

*We knew the Hikey Sprites*  
The memories of seven Norfolk people

*Val*

Met in Fakenham

12-5-2008

"There were some council houses in Kirby Bedon, I had to pass them every day on the way home from school. An old lady lived in the last one, she always used to say as we passed, 'Hurry you home girl, before them Highty Sprites get you'. I didn't know what they were, but I was glad to get home".

*Nigel (65)*

Met at the Royal Norfolk Show

1-7-2009

Nigel gave me information but also said he would make enquiries of his ninety-two year old mother when he visited her. He later rang me with his findings.

"It was a night-time thing, everyone in Kerdistone used to talk about them. They would say, 'Get you home before dark, do the Hikey Sprites will get you'. It was common between the Wars".

Nigel's mother was born during the First World War.

*Daphne (76)*

Met at a bus stop in Trowse

16-4-2009

"I grew up in Strimpsshaw. Mum used to say, 'The

Hikey Sprites will be after you, if you are naughty'. I didn't know what they were, I think a sort of fairy thing, but I knew they would come after me. It can be Hikey or Hiker".

*Bob (82)*

Met in the Forum Norwich

17-4-2009

"Mum talked about Hikey Sprites, they came out in the dark, of course there was no electricity then. I spent my childhood in Griston. Older children used to dare me to walk past a gap in a hedge, where a hose from a traction engine passed through, they said the Hikey Sprites were there".

Bob, reliving his fear, demonstrated in the Forum how he gingerly crept past that gap.

*Christine*

Met in Southrepps

21-10-2008

"We spent our childhood in Themelthorpe. When we were kids mum would say, if we were naughty, 'The Hikey Sprites will get you'. I shared a bedroom with my sister Gill, if we were noisy mum would say, 'Be you quiet or the Hikey Sprites will get you'. I think they were a sort of elf, rather evil little things".

*David*

From Marsham, letter published in E.D.P.

23-3-2009

"I remember these Hikey Sprites, or Hikey Spikes as we called them. My granny would warn us that they would, 'Get us if we were bad. But they never did! Perhaps we weren't bad enough'".

David who comes from a milling family (a water mill) gave me further information by telephone.

"Grandfather talked about Hydra Sprites which lived in water, the mill pool and the well. My brother, I think, coined the word Hikey Sprike".

How versatile the Hikey tradition is!

*Roland*

Born and brought up in Docking in the early 1930s  
Information supplied by his friend Ann

14-9-2009

"My old mum was always on about the Hikey Sprites. She told us they would come if we were behaving badly, we thought they would come when we were in bed and punish us or even take us away. I think they were a kind of very large goblin".

This account from the north-west corner of the county is a harsh portrayal of the Hikeys. It is not difficult to empathise with young Roland, in bed, in the dark, alert and apprehensive, awaiting his night-time visitor. It was a rather severe way of getting Roland to 'take heed', however helpful the intention.

Now for an encounter with fairies, maybe Hikey Sprites, most certainly Will-o'-the-Wisp.

*Hilary's Story*

I MET HILARY, A RESIDENT of the Great Hospital, in Bishopgate, Norwich in August 2009. I asked my usual leading question and in reply Hilary told this wonderful evocative story. I give it in her own words:

"We lived in Postwick, my dad worked at Grange Farm. Every Sunday evening the family, my parents, my sisters and myself attended the 6.30 evensong service at Postwick church, it was expected of us. When evensong ended, at about 7.30, mum went home with the youngest children to put them to bed. Dad and I walked down the loke to the marsh. It was getting dark, the marsh was covered with a blanket of mist on the top which flickered and danced amazing little flames, blue, tinged at the top with yellow. I held my dad's hand awe-struck, 'they are fairies,' he said. We walked home in silence, my mind full of wonder - I had seen fairies! From that day to this my belief in fairies was never in doubt".

Hilary's mum was a Postwick girl but Jack came from Hertfordshire. Had he been a local lad he might have said, 'Look Hilary they are Hikey Sprites'.

## *The Hikey Sprites Today*

I AM CONFIDENT MORE PEOPLE will now be aware of the Hikey than was the case before I began my researches two years ago. My supportive contacts have cast their nets far and wide and although as one said, "Most of my enquiries have been met with a blank stare," much, that could have been lost, is now recorded. This little enigmatical fey inhabitant of our county now has a future, let us hope for a long time. It has even appeared on the internet, unfortunately in a rather over-detailed, fanciful form.

Is the word used though now in an everyday way? It certainly is in Horstead, in connection with a dog. If the little fellow goes missing Terry will say to his wife, "Where's young Hikey Sprite?" Not his name mind, but his character. Terry as we saw before uses the term to describe, "mild naughtiness".

On a larger scale at the Ivy Farm Holiday Park in Overstrand, the proprietors, husband and wife, both recall their parents saying, when they were going somewhere, "Mind the Hyter Sprites don't get you!" They like to tell the children, staying with them, that the Hyter Sprites live on the camping fields and, "If you are quiet, at night, you might see them, with little lanterns carried on their backs". An interesting link to the Lantern Man and an inducement not to be too noisy, at night, among your fellow campers.

But everyday use in a family? Well in late September 2009, when the writing of this was nearly complete, I decided to spend an hour or two in Foxley Wood. Walking back through Foxley village I encountered Joan (Jimmy), born in 1928, tidying her garden. It soon became clear that Joan knew the Hikey Sprites well, knew them as, 'ghosts'. She described her childhood at Keeling Hall, between Foulsham and Themelthorpe, later living in those villages, before moving to Foxley. Joan's five girls were all warned, that if they were troublesome, "The Hikey Sprites will be after you". Joan has issued her grandchildren and great-grandchildren with the same warning. Here, in one family, we can see the Hikey tradition stretching over a continuous period of more than one hundred and fifty years, conveyed entirely orally without the help of written sources. Who knows how long it will survive in that family, by the same means, into the future – another fifty years perhaps?

## *Some Final Hikey Thoughts*

SO WHAT ARE WE TO MAKE of this Hikey Sprite tradition, this tantalising entity that has been my companion for nearly two years? So, 'hold you hard', while I shuffle a few ideas.

First of all what a great dialect name, **HIKEY SPRITE!** Once heard not easily forgotten, a name to juggle with, a name to enjoy. Surely, though, more than just a word.

Do we have here the tenuous remains of something pagan, a surviving fragment of an alternative religious tradition, reduced now to a folk belief? Something of the spiritual realm, a spirit of the wild, of woodland, of earth perhaps. A relative, maybe, of the woodwose, the Wild Man (now largely confined to carvings on Norfolk church fonts) or the Green Man who has enjoyed something of a comeback in recent years. This certainly has great appeal to neo-pagans and the practitioners of contemporary magic. Not sure though.

Do we have an echo, a folk memory of that deep, profound, primeval fear of dark places, forests in particular, where might have lurked sinister forces and entities, human, animal and nameless horrors? Forests harboured outlaws, fugitives and brigands, sheltered nefarious practices, provided hiding-places for the kidnapped and those on the run. It also sheltered the outcast, those sad souls driven out of their communities because of their bizarre unacceptable behaviour, their strange appearance, their odd gait or voice. In those villages, isolated by the surrounding deep forest, such people would have brought dread to their communities. I wonder if the genesis of the Hikey lay in such deeply rooted feelings. All possible.

These fears, eventually coalesced into the ubiquitous 'bogey man', a way of controlling recalcitrant youngsters, originally perhaps to control adults, to keep them away from areas of risk where enterprises of dubious nature were taking place. Gradually the 'bogey man' concept was transferred exclusively to children. Families created their own version of the bogey, a number of people have revealed to me their own unique name for this threat to children. Janet told me, 'Ben Bolt' was the favoured bogey of her parents, although her mum was not a Norfolk woman. Some of those who chose the Hikey Sprite have been recorded in my research.

We are getting close to the tradition, gathering together mere fragments at this twilight stage of the belief, to try and make sense of it. A century and more ago the Hikey would have been a discrete concept, now it merges and flows with other folk beliefs, our hold on it is tentative. Twenty-five years ago my task would have been easier, my findings more focused and cohesive, the resulting book more weighty.

If you are a 'believer', you may be disappointed that it was not my intention to produce a field guide for the Hikey – although I have described the habitats they favour. I cannot advise you on how to identify them, not much about their habits, their food, their habitations. Yet for me, at the end of this project, they do feel 'real'. So, at a personal level, I can say there are places in the Norfolk landscape, on heaths where the sun intensifies the scent of gorse bloom, where one gets a glimpse of a shy deer, where lithe birch trees sway in the wind, there I have felt the Hikeys are hiding in the bracken, among the heather. So too, in Autumn woodland when my feet shuffle the dry leaves, the wind swishes in the tree tops and a 'plop' marks the fall of an acorn or conker – there they are almost within reach, almost.

While our county retains its largely rural quality and some precious areas remain beyond the reach of traffic sound and away from the most severe light pollution, some magical landscapes will remain to give us inspiration, refreshment, calm. There the Hikey Sprite will remain, ever elusive, liminal, enigmatic, just beyond our touch.

In such places, my reader, you may roam as the light fades, your senses keen and alert, watchful and sensitive, then you may feel the Hikey's presence. Do not be fearful, with luck, you may have encountered them, all is well, just believe.

For me, at the end of my research, I am glad to have been aware of them and had their company all this time. Now though it is time to part from both the Hikeys and you my valued reader. It is time to say a fond, 'fare y'well together'.

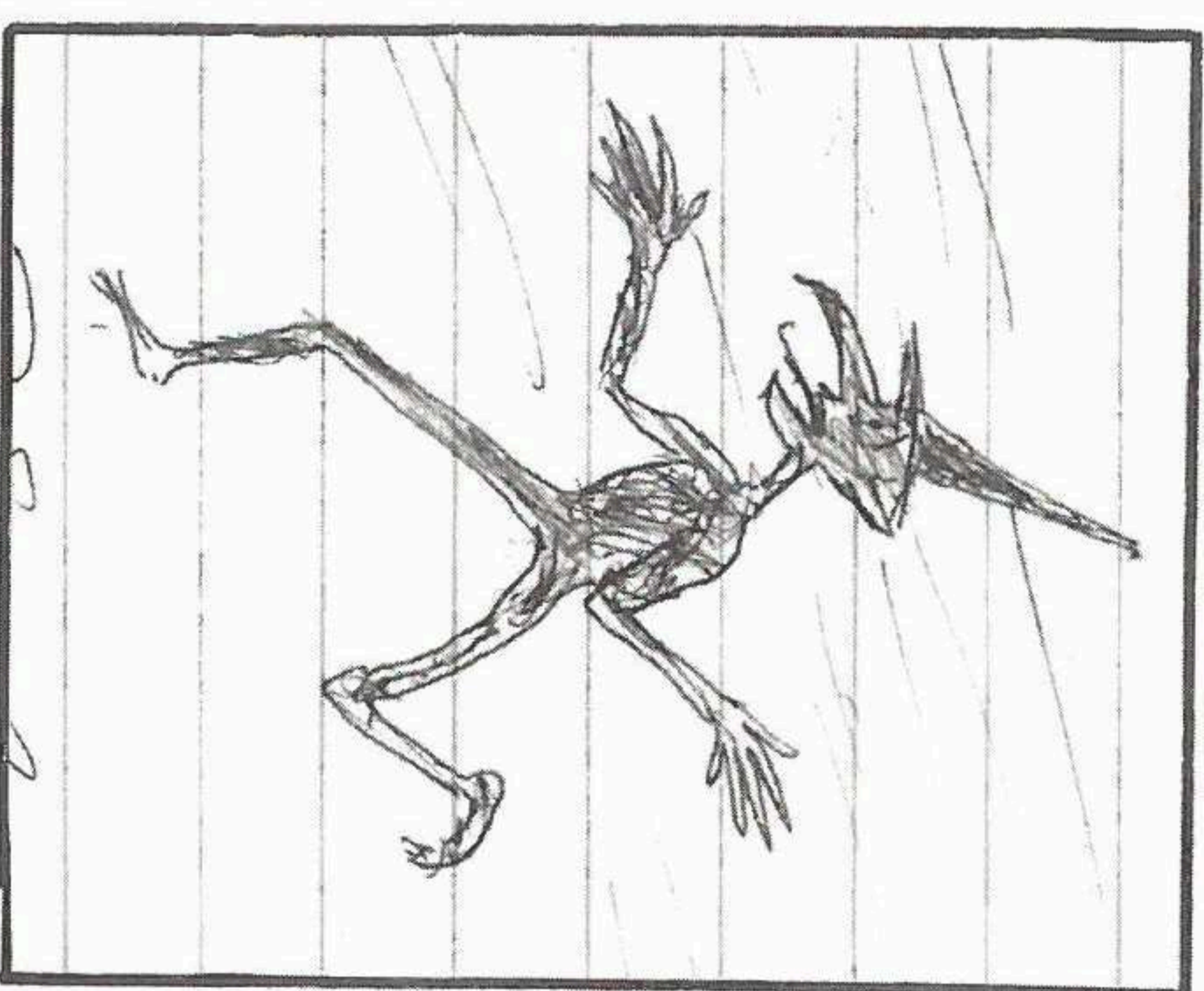
*Ray.*

*November 2009*

## *A Night-time Woodland Encounter*

IN APRIL 2009 I HAD A STALL at an event in the Forum, Norwich. I prominently displayed this poster appealing for information on the Hikeys, hoping to collect material for my research. A young man, Robert, probably in his early twenties, came forward with this interesting little episode.

*"A couple of weeks ago we were camping in Horsford Wood. I got out of my tent at about 2 a.m. to answer a call of nature. I was surprised to see, out of the corner of my eye, a little figure (he used his hands to indicate a height of 10cms or so) running by. I didn't know what it was 'til I saw the picture on your stall – it looked just like that!"*



DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THE HIKEY SPRITES? IF SO PLEASE TELL RAY. THIS IS HOW DICK, WHO LIVED IN SPARHAM IN THE 1930s, IMAGINED THEM.