Lovereading.co.uk
Helping you choose your next book

You loved your last book...but what are you going to read next?

Using our unique guidance tools, Love**reading** will help you find new books to keep you inspired and entertained.

Opening Extract from...

Zombie Apocalypse!

Created by Stephen Jones

Published by Robinson Publishing

All text is copyright © of the author

This Opening Extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE!



Also available

The Mammoth Book of 20th Century Science Fiction
The Mammoth Book of Brain Teasers
The Mammoth Book of Best British Crime/Mysteries
The Mammoth Book of Best Horror Comics
The Mammoth Book of Best of Best New SF
The Mammoth Books of Best New Manga 1, 2 and 3
The Mammoth Books of Best New SF 20, 21 and 22
The Mammoth Book of Best War Comics
The Mammoth Book of Bikers
The Mammoth Book of Boys' Own Stuff
The Mammoth Book of Brain Workouts
The Mammoth Book of Chess
The Mammoth Book of Comic Fantasy
The Mammoth Book of Comic Quotes
The Mammoth Book of Cover-Ups
The Mammoth Book of CSI
The Mammoth Book of the Deep
The Mammoth Book of Dickensian Whodunnits
The Mammoth Book of Egyptian Whodunnits
The Mammoth Book of Extreme Fantasy
The Mammoth Book of Funniest Cartoons of All Time
The Mammoth Book of Hard Men
The Mammoth Book of Historical Whodunnits
The Mammoth Book of Inside the Elite Forces
The Mammoth Book of Irish Romance
The Mammoth Book of Jack the Ripper
The Mammoth Book of Jacobean Whodunnits
The Mammoth Book of King Arthur
The Mammoth Book of Maneaters
The Mammoth Book of Men O' War
The Mammoth Book of Merlin
The Mammoth Book of Mindblowing SF
The Mammoth Book of Modern Battles
The Mammoth Book of Modern Ghost Stories
The Mammoth Book of Monsters
The Mammoth Book of Mountain Disasters
The Mammoth Book of New Sherlock Holmes Adventures
The Mammoth Book of On the Road
The Mammoth Book of Paranormal Romance
The Mammoth Book of Pirates
The Mammoth Book of Prophecies
The Mammoth Book of Quick Puzzles
The Mammoth Book of Roaring Twenties Whodunnits
The Mammoth Book of Short SF Novels
The Mammoth Book of Short Spy Novels
The Mammoth Book of Sorcerers' Tales
The Mammoth Book of The Beatles
The Mammoth Book of Time Travel Romance
The Mammoth Book of True War Stories
The Mammoth Book of Unsolved Crimes
The Mammoth Book of Vampire Romance
The Mammoth Book of Vampire Romance 2
The Mammoth Book of Vintage Whodunnits
The Mammoth Book of Wolf Men

ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE!

Created by Stephen Jones

With

Peter Atkins
Peter Crowther
Paul Finch
Christopher Fowler
Tim Lebbon
Paul McAuley
Kim Newman
John Llewellyn Probert
Mark Samuels
Pat Cadigan
Scott Edelman
Jo Fletcher
Robert Hood
Tanith Lee
Lisa Morton
Sarah Pinborough
Jay Russell
Mandy Slater
and Michael Marshall Smith





Constable & Robinson Ltd
3 The Lanchesters
162 Fulham Palace Road
London W6 9ER
www.constablerobinson.com

First published in the UK by Robinson,
an imprint of Constable & Robinson, 2010

Copyright © Stephen Jones 2010

The right of Stephen Jones to be identified as the
author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance
with the Copyright, Designs & Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. This book is sold subject to the condition
that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold,
hired out or otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover
other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition
including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

A copy of the British Library Cataloguing in Publication
Data is available from the British Library

UK ISBN 9781849013031

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

First published in the United States in 2010 by Running Press Book Publishers
All rights reserved under the Pan-American and International
Copyright Conventions

*This book may not be reproduced in whole or in part, in any form or by any means,
electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information
storage and retrieval system now known or hereafter invented, without written
permission from the publisher.*

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
Digit on the right indicates the number of this printing

US Library of Congress number: 2009943396
US ISBN 978-0-7624-4001-6

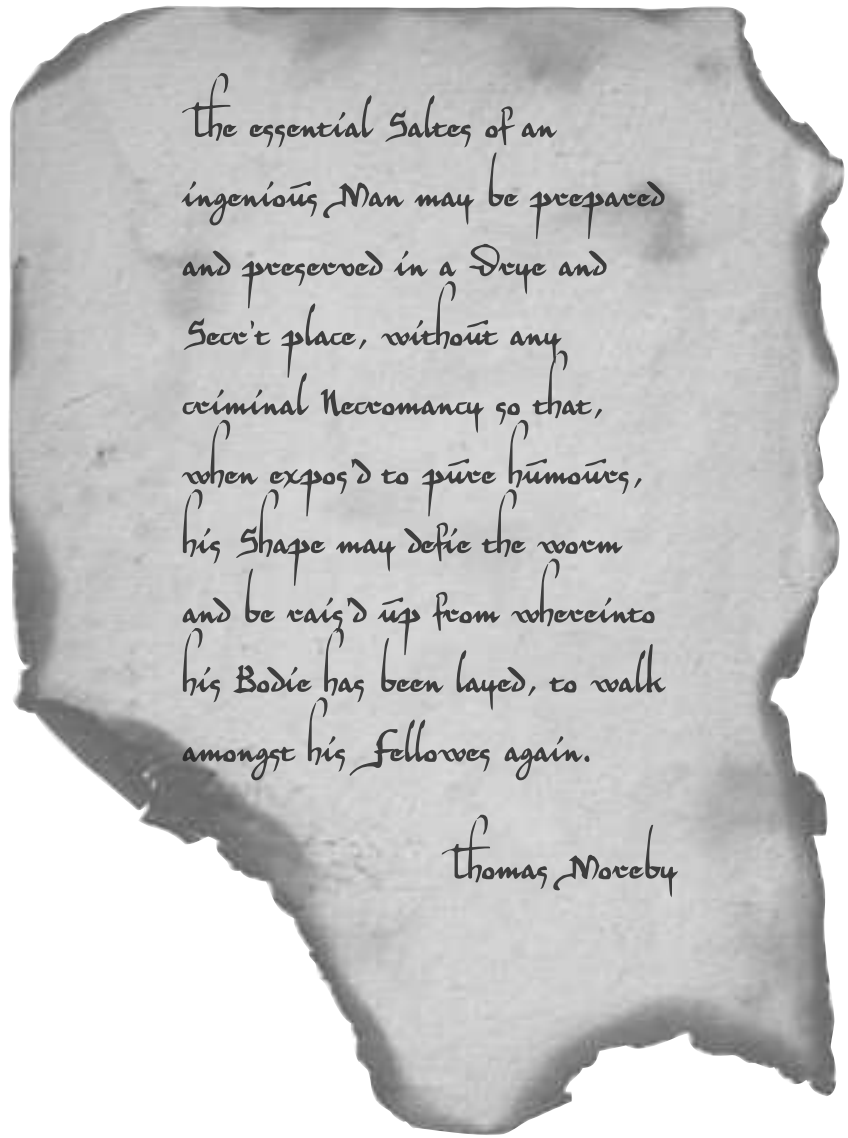
Running Press Book Publishers
2300 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103-4371

Visit us on the web!
www.runningpress.com

Printed and bound in the EU

Designed by Basement Press, Glaisdale
www.basementpress.com

This is a work of fiction. Any resemblances to actual companies, organizations
or people, either living or walking dead, is purely coincidental.





Hello Mum,

It feels strange to be e-mailing you, not least because I realise now that it's something I should have done far more often in the past. The phone's all very well but I always finish a call feeling I've got side-tracked and missed the chance to say anything in particular; and also that words, when they've been said aloud, have a way of falling apart and dissolving afterwards, becoming lost and left behind in ways that thoughts set down on paper never do.

Perhaps that's just the lawyer in me talking. Get it down, make it binding, make it *real* (and then bill by the hour, naturally). But I don't believe so. I think this is why we started to paint and write in the first place, why we treasure old letters and notes, why the idea of a person's signature still means something even now so much has become virtual and digital. We trust in the things we can reach out and touch. We try to make our ideas and emotions as concrete as things are in real life, to stop the past breaking apart like a flock of birds. Maybe that's what I'm actually missing, if I'm honest. When you and dad told us you'd decided to retire to Florida, Karen burst into tears but I was all, "Yes, what the hell, go where it's warm, play golf, drink margaritas, you've earned it . . ." — because I felt that's what

you *needed* to hear – and maybe I didn't think hard enough about what *I'd* be losing, looking back. Yes, we talked every week, of course, and I've been out to Sarasota many times, but it's not the same, is it? I'm old enough now to understand that the house near Dulwich was just one of several to you and dad, part of a progression, not the forge of life and crucible of childhood it was for me and Karen. However, I also now realise that we can Skype all we like but it's never going to be the same as turning up at that house, chucking my coat on a chair and strolling straight into the kitchen to find you already warming the pot – ready for us to pick up the same old conversations in the same old places, drinking tea from the same old mugs. Perhaps by the age of forty I should have moved beyond the need for those kind of physical comforts, but I haven't. Maybe no one ever does, and it's just that we all grow up and move and die and there comes a point where you can't do those things any more – and so you pretend it doesn't matter because no one wants to start every day in tears.

But . . . anyway. I'm writing to you now.

This whole New Festival farrago was supposed to honour the past, of course, as well as treasuring the present and looking forward to the future. That was the sell, the spin. But I remember dad explaining to me a long time ago (during the slog towards O-Level History, I assume) what the expression "bread and circuses" meant, and that's all the "New Festival of Britain" actually is, or has ever been: smoke and mirrors, a cynical attempt by the government to pretend the country wasn't sinking into the swamp; that the recession + the sodding coalition hadn't effectively bounced us back to the 1950s. I'm not even sure *who* they were trying to kid. The Americans? Europe? People on Mars? If you're living in the UK there's no way you can miss what's been happening – from the pushing through of the Police Special Powers Act to the subsequent deaths in Trafalgar Square. That is unless, of course, you're really, really stupid – which sadly, a lot of people are. The papers have been full of it since the day the New Festival was announced. Some days it's the only story in town (which, of course, was the point of it in the first place). Furrow-browed analysis of how much celebration there'll be of "our boys" in the armed forces, in newspapers pandering to middle-Englanders whose minds and horizons are too small to be seen by the naked eye. In-depth exposés in the "qualities", pontificating about who's taking back-handers and creaming profits off the top (politicians and building contractors, you'll not be surprised to hear), and whether sufficient attention will be paid to off-setting the bloody carbon debt . . . Posturing to their demographic, in other

words, while making no real difference to anything at all. And, of course, endless breathless speculation *everywhere* over which "celebs" might deign to take part – not to mention a special "reality talent show" to pick who sings the national anthem at the opening ceremony (for God's sake!).

Bread and circuses, smoke and mirrors. An endless "silly season". An attempt to generate enough white noise to mask the sound of the country crumbling to dust all around us. I once described it to Zoe as fiddling while England burned. It was funny then. I can see the skyline through my window as I type this letter. It's not funny now.

I was making a concerted effort to tune the whole bloody thing out until about three weeks ago, when Zoe came stomping into the kitchen one lunchtime ranting about something she'd just caught on Radio 4 – a breezy piece mentioning that pre-construction work was starting on one of the New Festival's South London sites – which basically boiled down to cheerfully destroying the grounds and graveyard of All Hallows Church. I suppose I must already have been missing you and dad more than I'd realised, because – even though I'd totally forgotten the church existed, if I'm honest – suddenly it all came back. I remembered how you used to bring us up to take us on walks across Greenwich Park on day trips to mooch around the Royal Observatory, and then north in a cab over the river, with lunch always in that Garfunkel's near Leicester Square and a toy from Hamleys if we were good (and on days like that, we generally were).

It all seems like a very long time ago now – but when I heard about the destruction of the graveyard it came crashing back, along with another memory (one which I'd revisited more recently, in fact): that of dad explaining to me about death one morning on one of these walks, standing looking through the railings at All Hallows, at the graveyard with its old and tilted stones. I think it was pretty soon after Nana had died. I'd always got on well with her, and so dad explained (as best you can, to an eight-year-old child) why I would never see Nana again except in my mind, and how sometimes that just had to be enough. He crouched down next to me to explain this and he was calm and measured and (I realise now) very, very strong, given we were talking about *his mother*, and she was only about two weeks dead. Even Karen seemed to absorb the ideas in a positive way, when (as you know) my darling sister had a tendency to stomp on the melodrama pedal even way back then. I recall glancing up to see you standing behind him, your hand gentle on his shoulder as he spoke.

And standing there in the kitchen with Zoe I remembered, too, what it had felt

like years later when I went away to college. Being away from home, finally having to lift my head from the meadows of childhood to take a look at the adult world with its long roads and dark alleys and mountains and broken bridges and rainbows and big skies. Alone for the first time in my life — with no one standing behind me, hand on my shoulder, letting me know I was looked after. And yet . . . I knew that you *were* still there, both of you, and that I need never look through any of life's fences alone.

Anyway. I found myself suddenly furious. I couldn't believe that the government and their familiars were allowed to just start digging up a churchyard — *our* churchyard, as I now thought of it — and I decided Zoe and I had to do something, and do it right away. That's something else I got from you and dad, I suppose, for better or worse — from the CND marches you hauled us on, the anti-apartheid protests, all that. The belief that everyone *can* do something about *everything*. Not anything big, perhaps — but *something*. A conviction that although it's easy to think the world has become too big and complex to affect, that it's been turned into an unstoppable train travelling too hard and fast through the night for any individual to stand a chance of making a difference . . . actually we still can.

So we got our coats on and went over there. We found nothing in the way of organised protest when we arrived: a few old codgers hanging about in a vaguely indignant way — the kind of people you'd *expect* to see protesting at the digging up of the grounds of an old, forgotten church in South London. (Sorry, no offence meant, I realise you probably reached "codger" status quite some years ago, technically, but you know the kind of oldsters I mean. The dusty kind.)

I got talking to a middle-aged academic type. Some kind of professor. She had a bee in her bonnet about something to do with the history of the All Hallows site, and got very excited when I let slip that I was a lawyer. She seemed to have more indignation at her disposal than actual evidence, however, and warning bells went off for me when she started banging on about plague pits and some disciple of Nicholas Hawksmoor (you remember, the 18th century architect, a pupil of Christopher Wren, all that). People have got it into their heads that Hawksmoor was one step away from a black magician (the Ackroyd novel is partly to blame, and the admittedly odd architectural style of Hawksmoor's churches, but it can't just be that) — and as soon as you hear someone conjure the guy's name then it's a fair chance you're dealing with a nutter, or at the very least someone who's put two-and-two together to make five. That's what I thought, anyway, and so I made my excuses and backed away, and she pretty

quickly understood I was going to be no help and shook her head and hurried off. Just before she turned the corner I saw her glance back, and in her face I thought I saw the look of someone who was on the verge of becoming very gently unhinged.

I was wrong. I realise now that it was *fear*. I think back and wish I'd read the woman's face better at the time, but sometimes, you just *get things wrong*. The past is not some idyll where everything was simpler and better and blessed with the soft sunlight of childhood afternoons – creatures with big, sharp teeth live back there, too. I had a brief affair a few years back, for example. (I know this is *way* too much information in a mother-son e-mail, but I'm putting it down anyway. There's no point skirting full disclosure now.) It didn't last long and I ended it myself, before I'd even had to admit to Zoe what was happening. Why? Because though the "now" of it was fun, I knew it would never stack up against all the yesterdays – and tomorrows – of the relationship I already had, and which I wanted to keep. For one night and a few afternoons I forgot myself, that's all. I forgot myself, got lost in time.

I *got something wrong*, is what it boiled down to, but on that occasion at least I had the chance to put it right. Zoe and I had our problems at the time (it happened soon after our fifth failed IVF, when the curtain came down on all that and neither of us were sure what the hell we were going to do with our lives); but "now" is not the only game in town, just like the "truth" is not always the thing that must be told. What's gone before is still here. The past hangs around us, inside us: like our clothes; like our lies; like our bones. The past is what holds you up to face the future, too, but when you find you can't have children – what do you do? Where's your road to what's coming up? How do you keep being part of *something*? You do it through trying to keep staying part of the flow, I suppose, though trying *not* to be one of those middle-aged buffoons who stop understanding anything or liking anything new; who step off the moving walkway of the now and retire to yesteryear, to carp and moan about all the things they don't understand now.

Anyway. Zoe and I hung around the church for a while, looking disapproving, but it didn't seem like much was actually *happening*, and there was no one to give a piece of our mind too, so in the end . . . Well, we left, and went and had a nice ploughman's lunch at a pub on the Thames. Not exactly a protest to be celebrated in legend and song, I'll admit, hardly the '68 Paris riots or Greenham Common II . . . but there didn't seem much else we could actually *do* – on that day, anyway. And it got us out of the house and having lunch

together, at least, which was nice. Remember the first time you met Zoe? I'm sure you do. That was a pub lunch too, up in Highgate. Dad took to her immediately, but I could tell from your body language when we left that you didn't quite approve, or weren't convinced . . . Yet. But you'd been that way with girlfriends before (admit it), and I was never sure whether it was a genuine take on the girl in question, or merely you being generically protective. You came round to Zoe pretty quickly in the end. How could you not?

Ten days passed. More crapulent newspaper coverage of the New Festival, and amidst the fluff and nonsense, I spotted a tiny piece about a patch of Hampstead Heath (which has been protected ground for centuries, bear in mind, the biggest patch of wild countryside in any city in the world) that had somehow been co-opted to the event and was about to have a huge, permanent statue of Winston Churchill built on it. I realised then that All Hallows was *not* a one-off, that the government truly was prepared to stomp all over London's history for their fifteen days of New Festival Fun, and it infuriated me to realise how people just don't understand the past any more. Attention spans have shrunk to nothing — but not just in the obvious way, the kind of thing dad and I have happily moaned about since I became old enough to realise the Younger Generation isn't just a phrase but a fact. I don't mean all the usual guff about MTV and video games and information being cut up into tiny chunks for tiny minds. I've watched the children of our friends playing video games, for hours upon end, and I know they *can* focus on something when they choose to. It's more that history, *time itself*, has become truncated, advert-breaked, atomised. People simply can't understand the continuum of experience any more. Anything before the 1950s is black and white and I-don't-know and I-don't-care, unless it has to do with Hitler or the Pharaohs. So why would they care about some old church, and the bodies buried there? Or get worked up about some patch of countryside that people just, like, walk around? Dead, dusty words blown away in the wind. People don't honour the past because they don't understand how *real* it was, how *written down in acts*, that it was as genuine and rich and dangerous as today. That the people in that shadowy dream we call the past ate and drank as we do, that they slept with each other and loved and murdered and lied, and that they did other things whose echo still sounds, hundreds of years after they've died.

And that made me angry, and galvanised us both. The funny thing is that maybe, if we *had* been able to have kids, we wouldn't have gone back that last time. Maybe little Ethan or Madeline (the names we'd chosen, but didn't get to

use) would have needed picking up from school or driving to some after-class activity and we wouldn't have been there when they started digging up the bodies. Wouldn't have seen the shards of ancient coffins, or the skeletal shapes in tatters of shrouds yanked unceremoniously from the ground.

The second time Zoe and I went to All Hallows it was early in the morning, although this time there were a lot more people. It was obvious straight away that half of them were recreational protestors — people who'd seen something on the news and thought it would be fun to shout and throw things: the kind who turn up at G18 summits and rant and rave about naughty capitalism before returning to their homes to enjoy the benefits of Western industrialisation and a globalised economy. There were those *other* people, too, the ones who can't seem to care deeply enough about anything in their own, real, lives, and so instead latch onto the flavour-of-the-month issue, or Lady Di, or Big Brother. The culturally lobotomised.

But there was also a third group — people like us, people with banners and placards, who were seriously unhappy about what was happening and what it represented. Unhappy . . . And maybe even disturbed. There were also a lot more police and army, forming a defensive cordon around the excavations. Many of them were armed, despite looking little more than teenagers. I noticed they appeared nervous, as if something had already happened that had them spooked.

The contractors had erected wooden fencing around the site by then, of course, but some bright spark had managed to jam a tiny webcam through a knot-hole and was feeding live video to anyone with an iPhone. We saw the cloud of what we assumed was red dust, floating up from the dry ground and up over the top of the fencing. We saw the bodies taken away towards the under-crypt of the church. We saw a declaration, in effect, that history only flows in one direction, and that the living were allowed to do whatever they liked to the remains of the dead.

The bizarre thing was that there was *cheering* while this was happening, while somebody's great-great-great-great-great grandmother was yanked out of the ground like ancient landfill, or the remains of someone else's forgotten pet. On both previous visits, amongst those vaguely protesting, we'd seen these cheerleaders for the New Festival. The kind of people who go to Wimbledon to bellow the name of whatever no-hoper currently represents the feeble best that Britain can do. The ones who string up St George flags whenever England is about to go down the pan in some international

football competition. The ones who reduce the idea of being English to some jingoistic farce. They were there that afternoon, and they cheered, not knowing they were hooting and laughing in the face of the end of the world. There's probably a metaphor for something or other to be found in this, but I don't think I have the energy to look for it.

Or the time, either. We've had no power here for nearly two days, and only 8% of the laptop's battery is left now. There's probably not much else to say, really, or at least little that I can face re-living. More mistakes to list, that's all. Like thinking that the government would do more than posture and prevaricate and debate, until it was too late. Like thinking that the man who attacked Zoe and I, when the trouble kicked off at All Hallows, was just a drunk. That thinking that all the love in the world was somehow enough to stop what happened next, or that the sentences of civilisation possessed a glue that would stop the world falling apart quite so quickly.

There's all that and more, but it's all compacting down to a black moment in my head and I find it increasingly hard to distinguish individual words. I've lost track of time too. Perhaps everyone does, towards the end. I've wasted all my time in remembrance and haven't got much said. Maybe a phone call would actually have been better this time, impossible though it would have been. I was on the phone to Karen when she died. I'm pretty sure she'd had a drink. A lot of people have had a drink now when you talk to them – often a great many drinks. I myself haven't been entirely sober in over a week. It doesn't help, but we do it anyway. Karen and I had been talking for over an hour, gathering up our memories like fallen leaves, before the wind blew them away, and then I heard them breaking in through her front door. I heard her shouting and screaming – say what you like about Karen (and you'll be happy to hear that she and I got on much better over the last two years), she gave as good as she got, always.

But in the end I heard her voice break. I heard it stop. I put the phone down before I could hear what happened afterwards. I've heard enough of these things now.

There comes a time when you have to put the phone down forever, and love means hard decisions. Love means remembering everything that has occurred between people, respecting it and honouring it as best you can – and in whatever way makes sense. Like when you gave the nod to dad's morphine being ramped up at the very end. I remember shambling out of that hospital into a numbingly humid Florida night, after he'd finally died,

and standing alone in the parking lot listening to cicadas and having *absolutely no doubt* about the rightness of what you'd done (and I had tacitly enabled) — nor about the unspoken decision that it was something Karen need never know about. I stood in a wide-eyed kind of peace, remembering the man who now lay dead in a bed four floors above me, back when he had crouched down with me to look through railings into a graveyard and told me that though Grandma was dead, I would always be able to see her in my mind.

When I close my eyes now, I can still see dad. The odd thing is that I suspect a lot of your friends looked at the pair of you, and saw dad's straight back and bullet-proof bearing and assumed all the strength in the partnership came from him, that you were just the (charming, and attractive) hostess and mother and cook. But people don't know anything, do they? People get things wrong. People probably had similar thoughts about me and Zoe, too, over the years. They'd be just as wrong there — though lately, in the last few weeks, I have stepped up to the plate. I was the one who said we should build a barricade at the end of the street last weekend, and talked our neighbours into helping. Okay, it hasn't held, but it gave us a couple of extra days. It was me who boarded up our house, too. You do what you can do, and then in the end you have to have the strength to admit it failed, and that time has run out.

On which note, Zoe sends her love. She hasn't explicitly said as much, but I know she does, or at least would have done if the opportunity had arisen. So I'm making that decision for her, doing it on her behalf. That feels odd, too (far more bizarre than sitting here writing an e-mail to you, though you've been dead for two years, and are, I truly hope, lying flat and decayed beyond desecration in Florida soil). You know what Zoe's like. She's very like you, in fact — a woman who makes up her own mind. That mind is no longer there, though, at least not as it was. As Karen and I used to say when we were children, the "lights are on but there's nobody home".

And actually, from the glimpse I got before I managed to trap Zoe in the basement yesterday, there's no light left either in those blue eyes now.

I don't think you ever actually made it down into our basement. Dad had a quick peek just after we moved into the house, but there's not a lot to see. Just two rooms, bare; the back one separated from the front one by a door which can be locked — and which is also, thankfully, very thick. I won't falter. I know there's nothing left for me outside the house, and that the remnant of the only

thing I *do* care about is trapped stumbling and lurching in the dark beneath the house. She doesn't breathe — I've tried listening through the door — but she moves. Slowly, irrevocably, like the things outside in the street. The things that pull at the planks I nailed up, the things that bang their faces against them until heads break apart and another thing comes up from behind to take their place.

When the computer screen finally goes blank, I'll stand up and set fire to a few bits and pieces on this level of the house (it's going to have to be books, I think, which I know would scandalise dad, but the bloody EEC made just about everything else fire-retardant).

Then I'm going down to the basement to sit and listen to Zoe and be as close to her as I can, until we both burn.

It's the best plan I can come up with, and I know you'd do the same, or something like it. You always believed the best of people, of our species. You marked the good times and made them special, and were fierce and resolute against the bad — the periods when unreason and violence and mindlessness won their temporary (you hoped) victories. You made the world better for those you loved, and I'm glad you aren't here to see what it's becoming, now that unreason and death has become timeless and permanent, now all that is wrong and dark is rising swiftly to the surface. In about half-an-hour, I won't be here to see it either.

I'm glad, too, that you're both buried on the other side of an ocean, so there is no chance we'll ever meet; shambling down the same street with no light in our eyes.

We will never see each other again, but that's okay. I'll always have you in my mind.

I lo

-

{
DOCUMENT ENDS:
FILE RETRIEVED FROM HARD DRIVE OF FIRE-DAMAGED LAPTOP [ref # **46887**];
LOCATION WITHHELD IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 19 OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY ACT;
RECORD ENDS:
}

British Media Corporation
Internal Communications

From: Internal Communications
Sent: 29 April, 08:52 AM
To: All London Staff
Subject: Traffic Congestion on Blackheath Road

This email is going to all staff

London staff are advised this week to avoid travel in and around the New Festival South London site, due to possible protests in the area. Congestion is expected to be especially severe around All Hallows Church and Blackheath Road.

Check the BMC's Emergency Information channels for further updates:

Phone: 0800 0666 999

Online: bmc.co.uk/999

Gateway: 999 Emergency Information

Ceefax: page 999

Internal Communications

To: William Barnsley, Cartographic Institute, Madrid
cc Dr Daniel Thompson, Dept Head, University College Hospital, London
From: Prof Margaret Winn, UCH London
Subject: All Hallows Church

Dear William,

The department is insisting I use e-mail now, citing the fact that it's faster and conveys more urgency, which is fortunate as I have something rather urgent to discuss with you.

Sorry you couldn't make it over to the conference at St Alpheges. Just as well though, as all the usual imbeciles were there, blocking any progress that might be made. The members of the Catholic Council were barking up the wrong tree as usual, exercising themselves about birth control and women priests when they should have been commenting on the problem at hand, and the CoE synod weren't much better, wittering on about gay clergy, so little was achieved. Put a bunch of priests in a room together and they'll start planning the music programme for the orchestra to play as the *Titanic* goes down. The fact that church attendances have all but disappeared in these troubled times seems to have completely escaped them. Don't get me started on that. I caught the PM's speech last night about how we must all pull together to overcome our economic adversities, and how Britain can teach the rest of the world how to survive this latest recession. He was speaking from a fact-finding trip to Texas. The GBP is now worth less than the Rand and he's hobnobbing with oil barons.

I attended the one-day event because I wanted to raise a question about All Hallows Church, but there was no time left at the end of the meeting to even touch upon the subject. Do you know the building? It's a rather unlovely early Victorian pile in stained and moss-covered Portland stone, with flying buttresses and a collapsing spire, on Blackheath Hill at the edge of Greenwich Park.

I went there last month because there's an odd story about the diocese that keeps surfacing (in my world, at least; you know how much time I spend researching for the London Archaeological Society at the British Library). The architect Nicholas Hawksmoor had a raft of apprentices who took his more controversial views rather too much at face value. It's known that one apprentice, Thomas Moreby, worked on All Hallows, and while it's certain that he oversaw the construction of the crypt and undercroft, nobody knows how much of the above-ground part of the building he finished. It's a bit pointless to wonder now, because the upper section was completely rebuilt around 1850.

Anyway, as I arrived, I noticed a row of bright yellow JCBs lined up in the car park. There were also about a dozen protesters (mostly senior citizens) in rain-hoods hanging about looking cold and bored. One of them had a sign that read KEEP THE COUNTRYSIDE GREEN, like we were in the New Forest or something. Blackheath is the suburbs, for Heaven's sake. I know they mean well, but I think they enjoy being victims.

So I pulled over, hopped out and took a look, and sure enough they'd started to excavate the grounds immediately behind the church. Apparently, the idea is that the New Festival of Britain site is to have a tram-link to the refurbished Virgin Dome, which I suppose is one reason for the site's selection. Which brings me to the urgency of this note; you're a cartographer and know about these things better than I, but isn't there a long-standing government order not to dig up the east side of the park? Can they simply override it without consultation?

I'd appreciate it if you could get back to me as quickly as possible. I came past the site again yesterday and it looks as if they've already started digging.

Best as ever,
Prof. Margaret Winn

To: William Barnsley, Cartographic Institute, Madrid
Cc: Dr Daniel Thompson, Dept Head UCH London
From: Prof Margaret Winn, UCH London
Subject: All Hallows Church

Dear William,

Thanks for your prompt reply. That's what I thought. But I've checked, and no such consultation has taken place. On Saturday I visited the Museum of London and met with your old colleague Diane Fermier, who by the way sends her regards. Down in that dimly lit basement we pulled out the original mapping grid of the Blackheath area. The 17th century boundary lines surrounding the park and church are surprisingly unchanged from those of the present day. It seems pretty obvious to me that no one has bothered to check up on this, a fact I find simply amazing.

Actually, the area between the park and the heathland has been disturbed on at least three occasions. Most recently, the largest ditches along Ladysmith Crescent were filled with rubble from houses and factories bombed during the Blitz in 1940. Before that, George III ordered a number of grand houses to be pulled down, and their remains were buried on the site in 1803 (this was at a time when the king was suffering from one of his lapses into madness – I imagine he thought the property belonged to raving Papists). Before that we find an estimated figure of almost 11,000 people buried on the site in the months directly preceding the Great Fire of London.

Now, although parish records do not extend to recording the deaths of London's poorest citizens, I'm pretty sure these were the earliest victims of the Bubonic Plague that swept the city in the year preceding the fire. Of the 100,000 who died, it would seem that over 10% of the total were placed here on one site because the soft clay soil was easily removable. According to Diane, some of the rich were buried in lead coffins, but all the

rest were placed in winding cloths or sacks, and here is my point – if they were then put in wet clay, surely this would act as a preservative?

I checked with an opposite number in Brussels, because – as you know – the Belgian government has been heavily involved in the disinterment of animal remains from peat bogs on the borders of Northern France, and they have found that not only is skin and hair remarkably well-preserved, but in many cases DNA sampling has shown that diseases we thought long-eradicated remained in stasis within animal carcasses.

If this is the case, what happens when the diggers reach London's dead? The sites in the centre of the old city have never been disturbed on this kind of scale. Do you know any epidemiologists who could offer advice about this? Clearly the government doesn't care to delve this deeply into the subject, but I think someone should make sure that there's no risk of contagion.

Best as ever,
Prof. Margaret Winn

To: William Barnsley, Cartographic Institute, Madrid
Cc: Dr Daniel Thompson, Dept Head, UCH London
From: Prof Margaret Winn, UCH London
Subject: All Hallows Church

Dear William,

I was surprised by your email yesterday. Can you really be so sure? I appreciate the point that centuries of low-core temperature should have killed off the hardiest microbes, but no one has ever tested a single site of this magnitude before. Now it emerges that the dig is to extend over forty metres down in order to incorporate several lift shafts and a large underground car park. This means disturbing a vast quantity of bodies.

I spoke with the site foreman, and he told me that he has been instructed to shift any "debris" he finds into separate containers so that an archaeological expert can sift through it, but he has not been told about the potential health risk posed by any finds, and has not been asked to quarantine any human remains. Indeed, he seems to have no knowledge about the history of the site.

If you really feel this is an overreaction on my part, then I shall leave you to your work and seek advice elsewhere.

Prof. Margaret Winn

To: Professor Margaret Winn, UCH London
From: Dr Marcus Hemming, Wellcome Institute

Dear Prof. Winn,

Thank you for your inquiry about the current excavation of the site at Blackheath designated for the New Festival of Britain. I had read about this in the press, but was surprised to hear that the land was formerly used as a plague pit. I must say I'm rather skeptical about this, as the distribution of the victims has been outlined in a number of historical records starting as early as 1667, and no one has ever singled out this site in particular. It seems especially unlikely as we know the pathogenic route of the plague, from which this area is far removed.

Are you sure about your facts?

To: Dr Marcus Hemming, Wellcome Institute
From: Professor Margaret Winn, UCH London

Dear Dr Marcus,

Let me set out my case. I hope you'll be able to understand my concerns after reading this.

In 2004, the London Metropolitan Archive in Clerkenwell received a set of large hand-drawn maps from the estate of one Oliver Whitby or Whichby (the spelling differs in different texts), who was the former Justice of the Rolls at Lincoln's Inn Fields. These items were found when the deceased's possessions were unparcelled from a lot sold but never examined by his great-grandfather. One of the problems faced by the LMA is the microfiching of material prior to disintegration, and as the maps were not deemed of sufficient public importance to receive preferential treatment they have sat in the basement of the LMA awaiting scans since their arrival.

In my researches, I met a young woman in charge of scanning these documents, and when she showed me the maps pertaining to the S.E. London area in question, extending across Blackheath to the edge of the church and Greenwich Park, I made copies because I knew I had seen their outline somewhere before, but could not remember where.

I'm sure you know that the architect Nicholas Hawksmoor built six complex churches to his personal design, the nearest to the excavation site being St Alfege's Church at Greenwich. While attending a seminar in that building recently, I was shown a layout dating from the period immediately following the Great Plague, which bore exactly the same borders.

Now, this is where it gets interesting; the Whitby family built and maintained a number of private burial sites around London. The first was constructed in 1642 at Blackheath, and the LMA's maps show a shaded section of the

heath which, according to a coda found in Oliver Whitby's notes, had been set aside for the burial of plague victims.

So far as I know, this is the only evidence that has ever been uncovered pertaining to the burial of victims in this area, although it has long been theorised that the area derived its name from its use as plague pit in the 14th century. If it can be proven that these documents are real and not forgeries – and why would they be? – I think I have a case to stop the excavations before any real damage can be caused. What I need from you is some kind of testimonial which acknowledges the possibility that plague bacilli might be able to survive at low temperatures for long periods of time. Would that be possible?

I must point out that as the excavations are now well under way, time is of the utmost essence.

Yours,
Prof. Margaret Winn, UCH London

To: Professor Margaret Winn,
From: Dr. Marcus Hemming, Wellcome Institute

Dear Prof. Winn,

This is very worrying news. I can't provide absolute proof of what you want, but I can at least tell you what I know. To begin with, nobody has actually identified the Great Plague as definitely stemming from the Bubonic bacillus. This was always assumed to be the case because the disease was thought to have originated in the Netherlands, from Dutch trading ships carrying infected bales of cotton. Bubonic plague is so-called because it causes swelling of the lymph ducts into "buboes".

The first areas affected in London were down by the docks. It was assumed that the plague was carried in miasma – poisoned air – and most London dignitaries beat a hasty retreat to the countryside, leaving their subjects to fend for themselves. The Lord Mayor, Sir John Lawrence, remained, but carried out his duties inside a specially constructed glass box. We now know that the disease was spread not by air but by blood.

The dead were buried beyond the city walls, one of the largest plague pits being situated in the so-called "Dead Ground" at the Priory Hospital of the Blessed Virgin Mary Without Bishopsgate, known as "St Mary Spital". Burial here stopped when it was discovered that the plague bodies were being placed on corpses from earlier graves, and there was a fear that this denseness of humanity under the

ground might cause a return of the contagion. It was a long-held belief that sheer weight of numbers could somehow cause diseases to multiply even among the dead. If the site at Blackheath had previously been used to bury the sick, it could well have been exposed and used again for plague victims – but why carry corpses across the river for burial?

The number of deaths in South London was quite small, so if, as you say, a sizeable percentage of the dead ended up at Blackheath, a proportion must have been moved from the North side of the Thames. Bodies were only shifted after dark – it was commonly said "Grief by day, death by night" – and the journey would have required a great number of carts. But if the sites at St Mary, Charterhouse and St Botolph were full, the City officials may well have hired private contractors to rid themselves of the diseased under cover of darkness. I must say it has always struck me as odd that so many bodies could be placed in just three main sites, and I have wondered before whether alternative arrangements were made for their disposal without public knowledge.

I don't suppose the nature of the site at Blackheath was pointed on any maps of the time. The area grew extremely wealthy during the time of the slave trade, and it would have made the building of local property undesirable.

If this was indeed the case, and this Mr Whitby hired men to transport the dead to his pits, I start to share your concern, because the water table at Blackheath is surprisingly high given its elevation, and the preservation of the bodies requires two main factors, dampness and pressure (to create a vacuum). With both of these requirements being met, it starts to seem foolhardy to simply break open deep ground without expert advice.

There is something else that I am more loathe to mention, simply because it seems so damned peculiar. Two centuries after the Great Fire eradicated the plague (actually the plague burned itself out by killing off everyone in London with weak immunity – the fire merely acted as a cleanser) the Victorians hired a team of Romanian boys to dig up the bodies at Charterhouse. They chose Romanians because this race was thought to be naturally immune to plague; their nation had no history of coming into contact with the pandemic. When the pit was opened and examined, Queen Victoria's royal physician was summoned and he ordered the immediate resealing of the enclosure, but no official reason was ever provided for this act.

I've always wondered if he saw something there that disturbed him, something he could not make known to the general public.

I'm not in a position to make any further investigation into this subject, as you know. But I think you should continue to be concerned – for all our sakes. Do let me know how you get on.

Best,
Marcus