Library some time ago. Unfortunately, the particular cutting is now missing, but her notes indicate that a 'Jenny wi' the airn teeth' was associated with Castle Semple Loch, Renfrewshire. Her interest had been aroused because her father, born in 1878, had been threatened by this Jenny with the iron teeth when he misbehaved, again suggesting that it was a parent's bogeyman or *Kinderschreck*. The use of iron teeth to frighten children is not confined to this Jenny. We have come across some other examples which are summarized in Figure 4.²⁸ There are various uncertainties and qualifications about this list. The 'Tom Dockin' description is the most straightforward but we lack information as to the circumstances of its use. 'Tante Arie', on the other hand, was apparently used as a threat. We have found two versions of the same Baba Yaga tale in English, one which mentions the iron teeth, one which does not. There is a Dragon of Wantley with iron teeth who once ate three children at one meal but we have not included that on our list as it seems essentially a literary product for adults. If we were to go beyond the specific idea of iron teeth to the broader theme of children being eaten by monsters, the list would of course become very long.²⁹ Furthermore, we wish to stress at present the extent to which 'iron teeth' may have been used by adults to frighten children.

It might be argued, of course, that the use of bogeymen to frighten children is dying out in the age of Dr Spock.³⁰ The extent to which the

technique is still used, or was used in the Gorbals in the 'forties and 'fifties, is uncertain. Two slightly later investigations in other areas give conflicting impressions. The Newsons, asking mothers in Nottingham, found only about one per cent admitting to the use of a frightening figure. Green, asking grammar-school boys in Leeds, on the other hand, found about fifty per cent saying they had been threatened with bogeymen and the like.³¹

Figure 4

OTHER IRON TEETH CHARACTERS

<i>Name</i>	<i>Character</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Source</i>
Tom Dockin	A bogie with iron teeth, devours bad children	Yorkshire	Wright, 1918
Tante Arie	Iron teeth, goose feet	Juras	Hoffmann-Krayer, 1915
Baba Yaga	Iron teeth, chicken legs, often eats children	Russia	Scholastic Book Services (no date)
(Mermaid)	Iron teeth, lives in distillery dam	Banffshire	C. Forsyth: Letters (5 March, 1985, 14 April 1985)

The discrepancy is not hard to explain. Mothers responding to enquiries by psychologists are likely to be influenced, at least in part, by their notions of what psychologists consider 'correct'. It may not be acceptable to admit to the use of bogeymen; actually using them in the privacy of one's home may be a different matter. In 'The Social Psychology of a "Good" Story', a paper delivered at the Perspectives on Contemporary Legend seminar, 1984, Sandy Hobbs drew attention to the various influences on a person's social behaviour, such as past history, the setting and the actions of others present. The question may have been posed to seek information about the mother's past experiences; the mother's answer, however, may be substantially influenced by the setting or her perception of the person asking the question.

Children's Hunts

Our appeal in local press and radio for people who either observed or took part in the Gorbals vampire hunt had only limited success as far as our original aim was concerned. However, what did emerge was that a number of people had memories of *similar* events. From interviews with these people, with the addition of a case which was reported in the press during our investigations, we have compiled Figure 5, a table of 'hunts'.³² With the exception of the Kilmarnock ghost hunt and the Gorbals vampire itself, our authority in each case is one person who recalls observing or taking part in the event in question. Statements about location were in each case precise, but we would be unwilling to place too much reliance on estimates of the numbers involved. It may or may not be significant that the four earliest cases are recalled by participants, the more recent cases not. It might be that people are reticent in early adulthood about admitting to behaviour which they come to think of as embarrassing. Three of the objects of the hunt are clearly in the folk tradition—that is, the Banshee, White Lady and Grey Lady. The 'Maniac' and the 'Miniman' we are unable to comment upon, the former because of its vagueness, the latter because we cannot interpret it. 'Springheeled Jack' is particularly interesting, not simply because it occurs twice. Although both incidents took place in the same area of Hutchesontown as the vampire hunt, the details differ. One informant particularly recalls standing with other children in Erroll Street looking up at an open window waiting for Springheeled Jack to appear. The other recalls going on several occasions to a street near 'Dixon's Blazes' iron works where large numbers of children waited in anticipation. What they 'saw' seems to have been illusions created by escaping gas.³³ Springheeled Jack has appeared in popular literature on a number of occasions. The origin of the name is disputed but whatever it may have been, it seems to have caught the popular imagination. In a number of cases, it seems to have been thought of as a real local threat rather than a literary figure. Of additional interest, in the context of the present discussion, is the suggestion that the name was used by parents to frighten children.³⁴

We have been using the word 'hunt' to refer to these incidents, for want of a better term. What the events have in common is that substantial numbers of children went *together* to seek out some frightening figure. The fact that they acted together may well have meant that they were willing to be more adventurous than they might have been on their own. However,

we doubt if it is particularly helpful to think of their behaviour simply in terms of mass hysteria. Children on their own or in small numbers often show a mixed reaction to the frightening. On the one hand, they may wish to get away from the object to reduce their anxiety, on the other hand, they may wish to learn more, which draws them to the object.³⁵ The presence of others may strengthen the latter tendency at the expense of the former.

Figure 5

'HUNTS' BY CHILDREN

<i>Date</i>	<i>Place</i>	<i>Scale</i>	<i>Object</i>	<i>Sources</i>
early 1930s	Glasgow: Govan	"huge number"	Banshee	Letter (E. Crofts, 4 March 1985)
1934/6(?)	Glasgow: Linthouse	100-150; 2-3 nights	White Lady	Interview (J. Richardson 11 April 1985)
1935/6(?)	Glasgow: Hutche- sontown	hundreds	Springheeled Jack	Interview (G. Lynch, 28 February 1985)
1938(?)	Glasgow: Hutche- sontown	thousands; several nights	Springheeled Jack	Interview (E. Firestone, 24 April 1985)
1954	Glasgow; Hutche- sontown	hundreds; 2 successive nights	Vampire with Iron Teeth	Various
1960?	Paisley: Foxbar	c. 100; successive nights	Maniac	Interview (J. Gilchrist, 4 February 1982)
1969/ 70(?)	Paisley: Glenburn	Bands of c. 10; one afternoon	Miniman	Interview (S. Tierney, 7 April 1982)
1985	Kilmarnock: Dean Castle	More than 100; several nights	Grey Lady (ghost)	<i>Evening Times</i> (13 March 1982)

What we have called 'hunts' involve relatively large groups of children but there may be significant ways in which the behaviour in these larger groups follows a similar pattern to those in small groups. Two or three children may approach the house of a 'witch' or some other frightening figure. Their behaviour may not have the same dramatic impact on the bystander as a hunt, but similar psychological processes may be at work. An informant gives an account of the only time she ventured near the dam where the mermaid with iron teeth lived:

I'd have been about six or seven at the time, and remember clearly going up the wood to the dam along with older children. When we reached the steep bank at the mouth of the dam, I refused to go further, because I was terrified of seeing the water, rather than the mermaid. However, I was so taunted by my companions that I eventually wriggled on my stomach, far enough up the bank, to raise my head for a split second, see the water, and slither quickly down the bank again.³⁶

Conclusion

At the present then, our conclusion is that contemporary commentators misconstrued the Gorbals Vampire hunt. In contrast to their implicit single cause/single effect model, we suggest that the behaviour can best be understood in the context of multiple life-long and current influences.³⁷ The behaviour of the children was not as aberrant or unusual as they seem to have thought. If children go 'hunting' a frightening figure, they do so because the presence of others strengthens their curiosity at the expense of their fears. The notion that such a frightening figure exists *may* be set off by the mass media, but on the evidence so far, it is rather more likely that the hunt for the figure will be the outcome of a longer-standing tradition passed on in various ways, including parent to child. We would urge others to look at the relationship of contemporary legend and childhood. Are there legends peculiar to—or more common amongst—children? Do some legends survive longer amongst children than amongst adolescents and adults?

NOTES

1. Martin Barker, *A Haunt of Fears* (London: Pluto, 1984).
2. Sandy Hobbs, 'The Folk Tale as News', *Oral History* 6/2 (1978), pp. 74-86.
3. *The Bulletin*, (24th September, 1954), p. 1; M. Nicolson, interviewed

February 7th, 1985; A. Deeprise, interviewed February 5th, 1985.

4. In addition to the *Bulletin* and *Daily Record* items listed in Figure 2, the following papers referred to the incident in the following week:

Friday September 24th: *Evening News*, *Evening Times*

Saturday September 25th: *Scottish Daily Express*, *Evening News*

Sunday September 26th: *Scottish Sunday Express*, *Sunday Mail*, *Sunday Post*

Monday September 27th: *Evening News*

Wednesday September 29th: *Scottish Daily Express*

On Monday October 4th, the *Daily Record* featured several readers' letters on horror comics, one of which, headed 'Blame Gorbals', referred specifically to the Gorbals vampire.

5. Norman Buchan, 'Voyage to Hysteria: I. The World of Comics', *Scottish Educational Journal* (November 5th, 1954), pp. 706-707. Part II appeared on November 12th, 1954, pp. 717-18. See also George H. Pumphrey, *Comics and Your Children* (Comics Campaign Council, 1954), p. 18 and *Children's Comics* (London: Epworth, 1955), pp. 57-58.

6. *Hansard* Series 5, vol. 537. The debate which took place on 28th February, 1955 is in columns 1072-1186. The Jenkins quotation is from col. 1096, Rankin, cols. 1149-50. Jenkins was not present during Rankin's speech and hence did not reply to this point.

7. An exception is the letter to the editor, *Daily Record*, cited in note 4 above. The anonymous writer favoured banning horror comics but linked the children's behaviour to social conditions in the Gorbals. E.S. Turner, *Boys Will be Boys* (revised edn; Castle Hedingham: Daimon, 1962), p. 200, accepts that the incident suggests that horror comics are 'not without effect'; however he does conclude that it would be easy to make too much of the affair: 'no doubt most of the participants thoroughly enjoyed it'. More recently, Alex Breadner has adopted the more sceptical approach exemplified by Barker in 'The Gorbals Vampire', *Fusion* 5 (1985), pp. 16-24.

8. See 'M.P.s May Hear of "Monster"', *Scottish Sunday Express* (September 26th, 1954), p. 5. We are grateful to Martin Barker for lending us his copy of the comic, *Startling Terror Tales* 1 (London: Arnold, 1954). The comic was featured in an article, 'This Stain on the Minds of Britain's Children', *News Chronicle* (September 30th, 1954).

9. Barker (1984, pp. 34-35) argues that the campaign required a lowest common denominator to bind together its varied supporters ranging from communists to right-wing populist newspapers. He suggests that the claim that the influence of horror comics on the vampire hunters was, if anything, a 'mental and moral effect' rather than a specific demonstrable link helped make the incident a prominent element in the campaign.

10. See J. Cunnison and J.G.S. Gilfillan, *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland: Glasgow* (Glasgow: Collins, 1958), for a discussion of these conditions.

The Glasgow city average in the 1951 census was 126.8 persons per 100 rooms. Hutchesontown ward had the highest rate, 181.6, Gorbals ward had the third highest, 165.8.

11. An autobiographical account of childhood in the Gorbals around this time is to be found in Jimmy Boyle's *A Sense of Freedom* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1977). Playing in the Southern Necropolis is described. A somewhat earlier period is portrayed in the opening chapters of John Burrowes's life of Benny Lynch, *Benny* (Glasgow: Collins, 1984).

12. See Donald Room, 'The Master of Bash Street', *Peace News* (December 24th, 1965), pp. 6-7 and Leo Baxendale, *A Very Funny Business* (London: Duckworth, 1978). In *The Beano* (June 5th, 1954), the Bash Street Kids were portrayed as auditioning for a horror film.

13. 'The Evil Among Us', *Daily Record* (September 14th, 15th, 16th, 1954), were three articles dealing with homosexuality, prostitution and child molesting respectively. The first refers to the Wolfenden Committee (which had been appointed on August 24th, 1954) starting to take evidence. The *Sunday Mail* had carried articles on child molesting and homosexuality on August 15th and August 22nd.

14. The finding of the body of George McNeill was reported in the *Evening Times* (August 3rd, 1954). The story was in and out of the newspapers for some time during the search for John Gordon, who was eventually found guilty of murder (see *Glasgow Herald*, March 23rd, 1955). McNeill's homosexuality and its possible relevance to the circumstances of his death were mentioned during evidence given by Dr George MacLeod of the Iona Community (*Glasgow Herald*, March 2nd, 1955).

15. The *Evening Times* had started a serialization of Jack House's *Square Mile of Murder*, a book about Glasgow murders, on September 21st, 1954. On September 5th and 12th, the *Sunday Post* featured the murder of an eleven year old boy in Wigan. On the latter date it took the opportunity to state that three hundred murderers were at that time loose in Britain. Of a slightly different character was a report in the *Daily Record* on September 23rd, the day of the hunt. The previous night phone calls had flooded into the office about a mysterious 'thing' in the sky over Glasgow. The newspapers identified it as a light plane on an advertising stunt.

16. After consulting a map and being shown where the cinemas in the area at that time were, he suggested tentatively that the film he had in mind may have been showing at the Paragon in Cumberland Street. This cinema did not usually advertize its programmes in the local press—a sign both of its relatively modest status and of the fact that it probably drew largely on a distinctly local catchment area for its audiences. We have been unable, so far, to discover what films were showing there that week.

17. Mr Deeprise was able to list six cinemas operating in the Gorbals at the time

as soon as asked! George, Green's, Palace, Paragon, Ritz, Wellington. This list seems to be complete, except that he did not count as truly 'Gorbals' cinemas, the two first-run cinemas, the Bedford and the Coliseum, situated in Eglinton Street, a main road on the edge of the Gorbals. Our main source for Glasgow cinemas of the time is *Kelly's Directory of Glasgow* (1954), supplemented by local newspapers. See also T. Loudon, *The Cinemas of Cinema City* (East Kilbride: the author, 1983).

18. See Dennis Gifford's *A Pictorial History of Horror Movies* (London: Hamlyn, 1973), and his *British Film Catalogue, 1895-1970* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1973). Also useful in this respect is Michael Weldon, *The Psychotronic Encyclopaedia of Film* (New York: Ballantine, 1983). There is a problem of terminology, however. How widely is the term 'horror film' to be used? Science fiction films had begun to achieve prominence in 1950. Furthermore some films might be regarded as 'horror' without achieving an 'H' or 'X' certificate. Henry Lane, 'How Do You Like Your Horror?', *Picturegoer* (June 19th, 1954), pp. 16-17, noted the contemporary decline of traditional 'horror' film and the rise of space fiction.

19. *Them!* (Warner Brothers, 1954, dir. Gordon Douglas) is described by Weldon in the book cited in note 18 thus: 'This classic science fiction film was the first of the oversized-bug movies'. It features a little girl so frightened by the giant ants that she can only say 'Them! Them!' Alex Breadner in the paper cited in note 7 suggests the relevance of *Devil Girl from Mars*, which was shown at Green's, Gorbals Cross, on 6th, 7th and 8th September, 1954. However, he withdrew this suggestion in 'The Gorbals Vampire Revisited', *Fusion 6* (1985), pp. 16-17, having learned more of its content. This judgment may have been a little hasty. *Devil Girl From Mars* (Spartan, 1954, dir. David Macdonald) deals with the landing of a space ship in Scotland. As mentioned earlier (note 15) there had been a mysterious object in the sky over Glasgow the night before the hunt. The *Daily Record* reported that 'flying saucer' had been one interpretation. The *Scottish Daily Express* (September 25th, 1954) reported certain subsidiary beliefs associated with the hunt. 'A man with a green mask had landed from Mars' and 'A space ship crashed into the cemetery and caught fire'.

20. *The Bowery Boys Meet the Monsters* was shown at the Coliseum in the week beginning August 6th, 1954; *Spooks Run Wild* was shown on Sunday, September 12th, 1954 at Green's. For the Bowery Boys and their films we have drawn on David Hayes and Brent Walker, *The Films of the Bowery Boys* (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel, 1984). Strictly speaking *Spooks Run Wild* featured the 'East End Kids' rather than the 'Bowery Boys' but the leading gang members were played by Leo Gorcey and Huntz Hall in both of these films.

21. Hobbs (1978).

22. Hugh Macintosh, *The Origin and History of Glasgow Streets* (Glasgow: Hedderwick, 1902). The children who applied the name 'Jenny with the Iron Teeth' to Miss Allan may have been using an already current phrase. One correspondent,

C. Harris recalls as a child applying the name to a somewhat strange looking woman in another locality; the woman died more than twenty years ago. Our point is that even if Macintosh's story is accurate it does not mean that the sole origin of the phrase has been established.

23. *Macgregor's Gathering*, BBC Radio Scotland, March 4th, 1985. We are grateful to Fiona Couper and Jimmie Macgregor for their cooperation.

24. Alexander Anderson, *Ballads and Sonnets* (London: Macmillan, 1879). Thanks are due to several people who drew our attention to this poem: S. Brown, Gordon McCulloch, Chris Morgan, Fay Stewart, Elizabeth Simmons.

25. Two papers by John Widdowson have drawn attention to this topic, 'The Bogeyman', *Folklore* 82 (1971), pp. 91-115, and 'The Witch as a Frightening and Threatening Figure', in Venetia Newall, ed., *The Witch Figure* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), pp. 200-20. In the latter he points out the lack in English of a term equivalent to the German, *Kinderschreck*. 'Bogeyman' is rather too specific in its reference and it may be as well to borrow *Kinderschreck* for use in English.

26. We have consulted George Burnett's *A Book of Scottish Verse* (London: Methuen, 1932), which also contains 'The Boo-man', 'Jenny wi' the Lang Pock' and 'Jenny Kilfunk', poems in a similar vein. Chris Morgan informs us she has a tattered copy of *A Book of Scots*, edited by W. Robb (Grant Educational), originally issued in the classroom, which contains Anderson's poem. It is also in Robert Ford's anthology, *Ballads of Bairnhood* (Paisley: Gardner, 1913). The question of using a figure linked to the idea of going to sleep is too large to be dealt with here. William Miller's 'Wee Willie Winkie', also in Burnett's anthology, seems a relatively benign figure. However, the Sandman is a somewhat more problematic case. 'The Sandman is coming' could be calming or threatening depending on the tone, or how it is performed. In one fictional example, the film *Les Portes de La Nuit* (Pathé-Cinema, 1946, dir. Marcel Carné), Diego says to the sleepy boy 'Le marchand de sable passe' with tenderness and the boy repeats the phrase sleepily. However as Freud points out Hoffmann portrays the Sandman as someone who carries off children's eyes to feed to his own children on the moon, a strikingly different type of figure. See Sigmund Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', pp. 368-407 in *Collected Papers*, Vol. IV (New York: Basic Books, 1959) (German original of this article, first published 1919). 'The Sandman' is included in E.T.A. Hoffman, *Tales of Hoffman*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982). Dorothy Bloch, *So the Witch Won't Get Me* (London: Burnett, 1979) is a relevant work in the Freudian tradition dealing with children's fears.

27. Mrs Catherine Hymers very kindly re-copied for our use 'The Curse of the Warlock of the Peil' which she had found in one of the volumes of notes and cuttings collected by Andrew Crawford and deposited in Paisley Public Library, under the general heading *Cairn of Loch Wynnock Matters*. In the volume 'Cuttings of Newspapers, Vol. X', which we consulted in March 1985 there is another item called 'The Curse of the Warlock of the Peil' on a sheet part of which

appears to have been cut away. The pagination of the volume at this point is also irregular.

28. Sources: Elizabeth Mary Wright, *Rustic Speech and Folk-lore* (London: Oxford University Press, 1914), Eduard Hoffmann-Krayer, 'Die "Tante Arie"', *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde* 25 (1915), pp. 116-23. Hoffmann-Krayer refers to children dressing up as Tante Arie to frighten others and also to Tante Arie being used to threaten misbehaving children. 'Tais-toi, ou je te conduirai à la roche à la Tante-Airie [sic]' (Be quiet, or I'll take you to Aunt Arie's rock) is quoted as a threat, Arie living in a cave in a rock. In the anonymous volume, *A Ghost, A Witch and A Goblin*, illustrated by Rosalind Fry (New York: Scholastic Book Services, no date), the story 'Baba Yaga' is said to be translated from *Baba Yaga* (Paris: Flammarion, 1932). We have not consulted the French text. The same story appears in *Russian Fairy Tales*, illustrated by A. Alexeieff (London: Routledge, 1946). However, Baba Yaga is not credited with iron teeth in this version. We are not at present able to say whether Baba Yaga has iron teeth in any Russian version or whether it is a translator's addition. Chris Forsyth, in two letters, gave us details of a mermaid with iron teeth (made by a blacksmith?) in Knock Dhu distillery dam in Banffshire in the 1930s. She believes that it may have been either a way of discouraging children from going to the dam, or, alternatively, a story brought in by children boarded out from Glasgow. Other examples of iron teeth, as far as we know, have not been used specifically to frighten children. Two James Bond films feature 'Jaws', a steel-toothed villain played by Richard Kiel (*The Spy Who Loved Me*, United Artists, 1977, dir. Lewis Gilbert and *Moonraker*, United Artists, 1979, dir. Lewis Gilbert). J.A.C. Brown refers to children being frightened by a witch with iron teeth but it is not clear what source or sources he has in mind (*Techniques of Persuasion* [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963]). K.M. Briggs in *A Dictionary of British Folk Tales* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971) includes 'The Dragon of Whatley' which has forty-four iron teeth and once ate three children. However, Jacqueline Simpson, 'Fifty British Dragon Tales', *Folklore* 89 (1978), pp. 79-93, gives as the original the poem in Percy's *Reliques* and refers to the text used by Briggs as an 'expurgated prose version'. See H.B. Wheatley's edition of Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1887), vol. III, pp. 279-88, for the supposed historical basis of this satire (located at Wharncliffe, Yorkshire). *O.E.D.* under 'Tooth' has a quotation 'our fear of the iron-teeth of the law' dating from 1659.

29. Two or three examples will suffice to illustrate our point. Iona and Peter Opie's *Children's Games in Street and Playground* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969) contains a number of games which involve implicit reference to children being eaten. What's the time Mr Wolf? (pp. 102-103), Dead Man Arise (pp. 106-108), Ghosties in the Garret (p. 307), Mother the Cake is Burning (pp. 317-29), Fairies and Witches (pp. 342-43). The poem, 'Jenny Kilfunk', cited in note 26, has a line: 'Where goblins on bairns but dine'. Alan Smith, 'The Image of Cromwell in

Folklore and Tradition', *Folklore* 79 (1968), pp. 17-39, quotes a verse about Cromwell from nineteenth-century Lincolnshire: 'Supps and dines and lives reliant, everyday on naughty children'.

30. Benjamin Spock writes, 'Naturally you should never threaten a child with bogeymen or policemen or the devil. Avoid films and frightening T.V. programmes and cruel fairy stories. The child is scared enough of his own mental creations' (*Baby and Child Care* [revised edn; London: Bodley Head, 1958]).

31. John and Elizabeth Newson, *Four Years Old in an Urban Community* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970). The results of their questioning on this point are on pp. 479-81, but see also pp. 209-11 for a discussion of children's fears of 'things which are nearly normal but not quite' such as ventriloquists' dolls or men dressed as women. A.E. Green's paper to the Folklore Society was summarized in *Folklore* 81 (1970), p. 328.

32. We have hints of other 'hunts', information on which was too limited to justify inclusion in the table. It seems highly improbable that those listed make up more than a fraction of such events. We have been able to interview only two people who said they had participated as children in the Gorbals vampire hunt. R. Fry (interviewed 24th February, 1985) was about fourteen years old at the time, lived in Pollok and went to school in Govanhill, which lies to the south of Hutchesontown and the Southern Necropolis. He did not recall actually being at the cemetery, but does remember older children hoaxing others by pretending to see frightening figures, for example 'the man with the vampire teeth'. This seems to confirm that the concept was part of local child culture, but whether his recollection is of the same days as the 'hunt' or before or after seems unclear. S. Tierney (interviewed 7th April, 1985) was eleven years old, lived in Centre Street, Tradeston, to the east of the Gorbals, and recalls preparing with other children for what they considered to be a long trip to the Southern Necropolis. The older children, including himself, made fun of younger ones who were preparing to take home-made tomahawks as weapons. The arrival at the cemetery was an anti-climax, the gates being locked and there being no activity. It seems possible that it was on the second night that his trip took place. The *Evening Times* report of the Kilmarnock case links it to the showing of the film *Ghostbusters* (Columbia-Delphi, 1984, dir. Ivan Reitman). However it should be noted that the children were reported to be looking for a traditional Scottish 'Grey Lady' rather than a ghost character from the film. Leaving aside the Gorbals Vampire, in no other case did our informants offer an 'explanation' of the object of the hunt. We have not included in the table of 'hunts' cases where people told us of going with other children to a 'witch's' house or whatever. Only when it was claimed that substantial numbers were involved in some form of mass action does it appear in the table. We doubt whether there is any self-evident cut-off point. Of the cases in the table, the Paisley 'Miniman' may be the most marginal, but we felt justified in including it because, although the children were in groups of about ten, there were

several groups, and their actions aroused the interest of adults in the vicinity. Although all the cases brought to our notice were from the West of Scotland, we doubt whether 'hunts' are confined to that region and would welcome additional cases.

33. 'Dixon's Blazes' was an iron works immediately adjacent to the Southern Necropolis. Burrowes, in the book cited in note 11, writes of the noise and light from Dixon's Blazes dominating life in the Gorbals and our informant, Ellis Firestone, spoke in similar terms. Burrowes also claims that it was used to threaten naughty children; the furnace fires were pointed out as the 'bad fire' to which they would be sent if they misbehaved. In addition to iron teeth, Dixon's Blazes and Springheeled Jack (discussed below) we have noted two other objects of fear in the Gorbals. Jimmy Boyle in his autobiography (see note 11) refers to a belief in a figure called 'the Fiddler' in the Southern Necropolis, fear of whom meant children would not play there after dark. Mr Boles (interviewed May 1st, 1985) recalls a ghostly, disembodied Hand said to frequent St Francis School, where it wrote on blackboards and shifted statues. Sometimes children congregated outside the school when there was a rumour that 'the Hand' had appeared at the window of the school. Fiona Harkin (letter, March 18th, 1985) refers to a fantasy man in Dalmarnock, not far from Hutchesontown, 'Staring Eyes', who wandered around and could be seen up dark closes because of his lit-up staring eyes.

34. Springheeled Jack is discussed in *Notes and Queries*, 10th Series, Vol. VII (1907), pp. 206, 256, 394 and 496 and Vol. VIII (1907), pp. 251 and 455, E.S. Turner (1962), p. 37, and Paul Begg, 'The Terror of London', *The Unexplained: Open Files* 6 (1984), pp. 34-37. Turner and Begg cite various fictional presentations including penny dreadfuls and a film. Begg writes that a century ago mothers said 'Be good or Spring-heeled Jack will get you!' In the works cited will be found a number of examples where people believed that Springheeled Jack was at work in a particular locality, including Aldershot, Limehouse and Warwickshire. Two correspondents in *Notes and Queries* heard about him as children. An additional reference of some relevance is Katherine Traill, *Reminiscences of Old Aberdeen*, 2nd edn (Aberdeen: Wyllie, 1937). As a child in Old Aberdeen in the 1860s or 1870s she was thrilled by stories of Springheeled Jack who was reputed to wander the Town. 'To us he was very real indeed, and we gloated over stories of his prowess' (p. 20). C. Harris (Letter, March 4th, 1985) writes that 'when we were at school, or playing about later at night we used to say to scare our pals "Here comes Springheeled Jake" [sic]'. 'Springheeled Jackson' is cited as a frightening figure by J.D.A. Widdowson, *If You Don't Be Good: Verbal Social Control in Newfoundland* (St John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1977).

35. One of us has observed a child watching the BBC television serial *Dr Who*, torn between fear and interest, switching the set off and then moments later switching it on again. To be under conflicting 'pulls' to explore and to feel comfortable is not confined to humans. In his experiments on young rhesus

monkeys reared with surrogate mothers, Harry Harlow was able to observe monkeys alternating between examining unfamiliar objects and returning to cling to the 'mother' for reassurance ('Love in Infant Monkeys', *Scientific American* Offprint No. 429, first published June 1959). We have not examined here the possible links between 'hunts' and mass hysterical illness. M.J. Colligan, J.W. Pennebaker and L.R. Murphy, eds., *Mass Psychogenic Illness* (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1982) is a useful recent work. Two particularly valuable recent studies consider the relationship between susceptibility and recent events in the individual's life history: C.W. Small and A.M. Nicholi, 'Mass Hysteria among School Children', *Archives of General Psychiatry* 39 (1982), pp. 721-24 and H.B. Roback, E. Roback and J.D. La Barbera, 'Epidemic Grieving at a Birthday Party', *Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics* 5 (1984), pp. 86-89.

36. A. Smith (1968) refers to children in 1905 looking for the site of a cottage near Worcester where Cromwell had convened with the Devil (Chris Forsyth, letter, April 14th, 1985).

37. In 'The Social Psychology of a "Good" Story' (see Gillian Bennett, Paul Smith and J.D.A. Widdowson, eds., *Perspectives on Contemporary Legend II* [Sheffield: CECTAL/Sheffield Academic Press, 1987], pp. 133-48), Sandy Hobbs discussed the various influences at work influencing the telling of a legend. The same general model may be applied to cases such as that discussed in the present paper, where the key feature appears to be that the children 'acted upon' the legend, as distinct from telling it.