

WOLD COTTAGE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON REPORTS OF THE PETTISWOOD AND EVORA METEORITES. C. T. Pillinger and J. M. Pillinger, Planetary Science Research Institute, Open University, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA, UK.

Numerous authors have noted that the correspondence of Edward Topham with the editor of the Oracle newspaper, concerning the fall of the Wold Cottage meteorite, acted as a stimulus to others who had seen stones fall from the sky to report their experiences [1,2].

The first of these was by businessman Mr W^m Bingley [3] in an extensive letter to the editor of the Gentlemen's Magazine about something that fell over 20 years earlier when he was living at Pettiswood in Ireland. Bingley's account, and his attempt to offer an explanation for what he had quite obviously seen has every semblance of authenticity. Bingley's career as publisher and bookseller was one which would likely have brought him into contact with Topham and he makes the very interesting observation that "upon further investigation by the learned my cake and Captain Topham's loaf will be found to have been both baked in the same stupendous oven." Bingley therefore is another early believer that all meteorites were related.

A second circumstance always cited is referred to as a letter from the poet Robert Southey [4] writing home from a visit to Portugal. There are numerous reasons to question the veracity of this theory. At the period in question the poet was out of England avoiding the wrath of a benefactress aunt who he had offended by getting involved in a scheme to found a commune and

subsequently clandestinely marrying. On his return to England he was somewhat financially embarrassed and just prior to entering training for the law submitted a manuscript for publication supposedly letters written home during his travels in Spain and Portugal. Some letters are addressed and dated; many others have no indication who they were sent to and when. The one containing information about the meteorite is in this category and like some other material in the book could be padding to make the work more substantial and acceptable to the publisher.

Southey needed the money from sales. Southey was out of Britain when Wold Cottage fell and did not return until shortly before his book was submitted and yet there are close parallels between the stories of Evora and Wold Cottage for example, Southey has an account of the local magistrate swearing testimonies (just as Topham did for his meteorites). The question which must be considered is did Southey, who is always credited with announcing the meteorites fall, indulge in a little opportunistic reporting?

References: [1] Pillinger C. T and Pillinger J. M. (1996) *Meteoritics and Planet. Sci.*, 31, 589–605. [2] Burke J. G. (1986) *Cosmic Debris*, Univ. California. [3] Bingley W. (1796) *Gentleman's Magazine*, 66, 726–728. [4] Southey R. (1797), letters written during a short residence in Spain and Portugal.