

Spirit? Ghost? Poltergeist?

Gef the Talking Mongoose Baffles Researchers

By Sean Casteel, SpectralVision.wordpress.com

If there were such a thing as a top 10 list of unexplainable phenomena throughout history, Gef would rank right at the top. Fortean researchers, parapsychologists, and skeptics alike would have to admit that they have never encountered such a bizarre but apparently well-documented case that is so completely devoid of hysteria in the timeless annals of the unexplained.

If Gef the talking mongoose is what it is claimed he is, he should certainly turn the heads of the scientific community, who at first glance would probably consider this to be a case of mass hysteria.

There is — as we shall see — every reason to recognize this talking animal as the Eighth Wonder of the World, a title for which he is wholly deserving, for it is said that Gef, an otherwise unassuming small rodent, could:

- Sing songs.
- Mimic the sounds of other animals.
- Read minds.
- Move objects through the air although he was nowhere near them.
- Chat with visitors from around the world, sometimes using vulgar language.
- Hide himself from curious eyes and become invisible whenever he wanted to.

Whatever the powers that lurk behind the curtain of paranormal mystery truly are, they usually manifest in dark and frightening ways. They are not shy or apologetic about inducing extreme levels of terror in the hapless percipients who encounter them. But in the case of Gef, the Talking Mongoose, it seems as though the spirits are

having a bit of childlike fun, indulging in a whimsical playfulness where no one is really injured or frightened — just perplexed and made curious by a creature who crossed over from the other side and took up residence in the home of a farming family living on the Isle of Man, located in the Irish Sea between Great Britain and Ireland.

Publisher Timothy Green Beckley has done his readers a favor by resurrecting an out-of-print book about Gef that is extremely rare. The book is called *The Haunting of Cashen's Gap: A Modern Miracle* by Harry Price and R.S. Lambert. It was first published in 1936. Beckley is now providing not only the original text, but the updated research of present-day writers like Tim R. Swartz and Hercules Invictus.

“James Irving and his family found themselves in the crosshairs of a series of increasingly strange events,” Swartz writes, “that would dominate their lives for years to



The Irving household, including J.T. Irving, Margaret Irving, Viorrey Irving, and Mona the sheepdog.



come. James 'Jim' Irving, an educated man, had previously been a traveling piano salesman, and although the farm was his retirement project, it was proving insufficient to support his wife, Margaret, and their young daughter, Voirrey. The farm was called Doarlish Cashen — Manx Gaelic for 'Cashen's Gap.' There were no neighbors nearby nor was there a telephone or electricity."

Beckley's updated reprint is called, simply enough, *Gef the Talking Mongoose*, and it opens with a chapter by longtime paranormal researcher Tim R. Swartz, who provides an excellent overview of the Gef saga and equips the reader with the basic facts as a precursor to the more detailed treatment by Price and Lambert.

Gef Introduces Himself

Gef made his first appearance on September 13, 1931.

"According to Jim Irving,"

Swartz writes, "he first saw a small, weasel-like animal in his farmyard that could bark like a dog and meow like a cat. Even more amazing, when Irving made other barnyard animal noises, the little animal would repeat the sounds back immediately. It wasn't long before the Irvings became aware that this creature had found its way into their home, announcing its presence with random scratches, rustling, and general activity between the walls and the matchwood paneling."

Thinking the sounds were caused by rats or other pests, the family set traps but caught nothing. Jim made a last-ditch attempt by growling like a dog at the invasive

vermin, only to hear something growl right back. He then realized it was the animal he'd seen outside.

"Whatever it was," Swartz recounted, "it proved to be a talented mimic. It would repeat Irving's imitations of various animals and birds, and soon he had only to name an animal and it would promptly respond with the appropriate sounds. At other times, it made a gurgling sound like a baby that soon changed into actual words."

Voirrey, the family's young child, was fascinated by the new guest and would ask the creature to repeat nursery rhymes, which it would do in a clear, high-pitched voice. The family called the interloper "Jack," but he soon

told his hosts he preferred to be known as "Gef," spelled G-E-F. He claimed to have been born in Delhi, India, in 1852, and he was brought to the island 20 years earlier when a farmer had imported mongooses to the area

hoping to curb the local rabbit population. Gef said he had always understood human speech, but he learned to speak himself more recently, having been taught by Jim.

As rumors of the strange creature spread throughout the Isle of Man, it was often claimed that Voirrey was fooling everyone by "throwing her voice," an explanation that Swartz skillfully debunks.

"This is not to say that Voirrey didn't at times imitate Gef's voice," Swartz admits. "In practically every poltergeist case that centers on children, there are instances where the child is seen to throw something or bang on a wall if they think they are not being observed. Voirrey was

Gef claimed to have been born in Delhi, India, and that he had always understood human speech.



Voirrey and James Irving stand on the front porch of Cashen's Gap.

probably guilty of this when Gef would become stubborn and refuse to make an appearance. But it is unlikely that Voirrey could have managed to keep such a long, drawn-out hoax going for as long as the phenomenon lasted.”

Investigators speculated from the beginning that Gef was a haunting of some kind — possibly a poltergeist.

“Gef could produce knocks and raps all over the house practically simultaneously,” Swartz writes. “He was also fond of throwing things at the Irvings and their guests from cracks in the paneling. As well, Gef claimed to be able to travel all over the island and repeat various conversations that he had overheard. He also had a rich vocabulary of swear words and loved to sing songs that were unknown to his hosts. These antics are very similar to poltergeist pranks, and even Jim Irving thought at times that Gef was more than just an ‘extra-clever mongoose.’”

The case attracted attention from the media. News of the mystery first reached London in October 1931, when an item concerning a “man-weasel” appeared in the press. A newspaper called the *Daily Sketch* published a photo of the Irving cottage with the caption “The Talking Weasel Farm,” and the *Daily Mail* and other journals briefly reported strange events at Doarlish Cashen. The Northern newspapers took a larger and more sustained interest in the affair because the talking animal was a near neighbor

and naturally paid more attention than the London newspapers.

Early in 1932, the *Manchester Daily Dispatch* sent a reporter to the Irving farm in order to investigate the mystery at its actual location. He was fortunate enough to hear Gef speak.

“The mysterious ‘man-weasel’ of Doarlish Cashen has spoken to me today,” the journalist wrote. “Investigation of the most remarkable animal story that has ever been given publicly — a story which is finding credence all over the island — leaves me in a state of considerable perplexity. Had I heard a weasel speak? I do not know, but I do know that I have heard today a voice which I should never have imagined could issue from a human throat; that the people who claim it was the voice of the strange weasel seem sane, honest, and responsible folk and not likely to indulge in a difficult, long, drawn-out, and unprofitable practical joke to make themselves the talk of the world; and that others had had the same experience as myself.”

Jim Irving told the reporter the story of how the animal had taken up residence in the family home but denied that the place was haunted.

“There are no spooks here,” Irving declared.

Who or What Was Gef?

The publicity in various media outlets quickly piqued the curiosity of psychic investigators Harry Price and R.S. Lambert, who would team up to write the aforementioned paranormal classic *The Haunting of Cashen's Gap* based largely on their own on-site investigation of the Irvings and their mysterious houseguest.

In their introduction, the pair writes: “The following pages are an essay in the Veracious but Unaccountable. Whether looked at from the point of view of psychology, of psychical research, of anthropology, or of sociology, this true story of Gef is very odd. We have been moved to set it down in as full a form as possible in order that everyone interested — including, we hope, posterity — may be in a position to form their own judgment about it.

“To believers,” they continue, “it will represent proof of a miracle; to skeptics a lesson in the laws of evidence. Some will call it nonsense from first to last; others will admit it to be at least as good as most ghost stories.

Throughout we have sought to avoid mere credulity on the one hand and prejudiced skepticism on the other. There may be readers who will be disappointed that we have at the end no cut-and-dried solution of the mystery to offer, but this only suggests that the facts, as we have honestly tried to set them forth, are susceptible of various explanations.”

The authors comment that although the farm yields little or no produce and that most people would find their lifestyle nearly intolerable, the Irvings are still a “united, cheerful, and healthy trio of normally intelligent persons. Nevertheless, into their lives has entered a mystery, perhaps one of the most curious and unaccountable mysteries of our times. Their solitary farm has become the scene of what is alleged to be a supernatural visitation — such a visitation as was common enough 300 years ago, when the reality of witches and their familiars was acknowledged and feared.”

And what does Gef call himself? He cannot be relied on, the two investigators write, to tell his hosts exactly what he is. At various times he has called himself a mon-goose and an “earthbound spirit.” This last description, they write, is a “purely spiritualistic term,” adding that Gef is thought to be afraid of dying, so he cannot be assumed to have made the transition to the world of the dead.

The Irving’s did not see Gef as a frightening creature but more like the family’s pet, one who could feast on biscuits, chocolate, and bananas and helped them keep the stoves lit. But to others he was considered a “monstrosity,” a freak of nature, an abomination to God.

Gef himself seemed confused about his identity. He once said he was from another dimension, that he was a spirit, but took that back by intimating, “If I were a spirit, how could I kill rabbits?” When quizzed on why he was so reclusive, Gef said he was not a pleasant sight to behold. That some might be frightened and see him as a “real freak.”

Gef suddenly took to singing and speaking in strange tongues. The authors were told that “the voice is extremely high-pitched, above the human range, with a clear, sweet tone.” He began to sing more and more: songs, hymns, and ballads. Some of these the Irvings knew; some were new to them. His singing became almost a nuisance.



Jim Irving using a pair of knives to show the depth of a crack in the match-board paneling from where Gef threw a packing needle at Capt. McDonald.

One Big Happy Family?

Though the Gef phenomenon seemed at times to center around Voirrey, she told the authors that she had no great love for him. However, she saw more of the animal than anyone else and was the only one to see all of him. Her parents frequently pleaded for him to show himself fully but were always refused. They sometimes saw a portion of him sitting on a beam or glimpsed something flashing past a gap in the hedge, but that is all. When they asked him to come out in the open, Gef answered them by saying, “I am a freak. I have hands, and I have feet, and if you saw me you’d faint. You’d be petrified, mummified, turned into stone or a pillar of salt!”

That last remark about a pillar of salt led the researchers to speculate that Gef must have attended Sunday school somewhere. Gef also found enough amusement in his living situation to make the Irvings familiar with the sound of his laughter.

“If laughter indicates happiness,” the two researchers reasoned, “then Gef must be supremely contented in the bosom of the Irving family. He laughs all day. He possesses an extensive repertoire of laughs. To quote Jim’s



Jim Irving pointing at what could be Gef's fingers protruding along the edge of one of his hiding spots.

description, 'Sometimes it resembles the tittering laugh of a precocious or mischievous child; at other times I would say it was the chuckling laugh of an aged person, and another distinct type is one which I would say was satanic laughter, or the laughter of a maniac.

"We all have a most intense dislike to this last laughter, as it is very trying. But, fortunately, we do not get this kind very often."

Trying to Express the Ultimate Truth

Price and Lambert can only offer three possibilities as to ultimate reality of Gef. First, Gef exists and haunts Doarlish Cashen, substantially as the Irvings say he does. Two, that Gef is a product of hallucination and fantasy. Or three, that Gef is a product of conscious deception. Acceptance of the first conclusion rules out the other two, but the second and third conclusion are not exclu-

sive of each other and may be entertained together or separately.

In assessing the reality of Gef, the authors are unwilling to sweep away the many trustworthy outside witnesses who heard Gef and were certain of his independent existence. They take very seriously the findings of people who also visited the farm, such as spiritualists, teachers, hikers, relations, and neighbors and are unwilling to discount their statements.

Given the reality of Gef, the authors speculated that had he been rather more docile and agreeable in his behavior, less elusive in his manifestations, and more pleasing in his personality, he might have become in time the center of a sort of cult.

In spite of his deficiencies, he gained a circle of admirers eager to hear his latest doings, ready to pay periodic visits to his shrine and to bring small gifts to win his good will.

"It is the stuff of which oracles are made," Price and Lambert write, "and the foundation on which temples are built. Gef rejects spiritistic interpretations of himself and yet will not or cannot reveal his own identity. He has no message to give out, no real miracles to work.

"It is certain that 'doubters' will abound and that the faithful themselves will be able to do little more than acclaim Gef, with all his wit, malice and tomfoolery, as **A VOICE AND NOTHING MORE.**"

But what a fascinating voice! Whether it came from a "clever" mongoose or a poltergeist in animal form, reading *Gef the Talking Mongoose* will more than satisfy occultists and students of the supernatural like few other works available today.

Oh, and by the way, there is even an account in the book of a talking stove — yes, I said talking stove — that goes well beyond the boundaries of Gef's abilities as an animal to speak. The universe gets stranger all the time. Where are John Keel and Charles Fort when you need them the most?

Suggested Reading

- *Gef the Talking Mongoose — The Eighth Wonder of the World*
- *Weird Winged Wonders: The Twilight World of Cryptid Creatures*
- *America's Strange and Supernatural History*
- YouTube Channel (400-plus interviews posted): **"Mr. UFOs Secret Files"**
- Sign up for Facebook group [Gef The Talking Mongoose](#) ♦