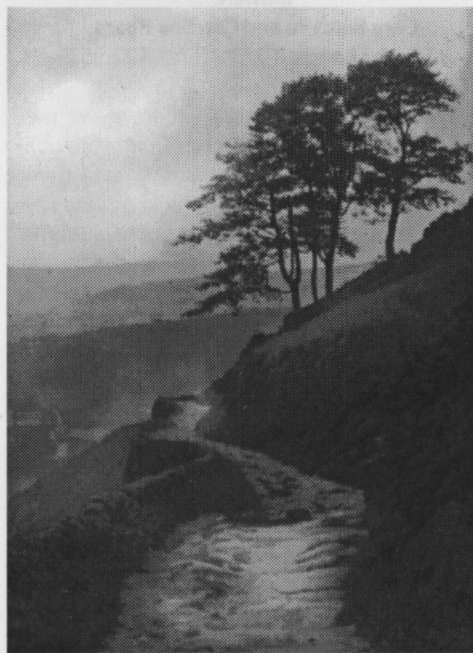


ing, indeed vital, that books such as this are produced. [Peter Knight]



JOURNEYS OF THE SOUL

John Billingsley

Northern Earth, 2023. Pbk, 48pp. £5.

www.northernearth.co.uk

In former times your journey through life would often be followed by the journey your body took for burial at the parish church. These routes, which could be many miles long, are known as corpseways and are the focus of John's latest explorations of the Upper Calder Valley (UCV).

Following an introduction detailing the history and chronology of corpseways, John turns his attention to several in the UCV. Many of the routes are extant, can be walked and are sporadically marked, for instance in the names attached to some sections and more intriguingly by carvings on the 'resting stones', including Marian marks, offering spiritual protection to both corpse and the funeral party.

Rather than simply detail the routes, which he does admirably, John examines their anom-

alies, expanding the discussion around corpseways from the simply historical and into the realms of past earth mysteries work. Why, for instance, do many of them not take the shortest or easiest route? And why do so many of them pass sites of folkloric significance or where ghosts have been experienced, an aspect of corpseways which has rarely, perhaps never, been previously discussed.

Journeys of the Soul is well illustrated with maps, photographs and drawings, making it the ideal companion for you to get out there and follow them yourself as the days lengthen and the warmth returns. By doing so you'll not only be seeing the landscape afresh, but in considering the purpose of these pathways, be taking part in your own *memento mori!* [Andy Roberts]

CANAL GHOSTS & WATER-WIGHTS THE SPIRITS OF BRITAIN'S WATERWAYS

Nick Ford

Country Books, 2023. Pbk, 232pp. £14.99.

978 1 7395824 5 6

I grew up in the Midlands walking along canals, both rural and industrial. In my teenage years I could often be found walking home from art college along the local canal, and early on Saturday mornings, taking my dog for a walk along the same canal.

This book lists more than 200 locations, with many more recorded paranormal encounters, on 69 canals and rivers in the UK. Many of these canals and rivers will be familiar to many *NE* readers.

In the pages of this new book, for example, we learn the folklore along the R Conwy about a supernatural creature called the Afanc, who was believed to cause floods. Little consolation for those affected by floods at the start of 2024.

There are some really unsettling and scary ghost stories here. My top spooky stories were set on the River Lea Navigation and Macclesfield Canal. This latter example involves a 'boggart', rather than a ghost. Talking of which, there are some very interesting non-ghost reports, such as the 'Monkey Man' encountered along the Shropshire Union Canal, the phantom dog along the



Montgomery canal and the creature of Loch Oich, which seems to resemble 'Nessie'!

Some of the stories are atmospherically illustrated with wonderful black and white illustrations by Nick's brother Jeremy. I should declare an interest here too – two of my own stories appear in this book. And I am not alone here – fellow *NE* names John Billingsley and Mark Greener have their research shared too.

Nick treats re-workings of real-life ghostly accounts with sensitivity, while maintaining a real air of supernatural menace. This is a great book to dip into, and I highly recommend it. [David Taylor]

THE FOLKLORE OF WALES: GHOSTS

Delyth Badder and Mark Norman

Calon 2023. 240pp £14.99. 978 1 915279 507

The ghost lore of Wales has many links to the wider British folklore, with some strange motifs of its own. This collection of spectral lore is especially interesting in that it is mostly based on sources originally written in the Welsh language, and each reference is presented in the original language, with a translation into modern English.

The tales are then commented on and set in context by the two authors, who are schooled in modern folklore studies. This results in an engrossing and authoritative discussion of the

Welsh attitude to ghosts and associated paranormal entities of the country. The tome is divided into a number of thematic chapters, such as 'ghosts in the landscape', 'spectral beasts' and 'death omens'. The latter seem to have been an especial preoccupation of the Welsh.

This is a fascinating collection of folklore, interestingly, if sceptically interpreted, which can be recommended. [Mike Haigh]

THE HERO

Lee Child

TLS Books, 2021. Pbk, 77pp. £5.99.

978 0 00 836187 7

I came across this book by accident, in that wonderful manner that libraries specialise in. Lee Child is a celebrated novelist, creator of the Jack Reacher series that I've never read, but why should his first ever non-fiction book be an essay on The Hero? I was taken on a whistle-stop tour of evolution from a storyteller's angle and through a female line, the evolution of fiction and its role in the human predicament. Stories are seen alongside tool-making and language as fomenting possibilities to be held in mind, to expand both individual and community potential – all kicked off with a discussion on the steady development of opiates, as archaeologically attested – it's no accident that 'hero/ine' and 'heroin' are related...

Into this tale of burgeoning human consciousness comes the Ice Age shrinking of population, and the mindset of the few thousand who survived, and then even worse news – farming. The elemental psychogeography of nomads was replaced by the possessive tedium of farming, and humans became more prey to competition and social organisation. And story? "The entire purpose of stories is to manipulate" whether emotions or people depending on who's telling... and so we get absurdist official heroes like Achilles and folk heroes like Robin Hood. A reason for Reacher is embedded here...

A little book that can easily be read in a single sitting between main meals, this is a titbit that is entertaining and surprisingly thought-provoking. [JB]