



**M**artin Reed, Professor Trevor Benson, Professor Peter Kendall and Dr Philip Sewell of the Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering have been awarded the JJ Thomson Premium by the Institution of Electrical Engineers for their paper *Anti-reflection coated angled facet design*, which was published in the IEE Proceedings — Optoelectronics. This is the second time that Professor Benson has won an IEE Premium award. In 1995 he received the Electronics Letters Premium with Vladica Trenkic and Professor Christos Christopoulos for the development of a new symmetrical super-condensed node for the transmission line modelling (TLM) method.

**O**ne in three people in the UK will have cancer at some time in their lives ... one in four will die from it. The Imperial Cancer Research Fund is looking for young and enthusiastic people to help to achieve their vision for the future. ICRF employs 1,000 doctors and scientists who are working towards a better understanding, prevention and cure of all kinds of cancers — they believe that if current trends continue they will be able to cut the number of cancer deaths by one-third by the year 2020. The charity would like to set up a vision team in Nottingham, a very different type of fundraising group and one of the first of its kind, with the challenge of raising £5,000 over the next 12 months. The vision team will not only offer the opportunity to contribute to the lifesaving work of the ICRF but also to meet new people, make friends and have some fun.

**T**he University of Aberdeen's Department of Forestry is seeking volunteers to help with its 1997 Internet survey research project. Researchers are investigating public preferences with respect to a wide range of landscapes and 'alternative' forest management systems. The survey is also being used to compare data obtained by conventional door-to-door surveys with that obtained from the Net. The team is looking for more than 500 volunteers nationwide. The survey is open to anyone with a computer and Internet access — it is easy to complete, self-contained and simply involves assessing images viewed on the computer screen. The URL for the survey is: <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/~for275>



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Ghoulies and ghosties and long-legged beasties have been a part of our folklore for thousands of years. **Lyn Heath-Harvey** looks at how modern science is turning the cold spotlight of fact onto the paranormal.

**I**t's hard to describe, but if you've ever felt it, you will know exactly what I mean. A sharp intake of breath, a prickle down the neck and a distinct impression ... that you are not alone.

Thousands of people every year claim to experience events they feel they cannot explain away by conventional means — apparitions, poltergeists, ESP and things that go bump in the night.

Some would say there are those who have a sixth sense which allows us to detect a supernatural presence or tune-in to someone's thoughts; others would snort with derision and claim the 'happenings' are merely the product of an over-active imagination or too much cheese for supper.

Whatever your standpoint — and, for the record, I am firmly in the believers' camp — the scientific research done over many years in this field by Dr Alan Gauld of the University's Department of Psychology is gripping stuff.

He is far from the Hollywood view of a 'ghostbuster' — his work in the field of parapsychology is much-respected and thoroughly scientific.

Dr Gauld's aim is to apply scientific methods to reports of strange happenings in an attempt to explain them in a rational way. He is open-minded about the subject but says he can explain away the majority of reports of strange events as belonging to an earthly rather than a spiritual dimension. That said, he can also tell a tale spooky enough to give you goosebumps.

Dr Gauld tries to keep out of the media limelight nowadays — he is understandably wary of how his work could be sensationalised or attacked by those who are hostile for whatever reason. But his eyes have a tell-tale sparkle when he talks about the excitement of a potential paranormal encounter.

"I was seven or eight when I embarked on my first supernatural adventure. There was an old building where strange things were supposed to have happened and I wanted to investigate, but I hit my head falling off a plank and that was an abrupt end to it," laughed Dr Gauld.

"Undeterred I retained my interest and joined the university's psychic research society

when I got to Cambridge. One of the first places we went to investigate in the early 1950s was a very old house called Abbas Hall near Sudbury, which was then isolated in the middle of a field. We had heard that the woman who lived there claimed to have seen the ghost of a nun crossing her room on many occasions.

"It was wonderfully atmospheric because there was no electricity, just oil lamps and suits of armour everywhere and the flames flickered, creating large shadows. It only served to add to our anticipation when we stopped off for milk at a local shop on the way and a girl heard us talking. You're not going *THERE* are you?" she said wide-eyed.

"During the night, members of the group saw lights they could not account for and there was a curious column of cold which you could put your hand into as it moved around. There was also a great noise at the window, as if someone had run their hand down the leaded panes, but I looked out and there was no one around. The highlight of the evening was when one member of the group sitting on the sofa suddenly yelled out that he had seen the nun beside him. I remember he was very upset and breathing heavily."

Another occasion, which Dr Gauld says still plays on his mind as one of the more curious of his many investigations, was at another very old hall about five miles from Wisbech. It was occupied by the then local Labour candidate for Wisbech, who later became an MP and now sits in the House of Lords, plus his wife, two children and mother-in-law.

"The family kept hearing funny noises from upstairs — raps and bangs and even a shaking bed. We were genuinely not expecting anything much to happen, but arrived late one foggy night and assembled the family together downstairs to hear their stories.

"We started them off on a ouija board, mainly as a device to ensure we knew where they — and their hands — were positioned to eliminate them as culprits if anything happened. I went upstairs to stand on the first-floor gallery. The temperature suddenly dropped around 10 degrees in a very short space of time and I heard footsteps coming up