



SPOOKY
LONDON



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Highgate's ghostly chicken

Not many people know that one of the pioneers of refrigeration was Sir Francis Bacon (the Elizabethan philosopher, not the painter). In 1626 in Highgate, he made the fateful decision to purchase a chicken, wring its neck, stuff it with snow and demonstrate how the science of preservation worked. But he caught a chill during the experiment and died shortly afterwards in nearby Arundel House. Various eyewitness accounts since then have reported a ghostly chicken, flapping and squawking around Pond Square, terrorising the locals.

Exorcism on the Underground

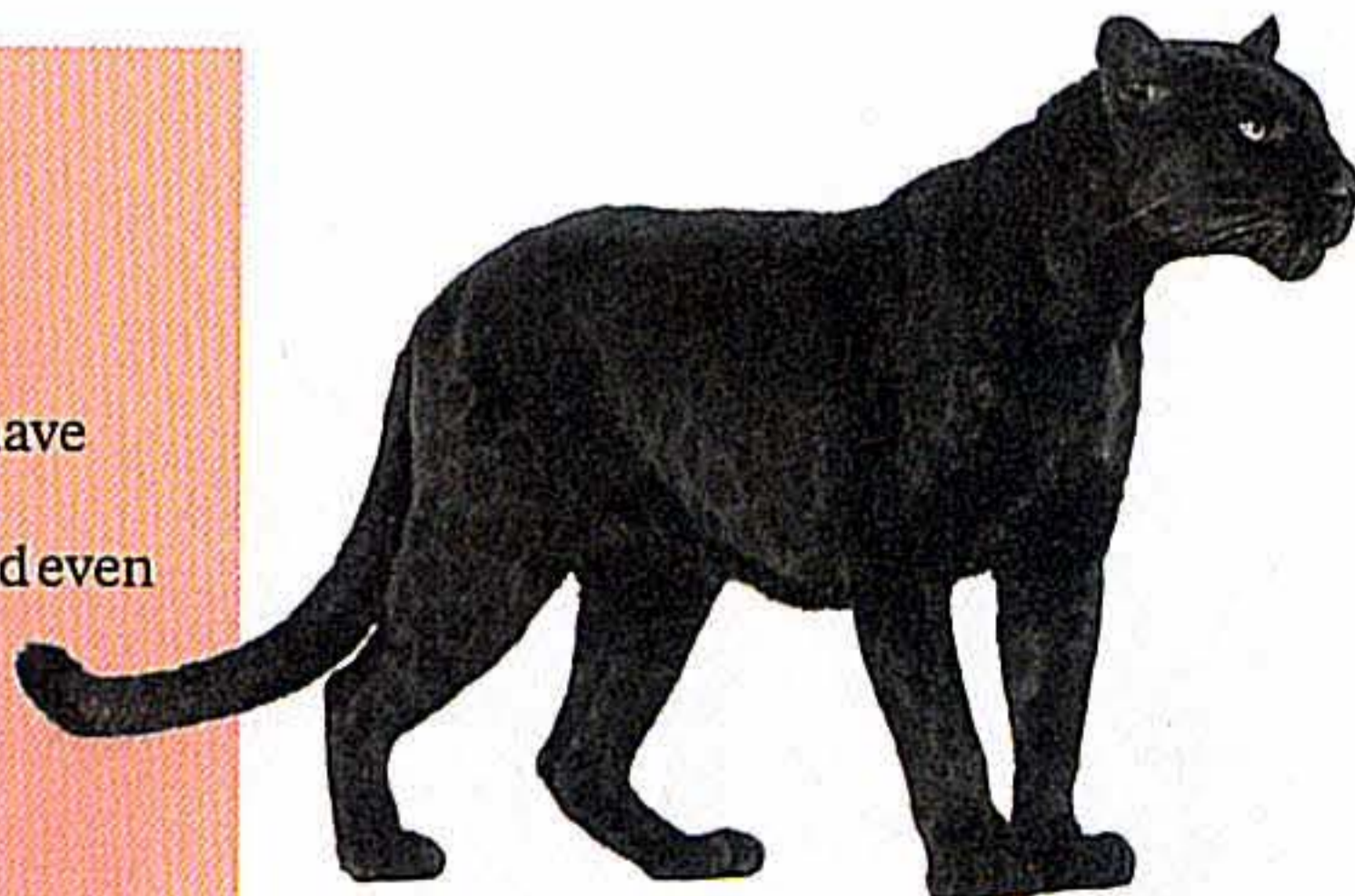
During the early 1990s a spate of breakdowns on the Circle line between Edgware Road and Baker Street led to an examination of records dating back to when the tunnels were dug. These revealed that bone and tooth fragments had been unearthed during construction. The official verdict of a 'plague pit' didn't fit with such a westerly location and the problems only disappeared after holy water was sprinkled on the site.

Cut-price burials on the Strand

In the 1840s London's skyrocketing population and frequent cholera outbreaks created a desperate shortage of graves. Churches began charging ever-increasing sums for a decent London plot. One unscrupulous minister by the name of Mr Howse charged a mere 15 shillings for a burial at his chapel near the Strand (less than half what others were advertising), then horrifyingly stuffed as many as 500 corpses in a year under the floorboards. ■

The beast of Sydenham Woods

For more than a decade, residents of SE26 have reported eerie sightings of a huge black cat, stalking the wooded hills, attacking pets and even people. Explanations of the phenomenon vary, but some people gothically believe that it is a panther that has escaped from an exotic private menagerie.



→ With thanks to Declan McHugh (author of 'Bloody London' and organiser of 'The Blood and Tears Walk' www.shockinglondon.com) and Olly Weston (London Bicycle Tour Company, www.londonbicycle.com)